

Rockdale Recreational Programming

Rockdale's recreational programming consists of a variety of seasonal events and festivals for residents. The Easter Egg Hunt is the only event geared specifically to children. Attendance has not been tracked for most events/festivals, but those that have been tracked have seen slow and steady growth in recent years. Most events are typically held in Fair Park or Wolf Park. Most sports leagues are run by outside organizations. There may be opportunities to provide additional recreational options for various age groups either by the City, other organizations or through partnerships.

Program Name (City run or operated by other vendor on City property)	Age Group				Location	Season	Fee	Estimated Annual Attendance/ Participation				
	Age 12 and under	Age 13-18	Adults	Seniors				2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Festivals/Events												
Alpha Phau Delta 5K Run	X	X	X	X	Veterans Park	Summer						
Rockdale Fair and Rodeo	X	X	X	X	Fair Park	Fall						
Community Easter Egg Hunt	X				Fair Park	Spring	FREE	200	250	300	300	350
Farmers Market	X	X	X	X	Wolf Park	Spring/Fall/ Winter	FREE	40	55	60	75	150
Milam County 4th of July	X	X	X	X	Fair Park	Every other Summer	FREE					
Youth Athletics												
Boys Little League Baseball	X	X			Little League Baseball Field	Spring						
Girls Softball	X	X			Softball Fields	Spring						
Swim Teams	X	X			Veterans Park	Summer						
Rockdale Tigers Youth Football and Cheer	X				Rockdale High School Football Fields	Summer						

Figure 71. Recreation Programs Table

Needs Assessment

Assessment Methodology

This Plan uses a multifaceted analysis to help determine the parks and recreational needs of the Rockdale community. The needs assessment analyzes whether those needs are being met and what types of improvements or changes would be beneficial for Rockdale. Existing parks and recreation opportunities are analyzed in terms of public opinion, the location and quantity of parkland, the quantity of facilities within parks, and natural resources in the City.

The needs assessment includes three parts. The use of multiple assessment methods helps to establish an understanding of key parks and recreation needs and inform Plan recommendations to address those needs.

Demand-Based Assessment

The needs assessment starts with a demand-based assessment. This includes an analysis and summary of public feedback to identify what the community wants and expects from the parks and recreation system, and how this compares to its current state.

Standards-Based Assessment

The standards-based assessment then analyzes parkland acreage, location and amenities in comparison with the needs and location of the current population and future growth areas. This is used to determine an appropriate target level of service for the Rockdale community and identify surpluses or deficits.

Resource-Based Assessment

Lastly, the resource-based assessment evaluates Rockdale's existing physical, man-made and natural resources to identify opportunities to leverage for public recreation benefit.

Demand-Based

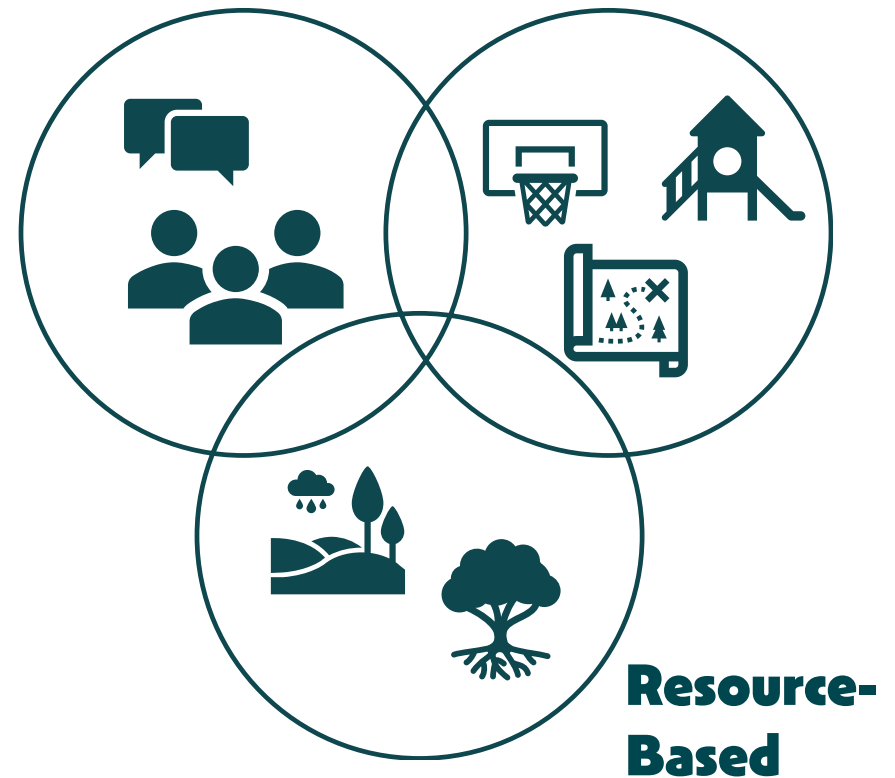


Figure 72. Three Elements of the Needs Assessment

Demand-Based Assessment

The demand-based assessment is a reflection of the community's needs, as expressed directly by residents through various public engagement opportunities. Community engagement included:

- Stakeholder conversations with the CPAC and focus group participants
- Comprehensive Plan Vision Survey
- Online Mapping Exercise
- Public Open House Event
- Parks-Specific Survey

The following pages present highlights from the community input received. These highlights are presenting varying opinions from Rockdale residents and/or park users and may differ between the various engagement opportunities and questions. Additional public engagement information and details can be found in Appendices A and D.

Stakeholder Listening Sessions

Over 20 participants provided feedback during a series of stakeholder listening sessions. Participants were asked to consider the existing parks and recreation system and explain their likes, dislikes and desires for change and/or improvements to the system as a whole. The following are key themes that were identified during these meetings, many of which were reiterated by participants in other engagement opportunities.

Desires:

- Expanded trails network.
- Youth activities, specifically a recreation/activity center and clubs and activities outside of academics and sports.
- Inclusive parks.
- More community events and festivals - especially family-friendly.
- Health is a major topic in Rockdale - parks could play a role in supporting increased wellness.
- A City that looks loved and cared for.
- Ability to host sporting events and the economic drivers those create.

Issues/Concerns:

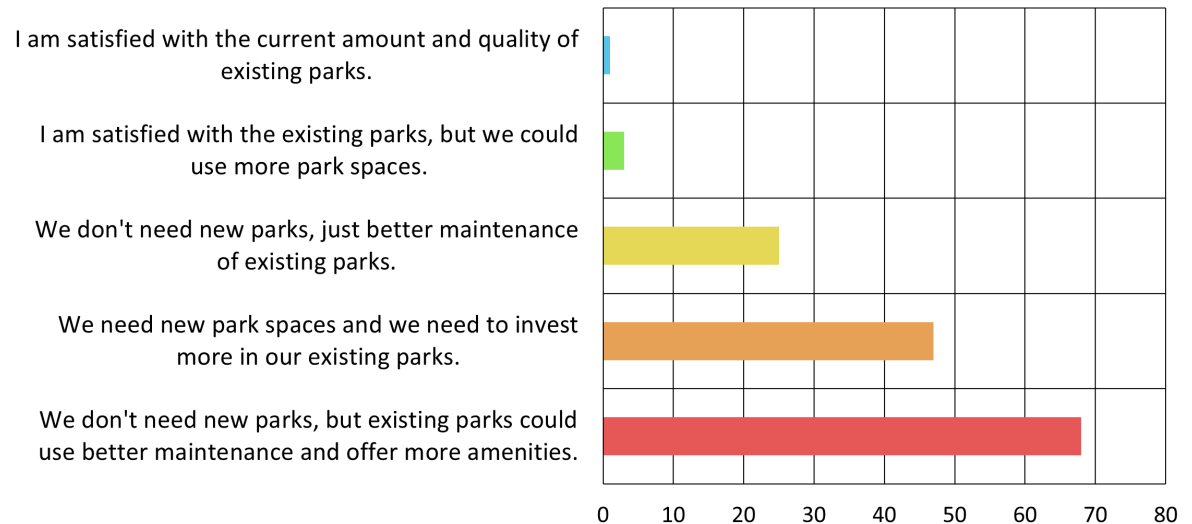
- General aesthetics and maintenance.
- For a long time ALCOA was a major supporter of community recreational activities, such as youth sports leagues and summer camps. Their departure left a hole in that aspect.
- The City has limited staff and financial resources to address parks maintenance and development.
- The City sold the Fair Park and Rodeo Arena facility to the Rockdale Fair Association and the site is no longer available for public use.
- Abandoned Aycock Center.
- Accountability for implementation of City plans.
- Usability of parks in the summer heat. There is a lack of shade or shade structures that actually trap heat.

Vision Survey

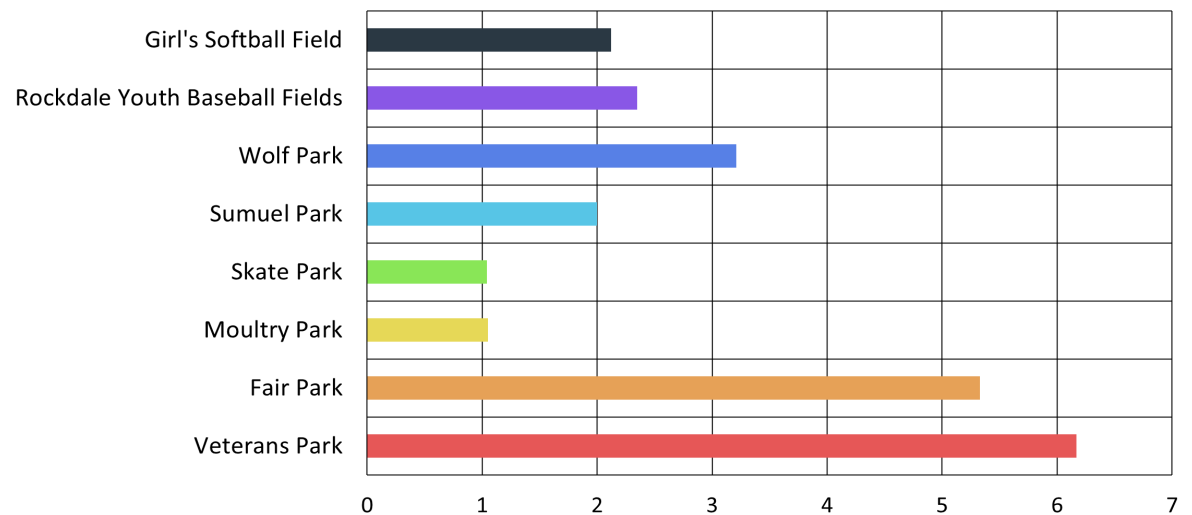
At the outset of the Comprehensive Planning process, a community visioning survey was conducted, which included elements of feedback on parks and recreation. There were 151 survey responses. The parks and recreation related takeaways include:

- Parks and recreation was second to last on the list of reasons why residents moved to or live in Rockdale.
- Quality parks and public spaces was No. 7 out of 15 choices for prioritizing areas of improvement - the provision of a recreation center was also noted as a need.
- Many residents noted parks as a top asset or amenity the City provides them - specifically the municipal swimming pool.
- Georgetown, Taylor and Round Rock were noted by residents as examples of city parks they enjoy.
- Parks were noted as something many residents would like to see changed about Rockdale - specifically more parks, additional playgrounds and inclusive playsets, and enhanced maintenance. Walking/biking trails were also noted as a desire.
- Beautiful and plentiful parks were often cited when residents were asked what their vision for the future of Rockdale was.
- Parks and open space was No. 5 out of 12 choices for prioritizing the new types of development residents want to see in Rockdale.

9. Which of the following do feel most accurately describes your opinion of Rockdale's parks?



10. Please rank the parks and recreation facilities in order of which ones you use the most.

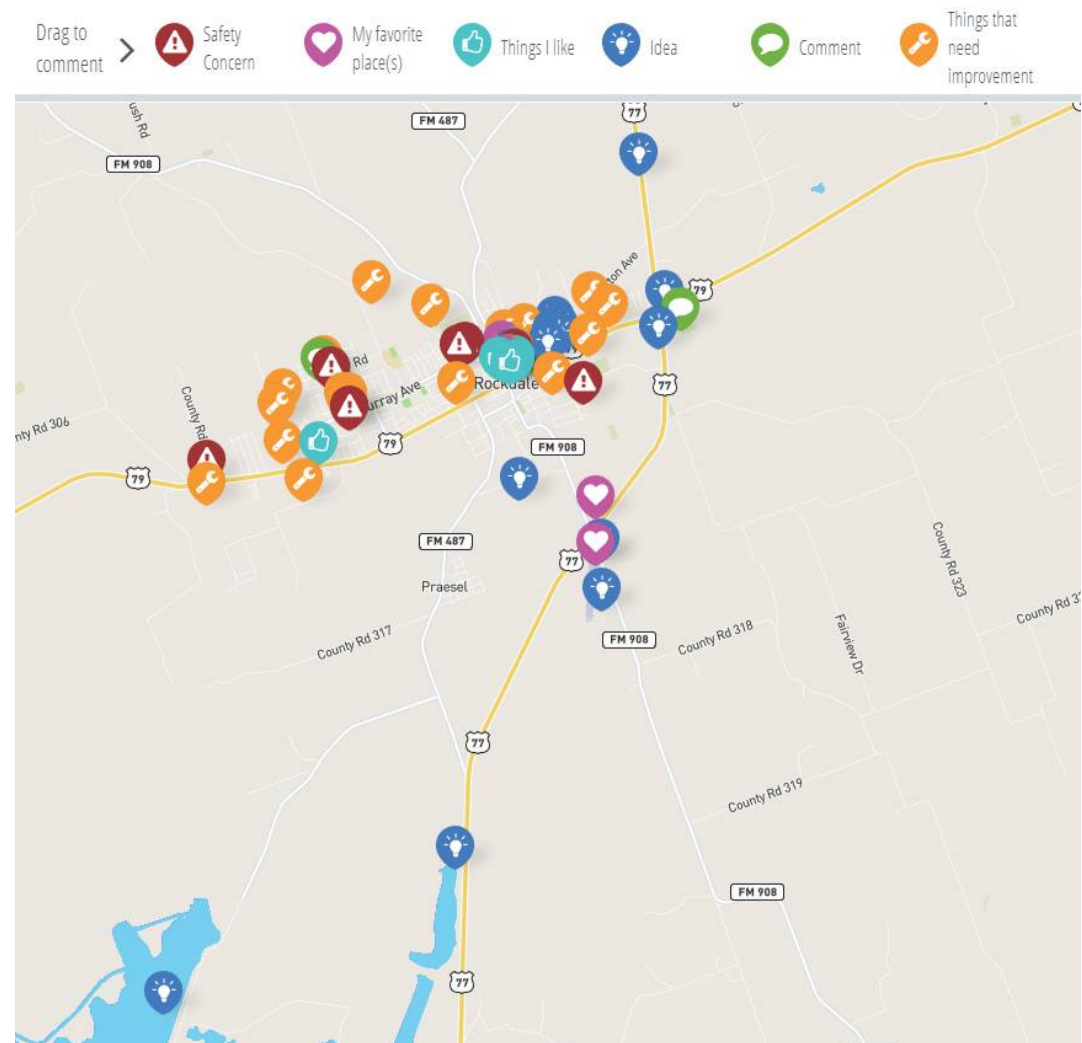


Online Mapping Comments

Throughout the course of the project, there was an online mapping exercise available for residents to provide comments and ideas related to specific points around Rockdale. The following represents real responses from participants regarding parks and recreation feedback:

