

Section 3.3.7. Recreation and Open Space Element

Pursuant to Section 163.3177(3), Florida Statutes.

Background Discussion

The purpose of the recreation and open space element is to plan for a comprehensive system of public and private recreation and open space sites that are available to the public.

The data and analyses for this element of the *Sanibel Plan*, pursuant to *Section 163.3177(6)(e), Florida Statutes* are provided in this subsection.

In the City of Sanibel there are a variety of open spaces and recreation sites and facilities. An abundance of Federal, State, County, Municipal, and private recreation facilities and open space exist on Sanibel. The Federally owned and administered J. N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge attracts thousands of visitors from all over the world.

It is anticipated that Sanibel will always attract tourists to its famous beaches and other natural resources. This situation produces a major impact on the Island and must be planned for so that the social and environmental values and the character of the community are protected and so that the commerce generated by such visits can be a benefit to the City and its residents.

When the City was incorporated, it was recognized that recreational facilities required upgrading and plans were made for improving existing and providing for additional facilities. In 2001, the City Council appointed a Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee and retained a consultant to study park and

recreational needs in the City. Public involvement, including focus groups, interviews, needs survey by mail and a town meeting, was a key component of this study. A Master Parks and Recreation Plan was reviewed by the Planning Commission and adopted by the City Council Resolution no. 02-78, on August 6, 2002.

The vision of the Master Parks and Recreation Plan is:

“to provide the City of Sanibel with strategically located special use facilities and neighborhood parks all sensitively woven into the Island’s existing environmental ‘fabric’ to meet residents’ recreation and social needs”.

In an attempt to ensure that the demand for recreation facilities does not exceed availability, a needs assessment was undertaken in the preparation of the Master Parks and Recreation Plan. These needs for parks and recreation facilities are based on the resident population. However, the seasonal population was considered and is reflected in the Master Plan.

Specific facility needs were identified in the Plan and steps have been taken to implement the Master Plan.

The City’s Capital Improvements Plan identified project funds for the improvement of parks and the construction of a new recreation complex to replace the original facility adjacent to the Sanibel School. The recreation complex was completed in 2007. The City obtained funding from a variety of sources for the implementation of the Master Parks and Recreation Plan. Implementation of the Master Plan is complete.

Three grants from the State of Florida were obtained to purchase a parcel of land to enlarge Community Park, to add and replace facilities at Community Park and to add and replace

facilities at Bowman's Beach Park. Upgrades to facilities at Roadside City Park have been completed.

Shared use paths contribute to the City's recreation facilities, as well as to its transportation facilities. The Master Plan for Shared Use Paths is incorporated into this Recreation and Open Space Element of the *Sanibel Plan*.

Proximity and access to recreation facilities is essential to ensure that recreation needs are adequately met. However, because of the relatively small size of the City and the low density of residential areas outside the Resort Housing District, Sanibel is comprised of a single service area for some recreation facilities. The Master Parks and Recreation Plan identified the need to decentralize recreational services in parks in various parts of the City.

Many resource-based open spaces, such as beaches and wetlands, are widely distributed throughout the City. Access to these natural resources has been extended by adding trails for hikers and non-motorized vehicles in locations that do not adversely impact these preservation lands. Additional trail access continues to be provided. In addition to the multitude of passive recreation opportunities afforded by the natural resources in the City and easy access to State waters for fishing and boating, the City has a good system of parks and recreation sites.

The key component of the Master Parks and Recreation Plan was the redevelopment of the Recreation Center. The new facility, opened in 2007, is located at the original site adjacent to the Sanibel School, in furtherance of the State's school siting criteria. Thus the Recreation Center and the Sanibel School will continue to provide a focal point for many community activities.

Another focal point for community activity, special events and informal assembly is being provided by the development of the Sanibel Community Park in the area adjacent to the Sanibel Community Association.

