

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Context

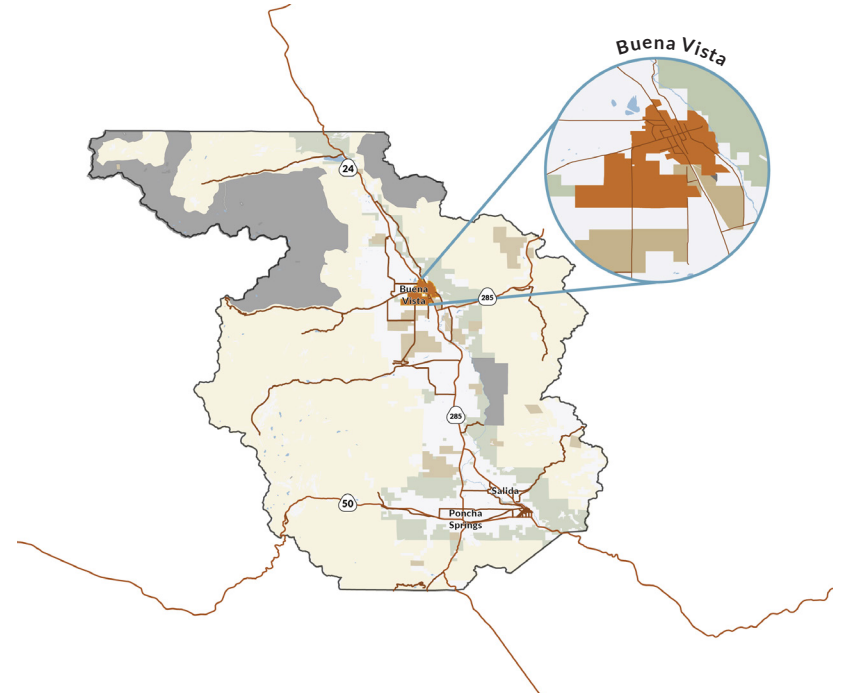
Located in the Arkansas River Valley, Buena Vista is a small, incorporated municipality in Chaffee County, Colorado. The Town sits at 7,965 feet in elevation and is home to roughly 2,800 full-time residents. Only two and a half hours southeast of Denver, its location along the Collegiate Peaks Scenic and Historic Byway, Highway 24, has become a draw for tourists looking for a mountain retreat.

## The Challenge

Buena Vista has developed numerous plans for individual parks and trails over the years; however, it requires a comprehensive review of the existing parks and trails infrastructure and guidance for how each piece fits into the larger community context. As a community known for its recreation, there is increasing conflict among user groups. This problem worsens in the summer months when an influx of tourists seek space for special events, seasonal housing options, and other recreational uses. The Town lacks a repository of parks and trails information, including provided amenities and allowable uses, and cannot quickly respond to requests or community needs.

## The Objective

This Capstone Project aims to develop a comprehensive planning tool that integrates trails, parks, and open space planning efforts in Buena Vista. This plan details the existing parks and trails within the town boundary and the surrounding three-mile area, establishes parks and trails typologies, and recommends future trail



connections to enhance access. The completed project includes a geodatabase that contains updated parks and trails data and recommendations to guide decision-making.

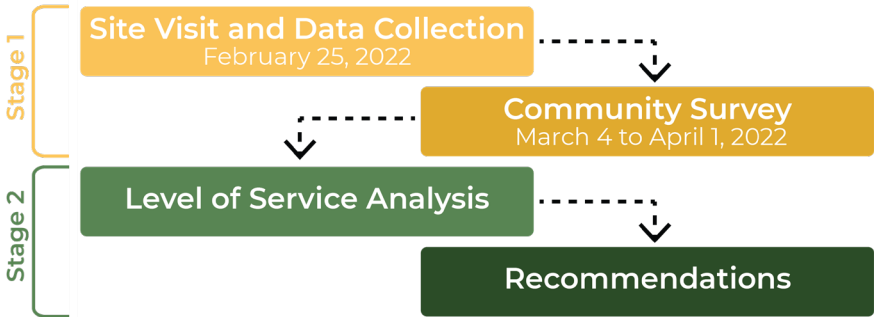
## Background Research

Parks and trails provide indisputable benefits to the communities they serve. They are a place for people to recreate, relax, and convene while also contributing to a community's economic and social well-being. The parks and trails that traverse Buena Vista and Chaffee County are no exception. They help drive economic

prosperity, for the town and region, and social cohesion around the shared love of the outdoors by residents.

