

Chapter 3 Community Facilities and Services





Chapter 3: Community Facilities and Services

3.1. Purpose 1 | CF

3.2. Community Facilities Snapshot 1 | CF

3.3. Goals and Strategies 8 | CF

Section 3.1. Purpose

The Community Facilities and Services Element provides an analysis of Mason's existing public facilities and services such as schools, parks, and public safety, and to identify community needs in each area. This element provides a vision to efficiently use public facilities, meet long-term public safety needs, and provide residents with ample park and recreation opportunities.

Primary components of this element include:

1. An inventory of open space areas, recreational resources, and designations of access points to open space areas and resources;
2. An analysis of forecasted needs, policies for managing and protecting open space areas and resources, and implementation strategies to acquire additional open space areas and further establish recreational resources;
3. Policies and implementation strategies designed to promote a regional system of integrated open space and recreational resources for existing and future spaces.
4. Recommendations to enhance and improve the City's public safety facilities and services.
5. Recommendations to enhance the utilization and efficiency of services and facilities.

Vision Statement

Mason will create a legacy of public facilities and efficient management of public services that supports a safe, healthy, attractive and fiscally sustainable community. Public safety facilities will expand to protect a growing population and business base. Parks and recreation facilities will grow to serve developing areas while improving connections to existing neighborhoods.

Section 3.2. Community Facilities

Snapshot

This section contains a summary of existing conditions, issues and opportunities related to community facilities in Mason. Detailed information can be found in the Existing Conditions Report.

Introduction

High quality community facilities and public amenities make Mason a highly desirable place to live. Excellent public schools, parks and city services contribute to Mason's high quality of life and sustainability as a community of choice.

Chapter 3 Cover Photo

Red, Rhythm and Boom - a Mason signature event - is held each year in celebration of Independence Day. Thousands of people gather in Corwin Nixon Park to enjoy live music and watch one of the largest fireworks displays offered in Southwest Ohio.

School System

- Mason prides itself on its availability of high-quality public and private education.
- The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) has designated Mason City Schools as Excellent, its highest rating for student achievement and progress, for the past seven years.
- The system has an enrollment of roughly 10,700, which is the size of a small city.
- The ODE ranked Mason City Schools fourth of the Ohio's 613 school districts in its overall performance index score for the 2006-2007 school year.
- The Ohio Physical Activity Plan, the principles of which have been adopted by the City, aims to make schools "centers of community physical activity" through physical education, sports, and routine active transport (see Chapter 7, Section 7.2 for additional information).

Higher Education

- A recently opened Mason branch of Sinclair Community College offers associate degrees and general post-secondary education.

Libraries

- The Mason community has its own independent public library, located at 200 Reading Road (see Map 3.2A).
- The Library completed an expansion in 2000 that doubled its size. Due to ongoing growth, the library is once again exploring expansion or satellite locations.

