CHAPTER 3

Needs Assessment

Assessment Methodology

This Plan uses a multifaceted analysis to help determine the parks and recreational needs of the Harlingen community. The needs assessment analyzes whether those needs are being met and what types of improvements or changes would benefit Harlingen. Existing parks and recreation opportunities are analyzed in terms of public opinion, the location and quantity of parkland, the number of facilities within parks and natural resources in the City.

The needs assessment includes three parts. These include demand-based, standards-based and resource-based assessments. The use of multiple assessment methods helps to establish an understanding of key parks and recreation needs and inform Plan recommendations to address those needs.

This approach ensures that both public input and objective data inform decision-making. By combining multiple assessment methods, the Plan captures a well-rounded understanding of needs. The results will guide future improvements and investments in Harlingen's parks and recreation system.

Demand-Based Assessment

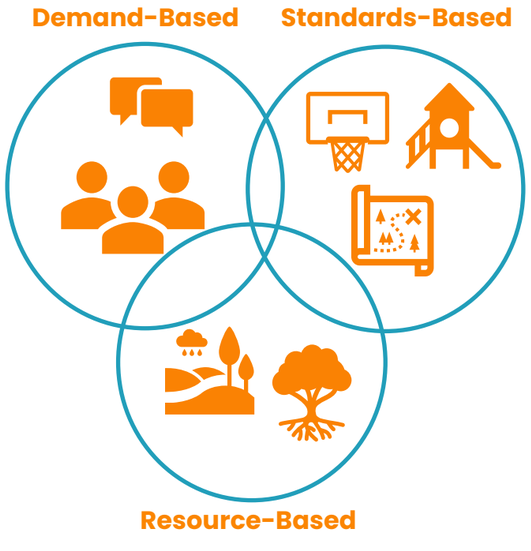
The needs assessment starts with a demand-based assessment. This includes an analysis and summary of public feedback to identify what the community wants and expects from the parks and recreation system and how this compares to its current state.

Standards-Based Assessment

The standards-based assessment then analyzes parkland acreage, location and amenities, comparing them to the needs and location of the current population and future residential growth areas. This is used to determine an appropriate target level of service for the Harlingen community and identify surpluses or deficits.

Resource-Based Assessment

Lastly, the resource-based assessment evaluates Harlingen's existing physical, man-made and natural resources to identify opportunities to leverage for public recreation benefit.



Demand-Based Assessment

The demand-based assessment is a reflection of the community's needs, as expressed directly by residents through various public engagement opportunities. Community engagement included:

- Parks Stakeholder Focus Group
- Parks-Specific Community Survey
- Online Mapping Exercise
- Public Open House

The following pages present highlights from the community input received. These highlights are opinions from Harlingen residents and/or park users and may differ between the various engagement opportunities and questions.

Stakeholder Focus Group

As part of the Harlingen Parks planning process, a stakeholder listening session was held to gather in-depth feedback from key user groups. Participants included representatives from youth and adult sports leagues, as well as park advocates who regularly engage with the City's parks and recreational facilities. The session provided an opportunity for these stakeholders to share firsthand experiences, challenges and priorities related to the parks and recreation system.

Participants spoke positively about the City's commitment to recreation but highlighted several areas where improvements are needed. A common priority was the expansion of Harlingen's existing trail network to support walking, running and biking across more neighborhoods. There was also a strong desire to see the development of a full-service indoor recreation center to provide year-round access to programming, particularly during inclement weather or extreme heat. Additional sports courts, restrooms and upgraded amenities were also emphasized as important steps to meet growing demand.

Alongside these priorities, stakeholders expressed concerns around ongoing maintenance, limited parking at sports complexes and insufficient lighting throughout parks and trails. Security was also noted as a concern, with several participants calling for improvements at specific parks. Another key issue was the limited after-hours access to Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD) outdoor facilities, which stakeholders felt could serve as valuable shared-use spaces, especially for league play.

Key Priorities Identified:

- Expand the existing trail network to improve connectivity.
- Develop a new indoor recreation center for year-round programming.
- Improve security measures at select parks.
- Construct additional basketball courts.
- Add more restrooms to support longer visits and larger crowds.
- Expand recreational sports fields and increase parking capacity for tournaments.

Key Concerns Raised:

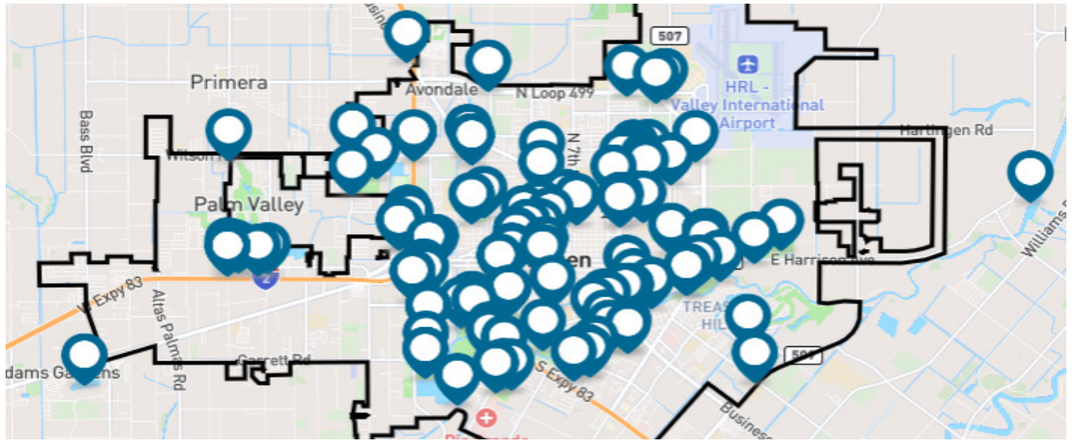
- Park beautification and maintenance need greater attention.
- Demand for league play exceeds current facility capacity.
- Inadequate lighting in parks and along trails.
- Limited after-hours access to HCISD facilities for community use.
- Insufficient parking for hosting large-scale sports events.
- Ongoing safety concerns in certain parks.

