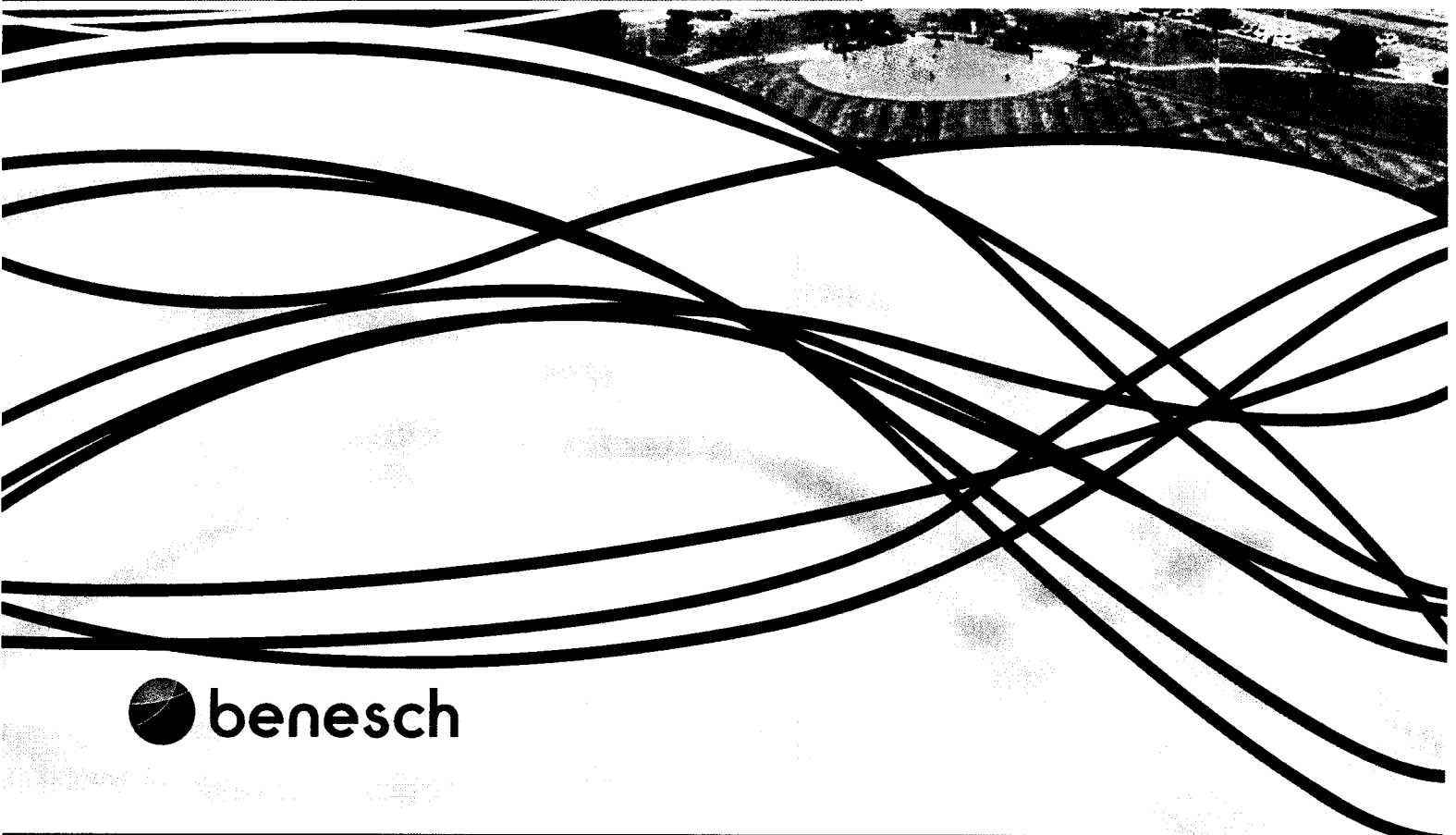
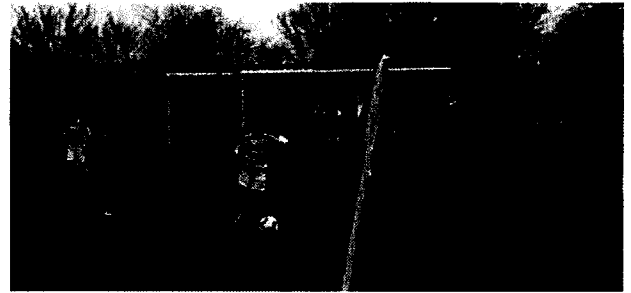


FINAL DRAFT
SEPTEMBER 26, 2017

PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

GASTON COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT
2017-2026



Acknowledgements



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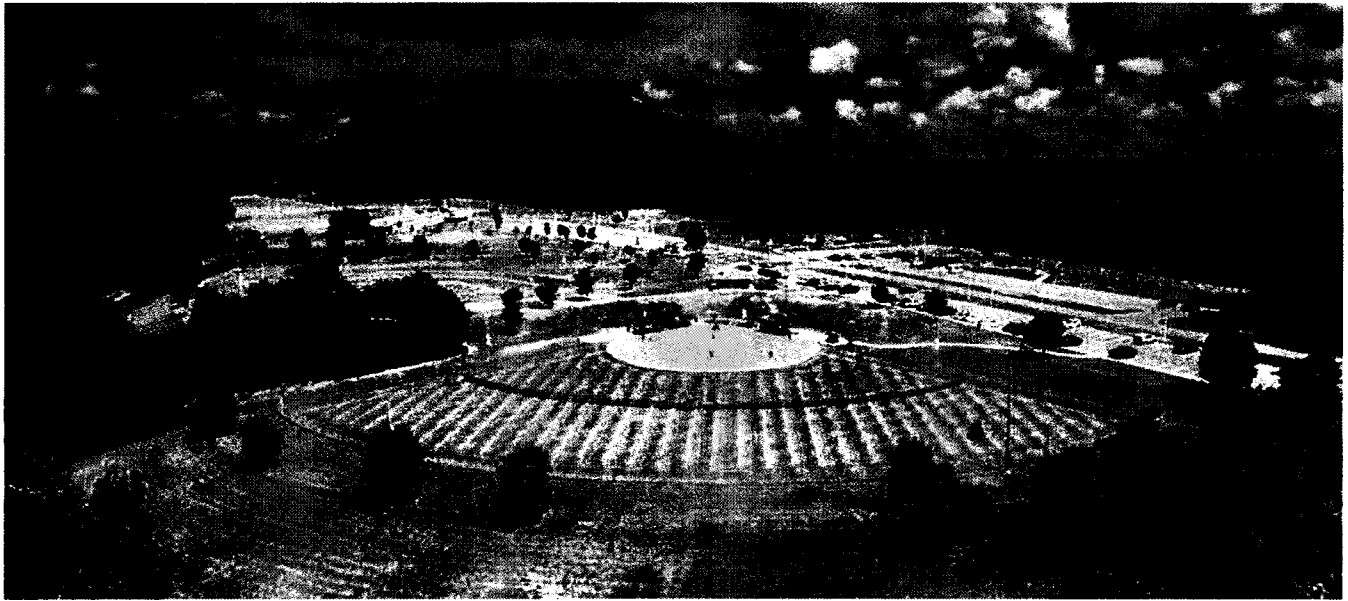


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George Poston Park

Executive Summary

In 2007 elected officials in Gaston County adopted the Gaston County Parks and Recreation Master Plan. This planning document was a collaborative effort by county and municipal park and recreation agencies to develop a ten year vision plan for parks and recreation needs. The 2007 Plan established goals for park development, land acquisition, agency partnerships, etc. It also recommended 9 capital improvement projects with an estimated cost of ±\$34,000 million (2007 dollars).

In the ten years since the Parks and Recreation Master Plan was adopted much has happened in Gaston County. During much of the period since the adoption of the Master Plan, the County has worked to recover from the nation's worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. Even through those trying times, the County's population has increased; resulting in increased urbanization and less open space. During this period, there have been some new parks and greenways developed and some land preserved through acquisition or easements, but many of the proposed improvements recommended in the 2007 Plan have not been implemented.

Recognizing the need for updating the Plan, elected officials funded a new planning study in 2016. Over the course of the past eight months County staff and community stakeholders have been working with the planning consultant on a new Parks and Recreation Master Plan specifically for the County's Parks and Recreation Department.

This Parks and Recreation Master Plan will help ensure that elected officials, parks and recreation staff, and citizen leaders have a road map to guide decision-making and actions as the County moves toward 2020, and beyond. It will provide a ten year vision (2017-2026) for the Department. This guide was carefully crafted by staff, the public, volunteers, and with the help of outside experts to ensure that future generations will have adequate parks, senior centers, trails, and open space.



The Plan starts with a description of existing facilities. Section One is a detailed description of current parks and recreational facilities. Section Two describes the service population - The People of Gaston County. Section Three covers accepted recreation standards and park needs. Section Four describes proposed improvements to facilities and parks. Finally, the Plan makes recommendations about a way forward. The Plan is comprehensive, and our best thinking in 2017 about how to proceed over the next 10 years.

PUBLIC INPUT

An important aspect of the planning study was identifying the public's desire for parks, recreation facilities and senior centers. The public was offered the opportunity to participate through:

- Two public workshops
- Meetings with community stakeholders
- County-wide survey

Over 600 people participated in this planning process. Findings from these public outreach efforts, as well as a summary of methodology, can be found in Section Two: The People of Gaston County.

GROWTH & POPULATION

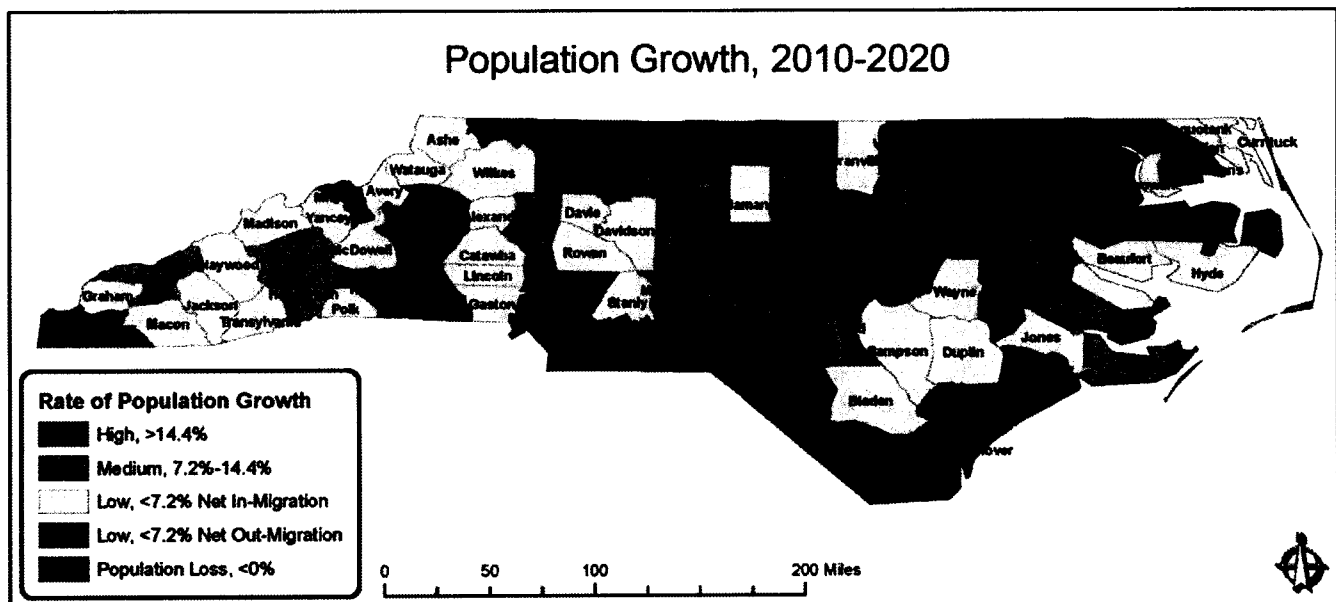
In addition to gathering public input, a critical step

in developing this plan is understanding the demographic and population changes that are occurring in the county. The 2010 census data provides very good information on population and demographics for use in this planning study. Likewise, the County's 2035 Comprehensive Land Use Plan provides valuable information for this plan.

Service Population

As noted in the graphic below, Gaston County is one of North Carolina's moderately growing counties. The US Census Bureau identified the County's July, 2016 population at ±216,965. This population figure has been rounded to 217,000 for purposes of this planning report. The North Carolina Office of State Budget and Administration projects the County's 2025 population to be ±232,454. As a 10 year plan, this figure has been projected to 235,000 as the County's 2026 population. This study uses these population levels as the basis of its Needs Assessment.

An important aspect of any parks and recreation Master Plan is determining the service population of the county or municipality the plan is designed to serve. While the overall service population of this plan is all Gaston County residents, the primary focus of plan recommendations is providing larger parks, greenways, and senior services in underserved areas of the county.



PARKS, RECREATION FACILITY & SENIOR CENTER NEEDS

As described in Section Three: Recreation Standards and Needs Assessment, a park system is typically comprised of eight park and recreation types. These park and recreational facilities include:

- Mini Parks
- Neighborhood Parks
- Community Parks
- Sport Complexes and District Parks
- Regional Parks
- Greenways
- School Parks
- Special Use Facilities
 - Gymnasiums
 - Senior Centers
 - Aquatics Facilities

Each of these parks/facilities provides recreation opportunities that meet citizens' recreational needs. A number of public and private agencies/entities provide leisure services in the community. Municipal agencies typically focus on Mini Parks, Neighborhood Parks, Community Parks, Greenways, School Parks, and special use facilities. County and state agencies often address larger park facilities (Community, District, and Regional Parks) and Greenways. Likewise, some County park agencies also have responsibility for senior centers. Schools, universities, churches, and private entities usually provide additional recreation facilities. This comprehensive plan addresses all recreation providers in the county with particular emphasis on Gaston County's role.

Park Needs

In the next ten years, Gaston County's Parks and Recreation Department, working with local partners, should focus its efforts in the following areas. We begin our discussion with the largest park types:

Regional Parks

Citizens of Gaston County are very fortunate to have three outstanding State Parks within easy driving distance. Crowders Mountain State Park and Lake Norman State Park are valuable natural and recreational resources, located in the immediate area. In addition, Kings Mountain State Park and Kings Mountain

National Military Park just south of Gaston County in South Carolina offer a wide variety of passive recreation opportunities.

These existing State Parks meet the needs of Regional Parks for the citizens of Gaston County.

District Parks

There are three existing District Parks serving county residents. Two of the District Parks (Dallas Park and George Poston Park) are operated by Gaston County. The third District Park (Rankin Lake Park) is operated by the City of Gastonia.

Even with these three existing District Parks, there is the need for an additional District Park in the county.

A District Park is needed to serve residents in the northeastern area of the county. While this area of the county is still relatively rural, future growth in this area will place greater demand on finding and protecting some parkland for future generations.

Development of District Parks should be a priority for Gaston County. This includes the renovation and expansion of its existing District Parks, as well as development of a new District Park in the northeastern area of the county.



Dallas Park Shelter

Community Parks

There are over 40 Community Parks in Gaston County. Community Parks are provided by several municipalities, as well as Gaston County. With almost 1,000 acres of existing Community Park land throughout the county, new Community Park development should not be a priority for the Department.

Neighborhood & Mini Parks

These parks are the smallest park types and are typically developed and operated by municipal agencies. Currently there are ten existing Neighborhood Parks throughout the county. All of these parks are operated by municipalities.

There is a need for additional Neighborhood Parks throughout the county, but Gaston County should not focus on Neighborhood Park development. Local agencies should take the lead in Neighborhood Park development.

Mini Parks are the smallest park type. These parks (often less than an acre) usually provide a playground, shelter, etc. There are six Mini Parks located in municipalities throughout the county. Additional Mini Parks are needed, but as a county agency, development of these small parks should not be a departmental priority.

Greenways

The most popular outdoor recreational activity in the nation is walking. This popularity was reflected in the survey and in comments made at the public workshops. One of the most popular recreational facilities to promote active lifestyles and help reduce obesity are Greenways. Greenways provide avenues for walking, jogging and biking. They also connect people with points of interest (parks, schools, housing, etc.).

Gaston County has been actively involved in the planning and implementation of the Carolina Thread Trail (CTT); the regional network of trails that will one day connect 15 counties. The County adopted a plan for the CTT in 2009. In the next ten years the County should work collaboratively with municipal agencies and the CTT organization in the development of this important resource.

Recreational Facility Needs

The Level of Service (LOS) for recreational facilities (i.e. ballfields, courts, picnic shelters, etc.) proposed for county residents were developed from a review of LOS used by other counties similar to Gaston County, and from input gathered during the public input process. The LOS, identified in Table 3A-Facilities, and discussed in greater detail in Section Four: Proposals and Recommendations, are the minimum recreation facility LOS recommended for Gaston County.

Based on these LOS, the number of public facilities needed in the park system through the planning period (2017 to 2026) are identified in Table 3B-Facilities, "Recreation Facilities Needs Assessment" (page 3-13), and summarized on the following chart. A more detailed discussion of each of the facility needs is provided in Section Four: Proposals & Recommendations.

In the following table, the "Existing Facilities" column indicates the number of existing recreation facilities currently available in the county. Existing facilities include facilities found in county parks, municipal parks and many school sites. The "Current Need" column identifies the total number of additional facilities currently needed. The "2026 Need" reflects the total number of additional facilities that will be needed by 2026.

As an example of how the Needs Assessment is presented, consider playgrounds. Currently there are 43 existing public playgrounds throughout the county. Based on the Standards for Facility Development that have been recommended for the County (one playground for every 4,000 people in the service population), there is a current demand for 54 playgrounds ($217,000 \div 4,000 = 54$). Since there are 43 playgrounds currently serving county residents, there is a current need to construct 11 additional playgrounds (demand of 54 – 43 existing playgrounds) to meet the demand. By 2025, with an increased population of 235,000, there will be a demand for 59 playgrounds ($235,000 \div 4,000 = 59$); or a need for 16 additional playgrounds.

	Existing Facilities	Current Need	2026 Need
Baseball/Softball Fields	76	7	14
Rectangle Fields	47	15	20
Basketball Courts	24	7	10
Tennis Courts	51	11	16
Volleyball Courts	6	5	6
Horseshoe	32	4	7
Shuffleboard Courts	1	4	5
Playground	43	11	16
Picnic Shelters	60	12	18
Hiking/Jogging Trails (miles)	±31	23	28
Amphitheater	5	6	7
Community Garden	2	9	10
Swimming Pool	7	4	5
Rec. Center w/Gym	6	3	3
Dog Park	3	3	4
Skate Park	3	1	2
Disc Golf	3	3	4
Sprayground	1	4	5

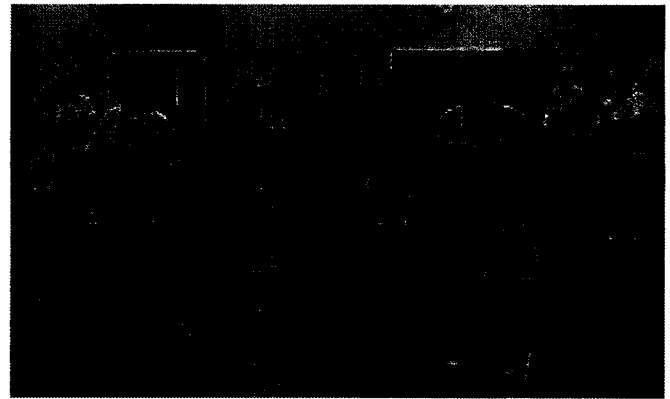
Current and future needs listed above are county wide needs. Gaston County is not responsible for meeting all needs. Many of these facility needs will be met by the municipal parks and recreation departments currently operating in the county. Meeting the needs of all county residents will require a collaborative effort. See Section Four for specific recommendations on facility needs to be met by Gaston County's Parks and Recreation Department.



George Poston Park Bike Trail

Special Use Facility Needs Senior Center

Gaston County currently has one senior center located at Dallas Park. The senior center is meeting many needs of Gaston County seniors and is well programmed by the County; however, as the demand for senior services grows, there will be a need for improvements to existing facilities.



Jazzercise class at the Dallas Park Senior Center

Proposed improvements/expansion to the Senior Center include:

- Therapy pool
- Shower/locker rooms
- Expanded fitness space
- Wood flooring/fitness area
- Sound proofing
- Indoor pickleball/volleyball as part of the future multi-purpose building.

In the immediate future (next ten years), the highest priority will be fitness room expansion and new flooring.

Community Centers & Gymnasiums

Currently the County does not offer its citizens a community center with gymnasium. Youth basketball programs are conducted by municipal agencies and youth athletic associations. The lack of adequate indoor space greatly restricts the opportunity for fitness equipment, volleyball, free play, etc.

Based on the responses from both the survey and the public workshops, there is some community support

for an indoor recreation center with gymnasium. Unfortunately the cost of constructing and (more importantly) operating an indoor recreation center is extremely high. The County should explore options for providing indoor facilities. One potential option is to partner with Gaston County Schools in development of joint use facilities.

Swimming Pools and Spraygrounds

In the past, NRPA and NCDENR provided a standard for pool development of one pool for every 20,000 people. This standard was based on the concept of multi neighborhood or community pools. Today, with the high cost of operation and construction of swimming pools, very few agencies develop neighborhood/community pools to that old standard. Instead agencies typically provide more centralized facilities where one pool may serve a greater population or consider development of a sprayground as an alternative.

Currently several municipal departments provide public pools (Bessemer City, Gastonia, and Stanley), but based on input received during the public participation, there is demand for additional aquatic facilities. The development and operation of a swimming pool is expensive and should be carefully considered. In the future, the County may consider developing swimming facilities, but at this time current demand does not warrant the cost of pool construction and operation.



Lineberger Park Pool in Gastonia

Spraygrounds are growing in popularity across the country. In addition to offering a water-based play

experience, the play structures, sprays, etc. afford children of all ages a total play environment and are much more economical to operate than a standard swimming pool. A properly designed, large water park sprayground can serve as a regional draw, provide revenue to the Department, and provide a beneficial economic impact to the surrounding area. The Department is currently developing its first sprayground at Dallas Park. Based on the popularity of these facilities, the Department should consider developing additional spraygrounds in other existing or future parks.

IMPROVING/EXPANDING EXISTING PARKS

An important component of this comprehensive planning effort was an assessment of the existing facilities currently serving county residents. Section One: Inventory describes improvements needed at each park. An order of magnitude cost estimate for the proposed improvements identifies over \$8 million dollars in potential improvements/renovations. Improvements to the following parks should be a priority for future development:

- Dallas Park
- George Poston Park
- Bessemer City Park
- North Belmont Park
- Tryon Park
- Pearl Henderson Park
- South Fork River Park
- Camp Sertoma
- Lewis Brooks Airfield
- Gaston County Senior Center

The County is currently working on an ADA audit for all county facilities. Recommendations from this audit should be used to guide ADA access improvements to all county parks.

OPERATIONAL NEEDS

The expansion of park facilities described in this document will greatly improve the park and recreation offerings in the county, but will come with a cost;

capital and operational. Expanding parks and adding facilities as outlined in this plan will increase operational and maintenance costs 15-20%. The County should consider the increased operational cost of any capital improvement before expanding facilities. Section Five: Action Plan Implementation provides some general guidelines on anticipated staff needs, as well as program and maintenance costs.

JOINT USE OPPORTUNITIES

The public is best served when government agencies work together. There are a number of public agencies operating in the county that have facilities and programs that potentially serve the public's need for parks and recreation. The County should continue to explore ways to work with other agencies to provide services and attain common goals.

The following agencies have missions that may be in alignment with the County's Parks and Recreation Department:

- Gaston County Schools
- CaroMont Health
- City of Gastonia
- City of Mount Holly
- City of Belmont
- City of Cramerton
- Bessemer City
- Town of Stanley
- Town of Dallas
- City of Lowell

Section Four: Proposals and Recommendations provides greater detail on the roles of these agencies in the community and avenues for partnerships.

CAPITAL NEEDS

The development of a new District Park, improvements to senior center facilities, construction of miles of greenways, and significant park renovations will require a substantial financial commitment from all the county over the next 10-15 years. As noted in Table 5-1 Capital Improvement Plan, the anticipated

cost of the recommendations found in this planning report will be over \$18 million. Recognizing that this is a Vision Plan for a county wide park system, County staff and elected officials must prioritize the recommendations in this document based on the public's input and staff review. The following park development initiatives should be considered the highest priorities:

- Renovations to several existing parks
- ADA improvements to existing parks
- Acquisition of land for a new District Park in the northeastern section of the county
- Construction of 3-5 miles of new greenways
- Development of additional spraygrounds

Section Four: Proposals and Recommendations and Section Five: Action Plan Implementation provide greater detail on improvements included in the capital improvements budget. Likewise, these sections provide strategies for funding the recommendations made as part of this comprehensive plan.

It should be noted that in 2007/2008 our country experienced the greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression. Unemployment rates were higher than those experienced since the 1930s. The housing bubble burst, resulting in millions of foreclosures and falling home prices. The failing economy resulted in significant reductions in government funds. Budget cuts in Washington and Raleigh have placed even greater stress on municipal and county agencies.

While the economy has improved in the past few years, public budgets are still challenged. Gaston County, like counties across the country, is faced with difficult decisions. Parks, recreation, and senior center services are an important component of community life. Studies show that recreation resources add to the quality of life in communities that support parks. Even with this understanding, elected officials must carefully consider how to allocate funds for day to day operation and facility expansion.

The park, recreation, and senior center services needs identified in this planning document are significant, and it is understood that not all recommendations will be acted upon in the next ten years. Instead, it is the intent of this plan to identify a vision for the County's park system and provide recommendations for reaching that vision. Parks and recreation staff, working with community leaders and elected officials, will implement the recommendations as financial conditions allow.



George Poston Park Volleyball Court

Capital Improvement and Land Acquisition	10 Year Total	2016-2020	2021-2026
Existing Parks Renovation/Improvements			
Dallas Park	\$4,275,000*	\$2,775,000	\$1,500,000
George Poston Park	\$500,000	\$500,000	
Bessemer City Park	\$325,000	\$325,000	
North Belmont Park	\$650,000	\$650,000	
Tryon Park	\$550,000	\$550,000	
Pearl Henderson Park	\$625,000	\$625,000	
South Fork River Park	\$500,000	\$500,000	
Camp Sertoma	\$100,000		\$100,000
Lewis Brooks Airfield	\$150,000		\$150,000
Planning & Design (10%)	\$767,500	\$592,500	\$175,000
Renovation Total	\$8,442,500	\$6,517,500	\$1,925,000
Land Acquisition			
Northeastern District Park (100 acres @\$12,500/acre)	\$1,250,000	\$1,250,000	
Land Acquisition Total	\$1,250,000	\$1,250,000	
Park Development			
Northwestern District Park (Phase One)	\$2,500,000		\$2,500,000
Planning and Design (10%)	\$250,000		\$250,000
Park Development Total	\$2,750,000		\$2,750,000
Senior Center			
Senior Center Improvements	\$250,000		\$250,000
Planning and Design (10%)	\$25,000		\$25,000
Senior Centers Total	\$275,000		\$275,000
Special Use Facilities			
Greenway Trail Development/Acquisition	\$5,000,000	\$1,500,000	\$3,500,000
Planning & Design (10%)	\$500,000	\$150,000	\$350,000
Special Use Facilities Total	\$5,500,000	\$1,650,000	\$3,850,000

* Includes \$1.5 million for multi-purpose building



Dallas Park

Section One

Department Overview/Inventory

INTRODUCTION

The first step in the master planning process is to inventory and assess the existing parks and recreation facilities currently serving Gaston County residents. With the current demand on County resources, it is extremely important to identify and utilize existing facilities to their fullest potential. This section identifies all existing parks and recreation facilities found in the county.

The majority of the publicly owned parks located in Gaston County are owned and operated by municipalities. These facilities include parks located in Belmont, Bessemer City, Cherryville, Cramerton, Dallas, High Shoals, Gastonia, Lowell, Mount Holly, Ranlo, and Stanley. The majority of these parks fall into the Community Park (20-40 acres), Neighborhood Park (5-20 acres), and Mini Parks (1-2 acres) classification. These existing municipal parks provide a good platform for recreational activities for citizens living within the municipalities.

Gaston County Parks and Recreation Department operates two District Parks, five Community Parks, and two Special Use Facilities. These parks are larger than most municipal parks and provide opportunities for citizens living in unincorporated areas. In addition to their parks, the Department also operates a senior center located at Dallas Park.

Gaston County Schools (GCS) is another major provider of recreation facilities throughout the county. The County's Parks and Recreation Department has joint use agreements with GCS and offers programs and provides maintenance for 10 school park facilities. This collaborative effort is critical to meeting the recreational needs of the citizens.

Another important park provider in Gaston County is North Carolina State Parks, which operates Crowders Mountain State Park in Kings Mountain.



Finally, the private sector offers recreational activities throughout the county. These private sector options range from outstanding golf courses, private swim clubs and residential amenity areas operated by homeowner associations. These non-governmental provided recreation opportunities are an important component in meeting recreational needs of county residents.

This section identifies the existing parks and recreation facilities currently serving the citizens of Gaston County. Special attention is provided for parks owned and operated by Gaston County; including a list of recommended improvements for each park.

GASTON COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

Mission Statements

The mission of Gaston County Parks and Recreation is to enhance the quality of life by providing parks and services that offer citizens opportunities for recreation, improvement of physical and mental well-being, and access to natural resources.

The County Parks and Recreation Department plans, develops, and maintains parks, and provides an array of organized activities to help meet the leisure needs of the citizens of the county.

At the present time, the Department maintains and manages twenty (20) parks. The most recent additions to the park system include the South Fork River Park, the second phase of George Poston Park, and Pearl Henderson Park. Plans are currently underway for renovations to Dallas Park.

The Department also provides technical assistance to municipalities and other organized groups throughout the county in the design and construction of recreation facilities and the development of recreational programs. The County's park and recreational programs are open to all citizens of the county regardless of age, sex, race, or economic status. Recreation is an important contributor to building sound physical and mental health, to molding good citizenship and character, and to reducing crime and delinquency. The parks system makes Gaston County a more attractive and desirable place for homeowners, business, and industry.

Events/Programs

The Gaston County Parks and Recreation Department provides a wide variety of community events and programs throughout the year. The following events have been held or are scheduled for 2017:

- Cornhole Tournament
- Senior Valentine Party
- Bike Fest
- Wicked Root Run
- Sticks for Kids Golf Clinic
- Cotton Ginning Days
- Senior Games
- George Poston Memorial
- NC Horseshoe State Tournament
- Veterans Breakfast



- Mid-Atlantic Classic
- Betty Wilson Classic
- Kids Catfish Tournament
- Parks & Rec Month Carnival
- Pitch, Hit, Run (Skills Competition)
- Stanley Creek Massacre 5k & 10k
- 1890s Historic Christmas Village
- Just Plain Dog Show
- Senior Christmas Party



Senior Center

An important component of the Department's recreation offering is the Gaston County Senior Center located in Dallas Park. The mission of the Senior Center is to respond to the ever-changing needs of senior citizens and their families; to affect in positive ways their quality of life; and to assist in maintaining their independence.

The Senior Center is a very active Senior Center which provides programs and services that support the senior residents of Gaston County in their efforts to remain healthy, active and independent members of the community.

A 6,200 square foot addition to the Citizens Resource Center expanded the room for dances and large events. It also includes a wellness room that provides weight equipment, a treadmill and recumbent bike, craft/multi-purpose room and computer room/library. Programs such as Tai Chi, yoga stretch and arthritis exercise classes, computer classes and special services such as legal aid and tax preparation are offered at the center.



