

Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation 10 YEAR MASTER PLAN



*The Natural Place
To Be...*



Mecklenburg County
Park and Recreation

Acknowledgments





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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation Department last developed a Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan in 1989. Many changes have occurred over the last 16 years in the City and County as it applies to the demographic growth of the region, the enhanced needs for open space and protection of natural resources, and the need for quality parks, recreation facilities and program services. In an effort to meet these needs and to remain ahead of development, with final build-out of the County expected to occur by 2025, the Department chose to create a new Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan to meet the needs of residents for the next 10 years.

The Goals and Objectives associated with the Master Plan included the following:

- Seeking community input to guide the Master Plan process and direction
- Coordinate the needs and input from the City of Charlotte, as well as Towns in the County within the Master Plan to serve as one park and recreation master plan for the entire County
- Analyze existing master plan documents from other Towns in the County that have relevance to the new County's Master Plan

The Comprehensive Master Plan components in this document include the following:

- An updated Greenways Master Plan
- An updated Natural Preserves Master Plan
- A Greenprinting process developed by the Trust for Public Land for identifying open space lands for parks, recreation facilities, greenways, and natural areas and identifying service gaps for parks and recreation facilities in the County
- A Recreation Program Plan for establishing the needs of recreation program services in the County
- Establishing a new Land and Facility Standards Matrix based on all public providers assets that are available to the community
- A Capital Improvement Plan for existing owned assets for the next 10 years
- A Demand Analysis for sports fields in the County
- A Sports Tourism Plan for the County

Each of these planning documents work together as one Master Plan in serving the County's needs for the next 10 years and will also act as stand-alone documents for staff and other service providers to use in daily work assignments. All park and recreation service providers





in the County were invited to participate in the development and planning of this Master Plan document to ensure ownership to the document.

As with any comprehensive planning process, the community was highly involved in the development of the Master Plan through stakeholder and focus group meetings. Public forums were held across the County, and a citizen household survey was conducted that helped to prioritize and identify the issues that needed to be addressed in the Master Plan and to support the key recommendations to act on over the next 10 years.

From this community input process three key Master Plan Themes emerged for the Plan to focus on and they are as follows:

- “Conservation and Stewardship”
- “Parks and Greenways”
- “Recreation Programs and Facilities”

Each theme was created to focus on key outcomes and strategies. The first five years of the plan is very specific in terms of meeting the needs of the community for acquiring land for natural areas preservation and neighborhood and community parks, as well as capital improvements for existing and new recreation facilities and amenities.

The Master Plan is a living document with many moving components that must be achieved simultaneously. The Master Plan is outcome based with performance measures to hold the County accountable to meet the needs of the community. It will require the support of the voters of the County to make the plan a reality. A sense of urgency must be in place due to the high levels of need that exist for acquiring available pieces of natural areas, as well as acquiring additional park lands for recreation purposes, greenways and trails, and the development of parks and recreation facilities in underserved areas of the County.

1.1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation developed this Master Plan process to lead the County and its Towns forward for the next ten years. This Master Plan was developed based on high levels of community input from stakeholders meetings, focus group meetings, public forums and a household citizen survey. The Master Plan used many new techniques and methodologies to gauge the needs of residents now and in the future that have not been used in past master plans.

The result of this planning process is a Master Plan that will serve as a roadmap for the Park and Recreation Department to follow with intensive implementation efforts for the first five years and continued follow-through for the next five years. The Master Plan process takes a comprehensive approach to melding goals, objectives, and strategies within the values of the community to create a structured plan that addresses all the issues facing the Park and Recreation Department in meeting community needs.

Each theme addresses the specific issues and needs brought forward by the community in the Master Plan process and addresses other needs which include the development a more balanced parks and recreation system.

The key values the Master Plan focuses on are as follows:

- Clean and well maintained parks
- Safety and security of parks and recreation facilities
- Affordable services
- Accessibility to parks, recreation facilities and programs
- Providing open space, greenways and trails to provide relief from urbanization
- Preserving natural areas
- Programming for a diverse population
- Maintain the importance of developing partnerships to maximize County resources



Through the statistically valid County-wide survey, which had 1033 surveys completed with a 95% level of confidence with margin of error of +/- 3%, the following are the 10 major survey findings:

- Mecklenburg County Parks is the prime provider of parks and recreation services
- Usage of parks is high with good satisfaction
- Enjoyment of the outdoors and close to our home residence are prime reasons for usage of parks and recreation facilities
- 88% or more of households feel it is important to use Mecklenburg County Greenways for environmental protection and a major connected network of walking, biking and nature trails
- Unmet citizen needs exist for a wide range of parks, trails, outdoor and indoor facilities and programs
- Walking and biking trails are the most important facilities, followed by small neighborhood parks, and large community and district parks
- Special events/festivals and adult fitness and wellness programs are most important programs
- Opportunities exist to grow programs at parks and recreation facilities
- Purchase land to preserve open/green space, use floodplain greenways to develop trails/facilities, develop new and connect existing walking and biking trails, fix-up/repair older park buildings/recreation centers and upgrade existing neighborhood/community parks are most important actions respondents would support with tax dollars
- Over 75% of respondents would vote in favor (53%) or might vote in favor (25%) on a bond referendum to fund the acquisition, improvement, and development of the types of parks, trails, green space, and recreation facilities most important to their households



The population of the County has experienced 3.3% growth a year for the last seven years from 2000 to 2007 and is expecting 3% growth to continue through 2012 for a total population of 982,136 projected by 2012.

The key community needs exist in neighborhood park lands of 1,597 acres and community park lands of 1,072 acres needed in 2008. Other areas that needs exist in 2008 include the need for playgrounds of (61); the need for (8) outdoor pools, and (238) miles of trails, (44) basketball courts and (44) tennis courts, (12) skateparks, and (12) dog parks. There is a need for 6-8 youth fast pitch softball fields and 8-10 multi-purpose sports fields. And finally the needs exists for 360,736 square feet of indoor aquatic space and 351,864 square ft of indoor recreation center space to meet the park and recreation needs of residents based on best practice industry standards of 1.5 square ft. of space per population for recreation centers and ½ sq ft of space for aquatic facilities per population served.

The Greenprinting process identified gaps in services as it applied to neighborhood parks, community parks and regional parks, as well as where gaps exist in recreation centers and aquatic facilities across the County for the Department to work toward to make needed improvement and additions in these areas. The Greenprinting process uses a series of layers of maps based on the demographics of the community and identifies elements that are missing in land and recreation facilities based on the values the community stated that is important to meet. The maps demonstrate gaps and where amenities and parks should be located along with land acquisition opportunities to support those needs.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg County community including the Towns in the County has very high expectations for the Parks and Recreation Department to meet. The residents recognize the urgency for acquiring land and the need for additional parks and recreation facilities in the County. There is also recognition that development got way ahead of the parks and recreation system's capability to keep up and that the Department is playing catch up. This will require the community to be patient and supportive in their support through approved bond issues for the Department to meet the needs.

1.1.1 GREENWAYS PLAN

There is a strong desire for greenways and trails in the system. The Greenways Master Plan outlines a strategy to develop 42.8 miles of greenways and trails on existing County lands by the end of 2013 and another 61 miles of trails by 2018 for a total of 129 miles of trails to be used for transportation and health and wellness purposes. The following are the 5-year and 10-year action plans.

1.1.1.1 5-YEAR ACTION PLAN

To meet the needs and expectations of County residents, the five year action plan will pursue an aggressive schedule for trail development. The focus will be on County-owned land with the goal of providing more trails to more residents. Concurrent goals include the improved efficiency of the design and permitting process in an effort to meet the trail development goals.

Goal – To construct 42.8 miles of new greenway trail by 2013

- Launch construction of 12.8 miles of currently funded projects within the first year of the plan's adoption
- Geographically disperse trail development throughout the County and surrounding towns
- Focus trail construction on publicly-owned land
- Work with permitting agencies to streamline the trail design and development process

Goal – To identify and prioritize acquisition efforts for the 10 year trail development plan

- Base trail development and associated land acquisition on developed ranking methodology
- Confirm feasibility of targeted trail construction priorities after two years (2010)

Goal – To improve connectivity to the existing and proposed greenway trail system

- Work with Charlotte Department of Transportation and coordinate planning and development of overland connections
- Work with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Department and other municipal planning departments to incorporate greenway corridor conservation and trail development into the rezoning and subdivision processes
- Work with the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) to incorporate trail development and connectivity to transit facilities
- Incorporate the greenway corridor system into the Long Range Transportation Plan
- Work with potential partners to synchronize trail development efforts and explore funding opportunities
- Work with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools to locate and construct neighborhood entrances that link schools and residential areas
- Implement improvements to the existing trail system

Goal – To identify and designate official routes of the Carolina Thread Trail

- Identify Little Sugar Creek, Long Creek, Mallard Creek and portions of Irwin Creek as initial corridors of the Carolina Thread Trail
- Work with the municipalities within Mecklenburg County to identify the additional Thread trail segments and formally adopt an alignment by 2009

Goal – To better facilitate multi-agency approach to trail development

- Work with CMU to prepare and adopt a joint use sanitary sewer and greenway easement instrument to be used when acquiring new joint use corridors
- Work with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services to adopt a joint use easement to be used when acquiring property for stream restoration and trail development



- Work with Duke Energy and other utilities on a joint use easement to develop greenway trail facilities within these easements
- Investigate possible ordinance amendments to encourage trail development for Charlotte-Mecklenburg and the surrounding municipalities

Goal – To explore policies and programs so that greenway corridors may better function as a conservation and enhancement tool for floodplain and riparian plant and wildlife habitat

- Work with Stewardship Services on management strategies for greenway corridors
- Work with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services to identify partnership projects and improvement projects within greenway corridors
- Work with Extension Services and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services to brainstorm and develop outreach efforts to educate and involve homeowners within the greenway corridors as to the value of the riparian habitats and possible backyard improvements homeowners can make to conserve and/or improve floodplain habitat

1.1.1.2 10 YEAR ACTION PLAN

The ten year action plan sets forth an ambitious goal of adding an additional 61 miles of proposed trail. The feasibility of this goal will be reassessed within the first two years of the 5 year action plan to realistically assess the proposed development goals. However, a focus will remain on finishing significant stretches of trail, including Little Sugar Creek and Mallard Creek greenways.

Goal – To construct 61.9 miles of new greenway trail by 2018, bringing the total miles of constructed greenway trail to 129

- Disperse trail development throughout the County and surrounding towns
- Extend developed greenway trail and increase connectivity between greenway trail systems
- Complete signature trails including Little Sugar Creek Greenway, Mallard Creek Greenway, and McDowell Creek Greenway
- Work with surrounding counties to identify desired regional connections

Figures 1 and **Figure 2** show the Greenway Master Plan Map and the Greenway Master Plan Priority Map.

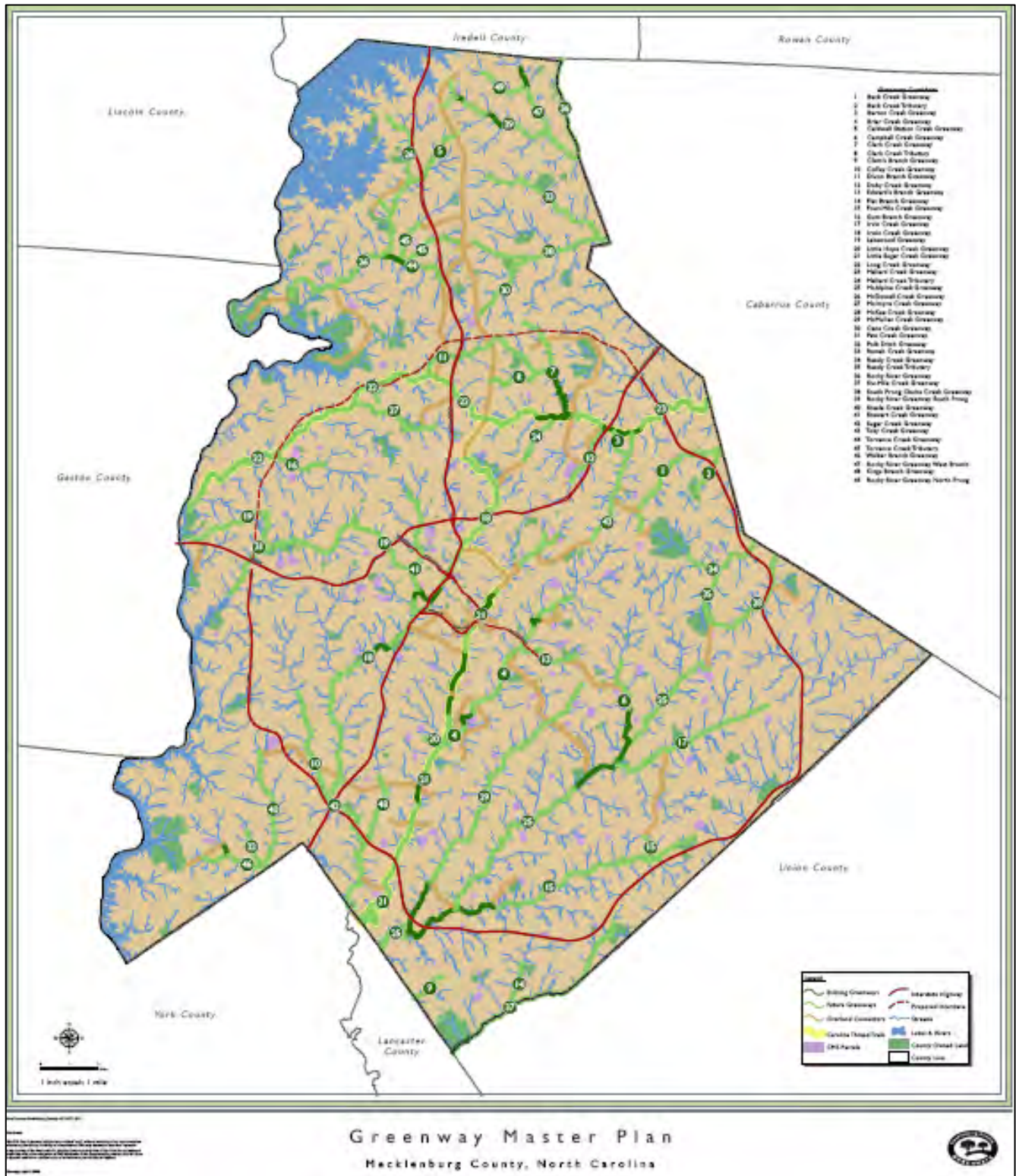


Figure 1 - Greenway Master Plan

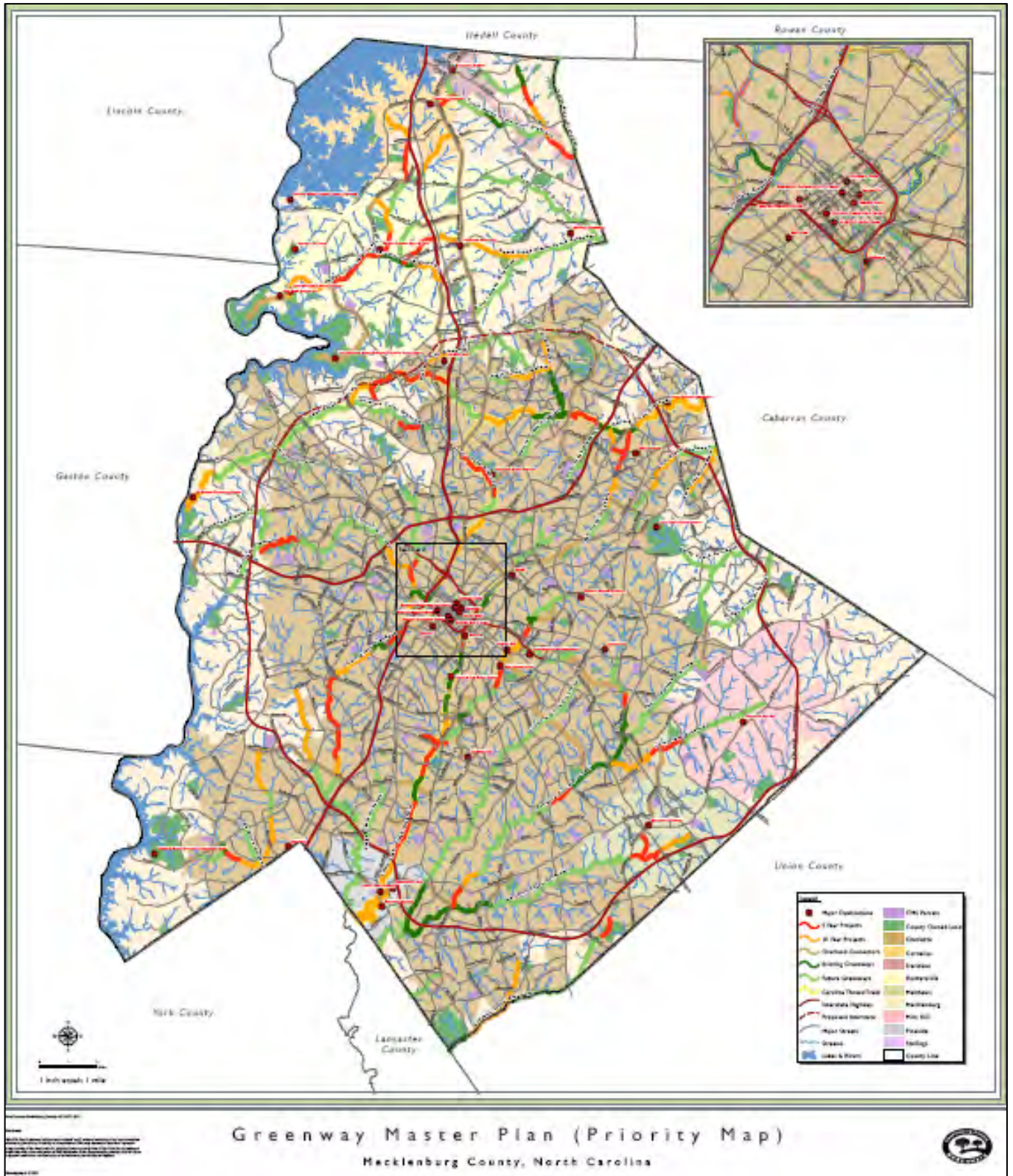


Figure 2 - Greenway Master Plan (Priority Map)

1.1.2 NATURE PRESERVES MASTER PLAN

The Nature Preserves Master Plan outlines a strategy to purchase up to an additional 6,991 acres of natural areas that exist in the County over the next 10 years. These lands are located on 88 separate parcels that are still available, but the County is losing 14 acres a day to development. The challenge centers on how quickly the County can either acquire the properties or help the land owners to preserve their properties without the County purchasing the properties through other conservation methods available to them. In addition, there is a need to continue to update the three existing nature centers and to develop an additional five (5) nature centers in underserved areas of the County. The last nature center was developed in 1993.

New policy updates were completed in the Nature Preserves Master Plan Update to help manage existing nature preserves and creating a no net loss of species policy on preserves in the system today. As part of the Nature Preserves Master Plan, five (5) new nature preserves are recommended on existing land banked properties to include Stevens Creek Nature Preserve, Berryhill Nature Preserve, Oehler Nature Preserve, Gateway Nature Preserve and Community Park and Davis Farm Nature Preserve.

Figure 3 and **Figure 4** show the Current Nature Preserves Map, as well as the Current and Recommended Nature Preserves Map.

1.1.2.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE NATURE CENTERS

Currently three nature centers serve the entire County. Nature Centers are the primary public facilities associated with nature preserves. The three nature centers are located at Latta Plantation, McDowell, and Reedy Creek Nature Preserves. Based on gap analysis, many residents must drive considerable distances to visit a nature center, creating a significant access and equity issue. Additionally, the results of the 2008 Community Survey as well as best practices indicate an extremely high level of need for additional nature centers. The Department's recommended standard of one nature center per 100,000 residents results in a current deficit of five nature centers, and a deficit of nine nature centers to serve residents by the year 2022. Refer to the *Mecklenburg County – Facility Standards Spreadsheet (Figures 33, 34 and 35)* in the Master Plan. Although many new nature centers were planned or discussed over the years, no new centers have been built or opened to the public for the past 15 years.

Based on the community survey results and service gap analysis of existing centers, the Nature Preserve Master Plan recommends five new nature centers to be built over the next 10 years. These nature centers would provide access and services to the majority of the County once opened (**Figure 5**). An additional four (4) nature centers will be needed in the following 5 years to meet the recommended standard.

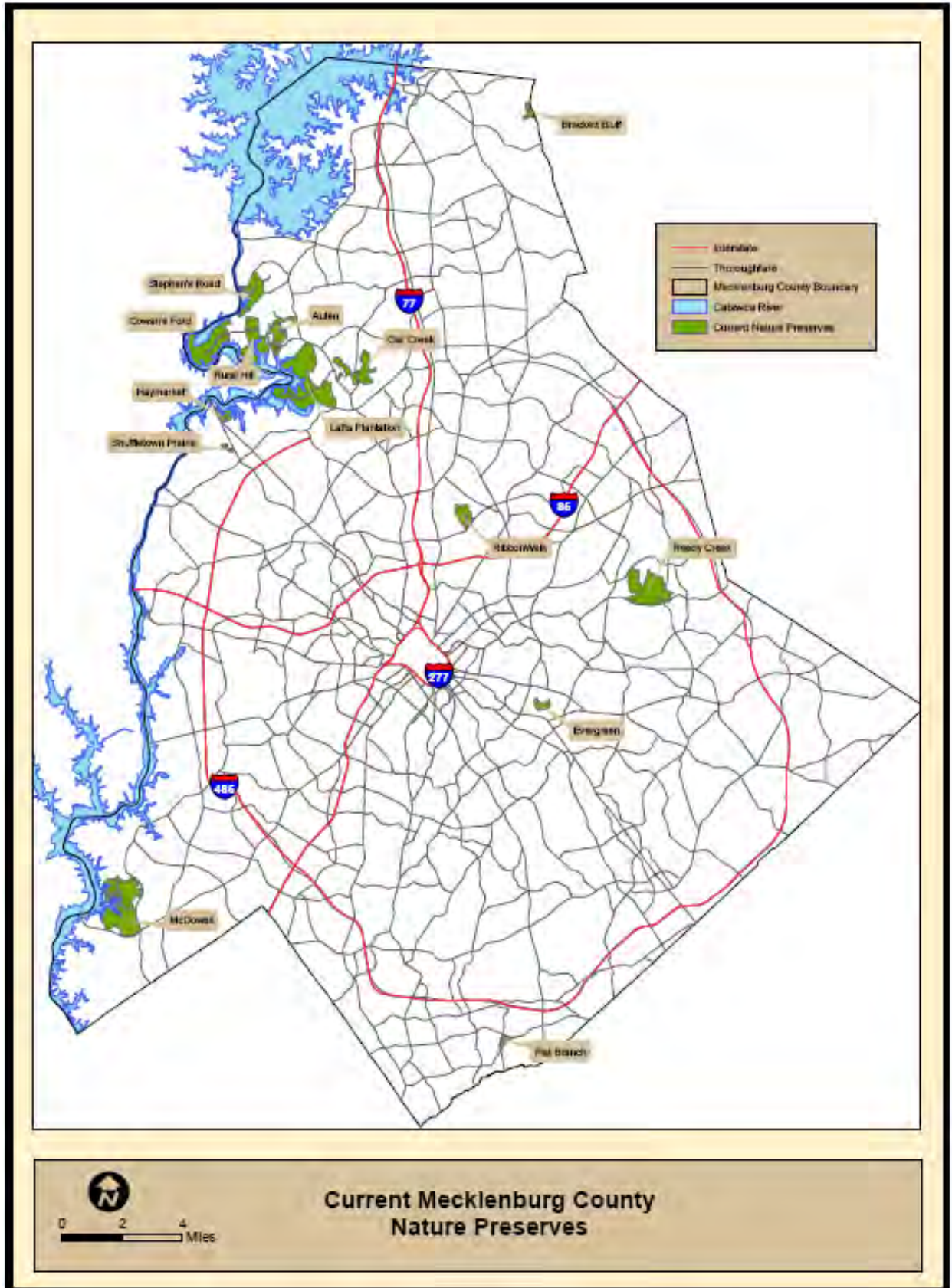


Figure 3 - Current Nature Preserves

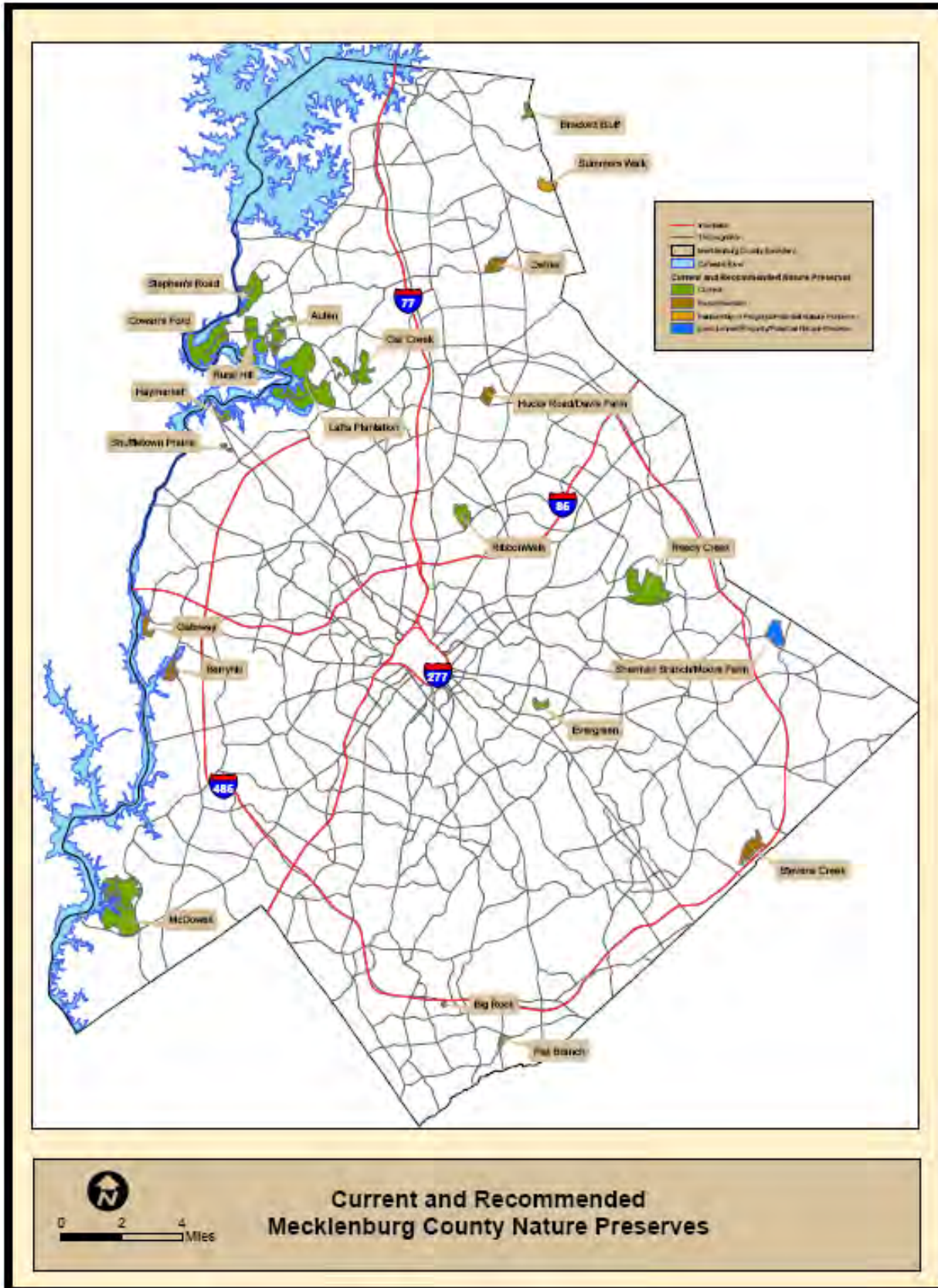


Figure 4 - Current and Recommended Nature Preserves

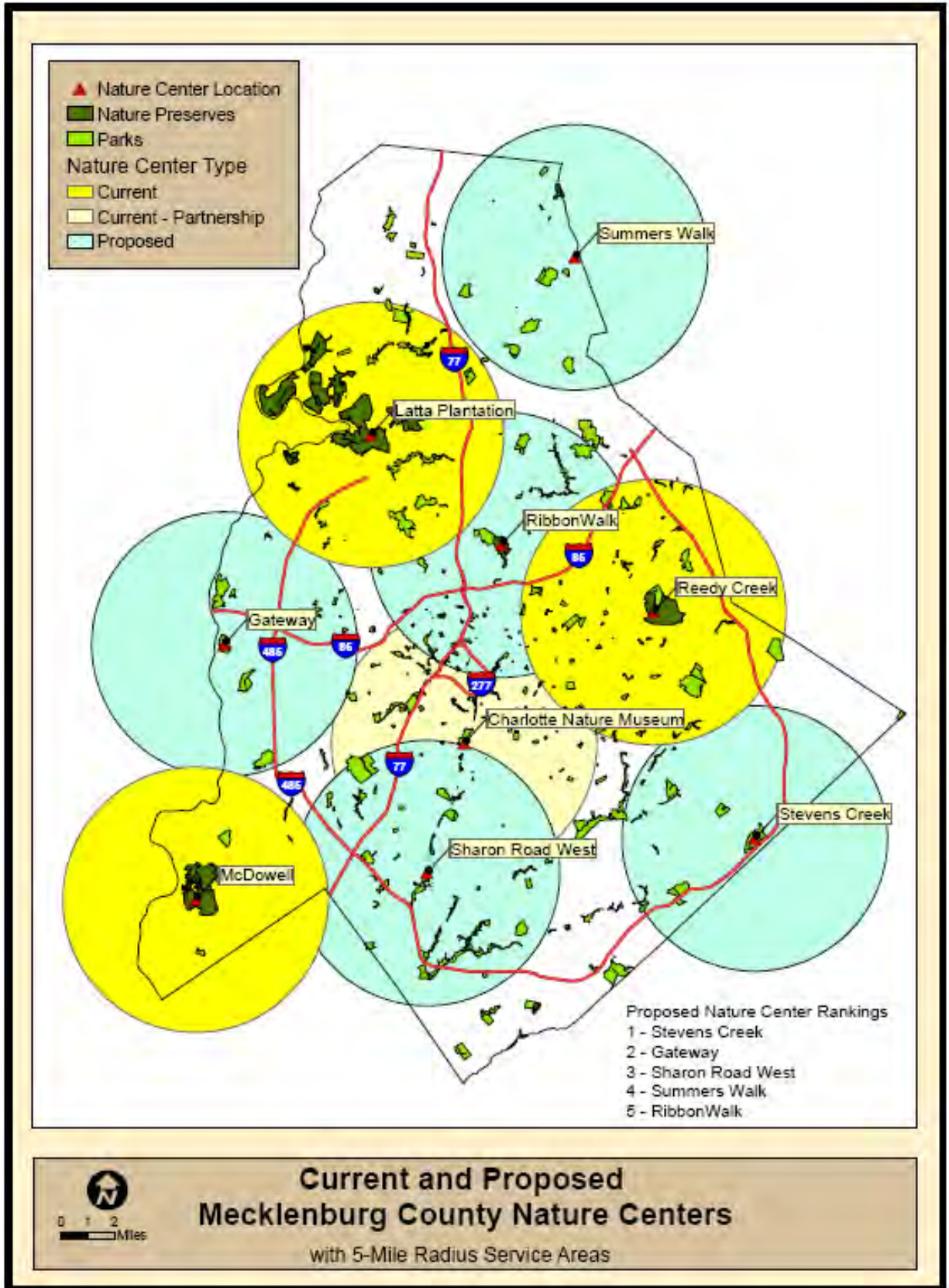


Figure 5 - Current and Proposed Nature Centers

1.1.3 THE PROGRAM PLAN

The Program Plan for the County addresses the recreation program needs of the community. The Program Development Plan calls for the following programs to become core programs for the Department in the future. Many of these are core programs currently and others are new. Current programs to remain core are as follows:

- Aquatics Programs
- Environmental Education
- Therapeutic Recreation programs
- Athletics for adults and youth
- 4-H programs
- Golf Services
- Senior Adult services

New core programs to be added include:

- Outdoor Adventure Sports
- Community-wide Special Events
- Active Adult Program for 50 to 65 year olds
- Fitness and Wellness Programs
- Summer Camps and After School Programs
- Performing Arts and Fine Arts Programs in conjunction with ASC

The Program Plan recommends stronger efforts be made in programming existing recreation centers, and theme them to attract stronger user participation. In addition, the Program Plan focuses on better efforts to market the services provided and to develop program plans with Towns in the County, as well as other service providers so that the gaps that exist in services are addressed. Partnerships need to continue to be developed with other service providers to maximize the County's resources and to support future recreation and aquatic center needs.

The Sports Tourism Plan addresses the need to provide sporting events that serve traditional sports and non-traditional sports. These events require some to be annual events while others require the County to bid for the events as it applies to regional and national amateur sporting events. Many of the non-traditional events are outdoor adventure focused or activities like cheerleading competitions that bring large numbers of groups to the County to compete. Some of the traditional events do not have the appropriate indoor and outdoor venues to host large competitions currently which will need to be addressed in the future.

The Capital Improvement Plan for the County outlines the needs of the Department based on the methodology used to meet community needs. The capital needs demonstrate a need of \$927,430,700 for the Department. The Master Plan recognizes the need, but also the reality of limited resources available. Key leadership in the County must decide what level of need they are willing to ask the voters to support through a series of bond issues over a 10 year period. As the County continues to grow and become more urbanized, the



intensity of the needs will increase. The challenges are apparent and the strategies need to be solid in meeting the needs of the community at whatever the level the community is positioned to support.

1.1.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1.4.1 VISION

The following vision presents how the Department desires to be viewed in the future:

“People who participate in recreation in Mecklenburg County will have a system of parks, greenways, and open spaces located throughout the County that will provide more parkland per capita than the national average, will connect neighborhoods, satisfy public recreation needs, and will protect environmentally sensitive areas.”

1.1.4.2 MISSION

The following mission presents how the Department desires to be viewed in the future:

“To enrich the lives of our citizens through the stewardship of the County’s natural resources and ensure efficient and responsive quality leisure opportunities, experiences and partnerships.”

1.1.4.3 COMMUNITY VISION FOR LAND

“Our Vision is to provide neighborhood park, community parks and regional parks across the County that provides a balance of park related experiences for people of all ages. The County will continue to acquire additional park and open space to protect the regions biodiversity and natural heritage through the promotion of open space, preservation, conserving natural communities, fostering awareness and stewardship through environmental education and outdoor recreation.”

GOAL

To protect the biodiversity and natural heritage of each Mecklenburg County Nature Preserve for its intrinsic value, the health of our environment, and the long-term benefit of the public. To acquire additional neighborhood and community park land in underserved areas of the County to promote active and passive recreation pursuits for people of all ages.

Strategies

- Implement the new park classifications to support school parks and community parks with design standards and user outcomes for appropriate recreation opportunities both passive and active
- Acquire park and open space property in underserved areas of the County to support the appropriate types of parks that are needed based on 13 acres per 1000 population for neighborhood, community and regional parks
- Acquire, or protect sensitive natural areas within the County to preserve the natural communities in perpetuity
- Acquire greenway corridors to support water quality and protect flood plain habitat opportunities for public access via biking, and walking trails

- To collect and utilize the best available scientific data to provide a sound basis for making management decisions
- Implement the Nature Preserves policy recommendations as it applies to appropriate uses for natural areas and capacity demand by users with a no net loss of species
- Incorporate five new Nature Preserves designation to include: Stevens Creek Nature Preserve, Berryhill Nature Preserve, Oehler Nature Preserve, Gateway Nature Preserve and Community Park and Davis Farm Nature Preserve
- Acquire future properties for Nature Preserves that has been identified in the Greenprinting process that identified sixty properties and 3,758 acres in the Tiered 1 and 28 properties in the Tiered 2 category for a total of 2,591 acres for a total of 6,349 acres of potential preserve properties
- Develop five new nature centers over the next 10 years to serve the environmental education needs of the community in underserved areas of the County
- Coordinate with the Charlotte Mecklenburg School District land acquisition strategies to support school parks and recreation facilities in developing neighborhoods

1.1.4.4 COMMUNITY VISION FOR GREENWAYS

“Develop a greenway corridor system that supports the drainage of water for water quality and flood control purposes while creating trails along these corridors for transportation and recreation purposes for walking, bicycling, running and wellness related activities for people of all ages.”

GOAL

Continue the expansion of the greenway rail system along practical trail corridors that will serve County residents and fulfill their need for additional walking and biking trails.

Strategies

- Expand the trail by 42.8 miles of trails in 5 years and 61.9 miles of trails in 10 years for a total of 129 miles on the ground by 2018
- Identify and prioritize acquisition efforts for the 10 year trail development plan
- Improve the connectivity to the existing and proposed greenway trail system
- Incorporate the Greenway corridor system into the Long Range Transportation Plan
- To identify and designate official routes of the Carolina Thread Trail
- Better facilitate multi-agency approach to trail development
- To explore policies and programs so that greenway corridors may better function as a conservation and enhancement tool for floodplain and riparian plant and wildlife habitat
- Develop loop corridors within the trail system to connect to major attractions and to support wellness and fitness components in neighborhood and community parks
- Hold a policy summit with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Departments and surrounding towns planning departments to consider the adoption of uniform open space greenways, trails and parks standards



1.1.4.5 COMMUNITY VISION FOR RECREATION FACILITIES

“Develop appropriate recreation facilities and amenities in underserved areas of the County in partnership with other service providers to maximize the County’s resources and meet the unmet recreation facility and amenity needs of residents.”

GOAL

To meet the Facility Standards by developing, individually and in partnership, a balanced offering of recreation facilities and amenities that adequately meets the needs of their target population.

Strategies

- Seek to meet the facility standards for recreation centers and aquatic facilities by the end of 2018
- Develop large sports complexes in existing community parks or regional parks
- Continue current partnerships and incubate new partnerships for athletic field development and establish a partnership policy for each entity within the County to provide increased asset capabilities and solidify working relationships for the future
- Establish a priority usage policy based on entity participation
- Develop sports courts complexes for tennis and gyms in the County to meet the needs of youth and adults but also for sports tourism purposes
- Develop art related facilities within recreation centers as outlined in the ASC master plan approved in January of 2004
- Partner with Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools on recreation center and park amenity components within elementary and middle school sites in areas that are missing recreation centers and amenities

1.1.4.6 COMMUNITY VISION FOR RECREATION PROGRAMS

“Develop and expand recreation programs as outlined in the Master Plan to increase awareness and use by residents of the County and to create more opportunities to serve people of all ages in a variety of recreation pursuits.”

GOAL

Offer core programs outlined in the program plan with high cost recovery levels, utilize training and performance measures to create consistency and employ partners and volunteers to support program operations and build advocacy for the County recreation program brand.

Strategies

- Develop and expand core recreation services across the County in aquatics, environmental education, adventure sports, therapeutic recreation, athletics, community-wide special events, active adults and seniors over 65+, fitness and wellness, facility rentals and new core programs in summer camps, after school and cultural arts
- Evaluate staffing needs to meet core program needs based on the hours required to produce the programs desired and missing in the County

- Develop consistent program standards and program development process used for all core programs offered to provide consistency in delivery of services
- Implement the Sports Tourism Plan as it applies to developing traditional and non-traditional events in the County to promote the region and create economic impact for the County
- Develop a pricing policy based on the true cost of services tied to the level of exclusivity a user receives over a general taxpayer and based on ability to pay
- Develop a marketing strategy for recreation and program services to increase the level of participation by the community from 19% to 30% over the next five years
- Develop partnership agreements with measurable outcomes for all special interest groups involved with the County
- Develop program partnership agreements with the local towns to maximize each other's resources and meet the community's unmet need
- Develop program policies on public/public partnerships, public/private partnerships and public/not-for profit partnerships
- Develop a specific branding program for program services across the County



1.1.4.7 COMMUNITY VISION FOR OPERATIONS AND FINANCING

“Our vision is to continue to manage all parks, facilities and programs to highest level of productivity and efficiency as possible to meet the needs of the residents of the County.”

GOAL

Implement a financing strategy that incorporates all available resources including a voter approved bond levy for implementing the recommendations in the Master Plan.

Strategies

- Implement the capital improvement program to repair and upgrade parks and recreation facilities to maximize their useful life
- Evaluate the opportunity to use a dedicated Division of Park Officers within the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department. in County Parks to eliminate crime and vandalism in parks
- Seek corporate support for establishing destination facilities such as a zoo, or aquarium with appropriate feasibility studies
- Train staff on the Greenprinting process and update all maps created in the Master Plan every two years

1.1.5 CONCLUSION

The Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department is a tremendous resource to the community for people of all ages and interest. The Department is highly respected by the



community and delivers a well-managed park and recreation system to the taxpayers of Mecklenburg County. The Department's last Master Plan was completed in 1989 and the Department now is trying to catch up to the tremendous growth the County has experienced and address the needs of this growth with updated levels of parks, nature preserves and recreation facilities to serve a growing and prosperous community. The Master Plan outlines the needs clearly as it applies to park land needs, nature preserve needs, recreation facility needs, trail needs, nature center needs and other amenity needs.

The challenges are grand in terms of the financing cost to support these needs. The County is expected to reach build-out by 2025, which is a short amount of time to support the land acquisition efforts required to save the most sensitive properties that still exist in the County, as well as to acquire land in underserved areas for neighborhood and community parks.

People who recreate in Mecklenburg will have a system of parks, greenways and open space located throughout the County that will provide more park land per capita than the national average, will connect neighborhoods, satisfies public recreation needs, and will protect environmentally sensitive areas. Residents and visitors will learn from and be inspired by our community's arts and cultural activity. We will have a local government that is highly efficient, effective, accountable, and inclusive. Partnerships between government, the private sector and the faith community will be bringing together people from diverse backgrounds to address and solve community problems.

Let the implementation begin!

CHAPTER TWO - COMMUNITY INPUT PROCESS

In order to meet the needs of residents and users of the system, the Master Plan was developed through a robust and varied customer input process. This process ensures that recommendations for the Master Plan have an external customer focus. It also helps to direct the Department in being able to better deliver on resident needs, and having a clear understanding of their interests. The PROS Team interviewed over 300 people in stakeholder interviews, as well as many others in 10 focus group meetings held in October of 2007 and (8) public forums from October 2007 to March of 2008. In addition PROS reviewed user surveys from specific park and recreation sites as well as program participants to gain input into the needs of users.

The following details a summary of key public input findings from the qualitative information generated from residents in the focus groups, stakeholder interviews, and community public meetings.

2.1 COMMUNITY INPUT FINDINGS

2.1.1 GENERAL PERCEPTION OF THE PARK AND RECREATION SYSTEM

It was determined through Mecklenburg County's stakeholder meetings that the general perception of the parks and recreation system is highly respected in the community. On the whole, while serious complaints were not heard from constituents, most feel that the system maintenance is mid-to-high level and superior to other cities. Citizens expect the park system to promote public health and well-being, preserve the environment, while improving on the development of existing and future parks, trails and recreation facilities in this urban society.



As the City and County increases density, open space is becoming a crucial component, especially as it relates to the protection of the water supply, accommodating drainage corridors, and ensuring air quality. The community wants a balanced system, of parks and recreation facilities and programs with equitable and fair distribution of shared resources which will have a greater impact on the entire community. Safety of the parks is an issue that must be addressed. Park Rangers are desired in the parks again with law enforcement capability. There needs to be better equity on which parks and greenway areas are being patrolled, and perhaps the Department needs to put cameras in some parking lots and boat ramp areas to protect users of the system. A key quote from a stakeholder indicated this "We are on the cusp of becoming a great parks system; it is a make or break time to develop parks and recreation facilities now before it is too late for this community."

Some specific areas citizens indicated that require more focus for improvement include:

- Addressing the accessibility issues in all parks



- Distribution of park and recreation assets throughout the County, especially on the eastside
- Providing more amateur sports facilities and improvement of athletic fields in the inner-city
- Completing and adding aquatics facilities in the south or southwest areas of the County
- Address the need to have connectivity between transportation and greenway planning
- Signage needs to be improved on where facilities are located
- Preservation of the County's historic buildings
- Suburban parks and areas are in better condition than urban parks, however, they need more green space and sports facilities, and could function better
- A major or "Signature Park" in the four wards uptown is highly desired
- Communication efforts between parks staff and the community needs to be improved, as many citizens are not aware or understand what opportunities and services are available, and the changes taking place within the system
- Overall, citizens love and have great family experiences in the parks, however, most feel there is not enough open space, recreation facilities, and neighborhood parks for the entire County



Greenway drainage corridors, paths, trails and their connectivity to major destinations were frequently mentioned by stakeholders as a great priority and they indicated the community would appreciate a major focus on these areas. Interconnectivity with other greenways, and the University campuses should be further expanded and developed. Completing current greenways planned needs to be a priority. In addition, the public would like the greenway system to be considered as part of the transit system that can be neighborhood based, and utilized as a wellness

generator. The community would prefer greenways to serve as an alternative mode of transportation, as well a recreation function.

The community views the Parks and Recreation Department as one of the most efficient agencies in the County because they are willing to explore and develop public and private partnerships. Partnering should be a paramount piece of the Master Plan. Stakeholders believe Mecklenburg County could be the amateur sports capital of the South, through an enhanced partnership with the hospitality and Convention Visitor's Bureau. Partnerships with the Police Athletic League and Mecklenburg County Schools for recreations centers also need to be expanded. Another big concern discussed by stakeholders was the County's ability to acquire and develop land to meet the needs of the growing community, and how to work better with developers on how to utilize some of their land in development projects

to meet specific for parks and recreation needs. Economic development and the Parks and Recreation Master Plan need to work together into the County's General Plan. The Parks and Recreation Master Plan should point out the relationship between these two planning components and center on how resources can be deployed through voter approved bonds to address economic needs through effective parks and recreation development.

Larger community parks and regional parks are needed in the City of Charlotte. The City has a adequate number of recreation facilities, although the east side of Charlotte has a deficiency of neighborhood parks.

Social aspects of parks and neighborhoods are critical in the development and improvement of the entire parks system and the County as a whole. The social needs of the community, as it applies to recreation development and program services, should be addressed for the present and 15 years from now. The parks system can help with meeting social issues as well, through the programs and facilities they provide to the community. The system is solid on parks but citizens want more recreation, facilities, and recreation programs. Mecklenburg County needs to re-establish inner-city recreation programs in recreation centers because recreation is a critical outlet for the youth and needs to be made a priority. Stakeholder suggestions included:

- Employing teenagers within parks and recreation services because employees can become mentors for young people to learn from
- Promoting the Parks and Recreation Department to work with the County on their parenting initiatives focusing on young adults and teens
- Adding more programs targeted for youth, teens, and seniors in the recreation centers as well as the allocation of a scholarship fund
- The County has been very good in the therapeutic recreation program, but other programs, such as summer camps, the arts, wellness and fitness related programs, need to be improved
- Program plans should be developed for each recreation center together with the community and the schools
- Fitness space in the recreation centers, as well as programs such as "Kid-fit" should be established and recreation centers should use the daytime periods to promote fitness for seniors
- The County needs to develop additional outdoor swimming pools in the inner-city and reevaluate the use of the pool in West Charlotte, as it is not used by the community
- There is a definite need for family and afterschool recreation programs in the County
- More summer programs are needed and the quality is excellent; however, additional people need to be served



2.1.2 WHAT IS VALUED MOST ABOUT PARKS AND RECREATION SERVICES

Residents value and equate their quality of life with:

- Parks and open spaces that are clean and well maintained
- Safe (low security risk) parks, recreation facilities, and programs
- Affordable services
- They want equitable accessibility to recreation facilities, sports fields, programs, and developed parks
- They value the County in providing more open space, greenways and parks as the County continues to be developed; it is more valued as a relief due to the urbanization and development of the County
- Programming and providing diverse recreation experiences for broad age segments across the County is also highly valued
- Other community values included maximizing partnerships, enhancing urban parks and suburban parks, and the protection of water sheds for greenways purposes

2.1.3 KEY PROGRAM SERVICE NEEDS

The stakeholders meetings identified several key program service needs for the Master Plan to focus on.

- The community wants a diverse range of parent and child after-school activities
- They want sports programs that provide opportunities for youth and adults
- Teen programs should be the number one priority
- Programs that serve younger children and families should be the priority
- Certain parks should be dedicated to family activities
- There is a need for adequate recreation facilities and programs to support and provide for the growing senior population

Improvements in programming in these areas were requested and defined as highly needed:

- Regional sports facilities and events
- Greenways programs and related events
- Recreation centers that provide historical, and inner-city youth programs
- Special events and festivals that are well done, and Department needs to provide more opportunities to jointly program more parks and street festivals with community based events
- Segregate developed parks and passive spaces were also mentioned

- The community is changing and the County must address the current demand for soccer, skate board needs, and the need to develop customize parks for the people who live next to neighborhoods parks
- Attendees encouraged more partnerships with the community, including private and non-private agencies such as the YMCA's who also provide typical programming for sports, however, some citizens cannot afford these, and it would be better if the parks system would provide greater opportunities for the entire public
- The County needs a proactive approach to serving the needs of people who don't have the money to buy the services provided
- Some hard core issues need to be dealt with that include after school care, providing outdoor education developing both indoor and outdoor sports complexes, creating more family entertainment and activities for the community to get people off the streets

2.1.4 KEY OUTCOMES FROM THE COMPREHENSIVE MASTER PLAN THE COMMUNITY WOULD LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN OVER THE NEXT TEN YEARS

The Master Plan for Mecklenburg County should consider creating the image of a healthy and vibrant lifestyle with a strong sense of community. Key outcomes stakeholders would like to see this Master Plan include:

- An overall clear vision; a plan that addresses gaps in services and addresses capital needs for existing and new recreation and park facilities
- The interaction with other governmental partnerships
- More activities and programs and that focus on the needs of seniors, teens, and adults
- Provide program guidelines on managing changes in recreation activities that people are engaging in (hiking trails and greenways are a high priority for most now), and how to implement changes in program services from lifecycle to lifecycle
- The Master Plan should address the perception of equity in parks and recreation services, and include an attainable schedule for implementing the recommendations in the Master Plan
- Agree and unite the County on priorities, and define what sets us apart
- Identify critical resources (tracks of land over 5 acres) that are available in the County for acquisition and long-range (ten years) proactive land acquisition plan with a development schedule
- Prepare a positive public communication outreach process to market, and educate the community on the need to support and finance the system through a approved voter bond issue





- Some stakeholders desire a consolidated park system representing every municipality in the system to eliminate inefficient duplication and overlap of services and how to best leverage available resources together
- Establishing goals and strategies for the short and long term needs for park land per capita, determining proximity from any household to a park, recreation facility or program was also requested by stakeholders

The community feels key leaders should drive the vision and incrementally move it forward. Commitment to a long-term vision with wide spread public support which can be funded with a sustainable operational approach is needed. Equity and fairness of access to parks, recreation facilities and programs is crucial to the outcome of the Master Plan. The greenway system and the connectivity that can be provided is a major issue that needs to be addressed. There is concern regarding the number of small neighborhood parks provided and how developers have fallen short of helping with the livability of the neighborhoods. Many stakeholders would like to see parks better integrated into the community versus sealed pieces of land, along with a better awareness of where services are provided on a coordinated basis. Regionalism needs to be addressed, and Master Plan must consider neighboring counties and how Mecklenburg County should be working together with them as well.

