

Bullis
Orsinger
MacArthur
Raymond Russell
Lakewood Acres
Pietz
Comanche
Covington
Mission
Harlandale
Navajo
South San
Rodriguez



Bexar County

**Parks & Open Space
Master Plan**

BEXAR COUNTY
INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES DEPARTMENT



PARKS AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN
2008-2020

PREPARED BY:

HNTB

HNTB CORPORATION

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Background

The Bexar County parks and open space system will consist of parks, natural areas, and linear greenways that foster community gatherings, provide opportunities for active and passive recreation for area residents, and preserve significant natural and cultural resources. Accordingly, this Parks and Open Space Master Plan has been developed to reflect these values.

The master plan follows the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) guidelines for a locally prepared master plan, which would make the county eligible for future grant funding for parks, if pursued. The planning horizon is 12 years, and covers the period from 2008 to 2020.

Inventory

Currently, there are approximately 25,066 acres of parkland in Bexar County which represents 235 parks. Approximately 4.7 percent (1,182 acres) of the parks are owned by Bexar County. Most parks fit into the neighborhood (10 acres or less) or community park (10-25 acres) categories. Government Canyon, located over the Edward Aquifer Recharge Zone in precinct 2, accounts for a significant portion of the Bexar County park acreage with approximately 8,622 acres. Additionally, with the exception of Bullis, Government Canyon and Calaveras Lake Park, most of the area outside San Antonio city limits is not currently being served by a park.

For planning purposes, the county was divided into four sub-areas that follow current Bexar County precinct boundaries. Precinct 1 has the largest total area and the most number of developable acres. It also incorporates the historic Mission Reach project. Precinct 2 has the smallest geographical area but the most number of park acres. Precinct 3 has the most undeveloped acres, with Camp Bullis accounting for approximately 12,000 acres. Precinct 4, which includes much of downtown San Antonio, has the greatest number of cultural resources and also incorporates the historic Museum Reach project.

Park Usage

According to the Bexar County Parks Department estimates, county parks served approximately 1.6 and 1.7 million attendees in Fiscal Year (FY) 2005-2006 and FY 2006-2007, respectively. The data also shows that Mission and Comanche are the most used parks in terms of attendance. When compared to the Bexar County parks system-wide average, the data suggests that Mission, Comanche, Rodriguez, and Raymond Russell are overburdened in terms of number of attendees per park acre. This has resulted in noticeable erosion of park resources within these facilities.

Public/Stakeholder Input

Input from the public and other stakeholders in the development of Bexar County Parks and Open Space Master Plan was obtained through

stakeholder interviews and questionnaires, park user-intercept surveying, and community informational meetings. Existing and potential park users responded that the highest priorities of the Bexar County parks system should be to:

1. provide better maintenance of existing parks;
2. provide more park amenities and comfort items including restrooms, water fountains, shade areas, and trash receptacles; and
3. provide more recreational amenities, including basketball courts, swimming pools, tennis courts, and nature trails.

Local park experts and county staff were also asked to identify priorities for the parks system. The highest priorities listed were to:

1. expand the existing park system through the acquisition of additional park lands and natural areas;
2. provide park facilities to unincorporated areas of the county to accommodate future demand;
3. develop the newly acquired county park facilities, including Lakewood and Hilltop Acres; and

4. provide more efficient maintenance and security in existing park facilities.

Needs Assessment and Recommendations

TPWD in its *Park, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan Guidelines*, effective January 27, 2005 suggests three methods for assessing needs for a locally prepared master plan: (1) demand-based, (2) standard-based, and (3) resource-based. Since a single approach would not adequately assess parks and natural areas needs for the county, a combination of these three methods was used.

A total of ten new park acquisition sites are recommended for completion by the year 2020 (**Figure 1**). In addition, improvements to seven existing facilities, as well as a facility maintenance plan are included in the overall parks program for a total budget of \$19,630,000. In addition, funding options and recommended strategies are outlined in Chapter IV. Listed below is a summary of recommended improvements identified from the needs assessment. These are divided into three categories: 1) operations and maintenance; 2) existing park improvements; and 3) new acquisitions.

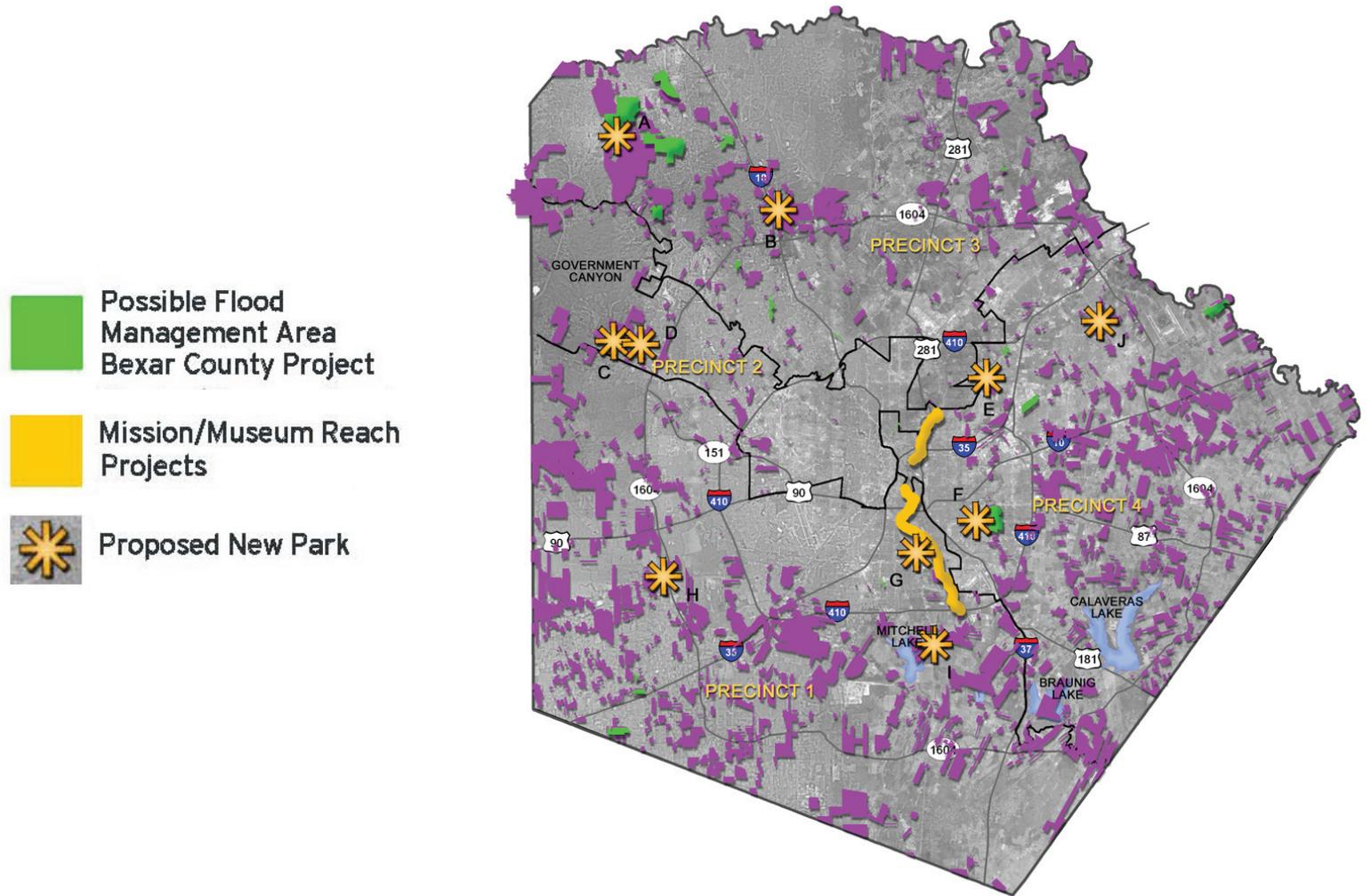


Figure 1.
Proposed Park Sites

Table ES-1. Draft Recommendations for Bexar County Parks System: 2008-2020

1. Operations and Maintenance

- Based on current park acreages and usage trends, Bexar County would benefit from a Mode III maintenance plan for the majority of the parks system (see Chapter IV: Section 2). A Mode II maintenance plan would be appropriate for higher use parks, including MacArthur, Mission, Comanche, and Raymond Russell.

2. New Park Acquisitions

- Provide additional park acreage with comparable facilities within the areas currently served by Mission, MacArthur, Comanche, and Raymond Russell to relieve these over-burdened parks
- Acquire park acreage for preservation of significant environmental areas in Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone (Site C) and Blue Wing Lake (Site H)
- Acquire additional park acreage to provide adequate level of service by 2020 at sites D, I, J

3. Existing Park Improvements

- Develop the recently acquired Lakewood and Hilltop Acres
- Complete the park improvements identified in the 2003 Bexar County Bond Package for Bullis, Comanche, Orsinger, Raymond Russell, and Rodriguez parks

Introduction

The *Excellent City Park System*, a publication by the Trust for Public Land, finds that a quality parks and open space system is a form of natural infrastructure that can provide many benefits to a community.¹ The report states that parks, when taken collectively, can result in:

- Cleaner air, as trees and vegetation filter out pollutants and produce oxygen;
- Cleaner water, as vegetation would filter runoff into streams, rivers, and lakes;
- More opportunities for physical fitness and lower health problems related to sedentary lifestyles;
- Increased tourism and commerce related to successful parks; and
- Natural beauty and buffers from traffic and noise.

Bexar County Existing Environment

Bexar County is located in south central Texas, where the Texas Hill Country and the South Texas Plains meet. The county covers an area of approximately 1,260 square miles and encompasses San Antonio, which is Texas' second largest city and home to over 1 million people. Bexar County is one of the fastest growing counties in the nation. The county is currently ranked number 21 in the top 25 counties for largest population growth between 1990 and 2000, and number 25

in the top 25 counties with the largest number of new private housing units.²

Bexar County is served by four major interstate highways (IH), four major United States highways (SH), SH 16, and Loop 1604, which is the outer loop around the city of San Antonio. While most of its population (approximately 82 percent) resides within the San Antonio city limits, other population centers within the county include the towns of Alamo Heights, Castle Hills, Converse, Helotes, Leon Valley, Kirby, Terrell Hills, Live Oak, Universal City, Fair Oaks, and Windcrest (**Figure 2**).

