

HORIZON 2025
THE BALDWIN COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2008 - 2025
CHAPTER 6: PARKS AND RECREATION ELEMENT
GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES
OCTOBER, 2008

CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

The Parks and Recreation Element is intended to guide public decision making while providing for a comprehensive system of recreation sites available to the public. Recreation is required to maintain a healthy balance in life, and has a direct effect on the general quality of life in Baldwin County.

The County Planning and Zoning Department staff prepared a document entitled *Baldwin County Parks and Public Access Inventory and Assessment*, dated July 2000, which provides an inventory of county, state, municipal and private resources available to the residents of Baldwin County. This report provided much of the data needed for the Park and Recreation Element Data, Inventory and Analysis. It is important for this inventory to be updated to include the acreage of each County park, in order to determine if the current population is provided with adequate recreational public facilities. The document states that all existing Baldwin County parks are for self-directed or passive recreation, and there are no organized sports fields that are maintained by the County. Many of the existing parks provide swimming, waterway access, and beach/shore access.

Adequate public recreational facility standards, or concurrency requirements, must be established to meet the recreational demands of the County as it grows. This is typically handled through the establishment of Levels of Service standards for public facilities that are impacted by new development, and is closely coordinated with population projections. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) was used as a guide to establish the levels of service standards (LOS) in this element. Each proposed new development must be evaluated for the likely impact upon the LOS. The *Parks and Public Access Inventory and Assessment* also notes the importance of a future Recreation Master Plan for the County, which would be very beneficial to properly prepare for the future growth of the County and provide adequate recreational facilities.

Park Classifications

Parks can be classified in a number of ways and serve a variety of functions, from providing open space in urban areas to large athletic complexes, and everything in between. The size of the park, the population served, service radii and the types of programming within the park generally determine park classifications.

- Resource-based recreation facilities are those places where recreation is driven by the natural landscape, such as a river, forest or lake; or cultural resources such as historical and archeological sites. Resource-based recreation can be passive such as walking along an interpretive trail or active such as mountain biking.
- Activity-based parks provide facilities for playing a specific sport or game such as basketball, baseball and soccer. These facilities are geared toward team sports and are managed for frequent use. Such facilities are frequently located in neighborhood,

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community and special use parks, and are sometimes located within large resource-based parks as well.

Activity and resource-based parks can further be classified by park type. Parks are typically designated as mini parks, neighborhood parks, community parks, district parks and regional parks. Counties tend to focus on providing more resource-based parks and large-scale facilities.

Mini Parks

The mini park (also described as a “pocket park”) serves as the local park within neighborhoods or as small urban green spaces that provide a park-like atmosphere. These small areas are either natural or landscaped areas located within built-up areas. Urban open spaces may fall into this category. These parks can be small areas nestled within common areas of development or perhaps integrated into intersection or roadway designs on the periphery. Facilities may include walks, benches, gardens or memorials. No planned recreational programming occurs here. Most pocket parks are provided through developer agreements and the land development process with very little responsibility on the part of counties or cities. The ideal community would have these scattered across urban/suburban areas within easy walking distance to many people. The following are typical characteristics of mini parks:

- Less than 5 acres in size
- ½ acre per 1,000 population
- ¼ mile service area radius
- Takes advantage of unique opportunity (locality, resource, view)
- Accessible by low-volume streets and trails
- Can be located in high-density areas, including commercially developed areas.

Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks are significantly larger than pocket parks and could include practice areas or green spaces/playing courts for drop-in games of all types. Neighborhood parks could be located adjacent to an elementary school site. They are not designed for extensive programmed activities and are generally used by the immediate community they serve. In more urbanized areas, these parks should ideally be accessible on foot or on bicycle. Within suburban areas, they should be accessible by bicycle or a short drive by car. The following are secondary characteristics of neighborhood parks:

- 5-19 acres
- 2 acres per 1,000 population
- ¼ to ½ mile service area radius
- Located within or adjacent to neighborhoods
- Takes on the character of surrounding areas
- Accessible by walking, bike riding or short drive by car
- Casual play with very little programming, if any at all

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- Provides a compatible balance of activities and resource-based recreation
- Facilities may include playgrounds, multipurpose courts/fields, tennis courts, landscape areas, benches, recreation buildings, picnic areas and walkways

