

Open Space Land Rating and Ranking Process (Prioritization)

An important focus of the Open Space Preservation Plan is to identify sensitive lands based on key elements that are both understandable and defensible, and use the elements to prioritize future land acquisition and conservation. This plan outlines the method the City will implement to identify sensitive lands that should be acquired by the public for preservation and protection.

Key Principles

Identify desirable elements. In general terms, there are a handful of elements that are considered desirable when describing preservation-worthy land. The City recognizes that these elements are not only desirable to City for purpose of preservation, but also to the holding entity or individual for the intrinsic, and potential economic, value they add to the land itself. Nevertheless, certain elements enhance the public health, safety, and welfare, and should form the foundation for any considerations of acquisition or conservation.

Identify desirable lands. Within the Peoria Planning area are a number of landowners with a mix of responsibilities that run with the land. These include federal lands: Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The mission of the BOR is to “manage, develop, and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public.” The BOR holds several parcels in North Peoria related to the Central Arizona Canal and Lake Pleasant. The mission of the BLM is to “enhance the quality of life for all citizens through the balanced stewardship of America’s public lands and resources through sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.” This includes managing and providing recreation opportunities, commercial activities, wildlife habitat, protection of vulnerable, and representative habitats, plant communities, and ecosystems, and providing interpretative activities to meet scientific and educational needs. The BLM holds several sections of land located primarily north of Carefree Highway (SR 74).

State land is another major land holder in the Peoria Planning Area. The Arizona State Land Department (ASLD) is the agency responsible for the management of State Lands, and their mission is “to manage State Trust lands and resources to enhance value and optimize economic return for the Trust beneficiaries, consistent with sound stewardship, conservation, and business management principles supporting socioeconomic goals for citizens here today and generations to come, and to manage and provide support for resource conservation programs for the well-being of the public and the State’s natural environment.”

Other public lands include County parcels managed by the Flood Control District of Maricopa County and by Maricopa County Parks and Recreation. The City of Peoria manages a few sites designated for future parks as well as parcels that have already been designated as public open space. The remaining lands are in private ownership and have either been developed, planned or are presently undeveloped with an intent to develop sometime in the future.

Each of the categories of land ownership above carry a variety of requirements, advantages and disadvantages with regard to conservation and/or acquisition for preservation. Lands that are in sync with the goals of the City’s intent to preserve significant open space will receive a higher ranking score than lands that may be difficult or costly to obtain.

Prioritize lands sought for acquisition. As stated elsewhere, the City desires to obtain ecologically and historically significant open spaces for the purpose of enriching the health, safety, and welfare of its

residents. Because the City is financially unable to acquire all desirable lands, it must prioritize land that benefits the public with the greatest return on investment. Some parcels might be protected primarily for their environmental or aesthetic value, while other parcels might best serve as wildlife connections and/or public trail links. Additionally, the City is aware of its rich cultural heritage in the northern regions of Peoria and has a mission of preserving the best of the numerous culturally significant sites for the education and enjoyment of the citizens of the City. Ultimately, the City's goal is to create a meaningful network of open spaces that promotes natural and historic preservation and enhancements to the outdoor lifestyle enjoyed by the public.

In general, the City's acquisition of open space should meet at least one of the following criteria. If more than one property is deemed desirable, then the City should make its selections based on the following priorities.

1. Contain one or more of the defined preservation features provided herein,
2. Expand or extend of a regional open space or drainage corridor,
3. Increase the size of an existing or adjacent open space area,
4. Create a linkage to an existing or planned trail system, or
5. Provide a public access point to existing or planned natural open space.

Preservation Program Goals

1. Conserve, preserve, restore or acquire important natural and cultural resource areas within the City boundaries and planning area.
2. Intercede in areas where important natural and cultural resource areas are in danger of being forever lost or negatively altered for all time.
3. Develop an open space system that is naturally sustainable and biologically healthy, ensuring protection of endangered species and mobility among wildlife groups.
4. Provide for recreation and economic development through conservation and preservation of scenic, cultural, and ecological resources.
5. Resolve conflict between private development and public interests as well as between county, state, and federal land management directives and objectives.
6. Enhance the overall quality of life in Peoria through open space management, conservation and preservation.
7. Create a healthy whole community by protecting healthy landscapes, affordable housing, human rights, social equity, public health and clean water.

