"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

– Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962)

INTRODUCTION

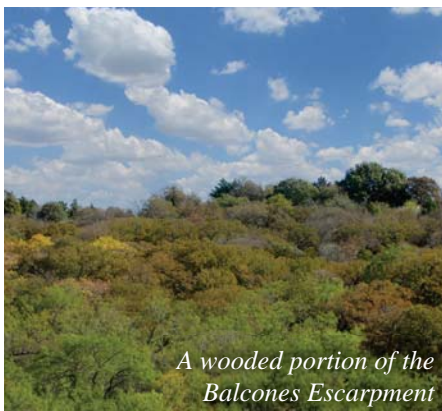2012 PARKS, RECREATION, TRAILS & OPEN SPACE
VISIONING MASTER PLAN

1.1

BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

Background

Cedar Hill is a premier City, a very desirable place to live, and one of the most unique and distinctive places within the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. Our city is known for its natural beauty—a direct result of its location along the Balcones Escarpment—and its diverse culture. These two elements set the foundation for the 2012 Parks, Recreation, Trails and Open Space Visioning Master Plan (the Master Plan).

Natural Beauty

The Balcones Escarpment is the dividing line between two ecoregions and affords unique geological formations, natural overlooks with wide vistas, secluded and forested valleys and canyons, and rich blackland prairies. In addition, it makes Cedar Hill the highest point in the Metroplex. People are able to experience Cedar Hill's natural beauty in all its glory at places like Dogwood Canyon, which boasts the greatest variety of rare plant species in North Texas, and the beautiful and well-maintained Cedar Hill State Park, which is located at the foot of the Escarpment on the shores of Joe Pool Lake. The beauty of the city is perhaps most easily experienced as one enters Cedar Hill along Mansfield Road or FM-1382, both of which follow the foot of the Escarpment along the State Park before sweeping upward toward the blackland prairie.

A wooded portion of the Balcones Escarpment

Diverse & Progressive Culture

Cedar Hill has a rich cultural history with many old structures in the historic district. Even so, Cedar Hill has a modern outlook with a state of the art Government Center and Uptown Village as a major shopping destination for both Cedar Hill residents and people from across the region. Our citizens have diverse backgrounds, but are united as a caring and cooperative community with a can-do spirit and people that are willing to lend a hand. We are a part of the Best Southwest—which includes Cedar Hill, Duncanville, Desoto and Lancaster—and serve as an anchor for quality of life and economic development in southern Dallas County.

Uptown Village

Purpose

This Master Plan is different from a traditional parks master plan. It is inspired by the City leaders' vision to simultaneously address the image of the city while identifying needs for capital projects. As such, the Master Plan includes the traditional elements of a parks master plan, along with a vision and branding for the physical character of the city. The key to this approach is that public facilities—especially streetscapes—strongly convey the image, character, and first impressions of Cedar Hill.

Historic Bridge at Northwood University

At its core, the purpose of this Master Plan is to identify preferences and needs, and provide guidance for the continued development of Cedar Hill's parks, recreation, trails and open space system, while addressing streetscapes as an integral part of the image of the city. The specific objectives of this Master Plan are to:

- Recognize the uniqueness of Cedar Hill found in the natural landscapes that comprise the Balcones Escarpment, creeks, and tree massings;
- Identify the needs of existing parks, trails, and recreation facilities;
- Identify the need for additional parks, park land, trails, and recreation facilities;
- Evaluate the spatial location of Cedar Hill's parks and recreation facilities and recommend measures to ensure a balanced distribution of facilities within the City that are easily accessible to pedestrians;
- Prioritize key park, recreation, and open space improvements;
- Develop a palette of cycling and pedestrian facilities and prioritize a citywide network of connections;
- Create streetscape improvements that will contribute to the image and branding of the city and provide pedestrian and bicycle connections;
- Guide City staff and City leaders in determining appropriate funding levels;
- Develop goals and objectives for improving quality of life within the City; and
- Provide a plan which is consistent with the funding and grant requirements for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

In addition, this plan serves as a tool to help staff coordinate between City departments, with other planning efforts (such as Historic Downtown initiatives, the 2008 Comprehensive Plan, and the 2010 City Center Vision Plan), non-municipal agencies (such as utility companies and railroads), and other jurisdictions (such as adjacent cities, counties, the Cedar Hill Independent School District, and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department/TPWD). This plan will also help the City of Cedar Hill compete for grants from various regional, state, and federal sources, including the North Central Texas Council of Governments and TPWD.