2.1.5 STRENGTHS OF THE PARK AND RECREATION SYSTEM

The parks and recreation system of Mecklenburg County offers several strengths that should be the foundation for building this Master Plan. Currently, the system is beginning to understand a new sense of urgency that was not there before. Stakeholders pointed out that the County is very strong in developing facilities and programs for families and youth. Some citizens felt the Department tended to build large regional parks while there was a lack of neighborhood parks to support the community needs in subdivisions, given the limited funding available. Strengths of the Department the community described include:

- A good track record of management of parks and recreation facilities which is appreciated by the citizens
- There is a high degree of public involvement in parks and recreation planning
- Most stakeholders felt the Park and Recreation Commission overall does a nice job, they combine interaction with the community on public process and outreach, work with individual neighborhoods, and encourage citizen involvement in management and development of the parks system. These strengths explain why the community is willing to invest in parks and facilities
- There is very dedicated and well trained staff in the Department
- Phenomenal natural resources
- The parks system does a good job with managing stewardship of its current holdings
- The Department has great accessibility and availability of park types available and uses
- The vision for Little Sugar Creek Greenway is outstanding

- The water protection focus and how it relates and ties in to open space is excellent
- There is good management of tennis and golf facilities; and use of recreation centers for community functions
- The greenway system is a huge strength that has wide-spread public support because it promotes connectivity
- The County has endorsed partnerships with other service providers and they see this as a strength

2.1.6 OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE ISSUES

Some critical operational issues brought up during the stakeholders meetings included:

- Designing parks to resolve safety issues and improve emergency procedures
- Facilitate better management of parks
- Building more shelters in parks
- Preventative maintenance is a very important element the County needs to consider as the County continues to grow
- Operationally, the County should also consider adding more staffing levels to adequately support facility maintenance and recreation program needs
- Some of the recreation centers need to be updated
- The community feels the system does not have enough public money and more could come from the private sector to help in capital development and operational costs
- Most program complaints center around teen programs, that there is not enough outlets for them to go to and enjoy
- Having an appropriate amount of funding for capital maintenance to support the parks and recreation infrastructure is an important issue to be addressed
- There should be a sustainable funding source in place, but beyond an annual budget review to support parks and recreation needs
- Stakeholders would like to see additional spending on beautification and more manicured parks
- In the lower income neighborhoods there is a lot of vandalism that needs to be addressed in parks
- Air conditioning in recreation centers was also mentioned as a improvement that is desired and it would increase attendance in the summer





- Several stakeholders would like to see the County renovate Memorial stadium and utilize it for more sports and high school functions
- Maintenance standards need to be shared with neighborhoods and sports groups on what the County is capable of delivering and more efforts to inform neighborhoods of the changes being planned in parks is desired
- Additional joint use facilities between municipalities, schools, colleges, and not-for-profits are desired by the community

2.1.7 FUNDING LEVELS OF PARKS AND RECREATION

Stakeholders offered their opinions regarding the funding levels for parks and recreation compared to other County services. The most frequently discussed opinion was that the park system is adequately funded operationally, but the Master Plan needs to address the future needs of the system. Most stakeholders stated that there is a need for a clear vision for future funding and what it will mean to the future of Charlotte and the entire County, and to the quality of life of the residents. Some indicated they had no issue with park capital funding being increased for future land acquisition, greenways and recreation facilities.

Equity of funding across the County is a big issue and it must be dealt with-in future funding efforts by the County. The public support for more funding for parks and recreation facilities and services is impressively very high, with a lot of creditability driven by key leaders. An area of the system that lacks in funding is in the capital improvement area. Community needs far outpace the money available and the County needs to seek many more grant funds and earned income funds to support capital needs. Land acquisition will require the most funding, however funding for this area is too low. The Department needs to have more staff time dedicated to work with neighborhoods and their leaders to create events in the community to keep the parks and recreation programs and services in front of people, to capitalize on funding needs and fund raising awareness.

2.1.8 PARTNER AND VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT

Stakeholders envision many new opportunities for partnerships and volunteerism utilizing a combination of people's time and corporate financial resources. Future partnerships the Park System should embrace are with City Center Partners, developers, neighborhoods, schools, hospitals, insurance companies, the Heart Association, pharmaceutical companies, libraries, Towns, University of North Carolina, Johnson C. Smith University, Queens University, convention and visitor bureaus, social services agencies, churches, Trust for Public Lands, The Urban Institute, and the hotel and tourism industries.

Going green is a good partnering opportunity for companies to be involved with the park and recreation system, and could be a great resource. There could be an improved partnership with the YMCA, land trusts, and neighborhood associations. Duke Energy was also mentioned as a partnership that should be explored, as they currently share their land for park use now with the County.

2.1.9 ROLE OF PARK AND RECREATION IN LONG TERM LIVABILITY

The community felt the role of the Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation system is a crucial component for the quality of life, long-term health, and vitality to this community and stakeholders feel the system cannot continue without greater funding for land acquisition, recreation facilities and capital improvement monies. Great cities have great park systems and in Mecklenburg County stakeholders feel that more is needed to provide for the future needs of the parks and recreation system. It is the most important element the County provides outside of mandated services and the County needs to be the key contributor to the quality of life of all residents in the County. It is as critical as the schools, police and safety services, and it is as important as the arts. People need an outlet after work and the County must create a real value for quality recreation time.

Most stakeholders expressed they felt there is a highly significant role for parks and recreation services, now and in the future. The County should be more aggressive in the provision of programs and services in the urban core. One of the biggest challenge's is for the leaders who set policy to understand the critical importance that parks and recreation services play in supporting preventative health issue and the park system needs to be at the front of the health and wellness process, for the next decade. Many key leaders mentioned it would be better to have a unified system, but the Towns want more local control.

The County leaders need to get more aggressive with the developers in the County to have them support more of the recreation and parks needs of the community. Park and Recreation needs to be at the table with all the key leaders on sports. People want to live in an area with well maintained parks and it creates strong economic value in the form of property values. There is tremendous opportunity and potential, which is currently being overlooked for how parks and recreation services can support the social service outreach needs of the community. The mission of the parks needs to build on ways to give youth more recreation and outdoor experiences to help them stay or get back on track.

As for as the City of Charlotte key leaders interviewed, they feel the parks system will only enhance the livability which is a key factor in attracting businesses and individuals to Charlotte. There is a strong desire for the parks to be family-friendly. The City of Charlotte leaders feels they need all levels and types of parks in the city. Stakeholders feel that parks and recreation services should be included in the top five initiatives that are going on in the City. Like the regional transit system, the parks system is totally tied to the livability of Charlotte.



2.2 COMMUNITY SURVEY FINDINGS

Mecklenburg County conducted a parks and recreation citizen survey during the winter of 2007-08 as part of a comprehensive long range plan for the County. The survey was designed to obtain statistically valid results from households throughout Mecklenburg County. The survey was administered by a combination of mail and phone.

The PROS Team worked with Leisure Vision and Mecklenburg County officials in the development of the survey questionnaire. This work allowed the survey to be tailored to issues of strategic importance to effectively plan the future system.

Leisure Vision mailed surveys to a random sample of 5,000 households throughout Mecklenburg County. These were followed up by phone calls and the goal was to obtain a total of at least 1,000 completed surveys. This goal was accomplished, with a total of 1,033 surveys having been completed. The results of the random sample of 1,033 households have a 95% level of confidence with a precision of at least +/-3.0%.

The summarized findings are below with a full **Household Executive Summary** located in **Appendix 1**:

2.2.1 VISITATION OF COUNTY PARKS DURING THE PAST YEAR

Figure 6 shows that 76% of respondent households have visited Mecklenburg County parks during the past year.

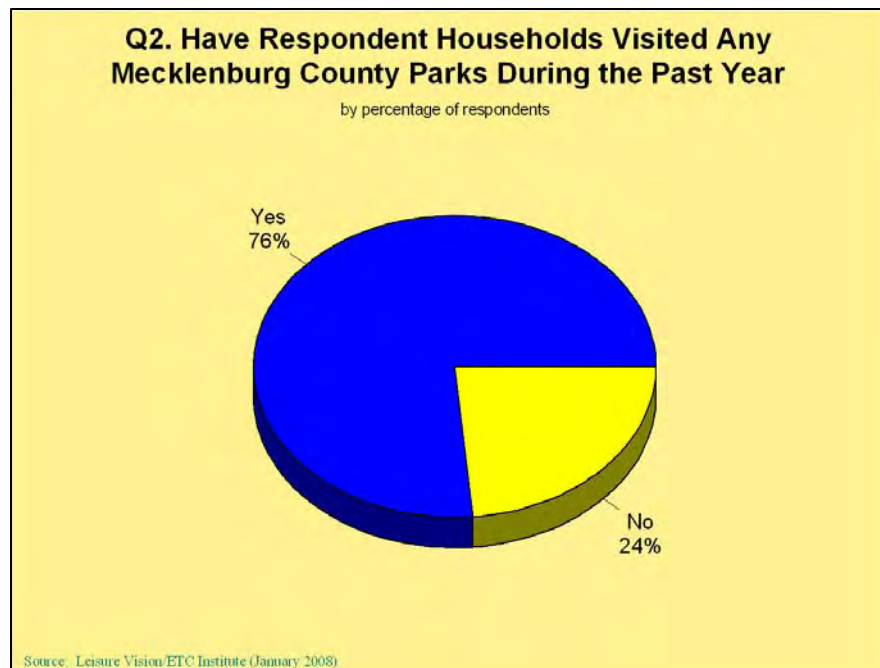


Figure 6 - Visitation of County Parks During the Past Year

2.2.2 PHYSICAL CONDITION OF COUNTY PARKS

Of the 76% of respondent households that have visited Mecklenburg County parks during the past year, 90% rated the parks as either excellent (31%) or good (59%) (Figure 7).

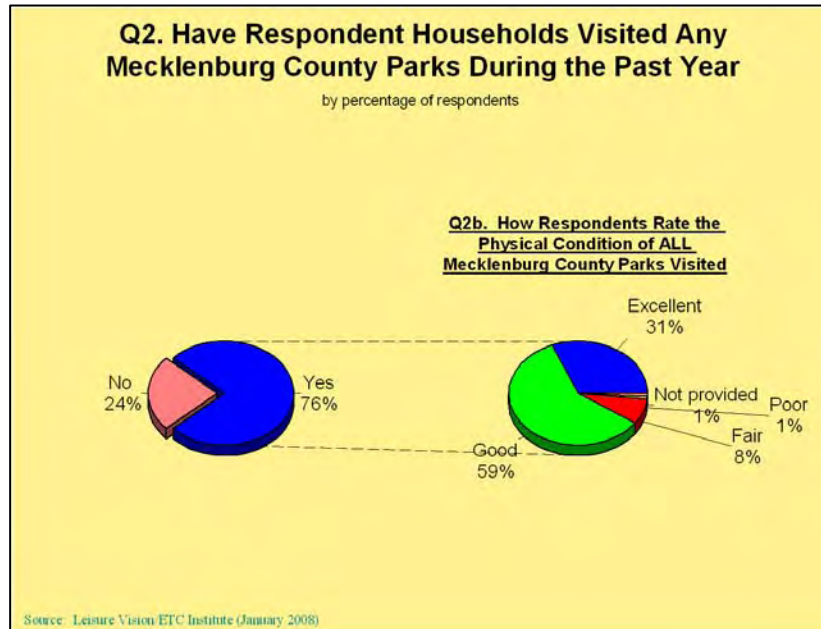


Figure 7 - Physical Condition of County Parks

2.2.3 PARTICIPATION IN COUNTY RECREATION PROGRAMS

Nineteen percent (19%) of respondent households have participated in recreation programs offered by the Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department in the past year (Figure 8).

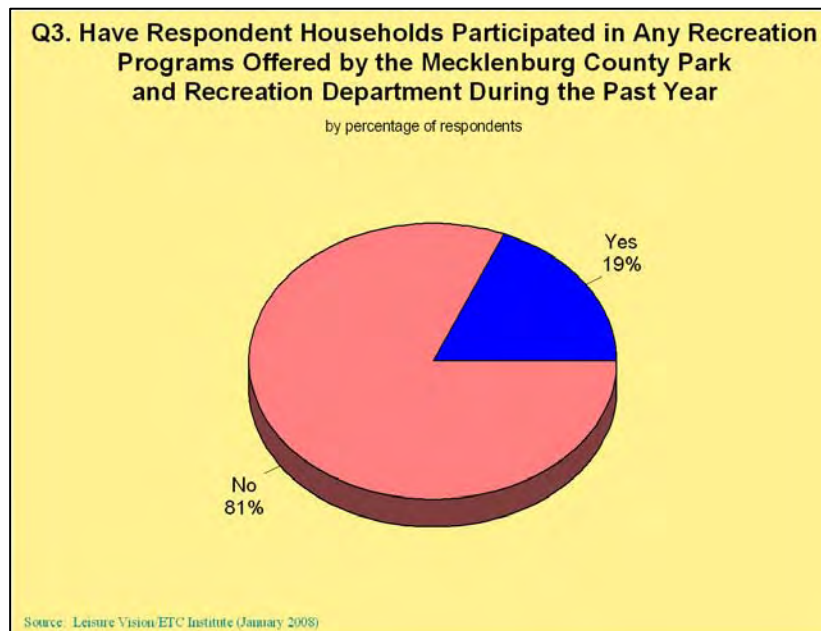


Figure 8 - Participation in County Recreation Programs



2.2.4 OVERALL QUALITY OF PROGRAMS PARTICIPATED IN

Of the 19% of respondent households that have participated in Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation Department programs during the past 12 months, 92% rated the overall quality of programs they have participated in as either excellent (32%) or good (60%) (Figure 9).

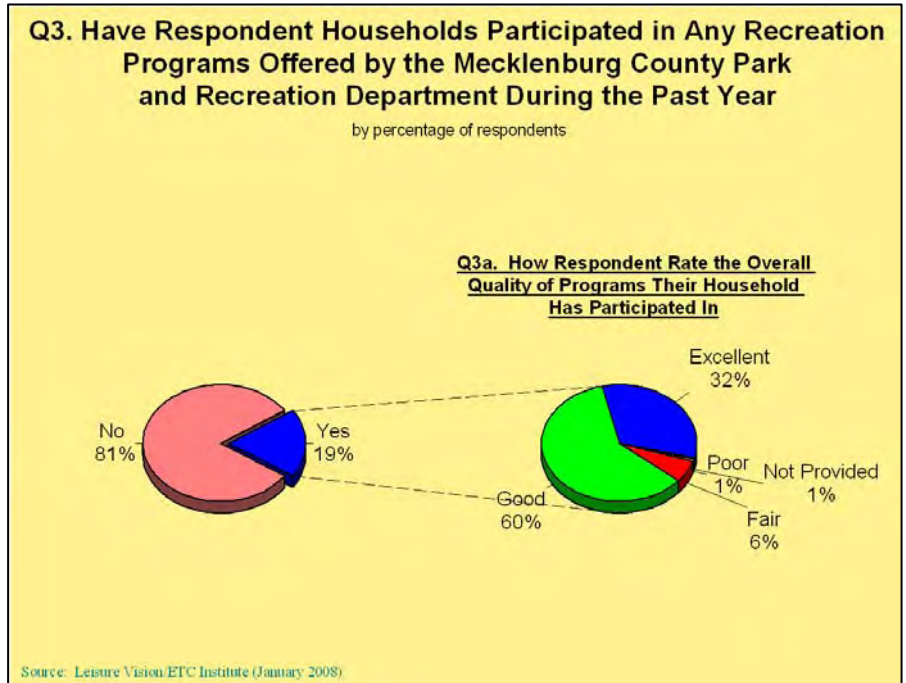


Figure 9 - Overall Quality of Programs Participated In

2.2.5 REASONS FOR USING COUNTY PARKS, RECREATION FACILITIES OR PROGRAMS

There are two reasons that over 60% of respondent households use Mecklenburg County parks, recreation facilities or programs: enjoyment of the outdoors (62%) and close to our home/residence (61%) (Figure 10).

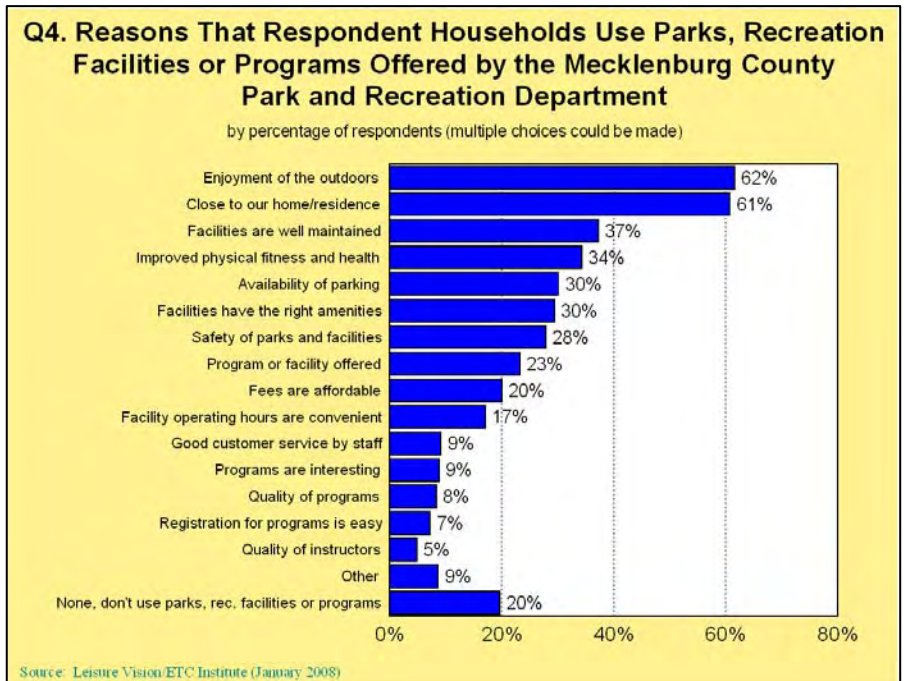


Figure 10 - Reasons for Using County Parks, Recreation Facilities or Programs

2.2.6 SUFFICIENT PARKS AND GREEN SPACE AREAS WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Thirty-nine percent (39%) of respondent households feel there are sufficient parks and green space areas within walking distance of their residence (Figure 11).

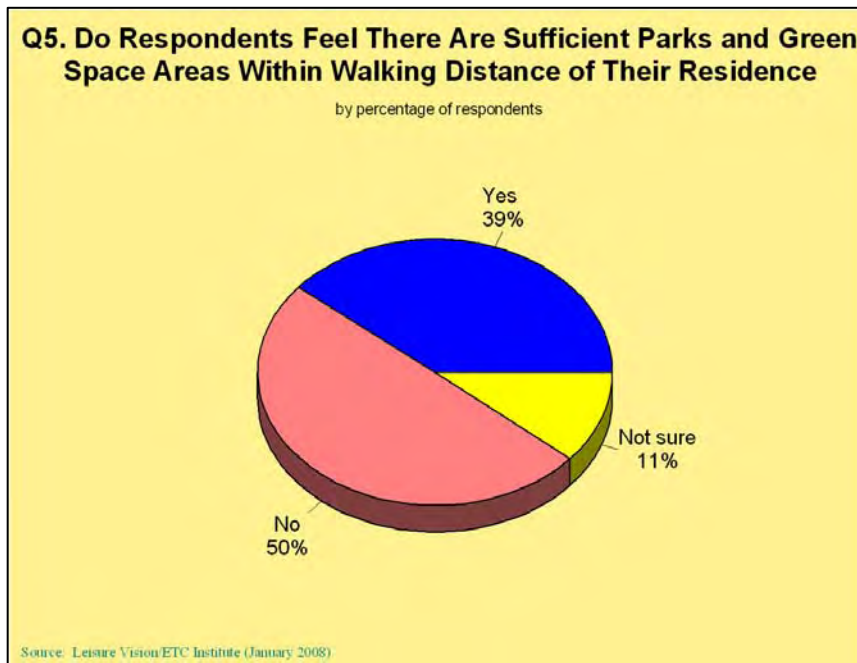


Figure 11 - Sufficient Parks and Green Space Areas within Walking Distance

2.2.7 WAYS RESPONDENTS LEARN ABOUT COUNTY PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

From friends and neighbors (53%) is the most frequently mentioned way that respondents learn about Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation Department programs and activities. The other most frequently mentioned ways that respondents learn about County programs and activities are from newspaper articles (41%), website (28%) and flyers/posters at parks and recreation facilities (22%) (Figure 12).

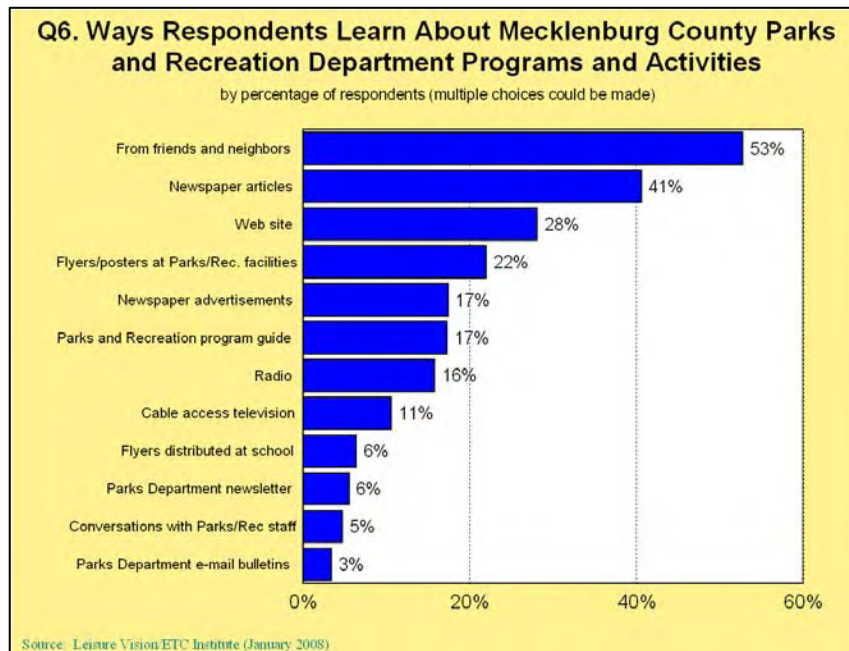


Figure 12 - Ways Respondents Learn About County Programs and Activities



2.2.8 IMPORTANCE OF VARIOUS GREENWAY OPTIONS

Seventy-seven percent (77%) of respondents feel it is very important to use greenways to provide environmental protection, and 66% feel it is very important to use greenways to provide a major connected network of walking, biking and nature trails (Figure 13).

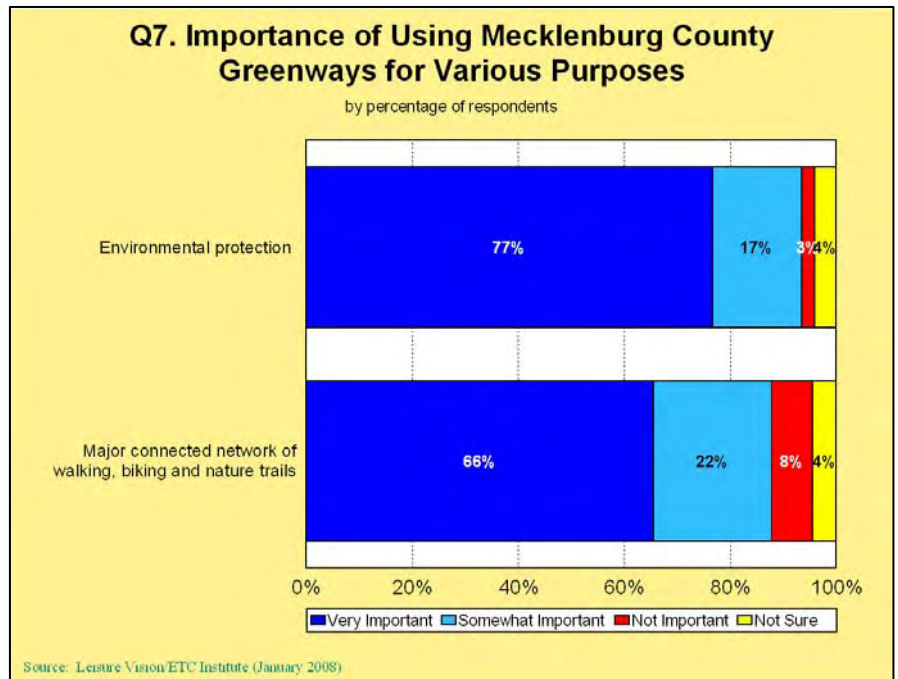


Figure 13 - Importance of Various Greenway Options

2.2.9 SUPPORT FOR VARIOUS AMENITIES

Over two-thirds of respondents are either very supportive or somewhat supportive of each of the three amenities (Figure 14).

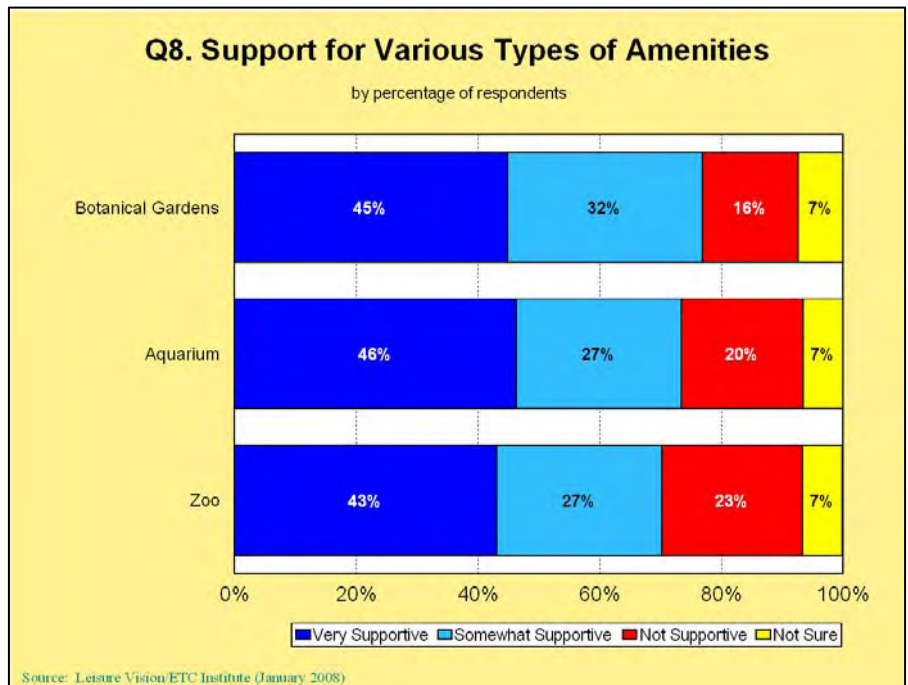


Figure 14 - Support for Various Amenities

2.2.10 AMENITIES MOST WILLING TO FUND WITH TAX DOLLARS

Thirty-three percent (33%) of respondents would be most willing to fund the zoo with their tax dollars. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of respondents would be most willing to fund botanical gardens, and 25% would be most willing to fund an aquarium (Figure 15).

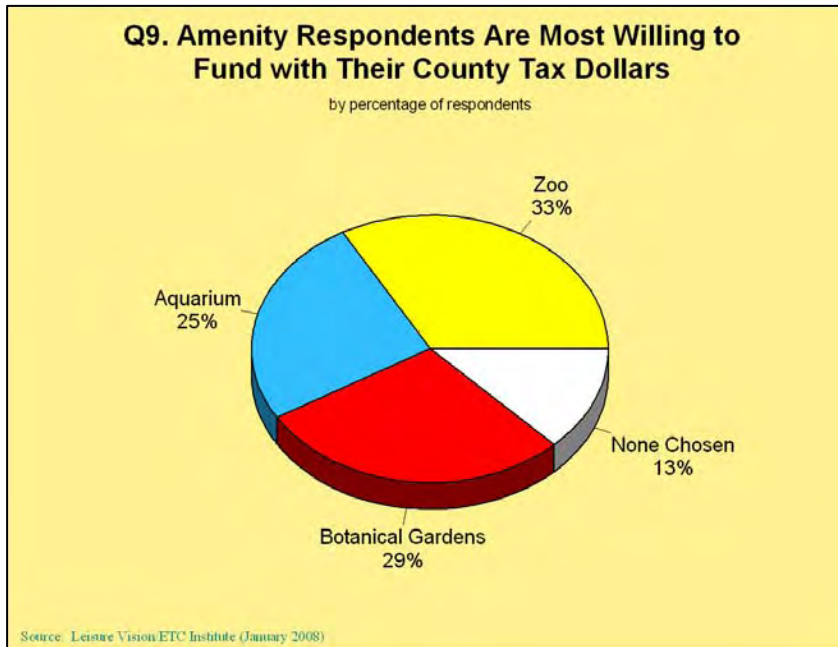


Figure 15 - Amenities Most Willing to Fund with Tax Dollars

2.2.11 NEED FOR PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

There are five parks and recreation facilities that at least 60% of respondent households have a need for: walking and biking trails (76%), large community parks and district parks (64%), small neighborhood parks (62%), nature center and trails (62%) and park shelters and picnic areas (60%) (Figure 16).

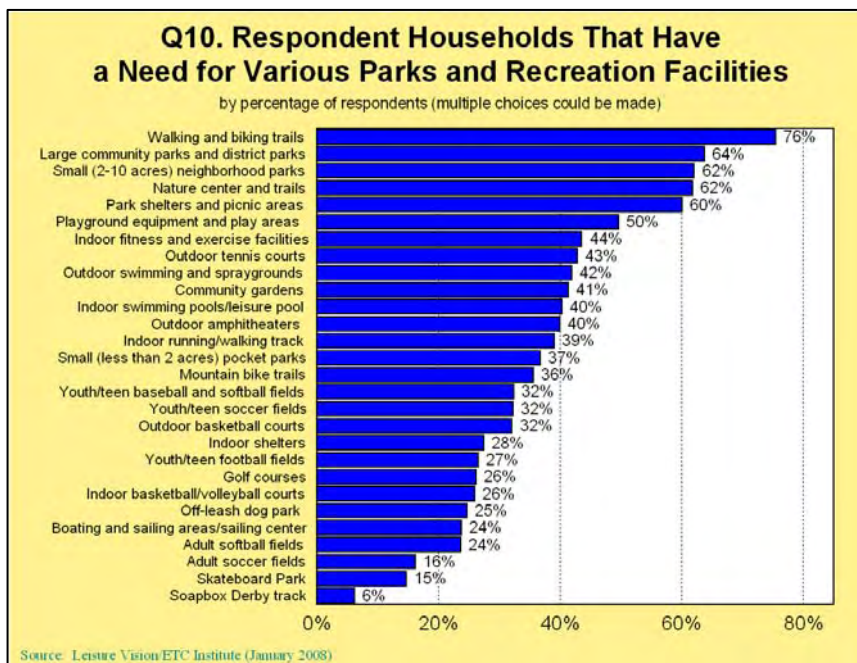


Figure 16 - Need for Parks and Recreation Facilities



2.2.12 ESTIMATED NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS WHOSE NEEDS ARE BEING MET 50% OR LESS

From the list of 28 parks and recreation facilities, respondent households that have a need for parks/facilities were asked to indicate how well these types of parks/facilities in Mecklenburg County meet their needs. **Figure 17** shows the estimated number of households in Mecklenburg County whose needs for parks/facilities are only being 50% met or less, based on 335,891 households in the County.

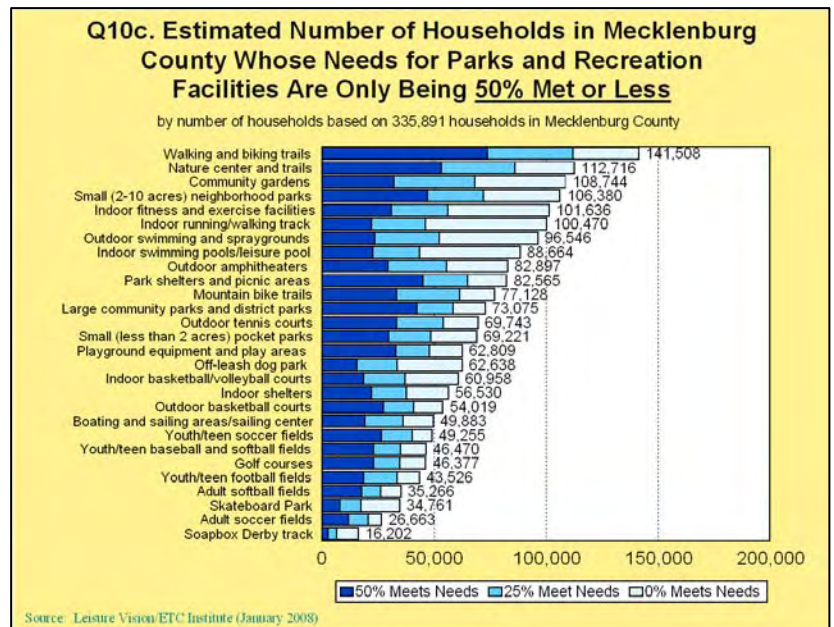


Figure 17 - Estimated Number of Households Who's Needs Are Being Met 50% or Less

2.2.13 MOST IMPORTANT PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

Based on the sum of their top four choices, the parks/facilities that respondent households rated as the most important are walking and biking trails (44%), small neighborhood parks (26%) and large community parks and district parks (23%). It should also be noted that walking and biking trails had the highest percentage of respondents select it as their first choice as the park/facility that is most important to their household (**Figure 18**).

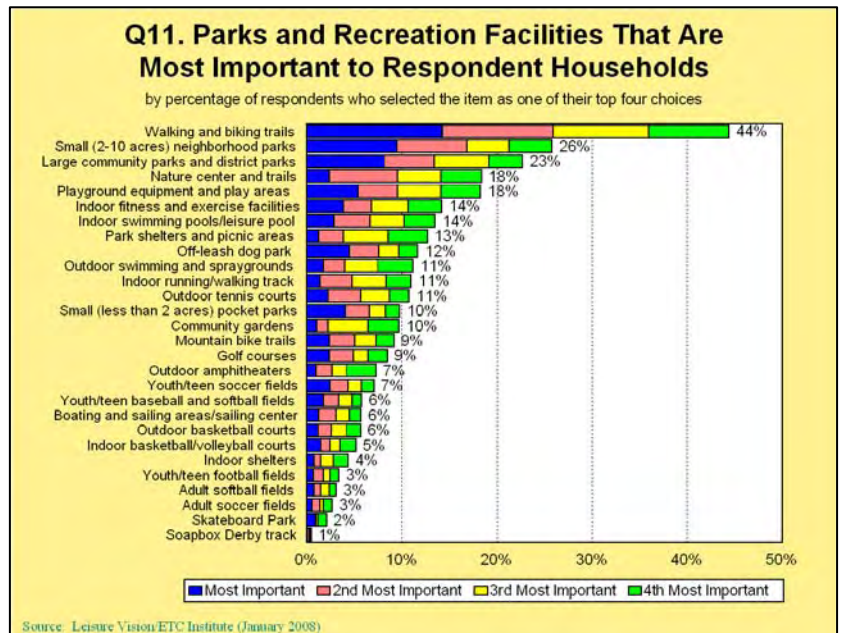


Figure 18 - Most Important Parks and Recreation Facilities

2.2.14 NEED FOR RECREATION PROGRAMS

There are four recreation programs that over 35% of respondent households have a need for: special events/festivals (50%), adult fitness and wellness programs (49%), family recreation/outdoor adventure programs (39%) and nature education programs (37%) (Figure 19).

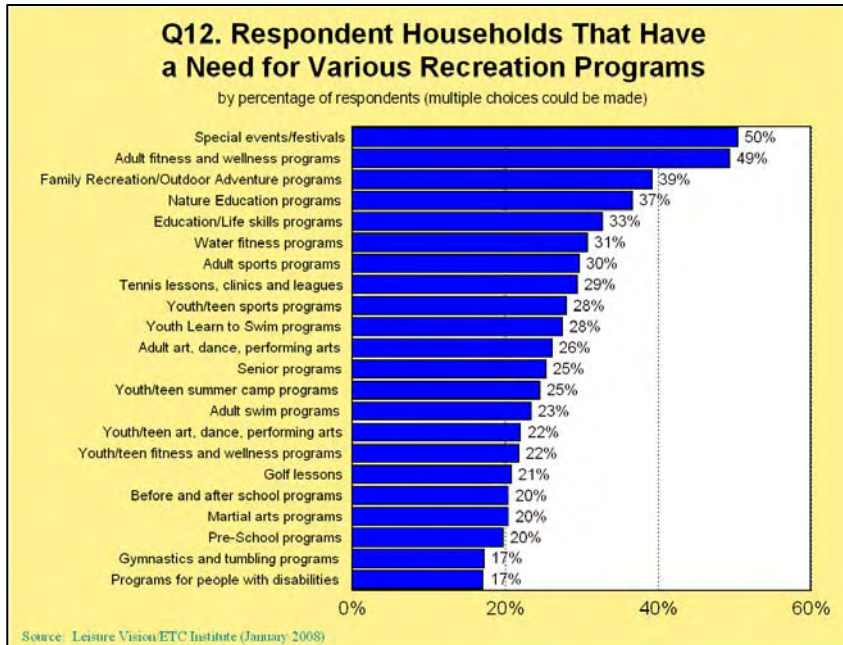


Figure 19 - Need for Recreation Programs

2.2.15 ESTIMATED NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS WHOSE NEEDS ARE BEING MET 50% OR LESS

From the list of 22 recreation programs, respondent households that have a need for programs were asked to indicate how well these types of programs in Mecklenburg County meet their needs. Figure 20 shows the estimated number of households in Mecklenburg County whose needs for programs are only being 50% met or less, based on 335,891 households in the County.

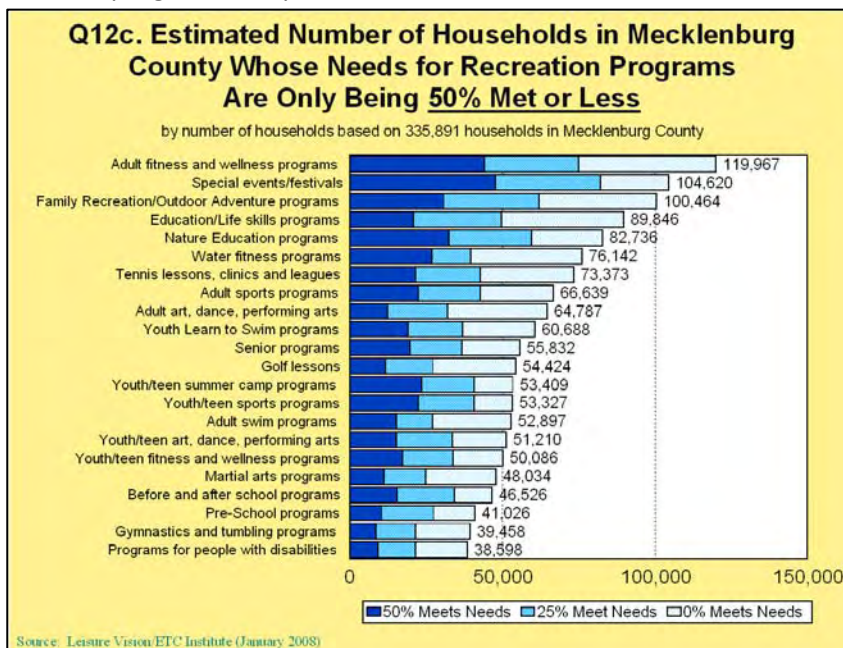


Figure 20 - Estimated Number of Households Who's Needs Are Being Met 50% or Less



2.2.16 MOST IMPORTANT RECREATION PROGRAMS

Based on the sum of their top four choices, the programs that respondent households rated as the most important are special events/festivals (28%) and adult fitness and wellness programs (28%). It should also be noted that adult fitness and wellness programs had the highest percentage of respondents select it as their first choice as the program that is most important to their household (Figure 21).

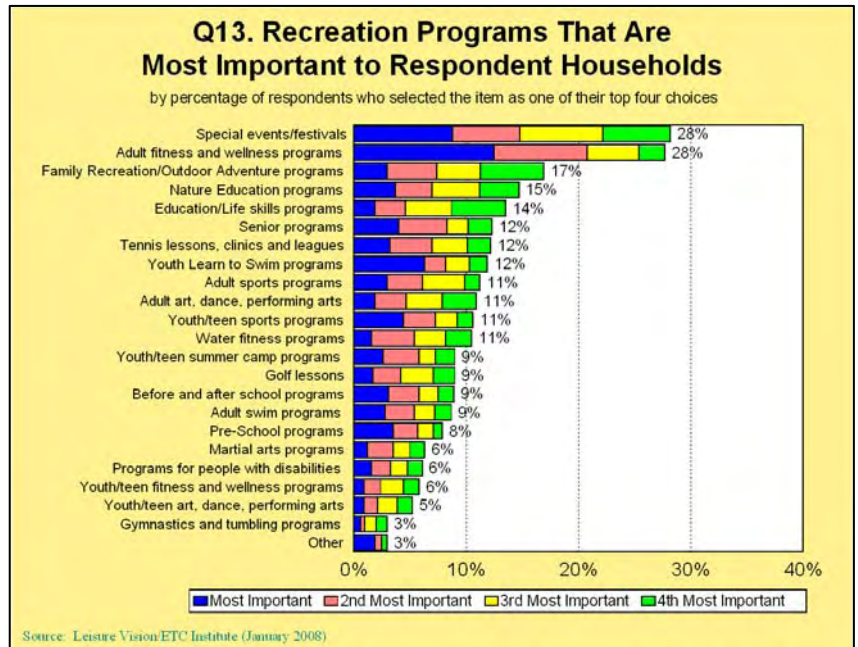


Figure 21 - Most Important Recreation Programs

2.2.17 PROGRAMS PARTICIPATED IN MOST OFTEN

Based on the sum of their top four choices, the programs that respondents currently participate in most often at Mecklenburg County facilities are special events/festivals (18%), adult fitness and wellness programs (8%) and family recreation/outdoor adventure programs (8%). It should also be noted that special events/festivals had the highest percentage of respondents select it as their first choice as the program their household currently participates in most often (Figure 22).

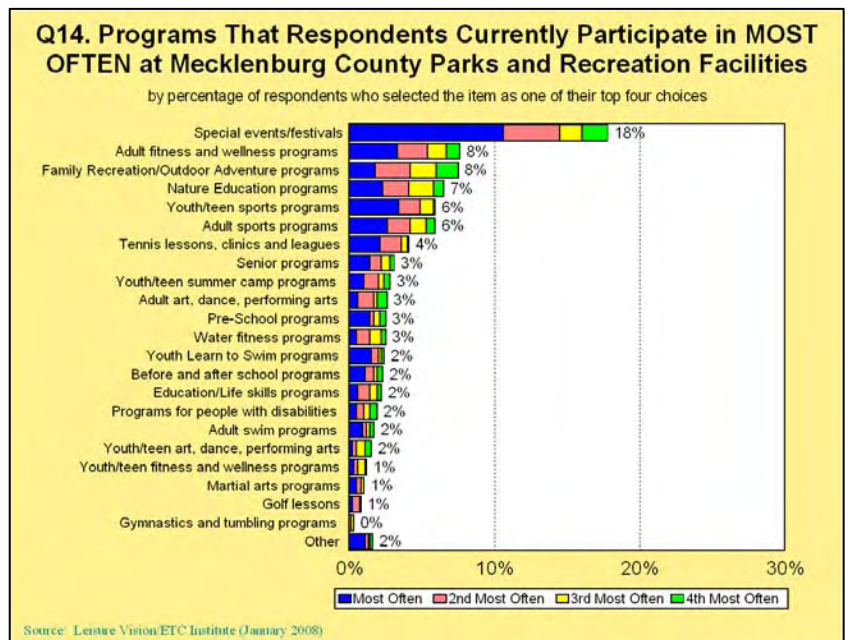


Figure 22 - Programs Participated in the Most

2.2.18 ORGANIZATIONS MOST USED FOR INDOOR AND OUTDOOR FACILITIES

The organizations that the highest percentage of respondent households have used for indoor and outdoor recreation and sports activities during the past 12 months are Mecklenburg County parks (56%), YMCA (37%) and churches (36%) (Figure 23).

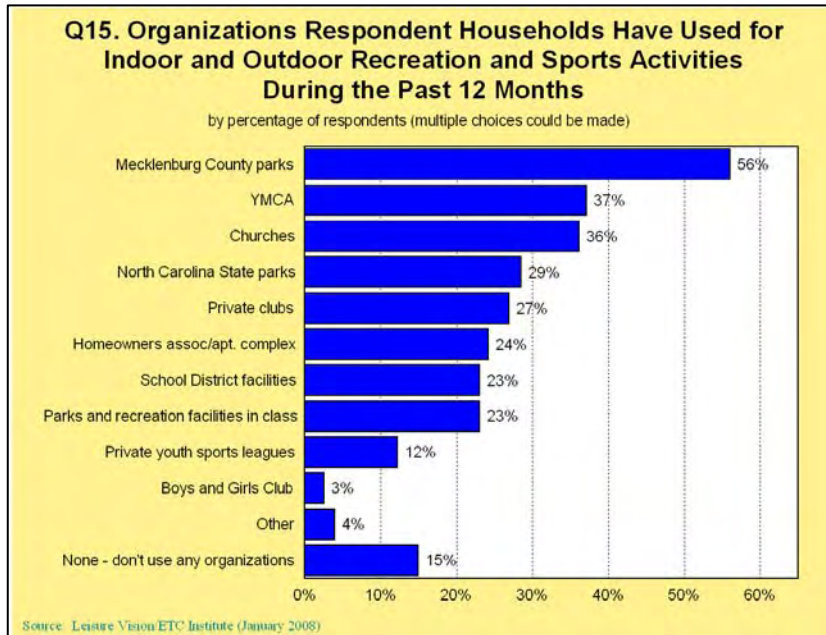


Figure 23 - Organizations Most Used for Indoor and Outdoor Facilities

2.2.19 LEVEL OF SUPPORT FOR VARIOUS ACTIONS THE COUNTY COULD TAKE

There are three actions that over 55% of respondents are very supportive of Mecklenburg County taking to improve the parks, recreation and green space system: develop new walking/biking trails and connect existing trails (59%), use floodplain greenways to develop trails and facilities (58%), and purchase land to preserve open space and green space (56%) (Figure 24).

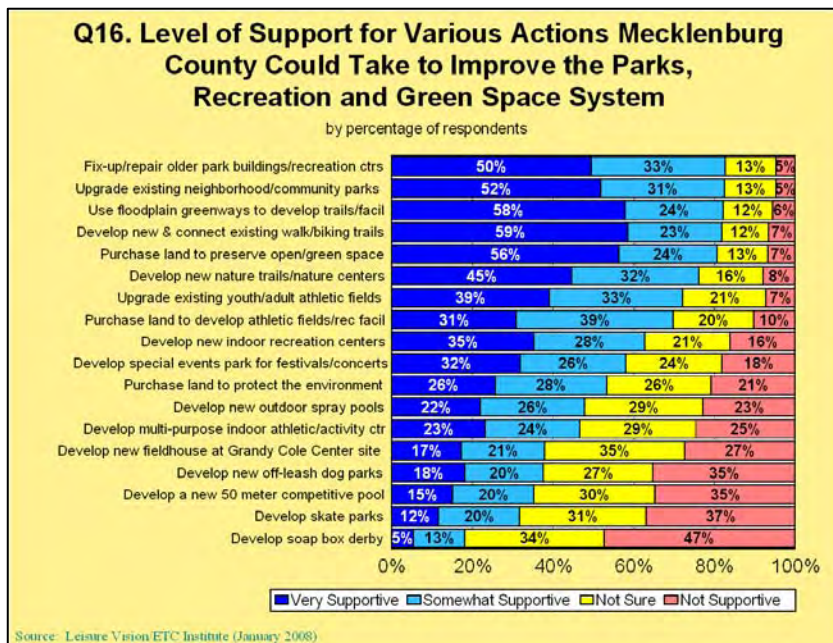


Figure 24 - Level of Various Support for Various Actions the County Could Take



2.2.20 ACTIONS MOST WILLING TO FUND WITH TAX DOLLARS

Based on the sum of their top four choices, the actions that respondents are most willing to fund with their County tax dollars are: purchase land to preserve open space and green space (44%), use floodplain greenways to develop trails and facilities (34%) and develop new walking/biking trails and connect existing trails (34%). It should also be noted that purchase land to preserve open space and green space had the highest percentage of respondents select them as their first choice as the action they are most willing to fund with their County tax dollars (Figure 25).

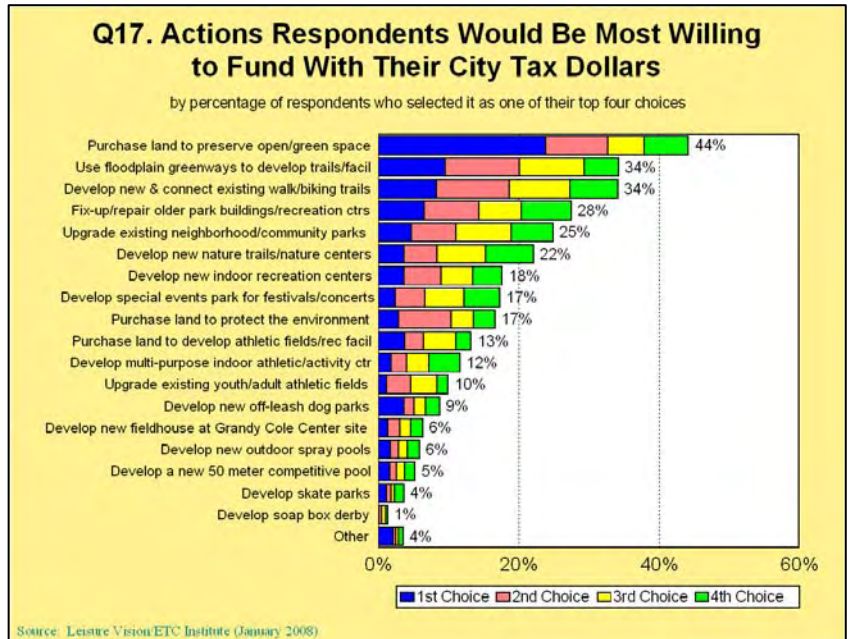


Figure 25 - Actions Most Willing to Fund with Tax Dollars

2.2.21 VOTING ON A BOND REFERENDUM

Seventy-eight percent (78%) of respondents indicated they would either vote favor (53%) or might vote in favor (25%) of a bond referendum to fund the acquisition, improvement and development of the types of parks, trails, green space and recreation facilities most important to their household (Figure 26).

