

Promoting Innovative Solutions to Increase Parks & Park Programs in Urban Neighborhoods



Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks

Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP) is a non-profit organization founded in 1997. FHBP's mission is "to promote, protect, and enhance the harbors, beaches, parks, trails, open spaces, natural preserves, and historic sites in Orange County."

Since 2000, FHBP has united conservation and community voices throughout Orange County through its Green Vision Project. Currently more than 80 organizations support the effort to increase the funding for parks, water quality, and open spaces in the region. One of the first tasks of the Coalition was to map conservation target lands. Known as the Green Vision Map, this map lays out the knowledge and efforts of the Coalition to preserve important landscapes.

The next major accomplishment of the Coalition was negotiating a comprehensive mitigation program. The Orange County Transportation Authority's Renewed Measure M includes approximately \$243.5 million (in 2005 dollars) or 5% of the freeway program to mitigate habitat impacts from freeway projects. The transportation sales tax measure was approved by a two-thirds majority of voters in 2006. The measure included funds to acquire, restore, and manage lands. This landscape level approach, with streamlined permitting, is a departure from the earlier piecemeal or project-by-project approach. With this funding, important acquisitions have begun to fill in the gaps in conservation in the County.

In 2011, FHBP published the General Plan Resource Directory to promote sustainable policies. The Healthy Communities Toolkit was later published in 2013 as a follow up to provide details on conservation and financing tools available to jurisdictions. In an attempt to widen our view, expand access to parks and nature, and reduce barriers to access, we undertook this study of parks in some of Orange County's more urban cities. From previous research on the existing amounts of parkland, three of the County's most park-poor cities were featured in this 2016 study.

Thanks to the collaboration with the Cities of Stanton, Garden Grove, and Westminster details on their existing parks and park programs were readily provided for our research. This particular study provides more than a dozen recommendations that any city, regardless of the number or park acreage, can implement to improve the community.

To Get a Copy of This Park Study

The Park Study can be downloaded for free from Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks website at: www.FHBP.org.

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Introduction

Chapter 1

"In merging nature and culture the most successful cities combine such universal needs as maintaining or restoring contact with the cycles of nature, with specific, local characteristics."

— Sally A. Kitt Chappell, Author

Imagine a child that didn't have access to a park to play, to fly a kite, to watch a bug, to skip rope, to use a swing set, or to gain new life experiences in nature and the out-of-doors. Unfortunately, in some local cities, this is not unheard of. What if the only thing keeping you away is that you don't know where the parks are located? What if the closest park is beyond a reasonable walk, then what?

The Trust for Public Land and The City Project have already analyzed park-poor communities in Southern California. They also looked at childhood obesity, demographics, and economics as it relates to park-poor communities. But no one has focused on Orange County and its park barriers. So, Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP) undertook a study on a handful of park-poor cities in Orange County to document where the parks exist and possible barriers to their accessibility, creation, and location. We also analyzed how far they are from existing residents so that future parks could be added or barriers reduced in specific locations. This report also includes a number of recommendations that are both replicable and scalable to all jurisdictions, not just park-poor, urban, and built out cities.

Study Purpose

In 2011, through the generosity of The Boeing Company, FHBP created a factsheet to understand Orange County Park and Walk Scores. This current effort dives deeper into three specific communities—Stanton, Garden Grove, and Westminster—where Park Scores were well below the recommended park acreage per thousand residents. The goal was to understand local park accessibility and sufficiency issues and to provide meaningful solutions to overcome the challenges.

Importance of Parks

The Trust for Public Land provided invaluable research related to the economic benefits of parks and their proximity to homes. Nearly every important measure, from increased property values to local economic revenues by tourists, is affected by improved access to parks. More recently, the health benefits of parks are being identified as well. Dr. Richard Louv, author of Last Child in the Woods, outlines what he termed "nature deficit disorder," with increasing rates of attention deficit, depression, and childhood obesity. Without access to parks, playgrounds, and places to



Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP

Experiencing a hike is something every child should have the opportunity to do.

play, our children and the greater community suffer. Recent articles from the Washington Post,¹ Stanford University,² and the New York Times³ all relay that access to nature brings important mental health benefits to all ages.

According to studies conducted by the University of California, Los Angeles and Berkeley, economically disadvantaged communities and communities of color tend to have fewer opportunities to access parks. The research indicates that with closer proximity to parks, an individual's likelihood of physical activity increases.⁴ Recently, Dr. Robert Zarr of Unity Health Care in Washington DC, has begun prescribing "walks in the park" instead of prescribing medicine for his pediatric patients. Access to, and availability of, places to play, exercise, and relax are important to our society and our health.

The types of parks differ depending on the age of a community. For example, looking at the older communities in north Orange County, significantly fewer regional parks exist compared with the newer communities in south Orange County.⁵ Therefore, as new communities get built, evolving information about better planning, walkability, community amenities, and sustainability have become better integrated.

See Map 1 on the following page.

The California Roundtable on Recreation, Parks, and Tourism created and adopted the *California Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights* that includes a basic list of experiences every child should have by the age of 14.

This is a step in the right direction for ensuring that we do not raise a generation of kids that has little to no experience in nature.

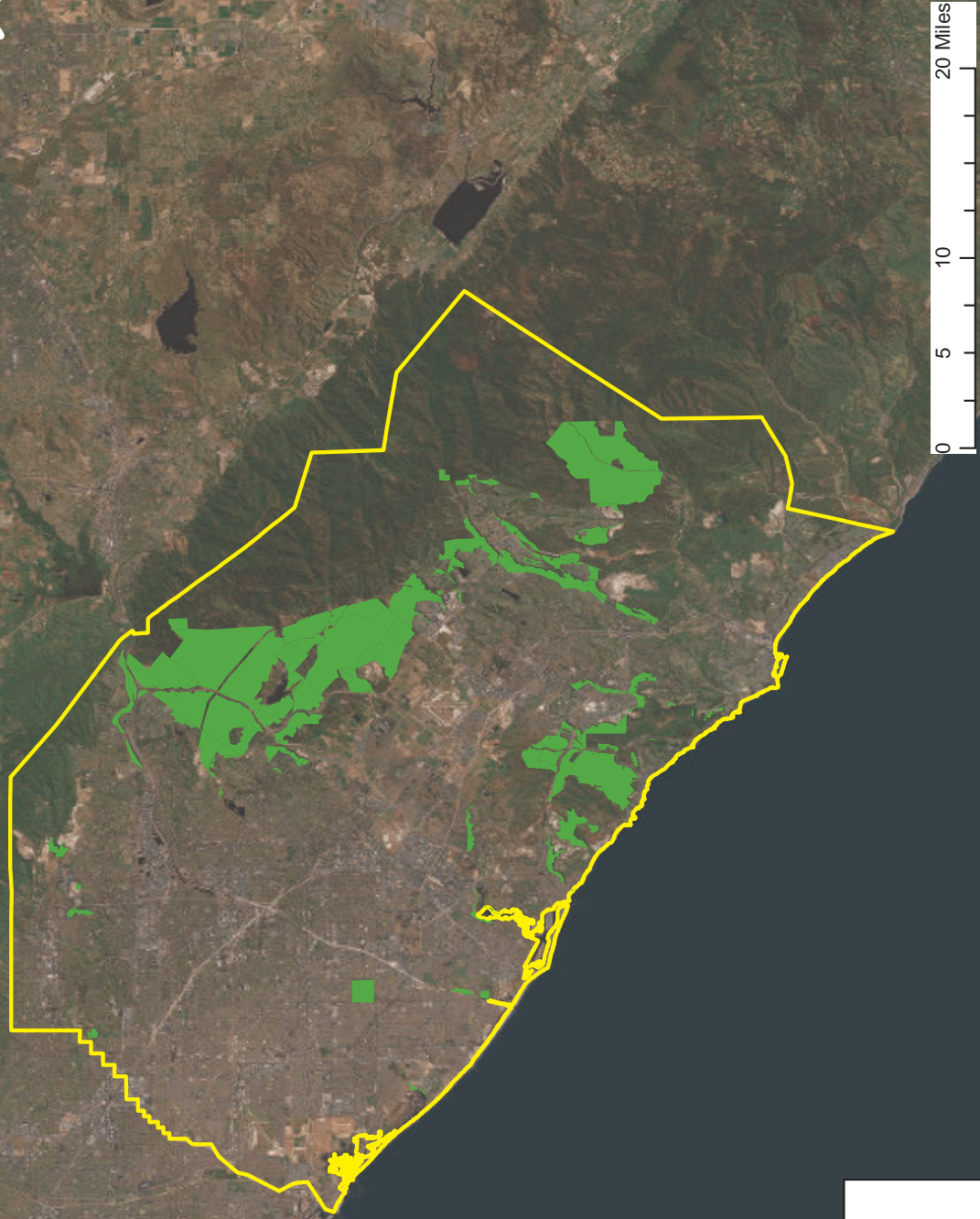
According to the *Bill of Rights*:

"Every child should have the opportunity to:



- Play in a safe place
- Explore nature
- Learn to swim
- Go fishing
- Follow a trail
- Camp under the stars
- Ride a bike
- Go boating
- Connect with the past
- Plant a seed"⁶

For these reasons, and many others, FHBP undertook this study. Through our research we documented where parks currently exist, determined which neighborhoods were within a 10 minute walk and conversely, which were not. We also looked at barriers that exist to gaining access to parks (i.e., walls, gates, parking, proximity to bus or bike routes). Using our Park and Walk Score factsheets, we selected three of the most park-poor communities in Orange County. Using our Green Vision Map as a resource, we mapped the parks, distances to neighborhoods, and made recommendations on where possible parks could or should be created. Neighborhoods outside the 10 minute walk zone, are identified as "target areas" in this study. To enhance park access, these target areas, should be the focus of the recommended strategies.

Orange County Regional Parks



LEGEND

	County of Orange
	Regional Parks

Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, iSat, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community

Map 1. The locations of Orange County's Regional and Wilderness Parks.

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Background

Chapter 2

*"Growing things soothe the mind, wild things uplift the soul,
rocks and hills and trees do something indefinable but positive
for the human spirit."*

— Thomas Kinkadee, Artist

The Quimby Act

The 1975 Quimby Act established a statewide requirement that developers set aside land, donate conservation easements, or pay fees for park improvements (called park-in-lieu fees). Revenues generated through the Quimby Act cannot be used for the operation and maintenance of park facilities. Many jurisdictions have enacted local ordinances that recommend a specific number of park acres, while others jurisdictions use the minimum of three acres per thousand residents as recommended by the Quimby Act.

Park Scores Report

In 2011, FHBP calculated the Park Score for each of the 34 cities in Orange County. Park Scores measure acres of protected parkland per 1,000 residents. The scores for this analysis were calculated using the 2010 Census data and the California Protected Areas Database.

