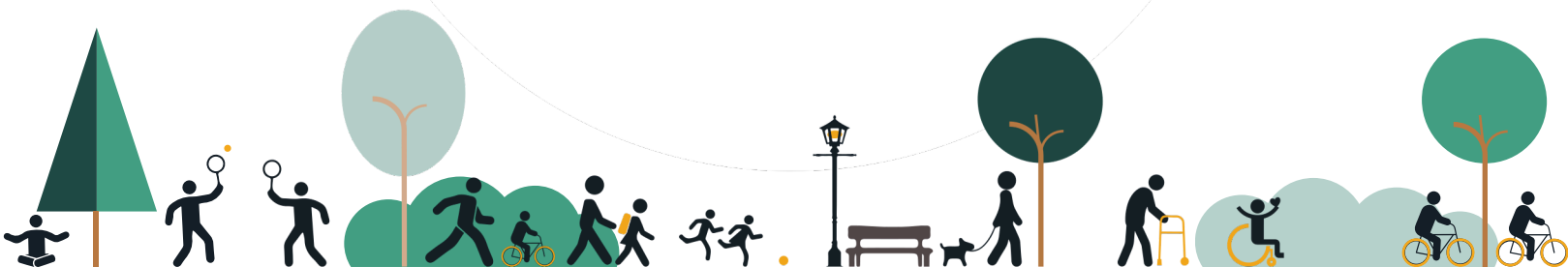




November 2022

**COMPREHENSIVE PARKS,
RECREATION + OPEN SPACE
MASTER PLAN**

Wilmington, North Carolina





ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CITY OF WILMINGTON

Community Services Department

Amy Beatty / Director
Sally Thigpen / Assistant Director
Davina Bell / Recreation Manager, Project Manager

City Council

Mayor Bill Saffo
Mayor Pro-tem Margaret Haynes
Councilman Neil Anderson
Councilman Charlie Rivenbark
Councilman Clifford Barnett
Councilman Kevin Spears
Councilman Luke Waddell

City Manager's Office

Anthony Caudle / City Manager
Thom Moton / Deputy City Manager
Mary Vigue / Deputy City Manager
Chad McEwen / Deputy City Manager

Advisory Board

Terry Smith / Chair
Shirin Jenkins / Co-Chair
Will Bordeaux
Ingrid Corbi
David Eason
Alexa Fritz
Zach Gilbert
Lisa Sullivan
Ron Woodruff

CONSULTANT TEAM

McAdams / Design Lead Rachel Cotter / Project Manager
Iona Thomas / Greenway Planner
Garrett Jenkins / Designer
Jennifer Beedle / Planner
Austin Bowman / Planner

PROS Consulting, Inc.

Leon Younger / President
Philip Parnin / Senior Project Manager

ETC Institute

Jason Morado / Senior Project Manager



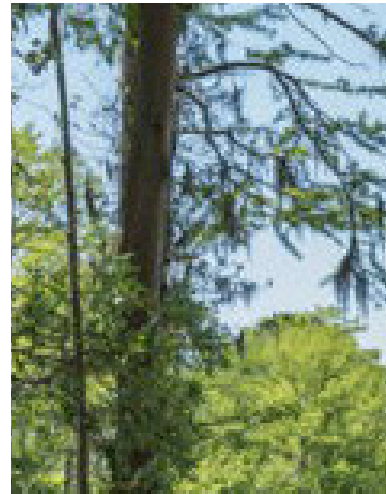
TABLE OF CONTENTS



THE PLAN + THE COMMUNITY

Review of Comprehensive Planning goals, community and planning context and demographics and trends analysis.

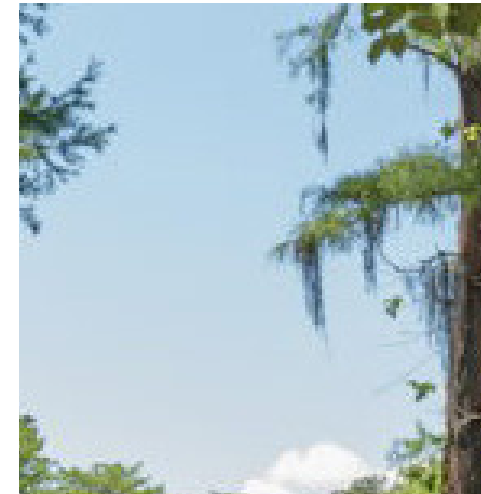
01



PARK + FACILITY + OPEN SPACE

Inventory and assessment of parks and assessment of equity and resilience.

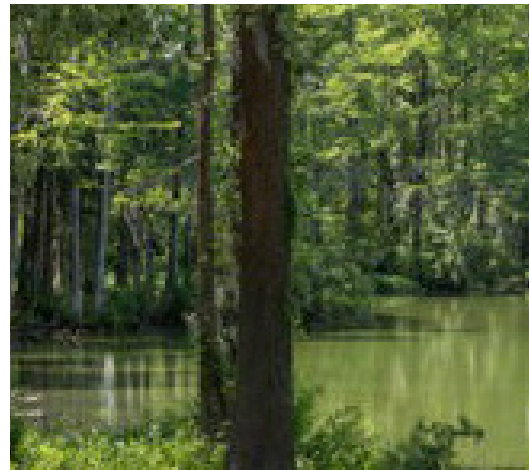
16



PROGRAMMING + OPERATIONS

Review of program offerings and marketing and partnership efforts. Assessment of finances and funding strategies.

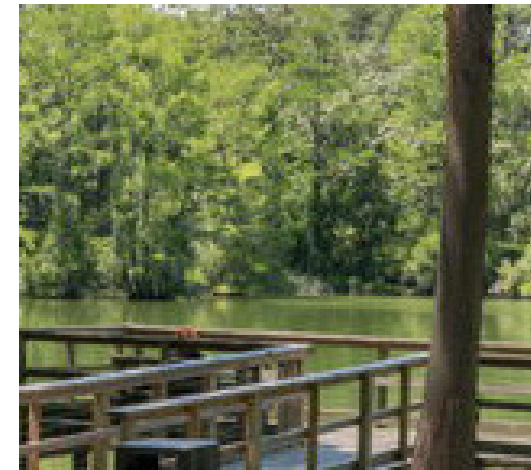
51



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Summary of community engagement efforts, scientific survey and results.

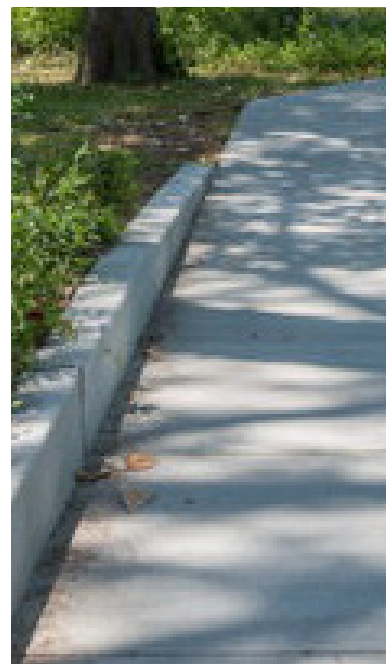
75



GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND ACTION PLAN

Detailed recommendations and action plan.

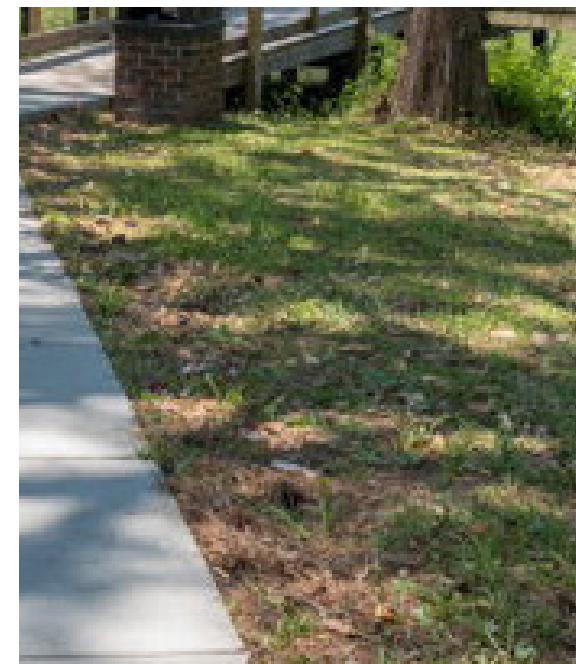
81



GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND ACTION PLAN

Programming and operations best practices, funding sources, park classifications and full program assessment

91





THE PLAN + COMMUNITY

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Introduction
- Comprehensive Planning Purpose
- Comprehensive Planning Process
- Plan Outline
- Community Context
- Planning Context
- Demographics Analysis
- Trends in Parks + Recreation
- Summary of Findings



INTRODUCTION

Wilmington, North Carolina is a lively riverfront city and the county seat of New Hanover County. Wilmington’s downtown and historic districts blend antebellum architecture with modern design and new attractions like a waterfront park and amphitheater, hotels and restaurants – all connected by the nearly two miles of scenic Riverwalk.

The City is also a college town, home to the University of North Carolina at Wilmington and Cape Fear Community College’s Downtown Wilmington Campus. Wilmington’s exciting and unique characteristics make the City a desirable place to live for current residents and those looking to relocate – and a sought after location for visitors. The need for an updated Comprehensive Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master plan (hereinafter referred to as Comprehensive Plan) was borne out of the City’s desire to provide an expansive and high-quality level of recreational services to current and future residents, ensure recreation opportunities are equitable, and understand the role parks play in building climate resilient communities.

This Comprehensive Plan will guide parkland, facility, recreation program, and operations improvements over a 10-year planning horizon. The plan acts as a resource for the public to understand current facility and program offerings, to learn what is planned for the future and provide decision makers with a framework to help guide, validate and prioritize project implementation. The Comprehensive Plan is developed through the lenses of the City of Wilmington, only achieved through multiple levels of community input, specifically examining community values related to parks and recreation.

The Wilmington Parks and Recreation Division provides a variety of parks, facilities and recreation services to the community with committed staff, diverse amenities, an array of athletic, life skills, and arts and culture programming, and community

events. It maintains over 744 acres of parks, a nature center, cultural center, recreation centers, athletic fields and more than 32 miles of trails. The Division prides itself on the uniqueness of Wilmington’s parks. Halyburton and Greenfield Park offer unique experiences unlike any other in Southeastern North Carolina; The Althea Gibson Tennis Complex supports tennis programming and celebrated the history of the great athlete for whom the facility is named; Legion Stadium is regionally recognized for its superior quality and capacity to accommodate large athletic events. Additionally, Wilmington Parks and Recreation is known for its one-of-a-kind facilities like the Stanley Rehder Carnivorous Garden, and Riverfront Park. The City is known for its special events and festivals that draw thousands of attendees at beloved events. Riverfront Park is home to the Azalea Festival, several beer, wine, and culinary events, as well as a host of concerts held throughout the year.

In 2016, the City completed a comprehensive, City-wide plan called Create Wilmington that included a roadmap to guide change, growth and preservation. The City’s Strategic Plan (2017-2020) provides a framework to ensure maintenance of the City’s core and essential services and identifies strategic initiatives for promoting culture and arts, creating open space, preserving, and protecting natural resources and supporting recreational programs. The current 2021- 2031 Comprehensive Plan will complement the larger Create Wilmington document to support future growth, development and asset management while providing a diverse, accessible and equitable palate of parks and recreation facilities and programs for all citizens.

Planning Purpose + Process

Planning provides the information a community requires to make informed, equitable and responsible decisions for meeting diverse community needs. Some of the reasons for pursuing a comprehensive plan for parks and recreation include the following:

 qualify for State and Federal grant funding opportunities	 validate decisions related to parks and recreation	 catalog community needs and wants
 create a 10-year work plan for Division staff	 engage community, staff, stakeholders and decision makers	 generate population based goals for new parkland, trails and more
 benchmark against other agencies to inform Division goals	 identify and resolve gaps and deficiencies	 prioritize goals for a 10 year planning horizon

Specifically, this Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Comprehensive Plan will:

- Define the role that the parks and recreation system will play in the future of the City of Wilmington;
- Accommodate additional demand new residents generate while evolving to meet emerging recreation trends;
- Qualify to access certain state and national funding sources required to improve and expand the system by having a master plan adopted within the past 10 years;

- Guide improvements to parkland and facilities, programming, operations and maintenance, finance and budget;
- Develop a resource for officials and the public alike to understand current park and facility offerings and learn about the future direction of the Division;
- Develop the action and implementation plan to aid the decision makers with a framework to guide, validate and prioritize project implementation.



Comprehensive Planning Process

Comprehensive planning provides a structure for evaluating needs and setting priorities. The planning process captures the status of the Division at a

moment in time, creates a vision for the future and identifies steps to achieve that vision. The plan will guide the Division's decisions and priorities for the next 10 years.

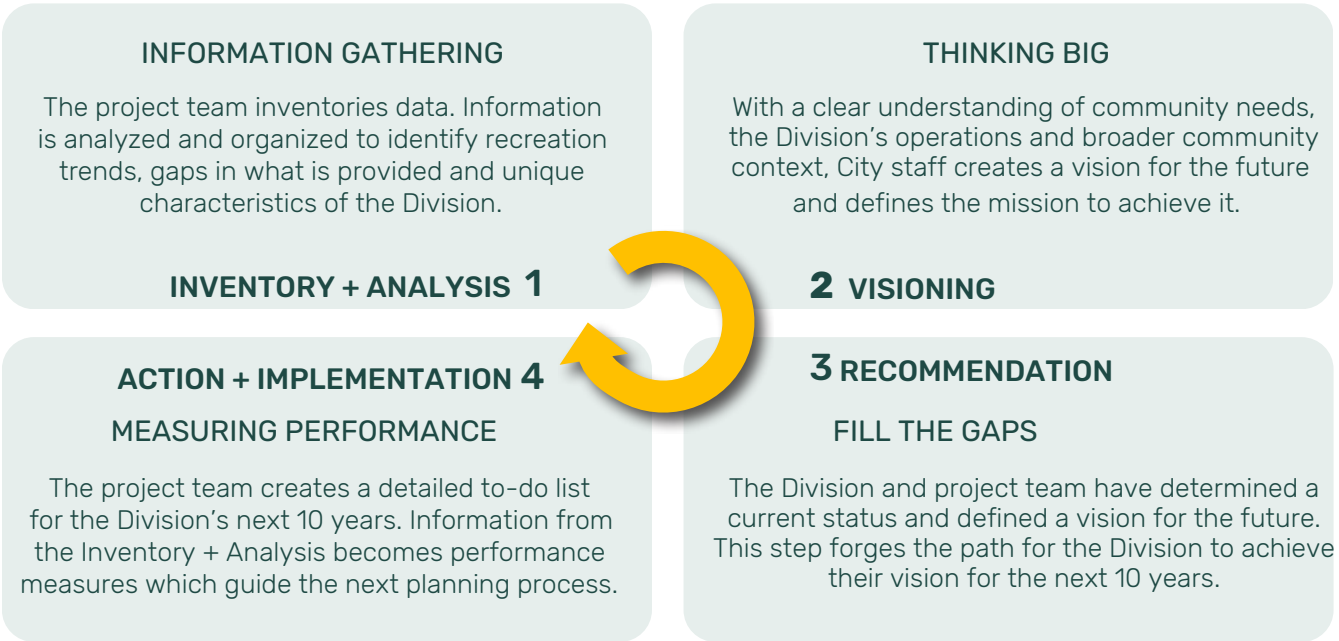


Figure 1: The master planning process.

PLAN OUTLINE

This plan is based on comprehensive community and staff engagement and data-driven recommendations determined through an analytical approach. From the initial inventory and analysis through the recommendations and action and implementation plan, the team engaged City of Wilmington residents, Wilmington Parks and Recreation staff, and stakeholders within the community. The current plan acknowledges local, regional and national recreation needs and trends, demographic shifts and agency performance. The project team observed current facilities and programs to evaluate the overall operational successes and challenges of the Division and its mission. Finally, the project team alongside Division staff developed a set of guiding principles that prioritize recommendations to improve recreational

offerings and meet growing expectations. The City of Wilmington 2021-2031 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Comprehensive Plan includes the following components:

THE PLAN AND THE COMMUNITY

The project team reviewed several current and relevant City of Wilmington planning documents to understand the context of such efforts, conclusions drawn, and recommendations for the future. The City's 5-year strategic plan and its 2016 Create Wilmington Comprehensive plan were reviewed to gain an understanding of either recommended or currently implemented strategies guiding growth and development of the City. A goal of this plan is to ensure all recommendations will be seamlessly integrated with other City plans, where appropriate.

The project team completed a demographic and trends analysis to glean a complete accurate understanding of Wilmington’s community tapestry, in terms of who the people are and how they engage with parks and recreation programs. This analysis considers national and local recreation trends cross-referenced with the City’s demographic data and national publications to draw conclusions about current and future recreation trends and participation levels.

Parks, Facilities and Open Space

This chapter takes a full account of the existing parks, recreation and open space system; analyzes the City’s efforts to provide equitable access to parks and facilities; examines the capacity of Wilmington’s park system to play a role in the City’s climate resiliency strategy; and, assesses current and future level of service (LOS). Level of service evaluates current and future needs for park acreage, trail mileage, and operational standards compared to national standards and best practices.

Operations

The project team engaged in a meaningful analysis of the Wilmington Parks and Recreation Division’s recreation programming, operations and maintenance, and finance and budget. The program assessment helps identify strengths, challenges and opportunities regarding recreational programming. The operations, maintenance and financial assessments observe standards currently in place and develop recommendations based on best practices.

Community Engagement

The project team performed a robust public engagement process which gathered input through staff, stakeholder groups, focus groups and community meetings. The process was designed to be transparent, equitable and engage the widest range of residents possible. The engagement plan consisted of the following elements:

- › One public open house taking place at strategically identified locations across the City
- › Two public meetings
- › Two staff meetings
- › Three Focus Group Meetings
- › Two Parks and Recreation Advisory Board meetings
- › Scientific Survey

Vision and Guiding Principles

Visioning allows staff to develop a future direction for the Division and each of its component parts. Guiding principles are developed based on community engagement and information gathered through research and inventory and analysis process. Each of this plan’s recommendations and action items are in service to support the guiding principle.

Recommendations and Action + Implementation Plan

The recommendations and prioritized implementation plan provide a framework to guide park, facility, open space, programming, and operational improvements for the future. It is structured to guide decision making for Division policy. Each recommendation is further prioritized as short term (1-5 years), mid-term (5-10 years), long-term (10+ years), or ongoing. Criteria for recommendation prioritization vary based on the context and criteria that may range from land availability to financial implications but are firmly rooted in community preferences.



COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Historic Context The City of Wilmington is a community with more than 280 years of history. Before being chartered as the town of Wilmington in 1739, the location was known in various iterations as New Carthage, New Liverpool, New Town, and Newton. The choice of the name “Wilmington” was adopted in reverence to the Earl of Wilmington, Spencer Compton, because of his role as an advisor to, who at the time, was the contemporary governor of North Carolina.

Over the course of a generation, the City of Wilmington became central to shipbuilding and related trades including lumber and naval stores. By the mid-19th century Wilmington was North Carolina’s largest city; an ascendancy due to the City’s location at the terminus of the Wilmington-Weldon railroad, and its position as a major port. It was during this time that improvements were made to the port’s supporting infrastructure while widespread adoption of steamship use was occurring in tandem.

During the Civil War, the port was the major base for Confederate brigades and smuggling blockade runners carrying supplies. This continued until its capture by Union troops in 1865. With the end of the Civil War, the port and railroad industries flourished, bringing to the City vast municipal improvements. Further, it was at this time, during Reconstruction that formerly enslaved African Americans experienced upward mobility. This would not last, however, as the 1898 overthrow of the legally elected biracial government halted further progress and Wilmington’s African American population dwindled. In memory of the event, the City created the 1898 Memorial Park in Wilmington commemorating the coup d’etat with six, 16-foot tall bronze paddles symbolizing the role of water in the spiritual belief system of people from the African continent .

The City of Wilmington was a critical shipbuilding center in the 20th century. In just over a span of five years, the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company of Wilmington constructed nearly 250 ships, fortifying the United States and the Allied Forces during

World War II, and strengthening the economy of Wilmington and surrounding areas. The retired USS North Carolina is permanently located in the Port of Wilmington, representing its significance to the war effort and the impact the creation of it and its sister ships had on the City of Wilmington. In 2020, Wilmington became the first city in the country to be designated an “American World War II Heritage City” for its efforts to preserve WWII heritage, restoration of wartime facilities, and recognition of veterans. Today, Wilmington serves as an economic, cultural, and services hub for southeastern North Carolina. The historic attractions, mild climate, water related activities, and business opportunities have made the region an attractive place to live and a destination for thousands of tourists visiting each year.



Regional Context

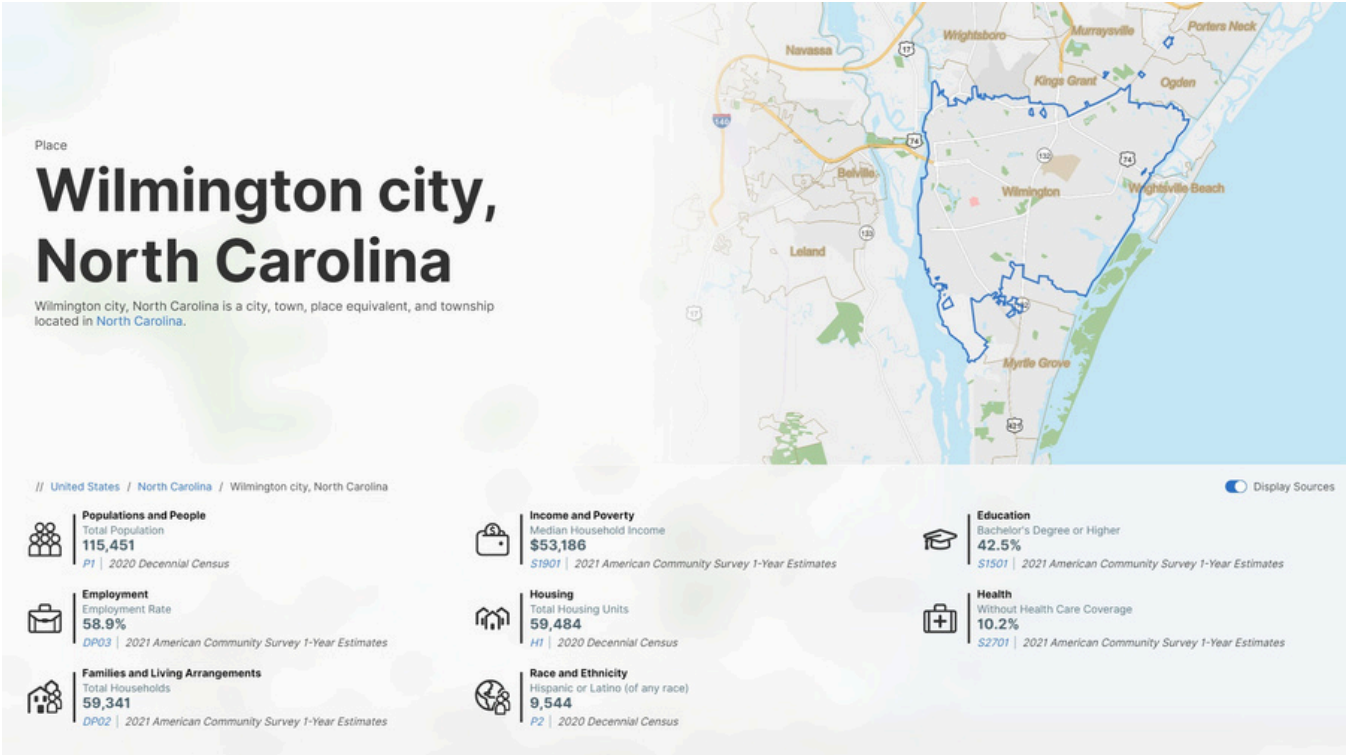


Figure 2: Wilmington Community Profile. American Community Survey Data, 2022.

Regional Context

The City of Wilmington’s location in the context of its proximity to cities like Raleigh, NC and Myrtle Beach, SC and connectivity to the greater region via Highway 40 have contributed significantly to the City’s growth in the last decade. Many new residential developments have been permitted to accommodate the influx of new residents wanting to make Wilmington home. In addition, Wilmington’s

investment in downtown business development has sparked a wave of new local businesses coming to the City. In 2015, Wilmington’s Riverwalk was recognized by USA Today as the number one riverwalk in the country. Popular attractions include Arlie Gardens, Battleship North Carolina, the River Walk, the North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher, Riverfront Park, and Live Oak Bank Pavilion.

Natural Resources

Wilmington is located at the juncture of two major watersheds, the Cape Fear River and the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. All surface waters in Wilmington drain to one of these two water bodies and are divided into two groups: tidal creeks and Cape Fear River tributaries. The eastern portions of Wilmington’s surface waters consist of tidal creeks and drain into the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. The western portion of Wilmington’s surface waters are comprised of the Cape Fear River tributaries and drain into the Cape Fear River.

Significant natural heritage areas are sites of special biodiversity significance. This significance may be from the presence of rare species, unique natural communities, important animal assemblages, or other

important ecological features. Wilmington includes significant natural heritage areas such as Halyburton Nature Preserve, Greenfield Lake, and the UNCW Longleaf Pine Forest. The topography of Wilmington is relatively flat with elevations at 38 to 40 feet above sea level or less. Sandy soils are typically covered with loblolly and long leaf pines as well as a variety of hardwood trees.

Natural resources such as nearby beaches and the historic river front area, and the USS North Carolina Battleship Memorial are some of Wilmington’s attractions that are made possible by natural resources. A variety of special events held year-round, such as the Azalea Festival and Riverfest, are possible due to the City’s natural resources.



PLANNING CONTEXT

City-wide areas of growth, current planning documents and development ordinances all form the planning context in which this plan was developed. This Comprehensive Plan is responsive to the existing policies, City-wide planning efforts and regional growth patterns that influence the City of Wilmington now and in the future.

Growth Factors The City’s Create Wilmington Comprehensive Plan of 2016 identifies growth factors describing how the City has evolved over time. The overall health of the community is impacted, in part, by how well the City is designed and how well it functions. The City identified health factors attributed to growing communities such as local transportation system, parks and recreational opportunities, access to healthcare facilities, and access to healthy foods. In 2021, City Council created a process to review and update the Land Development Code. The amendment modifies open space regulations for multifamily and some single-family development types currently requiring open space. Updates to the Land Development Code support the City’s efforts to guide orderly growth and development.

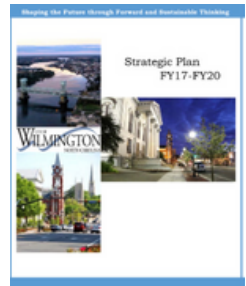
The Composite Growth Strategies Map, described in the 2016 Create Wilmington Comprehensive Plan, provides a geographic framework for how the City should grow and change. The map layers are organized into five groups: Mixed-use Centers, Areas of Opportunity, Corridors & Complete Streets, Transit that Works, and Open Spaces & Green Connections. Within Open Spaces & Green Connections, pedestrian and bicycle mobility is expressed in the map as being at the forefront of creating a livable city. Residents expressed great interest in being able to walk and bike comfortably and safely, including incorporating these modes into daily needs and social activities. This may include going to the park, exercising, shopping, going out for the evening, and commuting to work. A robust network of green connections and open spaces is proposed throughout the City.

Related Planning Documents

The following represents a summary of adopted planning documents that guide growth and development throughout City.



City of Wilmington’s 2017-2020 Strategic Plan



The Strategic Plan is intended to provide a framework for positive change in the City. The plan’s philosophy ensures maintenance of the City’s core and essential services and identifies strategic initiatives among them included promoting culture, arts and public spaces, providing unique, creative open space, parks and community facilities integrated with arts and cultural activities for all; protecting and preserving natural resources with quality design for the built environment; and marketing and supporting athletic programs. The planning team will be deliberate in aligning the 2022 Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan with these initiatives as related to parks and recreation.

Create Wilmington Comprehensive Plan, May 1, 2016



The Create Wilmington Comprehensive Plan is a series of five documents that when combined help Wilmington prioritize appropriate change, growth and preservation. The five components are: Growth Factors Report, Foundations Report, Policies, Growth Strategies Maps, and Growth Strategies Report. All five pieces work together to allow Wilmington to realize appropriate change, growth, and preservation. Many of the visions are associated with parks and recreation. For instance, the plan helps identify and recommend physical improvements such as bicycle paths, parks and sidewalks. The 2022 Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan will incorporate some of the major themes from this plan since it revealed that citizens want a diverse and inclusive

community full of family-friendly, vibrant and creative environments; a welcoming community that includes arts and culture, activities for youth, families and seniors; diverse modes of transportation needed for an inclusive, connected community where regional partnerships can link greenways and other amenities; balancing the need for open space and a well-designed built environment; creating unique places and captivating spaces including parks, that enhance the character of the community and are functional and aesthetically appropriate and enrich the lives of visitors and residents; and, managing natural habitats such as parks, water and open spaces, to protect water quality and maintain environmental sustainability.

City of Wilmington 2010 – 2015 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan

The purpose of the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan is to assess the current state of affairs regarding the provision of community parks, recreation and open space services, stimulate an open public discussion of future needs for community parks, recreation and open space programs, services, areas and facilities, and establish a plan of action for the future growth and development of community parks, recreation and open space services. Some of the focus areas mentioned include land acquisition, area and facility development, program and service development, policy and procedure considerations, and personnel considerations. The plan provides the City and the Parks and Recreation Division a viable blueprint and plan of action to guide the future orderly growth and development of the community’s parks and recreation system

Related Codes + Ordinances

Well written policy related to open space dedication, or the development of recreation facilities has the potential to influence the level of service and recreational opportunities available to City residents. The City’s Unified Development Ordinance shares open space requirements for single family and multi-family residential, mixed use, commercial and industrial districts. Over the years, open space standards of the City have been found to be inconsistent. As a result, City Council created a process to review and update the Land Development Code. During this process, more than 4,000 residents expressed their desires to make the City more walkable and bike friendly, develop and elevate parks, public spaces, and the services and recreational offerings available to the community. Consequently, the City of Wilmington set out to revise and update its open space regulations to make them more uniformly located within the code, as well as more uniformly applied in the community. In reviewing the proposed language from their Draft LDC (as presented at the June 17th work session), they largely achieved this goal. Open Space standards have been condensed and made clearer for the development community.

Wilmington’s proposed open space standards are fairly typical in many respects. The amount of open space dedication for Cluster Subdivisions (40%) and Residential Subdivisions (10%) are in line with many jurisdictions. The change from a per-unit open space dedication requirement to a flat 10 percent of the site will serve to disincentivize lower density subdivisions, while incentivizing higher density subdivisions (excluding multi-family).

The reduction in open space dedication for multifamily development (from 35% to 20%) brings their standards more in line with other jurisdictions. Even 20 percent open space dedication in a downtown urban setting could be an obstacle for some development, but the fee in lieu provision provides a potential avenue for relief in this scenario. The fact that the Commercial District Mixed Use (CDMU) open space standard is proposed to be the same as the multi-family dedication requirement could be seen as counterintuitive. Since fully commercial sites require no open space dedication and multi-family sites require 20 percent open space dedication, it would make some sense for a commercial mixed use site’s open space dedication to fall somewhere between those two figures, especially since mixed use sites are often where more density and intensity is desired.



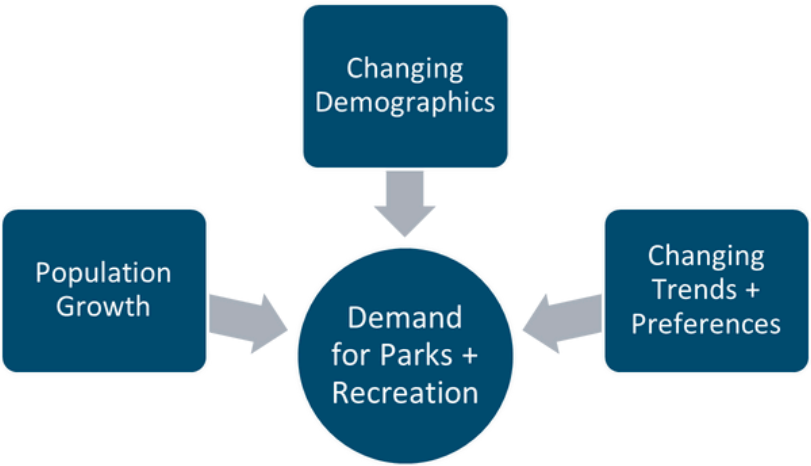
DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

An accurate understanding of a jurisdiction’s demographics is an essential foundation for creating an effective long-range plan. Demographic undercurrents drive many of this plan’s goals and objectives, providing a roadmap to keep Wilmington’s parks and recreation offerings current, relevant, equitable and sustainable. Alongside population growth as a variable, demographic analysis provides insight into changing proportional allocations of age, race and income. As these proportions shift, for example from younger to older, so do the types of recreational facilities and programs needed to meet demand. Concurrently, national trends in recreational preferences impact local demand for new activities and programs. Even when other demographic factors remain constant, changing preferences influence and alter a population’s demand for parks and recreation programs and facilities.

Included here is an assessment of the City of Wilmington’s current demographic tapestry, population growth projections, and demographic forecast for the 10-year planning horizon. The assessment also includes market research into the recreational habits of Wilmington’s current residents to illustrate demand for recreational activities. Combined, these two sets of data inform how the City of Wilmington’s needs for parkland and recreation services are understood now and through the 10-year planning horizon.

Methodology

Demographic analysis uses a variety of data, methods and assumptions to illustrate the varietal characteristics of an area and project potential changes into the future. This analysis draws from three data sources for the demographic analysis: the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS), the City of Wilmington, and ESRI. The ACS is a nationwide survey designed to provide communities with reliable and timely social, economic, housing, and demographic data every year. Data collected in the ACS provides estimates on a broad range of population, housing unit, and household characteristics for states, counties, cities, school districts, congressional districts, census tracts, block groups, and many other geographic areas. The ACS has an annual sample size of about 3.5 million addresses, with survey information collected nearly every day of the year. Data are pooled across a calendar year to produce estimates for that year. As a result, ACS estimates reflect data that have been collected over a period of time rather than for a single point in time as in the decennial census, which is conducted every 10 years and provides population counts as of April 1 of the census year. This plan uses estimated average annual growth rates and projected population change to describe the demographic composition of Wilmington’s population



Factors influencing changing demands for parks and recreation resources.

Elements of this chapter including population proportions are also sourced from ESRI, an international supplier of geographic information system software, web GIS and geodatabase management. ESRI uses data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the Internal Revenue Service and other high-quality local sources having developed methods specially tailored to estimating demographic characteristics.

Lastly, population data was gleaned from the City’s Create Wilmington Comprehensive Plan – Growth Factors Report. The 2010 Decennial Census was used to provide a snapshot of the City’s demographics at the time the plan was created in 2016. The plan asserts the City’s population will have increased by 56% between 2010 and 2040.



Estimates + Projections

Estimates provide a summary of an area’s current population or demographic characteristics, while projections are a proposed scenario for a future population, based on certain assumptions such as a consistent growth rate, or expected increase in migration.

Average annual growth is a measure for determining the rate of growth per year over a given period. The average annual growth rate is useful for showing the rate at which population growth is occurring per year even when population estimate data available spans a multiple year period. An indication of past

growth can be used to form the basis for projecting population for a future year. The City’s Planning and Development Department currently estimates that the City is growing at a rate of 0.9 percent population increase per year.

Projections are based on an estimate of the population at a given point in time and project a potential future scenario based on certain assumptions. ESRI’s analysis estimates 2021 data and makes a projection for 2026, calculating the average annual growth rate for each demographic segment over a period of five years. The project team then used that rate to project population growth to 2031. The population projections outlined will become the basis for many of this plan’s recommendations, most prominently the level of service analysis, which establishes standards for facility space, park acreage, sports fields and amenities needed within the next 10 years.

Key anticipatory findings from the overall demographic analysis include:

- ▶ The City will experience considerable population growth within the next 10 years.
- ▶ The City’s racial tapestry will remain largely unchanged.
- ▶ Adults aged 55+ will comprise half of Wilmington’s population growth by 2031, yet their percent of the total population will effectively remain the same.
- ▶ In recent years, the largest portion of people relocating in Wilmington came from other counties in North Carolina.

Population Growth

According to the 2020 Census, Wilmington’s population has increased by 8.43% since the most recent census, from 106,476 in 2010 to 115,451 in 2020. The City is currently growing at a rate of 0.9% annually, on pace with growth rates of North Carolina (1%) and the United States (0.7%). Wilmington is projected to continue to grow at the same percent annually during the next 10 years. The American Community Survey estimated the City can expect to grow by an average of 1,087 residents annually through 2026. This expected growth rate will expand the City’s population from an estimated 116,490 residents in 2021 to a projected 127,409 residents in 2031.

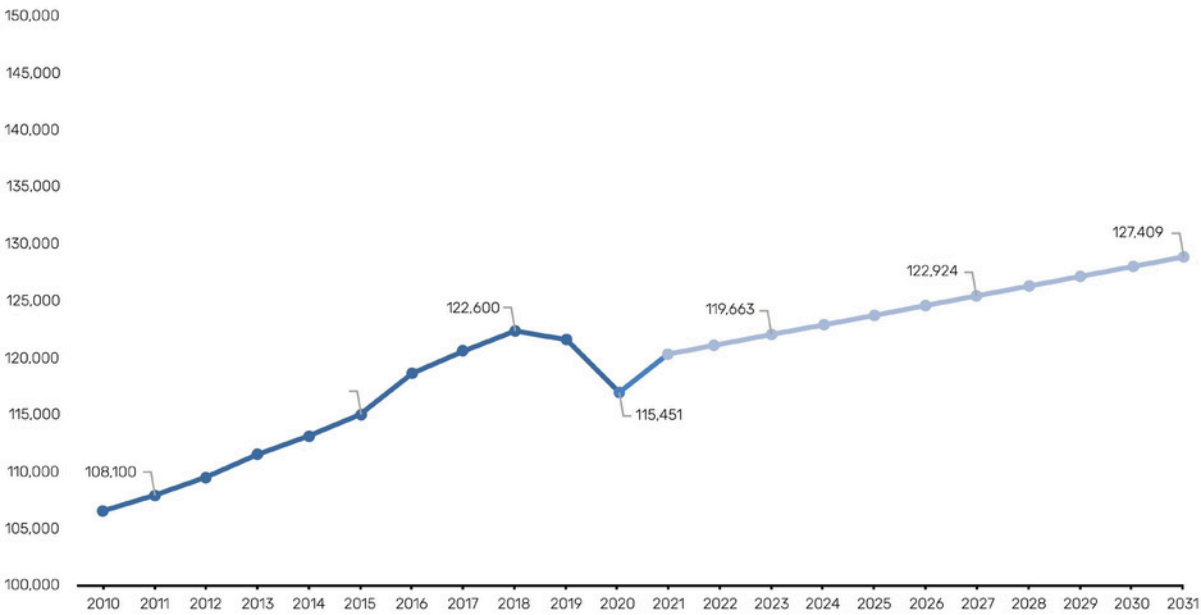


Figure 3: Prior and projected population growth for the City of Wilmington from 2010 to 2031.

City of Wilmington	North Carolina	United States
0.9%	1%	0.7%

Age Segment Currently, the most populous age cohort in the City of Wilmington is age 25-54 (38%), followed by age 55+ (30%). These proportions, as well as the proportion of the population age 15-24, and age 0-14 will effectively remain the same through the year 2031. This indicates while the population expands at a moderate rate, the proportional spread of age segments will remain stable. Under these assumptions, the 25-54 age cohort will remain the largest proportion of the

population, and the 55+ cohort will remain the second largest. Yet, it is important to keep in mind while the 55+ population percentage in Wilmington is projected to remain stable, the number of individuals in this age segment is projected to grow by over 9,000 by 2031. This is indicative of the national trend of a graying nation. The U.S. Census projects that by 2034, older adults are expected to outnumber children for the first time in U.S. history.

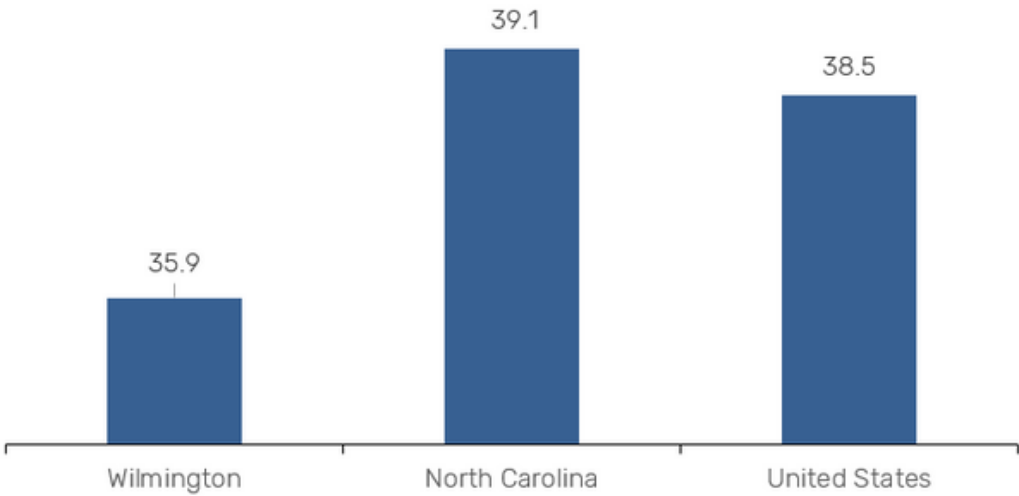


Figure 4: City, state, and national median age.

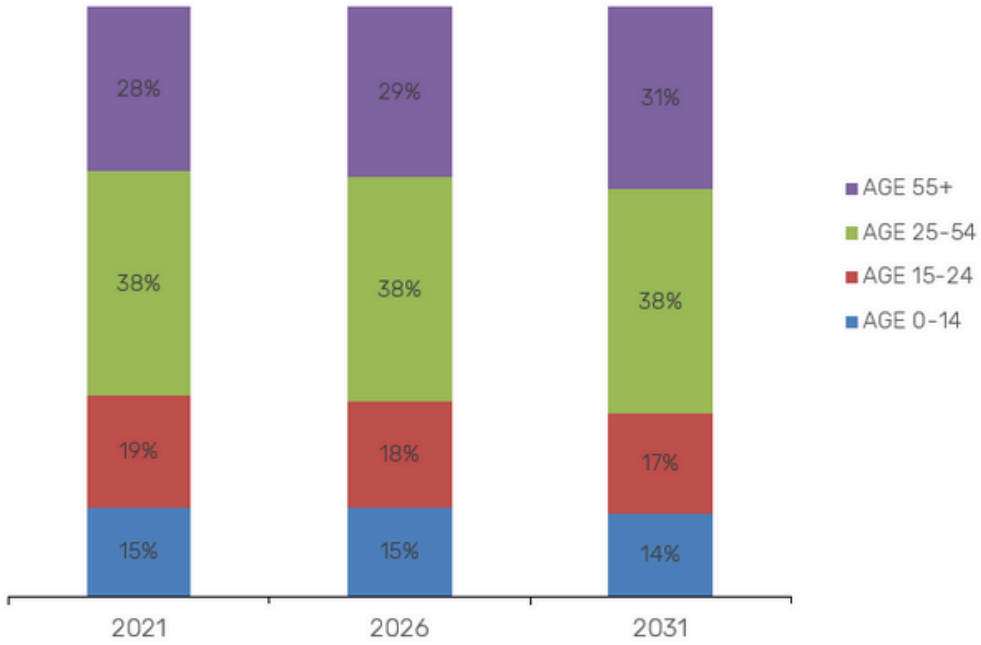


Figure 5: Age segmentation of population estimates for 2021, 2026 and 2031.

Trends in Recreation for Adults

Although adult sport leagues have remained popular for decades, the ultra-traditional ones like softball, basketball, and bowling are beginning to give way to what are being called ‘retro-rec’ activities like kickball, spikeball, cornhole, futsal, etc. Further, ‘adult recess’ is soaring in popularity. Outside Magazine chronicled an organization in San Francisco who saw its “Play Recess” participant numbers jump from about 150, to over 1,000 per season in just the past three years. The Wall Street Journal published an article in 2019 titled *Adult Recess’ Is Booming, Because Being a Grown-Up Is Hard* – pointing out public recreation agencies’ (including Greensboro, NC) concerted efforts and marked successes in providing adult fun. Play can be less obvious to define outside of when it is applied to children but, Gary Chick, a play theory scholar from Penn State says, “play is pretty much in your head. So if I think, I’m playing, then I am...If it feels like play to us, then why not? It is play.” This means parks and recreation agencies should not have to go to great financial or staffing lengths to offer activities to its adult clientele.

Cause-related programming is another trend among adult leisure seekers. Ann Beck, marketing and communications manager for Mansfield Texas Parks and Recreation was quoted in NRPA’s 2020 Top Trends report where she described an “insanely popular program, where a local animal shelter sponsors a 5K run and walk that pairs shelter dogs with program participants. The programs have raised revenue, expanded audiences for both the shelter and the recreation programs, and have been a huge hit, making people feel like they are making a difference.”



Speaking of animals, dog parks are the fastest growing type of park in the U.S., according to NRPA. The Association’s 2018 survey discovered that 91 percent of Americans believe dog parks provide benefits to their communities, and this was especially true among millennials. Even further, yoga with a variety of animals is a trending topic, and nationwide some park and recreation agencies are now sponsoring highly popular goat yoga classes.

According to AZ Big Media, “Meows, barks and bleats have been common at yoga sessions in recent years” largely fueled by Millennials and Gen Z.

Trends in Recreation for Active Older Adults

As mentioned previously, older adults will outnumber children in just the next 10 years. Based on public health evidence, the Census projects these older adults will be healthier and more affluent than any elderly generation before them. These factors point toward the coming need to understand the recreational desires of this critical age segment. The International Council on Active Aging (ICCAA) asserts, “today, recreational offerings should be much more active, such as fitness programs, 50-plus clubs that include adventure travel and sports.” ICCAA stresses “the biggest shift has been in the attitude of what people are capable of doing and the diversity of programs and services being offered to meet this shift.” Parks and recreation agencies should be ready to take up this call to action and plan to cater toward what are sometimes called ‘active agers.’

In terms of active recreation, older adults are more physically fit and willing to engage in non-traditional exercise than older generations past. As a result, parks agencies are offering more adventure sports to their active adult clientele. Zumba Gold, is designed to be a low-intensity workout, specifically for older adults. Not to mention, the Granny Basketball League. The league consists of more than 450 players on 40 teams across nine states – primarily in the Midwest – who take part in a program for women ages 50 and older who are interested in playing “a gentle game for women of a certain age.” Played true to traditional 1920s-era basketball rules, philosophy and culture, the Granny Basketball League was created by older players to ensure their own safety while still fostering a competitive, team-based setting. Another trend to note is older adults’ interest in volunteer, or cause based recreation. Although most opportunities to learn about ways to care for the environment are geared only toward youth, older adults are living more active lives and, in turn, are participating in community service projects and educational events.

All-Ages Programming		
		
Caregiver and Child Events Events and classes where parents or caregivers and children participate together. Examples include caregiver-child dances, exercise classes, music or art lessons and more.	Music and Movies in the Park Music and movie series integrate into hectic family schedules and become highly anticipated community-wide gatherings.	Adult and Senior Programming Many parks and recreation Divisions have expanded to provide adult and senior fitness, athletic and enrichment programming.
Passive Recreation		
		
Greenways Paved trails used for recreation or travel. Greenways provide locations for riding bikes and walking or jogging away from vehicle traffic, often in shaded settings.	Outdoor exercise equipment Equipment includes instructions for workout use. People use equipment individually or as part of a program.	Open Spaces Traditional park lawns and open spaces provide space for picnics, pickup sports games.

Race + Ethnicity
Estimates show that in 2021 Wilmington residents identifying as White comprises 74.5 % of the population. This proportion is projected to remain largely unchanged over the next 10 years. The same pattern holds true for those identifying as Native American, Pacific Islander, and Other Race. The percent of the population identifying as Asian is projected to increase by one half of one percent. The category estimated to have the largest flux in proportion is African American/Black, with a projected decrease of 1.6 percent between 2021 and 2031. The category with the second largest shift in its proportion is Two or More Races, with a projected increase of one percent between 2021 and 2031. This is in-line with the demographic changes being observed nationwide, as the percent of the United States population identifying as Two or More Races is projected to increase by 1.2% over the next 10 years, and is expected to double by the year 2060.

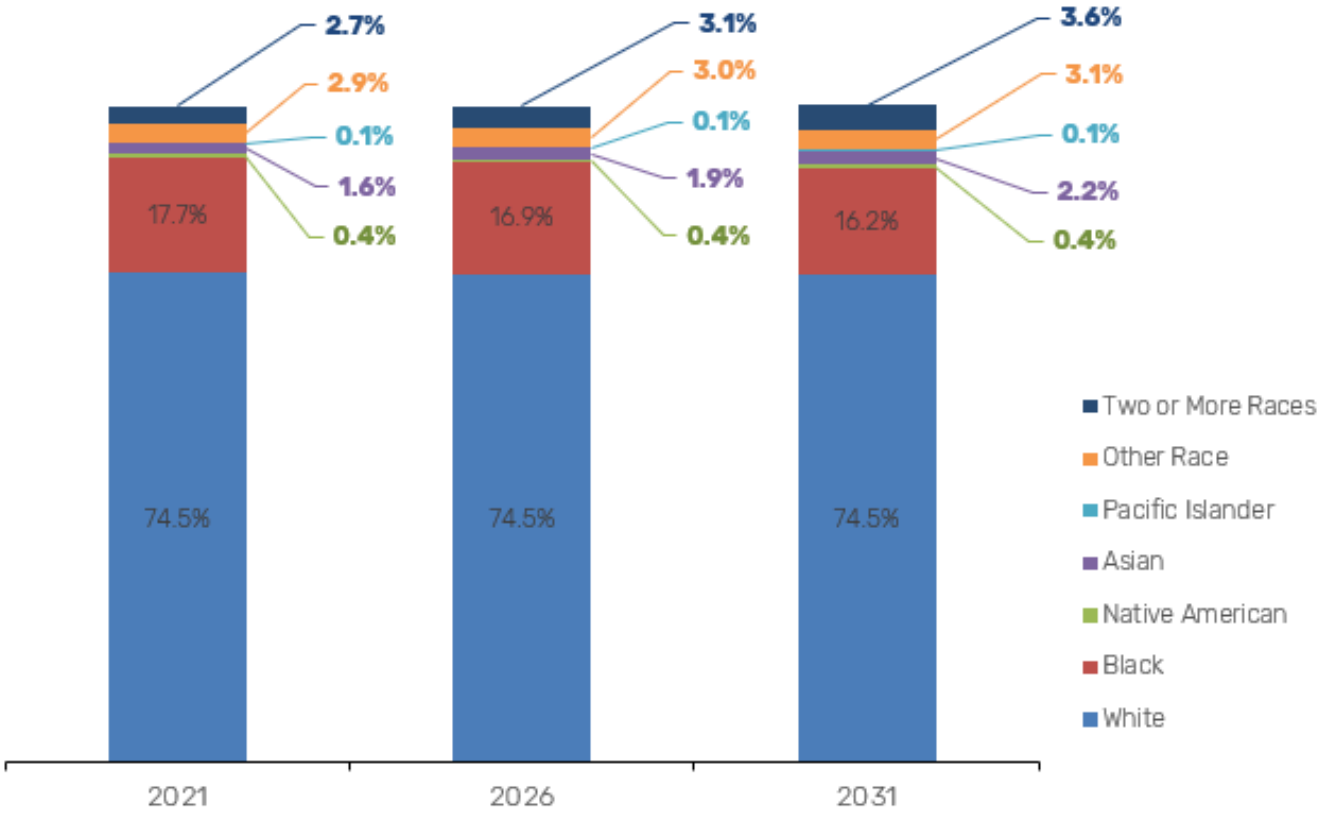
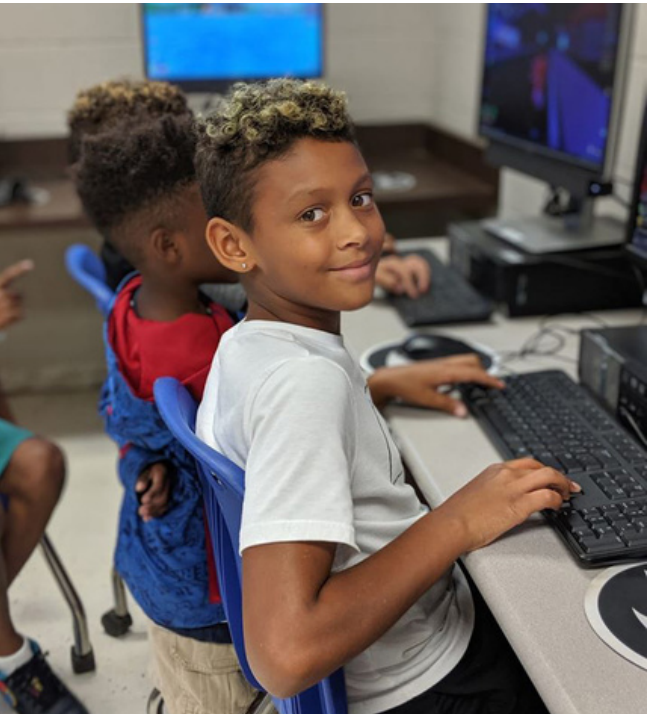


Figure 6: Racial segmentation of population estimates for 2021, 2026 and 2031.

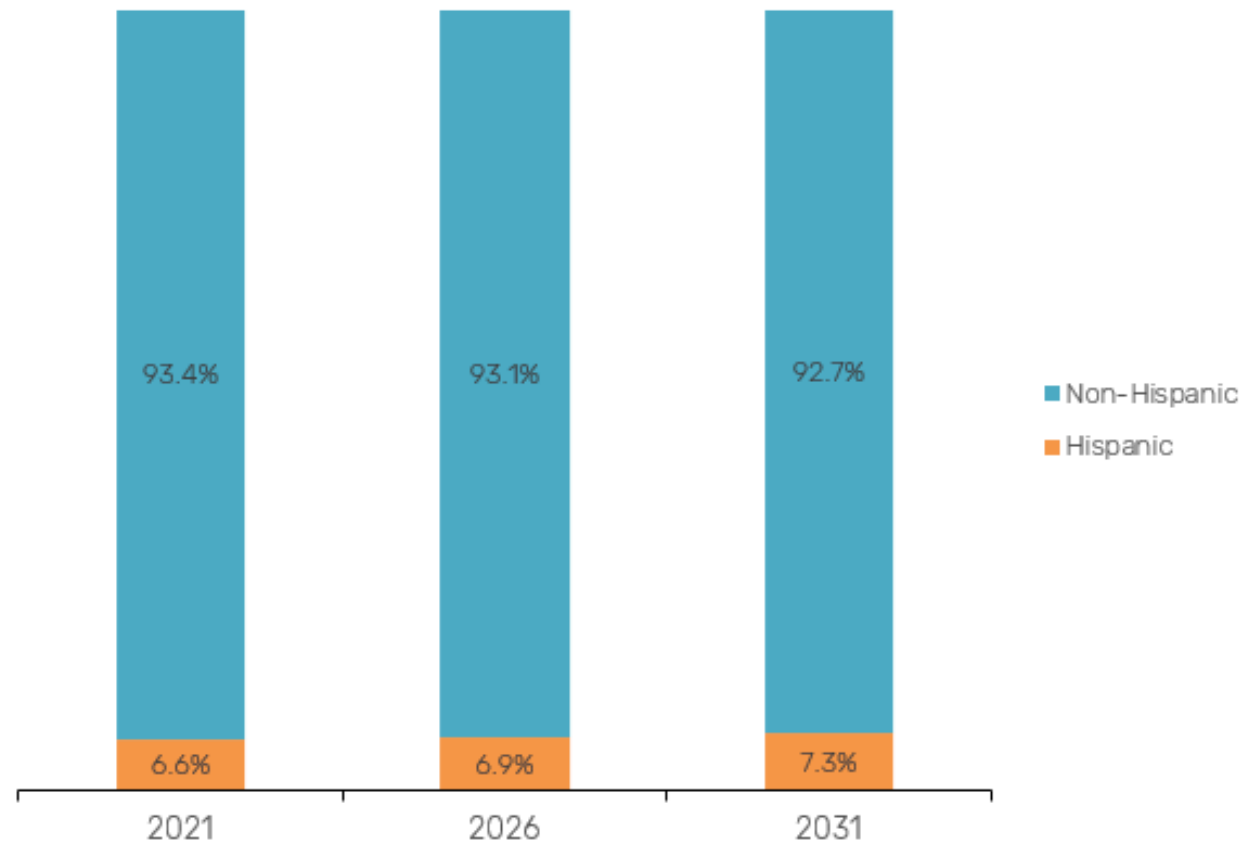


Figure 7: Population segment identifying as Hispanic or Non-Hispanics in 2021, 2026 and 2031

Trends in achieving racial equity

Many communities are recognizing intentions to equitably provide parks and recreation services to all community members have not resulted in equally positive outcomes for all community members, especially communities of color. Special attention is required to rectify historic disparities between resources available in white communities and communities of color. The following recreation trends indicate practices for improving outcomes for all community members by applying a racial equity lens.

