

— SAN JOSE —
**PARKS, RECREATION &
NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES**



Greenprint Update

Steering Committee #4:

Approach to Plants/Landscape

Methodology to Evaluate Park Quality



August 3, 2017

Approach to Plants and Vegetation

Responding to the Steering Committee's comments on Part I of the Needs Analysis, the Greenprint project team proposes adding plant and vegetation condition as an analysis point, looking at this within reinvestment needs as a standalone topic, and factoring it into the green infrastructure discussion.

The proposed approach involves analyzing the vegetation elements that are part of the Park Condition Assessment (PCA) as a means of evaluating the parks themselves and the existing measures of their condition. Three criteria within the PCA process relate directly:

- Trees
- Shrubs
- Groundcover/flowers

Analysis of the individual scores would include:

- Calculating an average of the three vegetation features for each park.
- Comparing the average vegetation scores to the overall PCA average, identifying parks that are below PCA 3.0 for vegetation and not for the overall PCA (highlighting parks that might otherwise be considered adequate).
- Review by PRNS staff to identify any parks that have poor overall vegetation quality but are not identified by PCA scores, which could indicate a failure of these measures.
- Parks flagged for sub-standard (less than 3.0) vegetation would be added to the layered needs analysis of parks, providing one more measure from which to evaluate the system.

Proposed Methodology: Quality Evaluation for San Jose Parks

Purpose

As we move into the needs assessment of San Jose’s Greenprint Update, we are shaping our assessment approach which will incorporate geography and demography. A further piece we would like to factor in is **park quality**. Park quality is a key driver for making capital investment and programming decisions. From a citywide perspective, we propose that each park site be evaluated for quality using aerial photographs, geographic information, and applying the criteria presented here.

Note for discussion: No groundtruthing will occur as part of this analysis.

Defining ‘Quality’ for the Purpose of Analysis

There are many ways that quality is discussed in terms of parks: design, materials used, condition, level of maintenance, among others. For the purpose of evaluating quality at the citywide scale as a factor in a multi-layered planning assessment, we use Joseph Juran’s definition of quality as “fitness for use”.

Criteria

The following criteria represent those that address “fitness for use” and can be objectively evaluated. At each park, a score of 0, 1, or 2 will be given for each criterion, with 2 representing highest ranking. When tree canopy prevents evaluation, a 99 will be placed in the criterion’s scoring column.

A. Surrounding Environment

The surrounding environment impacts the quality of the user experience at a park. It has an impact on perceptions of safety as well actual use of a site, and is an indicator of whether the park is woven into its local context. For this criterion, existing land use and transportation can be scored as follows.

0 – Poor quality surrounding environment: Industrial or auto-oriented retail uses, adjacent highways or wide streets with poor crossings.

1 – Mixed quality or neutral-quality surrounding environment.

2 – Good quality surrounding environment. Residential, mixed use, or downtown/neighborhood commercial district land uses and streets with good crossings.

B. Surrounding Density

Parks are more apt to be used and valued by residents who have less open space. These parks are enlivened by the activity and other people using these spaces for daily activities like exercise, pet walking and growing food. The City also sees a greater return on investment per resident for the park's resources. Additional density around parks also allows for additional partner resources to be brought to bear to improve the programming of the park. For this criterion, existing density can be scored as follows.

0 – Low density: Park is primarily surrounded by R-1 districts, all Industrial Districts, CO, A, and CG zoning districts.

1 – Medium Density: Park is primarily surrounded by CN, PQP, CP, R-2, R-MH, MS-C, and CIC zoning districts.

2 – Higher Density: Park is primarily surrounded by DC, DC-NT1, MS-G, GC and R-M

C. Clarity of Space(s)

Rather than one undifferentiated space, parks—like buildings—should be experienced as a series of defined “rooms.” These rooms separate incompatible uses, support crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED), and reinforce a high-quality identity for parks. These rooms can be defined through a combination of paving, topography, vegetation, fencing, walls, and other means. This concept of rooms should not be interpreted as enclosed spaces that one cannot be viewed from, but rather pieces of a composed, considered experience.

0 – No or low clarity of park spaces. Undifferentiated views and spaces View of key activity area(s) from surrounding streets are impeded.

1 – Neutral: air photo does not allow a determination.

2 – Views of key activity area(s) from surrounding streets appear to be unobstructed.

D. Access to Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL)

Through programs like the national Park Rx movement, community parks are increasingly viewed as a key, low-cost tool within a community's comprehensive approach to public health. Two key ways that parks promote health are through healthy eating and active living (HEAL). Promoting health in parks has subsidiary benefits as well: increasing usership, gaining more “eyes on the park” and encouraging healthy norms for all park users. In evaluating a park's access to HEAL, the following types of facilities and programs should be considered. We recognize that not all components are currently represented in San Jose:

- HE: Healthy Eating: community gardens, food “forests,” market gardens, farmer's markets, healthy food concessionaire
- AL: Active Living: a marked-distance walking loop trail, exercise stations, exercise circuits, Safe Routes to Parks connections

0 – Neither healthy eating nor active living elements from the list above are present at the park

1 – The park has at least one component from the healthy eating list AND at least one component from the active living list, but not both.

