



Chapter 7

Park Classification & Levels of Service



Park Classification and Levels of Service

In 1996, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) published the Park, Open Space, and Greenway Guidelines. These guidelines presented a model of typical park classifications, as well as recommended service levels based on population. “The purpose of the publication is to underscore the most important objective of the park and recreation planning process; to ensure that a community knows how to go about securing enough of the right kind of land to provide the scale of park and open space system the citizen’s desire.” (James D. Mertes, 1996) This valuable resource provides definitions, criteria, classifications, and development standards for the recreation industry. The publication also includes a Level of Service (LOS) analysis which is a “systems approach” to facility planning. The NRPA guidelines and LOS together with input received from the community provides for an ongoing, dynamic planning process. However, NRPA recognizes that these numbers do not take into account the unique qualities and needs of all communities across the country. Local trends, demographics, climate and the popularity of certain activities over others often dictate a greater need for certain facilities. Currently, NRPA is updating their standards through the Park Metrics, formerly PRORAGIS, system, an online service designed to capture national trend data from park and recreation departments.

National Park and Recreation Association (NRPA)

Based upon the Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines, the NRPA Level of Service (LOS) is a standard evaluation of park type and acreage across all park agencies based on what they offer their residents (James D. Mertes, 1996). The LOS is typically defined in parks and recreation master plans as a ratio representing the minimum amount of open space and park land needed to meet the recreation demands of the community. The NRPA recognizes the importance of the level of service as:



- An expression of minimum acceptable facilities for citizens of every community.
 - A guideline to determine land requirements for various kinds of park and recreation areas and facilities.
 - A basis for relating recreational needs to spatial analysis within a community-wide system of parks, recreation areas, and open areas.
- (James D. Mertes, 1996)

NRPA also states that each community should be considered on an individual basis in order to tailor the most appropriate range, quantity and quality of recreational facilities within the Department’s fiscal limits. Acreage of park land per 1,000 residents remains the most common technique of expressing equal opportunity, even though conditions and needs vary greatly between areas. This technique was utilized to help in determining the Level of Service for the Munster Parks and Recreation Department, along with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) standards, reviewed below.

PRORAGIS

Launched in 2009 as PRORAGIS, the NRPA Park Metrics is a search-able, online national database for use by park and recreation departments. The power of NRPA Park Metrics is its ability to run comparative reports to help agencies effectively manage and plan their resources and facilities. The park agency enters the information regarding their agency and the data can then be used to generate benchmarking reports. Users also have access to GIS mapping tools. The Munster Parks and Recreation Department should create a profile through PRORAGIS and compare the Department’s results against other agencies with a similar size and demographics. The database will let you compare the number of facility types such as ballfields, basketball courts, and tennis courts and the data will be applicable to the communities surrounding Munster that are also utilizing PRORAGIS and not based on a median of the national average.

Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)

The State of Indiana has been using the 1983 NRPA guidelines as a benchmark since they were first established, but has created its own LOS guidelines for park and recreation open space. Indiana established LOS guidelines divided into three recreation acreage categories: Local, State/Federal (regional), and Total (statewide) as outlined below:

- Local (County, Township, City or Town) recreation acres: Land owned by municipal, township and County governments, and land privately owned but open for public use.
- State/Federal (Regional) recreation acres: Land owned by either State or Federal governments for public recreational use.
- Total (Statewide) recreation acres: Total of all public recreation land statewide that is owned by all the entities in the other categories.

The State of Indiana took the above categories and created LOS guidelines for parks, recreation and open space for all Hoosiers. Indiana's guidelines for outdoor recreation for acres per 1,000 people are:

- County LOS (Local): 20 acres per 1,000 people (.02 acres per person) of public (local) recreation acres
- State/Fed (Regional) LOS: 35 acres per 1,000 people (.035 acres per person) of public State and Federal (regional) recreation acres
- Total (Statewide) LOS: 55 acres per 1,000 people (.055 acres per person) total (sum of) acres of public recreational acres from the first two categories

According to the The Indiana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2016-2020 (SCORP), Lake County meets this recommendation as a county for County or Local LOS.



Park Standards and Classification Descriptions

NRPA states “A park system, at a minimum, should be composed of a ‘core’ system of park lands, with a total of 6.25 to 10.5 acres of developed open space per 1,000 population.” In addition, as a means of organizing the open space facilities found in the Munster Parks and Recreation, the park sites are classified according to a NRPA hierarchy that provides for a comprehensive system of interrelated parks. These NRPA guidelines and definitions serve as a good baseline for determining a minimum standard for park services; however they are refined to address the needs of the users of the Munster Parks and Recreation Department (MPRD). The classification and acreage of the properties owned or leased by the MPR are outlined in a matrix later on in this report’s inventory and assessment section. The classifications used in the MPRD are as follows:

- Mini Park
- Neighborhood Park
- Community Park
- Open Space/Green Space
- Special Use

Chapter 11’s maps illustrate the Munster Parks and Recreation Department’s parks and facilities that are owned or leased as well as illustrate the service areas for Mini, Neighborhood and Community Parks.