Online Mapping Comments

Throughout the course of the project, there was an online mapping exercise available for residents to provide comments and ideas related to specific points around Harlingen. The map had 38 total participants that left 117 comments. Participants were able to upvote and downvote other comments. The following represents real responses from participants regarding parks and recreation feedback:

- I love the space and peace of Rangerville Park. However, the playground equipment is old, rusty and unsafe for my children. I would really love to see an update on that, and in the restrooms and driveway, you can visibly see the metal sticking out of the concrete! Also, if there were easier access to the park from the surrounding communities, that would be great as well.
- There needs to be better access to Pendleton Park when walking from the neighborhoods. I have asked many times for a crosswalk on Grimes with lights to Pendleton. There is a sign that says 'Duck Crossing,' which I love. Can we please have a dedicated crossing for us humans as well?
- Could this trail [Meg Jorn Trail] have some sort of shade or native tall trees for us runners?
- Please extend the bike trail from Hugh Ramsey to McElvey Park. There is no safe bike path between the two since they are both on major roads. This would be a huge upgrade to the trail and give so many more people safe access to it.
- Trail [Meg Jorn Trail] should also connect to the soccer complex.
- This area [Treasure Hills Blvd and Golden Bear Rd] should be turned into a pocket park. Many rare and uncommon birds have been spotted here (over 200 species) being on the migration corridor that birds use as they make pit stops as they migrate makes this location critical. Of about 50 species of shorebirds in North America, at least 31 species have been documented on record at this one spot. Birding tours also stop here, so it's also an important location economically.
- Victor Park tennis courts need new windscreens! The current ones are in shreds or are missing.
- I always said this park [Rangerville Park] needs a major update in the park's playground and restroom. My family and I love coming here, and I don't ever want to stop coming here, but the playground has been the same since I was eight, and now I'm 32. Please consider Rangerville Park for renovations!
- Need signs that CLEARLY state the rules for motorists, walkers, runners and cyclists, including emergency contact numbers. Lighting would be good, and the city should consider the use of trail marshals such as those in San Antonio. Safety is a big concern in the evening at [Arroyo Park]
- The basketball court [at Pendleton Park] needs better lighting. The walking track needs better lighting. Trees around the pond need to be trimmed back and cleaned up.

Map 6. Online Mapping Comment Pin Distribution



Public Open House

On February 24, 2025, the City of Harlingen hosted a joint Public Open House at the Harlingen Community Center. The event invited community members to engage with and provide feedback on the Comprehensive Plan, the Parks Plan and the Downtown Plan. A variety of interactive boards encouraged residents to share their thoughts, particularly on the City's parks and recreation offerings.

Participants expressed a strong interest in enhancing recreational opportunities across the City. Many called for an expanded network of walking and biking trails to improve connectivity and promote active lifestyles. The need for more restrooms in existing parks was another frequently raised issue, with residents emphasizing that better facilities would make parks more family-friendly and accessible for all ages.

Another major topic of discussion was equitable park access. Attendees voiced a desire for more investment in sports facilities like basketball and pickleball courts, along with a clear call for new park development in West Harlingen. Residents in that area noted the limited access to quality recreational spaces and encouraged the City to address this gap in future planning.

Key Feedback Highlights:

- Strong support for adding more walking and biking trails throughout the parks system.
- Requests for additional restroom facilities in existing parks to enhance usability.
- Increased interest in sports courts, including basketball, tennis and pickleball.
- Calls for new park development in West Harlingen to improve access and equity.
- Emphasis on connectivity between neighborhoods and parks via trails and sidewalks.



Parks Survey

A detailed 18-question survey focused on Harlingen's parks and recreation system, was carried out to collect feedback from a wide range of Harlingen residents and stakeholders.

The survey, which was available for approximately three months, received a total of 159 respondents. The respondents span a range of ages, with the majority being between 36 and 50 years of age. Nearly half of the survey respondents noted that they have no children in their household, with the next largest share of respondents identifying children between 6 and 10 years of age in their household.

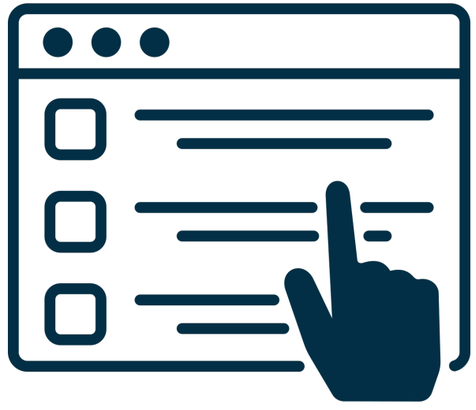


Figure 9. Age of survey respondents

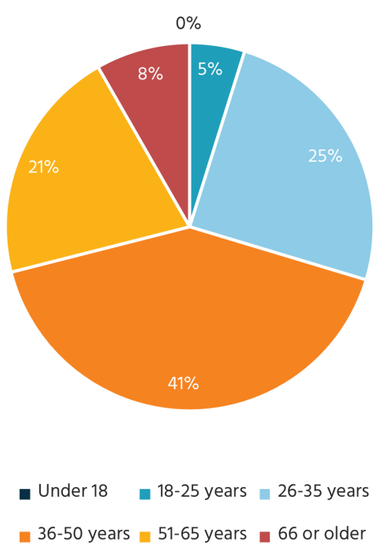
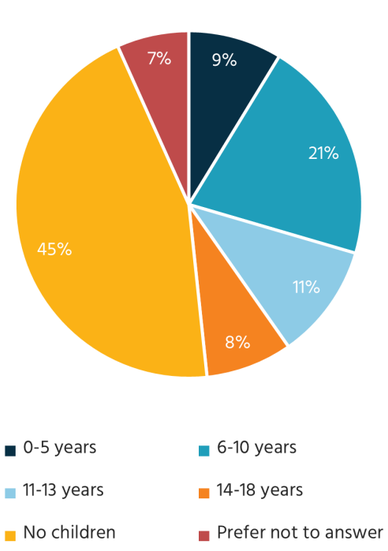


Figure 10. Age of children in respondent households



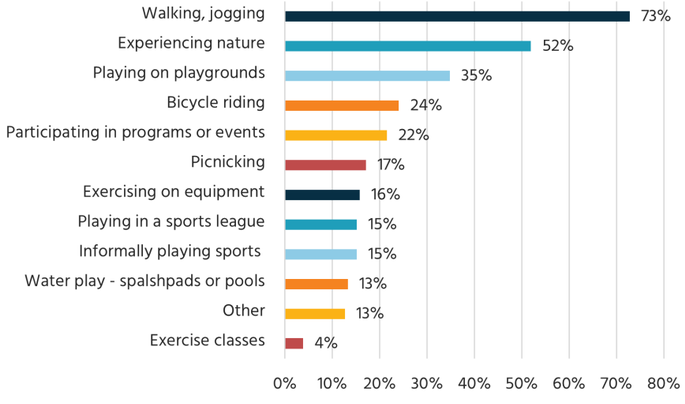
Parks & Recreation System Usage

Main Purposes for Parks & Recreation Usage

Understanding the primary uses of a city's parks system is essential for effective planning and resource allocation.

Respondents primarily use Harlingen's parks and recreation facilities for walking or jogging, experiencing nature and utilizing the playgrounds.

