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# CHAPTER 7 OPEN SPACE

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## VISION 2025 GENERAL PLAN DOWNEY, CALIFORNIA

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ADOPTED 1-25-2005

# Downey Vision 2025

## Chapter 7. Open Space

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### INTRODUCTION

Typical of most communities located within mature urbanized settings, Downey has a limited amount of open space areas. Open space areas are important not only to provide recreational activities for residents but also as a visual break from the built environment.

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# OPEN SPACE AREAS

Issue 7.1 Downey has a limited amount of open space.



In addition to public parks, which typically provide a range of recreational activities and are considered “active” open spaces, areas that are undeveloped or under-developed and function as “passive” open space areas are equally important.

These undeveloped open space areas are especially important in Downey since these augment the limited amount of park areas.

The undeveloped open space areas include

the following:

- Riverbeds. The Rio Hondo River runs along the western boundary, while the San Gabriel River runs along the eastern boundary. These areas create “edges” of open space and contribute to Downey’s unique character and help form the entrances to the City. There are also County bike trails along both riverbeds that are part of an extensive system connecting the Pacific Ocean to the San Gabriel Mountains.
- Utility easements along the west end of the city, owned by the Department of Water and Power, and along the east end of the city, owned by Southern California Edison. The easements are parallel, and in some places adjacent to riverbeds. Utility easements in the city are used for plant nurseries and provide opportunities for recreational use.
- Cemeteries, including the Downey Cemetery, located at the northeast corner of Lakewood Boulevard and Gardendale Avenue.
- Railroad. The Union Pacific Railroad cuts an east-west line across the entire City. Although it has a width of only 100 feet, combined it totals 62.7 acres of undeveloped open space. A portion of the railroad right-of-way could be developed for a bike trail linking the existing trails along the riverbeds. Also, if the railroad were to ever be vacated, it could be developed as open space.
- Golf Course. The two golf courses, on the western boundary, provide acres of greenery. One golf course,

Rio Hondo, is owned by the City while the other, Amigos, is owned by the County.

It is important that undeveloped open space areas are not over-developed with land uses that would limit the property's continual functionality as open space. The loss of these areas or the functionality of these areas would have a negative effect on the community. For this reason, an update of the open space provisions in the municipal code is necessary to clarify which areas are open space and to preserve these areas from development.

**Figure 7-1.3  
Open Space Inventory**

Open Space Type	Acres	Percent of Total
Flood Control Rivers/ Levees	157	31.5%
Los Amigos Golf Course	135	27.1 %
Rio Hondo Golf Course	101	20.2 %
Power Utilities Right-of-Way	58	11.6 %
Railroads	33	6.6 %
Downey Cemetery	7	1.5 %
Other	7	1.5 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>499</b>	<b>100 %</b>