Current population estimates show the total number of people living within Bexar County to be approximately 1,539,630. According to recent projections from the Texas State Data Center, this number is expected to reach 1,702,693 by 2020.³ In regards to ethnicity, Census 2000 data indicates that the primary ethnicity represented in the county is non-white/Hispanic (approximately 54 percent). Of the remaining 46 percent, the highest estimated percentages are white (36 percent); African-American (7 percent); and Asian-American (2 percent). The median age of the county is estimated to be 32 years, with children (0-17 years) representing approximately 28 percent of the total population, and seniors (65 and above) accounting for

¹ Harnik, Peter. *The Excellent City Park System*. Trust for Public Land, 2003, p. 32.

² U.S. Census Bureau, *County and City Data Book: 2000*, Table B-1.

³ Bexar County Information Services. 2007.

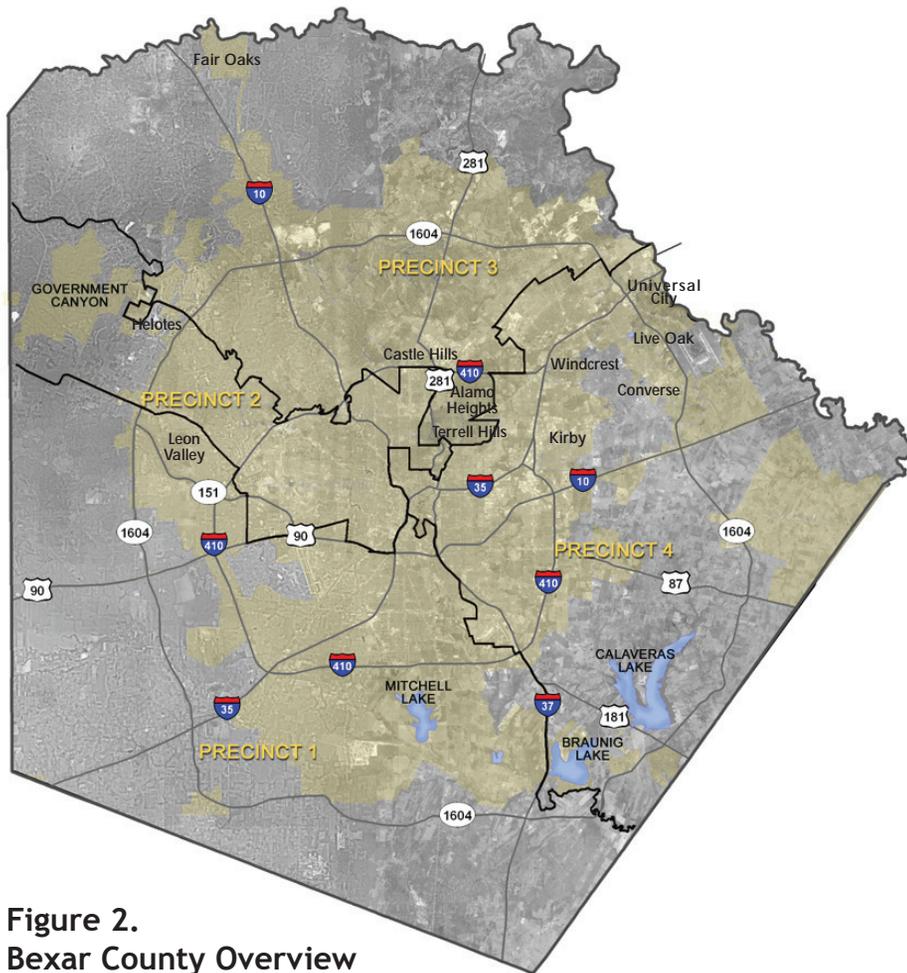


Figure 2.
Bexar County Overview

approximately 10 percent of the total population.

The county has experienced significant growth in population in recent decades. This is in part due to its natural features and availability of developable land; however, a considerable amount of growth can be attributed to the county's economic success. Primary industries are national defense, financial services, and tourism. The county has also developed a major regional medical center with the establishment of the University of Texas Health Sciences Center at San Antonio, the South Texas Medical Center, Brooke Army Medical Center, and Santa Rosa Hospital—among others. Additionally, growth in tourism related to several area attractions, including Fiesta Texas, Sea World of San Antonio, the River Walk, and the Alamo, as well as the success of the San Antonio Spurs professional basketball team, have all contributed to the economic success of the county.

1. Plan Development Process

This master plan for parks and open space was prepared by an independent consultant in cooperation with the Bexar County Parks Department. The approach follows guidelines identified in the TPWD *Parks and Open Space Master Plan Guidelines*, the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) standards for park acreage, and industry best practices.

Major steps in the planning process included:

1. preparation of an inventory of existing facilities;
2. identification of county goals and objectives;
3. establishment of park standards;
4. community and stakeholder involvement;
5. development of an overall needs assessment; and
6. development of a prioritization and implementation strategy for identified needs.

2. Precinct Profiles

Data from several sources was used to develop the planning profiles. Census 2000 data at the block group level was used for current population and demographic analysis. Data for the individual census tract block groups that comprised a single precinct were combined to develop totals for that area. For natural and cultural resources

analysis, data was collected from the respective public resource agency, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Texas Natural Resources Information System (TNRIS), TPWD, Texas State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Texas Historic Sites Atlas, the Bexar County Central Appraisal District, and the City of San Antonio Parks and Recreation Department. This information was incorporated into a geographic information system (GIS) and used to identify and analyze existing and potential park resources.

The demographic analysis for Bexar County was separated by precinct. **Figure 3.** shows planning areas.

Table 1. Demographic Summary of Population

	Square Miles	Population	Population per mi ²	Under 18 Years	65 Years +	Living in Poverty
Bexar County	1,257	1,392,931	1,114	395,282	144,314	15%
Precinct						
1	440	332,062	755	103,455	30,388	22%
2	122	339,661	2,784	93,594	34,521	17%
3	356	369,249	1,037	89,935	32,161	7%
4	339	351,959	1,038	108,298	47,244	16%

Source: Census 2000

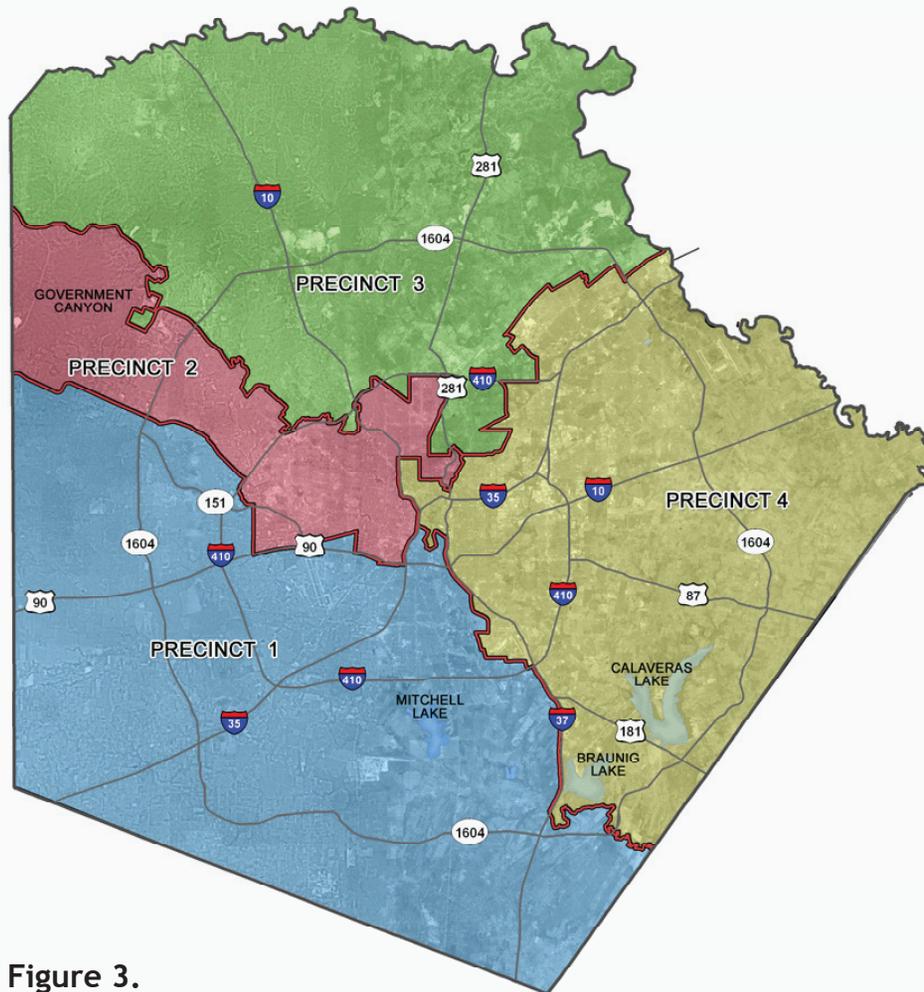


Figure 3.
Planning Areas

Precinct 1

Precinct 1, which covers an area of approximately 440 square miles, is located in the southwest corner of the county. It is bound by Culebra Road on the north, IH 37 on the east and the Bexar/Atascosa county line on the south and west. Census 2000 data showed the total population in this area to be approximately 332,062. Children and seniors represent approximately 40 percent of the total population (31 and 9 percent, respectively). Population estimates for the year 2020 suggest that approximately 402,410 people will live in this area.

A review of area demographics shows that minorities, primarily non-white/Hispanic, comprise approximately 83 percent of the area. According to Census 2000 data, a substantial portion of the population (approximately 22 percent) had incomes below the poverty level. The percent of persons unemployed is approximately four percent.

Precinct 1 is mostly undeveloped. Agricultural lands account for approximately 30 percent (82,119 acres) of total land area and developable open space in the area is approximately 33 percent (91,772 acres).⁴ There are 54 parks (2,091 acres) located in Precinct 1, including seven county park facilities: Hidalgo, Mission,

⁴ Open space refers to undeveloped land, natural areas, and preserves.

Padre, Hilltop Acres parks, Mission Reach, and the Harlandale and South San civic centers. One privately owned theme park, Sea World of San Antonio, is located in the northwest corner of the precinct. Twenty-three historic landmarks are located in Precinct 1. Surface water features account for approximately 13 percent of total land area in Precinct 1 and include three lakes: Canvasback, Mitchell, and Blue Wing.

Precinct 2

Precinct 2 is located in western Bexar County. It is bound by SH 16 on the north, US 281 on the east, Culebra Road on the south and the Bexar / Medina county line on the west. Precinct 2 covers the smallest geographical area of the four areas (122 square miles), but it has the greatest number of residents per square mile (2,784 persons). Census data revealed that approximately 339,661 persons lived in the area in 2000. Children and seniors represent approximately 40 percent of the total population, (at 29 and 11 percent, respectively). Approximately 405,280 people are expected to live in Precinct 2 by the year 2020.

