



# Chico Area Recreation and Park District



# Park and Recreation Master Plan

Adopted November 2008



## **Acknowledgments**

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# Chico Area Recreation and Park District



# Executive Summary





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# Executive Summary



“The greatest thing we do is create public spaces where we can celebrate our connection with nature and each other.”

– Hank Dittmar, Chief Executive,  
Prince Charles Foundation for the  
Built Environment

## Background

Since its formation, Chico has had a tradition of providing parks, recreation areas, and recreation facilities for residents of the area. The first recreation area provided was the 2,000-plus acre Bidwell Park that terminated on the west side of the City of Chico. Gifted to the City by Annie Bidwell, it included recreation improvements at One Mile Recreation Area and on Children’s Park Playground at the north end of Main Street and Park Avenue. With the recent addition of the nature preserve area above what was Upper Park, Bidwell Park now encompasses more than 3,500 acres. The City also developed a one-block City Plaza Park across from City Hall on Main Street, between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets and Park Avenue.

Upper Bidwell Park primarily provided for natural outdoor recreation activities, such as hiking, nature study, fishing, and swimming in natural pools along Big Chico Creek. The City later permitted the development of Bidwell Golf Course, an observatory, and recreation facilities at Horseshoe Lake in the Upper Park. Facilities for family and social activities were developed at the Five Mile Recreation Area just east of Manzanita Avenue; and in the Lower Park area between Manzanita Avenue on the east and Mangrove Avenue, which is the park’s west entrance, on the southwest end of the main park. Individual picnic sites were developed along Big Chico Creek between North and South Park Drives. At One Mile Recreation Area, facilities developed include picnic areas; horseshoe courts; grass playfield; restrooms; a large, fenced, and themed preschool age children’s play area – Caper Acres; and a campfire ring. A dam was also installed to create a swimming pool, called Sycamore Pool.

Later, group picnic facilities and a U.S. Forest Service tree research area were developed midway along South Park Drive, west of what is now Parkview Elementary School. The area was named Cedar Grove. Just east of this area was a barn and small outbuilding that later became the current Bidwell Park Nature Center area. Over time, the residents of the Chico area wanted to have organized recreation programs; however, the Bidwell Park and Playground Commission did not see programming as its roll for the provision of these services or facilities. As a result, in 1948, the residents of the Chico area approved the creation of the Chico Area Recreation and Park District (CARD).

The CARD board and staff worked with the City to develop Sycamore softball field at One Mile Recreation Area. CARD also contracted with the City to lease and develop sports fields and recreation facilities on the 35-acre Bidwell Park Hooker Oak Recreation Area just east of Manzanita Avenue. CARD then worked with the Chico Unified School District (CUSD) to develop lighted sports fields and tennis courts at the CUSD high schools. CARD later developed recreational swimming pools: Shapiro Pool at Chico Jr. High, and Pleasant Valley Pool and Recreation Center on CARD property adjacent to Bidwell Jr. High School.

Working with Butte County, the Chapman Recreation Center – renamed the Dorothy Johnson Center – was developed in 1969 (with HUD funding) at the 16<sup>th</sup> and C Street, Chapman Park. In the early 70s, CARD purchased the site of its current headquarters on Vallombrosa Avenue, and approved funding to develop the existing CARD Community Center and administrative offices. These facilities were dedicated in 1975. This was before 1978 when California Proposition 13, the Jarvis-Gann tax limiting initiative, was passed by California voters. This new law no longer allowed CARD to set a tax rate to cover its operations and capital improvement projects.

Following Proposition 13, CARD and the City adopted a program whereby new residential development would provide for the dedication of parkland, fees, or a combination of both to ensure parkland acquisition and improvements in areas of new development. One area of new development was adjacent to Highway 99 and 20<sup>th</sup> Street. Instead of developing a park site east of the freeway, the developer made land available for a park next to Chapman School. After a series of land swaps and purchases, CARD assembled 34 acres for the Community Park site at that location. Aided by California Park Bond Funds, Community Park, at the north end of Whitman Avenue (now Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway), was initially developed and dedicated in 1983. Six acres were later purchased and added to Community Park to expand to its present 40 acres.

Chico continued to grow, particularly to the northeast, northwest, and southeast. A master plan was needed to see that parks and recreation facilities were provided for these new areas. In 1988, a 20-year CARD Master Facilities Plan was developed and approved. The plan was then adopted into the City's General Plan. Part of the plan included meeting the need for neighborhood parks in northwest, northeast, and southeast City neighborhoods.