**Goals, Policies, and Programs**

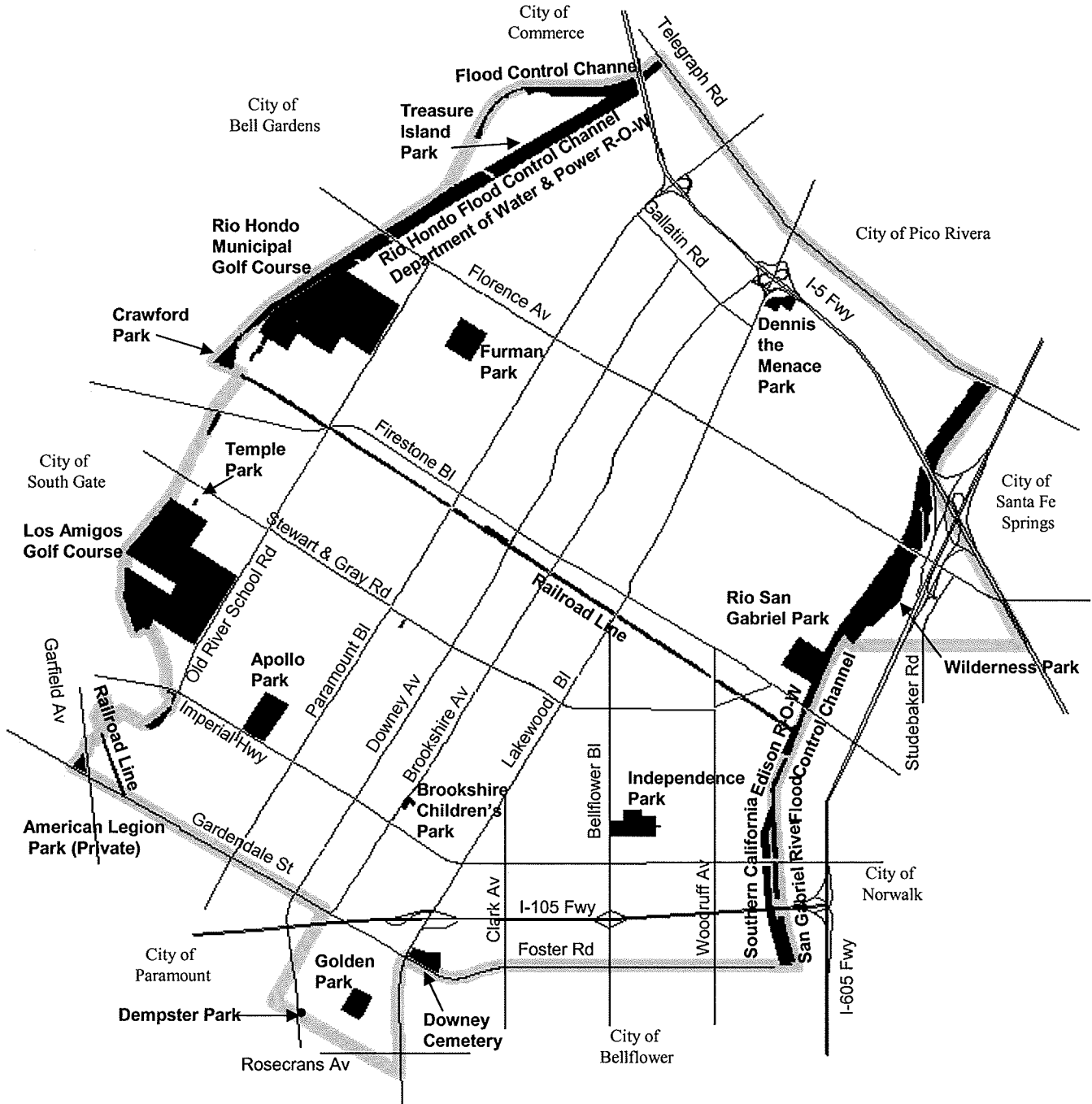
**Goal 7.1. Augment the availability of open space areas with other open spaces besides public parks.**

Policy 7.1.1. Preserve undeveloped areas that function as open space.

- Program 7.1.1.1. Adopt an ordinance that designates parks, golf courses, cemeteries, public schools, utility easements, railroad rights-of-ways, and riverbeds as open space.

- Program 7.1.1.2. Revise the open space zoning code standards to clarify which land uses are designated as open space areas.
- Program 7.1.1.3. Discourage the development of properties designated as open space areas, such as parks, golf courses, cemeteries, public schools, utility easements, railroad rights-of-ways, and riverbeds, that would limit the property's functionality as open space.
- Program 7.1.1.4. Promote the use of properties designated as open space areas for recreation purposes.
- Program 7.1.1.5. Promote the creation of and expansion of areas designated for open space.
- Program 7.1.1.5. Request that Union Pacific grant an easement over part of the railroad right-of-way parallel to Firestone Boulevard for a bike trail linking existing bike trails along the riverbeds.

**FIGURE 7.1-2  
MAP OF EXISTING OPEN SPACES**



SCALE  
1 INCH = 0.78 MILE

North

# EXISTING PARK AREAS

Issue 7.2. Downey has a limited amount of park areas.

