

SAN MARCOS

RIVERFRONT PARKS VISION PLAN



INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The City of San Marcos, Parks and Recreation Department has engaged Halff to provide vision planning and design services to reimagine the city-owned parks along the San Marcos River, including Plaza, Veramendi, Bicentennial, Children's, Rio Vista, William & Eleanor Crook, and Ramon Lucio Parks (collectively known as the Riverfront Parks). The primary goal of the planning project is to develop a visionary framework to guide the future development of the parks, their programming, facilities, features, general layout, funding requirements and potential implementation strategy through a study site and area context analysis and a robust public engagement process. Community engagement included two touchpoints, or rounds of engagement, including the introduction of the project and then presentation of design concept options. The results from these engagement efforts will be used to prepare a final concept and roadmap for the future park development, park programming, business operations and management. The vision plan will also be used as a promotional tool to generate public interest, support and funding for future parkland development and partnerships.

PROJECT UNDERSTANDING

The Preliminary Design Report (PDR) includes the following:

- On-site drainage analysis and conveyance, including evaluation of flood risk (riverine and onsite)
- Public utility main and utility service capacities/availabilities
- City utility research and inventorying via GIS and records drawings.
- On-site roadway improvements and parking
- On-site Erosion and Sedimentation Control design
- Evaluation of relevant codes and permitting required by the City and relevant state agencies
- Provision of preliminary opinion of probable construction costs
- Coordination for low impact design solutions
- Coordination with relevant local agency for public transit

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ROUND 1 - SPRING 2025

The first round of community engagement began in February 2025 with 7 open houses and an online survey that closed in March 2025, after which the Design Team prepared two concepts. The survey and activity boards gathered input on various aspects, including proximity to the park, duration of residence in San Marcos, preferred activities, and specific amenities desired by the community. 555 survey responses were received. Key themes identified from analysis of the survey and activity boards include:

IMPORTANCE OF THE RIVERFRONT PARKS SYSTEM:

99% of respondents agree that the San Marcos Riverfront Parks System are important to them. The top 5 reasons cited include:

- **Community and Recreation:** The parks provide a vital space for community activities and recreation, including swimming, kayaking, tubing, walking, and playing sports. They are a central part of family life and social gatherings.
- **Environmental and Economic Impact:** The river and parks are seen as unique and irreplaceable natural resources that contribute to the city's beauty and biodiversity. They also play a significant role in tourism, bringing economic benefits to San Marcos.
- **Health and Well-being:** Access to the parks and river is crucial for physical and mental health. They offer a peaceful setting for relaxation, exercise, and connecting with nature, which is essential for overall well-being.
- **Cultural and Historical Significance:** The riverfront parks are deeply embedded in the cultural and historical identity of San Marcos. They are cherished for their historical importance and as a symbol of the city's heritage.
- **Accessibility and Preservation:** The parks provide accessible public spaces for all residents, promoting inclusivity. There is a strong emphasis on preserving these natural areas for future generations and maintaining their ecological integrity.

USAGE AND ACTIVITIES:

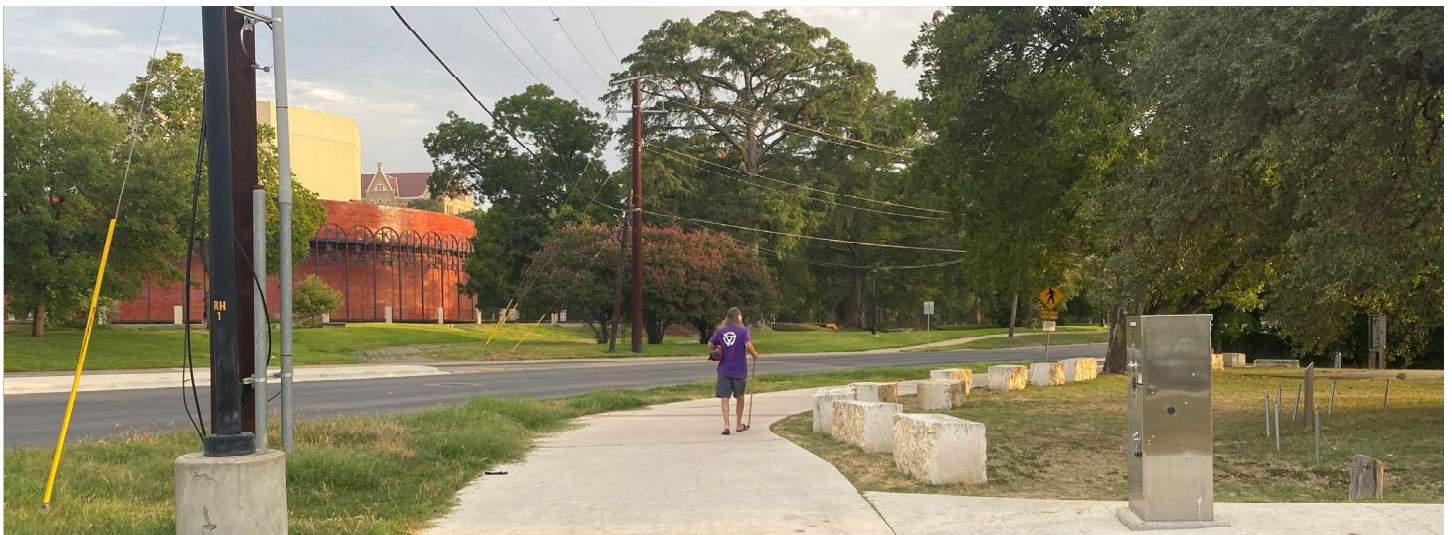
Top activities (in which 50% or more of respondents identify as participating a few times a year or more) include nature viewing/learning about the environment, walking/jogging on trails, picnicking and use of picnic tables, visiting playgrounds, floating the San Marcos River, swimming in the river, and kayaking/canoeing/paddle boarding. Areas favored by 25% or more of respondents include:

- (61%) Trails along the river
- (46%) Scenic views along the river
- (38%) The Falls and Dam at Rio Vista Park
- (31%) Events/concerts at the stage in Plaza Park
- (30%) Sewell Park
- (28%) Children’s Park Playscape

Reasons cited why those areas were favored include:

- **Natural Beauty and Scenic Views:** Many respondents appreciate the natural beauty and tranquility of the parks, enjoying the scenic views, wildlife, and the overall peaceful atmosphere. The river’s clarity and the lush greenery provide a serene environment for relaxation and recreation.

- **Family-friendly Activities:** The parks offer a variety of activities suitable for all ages, making them ideal for family outings. Features like the Children’s Park, playgrounds, and picnic areas are particularly valued for their ability to engage children and provide safe, enjoyable spaces for families.
- **Accessibility and Safety:** Easy access to the river and safe entry points are important to respondents, especially for those with older family members or young children. The parks are appreciated for their well-maintained trails, clean facilities, and overall accessibility.
- **Community Events and Social Interaction:** Events such as concerts in the park, festivals, and community gatherings are highly valued. These activities foster a sense of community and provide opportunities for social interaction, making the parks vibrant and engaging spaces.
- **Recreational Opportunities:** Respondents enjoy the diverse recreational options available, including swimming, kayaking, volleyball, soccer, and walking or running along the trails. The parks offer a perfect blend of nature and activity, catering to various interests and promoting a healthy lifestyle.



