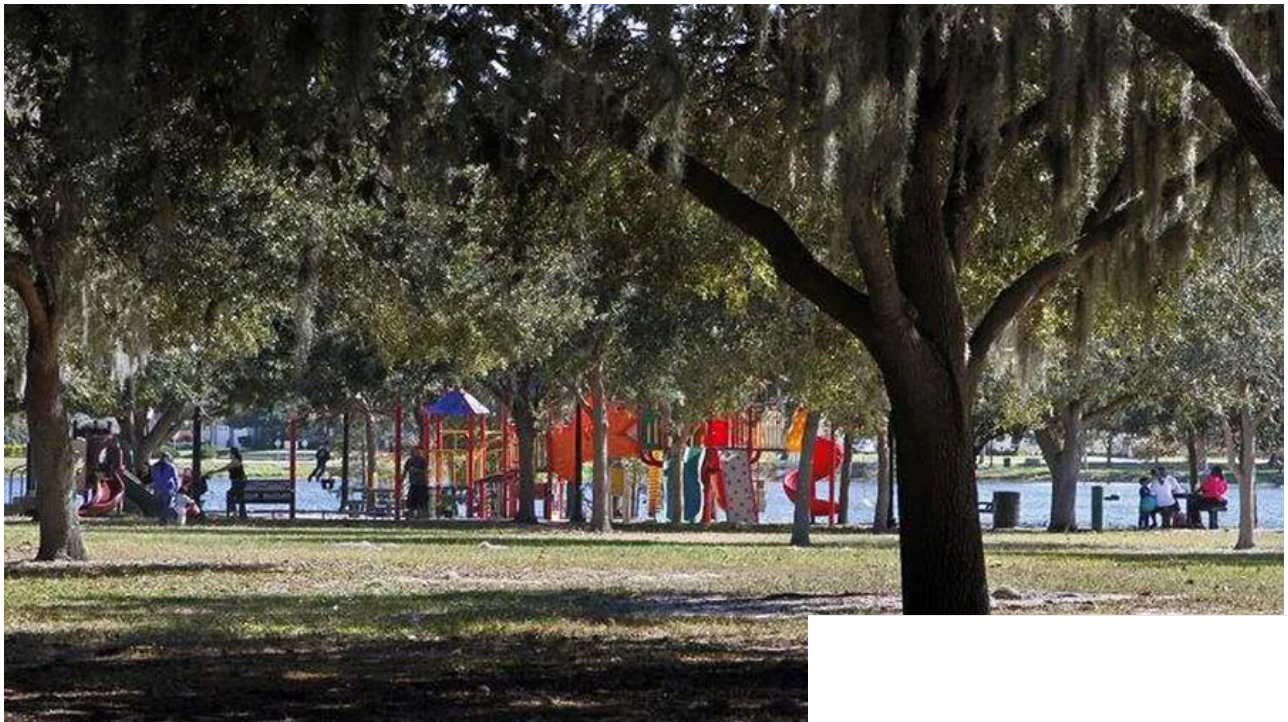


NEWS

How much parkland is enough? Cities' standards vary



Clearwater offers more than 12 acres per 1,000 people. The mayor wants to make it a signature destination.

These have become increasingly important questions as more of us live in cities.

Most Americans used to live in rural areas and small towns. Now 85 percent live in urban and suburban environments, where parks are typically the only place to experience nature.

Health studies show that adults and children who live in greener places are healthier and weigh less. Yet different cities in Pinellas County have wildly different standards for how much parkland they are obligated to provide their residents.

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Locally, the question of how much parkland is enough came up recently in Largo, and it's about to come up in Dunedin.

Housing developers used to pay Largo a hefty impact fee to provide parks for newcomers. Largo stopped collecting the fee two years ago and recently extended the moratorium two years.



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relaxed that, suggesting instead that each city establish its own standard based on its growth patterns.

