



CHAPTER 4

PARKS, OPEN SPACE, TRAILS, RECREATION, ARTS AND CULTURE



Gilbert Community Center

Vision Statement

Gilbert encourages the health and well-being of its residents through diverse recreational opportunities. The Town offers safe, well maintained facilities, parks and open spaces, including, locally and regionally connected multi-use trails, equestrian paths and bicycle lanes. Our community also fosters arts and cultural experiences.



INTRODUCTION

As the community has grown, Gilbert has steadily added to its system of parks, open space and trails through cooperative public and private efforts. Parks provide visual appeal, promote healthy lifestyles and give a sense of pride to neighborhoods.

Public parks coupled with nearby attractions and services are often the "engine" that drives tourism in a community. Parks also moderate artificially higher temperatures from the urban heat island effect through shading and evapotranspiration. Parks and open spaces help to define the character of the community by creating beauty, breathing room and value.

*"Kids need more
interactive
opportunities"*

*-- Resident at Open House
Meeting*

The Parks, Open Space, Trails, Recreation and Arts & Culture Element will guide decision making to ensure that as the Town develops, residents will continue to have access to the parks, trails and open spaces that are part of the foundation of Gilbert's lifestyle. Locations for bike paths are planned to assist with non-vehicular connections. A new section for Arts & Culture has been added to this Chapter to develop a long range plan to bring art to public places to be enjoyed by all. This Chapter combines the statutorily required elements for Open Space, Recreation and Bicycling. This Chapter also includes goals, policies and implementation strategies that will help carry out the Town's vision for these amenities in the following sections:

- Parks and Open Space
- Trails
- Recreation
- Arts and Culture
- Needs Analysis
- Goals and Policies
- Implementation Strategies



4.1 Parks and Open Space

Background

The Town of Gilbert's goal is that every person in the Town will have convenient access to safe public parks and affordable recreation opportunities. Parks and open space play vital roles in:

- Promoting the importance and value of leisure
- Enhancing community vitality
- Supporting human development and social ties
- Promoting health and personal wellness
- Providing a quality of life
- Attracting new businesses
- Connecting one with nature
- Fostering environmental stewardship

Private development has had a great role in the development of parks and open spaces by providing local accessible Neighborhood Parks/Tot Lots under the auspices of a Home Owner's Association (HOA). In addition, HOA's provide open space areas with retention areas and landscaped tracts along roadways. These sites, though not equipped or large enough to provide large sports facilities or recreation centers, do add a considerable amount of additional acres to an overall inventory of parks and open space. There are numerous commercial recreation and open space facilities vital to our community as well. These include golf courses, lakes, health clubs, swim clubs and dance studios.

Definitions

District Park: Parks of thirty (30) or more acres are designed to accommodate residents within a three-mile radius and provide a wide variety of activities. These parks include play apparatus, lighted and non-lighted game courts and/or game fields, picnic tables, restrooms, potable water, multi-purpose trails, activity centers and parking areas. They may include special use areas for swimming, biking, skating, dogs, equestrian or other specialized recreational activities.

The Town owns seven developed District Parks and manages one Maricopa County property, Rodeo Park. Most of these parks are located along the major regional trail systems allowing multi-modal connectivity with neighborhoods and other community destinations.

Neighborhood Parks/Tot Lots: A one-quarter to six (6) acre park serves as a neighborhood's



Gilbert Neighborhood Park

recreational and social focus. These parks may include some on or off-street parking, low-level lighting, potable water, shade, seating, outdoor gathering areas and a turf open space area for sports play. They generally include landscaped paths, sports courts and play structures. Connectivity to the surrounding area, by way of residential streets, bike lanes, sidewalks and interconnecting trails are vital to the park's success. These parks may be associated with open spaces in retention areas or within landscape tracts. These parks are intended to provide convenient play areas for small children and informal gathering areas within walking distance of one's home. These types of spaces are typically privately owned and maintained by the Home Owner's Association (HOA's) and designed for primary use by the subdivision residents only.