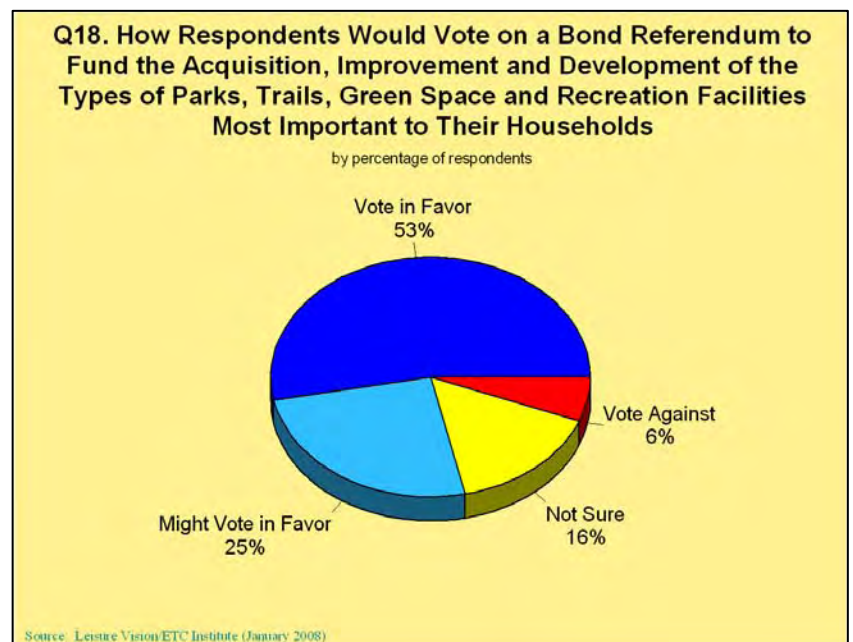


Figure 26 - Voting on a Bond Referendum

2.3 DEMOGRAPHICS AND TRENDS ANALYSIS

2.3.1 DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

The Demographic Analysis provides an understanding of the population characteristics of the potential Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation participatory base. This analysis demonstrates the overall size of the total population by specific age segment, race and ethnicity, and economic status and spending power of the residents through household income statistics.

2.3.2 SUMMARY

Mecklenburg County is the most populous and densely populated county in the State of North Carolina. However, in stark contrast to the most populated county in the continental United States – New York County, New York, which had an estimated persons per square mile for 2006 of 66,940, Mecklenburg County has a sparse 1,321.5 persons per square mile (695,454 persons divided by 526.3 square miles), or 2.06 persons per acre (695,454 persons divided by 336,819.2 acres). The County’s population density equates to a little less than one tenth (8.3%) of the total North Carolina average of 165.2 persons per square mile.

Formed 246 years ago, Mecklenburg County contains 7 municipalities, including the city of Charlotte and the towns of Cornelius, Davidson, Huntersville, Matthews, Mint Hill, Pineville and portions of Stallings. Between 2000 and 2007 the County experienced healthy growth which resulted in an estimated increase of nearly 157,945 persons to a current estimated total of 852,657 persons.

Mecklenburg County has a relatively young population – 50.3%, or 428,830 persons, of the total estimated population is 34 years of age or younger. Only 24.6%, or 209,736 persons, are aged 50 or older. The gender distribution is split equally amongst the male and female, a composition that is expected to stay relatively constant throughout the study period. The service area is primarily made up of persons classified as white (60.2%; 526,716 total persons) and black/African American (27.5%; 235,486 total persons); persons of Hispanic or Latino origin account for only 8.2% (70,191 total persons) of the total population.

Current median household income for the County is estimated at \$65,741, sizably greater than both the national and state averages; U.S. median household income for 2006 was estimated at \$48,451 and the State of North Carolina reported median household incomes of \$41,616. Household incomes reported within the County have been steadily increasing over the last few decades. The 1990 Census reported a median household income of \$33,818 and a 2000 median household income of \$50,638. Although median household income has risen in the past years nationwide, total individual income has dropped; this phenomenon is due to the increase in multiple household occupants participating in the work force.

2.3.3 METHODOLOGY

Demographic data used for the analysis was obtained from Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. (ESRI), the largest research and development organization dedicated to



Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and specializing in population projections and market trends. All data was acquired in January 2008 and reflects actual numbers as reported in the 2000 Census and demographic projections for 2007 and 2012 as estimated by ESRI. Straight line linear regression was utilized for projected 2017 and 2022 demographics.

2.3.4 TOTAL POPULATION

Mecklenburg County has grown at a steady annual rate of 3.3% since 2000. From 2000 to 2007, the County increased by an estimated 157,945 persons resulting in an estimated total population of 852,657 persons today. During much of this same period (2000 to 2006) the State of North Carolina’s population growth has been estimated at 10.0% overall (1.43% annual rate) – an increase of 807,192 persons from 2000 (estimated population of 8,049,313) to 2006 (estimated population of 8,856,505).

Population categorization by major age segment illustrates the relatively even age distribution of the County (see **Figure 27**).

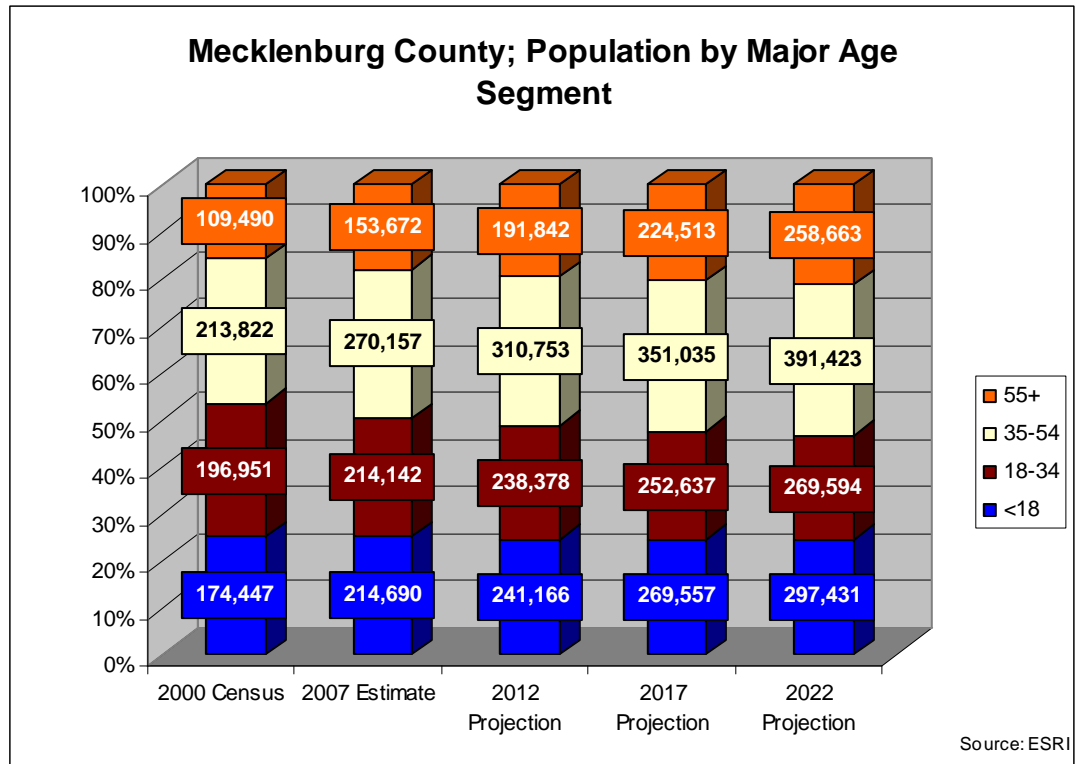


Figure 27 - Population by Major Age Segment

Currently, slightly more than half of the population is under the age of 35 (428,830 persons 34 & under; 852,657 total persons – 50.3%) and the largest single age group in the County is 35 to 54 age segment (270,155 persons 35 to 54; 852,657 total persons – 31.7%). As of 2006 18.0% of the total state population was aged 55 and above (2,045,950 persons aged 55+; 8,856,505 total persons). However, when compared to Mecklenburg County, the state composition of 55+ individuals is 5% more. The County’s populace of 55+ numbers 153,672

in 2007, and represents 18.0% of the total County population. This youthful population composition blended with such natural beauty and resources, as well as favorable weather patterns, lends itself to a very wide range of recreational, educational, and entertainment opportunities.

2.3.5 POPULATION GROWTH

Growth is expected to steadily continue for the County over the next five years but at a slightly lower pace than was experienced from 2000 to 2007 (annual growth rate of 3.3%), an annual growth rate of 3.0% is expected between 2007 and 2012 resulting in a total projected population for the County of 982,136 persons by 2012.

While most of the population segments are expected to grow in number in the next five years, it is projected that the County's largest increases will be among the maturing adults and mature adult segments. The five age segments with the largest percentage growth from 2007 to 2012 are projected to be:

- 60 – 64 years of age; 36.2% five year increase (33,216 to 45,230 persons)
- 18 – 24 years of age; 29.0% five year increase (80,980 to 104,490 persons)
- 85+ years of age; 28.4% five year increase (9,697 to 12,453 persons)
- 65 – 74 years of age; 28.0% five year increase (37,888 to 48,496 persons)
- 50 – 54 years of age; 24.2% five year increase (56,064 to 69,608 persons)

Three of the top five ranked age segments in terms of percent growth from 2007 to 2012 (60-64, 85+ and 65-74) contribute to the 55+ age segment (orange block in **Figure 27**) experiencing the greatest percentage growth (5.0% growth; 38,167 total persons) and coming in second in total population per age segment to the 35-54 age group (3.0% growth; 40,598 total persons).

Although the service area will begin to age, 73.4% of the population is still projected to be under the age of 50 in 2012.

2.3.6 GENDER

The gender distribution of the County is nearly equal (**Figure 28**). This distribution is projected to remain constant throughout the next five, ten, and fifteen year study periods.

Analyzing the population by gender reveals that as the population increases in age the female share of the population also increases. For 2007, the under-25 population is comprised of 51.0% male and 49.0% female. As the population ages, the male composition decreases resulting in a female majority. Males comprise only 45.0% of the 50+ population while females account for 55.0% of the 50+ population. The gender disparity widens when analyzing those aged 65+ – the gap widens by 5.0% – 40.0% male as compared to 60.0% female. Similar trends are anticipated in the future. Analyzing this breakdown along with the propensity of the North Carolinians to participate in outdoor recreational trends and cultural arts indicates a potential market geared toward the mature females may exist.



Men continue to outpace women in regards to gender participatory trends although the gap has begun to decrease – 63.7% of women participate in an activity at least once per year as compared to 64.2% of men.

While men and women share a desire for many of the same activities, men claim to participate in their favorite activities more often than women in any ninety-day span. With more women not only comprising a larger portion of the general populace during the mature stages of the lifecycle, but also participating in

recreational activities further into

adulthood, a relatively new market has appeared over the last two decades. This mature female demographic is opting for less team oriented activities which dominate the female youth recreational environment, instead shifting more towards a diverse selection of individual participant activities.

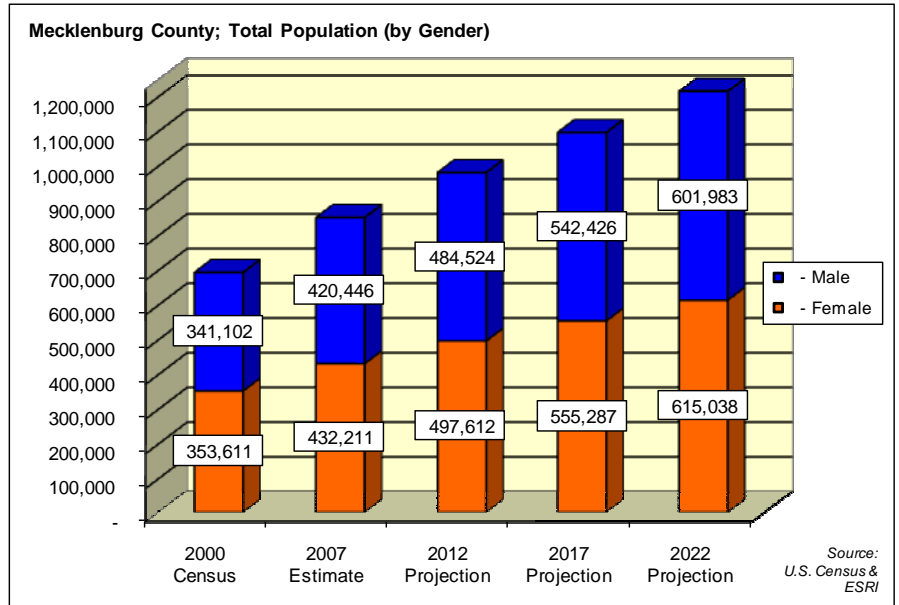


Figure 28 - Total Population by Gender

2.3.7 RACE AND ETHNICITY

Mecklenburg County is predominantly comprised of persons classified as white. With 60.2% of the total population (526,716 of the estimated 852,657 persons in the 2007 population are classified as white alone), the white alone populace is roughly twice as large

as the next ethnic group, Black/African

American. Persons classified as Black/African American are currently estimated at 27.5% of

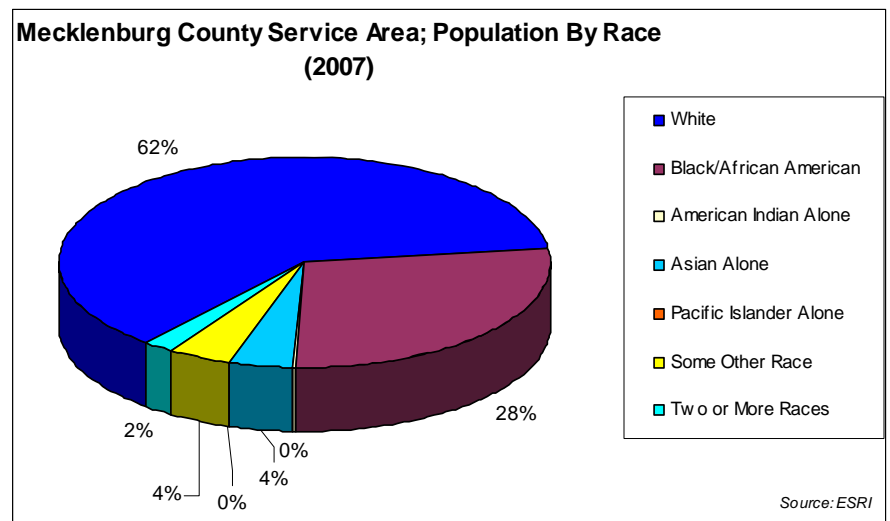


Figure 29 - Population Diversity, 2007

the County population, or an estimated 235,486 total persons. The remainder of the racial categorization (roughly 12%) is split amongst all other races. The current racial/ethnic composition is projected to remain constant during the remainder of the study period, as illustrated in **Figure 29** and **30**.

Persons of any race in combination with being classified as being of Hispanic or Latino origin account for nearly ten percent of the population (8.2%; 70,191 persons). Future projections (**Figure 30**) do indicate a slight decrease in the white population; however, the basic compilation of the racial/ethnic

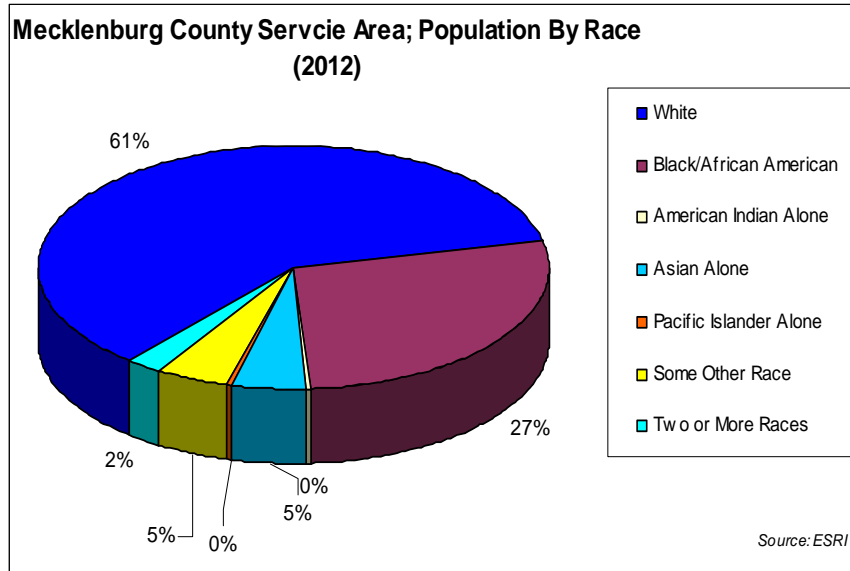


Figure 30 - Population Diversity, 2012

structure is projected to remain relatively unchanged.

Ethnic minority groups in the United States are strongly regionalized and urbanized and these trends are projected to continue. Different ethnic groups have different needs when it comes to recreational activities. Ethnic minority groups, along with Generations X and Y, are coming in ever-greater contact with white middle-class baby-boomers with different recreational habits and preferences. This can be a sensitive subject since many baby-boomers are the last demographic to have graduated high school in segregated environments, and the generational gap magnifies numerous ideals and values differences which many baby-boomers are unaccustomed to. This trend is projected to increase as more baby-boomers begin to retire and both the minority and youth populations continue to increase.



2.3.8 HOUSEHOLDS AND INCOME

Currently, there is an estimated 340,254 households in Mecklenburg County with an average household size of 2.45 persons. In comparison, the State of North Carolina has the relatively same average household size – 2.49 – while the average household size for the entire U.S. is 2.61.

Income characteristics for the County mimic those of both the state and nation, but are on average 58.9% higher than those for the State of North Carolina and on average are 44.5% higher than the U.S income averages. The estimated 2007 median household income in the County is \$ \$65,741, up an astounding 29.8% from \$ \$50,638 reported in the 2000 Census (see **Figure 31**). This represents the earnings of all persons age 16 years or older living together in a housing unit.

Household Income; Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

<i>Income Range</i>	<i>2000 Census</i>	<i>2007 Estimate</i>	<i>2012 Projection</i>	<i>Δ Pop/\$, '00-'07</i>	<i>Δ %, '00-'07</i>	<i>Δ Pop/\$, '07-'12</i>	<i>Δ %, '07-'12</i>
Less than \$15,000	28,247	36,561	744	8,314	29.4%	(35,817)	-98.0%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	27,688	37,437	709	9,749	35.2%	(36,728)	-98.1%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	34,101	35,235	1,005	1,134	3.3%	(34,230)	-97.1%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	44,710	51,732	1,993	7,022	15.7%	(49,739)	-96.1%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	58,289	61,309	5,002	3,020	5.2%	(56,307)	-91.8%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	33,355	42,628	4,796	9,273	27.8%	(37,832)	-88.7%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	27,381	39,106	9,209	11,725	42.8%	(29,897)	-76.5%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	8,712	13,621	8,313	4,909	56.3%	(5,308)	-39.0%
\$200,000 or More	11,078	18,262	14,157	7,184	64.8%	(4,105)	-22.5%
Average HH Income	\$ 68,732	\$ 90,972	\$ 112,823	\$ 22,240	32.4%	\$ 21,851	24.0%
Median HH Income	\$ 50,638	\$ 65,741	\$ 78,572	\$ 15,103	29.8%	\$ 12,831	19.5%
Per Capita Income	\$ 27,352	\$ 36,594	\$ 45,527	\$ 9,242	33.8%	\$ 8,933	24.4%

Source: U.S. Census and ESRI

Figure 31 - Household Income by Range

This significant increase implies that significant business development or relocation has occurred within the service area during this period. The County has similar income characteristics to both the state and national averages (**Figure 32**).

Average household income has also experienced a rather large increase over the reported 2000 Census – rising from \$57,184 to an estimated \$90,972. Analyzing the households by income range reveals that 52.1% of all households earn more than \$50,000 per year and 33.8% earn more than \$75,000 per year. A healthy household income signifies the presence of disposable income, all income available after taxes, and therefore the ability to fund various entertainment, recreation, and leisure activities.

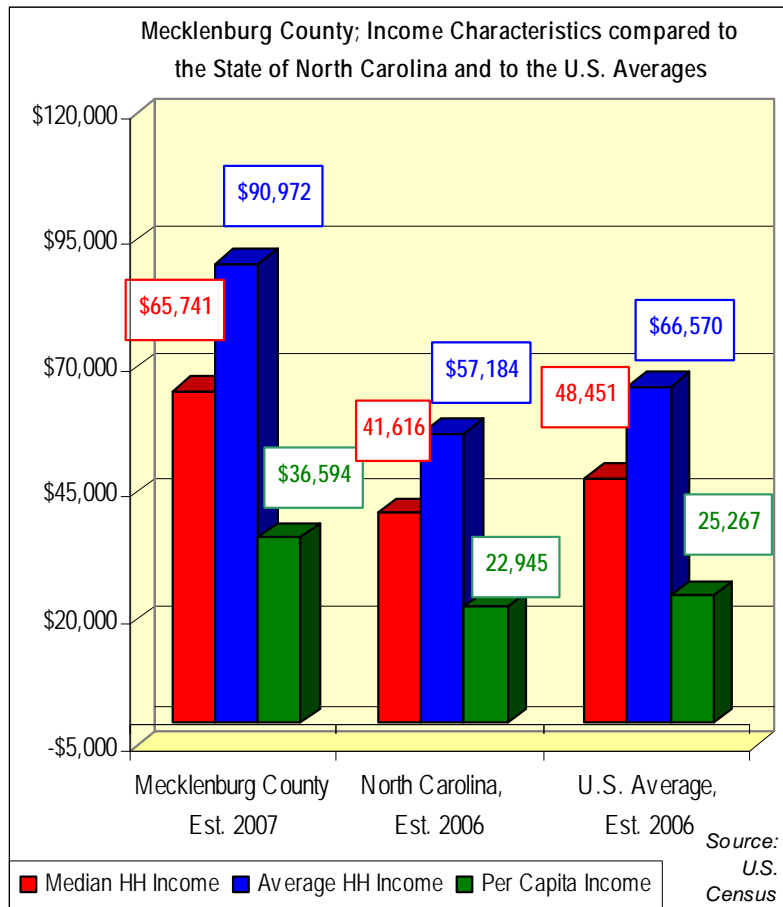


Figure 32 - Income Characteristics as Compared to State and National Averages



CHAPTER THREE - GENERAL PARK AND FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT PLAN

3.1 PARK CLASSIFICATIONS AND FACILITY STANDARDS

3.1.1 PARK CLASSIFICATIONS

Each type of park classification category serves a specific purpose, and the amenities and facilities in each park type must be designed for the number of citizens the park is intended to serve, drive time, active and passive amenities, and the uses it has been assigned. The Park Classifications have been updated from the 1992 Master Plan and the District Park Classification has been dropped and Community and Neighborhood School Park Classifications added for this Master Plan.

3.1.1.1 REGIONAL PARKS

Regional Parks ideally shall be a minimum of 100 acres in size or larger and shall serve a broad geographic region of the County. Each citizen living within the County shall have access to a regional park by driving no more than 20 minutes. Regional Parks shall serve a population standard of five (5) acres/1000 persons. Amenities within these parks will be both active and passive in nature. Regional Parks will support competitive athletic leagues and tournaments and have numerous athletic and passive park amenities such as tennis and basketball courts, softball/baseball, multi-purpose fields, shelters, playgrounds, walking trails and other amenities that provide for an all day experience. Indoor facilities such as shelters, recreation centers, aquatic centers, and other special facilities are also typical in a regional park. 100 FT. buffers shall be maintained around the entire perimeter of these parks.

3.1.1.2 COMMUNITY PARKS

Community Parks ideally shall be a minimum of 20-100 acres in size and shall serve a more localized service area within a geographic area of the County. Each citizen living within the County shall have access to a community park by driving no more than 15 minutes. Community Parks shall also serve a population standard of four (4) acres/1000 persons. Amenities within these parks will be both active and passive in nature but will not be developed to the extent of regional parks. Both active and passive type amenities similar to regional parks will be permissible but not to the quantity, size and tournament quality standards of regional parks. 100 FT. buffers shall be maintained around the entire perimeter of these parks.

3.1.1.3 NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

Neighborhood Parks ideally shall be a minimum of 2-20 acres in size and shall serve the immediately adjacent, local neighborhood. Each citizen living within this area shall have access to a neighborhood park by walking no more than a standard city block distance of six (6) blocks. Neighborhood Parks shall serve a population standard of three (3) acres/1000 persons. There will be no parking lots or restroom facilities provided at neighborhood parks. Amenities will be informal in nature and may include picnic shelters, benches, multi-purpose

fields, ½ basketball and volleyball courts and walking trails among other amenities. The 100 FT perimeter buffer requirement of regional and district parks is desired but not mandated.

3.1.1.4 SCHOOL / PARK

School Parks are facilities built in conjunction with the sighting of a school. Most typically these will be elementary schools- but middle and high school sites may also be considered. School Parks shall serve a population standard of ½ acre/1000 persons. Joint use facilities will be the primary goal of a school park and may include amenities such as ballfields, playgrounds, basketball courts, multi-purpose fields, parking lots and even indoor facilities such as gyms, offices and classrooms.

3.1.2 FACILITY STANDARDS

Facility Standards are guidelines that define service areas based on population that support investment decisions related to facilities and amenities. Facility Standards can and will change over time as the program lifecycles change and demographics of a community change.

PROS evaluated park facility standards using a combination of resources. These resources included: National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) guidelines; Best Practices of other cities/county's similar in size to Mecklenburg County (including Maryland National Planning Commission, Fairfax County Virginia, Lake County, Illinois, and Oakland County, Michigan); recreation activity participation rates reported by American Sports Data as it applies to activities that occur in the United States and the Mecklenburg County area; community stakeholder and citizens survey input; findings from the prioritized needs assessment report and general observations by PROS. This information allowed standards to be customized to Mecklenburg County. **Figure 33** shows the Facility Standards for 2008. **Figure 34** shows the Facility Standards for 2012. **Figure 35** shows the Facility Standards for 2017.

PROS did not incorporate private facilities into the standard based on their membership requirements. PROS recognizes that these private facilities provide some level of recreation contribution, but by the nature of having memberships create non-stable use. Non-stable use means people sign up for a membership and then after two or three years drop out of their membership and expect public facilities to be there for them when they do. Membership organizations on average lose 30% of their membership annually.

The land acquisition standards will be a difficult challenge to achieve; however, the County Real-estate Department is prepared to work toward meeting these needs and will follow this process.

- Seek to partner with schools on the acquisition and development of school parks to support school and neighborhood park needs
- Work with other public agencies in the County that acquire property for utility purposes to coordinate efforts to lease ground or obtain easements for park related purposes
- Seek grants and other funding opportunities to supplement the land acquisition budget



- Seek to acquire sensitive natural areas before development occurs through right of first refusal and through conservation easements as well as fee simple purchases
- Work with local land trusts to assist the County in acquiring sensitive natural areas
- Work with local developers and Planning Departments on providing park land as part of the development or re-development process
- Through the GAP analysis, the County will not be acquiring land or developing recreation facilities where a private facility provider has existing facilities. Through the CCORP Plan (see **Appendix 7**), the County has documentation of these facilities and will use this information in their decision-making process so as to compliment services rather than duplicate services where the standard needs to be met

Mecklenburg County - Facility Standards

PARKS:		Current 2007 Inventory - Developed Facilities						Service Levels - Current, National, and Recommended						2008 Facility Standards				
Park Type	Unit of Measure	Mecklenburg County Inventory	CMS Total (6)	Boys & Girls Club Total	YMCA Total	Municipal Inventory	Total Combined Inventory	Current Service Level			Typical National Standards / BEST PRACTICES		Recommended Standards; Revised for Local Service Area			Meet Standard/ Need Exists	Additional Facilities/ Amenities Needed	
Neighborhood / School Parks (Acres) 2 - 20 acres	Acre(s)	641.74	77.30	-	-	242.13	961.17	1.13	acres per	1,000	3.00	acres per	1,000	3.00	acres per	1,000	Need Exists	1,597 Acre(s)
Community Parks (Acres) 20 - 100 acres	Acre(s)	2,016.34	26.30	-	-	295.50	2,338.14	2.74	acres per	1,000	4.00	acres per	1,000	4.00	acres per	1,000	Need Exists	1,072 Acre(s)
Regional Parks (Acres) 100+ acres	Acre(s)	3,703.95	-	-	-	-	3,703.95	4.34	acres per	1,000	5.00	acres per	1,000	5.00	acres per	1,000	Need Exists	559 Acre(s)
Special Use - Golf/Sports Park/Other (Acres) (1)	Acre(s)	1,714.60	-	-	-	8.90	1,723.50	2.02	acres per	1,000	1.00	acres per	1,000	1.00	acres per	1,000	Meets Standard	- Acre(s)
Total Park and Special Use Acreage	Acre(s)	8,076.63	103.60	-	-	546.53	8,726.76	10.23	acres per	1,000	13.00	acres per	1,000	13.00	acres per	1,000	Need Exists	3,229 Acre(s)
Nature/Preserve Area (Acres)	Acre(s)	6,545.65	-	-	-	-	6,545.65	7.68	acres per	1,000								
Greenways (Acres)	Acre(s)	3,131.02	-	-	-	-	3,131.02	3.67	acres per	1,000								
Total Other Open Space Acreage	Acre(s)	9,676.67	-	-	-	-	9,676.67	11.35	acres per	1,000								
Total Combined Inventory Acreage	Acre(s)	17,753.30	103.60	-	-	546.53	18,403.43	21.58	0.00	1,000								
AMENITIES: (2)																		
Playgrounds	Structures(s)	121.00	2.00	5.00	2.00	22.00	152.00	1.00	structure per	5,610	1.00	structure per	2,500	1.00	structure per	4,000	Need Exists	61 Structures(s)
Outdoor Pools (2)	Site(s)	2.00	-	-	7.00	-	9.00	1.00	site per	94,740	1.00	site per	20,000	1.00	site per	50,000	Need Exists	8 Site(s)
Spraygrounds (2)	Site(s)	5.00	-	-	-	-	5.00	1.00	site per	170,531	1.00	site per	25,000	1.00	site per	50,000	Need Exists	12 Site(s)
Picnic Pavilions - Large	Structures(s)	16.00	-	-	-	-	16.00	1.00	structure per	53,291	1.00	structure per	20,000	1.00	structure per	20,000	Need Exists	27 Structures(s)
Picnic Pavilions - Medium/Small (3)	Structures(s)	135.00	-	-	6.00	-	141.00	1.00	structure per	6,047	1.00	structure per	5,000	1.00	structure per	10,000	Meets Standard	- Structures(s)
Picnic Pavilions - Indoor	Structures(s)	7.00	-	-	-	-	7.00	1.00	structure per	121,808	1.00	structure per	50,000	1.00	structure per	50,000	Need Exists	13 Structures(s)
Trails - All Surfaces - Paved (Miles) (4)	Mile(s)	86.69	0.13	-	0.50	16.00	103.31	0.10	miles per	1,000	0.40	miles per	1,000	0.40	miles per	1,000	Need Exists	238 Mile(s)
Basketball Courts	Court(s)	108.00	3.00	2.00	2.00	12.00	127.00	1.00	court per	6,714	1.00	court per	2,500	1.00	court per	5,000	Need Exists	44 Court(s)
Tennis Courts	Court(s)	136.00	5.50	-	7.00	21.00	169.50	1.00	court per	5,030	1.00	court per	4,000	1.00	court per	4,000	Need Exists	44 Court(s)
Volleyball Courts	Court(s)	42.00	-	-	1.00	2.00	45.00	1.00	court per	18,948	1.00	court per	15,000	1.00	court per	15,000	Need Exists	12 Court(s)
Dog Parks (3 acre minimum)	Site(s)	4.00	-	-	-	1.00	5.00	1.00	site per	170,531	1.00	site per	50,000	1.00	site per	50,000	Need Exists	12 Site(s)
Skateparks	Site(s)	2.00	-	-	1.00	-	3.00	1.00	site per	284,219	1.00	site per	50,000	1.00	site per	100,000	Need Exists	6 Site(s)
Nature Centers	Site(s)	3.00	-	-	-	-	3.00	1.00	site per	213,164	1.00	site per	50,000	1.00	site per	100,000	Need Exists	6 Site(s)
Aquatic Center/Indoor Pool (Square Feet)	Square Feet	65,593	-	-	-	-	65,593	0.08	SF per person	person	0.50	SF per person	person	0.50	SF per person	person	Need Exists	360,736 Square Feet
Recreation/Fitness Center Space (Square Feet)	Square Feet	387,122	-	-	482,000	58,000	927,122	1.09	SF per person	person	1.50	SF per person	person	1.50	SF per person	person	Need Exists	351,864 Square Feet

Notes:

1. Special Uses include Special Facilities, Recreation Centers, Pools, Golf Courses and Historic Sites
2. Two (2) Outdoor Pools include Cordelia and Double Oaks, while the rest are all included as Spraygrounds
3. Picnic Pavilions - Medium/Small include Pavilions Medium, Pavilions small, Decks and Wedding Sites. It also includes the Outdoor Shelters listed by the YMCA among the secondary providers
4. Trails - All Surfaces include Bike Trails, Hiking Trails, Multipurpose Trails and Walking Trails
5. Recreation/Fitness Space includes Recreation Centers and Fitness Centers
6. School Park sites are not available to the community throughout the day, the school park acreage and inventories have been counted as 50% of the total acreage available. The sites used are the 13 facilities with recognized Joint Use Agreements
7. The Other Providers do not include HOAs, apartment complexes or universities since they are not truly available for community use and restricted to only a small population number

Estimated Population - 2007:	852,657
Projected Population - 2012:	982,136
Projected Population - 2017:	1,097,712
Projected Population - 2022:	1,217,020

Figure 33 - Mecklenburg County - Facility Standards 2008



Mecklenburg County - Facility Standards

PARKS:		Current 2007 Inventory - Developed Facilities						Service Levels - Current, National, and Recommended						2012 Facility Standards					
Park Type	Unit of Measure	Mecklenburg County Inventory	CMS Total (6)	Boys & Girls Club Total	YMCA Total	Municipal Inventory	Total Combined Inventory	Current Service Level			Typical National Standards / BEST PRACTICES		Recommended Standards; Revised for Local Service Area			Meet Standard/ Need Exists	Additional Facilities/ Amenities Needed		
Neighborhood / School Parks (Acres) 2 - 20 acres	Acre(s)	641.74	77.30	-	-	242.13	961.17	1.13	acres per	1,000	3.00	acres per	1,000	3.00	acres per	1,000	Need Exists	1,985 Acre(s)	
Community Parks (Acres) 20 - 100 acres	Acre(s)	2,016.34	26.30	-	-	295.50	2,338.14	2.74	acres per	1,000	4.00	acres per	1,000	4.00	acres per	1,000	Need Exists	1,590 Acre(s)	
Regional Parks (Acres) 100+ acres	Acre(s)	3,703.95	-	-	-	-	3,703.95	4.34	acres per	1,000	5.00	acres per	1,000	5.00	acres per	1,000	Need Exists	1,207 Acre(s)	
Special Use - Golf/Sports Park/Other (Acres) (1)	Acre(s)	1,714.60	-	-	-	8.90	1,723.50	2.02	acres per	1,000	1.00	acres per	1,000	1.00	acres per	1,000	Meets Standard	- Acre(s)	
Total Park and Special Use Acreage	Acre(s)	8,076.63	103.60	-	-	546.53	8,726.76	10.23	acres per	1,000	13.00	acres per	1,000	13.00	acres per	1,000	Need Exists	4,782 Acre(s)	
Nature/Preserve Area (Acres)	Acre(s)	6,545.65	-	-	-	-	6,545.65	7.68	acres per	1,000									
Greenways (Acres)	Acre(s)	3,131.02	-	-	-	-	3,131.02	3.67	acres per	1,000									
Total Other Open Space Acreage	Acre(s)	9,676.67	-	-	-	-	9,676.67	11.35	acres per	1,000									
Total Combined Inventory Acreage	Acre(s)	17,753.30	103.60	-	-	546.53	18,403.43	21.58	0.00	1,000									
AMENITIES: (2)																			
Playgrounds	Structures(s)	121.00	2.00	5.00	2.00	22.00	152.00	1.00	structure per	5,610	1.00	structure per	2,500	1.00	structure per	4,000	Need Exists	94 Structures(s)	
Outdoor Pools (2)	Site(s)	2.00	-	-	7.00	-	9.00	1.00	site per	94,740	1.00	site per	20,000	1.00	site per	50,000	Need Exists	11 Site(s)	
Spraygrounds (2)	Site(s)	5.00	-	-	-	-	5.00	1.00	site per	170,531	1.00	site per	25,000	1.00	site per	50,000	Need Exists	15 Site(s)	
Picnic Pavilions - Large	Structures(s)	16.00	-	-	-	-	16.00	1.00	structure per	53,291	1.00	structure per	20,000	1.00	structure per	20,000	Need Exists	33 Structures(s)	
Picnic Pavilions - Medium/Small (3)	Structures(s)	135.00	-	-	6.00	-	141.00	1.00	structure per	6,047	1.00	structure per	5,000	1.00	structure per	10,000	Meets Standard	- Structures(s)	
Picnic Pavilions - Indoor	Structures(s)	7.00	-	-	-	-	7.00	1.00	structure per	121,808	1.00	structure per	50,000	1.00	structure per	50,000	Need Exists	13 Structures(s)	
Trails - All Surfaces - Paved (Miles) (4)	Mile(s)	86.69	0.13	-	0.50	16.00	103.31	0.10	miles per	1,000	0.40	miles per	1,000	0.40	miles per	1,000	Need Exists	290 Mile(s)	
Basketball Courts	Court(s)	108.00	3.00	2.00	2.00	12.00	127.00	1.00	court per	6,714	1.00	court per	2,500	1.00	court per	5,000	Need Exists	69 Court(s)	
Tennis Courts	Court(s)	136.00	5.50	-	7.00	21.00	169.50	1.00	court per	5,030	1.00	court per	4,000	1.00	court per	4,000	Need Exists	76 Court(s)	
Volleyball Courts	Court(s)	42.00	-	-	1.00	2.00	45.00	1.00	court per	18,948	1.00	court per	15,000	1.00	court per	15,000	Need Exists	20 Court(s)	
Dog Parks (3 acre minimum)	Site(s)	4.00	-	-	-	1.00	5.00	1.00	site per	170,531	1.00	site per	50,000	1.00	site per	50,000	Need Exists	15 Site(s)	
Skateparks	Site(s)	2.00	-	-	1.00	-	3.00	1.00	site per	284,219	1.00	site per	50,000	1.00	site per	100,000	Need Exists	7 Site(s)	
Nature Centers	Site(s)	3.00	-	-	-	-	3.00	1.00	site per	213,164	1.00	site per	50,000	1.00	site per	100,000	Need Exists	7 Site(s)	
Aquatic Center/Indoor Pool (Square Feet)	Square Feet	65,593	-	-	-	-	65,593	0.08	SF per person	person	0.50	SF per person	person	0.50	SF per person	person	Need Exists	425,475 Square Feet	
Recreation/Fitness Center Space (Square Feet)	Square Feet	387,122	-	-	482,000	58,000	927,122	1.09	SF per person	person	1.50	SF per person	person	1.50	SF per person	person	Need Exists	546,082 Square Feet	

Notes:

1. Special Uses include Special Facilities, Recreation Centers, Pools, Golf Courses and Historic Sites
2. Two (2) Outdoor Pools include Cordelia and Double Oaks, while the rest are all included as Spraygrounds
3. Picnic Pavilions - Medium/Small include Pavilions Medium, Pavilions small, Decks and Wedding Sites. It also includes the Outdoor Shelters listed by the YMCA among the secondary providers
4. Trails - All Surfaces include Bike Trails, Hiking Trails, Multipurpose Trails and Walking Trails
5. Recreation/Fitness Space includes Recreation Centers and Fitness Centers
6. School Park sites are not available to the community throughout the day, the school park acreage and inventories have been counted as 50% of the total acreage available. The sites used are the 13 facilities with recognized Joint Use Agreements
7. The Other Providers do not include HOAs, apartment complexes or universities since they are not truly available for community use and restricted to only a small population number

Estimated Population - 2007:	852,657
Projected Population - 2012:	982,136
Projected Population - 2017:	1,097,712
Projected Population - 2022:	1,217,020

Figure 34 - Mecklenburg County - Facility Standards 2012

Mecklenburg County - Facility Standards

PARKS:		Current 2007 Inventory - Developed Facilities						Service Levels - Current, National, and Recommended						2017 Facility Standards					
Park Type	Unit of Measure	Mecklenburg County Inventory	CMS Total (6)	Boys & Girls Club Total	YMCA Total	Municipal Inventory	Total Combined Inventory	Current Service Level			Typical National Standards / BEST PRACTICES			Recommended Standards; Revised for Local Service Area			Meet Standard/ Need Exists	Additional Facilities/ Amenities Needed	
Neighborhood / School Parks (Acres) 2 - 20 acres	Acre(s)	641.74	77.30	-	-	242.13	961.17	1.13	acres per	1,000	3.00	acres per	1,000	3.00	acres per	1,000	Need Exists	2,332	Acre(s)
Community Parks (Acres) 20 - 100 acres	Acre(s)	2,016.34	26.30	-	-	295.50	2,338.14	2.74	acres per	1,000	4.00	acres per	1,000	4.00	acres per	1,000	Need Exists	2,053	Acre(s)
Regional Parks (Acres) 100+ acres	Acre(s)	3,703.95	-	-	-	-	3,703.95	4.34	acres per	1,000	5.00	acres per	1,000	5.00	acres per	1,000	Need Exists	1,785	Acre(s)
Special Use - Golf/Sports Park/Other (Acres) (1)	Acre(s)	1,714.60	-	-	-	8.90	1,723.50	2.02	acres per	1,000	1.00	acres per	1,000	1.00	acres per	1,000	Meets Standard	-	Acre(s)
Total Park and Special Use Acreage	Acre(s)	8,076.63	103.60	-	-	546.53	8,726.76	10.23	acres per	1,000	13.00	acres per	1,000	13.00	acres per	1,000	Need Exists	6,169	Acre(s)
Nature/Preserve Area (Acres)	Acre(s)	6,545.65	-	-	-	-	6,545.65	7.68	acres per	1,000									
Greenways (Acres)	Acre(s)	3,131.02	-	-	-	-	3,131.02	3.67	acres per	1,000									
Total Other Open Space Acreage	Acre(s)	9,676.67	-	-	-	-	9,676.67	11.35	acres per	1,000									
Total Combined Inventory Acreage	Acre(s)	17,753.30	103.60	-	-	546.53	18,403.43	21.58	0.00	1,000									
AMENITIES: (2)																			
Playgrounds	Structures(s)	121.00	2.00	5.00	2.00	22.00	152.00	1.00	structure per	5,610	1.00	structure per	2,500	1.00	structure per	4,000	Need Exists	122	Structures(s)
Outdoor Pools (2)	Site(s)	2.00	-	-	7.00	-	9.00	1.00	site per	94,740	1.00	site per	20,000	1.00	site per	50,000	Need Exists	13	Site(s)
Spraygrounds (2)	Site(s)	5.00	-	-	-	-	5.00	1.00	site per	170,531	1.00	site per	25,000	1.00	site per	50,000	Need Exists	17	Site(s)
Picnic Pavilions - Large	Structures(s)	16.00	-	-	-	-	16.00	1.00	structure per	53,291	1.00	structure per	20,000	1.00	structure per	20,000	Need Exists	39	Structures(s)
Picnic Pavilions - Medium/Small (3)	Structures(s)	135.00	-	-	6.00	-	141.00	1.00	structure per	6,047	1.00	structure per	5,000	1.00	structure per	10,000	Meets Standard	-	Structures(s)
Picnic Pavilions - Indoor	Structures(s)	7.00	-	-	-	-	7.00	1.00	structure per	121,808	1.00	structure per	50,000	1.00	structure per	50,000	Need Exists	15	Structures(s)
Trails - All Surfaces - Paved (Miles) (4)	Mile(s)	86.69	0.13	-	0.50	16.00	103.31	0.10	miles per	1,000	0.40	miles per	1,000	0.40	miles per	1,000	Need Exists	336	Mile(s)
Basketball Courts	Court(s)	108.00	3.00	2.00	2.00	12.00	127.00	1.00	court per	6,714	1.00	court per	2,500	1.00	court per	5,000	Need Exists	93	Court(s)
Tennis Courts	Court(s)	136.00	5.50	-	7.00	21.00	169.50	1.00	court per	5,030	1.00	court per	4,000	1.00	court per	4,000	Need Exists	105	Court(s)
Volleyball Courts	Court(s)	42.00	-	-	1.00	2.00	45.00	1.00	court per	18,948	1.00	court per	15,000	1.00	court per	15,000	Need Exists	28	Court(s)
Dog Parks (3 acre minimum)	Site(s)	4.00	-	-	-	1.00	5.00	1.00	site per	170,531	1.00	site per	50,000	1.00	site per	50,000	Need Exists	17	Site(s)
Skateparks	Site(s)	2.00	-	-	1.00	-	3.00	1.00	site per	284,219	1.00	site per	50,000	1.00	site per	100,000	Need Exists	8	Site(s)
Nature Centers	Site(s)	3.00	-	-	-	-	3.00	1.00	site per	213,164	1.00	site per	50,000	1.00	site per	100,000	Need Exists	8	Site(s)
Aquatic Center/Indoor Pool (Square Feet)	Square Feet	65,593	-	-	-	-	65,593	0.08	SF per	person	0.50	SF per	person	0.50	SF per	person	Need Exists	483,263	Square Feet
Recreation/Fitness Center Space (Square Feet)	Square Feet	387,122	-	-	482,000	58,000	927,122	1.09	SF per	person	1.50	SF per	person	1.50	SF per	person	Need Exists	719,446	Square Feet

Notes:

1. Special Uses include Special Facilities, Recreation Centers, Pools, Golf Courses and Historic Sites
2. Two (2) Outdoor Pools include Cordelia and Double Oaks, while the rest are all included as Spraygrounds
3. Picnic Pavilions - Medium/Small include Pavilions Medium, Pavilions small, Decks and Wedding Sites. It also includes the Outdoor Shelters listed by the YMCA among the secondary providers
4. Trails - All Surfaces include Bike Trails, Hiking Trails, Multipurpose Trails and Walking Trails
5. Recreation/Fitness Space includes Recreation Centers and Fitness Centers
6. School Park sites are not available to the community throughout the day, the school park acreage and inventories have been counted as 50% of the total acreage available. The sites used are the 13 facilities with recognized Joint Use Agreements
7. The Other Providers do not include HOAs, apartment complexes or universities since they are not truly available for community use and restricted to only a small population number

Estimated Population - 2007:	852,657
Projected Population - 2012:	982,136
Projected Population - 2017:	1,097,712
Projected Population - 2022:	1,217,020

Figure 35 - Mecklenburg County - Facility Standards 2017



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3.2 FACILITY CAPACITY DEMAND STANDARDS MODEL

3.2.1 INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

PROS prepared customized sports field asset facility standards with the **PROS Capacity–Demand Standards Model™** (CDSM). This process supports evaluation of the various assets ability to meet demand (scheduled utilization) with the existing capacity.

The basis for the PROS CDSM is quantifying current suggested capacity of assets and comparing to current actual demand by unique individual usage. As an asset management and program planning tool directed to all levels of department administration and staff, along with legislative boards and commissions, the Capacity–Demand Standards Model™ will identify and integrate the benefits of properly managed assets that lead to better decision making regarding athletic assets. Prioritized recommendations in the report address optimal turf management strategies and effectiveness in field allocation. This model addresses short-term and long-term asset requirements based on current day usage patterns.

3.2.1.1 CAPACITY DEMAND OVERVIEW

Capacity and demand are exclusive measurements, independent of one another. Measurement, defined as “something ascertained by comparison to a standard”, is the ultimate product of the Capacity–Demand Standards Model. Utilizing the suggested capacity as the independent variable in the function allows for demand to be a measured solely on what specifically occurs.

Simply stated, capacity and demand may be demonstrated by a bathtub; the actual tub itself represents the capacity – the ability to hold water, the suggested use. Demand equates to the substance that is released into the tub – whether it be water, rocks, sand, or toys. Substance flowing over the rim signifies the tub is above capacity while a tub with substance below the rim signifies the tub is operating below capacity.

The CDSM was created in response to the commonly used NRPA standards which state one (1) asset to “X” number of persons. PROS recognized the inexactness of a standard based on a service area of the entire population when a particular asset’s participation base is strictly regulated by a minimum and maximum age. An example of this ambiguity is:

- Traditional Asset Standard Approach – One (1) T-Ball Field to 5,000 Persons
 - This standard implies that for every 5,000 persons of the population there should be one (1) T-Ball field in the inventory
 - Based on strictly enforced age limits, the generality of the standard produces an inaccurate portrayal due to a very limited participation base (generally between 5 and 6 years of age) in regards to the population as a whole
- PROS Capacity–Demand Standards Model™ Approach – One (1) T-Ball Field to X,000 5-6 Year Olds



- The PROS Capacity–Demand standard implies that each T-Ball field has an estimated service area of X,000 5 and 6 year olds
- This number is established by actual demand as it pertains to the individual assets capacity; only those persons aged 5 and 6 are applicable

Based on participation factors by activity as it applies to each individual sport field, capacity and demand service areas (population served by asset) were calculated and mapped to provide a graphical representation of gaps and overlaps in geographic area and population served. In addition to graphical representation of the equitable distribution of current assets via mapping, asset need in terms of additional sports fields was determined utilizing current assets available to the County and area municipalities.

From the service area mapping and the correlating detailed data, the final recommendations present alternatives to address areas where assets are needed or the potentially shifting from an over-served area to an underserved area. Capital, operations, and maintenance costs can be applied to these alternatives and a cost-benefit analysis performed to determine the optimal recommended solution. For a complete review of the Capacity Demand Standards Model see **Appendix 5**. The following present the findings and recommendations.