Three analyses were conducted. The first analysis included city owned parkland only. The second analysis included city and county owned parkland. The third analysis included all publicly owned protected lands

and beaches, even those with restricted access, as well as lands protected by conservation non-profits. Only 13 cities met or exceeded 3+ acres in the city only analysis, while 24 met or exceeded it in the other two analyses.

See Maps 2-4 on the following pages.

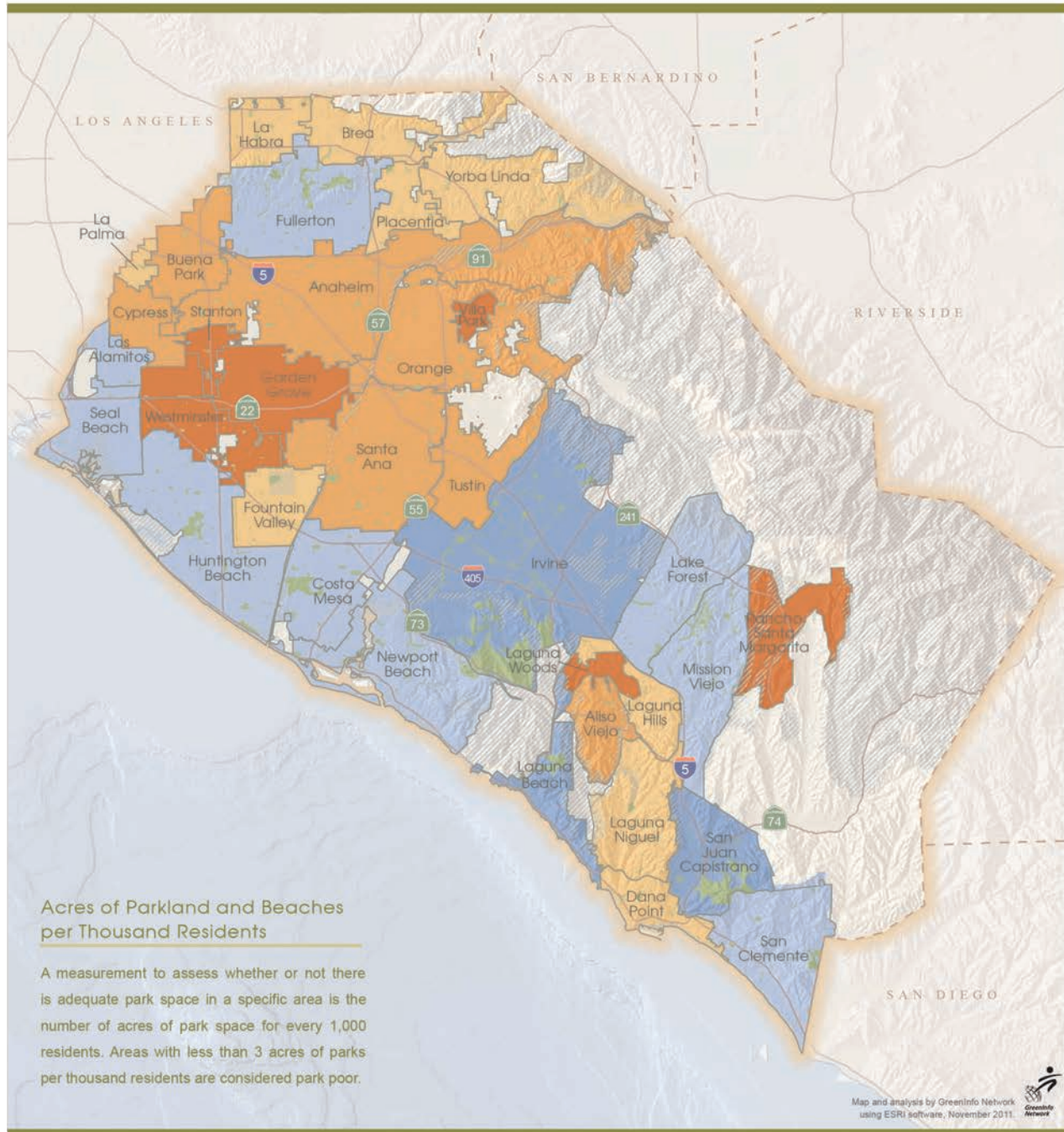


Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP

Dinosaur creatures allow imaginations to run wild in La Habra.

Park Score by City

Includes City Ownerships



Acres of Parkland and Beaches per Thousand Residents



Acres of parkland and beaches per thousand residents includes land with public access or restricted public access. Parkland and beach ownership includes city agencies only.
Data Sources: Demographics - 2010 census, Park/Green Space - CPAD v1.6, calandis.org

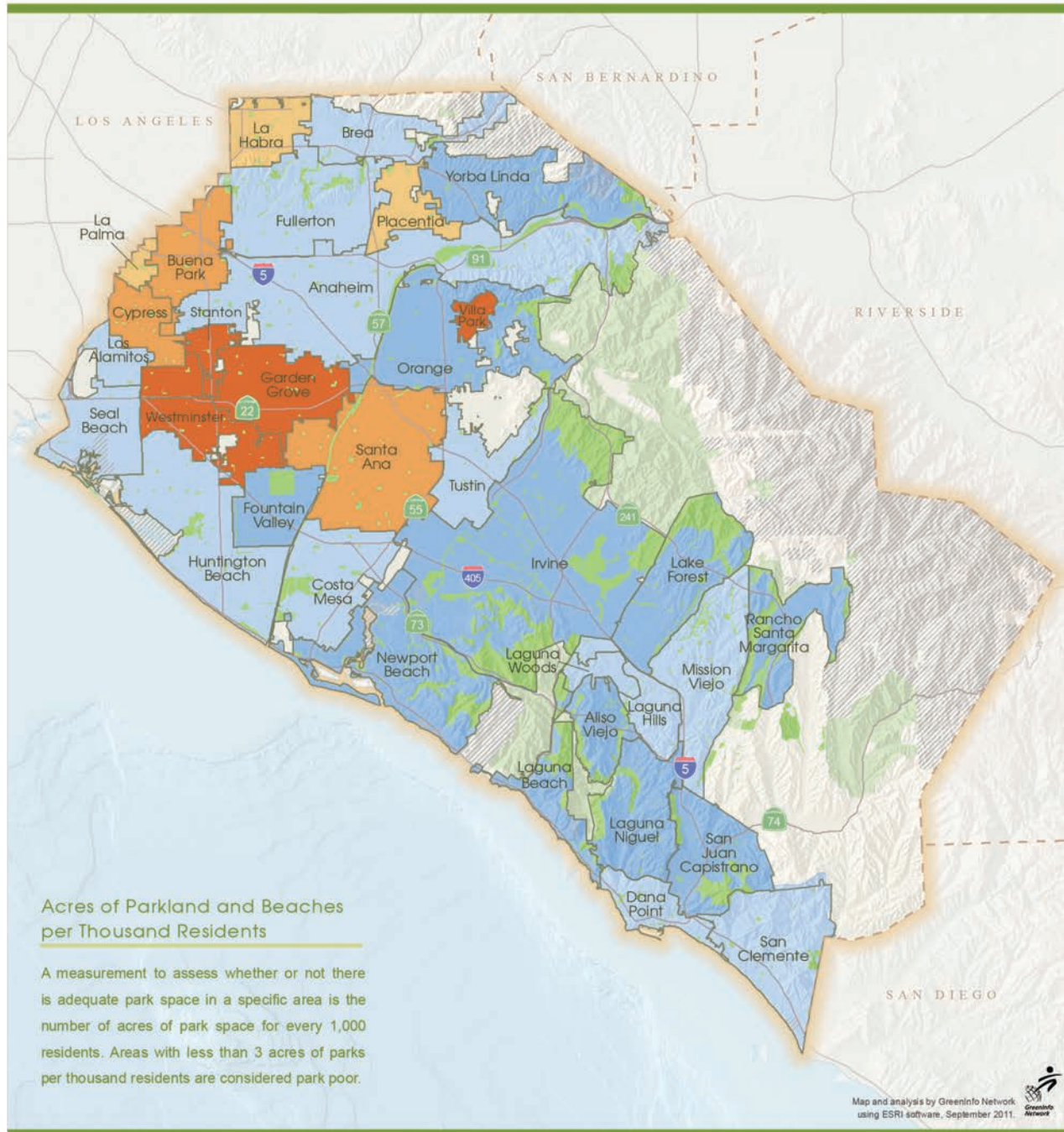
Other Features



Map 2. Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks' Park Score Map—City Ownerships.

Park Score by City

Includes City and County Park Ownerships



Acres of Parkland and Beaches per Thousand Residents



Acres of parkland and beaches per thousand residents includes land with public access or restricted public access. Parkland and beach ownership includes city and county agencies only. Data Sources: Demographics - 2010 census, Park/Green Space - CPAD v1.6, calands.org