Mini Parks

The smallest type of park, “mini parks”, are mainly designed to serve a concentrated population or a specific age group or function but they can serve persons of all ages located in the immediate area. Another term

“pocket park” has also been used to identify mini parks in recent years. They are designed for up to a ¼-mile radius of service and are 1.5 acres or less in size. The park is generally a “walk-to” type park, meaning no parking facilities for automobiles are normally found. Their primary purpose is to provide recreation to residents where major roads do not have to be crossed. The amenities provided can center on play apparatus for young children; however, some include passive activities for adults and seniors depending on the needs of the surrounding neighborhood. Other amenities typically include gazebos, benches, scenic overlooks, picnic tables, and ornamental landscaping. Mini park service levels are 0.25 to 0.5 acres per thousand residents.

The MPRD contains 5 mini parks, and includes:

- Sunnyside Park
- Monon Park & Trailhead
- Rotary Park
- Orchard Park
- John Friend Park

Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks form the foundation of the MPRD and serve as the recreational and social focus of the neighborhood. They generally range in size from 5 to 10 acres; however, due to the available land within the community as well as the amenities provided, sites as small as two acres in size may be appropriate for a neighborhood park. Neighborhood parks are designed for a ¼ to ½ mile radius of service. Concentrated intense recreation activities are common in these parks and they are usually designed within a limited amount of space. These parks serve residents in a variety of age groups. The park should be easily accessible and access should be uninterrupted by major roads or other significant barriers.

Neighborhood park features include aesthetically designed play areas, picnic areas, splash pads, ball fields, skating, open space for field games, shelters, and walking paths. Typically neighborhood parks do not provide off street parking; however parking may be necessary due to the scope of activities and size. Neighborhood parks

should serve between 10,000 to 20,000 residents, or 1.0 to 2.0 acres per thousand people.

The MPRD contains 10 neighborhood parks, and includes:

- Beech Park
- Briar Creek Park
- Burlwood Park
- Circle Park
- Cobblestones Park
- Evergreen Park
- Grove Park
- Kiwanis Park
- Twin Creek Park
- White Oak Park

Community Parks

Community parks are diverse in nature, serving a broader purpose than the neighborhood or mini parks. They are larger than neighborhood parks and are intended to serve large populations of the community as a whole.

Community parks usually have both day and evening activities which can result in lighted fields and amenities. Community parks include a mix of active and passive activities and attract users of all ages. Large play structures, baseball fields, football fields, soccer fields, hiking trails, sled hills, and swimming pools can all be part of a community park. The service area for such a facility can vary based upon the size and scope of activities offered; however, a park of this type may serve 50,000-80,000 people or 5-8 acres per 1,000 people.

Community parks generally range in size from 15 to 50 acres. However, due to available land area, sites over 10 acres in size can be appropriate to accommodate such activities. These parks are designed for a 1 to 3 mile radius of service and usually serve two or more neighborhoods. They are also easily accessible by multiple modes of transportation with on-site parking available.

The one-mile service area radius for this park classification as shown in Chapter 11 indicates MPR's community park covers the majority of the land within

the Department's boundaries, except the far south end of town, most of which is served by neighborhood and mini park sites.

The MPRD contains 7 community parks, and includes:

- Bluebird Park
- Centennial Park
- Community Park
- F H Hammond Park
- Heritage Park
- Stewart Park
- West Lakes Park

Special Use Parks

Special use parks are areas that include specialized recreational activities. These activities can have a very broad range from field houses, marinas, museums, gardens, outdoor theaters, nature centers, and golf courses. NRPA does not have specific standards for special use parks; however, these parks usually provide amenities that serve the entire agency boundary as well as visitors from outside the community.

The MPRD has 3 facilities that fall into the special use category:

- River's Edge Disc Golf
- Heritage Park (Kaske House)
- Clayhole Lake

Detention and Open Space

In addition, the MPR has 4 sites which do not provide any recreational activities meeting the Mini, Neighborhood, or Community Park criteria. Therefore, for this analysis, they have been classified as open space. These sites are typically dry detention sites, natural areas, or open green space. These sites might provide connections to the existing bike path system.

The MPRD contains 4 Detention/Open Space sites:

- 45th Avenue Greenspace
- Lawler Park Greenspace
- Redbud Open Space
- White Oak Woods

Parks and Facilities Overview And Levels of Service (acres per 1,000 population)

The MPRD oversees 44 park sites and facilities with a total of 345 acres. The MPRD Park Matrix reflects the current inventory of parks, their acreage, classification, and amenities as shown in Chapter 11. MPRD currently is providing 345 acres of developed land, or 14.93 acres per 1,000 population, which exceeds the NRPA recommendation of 6.25 to 10.0 acres/1,000 population. This calculation includes the acreages of Community, Neighborhood, Mini, and Special Use parks.