- *"Sumuel Park is an asset to the community, but the City must maintain these assets properly to truly have the benefit last. It is unfortunate that vandalism takes some of the benefit away and keeps City funds from being used to the benefit of all taxpayers."*
- *"All current Rockdale City Parks need an extreme makeover. For example the city pool has been repaired but shade structures are an eyesore and falling down. Huge visual improvement needs to be made to fencing and change room facilities. Walk thru the men's room sometime and see what I mean. I have never been an advocate of spending money on Bridge Park at the expense of other park improvements."*
- *"Veterans Park needs attention. There is a slide with a hole, others that are cracking. A sun shade over at least one play scape would make the park easier to utilize. Benches closer to the playscapes are needed, and the current walking path needs major attention."*
- *"Wolf Park pavilion is a wonderful resource."*
- *"We need a real nice park with shade and walking paths. Maybe a small water area to make it nice! Some benches! For the community in all seasons. [Referring to a location in the eastern portion of the City near the intersection of US77 and US79.]"*

- *"Have Bridge Park become a 'node' or stopping point along a sidewalk/trail system. Add a couple of benches and tables. Plant some trees. Fix up the bridges so they can be walked on."*
- *"Develop ALCOA lake into a city park much like Pflugerville has developed their little lake with trails, public fishing and beach areas."*



Public Open House

During the public open house held for the Comprehensive Plan, a set of interactive boards gathered community input related to parks. Feedback related to parks and recreation included:

- Desire for better signage for all parks.
- The Skate Park needs more trees and additional activities.
- The Youth Baseball Fields need better maintenance, general aesthetic upgrades and more adequate seating areas.
- Fair Park needs better parking and restroom modernization and upgrades. Participants also noted the desire for Fair Park to have more open/public access hiking trails, ballfields and a playground.
- Veterans Park needs restroom improvements and provision of restrooms outside the pool, better workout equipment, pickleball courts, and adults-only swim times.
- Sumuel Park needs better workout equipment, more equipment generally and restroom improvements.
- Bridge Park needs a clear purpose and better overall access. Additionally, desired amenities include restrooms, walking trails, picnic areas, benches, lighting, water features and landscaping. Many residents noted the ideal location of Bridge Park to serve as a "node" in a larger city-wide trail network.
- The Skate Park has a lot of opportunity but is underutilized, it needs updates to some of the skating elements (bowls and ramps), more gathering spaces, restrooms, lighting and picnic tables.
- General amenities that were noted as desired in Rockdale parks include community BBQ pits, community garden, outdoor exercise,

adult water activities (swimming), more walking paths and loop trails, bike paths, and dog parks.

- To note, adding more water elements to parks (e.g., splash pads, pools, water features) received negative feedback among some community members due to recent concerns over the water supply system and the use of potable water for parks being seen as wasteful.



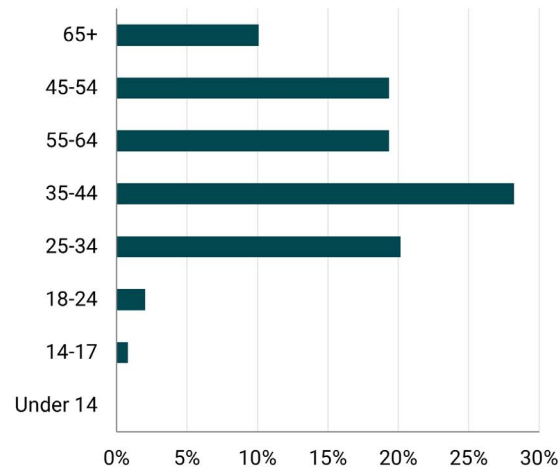
Parks Survey

As an integral part of the planning process, a comprehensive 25-question public survey focusing on parks was conducted to gather insights from a wide range of Rockdale citizens and stakeholders. The survey, open for approximately one month, garnered just under 300 responses.

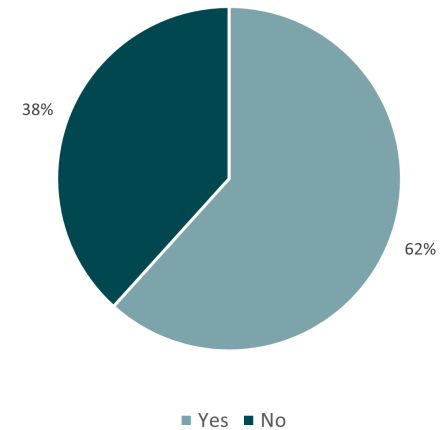
Notably, the respondents span a range of ages, with the majority falling between 25 and 44 years old. A considerable portion of participants showed the presence of children in their households, adding a familial dimension to the gathered data. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the majority of respondents are residents within the City, underscoring the local engagement and relevance of the survey findings to the community.

Survey Respondent Demographics

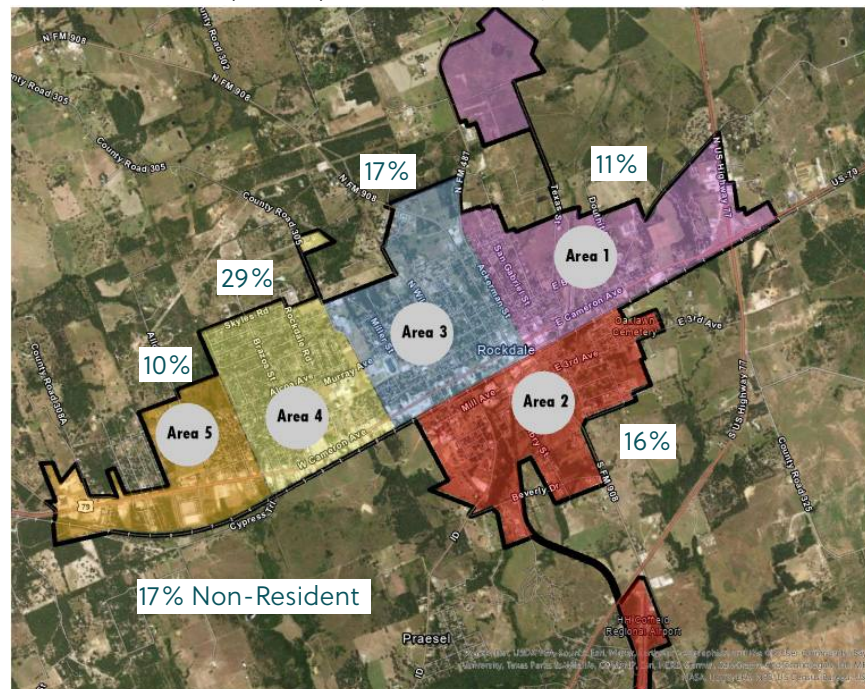
20. What is your age?



24. Are there children under the age of 18 in your home?



19. Based on the map, what part of Rockdale do you live in?



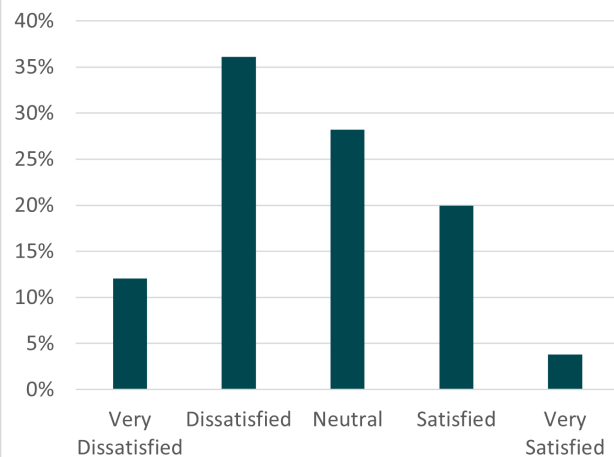
Rating of the City's Parks and Recreation System

Several factors influence how a community perceives, utilizes and approves of its parks and recreation system. When asked about their overall satisfaction with parks and recreational opportunities, respondents expressed a predominantly dissatisfied sentiment, with a notable number providing neutral responses.

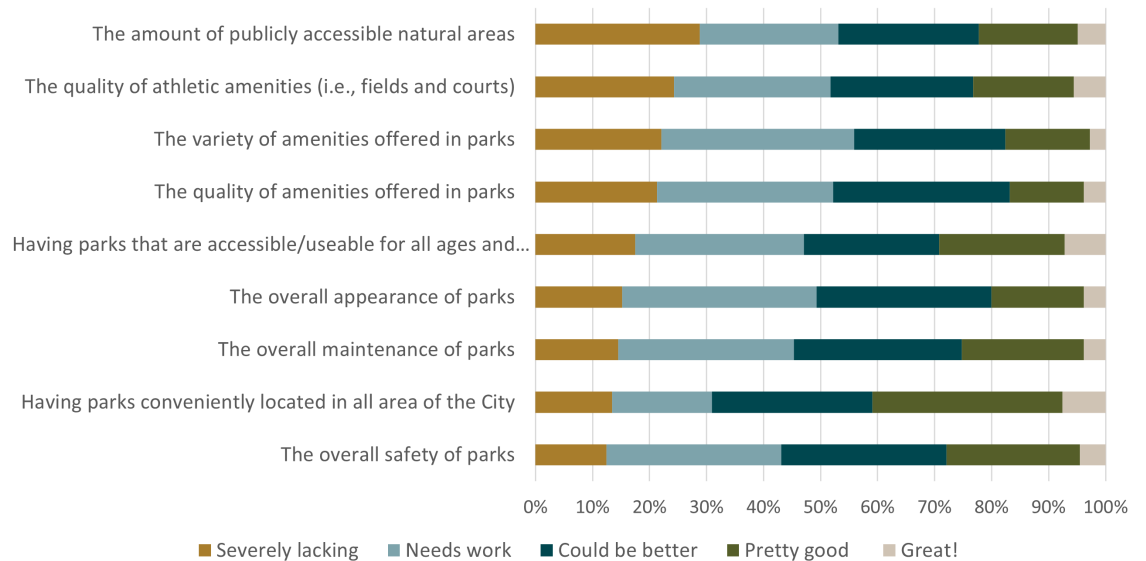
When evaluating the quality of various parks and recreation categories, the majority of respondents indicated that the elements were severely lacking, needing work or could be better. The most positively rated category was having parks conveniently located in all areas of the City.

When assessing the satisfaction levels regarding recreational programming opportunities for various age groups, responses again tended to gravitate toward categories indicating improvements - namely, severely lacking, needs work, or could be better.

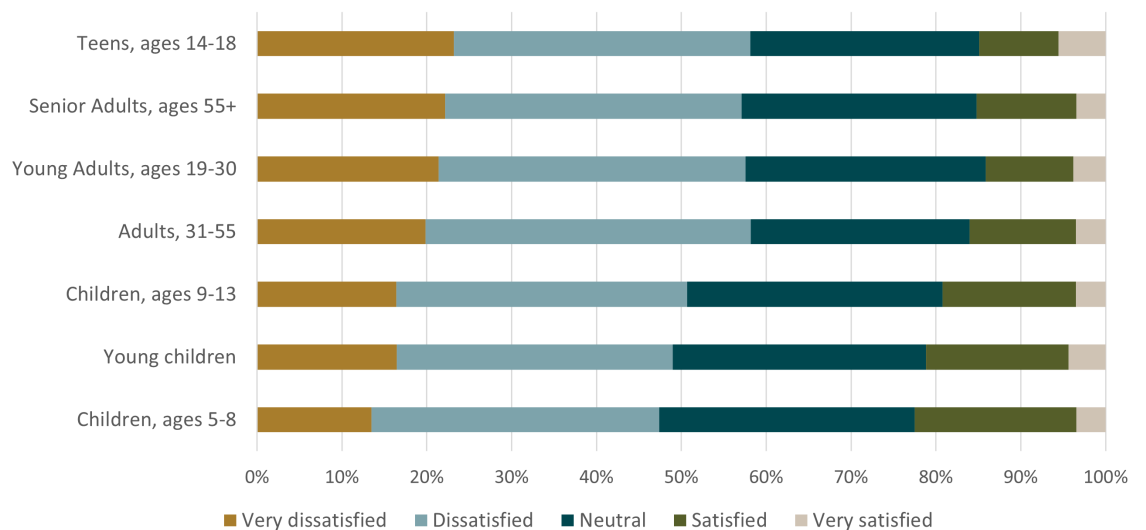
1. How satisfied overall are you with the parks and recreational opportunities in Rockdale?



2. How would you rate the City of Rockdale in the following categories?



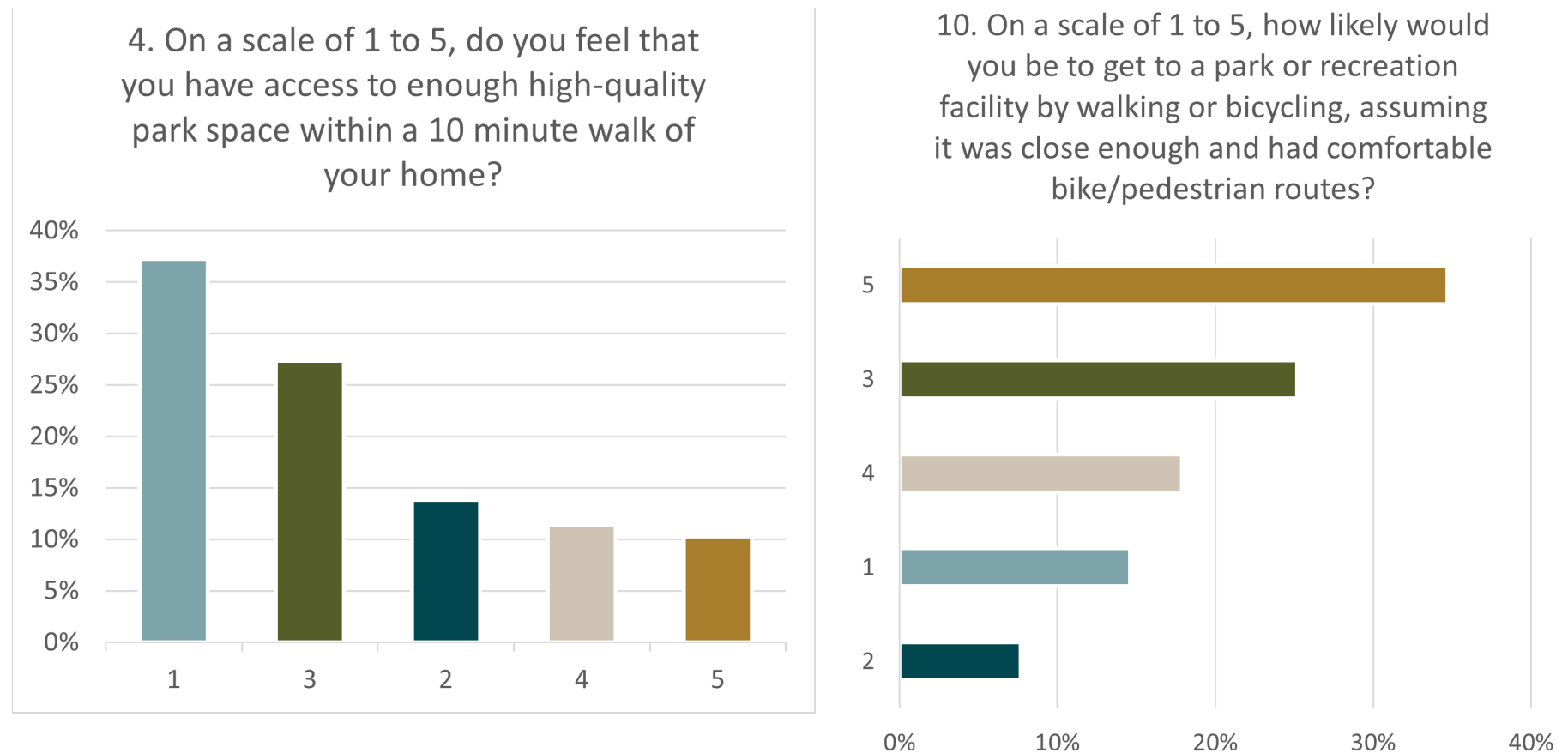
3. How satisfied are you with recreational programming opportunities in Rockdale for people in the following age groups?



