



Cherokee County

Recreation, Parks, Green Space & Trails Master Plan



Cherokee
Recreation
& Parks
Agency

Final Plan
2019 – 2028

Table of Contents

- ✓ Executive Summary *(included in a separate document)*
- ✓ Chapter One – Introduction
 - Impetus for the Plan
 - Previous Planning Efforts
 - Purpose of the Plan
 - Scope of the Plan
 - Demographics & Trends Analysis
 - Summary
- ✓ Chapter Two – Community Input
 - Introduction
 - Community Input Findings
 - Survey Findings
 - Summary and Findings
- ✓ Chapter Three – Facilities Assessment & Recommendations
 - Introduction
 - Park Classification & Facility Standards
 - Level of Service & Existing Park Locations
 - Gap Analysis
 - Greenways
 - Blueways
 - General Park Conditions, Assessments & Recommendations
 - Individual Park & Facility Assessments and Recommendations
 - Recommended Capital Improvement Plan
- ✓ Chapter Four – Operations Review & Recommendations
 - Introduction
 - Agency Organization & Structure
 - Staffing Levels
 - Budgeting & Funding
 - Maintenance Budget & Operations
 - Recreation Programming
 - Marketing & Customer Service
 - Partners in Recreation
 - National Accreditation
 - Summary, Key Observations & Recommendations
 - ✓ Cost Recovery & Resource Allocation
- ✓ Chapter Five – Opinion of Probable Cost & Funding Options
 - Opinions of Cost
 - Moving Forward with Funding
 - Traditional Primary Funding Methods
 - Alternative Funding Sources
 - Funding Recommendations Summary
- ✓ Appendices *(included in a separate document)*
 - Appendix A – Notes from Community Input
 - Appendix B – Survey Results
 - Appendix C – Trails Addendum from Cherokee County Comprehensive Transportation Plan
 - Appendix D – Capital Improvement Plan Report 2008 – 2018

Chapter One – Introduction

Impetus for the Plan

Cherokee County is committed to providing a superior quality of life for our residents and to preserving the beauty, unique character, and desirability of the community where we live, work, and play. Recreation, parks, green space and trails play a vital role in a vibrant, livable community. A number of factors played a role in the need for an updated master plan:

- The County’s population continues to grow at a rapid pace. The demographics are also changing. The number of active older adults and young adults is growing at a pace faster than other sectors of the population.
- National and regional trends in recreation are shifting. New forms of recreation are constantly evolving and new approaches to providing these services are emerging (e.g. pickleball, mountain biking, etc.).
- Recent capital improvements have addressed recreation and park needs and increased the level of service; and planning must continue to be a high priority.
- The “bar has been raised” through previous efforts and residents have greater expectations for recreation and parks services.
- This plan builds upon the momentum of previous planning efforts and focuses on future efforts to keep Cherokee County a great place to live, work and play.

Previous Planning Efforts

The **County’s Greenspace Protection Program** was adopted in 2000 for the primary purpose of utilizing funds from the Georgia Community Greenspace Program with the stated goal of permanently protecting 20 percent of its land area. Although funding by the state for the program ceased in 2004, the **Georgia Community Greenspace** program codified the concept of greenspace, acknowledged the detrimental aspects of urbanization, and emphasized the responsibilities of local governments to preserve land as a means of maintaining quality of life.

The most recent **Recreation and Parks Comprehensive Master Plan** was completed in 2004. That plan provided a framework for growth and improvements in the County’s parks system that have been implemented under the 2008 voter-approved.

The County updated its **Comprehensive Transportation Plan** in 2016. As part of that plan, the consultant provided planning for general connectivity and alignment for a system of multi-purpose trails and bicycle routes that will include destinations within Cherokee County and connectivity points to the trail systems and bicycle routes planned by adjacent counties, particularly Cobb, Fulton and Forsyth.

Purpose of the Plan

With a current population of nearly 250,000, Cherokee County is a growing community that continues to attract new residents and investment. The County’s system of recreation and parks is a vital part of maintaining a high quality of life. This plan updates and expands upon the previous planning efforts. Considerable progress has been made since the last plan in 2004.

In November 2008, Cherokee County voters overwhelmingly approved a referendum authorizing the County to issue \$90 million in general obligation bonds to improve the existing system of parks through the acquisition of parkland, the construction of new parks and facilities and the renovation and improvement of existing parks.

Combined with other sources including SPLOST, Impact Fees and contributions from cities and private organizations, the total program invested more than \$96 million in recreation facilities and parks within the county. Over 1,300 acres were purchased for future parkland and green space. A new soccer complex and aquatic center opened in 2012 and 2013 respectively. Renovations and improvements to existing parks totaled more than \$10 million. Patriots Park, located in southwest Cherokee County opened in March 2017. The first phase of Cherokee Veterans Park in northeast Cherokee County opened in August 2017. Each city also received park bond funds to undertake parks and recreation projects within their jurisdictions. See **Appendix D** for a complete summary of this capital improvement program and the various projects undertaken.

The purpose is to develop a community-supported plan that directly relates to the mission of the County and provides guidance to better prioritize, fund, develop and manage parks, recreation facilities, green spaces, trails and recreation programs.

The time is right to re-examine the recreation needs of Cherokee County citizens. The purpose is to develop a community-supported plan that directly relates to the mission of the County and provides guidance to better prioritize, fund, develop and manage parks, recreation facilities, green spaces, trails and recreation programs. Cherokee County staff with input from the Citizen Steering Committee and the assistance of Lose & Associates prepared the plan.

Scope of the Plan

The plan addresses the full range of recreation services including parks, green spaces, trails and recreation programming. The study area for the plan includes the entire County. The purpose of the plan is to guide the delivery of recreation and parks services in Cherokee County for a period of ten (10) years, however, the plan should be reviewed and updated periodically. Specifically, this plan:

1. Evaluates the status of existing recreation and park amenities within the county;
2. Considers the future plans of other governmental and not-for-profit recreation stakeholders within Cherokee County;
3. Provides an update to previous plans and studies; considers the recreation needs and desires of the current population of Cherokee County through proactive community outreach;
4. Plans for the expected growth of the County;
5. Considers national, regional and local trends in recreation;
6. Provides a gap analysis that identifies the opportunities; and
7. Suggests a comprehensive set of strategies that supports bridging the gaps.

Demographic & Trends Analysis

Community Profile

Located approximately forty-five minutes north of metropolitan Atlanta near the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, Cherokee County encompasses more than 421 square miles. It includes five municipalities and parts of two other small cities as well as most of Allatoona Lake, a 12,000-acre man-made lake managed by the US Army Corps of Engineers. Both the Etowah and Little Rivers flow south and west through the County and into the lake. As of 2017, the US Census Bureau estimates the County population at 247,573. The Atlanta Regional Commission

(ARC) estimates growth to over 392,000 by the year 2040. The County is a unique mix of suburban living concentrated mostly in the south transitioning to more rural communities in the north.

Cherokee County is experiencing tremendous growth, a trend that is expected to continue for some time due in part to the county's quality of life and business attraction, as well as its proximity to Atlanta and the growth of the Atlanta region. The ARC is comprised of Atlanta and the ten "core" counties surrounding it, including Cherokee County. In recent years, the Atlanta region has been consistently ranked in the top ten among cities with the nation's most growth and development.

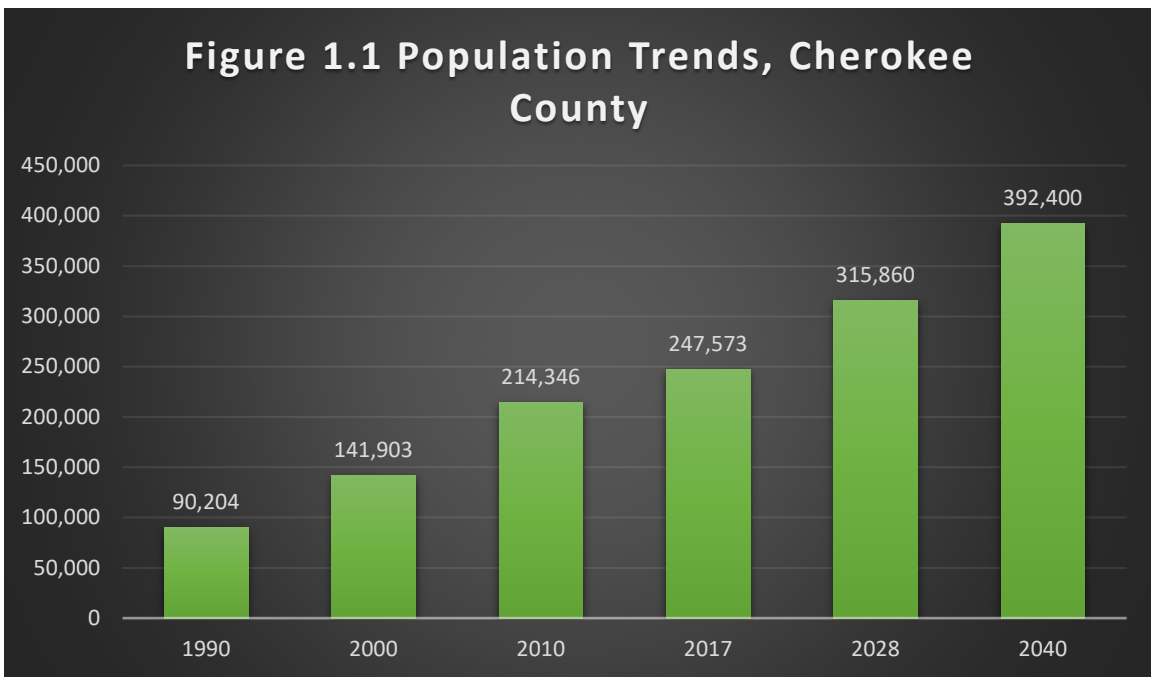
A review of the county's population and the characteristics of its residents is important to determine the parks and recreation needs as a community's needs are dependent on the preferences and way of life of its people. Preference and lifestyle are often dependent on age, gender, education and socio-economic status. Demographic research and public input generate data that allows us to anticipate public desires and predict the activities that will likely become most desired as a community's demographics profile changes over time. Data compiled from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey and the ARC provides insight into the County's demographic composition.

In addition to an analysis of the County data, comparisons to surrounding counties, the State of Georgia and the nation as a whole are provided to benchmark against other populations that the county may be measured. While the plan reviews the most current data available, demographic factors, such as age, are ever changing.

Age is likely the most influential aspect of recreation trends. For example, the child who is 10 years old when a plan is developed may be interested in team sports like softball, soccer or lacrosse; however, by the end of the plan's timeframe, as a young adult, her interests in recreation may change to include activities like running and cycling. Conversely, a young adult in his twenties may be a parent by the end of the plan, and household recreation needs may have shifted towards team and youth activities for his children.

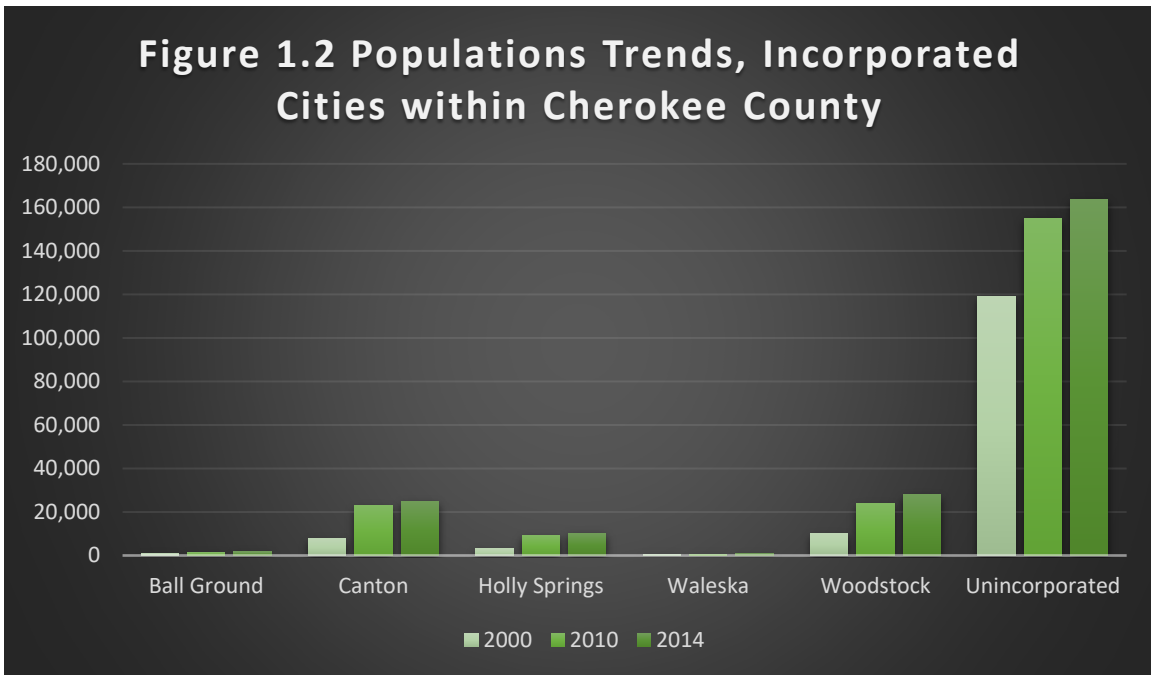
Population Trends

When analyzing the change in population as reported by the US Census Bureau, Cherokee County's population is clearly growing at a rapid pace. The 2017 estimated county population was 247,573. The County has seen an ongoing trend in population increases of more than 50% between the 1990 and 2000 decennial censuses, as well as between the 2000 and 2010 decennial censuses. Population projections for 2028 are projected at 315,860 residents. Figure 1.1 below illustrates the upward trend and a population of 392,400 persons in Cherokee County by 2040. This is an increase of 58.5% in 23 years, or an additional 144,827 residents.



Source: US Census Bureau; Atlanta Regional Commission, *The Atlanta Region's Plan*, February 2016

While the overall population increase in the county is notable, for the purpose of the plan it is important to gain better insight into where the growth has occurred, and traits of those populations, by looking at the incorporated cities of Cherokee County. Canton and Woodstock are the two (2) largest cities in Cherokee County, each with greater than 20,000 residents. Between 2010 and 2014, Woodstock's population increased 11%. Canton grew 8% over the same period.



Source: US Census Bureau

While the five (5) incorporated cities are population centers where we can evaluate the population data of the US Census Bureau, it should be noted that more than 70% of the county's population lies outside of these cities.

Comparison Counties

A comparison of area counties provides a context for Cherokee's population, land area, and population density. The charts below illustrate population growth rates in area communities, household characteristics, and density.

As previously described, Cherokee County has experienced tremendous population growth, growing more than 50% between 2000 and 2010. Neighboring counties have also seen high growth rates in the same period, with Forsyth County experiencing the greatest percentage of growth at 78.4%. Estimates of the 2017 population in each county indicate the trend is continuing, with Cherokee County's growth rate from 2010 to 2017 estimated at an increase of 16%.

Figure 1.3 Population Trends in Comparison Communities					
County	2000 Census Population	2010 Census Population	% Change from 2000 to 2010	2017 Population Estimate	% Change from 2010 to 2017
Bartow	76,019	100,517	32.2%	105,054	5%
Cherokee	141,903	214,346	51.5%	247,573	16%
Forsyth	98,407	175,511	78.4%	227,967	30%
Gwinnett	588,448	805,321	36.9%	920,260	14%
<i>Georgia</i>	<i>8,186,453</i>	<i>9,687,653</i>	<i>18.3%</i>	<i>10,429,379</i>	<i>8%</i>

Source: US Census Bureau 2000 Census; 2010 Census; 2017 Estimates

These are relatively low-density counties, but with an increase in population, the density will also increase. The 2017 US Census estimates showed a population density per square mile of land area in Cherokee County to be 588 persons. This is lower than both Gwinnett and Forsyth Counties, with 1,871 and 1,018, respectively, and greater than Bartow County with 229 persons per square mile of land area.