*Senior Games are a very popular activity with
Gaston County Seniors*



GASTON COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION

District Parks

Dallas Park 90 acres



Existing Facilities

Baseball Fields (4)
Multi-purpose Field
Tennis Courts (6)
Bocce Ball Courts (4)
Playground
Picnic Shelters (4)
Trail 1.0 mile paved
Water Access (fishing pond)
Amphitheater
Community Gardens (2)
Restroom/Concessions Buildings
Equestrian Arena

Recommended Improvements

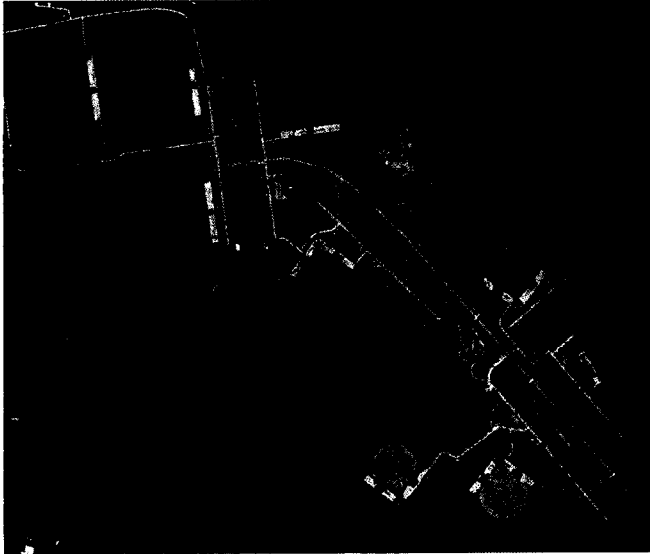
Complete improvements recommended in Dallas Park Master Plan

- Renovations to existing athletic fields
- Construction of multipurpose building
- Amphitheater cover
- ADA improvements

GASTON COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION

District Parks

George Poston Park 350 acres



Existing Facilities

Soccer Fields (4)
Baseball Fields (4)
Horseshoe Pits (24)
Playgrounds (2)
Picnic Shelters (2)
Trail 0.25 miles paved
Mountain Bike Trail 10 miles
Water Access (river access, lake access for fishing)
Dog Park
Restroom/Concession Buildings

Recommended Improvements

- Ballfield improvements
- Parking expansion
- Park amenities

GASTON COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION

Community Parks

Bessemer City Park 35 acres



Existing Facilities

Baseball Fields (4)

Multi-purpose Field

Playground

Picnic Shelters (2)

Restroom/Concession Building

Recommended Improvements

- Restroom improvements
- ADA improvements
- New restroom

GASTON COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION

Community Parks

North Belmont Park 33 acres



Existing Facilities

Baseball Fields (2)

Soccer Fields (2)

Playground

Picnic Shelters (3)

Trail 0.25 miles lighted, 0.25 miles nature trail

Restroom/Concession Building

Recommended Improvements

- Parking improvements
- ADA improvements
- Landscape improvements
- Splash Pad
- Disc golf
- Soccer field irrigation

GASTON COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION

Community Parks

Tryon Park 40 acres



Existing Facilities

Baseball Fields (5)

Soccer Field

Playground

Picnic Shelters (2)

Trail 0.25 mile

Restroom/Concession Building

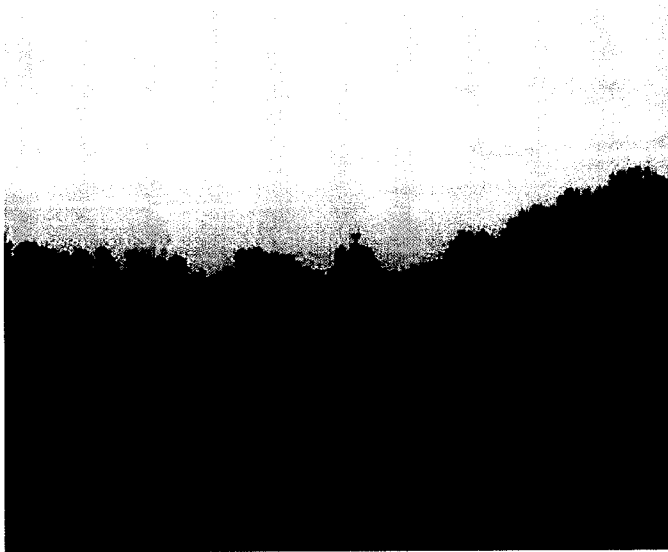
Recommended Improvements

- Restroom improvements
- Playground improvements
- Splash Pad
- Disc golf
- ADA Improvements

GASTON COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION

Community Parks

Pearl Henderson Park 5 acres



Existing Facilities

Baseball Field

Soccer Fields (2)

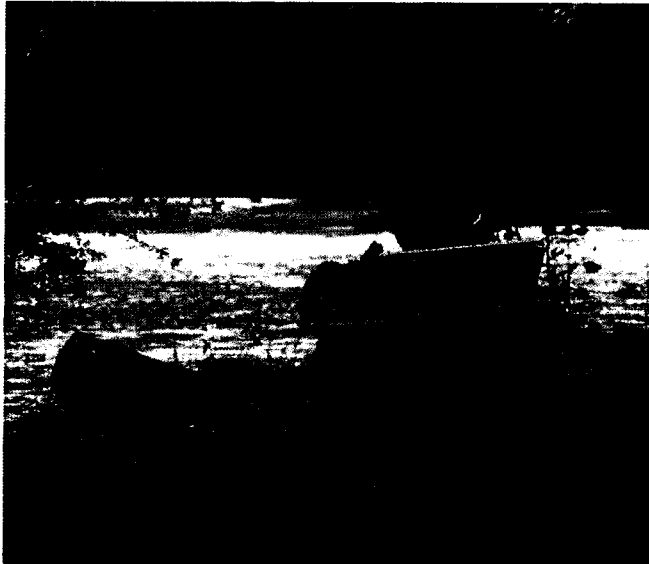
Recommended Improvements

- Athletic field lighting
- ADA improvements
- Parking lot improvements
- New restroom

GASTON COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION

Community Parks

South Fork River Park 44 acres



Existing Facilities

Trail 1 mile natural surface

Water Access (fishing, kayaking, canoeing)

Picnic Tables

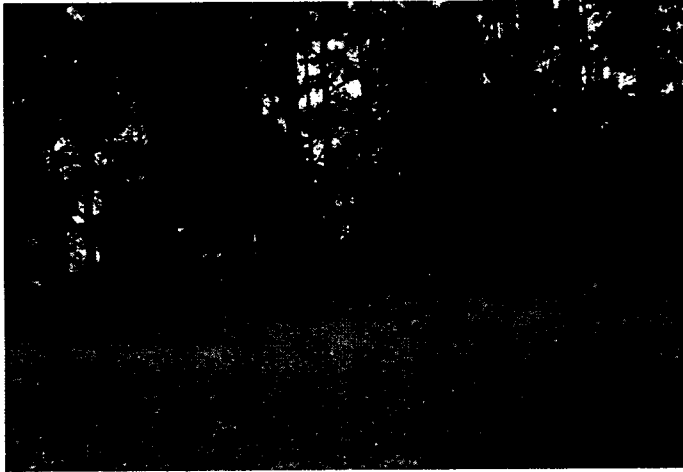
Recommended Improvements

- Trail improvements/expansion
- Parking lot improvements
- New restroom
- ADA improvements

GASTON COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION

Special Use Facilities

Camp Sertoma 10 acres



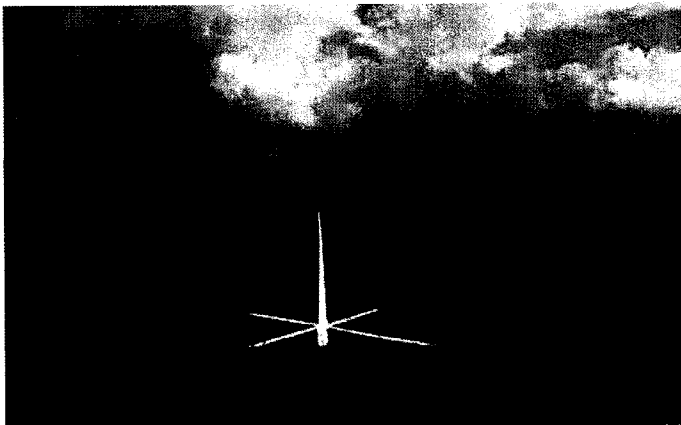
Existing Facilities

Lodge
Cabins (4)
Meeting Room
Kitchen
Nature Trail

Recommended Improvements

- HVAC improvements
- Drainage improvements
- Landscape improvements

Lewis Brooks Airfield 50 acres



Recommended Improvements

- New restrooms

Non-Governmental Recreation Opportunities

Private Swim and/or Tennis Clubs

- Gardner Acres
- Southhampton
- Racquet Club of Gastonia
- Wesley Acres

Golf

- Cramer Mountain Country Club
- Gaston County Country Club
- Crowders Mountain Golf Course
- Green Meadows Golf Course
- Gastonia Municipal Golf Course
- Tee Time (driving range only)

Fitness Clubs

- YMCA locations in Cherryville, McAdenville, Gastonia, and Belmont
- Planet Fitness
- Loray Athletic Club
- Armstrong Athletic Club
- Ultimate Fitness
- Route 74
- Hollywood Fit
- Crossfit
- Belmont Yoga Studio

Bowling

- Liberty Lanes
- Textile Lanes

Gymnastics/Karate

- First in Flight Gymnastics
- Ryan Hoover Extreme Karate
- Ormaza Family Karate

Batting Cages and Putt-Putt

- Adventure Landing

Kid's Games

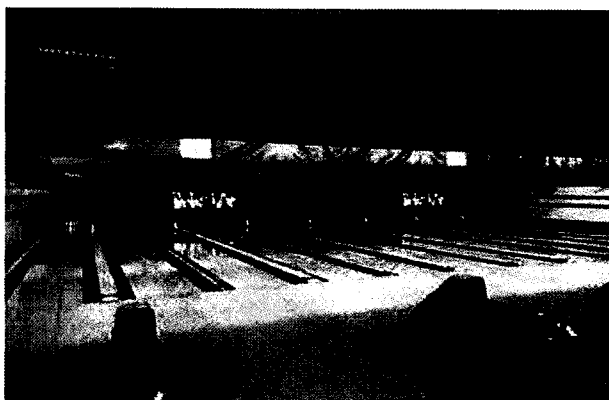
- Monkey Joes

Botanical Garden

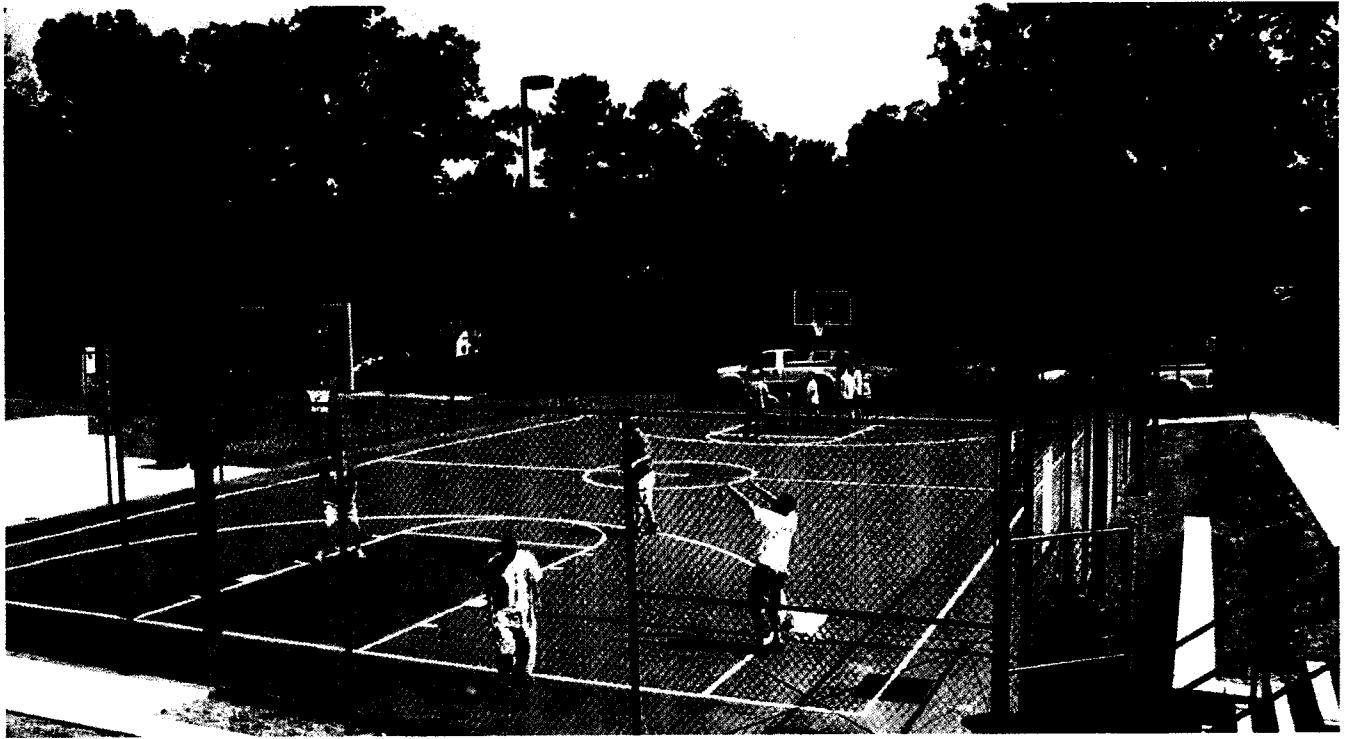
- Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden



Gaston County Country Club



Textile Lanes



Lineberger Park

Section Two

The People of Gaston County

INTRODUCTION

An important step in understanding the park, recreational, and senior center needs of Gaston County is to develop an understanding of the people that make up the county. Section Two includes an overview of the county, including an assessment of the county's history, features, population and demographics. This overview focuses on changes that are occurring throughout the county. This section also identifies the importance of providing healthy options (programs and facilities) in an effort to improve community health.

In addition to reviewing the county's projected growth, demographic changes and community health, the Needs Assessment included several public engagement opportunities to gather information on public demand/expectations for future parks. These initiatives included:

- County Wide Survey
- Staff and Stakeholder Meetings
- Public Workshops
- Input from Parks and Recreation Commission

Through these public engagements, considerable insight was gained regarding the public's desire for parks and recreation programs, facilities and senior programs. This section discusses the information gathered in preparation of this Comprehensive Master Plan.

POPULATION & DEMOGRAPHICS

County Features and History

While ranking 74th of North Carolina's 100 counties by size, Gaston County is the state's seventh largest county based on population. The majority of the county's population (approximately 130,000) reside within one of the county's fifteen incorporated areas. The larger municipalities within the county include (in order of population):

- Gastonia
- Mount Holly
- Belmont
- Cherryville
- Bessemer City
- Cramerton
- Dallas
- Stanley

The county was originally settled by Scots Irish, Pennsylvania Dutch, and English. In the 1750s, tension between the early settlers and the Native Americans (Cherokee) resulted in a fort being constructed at the junction of the Catawba and South Fork Rivers. Tensions were eased in the early 1770s when the boundary dispute between North and South Carolina was resolved; resulting in the Catawba Tribe being settled on a reservation near Fort Mill.

Early farming in the area consisted of small farms primarily by white yeoman farmers of English ancestry. With North Carolina's colonial policy restricting the size of the land grants, most farms in the county tended to be approximately 400 acres.

Gaston County was founded in 1846. It was named for William Gaston, a member of the State Supreme Court.

Cotton led to an industrial boom in the county between 1845 and 1848. During that period, three cotton mills were established in the county. While there is some discussion with regards to which mill was built first, the cotton revolution was driven by

Thomas R. Tate at Mountain Island, the Lineberger Family on the South Fork River, and the Stowesville Mill operated by Jasper Stowe and Associates in the South Point Community south of Belmont.

Natural resources are an important aspect of Gaston County's heritage. Resources range from Crowders Mountain in the southwest corner of the county to sites east of Stanley and at the mouth of the South Fork Catawba River. The county has twelve natural heritage sites of state or regional significance. These sites include:

- Six sites with Bigleaf Magnolia
- Two sites that provide habitat for the Bog Turtle
- Crowders Mountain State Park
- Pinnacle Road site
- Stagecoach Road site
- Farm site with old growth forest

The heritage sites contain a wide variety of unique plant, animal, and geological features including, Bigleaf Magnolia, Dwarf Junipers, granitic outcroppings, Fame Flower, Small Sedum, Pineweed, old farm growth (Beech, Yellow Poplar, Oaks, and Maples), Schweintz's Sunflower, and Magnolia Vine.



Crowders Mountain

Landform

Gaston County is part of the Piedmont Plateau between the Foothills of the Appalachians and the Sandhills of the coastal plain. The county's gently rolling terrain is punctuated with a series of geological features that are an important part of the county's history and identity. These features include Crowders Mountain, King's Pinnacle, Pasour Mountain, Jackson Knob, and Spencer Mountain.

Demographics

The median age in Gaston County is 39.4; higher than the state's (37.4) and the national (37.2) median age. As with most counties in North Carolina, the female population (51.6%) is greater than the county's male population (48.4%). Based on U.S. Census Bureau information (2014), Gaston County is predominantly white (80.2%). This percentage of white population is significantly higher than the State's white population percentage (71%). Black/African Americans are the next largest racial group with 16.1% of the population. Significantly less than the State's percentage of Black/African Americans (22%). The Hispanic/Latino population represents just over 6% of the county's total population, while the State's Hispanic/Latino population is over 9%.

The County's median household income is \$42,158 (2010-2015). This is a 6.35% increase over the 2000 median income (\$39,482), but is still below North Carolina's median household income of \$46,556. Projecting the percentage of increase in income from 2010-2015, the county's median income in 2026 will be approximately \$46,000. In 2014, the percent of all families in the county living below the poverty level was 14.3% and 18% for all people.

Population Trends & Projections

The county's population (based on the Decennial 2010 Census) was just over 206,000. That population represents an 8.6% increase in population since the 2000 census (190,365). From 2010 until 2015, the county's population grew by 3.6%. The July 2017 County population (based on US Census data) was 216,965. While a more rapid growth than many North Carolina rural counties, this growth rate has been slower than many North Carolina counties in urban regions.

Between 2000 and 2010, the fastest growth segment of the population was in people 15-34. This population segment reflected 31.4% of the population growth. Those over 55 accounted for 25.8% of the population growth during that same period.

Using U.S. Census data and other relevant resources, the County's 2035 Comprehensive Land Use Plan projected an annual growth rate of .8% for Gaston County.

Based on this growth rate, the plan projected the county's population to be 232,454 by 2025 and 251,747 by 2035. As a ten year plan, the Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan is focused on meeting needs of the County's service population in 2026. Projecting the 2035 Comprehensive Land Use Plan's 2025 population (232,454) by .8% (1,859), the 2026 projected population for Gaston County will be 234,313. For planning purposes, this projected population will be rounded to 235,000. Likewise, for the purpose of this planning report, 217,000 will be used as the county's current population.

Planning Considerations

There are several factors relative to the County's demographics that should be considered in developing recommendations for future park and recreation needs. These include:

- The county's population is growing. In ten years there will be almost 20,000 additional people living in the county. These additional people will need parks and recreation facilities and programs. In order to **maintain the current level of service to county residents, the Department will need to expand parks, facilities and programs by 10% over the next ten years.**
- The county's fastest growing population is young adults (15-34). Programs for this age group should be considered.
- The county's senior population is also growing. Programs and facilities for seniors should be considered.
- While income in the county has grown over the past decade, median income is relatively low. Recreation programs should be sensitive to this issue, and charges/fees for recreational programs should be carefully administered.

COMMUNITY HEALTH INITIATIVE

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), through its Division for Community Health (DCH), identified the importance partnerships play in preventing chronic disease and reducing health gaps. The CDC's Healthy Communities Program (HCP) identified three factors that raise the risk of disease. The factors include:

- Physical Inactivity
- Unhealthy Eating
- Tobacco Use and Exposure to Second Hand Smoke

The CDC recommends that there are a wide array of local, state and national organizations (public and private) operational in a community that have some level of responsibilities for improving public health.

Gaston County has a number of public agencies that have the ability to influence those community health factors listed above. The agencies/organizations include:

- CaroMont Health
- Gaston County Department of Health & Human Services
- Gaston County Parks and Recreation Department
- Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments

The underlying theme in this collaborative effort of community stakeholders is that the facilities and programs offered by the Parks and Recreation Agencies operating throughout the county provide many opportunities to improve community health. It should be noted that improving community health is a very complex issue and requires involvement by a wide range of community agencies.

It should also be noted that while improving community health may be a by-product of the facilities and programs offered by the County's Parks and Recreation Department, community health is not the primary focus of the Department.

Areas where the Department can play an important role include:

- Increasing/promoting active lifestyles by providing programs and facilities that encourage physical activity.
- Encouraging healthier diets by offering healthy options at park concession stands and vending machines.
- Increasing/promoting active lifestyles by providing facilities that allow people to become more physically active.

The County's Parks and Recreation Department is currently engaged in all three of these areas and will seek to find additional ways to provide healthy lifestyle options for Gaston County citizens.

Agency collaboration is recognized as an important way to promote community health. Through an ongoing open dialogue between agencies, partnerships will be formed and both facilities and programs will be enhanced.

PUBLIC INPUT

The most important step in the planning process is gathering input from county residents with regard to their desires for public recreation. As part of the master plan process, the following initiatives were taken to gather public input:

Community Interest and Opinion Survey

A community interest and opinion survey to gather input on county citizens' desires for park and recreation facilities was posted online and made available in printed format at the departmental offices and senior center. Over 500 people participated in the survey.

Public Workshops

Two public workshops were held to discuss park and recreation needs with citizens. The first meeting focused on gathering input from citizens on park use and recreational needs. The second meeting allowed citizens to review preliminary findings and provide input on proposed recommendations.

Staff Meetings/Stakeholder Meetings

Several meetings were held with staff and other county stakeholders to discuss the plan and gather information on park needs. Findings from these meetings are included in the appendix.

The following is a summary of findings from each of the public input initiatives:

Gaston County

Community Interest and Opinion Survey

As part of the planning process, the County Parks and Recreation Department conducted a public survey to gather input from residents on their desires for parks and recreation facilities/programs. The survey was posted on the Department's website and promoted through community events, community partner websites, and made available (via hard-copy) at the departmental office and senior center. Over 500 residents responded to the survey. The following results were recorded:

Question 1: Which County Parks and Recreation facilities have you or your household used in the past 12 months. The most visited County parks are:

- Poston Park
- Dallas Park
- South Fork River Park

Question 2: How would you rate the overall quality of the Gaston County parks and recreation facilities you have visited?

- 43% indicated Very Good or better
- 36% indicated Good
- 16% indicated Fair or Poor
- 5% did not know

Question 4: Please indicate reasons why you have not used Gaston County parks, trails and recreation facilities. Reasons most often listed (in order of responses):

- Too far from my home
- Safety Concerns
- Use services other than Gaston County
- Facilities not offered

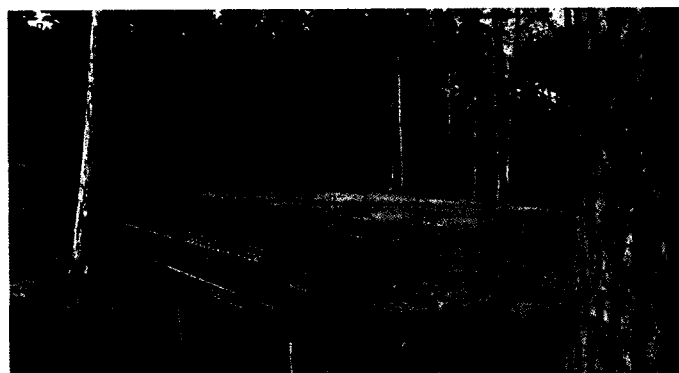
Question 5: Respondents were given a list of recreational activities/facilities and asked if they had an interest in participating/using each activity/facility. The following activities/facilities received the highest demand (in order):

- Walking trails/Greenways
- Picnicking Areas
- Nature Areas/wildlife habitats
- Playgrounds
- Outdoor Events/Performance Areas
- Biking Trails
- Fishing Lakes/Piers
- Community Gardens
- Play Areas for Children with Disabilities
- Public Art in Parks
- Indoor Recreation Facilities, Dog Park, Splash Pad, and River Access all received strong support as well

Question 6: For those facilities that your household members have a desire to use, please tell us if your needs for these facilities are currently being met.

The following facilities were identified as having the highest demand for unmet needs (in order):

- Camping Areas
- Nature Areas/wildlife habitats
- River Access for fishing/hunting
- Amphitheater
- River Access
- Walking Trails
- Skateboard Park/BMX Park
- Picnicking Areas
- Dog Park
- Fishing Lakes



George Poston Park Dog Park

Note! Those facilities/activities that show up on both lists (Question 5 (interest)/Question 6 (unmet need)) should be the highest priorities for future development/expansion. For example, camping areas was identified as a facility in Question 6 with a very high unmet need rating, but based on the responses from Question 5, there is a relatively low percentage of County residents expressing interest in camping; therefore building campgrounds is probably not the highest priority for future facility development. By contrast, nature areas/wildlife habitats was listed by a high percentage of County residents as an area they have interest in using and also as an area where additional resources are needed. This would indicate a need for the County to invest in natural areas and wildlife habitats.

Question 8: Do Gaston County residents have adequate access to the South Fork River?

- Yes 35%
- No 65%

Question 9: Is there a need for additional park and recreation facilities in Gaston County?

- Yes 84%
- No 16%

Question 10: Would you be willing to pay additional taxes and/or higher user fees to support park and recreational facility improvements?

- Yes 75%
- No 25%

Information Gathering Workshop

On June 19, 2017, an information gathering workshop was held to discuss county wide park and recreation facility needs. The meeting was held at the Gaston County Citizens Resource Center in Dallas Park. The meeting format was an informal drop-in, allowing attendees an opportunity to review displays providing information on existing county parks and requesting input on the quality and accessibility of those parks and facilities. Most importantly, attendees were asked to indicate the park and recreation facilities they currently use and identify recreational facilities they believe are needed. Approximately 15 people attended the 3 hour

open house. Overall, most everyone attending the workshop indicated they are currently using existing parks and recreation facilities in the county. Likewise, most attendees felt that the County's parks offer many valuable recreational opportunities. There was a general appreciation for existing facilities, programs, and park operations.

Most everyone attending the meeting expressed a need for additional parks and recreation facilities. The primary focus of those attending the public workshop was on the development of walking trails/ greenways and passive/low impact recreation. The overwhelming majority of attendees indicated a current use of walking trails and greenways and indicated a need for expanding trails. Likewise, there was strong support for expanding mountain bike trails.

Other recreation activities that attendees indicated a need for expanding included:

- Baseball fields
- Disc golf
- Outdoor performing area
- Tennis courts



Trails and passive recreation ranked very high in both the county-wide survey and the public workshop.

Preliminary Plan Review Workshop

A second public workshop was held on July 31, 2017 to discuss the County's Comprehensive Master Plan. The primary focus of this workshop was to review preliminary recommendations for park and recreation facility expansion/improvements and receive input from citizens. Six people attended the meeting. Derek Williams, park planner from Benesch, facilitated the meeting.

The meeting began with a power point presentation that explained the planning process as a five step process that included:

- Inventory
- Public engagement
- Development of Standards for parks and recreation facilities
- Needs assessment
- Action Plan

As part of the presentation, attendees were given information on each of the five steps; including a list of recommendations for park and recreation facility improvements to be accomplished by the Department over the next ten years. A copy of the power point presentation is included in the Appendix.

Following the presentation, the meeting was opened up for comments and questions. Overall everyone in attendance felt the preliminary recommendations were valid and supported the Department's plan. The following comments/suggestions were made:

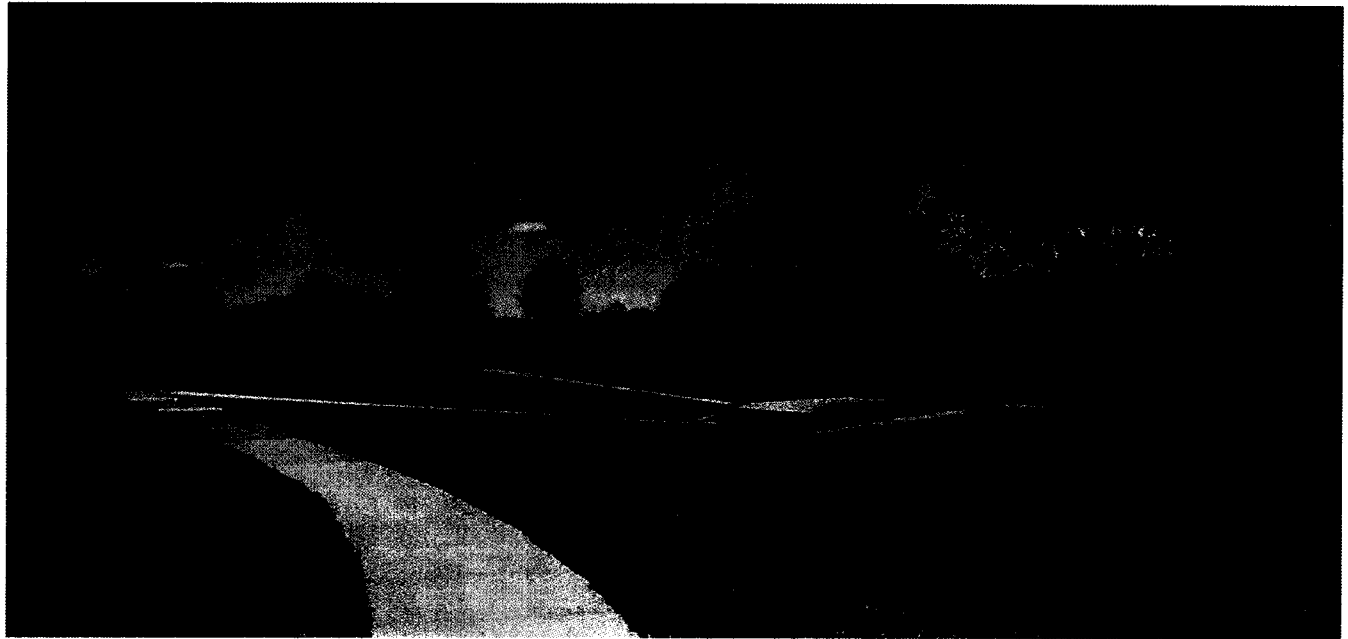
- Several of those in attendance represented youth football programs and expressed a need for additional football fields; especially fields that can be used for football games. Currently, these programs are using high school fields for games and are required to pay for the use of the facilities. Often the rental on the high school facilities is very expensive. Several of those in attendance suggested finding underutilized fields and possibly working with the agencies owning the fields to make improvements to the fields in return for a long term use agreement for game events. Further discussion of this option with County Staff was recommended.

- Erwin Park was discussed as a potential site for improving an existing underutilized field for use for football.
- The discussion of the need for additional fields for football reinforces the need for additional Rectangle Fields as outlined in the proposed recommendations of the Action Plan. There was very strong support for the development of additional fields to serve football.
- There was support for the development of additional trails and greenways throughout the county.
- The need for agencies throughout the county to work together was stressed by several people.
- There was a discussion regarding the approval of this plan and the next steps once this plan is approved. There seems to be strong public support to see recommendations from this plan implemented.

Participants were told that the plan will be finalized over the next few weeks and presented for approval at the August 21 meeting of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, with final approval of the plan by County Commissioners in September. Following approximately 30 minutes of open discussion by those in attendance, the meeting was adjourned.

Staff/Stakeholder Meetings

An important aspect of the planning process was gathering information on facility, program, and operational needs from County staff and from stakeholders from throughout the county. Several meetings were held to discuss the planning process and allow stakeholders to provide ideas for improving parks and recreation services through the county. See Appendix C for notes from these meetings.



Amphitheater at Dallas Park

Section Three

Establishing a County Wide Level of Service for Parks, Recreation Facilities & Senior Centers

INTRODUCTION

This section contains the analysis and assessment on which the recommendations of this Parks and Recreation Master Plan is based. This section begins with a review of previous plans that have been developed that are relevant to the recommendations for this planning study. The planning process also includes a review of other North Carolina counties and the Level of Service (LOS) they use to provide park, recreation facilities, and senior centers to their constituents. As part of this review, national and state trends in park and recreation preferences (Appendix F) are considered. This review of service levels is based on a description of the park types that typically make up a park system (Appendix E). Using these park types as a backdrop, we establish a desired LOS for park and recreation facilities specifically for Gaston County. This LOS is then used as a basis for establishing a park and recreation facility Needs Assessment for the County.

It should be noted that the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), in its 1995 report "Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines", determined there are no "national standards" for park development. NRPA is currently working to develop a national data base of recreation facility LOS for communities throughout the United States. The latest NRPA study recommends that each community is unique, and that standards reflecting the local "uniqueness" should be established, with an eye toward other counties/communities of similar size. This section utilizes input from the public workshops and the county wide survey, as well as a comprehensive review of other North Carolina counties to develop LOS specifically for Gaston County.

This study looks at several types of service levels. First we evaluate total acreage of park land within the service area and how this acreage is broken into park types. From this analysis it is possible to compare the parks in Gaston County with other counties, both in overall park acreage and park types within this overall acreage.

The second analysis in this section looks at recreation activities and the facilities required to program these activities. By establishing a population-based LOS for various recreation activities, this study establishes the type and quantity of facilities the County should develop in the future.

A third analysis of service in this section is an assessment of special use facility needs. The level of information on these special use facilities is somewhat more limited than the other park and recreation facilities, and more complicated because of the cost of construction and operation. This section includes a discussion of county wide needs for special use facilities.

The service levels established in this study were also derived from a review of the County's 2007 Parks and Recreation Master Plan, guidance from staff, and (most importantly) public input.



Dallas Park Lake

As we begin the assessment process, it is important to realize there are two different conditions in Gaston County. There are eight cities/towns in Gaston County that provided park and recreation services to their citizens. These municipalities (Gastonia, Belmont, Mount Holly, Cramerton, Bessemer City,

Stanley, Dallas, and Lowell) provide full time staff to program and maintain parks and recreation facilities. Elected officials in these communities have invested wisely in parks and recreation facilities. In the past decade, economic conditions have made it difficult to maintain and improve existing facilities, so there are important park needs within these municipal departments. Even within these limitations, citizens living in incorporated communities of the county have reasonably good access to parks and recreation facilities.

On the other side of the coin, the small towns and unincorporated areas of Gaston County have more limited access to parks and facilities. The county's small towns (Ranlo, High Shoals, and Cherryville) have developed small, local parks, but for the most part are underserved with traditional park and recreation facilities. For the most part, these smaller municipalities rely more heavily on County facilities.

Gaston County strives to meet the park and recreation needs of residents by providing District and Community Parks that offer both active and passive recreation, providing facilities for seniors at its senior center, and working with Gaston County Schools in joint use efforts at a number of park school facilities.

Several of the cities with parks and recreation departments have developed comprehensive park plans for their service populations. The development of this county wide comprehensive plan is not meant to negate or override the standards and guidelines established by the local agencies. Instead, this plan is designed to incorporate and work in conjunction with those local plans.

It is important to recognize that while the plan utilizes a dual approach in assessing the park and recreational needs of the county; ultimately this plan must develop recommendations that will improve the recreational opportunities of all Gaston County citizens, regardless of where they reside.

It should also be noted that the LOS for development established for Gaston County are consistent with other counties in North Carolina. In many cases, the development standards used in this plan are lower/less than the standards used in the 2007 Parks and

Recreation Master Plan. The needs that are identified in this plan are based on a conservative approach. Even taking this conservative approach, the recommendations in this document should lead the County to develop parks and facilities comparable to most other counties of similar size.

PREVIOUS PLANNING STUDIES

There have been a number of community/county-wide plans developed in the past that are directly related to developing a Parks and Recreation Master Plan for the County's Parks and Recreation Department. Below is a brief listing/summary of plans that were considered in the development of the recommendations found in this plan.

Carolina Thread Trail Master Plan for Gaston County Communities

In January of 2009, the Carolina Thread Trail (CTT) completed a master plan for development of the CTT through Gaston County. As with all of the CTT Master Plans, the planning process was driven by community and public involvement. The planning process was guided by a Steering Committee of municipal and county stakeholders and included public workshops, public drop-ins, and a public survey. Overall there was very strong support for the development of the CTT through the county and the development of additional trails throughout the community to connect to this regional trail.

The CTT Master Plan recommends the development of over 40 miles of trails to be constructed throughout the county. The following trail segments were identified:

First Priority Segments (26 miles)

- South Fork River Trail from Spencer Mountain south to I-85
- Cramerton to Downtown Belmont along Highway 7
- South Fork River Trail from I-85 to Cramerton
- Crowders Mountain to Gastonia
- Highland Rail Trail
- Highway 27 south to I-85 in Mount Holly

Second Priority Segments (16 miles)

- Rankin Lake Park to Spencer Mountain (near Long Creek)
- Mount Holly at Highway 27 along Catawba River to State Educational Forest
- US 29. 74 north to Bessemer City
- Belmont to Belmont Abbey College to connect to Mount Holly Greenway

See the Appendix for a plan of the proposed segments.

In addition to developing a plan for the trail corridors, the CTT Master Plan provided valuable information on community stakeholders (public and private) that should be engaged in trail development. It also provided a list of potential funding sources for trail construction.

The CTT Master Plan stresses the need for this to be a community partner effort. While Gaston County is an important player in greenway/trail development, the CTT will not be developed without involvement of local, state and regional partners. An important recommendation in the plan was the transition of the plan's Steering Committee into a Trail Advisory Committee to coordinate trail development efforts.

While it has been almost 10 years since the CTT Master Plan was completed, the document provides very valuable information about trail development and should be used as a guide as the County develops its greenway master plan and works with local agencies in the development of a county wide trail system.