Special Use Park: Special Use Parks and facilities are planned to be publicly or privately owned and maintained on public lands. They are designed and maintained to meet specific community needs and are not defined by size. They may include skate parks, aquatic centers, riparian habitat preserves, specific sports fields (e.g., soccer fields), dog parks and equestrian centers.

Open Space: Open Space includes passive and active areas such as floodways and floodplains, retention/detention areas, urban farms, school lands, golf courses and open space buffers.

The Town’s guidelines for residential, commercial and industrial development address desired open space buffers. Open space may be publicly or privately owned and maintained. In Gilbert, these open space areas are typically classified on the Land Use Map as Golf Course, Parks/Retention, Public Facility/Institutional or Utility/Transportation Corridors.

Linear Parks and Linkages: Since the linear parks traverse miles through the Town, they are interrupted by roadways and development; therefore, in order to provide safe routes and linkages, crossings have been planned at strategic locations. The Town’s Bicycle and Canal Trail map illustrates locations for existing and planned canal crossings and park-and-rides. These crossings, along with other amenities, are located along the linear parks and they have been partially funded by grant monies. Improvements made and planned to these linear parks include multi-use trails, amenities at rest areas and trail crossings. The trail along the Loop 202 Santan Freeway and the utility corridors continue to provide improvements with each development.



Neighborhood Connection to Western Powerline Trail



Hetchler Park-Soccer Complex



Freestone Park



Cosmo Dog Park



PARKS, OPEN SPACE, TRAILS, RECREATION, ARTS & CULTURE

4.2 Trails

The Town of Gilbert currently maintains approximately thirty (30) miles of trails and shares several major trail connections with the surrounding municipalities of Queen Creek, Mesa and Chandler. Multi-use trails are located within the Town's Central Trail system which consists of canals, utility corridors, the Loop 202 Santan Freeway and the Union Pacific Railroad. A Bicycle and Canal Trail Plan Map is included in the exhibits. Additional multi-use trails are planned along Riggs Road, Chandler Heights Road and Hunt Highway. In addition, many trails connect through private development and provide connections to regional destinations. The General Plans for Gilbert and Queen Creek identify both Queen Creek Wash and Sonoqui Washes as major equestrian, bicycle and pedestrian trails through the communities. These trails connect to parks, the San Tan Mountains and the San Tan Regional Park managed by Maricopa County.



Powerline Corridor/Central Trail



Western Powerline Trail

The most significant linear parks in Gilbert are noted on the Parks, Open Space, Trails and Recreation Plan Map, included in the exhibits, as the Central Trail. These trails, or linear parks, consists of three canals (Consolidated Canal, Eastern Canal and the RWCD Canal) that traverse through the planning area in a north-south direction and the Western Canal running in the east-west direction along the Loop 202 Santan Freeway and within utility corridors. The natural corridors of Queen Creek Wash and Sonoqui Wash also serve as linear parks. These linear parks provide buffers between land uses, recreation for a variety of activities and link other parks, open space and trails together. Since Gilbert is relatively flat, these linear parks provide great opportunities for safe pedestrian and bicycle routes.



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4.3 Recreation

Gilbert's recreational facilities are an important part of what makes the town a desirable place to live. The Town continues to invest in its infrastructure and public facilities as resources are available. This investment requires a strong emphasis on maintenance, rehabilitation and modernization. The Town is also committed to providing new services in areas that are under-served and in areas where change is expected in the future.

Gilbert has a variety of facilities to provide public recreation including community centers, cultural centers and special use facilities and parks. Special use parks have a community or region-wide service area, depending on the type of facilities they contain. The Town currently offers opportunities for equestrian trail riding, ice-skating, dog exercise and training, rodeo activities, replica baseball fields and wildlife observation. Gilbert also is committed to creating natural habitats as an integral part of its wastewater reclamation activities.

Riparian Preserves and the Riparian Institute

The Town of Gilbert has developed the means to conserve water and habitat in unique areas referred to as riparian preserves. In three locations, with a total of approximately 320 acres, the Town uses reclaimed water to recharge groundwater and also maintain riparian habitat. These special use areas are important water and wildlife conservation areas that make Gilbert unique and a more sustainable community.