- Normalizing conversations or changing the narrative about race is the only way to develop effective strategies for racial equity. One of the biggest challenges is the general discomfort many people experience in talking about race. This is a critical hurdle to overcome. Avoiding conversations about race means there is a greater likelihood organizations will not develop appropriate strategies to address institutional and structural racism.

The National Recreation and Parks Association acknowledges parks and recreation providers can be at the forefront of addressing racial equity due to their unique role as a public service provider of many quality-of-life programs and amenities. The NRPA recommends the following considerations for addressing racial equity in parks and recreation:

- Behavior drives attitude. Sometimes we think attitude drives behavior – we want people to “understand” racism and expect behavioral changes will follow. The opposite is true: Changing behavior changes understanding. Giving employees a common understanding of racial equity terminology and tools to use to do their jobs differently leads to an increased understanding of institutional and structural racism. In August of 2020 the Wilmington City Council unanimously adopted the Rise Together Initiative to ensure Wilmington is a community where every citizen is valued and shares in the same opportunities for prosperity and quality of life regardless of color, class, or creed. The initiative allows the City to 1) better understand ongoing challenges, 2) reflect on the progress the city has made, 3) identify unfinished work, and 4) develop a constructive response that involves the entire community from local government to the non-profit sector and business community.

- Equity is a process. It takes continual learning and practice to embed racial equity into an organization. Equity cannot be relegated to a checkbox or an additional step to an existing process. Instead, it is a shift in the way agencies do business, and the way people feel when they participate in programs.

Household Income According to the American Community Survey, in 2019, Wilmington households earned an average of \$47,580. In 2021, 38% of households have an annual income less than \$34,999 while approximately six percent of the population has an annual income of more than \$200,000. The City of Wilmington’s poverty rate is 22.2% as estimated by the ACS, down from 26.9% in 2010. Further, it is projected the least wealthy Wilmington households will experience some upward financial mobility, as those earning less than \$34,999 will drop by five percent by the year 2031.

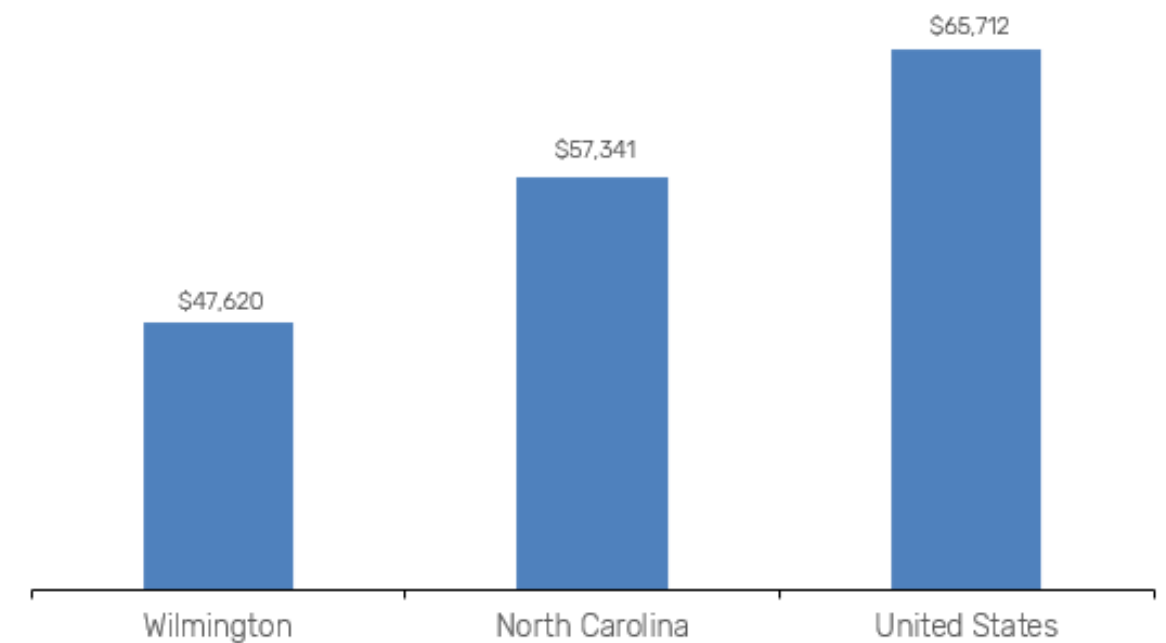


Figure 8: City, State, and National Average average individual income.

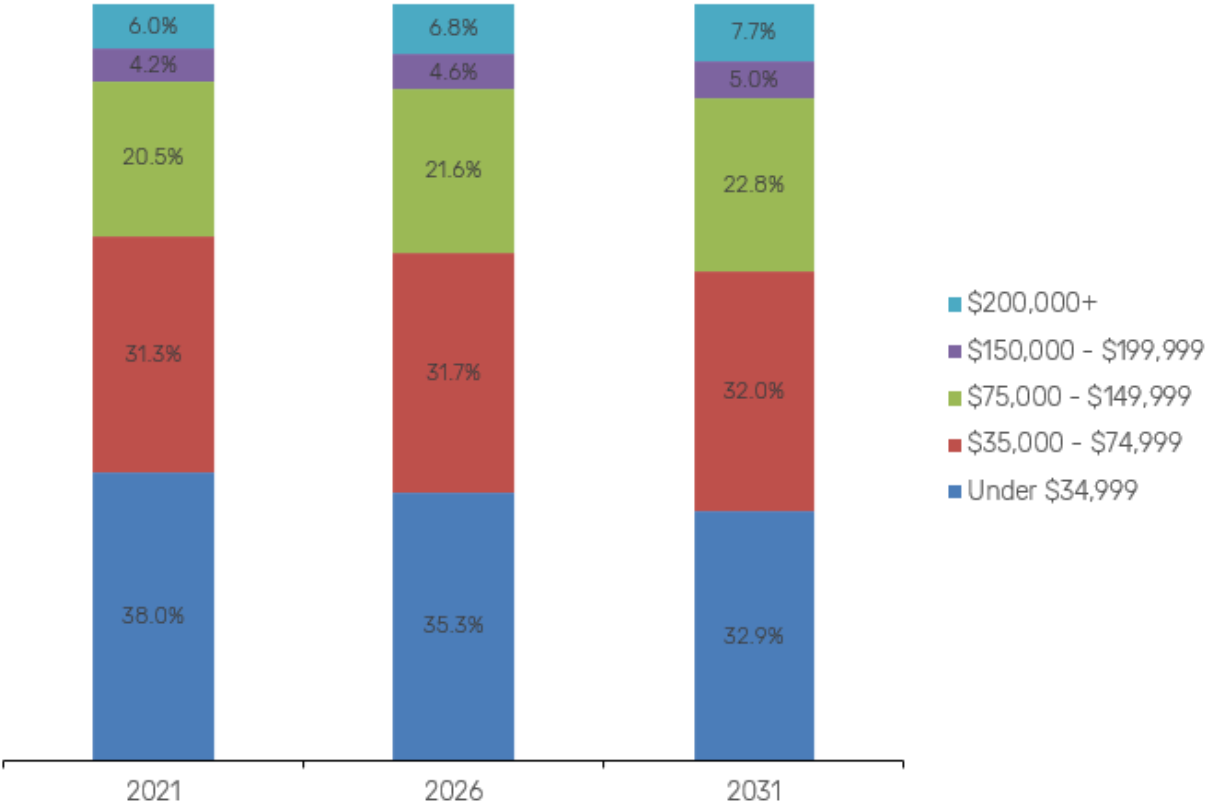


Figure 9: Average household income estimates in 2021, 2026 and 2031

Trends in ensuring affordable access

Parks are free and open to the public and serve as important locations for people to play, socialize and gather as a community. Community members are only able to access free or low-cost parks and programs if they can afford the trip to get there. Ensuring an equitable distribution of parks and amenities throughout a geographic area means residents truly have affordable access to parks and programs.

The 10-Minute Walk campaign is working to “ensure there’s a great park within a 10-minute walk of every person, in every neighborhood, in every city across America.” Eight North Carolina Mayors have signed the pledge.

A recent study from the National Recreation and Parks Association found “93 percent of Americans believe providing affordable out-of-school time programs at local parks, recreation centers and

libraries to families of all income levels should be a goal of their local government. Currently, 93 percent of park and recreation agencies nationwide administer or manage out-of-school time programs.” Parks and recreation agencies frequently provide day programs and camps for children at below-market or discounted rates. This service provides an affordable alternative for families who must find childcare when school is out of session. Day programs and camps can benefit all children but are especially important for low-income families with few other options for daytime childcare.

Parks and Recreation in Underserved Areas: A Public Health Perspective states, “Several studies have documented that while parks and recreational facilities are available throughout the United States, there are several additional factors that affect park use and physical activity levels.” Factors include:

- Park access – Easy park access is associated with increased park use. Park visits are more frequent and physical activity levels are higher.
- Park distribution – Disparities in park distribution are particularly evident in areas with low income and racial/ethnic populations.
- Park facilities – Within parks, there are certain types of facilities that encourage higher levels of physical activity than others, such as trails and playgrounds.
- Park conditions – Park facilities that are consistently well maintained, aesthetically appealing and safe have increased public use and physical activity.

TRENDS IN PARKS + RECREATION

The field of parks and recreation continually updates best practices and integrates new policies and technologies as they become available. A forward-looking parks and recreation agency will be aware of new and emerging recreation trends and can understand and anticipate the impacts broader trends will have. This plan looks at recreation and activity trends, high-level emerging trends in the field of parks and recreation, sustainability trends, and economic development trends – all of which are expected to have significant impact on Wilmington’s parks and recreation Division during the next 10 years.






LOCAL RECREATION TRENDS

Local recreation trends are sourced from ESRI, an international supplier of geographic information system software, web GIS and geodatabase

management. ESRI uses data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the Internal Revenue Service and other high-quality local sources. This analysis is drawn from ESRI’s market potential index (MPI). The MPI is a measure that compares demand for a product or service within a pre-determined geographic area, in this case Wilmington city limits, to the national demand for that product or service. Demand for a recreational activity is measured based on whether an individual has participated in a certain activity within the past 12 months.

This section uses information from a database of sports and leisure spending that estimates overall participation in a variety of sports and leisure activities. While this analysis provides a good indication of participation, additional factors such as the City’s own program numbers, and public input should also be considered when determining the types of programs to provide.

Results from the analysis indicate five activities as the most popular leisure activities among Wilmington residents. The most popular activities can all be undertaken individually and have relatively low barriers to entry. Walking and jogging can be done nearly anywhere with minimal specialized equipment. Although swimming requires built facilities and hiking mostly requires specialized terrain, these activities do not call for specialized equipment or a high level of training. Camping requires designated facilities, dedicated equipment, and a degree of specialized knowledge to fully enjoy the activity. But walking, swimming, jogging, and hiking are activities that can be adapted to a wide range of physical ability levels and are common activities people pursue at any age throughout a lifetime.

City of Wilmington Local Recreational Activity Trends - Source: ESRI MPI				
Fitness Walking	Swimming	Camping	Hiking	Jogging
				
27.4%	18.4%	15.8%	15.1%	15.0%

Wilmington currently offers paved greenways and trails, as well as some unpaved trails at Halyburton Park. Concerning camping, most parks and recreation agencies do not provide camping facilities. The NC Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan declares camping facilities are most often provided by state park systems, or the National Park System. Local government parks and recreation agencies do however provide camping trips and excursions. Wilmington Parks and Recreation does not currently offer this activity.

Most Popular Organized Sport Activities






People can participate in these sports by enrolling in a formal league or by playing informal pickup games. Golf frequently requires access to private facilities and can be expensive to pursue. Fortunately, Wilmington Parks and Recreation operates two public golf courses; one 18-hole and one 9-hole. Wilmington offers facilities for basketball, soccer, football, and tennis. Programming is provided by the City and program partners.






Most Popular Outdoor Activities

Outdoor activities are those that enable people to interact with the natural environment while pursuing physical activity. Many people pursue hiking and road biking for the combination of physical activity and

communion with rural areas and natural landscapes. Freshwater fishing, canoeing/kayaking and saltwater fishing are all activities that take place on bodies of water. The Cape Fear River and Intercoastal Waterway are resources serving recreational demand for these activities in the City. There are also areas on the Riverwalk where fishing is permitted. Wilmington offers trails for hiking and greenways for road biking.



City of Wilmington Local Recreational Activity Trends - ESRI MPI				
Basketball	Golf	Soccer	Football	Tennis
				
10.7%	10.3%	6.4%	6.1%	5.5%

City of Wilmington Local Recreational Activity Trends - ESRI MPI				
Camping	Fresh Water Fishing	Canoeing	Saltwater Fishing	Mountain Biking
				
13.8%	12.3%	8.0%	5.0%	4.6%

NATIONAL LEVEL RECREATION + ACTIVITY TRENDS

National level trends provide context for activities with rapidly growing or shrinking popularity of individuals’ activity levels. These national trends provide context to local recreational trends and can serve to anticipate trends at the local level. National popularity of team sports and individual activities have implications for future planning for the Division’s programs and facilities. National trends also provide perspective on whether changes in program participation within a given year is a local trend, or whether upward or downward local trends are part of a larger shift in preference.

The skyrocketing growth in pickleball, a moderately-paced and low-impact version of tennis popular among adults and seniors, is noted in all NRPA and Recreation Management trends reports over the past three years. Wilmington has the capacity to accommodate pickleball, and other non-tennis court games by converting a small number of tennis courts into pickleball courts. Wilmington currently has ten shared tennis-pickle ball courts and six exclusive pickle ball courts in design.

According to Recreation Management Magazine, among surveyed Departments, special holiday events continue to be the most common programs offered, followed by youth athletics, day and summer camps, and adult sports teams ranking next on the list. The

most common new additions agencies are planning in the next year are environmental education programs, fitness programs and teen programming.

Emerging Trends In Parks + Recreation

The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) each year provides a report on top Trends in Parks and Recreation. City Parks Alliance and Trust for Public Land are two other national organizations who provide resources on parks and recreation trends. Trends mentioned in the last three years include.

Climate Change Impacts

- Parklands in dense urban areas are credited to reducing heat island effect through tree canopy coverage and help mitigate stormwater runoffs by allowing infiltration on the large expanse of pervious lands. Parklands have been recognized as a vital component of infrastructure development strategy to help mitigate climate change effects.

Economic Impact

- According to an NRPA study, parkland has been recognized as an “economic development infrastructure” as many businesses are choosing their employment location strategically where their employees will have quality of life with easy access to quality parks and greenway trails. Many private donors are giving millions of dollars as



gifts to develop signature park projects as a way of giving back to the communities.

Creative Positioning

As real estate becomes a scarce resource, many agencies are proposing public open spaces as green roofs, stormwater management amenities, rails to trails projects, and most recently underground such as New York’s Low Line project.

Technology

Some of these innovations include drone use for parks surveillance and management, recreational drone use and harnessing solar power to provide charging stations, low level lighting, etc. With rapidly improving technology, solar powered video surveillance is gaining popularity and according to NRPA predictions, more than one-third of parks and recreation agencies have installed video surveillance in their facilities and parks over the past few years.

Children and Nature

Providing children access to natural areas and opportunities for daily interaction with nature has been a consistently growing trend over the last decade. Extensive research in the health and environmental behavior fields has proved many health and wellness benefits to younger generations, this trend is now evolving into policy, programs and partnership development to ensure equitable benefits across the population spectrum.

Response to the Global Health Crisis

Toward the end of 2020, the Trust for Public Land published a report on Parks and Pandemic in response to the global health crisis caused by COVID outbreak. While this report emphasizes the increased use of open spaces and greenway trails for health benefits, it also raises challenges faced by municipal agencies such as a decrease in tax revenue and targeted budget cuts resulting in employment loss. Looking at the future, the report also mentions an emerging trend of new

found appreciation for open spaces and parks bringing the focus to easy access to a high-quality park within a ten-minute walking distance.

SUSTAINABILITY TRENDS

The idea that parkland benefits the environment and promotes a city’s sustainability is an intuitive understanding park users naturally associate with the trees, streams, lush vegetation, and other natural features found in parks. Understanding exactly how parkland contributes to sustainability is more challenging, but cities are finding that exploring and defining this connection presents opportunities to create urban green spaces benefiting both the natural and built environment.

As storms increase in severity and more urban space is paved for new development, cities are beginning to look to parks for managing the increasing volumes of stormwater. As water from a rainstorm flows across pavement and roofs, it picks up small pollutants like sand and oils before flowing into gutters and then into underground stormwater conveyance networks. Ultimately, the water is discharged untreated into natural bodies of water. Parks are ideal locations for decentralized stormwater storage projects designed to hold water during a rain event but drain and remain dry when not holding stormwater. The water held percolates into groundwater or subsurface water, or slowly discharges into the city’s stormwater drains, thereby minimizing the peak flow that can overwhelm and flood stormwater conveyance systems.

According to the NRPA, “A number of park agencies that have begun to implement green infrastructure stormwater management projects in parks are discovering alternative and innovative funding sources beyond their own capital budget.” Since the water quality of stormwater is regulated by the Clean Water Act, park projects with stormwater treatment elements may be eligible for funding not typically considered for parks projects.

An innovative strategy for addressing sustainability on public parkland is the opportunity for mitigation banking. This process restores degraded streams

while generating additional revenue for the agency through the sale of mitigation credits through a qualified mitigation banking organization. According to the NRPA, “The practice of replacing or restoring natural resources in one area to offset the loss or damage to similar resources in another area through mitigation has long been acknowledged as one of the best practical solutions to the loss of valuable natural resources that results from development.” Currently, agencies are partnering with mitigation banking contractors who oversee restoration projects and will often compensate the agency for use of the land. NRPA also describes, “what is new in the mitigation landscape is that park and recreation agencies, already respected as long-term stewards of public lands, are being viewed by mitigation project sponsors as ideal potential partners for the creation and development of new mitigation banks, particularly those focused on restoring and protecting smaller streams and waterways. New mitigation banks, privately built on public lands, can allow park and recreation agencies to achieve multiple restoration goals simultaneously, including restoring environmentally damaged lands for which no funding would otherwise be available, permanently protecting such lands from future damage through perpetual conservation easements and gaining new revenues for management, conservation and education from royalties gained on the sale of mitigation credits.”

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

Parks and recreation’s role in economic development is a growing focus for parks and recreation agencies. Many directors are beginning to look at themselves as businesses and are implementing business development strategies into the operations of their agencies. As this dynamic occurs, it is essential for

all levels of their government, as well as residents and park users, to fully understand the economic development benefits parks and recreation agencies provide for their communities. More than mere concepts or thought experiments, many parks and recreation benefits can be documented and quantified into dollar amounts, which becomes an important message for communicating the value of investing in parks and recreation.

Tourism Spending

In addition to increasing a community’s existing wealth, parks and recreation can generate new income by generating tourism revenue. The City has several park resources that continually attract out-of-town visitors. Foremost on this list is the Althea Gibson Tennis Complex at Empie Park. Tennis tournaments held at the Complex create upwards of \$8 million dollars annually. Live Oak Bank Pavilion and IRONMAN North Carolina 70.3 are some of the unique amenities and events which attract overnight and day-trip visitors. Both of these tourism segments spend money participating in park activities (if there is a user fee associated with their activity) but also at restaurants, gas stations and other local businesses.

With the growth in amateur travel sports and other private recreation leagues, cities are looking to attract large weekend-long tournaments with dozens of teams which will stay at local hotels and eat at local restaurants. The City’s existing visitor amenities combined with the Division’s existing sports complexes likely means the City is well-positioned to attract large regional tournaments.



Direct Savings + Cost Avoidance

In addition to the impacts parks and recreation agencies generate based on their role as an economic entity in the community, a parks and recreation system can generate positive outcomes which avoid costs for which the City may otherwise be responsible. For example, parks promote physical and mental health through providing places where people can exercise, meditate and socialize. Providing programs, activities and facilities that prevent long-term health issues such as obesity and heart disease, access to parks and recreation indirectly reduces the burden for programs and services provided by other public entities such as hospitals and health departments – freeing them to continue to promote preventative health services.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

As the population grows and changes in the coming decade, the recreation needs will grow and change.

- › The overall population growth indicates a need for expanding parks and recreation services and suggests a growing tax base to support that work.
- › Large adult and older adult population cohorts suggest the need for programs geared toward Millennials, Gen Xers and Baby Boomers. Adult and youth athletics as well as family-oriented and intergenerational programming should also be considered.
- › The increasing household income levels indicate the ability to pay for parks and recreation services. Regardless of rising income for some community members, residents with lower incomes must still have affordable or no-cost access to parks and recreation services.
- › The area’s racial demographics will remain relatively unchanged during the next ten years, but there is still a need for equity, diversity and inclusion efforts to ensure equitable provision of parks, facilities, amenities and programs.
- › In addition to Wilmington’s specific community context, emerging trends in parks and recreation

project the many far-reaching benefits of incorporating parks and greenway planning into larger connected networks of urban infrastructure.



This page left intentionally blank.



PARK + FACILITY + OPEN SPACE

IN THIS CHAPTER

Park Assessments
Inventory + Level of Service
Equity Assessment
Resilience Assessment
Park + Facility + Open Space Recommendations

PARK SYSTEM ASSESSMENT

An assessment of the parks and facilities across the City of Wilmington’s park system is a tool for analyzing existing conditions and establishing a baseline for recommendations. The criteria discussed below are a synthesis of observations and are not intended to be discrete categories, nor a comprehensive list of considerations. The measures are grounded in standard best practices and are intended to be a summary of the realities, opportunities and challenges of the current conditions observed throughout the park system.

METHODOLOGY

The project team spent two days touring and visually assessing a sample of parks and facilities representing various size, age and quality of parks throughout the system. When touring the parks, the project team gave special attention to the following evaluation criteria



Park Infrastructure	Accessibility & Connectivity	General Condition & Safety	Diversity of Amenities	Park Character & Placemaking
<p>Do the built assets within the park adequately support the intended activity or program? Are the existing support facilities adequately functioning?</p> <p>What infrastructure components are missing?</p>	<p>Is the park designed so people of all abilities can meet or exceed all the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)? Does the park and its surroundings through greenways and trails? Does the network support pedestrians and bikers?</p>	<p>Is the park maintained to meet the needs of all park users? Does the park have adequate signage and facilities? Are the park amenities and facilities showing signs of wear and tear?</p> <p>park feel safe and encourage user safety?</p>	<p>Has the parks and recreation department intentionally sought to ensure that recreation facilities across the system are varied? Is the broadest possible user-base and greatest number of residents being served?</p>	<p>Are people able to identify the park as a City of Wilmington Park and easily navigate both to and within the park? Does the park design support the intended use and create an enjoyable place to pursue those activities?</p>

PARK INFRASTRUCTURE

Benefits parks provide are only as good as the integrity, quality and variety of the built assets they compose. Parks and recreation services are often cited in surveys as one of the most important contributing factors to a community’s livability. Whether it be pools, greenways, community centers, ballfields, or playgrounds, the recreational facilities within a park system often tangibly reflect community residents’ quality of life. Moreover, attention should be paid to the built assets that foundationally sustain parks including transportation infrastructure like roads, sidewalks and trails – as well as utility infrastructure like water, sewer and electricity. In addition to recreational facilities, park infrastructure includes support facilities within the parks like restrooms, storage buildings, lighting, signage and site furnishings (benches, receptacles, landscaping, etc.).



An evaluation of infrastructure across select City of Wilmington park locations is necessary to determine whether the City is making the best use of existing park facilities and amenities. This evaluation is two-pronged. First, over the course of the two-day parks assessment, the planning team observed the facility challenges and opportunities at each location and used observations to create themes to guide recommendations for infrastructure updates. Second, the scientific survey conducted as part of this comprehensive planning process informs park infrastructure recommendations by drawing on the public’s feedback regarding the unmet needs for recreation amenities and facilities in the City.

In a system with many well-established recreation resources, it is inevitable the City will be tasked with addressing infrastructure needs. While the majority (87.2%%) of households responding to the scientific survey rated the quality of parks visited in the past twelve months as excellent or good, visual evidence during the project team’s park assessments reveal several well-loved parks need renovations and repairs.



Facilities that can no longer accommodate the growing capacity of popular programs were noted across the City’s park system. Impacts of this issue are most starkly witnessed within the City’s indoor facilities. The City of Wilmington Parks and Recreation Division has onboarded experienced recreation programmers who have expanded programmatic offerings based on input from surrounding neighborhoods and recreation trends. Efforts to grow and enhance the City’s recreation offerings have indeed been successful and as a result have pushed the facilities to capacity with the need for expansion evident.

For example, the Martin Luther King Community Center at Robert Strange Park was built in the 1970s with the most recent expansion occurring in the 1980s, followed by a \$600,000 renovation as part of the 2006 bond projects. Facilities within the Robert Strange Complex include a community center, parent-child activity center and fitness center, (formally known as the “boxing center.”) The fitness center is inadequate for growth and there is a demand for larger group exercise areas. Similarly, the parent-child activity center is too small to host larger groups, and the gym within the community center is too small to host spectators. Thus, construction of a new high school size gym and commercial kitchen have been approved for funding as part of the 2016 bond referendum and are currently under design. An additional support infrastructure concern is parking. Expanded parking was not taken into consideration during planning and design of the additional gym. Inadequate parking, limited paved circulation, and the lack of sidewalk access within the park complex makes connectivity difficult.

That having been said, the City has planned a large renovation to the facility, which will include a significant upgrade to the current kitchen. The plan is to upfit it to a commercial kitchen to facilitate a variety of classes related to cooking and nutrition. Additionally, Division staff are working with local non-profit organizations to be able to implement culinary-related job training programs. Lastly, the space may also potentially serve as prep space for caterers or

food truck owners. The details for all of these are still in the process of being worked out, but future outcomes of this renovation will be positive for the surrounding community.

Another instance of the City’s ongoing effort to respond to the community’s recreational needs has been a concerted effort to grow program offerings at the Derick G.S. Davis Center @ Maides Park. In addition to expanding programs, the indoor facilities within the Davis Center at Maides Park are experiencing increased use due to the perception among City residents the area is much safer than it had been in the past. Further, the City recently elevated the level of promotion of this facility. Staff identified e-sports as a popular activity among the difficult to reach teen population. A room within the center was converted into an e-sports lab, which has become extremely popular. Converting the space was a well-informed decision, but ultimately eliminated the ability for it to be multifunctional. Both the Davis Center @ Maides Park and the MLK Community Center have concerns of being over capacity, show signs of aging mechanical and HVAC systems, offer limited office space for growing staff, and provide limited space for programming and storage.

Outdoor recreation facility infrastructure needs are continuing to be recognized and addressed. The City demonstrates its commitment to improving and expanding infrastructure by actively responding to residents’ needs. For example, members of the Northside Community expressed the need for improvements to Portia Mills Hines Park. The City’s 2018 outreach effort revealed a desire for restrooms, additional lighting, and a walking trail at the park. City Council unanimously approved funding the desired improvements. The project is currently under construction with a completion schedule for December 2022. Past recreational facility and support infrastructure improvements at Portia Mills Hines include basketball court resurfacing, new nets, and new signage throughout the park.

The City of Wilmington Parks and Recreation Division has a positive track record of park upkeep. Yet, the degree of quality landscaping and cleanliness cannot compensate for parks with outdated equipment. For example, the playground equipment at Northside Park is quite outdated. Having obsolete equipment makes maintenance more difficult and safety a concern. Updates to playground equipment are an opportunity to improve the safety and fun of a play structure.

The more current playground equipment at many of the City’s older parks like Portia Mill Hines Park, Kennedy Park, and Maides Park have been kept safe and well maintained reducing the occurrences of major wear and tear that could lead to safety concerns. The City’s three swimming pools are located at Robert Strange Park, Legion Sports Complex, and Northside Park. The pool at Legion



Field house at Legion Park



Modern playground equipment in Greensboro, NC

Sports Complex has been recently repaired, but the pools at Robert Strange, Legion Sports Complex and Northside Park need major repairs or should be replaced.

For example, the pool at Northside Park has numerous cracks and issues with groundwater. A ground water study is currently underway to inform future pool repairs. Infrastructure supporting the pool is also poor. Old picnic shelters were enclosed and converted into changing rooms/restrooms with no hot water.



Pool at Robert Strange Park with barbed wire perimeter fencing



The City should consider replacing or renovating this facility to increase usability. Northside Park also has a splashpad with deteriorating surfacing that needs replacement. That said, the surface is patched annually to prevent safety concerns.

Pickleball and tennis are both in high demand in Wilmington, at times placing the two at odds. The legacy of tennis runs deep in the City. The 24-court tennis complex at Empie Park is named after Althea Gibson, the first African American to win Wimbledon (in 1957) and the U.S. Open (in 1958). City staff confirmed to the planning team more than 20 tennis tournaments per year are hosted here, producing \$8 million dollars in economic impact for the City in 2019. All things considered, the tennis courts at the Complex are structurally sound and very well maintained. The same can be said for the tennis facilities at Robert Strange Park where the six courts support use by diverse partners and programs. Three of the six courts at Robert Strange Park are also lined for pickleball.

The tennis courts and support facilities at Maides Park are not as well maintained, which has pickleball promoters asking for the run-down courts to be converted to permanent pickleball. However, there has been resistance from the neighborhoods around the Park who are concerned this will come at the expense of a well-established neighborhood outreach tennis program for at-risk youth. The City has recently approved major improvements to include court resurfacing and replacement fencing.



ACCESSIBILITY & CONNECTIVITY

Connectivity

Connectivity by way of alternate modes of transportation within and between recreation facilities is essential to a successful parks system. Sidewalks and greenway trails provide safe alternatives to vehicular access. In fact, communities with alternate/active transportation networks provide greater access to free healthy outdoor activities which save money, provide mobility choices, free-up road space, reduce pollution, and promote economic vitality .

Often, sidewalk grids in urban areas provide the connectivity suburban greenways provide. The concept of park connectivity through greenway trails promotes active transportation and helps to improve the overall health of the community. Further, connections to regional greenways and trail systems have local and regional economic development potential. In addition, because greenways are sometimes located in utility easements and stream buffers, they not only help users connect to nature, but preserve ecological corridors for wildlife habitat.

Many of the parks in Wilmington, particularly those located in historically under-served communities, are walkable neighborhood parks based on the proximity of nearby homes and the sidewalk network. Neighborhood residents can easily walk or bike to Portia Mills Hines Park, Northside Park, and Archie Blue Park, which are situated in low traffic areas. Additional bike paths, sidewalks and signage should be considered to promote active transportation within these locations.

The River to Sea Bikeway connects several parks, including Robert Strange, Haneman, and Empie. Further it connects to the CCT, and destinations such as downtown and the Riverwalk. The Cross City Trail connects Empie and Halyburton and also connects to Wade Park and Anne McCrary Park, as well as UNCW and Wrightsville Beach Park. This segment of the overall greenway plan is a 15-mile off-road, multi-use greenway trail which runs from Wade Park through Halyburton Park and Empie Park to the Heide-Trask Drawbridge at the Intracoastal Waterway.

The City’s 2013 Greenways Plan states the purpose of the Cross-City Trail (CCT) is “to provide bicycle and pedestrian access to numerous recreational, cultural and educational destinations in Wilmington.” In addition to the CCT, the College Road Trail was recently completed, connecting users to the Holly Tree Road trail which connects to the Greenville Loop Trail (currently in design), which will connect to the River to Sea Bikeway. The Downtown Greenway which would connect Jervay Freedom Walk, 1898 Park, Archie Blue Park, Wallace Park, Empie Park and the CCT has an adopted master plan and deisgn is under way to connect Third Street to Archie Blue Park.

These initiatives are noteworthy, yet, some parks in underserved areas of the City which need safe walking routes most, currently remain disconnected from the greenway system. These residents must rely

on existing sidewalk networks that are often in need of repair or not marked as publicly accessible. Priority should be placed on these initiatives and closing gaps in urban sidewalk networks to prevent perceptions of inequity. The City’s remaining parks, particularly small, neighborhood parks that sit in distressed, racial minority areas are disconnected from an overall interconnected park system.



Connectivity and circulation within the City of Wilmington’s larger parks appears inconsistent. The lack of connectivity between site elements has led to missed opportunities for park patrons. This was seen at Halyburton Park. In conversations with park staff, the planning team came to learn some visitors to the park’s playground were unaware the nature center, pavilion and trails even existed there. This is due to the playground’s location at the very front portion of the park, and the parking lot runs vertically adjacent to where the playground is located. People bringing their kids to the playground park their cars at the front of the lot, never having visually observed the park’s additional and very substantial features.

Similar wayfinding challenges also exist at Empie Park. While there are a multitude of recreational amenities offered, their location within the park can be difficult to determine depending on what park users intend to do there. For example, the dog park is adjacent to the entry road and parking lot on its north side, with the Althea Gibson Tennis Center to its southeast. Dog Park visitors may not be aware there are additional recreation amenities at the park due to a lack of wayfinding signage, visibility obscured by the welcome center and lack of pathways for pedestrian circulation. Wayfinding signage and designated pedestrian pathways could dramatically increase the usability of this park while contributing to its overall amenity offerings.

Wayfinding refers to intentionally developed techniques to guide people through a physical environment and enhance their understanding and experience of the space. An absence of wayfinding signage makes it difficult for park users to identify and navigate their way through and to essential locations like restrooms, parking and seating areas. It also results in opportunity costs as park users may not know certain amenities exist within the parks especially if the sites are large and varied. Park patrons need visual cues such as maps, directions, and symbols to help guide them to their destinations. Effective wayfinding systems accomplish this goal and contribute to a sense of well-being, safety, and security.

Finally, the planning team noted the disconnected configuration of some of the City’s parks. Patches of unprogrammed space create fragmented sites. Examples of this can be seen behind the Davis Center at Maides Park, Empie Park and Archie Blue Park. By taking this action the City of Wilmington Parks



Unprogrammed space at Empie Park

and Recreation Division would not only increase recreation infrastructure, but also improve circulation within the parks.

Accessibility As a public agency, the Wilmington Parks and Recreation Division has a responsibility to provide accessible facilities and amenities for all ages and ability levels. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) outlines minimum standards for compliance with regulations which govern public accommodations to provide goods and services to people with disabilities on an equal basis . The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has also undertaken an inclusivity initiative to ensure all people have access to the benefits of local parks and recreation. NRPA defines inclusion as removing barriers, both physical and theoretical, so that all people have an equal opportunity to enjoy the benefits of parks and recreation.

In a system with many well-established parks and facilities such as Wilmington, older facilities may not meet the standards outlined by the ADA. As standards and regulations evolve it is very common for existing facilities to fall behind. Many of the older parks and their amenities do not provide sidewalks and walkways connecting amenities via ADA routes, creating disjointed park offerings which are not accessible by users of all abilities. For example, the playground at Archie Blue Park exhibits a play structure that is disconnected from the sidewalk infrastructure and as a result is inaccessible even though it has a wheelchair ramp within its use zone. One restroom facility at Empie Park has been out of use for close to five years due to noncompliance with ADA standards.



Overall, the amenities in Wilmington’s parks meet the minimum ADA compliance standards for accessible design. Accessible accommodation is provided via walkways to parking lots, some recreation amenities, and some support facilities such as restrooms and drinking fountains.

Inclusivity tends to exceed the requirements of the ADA and encourage built environment enhancements which increase access to parks for people with cognitive disabilities, the LGBTQ community, and racial and ethnic minorities. Popular inclusive park amenities are sensory gardens, inclusive playgrounds, Miracle League fields, bilingual signage and non- gender specific restrooms. The City provides recreation opportunities for park users of all ages and ability levels with provisions for inclusive playgrounds



Outdated picnic table, grill and concrete pad without ADA access at Archie Blue Park

at Olsen, Empie and Riverfront Park. Olsen Park is also home to the largest Miracle Field in the southeast, built to accommodate youth and adult sports.

GENERAL CONDITION & SAFETY The general condition of parks, amenities and facilities affects residents’ perceptions and level of satisfaction, which influences their use and perceived safety. Well-managed and maintained parks and facilities are typically considered safe and inviting by residents; however, based on interviews with Wilmington Parks and Recreation staff, the planning team was made aware of the public’s negative perception of some of the City’s parks, even though these parks are well managed and maintained. Park safety, whether perceived or real, can affect park utilization and the public’s overall perception of the park system.

The project team found the overall system offers both real and perceived park safety concerns. Elevated concrete playground borders are inviting for unintended uses that could present safety challenges.

Open site lines, cleanliness, separation between vehicular and pedestrian circulation, and well-staffed facilities contribute to higher rates of park utilization and continual activity resulting in “eyes on parks”, a natural surveillance system which contributes to improved safety by discouraging undesirable behavior. Overgrown vegetation, combined with low site lighting levels can impair site lines and create places for wrong doers to hide.

Equipment that falls into disrepair can present safety or non-compliance concerns. When analyzing the Wilmington parks system, it appears the City has invested in managing and maintaining their existing facilities; however, many of the parks are showing signs of aging, such as outdated play equipment worn court surfacing and deteriorating support amenities like benches, picnic tables, receptacles, etc. Empie Park, for example, manifests some of these concerns. Much of the park’s landscaping has been neglected, tennis courts were observed to have debris, and some of the tennis net rollers were not functional. One set of restrooms have been closed due to accessibility concerns, and another had a broken door handle, overflowing trash receptacles, and was generally unkempt.



⚡ Outdated trash receptacle and chain link fence at Archie Blue



⚡ Missing rails at Archie Blue Park may present a safety risk and not meet code



⚡ Raised concrete playground border at Northside Park



⚡ Tennis court surfacing and fences could use replacement



⚡ PVC stub in open field at Archie Blue should be removed to prevent safety concerns



⚡ Turf at Maides Park needs overseeding and broken goal should be removed and replaced

DIVERSITY OF AMENITIES

To say a park system possesses a ‘diversity of amenities’ is to say the agency has intentionally sought to ensure recreation facilities across the system are varied. The goal here is to reach the broadest possible user-base and serve the greatest number of residents. The City of Wilmington’s park system is balanced and rich in resources, however, the amenities are lacking assortment. The strength of a successful park system provides a variety of amenities and development should support the function and purpose of each park type to ensure diverse recreation opportunities are provided and community recreation needs are met.

The parks visited by the planning team seem to mirror one another in terms of the amenities offered. Some of the smaller parks located within marginalized neighborhoods like Northside Park, Portia Mills Hines Park and Archie Blue Park have the same amenities: playground, picnic shelter and basketball court. Northside Park and Archie Blue Park have water features – a splash pad/pool and kayak launch, respectfully but these facilities are either in poor condition or have features such as barbed wire fencing that appear unwelcoming and don’t necessarily facilitate a pleasant recreation experience for the average park user.

The City has the opportunity to diversify the park system’s amenities by renovating the pool at Northside Park, as well as the existing splash pad, with a top-notch water-play facility. Further, there is great value in improving the environmental conditions to allow safe access to Burnt Mill Creek as it is the only public non-motorized boat access location within the City-owned parks.

Providing the City’s residents with access to traditionally popular recreation facilities like playgrounds, athletic fields and courts has been demonstrated. Larger community parks like Maides, Robert Strange and Empie Park also have playgrounds, basketball courts and picnic shelters, and accommodate traditional athletics amenities like tennis courts and baseball/softball fields.

However, there does appear to be a lack of multi-purpose field space for sports like soccer, lacrosse, football/flag-football and other non-traditional sports gaining momentum – like cricket, rugby and field hockey. While the New Hanover County park system does provide additional multi-purpose fields accessible to all City residents, athletic fields under the City’s control should accommodate growing demand and provide open space in a highly urbanized community. The planning team observed several swaths of unprogrammed/undeveloped space within many of the parks that can be upfit to provide multipurpose field space, or space for other unique amenities that would contribute to the overall diversity of amenities across Wilmington’s parks. This is also important as opportunities for park expansion are limited due to the cost and limited availability of land within City limits. Open space the City should evaluate for additional programming was seen at Northside Park and Empie Park.

PARK CHARACTER AND PLACEMAKING
Parks present an opportunity to communicate a community’s unique image and brand, distinct community characteristics and ensure vibrant shared public spaces. Most often, this is accomplished by balancing consistency of signage, furnishings and materiality with the flexibility to express each park’s individual appeal. A major contributor to sense of place is brand recognition. This can be accomplished by the use of consistent color palettes, logos and wayfinding signage. Park amenities should also remain consistent. The planning team observed Wilmington’s overall park system appears to lack consistency among park furnishings such as trash receptacles, benches, water fountains, etc. The models and colors for the furnishings vary at each park site which otherwise would have helped create a unified appearance throughout the park system.

Both branding and wayfinding can help create a sense of place within parks. Parks which have a strong sense of place exhibit a specific visual and contextual identity that is felt by visitors. Wayfinding refers to the use of signage or other visual cues to guide visitors to their destinations in a safe and

enjoyable way. Like other site elements, wayfinding uses a hierarchy of scales, fonts and colors to communicate locations of parks and amenities within the parks.

Park users should be able to quickly recognize they are in a City of Wilmington park based on the aforementioned placemaking efforts. Public art, historic elements, vegetation and building materials characteristic of a certain geographic location or time period also shape a park’s sense of character. This in turn creates a unique and recognizable image for the City’s park system and streamlines replacement of amenities.

The City recently updated their community brand and installed City-wide wayfinding signage with the new Wilmington ‘swoosh’ logo and consistent black, white and blue color scheme.

Main entry signage, supplemental wayfinding signage within the large parks is minimal, making it difficult for new users to find amenities. For example, at Halyburton Park, the playground is on the front side of the parking lot and the nature center is on the backside. Without any signage it is difficult for playground users to know the other amenities are there without being alerted otherwise.

When amenities are distributed through parks covering many acres, a hierarchy of entrance signage and internal wayfinding signage would contribute to improved visitor orientation, safety and overall experience. The City of Wilmington’s park system should include consistent pedestrian-scale wayfinding signs to direct visitors to parkland, durable and consistent entrance signage, a list of amenities or preferably map and wayfinding signs within parks if needed.

KEY FINDINGS

- › The City of Wilmington Parks and Recreation Division has high quality staff who have proven capable of expanding program and services offerings.
- › Many of the City’s indoor facilities are at capacity which is limiting the growth of programs. There is inadequate space for storage or staff offices.
- › Many building systems (mechanical, HVAC, sound, etc.) are at the end of their life cycle and in need of replacement or in need of repair.
- › Traditional amenities (playgrounds, athletic fields, courts, etc.) within Wilmington’s park system are equally distributed throughout the City, yet the amenities may not address specific neighborhoods’ recreational needs.
- › Un-programmed/undeveloped areas within many parks could provide space for unique amenities to contribute to the overall diversity of recreation opportunities.
- › The parks and facilities are well kept and clean.
- › Wilmington’s overall park system appears to lack brand consistency. The use of consistent signage, site furnishings, architecture and materiality would create a unified appearance throughout the parks system and would give visitors a visual cue they are in a City of Wilmington park.
- › Both branding and wayfinding can help create brand recognition across a park system. If included in a park system, consistent wayfinding signage will direct visitors to and within parkland and serve as a signal they can likely anticipate and expect a positive experience within the parks. The City may want to develop a parks and recreation brand / logo and complete a wayfinding study.





Level of service (LOS) is a quantitative measure used to determine how much access to parks, trails, and indoor facility space residents have based on the park system’s current inventory and the jurisdiction’s total population. The purpose of the level of service analysis is to establish a baseline benchmark for the Division’s current offerings. The final output of the analysis is a determination of surpluses and deficits in parkland and facilities based on 10-year population projections.

The analysis is a four-step process that begins with an inventory of existing facilities. The second step is to compare Wilmington’s parks and facility inventory to national baseline benchmarks. Third, the findings are locally contextualized by understanding current offerings, recreation trends and demand, annual budgets, land use, land availability, and other factors to propose a recommended level of service. The recommended LOS is compared to current and projected population to quantify surplus and deficits of parkland and facilities. These metrics are used to inform many of this plan’s recommendations for how much parkland, trails, and indoor facility space the City of Wilmington should invest in to meet future recreation needs.

Level of service is also used to reflect the distribution of parkland and amenities across a jurisdiction by mapping the location of existing parkland and facilities. This chapter further explores where and why geographic gaps in service exist and recommends strategies for closing or overcoming those gaps.

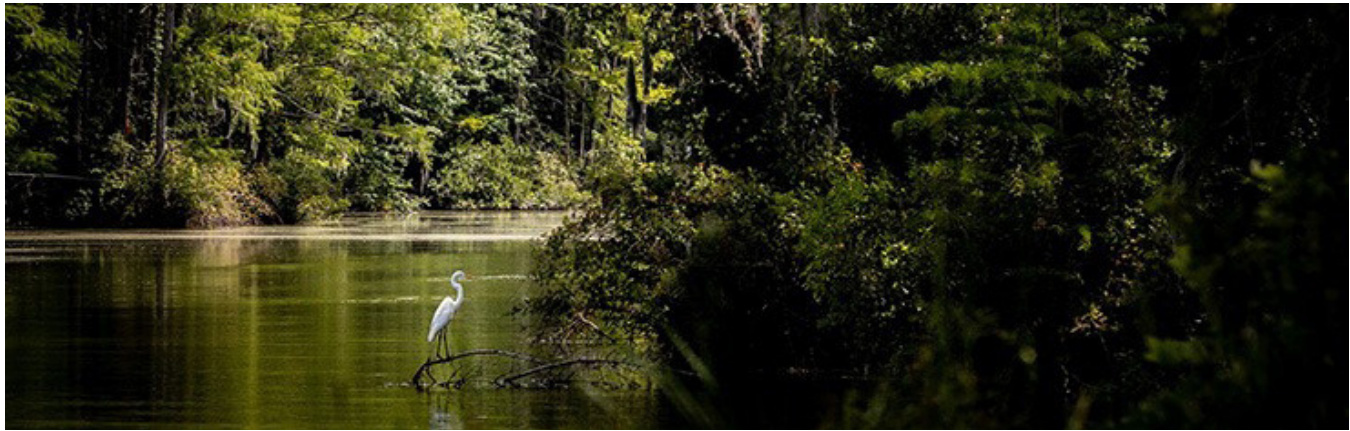
Baseline benchmarks are gleaned from the National Recreation and Parks Association’s (NRPA) Park Metrics database for departments serving similar sized populations (100,000 – 250,000) and associated 2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review. The 2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review contains self-reported data from 1,000 unique park and recreation agencies across the United States, as reported between 2018 and 2020. Taken together, NRPA Park Metrics provide “the most up-to-date data that inform current and

future decisions, and equip leaders with insights that help them make a case for greater funding, increased staffing, additional planning and more resources granted by key stakeholders and elected officials. ”

While partnerships and joint-use agreements are essential to providing adequate recreation opportunities to the public, it’s important to note that typically Level of Service only includes parks and facilities owned and operated by the jurisdiction. This is primarily to ensure if recommendations are made, the City has the authority and resources to implement change.

Methodology The level of service is a ratio which includes the current offering of parkland, trails, and facility space – divided by a portion of the current population. Parkland and trails are calculated based on a rate per 1,000 residents. The population figure used for this analysis is 126,430. This number is used throughout the plan as the City of Wilmington’s 2021 population estimate.

$$\frac{\text{parks and recreation offering}}{\text{portion of poulation}} = \text{Level of Service}$$



This plan determines 2031 level of service recommendations using population projections determined in the Demographics and Trends chapter as 145,154 residents. The current inventory serves as a baseline and the NRPA Park Metrics serve as a benchmark from which the City can goal-set.

The Level of Service Analysis examines:

- › Developed Park Acreage per Capita
- › Miles of Trails per Capita
- › Indoor Park and Recreation Facilities per Capita
- › Geographic Distribution of Parks, Facilities, and Amenities

INVENTORY

The City of Wilmington Parks and Recreation Division owns, operates, manages or retains joint use of 744 acres of parkland open and accessible to the public. Within this acreage, the Division offers diverse recreation opportunities including athletic fields and courts, pools and splashpads, golf courses, community centers, a nature center, fitness center, fishing, amphitheaters, a skate park, nature preserve, water access, trails, and even an interactive facility for parents and children. What follows is a detailed inventory of the parks and facilities offered by the Division.

Parkland

The City’s 744 acres of parkland is comprised of 47 parks ranging from a quarter acre to 190 acres and supports both active and passive recreation

amenities and programs. Parkland acreage can be broken down into the following categories:

Owned and Maintained:

The City both owns and is fully responsible for the site and building (if present) maintenance of the park.

Future / Undeveloped:

Land under the control of the Division that is intended for future developed parkland. Currently, there are only 66 acres of undeveloped parkland in the system and it is under construction for a future athletic complex, nCino Sports Park. The complex is owned by the City, and maintained by a private soccer organization, the Wilmington Hammerheads Youth Football Club.

Joint Use:

Joint use facilities refer to the sharing of indoor and outdoor recreation spaces. The details of the agreement are defined and typically include the duration and terms of the agreement. While this allows for optimization of community facilities, it is important both parties receive equal benefit from the agreement.

A summary of this breakdown follows:

Parkland	Acres
Owned	744
Total	744

Within the acreage, the following notable amenities can be found:

- › 12 baseball / softball fields
- › 16 multipurpose fields
- › 10 pickleball courts
- › 1 volleyball court
- › 17 basketball courts
- › 25 playgrounds
- › 3 boating access points
- › 7 fishing access points
- › 19 picnic shelters
- › 1 dog park
- › 1 splash pad
- › 1 skate park
- › 1 community garden
- › 3 outdoor swimming pools
- › 38 tennis courts
- › 2 Golf courses (1 x 18 hole course and 1 x 9 hole course)
- › 2 amphitheaters

Facilities

Community centers, recreation centers, nature centers, and senior centers are typical among parks and recreation agencies. The City of Wilmington is proud to offer two community centers, a nature center, a fitness center, and an interactive family center. These facilities support a wide range of programs and amenities from arts and crafts and nature programs to basketball and pickleball. Additionally, residents have access to the Hemenway Center, a City-owned facility leased to a non-profit, Voyage Wilmington, and Hannah Block USO Community Arts Center operated by Hannah Block Historic USO. The Hemenway Center connects youth with pathways to success by taking on a public health, community-based approach at empowering youth through offering local programs and resources. The Hannah Block USO Community Arts Center facilitates the coming together of generations, providing children with programs that challenge them creatively, and enhance the quality of life for residents throughout the region. While there is great diversity of programming and recreational opportunities hosted by the City’s facilities, during discussions with programming staff, it was revealed many programs are limited by the capacity of the indoor facilities.

The New Hanover County Senior Resource Center is the primary senior center for the Wilmington community. Traditionally, senior centers have been owned and operated at the County level, consistent with New Hanover County’s model. However, with an aging population, many municipalities are adding senior centers or dedicated space for senior programming within community recreation centers at the local level. For Wilmington, while the percentage of age 55+ residents is the second highest (28%) next to those age 25-54, the proportion of residents who are age 55+ will increase by two percentage points within the next ten years. With nearly one-third of the population 55+, this suggests that many residents have already reached the age 55+ group and may be seeking senior recreation and program opportunities.



The following summarizes the facilities open to Wilmington residents:

City of Wilmington Recreation Facilities

Facility	Square Feet	Offerings	Ownership	Operations/ Management
MLK Community Center @ Robert Strange Park	10,771	Multi-purpose rooms for arts and crafts, after school, athletic, and teen programs; open gym; events; full service kitchen; computer room	CoW	CoW
Derick G.S. Davis Center @ Maides Park	10,781	Multi-purpose rooms for arts and crafts, after school, athletic, and teen programs; open gym; events; full service kitchen; computer room	CoW	CoW
Fit For Fun Center @ Robert Strange Park	9,643	Parent-Child appropriate play Environment	CoW	CoW
Sherriedale Morgan Fitness Center @ Robert Strange Park		Fitness programs, yoga, personal training	CoW	CoW
Althea Gibson Tennis Complex @ Empie Park	2,000	Event rentals, meeting + program space	CoW	CoW
Halyburton Park Nature + Events Center	4,686	Event rentals / Nature Programs	CoW	CoW
Hemenway Center	2,392	Meeting + program space	CoW	Voyage Wilmington
Hannah Block USO Community Arts Center	21,750	Stage, 5 performing art studios for rent, art gallery	CoW	The Thalian Association
New Hanover County Senior Resource Center	NA	Programmed exercise, art classes + support groups; congregate meals and transportation	New Hanover County	New Hanover County
TOTAL	61,349			

City of Wilmington Dock Access

Linear Feet	Docks
Market Street Landing	200
Coastline Docks	11 slips / floating docks
Behind Hotel Ballast	450
Total	650



LEVEL OF SERVICE

ACRES OF PARKLAND PER 1,000 RESIDENTS

Parkland refers to the total number of acres of developed park property and maintained open space. The City of Wilmington currently owns or retains joint use of 744 park acres. Based on the current level of service analysis, the parks and recreation division is providing 5.88 acres parkland per 1,000 residents.



Parkland Level of Service

Current Offering	Current LOS	National Median LOS	Recommended LOS	Needed to Meet Recommended LOS (Current)	Needed to Meet Recommended LOS (Future)
Total Acres	(Acres/Per 1,000 Population)			Acres	
744	6.44	8.9	8.9	1,027 (+283)	1,134 (+390)

Compared to the national median for similar size communities, the City owns 2.46 fewer acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. To immediately achieve the national median, Wilmington would need to acquire 283 acres of parkland. Similarly, to meet the LOS for 2031 population projections, the City will need to acquire an additional 107 acres of parkland within the next 10 years, for a total of an additional 390 acres. The level of service emphasizes contextualization of existing conditions and resources that are readily available in the local environment.

Formative to this approach is understanding how every municipality has its own unique set of realities that present barriers to achieving baseline

level of service. This is particularly true of parkland acquisition. Many local governments have a limited ability to acquire land for myriad reasons. Wilmington is constrained by a limited availability of land overall, lack of reasonably priced property for sale, and development site suitability as a coastal city. Therefore this plan recommends the City of Wilmington maintain their current level of service of 6.44 acres of parkland per 1000 population which would require acquisition of 77 acres of parkland within the ten year planning horizon. This plan recognizes that acquiring 77 acres of parkland is aggressive and may not be feasible. Thus, this metric should be evaluated on an annual basis to determine if adjustments to the recommended LOS are needed.

Parkland Level of Service - Adjusted

Current Offering	Current LOS	National Median LOS	Recommended LOS	Needed to Meet Recommended LOS (Current)	Needed to Meet Recommended LOS (Future)
Total Acres	(Acres/Per 1,000 Population)			Acres	
744	6.44	8.9	6.44	0	821 (+77)

Since adding the LOS baseline acreage amount into the park system may be unrealistic in Wilmington, reimagining the City’s current parkland and amenities must be a priority. Knowing land availability is scarce and what is available is cost prohibitive, expounds on the importance of reimagining existing public spaces. The Urban Institute (U.I.) developed a program in 2020 entitled Reimagining Civic Spaces (RCC). The program holds that viewing civic assets (in this case recreational assets) as a collection, rather than a singular space can shift how local governments and stakeholders revitalize/repurpose/reprogram shared public places . The U.I. goes on and refers to the RCC approach as expanding from placemaking to “place-keeping”— the long-term management of public spaces. Over time and as population increases, the City may want to consider lowering their LOS and focusing on place-keeping to minimize the need for land acquisition.

and/or biking. The City of Wilmington has 32 total miles of trails in its network and thus a surplus of 5 miles compared to the national median. The City is currently offering a level of service above the national baseline benchmark.



MILES OF TRAILS

Park and recreation agencies that serve a population of 100,000 to 250,000 residents typically manage or maintain 27 miles trails for walking, hiking, running

Trails Level of Service

Current	National Median LOS	Needed to Meet Recommended LOS (Current)	Needed to Meet Recommended LOS (Future)
Total Miles	Total Miles	Miles	
32	14	5 miles surplus	0

For trail mileage, numbers should be used to guide trail mileage goals, but the emphasis should be on connectivity and networks of trails that provide users access to needed destinations as well as providing them as recreational amenities. Given the demand for greenway trails and the City’s efforts to attract visitors through trail tourism, this plan recommends the City consider constructing 10 additional miles of greenway trails over the next ten years. The City’s trail system is planned and maintained by a cross-collaboration among the Department of Planning and Development, Department of Community Services, Department of Engineering and the Wilmington Metropolitan Planning Organization (WMPO). This plan recommends continuing collaboration to implement additional trail mileage.

INDOOR PARK AND RECREATION FACILITY SQUARE FEET PER CAPITA

Park and recreation agencies offer various indoor facilities to their residents. According to the 2021 NRPA Agency Performance Report, more than three in five agencies offer community centers and recreation centers.

Many times, the terms “recreation center” and “community center” are used interchangeably. While the services offered at these facilities can overlap, the primary purpose of a community center is more social gathering space compared to recreational services at a recreation center. For example, community centers offer amenities like meeting rooms, classrooms, conference rooms, and spaces for large group gatherings for larger community. They could include

some indoor recreation amenities like gym, basketball court etc. Recreation centers focus on indoor recreation amenities and program offerings such as indoor fitness classes, art classes, or even an aquatic facility in a safe, inclusive environment.