Figure 1.4 Land Area and Density – Comparison Counties			
Community	Land Area (sq. mi.)	Avg. Household Size	Population Density per Square Mile
Bartow County	459	2.77	229
Cherokee County	421	2.80	588
Ball Ground	5.81	2.69	351
Canton	18.59	2.77	1,503
Holly Springs	6.57	2.76	1,817
Waleska	1.46	2.58	610
Woodstock	11.16	2.48	2,828
Forsyth County	224	2.94	1,018
Gwinnett County	430	2.98	2,140
<i>Georgia</i>	<i>57,513</i>	<i>2.63</i>	<i>181</i>

Source: US Census Bureau 2017 Estimates

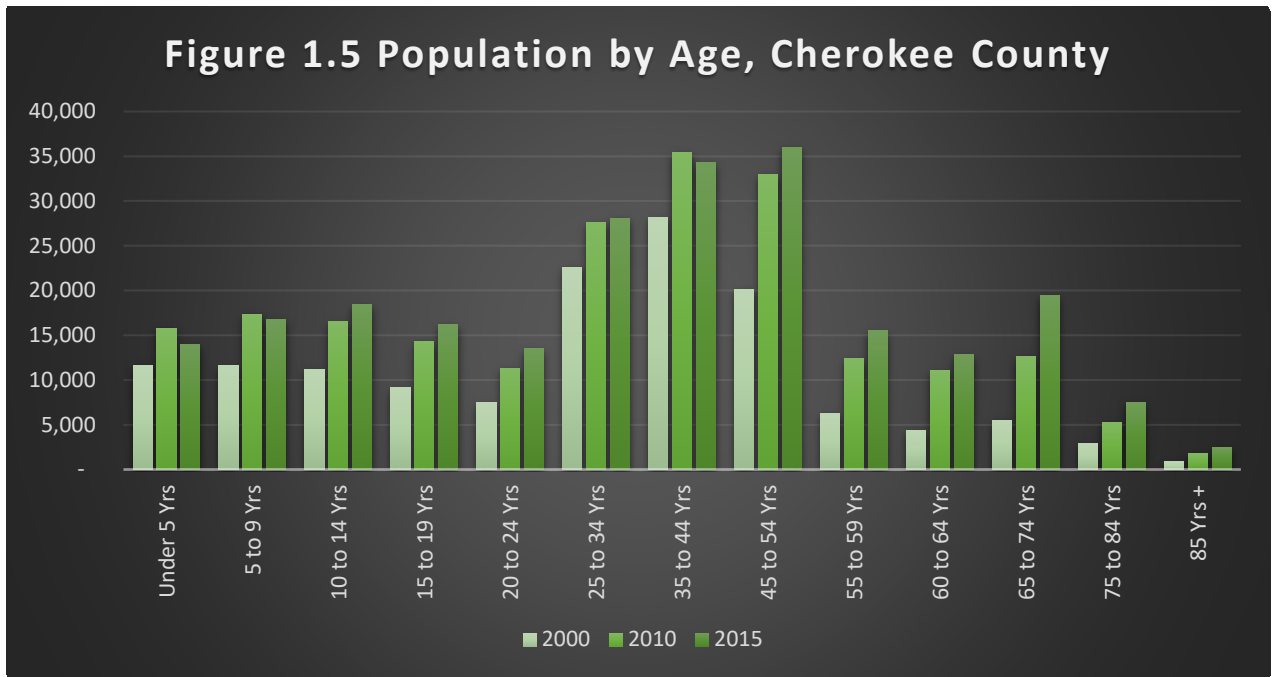
Population by Age

A review of the age of the community gives information into the types of activities a community may be interested in and what programs a community determines it may need to offer for its residents. The figure below illustrates that the largest population groups in Cherokee County are those individuals between ages 25 and 54 years, and account for nearly 45% of the total population. The largest age group is those individuals 35 to 44 years of age.

However, the largest increases in population were in the 60 to 64 and 65 to 74 age groups, with increases of 154% and 129%, respectively. This is indicative of the need to look at how seniors are being served.

These increases are evident in looking at the median age of the population. The median age for Cherokee County residents has increased since 2000 when the median age was 34.0 years. The 2010 Census showed a median age of 36.3 years.

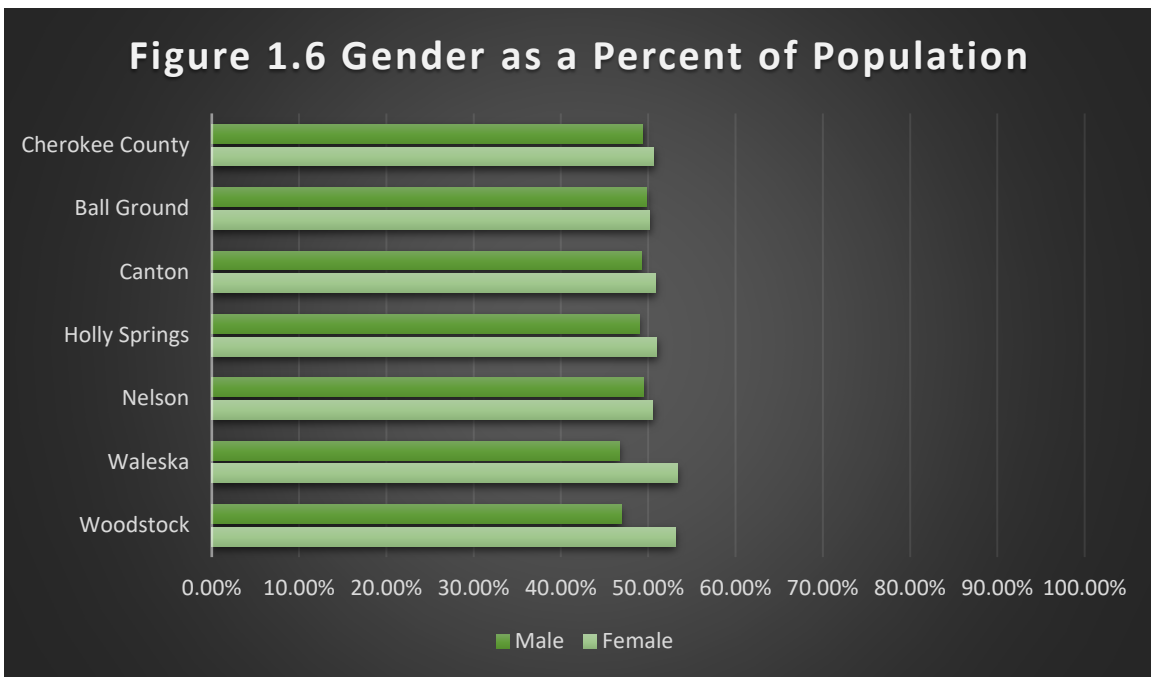
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Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 and 2010 Census and 2015 Annual Estimate

Population by Gender

The county's population by gender is generally consistent with both the state and national makeup, with females making up slightly more than 50% of the population in each community. The numbers are statistically significant and it is important that the county continue to offer a balance of recreation programs for both genders. These programs should be diverse in nature to reflect the unique needs of the community.



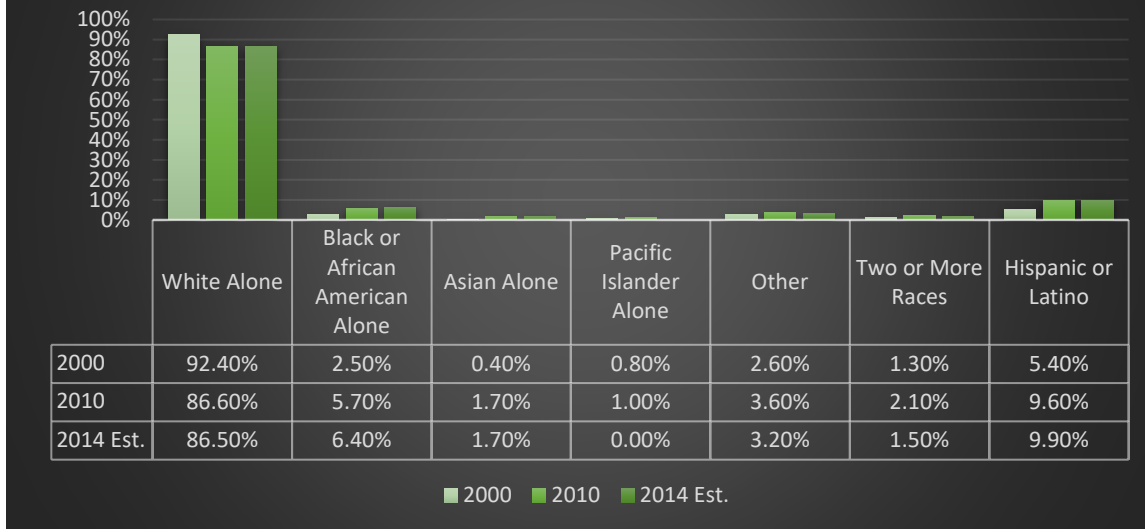
Source: US Census Bureau, 2010 Census

Population by Ethnicity

An analysis of Cherokee's race and ethnicity reveals a predominantly Caucasian population, although the racial makeup in Cherokee has been gradually changing since the 2000 US Census. Between 2000 and 2010, the African American population increased from 2.5% to 5.7% of the population. However, from 2010 to 2015, that population only changed from 5.7% to 5.8%. During those same periods, the Hispanic or Latino population nearly doubled from 5.5% to 9.9%.

The Atlanta Regional Commission predicts that by 2040, if these trends continue, we can expect the ethnic makeup of Cherokee County to be to approximately 71% White, 6% African American, and 17% Hispanic and 5% other. As the county population continues to become more diverse, the county will need plan to accommodate the needs of differing ethnic groups.

Figure 1.7 Ethnicity as a Percent of Population



Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 Census and 2010 Census; Atlanta Regional Commission Forecast 2040

Economic Trends

In researching the economic profile of the community, it is important to look at the homeownership rate, median household income and the poverty rate to gain an understanding of local economic factors. These numbers are important to compare to the state and national levels in order to understand if the county is lower or higher than average rates.

Cherokee County's homeownership rate is greater than both the state of Georgia and national rates of homeownership, with nearly 73% of the population owning their home. The median value of owner-occupied housing increased from \$212,300 in 2015 to \$ 229,000 in 2016. Note this is a growth in property value of \$45,800 over 2014 census estimates for owner occupied properties.

Figure 1.8 Home Ownership Rates, Poverty Rates and Median Value Owner-Occupied Housing			
	Cherokee	Georgia	United States
Home Ownership Rate	72.9%	62.2%	63.1%
% of Persons Below Poverty Level	7.4%	14.1%	11.3%
Median Value of Owner-Occupied Housing	\$183,200	\$147,900	\$181,200

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2014 1-year Estimates

Poverty rates in Cherokee are significantly lower than state and national rates. Less than 7.8% of Cherokee County's population is below the poverty level, while state and national rates are above 10%. Median household incomes in Cherokee are higher than state and national incomes. Cherokee County households have a median income of \$69,711, while the state of Georgia's average household income is \$49,321. Compared to area counties, only Forsyth has a higher median household income. This income level may indicate that households in Cherokee County have additional disposable income. It should be noted that even with higher income levels in the county, recreation and parks agencies must balance program fees for all income levels in the community to maximize access to programs.

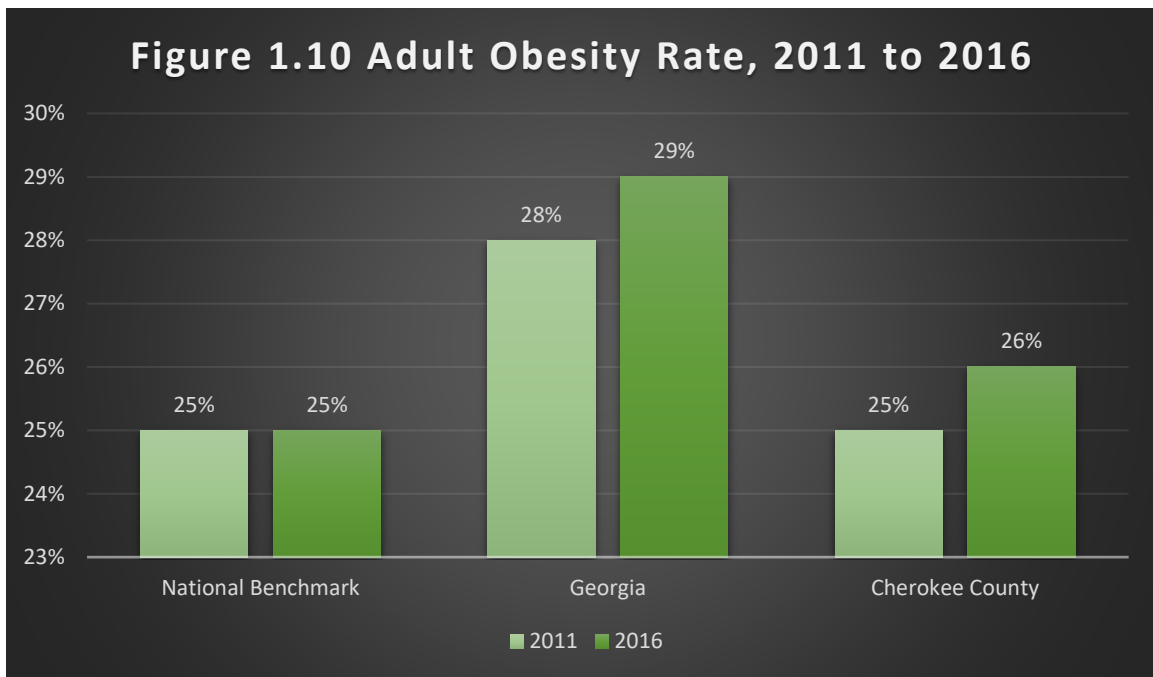
Figure 1.9 Median Household Income	
Community	Median Household Income
Forsyth County	\$85,639
Cherokee County	\$69,711
Gwinnett County	\$59,492
Bartow County	\$53,675
<i>United States</i>	<i>\$53,657</i>
<i>Georgia</i>	<i>\$49,321</i>

Health Trends

In addition to population trends in a community, a discussion of parks and recreation should include a discussion of the community's health. Specifically, it is important to highlight the health issues related to inactivity and adult obesity rates. In general, people are less active than in the past and lead sedentary lifestyles. This inactivity has led to an obesity epidemic, which continues to grow with the most dramatic increases seen in the southern United States. This routine affects life expectancy and has economic impacts on direct medical spending. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), "an estimated annual medical cost of obesity in the U.S. was \$147 billion in 2008 U.S. dollars; the medical costs for people who are obese were \$1,429 higher than those of normal weight" (CDC 2015).

According to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, a person reaches the level of obese once a Body Mass Index (BMI) level of 30 or more is achieved. BMI is calculated from your height-to-weight ratio and is a good gauge of risks for heart and lung disease. On average, the obesity rate is higher among middle age adults 40-59 years old than it is for adults under 39 or above 60 (Figure 1.10). Multi-use paths, trails, sidewalks and bike lanes provide citizens with an opportunity for exercise. Physical activity not only helps maintain a healthy weight, but it also benefits mental health, according to a report by the US Department of Health and Human Services, 1996. Research also reveals that those commuters who walk or cycle more regularly have noticeable better mental health than those who commute by car. (University of East Anglia (UEA) and the Centre for Diet and Activity Research (CEDAR), 2014)

The information compiled below, from County Health Ranking and Roadmaps, a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation program, compares Cherokee County's adult obesity rates (percentage of adults that report a BMI of 30 or more) to a national benchmark, as well as to the state of Georgia. The national benchmark, the 90th percentile of performers in the county, is an adult obesity rate of 25% of the population. Cherokee has a higher obesity rate than the national benchmark with 26% of the adult population obese. Cherokee is below the state rate of 29% of the adult population being obese. However, over a five-year period (2011 to 2016), the adult obesity rates in both Cherokee and Georgia have increased.



Source: www.countyhealthrankings.org *Top US Performers (90th Percentile)

Parks facilities and programming that are accessible to residents and allow for active participation by people of all ages can help reduce this number. We know that people's environment has an enormous impact on their choices. Having more parks, recreation amenities, sidewalks, bike lanes and greenways can help to improve a community's overall health. Offering a wide variety of recreation programs for all ages is equally important. The more diverse the recreation program offerings the more people who will be attracted to the programs and thus more health benefits to the community.

Transportation

Understanding a community's commuting practices provides insight into the rates of active transportation, and how much free time workers may have if they have longer or shorter commutes. According to the US Census' American Community Survey, the time that Cherokee County residents are spending in their commute to work is greater than both the state and national mean times. The mean time for a Cherokee County resident to commute is 33.5 minutes, whereas the state's mean time is 27.6 minutes and national time is 26.0 minutes. Longer commutes can affect workers' free time and contribute to health problems, such as increased blood pressure and more time being sedentary.

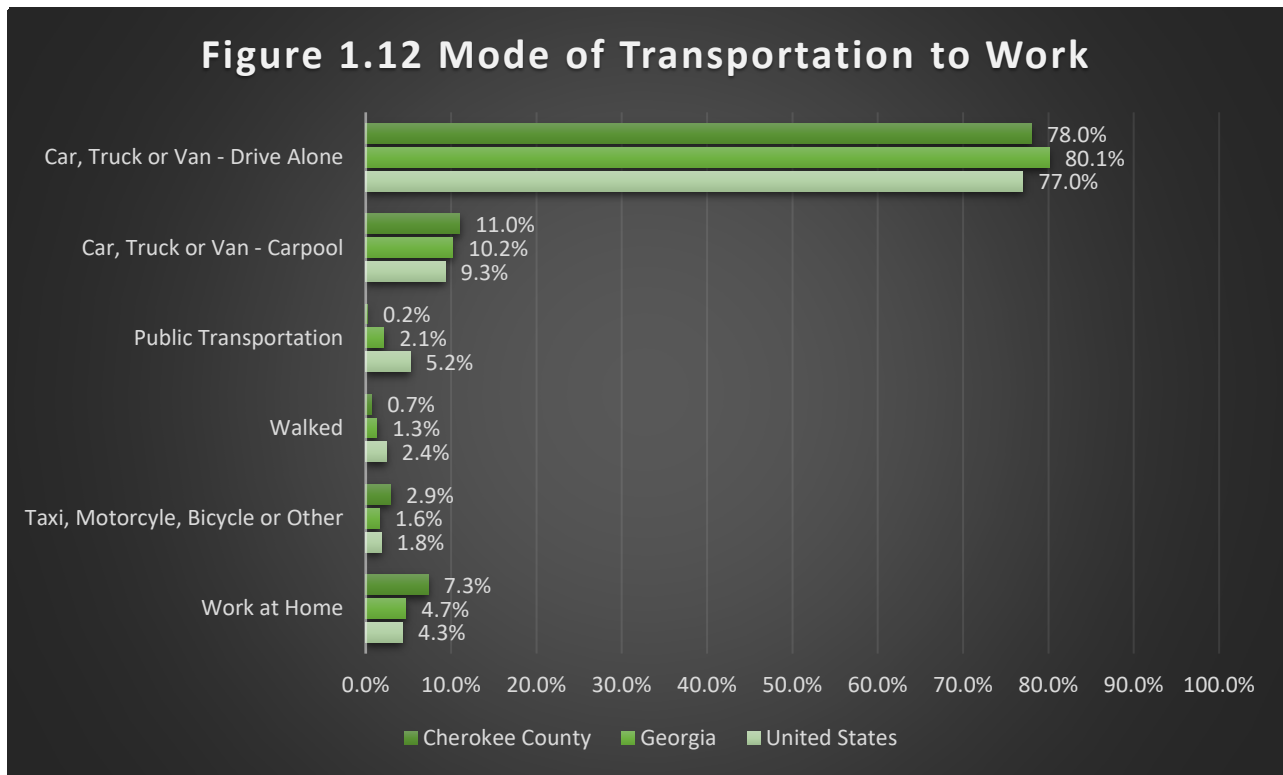
Figure 1.11 Mean Travel Time to Work			
Community	Cherokee	Georgia	United States
Mean Travel Time to Work	33.5 Minutes	27.6 Minutes	26.0 Minutes

Source: US Census Bureau 2014 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

A closer look into where residents are commuting shows that more than 78% of Cherokee County residents work outside of the county. Due to the location within the Atlanta region, workers may be commuting to places where the employment opportunities are greater, but they enjoy the quality of life that Cherokee County offers.