Community Parks

Recreational facilities in community parks should be designed for flexibility along with specific uses allowing the recreation provider to respond to changing programming trends. Community parks could be located adjacent to schools (elementary, middle or high school). The primary function of such parks is for providing places where typical recreation programming occurs. Community parks serve broader community areas and provide for a wide range of athletic or team sport opportunities as well as cultural and artistic programs and services. The following are secondary characteristics of community parks:

- 20-50 acres
- 5 acres per 1,000 population
- Up to a 3-mile service area radius for urban areas
- Up to a 6-mile service area radius for rural areas
- Access by walking or biking, but more often by car
- Usually located near major collector streets or arterial roads
- Serves needs of several neighborhoods
- More intensely developed than neighborhood parks
- Are primarily activity-based recreation sites, but can be resource-based
- Can include such facilities as athletic fields, swimming pools, multi-purpose fields and recreation centers
- Natural areas should be incorporated to provide biking, fitness, picnicking and open space activities
- Other community services (i.e., libraries, law enforcement substations, or fire/emergency services) may be located within a community park

District Parks

District parks are usually resource-based and located contiguous to or encompassing natural resources. Activities and facilities may include picnicking, boating, swimming, hiking, camping and play areas. These parks are usually 'drive to' parks and can be a 30-40 minute drive away, although they should be connected to a community's trail system as well. In some cases, district parks can be multi-purpose, large-scale activity-based parks that serve several communities. Such parks would be very appropriate in outlying areas of the County or in areas with a high concentration of unincorporated residents adjacent to cities. The service area for a district park is generally countywide, however given the geography and transportation network of Baldwin County, district parks should serve several communities. The following are secondary characteristics of district parks:

- 75+ acres (minimum of 50 acres)

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- 5 acres per 1,000 population
- 30-40 minute drive time
- Access by car, bikeways or trails

Regional Parks

Regional parks are almost always resource-based and are usually located in areas of diverse natural resources such as lakes, rivers, flora, fauna or topography. These are usually very large tracts of land and provide camping, equestrian activities, canoeing, boating, fishing and other resource-based activities. Such parks often serve to protect environmentally sensitive lands with facilities limited to resource-based activities. Care should be taken not to over use the land or allow activities that tax the stability of the resources contained within or adjacent to the park. The service area of a regional park could be multi-county. The following are secondary characteristics of regional parks:

- 250+ acres
- 20 acres per 1,000 population
- Offers the same type of activities as district parks, but on a larger scale
- Up to 60 minute driving time
- Access by car, bikeways or trails

Greenways and Trails

A “greenway” is described as a linear open space established along either a natural corridor, such as a riverfront or ridge-line; over land along a railroad right-of-way converted to recreational use, a canal, a scenic road, or other route; any natural or landscaped course for pedestrian or bicycle passage; an open space connector linking parks, natural reserves, cultural features, or historic sites with each other and populated areas; or a local strip or linear park designated as a parkway or greenbelt.

Trails are defined as linear corridors and any adjacent support parcels on land or water providing public access for recreation or authorized alternative modes of transportation. Trails are a common recreational component of greenways.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

GOAL 1: To provide and maintain an adequate and diverse park, recreational and open space system that provides equitable access and distribution to all residents and visitors of Baldwin County.

Objective 1.1: Prepare a countywide master plan for parks, recreation facilities and open space based on adopted level of service (LOS) standards that will meet the demands of the existing and future population of Baldwin County.

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Policy 1.1.1: Baldwin County shall strive to implement the level of service standards for parks, recreation and open space as shown in the table below. Table standards are advisory in application and provide a level of service that Baldwin County desires to achieve for parks and recreation, subject to financial feasibility.