Cedar Hill State Park

Cedar Hill Recreation Center

1.2
VISION & BRANDING

Vision

This Master Plan is built upon the community's vision of how Cedar Hill should evolve, change, and develop in the coming decades. This vision is the foundation of the Master Plan's goals; branding concepts; and future park, recreation, open space, trail, and streetscape improvements. Cedar Hill has a Citywide Vision Statement that serves as a guide and measure for decision making within the City[1]:

> **Citywide Vision Statement**
>
> *We envision Cedar Hill as a premier city that retains its distinctive character, where families and businesses flourish in a safe and clean environment.*

While this existing Citywide Vision Statement remains powerful and relevant, it does not fully define the community's vision for the physical future of Cedar Hill. That is, the future lay-out and visual character of urban development, streets, parks, etc. The vision described in this chapter is intended to supplement the Citywide Vision Statement by physically defining the community's dreams for the future. The Master Plan's vision is based on three innovative concepts, each of which establishes standards at some of the highest known levels nationally and internationally: City Within a Park, 20% Open Space Goal, and Nature/Urban Interface.

Central Park, New York City

[1] The City has also adopted seven core values intended to guide the future actions and growth of the community. These values include: Distinctive Character; Safe; Texas Schools of Choice; Clean; Vibrant Parks and Natural Beauty; Strong and Diverse Economy; and Excellent, Safe and Efficient Infrastructure.

City Within a Park

Cedar Hill will grow and flourish as a city within a park, rather than simply be a city containing parks. In other words, infrastructure, buildings, and neighborhoods will be integrated into the fabric of parks, open space, and greenbelts within the City. These areas will be highly visible from roadways and neighborhoods and will serve as essential elements of "green infrastructure"—providing trail connections, linear parks, natural drainage ways, and wildlife habitat. Perceived as the "front door" to the community, streets will play a significant role in implementing this vision concept.

City Within a Park

20% Open Space Goal

As a city within a park, 20% of the City's land area will consist of public and private open space. These areas will include City parks, greenbelts, and open spaces; county parks; Cedar Hill State Park; Northwood University; and Mount Lebanon Baptist Encampment[1]. Today, 16.3% of Cedar Hill consists of open space. With the overwhelming support of the community (as evidenced in the telephone survey) and in keeping with City Council priorities, the goal of 20% of City area dedicated to parks and open space is set to serve as a tremendous milestone, making the city distinct from any other in Texas and catapulting Cedar Hill to be on par with world-class cities.

20% Open Space Goal

Nature/Urban Interface

With an abundance of park and open space land in Cedar Hill today and in the future, there will be many places where the natural and built environments meet. Translated as the juxtaposition of nature and culture, it calls for contemplation and inspires creativity. As abstract imagery, the nature/urban interface will be celebrated and will influence the design of Cedar Hill's streets, gateways, facilities, and parks serving as landmarks and destinations on which community life focuses. The goal of emphasizing the interface between nature and urban is to complement and amplify the distinctiveness of each. With both nature and urban receiving the same level of attention, a synergy will be achieved whereby the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Nature/Urban Interface

1   The inclusion of these specific private open spaces is with the understanding that these areas will remain in their natural state in perpetuity with complete or partial public access.

Cedar Hill's Characteristic White Rock Outcroppings

"The white rock outcroppings and undulating topography are the most distinctive natural features in our City."

Branding

As a community, we see Cedar Hill as being a Premier City. While being premier remains a worthy goal, truly effective branding should celebrate the qualities that make Cedar Hill markedly different from other cities in the region, state, and nation. In fact, branding is at its most powerful when it is based upon prominent aspects of the community, whether physical (such as New York City's Central Park) or cultural (such as Santa Fe's nationally-recognized arts community).

Branding the City is then really about expressing Cedar Hill's distinctiveness. Creating an identity around the very qualities that make our City different will set Cedar Hill apart as a unique place within the Metroplex and will serve as a beacon around which the community flourishes. This can be done in a very physical manner with city gateways, monumentation, streetscape, and protection of the natural qualities of the City. The design of such elements requires inspiration from what is apparently distinct within the City in order to ensure effective branding.

