

# Chapter 2

## Austin PARD Park Definitions and Standards

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# Ch 2 PARD Definitions and Standards

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## 2.0 Introduction

Park definitions and standards are guidelines for the acquisition and development of parks. Standards assist the Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) in measuring its progress toward the equitable distribution of recreation resources, and in guiding policy decisions on future resource allocation. Standards also serve as a basis for determining and prioritizing needed park construction projects and the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) bond funding necessary for their execution.

Originally based on an analysis of various standards used by communities across the country and by the National Park and Recreation Association, the department's park standards and definitions have changed over time in response to actual local application. The economy, citizen input, existing park distribution and use, neighborhood patterns, and the character of Austin's natural resources have impacted and redefined these standards.

## 2.1 Park Definitions and Types

*Note: Determining the park type is based on acreage and is subject to change based upon the ability to develop the site (terrain, etc).*

### Neighborhood and School Parks

Neighborhood parks traditionally have been the backbone of Austin's park system. These popular parks typically provide basic recreational opportunities close to home. Ideally, all citizens have easy access to a neighborhood park within one-mile of their residences.

Neighborhood parks usually range from two to 30 acres. In most cases, they are close enough to residents to allow access by foot or bicycle. Traditional recreational facilities, such as playgrounds, basketball and tennis courts, open play areas and picnic tables are usually provided. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in less traditional landscape treatment in neighborhood parks. Wildflowers, native plants and less intensive maintenance techniques have allowed for natural areas within the traditional urban park setting.

School parks are typically located on elementary school properties in which the City of Austin has a limited ownership. Their function, service area and access characteristics are the same as neighborhood parks although they are typically smaller in size. School parks have enabled PARD to provide limited, recreational opportunities in built-out areas of the City where park sites were not secured in advance of development and are no longer available.

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Since the City shares ownership of the land with Austin Independent School District (AISD), the City must recognize AISD priority use of the site, which often constrains PARD in terms of park design, development and availability of use. In these school parks, PARD puts emphasis on recreational facilities which respond to the student population rather than the larger neighborhood population. School parks tend to be limited in terms of what they have to offer, especially when compared to neighborhood parks solely owned by PARD.

### District Parks

District parks are larger than neighborhood parks and are more highly developed to serve the needs of neighborhoods within their two-mile service areas. Typically, they provide the basic recreational opportunities found in neighborhood parks, plus major indoor and outdoor facilities. The land's features play a larger role in nature preservation and interpretation than the small natural areas occasionally found in neighborhood parks.

District parks range from 31 to 200 acres in size and are usually located on minor arterial roadways to encourage access by public transit, as well as by other means. These parks may have major indoor facilities such as recreation centers, senior centers and gyms. Major outdoor facilities may include regulation sport courts and playfields, group or reservation picnic facilities, junior Olympic or Olympic size swimming pools and bathhouses, trails and interpretive signage.

### Metropolitan Parks

PARD's largest standard park type provides the greatest diversity of recreational experiences. Metropolitan parks are generally natural resource-based and usually located along waterways. Major facilities are most often provided in these parks. Metropolitan parks serve the city-wide population and in some cases are tourist attractions or sites of special events drawing visitors from other parts of the country. They are usually over 200 acres in size and are preferably located on major waterways and roadways, although access is encouraged by all means. Public transit may serve the parks, but the majority of users arrive by personal or group vehicles.

Metropolitan parks typically include trails, open playfields, picnic facilities, swimming pools or swimming areas along natural waterway as well as active and passive recreation opportunities. Special interest recreation facilities might include archery ranges, radio controlled airplane fields, horseback riding, mountain biking, camping areas, boating amenities and fishing areas. Because of the natural and environmental features, many people also visit metropolitan parks for activities such as hiking, bird watching and nature interpretation.

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## Special Parks

Special parks are those which serve a specific function or protect a special feature. Examples include nature preserves, museums, boat landings, golf courses, urban squares, scenic viewpoints and gardens. This park type serves as a designation for parks and facilities which are clearly not one of the other types, and for this reason the function, size, service area, access and facility characteristics vary considerably. Due to the special nature of these parks, the service area is often city-wide.

