

8.0 OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The City of Prescott and its immediate surroundings are rich in scenic and recreational assets enjoyed and valued by generations of our citizens. This Open Space Element embraces current and future efforts to protect and enhance this amazing portfolio to conserve natural beauty for the benefit of residents and visitors alike. Past favorable economic circumstances allowed a significant focus upon fee simple land acquisitions. This was combined with donated parcels and easements, all of which are worthy of perpetual protection. Some of these conservation efforts date to the 1980s, and were then known as natural parkland conservation. As past, present and future lands come into City oversight, they provide opportunities to expand recreational destinations to compliment the City's lakes, greenways, diverse park system, extensive recreational trails, and nature center.

New tools have emerged towards maximizing the benefits nature affords us. Specifically these mechanisms are:

- Creatively utilizing long term leases, easements, licensing agreements, developer agreements, private donations, land exchanges, intergovernmental cooperation, and public/private partnerships in securing targeted land use, in addition to the occasional fee simple acquisition of property by the City.
- Integrating the existing and desired recreational assets into a network that is physically connected and functionally related, rather than simply adding stand-alone parcels to our inventory.
- Identifying and prioritizing our Open Space efforts based upon the historic, ecological, cultural, recreational, scenic, and economic values to be derived.
- Proactively planning, managing, and expanding the recreational assets of our community so as to attract visitors, boost our economy, and improve the quality of life for our own residents. This shall be a cooperative and partnering endeavor between the City and local non-profit organizations.

The vast majority of undeveloped land, whether publicly or privately owned, is not officially designated as open space. These areas may be developed in the future. To conserve open space, Prescott encourages zoning these areas to a Natural Open Space district, which restricts uses and encourages land owners to maintain their land in its natural state. Other means of conserving open space exist through easements, deed restrictions and development agreements, which are recorded legal documents used to manage development of a property. Several parks, lakes, trails and facilities have legal restrictions to conserve open space.

8.2 PUBLIC AND PRIVATE OPEN SPACE

The term Open Space is used in many forms and has different meanings in common usage. Typically, open space is often used to describe undeveloped land with

A.R.S. 9-461.05.

An open space element that includes:

- (a) A comprehensive inventory of open space areas, recreational resources and designations of access points to open space areas and resources.
- (b) An analysis of forecasted needs, policies for managing and protecting open space areas and resources and implementation strategies to acquire additional open space areas and further establish recreational resources.
- (c) Policies and implementation strategies designed to promote a regional system of integrated open space and recreational resources and a consideration of any existing regional open space plans.

distinctions between public and private open space. From a regulatory point of view, cities are composed of only two types of property, public and private. This critical distinction between public and private property has been the basis of urban design since the concept of land ownership emerged and “open space” first appeared. In early cities, public streets gave access to private property. With this, people started to distinguish between what is yours, mine and ours.

Public open space:

City owned public lands include lakes, streams, undeveloped natural areas, parks, trails and greenways. Examples include Acker Park, portions of the Granite Dells, and Prescott’s Greenways. These areas typically protect important viewsheds, natural resources or provide passive recreational opportunities for trails and other uses. Federally owned public open space is provided by the adjacent Prescott National Forest and the joint City-County leasing of Pioneer Park, from the U.S. Department of the Interior - Bureau of Land Management.

A more specific type of public open space is know as a preserve. These are lands set aside and protected from development by purchase, covenants, city charter clauses, and/or state or federal laws. Some existing preserves include the hill and areas east of Thumb Butte, Boyle DeBusk Open Space Preserve, White Spar Creekside Park, Watson Woods Riparian Preserve, and portions of Watson and Willow Lakes.

Private open space:

Some of the most scenic and unique areas within Prescott are privately owned. Many landowners recognize the natural qualities of their lands and take voluntary steps to protect and conserve open space through rezoning, conservation easements or sale of development rights. Areas set aside as privately owned protected open space may or may not be accessible to the public depending on the specific arrangements. The City strives to provide public access to privately held open space areas by entering into joint use agreements with private property owners.