Figure 11. Purposes for which respondents use parks



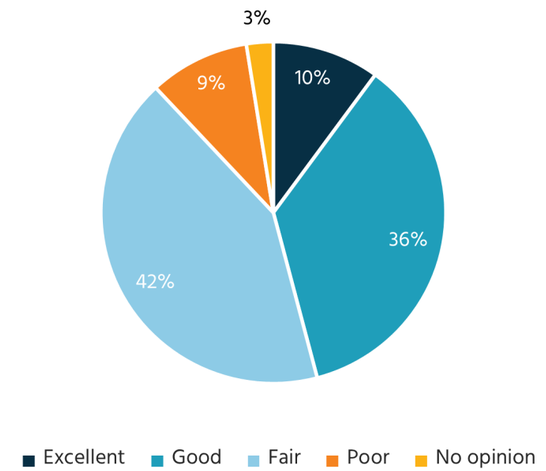
Overall Ratings of the Parks & Recreation System

Rating the Quality of Parks, Recreation and Open Space Opportunities in Harlingen

Nearly half of respondents (46%) rated the quality of parks, recreation and open space opportunities as excellent or good. The largest share of respondents rated the parks, recreation and open space opportunities as fair (42%). Of the respondents who rated the system fair or poor, the main themes were:

- Outdated or broken park equipment.
- Poor maintenance of existing parks.
- Overgrown and uneven trails.
- Inadequate lighting within park facilities.
- Lack of shade in some playground areas.
- Restrooms are frequently dirty.
- Demand for more events and activities.
- Concerns of excessive loitering.

Figure 12. Quality ratings of Harlingen's Parks & Open Space

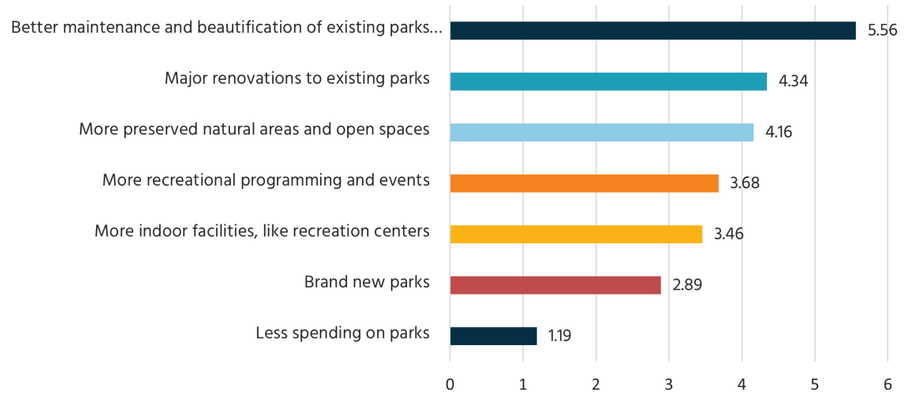


Parks & Recreation System Priorities

Most Important Priorities for Parks & Recreation in Harlingen

The primary parks and recreation functions that respondents viewed as priorities for the City included: better maintenance and beautification of existing parks and amenities, major renovations to existing parks and more preserved natural areas and open space.

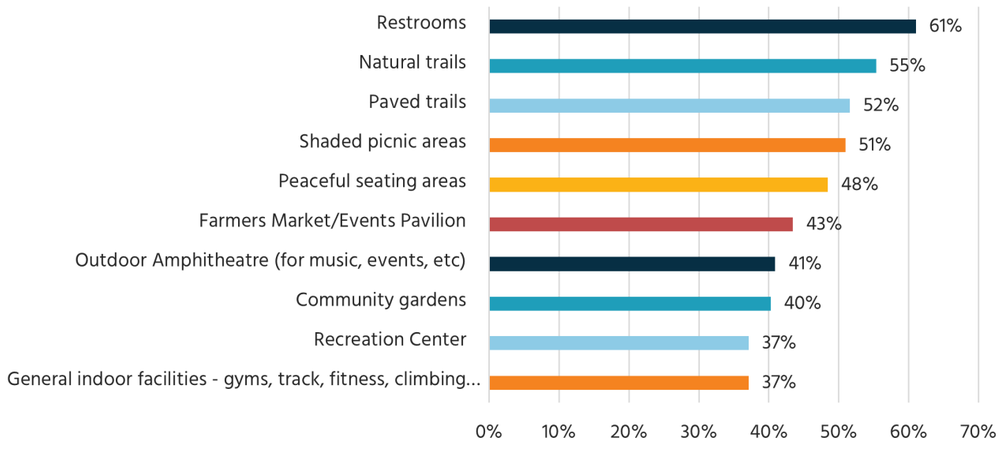
Figure 13. Respondents priorities for parks and recreation



Most Important Facility Priorities for Parks & Recreation in Harlingen

The top parks and recreation facilities that respondents viewed interest in included: additional restrooms, extended natural or paved trail connections and more shaded picnic areas.

Figure 14. Respondent priorities for parks and recreation facilities

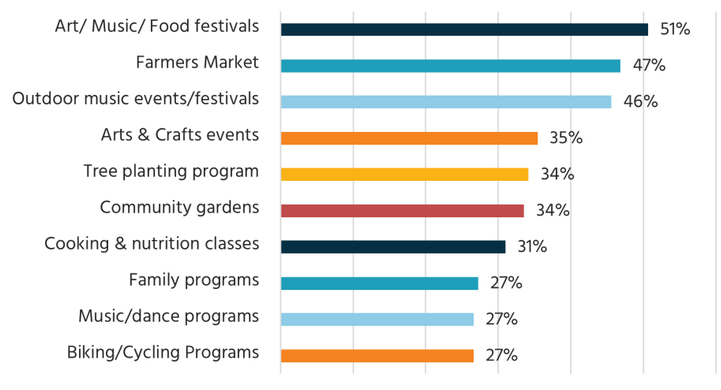


Parks & Recreation System Programming

Recreational Programming Priorities

The top parks and recreation program priorities that respondents expressed interest in included: the facilitation of festivals pertaining to art, music or food; particularly the development of a farmers market on parks grounds; and arts and crafts programming.