Demographic data for Precinct 2 indicates that approximately 69 percent of the total population of this area is non-white, Hispanic. Of the remaining 31 percent, the highest estimated percentages of ethnicities include white (25 per-

cent) and African-American (4 percent). Poverty rates in this area are higher than those of Bexar County as a whole. Census data reveal that in 1999, approximately 56,000 persons (17 percent of the population) had incomes below the poverty level. The percent of persons unemployed is comparable to Bexar County, at approximately 4 percent.

Agricultural lands account for approximately 16 percent (12,095 acres) of total land area. There are 66 parks (14,281 acres) located in Precinct 1, including one county park: Rodriguez Park; and Government Canyon (discussed in Chapter II). Twenty-five historic landmarks are located in Precinct 2. Surface water features account for approximately 8 percent of total land area in Precinct 2 and include two lakes, Woodlawn and Elmendorf.

Precinct 3

Precinct 3, located in northwest Bexar County, covers approximately 356 square miles. The area is bounded by Cibolo Creek on the north and SH 16 on the west. Precinct 3, which currently has a population of approximately 369,249 in 2000, is the fastest growing area in Bexar County. Recent population forecasts suggest that the area will grow to approximately 477,770 by 2020. Children and seniors represent approximately 35



percent of the total population (at 25 and nine percent, respectively).

In terms of ethnicity, Census 2000 data reveals that approximately 60 percent of the area is white, non-Hispanic. Of the remaining 40 percent, the highest estimated percentages of ethnicities include Hispanic (31 percent), African-American (4 percent), and Asian-American (2 percent). A review of household income data shows that Precinct 3 is the most affluent area in Bexar County. Approximately 46 percent of the households have annual incomes greater than \$50,000; approximately 18 percent have incomes of \$100,000 or greater. The percentage of the population with incomes below the poverty level is approximately 7 percent. The percent of persons unemployed in Precinct 3 is approximately 2 percent.

Agricultural lands account for approximately 32 percent (73,822 acres) of total land area. Camp Bullis, a United States Army camp, occupies 12,000 acres within this area, and accounts for a significant portion of the undeveloped land. There are 41 parks (5,903 acres) located in Precinct 3, including six county parks: Bullis, MacArthur, Orsinger, Walker Ranch, Raymond Russell, and the Raymond Russell Annex. One privately owned theme park, Six Flags Fiesta Texas, is located in the southwest corner of the precinct. Seven historic landmarks are located in Precinct

3. Surface water features account for approximately 13 percent of total land area in Precinct 3 and include one lake, Lewis Creek.

Precinct 4

Precinct 4 is located in the southeast quadrant of Bexar County, covering approximately 339 square miles. The area is generally bounded by the Bexar/Guadalupe county line on the north, the Bexar/Wilson county line on the east, the Bexar/Atascosa county line on the south, and IH 37 on the west. Census 2000 data showed the total population in this area to be 351,959. Children and seniors represent approximately 40 percent of the total population, (at 29 and 11 percent, respectively). The population is anticipated to increase to approximately 417,233 persons by 2020.

In terms of ethnicity, Census 2000 data reveals that approximately 45 percent of the area is non-white/Hispanic. Of the remaining 55 percent, the highest estimated percentages of ethnicities include white (37 percent) and African-American (14 percent). The percentage of the population with incomes below the poverty level is approximately 16 percent. The percent of persons unemployed in Precinct 4 is approximately 2 percent.

Agricultural lands account for approximately 34 percent (74,657 acres) of total land area. There are 74 parks (2,794 acres) located in Precinct 4, including 10 county park facilities: Comanche, Covington, the future Lakewood Acres, Pletz, Museum Reach, the AT&T Center, Main Plaza, and the Navajo Civic Center. One privately owned theme park, Splashtown, is located in the north-west corner of the precinct, near downtown San Antonio. Precinct 4 encompasses most of downtown San Antonio; consequently, 128 historic landmarks are located in this area. Surface water features account for approximately 14 percent of total land area in Precinct 4, and include three lakes: Martinez, Braunig and Calaveras.

Table 2. Summary of Bexar County Natural and Cultural Resources by Precinct

	Precinct 1	Precinct 2	Precinct 3	Precinct 4
County Parks	7	1	6	10
Total Parks	54	66	41	74
Landmarks/Historic Markers	23	25	7	128
<i>Source: HNTB 2007</i>				



1. County-wide Parks and Recreational Facilities

Currently, there are approximately 25,066 acres of parks and natural areas within Bexar County. This represents approximately 3 percent of all land within the county. Most of this land consists of parks owned and operated by other entities, including the City of San Antonio, the San Antonio River Authority (SARA), the State of Texas, and the U.S. Government (**Figure 4**). Approximately 1,182 acres (4.7 percent) is owned by the Bexar County parks system.

A total of 235 public parks are located in Bexar County. Most of these are neighborhood parks that are 10 acres or less in size and community parks between 10 and 25 acres in size.⁵ Table 3 summarizes each park type and includes the number represented in each category and total acreage.

Precinct 4 has the greatest number of individual parks; 74 of the 235 county-wide parks are located in this area. However, most of the park acreage is located in Precinct 2. This is primarily due to the presence of Government Canyon, which is an approximately 8,622-acre state park that is dedicated to the recharge of the Edwards Aquifer. Like Government Canyon, much of the land in northwest Bexar County is not available for wide recreational use, but is currently identified as natural areas or ranch use.

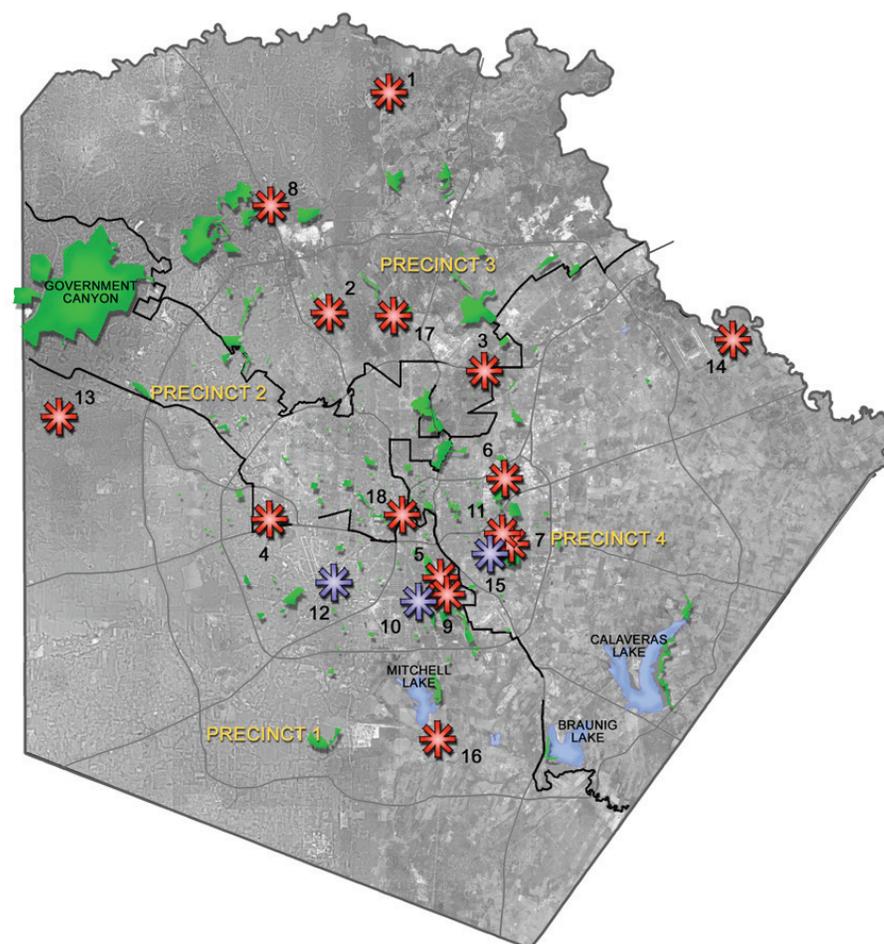


Figure 4.
Bexar County Parks & Natural Areas

⁵ See **Appendix E**, National Recreation and Parks Association: Park Classifications and Standards for Park Acreage.

Table 3. County-Wide Parks and Natural Areas: Bexar County		
Provider	Number	Acres
Bexar County		
Community Parks	12	467
Open Space	3	59
Special Use Facility	2	175
Joint-Sponsorship Facility	4	478
Civic Center	3	2
Total	24	1,182
City of San Antonio		
Neighborhood Parks	66	486
Community Parks	58	1,249
Large Urban Parks	14	2,527
Sports Complex	7	94
Natural Areas	23	9,144
Greenways	9	593
Historic Resource	6	122
Special Use Facility	14	327
Urban Space	5	12
Undefined	2	52
Total	204	14,606
Other Park Providers		
SARA	2	448
State of Texas	1	8,622
US Government	4	208
Total	7	9,278
GRAND TOTAL	235	25,066

Source: City of San Antonio Parks and Recreation Department

The scarcity of parks and natural areas within Bexar County is most notable in the unincorporated areas between the San Antonio city limits and the Bexar County line, particularly in the southwest quadrant of the county. With the exception of Bullis, Hilltop Acres, Lakewood Acres, Government Canyon, and Calaveras Lake Park, there are no dedicated park and natural areas available within these areas. Additionally, most of the parks that are available to county residents are owned and operated by the City of San Antonio. As a result, these primarily serve typical neighborhood uses, such as family gatherings, team sports, and other special events. Table 4 summarizes parks and natural areas acreage for Bexar County and the four precincts.