As privately owned lands are developed, open space areas may be protected through the Planned Area Development (PAD) process, whereby a minimum of 25% of the PAD area is set aside as protected open space. Typically, PAD open space areas are steep slopes, ridgelines, drainages or parks. Previous City codes allowed golf courses as open space, however, the current code states new golf courses may not be considered open space.

State Trust Lands should be considered as eventually to be privately owned due to the mission of the Arizona State Land Department to maximize revenues by the sale or lease of these lands. Because of their development potential, these lands are temporary and unprotected open spaces unless steps are taken toward conservation. Several state referendums have been introduced in recent years, without success, to allow state lands to be more easily preserved as open space. For example, Proposition 110 would have amended the Arizona Constitution to allow the state to exchange state trust lands for other public lands for the purpose of preserving open space. Citizen efforts to address open space concerns statewide effect the Prescott area due to the many acres of state trust lands nearby.

8.3 OPEN SPACE, PARKS AND RECREATION INVENTORY

The City's park system began with City Park, now known as Ken Lindley Field. This was a Works Progress Administration project in the early 1930s employing local workers to combat the Great Depression. In the 1960s, the City aggressively pursued Federal Land & Water Conservation Funds for the acquisition and development of parks. The City began utilizing various State funding sources in the 1990s including the State Lake Improvement Fund, and the Heritage Fund provided for by State lottery revenues. Lands were specifically acquired for parklands or open space to be conserved in perpetuity. The largest area of parkland is Willow Lake and Watson Lake, purchased from the Chino Valley Irrigation District in 1998 through a voter approved initiative. The lakes total acreage is based on water surface area either at full or at a lesser conservation level. Measurements of land base acreage versus surface water acreage therefore fluctuate.

The Parks and Recreation Department currently provides recreational opportunities for all ages and demographics. Our parks and recreation portfolio includes:

- 5 Regional Parks (totaling 1,241 acres)
- 6 Community Parks (totaling 153 acres)
- 4 Neighborhood Parks (totaling 11 acres)
- 3 Mini-parks (totaling 2 acres)
- 46 miles of recreation trails
- 16 Open Space/Natural Parkland parcels (totaling 765 acres)
- One recreation center building
- Landscaped rights-of-way throughout the City
- Prescott Greenways
- Watson, Willow and Goldwater Lakes
- Golf Course
- Rodeo Grounds

8.4 PARKS AND RECREATION ACTIVITIES

A variety of recreational activities occur in areas owned and managed by the City of Prescott including field sports, court sports, skateboarding, cycling, in-line hockey, hiking, horseback riding, bocce ball, lake sports, horseshoes, camping, rappelling, birding, remote control aircraft, playgrounds, picnicking, dancing, living history, live music, orienteering, geocaching, yoga, races, archery, zoo, community garden, dog park, nature center, performing arts and special events. The Department has a role in providing programs, facilities, and services for some of these recreation activities, and features one of the highest per capita sports participation rates in Arizona.

The City maintains an ongoing dialog with the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) regarding improving the lakes as fisheries. Discussions include slot limits for the bass population, removing crayfish to assist fish reproduction and other activities. AZGFD continues to stock trout in area lakes. The health of Prescott's lakes is a complicated and ongoing issue. Information about lakes and watersheds may be found in the Environmental Planning Element.

8.4.1 Parks and Recreation Goals and Strategies

Goal 1. Recognize greater recreation potentials and act on them to improve the quality of life for residents and visitors and make improvements, where needed, to current facilities.

Strategy 1.1 Seek financial support through the Capital Improvement Program and from the local community to upgrade aging facilities that have outdated amenities. These upgrades should have benefits to energy conservation, safety, aesthetics, tourism, user experience, and increased function.

Strategy 1.2 Identify and evaluate appropriate available lands for acquisition, license agreements, or acquisition of easements, based upon an inventory of parklands, open space and recreation facilities. Trail connectivity should be a high priority.