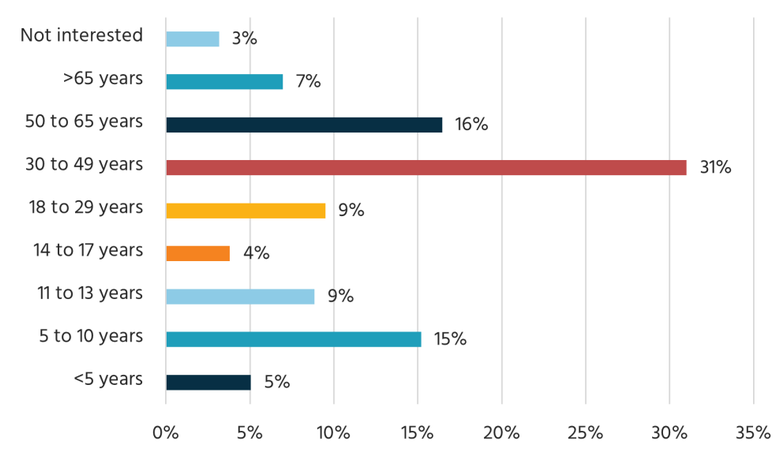
Figure 15. Respondents priorities for parks and recreation programming



Age Groups Interested in Parks Programming

Parks programming attracts interest from all age groups. The highest interest among children is seen in those aged 5 to 10 years, while adults aged 30 to 49 years show the greatest interest in parks programming.

Figure 16. Programming interest by age group

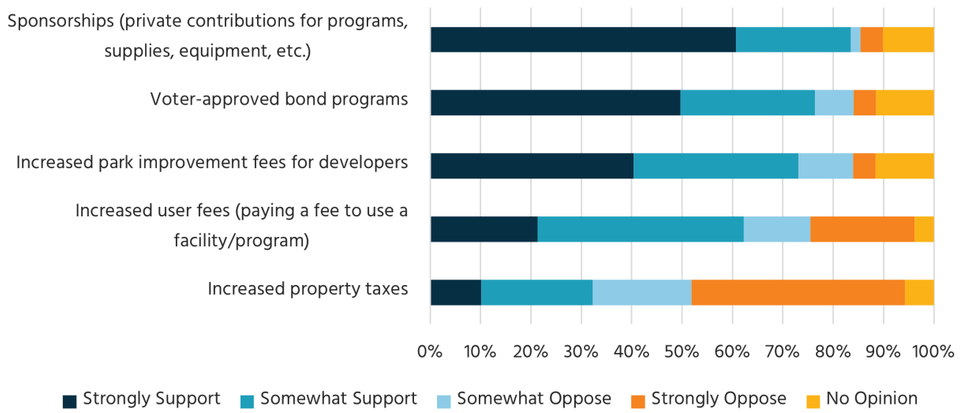


Parks & Recreation System Funding

Support for Funding Sources

Respondents were asked to rank their preferred funding sources for parks and recreation. Respondents had strong support for sponsorships and voter-approved bond programs as the preferred funding strategies to pay for developing and maintaining park and recreation facilities/amenities. There is less support for funding sources that pass the cost onto residents, such as increased user fees or property taxes.

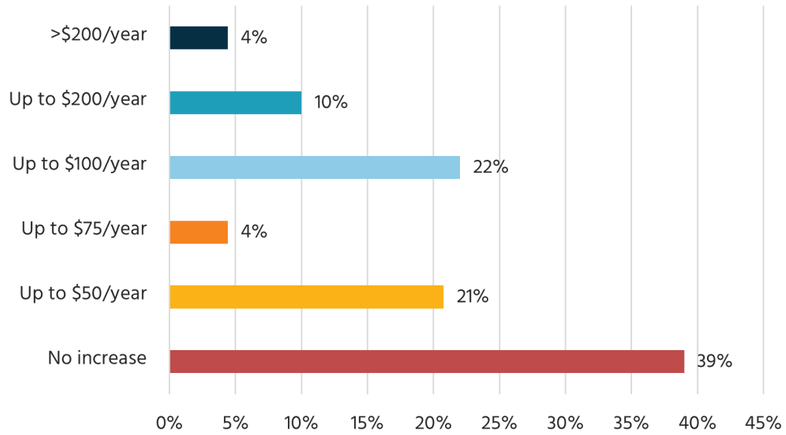
Figure 17. Respondents preferred funding sources



Willingness to Pay

Although increasing taxes was the least desirable funding mechanism noted above, 61% of respondents said they are willing to pay some additional property taxes annually to help fund the improvement priorities suggested in this survey. Respondents are willing to pay an average of $64 per year to help fund these priorities.

Figure 18. Amount respondents are willing to pay annually to support parks priorities



Standards-Based Assessment

The standards-based assessment analyzes parkland in terms of acreage, location and number of park facilities. It identifies the current level of service and whether it is meeting the community's needs. Levels of service represent a specific acreage of parkland or number of facilities needed per given population. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) publishes its Agency Performance Review annually. It presents data and insights from 1,000 parks and recreation agencies nationwide. This information was referenced throughout the standards-based assessment as a baseline comparison.

Three types of standards were examined in this assessment: acreage, location and facilities.



Acreage Level of Service

The acreage level of service defines the quantity of parkland acreage as a ratio to population. The results are expressed as park acreage per 1,000 residents. The analysis examines whether there is sufficient parkland for residents today and in the future.



Spatial Level of Service

The spatial level of service looks at the location and distribution of different park types to identify underserved areas and where new parks may be needed.

Facility Level of Service

The facility level of service defines the number of park facilities needed to meet the community's recreational needs. Standards are expressed as a ratio of facility per population size (e.g., one baseball field per 3,500 residents).

Acreage Level of Service

Different types of parks are intended to serve different needs. Pocket, neighborhood and community parks, cumulatively thought of as close-to-home parks, are focused on recreational benefits for nearby residents. In addition to local residents, regional parks serve a population beyond the immediate community. Linear parks/greenways and open space/nature parks provide passive recreation opportunities for the whole community, while special purpose parks serve a focused user group (e.g., dog parks).

While Harlingen's parks system includes 588.1 acres of parkland, approximately 152 acres are currently geared toward dedicated user groups or a single use in special use parks.

According to the 2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review, the median community with 50,000-99,999 people had 10.2 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. A target level of service has been defined for Harlingen through comparison with the NRPA Agency Performance Review and an understanding of the community's goals, opportunities and challenges.

Existing and target levels of service per park type are listed in the table on the next page. The City's total combined level of service today is 8.2 acres per 1,000 residents. Considering the total of all park types (including those without target levels of service), there is a current parkland deficit of 4.5 acres, with a future deficit that grows as the population increases toward its projected 2035 population.

The City is primarily lacking close-to-home parkland (i.e., pocket, neighborhood and community parks) today and in the future, as listed in the "surplus/deficit acreages" columns in the table. There is also projected to be a growing deficit in parkland identified for nature preserves or open space.

The City should consider opportunities for additional close-to-home parks in areas with new development in the future. Based on Harlingen's extensive amount of special-use parkland, it will be essential to enhance pocket, neighborhood and community park amenities (e.g., playground, basketball court, picnicking) within these parks to ensure that they can help meet the daily recreational needs for residents in the vicinity.