Inspiration

Cedar Hill's unique, beautiful, and diverse natural environment is perhaps its most distinct feature, and therefore serves as the inspiration for a City-wide branding concept. The convergence of the Cross Timbers and Blackland Prairie along the Balcones Escarpment lend Cedar Hill an unprecedented quality of natural beauty and ecological diversity. While there are many inspirational features of natural beauty in the City—such as creeks, forests, water bodies, and prairies—it is the white rock outcroppings and undulating topography that are the most distinctive natural features in our City. Focused through the lenses of the community's distinctive character and cultural diversity, these natural features serve as the inspiration for the branding of Cedar Hill, rendering it truly unique and apart from other cities.

Entering Cedar Hill along FM 1382

Branding Theme

The visual essence of the white rock outcroppings and undulating topography is found in their rectilinear and curvilinear qualities. The outcroppings are inherently linear and have both horizontal and vertical forms displayed through their striations and vertical faces. In contrast, the rolling hills are curvilinear with moderate vertical undulation expressed along the horizontal horizon.

Developing a branding theme from these features requires distilling their qualities into a design proposition that has physical expression as well as metaphoric meaning. Physical expression is found in the interface between rectilinear and curvilinear features. Metaphorically, such proposition may be expressed as the interface between culture and nature whereby the geometric character of rectilinear features represents culture and the organic character of curving features represents nature. This is particularly significant in Cedar Hill where a high premium is placed both on the protection of the natural landscape and the development of quality facilitates and destinations in the City, including the Government Center, Uptown Village, and the future City Center TOD development.

> *"Physical expression is found in the interface between straight and curving horizontal features. Metaphorically, such proposition may be expressed as the interface between culture and nature."*
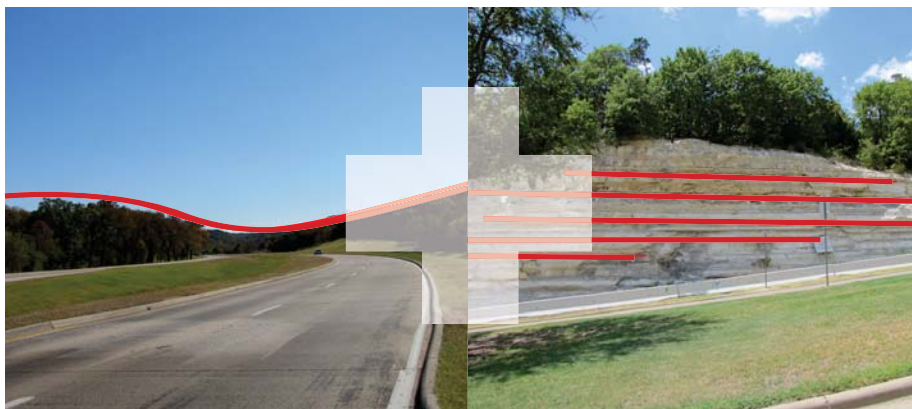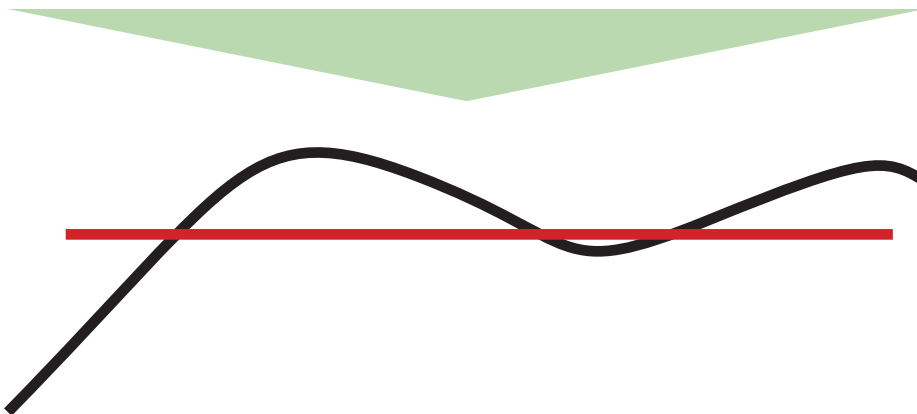

Figure 1.1 – Branding Theme

This graphic illustrates the undulating topography in contrast with the rectilinear striations of the Escarpment's white rock outcroppings. The resulting abstraction illustrates a curvilinear line intersecting with a straight horizontal line.

"The application of City branding... is based upon the concept of Nature/ Urban Interface..."

