



Chapter 9

Tall City Tomorrow Quality of Life



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Tall City Tomorrow Quality of Life

INTRODUCTION

Midland provides a high quality of life to its residents, not only by providing valuable jobs and homes, but also through community amenities such as parks, trails, cultural facilities, and good schools. Continuing to support that quality of life is important to Midland's residents. While the city continues to grow, residents want to make sure that the features they love about Midland remain constant. This is important for existing residents but also when businesses are trying to attract and retain employees. Chapter 6 explored the aesthetic character of the community. A city that looks good and offers a great quality of life offers people the opportunity to expand their horizons, encourages a sense of community, advances creativity, and creates happy residents. Happy and engaged people are ultimately more productive and connected to the community. These attributes are especially important to a community that is trying to attract and retain quality residents and therefore a quality workforce.

Tall City Tomorrow Quality of Life is the parks, recreation, and cultural element of Tall City Tomorrow Plan. It draws heavily on the input residents provided during the planning process and the city's existing Parks Master Plan.

ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

Park Expansion

Midland has a number of excellent parks but park expansion has been slow over the years. During times of fast growth the city has not had the tools in place to make sure that the park system grew with the population. New neighborhoods have often been left without a park within walking distance (see page 32, Park Distribution). When growth has slowed, the city is often left without the budget resources, public support, or the sites necessary to fill in the gaps. Park acquisition and financing has to be separate from maintenance budgeting and the expansion of the system has to be done with a long term vision. Cities often purchase park land with a phased approach to development of that land. For a larger community park the land may even be purchased well ahead of residential development but with a longer term vision toward residents' needs.

Draws and Playas

Numerous sections of this plan have discussed the opportunity that the playas and draws offer. These discussions have included:

- » Using the draws to expand the trail and bike system in Tall City Tomorrow Transportation
- » Multi-purposing the draws and playas for recreation and stormwater protection in Tall City Infrastructure
- » Expanding the city’s parks and open spaces by using the playas in Tall City: An Integrated Land Use Vision
- » Adding to the city’s character by improving the draws and making sure they are clear of debris in Tall City Character

Like all of the central United States, Midland doesn’t have mountains or oceans but it has its own special and beautiful qualities. The playas and draws offer the best access to the region’s natural beauty and the animal and floral life. Incorporating these assets into the city’s park and recreation system will add to the city’s quality of life, enhance stormwater protection, and connect residents to destinations around the city.

Cultural Connections

Heritage and cultural opportunities and arts and entertainment have always been important to Midland residents. For many communities these events are centered in distinctive districts or neighborhoods, but this is not the case for Midland. The city lacks distinctive and identifiable districts or neighborhoods where residents gather to share in the arts and entertainment. There are venues scattered around the city but no central hub of activity and energy. The Tall City Central District Plan and the Land Use Vision identifies districts that could be improved and locations for future neighborhood centers. Supporting the city’s traditional history and culture, while providing opportunities for new artists, will preserve the city’s culture and expand residents’ creative opportunities.

TALL CITY TOMORROW QUALITY OF LIFE PLAN

Parks, recreation, and cultural resources are more than just about residents’ play and leisure time, but are critical to the city’s health, civic, and economic quality. Midland should be a hometown to every resident, a place that provides them opportunities to connect with fellow residents and make healthy life choices. No resident should be isolated from the community or lack easy access to the city’s parks. To achieve high quality services and cultural assets, communities must come together to provide the resources necessary for long term investment. If these investments are not made, Midland will continue to be challenged to be seen as a “hometown.”



“Perhaps more than any time in recent history, the City of Midland should consider the intangible “Quality of Life” issues that can transform a common city into a great city.”

– 2012 City of Midland Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan

GOALS

1. Provide park facilities and recreation services accessible to Midland’s growing population.

Midland’s historic trend has been to focus on the need for housing and commercial needs during growth periods without the consideration of additional open space needs. Once the growth slows, the community’s support for funding is often hard to find. In the future Midland must incorporate open space and parks into the demand created by any new population and must monitor the needs and interests of existing residents closely.

2. Develop one or more cultural districts within Midland that offer a rich variety of art and entertainment options.

Residents throughout the planning process talked about their love of the city but also lamented that there was limited opportunity for arts and entertainment. It is always easier to feel that the “grass is greener” in another community but residents should not have to leave the community on a regular basis to find these options. Midland should provide a wide variety of options in places that allow residents to feel connected to the community.

3. Identify and establish an interconnected network of natural areas that provide recreation options and protect natural resources.