It will also be important to identify opportunities to expand or acquire additional parkland for nature preserves or open space within the City. This type of park is intended to remain minimally developed or in its natural state. As Harlingen evaluates development options for these parks, consideration should be given to including trails and picnic amenities, where appropriate, to allow the acres to provide some recreational benefit.

National Recreation & Parks Association (NRPA) 2024 Agency Review

Average Total Parkland per 1,000 residents (for communities 50,000-99,999 people)

- Lower Quartile: 4.8 acres/1,000 people
- Median: 10.2 acres/1,000 people
- Upper Quartile: 17.4 acres/1000 people

Figure 19. Parkland Acreage Level of Service

Park Classification	Existing Level of Service (LOS)		Recommended Level of Service (2025)			Recommended Level of Service (2035)	
	Existing Acreage (2025)	Current LOS (based on 71,829 population)	Recommended Target LOS (2025-2035)		2025 Recommended Acreage (based on 71,829 population)	Surplus/ Deficit Acreages (2025)	2035 Recommended Acreage (based on 92,516 population)	Surplus/ Deficit Acreages (2035)
Close-to-Home Parks								
Pocket Parks	11.6	0.16 Ac/1,000 Residents	0.25	Ac/1,000 Residents	18.0	**-6.4**	23.1	**-11.5**
Neighborhood Parks	51.6	0.7 Ac/1,000 Residents	1.5	Ac/1,000 Residents	107.7	**-56.1**	138.8	**-87.2**
Community Parks	278.6	3.9 Ac/1,000 Residents	4	Ac/1,000 Residents	287.3	**-8.7**	370.1	**-91.5**
Close-to-Home Parks Subtotal	341.8	4.8 Ac/1,000 Residents	5.75	Ac/1,000 Residents	413.0	-71.2	532.0	190.2
Other Parks								
Open Space/ Nature Preserves	94.4	1.3 Ac/1,000 Residents	2.5	Ac/1,000 Residents	179.6	-85.2	231.3	-136.9
Regional Parks	0	0.0 Ac/1,000 Residents	0	Ac/1,000 Residents	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Special Use Parks	151.9	2.1 Ac/1,000 Residents	Varies		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Other Parks Subtotal	246.3	3.4 Ac/1,000 Residents	Varies		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
All Park Types	588.1	8.2 Ac/1,000 Residents	8.25	Ac/1,000 Residents	592.6	-4.5*	763.3	-175.2*

**The bottom row includes all park types and an overall recommended level of service of 8.25 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. The total 2025 and 2035 surplus and deficit calculations are based on all park types combined (e.g., 588.1 existing acres - 592.6 recommended acres in 2025 = 4.5 acres deficit).*

Negative numbers indicate acreage deficits.

Spatial Level of Service

Access to Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks in Harlingen are generally designed to serve residents within a one-quarter to one-half mile radius, supporting daily recreational needs and encouraging walking or biking access. A one-quarter mile service area equates to approximately a five-minute walk, while a one-half mile service area corresponds to a ten-minute walk. To support equitable access, parks should be integrated into neighborhoods and located away from barriers such as major highways or rail lines.

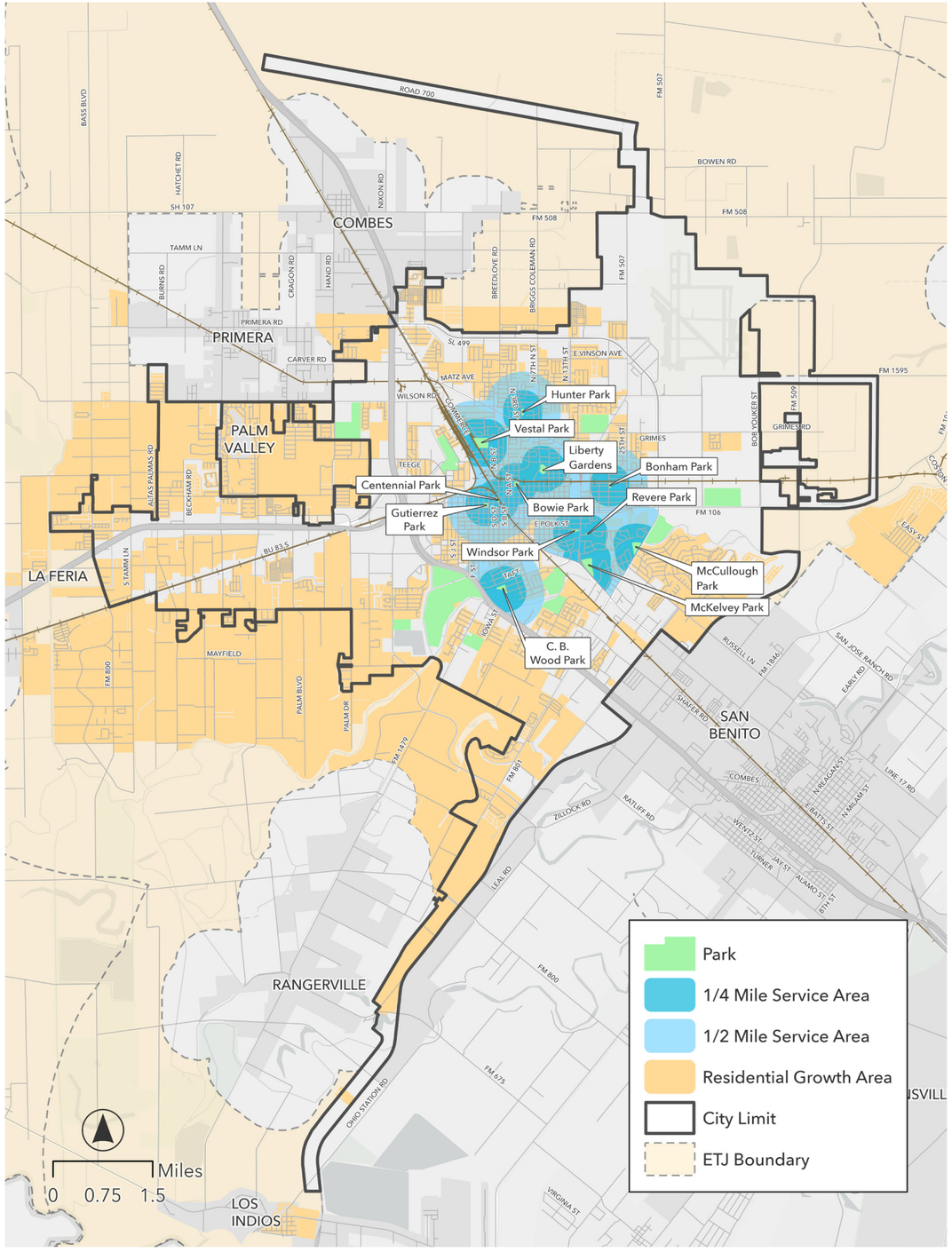
Map 7 illustrates the current one-quarter mile and one-half mile service areas of existing neighborhood parks in Harlingen. It shows that while the central areas of the City particularly around Bowie Park, Windsor Park and Vestal Park, are well served by multiple parks within walking distance, significant gaps in park access exist in several areas. Notably, residential neighborhoods in the western and southern parts of the City, as well as the growing community of Rangerville, fall outside of the one-half mile walking radius of any park.