The Riparian Institute was created in 2000 to assist in conservation and education efforts for the preserves and to promote this type of sustainable development in other communities. The total number of visits since 2000 surpassed one million in the year 2010. The preserves have become a highly recognized tourist destination in the region. Experiential education opportunities by the Institute have expanded to meet high demand by tourist visits. The Interpretive Plan for the preserves serves as a five year plan for development. In addition, a strategic plan for the Institute has been developed for long range planning purposes and should be referred to for future decision-making.



4.4 Arts & Culture

Arts and Culture are important aspects in remembering our past, enhancing the quality of life in the present, and enabling the community to establish a common voice for the future. Arts and Culture strengthens neighborhoods and enhances residents to become involved in the community. By allowing for the appreciation of public art, Gilbert becomes more appealing to residents, businesses and visitors.

The Town of Gilbert does not have a revenue stream for public arts or cultural activities at this time. Despite having limited revenue sources, the Town has utilized public art in open spaces. Artwork that enables a community to view these artifacts without having to pay a fee for this viewing is a positive influence in the community.

Arts & Culture Definitions and Inventory

Art: Items of artwork, sculptures, or other property that displays a cultural aspect of our community. Art in Gilbert includes:

- Underpass artwork on roadways
- Water features in parks
- Sculptures in the plaza areas of public places
- Historical monuments
- Unique building features
- Artwork within buildings

Public Art: Historically, the majority of public art works have been stand-alone projects such as murals, monuments or memorials. More recently, the range of public art has expanded to include artwork integrated into infrastructures such as sidewalks, roads, bridges, power plants and waste disposal and water treatment facilities.

Artwork can also be added to an existing structure such as sculptural forms in a lobby or exterior courtyard or a mural on the ceiling or wall. Public art can also be a performance, a temporary exhibit or a portable works collection.

Unlike art in a gallery or a museum, public art is accessible to the public and frequently involves the community in its selection and creation. Public art can come in any form that incorporates original artistic design. In most cases, an artist is commissioned to create artwork for a specific location.

Culture: Examples include music, theatre, writings, poetry and community events. Culture is a complex mix of language, social structure, values, beliefs, expressions of heritage, art and customs.



Big League Dreams: District Park



4.5 Needs Analysis

The future brings a range of challenges in providing excellent parks, trails, recreational facilities and activities. Some of those issues include funding to acquire additional land and a renovation and maintenance plan for aging facilities. Ongoing activities include planning, construction and renovation of parks, trails and recreation facilities during build-out. As the community develops, open space areas now known as agricultural lands, will be converted to residential or commercial uses with limited land devoted for parks, retention basins or school grounds. The Town will need to work closely with these private developments to ensure connectivity through use of trails, potential for shared use and quality amenities.

The Town also recognizes that over time, there will be unique needs for Gilbert's changing demographics. An example of that need would be the specific recreational needs for an aging population. The Town's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and Program identifies the magnitude of costs to develop new parks and complete and renovate existing parks.

A Master Plan is needed that will include a comprehensive inventory of parks, open space areas, recreational facilities, trails and designations of access points to open space areas and resources. It should also formalize a mechanism to support the arts and culture and related activities and venues.

The analysis will include forecasted needs and policies for managing and protecting these resources. The analysis will also include staffing and budget resources that are necessary to meet the needs of residents in maintaining the expected quality of life.



Discovery Park Playground



PARKS, OPEN SPACE, TRAILS, RECREATION, ARTS & CULTURE

4.6 Goals & Policies

Goal 1.0

Continue to enhance the quality of life for Gilbert residents by providing quality recreational and cultural opportunities.

Policy 1.1 Develop a ten (10) year Parks, Open Space, Trails, Recreation, Arts and Culture Master Plan that includes an inventory and analysis of the aforementioned aspects of this chapter with recommendations for resource management. The Plan should include inventory and analysis, community needs/goals and a ten (10) year action plan to maintain the current level of service, maintenance and operations within the Town's budget constraints.

