

1. INTRODUCTION

Grass Valley is a small community of approximately 10,000, located in the gold mining country of Nevada County, California. The City of Grass Valley and surrounding areas are expected to grow by 33% in the next 20 years. Quality-of-life is an important issue to residents of Grass Valley, who particularly value the City's small-town, rural character, sense of place and history, and proximity to open space. Parks and recreation services provide opportunities for community gathering, and for the enjoyment of the area's tremendous natural resources.

PURPOSE OF THE MASTER PLAN

To assist in maintaining Grass Valley's livability, the Parks and Recreation Commission and the City have set out to create the first Grass Valley Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The Master Plan describes how the City will strive to provide parks and recreation opportunities to residents for the next 20 years. This planning process provided the community with an opportunity to evaluate the parks and recreation programs, and to develop a vision that recognizes the anticipated changes and reflects the needs of the residents. Grass Valley's parks and recreation function has historically consisted of acquiring, developing, and maintaining traditional parks. Future recreational needs will be assessed and accommodated more effectively by following the Grass Valley Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The Master Plan will guide the City's response to demographic changes in the community, and new developments in the field of parks and recreation management.

The purpose of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan is to establish policy, set standards, identify and prioritize capital investments, and address operational and fiscal issues regarding parks and recreation facilities and programs in Grass Valley. The Master Plan will become a working document for parks and recreation staff, to be used for budget planning, developer guidelines, and coordination efforts with other county agencies and districts.

The Grass Valley Parks and Recreation Master Plan includes the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Needs Assessment

Chapter 3: Vision

Chapter 4: Recommendations

Chapter 5: Funding Program

DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

The current population of Grass Valley is approximately 10,000, with a total of 16,000 in the planning area. The Planning Area includes the city limits as well as adjacent unincorporated areas of Nevada County. The unincorporated areas are included in the planning area because they (1) are likely to be annexed in the future, (2) affect and are affected by the city, (3) receive or might reasonably be expected to receive city services. To determine future community needs, anticipated changes in the city population were studied. The following are the most important facts and trends:

- The population will increase dramatically within the Planning Area, growing by approximately 33% from 16,000 in 1998, to an estimated 24,000 in the year 2020.
- Households will become smaller and more diverse. In addition to traditional nuclear families, the Recreation and Park Commission will need to recognize the varied needs of people living in nursing and foster care homes, single parent families, persons living alone, and people with disabilities.

- As California becomes more diverse, Grass Valley will experience changes in the City's cultural and ethnic composition over the next 20 years.
- Nearly 60% of the Grass Valley residents currently rent their dwelling units. Significant amounts of high-density, rental housing increases the need for park and recreational opportunities.
- Grass Valley is a popular retirement community with a high proportion of senior residents. By 2020, residents 45 years and older will represent 50.8% of the City's population. These residents have specific recreational needs such as low-impact sports, swimming, weight training, etc. Residents will also need community facilities to house senior programs and activities.
- Almost 75% of Grass Valley's population are active adults (25 and older). Today's changing attitudes towards maintaining healthy lifestyles will contribute to a high demand for a wide variety of recreational activities.
- New jobs in technology have attracted younger families to Grass Valley, increasing demand for more active types of recreation and organized sports programs.

As the City's population grows and becomes more diverse, parks and recreation services must also grow and change to meet the needs of the community. Grass Valley has an abundance of natural features and resources that contribute to the quality of life. As a result, growth and new development are attracted to the resources Grass Valley offers. The growth of the City has increased the demand for parks, open space, and recreational needs. Consequently, the Recreation and Park Commission has a pivotal role to play in shaping the future of the City. With continued community support, the recreational goals of Grass Valley can be met and the City's resources will be protected for the enjoyment of future generations.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Grass Valley enjoys a tremendous natural setting in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains. Residents value the city's aesthetic attributes, particularly views of the hillsides and regional open space. Major streams in the area include the South Fork of Wolf Creek and Little Wolf Creek, which flow into Wolf Creek in the central Grass Valley area. Stream corridors provide valuable wildlife habitat and are sensitive to alteration. Additionally, Grass Valley's flood protection ordinance requires a 100-foot building setback from streams and rivers subject to flooding. These factors make riparian corridors ideal for trails and open space preservation. Grass Valley also has a rich history in the mining industry, beginning with the Gold Rush of 1849. Many of the city's historic homes, hotels, saloons, and other structures are still used today, contributing to the town's unique character. Residents strongly support historical preservation and interpretation.

POLICY AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The Grass Valley Parks and Recreation Master Plan has been developed under the guidance of the City's newly established Parks and Recreation Commission. The Master Plan is part of an ongoing General Plan update. Additionally, the Master Plan addresses planned annexations, which will create additional demand for recreation needs as well as opportunities for providing parks and recreation resources.