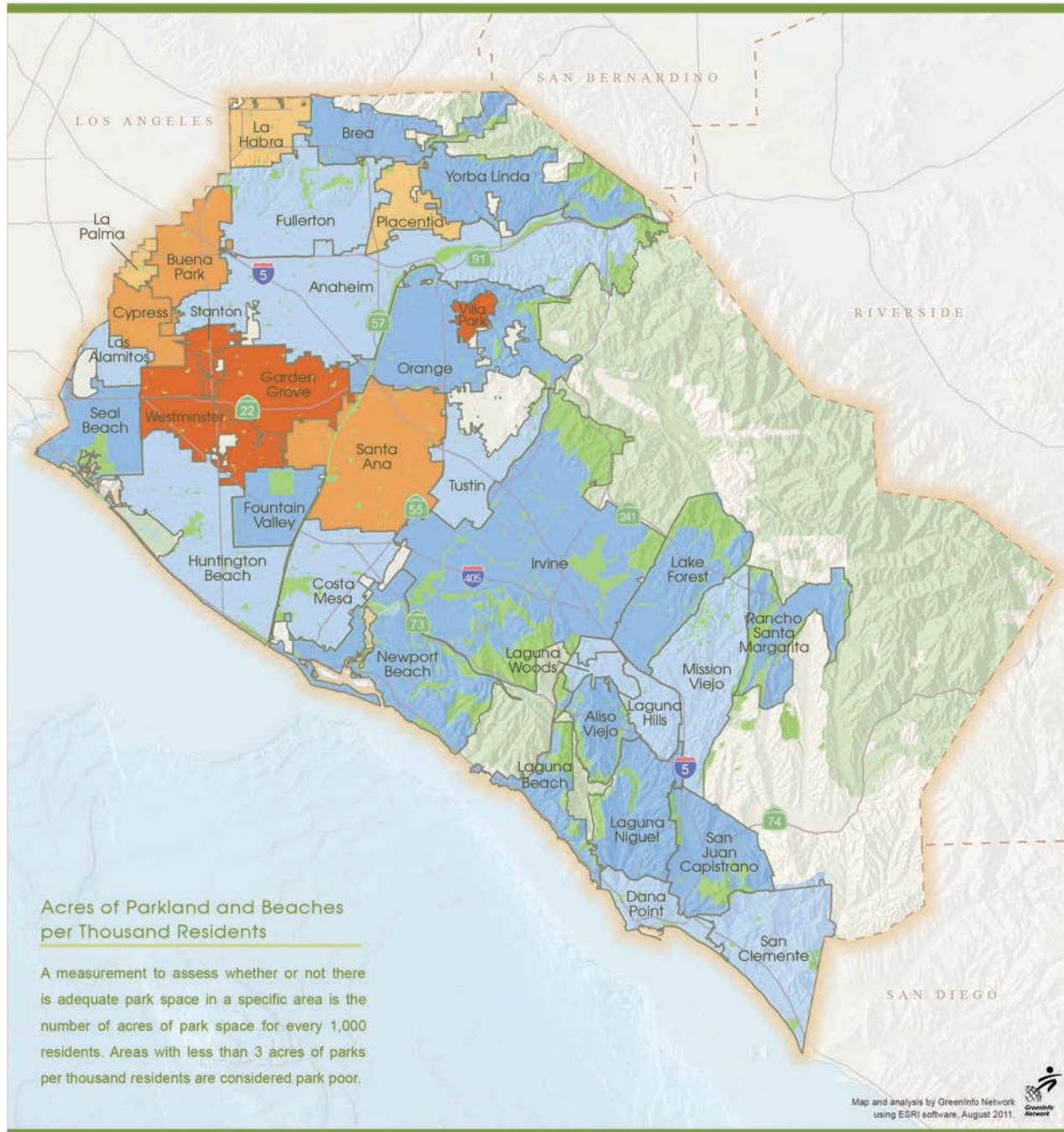
Other Features



Map 3. Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks' Park Score Map—Local and County Parks Ownerships.

Park Score by City

Includes All Park Ownerships



Acres of Parkland and Beaches per Thousand Residents



Acres of parkland and beaches per thousand residents includes land with public access or restricted public access. Parkland and beach ownership includes the following agencies: non-governmental organizations, city, county, state and federal governments.
Data Sources: Demographics - 2010 census, Park/Green Space - CPAD v1.6, calands.org

Other Features



Map 4. Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks' Park Score Map—All Park Ownership.



These parents are watching their children run and play at a Mission Viejo neighborhood park.

Selecting the Cities

Based on the existing research conducted by FHBP, the results for the cities with the least amount of park space per thousand residents were narrowed down to the list of potential candidate cities for research in this effort. For this analysis, the third park score factsheet “all park ownerships” calculation was used. The cities with the least amount of open space included:

City	Park Acres Per 1,000 Residents
Villa Park	0.0
Stanton	0.6
Garden Grove	1.0
Westminster	1.0
Buena Park	1.6
Cypress	1.8
Santa Ana	1.9
La Habra	2.1
Placentia	2.2
La Palma	2.3

Basics on the Cities

We opted to focus on the four cities with the lowest scores: Villa Park (0.0), Stanton (0.6), Westminster (1.0), and Garden Grove (1.0). After initial contact with each city, Villa Park was eliminated. Not one park existed in the city boundaries, and since this study was to provide recommendations on how to improve access to parks, a city without parks can’t improve access. In addition, Villa Park is an affluent community, which allows the residents to drive to parks in other communities or to recreate in other ways. The remaining three cities were each contacted again for background park information. FHBP used a Geographic Information System (GIS) to track the parks. Only Garden Grove had its park information available digitally. Stanton and Westminster were able to provide lists and our team digitized each park into a GIS database.

STANTON

The history of Stanton can be traced back to the land grants of the early 1800s. However, the most foundational decisions related to the creation of the city proper and its development can be aligned with the railroad. The city was formed in 1911 following successful efforts to stop the then-unincorporated community from being used as a sewage farm by Anaheim. The Pacific Electric Railway was a life line for the fledgling city, providing access to Los Angeles. Interestingly, the city unincorporated in 1924 to allow the State of California to build roads, then reincorporated in 1956.⁷

The City of Stanton encompasses only three square miles and has 38,305 residents. The range of land uses includes residential, commercial, and industrial. The city utilized a Redevelopment Agency to improve the community's quality of life and focused on revitalizing commercial and residential areas.⁸

GARDEN GROVE

Similar to Stanton, Spanish land grants of the 1800s were key to the creation of the community. Additionally, the Pacific Electric Railway brought tourists and businessmen to the area. Even before the County had incorporated, residents began forming the backbone of Garden Grove—whose main activity was agriculture. Service men from World War II had trained in the area and came back to settle and raise families. Thus, the population explosion, availability of land, and low prices meant more people and created the need for a structured government. The city was incorporated in 1956.⁹

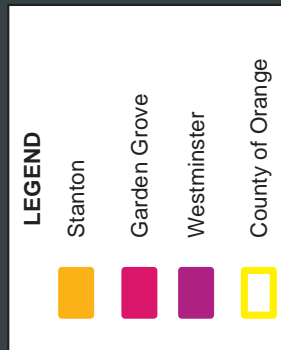
Today, the city has over 170,000 residents spread across 17.96 square miles. The land uses include mostly commercial and mixed use areas, while residential areas only make up a quarter of the land.¹⁰

WESTMINSTER

A Spanish land grant from 1784 first started the division of land in the area. The core group of settlers first arrived in Westminster in the 1870s. A Presbyterian Reverend invited all like-minded settlers to buy 40-acre homesteads in this newly formed colony. During its first decade, the community grew, with the creation of churches, schools, general stores, and such. The Southern Pacific Railroad increased land prices and servicemen also settled here. The city faced turmoil with earthquakes and desegregation battles, but rose above and incorporated in 1957.¹¹

The current population exceeds 92,000 residents and the land includes roughly 10 square miles. Forty-two percent of the city is residential. The second major use (25%) is streets, roads, and freeways.¹²

City Locations Map



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, i-cubed, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community

Map 4. Stanton, Westminster, and Garden Grove are in northwest Orange County.

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Research

Chapter 3

"Wondrous gardens demonstrate that few products of human creativity have as much magic. Gardens work powerful enchantment as they take us body and soul out of the busyness of life and into a place set apart."

— Thomas Moore, Author

GIS Layers

In order to understand the existing park locations, the Cities of Stanton, Garden Grove, and Westminster were contacted to see if they had digital database layers for their parks in a GIS. Garden Grove had an existing shapefile of its parks, but Stanton and Westminster did not. Those latter two shapefiles were created by FHBP and shared with the respective cities at the completion of the report. The respective cities' park lists and recreation brochures, and the Thomas Guide were used to confirm locations for Stanton and Westminster's park layers. Conversations with each city confirmed park sites and acreages. Each city was also sent a copy of the park map to verify accuracy prior to this report's publication.



Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP

Stanton Park is under an Edison easement.

The city statistics are as follows:¹³

City	City Size (Acres)	Population	Density (Population/Acres)	Number of Parks
Stanton	2,903	38,872	13.39	9
Garden Grove	16,756	175,393	10.47	19
Westminster	9,384	92,114	9.82	24

The park statistics are as follows:

City	Park Acres ^{14, 15, 16}	Park Density (Park Acres/City Acres)	Average Park Acreage	Park Acreage Per 1,000 Residents
Stanton	39.71	0.14	4.4	1.045
Garden Grove	143.3	0.007	7.54	0.81
Westminster	87.01	0.009	3.63	0.94

Since the Park Score Study in 2011, it appears Stanton improved its parks in terms of acreage, while Garden Grove and Westminster have lost some ground using this method of calculation. This is likely due to an increase in population. Garden Grove's population has increased by 5,000 people, while Westminster's increased by 3,000 people.

The City of Garden Grove relayed that three local non-profits run three different parks: Kiwanisland (2.3 acres), Boys and Girls Club (Main Branch – 1.5 acres), and Elks Lodge (1 acre).¹⁷ However, to maintain consistency in the park reporting above, these community-based non-profit facilities were left out for our calculations since no other non-profit run facilities were included in the study.

Park Visits

FHBP team members drove around Stanton, Garden Grove, and Westminster to document and understand

the on-the-ground issues with each known park. This research was done on four separate days. All 52 parks in the study were visited.

See Maps 6 - 8 on the following pages.

In addition, using our GIS database we created a buffer around each park extending one-half mile (or a ten-minute walk) from the park's boundaries.

See Maps 9 - 11 on the following pages.

The land outside this perimeter demonstrate which areas of each city had the lowest access to parks. The resulting map helps park planners and decision makers understand the best possible locations for solutions recommended in this report. The areas without parks should be targeted by the city to provide park functions and programs for these residents.

See Maps 12 - 14 on the following pages.