Sites were purchased for these parks on West 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue for Oak Way Park; on Ceres and Henshaw Avenues; and in southeast Chico on Baroni Avenue. Sites for small parks in neighborhoods were also provided by developers, within maintenance assessment districts, including Peterson Park, operated by CARD; Hancock Park; and Nob Hill Park. The City purchased, developed, and maintains the small Depot Park to the west of the old Chico train station on 4<sup>th</sup> Street; Humboldt Neighborhood Skate Park on Humboldt Road; and the small Ringle landscape park at the north intersection of Broadway and Main Streets.

A community park site was also planned north of Eaton Road to the east of the CA 99 freeway. When the DeGarmo family farm site (just west of CA 99 and north of Eaton Road) was being considered for sale, CARD officials met with the family and an agreement was entered into that allowed CARD to purchase the 25-acre site for a community park, to be named in perpetuity for the patriarch of the family, Luther DeGarmo. Eleven acres were also purchased and added to DeGarmo Community Park to bring that site to the current 36 acres. A housing development proposed in northeast Chico (on the northeast corner of Wildwood and Manzanita Avenues) was not approved, and the City subsequently acquired a 15-plus acre site at that location for Wildwood Park.

Most of the park sites in the 1988 CARD Master Plan were purchased. However, due to escalating construction costs, impact fees were not sufficient to fully develop all of the sites. More important, the City found it did not have sufficient general fund money to maintain these new parks as originally planned. Therefore, the Chico City Council adopted a policy requiring that local maintenance districts be established to maintain new neighborhood parks. The residents of the service areas for Oak Way and Baroni Parks approved assessment districts to maintain those parks, which were subsequently developed. Two neighborhood park sites, located at Ceres Avenue and Henshaw Avenue, remain undeveloped because maintenance assessment districts have not been approved by property owners in those service areas. During a series of public meetings, the neighbors in the service area of the planned neighborhood park at East First and Verbena Avenues decided to have this park remain a natural area maintained by the City.

Phase One of DeGarmo Community Park has been developed and Phase Two has been approved, with financial help from City Community Park Impact Fees. However, there are limited CARD funds to maintain the park. The master plan for DeGarmo Park includes a

recreation pool/aquatic facility; a multi-generational community center with senior citizen facilities; and other needed recreation facilities. Although greatly needed, no funds were available to develop the multi-use aquatic complex with competition facilities.

In 2006, the CARD Board of Directors authorized funds to update the outdated 1988 Master Recreation Facilities plan. In recent years, CUSD has experienced declining enrollments. In 2006, voters approved development of the 57-acre Canyon View High School (CVHS) site, with its traditional sports fields, courts, and other public facilities to serve CUSD and secondarily, residents of southeast Chico. Yet the decision to develop recreation facilities was put on hold. One of the first actions in the current CARD master planning process was for the CARD Board of Directors to ask that CUSD not commit, for other uses, the planned and approved land for recreation facilities that were to be at the CVHS site, which could be used for public recreation until the CARD Master Plan was completed. As such, this CARD Master Plan addresses the need for, and provision of, community facilities in southeast Chico, whereby CVHS could serve both the CUSD and CARD residents.

This 2008 master plan, to provide for Chico area public recreation facilities through the year 2028, was developed via a comprehensive process involving a Technical Advisory Committee consisting of CARD's partners providing recreation resources, including: the City of Chico, CUSD, Butte College, California State University, Chico, and others providing recreation resources to the residents of the greater Chico area. It also involved a Citizen's Advisory Committee consisting of residents from throughout the CARD service area and various representatives of recreation resource and service providers. The process included a number of public meetings for input regarding the recreation facility needs for CARD residents and for existing or desired recreation programs.

The plan addresses the deficiencies in the current parks and recreation facility resources. It identifies where and how needed recreation facilities should be provided. It further notes that a new Nexus Study is needed that will determine the cost to provide funds to fully develop parks and provide needed recreation facilities for the Chico area, and the impact assessments needed to provide these public recreation facilities. Supplemental funding from other sources such as RDA, sales taxes, bonds, gifts, corporate sponsorships, and other sources will be needed to provide major recreation facilities. The CARD Master Plan also addresses the need for ongoing funding to maintain these recreation resources. Finally, the CARD Master Plan identifies the need for CARD to work closely with its publicly funded partners identified on the Technical Advisory Committee above, and with private and commercial providers of recreation resources in the Chico Area Recreation and Park District to optimize the provision, use, and maintenance of recreation facilities to benefit the residents of the District.