Caption

PERFORMANCE GAP:

The most common issues encountered in the Riverfront Parks System that respondents cited include:

- **Enforcement of Rules and Security:** 9% of respondents cited that lack of security is an issue. There is significant concern about the lack of enforcement of park rules and inadequate security. Respondents feel that the presence of park rangers or security personnel is necessary to manage overcrowding, enforce no-littering ordinances, and ensure a safe environment, especially for families with young children.
- **Parking and Accessibility:** 64% of respondents indicated that parking is a major issue, particularly during peak times and weekends. Respondents suggest the need for more accessible parking, including spaces for people with disabilities. There is also a call for better management of parking to prevent overcrowding and ensure that designated areas are used appropriately.
- **Recreational Facilities:** 31% of respondents indicated that the riverfront parks do not meet their interests or needs. There is demand for additional recreational facilities such as sand volleyball courts, pickleball courts, and spaces for pick-up soccer games.
- **Maintenance and Cleanliness:** Overcrowding leads to issues with trash and maintenance. Respondents suggest increasing trash collection efforts during busy periods and providing more trash/recycle bins. There is also a need for clean and well-maintained restrooms.
- **Accessibility for Disabled Individuals:** Respondents highlight the need for better accessibility features, such as handicap rails and less steep rock steps, to make the parks more inclusive for disabled individuals.



Some aspects of the Riverfront Parks system lack sufficient accessibility for disabled individuals visiting the riverfront.

RECENT TRENDS:

Respondents were asked about the quality of the parks over the past 5 years.

- 46% of respondents indicated that the quality of the parks has improved over the past 5 years, citing noticeable improvements in the shoreline, erosion, habitat, park amenities like pickleball courts and refuse receptacles, and pedestrian access improvements including sidewalk improvements, bridge improvements, and the shared-use path.
- 35% of respondents identified that quality had stayed the same.
- 18% indicated that quality had declined, specifically mentioning issues that arise due to crowds, including litter, cleanliness, insufficient seating/picnic tables/refuse receptacles, and general disregard for the law and park rules.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS:

92% of respondents identify themselves as informed when considering the significance of the natural environment of the San Marcos River. There is a strong emphasis on the need to protect the natural environment, with 91% of respondents prioritizing efforts to improve water quality, stormwater runoff, and aquifer recharge.

FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS:

TOP 5 DESIRES EXPRESSED BY RESPONDENTS INCLUDE:

- Increased efforts to improve water quality, stormwater runoff, and aquifer recharge;
- Increased habitat conservation efforts;
- Expansion of the riverfront parks system by acquiring available properties;
- Improved pedestrian and bicycle access to the parks system;
- Better connections to citywide/regional trails.

Respondents understand that the existing locations of tennis and pickleball courts, the swimming pool, and the baseball fields are subject to constraints which conflict with existing amenities and limit expansion and improvement opportunities. When presented with options to relocate within the Riverfront Parks System, relocate outside of the Riverfront Parks System, leave them in their current locations, or remove them and rely on other existing locations, respondents preferred to relocate those activities to sites outside of the Riverfront Parks System.



Trail along Rio Vista Park provides pedestrian and bicycle access throughout the Riverfront Parks.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ROUND 2 - SUMMER 2025

The second round of community engagement began in May 2025 and presented concepts to the public for feedback at three open houses and an online survey that ended in June.

Open houses were open to all and conducted in a come and go format with no formal presentation. The objectives of the meeting were to:

- Inform the community about the project, tentative schedule, and engagement efforts;
- Share existing conditions, opportunities and challenges;
- Share preliminary concepts of the master plan;
- Invite feedback on the concepts;
- Encourage participation in the online survey; and
- Share information about next steps.

During the meeting, the project team shared details about the project. Interactive boards were used to determine what participants liked about each concept or what each concept was missing by leaving comments on boards via sticky notes. Participants were provided a link to an online survey and were encouraged to complete the survey and share it with others in the community.

The second online survey was launched on May 8, 2025 and closed the morning of May 16, 2025. It included 15 questions which asked for feedback regarding which items should be prioritized from each concept, how important it is for certain facilities to be included, and then broad demographic questions to help identify whether outreach efforts were connecting with the community effectively.

PARTICIPATION SUMMARY

The table below includes the times, dates, locations and summary of number of participants at the various engagement opportunities.

Event / Activity Type	Date & Time	Location	Number of Participant
Open House	May 8, 2025 5:30-7:00 p.m.	Activity Center	N/A
Online Survey	May 8, 2025 to June 16, 2025	Online	655

INPUT SUMMARY

The online survey asked respondents to provide input on a range of questions and received input from 655 participants who left 611 comments to open ended questions (excluding “How did you hear about this project?”). The charts and tables below represent the input received from all respondents to the survey. Full details including all written comments are provided separately to this document.

