

Passive Open Space

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the purpose of the City's open space program?

A: The City's open space program is intended to conserve, activate, and manage open space and urban forest lands consistent with City policies and regulations.

Q: How is the City's open space program structured?

A: The City has segregated its open space into two categories: active and passive. Active areas are those that are developed primarily for community access and recreation. These include parks, play fields and boulevards such as Ruston Way. Passive properties are generally undeveloped and covered with vegetation; many are regulated by the City's Critical Areas Preservation Code; and most provide or have the potential to provide benefits to stormwater quantity and quality. The distinction of "active" vs. "passive" on any property does not exclude an active function on a passive property or vice versa but more clearly defines departmental roles and funding. Responsibility for maintenance and operations is shared amongst many City departments.

Q: What is an active open space property?

A: Active open space properties are developed primarily for community access and recreation and include areas that are hardscaped, landscaped, and formalized. These areas are maintained and operated by the City's Public Works and Real Property Services Departments.

Q: What is a passive open space property?

A: Passive open space properties make up approximately 488 acres of City-owned forests, wetlands, streams, and habitat areas. Naturally vegetated and functioning ecosystems provide many environmental benefits to people as well as animals. Healthy forested lands absorb and reduce the amount of rain runoff, which would otherwise require large scale and costly engineered stormwater systems to manage. Because of the stormwater benefit, the City's Environmental Services Department maintains and manages the passive open space properties.

Q: How is the passive open space program funded?

A: Management of passive open space properties is primarily funded through surface water utility fees because of the stormwater benefits – improved water quality and reduced runoff volume – provided when natural areas are fully functioning.

Q: How are passive open space properties managed?

A: Individual properties are grouped together into larger management units based on geographic location, hydrologic connections, and vegetative condition. These management units are then assessed using the Forest Landscape Assessment Tool (FLAT). This rapid assessment method gathers quantitative data on vegetation which is used to characterize and prioritize management units. Many factors determine the next steps for any one property, the City’s more complex properties may need a Landscape Management Plan and/or permits to move forward.

Q: What is a Landscape Management Plan?

A: Landscape Management Plans are prepared and used to define and direct allowable long-term management activities for a property with regard to improvements, maintenance, process and any permitting requirements. Open Space Landscape Management Plans identify the “target ecosystem” and what steps and resources are required to achieve this goal. When open space areas encompass critical areas (i.e., wetlands, buffers, steep slopes), management plans are required and must be permitted per local, state and federal laws.

Common management activities (which could require a permit) include but are not limited to:

- Planting native vegetation
- Pruning or removal of vegetation
- Installation of permanent structures
- Filling or excavation of soil
- Exposing a large area of bare soil

Additional Resources:

For more information about permitting, click [here](#).

For more information about critical areas, click [here](#).