In addition to commute times, a review of the modes of transportation that people use to commute to and from work is also an important indicator. A review of Cherokee County residents 16 years and older that are working

shows that a majority of workers (78.0%) commute alone via car, truck or van. This average is just below the state average of 80%, while 11% of workers carpool, just above the state average of 10.2%. 7.3% of the population works from home, which is greater than both the state and national percent of workers who work at home. Active transportation rates, those who walk or ride a bicycle to work, are very low.

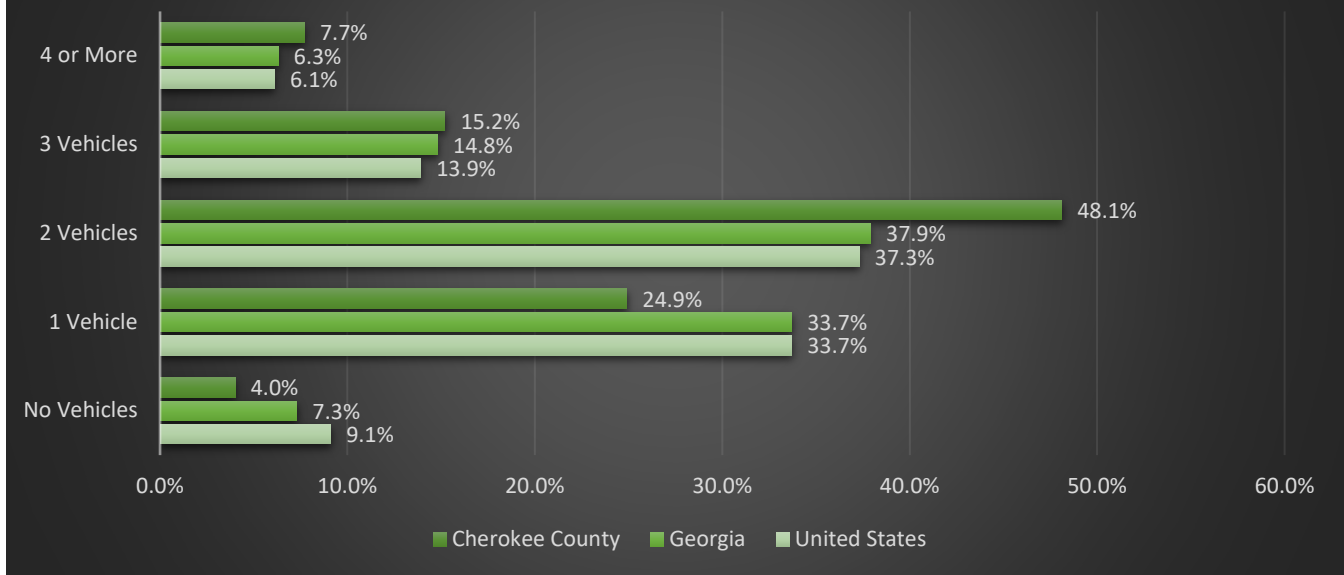


Source: US Census Bureau 2014 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

Cherokee County households consistently have greater numbers of vehicles than both the state and national households. More than 70% of the households have 2 or more vehicles, whereas 59% of households in the state have 2 or more vehicles. A higher number of vehicles may indicate that residents generally drive more than walk or bicycle to places they visit, again leading to a sedentary lifestyle. According to the U.S. Census' American Community Survey, “workers with no available vehicle walked four times more and biked three-and-a-half times more than workers with one available vehicle.”

The low number of people walking and bicycling to work reflects the auto centric development patterns in Cherokee County and the lack of pedestrian and bicycle facilities such as sidewalks, bike lanes and greenways. The recently adopted county transportation plan places greater emphasis on improving all of these alternative transportation systems that also provide recreation opportunities.

Figure 2.13 Vehicles Available per Household



Source: US Census Bureau 2014 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

Summary of Demographics & Trends Analysis

Cherokee County is experiencing population growth that will change the fabric of the County from where it exists today. In addition, considering its location within the Atlanta region, these changes are anticipated to occur at an accelerated rate. Changing demographics will bring a more diverse population, necessitating the county to plan for a wide range of facilities and programs to accommodate the population into the future.

The incorporated cities as well as unincorporated areas of the county are seeing steady growth rates. It is anticipated that the proportion of the county's population in these cities will grow to more than 35% of the population by 2030, up from 28.9% today. It is expected that the largest population centers in the next 10 years will be Canton and Woodstock, each making up nearly 15% of the county population. Annexations and continued development and redevelopment in these cities as well as other in the county will attribute to the growth of the population in incorporated area as compared to unincorporated areas of the county.

While understanding where the growth will occur is important, it is also important to understand how the population will grow in planning for parks and recreation facilities and programming needs.

Cherokee County, as a whole, is a predominately White/Caucasian community. Minorities, including Black/African American and Hispanic populations are continuing to grow. While Canton and Waleska are more racially diverse than other communities in the county, they are still predominately white with more than 70% of the population Caucasian. Cherokee's population is growing more diverse in its racial and ethnic composition.

Further, the county's population is aging, and the percentage of baby-boomers has increased. There should be a focus on programs and facilities for active adults (55+) to accommodate the needs of this population. Attention should be given to some of the activities most often utilized by this age group, such as pickleball, swimming, greenways, walking, hiking and running.

The population is also one with a higher median household income than most surrounding counties, and that of the state population. Income levels are of particular importance because they affect the community's ability to afford recreation programs and services. In communities with higher income levels, the parks agency may not need to subsidize recreation programs as much as it would if income levels were lower. This may affect how the County considers program fees and other revenues to offset programming costs.

Chapter Two – Community Input

Introduction

Public input is a critical component in developing a comprehensive plan for a recreation and parks agency. The citizens are the participants and users of the parks system and recreation programs. An effective plan must accurately reflect the facilities and programs most desired by the citizens of the community. The recommendations provided in this master plan were driven by public input gathered through a variety of forums: input recorded in interviews with public officials and staff, public meetings, focus groups, steering committee meetings, emails submitted to the county, and an online survey provided to the residents of Cherokee County.

Community Input Findings

Elected/Appointed Officials & County Staff Interviews

One-on-One Interviews were conducted with the Board of Commissioners, the Recreation & Parks Advisory Board, the County Manager, the CRPA Agency Director, the Director of Planning and Land Use, the Chief Financial Officer, and CRPA Senior Staff. Group interviews with agency staff, public officials and other county administrative staff were also conducted.

These interviews allowed the planning team to develop an understanding of how the recreation and parks agency and county government function. They also served to develop an understanding of existing issues within the community and the agency. Interviews with elected officials provided the planning team with an overview of how agency staff interacts with elected officials and share information. Further, the interviews provided insight into their vision for long-term planning and administration of the agency, as well as the priorities for the agency as part of the overall county government.

These interviews explored administrative practices, contract maintenance duties; ongoing partnership agreements with athletic associations and user groups and factors related to funding and park use. Interviews with recreation and parks agency staff revealed information about the daily operations of the agency and provided insight into the opportunities and constraints of staff. These interviews also allowed elected officials the opportunity to share thoughts on the current condition of the parks, how the staff operates and what they felt were important projects to undertake over the next ten years.

Steering Committee

A steering committee was selected from individuals from the community who have shown interest in the activities of the recreation and parks agency. The steering committee met at key points during the planning process to review planning efforts and provide feedback.

During the workshop, the steering committee was divided into two groups to outline the critical issues, strengths and weaknesses of the agency and its facilities, and compile a prioritized facilities wish list. The team and collective responses to the questions are provided in the Appendix.

The steering committee groups identified challenges facing the Cherokee Recreation and Parks Agency; the strengths and weaknesses of the agency; types of new programs and facilities; and preferred funding methods.

When asked what some of the critical issues facing CRPA are, the committee's responses included population growth, funding, staffing levels, lack of programming space, and future capital funding. When asked to identify strengths and weaknesses of CPRA the committee's responses included:

Strengths

- Professional & Dedicated Staff
- Recent Upgrades at Older Parks
- Newly Added Parks and Aquatics Center
- The Park Bond which Funded Renovations and New Facilities
- Existing Partnerships and Volunteers

Weaknesses

- Overall Lack of Staff
- Lack of Connectivity and Trails
- Lack of Passive Park Facilities
- Lack of Multi-purpose Fields
- Lack of Indoor Facilities
- Lack of Special Population and Senior Programs

When asked what the impacts of population growth would have on CPRA's ability to serve the county committee responses included strain current resources, increase traffic issues and require new parks to maintain level of service. When asked to identify new programs and facilities desired in the county committee responses included:

Programs

- Outdoor Education and Recreation Programs
- Special Population Programs
- Adventure Play
- Archery and Shooting Sports
- Senior Programs

Facilities

- More Trails of All Types
- Indoor Facilities of All Types
- Nature Center
- Community Gardens
- Passive Parks
- Multi-purpose Turf Fields
- Public Shooting (Rifle) Range

When ask to identify potential funding sources the committee responses included a new parks bond, SPLOST, dedicated millage for parks, grants, and sponsorships.

The planning team utilized the information gathered from this meeting, along with interviews and focus group sessions to create survey questions to see if the responses agree with the stakeholders. The information was also discussed at the public meetings.

Focus Groups

Multiple focus group meetings were held with community groups that shared common interests and the agency's programming staff. The focus group topics included:

- Youth Sports and Activities
- Adult Sports and Activities
- Trails and Open Spaces
- General Recreation and Therapeutic Programming
- City and County Services

At each focus group, members of the planning team facilitated a question and answer session to gain an understanding of the opportunities to better serve the needs of citizens throughout the county.

Youth and Adult Sports and Activities

Local youth and adult sports providers rent and use field and court space on county-owned facilities to provide sports programming. They offer sports and activities including baseball, tennis, soccer, football, lacrosse, and in-line roller hockey. The planning team met with these groups to learn about their needs and desires in terms of facilities, working with the county, and any difficulties they experience.

The groups reported positive experiences working with the county staff, and stated that they communicated well with the providers. When asked what improvements they would like to see, nearly all identified a need for additional field or court facilities that would allow for greater play for their programs. These would include multi-use fields, tennis courts, baseball, football and indoor facilities. Turf fields were suggested. The groups also identified a need for additional parking and restrooms at the parks.

Open Space and Trails

The open space and trails group was asked a series of questions about greenway corridors and trail development throughout the county. This group named a number of potential expansions to the existing trail network, as well as new greenways and trail locations. These included several creek corridors such as Noonday Creek and Yellow Creek and river corridors along the Etowah and Little River. The expansion of the Garland Mountain trails was discussed as a potential overnight destination trail system if expanded from 15 to 30 miles.

The group also recognized the need to connect destinations and existing trail networks, even those in other counties, such as the trail in Cobb County along Noonday Creek. Other connections included connecting downtowns to area parks, county parks to city parks, connections to the aquatic center, area schools, and connecting neighborhoods to town centers and retail centers. In particular, the group discussed the Rope Mill and Blanket Creek trail systems. These parks have existing bike trails that are recognized as quality trails. By connecting the two parks and expanding the trail network, out of town visitors would be attracted to the area and could stay overnight.

In addition to connections and expansions of trails, amenities frequently accompany a greenway system. Several suggestions from the group included overnight facilities and restrooms. The group also considered other types of open spaces, such as waterways and equestrian facilities. Because streams and rivers offer good paddling opportunities to residents and visitors, it was recommended that that access points and parking should be provided along stream and rivers, such as the Etowah and Little Rivers. Outdoor programming could be added, focusing on nature or outdoor activities and special events.

Special Populations and General Recreation Programming

Special populations and general recreation programming was addressed by a different group. This group discussed programs and facilities related to populations such as seniors, special needs individuals, as well as other general recreation programming. CRPA currently offers programs for these special populations and others are available through various organizations. These programs include challenger sports, Special Olympics, Senior Olympics, Miracle League and KAOS, a special needs summer camp. The Cherokee Senior Center offers multiple activities, including trips, fitness activities, and social activities.

When asked what facilities and programs are needed to address these special populations, the group noted a nature center is needed, as well as dedicated track and field facilities, accessible trails and parks, multi-purpose

senior center, indoor athletic facilities, special needs aquatic facilities and programming, walking groups and trips for special populations for larger groups.

Other general programs and facilities that the group identified included a need for facilities of all types in North Cherokee, summer art workshops for all ages, and swim facilities and team. The group encouraged CRPA to promote facilities and programs better so that residents could find information more easily.

City & County Services

The city/county services workshop identified programming, facilities and staffing that are needed or would be needed with additional facilities and programming in the county. The group was asked a series of questions about the programming and facilities offered, and what is needed now and in the future, as improvements are made. When asked what type of program space is needed, this group identified several spaces, including an athletics center, dedicated gymnastics space, recreation centers throughout the county including water play areas, nature center, trails, and more parks.

To follow up, the group was asked about specific programs and activities at the facilities they recommended. Their suggestions included camps, education programs, scout programs, nature programming and natural history programs at the nature center. The group recommended a recreation center should include a banquet hall, meeting and activity rooms, offices, indoor track, fitness area, basketball, water sports and camps. Senior Center programming and facilities should include a card room, computer room, fitness space, indoor/outdoor walking track, senior pool and sauna, and a number of classes. Other spaces, such as community rooms in existing fire stations, could include classes about safety and fine arts, game nights, clinics and more.

Public Meetings

Two public meetings were held to allow the public to share their desires for new recreation and programs across the county. A wide variety of comments from various interest groups was provided during these meetings. Documentation of these meetings is provided in **Appendix A**.

The first public meeting was held on March 7, 2016. Individuals attending this meeting identified a number of facilities, programs or issues that are needed. Those included additional trails, greenways and bike lanes, improved equestrian facilities, park improvements such as parking, emergency vehicle access and river access, disc golf facilities, and additional aquatic facilities.

The next meeting was held in an open house format on May 13, 2016 during an event at a County parks facility. The open house generated additional comments, including observations about the lack of equestrian facilities in Cherokee County and desire for improvements to the hockey facilities in the county.

Survey Findings

A community survey was conducted by posting a web link on the county websites and using social media. Additionally, the link to the survey was emailed to user groups. One thousand eight hundred eighty (1,880) participants logged on to respond to the survey. For a population the size of Cherokee County (235,900), this amount gives researchers a confidence interval of 2.25 at a 95% confidence level. This interval and level is optimal and provides a 2.25+/- range when analyzing results; meaning, for example, if 60% of the respondents said they

support a particular issue, we can be reasonably sure that if we asked the majority of the population, 57.75% to 62.25% would agree.

The survey questions assess the different types of programs that citizens are currently participating in and ones in which they show an interest. The survey results help the planning team to assess the priority for future facility development and types of improvements. They also provide insight into the community's desires for public recreation.

The following charts and graphs illustrate the survey results and responses. Additionally, some of the comments from respondents are included in this section. A complete copy of the survey and the full results are included in **Appendix B**.

Importance of Recreation & Parks

Understanding the community's satisfaction with the services provided by the Agency gives valuable information about what it is doing well, and areas where improvements could be made. Survey takers were asked to respond to a series of statements by expressing agreement, disagreement or stating they do not know about the statement.

The greatest positive feedback received was about the importance of parks and recreation in a community, compared to other priorities such as public safety, streets, utilities and schools. Respondents also commented positively on safety when visiting a park or recreation facility, access to parks and the positive image of the Cherokee Recreation and Parks Agency in the community. Those statements that received the greatest responses of disagreement included access to greenways and trails, and the distribution of parks throughout the county.

- Over 90% felt that parks and recreation is as important to the community as other priorities such as public safety, streets, utilities and schools.
- 92% answered they feel safe when visiting a park or recreation facility.
- 84% feel that CRPA maintains a good image in the community.
- Nearly 86% expressed satisfaction with the condition and image of the parks they have visited.
- While 84% felt they have good access to a park, nearly 33% felt they do NOT have good access to greenways and trails.

Over 90% felt that parks and recreation is as important to the community as other priorities such as public safety, streets, utilities and schools.