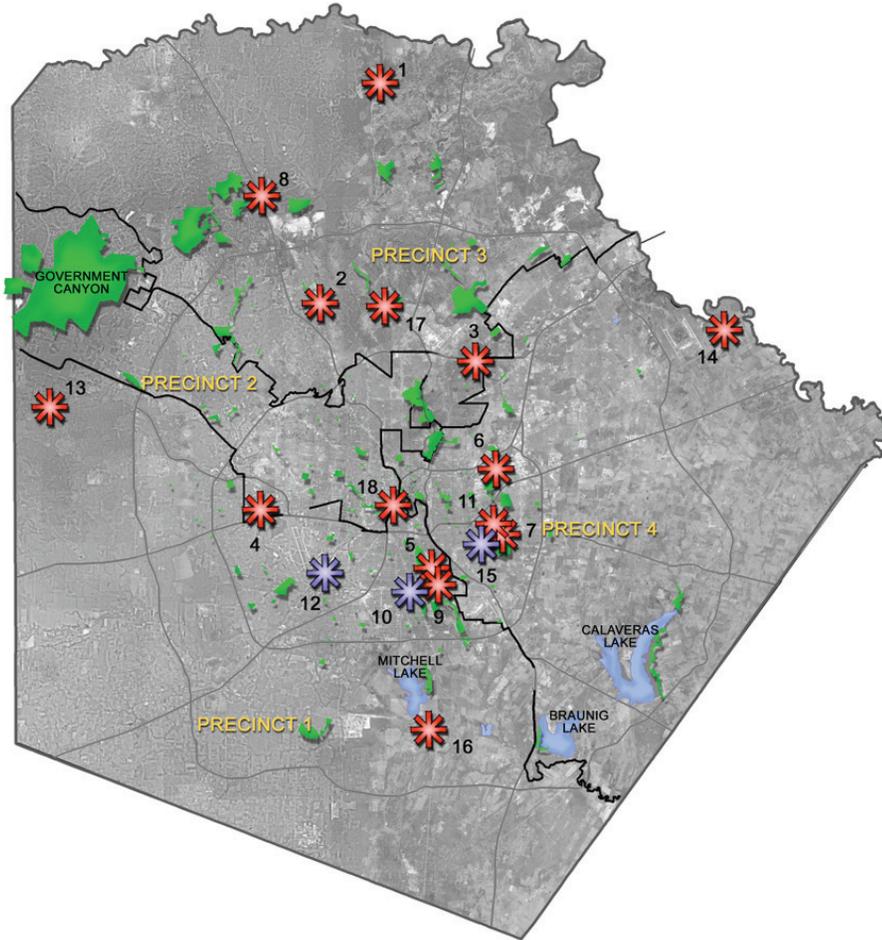
Table 4. Summary of Bexar County-Wide Parks and Natural Areas by Precinct					
	2006 Population Estimate	Acres of Parks and Natural Areas	Owned By Bexar County	Owned By Others	Total Acres of Parks and Natural Areas per 1,000 Residents
Bexar County	1,539,630	25,066	1,182	23,884	16
Precinct					
1	363,872	2,091	486	1,605	6
2	366,467	14,281	40	14,241	39
3	432,015	5,903	190	5,713	14
4	377,276	2,791	466	2,325	7

Source: HNTB 2007

2. County-Owned Parks and Recreational Facilities

Currently, a total of 24 facilities (approximately 1,182 acres) comprise the Bexar County parks system (Table 5). Most of the facilities are located within the San Antonio city limits, with the exception of Bullis, Hilltop Acres, and Lakewood Acres.

The majority of the parks are less than 50 acres in size and they are primarily characterized as community parks (See Appendix A: Bexar County Parks Inventory).



County Owned Park Facilities

1. Bullis Park
2. Orsinger Park
3. MacArthur Park
4. Rodriguez Park
5. Mission Park
6. Pletz Park
7. Comanche Park
8. Raymond Russell Park
9. Padre Park
10. Harlandale Civic Center
11. Covington Park
12. South San Civic Center
13. Hilltop Acres Park
14. Lakewood Acres Park
15. Navajo Civic Center
16. Hidalgo Park
17. Walker Ranch
18. Main Plaza

Figure 5.
Bexar County Parks & Natural Areas
Inventory

Table 5. Summary of Bexar County Parks Facility Inventory		
Community Parks	Acres	Precinct
Bullis Park	51	3
Comanche	40	4
Covington Park	19.29	4
Hidalgo Park	2.29	1
Lakewood Acres*	175	4
MacArthur Park	13	3
Mission Park	39	1
Orsinger Park	13	3
Padre Park	32	1
Pletz Park	24	4
Raymond Russell Park	19.67	3
Rodriguez Park	39	2
Open Space		
Covington (annex)	5.5	4
Hilltop Acres*	50.26	1
Raymond Russell (annex)	3.33	3
Special Use Facilities		
AT&T Center	170	4
Freeman Coliseum	5	4
Civic Centers		
Harlandale Civic Center	1.1	1
Navajo Civic Center	0.3	4
South San Civic Center	1	1
Joint-Sponsorship Facilities		
Main Plaza	0.5	2
Mission Reach	360	1
Museum Reach	27.4	4
Walker Ranch	90	3
Total	1,181.64	
<i>*New or undeveloped park</i>		
<i>Source: City of San Antonio Parks and Recreation Department</i>		

Annual park usage estimates were reviewed for the 13 existing parks and civic centers. These estimates show annual attendance in FY 2005-2006 and FY 2006-2007 to be approximately 1,624,335 and 1,730,293, respectively. Visitation was approximately five percent higher in FY 2005-2006 than in FY 2006-2007 due to construction activity which closed some park areas for brief periods during FY 2006-2007 (Figure 6).

Park reservation data indicates that the parks are used year-round, with peak periods occurring in the summer months (April to September). Primary uses for the facilities are birthday, graduation, and other family celebrations. Sporting events, including baseball and softball games, also account for a significant number of park events.

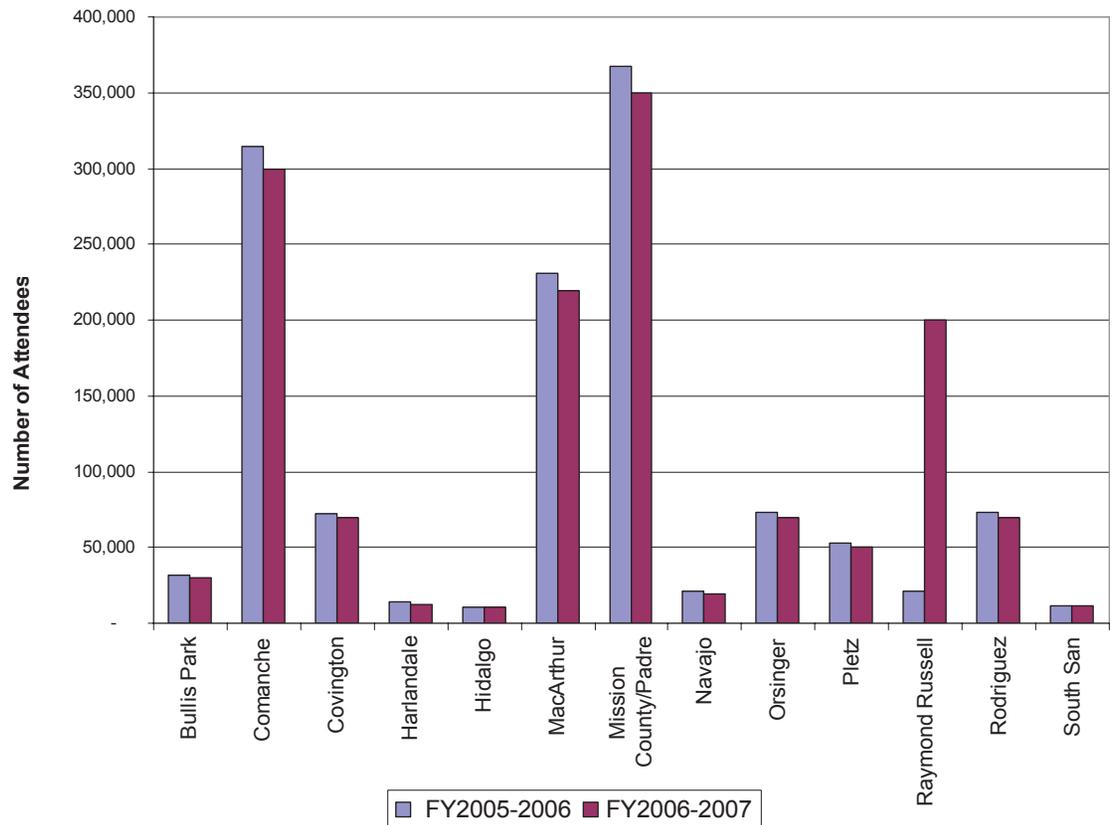


Figure 6.
Park Usage: Annual Attendance

In terms of number of attendees, Mission and Comanche are the most used county-owned parks, representing 24.5 and 21.9 percent, respectively, of total park attendance in FY 2006-2007 (Figure 6). Table 6 summarizes parks usage by facility. The number of park attendees per acre is included for comparison. When compared to the Bexar County parks system-wide average, the data sug-

gests that Mission, Comanche, Rodriguez, and Raymond Russell are over-burdened in terms of number of attendees per park acre. This has resulted in noticeable erosion of park resources within these facilities.

Table 6. Bexar County Parks: Usage Trends by Facility, 2005-2007

Park/Facility	Number of Attendees		Average Per Acre Usage (based on number of attendees)	Number of Reservations (2006)	Zip Code Most Served
	FY 05-06	FY 06-07			
Bullis	35,872	34,886	694	517	78258
Comanche	395,602	378,923	9,682	2,037	78223
Covington ¹	72,259	69,866	3,684	NA	NA
Harlandale Civic Center	31,065	30,516	-	526	78221
Hidalgo ²	10,643	10,136	4,537	NA	NA
MacArthur	273,456	257,751	20,431	2,172	78217
Mission	447,981	423,940	6,140	2,038	78223
Navajo Civic Center	39,737	31,935	-	457	78210
Orsinger	85,759	80,458	6,393	496	78249
Pletz	58,386	66,632	2,605	482	78219
Raymond Russell	57,427	236,709	6,394	1,132	78249
Rodriguez	91,175	85,721	2,268	827	78237
South San Civic Center	24,973	22,820	-	444	78211
Total	1,624,335	1,730,293	5,629	11,252	-
<p>1. Reservation numbers for Covington are included in totals for Comanche. 2. Hidalgo Park opened in 2007; therefore reservation data are not available. Source: Bexar County Infrastructure Services</p>					



1. Approach

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) in its *Park, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan Guidelines*, effective January 27, 2005 suggests three methods for assessing needs for a locally prepared master plan: (1) level of service (LOS)/standard-based, (2) demand-based, and (3) resource-based. A combination of these three methods was used to accurately assess park and open space needs for Bexar County.