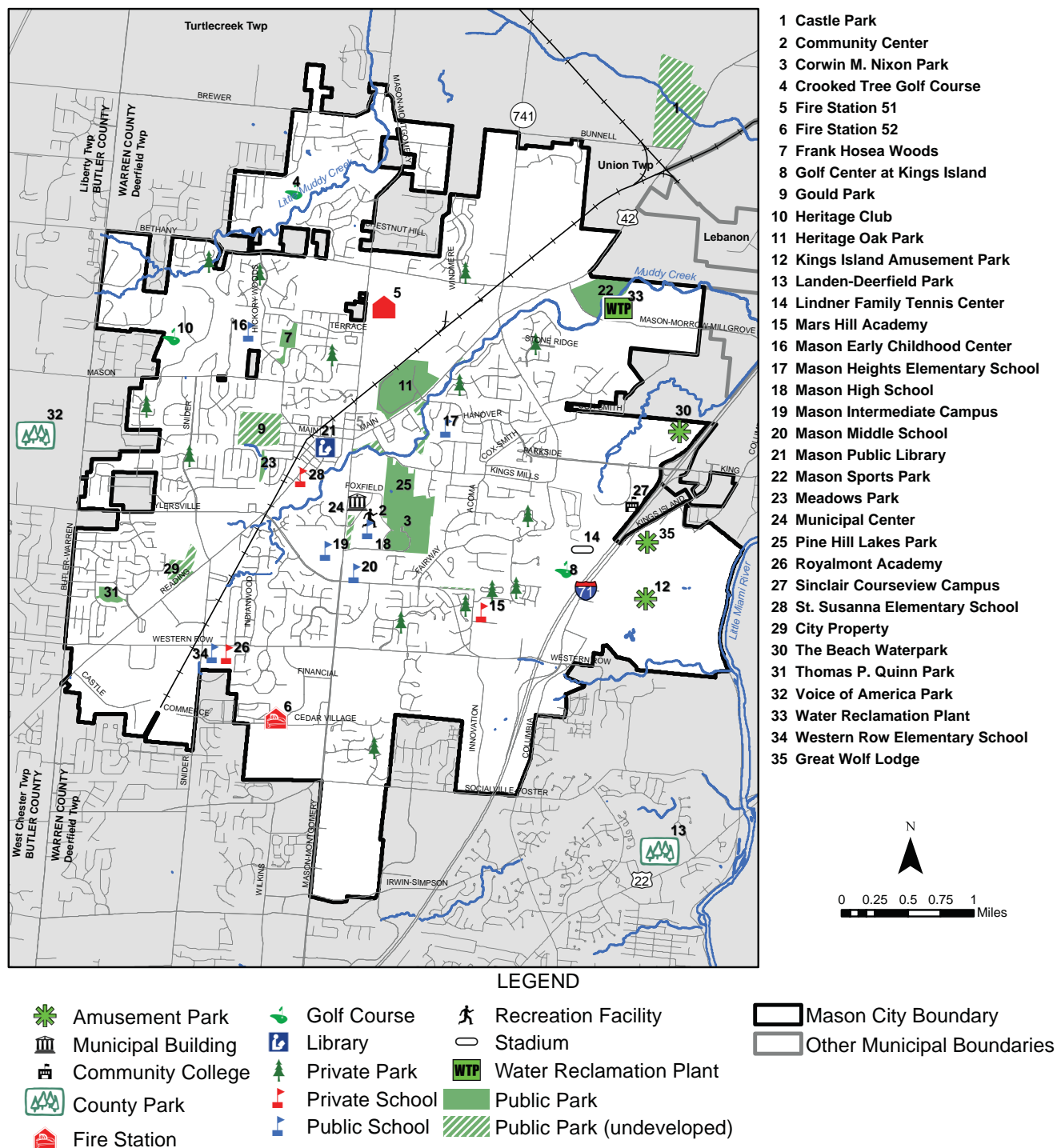


Mason Public Library

Highlights

- Mason residents enjoy access to one of the top-rated public school systems in Ohio.
- Mason's parks, Community Center and the Golf Center at Kings Island offer year-round, state-of-the-art recreation facilities.
- Many of Mason's schools, community parks and recreation facilities are concentrated in a central location. Some facilities are shared between the School District and City, which allows residents to utilize multiple services in one location.
- Mason City School District teaches students in grade-specific buildings, as opposed to neighborhood schools. Students are bussed to the school facilities, which are located in campus-style settings throughout the community.
- Private parks, located in subdivisions, help to increase the amount of recreation opportunities for residents.
- Mason Public Library needs to expand to serve a growing membership.
- Planned new parks will help to serve growing areas to the northeast, address a neighborhood park service area gap in southwestern Mason, and add a new greenway along the Muddy Creek.
- Recent development near Kings Island indicates an opportunity to create a branded "entertainment district" in this area.
- Efforts have been completed to improve the image and function of Downtown as the City's focal point and a pedestrian-friendly gathering spot. These efforts include streetscaping, façade improvement, greenway connections, and future cultural/entertainment facilities.
- The City maintains a high standard of public safety and administrative services.
- The Fire Department is currently rebuilding the outdated Station 51 on Alliance Drive and to adjust existing services to meet the needs of the growing community.