Parks like McKelvey Park, Centennial Park and Liberty Gardens offer valuable amenities to surrounding neighborhoods. However, areas near Palm Valley, eastern La Feria and parts of southeast Harlingen show limited access to parks within walkable distances. C B Wood Park and McCullough Park provide broader recreational amenities and can function as local neighborhood parks if supported by appropriate pedestrian and bike connections and amenities such as playgrounds, shaded trails and rest areas.

As Harlingen continues to grow, especially in western and southern areas, priority should be given to adding neighborhood parks in areas currently underserved by the existing park network. Infill park development and enhanced pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure should be considered to improve connectivity and ensure that all residents, regardless of location, can access a neighborhood park within a one-half mile walk or bike ride.







Map 7. Service Area of Neighborhood Parks

Access to Community Parks

Community parks in Harlingen are designed to serve multiple neighborhoods and provide a broader range of recreational amenities compared to neighborhood parks. These amenities may include playgrounds, picnic areas, pavilions, athletic fields, basketball and tennis courts, trails, swimming pools and splash pads. Because of their larger size and greater variety of amenities, residents are generally willing to drive to access these parks.

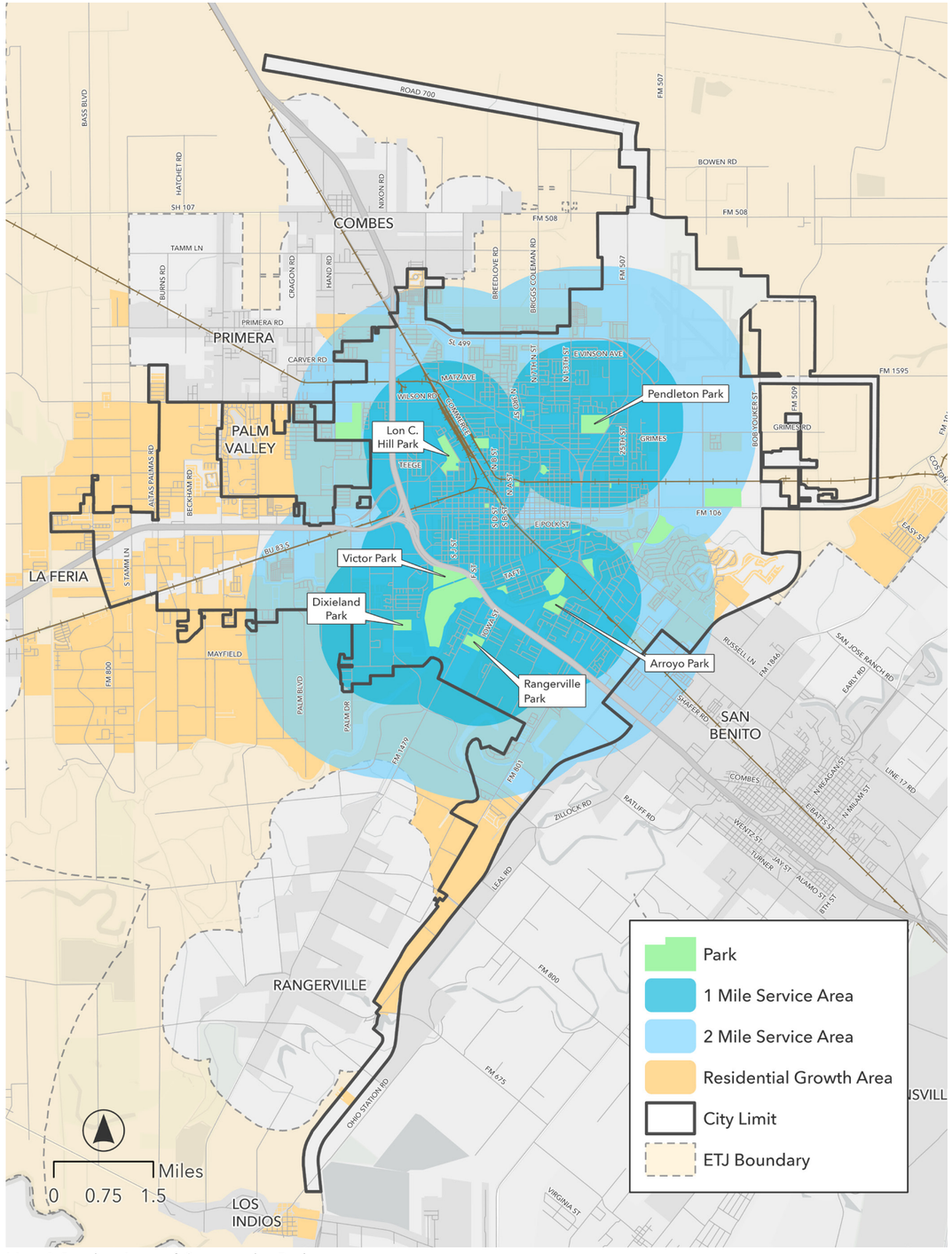
Map 8 illustrates one-mile and two-mile service areas around existing community parks in Harlingen, showing which areas benefit from proximity to these major recreational destinations. While most of the City is covered within the two-mile service areas of parks like Victor Park, Lon C Hill Park and Arroyo Park, there are still several underserved areas, particularly on the southwestern and northwestern edges of the City, as well as near the ETJ boundary around Rangerville and Palm Valley.

The community parks offer significant recreational amenities within their respective service areas. These parks serve as destinations for residents across the City and nearby areas. The vast majority of Harlingen's population falls within the two-mile service area of at least one community park. However, small gaps in access remain in fast-growing areas on the western and southeastern fringes of the City.

As residential development continues in and around Harlingen, especially near Rangerville and La Feria, the City should prioritize the creation of new community parks in underserved areas or the expansion of existing parks to ensure that all residents have equitable access to larger recreational spaces.







Map 8 Service Area of Community Parks

Access to Trails

Trails in Harlingen function as key community connectors, often accessed by foot or bicycle and typically serving the same one-quarter mile and one-half mile service areas as pocket and neighborhood parks. These trails support both recreational use and alternative transportation options, encouraging active lifestyles and providing direct links between parks, neighborhoods, schools and major destinations.