3.2.2 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Capacity–Demand Standards Model tm is not intended to be a scheduling tool. The purpose of the model is to assist in the managing and planning of assets to meet the demand of the users. Convenience is also not a factor in determining an assets capacity or demand. PROS does realize that although a particular asset may demonstrate excess capacity, the desirability of the available time may be low – this is true in the case of many early morning and late afternoon/late evening time slots.

Capacity–Demand is measured for three quartiles; multiple seasons may be in one particular quartile and one season may span multiple quartiles. Quartiles were created to ensure that the same parameters were being measured against one another and accurately applied across the system. When a usage occurs in more than one of the quartiles, usage is relationally split between the quartiles based on actual dates of usage as compared to the quartile parameters. Quartiles are defined as follows:

- Quartile 1 – March 1st to May 31st
- Quartile 2 – June 1st to August 31st
- Quartile 3 – September 1st to November 30th

Due to limited programming of outdoor assets during the typical winter months, the 4th quartile (December 1st to February 28th/29th) was not analyzed or illustrated.

The current asset capacity, demand, and requirements are presented in **Figure 36**. Based on the current asset utilization by season – actual demand compared to suggested capacity by asset type – the number and type of additional assets needed differs for each season. The largest single asset need compared to assets “on-line” is for large multipurpose fields in the first quartile; the second quartile/season does not demonstrate a need for any additional assets. Asset need by season is as follows:

- First Quartile/Season Asset Need
 - Softball - 220-foot fence radius – Five (5) additional assets needed
 - Softball - 300-foot fence radius – One (1) additional asset needed
 - Multipurpose Field (Small) - <240-foot – Two (2) additional assets needed
 - Multipurpose Field (Large) - >300-foot – Nine (9) additional assets needed
- Third Quartile/Season Asset Need
 - Softball - 300-foot fence radius – Eight (8) additional assets needed

These asset shortages – where capacity is eclipsed by demand – are based on assets which are “on-line” during the specified quartiles.

When analyzing **Figure 36**, the first season’s requirements are listed in the top chart and the third season requirements are shown on the bottom chart. Total asset inventory available for County usages is listed in the “Total Asset Inventory” column. Assets that are “on-line” are shown in the “Total Assets in Use” column. The culmination of the detailed capacity and demand data is shown using two methods – players supported versus registered players and event hours supported versus event hours required (demanded). Totals are based on the current demand placed on each asset type.

3.2.2.1 DEMAND COMPARISON BY PERSONS AND HOURLY USAGE

Capacity and demand are displayed by player totals to illustrate the total number of persons each field can support as it relates to the actual user base. Player analysis does not provide an understanding of the actual intensity/frequency each asset type is receiving, but an understanding of how many players an asset can support if the usage were to mimic normal usage patterns found on like assets within the geographical area. To provide an understanding of the intensity/frequency, capacity and demand utilization is also shown by hours each asset is actual used as opposed to suggested hours of use based on asset integrity. Player comparison illustrates “X” players can be supported under normal conditions, and hourly comparison stipulates “X” number of hours are proposed based on optimal usage guidelines.

An example of when the need to differentiate in persons and hours arises is explained in the following:

One usage is comprised of thirty (30) teams that utilize the asset on ten (10) occasions for one (1) hour per team as compared to six (6) teams that utilize the asset on more than fifty (52) occasions for an average of two (2) hours per team. The usage with the greatest number of players (roughly 300 players versus 90 players) is actually utilizing the asset for half as many hours as the usage with the least amount of players. This results in a vast difference in intensity of usage.

3.2.2.2 ASSETS REQUIRED, ASSETS ON-LINE, AND NEW ASSETS

When analyzing total number of assets required to meet demand based on total inventory available to the County participatory base, the column titled “Number of ADDITIONAL Assets Required by Season in Excess of On-Line Assets” illustrates the total number of additional



assets required to meet demand by season – this represents assets in excess of assets “on-line” on a system wide basis. This figure represents total number of assets required to meet demand based on optimal field usage guidelines and is rolled up to an asset category.

As noted on the previous page of this report, four asset types requiring additional assets to meet demand in the first quartile: small and large softball fields and small and large multipurpose fields. However, as shown in the “Total NON-PROGRAMMED Assets Remaining in Inventory” column of **Figure 36**, a portion of the inventoried assets are not being utilized. For example, there is a need for an additional 5 small softball fields to meet the current demand; however, there are 10 total assets that are currently non-programmed during this particular quartile (20 total small softball field assets; 19 small softball field assets in use). Opening up these assets that are offline (receiving maintenance/rest) for usage or shifting usages to other assets not operating at full capacity may help alleviate some of the need for additional fields. Shifting usage to other assets, however, can be a difficult alternative since scheduling conflicts may exist.

Removing assets from a programmed rest/maintenance state should not be considered a long term solution. Assets not receiving adequate rest and maintenance have the propensity to quickly decline into a substandard state. It is strongly recommended that an asset usage policy specifying rest and maintenance periods be adopted by the County. During no one quartile should all assets be “on-line”. Upon final adoption of sport field programming, it is recommended that each asset type should have portion of total inventory listed in the “Total NON-PROGRAMMED Assets Remaining in Inventory” column. Current asset on-line/off-line distribution that raises concern by each quartile is as follows:

- First Quartile Assets With Potential of Overuse
 - T-Ball Field – 3 assets inventoried; all 3 are in use; 3 required; zero new assets are needed to meet current demand
 - Zero assets are receiving rest/maintenance (“Total NON-PROGRAMMED Assets Remaining in Inventory”)
 - Eighty-six percent (86%) utilization of total hourly capacity
 - Multipurpose Field, Large – 30 assets inventoried; 26 in use; 35 required; 5 new assets are needed to meet current demand
 - Four (4) assets are receiving rest/maintenance (“Total NON-PROGRAMMED Assets Remaining in Inventory”)
 - More than 100% of total available suggested capacity is being utilized
- Third Quartile Assets With Potential of Overuse
 - Softball Field, Large – 49 assets inventoried; 36 are in use; 44 required; zero new assets are needed to meet current demand
 - Thirteen (13) assets are receiving rest/maintenance (“Total NON-PROGRAMMED Assets Remaining in Inventory”)

- Bringing 5 assets on-line would place the large softball field utilization at 88% of total hourly capacity

Capacity and demand for sport field assets must be analyzed with the community values prioritized needs assessment from the Master Plan. Although required assets may be in excess of current assets available, meeting additional field requirements can occur through a variety of methods and alternatives. Some alternatives include:

- Analyze existing natural turf multipurpose assets for possible conversion to synthetic turf fields; synthetic surface multipurpose assets with lighting significantly increases capacity
- Purchasing additional land for sport complexes, or community/regional parks which can support multiple sport field assets; sport complexes can be placed within community/regional park sites

					Players Supported (Normalized Usage Patterns) vs. Registered Players (Actual Demand)		Optimal Facility Usage Hours vs. Actual Facility Usage Hours					
1st Quartile/Season Analysis; Asset (Field) Types	Total Asset Inventory	Total County Assets	Total Other Asset Inventory	Total Assets In Use	Average Players SUPPORTED by Asset Type PER SEASON	Average REGISTERED Players by Asset Type PER SEASON	Event Hours per Season Supported PER ASSET TYPE	Event Hours per Season Required PER ASSET TYPE	Number of Assets Required by Season	Number of ADDITIONAL Assets Required by Season in Excess of On-Line Assets	Total NON- PROGRAMMED Assets Remaining in Inventory	NEW ASSETS REQUIRED IN ADDITION TO CURRENT INVENTORIES TO MEET DEMAND
T-Ball Field (temp backstop)	3	3	-	3	272.52	157.71	1,449.44	1,247.50	3.00	None	-	None
Baseball - 60-foot base paths	16	15	1	11	828.85	92.33	4,716.82	2,259.66	6.00	None	5.0	None
Baseball - 90-foot base paths	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	None	2.0	None
Softball - 220-foot fence radius	29	24	5	19	1,143.13	208.06	6,872.99	8,665.25	24.00	5.0	10.0	None
Softball - 300-foot fence radius	49	48	1	39	2,446.71	988.54	14,061.09	14,110.23	40.00	1.0	10.0	None
Multipurpose Field (Small) - <240-foot	60	52	8	49	4,580.52	249.39	24,740.75	25,582.38	51.00	2.0	11.0	None
Multipurpose Field (Large) - >300-foot	30	30	-	26	2,048.99	273.29	10,502.26	13,785.73	35.00	9.0	4.0	5.0

					Players Supported (Normalized Usage Patterns) vs. Registered Players (Actual Demand)		Optimal Facility Usage Hours vs. Actual Facility Usage Hours					
2nd Quartile/Season Analysis; Asset (Field) Types	Total Asset Inventory	Total County Assets	Total Other Asset Inventory	Total Assets In Use	Average Players SUPPORTED by Asset Type per Season	Average REGISTERED Players by Asset Type per Season	Event Hours per Season Supported	Event Hours per Season Required	Number of Assets Required by Season	Number of ADDITIONAL Assets Required by Season in Excess of On-Line Assets	Total NON- PROGRAMMED Assets Remaining in Inventory	NEW ASSETS REQUIRED IN ADDITION TO CURRENT INVENTORIES TO MEET DEMAND
T-Ball Field (temp backstop)	3	3	-	3	270.45	75.48	1,438.42	280.39	1.00	None	-	None
Baseball - 60-foot base paths	16	15	1	11	828.85	83.12	4,716.82	804.49	2.00	None	5.0	None
Baseball - 90-foot base paths	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	None	2.0	None
Softball - 220-foot fence radius	29	24	5	18	1,122.25	419.87	6,747.46	3,770.27	11.00	None	11.0	None
Softball - 300-foot fence radius	49	48	1	40	2,487.02	1,191.97	14,292.75	11,790.13	33.00	None	9.0	None
Multipurpose Field (Small) - <240-foot	60	52	8	45	4,065.98	234.46	21,961.54	9,865.80	21.00	None	15.0	None
Multipurpose Field (Large) - >300-foot	30	30	-	21	1,704.88	253.78	8,738.46	4,227.52	11.00	None	9.0	None

					Players Supported (Normalized Usage Patterns) vs. Registered Players (Actual Demand)		Optimal Facility Usage Hours vs. Actual Facility Usage Hours					
3rd Quartile/Season Analysis; Asset (Field) Types	Total Asset Inventory	Total County Assets	Total Other Asset Inventory	Total Assets In Use	Average Players SUPPORTED by Asset Type per Season	Average REGISTERED Players by Asset Type per Season	Event Hours per Season Supported	Event Hours per Season Required	Number of Assets Required by Season	Number of ADDITIONAL Assets Required by Season in Excess of On-Line Assets	Total NON- PROGRAMMED Assets Remaining in Inventory	NEW ASSETS REQUIRED IN ADDITION TO CURRENT INVENTORIES TO MEET DEMAND
T-Ball Field (temp backstop)	3	3	-	3	267.19	64.33	1,421.12	232.04	1.00	None	-	None
Baseball - 60-foot base paths	16	15	1	5	364.89	43.53	2,076.52	382.10	1.00	None	11.0	None
Baseball - 90-foot base paths	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	None	2.0	None
Softball - 220-foot fence radius	29	24	5	10	576.11	192.02	3,463.82	2,587.66	8.00	None	19.0	None
Softball - 300-foot fence radius	49	48	1	36	2,250.30	948.44	12,932.33	15,633.97	44.00	8.0	13.0	None
Multipurpose Field (Small) - <240-foot	60	52	8	45	4,434.36	232.06	23,951.28	15,192.06	29.00	None	15.0	None
Multipurpose Field (Large) - >300-foot	30	30	-	26	2,008.52	296.16	10,294.81	9,634.02	25.00	None	4.0	None

Figure 36 - Capacity Demand by Season



To accurately calculate the required assets by season, usages must be rolled up to the specific asset type utilized. The capacity and demand calculations presented prior in **Figure 33** are by asset type by season. Although it has been determined that capacity does service the demand on a system wide level based on available assets for each quartile, it is also important to recognize when demand exceeds capacity on an individual asset basis.

When multiple usages occur at one asset or individual usages require a large number of asset hours, capacity and demand are analyzed on an individual asset basis. High asset usage hours are usually attributable to youth programs and the need for practice time as well as game time or tournament quality programs which have a high utilization factor; conversely, adult programming typically does not practice, and games rarely take more than 1 or 1 ½ hours to complete.

In accordance with the results shown in **Figure 37**, 137 total assets are operating at or above the threshold of capacity – 80% – during the first quartile. The threshold is set to alert appropriate personnel as to the potential of an asset to easily escalate to a state of distress. More than 100 assets operate at 80% or more than suggested capacity for both the second quartile (127 assets above suggested capacity threshold) and the third quartile (109 assets above suggested capacity threshold).

This large contingency of assets receiving such high use leaves very little opportunity for future programming or additional sport tourism opportunities (tournaments, etc.).

	T-Ball Field (temp backstop)	Baseball - 60-foot base paths	Baseball - 90-foot base paths	Softball - 220-foot fence radius	Softball - 300-foot fence radius	Multipurpose Field (Small) - <240-foot	Multipurpose Field (Large) - >300-foot
Current Total Assets - Mecklenburg County SANCTIONED Assets Where Demand Exceeds 80.0% Capacity : By Site Classification / Type; by Season (Note: Excludes assets classified as "Maintenance")							
Neighborhood Park Assets Exceeding Cap.; 1st Season	-	1.0	-	6.0	-	6.0	-
Neighborhood Park Assets Exceeding Cap.; 2nd Season	-	1.0	-	6.0	-	8.0	-
Neighborhood Park Assets Exceeding Cap.; 3rd Season	-	1.0	-	2.0	-	8.0	-
Community Park Assets Exceeding Cap.; 1st Season	3.0	3.0	-	9.0	18.0	15.0	13.0
Community Park Assets Exceeding Cap.; 2nd Season	3.0	3.0	-	9.0	17.0	12.0	14.0
Community Park Assets Exceeding Cap.; 3rd Season	1.0	-	-	5.0	15.0	10.0	15.0
District Park Assets Exceeding Cap.; 1st Season	-	5.0	-	-	21.0	14.0	13.0
District Park Assets Exceeding Cap.; 2nd Season	-	5.0	-	-	22.0	11.0	7.0
District Park Assets Exceeding Cap.; 3rd Season	-	-	-	-	21.0	14.0	11.0
Elementary School Assets Exceeding Cap.; 1st Season	-	-	-	3.0	-	5.0	-
Elementary School Assets Exceeding Cap.; 2nd Season	-	-	-	3.0	-	4.0	-
Elementary School Assets Exceeding Cap.; 3rd Season	-	-	-	2.0	-	2.0	-
High School Assets Exceeding Cap.; 1st Season	-	-	-	-	-	1.0	-
High School Assets Exceeding Cap.; 2nd Season	-	-	-	-	-	1.0	-
High School Assets Exceeding Cap.; 3rd Season	-	-	-	-	-	1.0	-
Community Center Assets Exceeding Cap.; 1st Season	-	-	-	-	-	1.0	-
Community Center Assets Exceeding Cap.; 2nd Season	-	-	-	-	-	1.0	-
Community Center Assets Exceeding Cap.; 3rd Season	-	-	-	-	-	1.0	-
Total 1st Quartile/Season Assets Exceeding Capacity	3.0	9.0	-	18.0	39.0	42.0	26.0
Total 2nd Quartile/Season Assets Exceeding Capacity	3.0	9.0	-	18.0	39.0	37.0	21.0
Total 3rd Quartile/Season Assets Exceeding Capacity	1.0	1.0	-	9.0	36.0	36.0	26.0

Figure 37 - Total Assets Where USAGES Exceed CAPACITY THRESHOLD

As noted previously, system wide capacity by asset type does exist; however, there are a multitude of individual assets which are being over-used in terms of intensity/frequency of hours in use. To meet the high individual usage demand placed on these assets, online assets with additional capacity or off-line assets (assets classified as receiving maintenance or rest) could be utilized to disperse some of the demanded hours across the system. However, the County may encounter extensive scheduling issues when trying to shift usages within the already crowded sport field asset inventory. Usages which had a higher amount of hours required to meet demand than suggested asset hours are depicted in the Appendix along with detailed usage.

3.2.3 PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

As illustrated previously in **Figure 36**, although user demand does not exceed capacity as a system, excess demand is present at individual assets (**Figure 37**). To meet the current demand and projected future demand, it is evident that the County will need to continue current partnerships and incubate new partnerships when possible.

3.2.3.1 SYNTHETIC SURFACES

Currently the County has limited synthetic surface resources. Of the 189 different assets analyzed for the Capacity–Demand Analysis, 14 (7.4%) have synthetic surfaces. When analyzing the benefit of utilizing synthetic turf as opposed to natural turf, not only should the annual cost saving associated with routine and preventative maintenance be studied, but the increase in potential capacity and the guaranteed integrity of the playing surface should also be emphasized.

Due to the differences in normal usage patterns experienced at diamond field assets and multipurpose field assets, it is only recommended that synthetic surfaces be installed at multipurpose fields – the level of intensity associated with “bat and ball” diamond sports is much less than that found in multipurpose field sports (i.e. soccer, football, lacrosse). Suggested capacity of a synthetic surface multipurpose asset with lighting is exponentially greater than that of many multipurpose assets currently in the County inventories. **Figure 38** illustrates the annual maintenance cost savings realized in most synthetic surface installations following the initial capital investment.

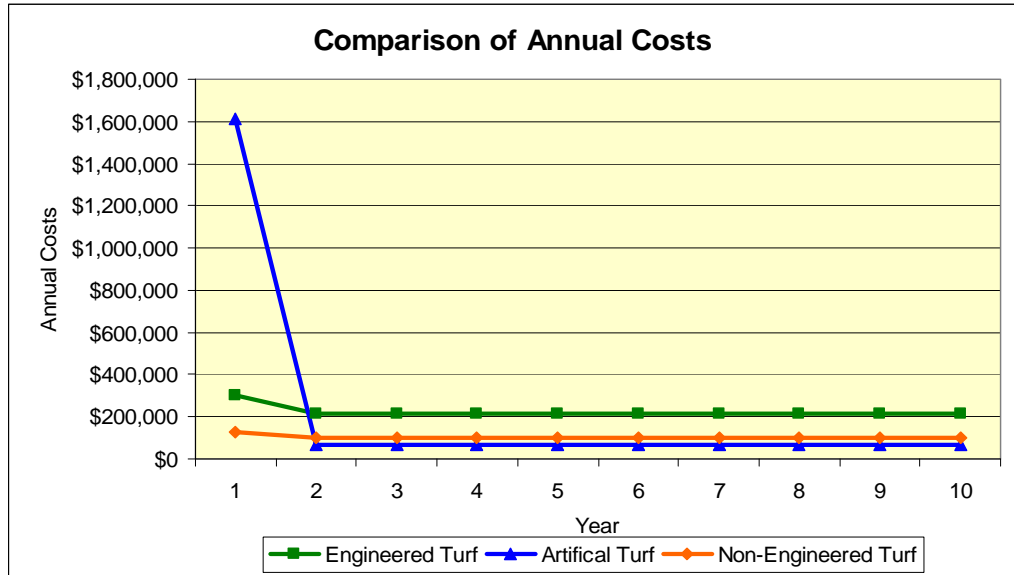


Figure 38 - Annual Cost Comparison by Field type; Average of 4 Acre Plot

Although overlays are not recommended for natural turf assets, one alternative that may be utilized to help alleviate the need for additional land is the combination of a synthetic multipurpose asset with a corner synthetic diamond field asset. This synthetic surface combination asset is designed to allow the multipurpose field to be completely independent of the diamond field asset infield area; the aggregate infield surface borders the boundaries of the multipurpose field but do not intrude onto the actual playing surface of the multipurpose asset. However, by combining the two distinct assets into one synthetic combination asset (an asset with an overlay), the capacity for each use (multipurpose field asset and diamond field asset) will in essence be reduced by half.

From a cost savings stand point, once the initial investment of the sports field has been made, an annual maintenance costs savings of thirty to sixty percent (30-60%) can be expected when comparing an engineered sport field asset to a synthetic surface sports field asset. Annual maintenance costs were derived utilizing average tasks associated with maintaining each field by type. This included the following tasks:

- Natural Turf, Engineered Surfaces
 - Labor – Mowing, fertilization, aerification, edging, pest control
 - Supplies and Equipment – Fertilizer, seed, fungicide, mower, edger, aerator, irrigation, and top dressing
- Synthetic Surfaces
 - Labor – Sweeping, grooming, weed control, pest control
 - Supplies and Equipment – various turf supplies, patches, sweeper

3.2.4 CONCLUSION

The results of the current Capacity–Demand Standards Model tm illustrate that as a whole, the County System meets the demand of the various user groups for all assets during each

quartile except for large multipurpose fields during the first quartile. However, analyzing assets on an individual basis illustrates that certain individual assets are operating with excessive demand. Such excessive wear can be detrimental to an asset's integrity. Excess usage is clearly evident by the 100+ individual assets exceeding optimal capacity during each of the three quartiles.

Some capacity shortages could be attributed to the current process of resting fields to generate optimum playing surfaces. Although this practice is highly recommended and extremely important for turf regeneration and high integrity sport fields, very few communities have the abundance of necessary assets to allow for a portion of the inventory to be offline during any one season.

It is recommended that the County continue partnering with neighboring towns and cities to provide recreational opportunities throughout the County. For optimal service offerings, PROS recommends that all existing and potential partners define strategies and policies for delivering services.

Due to the increased – nearly limitless – usage a synthetic surface can accommodate, it is recommended that the County consider developing two distinct athletic complexes to relieve the excess demand from current programming while establishing two tournament quality complexes with economic impact potential. Synthetic surfaces with lighting are only limited by the user's ability to schedule free time. Depending on the level of service that the County desires to maintain each asset at, the assumptions made for cost comparison may vary.

PROS recommends the following strategies to meet the capacity required by the existing and projected demand of the County and various user groups:

- Establish a rest and preventative/routine maintenance policy dictating a percentage of assets to be held off-line during each quartile/season
 - Establish partnership policy for each of the entities within the County to provide increased asset capacities and solidify working relationships
 - Establish priority usage policy based on entity participation
- Prepare cost and usage analysis for all Cooperative Use sport field assets to determine optimal operational, usage, and pricing agreements
 - An equitable partnership must be formed with all Cooperative Use providers that correlates to the level of service provided
 - Educate sports stakeholders (i.e. leagues, parents, coaches, sponsors) on the cost of service associated with Cooperative Use asset usage and benefits received; this can build support for future maintenance and capital improvement efforts
 - Adopt usage agreements that gradually cease overlay use
- Excess demand can be addressed and potential economic impact realized by developing a tournament quality youth/fast-pitch softball field complex and a multipurpose field complex



- Demand exceeds total capacity for large multipurpose field assets; development of a 8-10 field multipurpose field complex would alleviate excess demand while providing the County with the ability to shift usage patterns and attract tournament play; a minimum of four (4) fields should be regulation size fields with synthetic surfaces
- To assist in alleviating the high demand associated with softball fields, it is proposed that the County develop a youth/fast-pitch softball 6-8 field complex; currently only 37% the County's total softball field inventory is available for youth play (less than 300-foot fence dimensions)
- Evaluate existing multipurpose field assets to determine if conversion to synthetic surfaces is beneficial

Detailed asset inventory by usage by asset type, season, and site (park/school) is presented as a supplement in **Appendix A** of the **Appendix 5 – Capacity Demand Standards Model**. Detailed inventory by usage depicts all usages that occur at a specific asset; some assets have multiple usages per season. Capacity threshold by asset is also presented in **Appendix B** of the **Appendix 5 – Capacity Demand Standards Model**.

3.3 PRIORITIZED FACILITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The purpose of the Facility Needs Assessment is to provide a prioritized list of facility / amenity needs for the residents of Mecklenburg County. The Needs Assessment evaluates both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data includes the statistically valid Community Survey, which asked 1033 Mecklenburg County residents to list unmet needs and rank the importance. Qualitative data includes resident feedback obtained in Focus Group meetings, Key Leader Interviews, and Public Forums.

A weighted scoring system was used to determine the priorities for park and recreation facilities / amenities. This scoring system considers the following:

- Community Survey
 - Unmet needs for facilities– A factor from the total number of households mentioning their need for facilities. Survey participants were asked to identify the need for 28 different facilities. Weighted value of 4.
 - Importance ranking for facilities – Normalized factor, converted from the percent (%) ranking of facilities to a base number. Survey participants were asked to identify the top four facility needs. Weighted value of 3.
- Consultant Evaluation
 - Factor derived from the consultant’s evaluation of facility importance based on demographics, trends and community input. Weighted value of 3.

These weighted scores were then summed to provide an overall score and priority ranking for the system as a whole. The results of the priority ranking were tabulated into three categories: High Priority, Medium Priority, and Low Priority.

The combined total of the weighted scores for Community Unmet Needs, Community Priority and Consultant Evaluation is the total score based on which the Facility Priority is determined. **Figure 39** depicts the Facility / Amenity Needs Assessment for Mecklenburg County.



Figure 39 shows that walking and biking trails, small (2-10) acres neighborhood parks and nature center and trails were the top three facilities / amenities. These were followed by large community parks and district parks, indoor fitness and exercise facilities and playground equipment and play areas as the other high priority facility/amenity needs.

Mecklenburg County Facility / Amenity Needs Assessment	
	Overall Ranking
Walking and biking trails	1
Small (2-10 acres) neighborhood parks	2
Nature center and trails	3
Large community parks and district parks	4
Indoor fitness and exercise facilities	5
Playground equipment and play areas	6
Park shelters and picnic areas	7
Indoor swimming pools/leisure pool	8
Indoor running/walking track	9
Community gardens	10
Outdoor swimming and spraygrounds	11
Off-leash dog park	12
Small (less than 2 acres) pocket parks	13
Mountain bike trails	14
Outdoor tennis courts	15
Outdoor amphitheaters	16
Outdoor basketball courts	17
Indoor shelters	18
Golf courses	19
Youth/teen soccer fields	20
Indoor basketball/volleyball courts	21
Boating and sailing areas/sailing center	22
Youth/teen baseball and softball fields	23
Youth/teen football fields	24
Adult softball fields	25
Skateboard Park	26
Adult soccer fields	27
Soapbox Derby track	28

Figure 39 – Facility / Amenity Priority Needs Assessment

3.4 GENERAL PARK AND FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT PLAN

3.4.1 RECREATION CENTERS – SPECIAL FACILITY DEVELOPMENT

3.4.1.1 ASSESSMENT

The Master Plan’s citizen survey, community input, service analysis and needs assessments call for new and expanded recreation centers to serve the community in ways that include:

- Fitness and wellness
- Family recreation: multi-generational
- Senior citizens programs
- Youth/teen after-school programs
- Cultural arts programs

National standards for recreation centers call for 1.5 sq. ft. per capita, measured against the total population of the County. Mecklenburg currently has 1.02 sq. ft. per person, based on 387,122 total sq. ft. As the population grows dramatically in Mecklenburg over the next ten years, we will fall increasingly short of the standard. Projections estimate a shortage of 719,446 sq. ft. by 2017.

The trend in recreation centers is to build them larger, to accommodate more multi-generational activities and operate more cost efficiently. The size of our current recreation centers range from 12,000 to 27,000 which is far short of square footage by today’s standards. New recreation centers should be developed in the 50,000 sq. ft. plus range and regional recreation centers would range from 90,000-110,000 sq. ft., far larger than what we have now.

To help close the gap, the Master Plan envisions, over the next 10 years:

- Building four regional recreation centers, “destinations” that may tie-in with aquatics, nature centers, community and regional parks or future CMS school sites. Specific sites to be determined based on strategic locations in the four regions of the County
- Building two recreation centers to close the service gaps in key areas
- Expansion of nine existing recreation centers on key sites which allows significant increase of space and function to create “destination” facilities
- Renovation of three existing recreation centers specifically targeted to provide a specific program focus such as services to teens or senior citizens and for cultural arts
- Development of two cultural art facilities



3.4.1.2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology for where to build, expand, or renovate recreation centers is based on a ranking system which incorporates scores for the following criteria as well as takes into account the Arts and Science Council's Cultural Facilities Master Plan:

Master Planning

- Is the recreation center identified in the 2008 Parks Master Plan?

Property Ownership

- Does the County, or partnering entity, currently own all parcels necessary for recreation center development?

Service Gap

- Are there any developed recreation centers within a 2.5 mile radius?

Expansion

- Does the project expand the current scope of programming at the recreation center?

Partnership Opportunity

- Has a school, senior center, church, and / or library partnership opportunity been identified?
- Have outside funding sources been identified?
- Is the recreation center adjacent to a school, senior center, church, and / or library facility?

Linkages

- Is the recreation center adjacent to a planned and / or developed greenway?
- Is the recreation center adjacent to a planned and / or developed park?

Mass Transit

- Is the recreation center within a 0.5 mile radius of a public transportation station / depot?

A complete list of projects for the 5 and 10 year plan, cost estimates and amenities is in the 2008-2018 Capital Needs Assessment in the Master Plan. The Master Plan contemplates all recreation center development on existing County property.

3.4.2 AQUATIC CENTERS – SPECIAL FACILITY DEVELOPMENT

3.4.2.1 ASSESSMENT

The Mecklenburg County Comprehensive Master Plan's citizen survey, community input, service analysis and needs assessments notes the need for new and expanded aquatic facilities to provide the following services:

- Youth learn to swim programs
- Water fitness and safety programs

Typical national aquatic facility standards are .5 sq. ft. per person, measured against the total population of the County. Currently, Mecklenburg County has .08 sq. ft. per person of indoor aquatic space, based on 65,593 total sq. ft. The population is projected to continue to increase in Mecklenburg County over the next ten years which will increase the deficit. As a result of population growth, a deficit of 483,263 sq. ft. is projected by 2017.

The trend in aquatic facilities is to build zero depth entry, multi-generational facilities that can accommodate family fun, fitness and learn to swim activities as a component of a larger facility. Future plans include the construction of local and regional destination aquatic facilities to be designed for recreational, instructional and therapeutic uses. Sizes will vary however projections include intermediate to large sized facilities from approximately 30,000 sq. ft to 50,000 sq. ft.

To help close the gap, the following facilities are projected for the next 10 years:

- Construction of four regional indoor aquatic facilities centers as components of regional recreation centers on County-owned property. Construction of one intermediate sized indoor aquatic facility on County-owned property. Specific sites are to be determined based on strategic locations in the four regions of the County
- Construction of four outdoor aquatic facilities as part of existing recreation centers or parks to close the service gaps in key areas
- Expansion of two existing recreation centers to include aquatic facilities on key sites which results in the creation of intermediate size “destination” facilities
- Renovation or expansion of two existing indoor aquatic facilities specifically targeted to provide recreational, instructional, fitness, therapeutic and competitive programs.
- Construction of ten (10) outdoor spray grounds
- Renovation of two existing outdoor pools to include family fun features, instructional and water fitness activities

3.4.2.2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology for where to build, expand, or renovate aquatic facilities is based on a ranking system which incorporates scores for the following criteria the ability to build on County-owned land:

Amenity:

- Does the project provide an amenity or recreation activity no currently available?
- Does the project produce a new or enhanced revenue generating program?

Special Program:

- Has a unique population been identified as beneficiaries of the project?



- Does the project expand program offerings that address one of the following: (a) water Safety and learn to swim, (b) youth obesity or (c) crime prevention?
- Partnership Opportunity:
- Has a private or public partnership opportunity been identified?
- Will taxpayer dollars be saved via an identified partnership?
- Have outside funding sources been identified?

Linkages:

- Is the project adjacent to a planned or developed greenway?
- Is the project adjacent to a planned or developed nature center?
- Is the project adjacent to a planned or developed recreation center?
- Is the project adjacent to a planned or developed park?

Mass Transit:

- Is the project within a .5 mile radius of a public transportation station or depot?

A complete list of proposed projects for the 5 and 10 year plan, cost estimates and amenities is included in the 2008-2018 Capital Needs Assessment of the Master Plan.

CHAPTER FOUR - GREENWAYS MASTER PLAN UPDATE

4.1 INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY

The Mecklenburg County Greenways & Trails Master Plan has been updated as part of the preparation of the comprehensive Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The County's Greenways and Trails program is one of the oldest in North Carolina and the southeastern United States. In 1966, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Master Plan for recreation recommended greenways "as logical natural elements useful in creating a sense of physical form and order within the city." The plan proposed that greenways preserve the open space of urban residential areas while providing both active and passive recreation areas.



Although part of the planning fabric for several years, it was not until 1980 that an official greenway master plan was developed. The 1980 greenway master plan called for a 73-mile network of trails along 14 creek corridors. The plan envisioned a "green necklace" of creeks around the County that would address multiple objectives, including habitat conservation, recreation, alternative transportation, mitigation of flooding, and protection of water supply. In 1999, the County developed and adopted the Greenway Master Plan Update. The update built on the objectives articulated in the 1980 Master Plan. However, the focus of the program was expanded to concentrate more on stream corridor and floodplain protection. This 2008 update reaffirms the intent to adhere to the vision and objectives established within both the 1980 and 1999 master plans – to protect valued stream corridors for multiple purposes and to continue the development of appropriate creekside trails and overland connector trails.

Over the next five years, it is the goal of the County to continue the expansion of the greenway trail system principally on land the County currently owns or is close to acquiring. The five-year action plan identifies the construction of practical trail corridors that will serve County residents and fulfill their need for additional hiking and biking trails. The ten-year development plan will focus on connecting trail systems that will create significant linkages, enhance the regional trail network, and provide more residents with access to the growing trail system. The update also calls for the Park and Recreation Department to work closely with other agencies to identify and develop programs and policies that improve efficiency of developing a trail network system as well as focusing more attention on the stewardship of the greenway corridors so they may better serve their function as a conservation and enhancement tool for floodplain and riparian plant and wildlife habitat.

This 2008 update includes:



- A brief description of the existing greenways and trails system
- A plan of action that describes goals for trail planning, design, construction, phasing and operations
- A summary of benefits derived from the greenways and trail system
- An evaluation of best practices in greenway trail development across the region and nation
- An evaluation of regulatory policies and programs
- A list of recommendations for programming greenways and trails

At present, the County has over 30 miles of trail within 14 greenway and overland corridors. Over 7 miles of trails connect nearby residents from neighborhoods and park facilities to the main trail system. Through planning efforts of both greenway staff and Mecklenburg County Real Estate Services, over 3,000 acres of floodplain and riparian habitat have been conserved.

4.2 NEED FOR GREENWAYS AND TRAILS

There is a clear public need and desire for greenways and trail development in Mecklenburg County. In the fall 2007 and early 2008, Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation hosted a series of public meetings to seek public input on the master planning process. Greenways and trails were a major topic of discussion at these meetings. A community survey conducted by ETC Leisure Vision found that the development of walking and biking trails was an important and unmet need for the majority of Mecklenburg County residents.

The results of the 2008 Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation Master Plan update reveal the public's appreciation for natural areas and their desire for a comprehensive trail system. Echoing results found in Charlotte Department of Transportation's (CDOT) bicycle and pedestrian survey results, residents desired and supported the development of an interconnected trail system.

From a list of 28 parks and recreation facilities, the top 5 public requests were:

- 74% walking and biking trails (national average 68%)
- 63% Large community parks and district parks
- 62% Nature center and trails (national average 57%)
- 61% Small neighborhood parks of 2-10 acres
- 59% Park shelters and picnic areas

Survey results indicate County residents understand and support the role of greenways as both corridors for environmental protection and potential trail development.

- 93% of all residents felt the role of greenways as a connected network of walking, biking and nature trails was very important (75%) or somewhat important (18%).
- 88% of all residents felt the role greenways played in environmental protection was very important (65%) or somewhat important (23%).

- 80% of residents support (56% very supportive, 24% somewhat supportive) using floodplain land to develop biking and walking trails

The results generated by the Mecklenburg County survey support trends seen throughout the state and nation. The results of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) for North Carolina closely mimic Mecklenburg County survey results, and provide a strong rationale for natural resource conservation and the development of a strong trail system. According to the SCORP, the most popular outdoor activities for NC residents are:

- 75% Walking for pleasure
- 62% Visiting historical sites
- 71% Viewing scenery
- 53% Visiting natural areas
- 52% Picnicking

4.3 BENEFITS OF THE GREENWAYS AND TRAILS SYSTEM

Greenways and trails provide a variety of benefits that ultimately affect the sustainability of a community's economic, environmental, and social health. These benefits include:

- Creating Value and Generating Economic Activity
- Encouraging Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation
- Improving Health through Active Living
- Providing Clear Skies, Clean Water, Protected Habitat
- Protecting People and Property from Flood Damage
- Enhancing Cultural Awareness and Community Identity
- Providing Safe Places for Outdoor Activities
- Creative value and Generating Economic Impact

There are many examples, both nationally and locally, that affirm the positive connection between greenspace and property values. Studies indicate residential properties will realize a greater gain in value the closer they are located to trails and greenspace. According to a 2002 survey of recent homebuyers by the National Association of Home Realtors and the National Association of Home Builders, trails ranked as the second most important community amenity out of a list of 18 choices. The study also found that trail availability outranked 16 other options including security, ball fields, golf courses, parks, and access to shopping or business centers. Findings from the Trust for Public Land's *Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space*, and the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's *Economic Benefits of Trails and Greenways* (listed in the plan) illustrate how trail development and greenspace improve property values across the country.





4.3.1 ENCOURAGING BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN TRANSPORTATION

The sprawling nature of many land development patterns often leaves residents and visitors with no choice but to drive, even for short trips. In fact, two-thirds of all trips made are for a distance of five miles or less. Surveys by the Federal Highway Administration show that



Americans are willing to walk as far as two miles to a destination and bicycle as far as five miles. A complete trail network as part of the local transportation system, will offer effective transportation alternatives by connecting homes, workplaces, schools, parks, downtowns, and cultural attractions.

Greenway trail networks can provide alternative transportation links that are currently unavailable. Residents who live in subdivisions outside of downtown areas are able to walk or bike downtown for work, or simply for recreation. Trails allow residents to circulate through urban areas in a safe,

efficient, and fun way: walking or biking. Residents are able to move freely along trail corridors without paying increasingly high gas prices and sitting in ever-growing automobile traffic. Last but not least, regional connectivity through alternative transportation could be achieved once adjacent trail networks are completed and combined.

4.3.2 IMPROVING HEALTH THROUGH ACTIVE LIVING

A region's trail network will contribute to the overall health of residents by offering people attractive, safe, accessible places to bike, walk, hike, jog, skate, and possibly places to enjoy water-based trails. In short, the trail network will create better opportunities for active lifestyles. The design of communities—including towns, subdivisions, transportation systems, parks, trails and other public recreational facilities—affects people's ability to reach the recommended 30 minutes each day of moderately intense physical activity (60 minutes for youth). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Physical inactivity causes numerous physical and mental health problems, is responsible for an estimated 200,000 deaths per year, and contributes to the obesity epidemic".

In identifying a solution, the CDC determined that by creating and improving places in our communities for physical activity, there could be a 25 percent increase in the percentage of people who exercise at least three times a week. This is significant considering that for people who are inactive, even small increases in physical activity can bring measurable health benefits. Additionally, as people become more physically active outdoors, they make connections with their neighbors that contribute to the health of their community.

Many public agencies are teaming up with foundations, universities, and private companies to launch a new kind of health campaign that focuses on improving people's options instead of reforming their behavior. A 2005 Newsweek Magazine feature, *Designing Heart-Healthy Communities*, cites the goals of such programs "The goals range from updating restaurant menus to restoring mass transit, but the most visible efforts focus on making the built environment more conducive to walking and cycling." Clearly, the connection between

health and trails is becoming common knowledge. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy puts it simply: “Individuals must choose to exercise, but communities can make that choice easier.”

4.3.3 PROVIDING CLEAR SKIES, CLEAN WATER AND PROTECTED HABITAT

There are a multitude of environmental benefits from trails, greenways, and open spaces that help to protect the essential functions performed by natural ecosystems. Greenways protect and link fragmented habitat and provide opportunities for protecting plant and animal species. Trails and greenways reduce air pollution by two significant means: first, they provide enjoyable and safe alternatives to the automobile, which reduces the burning of fossil fuels; second, they protect forested and natural areas that create oxygen and filter air pollutants such as ozone, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide and airborne particles of heavy metal. Greenways improve water quality by creating a natural buffer zone that protects streams, rivers and lakes, preventing soil erosion and filtering pollution caused by agricultural and road runoff.



As an educational tool, trail signage can be designed to inform trail-users about water quality issues particular to each watershed. Such signs could also include tips on how to improve water quality. Similarly, a greenway can serve as a hands-on environmental classroom for people of all ages to experience natural landscapes, furthering environmental awareness.

4.3.4 PROTECTING PEOPLE AND PROPERTY FROM FLOOD DAMAGE

The protection of open spaces associated with trail and greenway development often also protects natural floodplains along rivers and streams. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the implementation of floodplain ordinances is estimated to prevent \$1.1 billion in flood damages annually. By restoring developed floodplains to their natural state and protecting them as greenways, many riverside communities are preventing potential flood damages and related costs.

Mecklenburg County has had its share of success converting former repetitive flood prone properties to restored greenway lands. Along Little Sugar Creek, the Westfield Road restoration project was completed in 2004. This project began with the purchase and removal of 70 flood-prone structures from the floodplain, followed by restoration of stream banks and wetlands and more effective management of storm water from surrounding areas. Funding for the Westfield Road project came from a wide range of sources, including the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services, Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation, North Carolina Department of Water Quality, and the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund.



4.3.5 ENHANCING CULTURAL AWARENESS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY



Trails, greenways, and open space can serve as connections to local heritage by preserving historic places and providing access to them. They provide a sense of place and an understanding of past events by drawing greater public attention to historic and cultural locations and events. Trails often provide access to historic sites such as battlegrounds, bridges, buildings, and canals that otherwise would be difficult to access or interpret.

Each community and region has its own unique history, its own features and destinations, and its own landscapes. By recognizing, honoring, and connecting these features, the combined results serve to enhance cultural awareness and community identity, potentially attracting tourism. Being

aware of the historical and cultural context when naming parks and trails and designing features will further enhance the overall trail and park visitor's experience.

4.3.6 PROVIDING SAFE PLACES FOR OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Greenways are one of the most studied landscapes in America. Countless surveys, reports and studies have been conducted by different organizations to determine the actual number and types of incidents that have occurred on greenways. In Mecklenburg County, an assessment of crime and the risk of crime have been studied extensively by geographers at the University of North Carolina Charlotte over a 10 year period. Two fundamental questions were asked and answered by this decade long study:

- 1) Do greenways suffer higher crime risk than nearby non-greenway properties?
- 2) Are greenways as safe as the urban landscapes that surround them?

The researchers examined all types of crime and concluded that the subject of violent crime could not be addressed because virtually no violent crime was recorded during the 10-year period. Therefore, they addressed property crime. They looked specifically at the Mallard Creek Greenway in North Charlotte and worked with law enforcement officials to gather and examine actual police reports. The researchers identified the number of reported crimes in the County as a whole (53,947), and within the district where the greenway is located (4,701) and then the greenway itself. They concluded that criminal activity associated with the greenway, in comparison to its landscape context, was negligible. The researchers concluded that greenways are not an attractive nuisance and do not attract crime or a criminal element.

Numerous other studies throughout the United States confirm what the researchers at UNC Charlotte found, that greenways do not attract crime, they are not havens for criminals, and that people living adjacent to greenways are not likely to experience an increase in crime as a result of living in close proximity to a greenway. A study in Indianapolis, IN, concluded that people who use the greenway were more likely to be in a safer environment than if they were physically located in the adjacent residential neighborhood.

4.4 REVIEW OF PEER COMMUNITIES

North Carolina has always been a leader in the national greenway movement. The state was one of the first in the nation to embrace a statewide forum supporting greenway creation at the local level. North Carolina is one of the few states in the nation to have appointed a Governor's Commission to examine the greenway movement and recommend strategies for implementing greenways at all levels of government and in the private sector.

Within this context, Mecklenburg County has been the most progressive of the 100 North Carolina counties with respect to planning and implementing a County-wide greenway program. The vast majority of greenway implementation success in North Carolina has occurred at the municipal level.

More than 50 North Carolina communities of all sizes are engaged in greenway implementation. All of the large metropolitan areas, Raleigh, Durham, High Point, Greensboro, Winston-Salem, Asheville, Cary, Fayetteville and Wilmington have developed greenway trails. Of these municipal programs, Raleigh's Capital Area Greenway Program is often considered to be the oldest and most comprehensive, exhibiting many "best practices." While Raleigh's system is certainly one of the oldest, Greensboro actually has more miles (80) of constructed greenway trail than any other North Carolina municipality. Raleigh has approximately 60 miles of constructed greenway trail.

4.5 5-YEAR ACTION PLAN

To meet the needs and expectations of County residents, the five year action plan will pursue an aggressive schedule for trail development. The focus will be on County-owned land with the goal of providing more trails to more residents. Concurrent goals include the improved efficiency of the design and permitting process in an effort to meet the trail development goals.

Goal – To construct 42.8 miles of new greenway trail by 2013

- Launch construction of 12.8 miles of currently funded projects within the first year of the plan's adoption
- Geographically disperse trail development throughout the County and surrounding towns
- Focus trail construction on publicly-owned land
- Work with permitting agencies to streamline the trail design and development process

Goal – To identify and prioritize acquisition efforts for the 10 year trail development plan

- Base trail development and associated land acquisition on developed ranking methodology
- Confirm feasibility of targeted trail construction priorities after two years (2010)

Goal – To improve connectivity to the existing and proposed greenway trail system



- Work with Charlotte Department of Transportation and coordinate planning and development of overland connections
- Work with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Department and other municipal planning departments to incorporate greenway corridor conservation and trail development into the rezoning and subdivision processes
- Work with the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) to incorporate trail development and connectivity to transit facilities
- Incorporate the greenway corridor system into the Long Range Transportation Plan
- Work with potential partners to synchronize trail development efforts and explore funding opportunities
- Work with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools to locate and construct neighborhood entrances that link schools and residential areas
- Implement improvements to the existing trail system

Goal – To identify and designate official routes of the Carolina Thread Trail

- Identify Little Sugar Creek, Long Creek, Mallard Creek and portions of Irwin Creek as initial corridors of the Carolina Thread Trail
- Work with the municipalities within Mecklenburg County to identify the additional Thread trail segments and formally adopt an alignment by 2009

Goal – To better facilitate multi-agency approach to trail development

- Work with CMU to prepare and adopt a joint use sanitary sewer and greenway easement instrument to be used when acquiring new joint use corridors
- Work with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services to adopt a joint use easement to be used when acquiring property for stream restoration and trail development
- Work with Duke Energy and other utilities on a joint use easement to develop greenway trail facilities within these easements
- Investigate possible ordinance amendments to encourage trail development for Charlotte-Mecklenburg and the surrounding municipalities

Goal – To explore policies and programs so that greenway corridors may better function as a conservation and enhancement tool for floodplain and riparian plant and wildlife habitat

- Work with Stewardship Services on management strategies for greenway corridors
- Work with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services to identify partnership projects and improvement projects within greenway corridors
- Work with Extension Services and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services to brainstorm and develop outreach efforts to educate and involve homeowners within the greenway corridors as to the value of the riparian habitats and possible backyard improvements homeowners can make to conserve and/or improve floodplain habitat

4.6 10 YEAR ACTION PLAN

The ten year action plan sets forth an ambitious goal of adding an additional 61 miles of proposed trail. The feasibility of this goal will be reassessed within the first two years of the 5 year action plan to realistically assess the proposed development goals. However, a focus will remain on finishing significant stretches of trail, including Little Sugar Creek and Mallard Creek greenways.

Goal – To construct 61.9 miles of new greenway trail by 2018, bringing the total miles of constructed greenway trail to 129

- Disperse trail development throughout the County and surrounding towns
- Extend developed greenway trail and increase connectivity between greenway trail systems
- Complete signature trails including Little Sugar Creek Greenway, Mallard Creek Greenway, and McDowell Creek Greenway
- Work with surrounding counties to identify desired regional connections

4.7 MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The County recognizes that to ensure residents continue to benefit from the greenway and trail system there must be a commitment to the protection and conservation of riparian corridors, the development of trails that provide desired connections and outdoor recreation opportunities. The following policy recommendations will guide the department in the planning and development of greenway corridors.



4.7.1 STAKEHOLDER APPROACH TO PLANNING

The greenway trails listed in the five and ten year action plan will undergo additional planning and design to ensure that the public has the opportunity to have input into the final route and alignment of each trail segment and to identify the opportunities and constraints associated with project development. In an effort to better engage the public in the planning and development process associated with greenway trail development, the Department will use a stakeholder approach to greenway trail design. The stakeholder group will be formed before the first community workshop is held. Group participation should be limited (12 persons, maximum) and made up of an array of citizen and local officials with a specific interest in the planning and design of the proposed trail section. For each trail segment, potential stakeholders will be identified and may include, but are not limited to, a representative of each of the following groups:

- Surrounding Homeowners/HOA Board Members
- Park and Greenway Advisory Council Members



- Local Business Owners
- Local Advocacy/Special Interest Groups
- Town and/or Planning Board Members
- Park and Recreation Division Manager
- Transportation Staff
- School Staff
- Health Department Staff

4.7.2 INCORPORATION OF TOWN GREENWAYS AND TRAILS PLANS

Since the 1999 Greenway Master Plan update, many of the surrounding towns have developed and adopted their own greenways and trails master plans. Greenway Planning and Development staff will serve as consultants to the towns to help implement the adopted plans. The plans and priorities of the towns are and will continue to be reflected in the County's greenways and trails development goals.

4.7.3 COORDINATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES

To meet the goals advanced in this update, there will need to be considerable collaboration with partners, including permitting agencies, surrounding towns, advocacy groups and others. The update contains an Appendix which specifically addresses the current opportunities and constraints for greenway trail development as defined by existing codes, policies and ordinances. The following are some of the recommendations resulting from this overview:

- Hold a policy summit with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Department and surrounding towns' planning departments to consider changes to the adoption of uniform open space, greenways, and parks standards
- Work with County and City storm water and floodplain management officials to discuss an appropriate County-wide strategy for building greenways that address issues related to the Post Construction Ordinance and floodplain development ordinance
- Work with Duke Energy and other utility agencies on the development of trails within utility corridors

4.7.4 CAPITAL COSTS 5 & 10 YEAR ACTION PLANS

Current capital needs for the planning, development and implementation of the five and ten year action plan, as well as improvements to existing facilities, is estimated at \$161,282,000. These capital costs do not include land acquisition.

4.8 RANKING CRITERIA

The Greenway Team has established the following ranking criteria to assist with the Capital Needs Assessment prioritization of greenway trails.