Q1. Refer Concept A. Out of the list below, which should be prioritized? You may select up to 6. (655 Responses/0 Skipped)

Response	Percent of Responses
Pavilions and picnic areas	32.57
Open lawn/open play space	28.42
All-abilities playground	27.34
Nature play	29.34
Event/activity space for concerts/farmers markets	30.41
Baseball fields	13.82
Sand volleyball	11.52
Splash park	38.56
River access for people of all abilities	45.01
Restoration and protection of natural areas	56.99
Boardwalk	17.97
Demonstration garden	9.52
Nature center	20.89
Birding/nature viewing areas	22.27
Natural/historical/cultural interpretive exhibits	14.44
Environmental learning and outdoor classroom	16.44
Shared-use trails for walking/jogging/running/cycling	60.52
Other (please specify)*	17.36
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racquetball/handball/paddleball (14) • Pickleball (12) • Covered multi-use recreation area (4) • Canoe/kayak access (4) • Pool (4) • Tennis (3) • Golf (3) • Dog park (2) • Trees/shade (3) • Disc golf (2) • Managed access (2) 	
<p>*Not all open-ended responses are included in the list above. Some responses duplicated existing multiple-choice options, while others—such as park furnishings, restrooms, or parking—are already considered as part of detailed park design.</p>	

Q2. Refer Concept B. Out of the list below, which should be prioritized? You may select up to 6.
(655 Responses/0 Skipped)

Response	Percent of Responses
Pavilions and picnic areas	36.56
Open lawn/open play space	33.95
All-abilities playground	33.33
Social games (table tennis, horseshoes, washers, etc.)	17.67
Event/activity space for concerts/farmers markets	34.56
Basketball courts	13.82
Tennis courts	10.29
Pickleball courts	21.51
Splash park	38.86
River access for people of all abilities	49.46
Restoration and protection of natural areas	59.29
Shared-use trails for walking/jogging/running/cycling	61.90
Other (please specify)*	16.44
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racquetball/handball/paddleball (14) • Baseball fields (14) • Sand volleyball (5) • Golf (4) • Trees/shade (4) • Pool (4) • Shaded multi-sport pavilion (3) • Canoe/kayak access (3) • Dog park (2) • Disc golf (2) 	
<p>*Not all open-ended responses are included in the list above. Some responses duplicated existing multiple-choice options, while others—such as park furnishings, restrooms, or parking—are already considered as part of detailed park design.</p>	



Pavilion located in Rio Vista Park



Open Lawn/Open Play Space located in Rio Vista Park

Q3. How important is it for the following facilities to be included in the future eastside regional park? (644 Responses/11 Skipped)

Response	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Neutral	Somewhat Unimportant	Not Important at all
Pavilions and picnic areas	33.88	40.10	10.31	8.02	8.02
Open lawn/open play space	36.51	35.12	17.30	6.06	5.71
All-abilities playground	42.14	33.68	13.64	5.87	5.35
Nature play	42.60	30.45	17.80	4.83	4.83
Social games (table tennis, etc.)	7.71	21.44	27.14	17.59	26.30
Event/activity space	23.90	35.84	18.17	8.51	14.24
Basketball courts	11.41	26.06	28.28	11.24	23.68
Tennis courts	9.11	24.17	29.47	11.42	27.15
Pickleball courts	16.53	20.50	24.79	11.74	27.27
Baseball fields	17.05	20.36	24.34	11.92	27.32
Sand volleyball	10.92	22.18	28.74	12.44	27.06
Swimming pool	28.17	24.05	14.00	10.05	24.88
Splash park	36.23	24.92	14.26	6.07	19.02
River access	60.43	26.44	8.54	2.63	2.46
Restoration/protection of nature	74.51	15.91	6.01	1.30	2.27
Boardwalk	19.51	34.26	24.75	6.39	15.41
Demonstration garden	12.93	30.78	30.61	12.24	14.12
Nature center	27.33	35.67	21.00	6.83	9.33
Birding/nature viewing areas	26.38	31.39	24.37	8.51	9.68
Nature/history/culture exhibits	20.90	33.11	27.93	7.36	11.37
Environmental learning	20.71	36.03	23.57	9.76	11.11
Shared-use trails	60.94	28.69	7.78	0.97	2.11