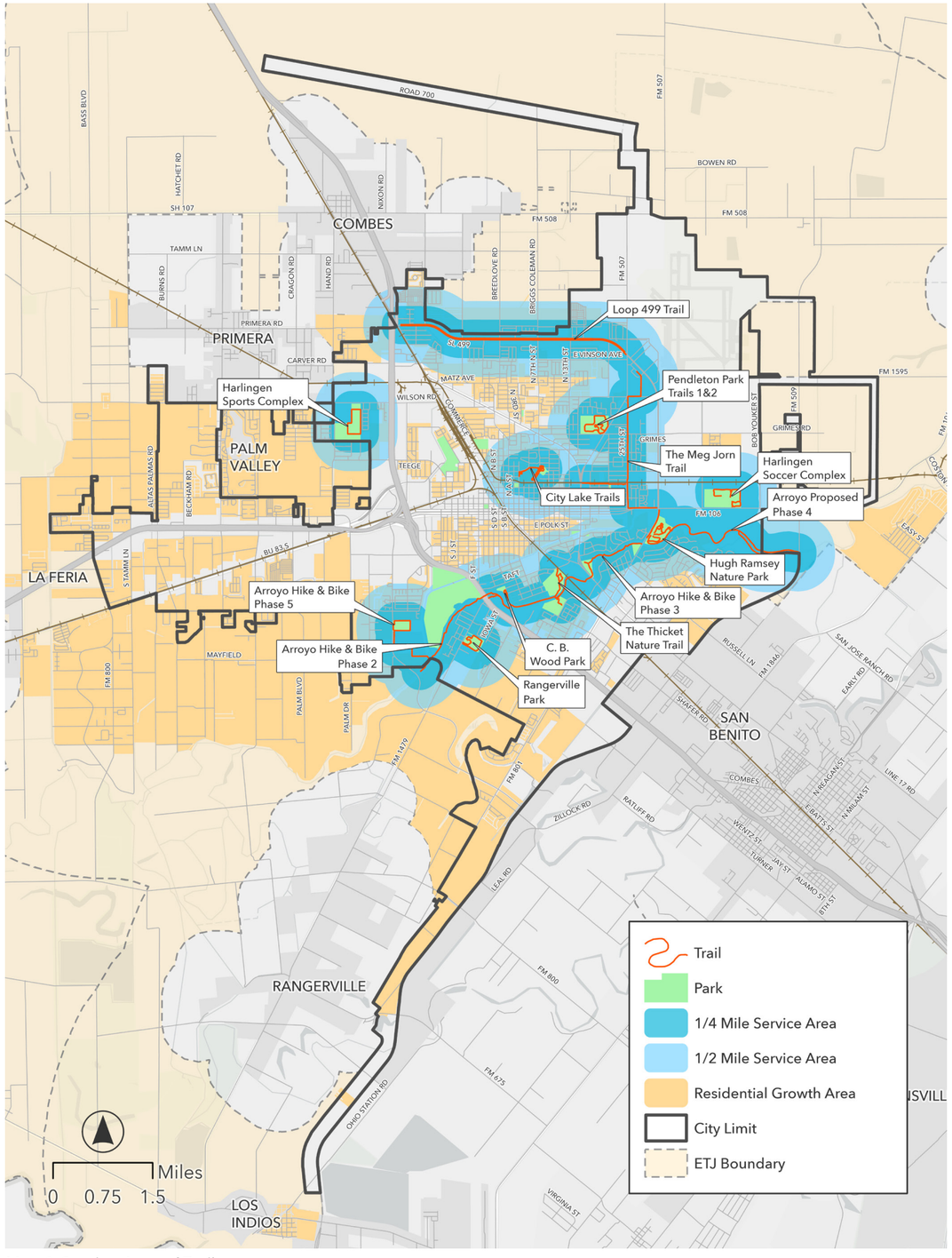
Map 9 illustrates existing and planned trails across Harlingen, along with their corresponding service areas. The existing trail network provides strong connectivity through central Harlingen, particularly along Arroyo Colorado and major parks like McKelvey Park, Hugh Ramsey Nature Park and Bowie Park. However, the current trail system does not extend into large portions of the City, including neighborhoods in the southwest, northwest and ETJ boundary near Rangerville and La Feria.

Harlingen's trails are currently concentrated along a few key corridors. To improve access, future trail development should prioritize linking residential areas, neighborhood and community parks, and other important community destinations. Expanding the trail network in underserved areas would improve walkability and bikeability while increasing access to outdoor amenities and safe travel options for all residents.

As the City continues to grow, particularly in areas south and west of the City center, expanding trail infrastructure will be essential for building a comprehensive and connected park system. Opportunities should be explored to connect existing parks such as Dixieland Park, Windsor Park and Victor Park with new trail segments to ensure all residents are within walking or biking distance of trails.







Map 9. Service Area of Trails

Facility Level of Service

In addition to evaluating overall parkland, it is important to assess the types of recreation facilities available for resident use. The facility level of service analysis provides an overview of existing facilities in Harlingen and compares them to recommended levels of service. The 2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review offers comparison data for the prevalence of outdoor park and recreation facilities per population. The facility target levels of service were determined through a baseline comparison of national averages for cities with populations between 50,000 and 99,999. These targets were then tailored to Harlingen based on community input, goals and an understanding of parkland access and staffing resources.

The facility level of service table outlines the current number of facilities in Harlingen and compares them to the estimated need based on the City's 2025 and 2035 population projections. This comparison identifies where current deficits exist and highlights future needs as the City continues to grow.

There are currently deficits in the following facilities:

- Softball fields
- Soccer fields
- Football fields
- Standalone backstops
- Basketball courts
- Pickleball courts
- Volleyball courts
- Playgrounds
- Splash pads
- Skate park

Looking to 2035, without the addition of new facilities, deficits will increase or emerge in:

- Baseball fields
- Additional restrooms and trails
- Swimming pool/aquatic facility
- Picnic pavilions