Preservation Program Objectives

1. Designate critical habitat areas within the City corporate boundary and Planning areas through acquisition, conservation or preservation overlays. (e.g., riparian corridors and edges, significant biological areas, wildlife transit corridors, and conservation areas.)
2. Inform the Peoria public on Peoria open space principles and efforts through documents, lectures and open houses.
3. Develop Green/ecologically balanced infrastructure development principles that protection the environment prior to development, and utilize sustainable processes in the development process.

4. Develop land use goals for conservation at different scales and categories of land uses based on sound defensible principles. (i.e., demonstrate scientific environmental advantages, economic benefits of preservation and conservation, and the health benefits of open space)
5. Develop goals for built environments and urban infill as well as for new development in rural or less-urban areas.
6. Require supporting documentation from development applicants
 - Topographic study
 - Native Plant Survey
 - Native Plant Salvage Plan
 - Watershed and Drainage Study
 - Geotechnical Study
 - Archaeological Study

Conservation Priorities:

- Protect drinking water
- Improve water quality in lakes, streams, and rivers
- Provide opportunities to learn about our unique natural environment
- Improve air quality
- Provide habitats critical to wildlife
- Preserve special places that make our community unique
- Protect historic and cultural sites
- Provide recreational opportunities that help keep kids away from gangs and drugs
- Improve public access to parks and natural lands
- Provide community trails and greenways
- Preserve quality of life

Key Conservation Questions:

- What areas of open space are important and what purposes do they serve? (e.g., view shed, recreation, forestry, agriculture, landscape, flood control, habitat)
- To what extent will additional open space benefit the community?
- What are the perceived concerns or hazards (e.g., crime, safety or fire)
- What community and regional open space preservation efforts are already underway?
- What organizations are already engaged in open space planning and protection efforts? (Have their efforts been successful?)

Guidance through Public Involvement

Public involvement primarily through citizens steering committee made up of major Stakeholder groups such as residents, landowners, local developers, the Arizona State Land Department, federal land managers, key City staff, and other interested parties.

The committee should have a separate Technical Advisory Committee whose responsibility would be to provide scientific and technical input to the steering committee.

The steering committee should be tasked with a non-binding oversight of the City's preservation efforts, including but not limited to:

- Identification of key areas that should receive as much protection as possible through a variety of means or methods.
- Ensure the preserve area is of adequate size to support the natural ecological system within the area or have an adequate corridor or linkage between other open space areas.
- Preserve the local plant, wildlife and natural resources to maintain the local ecosystem.
- Protect historical and archaeological resources within the preserve.
- Require projects with historic or cultural features to establish a preservation plan and obtain approval from the City's Historic Commission prior to mitigation or development.
- Create public access with appropriate facilities for the visitors.
- Ensure an appropriate trail system for public recreational uses such as hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding.
- Provide opportunities for the scenic enjoyment of mountain and desert views as well as for wildlife observation.
- Provide opportunities for research and education.
- Establish procedures to maintain the preserve and facilities on a regular basis.
- Monitor the evaluation and decision process for all transfers, donations, and dedications of open space lands to the City
- Establish improvement guidelines for incorporating necessary public safety and access infrastructure into acquired lands.
- Establish volunteer group guidelines

The Peoria Open Space Evaluation (POSE) Process. Parcels that may be candidates for acquisition, preservation, or some degree of conservation can be evaluated through a series of questions focused on the current status of a given parcel and the site conditions. Through GIS and field inventory, staff and the citizen's steering committee will be able to make sound decisions based on character and conditions as well as cost and suitability.

An example of an evaluation sheet follows. By asking a dozen questions, a given parcel can be quickly assessed and ranked in terms of suitability and availability – or likelihood of permanent loss if no action is taken. The questions are based on stated preservation/conservation goals and objectives.

Once a ranking has been established, an acquisition and preservation program can be put in place with guidelines for changes in status and immediate need. Individual parcels, once identified as significant, can be further analyzed and surveyed for uniqueness and sensitivity.