- **No Significant Barrier to Construction** – Barriers such as railroads, interstates, major infrastructure, difficult grades, and others present physical and financial obstacles to greenway trail construction. Preference should be given to greenways that do not require unusually difficult construction or high costs.
 - Ten (10) points awarded when a greenway trail does not encounter a significant barrier to construction.
- **Percent Planned Miles Developed per Park District** – Guarantees that all areas of the County get equal consideration for greenway trail development. Points are awarded based on the percentage of greenway miles identified in the Master Plan (per Park District) that are under design, construction, or currently developed. Greenway projects in Park Districts that have a smaller percentage of planned miles developed are awarded more points.
 - <10% of planned miles developed = 10 points.
 - 11% through 30% of planned miles developed = 5 points.
 - 31% through 50% of planned miles developed = 2 points.
 - > 50% of planned miles developed = 0 points.



The current % per park district including current projects as of 3/17/2008 is as follows:

- CPD1: 2.42 / 9.7 = 25% = 5 Points
- CPD2: 2.50 / 9.5 = 26% = 5 Points
- CPD3: 5.48 / 9.9 = 55% = 0 Points
- EAST: 1.36 / 15.6 = 9% = 10 Points
- NORTH: 7.5 / 36.6 = 20% = 5 Points
- NE: 10.24 / 47.4 = 22% = 5 Points
- NW: 0.0 / 31.0 = 0% = 10 Points
- SOUTH: 13.33 / 64.2 = 21% = 5 Points
- SW: 0.49 / 26.7 = 2% = 10 Points

- **Project Partnership, Public or Private** – Greenway is planned and built in conjunction with another public or private project. Examples include Carolina Thread Trail, CHA Housing projects, Metropolitan Midtown, CPCC expansion, CDOT sidewalk extension, LUESA Stream Restoration, CMUD Relief Sewer, and others. There may not be a quantifiable dollar amount known, but it is perceived that when projects are done together there are some major cost savings involved.



- 10 points awarded per partnership mile
- **Funding Partnership, Public or Private** – Funding can limit expansion of the greenway system. MCPR has success with park and greenway bonds, but it is important to consider seeking additional funds from other sources, and/or partnering with other projects to save cost. Examples include seeking donations from developers through the rezoning process, partnering with the towns as they apply for grants, or partnering with other public agencies such as LUESA, CDOT, or CMUD.
 - 1 point awarded per \$10,000 contributed to a greenway project from an outside agency.
- **Located within the ETJ of a surrounding Town** – MCPR has a goal of reaching out to provide equal service of park and greenway facilities County-wide. This includes the six surrounding towns in the County other than Charlotte.
 - 10 points awarded when greenway encounters ETJ of a surrounding town.
- **Listed in Other Adopted Plans or Studies** – The 1999 Greenway Master Plan took a comprehensive look at the planned greenway system for 10 years. It is also important that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission and six small towns in the County have established district, small area, neighborhood, corridor, and transit plans which reference greenway linkages as a key objective and policy guide. This criterion incorporates other County and municipal policies into greenway trail development.
 - 5 points if greenway section is listed in any other plan

4.8.1 LINKS

Being linear features, greenway trails function best when they link to points of interests and activated spaces. Each criterion below is important to the prioritization for development. A particular greenway receives the number of points specified for each link and a smaller number of points for each additional link.

- **Link to a Public or Private School** – Greenway trails can provide an alternative means of transportation for students and school staff as well as educational opportunities for students. This criterion applies to any pre-K through 12th grade public or private school.
 - 5 points for the first link, 2 points per additional links
- **Link to another Park, Greenway, Recreation Center, Nature Preserve, or Cultural Arts/Historical Facility/Property** – Connection to these facilities is one of the primary goals of the greenway system. It is important to look at how greenways connect to other recreational and cultural opportunities.
 - 5 points for the first link, 2 points per additional links
- **Link to a Planned Regional Trail (ex. – Carolina Thread Trail)** – It is important for MCPR to contribute to the vision for regional trails and as such should prioritize those greenway trails that would connect to a delineated regional trail.

- 5 points for providing a regional trail connection
- **Link to a “Destination” Listed in the Master Plan** – The Greenway Master Plan will provide a list of significant destinations that should be a connectivity focus for the greenway program. Some examples are Bank of America Stadium, Carowinds, U.S. National Whitewater Center, Verizon Amphitheatre, and James K. Polk site.
 - 4 points for the first link, 1 point per additional link
- **Link to a College or Library** – These institutions are centers for civic and cultural activity and also are hubs of pedestrian activity, making them ideal targets for greenway trail connection.
 - 3 points for the first link, 1 point per additional link
- **Link to a Mixed-Use Development** – Greenway trails play a key role in creating a pedestrian-friendly community. Likewise, mixed-use centers are built to accommodate pedestrians. Connecting to urban centers such as Birkdale increases the mobility of pedestrians.
 - 3 points for the first link, 1 point per additional link
- **Link to Transit** – Another primary goal of the greenway trail system is to provide transportation alternatives, and to link to other transportation opportunities. As the CATS bus and light rail systems continue to expand, greenway linkage to mass transit becomes extremely important.
 - 3 points for linking to light rail station, regional transit centers, or park & ride lots
 - 1 point per link to bus stops/bus routes
- **Link to Office or Commercial Area** – It is also important for the greenway system to connect to other uses besides residential areas and parks to encourage use of greenways for commuting to work and performing errands. This criterion can be applied to retail services and office complexes.
 - 3 points for linking to a business park
 - 3 points for linking to a regional shopping center (ex. Southpark, Northlake)
 - 1 point per link to general office or commercial area
- **Opportunity for a Neighborhood Access** – The more neighborhoods that are connected to the greenways, the greater the potential number of greenway patrons. Neighborhood access points should be emphasized to encourage more people to use the greenways.
 - 2 points per potential neighborhood access

4.8.2 LAND ACQUISITION MULTIPLIER

The most important factor in prioritizing greenway trail construction is property ownership. Therefore, greenway sections with the fewest parcels remaining to be acquired should be given highest priority.

- **Land Acquisition Multiplier** – The sub-total of all other ranking criteria is multiplied as shown below based on the number of parcels remaining to be purchased.



- Multiply based on the number of parcels remaining to be purchased.
 - 0 parcels = total (1)
 - 1 – 3 parcels = total (.75)
 - 4 – 6 parcels = total (.5)
 - 6+ parcels = total (.25)

Figure 40 outlines the Greenway Master Plan and the Greenway Corridors in the County, while **Figure 41** demonstrates the priorities in 5 year and 10 year timelines for the planned projects.

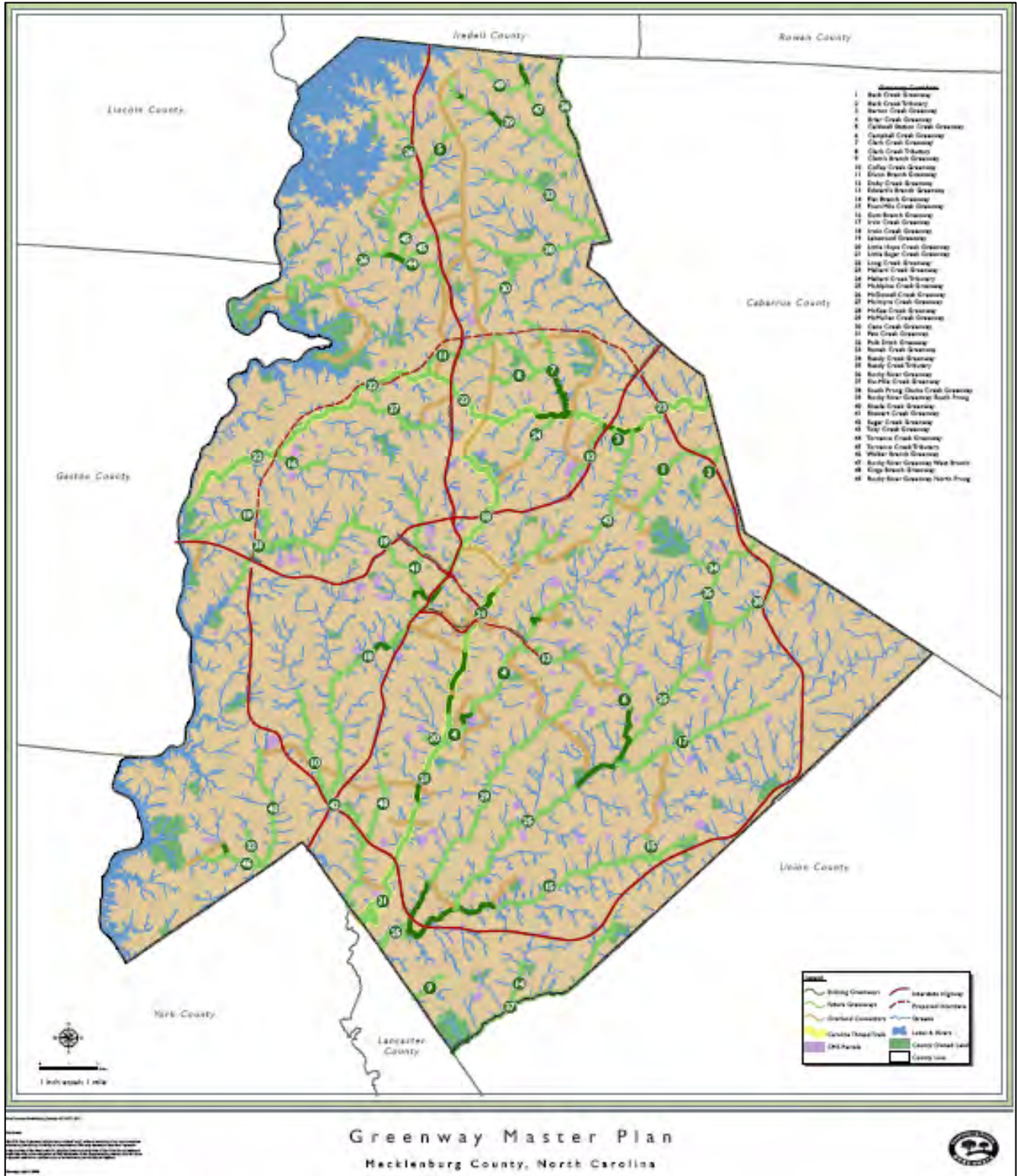


Figure 40 - Greenway Master Plan

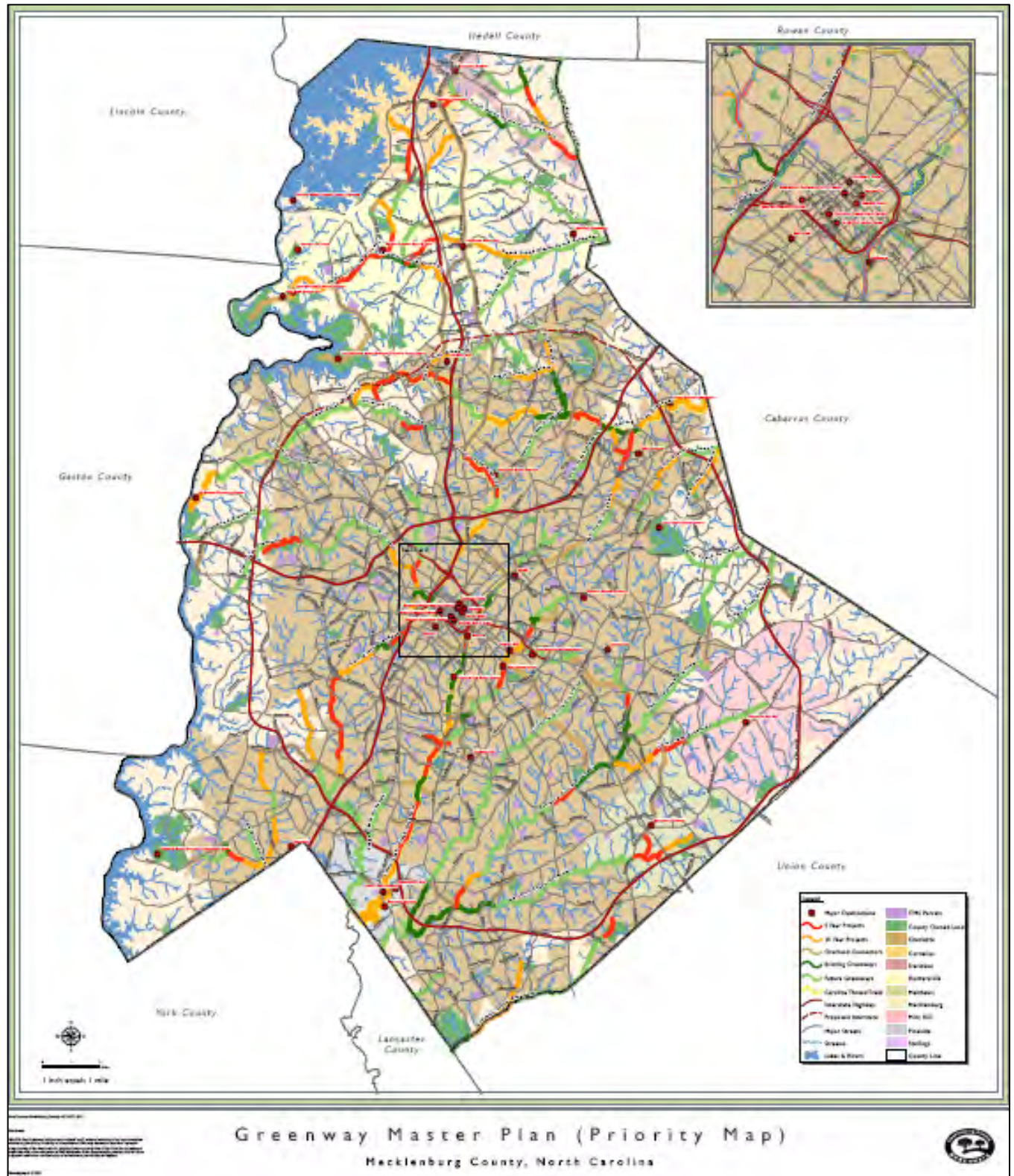


Figure 41 - Greenway Master Plan (Priority Map)

CHAPTER FIVE - NATURE PRESERVES MASTER PLAN UPDATE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The Mecklenburg County Nature Preserves Master Plan has been updated as part of the 2008 Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Master Plan. The Division of Nature Preserves and Natural Resources (formerly the Stewardship Services Division) has been utilizing the 1997 Nature Preserves Public Use Master Plan and the 2003 update to manage a growing system of nature preserves; however, due to system-wide growth it has become evident the plan needs to be updated. The 2008 plan includes: a review of the Division’s Mission and Vision; an overview of the benefits of natural resource conservation, natural areas, and nature-based programming; a review of nature preserve distribution;



management goals and policies; management strategies for nature preserves; a strategic acquisition strategy for future land protection; recommendations for future facilities and programming; and capital costs associated the recommendations. Currently, the Division protects and manages 14 nature preserves on 5,783.4 acres. Facilities and services include the operation of three nature centers, a 56-site campground, 35 miles of hiking trails, 37 parking areas, 25 bathrooms, and five picnic shelters. Nature-based and outdoor adventure recreation programs are provided for over 50,000 participants annually. Latta Plantation, Reedy Creek, and McDowell Nature Preserves provide outdoor nature-based recreation opportunities for over 500,000 visitors per year. Natural Resources staff collect and analyze scientific data used for land management, planning, and the land use decision making process. Staff identify, inventory and monitor natural areas, maintain the largest wildlife database in the region, manage for rare, threatened, and federally endangered species, and provide technical assistance to government agencies, outside organizations, and the public.

The mission for the Mecklenburg County Division of Nature Preserves and Natural Resources is to *“protect the region’s biodiversity and natural heritage for its inherent value and for the benefit of future generations by promoting open space reservation, conserving natural communities, and fostering awareness and stewardship through environmental education and outdoor recreation.”*

The vision is for *“natural communities to exist within Mecklenburg County in perpetuity and for these interconnected high-quality natural areas to benefit and be valued by all citizens.”*

Definition—Nature Preserves protect natural areas and are managed for their ecological value and native biodiversity, and where appropriate, provide the public with the opportunity to explore and experience nature.



- Nature preserves protect and enhance our air and water quality, contribute to the public understanding of natural systems and native species, provide sites for educational activities, outdoor recreation, wildlife observation, and nature appreciation, and preserve unique features and the natural beauty of Mecklenburg County.
- Acquisition or designation of sites of any size is authorized where warranted to protect a significant ecological, geological, or cultural resource (when co-located with a significant ecological resource).

Objectives—Nature preserves, as designated by the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners, are declared to be at their highest and best use for public benefit by serving one or more of the following public purposes:

- Contribute to the growth and development of public understanding of and empathy for natural systems, and the consequent development of public understanding for the interdependence of all forms of life and vital dependence of the health of the human community on the health of other natural communities.
- Provide sites for scientific research and examples for scientific comparison with more disturbed sites.
- Provide sites for educational activities and places where people may observe the natural world, learn about environmental systems, and reflect upon nature.
- Provide habitat for the survival of rare plants or animals, natural communities, or other significant biological features.
- Provide opportunities for nature-based recreation compatible with the protection of the natural area.
- Provide places for the preservation of natural beauty or unique/unusual natural features.
- Provide large, contiguous undeveloped natural lands in perpetuity for the purpose of conserving open space and creating wildlife corridors within densely developing urban areas.
- Provide small habitat areas within urban or suburban development areas that can act as “stepping stones” to habitat corridors or between larger protected habitat areas.

5.2 NEED FOR NATURE PRESERVES

There is a clear public need and desire for nature-based recreation in Mecklenburg County. Public input framed the planning process for the 1997 Nature Preserves Master Plan. A series of meetings were conducted with stakeholders throughout the County. It became clear through those public meetings that residents desired passive open space and natural areas that would allow walking/hiking, wildlife viewing, and opportunities to learn about the natural heritage of their community. Over the past 10 years, community support for open spaces and natural resource conservation remained strong. The visioning efforts for the 2008 Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Master Plan clearly reveal the public’s

appreciation for natural areas. Stakeholders and focus groups from all geographic areas of the County stated that open space and natural resources are very important to the community. Representative comments from stakeholders and focus groups include:

- *“Do not have enough nature preserves.”*
- *“Preservation of the environment, our society, and our youth is what is expected of the County.”*
- *“Natural settings provide a great way to center yourself in an urban environment.”*
- *“The availability of green space is of high value.”*
- *“Green Space needs should be a focus. This includes the environment and air quality.”*
- *“Water protection and the connection to open spaces needs to continue to be a ‘strength’ of the system.”*
- *“We need to be a ‘green’ community.”*
- *“Land acquisition is a high priority.”*
- *“Environmental stewardship is a strength of the system.”*

The importance of nature preserves and their associated facilities and programming was further revealed and confirmed in the random household Community Survey conducted as part of the master planning process. The survey was completed in January 2008, and had a goal of 1,000 completed surveys. The survey results are statistically valid with a confidence level of 95% (+/- 3.5%). The results of the survey continue to confirm that County residents value nature preserves and the outdoor opportunities they provide. Representative data include:



- Seventy-six percent (76%) of residents have visited a Mecklenburg County park in the past year (national average 72%).
- Top two reasons people visited parks: enjoyment of the outdoors (62%) and close to home (61%).
- (Only) 39% of residents feel there are sufficient parks and green space within walking distance of their homes.

From a list of 28 types of parks and recreation facilities, the top 5 requested by the public were:

- 76% Walking and biking trails (national average 68%)
- 64% Large community parks and regional parks
- 62% Nature center and trails (national average 57%)



- 62% Small neighborhood parks of 2-10 acres
- 60% Park shelters and picnic areas

Soccer fields (32%), youth baseball/softball fields (32%), football fields (27%), golf courses (26%), and other athletic facilities/amenities were all considerably lower.

The top three needs (currently only being 50% met or less), based on 335,891 households in the County, are:

- Walking and biking trails
- Nature center and trails
- Community gardens

Most popular/top four programs residents have a need for (from a list of 22 program categories) include:

- 50% Special events/festivals
- 49% Adult fitness and wellness programs
- 39% Family recreation/outdoor adventure programs
- 37% Nature education programs

The results of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) for North Carolina closely mimic the Mecklenburg County survey results, and provide a strong rationale for natural resource conservation and the provision of nature preserves. According to the SCORP, outdoor activities for North Carolina residents are very popular and include:

- 75% Walking for pleasure
- 71% Viewing scenery
- 62% Visiting historical sites
- 53% Visiting natural areas
- 52% Picnicking

All of these activities and more are experienced at County nature preserves. Outdoor recreation surveys at the national level have also shown the desire of Americans to have outdoor experiences. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has conducted a nationwide recreation survey every five years since 1955. It is one of the oldest and most comprehensive continuing recreation surveys in the country. The 2006 survey found that 87.5 million U.S. residents 16 and older participated in wildlife-related recreation. Of that, the vast majority participated in wildlife watching activities (i.e. bird watching, nature observation, nature photography, etc.) with approximately 71.1 million residents participating in these activities. This was an 8% increase over the prior survey. In contrast, the number of sportspersons (fishers and hunters) declined by 10%. Overall, nearly a third of the U.S. population enjoyed wildlife watching in 2006. Of all wildlife, birds attracted the biggest following, with 47.7 million participating from home, close to home, or taking trips specifically to bird watch. Additionally, these wildlife watchers spent \$45.7 billion on their

activities. Survey responses revealed that benefits to outdoor enthusiasts range from personal satisfaction to social interaction. Wildlife watchers make up one of the largest segments of visitors served at nature preserves.

Finally, the Outdoor Industry Foundations Outdoor Recreation Participation Study™ (research conducted by The Leisure Trends Group) provides data on numerous trends since 1998. The objectives of this study are to “annually track nationwide participation levels for Americans 16 and older in active outdoor activities, give insight into American’s behavior as outdoor recreationists, and provide independent and projectable research to help the outdoor industry.”

Key findings of the 2006 report include:

- 161.1 million (72%) Americans 16 and older participated in an outdoor activity in 2005.
- The majority of these Americans participated in between one and three activities (62.6%).
- The top five active outdoor activities* by percent of Americans who participated are: Bicycling, Fishing, Hiking, Camping, and Trail Running.
 - *Wildlife watching was not an activity measured by this survey. This survey included only active outdoor recreational pursuits.

All of the top five activities, especially fishing, hiking, camping, and trail running, are offered at Mecklenburg County nature preserves. Although not one of the top five activities, the activity with the greatest decline over the eight year period was overnight backpacking (22.5% decline). This follows a national trend where the greatest growth in individual outdoor activities are those that can be “Done in a Day.” For instance, hiking (on unpaved trails) continues to remain one of the most popular outdoor activities. The 2005 American hiker was a relatively balanced demographic by gender, household affluence, children in household, and region of the country. The average hiker hit the trails on average 11 times in 2005, with 20% hiking more than 11 times. Additionally, Hispanic hikers are increasing in numbers. Results such as these highlight the importance of providing “local” and “close to home” opportunities to explore nature, hike, trail run, bird watch, picnic, canoe/kayak, fish, and camp.



Results of these local and national surveys provide the basis for many of the recommendations contained within this Master Plan. Arguably, never before has the need and desire by the public for nature preserves, access to nature trails and facilities, and nature-based outdoor recreational programming been so strong at both the local and national level.



5.3 BENEFITS OF THE NATURE PRESERVE SYSTEM

The benefits of acquiring, protecting and managing natural preserves are numerous. For the purpose of this report, they are broken down into three categories: Environmental, Economy, and Health/Quality of Life benefits. For more information, refer to the full 2008 plan.

5.3.1 ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

The environmental benefits of protecting open space, high quality natural areas, tree-canopy, watersheds, and shorelines are extensive as there is a direct correlation between forested lands and water quality. The County has experienced a significant loss of open space to development and an increase of impervious surfaces in the past 20 years. Increased storm water runoff from these surfaces creates significant impacts to our streams, lakes, and water quality. The run-off enters creeks and tributaries, creating scouring and heavy erosion, and in many areas eventually draining into the region's drinking water supply. Currently most streams do not meet the County's "fishable or swimmable" standard. Additionally, for the first time, the water quality of Mountain Island Lake (MIL) slipped from excellent to excellent/good, largely due to development upstream of main tributaries in the Huntersville area. (LUESA 2006 State of the Environment). As development continues, and impervious surfaces continue to increase, protecting the watersheds of critical drinking reservoirs will continue to be necessary. A 2003 study indicated that the nearly 5,800 acres of nature preserve property throughout the County have a storm water retention capacity of 29 million cubic feet per year. This means that County nature preserves are naturally filtering this amount of storm water annually, which otherwise would fall onto impervious surfaces and directly enter the tributaries and lakes of the County.

One goal of the County has been to protect the watershed of MIL, the source of drinking water for most Mecklenburg County and City of Charlotte residents. It is for this reason that the majority of nature preserve acreage is located in the NW region of the County. The goal of Phase 1 of this program was to protect 80% of both the shoreline and the key tributaries of the lake. To date, the region has done a fair job of protecting the shoreline (nearly 74% protected). Mecklenburg County nature preserves protect 14 miles of this shoreline, the vast majority of the 74%. Although additional shoreline needs to be protected, this is encouraging. However, only 20% of the tributaries have been protected. Nature preserves such as Gar Creek Nature Preserve were specifically purchased for protection of this vital tributary, which discharges immediately upstream of the MIL drinking water intake. Because additional development within the MIL watershed is occurring and likely to continue to occur until "build out", land along tributaries and the lake should be pursued for acquisition and protection.

It is interesting to note that a survey completed by the Trust for Public Lands in Mecklenburg County revealed extremely strong citizen support for protecting our drinking water quality. Water quality ranked 2nd in priorities just behind crime/public safety, and ahead of schools, transportation, and jobs/economic development.

Another factor in the health of Mecklenburg County residents is air quality. Local studies have shown the significant beneficial impact that an extensive forest can have on air quality. The Urban Ecosystem Analysis of Mecklenburg County, which was prepared by American Forests in 2003, revealed that from 1984 to 2001, the forested land in Mecklenburg County decreased over 22%. There is a direct correlation between air quality and forested land. Urban forests reduce the negative effects of air pollution by removing carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, ozone and particulate matter. The American Forests study estimated that the forested lands in Mecklenburg County remove 17.5 million pounds of pollutants from the air annually. As of 2007, County nature preserves accounted for 472,000 pounds of air pollution removal every year. It has been conservatively estimated that the air quality benefits provided by the County nature preserves can be valued at \$2,210,000 per year.



5.3.2 ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Although not well known, County nature preserves provide direct, and significant, economic benefits. The greatest of these benefits derives from higher sale prices and associated higher yearly property taxes via the “proximity effect.” The proximity effect results from the fact that people are willing to pay more (for a comparable home) based on location. In layman’s terms this is known as “location, location, location...” Real estate markets consistently show people are willing to pay more for homes located close to parks. Dr. John Crompton, Texas A&M University, is a well-known authority on the subject. His work, “The Proximate Principle: The Impact of Parks, Open Space and Water Features on Residential Property Values and the Property Tax Base”, explores this effect in detail. Over 30 empirical studies clearly show parks have an overwhelming positive effect on property values. The resulting higher sale price and associated yearly taxes by an owner living adjacent to or near a park represent a direct, immediate, and on-going economic return to a municipality on its investment in the park. This is a direct economic tax benefit to the community, with no increase in services (or associated expenditures) required.

The effect of parks on property values is not a new phenomenon. Frederick Law Olmsted, the architect of New York’s Central Park, justified the purchase of this park by showing how the rise in adjacent land value would produce enough new tax revenue to pay for the park investment. By 1864, Olmsted could document new tax revenue with a \$55,880 net return in annual taxes. By 1873, the park – which until then had cost approximately \$14 million, was responsible for an extra \$5.24 million in taxes each year.

Not surprisingly, Crompton’s recent work clearly shows that “passive properties” and parks (non-athletic parks such as nature preserves) show the greatest proximity effect. In fact, on average, properties adjacent to passive parks such as nature preserves experience a 20% increase in value. The proximity effect declines to zero percent for properties 2,000 feet away, or an average of 6-8 city blocks. Using the results of these studies, it has been



estimated that the tax benefit of Mecklenburg County nature preserves on the adjacent 2,026 property owners and 3,146 nearby property owners within 1,000 feet of a preserve equals \$1.18 million per year.

Two additional economic benefits of County nature preserves include tourism and direct revenue generation. Based on the 2004 Charlotte Tourism Report and visitation to the nature preserves and the many special events hosted at these sites every year, the estimated yearly tourism benefit of County nature preserves in 2005 was \$1.08 million. The direct revenue associated with Department fee-based nature programs, camps, shelter rentals, and the McDowell campground totaled \$181,000 in 2006. Taken together, the tax benefit, tourism benefit, and revenue of the nature preserves and associated facilities and programs alone exceeds \$2.4 million per year.

5.3.3 HEALTH & QUALITY OF LIFE BENEFITS

The nature preserves system and connecting trails/greenways significantly benefit the health of local residents. This is a very important consideration as studies indicate approximately 33% of Americans are overweight. The Centers for Disease Control report that the number of overweight adult Americans increased over 60% between 1991 and 2000. The percentage of overweight children between the ages of two and five years old increased by almost 36%, and studies show the amount of television that children watch directly correlates with measures of their body fat. One recent study found that children ages eight to ten years old experience an average of 6-10 hours of “screen time” per day. Childhood obesity is up 300% over the past two decades, with nearly two out of every ten children now obese. As stated in the Outdoor Recreation Participation Study TM, the decline in the average number of outings taken by 16 to 24 year olds is a result of competition by other non-outdoor activities. For example, on an average day in 2005, 14% of 16 to 24 year old males indicated they played video games and 31% indicated that it was one of their favorite activities. Another 2006 survey found that 91% of parents cite television, computers, and video games as the main cause of their children’s disinterest in outdoor play.

Other health issues include the growing number of children with Type II diabetes, asthma, and attention deficit disorder (ADD). Stress levels continue to rise as well, and stress is linked to both physical and mental health. More than ever, stress is recognized as a major drain on corporate productivity and competitiveness. Depression, one type of stress reaction, is predicted to be the leading occupational disease of the 21st century, and is responsible for more days of lost work than any other single factor. Annually, over \$300 billion is spent on stress-related workers compensation claims, reduced productivity, absenteeism, health insurance costs, direct medical expenses and employee turnover. This equals, on average, \$7,500 per U.S. employee.

Nature preserves can be, and are, part of the solution to these significant health and societal issues. Over 100 studies find that spending time in nature reduces stress. As documented in “Last Child in the Woods” by Richard Louv, other studies find that children with nature near their home report lower levels of behavioral conduct disorders, anxiety, and depression. Studies demonstrate children have a greater ability to concentrate in more natural settings, and that children engage in more creative forms of play in green areas.

Incredibly, studies even suggest that children who spend more time playing outdoors have more friends, and there is compelling evidence that nature is useful as therapy for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

In response to these trends, there is growing support for the reconnection of children and nature. The Division of Nature Preserves and Natural Resources makes a strong effort to help resolve these health and social issues by providing environmental education programs throughout the nature preserve system.

Research conducted at 150 schools in 16 states over a 10-year period found that environmental education produces student gains in social studies, science, language arts, and math; improves standardized test scores and grade point averages; and develops problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision making skills. In addition, environmental education students typically outperform their peers in traditional classes and these students also demonstrate better attendance and behavior. For more than a decade, the National Environmental Education & Training Foundation and the Roper Starch polling organization have been conducting surveys that show 95% of American adults support environmental education. Every year, staff conduct hundreds of educational programs for over 30,000 students and residents. As the only public provider of hands-on, outdoor, environmental education in the County, the Division will continue to enhance and expand these offerings as funding permits.



Although it is clear that residents of Mecklenburg County value open space and natural resource conservation and that there are significant environmental, economic, and health benefits from nature preserves, there are other reasons that these resources are a value to the community. The quality of life as well as economic vitality in the region is consequently enhanced by both recreational and educational opportunities available throughout the nature preserve system. Ecotourism is a growing component of regional economies across the country. This type of tourism is generally based on the attraction of natural areas for outdoor recreation, viewing of wildlife and scenic resources, and visitor education. Even though it would seem that ecotourism would be something experienced in wilderness areas, many urban areas are taking advantage of natural and cultural resources to attract visitors and provide local residents the opportunity to partake in outdoor adventures close to home. Local examples include the Carolina Thread Trail, which will link natural and cultural sites in a 15 county region within the Piedmont, and the Central Carolinas Biodiversity Trail, which will guide visitors to areas with unique wildlife and natural areas throughout the Piedmont. A strong nature preserves system will be a key component of these regional trails and will attract regional and national visitors to the Charlotte metropolitan area, which in turn will benefit the local economy.



5.3.4 REVIEW OF PEER COMMUNITIES

As of 2005 there were 6.6 acres of nature preserve per 1,000 residents. A review of thirteen peer communities showed that the Mecklenburg County Nature Preserves system is lagging far behind other communities in acquiring and protecting lands for protection and nature-based recreation. No other community reviewed had less land set aside for natural resource management, wildlife and watershed protection, and passive recreation, either by total acreage, acres per resident, or percent of County land.

5.4 MANAGEMENT GOALS

- To protect the biodiversity and natural heritage of each Mecklenburg County Nature Preserve for its intrinsic value, the health of our environment, and the long-term benefit of the public.
- To collect and utilize the best available scientific data to provide a sound basis for making management decisions.
- To maintain, enhance, and/or restore the integrity and biodiversity of natural communities.
- To identify target species in need of monitoring and/or management.
- To identify, acquire, designate and protect as Nature Preserve other County areas containing important ecological, geological, or cultural resources.
- To attempt to link together Nature Preserves and other natural areas.
- To minimize the impact of external human influences on Nature Preserve properties.
- To provide nature-based outdoor recreation and education opportunities to the public, while ensuring protection of our natural resources and natural areas.

5.5 MANAGEMENT POLICIES

The County recognizes that to ensure that residents continue to benefit from the nature preserve system there must be a commitment to protection of natural areas within the preserves, minimizing impacts from outside influences, and giving priority to natural communities when conflicts arise. The following policies will guide the Division of Nature Preserves and Natural Resources in managing resources on nature preserves to enhance the natural environment throughout the County.

5.6 APPROPRIATE USE OF NATURE PRESERVES

The Division recognizes that there should be limitations to some outdoor recreation pursuits and that some public uses have been determined to be inappropriate for nature preserves. It is critical that any public use of a nature preserve will not cause unacceptable impacts to the resource. The determination of appropriate public use will be the “recreation vs. resource” test. The appropriateness of public uses in nature preserves will be evaluated for consistency with the Division’s Mission, Management Goals, Management Policies, or County Ordinance; actual and anticipated impacts to the resource; and resources available to manage the current/proposed use.

Policy – If it is determined that a proposed public use will result in unacceptable impacts to the resource, then this use will be disallowed from the nature preserve. If it is determined that current public uses are creating unacceptable impacts to the resource, that public use will be eliminated.



Appropriate public uses at nature preserves are:

- Hiking/Walking/Jogging
- Wildlife Observation/Bird Watching
- Nature Study and Appreciation/Spending Time in Nature
- Educational Activities (school groups, scouts, public, colleges/universities, etc.)
- Public and Private Nature-based Programs (environmental education, outdoor recreation)
- Picnicking
- Fishing
- Canoe/Kayaking
- Camping (currently at McDowell Nature Preserve and Copperhead Island only)
- Biking on Paved Roads Only
- Horseback Riding (Latta Plantation Nature Preserve only; limited to designated equestrian trails)

This policy addresses appropriate uses within a nature preserve. Mecklenburg County ordinances and policies have also been adopted to govern the use and operation of County Park and Recreation Facilities. The County ordinances and policies are presented in the Appendix to this plan. All County ordinances apply to nature preserves.

The following uses and actions are prohibited within nature preserves:



- Removal or destruction of any natural objects, including plants or minerals (per County ordinance)
- Feeding of wildlife, including waterfowl (per County ordinance)
- Mountain Biking on natural/non-paved trails
- ATV Riding (per County ordinance)
- Swimming (per County ordinance)
- Dogs off leash (per County ordinance)
- Horseback Riding (except at Latta Plantation on designated equestrian trails)
- Releasing of pets or feral animals (per County ordinance)
- Camping (except at established campgrounds)
- Hunting and trapping (except specially approved deer management hunts)
- Injuring, killing, or harassing in any manner, any bird or animal (per County ordinance)

5.7 MANAGEMENT ZONES

Public uses at nature preserves are based upon “management zones” designated within each nature preserve. These zones are determined by the natural resources found within them. The specific management of each zone differs, as well as the permitted public uses and amenities, based on the quality of the natural areas of the zone, potential impacts certain activities can have on these areas, and/or other significant features (i.e. the presence of endangered species, etc.). All natural areas within a nature preserve are designated as Natural Zone, Outstanding Natural Zone, or Critical Natural Zone. These zones exhibit significant biological diversity and ecological processes. The overall management priority of these zones is the conservation and restoration of natural communities and the protection of animal and plant species. In addition to the three natural zones, a Cultural and Historical Zone has been established for the protection and management of unique cultural resources, and a Support Development Zone has been established to permit the construction and building of facilities which support the mission of the Division. Management zones are assigned a hierarchy level (i.e., 1 to 4 where 1 is the most significant) based on their ecological sensitivity and development restrictions. Zone maps have been established for all nature preserves and can be found in the master plan.

- Hierarchy Level 1 - Critical Natural Zone
- Hierarchy Level 2 - Outstanding Natural Zone
- Hierarchy Level 3 - Natural Zone
- Hierarchy Level 3 - Cultural and Historical Zone
- Hierarchy Level 4 - Support Development Zone

Policy – If changes to management zones in a nature preserve are proposed, the changes can only be upgraded to a more strict management zone (i.e., to a higher hierarchy level, such as a Natural Zone to Outstanding Natural Zone) or result in an overall decrease in

Support Development Zone. Because the nature preserve is established to preserve natural communities, it is evident that the predominant management zones with a nature preserve will be the Natural, Outstanding, and Critical Zones.

Policy – The total amount of Support Development Zone within a nature preserve may never exceed 10% of the total preserve acreage.

Definitions of the nature preserve management zones can be found in the master plan, as well as specific restrictions, permitted uses, and management priorities for each zone.

5.8 MAINTAIN SPECIES OF CONCERN

Policy – Every attempt shall be made to ensure no net loss of species of local conservation concern or their critical habitat within the nature preserve system.

The Division monitors and manages for numerous local, state, and federal species of conservation concern. The long term goal is to ensure these species do not disappear from our community. To accomplish this, the Division will conduct comprehensive surveys for and protect species of concern. The Division will strive to recover all species of concern and their critical habitats within the nature preserve system. To accomplish this, the Division will: adhere to policies within this master plan, coordinate with state and federal agencies to ensure that all management activities meet the requirements of state or federal species recovery plans, and prepare and implement management plans for all natural areas.

5.9 NATURE PRESERVE DESIGNATION OF LAND-BANKED PROPERTIES

In 2007 the Division completed an analysis of undeveloped “land-banked” Department properties. The analysis was conducted in an attempt to document natural resources at each site and provide recommendations, where appropriate, for properties that should be considered for nature preserve designation (either whole or in part).

The original analysis included 46 properties totaling 3,522 acres that, at the time, were land-banked and undeveloped. Since that time, 21 of these properties (1,856 acres) have been developed. Many of the remaining properties do not contain significant natural resources or high quality natural areas, and are therefore recommended to be developed as Neighborhood, Community, or Regional Parks based on need. Two properties, the Back Creek and Pennington properties, contain high quality natural areas, but with sensitive planning and design they could still support limited active use development and provide active parks.

Of the remaining properties, six contain exceptional natural areas and/or unique features, rare species of concern, and high biodiversity. Five are recommended for Nature Preserve designation in the Department’s new 10-year master plan. These new Nature Preserves will be:





- Stevens Creek Nature Preserve
- Berryhill Nature Preserve
- Oehler Nature Preserve
- Gateway Nature Preserve & Community Park
- Hucks Road/Davis Farm Nature Preserve

The locations of these five properties are within the service radii of other Community and Regional Parks. Hence, residents living near these preserves have, or will have, their active recreation needs met at those facilities. Total acreage of the above five properties (or portions thereof) to be designated nature preserve is 730.6 acres. This will bring the total acreage of the nature preserve system to 6,514 acres. The sixth property containing exceptional natural resources, Sherman Branch, is in an area of the County that also shows a strong need for a Regional Park (existing active recreation service gap). Therefore, the Department recommends the Sherman Branch property remain “landbanked” and undesignated for the time being. The Department will pursue land acquisition nearby for an active Regional Park to serve this area. This could then result in Sherman Branch being designated Nature Preserve. Information of each of the six properties mentioned above is available through the Department.

5.10 ACQUISITION OF NATURE PRESERVE PROPERTIES

To assist with a strategic approach toward nature preserve land acquisition, the Trust for Public Lands completed a “greenprinting” analysis of Mecklenburg County. The greenprinting process takes community values and uses them as a basis for rating properties. Two analyses were conducted to determine Nature Preserve priority land acquisitions. The first was a “Critical Wildlife Habitat” greenprint, and the second was a “Parcel Prioritization” greenprint. The Critical Wildlife Habitat considered and mapped the following: forested habitat, early successional habitat, wetland habitat, riparian habitat, Natural Heritage Sites, buffer zones adjacent to existing unique/rare habitats, wildlife corridors, presence of rare species of concern, critical watersheds, and large unbroken natural areas remaining in the County. Based on a weighted matrix, lands were ranked 1-5, five being lands exhibiting the highest “critical habitat values.”

The second analysis evaluated parcels of land throughout the County, and those parcels that were both larger and contained the least amount of impervious cover were also mapped and ranked. Where these parcels overlaid with mapped Critical Habitat areas scoring 3-5, a final ranking was established. This final ranking is based on a scale of 1-24, with twenty-four being the highest possible score a parcel could receive, based on various factors such as size, undeveloped state, and the presence of critical habitat factors.

Properties which scored a value of 16-24 (Tier 1) contain the greatest value in terms of critical habitat. Properties which scored a value of 15 are considered Tier 2. The combined acreage of these 120 properties is 6,446. These properties should be considered for future nature preserve acquisition, as they would greatly contribute to the unmet needs of the community and protect significant areas. Therefore, the Department has set a goal of acquiring and protecting an additional 6,446 acres of nature preserve properties.

Properties scoring 14 or less may still contain critical habitat and would significantly benefit the community by protection. Acquisition of these properties should be pursued if funding and opportunity exists.

The maps in **Figure 42** and **Figure 43** show the Current and the Current and Recommended Nature Preserves respectively.

5.11 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE NATURE CENTERS

Currently three nature centers serve the entire County. Nature Centers are the primary public facilities associated with nature preserves. The three nature centers are located at Latta Plantation, McDowell, and Reedy Creek Nature Preserves. Based on gap analysis, many residents must drive considerable distances to visit a nature center, creating a significant access and equity issue. Additionally, the results of the 2008 Community Survey as well as best practices indicate an extremely high level of need for additional nature centers. The Department's recommended standard of one nature center per 100,000 residents results in a current deficit of five nature centers, and a deficit of nine nature centers to serve residents by the year 2022. Refer to the *Mecklenburg County – Facility Standards Spreadsheet (Figures 33, 34 and 35)* in the Master Plan. Although many new nature centers were planned or discussed over the years, no new centers have been built or opened to the public for the past 15 years.

Based on the community survey results and service gap analysis of existing centers, the Nature Preserve Master Plan recommends five new nature centers to be built over the next 10 years. These nature centers would provide access and services to the majority of the County once opened (**Figure 44**). An additional four (4) nature centers will be needed in the following 5 years to meet the recommended standard.



Figure 42 - Current Nature Preserves

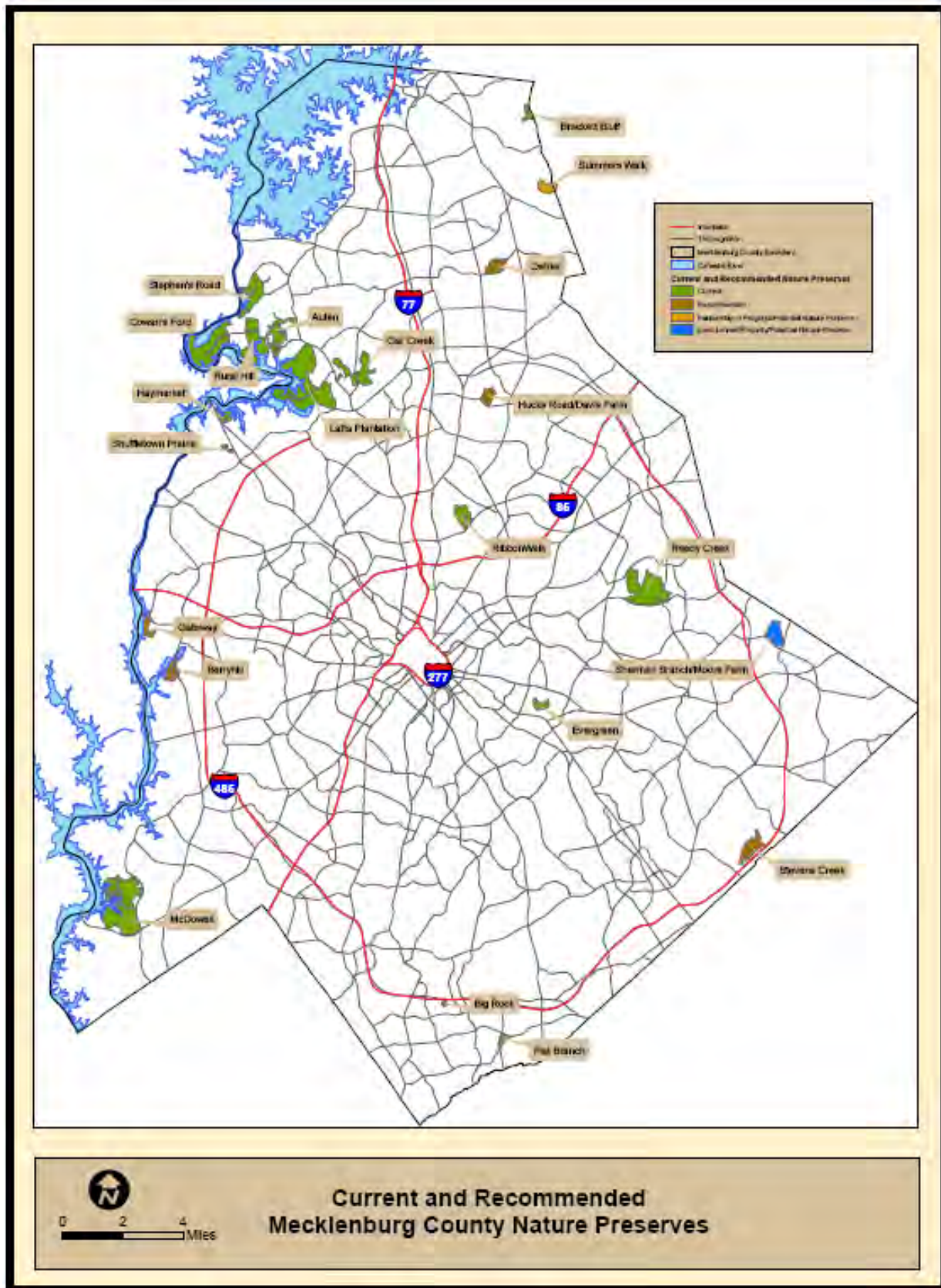


Figure 43 - Current and Recommended Nature Preserves

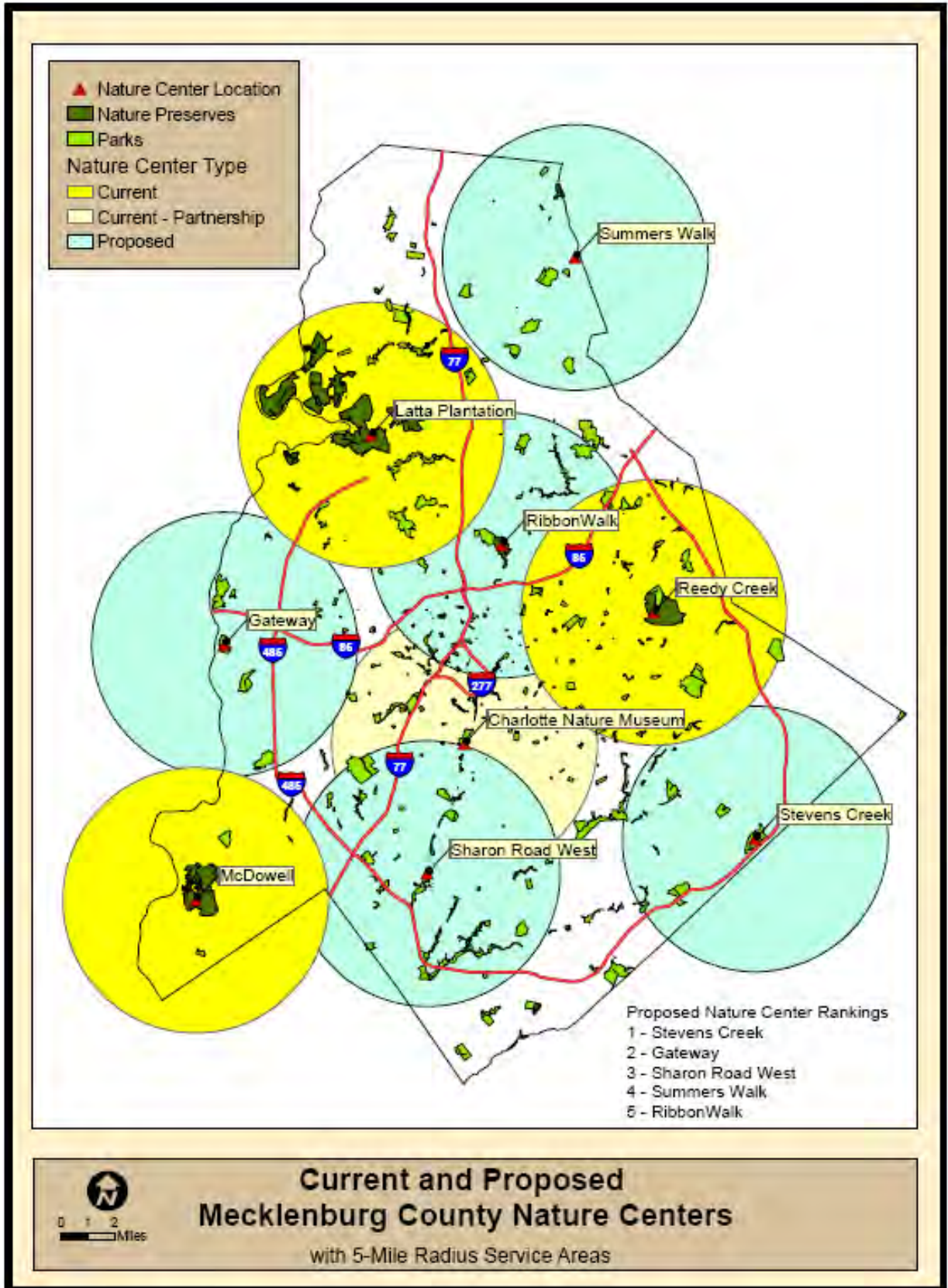


Figure 44 - Current and Proposed Nature Centers

5.12 CAPITAL COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH RECOMMENDATIONS

Current capital needs for the master planning and development of five new nature preserves and basic amenities (bathrooms, shelters, trails, parking lots), the master planning and development of four existing designated preserves (Evergreen, Flat Branch, RibbonWalk, and Haymarket), the construction of new nature centers, and the expansion of two existing nature centers is estimated at \$54,900,000 over the next ten years. These capital costs do not include land acquisition for future nature preserves.