### **Why Was the Plan Developed?**

The Chico Area Recreation and Park District Park and Recreation Master Plan will become the guiding document for the future of the District as it relates to parks and recreation facilities and services. As the greater Chico area continues to transition and evolve as a premier community within the northern Sacramento Valley, so too will the park and recreation needs of its residents and visitors. As this evolution occurs, the community has been mindful of maintaining the character and heritage that has made it such a unique place to live, work, and play over the years. Easy and equitable access to parks and recreation facilities is a highly valued element of any community. A high quality public realm, including tree-lined streets, safe pedestrian and bicycle environments, natural areas, places to recreate and meet neighbors, attractive parks, recreation facilities, and places for community gatherings and celebrations are all attributes

that enhance community livability and desirability. In addition, the urban forest, parklands, and surrounding open spaces improve environmental health by providing cleaner air and water and preserving critical urban wildlife habitat.

The benefits of a great park and public open space system go well beyond their contribution to the physical environment. The public parks, trails, and recreation system is available to all citizens, regardless of age, ability, or economic status, and provides many great benefits for all people. Parks, recreation, trails, and community areas that celebrate local culture, heritage, and values tend to improve physical and mental health, create opportunities to develop and enhance the community, add to civic pride, and provide positive opportunities for leisure time pursuits. Parks also provide for business, tourism, art, and cultural interests and needs. This master plan is a fundamental element for advancing continued investment in such a critical component of the public realm.

Parks and recreation have always been an integral part of the community, one which residents strongly support. Over the years, CARD leaders have recognized the diverse park and recreation needs of residents, while also being mindful of its relationship with the City of Chico in providing opportunities to address these needs. Time and generous community support have afforded the City the ability to secure large areas of open space in the community for passive and nature-based recreation. However, securing space for active recreation and urban parks has proven more challenging over the years. As such, with the development of this master plan, CARD is making efforts to correct past deficiencies while at the same time looking towards the future to ensure that adequate and appropriate parks and recreational opportunities are made available to residents as the community continues to grow and evolve.



The specific focus of the plan was to:

- Develop a detailed inventory of all parklands and quantify the level of service for existing and future residents.
- Assess the current condition of both CARD and City parks and recreation facilities, including consideration of safety conditions and ADA issues.
- Analyze and determine community needs through discussions with user groups and trends in recreational programs and parks.
- Identify areas of the community currently underserved by parks and changes in population to determine parkland and facility needs, as well as opportunities for synergies between parklands and future redevelopment projects.
- Define level of service standards, a classification system, and general design criteria for parks.
- Outline improvement programs that will update the features in existing parks.
- Create and define a clear vision and complementary goals and objectives for CARD parks and recreation facilities.
- Develop an action plan for implementation.

The emphasis of this Plan focuses on how CARD, in conjunction with the City of Chico and Butte County, can upgrade and enhance its existing parks, trails, and recreation system to better meet the needs of current and future residents. As part of this, the Plan identifies opportunities for the community to increase its total parkland through the enlargement of existing parks, the construction of new parks, and joint-use agreements with outside partners where feasible.

This Parks and Recreation Master Plan should be revisited and updated periodically, ideally every five years and in conjunction with the forthcoming City of Chico General Plan Update as well as Butte County's General Plan, to

ensure that it accurately reflects current and future needs, changing conditions, and to adjust priorities within the community as appropriate.

### **An Involved and Public Process**

The park and recreation master planning process for CARD began in January 2007. This process was developed through a series of meetings with several groups, all of which provided insight, advice, and guidance. These groups included CARD staff; the Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC), composed of community members and citizens representing diverse interests, which served as the primary advisory group; the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), consisting of staff from CARD, the City of Chico, the Chico Unified School District, and California State University, Chico, which provided technical guidance; and the Bidwell Park and Playground Commission. Lastly, the CARD Board of Directors provided invaluable advice, insight, and guidance that shaped the vision, goals, and details of the plan.

A detailed public involvement and community outreach effort was organized. Multiple interviews were conducted with frequent park user groups, including local sports clubs, cultural and civic organizations, and other interested parties. Additionally, two public open houses were held to solicit general community input.

The Plan also includes comparison studies with peer communities in the northern California area. Recreation trends from the California SCORP (State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan) and national recreational trends and statistics were also examined. In addition, prior and relevant plans were incorporated into this Plan, including the 1988 CARD Comprehensive Park and Recreation Master Plan; the unadopted 2002 CARD Park and Recreation Master Plan; the 2003 Nexus Study; the 2005 Municipal Services Review for Recreation and Park Services; 2006 City of Chico Municipal Services Review; the 2005 City