2. Level of Service Analysis

The LOS/standard-based approach is a macro-level analysis that uses established standards to determine facilities and park areas needed to meet the needs of a given population size. The standards may be based on demand studies, the professional judgment of park and recreation planners and designers, etc. A standard-based assess-

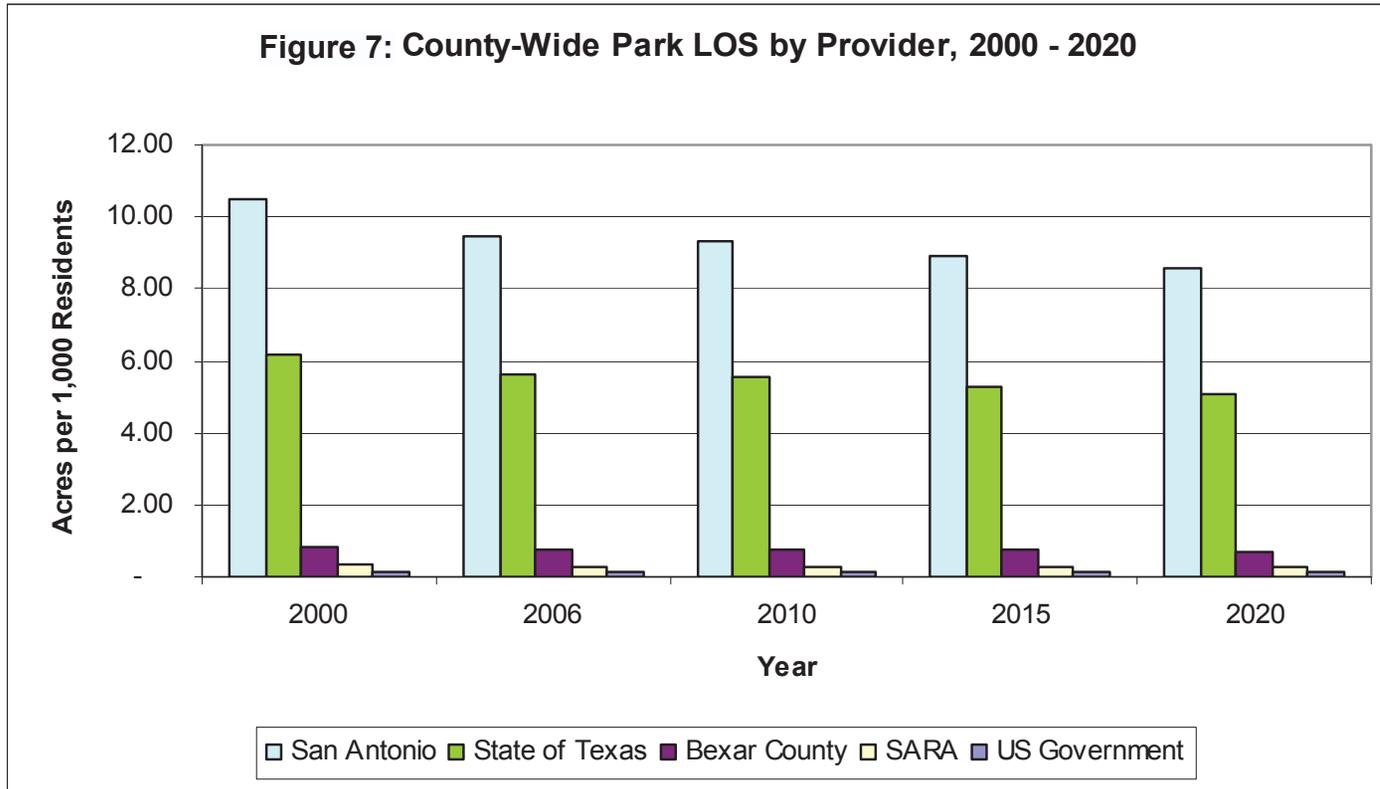
ment typically uses a ratio of number of acres or facilities provided per 1,000 residents as a level of service (LOS) to be provided in a community. This follows the *National Recreation and Park Associations Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines*.

In 2006 there were approximately 16 acres of parkland for every 1,000 residents available in Bexar County. Of this amount, Bexar County provided less than one acre (0.8 acre) of parkland per 1,000 residents. Since there are currently no national standards or recommendations for the amount of parkland that counties should contribute, existing level of service data for several large Texas counties were compiled to provide benchmarks for the Bexar County system (Table 7).

Table 7. Level of Service: Comparison to Other Texas Counties

County	Population*	County-Owned Acres	Acres per 1,000
Bexar	1,539,630	1,182	0.8
Dallas	2,218,899	3,200	1.4
Harris	3,400,578	21,630	6.4
Travis	812,280	2,797	3.4

*Source: Texas State Data Center, 2006



The amount of available park acres per 1,000 residents was projected for Bexar County using population estimates for 2010, 2015, and 2020 (Figure 7). The data suggests that the current park system will not keep up with future demand.

Table 8 provides a summary of the number of park acres that Bexar County would need to ac-

quire in order to achieve various LOS ratios. To maintain the current LOS of 0.8 acres per 1,000 residents, the county would need to add approximately 142 acres to its system by 2010 and continue expanding the system to add a total of 263 acres by the year 2020.

LOS Ratio	2006	2010	2015	2020
0.8 (Bexar)	0	142	206	263
1.4 (Dallas)	974	1,003	1,108	1,202
3.4 (Travis)	4,053	4,125	4,380	4,608
6.4 (Harris)	8,672	8,807	9,287	9,716

3. Demands Assessment

The demand-based approach is a micro-level analysis that relies on information gathered from participation rates, surveys, and other information that indicates how much of the population wants certain types of facilities. “Demands” have been gathered from stakeholder questionnaires, comments made during public meetings, and user-intercept surveys.

Stakeholder Involvement

Stakeholder questionnaires were used to identify park priorities of county-elected officials and staff, civic leaders, and community activists. The questionnaire consisted of 23 questions that allowed respondents to rate the adequacy of existing facilities, provide feedback on their individual

park experiences, and identify opportunities for future improvement. A complete list of questions is included in Appendix C.

Local park experts and county staff were also asked to identify priorities for the parks system. The highest priorities listed were to:

1. expand the existing park system;
2. acquire additional natural areas;
3. accommodate future population growth;
4. provide park facilities to unincorporated areas of the county;
5. complete construction of Lakewood Acres and Hilltop Acres;
6. provide efficient maintenance; and
7. provide security in park facilities.

Public Input

Park User-Intercept Surveys

In addition to stakeholder interviews, the public was engaged in the planning process by a field survey method called intercept surveying. Intercept surveying is a face-to-face, random survey method that was conducted at county park facilities as well as several commercial areas. A total of 1,014 surveys were conducted. Those surveyed were asked to provide basic demographic information, including age, household income, and ethnicity. Survey questions were also designed to obtain current user preferences and to identify individual park needs. A complete list of questions and a summary of results is found in Appendix D.

Community Meetings

A series of public meetings were held at key milestones in the planning process. The purpose of these meetings was to inform the community of the development of the *Bexar County Parks & Open Space Master Plan*. Participants were given an overview of the planning process and provided an inventory of existing facilities. They were then asked to provide feedback regarding existing park conditions and to identify opportunities for future improvements.

Public Involvement Summary

The highest priorities of the Bexar County parks system identified by existing and potential park users are to:

1. provide better maintenance of existing parks;
2. provide more park amenities and comfort items including restrooms, water fountains, shade areas, and trash receptacles; and
3. provide more recreational amenities, including basketball courts, swimming pools, tennis courts, and nature trails.

4. Significant Natural and Cultural Resources

The resource-based approach examines the assets and resources of the area for open space, parks and recreation facilities, and defines how these resources can be utilized. For example, the availability of a lake or river within an area is a resource which can be utilized in developing a park system.

Much of Bexar County is situated along the Balcones Escarpment, which is the exposed portion of the Balcones Fault that runs along IH 35 through central Texas. The geography north of



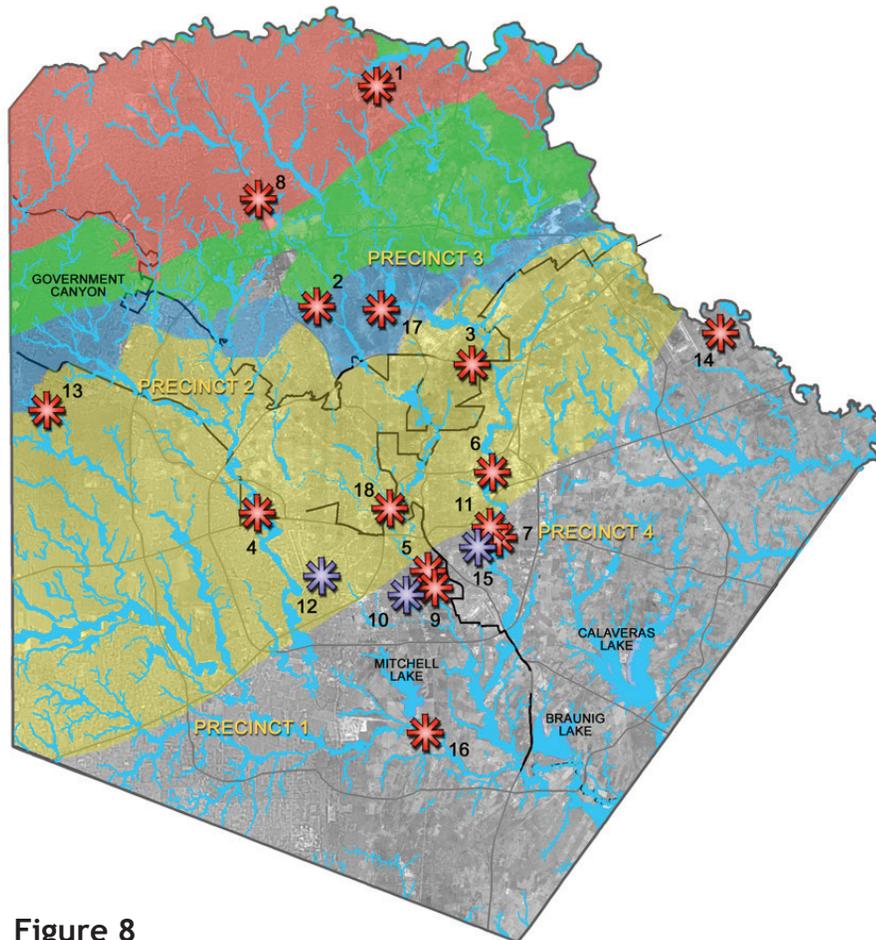


Figure 8
Significant Natural Resources

the escarpment consists of rocky hills and canyons that make up the Texas hill country. Also located in this area is the Edwards Aquifer, which is the primary source of water for the greater San Antonio area (Figure 8).⁶ South of the escarpment are the low-lying Coastal Plains and Blackland Prairie. The San Antonio River, the principal river in Bexar County, begins approximately four miles north of downtown San Antonio and flows southeast through the county. Other major streams in the county include the Medina River, Medio, Leon, Helotes, Olmos, Salado, Calaveras, and Cibolo creeks. Several large man-made lakes in the county include Calaveras Lake, Braunig Lake, and Mitchell Lake.