A detailed breakdown of these estimated costs is included in the Department's Master Plan.



CHAPTER SIX - GREENPRINTING AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

6.1 GREENPRINTING PLAN

Greenprinting is a unique modeling process and framework developed by the Trust for Public Land (TPL) and validated in over 40 locations across the US. Greenprinting uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to make informed, strategic decisions about land conservation and resource protection priorities. The process applies a systematic approach to translate regional values into objective metrics for modeling conservation priorities across the landscape.

Based on input from community focus groups, workshops, interviews, and surveys, Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation staff identified key park, greenway, and natural resource protection goals, including:

- Meet Active and Passive Recreation and Park Needs
- Increase Greenway Connectivity and Trail Usability
- Protect Critical Habitat
- Protect Water Resources
- Enhance Water Quality
- Maintain Cultural Landscapes

6.1.1 NATURAL AREAS PROTECTION

This section describes the greenprinting process as it relates to the protection of natural areas. Land acquisition priorities for Natural Areas were determined using a 2-stage approach:

1. **Resource Analysis** – Top-down conservation assessment
2. **Parcel Prioritization** – Bottom-up acquisition analysis

To accomplish the resource analysis, Mecklenburg County Natural Areas staff identified the metrics shown in **Figure 45** to characterize areas of critical habitat on the landscape. Each criterion was modeled and mapped, using best available data, as described in the table. Staff then assigned weights to each criterion, to communicate relative strategic importance for protection. **Figure 46** represents a weighted aggregation of all critical habitat criteria.

In general, staff assigned highest strategic importance to areas that buffer existing natural areas from roads and/or that represent large contiguous habitat areas.

Criteria	Relative Importance	Modeling Methodology
Buffer zones adjacent to identified unique/rare habitats and NHSs	25%	Result for Large Unbroken Natural Areas model (see below), identifies contiguous areas of natural lands that are unfragmented by roadways. Used this result to identify natural buffer zones that are immediately adjacent to Natural Heritage sites and Nature Preserves, and extend out to keep these areas isolated from roadways.
Large Unbroken Natural Areas	25%	Identifies large contiguous natural areas unfragmented by roadways. Natural areas were extracted from National Landcover datasets. Highest priority was assigned to largest contiguous areas -- greater than 1000 acres. Medium High priority was assigned to contiguous natural areas between 750 and 1000 acres. Moderate priority was assigned to areas of 500-750 acres.
Wildlife Corridors	10%	Identified potential wildlife movement network between Nature Preserves and Natural Heritage Sites. Stream corridors were considered as the primary corridors. Where connections to Nature Preserves and/or Natural Heritage Sites could not be achieved via stream corridors, areas with forest cover and/or existing greenways were used to complete the connections.
Endangered, Rare, and Species of Concern	10%	Combines Mecklenburg County species siting data (Amphibians, Birds, Mammals, Reptiles) data with Mecklenburg County Natural Heritage Areas and NCNHP species of concern data. Removed plant communities and those elements no longer existing. Computed density of species sitings within a half mile radius. Areas with highest density of siting were assigned highest priority.
Critical Watersheds	5%	Based on Mecklenburg County critical watersheds data.
Forested Habitat	5%	Location of forested areas based on Mecklenburg County tree canopy dataset.
Early Successional Habitat	5%	Used SEGAP ecological systems data to identify herbaceous and shrub successional vegetation locations
Wetland Habitat	5%	Includes a 100 ft buffer around all wetland areas.
Riparian Habitat	5%	Includes locations for all lakes, ponds and streams. Stream locations based on SWIM buffers data.
Natural Heritage Sites	5%	Combines data from Mecklenburg County Natural Heritage Areas dataset with NCNHP species points and lines. Buffered NCNHP species points and lines by 328 ft. (100m). Removed plant communities.

Figure 45 – Areas of Critical Habitat

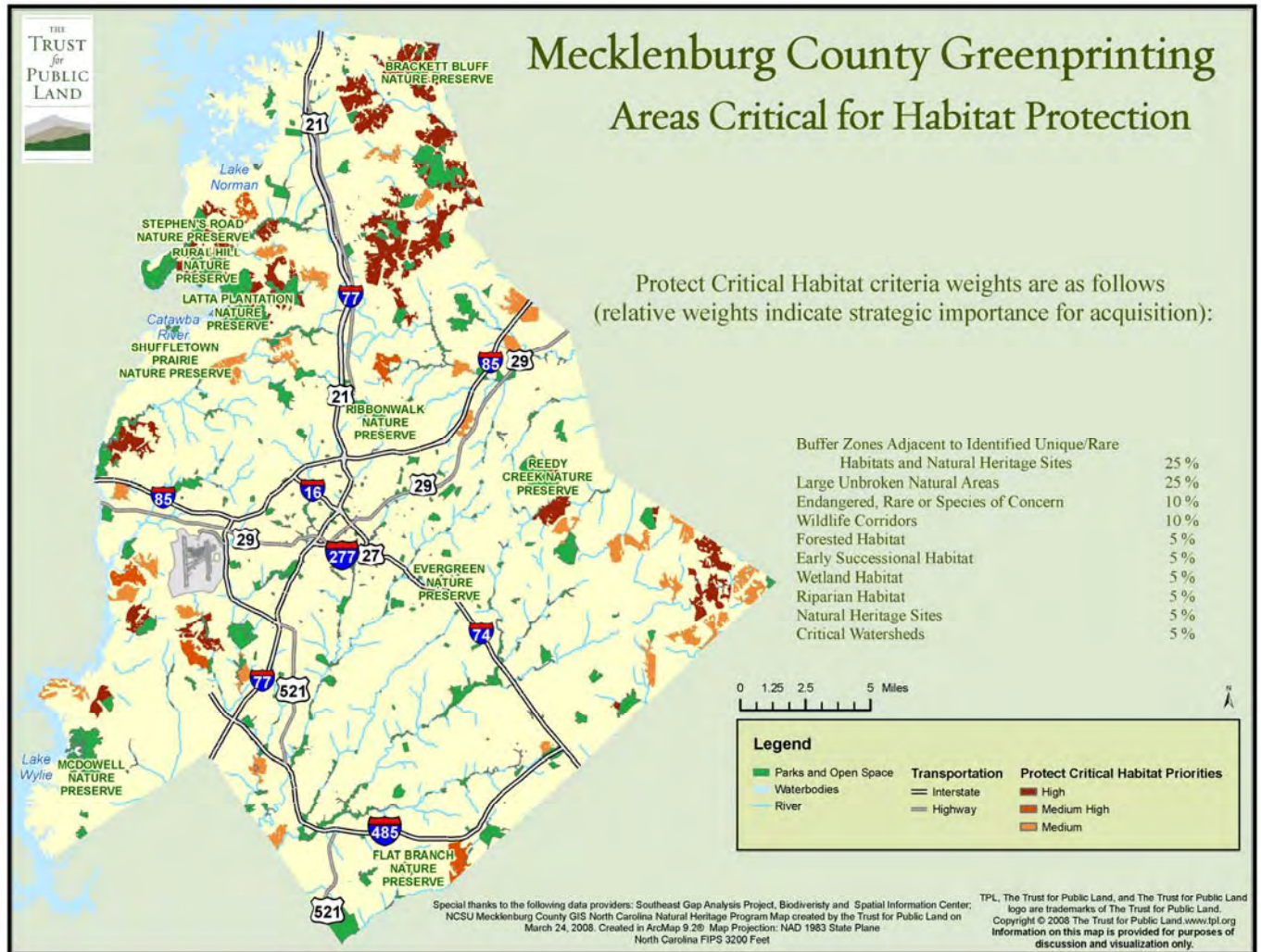


Figure 46 - Areas Critical for Habitat Protection

The Greenprint analysis for natural area protection also included an acquisition prioritization analysis, using the above resource analysis as a baseline. This analysis was used to score parcels based on the opportunity, appropriateness, and importance for realizing the 2008 Natural Areas plan. Mecklenburg County Stewardship Services Natural Areas Acquisition Ranking Criteria were used as a framework. Acquisition criteria used for this analysis are as follows:

Requirements:

- Must be greater than 5 acres
- Must contain a critical natural resource

Scoring Criteria:

- Total area of natural or pervious cover
- Cultural resource present: farmland or historic site
- Adjacent to an existing Nature Preserve
- Targeted for acquisition (MIL Corridor property or 2007 Natural Areas Needs Assessment property)
- Significant for water quality protection
- Adjacent to existing park or greenway
- Adjacent to other natural areas (CLC lands)
- No Nature Preserve within a 3 mile radius

The following map depicts areas that were identified as best opportunities for Natural Areas acquisition, using the criteria listed above. Properties were grouped based on overall score:

- Tier 1 and Tier 2 included 120 properties for 6,446 acres
- Tier 3 locations (not mapped) included 85 additional properties, covering 6,991 additional acres

See **Figure 47** on the next page.

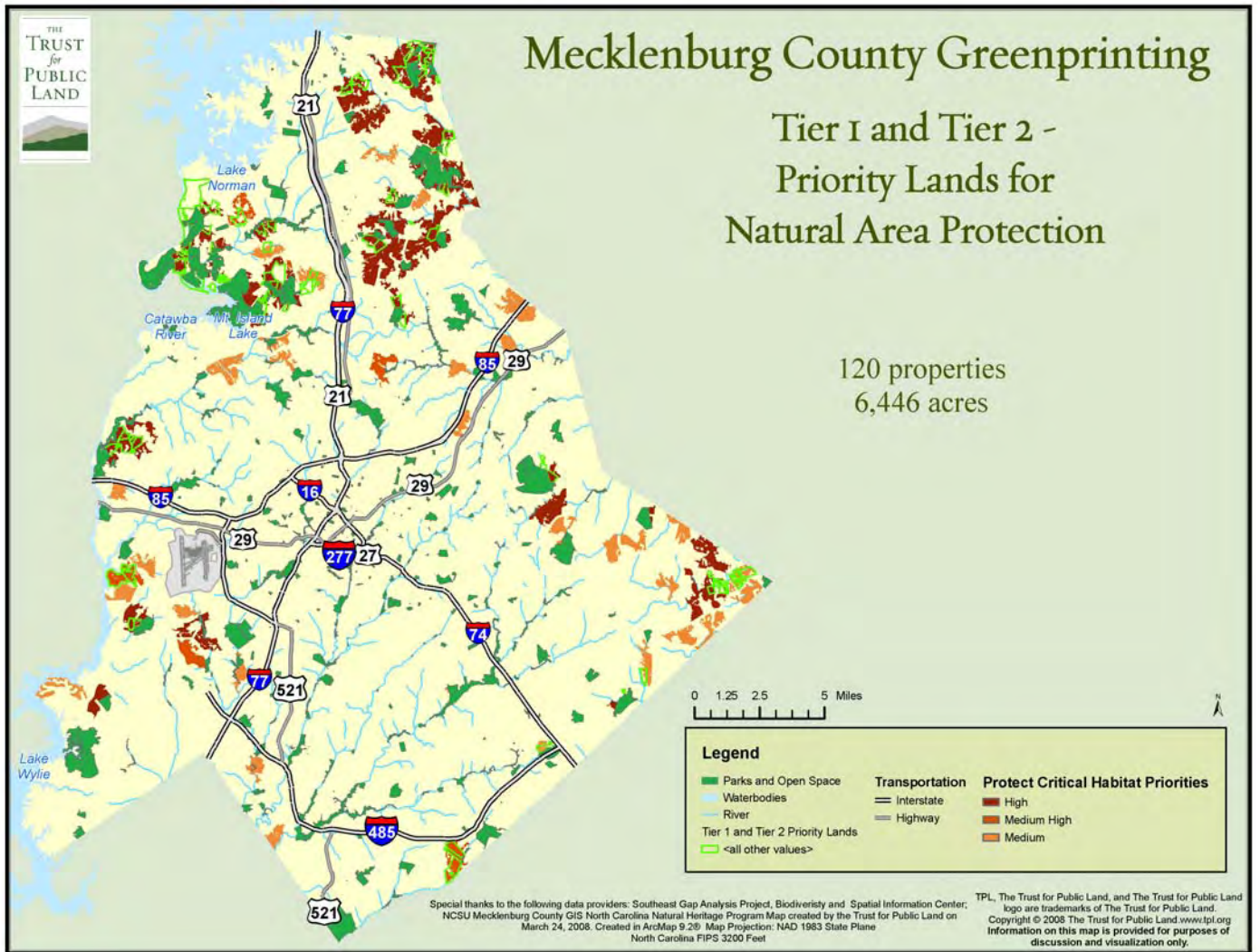


Figure 47 - Tier 1 and Tier 2 - Priority Lands for Natural Area Protection

6.1.2 PARK FACILITIES NEEDS ANALYSIS

This section describes the greenprinting process as it relates to needs and opportunities for park facility sitings. The Park Facilities needs analysis used a 2-stage approach:

1. **Capacity Service Area Analysis**- service areas for existing park facilities based on facility capacity
2. **Gap Analysis and Parcel Prioritization** – identification of opportunities for new facilities in service area gaps

The capacity service area population of each asset represents the market size or pool of potential users that a specific asset can potentially support. Demand service area population for each asset is based on actual usage and the correlating population served. These factors, when mapped against population density, show the geographic area or market size for the age segment and gender for a particular asset based on the capacity of the representative asset to support the usage.

Gap analysis and parcel prioritization modeling was then used identify opportunities for new facilities in the service area gaps determined above. Criteria used for this analysis included the following:

6-1. Master Planning:

- Is the project identified in the 2008 Parks Master Plan?
- Does the project have its own approved Master Plan?

6-2. Service Gap:

- Are there any parks within the project’s intended service radius?

6-3. Residential Population:

- What is the residential population within the intended project’s service radius of the project (normalized to 0.5 mile radius)?

6-4. Expansion:

- Does the project expand the current scope of programming at the facility (i.e. additional phase of development)?

6-5. Partnership Opportunity:

- Is project adjacent to a school and / or library?
- Has a public and / or private partnership been identified?
- Has an outside funding source been identified?

6-6. Linkages:

- Is project adjacent to a planned and / or developed greenway?
- Is the project adjacent to a planned and / or developed nature center?
- Is project adjacent to a planned and / or developed recreation center?

6-7. Mass Transit:

- Is the project within a 0.5 mile radius of a public transportation station / depot?



The following maps (**Figures 48 – 53**) illustrate both service area coverage for each park facility type, and 2010 Population Density Projections within the gaps, as projected by the UNCC Traffic Analysis Zone Study. The maps include Neighborhood Parks, Community Parks, Regional Parks, Community and Regional Parks, Recreation Center, Aquatics Facility service areas. The planned school sites too have been depicted in separate maps following these service area maps. The three maps include proposed Elementary School Sites, Middle School Sites and High School Sites. The County will be looking to partner with the CMS to maximize usage of the new school sites and seek to fulfill some of the current gaps in neighborhood and community park sites with the new school sites.

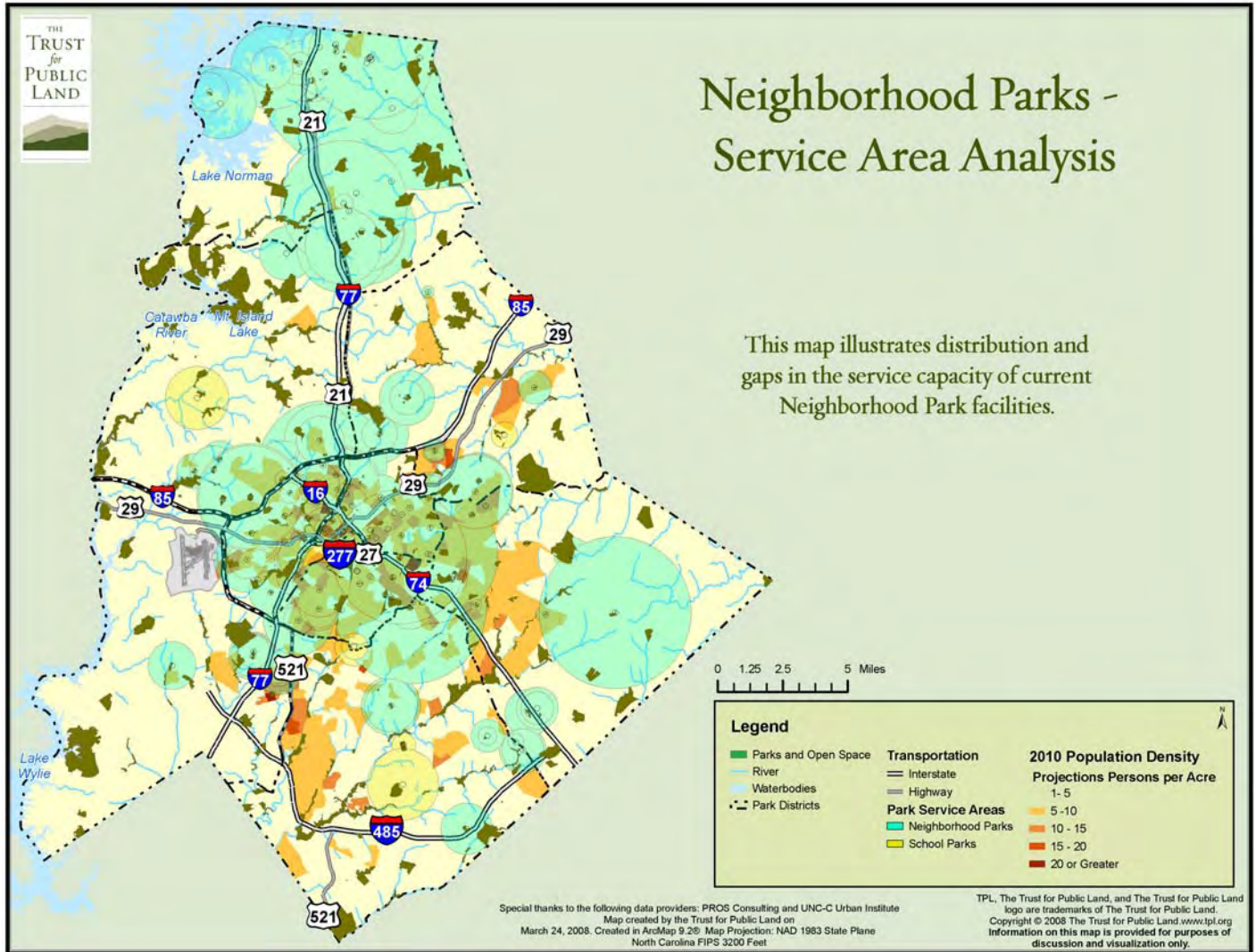


Figure 48 - Neighborhood Parks - Service Area Analysis

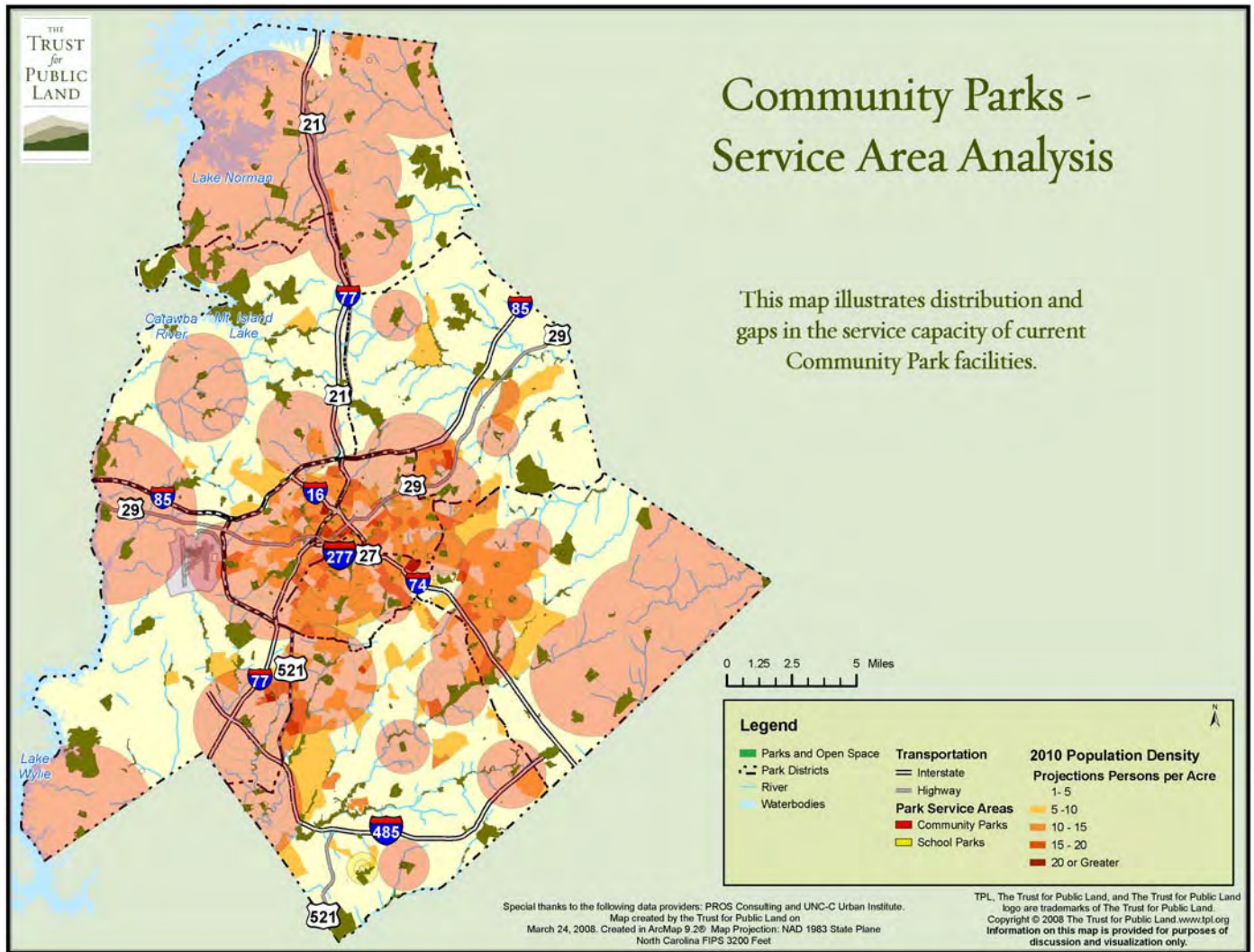


Figure 49 - Community Parks - Service Area Analysis

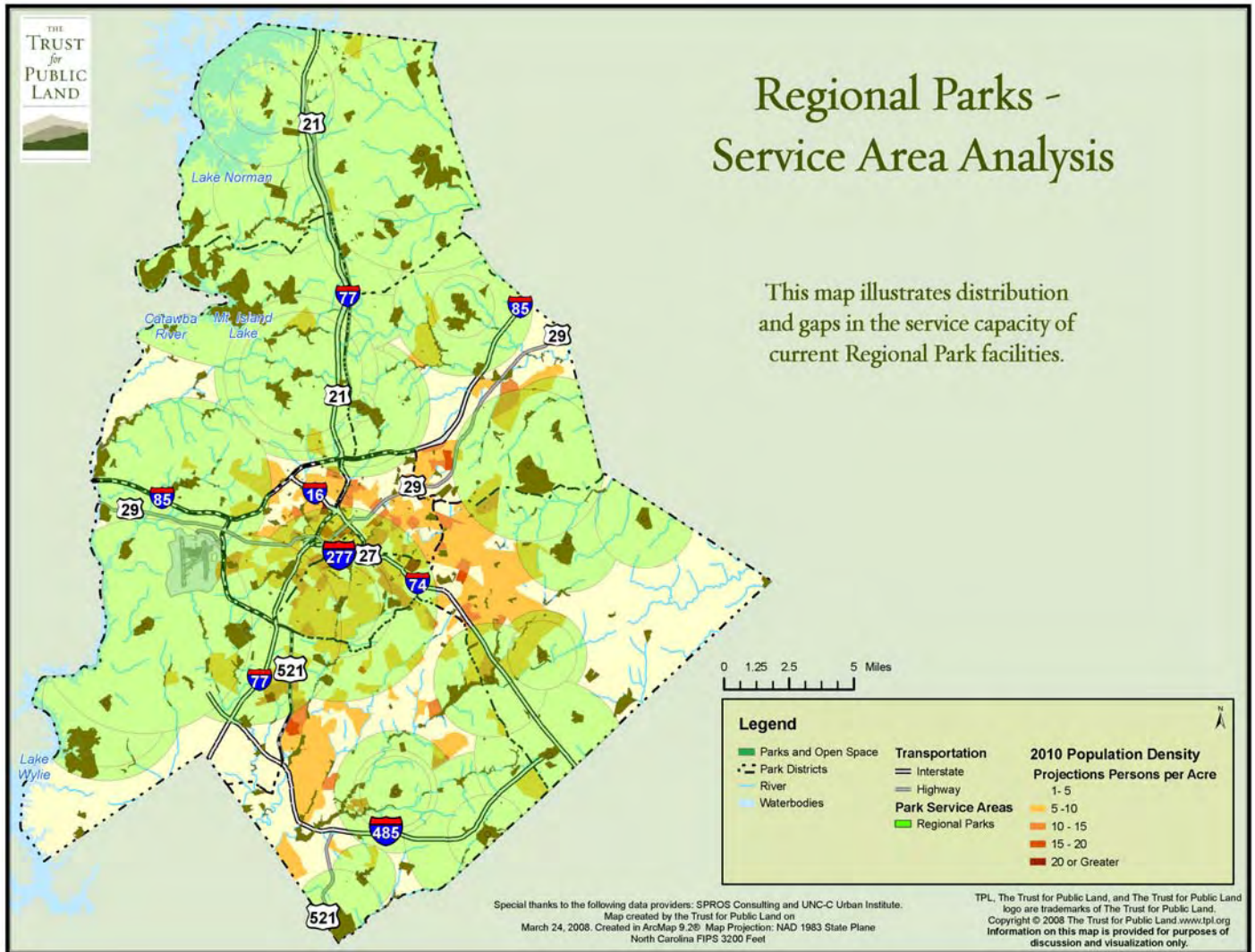


Figure 50 - Regional Parks - Service Area Analysis

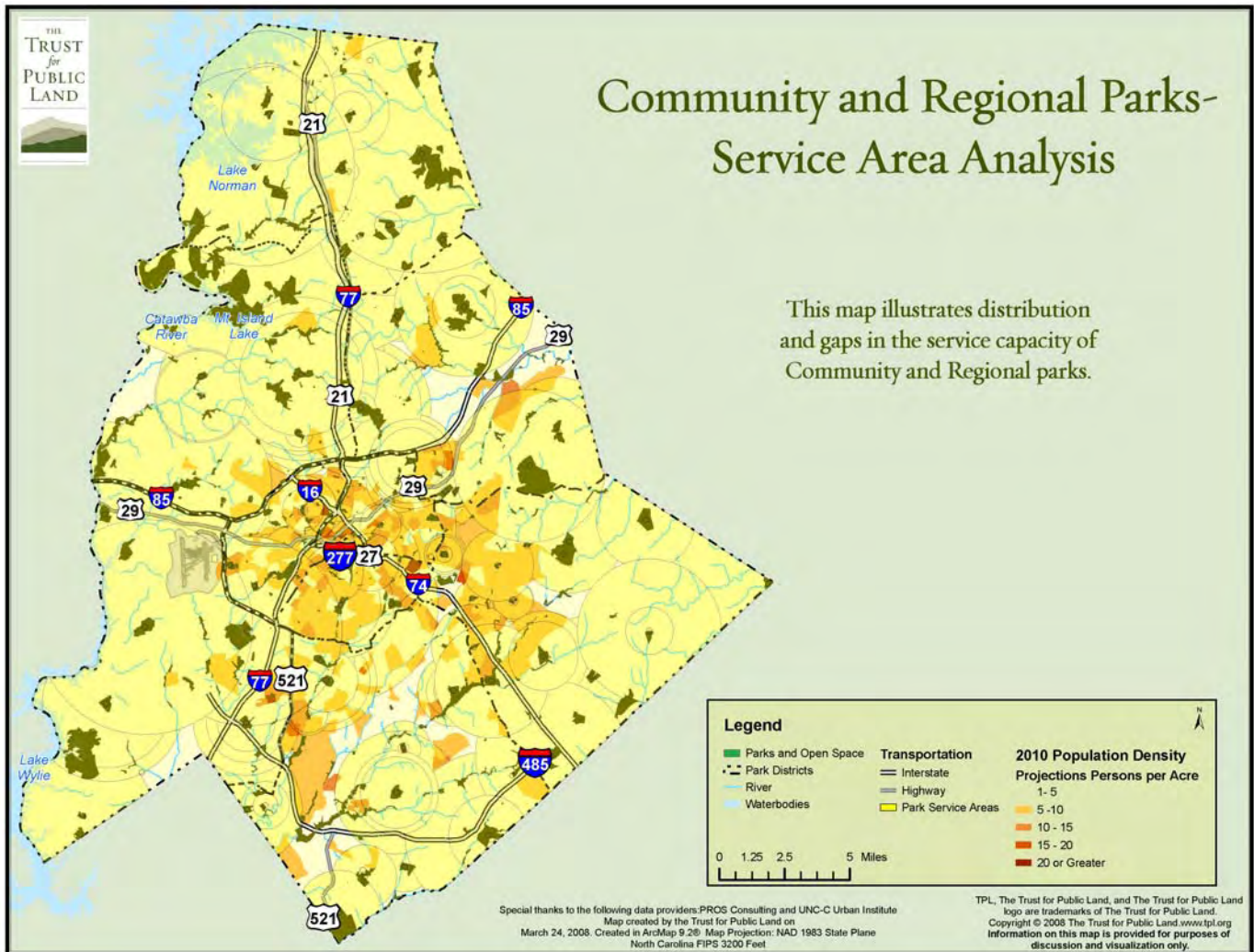


Figure 51 - Community and Regional Parks - Service Area Analysis

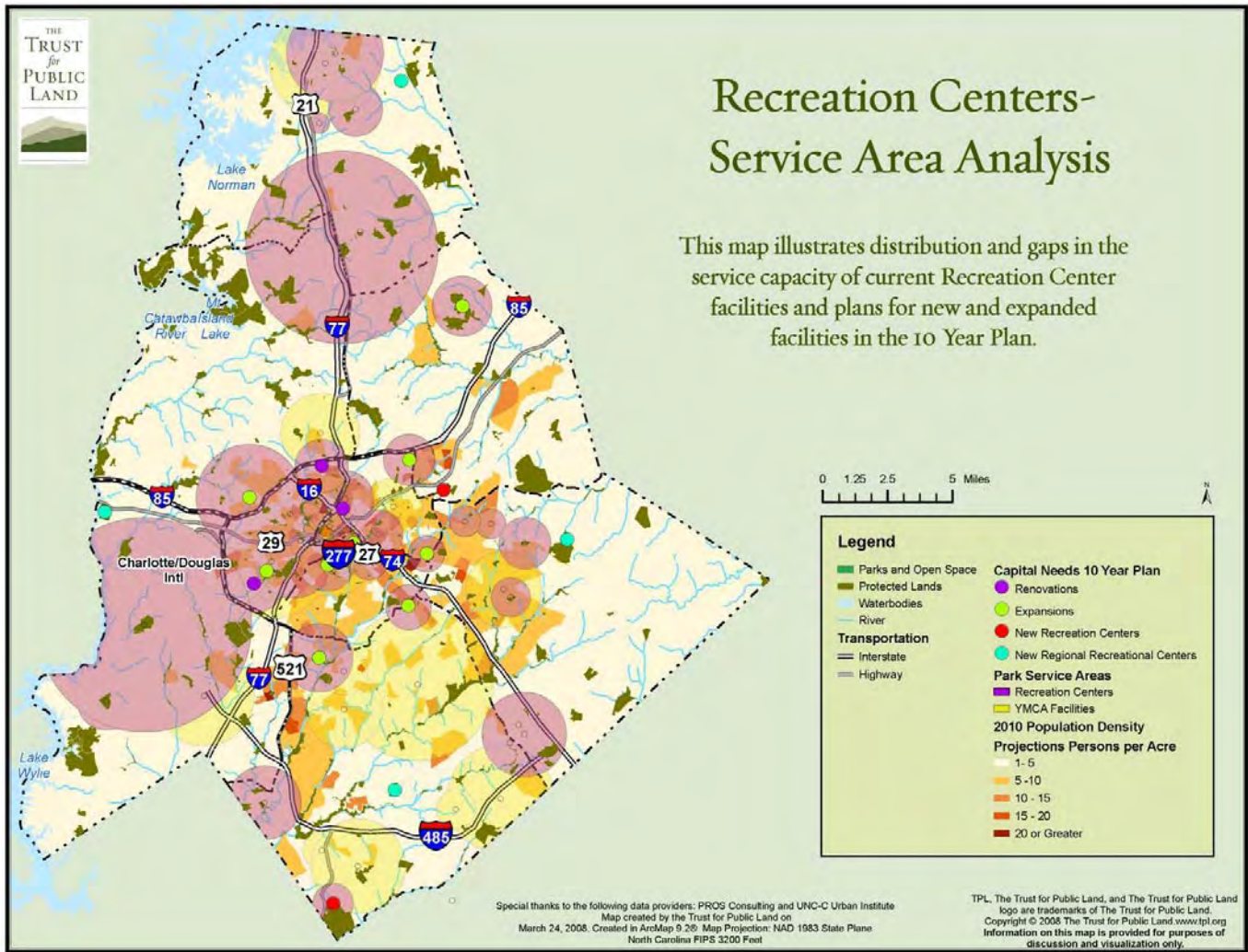


Figure 52 - Recreation Centers - Service Area Analysis

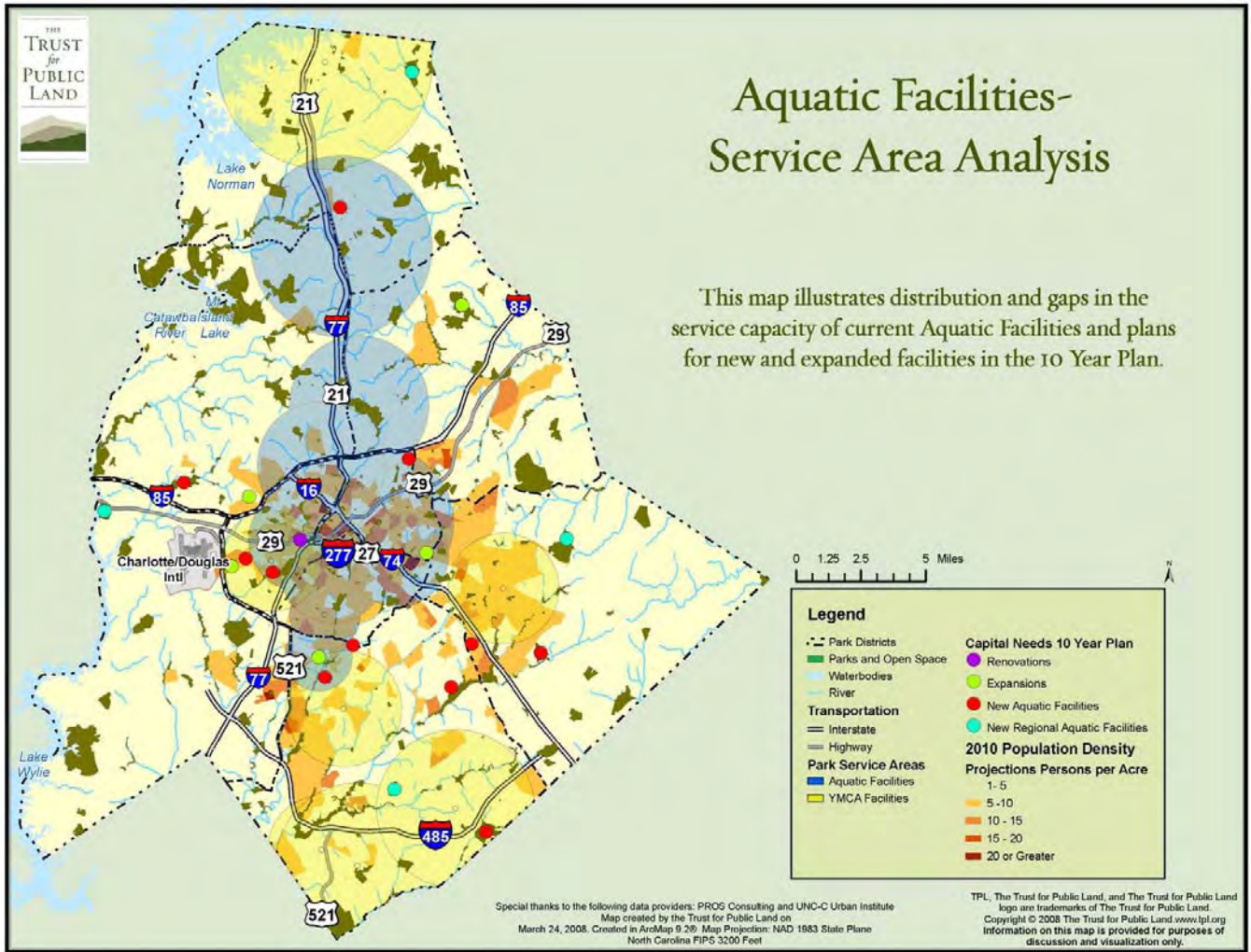


Figure 53 - Aquatic Facilities - Service Area Analysis

6.1.3 NEXT STEPS

The Greenprint framework provides an on-going decision support tool. Mecklenburg County GIS staff will receive training and delivery of the Greenprint GIS modeling, parcel prioritization, and reporting tools. This will allow the County GIS staff to update and extend the models as new data or priorities are identified. GIS staff will be able to produce parcel-level statistics and profiles, for assistance in acquisition evaluation.



6.2 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT

6.2.1 FACILITY ASSESSMENTS AND CAPITAL MAINTENANCE PROGRAM (CMP)

The purpose of this CMP report is to assist Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department North Carolina in evaluating the physical aspects of this property and how its condition may affect the County's financial decisions over time. For this assessment, representative samples of the major independent building components were observed and their physical conditions were evaluated. These components included the site and building exteriors and representative interior areas. The estimated cost for repairs and/or capital reserve items is included in the 5 year, 10 year and 20 year cost projections.

Specialized Park Services (SPS) property management staff and code enforcement agencies were interviewed for specific information relating to the physical property, code compliance, available maintenance procedures, available drawings, and other related documentation.

The assessment team Engineering & Environmental Consulting Services (EMG Consultants and SPS) visited each identified property to evaluate the general condition of the buildings and site amenities, reviewed available construction documents in order to familiarize themselves with and be able to comment on the in-place construction systems, life safety, parking areas, interior elements, park amenities, mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems, and the general built environment. The assessment team conducted a walk-through inspection of the buildings in order to observe building systems and components, identify physical deficiencies and formulate recommendations to remedy the physical deficiencies.

The Physical Needs Assessment was performed at the Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation request using methods and procedures as outlined. These estimates are based on invoice or bid documents provided either by the Owner/facility and construction costs developed by construction resources such as R.S. Means and Marshall & Swift, staff and consultants experience with past costs for similar properties, city cost indexes, and assumptions regarding future economic conditions.

6.2.2 METHODOLOGY

Based upon our observations, research, and judgment combined with consulting commonly accepted empirical Expected Useful Life (EUL) tables, EMG and staff rendered an opinion as to when a system or component will most probably necessitate replacement during the evaluation period. The evaluation period for this assessment is 20 years. Accurate historical replacement records provided by the Property Manager are typically the best source for this data. Exposure to the weather elements, initial system quality and installation, extent of use, and the quality and amount of preventive maintenance exercised are all factors that impact the effective age of a system or component. As a result, a system or component may have an effective age that is greater or less than its actual age. The Remaining Useful Life (RUL) of a component or system equals the EUL less its effective age.

A facility condition index (FCI) score was calculated for each facility. The FCI is the ratio of the cost of needed maintenance and repairs divided by the cost of replacement. The priority of each project was then set by evaluating the weighted criteria shown below:

- 4-1. Facility Condition:
 - What is the Facility Condition Index Rating of the project?
- 4-2. Safety:
 - Does the project correct a safety concern?
- 4-3. Accessibility:
 - Does the project improve ADA accessibility to an existing program component?
- 4-4. Visitation:
 - Does the project improve visitation?
- 4-5. Security:
 - Does the project improve security?
- 4-6. Operation and Maintenance Costs:
 - Does the project impact operation and maintenance costs in a positive manner
- 4-7. Operational Support:
 - Does the project have potential to generate revenue or partnerships?
- 4-8. Citywide Citizen Survey:
 - Does the project meet priorities identified in the citywide customer survey?

This assessment has provided a current and meaningful 20 year Capital Needs/Improvement Plan and it can be updated and used by staff. All existing park related buildings, structures, and amenities were included in the CMP.

The total estimated CMP cost for all park districts during 2008-2012 is \$21,924,706, adjusted for inflation. The total estimated CMP cost for 2013-2017 is \$31,653,392, adjusted for inflation. The estimated combined CMP cost for the next ten years is \$53,578,098. **Figure 54** and **55** indicate the five and ten year improvements that are scheduled and the level of distribution across the County of where project dollars will be spent.

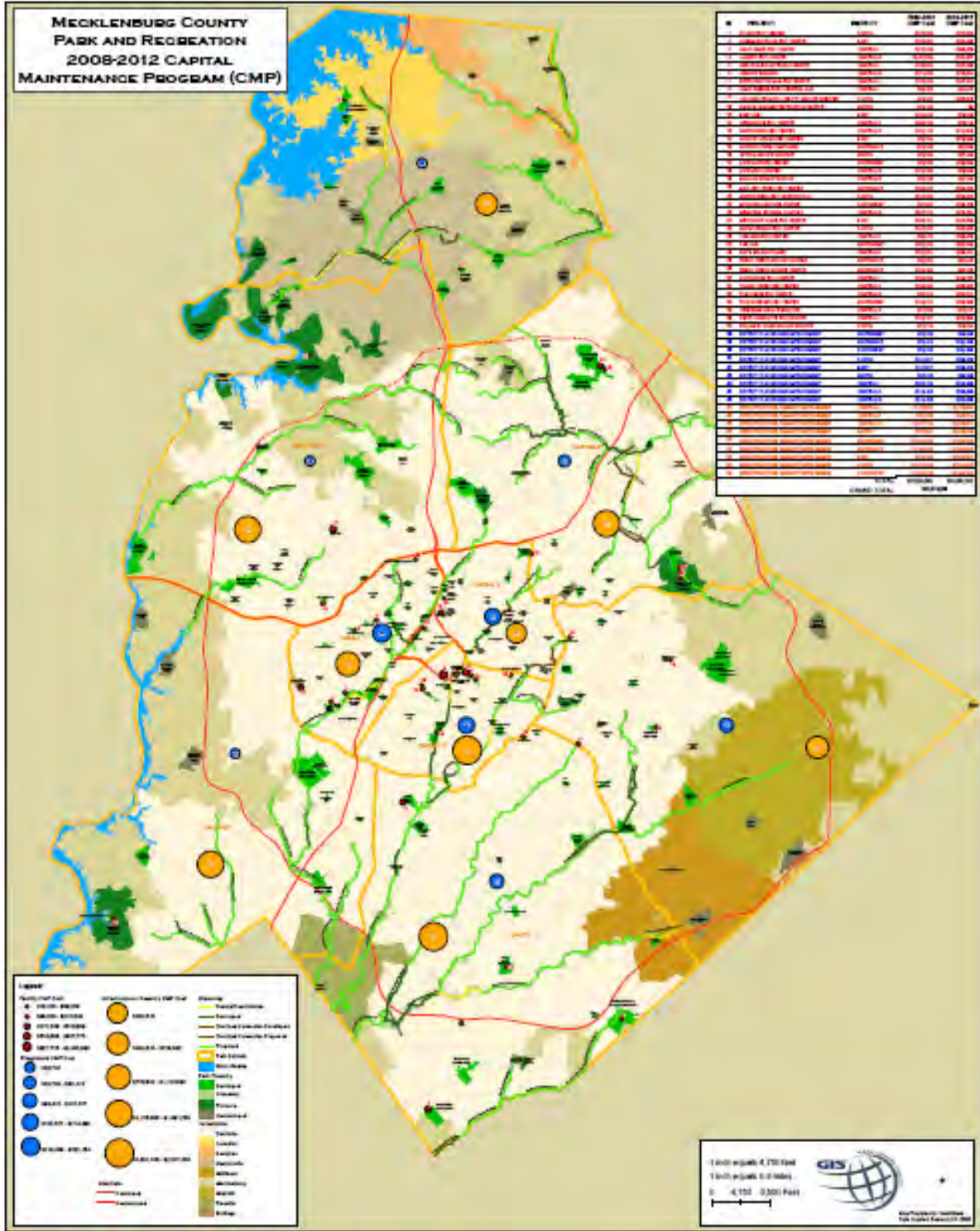


Figure 54 - Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation 2008-2012 Maintenance Program (CMP)



6.3 CAPITAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The Capital Needs Assessment (CNA) is a community driven document that outlines the park and recreational needs of the community. The CNA provides a list of capital projects projected to be completed over the next 5-10 years. Projects listed in the CNA were compiled through community input. Priorities guide the department in formulating the list from which projects are identified to create future bond referendum(s).

The CNA is broken down into six (6) categories: (1) Conservation and Stewardship; (2) Greenways; (3) Parks; (4) Recreation Facilities; (5) Improvements; and (6) Land Acquisition. Each of these individual categories have respective project ranking criteria that guide prioritization of individual projects. This provides an objective methodology to ranking projects.

The community input process starts with citizens and Advisory Councils. Community workshops are organized throughout the County for citizens to provide input on needed facilities and projects. The various citizen Advisory Councils conduct these meeting jointly with staff.

A preliminary CNA is then developed by the Staff to include project and budget data collected from all departmental service divisions and advisory councils. The Strategic Planning and Long Range Finance Committee reviews the CNA document provides feedback to staff. This document is then presented to the Park and Recreation Commission for information.

The Capital Needs Assessment (CNA) and the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) are then presented to County Senior Leadership and then an annual presentation is made to the Citizens Capital Budget Advisory Committee (CCBAC). The CCBAC reviews the information presented and then makes a formal recommendation to the County Manager and the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). The BOCC then adopts the capital program at the spending levels they identify and approve. Once the BOCC approves the amount of money the bond referendum will contain for parks, the CNA is used to determine which projects will be included on the bond referendum.

Each of these individual categories has respective project ranking criteria that guide prioritization of individual projects. This provides an objective methodology to ranking projects. In addition, the Park and Facility Standards in the Master Plan outline the needs of the community based on best practice standards for populations similar to Mecklenburg County. These needs depict the gaps in land, facilities, and amenities missing in Mecklenburg County to create a more balanced system.

Figure 56 presents the Capital Needs Assessment for 2008-2018.

2008-2018 CAPITAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT										
COST BREAKOUT BY CATEGORY										
Category	New Development			Improvements			Maintenance & Repair			Grand-Total
	5Y	10Y	Total	5Y	10Y	Total	5Y	10Y	Total	
Conservation and Stewardship	36,000,000	0	36,000,000	7,800,000	11,100,000	18,900,000	-	-	-	54,900,000
Greenways	46,887,000	109,175,000	156,062,000	5,220,000	-	5,220,000	-	-	-	161,282,000
Parks-Community	9,000,000	10,800,000	19,800,000	10,703,000	30,115,600	40,818,600	-	-	-	60,618,600
Parks-Neighborhood	11,400,000	-	11,400,000	3,100,000	-	3,100,000	-	-	-	14,500,000
Parks-Regional	14,400,000	18,000,000	32,400,000	123,539,402	19,460,500	142,999,902	-	-	-	175,399,902
Parks-School	2,100,000	-	2,100,000	600,000	-	600,000	-	-	-	2,700,000
Rec. Facilities-Aquatic-Improvements	-	-	-	8,000,000	31,900,000	39,900,000	-	-	-	39,900,000
Rec. Facilities-Aquatic-New	0	10,500,000	10,500,000	-	9,000,000	9,000,000	-	-	-	19,500,000
Rec. Facilities-Rec. Ctr.	63,000,000	25,000,000	88,000,000	142,930,800	46,623,800	189,554,600	-	-	-	277,554,600
Rec. Facilities-Special	-	-	-	24,000,000	-	24,000,000	-	-	-	24,000,000
Improvement-Athletics	-	-	-	17,700,000	4,517,000	22,217,000	-	-	-	22,217,000
Improvement-Parks	-	-	-	17,407,500	3,873,000	21,280,500	-	-	-	21,280,500
Improvement-Maint. & Repair	-	-	-	-	-	-	21,924,706	31,653,392	53,578,098	53,578,098
Total	\$182,787,000	\$173,475,000	\$356,262,000	\$361,000,702	\$156,589,900	\$517,590,602	\$21,924,706	\$31,653,392	\$53,578,098	\$927,430,700
SUMMARY: 5 YR. NEW DEVELOPMENT \$182,787,000 5 YR. IMPROVEMENTS \$361,000,702 5 YR. MAINT & REPAIR \$21,924,706 5 YR. TOTAL \$565,712,408										

Figure 56 - 2008-2018 Capital Needs Assessment

6.4 FUNDING AND REVENUE STRATEGIES

As with any Master Plan process, the needs typically outweigh the available resources available. It is important for Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation Department to develop other financing alternatives used by other large metropolitan systems to help finance operational costs and capital costs. The voters of the County have been supportive for the system in the past and hopefully in the future as well. The following are financing options used by other systems that may already be used by the Department, but there may be other alternatives that could be considered for helping the Department finance the system in the future.

6.4.1 GENERAL FUNDING SOURCES

General Fund: General funds derived from property taxes and other municipal income sources are a normal way of supporting park system operations but are limited in their ability to fund significant land acquisition or capital development.

General Obligation Bond: A general obligation bond is a municipal bond secured by the taxing and borrowing power of the municipality issuing it.

Governmental Funding Programs: A variety of funding sources are available from federal and state government for greenspace-related projects. For example, the Land and Water Conservation Fund provide funds to state and local governments to acquire, develop, and improve outdoor recreation areas. Federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds can be used in part to support greenspace related improvements. Transportation enhancement funds available through SAFETELU, the current federal transportation bill, can



be used for trail and related greenspace development. AmeriCorps grants can be used to fund support for park maintenance.

