

III. Plan Development Process

Background: Efforts to develop a Park, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan date back to 1983, when the City of Wichita Falls commissioned the consulting firm of Myrick Newman Dahlberg & Partners, Inc. of Dallas, Texas, to work with the city staff in order to develop a Parks, Recreation and Open Space Element. The ‘Element’, which was adopted April 1, 1983, was to be included, along with other departmental elements, in the city’s comprehensive plan. Although the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Element was adopted, a formal city comprehensive plan was not developed. Input for the “Element” was obtained from eight public meetings, four sessions with the park board, two work sessions with directors from the Planning Department, Parks & Recreation Department, and the consultants, and a random telephone survey of Wichita Falls’ residents. Some of the recommendations included in the “Element” were: improved maintenance of parks, more restrooms, more playground equipment, more supervised summer playground programs, improvements to Lake Wichita & Lake Wichita Park, more park security, more trees & beautification, more picnic shelters, and more swimming pools. Recommendations for facilities included: additional parks (as well as removal of others), indoor recreation facilities, 6-field softball complex, disc golf course, landscaped vehicular corridors, ponds, and Wichita River & Holliday Creek corridor improvements. The “Element” also addressed the findings of the 1980 Texas Outdoor Recreation Plan (TORP) for the Wichita Falls region. The TORP recommendations included: additional public swimming pools (there were sufficient numbers of pools if private pools were counted), additional trails, more playgrounds, more golf holes, soccer fields, basketball courts, softball fields, and more water surface area for boating, fishing, skiing, etc. The “Element” did provide valuable information and some of the recommendations have been accomplished over the years.

Information, citizens desires and opinions used to update this master plan come from several sources. The cities Visions 20/20 plan available to all citizens on the city website, through the Park Board that meets monthly to address citizens needs and desires and through town hall meetings held monthly throughout the city’s 5 council districts.

Several surveys have provided public input into the development of this master plan. The Parks & Recreation Citizens’ Leisure Survey done in FY 1986-87 of a random sample of Wichita Falls’ residents helped the Parks & Recreation Department better understand citizen desires (**Appendix 5**). It gave direction into both general and specific activities. Much was gained with regards to both existing and new facilities, as well as, satisfaction levels. Public awareness of programs and facilities was a concern. The results showed the desire for more picnic areas, playgrounds, swimming pools, neighborhood parks, beautification, ponds, restrooms, and trails. Citizens indicated that the addition of an indoor recreation facility and an outdoor café in a scenic park would be most important to them. Finally, the survey indicated a desire of the public to allocate more tax dollars on leisure services. Many of these citizen desires were similar to the desires and recommendations found in the 1983 “Element”.

In the 1990 Recreation Program Survey of a similar random sample, many of the findings were similar to the 1986-87 survey (**Appendix 6**). Of programs and facilities not available to citizens at that time, dining in a scenic park restaurant rated highly. In

addition, other desires were a pier on Lake Wichita with dining, a marina on Lake Wichita, and several instructional classes. Results indicated that city programs were good and met the needs of the public. Citizens, as in the previous survey, believed that more money should be allocated to recreation programs and services and users should pay some of the cost of the program.

It was desired to conduct a survey of senior citizens in the city, since Wichita Falls has a large senior citizen population, as illustrated in **Section I**, to determine if their needs were being met and what their desires were. In 1991, a survey was conducted during an event for senior citizens called ‘Senior Focus’, presented by a local television station (**Appendix 7**). It was learned which activities currently offered by the city the seniors enjoyed and why they don’t participate in others. The survey also showed what new facilities and activities Wichita Falls senior citizens prefer. A desire to have motorized tram rides on scenic trails was the highest rated activity. In addition, they showed a desire to have an outdoor theater, an outdoor restaurant in a scenic park, a pier for dining on Lake Wichita, a trail system linking Lucy Park to Lake Wichita using the Holliday Creek / Wichita River corridors, a botanical center, and a senior citizen leisure center.