Map 3.2A: Community Facilities



Parks and Recreation

- Overall, Mason residents have access to an impressive array of public and private open space and recreational facilities.
- The City includes nearly 300 acres of public parkland in seven City parks with a range of active and passive recreational facilities, as well as an indoor community recreation facility and public golf course.
- The City also includes several private recreation facilities such as golf courses, neighborhood parks, athletic facilities and amusement parks.
- The Ohio Physical Activity Plan envisions the development of a statewide trail, bikeway, and open space network. The 2001 Bicycle and Pedestrian Way Master Plan provides guidance on developing a city wide bike and pedestrian system.
- The City owns The Golf Center at Kings Island located on Fairway Drive. The course, developed in 1972, was designed by Jack Niklaus. Mason residents enjoy discounted golf rates. Other amenities include a pro shop, locker rooms, the Courseview Restaurant and Bar, Patio Grille and meeting and banquet rooms.

Existing Parks

- Mason is well-served by community parks (see Map 3.2B). However, the City has limited public neighborhood parks, particularly in the eastern half of the community. Private parks, located in subdivisions, help to meet the need.

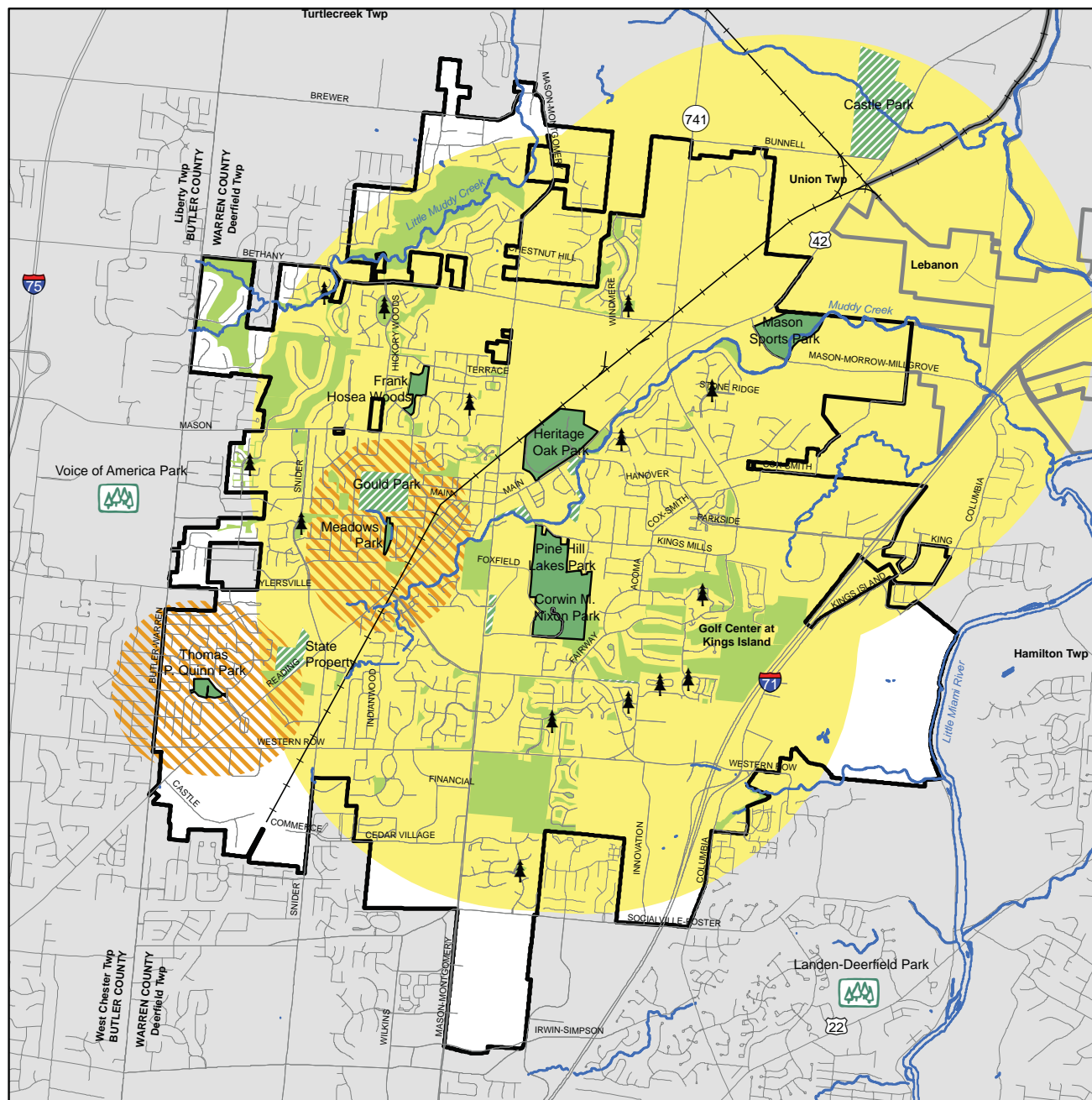
Community Center

- In addition to its public park system, Mason offers a 150,000 square foot indoor public recreation and activity center. The center includes recreational and leisure facilities and equipment, as well as hundreds of programs and activities. The community center expanded in 2010 and includes additional fitness and recreation space as well as a medical office building for Group Health Associates and Bethesda Physical Therapy. The community center will also have space for tenants that can help to achieve the goal to “live well in mason”.



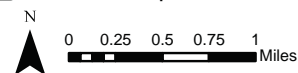
The Golf Center at Kings Island offers several public amenities such as a gazebos, meeting rooms, banquet hall, and restaurant in addition to golf.

Map 3.2B: City Park Service Areas



LEGEND

- | | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| City Park | Recreational / Open Space | Mason City Boundary |
| City Park (undeveloped) | County Park | Other Municipal Boundaries |
| Community Park Service Area (1.75 mi.) | Private Park with Rec. Facilities | |