## Pocket Parks

Pocket parks are intended to provide recreational opportunities in locations where (publicly accessible/park) space is limited. Typically, pocket parks should be placed within new areas of high (population) density; such as Transit Oriented Developments, Vertical Mixed Uses, etc. However, in order to meet the growing demand for public spaces and due to limited availability of land in the urban core, pocket parks are being incorporated into areas of existing high population (density) areas. Pocket parks are up to 1.99 acres in size and are within a walking distance of either a few blocks or up to a 1/4-mile.

## 2.2 Park Development Process

The Park Development Process serves as a guideline for its phased development upon acquisition of land. The Park Development Process is divided into three progressive levels. The park improvements and amenities which describe levels I, II, and III serve as targets for typical development, but are not guaranteed items in each park. The timing, techniques and procedures for accomplishing each level may vary significantly in response to funding availability, constituent preferences and natural characteristics of the parkland.

### Level I Development

Level I development marks the beginning of the Park Development Process by providing basic recreational opportunities and easy access for the public. The first step is the design process. For all park development projects, basic socio-economic data on likely users and data on the natural features of the park are analyzed to provide a basis for initial design work. A series of conceptual development plans are prepared for review by those who will build, maintain and use the park. The design review process, including meetings with staff, neighborhood representatives and other interested users, is intended to identify design problems and solutions prior to construction. Ultimately, a conceptual plan is refined to a master plan to guide development through Level III Development.

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Typically, Level I development in neighborhood and district parks provides traditional recreational opportunities as possible for the available funds. Open playfields, signage, picnicking, trails and support facilities such as trash receptacles and drinking fountains are typically included. If funds allow, recreational items responsive to specific groups, such as a children's playscape or community picnic shelter, may also be constructed.

In metropolitan parks and greenbelts, Level I development emphasizes construction of basic infrastructure such as parking lot or trails. Instead of active recreational facilities, Level I development in a metropolitan park provides access to the natural resources found on the site.

### Level II Development

Level II development provides many of the remaining facilities typical of the park type. Upon completion of Level II development, a park is not yet finished, but has a wide variety of recreational opportunities typical of its park type. For neighborhood parks, Level II may mean the inclusion of a playground, open playfields with goals, basketball and tennis courts, designated trails, landscaping or irrigation. Level II development in district parks usually results in construction of a swimming pool, recreation center or both.

In metropolitan parks, Level II may include the addition of large playscapes, miles of trails with interpretive signage, restrooms and major recreation facilities such as a sports complexes or a swimming pools. Since items in a metropolitan park are generally more expensive than facilities found in other park types, several funding cycles may be needed to complete its Level II development.

Level II development in greenways and special parks varies considerably, but generally accommodates increased visitation through additional infrastructure or expansion of a main facility.

### Level III Development

For Level III development, final improvements are made to complete the park's full potential. Typical improvements might include special landscaping, recreation facilities for special interest groups or formalization of informally designated use areas. Level III development is usually initiated when existing park facilities are well used and their infrastructure is still sound. Many parks found in the older part of central Austin have reached the Level III stage, where a full range of recreational facilities exist.

### Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation is required when a park, facilities or infrastructure are falling into disrepair due to age or heavy use, or when the park no longer responds to target user groups or new standards. Rehabilitation may be for a specific facility within a park, may include a general face-lift to the park showing signs of heavy wear and tear, or may require complete redevelopment in order to respond to changing user needs. Whatever the extent of wear/damage, the rehabilitation project will cycle back through the Park Development Process.



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## 2.3 Park Maintenance

### Park Maintenance

While the decline in the economy has strained the already depleted maintenance and operations budget, the constant residential growth has continued to put increased pressure on the park system. Such demands by increased park users have created challenges for routine upkeep and basic maintenance for parks of all sizes.

Below are the park maintenance guidelines PARD strives for:

**Service Level I:** State-of-the-art-maintenance applied to a high quality diverse landscape. It is associated with high-traffic urban areas, such as public squares, malls, government grounds, colleges, or university campuses.