Sample Evaluation Sheet

Peoria Open Space Evaluation (POSE)

Part 1 Location and Size _____ Date _____

General Location _____

Nearest Cross Streets _____

Assessor's Parcel No.- _____ - _____ - _____

Current Land Use _____

Total SF / Acreage _____ / _____

Approx depth and width _____

Part 2 Ownership

Current Ownership _____

Assessor's Value _____

Current Zoning _____

Part 3 Existing Conditions

Approximate developable area _____ %

Approx % Hillside _____ %

Services within 1/2 mile:

Electricity

Natural Gas

Cable TV

Telephone

Water

Sewer

Part 4 Notes _____

Peoria Open Space Evaluation (POSE)

Part 5 Land Evaluation Scoring Criteria

Category	1 point	5 points	10 points
1 Ownership	Federal Land	State or County Land	Privately owned
2 Planned development	Development has occurred, or will soon occur	Development exists or is planned within ½ mile.	Isolated and remote.
3 Availability	Dedication or donation possible, sale not imminent.	Cost may be below market value	Parcel is or soon will be for sale at full market value or higher.
4 Existing parks, trails and open space	Parcel does not connect to existing or planned parks, or open space	Parcel is adjacent to parks or open space, but is interrupted by a roadway, wash, ridge or other barrier.	Parcel connects existing parks or open spaces and forms a continuous network of open space.
5 Accessibility	Parcel is isolated and remote. Accessibility is difficult	Parcel is moderately accessible - roadways are adjacent or near.	Parcel is accessible with existing improved roads
6 Utilities	No utilities, area is remote	Utilities are near and can easily be extended	Site is fully serviced or utilities are adjacent

Part 6 Site Assessment Scoring Criteria

Category	1 point	5 points	10 points
1 Vegetation	Urban or overgrazed. Little or no vegetation. Previously developed	Disturbed with some vegetation and with evidence of regeneration.	Undisturbed, well vegetated, mature landscape.
2 Riparian and Water Resources	Heavily graded and channelized. No significant water resources	Straight or slightly meandering channels, some natural onsite detention	Natural spring, riparian or aquatic system with active or seasonal water
3 Wildlife, Biological, and Habitat Value	Species typical for in-fill urbanized environments. Little value, heavily degraded	Mostly natural. Close to population. Reasonable habitat value.	Pristine. Major wildlife corridor. Threatened, endangered, or rare species are present
4 Land	Rocky soils, bedrock, unmitigated mining or hazardous materials present.	Restored or mitigated site, mix of outcrops with good soils. Currently farmed or grazed.	Well developed soils, no known hazards or evidence of prior farming, grazing, or mining
5 Scenic value	Small parcel; generally flat to rugged terrain with limited scenic value	Pristine. Limited views from off site locations, limited views from within the site	Unique views both to and from prominent features on site.
6 Historic and Cultural value	No historic or cultural sites within the parcel	Contains some features or relationship to nearby features	Highly valued and significant historic or cultural features; may be eligible for Historic Register

Peoria Open Space Evaluation (POSE)

Note: If the category does not apply, score no (0) points.

Part 5 Land Evaluation

Category	1 point	3 points	5 points	7 points	10 points
1 Ownership	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2 Planned development	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3 Availability	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4 Existing parks, trails, and open space	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5 Accessibility	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6 Utilities	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Part 6 Site Assessment

Category	1 point	3 points	5 points	7 points	10 points
7 Vegetation	<input type="checkbox"/>				
8 Riparian and Water Resources	<input type="checkbox"/>				
9 Wildlife, Biological, and Habitat Value	<input type="checkbox"/>				
10 Land	<input type="checkbox"/>				
11 Scenic value	<input type="checkbox"/>				
12 Historic and Cultural value	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Land Evaluation Scores

0

0

0

Site Analysis Scores

0

0

0

Total Score

0

0

0

Evaluation Criteria

Ownership. There are four primary entities with ownership or jurisdiction over the land included in the Study Area. These entities include the Federal Government, Arizona State Land Department, Maricopa County Parks and private ownership. Each of these entities control land which has features that merit protection, so it will be important to identify measures or procedures that can be implemented within the legal limitations that pertain to each of these entities.

The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) previously controlled the area surrounding Lake Pleasant. Through the Recreation and Public Purposes Act (RPPA), the Maricopa County Parks Department has committed to utilize and manage these areas for recreational purposes. These recreational activities are primarily water related however, the County's Master Plan does include other recreational uses such as overnight camping, interpretive facilities and other support services that contribute to the use of the lake and park area.