| Neighborhood Park Service Area (0.5 mi.) | | |



Private Recreation

- Mason has several private recreation establishments that serve as tourist attractions including:
 - Kings Island Amusement Park
 - The Beach Waterpark
 - Wall-to-Wall Soccer
 - McGees Courts-for-Sports (volleyball and basketball)
 - Sports Express (indoor volleyball)
 - Lindner Family Tennis Center
- The Great Wolf Lodge, adjacent to Kings Island, complements the amusement parks' offerings with a hotel, conference center and indoor water park.
- Golf courses in Mason include the private Heritage Club in northwest Mason and Crooked Tree Golf Course, which is open to the public.

Planned City Parks

- Mason adopted a Parks Master Plan and New Park Design in 2004 that identified recreation facility and open space needs and developed concept plans for several park locations. Implementation of these recommendations is well underway. The City has completed the Mason Sports Park and initial phases of the Muddy Creek corridor trails.



Downtown is located in the historic core of Mason and includes several older structures such as the former City building.



Kings Island Amusement Park

Proposed New Parks

Muddy Creek Greenway Corridor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greenway with pedestrian path linking parks, neighborhoods and downtown in central and northeastern Mason.
Crooked Tree Property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.9 acre property on Brewer Road near Crooked Tree Estates
Old Stitt Road Property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former Stitt Road right-of-way • Improvements will include landscaping and a bike trail.
Kathleen Bevan Castle Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portion of the 126-acre property to the northeast of the City. A portion will be retained for non-park use.
Memorial Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4.5 acres adjacent to Veterans Memorial, Municipal Center, High School and Community Center.
Former State Property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 23-acre property on U.S. 42 purchased by the City by the State of Ohio. • Will be developed as a neighborhood park serving the southwestern portion of Mason.
Gould Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 49-acre former farm. • Planned primarily as passive open space and neighborhood park use.