Bond Referendum: This funding approach involves submission of a bond measure to be used to finance greenspace acquisition, development, and/or maintenance to a direct popular vote. According to the Trust for Public Land, voters in 23 states approved 104 ballot measures in November 2006 that will provide \$6.4 billion in funding for greenspace-related acquisition and development.

6.4.2 DEDICATED FUNDING SOURCES

Park Impact Fees: These fees are attached to the cost of new residential development based on the square footage or number of bedrooms per unit to generate funds for park acquisition and development. Impact fees typically range from a low of \$500 dollars per unit to a high of \$9,000 dollars per unit and should be periodically updated to address market rates and land values.

Tax Allocation District: A Tax Allocation District (TAD) involves the issuance of tax-exempt bonds to pay front-end infrastructure and eligible development costs in partnership with private developers. As redevelopment occurs in the district, the “tax increment” resulting from redevelopment projects is used to retire the debt issued to fund the eligible redevelopment costs. The public portion of the redevelopment project funds itself using the additional taxes generated by the project. TADs can be used to fund greenspace acquisition and development as an essential infrastructure cost.

Boulevard Tax: This funding source has been used by Kansas City, MO to develop and maintain its nationally known parkways and boulevard system. Residents who live along these corridors pay a charge based on a lineal foot that is added to their property tax bill. This approach has proven to be very beneficial to owners when selling their homes because of the added value to their properties.

Cash-in-Lieu of Open Space Requirement: Ordinances requiring the dedication of open space within developments to meet the park and recreation needs of the new residents often have provisions allowing cash contribution to substitute for the land requirement. The proceeds can be applied to a park off-site that serves the needs of the development.

Dedicated Sales Tax: A dedicated sales tax has been used by many cities as a funding tool for capital improvements. The City of Lawrence, KS passed a one-cent sales tax for parks that has generated over \$50 million in park improvements over the last seven years. The City of Phoenix receives sales tax revenue from car rentals to support capital needs of parks and recreation services.

Facility Authority: A Facility Authority is sometime used by park and recreation agencies to improve a specific park or develop a specific improvement such as a stadium, large recreation center, large aquatic center, or sports venue for competitive events. Repayment of bonds to fund the project usually comes from sales taxes. The City of Indianapolis has created several recreational facilities to meet local needs and national competition venues as an economic development tool. The Facility Authority is responsible for managing the sites and operating them in a self-supporting manner.

Improvement District: An improvement district allows for special assessments on property owners to support acquisition, development, and/or maintenance costs. There are various types of improvement districts that apply to parks and greenspaces. Landscape and Lighting Districts are used by California communities to fund park development and ongoing maintenance. Park Benefit Districts establish assessments on properties based on the benefits and costs of acquisition and development associated with a parkland improvement. Benefit Districts are typically applied to regional parks, large community parks, event plazas, signature parks, and attractions located in downtown areas or areas slated for redevelopment. In Park Maintenance Districts, the assessments are earmarked to fund park maintenance within a designated area (similar to Landscape and Lighting Districts).

Real Estate Transfer Fee: This relatively new form of funding is being used by a number of agencies and states to acquire and develop parkland. The money is generated by the transfer of real estate from one owner to another owner, with the municipality retaining a percentage of the value of the property (typically one-half percent) at the time of sale. The proceeds can be dedicated to acquiring land or for other greenspace purposes.

Revolving Fund: This is a dedicated fund to be used for greenspace purposes that is replenished on an ongoing basis from various funding sources.

Stormwater Utility Fee: Also referred to as a Surface Water Management Fee, this funding source is derived from fees on property owners based on measures such as the amount of impervious surfacing. It is used by many cities to acquire and develop greenways and other greenspace resources that provide for stormwater management. Improvements can include trails, drainage areas, and retention ponds that serve multiple purposes such as recreation, environmental protection, and stormwater management. The City of Houston is using this source to preserve and maintain bayous and to improve their access and use for flood control and recreation purposes.

Transient Occupancy Tax: This funding source is used by many cities and counties to fund improvements to parks to improve the image of an urban area, to enhance parks surrounded by hotels and businesses, to support the development of a park-related improvement, or to build an attraction. Transient occupancy taxes are typically set at 5 to 10% on the value of a hotel room and can be dedicated for parkland improvement purposes.

Wheel Tax: A Wheel Tax is a method of taxation commonly used by cities or counties to generate revenue. The tax is charged to motorists based upon the number of wheels their vehicles have, often collected at the time of vehicle registration or tag renewals. Wheel taxes can be used to fund management and maintenance of park roads and parking lots.

6.4.3 REVENUE CAPTURE

Land Leases/Concessions: Land leases and concessions are public/private partnerships in which the municipality provides land or space for private commercial operations that enhance the park and recreational experience in exchange for payments to help reduce operating costs. They can range from vending machines to food service operations to golf courses.

User Fees: User fees are fees paid by a user of recreational facilities or programs to offset the costs of services provided by the municipality. The fees are set by the municipality based



on cost recovery goals and the level of exclusivity the user receives compared to the general taxpayer.

Capital Improvement Fee: A capital improvement fee can be added to the admission fee to a recreation facility to help pay back the cost of developing the facility. This fee is usually applied to golf courses, aquatic facilities, recreation centers, ice rinks, amphitheaters, and special use facilities such as sports complexes. The funds generated can be used either to pay back the cost of the capital improvement or the revenue bond that was used to develop the facility.

Corporate Naming Rights: In this arrangement, corporations invest in the right to name an event, facility, or product within a parks system in exchange for an annual fee, typically over a ten-year period. The cost of the naming right is based on the impression points the facility or event will receive from the newspapers, TV, websites, and visitors or users. Naming rights for park facilities are typically attached to sports complexes, amphitheaters, recreation centers, aquatic facilities, stadiums, and events.

Corporate Sponsorships: Corporations can also underwrite a portion or all of the cost of an event, program, or activity based on their name being associated with the service. Sponsorships typically are title sponsors, presenting sponsors, associate sponsors, product sponsors, or in-kind sponsors. Many cities and counties seek corporate support for these types of activities.

Maintenance Endowment Fund: This is a fund dedicated exclusively for parks maintenance, funded by a percentage of user fees from programs, events, and rentals.

6.4.4 PRIVATE FUNDING SOURCES

Business/Citizen Donations: Individual donations from corporations and citizens can be sought to support parks and greenspaces. As an example, the Naperville, IL Park District has an ongoing program soliciting tax deductible contributions from individuals, community organizations, and businesses to enhance park and recreational services.


Private Foundation Funds: Nonprofit community foundations can be strong sources of support for parks and greenspace. The City of Indianapolis has received over \$100 million in grants from the Lily Endowment for park-related improvements.

Nonprofit Organizations: Nonprofit organizations can provide support for greenspace and parks in various ways. Examples include:

- **Conservancy or Friends Organization:** This type of nonprofit is devoted to supporting a specific park such as the Central Park Conservancy in New York or the Piedmont Park Conservancy in Atlanta.
- **Land Trust:** Land trusts are nonprofits focused on greenspace preservation. In Atlanta, the Trust for Public Land and Conservation Fund help to facilitate greenspace acquisition by the City but do not own land and easements outright. Project Greenspace proposes establishment of a new land trust dedicated to acquiring and managing greenspace in Atlanta.
- **Conservation District:** Conservation Districts operate like a land trust but are set up to protect specific properties areas with high greenspace value, such as watersheds

or sensitive natural areas. The conservation district role is to provide landowners with tax benefits to allow their properties to be preserved as part of the district.

- **Parks Foundation:** Established to support system-wide parks and recreation needs, park foundations have helped many cities across the nation to acquire land and develop parks. For example, the Parks Foundation of Houston raises \$5 million annually on average for land acquisition and park improvements. Mecklenburg County’s Partners for Parks is a perfect example of how this has worked locally to provide park improvements and programs.



**PARTNERS
for PARKS**
- **Greenway Foundations:** Greenway foundations focus on developing and maintaining trails and green corridors on a county / city wide basis. The City of Indianapolis Greenway Foundation develops and maintains greenways throughout the city and seeks land leases along the trails as one funding source, in addition to selling miles of trails to community corporations and nonprofits. The development rights along the trails can also be sold to local utilities for water, sewer, fiber optic, and cable lines on a per mile basis to support development and management of these corridors. King County in the Seattle area has done a very good job in accessing this funding source for greenway development.
- **Gifts to Share:** This approach is used in Sacramento, CA in the form of a nonprofit that solicits donations for park improvement projects.

Homeowner Association Fees: Homeowner association fees are typically used to maintain dedicated greenspace areas within private residential developments. They could be applied to maintaining privately owned greenspace that is publicly accessible through an agreement between the developer and the County / City.

Lease Back: Lease backs are a source of capital funding in which a private sector entity such as a development company buys the land; develops a facility such as a park, recreation attraction, recreation center, pool, or sports complex; and leases the facility back to the municipality to pay off the capital costs over a 30 to 40 year period. This approach takes advantage of the efficiencies of private sector development while relieving the burden on the municipality to raise upfront capital funds.

6.4.5 VOLUNTEER SOURCES

Adopt-a-Park: In this approach local neighborhood groups or businesses make a volunteer commitment to maintaining a specific park. Adopt-a-Park arrangements are particularly well-suited for smaller parks which are less efficient for a parks department to maintain. Most cities and counties have a number of Adopt-a-Park agreements in place.

Neighborhood Park Initiatives: These are formal or informal initiatives by local groups to address the needs of an individual park. Examples include park watch programs such as Mecklenburg County has and “clean up/fix up” days.

Adopt-a-Trail: This is similar to Adopt-a-Park but involves sponsorship of a segment of a trail (e.g., one mile) for maintenance purposes.



Community Service Workers: Community service workers are assigned by the court to pay off some of their sentence through maintenance activities in parks, such as picking up litter, removing graffiti, and assisting in painting or fix up activities. Most workers are assigned 30 to 60 hours of work.

CHAPTER SEVEN - RECREATION PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT PLAN

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The Mecklenburg County Recreation Program Plan seeks to undertake a holistic view of the state of the recreation program market in Mecklenburg County. This program plan includes a situational analysis of Mecklenburg County's existing program offerings via the program assessment, market identification from a user and competitor perspective, a gap analysis that seeks to identify existing gaps in core programs and a demand analysis of needs for sports related amenities.

The consulting team will then address these findings by offering a program organizational and development plan. Lastly, this program plan report will evaluate the amateur sports tourism market in Mecklenburg County and its surrounding areas within a 200 miles radius to determine sport competition gaps and sports facility needs to service that gap.

7.2 PROGRAM NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The purpose of the Program Needs Assessment is to provide a prioritized list recreation program needs for the residents of Mecklenburg County. The Needs Assessment evaluates both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data includes the statistically valid Community Survey, which asked 1033 Mecklenburg County residents to list unmet needs and rank the importance. Qualitative data includes resident feedback obtained in Focus Group meetings, Key Leader Interviews, and Public Forums.

A weighted scoring system was used to determine the priorities for park and recreation facilities / amenities and recreation programs. This scoring system considers the following:

- Community Survey
 - Unmet needs for recreation programs – A factor from the total number of households mentioning their need for facilities and recreation programs. Survey participants were asked to identify the need for 28 different facilities and 22 recreation programs. Weighted value of 4
 - Importance ranking for programs – Normalized factor, converted from the percent (%) ranking of programs to a base number. Survey participants were asked to identify the top four recreation program needs. Weighted value of 3
- Consultant Evaluation
 - Factor derived from the consultant's evaluation of program importance based on demographics, trends and community input. Weighted value of 3

These weighted scores were then summed to provide an overall score and priority ranking for the system as a whole. The results of the priority ranking were tabulated into three categories: High Priority, Medium Priority, and Low Priority.

The combined total of the weighted scores for Community Unmet Needs, Community Priority and Consultant Evaluation is the total score based on which the Program Priority is



determined. **Figure 57** depicts the Recreation Program Priority Needs Assessment for Mecklenburg County.

Figure 57 identifies Adult Fitness and Wellness Programs, Special Events / Festivals and Family Recreation – Outdoor Adventure Programs as the three core program areas that merited the highest priority.

Mecklenburg County Program Needs Assessment			
	High	Medium	Low
Adult fitness and wellness programs	1		
Special events/festivals	2		
Family Recreation - Outdoor Adventure programs	3		
Nature Education programs	4		
Education/Life skills	5		
Youth Learn to Swim programs	6		
Water fitness programs	7		
Senior programs		8	
Tennis lessons, clinics and leagues		9	
Adult sports programs		10	
Adult art, dance, performing arts		11	
Youth/teen sports programs		12	
Youth/teen summer camp programs		13	
Adult swim programs		14	
Golf lessons			15
Before and after school programs			16
Pre-School programs			17
Martial arts programs			18
Youth/teen fitness and wellness programs			19
Youth/teen art, dance, performing arts			20
Programs for people with disabilities			21
Gymnastics and tumbling programs			22

Figure 57 – Program Priority Needs Assessment

7.3 MECKLENBURG SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

The Consultant Team performed a detailed assessment of Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation's program offerings. This assessment offers an in-depth perspective of the recreation program offerings and helps to identify the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities in the program delivery system. The assessment also provides recommendations of core programs, program gaps, review of service systems in support of programming, review of the organizational structure, duplication of programs with other recreational service providers in the community, and provides direction in future program offerings for the County.

The Consultant Team based these program findings and comments from a variety of methods including:

- Staff interviews and focus groups
- Program assessments for approximately 50 program areas
- Review of public meeting comments
- Lifecycle and age segment review of programs
- Similar provider analysis
- Market capture
- Review of needs assessment survey
- Web site and Get Going Guide review
- Review of service system and marketing methods
- Review of measurement results

This program plan addresses the program offerings from a macro and micro perspective. It identifies system-wide key issues and presents recommendations for these issues, while also offering recommendations to elevate the existing core programs to the next level and ways to best position program delivery for the future. The plan is organized according to the following sections:

- Program Portfolio and Analysis
- Specific Program Analysis
- Organizational Structure Review
- Similar Provider Analysis
- Marketing Method Review
- Customer Satisfaction Measurement System Review
- Backstage Support Review
- Web Site Review
- Financial and Pricing Review
- Corporate Support/Partners
- Performance Measurement Review
- Program Development



7.3.1 PROGRAM PORTFOLIO AND ANALYSIS



The Consulting Team advocates the importance of developing core program areas as a means of focusing on quality control and ensuring alignment of program offerings with customer need. Furthermore, core program areas suggest a rational decision making process in choosing programs to be offered, rather than existing as a random process based on the energy and personality interest of program staff. The core program process also helps to fulfill a systems approach to programming and better enables the Department staff to offer geographical, and age segment based programs, while managing the life cycle balance of existing programs to achieve the highest efficiency and productive programs possible.

Currently, Mecklenburg County program offerings are organized according to the following core areas:

- Aquatics programs
- Recreation center programs
- Senior services and programs
- Nature Center programs
- Environmental outdoor recreation programs
- Athletics
- Therapeutic Recreation programs
- Community special events
- 4-H programs
- Golf services

The needs assessment household survey conducted as part of the Master Plan is helpful in identifying core program needs. According to the results of the survey, the highest ranking percentage of households having a need for recreation programs is as follows:

- Special events
- Fitness and wellness activities
- Family recreation/outdoor adventure programs
- Nature education programs
- Education/life skills programs (Life skills are abilities individuals can learn that will help them to be successful in living a productive and satisfying life)
- Water fitness programs

All of these areas are included in the recommended core program list provided by the consulting team.

A follow up question on the household survey related to how well Mecklenburg County meets the needs for these most important programs. The highest number of households with needs being met 50% or less ranked as follows:

- Adult fitness and wellness programs
- Special events/festivals
- Family recreation/outdoor adventure programs
- Education/life skill programs (Life skills are abilities individuals can learn that will help them to be successful in living a productive and satisfying life)
- Water fitness programs
- Tennis lessons, clinics and leagues



Again this list matches up well with the recommended core program list.

According to the needs assessment household survey, 19% of households have participated in a recreation program during the last year. This compares to a national average of 30% of household participation. The reason for this level of participations can be traced back to the Departments primary emphasis in the past on park land acquisition and park development with a lesser emphasis on recreation program services. Therefore, the Department has a significant non-user market to tap into. While program participation is lower than average, park visitation of 76% is slightly higher than average. The Department could take advantage of this good level of park visitation to increase program participation by having informational kiosks about programs located in parks.

While the program participation rate is low, the quality of the programs is rated high. Overall quality was mentioned as excellent by 32% of the respondents and good by 60% of the respondents. This translates into 92% overall satisfaction, which compares to the numbers the Department achieves through their customer satisfaction measurement system. A longer term goal for quality satisfaction is to achieve an excellent quality rating by 50% or more respondents. Best in class systems target this as a goal.

Within the program assessments, staff completed an analysis of the distribution of programs according to their lifecycle stage. The lifecycle assessment was more intuitive and qualitative, rather than using actual quantifiable data. Nonetheless, it gives programming staff an opportunity to see how programs fall along the lifecycle continuum. The following shows the distribution of percentage share of programs in each category of the lifecycle stage:

- Introduction 18%



- Take off 34%
- Growth 26%
- Mature 9%
- Saturated 10%
- Decline 5%

This actually is excellent performance, as obviously, programs are better positioned in the introduction, take off and growth life cycle stages (almost 80%). PROS recommend that at least 60% of programs fall into these categories. Only 5% of programs are categorized in the decline stage. The recommendation is to change or eliminate programs that show a downward trend, occurring over at least a couple of years. The high percentage of programs in the earlier stages of the lifecycle suggests that programming is beginning to become a more dynamic part of the Department's repertoire of programs and services. This is a result of new leadership in the organization. The complete lifecycle program distribution is included in the Appendix.

Program assessment information also included age segment breakdowns. Also included in the Appendix is the complete list of programs according to age segments. The overall percentage breakdown includes:

- Preschool 11%
- Elementary 17%
- Middle School 23%
- High School 19%
- Adult 16%
- Senior 14%

Again, this is an excellent spread throughout all age segments. Most park systems have a much higher percentage of preschool and elementary age programs, fewer middle school programs, and even less high school age programs. As the population ages, there should be a shift toward more senior programs. In reviewing the youth survey results provided by Department staff, many of the surveys mentioned a disinterest in what the Department has to offer in the way of park and recreation services. This, despite 42% of program offerings targeted for teens in middle and high school. Ideally youth programs require consistent review and assessment of users to keep programs positioned well in the minds of young people with more programs targeted to drop-in, three hour workshops on skill development, special events based around music, dance, club sports and entertainment.

7.4 GAP ANALYSIS

County facilities were modeled for Gap Analysis, or areas that exhibit gaps in service. County facilities were geo-coded by address and are represented on the map by green circles. Drive time analysis for each County facility was also established. Each center's drive time area represents a 10-minute drive time based on posted speed limits of all road/thoroughfares. Ten minute parameters were utilized based on travel trends and

standard center offerings. Drive time does not include stop signs or stop lights or any impeded traffic flows; drive time analysis depicts a “best case scenario” or optimal drive time.

The 10-minute drive time areas are depicted by the purple polygon areas on the map. The portions of the **Figure 58** that are not encompassed with the purple polygon area represent gaps or underserved areas. In **Figure 59**, portions of the map that have overlapping purple service areas represent an opportunity for the County to diversify programming.

Other service providers consisting of local YMCA facilities were also modeled for Gap Analysis. YMCA facilities were geo-coded by address and depicted on the map by blue points/circles. Drive time analysis for each YMCA facility was established based on the same 10-minute service area as the County facilities. These other service provider service areas are represented by the orange polygon areas on the map which depicting the culmination of a 10-minute drive time from all YMCA facilities based on a best case or optimal scenario of traffic flowing at posted speed limits on all roads and thoroughfares with no impeded traffic, including stop signs, stop lights, and traffic congestion. The portions of the map that are not covered by orange polygon areas represent gaps in YMCA facility service areas.

Portions of the combined County facility and other service provider map that are not covered by either the purple or orange polygon areas represent the gaps in overall facility service areas. This portrays the assumed unmet need for additional services based on drive times. Portions of the combined map represented by a maroon or pink color represent overlaps of County and private sector provider drive time service areas, showing an opportunity to diversity programming to provide an opportunity for an exemplary and expansive program offering.

Interpretation of the map shows that the core-County area is adequately served based on drive time analysis by both County facilities and YMCA facilities, with the YMCA facilities offering extended service areas in the northern, southern, and southwestern portions of the County. Portions of the eastern, northeastern, northwestern and southwestern regions of the County are not served by the combined service area.

Furthermore, each County facility was mapped with participation data for each facility, where available, to illustrate the current market for each facility. Addresses of anonymous users were mapped based on available CLASS system data for each facility, but due to the relatively recent practice of utilizing CLASS for all participatory data, not all County centers are depicted. County facilities were geo-coded by address and are represented on the map by purple points/circles. Drive time analysis for each County facility was established based on a service area of 10-minute drive times. These areas are represented by the purple polygon areas on the map depicting the culmination of a 10-minute drive time from all County facilities based on a best case or optimal scenario of traffic flowing at posted speed limits on all roads and thoroughfares with no impeded traffic, including stop signs, stop



lights, and traffic congestion. Participation data was divided into three categories based on a measurement of a direct line between two points – “as the crow flies”:

- Light blue – these dots/points represent those participants who reported a home address less than five miles from the County facility
- Orange – these dots/points represent those participants who reported a home address five to ten miles from the County facility
- Red – these dots/points represent those participants who reported a home address ten miles or more from the County facility

Figure 58 depicts the County Center Gap Analysis which demonstrates the total service area served by the various Mecklenburg County Recreation Centers. As can be seen from the figure, the North side, East side, parts of the South-East side and the South-West side of the County are underserved by County facilities. However, it is also important to establish the service area served by other providers to evaluate if there is an actual gap in the services offered or if that gap is adequately filled by comparable private providers.

Figure 59 depicts the County Center and Private Service Provider Gap Analysis which demonstrates the total service area served by the various Mecklenburg County Recreation Centers and the Private Service Providers. It must be noted that in this case the private service providers considered were primarily YMCA facilities since they are the most comparable and widespread service providers. As **Figure 59** demonstrates the North side and large portions of the South-east side are served by the YMCA facilities. However, the Eastern, Northeastern and Northwestern portions as well as part of the west side of the County are underserved by the combined facilities.

Interpretation of the individual recreation center service area maps show that most County facilities have the bulk of their participants within its five mile radius, yet participants are distributed throughout the County and beyond showing a willingness to travel to particular County facilities, such as First Ward Recreation Center and Mallard Creek Recreation Center among others. Also, as seen in the case of Tom Sykes Recreation Center for example, which has a high proportion participants driving from a distance than from nearby, there seems to be a potential audience with the 10 minute drive time of that recreation center that could be captured and converted into users of the system.

On the other hand, there is a relatively small participant size at certain recreation centers, the Merry Oaks Recreation Center and the Philip O’Berry Recreation Center for example. One reason could be the limited facility availability since it is a shared school site. However, there does exist an opportunity to identify other causes for limited participation and evaluate means to attract a larger portion of the target market.

The Albemarle Road Recreation Center Drive Time Analysis is shown in **Figure 60** as an example, for all other recreation centers refer to **Appendix 6**.

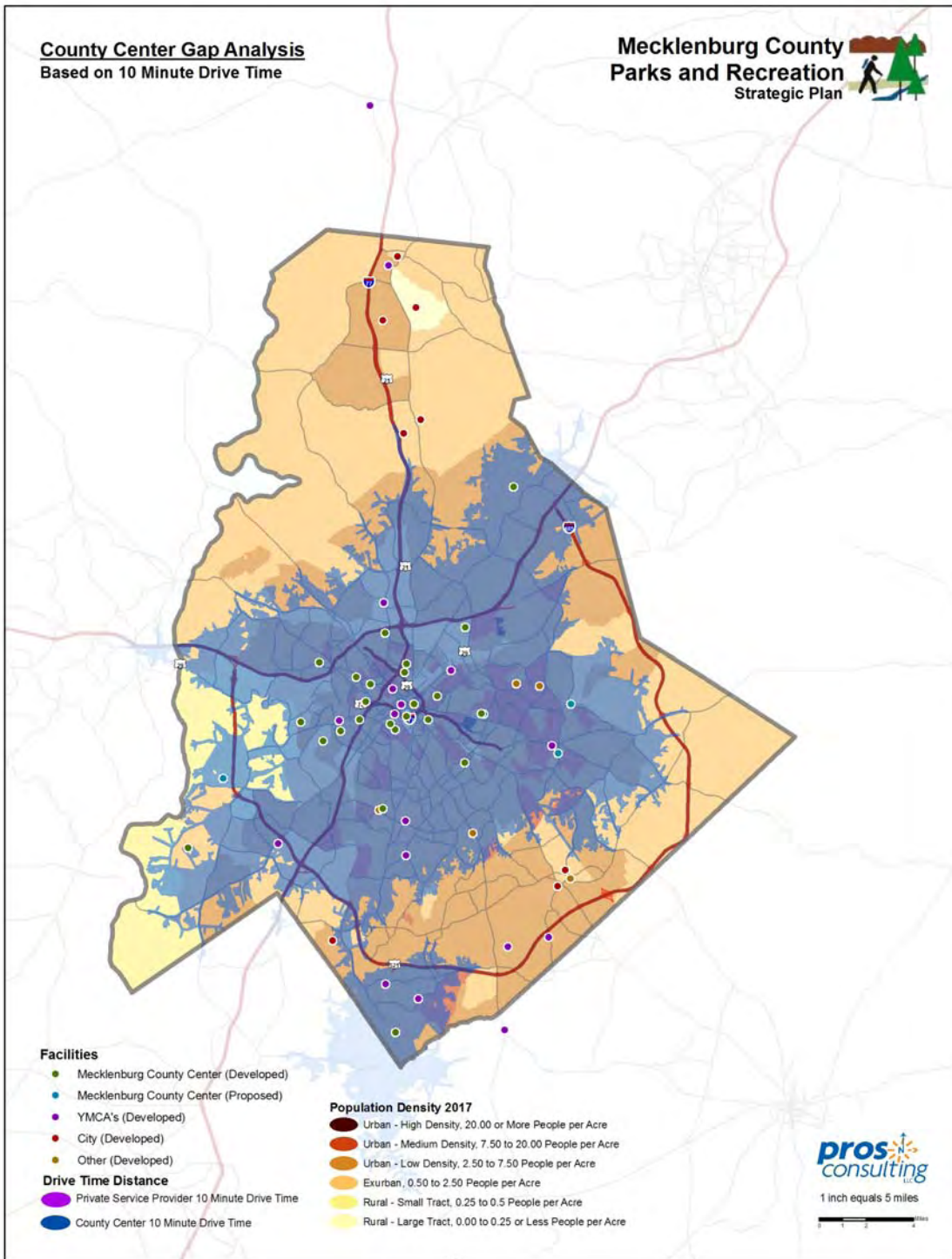


Figure 58 - Community Center Gap Analysis

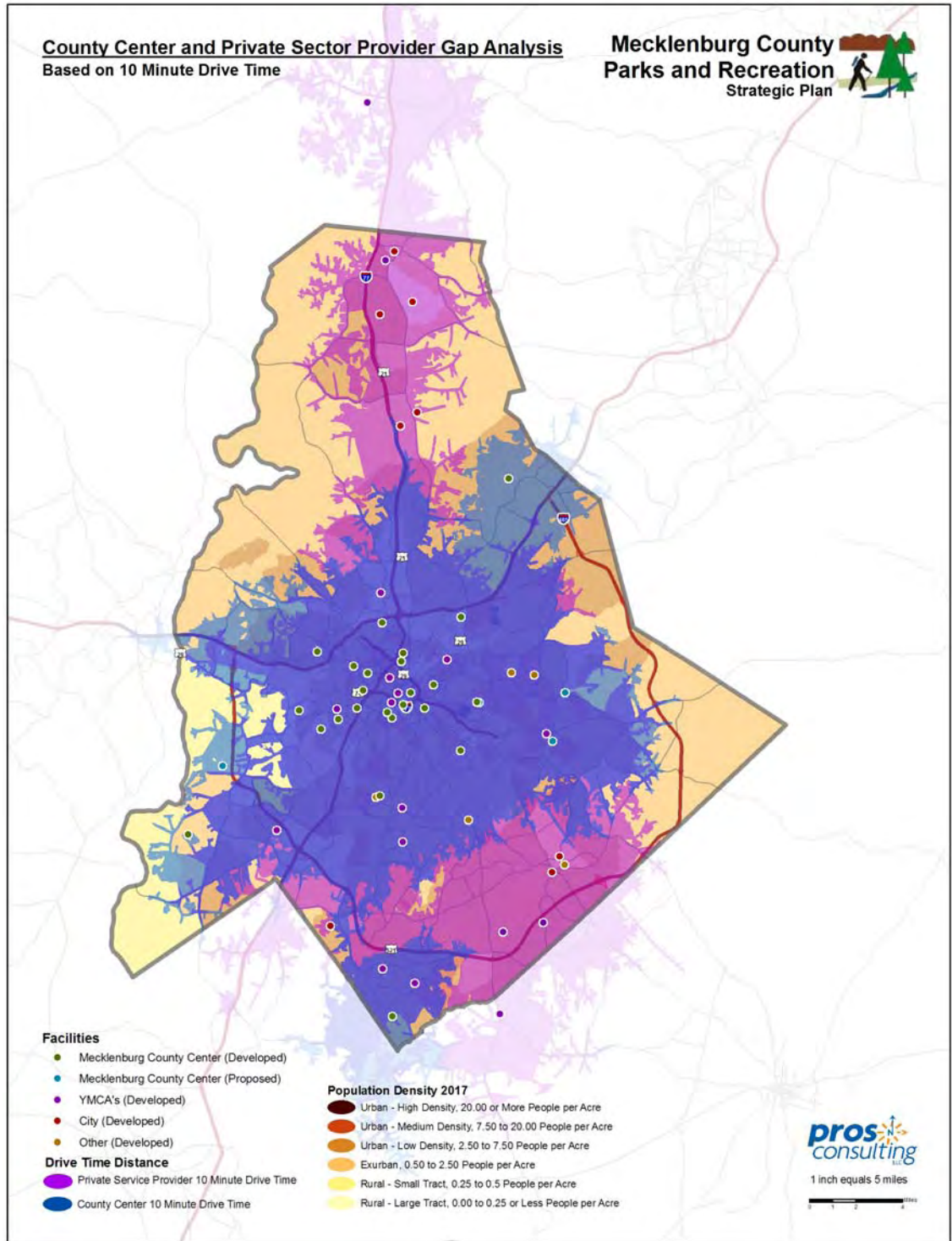


Figure 59 - Mecklenburg County and Other Providers Service Area

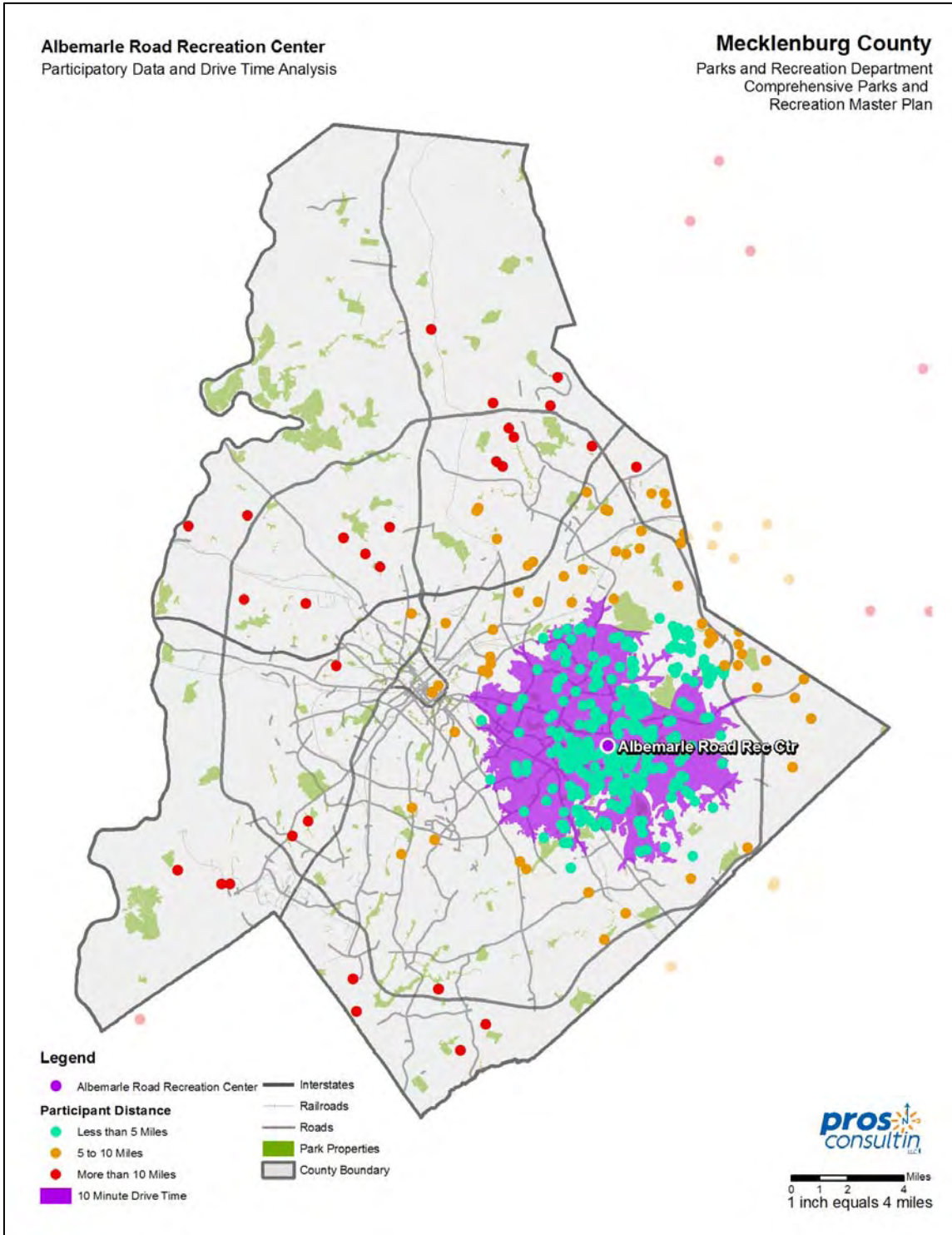


Figure 60 - Albemarle Road Recreation Center



7.5 COST OF SERVICE (1 CORE PROGRAM – 1 CENTER)

The purpose of the cost of service analysis is to evaluate the programs and services at the Albemarle Road Recreation Center to achieve the following:

- Determine the cost effectiveness of each program area including identifying subsidy levels and resource efficiencies
- Analyze operations associated with each program area to identify total costs and assist in the design of appropriate user fees
- Facilitate and document the achievement of pricing policies and recovery goals

The cost of service analysis is to determine the total cost of providing services to individual customers, groups of customers, or an entire customer base. The total cost of service includes all direct and indirect costs. The results of the analysis support decision making for determining what programs and services require additional operating capital or additional fees to be charged for specific services. Following is the methodology used to prepare this cost of service analysis:

- Direct costs include those incurred directly such as salaries and benefits, store inventory, activities, uniforms, supplies, equipment rental, contractual services, printing, programming, and volunteer program.
- All costs other than direct costs are indirect costs. Indirect costs are allocated to each department and/or program based upon the indirect cost allocation included in the model. The portion of indirect cost allocated to each cost center is based on the allocation methodology applied to the specific indirect cost element.
- The direct cost plus the indirect costs equal the total costs.
- The total costs divided by the units of service were identified to determine the total costs per unit of service.
- The result of the cost-of-service analysis does not necessarily mean that the Department should recover the total costs-of-service through user fees. The Pricing Policy should guide the recovery of costs through user fees.

The review performed by the PROS team includes:

- Cost recovery of services for Albemarle Road Recreation Center
- The readiness for the development of a comprehensive cost of services model

This review results in an action plan that identifies information needed to perform a detailed cost of service analysis and develop a cost of service model. The action plan provides strategies for implementing a cost of service approach for budgeting and pricing including documenting the cost of individual functions and services provided by the Department. In addition, the recommended cost of service approach will document the revenue recovery of individual programs and services, and permits the establishment of cost recovery goals and policies.

A cost-of-service analysis includes three levels of assessment:

- **Direct Cost** - The most detailed analysis will be at the program level and will assess the cost and related recovery for each activity within the budget programs. This assessment will document the direct cost of each program area.
- **Indirect Cost** – The second tier assessment will allocate the Department indirect and administrative costs to the program areas. The indirect and administrative should be reviewed in relationship to both the direct cost and potential extra administrative and/or facilities costs associated with each program offering. Indirect costs include services from organization units outside recreation; such as, building and grounds maintenance, accounting services, legal services, and external service charges and contractors. Administrative costs include the general administrative functions and governance of the Department.
- **Other Financial Impacts** – The third tier assessment will allocate debt service, external costs, and external funds; such as grants, gifts or donations, to the program areas.

Details on specific activities, programs, services, and permits will be needed to complete a true cost-of-service analysis. This includes:

- Programs - Details for each activity including:
 - Number of activities/sessions
 - Attendance/participants
 - Current fee schedules
 - Actual revenues by program
- Facilities - Details regarding facilities including:
 - Number of facilities by function
 - Size and attributes of each facility
 - Age of facilities
 - Approximate historical cost of facility construction
- Maintenance - Details for each activity including:
 - Historical work order summary, if available
 - Staff hours and costs by program
 - Maintenance Equipment
 - Supply, material, and part warehousing
 - Contracted maintenance functions

With the additional activity information and the currently available accounting information, the Department would be able to complete a comprehensive cost-of-direct analysis.

7.5.1 DATA ASSESSMENT

The PROS Team reviewed this information to identify the format of the financial information and the availability of activity statistics sufficient to document the cost per unit of service. The program budget information is not presented at the program level for each activity and service. The PROS Team’s overall assessment of the data includes



7.5.2 COST OF SERVICE FOR ABLEMARLE ROAD RECREATION CENTER

The provided information is sufficient to asset the total recreation programs at the center. Recreation Specialists and Recreation Assistant costs where estimated based on our experience at other agencies.

Figure 61 shows the direct costs from fiscal year ending 2007 with the estimated salary costs and program revenues. With the estimated salary costs, the revenue recovery is 26% of the expenses.

Albemarle Road Recreation Center									
BFY	Fund	Dept	Unit	Unit Name		Location	Object	Object Name	Expense
2007	0001	PRK	5201	Contracted Services	8002	Albemarle Road Recreation Center	5313	Security	\$ 11,982.50
2007	0001	PRK	5630	Structural Services	8002	Albemarle Road Recreation Center	6025	Materials-Maint & Repair	\$ 584.60
2007	0001	PRK	5650	Turf & Irrigation	8002	Albemarle Road Recreation Center	6025	Materials-Maint & Repair	\$ 134.50
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness	8002	Albemarle Road Recreation Center	5110	Auto Allowance - Mileage	\$ 119.09
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness	8002	Albemarle Road Recreation Center	5121	Printing	\$ 48.50
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness	8002	Albemarle Road Recreation Center	6005	Departmental Supplies	\$ 3,158.94
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness	8002	Albemarle Road Recreation Center	6025	Materials-Maint & Repair	\$ 1,659.99
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness	8002	Albemarle Road Recreation Center	6035	Uniforms-Clothing	\$ 250.05
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness	8002	Albemarle Road Recreation Center	7395	Instructional Costs	\$ 5,665.94
2007	0001	PRK	5700	FWRC	8002	Albemarle Road Recreation Center	5110	Auto Allowance - Mileage	\$ 32.04
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness	8002	Albemarle Road Recreation Center	5110	Auto Allowance - Mileage	\$ 152.64
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness	8002	Albemarle Road Recreation Center	5110	Departmental Supplies	\$ 1,326.49
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness	8002	Albemarle Road Recreation Center	5110	Instructional Costs	\$ 493.00
Operating Expenses									\$ 25,608.28
BFY	Fund	Dept	Unit	Unit Name		Sub-Unit		Object Name	Expense
						Albemarle Road Recreation Center		Recreation Specialist	\$ 40,000.00
						Albemarle Road Recreation Center		Recreation Assistant	\$ 27,000.00
Total Staff Costs									\$ 67,000.00
Total Expenses									\$ 92,608.28
BFY	Fund	Dept	Unit	Unit Name		Sub-Unit		Sub-Revenue Source	Revenue
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness		Albemarle Road Recreation Center		After School Program	\$ 300.00
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness		Albemarle Road Recreation Center		Cheerleading	\$ 11,262.50
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness		Albemarle Road Recreation Center		Classes & Programs	\$ 1,295.00
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness		Albemarle Road Recreation Center		Co-Rec Soccer	\$ 1,105.00
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness		Albemarle Road Recreation Center		Trips	\$ 60.00
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness		Albemarle Road Recreation Center		Youth Baseball	\$ 1,100.00
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness		Albemarle Road Recreation Center		Youth Basketball	\$ 6,000.50
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness		Albemarle Road Recreation Center		Youth Soccer	\$ 55.00
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness		Albemarle Road Recreation Center		Reimbursement of Costs	\$ (104.50)
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness		Albemarle Road Recreation Center		Misc-Concessions	\$ 767.72
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness		Albemarle Road Recreation Center		Coca-Cola	\$ 264.77
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness		Albemarle Road Recreation Center		Gym Rental	\$ 820.00
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness		Albemarle Road Recreation Center		Center/Facility	\$ 1,004.50
2007	0001	PRK	5700	Fitness		Albemarle Road Recreation Center		Rent	\$ (82.00)
Total Revenues									\$ 23,848.49
Total Recovery									26%

Figure 61 - Expenses and Revenues

The Youth Basketball program cost recovery is shown in **Figure 62**. Youth Basketball recovered 122% of the direct costs and 23% of the direct and indirect costs.

Youth Basketball			
	Direct	Indirect	Total
Revenues	\$6,380.00		\$6,380.00
Expenditures			
Staffing: Recreation Specialist (120 hours X \$23 per hour)		\$2,760.00	\$2,760.00
Trophies	\$520.50		\$520.50
Uniforms	\$2,500.50		\$2,500.50
Banquet	\$0.00		\$0.00
Referees: 44 games x 2 refs x \$25	\$2,200.00		\$2,200.00
Gym Use: \$55 per hour x 350 hrs		\$19,250.00	\$19,250.00
Total Expenditures	\$5,221.00	\$22,010.00	\$27,231.00
TOTALS	\$1,159.00		-\$20,851.00
Recovery	122%		23%

Figure 62 - 2007 Youth Basketball Expenses and Revenues

The other programs at the Albemarle Road Recreation Center had no reported direct or indirect expenses.

7.5.3 PRICING OF SERVICES

After the cost-of-service is documented, the Department may wish to review its comprehensive Pricing Policy to compare the current cost recovery to the established recovery policies. The cost of service result also document the level of required subsidy to maintain the programs and services based on Department goals and objectives.

The result of the cost-of-service analysis does not necessarily mean that the entity should recover all of the costs of a service through user fees. Though the cost of service depicts the cost to provide a service, it should not be used as a cost recovery benchmark. The cost of service results document what is required in the way of operating capital and what rates should be set to meet the recovery goals of the pricing policy. When evaluating the pricing of services, organizations typically analyze their target market and the social and economic impact of the service, the characteristics of the product or service, and environmental influences.

A Pricing Policy provides the Department with consistent guidelines in pricing services and programs. This allows users to better understand the philosophy behind pricing a service. Furthermore, the level of service and benefits users receive is translated into a price that is based on a set subsidy level, or on the level of individual consumption or exclusivity that is involved outside of what a general taxpayer receives.



Cost-of-service documentation with adopted pricing policies provides the Department with the tools to adjust the pricing of programs and services as operation and maintenance costs increase against a fixed tax revenue stream.

The objectives of pricing user fees are fourfold:

- Equity
- Revenue production
- Efficiency
- Redistribution of income

Equity means that those who benefit from the service should pay for it; and those who benefit the most should pay the most. The type of service will directly determine the cost recovery strategy or pricing strategy to be used in pricing park and recreation services. Public agencies offer three kinds of services.

- Public services normally have no user fee associated with their consumption. The cost for providing these services is borne the general tax base.
- Merit services can be priced using either a partial overhead pricing strategy or a variable cost pricing strategy. Partial overhead pricing strategies recover all direct operating costs and some determined portion of fixed costs. The portion of fixed costs not covered by the price established represents the tax subsidy. Whatever the level of tax subsidy the Department needs to effectively communicate the level of tax subsidy being provided by the Department.
- Private park and recreation services are where only the user benefits, then most park and recreation agencies are pricing services using a full cost recovery strategy. The price of this particular service is intended to recover all fixed and variable costs associated with the service.

Revenue production means that user fees from parks and recreation programs and activities will assist in the overall operation of the Park and Recreation budget. Revenue production gives the Department needed cash flow for projects not budgeted in that year's budget. It gives flexibility in providing services not normally provided through tax dollars. Example: Promotional dollars for programs and services. Revenue production gives the Department in-kind dollars for grant matches and the ability to enhance facilities.

Revenue production helps offset tax dollars spent on a specific program that over time has lost enthusiasm by the public, but demands more tax dollars to maintain expenses associated with a market that is losing support. Revenue dollars paid by individuals would place value on the experience that the individual is obtaining from the services provided by the Department which develops a deeper commitment to the programs they help support.

Efficiency is maintained by the Department utilizing revenue dollars because expenditures are not made unless necessary revenues are available. Priorities in management of park lands, resources and activities are clearly defined because the services provided are clearly made priorities because direct user dollars are associated with the activities that the public wants provided. Cost tracking of dollars spent for each activity is documented. Pricing can achieve six positive results:

- Reduces congestion and overcrowding
- Indicates clientele demand and support
- Increases positive consumer attitudes

- Provides encouragement to the private sector (so it can compete with us, and we can reallocate our resources when necessary)
- Provides incentive to achieve societal goals
- Ensures stronger accountability on agency staff and management

Redistribution of income means that the dollars associated with each activity it came from to pay for direct cost and for future improvements associated with the activity. Example: Adult softball players pay fees for maintenance and capital improvements associated with the activity they choose to participate in.

7.5.4 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.5.4.1 ACTION PLAN

The following Action Plan presents the steps required for the Department to implement a full cost of service approach. The action plan is organized by major task. In certain cases, tasks may be performed simultaneously with others to gain efficiencies and to recognize the integral nature of certain activities. Action plan step will document extent to which program areas are self-supporting, at breakeven or requiring a subsidy.

7.5.4.2 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection includes gathering the required operating data.

7.5.4.3 COST ANALYSIS

The cost analysis documents total costs for each program or service. In a multi-program organization, the costs can be divided into two different types: direct and indirect. Direct costs are those that are clearly and easily attributable to a specific program. Indirect costs are those which are not easily identifiable with a specific program, but which may be necessary to the operation of the program. These costs are shared among programs and, in some cases, among functions. Administrative cost also need to be identified such as purchasing, human resources, information services, general management and governance which should be charged as indirect costs.

7.5.4.4 COST OF SERVICE MODEL

A Cost of Service Model documents the analysis and facilitates annual updates. A cost of service model is developed to incorporate and allocate direct and indirect costs in order to make management decisions on pricing of services and to indicate revenue impacts, subsidy levels, and operational effectiveness. The model incorporates budgeted expenditures allowing for continuous updates, efficient analysis and informed decisions. This model is used in budget development and pricing of programs and services.

7.5.4.5 USER FEE DESIGN

The analysis of each program area's resource requirements documents the proper allocation of resources to achieve the Department's desired quality and quantity of services and programs. Additionally, the analysis provides a method for documenting operational efficiency and determining subsidy levels.



The cost analysis information is used to assess functional responsibilities and identify areas in need adjustments in staffing levels and budgeted funds.

Based on the pricing policies and recovery goals, the Department will have the capabilities to revise existing and/or design new user fees.

7.5.4.6 UPDATE OF REVENUE PLAN

The final step is an update of the Department's revenue plan to project program demand, user fees, and program revenues over a five-year period.

7.5.4.7 RECOMMENDED TIMELINE

It is recommended that the Department implement the Action Plan over a four-month period of time. This time line includes the data gathering and analysis action step presented above along with time to train key staff members in the processes and use of the model.

7.5.4.8 REQUIRED RESOURCES

To successfully perform and maintain a cost of service approach, the Department will need:

- The additional activities and financial information discussed above
- One or two key staff to be trained in the processes and to be responsible for future cost analysis and updates
- Staff time available to gather the required information and review the analytical results
- A computer with sufficient memory (minimum 512mb-1Gb preferable), hard disk space (minimum 80mb available), and software (Microsoft Excel 2003) to run the model.

7.5.4.9 UPDATE OF PRICING POLICIES

During the cost of service analysis is an opportune time to review and update the Department's pricing policies to maximize the results of the cost of service analysis and make adjustments to policies and cost recovery goals.

7.6 FACILITY CAPACITY UTILIZATION

The Albemarle Road Recreation Center (ARRC) is used as a sample to document the utilization of recreation facilities. Based on the information reviewed, the ARRC has 78 operating hours per week available for County programs and other sanctioned programs, of which 2 hours – from 7:00 AM to 9:00 AM, Monday through Friday – are apportioned to the Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools Alternative to Suspension program. It must be noted that the Non-prime time % at ARRC is skewed a bit from the typical center due to having the school truancy program on site. The non-prime time usage of 71-83% is not typical across the board and systems tend to be less than 50% generally.

Based on the program schedules, 78 total operating hours are derived from an available schedule that includes Monday through Friday, 7:00AM to 9:00PM, and Saturday hours of 9:00AM through 5:00PM. Programmed activities begin with at 7:00AM Monday through Friday in the gymnasium and extend through the 8:00PM hour on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday in Class 1. The gymnasium and three classrooms are scheduled at total of 170.5 hours per week and total aggregate operational hours for the four areas amounts to 312.0 hours. The Albemarle Road Recreation Center’s total weekly utilization for all four areas comes to 57%.