Branding Application

Cedar Hill's branding theme for master planning purposes is based on the concept of Nature/Urban Interface, as described on page 1–5. This theme is physically expressed through a common design language that is inspired by the juxtaposition of ideas and constructs including: nature/ culture; urban/rural; and curvilinear/rectilinear. This common design language is distilled in creating contrast in form, material, texture, color, scale, and formality as applied to physical features within the City such as: gateway features; monuments; paving patterns; and elements within parks, including park signs, pavilions, and overlooks.

The following principles serve as a guide for the design of these physical features:

"The common design language is distilled in creating contrast..."

- **Form** – Inspired by undulating topography and the rectilinear character of the white rock outcroppings, contrast is achieved with rectilinear forms designed in juxtaposition with curvilinear forms. In urbanized areas, design forms will generally be geometric to be intersected by a curvilinear element. Design forms in rural and natural areas will generally be more organic to be intersected by geometric elements.

- **Material & Texture** – Contrast is found in the juxtaposition of natural materials (in the form of native plants and natural stone) and man-made materials (in the form of metal). Contrast is also achieved with the juxtaposition of living plants with inanimate metal/stone. With innovation, the texture of materials can be applied to create contrast and visual interest. For example, natural-quarried stone contrasted with smooth-cut stone; polished stainless steel contrasted with weathered Corten steel; and finely-leaved Cedar Elm trees contrasted with coarsely-leaved Bur Oaks.
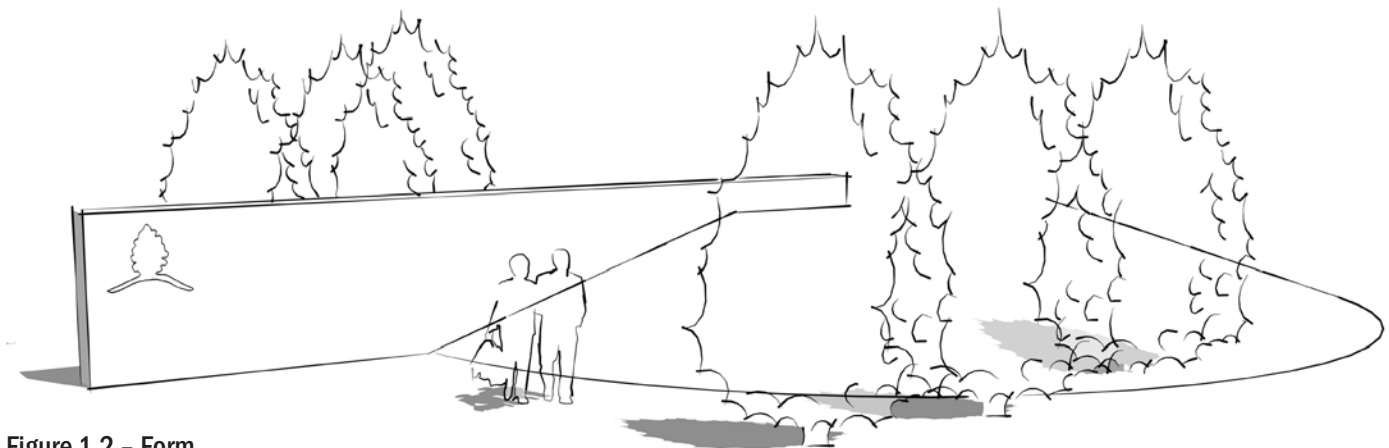

Figure 1.2 – Form

The image illustrates the potential application of the branding theme by means of a linear form (such as a stone wall) that interfaces with a curving landform.

Figure 1.3 – Material

These images provide an example of a common material (limestone) with different texture treatments. The left example is suitable for formal applications in urbanized areas while the right example is more suitable for organic applications in natural areas.