The City of Peoria and the County have a cooperative relationship and typically support each other when working toward common goals. The County recognizes the value of the natural setting and the lake features and considers protecting and preserving these features when developing recreational facilities at the lake. While the relationship is cooperative, the City of Peoria does not have jurisdiction over the County's improvements at the lake. Because the County is already examining ways to protect unique environmental areas within the park limits, the area is generally excluded from this Preservation Master Planning effort. The lake is a valuable asset for the City of Peoria and will continue to be an attraction for the residents of the Northwest Valley. The County will continue its efforts of protecting the aesthetic and environmental value of the regional park. This Master Plan will focus on the areas within the City limits and planning area, but outside of the park boundary.

The Federal Government has jurisdiction over a number of separate parcels within the Study Area. The federal agencies owning parcels include the BOR and the BLM. Some of the areas owned by these agencies address a very specific use, such as an irrigation or water distribution canals (e.g., the Central Arizona Project). These special use areas have an irregular and specific alignment or boundary which includes the feature under the agency's control. Other areas controlled by the agencies are much broader and are, typically defined by section lines or partial sections as boundaries. There are limited and specific land uses currently allowed on these federal parcels (e.g., grazing). However, these are generally considered low impact and the visual character of these areas may not experience a significant change with these uses. There is a specific procedure associated with acquiring the opportunity to utilize these parcels. The procedure falls under the Recreational and Public Purposes Act. This procedure will be examined later in this study.

A second significant landholder within the Study Area is the Arizona State Land Department (ASLD). These parcels are typically associated with an entire section or portion of a section. There are a number of natural features, environmental areas and cultural sites worth protecting which occur on parcels of land under the jurisdiction of the ASLD. Like federal properties, the areas owned by ASLD are somewhat protected from immediate development by the process established for acquiring these properties. The procedures and stipulations associated with obtaining these areas or protecting unique and valuable features within these State Land parcels will be explored later in this report. **It should also be mentioned that Maricopa County is an active landholder with responsibility for the management of Lake Pleasant Regional Park.**

The third major category of land ownership involves parcels that are privately owned. Due to recent land trades between the federal government and private landowners, the amount of land under private

ownership has increased significantly within the last three to four years. The current population growth trends of the metropolitan area, combined with the attraction of the Lake Pleasant/north Peoria area makes these private areas available for near to long-term development activities. The private ownership also occurs in some of the more environmentally and visually interesting areas, particularly areas within the Hieroglyphic Mountains. The large majority of private areas within the Study Area are owned by single entities. There are a number of smaller tracts which are scattered throughout the Study Area owned by others, but the large consecutive parcels of private land are under one ownership (i.e., Vistancia, Saddleback Heights, and Lake Pleasant Heights). The owners of this properties have previously master planned these parcels. Their planning efforts have demonstrate a degree of sensitivity and appreciation for the value of open space areas, and a commitment to protect the unique and rugged areas of the property.

Existing or Planned Development. While parcels in close proximity to high-density commercial and/or residential areas may have more convenient access to a larger number of users, parcels that are being considered for preservation are those that may be susceptible to loss of ecological or recreational value. If the parcel or adjacent parcels have already been planned or developed, or has constraints such as deed restrictions or easements, then the parcel is considered to having lower preservation value.

Availability. When an area is likely to experience change through development, it is not uncommon for owners to offer the property for sale to private developers. Consequently, higher weight is given to parcels for sale or soon to be offered on which some development has already occurred or development is so close that development will likely occur soon. Parcels that have attributes that may involve dedication or donation at a future date are weighted lower if development or sale is not considered to be imminent.

Existing Public Recreational Amenities. The proximity of a parcel to other public parks and open spaces is a significant factor. Candidate parcels should be assessed to determine whether existing parks and/or open space will be connected if the parcel is preserved or acquired. Sites that are adjacent to, or are in close proximity to existing parks act synergistically to improve and enhance the integrity and recreational/ecological value of both sites. For example, if open space is added to an existing park, a greater range of recreational activities can be accommodated, and existing ecological attributes are more easily preserved. Moreover, connections between parks serve to improve the accessibility between such parks.

Accessibility. Accessibility is both benefit and drawback to open space. While the public needs good access for enjoyment of the resource, fragile environments can be despoiled by too much access and use. The right balance of access is necessary for protection and public use. Parcels that are remote and isolated are unlikely to be developed in near term and therefore receive lower weighting in the assessment. Parcels that have existing improved roads should receive the highest considerations in relationship to other benefits and evaluation criteria.