Benefits of Recreation and Parks

Respondents were asked about benefits they or their household may receive from various recreation and parks facilities. They were asked to indicate their level of agreement with potential benefits. The top five benefits in which respondents indicated agreement were:

- 99% agree that parks and recreation improve physical health and fitness.
- 97% agree that parks and recreation improves the quality of life in Cherokee County.

- 91% agree that parks and recreation helps attract new residents and business.
- 81% agree that parks and recreation contributes to economic development through tourism.
- 67% agree that parks and recreation helps to reduce crime.

In addition to the responses above, respondents were afforded the opportunity to provide additional benefits they may receive from recreation, parks, greenspaces and trails. A few of the responses received are listed below.

- *Quality family time opportunities that are conveniently located.*
- *Build teamwork in our youth.*
- *Enjoy time with dogs.*
- *Get kids out of the house and families doing things together.*
- *Better academic performance of students.*

Funding

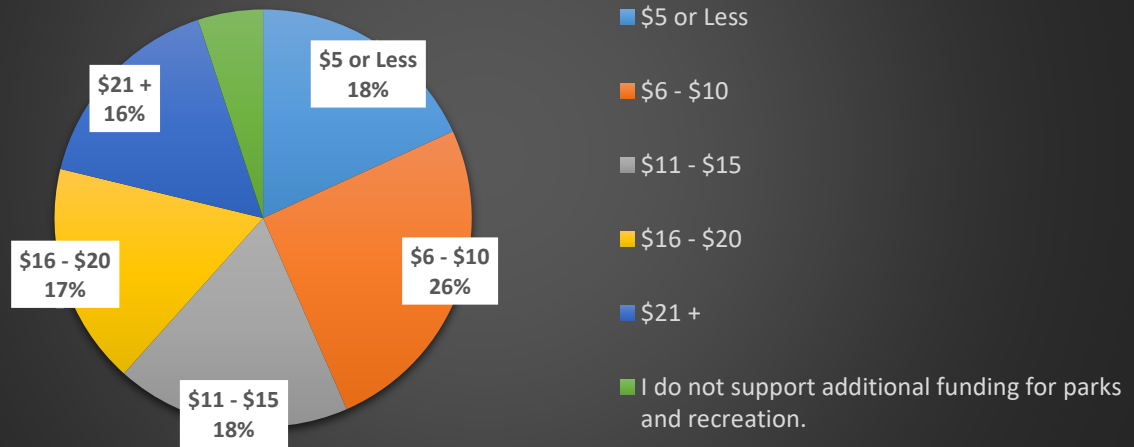
When respondents are requesting recreation and parks improvements, it is important to obtain feedback on the funding for these improvements and how respondents desire to pay for additional programs and facilities. We asked respondents to rank their preferred method of funding, should the county require additional funds in order to invest in more facilities.

We asked about the use of property tax dollars for park maintenance and recreation programming. Presenting respondents with the annual per household contribution of \$7.08 from property taxes in 2016, we asked how much additional funding they would support for parks and recreation.

...more than 76% are willing to add at least \$6 to their current contribution in order to help support the parks and recreation in Cherokee County...

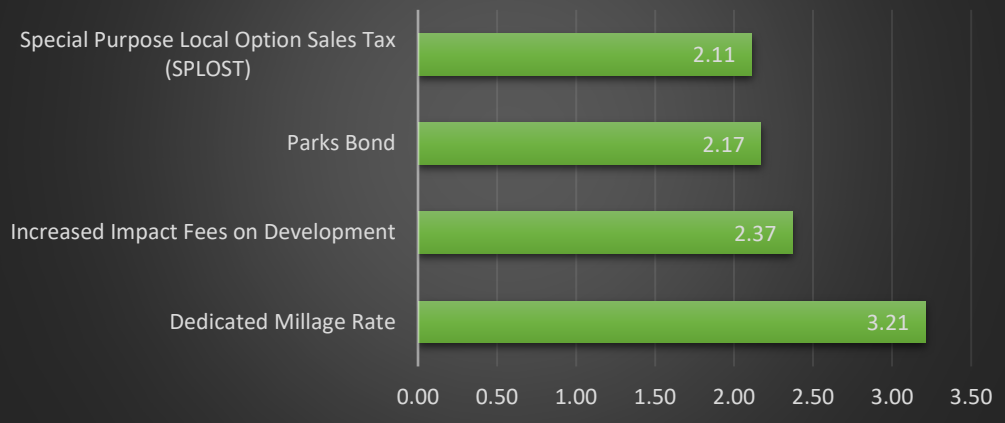
Over half, 52%, of those who provided answers are willing to add at least \$11 and more than 76% are willing to add at least \$6 to their current contribution in order to help support the parks and recreation in Cherokee County. Sixteen percent are willing to contribute an additional \$21+ toward parks and recreation. While these amounts do not seem to be substantial at an individual rate, when you consider those contributions at a countywide level it is a generous amount of funds. Very few, 5%, expressed no support for additional funding.

How much additional funding for recreation thru property taxes do you support?



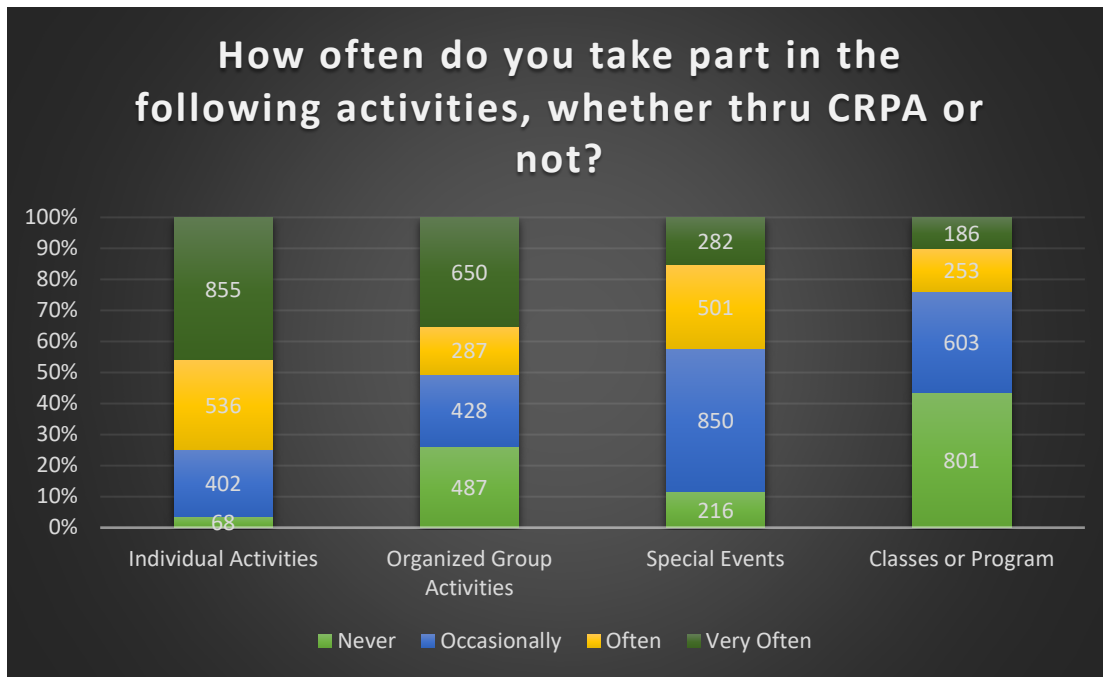
When asked about options for funding capital improvements, respondents were asked to rank options from highest to lowest. It should come as no surprise that a dedicated millage rate increase was the least popular choice amongst respondents for capital funding options. The use of Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) funds was the most popular, followed closely by a parks bond. There was also interest in increasing impact fees on development.

Preferred Methods for Capital Funding (Lowest Number being the Highest)



Program Participation

To gauge a clear measurement of program and activity participation, we asked survey respondents, "Using the list below, indicate how often you take part in the following parks and recreation programs." We listed special events, individual activity, organized group activity, and classes or programs. Not surprisingly, many had not participated in the classes or programs, and only about half regularly participated in organized group activity; we found most individuals had participated in individual and special events activities. These findings are similar to findings we have seen in other communities across the country.



To find out what programs and activities respondents prefer and which ones they would like to participate in, researchers asked a series of questions that listed programs and activities typically offered by recreation and parks agencies. The programs and activities were classified into four categories: Youth, Adult, Senior and Special Events/Classes. Participants were asked to place a check next to the programs and activities that they or their family members have participated in, or for which they have an interest.

Below are the top five youth sports in which respondents indicated they or their family members have participated. Basketball is the most common sport, followed by soccer and baseball. The responses are similar to trends we have seen in other similar communities. When asked to identify the sport activities that they and their families would like to participate in from the same list, respondents revealed a strong desire for archery and swim team programs.

Top Five Youth Sport Activities (Have Participated In)		Top Five Youth Sport Activities (Would Like to Participate In)	
Activity	Responses	Activity	Responses
Basketball League	447	Archery	396
Soccer League	428	Swim Team	252
Baseball League	424	Sports Camp	251
Swim Team	208	Tennis Programs	242
Sports Camp	198	Track Team	231

In the analysis of the survey results for adult sports, the following programs and activities are the top five that respondents have participated in and ones in which they would like to be involved. We find a higher number of responses for activities in which they would like to be a participant.

Top Five Adult Sport Activities (Have Participated In)		Top Five Adult Sport Activities (Would Like to Participate In)	
Activity	Responses	Activity	Responses
Softball Leagues	116	Kickball	226
Tennis Leagues	91	Disc Golf	196
Basketball Leagues	61	Softball Leagues	196
Soccer Leagues	56	Tennis Leagues	193
Baseball Leagues	51	Volleyball Leagues	183

When asked about what activities seniors have participated in, the responses are lower than the other groups, which is not surprising given that it targets a specific age group. Through these questions, the survey results revealed that the majority of the senior respondents would like to continue activities such as aerobics classes, but they are also interested in walking/hiking clubs, gardening and nature programs.

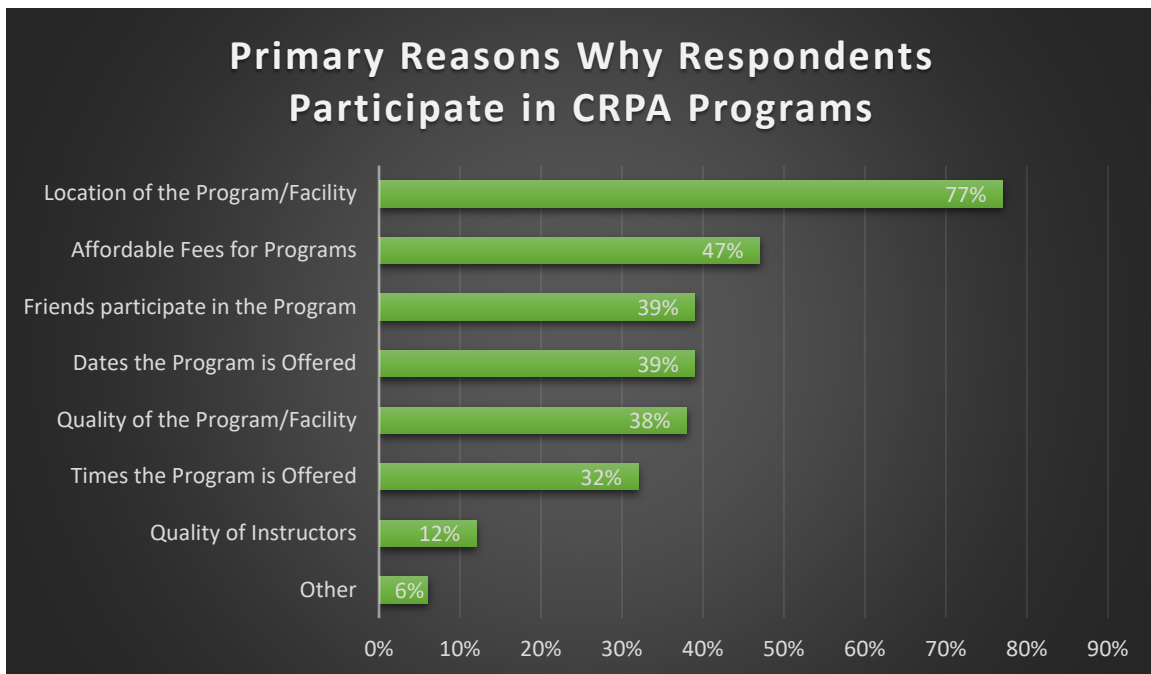
Top Five Senior Activities (Have Participated In)		Top Five Senior Activities (Would Like to Participate In)	
Activity	Responses	Activity	Responses
Aerobics Classes	32	Walking Club	241
Swimming (Water Aerobics)	26	Hiking Club	231
Health/Fitness Classes	25	Gardening	229
Senior Trips	20	Aerobics Classes	225
Walking Club	15	Nature Programs	215

In order to find out what special events, classes and adventure activities that respondents have participated in and would like to participate in, we listed special events and classes. In analyzing the survey results, the following programs and activities are the top five that respondents have participated in or would like to participate in. When

analyzing the response rates, we find that 5K Races/Triathlons, Mountain Biking Competitions and other extreme physical activities, like Zip Lining, are the most popular ideas of special activity around Cherokee County.

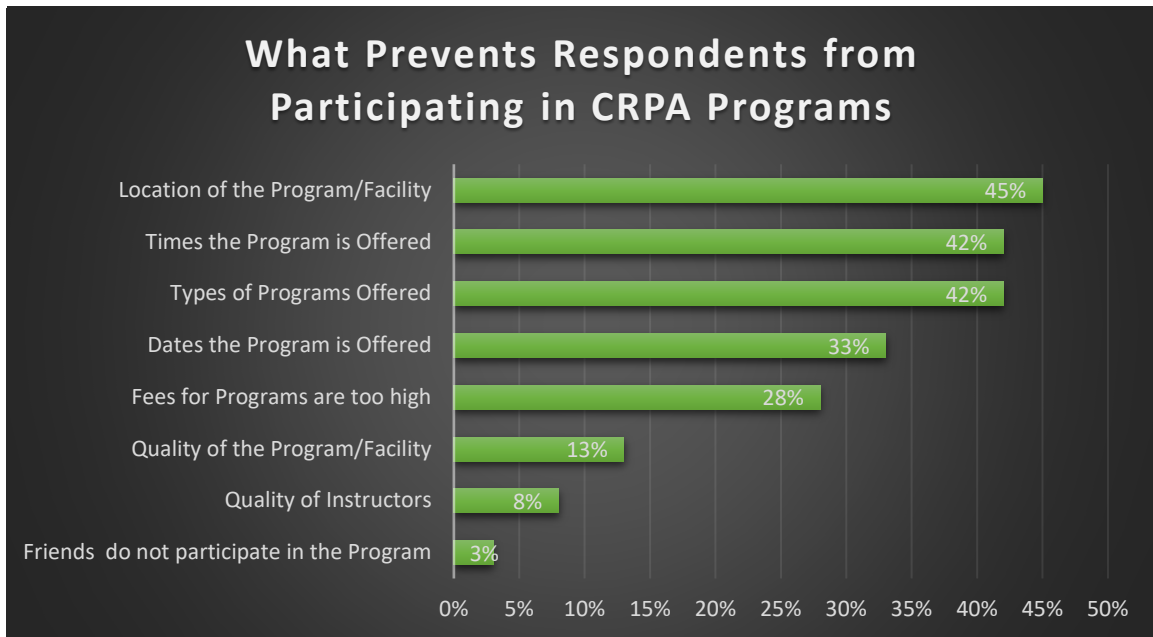
Top Five Special Events, Classes or Activities (Have Participated In)		Top Five Special Events, Classes or Activities (Would Like to Participate In)	
Activity	Responses	Activity	Responses
5K Races/Triathlons	547	Canoeing/Kayaking	640
Touch-a-Truck	237	Food Truck Events	629
Biking (BMX and/or Mountain Biking)	228	Adventure Trips	628
Food Truck Events	200	Zip Lining Programs	522
Canoeing/Kayaking	192	Challenge/Ropes Course	492

We wanted to gain an understanding of the recreation and parks aspects that encourage participation. Respondents were provided several reasons from which they could choose to indicate why their household participates in the programs offered by the CRPA. The chart below shows that respondents most frequently indicated that the location of the program/facility contributed to their reason for participation, followed by the afford ability of the programs.



Conversely, we wanted to find out more about what prevents respondents from participating in CRPA programs. Program/facility location also contributes to the lack of participation by respondents, although not nearly as high a rate of those that do participate, 77% vs. 45%.

Other responses show that the times programs are offered and the types of programs that are offered affect participation. This indicates the county may want to evaluate when and where programs are offered when adding additional program offerings. See the sections with recommendations on programming and indoor facilities.