Access to the City's Parks and Recreation System

When questioned about the accessibility of walking to a park within a 10-minute radius of their homes on a scale of 1 to 5, respondents indicated a perception of poor access, with a notable number expressing a relatively neutral stance, signaling a range of perspectives.

When asked about their likelihood to walk or bike to a park, a majority of respondents were likely to do so if comfortable facilities were available.

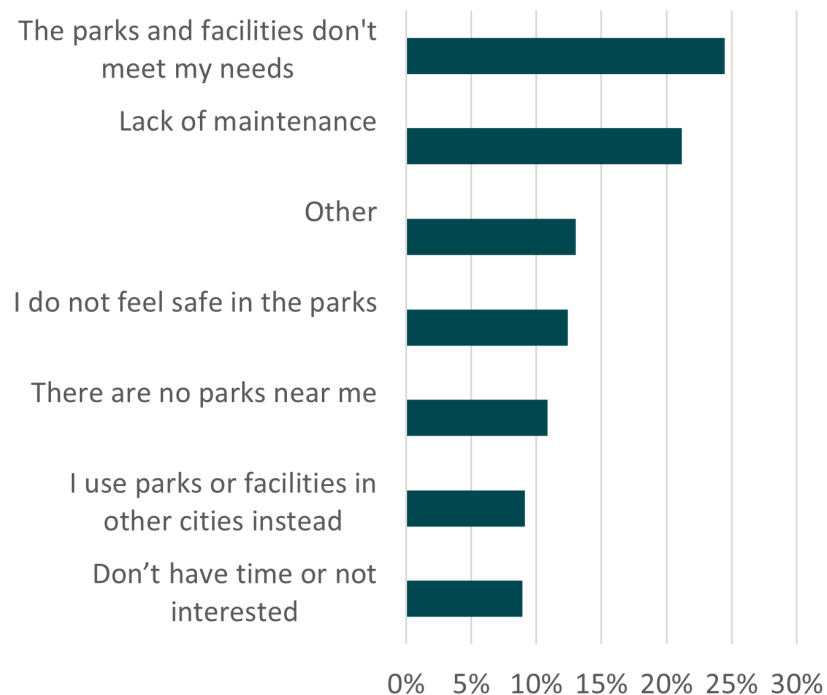


Parks and Recreation Importance

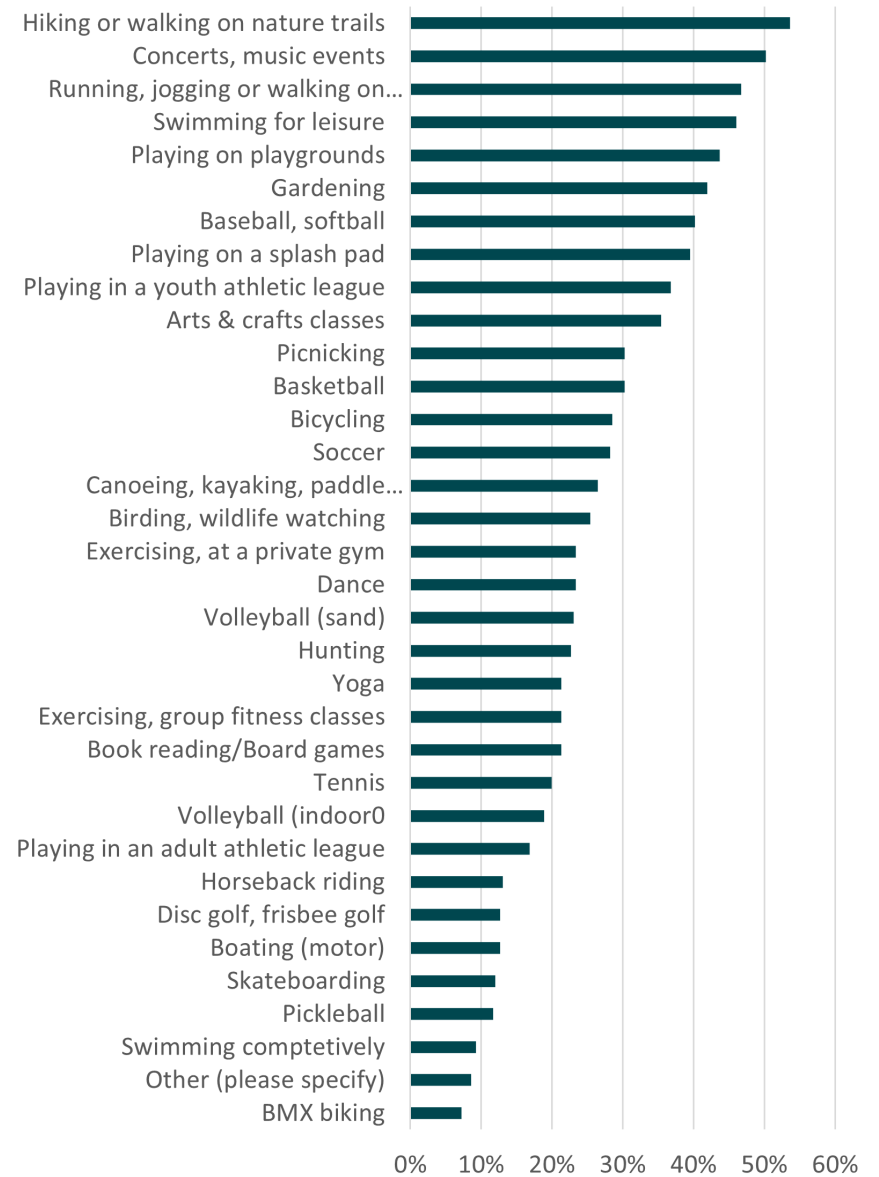
As the City considers expanding its park offerings, it is helpful to know which amenities will cater to the widest range of residents. Top ranking activities included passive recreation such as using trails, concerts and music events, swimming, and playing on playgrounds. Two of the top 10 ranked activities included athletics.

In contrast, exploring the factors that deter residents from utilizing City facilities reveals that the foremost reasons include facilities not meeting their needs and a perceived lack of maintenance. Additional responses address concerns regarding safety, specific usage limitations, and insufficient desired amenities.

6. What keeps you from using the parks and recreation facilities in Rockdale more often? (Check all that apply)



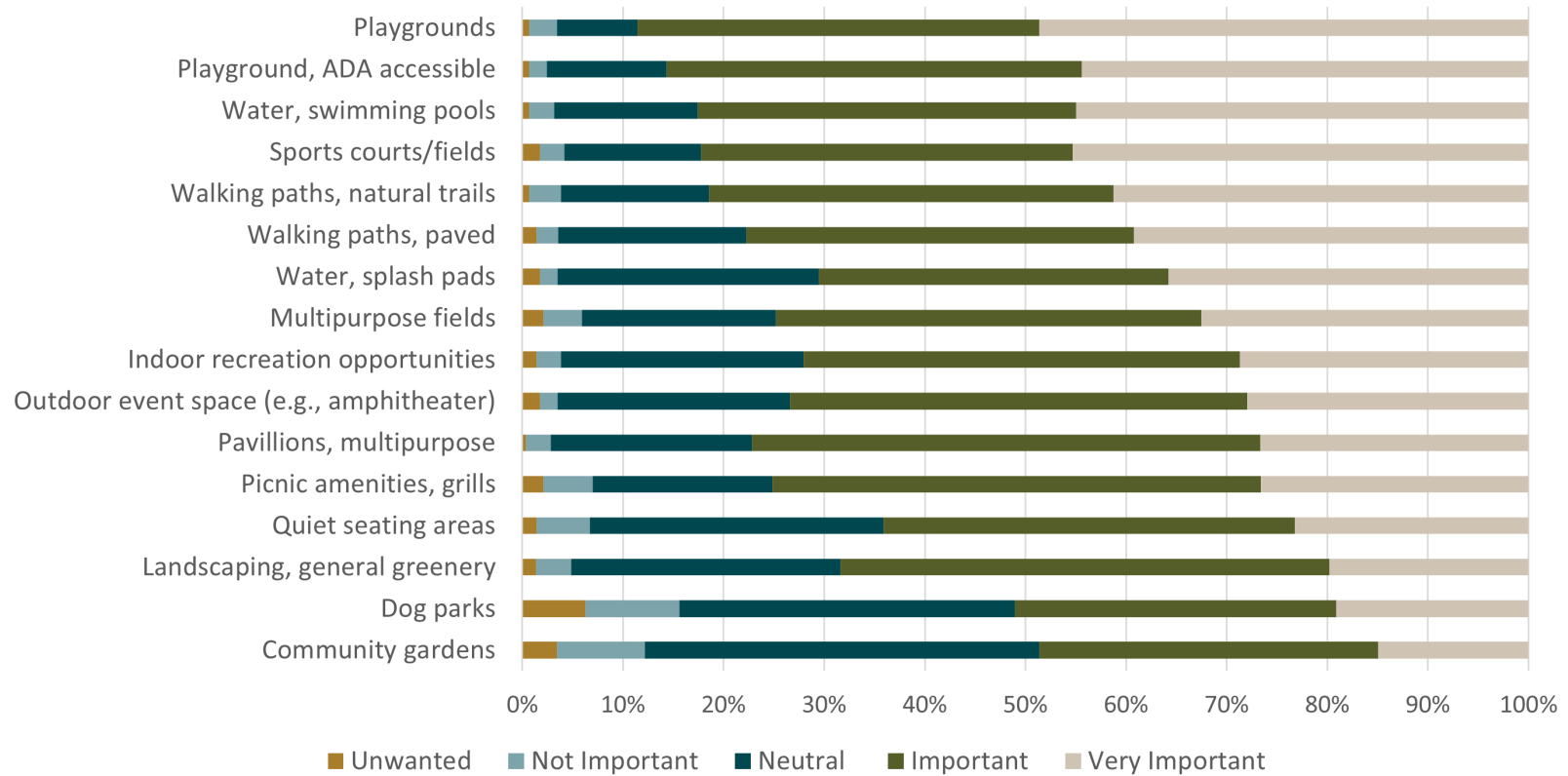
7. What are you or your family's favorite recreational activities? (Check all that apply)



Amenity Importance

The City has many opportunities to improve its parks and recreation system, with a clear focus from respondents on almost all amenity options in this question. The top three ranked amenities - ADA accessible playgrounds, swimming pools, and sports courts/fields - were highlighted as especially important. Most respondents rated all provided improvements as either very important or important, indicating a strong community desire for enhancements. Exploring these specific amenities and their priority could offer valuable guidance for aligning future initiatives with community preferences.

11. How important is it for the following amenities to be provided in Rockdale parks and recreational facilities?



Asset and Challenges

No matter the size or quality of a parks and recreation system, there are always improvements that can be made. In order to help determine the community's highest priorities, respondents were asked what is the greatest asset and challenge of the City parks and recreation system.

Key asset themes included:

- City pool
- None
- Splash pad
- Sumuel Park
- Veterans Park
- Tennis courts
- Youth fields

Key challenge themes included:

- Lack of maintenance
- Cleanliness
- Funding
- Accessibility
- Lack of sidewalks
- No indoor sporting area
- Parking

12. What is the City's greatest parks and recreation asset?



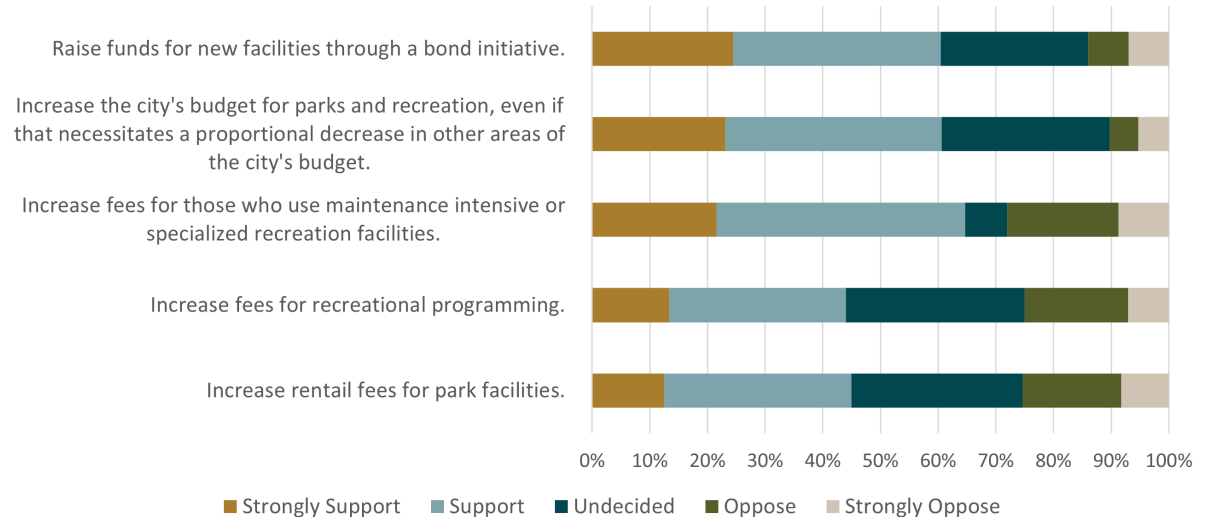
13. What is the City's greatest parks and recreation challenge?