Also common are senior centers, performance amphitheaters and nature centers. Two in five agencies offer senior centers, typically providing one facility for every 61,975 residents in their jurisdiction. The typical park and recreation agency operates seven buildings, while those serving populations between 100,000 and 250,000 oversee 14 buildings.

The City of Wilmington provides a parks and recreation Division to serve a population of 115,451 residents. Fifty percent or more parks and recreation agencies serving populations between 100,00–250,000 residents provide at least one of the following indoor facilities:

- › Recreation Center & Gym (79%)
- › Community Center (61%)
- › Senior Center (52%)

This LOS analysis considers the number of residents serviced per facility owned and operated by the City. The standard LOS measurement only considers municipality owned and operated facilities. However, this plan references all publicly available facilities in Wilmington, deviating from the rule of thumb to provide a more comprehensive picture of the recreation facilities and programs offered across the City. The following summarizes the facilities considered as part of the LOS analysis:

Facility Inventory

Indoor Facilities	No. of Facilities	Wall of WLM Facilities	Notes
Recreation Centers	2	Derick G.S. Davis Center @ Maides Park MLK Community Center, Sherriedale Morgan Fitness Center and Fit For Fun @ Robert Strange Park	For the purposes of this plan, all facilities at Robert Strange Park are considered one Recreation Center, defined as having >20,000 SF of total recreation space
Community Centers	1	Hemenway Center	The Hemenway Center is owned by the City and operated / managed by Voyage Wilmington.
Senior Centers	0	-	-
Nature Center	1	The Nature + Event Center @ Halyburton Park	
Cultural Arts Center	1	Hannah Block USO Community Arts Center	The Hannah Block USO Community Arts Center is owned by the City, and operated by The Thalian Association

The below table summarizes the national median number of residents served per facility for jurisdictions with a population between 100,000 and 250,000 residents, the proposed level of service for the City’s indoor facilities by facility type, and the number of additional buildings to meet both the current recommended level of services and future level of service based on the 2031 population projections.

Based on this analysis, the City would currently need to add one community center and one senior center to meet the recommended Level of Service. The computations shown in the table below reflect fractions of various types of indoor facilities may be needed to support the projected needs of a growing community and could be interpreted many ways. Based on population projections and the perspective of Division staff and community voices expressed during the engagement process, there is no doubt additional indoor recreation space is in demand. The recommendations chapter of this plan further details how the City can approach the expansion of indoor recreation space in the most efficient and effective way possible.

Facilities Level of Service

Indoor Facilities	CoW	CoW	National Median LOS	Recommended LOS	Need to Meet Recommended LOS (Current)	Needed to Meet Future LOS
	No. of Facilities	Population Per Center		No. of Facilities		
Recreation Centers	2	57,725	53,550	57,725	0	.2
Community Centers	1	115,451	56,025	55,000	1	1.32
Senior Centers	0	-	122,000	125,000	1	.02
Nature Center	1	115,451	125,000	125,000	0	.02
Cultural Arts Center	1	115,451	NA	125,000	0	.02



Geographic Distribution of Parks, Facilities, and Amenities

Understanding the existing geographic distribution of parkland and facilities will address current gaps in service and aim to provide more recreation opportunities to communities appearing underserved. This component of the Level of Service analysis looks at where parks, recreational amenities, and indoor facilities are located across the City of Wilmington, where there are gaps, and speculates on why gaps occur to inform recommendations for enhancing the equitable distribution of recreation opportunities.

Parkland Distribution

Planning areas of the City referenced here are derived from neighborhood boundaries created for the purpose of public meetings while drafting Wilmington’s Comprehensive Plan. More detailed

descriptions of these areas can be found in the Foundations Report adopted in March of 2016. Many of Wilmington’s parks are either in or near the City’s downtown area, including flagship parks like Greenfield Park, Riverfront Park and Live Oak Bank Pavilion, and Legion Sports Complex. Areas of Wilmington being best served by parks include the northwest portion of the City adjacent to the Cape Fear River, which include Upper Downtown and Historic Downtown. New Hanover County provides a high level of service with Airlie Gardens and Long Leaf Park located in the College Road and Pine Grove Road areas, respectively.

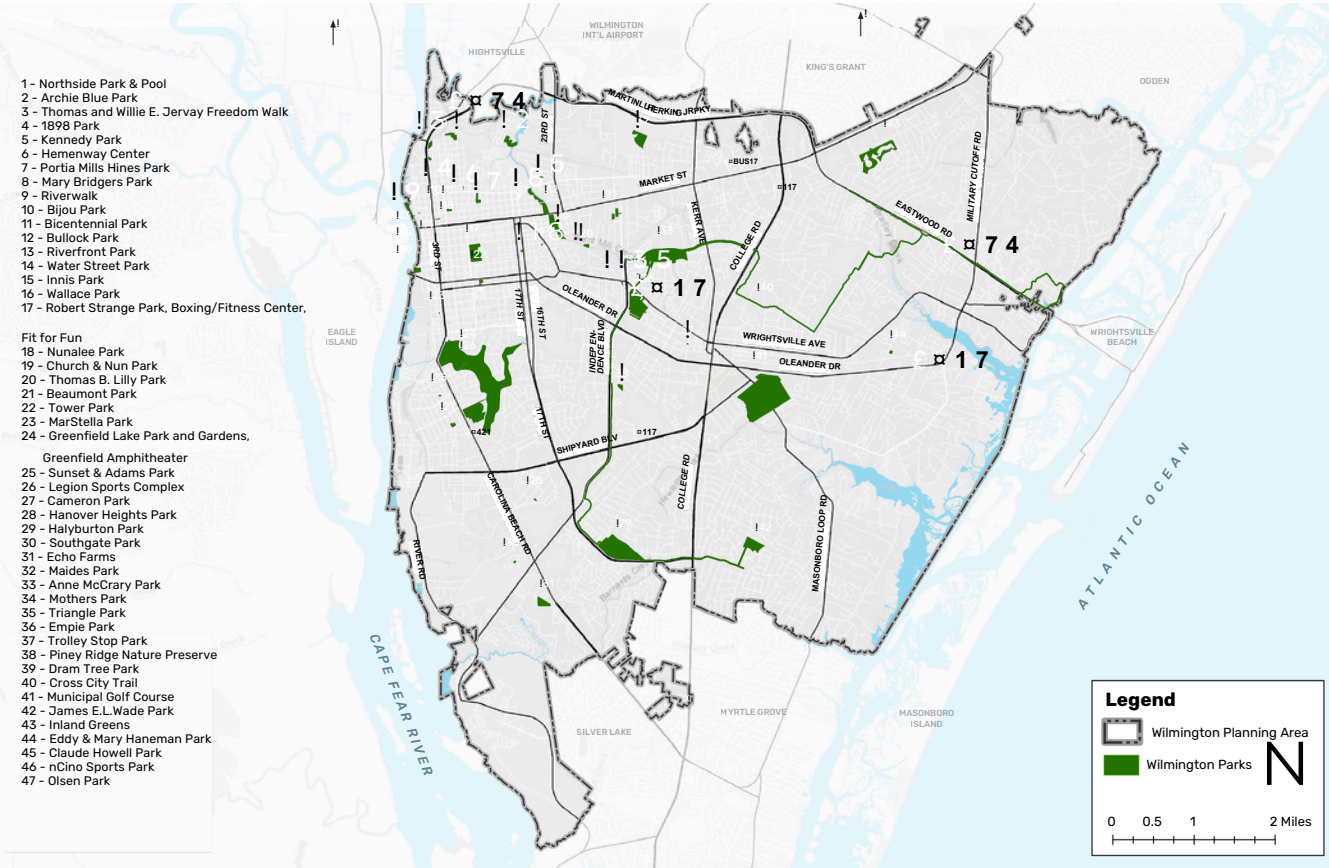


Figure 1: Geographic distribution of parks in Wilmington.

As described above, the City has made strong efforts to serve a substantial proportion of Wilmington communities with access to parks and recreation. Yet, to look closely at the map, it appears only about one-quarter of Wilmington is being well served in terms of geographic distribution of parks and facilities. The map points to areas of moderate need throughout the majority of the City’s eastern portion and Wilmington’s “boot” to the southwest. Areas of critical/very high need include portions of the City north and north east of Oleander Drive, adjacent to UNCW, and sections of downtown south of Greenfield Park.

Through this analysis, it is apparent gaps in access to public parks exist, however, it is important these gaps be further investigated to determine if provisions for parks are possible and/or truly needed in these areas. For example, Landfall, a planned community in

the northeast portion of the City; limits the potential for land acquisition for a public park, however, provides many recreation facilities within the private community. While these facilities are not open to the public, they certainly fulfill many of the recreation needs for residents, including:

- Overlook Park
- Volleyball Court
- Regulation Sized Soccer Field
- Landfall Lake
- Basketball Court
- Nature Trails
- Nature Preserve
- Playgrounds



Map of the Landfall community / Landfall Realty, LLC

While these parks and facilities do not necessarily contribute to the City’s level of service, they do provide recreation opportunities for the immediate residents and makes acquiring land for public parks difficult if not impossible to achieve. Thus, this plan would exclude this area from recommendations for land acquisition for the purposes of improving the geographic distribution of parkland. Similar areas would include UNCW and other large planned communities.

Ten Minute Walk

The Trust for Public Land (TPL), Urban Land Institute, and NRPA joined hands in creating a 10-minute walk to park campaign with a goal that everyone should be able to reach the nearest park or open space within ten minutes or half a mile distance from their home. This initiative is being embraced by parks and recreation agencies across the US to achieve equitable access to parks, recreation facilities, and programs to help residents achieve positive health outcomes related to walkability and access to spaces that encourage physical activity.

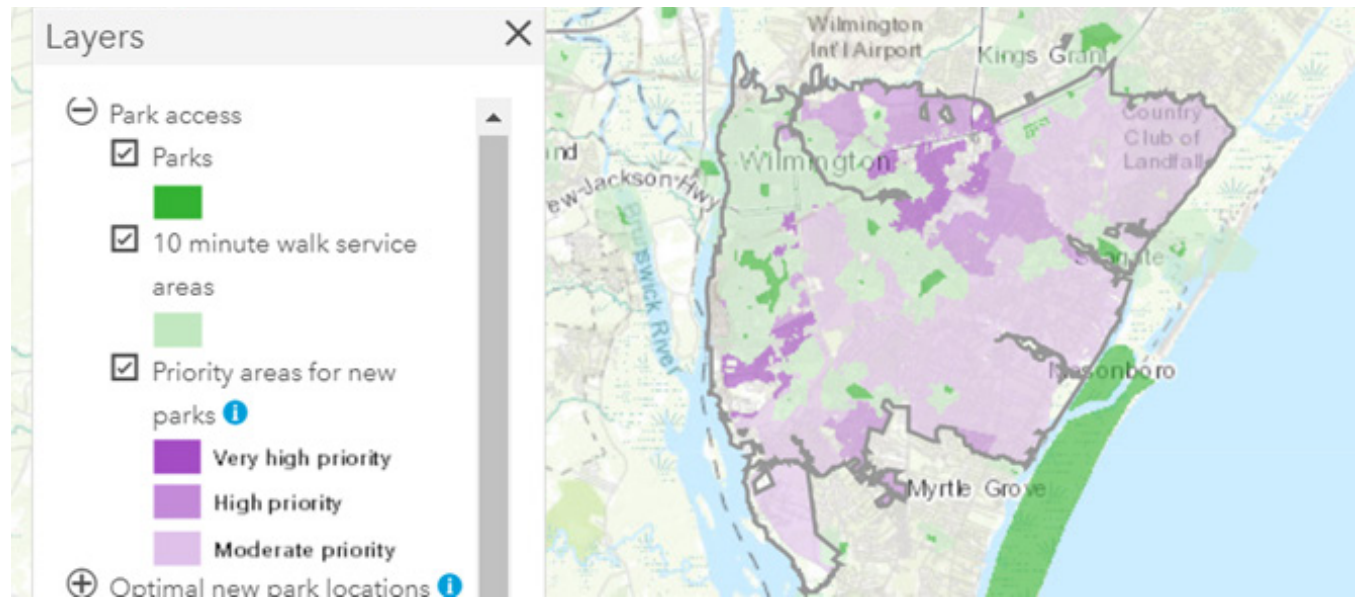
The Trust for Public Land maintains a database that tracks park-related data for communities around the country. The analysis is based on census data and provides metrics for community-wide walkability including demographic characteristics of those living within a 10-minute walk of a park. For each park, TPL created a 10-minute walkable service area using a nationwide walkable road network dataset provided by Esri. The analysis identifies physical barriers such as highways, train tracks, and rivers without bridges, and chooses routes without barriers.

According to the 2021 TPL report, 36 percent of Wilmington residents are within a 10-minute walk of a park, which is below the national average of 55 percent. If this deficit were to be addressed, and the City of Wilmington would design and connect their system to make parks and facilities accessible by means of walking, community members would reap some of the following benefits:

- Increased opportunities for exercise. Even small amounts of exercise have positive health outcomes.
- Enhanced quality of life, especially in socially vulnerable areas of the City.
- Expanded access for at-risk youth and low-income families that cannot reach parks than walking.
- Improved connections and social relationships among community members.

Many of the parks accessible within a ten-minute walk of residents are in more dense, downtown areas of the City. The limited number of parks in the eastern portion of the City, and the more suburban / residential land uses contribute to a gap in service by a park within a 10-minute walk.

The map below shows areas to focus on in consideration of additional land acquisition for parks or connections to benefit residents as well as visitors. Priority areas are also provided by TPL and determined by a data-supported, equally-weighted synthesis of the six metrics presented in the figure below. Dark purple shades indicate areas of Wilmington that are in high-priority need of parks. The lighter shades of purple indicate areas of need, albeit lesser.



Priority Areas for New Parks / Trust for Public Land

According to the TPL map, the Carolina Heights neighborhood, which contains Mary Bridgers, Bulluck, and Wallace Parks is also well served, yet it should be noted these parks are mainly unprogrammed open space with few amenities.

of the City's neighborhood parks are located in the northwest quadrant, therefore, the majority of these types of amenities are located here. When expanding existing or constructing new parks, these maps should be reviewed so amenities are better distributed throughout the City.

Facility and Amenity Distribution This level of service analysis expounds upon the geographic distribution of parklands by analyzing where park facilities and amenities are located throughout the City of Wilmington. Notwithstanding the acute benefits of public recreation amenities and facilities, there are numerous instances within park systems across the United States that find park and recreation amenities inconsistently dispersed across varied neighborhoods in a community. While the physical condition of the parks as compared to social vulnerability and demographics is discussed in the equity assessment, the general distribution of amenities across the system is discussed below. Basic park amenities are fairly distributed throughout Wilmington's park system. The instances of playgrounds, benches, sports courts (as a category), open lawn, and covered shelters can be documented at the majority of the City's parks. This statement, however, needs to be juxtaposed with the distribution of parkland throughout Wilmington. The majority

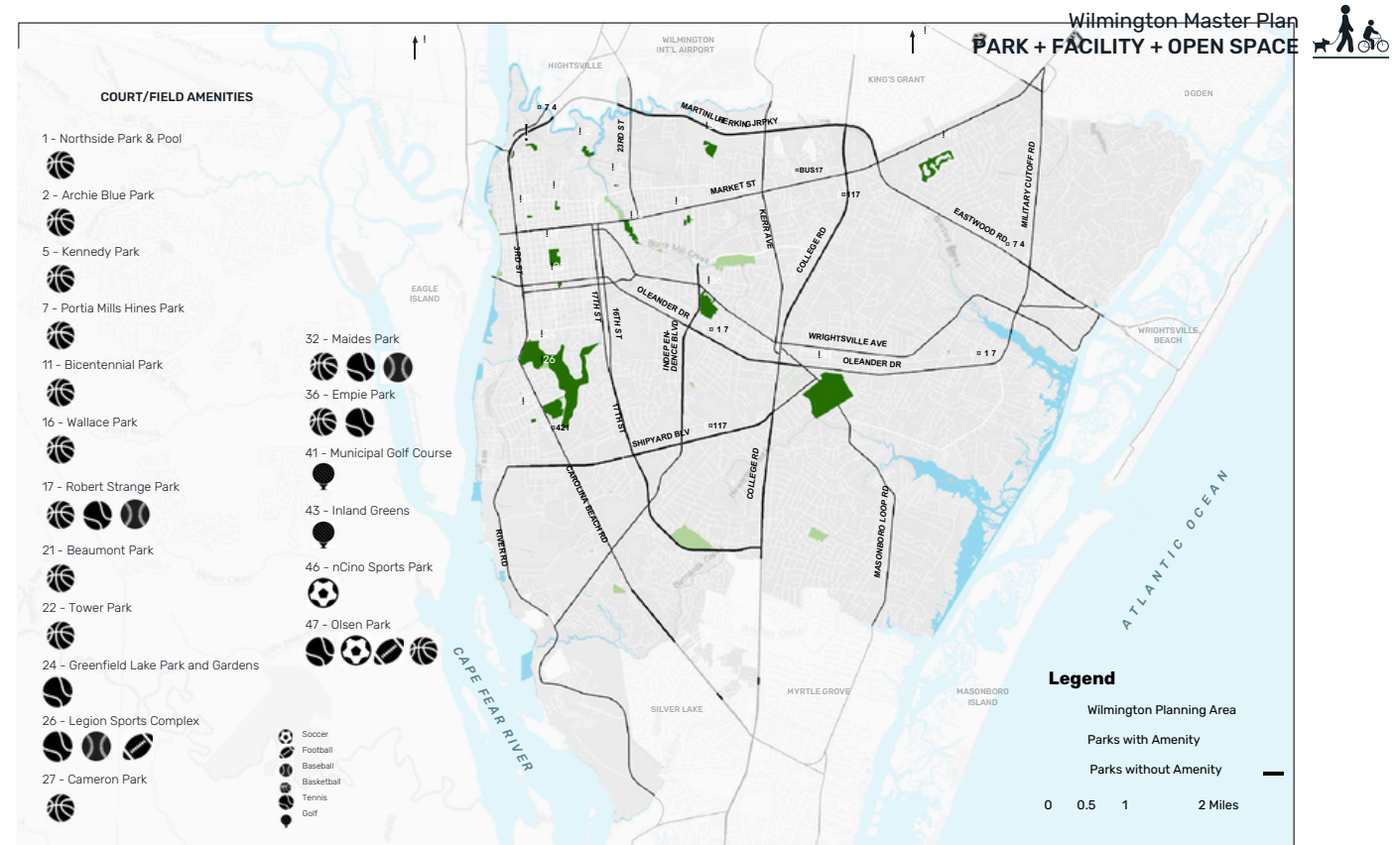


Figure 2: Courts and athletic fields.

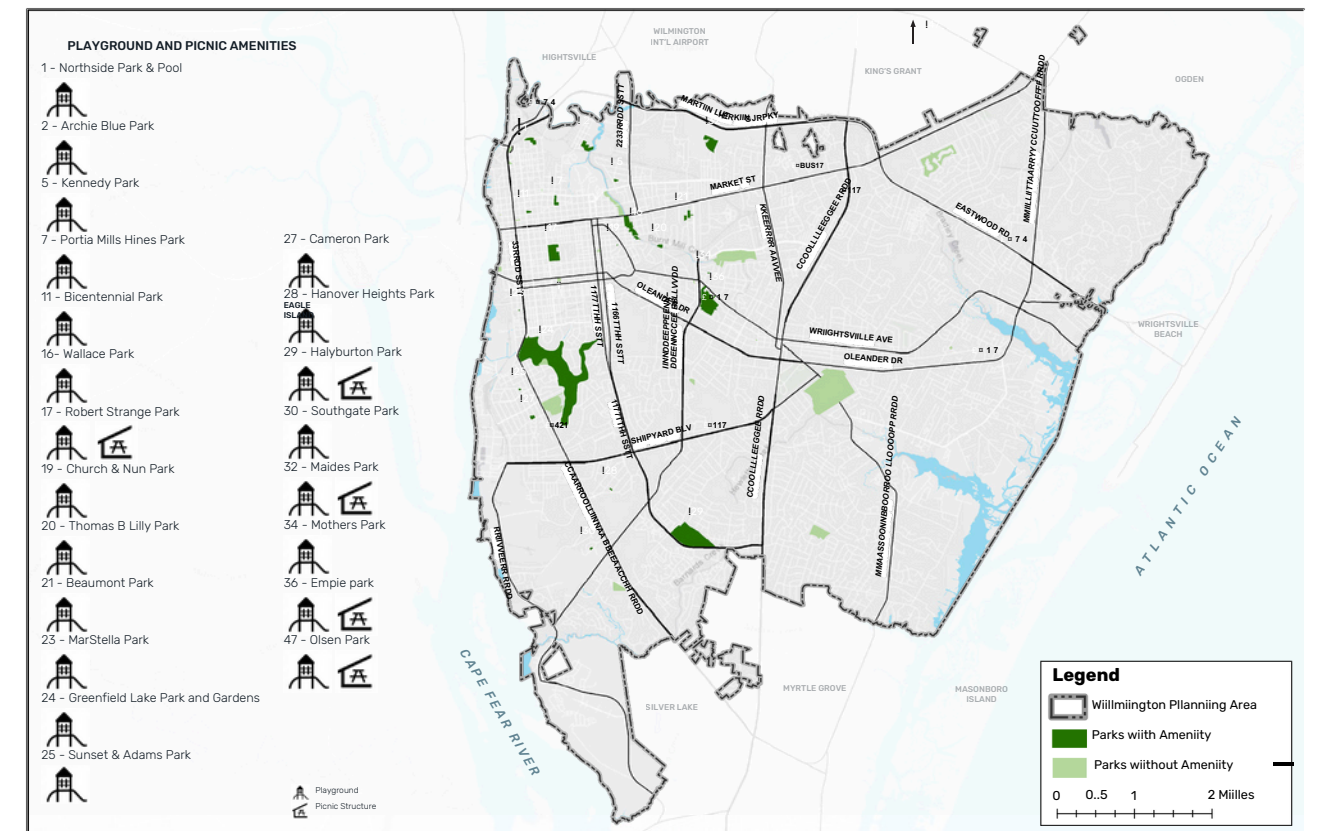


Figure 3: Playgrounds and picnic shelters.

LEVEL OF SERVICE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- › Most of the City’s parkland and facilities are located in the northwestern portion of the City, leaving gaps in service in the southwestern, eastern, and northeastern portion of the City.
- › The City should maintain their Level of Service for park acres per 1,000 population, resulting in the need for acquisition of 120 acres of parkland in the next ten years.
- › Land acquisition is challenged by limited land availability and the high cost of property and thus, the City should focus on place-keeping to the same degree of place-making.
- › The gaps in service may be due to large planned communities, UNCW, residential development and the limited availability of land for acquisition closer to the coast.
Two high-priority areas for new parks include the
› area in central Wilmington just north of Oleander Drive, and the area just south of Greenfield Park.
- › Indoor recreation space is in demand and limits the expansion of programs and necessary office and storage space. Additional indoor facility space to support a variety of programs and administrative services is needed.
- › Trails continue to be highly desired and the recommended level of services indicates 10 additional miles of trails should be constructed in the next 10 years.
Most of the neighborhood parks are located in
› the northwestern portion of the City and thus a concentration of outdoor courts, playgrounds, benches and shelters are located here.
This plan notes that per the Riverlights planned community, there will be two dedicated public
› parks (18 acre + four acre).



Equity Assessment

The purpose of this analysis is to illustrate equitable provision of parks and amenities across the City of Wilmington to determine whether parks are accessible to and serve vulnerable populations. Government investment in parks is intended to create benefits for individuals and the wider community. For example, providing places to exercise in parks creates a benefit for individuals who use the space. That benefit becomes extended to the larger community by diminishing health care costs associated with outcomes of sedentary lifestyles.

Residents living in areas with lower social vulnerability may be better suited to access the services needed to improve social and health outcomes than residents

living in areas with higher social vulnerability. In areas with higher social vulnerability, a park may provide a valuable resource an individual may not otherwise have access to. Providing parks to all residents is important, and this assessment illustrates the need for additional investments in parks and recreation services in areas with higher social vulnerability. This analysis is intended to serve as a baseline assessment to guide future decision making for investment in parks and recreation services.

WHAT IS SOCIAL VULNERABILITY?

Social vulnerability refers to the inability of people, groups of people, organizations, and societies to withstand adverse impacts from multiple stressors to which they are exposed. These impacts are due in part to characteristics inherent in social interactions, institutions, and systems of cultural values.

Social vulnerability research frequently focuses on risk management analysis, particularly related to the impacts of natural hazards. This chapter recognizes that many of the factors that determine a community’s resilience to natural hazards are the same factors that leave communities vulnerable to ongoing public health risks, such as a lack of access to parks and open space.

The following factors influence social vulnerability:

- | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| › Socioeconomic status | › Age | › Health and disability status |
| › Race and ethnicity | › English language proficiency | › Medical issues and disability |

Continued reading:

Planning for an Emergency: Strategies for Identifying and Engaging At-Risk Groups: A guidance document for Emergency Managers. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
Inequalities in the Build Environment Underlies Key Health Disparities in Physical Activity and Obesity. Penny Gordon-Larsen, Melissa C. Nelson, Phil Page, Barry M. Popkin

METHODOLOGY

The Social Vulnerability Index combines demographic characteristics commonly used as indicators for areas considered at risk of experiencing negative social or health outcomes. Social vulnerability includes an analysis of socioeconomic status, household composition and disability, minority status and language, and housing and transportation to determine the area’s vulnerability. The dataset for this analysis is created by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention with the intention of assisting communities after a natural disaster. More recently, this data set has been applied to community planning, especially in the areas of public health, parks and recreation, and greenway planning.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention social vulnerability index “uses U.S. Census data to determine the social vulnerability of every census tract. Census tracts are subdivisions of counties for which the Census collects statistical data. The social vulnerability index ranks each tract on 15 social factors, including poverty, lack of vehicle access, and crowed housing, and groups them into four related themes. Each tract receives a separate ranking for each of the four themes, as well as an overall ranking.”

As shown in the table below, the index indicates the areas in the northwestern and western portions of Wilmington have the highest social vulnerability rankings overall. These include the areas northwest of Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway and Market Street, southwest near Dawson Street and 16th Street and Carolina Beach Road and River Road. Other areas of high vulnerability are the North College Road, Wrightsville Avenue and Oleander Drive areas.

overall. Specifically, central areas near Oleander Drive, Independence Boulevard and Shipyard Boulevard, eastern areas near Military Cutoff Road and Eastwood Road and southern areas near Masonboro Loop Road and College Road, all rank in the lowest social vulnerability category.

Information presented in the table below describes the map data in terms of overall social vulnerability rankings. Each column includes a summary of all parks within all census tracts of that category.

Areas in the central and eastern portions of Wilmington have the lowest social vulnerability

OVERALL SOCIAL VULNERABILITY	SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS	Below Poverty
		Unemployed
		Income
		No High School Diploma
	HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION + DISABILITY	Age 65 or Older
		Age 17 or Younger
		Civilian with a Disability
		Single-Parent Households
	MINORITY STATUS + LANGUAGE	Minority
		Speak English “less than well”
	HOUSING + TRANSPORTATION	Multi-Unit Structures
		Mobile Homes
		Crowding
		No Vehicle
		Group Quarters

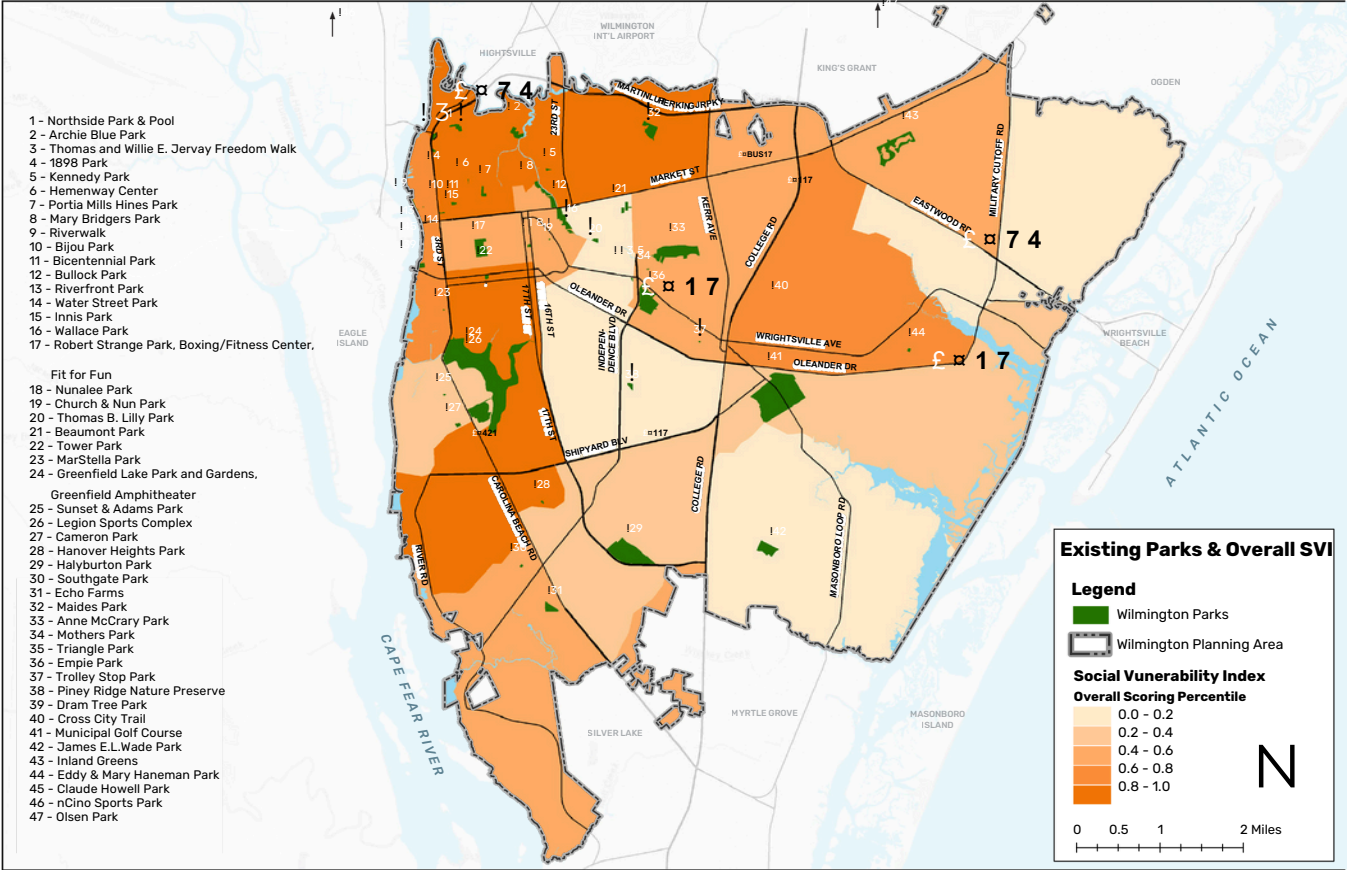


Figure 4: Overall SVI in Wilmington.

	Higher Social Vulnerability			Lower Social Vulnerability	
Ranking	1	2	3	4	5
Total Number of Parks	14	9	13	10	6
Square Mileage of Area	9.04	5.36	10.5	10.35	15.136
Population within Area	22,329	16,762	49,685	31,502	39,926
Parks per Square Mile	1.55	1.68	1.24	0.97	0.40
Parks per 1,000 populations	0.63	0.54	0.26	0.32	0.15

Components of the overall social vulnerability index and four composite indices

There are 14 parks located within census tracts ranking high for social vulnerability. This is the greatest number of parks of any social vulnerability ranking, with mid-level ranking for social vulnerability closely trailing with 13 parks. There are six parks located in census tracts with low social vulnerability.

When numbers are adjusted to account for population and square mileage, the data indicates the second highest ranking social vulnerability area has the most parks per square mile, shown in Table 2 as 1.68 parks per square mile. Locating parks in areas where they serve the majority of people increases opportunities to serve and reach the most vulnerable populations.

The analysis indicates Wilmington Parks and Recreation provides park access to populations living in both high and lower social vulnerability areas. Areas in the first and second highest vulnerability rankings have more parks per square mile and parks per 1,000 population. Areas in the lowest ranking social vulnerability areas have the least amount of parks per square mile and parks per 1,000 population. Thus, it appears the most vulnerable areas appear to have geographically equitable park provision while areas least vulnerable may experience lesser public park provisions. The absence of public parks in areas with low SVI may also be in part due to the number of planned communities with private recreational amenities within the developments.

Additional Considerations A limitation of this analysis is the scale. There may be neighborhood-specific information that is not captured at the census-block level. Some isolated communities may appear to have access to parks and recreation, but due to physical barriers such as a disconnected sidewalk network, may not have actual access to parks and recreation services.

Second, this analysis does not account for the physical conditions or quality of all parks within an area. This element is discussed later in this chapter.

Third, this analysis does not account for all safety conditions in parks. Crime heat maps indicate criminal activities near the areas close to parks such as 3rd Street and Dawson St, Carolina Beach Road, Dawson St and 16th Street and Independence Boulevard and Oleander Drive. However, the data reflects some gaps due to the lack of addresses for interior roads in parks. As a result, crimes might be occurring in the actual parks themselves. The safety and feelings of being secure in parks is an additional factor to consider in the provision of equitable parks.

Establishing an equitable parks system considers whether all residents have reasonable access to quality parks. Access includes proximity (how close parks are located near residents). Quality includes maintenance, park programming and safety (protective surfaces under play equipment, emergency phone call boxes, trip hazards, lighting, etc.).



SOCIAL VULNERABILITY INDEX COMPONENT INDICES

The figures that follow map each Social Vulnerability Index component catalogs:

- › Socioeconomic status,
- › Household composition and disability,
- › Minority status and language, and
- › Housing and transportation.

This chapter does not include the detailed metrics for each index, but the maps provide an important visual context.

Socioeconomic Status

This measure ranks poverty level, unemployment, income, and high school diploma attainment. Central and eastern portions of Wilmington have the lowest social vulnerability overall and includes 6 parks. Areas in the northwestern and western portions of Wilmington have the highest social vulnerability overall, and includes 14 parks. Economically disadvantaged populations are less likely to have disposable income for leisure and recreational activities. Implications for these populations includes offering park amenities and affordable programming to meet the needs of the community. Engaging vulnerable populations during the planning phases of parks and programs can help communities offer amenities and programs residents may want and generally use.

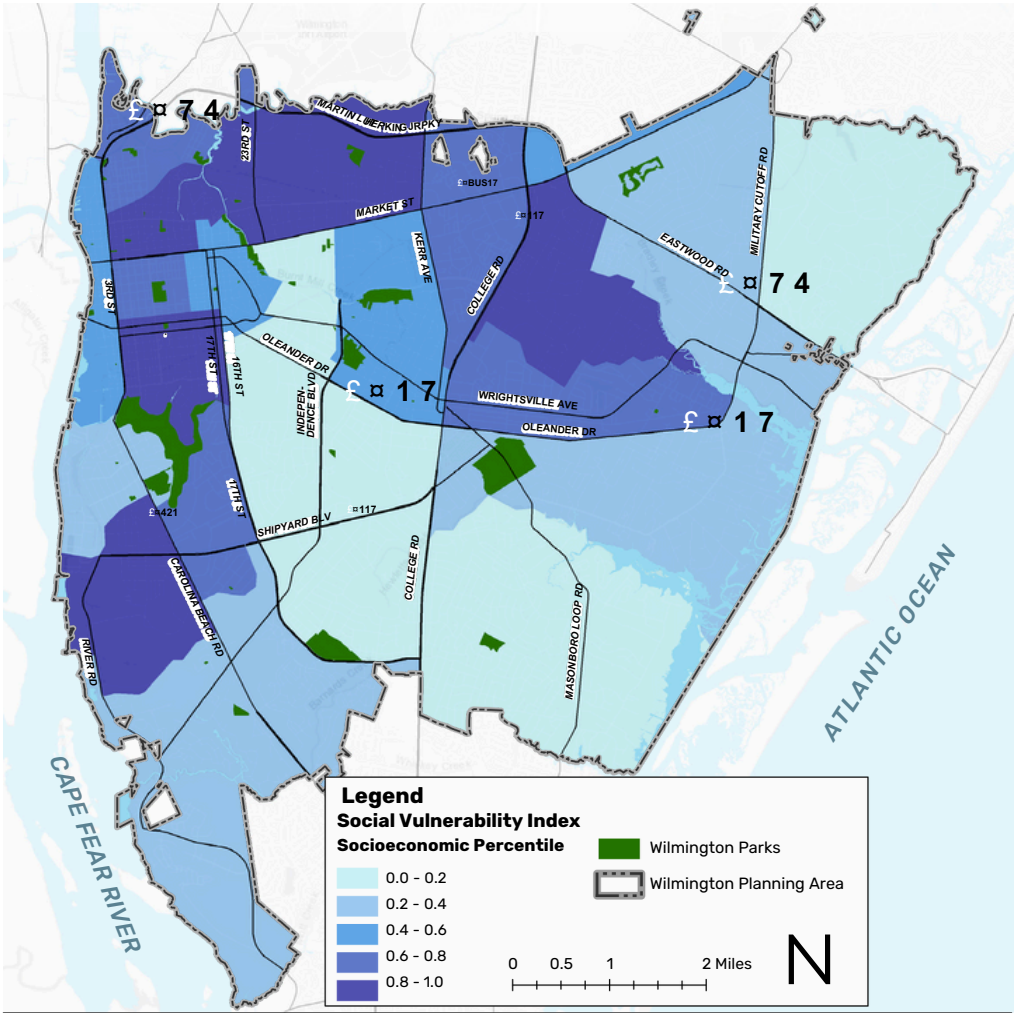


Figure 5: SVI Socioeconomic Status Index

Household Composition and Disability

This index measures seniors 65 years of age or older, children less than 18 years of age, civilians with disabilities, and single-parent households with children under the age of 18. The highest two rankings for social vulnerability located mainly in the western areas of the city and include 36 parks. Sixteen parks exist within the eastern areas, which are rated lowest vulnerability ranking for this measure. Vulnerable groups in this category will likely require

financial support, transportation, or assistance with ordinary daily activities. Implications for these parks include providing universal design that prioritizes physical access for users of all ability-levels, developing programming for youth, teens, seniors and families and offering programming during times to accommodate working, single-parents.

Minority Status and Language

There are multiple areas throughout the city with the highest rankings for minority status and language vulnerability. Minority status and language measures English speaking ability among those ages five or older. Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, Native American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander all define minority status for this ranking. Social and economic marginalization has rendered

these populations more vulnerable. Implications of this information for park planning include posting wayfinding signing, rules and recreation programming materials in multiple languages. The presence of diverse communities creates opportunities for celebrating cultural heritage

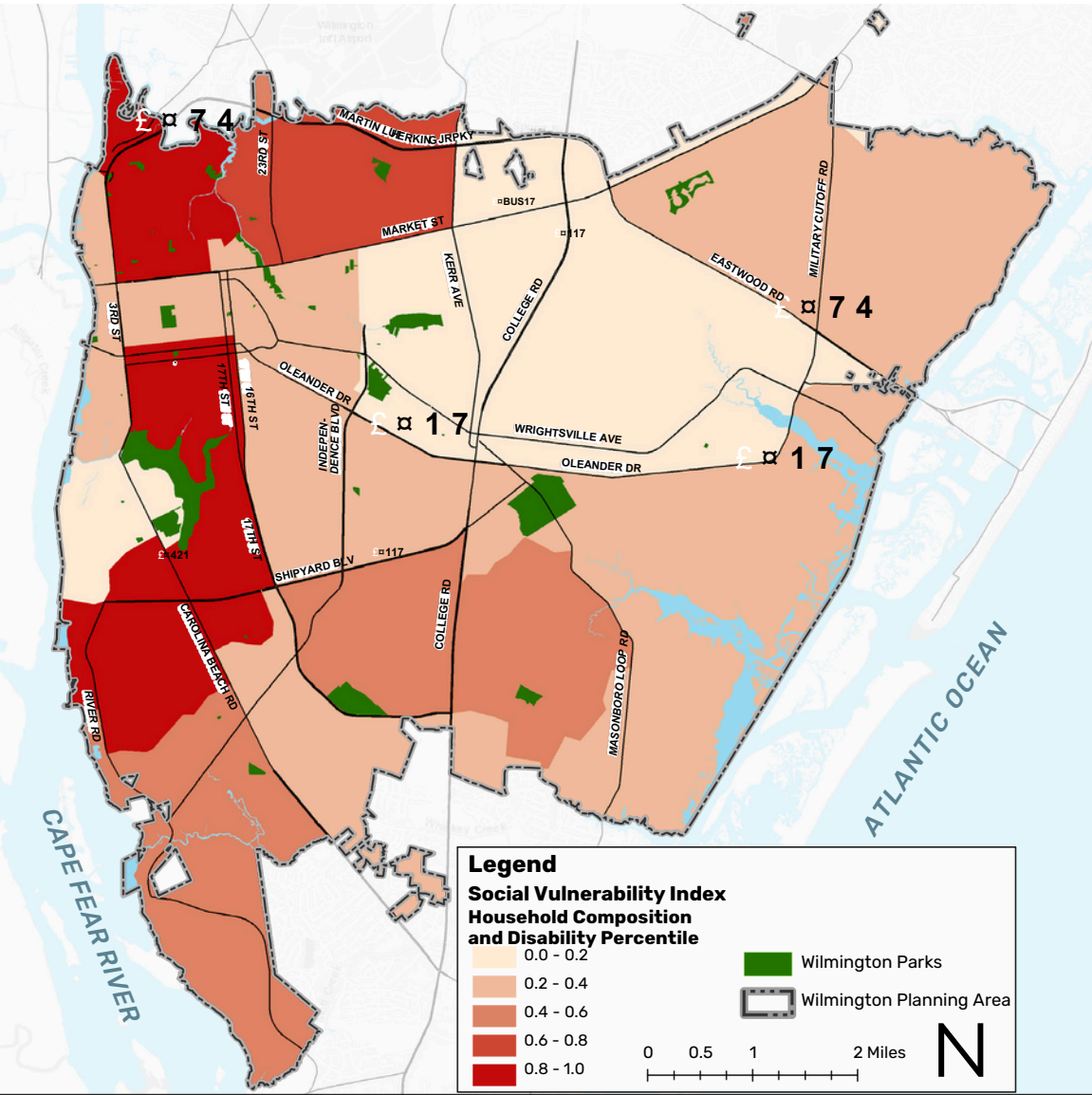


Figure 5: SVI Household Composition and Disability Percentile Index

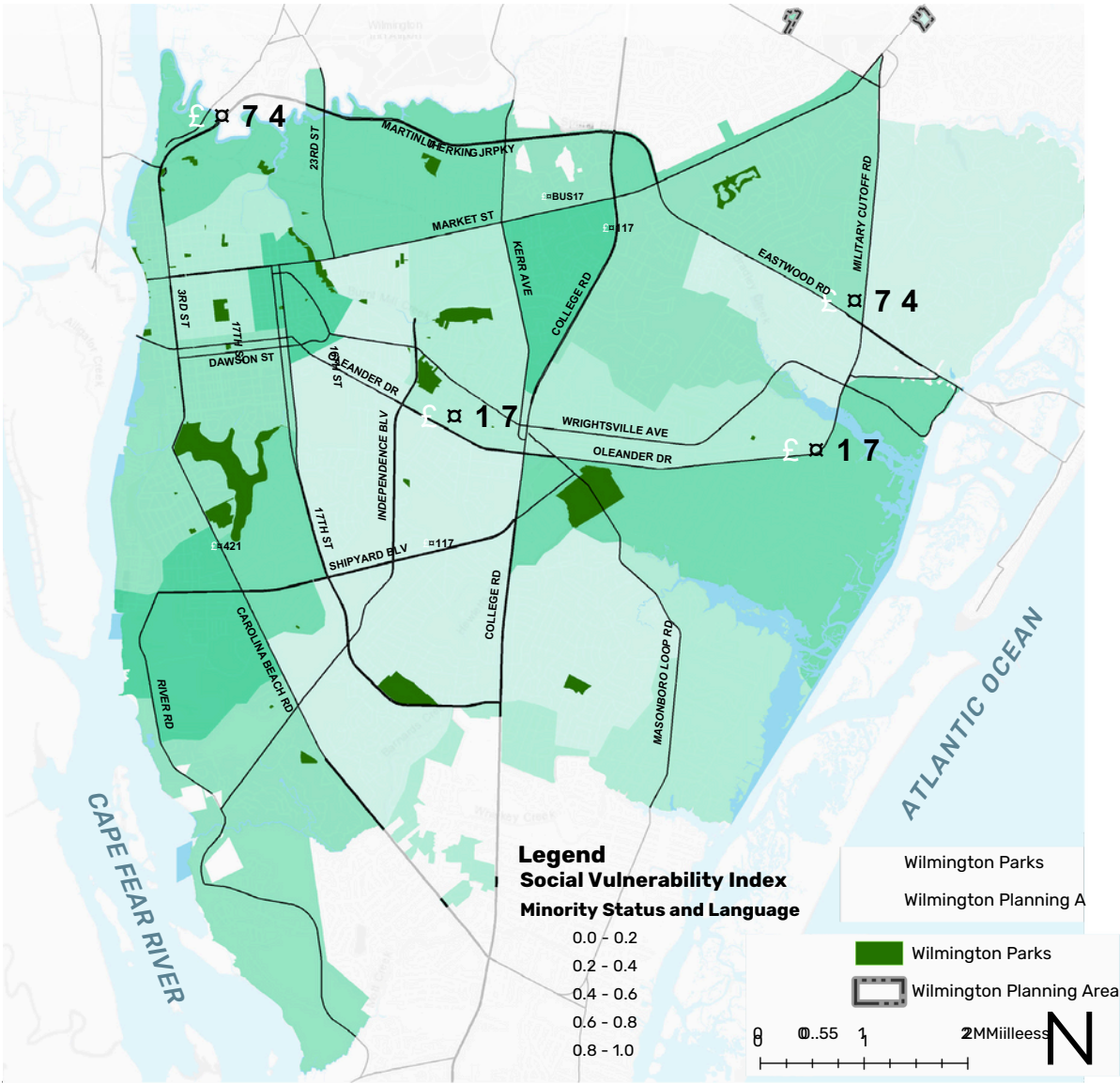


Figure 6: SVI Minority Status and Language Index

Housing and Transportation

This index measures multi-unit housing, mobile homes, crowding of living quarters, lack of vehicle access, and group quarters housing. Multiple areas throughout the city have the highest vulnerability ranking for housing and transportation. Housing quality is an important factor for vulnerable communities along with access to personal or public transportation. Both housing and transportation

are tied to personal wealth. Implications for these parks include ensuring residents have quality, safe and accessible parks within walking distance, with programming reflective of the populations living near or within walking distances of those parks.

WALKABILITY AND PARKS

Equitable parks must also be concerned with the question of who parks are serving. While the Level of Service section discusses an overall percentage of residents who have access to a park within a 10-minute walk, this analysis summarizes the demographics, or the who, of those residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park. A comparison of the demographics of residents living within 10-minute walk of a park to the overall demographic characteristics of Wilmington is then analyzed. If the demographic makeup of residents that have access to a park within a 10-minute walk is comparable (less than 5% deviation), to the City's general demographics, a higher degree of equity is inferred. This analysis uses common indicators of social vulnerability to determine whether Wilmington Parks and Recreation is serving a representative sample of the population or if parks disproportionately serve certain segments of the population.

The table on the following page shows the demographic characteristics of Wilmington residents within a 10-minute walk compared to the overall population of the city. Wilmington provides a ten-minute walk to parks to serve 36 percent of all City residents. Demographic characteristics indicate the City is comprised of 74.5% White, 17.7% Black or African American, 0.4% American Indian, 1.6% Asian, 0.1% Pacific Islander, 2.9% Other races and 2.7% Two or more races. Characteristics of residents within a 10-minute walk of Wilmington parks vary: 61.7% White, 31.1% Black or African America, 0.5% American Indian, 1.1% Asian, <0.1% Pacific Islander, 2.6% Other races and 3.0% Two or more races. Fewer Whites and Blacks or African Americans live within a 10-minute walk of the park when compared to the overall percentage of Whites or African Americans living in Wilmington. American Indians, Asians, Pacific Islanders, Other races and Two or more races have percentages that are similar to the overall populations living in Wilmington.

This analysis specifically examines the walkability of parks in high social vulnerability areas. The walkability assessment map shows the areas of Wilmington within a 10-minute walk of existing parks. The social vulnerability index map shows the North, Central, Greater Downtown North, Greater Downtown South and Port planning areas have the highest social vulnerability rankings, followed closely by the University and Greenville areas with the second highest ranking levels of social vulnerability.

Other demographic characteristics include median household income, unemployment rates, households below the poverty level and households with one or more people with a disability. The median income of households within a 10-minute walk of parks is \$42,461, approximately \$5,159 less than the city-wide median household income. Data reveal unemployment rates and households with income below poverty level have similar rates to the overall population. There are a larger percentage (28.1%) of households with one or more persons living with a disability than the overall population (9%). These results show that residents who are unemployed and living below the poverty level have similar access to parks within a 10-minute walk area as the overall population. Households with one or more persons living with a disability have greater access to parks than the overall population.

The analysis indicates that most of the Greater Downtown North and Greater Downtown South planning areas have parks within a 10-minute walk. Almost half of the Midtown planning area has parks within a 10-minute walk. The remaining planning areas have limited parks within a 10-min walk which include the Port, North, Central, Northeast, University, Greenville, South, Masonboro and Southwest planning areas. The analysis also considers alternative forms of transportation available in each planning area as shown in the SVI Housing and Transportation Map. Each of the planning areas has at least one mode of alternative transportation such as bike paths or multi-use paths.

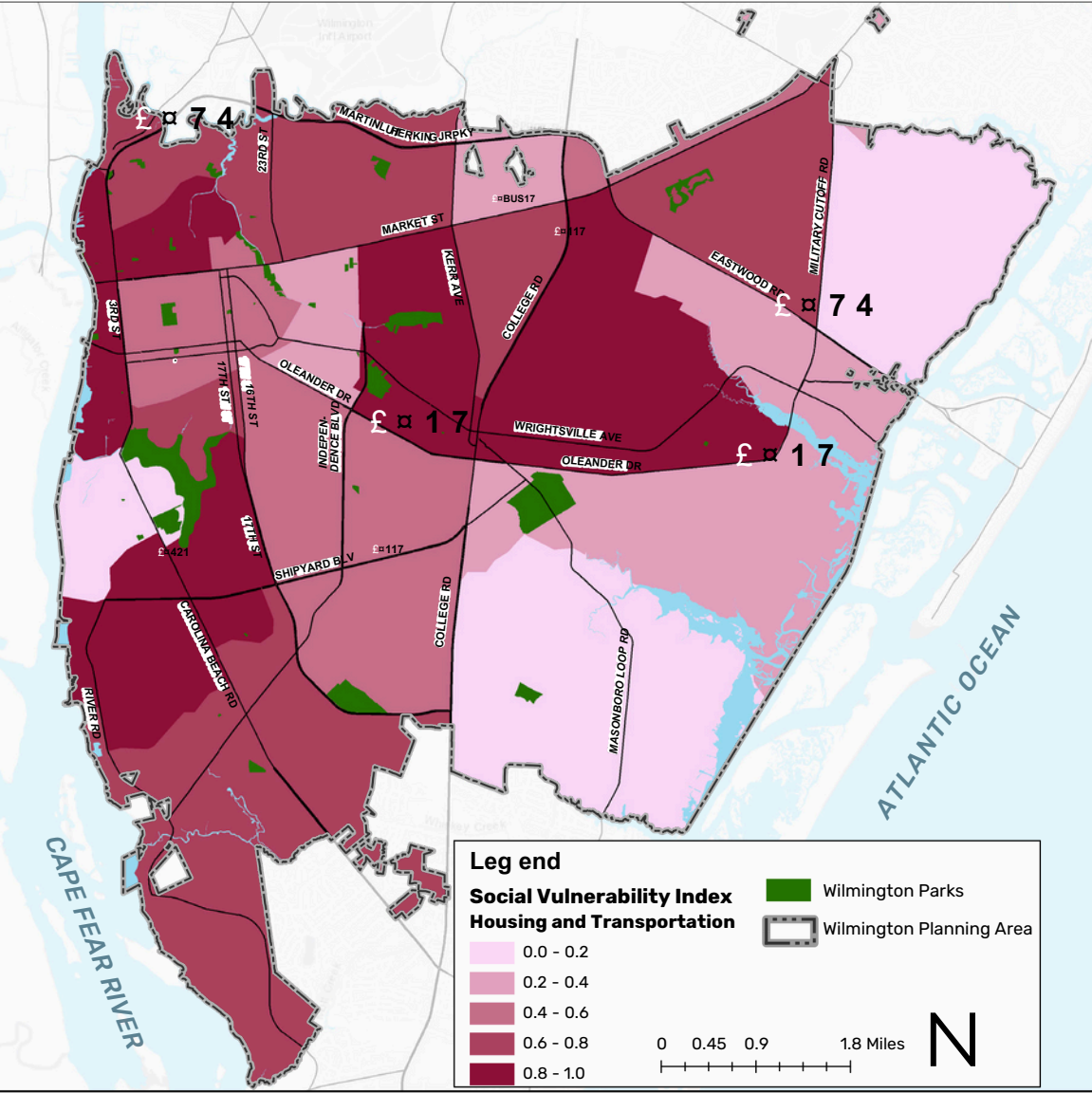


Figure 7: SVI Housing and Transportation Index

Demographic characteristics within a 10-Minute Walk of Parks

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTIC	10-MINUTE WALK AREA (2021 ACS DATA)		CITY OF WILMINGTON (2019 ACS DATA)	
Total Population	39,201		126,430	
Total households	17,295		55,721	
Median household Income	\$42,461		\$47,620	
Racial Characteristics				
White	24,186	61.7%	94,236	74.5%
Black	12,172	31.1%	22,387	17.7%
American Indian	188	0.5%	551	0.4%
Asian	432	1.1%	2,045	1.6%
Pacific Islander	36	>0.1%	129	0.1%
Other	1,021	2.6%	3,623	2.9%
Two or More Races	1,166	3.0%	3,460	2.7%
Unemployed (per US Bureau of Labor Statistics)	6%		5.8%	
Household with income below poverty level	24.3%		22.2%	
Household with one or more people with a disability	28.1%		9%	

PARK CONDITIONS AND COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

EQUITABLE EXPERIENCES

Equitable park distribution as discussed in the Level of Service section, does not always liken such distribution of park amenities with park conditions. Even if a park system provides parks equitably distributed throughout a jurisdiction, the quality of the parks, and thus experience of their users, may vary significantly. Thus, an equity lens is applied to park visits and community conversations to further assesses the physical conditions, quality, safety and welcoming environment of parks.

The project team conducted additional site visits for a representative sample of parks with high SVI scores (.8 – 1.) within a ten-minute walk of that park.

Parks included:

- › Archie Blue Innis
- › Portia Mills Hines
- › Robert Strange
- › Maides
- › Greenfield
- › Riverfront
- ›

The project team concluded that, overall Wilmington parks, regardless of location and demographic served, are well-maintained and clean. However, it was observed the experiences offered by parks across the system varies, and thus, while not necessarily tied to demographics or high SVI figures, is not fair. The below images depict how the park system could be seen as providing both high quality and lower quality experiences for park patrons.

This plan does note the City is in the process of undertaking improvements to Portia Mills Hines Park and a master plan for Greenfield Park to improve the overall experience by park patrons.

Northside Park (SVI .8-1.0)



Greenfield Park (SVI .6-1.0)



Distribution of Park Amenities

Similarly, the distribution of different park amenities throughout the park system is inconsistent, which is also noted and mapped in the Level of Service Chapter. During the community engagement process, residents described parks as diverse based on neighborhoods and amenities and felt park activities should be spread throughout all the parks, not just in certain parks. The public communicated a need for public transit to safely access parks. The need for safe amenities at each park was also discussed. Residents stressed the importance of identifying needs for park activities/amenities based on neighborhood demographics. They shared

Halyburton Park (SVI .2-.4)



Riverfront Park (SVI .6-.8)



concerns about the Wilmington Parks and Recreation Division introducing recreation programs catering to niche groups of individuals that may be unfamiliar such as pickleball at Maides Park. Residents felt improving communications between the City and community members about park activities could increase park use by all people. Wilmington residents understand the value of recreational services but stress the importance of ensuring those messages are intentionally crafted to heighten awareness of the City’s recreation resources and stress how these services are for everyone.