Park Facility Level of Service Standards		
Park Type	Acres per 1000 Persons	Minimum Acreage per Park
Mini/Pocket Park	½ acre	Less than 5 acres
Neighborhood Park	2 acres	5 acres
Community Park	5 acres	20 acres
District Park	5 acres	50 acres
Regional Park	20 acres	250 acres
Trails	1 mile	N/A

Policy 1.1.2: By 2012, the County Planning Department, in conjunction with the Parks Department shall develop a countywide plan for the recreational development of parks and open space contemplated by this comprehensive plan. The plan shall include at a minimum:

1. An assessment of the current and projected demand for county recreation facilities and open space
2. Standards for developing the various categories of county park sites
3. An analysis of the long term effectiveness of current parks and open space levels of service standards for meeting the needs the population
4. Provisions for joint and co-located recreation facilities for use by both the county and the Board of Education
5. An assessment of the suitability of undeveloped park sites throughout the county with plans for their development or role as open space and identification of the appropriate entity(ies) for maintaining each site.

Objective 1.2: The County shall maintain and expand its current park and recreation facilities inventory to meet the needs of the population through 2025. These facilities shall be designed to meet the needs of the residents and be appropriately located.

Policy 1.2.1: By 2010, the Archives and History Department shall coordinate with the Bicentennial Advisory Committee and other County Departments for maintenance of, and additions to, Bicentennial Park.

Policy 1.2.2: By 2010, Baldwin County shall evaluate the need for new or expanded special use recreational facilities, including handicap accessibility. Where economically and otherwise feasible, existing publicly owned facilities shall be modified to permit handicap access.

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Policy 1.2.3: Parks and recreation facilities shall continue to be maintained in a safe and aesthetically pleasing manner. Safety precautions shall include the provision of adequate lighting and waste receptacles, improved access for the elderly and handicapped, and the regular maintenance of landscaping, pavement and buildings.

Policy 1.2.4: Baldwin County shall promote the development of private neighborhood parks by allowing density bonuses in appropriate zoning districts included in the Land Development Regulations. The promotion of private neighborhood parks does not require Baldwin County to own, operate, or maintain these facilities.

Policy 1.2.5: The specific design for community parks will be tailored to meet the needs of the community to be served while recognizing the particular attributes of the park site. Typical facilities at a community park may include ball fields, tennis courts, play areas, picnic areas, multipurpose courts, recreation buildings and sports fields. Community parks should be designed and developed to allow for passive uses as well.

Policy 1.2.6: Neighborhood parks shall emphasize pedestrian access, with vehicular accessibility given less emphasis.

Policy 1.2.7: To the extent possible, parks will be designed with buffers to minimize conflicts between different recreational uses and between recreational and adjacent uses.

Policy 1.2.8: To the extent possible, parks should be linked to bike paths, trails and greenways, and other parks.

Policy 1.2.9: Due to the nature of countywide parks and the limit on the availability of appropriate sites, countywide park facilities will be distributed throughout the entire county, based on actual and projected population distribution.

Objective 1.3: The County shall maintain and expand its current trail system and bike path inventory to meet the needs of the population through 2025. These facilities shall be designed to meet the needs of the residents and be appropriately located.

Policy 1.3.1: Baldwin County shall prioritize the acquisition and development of segments needed to complete planned trails based on land availability, projected trail usage, and opportunities through the development review process. The County shall develop these planned trails incrementally through the planning period, to adequately serve Baldwin County's growing population.

Policy 1.3.2: Trails shall be located so as not to unduly interfere with the privacy of residents.

Policy 1.3.3: Trail access shall be an integral part of the planning and construction of parks and recreation facilities.

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Policy 1.3.4: Baldwin County shall coordinate trail planning with the municipalities' designated bicycle route system and other existing and planned bicycle and pedestrian facilities in the street right-of-way.

Policy 1.3.5: Baldwin County shall appropriately sign all trails. Signage may include interpretive and historical information.

Policy 1.3.6: Baldwin County should identify trail connections through municipalities and adjacent counties and coordinate with those jurisdictions to promote development of a regional trail network.

Policy 1.3.7: Baldwin County shall strive to interconnect existing and future dedicated open space areas, pedestrian and bicycle trails, hiking trails, equestrian trails, canoe runs, and where appropriate, utility corridors, into the greenways network.

Policy 1.3.8: Baldwin County shall consider incentives to private landowners to encourage their participation in the creation of the greenways network.

Policy 1.3.9: The planning, design and construction of all trails and greenways will be supervised and monitored by the appropriate county agencies.

Policy 1.3.10: The feasibility of converting railroad and power line easements and rights-of-way into linear parks, trails and greenways will be explored by County staff.