Potential Funding to Support Parks and Recreation

In meeting the demands of Rockdale residents, securing additional funding for parks and recreation may become imperative. Respondents were asked how strongly they would or would not support various funding strategies. The most supported strategy was raising funds for a new facility through a bond initiative, with increasing the City's budget closely behind. Based on the potential willingness among residents to explore and discuss funding options, it is important for the City to have transparent communication and collaboration in addressing the community's needs.

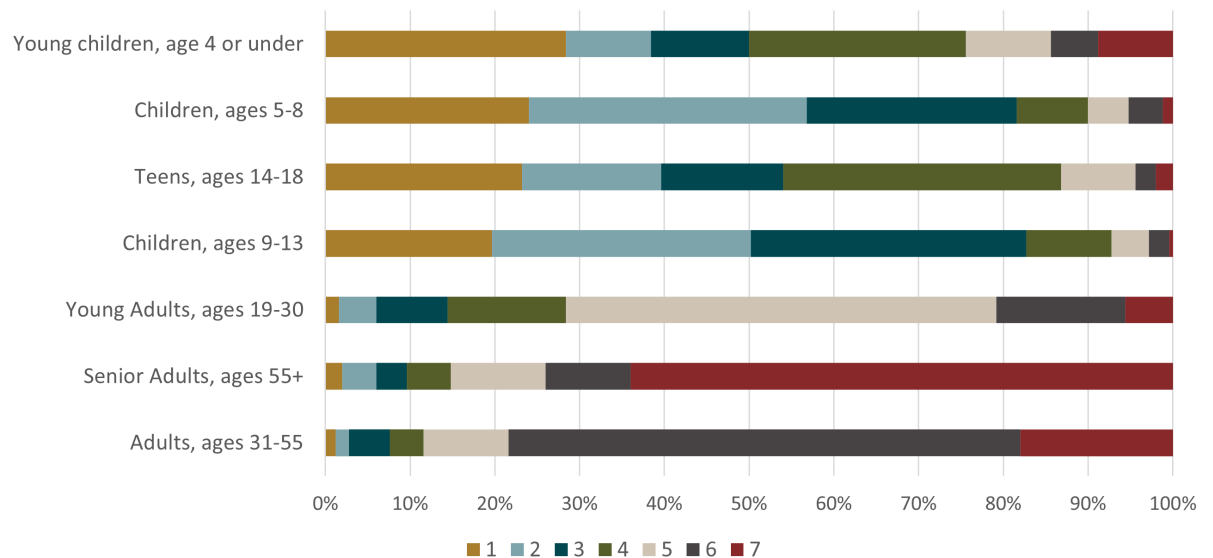
14. To meet the needs of Rockdale residents, the City may require additional funding for parks and recreation. How strongly would you support or oppose the following finance strategies?



Recreational Programming

In the strategic allocation of funding and resources for recreational programming, an important consideration is determining the age groups with the most significant needs. According to respondent feedback, the top priority age groups identified for enhanced recreational programming include young children aged 4 or under, children aged 5-8, children aged 9-13, and teens aged 14-18.

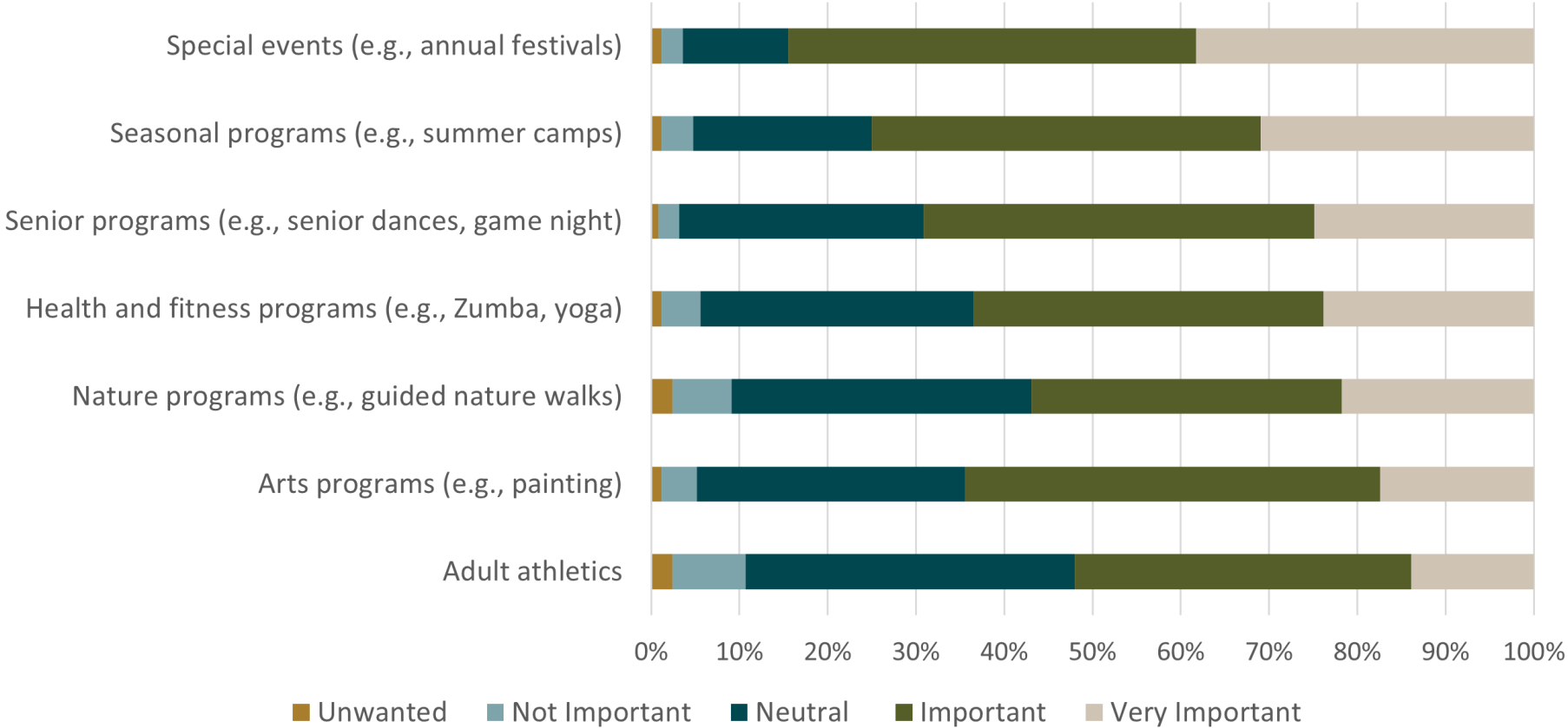
16. Rank in order the age groups you feel have the greatest needs for recreational programming.



Recreational Opportunities

When considering recreational programs, it is important to consider community preferences as they are the target user of the programs. Respondents indicated that all programs and opportunities presented in the survey are deemed important or very important. Interestingly, adult athletics emerged as the least prioritized among the preferences expressed.

17. How important is it for the City to provide or support the following types of recreational opportunities?



Standards-Based Assessment

The standards-based assessment analyzes parkland in terms of acreage, location and number of park facilities. It identifies the current level of service and whether it is meeting the community's needs. Levels of service represent a specific acreage of parkland or number of facilities needed per given population.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) publishes their Agency Performance Review annually. It presents data and insights from 1,000 parks and recreation agencies around the country. This information was referenced throughout the standards-based assessment as a baseline comparison.

Three types of standards were examined in this assessment: acreage, location and facilities.

Acreage Level of Service

The acreage level of service defines the quantity of parkland acreage as a ratio to population. The results are expressed as park acreage per 1,000 residents. The analysis examines whether there is sufficient parkland for residents today and in the future.

Spatial Level of Service

The spatial level of service looks at the location and distribution of different park types to identify underserved areas and where new parks may be needed.

Facility Level of Service

The facility level of service defines the number of park facilities needed to meet the community's recreational needs. Standards are expressed as a ratio of facility per population size (e.g., one baseball field per 3,500 residents).



Acreage Level of Service

Different types of parks are intended to serve different needs. Pocket, neighborhood and community parks, cumulatively thought of as close-to-home parks, are focused on recreational benefits for nearby residents. In addition to local residents, regional parks serve a population beyond the immediate community. Greenbelts/linear parks provide passive recreation opportunities for the whole community, while special use parks serve a focused user group (e.g., sports complex providing only athletic recreation options).

While Rockdale's parks system includes 37.1 acres of publicly accessible parkland, over 25 acres are currently geared toward dedicated user groups or a single use in special use parks.

According to the 2023 NRPA Agency Performance Review, the median community with less than 20,000 people had 13.0 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents.¹ However, community feedback during this process has highlighted that improving and enhancing the existing City parks is a higher community priority than developing new parks. Thus, a target level of service has been defined for Rockdale through comparison with the NRPA Agency Performance Review, and an understanding of the community's goals, opportunities and challenges.

Existing and target levels of service per park type are listed in the table on the next page. The City's total combined level of service today is 6.7 acres per 1,000 residents. Considering the total of all park types (including those without target levels

of service), there is a current parkland deficit of 3.0 acres, with a future deficit that grows as the population increases toward its projected 2035 population.

The City does not have any existing regional parks. In consideration of the community's feedback on where to prioritize parks and recreation spending (i.e., improving existing assets) and an understanding that regional parks often require substantial acreage and are not appropriate for all communities, no acquisition of regional parkland is recommended in this Plan. This should not, however, preclude the City from capitalizing on an opportunity for regional parkland if one should arise in the future.

Based on the target levels of service, the City is primarily lacking close-to-home parkland (i.e., pocket, neighborhood and community parks) today and in the future, as listed in the "surplus/deficit acreages" columns in the table.

The City should consider opportunities for additional close-to-home parks in areas with new development in the future. Based on the City's extensive amount of special use parkland, it will be important to enhance pocket, neighborhood and community park amenities (e.g., playground, basketball court, picnicking) within these parks to ensure that they can help meet the daily recreational needs for residents in the vicinity. Adding diverse recreation offerings to the parks will allow them to meet the need of a wider user group (e.g., adding a playground to a sports complex to provide recreation for players' families).

If properly located and developed with bicycle and pedestrian trails, greenbelts/linear parks can greatly contribute to citywide connectivity to parks and other points of interest. There is no specific target level of service for linear parks.

However, the City should evaluate opportunities to provide linear parks as an option for residents of all ages and abilities to exercise, recreate, enjoy their natural surroundings and connect with the greater community.

National Recreation & Parks Association (NRPA) 2023 Agency Review

Average Total Parkland per 1,000 Residents (for communities under 20,000 people):

- Lower Quartile = 6.0 acres/1,000 people
- Median = 13.0 acres/1,000 people
- Upper Quartile = 21.1 acres/1,000 people

<https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/research-papers/agency-performance-review/>

¹ <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/research-papers/agency-performance-review/>

Park Classification	Existing Level of Service (LOS)		Recommended Level of Service (2024)			Recommended Level of Service (2035)	
	Existing Acreage (2024) ¹	Current LOS (based on 5,529 population ²)	Recommended Target LOS (2024-2035)	2024 Recommended Acreage (based on 5,529 population ²)	Surplus/Deficit Acreages (2024)	2035 Recommended Acreage (based on 7,709 population ²)	Surplus/Deficit Acreages (2035)
Close-to-Home Parks							
Pocket Parks	1.4	0.25 Ac/1,000 Residents	0.25 Ac/1,000 Residents	1.4	0.0	1.9	-0.5
Neighborhood Parks	5.1	0.9 Ac/1,000 Residents	2.5 Ac/1,000 Residents	13.8	-8.7	19.3	-14.2
Community Parks	5.0	0.9 Ac/1,000 Residents	4.5 Ac/1,000 Residents	24.9	-19.9	34.7	-29.7
Close-to-Home Parks Subtotal	11.5	2.1 Ac/1,000 Residents	7.25 Ac/1,000 Residents	40.1	-28.6	55.9	-44.4
Other Parks							
Regional Parks	0	0.0 Ac/1,000 Residents	0.0 Ac/1,000 Residents	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Greenbelt/Linear Parks	0	0.0 Ac/1,000 Residents	Varies	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Special Use Parks	25.6	4.6 Ac/1,000 Residents	Varies	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Other Parks Subtotal	25.6	4.6 Ac/1,000 Residents	Varies	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
All Park Types	37.1	6.7 Ac/1,000 Residents	7.25 Ac/1,000 Residents	40.1	-3.0	55.9	-18.8

¹ Includes City-owned and publicly accessible parks. Excludes City-owned recreation facilities as the surrounding open space areas are not currently programmed as parks

² Source: Current Population: United States Census Bureau, July 1, 2022 Population Estimates; 2035 Population: 2.5% Growth Rate Projections in the Land Use and Development Chapter

The bottom row includes all park types (including those without target levels of service) and an overall recommended level of service of 7.25 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. The total 2024 and 2035 surplus and deficit calculations are based on all park types combined (i.e., 37.1 existing acres - 40.1 recommended acres in 2024 = 3.0 acre deficit)

Negative numbers = acreage deficits

Figure 73. Parkland Acreage Level of Service Table

Spatial Level of Service

Access to Pocket & Neighborhood Parks

Pocket parks typically serve residents within a 1/4-mile area, while neighborhood parks are meant to serve residents within a 1/4-mile to 1/2-mile radius. These parks are intended to serve daily recreational needs for nearby residents and are often accessed by foot or bike. These service areas equate to approximately a 5-minute (1/4-mile) to 10-minute (1/2-mile) walk. Pocket and neighborhood parks should be generally located away from major arterial streets and should be accessible without requiring residents to cross major roadways.

The pocket and neighborhood park service areas are illustrated on the maps on the next two pages. Service areas are clipped where they would require residents to cross a major roadway or railroad tracks to access them.

Neighborhood and community parks may also serve pocket park needs for nearby neighbors, and likewise community parks may also serve neighborhood park needs. For this reason, pocket park service areas include pocket, neighborhood and community parks and neighborhood park service areas include both neighborhood and community parks.

When service areas are overlaid with the residential growth areas, it is evident where existing and future residential areas are not being served adequately by parks.

There are minimal pocket parks within the City; however, the presence of neighborhood and community parks provides relatively good access to recreational spaces for residents in neighborhoods near Downtown and somewhat for residents in the established neighborhoods west of Downtown. Notably, there are large areas of both existing and future residential areas lacking such amenities. Neighborhood parks have similar service areas to pocket parks, with slightly wider coverage. The same areas lacking access to pocket parks are also generally lacking access to neighborhood parks. To note, the areas lacking coverage do contain some non-City owned recreational spaces, that could serve these park needs if there were formal agreements in place and with some enhancements which would allow them to serve general public park uses.