- **Color** – As much as possible, the inherent colors of materials are allowed to shine through, which adds an element of authenticity and can reduce maintenance needs. The colors derived from natural materials include buffs, whites, and tans of the rock outcroppings; bold greens and browns of the forests; piercing blue of the sky; and explosive yellows and reds of fall foliage. The colors derived from man-made materials include rust brown of Corten steel and silver of stainless steel. The predominant colors are the more muted earthtones, while vibrant hues are used to highlight key icons and details. Similar to texture, color contrast can be achieved through the juxtaposition of different types of materials.
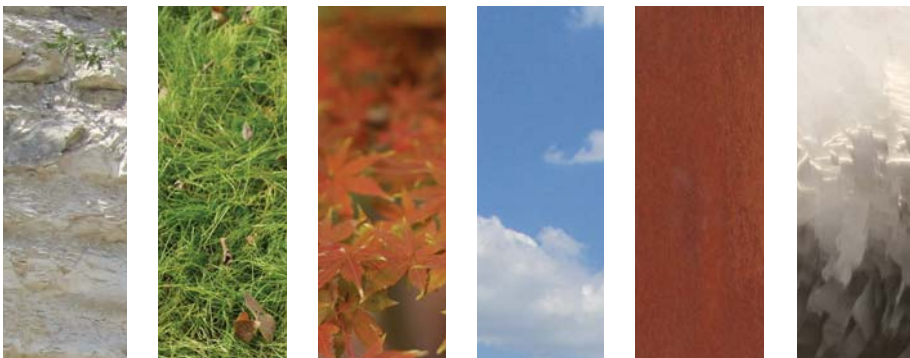

Figure 1.4 – Color

Nature provides a broad and vibrant range of colors. Augmented by Corten and stainless steel, the natural colors of the materials used provide the foundation for the palette with minimal need for paint.

- **Context** – The context in which a particular branding element is located shapes the scale and formality of each branding element. In natural and low-density areas, often within the expanse of open space, elements may be larger in scale and more natural and organic in design (however, smaller-scaled elements may be preferred to reduce visual impact). In contrast, elements in urbanized environments are scaled down and more formal or refined. This translates into bold designs at the edges of the City transitioning into more refined smaller-scale applications in the City Core, e.g. the use of large, rough-cut quarried stone at the city edge and the use of small and smooth-cut stone in the city center. Speed of the viewer also plays a role, with elements along roadways necessitating a larger scale than elements along trails or interior roadways with slower-moving traffic.

Branding Coordination

Successful city branding furthermore identifies features and destinations in the City that should be celebrated for their sheer beauty and quality. Such branding-related destinations that are truly unique to the City include Cedar Hill State Park and Dogwood Canyon. It is prudent for the City to align itself closely with these destinations and continue to market and publicize them as a way to distinguish ourselves from other cities.

