OVERVIEW - CITY PROFILE

To appropriately and adequately plan for parks and recreation, it is necessary to understand the forces that shape the many facets of the City and how they relate to parks and recreation. This Chapter serves to illustrate the City in terms of its natural, physical, and socioeconomic composition – highlighting relevant findings and important trends affecting the provision of park and recreation facilities.

2.1 REGIONAL SETTING

The City of Cape Coral is a large peninsula well situated on the sunny southwest coast of Florida in Lee County. The City, incorporated in August 1970, measures 114 square miles, making it geographically the second largest city in the State and the largest city in Lee County in terms of size and population. It is bordered by the Caloosahatchee River on the east and Matlacha Pass on the west. In 2000, Cape Coral ranked as the 13th most populous city in the State with over 100,000 residents. About 75 percent of Florida's population resides within 150 miles of Cape Coral. Map 2-1 is a map of Cape Coral and the surrounding region.

2.2 PLATTED LANDS

Cape Coral began as a land sales development of 103 square miles just over 40 years ago. The original developers, the Rosen brothers (Gulf American Land Corporation), platted and prepared 89 square miles of land for development – altering the natural landscape, installing roads, digging canals and grading building sites. Unlike traditional cities that were developed in response to trade and transportation, Cape Coral was developed to sell lots in "paradise" to those in the north and throughout the world. Development of the city was driven by dividing the land into as many lots as possible to sell. As such, little land was set aside for public facilities such as parks. The original development of Cape Coral provided for an extensive network of roadways and canals throughout the City. These roads and canals were constructed in anticipation of the rapid buildout of the City. However, the City did not develop as originally anticipated or advertised and some roads in the remote areas of Cape Coral are now overgrown with vegetation.

As a result of the pre-platting of Cape Coral, the City is characterized by platted lots sized 40 feet wide by 125 feet deep with a minimum of 2 lots required to construct a single-family home.
According to the City's Geographic Information System (GIS) data, there are approximately 130,000 parcels of land within the City. Based on an average of two lots per parcel that equates to nearly 260,000 platted lots.

People throughout the world own these lots. Often, the owners bought the lots without ever seeing the lot in person and have no realistic concept about the lots that they bought 30 or 40 years ago. Similarly, many lots are passed from generation to generation through wills and inheritance without the owner ever seeing the property.

Of the 130,000 parcels less than 1% are 10 acres or greater in size. Considering the geographic size of the City (114 square miles) and the potential buildout population of over 400,000 residents, the lack of large parcels for development is a serious concern. Not only are large parcels needed for parks and recreation but also for public facilities, commercial, industrial and institutional uses needed at buildout.

2.3 NATURAL RESOURCES

Understanding the physical and natural make up of Cape Coral is an important part of planning for parks and recreation. It helps to reveal the composition and character of a community and how it is connected to natural systems.

Cape Coral is unique in that 78% of the natural ecological communities, including hydrology, soils, and vegetation have been removed. Yet the City is only about one-quarter developed (City of Cape Coral Comprehensive Plan, 1997).

Surface waters consist of some 400 linear miles of manmade canals in the interior of Cape Coral. In general, most of the canals in eastern Cape Coral discharge directly into the Caloosahatchee River. The canals in western Cape Coral discharge into the spreader waterway which is designed to direct the water and sheet flow into Matlacha Pass – an Aquatic Preserve which extends along most of Cape Coral's western border.

Natural areas identified by the City's Comprehensive Plan include (See Map 2-2):

Matlacha Pass Preserve
Aquatic preserve and mangrove/wetland fringe that borders the western edge of Cape Coral is owned and managed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

Four Mile Cove Ecological Preserve
Area owned by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and managed and operated by the City of Cape Coral. Located along the banks of the Caloosahatchee River in southeast Cape Coral. Currently managed as part of the City's parks and recreation system. Additional discussion of the park is contained in Chapter 3.
Glover Bight
Located at the southern tip of Cape Coral. Four distinct zones with differing ecological characteristics comprise the area. Rotary Park is located within the Glover Bight area. Additional discussion of the park is contained in Chapter 3.

Shorehaven
This area includes a mangrove forest and salt marsh in eastern Cape Coral adjacent to Four Mile Cove Ecological Park.

Mid-Matlacha Pass East
Area located along the western border of Cape Coral between the Matlacha Pass Preserve to the south and S.R. 78 to the north. This area contains mangrove and bay swamp bordering the Matlacha Pass. In March 2001, Lee County, through the Lee County Conservation 2020 Lands Program, acquired over 230 acres for conservation.