Park Use & Access to Parks & Recreation Facilities

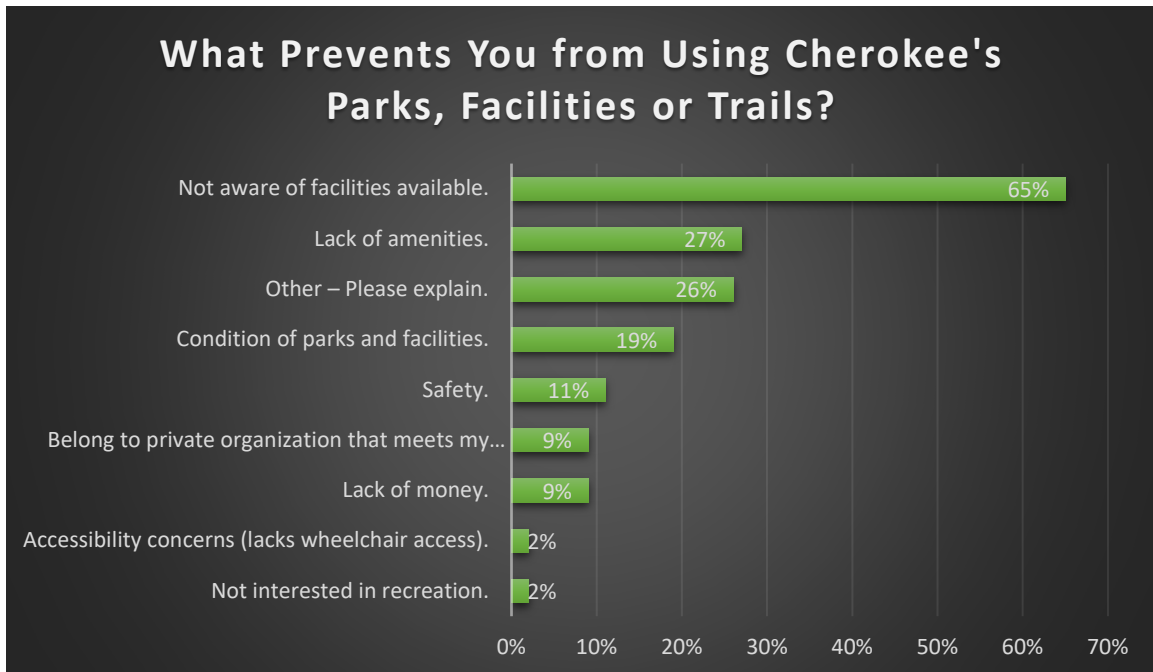
We then asked respondents how frequently they visit each of the County parks. During the analysis, we combined 1-5 visits, 6-11 visits and 12 or more visits. The five parks with the most visits (combined) per the survey responses are below. Hobgood Park had a notably high number of visitors, followed by the aquatic center, Blankets Creek, JJ Biello Park and the Recreation Center. The five parks with the highest "no visits" combined with "not aware of this park" per the survey responses are also listed below.

Five Most Visited Cherokee County Parks & Facilities		Five Least Visited Cherokee County Parks & Facilities	
Park or Facility	Responses	Park or Facility	Responses
Hobgood Park	1091	Lewis Park	1507
Cherokee County Aquatic Center	832	Riverchase Park	1485
Blankets Creek Bike Trails	733	Union Hill Community Center	1465
JJ Biello Park – Valley Playground	650	Cline Park	1428
Recreation Center	556	Buffington Park & Gym	1413

The survey asked residents to indicate what prevents them and their families from using parks, facilities or trails. For this question, respondents could select multiple answers, which is why the percentages listed do not equal 100%. The most votes were given to "not aware of facilities available". Researchers were surprised by this outcome because, in past surveys, respondents will usually select "other" and list "lack of time".

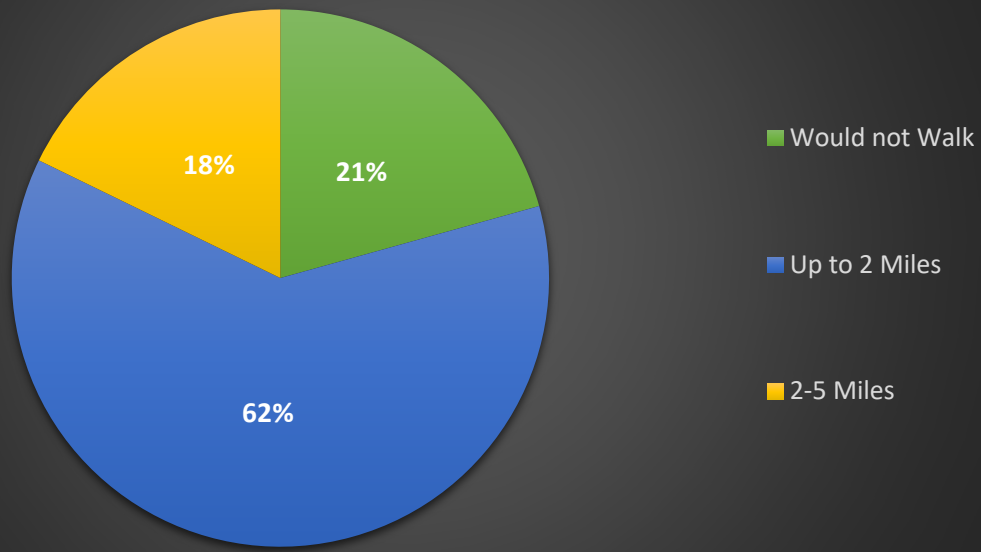
Under "Other-please explain," we gathered 358 responses. Responses varied from a mistaken belief that pets are not allowed within the facility, to a lack in equestrian venues, general trail length and the existence of a track facility. However, the majority of responses were related to parks and facilities being too far from home or overcrowded. Below are some of the comments:

- *Not close by...*
- *We would like more bike trails. We spend a lot of time in other counties using the Big Creek Greenway.*
- *My son is having a hard time to practice for track & field facility for track this year, as we don't have track available ... :(*



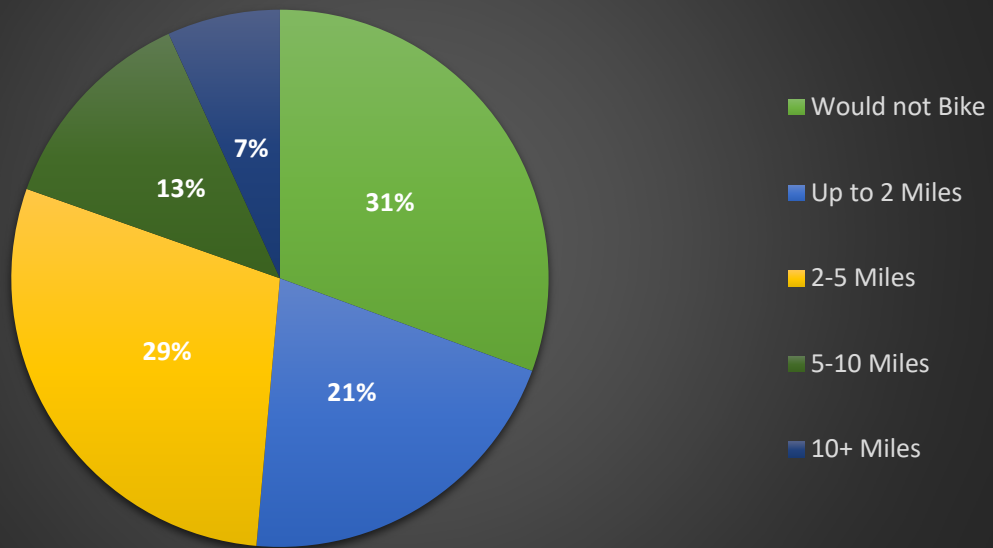
As part of the survey, respondents were asked how far they would be willing to walk or bike to parks and recreation facilities. As many as half the respondents would drive under fifteen minutes, and many are okay with walking -- so long as the parks are within a two-mile radius. This leads researchers to believe that re-evaluation of the distribution of park and event locale could certainly prove beneficial.

Willingness to Walk to a Park



Biking had a higher percentage of respondents who would not bike (30%), which leaves 70% percent willing to bike some particular distance. The greatest response was from those willing to bike up to 5 miles.

Willingness to Bike to a Park



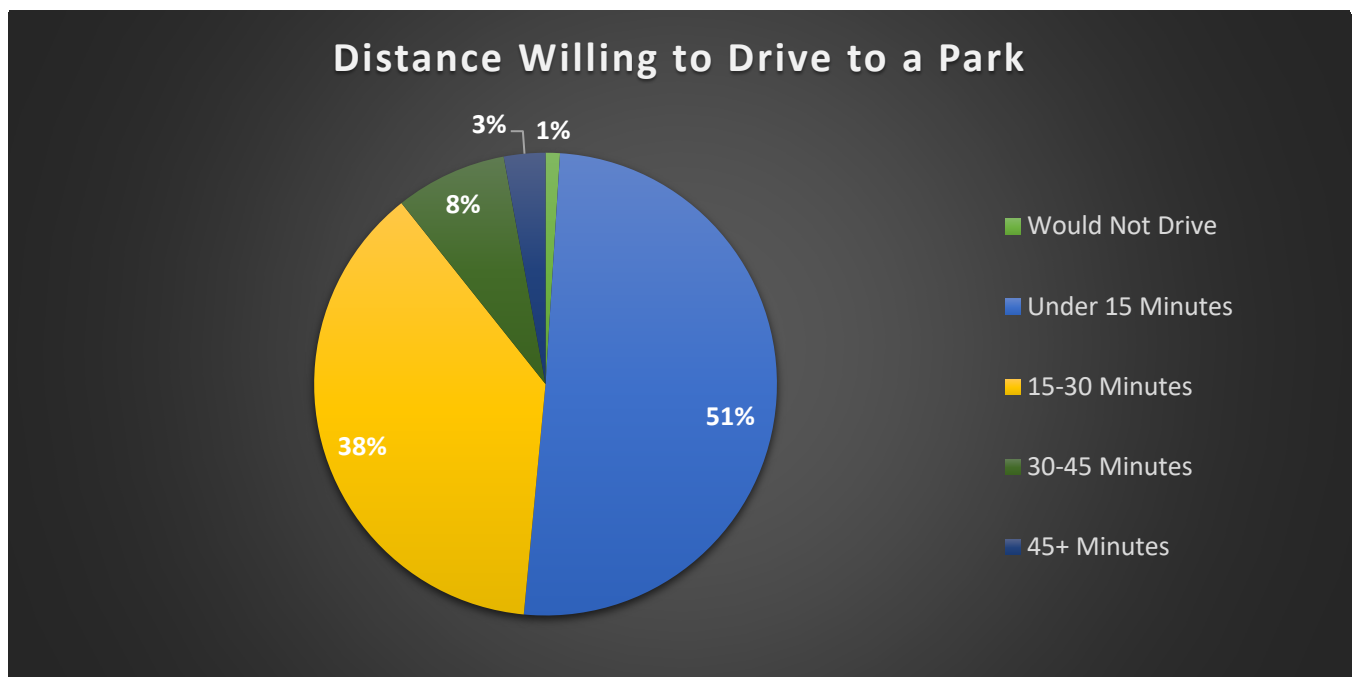
The results are encouraging that nearly three-quarters of the respondents are willing to walk or bike to a park. Cherokee County will need to invest in improvements such as sidewalks, bike lanes and greenways and provide

additional infrastructure such as bicycle racks at parks. With these improvements, Cherokee County could see an increase in alternative transportation and, perhaps, a reduction in obesity rates.

When asked why you would not walk or bike, the overwhelming majority of respondents said they simply did not want to put their lives or lives of their family members in danger. Other reasons or concerns are as follows:

- *I do not own a bike.*
- *Health.*
- *Very hilly, mountainous area.*
- *My little ones cannot pedal that far yet, so we would drive to (t)he location to ride our bikes.*

The survey questioned respondents about the amount of time they would be willing to drive to a park. Researchers found that most respondents prefer to drive under 15 minutes. Compared to other communities, this is a high percentage. The reasoning could be related the high number of commuters in the community not wanting to travel once they return home or on the weekend. No matter the reason, it is clear that the majority of respondents desire parks near their home.



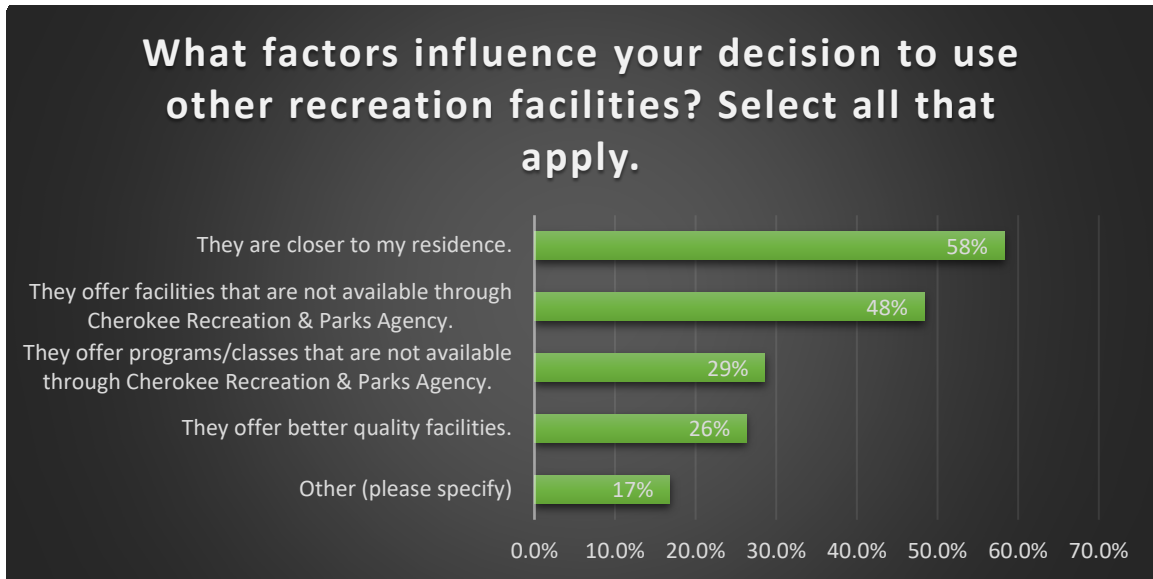
Next, researchers wanted to find out if respondents are traveling outside of Cherokee County for parks and recreation activities. **Survey results indicate that the 69% of respondents do travel outside of Cherokee County to use parks and recreation facilities.**

When asked where those respondents who travel outside of Cherokee County go for recreation and park facilities, 834 individuals responded. Of those responses, there were 202 mentions of Cobb County facilities, and 91 and 101 mentions of Fulton and Forsyth Counties' facilities. Other responses included the Chattahoochee National Forest, as well as various state parks in the greater Cherokee region.

To find out what other providers of parks and recreation participants are using, we asked and found that many are using neighborhood and HOA-provided recreation facilities.

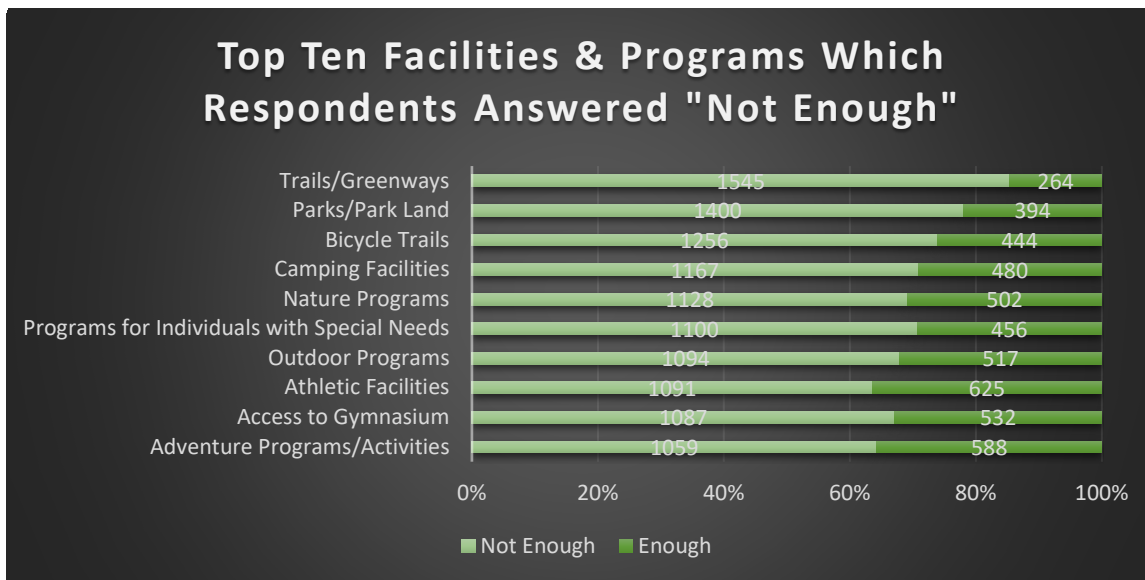


To understand why respondents use these other providers, we found that it is mostly because the other providers are located closer to the respondent's home. Not only that, but 48% say they offer facilities that are not available through the Cherokee Recreation and Parks Agency. Under "Other (please specify)", comments included safety concerns and childcare needs.



Facility & Program Priorities

By utilizing the survey, researchers are able to find out more about park and program usage in Cherokee County. The majority of respondents indicated that there are "not enough" trails and/or greenways. Extremely few respondents indicated that the Cherokee Recreation and Parks Agency provided "too many" of the items listed. In the "enough" category, we find the highest votes for boat ramps and aquatic facilities.



We wanted to gain an understanding of respondent priorities as it pertains to facilities. We asked respondents to indicate the level of need for a number of potential items, should funding be available. The list below shows the level of the community's support for a number potential projects.

Consistent with the earlier findings, respondents very much seek improvements to infrastructure, paved pedestrian trails and sidewalks that provide connectivity for community homes, recreational establishments and schools. In addition, among the top five responses are a recreation center, more parks, a nature center, and canoe/kayaking facilities.