Downtown

- As the historic and cultural center of Mason, downtown is a unique kind of community facility.
- The City completed the Downtown Revitalization Plan in 2002, which recommended a series of improvements aimed at making downtown a vibrant mixed-use environment and gathering spot.

- The City is pursuing implementation of several of the recommendations, including:
 - Burying of utilities (completed).
 - Establishment of public parking lots.
 - Construction of pocket parks.
 - Gateway signage.
 - Establishment of a Train Depot.
 - Development of the Muddy Creek greenway.
- The Water Reclamation Plant houses the Public Utilities Department, while the Public Works Department operates from a separate facility near the intersection of State Route 741 and Bethany Road.
- Mason's largest single source of revenue, like many Ohio cities, is its Income Tax. Mason's one-percent income tax rate produced over \$21 million in 2008.
- Mason began offering a 100% credit in 2010 to residents who pay income taxes to other communities.
- The Finance Department earned a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada, the highest recognition for government accounting and financial reporting numerous times.

Public Safety and Administration

Fire & EMS

- Fire and EMS services are provided by the City of Mason Fire Department, which operates two fire stations in the community (see Map 3.2A).
- Ongoing growth continues to necessitate improvements and expansions in the Fire Department, including:
 - A replacement for the current Station 51, due to the lack of adequate space.
 - Eventual construction of a third station and potential relocation of Station 52.

Police

- The City of Mason Police Department has achieved accreditation by the international Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, a voluntary distinction that indicates a high level of quality in law enforcement services and administration.
- The Department faces a surge of calls for service during summer months, due to the seasonal influx of tourists to local venues such as Kings Island Amusement Park, The Beach Waterpark, and the Lindner Family Tennis Center.
- A potential satellite facility at Kings Island has been discussed.

City Administration

- The Municipal Center, built in 2002, includes the Police Department as well as operations for Administration, Fire, Engineering and Building, Finance, and Parks and Recreation departments.



Mason Municipal Center

Section 3.3. Goals and Strategies

Goal CF-1. Expand park system.

A healthy community includes a variety of parks and open spaces located within reasonable walking distance of residents.

Parks meet a community's recreational needs, provide community gathering spots and add value to neighborhoods and encourage healthy lifestyles. They also contribute to economic development efforts because they improve a community's overall quality of life.

Strategy CF-1.1.

Provide a park or usable open space within a 5 to 10 minute walk of every resident.

The City should expand its park system through acquisition, requirements for new development, and shared facilities with the School District as the community grows and as funding permits.

Action CF-1.1.1. Include recreational amenity requirements in greenspace standards for new residential developments that are not within a 5 to 10 minute walk of an existing park or open space.

Action CF-1.1.2. Develop pocket parks where neighborhoods lack convenient access to parkland or usable open space and along the Muddy Creek Greenway to help satisfy park needs, particularly at trailhead locations.

Action CF-1.1.3. Ensure adequate resources are available to maintain parks as the system grows.

Strategy CF-1.2.

Continue to work with the school system to develop shared use facilities.

Action CF-1.2.1. Establish regular and ongoing dialogue with the school system to determine the opportunity for shared facilities, programs, and needs.

Action CF-1.2.2. Work with school officials to collocate and place additional fields, hard courts and playgrounds on school property to serve the needs of adjacent families and residents.

Strategy CF-1.3.

Continue to acquire additional park land as the City grows. Utilize strategies described under Goal NR-2 in Chapter 2 which include cluster development, acquisition/dedication of sensitive areas and development of a Green Infrastructure Plan, in addition to the action below.



Private Open Space with gazebo and soccer field in the Parkside subdivision (See CF-1.1.1)

Action CF-1.3.1. Support the Mason Parks Foundation in partnership with the private sector as a funding source for future parks.

Strategy CF-1.4.

Continue to rely on developer contributions and private open space to off-set public demand for parks.

Residents expect excellent parks and recreation facilities; future residents will do the same. Impact fees and dedications partially pay for one-time upfront costs but do little to pay for ongoing maintenance.