Utilities. Likewise, the presence of utilities would generally indicate a high likelihood of development. This in turn may make the parcel expensive to acquire or preserve. Parcels that are remote and distant from available utilizes are unlikely to be developed in near term and therefore receive lower weighting in the assessment. However, access to services are important for public comfort and safety and should be given high considerations in relationship to other benefits and evaluation criteria.

Vegetation. Areas that have been heavily degraded through overgrazing or over use are in many ways less desirable for preservation or acquisition unless a site assessment indicates a possibility of a

successful restoration program. For example, parcels that have a significant stand of saguaros that have been used as target practice are unattractive and the health of the stand is questionable. Mature vegetation that has evidence of being well watered and untouched has the highest value from an ecological and biological standpoint. A diverse landscape is more desirable than a monoculture or one with just a few dominant species.

Riparian and Water Resources. Natural drainage corridors offer some of the greatest value in terms of environmental and aesthetic character. Within the study area, there are a variety of watercourses that range from small localized drainage to river corridors. As is typical with desert washes, concentrated drainage supports a greater variety and greater density of natural vegetation than the surrounding desert. This increased density of vegetation provides food and cover for a wide variety of desert wildlife and serve as trailways for the larger mammals. Vegetation and rocky outcrops exposed by erosion provide habitat for smaller mammals, reptiles and birds.

There are two primary rivers within the Study Area. The Agua Fria River is the primary drainage for the study area. The Agua Fria has historically played a significant role with the native peoples who dwelt in this area as is evidenced by the number of archeological sites identified along the river corridor. The character of the river has been changed in recent history with the Lake Pleasant Dam and more recently the Waddell Dam, which creates Lake Pleasant. The Agua Fria River still offer areas of riparian vegetation with stands of cottonwood trees and mesquite bosques. The wash bottom is fairly broad and there are areas where years of erosion have left dramatic cliffs and interesting rock formations along its banks.

The second primary river located in the Study Area is the New River. This river is located in the Southeast portion of the Study Area. The river facilitates a significant watershed but its channel is not as well defined as the Agua Fria. In many areas the New River is a series of braided channels with tributaries, which also parallel these channels before connecting into the main flow. This creates a broader area of riparian vegetation, which is supported by the intermittent flows of the river.

Like the Agua Fria River, there are a number of cultural sites located along or near the banks of the New River. Recent influences of man on the river include the impacts of ranching and residential development. One of the most significant impacts to the New River was the development of the New River Dam as a flood control project. This dam was designed to contain and control surface drainage north of the dam to protect development to the south. The containment of stormwater drainage has contributed to increased vegetation density in the areas where the water is impounded.

There are a number of significant desert washes located throughout the Study Area. Most of these start outside the Study Area and flow into the Agua Fria River or Lake Pleasant. These washes include Humbug Creek, French Creek, Castle Creek, Garfias Wash, Cottonwood Creek, and Morgan City Wash. The headwaters of these washes are located in the Hieroglyphic Mountains. The only significant wash which does not flow into the lake or the Agua Fria River is the Paddelford Wash. This wash is located in the western portion of the Study Area and is the primary drainage for the watershed located on the western side of the Hieroglyphic Mountains.

The rivers and washes listed above are primary corridors for regional wildlife and they provide important habitat. These washes are lined with mature desert trees and provide an important aesthetic contrast to the adjacent and comparatively barren slopes of the hillsides. Secondary and tertiary washes which feed into washes and rivers from the adjacent hillsides and flatlands vary in width from small narrow canyon washes to sandy bottom washes as wide as a vehicle. These smaller washes provide important vegetation areas and wildlife habitat and provide a link to the hillsides, mountains and canyon of the Hieroglyphic Mountains.

Wildlife, Biological, and Habitat Value. Sites with a relatively high degree of natural species diversity are generally recognized as demonstrating high ecological quality. In addition, sites which contain a diversity of rare and/or significant natural attributes are valued highly since public acquisition or management would improve the likelihood of these attributes being preserved for current and future generations. Sites that are relatively diverse are often more interesting, aesthetically pleasing, and likely to resist extinction.

The area of most concern is the area around Lake Pleasant due to the number of high value, significant washes and lush Arizona Upland communities. Major washes which exist in this area are Morgan City Wash, Pipeline Canyon, Cottonwood Creek, Garfias Wash, Castle Creek, French Creek, Coles Wash, and Humbug Creek. Each of these support riparian habitats consisting of cottonwood and tamarisk, while others are characterized by wide dense mesquite bosques. These washes provide for diversity in the area, as well as serving as movement corridors for wildlife species, including deer and javelina.