- **Provide more paved trails and improved sidewalks that link neighborhood, schools and parks together. 88%**
- **Develop more parks throughout Cherokee County. 80%**
- **Develop recreation centers throughout the county. 73%**
- **Develop a nature center. 73%**
- **Expand canoeing/kayaking facilities. 69%**

Respondents Additional Comments

The survey provided an opportunity for individuals to give additional comments about Cherokee County's recreation and parks programs and facilities. Nearly 400 comments were received. While the comments were varied, there are certain trends that surfaced in the comments. Those included requests for turf and multi-use fields, more trails and greenways, track and field facilities, and park facilities in certain areas of the County . The additional comments can be found the Appendix C.

Demographics

The survey included several questions to gauge the demographics of the respondents. The results provide insight into whether the survey reached a representative group of Cherokee County residents. Based on the information gathered, it appears that the survey did reach a similar demographic as the community profile demonstrates. Below is a summary of those findings.

- We find that over 62% of the respondents have lived in Cherokee County 11 years or more.
- While Cherokee County's population, according to the US Census Bureau, is 49.4% male, only 34% of respondents indicated that they are male. Females made up 66% of survey respondents.
- A mix of age groups contributed to the survey, with the largest age groups being between 35 to 44 and 45 to 54. However, there were nearly equal percentages of respondents younger and older than these age groups.
- When asked about their household characteristics, surveyors found that a great majority of respondents (73%) have households with children.
- Corresponding with these findings, 76% of those responding indicated that their household is made up of two-parent families. In a majority of those households, both parents are working.
- Eight percent (8%) of respondents indicated they are retired.
- When asked further about the age groups of those children living at home, the largest age group of children is those age 12 to 19 (41%), followed closely by those ages 5 to 11 (36%).
- The greatest numbers of respondents were from the following zip codes: 30114, 30115, 30188, and 30189. 30114 and 30115 combined to account for 45% of the responses. 30188 and 30189 combined to account for 39% of the responses. Combined, these four ZIP codes represent about 84% of the responses. Not surprising, these are located in population centers with the higher populations in the County.
- When asked about housing ownership, survey respondents indicated a high rate of homeownership, with more than 90% indicating they own their home. This is higher than the demographic data from the US Census Bureau, which reports a homeownership rate of about 73%.
- About a quarter of respondents indicated household income levels of each of the following categories: below \$75,000, between \$75,000 and \$100,000, between \$100,000 and \$150,000, and more than \$150,000. This is consistent with the demographic data documented in **Chapter One** that indicates an annual household income of \$69,711, a level above national and state household incomes.
- Respondents were also asked about their race and ethnicity. 93% identify as White/Caucasian. Two percent (2%) of respondents indicated they are of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish descent. There were a few cases in which respondents were unable to check multiple races so they listed bi-racial or multi race family in the "Other (please specify)" option.

Summary and Findings

Public input is a critical component in developing a comprehensive plan for a recreation and parks agency. The citizens are the participants and users of the parks system and recreation programs. An effective plan must accurately reflect the facilities and programs most desired by the citizens of the community. The recommendations provided in this master plan were driven by public input gathered through a variety of forums: input recorded in interviews with public officials and staff, public meetings, focus groups, steering committee meetings, emails submitted to the county, and an online survey provided to the residents of Cherokee County.

The public participated through the following initiatives:

- Two (2) Public Workshops (nearly 200 attendees)
- Twenty (20) One-on-one interview with stakeholders
- Four (4) Focus Group Sessions
- County-Wide Online Survey (Over 1,880 responses)

While some users had stronger desires for specific facilities and programs over others, the overall direction for future improvements was relatively parallel among all the groups. The public input process brought forward some consistent themes as listed below.

- Over 90% felt parks and recreation is as important to the community as other priorities such as public safety, streets, utilities and schools.
- 99% agree that parks and recreation improve physical health and fitness and 97% agree that parks and recreation improves the quality of life in Cherokee County.
- Over 76% of survey respondents support additional funding of \$6.00 or more for parks and recreation through property taxes.
- When asked about raising capital funds for future projects, SPLOST, Increase Impact Fees and General Obligation Bonds were the preferred methods.
- When asked why they participate in CRPA programs, the top two reasons given by survey respondents were location of the program/facility and affordable fees for programs.
- Conversely, when asked what prevents them from participating in CRPA programs, the top two reasons given were location of the program/facility and times the programs are offered.
- While the majority of Cherokee County residents currently drive to parks, if safe routes were available, up to 80% of survey respondents said they would be willing to walk up to two miles to a park while 70% said they would ride a bike some distance to a park.
- More than half of survey respondents use neighborhood/HOA recreation facilities. Other providers of recreation facilities frequented by Cherokee County residents include Georgia DNR, US Army Corps of Engineers and private facilities.
- The top reason why survey respondents use other recreation facilities is proximity to their homes.
- When asked what facilities are most needed if funding is available, the top five answers were more trails; more parks; recreation centers; nature center; and canoe/kayaking facilities.

Chapter Three –Facilities Assessments & Recommendations

Introduction

The Facilities Assessment and Recommendations section of the plan assesses the current Level of Service (LOS) of parks and recreation facilities provided by Cherokee County as well as other parks and recreation facilities provided within the county by cities and other recreation providers.

Using national standards, similar communities and public input, the plan recommends a standard for Cherokee County. This section compares the current LOS to that standard and estimates the needs of the county against that standard given the projected growth.

By comparing the LOS to the recommended standards and using the projected growth, the plan provides a recommended capital improvement plan to keep up with the changing demands on parks and recreation facilities as the county grows. This recommended capital improvement plan also includes recommendations for renovations and expansion of existing parks and facilities.

Park Classification & Facility Standards

In 1995, the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) published *Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Guidelines* by James D. Mertes, Ph.D., CLP, and James R. Hall, CLP. The book outlined a template for typical park classifications, numbers of acres a system should have and recommended service levels based on population. Strictly intended as a guideline, the book does not take into account the unique character of a community. Local trends and popularity of some activities often dictate a different need for particular facilities. The guidelines outlined in *Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Guidelines* serve as a good baseline for determining a minimum standard. These guidelines, along with the community needs assessment, community input and the 2016 NRPA Field Report were used to develop service standards for Cherokee County.

Critical to the service delivery system of any agency is the provision of the four basic park categories: mini parks, neighborhood parks, community parks and regional parks. Beyond these four basic park types are special-use parks, natural areas/preserves, greenways, school parks and private parks/recreation facilities. Each is classified differently based upon the types of amenities, size, service area and how access is gained to the facility.

Figure 3.1 provides a definition of each park classification along with information on size and service criteria.

Figure 3.1 Park Classifications with Service Criteria			
Classification	Description	Desirable Size	Location Criteria
Mini-Park	Small parks with limited activity that should provide seating, landscape and possibly a playground, community garden or other passive recreation activities	5 acres or less	¼ mile radius
Neighborhood Park	Area for more intense recreation activities, such as playing fields, larger playgrounds, shelters, trails, swimming pools, restrooms, etc.	5-20 acres	½ mile radius
Community Park	All-inclusive facility for recreation users that provides a mix of active and passive activities and attract users of all ages from sports fields to a community center	20-75 acres	1-3 mile radius

Figure 3.1 Park Classifications with Service Criteria			
Classification	Description	Desirable Size	Location Criteria
Regional Park	Unique outdoor recreation area with various amenities which may include boating, fishing, swimming, camping but may also include a water park, etc.	50-250 acres	Varies
Special Use Park or Facility	Special use parks are designed to meet the needs of a specific user group such as an aquatic center, golf course, zoo or museum	Varies	Varies
Sports Complex	Sports complexes are parks that are dominated by athletic facilities	Varies	Varies
Natural Resource Area/Preserve	Land with natural resources, historic landscapes, visual beauty, bio-diversity, etc.	Varies	Varies
Greenways	Linear corridors that loop and/or link to other amenities	50 ft. wide	½ mile radius along path
School Park	Typically found at middle and high schools with youth athletic fields that support team sports	Varies	Varies

Table adapted from Mertes, J.D. and J.R. Hall. *Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Guidelines*. Alexandria, VA: National Recreation and Park Associations, 1995.

Mini Parks

These parks are the smallest park type. While they are desirable amenities and often developed in more urban settings, they are not typically developed by agencies in suburban and rural counties. Cherokee County should continue to encourage the creation of these neighborhood amenities through the development process, but development of these parks as county parks is not recommended.

Community Parks and Neighborhood Parks

The majority of Cherokee County’s existing parks fall into these two categories. As the county continues to grow, the county should consider adding additional community and neighborhood size parks in the appropriate geographic areas of the county as the demand arises. The amenities in each park can be tailored to meet the needs of the service area.

Special Use Facilities and Greenways

The county has several special use parks and facilities such as the Blankets Creek Bike Trails and the Cherokee County Aquatic Center. This plan calls for the addition of some additional special use facilities. See the recommended capital improvement plan for details.

The top facility requested through community input is linear trails or greenways. Short greenways have begun to develop in the cities of Woodstock and Canton. The county should consider developing more greenways in collaboration with the cities to connect high priority destinations throughout the county.

Level of Service & Existing Park Locations

Evaluating the level of service determines whether a recreation delivery system is meeting the needs of the community. The analysis begins with a review of the existing facilities and level of service (LOS) offered by an agency. Figure 3.2 lists the parks and recreation facilities operated by Cherokee County. The facilities inventory shows the county owns or leases thirty-four (34) separate parcels with a total land area of approximately 4,133 acres. Of the thirty-four parcels, twenty-three (23) are developed and readily available for public use and eleven (11) are undeveloped at this time. Including the new parks added in 2017, the county controls 2,443 acres of parkland that are readily available for use by the public.

Figure 3.2 Cherokee County Parks & Facilities

Park/Facility Name	Athletic Fields (FB, Soc, Lax)	Banquet Hall	BB / SB Diamonds	Batting Cages	Concessions / Kitchen	Disc Golf Course	Dog Park	Event Lawn	Fish/Boat Ramp	Gymnasium	In-Line Hockey Rink	Pavilions	Pickleball Courts	Playgrounds	Pool or Splash Pad	Restrooms	Skate Park	Tennis Courts	Trails, Equestrian (mi)	Trails, Mountain Bike (mi)	Trails, Paved Ped. (mi)	Trails, Soft Pedestrian (mi)	Acres
Badger Creek Park	14	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	Y	-	-	-	-	-	-	151
Barnett Park	-	-	3	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	Y	-	-	-	-	0.2	0.2	25
Blankets Creek Bike Trails	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	Y	-	-	-	15	-	-	364
Buffington Park & Gym	-	-	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
Cherokee County Aquatic Center	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	3	Y	-	-	-	-	-	-	38
Cherokee Mills Park	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	40
Cherokee Veterans Park	3	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	Y	1	2	-	-	1.5	2	149
Cline Park	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	1	Y	-	2	-	-	-	0.3	12
Dwight Terry Park	-	-	2	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	Y	-	-	-	-	0.5	-	30
Fields Landing Park	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	7	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	280
Garland Mtn. Horse/Hiking Trails	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	Y	-	-	15	-	-	-	544
Hickory Trails Park	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	Y	-	-	-	-	-	0.8	24
Hobgood Park	1	-	10	7	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	4	-	1	-	Y	-	4	-	-	0.5	-	60
JJ Biello Park	6	-	-	6	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	4	-	2	-	Y	-	10	-	-	-	1	470
Kenney Askew Park	1	-	-	10	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4	1	-	Y	-	4	-	-	-	-	60
Lewis Park	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	1	-	Y	-	-	-	-	-	1.5	57
Patriots Park	-	-	3	2	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	Y	-	-	-	-	0.8	-	33
Recreation Center, South Annex	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	1	-	Y	-	-	-	-	0.4	-	14
Riverchase Park	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10
Sequoyah Park	1	-	4	2	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	Y	-	-	-	-	-	1.5	39
Union Hill Community Center	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	Y	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Waleska Park	-	-	3	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	Y	-	-	-	-	-	-	18
Weatherby Park	1	-	3	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	Y	-	-	-	-	0.4	-	17
Totals	27	1	40	39	16	1	1	5	2	2	1	34	6	17	4		1	22	15	15	4.3	7.3	2,443

Once the existing facilities inventory was completed, the planning team compared the overall number and types of facilities to standards based on NRPA and other guidelines. The NRPA standards do not provide guidance on newer types of facilities such as skate parks, dog parks and pickleball courts. For these reasons, the planning team has developed standards specific to Cherokee County to determine the community level of service. These guidelines enable the planning team to detect where the county has a surplus or deficiency in a particular type of facility or service. While these standards provide guidance on the quantity of facilities, they cannot be used indiscriminately and without understanding facility quality, location and other factors.

In reviewing the community level of service each community must consider how these numbers reflect the actual recreation characteristics of the community. For example, the community level of service based on national averages indicated a current shortage of twenty-three tennis courts and growing to a shortage of forty-one by the year 2028. Based on community input during the planning process this level of shortage was clearly not indicated. The lack of comments relating to tennis could be a reflection of the impact that neighborhood homeowners' association (HOA) facilities are having on the demand for recreation facilities. Many HOA's provide playgrounds, tennis courts, basketball courts and swimming pools. As these facilities are convenient for homeowners, they choose to use these facilities rather than use public parks. The community survey discussed in Chapter Two revealed that 50% of respondents noted they use HOA facilities and 58% of respondents indicated they use other provider facilities because they are closer to their home. Therefore, each community should develop their own level of service standards that reflect community input and use patterns. In this example, the planning team adjusted the recommended number of public tennis courts downward based on the community input.

To examine the projected surpluses and deficits of each facility type, the planning team compared the existing county, municipal and non-profit facilities to the recommended level of service. Figure 3.3 summarizes the inventory of all public parks and recreation facilities operated by the county, municipalities, the USACE and several local not-for-profit recreation providers.

The planning team used population data estimates from the US Census Bureau and 2028 projections based on Atlanta Regional Council and Georgia Governor's Office. Based on the recommended community standard, the current population and the projected population in 2028, Figure 3.4 compares the existing supply of parks and recreation facilities to the needs for 2019 and 2028.

The following summarizes the results of these comparisons.

- When only county facilities are compared with national service standards, the county is clearly short of core facilities including sports fields, tennis courts, basketball courts, greenways and indoor programming space. The county is also short of dog parks, skate facilities and splash pad/aquatic facilities.
- However, when county, municipal facilities, local facilities provided by the USACE as well as facilities provided by local non-profit volunteer groups are combined and compared with service standards, we see a significant increase in the number of baseball/softball fields, tennis courts, playgrounds and greenways that are available to county residents.
- Even when all local parks and recreation facilities are compared to community standards, by 2028 we expect there to be shortages in greenways, pickleball courts, indoor programming space (Recreation Centers), and athletic fields for football, soccer and lacrosse (whether natural grass or synthetic). We also expect shortages in other amenities.

With a projected population increase of approximately 70,000 new residents over the next ten years, needs will increase and areas where there are deficits are expected to increase.

Figure 3.3 Current Community Parks & Recreation Facilities Inventory

Facility Type	Cherokee County	Woodstock	Holly Springs	Canton	Ball Ground	Waleska	Nelson	Cherokee YMCA	SCRA	Macedonia BB	USACE	2017 SUPPLY
Public Parks & Facilities	23	7	3	7	3	-	1	-	-	-	5	49
Acres	2,443	148	51	130	22	-	3	-	-	-	na	2,796
Adaptive BB/SB Diamond	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Baseball/Softball Diamond	39	-	1	3	3	-	1	-	15	3	-	65
Basketball, Outdoor	2	2	-	3	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	9
Batting Cages	40	-	-	1	2	-	-	-	7	3	-	53
BMX Bike Track	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Boat Ramp/Canoe Launch	2	1	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	4	10
Campgrounds	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3
Disc Golf	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Dog Park	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Equestrian Trails (miles)	15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15
Football Fields	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	5
Greenways (miles)	-	3.5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.5
Inline Hockey Rink	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Mountain Bike Trails (miles)	15	14	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	29
Multipurpose Fields (soccer, lax)	23	-	1	8	1	-	-	3	-	-	-	36
Nature Trails (miles)	7.3	.25	.5	7.6	-	-	.5	-	-	-	-	16.2
Park Walking Trails (miles)	4.3	1.1	1	2.5	.25	-	-	-	-	-	-	9.1
Pickleball	6	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
Picnic Shelters	33	3	4	4	2	-	1	1	-	-	2	50
Playgrounds	17	2	3	5	1	-	1	2	-	-	2	33
Recreation Center/Gym	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2
Running Track	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Skate Park	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Splash Pad	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Swimming Pool Complex	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2
Tennis Courts	22	4	-	4	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	32
Volleyball Courts, Outdoor	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

* 2017 Supply includes County, Municipal, USACE and non-profit provided facilities.