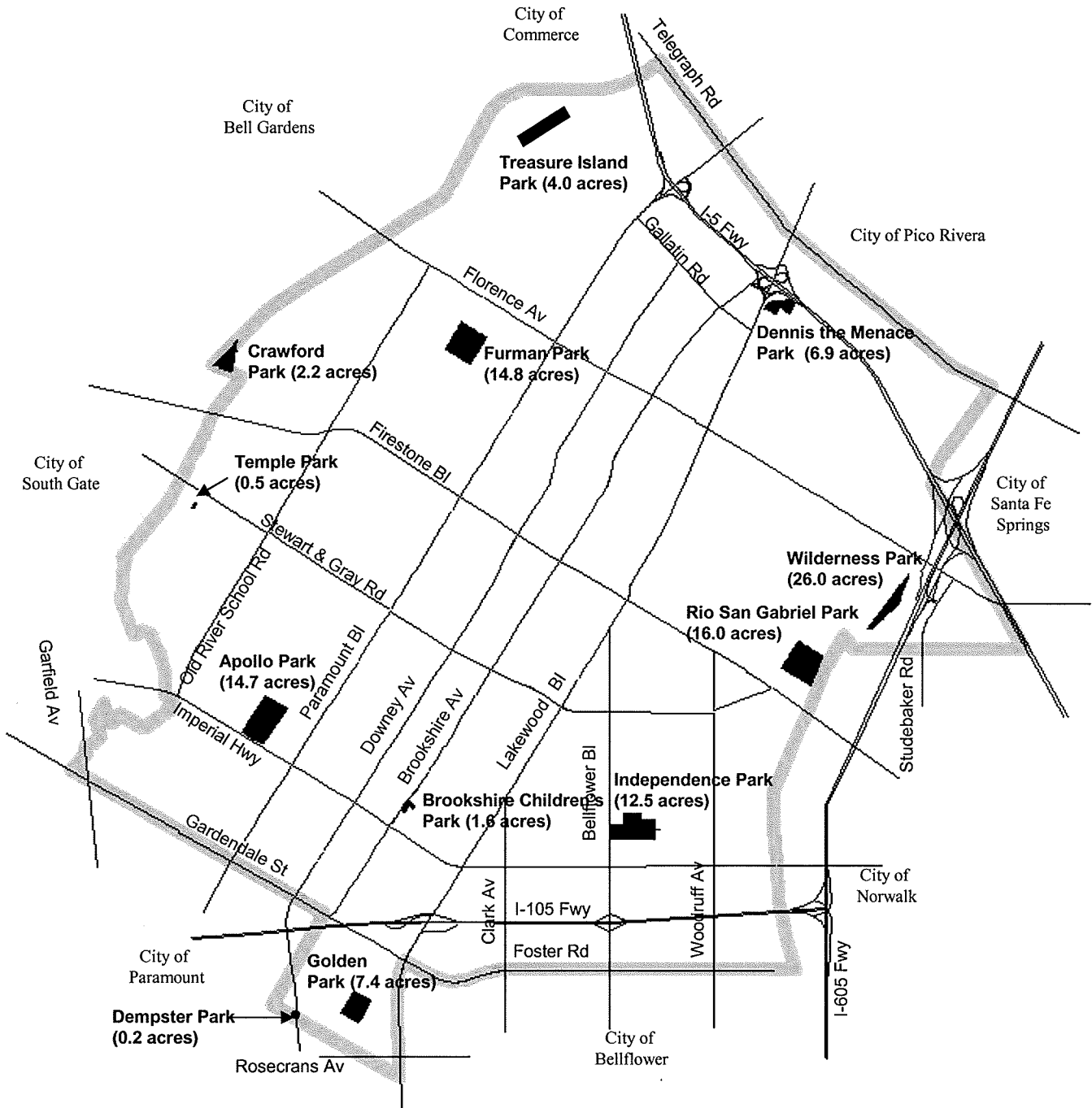
There are a total of 106 acres of park area in 11 individual parks. The parks attract over 800,000 visitors a year. The recreational facilities at parks are provided by the City Community Services Department and the park grounds are maintained by the City Public Works Department. Most Downey parks are staffed year round to meet the needs of the numerous community groups, reservations, athletic organizations and individuals using the parks. Downey's parks provide a wide variety of recreational facilities. These include playing fields, basketball, handball and volleyball courts, playgrounds and picnic areas. Activity buildings are also available for community use. Park programs include special interest classes, athletic league, concerts in the park, after school programs, year round and summer recreation programs and special events.