Albemarle Road Recreation Center Utilization (Overall); Prime-time / Non Prime-time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Weekly Total
Total Center Hours - AGGREGATE ROOM TOTALS	56.0	56.0	56.0	56.0	56.0	32.0	Closed	312.0
Total Programmed Hours - ALL PROGRAMS	32.0	35.0	35.0	35.0	32.0	32.0	Closed	170.5
Percent Utilized - TOTAL CENTER	57%	63%	63%	63%	57%	55%	N/A	57%
Percent of Total Hours Utilized - Prime-time	27%	30%	30%	30%	27%	0%	N/A	26%
Percent of Total Hours Utilized - Non Prime-time	30%	32%	32%	32%	30%	0%	N/A	28%
Total Prime-time Hours Available (7-10A; 3-8P)	32.0	32.0	32.0	32.0	32.0	32.0	Closed	192.0
Prime-time Hours Scheduled	15.0	17.0	17.0	17.0	15.0	-	Closed	81.0
Percent of Prime-time Utilization	47%	53%	53%	53%	47%	0%	N/A	42%
Total Non Prime-time Hours Available (10A-3P; 8-9P)	24.0	24.0	24.0	24.0	24.0	24.0	Closed	144.0
Non Prime-time Hours Scheduled	17.0	18.0	18.0	18.0	17.0	-	Closed	88.0
Percent of Non Prime-time Utilization	71%	75%	75%	75%	71%	0%	N/A	61%

Figure 63 - Albemarle Road Recreation Center Overall Utilization

Analyzing the capacity utilization by prime-time and non prime-time categories provides a proactive process for program planning and scheduling. Based on pricing policies and cost recovery goals, both convenience (time) of use and level of exclusivity that an individual or group receives should be incorporated into the fee charged. Prime-time program slots, time slots throughout the day that are more desired, should not only be programmed with the most sought after programs, but also with the programs that have the greatest cost recovery. The utilization during the prime-time portions of the day is not a challenge at many centers, rather the bigger challenge is how to entice users into the center during the “down” time. Prime-time and non prime-time hours were classified as:

- Prime-time Hours – 7:00 to 10:00AM; 3:00 to 8:00PM
- Non Prime-time Hours – 10:00AM to 3:00PM; 8:00 to 9:00PM

The following information was provided for the Albemarle Road Recreation Center and has been utilized for the various program areas.

- Total center hours
- Programmed hours attributed to each area
- Total percent utilization
- Prime-time and non prime-time utilization

Gymnasium

The Gymnasium is schedule for a total of 46 hours per week; weekly utilization equates to 59% of available hours (78 total operational hours; 46 total programmed hours).



Prime-time utilization reached a high of 63% for both Tuesday and Wednesday (5 of the 8 hours categorized as prime-time were programmed). Prime-time programming for Tuesday and Wednesday equates to 36% of all operational hours (5 hours of prime-time programming of the total 14 operating hours available).

Non prime-time utilization peaked at 100% for Tuesday and Wednesday (all 6 of the hours classified as non prime-time were programmed), or 43% of total operational hours for each of the respective days (6 hours of prime-time programming of the total 14 operating hours available).

Gymnasium Utilization; Prime-time / Non Prime-time (Based on program schedule provided for Albemarle Road Center)	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Weekly Total
Total Hours Available - ARRC	14.0	14.0	14.0	14.0	14.0	8.0	Closed	78.0
Total Hours Scheduled - Gymnasium	8.0	11.0	11.0	8.0	8.0	-	Closed	46.0
Percent Utilized - Gymnasium	57%	79%	79%	57%	57%	0%	N/A	59%
Percent of Total Hours Utilized - Prime-time	21%	36%	36%	21%	21%	0%	N/A	24%
Percent of Total Hours Utilized - Non Prime-time	36%	43%	43%	36%	36%	0%	N/A	35%
Total Prime-time Hours Available (7-10A; 3-8P)	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	Closed	48.0
Prime-time Hours Scheduled - Gymnasium	3.0	5.0	5.0	3.0	3.0	-	Closed	19.0
Percent of Prime-time Utilization - Gymnasium	38%	63%	63%	38%	38%	0%	N/A	40%
Total Non Prime-time Hours Available (10A-3P; 8-9P)	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	Closed	36.0
Non Prime-time Hours Scheduled - Gymnasium	5.0	6.0	6.0	5.0	5.0	-	Closed	27.0
Percent of Non Prime-time Utilization - Gymnasium	83%	100%	100%	83%	83%	0%	N/A	75%

Figure 64 - Gymnasium Utilization

Classroom 1

Classroom 1 is schedule for a total of 58 hours per week; weekly utilization equates to 74% of available hours (78 total operational hours; 58 total programmed hours). Class 1 has the greatest occurrence of prime-time programming amongst all four areas. Thirty-two (32) of the 58 programmed hours can be attributed to prime-time hours.

Prime-time utilization reached a high of 100% on Thursday (all of the 8 hours categorized as prime-time were programmed) with Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday each having 75% utilization for during the prime-time hours (6 of the 8 hours categorized as prime-time were programmed). Prime-time programming for Thursday equates to 57% of all operational hours (prime-time programming accounted for 8 hours of the total 14 operating hours available) while Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday each equate to 43% of all operational hours (6 hours of prime-time programming of the total 14 operating hours available).

Non prime-time utilization followed the same pattern as prime-time scheduling, peaking at 100% for Thursday (all 6 hours categorized as non prime-time were programmed) and 83% utilization for Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday. Non prime-time programming accounted for 36% of all program hours for Class 1 for each of the days except Thursday, of which 43% of programmed hours were non prime-time.

Class 1 Utilization; Prime-time / Non Prime-time (Based on program schedule provided for Albemarle Road Center)	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Weekly Total
Total Hours Available - ARRC	14.0	14.0	14.0	14.0	14.0	8.0	Closed	78.0
Total Hours Scheduled - Class 1	11.0	11.0	11.0	14.0	11.0	-	Closed	58.0
Percent Utilized - Class 1	79%	79%	79%	100%	79%	0%	N/A	74%
Percent of Total Hours Utilized - Prime-time	43%	43%	43%	57%	43%	0%	N/A	41%
Percent of Total Hours Utilized - Non Prime-time	36%	36%	36%	43%	36%	0%	N/A	33%
Total Prime-time Hours Available (7-10A; 3-8P)	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	Closed	48.0
Prime-time Hours Scheduled - Class 1	6.0	6.0	6.0	8.0	6.0	-	Closed	32.0
Percent of Prime-time Utilization - Class 1	75%	75%	75%	100%	75%	0%	N/A	67%
Total Non Prime-time Hours Available (10A-3P; 8-9P)	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	Closed	36.0
Non Prime-time Hours Scheduled - Class 1	5.0	5.0	5.0	6.0	5.0	-	Closed	26.0
Percent of Non Prime-time Utilization - Class 1	83%	83%	83%	100%	83%	0%	N/A	72%

Figure 65 –Classroom 1 Utilization

Classroom 2

Classroom 2 is schedule for a total of 55 hours per week; weekly utilization equates to 71% of available hours (78 total operational hours; 55 total programmed hours). Thirty (30) of the 55 programmed hours can be attributed to prime-time hours.

Both prime-time and non prime-time utilization stay constant each day of the five day week for Class 2. Prime-time utilization remained a stable 75% all five days – Monday through Friday (6 of the 8 hours categorized as prime-time were programmed). Prime-time programming for each of the five days equates to 43% of all operational hours (prime-time programming accounted for 6 hours of the total 14 operating hours available).

Non prime-time utilization followed the same steady scheduling pattern displayed by the prime-time slots. Each of the five working days non prime-time slots were programmed at an 83% utilization (5 of the 6 hours categorized as non prime-time were programmed). When compared to total operating hours, Class 2 non prime-time programming accounted for 36% of all program hours for each of the five days (5 of the total 14 operating hours available).

Class 2 Utilization; Prime-time / Non Prime-time (Based on program schedule provided for Albemarle Road Center)	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Weekly Total
Total Hours Available - ARRC	14.0	14.0	14.0	14.0	14.0	8.0	Closed	78.0
Total Hours Scheduled - Class 2	11.0	11.0	11.0	11.0	11.0	-	Closed	55.0
Percent Utilized - Class 2	79%	79%	79%	79%	79%	0%	N/A	71%
Percent of Total Hours Utilized - Prime-time	43%	43%	43%	43%	43%	0%	N/A	38%
Percent of Total Hours Utilized - Non Prime-time	36%	36%	36%	36%	36%	0%	N/A	32%
Total Prime-time Hours Available (7-10A; 3-8P)	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	Closed	48.0
Prime-time Hours Scheduled - Class 2	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	-	Closed	30.0
Percent of Prime-time Utilization - Class 2	75%	75%	75%	75%	75%	0%	N/A	63%
Total Non Prime-time Hours Available (10A-3P; 8-9P)	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	Closed	36.0
Non Prime-time Hours Scheduled - Class 2	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	-	Closed	25.0
Percent of Non Prime-time Utilization - Class 2	83%	83%	83%	83%	83%	0%	N/A	69%

Figure 66 - Classroom 2 Utilization



Classroom 3

Classroom 3 is the least programmed areas within the Albemarle Road Recreation Center. Unlike the gymnasium and each of the other two classrooms, Classroom 3 is scheduled for less than half of the available opportunities. One of the reasons for this due to the fact that it is an activity room and is used more often as ‘open play area’. The limited use occurs in the form of 2 hours per day, Monday through Friday, for a total of 10 programmed hours per week. Weekly utilization for Class 3 equates to 13% of available hours (78 total operational hours; 10 total programmed hours).

Based on scheduling, Class 3 is allocated to senior programs on a daily basis from 10:00AM to 12:00 noon. There is no prime-time utilization for Class 3.

Non prime-time utilization remains steady, if not robust. Each day, Monday through Friday, has a total of two non prime-time program hours. This is the equivalent of 33% of the total available non prime-time hours (2 of the 6 total non prime-time hours) and 14% of total center hours per day (2 of the total 14 daily operating hours available).

Class 3 Utilization; Prime-time / Non Prime-time (Based on program schedule provided for Albemarle Road Center)	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Weekly Total
Total Hours Available - ARRC	14.0	14.0	14.0	14.0	14.0	8.0	Closed	78.0
Total Hours Scheduled - Class 3	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	-	Closed	10.0
Percent Utilized - Class 3	14%	14%	14%	14%	14%	0%	N/A	13%
Percent of Total Hours Utilized - Prime-time	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	N/A	0%
Percent of Total Hours Utilized - Non Prime-time	14%	14%	14%	14%	14%	0%	N/A	13%
Total Prime-time Hours Available (7-10A; 3-8P)	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	Closed	48.0
Prime-time Hours Scheduled - Class 3	-	-	-	-	-	-	Closed	-
Percent of Prime-time Utilization - Class 3	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	N/A	0%
Total Non Prime-time Hours Available (10A-3P; 8-9P)	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	Closed	36.0
Non Prime-time Hours Scheduled - Class 3	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	-	Closed	10.0
Percent of Non Prime-time Utilization - Class 3	33%	33%	33%	33%	33%	0%	N/A	28%

Figure 67 - Classroom 3 Utilization

Summary

Classroom 1 and Classroom 2 are used the most of all four areas – Classroom 1 is utilized a total of 74% of available time and Classroom 2 is utilized 71% of available times. These utilization factors include Saturday; although there are no programs scheduled for Saturdays at the ARRC, the opportunity to schedule exists therefore the operational hours were figured into the utilization.

Classroom 3 receives relatively no use; with only two scheduled hours per day Mondays through Fridays, the room has a total of 68 additional hours available for programming. Programs to complement the existing senior programs should be explored. Another alternative to the senior programming in Classroom 3 may be to extend the age segment offering of Classrooms 1 and 2 into Classroom 3 to allow for a true family experience.

Ultimately, all programming options should be explored to increase Classroom 3 utilization and to increase the evening utilization of all of the classroom spaces.

The Gymnasium is well used during the week, however, program information may not adequately account for open gym periods. The ARRC staff should explore actively scheduling Saturday mornings to increase utilization and program revenues. Partnerships with public and private leagues may be possible.

7.6.1 PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Based on a review of all the information regarding recreation programs, PROS Consulting, recommends the following future core programs:

- Aquatics programs
- Environmental/nature center programs
- Adventure sports (outdoor recreation) programs
- Therapeutic recreation programs and services
- Athletics
- Community-Wide Special Events
- 4-H programs
- Golf services
- Active adults 50-64 and Seniors 65 programs
- Fitness and wellness programs
- Facility rentals
- Summer camps and after school programs

This list includes all of the current core programs. The additional items are fitness and wellness, differentiating the senior market between “active adults” and seniors, facility rentals, summer camps, and after school programs.

Senior programs are recommended to develop into a core program, given the growing market of this age group as well as “active adult” interest in recreation opportunities. The program area should evolve into two distinct program areas between the more active adults and the more senior market as mentioned previously. Education and life skill programs scored high on the program needs assessment (program priorities), which should result in an increase in these kind of programs.





Fitness and wellness programs had the second highest program need of the 22 programs listed on the needs assessment survey. This translates into 165,930 households having a need for fitness activities. Of the households whose needs for recreation programming are only being met by 50% or less, adult fitness and wellness programs had the greatest unmet need. Fitness activities are served by the eight fitness centers as well as fitness classes and activities at some of the recreation centers. This includes only approximately 9,600 square feet for all the fitness centers combined. The centers should re-position themselves to accommodate larger square footage dedicated to fitness as well as more hardwood floor areas for group exercise and indoor cycling.

Some centers, such as the Mallard Creek center, have a significant emphasis on fitness. This is a key program area to grow in the future, not only for adults and seniors, but for youth as well. With the increase in childhood obesity, there is tremendous interest in offering programs geared toward the outcome of developing healthier children. The inventory of fitness programs should include:

- Boot camps
- Personal training
- Indoor cycling
- Yoga
- Pilates
- Group exercise (jazzercise, Zumba, kickboxing)
- Youth fitness
- Nutrition
- Wellness seminars
- Massage
- Corporate fitness

All recreation centers should offer a mix of these programs each programming cycle and for all age segments.

It is also recommended that facility rentals become a core program area. Over 70 rental areas and sites exist for receptions, weddings, family reunions, corporate events, picnics, and birthday parties. This area has a significant presence on the web and is a great amenity. Significant revenue opportunity exists in this area.

Summer camp programs/before and after school should also grow into a core program area. This is based on discussions with similar providers who commented on the need for more after school programs and summer day camp programs.

Cultural arts programming does not have much of a presence in the current program offerings, as only a few cultural arts programs are offered throughout the entire system. There is a tremendous opportunity to develop this as a significant program area. If this program area grows successfully, in the future, it should be regarded as a core program as well. Opportunities exist to partner with arts groups as a way of getting started, as well as

nearby colleges. Arts programming can include dance, performing arts, music, and visual arts.

Dance programs can include:

- Ballroom dancing
- Latin dance and salsa
- Dance African
- Square dancing
- Swing dancing
- Wedding dancing
- Belly dancing
- Youth dancing (jazz, tap, ballet)
- Adult dancing (jazz, tap, ballet)

Many park and recreation systems do very well in the dance area and are attracting more and more students with a resurgence of dance interest throughout the United States. Many offer “a school of dance” program, which is a yearlong program that attracts more serious dancers. Richmond, Virginia’s Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities offers such a program.

Performing arts can include:

- Youth drama clubs
- Improv and mime
- Musical theatre
- Theatre production

Music can include:

- Private music lessons
- Guitar
- Piano
- Voice
- Community singing group

Through a partnership with the Community School of the Arts, Suzuki violin instructions are offered.

Visual arts can include:

- Cartooning
- Ceramics, youth and adult





- Sketching and drawing, youth and adults
- Crafts, youth and adult
- Photography
- Watercolor
- Jewelry design

The key to developing art programs is space and designated space is needed in recreation centers as well as having an art center for fine arts and performing arts in the County. Large systems such as Seattle, Dallas, Columbus, and Indianapolis, all have designated art centers that provide classes, training, exhibits, performances and events to promote the arts in the community.

Other programming area gaps include self defense and martial arts. This program area is under- represented in the current program offerings as only a few recreation centers offered this as a program area in the current Get Going Guide. Self defense is generally a strong program area for most park and recreation systems throughout the United States. Though, this program area ranked in the low program category in the program needs assessment. This could be a result of Mecklenburg County not having a presence in this program area and was not considered an important program. Demand could be created by targeting this as an important program area. This program area can include:

- Adult karate
- Youth karate
- Tae Kwon Do
- Self defense for adults
- Aikido
- Shaolin Kung Fu
- Wing Chun

Gymnastics/tumbling offerings are very minimal. Bette Rae Thomas Recreation Center has been offering a program for the past year. This is an area that can be further developed and offered at various other centers too, based on the market demand. Program areas can include:

- Tot gymnastics
- Junior gymnastics
- Tumbling
- Parent/tot gymnastics

Recreation program development needs to be a core competency of the organization. The recreation program skill set currently needs to be developed and improved. The Department should introduce a training program for all recreation programming staff that provides consistency and quality control in the programming process. This can be facilitated through a train the trainer program, in order to offer the program on a continuous basis. The training can include items such as:

- Recreation program development...what to offer
- Marketing and promotions of programs
- Get Going Guide process (timelines, submissions, writing material)
- Instructional quality, guidelines for contractual employees
- Customized customer service training
- Instructor selection and supervision(staff and contractual)
- Measuring customer satisfaction
- Quality control in recreation programs
- Cross promotions with other program areas
- Financial and budget goals, results
- Program standards
- Instructor Tool Kits
- Measuring program performance

A recreation development process manual should then be developed and include all of this information. New staff can then receive training as part of the orientation process.

In order to maintain good program development throughout the entire system, the Department should consider developing an annual program review process in which staff presents information about their key program results to senior leaders of the organization. This helps to identify cross promotional opportunities, potential impacts to other areas of the Department, support needed by County government, and provides the Department with an overall assessment of program performance. In addition, from a staffing standpoint, the Department will be well served with a standard of 1 staff / 9500 residents. This means that the Department is currently short by about 15 staff members given their current staffing of 75. This additional staff will be vital to ensure the successful implementation of the additional recommended core programs and also to address the growth in future programming.

In reviewing the program assessments, program areas generally do a good job with human resource requirements for programs. This includes annual review of policies and procedures, customer service training offered twice a year, life safety training on a regular basis, and regular performance appraisals. These work actions support good instructional quality and are all good practices.

As for suggestions for improvements, as a result of a lack of a programming system, there is no consistency in the recreation programming experience for customers. The Department does not deploy a comprehensive set of standards throughout the system. Standards do not exist throughout all program areas, though there are examples of standards being in place. Specifically, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, there are standards for human resource requirements.

Standards include those items that need to be present to ensure quality control in a recreation program. Standards ensure there is no gap between customers expectations of service and customers perspective of service based on actual experience (the difference



between what customers expect and what their opinion is based on their experience) Not all standards can be applied consistently across all programs because there are different needs for different programs.

Examples of standards include:

- Cleanliness
- Safety
- Staff appearance (uniforms)
- Program registration process
- Telephone answering standards
- Instructional lesson plans
- Class minimums and maximums
- Staff to student ratios
- Injury reporting
- Policy use and communication
- Customer relations



Each program area should identify its major list of standards and have that list as a part of new employee orientation and training. In order to help remind staff of their standards, program areas can come up with a standard of the month and reinforce its practice through email reminders or through staff meetings.

After developing the standards, the next step is to develop a method to ensure that standards are being followed. One method to accomplish that objective is to develop an audit process. A check list of performance is developed and then staff (or an

objective third party person) is assigned to visit programs and ensure conformance with identified standards.

Much variation exists among those involved in programming regarding the use of contractual versus employed staff. In many cases, contractual employees are hired to fulfill specialty program areas in which there is abundant supply of private contractors. This includes areas such as karate. In other cases, contractual employees exist because the Department heretofore strategically positioned itself to farm out recreation programming activities. Contractual employee percentages vary across the board as well. Systems throughout the country are moving to more of a split of 60-40% to 70-30% contractor to park agency.

Communication processes with part time staff is a challenge for a Department the size of Mecklenburg County. It is very difficult to deploy mission, vision and values with staff who work only a couple of hours a week for the Department. Efforts should be made to ensure

that part time programming staff feel connected and informed about the Department. These staff have very heavy interface with the public, and they need to have a sense of attachment to the Department. During the orientation and training period of programming staff, it is good practice to have an instructor's tool kit that outlines the Department's mission, vision, strategy, balanced scorecard, etc. The tool kit should also include quality standards for their area. Having face time with senior leaders is important to this staff group. A regular once or twice a year meeting with this group is important.

7.6.2 MARKETING ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

An analysis of the Department's marketing approach reveals that it is imperative for the Department to evolve into a more strategic and systematic marketing system. The Department currently does not have a marketing plan that guides marketing activities for the future. An overall plan should exist, supplemented by brief individual business plans for core programs and services. The marketing plan should be aligned with the Department's strategies. Elements of the plan should include an overall SWOT of marketing (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats), major marketing strategies, and an action plan with annual goals and objectives. It is important for marketing to be connected to the performance of various program and services areas to determine where marketing resources should be targeted. There should also be an evaluation of what is currently done in the way of allocating marketing resources. For example, Ray's Splash Planet and the Aquatics Center are treated differently in terms of marketing. Ray's has \$80,000 to work with and the Aquatics Center receives only several thousand.



There is only 1.5 staff dedicated toward marketing activities. Current efforts relate to publicity and public information, rather than a comprehensive approach to marketing. There should be more labor support in this area. Similarly sized departments have at least three or four marketing staff involved in marketing, corporate and community relations, public information, web site development, and graphic design. An ideal Department marketing budget should be about 4-5% of the operating budget.

In absence of sufficient staff to handle marketing activities, it may be useful to develop a cross functional marketing team that monitors the entire marketing system. Interns from nearby colleges may also provide some additional labor resources.



The Get Going Guide is published twice a year. Most park systems publish program guides three to four times a year, with it trending toward three times a year. The lack of frequency of the Guide probably affects lower than average household percentage of program participants.

The Get Going Guide is a good name for a program guide, representing involvement and action, which will contribute to the overall health and wellness of the community. The



layout of the Guide is easy to follow. It is particularly helpful for each major program area to list programs by the various age categories.

The Guide is actually a new marketing piece. Previous to last year, there was no system wide program guide. However, there are currently thousands of households not receiving the Guide as it is distributed primarily through the elementary schools and Department facilities. It was distributed through the newspaper, but this was determined to be too expensive. This undoubtedly contributes to the low participation rates of recreation programs by residents. According to the needs assessment survey, only 17 % of residents learn about Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation programs and activities through the Get Going Guide. Typically, across the United States, 49% of households rely on the program guide as their primary means of receiving information. On the other hand, 41% of households rely on the newspaper for information about the Department activities. Therefore, the distribution through newspapers should be reconsidered.

The Guide is also distributed to centers and other locations. About 100,000 copies are printed. Staff indicated that many more guides need to be printed, particularly based on the fact that 335,891 households exist in the County. 28% of households receive their information about park and recreation services from the web site, which is a good percentage that will undoubtedly climb. Having on-line registration and the Guide included in the web site is good. There are large park systems that enable the residents to “subscribe” to the guide and even charge a small subscription fee. Others use advertising as a way of defraying expenses. Eventually, the importance of a hard copy brochure will diminish as more and more households become familiar with on-line registration and program information.

The frequency of the Guide's distribution is less than other systems, as most other systems have three or sometimes even four distribution periods. The Mecklenburg staff feel that the twice a year frequency works, as compared to not having any program guide at all. Some staff takes it upon themselves to develop interim publicity pieces, knowing that twice a year distribution does not provide enough reach and frequency for program promotion. During staff interviews, many staff commented on the need to improve the navigation of the web site to make it easier for people to sign up for programs and classes.

The Get Going Guide process reinforces maintaining the status quo in recreation programming because of the infrequency and cycle time of its distribution. For one thing, staff needs to develop their information far in advance of the guide's distribution. . As a result, one staff person mentioned that only a third of what is really offered is included in the guide. Secondly, there isn't an incentive to come up with new program ideas within the six months between the guide's distribution. Staff had a variety of opinions about the Get Going



Guide and how to make it more effective. Some thought it was great, and a significant improvement, just by virtue of it being available. Others thought the layout of information should be changed to make it easier reading for customers. It is important to have customer feedback about the Get Going Guide. One suggestion is to have a series of focus groups with a variety of customers, and go through a set of questions relating to the design and layout, organization of information, frequency of distribution, and program descriptions.

Beyond the Get Going Guide, individual program and facility areas supplement their publicity by developing site specific or program specific brochures. The nature centers and outdoor education have their own publication that is done quarterly. It is called Natural Connections. Therapeutic Recreation has the TR Wire, which is published seasonally.

Some of the programming areas keep a database of names of users in order to email them. Though, it was mentioned that some of the lists need to be updated. All areas should do this. According to the program assessments, only some areas used email blasts. This is something that should be applied consistently. All program areas should develop a participant database at the time of registration and initiate email blasts from these lists. Email blasts can be set up to go to all customers in the database, or targeted customers within program areas.

According to youth survey information provided by the Department, the teen market has a very low level of awareness of programs and services. It may be helpful to develop MySpace



or Facebook promotional efforts. Many libraries in the Chicago area have used this successfully to gain a better teen audience.



As for branding and image, the Department's logo has been in use for quite some time. It is visible at locations throughout the Department. At some point in the future, it may be useful for the Department to have something more contemporary. Though, this is not a short term priority. The slogan of The Natural Place to Be...is a good one and reinforces the notion of get going, be active and Mecklenburg County is the place for recreation. In order to develop a stronger image for recreation programming, a separate theme and brand could be developed. This has been done in other systems throughout the country.

The Department just started a monthly e-newsletter that is available on the web. It would help to evaluate its effectiveness after a period of time.

Staff members have a high level of satisfaction toward the media contact and public service announcements that go out. However the Department is at the mercy of the newspapers as far as whether or not the information is printed. One staff mentioned the idea of getting more exposure through the local cable government access television station.

7.6.3 CORPORATE SUPPORT AND PARTNERSHIPS

The most significant corporate relationship for the Department is the sponsorship of youth sports activities by Blue Cross/Blue Shield. Within the program offerings, other corporate supports relationships include Starbucks, the Charlotte Bobcats, Coca Cola Bottling Company and Wal-Mart.

Specific program areas use many non for profit and community association to deliver programs. According to the program assessments close to 300 partners are included in the partnership inventory. Examples include the Charlotte Boxing Academy and the Charlotte Flights Track and Field Club for youth. Therapeutic Recreation uses Special Olympics and Carolina Rehabilitation.

Many program areas use Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, including aquatics competition, Ray's, golf courses, and sports. Institutions of higher learning include Ray's partnership with Johnson and Wales University, Wingate University, and the UNC-Charlotte Center for Mathematics, Science and Technology. As mentioned previously in the similar provider section, Mecklenburg County partners with the YMCA in a variety of activities. Recreation classes and golf partner with Boys and Girls Clubs. In addition the Department partners with the Police Athletic League in offering sports activities. Events and festivals use libraries,

Mecklenburg Health Department, the Police and Fire Departments, and neighborhood associations.

Obviously, Mecklenburg County uses partners for virtually all of its program areas. Because of the vast size of the number of partners used, it becomes difficult to ensure that written partnerships exist and are up to date. A process should be put into place to ensure that equitable agreements exist and are up to date.

Based on the results from the similar provider analysis, opportunities exist for more partnerships with the YMCA, YWCA, and local towns. In addition, there is opportunity to partner more with corporations beyond the ones mentioned above.

As for corporate partnerships, the goal is to develop and implement sustainable strategies for increasing revenue from public-private partnerships.

7.6.3.1 PROPERTY ASSETS

Evaluate what Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation has to offer sponsors and how it is currently packaged. Discuss with or survey current sponsors to better understand their priorities and what is important to them.

Strategy: The feedback will help shape adjustments in how sponsor benefits are packaged. For instance, if e-blasts or web site content is listed as one of the most important benefits to a company, then these should be included in a higher priced, higher level sponsor package.

7.6.3.2 SURVEY

Provide companies with specific information about the people or households they will reach through a sponsorship. Knowing the audience will make proposals more compelling to companies, and will provide Mecklenburg County with another way to identify potential sponsors.

Strategy: Survey adult members or participants to profile their purchasing habits, interests and lifestyles. This information should be provided in proposals to companies when selling sponsorships. Questions such as, does your family have a pet? What other membership-based organizations do you belong to?

This data will assist Mecklenburg County sponsorship sellers in addressing prospects' unique needs and will demonstrate that members or attendees are potential customers or consumers for a sponsor.

7.6.3.3 PROSPECTING AND SALES

Key leadership and staff should work together in identifying and securing sponsors. Rarely does one person have all the contacts or all the information on a business. Researching prospects, compiling a list of contacts and taking a collaborative approach to the sales prospect is more effective and efficient



Strategy: Combine your knowledge of Mecklenburg County with your research of a company for a powerful proposal and better-integrated sponsorship package. This will move Mecklenburg County into solution-based sales and away from one time transactions.

Hoovers.com, a local Chamber contact, board members, trade publications and general Internet research are all viable ways of developing a profile of information. Invest in sales training for key staff and if possible, sponsorship conferences, such as those offered by IEG, a leading national sponsorship organization.

7.6.3.4 REVENUE AND PRICING

The Department has a detailed Revenue and Pricing Policy that provides a very specific framework for the pricing of services. Services are divided into three categories: basic, extended, and special services. These follow the traditional model of public, merit and private goods. Basic and special services require formal approval from the County Board. The Department director has the discretion to establish extended services. These include general recreation programming fees.

Non-County fees are 50% more than resident fees. This is a steeper percentage than what PROS typically finds. Systems generally establish higher non-resident fees when resident demand for services exceeds capacity. Otherwise non-resident fees are set at a lower than 50% surcharge in order to generate sufficient revenue from non-residents.

Many program areas do not have cost recovery goals or track cost per experience. Having cost recovery goals is an important method of ensuring financial accountability. It provides a guide post for staff in the establishment of fees. Aquatic programs do track their cost recovery, and according to the program assessment, successfully recover 100% of direct costs.

7.7 SPORTS TOURISM STRATEGY

7.7.1 INTRODUCTION

The section of the report seeks to provide a broad analysis of the current situation with respect to availability, demand and impact of amateur sports tourism. Additionally, factoring in events held in the surrounding region and assessing growth trends regionally and nationwide will help identify gaps and potential event offerings for the County. Evaluating the available resources in the County in light of the gaps will help devise types of traditional and non-traditional amateur sports events that could be pursued in the future. This section will then outline event types that would best serve the County's aim to attract various events and consequently boost sports tourism and economic growth.

Over the last several years, Sports Tourism has emerged as one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry. Sports Tourism is broadly defined as *"All forms of active and passive involvement in a sporting activity, participated in casually or in an organized way for non-commercial or business / commercial reason that necessitate travel away from home and work locality"*. Passive involvement includes travelling to view sporting events or museums while active involvement would be defined more as scuba diving, cycling, golf, running etc.

7.7.2 CURRENT SITUATION – NATIONAL AND REGIONAL TRENDS

Information obtained released by American Sports Data (ASD) earlier this decade has shown that swimming, walking, bowling, bicycling, and fishing top the list of most popular sports. These are sports that appeal to young and old, can be done anywhere, and can be enjoyed regardless of level of skill. They also have appeal because they have a social aspect: people enjoy walking together; fishing boats and bowling leagues offer camaraderie.

Participation rates in swimming have remained steady over course of the study period in which it was tracked (1998 to 2005) and recorded by ASD. While there has been a slight decline of three percent (3.2%) in total participation from 1998, with over 91.3 Americans swimming at least once during 2005, swimming remains the most popular sport activity in the United States.

Among the new fitness activities, some activities saw growth because they're simply "hot," some new sport to invigorate fitness and leisure time. Wakeboarding, paintball, wall climbing, and mountain biking, BMX biking, snowboarding are all part of the "extreme sports" category, that have been showing growth trends, activities for the younger generation. Paintball in particular is getting increasingly popular and over 15000 participants from all over the country had participated in the inaugural Paintball World Cup at Disney's Wide World of Sports Complex in Orlando 2006.

From a traditional team sport standpoint, the ERA report has shown that Baseball, Softball, Football and Soccer all experienced single-digit growth trends in this region in the last few years. Also, lacrosse has demonstrated a high growth percentage too and is among the fastest growing sports especially on the coasts. The list of fastest growing high school



sports, as mentioned in the ERA report, has Lacrosse, Bowling, Ice Hockey, Water Polo and Soccer in the top five over the last 5 and 10 year period.

ASD data more specific to the Mid-Atlantic region also corroborates these findings. Baseball, Cheerleading, Ice Hockey, Football, Lacrosse, Soccer and Volleyball all have higher than average participation rates. Evaluating an index of participation where 100 is average, the following are some of the indexes for sports that are growing and poised to grow further in this region. With regard to sports participation, a geographic index is simply the participation rate of a given geographic segment against the national participation. Thus an index of 100 would indicate that participation in that sport is identical to national averages while a higher than 100 index would indicate greater popularity for that sport in a geographical region.

- Lacrosse (index 286, 1.4 participants per 1000), with over half a million participants in the Mid-Atlantic region alone and increasing
- Indoor Soccer (index 161, 2.8 participants per 1000), over 1 million participants
- Wrestling (index 148, 1.4 participants per 1000), over half a million participants
- Ice Hockey (index 157, 1.6 participants per 1000),
- Baseball (index 121, 4.4 participants per 1000), over 1.5 million participants
- Volleyball – court (index 115, 5.1 participants per 1000), almost 2 million in court volleyball
- Cheerleading (index 114, 1.8 participants per 1000)

In addition, Martial Arts, Kayaking and Mountain Biking too have higher than average participation numbers and these trends are indicative of the current demand and growth potential of a variety of competitive and semi competitive events in these sports. Tennis too has demonstrated rejuvenated interest and has grown over 10% in the last five years nationwide. Also, nationwide trends and the sheer number of events held demonstrate the high growth of endurance running events like the marathons, half-marathons, biathlons, triathlons and ironmen races. The annual National Duathlon Festival held in Richmond, VA in partnership with USA Triathlon is an example of the growing body of such hybrid events that are being organized successfully all over the country.

7.7.3 MECKLENBURG COUNTY – REGIONAL EVENTS

PROS performed the situational analysis by exploring various systems within a 200 mile radius that had a population of 50,000 residents. This would ensure that they were within a distance that could compete for sports tourists and also have the size and infrastructure to match the scale of events possible. It must be noted that in an attempt to track as many amateur sports events as possible, there could be some that may have been left out. However, with such a large pool of events the overall trends and gaps would be very evident.

In reviewing the activities of all the cities surveyed within a 200 mile radius, the activities were categorized according to:

- Entertainment and sports – spectators (17%)
- Adventure Sports / Outdoor recreation (4%)
- Competition, tournaments and races (65%)
- Festivals and Special events (15%)

The above percentages depict the event break-up based on the pre-defined categories.

A large number of cities seemed to offer a variety of running and bike competitions and races. It seems as though every community offers this as a primary staple of events. However, a number of these events are the 5K, 10K, 1 mile races that tend to get a majority of their participants from the local community itself and do not truly draw in a regional presence. Trends on American Sports Data depict that Recreational Walking and Running are among the most preferred activities across all races throughout the country. Running / jogging has witnessed a 12.3% increase nationwide from 2000 – 2005. This interest in recreational participation is likely to manifest into a larger attraction towards competitive events as well, albeit for a much smaller population segment.

As for sporting events, youth events are relatively well represented throughout the region, particularly baseball and basketball. However, it appears that football, softball and soccer events are not as abundant as the others. ASD data has shown that field sports, including lacrosse and soccer, and to a lesser extent touch and tackle football have been demonstrating positive growth trends. The majority participation for these events comprises of a younger audience under the age of 21, though there does remain active adult participant population for the other sports, particularly soccer.

Cheer and Dance competitions are among the largest draws for a regional audience and affiliated spectators. The increased visibility on sports media like ESPN among others has only served to heighten the interest and draw greater participation. There are a few cheer and dance events being held regionally including the National Cheer Star Competition in Savannah, GA, International Dance Challenge in Knoxville, TN, Georgia Peach Open National Championship - Cheer & Dance, and various smaller Cheerleading competitions in Concord NC. However, this is definitely a market that has high growth potential in this region and the County could be well served by an increased focus on attracting similar events.

The third most frequent offering is the festival and special event category. The needs assessment survey for Mecklenburg County suggested a very high interest in special events, so this may be an area that could be looked into. However, given the nature of these events, they are unique from one place to another and it is a challenge to accurately estimate the demand or gaps for special events.

Barely a blip on the radar screen is the outdoor recreation category. The Nantahala Outdoor Center in Asheville, NC offers a variety of year round events while Richmond, VA hosts the annual James River Adventure Games which draws a regional audience to participate in a variety of events that include Off-road Triathlon, Trail Running, Mountain Biking, canoeing, kayaking, Open Water Swim and Rowing. This is a fast growing format that offers activities for a wide demographic and encourages family participation.

7.7.4 OPPORTUNITIES AND STRATEGIES RECOMMENDED

The N.C. Department of Commerce’s Sports Development Office and the Charlotte Sports Commission are currently engaged in promoting the state and the region by vying to host events and attracting visitors to the region. They have, thus far, been successful in their endeavors as seen by the current calendar of events that includes the Spring Regional Diving USA meet and from 2008 Fencing Junior Olympics to AAU Summer State Championships.



Industry experts who have worked with large cities interested in hosting events have stated a preference in the short term towards hosting smaller circuit events that occur on an annual basis over the larger one off single or multi-sport event. The rationale behind this is that the circuit events allow the City to build its brand and image while constantly positioning itself to host the larger one-off events as well.

The very experience of hosting circuit events can be leveraged into creating a stronger position for the City / County to bid on events. Indianapolis with the Indy 500, the Indianapolis Mini-Marathon, an ATP Tour event and various swimming championships had positioned itself exceptionally well and the Pan-American Games, the World Police and Fire Games and the NCAA Final Four's only serve to enhance that reputation. There are numerous opportunities for the County and the Sports Commissions to work in tandem and continue to build relationships with various sports governing bodies to host events in the region.

Also, to foster the organic growth of similar events the County could set up a 'Sports Event Incubator' program similar to the model employed by the City of Richmond (Richmond Sports Backers). This program could serve as a support system and breeding ground for ideas and future events that have the potential to mature into larger regional events.

7.7.5 YOUTH FOCUS

In looking at the smaller events, the County would be well served with a strategic focus on youth sports. The potential for affiliated spectators i.e. family / friends travelling for the event is usually higher for youth sports events as compared to adult sports. The demographic trends in the region point to a large segment of youth in the coming years and this further helps make the case for a youth focus sports event strategy. In addition, given its unique location and scale of available resources, the County should seek to position itself as a regional destination for national circuit events for youth sports similar to what it has done with the AAU Summer State Championships.

Based on the findings of the Capacity Demand Standards Analysis, Mecklenburg County is currently well placed and meeting overall current field demands. However, there are over 100 fields that are subject to overuse and face significant wear and tear. Thus, the study recommends developing tournament quality athletic sports complexes with synthetic multi-purpose field capacity. The extended usage and the flexibility that these fields provide would provide a huge boost to the County's ability to host additional regional sports tournaments for a variety of sports from diamond sports, to soccer, lacrosse, football and even field hockey. Also from a facility standpoint, an indoor multi-purpose fieldhouse would be another asset type that would help to expand the ability of event that the County could bid for and host.

The current amateur sports events offerings vary from the Special Olympics to Spring Regional Diving USA meet and from 2008 Fencing Junior Olympics to AAU Sumer State Championships. Suggested event types to focus on include:

- Traditional Sports tournaments
- Cheer and Dance events
- Endurance Events
- Adventure Sports Events

Youth Sports tournaments have been expanding as well and there exist a variety of sports governing bodies and leagues that seek venues to host their events year round. Additionally, a strategy that the County could pursue is to tie up with organizations that conduct regional and nationwide circuit tournaments like Rocky Mountain Nationals (Wrestling), Kick-It 3v3 (Soccer) etc. These circuit events essentially follow the model of the Final Four tournament with regional qualifiers and championship games in fixed destinations every year. They tend to offer secure participation, a regional and national audience as well as opportunities to increase the popularity of various sports in the area.

Additionally, with additional infrastructure development there would be opportunities for structured programming around these tournaments. In addition, there are multiple opportunities to partner with various organizations to host sports specific camps on a year round basis that would draw in a regional participation as well. Some good models to evaluate could be the David Beckham soccer academy in Los Angeles and Nike Sports Camps (U.S. Sports Camps) that are that are organized throughout the country. The trends and growth patterns as well as the gaps in sports offerings for the region indicate an affinity towards, soccer, volleyball, lacrosse, touch and tackle football, and softball events.

As mentioned earlier, **Cheer and Dance**, marching and baton twirling events have been steadily growing and there is a good opportunity for the County to become the largest regional destination for these events. However, the lack of a fieldhouse could hamper the County's ability to offer this at the desired scale. The County could be well served by further exploring the possibility of a fieldhouse that could offer a variety of such events along with other youth sports events like martial arts, wrestling, gymnastics, basketball, volleyball etc. A good example of that model would be the fieldhouse at Disney's Wide World of Sports Complex in Orlando, FL. Based on operational experience, it appears that female youth sports activities including gymnastics, softball and volleyball tend to draw in the largest affiliated spectator group of all sports.

Endurance events are among the fastest growing group of events and tend to have a larger number of affiliated spectators that would be willing to travel to various events. In addition, there are very low barriers to entry both from a participant and a host site standpoint. Any individual willing and able to participate could do so with limited time and resources. Similarly, from an organization standpoint, a system requires limited infrastructure investment and could do so in multiple places. Also, as events like the Chicago Marathon and the Boston Marathon have shown, there is a huge impact on the branding and image of the City as a result of hosting the large scale events. The Thunder Road Marathon in Charlotte, which serves as a qualifier for Boston Marathon, is a good starting point.

Adventure sports have been attracting an increasing 'adrenalin-seeking' audience base over the past few years. In addition to the U.S Olympic Trials, events like an annual Charlotte / Mecklenburg County adventure sports triathlon or an adventure sports festival similar to the James River Adventure Sports Festival could seek to leverage the US National Whitewater Center. These would help generate additional revenue streams for the center's operations as well as generate additional economic impact for the region.



7.7.6 SUMMARY

Overall, the County is well placed to further its claim as the regional sports destination and attracting a wider audience base for its amateur sports events. From an infrastructure standpoint, tournament quality multipurpose sports complexes and a fieldhouse for indoor traditional and non-traditional sports events would assist the County. Youth sports events, including tournaments and cheer and dance events, present high growth opportunities. Endurance and adventure sports events too exhibit similar patterns. These events have demonstrated high growth trends and operational experiences have shown that they tend to be very successful in drawing regional and national audiences. A focus on creating annual circuit events versus attracting one-off events would be recommended. Overall, a greater emphasis on building additional tournament quality infrastructure and targeting youth sports events, organized internally or in partnership with event organizers, would be the ideal mix to promote the region and boost the influx of sports tourists visiting the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area.

CHAPTER EIGHT - COMPREHENSIVE MASTER PLAN DEVELOPMENT

8.1 VISION

The following vision presents how the Department desires to be viewed in the future:

“People who participate in recreation in Mecklenburg County will have a system of parks, greenways, and open spaces located throughout the County that will provide more parkland per capita than the national average, will connect neighborhoods, satisfy public recreation needs, and will protect environmentally sensitive areas.”

8.2 MISSION

The following mission presents how the Department desires to be viewed in the future:

“To enrich the lives of our citizens through the stewardship of the County’s natural resources and ensure efficient and responsive quality leisure opportunities, experiences and partnerships.”

8.2.1 COMMUNITY VISION FOR LAND

“Our Vision is to provide neighborhood park, community parks and regional parks across the County that provides a balance of park related experiences for people of all ages. The County will continue to acquire additional park and open space to protect the regions biodiversity and natural heritage through the promotion of open space, preservation, conserving natural communities, fostering awareness and stewardship through environmental education and outdoor recreation.”

8.2.1.1 GOAL

To protect the biodiversity and natural heritage of each Mecklenburg County Nature Preserve for its intrinsic value, the health of our environment, and the long-term benefit of the public. To acquire additional neighborhood and community park land in underserved areas of the County to promote active and passive recreation pursuits for people of all ages.

Strategies

- Implement the new park classifications to support school parks and community parks with design standards and user outcomes for appropriate recreation opportunities both passive and active
- Acquire park and open space property in underserved areas of the County to support the appropriate types of parks that are needed based on 13 acres per 1000 population for neighborhood, community and regional parks
- Acquire, or protect sensitive natural areas within the County to preserve the natural communities in perpetuity
- Acquire greenway corridors to support water quality and protect flood plain habitat opportunities for public access via biking, and walking trails
- To collect and utilize the best available scientific data to provide a sound basis for making management decisions



- Implement the Nature Preserves policy recommendations as it applies to appropriate uses for natural areas and capacity demand by users with a no net loss of species
- Incorporate five new Nature Preserves designation to include: Stevens Creek Nature Preserve, Berryhill Nature Preserve, Oehler Nature Preserve, Gateway Nature Preserve and Community Park and Davis Farm Nature Preserve
- Acquire future properties for Nature Preserves that has been identified in the Greenprinting process that identified sixty properties and 3,758 acres in the Tiered 1 and 28 properties in the Tiered 2 category for a total of 2,591 acres for a total of 6,349 acres of potential preserve properties
- Develop five new nature centers over the next 10 years to serve the environmental education needs of the community in underserved areas of the County
- Coordinate with the Charlotte Mecklenburg School District land acquisition strategies to support school parks and recreation facilities in developing neighborhoods

8.2.2 COMMUNITY VISION FOR GREENWAYS

“Develop a greenway corridor system that supports the drainage of water for water quality and flood control purposes while creating trails along these corridors for transportation and recreation purposes for walking, bicycling, running and wellness related activities for people of all ages.”

8.2.2.1 GOAL

Continue the expansion of the greenway rail system along practical trail corridors that will serve County residents and fulfill their need for additional walking and biking trails.

Strategies

- Expand the trail by 42.8 miles of trails in 5 years and 61.9 miles of trails in 10 years for a total of 129 miles on the ground by 2018
- Identify and prioritize acquisition efforts for the 10 year trail development plan
- Improve the connectivity to the existing and proposed greenway trail system
- Incorporate the Greenway corridor system into the Long Range Transportation Plan
- To identify and designate official routes of the Carolina Thread Trail
- Better facilitate multi-agency approach to trail development
- To explore policies and programs so that greenway corridors may better function as a conservation an enhancement tool for floodplain and riparian plant and wildlife habitat
- Develop loop corridors within the trail system to connect to major attractions and to support wellness and fitness components in neighborhood and community parks
- Hold a policy summit with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Departments and surrounding towns planning departments to consider the adoption of uniform open space greenways, trails and parks standards

8.2.3 COMMUNITY VISION FOR RECREATION FACILITIES

“Develop appropriate recreation facilities and amenities in underserved areas of the County in partnership with other service providers to maximize the County’s resources and meet the unmet recreation facility and amenity needs of residents.”

8.2.3.1 GOAL

To meet the Facility Standards by developing, individually and in partnership, a balanced offering of recreation facilities and amenities that adequately meets the needs of their target population.

Strategies

- Seek to meet the facility standards for recreation centers and aquatic facilities by the end of 2018
- Develop large sports complexes in existing community parks or regional parks
- Continue current partnerships and incubate new partnerships for athletic field development and establish a partnership policy for each entity within the County to provide increased asset capabilities and solidify working relationships for the future
- Establish a priority usage policy based on entity participation
- Develop sports courts complexes for tennis and gyms in the County to meet the needs of youth and adults but also for sports tourism purposes
- Develop art related facilities within recreation centers as outlined in the ASC master plan approved in January of 2004
- Partner with Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools on recreation center and park amenity components within elementary and middle school sites in areas that are missing recreation centers and amenities



8.2.4 COMMUNITY VISION FOR RECREATION PROGRAMS

“Develop and expand recreation programs as outlined in the Master Plan to increase awareness and use by residents of the County and to create more opportunities to serve people of all ages in a variety of recreation pursuits.”

8.2.4.1 GOAL

Offer core programs outlined in the program plan with high cost recovery levels, utilize training and performance measures to create consistency and employ partners and volunteers to support program operations and build advocacy for the County recreation program brand.



Strategies

- Develop and expand core recreation services across the County in aquatics, environmental education, adventure sports, therapeutic recreation, athletics, community-wide special events, active adults and seniors over 65+, fitness and wellness, facility rentals and new core programs in summer camps, after school and cultural arts
- Evaluate staffing needs to meet core program needs based on the hours required to produce the programs desired and missing in the County
- Develop consistent program standards and program development process used for all core programs offered to provide consistency in delivery of services
- Implement the Sports Tourism Plan as it applies to developing traditional and non-traditional events in the County to promote the region and create economic impact for the County
- Develop a pricing policy based on the true cost of services tied to the level of exclusivity a user receives over a general taxpayer and based on ability to pay
- Develop a marketing strategy for recreation and program services to increase the level of participation by the community from 19% to 30% over the next five years
- Develop partnership agreements with measurable outcomes for all special interest groups involved with the County
- Develop program partnership agreements with the local towns to maximize each other's resources and meet the community's unmet need
- Develop program policies on public/public partnerships, public/private partnerships and public/not-for profit partnerships
- Develop a specific branding program for program services across the County

8.2.5 COMMUNITY VISION FOR OPERATIONS AND FINANCING

"Our vision is to continue to manage all parks, facilities and programs to highest level of productivity and efficiency as possible to meet the needs of the residents of the County."

8.2.5.1 GOAL

Implement a financing strategy that incorporates all available resources including a voter approved bond levy for implementing the recommendations in the Master Plan.

Strategies

- Implement the capital improvement program to repair and upgrade parks and recreation facilities to maximize their useful life
- Evaluate the opportunity to use a dedicated Division of Park Officers within the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department. in County Parks to eliminate crime and vandalism in parks
- Seek corporate support for establishing destination facilities such as a zoo, or aquarium with appropriate feasibility studies
- Train staff on the Greenprinting process and update all maps created in the Master Plan every two years

8.3 CONCLUSION

The Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation Department is a tremendous resource to the community for people of all ages and interest. The Department is highly respected by the community and delivers a well-managed park and recreation system to the taxpayers of Mecklenburg County. The Department's last Master Plan was completed in 1992 and the Department now is trying to catch up to the tremendous growth the County has experienced and address the needs of this growth with updated levels of parks, nature preserves and recreation facilities to serve a growing and prosperous community. The Master Plan outlines the needs clearly as it applies to park land needs, nature preserve needs, recreation facility needs, trail needs, nature center needs and other amenity needs.

The challenges are grand in terms of the financing cost to support these needs. The County is expected to reach build-out by 2025, which is a short amount of time to support the land acquisition efforts required to save the most sensitive properties that still exist in the County, as well as to acquire land in underserved areas for neighborhood and community parks.

Parks provide a resource that will be saved in perpetuity and will provide generations a place to enjoy the outdoors, develop skills, and enjoy the social and wellness benefits that parks and recreation services provides to the community. To achieve the recommendations outlined in the Master Plan will take strong leadership and strong support of the taxpayers of the County. The parks and recreation system fully-developed will provide residents an incredible environment to work live and play, as well as provide economic benefits for homeowners and businesses. Most importantly it will provide the quality of life resident's desire. Let the implementation begin!

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