Methodology

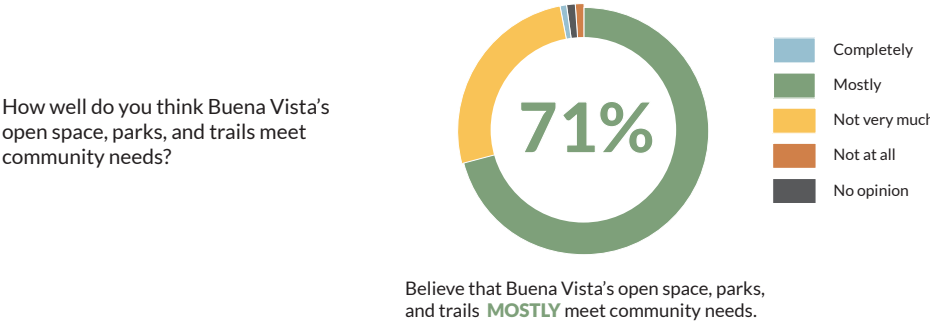
The project methodology involved three parts: Data Collection, Community Survey, and Data Analysis. First, the team collected data using existing GIS data and volunteers. The existing GIS layers for parks and trails were missing data or inaccurate. With the help of volunteers, the team filled in the gaps and collected information about parks and trails amenities that was then inputted into GIS. Next, the team distributed a community survey to collect perceptions on Buena Vista’s parks and trails system. The survey was used to help inform future recommendations for park use and trail connectivity. Finally, the team performed a Level of Service analysis to determine whether the existing parks and trails are meeting community needs. The Level of Service standards are based on the standards developed by the Rural Planning Institute specifically for small Colorado communities in 2003.



Community Survey

The community was asked to provide insight into their views on Buena Vista’s parks and trails. Out of the 97 respondents, 71% believe that Buena Vista’s parks and trails mostly meet community needs. Parks and trails are well utilized by the community with the most popular options situated along the Arkansas River.

Connectivity to parks and open space is a top priority for respondents, and the most sought-after improvement was new trail connections to regional trail systems. Ultimately, respondents shared that connectivity, safety, and maintenance were the areas that the Town should prioritize.