Figure 3.4 Community Standards, Facility Supply & Needs

Facility Type	Cherokee County Standard	2017 Supply	2019 Need	2028 Need	Additional Needed by 2028
Public Parks	NA	49	---	---	<i>Special</i>
Acres	10.1 per 1,000	2,796	2,500	3,190	394
Adaptive BB/SB Diamond	1 per 150,000	1	2	2	1
Baseball/Softball Diamond	1 per 4,500	65	55	70	5
Basketball, Outdoor	1 per 30,000	9	8	11	2
Batting Cages	1 per BB/SB Field	53	65	70	17
BMX Bike Track	1 per 150,000	0	2	2	2
Boat Ramp/Canoe Launch	<i>See Table 3.5</i>	10	---	---	<i>Special</i>
Campgrounds	NA	3	---	---	<i>Special</i>
Disc Golf	1 per 75,000	2	3	4	2
Dog Park	1 per 60,000	2	4	5	3
Equestrian Trails (miles)	NA	15	---	---	<i>Special</i>
Football Fields	1 per 40,000	5	6	8	3
Greenways	1 per County	3.5	---	---	<i>Special</i>
Inline Hockey Rink	1 per 150,000	1	2	2	1
Mountain Bike Trails (miles)	NA	29	---	---	<i>Special</i>
Athletic Fields	1 per 7,500	36	33	42	6
Nature Trails (miles)	1 Trail per Passive Park	30.2	---	---	<i>Special</i>
Park Walking Trails (miles)	1 Trail per Park	9.1	---	---	<i>Special</i>
Pickleball	1 per 20,000	7	12	16	9
Picnic Shelters	1+ per Park	50	---	---	<i>Special</i>
Playgrounds	1+ per Park	33	---	---	<i>Special</i>
Recreation Center/Gym	1 per 75,000	2	3	4	2
Running Track	1 per 150,000	0	2	2	2
Skate Park	1 per 100,000	1	2	3	2
Splash Pad	NA	1	---	---	<i>Special</i>
Swimming Pool Complex	1 per 100,000	2	2	3	1
Tennis Courts	1 per 8,000	32	31	39	7
Volleyball Courts, Outdoor	1 per 60,000	0	4	5	5

As the county looks at needs over the next ten years, there is a need to balance development of passive parks along with active parks and additional indoor programming spaces. As the county develops new parks with a variety of amenities, shortages in each area will be addressed. Additionally, there is opportunity to add some of these amenities to existing parks. The top need identified through public comments and data analysis is more access to multipurpose trails. See the section in this chapter on greenways for more information and recommendations on trails and greenways.

The amount of land purchased recently under the Parks Bond is a positive for the county. See Figure 3.5 for a list of the undeveloped parcels controlled by the County available for development as a park. The county currently exceeds the desired community level of service for parkland. In addition, when combined with municipal and privately operated parks, the surplus is greater. The county currently has excess parkland, but as the population continues to grow, the county will need to continue to review these needs. With the population increase, the planning team expects a slight deficit by the year 2028 unless existing parcels are developed and opened as parks.

Figure 3.5 Undeveloped Park Properties Owned by Cherokee County				
Parcel Name	Address	City	ZIP	Acres
Rebecca Ray Park	1655 Creighton Road	Ball Ground	30107	15
Thacker Property	Allison Lane	Ball Ground	30107	141
Yellow Creek Road Property	Yellow Creek Road	Ball Ground	30107	538
Park Village	Fate Conn Road	Canton	30115	25
John Ford Property	Rampley Trail	Canton	30115	62
Forestar Property	Rampley Trail	Canton	30115	186
Willoughby-Sewell Property	Ficklen Church Way	Canton	30115	227
Hudgens Property	Highway 140	Waleska	30183	405
Priest Road Property	6001 Priest Road	Acworth	30102	11
Rubes Creek Park	Timberland Street	Woodstock	30188	36
Dunn Property	2565 Highway 92	Acworth	30102	39
Thompson Property	3321 Kellogg Creek Road	Acworth	30102	43
Total				1,728

A preliminary analysis of the land reveals that several of the parcels are suitable for park development and are located in areas of the county where parks are needed. Development patterns vary greatly across the county. The southern portion of the county has the highest levels of both residential and commercial development. Woodstock and Canton have the greatest diversity of commercial development and acres of multi-family housing. Holly Springs and the Hickory Flat community are experiencing high levels of residential development at this time. North of Canton, population densities drop rapidly as much of this area is mountainous forestlands.

Park development patterns have mirrored development patterns with the majority of county parks being located near Woodstock and Canton. The one major park north of Canton is Garland Mountain Horse & Hiking Trails. However, the use of this park is specific to equestrian trail riders and hikers. Cherokee Veterans Park, which opened in 2017, has increased service to the northeast portion of the county including communities such as Ball Ground, Free Home and Macedonia.

Map 3.1 shows existing county parks and recreation facilities, city parks as well as other recreation facilities including the YMCA, non-for-profit providers and the US Army Corps of Engineers day use sites and boat ramps. Map 3.2 shows all these existing parks and recreation facilities plus the undeveloped county-controlled properties. Map 3.3 adds services areas for neighborhood, community and regional parks to provide a reference to potential gaps in service throughout the county.

Gap Analysis

A gap analysis is an assessment of the service areas related to parks and its amenities to determine if there are areas of a community that are underserved. It identifies gaps in the overall service standard for each park category. The service area analysis begins by classifying existing parks using the NRPA park classifications (See Figure 3.1: Park Classifications with Service Criteria). All existing parks were classified based on use patterns as well as size and NRPA standards. Service areas for each category are provided on Map 3.3.

Cherokee County residents have access to forty-five (45) county and city parks recreation facilities. They are also served by five (5) US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) recreation facilities as well as the YMCA and not-for-profit

providers. In terms of parkland, there is an abundance of passive parkland to serve the residents; however, the supply of developed recreation facilities creates challenges with respect to expanding programs.

The overall geographic distribution of the parks in relation to where the population is located is good. There are pockets in the southwestern and southeastern sections of the county that are underserved. The county has undeveloped parcels of property in the southwestern part of the county that, if developed, would greatly improve access to parkland in this densely populated area. The Priest Road property has limited potential for development as a small neighborhood park or as a site for a small community center.

North of Highway 20 and northwest of I-575, there are vast areas of the county that do not have access to parks within five miles of their home. These residents have to travel further reach most of the developed park facilities in the county. Conversely, the population densities are currently so low it is difficult to justify developing many parks in these areas until development patterns change. The county does own properties north of Highway 20 that do have good development potential.

The Thacker property is a great property for the development of Community Park with a variety of active and passive components. The Yellow River property is a good spot for the development of a new river access point, campground and trails. The Hudgens property that abuts Garland Mountain Horse & Hiking Trails provides opportunity to develop additional trails, as well as primitive camping facilities. Development of these properties will provide better access to parks for residents in the northern section of the county as well as improved access to passive parks and nature-based activities. See Map 3.5 to see the impacts on service areas that would occur with the development of the aforementioned park properties.

After the development of the proposed parks, the areas that remain most underserved in terms of county parkland are the east and southeast sections of the county. While Cherokee County does not currently own a potential park site in the southeastern section of the county, the City of Holly Springs does have undeveloped park property in the Hickory Flat area. Other ways to improve access to parks and amenities in the southeastern section of the county will be developing greenways along the Little River and its tributaries, further developing portions of J.J. Biello Park in accordance with the master plan for this park, and renovating the newly-leased Old Hickory Flat Gym into a community center.

Throughout the community meetings held as part of this study, the citizens voiced a strong desire for additional parks and linear parks or greenways that link parks together. The community survey also showed strong support for these facilities as well. Over the next ten years, the county will need to add active and passive park facilities, greenways and blueways to meet the recreation needs of the county as growth continues. The need for both indoor and outdoor facilities has been identified. Connecting these facilities with greenways is clearly a priority for citizens.

Greenways

The development of greenways will greatly improve recreation opportunities in the county. The recently completed *Cherokee County Comprehensive Transportation Plan* included a section that focused on greenways and bike & pedestrian routes to improve connectivity throughout the county. That addendum (Appendix C: Trails Addendum from Cherokee County Comprehensive Transportation Plan) is attached and referenced in this plan. This planning effort contained a great deal of community engagement on where pedestrian and bicycle facilities should be developed. A stakeholder committee was formed and projects were prioritized in the plan. The stakeholder committee developed a list of objectives for trail development, assessing the degree to which a given trails project:

- Constructs or extends an existing trail;
- Serves a popular destination that is not currently accessible by trail;
- Provides an interface into an adjacent county's trail system;
- Develops a connection to an existing trail or bicycle-pedestrian route; and/or
- Anticipates a connection to a proposed trail or bicycle-pedestrian route.

Using these objectives, the stakeholders identified developing connections between Olde Rope Mill Park and J.J. Biello Parks, historic downtown Woodstock, Noonday Creek trails and along Noonday Creek to connect to Cobb County trails as short term high priority projects.

The planning team agrees with these recommendations as similar comments were heard during the public engagement process for this plan. In addition, other areas are recommended as high priority projects. The planning team suggests that trails be developed along the Little River to provide recreation opportunities to residents in the southeastern section of the county. Similarly, a trail along the Etowah River corridor linking county parks with the City of Canton parks will provide access to recreation opportunities along the river and could link to long-range regional plans for a trail similar to the Silver Comet trail in Polk, Paulding and Cobb counties.

Residents who attended the public input meetings are interested in trails along the river, even if they are not paved trails. They just want trails that allow them greater access to the river and provide connectivity opportunities from their neighborhoods.

The City of Woodstock, working with the non-profit group, Greenprints Alliance, has developed a trails plan for the city that calls for over sixty miles of trails throughout the city. The City of Canton has begun to develop multi-use trails connecting several of their parks along the Etowah River.

While each city is unique, the planning team feels the county should strive to link these systems of trails where possible to create the greatest possible level of connectivity. As the county continues to grow, the connection of other locations such as neighborhoods, schools and parks throughout the county will increase access to parks and provide greater recreation opportunities. The development of a countywide greenway plan that incorporates and links trails within cities with other priority locations should be a priority. See Map 3.6 for the existing and proposed Greenways.

Blueways

Blueways, or river trails, is another way to expand recreation opportunities in the county. The Etowah River and, to a lesser extent, the Little River, offer paddling opportunities. The main obstacle to paddling on these rivers now is the lack of safe public access points. New access ramps are recommended along the Etowah River at intervals of five to nine miles. See Figure 3.6: Existing and Possible Etowah River Launch Sites. These ramps, along with the existing ramps at Etowah River Park in Canton, Fields Landing and Knox Bridge, offer paddlers a variety of paddling options and trip lengths.

Figure 3.6: Existing and Possible Etowah River Launch Sites

Launch or Parcel Name	River Mileage	Distance from Previous (miles)	Jurisdiction/Owner	Notes	Status
<i>Eagles Beak</i>	55.3	---	<i>Forsyth County</i>	<i>Open</i>	●
Yellow Creek Road	61	5.7	Cherokee County	Property Acquired	
Hwy 372	66	5	GA Fish & Wildlife	Under Design	
Gober Beach	71.8	5.8	Private Property	East Cherokee Drive	
Thacker Property	75.5	3.7	Cherokee County	Property Acquired	
<i>Etowah River Park</i>	85	9.5	<i>City of Canton</i>	<i>Open</i>	●
Boling Park	87.5	2.5	City of Canton		
<i>Knox Bridge</i>	95.7	8.2	<i>USACE</i>	<i>Open</i>	●
<i>Fields Landing Park</i>	97.4	1.7	<i>Cherokee County</i>	<i>Open</i>	●

In addition to these ramps on the Etowah, access to Little River can be increased by upgrading the existing access point at Rope Mill Park (City of Woodstock) and adding an access ramp at J.J. Biello Park. It is 2.5 miles from J.J. Biello Park to Old Rope Mill Park and another 5 miles from Old Rope Mill Park to the Cherokee Mills boat ramp that could serve as a takeout point. This short blueway could be functional with some capital investment. The ramps at J.J. Biello Park and Old Rope Mill Park would require updates of the current plans and the approval of the USACE.

Support facilities for picnicking and other activities should be provided along with adequate parking areas at all access points. Signage should be provided at all access ramps showing travel distance and anticipated travel time between access ramps. Other existing ramps that could be connected to these new ramps should also be shown in order to give users an opportunity to decide trip options. See Map 3.6 for the proposed Blueways and access points.

Existing Park Conditions, Assessments & Recommendations

Although specific needs vary between parks, issues found to be consistent throughout the Cherokee County park system were revealed through evaluations on each of the county's park sites. The parks in the system require various levels of maintenance and upgrades. Items noted in good shape or recently renovated, upgraded, etc. may only require minor ongoing maintenance. Items noted in fair shape are generally older but are still serviceable and usually have a few more maintenance issues requiring attention such as replacement of parts, repainting, etc. Items noted in poor shape are unsafe and/or rapidly deteriorating and require significant replacement of major components, not just maintenance of a few items. Many of the issues below are commonly found in most parks around the country. Some of the issues that are common to all parks include facility design standards, signage and promotional materials standards, accessibility issues, and playground safety standards.

Facility Design Standards

When designing improvements and developing future parks, Cherokee County parks will benefit from an overall unified look that can be achieved through the use of standard signage, site furnishings, and architecture materials. A standard signage and site furnishings palette will create a consistent look and ease maintenance coordination. A unified site furnishings package, including commercial-grade trash receptacles, tables and benches, standardized fencing materials, water fountains, street and security light fixtures, internal park signage and other common site equipment, should be established. The basis for creating a strong park facility image is the utilization of design guidelines and standards that allow a visitor to identify a park immediately by the elements that are present there. Development of a set of facility design standards is highly recommended.

Park renovation projects that have been recently completed have started to address facility design standards. Over recent years, this design team has developed renovation plans for several projects where consistent use of materials has been implemented. The result of these efforts has provided a starting point for the parks system to continue to consolidate and streamline the use of materials and should be continued as new facilities are developed and existing parks are renovated.

Signage & Promotional Materials Standards

A signage program is needed throughout the park system to identify different facilities within the parks, direct users within larger parks and provide other valuable information in a consistent style. Regulatory signs, rules signs, etc. have been placed over many years as the parks have developed. A signage program should evaluate the existing signs and address content, placement, as well as resolve any potentially conflicting information.

Directional signage, entry/identification signage and signs within parks are critical elements. Directional signs locating parks should be placed along major thoroughfares to alert potential users to the presence of a park in the vicinity. Park sign programs can be implemented into an existing community-wide wayfinding program or as an independent program.

Similar to the facility design standards, recent renovation projects have begun the process of implementing standard signage packages to be implemented at each project. Although these packages have not been formally adopted by the agency, they could serve as a starting point for other park projects. It is recommended that standard signage types for park entry/identification signs (large and small), directional and informational signs, and interpretive and regulatory signs be developed. Providing a standard style of signage for every type of sign in the park will help strengthen the identity of the agency's park system.

Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Accessibility Issues

The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability and requires compliance by all Title II (Public) and Title III (Public Accommodations and Commercial) entities. The 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design include all recreation facilities and their amenities, including bathrooms, picnic tables, bleachers, dugouts, and swimming pools. The new standards offer more governance and specifics than the previous standards, but still leave some room for interpretation for some park facilities; however, they are specific in their requirements for all playgrounds, hard courts, pathways, spectator areas, fishing piers, water play features, restrooms and programming spaces to be accessible. The guidelines provide specifics on maximum vertical and horizontal slopes that can be used along access routes if they are to be compliant.

It is important that a more detailed analysis be conducted of each park in order to formulate a transition plan to address these issues. The transition plan should look at how updates in the parks will impact programming in each park. Updates that maximize program access should be high priority items and those that have less impact given

a lower priority. Recent renovation projects have begun to address ADA issues in many of the parks. The county should continue these efforts as additional renovations and improvements occur over time. The goal should be to illuminate all access and ADA issues and provide all residents good access to programs and facilities.

Playground Safety Standards

Another prominent issue within some park systems is the non-compliance of playground equipment with safety standards by organizations such as U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and the International Play Equipment Manufacturers' Association (IPEMA). The standards proposed by these organizations are meant to serve as a guideline to help create atmospheres that are safe and pose a minimal threat of injury. Studies show that the majority of injuries sustained on public playgrounds are to the head-a result of falls from the play structure to the ground. For this reason, consideration has been given as to what the critical fall height would be in which a fatal head injury might occur.

Cherokee County has made great strides in recent years to keep up with playground safety standards. The Agency has a two full-time staff members who have an active Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) certification and makes regular inspections of play equipment to limit the liability by ensuring playgrounds are kept in compliance. Additionally, the County continues to redress the engineered mulch systems at many of the playgrounds. While these are great improvements since the previous plan, many of the park playgrounds still require additional surfacing.

As playgrounds are added to the system and older equipment is updated, the planning team recommends using unitary safety surfacing where possible. While it has a high initial cost, it has a lower maintenance cost and eliminates the need for annual material costs required with a wood chip surface.

Individual Park & Facility Assessments & Recommendations

Following are assessments of the individual parks and recreation facilities owned or leased by Cherokee County. Information regarding the size, location and amenities within each park and facility is listed. Planning team members analyzed facilities for their age, functionality and conditions, and provided the following recommendations accordingly.

Badger Creek Park

Location: 464 Blalock Road, Woodstock, GA 30188

Size: 151 acres

Classification: Special Use - Sports Complex

Amenities:

- 14 Soccer Fields of Various Sizes
- 1 Restroom/Concession Building
- 2 Restroom Buildings
- Paved Off-Street Parking



Review:

Badger Creek Park is the primary facility used by the Cherokee Soccer Association. The soccer association maintains the facility under an agreement with the county. The facility is built on a former inert landfill site which has impacted its development and ability to provide an effective arrangement to minimize maintenance efforts and overall tournament-level facilities.

Field sizes vary to accommodate the age groups that utilize this facility. All fields are irrigated and some have low mast sports lighting on wood posts. The turf on the fields and the overall common areas is in relatively poor condition with bare spots and weeds. Slope treatments between the field terraces are maintained turf, resulting in additional bare spots and rills on the slopes.

Perimeter fencing and backstop netting on the fields is in good condition and functional. ADA accessibility is provided from the parking areas to each field, though paved access is not provided to team areas. Parking lots are paved with asphalt and provide the necessary striping and access to comply with ADA. Parking lots do not have lighting. The buildings on site are in good condition and provide the correct ADA considerations.