Gaston County 2035 Comprehensive Land Use Plan

In 2016, the County developed the 2035 Comprehensive Land Use Plan to create a 20 year vision for county land use. The planning process engaged hundreds of people from across the county. Several of the recommendations in the plan are directly related to parks, greenways, and natural resources. The plan identified 8 goals for future development. Goal 7 in the plan focused most directly on parks, but several other Goals included strategies that are related to parks and recreation. The following goals include recommendations relative to this Comprehensive

Park Plan.

Goal 7. Emphasize the importance of our natural resources through highlighting natural environments and encouraging the use of environmental recreation.

Recognizing the county has an abundance of natural resources, the 2035 Plan recommends the county's natural resources be used to attract tourist and potential residents to the area. Specific objectives and strategies to achieve this goal include:

- Emphasizing existing recreation amenities and encouraging new recreational amenities. This initiative recommended the following:
 - Create greenway connections between recreational facilities to allow non-motorized and active transportation between Gaston County communities
 - Promote Park and Recreation facilities as a way to improve health, enhance the county's image, and improve the quality of life for current and potential residents.
 - Promote Gaston County's eco-resources on the County website and social media
 - Conserve the natural environment to maintain Gaston's eco-tourism assets
 - Identify areas to be maintained as natural environment to enhance existing facilities
 - Identify areas of potential new eco-tourism sites and recreational facilities
 - Create a greenway/blueway buffer to support the existing trail network in Gaston County and create opportunities for trail side parks

In addition to Goal 7, which was very focused on Parks and Recreation Resources, the 2035 Plan contained several goals that touched on parks, recreation facilities and greenways. Other relevant goals included:

Goal 2: Improve the transportation system to include multi-modal regional considerations of highways, bicycle and pedestrian connections, mass transit and connectivity between communities within Gaston County and the larger Charlotte metropolitan area.

Within this goal the following recommendations are

related to parks, recreation and greenways:

- Improve and expand infrastructure for non-motorized transportation alternatives
- Connect trails and greenways to residential areas to link neighborhoods to services

Goal 4: Enhance quality of life to absorb growth while focusing on commercial and community resources, walkability, and agricultural preservation.

Under this Goal, recommendations include setting aside quality commercial areas along corridors for development to reduce pressure on sensitive natural resource areas and connecting new developments and redevelopments with greenways where opportunities exists.

Goal 6: Improve the image of Gaston County both to current and potential residents; focusing on retaining and increasing the population of young professionals.

Under this Goal, under the recommendation to make an investment into Gaston County's image, the plan recommends support of natural resource initiatives that seek to invest in Gaston County's unique assets.

In summary, parks, greenways, and natural resources are identified as important county assets with great potential to improve the quality of life for existing residents and to attract new people and business to the county. Likewise, there is very strong support in the plan for expanding parks and greenways that will create ecotourism opportunities.

2007 Gaston County Parks and Recreation Master Plan

In 2007, the County completed a Parks and Recreation Master Plan to provide a 10 year vision for the Parks and Recreation Department. In the 10 years since this plan was developed, there have been many changes in the county. The population has grown, county demographics have changed, there are new trends in park development, and many improvements have been made to county parks over the past 10 years. With all of that said, an important starting point for this current plan is a review of the 2007 Plan. It is important to understand the vision that

was established in 2007 in order to determine the vision for the next 10 years.

The planning process for the 2007 plan was very similar to the current process. The plan was developed with considerable public engagement. Public workshops and a county wide survey were conducted to gather input from county residents.

The plan contained a list of proposed improvements to existing parks and a list of new parks and greenways that were needed. Proposed improvements included:

- Improvements to Dallas Park
- Improvements to George Poston Park
- Improvements to several Community Parks (Tryon, Bessemer City, North Belmont)
- Improvements to School Parks
- Development of South Fork River/Mountain View Street Linear Park
- Development of a Greenway Master Plan
- Improvements to Camp Sertoma
- Improvements to Lewis Brooks Airfield
- Land acquisition and development of a new Athletic Complex

Order of magnitude cost were provided for each of the recommendations. The total capital cost for all recommended improvements was just under \$34,000,000. This projected cost included \$29 million for the development of the tournament level athletic complex.

Gaston County 2017 ADA Transition Plan

The County is currently developing ADA Transition Plans for each of its facilities/properties. Through this process, plans will be developed for each of the Department's park and recreation facilities. The findings from these studies will identify ADA access issues at existing parks and provide facility improvements that will eliminate ADA barriers.

Recommendations from the plans should be incorporated into any facility renovations undertaken in the future.

The proposed renovations for existing parks listed in this document acknowledge the need for ADA improvements, but this planning study does not include detailed assessment of ADA access. Once the county-wide ADA Transition Plan has been completed, these planning documents should be used to guide future park improvements.

ADA improvements to existing park facilities should be one of the Department's highest priorities.

MUNICIPAL PARKS & RECREATION PLANS

In addition to these county wide planning efforts, several of the municipal agencies with Parks and Recreation Departments have created Comprehensive Park and Recreation Plans. The following is a brief summary of several existing plans:

Vision for a Healthy Community 2005-2020, A Plan for Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces

In 2005, the City of Gastonia developed a vision plan for its Parks and Recreation Department. The plan included a detailed assessment of existing parks and recreation facilities. It also included an analysis of the city's population and demographics, and conducted a city wide survey to gather public input.

The 2005 plan proposed almost \$6 million in "improvements/repairs/upgrades to existing facilities" and another \$30.5 million in "new facilities and major renovations/makeovers/conversions of existing facilities." Recognizing that over \$35 million in capital improvements was a very significant undertaking, the plan identified nine top priority projects with an anticipated cost of just over \$18 million. The priority projects included:

- Renovations to Lineberger Park
- Renovations to Rankin Lake Park
- 8-10 miles of Greenways
- Community Center Building
- Youth Sports Complex
- Davis Park & Phillips Tract

- Youth Sports Complex
- Skate Parks
- Improvements to Adult Recreation Center
- Land Acquisition/Banking

It should be noted that many of the proposed projects have been completed by the City over the past decade.

Mount Holly Comprehensive Recreation and Park Master Plan

In 2010, the City of Mount Holly updated its Comprehensive Recreation and Park Master Plan to develop a ten year vision for its park system. The planning process included both public workshops and a city wide telephone survey based on a random sample of city residents.

The plan called for the development of:

- 2 new Mini Parks (Land Acquisition & Development)
- 2 new Neighborhood Parks (Land Acquisition & Development)
- Facility Expansion at Mountain Island Park
- Expansion of Greenways (especially along the Catawba River)
- Renovations to Existing Parks
- Sprayground

The plan projected a capital improvement budget of almost \$6 million for the recommended improvements.

Cramerton Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Master Plan 2008-2018

In 2008, the Town of Cramerton developed a ten year plan to identify existing and future needs for parks and recreation facilities.

The planning report indicated (based on anticipated growth) a need for an additional Community Park and several additional Mini Parks. Likewise, the planning report indicated a need for additional youth baseball and soccer fields, as well as the development of additional walking trails. Proposed recommendations in the plan included:

- Improving accessibility in both facilities and programs

- Daily maintenance of all parks
- Expansion of bike lanes
- Land acquisition
- Greenway expansion
- Dedication of land for greenways
- Encouragement of recreation easements
- Expansion on connectivity
- Development of unified signage for parks and greenway/interpretive signage
- Walkable communities
- Endowment funding
- Intergovernmental cooperation
- Educational programs
- Stewardship programs

Improvements to the following facilities:

- C.B. Huss Recreation Complex
- Central Park
- Riverside Park & Greenway
- Town Center
- Goat Island Park
- New Sports Complex

The Master Plan included recommendations for capital improvements of approximately \$6.7 million.



George Poston Park Bike Trail

LEVEL OF SERVICE

The first step in developing a County-wide Park Master Plan is to establish a Level of Service (LOS) analysis for both park land and recreation facilities. Typically this process begins with a review of previously used LOS and the LOS other counties are using as they provide park and recreation facilities (benchmarking). We have included a review of other county standards as part of this planning process.

The LOS for both park acreage and recreation facilities is expressed in a population based format. For example, a county may decide to provide District Parks to its residents at a LOS of 2.5 acres of District Park land for every 1,000 people that live in the county. If the county has a population of 100,000 there will be a demand for 250 acres of park land dedicated to District Parks ($2.5 \text{ acres} \times 100 = 250 \text{ acres}$). If that same county currently has a District Park with 100 acres, there is a county wide need for 150 acres of additional park land dedicated to District Park(s) [demand (250 acres) – supply (100 acres) = need (150 acres)].

The same process is used to determine recreational facility needs. If the same county determines that softball fields should be available to its residents at a LOS of 1 field for every 10,000 people, there is a demand for 10 softball fields in the county ($100,000 \text{ population} \div 10,000 \text{ LOS} = 10 \text{ fields}$). If the county has 7 existing softball fields serving the recreational needs of county residents, there is a need for 3 additional softball fields [demand (10 fields) – supply (7 fields) = need (3 fields)].

PARK NEEDS

Table 3A-Park Acreage provides a summary of acreage standards used by other counties and the standards adopted in the 2007 Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The final column on Table 3A-Park Acreage (in yellow) provides the recommended acreage standard to be used by Gaston County for each park type. Table 3B-Park Acreage Needs Assessment uses the new standards to identify county wide park needs. The following descriptions provide insight on how the standards were chosen, what needs are identified and the responsible agency for each park type.

A general description of the different parks typically serving a community is provided in Appendix E. In reviewing these park needs, it is important to remember that the classification and description of the park types are fluid and often reflect the specific needs/use of the county and the particular park. Park classification may be based on size, facilities offered, community demand, or lack of other viable options in the service area.

An example of a park's role varying from the park classification guidelines is Pearl Henderson Park. At 5 acres, this park is much smaller than the typical Community Park, but because of its use, the area it serves, and the role it plays in the Department's system it is functioning as a Community Park and not a Neighborhood Park. Likewise, the acreage listed in the Classifications for Parks, Open Space and Greenways (Appendix E) provide a general range for desired size of facilities. The recommended acreage for each of the parks is not intended as hard and fast rule of size. The acreages included in the guidelines are not sequential. A 50 acre park could serve as a Community Park or a District Park; depending on the facilities offered, the programming provided and the availability of other parks in the system.

The following is a county wide assessment of the park needs for the next ten years.

Mini Parks

Mini Parks are the smallest park type and typically include a playground, shelter and possibly a play court. There are several parks that fit into the Mini Park classification in the county. They are operated and maintained by municipal agencies.

A standard of .10 acres for every 1,000 people in the service population has been established for Mini Parks. This LOS of development is less than the standard used by many North Carolina communities. It reflects a trend in park development away from Mini Parks because their small size limits their recreational use and makes them expensive to maintain and operate. Based on this service level, there is a need for additional Mini Parks in certain areas of the county. In the future municipal agencies may decide to build additional Mini Parks.

As a county agency, Gaston County should not focus its efforts on the development of these smaller parks, but should let municipal agencies meet this park need.

Neighborhood Parks

Like Mini Parks, Neighborhood Parks are typically developed by municipal agencies. Most all municipal departments in the county offer several Neighbor-

hood Parks to their citizens.

The service level set for Neighborhood Parks established by this Master Plan is 1 acre per 1,000 people. Utilizing this level of development, there is a need for 150 acres of additional Neighborhood Park land throughout the county. By 2026 this need will reach 168 acres. Assuming most Neighborhood Parks are in the 5-15 acre range, by 2026 there will be a need for 17-19 additional Neighborhood Parks.

The responsibility of developing these future parks should be on municipal agencies. The County may consider working with local agencies in some form of assistance, but development of Neighborhood Parks should not be a priority for the County.



Tryon Park Walking Track

Community Parks

As with Mini and Neighborhood Parks, municipal agencies are the primary provider of Community Parks in Gaston County. Municipal agencies provide almost 30 Community Parks on almost 800 acres of park land. The County offers 5 Community Parks on 160 acres of park land.

Based on a park land/population ratio of 4.0 acres per 1,000 population (the standard used in the 2007 Parks and Recreation Master Plan), the need for Community Parks has been met. The development of future Community Parks should not be a priority for the County, although in the future it is possible that some of the municipalities in the County could develop additional Community Parks.

District Parks

District Parks are large parks (usually greater than 100 acres) that provide both active and passive recreation. Typically county agencies are the primary source for funding and operating these large parks.

There are 3 existing Community Parks in the county. Gaston County provides 2 of these parks (Dallas Park and George Poston Park). The City of Gastonia provides a 3rd District Park at Rankin Lake. Together these parks provide 619 acres of District Park land.

Utilizing a standard of 3.5 acres per 1,000 (less than the standard used in the 2007 Parks and Recreation Master Plan) for District Park development, there is a current need for over 140 additional acres of District Park land in the county indicating a need for one additional District Park to serve the citizens of Gaston County. By 2026, with the anticipated increase in county population (18,000 new citizens), the need for this park will be critical. Based on the growth in the eastern area of the county, the new District Park should be located in the northeastern area. Finding and acquiring land for this future park should be a priority.

Regional Parks

Several excellent State Parks (Crowders Mountain, Lake Norman, and King's Mountain) are within easy driving distance of Gaston County. These large Regional Parks meet the passive recreation needs of county citizens. Development of a Regional Park should not be a priority for the County.

FUTURE LAND/OPEN SPACE NEEDS

As a rapidly urbanizing county, Gaston County should always be open to opportunities for preserving land for open space and recreation. As noted in previous sections on specific park needs, there is a county wide need for additional park land. As the county's population grows, finding undeveloped property for parks will become more difficult. As noted in Section Five, acquiring property for future parks should be a priority.

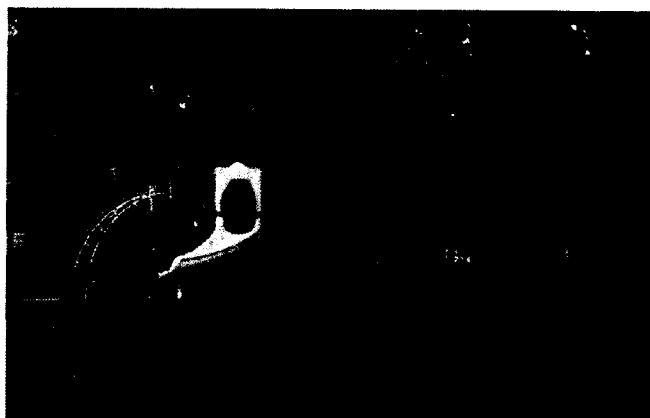
FACILITY NEEDS

The level of service for recreational facilities (i.e. ball-fields, courts, picnic shelters, etc.) proposed in this plan was developed from a review of LOS used by other counties similar to Gaston County, and from input gathered during the public input process. The LOS, identified in Table 3A-Facilities, and discussed in greater detail in Section Four: Proposals and Recommendations, are used in the developing of the recreational facility needs assessment.

Based on these LOS, the number of public facilities needed in the park system through the planning period (2017 to 2026), are identified in Table 3B-Facilities, "Recreation Facilities Needs Assessment" (page 3-13) and summarized on the following table. A more detailed discussion of each of the facility needs is provided in Section Four: Proposals & Recommendations.

In the following table, the "Existing Facilities" column indicates the number of existing recreation facilities currently available in the county. The "Current Need" column identifies the total number of additional facilities currently needed. The "2026 Need" column reflects the total number of additional facilities that will be needed by 2026.

As an example of how the Needs Assessment is presented, consider playgrounds. Currently there are 43 existing public playgrounds throughout the county. Based on the Standards for Facility Development that have been recommended for the County (one playground for every 4,000 people in the service population), there is a current demand for 54 playgrounds ($217,000 \div 4,000 = 54$). Since there are 43 playgrounds currently serving county residents, there is a current need to construct 11 additional playgrounds (demand of 54 - 43 existing playgrounds) to meet the demand. By 2026, with an increased population of 235,000, there will be a demand for 59 playgrounds ($235,000 \div 4,000 = 59$); or a need for 16 additional playgrounds.



Bessemer City Park Playground

	Existing Facilities	Current Need	2026 Need
Baseball/Softball Fields	76	7	14
Rectangle Fields	47	15	20
Basketball Courts	24	7	10
Tennis Courts	51	11	16
Volleyball Courts	6	5	6
Horseshoe	32	4	7
Shuffleboard Courts	1	4	5
Playground	43	11	16
Picnic Shelters	60	12	18
Hiking/Jogging			
Trails (miles)	±31	23	28
Amphitheater	5	6	7
Community Garden	2	9	10
Swimming Pool	7	4	5
Rec. Center w/Gym	6	3	3
Dog Park	3	3	4
Skate Park	3	1	2
Disc Golf	3	3	4
Sprayground	1	4	5

Current and future needs listed above are county wide needs. Gaston County is not responsible for meeting all needs. Many of these facility needs will be met by the municipal parks and recreation departments. Meeting the needs of all county residents will require a collaborative effort. See Section Four for specific recommendations on facility needs to be met by Gaston County's Parks and Recreation Department.

**Table 3A-Park Acreage
Gaston County
Standards for Acreage by Park Classification
Comparison of Level of Service Used by Other NC Agencies**

Park Types	Currituck County	Elizabeth/ Pasquotank County	City of Fayetteville/ Cumberland County	Iredell County	Cabarrus County	Yadkin County	Old NRPA Standards	Gaston County 2007 Master Plan	Gaston County 2017 Proposed Standards
Mini Parks	NA*	1-3 Acres/Park (.25 Acres/ 1,000)	.5-3 Acres/Park (.5 Acres/ 1,000)	1-2 Acres/Park (.25-.5 Acres/ 1,000)	.25-3 Acres/Park (.1 Acres/ 1,000)	NA*	.25-1 Acres/Park (.25-.5 Acres/ 1,000)	NA*	1-5 Acres/Park (.1 Acres/ 1,000)
Neighborhood Parks	5-10 Acres/Park (1 Acres/ 1,000)	7-15 Acres/Park (1 Acres/ 1,000)	7-15 Acres/Park (2.5 Acres/ 1,000)	10-15 Acres/Park (1-2 Acres/ 1,000)	3-25 Acres/Park (1 Acres/ 1,000)	NA*	5-10 Acres/Park (1-2 Acres/ 1,000)	5-15 Acres/Park (2 Acres/ 1,000)	5-15 Acres/Park (1 Acres/ 1,000)
Community Parks	30-50 Acres/Park (3 Acres/ 1,000)	40-100 Acres/Park (5 Acres/ 1,000)	30-50 Acres/Park (1.25 Acres/ 1,000)	30-50 Acres/Park (5-8 Acres/ 1,000)	25-70 Acres/Park (2.5 Acres/ 1,000)	30-50 Acres/Park (1.5 Acres/ 1,000)	30-50 Acres/Park (5-8 Acres/ 1,000)	40+ Acres/Park (4 Acres/ 1,000)	40+ Acres/Park (4 Acres/ 1,000)
District Parks	50 -100 Acres/Park (3 Acres/ 1,000)	±60-100 Acres/Park (2.5 Acres/ 1,000)	40-80 Acres/Park (1 Acres/ 1,000)	100-200 Acres/Park (5-10 Acres/ 1,000)	100-300 Acres/Park (3 Acres/ 1,000)	100-150 Acres/Park (2.5 Acres/ 1,000)	+75 Acres/Park (5-10 Acres/ 1,000)	200-400 Acres/Park (10 Acres/ 1,000)	100+ Acres/Park (3.5 Acres/ 1,000)
Regional Parks	150-1,000 Acres/Park (3 Acres/ 1,000)	NA**	100-250 Acres/Park (3.25 Acres/ 1,000)	NA**	750 Acres/Park (5 Acres/ 1,000))	150-1,000 Acres/Park (5 Acres/ 1,000)	NA**	1,000 Acres/Park (10 Acres/ 1,000)	1000+ Acres/Park (10 Acres/ 1,000)

*Most county parks and recreation agencies do not provide Mini Parks, Neighborhood Parks, or Community Parks.

**Regional Parks typically provided by State/National Agencies.

**Table 3A-Facilities
Gaston County
Recreation Facilities Standards
Comparison of Level of Service Used by Other NC Agencies**

	NRPA Guidelines	State Standard	Currituck County	Elizabeth/ Pasquotank County	City of Fayetteville/ Cumberland County	Iredell County	Cabarrus County	Yadkin County	Gaston County 2007 Master Plan	Gaston County 2017 Standards
Fields										
Adult Baseball	1/20,000	1/15,000	1/10,000	1/10,000	1/20,000	1/20,000	1/15,000	1/30,000	1/20,000	1/20,000
Youth Baseball	N/A	N/A	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/6,500	1/6,000	1/5,000	1/12,000	1/5,000	1/6,000
Softball	N/A	N/A	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/7,500	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/20,000	1/5,000	1/6,000
Football	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/20,000	1/20,000	1/10,000	1/20,000	1/10,000	1/40,000	1/4,000	1/3,500
Soccer	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/7,500	1/8,000	1/4,500	1/10,000	1/4,000	1/3,500
Courts										
Basketball	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/10,000	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/10,000	1/7,500	1/20,000	1/5,000	1/7,000
Tennis	1/2,000	1/2,000	1/10,000	1/3,000	1/4,000	1/10,000	1/4,000	1/10,000	1/2,000	1/3,500
Volleyball	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/15,000	1/20,000	1/7,500	1/10,000	1/5,000	1/20,000
Horseshoe	1/5,000	N/A	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/15,000	1/20,000	1/7,500	1/20,000	1/5,000	1/60,000
Shuffleboard	1/2,000	N/A	1/10,000	1/5,000	1/15,000	1/20,000	1/1,000	1/20,000		1/40,000
Outdoor Areas										
Picnic Shelter	1/2,000	N/A	1/2,000	1/3,000	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/3,000	1/5,000	1/6,000	1/4,000
Playground Activities	N/A	1/1,000	1/3,000	1/1,000	1/3,000	1/5,000	1/3,000	1/5,000	N/A	1/4,000
Trails										
Hiking/Fitness/Jogging	1/region	.4 mile/1,000	.4 mile/1,000	.4 mile/1,000	.4 mile/1,000		1 mile/4,000	.3 mile/1,000	1 mile/4,000	1 mile/4,000
Specialized										
Rec. Center w/Gym	1/25,000	N/A	1/20,000		1/16,000		1/50,000	1/40,000	1/20,000	1/25,000
Rec. Center w/out Gym	1/10,000	N/A	1/20,000	1/20,000			1/50,000		1/20,000	1/50,000
Outdoor Pool	1/20,000	1/20,000	1/20,000	1/20,000	1/50,000		1/50,000	1/30,000	1/75,000	1/20,000
Bicycling/Urban	1 mile/2,000	1 mile/1,000	1 mile/1,000	1 mile/1,000	1 mile/1,000	1 mile/2,000	1 mile/1,000	1 mile/1,000	1 mile/2,000	1 mile/2,000
Amphitheater	1/20,000						1/20,000			1/20,000
Disc Golf					1/50,000		1/15,000			1/25,000
Skateboard Park					1/100,000		1/50,000		1/50,000	1/50,000
Dog Park					1/50,000		1/50,000		1/50,000	1/35,000
Community Garden							1/20,000			1/20,000
Sprayground							1/50,000			1/40,000

**Table 3B-Park Acreage
Gaston County**

Park Sites and Acreage Needs Assessment

Park Types	2017 Existing Facilities*	Standard for Development	Current Demand 217,000**	Current Need	2026 Demand 235,000***	2026 Need
Mini Parks	6 Parks 12 Acres	1-5 Acres/Park (.1 Acres/ 1,000)	8-10 Parks 21.7 Acres	2-4 Parks* 9.7 Acres	10-12 Parks 23.5 Acres	5-6 Parks* 11.5 Acres
Neighborhood Parks	10 Parks 67 Acres	5-15 Acres/Park (1 Acres/ 1,000)	25-30 Parks 217 Acres	10-15 Parks* 150 Acres	28-33 Parks 235 Acres	17-19 Parks* 168 Acres
Community Parks	41 Parks 961 Acres	±40 Acres/Park (4 Acres/ 1,000)	23 Parks 868 Acres	Needs Met**	25 Parks 940 Acres	Needs Met**
District Parks	4 Parks 619 Acres	±100 Acres/Park (3.5 Acres/ 1,000)	5-6 Parks 759.5 Acres	1 Park 140.5 Acres	5-6 Parks 822.5 Acres	1 Park 203.5 Acres
Regional Parks	1 Park 3,500 Acres	1,000 Acres/Park (10 Acres/ 1,000)	1 Park 2,170 Acres	Needs Met by State Parks	1 Park 2,350 Acres	Needs Met by State Parks

* There is a need for additional Mini Parks and Neighborhood Parks in Gaston County, but typically these smaller parks are built and operated by municipal departments.

**There is not a need for additional Community Parks to be developed by the county. There could be the need for municipal agencies to develop additional Community Parks based on local needs.

**Table 3B-Facilities
Gaston County**

Recreation Facilities Needs Assessment

	2017 Standard	Existing Facilities	Current Demand (217,000*)		Current Need (217,000*)	2026 Demand (235,000*)	2026 Need (235,000*)	
Fields								
Adult Baseball	1/20,000	76	11	83	7	12	90	14
Youth Baseball	1/6,000		36			39		
Softball	1/6,000		36			39		
Rectangle Fields	1/3,500	47	62		15	67		20
Courts								
Basketball (outdoor)	1/7,000	24	31		7	34		10
Tennis	1/3,500	51	62		11	67		16
Volleyball	1/20,000	6	11		5	12		6
Horseshoes	1/6,000	32	36		4	39		7
Shuffleboard	1/40,000	1	5		4	6		5
Outdoor Areas								
Playgrounds	1/4,000	43	54		11	59		16
Picnic Shelter	1/3,000	60	72		12	78		18
Trails								
Hiking/Fitness/Jogging	1 mile/4,000	±31 miles	54 miles		23 miles	59 miles		28 miles
Specialized								
Amphitheater	1/20,000	5	11		6	12		7
Community Garden	1/20,000	2	11		9	12		10
Swimming Pool	1/20,000	7	11		4	12		5
Recreation Center w/ Gym	1/25,000	6	9		3	9		3
Dog Park	1/35,000	3	6		3	7		4
Skate Park	1/50,000	3	4		1	5		2
Disc Golf	1/35,000	3	6		3	7		4
Bicycling/Urban	1 mile/2,000		108		108	178		118
Sprayground	1/40,000	1	5		4	6		5



North Belmont Park Playground

Section Four

Proposals & Recommendations

INTRODUCTION

Many county agencies in North Carolina's urban areas focus on providing parks, senior centers and recreation facilities/services to county residents that live in unincorporated areas or small towns (without parks and recreation departments). Gaston County's primary mission falls within that parameter.

There are eight municipalities in Gaston County that offer their citizens parks and recreation facilities and programs through departmental services. These eight municipal departments are Gastonia, Mount Holly, Belmont, Cramerton, Bessemer City, Stanley, Dallas, and Lowell. These eight departments serve approximately half of the entire county population and provide a wide variety of facilities and programs.

Gaston County's Parks and Recreation Department focuses its efforts on providing parks and recreation facilities to the $\pm 100,000$ citizens living in the rural areas of the county that are not served by a parks and recreation department. In addition to serving the unincorporated areas and smaller towns, the Parks and Recreation Department also focuses on working with the municipal agencies throughout the county where opportunities exist.

The needs identified in Section Three: Establishing a County Wide Level of Service for Parks, Recreation Facilities and Senior Centers were established within this organizational framework between county and city departments.

Identification of these recreational needs/opportunities comes at a time when Gaston County (like many counties in North Carolina) has finally grown out of the nation's worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. While the county's economy is once again vibrant, County staff and elected officials must carefully plan for park and recreation needs.

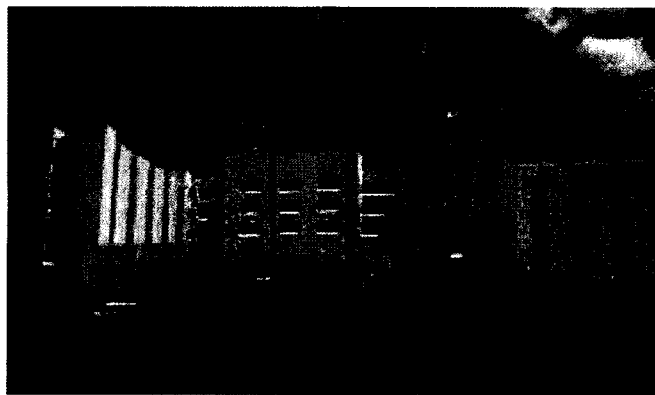
Gaston County should not approach the task of providing parks, recreational opportunities and senior centers alone. There are a number of public and private agencies and organizations throughout the county that can share in that role.

School facilities are often used to meet community recreational needs during non-school hours. Gaston County Schools have historically been an important resource for county recreation programs. The indoor and outdoor facilities of the school system play an instrumental role in meeting recreational needs of all county residents. The continued exploration and development of joint use opportunities with the school system is critical to the success of this parks and recreation master plan.

The Cities/Towns of Gastonia, Mount Holly, Belmont, Cramerton, Bessemer City, Stanley, Dallas, and Lowell are primary providers of parks and recreation facilities in the county. In addition, several of the county's smaller communities (Cherryville, Ranlo, and High Shoals) provide small parks and civic spaces. The development of county wide parks and recreation facilities should be coordinated with the facilities and services offered by all of these municipalities. There is great value in collaboration of all park and recreation agencies. Financial and human resources are too valuable to duplicate. Where possible, the municipal agencies should work with the County for the betterment of parks and recreation programming.

Another major player with the mission of improving community health and the quality of life is CaroMont Health. The County should look for opportunities to partner with the hospital and other health organizations in the promotion of healthy lifestyles.

Finally, the private sector plays an important role in providing recreational opportunities in the county. A number of fitness clubs, neighborhood swim clubs, churches, and other private or quasi-private organizations provide valuable recreation opportunities to the citizens of Gaston County. The facilities and programs of these private sector organizations should be considered as the County plans development of future facilities.



CaroMont Health

It is essential to clearly understand how the County will interface with these other recreational and health providers. This cooperative effort will eliminate duplication of facilities and services. The proposals in this Master Plan are based on what each recreational provider is anticipated to offer through the ten year planning period (2017-2026).

State of North Carolina

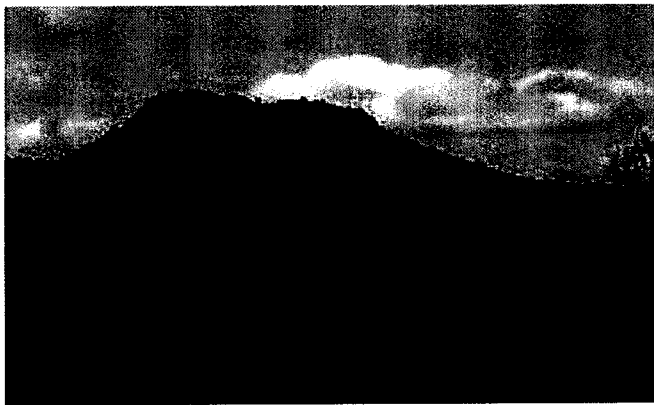
The State of North Carolina, through its State Parks, Division of Historical Sites and Properties and its Wildlife Division offer people of Gaston County a variety of parks and recreational experiences.

There are several outstanding State Parks within easy driving distance of county residents. Crowders Mountain State Park is located in southwestern Gaston County south of Gastonia. This very popular park provides over 3,500 acres of open space with a wide variety of hiking and camping opportunities. Views from the mountain provide a 25 mile panorama of the surrounding area. Likewise, Lake Norman State Park provides a wide variety of water based recreation, as well as trails, camping, and open space. While not located in Gaston County, this wonderful

regional facility is within easy driving distance of all county residents.

In addition to State Parks, the North Carolina Forest Service offers a wonderful environmental education opportunity at Mountain Island Educational State Forest in Stanley. This forest preserve provides both educational opportunities and undeveloped open space for hiking and passive recreation.

It is anticipated that the State of North Carolina will continue to maintain and operate these outstanding facilities. The County, along with other nearby government agencies, should express their desire to see these resources used to their utmost potential. This may include the expansion of facilities and recreational opportunities. The State should continue to offer a variety of recreational facilities and programs on a regional basis. In addition, the State should be the provider of regional State Parks that include opportunities for camping, fishing, biking, and special facilities of regional and statewide interest.



Crowders Mountain

Gaston County Schools

Historically, the Gaston County School Board has been a significant partner with the County in providing recreational opportunities to county residents. As noted in Section One: Inventory, the County relies heavily on school facilities for athletics. Currently the County is programming facilities at ten schools for youth athletic programs. In return, the County provides maintenance on school park facilities.

Going forward, the County and the School Board should look for adding opportunities to work together. An important area of collaboration would be the joint planning of future schools. By working together in the early stages of planning, opportunities for joint development of both indoor and outdoor recreation facilities could be identified.

As noted in the Needs Assessment, there is considerable demand for gymnasium space for public recreational use. Partnering with the school system as new schools are constructed is the most economical means of developing indoor recreational space. Examples of joint use of indoor recreational space can be seen in counties throughout North Carolina (Onslow County, Cumberland County, New Hanover and many others).

CaroMont Health

Citizens of Gaston County have access to outstanding medical facilities offered by CaroMont Health. Their facilities provide residents of Gaston County, and the surrounding area, with excellent healthcare. Recent studies on obesity and healthy lifestyles have made it apparent that a community's health is linked to regular physical activity. Many of these activities are currently offered by the Parks and Recreation Departments in the County.

The County's Parks and Recreation Department, working in conjunction with CaroMont Health, should look for programs and facilities that can improve community health.

GASTON COUNTY PROPOSALS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The County, through its Parks and Recreation Department, currently affords its citizens a variety of recreation opportunities through its parks, recreational facilities, and senior center. These facilities provide opportunities for both active and passive recreation.

The County's park system is primarily oriented toward larger parks (District and Community Parks), while the municipal departments in the county focus on Community, Neighborhood, and Mini Parks. The Department also relies heavily on use of ten school park locations across the county.

The County's existing parks provide a solid foundation of recreation facilities and green space; however, there are a number of areas where expansion and improvements are needed.

In addition to its parks, the County's Parks and Recreation Department also programs indoor recreation activities and operates a senior center.

The Parks and Recreation Department must work with other agencies in the county to provide the park land and facilities that will be required to meet the park and recreational needs identified in the planning report. This collaborative effort should include working with the school board, surrounding counties, and the municipal departments to minimize duplication of facilities by developing and maintaining joint use agreements wherever possible.

We will begin our discussion of recommendations with parks and the outdoor facilities typically found in them. We will then turn our attention to special use facilities (senior center, gymnasiums, etc.). Finally there is a review of trends in the parks and recreation fields.

Park Needs

Through the planning and public involvement process, standards for park acreage and recreation facilities have been developed. These standards were defined in Section Three: Standards and Needs Assessment, and identified in Table 3A-Park Acreage, and Table 3A-Facilities.

Utilizing the standards for development and applying them to the County's current and projected population, a Needs Assessment for both parks and recreation facilities was developed. The summary of this Needs Assessment is found in the tables at the end of Section Three.