Parks and Recreation Commission

In January 1999, the City of Grass Valley authorized the creation of a Parks and Recreation Commission to meet rising public expectations and expanding definitions of recreation. The City identified the following scope of duties for the Commission, which has guided the development of the Master Plan:

- Emphasize recreation programs, organized activities and events.

- Recognize the demand for non-traditional recreational facilities such as trails, cultural facilities, and natural open space.
- Address community demographic and development patterns.
- Determine park and recreation needs, standards, and levels of service.
- Assess the opportunities available through private recreation providers in designing programs that best meet the needs of the community, complementing rather than competing with private providers.

Grass Valley General Plan Update

The Master Plan is an extension of the City of Grass Valley’s 2020 General Plan, which will guide the City’s development over the next 20 years. The Parks and Recreation Master Plan must be consistent with the City’s General Plan policy framework and standards. Since the Parks and Recreation Master Plan was developed concurrently with the General Plan update, the Master Plan reflects the planning assumptions and community visions presented in the General Plan.

The goals and objectives under the Recreation Element of the 2020 General Plan for the City of Grass Valley call for expanded and diverse recreational programs, areas, and opportunities, and for providing additional cultural opportunities for the community. Tables 1 and 2 highlight the policies presented in the General Plan.

Table 1: Recreation Policies under the 2020 General Plan for the City of Grass Valley

1-RP	Provide parks and open spaces of different sizes and types to respond to the needs of a diverse population, including trails for pedestrian and equestrian use, bicycle pathways, linear parkways and park-like natural areas.
2-RP	Increase the standard of park acreage to population.
3-RP	Distinguish neighborhood park needs from community and regional park needs.
4-RP	Establish a City-sponsored open space district to operate and manage existing and future open space resources.
5-RP	Formalize and enhance walking trails in existing City parks.
6-RP	Provide non-motorized linkages between parks and open spaces.
7-RP	Include a map in the General Plan designating a trails network for the Planning Area.
8-RP	Cooperate with other jurisdictions to address regional park and recreation needs.
9-RP	Develop performing arts in various venues, including a performing arts center.
10-RP	Expand the existing library as a cultural venue.
11-RP	Create a public plaza in downtown for community events and activities.
12-RP	Support efforts to establish a community center for mixed ages and a variety of uses.

Table 2: Open Space Policies under the 2020 General Plan for the City of Grass Valley

2-COSP	Establish active program of land/development rights acquisitions in order to protect sensitive environmental areas and features.
3-COSP	Encourage clustering, density averaging and other techniques to preserve open space and natural systems.
4-COSP	Establish standards for inclusion and management of permanent open space in new developments.
7-COSP	Recognize and reinforce Grass Valley's public park system.
10-COSP	Establish a City trail network program for friendly acquisitions, development and administration of a natural trails system.
11-COSP	Return to open space those areas within which flooding poses a clear danger to life and property.
18-COSP	Develop agreements with Nevada County on a strategy for conservation and open space protection within the Grass Valley Planning area and sphere of influence.
19-COSP	Enlist appropriate efforts and interest of state and federal agencies and private foundations regarding conservation and open space protection.

Annexations

The City of Grass Valley has entered into annexation agreements with a number of properties, including Loma Rica, North Star, Kenny Ranch, and Glenbrook. These properties, which will be developed in the near future, include plans for community parks and open space, and bike and trail linkages.

PLANNING PROCESS

The Master Plan Project Team consisted of City staff members from several departments, including the Parks and Recreation Commission, Public Works Department, Planning Department, and City Administrator, and a consulting team of environmental planners, community involvement specialists, landscape architects, and park and recreation professionals. The process has included:

- A site and program inventory of existing Grass Valley parks and open space;
- Meetings with stakeholders and city staff;
- Document review;
- Comparative standards analysis of similar communities;
- Two community workshops; and
- Meetings with the Parks and Recreation Commission, Planning Commission and City Council.

The Grass Valley community showed its support and interest in the park planning process through its enthusiastic attendance of two community workshops. Over 100 people attended the first community workshop in April 2000. The planning team presented the overall planning process and goals for the project. Community members participated in a brainstorming session and group discussions regarding trails and undeveloped park sites (Mulcahy Field and Morgan Ranch), developed park sites (Elizabeth Daniels, Dow Alexander, Condon, Minnie, Memorial), and funding issues. At the second workshop, the planning team presented the draft recommendations for developed and undeveloped parks, future sites, and trails. The recommendations of this Master Plan reflect the input received at these meetings.