Bexar County is one of only eight counties in Texas with three of the eleven different natural regions found within a single county. These include the Edwards Plateau, Blackland Prairie, and South Texas Brush Country. The most distinguished of the three regions, the Edwards Plateau, is located in the northwest section of the

⁶ Stone, Dan and Geary M. Schindel. The Application of GIS in Support of Land Acquisition for the Protection of Sensitive Groundwater Recharge Properties in the Edwards Aquifer of South-Central Texas. *Journal of Cave and Karst Studies* 64(1): 38-44.

county. This region contains soils that are usually shallow, underlain by limestone. Typical plant species may include Ashe juniper, Texas Oak, and Live Oak in the southern and eastern canyon lands, and mesquite in the west. Wildlife typically distributed in the area includes various mammals, reptiles, birds, and amphibians. Additionally, Bexar County contains habitat for nearly 30 federally listed threatened and endangered plant and animal species.

There are 161 historic markers and 22 historic districts in Bexar County. These are primarily located in downtown San Antonio, and along the San Antonio River. A complete cultural resources inventory is found in Appendix B.⁷ In addition, the San Antonio River Authority is currently overseeing a ten-year project to develop the portion of the river that flows through central San Antonio. The improvements will occur along the four-mile Museum Reach, which is north of the downtown area, and the nine-mile Mission Reach, which is south of downtown. The goal of the project is to provide flood control while increasing recreational and economic development opportunities. The project also aims to extend the amenities of the River Walk into areas of Museum Reach that are currently inaccessible due to sheer banks, vegetative growth, and the lack of pathways. Additionally, the project will restore native habitat and the natural meander of the river along Mission Reach.⁸

⁷ Handbook of Texas Online: <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/SS/rns6.html>. Last accessed August 15, 2007.

⁸ San Antonio River Authority. "River Improvements to Provide City with Limitless Benefits." http://www.sara-tx.org/site/public_info/news_releases/project_benefits.html. Last accessed: 10/14/07.

1. Goals and Objectives

The Bexar County parks and open space system will consist of parks, natural areas, and linear greenways that foster community gatherings, provide opportunities for active and passive recreation for area residents, and preserve significant natural and cultural resources. Specific goals of the open space master plan were developed from feedback received during the community and stakeholder and involvement process are to:

- Protect wildlife and endangered species habitat and restore damaged ecosystems;
- Preserve significant natural and cultural resources, including historic landscapes;
- Ensure compatibility with the development of area hike and bike trails;
- Develop a system of interconnected linear parks (greenways) that extend along area rivers and creeks;
- Support local initiatives to improve open space development along the San Antonio river corridor, including the development of the Mission Reach and Museum Reach projects;
- Provide a park system that is accessible for all Bexar County residents;
- Preserve existing park investments;
- Develop partnership opportunities for parks system.

2. Proposed Implementation

Recommendations for improvements to the Bexar County parks system were developed based on the county's goals and objectives, existing and forecasted park LOS, user and stakeholder needs and priorities, and the availability of significant natural and cultural features within the county. If implemented, these improvements would serve to maintain existing Bexar County investments, upgrade existing facilities to current standards, and accommodate future demand. The recommended improvements are summarized in the following sections.

Parks System Operation and Maintenance

Issues related to maintenance, security, and general cleanup of existing parks and facilities were identified through the user surveys and community meetings. Since general park maintenance is an ongoing expense for the county, it is beneficial to establish a standard of operation to which park maintenance providers can adhere.

The NRPA lists six maintenance modes for parks and open space in the 1986 report. The modes range from one to six, with one being the most intensive maintenance plan, and six being the least intensive. A definition for each mode is provided below.

- Mode I: State of the art maintenance applied to a high quality diverse landscape. Usually associated with high traffic urban areas such as public squares, malls, governmental grounds or visitation parks;
- Mode II: High level maintenance, associated with well developed park areas with reasonably high visitation;
- Mode III: Moderate level maintenance, associated with locations with moderate to low levels of development, moderate to low levels of visitation, or agencies that due to budget constraints can not afford more intense maintenance;
- Mode IV: Moderately low level, usually associated with a low rate of development, low visitation, undeveloped areas, or remote parks;
- Mode V: High visitation natural areas, usually associated with large urban or regional parks. Size and user frequency may dictate resident maintenance staff. Road, pathway or trail systems relatively well developed. Other facilities

at strategic locations such as entries, trail heads, building complexes and parking lots; and

- Mode VI: Minimum maintenance level, low visitation natural areas or large urban parks that remain undeveloped

Based on current park acreages and usage trends, Bexar County would benefit from a Mode III for the majority of the parks system. A Mode II maintenance plan would be appropriate for higher use parks, including MacArthur, Mission, Comanche, and Raymond Russell.

Existing Park Improvements

A total of \$5,925,000 was allocated in the 2003 Bond Proposition 3 to provide for the purchase, acquisition, construction, and equipping of parks and recreation improvements and venues in Bexar County. This included funding for cultural, educational, historical document preservation and museum facilities. Of the 14 projects identified, 7 of the projects, totaling \$4,575,000, were public partnerships designed to leverage additional investments in park and cultural facilities. The remaining \$1.35 million was allocated for specific improvements to the following existing county park facilities:

- Lakewood Acres, \$400,000
- Bullis Park, \$125,000
- Comanche Park, \$200,000

- Orsinger Park, \$125,000
- Raymond Russell, \$250,000
- Rodriguez, \$250,000

Total: \$1,350,000

In addition to the six parks identified in the 2003 bond package, the county recently acquired Hilltop Acres through the Federal Emergency Management Agency Flood Buyout Program. Hilltop Acres is approximately 50 acres of land located in the far western section of the county (Precinct 1). Recommendations are to develop the area into a regional park that will be opened to the public after 2008. Total estimated cost for the project is \$332,750.

New Park Acquisition

Selections for new park locations considered several criteria, including; 1) the availability of developable acres; 2) LOS based on existing park distribution and projected population estimates; 3) compatibility with area hike and bike trails; 4) compatibility with other open space projects; and 5) the presence of significant natural and cultural features. Nine sites were identified as locations for new park acquisition (Figure 9). Table 9 is an evaluation matrix that lists criteria used to identify proposed park sites. The park identification number, number of acres, and county precinct are included for reference.

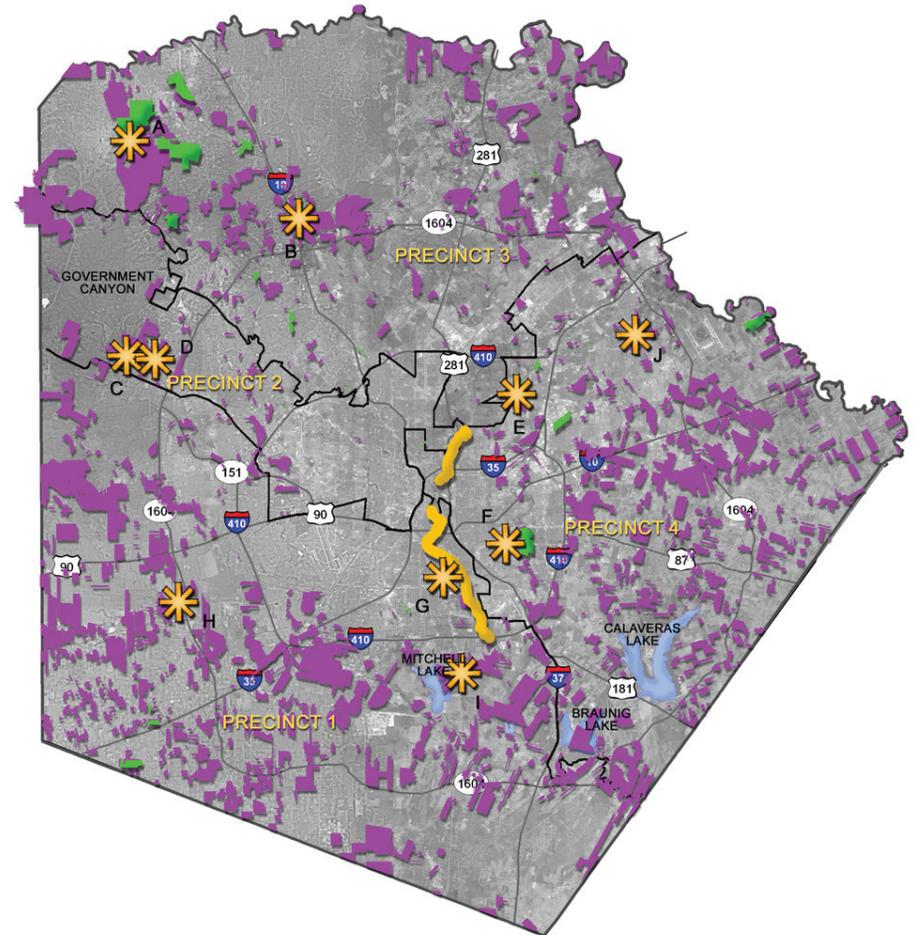


Figure 9
Proposed Park Sites

Table 9. Park Acquisition Evaluation Matrix

Park ID	Acres	Precinct	Achieves Minimum LOS Ratio (0.8)	Adjacency to 100-Year Floodplain Project	Compatible with Other Open Space Projects	Available Open Space	Endangered Species Habitat Present
Site A	135	3	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦
Site B	30	3	♦		♦	♦	
Site C	30	2	♦	♦	♦	♦	
Site D	30	2	♦	♦	♦	♦	
Site E	30	4	♦	♦	♦	♦	
Site F	30	4	♦	♦	♦	♦	
Site G	30	1	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦
Site H	180	1	♦		♦	♦	
Site I	200	1	♦		♦	♦	♦
Site J	130	4	♦	♦	♦	♦	

Summary of Recommended Improvements by Precinct

Precinct 1

- Acquire new park acreage at Site G to develop a community park that will provide additional facilities in the area currently served by Mission Park
- Acquire new park acreage at Site I to develop a nature preserve/greenway for preservation of significant birding area
- Acquire new park acreage at Site H to develop a nature preserve/greenway
- Develop outdoor recreational facilities, including a greenway for Hilltop Acres

Precinct 2

- Acquire new park acreage at Site C to develop a community park that will meet existing and future population demand in the area
- Acquire new park acreage at Site D to develop a community park that will meet existing and future population demand in the area
- Rehabilitate outdoor park and recreational facilities at Rodriguez Park