Regardless of how existing parks are further enhanced, there are still substantial areas lacking access to parkland of any kind. As the City considers locations for new close-to-home parks, priority should be given to residential areas located within the need areas. Need areas are those areas within the growth area that are not currently serviced with appropriate parks, as illustrated and discussed on the following pages.

As the City considers improvements to its sidewalk and trail network, priority should be given to streets within a 1/2-mile distance of existing parks to allow nearby residents to safely walk and bike to the parks.



Moultry Park



Samuel Park

Map 54. Service Area of Parks Meeting Pocket Needs

Road

Railroad

Rockdale City ETJ

Rockdale City Limits

Pocket Park

0.25 mile buffer

Growth Area

Other Parks

1

Post Oak Park

2

Wolf Park

3

Moultry Park

4

Sumuel Park

5

Bridge Park

6

Veteran's Park

7

Skate Park

8

Patterson Community Center

N

SCALE: N.T.S

Map 55. Service Area of Parks Meeting Neighborhood Needs

Road

Railroad

Rockdale City ETJ

Rockdale City Limits

Neighborhood Parks

0.25 mile buffer

0.50 mile buffer

Growth Area

Other Parks

1

Bridge Park

2

Sumuel Park

3

Moultry Park

4

Veteran's Park

5

Skate Park

6

Patterson
Community Center

SCALE: N.T.S

Access to Community Parks

Community parks are large parks that are meant to serve multiple neighborhoods. They typically include a range of facilities such as playgrounds, picnic pavilions, athletic fields and courts, trails, swimming pools, and splash pads. Residents are often willing to drive to these parks for access to a greater diversity of options than at their neighborhood park.

A 1- to 2-mile service area is shown around the parks that have the potential to provide community park benefits based on their size, amenities or current use (see map on the next page). There is currently only one community park in Rockdale, Veterans Park. When the community parks service area is overlaid with the residential growth areas, parkland need areas are most evident in the eastern portion of the City. As this area further develops, there may be an opportunity to create community parks or upgrade existing parks to meet both community and neighborhood parkland needs for this part of the City.

The open space around the George Hill Patterson Center is not currently used as a community park. However, based on its size, if properly amenitized it could become a new community park for the City. Additionally, Moultry Park has land around it that could be considered for acquisition, which would allow it to also serve as a community park. Enhancing the Patterson Center and Moultry Park into community level parks would go a long way toward expanding parks coverage without building new parks.



Veterans Park (all images)



Map 56. Service Area of Parks Meeting Community Needs

Road

Railroad

Rockdale City ETJ

Rockdale City Limits

Community Park

1 Mile Buffer

2 Mile Buffer

Growth Area

Other Parks

The map displays the Rockdale City Limits, outlined in a thick black line, and the Rockdale City ETJ, outlined in a dashed black line. The area is divided into several zones: a 1-mile buffer (light green), a 2-mile buffer (blue), and a growth area (orange). Other parks are shown in green. A yellow square indicates the location of a community park, which is identified as Veteran's Park (1) in a callout box. The map also shows major roads (79, 908, 487, 77) and a railroad line. A north arrow and a scale of N.T.S. are located in the bottom left corner.

1 Veteran's Park

SCALE: N.T.S

Access to Trails

Similar to pocket and neighborhood parks, trails are often accessed by foot or bike. They thus have the same service area as pocket and neighborhood parks — 1/4- to 1/2-mile.

Existing trails in Rockdale are provided as small loop trails within Veterans Park and Sumuel Park. Based on nearby natural conditions, there may be opportunities to connect these trails to greater areas of Rockdale using new trails along floodplains and creeks.

The trail and pocket/neighborhood parkland need areas are relatively similar. If trails and new parks are located in close vicinity to each other, the trail network could serve as a community-wide connection between park amenities.

Based on strong community support, further development and expansion of the City's trail network should be considered a priority for implementation.



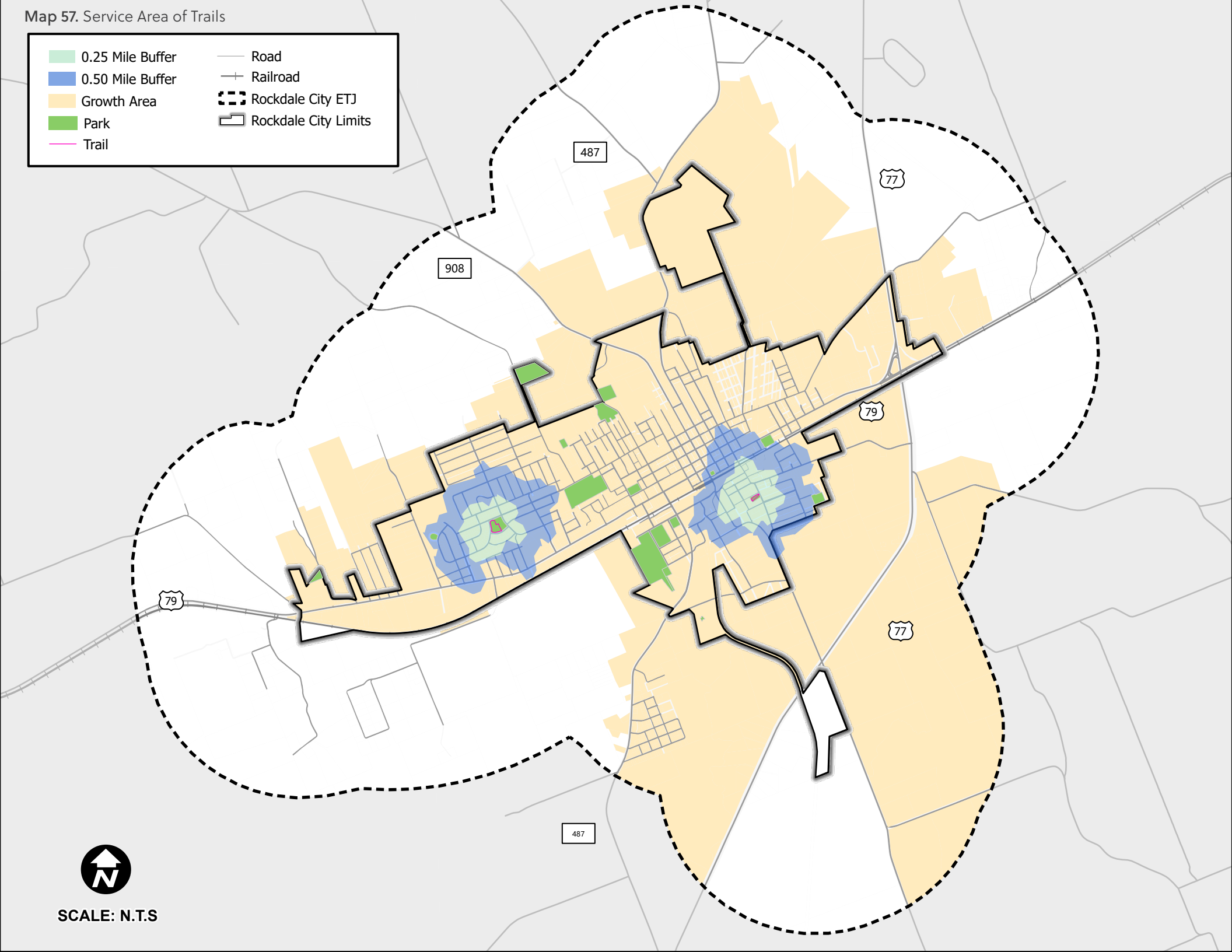
Veterans Park



Sumuel Park

Map 57. Service Area of Trails

- | | |
|---|--|
|  0.25 Mile Buffer |  Road |
|  0.50 Mile Buffer |  Railroad |
|  Growth Area |  Rockdale City ETJ |
|  Park |  Rockdale City Limits |
|  Trail | |



SCALE: N.T.S

Facility Level of Service

In addition to considering the different types of parkland, it is important to consider what types of facilities are available for resident use. The 2023 NRPA Agency Performance Review also provides comparison data for the prevalence for outdoor park and recreation facilities per population. The facility target levels of service were determined through a baseline comparison of the 2023 NRPA Agency Performance Review results for communities with less than 20,000 people. Targets were then tailored to Rockdale based on community input, goals, and an understanding of parkland and staffing opportunities and challenges.

The Facility Level of Service table on the next page illustrates the current level of service for each type of facility based on the current estimated population. Targets are applied to the facility categories to determine current and future deficits. The far right column displays the findings from the 2023 NRPA Agency Performance Review for communities with less than 20,000 people, when available.

There are currently deficiencies in the following facilities:

- Basketball courts
- Disc golf
- Fitness equipment circuit
- Multipurpose fields
- Soccer fields
- Trails
- Picnic facilities
- Recreation center

Looking out toward 2035, without the addition of new facilities, there will also be deficiencies in:

- Standalone backstops
- Volleyball courts
- Splash pads

Most other current deficits remain the same in 2035 or increase incrementally.



Skate Park



Veterans Park

		Current Available ¹	Current LOS (1 Facility per # Residents)	Target LOS (Per Residents)	2024 Need (based on 5,529 pop. ²)	2024 Deficit or Surplus	2035 Need (based on 7,709 pop. ²)	2035 Deficit or Surplus	Cities less than 20,000
Active	Baseball Fields	5	1,106	1 per 3,500	2	3	3	2	1 per 3,114
	Softball Fields	4	1,382	1 per 5,000	2	2	2	2	1 per 5,079
	Standalone Backstop	1	5,529	1 per 6,000	1	0	2	-1	
	Basketball Courts	1.5	3,686	1 per 4,000	2	-0.5	2	-0.5	1 per 3,729
	Disc Golf	0	0	1 per city	1	-1	1	-1	
	Fitness Equipment Circuit	0	0	1 per city	1	-1	1	-1	
	Multipurpose Field ³	0	0	1 per 4,000	2	-2	2	-2	1 per 3,859
	Pickleball Court	1	5,529	1 per 4,000	2	-1	2	-1	1 per 3,252
	Skate Park	1	5,529	1 per city	1	0	1	0	1 per 10,726
	Soccer Fields	0	0	1 per 3,500	2	-2	3	-3	1 per 3,600
	Tennis Courts	3	1,843	1 per 3,000	2	1	3	0	1 per 2,805
	Trails (miles)	0.4	13,823	1 per 2,000	2.8	-2.4	4	-3.6	Median 4 total miles
	Volleyball Courts (Outdoor)	1	5,529	1 per 7,000	1	0	2	-1	
Passive	Amphitheater/Outdoor Event Space	1	5,529	1 per city	1	0	1	0	1 per 11,000
	Dog Park	1	5,529	1 per city	1	0	1	0	1 per 11,100
	Horseshoe Pits	0	0	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies	
	Picnic Pavilions	5	1,106	1 per 3,000	2	3	3	2	
	Picnic Facilities (e.g., tables)	4	1,382	In all publicly accessed parks	In all publicly accessed parks	-5	In all publicly accessed parks	-5	
	Playgrounds	5	1,106	1 per 2,000	3	2	4	1	1 per 2,014
Water	Fishing Piers	0	0	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies	
	Swimming Pool/Aquatic Facility	1	5,529	1 per city	1	0	1	0	1 per 9,745
	Splash Pad	1	5,529	1 per 6,000	1	0	2	-1	
Misc.	Recreation Center	0	0	1 per 10,000	1	-1	1	-1	1 per 9,745
	Restrooms/Portable	7	790	Where feasible	Where feasible	Varies	Where feasible	Varies	

¹ Excludes ISD and non-publicly accessible facilities

² Source: Current Population: United States Census Bureau, July 1, 2022 Population Estimates; 2035 Population: 2.5% Growth Rate Projections in Land Use and Development Chapter

³ Multipurpose field should be appropriate for soccer, football and other rectangular field uses

Figure 74. Facility Level of Service Table

Summary of Needs

Through the needs assessment and public engagement process, the need for additional distribution of parkland, increased connectivity, new and improved facilities, and expanded recreational programs were identified. These needs include services that are currently lacking for existing residents as well as needs expected as Rockdale's population grows through 2035.

The future Cornerstone Development in Target Area 1 is proposing to dedicate approximately 3.8 acres of parkland. Due to this dedication, the needs in this area will change from needing parkland and amenities to potentially more specific needs to be determined once the parks are developed.

The map on the opposite page illustrates all existing close-to-home park service areas, residential growth areas and areas lacking adequate access to any parkland. The areas lacking any parkland access are mostly future growth areas and should be Rockdale's target areas for new parkland acquisition or expansion of park services to provide the needed access. Key parks and recreation needs are summarized below.



Parkland Acreage and Development

- Enhanced maintenance for all park spaces and equipment
- Upgrades to existing parks
- Account for additional close-to-home parks, especially in future residential areas



Park Facilities

- Basketball courts
- Disc golf
- Fitness equipment
- Multipurpose fields
- Soccer fields
- Trails
- Picnic facilities
- Recreation center



Parkland Access and Connectivity

- A trail network that connects major park spaces
- Safer and more complete sidewalk network throughout the City



Recreational Programs

- Children and youth programming
- Indoor recreation
- Additional family-oriented community events

Map 58. Park Needs & Target Areas Map

Road

Railroad

Rockdale City ETJ

Rockdale City Limits

Park Coverage Area

Growth Area

Parks

The map displays the Rockdale City ETJ (dashed line) and City Limits (solid line). The Park Coverage Area is shaded in blue, while Growth Areas are in yellow. Existing parks are marked with green polygons. Three specific regions are highlighted with red ovals and labeled: Target Area 1 in the north, Target Area 2 in the east, and Target Area 3 in the south. A callout box points to a location within Target Area 1, stating: "Future Cornerstone development to dedicate 3.8 acres of parkland." The map includes major roads 487, 908, 77, and 79, and a railroad line. A north arrow and scale (N.T.S.) are located in the bottom left corner.

Future Cornerstone
development to dedicate
3.8 acres of parkland.

**Target
Area 1**

**Target
Area 2**

**Target
Area 3**

SCALE: N.T.S

Resource-Based Assessment

The resource-based assessment is the third analysis for the needs assessment. This exercise recognizes key physical, man-made or natural resources within the community that may provide potential recreational opportunities. These areas can either support active recreational pursuits or provide opportunities for passive enjoyment. The following areas have potential to be further leveraged for recreation or open space preservation.

Natural Drainage Channels

Water bodies and floodplains are areas that are inherently unsuitable for most types of development. They are also often beautiful natural areas that wind through cities. Rockdale's streams, such as the Rockdale Branch and Little Ham Branch, and associated floodplains extend south and north across the City. With strategic development of trail infrastructure, these natural areas could be used as a key element in a citywide trail network.



Natural drainage channel in Bridge Park.

Recommendations

The overall consensus of the community feedback related to parks was that residents would prefer to see enhancements and upgrades to existing parks over the addition of new parks spaces. This is also in line with the City's position, as they do not currently have the staff to maintain additional park spaces. Therefore, recommendations focus on making the most of the City's existing parks and recreation assets, with a few aspirational recommendations for new parks and facilities.



