

Appendix I - Park Service Area Guidelines

Park Service Guidelines

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has established national guidelines for quantities of park and recreation facilities related to population, suggesting that these guidelines should be adapted to individual municipalities. The city of Boulder Parks and Recreation Department used the NRPA guidelines as a starting point, and then considered Boulder's unique geography, recreation preferences, and other circumstances, such as the high cost of land.

The guidelines listed below are used to evaluate whether park services in existing neighborhoods are sufficient in quantity and quality to determine the need for new parks to serve new or redeveloping residential or commercial areas and to monitor progress in meeting department goals. These guidelines are flexible to allow the city to respond to opportunities and constraints.

Types of Parks

Pocket Parks and Urban Plazas

Boulder's park system includes a number of pocket parks, which are typically smaller than three acres and serve residents living within a .25-mile walking distance. Urban plazas are often smaller hardscaped and landscaped spaces that provide open space for surrounding residences, offices, and commercial buildings. Pocket parks and urban plazas will be acquired when larger land parcels are not available or when unique opportunities present themselves.

Characteristics of Pocket Parks

1. Smaller than three acres
2. Easily accessed by surrounding neighborhood
3. Often include seating and/or children's play area
4. Generally used for passive (not active) recreation
5. Expensive to maintain due to size, materials, and features

Characteristics of Urban Plazas

1. Small urban space, often with a higher amenity level (examples: hardscaped areas, street furnishings, plantings)
2. Often surrounded by buildings and uses that generate activity
3. Considered outdoor "rooms" for passive recreation and civic uses
4. Attractive and usable to a wide range of people
5. Include flexible space that can be used for outdoor festivals, markets and other public events
6. Expensive to build and maintain due to high amenity level and size

Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks often are considered the most fundamental park type in a city's park system because they provide a focal points for neighborhood identities, gathering places for friends and family, opportunities for informal play and natural settings for quiet reflection. Historically, Boulder's neighborhood parks are five acres or larger. With limited availability of larger parcels, future sites between three and five acres will be considered only when larger sites cannot be acquired. The department develops specific features for individual parks on the basis of a design process that includes extensive neighborhood participation.

Characteristics of Traditional Neighborhood Parks

1. Typically five acres or larger
2. Typically serve residents living within easy walking and biking distance (.5 mile)
3. Offer nonprogrammed outdoor space including paths, seating areas, places to picnic and play catch, children's play areas, and landscaping that enhances and preserves the site's natural character

Characteristics of Smaller Neighborhood Parks

1. Minimum of three acres
2. Flat, grassy, flexible-use space of at least one acre that is not programmed for active recreation or for stormwater detention use
3. Area for children's playground equipment
4. Areas for sitting and picnicking
5. Easily accessible to neighbors by sidewalks and/or paths

Community Parks

Community parks are larger than 50 acres and include a mix of active and passive park areas and active recreation facilities, such as courts and formal sports fields. They include playgrounds and picnic facilities. Boulder's community park guidelines are met by East Boulder Community Park, Foothills Community Park, and Harlow Platts Community Park. The department plans additional development at East Boulder and Foothills Community parks. No additional community park sites are planned, although the department remains open to future possibilities.

City Parks

City parks serve the entire community. They provide space for high-intensity recreational facilities, as well as natural areas and features typical of neighborhood and community parks. Valmont City Park and the Area III site meet the city's guideline for city parks. Part of Valmont City Park has been developed, and the Area III site will be held in reserve to meet long-term recreational needs. No additional city park sites are planned, although the department is open to future possibilities.

Park Guidelines

Park Type	Size (acres)	Walking Distance (miles)	Amount/1,000 Population
Pocket Park/ Urban Plaza	< 3	.25 mile	1.5 acre/ 1,000
Neighborhood Park	> 5*	.5 mile	1.5 acre/ 1,000
Community Park	> 50	3.5 miles**	1.5 acre/ 1,000
City Park	100-300	n/a	100-300 acres total

* *Smaller neighborhood parks will be considered if guidelines can be met (see above).*

** *Residents living within .5 mile of a community park are considered to have their neighborhood park needs met.*

Gaps in Boulder’s Park System

There are approximately 165 acres of undeveloped parkland in the system. This includes 30 acres of neighborhood and pocket parks, 20 acres of community parks, and 115 acres of city park at Valmont. There are also 191 acres of city park land in Area III in reserve for future consideration. Due to funding constraints, park development has not kept pace with residential development in certain parts of the city. Underserved areas are located primarily in the northernmost part of the city (see Park Service Area Map pages 26-27 in the 2006 Parks and Recreation Master Plan). Completion of Boulder’s undeveloped parks will meet the department’s service guidelines in most of these underserved areas, and will provide additional parks in well-served areas. Exceptions include several areas in the Gunbarrel area and areas near New Vista High School, where land is scarce and joint-use agreements with the Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) mitigate needs.

The 2005 Parks and Recreation Survey confirmed that residents place a high priority on completing undeveloped park sites. Developing neighborhood parks was the highest priority, followed by developing pocket parks and finish developing East Boulder Community Park.

Park Needs in Developing Areas

Due to the high price and lack of available land to develop in Boulder, some growth will take place in infill sites that are not currently zoned for housing, including commercial and industrial areas. Rezoning and redevelopment of infill sites may require the city to acquire and develop new park lands for urban open space and recreation. Infill developments may have an even greater need than other neighborhoods for parks and urban green space because of higher density (more people per square mile) with more multi-story housing, and housing in mixed-use development. New infill housing will include a variety of housing types and a range of prices, including more affordable units than in most Boulder neighborhoods. With smaller housing lots, more young singles and seniors, and families living in “starter” homes, infill developments will need public spaces for residents to play and relax. These sites may not be large enough to provide a neighborhood park of five or more acres, so smaller neighborhood parks, pocket parks, or urban plazas will be considered. The department will explore creative ways to acquire, develop and maintain these park sites.

The areas where significant change is anticipated are the Gunbarrel area and the Transit Village. The need for an additional park site was identified through the Gunbarrel Area Plan, and the next step will be to identify where and how it will occur. Park needs for the Transit Village will be considered through the Transit Village Area Plan.

Future Population Projections and Park Needs

Current population projections estimate a population in Boulder of 124,400 (Area I and II) by the year 2030. The current park acreage (developed and undeveloped) exceeds the department's guidelines established for park acreage per 1,000 residents. It also meets the guidelines for this projected population. However, the geographic distribution of the city's park land will need adjustment to meet future community needs. Through the city's area planning and subcommunity planning processes, future park needs in new and redeveloping neighborhoods will continue to be addressed. Subcommunity and area plans address planning issues at a detailed level and explore new land use ideas, including specific park needs, for an entire subcommunity, specific areas or neighborhoods.

When Park Service Needs Cannot be Met

New park locations are determined by an evaluation of factors such as those listed below:

- distance to the nearest pocket, neighborhood or community park
- availability of a suitable park site
- nature and density of the surrounding neighborhood
- access to Open Space and Mountain Parks lands
- availability of private homeowner association parks
- competing community goals for suitable parcels

Where acquisition of additional park land is not feasible, the department will explore collaborations such as:

- long-term lease agreements with the Boulder Valley School District
- private schools, churches or child care centers
- street closures or transportation right-of-way "vacations"
- joint development of privately-owned property
- use of indoor spaces, terraces and rooftops