Action CF-1.4.1. Consider increasing the 5% minimum greenspace set-aside requirement to 10% in the subdivision regulations and offer in-lieu-of fees.

Action CF-1.4.2. Evaluate the City's park impact fee and increase if determined set fees are not commensurate with costs.

Strategy CF-1.5.

Develop benchmarks to guide sound parks and recreation decision making related to growth.

Action CF-1.5.1. Establish a per capita park acreage benchmark.

Ten acres of parkland per 1000 capita has become a commonly accepted benchmark. It is thought to be the smallest amount needed to accommodate resident recreational needs. Adequate park acreage seems to exist in Mason at this time and into the immediate future given the city's acquisition of additional acreage. Equitable distribution is perhaps a higher priority, particularly in older neighborhoods that lack neighborhood schools and parks.

Goal CF-2. Provide more leisure opportunities for residents.

Recreational, social and cultural facilities and programming make a community an attractive place to live. Mason already offers excellent recreational facilities and programming. Additional elements desired by residents include vibrant public spaces and an arts venue.



Frazee Pavilion in Kettering, Ohio (See CF-2.2)

Strategy CF-2.1.

Develop urban, pedestrian-oriented parks that offer comfortable and interesting spaces to relax, stroll and socialize.

Action CF-2.1.1. Work with local residents, businesses and merchants to identify strategic areas to develop urban parks and plazas.

Action CF-2.1.2. Develop public and private partnerships to fund the construction and maintenance of urban parks and plazas.

Action CF-2.1.3. Activate urban parks with adjacent mixed-use development and continuous programming.

Strategy CF-2.2.

Conduct a feasibility study to determine the need for an outdoor performing arts venue such as Frazee Pavilion (Kettering, Ohio) and a community arts center as well as a skate park and 50 meter pool.

Action CF-2.2.1. Retain the services of a consultant to determine need, costs and financial feasibility of these facilities.

Goal CF-3. Preserve and enhance Mason's historic and cultural assets.

Historic buildings provide a connection to the City's past and are a source of community identity and uniqueness. Preserving these properties is critical to preserving Mason's vitality and sense of place.

Strategy CF-3.1.

Maintain and enforce provisions of the Downtown Overlay District that preserve landmark historic buildings.



An example historic landmark structure in downtown.

Action CF-3.1.1. Provide technical assistance, low interest loans and grants for the preservation and rehabilitation of landmark historic buildings and structures.

Goal CF-4. Support expansion of continuing and higher education opportunities in Mason.

Expanded higher education opportunities can make Mason a more attractive place to live and can become a driver for economic development.

Strategy CF-4.1.

Work with Sinclair Community College, the University of Cincinnati, Xavier University, the University of Dayton, and Miami University to increase educational opportunities and degree programs in Mason.

Action CF-4.1.1. Establish and maintain dialogues with university decision-makers, aimed at exploring branch campus locations, partnerships with local schools and businesses and other means of increasing higher education opportunities.

Action CF-4.1.2. Encourage higher education providers to share facilities.

Action CF-4.1.3. Support transit linkages to facilities within Mason and outside Mason.

Action CF-4.1.4. Enhance education-at-a-distance opportunities by improving home broadband access as part of the broadband plan discussed in Goal IF-1 in Chapter 5.

Strategy CF-4.2.

Offer Mason High School and the Community Center as classrooms for higher education.

Action CF-4.2.1. Work cooperatively with the School District to share facilities and programs.



Mason High School is a state of the art facility located in the Community Core.



Focal point example (See CF-5.2.2)

Goal CF-5. Promote a vibrant arts and cultural presence in Mason.

The arts are a proven tool for improving community quality of life and generating economic activity. A vibrant arts and cultural presence will broaden and solidify Mason's appeal to businesses and residents.

Strategy CF-5.1.

Promote art as part of the Mason experience.

Action CF-5.1.1. Support the arts with resources such as funding, meeting or exhibit space and equipment.

Action CF-5.1.2. Consider an Art fund for public art.

Strategy CF-5.2.