Charlotte Harbor South
Area located in extreme northwest Cape Coral extending from the northern City limits to the south. This area formally was planned for the expansion of the Burnt Store Marina Development of Regional Impact (DRI); however, in 1998 the State of Florida acquired this land through the Conservation and Recreation Lands Program (CARL). Currently, this area is managed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

Fliegel Property/Major Park
This area consisting primarily of pinelands and scrub oak is located in northeast Cape Coral. The City acquired 200 acres of this land for future development of a major park. An additional 200 +/- acres directly to the south of the major park site was recently acquired by Lee County through the Lee County Conservation 2020 Lands Program.

Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods
The Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods, a targeted area for acquisition through the State CARL program, is located primarily to the north of the Cape Coral city limits. The total project encompasses 19,361 acres of which 12,775 acres have been acquired by the State. Of the remaining 6,586 acres left for acquisition an area of 222 acres is located within the City of Cape Coral. This area is a triangular piece of property located to the east of Chiquita Boulevard and north of the Gator Slough Canal. According to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods is the largest remaining tract of intact pine flatwoods in southwestern Florida.

Four Mile Cove Ecological Preserve
2.4 TRANSPORTATION ACCESS

The City of Cape Coral is served by a conventional suburban hierarchy of roadways that consist of arterials, collectors, and local streets. Major surface access to Cape Coral from the north or south is provided by I-75 and U.S. 41.

Cape Coral has approximately 1,100 miles of roadways. In general, the north/south routes are evenly spaced apart every one or two miles. The east/west facilities are not evenly distributed and have significant gaps.

Principal arterials in Cape Coral include Veterans Expressway, Del Prado Boulevard, S.R. 78, Hancock Bridge Parkway, Burnt Store Road and Cape Coral Parkway. Other major north/south roadways include Chiquita Boulevard, Santa Barbara Boulevard, Country Club Boulevard and Coronado Parkway. Other major east/west roadways include Viscaya Parkway, Diplomat Parkway, and Kismet Parkway.

2.5 BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES

The original developers of Cape Coral did not provide a coordinated and connected system of sidewalks or bicycle paths. Consequently, the provision of pedestrian and bicycle facilities has historically been a major concern for the City.

Over the past decade, the City has made significant strides in attempting to provide adequate bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Specifically, the City has provided on-street bicycle lanes, installs sidewalks and/or bicycle facilities on new roadways and major road reconstruction, aggressively pursues grants through the State and Federal governments for sidewalks and has initiated a bicycle/pedestrian facility planning process. Map 2-3 displays the existing and committed bicycle and pedestrian facilities in Cape Coral.

The on-street bicycle lanes are highly utilized by not only bicyclists but also walkers and joggers. On 4 lane divided roadways that meet specific criteria established by the City's Public Works Department, one lane in each direction is striped as a bicycle lane leaving one lane in each direction for motorized traffic. These on-street bicycle lanes are very popular and widely used. Unfortunately, as development continues and traffic volumes increase these on-street bicycle lanes will become less viable.
The lack of bicycle/pedestrian facilities in Cape Coral is a major limiting factor in the ability of people to visit parks throughout the City without having to use a car.
2.6 ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Cape Coral's economy is fueled by the steady influx of new residents into the City. The real estate, construction, schools, government, health care, service and retail industries are the major employers in Cape Coral as well as the region. However, according to the City of Cape Coral 2000 Annual Report, over 70% of businesses in Cape Coral are small businesses with less than 10 employees.

Cape Coral has seen an increase in the assessed value of property over the past 5 fiscal years. In 1997 the assessed value of property in Cape Coral was $3.6 billion and has risen to over $4.2 billion in 2001. This reflects an increase of nearly 17%. This increase has primarily been driven by the construction of new single-family homes in Cape Coral. In 2000, the City issued over 2,000 permits for new construction. Of the 2,000 permits more than 1,700 were for new single-family homes, 84% of all new construction.

Overall, Cape Coral's economy is strong and growing. Information contained in the City's Fiscal Year 1999 Comprehensive Financial Report reflects the City's strong economy. The unemployment rate is estimated to be less than 3% with new job growth of over 6,000 since 1990. Taxable sales increased by 94% between 1991 and 1999.