2 – The park has at least one component from the healthy eating list AND at least one component from the active living list.

E. Variety of Experience – Built Environment

Parks that offer a variety of recreation opportunities provide a better user experience and invite different types of users into the park. Through the public involvement activities of the Greenprint Update, we gained input on preferences for the basic features parks in San Jose should include, and have incorporated these preferences into the scoring.

0 – Missing one or more of:

- a picnic area (picnic table or shelter structure),
- designed play environment (playground, sprayground), or
- at least one other outdoor recreation facility (ballfield, sports court, dog park, skate park, etc.)

1 – Includes a picnic area (picnic table or shelter structure), designed play environment (playground, sprayground) and at least one other outdoor recreation facility (ballfield, sports court, dog park, skate park, etc.)

2 – Includes more than one additional activity areas and features than those included in score 1.

F. Variety of Experience – Programming

Programming—concerts, movie-nights, performances, yoga, kid’s events, community festivals, etc.—can have a profound effect on the quality of a park, bringing people, activity and engagement to the site. Programming can also reflect the surrounding community and its values, reinforcing a sense of shared history, identity and purpose that includes events at the park. The most powerful programming integrates itself with the daily and weekly rhythms of park users, so that it becomes part of the community’s expectation of place.

0 – Regular, city-sponsored/supported programming either does not occur or happens irregularly (less than once a month).

1 – City-sponsored/supported programming occurs between once a month and once a week.

2 – City-sponsored/supported programming occurs once a week or more frequently.

G. Art

Public art can serve a myriad of purposes in enhancing the experience of a park. The benefits of public art include attachment to a place, increased economic performance, aesthetic appreciation, supporting the local community of artists/craftspeople and more.

0 – No art at the site.

1 – Integrated art that enhances, but does not overshadow, the park experience. Examples of this might be embedded paving patterns, tile mosaics on walls, small sculptures or artist-designed tree grates.

2 – Signature art defines a park or room within a park. Usually more monumental in scale, these elements become iconic symbols of the park and are the social media moment that people are

drawn toward. (Although at a different scale, the Bean in Chicago's Millennium Park is an example of such signature art).

H. Setting

Oftentimes, parks are created to provide public access to a particularly compelling or breathtaking natural or manmade resource like a lake, signature building or bridge, mountain vista, cityscape or coastline. These singular settings encapsulate the layout of a site affects the quality of the park user's experience. A site should have a rational circulation system that connects activity areas. Within the activity areas, compatible features and amenities should be grouped to create nodes of activity.

0 – The setting does not differentiate this park from others.

1 – The setting for the park contributes to its quality, identity and success, and the setting is of localized importance rather than regional (e.g. a park along a creek).

2 – The setting for the park defines or helps define its quality, identity and success, and the setting is of regional importance (e.g. a bayshore or view to distant mountains).

I. Social Media

As we live more and more of our lives online, social media posts have become an important indicator of the "stickiness" of particular park sites. In the competition for people's time and attention, retailers and marketers are even designing "social media moments" into malls and lifestyle centers. To understand which of San Jose's park assets people are attached to as demonstrated via social media postings on popular platforms like Facebook and Instagram by dividing each park's social media impact into quintiles.

0 – The social media footprint for this park is within the bottom three quintiles.

1 – The social media footprint for this park is in the fourth quintile.

2 – The social media footprint for this park is in the top (fifth) quintile.

Methodology

1. The evaluator will use columns on the inventory spreadsheet to record evaluation scores.
2. The evaluator will use Google Earth and a file based on the current GIS inventory to view the GIS data overlaid on air photos.
3. The evaluator will work park by park through the entire city park inventory, using the following process:
 - A. The evaluator will check that the GIS file depicts the park in the right location. If incorrect, the evaluator will flag the park in the inventory spreadsheet for incorrect location.
 - B. If correct, the evaluator will compare the inventory with the aerial photo. If the inventory and photo are not consistent, the evaluator will flag that park in the inventory spreadsheet.
 - C. Using easily accessible means (e.g. for a remote evaluator, using Google StreetView and aerial imagery rather than visiting each park), the evaluator will evaluate the site for each of the identifies criteria, placing a score in the appropriate column on the inventory spreadsheet.
4. For each criterion, the evaluator will select and capture a screen shot of a site or area that exemplifies each score (0, 1 and 2) for use in illustrating the ratings. This will result in 30 images.

In addition to this evaluation of park quality, the analysis will take into account existing measures of condition (The Park Condition Analysis or PCA) and public input results from the Greenprint process, notably the aggregated rankings associated with each park that received feedback in Mapita.