**Service Level II: High-level maintenance**

It is associated with well-developed public areas, malls, government grounds, or college/university campuses. Recommend level for most organizations.

**Service Level III: Moderate-level maintenance**

It is associated with locations that have moderate to low levels of development or visitation, or with operations that, because of budget restrictions, cannot afford a higher level of maintenance.

**Service Level IV: Moderately low-level maintenance**

It is associated with locations affected by budget restrictions that cannot afford a high level of maintenance.

**Service Level V: Minimum-level maintenance**

It is associated with locations that have severe budget restrictions.

**Service Level VI: Natural area that is not developed**

## 2.4 Park Standards

### Park Standards

Park standards are guidelines for the acquisition and development of parks. Standards assist the Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) in measuring its progress toward the equitable distribution of recreation resources, and in guiding policy decisions on future resource allocation. Standards also serve as a basis for determining and prioritizing needed park construction projects and the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) bond funding necessary for their execution. PARD currently maintains standards for Park Types and Park Development, as described in the following pages.



## Ch 2 PARD Definitions and Standards

### Neighborhood and School Parks:

**Function:** These are typically located in the center of a single neighborhood or in conjunction with an elementary school or a greenway. Access to the parks are typically from collector streets, bike routes and greenways; with emphasis on access by foot or bicycle.

**Size:** Neighborhood and school parks range from two acre to 30 acres.

**Service Area:** The service areas for these are a one mile radius.

**Character:** Neighborhood and school parks respond to demographic and cultural characteristics of neighborhoods.

**Level II Development:** May include multi-purpose fields, playfield equipment (backstop, goals, etc), basketball, tennis courts, landscaping and irrigation.



Little Stacy Neighborhood Park

**Level I Development:** Develop a park master plan. Construction may include playground, picnicking, trails and signage.



Eilers (Deep Eddy) Neighborhood Park

**Level III Development:** Special interest facilities, designated natural areas, additional landscaping and other amenities to realize full potential of site.



South Austin Neighborhood Park and Recreation Center

# Ch 2 PARD Definitions and Standards

## District Parks:

**Function:** Regional parks with both indoor and outdoor facilities, draw users from surrounding neighborhoods, and are natural resource based with special recreational pursuits. Access to these parks are typically from minor arterial roadways, public transit, bike routes and greenways.

**Size:** District parks range from 31 acres to 200 acres.

**Service Area:** The service areas for these are a two mile radius.

**Character:** District parks respond to demographic and cultural characteristics of neighborhoods.

**Level I Development:** Develop a park master plan. Construct infrastructure such as restrooms and parking area(s). Construct facilities such as playground, basketball, tennis courts, multi-purpose fields, interpretive signage for natural areas, picnicking, trails, trail amenities and signage.



Mabel Davis District Park

**Level II Development:** Community pool, athletic fields, recreation center, landscaping and irrigation.



Garrison District Park

**Level III Development:** Special interest facilities, designated natural areas, additional landscaping and other amenities to realize full potential of site.



Beverly S. Sheffield Northwest District Park



# Ch 2 PARD Definitions and Standards

## Metropolitan Parks:

**Function:** Large parks drawing users from all over Austin. Focus on natural resource values and diversity of recreational opportunities. Access to these parks is typically from major arterial roadways, public transit, bike routes and greenways.

**Size:** Metropolitan parks are 201 acres and up.

**Service Area:** The service areas for these are a city-wide.

**Character:** Often include water-based recreation and environmental education. Metropolitan parks respond to demographic and cultural characteristics of neighborhoods.

**Level I Development:** Design process for master development plan to include infrastructure such as internal roads, utilities, restrooms and access to major natural features.