The rubber wheeled trail train was completely constructed in-house by Parks & Recreation maintenance workers. The engine is a redesigned, rear engine airplane tug.

In 1991, the engineering firm of Biggs & Mathews, Inc. was commissioned to complete a study to determine recreational use of Lake Wichita, a 2,100 acre surface area lake at 980.7 maximum pool elevation, owned by the city and located adjacent to Lake Wichita Park. *Note: Lake Wichita dam & spillway were reconstructed from 1992 - 1994 and is currently at 976.0 maximum pool elevation and provides 1,224 acres of surface area.* Specifically, the study was to look at options relating to increasing the depth of the lake by dredging. Upon completion, the Lake Wichita Study of 1991 made several recommendations, although very costly, for making the lake more useful for recreation. Options were: take no action, drain the entire lake, dredge North portion to contour 976, dredge North portion to contour 978, and dredge overall lake to contour 978. The report found and recommended that by making improvements (cleaning, widening, constructing minor flow structures) to the existing system would increase the canal system capacity up to approximately 15 million gallons per day, which is sufficient to keep up with evaporation losses. The findings suggested that with the additional water the lake could be maintained between 974 and 976 feet.

In 1993, the City Council appointed a group of interested citizens to serve on a committee to examine the Lake Wichita area. The committee was asked to examine the future uses and adaptive reuses of this area. They were to address unmet needs and how proposed Lake Wichita facilities might meet needs. They were asked to examine who would benefit, program costs, and funding sources. The 1993 Lake Wichita Study was completed in 1994 with the following recommendations:

Project 1

- Divert enough water from Lake Diversion to Lake Wichita in order to maintain the constant lake level at 976 feet, which would provide a lake surface area of 1,224 acres.
- Acquire property on the east side of the lake and construct a boat ramp with parking lot.
- Acquire and remodel 2 Corps of Engineers' buildings for recreational use.
- Make improvements to yacht club area & facility.
- Develop a sand beach at Lake Wichita Park, adjacent to the lake.

Project 2

- Acquire and clear additional property adjacent to the northeast side of the lake for park development.
- Construct shoreline trails from Lake Wichita Park to the spillway, and from the spillway to the proposed new park area on the northeast and east sides of the lake.
- Construct a bridge over the lake spillway to link above trail system and an outdoor theater adjacent to the dam.

Project 3

- Construct a large open-air pavilion in the proposed new park area with restroom, kitchen, education facility and patio area.
- Construct an RV Park in the proposed property acquisition area.

Project 4

- Request a study from the Corps of Engineers to deepen the lake an additional 2 feet.



Anglers and boaters appreciate access to Lake Wichita on the East Side of the lake. This is the area where several proposed improvements are recommended.

The Lake Wichita Study Committee cited several benefits. The lake would be maintained at a constant level to help protect fish and wildlife habitat and encourage a variety of recreational uses. Property acquisition and construction of facilities and amenities on the northeast / east side of the lake would provide for the development of a new and needed park for a variety of water related and other recreational and educational activities where the water would be aesthetically pleasing to users. A Recreational Vehicle Park and increased depth would provide an economic benefit. The RV Park could attract visitors for longer periods of stay and increasing depth could provide additional fishing days, attracting anglers to the lake for longer periods of time. Accessibility to the water would increase recreational use on and in the water. A sand beach would provide opportunities that are not available within 50 miles of the city. The proposed trails would connect Lake Wichita Park to the new proposed park along the shoreline, giving users access to sections of the lake previously not easily accessible by foot. Estimated costs to accomplish all recommendations of the study were \$1,683,335. A few of the improvements have been accomplished, however, some of those that have not been funded are further addressed in this Master Plan and in the priorities in **Section VII**.