Policy 1.2 Provide a variety of recreational experiences that meet acceptable design principles that are attractive, safe and easy to maintain. Provide for high visibility and use Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) techniques when designing and building new facilities.

Policy 1.3 Encourage the use of renewable energy concepts such as Green Building, LEED principles and use of solar energy whenever applicable.

Policy 1.4 Provide a variety of amenities that are appropriately designed and equipped, age-appropriate and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Policy 1.5 Work to provide, through the use of parks, trails and public art, visual relief from development, reinforcing the character of the surrounding neighborhoods and providing shade to reduce heat-island effects.

Policy 1.6 Develop parks that are connected to the Central Trail System as defined in this plan or identify direct routes between them. Public access easements may achieve this commitment.

Policy 1.7 Support the formation of volunteer citizen patrols to help keep parks, trails, open space and recreational facilities safe and secure.

Policy 1.8 Provide recreational opportunities within detention facilities used in conjunction within flood zones and regional transportation corridors, including the Loop 202 Santan Freeway.

Policy 1.9 Raise the awareness of the value of Arts and Culture by encouraging them in the community, including philanthropic organizations, businesses, individuals and government.



Neighborhood Connection to Western Powerline Trail

Goal 2.0

Pursue public/private partnerships to provide public or private assets related to this chapter.

Policy 2.1 Incorporate parks, recreational facilities and trails and with existing and future public facilities publically or privately funded projects. Also, encourage the inclusion of public art and the creation of art/cultural activities within these projects.

Policy 2.2 Continue to work with the Maricopa County Flood Control District for co-location of parks to provide a cost effective alternative to storm water management while providing useable space for community recreation.

Policy 2.3 Develop an integrated relationship between the Town, schools, religious facilities, HOA's and the private sector to ensure access to public recreational facilities and optimum use of parks and open space.

Policy 2.4 Create partnerships with local businesses to support interconnectivity between shopping destinations and park/trail systems.

Policy 2.5 Establish a Special Event policy that encourages cultural and physical fitness events in parks and on trails.

Policy 2.6 Develop natural habitats and wildlife viewing areas at public groundwater recharge sites and locate facilities at these sites for education and eco-tourism.

Policy 2.7 Encourage the development of formalized relationships between the Town of Gilbert, Maricopa County and other regional jurisdictions in order to share professional knowledge and responsibilities for the identification and protection of archaeological, historic and cultural resources.

Policy 2.8 Encourage new development to co-locate parks or open space areas with school facilities and existing parks, trails and recreational facilities that are consistent with adopted Guidelines.



Polar Ice Skating Rink: Crossroads District Park

Goal 3.0

Celebrate the heritage of Gilbert.

Policy 3.1 Encourage agricultural landowners/producers, large lot landowners and other groups to collaborate on agricultural easements, community gardens, Farmer's Markets and land preservation.

Policy 3.2 Encourage the growth of recreational related areas and facilities keeping an open, nonurban feel to Gilbert.

Policy 3.3 Provide a north-south bike route within the Heritage District.

Policy 3.4 Provide for facilities that enhance the unique identity of Gilbert as a leader in the preservation of and education about sustainable resources.

Policy 3.5 Foster the enhancement and expansion of Gilbert's existing historic/heritage district and landmark areas. The downtown Heritage District is a potential center for arts and culture serving the East Valley.



Riparian Preserve at Water Ranch

Goal 4.0

To be recognized as a premiere education and recreation destination demonstrating sustainable use of natural resources, activities for a diverse population and preservation of wildlife habitat.

Policy 4.1 Provide the best recreational facilities and activities possible that cater to a diverse population, including wildlife.

Policy 4.2 Encourage additional recreational venues that can develop “citizen science” as a tourism element of the Town’s economic development strategy.

Policy 4.3 Encourage community, public and private organizations to support the maintenance and operation of existing and new recreational facilities.



Riparian Preserve Wildlife

Goal 5.0

Provide sufficient resources to acquire, develop, upgrade and maintain parks.

Policy 5.1 Update the CIP annually.