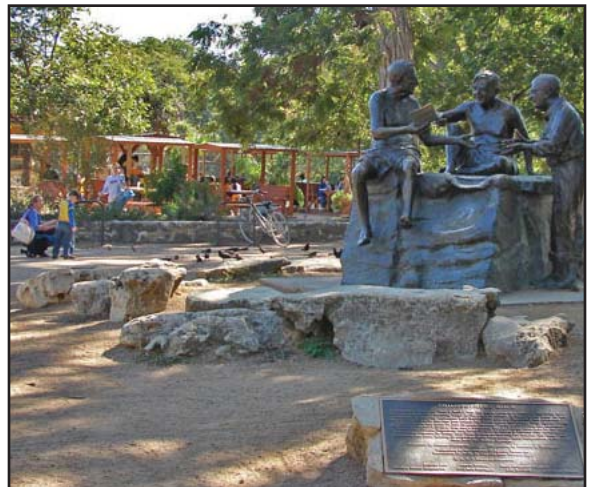
Circle C Ranch Metropolitan Park

**Level II Development:** Development of beach area (where possible), playground, basketball or tennis courts, trails, landscaping, support facilities (trash receptacles, etc), picnic facilities, pool, athletic fields, tennis courts and a recreation center. These may include a park manager's office and a maintenance facility.



Edward Rendon Sr Park and Festival Beach

**Level III Development:** Special interest facilities, designated natural areas, additional landscaping and other final touches to realize full potential of site.



Zilker Metropolitan Park

## Ch 2 PARD Definitions and Standards

### Special Parks:

**Function:** Special parks or facilities which focus on locally unique or significant natural, historic or cultural resources.

**Size:** Varies due to diverse user groups.

**Service Area:** Varies however often city-wide.

**Character:** Special Parks may serve particular user groups. Such groups may include museums, art centers, plazas, athletic complexes, golf courses, natural preserves and scenic viewpoints.

**Level II Development:** Varies.



Elisabet Ney Museum

**Level I Development:** Design process for master development plan. Development varies considerably depending upon size and purpose of park or facility. For major projects such as golf courses, Level I could be a master plan only. For a project such as a nature preserve, most development could occur at this level.

**Level III Development:** Final touches to realize full potential of site or facility.



Onion Creek Soccer Complex



George Washington Carver Museum



## Ch 2 PARD Definitions and Standards

### Pocket Parks - Neighborhood:

**Function:** Offers recreational opportunities in locations where public accessible green space is limited or areas not served by any other park. These parks are usually designed for a specific age group or user group living within the immediate neighborhood. They may address limited or isolated recreational needs, or be located where dense residential population limits the availability of open space.

**Size:** Up to 1.99 acres.

**Service Area:** Less than 1/4 mile radius in a residential area.

**Character:** The range of character can be for intense use or aesthetic enjoyment with low maintenance being essential.

**Level I Development:** Develop a park master plan. May include open space, picnicking and signage.



Brownie Pocket Park

**Level II Development:** May include a playground, water features (water playscape/splash pads), pavilion, landscaping and irrigation.



Chestnut Pocket Park

**Level III Development:** May include special interest facilities, designated natural areas, additional landscaping and other amenities to realize full potential of site.



Sparky Pocket Park

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### Pocket Parks - Urban:

**Function:** Offers recreational opportunities in high density areas (Transit Oriented Development, Vertical Mixed Use, etc) where residents have no or very limited public green space and are not served by any other park. These parks may also be a non green spaces such as plazas, courtyards, paseos/ pedestrian malls.

**Size:** Up to 1.99 acres.

**Service Area:** The service area covers several blocks to less than 1/4 mile radius in a residential area.

**Character:** The range of character can be for intense use or aesthetic enjoyment with low maintenance being essential.

*\*\*The park should have significant sun exposure year round in order to prevent parkland from being predominantly shaded the majority of the day. Bare walls adjacent to park should have aesthetic murals or covered with greenery.*

**Level I Development:** Design process for master development plan. Open space, picnicking, trail, signage, support facilities.

**Level II Development:** Playground, water features (water playscape), pavilion, landscaping and irrigation.

**Level III Development:** Special interest facilities, designated natural areas, additional landscaping, other final touches to realize full potential of site.