Downey does not provide the minimum 1.5 acres of parks for every 1,000 residents, as recommended by the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA). With a population of 107,323 (in Year 2000), there is a shortfall of 50 acres of park areas towards meeting this goal.

**Figure 7-2.1  
Public Park Inventory**

<b>Park Type</b>	<b>Park Name</b>	<b>Acres</b>
<b>Pocket Parks</b>	1. Dempster Park	0.2
	2. Temple Park	0.5
	3. Brookshire Children's Park	1.6
	4. Crawford Park	2.2
<b>Neighborhood Parks</b>	5. Treasure Island Park	4.0
	6. Dennis The Menace Park	6.9
	7. Golden Park	7.4
	8. Independence Park	12.5
	9. Apollo Park	14.7
	10. Furman Park	14.8
	11. Rio San Gabriel Park	16.0
<b>Community Park</b>	12. Wilderness Park	26.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>

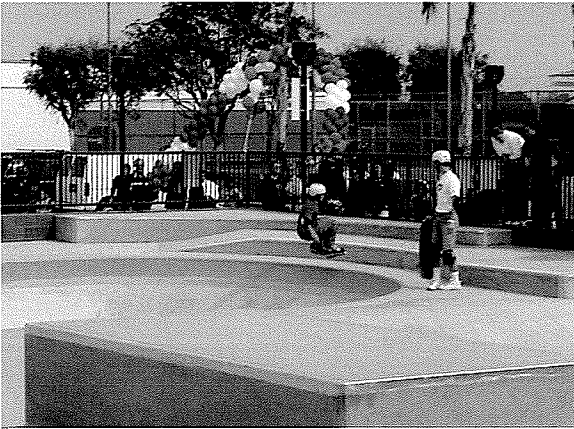
**FIGURE 7.2-2**  
**MAP OF EXISTING PUBLIC PARKS**



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1 INCH = 0.78 MILE

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Skate Upgrade at Independence Park

As a mature community with few vacant property, it has been difficult to find property for new parks. Therefore, the emphasis of the Community Services Department has been to enhance the facilities within existing park areas. This includes the Barbara J. Riley Community and Senior Center at Apollo Park in 1997, the Downey Gymnasium at Apollo Park in 1997, and the Skate Park at Independence Park in 2002.

Park maintenance and upgrade has also become an issue since most parks are approaching 50 years old. A Park Maintenance Master Plan may identify necessary upgrades such as the following:

- Upgrade playground equipment at certain parks.
- Provide handicap-accessible restrooms at all parks.
- Renovation activity buildings Rio San Gabriel Park.
- Replace tennis court lights at Furman Park.
- Replace baseball diamond lights at Apollo Park.
- Increase the number of soccer playfields as soccer is increasingly popular among Downey's youth and adults.
- Monitor subsidence and the possibility of escaping gas at Rio San Gabriel Park, which was constructed atop an abandoned sanitary landfill and is subject to land movement due to underground decomposition.
- Correct drainage problems at the south parking lot at Rio San Gabriel Park.
- Designate a dog park, where dogs may roam without leashes.
- Develop the south end of Wilderness Park with recreation facilities.
- Correct for erosion at the lake edges at Wilderness Park.