Stanton Park Locations



County
Unincorporated

LEGEND



Stanton



Other Cities



Parks

PARK NAMES

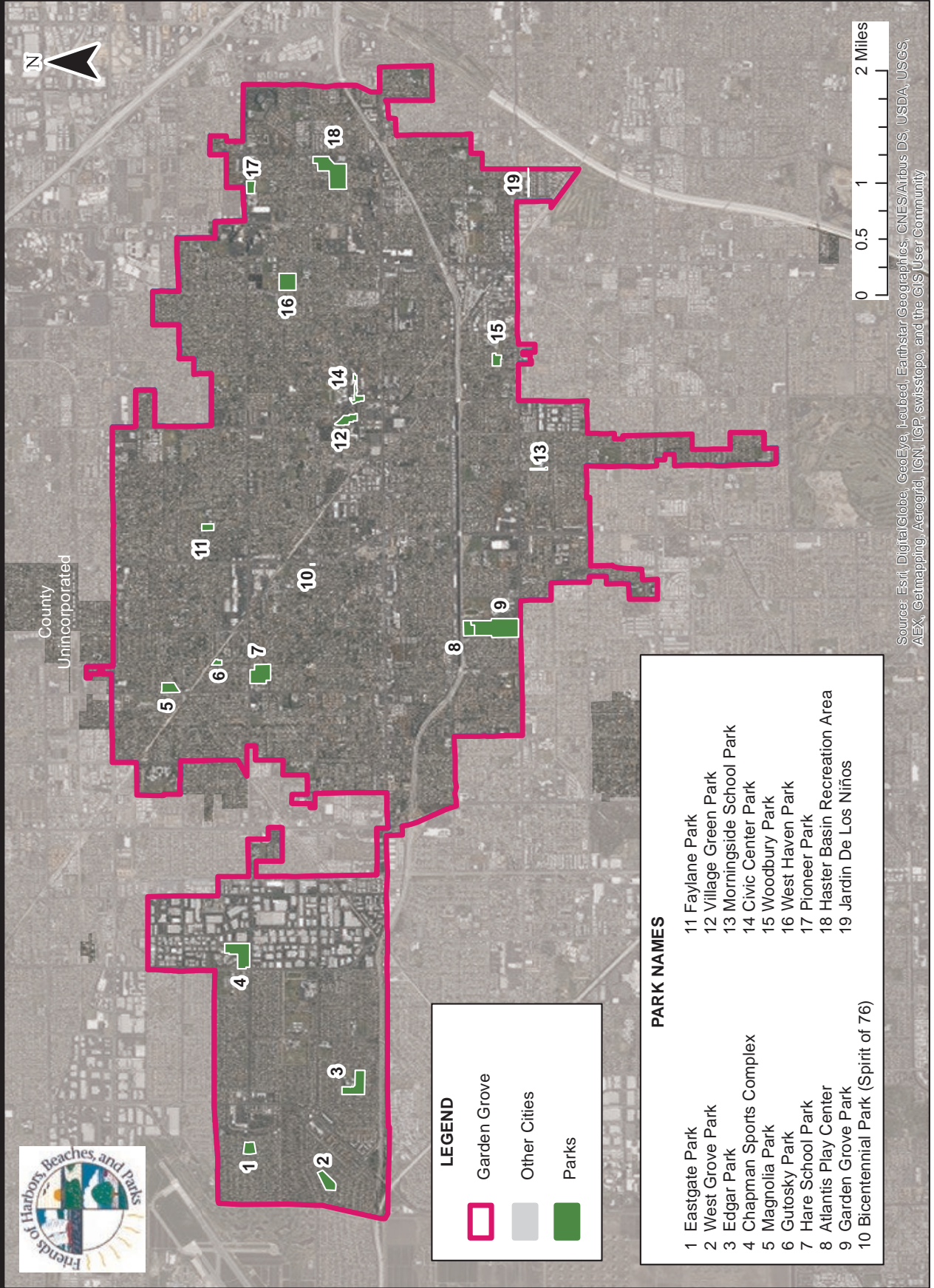
- 1 Stanton Central Park
- 2 Victor Zuniga Park
- 3 Veterans Memorial Park
- 4 Martha Weishaupt Linear Park
- 5 Stanton Park
- 6 Norm Ross Sports Complex
- 7 Premier Park
- 8 Harry M. Dotson Park
- 9 Hollenbeck Park

0 0.5 1 2 Miles

Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community

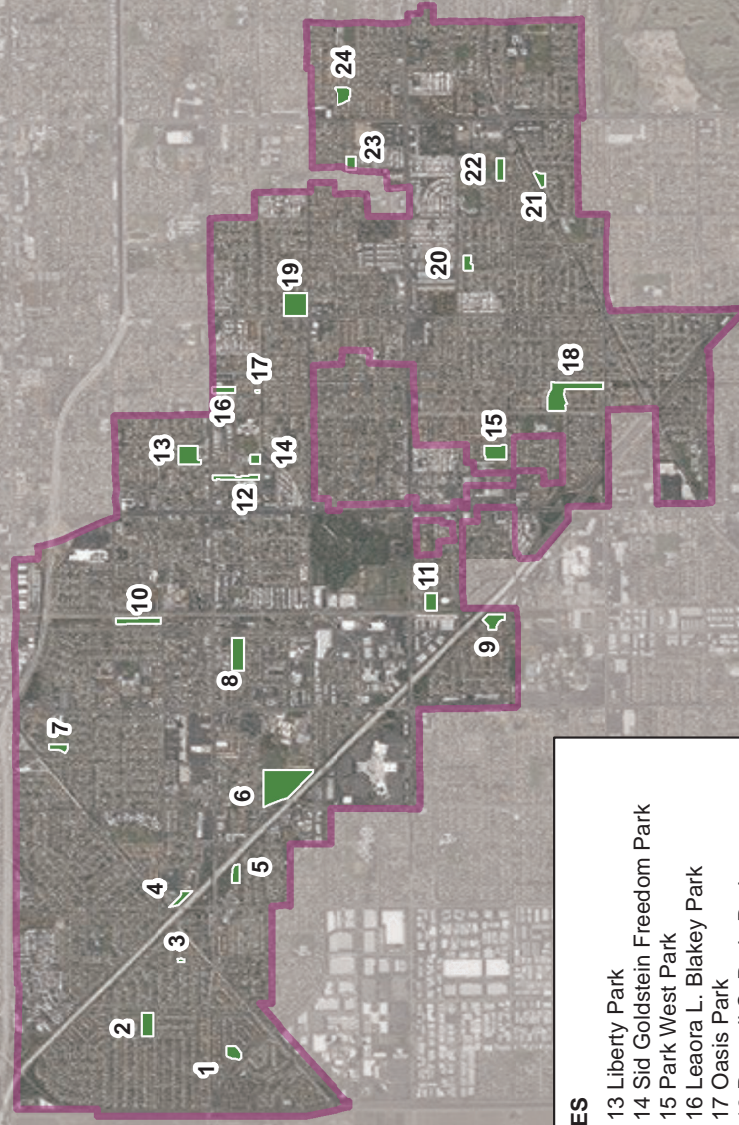
Map 6. *The City of Stanton has nine local parks.*

Garden Grove Park Locations






Map 7. The City of Garden Grove has 19 local parks.

Westminster Park Locations



LEGEND

-  Westminster
-  Other Cities
-  Parks

PARK NAMES

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 Westminster Village Park | 13 Liberty Park |
| 2 Bolsa Chica Park | 14 Sid Goldstein Freedom Park |
| 3 Virginia K. Boos Park | 15 Park West Park |
| 4 Margie L. Rice Park | 16 Leaora L. Blakey Park |
| 5 Cascade Park | 17 Oasis Park |
| 6 Buckingham Park | 18 Russell C. Paris Park |
| 7 Goldenwest Park | 19 Westminster Park |
| 8 Sigler Park | 20 Coronet Park |
| 9 College Park | 21 Cloverdale Park |
| 10 Frank G. Fry Park | 22 Elden F. Gillespie Park |
| 11 John Land Park | 23 Newcastle Park |
| 12 Civic Center | 24 Bowling Green Park |



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, iSat, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community

Map 8. The City of Westminster has 24 local parks.