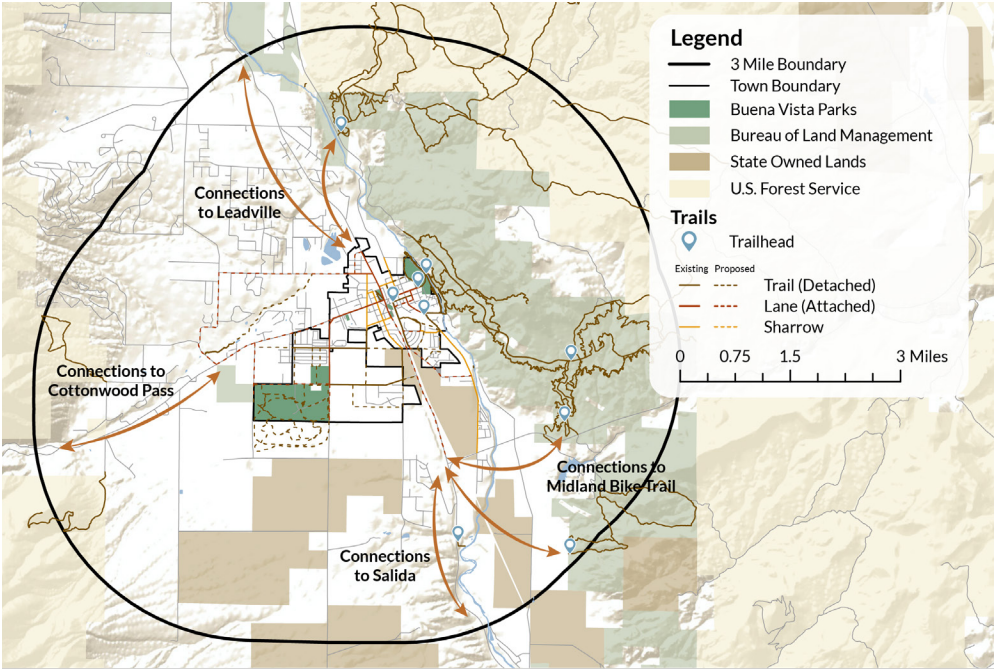
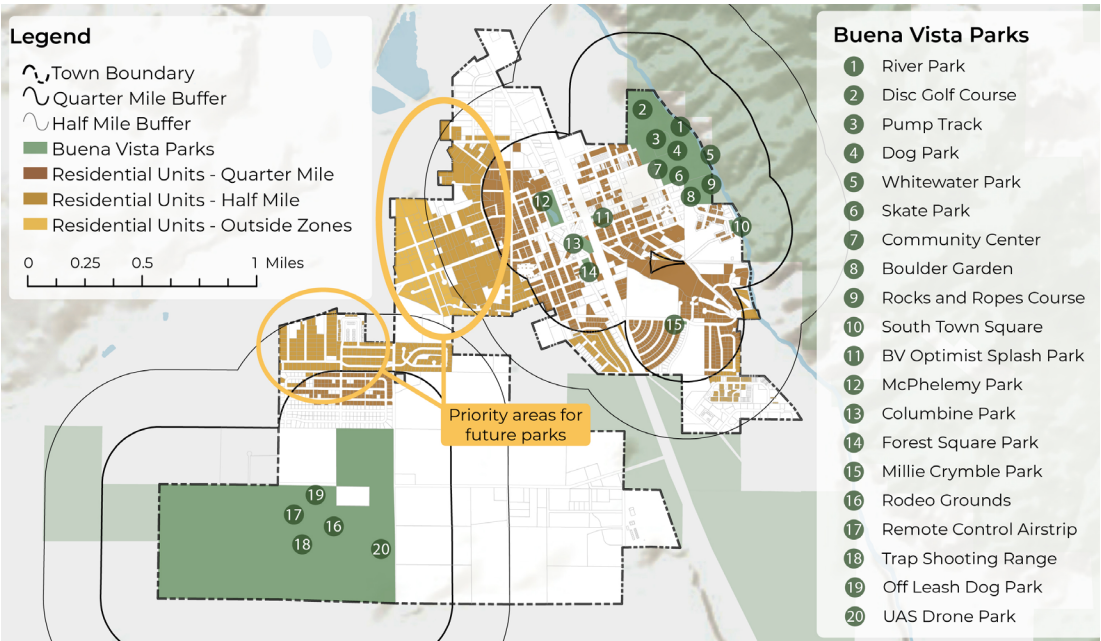
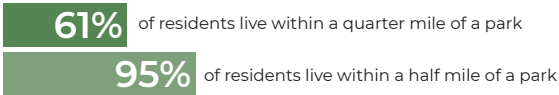
Parks

Buena Vista has three distinct types of parks available for community enjoyment: community parks, neighborhood parks, and pocket or special-use parks. Community parks are larger parks that serve the entire community and typically feature amenities like sport fields, utilities, and trail systems. Neighborhood parks are oriented around the immediate residents and typically feature play equipment or picnic areas for small gatherings. Lastly, pocket or special use parks are distinct. They are often much smaller and are for unique uses such as skating, kayaking, or disc golf. Limited amenities are provided at these parks. The report includes a table that outlines the available amenities and primary uses at each park. This table will help town staff inform the public about allowable uses.