Notes:

- Green text indicates that 50% more respondents agreed that an item was important than respondents who agreed it was unimportant.
- Red text indicates that 50% more respondents agreed that an item was unimportant than respondents who agreed that the same item was important.
- Yellow highlighted boxes indicate that one end of the spectrum (important vs. unimportant) received more votes, but not as high as 50% more than the other end of the spectrum.

Q4. Is there anything the planning team should keep in mind while finalizing the park concept?
(337 Responses/318 Skipped)

A summary of the answers are provided below.

- Preserve and prioritize green spaces and natural areas, avoiding overdevelopment and maintaining the river’s natural beauty.
- Limit the number of parking spots to reduce overcrowding and environmental impact, and consider alternate solutions like shuttle services.
- Ensure accessibility for all, including people with disabilities, through thoughtful design and infrastructure improvements.
- Focus on family-friendly amenities such as playgrounds, splash pads, and picnic areas to create a welcoming environment for residents and visitors.
- Protect the river’s ecosystem by controlling access, limiting visitor numbers, and enforcing anti-littering measures.
- Incorporate areas for dogs, including off-leash parks and dog-friendly river access points.
- Maintain existing recreational facilities like baseball fields while considering additional sports amenities such as pickleball courts and sand volleyball.
- Provide ample shade and water refill stations to ensure comfort and hydration for park users.
- Enhance safety measures, including pedestrian-friendly pathways and better traffic flow management.
- Educate visitors about the importance of protecting the river and surrounding natural environment through signage and interactive experiences.

Q5. How close do you live to the Riverfront Parks System? (637 Responses/18 Skipped)

Response	Percent of Responses
Less than ¼ mile	4.90
Between ¼ to ½ mile	4.11
Between ½ mile to 1 mile	10.74
Between 1 to 2 miles	28.75
More than 2 miles	51.50

Q6. How long have you lived in San Marcos?
(638 Responses/17 Skipped)

Response	Percent of Responses
Less than 5 years	17.98
5-10 years	24.29
11-20 years	23.97
21-30 years	14.67
More than 30 years	14.67
I do not live in San Marcos	4.42

Q7. How did you hear about this project?

(635 Responses/20 Skipped)

Response	Percent of Responses
Social Media (X, Facebook, Etc.)	37.24
Friend, family or neighbor	26.31
Email from the City of San Marcos	34.71
City of San Marcos website	14.42
Flyer	1.43
Neighborhood meeting	2.22
Other (please specify)*	6.02
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • San Marcos River Foundation (4) • News (6) • Surge Soccer (6) • City employee/official (3) • SMYBSA (8) • School (3) • Yoga instructor (3) 	
*Sources which only received one response not included.	

Q8. In which category is your age?

(634 Responses/21 Skipped)

Response	Percent of Responses
Under 18	0.16
18-24	4.76
25-34	24.29
35-44	32.22
45-54	14.13
55-64	8.25
65-74	13.02
75+	3.17

Q9. What is your gender?

(631 Responses/24 Skipped)

Response	Percent of Responses
Woman	67.62
Man	31.26
Identify in another way	1.12

Q10. Do any children 17 or under live in your household? (633 Responses/22 Skipped)

Response	Percent of Responses
Yes	45.12
No	54.88

Q11. What is your race and/or ethnicity?

(612 Responses/43 Skipped)

Response	Percent of Responses
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.82
Asian or Asian American	1.64
Black or African American	2.30
Hispanic or Latino	24.34
Middle Eastern or North African	0.33
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.33
White	65.63
Another Race	4.61