Policy 5.2 Provide adequate funding for acquisition, construction and maintenance of recreational assets through bonds, system development fees, grants and other means.

Policy 5.3 Encourage community, public and private organizations to partner with the Town and support the maintenance and operation of all recreational assets.

Policy 5.4 Explore resources and partnerships for tournaments, signature or cultural events and festivals at the local, regional or national level.

Policy 5.5 Develop a long term maintenance strategy for parks.



Western Powerline Trail



Cosmo Dog Park



PARKS, OPEN SPACE, TRAILS, RECREATION, ARTS & CULTURE

4.7 Implementation Strategies

1. Parks & Open Space	Responsible Entity	Complete By
1. Fund and create a ten (10) year Master Plan that will include a comprehensive inventory of parks, open space areas, recreational resources, trails and designations of access points to open space areas and resources. The analysis shall include forecasted needs, policies for managing and protecting open space areas and resources.	Community Services Planning	Ongoing
2. Adopt and implement design guidelines for public and private parks, trails and recreational facilities to ensure consistent development of these assets throughout the Town.	Community Services Planning	Ongoing
3. Establish public park maintenance standards.	Community Services	Ongoing
4. Plan for funding to meet future needs as established in Gilbert’s Standards for District Parks facilities.	Community Services	Ongoing
5. Annually update the maintenance plan to address aging facilities and asset management.	Community Services	Ongoing
6. Annually budget sufficient resources to maintain the public parks, pursuant to the adopted maintenance standards.	Community Services	Ongoing
7. Design and construct a District Park in the Santan Character Area.	Community Services Town Manager’s Office	Long Term

8. Work with the Maricopa County Flood Control District to open the Eastern Maricopa Floodway for recreation use and amend the Eastern Maricopa Floodway Area Drainage Master Plan to reflect parks identified in this plan.	Intergovernmental Liaison Community Services Public Works	Ongoing
9. Allocate funding for the construction of Chandler Heights and Rittenhouse Basins in the Town's Capital Improvement Plan.	Community Services	2008-2012
10. Work with ADOT on the use or acquisition of detention basins for park purposes.	Town Manager's Office	Ongoing
11. Work with Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport on design of basins and recharge areas located near the airport.	Public Works	To be determined
12. Work with ASU Polytechnic on the co-use of old military ballparks and/or other parks as appropriate.	Community Services	Ongoing
13. Create a Riparian Area Overlay Zoning District for riparian areas including recharge facilities, canals, Queen Creek Wash and Sonoqui Wash and any other appropriate areas.	Planning Community Services Public Works	To Be Determined
14. Explore various methods to obtain land for Town of Gilbert District Parks.	Town Manager's Office	Ongoing
2. Trails	Responsible Entity	Complete By
1. Design, build, maintain and retrofit new and existing trails using new standards set by Parks Master Plan.	Community Services	Ongoing
2. Support Maricopa County in the completion of the Maricopa, Marathon Trails and other trail projects as well as the Queen Creek/Sonoqui Wash Trail.	Community Services Town Manager's Office	Ongoing
3. Work with the Town of Queen Creek in the design and development of the Queen Creek and Sonoqui Wash.	Community Services	Ongoing

4. Continue to develop partnerships between the Town and other entities, like MCFCD, RWCD, SRP, HOAs, non-profit organizations and local business.	Community Services Town Manager's Office	Ongoing
5. Work with RWCD for use of RWCD property on both sides of canals.	Community Services Town Manager's Office	Ongoing
6. Create and promote programs like "Adopt a Trail".	Community Services	Ongoing
7. Create trails interactive website with maps and information about trail safety and the Town's trail network.	Community Services	Ongoing
8. Design, adopt and implement the "share the trail" educational program and brochure.	Community Services	Ongoing
9. Actively participate in the National Trails Training Partnership and the Rails to Trails Conservancy Program.	Community Services Town Manager's Office	Ongoing
10. Participate in the League of American Bicyclist and become part of the National Recreational Trail System.	Community Services	Ongoing
11. Sign and stripe selected arterial and collector streets for bicycle lanes and maintain it as per Bicycle Plan.	Public Works	Ongoing
12. Work with the National Endowment for the Arts and other groups to provide art displays on trails.	Community Services	Ongoing
13. Protect equestrian trails and users by forming alliances with the Arizona Horse Council.	Community Services	Ongoing
14. Publish and update trail maps in related websites.	Community Services	Ongoing
15. Work with the Gila River Indian Community on establishing a 20 foot wide public access trail easement located on the south side of Hunt Highway to continue the trail planned by the City of Chandler.	Town Council Community Services Town Manager's Office	Ongoing