EQUITY ASSESSMENT SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- › An analysis of the social vulnerability and an analysis of the demographics of residents within a 10-minute walk of parks both indicate Wilmington Parks and Recreation is equitably providing parks to Wilmington residents from a perspective of demographics of residents the parks serve.
- › Results from the Facilities Assessment and Level of Service Analysis suggest the park system could be strengthened by providing a greater variety of amenities distributed across the entire system to ensure diverse recreation opportunities are provided more equitably, and community recreation needs are met.
- › Areas with mid- to high- social vulnerability rankings have the highest concentration of parks, while areas in the lowest socially vulnerability rankings have fewer parks. The analysis indicates Wilmington Parks and Recreation provides park access to populations living in higher and lower social vulnerability areas.
- › The demographics of residents within a 10-minute walk of parks is similar to the overall demographics of Wilmington.
- › This analysis should be considered with the level of service analysis to determine the appropriate level of parks and recreation services to provide a more equitable distribution of park amenities and programs across all park locations.
- › The quality of the parks experience varies greatly across the City and attention should be given to parks where outdated equipment, worn fixtures, finishes and furnishings, overgrown vegetation, and unwelcoming features such as barbed wire fence yield a less welcoming environment.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

This analysis is intended to inform decisions about investing in parks and recreation services to ensure government funds are invested equitably throughout the system. This analysis suggests the existing system provides a foundation for future park enhancement and development, since the demographic characteristics of populations parks serve are proportionally representative of the overall population’s demographic characteristics.

This analysis does not capture very small or isolated populations. While the analysis indicates the Division is providing parks equitably throughout Wilmington, there may be individual neighborhoods or underrepresented populations that are underserved. A finer-grained analysis of individual parks and local knowledge of communities could help identify locations where isolated communities need additional park access.



Resilience Assessment

Wilmington’s park system has the capability to play a unique and essential role in the City’s overall climate resiliency strategy. Public park infrastructure can provide measures to protect property and assets within environmentally vulnerable communities. The contribution to Wilmington’s overall resiliency is dependent upon the symbiotic relationship between parkland location, size, programming, and facilities. For example, parks, and the open space within them can be programmed for flood storage and water quality improvement. Park structures can also be sited to be areas of respite and rescue, designed to withstand severe weather conditions. They offer shelter during extreme events, or serve as a staging point for emergency operations. In every instance the resiliency value of the parks system is highest during times when the recreational value is often at its lowest, and it is this ability to morph from recreation to protection that makes parks such a key element of the resiliency strategy.

During inclement times the value of the park system is temporarily converted from recreation to protection. While the loss of recreational function may be initially viewed as a disruption of service, it is in fact an asset. It is rare to have land which can add value to Wilmington’s quality of life during sunshine and hurricanes, albeit in very different manners. Every park in Wilmington should play a role in protecting the infrastructure, neighborhood, and quality of life within their sphere of influence.

The threat of severe storms and extreme rainfall continue to rise in the southeastern US. Projections from the North Carolina Climate office show a continued upward trend in many rainfall related categories including the total annual precipitation, the number of extreme (>3”) rainfall events, and the frequency of hurricanes and tropical storms. With the City’s location at the mouth of the Cape Fear River and nearby shores of the Atlantic Ocean, threats arrive from both land and sea. Flooding from the Cape Fear River directly impacts the infrastructure in the historic riverfront, the port, and at critical utility assets including power plants, water treatment

facilities, and wastewater treatment plants. Threats from the Atlantic Ocean are twofold – extreme events bring wind and storm surges, but the persistence of sea level rise is causing higher tides and more frequent sunny day flooding events which can impact the utility distribution systems (most frequently water and sewer), drainage infrastructure, transportation networks, and private properties.

Methodology

For this comprehensive planning effort, McAdams used GIS information to evaluate, at a high level, each park’s potential resiliency value and contribution to the City’s resiliency portfolio. This analysis was completed using five categories identifiable and quantifiable using GIS desktop analysis. Additional potential to add resiliency elements is very likely and could be identified during site visits. Existing parks were evaluated using an assessment matrix with the following criteria: proximity to a mapped water body, location within a watershed, overall park size, proximity to areas prone to flooding, and proximity to a critical habitat. Each criterion was assigned a resiliency value based on simple variables, which are described in more detail below.

Proximity to a Mapped Waterbody

Each park’s potential to reduce downstream or neighborhood flooding, improve water quality and elevate ecosystem services is rooted in the location of the site. Mapped waterbodies are those that are mapped on United States Geological Survey (USGS) Quad Maps, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Soils Maps, or the North Carolina Division of Water Resources (NCDWR) Surface Water Classification system. Being close to these systems will expand the potential for a park to play a role in improving the resiliency of a larger area. Examples of this include providing storage to accept floodwaters from multiple sources, linking to a larger more diverse habitat system, connecting multiple elements of green infrastructure, or providing water quality benefits that will be directly passed on to the receiving stream, river, or marsh with minimal chance for recontamination or alteration.



Parkland featuring aquatic habitats ^

Watersheds:

Currently, Wilmington has a watershed restoration plan for Bradley and Hewletts Creek. For the purposes of this strategy, all watersheds are given equal weighting. This levels the playing field between proactive and reactive resiliency efforts.

Park Size:

When examining total resiliency potential, large green spaces generally hold more opportunity to incorporate flood storage and habitat protection. The highest rating was given to parks over 5 acres in area, with moderate value placed on parks between 1 and 5 acres. Parks less than 1 acre may still have potential resiliency benefits, but in general their ability to offer protection to a larger area during extreme weather is limited.

Proximity to Known Flooding Issues:

Addressing areas where it is currently known that flooding is impacting communities is a priority. Locating potential resiliency measures in areas where the benefits they offer directly protect and aid existing property owners is critical to ensuring efficient expenditure of City resources. Projects located adjacent to areas of known flooding problems

were given the highest rating, with projects within 1000 feet of a known flooding problem being rated as moderately beneficial. Projects farther than 1000’ feet from the known flooding problem are initially given the least weight, however detailed project studies documenting a specific park’s potential to reduce downstream flood risk could be used to change the priority ranking.

Proximity to Critical Habitats: Preserving natural habitats within Wilmington’s urban boundary is critical to overall resiliency. Critical habitats include areas highly likely to be home to threatened or endangered species as well as large areas of freshwater or saltwater wetlands and marshes. Existing parks with high habitat value were given more weight in the matrix, and potential park sites that might be preserved to protect critical habitat should be prioritized. Highest value was given to those sites which include critical habitat, with moderate weight being awarded to sites adjacent to habitat areas.

The weighting of the matrix criterion is already evident in the City’s existing park system as shown on the map on the following page.

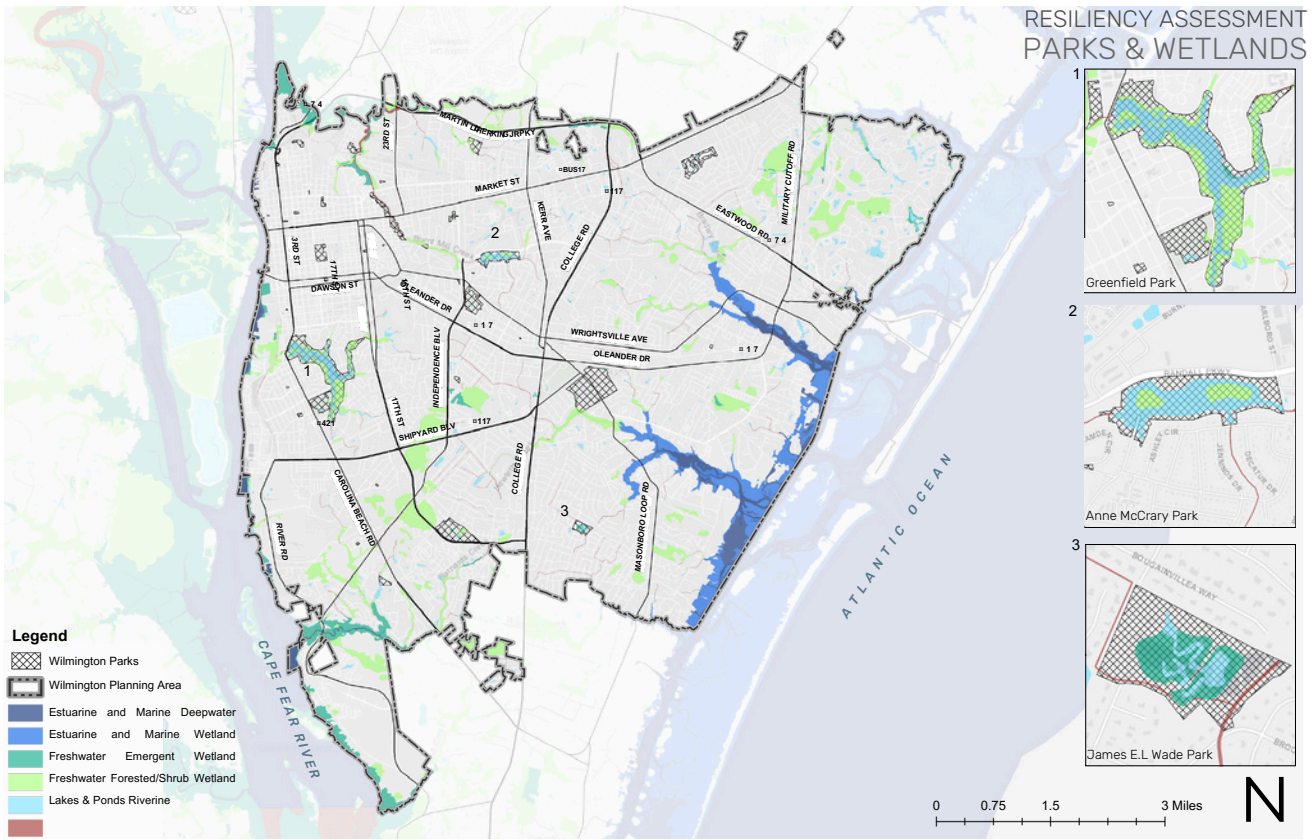


Figure 8: Parks and Wetlands

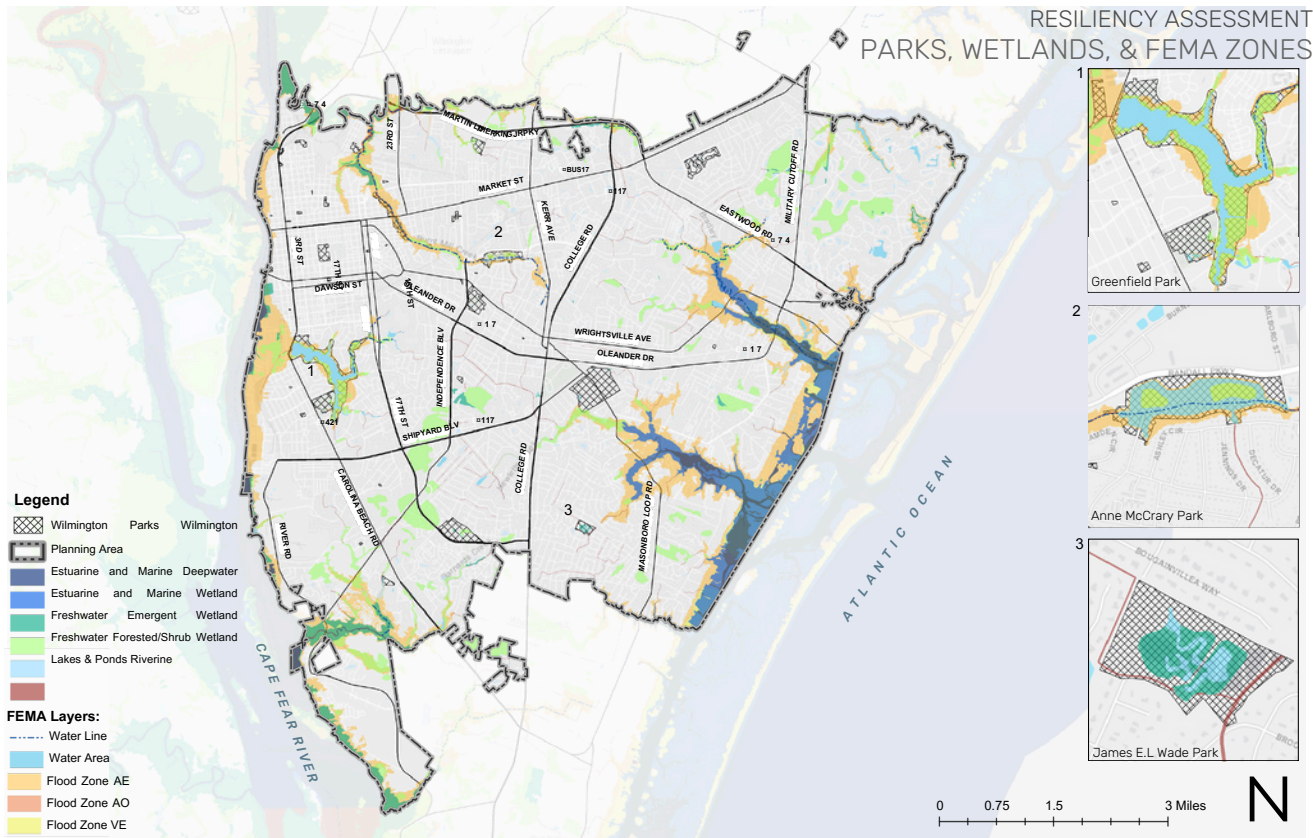


Figure 9: Parks, Wetlands and FEMA zones

Many of the City's major parks are situated in or adjacent to bodies of water. For example, James E.L. Wade Park is a body of water itself, filtering and attenuating floodwaters in the headwaters of Hewlett's Creek. Anne McCrary Park provides flood storage but does not offer active recreation, while Greenfield Park leverages it's surface water for active recreation and the water body plays a role in resiliency strategies. Wallace Park and Mary Bridgers Park both provide flood storage which protects the surrounding neighborhoods. In these parks, flood control structures retain floodwaters and meter flows during storms to protect downstream habitats and properties. In an example of a moderate contribution to resiliency, Archie Blue Park sits on the banks of Burnt Mill Creek which feeds into the NE Cape Fear River and borders significant natural green space and the river's floodplain. This connectivity of green spaces also preserves existing floodplain area from being compromised in the future, preventing future impact from land development and urbanization.

The City's parks have the potential to protect their surrounding communities by storing and blunting the impact of floodwaters during major storm events, including hurricanes. The loss of floodplain storage has been one of the most profound and impactful side effects of increased urbanization and land development. As lowlands are filled in to make room for and elevate roads and buildings, floodwaters have nowhere to go but up, raising the normal water level and thus the flood elevation compounding the issue. Soils compacted by development, and vegetated areas converted to concrete and asphalt reduce or even eliminate the absorption, infiltration, and storage of rainwater within the landscape. Not only do these land development practices reduce the benefits of natural green infrastructure, but they also place structures in high-risk locations. As the number and intensity of large storm events continues to increase annually, the loss of flood storage volume coupled with the location of urban infrastructure and increasing rainfall means storms will more frequently flood neighborhoods and businesses.

The park system often provides permanently protected large open spaces. Whether these are natural conservation areas such as Piney Ridge Nature Preserve, developed natural areas like Wade Wetland or more active areas, the open space generally retains its ability to absorb rainfall and is protected from future urbanization. When considering future sites, swaths of large open green spaces need to be protected before they are converted to development so open spaces and preserved vegetated areas can double as flood storage areas. Flood storage areas can double as recreation sites in the case of natural areas within or adjacent to floodplains. Parks adjacent to streams and wetlands, or in other low-lying areas, provide the opportunity to recapture some of the infiltration capacity lost to developed areas and to expand flood storage areas adjacent to existing floodplain. These are ideal locations for the design and management of stormwater control measures and other flood storage systems, providing both ecological function and aesthetic beauty to park spaces. At Wade Wetland, which was constructed through a City and County partnership, flood storage and water quality improvements can share equal billing with recreation in a well-designed park. While this resiliency plan focuses on the physical attributes of park location and design, it's important to recognize the strength partnerships also bring to the equation. Sustainability is achieved when there is a balance struck between economic, environmental, and civic goals. Partnering on this project was essential in securing the financing through the Land and Water fund (formerly the Clean Water Management Trust Fund), and without the financial kick start, few projects would ever get off the ground.

Parks do not need to have a permanent water body to be a valuable flood storage area. In fact, any green space can be designed with localized depressions, allowing them to absorb the impact of flooding during large storm events, so long as structures and critical infrastructure are located outside of the inundation zones or fortified against its impacts.

The existing parks in the City of Wilmington should maintain or expand their current level of resiliency service and benefits by considering the following strategies:

- Continue to ensure dam and outlet control inspections are up-to-date and all components of the impoundment systems are in adequate working order.
- Continue to update the existing storm preparedness manual, which includes guidance on pre-storm inspections, troubleshooting, and water level management strategies to maximize flood storage potential and ensure proper function during large storms.
- Continue to maintain or increase flood storage capabilities within existing parks through regular maintenance or renovations.
- Monitor vegetation health and look for indicators of saltwater intrusion, as this can be an early indicator of sea level rise and/or reduced ecological functioning.
- Relocate structures and critical infrastructure away from high-risk areas or invest in fortifying these entities.
- Remove invasive and non-native vegetation and replace with native vegetation to restore, enhance and preserve natural ecosystem function.
- Evaluate mowing and maintenance practices to increase the inventory of sustainable, native nature-based strategies.
- Increase tree canopy within parks and throughout the City as a strategy to reduce surface runoff.
- Maintain the presence and avoid the filling of low-lying areas to provide 'escape' for floodwaters, even if the areas get soggy or occasionally hold water

- Explore ways to make elements and infrastructure within the parks multifunctional to reduce disturbed land while still achieving desired community benefits

The City should also look to this methodology when considering the value of new parks. The combination of location, function, and purpose of select locations may be a departure from traditional park planning. Passive uses (walking trails, birding, nature preserves) and protection of existing infrastructure and property has a value which may not be evident or prioritized in current revenue models.

As Wilmington prepares for a resilient future, the parks system can play a key role in protecting infrastructure and assets from flood damage and water quality impairments. Planning for extreme weather and the impacts of sea level rise are a necessity today. While the hope is to not need to lean on green space for protection, integrating it into park design and maximizing its value costs little compared to the costs of rebuilding– it's also just good smart design. The park system's role in resiliency achieves many objectives – it can actively buffer developed areas from floodwater, improve the health and wellness of Wilmington's citizens, and add a public asset to an area that otherwise might be developed and put more citizens and businesses at risk. Using the design and planning tools outlined in this section will directly increase Wilmington's resiliency as climate changes continue to impact our day to day lives.

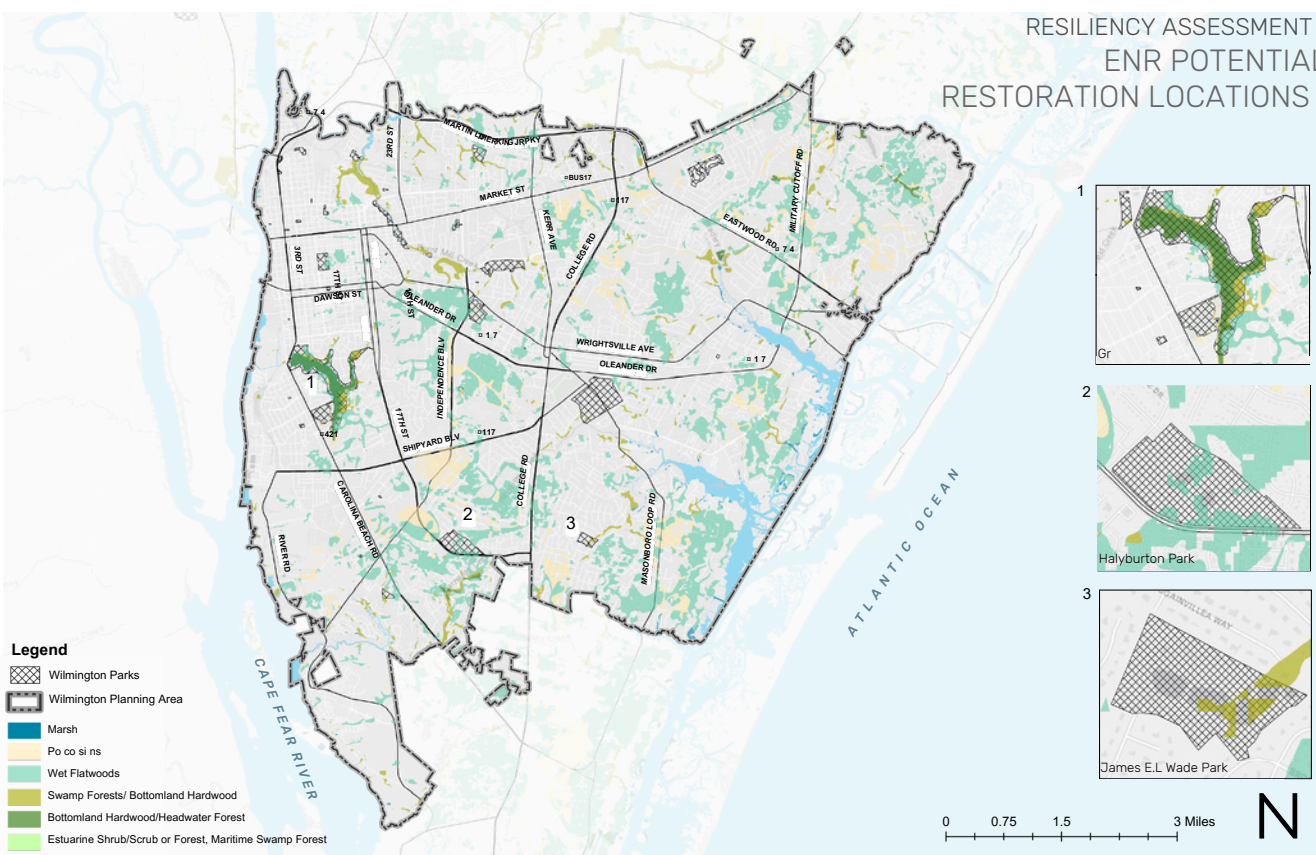


Figure 10: Environmental and natural resource restoration opportunity areas.





Parks, Facility + Open Space Recommendations

GOAL 1: MAINTAIN HIGH QUALITY FACILITIES TO MEET USER NEEDS IN A SAFE AND ENJOYABLE WAY.

Collaborate with the Public Services Department to Finalize a Detailed Assessment of Building Systems to Extend the Life cycle of Recreation Facilities

Building systems such as mechanical, electrical, masonry and roofing play a role in user experience, safety, and safeguards the longevity of recreation buildings across the City’s park system. Since a deferred maintenance list for facilities has been developed and operationalized, this plan did not evaluate the detailed condition of building systems at every facility. Instead, this plan identifies general themes and makes recommendations intended to improve or extend the lifespan of the existing facilities. Given the age and condition of many of the Divisions’ facilities, original mechanical, electrical, masonry and roofing systems depend on routine maintenance, upgrades and replacements to prolong their lifespan and improve indoor air quality.

The City should develop a short list of priority facilities to receive a formal building assessment by a licensed engineer to determine the remaining lifespan of existing building facilities and recommend repairs, replacements and on-going maintenance practices to extend existing and future building systems. While this is the responsibility of the Public Services Department and reported as currently underway, the Division should monitor progress and ensure execution of the recommendations by requiring regular updates. Priority should be given to facilities that have not benefited from capital investment in ten or more years, and those in areas with high Social Vulnerability Indices.

Construct a Multi-generational Recreation Center to Fulfill the Demand for Senior Programs and Additional Community Center Space.

This plan further recommends the City increase its

square footage of indoor recreation space to provide opportunities for program expansion, office space, and storage. The inventory and analysis and staff interviews revealed a significant shortage of indoor recreation space. Lack of office space, storage space and space to expand recreation programming is limiting the Division’s ability to meet current needs and expand to meet future demands. From a programmatic and operational perspective, it should be noted that the square footage consideration for an individual facility will depend upon the types of amenities provided at that facility. Including, but not limited to, gymnasium space, multipurpose rooms for recreation programming, specialized programmed space for arts such as pottery and dance, technology programs requiring computers and desks, staff offices, and storage space.

Furthermore, based on the recommended level of service analysis, the City should add one community center and one senior center. While residents have access to the New Hanover County Senior Resource Center, many of the programs are focused around resources for aging. Today, residents in the 55+ age group are more active than ever and are looking for activities including running and walking, pickleball, dancing and performance arts, exercise classes, classes, events and field trips. This demand, and the increase in 55+ populations nationally, has led to an increase in the prevalence of local park and recreation agencies (9 of 10) offering dedicated facilities, activities and programming to older adults. While the City offers senior programs, dedicated space for active adults and expanded services could better meet the needs of residents.

This plan also emphasizes the need for reality-based planning, or, recommendations that can realistically be accomplished over the ten-year planning horizon. For Wilmington, construction of a community center and senior center may not be possible with the limited budget and land availability. Thus, this plan recommends the City consider construction of a multi-generational center in lieu of one community center, to more efficiently address the diverse needs of a growing community.

This recommendation is also supported by the demand for flexibility of space within municipal recreation facilities. Flexible space is one of the strongest trends and greatest challenges for recreation service providers, as they try to anticipate needs in the face of constant change due to new innovations, directions, technologies and the expectations of their multi-generational community members. Recently, forward thinking communities have recognized the benefits involved with providing indoor recreation facilities that are multifunctional and ‘multi-generational.’ Historically, indoor recreation facilities were designed to primarily accommodate youth sports and recreational services. Yet over the past decade, the recreation industry has envisioned an evolution from the prior model, where the concept is now multi-generational. According to industry leaders, what were once ‘recreation’ centers, providers of limited services geared mainly toward youth, are becoming multi-generational community gathering spaces, engaging toddlers through active adulthood .

Recreation professionals, planners and architects concur that dedicating space to particular programs, results in inefficiency. They are designing versatile spaces that allow for the most flexibility from a programming perspective to handle current trends and have the capacity to accommodate future demands. Right now, meeting the demand for fitness opportunities in community centers is top priority

among leisure providers. Public input shaping the body of this plan confirms the need for expanded access to fitness opportunities. The scientific survey results show fitness and wellness programs should be a high priority for investment, with the second highest PIR of 169.9. A high level of demand for fitness access is also in part fueled by active adults’ (defined as 50-plus) dwindling interest in activities stereotypically associated with their age group. They are looking for active programming, which community centers are now providing.

Trends in the recreation industry indicate there is diminishing value in what have traditionally been referred to as ‘senior centers.’ Typically, North Carolina’s counties provide senior services, as is the case with New Hanover County. The County’s Senior Resource Center provides accommodations related to “senior issues, needs and services.” Among these are what appear to be a range of fitness and movement programs. Despite these offerings, senior programs remain a need in the City of Wilmington. The scientific survey results indicate a facility for seniors is a medium priority investment (PIR of 65.6) consideration, yet the results go on to demonstrate that senior programs should be considered immediate term / high priority investment based on a PIR of (117.8), the third highest priority behind outdoor movies and concerts, and fitness and wellness programs.

CASE STUDY

North Richland Hills, TX

The NRH Centre is a multifunctional and multi-generational facility that combines amenities that were either missing or scattered around the municipality. The building is not just a recreation center or a senior center, nor is it broken up into institution-like areas designed to support specific niche activities.

The 85,000-square-foot building was drawn across inviting forms and purposes of a more intimate human scale. Once inside, patrons have the ability to move between spaces, but are not compelled to. Each key function has its own interior design personality, yet they all work together. Features unique among the region’s municipal facilities include a climbing wall within the aquatics component.

GOAL 2: UPGRADE PARKS TO INCLUDE AMENITIES REFLECTING THE LATEST TRENDS AND COMMUNITY NEEDS IN A WAY THAT CREATES SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCES.

Re-imagine Neighborhood Parks to Meet the Needs of Surrounding Neighbors.

Several neighborhood parks across Wilmington’s park system have similar amenities: playgrounds, benches, sports courts, open lawn, and restrooms. Depending on when planned and constructed, this could possibly be attributed to the trends in recreation planning.

The concept of a neighborhood park was intended to provide basic recreation amenities within walking distance of designated neighborhoods across a municipality. A standard footprint for a neighborhood park was typically used and replicated jurisdiction-wide. Since this time, industry trends have moved to developing neighborhood parks in collaboration with surrounding residents to ensure community needs are met and recreation preferences considered to ensure strong usership. This is particularly important in diverse communities where recreation preferences vary by race, ethnicity and culture.

This plan recommends the City reimagine neighborhood parks to create significant experiences for surrounding residents. This means engaging residents in the park-making process. Recently, the City engaged surrounding community members to provide input on ways to enhance Portia Mills Hines Park.

CASE STUDY

Ethnicity and Urban Park Use: A Cross-Cultural Examination of Recreation Characteristics Among Six Population Subgroups
This study was conducted by the National Park Service to better understand ethnicity-related differences in leisure preferences among six distinct ethnic groups. Researchers realized that acknowledging the ways in which residents use urban parks and forests for recreational purposes has considerable implications for park planning. Results from the investigation revealed significant differences in the ways members of the six ethnic groups experience leisure and interact with a park environment. For example, African-American and Hispanic populations were more likely to visit parks in larger groups than Whites and Chinese-Americans; Whites, Hispanics and Koreans more likely than African-Americans, Chinese and Japanese to participate in physical exercise during their park visits; and African-Americans and Hispanics reported the highest levels of participation in team sports, while Whites and Hispanics were the most likely to engage in outdoor land and water activities.



The process resulted in a vision for a restroom building, walking path, basketball court lighting and parking. A similar process could be used to reimagine the following parks through a park master planning process:

- › Robert Strange Park
- › Northside Park and Pool
- › Archie Blue Park
- › Maides Park

Provide Diverse Park Amenities. The Division should continue to review industry trends and utilize surveys to understand evolving recreation interests, needs and wants to provide relevant and diverse parks. Parks should include diverse amenities with wide community appeal. A diversity of amenities leads park users to extend their length of stay and appeals to a wider audience of potential park visitors. A combination of amenities with low barriers to entry and more “niche” amenities provide all visitors with recreation opportunities while offering a unique amenity gives a park its own identity. Examples of amenities with low barriers to entry include paved, looped walking trails, sport courts, and open multipurpose lawns for unprogrammed play. The public also reported strong desire for additional pickle ball courts, however, this plan notes many of these comments were from unincorporated New Hanover County and Brunswick County residents rather than City residents. This activity is brimming with momentum, easy to learn, and inexpensive. Pickleball is popular among adult

and older adult populations, the two most numerous age segments in Wilmington. Furthermore, as this plan has laid out, there is demand for more senior programs and fitness options. Niche amenities may include splash pads, inclusive playgrounds, sensory gardens, and ninja or ropes courses.

Meet the Needs and Wants of the Community

According to the statistically valid survey, a farmers market pavilion is the third most important facility to households. Similarly, a farmers market pavilion is listed as the second highest priority for investment (PIR = 163.9). This result is somewhat surprising given the City currently hosts three farmers’ markets: The Wilmington Farmers Market, the Downtown ILM Market, and the Riverfront Farmers Market which is also North Carolina’s longest running farmers market. Two additional farmers markets are located nearby at the Ogden Market Place and in Wrightsville Beach. While not all owned and operated by the City’s Parks and Recreation Division, five farmers’ markets seem adequate for the size of Wilmington. This may indicate marketing is insufficient and residents are not aware these facilities exist. Supporting this, the scientific survey indicates that when asked what may prevent households from using city parks and facilities, the top reason was the lack of information or not knowing what is being offered. Complicating this is that over half of households indicate they learn about City parks, facilities and special events through word of mouth. The City could consider partnering with each organization to assist with programming, marketing or advertising to bolster awareness.

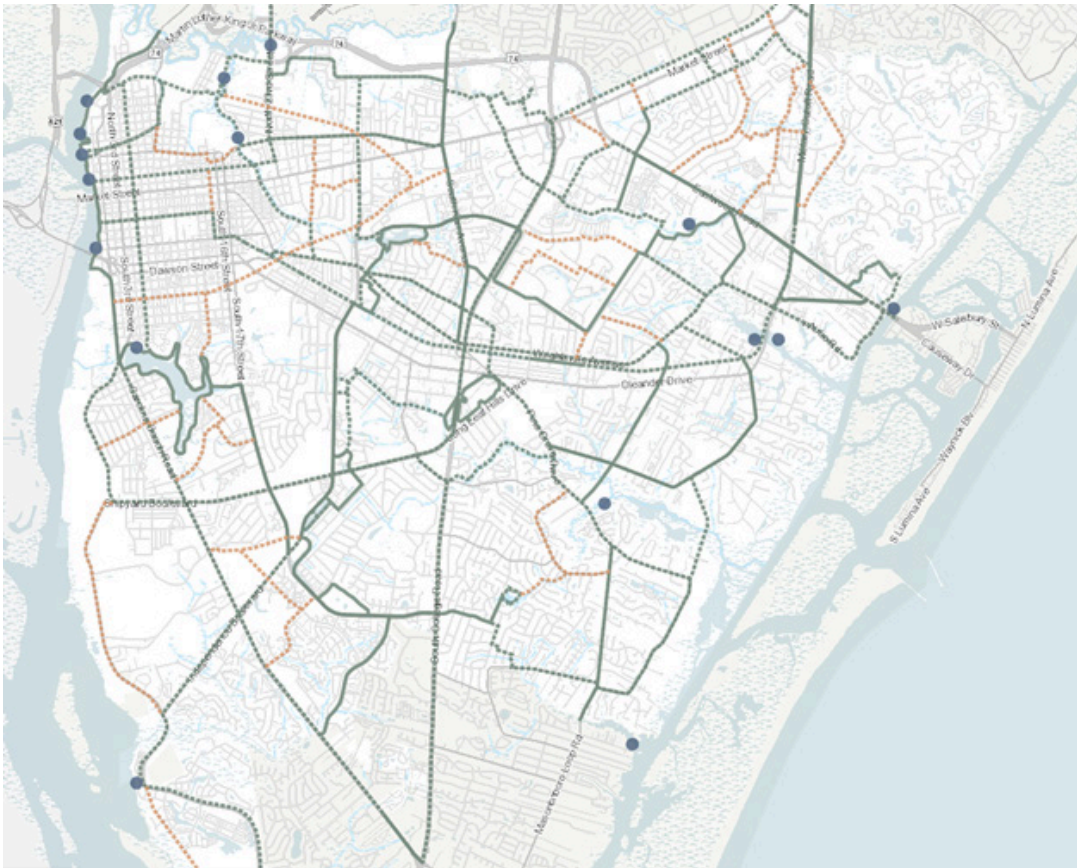
. Alternatively, the City could invest in construction of a farmers market pavilion to own and operate as a fourth option for residents.

In addition to a farmers market pavilion, other needs for facilities that ranked high and should be a priority, include water access, trails, natural open space, and trailheads. Together, these elements address passive recreation needs and contribute to ecosystem services, or benefits people obtain from ecosystems. This plan recommends the City provide improved access to the waterways and protected natural open spaces to increase opportunities for people to experience and connect to nature, educate visitors on the importance of environmental stewardship, improve resilience and provide recreational value. As a coastal city, Wilmington has miles of intercoastal waterways that could provide water access, yet only three public parks have water access, including Greenfield Park, Anne McCrary Park and Archie Blue

Park. When acquiring additional land for future park improvements, this plan recommends prioritizing parcels where water access is possible, especially in the eastern portion of the City. This recommendation aligns with the City’s Open Spaces and Green Connections recommendation as part of the Comprehensive Plan adopted in March 1, 2016.

High Priorities for Parks & Recreation Facility Investments:

- Greenway trails
- Farmers market pavilion
- Natural surface trails
- Natural open space
- Water access for boating, kayaking, canoeing
- Trailheads with restrooms and parking



➤ Recommended water access points per the Growth Maps completed for the 2016 Comprehensive Plan

This plan also recommends the City develop a Level of Service (LOS) standard for preserved open space. This is typically a percentage of the overall land acquisition. Not only will this provide additional access for residents, but it will also help preserve the ecological functionality of the City’s natural resources and increase City-wide resilience.

Leverage Technology

While the benefits of nature-based recreation and disconnecting from screen time is an important function of parks, attracting younger generations requires balancing the use of technology with outdoor access. Incorporating state of the art technological features into park environments has caught the attention of agencies and designers alike. Integrated wi-fi network, smart playgrounds, solar powered site furnishings, apps to track park usage, activities, special events registrations etc., and incorporating VR technologies to create ‘smart parks’ are a few of the latest trends. “SMART Park” is a new concept defined as a park that uses technology (environmental, digital, and materials) to achieve a series of values: equitable access, community fit, enhanced health, safety, resilience, water and energy efficiency, and effective operations and maintenance. The UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation has created a toolkit for developing ‘smart parks’ which described a compilation of technologies that can be used in parks to make them SMART.

GOAL 3: IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL CONDITION OF PARKS SO THEY FEEL SAFER AND MORE WELCOMING

Update and Maintain Existing Parks and Facilities

This plan recommends the City undertake an initiative to invest in and transform parks that have seen limited investment over the last ten years. Immediate progress can be seen and felt by communities through targeted improvements aimed to physically enhance local parks. Improvements may include repainting and repairing play equipment, resurfacing ball courts and play areas; repairing benches, fences and other features, and making parks greener with more plantings, trees and restored lawns. The

City should identify their priority list for targeted improvements focusing on those that have not seen significant capital investment in over ten years, are in areas with high Social Vulnerability Indices (see the equity assessment) and present safety, security or code compliance concerns. This process should actively engage the local neighborhoods to gather ideas from residents who use the parks, incorporating those ideas into designs.

This notion is greatly supported by the community with 92.3% of survey respondents indicating they support the City investing in the improvements and upkeep of existing facilities, and 59.3% of respondents indicated they would support this initiative with tax dollars. Additional financial support was indicated by respondents willing to support improvements and expansions with a future bond financed within the existing property tax rate structure (65%) followed by adjusting registration fees (52.3%) and a future bond that would require a property tax rate increase to finance the debt (39.7%). Finally, community support for maintenance of parks and facilities was indicated by respondents as the top area they believe the City should focus on improving followed by greenway connectivity (41.3%), safety and security (40.5%) and updating existing parks and facilities (40.0%). These results and the team’s observations during the site assessments greatly support maintenance, updates, repairs, improvements and expansion of existing facilities as a top priority for the Division over the ten-year planning horizon.

This plan also recommends improving the physical condition of parks to foster improved feelings of perceived safety. Survey respondents reported safety at facilities as a leading reason preventing their households from using City parks. At 19.9% of respondents, this reason is more than ten percent higher than the national average of 9.7%.

In addition to improved facilities and on-trend amenities, perceived feelings of safety can be improved by implementing safety design techniques like Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). Such strategies can help defend public spaces against potential offending. The success of CPTED is predicated on three key concepts – natural surveillance, natural access control and territorial reinforcement.

Natural Surveillance is focused on increased visibility – a design concept directed at keeping intruders easily observable through use of lighting, landscaping and the placement of windows. Natural Access Control simply controls physical access and can be created by incorporating any physical or mechanical means of access control such as fences, gates, berms or landscaping. Territorial Reinforcement uses physical design to promotes a sense of ownership. By clearly defining spaces as public and private, and keeping public spaces well maintained and visually appealing, a sense of ownership and pride discourage misuse of civic spaces.

While the City has been intentional about implementing CPTED practices, trimming hedges and overgrown vegetation could enhance this initiative. This is particularly true for Greenfield Park where overgrown vegetation has limited views to areas of the park and provides places for wrong doers to hide. The City is currently undertaking a master plan for Greenfield Park in part to address this exact challenge. Similarly, updating amenities and programming parks to address the needs and wants of the surrounding neighborhoods will increase park usage and discourage unintended usage of Wilmington parks.

While this plan primarily addresses improvements that can be made to the built environment to improve perceived feelings of safety, the City should continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the park ranger program by documenting instances of crime. Currently, this pilot program employs one park ranger primarily stationed at Greenfield Park to discourage crime and lessen homelessness in the park.

GOAL 4: FURTHER AN INTERCONNECTED PARK SYSTEM Interconnectivity should be addressed in a manner that considers external access via greenways and trails, as well as pathways within parks – connecting amenities throughout the park. Connectivity by way of a City-wide trail system can improve access to parks, providing opportunities to improve health. Within parks, paved walkways and trails can connect individual amenities while offering recreational value with a low barrier to entry. External to parks, greenway trails can provide system-wide connections between parks and places of work, employment, residence or shopping. Park development should consider proximity to local greenway trails and include provisions for both connectivity within the park and to other civic destinations. Connections promote connectivity between parks, neighborhoods and other civic destinations.

This plan recommends furthering connectivity both within and between parks. According to the statistically valid survey, the largest percentage of respondents indicated natural surface trails and greenway trails are the most important amenity to their household. While the City currently offers 32 miles of trails, greenway trails received the highest Priority Investment Rating (PIR = 174.3) of all amenities.

When comparing reasons preventing households from using parks and recreation facilities offered by the City of Wilmington and barriers to use nationally, nearly twice as many Wilmington respondents report facilities are too far from home. Similarly, the Level of Service analysis reports the percentage of Wilmington residents within a ten-minute mile walk of a park (36%) is well below the national average (55%). While a greenway master plan was developed in 2013, the City should complete an update to identify which recommendations have been achieved, which are no longer a priority, and develop new recommendations to address current and future needs.

Recommendations should be aimed at connecting people to the places they want to go and promote an interconnected network of parks. Priority should also be given to constructing sections of greenway in high areas of SVI as indicated by the maps in the Equity Assessment.

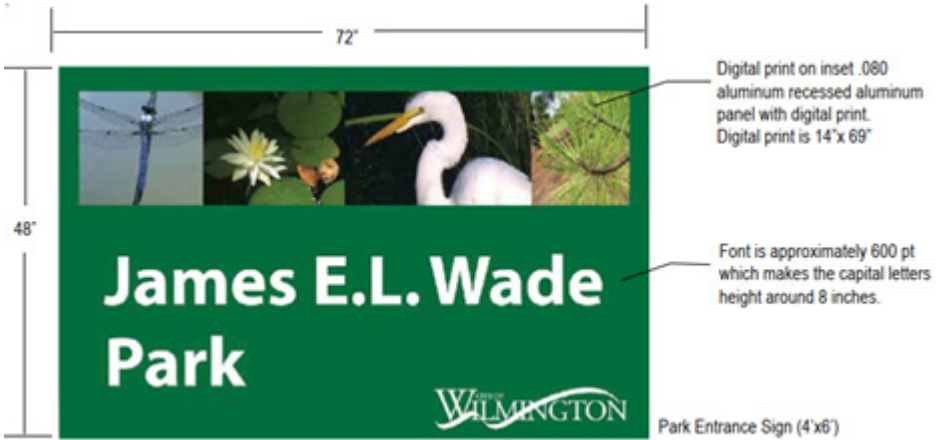
GOAL 5: ESTABLISH VISUAL CUES TO ORIENT VISITORS AND ESTABLISH BRAND RECOGNITION

Establish branding standards for parks that include consistent signage and site furnishing standards. This plan recommends ways to improve the overall visual appeal and character of the park system through visual cues that orient visitors and establish brand recognition. There are strong connections between the built environment and perceived feelings of safety, pride and belonging in a community. The built environment is a way to express historic, social and cultural identity in a community and tell stories about its’ people and values. More specifically, parks present an opportunity to communicate a community’s unique image and brand, distinct community characteristics and ensure vibrant shared public spaces. This plan recommends developing a consistent / standardized pallet of wayfinding signage and site furnishings, while insisting on integration of community involvement and public art into all park design projects.

A City-wide signage plan has been developed and implemented at most of the parks. An example park

entrance sign from the plan, and for Portia Mills Hines Park are shown below. Most of the existing signage at parks, specifically park entry signage, are in need of replacing the photo collages. Parks staff is currently working with the Communications Department to look at different signage styles for parks. Parks that would benefit from entrance signs include: Wallace, Triangle and Mary Bridgers. While signs exist at Greenfield, Halyburton and McCrary Park, the signage does not meet the standards within the signage plan, nor meet the specification for the number of signs within parks. This plan recommends the City arrive on a final set of park signage standards (either the existing or an updated version if desired) and implement the signage standards across the system, making those parks with outdated signage or lacking signage all together, a priority.

This plan recommends a similar plan for site furnishings and materials be developed for the park system to ensure visual continuity, a predictable replacement schedule and more efficient / cost effective repairs and replacements. Several different styles of benches, trash receptacles, fencing and playground edging can be seen across the system.





Example of park entrance sign as intended by the City's adopted signage plan. ⬆



Multiple styles of benches, trash receptacles and supporting signage can be found across the system. ⬆

In addition to the brand and visual consistency, consistent models and manufacturers of signage and site furnishings make replacements and repairs more predictable, cost effective, and efficient through an on-call vendor or maintenance agreement City-wide.

This plan also recommends the Division undertake a branding campaign to develop a logo and tag line specifically for the Parks and Recreation Division. According to the National Recreation and Parks Agency, branding is the process of creating both an image and benefits that lead to a level of distinction, brand equity and competitor differential. Branding encompasses the organization's personality, culture, level of professionalism and visual image while emulsifying the agency's image-building and marketing efforts.

Consider Adopting a 1% Public Art Dedication

Finally, the City should consider adopting a one-percent public art dedication because engaging residents and artists in the design process will enhance placemaking aspects of parks. A one-percent art dedication commits the Division to dedicating a small portion (1%) of a park's construction budget to public art installations.

GOAL 6: PLAN, DESIGN AND CONSTRUCT PARKS TO PROMOTE WELLNESS

It is not difficult to make the case for the integral relationship between parks and health. The first parks in the United States were developed in the 19th century as public health resources. Conceived as 'green refuges' in urban areas, parks were designed with the aim of improving the health and the quality of life for all residents by offering places for recreation, spiritual transformation through nature, exposure to fresh, clean air, and social interaction

that transcended class. Since that time, public investment in parks has been a priority for every level of government and the evidence suggesting that parks are 'green health spaces' has grown.

Among an endless list of benefits, some of the documented health-related benefits of parks are increased physical activity, reduced stress, improved mental health, and increased social connectivity. Parks are a critical part of a community's public health infrastructure and there is a growing body of scientific research to support this claim as recognized by the NRPA as one of the three pillars of parks and recreation. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical need for open spaces and natural areas where people can safely engage in physical activity and socially connect with others, emphasizing the fact that parks are an essential service for the community.

ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS SUPPORT THE NEED FOR HEALTH AND WELLNESS INITIATIVES:

Public Input Meeting: Health and Wellness is the #1 community value

Scientific Survey Findings: Participants indicated fitness and wellness programs as one of the top priority for investment with a rating of 170/200

Plan, design, and program both parks and recreation programs systemwide to improve health outcomes encompassing the "whole person."

This approach to health involves looking at the whole person—not just separate organs or body systems—and considering multiple factors that promote either health or disease. It means helping and empowering individuals, families, communities, and populations to improve their health in multiple interconnected biological, behavioral, social, and environmental areas. Instead of treating a specific disease, whole person health focuses on restoring health, promoting resilience, and preventing diseases across a lifespan.



Various types of playground edging can be found across the system. ⬆

Access to well maintained and safe outdoor space has been associated with initiating and maintaining physical activity and reducing obesity. Additionally, higher levels of neighborhood green space are associated with significantly lower levels of symptomatology for depression, anxiety and stress. Finally, the casual interactions that happen between people in parks—a simple hello, nod, or wave of the hand—have been shown to be important in fostering a sense of community and feelings of inclusion. A 2016 study published in the Annals of Nutrition and Metabolism found that regardless of age, the health benefits for well-being are due in part to the level of leisure activity participation. These results highlight

the importance of leisure activities for successful aging throughout the adult life span. Interventions designed to improve well-being through increasing leisure activity participation should also take physical health into consideration, particularly for older adults.

The following table illustrates measurable criteria for the planning, design and programming of parks to improve health outcomes for the whole person. These criteria move beyond traditional park measures making explicit the elements needed for developing a parks system that promotes health for all residents.



CATEGORY	CRITERIA	MEASURE
Planning	Proximity	% population within ½ mile of a park or shared use recreation area
	Walking Access	% of population with a less than ½ mile walkable route to park (or shared use recreation area) or trail entrance
	Park Connectivity	Ratio of the number of people with less than a half-mile walk route to a public park or trail entrance to the number of people living within a half mile of that specific park or trail corridor boundary.
	Park Acreage	Total land area designated as public parks or trails in a given range ('park deserts', unequal distribution)
	Financial Investment	<div>› Investment per park user</div> <div>› Investment per resident within ½ mile of park</div> <div>› Ratio of reinvestment (how much invested in park/ total cost to replace all existing park assets)</div> <div>› Investment strategy that includes consideration of community characteristics and site specific characteristics</div>
Design	Inclusion	<div>› Assessment of community context (demographics, community health, inequality, and assets) informs overall priorities and strategies for inclusion</div> <div>› # of community members from underrepresented social groups actively engaged in the planning process</div> <div>› Proportion of decisions made with stakeholder input</div> <div>› Level of impact of stakeholder involvement</div>
	Safety	<div>› Multiple access/entry points</div> <div>› Extent to which Crime Prevention through Environmental Design Guidelines are followed</div> <div>› Hierarchy of lighting types and clear sight lines incorporated into design</div>
	Access	<div>› Presence of ADA required features</div> <div>› # of entry points</div> <div>› # of connections to nearby neighborhoods, trails, and primary destinations</div> <div>› # of walkable routes to the park</div> <div>› Visible entrance and wayfinding signs</div>
	Physical Activity	<div>› # of leisure, moderate, and vigorous physical activity areas</div> <div>› # of park elements for different age groups and populations</div>

Design	Healthy Eating	# of acres dedicated to edible landscapes
	Social Cohesion	# of park elements that encourage social interaction
	Inclusion	<div>› Proportion of design decisions that are made with stakeholder input (i.e. local community members, underrepresented/excluded social groups)</div> <div>› # of cultural, locally sourced, and natural heritage features incorporated into park design</div>
Programming	Safety	<div>› Percentage of instructors to achieve CPR and other safety-oriented certifications</div> <div>› Number of parks and facilities with available first aid supplies</div>
	Access	Percentage of Wilmington residents who report not being able to participate in parks and recreation programs due to transportation barriers
	Physical Activity	<div>› Funding for fitness programs</div> <div>› Participation rates</div> <div>› Percent or number of programs with physical components</div> <div>› Program evaluation results</div>
	Healthy Eating	Percent or number of programs focused on healthy food options, agriculture and cooking
	Inclusion	<div>› Number of instructors reporting completed inclusivity training</div> <div>› Number of programming decisions that involve target population feedback</div> <div>› Number of program registrants with scholarships or on sliding fee</div> <div>› Number of Wilmington residents who report cost as a barrier to participating in Parks and Recreation programs</div> <div>› Equitable demographic distribution of program participants (age, race/ethnicity, income, education)</div>
	Social Cohesion	<div>› Number of programs that promote social interaction</div> <div>› Number of annual community events</div>

GOAL 7: UPGRADE PARKS AND AMENITIES TO IMPROVE INCLUSIVITY AND ENFORCE ADA COMPLIANCE

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) outlines minimum standards for compliance with regulations that govern public accommodations to provide goods and services to people with disabilities on an equal basis . An agency must also ensure all users are able to move around the park and benefit from the park’s amenities. Accessible parks will meet design requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, but a truly inclusive park will focus on the experience of users with disabilities and promote their full involvement in play, fitness and social engagement at parks.

Recently, the City undertook and executed an ADA transition plan. Instances of non-compliance that were not resolved, instead led to decommissioning of the amenity. This plan recommends the City continue to enforce ADA compliance for renovations and new construction.

Quick Resource: A Checklist for Existing Facilities.

This checklist will help identify accessibility problems and solutions in existing facilities in order to meet an agencies’ obligation under the ADA.

<https://www.washington.edu/doiit/equal-access-universal-design-physical-spaces>

Source:
Checklist for Existing Facilities version 2.1. Revised August 1995, Adaptive Environments Center, Inc. for the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research.

Acknowledgement: The contents of this brochure were developed under a grant from the U.S. Division of Education, #P333A050064. Copyright © 2017, 2012, 2010, 2009, 2008 University of Washington. Permission is granted to copy these materials for educational, noncommercial purposes provided the source is acknowledged.



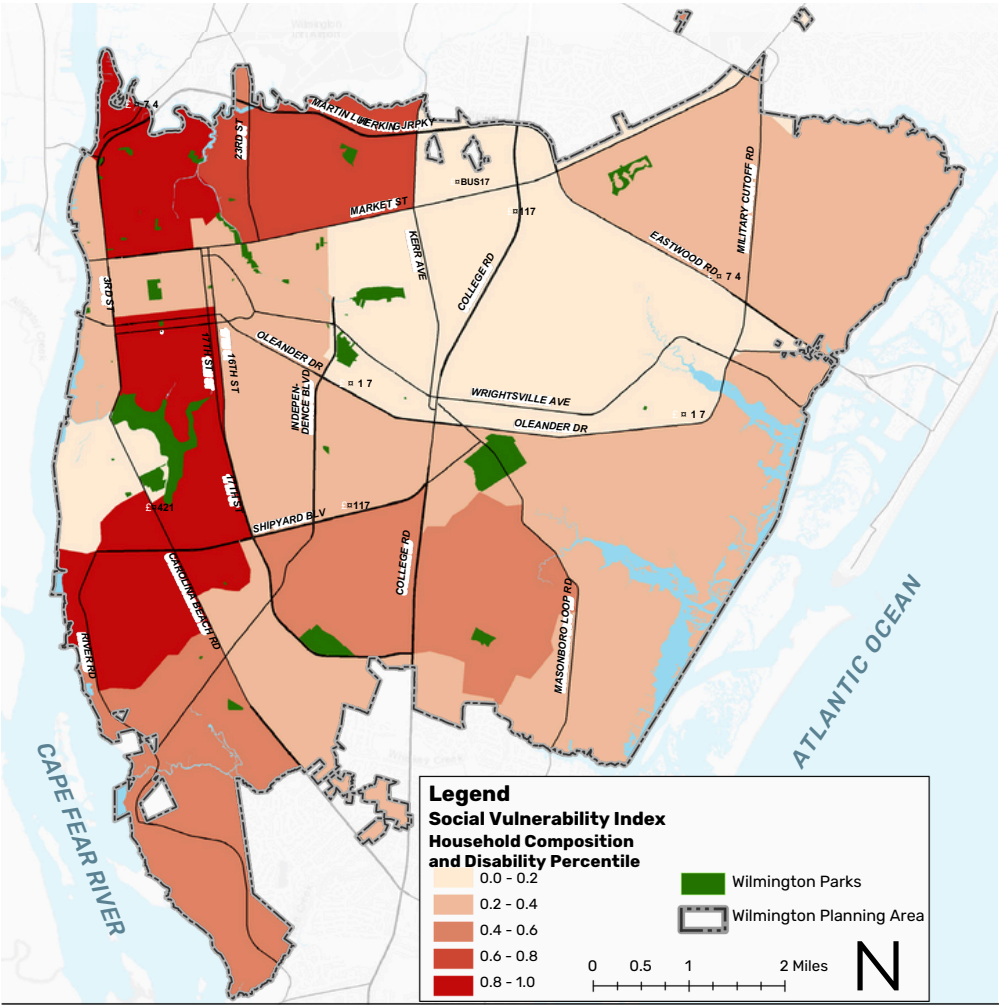
Example of inaccessible bench

There are additional considerations to promote true inclusivity. Building on the principles of universal design, inclusivity expands the idea of accessibility to include the experiences of people with disabilities, which may include challenges with mobility, cognition, vision, hearing or others. Instead of designing for the average user, universal design encourages design for people with a broad range of abilities, ages, reading levels, learning styles languages and other characteristics . Key considerations when applying universal design principles include identifying the space, understanding the overall population of users, involving users with diverse characteristics, integrating, and applying universal design strategies alongside architectural design and engineering, training staff and programmers in diversity and inclusion, and periodically evaluating the effectiveness of universal design through user surveys and suggestions .

An inclusive space will ensure people with disabilities are able to have a safe, fun, social and active park experiences. Considering the full park experience for all park users above and beyond ADA accessibility standards will create a park system inclusive of all users and thus, more equitable.

Notably, the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) considers social equity as one of the three pillars that guide their work. According to NPRA, “the very philosophy of public parks and recreation is that all people regardless of race, ethnicity, age, income level, physical ability, sexual orientation, gender or religion are able to take advantage of quality programs, facilities, places and spaces that make their lives and communities great”. The goal of their social equity pillar is to ensure this principle is a reality throughout the country and they have prioritized inclusion as the path to achieving this goal. The NPRA defines inclusion as “removing barriers, both physical and theoretical, so that all people have an equal opportunity to enjoy the benefits of parks and recreation”.

According to the household composition and disability percentile map below, inclusive facilities should be located in the areas with a greater percentile of households comprised of at least one individual with a disability.



Inclusivity tends to go beyond the requirements of the ADA and encourage built environment enhancements that increase access to parks for people with cognitive disabilities, the LGBTQ community, and racial and ethnic minorities. Parks and Recreation agencies should meet the needs of these groups by providing increased opportunities through program offerings such as :

- › Health and wellness programs that explicitly state that they are inclusive of all community members
- › Create welcoming facilities that are safe and comfortable
- › Childcare programs that are cognizant of all family units
- › Outreach programs and mentoring services for youth particularly in LGBTQ and racial and ethnic minorities
- › Connections to local social service providers

Case Study:

In 2017, the City of Portland Oregon adopted a Five-year Racial Equity Plan. A goal of this plan was to strengthen outreach and public engagement for communities of color and immigrant and refugee communities. While the City of Wilmington may choose to target alternative demographics, such as people of color, transgender, or teen populations, many of the strategies would apply to addressing inclusion through outreach, education, promotional materials and informational signage.