While the tables provide "the numbers" of the Needs Assessment, this section will define the reasoning behind the numbers and provide a description of how the numbers are used to provide recommendations that will ultimately guide the Department in the coming decade.

We begin with an overview of the different park types found in most counties, and how these parks should be developed in the future.

Regional Parks

Regional Parks are typically large, passive oriented parks that highlight, utilize and protect a unique feature. These parks, as the name implies, serve people from across a region; therefore, most people have to travel to enjoy these park types. As noted in Section Three, Regional Parks are typically offered by national, state, or county agencies. Occasionally, municipalities with populations of 100,000 or more may provide a Regional Park.

Gaston County is very fortunate to have an outstanding State Park located in the southwest area. This outstanding park provides a wide variety of nature based recreational activities. The facilities in this park provide valuable recreation opportunities for county residents and attracts visitors from across the region.

To the northwest of Gaston County, Lake Norman State Park provides access to the state's largest lake. This park offers a wide range of water based recreation, as well as hiking and biking trails.

In addition to these nearby North Carolina State Parks, county residents have easy access to King's Mountain State Park and King's Mountain National Military Park. Operated by the South Carolina State Parks and the National Park Service, these sites provide county residents with a unique historic site that includes a visitors center, historical structures, trails, and outdoor exhibits. In addition to the historical aspects of the site, there are opportunities for passive recreation.

These excellent State Parks and Historical Sites meet the needs of a Regional Park for the citizens of Gaston County and allows the Department to focus

on the development of other park types.



District Park

District Parks are another large park type often provided by county agencies or larger municipalities. These parks are typically in the 100 acre range and provide a wide variety of recreational opportunities.

There are three District Parks currently serving county residents. The County has two District Parks; Dallas Park located in the center of the county and George Poston Park located in Lowell in the east central area of the county. In addition to the county's two District Parks, the city of Gastonia provides a District Park (Rankin Lake Park), located in the central area of the county.

Together these parks provide over 600 acres of District Park land, but even with these three parks there is a need for an additional District Park in the county. Utilizing a relatively conservative standard for District Park development (3.5 acres/1,000 people), there is a need for over 140 acres of additional District Park land in the county. This indicates a need for one additional District Park. Based on the centralized location of the county's existing District Parks and the rapid growth in the northeast region of the county, the best location for this future park will be in the northeast area of the county between Stanley and Mount Holly.

The development of a District Park in this area will provide park and recreation facilities in an underserved area of the county, and will provide many of the needed recreation facilities that are discussed later in the section.

Community Parks

Community Parks are an important component in many county park systems. These parks are usually large enough (30-100 acres) to provide both valuable active recreation opportunities and preservation of undeveloped open space and passive recreation areas.

There are over 40 Community Parks located throughout the county. The majority of these Community Parks are located and operated in municipal jurisdictions. Gaston County operates five Community Parks located throughout the county.

With over 40 Community Parks covering almost 1,000 acres of park land. The development of additional Community Parks should not be a priority for Gaston County. In the future, additional Community Parks could be needed by any of the county's growing municipalities, but any future Community Park development should be by local agencies, not Gaston County.



Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood Parks play an important role in providing both active and passive recreation in most municipal park systems. These parks, usually in the 7-15 acre range, are large enough to include both active and passive recreation opportunities. Typically, county park departments do not focus on development of Neighborhood Parks. Instead, Neighborhood Parks are typically constructed and operated by municipal agencies.

There are 10 Neighborhood Parks located in Gaston County. All of the existing Neighborhood Parks are in municipal jurisdictions. This is a relatively low

number of Neighborhood Parks to serve the 100,000 plus people living in the County's municipalities.

Based on very conservative LOS for Neighborhood Park development (1 acre/1,000 population), there is a current need for ten to fifteen new Neighborhood Parks throughout the county. By 2026, that need will increase to 17-19 Neighborhood Parks. As with Community Parks, development of Neighborhood Parks should be the responsibility of the municipalities.

Mini Parks

Mini Parks are the smallest of the park types. These parks typically are less than an acre and provide a limited range of activities (playground, picnic shelter, benches, etc.). Mini Parks, like Neighborhood Parks, provide relatively limited recreation facilities, but are located in close proximity to the service population they serve. County agencies typically do not develop Mini Parks.

Utilizing a very conservative LOS for development (.1 acre/1,000 population), there is a need for additional Mini Parks in the county, but these smaller parks are typically developed by municipal agencies.

Greenways/Trails

The most popular outdoor recreation activity in the nation is walking. This popularity was reflected in the survey that was conducted as part of this planning study and in comments made during the public workshops.

The importance of providing trails and greenways has heightened over the past decade with the increase in obesity. Walking has become an important activity in the mission to improve community health.

Greenway trails are typically off-road trails that meander through neighborhoods and natural areas providing transportation corridors and recreational opportunities for walkers, joggers, roller bladers, and cyclists. The trail surface can either be natural or paved. Paved trails are normally eight to ten feet in width. Natural surface trail widths can vary based on conditions.



In addition to providing environmental protection and recreation opportunities, Greenways can produce economic development. The North Carolina Department of Transportation Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation conducted a study on a bicycle trail constructed along the northern Outer Banks region. This study determined that a \$6.7 million investment in off-road bike paths and shoulder improvements produced an estimated \$60 million annually in economic benefit. In addition, the study found that:

- Bicycle facilities in the area are an important factor to many tourists visiting the region.
- Investments in the bicycle facilities improved the safety of the area's transportation system.
- Bicycle activities include the benefits of health, fitness, quality of life, and the environment.

Greenways also offer a valuable alternative to automotive transportation. A Greenway trail often provides a linkage between communities, schools, churches, businesses, and parks.

The Carolina Thread Trail (CTT), the regional network of greenways, trails, and blueways that will one day connect 15 counties and 2.3 million people, will run through Gaston County. The Gaston County section of the greenway was adopted in 2009 and has been an important planning tool for both the County and the municipal departments. The proposed route includes approximately 100 miles of trails in the county. See Section Three for additional details on the CCT Master Plan for Gaston County.

The development of the CTT should be a collaborative priority and Gaston County should work in

close alignment with the municipalities to facilitate development.

Trail segments identified during this planning process as highest priority include:

- Connecting Dallas Park with the Gaston Community College campus, Rankin Lake, and downtown Gastonia
- Development of trails along the South Fork River connecting Cramerton, McAdenville, Lowell, and Belmont to George Poston Park.
- Trail connecting George Poston Park to Spencer Mountain

Bikeways

The need for bikeable roads and the development of Greenways for biking was mentioned in many of the interviews and in the public workshops. With the focus on healthy lifestyles, the environment, and alternative transportation, there is a great need to develop and implement a bike plan.

The County should encourage the State to include bike lanes whenever roadway improvements are made or new roads constructed. The County should also address their subdivision process to ensure developers provide bicycle (and pedestrian) routes in the roadway improvements they construct as part of the development process.

The County should consider applying for federal SAFETEA program non-vehicular transportation funds that encourage alternative means of transportation. These funds have been used to construct bike lanes and Greenway trails in communities throughout North Carolina.

Through careful planning, the County should encourage development of bike routes that will connect all of the county's towns and points of interest and will provide both a tourist attraction and a valuable resource for active recreation for county residents.

Water Access and Blueways

Gaston County is blessed with an abundance of water resources. The South Fork River, the Catawba River,

Mountain Island Lake, Rankin Lake, and miles of creeks and streams provide a wide range of water resources. The desire for water access was heard throughout the public participation process.

The value of these water resources have become more evident over the past few years. The County, through its Gaston Outside promotions, has begun to market these resources, along with trails and parks, as a travel and tourism attraction.

The value of these water resources have been recognized by many citizens and a number of organizations are at work to preserve these valuable resources and enhance their appearance and use. An excellent example of this effort is the South Fork Blueway, which has been developed as part of the Carolina Thread Trail in conjunction with several municipal agencies.

RENOVATION & EXPANSION OF EXISTING PARKS

While the focus of the previous recommendations has been on the acquisition and development of new parks, there is also a need to improve and expand facilities at many of the County's existing parks. As part of the ongoing planning and budgeting process, the Parks and Recreation Department annually establishes a list of capital improvement projects. This list of capital improvements needs is then used by the Department and elected officials to establish yearly capital improvement budgets.

Important renovation projects which should be considered include:

- Dallas Park
- George Poston Park
- Bessemer City park
- North Belmont Park
- Tryon Park
- Pearl Henderson Park
- South Fork River Park
- Camp Sertoma
- Lewis Brooks Airfield

See Appendix H for a summary of future park improvements at each of these parks.

As noted in Section Three, the County is currently developing an ADA Transition Plan for its facilities. Through that study, each of the Department's parks have been assessed with regard to ADA accessibility and recommendations have been made with regard to needed renovations.

As a public entity, it is very important for the County to make all of its parks and recreation facilities accessible. Once the ADA Transition Plan is completed, the Department should use the recommendations from this plan to improve accessibility.

MASTER PLANS FOR FUTURE PARK IMPROVEMENTS

As noted in previous sections, Master Plans should be developed for several of the County's existing parks and future parks. Parks and facilities that warrant special study include:

- Countywide Greenway Master Plan
- Detailed Facility Assessments for all County Parks

FACILITY PROPOSALS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This planning report recommends the County should develop a new District Park, renovate its existing parks, and expand trails. In addition to these outdoor recreation needs, there are improvements recommended for the senior center. The improvements that will be made as part of these expansions and renovations will add many new facilities to the Department's inventory. The County should consider the list of facility needs established in Section Three and described in greater detail in this section as it builds new parks and renovates existing facilities. It should be noted the facility needs listed here are county wide needs. Meeting all of these needs will require a coordinated effort by all park and recreation providers.

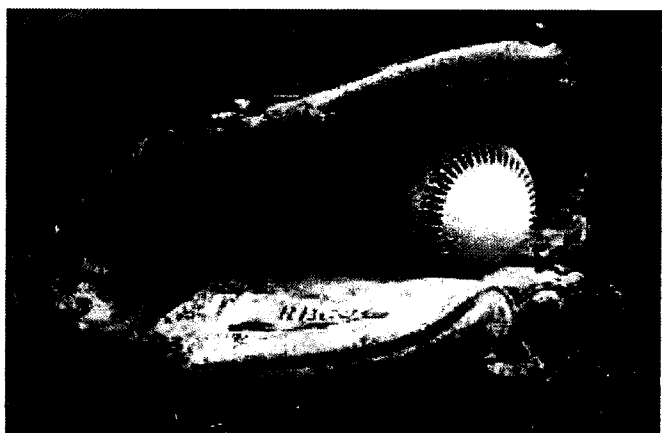
Adult Baseball

Over the past five to ten years, the popularity of adult baseball has waned, both locally and across the nation. Based on this trend, a LOS of one field per 20,000 people for the development of adult baseball fields is recommended. Utilizing this standard of field development, there is not a pressing need for an additional adult baseball field. Additional fields could be constructed in the future if demand arises.

Youth Baseball

Youth baseball is a very popular sport in North Carolina and that popularity is evident in Gaston County. The County, utilizing school fields, has access to a large number of youth fields. Utilizing a LOS of one field for every 6,000 people (LOS similar to other NC counties), there is a need for several additional fields. As the county's population grows, the need for fields will grow as well. Some of these needed fields could be constructed at the proposed District Park and some of these fields will likely be constructed as municipal agencies build new parks in the future.

In addition to the local demand for youth baseball fields, the development of facilities for youth baseball could also provide valuable economic benefit to the county. Economic impact studies indicate a tournament level baseball facility in Gaston County could successfully create a venue for youth tournaments that would bring tens of thousands of tourist to the county; creating economic impact through restaurants, hotels and shopping. See Section Five on Park Facilities as Economic Developers. Improvements to the ball fields at Dallas Park, as outlined in the Park's Master Plan, could provide a tournament level facility.



Softball

Men's adult softball has traditionally been a popular sport in North Carolina. NRPA and NCDENR standards (one field per 5,000 people) reflect that popularity. This plan recommends a LOS development of one field per 6,000 people (similar to other North Carolina counties). Based on this standard, the County currently has a need for a few additional softball fields. These fields, as well as the little league fields, could be located in the proposed District Park or through expansion of parks in municipalities.

It should also be noted that changes in demand have now placed additional emphasis on women's and youth softball. In the future, softball fields should be designed to accommodate this new area of play, or some of the existing fields should be retrofitted to allow for women and youth play.

Rectangle Fields

Many park and recreation agencies are moving towards the development of multipurpose fields to provide play space for football, soccer, lacrosse, and rugby. The development of these multipurpose fields, sometimes simply called rectangle fields, provides the most program flexibility. Based on input from staff, stakeholders, and the public, there is a need for fifteen additional rectangle/multipurpose fields in the county. By 2026, this need will grow to 20 rectangle fields.

Football

Football's popularity as a community based youth sport has been reduced by the emergence of soccer and (most recently) lacrosse. However, based on input received during the public workshop, there appears to be a need for "game day" fields and opportunities to work with youth football associations to improve underutilized fields.

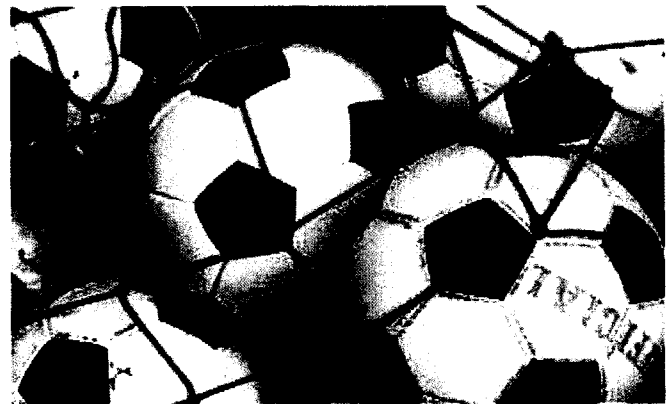
Soccer

Soccer is one of the fastest growing sports in America. Some local demand for the sport was expressed in the survey and during stakeholder meetings. This Master Plan reflects this demand by establishing a LOS of one field for every 3,500 people within the service population. Utilizing this standard for development, the County needs fifteen additional rectangle

fields, by 2026 the demand will grow to twenty.

As with ball fields, some of these new rectangle fields will be located at the new District Park, some may be added to existing county parks, and some will be added at municipal parks.

The County should consider lighting athletic fields, which effectively doubles their use. Likewise, the development of synthetic turf fields could greatly increase playing time on existing fields and reduce the number of fields needed.



A final note on soccer, the demand for multi-purpose fields will be made more intense by the new interest in lacrosse, field hockey and rugby. Played on a field very similar to a soccer field (they are slightly larger than soccer fields), these sports will likely increase in popularity and should be considered as the County reviews its rectangle field needs. These new sports should be taken into consideration since play for both sports can be programmed on similar fields. One method to accommodate the variety of field games (soccer, lacrosse, rugby, football) is to develop larger multi-use fields that can be used for a variety of field games.

Basketball (Outdoor)

Basketball remains an extremely popular sport in the United States. Played by a variety of ages, and increasingly by females, this sport can be played either indoors or out. Currently there are twenty-four public outdoor basketball courts located throughout the county. Based on a LOS of one outdoor basketball court per 7,000 people, the County currently has a need for seven new outdoor courts, by 2026 the need will increase to ten courts.

In addition to outdoor courts, there is a need for indoor basketball, as well. See the section on Community Centers and Gymnasiums for the community's need for indoor courts.

Tennis

Based on input received in stakeholders interviews and the public workshops, tennis is a relatively popular sport in Gaston County. Currently there are fifty-one public courts in the county. A number of these courts are located at schools.

Utilizing a relatively conservative LOS of facility development (one court per 3,500 people) there is a current need for eleven additional courts throughout the county. These courts could be added at the proposed District Park or by municipal agencies as new parks are developed.

The demand for tennis courts is also impacted by the recent emergence of pickleball. As noted under the section on Trends in Parks and Recreation Facilities, pickleball is one of the region's fastest growing recreation activities. Pickleball can be played on a realigned tennis court; this increases the demand for tennis courts.

Volleyball

There are only six outdoor volleyball courts in parks throughout the county. There is a need for several additional courts. Volleyball courts are relatively small and can easily be added to existing parks.



Horseshoes

There are currently thirty-two horseshoe courts throughout the county. Based on a conservative LOS (one court per 6,000 people) there will be a need for several courts in the future. This activity provides a recreational outlet and opportunities for social interaction, particularly for older citizens.

The County may consider building horseshoe courts in parks or in conjunction with its senior center if there is a demand for this activity in the future. Like volleyball courts, horseshoe courts are relatively small and can easily be added to existing parks or senior centers.

Shuffleboard

There is only one public shuffleboard court in Gaston County. This activity provides a recreation outlet for social interaction, particularly for older citizens. The County may consider building shuffleboard courts if there is additional demand for this activity in the future. Like horseshoe pits, shuffleboard courts are relatively small and can easily be added to existing parks or senior centers.

Picnic Shelters

Picnicking was one of the most popular recreational activities listed by respondents in the County's survey. There are currently sixty picnic shelters located throughout the county. Based on a LOS of one shelter per 3,000 people, there is a need for twelve additional shelters. By 2026, there will be a need for eighteen shelters. Picnic shelters can be added to existing parks, and should be included in any new parks built throughout the county.

Playgrounds

There are forty-three public playgrounds serving county residents. Many of these playgrounds are located on school property. Playgrounds were listed as a popular recreational facility in the survey and public workshops. Additional playgrounds are needed. As new parks are developed, the County should look for locations for additional playgrounds. Larger parks may warrant more than one playground.

Safety inspections and ADA accessibility audits should be conducted at all existing playgrounds. As new playgrounds are completed and existing playgrounds renovated, wood fiber and sand surfaces should be replaced with poured in place (PIP) safety surfacing. PIP surfaces provide wheelchair accessibility and reduces maintenance and lifecycle costs of the playgrounds.

A popular trend in playground development is natural play areas. These relatively new play areas are designed on the concept of providing opportunities for children to interact with the natural environment when playing. Instead of relying on plastic and steel play structures, these play areas use natural features (creeks, rocks, trees, dirt, etc.) to provide play opportunities. Inspired by the book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children*, this new trend in playground development seeks to re-introduce our youth to the natural environment. The County should consider development of nature based playgrounds in one of its parks.



Pedestrian Trails

Walking is the number one outdoor recreational activity in the United States. Walking or biking trail use scored high in the public survey ($\pm 93\%$ indicated they are interested in using trails). Over two thirds (66%) stated their need for trails was not being met.

With this level of public demand, the development of walking trails and greenways should be a priority for future park development. A priority should be placed on walking trail development in all existing and future parks. A paved walking trail is an important component of all park types, and should be provided in all Neighborhood, Community and District Parks.

In addition to paved trails, many county parks should also include natural trails for passive recreation and access to undeveloped open space within the parks.

Pedestrian trails should be included in all parks as the County improves its park system. In addition to park trails, the County should look for opportunities to work with partner agencies/organizations to explore opportunities for trail development along the South Fork River to provide pedestrian connections between parks, schools, and other public spaces.

Biking Trails

Biking is a rapidly growing outdoor recreational activity. The County should expand opportunities for biking through the development of a Greenway trail system, including paths suitable for biking in existing and future parks, and through encouraging NCDOT to develop roads with bike lanes or wider shoulders to accommodate bikers. The County should work with other stakeholders to help promote and facilitate new bikeways throughout the county.

In addition to paved bike trails, the County should look for opportunities with its existing or future parks to develop mountain bike trails. Based on input received at the public workshops and in stakeholder interviews there is demand in the county for this sport. Currently there are mountain bike trails in George Poston Park and Rocky Branch Park. Based on the popularity of these facilities, the County should consider development of additional mountain bike trails.



Amphitheaters and Outdoor Performing Areas

There are several existing amphitheaters in Gaston County. There seems to be demand for outdoor special events in the public workshops. Amphitheaters should be considered as potential outdoor amenity areas as future parks are developed.

SENIOR CENTER & SERVICES

The National Council on Aging now classifies older adults or seniors as age 60 and above. There are 10,000 Americans turning age 65 every year. "As the population ages, older Americans will play an increasingly important role in our economy." – National Council on Aging. According to Gaston County Census Bureau 2010 data numbers, persons 65 years and over account for almost 13.2% of the County population. Percentage numbers were not available for age 60 and above.

Gaston County currently has a senior center located in the County offices at Dallas Park.

Healthy Aging

By investing in and expanding services for Gaston County's senior citizens, proactivity and prevention can offset significantly more costly medical treatments and expenses. Chronic health conditions are, unfortunately, often a part of the aging process. Ninety-two percent of people over age 65 live with at least one chronic health condition, such as diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, or cancer. Seventy-seven percent live with two or more such conditions. (Source: National Association of Area Agencies on Aging). Today, senior center professionals and staff are assisting their clients in the management of these conditions, helping seniors remain healthy and active in their communities.



Recommendations

The continued growth in the county's senior population, coupled with nationally recognized aging-focused research and data, indicates a need for expanded services for seniors in Gaston County. This can be achieved by partnering with other agencies, but will ultimately require re-purposed, renovated, or new facilities at the County's Senior Center.

There may be a financial benefit to partner city and county funds for these facilities as they expand their reach.

Services

Seniors can benefit by community based programs planned to meet their special needs. Diverse groups of active adults require multiple functions and a comprehensive array of services. The NCOA lists the following recommended programs and services:

- Meal and nutrition programs
- Information and assistance
- Health, fitness, and wellness programs
- Transportation services
- Public benefits counseling
- Employment assistance
- Volunteer and civic engagement opportunities
- Social and recreational activities
- Educational and arts programs
- Intergenerational programs

Noticeably, there is a strong alignment between Gaston County's needs and the Nation's trends. While the County's senior services offered through the Parks and Recreation Department cannot address all of the programs/needs, it is important for the

Department to identify program priorities and focus on those priorities.

Existing Facility Improvements

The existing Dallas Senior Center has been expanded by 6,200 square feet, currently offering a relatively wide range of program spaces. Even with these improvements, additional renovations and improvements for both general maintenance and to stay current with growing senior needs and demographic demands will be needed in the future. An important aspect of any renovation of the facility will be eliminating the “institutional” feel of the building.

Renovations, repairs and expansion to the existing senior center could include:

- Therapy pool
- Shower/locker rooms
- Expanded fitness space
- New flooring for exercise areas
- Sound proofing between spaces
- Additional storage/equipment space

The development of these new program areas will require a 4,500 - 5,000 sf expansion to the existing Senior Center. In the immediate future (next 10 years), the highest priority should be fitness room expansion and new flooring.

In addition, to the need for program expansion listed above, there is strong demand for pickleball and volleyball. The proposed multi-purpose building at Dallas Park could provide space for these activities.

Funding

Senior Centers have a unique base of support in each local community. Many are supported by county and municipal governments along with private, and non-profit organizations. United Way, foundations, and civic, religious and social groups, along with fundraisers, bond referendums, and participant donations and fees are all used to build and operate senior centers.

Naming

Nationally, centers are moving away from the term ‘senior’ center; and are instead rebranding to Active Adult Centers. This appeals to a more vibrant and

exciting place to improve one’s quality of life.

SPECIAL USE FACILITIES

Community Centers & Gymnasiums

Based on input received at the public workshops and from the county wide survey, many Gaston County residents would like to have better access to indoor recreation facilities. Over two-thirds (68%) of survey respondents indicated a desire/need for indoor recreation.

The construction and operation of a multi-use recreation center is a significant undertaking, but it is the recommendation of this report that the County explore this option. Many of the stakeholders discussed the importance of providing parks and recreation facilities and programs that will enhance the quality of life of Gaston citizens and attract people and business to the county. The development of better indoor recreation facilities will help give the County the type of park system that will reach that goal.

A recreation center also provides space for classes and programs that can promote healthy lifestyles.

The County should explore all options for providing indoor recreation opportunities. The joint use of school facilities may be the best option for providing indoor facilities.



Counties and municipal park and recreation agencies across North Carolina work with school boards to partner in the development of school facilities to be used jointly. Under this scenario, the parks and rec-

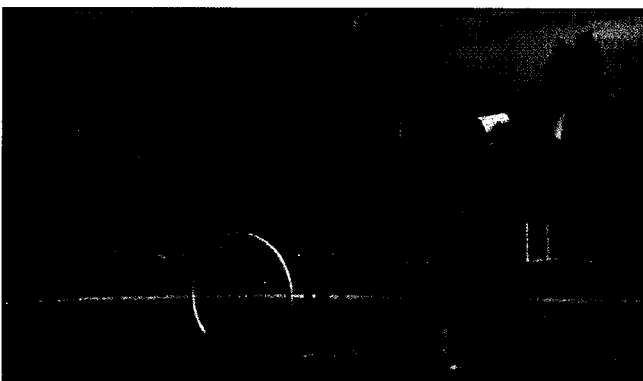
recreation agency may work jointly with the local school board to develop larger gymnasiums or additional gymnasiums at schools to accommodate non-school recreational use of the facilities. By partnering, both agencies are allowed to realize savings in development cost. Onslow County, Cumberland County, New Hanover County, and many other North Carolina counties have used this approach to build indoor facilities.

Swimming Pools, Therapy Pools & Spraygrounds

In the past, NRPA and NCRPA provided a standard for pool development of one pool for every 20,000 people. This standard was based on the concept of multi-neighborhood or community pools. Today, with the high cost of operation and construction of swimming pools, very few agencies develop neighborhood/community pools to that old standard. Instead, agencies typically provide more centralized facilities where one pool may serve a greater population.

There are several existing swimming pools in municipal parks (Lineberger, Erwin Community Center, Harper Park) and plans for a future pool at North Park. While these existing pools are meeting many aquatic needs, there is a need for additional swimming pools in the county.

Many county Departments in North Carolina do not provide pools or aquatic programs, but instead rely on municipal departments to provide these facilities and programs. Based on the cost of building and operating aquatic facilities, it is highly unlikely the County will develop swimming pools in the future.



Spraygrounds are growing in popularity across the country. In addition to offering a water-based play experience, the play structures, sprays, etc. afford children of all ages a total play environment and are much more economical to operate than a standard swimming pool. A properly designed, large water park sprayground can serve as a regional draw, provide revenue to the County, and provide a beneficial economic impact to the surrounding areas. The County is currently working on plans for the development of its first sprayground at Dallas Park. Based on the popularity of this relatively new recreation facility, the County should consider additional spraygrounds in other parks.

TRENDS IN PARK & RECREATION FACILITIES

The list of recreational activities developed for this Parks and Recreation Master Plan is based on national and state standards that have been used in park planning for decades. As noted earlier in this section, these standards are used as a point of reference, with the understanding that each agency should develop standards that are unique to their specific needs.

One of the downsides of the national and state guidelines is that they are not updated often and fail to incorporate newer trends and activities. In the past decade, several new activities have been growing in popularity and should be considered in future park development. These activities include:

Skateboard Parks and Extreme Sports

Skateboarding has been popular for several decades. In the past decade, many communities have recognized its popularity and have tried to provide a safe and vandal resistant setting for this creative sport. There are currently three Skateboard Parks in the county. There was little interest in developing additional Skateboard Parks expressed in the survey or the public workshops. At this time, the development of this type of facility does not appear to be a priority.

Disc Golf

Disc golf received significant demand in the survey (over half of those surveyed expressed interest). Likewise, nationally the popularity of the sport continues to grow. There are currently several disc golf courses in the county. Disc golf courses are inexpensive and have minimal impact on the land. The County should consider development of additional disc golf courses in the future.

Off-leash Dog Areas

Off-leash dog areas are one of the newest trends in park development. The popularity of these facilities (also known as Dog Parks), is a response to the nation's love of pets and the increase in apartment/condo living. Communities throughout North Carolina are now constructing Dog Parks.

Dog Parks take many forms, but are primarily a place within a park where park users can bring their dogs to run, walk, and recreate. They usually include a fenced open area where dogs, accompanied by their owner, are allowed to run free. Often the off-leash dog area is divided into sections for large and small dogs or in runs that can be rented.

The County currently operates a Dog Park at George Poston Park and is working on development of a new dog area in Dallas Park. Based on the success of these new facilities, the County may consider development of additional Dog Parks in its parks in the future.



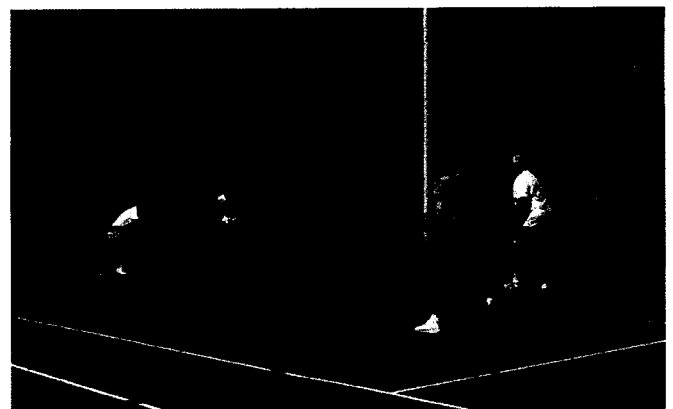
Community Gardens

Community gardens provide a wide variety of community enhancements. They offer health benefits

by providing local gardeners with fresh vegetables and increased exercise as they tend the gardens. They also provide environmental benefits by reducing transportation cost for food production and providing more plant cover, which reduces urbanization impacts on climate change. In addition, community gardens provide a venue for social interaction that reduces isolation and supports community involvement.

There are currently two community gardens in public parks throughout Gaston County.

With the many benefits provided by community gardens, many parks and recreation agencies are implementing community garden programs. Additional community gardens should be considered in the future.



Pickleball

One of the fastest growing sports in the region is pickleball. Played on a court similar (but smaller) to a tennis court, this sport uses a paddle and plastic ball. The smaller court and plastic ball makes the sport attractive to seniors, but youth and teenagers are also attracted to the quickness of the game. With the rapid increase in popularity of this sport, many recreation departments are encountering community demand to build pickleball courts or convert tennis courts to multiple use.



There is a county-wide need for rectangle fields

Section Five

Action Plan Implementation

INTRODUCTION

In the previous sections, the County's needs for parks, recreational facilities, and senior centers have been identified. Careful planning and strategic thinking will be required if these needs are to be met. This section will identify funding sources for implementing some of the recommendations of this plan and identify possible strategies for funding the proposed recommendations.

Instrumental to the implementation of this Master Plan is the identification of adequate funding for facility development and improvements. Finding adequate funding for parks and recreation is often difficult with the many financial demands most counties face. Limited budgets place even greater importance on careful planning to meet projected needs.

While the primary focus of previous sections has been on park and facility improvements, physical improvements are only part of the issue as the County strives to offer its citizens quality parks and recreation services. As County leaders plan for the future, they should also consider a number of operational and management issues that will position them to meet county wide needs. This section reviews some of those issues.

This section will look at a Capital Improvements Plan for addressing recommendations found in Section Four and provide a strategy for raising funds to construct the proposed improvements and new facilities.

Implementing the recommendations made in this Master Plan will result in meeting the future needs for parks, recreation services, and senior centers. If the needs identified in this report are to be met, the County must establish adequate budgets for projected staffing, operations and maintenance costs, and for capital improvements for parks, recreation, and senior centers. This Action Plan is designed to give County staff viable options to help finance the proposals and recommendations of this Master Plan.

REVENUE PLAN

Upon adoption of the Master Plan, County staff should consider the establishment of a Revenue Plan for the Parks and Recreation Department. A Revenue Plan incorporates all available funding resources, prioritizes them, and puts each option into a funding strategy. In a Revenue Plan, the following funding alternatives are evaluated for their appropriate use in funding capital improvements and programs:



KEY FUNDING/REVENUE SOURCES

There seems to be strong public support for the County to improve parks, expand recreation and senior programs, but innovative measures will be required to meet the needs identified in this plan. The proposed new facilities and expanded operations will require dollars from a variety of sources. The following funding sources are provided to help the County evaluate funding options:

General Tax Revenues (operational & capital)

General tax revenues traditionally provide the principle source of funds for general operations and maintenance of municipal and county parks and recreation departments. Recreation, as a public service, is scheduled along with health, public safety, schools, etc. in annual budgets established by the governing authority. Assessed valuation of real and personal property provides the framework for this major portion of the tax base. This tax base is then used to fund the majority of county services. Currently, funding for parks and recreation/senior services is a relatively small portion of the County's overall budget. If the County wishes to enhance the quality of life and healthy lifestyle opportunities for its residents, the current level of funding for parks and recreation should be increased.

Park Foundation (operational & capital)

A park foundation can be instrumental in assisting the County in acquiring land, developing facilities, sponsoring programs, and buying equipment for park and recreation needs. Park foundations typically create funding strategies for generating monies to support park projects. These include foundation membership fees, individual gifts, grants from other recognized and national foundations, long term endowments, and land trust for future acquisitions.

Partners for Parks, a Mecklenburg County based foundation, is committed to the development of Regional Parks; including parks in Gaston County. Partners for Parks is a good example of a foundation developed to support a facility or project. The County should explore ways to work with Partners for Parks or a similar organization should be established specifically for Gaston County.

General Foundations (operational & capital)

Another source of revenue is the direct contribution of money from state and national General Foundations. Foundation funds should be sought for both development and construction of facilities as well as providing programs. Funding sources should include general-purpose foundations that have relatively few

restrictions, special program foundations for specific activities, and corporate foundations with local connections.

Foundations with Emphasis on Conservation, Healthy Lifestyles & Parks

Gaston County is in a position to receive grant funding from a wide variety of public foundations and trusts. Below is a list of funding sources that are particularly applicable. A number of these fundings/trusts are currently at work in the county:

- The Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust has been instrumental in funding projects in North Carolina. Their focus is to improve the quality of life and health.
- The Trust for Public Land and NC Rails-Trail have been instrumental in providing financial and technical assistance for open space conservation and development of greenways in North Carolina.
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) is the nation's largest philanthropic organization devoted specifically to the public's health. RWJF promotes change through partnerships and collaboration, with the goal of building a culture of health for all Americans. RWJF generally supports public agencies, universities, and public charities that are tax-exempt.
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation places optimal development of children at the center of all of their grants. They concentrate on early childhood development within the context of families and communities. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation's areas of focus are: educated kids, healthy kids, secure families, community and civic engagement, and racial equity.
- KaBOOM! is a national non-profit dedicated to providing play opportunities for America's children. They envision a place to play within walking distance of every child. KaBOOM! works with communities, volunteers and funding partners to build playgrounds throughout the country.
- BlueCross BlueShield of North Carolina Foundation has invested millions of dollars in communities across the state. They support opportunities that impact the health of our state. Their areas of focus are: health of vulnerable populations,

healthy active communities, and community impact through non-profit excellence.