What makes for a high quality of life varies from household to household but there are a few items that are common. Good schools and parks are often at the top. Every resident, from the mom pushing a stroller on an evening walk to a group of friends from school should be able to access the city’s parks and open spaces. Recreation options should not require a ride in a car, but access to the city’s best natural resources should be easy and allow residents to make healthy life choices on a daily basis.

4. Encourage neighborhood and community destinations that are family friendly and support strong social networks.

In an age of social media, when many young residents’ interactions take place online, communities need to be even more vigilant in providing quality spaces for people to relax, exercise, and interact with fellow residents. Personal interactions and relationships make for stronger communities but those places first have to exist in a city. Residents that are isolated are less invested in their property, their neighborhood, and ultimately in their community. If Midland wants to remain the family-friendly community it is, the city will need to support the development of places that bring people together in safe and affordable ways.

INITIATIVES & POLICIES

1. Update the city’s existing Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan as required

Action item: *Implement existing and future parks, recreation, and open space master plans.*

Cities are required to complete a comprehensive parks, recreation, and open space master plan every 10 years. The last plan completed for Midland was in 2007, meaning that an extensive update should take place in the next year. The update to this document offers the city a great opportunity to assess the city’s park needs after a heightened growth period that had not yet started in 2007. More important is the implementation of this document. This strategic vision should be implemented by the city to ensure the continuation of a high quality system and access for all to quality parks.

2. Add park land to the city’s system to ensure the same level of service as the city’s population grows

Action item: *Expand the city’s neighborhood park system to growth areas outside of Loop 250.*

Within areas that are already developing the city must take more aggressive steps to identify and secure property for parks. For areas that have not already seen development the city must implement a park dedication system that ensure that new neighborhood parks are developed in conjunction with new growth (see Initiative 5).

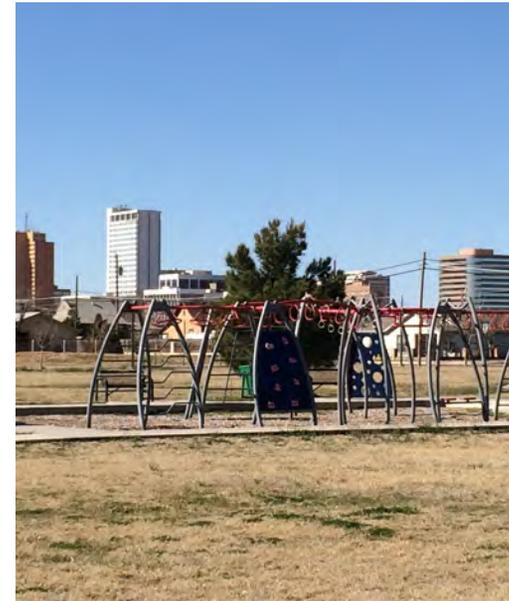
Action item: *Add to the city’s community park system through the preservation of large playas*

As the city grows in population new community parks will also need to be added. Residents should expect that at minimum the city will maintain the current level of service or acres per resident that exist today. Surrounding the city are several large playas. These areas provide a great opportunity to enhance stormwater protection, connect residents to the region’s ecosystem, and expand the city’s parks system. These parks may have to be slightly larger than the playa itself to ensure good stormwater protection and adequate space for park amenities. These areas should also be connect to surrounding neighborhoods, the park system, and major community destinations through the draws and hike and bike system.

3. Plan for enhancements to existing parks

Action item: *Budget adequately for the maintenance and improvement of existing parks on an annual basis*

The city should provide a reliable and diversified funding package for park maintenance, capital improvement, and operations. This may including working with local organizations to assist in these efforts. This works best for maintenance and capital improvements but not necessarily for operations. Although, companies may be tapped to sponsor some operations or events. As part of these partnerships and through the Park and Recreation Master Plan, locations for new recreation interest (dog parks, Frisbee golf, etc.) should be identified and development and operations budgets assembled.



“Host Specialized events in Parks”

– Community Comment



4. Use trails and the draws to connect the city's existing and future parks through a linear recreation system

Action item: Implement the 2014 Hike and Bike Trails Master Plan (see also Transportation initiatives)

Midland's Hike and Bike Trails Master Plan outlines an extensive list of potential projects that will connect key destinations. The plan includes priority projects, design standards, funding sources, and responsibilities. This system can be an easier and sometimes more affordable way to connect residents in underserved neighborhoods to parks.