The northern lake and foothill portions of the West Zone are characterized by rolling hills, dissected by washes supporting healthy stands of saguaros. The western bajadas are also dissected by washes with healthy stands of desert vegetation. Protecting these drainages and the slopes supporting such diversity is preferable. The floodplains tend to be urbanized, less diverse and flatter with fewer areas of interest for preservation except where there is surface water, scenic views or cultural sites.

Land. When contrasted to most areas of Peoria one of the most unique characteristics of the Study Area is the variation in the topography and the landforms. The most significant variations are found where the Hieroglyphic Mountains occurs. There are several significant peaks which stand out as visual landmarks scattered throughout the Study Area. These peaks and hillsides are often surrounded by areas which are relatively level in terms of grade. The Hieroglyphic Mountains terminate at the interface with the Agua Fria River, where there is a definite change in landform from the mountainous hillsides to the floodplains of the river environment.

The majority of the Study Area is below a 10 percent slope, which is typically considered suitable for development with a reasonable amount of earth grading. When steeper slopes are encountered, the severity of cuts and fills and the visual scaring of grading activities becomes much more apparent. These steeper areas are also associated with rocky hard dig conditions, which often lead to a higher development cost.

Scenic value. As important as hillsides, mountains, valleys, and river corridors are, flat land is also an important consideration for significant views. In some cases, the public may only be able to appreciate the beauty and significance of the land and surrounding landscape from a visual advantage point on flatter terrain, with the primary landscape of interest in the background. Unique, one-of-a-kind, or last-of-a-kind scenic views are a high priority for preservation. Once significant views are degraded, their aesthetic value diminishes.

Historic and Cultural value. Cultural resources judged to be of the highest sensitivity include National Historic Landmarks and Monuments, other properties listed on the National or State Register, districts or individual buildings and structures designated as important by local governments or communities, and traditional cultural places. Somewhat less sensitive, but nonetheless providing serious constraints (or interpretive opportunities), are substantial archaeological sites or site groupings that require extensive mitigative data recovery if they are disturbed and that also have a high potential to contain human burials. If any locales were identified as being of particular concern to Native American

communities, they also would be regarded as constraints irrespective of whether or not they had been formally identified as traditional cultural places or sacred sites.

Prehistoric archaeological site types recorded within the project area include villages, hamlets, farmsteads, field houses, and various short-term activity sites. Features noted at these sites include ball courts, trash mounds, terraces and other agricultural features, pit houses, above ground masonry structures, ramadas, middens, petroglyphs (rock art), lithic reduction loci, quarries, and general artifact scatters. These sites and features range in age from Archaic (beginning as early as ca 8000 BC) to Protohistoric (sixteenth and seventeenth century Yavapai), but most pertain to the Formative Hohokam archaeological tradition, which may have begun as early as AD 300 and persisted until mid 1400's. A limited number of historic buildings and structures that reflect the area's ranching and mining history have also been recorded.

The Land Decision Matrix

Numeric ranking systems are popular in terms of objectivity, transparency, and accountability. Once the values are tallied for a given area or parcel, staff can prioritize a schedule of acquisition based on available funding.

Prior to 2008, Peoria was one of the fastest growing communities in the US. The rate of land conversion to development was such that timely assessment of the public value of significant lands was difficult and sometimes impossible. The likelihood of development often affects the asking price because of possible competition from private buyers. Sometimes, owners feel they can hold out for more money or wait for the marketability of the parcel to increase.

Landowners may have valid reasons for wanting to sell a parcel by a certain date, or perhaps a death triggers the sale of a parcel that is on the acquisition list before funding has been authorized. This is a scenario where some flexibility should be built into the acquisition program to be able to react quickly to a change in schedule.

Management of acquired projects must also be considered. The City's ability to care and support open space and green space must be carefully considered. As lands are acquired and the program goals are met, the emphasis will naturally shift from acquisition to stewardship. If local government is committed to an open space program, it must also be willing to address long term stewardship of the lands it acquires.

Even though it might be unwise to purchase a large parcel that requires extensive maintenance if funds are not in place for such operations, iconic and heritage landscapes should be protected as soon as funding is available even if a maintenance is not clearly in place. Endangered landscapes must be saved before it is too late, and waiting for all the funding mechanisms to fall into place may result in the loss of a cherished site. Conservation Easements leave the management of the property in the hands of the owner, but may also be encumbered with restrictions for public access. A simple decision matrix can be devised to help assess whether a particular parcel is best suited for conservation, preservation or acquisition.

