1.0 INTRODUCTION

Park and recreation facilities not only enrich the well being of those who enjoy them, but can improve the aesthetics of neighborhoods, increase property values, draw in tourists, and enhance the overall image of a community. Parks also provide open space for wildlife habitat, protect sensitive ecosystems threatened by development and preserve large tracts of forestlands which freshen the air and add scenic beauty. The benefits parks and recreation facilities can contribute to the quality of life and long-term vitality of a community are virtually limitless.

The City of Cape Coral recognizes the tremendous value parks and recreation facilities provide to the community and desires to improve existing parks and recreation facilities and to proactively plan for the parks and recreation needs of its future residents. In the summer of 2000, the City selected the consulting firm of Wade-Trim, Inc. to prepare a Parks and Recreation Master Plan in cooperation with the City's Parks and Recreation Department. This project was commissioned in large response to the rapidly growing population and resultant park and recreation needs that are anticipated to arise during the 10 year planning period.

1.1 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

From inception, the City of Cape Coral stressed the importance of developing a Parks and Recreation Master Plan that responds to the needs of its users in an effective manner. The City believed the public should be the guiding force behind parks and recreation decisions.

The City Parks and Recreation Department selected and assembled a Steering Committee to guide the development of the Master Plan. Members, representing both the public and private sector, were chosen for their keen insight into important issues affecting the City and the parks and recreation system.

Reaching the residents involved extensive efforts by the City that included a mass survey mailing to 5,000 households, conducting 3 public workshops, as well as discussions with Parks Supervisory Staff, City Department Directors, and other community organizations such as the Shriners Club and the Chamber of Commerce. The methodology and results of the public input process are discussed in Chapter 4.
1.2 MISSION STATEMENT

At the outset, a mission statement was developed by the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Steering Committee to guide the planning process. The mission statement represents a synthesis of the ideas and values expressed during an intensive visioning session and serves as a guidepost for decision making through the master planning process. The mission statement reads:

“To establish a plan that meets the diverse recreational and social needs of Cape Coral citizens as individuals and as part of larger groups. This Plan shall establish a vision through the year 2010 that protects and enhances the quality of life for ourselves today and our families of tomorrow.”

The above mission statement must be maintained in harmony with the City of Cape Coral Comprehensive Plan and vice versa. The spirit of future Plan amendments should be reflective of the central goals expressed in the mission statement.

1.3 GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

The Recreation and Open Space Element adopted as part of the City of Cape Coral Comprehensive Plan in 1989 and subsequently amended in 1997 contains a series of objectives and policies that are intended to achieve the primary and secondary goals specified below.

General Goal:

➤ Enhance the quality of life in Cape Coral by developing a system of public parks, recreational facilities, and open space which meets the varied needs of present and future populations.

Subordinate Goals:

➤ Acquire and develop a system of park lands, recreational facilities, and open spaces that keeps pace with community growth and changing community needs.

➤ Provide a balanced and varied system of park lands, recreational facilities, and open spaces that are conveniently located, and accessible to all members of the public regardless of age or disability.

These goals provide a base framework for the development of this Master Plan.

1.4 GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM (GIS) APPLICATION

This Master Plan was prepared with the technological assistance of GIS application software. GIS was used to display and spatially analyze extensive amounts of data collected on City parks and recreation facilities. GIS enables the user to produce, maintain, and query data sets that are
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tied to a “real world” geographic coordinate system. The GIS database generated for this project will be maintained and updated by the City for use in future Master Plan updates.

1.5 PLAN PREVIEW

This document is designed to guide parks and recreation programming decisions through 2010. The Master Plan is essentially divided into two halves; the first providing the necessary background technical data to make informed decisions (basis for action) and the second half outlining detailed recommendations for capital improvements and associated implementation strategies (action plan).

City Profile

This section illustrates the City in light of its natural, physical, social and economic characteristics. It looks at past, current and future trends for their influence and impact on parks and recreation. Public lands are accounted for and assessed in relation to growth patterns.

Inventory and Conditions Assessment

All existing City owned and/or operated parks and recreation facilities were inventoried by Parks and Recreation Department staff. Wade-Trim subsequently conducted a field survey to assess the condition of these facilities in terms of function and maintenance. Collectively, this information establishes the baseline for identifying current and future facility deficiencies and surpluses as well as needed improvements.

Recreation Guidelines and Needs Assessment

Parks and recreation standards set benchmarks and goals that the City should strive to reach by the end of the planning period. As such, they must be specific, measurable and realistic. They must also be reflective of public desires and take into account the special needs of the disabled and elderly. Once the bar is set, a gap analysis is performed to determine the extent future parks and recreation facilities and programs are needed.

Inventory of Funding Sources

Once future park and recreation needs are defined, it is critical to identify available funding sources that may be applied towards implementing capital projects. This section summarizes traditional and alternative local, state, and federal funding sources according to program objectives and requirements. The budget for the City's Parks and Recreation Department is also examined.

Implementation and Capital Improvements Program

A description of the actions required for the implementation of the findings of this Master Plan is provided in this chapter along with a schedule of capital improvements and their associated
costs. This Capital Program is intended to prioritize recommendations for implementation. In addition, the City's five-year Asset Management Plan is examined.

**Recommendations**

This Chapter outlines the priority recommendations to meet the needs identified through the Master Plan analysis and the parks and recreation guidelines. Recommendations are designed to assist and guide decision-makers in setting priorities for parks and recreation improvements over the next decade.