

## Chapter 17: Parks & Recreation

At one time planners assumed a community was adequately served if there were ten acres of park and recreation land for every thousand residents. Today a systems approach is used to compare the supply of park and recreation facilities with the demand for these facilities on the part of residents and other users. This approach is set forth in *Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines*, published by the National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA).<sup>128</sup>

The NRPA systems approach is based on a *Level of Service* (LOS) analysis applied to each classification of park within a locality. Classifications set forth in the NRPA *Guidelines* include: mini-parks, neighborhood parks, school-parks, community parks, large urban parks, athletic complexes, natural area preserves, historic district parks, and greenways. LOS is determined by applying the following analysis to each applicable classification.

1. Determine the Recreation Activity Menu for each park classification. The Recreation Activity Menu (RAM) is the list of all recreation facilities, i.e. tennis courts, tot lots, picnic units, etc., which go into each park classification and for which a specific amount of space will be needed. The RAM determines the facilities space requirement for the LOS formula.
2. Determine Open Space Size Standards for each park classification for which LOS standards will apply.
3. Determine the Present Supply of these recreation activity choices.
4. Determine total Expressed Demand for these recreation activity choices.
5. Determine the Minimum Population Service Requirements for these recreation activity choices.
6. Determine the individual LOS for each park class.
7. Determine the collective LOS for the entire park and recreation system.

The preceding steps are intended to compare the park and recreation facilities desired by area residents with the existing supply. If the supply is inadequate then a strategic planning process is used for determining how to resolve the shortfall within constraints such as available funding. The NRPA guidelines also contain recommendations for proximity of some park classifications to residential areas. For example, a neighborhood park should be within a quarter- to half-mile of a residential area with no intervening non-residential streets which would impede travel by foot or bicycle. A neighborhood park ranges from five- to ten-acres and is designed for both passive (hiking, biking, picnicking) and active (tennis, soccer) recreation.

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A town, city or county should use a process modeled after the NRPA guidelines to assess the impact of various possible growth scenarios on the supply and demand of park and recreation areas. Contact your local parks and recreation agency to see if such an assessment is available. The local comprehensive or master plan should contain a chapter or element setting forth the supply of park and recreation facilities contrasted with planned expansions and increased demand based upon anticipated future growth.

While the LOS approach works well for determining acres of parkland required for many recreational pursuits, it is not appropriate for assessing the need to preserve areas that are significant because of ecological, scenic, or other natural values. A number of states have adopted Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans (SCORP). These plans tend to be the most thorough analysis of the need for additional parkland for hiking, bicycling, hunting, and other recreation pursuits requiring large areas of land. The SCORP for your state may provide sufficient information to assess the impact of growth scenarios on the supply and demand of these park areas.