



Planning for Parks and Recreational Opportunities



February 19, 2026



Planning for Parks in an Infill City

- Housing Capacity
- Market realities
- State law constraints



Growth in a Developed City

- San Diego is largely built out, with limited vacant land for new development
- State housing laws require cities to accommodate growth within existing urban areas
- Housing needs to be located near jobs, services, and transit to remain affordable and reduce displacement
- As neighborhoods intensify, parks must serve more people within the same physical footprint

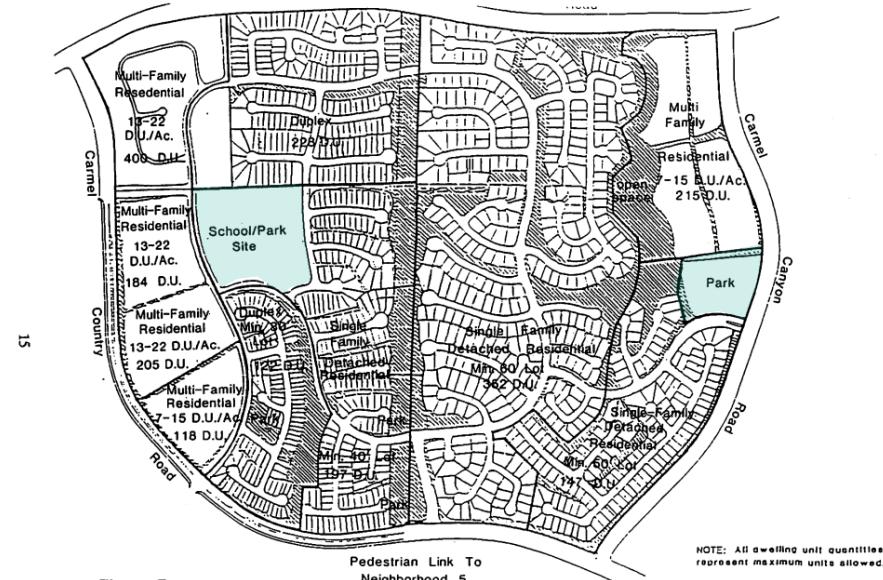


How We Used to Plan for Homes and Parks

- New communities developed on largely vacant land
- Parks were planned at the same time as homes and schools
- Land could be reserved or acquired in advance
- Park systems were predictable and contiguous
- Homes were constructed and occupied within a short timeframe, along with the parks



Planning for Parks in a Newly-Planned Community





Planning for Parks in Existing Communities





How We Plan for Homes and Parks Today

- Virtually no large areas of developable vacant land remain
- Capacity for new homes is created within existing developed communities
- Most land is privately owned by thousands of different owners
- Community plan updates create capacity for new homes to be built, but do not mandate it be built
- The decision to redevelop a property ultimately rests with individual property owners



Capacity Does Not Equal Growth

- Community plans allow more housing, businesses and services than is built
- Capacity is a long-term ceiling, not a development forecast
- The pace and scale of new home construction depends on:
 - market conditions
 - financing
 - timing
 - property owner interest in redeveloping or selling to a developer



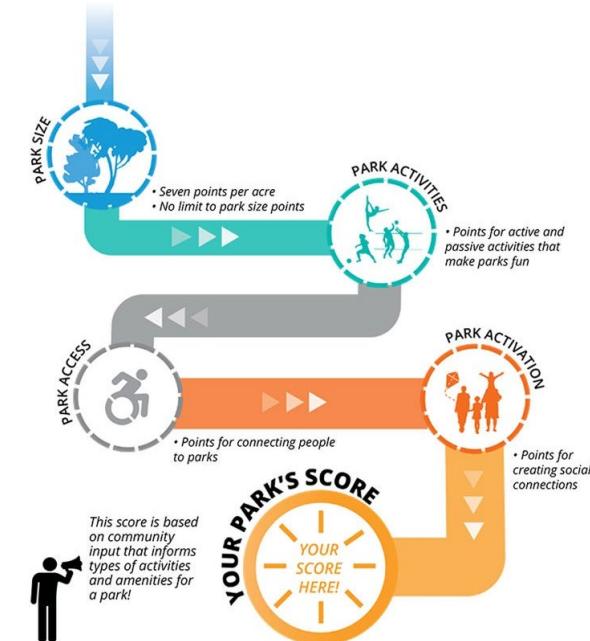
Why We Cannot Plan Parks on Private Land

- State law prohibits down-zoning
- The City:
 - Cannot reserve future parkland on private property
 - Cannot assume specific sites will redevelop
- Park planning must be legally defensible



Infill Development Requires a Different Park Strategy

- Parks Master Plan established a new standard for park development that reflects the City's reality as a developed, in-fill City
- Success is measured by recreational value, not acreage





Infill Development Requires a Different Park Strategy

- Park planning in infill communities focuses on:
 - Enhancing existing parks
 - Identifying City-owned land that can be used for parks
 - Creating flexible, multi-use spaces
 - Improving connectivity and access
 - Identifying opportunities for joint use with other agencies
 - Acquiring new lands for parks as opportunities arise
 - 10% of Citywide Parks DIF reserved for land acquisition
 - Larger projects constructing public spaces



Role of Private Development

- In designated overlay zones
 - Developer must provide publicly accessible spaces
 - Projects contribute to on-site recreation
- These spaces:
 - are scaled to development size
 - complement city parks
 - expand access to recreational opportunities in dense areas
- New Community Enhancement Overlay Zones are established with Community Plan Updates



What This Means Going Forward

- Community plans add capacity for new homes and businesses, but cannot compel redevelopment, which occurs incrementally based on market conditions and property owner interest
- Specific parks are identified on current City-owned and controlled land
- Infill communities require:
 - Incremental and flexible solutions
 - Partnerships with other agencies such as school districts
 - Public-private partnerships
 - Identifying opportunities for future land acquisition
 - A focus on access, quality, and equity



Citywide Plans

- In addition to Community Plan Recreation Elements updates, the Park Planning team works on various Citywide Park plans, including master plans for regional parks
- Active projects – Chollas Creek Park Master Plan, Trails Master Plan and Balboa Park Master Plan
- As part of Citywide Park Planning efforts, policies to further access to recreation are proposed and brought forward to City Council
- The Park Planning team is also working on making the Park Master Plans implementation ready through streamlining the review process



Parks & Rec Board Participation

- City Planning will engage the Park & Recreation Board at key milestones throughout each Community Plan Update, including:
 - At project kick-off
 - During the ideas phase of the planning process
 - Once a draft is available for the community plan
 - For a recommendation to the City Council
- City Planning is currently advancing the Mid-Cities Community Plan Update
- Upcoming Community Plan Updates include:
 - Otay Mesa-Nestor
 - Rancho Bernardo

