

Working with Municipal Parks for Access to Equestrian Facilities– Part 1, The Master Plan

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What is a Master Plan?

A 'master plan', according to the Merriam-Webster Learners Dictionary: "A detailed plan for doing something that will require a lot of time and effort". So true. The considerable work is well worth the time and effort.

When a new park or renovation of an existing park is proposed, planning usually results in a master plan. Master plans may be stand-alone documents or incorporated into the community's overall comprehensive plan. Master plans contain site plans, narratives and budgets. Park master plans are produced with the direction and expertise of parks staff, outside consultants, parks, planning agencies and input from community members, largely at open meetings. These meetings are important to the equine community, as they provide a forum for discussion of their needs and an opportunity to influence policy about equine activities and horse-keeping for the long term.

Public meetings should never be the only communication pathway between organizations, agencies and consultants. Equine community members should also strive to develop relationships through the more relaxed atmosphere of a staff member's office or an invitation to an equine event.

How does a Master Plan differ from a Community Comprehensive Plan?

Community comprehensive planning incorporates a broader view of the community than a master plan for a singular element, such as a park or park system. A comprehensive plan addresses issues of interest to the entire community for a future timeframe, usually ten to twenty years. Every 5 to ten years the plan is reviewed and revised to reflect changing conditions and needs.

Comprehensive plans use images, drawings and narratives to illustrate existing and proposed elements, providing justification and budget proposals for each, and may include or refer to the community's other master plans, such as a trails or greenways plan. For links to more planning and zoning information, see **NOTE** below.

Zoning ordinances are the regulations that help enforce the intentions of the comprehensive plan. A zoning plan is a drawing that shows the locations where various zone types, such as commercial, residential, etc. are allowed. Zoning codes must be followed when any new development or rehabilitation is proposed. Understanding the language in both the community's comprehensive plan and zoning ordinances, which may be friendly or unfriendly to horses, is important, as is an awareness of and familiarity with any additional master plans that the comprehensive plan incorporates or refers to.

When organized, the equine community can accomplish a great deal, through advocacy, in making plans and regulations more horse-friendly. Creating relationships between equine organizations and planning related personnel is critical.

Comprehensive plans and master plans both identify potential funding sources and spending priorities for project work, services and amenities such as infrastructure, utilities, where certain land uses can and cannot be carried out, and elements that will improve livability. These include outdoor amenities such as parks, trails, greenways and open land.

All Community Members Must Make Their Voices Heard
...Equestrians Need to Educate Decision Makers and Citizens as to the Value of Horses in Their Community.

Park Master Planning Begins with Advocacy

A park or park system master plan will generally include a narrative about the needs of the community for open space, recreation and sports, and natural areas. Municipalities with a strong equine presence often create separate master plans for equine facilities and trails and develop equine overlay districts for the protection of equine land areas.

When it comes to equestrian facilities and trails, input from the equine community is particularly important. In our article “Equine Advocacy – A Best Practice for Equine Access,” (<https://bit.ly/2OaesHu>) ELCR recommends that an organization achieve non-profit status and that the organization be somewhat permanent in order to continually monitor planning, zoning and development scenarios within the area covered by the plan, or perceived gains in equine access can be easily lost.

NOTE: For more information on Planning and Zoning, See ELCR’s *Horse-Friendly Zoning Practices in American Communities*, our *Planning and Zoning Guide for Horse Friendly Communities* and other planning information located on our Planning for Horses in Your Community Issues section. Click [here](#).



Public Input Meeting. Photo Courtesy NRCS

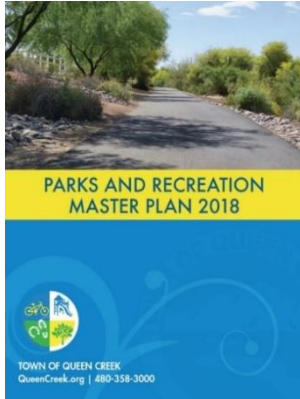
Great Communicators

As all community members must make their voices heard so that specific public space needs are met, equestrians and other equine enthusiasts need to educate decision makers and neighbors as to the value of horses in their community, including:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Tourism attraction
- Community Identity – visual benefits of horses and horse land
- Economic Benefits
- Ecosystem benefits of open land for soil, water and air quality

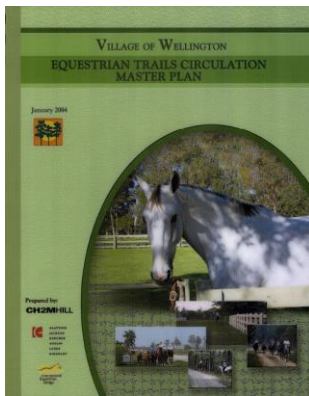
When well phrased and delivered, explaining these benefits will help decision makers to understand that it is to the community’s benefit to include equestrian facilities and trails in the planning process.

Equine Master Plans and Plan Drawings – Examples (See Part 2, An Illustration of Parks Master Plans, for additional examples)



Queen Creek Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2018. Recognizing their equestrian and agricultural heritage, the Town of Queen Creek, Arizona includes their equestrian facilities and trails within their overall Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The equestrian components are included for future enhancement and expansion. The master planning process included The Town Council, Administration, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Council, staff from many of the town’s government agencies and consultants, with input from the town’s residents and businesses through workshops, meetings and surveys. The equine community was well represented.