Stanton Park Locations with 1/2 Mile Buffer



County
Unincorporated

LEGEND

Stanton

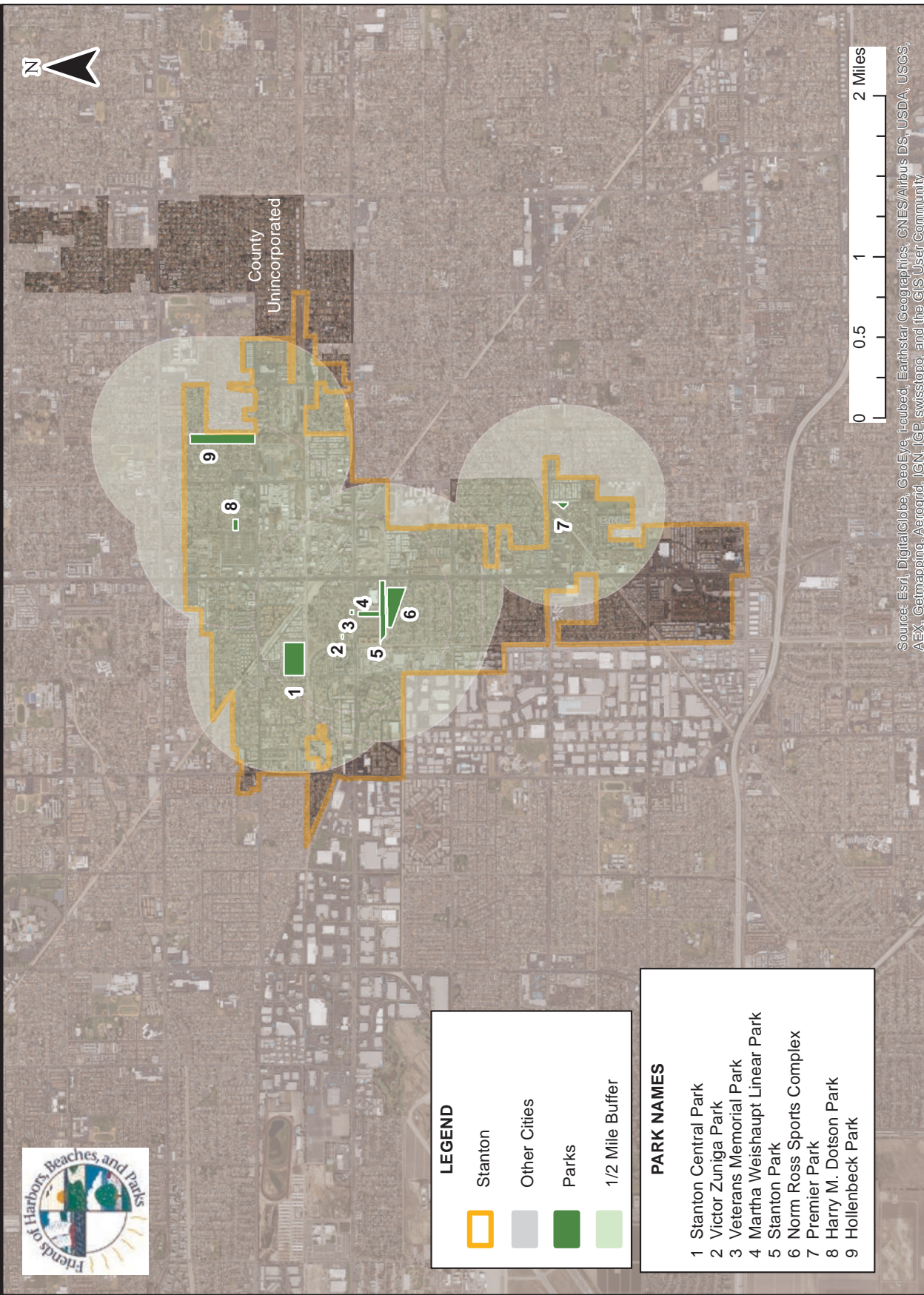
Other Cities

Parks

1/2 Mile Buffer

PARK NAMES

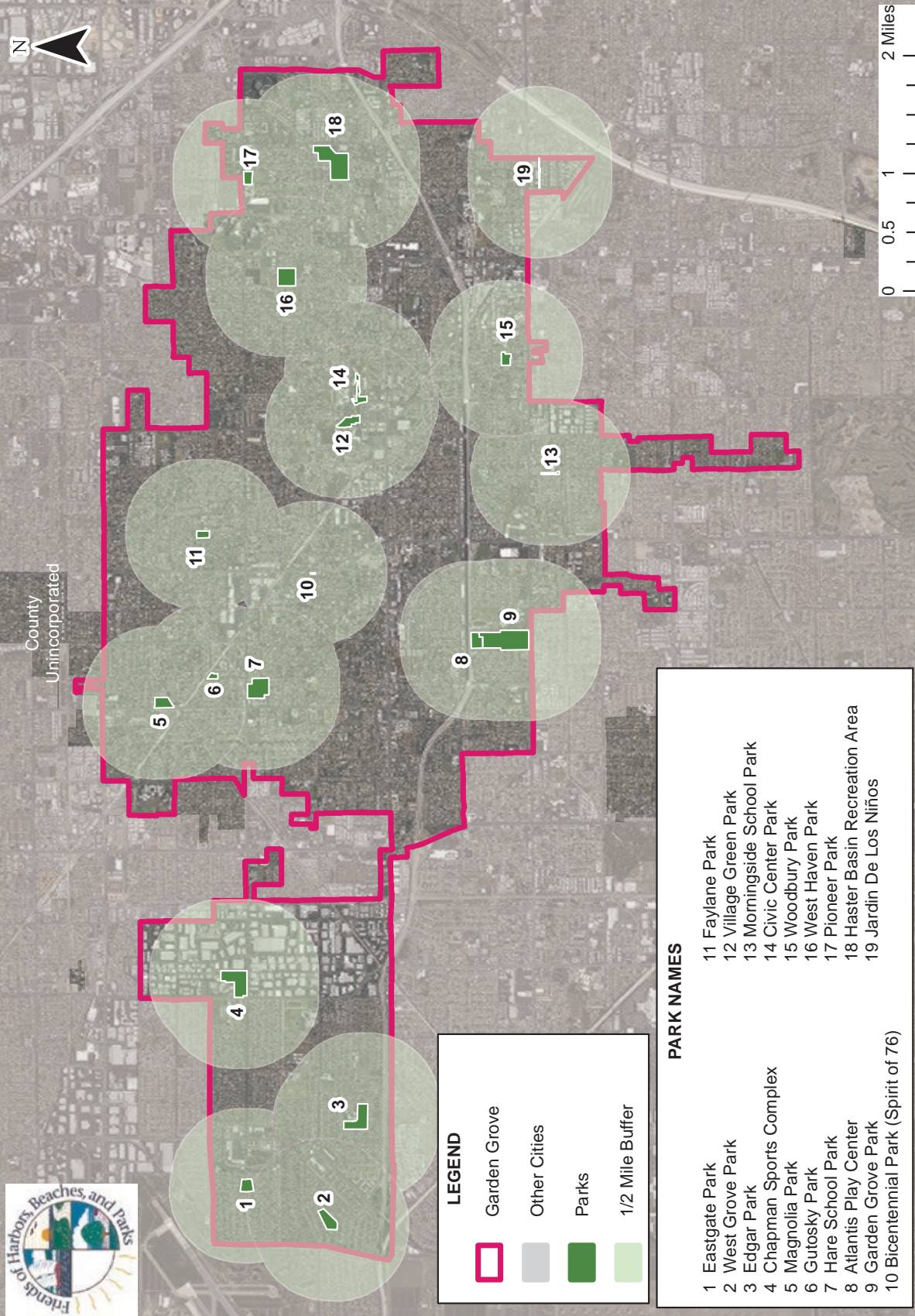
- Stanton Central Park
- Victor Zuniga Park
- Veterans Memorial Park
- Martha Weishaupt Linear Park
- Stanton Park
- Norm Ross Sports Complex
- Premier Park
- Harry M. Dotson Park
- Hollenbeck Park



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, i-cubed, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community

Map 9. Each park in Stanton has a 1/2 mile buffer added to delineate a 10 minute walk to the park.

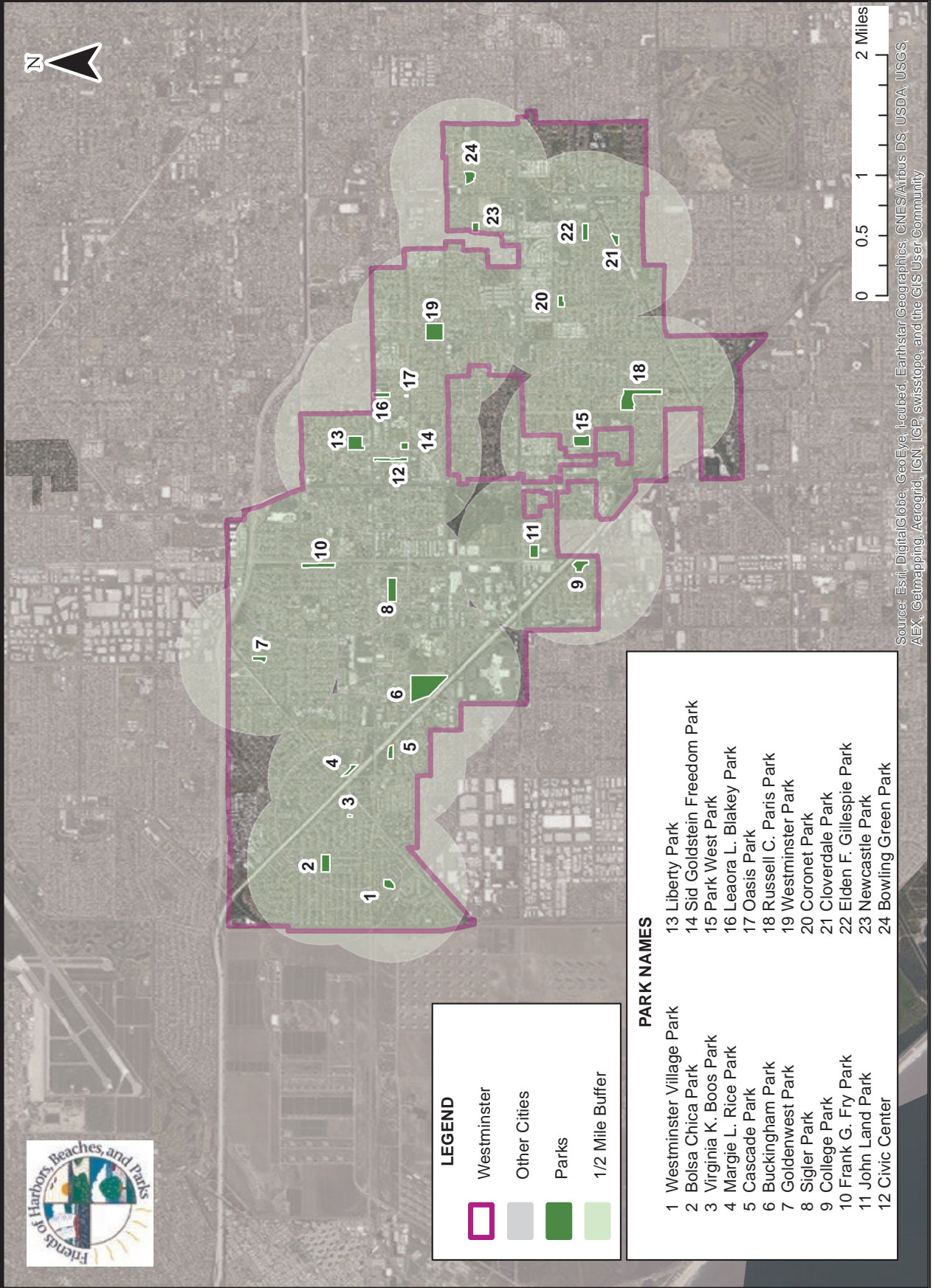
Garden Grove Park Locations with 1/2 Mile Buffer



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, i-cubed, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community

Map 10. Each park in Garden Grove has a 1/2 mile buffer added to delineate a 10 minute walk to the park.

Westminster Park Locations with 1/2 Mile Buffer



Map 11. Each park in Westminster has a 1/2 mile buffer added to delineate a 10 minute walk to the park.