Policy 1.3.11: By 2012, develop a comprehensive Bikeways, Trails, and Greenways Master Plan to guide the development of such facilities throughout the planning period. This plan should be closely coordinated with municipalities and the Baldwin County Trailblazers.

Policy 1.3.12: The County shall consider bike trails and pedestrian paths adjacent to wetland corridors as complimentary uses.

Policy 1.3.13: Coordinate trails and greenway planning and construction efforts with private landowners to identify, protect, develop and manage linear open space connectors for recreation and conservation greenway corridors, and encourage private landowners to dedicate greenway facilities for public recreational use through incentives and impact fee credits.

Objective 1.4: To improve access to public beaches and other bodies of water; and to provide a share of the boat ramps needed to allow county residents and visitors inexpensive access to public waterways to meet anticipated demand.

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Policy 1.4.1: Baldwin County will retain the current inventory of water accesses; develop and/or redevelop at least 1 water access per year; and will acquire additional water accesses whenever and wherever economically feasible.

Policy 1.4.2: The development of each water access will be evaluated on an individual basis in order to provide the correct level of development for each site based on legal status and legal limitations.

Policy 1.4.3: The County will continue to pursue grants and other initiatives as funding sources for additional water accesses.

Policy 1.4.4: Baldwin County will continue to research and maintain available data to identify any additional publicly owned water access to be listed with the current inventories.

Policy 1.4.5: Baldwin County will seek to reclaim any water accesses that are legally county-owned property. This reclamation process will include working with adjoining property owners to remove any encroachments that have been placed in the access.

Policy 1.4.6: By 2016, the County shall provide camping and playground areas at appropriate public accesses on water frontage and improve public access to beaches.

Policy 1.4.7: Baldwin County will provide one boat ramp lane with adequate parking per 40,000 population of the entire county.

Policy 1.4.8: Boat ramp construction and expansion shall be directed to popular boating areas including, but not limited to, Lillian, Fort Morgan, and the Eastern Shore and North Baldwin rivers.

Policy 1.4.9: The placement of public and private boat ramps and marinas, both freshwater and saltwater, shall be done in a manner in which minimizes negative impacts to the environment.

Policy 1.4.10: Private boat ramps shall be encouraged and allowed where environmental and safety impacts are not significant.

Policy 1.4.11: A minimum of 1 acre of usable space should be allocated for each publicly owned boat ramp facility to provide for ample parking of trailers and cars, and the provision of other facilities such as restrooms, potable water, docks and lighting.

Policy 1.4.12: The County will make improvements to existing boat ramps where necessary and economically feasible.

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Policy 1.4.13: Baldwin County will maintain a classification system for boat ramps which addresses location guidelines, types of boat ramp facilities for different areas, and needs and standards for parking for the different types of facilities.

Objective 1.5: Preserve a portion of the County’s natural environment for resource-based recreational activities in order to preserve natural habitats, protect the water supply, and preserve the natural heritage. These natural resources shall be available to the general public for resource-based recreational activities, enjoyment of nature, and educational enrichment, and may include lands to augment that which is set aside by the State of Alabama and the federal government.

Policy 1.5.1: Countywide parks will be resource-based facilities that preserve natural amenities. Baldwin County will avoid locating incompatible uses in regional parks.

Policy 1.5.2: To protect sensitive ecosystems and wildlife corridors, park and recreation facilities shall be located and designed in an environmentally sensitive manner, including limiting or prohibiting public access where necessary within the greenways system to protect such resources.

GOAL 2: To seek funding alternatives for the acquisition of additional recreation lands and for the maintenance of existing park and recreation sites.

Objective 2.1: Investigate alternative funding sources to be used for the acquisition of parks and open space, facility development, and the maintenance of existing and future park and recreation sites.

Policy 2.1.1: The County shall continue to monitor existing recreational opportunities and seek funding sources to prevent recreational deficiencies during the planning period.

Policy 2.1.2: The County shall identify and evaluate specific State of Alabama and Federal Government programs to determine applicability to certain County projects and goals. If determined feasible, application should be made.

Policy 2.1.3: The County shall consider the use of recreational impact fees to pay for recreation lands, facilities and maintenance.