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/article/623289>

Intentional facility improvements such as restrooms, changing rooms, and locker rooms to create safe and comfortable spaces for all community members should be considered to make these facilities welcoming, comfortable, and safe for all community members. Being explicit about inclusion through promotional materials and informational signage help with community outreach and education. This can also be achieved by limiting the use of microaggressions and phrases like “no loitering” on park signage. According to the Oxford Dictionary,loitering means to stand or wait around idly or without an apparent purpose. While this does not indicate any criminal activity, many parks across the country prohibit “loitering,” which could be interpreted as exclusive. In 2017, New York City (NYC) Parks removed “loitering” as a park rule as part of Criminal Justice Reform Act to promote inclusion across the park system. Other examples include using images with participants of various race, ethnicity, gender identity, or age; using community rooted partners to reach marginalized residents during community engagement; identifying language that resonates with a diverse user group, and developing graphic standards, marketing templates, photo banks and distribution avenues tailored to be culturally responsive.

Specific strategies for improving inclusivity include:

- › Bring diverse voices to your organization
- › Clear messaging and communications in promotional materials about inclusivity
- › Trained staff to promote gender neutral interactions and inclusive language related to physical appearance
- › Intentional community engagement to bring trust and transparency in the process

This plan recommends the integrated principles of universal design and inclusivity into the park design, development and programming process. The Division should also consider an overall inclusivity plan that identifies current strengths and opportunities

within the Division for expanding parks and services accessible to special populations. This document will be more thematically focused, rather than detail specific or small projects and will help guide the division’s mission around serving special populations and establish performance measures. In addition to guiding the Division to better serve people with disabilities, this document will identify achievable goals that provide accountability and create achievable benchmarks the Division can celebrate and communicate to the community.

GOAL 8: INTENTIONALLY ACQUIRE LAND TO SUPPORT GROWTH AND FUTURE RECREATION NEEDS

Parkland Acquisition

According to the Level of Service (LOS) analysis, the City would need to acquire 77 acres of parkland to maintain the current level of service of 6.44 acres of parkland per 1,000 population and meet the population projection for the ten-year planning horizon. Also noted in the LOS analysis, this may be unrealistic considering the availability and cost of land. This is an ambitious goal for the City and while included, the City may chose to lower the level of service over the ten year planning horizon to reduce the overall acreage required for land acquisition.

This plan recommends a high degree of due diligence prior to land acquisition to maximize City resources and inform the decision-making process. Both the right location and the right land should be considerations during the land acquisition process.

The City can use a parcel scoring system to identify the desired characteristics and then rank each potential acquisition accordingly. This same process can be applied to surplus properties to determine if parcels the City already holds should be designated for future park uses. A site suitability study provides an overview of the legal and physical opportunities and constraints of the site that can be used to determine if a site is suitable for a desired end use. Site suitability studies provide evidence to validate informed decisions regarding land acquisition.

Land Acquisition for Park Development Matrix

	SITE SUITABILITY	DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL	CHARACTERISTICS
LOW SUITABILITY	Appropriate for passive recreation and minimal disturbance	More prescriptive Fewer options More constraints on the ability to develop	Shallow superficial rock Steep slopes Poor or hydric soils Title commitments Development regulations don’t allow intended use
HIGH SUITABILITY	Appropriate for active recreation, maximum disturbance possible	Less prescriptive More options Few constraints on the ability to develop	Road frontage or deeded access Acreage sufficient for intended use Development regulations allow for intended use Less topographical variation
Preference is given to parcels that are adjacent to existing parks, are within proximity to other civic destinations, connect to trail networks or are in areas with gaps in services.			

Existing Park Expansion

While acquiring 77 acres of new parkland may be challenging due to land availability and the cost of real estate, expansion or programming of underutilized spaces in existing parks could also increase the system’s level of service. For example, the space behind the Davis Center at Maides Park could be upfit into designated multipurpose fields to accommodate the City’s expanding athletics program; as could the expansive outfield space at Archie Blue Park.



Open space at Maides Park available for additional amenities or programming. ^

GOAL 9: ENHANCE EQUITY OF PARKS BY FOSTERING A SYSTEM OF EQUAL ACCESS TO MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES

It is important to note that criteria such as geographic distribution, population density, service area and the particular facilities and amenities included across the park system are also important in measuring the general efficacy of Wilmington’s park and recreation services. As discussed throughout the entirety of this plan, the benefits of public parks are innumerable for community members of all backgrounds benefits are particularly consequential for marginalized individuals living in high density neighborhoods, areas of poverty, and areas steeped in pollution.

Geographic Distribution

As presented in the Level of Service section, there is a geographic gap in access to parkland in two areas of high priority located along the UNC Wilmington corridor of College Road. Furthermore, according to

the Social Vulnerability Index and Equity Assessment, Wilmington residents living in these areas of the City are particularly socially vulnerable and would benefit from increased access to parkland. With that understanding, the City has identified two parcels dedicated as public parks south of Shipyard, near the River Lights Community. The City should further investigate the area that sits in between Market Street and Oleander Drive to determine the feasibility of developing parks here.

The park search area map below identifies priority areas that should be considered for parkland acquisition. Park search areas are identified based on a lack of existing parks and a proximity to future population centers and growth areas, as determined by building permits the City has issued and the Composite Growth Strategies Map developed for the Comprehensive Plan.

Distributed Amenities

The City should strive to provide a variety of amenities equitably distributed across the City. As Goal 2 of this document discusses, basic park amenities are fairly distributed within Wilmington’s neighborhood parks. However, the Wilmington Parks and Recreation Division should synthesize working knowledge of recreational trends with engaging the surrounding neighborhood residents to align recreation preferences with proposed amenities and park programs. This in turn will lead toward more equitable and sustainable offering of amenities geographically across the City well into the ten-year planning horizon.

Park Quality and Condition

While replacements are typically based on life cycle and condition, to improve equitable access to quality experiences, the City should also prioritize upgrades and replacements in areas of high social vulnerability, or those parks that haven’t seen upgrades and replacements recently. The equity assessment and park assessments revealed that there is great variety in the physical condition of the parks across the system. New parks with state-of-the-art furnishings and amenities are juxtaposed with older parks that appear to have seen little investment, repairs or upgrades over the years. This lack of consistency and disparity between old and new contributes to a less equitable park system. As directed in Goal #2, the City should prioritize repairs and upgrades to older parks that have seen little investment over the years, especially those in areas with high social vulnerability indices.

Financial Investment

Finally, the City should begin to track capital projects and investment across the park system through a georeferenced tracking system. This will reveal whether the distribution of park funds and improvements is equitable as it relates to geographic location and demographics. The City’s website has a page dedicated to describing the 2016 Parks Bond projects. This plan recommends a similar page be developed for all capital park projects to promote transparency and foster community input and support. This plan notes the City’s Engineering Department and GIS analysts have collaboratively begun developing this database. This initiative should be well coordinated with the Parks and Recreation Division and communicated to all levels of staff.

Similarly, the Division should establish a process for funding eligibility and prioritizing projects that aim to design, build, construct and maintain parks to provide equitable access and park experiences for all residents. It is encouraging the City currently uses a tool for evaluating projects for funding consideration that includes a point system for criteria including Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Economic Development; Infrastructure; Plan and Project coordination and Public Safety / Hazards. While the tool exists, it would be beneficial to track approved projects, cross referencing them with improvements needed in areas of high vulnerability as described in the Equity Assessment.

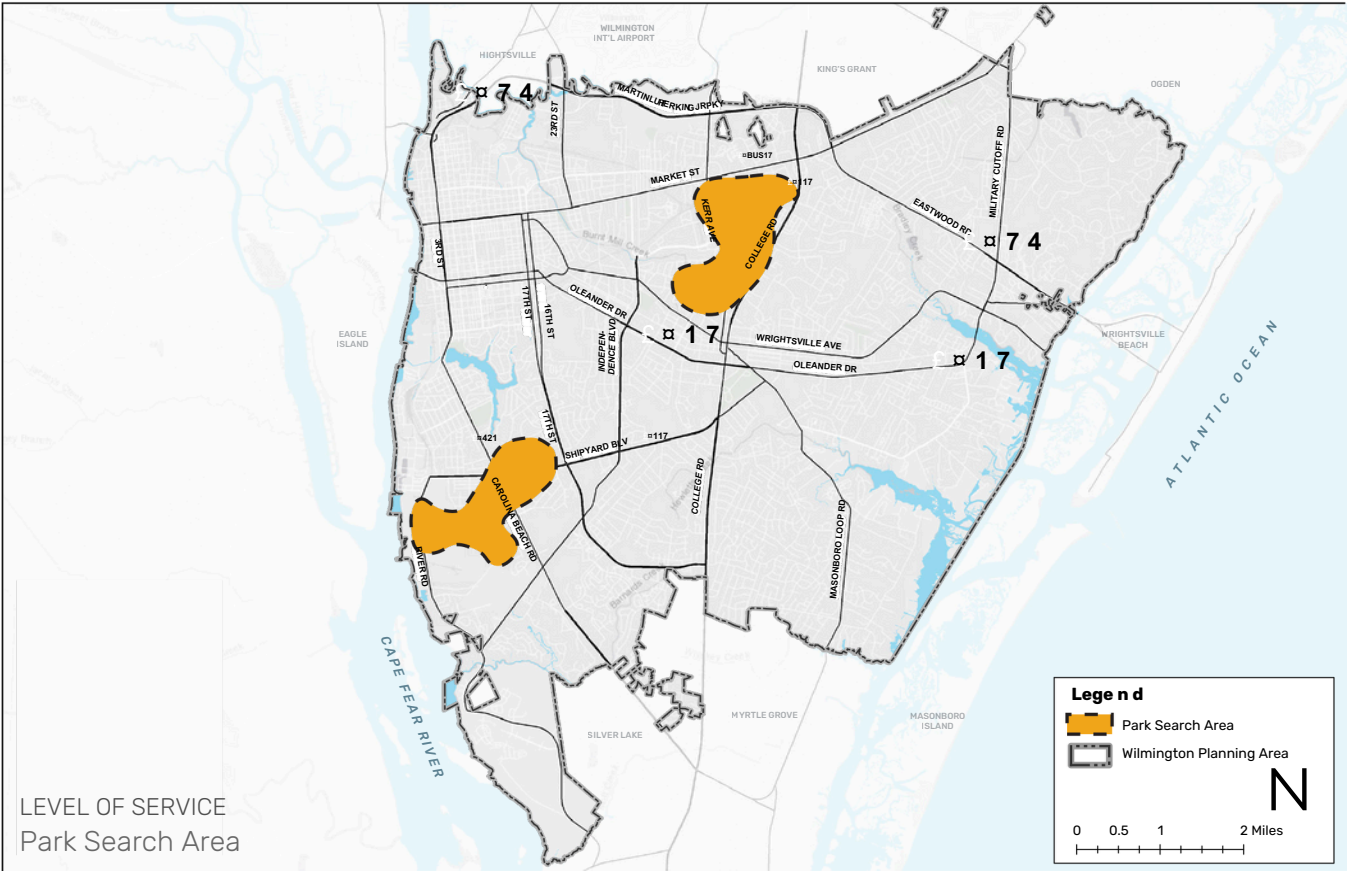
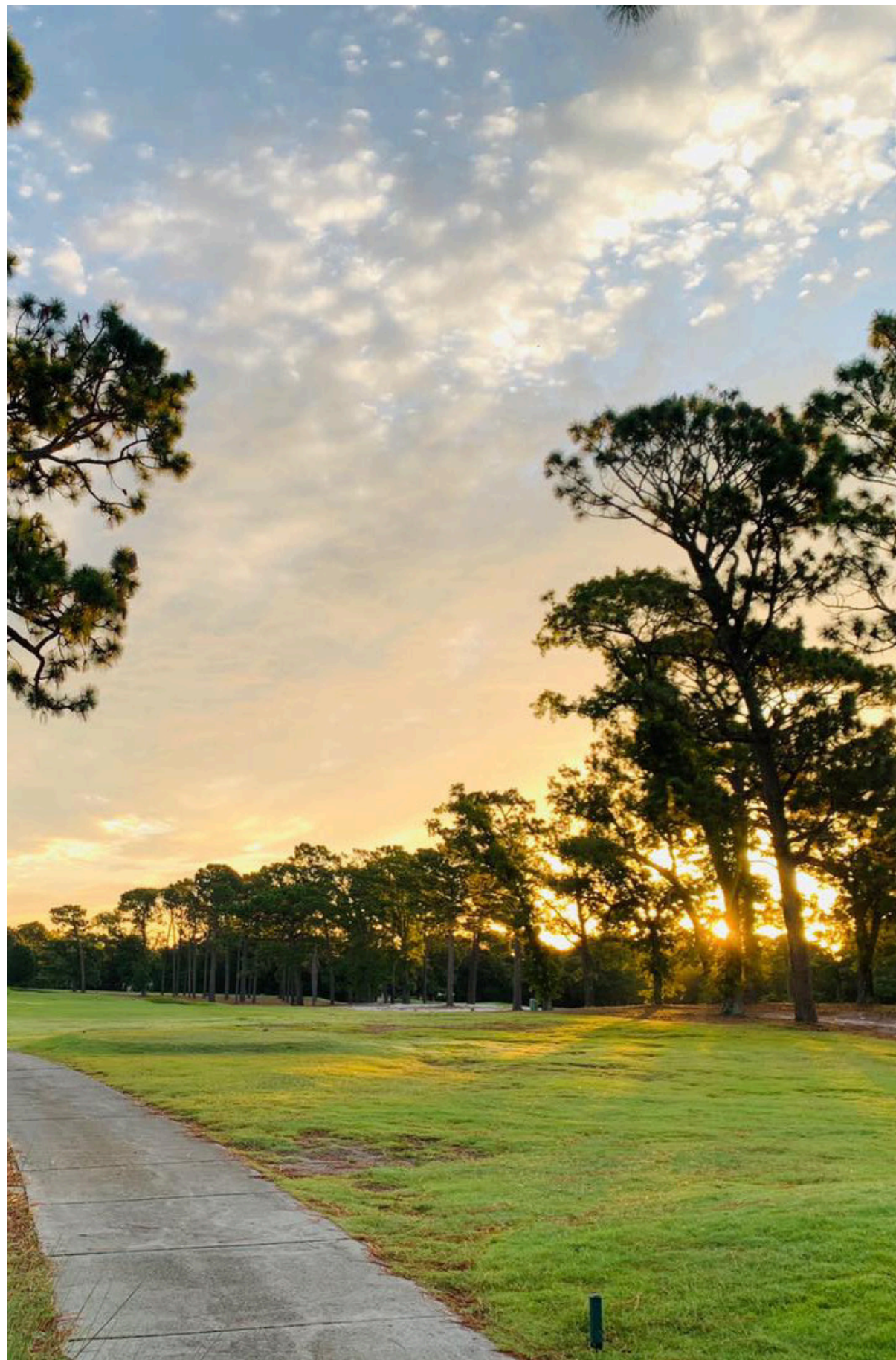


Figure 11: Search areas for land to be acquired for park development.



PROGRAMMING + OPERATIONS

IN THIS CHAPTER

Programming

Marketing + Volunteers + Partnerships

Maintenance

Financial Assessment

Revenue + Funding Strategies

INTRODUCTION
Program Assessment

The consulting team performed a Recreation Program Assessment of the services offered by the City of Wilmington Parks and Recreation Division. The assessment offers an in-depth perspective of program and service offerings and helps identify strengths, challenges and opportunities regarding programming. The assessment also assists in identifying core programs, program gaps within the community, key system-wide issues, areas of improvement and future programs and services for residents and visitors.

Methodology

The evaluations are based on program findings and comments from a review of information provided by the Division including program descriptions, financial data, website content and discussions with staff. This report addresses the program offerings from a systems perspective for the entire portfolio of programs.

The Division’s mission is “The Parks and Recreation Division provides citizens with a diversity of recreation and leisure opportunities, experiences and unique amenities. These programs and services offer

significant psychological, physiological, sociological, cultural, environmental and economic benefits by contributing to reductions in health care costs, decreasing job turnover and contributing to the net local, regional and national economy through tourism.”

In order to help achieve this mission, the Division provides a broad range of recreation and leisure programming for all ages. These program offerings are supported with dedicated spaces which includes:

- › (40) Parks
- › (2) Recreation Centers
- › (1) Community Centers
- › (3) Swimming Pools
- › (2) Golf Courses
- › 32 Miles of Trails
- › Fitness Center
- › Community Arts Center
- › Splash Pad
- › (2) Amphitheaters
- › Athletic Fields
- › Sport Courts
- › Skate Park
- › Nature Preserves
- › Preschool Activity Center

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT SHEET SUMMARY OF FINDINGS
Below are some overall observations that stood out when analyzing the program assessment sheet:

- › Overall, the program descriptions effectively communicate the key benefits and goals of each Core Program Area.
- › Age segment distribution is aligned with the community’s current population but needs to be monitored annually to ensure that program distribution continues to match Wilmington’s demographics.
- › Program life cycles: Approximately 16 percent of the system’s current programs are categorized in the Introduction Stage, while 2 percent of programs fall into the Decline Stage. A complete description of Life cycle Stages can be found in the following chapters.
- › The City’s Volunteer Program allows residents and organizations to easily get involved and give back to the community through various volunteer opportunities, special events, programs, park cleanup, etc.
- › From a marketing and promotions standpoint, the staff utilizes a variety of marketing methods when promoting their programs including: printed and online program guides, the City’s website, flyers or brochures, direct mail, email blasts, marquees signs, radio advertisements, in-facility signage, print and online newsletters as well as various social media channels.
 - The Division would benefit from identifying Return on Investment (ROI) for all marketing initiatives.
 - Pursue opportunities to increase the number of cross-promotions.

- › Currently, the Division does a great job utilizing a variety of customer feedback methods. Moving forward, it is highly recommended that the Division continue this best practice of incorporating user feedback in order to measure and track key performance indicators over time.
- › Pricing strategies vary across the board. Currently, the most frequently used strategies are age segment pricing, residency rates, market rates and the customer’s ability to pay. These are good practices and should be continued in addition to implementing some new pricing strategies which can be found in Section 1.3.5. Furthermore, it is essential to understand the current Cost-of Service in order to determine ideal cost recovery goals.
- › Financial performance measures, such as cost recovery goals are not currently being utilized. Moving forward, it is recommended for staff to begin tracking cost recovery for all Core Program Areas. When doing so, the staff should factor in all direct and indirect costs pertaining to programming. A focus on developing consistent earned income opportunities would be beneficial to the Division’s overall quest for greater fiscal sustainability.
- › Programs need to be assessed to determine their lifecycle stage. Any program that is in the decline stage due to the lack of participation needs to be reinvented or canceled.
- › Programming staff needs to be updated with the proper strategies used to ensure the potential for program success.



Core Program Areas

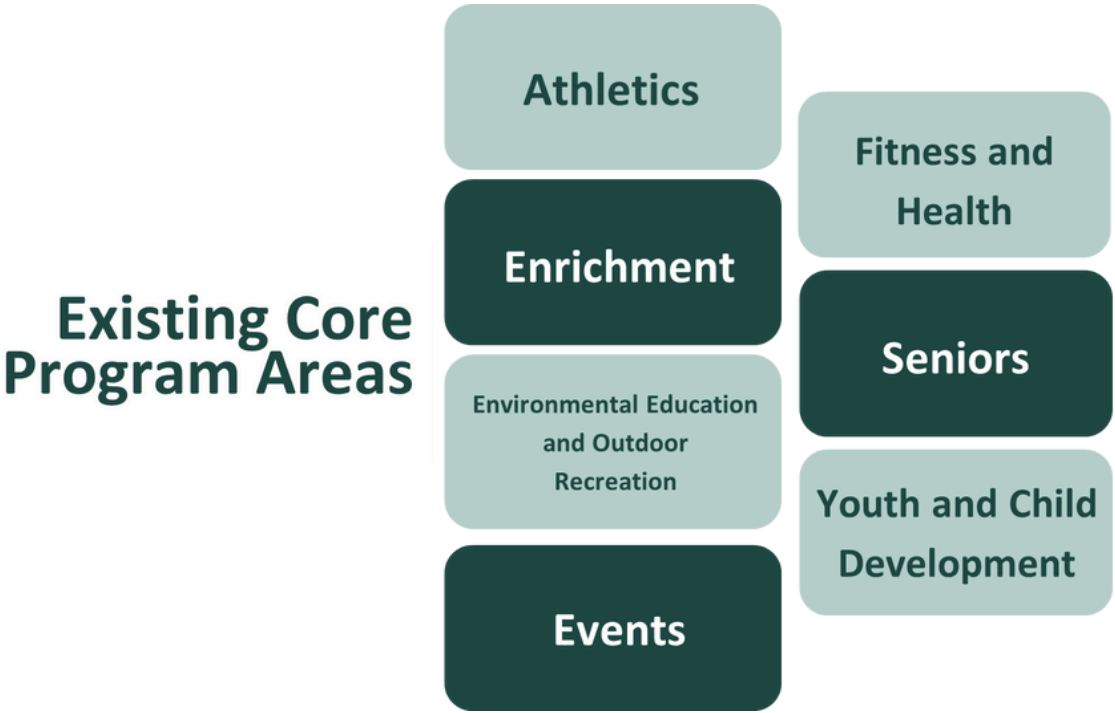
To help achieve the mission, it is important to identify Core Program Areas based on current and future needs to create a sense of focus around specific program areas of greatest importance to the community. Public recreation is challenged by the premise of being all things to all people. The philosophy of the Core Program Area is to assist staff, policy makers and the public to focus on what is most important to the community. Program areas are considered as Core if they meet a majority of the following criteria:

- › The program area has been provided for a long period of time (over 4-5 years) and, or is expected by the community.
- › The program area consumes a relatively large portion (5 percent or more) of the agency’s overall budget.





- › The program area is offered 3 to 4 seasons per year.
- › The program area has wide demographic appeal.
- › There is a tiered level of skill development available within the program area’s offerings.
- › There is full-time staff responsible for the program area.
- › There are facilities designed specifically to support the program area.
- › The agency controls a significant percentage (20 percent or more) of the local market.




Existing Core Program Areas

In discussions with the Division staff, the consulting team identified seven Core Program Areas currently being offered.



Core Program Areas for City of Wilmington

Athletics		<p>Description: Athletic instruction, programs and leagues offered for youth and adults.</p> <p>Goals: Provide opportunities for athletic skill development, mental and physical health, character development and fun in a positive, welcoming and safe environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">› Basketball› Golf› Soccer› Pickleball› T-Ball
Enrichment		<p>Description: Programs, events and activities designed to build life and social skills.</p> <p>Goals: Provide a fun and safe environment for citizens of all ages to learn and build a variety of skills to enhance their quality of life.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">› Art from the Heart› Cooking Classes› E-gaming› Finance Education› Summer Camp Shriver› Youth Dance Team
Outdoor Recreation/Education		<p>Description: Programs, events and community outreach allowing the public to engage and explore the natural environment, participate in conservation efforts and empower the community to work towards a more sustainable future.</p> <p>Goals: Provide quality, affordable and welcoming environmental education programs and outdoor experiences to all citizens in the community enhancing their quality of life and physical, mental and spiritual well-being.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">› Afterschool Adventures› Black Bears Ecotour› Fishing at Smith Creek› Learn to Swim› Nature Jeopardy› Snake and Turtle Feeding› Summer Nature Camp
Events		<p>Description: Once per year special events at City of Wilmington facilities.</p> <p>Goals: Create a strong sense of community by providing a diverse range of entertainment and educational opportunities for large groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">› Downtown Tree Lighting› Fire in the Pines Festival› Halloween Fest› Kids Night Out› Outdoor Recreation Film› Water Works› July 4th Celebration

Fitness + Health		<p>Description: Programs that provide exercise, health education and wellness activities to all ages.</p> <p>Goals: All citizens of Wilmington to have basic fitness literacy and access to high quality fitness, health and wellness resources.</p> <p>Description:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Extreme Hip Hop➤ Fitcamp➤ PE for Homeschool➤ Personal Training➤ Yogalates➤ Zumba
Seniors		<p>High quality and inclusive programs for individuals 55 years and older focusing on exercise, sports, nutrition, social interaction and enrichment.</p> <p>Goals: To provide opportunities for individuals to improve their quality of life by participating in health and fitness programs, social opportunities and various enrichment opportunities.</p> <p>Description: Programs offered for children and youth</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ City Senior Amateur➤ Computer Literacy➤ Tai Chi➤ Senior Bingo➤ Senior Fit➤ Senior Travel Club➤ Senior Walking Club➤ Sit N Stretch
Youth + Child Development		<p>ages 0-18, focused on developing the whole child or person, while parents are away and also to encourage parent involvement, focusing on exercise, sports, nutrition, social interaction and enrichment.</p> <p>Goals: Provide a fun and safe environment for children and youth to learn, play and interact at an affordable fee.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ After school➤ Big Kid Days➤ Fit For Fun➤ Sensory Camp➤ Spring Break Camp➤ Summer Camp➤ Davis Center

Core Program Area Recommendations

These existing Core Program Areas provide a generally well-rounded and diverse array of programs that could serve the community at present. Based upon the observations of the planning team, demographic and recreation trends information, the Division staff should evaluate Core Program Areas and individual programs on an annual basis to ensure offerings are relevant to evolving demographics and trends in the local community.

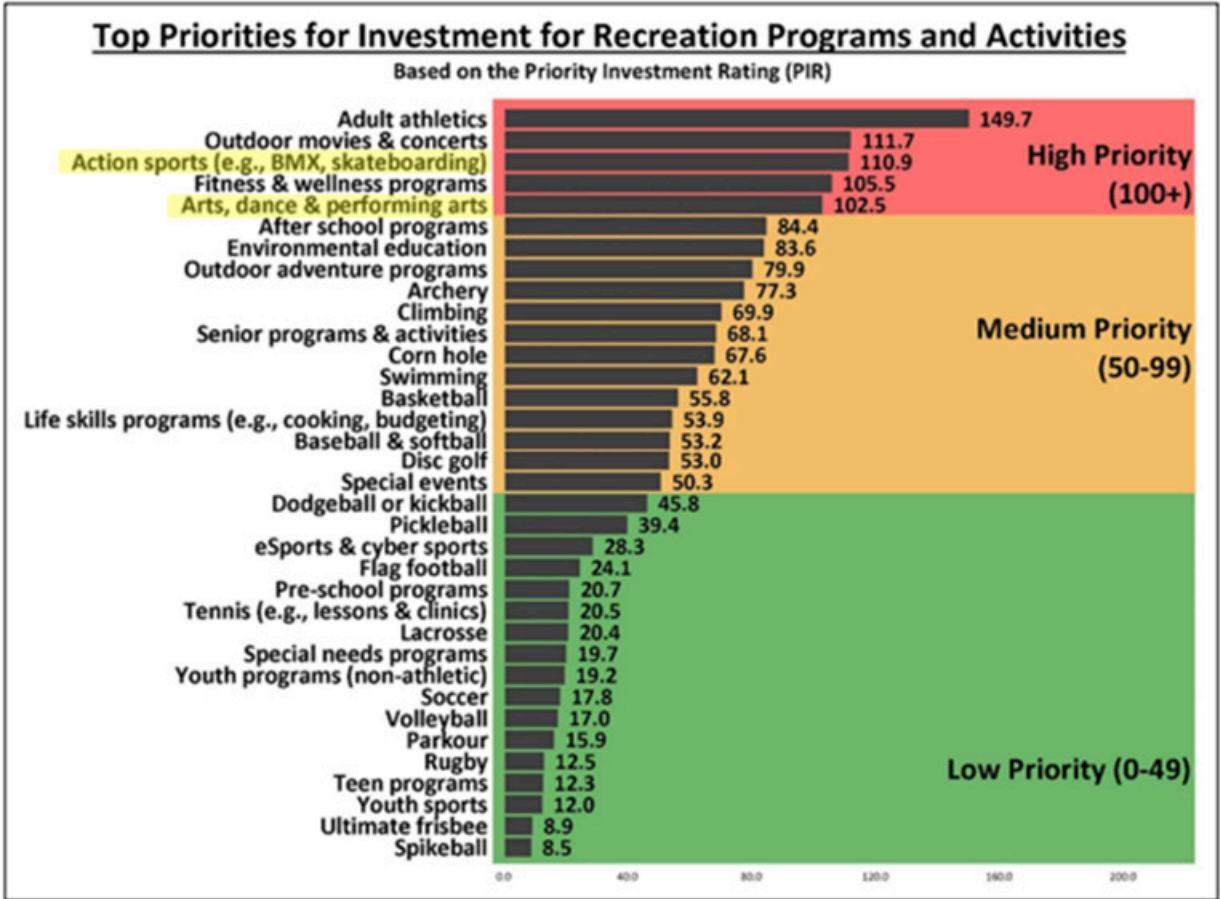
Based on community input, residents have a need for additional athletic programs, specifically ones dedicated for adults. Residents would like to see more community-oriented special events, such as outdoor movies and concerts that scored second highest in terms of priority for residents who participated in the statistically-valid survey.

Potential New Core Program Areas

The Division should explore adding Core Program Areas to assist in fulfilling any existing unmet needs. Based on input gathered through ETC Institute’s statistically-valid survey, Wilmington residents have a strong “need” for some additional programs outside of what is currently being offered. Some expanded and new program areas the Division should consider moving forward would include:

- Action sports (BMX and skateboarding)
- Arts (dance and performing arts)

While dance and performing arts are offered at the City’s Hannah Block Community Arts Center, they score as one of the highest priorities, along with action sports for Wilmington residents. Both should be discussed by the Division staff when contemplating new programs to introduce to the community, or generating greater awareness of current program offerings.



Top Priorities for Investment

PROGRAM STRATEGY ANALYSIS

Age Segment Analysis

The table below depicts each Core Program Area and the most prominent age segments they serve. Recognizing that many Core Program Areas serve

multiple age segments, Primary (noted with a ‘P’) and Secondary (noted with an ‘S’) markets are identified.

Age Segment Analysis						
Core Program Area	Preschool (5 and Under)	Elementary (6-12)	Teens (13-17)	Adult (18+)	Senior (55+)	All Age Segment Programs
Athletics	P/S	P/S	P	P/S	S	P/S
Enrichment	S	P	P/S	P/S	S	P/S
Environmental Education + Outdoor Recreation	P	P/S	P/S	P/S	P/S	P/S
Events	P	P/S	P/S	P/S	P/S	P/S
Fitness + Health		P/S	P/S	P	P	S
Seniors					P	
Youth + Child Development	P	P	P/S	S	S	S

 Wilmington Program Priority by Age Segment



For this report, an Age Segment Analysis was completed by Core Program Areas, exhibiting an over-arching view of the age segments served by different program areas, and displaying any gaps in segments served. It is also useful to perform an Age Segment Analysis by individual programs, in order to gain a more nuanced view of the data. Based on the age demographics of the City, current programs seem to be well-aligned with the community’s age profile. With the City’s median age being 36 years-old, it is quite fitting that the Adult age segment is a priority.



That being said, Wilmington’s 20- to 25-year-old population makes up the largest age group, so ensuring the City provides ample programming dedicated to young adults will be instrumental for the success of the Division. Potential program areas the Division could add and expand upon include Adult Athletics, Action Sports, Fitness and Wellness Programs, which all scored as “High Priority” in the community survey and are popular among the 20–25-year-old age segment.



The Staff should continue to monitor demographic shifts and program offerings to ensure that the needs of each age group are being met. It would be best practice to establish a plan including what age segment to target, establish the message, which marketing method(s) to use, create the social media campaign and determine what data to measure for success before allocating resources towards a particular effort.



Program Life cycle Analysis

A Program Life cycle Analysis involves reviewing each program offered by the Division to determine the stage of growth or decline for each program. This provides a way of prioritizing strategic decisions about the overall mix of programs managed by the agency to ensure that an appropriate number of programs are “fresh” and that relatively few programs, if any, need to be discontinued. This analysis is

not based on strict quantitative data, but rather, is based on staff members’ knowledge of their program areas. The following table shows the percentage distribution of the various life cycle categories of the City’s programs. These percentages were obtained by comparing the number of programs in each individual stage with the total number of programs listed by staff members.

Life Cycle	Description	Actual Program Distribution		Recommended Distribution
Introduction	New Programs; modest participation	16%	79%	50%-60% Total
Take-Off	Rapid participation growth	32%		
Growth	Moderate, but consistent participation growth	31%		
Mature	Slow participation growth	18%	18%	40%
Saturation	Minimal to no participation growth; extreme competition	1%	3%	0%-10%
Decline	Declining participation	2%		

Figure 4: Wilmington Program Life cycle Distribution

The Life cycle Analysis depicts a slightly skewed program distribution. Approximately 79 percent of all programs fall within the beginning stages (Introduction, Take-Off, and Growth). It is recommended to have 50 to 60 percent of all programs within these beginning stages because it provides the Division an avenue to energize its programmatic offerings. Eventually, these programs will begin to move into the Mature Stage, so these stages ensure the pipeline for new programs is in place. It is key to continue adding new programs in the Introduction stage as those programs are meant to progress through the life cycle stages. According to staff, 18 percent of all program offerings fell into the Mature Stage. This stage anchors a program portfolio and it is recommended to have roughly 40 percent of programs within the Mature Category in order to achieve a stable foundation. Additionally, 3 percent of programs are saturated or declining. It is a natural progression for programs to eventually evolve into saturation and decline.

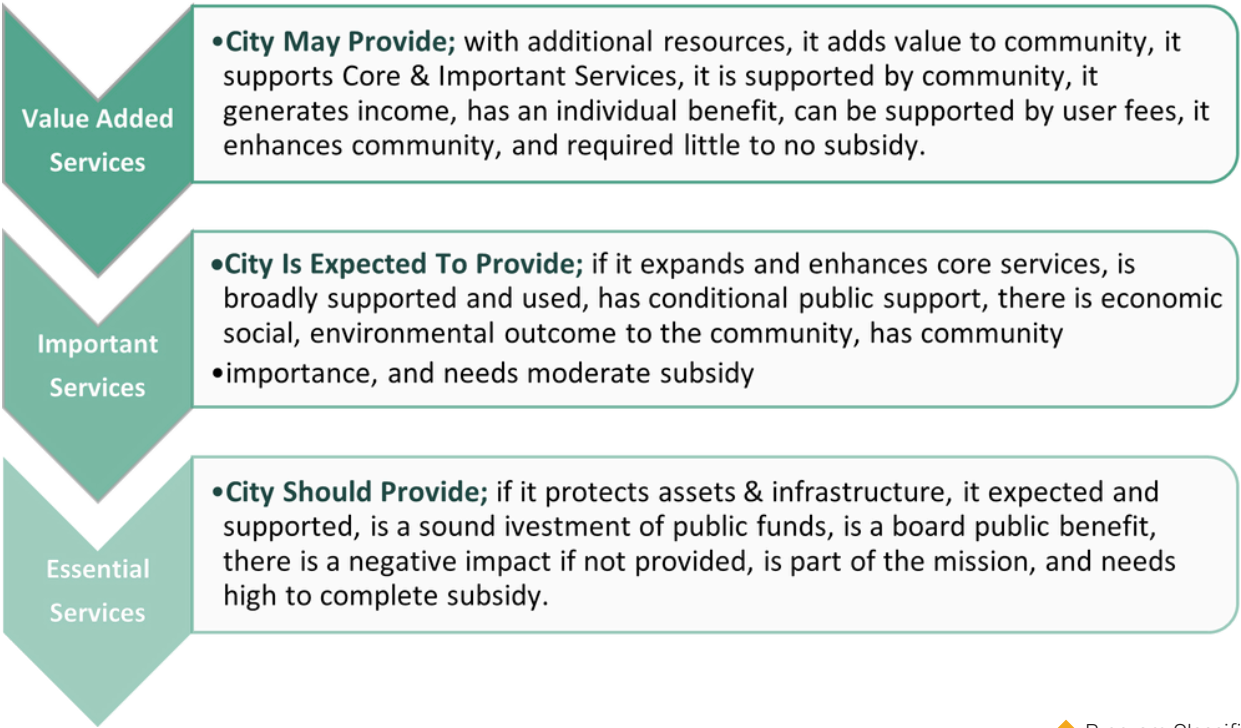
However, if programs reach these stages rapidly, it could be an indication the quality of the programs does not meet expectations, or there is not as much of a demand for the programs. As programs enter into the Decline Stage, they must be closely reviewed and evaluated for repositioning or elimination. When this occurs, the Division should modify these programs to begin a new life cycle within the Introductory stage or replace the existing programs with new programs based upon community needs and trends. The Staff should complete a Program Lifecycle Analysis on an annual basis and ensure the percentage distribution closely aligns with desired performance. Furthermore, the Division could include annual performance measures for each Core Program Area to track participation growth, customer retention and the percentage of new programs as an incentive for innovation and alignment with community trends.

Program Classification Analysis Conducting a classification of services analysis indicates how each program serves the overall organization mission, the goals and objectives of each Core Program Area, and how the program should be funded regarding tax dollars, user fees and charges. How a program is classified can help to determine the most appropriate management, funding and marketing strategies.

Program classifications are based on the degree to which the program provides a public benefit versus a private benefit. Public benefit can be described as everyone receiving the same level of benefit with equal access, whereas private benefit can be

described as the user receiving exclusive benefit above what a general taxpayer receives.

For this exercise, the Division used a classification method based on three categories: Essential Services, Important Services, and Value-Added Services. Where a program or service is classified depends upon alignment with the organizational mission, how the public perceives a program, legal mandates, financial sustainability, personal benefit, competition in the marketplace and access by participants. The following graphic describes each of the three program classifications.



Program Classification

With assistance from the Staff, a classification of programs and services was conducted for all recreation programs offered by the Division. The results presented in the following table represent the

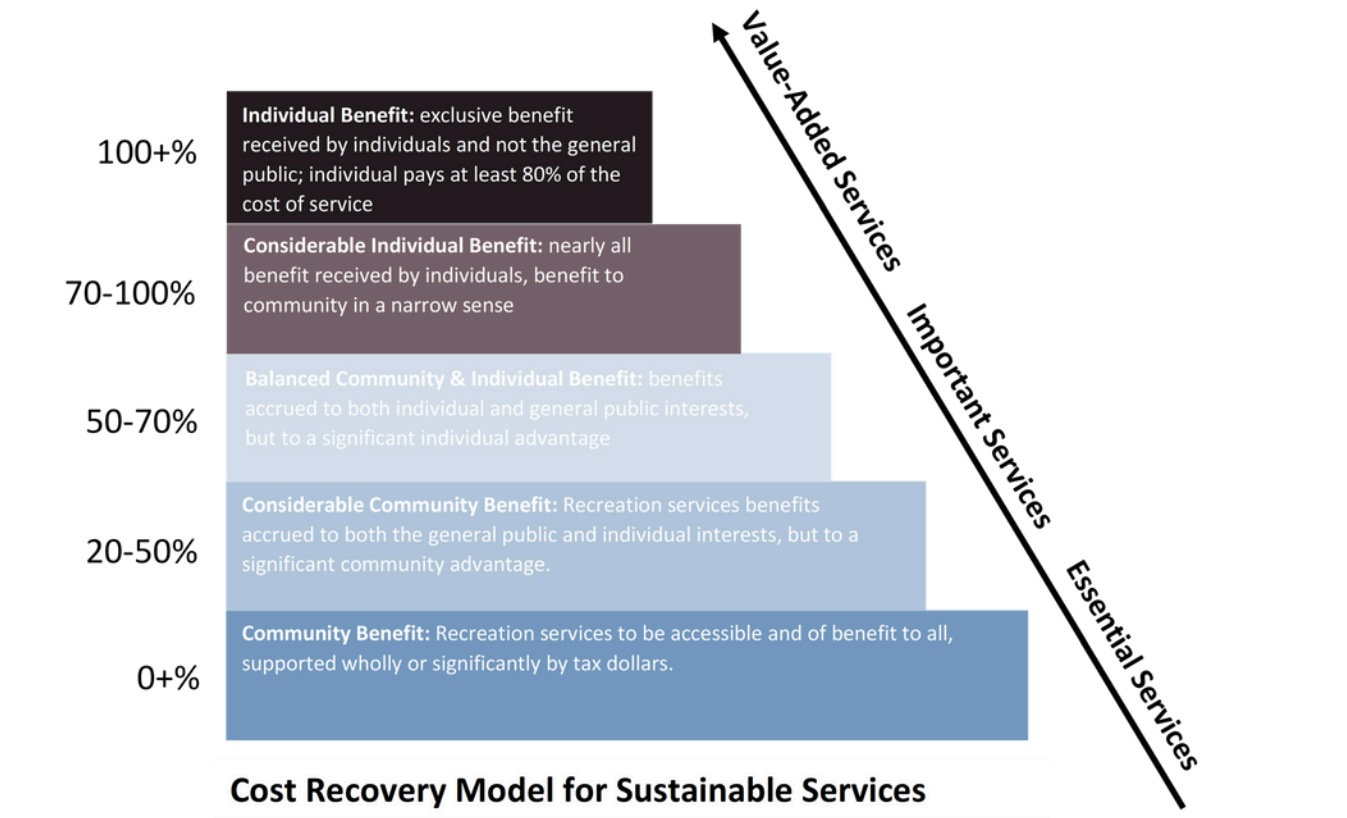
current classification of recreation program services. Programs should be assigned cost recovery goal ranges within those overall categories.

Wilmington Program Classification Distribution		
Essential	Important	Value-Added
40%	39%	21%

Wilmington Program Classification Distribution

As the Division continues to evolve to better meet the community’s needs, there could be an added benefit to managing the services if they all were classified according to the Cost Recovery Model for Sustainable Services depicted below in. Given the broad range of cost recovery goals (i.e., 0 percent to 40 percent for Essential Services or 40 percent to 80 percent for Important Services), it would be helpful to further distribute programs internally within

sub-ranges of cost recovery as depicted in the figure below. This will allow programs to fall within an overall service classification tier while still demonstrating a difference in expected or desired cost recovery goals based on a greater understanding of the program’s goals (e.g., Pure Community services versus Mostly Community Services or Community and Individual Mix versus Mostly Individual Mix).



Cost Recovery Model

COST OF SERVICE & COST RECOVERY

Cost recovery targets should at least be identified for each Core Program Area, and for specific programs or events when realistic. The previously identified Core Program Areas would serve as an effective breakdown for tracking cost recovery metrics including administrative costs. Theoretically, the Staff should review how programs are grouped for similar cost recovery and subsidy goals to determine if current practices still meet management outcomes.

Determining cost recovery performance and using it to make informed pricing decisions involves a three-step process:

1. Classify all programs and services based on the public or private benefit they provide (as completed in the previous section).
2. Conduct a Cost-of-Service Analysis to calculate the full cost of each program.
3. Establish a cost recovery percentage, through Division policy, for each program or program type based on the outcomes of the previous two steps and adjust program fees accordingly.

The following narrative provides more detail on steps 2 and 3.

Understanding The Full Cost-Of-Service To develop specific cost recovery targets, full cost accounting needs to be created on each class or program that accurately calculates direct and indirect costs. Cost recovery goals are established once these numbers are in place, and the Division’s program staff should be trained on this process. A Cost-of-Service Analysis should be conducted on each program, or program type, that accurately calculates direct (i.e., program-specific) and indirect (i.e., comprehensive, including administrative overhead) costs. Completing a Cost-of-Service Analysis not only helps determine the true and full cost of offering a program, but it also provides information that can be used to price programs based upon accurate delivery costs. Figure 8 illustrates the common types of costs that must be accounted for in a Cost-of-Service Analysis.



The methodology for determining the total Cost-of-Service involves calculating the total cost for the activity, program, or service, then calculating the total revenue earned for that activity. Costs (and revenue) can also be derived on a per unit basis. Program or activity units may include:

- › Number of participants
- › Number of tasks performed
- › Number of consumable units
- › Number of service calls
- › Number of events
- › Required time for offering programs service

Agencies use Cost-of-Service Analysis to determine what financial resources are required to provide specific programs at specific levels of service. Results are used to determine and track cost recovery as well as to benchmark different programs provided by the Division between one another. Cost recovery goals are established once Cost-of-Service totals have been calculated. The Program Staff should be trained on the process of conducting a Cost-of-Service Analysis and the process should be done on a regular basis.

Current Cost Recovery

Agencies use Cost-of-Service Analysis to determine what financial resources are required to provide specific programs at specific levels of service. Results are used to determine and track cost recovery as well as to benchmark different programs provided by the Division between one another. Cost recovery goals are established once Cost-of-Service totals have been calculated. The Program Staff should be trained on the process of conducting a Cost-of-Service Analysis and the process should be done on a regular basis.

With regard to programs, services, events and methods to measure and track cost recovery have not been developed up to this point. It is best practice to have cost recovery goals at the Core Program Area Level, and over time, evolve into implementing cost recovery goals at the individual program level as well. The below table shows cost recovery best practices for those Core Program Areas identified. Setting, tracking and reaching cost recovery goals for every Core Program Area will help the Division justify program expense and make a case for additional offerings in the future.

Best Practice Cost Recovery Goal by Core Program Area			
Core Program Area	Best Practice in Cost Recovery	Core Program Area	Best Practice in Cost Recovery
Athletics	25%-75%	Fitness + Health	50%-100%
Enrichment	0%-25%	Seniors	25%-50%
Environmental Educational + Outdoor Recreation	0%-50%	Youth + Child	25%-75%
Events	0%-25%		

 Cost Recovery by Core Program Area

As shown in the table, cost recovery targets can vary based on the Core Program Area, and even at the program level within a Core Program Area. Several variables can influence the cost recovery target, including life cycle stage, demographic served, and perhaps most important, program classification. These are best practices for Core Program Areas. Programs within each Core Program Area will vary in price and subsidy level. The program mix within each Core Program Area will determine the cost recovery capabilities. The Division should determine the current cost recovery of each Core Program Area to begin establishing goals. With an approved cost recovery goal, annual tracking and quality assurance cost recovery goals will improve. Use this key performance indicator in Figure 9 and update it annually to include the actual cost recovery achieved. Each Core Program Area can be benchmarked against itself on an annual basis.

Cost Recovery Best Practices

Cost recovery targets should reflect the degree to which a program provides a public versus individual good. Programs providing public benefits (i.e., Essential programs) should be subsidized more by the Division; programs providing individual benefits (i.e., Value-Added programs) and should seek to recover costs and generate revenue for other services. To help plan and implement cost recovery policies, the following definitions have been developed to help classify specific programs within program areas.

- › Essential Programs categories are critical to achieving the organizational mission and providing community-wide benefits and therefore, generally receive priority for tax-dollar subsidization.
- › Important or Value-Added program classifications generally represent programs that receive lower priority for subsidization.
 - Important programs contribute to the organizational mission but are not essential to it. Therefore, cost recovery for these programs should be high (i.e., at least 80 percent overall).

- Value-Added programs are not critical to the mission and should be prevented from drawing upon limited public funding, so overall cost recovery for these programs should be near or in excess of 100 percent.

Program Pricing Strategies

Pricing strategies are one mechanism agencies can use to influence cost recovery. Overall, the degree to which the Division uses various pricing strategies is sporadic. Pricing tactics are concentrated in age segment pricing, residency rates, market rates, and customer’s ability to pay.

The core area with the largest variety of pricing strategies is currently Athletics, which utilizes 8 of the 10 strategies. Considering weekday and weekend rates, prime and non-prime time rates, group discounts, and also by location, pricing valuable strategies should be done when setting prices. These untapped pricing strategies are useful to help stabilize usage patterns and help with cost recovery for higher quality amenities and services. The consulting team recommends that all Core Program Areas utilize cost recovery as a major factor in determining pricing and focus on underutilized pricing strategies to bolster participation and revenue.

The Staff should continue to monitor the effectiveness of the various pricing strategies they employ and adjust them as necessary. It is also important to continue monitoring another yearly competitor and other service providers (i.e., similar providers) as found in Appendix B. The table below details pricing methods currently in place by each Core Program Area and additional areas for strategies that should be implemented over time.

PROGRAM STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS

In general, the Division Program Staff should continue the cycle of evaluating programs on both individual merit as well as the program mix as a whole. This can be completed at one time on an annual basis, or in batches at key seasonal points of the year, as long as each program is checked once per year. The following tools and strategies can help facilitate this evaluation process:

Mini Business Plans

The consulting team recommends that Mini Business Plans (2 to 3 pages) for each Core Program Area be updated on a yearly basis. These plans should evaluate the Core Program Areas based on meeting the outcomes desired for participants, cost recovery, percentage of the market and business controls,

Cost-of-Service, pricing strategy for the next year and marketing strategies that are to be implemented. If these mini-business plans are developed regularly and consistently, they can be effective tools for budget construction and the justification processes in addition to marketing and communication tools.



Halloween Tennis Tournament

Pricing Strategies										
Core Program Areas	Age Segment	hold Status Family of House-	Residency	Prime,Weekday or Weekend Discount		By Location	By Competition (Market Rate)	Customer Recovery	Ability to Pay	
Athletics	x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x
Enrichment							x			x
Environmental Education + Outdoor Learning	x					x		x		x
Events						x	x	x		
Fitness + Wellness	x		x			x	x			
Seniors			x				x			
Youth + Child Development	x	x	x				x			x

Pricing Strategies

Program Development & Decision-Making Matrix

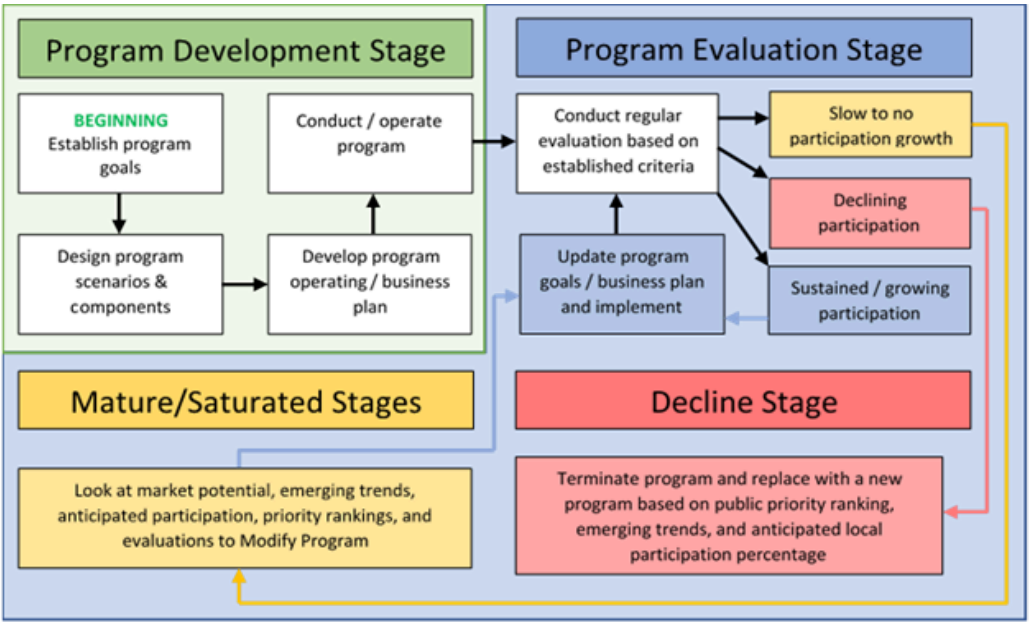
When developing program plans and strategies, it is important to consider all of the Core Program Areas and individual program analysis discussed in this Program Assessment. Life cycle, Age Segment, Classification and Cost Recovery Goals should all be tracked. This information, along with the latest demographic trends and community input, should be factors that lead to effective program decision-making. Community input can help the Staff focus on specific program areas and develop new opportunities for a specific group of citizens to target that includes the best marketing methods to use.

A simple, easy-to-use tool similar to the below will help compare programs and prioritize resources using multiple data points, rather than relying solely on cost recovery. In addition, this analysis will help the Staff make an informed, objective case to the public when a program is in decline, but enjoyed by a few participants, yet is retired. If the program or service is determined to have a strong priority among users, appropriate cost recovery, good age segment appeal, good partnership potential and strong market conditions exist, the next step is to determine the marketing methods to use by completing a similar exercise as the one seen below.

Program Evaluation Cycle (With Lifecycle Stages)

Using the Age Segment and Life cycle analysis, and other established criteria, the Program Staff should evaluate programs on an annual basis to determine the program variety. This can be incorporated into the Program Operating and Business Plan process. A diagram of the program evaluation cycle and program life cycle is found in Figure 12. During the Introductory Stages, the Program Staff should establish program goals, design program scenarios and components, and develop the program operating or business plan. Regular program evaluations will help determine the future of a program.

If participation levels are still growing, continue to provide the program. When participation growth is slowing (or non-existent) or competition at other providers increases, the Staff should look at modifying the program to re-energize the customers' interest to participate in the program. When program participation is consistently declining, the Staff should terminate the program and replace it with a new program based on the public's priority ranking and activity areas that are trending nationally, regionally and locally, while taking into consideration the anticipated number of local participants.



Evaluation Cycle with Program Lifecycle Logic Matrix

MARKETING, VOLUNTEERS, AND PARTNERSHIPS

CURRENT RECREATION MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

The Division’s current marketing plan utilizes several communication methods to connect with residents including printed and online program guides, the City’s website, flyers or brochures, direct mail, email blasts, marquees signs, radio advertisements, in-facility signage, print and online newsletters as well as various social media channels.

Effective communication strategies require striking an appropriate balance between the content with the volume of messaging while utilizing the right methods

of delivery. The Division has a broad distribution of delivery methods for promoting programs and it is imperative to continue updating the marketing plan annually to provide information for community needs, demographics and recreation trends.

An effective marketing plan must build upon, integrate with supporting plans and directly coordinate with organization priorities. The plan should also provide specific guidance as to how the Division’s identity and brand is to be consistently portrayed across the multiple methods and deliverables used for communication.

Marketing & Promotion Methods

Program Idea (Name or Concept):

Marketing Methods	Content Developed	Contact Information	Start Date
Activity Guide			
Website			
Newspaper Article			
Radio			
Social Media			
Flyers - Public Places			
Newspaper Ad			
Email Notification			
Event Website			
School Flyer/Newsletter			
Television			
Digital Sign			
Friends & Neighbors Groups			
Staff Promotion @ Events			

Internal Factors

Priority Ranking:

High

Medium

Low

Program Area:

Core

Non-core

Classification

Essential

Important

Discretionary

Cost Recovery Range

0-40%

60-80%

80+%

Age Segment

Primary

Secondary

Sponsorship/Partnership

Potential Partnerships

Monetary

Volunteers

Partner Skill

Location/Space

Potential Sponsors

Monetary

Volunteers

Sponsor Skill

Location/Space

Market Competition

Number of Competitors

Competitiveness

High

Medium

Low

Growth Potential

High

Low



Business Plan Examples

WEBSITE

The Division’s website (<https://www.wilmingtonnc.gov/departments/parks-recreation>) has several features making it easy to navigate and make it user friendly. There is a navigation bar located along the left side of the homepage as well as a “Quick Link” section located near the bottom of the homepage and both links assist users in finding specific information on secondary pages.