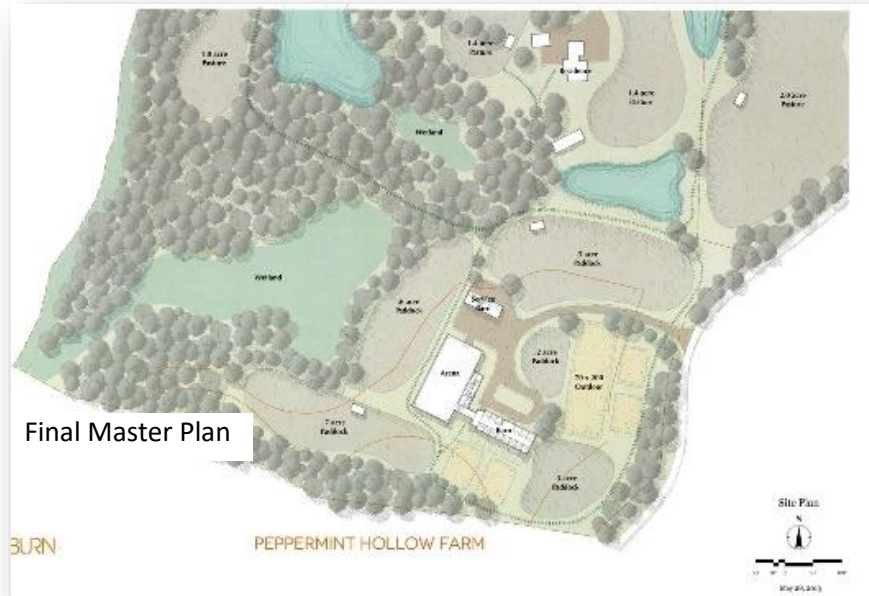
Queen Creek Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2018. [Ctrl/Click image for the full plan.](#)



Village of Wellington Equestrian Trails Circulation Master Plan 2004. Wellington, Florida is a very equine oriented village. With over 57 miles of equine accessible trails crossing public, private and canal properties, the village recognized the need to provide a quality trail inventory, improve trail alignments, document needed improvements and provide for overall maintenance. The master planning process created a stand-alone document, consistent with the Equestrian Element of the Village of Wellington Comprehensive Plan. Note that outside consultants played a very major role in research, public input and development of this plan alongside Village government staff.

Village of Wellington Equestrian Trails Circulation Master Plan 2004. [Ctrl/Click image for the full plan.](#)

This drawing of the final layout of Peppermint Hollow Farm, proposed by **Blackburn Architects** is an example of a rendered (refined and colored) final master plan drawing, similar to what you might see in many equestrian related trail or facilities plans, with each major element labelled. An accompanying report gives inventory, development, phasing and budgetary information.



What Can You Expect from the Master Planning Process?

You may have seen the very colorful master plan drawings that communities exhibit to illustrate their plans, especially park plans. Not just pretty drawings, they are the result of a long process:

- The decision is made that a master plan is needed. The master plan is a framework of projects to be done in the future. The master plan must be funded, whether produced in-house or by outside consultants, so now is a good time to begin to search for potential funding resources.
- The need for an early feasibility or market study is assessed, which examines and answers the question, “Can the community support a new or revitalized facility?”
- A Steering committee formation: identified stakeholders will lead the master planning process.
- A consultant is hired or work is assigned to planning staff. If an outside consultant is required, the steering committee or government agency will need to create and send out an RFP (Request for Proposal) or RFQ (Request for Qualifications), a good business practice. Your government agency partner will guide the contracting process.
- An Inventory existing land and facilities is done.
- Input is received from community members through a series of public meetings, surveys, etc. Input is analyzed, and conceptual plans are created and discussed with the steering committee.
- A final plan is developed from concept drawings. Potential funding sources are pinned down.
- The Master Plan Report is completed, containing plan, elevation and perspective drawings of specific areas to justify and fully illustrate all plan components. Design standards are created, containing agreed upon styles and materials for elements such as signage, building finishes,

lighting, mounting blocks and trail cross-sections. Meeting records, descriptions of community needs, prioritization schedule and a budget implementation plan are included.

- The Final Master Plan and Report are presented for public viewing and/or comment.

Now, with the completion of the master planning process, the community has a firm site plan, budget, phasing/ prioritization and potential funding resources for implementation of the plan. For an equestrian use plan, you and your organization will have done a good job of asking for and justifying your equine facility and trails needs, and they are illustrated within the Master Plan. Keep in mind that the Master Plan is a fluid document that will need to be reviewed and amended to take advantage of project opportunities and changes in priorities.



Photo by Lee Rouse

Next Steps

- If your steering committee, along with the primary public agency (parks or other), hasn't begun to explore partnerships with other public agencies and private foundations, now is the time to do it. You have a well-written and illustrated plan in hand. Talk and agree about who will make an appeal to agencies and foundations for funds.
- Your steering committee may need to hire a grant writer to research potential grants, low-interest loans and other partnerships that will garner materials and volunteer labor.
- Refer to the Master Plan for first-priority projects. Also keep an eye/ear out for serendipitous projects – opportunities that present themselves at a given time, probably not in sequence with your prioritization list but that can't be passed up.

Working with Municipal Parks for Access to Equestrian Facilities– Part 2, An Illustration of Parks Master Plans, contains examples of park master plans from around the US. Each example will be linked to the designer's or communities' websites and documents.

About the Equine Land Conservation Resource (ELCR): *The Equine Land Conservation Resource is the only national not-for-profit organization advancing the conservation of land for horse-related activity. ELCR serves as an information resource and clearinghouse for land and horse owners on issues related to equine land conservation, land use planning, land stewardship/best management practices, trails, liability and equine economic development. For more information about the ELCR visit our website at www.elcr.org or call (859)455-8383.*