Precinct 3

- Acquire new park acreage at Site B to develop a community park that will provide additional facilities in the area currently served by Raymond Russell Park
- Acquire new park acreage at Site A to develop a nature preserve/greenway for preservation of the Edwards Aquifer and critical animal species habitat
- Develop outdoor recreational facilities, including a linear park/greenway at Lakewood Acres
- Develop outdoor recreational facilities for Bullis Park
- Provide park-like improvements on approximately 3.5 acres of dedicated land adjacent to Raymond Russell

Precinct 4

- Acquire new park acreage at Site F to develop a community park that will provide additional facilities in the area currently served by Comanche Park
- Acquire new park acreage at Site E to develop a community park that will provide additional facilities in the area currently served by MacArthur Park
- Acquire new park acreage at Site J to develop a community park that will provide additional facilities in the area currently served by MacArthur Park
- Rehabilitate outdoor park and recreational facilities at Comanche Park

Table 10. Proposed Park Acquisitions and Budgets					
Bexar County Parks and Open Space Master Plan, 2008-2018					
Name	Park Type**	Acres	Description	2007 Estimated Development Cost*	Precinct
Site A	Nature Preserve/Greenway	135	New acquisition	\$0.95 Million	3
Site B	Community Park	30	New acquisition	\$1.05 Million	3
Site C	Community Park	30	New acquisition	\$1.05 Million	2
Site D	Community Park	30	New acquisition	\$1.05 Million	2
Site E	Community Park	30	New acquisition	\$1.05 Million	4
Site F	Community Park	30	New acquisition	\$1.05 Million	4
Site G	Community Park	30	New acquisition	\$1.05 Million	1
Site H	Nature Preserve	180	New acquisition	\$1.26 Million	1
Site I	Nature Preserve	200	New acquisition	\$1.40 Million	1
Site J	Community Park	30	New acquisition	\$1.05 Million	4
Total		725		\$10.96 Million	
Existing Park Improvements					
Name	Park Type	Acres	Description		Precinct
Hilltop Acres	Greenway	50	Develop outdoor recreation facilities	\$1.33 Million	1
Lakewood Acres	Greenway	175	Complete construction	\$0.90 Million	3
Bullis Park	Community Park	51	Develop outdoor recreation facilities	\$1.10 Million	3
Comanche Park	Community Park	40	Rehabilitate outdoor park and recreational facilities	\$1.95 Million	4
Raymond Russell	Neighborhood Park	23	Improve existing facility; acquire land and construct new facility	\$1.27 Million	3
Rodriguez	Community Park	39	Rehabilitate outdoor park and recreational facilities	\$2.12 Million	2
Total		378		\$8.67 Million	
TOTAL				\$19.63 Million	

*Note:

Park development costs - \$70,000 per acre (does not include land acquisition costs)

Nature preserve- Developed at 10% of available acreage

Community Park - Developed at 50% of available acreage

Neighborhood Park - Developed at 100% of available acreage

**See Appendix E for park classifications

3. Funding Options

The vision for the Bexar County parks system requires an overall funding strategy that incorporates finance options for each park, trail, open space parcel, or recreation facility that comprises the system. The complete park funding plan would involve a combination of revenue sources, cost avoidance strategies, and efficient management to achieve the county's goals. Accordingly, several tools and funding sources that could be used to implement the proposed park improvements are identified below.

▫ **Ad Valorem Taxes:** Ad valorem tax revenues (including sales and use, and property taxes) comprised over 60 percent of Bexar County's annual general fund revenue in FY 2006-2007. Bexar County may choose to increase these taxes and earmark the additional funds to accomplish several of the proposed park improvements. While this would require voter approval, this finance method could generate substantial revenues for park improvements and help foster public support for the parks and open space initiatives.

▫ **Sports and Community Venues:** Texas Local Government Code provides cities and counties with authority to finance economic development projects. In November 1999, Bexar County voters approved a 1.75 percent hotel occupancy tax and a 5 percent short-term motor vehicle rental tax that was used to finance the County's \$146.5 million contribution to build the AT&T Center.

In 2008 voters elected to extend this venue tax that will become a funding source for San Antonio River improvements; youth/amateur sports facilities; enhancements to the Freeman Coliseum, livestock facilities, and AT&T Center; and, performing and cultural arts facilities. See Section 4: Bexar County Visitor Extension.

▫ **Bonds:** A bond is a debt security issued by a state, municipality or county in order to finance capital improvements. In typical bond structures, investors lend money to an entity for a defined period of time and interest rate. In 2003, Bexar County approved a \$99.2 million bond package to fund capital improvement projects in four major areas that included parks and recreation.

▫ **User Fees:** These include direct fees (recreation fees, picnic pavilion fees, and field rentals) that are charged for the provision of services or facility use. User fees are only collected from those who use a particular facility. User fees are successful in recouping some of the costs associated with operations, facility maintenance, and capital replacement.

▫ **Grants**

- **Texas Recreation & Parks Grant:** TPWD, through the Texas Recreation & Parks Account, provides funding for recreational parks, trails, and indoor recreational facilities. Up to a 50 percent match (or up to \$500,000) can be ob-

tained for new park and trail facilities. Submissions are usually accepted in January and July of each year.

- **Recreational Trails Program Funds:** The current federal transportation funding legislation, SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: a Legacy for Users) authorizes and provides funding for the Recreational Trails Program (RTP). These funds are made available to state governments to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both motorized and non-motorized recreational trail uses. RTP funds are administered by TPWD and awarded annually on a competitive basis to local governments.

- **Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF):** These monies are made available to federal, state and local governments through the Land and Water Conservation Act of 1965. The LWCF allows entities to purchase land, water and wetlands for the benefit of the public good. Funds are administered annually and may be made available for a 3-year period.

- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Partnering with private entities would allow the county to access funding sources outside traditional tax revenues. Private partnerships are most viable when they involve high profile projects that are of interest to corporate entities and when a public entity has

a well-established partnership policy. See Section 5: Related Economic Development Initiatives.

- **Public-Public Partnerships:** Partnering with other departments or agencies would allow the county to access tax revenues from multiple budget sources to raise dollars necessary for capital expenses that might otherwise not be available at the scale needed by either of the individual entities entering into the partnership.

Bexar County, the City of San Antonio, and SARA have developed a comprehensive 10 year capital improvement plan for flood control and drainage. This plan includes 26 new projects and covers five watersheds: Cibolo Creek, Leon Creek, Medina River, San Antonio River, and Salado Creek. This is in addition to the San Antonio River Improvements Project, which is a collaborative effort of the County, the City, SARA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and private enterprise. This project consists of the environmental restoration amenity and flood control improvements to 13 miles of the San Antonio River north and south of downtown.

The total cost of the comprehensive capital improvement plan is estimated to be \$550 million, and would be financed over a 10 year period with proceeds from the Flood Control portion of the county's ad valorem taxes. While these funds are not an additional revenue source for parks plan-

ning, the project offers opportunities for trail and open space development in parcels adjacent to area floodways.

4. Bexar County Visitor Tax Extension

Chapter 334 of the Texas Local Government Code provides cities and counties with authority to finance economic development projects. The venue project revenue sources that can be adopted include a sales tax, a hotel occupancy tax, short-term motor vehicle rental tax, an event parking tax, an event facility tax, and a venue facility use tax. Voters must approve both the tax and the venue project on which it will be spent. A venue is defined as being one of the following: sports stadia, convention centers, tourist development areas along an inland water way, and municipal parks and recreation systems.

In 1999, Bexar County instituted a Venue or Visitor Tax, a combination 1.75 percent hotel occupancy tax and a 5 percent short-term motor vehicle rental tax, which provided \$146.5 million to construct the AT & T Center, and improve its historic Coliseum and Livestock Exposition grounds. Since the County will finish paying for the arena much sooner than projected, the Commissioners Court realized the value of this funding tool and that extending the Venue Tax could provide funding for other community needs as-

sociated with parks and recreation.

The Commissioners Court directed efforts towards identifying key projects that would benefit the community, enhance tourism and spur economic opportunities through a public involvement process that also identified sponsors for each of these projects. Each sponsoring organization will provide private sector funding, in addition to public funding from the Venue Tax. Three citizen and stakeholder committees were established to address three project types, based on community needs: amateur sports, performing and cultural arts, and San Antonio River improvements. The voters accepted the extension of the tax and a Program Office has been established at the County to administer grants to the sponsoring organizations.

Through the venue program, Bexar County will assist with funding to develop 13 amateur sports facilities, improve the San Antonio River creating a 13-mile system of trails for hiking and bicycling that will connect the north and south sides, and upgrade barns and stock show grounds at the Freeman Coliseum.

Figure 10 shows the San Antonio River improvements that will connect Brackenridge Park to Mission Espada

The county will begin to address some of the needs identified by park users by adding amenities such as basketball courts, pools, and nature trails through the development of 13 sports facilities. These 13 facilities will add 46 new soccer fields, 31 new baseball diamonds, 22 softball diamonds, 7 football fields, 3 tracks, 1 cross-country course, 1 fencing facility, 1 basketball and volleyball tournament facility, and an outdoor swimming stadium. Additionally, the San Antonio River Improvements Project, will provide much needed recreational outlets along the river, particularly south of downtown. The planned hike and bike trails, restored ecosystems and wetlands, and opportunities to launch watercraft will all become critical assets to the county's overall parks system.

