

All land acquisition must have both an independent real estate appraisal report to establish fair market value and an environmental assessment before land can be purchased per City Council resolution. The City often applies for grant funding to offset the purchase price, in which case there generally additional review requirements. All purchases and acquisition of land rights require City Council approval.

D. Acquisition Criteria for Parkland Property within the City Limits

The following criteria are considered for all potential acquisitions. They are not weighted or listed in any order of priority.

1. City-wide System Balance/Geographic Distribution as well as Open Space Convenient to Each Neighborhood

Acquisition of sites for facilities to serve area-wide current or future demand for activities like basketball, ice and in-line skating, soccer, swimming, softball, and tennis must be considered as well as providing parks convenient to each neighborhood. The current standard is provision of neighborhood parks within ¼ mile of each residence. Opportunities in areas considered to be deficient (in terms of parkland) are considered as the City attempts to meet access and availability standards.

2. Natural Resource Protection

Decisions such as whether to preserve undeveloped or "natural" parkland and how to manage it by assessing its environmental integrity and potential to support a well-functioning ecosystem are considered. Natural Area Preservation staff evaluates how each natural area compares with others in terms of ecological significance, including such measures as biological diversity, presence of rare or unusual species, presence of invasive exotic species, and other factors.

3. Open Space and Green Space Imagery/Aesthetics

Acquisition evaluations include a consideration of vistas of trees, the river, and parks to provide visual relief from urban infrastructure.

4. Enhance Access and Linkage

Land that facilitates non-motorized transportation from urban areas and neighborhoods to other parks, connectivity along the Huron River and creeks, including wildlife corridors, and land that links other community destinations is considered. Parcels that would improve access or that contain unique natural or historic features adjacent to an existing park are a consideration.

5. Protection of the Huron River, Watersheds, and Water Quality

Protecting watersheds by incorporating fragile or important watershed features into the park system helps protect the overall health of the Huron River watershed and can help ameliorate flooding potential. Acquisitions along the Huron River and its tributaries that protect or enable better public use of this asset are a high priority.

6. Recreation Value and Suitability for Intended Use

When a specific need is identified to enhance recreation opportunities or provide better balance of park or recreation facilities, sites well-suited to satisfy that need are considered. A flat, well-drained field is a good example of site suitability for athletic fields, and having land that is buildable is crucial for certain types of amenities.

7. Method of Acquisition/Direct Costs

This criterion provides the opportunity to rate a site's value relative to how it will be acquired. Acquisition opportunities with grants, donations from neighborhood associations, gifts, and bargain purchases would rate higher than market rate purchases. Dedications, easements, and leases may also be preferable to outright purchase. Certain parcels of land may require a faster decision-making process because there is a high potential for development or purchase by another agency for non-public use that would lead to a loss of desirable land.

8. Provides for Future Needs/Anticipates Growth

As the City is growing, future needs for residents must be anticipated and accommodated. A site that addresses future City growth and recognizes other agency plans and impacts would rate highest in this category.

9. Long-Term Development and Maintenance Costs

Excessive development and maintenance costs that a potential acquisition site requires would be a factor in the perceived value of the acquisition. Sites requiring minimal anticipated development and/or maintenance costs would rate higher in this category.

E. Property Acquisition Options for Parkland and Greenbelt Properties

There are many tools available to secure land for public park and open space use. The following are the most common. Any single acquisition may involve more than one of these methods.

1. Outright Acquisition of Parcels

In many cases, the City may opt to purchase property outright and maintain full ownership and rights of a piece of land. Bluffs Park is an example of an outright acquisition (this criterion is for parkland acquired in the City only).