- Playworks Grants Database is a good resource for grants. Examples found within this database are:
 - The philanthropic arm of Safeway Groceries which established the Safeway Foundation to support non-profits whose mission is aligned with the company's priority areas; hunger relief, education, health and human services and assisting people with disabilities. The Safeway Foundation offers grants up to \$25,000.
 - Cigna Health through its Cigna Foundation supports organizations that enhance health in individuals, families and communities. They offer grants up to \$5,000.
 - Home Depot, through its Community Impact Grants Program, offers grants up to \$5,000 to non-profits that use volunteers to improve community health.
 - People For Bikes provides a community grant program that provides grants up to \$10,000 to improve infrastructure and programs that make it easier and safer for people of all ages and abilities to bike.

Another source of local assistance may be large corporations with foundations established to provide grants for public projects. Companies such as Bank of America, REI, and Duke Energy may have available funding through existing grant programs, or they may be interested in creating a program or partnership for specific projects.

The County should actively pursue grants from foundation and trust sources on a regional and national level. Information on trusts and foundations can be found through the Foundation Center, 79 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10003-3076 (<http://foundation-center.org/>) and the Non-Profit Gateway to Federal Government agencies (<http://www.usa.gov/index.shtml>).

General Obligation Bonds (capital)

General tax revenue for parks and recreation are usually devoted to current operations and maintenance of existing facilities. General obligation bonds

are often used to finance capital improvements in parks. The State of North Carolina gives municipal and county governments the authority to accomplish this borrowing of funds for parks and recreation through the issuance of bonds not to exceed the total cost of improvements (including land acquisition). For purposes of paying the debt service on the sale of these bonds, government bodies are often required to increase property taxes. Total bonding capacities for these government agencies are limited to a maximum percentage of assessed property valuation.

Gaston County has not used this method of financing park improvements in the past. In view of the recommended capital improvements suggested in this plan, borrowing of funds to acquire new land and develop facilities may be a consideration. Response from the county wide survey indicated there may be support for additional spending to develop parks.

An added value of a governing agency's bonding authority and capacity is its ability to use those funds to leverage other funding opportunities. Bonding enables government agencies to utilize funds to match federal grant-in-aid monies or state funds. General obligation bonds are still the greatest source utilized to fund park projects in North Carolina. Through a well thought out and publicly presented bond campaign, voters would be given the opportunity to choose to support park improvements through the selling of bonds.

Revenue Bonds (capital)

Revenue bonds are used for financing high use specialty facilities like golf courses, aquatic centers, tennis centers, and complexes for softball and soccer. The users, and other revenue sources, pay for operations and sometimes repay the bonds. This revenue source would only be of use to the County if they choose to change their tax subsidy policy for using this type of funding. The County most likely would not seek out this option.

The legal requirements for utilizing these funding mechanisms are extremely complicated and can require approval from the state legislature. Use of revenue bonds seem to be unlikely at this time.

Limited Option or Special Use Tax (capital)

Limited option or special use taxes can be established in various ways. A municipality or county can establish the tax by determining the source, such as property valuation, real estate transfer taxes, or sales tax. This option requires legislative approval. Typically, special use taxes are structured on sales tax or transfer taxes and are earmarked for a specific project. A governing body can approve a tax that is identified or earmarked on property valuation; however, other sources may require state approval. The idea behind a special option or limited option tax is that the tax is identified or limited for a special purpose or projects and the duration can also be limited to accomplishing the projects.

The County currently levies an occupancy tax on hotel rooms to help fund travel and tourism operation and promote local tourism. Many travel and tourism authorities throughout North Carolina utilize this funding source to make improvements to recreation facilities that attract tourists. This funding source could be considered in the development of athletic fields, trails and river access, or equestrian facilities that might enhance tourism.

Federal and State Assistance (capital)

Federal funding sources are available to assist financing capital improvement recommendations found in this plan. One of the oldest park funding sources has been available from the U.S. Park Service's Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Several of the existing parks in Gaston County were funded with monies from this funding source. Unfortunately, funding through this program has been sporadic over the past few years.

Other potential federal funding sources are the National Foundation of Arts and Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

The North Carolina General Assembly passed a bill in 1994 creating a consistent source of funds for parks and recreation in the state. The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) provides money for capital improvements, repairs, renovations, and land acquisition of state and local parks. Originally, reve-

nues from the state's portion of the real estate deed transfer tax support the fund. Revenues vary from year to year. The structure of this funding source has recently gone through changes based on legislative action. While the funding structure for this fund has changed, it appears PARTF will continue to fund park and recreation facilities in North Carolina.

Of the funds allocated, 65% go to the state parks system, 30% provide matching grants to local governments, and the remaining 5% go to the Coastal and Estuarine Water Beach Access Program. The maximum matching grant is limited to \$500,000 for a single project. The PARTF system allows an agency to apply for a 50/50 cost-sharing grant to develop or acquire park land and facilities.

PARTF and LWCF funds have been used by the County and several municipalities to build parks. In the future, the County should consider applying for funds through this program on a regular basis.



Additionally, the State can fund projects such as bikeways and pedestrian walks through the federally funded SAFTEA [formerly known as the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA)]. The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) administers the funds and the local government agency can use these funds for developing portions of any proposed Greenway system. Local communities can also apply for assistance with pedestrian, bikeway, and greenway projects by applying for "NCDOT Enhancement Funds."

Another source of state administered funding is through the Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF). These funds are set aside for the acquisition of riparian properties, financing of innovative

wastewater management initiatives, stormwater mitigation and stream bank restoration projects, support for greenways, and some planning programs. The acquired or purchased property can be used for recreation while protecting valuable water resources from the affects of urban encroachment. Money from this grant is particularly applicable to the preservation of open space, greenway development, and water access.

Unfortunately, since the economic downturn that started in 2008, all of these funding sources have been reduced.

An excellent source to find government grants is on the website www.grants.gov. This website clearing house provides information for all federal grants. Grant opportunities exist in the following categories:

- Community Development
- Environment
- Health
- Natural Resources
- Transportation

Any of these categories could have grants that could be used to develop programs and facilities for parks.

User Fees (operational)

User fees are often charged by departments to offset operational cost, and (occasionally) provide funding for the construction of facilities. Every agency must establish its philosophy with regard to cost recovery through the use of fees. The County has historically charged fees for some facilities and programs, but these fees have typically not been set to cover the total operational cost of the program and have never been used to finance construction of facilities.

Ultimately, the County may consider a change in user fees that will help offset more of the cost of some activities. Based on elected officials' direction, the revenue generated by increased fees could then be used to offset impacts on the general fund and possibly be used for capital improvement funding to help make park improvements.

Many of the proposed facilities in this Master Plan are outdoors (playgrounds, open space, athletic facilities, etc.) and offer only limited opportunity for cost recovery. There may be some areas where greater cost recovery could be achieved. Examples may include rental fees for shelters, fields, etc. or for requiring permits for dog parks, disc golf, etc.



George Poston Park Shelter

Revenue Opportunities

User fees are not the only means of generating revenue. The County is currently utilizing many revenue generating opportunities, but should always be looking for new ways to generate revenue. Some of these opportunities include:

- Sponsorships from local private businesses. Sponsorships typically come in the form of products, events, programs, cause-related, and in-kind. Sponsorships can also take the form of naming rights for a facility or program. Sponsorship or naming agreements should include very specific details related to sponsorship cost, duration, use of promotional materials, etc.
- Grant applications from local foundations, state and federal agencies, or individuals are typically created by staff. Most grants take time to prepare and require coordination effort with other agencies or departments from within the community to create a quality submittal. Grants also require extensive tracking of expenditures and outcomes for attaining future funding.
- Partnerships are a relatively new method of sharing funding resources to provide services. These partnerships can be formed with a wide variety of other public or private agencies. Many times the partners are two or more government agencies. Through these partnerships, the County receives direct benefit in either facility use, programming assistance, or volunteer man hours. All of these benefits add value and help offset cost; thus creating earned income. This earned income requires both agencies to have common visions, values, and goals for the partnership to be successful. Examples of partnerships include:
 - Church facilities for recreation services. Several churches or religious organizations in the county are providing recreation facilities and programs.
 - Youth sports associations are an important partner in organizing and programming many youth sports in the county.
 - Trail sponsors that adopt sections of trails for maintenance and cleanup.
 - Adopt-a-park partners that help maintain park lands. These sponsors are typically in the form of neighborhood associations and businesses that are in proximity to parks.
 - School partnerships where both partners invest in the development of facilities and programs based on shared use of facilities and staff. This investment may be financial, or may include other means of support.
 - Special event partners that assist with the development of community-wide events.
 - Program partners who assist in providing services to the community.
 - Advertising and licensing in programs, facilities, and events sponsored by the County. The County could leverage highly exposed advertising space to businesses willing to pay a fee for the right to advertise.
- Volunteer development programs can reduce staff costs. Volunteers can create advocacy and bring down the cost of programs and services.
- Privatizing the development of facilities or services is an opportunity that is used by some departments when they are unable to control the cost of labor and are unable to find the needed capital to develop a recreational facility or a concession operation. This gives the government agency a management tool to create an asset or improve a service without tapping into their own resources. Facilities that are typically considered for privatization include golf courses, marinas, camping and RV facilities, boat rentals, bike rentals, equipment rentals, and other forms of

concessions.

- Marketing strategies are an important component in developing untapped revenue opportunities. Promotional activities improve awareness of the activities provided by the County and assist in bringing more revenue to the system by filling programs and facilities.

METHODS FOR LAND ACQUISITION & DEDICATION

In order to meet the needs identified in this report, the County will need to expand its park and recreational lands, and there will be a need for future land acquisition. Methods available for acquiring the land include the following:

Fee Simple Purchase

Outright purchase is perhaps the most widely used method of obtaining land. Fee simple purchase has the advantage of being relatively simple to administer and to explain to the general public to justify a particular public expenditure. Unfortunately, fee simple purchase often is the most expensive means of obtaining and utilizing a property.

Fee Simple Purchase with Lease-Back or Resale

This technique of land acquisition enables the County to purchase land to lease or sell to a prospective user with deed restrictions that would protect the land from abuse or development. This method is used by governments who impose development restrictions severe enough that the owner considers himself to have lost the major portion of the property's value and it is more economical for him to sell with a lease-back option.

Long-Term Option

A long-term option is frequently used when a property is considered to have potential future value though it is not desired or affordable at the time. Under the terms of a long-term option, the County agrees with the landowner on a selling price for the property and a time period over which the County has the right to exercise its option. The first benefit

of this protective method is that the option may stabilize escalating land cost and establishes land use for the property. Secondly, the County does not have to expend large sums of money until the land is purchased. Thirdly, the purchase price of the land is established. The disadvantage of this method is that a price must be paid for every right given by the property owner. In this case, the cost of land use stabilization and a price commitment comes in the form of the cost of securing the option.

First Right of Purchase

This approach to acquiring land eliminates the need for fixing the selling price of a parcel of land, yet alerts the County of any impending purchase which might disrupt the land acquisition goals. The County would be notified that a purchase is pending and would have the right to purchase the property before it is sold to the party requesting the purchase.

Land Trust

The role and responsibility of a Land Trust is to acquire park land and open space while maintaining a well-balanced system of park resources representing outstanding ecological, scenic, recreational, and historical features. A Land Trust is a 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit corporation made up of key knowledgeable leaders in the area who represent a cross section of interest and experience in recreation, historic properties, conservation, preservation, land development, and environmental issues. Their goals and responsibilities are to work with landowners to acquire park land for current and future generations. The individuals appointed to the Land Trust must have knowledge of land acquisition methods and tools used to entice land owners to sell, donate, provide easements, life estates, irrevocable trusts, or a combination of all. This includes seeking out a knowledgeable land acquisition attorney who is trained in these areas to provide the most efficient and effective processes to achieve the balance of types of land to meet the goals of this Master Plan.

The County does not have to go through the time and expense of setting up a land trust to utilize this vehicle for land donation or conservation. The Catawba Lands Conservancy and the Nature Conservancy are

established land trusts in the area. The County could partner with them to provide protection of valuable open space without creating a new entity.

Donations

A significant, and yet often untapped, source for funding for acquisition and development of public park projects is through a well-organized local gifts program. Donations of land, money, or labor can have a meaningful impact on the development of the Parks and Recreation Department.

The most frequently used type of gift involves the giving of land to be used for a park. The timing of such a donation can correspond with a PARTF grant application, thereby providing all or a significant portion of the local matching requirement associated with this fund. A similar use of gifts involves donated labor or materials, which become part of an improvement project and help to reduce project costs. The value of the services or materials can, in some cases, also be used to match non-local grant funds.

Some agencies have developed a gift catalog as a tool for promoting a gifts program. Such a publication should explain the role and importance of the gifts program, describe its advantages, define the tax advantages that may occur to the donor, and identify various gifts (land, labor, play equipment, materials, trees, etc.) that are needed to meet program needs. The gifts catalog should be prepared in a format that can be distributed effectively and inexpensively and should provide a clear statement of needs, typical costs associated with various gifts, and be made readily available to the public.

To aid this type of gift program, a strategy for contacting potential donors (individuals, businesses, foundations, service clubs, etc.) should be developed. An important part of this strategy should include contacting the local Bar Association, trust departments of lending institutions, and the Probate Court. Communicating with these groups regularly will make them aware of the potential for individuals to include a gift to the County as part of their tax and estate planning.

Life Estate

A life estate is a deferred gift. Under this plan, a donor retains use of his land during his lifetime and relinquishes title to such land upon his death. In return for this gift, the owner is usually relieved of the property tax burden on the donated land.

Easement

The most common type of less-than-fee interest in land is an easement. Property ownership may be viewed as a combination of rights. With this understanding, it is possible to purchase any one or several of these rights. An easement seeks either to compensate the landholder for the right to use his land in some manner or to compensate him for the loss of one of his privileges to use the land. One advantage of this less-than-fee interest in the land is the private citizen continues to use the land while the land remains on the tax records; continuing as a source of revenue for the County. Perhaps the greatest benefit lies in the fact that the county purchases only those rights that it specifically needs to execute its park land objectives. By purchasing only rights that are needed, the County is making more selective and efficient use of its limited financial resources.

Zoning/Subdivision Regulations

Many communities in North Carolina have zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations that require a developer to donate a portion of the property they are developing to the government agency to be used for public park land. Through these regulations (zoning ordinances, subdivision regulation, and mandatory dedications) developers may be required to provide new park land at no cost to the County. Regulations can require land to be dedicated and/or compensation made to the County for the development of park land.

A detailed evaluation of all subdivision ordinances for each of the municipalities in the county, as well as the County's subdivision regulations, should be made. Wherever feasible, subdivision regulations should include some provisions for the dedication of land for open space or recreational use. Care should be taken in developing any regulation requiring such dedication. Subdivision requirements should include terminology to ensure the permitting agency has the

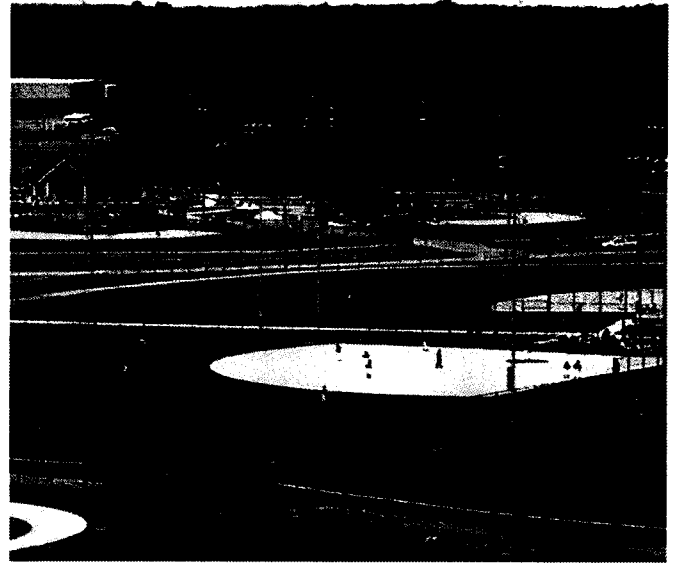
authority to review and approve any land dedicated as public open space or for recreational use to ensure it is usable for such purposes. Likewise, dedication ordinances should have a provision for payment in lieu to eliminate the dedication of property too small to provide community benefits or unsuitable for park development.

PARK FACILITIES AS ECONOMIC DEVELOPERS

John L. Crompton, in his publication "Parks and Economic Development", determined there are four economic development benefits that a community may derive from park and recreation services. These benefits include:

- **Attracting Tourists:** The features and programs that attract tourism to a community include parks, beaches, historic sites, museums, special events and festivals, and athletic tournaments. The majority of these features are provided by public agencies (national, state, local park agencies, etc.).
- **Enhancing Real Estate Values:** Research shows people will pay more to live close to natural park areas. These higher property values result in owners paying higher property taxes, which in turn offsets some of the cost for the development of parks and preservation of open space.
- **Attracting Business:** Quality of life issues influence where businesses locate. Parks, recreation, open space, and senior services are an important component of the quality of life equation. Good parks help cities and counties attract and retain businesses.
- **Attracting Retirees:** A new growth industry for American communities is the retirement population. The decision to relocate by this segment of our population is primarily governed by climate and recreation opportunities. This segment of the population is extremely attractive to local governments because retirees are unlikely to have children enrolled in the local school system and therefore are less of a burden on the community's tax base.

Through investing in parks and recreation facilities, county officials can ensure that Gaston County provides the quality of life that helps attract new businesses, enhances real estate values, and provides an attractive option to the retirement community.



Athletic tournaments attract tourism

There are many opportunities for economic impact in Gaston County through tourism. Community leaders have recognized the potential for this economic impact by establishing Gaston Outside. This organization is actively engaged in bringing visitors to Gaston County.

John Crompton lists the following opportunities for tourist attractions:

Tournament Sports

- Softball
- Soccer
- Baseball
- Basketball

Arts

- Theaters
- Art Galleries
- Museums
- Performing groups, Music
- Concerts

Heritage Places

- Ethnic cultural places
- Shrines/churches
- Historical sites and structures
- Educational institutions
- Industry factory tours

Parks

- National
- State
- Regional
- Local
- Beaches
- Theme parks
- Recreation
- Events and festivals
- Aquatic and coastal areas
- Outdoor recreation (e.g., camping, fishing, hunting)

Arenas

- College sports
- Professional franchises
- Concerts and exhibitions

Some of these activities and facilities are already found within the County. Many of these potential tourism attractions are in the public realm or are a public/private venture.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

County leadership must also address some of the operational issues that will face the Department in the coming decade. These issues relate to the manpower and organizational changes that will be required as the County adds new parks/facilities. These recommendations address some of the critical operational issues the Department needs to identify as it expands the facilities and services it provides.

An important aspect of these planning recommendations is to develop a vision for the Department to improve park, recreation, and senior opportunities for county residents. Ultimately, the provision of

better parks and recreational programs includes both facility improvements and establishing a method of delivery of services. Currently, the County is limited in the resources it directs to this mission. If the County is to improve the quality of parks, recreation, and senior services offered, it will be required to add staff to manage/operate facilities and provide services.

Staff Needs

Action on the recommendations found in this Master Plan will expand the County's parks and facilities. The development of a new District Park, the construction of a new recreation facilities, and the expansion of trails will require additional staff to maintain, operate and program these new facilities. While the development of a true operation and maintenance program for these future facilities is beyond the scope of this Master Plan, the County should plan to add the following positions to effectively operate the future facilities:

- Park Supervisor
- Program staff
- New grounds crews (1 foreman, 2 laborers)
- Seasonal park staff
- Senior center staff

It is important that the County plan and budget for adequate staff positions for any new facilities that are constructed. Likewise, as these new facilities come on line, the County should actively seek the highest level of programming staff with strong educational experience in the various areas of park and recreation administration.

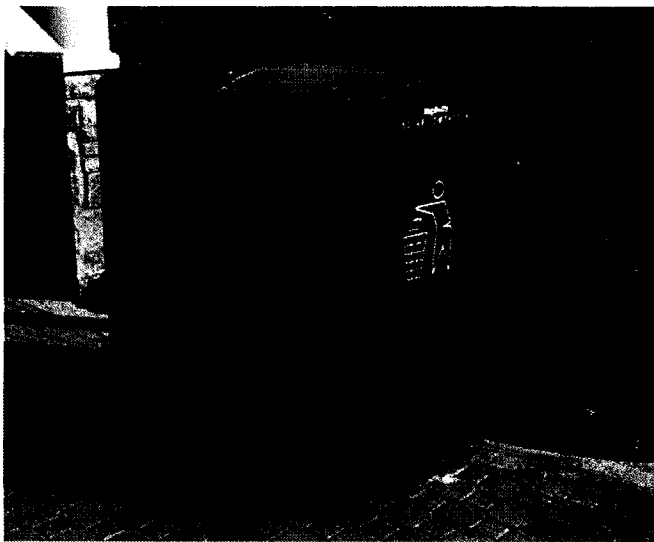
Operational Costs

As noted above, the development of new recreation facilities will require additional staff. These new staff positions will add to the annual operational budget in both staff and equipment costs. The expansion of recreational facilities could also add to the energy and utility cost of parks, recreation facilities, and the senior center. The recommended facility improvements included in this Plan will increase the County's facilities. Expansion of parks and greenway will have implications to the operational budget. The County's management staff and elected officials

must carefully consider the financial impact of each major capital improvement project as projects are considered. No capital improvement project should be undertaken without the commitment of support for adequate ongoing operational funding. Likewise, consideration should be given to the positive economic impacts that some facilities may have on the County's economy, and if applicable, their potential for revenue generation.

Greener Operation

As the world's population expands and environmental concerns over global warming, conservation of resources, and preservation of our fragile natural systems become more apparent, greater environmental responsibility by public and private agencies has become critical. As a government agency, particularly one that is involved with the management of public open space and the improvement of the public's health, the Department's operation should make a concerted effort to minimize its environmental impact.



Promoting recycling is one initiative to reduce waste

With this understanding, the County should evaluate its maintenance and operational procedures with an intent to minimize waste and environmental impact. Where economically feasible, the County should look to implement operational procedures that emphasize conservation, recycling, and sustainability. Like-

wise, as the County looks to build new facilities, it should consider constructing facilities that minimize environmental impacts, conserve energy, and reuse building materials where possible.

As a starting point for this conversion to a "greener" operation, the County should establish a committee of operation, maintenance, and construction stakeholders to study the options available and develop a plan for becoming "greener".

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Capital Improvement Plan for the acquisition, renovation, and development of parks and greenways for the planning period was prepared with input from County staff and public involvement. All of the proposed costs are shown in current dollar values. The capital improvement costs include funds for land acquisition, site preparation, site utilities, and facility development as well as estimated planning and design fees.

The Capital Improvement Plan can be summarized into the following components:

Existing Parks Renovations	\$8,442,500
Land Acquisition	1,250,000
New Park Development	2,750,000
Senior Center Improvement	275,000
Special Use Facilities/Greenways	5,500,000
Total Capital Improvement Budget	\$18,217,500

Table 5-1 "Capital Improvements Plan" shows the costs associated with the capital improvement program. The table reflects the proposals and recommendations as outlined in Section Four of this Master Plan.

FIVE YEAR PRIORITY PROJECTS

Recognizing that this is a vision plan for a county wide park system, County staff and elected officials must prioritize the recommendations in this document based on the public's input and staff review.

The following park development initiatives should be considered as a priority in the next ten years:

- Renovations to several existing parks
- ADA improvements to existing parks
- Acquisition of land for a new District Park in the northeastern section of the county
- Construction of 3-5 miles of new greenways
- Development of additional spraygrounds

MASTER PLAN FUNDING STRATEGY

This Master Plan identifies a Vision Plan for park development in Gaston County. It is understood that not all of the recommendations will be acted upon over the next decade. The County will ultimately have to prioritize the steps they will take to meet some of these park and recreation needs. It will require a combination of revenue sources to accomplish the recommendations of the Master Plan. There are numerous combinations of funding strategies that can be explored and implemented. Upon careful analysis of past budget documents, current practices, available resources, and national trends, an example of a funding strategy is presented as one possible strategy.

General Funds

Allocations from the General Fund will need to increase to pay for operation of future facilities and programs. As noted previously in this section, the proposed facility improvements will require a number of added staff positions. As new staff positions are required, the annual operating budget must be increased. This additional per capita funding could fund the majority of future operational costs, but will not provide the funding required for capital improvements.

In addition to this increased operational spending, the County should begin budgeting for capital improvements projects on an annual basis. Annual allocations of \$500,000 to capital improvements over the next ten years could provide \$5 million in funds for capital projects and provide valuable matching funds for grants.

General Obligation Bonds

General Obligation Bonds could be used for major renovations and to acquire and develop new parks and recreation facilities. A successful bond campaign for park improvements in the next ten years could generate \$5-10 million for construction and acquisitions. This would represent a significant portion of funds needed for the proposed capital improvements budget. These funds can be dedicated to funding the larger park development and making major park improvements. As noted earlier in this section (General Obligation Bonds, page 5-3), this level of bond sales will likely result in the need for additional tax revenues to pay for the debt service created by the sale of these bonds.

Revenues & User Charges

One strategy to accomplish the goals of this plan is to price services based on the value and benefits received by the participants beyond those of all taxpayers. Increasing the number of participants using the facilities and programs will increase revenue opportunities. A good time to price services to their value and benefits is after new facilities are constructed or when facilities have been renovated to enhance a participant's recreational experience. A proposed user charge revenue strategy designed to recoup a good percentage of program cost could be considered. This will create more revenue and capacity opportunities for the program needs of the County.

Currently, revenues and user charges account for a portion of the operating budget. As facilities are developed, the County should consider a fee structure that will allow greater net revenue to be realized. Assuming the level of funding can increase, it could generate \$75,000 to \$100,000 annually, providing as much as a million dollars in increased income over the next ten years that can be used for operating new facilities developed as recommended in this plan.

Partnerships & Gifts

The County should work to develop a park foundation to explore ways to raise sponsorships and gifts. This non-profit organization can engage private citizens and corporations to donate money and in-kind

services for use for parks and recreational services. Through active involvement with a park foundation, the County may be able to raise \$75,000 - \$100,000 in funds annually. This could result in donations of as much as a million dollars over the next ten years. This level of funding would require the creation of a park foundation to become an active organization within the county.

Sponsorships & Naming Rights

Another excellent source of development capital is through project sponsorship/underwriting by corporations throughout the community. Quality facilities, properly marketed, provide an excellent venue for raising development funds. Naming rights for athletic fields, equestrian facilities, playgrounds, etc. can be used to raise tens of thousands of dollars.

Grants

As noted previously, grant funding has been an important resource for funding parks throughout the county. The County will need to renew those efforts to explore grants such as LWCF, PARTF, SAFTEA, clean water grants, etc. In addition to the grants focused on typical park development, the County should explore grants offered by foundations to improve and expand facilities. Active pursuit of these funding sources could provide several million dollars in funds for capital improvements over the next ten years.

Overview

Together, these funding options could be used to raise millions of dollars of development capital over the next decade. It may be unrealistic to assume the County can fund ±\$18 million of park improvements in the next ten years, but actively pursuing the options that are available should provide funding for many of the needs listed in this Master Plan. Through the continued use of this document, County staff and elected officials can identify and prioritize community needs and actively seek funds to meet those needs over the next ten (or more) years.

**Table 5-1
GASTON COUNTY
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MASTER PLAN
CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

Capital Improvement and Land Acquisition	10 Year Total	2016-2020	2021-2026
Existing Parks Renovation/Improvements			
Dallas Park	\$4,275,000*	\$2,775,000	\$1,500,000
George Poston Park	\$500,000	\$500,000	
Bessemer City Park	\$325,000	\$325,000	
North Belmont Park	\$650,000	\$650,000	
Tryon Park	\$550,000	\$550,000	
Pearl Henderson Park	\$625,000	\$625,000	
South Fork River Park	\$500,000	\$500,000	
Camp Sertoma	\$100,000		\$100,000
Lewis Brooks Airfield	\$150,000		\$150,000
Planning & Design (10%)	\$767,500	\$592,500	\$175,000
Renovation Total	\$8,442,500	\$6,517,500	\$1,925,000
Land Acquisition			
Northeastern District Park (100 acres @\$12,500/acre)	\$1,250,000	\$1,250,000	
Land Acquisition Total	\$1,250,000	\$1,250,000	
Park Development			
Northwestern District Park (Phase One)	\$2,500,000		\$2,500,000
Planning and Design (10%)	\$250,000		\$250,000
Park Development Total	\$2,750,000		\$2,750,000
Senior Center			
Senior Center Improvements	\$250,000		\$250,000
Planning and Design (10%)	\$25,000		\$25,000
Senior Centers Total	\$275,000		\$275,000
Special Use Facilities			
Greenway Trail Development/Acquisition	\$5,000,000	\$1,500,000	\$3,500,000
Planning & Design (10%)	\$500,000	\$150,000	\$350,000
Special Use Facilities Total	\$5,500,000	\$1,650,000	\$3,850,000

Total Capital Improvement Budget Cost	\$15,217,500	\$9,417,500	\$5,800,000
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* Includes \$1.5 million for multi-purpose building

Appendices

APPENDIX A

COMMUNITY INTEREST AND OPINION SURVEY

As part of the planning process, the County Parks and Recreation Department conducted a public survey to gather input from residents on their desires for parks and recreation facilities/programs. The survey was posted on the Department's website and promoted through community events, community partner websites, and made available (via hard-copy) at the departmental office and senior center. Over 500 residents responded to the survey. The following results were recorded:

Question 1: Which County Parks and Recreation facilities have you or your household used in the past 12 months. The most visited County parks are:

- Poston Park
- Dallas Park
- South Fork River Park

Question 2: How would you rate the overall quality of the Gaston County parks and recreation facilities you have visited?

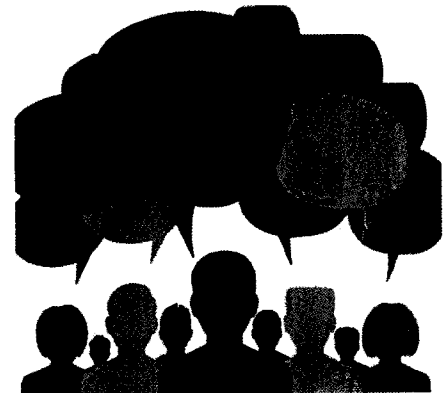
- 43% indicated Very Good or better
- 36% indicated Good
- 16% indicated Fair or Poor
- 5% did not know

Question 4: Please indicate reasons why you have not used Gaston County parks, trails and recreation facilities. Reasons most often listed (in order of responses):

- Too far from my home
- Safety Concerns
- Use services other than Gaston County
- Facilities not offered

Question 5: Respondents were given a list of recreational activities/facilities and asked if they had an interest in participating/using each activity/facility. The following activities/facilities received the highest demand (in order):

- Walking trails/Greenways
- Picnicking Areas
- Nature Areas/wildlife habitats
- Playgrounds
- Outdoor Events/Performance Areas
- Biking Trails
- Fishing Lakes/Piers
- Community Gardens
- Play Areas for Children with Disabilities
- Public Art in Parks
- Indoor Recreation Facilities, Dog park, Splash Pad, and River Access all received strong support as well



Question 6: For those facilities that your household members have a desire to use, please tell us if your needs for these facilities are currently being met.

The following facilities were identified as having the highest demand for unmet needs (in order):

- Camping Areas
- Nature Areas/wildlife habitats
- River Access for fishing/hunting
- Amphitheater
- River Access
- Walking Trails
- Skateboard Park/BMX Park
- Picnicking Areas
- Dog Park
- Fishing Lakes

Note! Those facilities/activities that show up on both list (demand/unmet need) should be high priorities.

Question 8: Do Gaston County residents have adequate access to the South Fork River?

- Yes 35%
- No 65%

Question 9: Is there a need for additional park and recreation facilities in Gaston County?

- Yes 84%
- No 16%

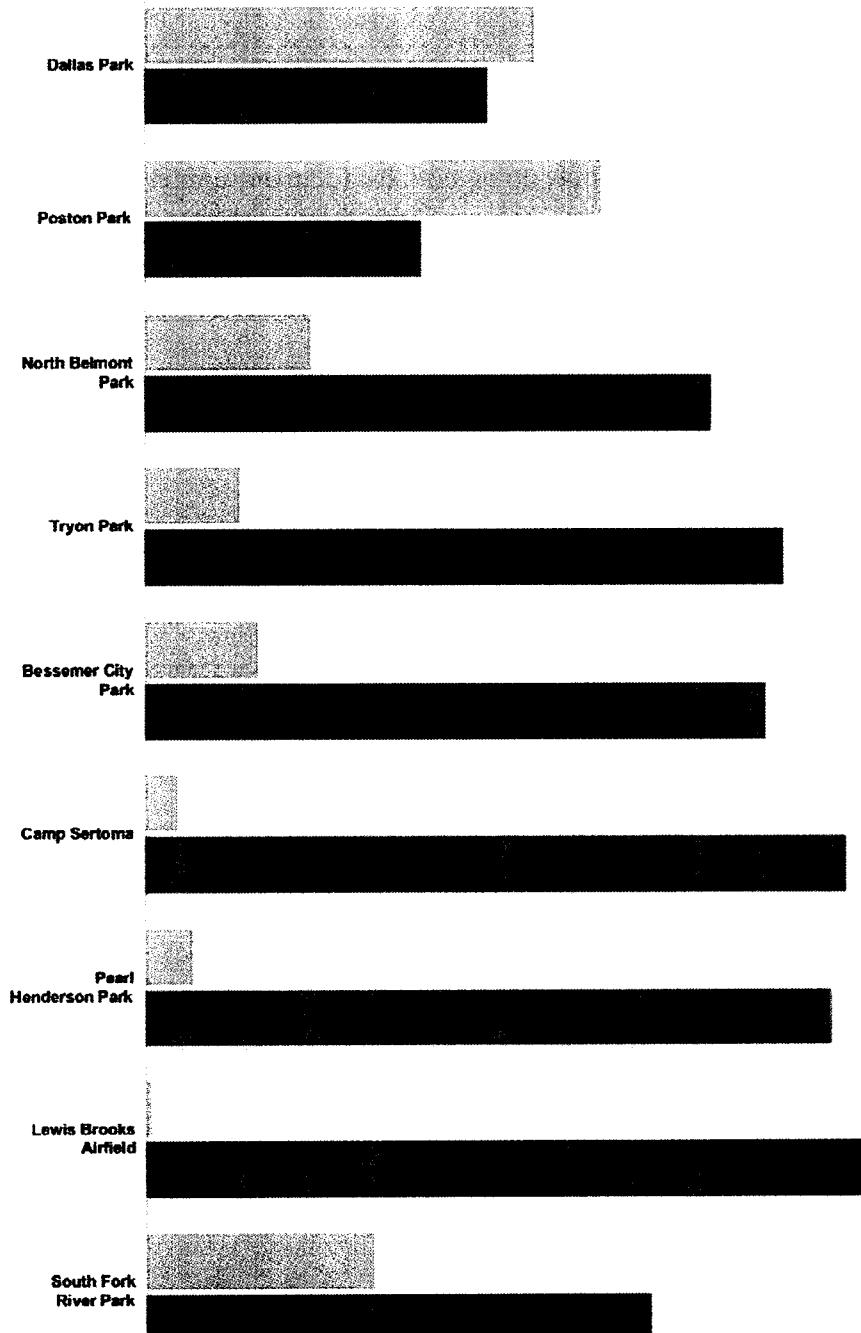
Question 10: Would you be willing to pay additional taxes and/or higher user fees to support park and recreational facility improvements?