Further down the homepage users will find “Stay Connected” which has links to all of the City’s social media pages including, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and Nextdoor. Using these platforms make it easy for residents to follow or subscribe to the City’s varies social media communications in order to stay connected about what is happening in the community

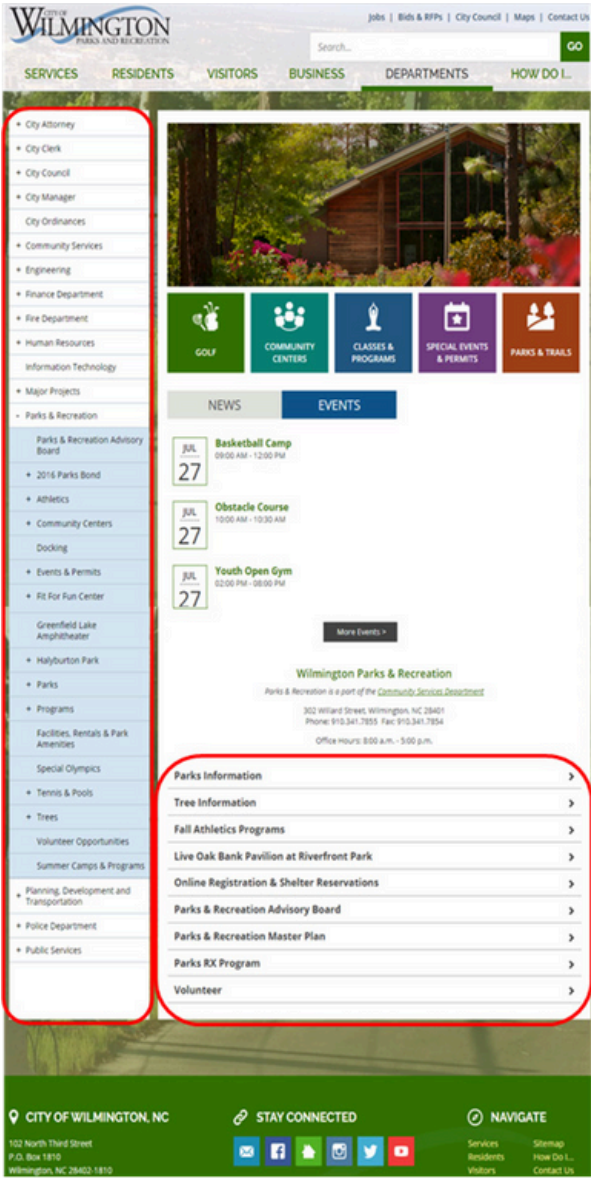
SOCIAL MEDIA

The key to successful implementation of a social network is to move participants from awareness to action and creating greater user engagement. This can be done by:

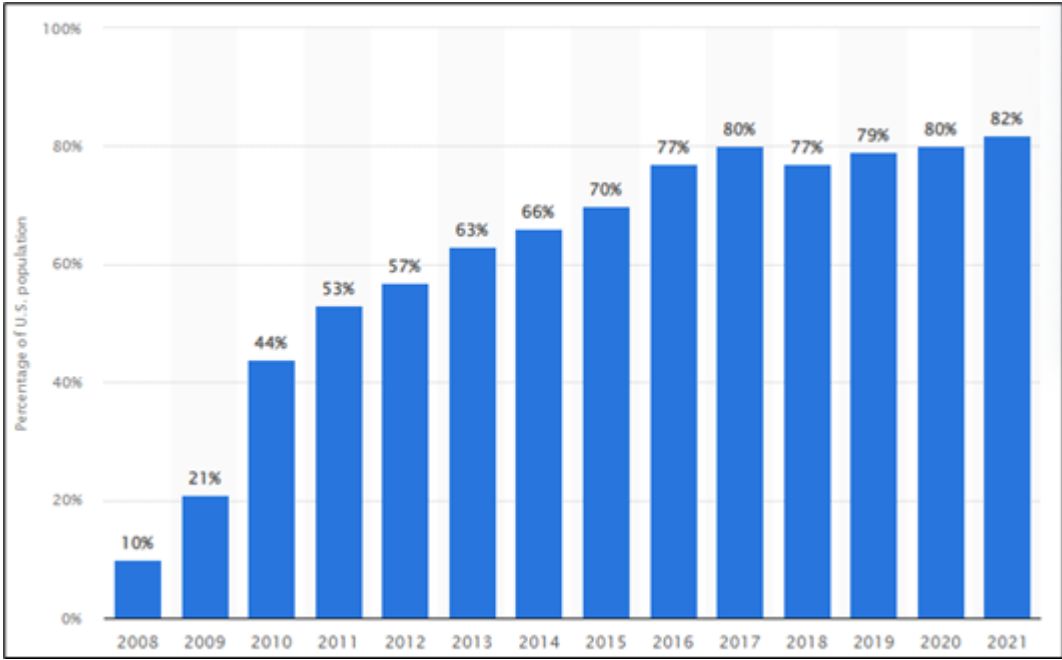
- Allowing controlled ‘user generated content’ by encouraging users to send in their pictures from the City’s special events or programs.
- Introducing Facebook-only promotions to drive greater visitation to Facebook.
- Leverage the website to obtain customer feedback for programs, parks and facilities and customer service.
- Maximize the website’s revenue generating capabilities.
- Conduct annual website strategy workshop with the Staff to identify ways the website can support the City’s Social Media Trends.

SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

Over the last decade, social media has become one of the Country’s fastest growing trends. With only ten percent of the country using social media in 2008; today, an estimated seventy-nine percent of the U.S. population is currently using some form of social media. With such a large percentage of the population



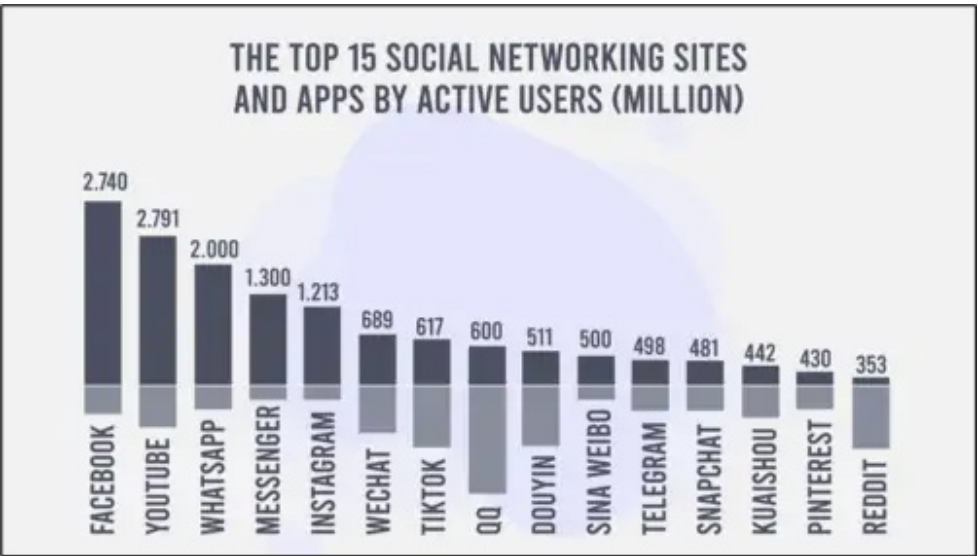
using these online media platforms in their daily lives, it becomes essential for the City to take advantage of these marketing opportunities. Social media can be a useful and affordable tool to reach current and potentially new system users. Such platforms as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter and LinkedIn are extremely popular with not only today’s youth, but also young and middle-aged adults.



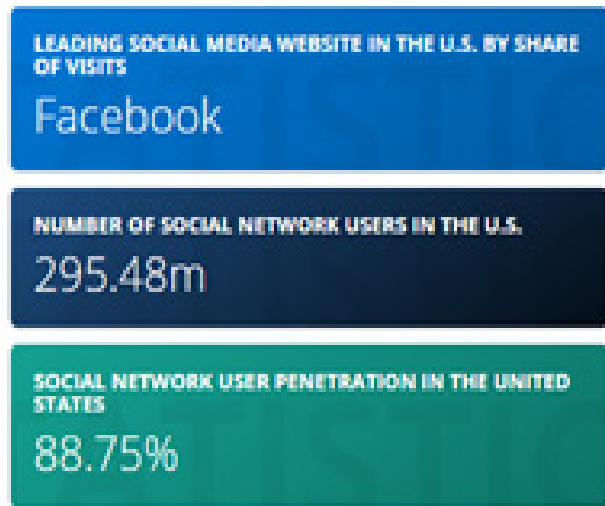
Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/273476/percentage-of-us-population-with-a-social-network-profile>

Social Media Platforms

Below is a chart that depicts the most frequently used social media sites throughout the world. As of August 2021, Facebook and YouTube stand out as the most heavily trafficked social media platforms, with an estimated 2.74 billion and 2.79 billion visitors per month.



Source: www.dreamgrow.com/top-15-most-popular-social-networking-sites/



Mediums Used to Access the Internet

The neighboring image is taken directly from Statista.com and depicts the number of social media users in the United States and internet penetration in the US. In 2021, less than 12 percent of surveyed adults state they do not use social media. As of 2021 Statista, the United States has the largest online market in the world with over 320 million users.

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS RECOMMENDATIONS

- › Ensure the marketing plan includes the components and strategies identified in this section.
- › Establish priority segments to target in terms of new programs and service development using communication tactics.
- › Establish and regularly review performance measures for marketing; performance measures can be tracked through customer surveys as well as some web-based metrics.
- › Leverage relationships with partners to enhance marketing efforts through cross-promotion that include defined measurable outcomes.

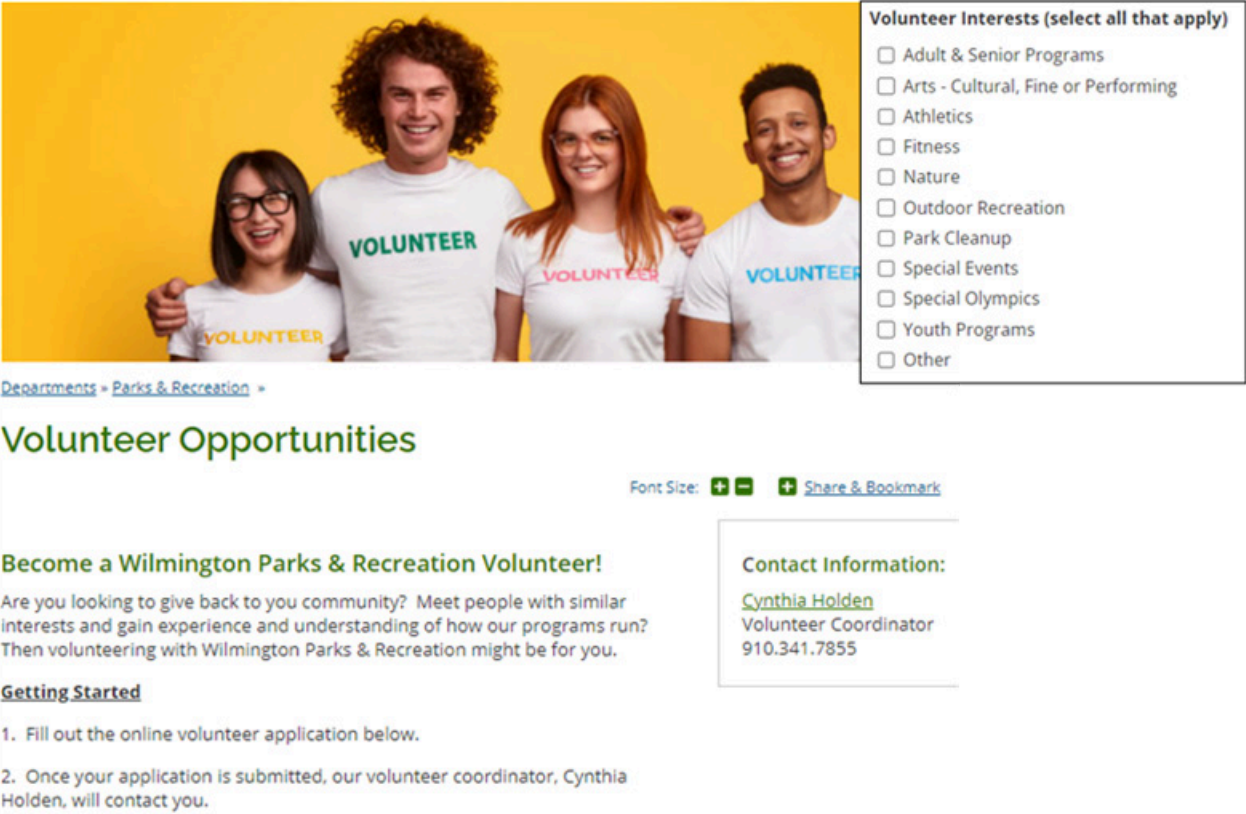
VOLUNTEER AND PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT

Today, most public recreation and parks divisions seek productive and meaningful partnerships with both community organizations and individuals to deliver quality and seamless services to their residents. These relationships should be mutually beneficial to each party to better meet overall community needs and expand the positive impact of the agency's mission. Effective partnerships and meaningful volunteerism are important strategic areas for the City to use and meet the needs of the community in years to come.

Current Volunteer Management

When managed with respect and used strategically, volunteers can serve as the primary advocates for the City and its offerings. Currently, Wilmington has volunteer opportunities posted on the City's website and on the Parks and Recreation homepage. Additionally, volunteer applications for those who want to get involved are also available online. (<https://www.wilmingtonnc.gov/departments/parks-recreation/volunteer-opportunities>).

Management of volunteers is currently well tracked and should continue moving forward. Key Performance Indicators such as the number of volunteers, volunteer hours, type of volunteers (E.g., community service, special event, intern or others) are currently being tracked. Tracking volunteer hours can be used in budget discussions to show how well the Division is able to leverage limited resources. A complete list of volunteer recommendations and best practices can be found in Appendix D.



Maintenance and Operations Assessment

Operations and maintenance functions are an important spoke in the wheel of the Wilmington Parks and Recreation System. A protocol review process was used to further understand the division’s efforts to manage park maintenance and glean information that helped guide the consultants to make recommendations. Information was assimilated and consideration made of the current practices of staff to aid in the implementation of additional maintenance and operational procedures and recommendations that, if applied, can assist when building a best-in-class park system for the City of Wilmington.

METHODOLOGY

This Maintenance Assessment Report is based on site visits and discussions with the Staff of the Wilmington Parks and Recreation Division of parks and recreation facilities on May 5th and 6th, 2021. Open discussions were conducted with staff members throughout the Maintenance Division to understand their overall responsibilities, existing maintenance practices, life cycle data they track and what performance measures they use to demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness of their work. Evaluations were made based on the on-site observation findings and comparisons of the maintenance and operational standards that are currently in place. This information was evaluated against the maintenance and operational practices in similar size agencies across the country to the Wilmington Parks and Recreation system as well as national maintenance standards among agencies that use best practices. Those standards were used to create this report and develop

recommendations for the staff to use in the future.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Wilmington Parks and Recreation is identified as a separate division and is a function of a larger city department. Parks and recreation operations are not considered a separate stand-alone department. This creates efficiency difficulties that cause issues for park and recreation to deliver quality performance and top-rate park conditions. The apparent lack of staff and insufficient funding for the division to provide the correct level of maintenance in the parks is apparent. The lack of funding also fuels related park grounds maintenance problems with incorrect equipment or the absence of equipment that negatively impacts the ability of the staff to perform their duties and maintain the 744 acres of parkland, facilities, and amenities in the most efficient and effect manner. Additionally, parks and recreation maintenance staff maintain approximately 300 additional acres of City right-of-way.

The City reports the Division employs 105.38 Full Time Equivalent staff (FTE’s). The NRPA Park Metrics report for 2022 indicates that jurisdictions of a similar size (100,000 - 250,000 population) have a median figure of 117.9 FTE staff. With 105.38 FTE’s, the City appears slightly below, yet still on-par with other agencies of similar size. Per capita, the NRPA Parks Metrics reports a median figure of 8.1 FTE staff per 10,000 population, compared with Wilmington’s 9.16 FTE’s per 10,000 population. These metrics suggest the City’s staffing levels appear to measure up with national median values for communities of similar size.

STAFFING LEVELS FOR THE DIVISION COMPARED TO NRPA PARKS METRICS			
STAFFING	TOTAL FTE’s	FTE’s PER CAPITA	OPERATIONS/MAINTENANCE STAFF DISTRIBUTION
City of Wilmington	105.38	9.12	52%
NRPA Median NRPA	117.9	8.1	45%
Lower Quartile	72	4.3	NA
NRPA Upper Quartile	193.2	11.9	NA



Currently, the Division employs 52.96 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff dedicated to maintenance and responsible for maintaining 744 acres of parkland, 89 miles of road right-of-way, and 129 alleys and medians, totaling approximately 1405.61 acres of City maintained land and facilities. This equates to 26.54 acres maintained per FTE. Similar to medians, alleys and right-of-ways, the Division’s maintenance staff also maintains the Public Services Operation Center, 305 Chestnut, City Hall, the Police Department Headquarters, as well as assists at other sites upon request. The totality of all areas maintained, and at the level desired by the public and elected officials, is significant and possibly more than the existing staff have capacity to address. While staff interviews and site visits indicate maintenance staffing levels may not be adequate for the quantity or quality of acreage staff are expected to maintain, the industry standards recommend managing maintenance staff to 28 acres per FTE. Thus, at 26.54 acres per FTE, the City is operating near the industry best practice value.

LEADERSHIP

The Wilmington Parks and Recreation Division employs a Parks, Landscape and Forestry (PLF) Superintendent and Supervisors who manage and schedule work according to standards. Employing a dedicated parks and recreation director will provide leadership and guidance for the staff to manage their time and improve on the minimal standards of expectation. Maintenance plans should be standardized for the park system. While a superintendent is included in a design review of parks to be developed or redeveloped, the maintenance staff feels left out of this process. It is important to provide them with the opportunity to comment on the impact a new park or recreation amenity will have on their work capabilities. New parks being developed do have design standards for neighborhood and community parks, but some older parks need updated site master plans.

DIVISION VS. DEPARTMENT

Throughout the United States, there are few cities with a population similar in size to Wilmington, which operate parks and recreation services as a division

of their city. Most cities the size of Wilmington have designated stand-alone parks and recreation department. By repositioning the division to a department and implementing best practices, many of the issues addressed in this assessment could be resolved. This of course will require the City to hire a dedicated and knowledgeable parks and recreation director to set operational standards for parks and recreation services and ensure they are met. The division could then further provide city residents, elected officials, and administration with the level of performance that is needed to achieve a first-class park and recreation system when considering the management of parks, recreation, and adequate funding for maintaining the system. In almost every case where public works has managed the parks and recreation maintenance responsibilities for their city across the United States, the public works department decided that wasn’t their core service and the city reestablished a park maintenance division within the Parks and Recreation Department to manage the parks.

The creation of a new department would allow the organization to operate with documented key performance indicators related to staffing levels, budgets, and service delivery to understand performance and make more informed decisions. This is partially accomplished by tracking unit costs on a per acre or square foot basis as a baseline to monitor when standards are met, or there are needs for improvement. This would provide proof through key



performance indicators and performance measures for what the staff is truly capable of providing the community and levels of maintenance that are needed to meet the expectations of the community. Typically, accountability would coincide with the level of funding received. The City will have the opportunity to recognize a well-maintained system and be more inclined to provide funding to sustain the care and appearance of park property and facilities. The organization and employees operating in the system will be able to validate how well tasks are performed and document the levels of maintenance they are providing to the city as well as the amenities they manage. This process will enable the staff to tell their story with data to verify what their needs are and operate in a business culture. This would demonstrate to the City leaders that the department can manage their staff, be held accountable to maintenance standards, and operate as a standalone department to meet everyone’s expectations.

FUNDING

Additional funding and delegating responsibility of the budget to a department would initiate the desired level of accountability of funds when generating revenues and managing expenses. That level of accountability will help tell the story of the parks and recreation department to the City. This will require a change in how the Division operates by moving the

management structure and organizational approach to park maintenance into a business culture that organizes the staff by job function, position, and job description in a formal organizational chart. This culture model demonstrates the division should operate similar to a private enterprise with job responsibilities and accountability to create ownership of employees to their tasks and pride in what they do contributes to the success of the organization.

Until recently, some maintenance staff indicated they have had minimal involvement in the budget process. As the 2023 budget is prepared the staff have participated in the process to assure proper operational dollars and equipment dollars coincide with the machinery and equipment available as well what type of staff and equipment will be needed if any new park development occurs. A new \$38 million dollar bond issue was recently passed by the voters. Additional operational dollars must be considered along with lifecycle funds for the system to take care of the additional parks and amenities that are included in the bond issue. This will help the system to avoid being underfunded as funds for park maintenance of older parks deplete maintenance dollars faster because the amenity lifecycles are in decline while new parks are being developed.

MAINTENANCE DUTIES

Maintenance standards should be improved throughout the system based on existing conditions with the goal that those standards can be met at 90 percent or greater on a weekly basis. The City has developed fairly comprehensive standard operating procedures for parks and facilities, but are not established to capture direct and indirect costs, or when and where problems occur.

There are no set metrics in place that relate to maintenance costs per acre, costs to maintain a sports fields, or for care of trails, “right-of-ways, medians and alleys. Standardized maintenance management plans would include asset life cycle monitoring of equipment requirements included in the capital improvement process for the staff to keep capital amenities updated. Effective monitoring of equipment condition, investment according to proper replacement cycles and verification of specifications for the proper equipment will eventually minimize costly repairs and keep necessary mobile and static capital equipment usable and perhaps extend equipment life. The information about asset lifecycles needs to be documented in the budgeted year it was acquired. The division is now using a new maintenance management system to help monitor

life cycle maintenance practices which should help reduce repairs in the future.

In terms of maintenance staff, expertise related to efficiency, crew members with proper skills in the correct positions will prevent the system from falling behind in overall performance. It is critical to not limit the growth and development of the park maintenance staff who are necessary to improve the maintenance of existing parks or maintain new park facilities in the future. Some staff indicated not being provided with an avenue to communicate with decision makers about specifications for ordering new equipment that would be best suited for maintaining parks, trails and open spaces before the equipment is purchased.

The division has two maintenance shops, one is not large enough to house their equipment properly and the other is a large complex of buildings that are functional but are in need of a total organization and redesign to be managed efficiently. The shop areas are not laid out in a way for the staff to perform maintenance and repairs effectively in the space available. The shops lack the level of storage space necessary to keep an adequate level inventory of supplies for parks maintenance staff daily use.

The tool storage area and small engine repair shops were being reorganized when the park evaluation occurred, and it appeared there is insufficient space for routine repairs and preventative maintenance inventory required for the equipment the parks staff uses. **The City is has addressed this concern by developing a PLF maintenance campus, which is currently in design.**

Based on best practices, the total responsibility to maintain indoor and outdoor spaces needs to be documented by the existing staff at a higher level than what is currently expected. This would require a clear understanding of how much indoor space square footage is required to be maintained as well as how much of the total park system acreage based on the type of park land maintained (neighborhood parks, community parks, golf course, sports fields, school area) needs to be maintained at a Level One, Level Two or Level Three category of maintenance care and how much should be left in a natural state. The workload by the staff exceeds their capacity, therefore too much is not finished given the time they have with equipment in the current condition they have to use. The staff works primarily in a reactionary mode and while some maintenance standards are fairly consistent, others are not. The Staff is accomplishing a Level 2 or Level 3 maintenance standards and these levels should continue to be followed in the future. However, staff indicates that they rarely are able to achieve the standards of the most basic level.

A considerable amount of deferred maintenance is needed throughout the park system, most notably in:

- › Updating and replacing playgrounds
- › Managing park drainage in various parks
- › Keeping up with minor park site improvements
- › Picnic shelter enhancements
- › Sport fields care
- › Trails upkeep
- › Maintaining parking areas
- › Lighting
- › Instituting proper forestry practices

Utilizing Key Performance Indicators would set the stage for evaluating maintenance areas within the division and help to establish priorities to guide maintenance operations in the parks. Thus, when budgets are being developed, department needs should be more accurately communicated and consistently provided for appropriate funding.

REVENUE AND COSTS

Rentals of park facilities and amenities, including sports fields and other facilities throughout the system do not appear to be managed based on a revenue policy with cost recovery goals. Upon review of the financial information provided, it does not appear the City uses a financial model where cost recovery goals combined with total cost of services inform fees. Based on the program assessment, it seems fees are low for some of the value added services provided. On average, over the last five (5) years, the City’s revenue as a percentage of total expenses was 14%. This is low compared with the median value for similar size agencies nation wide, which is 23%. Further, the process for arriving at these percentages requires the in-depth and first hand knowledge of the accounts and is difficult for the average consultant to determine. Developing key performance indicators on a unit-basis (i.e., cost of service per participant) will help the Division make more informed decisions regarding facilities and services. Specifically, this plan recommends the City establish clear cost recovery goals based on the Cost Recovery Model for Sustainable Services shown above, and better record, track and evaluate both direct and indirect expenses for all facilities and services (see Total Cost of Service model graphic above).



Accurate tracking of direct and in-direct costs would provide more accountability and limit the burden of the existing entitlement by some groups and organizations in the city that don't pay their fair share for using park fields and facilities. Entitlement in any agency is difficult to curb because some organizations feel they deserve priority use of fields and facilities and are not willing to pay the actual cost to do so. The budgeted amount for maintenance of sports fields does not cover the overuse caused by these groups. These organizations fees for use are not sufficient to cover costs for exclusive use, sustain care of the fields and diamonds or cover replacement costs such as the all-weather turf that is needed at the high school soccer field and football field.

A pricing policy for use by predominate organizations such as Greater WLM Tennis Center, and the Althea Gibson Tennis Center, and the WLM Adult Softball Association and Olsen Park should be established. This would encourage recovery of operational costs based on unit costs for all operations and field maintenance when a team generates revenue from city owned property with no expenses. This pricing

strategy would also help render additional funding for new parks and facilities that will need to be added to the system as the population grows and more recreational opportunities are needed.

Yearly capital improvement funding in the past was very low for a park system compared to cities the size of Wilmington. However, with the passage of the bond issue, new capital dollars are available to help shore up the system. This will go a long way to help bring the park system up to a quality standard in all areas of the system in the future.

Most recently (2022), the Division reported dedicating 65% of it's operating budget to maintenance. The NRPA Park Metrics reports the median value for maintenance as a percentage of overall operating expenditures is 45%. Thus, the Division is providing a greater proportion of their budget to maintenance than other agencies of similar size. This could be due to the additional responsibilities (i.e., maintenance of medians, rights-of-way) Division maintenance staff are expected to execute.



Photo courtesy: Wilmington Star News



COMPENSATION

A salary study has been done to evaluate pay scales within the division compared to other businesses and industries in Wilmington. This will help the Division in the future to support hiring people who will stay with the system longer and lower the rate of vacancies from occurring in the system. This salary study should improve pay level for the Division and future budgets based on the skill set desired.

Presently, the city has approved raising the base pay for park maintenance staff to \$15 per hour, and part time staff pay to \$12.41. These amounts may not be enough to attract new employees or retain existing staff members. The amount of work required is disproportionate to the existing pay scale and does not encourage skilled people that are experienced in maintenance to apply.

SKILLED TRADES

There are no certified trades such as plumbers and electricians in the Parks and Recreation Division to care for the facilities and assure critical electrical, HVAC, water and drains are maintained consistently. These positions are located in the Public Services Department and the challenge for the Parks and Recreation Division is how maintenance needs are prioritized. For emergency repairs there is no on call contracts in the parks and recreation division for park related issues. There are on-call contracts for indoor facilities that include HVAC requirements. If an emergency situation arises after hours or on weekends, the staff contacts Public Services and they reach out to an on-call contractor. Repairs for park related issues are perceived as low-priority. Repairs do get done and while this process is being evaluated, a rapid response team should be assigned to the

park system on weekends. The park and recreation division does not have service contracts for trade related services. The staff does use a reporting plan to perform weekly and daily tasks to keep the parks and facilities safe, ready, and presentable.

STAFF

Ideally, a properly funded parks maintenance department has a full staff made up of a park superintendent, park managers comprised of a grounds supervisor who oversee an area of the city, a shop supervisor, a sports field supervisor, a golf course superintendent, a forestry supervisor and a trail supervisor to care for the parks, trails, sports fields, golf courses and natural areas to assure the park system is acceptable and safe to residents in the community. Morale among the staff is low and continues to wane with low pay and additional work responsibilities beyond their assigned duties.

The Division utilizes volunteers to help with programs, special events and assistance at facilities. In fiscal some 321 and 346 volunteers assisted the Division in 2020 and 2021 respectively. The Parks and Recreation Division has not historically used volunteers for park maintenance, however, a citizen volunteer tree maintenance program is in the process of being developed.

PROGRAM + OPERATIONS RECOMMENDATIONS

- › The Wilmington Parks and Recreation Division staff has processes to pass their input upward through the chain of command. However, there is a disconnect between asking for feedback, incorporating feedback at the supervisor's and department director's discretion and what ultimately is in the recommended budget. Therefore this plan recommends the Parks and Recreation Division staff strengthen its relationship with City leadership to use data and honed communication skills geared toward justifying needs translatable into the budget. If the goal of the Division is to become its own City-wide department, it should be understood that process of moving from a division to a department will require a higher level of management skills than exist today. This needs to be accomplished with staff training in all areas of the park and recreation system to become a best practice organization.
- › Improved financial policies are needed to allow a successful transition for the division to become an independent department and proper financial management must go beyond putting a budget together each year. The financial data available to create this assessment can be used as a baseline report to build upon in the future. All key staff members need to be trained to interpret and understand what the data reveals so they can operate in the most efficient and effective manner.
- › Managing the necessary internal operations to a set of maintenance and operational standards will show the capability and increase accountability of the staff to the city. This will require a commitment of the staff and the City to demonstrate the importance of attending training and maintenance management and recreation management schools in the industry.
- › Higher starting pay for new hires and raising salaries for the existing staff should be considered for the purpose of keeping them aligned with

the City pay scales. These commitments are an important element to the success of the parks and recreation division now and in the future. A full complement of staff would allow for the delegation of duties and tasks more equitably across the system and increase performance levels to meet the work needed to maintain the parks, facilities, and amenities.

- › The maintenance staff needs equipment that is designed for how it will be used and operated by properly skilled staff members to get the job done correctly and efficiently. Much of the equipment is undersized and this requires more time to maintain the areas they are focused on to improve. Allowing the staff to have input with equipment specifications before they go to bid would help resolve this problem.



- › Getting maintenance and operations staff more involved in the budget process will provide them a clear understanding of how the process works. Their involvement informs them of how expenditures and accountability impact the financial operations of their area of responsibility which creates more ownership of their work.
- › Develop a life cycle asset replacement program to document age, condition and replacement schedule for equipment and amenities. It has been indicated that there is an equipment replacement fund for equipment that is past its useful life. This fund should be used to increase the number and types of equipment in the parks to maximize the efficiency of the park and recreation operations. Amenities can be replaced by priority of age and condition for effective and timely use as a capital investment as well as regulate the high cost of replacing multiple amenities in a single year. With the proper maintenance standards and tracking Key Performance Indicators, the staff will anticipate capital needs for the existing park land as well as the existing equipment. This will also help the staff to measure how efficient they are in managing the maintenance operations.
- › Understanding the implications of revenue earned from amenities and facilities by type (golf course, indoor recreation spaces, athletic fields, etc.) will improve the Staff's understanding of how revenue is generated as well as how direct and indirect costs are associated with park maintenance and development.
- › Manage the maintenance staff to 28 acres per FTE. The total acreage of areas maintained by Division staff should be continually confirmed to fully understand the number of acres per FTE maintained. This figure can then be compared to national median values to determine if the maintenance staffing capacities are in surplus or deficit compared to other jurisdictions of similar size with similar responsibilities.
- › Designated certified trade labor needs to be assigned in the areas of plumbing, electrical and HVAC for the park system so the Staff gets to

know the inner workings of each of the buildings in the system as well as other amenities instead of being located in a separate division. This change would be an investment to reduce the amount of time spent on emergencies currently that are handled through public works. Outside service contracts can still be put in place to handle problems on nights and weekends and for situations where the staff is unqualified or working on other tasks. A full cost of service assessment should be developed for all park staff duties in order to understand how efficient the staff is and also to see if job descriptions align with staff positions.

► Allowing entitlement by some organizations and groups shows unfair management of the system by allowing preferential use and overuse of sports fields by some organizations. Incorporating a formal fee structure will help to produce at least 27 percent of the total operating budget through user fees and this should be made a priority in the system. These fees should be allowed to stay in the department to help offset operational cost versus used to reduce the tax support for parks and recreation services. Allow the division to keep the earned revenue will help them manage in a more fiscally responsible manner. The existing sports field fees do not produce enough revenue to maintain the fields or facilities also used by the public. Ongoing entitlement of certain groups creates animosity among teams and organizations and is a drain on revenue, while expenses for the care of fields and diamonds is ongoing. Organizations that feel they have exclusive use of facilities need to pay at least half of the operational costs associated with the time they use the park facilities for their exclusive use.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

An assessment of the financial mechanisms used by the Wilmington Parks and Recreation Division was an important step when developing recommendations that will aid in the future management of the system. Areas assessed included an understanding of the existing budget practices. From the review of

budgeting practices, a best practice would be to align the expenses and revenues of the overall budget in the same document. This practice will allow for a quick understanding of the overall impact revenues have when compared with the expenses.

The same practice needs to be implemented when comparing program and facility budgets. This practice helps to understand the important details that are necessary for proper budget management. Aligning the revenues and expenses in these budgets will aid in an overall understanding of the potential, or need, for generating revenue to cover the costs of facility and program operations. Even if the generation of revenues to recover operational costs is not a primary concern, the knowledge of how those operations stand in the overall scheme of operational budgeting is important.

Effective communication of the organization’s financial performance is important with several groups. The elected and appointed officials of the city, internally with the administration and the staff, residents of the park and recreation system, and with potential partners that wish to invest in a future program or facility initiatives. Budget transparency is a critical consideration. The published final draft of the budget needs to be effectively communicated with the constituents of the park and recreation system.



Currently, budgets are reflected in two separate areas which make analysis and communication of the economic message cumbersome.

From this study, it has been determined that the creation of a solid revenue policy needs to be completed. The policy needs to reflect the expectations of costs for the rental of park facilities and amenities. The fees need to be tied to the true cost of services for making the amenity available to the parties that are interested in using the park and recreation system asset. The city has a revenue policy and some high-level business plans, but the level of cost recovery is very low for the type and quality of facilities in place.

The lack of data on users and revenue tracked adds to the confusion on how the city wants to create revenue to offset operational costs. This adds to the lack of data collection and no real key performance indicators to push the staff to be diligent about the

collection of revenue. One flaw in the system that needs consideration is that the Division does not get to retain the revenue earned to help support their staffing and equipment needs. This practice tends to disincentivize the need to collect the fees that are required to recover operational costs. There is no knowledge of direct and indirect costs associated with programs or recreation facilities to help staff understand the “why” behind user fees. Fees need to be established based on the public and private good of the services the user enjoys.

A pricing strategy that addresses the exclusive use of facilities needs to be implemented in the future. This practice would help the park and recreation system to recover operational costs based on unit costs for specific operations. One example is field maintenance. Organizations generate fees from the use of city-owned assets. It is an unfair practice when a team generates revenue from the city-owned property with no expenses for the use of those facilities.

DIVISION REVENUES VS EXPENSES						
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total Operating Budget	\$7,224,107.00	\$7,599,521.00	\$8,497,633.00	\$9,235,997.00	\$9,542,178.00	\$9,985,993.00
City's Budget	104,921,057.00	110,704,372.00	106,526,908.00	\$113,480,412.00	\$115,713,806.00	\$127,516,557.00
Percent of City's Budget	7%	7%	8%	8%	8%	8%
Total Expenses	\$6,920,279.37	\$7,036,367.28	\$7,319,288.44	\$7,148,565.83	\$8,020,566.49	\$7,596,337.20
Total Revenues	\$843,671.47	\$831,616.62	\$1,074,291.64	\$875,046.90	\$508,528.89	\$1,052,582.25
Cost Recovery	12%	12%	15%	12%	6%	14%

EXPENSES AND COST RECOVERY					
	2022	2022 PER CAPITA	2022 PER ACRE OF PARK AND NON- PARK SITES*	2022 OPERATING EXPENDITURES PER FTE	COST RECOVERY
WLM Operating Budget	\$9,985,993.00	\$84.96	\$7,104.38	\$94,761.75	14%
NRPA Median	\$11,635,516.00	\$74.22	\$7,447.00	\$104,251.00	20%
NRPA Lower Quartile	\$5,5874,168.00	\$43.03	\$3,096.00	\$74,889.00	9%
NRPA Upper Quartile	\$21,627,663.00	\$154.92	\$14,793.00	\$146,070.00	37%
*Note: .Number of acres includes parkland and additional acres of City right-of-way as provided by the City, for a total of 1405.61 acres.					

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Expenses and Revenues for each program area need to be aligned in the same document to allow for a quick understanding of the cost to operate the program area against the actual or potential revenue that is generated in the program area. Currently, they are reflected in two separate areas which makes analysis cumbersome.

The Divisions overall operating budget is lower than the national median for communities of similar size by ±\$2,000,000. The Division’s operating budget per acre is just under the NRPA median for similar size communities, but within an acceptable range. This is calculated using total park acres plus the approximate acreage within the City’s right-of-way which should be confirmed on a regular basis. Cost recovery for the Division is much lower than the national median, indicating expenses significantly outweigh expenses. Cost recovery could be improved through a more detailed account of direct and indirect expenses, and evaluation of service fees.

The Divisions operating budget per FTE is almost

\$10,000 lower than the national median. Given the number of FTE’s are on par with the national median, and overall operating budget is low compared to the national median, this suggests the City could increase their annual operating budget to expand the capacity and capabilities of the Division.

As illustrated earlier, when the cost recovery for the delivery of programs is less than necessary making the budget an expense budget rather than a budget that may be able to generate some revenues to cover key program expenses. Thus, there is a significant dependency on tax funds to support facilities and programs. It will be important for the city administration to determine the desired cost recovery. Once determined, program and facility costs and budget strategies can be adjusted so desired recovery rates can be achieved.

Many program fees are minimal and many times give the impression that the programs don’t have value. Programs are priced to the 20 percent of potential participants who cannot afford to pay for the activity rather than the 80 percent who are able to pay.

- Partnerships and sponsorships are blended into the budget. In order to track the efficiency and use of those funds, they need to be categorized and illustrated in the budget as separate items. Forms of measurement need to be established to best demonstrate to the staff and the funders the effectiveness of the relationship.
- Many of the partnerships listed are actually contractual agreements. These relationships need to be revisited to ensure a fair distribution of revenue and expenses is taking place. Participation levels at the facilities infer that the customer base is consistent over the year. There are no programs designed for the new customer illustrated at the facilities. Allowing entitlement by some organizations and groups shows improper management of the system by allowing preferential use and overuse of sports fields. Ongoing entitlement of certain groups creates animosity among teams and organizations and is a drain on revenue, while expenses for the care of fields and diamonds are ongoing. Organizations that feel they have exclusive use of facilities need to pay at least half

STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS

- It appears the current economic strategy of the park and recreation department is to offer programs and opportunities for little or no cost. When analyzing the data presented for review, the total amount of program revenue is very limited. If the desire is to increase the potential for generating additional revenue several initiatives need to take place.
 - The revenue policies created by the city need to reflect pricing strategies for non-profit programs (intended to be a free or at little cost), merit programs (intended to recover the direct costs for providing the program), and private programs (programs that generate enough revenue to pay for direct and indirect costs to produce the activity).

of the operational costs associated with the time they use the park facilities for their exclusive use.

- Current financial data is not reflected in a way that is easy to interpret the economics of each recreation facility. When one reviews Golf Maintenance, Tree Maintenance, and Park Maintenance it is easy to understand the costs of supporting those operations.
 - When revenues and expenses take place in facilities and programming, the accounting needs to be reflected so the examiner can understand the costs of providing a service.
 - Each facility needs to have its own balance sheet of information that illustrates the revenue streams such as memberships, program fees, and sponsorship and partnership income that supports the program. Within the same ledger the expenses to conduct the facility or program operation needs to be illustrated. Expenses will include personnel, materials, and supplies and any small capital needs associated with the costs to conduct the programs and contractual relationships.

Revenue and Funding Strategies

Park and Recreation systems across the United States today have learned to develop a clear understanding of how to optimize revenue generation options to support parks and recreation services with limited tax dollars available. They no longer rely on taxes as their sole revenue option but have developed new sources of revenue options to help support capital and operational needs.

The following sources are financial options the City currently implements and some alternative sources to consider in supporting the recommendations outlined in the Master Plan. This list is intended to serve as a resource to fit a variety of projects, operational needs or partner-specific initiatives as well as to provide inspiration while considering other strategies beyond these suggestions.

The Park and Recreation Division currently uses the following funding sources and the fees help off set operational costs. User fees for golf, recreation programs, special purpose leagues, facility access and reservations come in the form of the following categories:

- › Memberships and seasonal passes for golf and fitness centers
- › Green fees from golf
- › Grants
- › Donations from non-profit collaborators
- › Program fees for classes, sport leagues, lessons, organized walks
- › Permit fees for access to special facilities: tennis, special events, picnic shelters, road races, rental of space in community centers and the nature center, fixed rent from the amphitheaters by a third party venue.
- › Concessions sales, revenue share from pool operators
- › Earned Income from sponsorships and ticket surcharges
- › Janitorial and maintenance fees from New Hanover County Schools

Based on the review of the program assessment for the Division, it appears there needs to be some adjustment in the existing fees and service charges to meet cost recovery goals outline in the Division budget and their business plans. Staff costs have increased across the country and those cost increases need to be passed on to the users. The Division does not have an overall cost recovery goal for programs and special use facilities, while best practice agencies of similar size and based on NRPA data cover 16% of the Division’s operational costs through user fees and other funding sources. This standard should be considered for Wilmington and will require an up-to-date pricing policy and earned income policy. The City should allow the Division to keep the revenues they earn so they can properly staff parks and recreation facilities, buy needed equipment and market their services effectively.

EXTERNAL FUNDING SOURCES

External funding sources are opportunities for the staff to increase cost recovery in the facilities and through their programs without increasing fees. The following topics are funding options that could be pursued further or developed within the system. Usually, this requires a dedicated staff person to focus on business development and pursue these sources of revenue.

Corporate Sponsorships

Corporate Sponsorships are in place for the nCino Sports Park at \$1,325M, and the Cross City Trail for \$555,000. These are great sponsorship opportunities for the Division to offset development and operational costs. This revenue-funding source allows corporations to invest in the development or enhancement of new or existing facilities in park systems. Sponsorships are also extensively used for programs and events across the United States for parks systems similar to Wilmington.

Implication for Wilmington: While the City already uses this funding source for their new concert venue, nCino Sports park and the Cross-City Trail other opportunities exist to leverage this source of revenue for the future. Assigning a

person to develop sponsorships usually requires a dedicated staff person or and contract support person to develop these opportunities to provide sponsorships for the Division and manage the sponsorship agreement.

Crowdfunding

This is a web-based source which aggregates funds from a group of people who are willing to support a specific project, be it program related or facility related. Some sites that successfully use the internet to provide funding are www.kickstarter.org, www.indiegogo.com and www.mightycause.com and others. This funding strategy is an opportunity for the City to explore and is best used for individual projects that serve a special interest group such as, In Our Backyard (www.ioby.org), a regional Crowdfunding platform operating in New York, Detroit and Pittsburgh that crowdfunds for community based programmatic or capital needs.

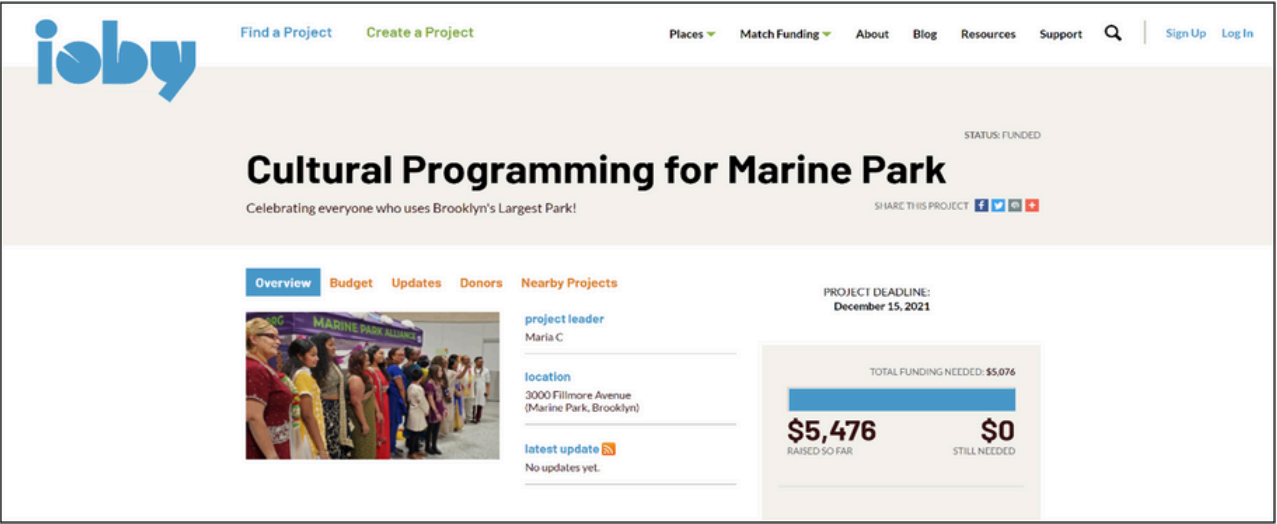
Implication for Wilmington:

Crowd funding sources could be managed through a non-profit partner, either through the City, or a newly created Parks Foundation that can support the Division’s needs. The estimated revenues are most likely under \$100,000 and this could also encourage matching donations from corporate partners.

Partnerships The City currently implements this funding strategy in a few ways with various partnerships that are joint development funding sources or operational funding sources between two separate agencies. These may be two government entities, a non-profit and a governmental entity, or a non-governmental business and a governmental entity. Two partners jointly develop revenue producing park and recreation facilities and share risk, operational costs, responsibilities and asset management based on the strengths and weaknesses of each partner.

Implication for Wilmington:

This is a strategy to build upon partnerships and develop specific policies to manage public-private and non-profit partnerships differently. This could be in the form of partnerships for sports fields, golf operations, community centers, nature centers, special use programs and events the City provides now. The City has a partnership with Hammerheads for management of nCino Sports Park, a partnership with the YMCA and NSEA Swim aquatics operations, VOYAGE (Hemenway Center), CEI (MLK Center) and New Hanover County Senior Center (Davis Center).



Foundations And Gifts

The City currently implements this funding strategy when opportunities are available, but it is not a consistent or reliable source of funding. These dollars are raised from tax-exempt, non-profit organizations established with private donations in promotion of specific causes, activities or issues. They offer a variety of means to fund capital projects, including capital campaigns, gift catalogs, fundraisers, endowments, sales of items and other community interest opportunities.

Implications for Wilmington: The City indicates that they cannot establish an effective Parks Foundation unless it is a well- financed impetus from the private sector. This should be explored more because standalone Parks Foundations do exist in cities the size of Wilmington that are dedicated to helping the Division accomplish its mission through fundraising and financing capital projects and services. The Division should also become a member of the National Association of Park Foundations (<https://www.the-napf.org>) to identify best practices from other foundations nationwide and in North Carolina.

Conservancies

These are organized fund raising and operational groups who raise money for individual signature parks in a City and attractions such as zoo’s, regional parks, historic sites and other community amenities. There are over two thousand conservancies in the United States with people serving who have a philanthropic history, making conservancies important to their for specific funding opportunities.

Implication for Wilmington:

The City should explore developing a Conservancy for their signature parks in addition to developing a Parks Foundation. The Conservancy would focus exclusively on raising money and support for long term maintenance and capital needs to preserve a facility and parks in Wilmington for future generations. Similar to establishing a foundation, a conservancy would require well-financed impetus from the private sector. Feasibility should be evaluated prior to

establishing.

Friends Groups

Friends Groups value is in the form of time, labor, funding and or capital. These groups are formed to raise money, typically for a single focus purpose that could include a park facility or program that will better the community as a whole and for their special interests.

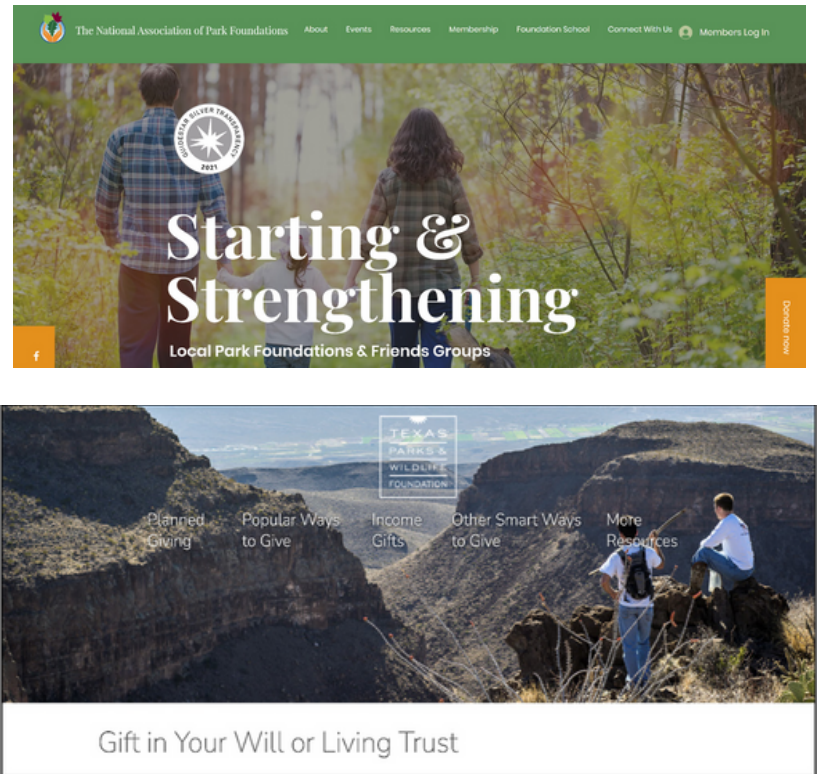
Implication for Wilmington: Continuing to establish Friends groups to help raise money for capital needs, operational and maintenance needs for some special facilities in Wilmington such as what the Muni Friends Group has done for the golf courses must be continued. Friends’ groups could also be established in the City for neighborhood parks to support their needs for clean ups days and fix up activities in parks.

Irrevocable Remainder Trusts And Living Wills

These trusts are set up with individuals in the community who typically have significant wealth. A trust fund is set up to bequeath a portion of their wealth to the City in a trust fund that allows it to grow over a period of time and is available for the City to use a portion of the interest to support specific park and recreation facilities or programs designated by the trustee. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Association, the National Parks and Recreation Association and others annually encourage their supporters to consider such an option.

Implication for Wilmington:

With the presence of a large number of high-net-worth individuals, this is an opportunity for the City to explore with a contract consultant or dedicated staff. They can bequeath a portion of their wealth in the form of stocks or options to the Division through the Park Foundation.



Volunteerism This is an indirect revenue source of individuals that donate time to assist the Division by providing a product or service on an hourly basis. This reduces the organization’s cost by providing the service and builds advocacy into the system. These hours are converted to “in-kind” dollars that can be used as matching money for grants the Division applies for in the future.

Implication for Wilmington:

The City currently implements this funding strategy, and could benefit from it being expanded. Many volunteer programs are available throughout the Division and there is an opportunity for systemization and improved utilization. The goal should be to reach 12-15 percent of the total paid staffing hours supported by volunteer hours to help operate the system. This usually takes a full-time volunteer coordinator to achieve this hourly volunteer goal, but it can be very advantageous to the City.

Private Donations

Private Donations may be received in the form of capital and operational funds, land for new parks,

land for conservation, facilities for all types of recreation experiences, recreation equipment, art or in-kind services. Donations from local and regional businesses as sponsors for events or facilities should continue to be pursued. Private gratuitous easements were received to build the Cross-City Trail in the amount equal to \$800,000. Friends of Muni have made significant donations to Muni Golf Course. The Cape Fear Garden Club regularly makes donations to the City in the for form of landscaping enhancements as well. These are great models to build for the future.

Implication for Wilmington:

This funding source can support low-income scholarship programs for youth and adults. Private donations require a strategy to identify people capable of investing in the park system’s future in various ways. Working with a park foundation could enhance these opportunities greatly if they were developed and put into action for the long-term development of the park and recreation system in Wilmington.



Special Fundraisers Many park and recreation agencies have special fundraisers on an annual basis to help cover specific programs and capital projects. Implication for Wilmington: At this time in Wilmington, there are not any special fundraisers in their Recreation or Parks. It requires a cost benefit analysis on the staff time required versus the Return on Investment. Ideally, a new Parks Foundation should conduct an annual fundraiser to help generate the maximum revenue at one large event such as the Parks Alliance of Indianapolis that organizes an annual Mayor's Lunch for Parks supported by the entire community.

CAPITAL FUNDING SOURCES

Capital Fees

Capital fees are added to the cost of revenue producing facilities such as golf courses, pools, recreation centers, hospitality centers and sports complexes, then are lifted after the improvement is paid off. The City operates special facilities in Wilmington now and charges user fees to cover operating expenses that contribute towards the cash balance that can be used to reinvest into the cost center operations and facilities. The City also collects fees that are placed in committed revenue accounts for improvements and maintenance of greenways and other bike and pedestrian improvements, community centers, tennis centers, softball complex and Legion and Buck Hardee Fields.

Implication for Wilmington:

The City should continue to collect a capital fee into their golf fees, sports complexes and tennis center that can be dedicated to capital improvements for the future.

Development Fees Impact Fees

These impact fees are assessed on the development of new residential properties with proceeds to be used for parks and recreation purposes, such as acquiring land for new parks as well as creating neighborhood and community parks for development. Having a land dedication fee and park impact fee treats parks as infrastructure; not any different than roads and sewers in the community. These impact fee can be anywhere between \$1,500 to \$5,000 per home developed depending on the value of the house being built.

Implication for Wilmington:

The City already uses this funding source, The City already used this funding sources as allowed by state status.

Redevelopment Funds

Redevelopment dollars from the County or the State can be used to promote tourism and economic development in an area identified for redevelopment. Redevelopment agencies are typically located as part of cities and counties in most states, and could be a good source to draw on for a portion of the capital costs needed for redevelopment.

Implication for Wilmington:

The City should explore the implementation and feasibility for use of redevelopment funds for the golf course, tennis center or one of its signature parks. Currently, the City receives mitigation funds from developers for tree removal on redevelopment sites.

Private Partnerships

These arrangements are between the City and a private company to finance and contract

infrastructure projects similar to the new riverfront concert venue. The private sector financing can help bring projects to completion on time and under budget with the risk held by the partners. The City is required to make payments over an identified period of time and from an existing or newly developed source or incorporate capital fees to users of the project.

Implication for Wilmington:

The City could explore this opportunity particularly for future recreation development such as a community center, aquatic center or a signature park.

USER FEES

Recreation Service Fees

This is a dedicated user fee, which can be established by a local ordinance or other government procedures, for the purpose of constructing and maintaining recreation facilities. The fee can apply to all organized activities, which require a reservation of some type or for another purpose as defined by the local government. Examples of such activities include; adult basketball, volleyball, tennis leagues, softball leagues, youth baseball, soccer, golf, football leagues, softball leagues and special interest classes. All special facilities charge user fees to cover operating expenses and contribute towards cash balances that may be used to reinvest into cost center operations and facilities.

Implication for Wilmington:

The City needs to complete an updated fee survey and pricing policy to determine where current pricing is at with current economic trends and explore the implementation of this strategy at existing facilities, as well as potential ones in the future like a new Community Recreation Center or an Aquatic Center.

Fees And Charges

Fees and charges must be market-driven and should be in line with what comparable cities charge based on both public and private facilities in the region. The potential outcome of revenue generation is consistent with national trends relating to public park and recreation agencies that generate an average

of 20 to 30 percent of operating cost from fees and charges.

Implication for Wilmington:

The Division already has this source in place and is implementing this funding strategy. Fees and charges generate a very small portion of the Division's budget. There are other opportunities to explore user fees in the Division as well as where the user receives a higher benefit than the general taxpayer and should pay for that level of exclusive use.

Permits (Special Use Permits)

These special permits allow individuals to use specific park property for their own financial gain. The City either receives a set amount of money for the permit or a percentage of the gross service that is being provided.

Implication for Wilmington:

The City has some mobile food permits and is determining if there is an ongoing need to implement more permits. The City also permits caterers for providing food at events held in their permitted facilities successfully and this needs to continue as another funding source for the Division.

Reservations This revenue source comes from the right to reserve specific public property for a set amount of time. The reservation rates are usually set and apply to meeting rooms for weddings, reunions, special use facilities like tennis and golf outings or other types of facilities for special activities.

Implication for Wilmington:

Reservations are already in place at all community park picnic areas, sports facilities like golf courses, at the tennis center and for reservable public buildings. At this time, there is an opportunity to reevaluate rental pricing based on the market, the quality of the experience, differential pricing using prime time, non-prime time, weekday, weekend rates or special use fees.

Equipment Rental

The revenue source could be made available on the rental of equipment such as tables, chairs, tents, stages, bicycles, roller blades, kayaks, boats and other items that are used for recreation purposes.

Implication for Wilmington:

The City does not implement this funding strategy. Equipment rentals could be made available at signature parks and the waterfront in Wilmington.

Ticket Sales Admissions

This revenue source is to access facilities for self-directed activities such as pools, ballparks and entertainment facilities. These user fees help off-set operational costs.

Implication for Wilmington:

Ticket sales are already implemented at the new concert venue. Admission fees are a practice that is fairly common across the nation and is worth evaluating to understand it as a revenue opportunity.

Grants Land Trust

Many systems have developed land trusts to help secure and fund the cost for acquiring land that needs to be preserved and protected for greenway purposes or for environmental areas. This could be a reliable source to look to for acquisition of future lands as well as acquiring access to the river.

Implication for Wilmington:

This funding strategy is an opportunity for the City to research and implement.



TAX FUNDING SOURCES

Hotel And Motel (Tot) Tax

This is a tax based on gross receipts from room charges and meal services which may be used to build and operate sports fields, regional parks, golf courses, tennis courts, concert venues and other special park and recreation facilities.

Implication for Wilmington:

The City has a Transient Occupancy Tax distribution but currently it does not include parks and recreation facilities or services in Wilmington. Exploring the opportunity to include a percentage for parks and recreation purposes may be beneficial especially at the new river park and for indoor and outdoor sports venues that promote sports tournaments for soccer, basketball, volleyball, wrestling, baseball, softball and pickleball in the future. Hotel Occupancy taxes statutorily may only be used for the Wilmington Convention Center and for beach renourishment. The Parks and Recreation Division should consider evaluating future sports tournament impact on hotels and fast food to make a claim for some dollars from this funding source to be used to market and promote sports tourism as this is a very common practice in other communities.