In 1995, a telephone survey was conducted of 225 random respondents by a Midwestern State University graduate studies class. It was found that of those who responded to the survey, 99% were registered voters. The results of predominantly registered voters were a little different from findings of previous surveys. The greatest desires for new facilities were a senior citizen facility, wading pool for children, botanical center, outdoor theater, and recreation center with gym. **Table 7** summarizes responses to this survey as they relate to the desire for new Parks & recreation facilities.

In 1996, another Midwestern State University graduate studies class conducted a telephone survey of registered voters to determine the desire of Parks & Recreation facilities and other city department improvements (**Appendix 8**). Although improved police & fire training facilities and street improvements were found to be the greatest needs, park trails, a recreation center, and Lake Wichita improvements followed closely behind.

Early in the year 2000, the Wichita Falls Park Board along with city staff, used data from previous surveys and studies and began development of the Five Year Park, Recreation & Open Space Plan which identified proposed improvements prioritized over a five year period. These recommendations included: a public indoor gymnasium, Holliday Creek trail connecting Hamilton Park to Scott Street, water resources (Lake Wichita shoreline improvements, pond in Expressway Village and McGrath Creek urban walkway), botanic displays along Holliday Creek trail phase 1, improvements to Lake Wichita Park & Lucy Park (group pavilions, parking lots and irrigation, & covered roller hockey/activities court in Lake Wichita Park), and a 4 field softball complex. The Five Year Plan was completed in September 2000, presented to and favorably received by the City Council in October 2000. Some councilors even proposed funding sources. Recommendations in the Five Year Plan will receive the highest priorities in this Master Plan, as identified in **Section VII**.

The findings of the surveys and studies, along with the recommendations of the plans were incorporated in the further development and refinement of the Parks &

Recreation Department's goals, objectives, and needs identification and assessments in **Section II**. Sources used to formulate this Master Plan include demographics, public input, recreation standards & comparisons, facilities, programs, open space, previously published studies, and professional judgement.

Table 7
Citizen Survey - 1995

Desire for New Parks & Recreation Facilities

<i>Facility</i>	<i>Favor</i>	<i>Opposed</i>	<i>Undecided</i>
Recreation center with gym	68.0%	24.4%	7.6%
Public boating access to Lake Wichita	66.2%	21.3%	11.1%
Outdoor Theater	72.0%	19.1%	8.0%
Restaurant with view of Lake Wichita	60.9%	30.2%	8.0%
Botanical center with flower/plant exhibits	73.3%	17.8%	8.0%
Rental building for private events on Lake Wichita	64.0%	23.6%	11.1%
Snack bar in Lucy Park	67.1%	19.1%	13.3%
Game tables & courts for senior citizens	81.3%	12.9%	4.9%
Indoor swimming pool	52.0%	38.2%	8.9%
Leisure pool with multi-play features	59.1%	31.6%	8.4%
Children's wading pool	78.2%	16.4%	4.4%
Indoor tennis courts	37.8%	50.2%	11.1%
Sand volleyball courts	63.6%	23.1%	12.4%
Outdoor roller hockey rink	41.8%	38.2%	19.1%
Tram rides on trail system	60.9%	30.7%	7.6%



Some of the surveys called for more group pavilions, covered multi-use courts, trails on Holliday Creek and park ponds, in addition to other facilities.

The most recent effort to complete a Master Plan coincided with the development of the Five Year Plan. It was decided to direct efforts to complete both documents simultaneously. The Parks & Recreation staff performed a majority of work on the plan with special assistance from the Wichita Falls Community Development Department and input from the Park Board.

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The final phase of review and adoption of the Master Plan includes:

1. Present the Master Plan to the general public and hold a public hearing for citizens to review.
2. Present the Master Plan to the Park Board for review, discussion and recommendation to City Council.
3. Present the Master Plan to the Community Development Department for their review, discussion and recommendation to City Council.
4. Submit the Master Plan to Texas Parks & Wildlife Department staff for review and comment.
5. Submit the Master Plan to City Council for their review and official adoption.
6. Resubmit the Master Plan, following City Council adoption, to Texas Parks & Wildlife Department staff for final acceptance.