- Yes 75%
- No 25%

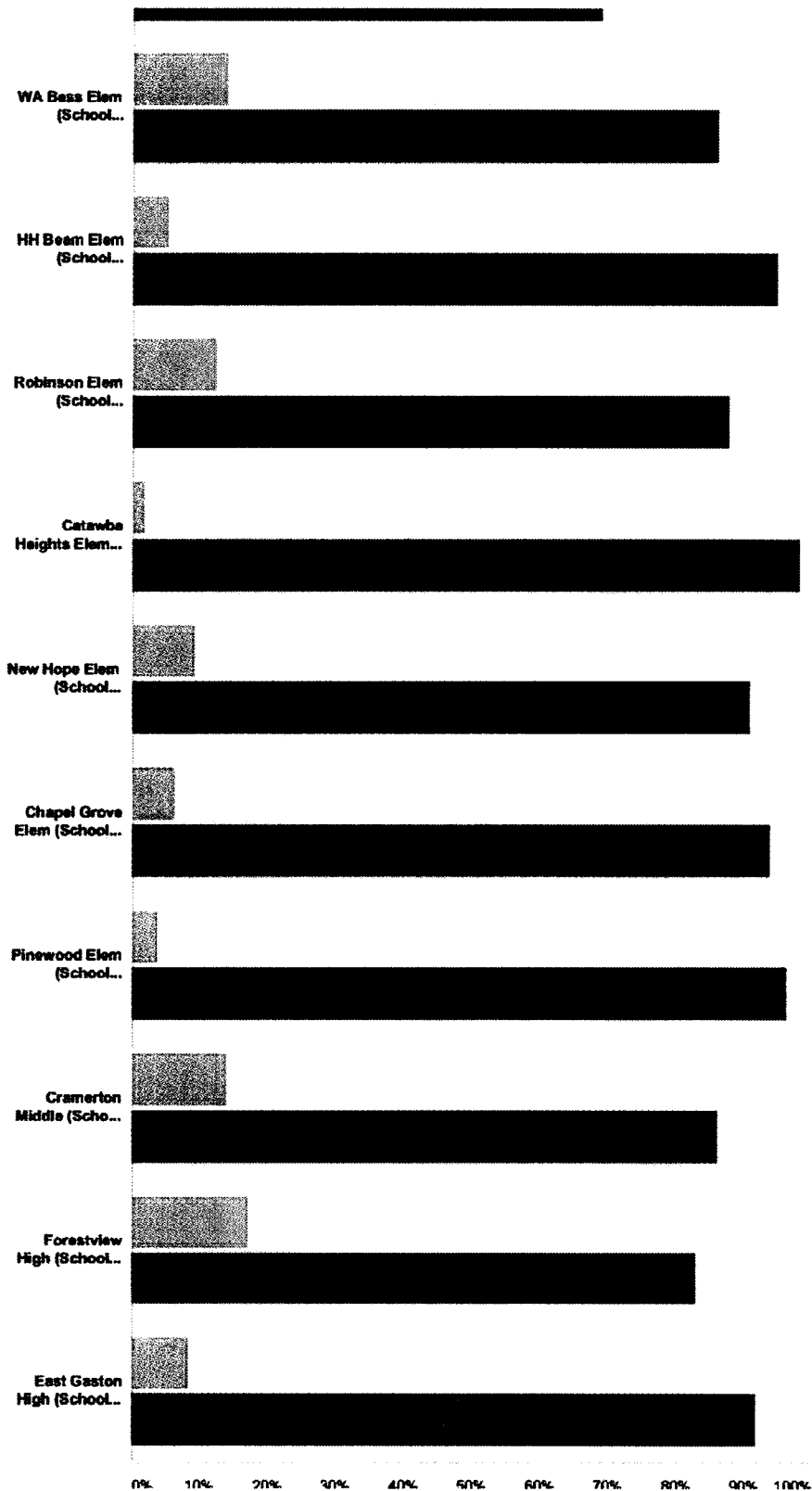
Gaston County Parks & Recreation Community Interest and Opinion Survey

Q1 Have you or other members of your household visited any of the following Gaston County parks or recreation facilities during the past 12 months?

Answered: 505 Skipped: 0



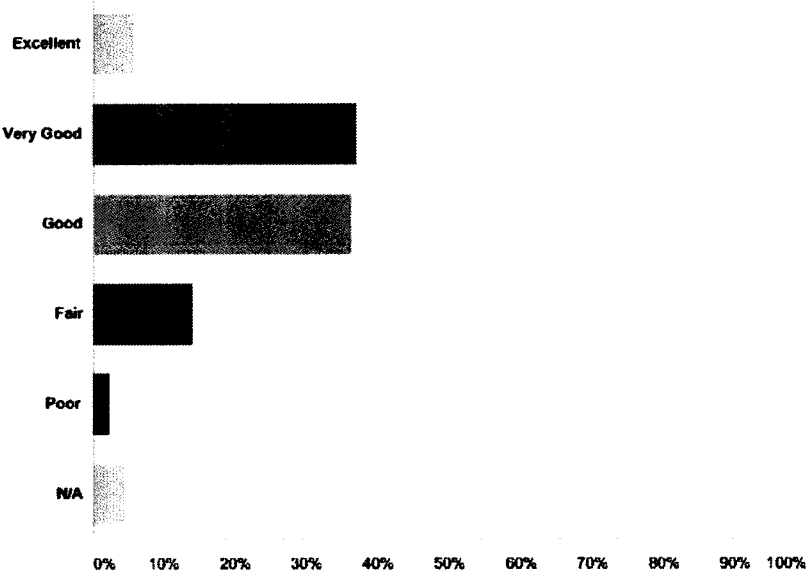
Gaston County Parks & Recreation Community Interest and Opinion Survey



Gaston County Parks & Recreation Community Interest and Opinion Survey

Q2 How would you rate the overall quality of the Gaston County Parks and Recreation's facilities which you or members of your household have visited?

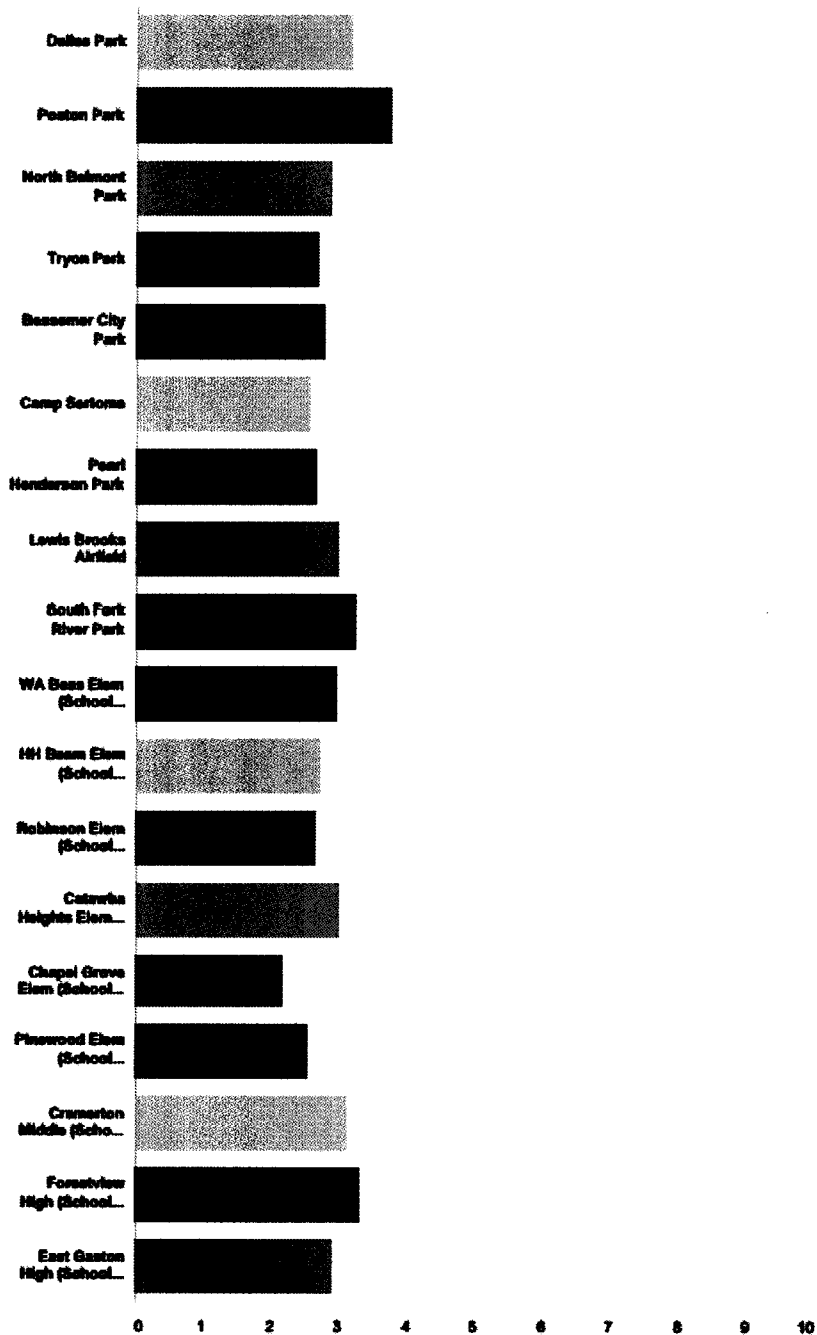
Answered: 407 Skipped: 98



Gaston County Parks & Recreation Community Interest and Opinion Survey

Q3 Please rate the physical condition of the following facilities that you or members of your household have used in the past 12 months. Please use the scale of 1=Poor, 2=Fair, 3=Good, 4=Very Good and 5=Excellent.

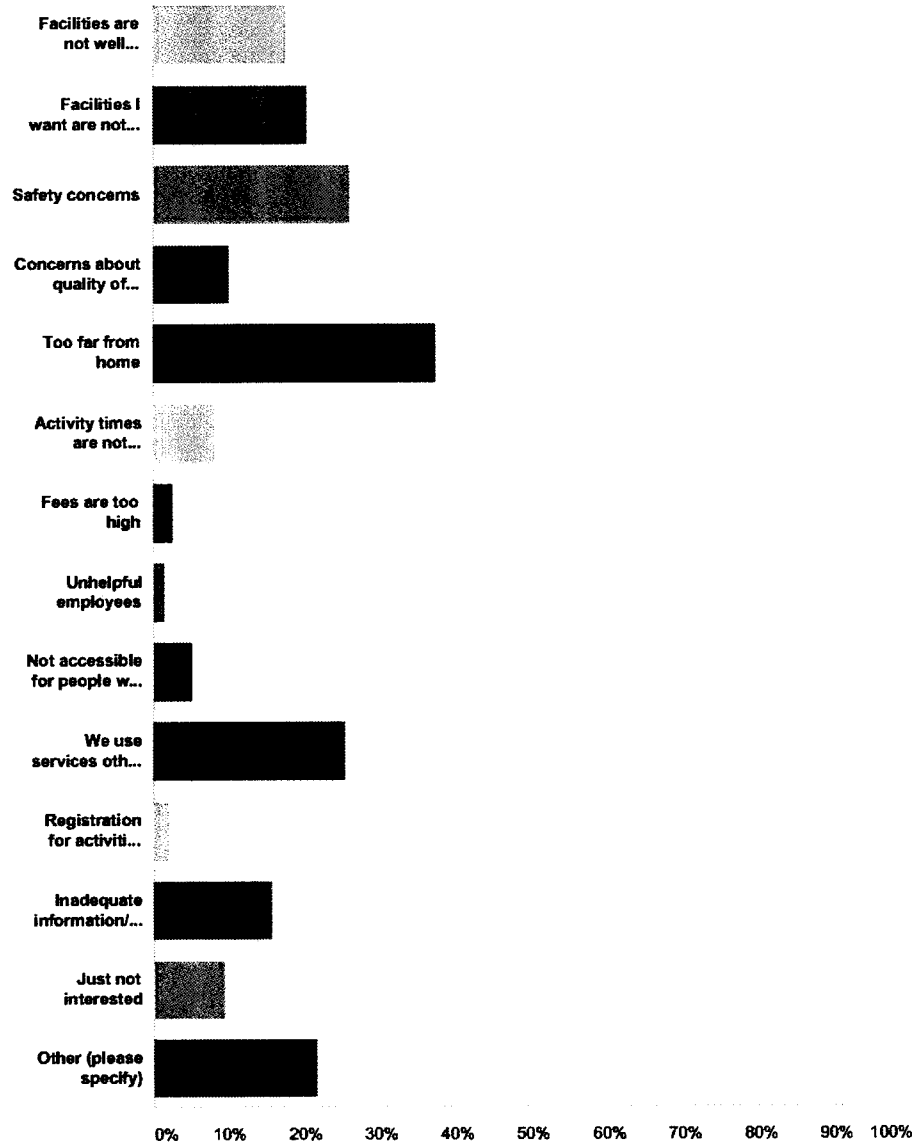
Answered: 394 Skipped: 111



Gaston County Parks & Recreation Community Interest and Opinion Survey

Q4 Please CHECK ALL the reasons you or other members of your household have chosen NOT to use the Gaston County parks, trails, recreation facilities.

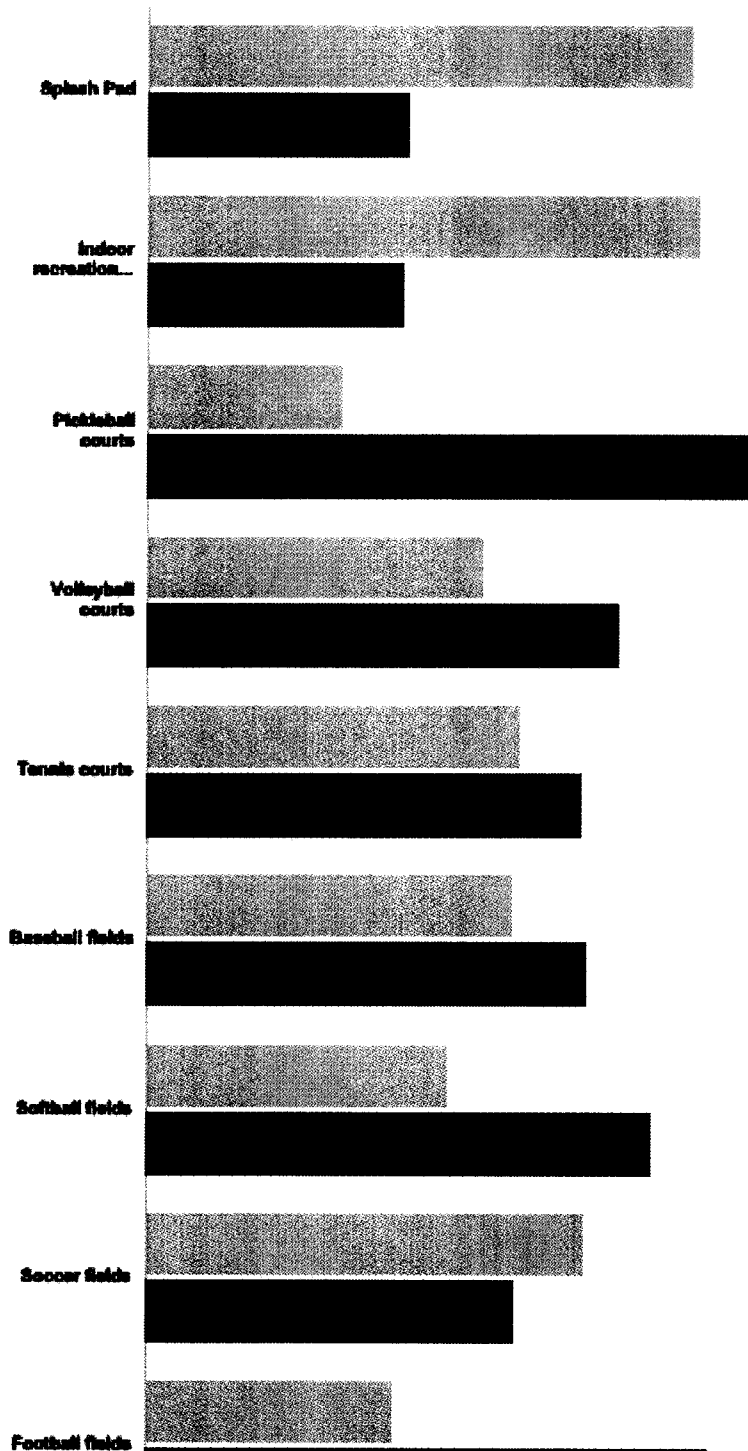
Answered: 321 Skipped: 184



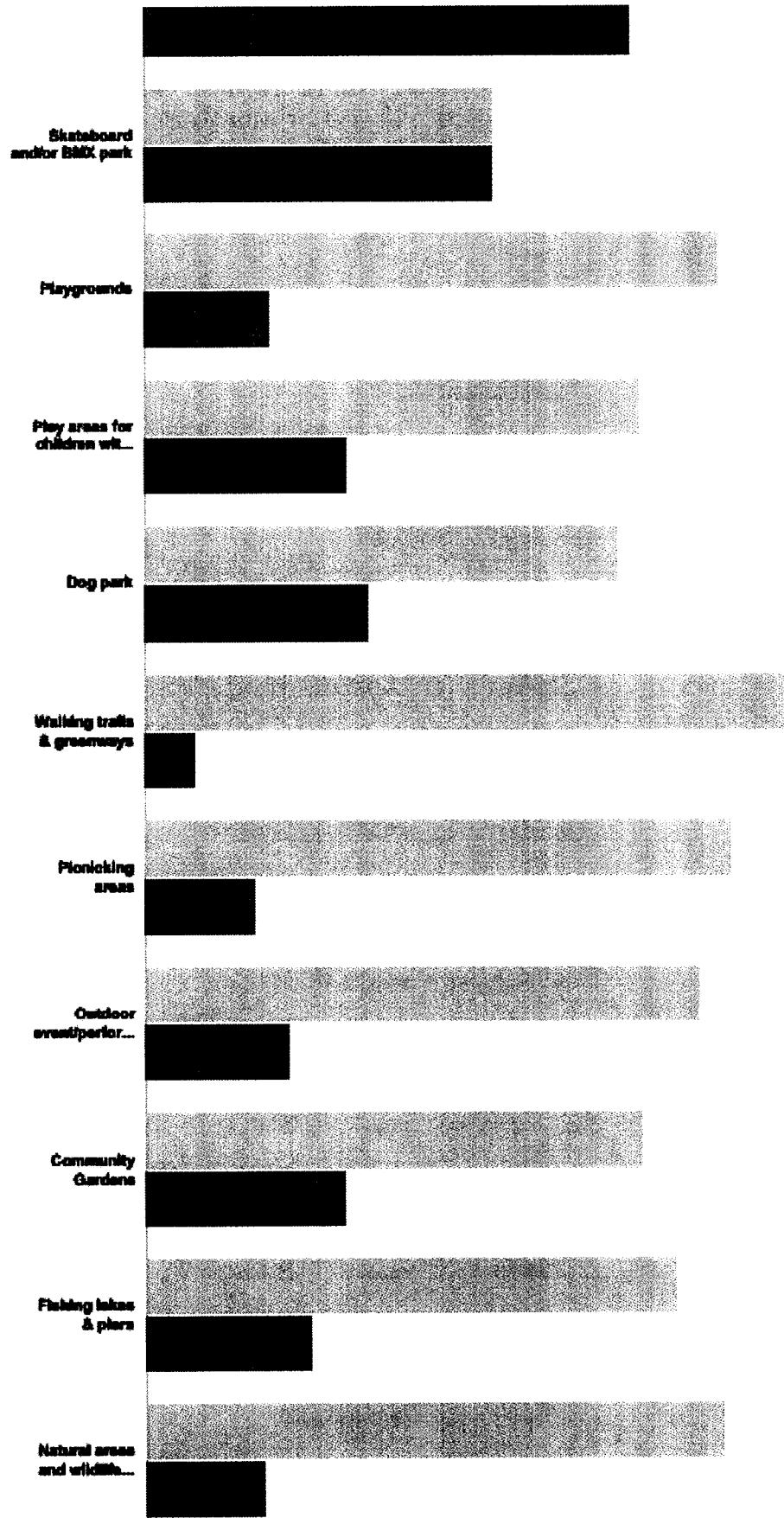
Gaston County Parks & Recreation Community Interest and Opinion Survey

Q5 For the following list of existing and potential parks and recreation facilities please indicate if you or members of your household have a desire/want for these facilities by checking YES or NO.

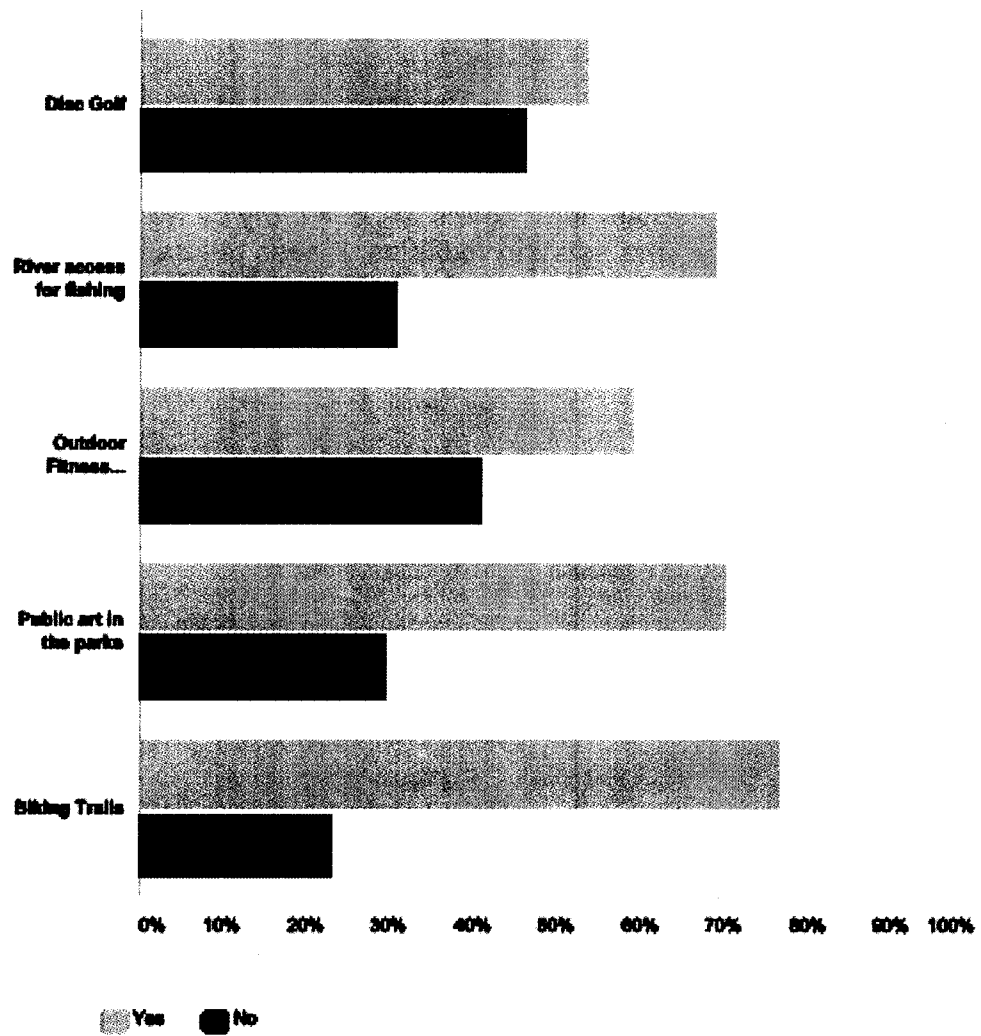
Answered: 321 Skipped: 184



Gaston County Parks & Recreation Community Interest and Opinion Survey



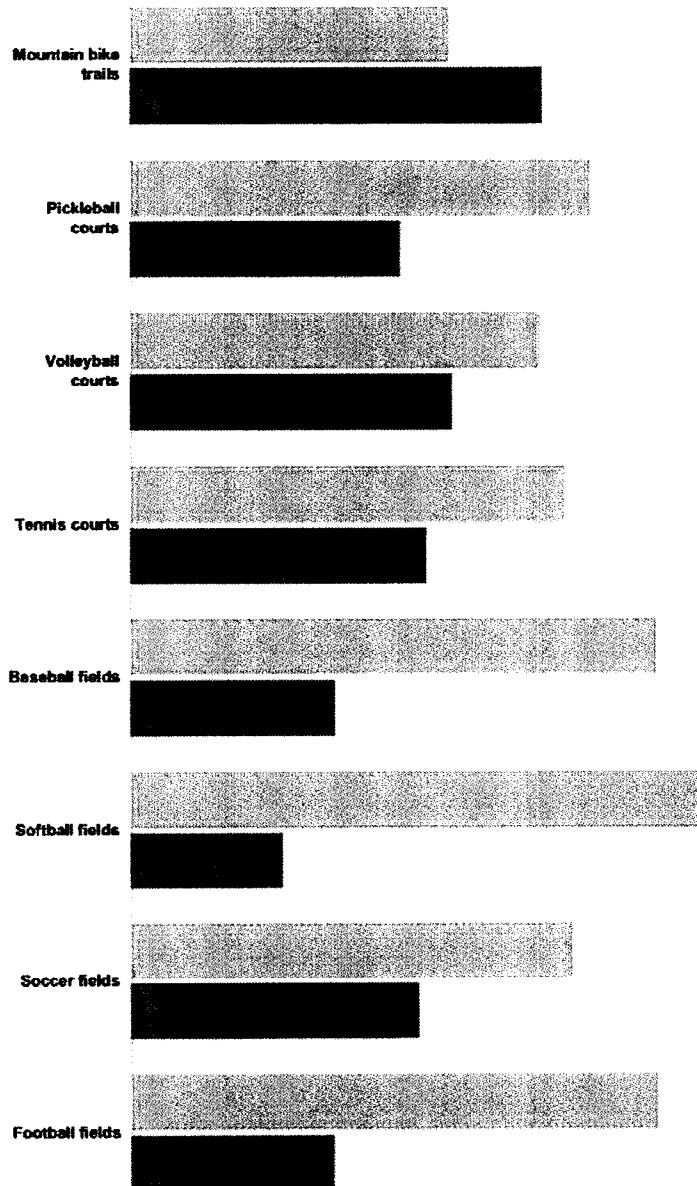
Gaston County Parks & Recreation Community Interest and Opinion Survey



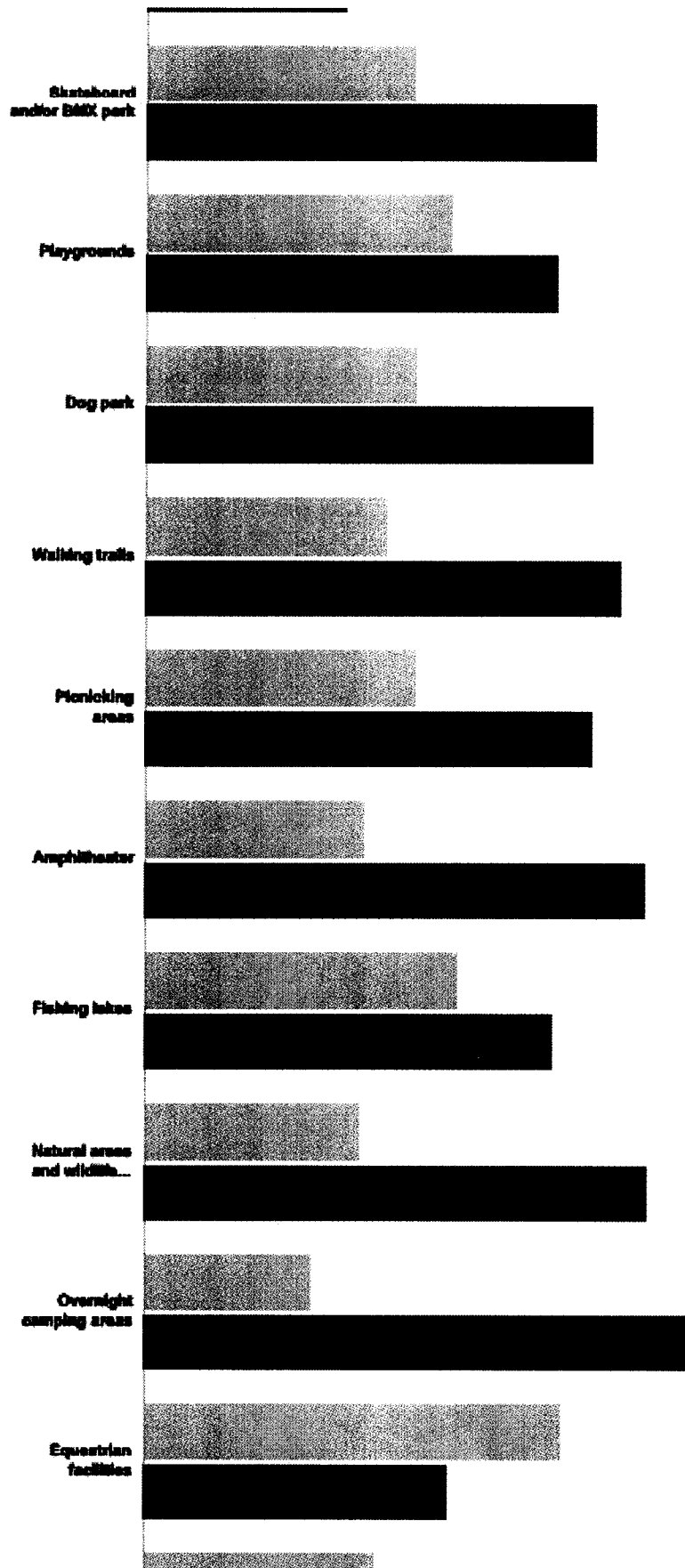
Gaston County Parks & Recreation Community Interest and Opinion Survey

Q6 For the facilities for which your household members have a desire to use, please tell us how well your household members' needs are currently being met by the existing facilities. Please tell us if there are enough existing facilities to meet your needs or if additional facilities are needed. Check the appropriate boxes below.

Answered: 321 Skipped: 184

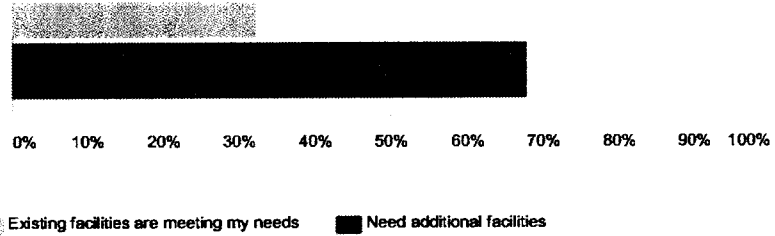


Gaston County Parks & Recreation Community Interest and Opinion Survey



Gaston County Parks & Recreation Community Interest and Opinion Survey

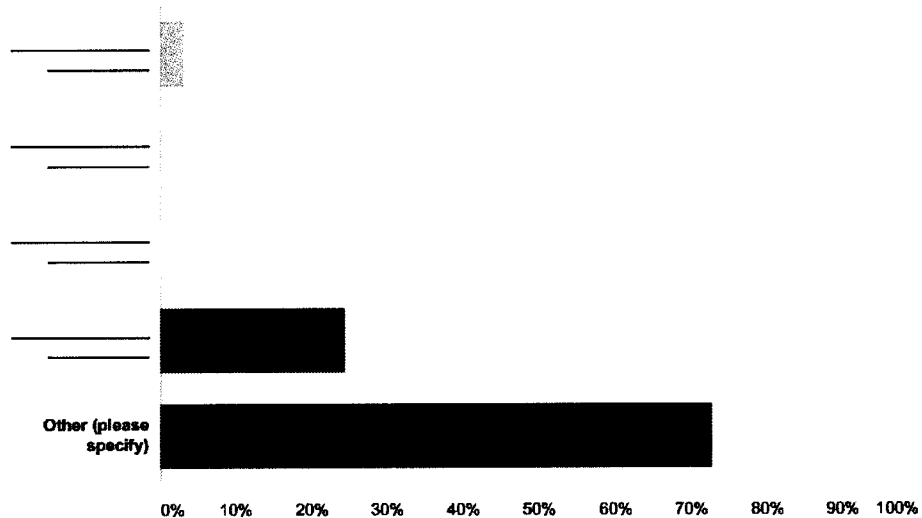
River access
for fishing ...



Gaston County Parks & Recreation Community Interest and Opinion Survey

**Q7 Of the recreation facilities listed above,
which FOUR are most important to your
household?**

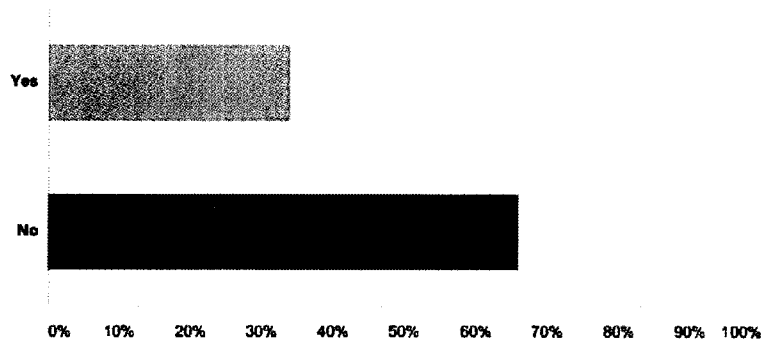
Answered: 230 Skipped: 275



Gaston County Parks & Recreation Community Interest and Opinion Survey

Q8 Do you believe Gaston County residents have adequate access to the South Fork River?

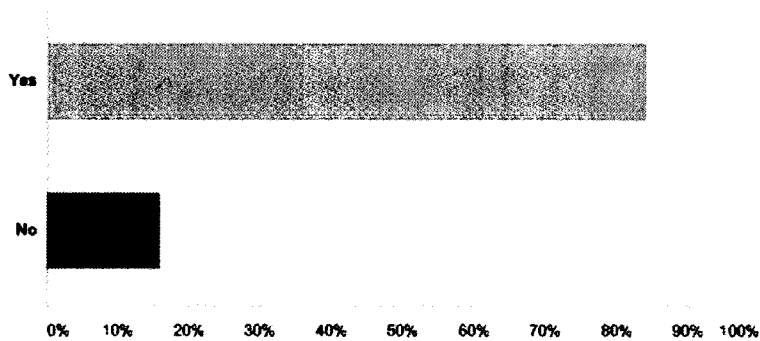
Answered: 293 Skipped: 206



Gaston County Parks & Recreation Community Interest and Opinion Survey

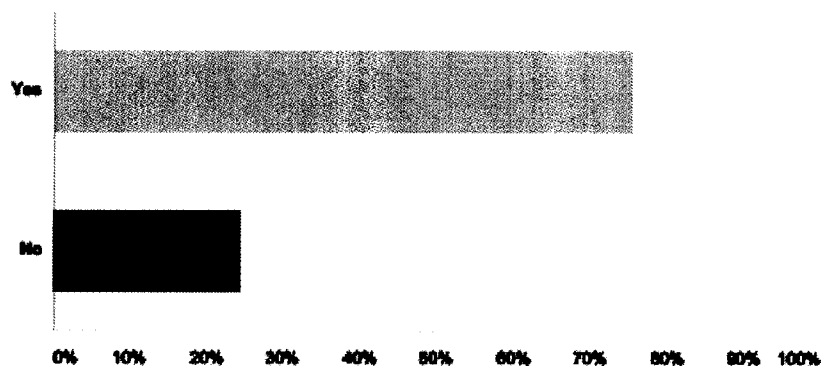
Q9 In your opinion do you believe there is a need for more parks and recreation facilities in Gaston County?