GOAL 3: Ensure park planning documents are updated and revised as necessary on a regular basis.

Objective 3.1: The County will maintain inventories, surveys, and records essential to the park planning process, and will periodically update park planning documents and inventories.

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Policy 3.1.1: The County shall continue to update and maintain the existing inventory of County-owned parks and recreation sites, and include regional and state parks available to County residents. The inventory will include total acreage of each park and recreational site.

Policy 3.1.2: The County should utilize a systematic approach to survey users of park facilities and residents of Baldwin County as to their needs, desires, preferences and evaluations of park and recreation facilities and programs.

Policy 3.1.3: By using the experience and knowledge of community groups and professionals and by using data garnered from surveys and public hearings, the county will distribute facilities based on interest and need.

GOAL 4: Coordinate park planning with local governments, government agencies, and other applicable agencies.

Objective 4.1: Communicate with municipalities, the Baldwin County Board of Education, State of Alabama and County residents to prevent overlapping of recreational programs and facilities in adjacent areas and to maximize efficient use of facilities.

Policy 4.1.1: Baldwin County shall coordinate with the Baldwin County Board of Education for the co-location and joint use of parks, libraries and schools.

Policy 4.1.2: Baldwin County shall coordinate and communicate with municipalities and the State of Alabama regarding parks and recreational plans of each entity.

Policy 4.1.3: Baldwin County shall assist any non-profit land trust that is established in Baldwin County for the purpose of receiving and managing public park and recreation lands through the provision of information and technical assistance.

Policy 4.1.4: The County shall market the parks and recreation system, through the County's Public Information Officer, using available media such as, the internet, radio, television, signage and literature to enhance public awareness of the County's diverse parks and recreation system.

Policy 4.1.5: Neighborhood parks shall be addressed through County coordination with the municipalities, Baldwin County Board of Education, and the County's land development regulations. Neighborhood or community parks (as appropriate for the neighborhood and school size) should be located within one-half mile of schools, and, if practical, should be developed as adjoining or joint-use facilities.

GOAL 5: To require new development to provide adequate recreation and open space for improved aesthetic appearance, visual relief, environmental quality, preservation of existing native trees and plant communities, and the planting of required vegetation.

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Objective 5.1: Development regulations should require that new residential developments provide sufficient open space to meet the needs of their residents, and that new non-residential developments provide sufficient open space for the benefit of their patrons and the general public.

Policy 5.1.1: The County will review the open space requirements of the land development regulations to determine if these requirements should be modified in any way to best meet the open space requirements of residents of new developments.

Policy 5.1.2: The County shall encourage the connectivity of recreation areas and residential uses by using bike trails, pedestrian paths, waterways, and other open space corridors.

Policy 5.1.3: The County will review the open space requirements of the land development regulations to determine if these requirements should be modified in any way to best meet the open space requirements for non-residential developments.

Policy 5.1.4: Consideration should be made to new non-residential retail developments providing pedestrian and bikeway connectivity to nearby residential uses, to encourage non-vehicle traffic and reduce vehicular traffic and vehicle emissions.

Objective 5.2: New developments must use innovative site planning to define open space designed to preserve existing native vegetation and provide visual relief. This objective and subsequent policies are to be implemented through the County's land development regulations.

Policy 5.2.1: Any new development with existing indigenous vegetation is encouraged to provide half of the required open space as existing native plant communities. Any new development with existing native trees without associated native groundcover or understory is encouraged to provide half of the required open space with areas containing existing native trees. The planting of native shrub species within native tree protection areas is encouraged.

Policy 5.2.2: Open space areas must be designed to preserve and allow the continued growth and viability of existing native trees.

Policy 5.2.3: The County shall adopt open space land development regulations to define standards for a variety of open spaces for each land use category.

Policy 5.2.4: The County encourages new developments to incorporate existing native plant communities and/or native trees along proposed and/or existing rights-of-way.

Policy 5.2.5: The County encourages new developments to incorporate large, contiguous open space areas in the development design.

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Policy 5.2.6: Proposed planned developments must submit an open space design plan with an assessment of the existing native plant communities and native trees. The open space design plan must delineate the indigenous preserves and/or native tree preservation areas.