

# Urban Open Spaces

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**OBJECTIVE:** Recognize the value of urban open spaces (including among others: greenways, greens, squares, courts, plazas, urban parks and playgrounds, street medians, and tree lawns between street and sidewalk) as a structuring element in emerging urban areas, and as a part of a larger network of urban open space which may be linked to the rural open space system.

There is a fundamental difference in the value and character of open space in urban and rural situations. In the Rural Area, the County is often seeking to conserve large systems of land of particular value (such as agricultural and forestry lands) or to preserve areas of significant resources (mountain ridges, stream valleys, wildlife habitat.) Whereas, in urban areas some preservation of natural areas (such as stream valleys) occurs, but more often, open spaces are designed and created. Their value to the community is determined by their shape, configuration, and relationship to buildings and other built forms, as well as their natural attributes.

Urban open spaces will become more important as the County's Development Areas become denser and as additional urban areas are developed. The Open Space Plan's Development Area Maps delineate the resource areas that should be consistently maintained for open space as development occurs. In addition, specifically designed open spaces should be incorporated as amenities into urban developments to offset the higher densities. In evaluating higher density proposals, the County will consider how they relate to existing open space systems, and how they create new open spaces. In his book *Open Spaces*, August Heckscher states:

“Each city [urban area] is a place of its own, its uniqueness determined in large measure by patterns created by the alternation of structure and void, of buildings and spaces between. The larger green spaces, parks and parkways, riverbanks and waterfronts, give to a city the coherence that allows the urban dweller to have a feeling for the whole.”

“Such green spaces may be viewed as the city's skeleton. They are the underlying structure from which depend neighborhoods, institutional complexes, and business centers. A person who knows his parks can tell where he lives...and because parks are so often the product of basic topography, he should not be ignorant of how his city is related to land, to river, to sea.”

Greenways are discussed in detail, but all types of urban open spaces are recognized for their importance in providing structure to urban design, and contributing to the quality of life of all County residents.

**Strategy:** Evaluate all Development Area proposals for their contribution to the urban open space network.

**Strategy:** Seize opportunities for urban parks.