The Park Maintenance Master Plan may be financed through the city's Capital Improvement Program, but additional methods of financing park maintenance and renovation should be explored. This may include securing grants, donations, public/private partnerships and user fees as a means of financing park maintenance and upgrades. Additional funding is also available through the development review process. State Law (Quimby Act) authorizes cities to

require developers to either dedicate land for parks and/or provide a fee in lieu of land dedication. The city developed a fee amount charged for new housing unit constructed and has collected a significant amount used towards park maintenance. As part of a move towards recovering costs associated with new developments, there is an opportunity to expand the fees charged for development to fund park maintenance and upgrade.

### **Goals, Policies, and Programs**

#### **Goal 7.2. Optimize the use of established public parks to meet the needs of residents.**

Policy 7.2.2. Upgrade existing park facilities.

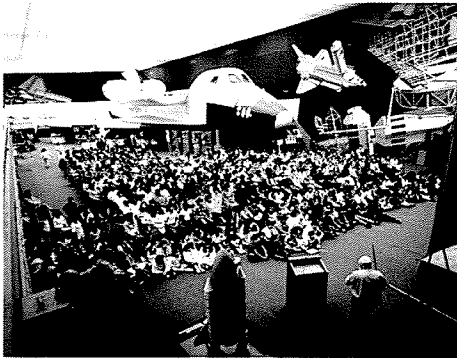
- Program 7.2.2.1. Maintain an adequate level of recreational staffing at park facilities.
- Program 7.2.2.2. Develop a Park Maintenance Master Plan to identify needed upgrades to existing park facilities.
- Program 7.2.2.3. Provide funding for park improvements in the upgrades to existing park facilities in the Capital Improvement Program.
- Program 7.2.2.4. Expand fees charged for development to fund park maintenance and upgrade.
- Program 7.2.2.5. Secure alternative means of funding, such as grants, donations, user fees and public/private partnerships, for parks upgrades.

## NEW PARK AREAS

Issue 7.3. Downey needs more park areas.

Although Downey has limited amount of vacant property available, there are several opportunities for additional park areas.

Downey Landing Development. The specific plan for the Downey Landing development sets aside 13 acres of land located on the west side of the site along Clark Avenue for a public park and a museum/learning center. The park would provide new playing fields and playgrounds. The learning complex should include a museum dedicated to the aeronautical and space-era history of the site, meeting areas and/or conference center. This park will serve to serve increased demands for residents in the south part of the City, which is especially in the greatest need for additional recreational programs.



A learning center is planned at the former NASA site

Rancho Business Park. A 1-acre park & historic interpretative center is proposed to be built upon implementation of Phase 3 of the Rancho Specific Plan. The 120 acre Rancho Business Center is located south of Imperial Highway along the City's western boundary. The park will be located at the center of the site where several significant trees are located, including a Moreton Bay fig tree, one of the largest in Los Angeles County.

Downtown Area. The downtown area has several vacant or underutilized parcels that could be used as a mini-park or plaza. Such an open space area should be along or close to Downey Avenue and can act as a centerpiece to the downtown area. In addition, its design should encourage pedestrian activity.

Due to the limited amount of vacant property available, the City should take full advantage to create additional open space wherever possible, including the creation of "pocket parks". Although sometimes as small as 2,500 square feet,

pocket parks provide benefits by providing some aesthetic relief from the built environment and should be encouraged.

### **Goals, Policies, and Programs**

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#### **Goal 7.3. Increase the amount of park acreage.**

Policy 7.3.1 Promote the expansion of the existing park system.

- Program 7.3.1.1. Promote the creation of new parks, especially in areas of the city in the greatest need of additional parks.
- Program 7.3.1.2. Develop a public park at the Downey Landing development site.
- Program 7.3.1.3. Develop an open space area or plaza in the downtown area.
- Program 7.3.1.4. Develop a portion of the Rancho Business Center for a park and historic interpretative center.
- Program 7.3.1.5. Promote the development of pocket parks.

# SCHOOLS

Issue 7.4 Downey's schools are an important asset to the community.

Downey is known in the area by its excellent school system. Schools are commonly mentioned as the main reason many residents chose to live in Downey. Therefore, it is important that the city government combine efforts with the local schools to enhance the community.