Special Improvement District Benefit District

This source establishes taxing districts to provide funds for certain types of improvements that benefit a specific group of affected properties. Improvements may include landscaping, acquisition of art and supplemental services for improvement and promotion, and can include recreation and cultural enhancements.

Implication for Wilmington: This funding strategy should be researched for benefits it may provide to the City. This may require voter approval in North Carolina, but improvements along the river are genuine benefits to the City and would provide an elevated level of economic impact on the City. The City already has done a lot of improvements to the river for economic purposes and this source provides opportunity for future growth.

Food & Beverage Sales Tax The tax is usually associated with convention and tourism bureaus. However, since parks and recreation agencies manage many of the tourism attractions in the cities where food and beverages are served, this sales tax can provide a funding source for operational or capital expenses.

Implication for Wilmington:

This funding strategy has definite potential for the City and should be researched. This tax is usually in the 0.25 percent of 0.5 percent category on fast food only.

FRANCHISES AND LICENSES

Pouring Rights

Private soft drink companies often execute agreements with organizations for exclusive pouring rights within certain facilities. A portion of the gross beverage sales goes back to the organization.

Implication for Wilmington:

The City does not have this funding strategy in place and it could be a viable opportunity for a Citywide vending agreement. The volume of sales must be high enough to qualify, so further analysis would be required.

Private Concessionaires

Private concessionaires are used for contracted classes and golf course management operations. Research for other areas of operations is periodically reviewed for viability. This funding source is a contract with a non-governmental business to provide and operate desirable recreation activities that are financed, constructed and operated by the private sector with additional compensation paid to the organization.

Implication for Wilmington:

The City currently implements this funding strategy but should consider rebidding some elements of the contracts in place where appropriate.



Private Developers These developers lease space from City-owned land through a subordinate lease that pays out a designated dollar amount plus a percentage of gross dollars for recreation enhancements. These could include a golf course, restaurants, driving ranges, sports complexes, recreation centers and ice arenas.

Implication for Wilmington: This funding source for the City is similar to the Private Concessionaires. Hospitals have become major lease space holders in community centers across the United States by including rehabilitation centers and therapy pools.

Easements This revenue source is available when the City allows utility companies, businesses, or individuals to develop some type of an improvement above ground or below ground on their property for a set period of time and a set dollar amount to be paid to the City on an annual basis.

Implication for Wilmington: The City has many historical easements that have been provided by utilities. The City should be open to these and any new requests for easements made with the City.

Advertising Sales Advertising can be implemented on golf scorecards and golf carts and scoreboards at sports complexes. While these opportunities may exist already but efforts should be made to expanded to this concept to a Recreation Program Guide and other marketable areas. This revenue source is for the sale of tasteful and appropriate advertising on park and recreation related items such as organization's printed materials, on scoreboards, other visible products or services that are consumable or permanent that would expose the product or service to the community.

Implication for Wilmington: The City does very little in this funding area and it is worth pursuing further.

Inter-Local Agreements The City is already doing some of this with the school district and could benefit from using these agreements more. Contractual relationships can be between two or more local units of government or a local unit of government and a non-profit organization for joint usage and development of sports fields, regional parks or other park facilities.

Implication for Wilmington: The City currently implements this funding strategy, and it should be it should be considered due to the amount of money the City is subsidizing school district use on City owned facilities now.

FINANCIAL STRATEGY
Build On Financial Strengths
The Division displays a below average management of financial and budgeting functions when compared to most park and recreation agencies. The Division did experience some revenue volatility due to Covid-19, particularly within the community center and fitness areas of the City, while other funds and the golf course did very well. The strategies presented are intended to build on the Division's successes and strengths. The Division may consider the following principles and identified strategies when setting operational and budgetary goals.

Revenue Policies The Division performs an annual budget review of programs and operations. The annual review provides an assessment of the revenue recovery and operating costs for each program area. The next step in revenue

formulation is an updated pricing policy and earned income policy.

A Pricing Policy is designed to provide the park system consistent guidelines in pricing admissions, facilities and program services. This allows the users to better understand the philosophy behind pricing a service and the fees charged. Furthermore, the level of service and benefits users receive is translated into a price that is based on a set subsidy level, on the level of individual consumption or exclusivity that is involved outside of what a general taxpayer receives. The subsidy levels should be in line with the Division's program plan. The pricing policy is expressed in terms of the percentage of cost recovery the agency is trying to recover against the agency's overall budget and the activity goal within a specific core business.





COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Introduction
- Public Open Houses
- Scientific Survey
- Focus Group Meetings
- Summary of Findings



Community engagement is an essential part of any public planning process, and the most effective plans are firmly rooted in the realities and visions of the communities that create them. This plan uses a combination of engagement from community members, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and focus groups to inform the information-gathering process.

The community engagement process was designed to maximize the amount of input and feedback from stakeholders and the public. The process was intended to be equitable and inclusive, offering a variety of input opportunities and methods for community members to have a comfortable platform for expressing their input. An assortment of engagement types were used to provide balanced input to gain a variety of perspectives and included:

- › Public Open Houses
- › Scientific Survey
- › Public Opinion Survey
- › Focus Groups

Through this engagement process a set of values and visions emerged, establishing the comprehensive plan framework. Meetings towards the beginning of the planning process had a broad approach to inform attendees about the planning process and solicit input regarding community values, customer satisfaction and the recreational needs and wants of the community. Meetings later in the process took a more focused approach, seeking feedback on proposed recommendations.

Community Open House	Scientific Surveys	City-wide Public Opinion Survey	Focus Groups	Advisory Board Meeting
144 participants	402 households	1,401 participants	21 participants	11 participants
<div>› Community Values: #1 Health + Wellness</div> <div>› Program Desires: Outdoor Adventure #1</div> <div>› Park Facility Desires: Pickleballs #1</div> <div>› Greenway Elements Desires: Park Connections #1</div>	<div>› 69% - very or somewhat satisfied with the value of W DPR services</div> <div>› 30% - participated in a W PRD program or event in the last year.</div> <div>› 44% - do not participate due to lack of knowledge</div> <div>› Greenways are PIR #1</div> <div>› Outdoor concerts/ movies are PIR#1</div>	<div>› Majority use W PR parks a few times a month</div> <div>› Majority do not engage in W PR programs or events</div> <div>› Greatest participation barrier: lack of information</div> <div>› Greatest visitation barrier: park conditions</div>	<div>› Equity: Recognize have vs. have-not parks</div> <div>› Partnerships: Identify relationships to achieve goals.</div> <div>› Outreach: Establish effective ways to communicate</div> <div>› Community: Parks convey community identity</div>	<div>› Community: Parks enable connections among citizens</div> <div>› Commitment: W PR staff are dedicated to providing recreation services</div> <div>› Contribution: The City should augment the parks and recreation budget</div>

Community Engagement Summary of Results

Public Open Houses

PURPOSE

To solicit input regarding community values, satisfaction and recreational needs and wants.

METHODOLOGY

The public was invited to view a brief presentation and a display of boards describing early suggestions for comprehensive park planning. Attendees were able to attend an open house meeting in person at any one of four (4) locations on August 12, 2021: Halyburton Park; Davis Center at Maides Park; MLK Community Center; and New Hanover County Public Library. Virtual participation via Zoom was also available. Full meeting notes for the open houses are located in the Appendix.

Big Ideas

Community Values

- › Health + Wellness
- › Environment + Nature
- › People + Community

Desired Recreation Programs

- › Outdoor Adventure Programs
- › Adult Athletics
- › Life Skills Classes

Desired Recreation Amenities + Facilities

- › Pickleball Courts
- › Greenways + Trails
- › Aquatics Center
- › Outdoor Gym/Fitness Area
- › Outdoor Water Feature or Splashpad

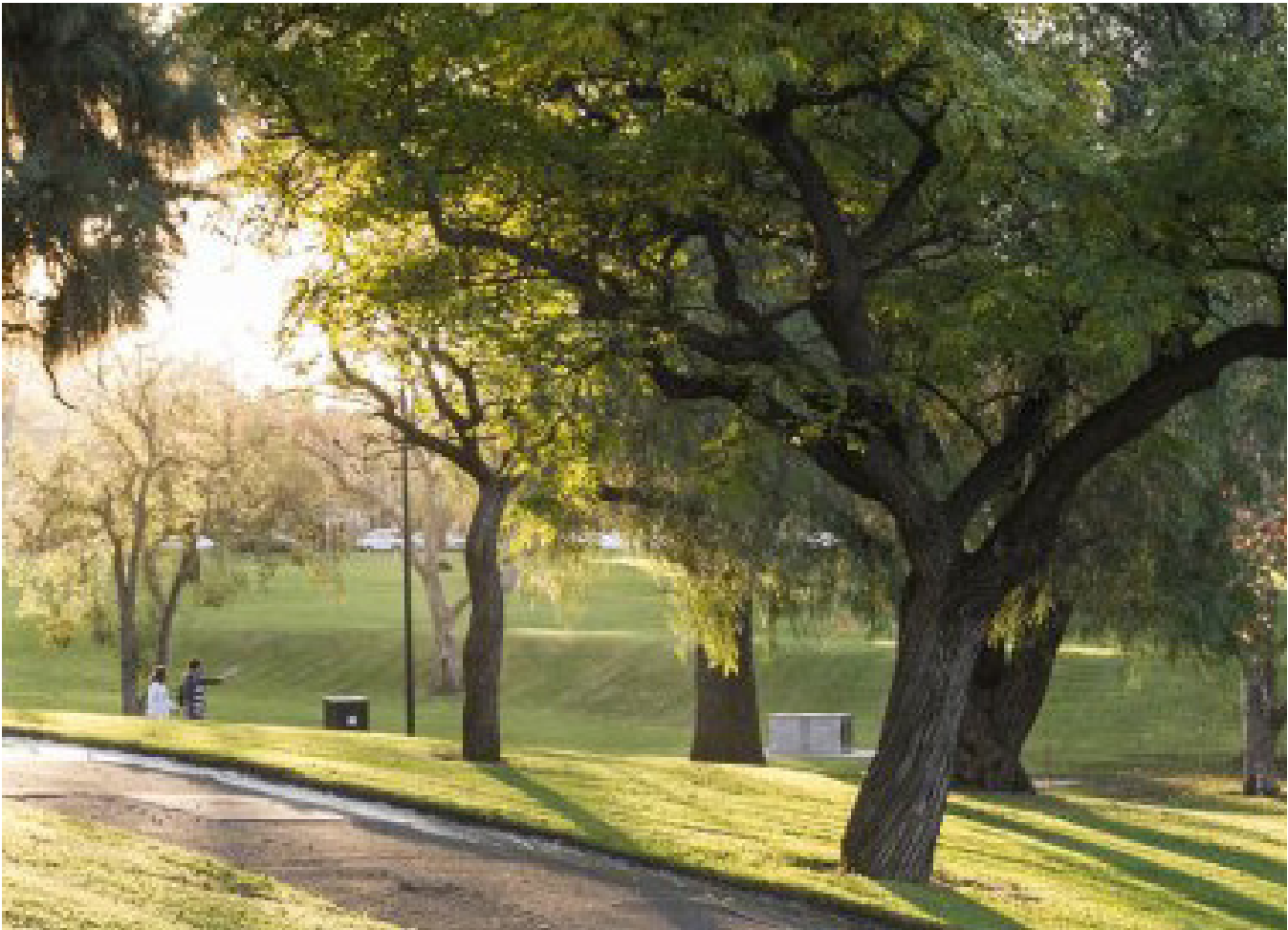
Greenway Desires

- › Greenways connected to parks
- › Greenways in proximity to residents' work and home
- › Greenways incorporating public art and sense of place

Summary of Findings

Responses indicate the City of Wilmington's Parks and Recreation system should strive to create places where people can pursue activities to promote health and wellness, where people can learn about and experience nature, and where people can connect with their community and be social with friends and family.

- › Desired programs reflect stated community values. The public listed outdoor adventure programs, adult athletics, and life skills/enrichment classes as their top three most desired recreation program areas.
- › Parks offer opportunities for engaging with the outdoors. Feedback from the community indicated an appreciation for this sentiment, reflected in their conveyance of wants and needs for outdoor recreation programming.
- › The community indicated an appreciation for the importance of engagement and communication between the Wilmington Parks and Recreation Division and the people it serves. Participants expressed their belief that the City could do better to communicate and promote its facilities and services to the general public.



- › Participants indicated a desire for increased connectivity to parks with more greenways and trails.
- › There is healthy demand among City residents for diversifying recreation amenities. Those that rose to the top of the list included pickleball courts, aquatics facilities, outdoor gyms, farmers market facilities, and community gardens. Ensuring that parks accommodate individuals with disabilities was important.

SCIENTIFIC SURVEY

Purpose

It is not overlooked or uncommon for the public to question results from a survey. In fact, there are numerous aspects attributed to this type of doubt. The concept of self-selecting, or open access

surveys, lends itself to inherent bias that can be viewed as contributing to faulty information. This method of surveying allows individuals to participate in a poll at will. This technique can be problematic in that those who feel particularly compelled by a topic have a platform from which to speak out, aggregating an oversupply of information rife with disproportional instances of extreme responses. Conversely, the public has much more confidence in survey outcomes if they feel assured that the survey was done scientifically. A survey that has gone through the steps of the scientific process poses a higher percentage of validity and reliability of the results.

Thus, the objective of the current public input effort was to employ a statistically reliable means of impartially identifying what Wilmington residents see as the most vital recreational needs in their community. The intent behind this approach was to accumulate results that can be used to: identify gaps in recreational services; recognize service areas that are perceived as robust; rally the community around parks and recreation in the City of Wilmington; and support rationale for future investment.

METHODOLOGY

ETC Institute, a survey contractor, mailed a survey packet to a random sample of households in the City of Wilmington. Each survey packet contained a cover letter signed by the Director of Community Services, a copy of the survey, and a postage-paid return envelope. Residents who received the survey had the option of returning the survey by mail or completing it on-line. The overall results for a sample

of 402 surveys have a precision of at least +/-4.8 percent at a 95 percent level of confidence. A more detailed description of ETC Institute's methodology for ensuring statistically valid results is contained in the Appendix.

Priority Investment Rating

The priority investment rating was developed by ETC Institute to provide decision makers with an objective tool to evaluate the urgency that should be attributed to investments in parks and recreation facilities, amenities, and programs. The priority investment rating combines and equally weighs 1) the importance residents place on certain facilities, amenities and programs and 2) how many residents have unmet needs for that facility, amenity, or program. The graphic below depicts the process of the priority investment rating.

Recreational Facilities, Amenities, and Programs

The items listed below were identified as Wilmington residents' top five most pressing needs for recreation amenities, facilities, and programs. The charts that follow present the entire list of items survey takers had the option to select, and places them in order of highest priority for investment to lower priority for investment.

- High Priority Recreation Amenities + Facilities
 - Greenway Trails
 - Farmers Market Pavilion
 - Natural Surface Trails
 - Natural Open Space
 - Water Access for Canoe, Kayak, Boating
- High Priority Recreation Programs
 - Outdoor Movies + Concerts
 - Fitness + Wellness
 - Senior Programs + Activities
 - Outdoor Adventure Programs
 - Environmental Education

facilities in the past twelve months, rated the quality of them as excellent or good. Of the households that have visited City parks in the past twelve months, 30.5 percent rated the quality of the parks/facilities as excellent, 56.7 percent rated the quality as good, and 12.8 percent rated the quality as either fair or poor.

Communication

Respondents were asked what methods they use to learn about City parks, facilities, and special events. The top two responses were word of mouth (55.2%) and social media (48.3%). Following these methods, the next three were, City newsletter (37.8%), search engine (34.3%), and City website (33.1%).



Additional Findings

The survey went on to capture further public feedback related to other components of Wilmington Parks and Recreation operations. This summary examines reported usage of the City of Wilmington parks and facilities, user perceptions of park conditions, and public opinion toward the City's efforts to provide recreational services. It also looks at current and preferred methods of communication between the Division and Wilmington residents, as well as barriers to park, facility, and program usage.

Usage and Perceptions of Park Conditions

When asked about visiting City of Wilmington parks and facilities, the majority of the households indicated they visited anywhere from two to three times a week to a few times a month. During the past twelve months, Halyburton Park and Greenfield Park were visited by the highest percentage of households. Fifty-five percent (54.5%) of households indicated they had visited Halyburton Park and 49.5 percent had visited Greenfield Park during the past twelve months. In terms of overall quality, survey findings indicate most households that visited City parks/



Respondents were asked to select the top two sources of information that they most prefer to use to learn about City parks, facilities, and special events. The following top four sources of information were rated as one of the respondents’ top two choices: Social media (34.1%); City newsletter (29.6%); City website (22.6%); and Direct email (22.1%).

Opinions

Thirty percent (30.2%) of households indicated they have participated in recreation programs or special events offered by the City in the past twelve months. Of these households, 79.0 percent rated the overall quality of the programs/events participated in as excellent or good and 21.0 percent rated the quality as fair or poor.

Almost all respondents agree with the following statements regarding the Wilmington Parks and Recreation: “Public parks add to quality of life in the community” (95.7%), and “Recreation and parks are an essential service to the City” (94.7%).

Most respondents are supportive of the City investing in the improvements and upkeep of existing facilities. Respondents were asked how supportive they would be of the City taking various actions to improve the parks and recreation system. The top three actions that respondents support, based on the sum percentage of very supportive and supportive responses, were: Investing in improvement and

upkeep of existing facilities (92.3%); Developing additional links or segments within City’s existing greenway trail segments (82.9%); and Implementing sustainability measures to minimize environmental impact of parks and recreation facilities (80.5%).

After respondents were asked their level of support for various actions on improvements or developments, respondents were asked to rank the top three they would be most willing to support with tax dollars. Based on the sum of respondents’ top three choices, 59.3 percent indicated they would be most willing to support investing in improvements and upkeep to existing facilities, 57.5 percent would be most willing to support developing additional links or segments within City’s existing greenway trail segments, and 48.8 percent support connecting existing trails to downtown neighborhoods & parks

Barriers to Participation

Respondents indicated, from a list of 15 potential reasons, what prevents them from using recreation programs offered. The top response was the lack of information/not knowing what is being offered (44.3%), followed by households do not have enough time/ too busy (24.4%) or facilities are too far from home (24.1%).



Focus Group Meetings

Organization	Date
Parks + Recreation Advisory Board	August 18, 2021
Wilmington Convention + Visitors Bureau	August 24, 2021
Advocates Focus Group <ul style="list-style-type: none">› National Association for the Advancement of Colored People› University of north Carolina, Wilmington› New Hanover County Regional Medical Center	August 24, 2021

Purpose

Focus Group meetings provide a way to receive input from organizations whose purpose aligns with the Parks and Recreation Division. Guided discussions included opportunities to work toward a well-rounded park system that embraces a certain set of values. For example, members of the Wilmington Convention and Visitors Bureau approached questions from their positions as promoters of visitation to the City and the positive economic and social impacts of tourism. Community advocates and organizers responded from their unique positions, incorporating perspectives of their constituents. Each group added value to the overall community engagement effort representing varied roles in improving quality of life in Wilmington.

Methodology

The three focus group meetings began with an overview of the project and the following questions were used to guide and prompt conversation.

- › What about parks and recreation makes your community better?
- › What is your parks, recreation, and greenways system known for?
- › What would strengthen the Division’s positive impact on Wilmington?
- › What are some of the biggest threats or challenges to the assets you have identified?

Parks And Recreation Advisory Board Perceptions

Summary of Findings:

- › The parks system provides safe spaces to bring people together that may not otherwise interact.
- › The board stated a need for more bike lanes to connect communities.
- › The parks system is known for Greenfield Lake Park, Althea Gibson Tennis Complex, Halyburton, tennis, baseball, cross city trail and nature trails.
- › The Division is functioning with limited staff and an inadequate budget.
- › Program staff cast a wide net to reach broad segments of the population and understand the importance of inclusion.
- › The board feels that engagement is very important and should expand.
- › With Wilmington’s population growth, the board voiced concern of a potential shortage of park space. Therefore, they shared that it is important to strengthen and improve the existing park facilities, budget for existing facility maintenance, preserve as much green space as possible and create pocket parks in neighborhoods.
- › The board stated their belief that city has a great Parks and Recreation Division.

Wilmington Convention + Visitors Bureau Perceptions

Summary of Findings:

- › The Bureau is highly in favor of Wilmington's Parks and Recreation Division's efforts to provide, attractions, facilities, amenities and services for visitors.
- › The Bureau stated a need for additional facilities to accommodate indoor events such as a tennis plaza, aquatics center and indoor sports complex. Additional amenities at the Althea Gibson Tennis Complex and Legion Stadium are desired.
- › There is need for heightened visitor awareness of Division offerings. Tourists are often unaware of existing activities because they don't know where this information is located.
- › Bureau representatives expressed their desire to work more closely with the Wilmington Parks and Recreation Division to reach both agencies' mission and goals.

Advocates Focus Group Perceptions

Summary of Findings

- › A diverse palate of park facilities and recreational activities should be provided equally across the park system.
- › Parks provide access to public open spaces, preserving green space and convey community identity.
- › The group stated that communication with the public could be improved; there is a perception that there are individuals and groups that are unaware of what is available.
- › Safety is perceived as a barrier for use of the park system and the group stated that there is a need for enhanced and proactive safety considerations.
- › A better understanding of the City's demographics could drive conversation and subsequent action geared toward proactively addressing the recreational needs of Wilmington's diverse community composition.

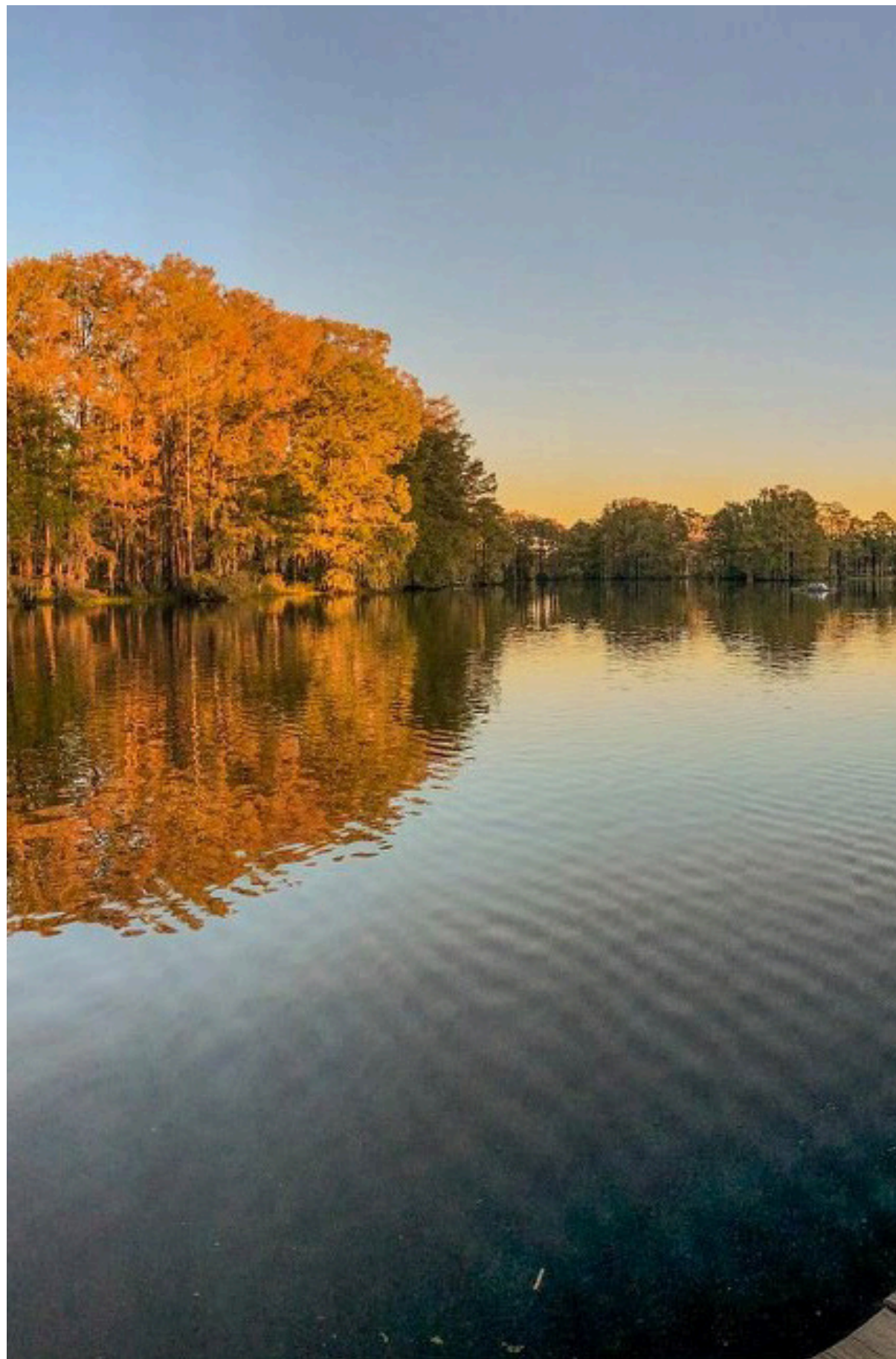


Community Engagement Summary of Findings

Community engagement throughout this planning process indicated the following core ideas:

- › The parks and recreation system brings people together and promotes health and wellness. Parks offer opportunities for nature education.
- › The Parks and Recreation Division should improve communication with the community and visitors to the City of Wilmington.
- › Connectivity and transportation were common areas of input. Increased connectivity to parks with more greenways is desired. The community also suggested the parks division should work with the Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority (Wave Transit) to provide more public transportation to parks. More bike lanes are also desired for park connectivity.
- › Ensuring that parks accommodate a variety of disabilities was also important. Safety is perceived as a barrier for use of the park system with a need for enhanced and proactive safety measures. Parks and recreation staff should be increased; budgets should be increased. The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board stressed the need for more park maintenance resources as park aesthetics need to be improved. The potential for public-private partnerships to support the park system were encouraged to be explored. This includes adding new partnerships as well as expanding existing partnerships.
- › Along with access to the water, the Wilmington Riverwalk, Althea Gibson Tennis Complex, and Legion Stadium provide unique and high quality amenities for city residents. These places were discussed in the realm of providing amenities for residents and supporting tourism.





GUIDING PRINCIPLES + ACTION PLAN

IN THIS CHAPTER

Guiding Principles

Action Plan



Outlined below is an implementation plan with prioritized action items. The recommendations presented have been further refined into strategies or action items and prioritized as short-term, mid-term, long-term or ongoing. Action items receiving higher priority are those supported by significant community input or are items that have been delayed or postponed in the past but have significant bearing on achieving the goals of this plan. Each action item indicates a responsible party to foster accountability within the department as well as component of the parks and recreation system it relates to such as parks and facilities, greenway trails, programs, operations and maintenance, and finance. Each action item also assigns a responsible party to foster accountability.

The responsible party has been identified based on the Wilmington Parks and Recreation’s key areas of responsibility and management, including:

- Responsible Parties Key:
- › ED – The Department executive team: Director and Assistant Director
 - › LD – The Department leadership team: Director, Assistant Director, Superintendent, Managers, Supervisors
 - › PM – Park Maintenance Section
 - › PS – Public Services
 - › RS– Recreation Section
 - › AD – Administration Division
 - › FD – Financial Division
 - › EGD – Engineering Department
 - › OD – Other City Departments
 - › OC – Outside Consultant
 - › DW – Dynamic Workforce
 - › E – Equity
 - › I – Inclusion
 - › CC – Community Connections
 - › FR – Financial Resources
 - › OE – Outdoor Engagement
 - › S – Safety
 - › HW – Health + Wellness
 - › MS – Manage by Standards

GOAL	TIMELINE	TIMELINE CODE
Short-term	1-5 Years	ST
Mid-term	5-10 Years	MT
Long-term	10+years	LT
Ongoing	Continual	OG



Goal 1: Maintain high quality facilities to meet user needs in a safe and enjoyable manor.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE(S)	GOAL	STRATEGY	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBLE GROUP
DW, E, I, MS	1.1	Collaborate with the Public Services Department to finalize a detailed assessment of building systems to extend the life cycle of recreation facilities.	ST	PS, ED, LD
DW, E, I	1.2	Monitor progress and ensure execution of recommendations by the Public Services Department.	MT	PS, ED, LD
I, CC, FR, HW	1.3	Construct a multi-generational recreation center to fulfill the demand for senior programs and additional community center space.	LT	ED, EGD

Goal 2: Upgrade parks to include amenities reflecting the latest trends and community needs in a way that creates significant experiences.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE(S)	GOAL	STRATEGY	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBLE GROUP
E, I, S, HW	2.1	Re-imagine neighborhood parks to meet the needs of surrounding neighborhoods by completing, as a priority, park master plans for Robert Strange Park, Northside Park + Pool, Archie Blue Park, and Maides Park.	ST	ED, LD, OC
E, I, S, HW	2.2	Complete additional park master plans such as Kennedy Park and others as funding allows	LT	ED, LD, OC
E, I	2.3	Provide diverse park amenities including additional splash pads and inclusive playgrounds, and sensory gardens, pump track, and ninja / ropes courses.	OG	LD, PM
CC, OE, HW	2.4	Meet the needs and wants of the community, prioritizing trails, natural open space, water access for boating, kayaking and canoeing, and trailheads with restrooms and parking.	MT	ED, EGD, OC
OE, HW	2.5	Develop a Level of Standard for green space / preservation.	ST	ED, PM
I, CC, OE	2.6	Leverage technology and explore trends in "SMARTPark trends"	ST	LD



Goal 3: Improve the physical condition of parks so they feel safer and more welcoming

GUIDING PRINCIPLE(S)	GOAL	STRATEGY	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBLE GROUP
E, I, FR, S, MS	3.1	Update and maintain existing parks and facilities, prioritizing those not experiencing significant investment in more than 10 years, in high SVI areas, and with safety, security or code compliance concerns.	MT	ED, FD, ENG
E, I, FR, S, MS	3.2	Improve the physical condition of parks to foster improved feelings of perceived safety	ST	ED, LD, FD, PM
S	3.3	Continue to implement CPTED strategies	OG	ED, LD, FD, PM
S	3.4	Monitor the effectiveness of the park ranger program	OG	ED, PM

Goal 4: Further an Interconnected Park System

GUIDING PRINCIPLE(S)	GOAL	STRATEGY	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBLE GROUP
CC, HW	4.1	Build upon connectivity in and between parks	LT	ED, FD, EGD, OD
CC, FR	4.2	Construct 10 miles of new greenway	LT	ED, FD, EGD, OD
CC, FR, HW	4.3	Close gaps and complete repairs in sidewalk networks	MT	ED, FD, EGD, OD
CC, FR, HW, MS	4.4	Complete an update to the greenway trails master plan	ST	ED, LD, OD, OC
CC, HW, MS	4.5	Increase the percentage of residents within a ten-minute walk of a park	LT	ED, FD, EGN, OC

Goal 5: Establish visual cues to orient visitors and establish brand recognition

GUIDING PRINCIPLE(S)	GOAL	STRATEGY	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBLE GROUP
DW, FR, OE, MS	5.1	Establish branding standards for parks that include consistent signage and site furnishing	ST	ED, LD, OD
FR, S, MS	5.2	Identify pallet of consistent furnishings for use in all parks and implement installation	ST	ED, PM
DW, FR	5.3	Develop a tag line and logo for the Division	ST	ED, OD
FR, OE	5.4	Consider a 1% public art dedication	ST	OD

Goal 6: Plan, design and construct parks to promote wellness

GUIDING PRINCIPLE(S)	GOAL	STRATEGY	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBLE GROUP
E, I, HW	6.1	Plan, design, and program both parks and recreation programs systemwide to improve health outcomes encompassing the “whole person.”	OG	ED, LD, RS, EGN
E, I, HW	6.2	Expand number of leisure, moderate and vigorous physical activity areas in existing parks	MT	ED, LD, RS
E, I, HW	6.3	Offer healthy food options through, concessions, food trucks, camps and other providers	MT	ED, LD, RS
E, I, HW	6.4	Increase the number of park elements that encourage social interaction like seating options, performance space, and open space for impromptu activity	MT	ED, LD

Goal 7: Upgrade parks and amenities to improve inclusivity and enforce ADA compliance

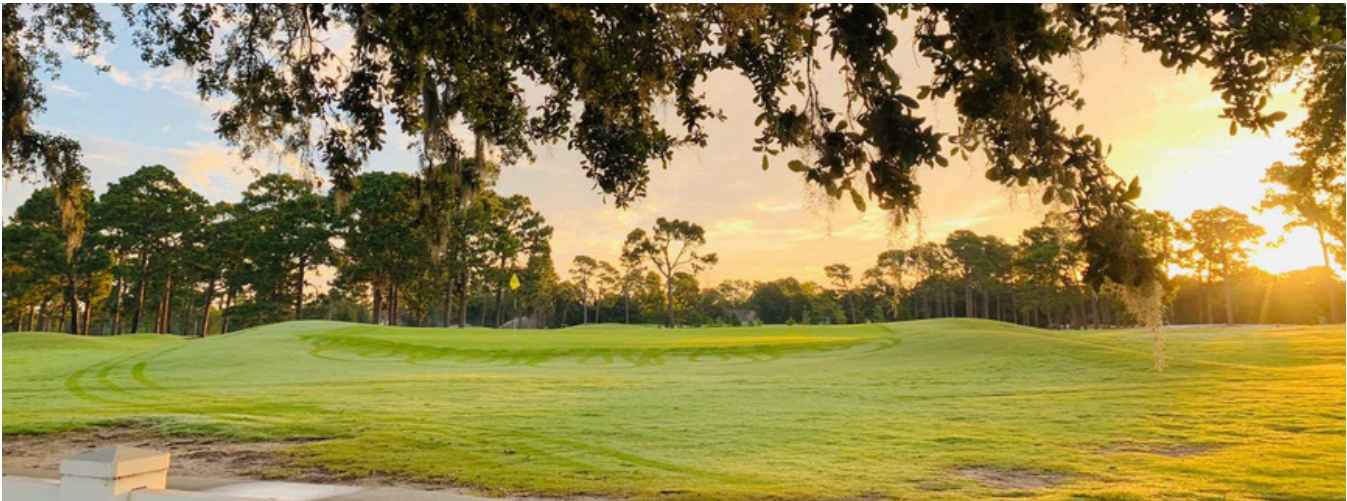
GUIDING PRINCIPLE(S)	GOAL	STRATEGY	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBLE GROUP
FR, S, MS	7.1	Continue to enforce ADA compliance for renovations and new construction	OG	ED, LD, PM
I	7.2	Expand opportunities for inclusive recreation through construction of sensory rich elements, ground-level play activities, universal furnishings,	MT	ED, LD, OC
E, I, S	7.3	Review policy and signage for microaggressions, vagaries, and exceptions.	ST	ED, OD
E, I, MS	7.4	Use language in signage, publications and marketing materials that represent diverse voices	ST,OG	ED, OD
DW, I, MS	7.5	Train staff on inclusivity practices	ST	ED, LD
	7.6	Ensure the use of universal design for park renovations, expansions and new construction	OG	ED, EGD

Goal 8: Intentionally acquire land to support growth and future recreation needs

GUIDING PRINCIPLE(S)	GOAL	STRATEGY	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBLE GROUP
OE, MS	8.1	Acquire 120 acres of land (or other realistic acreage) for future parkland development	LT	ED, OD
FR, MS	8.2	Use best practices in due diligence to make informed decisions regarding land acquisition	OG	ED, OD
FR	8.3	Identify open / unprogrammed space for existing park expansions		ED, OD

Goal 9: Enhance the equity of parks by fostering a system of equal access to meaningful experiences

GUIDING PRINCIPLE(S)	GOAL	STRATEGY	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBLE GROUP
E, I, MS	9.1	Improve the geographic distribution of parks across the City, prioritizing new parks in the two areas identified on the park search area map.	LT	ED, OD
OE	9.2	Align city-wide recreation trends with the specific recreation preferences of neighborhoods	MT	ED, OD
E, I, OE, MS	9.3	Ensure consistency of park experiences across the system by investing in parks needing repairs and upgrades, and prioritizing those in high SVI areas that have seen little investment in the last 10 years.	ST	ED, LD, FD
E, OE, MS	9.4	Promote the use of the GIS tool under way by the Engineering Department to georeference and track capital projects across the City.	ST,OG	ED, LD, EGD
E, MS	9.5	Cross reference projects approved through the CIP prioritization tool with needed improvements in high SVI areas.	ST,OG	ED, LD, EGD



Goal 10: Maintain high quality facilities through enhanced management and standards				
GUIDING PRINCIPLE(S)	GOAL	STRATEGY	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBLE GROUP
	10.1	Manage staff to 28 acres per maintenance FTE to achieve the level of care needed for parks, trails, alleys, medians and buildings. ‣ Confirm on an on-going basis the total number of acres maintained by the Division staff including parks, trails, alleys, medians and buildings.		
E	10.2	Develop a maintenance management plan linked to maintenance standards that connects the correct staff, parks equipment and tasks for all operations in the department. ‣ Assign the appropriate staff to the proper maintenance equipment, mowers, trucks, trailers, and small engine machines best suited for the task.	ST	PM
E, S, HW, MS	10.3	Continue the development of the forestry plan the city has in place. ‣ For the remainder of the City’s forestry plan for the canopy, establish an 8–10–year pruning schedule for street trees and 10–12 years for park trees. ‣ Continue the tree condition assessment for street trees and maintain the existing inventory catalog of new and removed trees.	ST	PM

S, HW, MS	10.4	Develop a sports field maintenance plan that defines the standards for practice, recreational and competitive fields to maximize the value, field condition and use. ‣ Limit the number of games and practices to: – 600 hours annually for competitive grass fields – 800 hours annually for recreational grass fields. ‣ Construct practice fields to minimize wear and tear on tournament fields ‣ Convert at least 10% of all sports fields to all weather fields to support sports tourism needs in the city with a combination of soccer, football and baseball fields	LT	RS
E, I, CC, S, MS	10.5	Develop facilities plans for the park system. ‣ Determine: – Indoor space needed to keep supplies organized and equipment in good condition. – Repair space needed for the staff to maximize their efficiency. – Workspace indoor space needed for shop space to keep equipment maintained and in could condition. – Outdoors storage space for large equipment and park items.	ST	PM, PS

S, HW, MS	10.6	Develop a maintenance management training program for seasonal, part-time and fulltime employees to maximize their skills and increase their potential. <ul style="list-style-type: none">› Send park managers and supervisors to maintenance management schools. (State Parks and Recreation Association and NRPA Maintenance Management School).› Continue training the staff to correctly enter work orders and data in the existing maintenance management software.› Train the staff to properly operate and maintain equipment to keep repairs at a minimum.	LT	PM, RS
------------------	-------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------	---------------

Goal 11: Simplify financial data management to easily measure performance and guide decision making.				
GUIDING PRINCIPLE(S)	GOAL	STRATEGY	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBLE GROUP
FR, MS	11.1	Establish a full-time position for a business / financial manager. <ul style="list-style-type: none">› Develop a job description based on the needs of the department to draw candidate with business, management and financial skills that will work in the best interest of the system.	ST,MT	ED, OD

FR, MS	11.2	Develop a list of metrics for unit costs that define financial success for the Department. <ul style="list-style-type: none">› The list needs to be comprehensive and include key fiscal segments of the system.	ST	ED, LD, FD
FR, MS	11.3	The revenue policies created by the city need to reflect pricing strategies for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">› Non-profit programs (intended to be a free or at little cost)› Merit programs, (intended to recover the direct costs)› Private programs (generate enough revenue to pay for direct and indirect costs)› Identify and track direct and indirect costs of all programs to understand what the cost of program delivery is compared to revenue generated, in order to determine cost recovery and cost per program.› Use cost recovery calculations to assist in future decisions and where to focus resources to ensure high value programs and experiences.	ST	ED, OD
MS	11.4	Programs need to be assessed to determine their life cycle stage. Any program that is in a declining stage due to the lack of participation needs to be reinvented or canceled. <ul style="list-style-type: none">› Educate the program staff about life cycle management best practices.› Implement best practices in life cycle management to ensure the potential to meet minimum participation rates.	ST,OG	LD, RS

FR, MS	11.5	Refine file organization to make it easier for the staff to access, interpret and make department decisions.	ST	ED, LD
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Financial filing needs to be a consistent process that is easy to read, assemble and address the accounts that pertain to specific funds or activities. Categories:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Parks and Recreation budget combined with revenues.Department Budget revenues and expenses need to be reflected by each facility.Revenue and expenses generated in each facility's operationsProgram revenue by individual core program type and activity.Expenses by individual core program type and activity.Budget accounting needs to reflect multiple years of activity in the same document.Registration Software Data<ul style="list-style-type: none">Program YearProgram Type: Youth Variety Camp (YVAR) or Youth Sports (YSPR). Youth Art (YART) or other.Season of the year.Program start and finishStatus: Active, Inactive or Cancelled.Combo Key: Assigned course number, season and section of the course.Full Program DescriptionEnrollment –Room or Space UsedResident and Non-resident fees collected for the program.		

Goal 12: Develop programs that activate spaces and encourage existing and new users to experience parks, recreation facilities and services				
GUIDING PRINCIPLE(S)	GOAL	STRATEGY	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBLE GROUP
E, I, CC, FR, OE, MS	12.1	All programs need to be classified as core essential / important / value-added. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Classifications indicate cost recovery levels by the degree of public and private good associated with the programs.	ST	RS
FR, MS	12.2	Establish the level of partnership subsidy. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Partnership levels:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Public / Public PartnersPublic / Not-for-profit partnersPublic / private partnersUtilize a written document with the funds invested by each party, assessed each year and include adjustments made to match the partnership agreement.	MT	LD, RS
FR, MS	12.3	Once a pricing policy is established, the staff will need to be trained. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Provide training about pricing services, how to communicate and how to implement them.	MT,OG	LD, RS

FR, MS	12.4	Expand staff training to include how to develop program standards. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standards per area to develop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budgets, purchasing, program lifecycles, age segments, classification systems, cost recovery models, staffing and marketing 	ST	LD, RS
FR, MS	12.5	Fully utilize RecTrac Software to make informed decisions about programming. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data to enter: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Date, time, location and fees. 	OG	RS, OD
E, I, FR, MS	12.6	Establish key performance measures for facilities and programs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance measures should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percentage of use for each facility: prime time, non-prime time and by season -measured to the established use goal for the facility and the budget. By classification of the service, determine how well the program meets the cost recovery level established. Programs offered versus programs meeting the minimum requirements to hold the class. The level of the indirect costs factored in with the true cost of the program, including adjustments made to the price of the services. Non-resident rates adjusted to meet the cost recovery goals. New core services established to support facility cost recovery goals where appropriate. 	MT,OG	ED, LD

E, I, FR, MS	12.7	Complete a review of the Department policies and procedures to ensure there is consistency across all lines of business. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistency in areas of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Separate partnership policies public / public partnerships, public / not-for-profit partnerships and public / private partnerships. Tracking each partner's contribution versus what the city contributes on a yearly basis. Make adjustments on the partnership agreements regarding the level of financial responsibility for each partner. 	ST	ED, LD
---------------------	-------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------	---------------



Goal 13: Establish an organizational structure to improve communication, efficiencies and performances				
GUIDING PRINCIPLE(S)	GOAL	STRATEGY	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBLE GROUP
DW, FR, CC, MS	13.0	Establish the Division as a separate, standalone Department	MT	OD
DW, FR, CC, MS	13.1	Employ a Director and Assistant Director of the newly established Department to oversee operations, finance, recreation, parks, and other functional aspects of the organization.	ST	OD
DW, FR, CC, MS	13.2	Establish a communications plan to ensure all staff receive consistent, current and relevant information. Ensure the communications plan considers succession and transfer of institutional knowledge	ST	ED, LD, OD
DW, FR, CC, MS	13.3	Identify a champion to implement this system plan. The champion will be held accountable to the action plan and responsible for execution and celebrating successful completion of milestones.	ST	ED

This page left intentionally blank.



November 2022

APPENDIX I

Wilmington, North Carolina



BEST PRACTICES

Volunteer management

In developing the volunteer program, some best practices that the Town should be aware of in managing volunteers include:

- > Involve volunteers in cross-training to expose them to various departmental functions and increase their skill. This can also increase their utility, allowing for more flexibility in making work assignments, and can increase their appreciation and understanding of the Department.
- > Ensure volunteers are coordinated with the Town of Morrisville as a whole, and that he or she is Finally, this plan recommends the department continue to build volunteerism to serve marketing and communication efforts. communicating with associated park staff to stay fully informed about the strategic direction of the agency overall, including strategic initiatives for all divisions. Periodically identify, evaluate, or revise specific tactics the volunteer services program should undertake to support the larger organizational mission.
- > Develop a good reward and recognition system to maintain the desirability of volunteerism in the agency. The consultant team recommends using tactics similar to those found in frequent flier programs, wherein volunteers can use their volunteer hours to obtain early registration at programs, or discounted pricing at certain programs, rentals or events, or any other Town function. Identify and summarize volunteer recognition policies in a Volunteer Policy document.
- > Update volunteer position descriptions regularly. Include an overview of the volunteer position lifecycle in the Volunteer Policy, including the procedure for creating a new position.

Add end-of-lifecycle process steps to the Volunteer Policy to ensure that there is formal documentation of resignation or termination of volunteers. Also include ways to monitor and track reasons for resignation/termination and perform exit interviews with outgoing volunteers when able.

- > In addition to number of volunteers and volunteer hours, categorize and track volunteerism by type and extent of work, such as:
 - ☐ **Regular volunteers:** Those volunteers whose work is considered to be continuous, provided their work performance is satisfactory and there is a continuing need for their services.
 - ☐ **Special event volunteers:** Volunteers who help out with a particular event with no expectation that they will return after the event is complete.
 - ☐ **Episodic volunteers:** Volunteers who help out with a particular project type on a recurring or irregular basis with no expectation that they will return for other duties.
 - ☐ **Volunteer interns:** Volunteers who have committed to work for the agency to fulfill a specific higher-level educational learning requirement.
 - ☐ **Community service volunteers:** Volunteers who are volunteering over a specified period of time to fulfill a community service requirement.

Partnerships - general

All partnerships developed and maintained by the Department should adhere to common policy requirements. These include:

- > Each partner will meet with or report to Department staff on a regular basis to plan and share activity-based costs and equity invested.
- > Partners will establish measurable outcomes and work through key issues to focus on for the coming year to meet the desired outcomes.
- > Each partner will focus on meeting a balance of equity agreed to and track investment costs accordingly.
- > Measurable outcomes will be reviewed quarterly and shared with each partner, with adjustments made as needed.
- > A working partnership agreement will be developed and monitored together on a quarterly or as-needed basis.
- > Each partner will assign a liaison to serve each partnership agency for communication and planning purposes.
- > If conflicts arise between partners, the Town-appointed lead, along with the other partner's highest ranking officer assigned to the agreement, will meet to resolve the issue(s) in a timely manner. Any exchange of money or traded resources will be made based on the terms of the partnership agreement.

Each partner will meet with the other partner's respective board or managing representatives annually, to share updates and outcomes of the partnership agreement

Partnerships - public / private

The recommended policies and practices for public/private partnerships that may include businesses, private groups, private associations, or individuals who desire to make a profit from use of Department facilities or programs are detailed below. These can also apply to partnerships where a private party wishes to develop a facility on park property, to provide a service on publicly-owned property, or who has a contract with the agency to provide a task or service on the agency's behalf at public facilities. These unique partnership principles are as follows:

- > Upon entering into an agreement with a private business, group, association or individual, Town staff and political leadership must recognize that they must allow the private entity to meet their financial objectives within reasonable parameters that protect the mission, goals and integrity of the Department.
 - > As an outcome of the partnership, the Town of Morrisville must receive a designated fee
 - > that may include a percentage of gross revenue dollars less sales tax on a regular basis, as outlined in the contract agreement.
- The working agreement of the partnership must establish a set of measurable outcomes to be achieved, as well as the tracking method of how those outcomes will be

monitored by the agency. The outcomes will include standards of quality, financial reports, customer satisfaction, payments to the agency, and overall coordination with the Town for the services rendered.

- > Depending on the level of investment made by the private contractor, the partnership
- > agreement can be limited to months, a year or multiple years.

If applicable, the private contractor will provide a working management plan annually they will follow to ensure the outcomes desired by the Department. The management plan can and will be negotiated, if necessary. Monitoring of the management plan will be the responsibility of both partners. The agency must allow the contractor to operate freely in their best interest, as long as the outcomes are achieved and the terms of the partnership agreement are adhered to.

- > The private contractor cannot lobby agency advisory or governing boards for renewal of
- > a contract. Any such action will be cause for termination. All negotiations must be with the Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources Director or their designee.

The agency has the right to advertise for private contracted partnership services, or negotiate on an individual basis with a bid process based on the professional level of the service to be provided.

Financial Sustainability

Fundraising:

- > Departments should consider establishing more park related Friends Groups, establishing a Park Foundation, or the development of a future Park Conservancy to help raise money for the system or a specific park as needs to continue grow. Example. Average park foundations in cities the size of Nashville typically raise 4-5 million a year for the parks system they represent. Some cities also create Park Conservancy's for a specific large park or attraction. Example: The city of St. Louis has a Park Conservancy for Forest Park called Forest Park Forever that has raised over 200 million dollars for updating Forest Park and it manages elements of the park on a yearly basis to keep their investment working for the long term. They raise on average approximately 4 million a year for operations of that park. There are 39 such Conservancy's managing signature parks in cities across the United States now based on TPL.
- > Find philanthropists that will support users that do not have the ability to pay for services and
- > have them invest in these users through a park foundation or friends group established for this purpose.

Teach and train your key park and recreation related boards or city leaders that Friends Groups, Conservancy's and Park Foundations are not in competition with you but need to act as your advocate. Placement of the right types of people on these boards is a very important process that needs to be taught and put into practice. These types of boards can meet the level of fundraising desired by the agency if the right people are on the board. Management agreements between each fundraising group needs to be completed each year with goals, dollars to be raised for what purpose and benefit to the Department.

Partnering:

- > Never allow a private or a not-for-profit group to make money of Department owned facilities without the Departments receiving a share of the gross revenue. Make sure the Department split covers the true costs and then the revenue desired based on an operating pro-forma from the event they are creating in the recreation or park facility it is being provided in.
- > Privatize services where the Departments does not have the capital dollars to operate and maintain the facility, park or service that the system owns to a competitive cost per acre level.
- > Have working, signed agreements with all types of partners to include (public/private, public/not for profit and public/public partners). This requires separate operational policies on each type of partnership that is established. Establish partnership principles that the Department will manage by so not to entitle the partner in anyway.
- > Do not partner with any single group unless the Departments has their own direct and indirect costs determined. Understand the equitable investment the potential partner or partners are putting into the relationship.
- > All partnerships must have working agreements with measurable outcomes. They are to be reviewed at least every two years as one means to hold each other accountable.
- > Ask the private sector to develop team building days in the Departments' parks and facilities by creating cleanup and fix up days. This builds community support and it will overnight enhance The Departments' parks or facilities to a much higher level and it gives the corporate partner a selling point to their value in the community.
- > Determine sponsorship opportunities and levels of sponsorships for the Departments system every five years. Hire a private sponsorship contractor who knows the value of sponsorships for a percentage of the total amount raised instead of doing it yourself. Chicago Park District raises large sums of money to support operational costs through sponsorships of its system.

Government Finance:

- > Know the value of the system less land value and what the assets are worth and where those assets are in their life cycle. This will allow the Department to determine where capital improvements need to be made and the cost benefit of those improvements to the system. Best practice agencies are investing at a minimum 3-5% a year to protect the assets they own. Example; Columbus Ohio invests 30 million a year in maintaining the public assets they own now. This was accomplished by a voter bond issue in 2014 for the next ten years.
- > The Department needs to find dedicated funding sources they can count on annually to support their operational and capital needs.
- > Develop a Business Development division within the Departments to pursue grants, establish and manage effective partnerships, create more earned income, and develop business plans with staff managing revenue producing facilities to maximize each site's earned income capability.
- > Consider setting up business enterprise systems for revenue producing parks or facilities.
- > Develop a cost benefit analysis on all capital improvement projects prior to developing these future parks or facility sites to determine if it is financially feasible and rather operational dollars will be available to support it.

- > Submit two budgets for approval. One that is only tax support and one that is earned income revenue only. This way elected officials can focus on tax related budget items only and revenue related items second.
- > Know how to properly execute an Annual Budget. There is a lot of time spent in the formulation of a budget, but it is the execution of the budget that saves a system. Issues like review, explaining variances, adjustments, operating within it, insuring that all managers are aware of its importance to the financial stability of the agency.
- > Understand the real details of “Capital.” What are the carrying costs of land, facilities, and equipment? Do not burden the Department with capital projects that cost the agency more to own than the land is worth.

Cost Recovery:

- > Replace revenue-producing equipment every 5 years to keep the user experience relevant and competitive with other service providers.
- > Include senior management staff on all design decisions. Force landscape designers and facility architects to outline the maintenance costs on all parks and facilities they design to ensure their design is aligned with the Department’s maintenance and recreation operating budgets.
- > Consider acquiring additional land along trails to setup the potential for land leases for concession operations for a land lease to help support operational costs of the trails system.
- > Know your true costs to deliver program services, maintain parks, trails and facilities, both direct and indirect costs so that the Department can determine the true costs of services on a unit cost basis. This helps to determine how to establish equitable partnerships and when to outsource tasks that are too expensive to provide with public employees.
- > Develop business plans on any program service or facility that the Departments operates that costs more to operate than \$100,000 a year with a goal to deliver a cost recovery goal of 50% at a minimum.
- > Classify services based on core essential, important and value-added criteria and then price services that are furthest away from their mission at full cost recovery levels.

Enterprise Management:

- > Set up business enterprise systems for revenue producing facilities and programs.
- > Design parks and recreation facilities for efficiency, productivity and to produce revenue that will offset operational costs at a predetermined cost recovery goal.
- > Develop a financial policy that allows the Department to keep all earned income revenue in your operating budget without lowering tax dollars received. The Department should not be penalized for generating revenue to keep the system well positioned for the future.
- > Every three years bid out services where the costs are higher than the private sector to keep the Department’s costs competitive in the market place.
- > Develop an annual revenue plan.
- > Find dedicated funding sources that the Department can count on annually.
- > When building a park or trail system, require an agreement from your elected officials that you will receive the appropriate amount of operational funding to ensure that the Department can

maintain these facilities once developed so you do not put undue pressure on the agency's budget. This requires that the staff develop an operational impact cost for each capital improvement developed for the system.

- > Budget for marketing and branding of revenue producing facilities at 3-5% of total operational costs.
- > Do not give any group in the community a larger than necessary discount because of their age, their occupation, their military service etc. All citizens are valuable and should be treated the same. Understand the size of the market for core programs and facilities and how much of the market the Department controls. Is there opportunity to penetrate the market further?
- > Study and understand market strategies that will make a measurable difference and improve the economic positioning of the program or facility the system is targeting.
- > Inform users and partners of what the Department's costs are so they appreciate the value the Department puts into place into the facility or service. This strategy will help to reduce entitlement of users.
- > Track user analytics to understand who and how often the system is being used by patrons.
- > Understand concession management, what it takes to make it worth the time and investment for the Department to provide the service versus an outside contractor. Don't allow special interest groups to have exclusive rights to concession operations without paying the Department some level of gross revenue.

Operational Management:

- > The Department needs to consider not maintaining things in the park system that nobody uses and remove them from the park system. This is a waste of money.
- > Manage by standards and track costs to implement each type of standard for park maintenance and program services.
- > Train staff, regularly on business principals, cost recovery, cost of service and customer service.
- > Know the demographics of users to determine their needs and capability of supporting programs and capital costs.
- > Track population trends and figure out how demographic changes will affect the Department in the future.
- > Hold staff accountable to cost recovery goals for programs, facilities and parks the Department maintains with revenue to support those services. This includes tracking performance outcomes.
- > Track employee costs of similar sized park systems. Review the wages and benefits for all positions every five years to understand how competitive the Department wages are with other systems. Judge if you are below an acceptable level with or above the standard desired for wages and benefits. The goal for total wages including salaries and benefits should be no more than 55-60% of total operational budget costs.
- > Employ the right people for the right job, for the right pay, to achieve the right outcome and benefits to the agency. Learn and apply the correct functionality and desired productivity of key positions within the system so that it is not personality driven but functionally driven.
- > Reward employees for efficiency and productivity.

- > Train staff to understand the management strategies of their supervisors as one way to prepare them for positions at the next level of responsibility.
- > Develop annual revenue and efficiency work sessions with your staff.
- > Properly train staff in business management of concession operations.
- > Hold employees accountable to productivity standards of facilities and programs and cost recovery levels and give them measurable outcomes to manage to and report out quarterly or every six months.
- > Develop sustainability performance outcomes to hold all divisions accountable.

FUNDING SOURCES FOR CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT DOLLARS AND OPERATING COSTS:

The following financial options outline opportunities to consider in supporting the capital improvements as well as operational costs associated with managing the system for the future. Many of these funding sources may not be allowed or have never been used but should be pursued through legislative means should the Department see the value in pursuing these funding sources.