Veterans Park

Goals for the Parks & Recreation System

The following goals provide overall direction for Rockdale's parks and recreation system to achieve the community's vision and aspirations. These goals should be used to help guide the City's decision-making processes and form the basis of the PROST plan's recommendations.

1. Proactively obtain and preserve parkland for permanent open space.
2. Ensure the park system responds to the needs and desires of Rockdale's citizens.
3. Provide a variety of recreational opportunities suitable for all ages, abilities and interests.
4. Prioritize safety, maintenance and accessibility in Rockdale parks.
5. Pursue partnerships and diverse funding strategies to support the enhancement and expansion of parks and recreational options for Rockdale residents.

Parkland Acquisition & Preservation

Goal 1: The City will proactively acquire and preserve parkland for permanent open space.

Action 1.1 - Preservation of existing parkland.

As the City grows, especially into the ETJ area, the City should proactively pursue preservation of land for parks. The first step is to preserve existing City-owned land. Land is a finite resource and divesting of parkland assets is not in the long-term interest of the City or its residents. Additionally, the City of Rockdale leadership and community members have identified the priority of improving existing parks before acquiring more acreage.

The undeveloped City-owned land adjacent to the George Hill Patterson Community Center provides an option for new parkland without acquisition.

Action 1.2 - Acquisition of land outlined in the Plan.

Undeveloped, privately owned land adjacent to Moultry Park may provide an option for acquisition and expansion of that park. Expanding and/or further developing these areas has potential to address some of the parkland needs in target areas three and four, shown on Map 57.

As the land within target area one develops in future years, the City should look for opportunities to acquire and preserve parkland. This could be through parkland dedication requirements for

residential development projects going into the area or the purchase of additional land parcels by the City.

Action 1.3 - Review parkland dedication policy and modify as needed.

In order to meet parkland needs as additional areas of Rockdale are developed, the City should review the current parkland dedication policy, located in the Rockdale Code of Ordinances - Subdivision Ordinance, and update as needed. This could allow additional dedication of land and/or collection of funds from the private development community for acquisition, development and improvements of parks within defined park need areas. It is important that any accepted land has true recreation potential.

The City may consider privately owned parks, such as those owned and managed by an HOA, to account for some level of pocket or neighborhood parks accessible for future residents in communities that provide them with those amenities.



Moultry Park

Park Improvements & New Amenities

Goal 2: Ensure the park system responds to the needs and desires of Rockdale's citizens.

Action 2.1 - Improve Veterans Park.

This is the most highly amenitized park currently in Rockdale. Recommended improvements include:

- Ensure the amenities stay safe and in good condition via proactive maintenance.
- Implement the concept plan already created for the Veterans Memorial.
- Install lighting.
- Consider additional amenities including exercise stations.
- Upgrade the walking trails to be ADA accessible.
- Upgrade the pool area (see Action 5.6 for more details).
- Enhance the park through general beautification and landscaping.
- Add community gardens.
- Add public WiFi.

Action 2.2 - Improve Sumuel Park.

This is the most recently updated park space in Rockdale. Recommended improvements include:

- Ensure the amenities stay safe and in good condition via proactive maintenance.
- Consider shading the basketball court.
- Install additional lighting and parking.
- Enhance the natural function of the

drainageway via native plantings and habitat restoration.

Action 2.3 - Enhance beautification efforts throughout the parks.

The community voiced a desire for more attractive parks. Beautifying parks helps to increase community pride, attract greater usage and improve the City's overall image. The City should consider beautifying existing parks through enhanced landscaping in high-visibility areas, choosing amenities with upgraded materials for durability and aesthetics (e.g., furnishings and pavilions), and proactively repairing and replacing amenities as needed.

Action 2.4 - Develop a community-wide trail network connecting key points of interest.

Establishing routes connecting schools to parks and points of interest throughout the City is important for promoting outdoor activities and enhancing community connectivity. A first phase of trails has been identified, to connect Bridge Park, Moultry Park, Sumuel Park, the Skate Park, and the George Hill Patterson Community Center. A larger, second phase of the trail network would connect additional destinations including Downtown, Veterans Park, the Baseball and Softball Fields, and schools. A connection to the Dog Park could also be considered. See Map 58.

If the City pursues the idea of a consolidated regional complex, the trail links to the softball and baseball fields would not be constructed. However, if these sites redevelop as major projects, trail connections may still be warranted.

Action 2.5 - Improve Bridge Park.

Recommended improvements include:

- Implement the concept plan already created, including amenities such as walking trails, a pavilion and events lawn, landscaping, and parking.
- Consider nature play for the playscape in Bridge Park, as it offers a different play experience and keeps with the natural character of the park.
- Ensure new amenities are ADA accessible.
- Prioritize protecting the space's natural character, including trees and drainageways, while making upgrades to the park.
- Enhance the natural function of the drainageway via native plantings and habitat restoration.

Map 59. Proposed Trail Network.

Future Trail Phase 1

Future Trail Phase 2

Future Trail Phase 3

Rockdale City ETJ

Rockdale City Limits

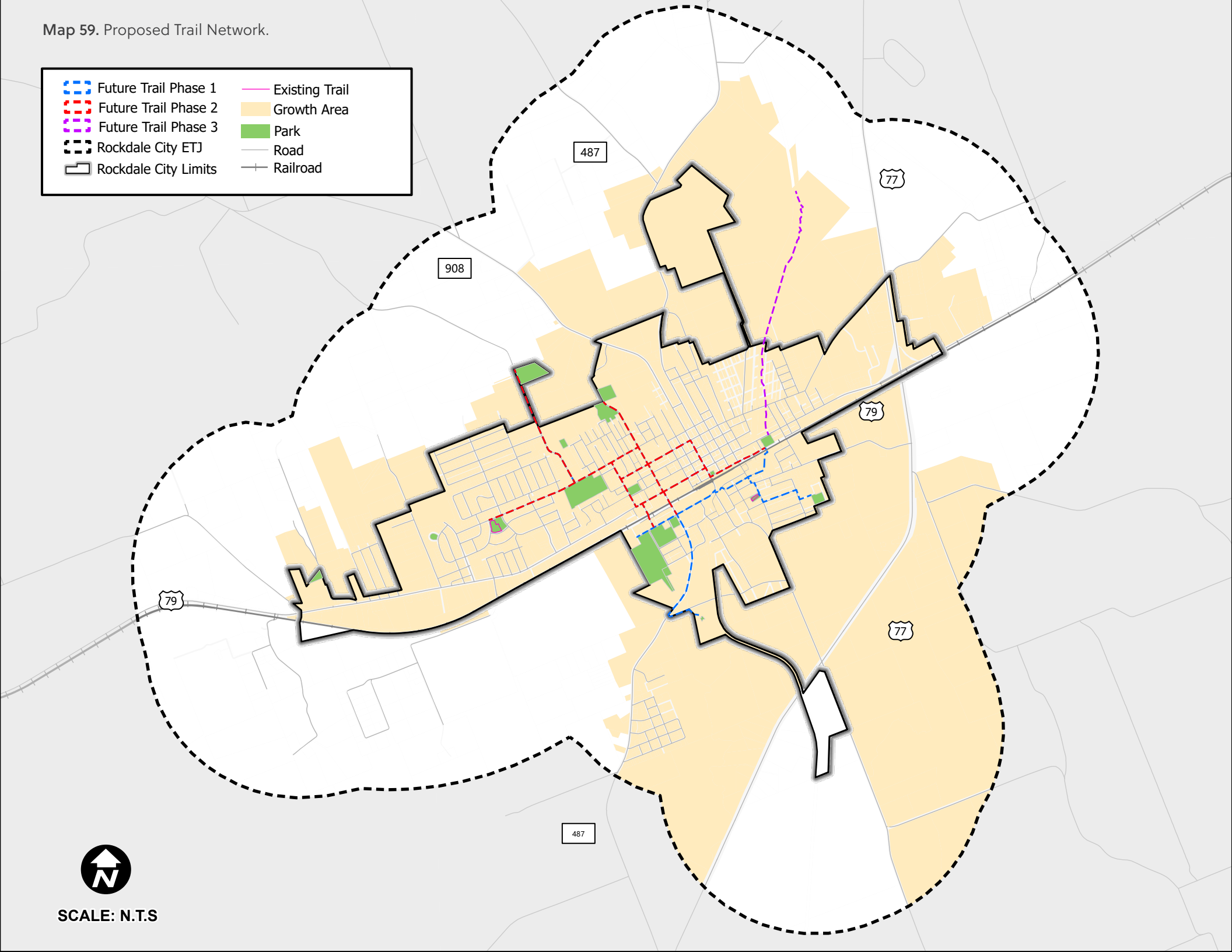
Existing Trail

Growth Area

Park

Road

Railroad



SCALE: N.T.S

Action 2.6 - Relocate the Dog Park.

The City should consider relocating the Dog Park to Fatherree Field if improvements are made to the road quality on Beverly Dr, or alternatively, explore relocating it to the vacant land surrounding the George Hill Patterson Community Center. Relocation would offer the prospect of significantly expanding its size, providing ample space for dogs to roam and play. Relocation also allows the existing site to be used solely by the animal shelter, minimizing biosecurity concerns.

Recommended improvements to the relocated dog park include:

- Offer basic amenities such as signage and lighting, parking area, fully fenced play areas with dual gates, separate play areas for large and small dogs, shaded seating in both play areas, drinking water availability for both humans and pets, and waste stations with baggies and receptacles.
- Consider ground cover within play areas that minimizes mud, such as bark or pea gravel, especially in the most highly trafficked areas.
- Provide additional amenities such as canine agility obstacles as budget allows.

Action 2.7 - Improve the Skate Park.

Recommended improvements include:

- Implement paved parking to accommodate visitors to the park.
- Upgrade existing skate ramps and amenities to promote safety, usability

and accessibility. Work with park users to ensure new facilities are in line with user needs.

- Add shaded seating and tables, restrooms, loop trail, and public WiFi.
- Utilize the undeveloped area of the park, which is currently in the floodplain, to create a multipurpose or 3v3 soccer field, ensuring compatibility with its functional floodplain status.
- Enhance the natural function of the drainageway via native plantings and habitat restoration.

Action 2.8 - Improve George Hill Patterson Community Center Outdoor Spaces.

Amenitize the underutilized outdoor spaces of the site to turn the space into a full community park.

- Implement the concept plan already created, including amenities such as walking trails, multiple pavilions and outdoor event spaces, a playscape, benches and lighting, art, outdoor games and activities, and landscaping.
- Add park signage consistent with all Rockdale parks and ensure the community knows this is now a public park.
- Consider additional amenities such as picnic areas with grilling stations, drinking water sources and public WiFi.
- Add community gardens.
- Ensure new amenities are ADA accessible.
- Protect the space's natural character, especially large shade trees, while making upgrades to the park.

- Consider relocating the dog park to additional vacant space around the center.
- Explore adding a full-size soccer/multipurpose field to the site if there is room beyond the already conceptualized amenities.

Action 2.9 - Improve Moultry Park.

The City may explore the opportunity to acquire some additional acreage for Moultry Park and enhance this spaces into a full community park.

Recommended improvements include:

- Improve signage and park visibility from Baxter St.
- Pave the access road and parking area.
- Increase lighting.
- Enhance the park through beautification and landscaping.
- Update restrooms and add water fountains.
- Provide a shade cover over the basketball court.
- Consider relocating the playscape farther from the basketball court to minimize conflict between age groups. Consider updating and modernizing with a new playscape, if budget allows. Provide a shade cover over the playscape and benches for to improve user comfort.
- Install a picnic pavilion with WiFi connectivity.
- Upgrade the large portion of undeveloped park area to be a multipurpose practice field.
- Remove the existing standalone backstop and install a new backstop at one corner of the new multipurpose field.

Action 2.10 - Evaluate opportunities to provide a Regional Sports Complex.

One of the few recreational amenities the City is currently adequately providing are baseball and softball fields. If the City wishes to create a new regional tournament-level sports complex, this Plan recommends consolidating the existing baseball/softball fields to this new complex and redeveloping those existing sites. Rockdale does not need both the existing and new baseball/softball facilities. Additionally, a new sports complex should accommodate those amenities that Rockdale currently lacks, such as soccer fields. A regional sports complex should be located in the vicinity of other amenities, such as dining, shopping, and lodging, in order to realize the most economic impact for the City.

Action 2.11 - Improve Post Oak Place Park.

Amenitize the space to serve as a pocket park.

- Select minimal passive amenities, such as benches, picnic tables and soft surface walking paths, to minimize creating nuisances for immediate neighbors. Avoid adding lighting or off-street parking, out of respect to the neighbors.
- Work with the adjacent neighbors to identify appropriate enhancements to this space.
- Preserve the space's natural character while making park upgrades (e.g., large shade trees).

Action 2.12 - Develop park design guidelines.

In addition to signage, incorporating similar materials, furnishings and level of maintenance throughout all City parks will help to build greater continuity within the parks system and provide efficiency for design decisions. The City should consider adopting park design guidelines to steer the design and construction of new and improved parks and recreation facilities. Consideration should be given to:

- Choosing furnishings and facilities that use attractive, durable, vandal-resistant materials.
- Implementing standards for native and water-efficient landscaping.
- Minimizing maintenance requirements to the extent possible.
- Increasing security and safety through design decisions (e.g., Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design).
- Designing for all ages and abilities.
- Considering adjacencies between amenities and the target audiences.
- Allowing for flexibility of use.
- Maximizing shade.
- Beautifying the parks.
- Incorporating a consistent parks brand through styles and materials used in the parks.

Action 2.13 - Systematically address recreation amenity deficiencies.

As the City further amenitizes existing parks or develops new parks, it should prioritize providing amenities with identified deficits as defined in the facility level of service assessment. These do not need to be the only amenities included, but should be a starting point for all discussions about adding recreation options to parks.

Action 2.14 - Update the PROST Plan.

The community's parks and recreation needs and desires will change as the population grows and demographics shift. The City should plan to update the Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Master Plan periodically to ensure that it reflects current needs and priorities. The TPWD recommends updating the Plan every five years or before any new major developments occur that significantly change the parks and recreation needs of residents. This can also help the City during a TPWD grant funding evaluation, as TPWD places a higher point value on submittals that demonstrate that a plan has been updated within the previous five years. All Plan updates should include a public involvement process.

In the coming years, the City should review and update the Plan using the following steps:

- Annually: Staff review implementation to identify progress and provide an annual report to the City Council.
- Every five years (or sooner if needed): Conduct a full review and make needed updates to the inventory, needs assessment, recommendations, and prioritization, if needed.

Recreational Facilities & Programming

Goal 3: Provide a variety of recreational opportunities suitable for all ages, abilities and interests.

Action 3.1 - Evaluate opportunities to provide a Community and/or Recreation Center in Rockdale.