Stanton's Target Areas

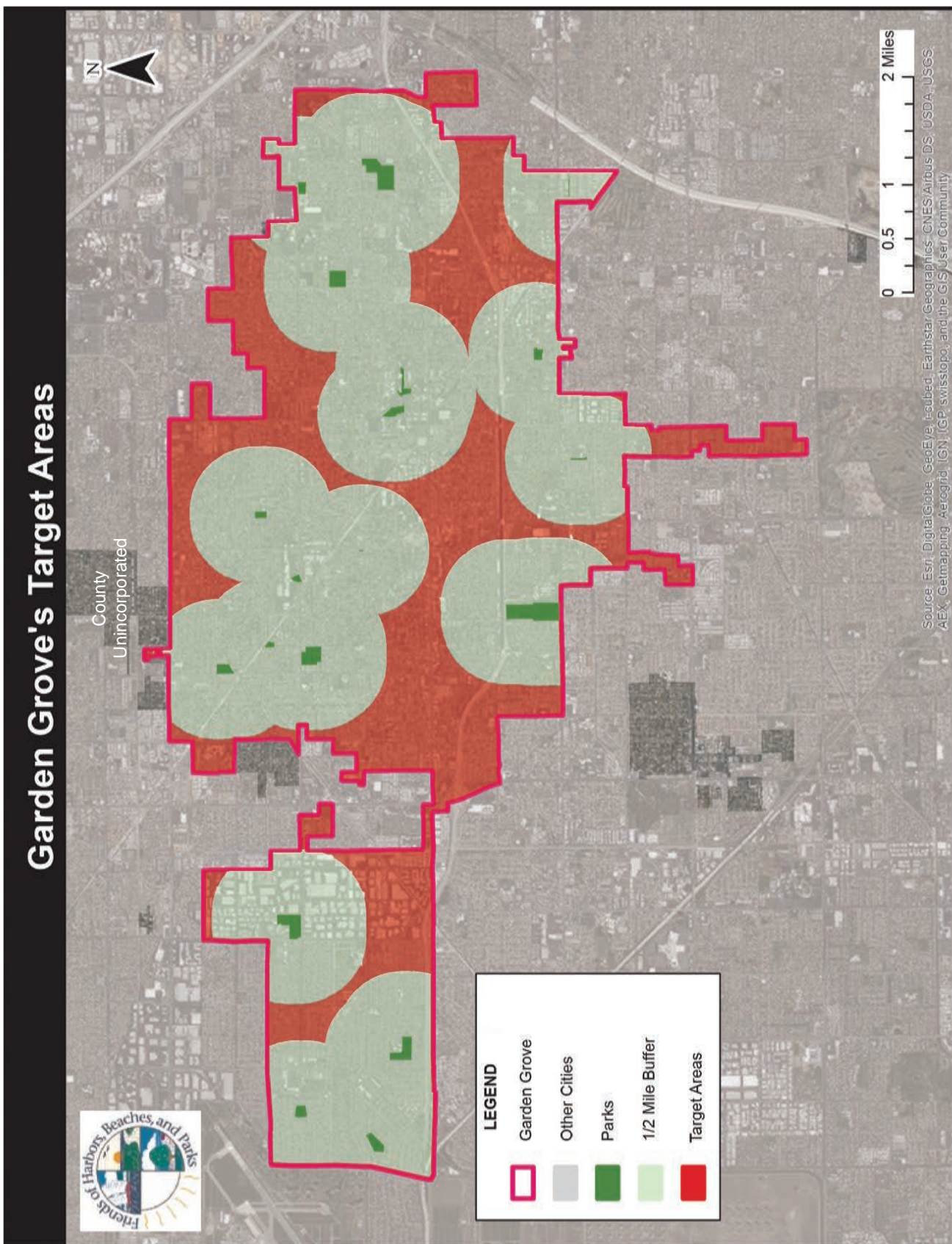


County
Unincorporated



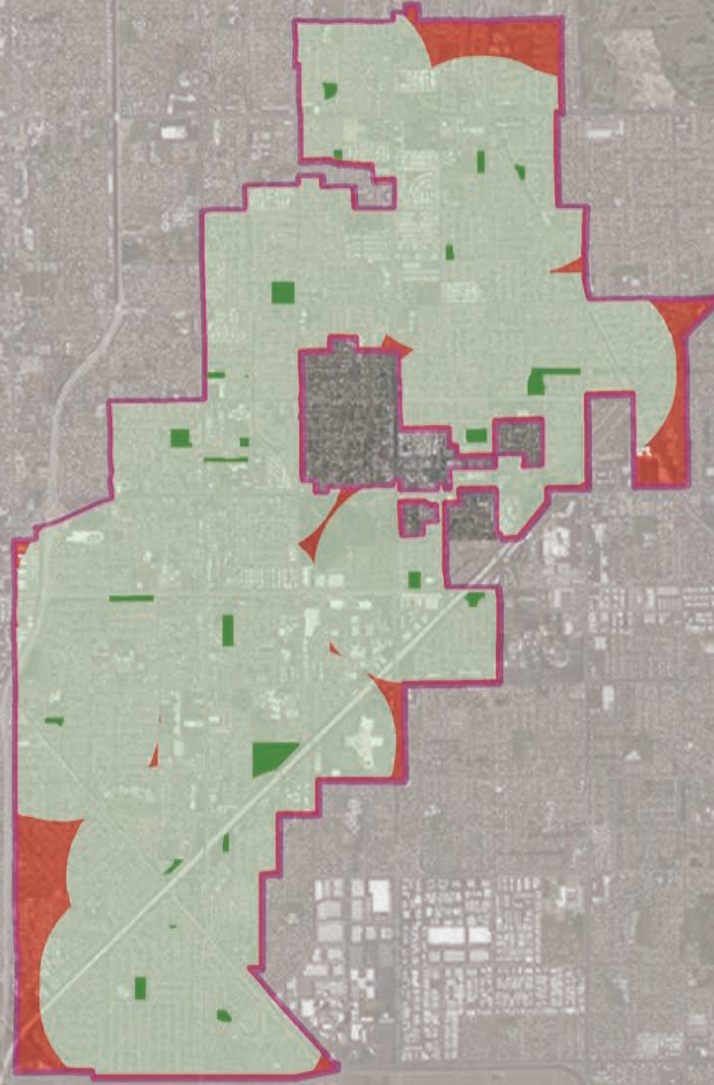
Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community

Map 12. Areas that should be targeted in Stanton for park programs and other park services are shown in red.



Map 13. Areas that should be targeted in Garden Grove for park programs and other park services are shown in red.

Westminster's Target Areas



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, Swisstopo, and the GIS User Community

Map 14. Areas that should be targeted in Westminster for park programs and other park services are shown in red.

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Results

Chapter 4

"Greatest good, for the greatest number for the longest time."

— Gifford Pinchot, Forester

One of the most noted outcomes of this tour and study was that well-kept, graffiti-free, and apparently safe community parks was a priority in each of the three cities. A sense of character, community spirit, and place were present in the majority of parks. Our tours were conducted on weekday mornings and members of the community were found in nearly every park during the visit. Each location had its own unique characteristics, but many of the parks shared similar amenities that made them more appealing to the public, including:

- Picnic benches and seating
- Barbeques
- Grassy areas
- Parking (street or in a lot)
- Active sports (basketball, handball, tennis, baseball, etc.)
- Playground equipment
- Walking paths and trails
- Adult exercise equipment
- Shade structures

Most neighborhood parks, for example, didn't include restroom facilities. This is likely because of the proximity of the intended park visitor's residence to the park itself. A restroom was likely just a few houses away and the visitor could go home to use the

facilities—quickly and easily. This is one distinguishing feature in the city's park classification system. In fact, these neighborhood parks seemed to be the most open and least restricted in terms of access. Sometimes they were an "island of parkland" in the midst of a neighborhood and open on three or more sides. Other times these parks were in a corner lot and provided ample walk-in access on two sides. However, most of these parks didn't offer parking lots—only street parking.

This was confirmed in Westminster where the city has two classifications: neighborhood parks and community parks.¹⁸ The neighborhood parks do not have restrooms and are smaller, while the larger community parks do have restrooms and parking. The City of Stanton has three classifications for its parks: community centers, neighborhood parks, and linear parks.¹⁹ The City of Garden Grove has two classifications for its parks: sports complexes and community parks.²⁰ The sports complexes tend to have multiple sport related facilities (baseball diamonds, soccer fields, basketball courts, tennis courts, etc.). Community parks are not focused on sports, though they may have a sports-related amenity.

Site Constrained Parks

In several instances, the local parks backed up to a freeway. This site may have had no other suitable land use options or it was the only location left for a neighborhood park as the area was being planned and developed. In some cases, vegetation and sound walls were used to reduce noise impacts. While these parks tended to be on the smaller side, the spaces were creatively used (e.g., Cascade, Margie L. Rice, and Buckingham Parks in Westminster).

Joint-Use Agreements

Many of the parks were near to or shared a border with a local school and acted as an extension (likely joint-use) of the recreational opportunities. These amenities included, but are not limited to: baseball, soccer, basketball, tennis, and handball. However, due to security restrictions at the school, this also generally meant that the park wasn't available to the public during the day. Frequently, there were chain-link fences and locked gates dissuading the public from use during school hours. It appeared that the parks adjoining schools actually blocked access more than they expanded it (e.g., Edgar and Lake School Parks in Garden Grove, and Golden West and Elden F. Gillespie Parks in Westminster). The City of Garden Grove confirmed it had joint-use agreements with the school district and these types of use limitations did exist for safety and security.²¹ The City of Stanton includes four separate school districts and joint-use agreements have been reached with each of them.²²

Memorial Parks

Several of the parks focused on a memorial of some kind, including: Veterans Memorial Park in Stanton and Sid Goldstein Memorial Park in Westminster. These were well-kept facilities, with public benches and especially attractive landscaping honoring service members.

Family Resource Centers

In a few instances, family resource centers also were placed within some community parks. This shared use likely benefited the community and the agency working at the center. Residents could get their needs handled at the resource center and then take the kids to the park just outside the doors (e.g., Sigler Park in Westminster and Magnolia Park in Garden Grove). The City of Stanton also has a Family Resource Center that is in its 12th year of funding from the County of Orange



Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP

Margie L. Rice Park backs up to the 405 Freeway.

through the Families and Communities Together Grant (FACT) program.²³

Parks with Water Features

One innovative feature in Westminster's Sigler Park is the inclusion of a Splash Pad. The recycled water feature is available for the community's use from Memorial Day to Labor Day from 12-5 daily. In light of the drought it is a better alternative than having kids run through the sprinklers with potable water at each home.²⁴ Stanton also has two parks with water features: Stanton Central and Harry M. Dotson Parks.²⁵

Mistaken Data

A few parks didn't actually exist on the ground as shown in the particular city's listing. We found the site for Leaora L. Blakey Park in Westminster, but it had a chain-link fence around it and appeared abandoned. After research with the city, it turns out the land was donated by Ms. Blakey for operation and management by the Westminster Historical Society. It is only open when volunteers are available to welcome visitors.²⁶

We found a park, Oasis Park, that wasn't on the original list provided by the city. Morning Side School Park in Garden Grove was a strip of land adjacent to the roadway into and out of the school. This appeared



Hollenbeck Park is situated under an Edison utility easement and includes trails, playground equipment, and grass.

to be more of an extension of the school grounds rather than an actual park and measured only a few feet wide. Nevertheless, the city counted it as a park on its roster.

Multi-Jurisdictional Agreements

In another situation, a multi-jurisdictional agreement brought a water retention facility, Haster Basin, into the mix as a 21.5-acre recreational facility. The City of Garden Grove confirmed this is not considered a city park facility, but its acreage was included in the city's total park acreage.²⁷

Edison Easements

Several parks were clearly utilizing easement lands owned by Edison (e.g., Hollenbeck and Stanton Parks in Stanton, and Russell C. Paris [partial] and Frank G. Fry Parks [full] in Westminster). Power lines were strung high above the ground and large electric towers were situated within the parks. Most of these parks had either chain-link fences or brick walls separating residential areas from the park along the easement. Generally, the access was limited to the top or bottom of the park—no side entrances. With the humming of the electrical lines above, it wasn't an ideal location, but it was an attempt to make use of underutilized space. Stanton officials noted that most uses in these easement areas had to be temporary and approved by the landowner.²⁸

Parks Under Construction

Two parks were under construction during our study: Stanton's Central Park and Bicentennial Park (Spirit of 76) in Garden Grove. A conversation with the Community Services Director, Julie Roman, confirmed that Stanton Central Park opened in June 2016. This park was developed from the ground up and was funded through Proposition 84 funds, bonds, and park-in-lieu fees. Additional funding details on this park are available in Chapter 5.²⁹ Bicentennial Park was getting renovated with drought tolerant plants for a demonstration garden as described in Chapter 5.³⁰

Focused Play Equipment

The clear majority of parks focused playground equipment toward children under 10 years old. Most were lacking amenities for the 10-16 year olds. One park, Liberty in Westminster, had a skate park that was being used during weekday mornings by young adults.



Liberty Park has a well used skate park.

Chapman Sports Complex and Pioneer Park, both in Garden Grove, had a hockey rink available.