16. Work with ADOT to construct bridges with sidewalks and bike lanes on both sides of the bridge.	Community Services Town Manager's Office Public Works	Ongoing
17. Work with ADOT to use culverts under the Santan Freeway for pedestrian, bicycle and equestrian crossings.	Community Services Town Manager's Office Public Works	Ongoing
18. Continue to work with ADOT to obtain right-of-way along the Santan Freeway for the construction and retrofit of trails	Community Services Town Manager's Office	Ongoing
19. Establish and execute a plan for the construction of underpass multi-use trail grade-separated crossings of arterials and canals.	Community Services Town Manager's Office	Ongoing
20. Work with the City of Chandler on the design and development of the Brooks and Cloud Drive Trails.	Community Services Town Manager's Office	Ongoing
3. Recreation	Responsible Entity	Complete By
1. Have the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board oversee progress of outlined goals and policies.	Community Services	Ongoing
2. Continue to develop partnerships between neighboring communities on the co-ownership of recreational facilities.	Community Services	Ongoing
3. Design future aquatic facilities for year-round use. Retrofit existing facilities with "bubble" enclosures to support year-round use.	Community Services	Ongoing
4. Seek corporate partners to develop a water park within a district park.	Community Services	Ongoing
5. Develop pedestrian-oriented cultural, educational, and business amenities in connection with the south Riparian recharge facility.	Community Services Town Manager's Office	Ongoing

4. Arts and Culture	Responsible Entity	Complete By
1. Have the Human Relations, Culture & Arts Promotion Commission oversee progress of outlined goals and policies.	Community Services	Ongoing
2. Fund and create a Master Plan that will include a comprehensive inventory of arts & cultural areas and resources. The analysis shall include forecasted needs, policies for managing and incorporating arts and culture resources into land use areas and entertainment districts.	Community Services Planning	Ongoing
3. Develop a plan for the utilization of the Downtown Heritage District, the Higley Performing Arts Center, and the Town's District parks and open spaces to be used for arts and culturally related events.	Community Services Town Manager's Office Development Services	Ongoing
4. Seek funding to build the stability and excellence of arts and cultural organizations, support arts education programs, and maintain the town's art collection and cultural facility infrastructure.	Community Services Town Manager's office	Ongoing
5. Provide increased opportunities for citizens of all ages to participate in arts and culture in schools and the community.	Community Services	Ongoing
6. Create new partnerships and collaborations that will lead to new synergies within the arts and cultural community.	Community Services Town Manager's Office	Ongoing
7. Develop parks, libraries, schools, community centers and historic buildings as venues for arts and cultural activities.	Community Services Town Manager's Office	Ongoing
8. Foster development of affordable office, rehearsal and meeting spaces for cultural organizations, spaces for the production of experimental works, and multi-use theater spaces that can house several groups collaboratively.	Community Services Town Manager's Office Development Services	Ongoing

9. Facilitate public/private partnerships that fund, develop, operate and maintain multi-use arts and cultural facilities.	Community Services Development Services	Ongoing
10. Plan, design and construct new cultural facilities through the town bond program.	Community Services Town Manager's Office Development Services	Ongoing
11. Explore the possibility of creating an art in private development program that includes incentives, requirements and /or funding mechanisms for inclusion of artwork and arts and cultural spaces in private development.	Community Services Town Manager's Office	Ongoing
12. Develop a signature public space that includes green spaces, shade and water features and can accommodate large public gatherings and arts and cultural activities.	Community Services Town Manager's Office	Ongoing



Freestone Park