Promote the Community Core as a focal point for the arts.

Action CF-5.2.1. Consider local talent sources when appointing artists. This will encourage artists to reside in Mason.

Action CF-5.2.2. Encourage the development of artists lofts, studio and gallery space.

Action CF-5.2.3. Allow art in the downtown to reinforce its identity and sense of place.

Action CF-5.2.4. Incorporate an outdoor performing arts facility in the downtown that can be used for theatrical and musical performances. See CF-2.2 to determine feasibility.

Strategy CF-5.3.

Develop a system of wayside exhibits and interpretive panels in key locations through the City.

Action CF-5.3.1. Inventory historic people, places and events as well as significant natural resources to identify content and location for interpretive panels.

Action CF-5.3.2. Develop wayfinding and interpretive sign guidelines and regulations. Integrate the signage with the system of districts established as part of Goal ED-5 in Chapter 4.

Strategy CF-5.4.

Continue to support the Mason Arts Festival, Heritage Festival, and Red Rhythm and Boom.

Action CF-5.4.1. Seek corporate sponsors and offer naming rights for large events to help offset costs to the city.

Goal CF-6. Maintain and enhance public safety and emergency response levels of service to support community growth.

Maintaining and enhancing these essential services will eventually require new facilities as well as strategies to use facilities efficiently, monitor levels of service, and develop land use patterns that support public safety efforts.

Strategy CF-6.1.

Establish new Fire and Police stations to service growth areas.

Action CF-6.1.1. Establish a third fire station to improve the level of service and meet future growth needs or rely on mutual aid if adequate service levels are achievable.

Action CF-6.1.2. Encourage collocation of multiple public safety services where appropriate to utilize tax dollars efficiently.

Action CF-6.1.3. Continuously monitor and evaluate staff, equipment and facility resources with respect to the volume, type and geography of calls for service as well as changing technology and socioeconomic conditions.



Wayside Exhibits (See CF-5.3)

Developing visible connections between the urban environment, landscape features and a storyline can help define a community and acknowledge a sense of place. Wayside exhibits are a means for exploring, learning about, enjoying, and conserving the City's history, special places, neighborhoods, parks, and community.

Interpretation is more than facts or stories; it is information that builds connections between personal interests and a place, event, resource or landscape. The result is a deeper sense of history and appreciation for the place, resource or landscape.

Action CF-6.1.4. Use Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles in public spaces and as part of landscape and site plan review to promote a pedestrian-friendly community and to complement police services.

Goal CF-7. Maintain and enhance the quality of Mason's school system.

Mason Public School District has been and will continue to be a primary factor in determining Mason's success in attracting residents.

Strategy CF-7.1.

Continue to seek opportunities to partner with school to improve community facilities.

Action CF-7.1.1. Continue to work with the School District to seek opportunities for collocation and shared use of City and School District facilities.

**Mason Community Center - an example of a successful public-private partnership
(Goal CF-7 and CF-1.2)**

The Community Center is attached to Mason High School, the result of a unique partnership between the City and School District. The School District built the facility, while the city operates and manages it.

The design of both the High School and Community Center as a single structure, as well as the sharing of resources between the two jurisdictions, saved taxpayers about \$12 million and enabled the City to provide a state-of-the-art facility. The facility won a Partnership Award from the National Recreation and Park Association.



This Mason Community Center addition added 31,000 square feet to this state of the art facility.

2010 expansion costs will be offset by TriHealth's medical office addition. The expansion includes 31,000 square feet of medical office space, a new fitness floor nearly three times the current size, a warm-water therapy pool, a new multi-purpose/gymnastics room, new flexible open programming space, a "Main Street" entrance to enhance the traffic flow and provide cross-marketing opportunities for local businesses and community groups, expansion space for the possibility of additional complementary tenants, and an expanded Kids Korner child-care area.

The city will lease office space to Group Health Associates and Bethesda Physical Therapy, while maintaining ownership of the entire facility. The annual lease payment will cover all costs associated with such office space and a portion of the costs for the additional areas.