Downey High School

Educational facilities for grades K through 12 are provided by the Downey Unified School District provides for about 97 percent of properties within the city. The remainder are served by the Little Lake School District, and Los Angeles Unified School District. These districts do operate any public schools within the City and all public schools within the city are operated by the Downey Unified School District. The public schools are augmented by several private schools, learning centers, and after-school programs.

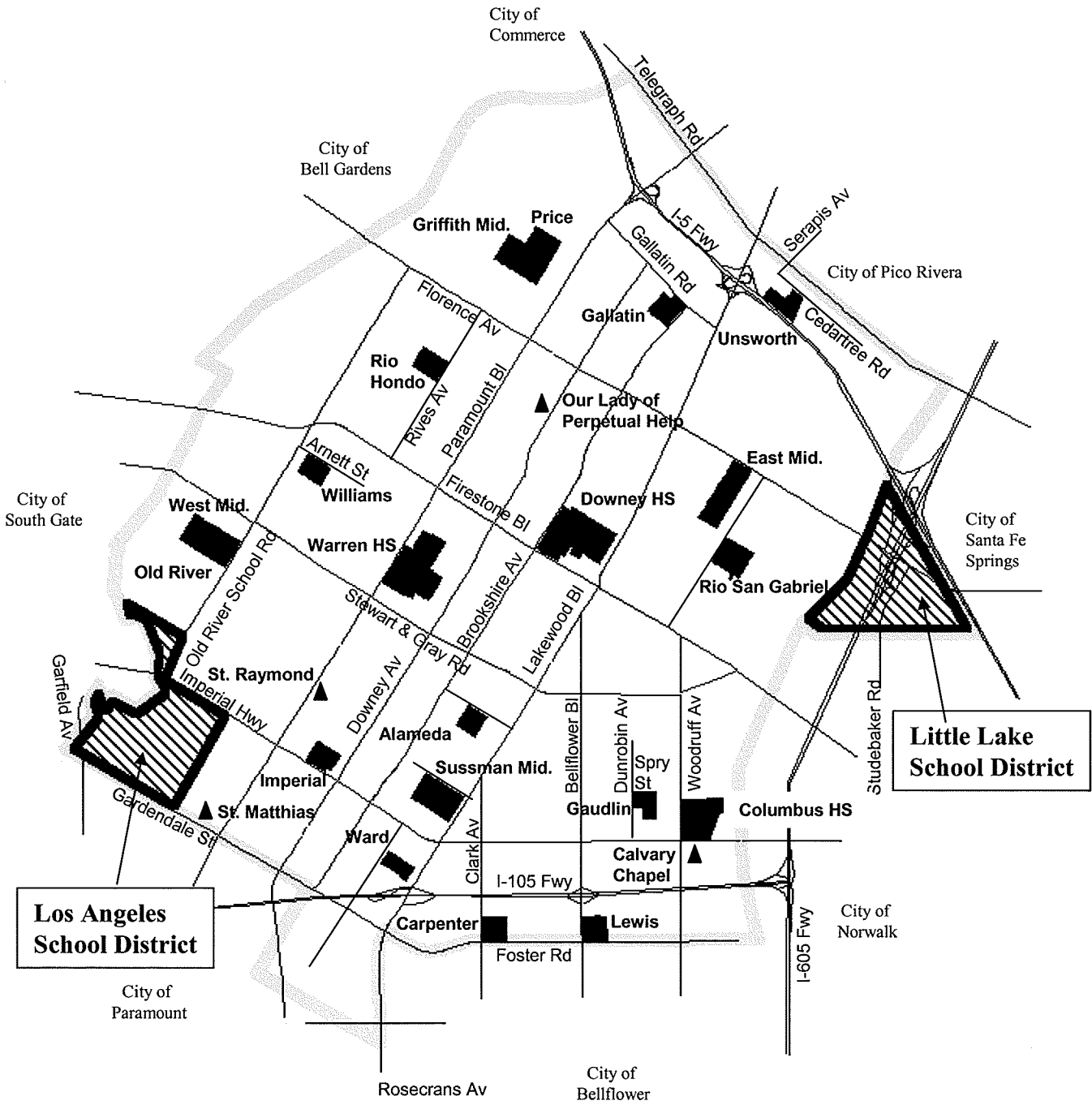
Continuing education for adults benefits residents by channeling their creativity, enriching their knowledge, or updating skills in response to job market changes, and benefits society as a whole. Adult schools, trade schools, extension centers, and other opportunities should be encouraged wherever possible. Educational facilities for adults include the Downey Adult School, located at Columbus High School and operated by the Downey Unified School District. Two community colleges, Rio Hondo College and Long Beach Community College, are close to Downey. In addition, the Southern California region offers a variety of 4-year colleges for residents.