Hiking in Dogwood Canyon

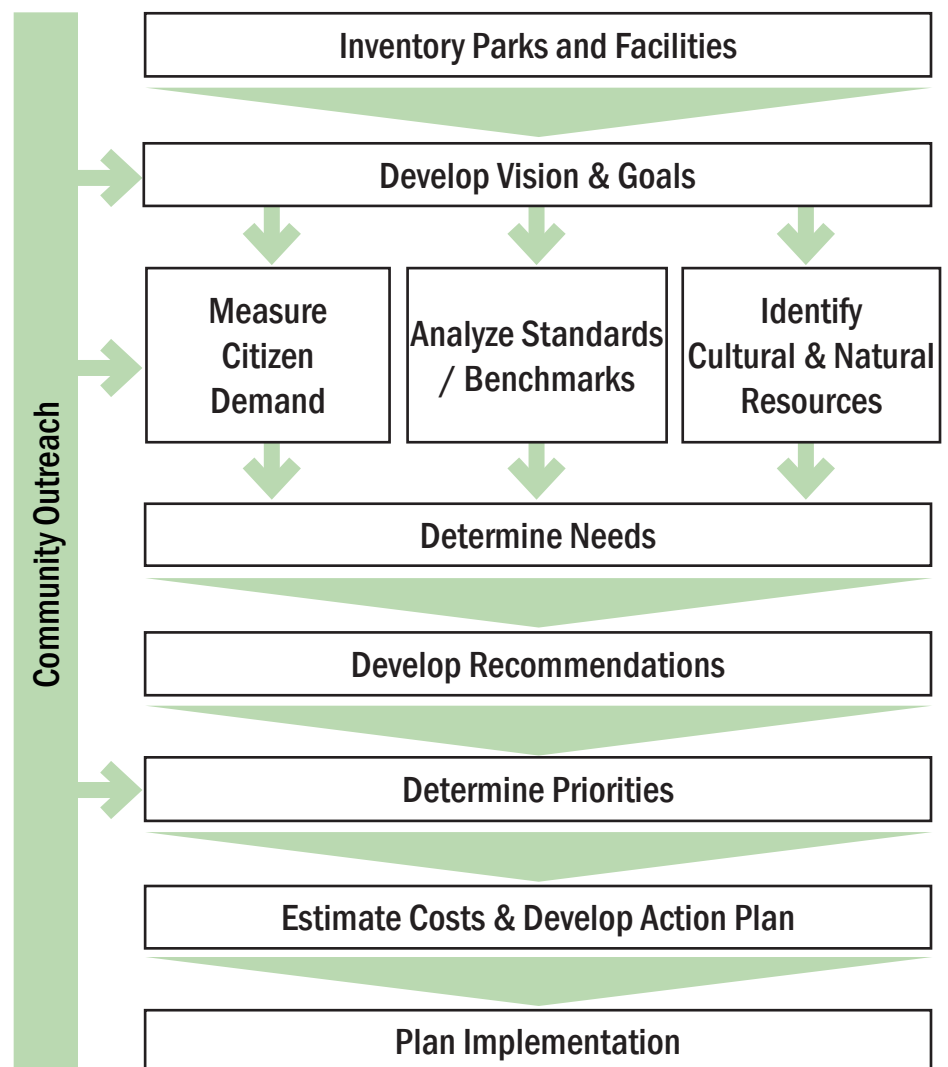*(this page intentionally left blank)*

1.3
METHODOLOGY

Planning Process

This Master Planning process is illustrated in Figure 1.4. The development of the Master Plan was guided by a Master Plan Visioning Committee, represented by the Park Board, Cedar Hill Community Development Corporation, and City Council. The ultimate goal of the Visioning Committee was to champion the Master Plan not only with their input and guidance, but also by motivating its importance to City Council and the public at large.

The Planning Team was lead by Halff Associates, Inc. with the assistance of Brinkley Sargent Architects and Raymond Turco and Associates. The analysis performed as part of this Master Plan and the resulting recommendations and priorities are based on the needs of the citizens as identified through a wide-reaching public involvement process. The Master Plan results in an Action Plan, which includes specific items to be implemented in the near-term (5 year) and long-term (10 year) future.

Figure 1.4 – Planning Process

This diagram illustrates the planning process followed during the development of this Master Plan.

Report Outline

This Master Plan is organized into eight chapters. Each of these chapters details a major component of the master planning process.

Introduction (Chapter 1)

In addition to defining the purpose of this Master Plan and the process by which it has been produced, this chapter also reflects Cedar Hill's vision and goals as the guiding principles for the development of the parks, recreation, trails and streetscape system within the city.

Context (Chapter 2)

Chapter 2 examines the internal and external factors influencing Cedar Hill's parks, recreation, trails and streetscape system including the city's history. The natural resources, regarded as important image defining elements of the city, are briefly described. The community's demographics are analyzed and several of the City's previous studies are reviewed to better understand the past, present, and future of Cedar Hill. Regional and national trends related to parks and recreation are also analyzed. Community outreach and public involvement are core components of the Master Plan process. The summary of this input directly impacts the recommendations of the Master Plan.

Parks & Open Space (Chapter 3)

This chapter focuses on the provision of parks and recreation facilities and the protection of open space. Included in this chapter is an overview of Cedar Hill's existing parks, recreation, and open space system; an analysis of needs based on regional and national benchmarks and standards; recommendations; cost estimates; and prioritized future actions.

Aquatics & Indoor Recreation (Chapter 4)

The existing Recreation Center, Senior Center, and Crawford Park pool are analyzed in this chapter and recommendations are made for their improvement. In addition, regional benchmarks are considered and used to determine future needs based on the growing population.

Trails & Bikeways (Chapter 5)

The Trail Master Plan and Bikeways Master Plan are the subject of this chapter. The Trails Master Plan focuses on the provision of paved or unpaved shared-use pathways for pedestrians, cyclists, and other user groups that are typically located along creeks, greenbelts, nature areas, utility corridors, and sometimes roadways. The Bikeways Master Plan focuses on facilities specifically for cyclist use, including bike lanes, that are located on roadways.

Streetscapes (Chapter 6)

The focus of this chapter is the development of a set of aesthetic guidelines that will help the City enhance its visual character and appeal along roadways. The chapter includes an analysis of streetscape types within the City, an overview of a design theme for streetscapes, concepts for gateways, roadway sections and plans for all thoroughfare types, and a palette of materials.

Implementation Summary (Chapter 7)

Strategic policy recommendations and a summary of action items are the foci of this chapter. In addition, a summary of the key priorities resulting from this Master Plan and the costs associated with its implementation are provided.