Answered: 321 Skipped: 184



Q10 Would you be willing to pay additional taxes and/or higher user fees to support park and recreation facility improvements?

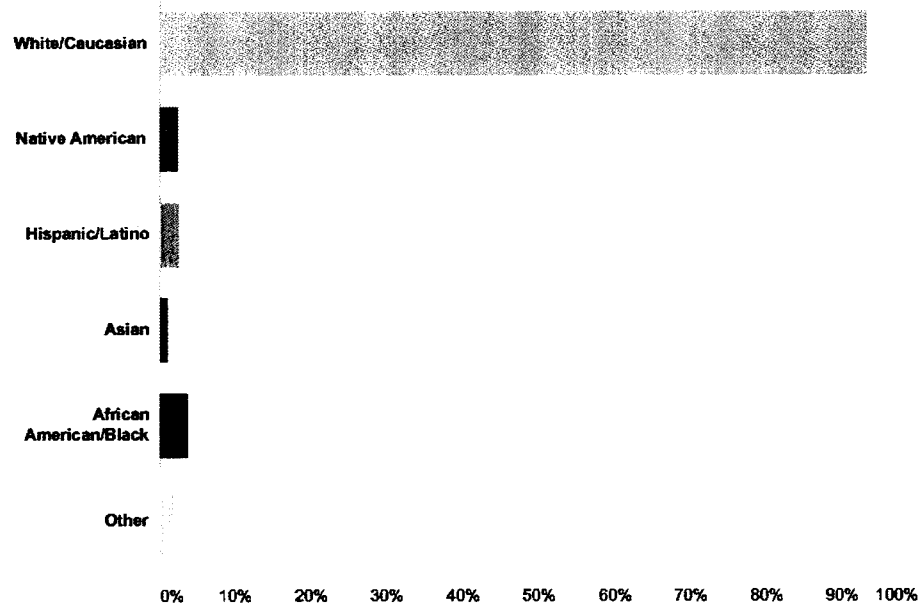
Answered: 321 Skipped: 184



Gaston County Parks & Recreation Community Interest and Opinion Survey

Q15 Which of the following best describes your race/ethnicity? (Check all that apply)

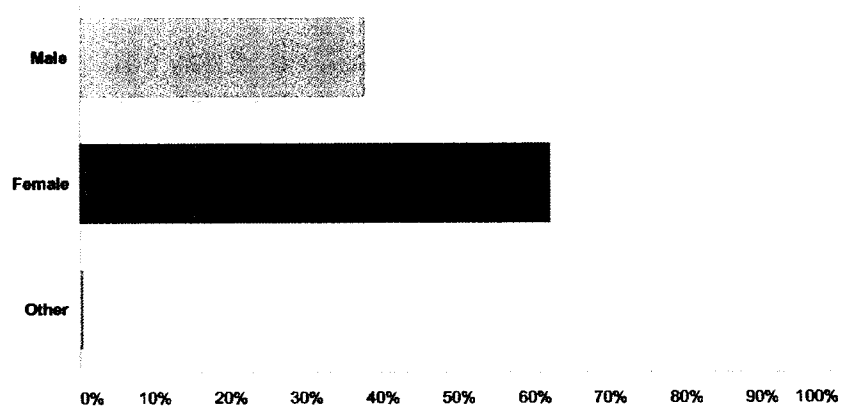
Answered: 313 Skipped: 192



Gaston County Parks & Recreation Community Interest and Opinion Survey

Q16 Please tell us your gender:

Answered: 313 Skipped: 192



APPENDIX B PUBLIC WORKSHOPS

Information Gathering Workshop

Date: June 19, 2017

Location: Gaston County Citizens Resource Center

An information gathering workshop was held to discuss county wide park and recreation facility needs. The meeting was held at the Gaston County Citizens Resource Center in Dallas Park. The meeting format was an informal drop-in, allowing attendees an opportunity to review displays providing information on existing county parks and requesting input on the quality and accessibility of those parks and facilities. Most importantly, attendees were asked to indicate the park and recreation facilities they currently use and identify recreational facilities needs they believe are needed.

Approximately 15 people attended the 3 hour open house. Overall, most everyone attending the workshop indicated they are currently using existing parks and recreation facilities in the county. Likewise, most attendees felt that the County's parks offer many valuable recreational opportunities. There was a general appreciation for existing facilities, programs, and park operations.

Most everyone attending the meeting expressed a need for additional parks and recreation facilities. The primary focus of those attending the public workshop was on the development of walking trails/greenways and passive/low impact recreation. The overwhelming majority of attendees indicated a current use of walking trails and greenways and indicated a need for expanding trails. Likewise, there was strong support for expanding mountain bike trails.

Other recreation activities that attendees indicated a need for expanding included:

- Baseball fields
- Disc golf
- Outdoor performing area
- Tennis courts

Preliminary Plan Review Workshop

Date: July 31, 2017

Location: County Offices Dallas Park

A second public workshop was held to discuss the County's Comprehensive Master Plan. The primary focus of this workshop was to review preliminary recommendations for park and recreation facility expansion/improvements and receive input from citizens. Six people attended the meeting. Derek Williams, park planner from Benesch, facilitated the meeting.



The meeting began with a power point presentation that explained the planning process as a five step process that included:

- Inventory
- Public engagement
- Development of Standards for parks and recreation facilities
- Needs assessment
- Action Plan

As part of the presentation, attendees were given information on each of the five steps; including a list of recommendations for park and recreation facility improvements to be accomplished by the Department over the next ten years. A copy of the power point presentation is included in the Appendix.

Following the presentation, the meeting was opened up for comments and questions. Overall everyone in attendance felt the preliminary recommendations were valid and supported the Department's plan. The following comments/suggestions were made:

- Several of those in attendance represented youth football programs and expressed a need for additional football fields; especially fields that can be used for football games. Currently, these programs are using high school fields for games and are required to pay for the use of the facilities. Often the rental on the high school facilities is very expensive. Several of those in attendance suggested finding underutilized fields and possibly working with the agencies owning the fields to make improvements to the fields in return for a long term use agreement for game events. Further discussion of this option with County Staff was recommended.
- Erwin Park was discussed as a potential site for improving an existing underutilized field for use for football.
- The discussion of the need for additional fields for football reinforces the need for additional Rect-angle Fields as outlined in the proposed recommendations of the Action Plan. There was very strong support for the development of additional fields to serve football.
- There was support for the development of additional trails and greenways throughout the county.
- The need for agencies throughout the county to work together was stressed by several people.
- There was a discussion regarding the approval of this plan and the next steps once this plan is approved. There seems to be strong public support to see recommendations from this plan implemented.

Participants were told that the plan will be finalized over the next few weeks and presented for approval at the August 21 meeting of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, with final approval of the plan by County Commissioners in September. Following approximately 30 minutes of open discussion by those in attendance, the meeting was adjourned.

APPENDIX C

MEETING MINUTES

Project Kick Off Meeting with Staff

Date: May 22, 2017

Time: 10:00 AM

Location: Gaston County Offices at Dallas Park

Attendance:

Cathy Hart

Ellen Fenters

Josh Henderson

Brian Rogers

Jamie Wilkinson

Derek Williams

The purpose of this meeting was to sit down with the Parks and Recreation staff to discuss the master planning process, gather input on existing facilities and programs, and gather input from staff on current and future needs. The meeting was facilitated by planner Derek Williams, but was primarily an open discussion about the planning process and desired outcomes. The following items were discussed:

Staff recognizes there are ADA accessibility issues in most parks. The County is currently conducting an ADA audit that will identify issues and assign costs to resolve those issues. This information will be incorporated into the Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP).

Lack of parking was another deficiency that is found in many of the County's existing parks, especially in parks that have high concentrations of athletic fields.

Batting cages are also needed at several fields.

Multi-purpose fields seem to be the athletic field most needed. With the explosive growth of soccer and the recent growth of lacrosse, there is a strong demand/need for rectangular fields. Lighting of fields and development of synthetic surfacing could greatly expand the use of existing fields.

Demand for Pickleball is growing. Currently Pickleball is being played in gymnasiums, but outdoor courts could help meet some of the demand. Currently the County only has 2 outdoor Pickleball Courts. More courts are needed.

The County is growing in population. The majority of growth coming along the county's eastern border; which borders Mecklenburg County. The one area in the county most likely to need additional parkland is the county's northeastern section.

An important part of the plan will be determining the service population of the planning study. It was decided that the plan should consider all county residents as its Service Population; with the understanding



that many Gaston County residents also live in municipalities that provide parks and recreation programs (Gastonia, Mount Holly, Belmont, etc.).

Another important decision in the planning process will be to determine the anticipated growth for the county over the next 10 years. The NC Office of Budget and Administration has population projections for all NC counties. Based on the State's projections Gaston County's population will grow by approximately 25,000 over the next 10 years. Cathy will contact the County's Planning Department to see if they have more detailed information on population projections.

There is considerable interest in extending greenways throughout the county. The Carolina Thread Trail Master Plan was completed in 2009. This plan recommends a number of trail segments. The County is in the process of building a trail that will connect Dallas Park to the Gaston Community College and then to Rankin Lake Park. Another important greenway project for the County is the South Fork River Greenway. Greenway connectivity should be an important aspect of the recommendations coming from this CMP.

Senior programs are currently provided from the Senior Center at Dallas Park. The existing center includes a wellness room (with exercise equipment), a crafts/multi-purpose room, and computer room. The existing facility offers many programs, but does not include a full gymnasium; which limits some program options. One facility that would greatly improve offerings to seniors would be a therapeutic pool. Not a full size lap pool, but instead smaller pool that could be used for water therapy, exercise, etc. in the future, there could be a need for a second senior center at George Poston Park.

The County is heavily involved in athletics through maintenance and development of athletic fields and facilities. The majority of the youth athletic programs are promoted and operated by youth athletic associations. Some adult leagues are run by the County. The County's ball fields are heavily used by travel teams and tournaments; which is good, because these events bring people into the county and create tourism dollars. There is still strong demand for youth baseball and girls softball. Adult ball play is not as popular. As noted previously, soccer and lacrosse are creating the heaviest demand, and there is a need for additional multi-purpose fields.

Many of the County's athletic facilities/fields are located on school/park sites. The County currently has 10 school/park sites. While play at Elementary and (to some extent) Middle Schools works well, access to High School fields is often very limited. In essence the county is maintaining facilities at some locations with very little access. The joint use concepts of school facilities might be something to review in the future.

While there has been a master plan completed for Dallas Park (2013), other parks have not been master planned. At this time, there does not appear to be significant need for master plans at other parks.

Both Dallas Park and George Poston Park need improvements to their maintenance facilities.

Previously, there has been much discussion about development of a tournament level sports complex in the county as a revenue generator. Travel and Tourism explored several options for developing a facility, but the concept never fully developed. Currently there does not appear to be strong support for such a facility. Improvements to the fields at Dallas Park could provide a venue for tournaments.

CaroMont Hospital is the primary health care provider in the county. The hospital is a great community partner and has invested in community facilities that support healthy life styles. The Department should continue to look for partnership opportunities with them.

Public engagement, as part of the planning process, was discussed. The first public workshop was scheduled for June 20 (in follow-up correspondence it was changed to June 19). The workshop will be held at the County's offices at Dallas Park. The first workshop will be an "information gathering" meeting. Attendees will be provided information on the County's existing parks and programs, and the purpose of the master plan will be discussed. Attendees will then be invited to share their views on existing parks and the need for additional parks and facilities. The meeting will be conducted as a "drop-in" format; no formal presentation will be given. County staff will conduct similar meetings in other areas of the county.

Later in the summer another public workshop will be held to present preliminary recommendations to the public and receive input on the draft plan.

A survey will also be used to gather public opinions. This survey will be posted on the County's website and Facebook page. It will also be distributed (in hard copy) at community events and county recreation programs. Examples from previous surveys will be used to develop the survey questionnaire. Questionnaire development will start immediately, with the survey being posted in the next few weeks.

Trends in recreation facility/programs were discussed. The following relatively new activities seem to be growing in popularity:

- Pickleball
- Lacrosse
- Dog parks
- Spraygrounds
- Disc golf

In addition to these relatively new activities, there seems to be very strong demand for water access and especially fishing. The County has 4 lakes where fishing is allowed. There is also considerable interest in paddle boating, canoeing, and kayaking. There was also some discussion about swim beaches.

While the County does not envision getting into the recreation center/gymnasium business, there was discussion about the possible need for a community building that could be rented for special events, reunions, etc. The Master Plan for Dallas Park includes a community building/special events building. This building could meet this need.

Dallas Park also has the Historic Village, which is an important County asset. The Historic Village has a volunteer committee that guides operation/promotion of this unique facility. Unfortunately many of the members of this Committee have served for many years. As these members move off the Committee, new advocates for the Village will need to be identified.

The meeting was adjourned following approximately an hour of open discussion.

Community Stakeholders Meeting: Parks and Recreation Directors

Date: July 17, 2017

Attendees:

Zip Stowe, Belmont
Chuck Dellinger, Gastonia
Cam Carpenter, Gastonia
Mark Jusko, Mount Holly
Eric Smallwood, Cramerton
Cathy Hart, Gaston County
Josh Henderson, Gaston County
Brian Rogers, Gaston County
Derek Williams, Benesch

The purpose of this meeting was to review the County's plan for developing a Comprehensive Park and Recreation Master Plan and have a discussion with municipal parks and recreation directors on countywide park and recreational needs. The meeting began with a general overview of the planning process with an explanation that the County's Comprehensive Plan will address countywide needs (with both municipal parks and county parks), but the primary focus of this plan will be identifying the park and recreation facility needs that should be addressed by Gaston County. It was noted that if any of the municipal agencies would like to have specific projects identified in the planning document they could hold local public workshops to identify those needs and the County plan will include those projects in the list of recommendations; with the understanding that project development of local projects will be by the local agency. No one in the group identified a specific project they would like to have included in the plan's recommendations. It was also noted that most of the agencies represented at this meeting already have system wide park and recreation plans for their departments.

Most everyone felt that development of a countywide trail system should be one of the priorities of the plan. The Carolina Thread Trail Master Plan provides a great overview of a countywide trail network. There are many trail segments that would connect the different municipalities and other points of interest. The proposed trail connecting Dallas Park with the Community College and Rankin Lake Park; ultimately connecting to downtown Gastonia is an example of trails connecting points of interest. The CTT trail connect residential areas with commercial areas in Cramerton was another example of greenways providing a community asset. Mount Holly is in the process of developing similar trails. Trails along Rocky River should also be a priority. The property associated with the former Linwood Springs Golf Course, which was purchased as part of the Garden Parkway project was identified as a property that can have a positive impact on parks in the county. Currently owned by NCDOT, this property could be a passive park in the future.

Crowders Mountain State park is another important asset owned by the state, but located in the county. Located adjacent to Gastonia, this park provides benefits for local residents and brings visitors to the county. Travel and tourism officials have recognized the value of the county's parks and natural resources and have begun promoting the outdoor resources found in the county in an attempt to increase travel and tourism dollars. The county's rivers and streams, with trails and blueways, is an important attraction. In the future more resources will be spent on enhancing the public's access to these resources.

The relationship between the county and the local departments was discussed. Everyone felt the county and the local agencies have a good working relationship; especially in instances where the county can help facilitate development of projects that are operated and maintained on a local level.

There was a discussion about the need to develop a countywide greenway plan. In some ways. The CTT master Plan for the county outlines a general description of major trail routes, but there is a need for more delineation of trails that connect local features. One suggestion was to use countywide utility maps to identify where sanitary sewer lines exist and where they are proposed. These corridors will provide a pretty good overview of potential greenway corridors.

In general discussions about facility needs, it was noted that there is a need for additional multipurpose or rectangle fields. Currently this seems to be the one area in athletic field development that is lacking. The need for indoor recreation facilities seems to vary depending on the location. Gastonia seems to have adequate indoor facilities, but in Belmont, the need for a recreation center is a high priority. It was noted that the County will likely not be developing and operating indoor recreation facilities.

Everyone agreed that the joint use of school facilities is important and should be encouraged.

Several people mentioned the Mountain Island Educational State Forest in Stanley as a wonderful resource that will provide both open space, environmental education, and opportunities for passive recreation. Likewise, the plan should include reference to other important county assets like the Daniels Stowe Botanical Gardens.

APPENDIX D

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS WORKSHOP

POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

JULY 31, 2017

Parks & Recreation Master Plan

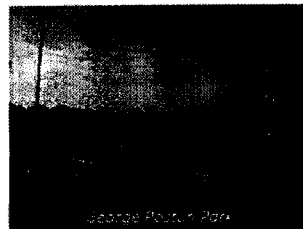
Gaston County, North Carolina

July 31, 2017

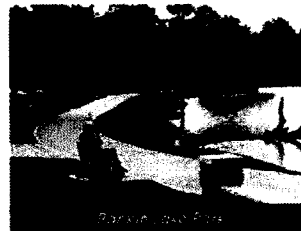


benesch

Step One: Inventory



George Patton Park



Barkin Lake Park

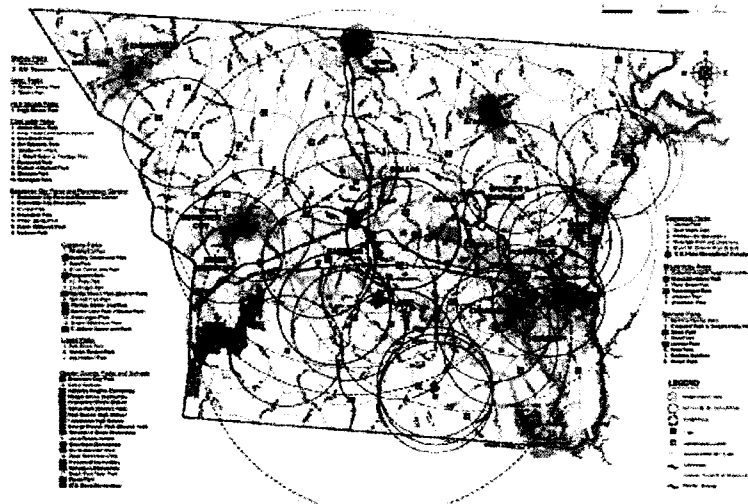
- Inventory of public parks and open space serving County residents
 - Municipal Parks and Facilities
 - County Parks and Facilities
 - State/Federal Parks
 - Private Facilities

benesch



Step One: Inventory

Gaston County Parks, Recreation and Greenways Map



benesch

Step One: Inventory

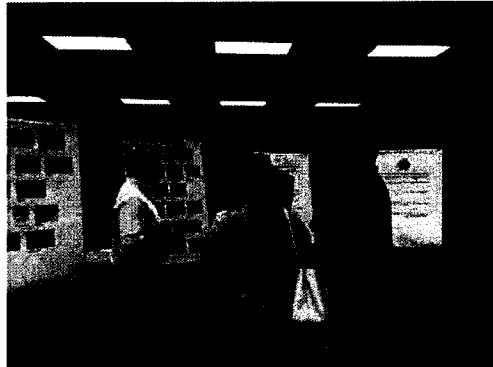
Review of current and projected population and demographic information

All Topics	Gaston County, North Carolina	UNITED STATES
Population estimates, July 1, 2016, (V2016)	216,966	323,127,613
PEOPLE		
Population estimates, July 1, 2016, (V2016)	216,966	323,127,613
Population estimates base, April 1, 2010, (V2016)	206,101	308,758,105
Population, percent change - April 1, 2010 (estimates base) to July 1, 2016, (V2016)	5.3%	4.7%
Population, Census, April 1, 2010	206,086	308,745,538
Persons under 5 years, percent, July 1, 2016, (V2016)	6.0%	6.2%
Persons under 5 years, percent, April 1, 2010	6.4%	6.5%
Persons under 18 years, percent, July 1, 2016, (V2016)	22.9%	22.8%
Persons under 18 years, percent, April 1, 2010	23.9%	24.0%
Persons 65 years and over, percent, July 1, 2016, (V2016)	15.5%	15.2%
Persons 65 years and over, percent, April 1, 2010	13.2%	13.0%

benesch

Step Two: Public Input

- Public Workshops
- County-Wide Survey
- Meetings with community stakeholders



Step Two: Public Input

Q2 How would you rate the overall quality of the Gaston County Parks and Recreation's facilities which you or members of your household have visited?

Answered: 407 Skipped: 98

Key Findings

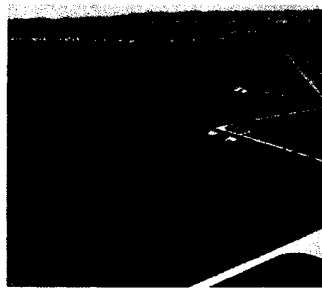
- Existing parks are heavily used and valued
- Dallas Park and George Poston Park are the most used facilities
- Strong demand for expansion/improvement of facilities, especially:
 - Walking & Biking Trails
 - Open Space/Passive Recreation
 - Family Recreation
 - Playgrounds
 - Picnicking
- Willingness to pay for improvements



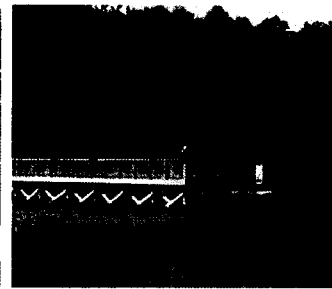
Step Three: Development of Standards



Mini & Neighborhood
Parks



Community Parks &
District Parks



Regional Parks &
Greenways

Special Use Facilities: Indoor Recreation Facilities,
Senior/Teen Centers, Aquatic Facilities



Step Three: Development of Standards

Parks by Classification

Park Types	Currituck County	Elizabeth/ Pasquotank County	City of Fayetteville/ Cumberland County	Iredell County	Cabarrus County	Yadkin County	Old NRPA Standards	Gaston County 2007 Master Plan	Gaston County 2017 Proposed Standards
Mini Parks	NA*	1-3 Acres/Park (.25 Acres/ 1,000)	5-3 Acres/Park (.5 Acres/ 1,000)	1-2 Acres/Park (.25-.5 Acres/ 1,000)	25-3 Acres/Park (.1 Acres/ 1,000)	NA*	25-1 Acres/Park (.25-.5 Acres/ 1,000)	NA*	1-5 Acres/Park (.1 Acres/ 1,000)
Neighborhood Parks	5-10 Acres/Park (1 Acres/ 1,000)	7-15 Acres/Park (1 Acres/ 1,000)	7-15 Acres/Park (2.5 Acres/ 1,000)	10-15 Acres/Park (1-2 Acres/ 1,000)	3-25 Acres/Park (1 Acres/ 1,000)	NA*	5-10 Acres/Park (1-2 Acres/ 1,000)	5-15 Acres/Park (2 Acres/ 1,000)	5-15 Acres/Park (1 Acres/ 1,000)
Community Parks	30-50 Acres/Park (3 Acres/ 1,000)	40-100 Acres/Park (5 Acres/ 1,000)	30-50 Acres/Park (1.25 Acres/ 1,000)	30-50 Acres/Park (5-8 Acres/ 1,000)	25-70 Acres/Park (2.5 Acres/ 1,000)	30-50 Acres/Park (1.5 Acres/ 1,000)	30-80 Acres/Park (5-8 Acres/ 1,000)	40+ Acres/Park (4 Acres/ 1,000)	40+ Acres/Park (4 Acres/ 1,000)
District Parks	50 -100 Acres/Park (3 Acres/ 1,000)	80-180 Acres/Park (2.5 Acres/ 1,000)	40-80 Acres/Park (1 Acres/ 1,000)	100-200 Acres/Park (5-10 Acres/ 1,000)	100-300 Acres/Park (3 Acres/ 1,000)	100-150 Acres/Park (2.5 Acres/ 1,000)	+75 Acres/Park (5-10 Acres/ 1,000)	200-400 Acres/Park (10 Acres/ 1,000)	100+ Acres/Park (3.5 Acres/ 1,000)
Regional Parks	150-1,000 Acres/Park (3 Acres/ 1,000)	NA**	100-250 Acres/Park (3.25 Acres/ 1,000)	NA**	750 Acres/Park (5 Acres/ 1,000)	150-1,000 Acres/Park (5 Acres/ 1,000)	NA**	1,000 Acres/Park (10 Acres/ 1,000)	1000+ Acres/Park (10 Acres/ 1,000)



Step Four: Needs Assessment

Current and Projected Facility Needs

	2017 Standard	Existing Facilities	Current Demand (2017, 2027)	Current Need (2017, 2027)	2028 Demand (2017, 2027)	2029 Demand (2017, 2027)
Fields						
Adult Baseball	1/20,000	76	11	7	12	14
Youth Baseball	1/6,000		26		26	
Softball	1/6,000		26		26	
Rectangle Fields	1/3,500	47	61	14	67	20
Courts						
Basketball (outdoor)	1/7,000	24	27	3	34	19
Tennis	1/3,500	61	61	20	67	16
Volleyball	1/20,000	6	11	5	12	6
Horseshoes	1/6,000	32	36	4	39	7
Shuffleboard	1/60,000	1	5	4	6	5
Outdoor Areas						
Playgrounds	1/4,000	43	54	11	58	16
Picnic Shelter	1/3,000	60	72	12	76	16
Trails						
Hiking/Jessie/Jogging	1 mile/4,000	±15 miles	±54 miles	39 miles	58 miles	44 miles
Specialized						
Archery/Target	1/20,000	5	11	6	12	7
Community Garden	1/20,000	2	11	9	12	10
Swimming Pool	1/20,000	9	11	2	12	3
Recreation Center w/ Gym	1/25,000	6	9	3	9	3
Dog Park	1/55,000	3	6	3	7	4
State Park	1/50,000	3	4	1	5	2
Disc Golf	1/25,000	3	6	3	7	4
Bicycling/Urban	1 mile/2,000		108	108	178	116
Sprayground	1/50,000	1	4	3	5	4



Step Five: Plan of Action

Park Needs (Ten Year Plan)

Develop several new Mini Parks

- ± 1-2 Acres
- Playground, Shelter, Bench, Etc.
- Located in underserved areas of towns/cities
- Developed and maintained by municipal agencies

Develop several new Neighborhood Parks

- 5-8 acres
- Family oriented facilities (playgrounds, shelters, etc.)
- Located in underserved areas of the towns/cities
- Developed and operated by municipal agencies



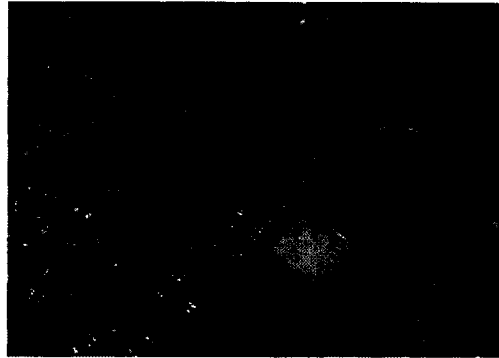
Step Five: Plan of Action

Park Needs (Ten Year Plan)

Existing Community Parks are meeting needs of County residents

District Park

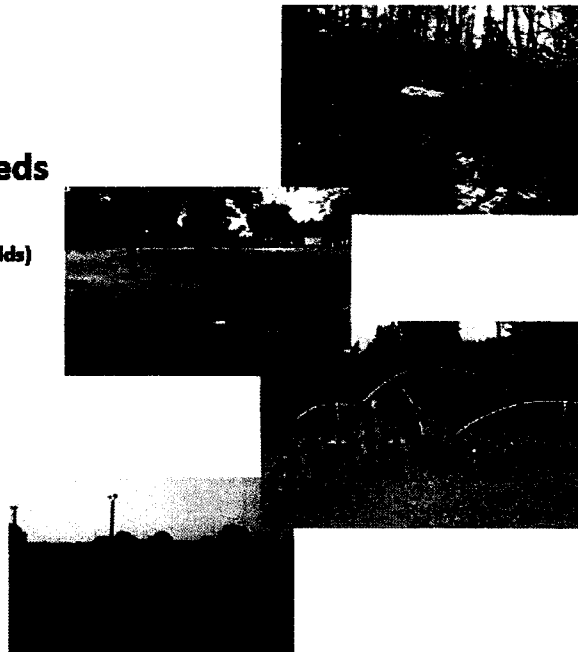
- Acquire land and develop new District Park
- ± 100 Acres
- Located in northeast area of county
- Active and passive recreation
- Phase One in next 10 years



Step Five: Plan of Action

Recreation Facility Needs

- Ballfields
- Multi-purpose Fields (Rectangle Fields)
- Playgrounds
- Picnic Areas/Shelters
- Court Games
- Disc Golf Course
- Mountain Bike Trails
- Community Gardens
- Splash Pads/Spraygrounds



Step Five: Plan of Action

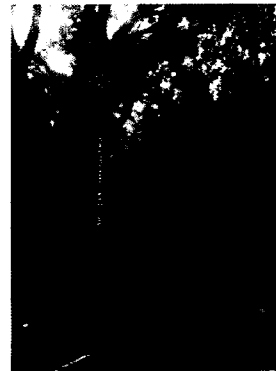


Chatham Park, Spartanburg, NC

VORTEX

Special Use Facilities

- Develop additional spray grounds
- Expand greenway trails



Step Five: Plan of Action

Park Needs (Ten Year Plan)

- Renovate existing park areas (District & Community Parks)
- Encourage development of additional infrastructure/facilities at Crowders Mountain State Park
- Expand building and grounds staff to maintain growing park system
- Work collaboratively with municipalities throughout county



Questions?



benesch



APPENDIX E: CLASSIFICATIONS FOR PARKS, OPEN SPACE & GREENWAYS

A well balanced park system is made up of several park types that range from very large Regional Parks (often encompassing hundreds of acres) to very small Mini Parks (sometimes less than one acre). The descriptions on the following pages define the parks that typically comprise a community's park system. Numerous agencies (federal, state, county, and municipal) play a role in providing this system. Looking at the entire system helps identify the roles of the various agencies.

The following park descriptions are based on park classifications outlined in the 1995 National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) publication "Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines". They are not intended to serve as park standards, but instead are used as a framework for describing the components found in a park system. Communities should structure their park types based on individual community needs. Table 3A-Park Acreage and Table 3B-Park Acreage reflect the standards for development that are recommended for Gaston County. The recommended standards vary slightly from NRPA guidelines listed on the following pages.

Regional Parks

Regional Parks are typically very large sites, encompassing unique qualities that exemplify the natural features, diverse land formations, and the variety of vegetation and wildlife found in the region. Examples of the types of facilities provided in a Regional Park include environmental centers, camping, nature trails, observation decks, and picnic areas. Open fields for non-structured activities, such as frisbee throwing or kite flying, are also generally found in these parks.

Land chosen for future preserves or the expansion of existing sites should contain the previously mentioned characteristics accompanied with natural water features such as beach areas, rivers, and creeks. The majority of the site should be reserved for passive recreation, with the remaining acreage used for active recreation.

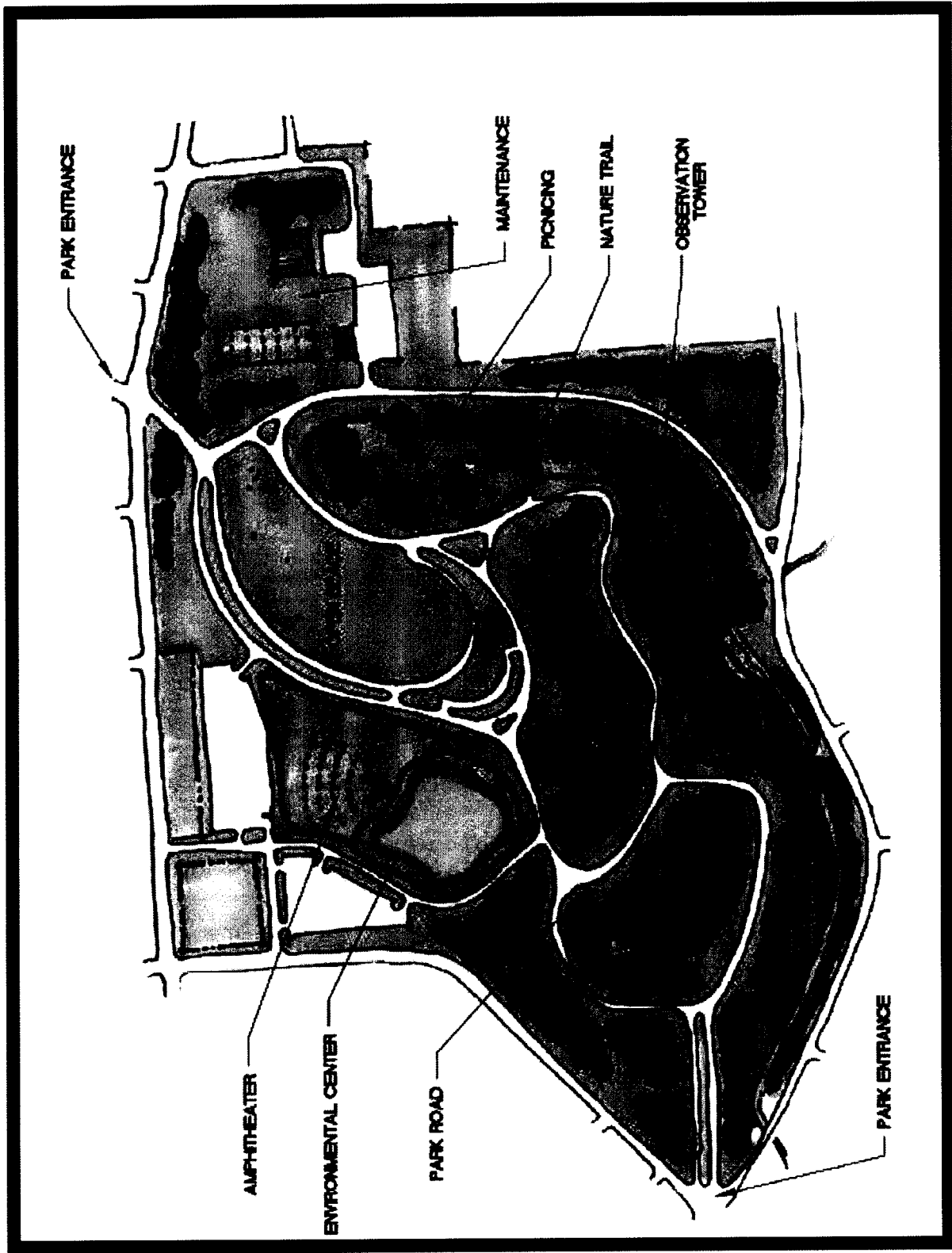
NRPA's guidelines for developing Regional Parks are as follows:

Service Area:	Typically serve the entire county
Acreage/Population Ratio:	10 acres per 1,000 persons
Typical Size:	Sufficient area to encompass the resources to be preserved and managed. Typically a minimum of 200 acres; up to 1,000 acres.