Strategy 1.3 Establish plans and timelines for the development of targeted lands, as appropriate, through budget and capital improvement processes.

Strategy 1.4 Update or amend the 2007 Parks and Recreation Master Plan to recognize new opportunities, changing recreation trends and facility needs.

Strategy 1.5 Continue and expand cooperative programs with the Prescott National Forest and with all entities to enhance trail connectivity and maintenance standards.

Strategy 1.6 Seek new partnerships with Yavapai County, other government entities, organizations or individuals to serve the parks and recreation needs of Prescott, as well as the region.

Strategy 1.7 Continue coordination with the towns of Prescott Valley, Chino Valley and other entities to plan cross-jurisdictional trails, open space, and recreation opportunities.

Goal 2: Establish recreation strategies for Willow, Watson, and Goldwater Lakes to continually improve and enhance these assets to the City, for both residents and visitors.

Strategy 2.1 Seek to apply the recommendations of the Arizona Department Environmental Quality (ADEQ) by budgeting for and implementing measures to reduce the algae and weed growth in Willow and Watson Lakes.

Strategy 2.2 Work closely with the Arizona Game & Fish Department to continually improve the fishing conditions at Willow, Watson, & Goldwater Lakes.

Strategy 2.3 Should Watson Lake levels drop to the conservation pool elevation, seek appropriate partnerships from volunteer groups to remove dead and down trees at the south end of lake as a potential fire and safety hazard.

Strategy 2.4 Expand recreational opportunities and facilities at upper Goldwater Lake to fully utilize the area to better accommodate recreation demands and future recreation trends.

8.5 TRAILS AND GREENWAYS

City trails and greenways currently allow for non-motorized recreation and transportation. Trails and greenways connect destinations within Prescott including schools, businesses, neighborhoods, parks and other recreational places. Prescott has received national recognition for its progressive approach to providing a high quality trail system. Completion of the 50-mile Prescott Circle Trail, Prescott Greenways, and Granite Dells trail expansion will further enhance the trail system.

8.5.1 Trails and Greenways Goals and Strategies

Goal 1. Expand and improve the connectivity of the trails and greenway system.

Strategy 1.1 Complete high priority trails within the following geographical priorities: 50-mile Prescott Circle Trail, Prescott's Greenways, Prescott Peavine Trail to Chino Valley, Willow Lake to Watson Lake via Granite Dells, multiple trails to Glassford Hill with connectivity to Prescott Valley, Recreation Pathways City-Wide, and Completion of Larger Interconnected Trail Networks.

Strategy 1.2 Establish a matrix using scoring criteria for proposed trails to define priorities for trail construction.

Strategy 1.3 Implement creative right-of-way acquisition strategies for trails, such as license agreements, leasing, and easements. This includes exploring feasibility of roadways, utility, and drainage corridors.

Goal 2. Encourage greater public participation in the planning, development and maintenance of trails and greenways.

Strategy 2.1 Develop a community volunteer creek monitoring program expanding and supporting a creek watch project.

Strategy 2.2 Prepare information for the public regarding the importance of trails and greenways, detailing how they contribute to the value of developed land and the health of the community. Include information regarding state laws on landowner protection from liabilities, fee simple purchases,

license agreements, land donations and easement acquisitions.

Goal 3. Support the linkage of public and private open space and trail systems to serve the community more efficiently.

Strategy 3.1 Encourage new developments to designate open space areas that adjoin and link to existing public or private open space areas.

Strategy 3.2 Require the creation of publicly accessible trails in new subdivisions where such trails can provide new or improved connectivity for existing trail networks.

8.6 OPEN SPACE POLICY

The Parks and Recreation Department is currently focused within the following geographical areas: 50-mile Prescott Circle Trail, Prescott's Greenways, Prescott Peavine Trail to Chino Valley, Willow Lake to Watson Lake via Granite Dells, Multiple Trails to Glassford Hill with connectivity to Prescott Valley, Recreation Pathways City-Wide, and Completion of Larger Interconnected Trail Networks in order to benefit the Mile-High Trail System. The acquisition, dedication and stewardship of open space as a community amenity is also an economic development asset which supports the tourism industry.