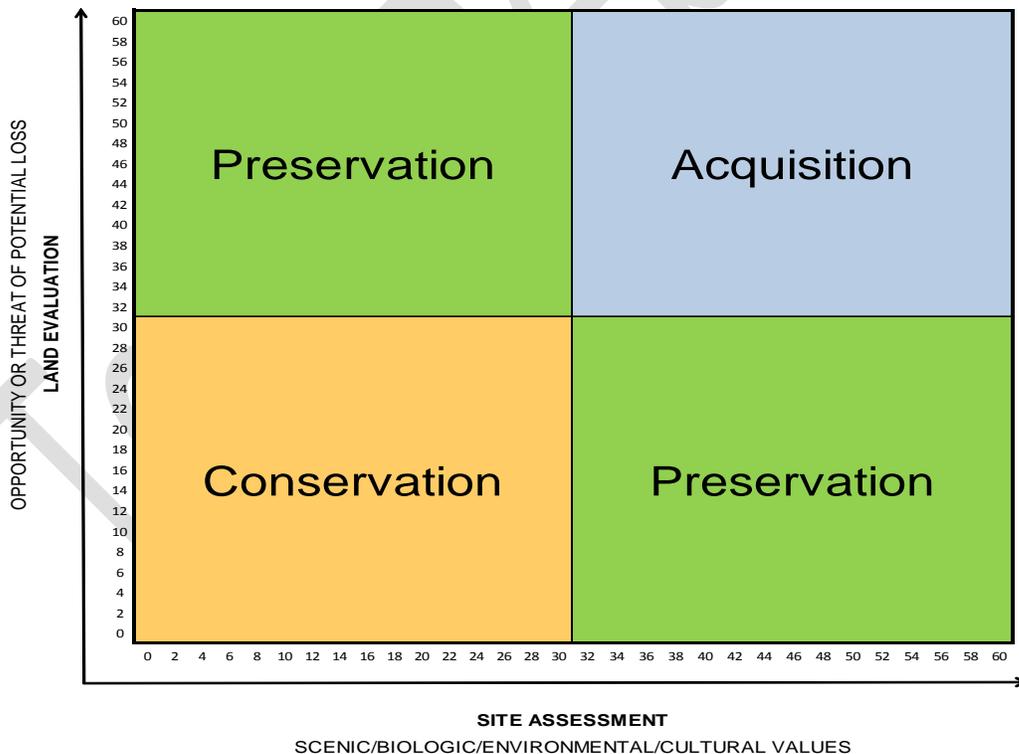
The Land Evaluation "Y" axis weighs the opportunity or threat of potential loss of the parcel. Six questions focus on the status of the land and whether the parcel is remote or in the path of imminent development:

- Ownership: Who holds title: federal, state, county, or is it in private hands?

- Existing development: has the parcel been previously developed or master planned; or is it isolated and remote?
- Availability: is the parcel likely to be donated or dedicated,; is it for sale or will it soon be for sale at full market value?
- Existing recreational amenities: does the parcel connect existing parks, trails, and/or open space?
- Accessibility: what is the degree of remoteness; is existing infrastructure adjacent or within the boundaries?
- Utilities: how close are existing or near future utilities?

The Site Assessment “X” axis weighs the ecological and cultural aspects of the parcel. Six questions focus on the uniqueness of the parcel.

- Vegetation: is the parcel relatively undisturbed, well vegetated, of high habitat value, or a mature landscape?
- Riparian and water resources: does the parcel contain a river, wash or natural spring within the property boundaries?
- Significant habitat, biological or ecological value: does the parcel contain threatened or endangered species?
- Landform: is the parcel that are relatively untouched, with little or no evidence of degradation or has it been overgrazed, mined or heavily used?
- Scenic views: does the parcel contain or offer significant scenic views?
- Cultural or historic significance: Are there significant historic or archeological features onsite?