In this element of the *Sanibel Plan*, level of service (LOS) standards have been established for recreation facilities. The City has successfully attained these levels of service. With the adoption and implementation of the Master Parks and Recreation Plan, these LOS standards have been updated and the new standards are reflected in Policy 1.2 of this element.

Fewer than 600 additional dwelling units remain to be developed in the City of Sanibel (which is less than 10 percent of the housing stock at "build-out") and the majority of those dwelling units will be infill development on existing lots for single family dwellings. Since the City is close to "build-out", it is impractical to link the replacement of existing recreational facilities to the concurrency management program for the development of additional dwelling units. Nonetheless, it is an objective of the *Sanibel Plan* to provide the recreation facilities listed here in the Standards for Recreation Facilities.

The City's recreation facilities are adequate to serve existing development and the limited new development that remains to be built in the City. However, the City will continue to provide recreation facilities and programs beyond the minimum level of service standards for recreation facilities established in this element of the Plan.

The schedule to replace and upgrade recreational facilities in accordance with the Master Parks and Recreation Plan will depend on the City's ability to fund these improvements. Funded components of the Master Plan will be included in the City's Five-Year Capital Improvements Plan, but these

recreational facilities will not be included in the adopted Five-Year Schedule of Capital Improvements.

The Community Center is provided by the Sanibel Community Association. The Sanibel Island Golf Club, available to the public, is provided by the private sector. Other private recreation facilities, such as tennis courts, satisfy some demand from neighborhoods and condominium developments.

As the City of Sanibel has matured, open spaces provide the increasingly important function of conservation and protection of natural resources. Furthermore, open spaces contribute to the nonurban atmosphere desired by the residents of Sanibel.

The abundance of open spaces in the City of Sanibel has attracted people to the Island in large numbers. These natural resource-based features of the community create a demand that, at times, seem to exceed the supply. Although the City and other conservation-oriented organizations continue to acquire and manage environmentally sensitive lands, the best means of retaining quality open spaces is through the proper management of the seemingly unlimited demand on the resource.

It can easily be assumed, with the City's 15 miles of Preservation Districts along the Gulf Beach and Bay Beach and 6,000-acre Conservation District on environmentally sensitive lands, that there is a sufficient amount of open spaces on Sanibel. Yet, a level of demand for use that can produce overuse threatens the quality of some of these extensive resources, particularly the beaches.

A stable portion of this demand comes from residents, both permanent and seasonal, but a significant and increasing demand for use of these open spaces comes from day visitors.

As the City of Sanibel continually adjusts to its role in the region, the City's management and participation in the management of these treasured resources must include programs to protect against their overuse and consequent degradation. This is true for Sanibel's beaches, its wildlife refuge and other conservation lands.

About one third of the linear mileage of beaches in Lee County accessible by car is in the City of Sanibel. Although the functional population of the City of Sanibel grows slowly, the functional population of Southwest Florida is growing much faster.

The increase in the population and visitors of Lee County increases the demand for day trips to the City of Sanibel. Demand for the beaches is increasing while the supply of beaches is not.

The maintenance of a natural beach as a vital natural resource is important to the community's quality of life and the economy of the City. For a variety of environmental, social and economic reasons, it is important that the carrying capacity of the beach for wildlife is not diminished. As the City expresses its objective to preserve the natural condition of Sanibel beaches, there is a need to determine acceptable limits of change, if any, to the Gulf Beach Zone. There remains a need to develop a scientific methodology to establish baseline conditions; to monitor the change of conditions over time and to assess the extent to which these changes can be attributed to human activities.

The demand for recreation facilities comes largely from permanent and seasonal residents and has been well addressed since the City's incorporation. Consequently, the City of Sanibel has and is adequately providing for its existing and foreseeable needs for active recreational facilities. An exception to this

situation is the increasing use of the City's shared use path system by day visitors.

The schedule to replace and upgrade recreational facilities, in accordance with the Master Parks and Recreation Plan, will depend on the City's ability to fund construction and maintenance of these improvements.