Figure 20. Facility Level of Service

	Facility/ Amenity	Current Available	Current LOS (1 Facility per # Residents)	Target LOS (Per Residents)	2025 Need (based on 71,829 pop.)	2025 Deficit or Surplus	2035 Need (based on 92,516 pop.)	2035 Deficit or Surplus	Cities between 50,000 to 99,999*
Active	Baseball Fields	19	3,780	1 per 5,000	15	4	19	0	Diamond fields 1 per 3,675
	Softball Fields	8	8,979	1 per 5,000	15	-7	19	-11	
	Backstop	3	23,943	1 per 5,000	15	-12	19	-16	
	Basketball Courts	5	14,366	1 per 10,000	8	-3	10	-5	1 per 8,363
	Disc Golf	1	71,829	2 per city	1	0	1	0	1 per 58,603
	Fitness Equipment Circuit	6	11,972	1 per 35,000	3	3	3	3	1 per 35,000
	Football Fields	8	8,979	1 per 5,000	15	-7	19	-11	1 per 4,070 (Rectangular Field)
	Skate Park	0	0	1 per city	2	-2	2	-2	1 per 60,904
	Soccer Fields	10	7,183	1 per 5,000	15	-5	19	-9	1 per 4,070 (Rectangular Field)
	Pickleball Courts	0	0	1 per 10,500	7	-7	9	-9	1 per 10,500
	Tennis Courts	20	3,591	1 per 5,000	15	5	19	1	1 per 5,865
	Trails (miles)	25.5	2,817	1 per 7,500	9.6	15.9	12.3	13.2	Median 18.1 miles
	Volleyball Courts (Outdoor)	1	71,829	1 per 10,000	8	-7	10	-9	1 per 26,612

**Metrics were obtained from the 2024 NRPA Agency Review. Some facility categories are not included in the Agency Review.*

	Facility/ Amenity	Current Available	Current LOS (1 Facility per # Residents)	Target LOS (Per Residents)	2025 Need (based on 71,829 pop.)	2025 Deficit or Surplus	2035 Need (based on 92,516 pop.)	2035 Deficit or Surplus	Cities between 50,000 to 99,999*
Passive	Outdoor Event Space	0	0	1 per 59,000	2	-2	2	-2	1 per 59,000
	Dog Park	1	71,829	2 per city	1	0	1	0	1 per 55,135
	Horseshoe Pits	1	71,829	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies	
	Picnic Pavilions	36	1,995	1 per 2,000	36	0	47	-11	
	Picnic Facilities (e.g., tables)	146	492	In all publicly accessed parks	In all publicly accessed parks		In all publicly accessed parks		
	All inclusive playground	1	71,829	1 per city	0		0		1 per 30,239
	Playgrounds	21	3,420	1 per 2,000	36	-15	47	-26	1 per 3,707
Water	Fishing Piers	1	0	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies	
	Swimming Pool	3	23,943	1 per 30,000	3	0	4	-1	1 per 46,353
	Splash Pad	2	35,915	1 per 25,000	3	-1	4	-2	1 per 54,100
Misc.	Recreation Center	0	0	1 per 39,886	2	-2	3	-3	1 per 39,886
	Restrooms/ Portable	21	3,420	Where feasible	Where feasible	Varies	Where feasible	Varies	1 per 5,520

Resource-Based Assessment

The resource-based assessment is the third analysis for the needs assessment. This exercise recognizes key physical, man-made or natural resources within the community that may provide potential recreational opportunities. These areas can either support active recreational pursuits or provide opportunities for passive enjoyment. The following areas have potential to be further leveraged for recreation or open space preservation.

Extend the Arroyo Colorado Greenbelt System

The Arroyo Colorado is one of Harlingen's most significant natural assets, offering tremendous potential for greenbelt expansion and ecological preservation. By enhancing trail connectivity, restoring native vegetation, and developing passive and active recreational nodes along the Arroyo, the City can transform this underutilized corridor into a continuous linear park. This extension would improve pedestrian and bicycle access across the community, connect neighborhoods to nature and serve as a vital ecological buffer that supports flood mitigation and water quality improvement.

Maximize the Use of Underserved Parks

While Harlingen has an extensive network of parks, many remain underutilized due to limited programming, outdated infrastructure or lack of accessibility. A resource-based approach encourages investment in these spaces through upgraded amenities, inclusive play areas and year-round programming that reflects the needs and interests of surrounding communities. Revitalizing these parks especially in areas with lower access to recreational opportunities can transform them into vibrant, multi-generational community spaces that foster connection and well-being.

Enhancing Interaction with Nature

Harlingen's ecological richness, particularly in the context of bird migration and native habitat, creates unique opportunities to strengthen residents' interaction with nature. Expanding interpretive signage, birdwatching lookouts, native plant



gardens and educational trails can deepen public appreciation for local ecosystems. Collaborations with schools, nature centers and conservation groups can further elevate these spaces as outdoor learning environments, promoting environmental stewardship across all age groups.

Leverage Flood-Prone Areas for Resilient Park Design

Given Harlingen's vulnerability to flooding, especially in areas near the Arroyo Colorado and low-lying neighborhoods, park design can serve a dual function providing recreation while managing stormwater. Flood-prone lands can be transformed into resilient open spaces through the use of detention basins, bioswales and wetlands that absorb runoff while supporting recreation, education and habitat restoration. These green infrastructure solutions not only reduce flood risk but also add value to neighborhoods and reduce infrastructure strain.

Address Heat Resilience with Shaded and Cooling Amenities

Extreme heat is a growing concern in Harlingen's subtropical climate. Parks play a critical role in mitigating the urban heat island effect and offering relief during hot months. Strategic tree planting, especially around seating areas, playgrounds and trails, along with the use of shade structures and water play features, can create more comfortable and inclusive park experiences. Incorporating reflective materials, native vegetation and park layouts that take advantage of wind patterns can also contribute to cooling while reducing long-term maintenance costs.

Summary of Needs

Through the needs assessment and public engagement process, the need for additional distribution of parkland, increased connectivity, new and improved facilities, and expanded recreational programs were identified.



Parkland Acreage and Development

- Additional close-to-home parks are needed to address service area gaps, especially in West Harlingen, Rangerville and new growth areas.
- Enhancing existing parks with upgraded amenities and new features will help meet the community's growing needs.
- Expanding access to nature parks and open space is a priority, particularly for flood resilience and passive recreation.



Park Facilities

- Address shortages in multi-purpose fields to facilitate a greater amount of space specifically for soccer and football.
- Develop a full-service indoor recreation center to support year-round use.
- Provide additional restrooms, splash pads and shaded playground areas in high-use parks.
- Improve lighting, safety and maintenance in existing parks and along trails.
- Respond to demand for dog parks, pickleball courts and updated court amenities.



Parkland Access and Connectivity

- Expand the trail network to create a more accessible, connected park system.
- Improve sidewalk and bike access to parks from surrounding neighborhoods.
- Connect parks through greenways, particularly along the Arroyo Colorado corridor.
- Prioritize park and trail investments in underserved areas with limited walkable access.



Recreational Programs

- Expand youth and senior programming to serve all age groups.
- Support more community-wide events like concerts, farmers markets and festivals.
- Introduce environmental education, nature-based activities and fitness programs.
- Promote inclusive programming for people with disabilities and underserved populations.