Based on community input, there is a strong desire for a community or recreation center in Rockdale that can accommodate indoor recreational classes and additional programming, especially for teens and youth. It is recommended that the City undertake a Community and/or Recreation Center feasibility study to determine the viability, location, programming, cost and potential funding sources for such a facility. The study should consider space needs for:

- Indoor recreational programs and classes for all ages.
- Rentable spaces for meetings and events of different sizes.
- A lounge for teens with a student-staffed coffee shop/cafe, an e-sports room and lounge furniture.
- Adequate parking to serve the desired programming.
- After school programs.
- Potential partnership programs.

Potential locations to consider could include:

- Redevelopment of the Aycock Center.
- Redevelopment of the baseball or softball fields, if those sites get consolidated into a regional complex.

- A new site within Downtown or near the high school.

The site of the new Community and/or Recreation Center should connect to the city-wide trails network and specifically to the middle and high schools via safe multi-modal routes.

Action 3.2 - Develop or support the development of a Community & Recreation Center in Rockdale.

Following identification of the preferred location, programming, and funding or partnership strategy, the City should proceed with the design, construction and management of a Community & Recreation Center.

Action 3.3 - Support more community clubs and activities.

There is a need for clubs and activities for all residents. The City should support programs such as the arts and STEM. This could include initiatives/programs such as:

- Based on community feedback, a high priority should be placed on youth programs.
- Athletic leagues and clinics.
- Arts and crafts classes and camps.

- Technology classes and camps.
- Inclusive programs for children with all abilities.
- Non-traditional sports programs (e.g., skateboarding).

Action 3.4 - Create a community garden program.

Community gardens were an identified need by the community and can provide a variety of health and wellness benefits for community members. The City should seek to provide community garden plots in their community level parks, including Veterans Park, Moultry Park, or the George Hill Patterson Community Center.

Along with provision of the garden plots, there must be a program in place to ensure proper use and maintenance of plots. This can be a community or City-led program that focuses on the member and plot management as well as the communal elements of the garden, such as:

- General area upkeep and work days.
- Communal tools.
- Rules and security.
- Educational programs, either for members or external groups.
- Care trades (for when members are out of town and need extra help caring for their plot).

Action 3.5 - Enhance events programming.

Many park spaces are going to be most effective and valuable when they are properly programmed with events and activities. This could be the responsibility of a new recreational programming coordinator or manager role on City staff (as noted in Action 4.2), the Rockdale MDD or other organization as deemed appropriate. The park spaces noted as most appropriate to host community events (given the recommended updates and enhancements) are:

- Bridge Park.
- Patterson Center
- Wolf Park and the Milam Avenue Festival Street.



Abandoned Aycock School

Safety & Maintenance

Goal 4: Prioritize safety, maintenance and accessibility in Rockdale parks.

Action 4.1 - Conduct a staffing assessment.

The Rockdale Public Works Department currently includes three staff members to maintain the City's parks and support City events. The parks related staff currently focus mostly on day-to-day maintenance and not on long-range parks planning.

It is recommended that the City conduct a staffing assessment to determine needs for additional staff and consider the establishment of an official Parks and Recreation Department. The assessment should consider increased maintenance regularity, capacity to quickly address safety and security concerns, and handle recreational programming. The assessment should also consider the staffing needs beyond the day-to-day operations and maintenance, such as long-range planning, prioritization, securing funding and parks development.

Action 4.2 - Ensure adequate funding and staffing accompany park system expansions.

A poorly maintained park is oftentimes viewed as worse than no park at all. As the City develops additional park facilities, it is also crucial to budget adequate funding and staffing to allow for increased park system maintenance and repairs. If the City wants to grow recreational

programming, it is likely that there will be the need for a specific recreational programming coordinator or manager staff position.

Action 4.3 - Develop a proactive maintenance plan.

The overall maintenance of park facilities is a major concern for Rockdale residents. City maintenance staff is overburdened and responsible for all maintenance throughout the City. With the addition of new staff dedicated to parks planning, maintenance and development, a maintenance plan that focuses on proactive updates and quickly addresses any equipment safety concerns should be created. A proactive maintenance can help prevent unexpected costs and undue risk for the City as well as allow staff to identify the most efficient and effective way to maintain parks. At a minimum, this plan should include:

- An inventory of park assets.
- Proactive park maintenance plans and schedules for each park.
- Replacement plans for amenities.
- Required training necessary to develop the specialized skill sets needed to maintain the parks.

Action 4.4 - Conduct an ADA assessment and develop a prioritized plan to address any issues.

Some of the amenities in the parks system are currently inaccessible to individuals who are mobility challenged. In order to provide equal access to park amenities, the City should conduct an ADA assessment of each of the parks including trails, playgrounds, splash pads, parking areas, picnic facilities, etc. Identified deficiencies should be addressed in a prioritized order.

Action 4.5 - Increase shade within all parks.

In Texas's climate, shade is an important element in making the parks usable and comfortable and also in promoting community health and wellness in public spaces. It is recommended that the City provide additional shaded areas in all parks. This can be through the use of shade structures, shade fabric or the planting of more shade trees. These efforts should be focused in gathering areas and along walking trails.

Action 4.6 - Develop a Lighting Plan.

Many of the parks in Rockdale lack adequate lighting, which can make the parks feel less available and comfortable for users. The City should conduct an assessment of each of the parks including trails, playgrounds, parking areas, picnic facilities, etc. and identify deficiencies in lighting. The City should then come up with a plan to increase and update lighting in a prioritized order. This can include upgrades to lighting that can not only enhance safety but also reduce maintenance and increase aesthetics and efficiency of fixtures.

Action 4.7 - Provide system-wide consistent parks signage.

Consistent parks signage, including materials and graphic content, helps residents and visitors navigate to/within parks, visually recognize City-owned parkland, and build an understanding of allowable behaviors. The City should develop a consistent parks branding strategy and update entry and wayfinding signs at all parks accordingly. Each park should have signs with the park name, rules and contact information for maintenance and other requests. Entry signs should be located in prominently visible locations and have park names at an easily legible size. Park rules signage should be provided, where needed.

Action 4.8 - Evaluate opportunities to increase the use of technology at all City parks.

Creating opportunities for people to interact with nature while staying connected with technology can be a great way to encourage increased park usage. It is recommended that the City seek to provide public WiFi access at all City parks. The City can also utilize QR code quick links on signs throughout the parks to allow people to report an issue, learn about a recreation opportunity, educate themselves about natural features or participate in organized activities (e.g., digital scavenger hunt).



Needed maintenance at Veterans Park

Partnerships & Funding

Goal 5: Pursue partnerships and diverse funding strategies to support the expansion of parks and recreational options for Rockdale residents.

Action 5.1 - Work with the Chamber of Commerce to enhance Wolf Park.

Recommended enhancements include:

- Transform the park into a paved plaza and Downtown signature space.
- Amenitize the space for everyday use that is also flexible for events, such as movable picnic tables in the pavilion.
- Implement general beautification and landscaping with a focus on enhanced planting beds rather than a large grass area.
- Add food truck hook-ups for events – this could also be added to the MDD parking lot, creating a food truck area off to the side of the park space.
- Install public WiFi.

Action 5.2 - Work with the Rockdale Historical Society to amenitize their Downtown green spaces.

There are two blocks of green space behind the Historic Depot Building along Milam Ave. This site sits in a prime location in Downtown Rockdale adjacent to Wolf Park. Work with the Society to

make those spaces contribute more fully to the fabric of Downtown.

Recommended enhancements include:

- Create a small plaza area outside the dining car event space (bounded by the restrooms, train cars, and blacksmith's building) to serve as a prefunction or event space, as well as an outdoor classroom for educational visits.
- Turn the rest of the space into a linear park with landscaping, trees, walking paths, seating and picnic tables.
- Enhance beautification and landscaping throughout the area.

Action 5.3 - Work with the Fair Association to explore opportunities at Fair Park.

With the sale of Fair Park and Rodeo Arena from the City to the Fair Association, many residents feel the loss of a public asset. The City should coordinate with the Rockdale Fair Association to open up opportunities to host additional community events and communicate potential community needs. Additionally, the City may consider participating in assisting the Fair Association to reopen portions of the site back up for public use. There are large portions of land on the site where nature trails and a disc golf course

may be a good use of space. Security could be maintained by moving the fence to keep the rest of the facilities secure.

Action 5.4 - Work with the Youth Baseball and Softball Associations to coordinate the future of those activities in Rockdale.

The Youth Baseball and Softball Associations are important to the City and residents of Rockdale. The City should partner with these groups either on a new regional sports complex and redevelopment of the existing facilities or to update the existing baseball/softball facilities.

Action 5.5 - Partner with Farmers Market to expand events.

The Farmers Market is a popular event and with the recommendations of this Plan to enhance Wolf Park and create a new Milam Ave festival street with vendor spaces, there is great opportunity to expand the Farmers Market events.

Action 5.6 - Work with the Hutto, Texas YMCA of Greater Williamson County to upgrade the pool at Veterans Park.

Recommended enhancements include:

- Update locker rooms.
- Add additional shaded deck areas.
- Upgrade and screen the pump equipment.

Action 5.7 - Reevaluate and/or establish joint maintenance agreements with athletic leagues.

Some of the City's existing and future facilities may be used by third-party youth and adult athletic leagues. As the City considers increasing maintenance throughout the parks system, it should consider reevaluating and/or establishing joint maintenance agreements with the leagues. This can help to ensure that each party's responsibilities are clear, athletic facilities are adequately maintained, and that league fees are sufficiently offsetting the City's costs.

Action 5.8- Work with Kay Theatre and The 1895 project to host fine and performing arts programming.

Additional youth activities were a major need identified by the community. Rockdale has fine and performing arts assets in the Kay Theatre and the planned 1895 project. The City should utilize these assets to provide additional programming

for residents. To note, the 1895 redevelopment is planning a pocket park at their site in Downtown.

Action 5.9 Evaluate opportunities for inter-local agreements with Rockdale Independent School District.

Cities and school districts often provide similar types of recreational amenities for their target users. In order to maximize sharing of mutually beneficial resources, the City should evaluate development of inter-local agreements with the Rockdale Independent School District. This could include allowing school district use of facilities such as City-owned athletic fields, and public use of school facilities such as playgrounds and athletic fields outside of school hours.

Action 5.10 Pursue grant funding.

In order to maximize park system development potential, the City should consistently evaluate and pursue appropriate grant funding opportunities. This includes Texas Park and Wildlife Grants as well as a variety of other recreational grants available to cities.

Action 5.11 - Evaluate opportunities for public-private partnerships.

Partnerships between cities and private-sector companies can be powerful tools to finance, build, and/or operate parks and facility projects. It is recommended that the City evaluate and pursue opportunities for public-private partnerships to best leverage its existing resources and expand offerings for the community. This could include consideration of partnerships for a recreation

center and sponsorships from the local business community, among others.

Action 5.12 - Consider pursuing bond funding for parks and recreation improvements.

When asked about funding strategies, over 60% percent of respondents voiced support or strong support for a voter approved bond initiative via the public parks survey. As the City explores large-scale capital improvements, it should consider approaching the citizens with certificate of obligation bond options. This requires preparation of bond-ready projects with detailed design plans and vetting the projects with a citizen bond committee.

Implementation

High Priority Needs

This Plan includes a variety of recommendations to improve and expand the parks, facilities, trails and recreational programming in Rockdale. The Plan meets the TPWD's requirements for a parks, recreation and open space master plan, and can help increase the City's competitiveness when applying for TPWD grant funding.

Rockdale's top priority parks facility needs are summarized in the adjacent table. These are based on community input, needs assessments, consultant evaluation, and staff input. Future parks and recreation efforts should work toward fulfilling these community needs.

Figure 75. Top Priority Facility Needs Tables

New facilities needed based on community input	New facilities needed based on level of service	Upgraded facilities needed based on existing condition
1. Trails/Nature Trails 2. Inclusive playgrounds 3. Recreation center 4. Community garden 5. Fitness Equipment	1. Soccer Fields 2. Picnic Facilities 3. Trails 4. Multipurpose fields 5. Recreation center 6. Fitness Equipment	1. Lighting, generally 2. Shade, generally 3. Baseball, softball fields 4. Dog Park 5. Playground equipment
Top 10 cumulative outdoor facility needs		Top 10 cumulative indoor facility needs
1. Additional shade throughout all parks 2. Trails, especially nature trails 3. Soccer Fields 4. Multipurpose fields 5. Additional lighting throughout all parks 6. Improved Playground Equipment/Inclusive Playgrounds 7. Improved dog park 8. Community gardens 9. Improved Softball/Baseball Fields 10. Fitness Equipment Circuit		1. Recreation/Community center 2. Youth Programs

Prioritized Action Plan

Prioritization

The recommended actions of this Plan have been prioritized based on the following criteria:

- Level of need based on community input
- Level of need based on the level of service
- Existing conditions evaluations
- Less complex actions that can create early wins

Actions have been organized into near-term (1-2 years), mid-term (3-7 years) and long-term (8-10+ years) time frames, with an indication of actions that will be ongoing. Some actions will be initiated and completed within their designated time frame, while others may be initiated during their designated time frame and then completed over time. Near- and mid-term actions have been ranked. Long-term actions should be further prioritized in subsequent Plan updates.

The priorities set forth in the Prioritized Action Plan on the next page are intended to guide staff and the City Council as they improve and operate the parks and recreation system for the next five to 10 years. This does not, however, preclude the City from initiating an action sooner than recommended if opportune circumstances arise.

To note, not all of the recommendations above are translated into specific action items. Many of the recommendations, such as funding and partnerships, will be necessary to pursue as a part of implementing the actions noted here.

Potential Cost Ranges

Order of magnitude potential cost ranges are provided where possible in the action plan. These planning level cost ranges were created in 2024, based on a current understanding of the industry. Ultimate costs will be dependent on detailed design and construction plans, industry trends, and timing of implementation. Considering current high levels of inflation, costs should be re-evaluated closer to budgeting and implementation phases. Final costs will be dependent on further decisions by the City. Additional information regarding assumptions utilized to create these opinions of probable costs (OPCCs) can be found in Appendix D.