Community	Neighborhood	Pocket / Special
Over 10 acres	Less than 10 acres	Less than 1 acre

Overall, Buena Vista currently offers park space well beyond the standard set by the Rural Planning Institute. Buena Vista has 438 acres designated park space, far exceeding the standard of 14 acres per 1,000 residents. However, not all this space is usable. Analysis of the service area shows that the parks are easily accessible for residents by walking or biking. There is a need for additional parks on the west side of town to improve accessibility; however, residents indicated they were satisfied with parks and amenities that are currently provided. Most visitors feel safe visiting the parks, and believe they are in good condition.

Service area analysis shows:

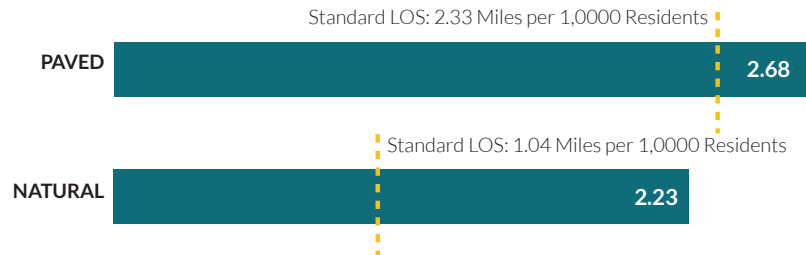


## Trails

Buena Vista maintains three types of trail: regional, community, and recreational. Regional trails are defined as non-motorized connections between municipalities in Chaffee County. Community trails serve as primary non-motorized routes between neighborhoods and community assets including parks, schools, economic centers, and trail heads. These trails can be used by bicyclists or pedestrians. Finally, recreational trails are lower volume trails that provide non-motorized circulation within parks and open space. Within those types there are three classes: trail (detached), lane (attached), and sharrow (shared roadway).

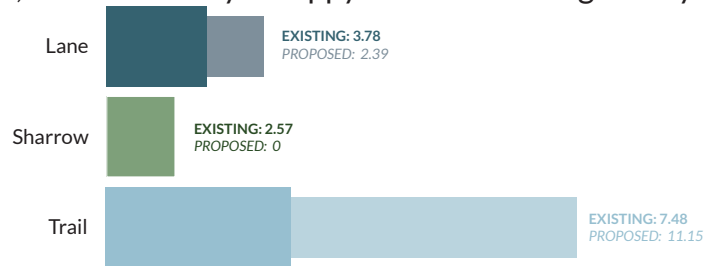


Buena Vista currently maintains approximately 14 miles of dedicated trails including bike lanes and sharrows. As of 2022, Buena Vista exceeds the current standard level of service by providing over 6 miles of natural multi-use trails. When assessing the paved trails system, Buena Vista generally meets the standard. However, when broken down by trail type, the town offers well below the adequate amount of paved, detached multi-use trails.



Buena Vista has numerous plans in place to continue expanding and improving its existing trail network. Based on this plan, there are approximately 13.54 miles of trails that are currently being planned or proposed – 2.39 miles of additional bike and pedestrian lanes and 11.15 miles of trail.

Overall, the community is happy with the existing trail system but



identified three key areas for improvement: Connectivity, Safety, and Maintenance. While Buena Vista provides adequate trail mileage, community members felt that the system is disconnected. Also, the primary trails adjoin high traffic corridors creating safety challenges for users. And finally, general maintenance and dog waste management were common concerns.

## Recommendations



### PARK GOALS

#### 1. Service

- 1.1 Ensuring all residents are within a 10-minute walk to a park.
- 1.2 Provide typology appropriate facilities at all parks.

#### 2. Maintenance

- 2.1 Perform regular maintenance and upkeep of park facilities.



### TRAIL GOALS

#### 1. Connectivity

- 1.1 Expand the local and regional trail network and create links to key community destinations.

#### 2. Safety

- 2.1 Ensure trail users feel safe and protected when using the local trail network.

#### 3. Maintenance

- 3.1 Maintain the existing facilities to ensure a positive user experience.