School properties within Downey contribute to the amount of open space in the City since a great proportion of their sites are not improved with buildings. From a land use perspective, public schools also often serve as a focal point for local neighborhoods. Local schools, if made available to residents for recreational purposes, can augment local parks towards meeting the needs of residents for recreational facilities

**Figure 7-4  
School Inventory**

<b>School</b>	<b>Address</b>
<b>Public Elementary Schools</b>	
Alameda	8613 Alameda
Carpenter	9439 Foster
Gallatin	9513 Gallatin
Gaudlin	9730 Spry
Imperial	8133 Imperial
Lewis	13232 Bellflower
Price	9525 Tweedy
Old River	11995 Old River School
Rio Hondo	7731 Muller
Rio San Gabriel	9338 Gotham
Unsworth	9001 Lindsey
Ward	8851 Adoree
Williams	7530 Arnett
Pace	(outside city) 9625 Van Ruiten, Bellflower
<b>Public Middle Schools</b>	
East	10301 Woodruff
Griffiths	9633 Tweedy
Sussman	12500 Birchdale
West	11985 Old River School
<b>Public High Schools</b>	
Downey	11040 Downey
Warren	8141 De Palma
Columbus	12332 Woodruff
<b>Private Schools</b>	
Our Lady of Perpetual Help	10441 Downey
St. Raymond	12348 Paramount
St. Matthias	7701 Gardendale
Calvary Chapel	12808 Woodruff

**FIGURE 7.4-2  
MAP OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS**



SCALE  
1 INCH = 0.78 MILE



The Downey Unified School District and the City have several cooperative agreements to provide school grounds for recreational purposes for residents, such as during after-school hours and weekends. The City has access rights to all gymnasiums, athletic fields and swimming pools when not in use by the district. The Community Aquatic Center at Downey High School and the soccer field and baseball diamonds at Columbus High School were all collaborative projects of the school district and City.

In the past, school sites have been sold and redeveloped with other land uses thereby eliminating their benefit as open space. If school properties are made available for sale or lease, it is important that the city evaluate purchasing the whole or portion of school properties to ensure its continued use as open space by residents.



## **Goals, Policies, and Programs**

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### **Goal 7.4. Combine efforts by the local school districts and the city towards enhancing the community.**

Policy 7.4.1. Support the local school districts and other groups involved with providing educational facilities for residents.

- Program 7.4.1.1. Maintain effective lines of communication between the local school districts, the City and the community.
- Program 7.4.1.2. Ensure that new developments adequately mitigate potential impacts on area schools.
- Program 7.4.1.4. Support efforts to raise funds for local school districts and other groups involved with providing educational facilities for residents.
- Program 7.4.1.5. Actively work with private, non-profit and public community services organizations to provide educational and community services including child care, English translation, after school programs and recreational activities.

Policy 7.4.2 Promote the use of recreational facilities and programs on school properties by residents.

- Program 7.4.2.1. Support the development of recreational facilities on school properties for use by residents.
- Program 7.4.2.2. Promote the availability of school recreational facilities for use by residents.
- Program. 7.4.2.3. Consider acquiring surplus school properties for open space and park use.