Typical Facilities:

Environmental Center	Picnic Tables with Grills (not under shelter)
Equestrian Center	Restrooms/Vending
Primitive Camping	Beach
Group Camping	Swimming
Recreational Vehicles Camping	Boating
Nature Trails	Fishing Piers/Boat Docks
Observation Deck	Parking
Picnic Shelters with Grills	Caretaker's House

Development of **Regional Parks** typically falls within the responsibility of federal, state and/or county agencies.



Typical Regional Park

200 + Acres

District Parks

A District Park provides more diverse recreational opportunities than the Regional Park. The District Park emphasizes passive recreational opportunities that are similar to the Regional Park in addition to including limited active recreational facilities. It is easily accessible by the population (typically 40,000) it serves and maintains a 2.5-5 mile service radius. The park contains a minimum of 5 acres per 1,000 population and should be a minimum of 100 acres in size.

An indoor recreation building/community center may be included in a District Park. These facilities typically reflect the character of the park with a historic, natural, or urban theme. Active recreational facilities located in a District Park include play areas, limited ball fields, hard surface courts, multi-purpose play fields, picnicking locations, and various types of trails.

Listed below are NRPA's guidelines for developing District Parks:

Service Area:	Typically serve the entire community
Acreage/Population Ratio:	5.0 acres per 1,000 persons
Typical Size:	40 acres minimum, 80-150 acres optimal

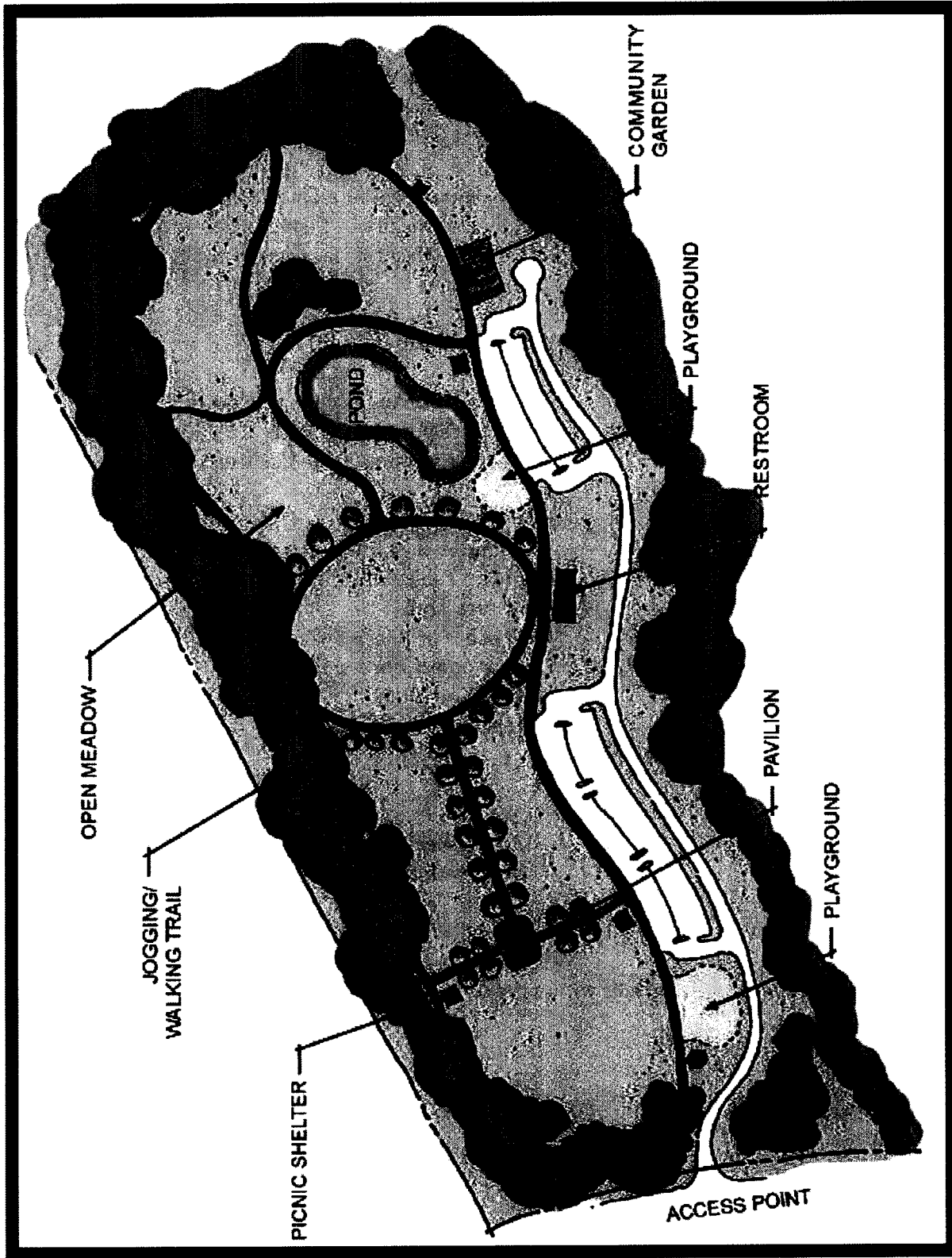
Typical Facilities:

Playground	Picnic Shelter with Grills
Basketball Courts	Picnic Tables with Grills (not under shelter)
Tennis Courts (lighted)	Nature Trail
Tournament Level Tennis Facilities	Benches or Bench Swings
Volleyball Courts	Restroom/Concessions
Multi-purpose Fields	Parking
Tournament Level Soccer Fields	Service Yard
Tournament Level Baseball/Softball Fields	

Alternate Facilities:

Recreation Center	Amphitheater
Tennis Center	Observation Decks
Running Track	

Development of **District Parks** typically falls within the responsibility of county or municipal agencies.



Typical District Park

80-150 Acres

Community Parks

Community Parks provide for the recreation needs of several neighborhoods or large sections of the community. A range of facilities is typically provided and may support tournament competition for athletic and league sports or passive recreation. These parks also present opportunities for nontraditional types of recreation. Fifty percent of Community Park sites should be developed for passive recreation. These relatively undisturbed areas may serve as buffers around the park and/or act as buffers between active facilities.

Community Park sites should have varying topography and vegetation. Forested areas should have a variety of tree species. Cleared areas should be present for siting active recreational facilities. One or more natural water feature(s), such as a lake, river, or creek, are desirable. Park land should be contiguous and strategically located in order to be accessible to all users within the neighborhoods it serves.

Listed below are NRPA's guidelines for developing Community Parks:

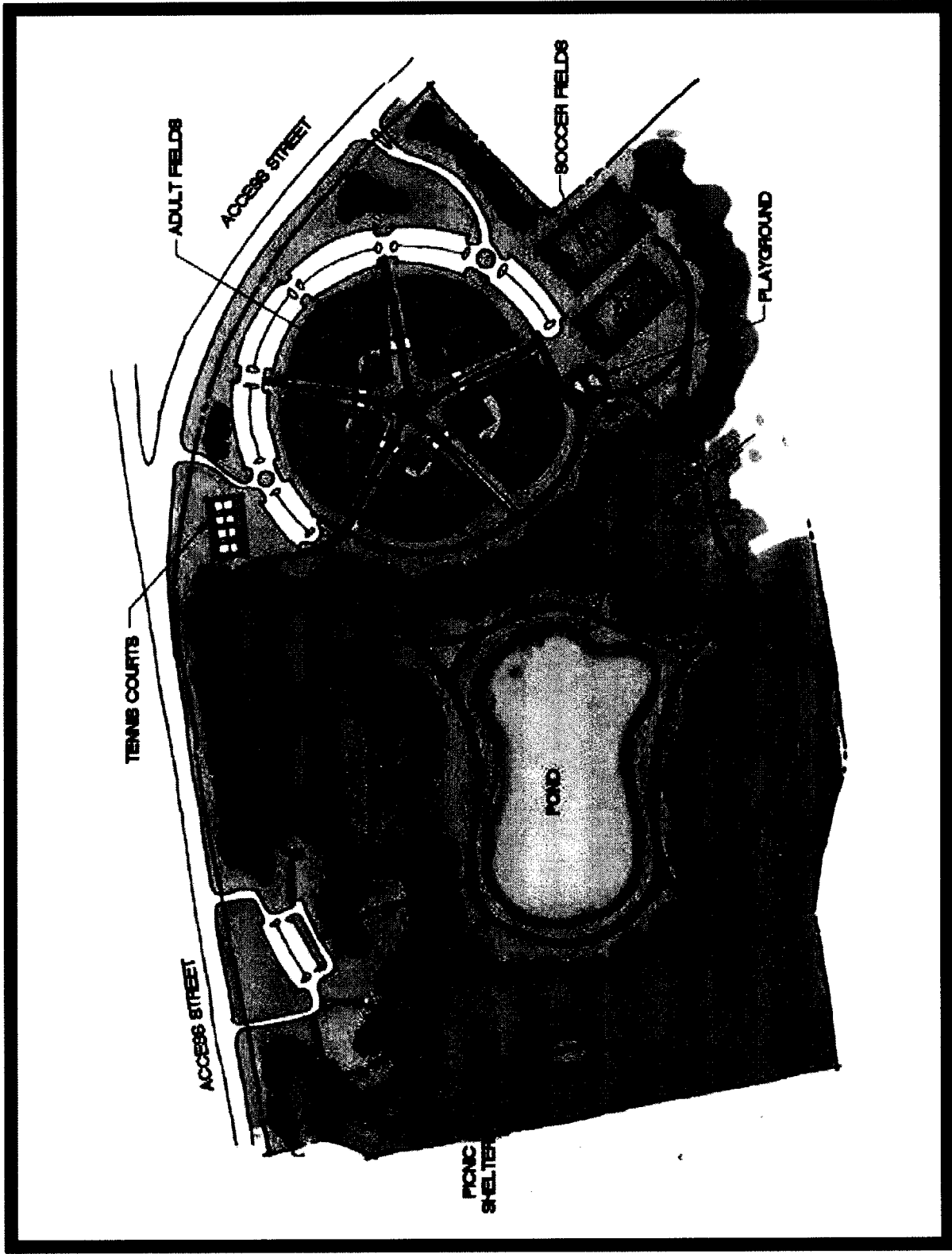
Service Area:	.5 - 3 mile radius
Acreage/Population Ratio:	5.0 acres per 1,000 persons
Typical Size:	30-50 acres

Typical Facilities:

Recreation Center	Picnic Tables with Grills
Basketball Courts	Benches or Bench Swings
Tennis Court (lighted)	Nature Trails
Baseball/Softball Fields (lighted)	Restroom/Concessions
Multipurpose Fields	Parking
Soccer Fields (lighted)	Playgrounds
Swimming Pool	Volleyball Courts
Amphitheater	Disc Golf
Observations Decks	Lakes
Picnic Shelters	Paddle Boat/Canoe Harbor
Picnic Shelters with Grills	Fishing Piers/Boat Docks

Specialty facilities may be added to or substituted for other facilities depending on community need or special site characteristics.

Development of **Community Parks** may fall within the responsibility of municipality or county agencies.



Typical Community Park 30 - 50 Acres

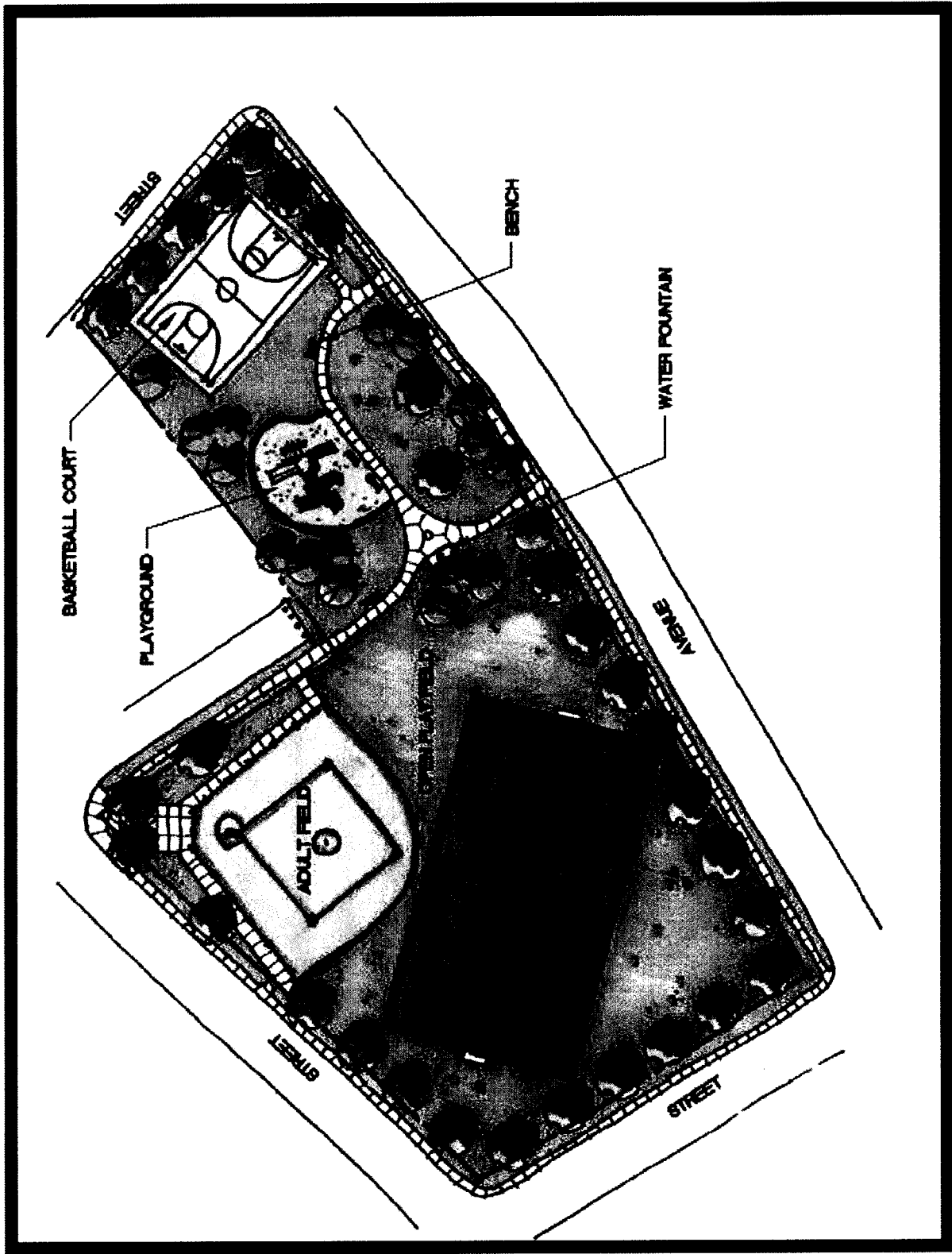
Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood Parks provide the basic unit of most park systems. These parks are usually located within walking distance of the area serviced and provide a variety of activities of interest to all age groups. While their small size requires intense development, fifty percent of each site should remain undisturbed, if possible, to serve as a buffer between the park and adjacent land users.

The NRPA guidelines for Neighborhood Park development are as follows:

Service Area:	.25 to .75 mile radius to serve walk-in recreation needs of surrounding populations
Acreage/Population Ratio:	2.5 acres per 1,000 persons
Typical Size:	5-10 acres
Typical Facilities:	
Playground	Picnic Shelters with Grills
Court Games	Picnic Tables with Grills (not under shelter)
Informal Play Field	Benches or Bench Swings
Volleyball	50% of Site to Remain Undeveloped
Trails/Walkways	Parking (7-10 spaces)

Neighborhood Parks are typically developed by municipalities.



Typical Neighborhood Park 5 - 10 Acres

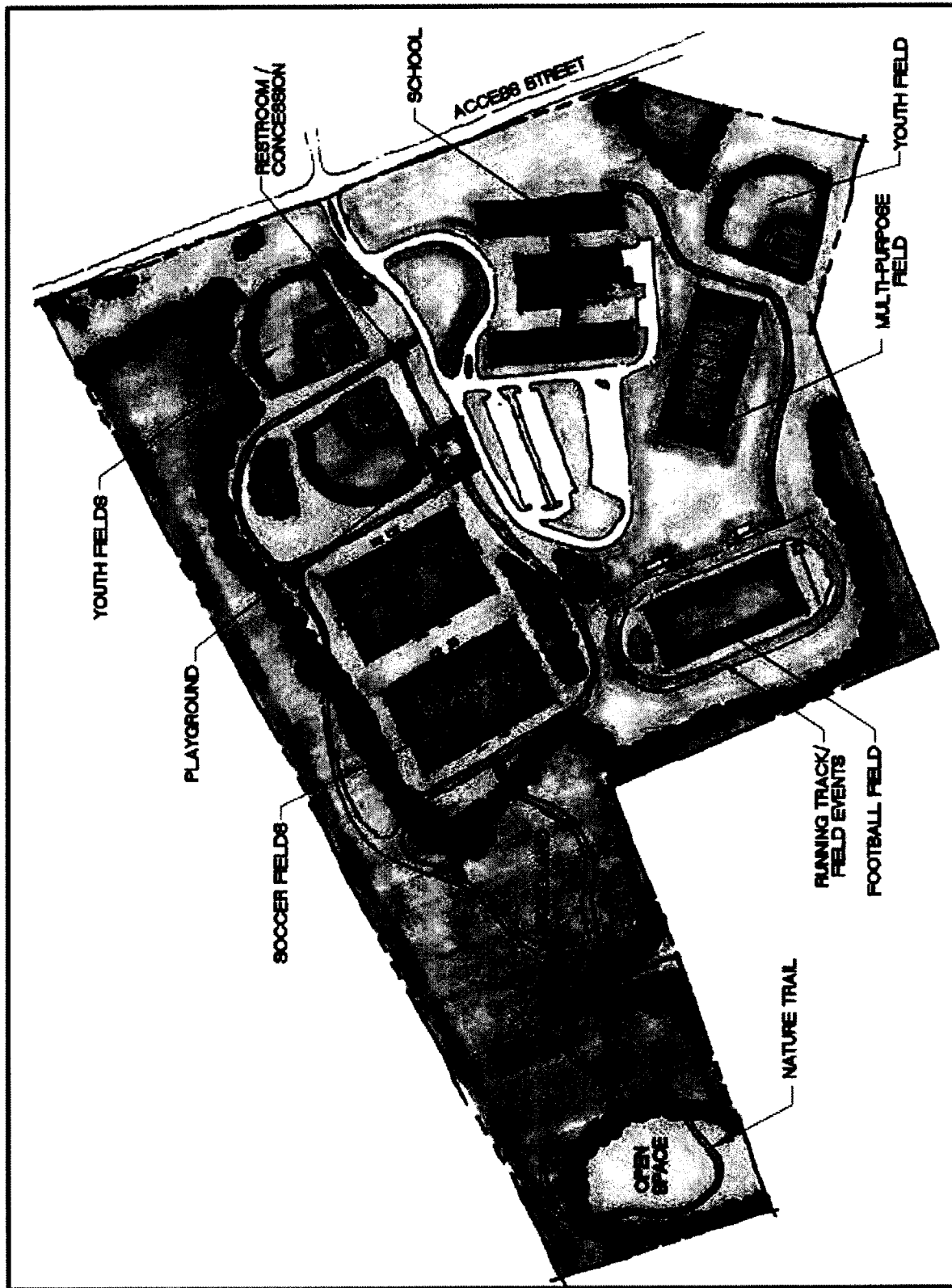
School Parks

Joint use is a mechanism that public agencies use to maximize resources. Through joint use, both the school system and the parks and recreation department benefit from shared use of facilities and valuable land resources. School Park facilities typically go beyond the simple joint use of school facilities. The parks and recreation agency will become a partner in the development of a school site and fund recreational facilities beyond those typically built with a stand-alone school. These facilities may be indoor spaces (gymnasiums, classrooms, meeting rooms, etc.) or outdoor recreation facilities (ballfields, playgrounds, picnic shelters, etc.). The cost of developing and operating these additional facilities is minimized when constructing them in partnership with school development. Savings are also found in shared infrastructure (parking, restrooms, etc.) and shared maintenance and operational cost.

The School Park concept maximizes the joint use objective and provides a planned facility that maximizes public funds. The School Park concept typically varies depending on the school. Elementary and middle schools provide the ideal setting for a Neighborhood Park, while middle and high schools follow the function of a Community Park or sports complex. Access to school sports facilities at high schools and middle schools can be difficult based on team sports needs. This concept only works if there is a mutually agreed upon joint use agreement to define roles, responsibilities, and use of facilities.

Service Area:	Varies depending on school type and park type
Desirable Size:	Varies depending on school type and park type
Typical Facilities:	Varies depending on school type and park type

Development of **School Parks** usually fall within the responsibility of municipalities, county agencies, or school districts.



Typical School Park

± 50 Acres

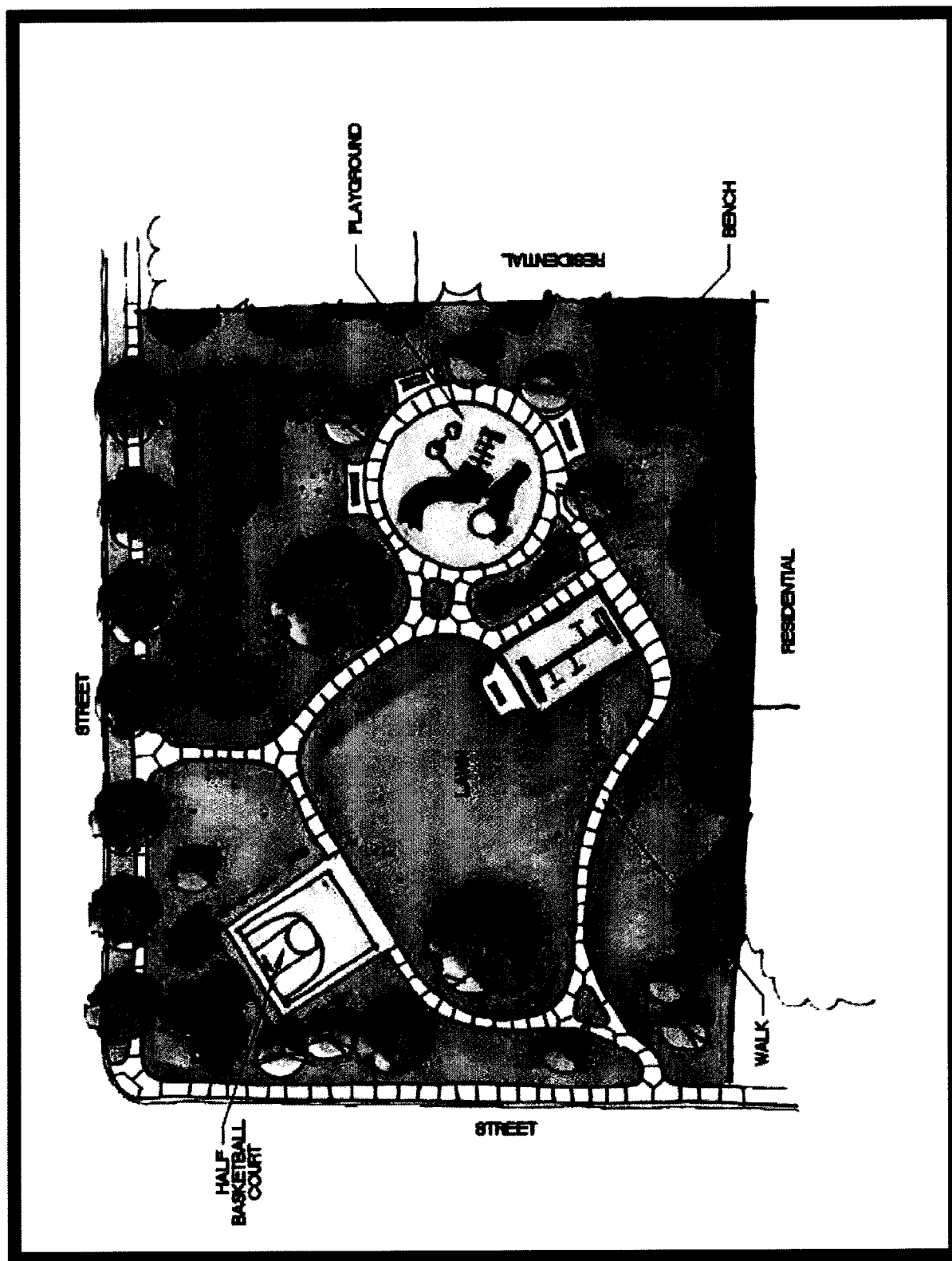
Mini Parks

Mini Parks are the smallest park classification. These parks are located within walking distance of the area serviced, and they provide limited recreational needs. The small amount of land associated with Mini Parks usually results in intense development with little to no buffer between the park and adjacent properties.

NRPA's guidelines for Mini Park development are as follows:

Service Area:	.25 mile radius to serve walk-in recreation needs of surrounding populations
Acreage/Population Ratio:	.25 acres per 1,000 persons
Typical Size:	.25 - 1 acres
Typical Facilities:	
Playground	Picnic Tables with Grills (not under shelter)
½ Basketball Courts	Benches or Bench Swings
Open Play Area	Landscaped Public Use Area

Mini Parks are typically developed by municipalities.



Typical Mini Park

.25 - 1 Acres

Greenway Trails

Greenways provide an important component of the overall park system. They:

- Serve as alternative non-motorized transportation facilities.
- Provide links between parks, schools, neighborhoods, and commercial areas.
- Emphasize harmony with the natural environment.
- Provide safe pedestrian movement.
- Provide resource based outdoor recreational opportunities.
- Enhance adjacent property values.
- Provide linear parks and open spaces.

Greenways are very similar to natural resource sites; the primary difference is the emphasis on pedestrian trails found in the greenway system.

Desirable Size: Greenways form corridors that vary considerably in length and width.
A 50' width is generally considered a minimum.



APPENDIX F: NATIONAL AND STATE STUDIES ON OUTDOOR RECREATION DEMAND

President's Commission

The President's Commission Report indicated the following significant facts:

The top ten most popular outdoor recreation activities nationwide are:

Picnicking	Playing sports
Driving for pleasure	Fishing
Swimming	Attending sporting events
Sightseeing	Boating
Bicycling	Walking for pleasure

Activities rapidly growing in popularity are:

Canoeing	Sailing
Bicycling	Hiking/backpacking
Attending outdoor sports	Walking for pleasure
Camping, all types	Water skiing

The President's Commission report also noted that municipal agencies are providing 39% of the public recreation opportunities.

North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Survey

The North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Survey provided a list of the most popular outdoor recreation activities in the state. The most popular outdoor recreation activities in North Carolina are:

1. Walking for pleasure
2. Driving for pleasure
3. Viewing scenery
4. Beach activities
5. Visiting historical sites
6. Swimming
7. Visiting natural areas
8. Picnicking
9. Attending sporting events
10. Visiting zoos



Gaston County

Gaston County
Board of Commissioners
www.gastongov.com

Parks & Recreation

Board Action

File #: 17-312

Commissioner Brown - Parks and Recreation - To Formally Adopt the 2017 Gaston County Parks and Recreation Master Plan

STAFF CONTACT

Cathy Hart - Parks and Recreation - 704-922-2162

BUDGET IMPACT

No Impact - Adoption of Plan Does Not Commit Funding

BUDGET ORDINANCE IMPACT

No County Funds

BACKGROUND

Parks and Recreation has worked the last several months to develop the 2017 Gaston County Parks and Recreation Master Plan. This plan will serve as a guide to park development and improvements over the next ten years and will be an important tool in the pursuit of grants for Gaston County recreational facilities. To develop the plan, staff and consultants developed an inventory of all public parks and recreation facilities serving Gaston County residents. This inventory includes county, municipal, state, and private facilities. The planning process also included gathering public input through workshops, a county-wide survey, and meetings with community stakeholders. The remaining steps of the process included developing facility standards, conducting a needs assessment, and then devising a plan of action. The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board adopted the 2017 Parks and Recreation Master Plan at their August 21, 2017 meeting.

POLICY IMPACT

N/A

ATTACHMENTS

Parks and Recreation Master Plan

DO NOT TYPE BELOW THIS LINE

I, Donna S. Buff, Clerk to the County Commission, do hereby certify that the above is a true and correct copy of action taken by the Board of Commissioners as follows:

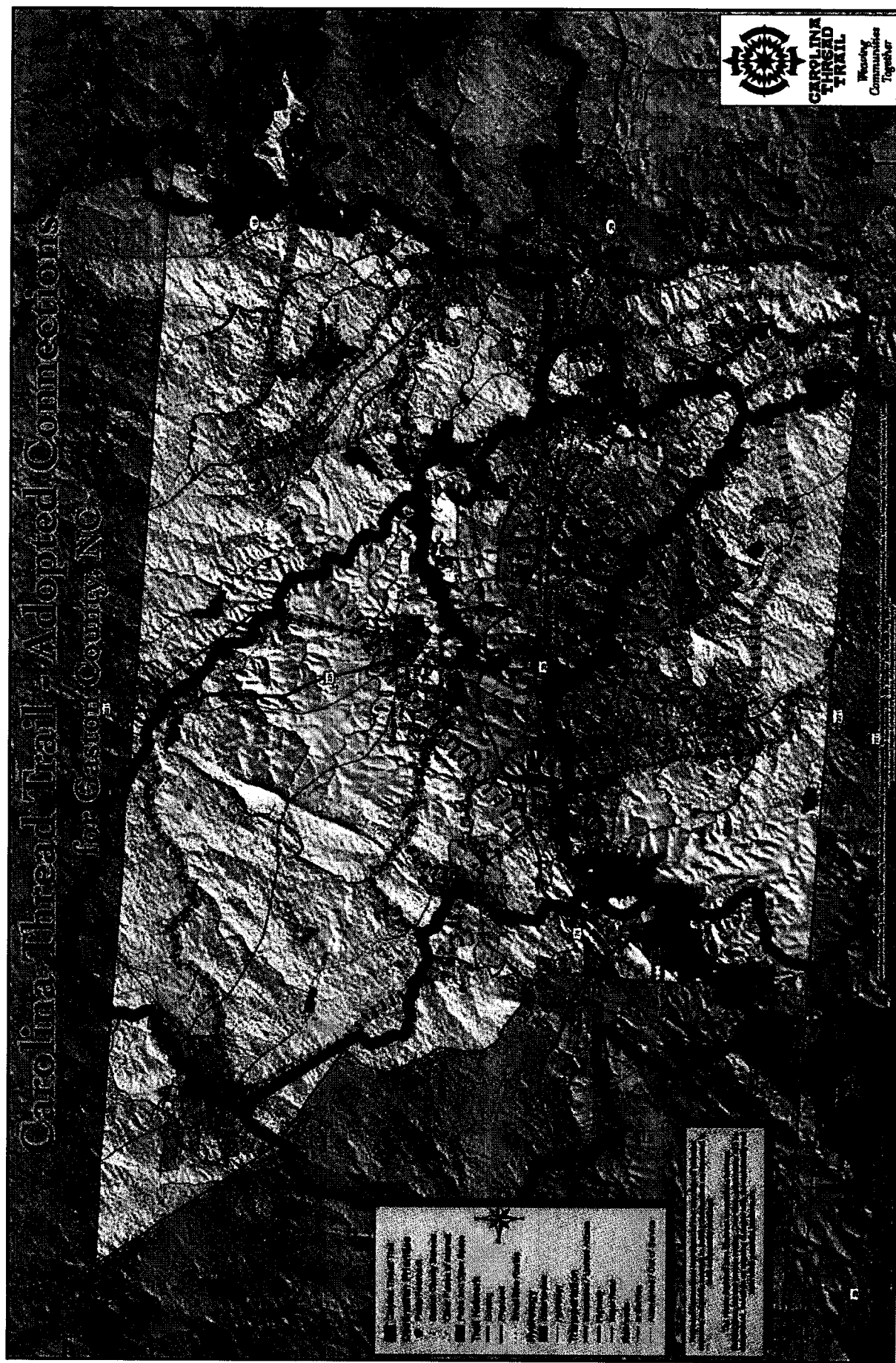
NO.	DATE	M1	M2	Brown	Fraley	Grant	Hovis	Keigher	Philbeck	Worley	Vote
2017-227	09/26/2017	TP	AF	A	A	A	A	AB	A	A	U

DISTRIBUTION:

Laserfiche Users

A=AYE, N=NAY, AB=ABSENT, ABS=ABSTAIN, U=UNANIMOUS

APPENDIX G - CAROLINA THREAD TRAIL MASTER PLAN



APPENDIX H

GASTON COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION

PROPOSED PARK RENOVATIONS

Dallas Park		\$4,275,000
Athletic Field Renovations	\$2,500,000	
ADA Improvements	\$100,000	
Multipurpose Building	\$1,500,000	
Amphitheater Cover	\$175,000	
George Poston Park		\$500,000
Ballfield Improvements	\$250,000	
Parking Lot Improvements	\$100,000	
Expanded Park Amenities	\$150,000	
Bessemer City Park		\$325,000
Restroom Improvements	\$25,000	
ADA Improvements	\$50,000	
New Restroom Facilities	\$175,000	
North Belmont Park		\$650,000
Parking Improvements	\$100,000	
ADA Improvements	\$50,000	
Landscape Improvements	\$25,000	
Splash Pad	\$400,000	
Disc Golf	\$25,000	
Soccer Field Irrigation	\$50,000	
Tryon Park		\$550,000
Restroom Improvements	\$25,000	
Playground Renovation	\$100,000	
Splash Pad	\$400,000	
Disc Golf	\$25,000	
Pearl Henderson Park		\$625,000
Athletic Field Lighting	\$250,000	
ADA Improvements	\$25,000	
Parking Lot Improvements	\$100,000	
New Restroom	\$250,000	
South Fork River Park		\$500,000
ADA Improvements	\$50,000	
Trails	\$100,000	
Parking Lot Improvements	\$100,000	
New Restroom	\$250,000	
Camp Sertoma		\$100,000
Drainage Improvements	\$15,000	
HVAC at Lodge	\$75,000	
Landscape Improvements	\$10,000	
Lewis Brooks Airfield		\$150,000
New Restroom	\$150,000	
Total Park Renovations		\$7,675,000