Teen Centers

Teenagers and young adults are typically hard-to-serve populations when it comes to parks. The importance of providing safe recreational areas for this age group cannot be overstated. While the City of Stanton offers teen programs,³¹ just like Westminster and Garden Grove, they do not have a teen center specifically.^{32, 33}

A local non-profit runs a Teen Center out of the old theater in the City of Garden Grove with limited hours during the school year. It operates Monday through Friday during the summer.³⁴ The newly designed Stanton Central Park will likely be a big attraction in that community for all age levels.

A handful of other parks, Eastgate in Garden Grove for example, had adult exercise equipment available. Garden Grove Park is reported to have outdoor fitness equipment installations in August 2016.³⁵ These provide an opportunity for teens, adults, and seniors to get out of the house and use exercise equipment without having to purchase a gym membership.

Unique Parks

A few parks are deserving of attention and praise for their unique features, siting, or amenities.

First, Civic Center Park in Garden Grove included babbling brooks, ponds, and wetland vegetation nestled within the small civic center facilities for the city. Ducks, egrets, and other birds were enjoying the shaded areas, as were toddlers with their parents. Walking paths, bridges, and a native plant garden made the park aesthetically pleasing, gave it character,



Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP

Garden Grove's Civic Center Park has a flowing stream.



Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP

Garden Grove's Atlantis Play Center had fun play areas.

and linked the city buildings together. It was well-thought out and well-designed.

Second, the Atlantis Play Center in Garden Grove was uniquely interesting. This inexpensive fee-based play area (\$2 per person) was completely enclosed with an extensive chain-link fence, available for rental, and abutting the freeway. Its layout was reminiscent of miniature golf facilities, but each area highlighted a different sea-themed play area (such as whales, sharks, and boats). There was a snack area, water-feature play area, called the Splash Pad, and the site was handicap accessible. This park was the most enchanting park (as seen through our adult eyes) with bridges, passages, and ramps connecting different areas of the center. Yet it was also secure so that parents could let children roam and run. During the winter the city offers a "Snow Day" there. Staff coordinates getting 50 tons of snow on site and invites the community to come have fun. Numerous other fun activities are offered here as well, including a Halloween event. This particular park is considered Garden Grove's gem of the city.³⁶

Finally, Jardin De Los Niños in Garden Grove made exceptional use of its limited linear space. It was bounded by a commercial/industrial complex on one side and a dense residential apartment complex across the street. There was only about 20 feet between the street and the back wall of the industrial complex, but this space nevertheless included picnic areas, a quarter court basketball area, fitness equipment for adults, play equipment for the kids, and a mural with positive, thoughtful messages painted on to it. The park also connected multiple neighborhoods. It may have been small, but it was mighty and would be easy to replicate in other cities with tight quarters. These linear parks can be worked into commercial and industrial areas that people can access during the workday.



Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP

Jardin De Los Niños had adult exercise equipment.

An honorable mention needs to go to Stanton Central Park, which was under construction when the site visits were conducted. This facility opened in June and includes more than 11 acres of expansive opportunities for the community. From event centers to playgrounds, equipment storage buildings and picnic pavilions to sports fields and a community and park building—this facility has its bases covered. There is also a skate park, splash pad, landscaping with screening trees and bio-swales, and an exercise loop trail. Stanton built this facility by engaging the community. Residents helped design this innovative park. Kudos to Stanton for such a great accomplishment. As noted multiple times in this report, this facility was constructed without using General Fund dollars.³⁷



Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP

Stanton Central Park has 11 acres of public amenities.

Additionally, an honorable mention also goes to Westminster for its Frank G. Fry Park and nearby Hoover Trail. The 4.26 acre park sits under an Edison easement and is bounded on the east by Hoover Street. The park spans a neighborhood block and includes walking paths, play equipment, and excellent signage. And, this linear park is adjacent to the newly constructed Rails-to-Trails project called Hoover Trail. Much of the colorful vegetation has already been installed beautifying the adjacent vacant land. However, portions of the actual walking path have yet to be constructed. Upon completion, the path will provide a safe place for pedestrians to enjoy a walk with Frank G. Fry Park mere steps away. This approach and placement has many benefits to the community. The city noted it is seeking funds to continue this trail project.³⁸



Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP

Frank G. Fry Park is a linear park near Hoover Trail.

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Connections with Each City

Chapter 5

*"We know that parks generally build social cohesion."
— Richard Louv, Author*

To ensure this study has accurately portrayed each city, its park features, and amenities, FHBP set up telephone calls with each Park Director and other relevant staff. Additional details on parks and programs, information about the city, its land uses, as well as confirmation of a variety of park-related topics were discussed. Each Park Director was given the opportunity to review and comment on this report to confirm accuracy and provide additional feedback prior to publication. Thank you to each of our studied cities for participating in this effort. We hope it and the recommendations prove beneficial to you.

Stanton

We had a brief conversation with the City of Stanton's Community Services Director, Julie Roman, about the city and its parks and park programming. She relayed one of the most unique features that has allowed the city to have a structurally balanced budget was a local sales tax measure. In 2014, voters enacted Measure GG with no sunset date. It included a one-cent city sales tax to fund important safety services—most specifically funding for additional positions with the Orange County Sheriff's Department and Orange County Fire Authority.

That said, the City of Stanton appears to be very innovative in terms of its park funding. For example, the city received Proposition 84 funds to build Stanton Central Park. Additionally, public-private partnerships fund staff positions and park operations and maintenance. No General Fund dollars go to support this new park. In fact, two businesses have stepped forward to donate \$100,000 per year for this endeavor. And, the fundraising doesn't stop there. The city has also received two other grants to promote its park and after-school programs including the: state's Gang Reduction Intervention Partner (GRIP) funding



Victor Zuniga Park includes basketball courts.

and FACT funding mentioned in Chapter 4. GRIP allows for pro-actively working with principals and the four school districts to offer programming, day camps, classes, and gang interventions. This has been very beneficial in keeping the kids engaged with positive programming. FACT has also allowed the city to fund human services programming in its Family Resource Center. While the city may be slim on actual parks, the dedication of Parks Department staff and the City Manager to find funding through grant programs and partnerships is commendable.

Garden Grove

During our discussion with the Garden Grove Community Services Director and Recreation Manager, Kim Huy and John Montanez respectively, we learned the city was poised to start a Park Facilities Master Plan. They were drafting the scope of work in July 2016 with a project completion date anticipated by June 2017. This particular project is being contracted by the city. The goal with the Master Plan is to identify park facilities and their needs/deficiencies and specific amenities each park offered. It is anticipated this Park Study can be used as a resource during this process. It appears that many creative programs, such as travelling or mobile park programs, that the staff would like to offer have not received enough (or any) allocation in the city's annual budget. Other unique park programs have been offered. For example, the city just reopened its Spirit of 76 Park with drought tolerant native plants as a demonstration garden.³⁹

We were pleased to hear that Garden Grove was already incorporating a lot of the recommendations that this study highlighted. For example, the city offers a Concert in the Park series every summer. These draw 2,000 people from within and outside the city for live music events. Additionally, Garden Grove is working



Gutosky Park was a charming park with lots of trees.

with the Orange County Transportation Authority to improve bike paths. Most specifically a Demonstration Bike Path was created on an old Pacific Electric Right of Way. An additional walking path is also in the works.

Westminster



Sid Goldstein Freedom Park pays tribute to veterans.

During our discussion with the Westminster Parks Director, Diana Dobbert, we learned the city is undergoing a General Plan update. General Plans are the basic framework for how a city grows and develops. It outlines specific land uses, where they are appropriate and in what quantities. As expected, early results indicate that the city is park deficient. And, as with most cities, there are park funding issues. In this instance there is a \$12 million structural deficit acknowledged by the city. That said, the study for the General Plan Update indicates there are 222 acres of drainage ways and channels that may be able to be used somehow. The General Plan was made available for public review in July 2016. Continued lack of funding for park amenities, programs, and land—may make our report's creative recommendations all the more useful.

The city has been thoughtful in using Edison easements for park space. Nearly 15 years ago, a deal was struck between the city and Southern California Edison so that the land could be leased as permanent open space. This is a creative use of space that is otherwise limited in its functions due to powerline maintenance. We also learned that Westminster is working on two creative park solutions right now. First, the Hoover Trail which is being built in phases (a walking path and then an active transportation path). Using an abandoned area, the city revitalized the Hoover Street Corridor with this new community

asset that allows for safe, outdoor, and passive use. In another instance, Westminster has been working on the Navy Railroad Easement for a Rails-to-Trails type community amenity. This project is still being

negotiated, but when finished it is anticipated to become an important community asset.⁴⁰

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Recommendations

Chapter 6

"The iconic urban parks with their straight borders and square shoulders aren't going away. They are treasured in cities around the world. But the orderly layout they require is harder to find in places that are already built up. So our newer urban parks, in the United States and beyond, reflect the challenges of acquiring and developing land."

— Ken Otterbourg, Author

Based on the existing constraints of the stable neighborhoods surrounding the various parks, it is difficult to offer recommendations that improve access without losing another feature. For example, a new entrance to increase access to a neighborhood park can only go where feasible. If a park is surrounded by private property (and therefore walls) on three sides, no additional entrance is appropriate for the public. This means we need to be creative about how to add or increase park spaces or park access using new tools. And, it isn't only Orange County urban cities that face this challenge—it is a national issue, especially for the large metropolis areas.

We do have a few innovative suggestions to improve access to parks or by bringing parks to the people including:

Get Residents Outside

Cities can utilize their existing community park and recreation brochures and websites to educate residents on how to find access to the local, regional, and state parks. Each of the communities in this study has available a Community Guide to Activities offered by the Parks and Recreation Department. For example,

Bolsa Chica and Huntington State Beaches are just a few miles from our study area and bus routes could be provided in the Guide to get residents to and from their neighborhood to these state beaches. Sometimes simply providing the tools to get from Point A to Point B is all you need.