Veterans Park

Rank	Action Items	Implementation Timeframe				Potential Cost Range
		Short-term (1-2 yrs)	Mid-term (3-7 yrs)	Long-term (8-10+ yrs)	Ongoing	
PR-1	Conduct a staffing assessment. It is recommended that the City conduct a staffing assessment to determine needs for additional staff and consider the establishment of an official Parks and Recreation Department.	◆				City staff resources
PR-2	Review parkland dedication policy and modify as needed In order to meet parkland needs as additional areas of Rockdale are developed, the City should review the current parkland dedication policy, located in the Rockdale Code of Ordinances - Subdivision Ordinance, and update as needed.	◆				City staff resources
PR-3	Develop park design guidelines. In addition to signage, incorporating similar materials, furnishings and level of maintenance throughout all City parks will help to build greater continuity within the parks system and provide efficiency for design decisions.	◆				City staff resources or Consultant (\$50,000-100,000)
PR-4	Enhance beautification efforts throughout the parks. The City should consider beautifying existing parks through enhanced landscaping in high-visibility areas, choosing amenities with upgraded materials for durability and aesthetics (e.g., furnishings and pavilions), and proactively repairing and replacing amenities as needed.	◆				\$25,000-50,000 per park; includes benches, trashcans, trees and landscaping. Assumes labor by City staff.
PR-5	Create a community garden program. The City should seek to provide community garden plots in their community level parks, including Veterans Park, Moultry Park, and the George Hill Patterson Community Center.	◆				\$500 per planting bed, plus fencing, pathway materials, and any equipment or buildings as applicable
PR-6	Evaluate opportunities to provide a Community and/or Recreation Center in Rockdale. It is recommended that the City undertake a Community and/or Recreation Center feasibility study to determine the viability, location, programming, cost and potential funding sources for such a facility.	◆				City staff resources and consultant (\$75,000-120,000)
PR-7	Evaluate opportunities for inter-local agreements with Rockdale Independent School District. In order to maximize sharing of mutually beneficial resources, the City should evaluate development of inter-local agreements with the Rockdale Independent School District. This could include allowing school district use of facilities such as City-owned athletic fields, and public use of school facilities such as playgrounds and athletic fields outside of school hours.	◆				City staff resources
PR-8	Improve Bridge Park. - Implement the concept plan already created, including amenities such as walking trails, a pavilion and events lawn, landscaping, and parking. - Consider nature play for the playscape in Bridge Park, as it offers a different play experience and keeps with the natural character of the park. - Ensure new amenities are ADA accessible. - Prioritize protecting the space's natural character, including trees and drainageways, while making upgrades to the park. - Enhance the natural function of the drainageway via native plantings and habitat restoration.		◆			\$1,200,000-1,400,000; plus 18% soft costs and 30% contingency

Rank	Action Items	Implementation Timeframe				Potential Cost Range
		Short-term (1-2 yrs)	Mid-term (3-7 yrs)	Long-term (8-10+ yrs)	Ongoing	
PR-9	Relocate the Dog Park. Explore relocating the Dog Park to Fatheree Field if Beverly Dr road quality improves, or alternatively, consider relocating it to the vacant land surrounding the George Hill Patterson Community Center.		◆			\$110,000-125,000; for a one acre dog park
PR-10	Ensure adequate funding and staffing accompany park system expansions. As the City develops additional park facilities, it is also crucial to budget adequate funding and staffing to allow for increased park system maintenance and repairs.		◆			City staff resources
PR-11	Develop a community-wide trail network connecting key points of interest. The City should consider establishing routes that connect schools to parks and points of interest throughout the City to help promote outdoor activities and enhancing community connectivity, per this Plan.	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3		\$1,000,000 per mile, does not include land acquisition
PR-12	Increase shade within all parks. It is recommended that the City provide additional shaded areas in all parks. This can be through the use of shade structures, shade fabric or the planting of more shade trees. These efforts should be focused in gathering areas and along walking trails.		◆			Structures: \$75,000-150,000 each Trees: \$600-800 each, plus installation
PR-13	Develop a proactive maintenance plan. With the addition of new staff dedicated to parks planning, maintenance and development, a maintenance plan that focuses on proactive updates and quickly addressing any equipment safety concerns should be created.		◆			City staff resources
PR-14	Conduct an ADA assessment and develop a prioritized plan to address any issues. Some of the amenities in the parks system are currently inaccessible to individuals who are mobility challenged. In order to provide equal access to park amenities, the City should conduct an ADA assessment of each of the parks including trails, playgrounds, splash pads, parking areas, picnic facilities, etc. Identified deficiencies should be addressed in a prioritized order.		◆			City staff resources and consultant
PR-15	Develop a Lighting Plan. The City should conduct an assessment of each of the parks including trails, playgrounds, parking areas, picnic facilities, etc. and identify deficiencies in lighting. The City should then come up with a plan to increase and update lighting in a prioritized order. This can include upgrades to lighting that can not only enhance safety but also reduce maintenance and increase aesthetics and efficiency of fixtures.		◆			City staff resources
PR-16	Support more community clubs and activities. This could include initiatives/programs such as: - Based on community feedback, a high priority should be placed on youth programs. - Athletic leagues and clinics. - Arts and crafts classes and camps. - Technology classes and camps. - Inclusive programs for children with all abilities. - Non-traditional sports programs (e.g., skateboarding). - Work with Kay Theatre and the 1895 project to host fine and performing arts programming.		◆			TBD

Rank	Action Items	Implementation Timeframe				Potential Cost Range
		Short-term (1-2 yrs)	Mid-term (3-7 yrs)	Long-term (8-10+ yrs)	Ongoing	
PR-17	Provide system-wide consistent parks signage. The City should develop a consistent parks branding strategy and update entry and wayfinding signs at all parks accordingly. Each park should have signs with the park name, rules and contact information for maintenance and other requests.		◆			Park Monument Signage - \$5000-15,000 each Regulatory Signage - \$500-1000 each
PR-18	Evaluate opportunities to provide a Regional Sports Complex. If the City wishes to create a new regional tournament-level sports complex, this Plan recommends consolidating the existing baseball/softball fields to this new complex and redeveloping those existing sites.		◆			Planning & Design by Consultant - \$75,000-100,000 \$3,700,000-4,200,000; plus 18% soft costs and 30% contingency, does not include land acquisition
PR-19	Acquisition of park land - Moultry Park Undeveloped, privately owned land adjacent to Moultry Park may provide an option for acquisition and expansion of that park.		◆			TBD
PR-20	Improve Moultry Park. - Baxter St. - Pave the access road and parking area. - Increase lighting. - Enhance the park through beautification and landscaping. - Update restrooms and add water fountains. - Provide a shade cover over the basketball court. - Consider relocating the playscape further from the basketball court to minimize conflict between age groups. Consider updating and modernizing with a new playscape, if budget allows. Provide a shade cover over the playscape and benches for to improve user comfort. - Install a picnic pavilion with WiFi connectivity. - Upgrade the large portion of undeveloped park area to be a multipurpose practice field. - Remove the existing standalone backstop and install a new backstop at one corner of the new multipurpose field.		◆			\$930,000-1,135,000
PR-21	Improve the Skate Park. - Implement paved parking to accommodate visitors to the park. - Upgrade existing skate ramps and amenities to promote safety, usability and accessibility. Work with park users to ensure new facilities are in line with user needs. - Add shaded seating and tables, restrooms, loop trail, and public WiFi. - Utilize the undeveloped area of the park, which is currently in the floodplain, to create a multipurpose or 3v3 soccer field, ensuring compatibility with its functional floodplain status. - Enhance the natural function of the drainageway via native plantings and habitat restoration.		◆			\$450,000-520,000; does not include upgrades to the skate ramps as those require further investigation

Rank	Action Items	Implementation Timeframe				Potential Cost Range
		Short-term (1-2 yrs)	Mid-term (3-7 yrs)	Long-term (8-10+ yrs)	Ongoing	
PR-22	Improve Veteran's Park - Ensure the amenities stay safe and in good condition via proactive maintenance. - Implement the concept plan already created for the Veterans Memorial. - Install lighting. - Consider additional amenities including exercise stations. - Upgrade the walking trails to be ADA accessible. - Upgrade the pool area (see action 5.6 for more details). - Enhance the park through general beautification and landscaping. - Add community gardens. - Add public WiFi.		◆			\$200,000-260,000; does not include upgrades to the pool as that requires further investigation
PR-23	Develop or support the development of a Community & Recreation Center in Rockdale. Following identification of the preferred location, programming, and funding or partnership strategy, the City should proceed with the design, construction and management of a Community & Recreation Center.		◆			Planning & Design by Consultant - \$75,000-100,000
PR-24	Evaluate opportunities to increase the use of technology at all City parks. It is recommended that the City seek to provide public WiFi access at all City parks. The City can also utilize QR code quick links on signs throughout the parks to allow people to report an issue, learn about a recreation opportunity, educate themselves about natural features or participate in organized activities (e.g., digital scavenger hunt).		◆			Data & IT Planning Consultant - \$25,000-30,000
PR-25	Improve Sumuel Park - Ensure the amenities stay safe and in good condition via proactive maintenance. - Consider shading the basketball court. - Install additional lighting and parking. - Enhance the natural function of the drainage way via native plantings and habitat restoration.			◆		\$185,000-250,000
PR-26	Improve George Hill Patterson Community Center Outdoor Spaces. - Implement the concept plan already created, including amenities such as walking trails, multiple pavilions and outdoor event spaces, a playscape, benches and lighting, art, outdoor games and activities, and landscaping. - Add park signage consistent with all Rockdale parks and ensure the community knows this is now a public park. - Consider additional amenities such as picnic areas with grilling stations, drinking water sources and public WiFi. - Add community gardens. - Ensure new amenities are ADA accessible. - Protect the space's natural character, especially large shade trees, while making upgrades to the park. - Consider relocating the dog park to additional vacant space around the center. - Explore adding a full-size soccer/multipurpose field to the site if there is room beyond the already conceptualized amenities.			◆		\$875,000 - 1,100,000; plus 18% soft costs and 30% contingency, does not include land acquisition

Rank	Action Items	Implementation Timeframe				Potential Cost Range
		Short-term (1-2 yrs)	Mid-term (3-7 yrs)	Long-term (8-10+ yrs)	Ongoing	
PR-27	Improve Post Oak Place Park. - Select minimal passive amenities, such as benches, picnic tables and soft surface walking paths, to minimize creating nuisances for immediate neighbors. Avoid adding lighting or off-street parking, out of respect to the neighbors. - Work with the adjacent neighbors to identify appropriate enhancements to this space. - Preserve the space's natural character while making park upgrades (e.g. large shade trees)			◆		\$45,000-55,000
PR-28	Update the Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Master Plan. The City should plan to update the Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Mater Plan periodically to ensure that it reflects current needs and priorities.				◆	City staff resources and consultant; depending on scope

Funding Sources

General Funds

This source of funding is supported by ad valorem tax revenues and is generally the primary source of funds for maintenance and operation of the existing park system. The general fund is also the source for projects requiring smaller amounts of capital investment. It is important to include funding for ongoing maintenance and staff requirements for new trail and park improvements.

Economic Development Corporation

Economic Development Corporations (EDCs) are often utilized in communities as a means of concentrating resources toward economic development and creating new jobs. One advantage to EDCs is that they may exist as a public entity (directly associated with municipal government) or as a non-profit organization. EDCs may be created to promote and attract economic development for the City as a whole, or they may be created to specifically address issues within a particular neighborhood or area within the community. EDCs often receive funding from both public and private sources, such as funding by 4B sales tax revenues, and essentially act as an ambassador for the area that they serve. Advocacy and proactive outreach are important functions of EDCs in their attempt to reach out to potential development and provide reasons and incentives for choosing to locate within the identified area. It is recommended that members

of the Rockdale Municipal Development District use this document as a guide in promoting and attracting development within the study area.

Bonds

Bonds are generally the most common source used by cities for the purchase of land and for providing development monies. Debt financing through the issuance of municipal bonds is one of the most common ways to fund park, recreation and open space projects. This type of funding is a strategy wherein a city issues a bond, receives an immediate cash payment to finance projects, and must repay the bond with interest over a set period of time ranging from a few years to several decades.

A general obligation bond is amortized using ad valorem taxes and is used to fund capital projects that are not supported by a revenue source. These projects include water service, sanitary sewer service, and park acquisition and development. The availability of bonding for parks is often dependent upon the overall municipal needs financed by this source. Capital items such as purchase of land and physical improvements with a usable life expectancy of 15 to 20 years can be funded with general obligation bonds.

A revenue bond finances projects which produce enough revenue to retire their debt, such as golf courses, batting cages and enterprise-oriented park projects.

Developer Requirements

This involves requiring new development to provide a dedication of land for parks (or fee-in-lieu of land), park development fees, and trail rights-of-way or easements to offset the City's costs.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Local Park Grants

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Local Park Grant Program includes five individual programs that assist local governmental entities with the acquisition and/or development of public recreation areas and facilities. In general, these grants provide percentage matching grant funds to local units of government to acquire and develop parkland, renovate existing public recreation areas, or construct recreation centers, nature centers and other indoor recreation-related buildings. Current grant requirements can be found at <https://tpwd.texas.gov/business/grants/recreation-grants/about-local-parks-grants>.

Grant Program	Eligible Population
Small Community	<20,000
Non-Urban Outdoor Recreation	<500,000
Urban Outdoor Recreation	<500,000
Non-Urban Indoor Recreation	>500,000
Urban Indoor Recreation	>500,000

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Community Outdoor Outreach Program (CO-OP) Grants

The CO-OP grant helps to introduce underserved populations to the services, programs and sites of TPWD. This is not a land acquisition or construction grant; this is only for programs. Grants are awarded to non-profit organizations, schools, municipalities, counties, cities and other tax-exempt groups. Funds may be used for direct program costs for outdoor recreation or environmental education and conservation programs.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Recreational Trail Grants

TPWD administers the National Recreational Trail Grants in Texas under the approval of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). This federally funded program receives its funding from a portion of federal gas taxes paid on fuel used in non-highway recreational vehicles.

Private Donations

This source of financial assistance would usually come from a citizen, organization or business that has an interest in assisting with the development of the park system. Land dedication is a common occurrence when property is being developed.

The location of a neighborhood park within a residential development offers additional value to residential units within that neighborhood, especially if the residential development is occupied by younger families with children. Once property is acquired through this method, the City should be prepared to improve the facility for use within a reasonable length of time and to maintain the new facility.

Private donations may also be received in the form of funds, facilities, recreation equipment, art and in-kind services. Donations from local and regional businesses as sponsors for events or facilities should be pursued. A Parks Improvement Trust Fund may be set up to manage donations by service organizations, benevolent citizens, willed estates and other donated sources. The purpose of this trust is to establish a permanent source of principal value that will increase as donations occur. The principal cannot be decreased; however, the annual interest can be used for park development.

Public Improvement District (PID)

When authorized by City Council in compliance with state laws, new developments can establish a Public Improvement District (PID). As a taxing district, the PID provides funds specifically for the operation and maintenance of public facilities such as parks and major boulevards.

Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones (TIRZ)

A TIRZ is a tool used by local governments to finance public improvements in a defined area as approved by the City Council. When an area is designated as a TIRZ district, the tax base is frozen at the current level. As development occurs within the TIRZ, the increased value of property, or the tax increment, is captured. The tax increments are posted to a separate fund to finance public improvements within the district.

Partnership with the School District and County

The City can investigate opportunities to share park facilities and their associated cost with both the local school district and county as they have many common goals. Additionally, assets and costs can be shared between the entities to help meet each of their specific needs. For example, the City may purchase land next to a future school site and a school district may install the facilities, such as a playground, which can be enjoyed by the entire community. As a result, the entire community benefits.