## Ch 2 PARD Definitions and Standards

**Greenways:** *(additional information located in Ch 8 Blueways, Greenways and Trails)*

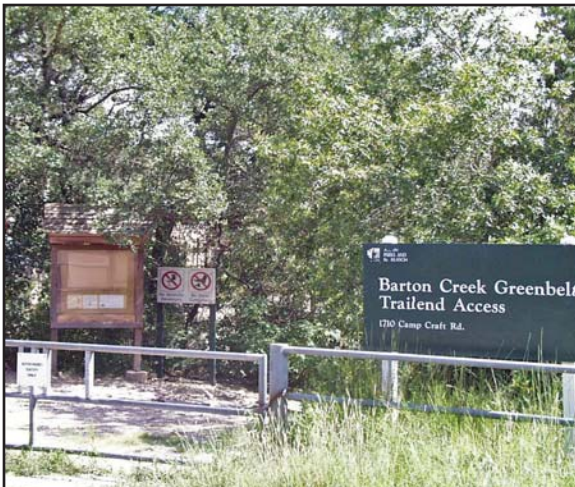
**Function:** Greenways are multi-functional linear park systems that often link to other types of parks, serve as wildlife corridors, provide areas for flood control, means of preserving water quality, contain routes for alternate modes of transportation and function as possible utility corridor.

**Size:** Has a minimum width of 50' however 200' width is more desirable

**Service Area:** Varies due to size of feature.

**Character:** Greenways are intended for passive recreational use and typically follow rivers, creeks, scenic ravines and encompass the 100 year flood plan and water quality zone.

**Level I Development:** Design process for master development plan. Trail head, parking and interpretive signage.



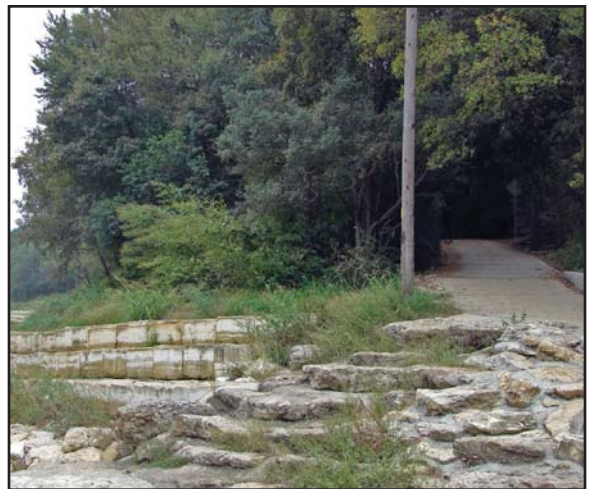
Barton Creek Greenbelt

**Level II Development:** Addition of benches, picnic facilities, drinking fountains, bank stabilization.



Johnson Creek Hike and Bike Trail/Greenway

**Level III Development:** Formalization of area with additional signage, erosion control and landscaping.



Shoal Creek Hike and Bike Trail/Greenway

## Ch 2 PARD Definitions and Standards

**Park Trail:** *(additional trail information is located in Ch 8 Blueways, Greenways and Park Trails)*

**Function:** Multi-purpose trails are located within parks, greenways, and natural resource areas. Located within mostly natural settings, park trails provide recreational opportunities and may also provide connectivity to other green spaces, neighborhoods, urban development, and alternative modes of transportation outside of the park.

**Size:**

Multi-Use Trail:

All users except equestrian:

Urban – 12' wide

Suburban – 10' wide

Rural – 8' wide

All users including equestrian:

Urban – 16'

Suburban – 12' wide

Rural – 10' wide

Single-Use Trail:

Pedestrian – 6' wide

Mountain Bikes (single track) – 2' to 3' wide

Equestrian – 6' wide

Motorcycle – (single track, trials-type course) – 4' minimum width

**Service Area:** Varies due to size, location, connections and features.

**Park Trail Corridor:** There should be a cleared area that is level with the trail, extending 2' from each side of the trail tread edge. An area of selective woodland thinning should extend 20' (single use) to 26' (multi-use) from the centerline of the trail. Clearing height above the trail should extend to 8' for pedestrians, to 10' for bicycles, and to 12' for horses.

**Level I Development:** Design process for master development plan. Trail head, parking and interpretive signage.

**Level II Development:** Addition of trail amenities including benches, drinking fountains and restrooms.

**Level III Development:** Includes special facilities such as educational kiosk, wildlife viewing areas and special designations.