Figure 11 shows locations of Bexar County Youth and Amateur Athletic Facilities for the Venue Tax Program

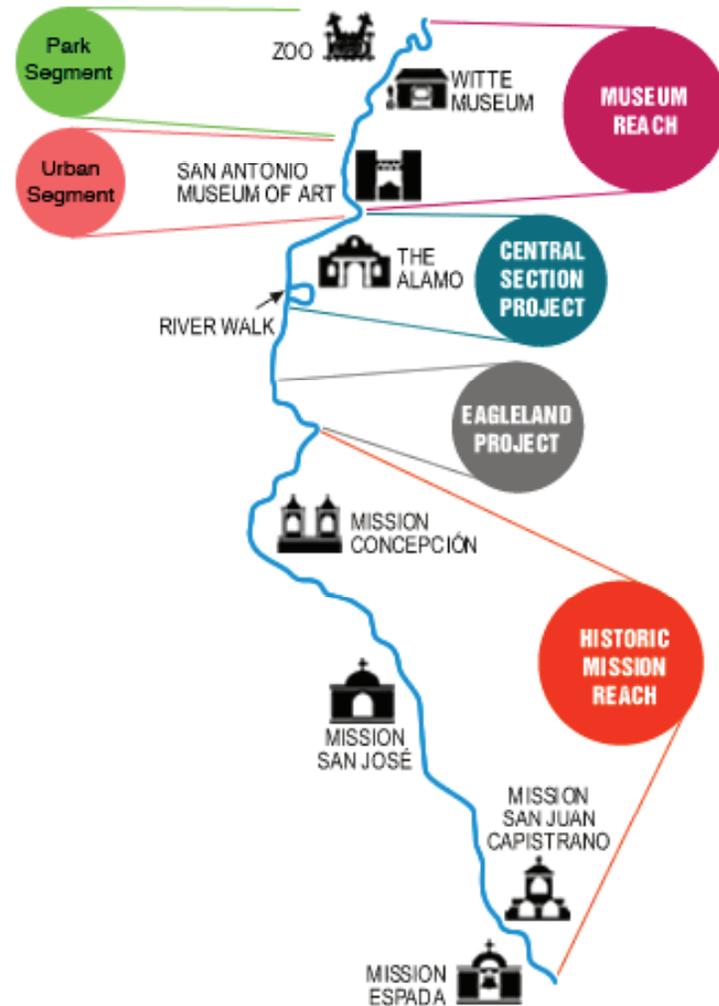


Figure 10.
San Antonio River Expansion & Improvements Project

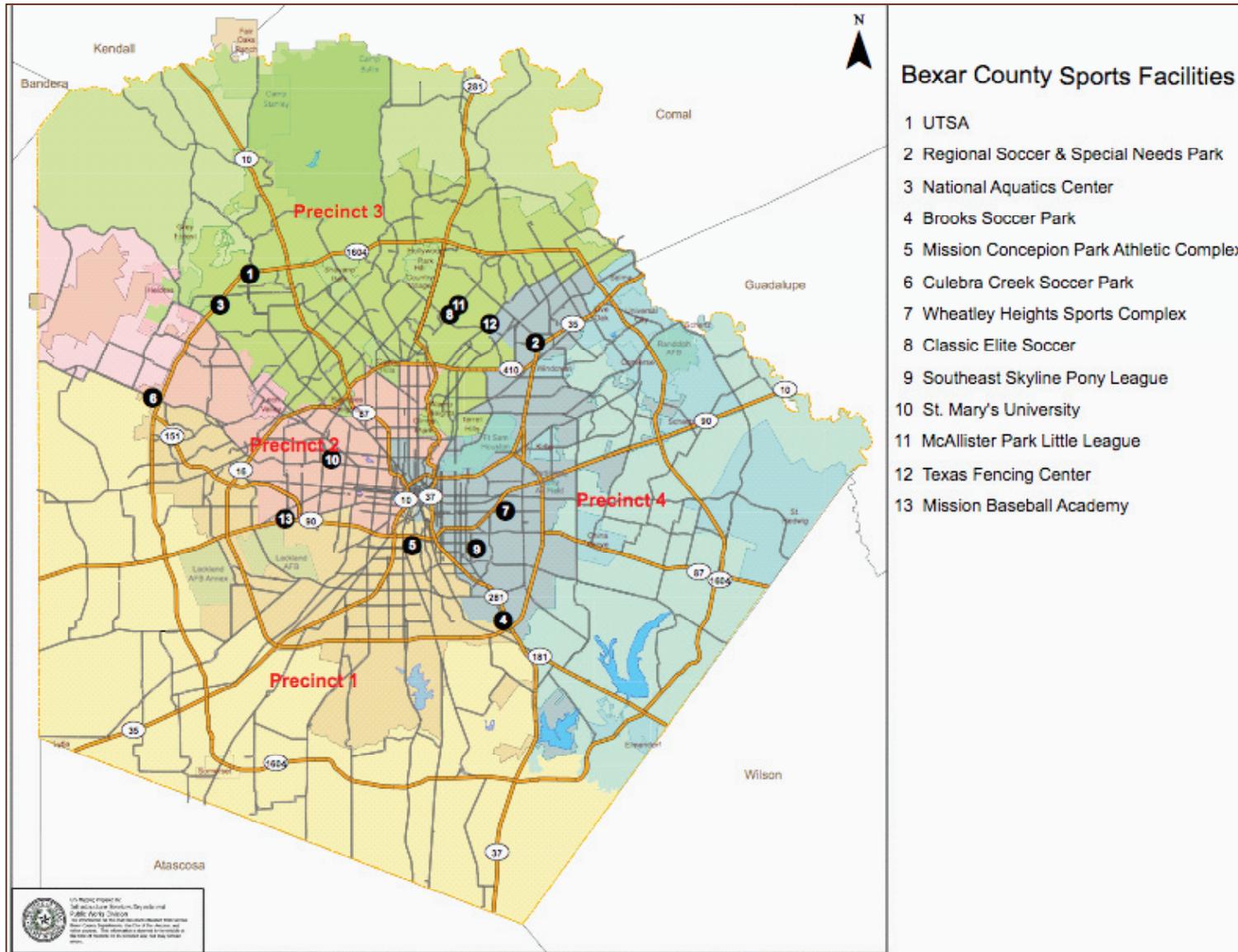


Figure 11.
Youth & Amateur Athletic Facilities

5. Related Economic Development Initiatives

Additional tools that are currently in use by the county which can be used to implement park improvements include tax increment reinvestment zones (TIRZ) and public infrastructure districts (PID).

Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones

Tax increment financing (TIF) is a tool that local governments can use to publicly finance needed structural improvements and enhance infrastructure within a defined area. These improvements usually are undertaken to promote the viability of existing businesses and to attract new commercial enterprises to the area. Under a TIF, the property owner pays taxes on the full value of the property, and the taxing entities pay into the TIF fund the taxes attributed to the added value of the land due to the new development. TIFs may be initiated only by a city. If a property is located outside of the city limits (within the city's extraterritorial jurisdiction or beyond), it is not eligible for tax increment financing unless annexed into the city.¹⁰

A TIRZ is an area in which tax increment financing is being used to attract development or redevelopment. A TIRZ must meet set criteria for designation, including substandard or blighted conditions, open area due to obsolete platting or deterioration, or by petition of 50 percent

of property owners in the district. Currently, there are 17 active and 11 pending TIRZs located within Bexar County.

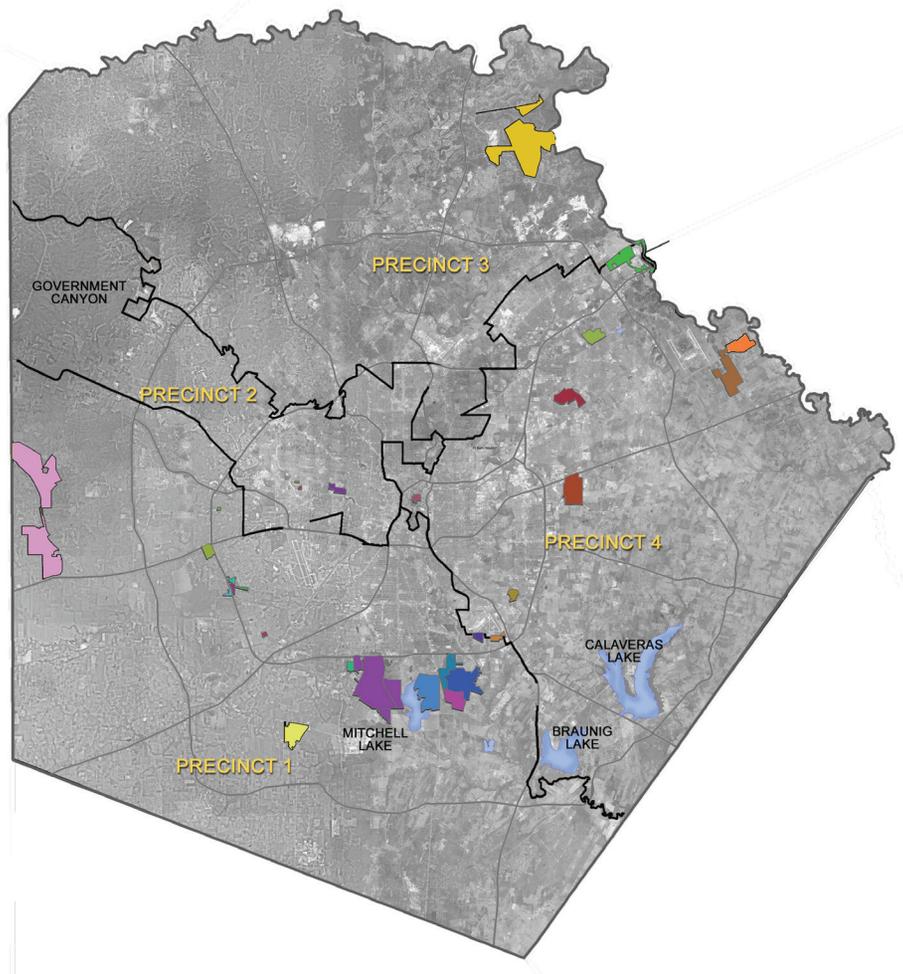
Public Improvement District

A PID is a financing method for making public street, water, or sewer improvements to a neighborhood. Property owners who benefit from installation of the improvements pay for them through special assessments levied on their property. In addition to financing infrastructure improvements such as roadways, parking, and mass transit, PIDs can be used for the establishment or improvement of parks, recreation, and cultural facilities. Currently, there are 3 active and 4 planned PIDs within the county. **Figure 12** shows the location of TIRZs and PIDs in Bexar County.¹¹

Bexar County could achieve several of its parks and open space goals through the current TIRZ and PID programs. While the county has achieved some of these goals without these tools, it is recommended that existing TIRZ and PID policy be amended to include specific requirements for parks and open space.

¹⁰ The statutes governing tax increment financing are located in Chapter 311 of the Texas Tax Code.

¹¹ Texas Local Government Code, Chapter 372: Improvement Districts in Municipalities and Counties.



- TIRZ**
- Brookside
 - Terramark (Espada I)
 - Terramark (Espada II)
 - Terramark (Espada III)
 - Hallie Heights
 - Heathers Cove
 - Highland Heights
 - Houston Street
 - Hunters Pond
 - Lackland Hills
 - Meadow Way
 - Mission Creek
 - Mission Del Lago
 - New Horizons
 - North East Crossing
 - Plaza Fortuna
 - Retama Park
 - Ridgestone
 - Rosedale
 - Rosillo Ranch
 - Sedona
 - Sky Harbor
 - Stablewood Farms
 - Verano (Texas A&M University- San Antonio)
 - Woodcrest
- PIDs**
- Cibolo Canyon
 - CrestMark
 - Crosswinds at Southlake
 - Espada I
 - Espada II
 - Espada III
 - Westside 211

Figure 12.
TIRZs & PIDs in San Antonio



Appendices