Plan for Recreation and Open Space

The provisions of the City's Plan for Recreation and Open Space are as follows:

1. After renovating and replacing outdated and worn-out facilities, maintain recreational facilities to keep them functional and to extend their usefulness.
2. Operate recreational facilities and programs in a fiscally responsible manner, employing user fees when this funding is found to be equitable and appropriate.
3. Continue to provide shared use paths throughout the Island that are outside the pavement of major streets and in the right-of-way within the vegetation, in accordance with the Master Plan for Shared Use Paths.
4. The Gulf and Bay beaches of Sanibel, a natural resources that are hard to visit without having recreational experiences, are to be maintained in their natural conditions, thereby ensuring passive recreational opportunities, such as bird watching, that are compatible with wildlife's use of this rare and limited natural resource. Commercial uses of the Gulf and Bay beaches, except for those incidental to recreation use that is compatible with scenic preservation and conservation uses, will be prohibited. Recreational activities in the Gulf and Bay beaches shall not interfere with the conservation of these vital natural resources.
5. Maintain all existing beach access easements and restrict public access across private property except where such easements exist. The establishment of new public accessways to the beach and the expansion of parking areas at existing beach accessways should only be approved if these areas of human activity will not cause further infringement on the carrying capacity of the beach for wildlife.
6. Continue to provide bicycle racks at beach access points and parks as a means of encouraging use of bicycles for transportation to the beach, parks and recreational facilities.
7. Continue to provide restrooms and changing areas at heavily used beach access areas where they can be compatible with surrounding land uses.
8. Restore dunes and beach ridges and dune and beach ridge vegetation in areas of erosion near beach access points.
9. Continue to provide a launching facility for non-motorized water craft, such as canoes and kayaks at Bayview Park, which are compatible with the

carrying capacity of the impacted water body and compatible with surrounding land uses.

10. Continue the ongoing commitment to provide easy access to recreation facilities for the general population and particularly for the very young, senior citizens and people with disabilities.
11. Continue to provide a recreation center for all ages on Sanibel.
12. Continue to provide a senior center (Center 4 Life) on Sanibel. The City is considering improvements (renovation or replacement) for the Center 4 Life facility.
13. Continue to promote cultural activities in the City.
14. Consider development of an area to serve as a focal point for community activity, special events and informal assembly.
15. Support the continued provision of private recreational facilities available to the public (such as the Community Center and golf courses) that are compatible with the goals, objectives and policies of the *Sanibel Plan*. The private sector is expected to continue to play a major role in providing recreation and leisure opportunities to residents as well as visitors.
16. Include preservation and conservation areas in the City of Sanibel such as tidal wetlands and beaches as the heart of the City's open space network. This

resource is a vital component in the Plan for Scenic Preservation.

17. Prohibit the exploitation of the natural resources in preservation and conservation areas, including the prohibition of commercial activities on the beach, except for limited activities that are accessory to resort housing uses.
18. Implement programs and measures that further protect the beaches on Sanibel so that the extent of land use and other human activity is not diminishing the carrying capacity of the beach for wildlife.
19. Pursue opportunities for "unimproved" natural trails for biking and hiking on appropriate City properties.

Goals, Objectives and Policies

Ensure that adequate recreational facilities and open spaces are provided to satisfy the recreational needs of residents to the extent practicable, in a manner that preserves and protects the fragile natural resources of the Island.

Objective 1

Through the implementation of the *Master Parks and Recreation Plan*, the City of Sanibel's system for recreation facilities will continue to provide adequate recreational opportunities for its residents that are compatible with the wildlife's use of natural resources, through the initial and long range planning periods of this Plan.

Policy 1.1. Preserve and maintain existing recreational facilities by providing proper management supported by an adequate operating budget.

Policy 1.2. Provide adequate recreational facilities for the residents of the City of Sanibel. Recreational facilities, which already exist or are being replaced have been provided in accordance with the following level of service standards.