Action item: Fund improvements to existing draws

The condition of the draw system can be sporadic and older sections with the existing city can have the least appealing environments. For some of the city's draws, especially in the eastern half of the city, the draws are channelized or attract debris. Improvements should enhance stormwater management and provide a quality greenway that is accessible to residents. Draws outside of Loop 250 should also offer non-motor vehicle access around the city and connect these areas to destinations, such as parks, schools, churches, and commercial centers inside the Loop.

5. Identify and implement new programs and policies for funding park expansion

Action item: Adopt a park land dedication ordinance

Neighborhood parks are a fundamental component of any park system. These are the parks where families walk for playground time or a picnic. They are the spot where neighbors interact and connect with their community. In the past there has been no set policy or ordinance to ensure that new neighborhood parks are developed in growing areas. The city should adopt a park land dedication ordinance that would assist in the acquisition of neighborhood park land. This can be done by requiring either a land dedication or payment of cash in lieu of a dedication by developers as a condition of subdivision plat approval. The development of these spaces then can be phased in as growth occurs within an area. Ultimately everyone benefits from this type of approach – one development doesn't have to cover the full cost of including a park, and they have added value to their development because of the appeal neighborhood parks have for buyers.

Action item: Team with local civic organizations and philanthropists to fund the expansion and improvement of the park system

The city should develop partnerships and sponsorships with local organizations to assist with the improvement and expansion of the park system. For smaller neighborhood parks partnerships with civic organizations can assist in the maintenance for fundraising for smaller scale improvements, such as new playground equipment. For larger scale or community parks the city should consider teaming with local businesses or philanthropists to fund or sponsor expansions. These often include naming rights and other recognitions for the sponsoring company.

6. Preserve or enhance natural habitat and open spaces

Action item: Maintain and improve the existing habitat areas.

Spaces like the I-20 Wildlife Preserve should be supported as a community amenity. City support may come in the form of infrastructure, such as adequate road access and quality signage directing residents and visitors to the site. These sites provide great education opportunities, open spaces for walking trails, and improved stormwater management.

Action item: Require preservation of existing playas as development occurs around them.

These resources should be preserved, both for the stormwater management protection they can provide and also the natural features that they can provide to residents. Midland's stormwater system is heavily dependent on the draws and streets, often resulting in standing water in the streets. In future development the playas should be used to assist in the absorption of this stormwater and protection from flash flooding along the draws.

Action item: Connect the city's playas through greenways and draws and make them accessible to the public.

As a key part of the city's future community park system the playas should be connected through a system of greenways, draws, and parkway system. The draws provide an easy and comfortable way to make these resources connect for people outside of their cars. Using the proposed parkway system (See Tall City Tomorrow Transportation: Collectors Initiative 4) motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists should be connected to the playas.

7. Implement land use regulations that support the development of mixed-use developments

Action item: Implement land use guidelines outlined in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 outlined the benefits of encouraging a mix of land uses and activities. Implementation of an intensity-based approach combines like uses and encourages the creation of more vibrant centers of activity. These centers add to residents' quality of life by improving access to daily services, jobs, and entertainment options.

Action item: Direct city investments and redevelopment dollars toward mixed-use projects.

Residents asked for more destinations where a person could walk, dine, and shop in one stop. The city should prioritize infrastructure and redevelopment dollars in the Central District and the Eastside Infill area toward projects that create mixed use destinations. This same approach should be taken for any of the city's existing commercial nodes.

“Create more parks: not just manicured ball-fields, but “natural areas,” where people can walk/bike/horseback ride. While the Basin is not beautiful, it is interesting and there is beauty in the details—the small things like the various flora and fauna.”

– Community Meeting Comment

“I'd like to see more parks/walking trails/central shops where you could spend an afternoon (think small town downtowns with a central anchor) hanging out.”

– Greta M.

“Don’t be so quick to eliminate western culture from Midland, please. Western heritage, ranching, and such played a rather large part in developing the area, and it seems to be forgotten in all cultural events. Please bring some back.”

— Ken M.

8. Connect the city’s museums and cultural destinations

Action item: Improve pedestrian and bicycle access between the city’s museums and the destinations

The Museum District is a great community amenity but access to this area is limited. Expansion of the Hike and Bike system should include access to the city’s museums (in and outside the district) and connect key destinations together.

9. Work with local organization to develop a cultural heritage plan

Action item: Identify ways that the city can assist in implementation of a cultural heritage plan

Long time Midland residents take an immense amount of pride in the city’s history and character. Efforts should be made to encourage the preservation of Midland’s cultural heritage and history through the development and implementation of a cultural heritage plan. The plan should build awareness with new residents about what makes Midland special and the pride that long-time residents have in the community.