The City has recently began a $200 million utility expansion program to provide utilities along the north side of the S.R. 78 (Pine Island Road) corridor, construction of the North Loop near North Cape Industrial Park and utilities to the booming southwest sector of the City. This utility expansion program will promote the continued economic growth of the City.

2.7 POPULATION TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS

It is essential to be aware of demographic trends to properly plan for the population of a community. Factors such as age, household size and income influence, to a degree, decisions regarding the provision of parks and recreation facilities.

Population

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the City of Cape Coral has tripled its population since 1980. There was an explosion of population growth during the 1980's (40,824 new residents or 119% increase) that continued to a lesser extent into the 1990's (27,049 new residents or 36% increase). The City of Cape Coral Department of Community Development projects a growth rate similar to last decade to continue during the planning period with a rise in population of 32% to reach 135,011 residents by 2010.

These figures do not account for seasonal visitors. For planning purposes, the functional population (permanent plus seasonal residents) is used. According to data released by the City of Cape Coral Department of Community Development, Table 2-1, it is estimated that the functional population of Cape Coral in 2000 was 120,697. By 2010, the end of the planning period, the functional population is projected to reach 184,432 - a 53% increase.
TABLE 2-1
CITY OF CAPE CORAL
FUNCTIONAL POPULATION PROJECTIONS
2000 TO 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>120,697</td>
<td>150,733</td>
<td>184,432</td>
<td>30,036</td>
<td>24.89%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: City of Cape Coral Department of Community Development, 2001

According to 1999 Sector Population Growth figures developed by the City of Cape Coral Department of Community Development, most residents (about 60%) live in the southeast quadrant of the City where water access is prime. This is followed by the southwest quadrant in which about 30% of City residents live. The remaining 10% live in the northeast and northwest sections of the City where land is predominantly undeveloped.

The distribution of growth in Cape Coral over the past 10 years has been primarily concentrated in the southwest sector of the City. Between 1989 and 1999 southwest Cape Coral has more than doubled its population and added the greatest number of new residents, over 15,000.

Age Distribution

Understanding the age distribution of a community’s population is essential when considering future acquisitions and/or improvements within a parks and recreation system. An increasingly elderly population, for example, may require improvements at the City’s senior center and in related programming such as bingo, dancing, and cards. This may also indicate an immediate need to evaluate handicapped accessibility at parks to ensure all persons have the opportunity to participate in recreation.

According to U.S. Census data the median age of the City dropped from 50 years in 1980 to 39.9 years in 1990 and then rose slightly to 41.6 years in 2000.

Age distribution trends were examined to detect changes in the population composition that may have an impact on the provision of future recreation facilities. Since 1980, Cape Coral’s population has gotten younger with the introduction of new families with school children. School aged children currently account for 19% of the population, compared to just 14% in 1980. Correspondingly, the percentage of residents that falls in the family formation life cycle (18-44), surged during the 1980's to account for over a third (34.6 percent) of residents by 1990. This proportion dropped slightly to 30.6 percent by 2000. This trend suggests that there is a growing need for active recreation facilities and play equipment for school aged children. Although the City’s empty nest and retirement population has declined during the last 20 years, they currently comprise 45% of the total residents. Special provisions need to be made to...
accommodate the less intensive recreational needs of older residents who tend to have more leisure time. Providing a sensitively balanced array of recreational facilities to accommodate all age groups will ensure equity and opportunity in the park system.

Analysis of the age distribution, as shown in the following chart, indicates that the percentage of retirees has consistently reduced since 1980, 25% in 1980 to 19.6% in 2000, while the school age population is increasing, 14.1% in 1980 to 19% in 2000. Table 2-2 identifies the increase in school enrollment between 1980 and 2000 as reported by the Lee County School Board for schools located in Cape Coral.

**Age Distribution**
## Public School Enrollment, City of Cape Coral

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public School</th>
<th>Opened</th>
<th>School Year Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elementary School</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caloosa</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>1,113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplomat</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulf</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelican</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>685</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skyline</td>
<td>1988</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Total</strong></td>
<td>2,407</td>
<td>4,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle School</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caloosa</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>1,297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplomat</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulf</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trafalgar</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Total</strong></td>
<td>1,297</td>
<td>2,342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High School</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Coral</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>1,974</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mariner</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Total</strong></td>
<td>1,974</td>
<td>3,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>5,678</td>
<td>10,382</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lee County School Board, 2000