Offer Community Activities

Just as homeowners' associations and community groups have done, cities can host community or neighborhood movie nights or a summer concert



Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP

These kids are enjoying a day in the park in La Habra.

series on the lawns of their existing parks. This provides residents with a sense of community, utilizes existing public spaces, and can be located at a different park throughout the city each week. Bringing people together has many benefits and cities can utilize their own parklands or parking lots as the venue. In many instances, residents will simply walk with their lawn chair or blanket to see the movie because it is offered so close to home. Simple features can be added for very little cost such as cushions, bean bag chairs, and a portable popcorn maker. This is something the City of Garden Grove is already doing with its Summer Concert Series.⁴¹ Concerts in the Parks and Movie Night Under the Stars are also offered by the City of Stanton. Staff there also offer “Talk on the Block” neighborhood meetings and continually engage residents through online channels.⁴²

Increase Opportunities for All Ages

We noticed a tendency to focus equipment and play areas on younger children. But the needs and interests of pre-teens, teenagers, and even young adults are also important in those formative years. If equipment for them cannot be incorporated into existing neighborhood parks, cities are encouraged to offer pre-teen and teen youth programs at community and/or recreation centers. The traditional offering is basketball courts, but skate parks are becoming more common. The hope is that offering this demographic a place to recreate or participate in teen-focused programs will keep these young adults occupied with healthy activities. Furthermore, incorporating opportunities for adults, such as exercise equipment, walking paths, native plant gardens, educational kiosks, at local parks also improves physical and mental health, social interactions, and community engagement. The City of Stanton is pro-actively involving teens and pre-teens as part of their gang prevention efforts. In fact, they’ve created a Youth Commission and run an annual youth in government day.⁴³



These men are enjoying basketball at Mile Square Park.



Westminster created the Hoover Trail as a Rails-to-Trails project.

Use Abandoned Easements

All three of the communities in this study grew because of the placement of the railroads. New programs like Rails-to-Trails are designed to create trails on existing but abandoned rights of way. Railroad easements, for example, provide opportunities to create and connect parks, increase opportunities for outdoor exercise, and can sometimes be funded by grant programs. Westminster has confirmed it is working on this idea already,⁴⁴ as did Garden Grove,⁴⁵ but it is unknown if any other abandoned railway lines exist in Stanton. Creating temporary parks in easement areas, such as under Edison lines is an efficient use of space. Partnerships with utility companies can increase the amount of park acreage in areas that are underutilized. Again, Westminster has already achieved this success working with Southern California Edison.⁴⁶ Garden Grove is working with the Orange County Transportation Authority on the former Pacific Electric Right of Way.⁴⁷ Stanton has two parks created under a Southern California Edison partnership.⁴⁸

Convert Parking Lots to Parks

If cities do not have additional land to convert to or create a park, existing spaces can be better utilized. Many businesses operate a typical work week under a 9 – 5 schedule. This leaves their parking lots open, available, and underutilized over the weekends. Cities can negotiate a contract for temporary use of the parking lots for farmers markets, community activities, and other attractions. Activities, movie nights, and other community-focused events can be held there also. If you are simply out of space, consider re-imagining what space you do have. The City of



The Yorba Linda Farmer's Market is held in a central location on Saturday mornings on a parking lot.

Stanton has converted parking lots to parks by creating three linear parks: two on Katella Avenue and one on Beach Blvd.⁴⁹

Convert Streets to Temporary Parks

Across the nation, we are hearing about the temporary closure of streets to accommodate community activities. For example, the most well-known is CicLAvia, which promotes a car-free day on a well-known public street. According to its website, "CicLAvia started as a grassroots initiative in 2008 as the outgrowth of discussions held by a number of individuals who recognized that open streets events could address active transportation, urban land use, and public health needs in Los Angeles."⁵⁰ Garden Grove has already started a similar concept with its Re-Imagine Garden Grove Downtown with open streets. The city's website states, "The second year event invites residents and visitors to experience a car-free, re-envisioned downtown environment celebrating the community, diverse cultures, and a healthy lifestyle."⁵¹ The first year Garden Grove did this event they closed three miles of streets and for the March 2017 event the goal is to close up to four miles.⁵² These innovative ways to engage residents are highly encouraged. It doesn't just need to be about active transportation; it could be a street fair, cultural exhibit, or yoga class that is offered in a special more limited location.

Incorporate Community Parklets

San Francisco is credited with the idea of the first parklet. It is an extension of the sidewalk allowing people to use the street. Either portions of a parking

lane or parking space are used to extend the community space. Parklets can range from places to sit, rest, or stop next to the street or businesses. If the parklet is used as a community space, there are opportunities for art, greenery, bicycle parking, or demonstration areas. These features can either be permanent or temporary, but either way they are generally always open to the public. Restaurants, coffee shops, bookstores, and other neighborhood gathering places could easily provide space to create a parklet.

Create Mobile Parks

Certain non-profit groups realized the benefit of using vehicles to bring nature to the inner city. By converting passenger vans into mobile parks, cities could adopt this innovative idea as well. Vehicles could have games (e.g., a ring toss or bean bag toss with a nature theme, card matching game); educational components (e.g., replicated animal skulls, tracks, and furs available to touch and feel); giveaways (e.g., stations where kids can create imprints of animals tracks or bookmarks); sports equipment (e.g., soccer balls, jump ropes, and baseballs); and coloring contests (e.g., color a scene for where an octopus might live). Stanton has a "Rec on Wheels" program where, in cooperation with apartment complexes and mobile home parks, programming is brought to different areas of the city lacking park space.⁵³ Garden Grove has looked into this type of amenity, but presently doesn't have the budget to implement it.⁵⁴

Add Opportunities in Safe Places

Through partnerships with the police department or fire department, some communities have created safe places for kids and adults to enjoy together. In some examples, basketball courts are temporarily available during certain hours allowing the public to enjoy the recreation, in a safe, well-lit environment behind the police or fire station. This type of opportunity builds community, trust, transparency, and increases relations between the public and public service providers. This also has the secondary benefit of providing youth with positive role models. While other pressures (situations at home, school, or on the street) have influence on their futures, engaging youth, especially at-risk youth, with leaders and service providers can be a type of early intervention.

Add Place-Based Features

Many of the parks we visited could incorporate place-based features that improve community relations, engagement, and understanding. For example, incorporating community bulletin boards or kiosks with information about the city or some historical component provides an opportunity to communicate and educate. Additionally, something as simple as vertical plants for the walls provides a calmer, cleaner, and more inviting atmosphere. The walls could include context sensitive design like art work, stamped concrete, or murals from the community. Features like these improve a sense of ownership, stewardship, and respect for community property. Adopting these features after the fact may increase costs initially, but may also reduce maintenance needs in the future. Murals were incorporated in the Jardin de los Niños in Garden Grove and it provided a real sense of character for the park.



This Lake Forest shopping center includes context sensitive design features.

Build Partnerships

Often times corporations with a major economic interest in a specific geography like to invest in the community. Corporations want happy employees and to accomplish that the quality of life issues must be addressed. Additionally, many non-profits such as Rotary and Kiwanis and even local environmental, school, and advocacy groups can support community programs locally through partnerships. From providing funding to providing volunteers, these partners can become an integral part of a city's park programming. As noted above, the City of Stanton has already utilized public-private partnerships to advance its park goals.⁵⁵ This could become a way to ensure park benefits remain into the future.

Create Pop-Up Parks & Programs

In an entirely new and still developing concept, pop-up parks in urban environments get people outdoors and breathe life back into an otherwise dull environment. The pop-up parks concept means decision makers, park planners, and the community need to rethink their urban spaces and programming. Pop-up parks can include a suite of opportunities: music education, rhythm and dance, calisthenics, exercise courses, yoga, libraries, bike shops, and more. There are even opportunities where families that don't know each other can get together and play old fashioned games. For example, a tent is erected with games from days gone by (hula hoop, cards, jacks, jump rope, coloring books, face painting, etc.). This seems to be a opportunity for our more urban communities—especially those in this study—to incorporate at the local level. A Guide to Pop-Up Parks is available online by Bison Innovative Products at: www.bisonip.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/PopUpParksGuide-2013.pdf.

Create "Local" Park Camping

Based on the economics of these park-poor communities, it is highly likely many of the residents will never have been camping. Cities could explore this idea and provide an Overnight Camp Out in one or more of the local parks. Garden Grove's Camp Out was held in mid-July at its Atlantis Park facility.⁵⁶ If residents don't have tents or sleeping bags, partnerships with the local YMCA, REI store, or Boy and Girl Scouts could be launched. Having a community camp out in a local park would not only be fun, but would also likely encourage more inquisitive responses about the world we live in than before the trip. Nearby universities have camp programs for disadvantaged kids. For example, UCLA's UniCamp and Cal State Fullerton's

Titan Camp may be able to provide camp counselors or partner for local programs. Partnering with other organizations seems to be a critical component that could really boost the use, experience, and enjoyment of residents (families especially) in our study area.

Bring Nature to the City

Numerous organizations already exist that can provide the community with an up-close and personal experience with wildlife ambassadors. From explaining how to keep raccoons out of your garbage can to the importance of snakes for keeping mice populations under control, these programs provide a great educational experience for adults and children alike. Summer programs or even programs scattered throughout the year could educate the populace and increase their understanding and appreciation of nature. Organizations such as Nature of Wildworks, Inside the Outdoors, and the Bird of Prey Center offer these opportunities at reasonable prices, but should be scheduled well in advance. Garden Grove confirmed it has used these types of programs in the city before with great success.⁵⁷

Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP



This program highlights animals you may see in an urban environment.

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Conclusion

Chapter 7

"Parks belong to everybody and to nobody."

— Edward Abbey, Author

Cities with limited abilities to expand existing parklands should consider incorporating the ideas from this study as funding is available. Targeting locations without park facilities should also be a priority.

The City of Stanton employs 90% of the part-time employees through grants and while their hours may shift based on season (less during the school year, more during the summer). This is an efficient use of limited funds. The city indicated that its Strategic Plan, which includes a Park Master Plan, will be updated over the next few years. It is very clear that support from decision makers and leaders, like the City Manager, can have important impacts to the success of a department.⁵⁸

The City of Garden Grove has done an exceptional job with its limited park acreage by creating new and fun opportunities within the city. From live music concerts to partnering with non-profits to help run a former mobile home that was converted into a theater—they have been pro-active. The city indicated that staffing exists to implement several programs they have ideas for and they are actively seeking funding to implement them. The Park Facilities Master Plan should add

tremendous value to the city's existing park system and park programs.⁵⁹

The City of Westminster has had public-private partnerships in previous years that allowed the city's mobile vehicle to engage kids from apartment complexes that lack nearby parks facilities. Additionally, Westminster was successful in getting a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to implement some of its park programming efforts. This is exactly the type of program that gets kids outdoors, provides positive experiences, and increases park access in an innovative way.⁶⁰

FHBP is grateful for the generous funding from The Boeing Company, allowing it to complete this important analysis. We seek to provide our leaders with unique, innovative, and replicable ways to increase green spaces locally. We've offered more than a dozen useful examples that can be employed even in the most park-rich environments. Residents will benefit from being engaged with their community and the outdoors.

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Acknowledgments

Chapter 8

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The copy for this Park Study was mainly written by Melanie Schlotterbeck who is a consultant to environmental non-profits throughout California. She works as part of the Green Vision Core Team for FHBP.

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Chapter 9

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This Park Study is available electronically as one way to reduce our impact on the environment.



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