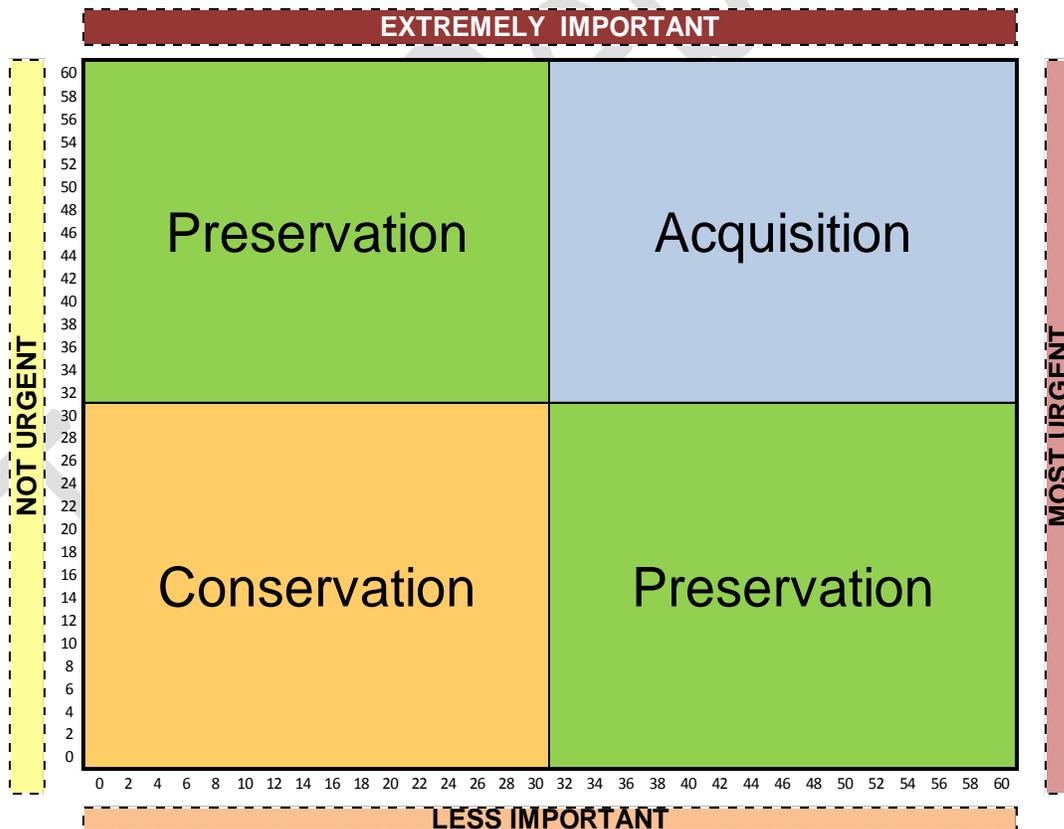


This method ranks parcels primarily on the basis of environmental importance and how the parcel fits in the regional context. Acquisition strategies that only consider the price and availability of the parcel often fail to consider the environmental significance of a parcel, the parcel’s relationship to urban sprawl, or whether the location is the best given concentrations of populations. A systematic assessment process such as this can maximize the public dollar in the purchase of open space investments.

Conservation is the careful and skillful management of natural areas and cultural sites with a goal of preservation of the best or most fragile areas in conjunction with development or improvement to other areas of the parcel. Conservation does not automatically exclude development but rather requires best methodologies and planning to achieve the development while maintaining the core attributes of the natural open space or features. Conservation is typically achieved through conservation easements and is generally considered a partnership between the City and the owner.

Preservation by contrast, is the act of removing something from potential loss or endangerment. Preservation is used to keep or maintain an area in an unaltered condition so that the intrinsic values will not be lost or overshadowed by development. Preservation of land is generally regarded as a reservation of land for a specific purpose and protection. Preservation can be achieved through private means or more typically through dedications to the City for maintenance and administration.

Acquisition is a pro-active purchase of a parcel of land that is significant in terms of environmental quality, historical significance, protection of public resources, or subject to loss or destruction by development. Acquisition generally occurs when conservation easements or dedications cannot



otherwise be obtained. Acquisition is a significant use of public monies and the City must be able to justify the degree to which the land in question is considered for acquisition.

Sound science must be used as the basis for criteria. Whether geology, hydrology, ecology, or cultural resources, defensible information will support how the investment contributes in a significant way. GIS mapping is an invaluable tool for mapping and weighting parcels and criteria and has the ability to sort through various models such as natural, cultural, economic and social factors for a given area. Combined with local input, this process can provide reasonably objective criteria for project identification and selection.

TO BE REPLACED