The proportion of land dedicated to protect open space within the community is growing. This reflects a shift in attitude regarding the importance of open space, which began with public and private actions regarding trails in the early 1990s. As pristine areas with trails and access to the national forest began to develop, the public requested that access points remain untouched. This was accomplished through agreements made between the City, developers and National Forest officials. Protecting significant geological features, natural areas and viewsheds resulted in a number of private/public partnerships.

The City adopted a Master Trails Plan in 1996 and continues to pursue federal, state and private funding sources. Prescott voters approved a sales tax initiative in 2000 setting aside revenues for acquisition of open space as provided for in the City's adopted Open Space Master Plan, which was updated in 2008.

Open space is acquired based on biologic, geologic, recreation, cultural, historic, scenic and riparian characteristics of the land, as well as, tourism and economic assets for the future. Open space includes areas of scenic beauty, recreation, preserves for riparian areas, wildlife, vegetation, and cultural resources. The character and function of open space differs on a case by case basis depending on the individual property as well as the purpose for the acquisition.

Annexations will often have an open space component and are required to meet standards for open space as provided for in the Prescott Land Development Code. New open space assets are identified during the annexation process and stewardship plans are adopted by the City Council. In adjoining areas, open space may be maintained through intergovernmental agreements.

8.6.1 Open Space Policy Goals and Strategies

- Goal 1.** Create a City Council appointed advisory committee on open space acquisition and stewardship.
- Strategy 1.1** Develop and adopt criteria for size, composition, policies and procedures for use by the advisory committee.
 - Strategy 1.2** Assess future funding options for open space in the post 2015 period.
- Goal 2.** Acquire open spaces through purchase, purchase of development rights or easements, acceptance of voluntary dedications and negotiation of intergovernmental agreements:
- Strategy 2.1** Continue to develop parks recreation.
 - Strategy 2.2** Continue to acquire trails and contiguous open spaces along creeks or in other areas to connect trails or open spaces within the city and to like areas beyond the corporate limits.
 - Strategy 2.3** Preserve passive natural open spaces to conserve wildlife and view corridors, or protect cultural resources such as sensitive historic/archaeological sites.
 - Strategy 2.4** Rezone the property to an open space designation for all parcels of land acquired by the City for open space protection or conservation.
- Goal 3.** Identify significant open spaces in the Prescott area.
- Strategy 3.1** Prioritize open space parcels for City acquisition. Periodically review and update this list to reflect current conditions and information.
 - Strategy 3.2** Continue, where appropriate, to evaluate existing parcels of public or private open space to determine the most appropriate mechanism for conservation.
 - Strategy 3.3** Seek collaborative ventures between the private, public, and non-profit sectors for stewardship of open space lands.
 - Strategy 3.4** Promote proactive annexation of areas outside the City boundary, which have been identified as having significant open space value.

Goal 4. Achieve a community and region-wide balance between development and open space conservation.

Strategy 4.1 Continue long-range regional cooperation in open space acquisition and stewardship.

Strategy 4.2 Provide incentives to promote the dedication of open space by property owners.

Goal 5. Maintain the biological, cultural, visual, and recreational integrity of protected and unprotected tracts of open space.

Strategy 5.1 Continue to provide stewardship for all components of protected and unprotected tracts employing the expertise within city staff and organizations and entities within the Open Space Alliance.

Strategy 5.2 Maintain conservation of habitats and ecosystems within existing open space in accordance with city, state and federal requirements.

Strategy 5.3 Protect connectivity of existing open space areas and trails by requiring developing areas to provide appropriate access.

Strategy 5.4 Encourage re-vegetation of disturbed or damaged areas and removal of invasive non-native vegetation.