**Standards for Recreation Facilities
for the residents of the City of Sanibel**

No.	Facility
3	Ball Diamonds/Multi-purpose Fields
2	Multi-purpose Court Areas
1	Covered Multi-purpose Area (2 courts)
4	Outdoor Tennis Courts
2	Volleyball Courts (indoor or outdoor)
1	Aquatic Center
1	Golf Course (18 holes)
1	Community Center
1	Boat Ramp (dual launching capability)
1	Skate Area
1	Non-motorized Boat Launching Area
3	Playgrounds

Shared Use Paths are to be provided in accordance with the Master Plan for Shared Use Paths; however, there is no level of service standard for shared use paths.

The City will continue to provide recreation facilities and programs beyond the minimum level of service standards for recreation facilities established in this Policy.

Policy 1.3. Acquisitions of parks and major improvements to recreational facilities, needed to comply with level of service standards for recreational facilities, are to be scheduled in the Five-Year Schedule of Capital Improvements of the Capital Improvements Element of this Plan.

Policy 1.4. Acquisition of parks and major improvements to recreational facilities, not needed to comply with level of service standards for recreational facilities, and, therefore, not included in the Five-Year Schedule of Capital Improvements, are to be included in the City's Capital Improvements Program.

Objective 2

The City of Sanibel's system of open spaces will continue to provide scenic resources and recreational opportunities for its residents through the initial and long-range planning periods of this Plan.

Policy 2.1. Open spaces will be protected from incompatible land uses by requiring a development permit (order) for development of adjacent lands.

Policy 2.2. Retain requirements in the Land Development Code that open spaces (undeveloped areas) be provided within private developments.

Policy 2.3. Use preservation and conservation areas as scenic resources, in a manner that is compatible with the principal purpose of these areas.

Objective 3

Encourage people to use alternatives to the private automobile as a means of transportation to public recreational facilities and open space areas.

Policy 3.1. Limit parking spaces for motorized vehicles (automobiles), as to number and location, in a manner that is consistent with natural resource conservation objectives and compatible with surrounding land uses.

Policy 3.2. Provide shared use paths and routes and secure bike racks as a means of encouraging the use of bicycles as a method of transportation to public recreation facilities and open space areas.

Policy 3.3. Provide safe and convenient shared use paths and routes as a means of encouraging bicyclist and pedestrian access to public recreation facilities and open space areas.

Objective 4

The numerous public accessways to the beaches in the City of Sanibel will be preserved and maintained, as well as improved, if warranted.

Policy 4.1. Public accessways to the beaches should maintain a limited number of parking spaces in order to accommodate access to and use of the beaches in a manner that preserves and protects the fragile beach environment.

Policy 4.2. Reserve a portion of the beach access parking spaces for use by residents.

Policy 4.3. The exploration of programs for reducing auto ridership within the City, identified by the transportation policies of this Plan, should consider providing continued and improved accessibility to public accessways to the beaches.

Objective 5

All levels of government and the private sector will provide recreational opportunities to achieve a balanced recreation system.

Policy 5.1. Efforts to satisfy recreational needs that are not fulfilled by the private sector will be shared by the public and private sectors.