General Obligation Bond: A general obligation bond is a municipal bond secured by a taxing authority to improve public assets that benefits the municipal agency involved that oversee some of the parks and recreation facilities in the city. General Obligation Bonds are a tool used by local governments to borrow money. The bonds are guaranteed by the governing body's full faith and credit and backed by property tax revenues. Departments can use revenue generated from the sale of general obligation bonds to fund a park project and repay the bonds and interest with future property tax revenue.

General Obligation Bonds should be considered for park and recreation facility projects; such as an update to Neighborhood, Community and Regional Parks, trails, recreation centers, aquatic centers, or a sports complexes. Improvements to parks should also be covered by these funding sources because there are very little operational revenues associated with these parks to draw from and some of the parks improvements are in need of upgrades and renovations limiting the uses of other revenue sources. These parks help frame the image and benefit to a wide age segment of users and updating these parks will benefit the community as a whole and stabilize neighborhoods and other areas. This has to be viewed as an economic impact improvement to stabilize neighborhoods and invite people to live in these neighborhoods because of the quality of parks in their neighborhood. If the parks are maintained to a higher level than the neighborhood it raises the value of property. If parks are maintained below the level of existing homes in the neighborhood it will bring the property values down.

Independent Municipal Corporations like a Facility Authority can issue debt up to 2% of the debt limit of the city in most states for bond funding. This opportunity is subject to approval of city council.

Local Option Income Tax for Public Safety- Many cities in Ohio have used this funding source to help support law enforcement in parks and in their city. Other cities have incorporated this option and moved dollars related to this funding source to support park infrastructure in their parks in Ohio.

Economic Impact Income Tax- EDIT Funds. These funds are used to support economic impact projects in parks in many cities. This may be an opportunity to create this funding source for park related economic improvements related to parks.

Levy on Property Tax: Public agencies around the country receive funding through property tax revenues. State laws vary on how these funds can be used- rather applied to operating cost or capital investments.

Special Purpose Levies: Public agencies, including parks can receive funding through a tax levy designated to a specific purpose and generally for a limited period of time. This could be a one-time, special purpose levy implemented for a limited time period.

Recreation and Park Impact Fees: implementing a recreation impact fee if the Department wanted to pursue these funds from developers. Impact fees generally provide some capital funds but rarely are they sufficient to provide full funding of large projects.

Internal Park Improvement Fund: This funding source is created from a percentage of the overall park admissions to attractions such as sport complexes, golf courses, aquatic centers, fieldhouses or special events in a park and would allow a percentage usually in the 3-5% of gross revenues to be dedicate to the park or recreation facility for existing and future capital improvements. This type of user fee does not require voter approval but is set up in a dedicated fund to support the existing park for future capital, maintenance and improvements.

Tax Increment Finance District: Commonly used for financing redevelopment projects. A Tax Increment Finance District (TIF) involves the issuance of tax-exempt bonds to pay front-end infrastructure and eligible development costs in partnership with private developers that are considered Quality of Life improvements that capture increases in property tax revenue within a designated geographic area and allocates it for a specific public purpose. TIF revenue has been used towards park acquisition, maintenance, and improvements in certain cities. As redevelopment occurs, the “tax increment” resulting from redevelopment projects is used to retire the debt issued to fund the eligible redevelopment costs. The public portion of the redevelopment project funds itself using the additional taxes generated by the project. TIFs can be used to fund park improvements and development as an essential infrastructure cost. These funds would work well in the downtown park redevelopment and in trail development.

Sales Tax: Some cities and states allocate a percentage of local or state-wide sales taxes specifically for parks. A general sales tax applies to a broad base of goods, which means that “a substantial amount of revenue can be generated with a relative low tax rate. This keeps the burden on household’s low. This has been used in Texas to fund Texas State Parks from the sale of outdoor recreation equipment and in other states to fund trails and city-wide improvements.

Developer Cash-in-Lieu of meeting the Open Space Requirement: Ordinances requiring the dedication of open space within developments to meet the park and recreation needs of the new residents often have provisions allowing cash contribution to substitute for the land requirement.

Park Land Dedication Fee: A park land dedication fee requires that a portion of any housing or commercial/industrial development be dedicated to public use, in the form of parks, recreation facilities, playgrounds, etc. Alternatively, the development may pay cash in lieu of a land dedication, which would be put in a special fund and used for future park acquisition.

Business Improvement District: The public private partnership collects additional taxes from business within a designated area. The fees are used for public projects, based on the notion that a well maintained public space will increase commerce for local businesses. Generally used in downtown areas, a Business Improvement District is a useful strategy for pooling revenue to support a common goal. BID funding is managed by a nonprofit corporation created through the city. This BID district can help support downtown parks as well.

Impact Development Fees: Impact Development Fees are one-time fees assessed on residential or commercial development based on the theory that growth pays for growth. Revenue generated from impact fees are allocated towards public infrastructure, including parks. This is a major source of funding for many fast-developing communities.

Facility Authority: A Facility Authority is sometimes used by park and recreation agencies to improve a specific park or develop a specific improvement such as a stadium, large recreation center, large aquatic center, or sports venue for competitive events. Repayment of bonds to fund the project usually comes from a sales tax in the form of food and beverage. A facility Authority could oversee improvements for the large facilities; such as an aquatic center and sports field complex. The Department could seek out a private developer to design build a field house facility for Parks and Recreation by paying back these costs over a 20-year period through the facility authority. The Facility Authority could include representation from the schools, the city/town and private developers.

Utility Lease Fee: Utility lease fees have been used to support parks in the form of utility companies supporting a park from utility easements, storm water runoff and paying for development rights below the ground. This funding source is derived from fees on property owned based on measures such as the amount of impervious surfacing as well as fees from utility companies having access through the park. It is used by many cities to acquire and develop greenways and other open space resources that provide improvements in the park or development of trails. Improvements can include trails, drainage areas, and retention ponds that serve multiple purposes such as recreation, environmental protection, and storm water management. This could be a source for the utilities to make a contribution to support the parks and trails in the future. This has been very successful in Houston along their bayous and in King County Washington.

Transient Occupancy Tax: This funding source is used by many cities and counties to fund improvements to parks from hotels that benefit from the parks in the form of sporting events or entertainment where participants stay in hotels when they use city or county owned sports complexes or competitive facilities. The Transient Occupancy Taxes are typically set at 3-5% on the value of a hotel room a 1% sales tax that can be dedicated for park and recreation improvement purposes as well. Because of the value that parks could provide in the way of events, sports, entertainment and cultural events, hotels in the area that benefit could be set up with a portion of their occupancy funds going to support park and recreation related improvements. Tracking the economic value back to the hotels is important to build trust with the hotel business community.

Food and Beverage Tax: These dollars can come from the local community as well as visitors to help pay for a bond to finance future park and recreation related improvements. Food and Beverage Taxes are very well accepted in most communities. Many park and recreation agencies have a 1% food and beverage tax to support land acquisition across the country.

Special Service District: Many cities have moved parks and recreation services to a Special District especially in Ohio, Illinois, California and Oregon. Businesses and property owners within a designated area can request that a city authorize a Special Service District. Within the district, property owners and businesses pay a service charge that is used for special services, such as park improvements for operations and maintenance.

Capital Improvement Fee: A capital improvement fee can be added to an admission fee to a recreation facility or park attraction to help pay back the cost of developing or updating the facility or attraction. This fee is usually applied to golf courses, aquatic facilities, recreation centers, stadiums, amphitheaters, and special use facilities such as sports complexes. The funds generated can be used either to pay back the cost of the capital improvement on a revenue bond that was used to develop or redevelop the facility. Capital improvement fees normally are \$5 per person for playing on the improved site or can be collected as a parking fee or admission fee.

Capitalizing Maintenance Costs: Levies and bonds for new projects do not always account for the ongoing maintenance and operations funding that will need to be needed by those projects. By capitalizing maintenance costs, cities include those anticipated costs into the specific levy or bond proposal and then set the funding aside in an endowment to cover the future costs.

Lease Back: Lease backs are a source of capital funding in which a private sector entity such as a development company buys the park land site or leases the park land and develops a facility such as a park, recreation attraction, recreation center, pool, or sports complex; and leases the facility back to the municipality to pay off the capital costs over a 20 to 30-year period. This approach takes advantage of the efficiencies of private sector development while relieving the burden on the municipality to raise upfront capital funds. This funding source is typically used for recreation and aquatic type facilities, stadiums, civic buildings, and fire stations.

Capital Improvement Fund Purpose: The purpose of the Park and Recreation Capital Improvement Fund is to allow for the collection of fees, donations, and revenue from vending machines, and to allow for depositing those fees, donations, revenues from vending machines in the fund for the purpose of future land acquisition or specific capital improvements as may be deemed necessary for future improvement or expansion of the Parks Department.

Park and Recreation Capital Improvement Fund: Fees, donations, and revenue from vending machines established. Fees may be established and collected by the Park and Recreation Board for particular special events held on park property as the Board may deem necessary for that specific event. Private organizations who hold their event on park property and who charge admission for the event shall

donate a portion of those charges to The Park and Recreation Capital Improvement Fund. Revenue from all vending machines placed on park property and accessible to the public shall be placed in the fund.

Partnerships: Most do not have equitable agreements for how the partnership is financed. Establishing policies for public/public partnerships, public/not-for-private partnerships and public private partnerships needs to be established with measurable outcomes for each partner involved. The Departments can gain a lot of operational monies back to the department if they can manage their partnerships in a more equitable manner.

Land Leases/Concessions: Land leases and concessions are public/private partnerships in which the municipality provides land or space for private commercial operations that will enhance the park and recreational experience in exchange for payments to help reduce operating costs. They can range from food service restaurant operations to retail operations on city owned property such as marinas and bait shops. Leases usually pay back to the city a percentage of the value of the land each year in the 15% category and a percentage of gross from the restaurant or retail attraction. They also pay sales tax and employee income taxes to the city which supports the overall government system in the city.

Admission to the Park: Many park and recreation systems in the United States have admission fees on a per car, per bike and per person basis to access a park that can be used to help support operational costs. Car costs range from \$3 to \$5 a car and \$2 dollars a bicycle or \$2 dollars a person. This is occurring in many park and recreation systems especially at large regional parks. This would really only apply to regional parks or special use sports complexes in city if it is considered. This fee may be useful for large events and festivals that have the capability to be set up as a fee based park at least on weekends.

Parking Fee: Many parks that do not charge an admission fee will charge a parking fee. Parking rates range from \$3 to \$4 dollars a day. This funding source could work for helping to support special events, festivals and tournaments. City and County park systems in Florida and Maryland charge parking fees for beaches, sports complexes and special event sites. They also have parking meters in parks to support the system or individual park and this could be applied to some parks that have high levels of people parking for free in city parks and going to work close by.

User Fees: User fees are fees paid by a user of recreational facilities or programs to offset the costs of services provided by Departments in operating a park, a recreation facility or in delivering programs and services. A perception of “value” has to be instilled in the community by staff for what benefits the system is providing to the user. As the Department continues to develop new programs, all future fees should be charged based on cost recovery goals developed in a future Pricing Policy. The fees for the parks and/or core recreation services are based on the level of exclusivity the user receives compared to the general taxpayer. It is recommended that user fees for programs be charged at market rate for services to create value and operational revenue. For services that cannot move forward on adequate user fees to obtain the required cost recovery, consideration of contracting with a not-for-profit and/or private company to help offset service costs should be pursued. This would save the system dollars in

their operational budgets while still ensuring the community receives the service to keep the quality of life at a high standard.

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

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

Advertising Sales: on sports complexes, scoreboards, gym floors, trash cans, playgrounds, in locker rooms, at dog parks, along trails, flower pots, and as part of special events to help support operational costs have been an acceptable practice in parks and recreation systems for a long time and can support operational costs.

Maintenance Endowment Fund: This is a fund dedicated exclusively for a park's maintenance, funded by a percentage of user fees from programs, events, and rentals and is dedicated to protect the asset where the activity is occurring.

Park and Recreation Revenue Revolving Fund: This is a dedicated fund to be used for park purposes only that is replenished on an ongoing basis from various funding sources such as grants, sponsorships, advertising, program user fees and rental fees within the park system.

Permit Fees: This fee is incorporated for exclusive reservations for picnic shelters, sports fields, special events that are for competition tournaments by other organizations who make a profit off of the Department owned facilities. Permit fees include a base fee for all direct and indirect costs for the Department to provide the space on an exclusive basis plus a percentage of the gross for major special events and tournaments held on park owned permitted facilities. Alcohol permits should be explored and if determined worthwhile, added to these permits which would generate more dollars for these special use areas. These dollars could be applied to a Recreation and Park Revolving Fund to help support park improvements and operations in the future.

Tipping Fees: In Michigan some park systems get tipping fees collected at city/county owned landfills are redirected back to their parks systems to help pay for the cost of litter pick up in city and county parks.

Land Leases: Many communities across the United States have allowed land leases for commercial retail operations along trails as a source of funding. The communities that have used land leases look for retail operations that support the needs of recreation users of the trails. This includes coffee shops, grill and food concessions, small restaurants, ice cream shops, bicycle shops, farmer’s markets and small local business. The land leases provide revenue to maintain the trails and/or to be used for in-kind matching. The City of Indianapolis has many concession leases along the 100+ miles of trails to support the operational costs of trails.

Sale of Development Rights below the Ground: Some public agencies have sold their development rights next to greenways below the ground for fiber optic lines and utility lines for gas and electric on a lineal foot basis. This has occurred in King County, Washington.

PRIVATE FUNDING SOURCES

Hire a Grant Writer: There are many local and national grant writers who can help the system acquire local, state and national grants for a relatively low cost.

Business/Citizen Donations: Individual donations from corporations and citizens can be sought to support specific improvements and amenities. Crowd funding is used by many park and recreation agencies.

Exclusive Product Placement: Many cities have the official drink or food of parks and recreation, buying the right to be exclusively sold at kiosks and concession stands. They all pay for the right to be exclusive.

Private Foundation Funds: Nonprofit community foundations can be strong sources of support for The Departments and should be pursued for specific park and recreation amenities. This can come from a community foundation or a private foundation. Most large park systems have their own parks foundation as well.

Nonprofit Organizations: Nonprofit organizations can provide support for green space and parks in various ways. Examples include the following:

- > **Conservancy or Friends Organization:** This type of nonprofit is devoted to supporting a specific park like Centennial Park. These Park Conservancy’s or Friends Groups are a major funding source for parks in the United States.
- > **Greenway Foundations:** Greenway foundations focus on developing and maintaining trails and green corridors on a County-wide basis. Departments could seek land leases along their trails as a funding source, in addition to selling miles of trails to community corporations and nonprofits. The development rights along the trails can also be sold to local utilities for water, sewer, fiber optic, and cable lines on a per mile basis to support development and management of these corridors. Some greenway foundations have created its own specific Greenway Trail license plate to help support the development and maintenance of trails.
- > **Floodway Funding Sources:** Many cities and counties have used floodway funding sources to support development and operations of greenways. This funding source is used extensively in Houston, Texas, and in Cleveland, Ohio for their park systems.

Greenway Trust Fund: Another strategy used by several communities is the creation of a trust fund for land acquisition and facility development that is administered by a private greenway advocacy group, or by a local greenway commission. A trust fund can aid in the acquisition of large parcels of high-priority properties that may be lost if not acquired by private sector initiative. Money may be contributed to the trust fund from a variety of sources, including the municipal and county general funds, private grants, and gifts.

Greenway Fundraising Programs: Agencies across the United States have used greenways for not-for-profit fundraisers in the form of walks, runs, bicycle races, and special events. The local managing agency usually gets \$2-\$5 per participant in the events to go back to support the operations and maintenance costs.

Greenways Conservation Groups: Conservation groups adopt green corridors to support the operations and capital costs for specific greenway corridors. These groups raise needed money for designated greenways for capital and operations costs.

Local Private-Sector Funding: Local industries and private businesses may agree to provide support for greenway development through one or more of the following methods:

- > Donations of cash to a specific greenway segment.
 - > Donations of services by large corporations to reduce the cost of greenway implementation,
 - > including equipment and labor to construct and install elements of a specific greenway.
- Reductions in the cost of materials purchased from local businesses that support greenway implementation and can supply essential products for facility development.

Adopt-A-Foot Program: These are typically small grant programs that fund new construction, repair/renovation, maps, trail brochures, facilities (bike racks, picnic areas, birding equipment) as well as provide maintenance support. The Adopt-A-Foot program is in the form of cash contributions that range from \$2,640 to \$26,400 over a five-year period.

State Water Management Funds: Funds established to protect or improve water quality could apply to a greenways/trails project if a strong link exists between the development of a greenway and the adjacent/nearby water quality. Possible uses of these funds include the purchase of critical strips of land along rivers and streams for protection, which could then also be used for greenways; develop educational materials, displays; or for storm water management.

Estate Donations: Wills, estates, and trusts may be also dedicated to the appropriate agency for use in developing and/or operating the greenway system

Jandy Ammons Foundation: Provides funding to nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations for the following:

- > Wildlife/park/hunting/conservation projects
- > Educational projects/artistic installations
- > Christian church mission endeavors

- > Other Organizations and projects within the scope of the Foundation's mission

Further information on the foundation's website: <http://www.thejandyammonsfoundation.org/Grant-Guidelines>

VOLUNTEER SOURCES

Adopt-a- Area of a Park: In this approach local neighborhood groups or businesses make a volunteer commitment to maintaining a specific area of a park. Adopt-a- area of a Park arrangements are particularly well-suited for the Department.

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

Community Service Workers: Community service workers are assigned by the court to pay off some of their sentence through maintenance activities in parks, such as picking up litter, removing graffiti, and assisting in painting or fix up activities. Most workers are assigned 30 to 60 hours of work. This would seem to be a good opportunity for the parks to work with the sheriff's department on using community service workers.

VOLUNTEER ASSISTANCE AND SMALL-SCALE DONATION PROGRAMS

Greenway Sponsors: A sponsorship program for greenway amenities allows for smaller donations to be received both from individuals and businesses. The program must be well planned and organized, with design standards and associated costs established for each amenity. Project elements that may be funded can include mile markers, call boxes, benches, trash receptacles, entry signage and bollards, and picnic areas.

Volunteer Work: Community volunteers may help with greenway construction, as well as conduct fundraisers. Organizations that might be mobilized for volunteer work include the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

OPERATIONAL FUNDING COSTS OPPORTUNITIES

The following are funding options to consider in operations of a system.

Concessions: Concessions can be leased out to a private operator for a percentage of gross profits. Typically, 15%-18% of gross profits for concessions of a profit operator, or a managing agency over a park site could manage concessions. This can include retail goods as well at golf pro-shops and tennis centers.

Parking Fees: During major special events, the park system could charge a \$5 parking fee for special events in the parks.

Field Permits: Department can issue recreational use permits for activities, practice or games. Permits should cover the operational cost of each field and management costs. If a private operator desires to rent the site for a sporting tournament for private gain, Departments should provide a permit fee plus a percentage of gross from the event for the exclusive use of the fields.

Reservation Fees: Reservation fees for picnic shelters, hospitality spaces and special use facilities are a great source of revenue for the system if priced correctly and include all operational and capital costs in the fee.

Admission Fee: An admission fee to an event in the park can be utilized.

Walking and Running Event Fees: Event fees for walking and running events in a park can be assessed to cover safety staff managing the event in the park.

Advertising Revenue: Advertising revenue can come from the sale of ads on banners in the parks. The advertising could include trashcans, trail markers, visitor pull trailers, tee boxes, scorecards, and in restrooms.

Wi-Fi Revenue: Departments can set up a Wi-Fi area whereby a Wi-Fi vendor is able to sell the advertising on the Wi-Fi access banner to local businesses targeting the users of the site. This revenue has amounted to \$20,000-\$50,000 in revenue for similar systems.

Cell Tower: Cell tower leases can be used. This revenue source would support \$35,000-\$50,000 annually for the site if cell towers in areas needing cell towers.

Special Event Sponsors: Special events provide a great venue for special events sponsors as it applies to a concert, stage, entertainment, and safety.

Room Reservations: Rental of rooms in the park system can gain operational revenues from these amenities with a typical range of \$200-\$500 a day for exclusive rental reservations.

Special Fundraiser: Many agencies hold special fundraisers on an annual basis to help cover specific programs and capital projects to be dedicated to a facility or district as a whole.

OTHER GOVERNMENT FUNDING SOURCES

Governmental Funding Programs: A variety of funding sources are available from federal and state government for park-related projects.

For example, the **Land and Water Conservation Fund** funding program has been reinstated for 2016 levels at 150 million and can provide capital funds to state and local governments to acquire, develop, and improve outdoor recreation areas. **Federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)** funds are used to support open space related improvements including redevelopment and new development of parks and recreation facilities. **Transportation Enhancement Funds** available through SAFETELU, the current approved federal transportation bill, can be used for trail and related green space development, **AmeriCorps Grants** can be used to fund support for park maintenance. These examples are outlined below:

SAFETULU Funds as well as Safe Routes to School Funds should be pursued for the trail improvements outlined in the plan as well and **Transportation Enhancement Funds. Transportation Enhancement Funds monies** require a 20% match and Safe Routes to School Funds require no match.

CDBG (Community Development Block Grants) funds are used by many cities and counties to enhance parks. These funds should be used to support the re-development of major facilities based on its location and what it will do to enhance the neighborhood and schools surrounding the park which is the purpose for CDBG monies.

AmeriCorps Grants should be pursued by the Parks Division to support park maintenance and cleanup of drainage areas where trails are located and small neighborhood parks.

Federal Housing Grants can also help support parks near federal housing areas and should be pursued if appropriate.

Conservation Reserve Program: The U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), through its Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, provides payments to farm owners and operators to place highly erodible or environmentally sensitive landscapes into a 10-15-year conservation contract. The participant, in return for annual payments during this period, agrees to implement a conservation plan approved by the local conservation district for converting sensitive lands to less intensive uses. Individuals, associations, corporations, estates, trusts, cities, counties and other entities are eligible for this program. Funds from this program can be used to fund the maintenance of open space and non-public-use greenways along bodies of water and ridgelines.

Wetlands Reserve Program: The U.S. Department of Agriculture provides direct payments to private landowners who agree to place sensitive wetlands under permanent easements. This program can be used to fund the protection of open space and greenways within riparian corridors.

Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention (Small Watersheds) Grants: The USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) provides funding to state and local agencies or nonprofit organizations authorized to carry out, maintain, and operate watershed improvements involving less than 250,000 acres. The NRCS provides financial and technical assistance to eligible projects to improve watershed protection, flood prevention, sedimentation control, public water-based fish and wildlife enhancements, and recreation planning. The NRCS requires a 50-percent local match for public recreation, and fish and wildlife projects.

Urban and Community Forestry Assistance Program: The USDA provides small grants of up to \$10,000 to communities for the purchase of trees to plant along city streets and for greenways and parks. To qualify for this program, a community must pledge to develop a street-tree inventory, a municipal tree ordinance, a tree commission, committee or department, and an urban forestry-management plan.

Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program: A program of the NC Forest Service, the U&CF grant program funds projects which lead to a more effective management of urban and community forests, and improve public understanding of the benefits of preserving existing tree cover in communities. Funds are for creating new programs, expanding existing programs, assisting communities with meeting Tree City USA standards, etc. Grants open January 1 and close March 31. Attendance at an applicant workshop is required. Funds range from \$2,500 - \$15,000.

Small Business Tree-Planting Program: The Small Business Administration provides small grants of up to \$10,000 to purchase trees for planting along streets and within parks or greenways. Grants are used to develop contracts with local businesses for the plantings.

Economic Development Grants for Public Works and Development of Facilities: The U. S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA), provides grants to states, counties, and cities designated as redevelopment areas by EDA for public works projects that can include developing trails and greenway facilities. There is a 30-percent local match required, except in severely distressed areas where federal contribution can reach 80 percent.

National Recreational Trails Program: These grants are available to government and nonprofit agencies, for amounts ranging from \$5,000 to \$50,000, for the building of a trail or piece of a trail. It is a reimbursement grant program (sponsor must fund 100% of the project up front) and requires a 20% local match. This is an annual program with an application deadline at the end of January. The available funds are split such that 30% goes toward motorized trails, 30% to non-motorized trails, and 40% is discretionary for trail construction.

Design Arts Program: The National Endowment for the Arts provides grants to states and local agencies, individuals and nonprofit organizations for projects that incorporate urban design, historic preservation, planning, architecture, landscape architecture, and other community improvement activities, including greenway development. Grants to organizations and agencies must be matched by a 50-percent local contribution. Agencies can receive up to \$50,000.

PARK CLASSIFICATIONS

Pocket Park

According to the NRPA, a pocket park is a small outdoor space, usually less than 0.25 acres up to 3 acres, most often located in an urban area surrounded by commercial buildings or houses. Pocket parks are small, urban open spaces that serve a variety of functions, such as: small event space, play areas for children, spaces for relaxing and socializing, taking lunch breaks, etc. Successful pocket parks have four key qualities: they are accessible; allow people to engage in activities; are comfortable spaces that are inviting; and are sociable places. In general, pocket parks offer minimal amenities on site and are not designed to support programmed activities. The service area for pocket parks is usually less than a quarter-mile and they are intended for users within close walking distance of the park.

This type of park is not commonly found in a public park system, and is normally designed, constructed and maintained as a common's area within a Homeowner's Association.

Neighborhood Park

A neighborhood park is between 3-10 acres in size and has a .5-mile service radius, however, some Neighborhood Parks are determined by use and facilities offered and not by size alone. These parks are often the most used on a day-to-day basis as they offer a variety of recreational and community opportunities close to neighborhoods in which people work and play. These parks are integrated into the pattern of the community, often have little to no parking in order to promote walkable communities, are tied into the greenway system and provide important nodes within the larger open space pattern. Other features include:

- > Length of stay: One hour experience or less
- > Site Selection: On a local or collector street. If near an arterial street, provide natural or artificial barrier. Where possible, next to a school. Encourage location to link subdivisions and linked by trails to other parks
- > Amenities: One signature amenity (e.g. playground, spray ground park, sport court, gazebo); no restrooms unless necessary for signature amenity; may include one non-programmed sports field; playgrounds for ages 2-5 and 5-12 with some shaded elements; no reservable shelters; loop trails; one type of sport court; no non-producing/unused amenities; benches, small picnic shelters next to play areas. Amenities are ADA compliant
- > Landscape Design: Appropriate design to enhance the park theme/use/experience
- > Revenue facilities: none
- > Land usage: 85 percent active/15 percent passive
- > Programming: Typically none, but a signature amenity may be included which is programmed
- > Maintenance Standards: Provide the highest level maintenance with available funding. Seek a goal of Level 2 maintenance standards. Some amenities may require Level 1 maintenance
- > Signage: Directional signage and facility/amenity regulations to enhance user experience

- > Parking: Design should include widened on-street parking area adjacent to park. Goal is to maximize usable park space. As necessary, provide 5-10 spaces within park including handicap spaces. Traffic calming devices encouraged next to park
- > Lighting: Security only. Lighting on all night for security
- > Naming: Consistent with the Town's ordinances for naming of parks, or may be named after a prominent or historic person, event, or natural landmark
- > Other: Customized to demographics of neighborhood; safety design meets established Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) standards; integrated color scheme throughout

Community Park

A community park is between 10 and 30 acres in size but can be as large as 100 acres, has a 2-mile service radius and serves the local community. Community Parks are intended to be accessible to multiple neighborhoods and should focus on meeting community-based recreational needs, as well as preserving unique landscapes and open spaces. This park types offer a larger variety of outdoor recreational opportunities such multiple athletic fields or a combination of multiple uses. These parks should offer passive and active recreational opportunities and can preserve natural habitat. It is important to link these community parks within the pattern of green space as they offer a broader variety of park facilities. These parks have four significant amenities with an approximate length of stay of two to three-hour experience.

- > Site Selection: On two collector streets minimum and preferably one arterial street. If near arterial street, provide natural or artificial barrier. Minimal number of residences abutting site. Preference is streets on four sides, or three sides with school or municipal use on fourth side. Encourage trail linkage to other parks
- > Length of stay: Two to three hours experience
- > Amenities: Four signature amenities at a minimum: (e.g., trails, sports fields, large shelters/pavilions, community playground for ages 2-5 and 5-12 with some shaded elements, recreation center, pool or family aquatic center, sports courts, water feature); public restrooms with drinking fountains, ample parking, and security lighting. Amenities are ADA compliant. Sport Fields and Sport Complexes are typical at this park.
- > Revenue facilities: One or more (e.g. pool, sports complex, pavilion)
- > Land usage: 65 percent active and 35 percent passive
- > Programming: Minimum of four essential program services (e.g. sports, day camps, aquatics)
- > Maintenance Standards: Provide the highest level maintenance with available funding. Seek a goal of Level 2 maintenance standards. Some amenities may require Level 1 maintenance

Parking: Sufficient to support the amenities; occupies no more than 10 percent of the park. Design should include widened on-street parking area adjacent to park. Goal is to maximize usable park space. Traffic calming devices encouraged within and next to the park

- > Lighting: Amenity lighting includes sport field light standards. Security lighting on dual system with 50 percent of lights off at a set time and 50 percent on all night for security
- > Signage: Directional signage and facility/amenity regulations to enhance user experience. May include kiosks in easily identified areas of the facility
- > Landscape Design: Appropriate design to enhance the park theme/use/experience. Enhanced landscaping at park entrances and throughout park
- > Naming: Consistent with the Town’s naming right ordinance, may be named after a prominent or historic person, event, or natural landmark
- > Other: Strong appeal to surrounding neighborhoods; integrated color scheme throughout the park; partnerships developed with support groups, schools and other organizations; loop trail connectivity; linked to Regional Park, trail or recreation facility; safety design meets established CPTED standards.

District Park

The district park is approximately between 30 and 150 acres in size and has a service radii of approximately 5 miles. District parks offer a more unique service than neighborhood and community parks and serves a broader group of people. They provide many passive recreation opportunities and some active recreational facilities. Areas which exhibit unique environmental, social or historic features are prime sites for a district park. Some typical park facilities might include nature preserves, athletic fields, large community centers or a system of greenways trails.

Regional Park

Regional Parks, are typically larger than 100 acres in size and serve a very broad range of people. These parks offer large scale recreational opportunities and tend to offer mostly passive recreation such as boating, camping, nature education or exploration. Regional parks can be managed as nature preserves and can protect high-quality natural areas from development. These large tracts of land can offer unique recreational opportunities suited to larger areas such as disk golf, mountain biking or equestrian riding while still offering more traditional recreational opportunities like playgrounds, play lawns, athletic complexes or firing ranges. Anderson Creek Park is currently Harnett County’s only regional park.

- > Site Selection: Prefer location which can preserve natural resources on-site such as wetlands, streams, and other geographic features or sites with significant cultural or historic features. Significantly large parcel of land. Access from public roads capable of handling anticipated traffic.
- > Length of stay: All day experience
- > Amenities: 10 to 12 amenities to create a signature facility (e.g. golf course, tennis complex, sports complex, lake, regional playground, 3+ reservable picnic shelters, camping, outdoor recreation/extreme sports, recreation center, pool, gardens, trails, zoo, specialty facilities); public restrooms with drinking fountains, concessions, restaurant, ample parking, special event site. Sport Fields and Sport Complexes are typical at this park. See details in Sport Complex classification and Appendix A – Sport Field Amenities for more information
- > Revenue facilities: More than two; park designed to produce revenue to offset operational costs

- > Land usage: Up to 50 percent active/50 percent passive
- > Programming: More than four recreation experiences per age segment with at least four core programs provided
- > Maintenance Standards: Provide the highest level maintenance with available funding. Seek a goal of Level 2 maintenance standards. Some amenities may require Level 1 maintenance
- > Parking: Sufficient for all amenities. Traffic calming devices encouraged within and next to park
- > Lighting: Amenity lighting includes sport field light standards. Security lighting on dual system with 50 percent of lights off at a set time and 50 percent on all night for security
- > Signage: Directional signage and facility/amenity regulations to enhance user experience, May include kiosks in easily identified areas of the facility
- > Landscape Design: Appropriate design to enhance the park theme/use/experience. Enhanced landscaping at park entrances and throughout park
- > Naming: Consistent with the Town’s naming ordinance, may be named after a prominent or historic person, event, or natural landmark
- > Other: Safety design may meet CPTED safety standards; integrated materials throughout the park; linked to major trails systems, public transportation available, concessions, food and retail sales available, dedicated site managers on duty. Telephone/Cable TV conduit available.

Special Use Park/Facility

Special Use facilities are those spaces that don’t fall within a typical park classification. A major difference between a Special Use facility and other parks is that they usually serve a single purpose whereas other park classifications are designed to offer multiple recreation opportunities. It is possible for a Special Use facility to be located inside another park. Special Use facilities generally fall into three categories:

- Historic/Cultural/Social Sites** – unique local resources offering historical, educational, and cultural opportunities. Examples include historic downtown areas, commercial zones, plaza parks, performing arts parks, arboretums, display gardens, performing arts facilities, indoor theaters, churches, and amphitheaters. Frequently these are located in Community or Regional Parks
- Golf Courses** – Nine and 18-hole complexes with ancillary facilities such as club houses, driving ranges, program space and learning centers. These facilities are highly maintained and support a wide age level of males and females. Programs are targeted for daily use play, tournaments, leagues, clinics and special events. Operational costs come from daily play, season pass holders, concessions, driving range fees, earned income opportunities and sale of pro shop items
- Indoor Recreation Facilities** – specialized or single purpose facilities. Examples include community centers, senior centers and community theaters. Frequently these are located in Community or Regional Parks

Outdoor Recreation Facilities – Examples include aquatic parks, disk golf, skateboard, BMX, and dog parks, which may be located in a park

Additional Features of Special Use Facilities include:

- > Size of park: Depends upon facilities and activities included. Their diverse character makes it impossible to apply acreage standards
- > Service radius: Depends upon facilities and activities included. Typically serves special user groups while a few serve the entire population
- > Site Selection: Given the variety of potential uses, no specific standards are defined for site selection. As with all park types, the site itself should be located where it is appropriate for its use.
- > Length of stay: varies by facility
- > Amenities: varies by facility
- > Revenue facilities: Due to nature of certain facilities, revenue may be required for construction and/or annual maintenance. This should be determined at a policy level before the facility is planned and constructed
- > Land usage: varies by facility
- > Programming: varies by facility
- > Maintenance Standards: Provide the highest level maintenance with available funding. Seek a goal of Level 2 maintenance standards. Some amenities (i.e., rose gardens) will require Level 1 maintenance
- > Parking: On-street or off-street parking is provided as appropriate. Design should include widened on-street parking area adjacent to park. Goal is to maximize usable park space. As necessary, provide a minimum of five to 10 spaces within park including handicap spaces. Traffic calming devices encouraged next to park
- > Lighting: Security or amenity only. Lighting on dual system with 50 percent of lights off at a set time and 50 percent on all night for security
- > Signage: Directional signage and facility/amenity regulations to enhance user experience
- > Landscape Design: Appropriate design to enhance the park theme/use/experience
- > Naming: Follows Town ordinance for naming or may be named after a prominent or historic person, event, or natural landmark
- > Other: Integrated color scheme throughout the park; safety design meets established Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) standards. Cable TV conduit as appropriate.

Greenbelts /Multi-use Paths

Greenbelts/Trails are recognized for their ability to connect people and place and often include either paved or natural trails. Trails can also be loop trails in parks. Linking neighborhoods, parks, recreation facilities, attractions, and natural areas with a multi-use trail fulfills two guiding principles simultaneously: protecting natural areas along river and open space areas and providing people with a way to access and enjoy them. Multi-use trails also offer a safe, alternative form of transportation; provide substantial health benefits, habitat enhancements for plants and wildlife, and unique opportunities for outdoor education and cultural interpretation.

- > Size: Typically at least 30-foot width of unencumbered land for a Greenbelt. May include a trail to support walk, bike, run, equestrian type activities. Typically an urban trail is 10-foot wide to support pedestrian and bicycle uses. Trails incorporate signage to designate where a user is located and where the trails connect in the Town.
 - o Equestrian uses can occur in both urban and open space settings by adding 10 more feet of space to separate equestrian usage from pedestrian/bike usage. In urban settings, equestrian use includes five foot of decomposed granite plus a five foot landscaped separation from the pedestrian/bike trail. In open space settings, equestrian use includes five foot of harrowed soil plus a five foot natural separation from the pedestrian/bike trail
 - > Site Selection: Located consistent with approved Trails Master Plan
 - > Amenities: Parking and restrooms at major trailheads. May include small parks along the trail
 - > Maintenance standards: Demand based maintenance with available funding
 - > Lighting: Security lighting at trailheads is preferred. Lighting on dual system with 50 percent of lights off at a set time and 50 percent on all night for security
 - > Signage: Mileage markers at half mile intervals. Interpretive kiosks as deemed appropriate
 - > Landscape Design: Coordinated planting scheme in urban areas. Limited or no planting in open space areas
- Other: Connectivity to parks or other Town attractions and facilities is desirable

Open Space/Natural Area

Open Space/Natural Areas are undeveloped but may include natural or paved trails. Grasslands under power line corridors are one example; creek areas are another. Open Space contain natural resources that can be managed for recreation and natural resource conservation values such as a desire to protect wildlife habitat, water quality and endangered species. Open Space also can provide opportunities for nature based, unstructured, low-impact recreational opportunities such as walking and nature viewing.

- > Amenities: May include paved or natural trails, wildlife viewing areas, mountain biking, disc golf, interpretation and education facilities
- > Maintenance standards: Demand-based maintenance with available funding. Biological management practices observed.
- > Lighting: None
- > Signage: Interpretive kiosks as deemed appropriate

- > Landscape Design: Generally none. Some areas may include landscaping, such as entryways or around buildings. In these situations, sustainable design is appropriate.

Sports Complexes

Sports complexes are developed to provide four to 16 fields or courts in one setting. A sports complex may also support extreme sports facilities, such as BMX and skateboarding. Sports Complexes can be single focused or multi-focused and can include indoor or outdoor facilities to serve the needs of both youth and adults. Outdoor fields should be lighted to maximize value and productivity of the complex. Agencies developing sports complexes focus on meeting the needs of residents while also attracting sport tournaments for economic purposes to the community.

Sport field design includes appropriate field distances for each sport's governing body and support amenities designed to produce revenue to offset operational costs. Signature sports complexes include enhanced amenities such as artificial turf, multipurpose field benches and bleachers, scoreboards, amplified sound, scorer's booths, etc. Enhanced amenities would be identified through discussion between Town and Schools and or sports associations and dependent upon adequate funding. Additional features include:

- > Size of park: Preferably 40 or more acres for stand-alone complexes
- > Service radius: Determined by community demand
- > Site Selection: Stand-alone sports complexes are strategically located on or near arterial streets.
- > Refer to community or regional Park sections if sport complex located within a park. Preference is streets on four sides, or three sides with school or municipal use on fourth side.
- > Length of stay: Two to three hours experience for single activities. Can be all day for tournaments or special events
- > Amenities: Four to sixteen fields or sports courts in one setting; public restrooms, ample parking, turf types appropriate for the facility and anticipated usage, and field lighting. Amenities are ADA compliant.
- > Revenue facilities: Four or more (e.g. fields, concession stand, picnic pavilion)
- > Land usage: 95 percent active and 5 percent passive
- > Programming: Focus on active programming of all amenities
- > Maintenance Standards: Provide the highest level maintenance with available funding. Plan for Level 1 and sometimes 2 level of maintenance standards at signature facility
- Parking: Sufficient to support the amenities. Traffic calming devices encouraged within and next to park
- Lighting: Amenity lighting includes sport field light standards. Security lighting on dual system with 50 percent of lights off at a set time and 50 percent on all night for security
- Signage: Directional signage and facility/amenity regulations to enhance user experience. May include kiosks in easily identified areas of the facility

- > Landscape Design: Appropriate design to enhance the park theme/use/experience. Enhanced landscaping at entrances and throughout complex
- > Naming: Consistent with the Town's naming ordinance, may be named after a prominent or historic person, event, or natural landmark
- > Other: Integrated color scheme throughout the park; safety design meets established Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) standards.

PROGRAM CLASSIFICATION

Core Program Area Key			
Athletic	Environmental Education/ Outdoor Recreation	Fitness / Health	Youth & Child Development
Enrichment	Events	Seniors	

Classifications		
Essential		
Youth 17- Under Basketball	Special Olympics - Softball / T-ball	Spring Games
Basketball Leagues T-Ball	Special Olympics - Tennis	Basketball Skills Day
Basketball Camp	Special Olympics - Cheerleading	Social Events
Swim Lessons (outside orgs)	Special Olympics - Young Athletes	Fire in the Pines Festival
Adult softball (outside org) Youth	Camp Shriver	Senior Thanksgiving Luncheon
Football (outside org) Open gym	Junior Officials	City Amateur
(youth) Open gym (adult)	Girls Mentorship	Ladies City Amateur
Junior Tennis Clinics	Boy's Mentorship	Men's Golf Association
Adult Tennis Clinics Adaptive	Special Olympics - Sailing	Open Gym
Tennis Clinics Wheelchair Tennis	Special Olympics - Skiing	Daily Golf Play - Municipal Golf Course
Clinics Special Olympics - Track	Special Olympics - Snowboarding	Geri Fit
& Field Special Olympics -	Special Olympics - Surfing	Tai Chi
Basketball Special Olympics -	Summer Nature Camp	Senior Fit
Bowling Special Olympics -	Free Friday Bird Hike	Matters of Balance
Gymnastics	Tree ID Hike	Yoga
Special Olympics - Powerlifting	Spiders of NC	Sr. Men's Doubles Drop-in
Special Olympics - Swimming	Opossums	Sr. Women Doubles Drop-in
	Nature Jeopardy	City Senior Amateur
Special Olympics - Volleyball	Nature Storytelling	After school - Derick Davis Center
Special Olympics - Bocce		Summer Camp - Derick Davis Center
Special Olympics - Cycling	Summer Sounds	Fit For Fun daily program
Special Olympics - Equestrian	Night Sky	After school - MLK Center
Special Olympics - Flag Football	Halloween Fest	Summer Camp - MLK Center
Special Olympics - Golf	Healthy Kids Day	Spring Break Camp
Special Olympics - Soccer	Senior Games	
	Polar Plunge	
	Fall Games	

Classifications		
Important		
Adult 18+ Basketball (Open Gym)	Wildlife Explorers	Kids Night Out Spring
Indoor Soccer 6U Basketball Flag	4-H Outdoor Programming	Eggventure 4th of July
Football--9U, 12U, 15U Basketball	Little Explorers	Celebration Downtown
Clinics	Afterschool Adventures	Tree Lighting Holiday
	Creature Feature	Parade
Tennis (outside org)	Fall Bird ID Hike	Greenfield Lake Tree Lighting, Holiday Movie & Santa Visits Holiday Home
First Tee Youth Golf (outside org)	Snake and Turtle Feeding	Decorating Contest
Youth Soccer (outside org)	Coastal Wildlife Workshop	Permit all City-wide events
Men's Baseball (outside org)	Winter Waterfowl ID	Art from the Heart
Cheer (outside org)	iNaturalist Workshop	Imagination Station-Reading Fest.
Open gym (seniors)	Birds of Prey	MLK Fun Day
Try Tennis Clinics	Group Nature Programs	Great Pumpkin Hunt
Try Play Clinics	Outreach Nature Programs	Holiday From the Heart
Try Match Round Robin	Nature Discoveroy Backpacks	Charity Outings -Municipal Golf Course
Junior Team Tennis League	Spring Bird ID	Egg Hunt
Adult Tennis Leagues	Mammals: Skulls, scat and tracks	Fitcamp
Housing Education	Birding by Ear	6-week Fitness Program
Finance Education	Snakes of NC	Monthly Health & Fitness Workshops Senior Fit
Junior Coaches	Learn to Swim	Yogalates
Cooking Classes	Learn to Fish	Pilates
King's Teens	Learn to Sail	Extreme Hip Hop
Youth Dance Team	Urban Hikes	PE for Homeschool
Open Gym for Adults with Disabilities	Learn to Kayak	Bingo - Derick Davis Center
		Computer Literacy
		Park Popups
		Water Works

Classifications		
Value-Added		
55+ Basketball	NC Birding Trail Hikes	Sit N Stretch
Pickleball	Kayak Trips	Senior Walking Club
Intro to Beach Volleyball	Coffee with the Birds	Senior Travel Club
Archery Program	Black Bears Ecotour	Senior Bingo - MLK Center
Archery Camp	Outer Banks Birding Trip	Big Kid Days
T-Ball Camp	Alligators Workshop	Sensory Camp
Olympics Camp	USTA Jr. Tournaments	Creature Features
City Employee Leagues	USTA Adult Tournaments	Science Cycle (Cape Fear Museum)
Adult kickball (outside org)	NC St. Combo Champs	Dino Dig
Futsal (outside org)	JTT State Champs	
	Tennis on Campus St. Champs	
Golf League (Inland Greens)	Charity Tennis Tourn.	
E-gaming	Fall Festival	
Nutrition Class	Outdoor Recreation Film	
Live on Stage	Zumba	
Broadway for a Better World	Personal Training	
DEI Staff Roundtable		

SIMILAR PROVIDER BENCHMARK

Other Service Providers					
Name of Agency	Location in the Town / County	Operator (Public / Private / Not-for-Profit)	General Description	Price Comparison with your Services	Distance in minutes from your Prime Facility
YMCA	2710 Market St	Not-for-profit	Family Community Center offering variety of youth sports, and adult fitness programs	Higher	VARIES
Boys and Girls Club	East Wilmington/New Hanover	Not-for-profit	Youth Community Center	Same/Higher	5 minutes
Senior Resource Center	South Wilmignton/New Hanover	Not-for-profit	Senior Community Center	Lower	10 minutes
Winter Park Optimist	Pine Grove Rd	Not-for-profit	T-BALL, BASEBALL	N/A	10 minutes
AAU	N/A	Private	BASKETBALL	N/A	Varies
Halo Hoops	N/A	Not-for-profit	BASKETBALL LEAGUE	N/A	Varies
i9 Sports	N/A	Private	FLAG FB, SOCCER, BBALL	N/A	Varies
Capt'n Bills	4240 Market St	Private	BEACH VOLLEYBALL	N/A	10 minutes
Pop Warner Football	N/A	Not-for-profit	FOOTBALL AND CHEER	N/A	Varies
Police Activities League	N/A	Not-for-profit	BBALL, CHEER, WRESTLING	N/A	Varies
Carolina Beach Parks & Recreation	1121-B N Lake Park Blvd, Carolina Beach	Public	BASKETBALL, FLAG, VOLLEYBALL, SOCCER	N/A	20 minutes
New Hanover County	N/A	Public but they offer tennis services through local community tennis organizations	Clinics offered at NHC Parks	Higher	10 minutes
Area Country Clubs	Located throughout NHC	Private	Clinics offered to members	Higher	Varies
ACCESS of Wilmington	2021 Corporate Dr STE B, Wilmington	Not-for-profit	Offers sports and social programming	Higher	20 minutes
Airlie Gardens	300 Airlie Rd, Wilmington	Public	Public garden with environmental education programs for school groups and limited public programs - NHC	Same	15 minutes
Cape Fear Museum	814 Market St, Wilmington, NC 28401	Public	Public museum	Same as Halyburton; Higher than Fit for Fun Center	15 minutes
The Children's Museum of Wilmington	116 Orange St, Wilmington, NC 28401	Non-Profit	Museum for kids ages 1 to 10 with hands-on exhibits,	Higher	4 minutes

			outdoor playground, & party rooms.		
Other Service Providers					
Name of Agency	Location in the Town / County	Operator (Public / Private / Not-for-Profit)	General Description	Price Comparison with your Services	Distance in minutes from your Prime Facility
Smart Start of NHC	3534 S College Rd, Wilmington, NC 28412	Non-Profit	Early childhood educational consultant in Wilmington, North Carolina	Lower / Same	16 minutes
The Little Gym of Wilmington Carolina	132 Racine Dr Unit 1, Wilmington, NC 28403	Private	Gymnastics center in Wilmington, North Carolina with preschool programs	Higher	13 minutes
Gymnastics Academy	3529 Carolina Beach Rd, Wilmington, NC 28412	Private	Gymnastics center in Wilmington, North Carolina with preschool play	Higher	11 minutes
NHC Libraries	Closest: Main Branch 201 Chestnut St, Wilmington, NC 28401	Public	Public library with preschool programs	Lower	5 minutes
Planet Fitness	Kerr ave	Private	Fitness	Higher	8 minutes
02 Fitness	Independence blvd	Private	Fitness	Higher	8 minutes
T&F Fitness	Kerr ave	Private	Fitness	Higher	12 minutes
Anytime Fitness	New Centre	Private	Fitness	Higher	10 minutes
Town of Wrightsville Beach	Wrightsville Beach, NC New Hanover County	Not for profit - government	Municipality	Same	10 minutes
New Hanover County Parks and Gardens	Wilmington is in New Hanover County 901 Nixon Street,	Not for profit - government	Municipality	Same	N/A
Community Boys & Girls	Wilmington 2759 Vance Street,	Non-Profit	Afterschool and Summer Camps	Lower	2 minutes
Bridage Boys & Girls	Wilmington 2222 South College, Wilmington	Non-Profit	Afterschool and Summer Camps	Lower	10 minutes
Senior Center	2815 S. College, Wilmington	Government	Senior Programs	Lower	20 minutes
YWCA	4126 S. College Road, Wilmington	Non-Profit	Afterschool and Summer Camps	Lower	15 minutes
Mustard Seed	Princess Place, Wilmington	Non-Profit	Afterschool and Summer Camps	Lower	25 minutes
Soar as Eagles	901 Fanning Street, Wilmington	Non-Profit	Afterschool and Summer Camps	Same	5 minutes
DREAMS		Non-Profit	Camps Afterschool and Summer	Same	5 minutes
Communities in Schools	Orange Street	State	Camps Afterschool and Summer	Lower	1 minutes
Arc of Wilmington	N/A	Non-Profit	Camps	Lower	7 minutes

Program Assessment

Sheriff's Dept.	Blue Clay Road, Wilmington	Government	Summer Camp	Higher	15 minutes
-----------------	-------------------------------	------------	-------------	--------	------------

POTENTIAL FUNDING STRATEGIES

Due to parks and recreation budgets being cut across the county, agencies have been forced to become more creative regarding funding strategies. Some agencies have even began using tactics such as crowdsourcing and crowdfunding. Examples include:

- Expand opportunities for Crowdsourcing information on an ongoing basis. Crowdsourcing is use for a call out of all types of resources such as manpower, volunteers, and equipment to help accomplish your set goal
 - Some existing resources include mindmixer.com and peakdemocracy.com which can be evaluated if the Department has the resources and can utilize it on an on-going basis. Crowdsourcing options could include printing program guides or developing marketing material
- Provide opportunities for Donations or Crowdfunding through the website. Crowdfunding is a monetary call out to complete a project or meet a goal.
 - kickstarter.org / indiegogo.com / gofundme.com these sites help bring small amounts of money together to create needed capital



VOLUNTEER/PARTNERSHIP BEST PRACTICES & RECOMMENDATIONS

BEST PRACTICES IN VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

In developing a volunteer policy, some best practices that the Department should be aware of include:

- Involve volunteers in cross-training to expose them to various organizational functions and increase their skill. This can also increase their utility, allowing for more flexibility in making work assignments, and can increase their appreciation and understanding of the Department.
- Ensure a Volunteer Coordinator (a designated program staff member with volunteer management responsibility) and associated staff stay fully informed about the strategic direction of the agency overall, including strategic initiatives for all divisions. Periodically identify, evaluate, or revise specific tactics the volunteer services program should undertake to support the larger organizational mission.
- A key part of maintaining the desirability of volunteerism in the agency is developing a good reward and recognition system. The consultant team recommends using tactics similar to those found in frequent flier programs, wherein volunteers can use their volunteer hours to obtain early registration at programs, or discounted pricing at certain programs, rentals or events, or any other City functions. Identify and summarize volunteer recognition policies in a Volunteer Policy document.
- Regularly update volunteer position descriptions. Include an overview of the volunteer position lifecycle in the Volunteer Manual, including the procedure for creating a new position.
- Add end-of-lifecycle process steps to the Volunteer Manual to ensure that there is formal documentation of resignation or termination of volunteers. Also include ways to monitor and track reasons for resignation/termination and perform exit interviews with outgoing volunteers when able.

In addition to number of volunteers and volunteer hours, categorization and tracking volunteerism by type and extent of work, is important:

- **Regular volunteers:** Those volunteers whose work is continuous, provided their work performance is satisfactory and there is a continuing need for their services.
- **Special event volunteers:** Volunteers who help with a particular event with no expectation that they will return after the event is complete.
- **Episodic volunteers:** Volunteers who help with a particular project type on a recurring or irregular basis with no expectation that they will return for other duties.
- **Volunteer interns:** Volunteers who have committed to work for the agency to fulfill a specific higher-level educational learning requirement.
- **Community service volunteers:** Volunteers who are volunteering over a specified period to fulfill a community service requirement.

The Department should encourage employees to volunteer themselves in the community. Exposure of staff to the community in different roles (including those not related to parks and recreation) will raise awareness of the agency and its volunteer program. It also helps staff understand the role and expectations of a volunteer if they can experience it for themselves.

BEST PRACTICE FOR ALL PARTNERSHIPS

All partnerships developed and maintained by the Department should adhere to common policy requirements. These include:

- Each partner will meet with or report to the Department staff on a regular basis to plan and share activity-based costs and equity invested.
 - Partners will establish measurable outcomes and work through key issues to focus on for the coming year to meet the desired outcomes.
 - Each partner will focus on meeting a balance of equity agreed to and track investment costs accordingly.
 - Measurable outcomes will be reviewed quarterly and shared with each partner, with adjustments made as needed.
 - A working partnership agreement will be developed and monitored together on a quarterly or as-needed basis.
- Each partner will assign a liaison to serve each partnership agency for communication and planning purposes.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

The recommended policies and practices for public/private partnerships that may include businesses, private groups, private associations, or individuals who desire to make a profit from use of the Department's facilities or programs are detailed below. These can also apply to partnerships where a private party wishes to develop a facility on park property, to provide a service on publicly-owned property, or who has a contract with the agency to provide a task or service on the agency's behalf at public facilities. These unique partnership principles are as follows:

- Upon entering into an agreement with a private business, group, association or individual, the Department staff and political leadership must recognize that they must allow the private entity to meet their financial objectives within reasonable parameters that protect the mission, goals and integrity of the Department.
 - As an outcome of the partnership, the Department must receive a designated fee that may include a percentage of gross revenue dollars less sales tax on a regular basis, as outlined in the contract agreement.
- The working agreement of the partnership must establish a set of measurable outcomes to be achieved, as well as the tracking method of how those outcomes will be monitored by the agency. The outcomes will include standards of quality, financial reports, customer satisfaction, payments to the agency, and overall coordination with the Department for the services rendered.
- Depending on the level of investment made by the private contractor, the partnership agreement can be limited to months, a year or multiple years.
- If applicable, the private contractor will provide a working management plan annually that they will follow to ensure the outcomes desired by the Department. The management plan can and will be negotiated, if necessary. Monitoring of the management plan will be the responsibility of both partners. The agency must allow the contractor to operate freely in their best interest, as long as the outcomes are achieved, and the terms of the partnership agreement are adhered to.

- The private contractor cannot lobby agency advisory or governing boards for renewal of a contract. Any such action will be cause for termination. All negotiations must be with the Department Director or their designee. The agency has the right to advertise for private
- contracted partnership services or negotiate on an individual basis with a bid process based on the professional level of the service to be provided. If conflicts arise between both partners, the highest-ranking officers from both sides will try to resolve the issue before going to each
- partner's legal counsels. If none can be achieved, the partnership shall be dissolved.

PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

The Department currently has a strong network of recreation program partners. Therefore, the following recommendations are both an overview of existing partnership opportunities available to the Department, as well as a suggested approach to organizing partnership pursuits. This is not an exhaustive list of all potential partnerships that can be developed, but this list can be used as a reference tool for the agency to develop its own priorities in partnership development. The following five areas of focus are recommended:

1. Operational Partners: Other entities and organizations that can support the efforts of the Department to maintain facilities and assets, promote amenities and park usage, support site needs, provide programs and events, and/or maintain the integrity of natural/cultural resources through in-kind labor, equipment, or materials.

Vendor Partners: Service providers and/or contractors that can gain brand association and notoriety as a preferred vendor or supporter of the City or Department in exchange for reduced rates, services, or some other agreed upon benefit.

3. Service Partners: Nonprofit organizations and/or friends' groups that support the efforts of the agency to provide programs and events, and/or serve specific constituents in the community collaboratively.

Co-Branding Partners: Private, for-profit organizations that can gain brand association and notoriety as a supporter of the Department in exchange for sponsorship or co-branded programs, events, marketing and promotional campaigns, and/or advertising opportunities.

5. Resource Development Partners: A private, nonprofit organization with the primary purpose to leverage private sector resources, grants, other public funding opportunities, and resources from individuals and groups within the community to support the goals and objectives of the agency on mutually agreed strategic initiatives