"The 10-acres-per-thousand standard was developed in the early '60s and lasted through the '80s. Then it kind of started to erode," said Bill Beckner, the park association's research director.

The problem? Many small, built-out communities had no hope of ever meeting that standard. Conversely, cities that went above and beyond the standard ran into resistance if they tried to acquire still more parkland.

"We had everybody mad," Beckner joked. "They just changed the name from 'standard' to 'guideline.' "

While Pinellas cities have different standards, there are mitigating factors. Some cities exceed their own standard. Or there are cases like Seminole, which has relatively little of its own parkland but is surrounded by three huge county parks.

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walking path at what will be this city's newest park. Riviera Bay Park will open this spring on the 8-acre site of the shuttered Rio Vista Elementary School in northeastern St. Petersburg.

"If you looked at our service area map, there was kind of a gap in this area," said Sherry McBee, parks and recreation director. Money for the \$1.7 million park came from the Weeki Wachee Fund, created when the city sold a 440-acre recreation area in Hernando County.

The city doesn't charge developers a parks impact fee. "We have tried to acquire property, but it's just hard in the city of St. Petersburg. It's pretty much built out," McBee said.



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St. Petersburg's standard calls for 9 acres of parkland but actually has 12.1 parkland acres per 1,000 residents (not preserves), while its larger neighbor Tampa has 9.9, according to Public Land.



Clearwater's standard is 4 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, but it actually has more than 12 acres per 1,000 people. It currently has 1,358 acres of parkland, and its official population is 108,732, said Felicia Leonard, a Parks Department manager.

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Clearwater charges a parks impact fee and still acquires parkland but is trying to decide whether to continue its decade-old approach of creating lots of small neighborhood parks or to focus on creating signature regional parks.

Mayor George Cretekos is pushing to remake 38-acre Crest Lake Park near downtown into a signature destination, more like Largo Central Park.

Largo

Largo has about 8.5 acres of parkland per 1,000 people — exceeding the city's standard, which is 7.5. The city also has nearly \$2.2 million in impact fees sitting in the bank, ready to buy parkland.

So officials think waiving the impact fee is no big deal, but they acknowledge they must follow through on promises to expand parkland on the city's east side, which is growing through annexations.

Largo's newest park, 11-acre Datsko Park, is on the east side. But one goal of Largo's strategic plan is to purchase a 20-acre parcel east of U.S. 19 for a park. That would cost a lot of money.

Pinellas Park

It has 301 acres of parkland for its population of 49,07 acres per 1,000 residents, said city spokesman Tim Ca

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Dunedin's ordinances require 6 acres of open recreational space for every 1,000 residents. With 334 acres of city parks, Dunedin actually has 9 acres per 1,000 people. That doesn't include the state-owned Caladesi and Honeymoon Island parks.

After J.C. Weaver Park opened along Bayshore Boulevard, officials debated whether to get rid of Dunedin's land dedication ordinance, which requires housing developers to either include green space or contribute to a city parks fund. The ordinance remains in effect, but the issue is about to come up again, said planning director Greg Rice.

Tarpon Springs

When it comes to parks acreage per thousand residents, Tarpon Springs has separate standards for different kind of parks: 0.8 acre per thousand for mini parks, 1 for neighborhood parks, 1.5 for community parks.

Those standards are far exceeded by the amount of open space in the city — 1,336 acres of parks and preservation land, more than a quarter of Tarpon's land area. However, that includes the county's A.L. Anderson Park and Fred Howard Park. Only 175 acres are actually owned by the city.

Seminole

The city's standard is 1 acre of open space per 1,000 residents. The city owns 46 acres of open space — about 2.7 acres per 1,000.

The city, though, is wedged between three large county
Boca Ciega Millennium Park and Lake Seminole Park.

Researcher *Natalie Watson* contributed to this report. Mike Brassfield can be reached at brassfield@tampabay.com or (727) 445-4151.

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