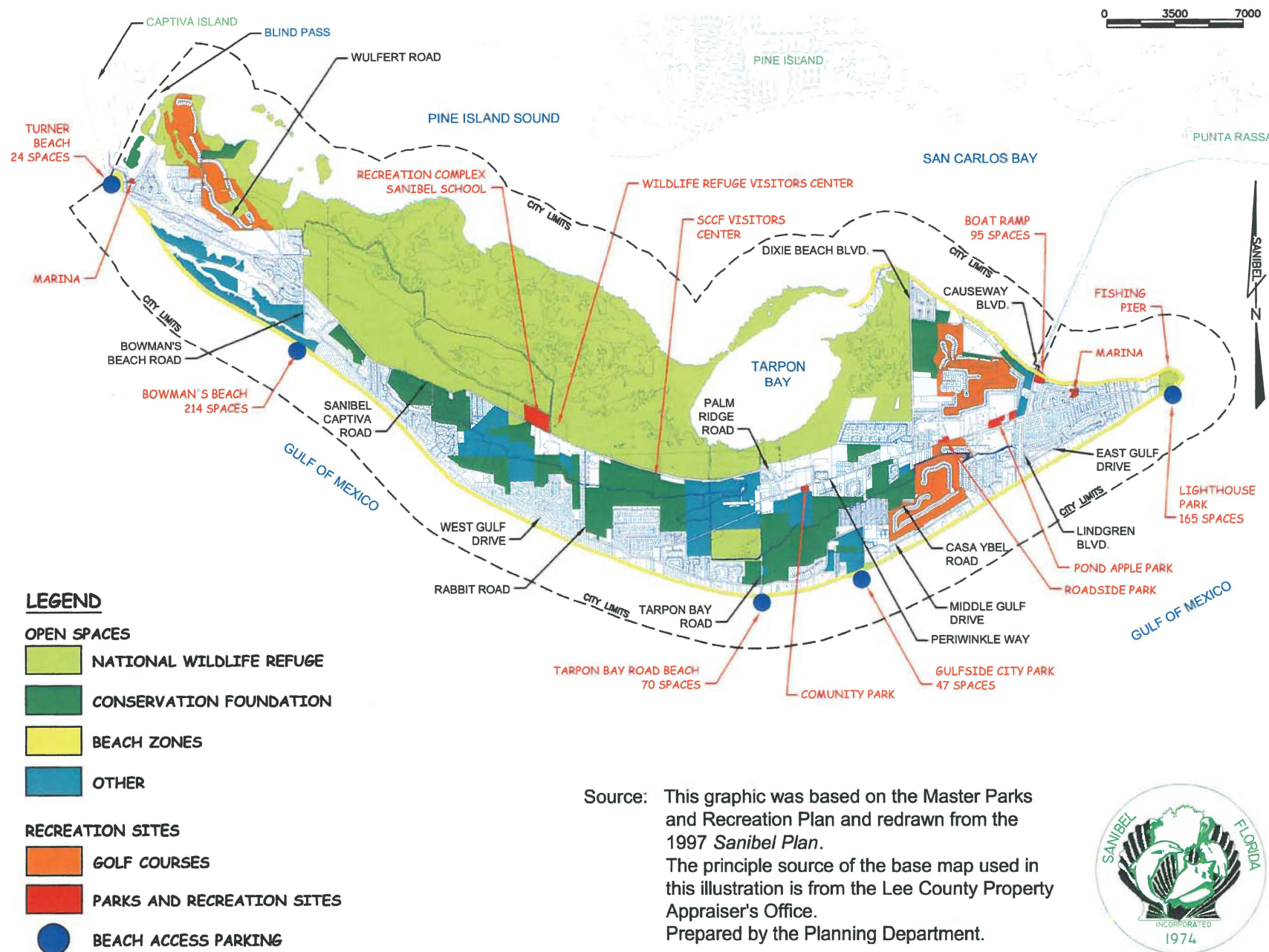
Policy 5.2. The City of Sanibel will coordinate its efforts to provide recreation opportunities, including the preservation of open spaces, with those of the

- J. N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge Education Center
- Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation
- Lee County School District
- Lee County Government
- Sanibel Community Association
- The private sector

Policy 5.3. Encourage private developments to provide recreation facilities and open spaces in accordance with the goals, objectives and policies of this Plan by

including land development regulations in the Land Development Code that provide incentives for this.

Policy 5.4. Encourage private developers to set aside undeveloped lands suitable for passive recreation or conservation uses by applying land development regulations that provide incentives to do this.



RECREATION SITES AND OPEN SPACES