Recommendations:

- Consider implementation of artificial turf development on key fields for increased playability. At least one (1) artificial turf field for each age group is recommended.
- Stabilize slopes with low-maintenance plantings such as Love Grass to improve performance and overall appearance and reduce maintenance by not mowing these areas.
- Provide paved access routes to team areas on each field where feasible.
- Consider providing lighting for parking lots.

Consider providing high-mast sports lighting with concrete posts for more efficient and uniform lighting on the fields. Designers will have to consider the underlying suitability of the subsurface to determine specific design requirements and overall feasibility.

Barnett Park

Location: 10795 Bells Ferry Road, Canton, GA 30114
Size: 25 acres
Classification: Community Park



Amenities:

- 3 Baseball/Softball Diamonds
- 4 Batting Cages
- 1 Playground
- Picnic tables
- 1 Restroom/Concession Building
- 1 Restroom Building
- Trail (Paved and Soft Surface)
- Paved Off-Street Parking

Review:

Barnett Park was recently renovated in 2013 with much of the recent improvements addressing ADA deficiencies and overall aesthetics. All ballfields are in fair condition and have sports lighting as well as irrigation. ADA access to these fields is good, though it should be noted that due to site constraints, the recent renovations were not able to provide full access to the rear fields, though a paved route is provided from parking.

The front concession/restroom building is in fair condition and is ADA compliant. The rear restroom building is new and has good ADA accessibility. The playground contains a 2-5 yr. and 5-12 yr. structure, as well as swings and other freestanding structures. All structures are in good condition. ADA accessibility to the playground is good.

Parking for the facility is paved with asphalt and has some lighting for nighttime access. Overall ADA accessibility is good. The trail loop is a combination of paved surfacing and gravel with some wooden pedestrian bridges crossing water features on the rear of the property. The full loop is not to ADA standards and requires users to complete the loop by using the parking lot drive.

Recommendations:

- Provide full paved ADA trail loop. Consider providing designated ADA connection parallel to existing parking lot using boardwalk or other methods along slope.
- Assess existing parking lot lighting for night play and provide additional poles as necessary.
- Provide paved ADA access to picnic tables and other site furnishings.

Alternatively, as other baseball/softball diamonds are developed, the county may consider removing the rear fields in favor of more passive recreation considering the limited access and proximity to wetlands.

Blankets Creek Bike Trails

Location: 2125 Sixes Road, Canton, GA 30114
Size: 363.5 acres
Classification: Special Use – Mountain Bike Trails

Amenities:

- 15 Miles of Mountain Bike Trails (varying skill levels)
- 1 Restroom Building
- 2 Pavilions
- 1 Maintenance Building
- Picnic Areas
- Bike Service Station
- Gravel Off-Street Parking with Paved Drive Aisles



Review:

The majority of this property is leased from the USACE and is jointly maintained by CRPA and SORBA. The trail system includes over 15 miles of soft surface trails and bridges to accommodate varying skill levels for mountain bikers and hikers. Trails are occasionally closed due to weather conditions, but are otherwise well maintained by SORBA. Trails are accessed through a kiosk area with a donation honor box and picnic tables.

A gravel lot with paved aisles and paved handicapped parking spaces provides parking. Parking areas are not lighted. Overall ADA access is good from the parking area to the other facilities with the exception of one of the pavilions. Other passive picnic areas are also located just off the parking lot. A bike maintenance station is also provided immediately off the parking area.

The restroom building is four individual "family" style restrooms. The building's condition is good and has proper ADA design. Both pavilions are in excellent condition. The maintenance yard features a large building that is shared by the County and SORBA.

Recommendations:

- Provide additional paved access to the second pavilion to improve ADA access.
- Provide paved access to passive picnic facilities.

Consider providing phased expansion of the paved parking areas to improve overall facility access. Changes to the parking lot will require an updated master plan through the USACE.

Buffington Park & Gym

Location: 4600 Cumming Highway, Canton, GA 30114
Size: 5 acres
Classification: Neighborhood Park

Amenities:

- 1 Baseball Diamond
- 1 Restroom Building
- 1 Pavilion
- 1 Basketball Court
- 2 Batting Cages
- 2 Tennis Courts (inactive)
- 1 Gymnasium
- Gravel Off-Street Parking



Review:

This facility is in generally poor condition and should be reassessed for master planning and overall renovations. The primary access road is steep and narrow and does not provide adequate site lines for vehicular circulation. The degraded paved road terminates in a gravel parking area that requires resurfacing and improved perimeter vehicular controls.

The former tennis courts are not in use and would require significant renovation including new equipment, pavement and fencing, in addition to ADA access. The existing basketball court needs resurfacing, new striping and goals, as well as ADA access. A picnic pavilion is located in the open space and will be serviceable with some renovations including new roof, paint, site furnishings and ADA access. The existing restroom building is not currently in service and generally lacks both interior and exterior ADA design requirements. The baseball field is in fair condition, though renovations are required to spectator areas and infield drainage. Sports lighting is not provided as this field is primarily used as a practice facility.

The Buffington Elementary Gym is currently subleased by an independent operator. Some recent renovations have been provided; however, the gym requires a significant capital investment to address ongoing maintenance needs. Overall ADA access continues to be an issue as well as general upkeep of the building's interior and exterior. The gym features a single indoor court with four retractable goals and built-in bleachers. Other spaces in the building include a concession area, restrooms, storage rooms and offices. The building has heating and ventilation, and air conditioning is provided in the office space.

Most of the property is leased from the Cherokee County School District. The park in its current configuration is dependent on school property for all of the parking as well as the tennis courts, basketball court and pavilion. The park needs a complete renovation and without parking on the property and no control over how the school system uses the property it is hard to justify further investments with Cherokee Veterans Park just a few miles away.

Recommendations:

- Explore the long-term best use for this property before investing further funds into the property.

Cherokee County Aquatic Center

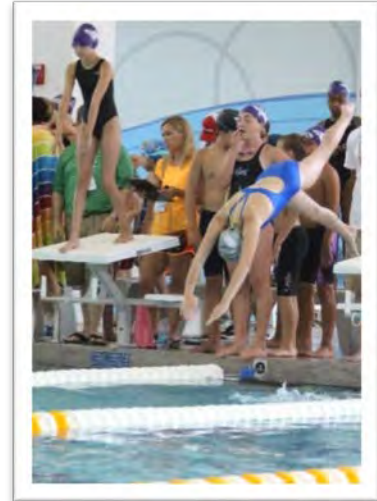
Location: 1200 Gresham Mill Parkway, Holly Springs, GA 30114

Size: 37 acres

Classification: Special Use - Aquatics Center

Amenities:

- Indoor Competition Pool
- Indoor Therapy Pool
- Outdoor Family Aquatics, includes Slides, Zero-Depth Entry Pool and Splash Area, Lazy River, (2) Pavilions
- Restrooms/showers
- Multi-Purpose Rooms
- Staff Offices
- Concessions
- Paved Off-Street Parking



Review:

Recently completed in 2013, this facility offers a full spectrum of leisure and competition aquatic facilities. All of the facilities are in good condition and the overall site is well maintained.

Recommendations:

- Continue with ongoing maintenance operations and provide a capital development campaign to address future renovations and capital repairs that may be required, particularly nearing the end of the timeline for this system master plan.
- Consider converting natatorium lights to LED for energy conservation.
- Provide additional temporary and permanent signage as necessary to identify the facility's location from major thoroughfares.

Cherokee Mills Park

Location: 6900 Bells Ferry Road, Woodstock, GA 30189

Size: 39.5 acres

Classification: Special Use - Boat Ramp



Amenities:

- 3-Lane Boat Ramp
- Courtesy Dock
- 1 Restroom Building
- Paved Off-Street Parking

Review:

Cherokee Mills Park is leased from the USACE and is used as a seasonal boat ramp to access Allatoona Lake. The facility is accessed through a ticketing station that is staffed on weekends during the high season. During the off-season, users pay fees at an honor box located near the ramps. A large paved lot is provided for truck and trailer parking and circulation. A single ADA parking space is provided but does not have a direct connection to the ramps or the courtesy dock.

The ramps are in good condition but there are no courtesy lights provided for early/late departures/arrivals. The courtesy dock is in fair condition but does not provide ADA access.

The restroom building, constructed by the USACE many years ago, is not operable. It is located on a ridge along the road and is not ADA accessible. Site considerations have limited the restroom building location to this area and cannot change unless sewer service and a lift station are provided. Portable restroom facilities are provided at parking lot level.

A local rowing club has expressed an interest about using this park as a base of operation for the club. See the attached master plan for redevelopment of this park that has been approved by the USACE. This master plan includes replacing the existing restroom.

Recommendations:

- Implement approved master plan.
- Upgrade ticket station for maintenance and aesthetics.
- Provide courtesy lights at boat ramp and dock.
- Improve ADA circulation including dock replacement.
- Review options to improve restroom facilities for the site.
- Continue discussions with rowing club.



OVERALL SITE FOR CHEROKEE MILLS MASTER PLAN

PREPARED BY:
RMA
 Findt-McDuff Associates, Inc.
 324 Cherokee Street - Marietta, GA 30060
 Phone No. 770-427-8800
 Fax No. 770-427-8800

- IMPROVEMENT SCHEDULE**
- TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS (FED 06)
 - TRAILHEAD PARKING
 - PLAYGROUND, PAVILIONS, RESTROOMS
 - TRIALSIDE DOCKETS
 - BOAT RAMP IMPROVEMENTS (FED 07)
 - ACCESS ROAD
 - PARKING AREA
 - RESTROOM/PIA BOOTH/PICNIC TABLES
 - BOAT RAMP IMPROVEMENTS (2006-2011)
 - TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS (2006-2011)
 - ACCESS ROAD TO EXISTING
 - CHEROKEE MILLS PARKING

- LEGEND**
- WOODED AREA
 - LAKE AT NORMAL POOL ELEV 894.7'
 - LAKE AT POOL ELEV 891.7'
 - NEW ASPHALT PAVING
 - PHASE II ROAD IMPROVEMENTS (20' RISE PERFORMED BY CHEROKEE COUNTY ROAD DEPARTMENT FOR WINDWARD TROUSERS)
 - EXISTING ASPHALT PAVING
 - GRAVEL
 - NEW TRAILS
 - CONCRETE WALKS
 - WATER SERVICE
 - ELECTRICAL SERVICE
 - STREET LIGHT
 - TRIALSIDE PENCHES

PARKING ADDITIONS

- NEW BOAT SPACES = 30 SPACES NET
- NEW CAR SPACES = 36 SPACES (TRAILHEAD)
- TEMPORARY PARKING SPACES = 8 SPACES



Cherokee Veterans Park

Location: 7345 Cumming Highway, Canton, GA 30115

Size: 149 Acres

Classification: Regional Park

Amenities:

- 1 Artificial Turf Athletic Field
- 2 Natural Grass Athletic Fields
- 2 Tennis Courts
- 2 Pickleball Courts
- Playground
- Skate Park
- 1/3 Mile Paved Walking Path Near Playground
- 1 1/3 Mile Paved Walking Path Around Park
- Large Open Meadow
- Concessions
- Restrooms



Review:

Cherokee Veterans Park is the newest park in the Cherokee County system. The first phase opened in August 2017 and includes the amenities listed above. The park is excellent condition.

See attached for the complete master plan that includes areas for expanded and new components. These include additional tennis & pickleball courts, expanded bicycle & skate park area, large community pavilion, playground expansion, four-field baseball/softball complex, veterans' monument, small pavilions, soft trails, and a recreation center.

Recommendations:

- Continue to develop future phases of the park including:
 - Recreation Center;
 - Large and small pavilions;
 - Expanded Playground;
 - Nature Trails;
 - Additional Tennis and Pickleball Courts;
 - Bicycle Playground or BMX area; and
 - Softball / Baseball Complex.

Cline Park

Location: 704 Bartow Street, Waleska, GA 30183

Size: 12.2 acres

Classification: Neighborhood Park

Amenities:

- Playground
- 2 Restroom Buildings
- 1 Pavilion
- 2 Tennis Courts
- 1 Basketball Court
- 1 Splash Pad
- 1/3 Mile Trail Loop
- Paved Off-Street Parking



Review:

A paved parking lot that includes lighting and handicapped parking spaces serves Cline Park. While ADA access is good, an additional handicapped parking space located closer to the splash pad should be considered. The park's tennis courts are lit and in fair condition. Resurfacing to address the cracks that are developing and new tennis equipment will be needed during the timeframe of this plan.

At the center of the park is a cluster that includes a playground, restroom building and pavilion. The playground includes a structure for 5-12 year olds as well as freestanding equipment. Improved ADA access to the playground is needed. The picnic pavilion is in fair condition, but will require new paint and roofing within the next few years. A prefabricated restroom building is provided at the rear of this cluster along with a site drinking fountain. Both are in good condition.

The park's splash pad is in good condition and includes both ground and overhead play features. The splash pad and pavilion are heavily used during the summer. ADA access is available from the parking area and includes a connection to a second restroom building. A basketball court is located adjacent to the splash pad. The court is in poor condition due to poor drainage and will require replacement. A soft surface trail loop is provided at the rear of the park.

Recommendations:

- Repair cracks and resurface tennis courts.
- Renovate pavilion.
- Improve ADA access to the playground and the splash pad, as well as the basketball court.
- Add a second pavilion near the splash pad to account for heavy use during summer months.
- Renovate the basketball court.

Dwight Terry Park

Location: 13395 East Cherokee Drive, Ball Ground, GA 30107

Size: 30 acres

Classification: Community Park

Amenities:

- 2 Baseball/Softball Diamonds
- 1 Restroom/Concession Building
- 2 Batting Cages
- 1 Playground
- ½ Mile Trail Loop
- Paved Off-Street Parking



Review:

Dwight Terry Park was recently renovated in 2013 to address ADA concerns and general field conditions. Both baseball fields are irrigated and lighted and are in generally good condition. The central concession/restroom building was also included in the recent renovations and is in good condition. Adjacent to the concession building is a centralized playground with a play structure for 5-12 year olds that is in good condition. An ADA access ramp into the playground is needed.

Elsewhere on the site, the off-street parking is fully paved and has good ADA access to the facility from the lower lot. Additional work is needed to capture and convey storm water coming from the parking lot away from the area around the playground.

The paved walking trail loop goes around the facility's perimeter. The trail is not capable of meeting ADA standards in its current alignment due to slope transitions.

Recommendations:

- Upgrade existing athletic field lighting.
- Address storm water runoff from the parking lot.
- Improve playground area.
- Provide weeping Love Grass plantings on the slope adjacent to the parking lot.
- Consider feasibility of expanding the trail loop to provide an additional run as well as a designated ADA trail loop.

Fields Landing Park

Location: 600 Fields Landing Drive, Canton, GA 30114
Size: 280 acres
Classification: Community Park

Amenities:

- 1 Large Pavilion
- 6 Small Pavilions
- 1 Gazebo
- 1 Playground
- Boat Ramp with Courtesy Dock
- Fishing Pier
- Small Picnic Areas
- 2 Horseshoe Pits
- Paved Off-Street Parking



Review:

Field's Landing Park is leased from the USACE and provides boat access at the headwaters of Allatoona Lake. The boat ramp is a single lane accessible from a paved parking lot with truck and trailer parking. The ramp also has a courtesy light and courtesy dock though the dock does not provide ADA access for handicapped boaters. Parking is very limited when the pavilion is in use and many boaters are on the lake.

Near the boat launch is a small cluster that includes a larger rental pavilion, a playground, horseshoe pits and a portable restroom shelter. The pavilion is in good condition, but will likely need a new roof during the timeframe of this plan. The adjacent water fountains at the pavilion are not in service.

The playground features a small structure that is in good condition but needs improved ADA access. The portable toilet shelter is in fair condition. Most of the park's water frontage is composed of stand-alone picnic areas and picnic shelters. The condition of the shelters varies but is fair. Many of the site furnishings do not match and several require replacement. Another horseshoe pit is located in this area as well as another non-functioning drinking fountain. The fishing pier is in good condition and is ADA accessible; however, there is no dedicated handicapped parking from the parking lot to the pier. The remainder of the park site is wooded and many park users take unmaintained trails along the shore to access additional fishing areas away from the core of the park.

Attached is a master plan for improvements to the park approved by the USACE that would expand amenities and add parking.

Recommendations:

- Implement the approved master plan.
- Repaint and reroof existing shelters as necessary.
- Address ADA deficiencies at the playground.
- Evaluate drinking fountains for repair or removal.
- Address general ADA access throughout site to include pavilions, boat dock and fishing pier.



FIELDS LANDING MASTERPLAN

SHEET 1 OF 2

- LEGEND**
- WOODED AREA
 - = PROBABLE WETLANDS AREAS
 - = LAKE AT NORMAL POOL ELEV 840'
 - = LAKE AT OFF SEASON POOL ELEV 832'
 - = NEW ASPHALT PAVING
 - = EXISTING ASPHALT PAVING
 - = NEW TRAILS
 - = PAVILION W/TABLE
 - = TRAILSIDE BENCHES



- WATERMENTION SCHEDULE**
- EXISTING PARK IMPROVEMENTS (PER 06)
 - NEW BOAT RAMP
 - NEW PARKING AREA
 - GROUNDLINE STABILIZATION
 - RESTROOM
 - TRAILSIDE PARKING
 - TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS (PER 07)
 - TRAILSIDE BENCHES
 - TRAILSIDE PLATFORMS
 - TRAILSIDE PAVERS
 - BENCHES/PAVILIONS

LEASE AREA
 EXISTING LEASED AREA = 1075 ACRES
 PROPOSED LEASE AREA = 2104 ACRES
 TOTAL COMBINED LEASE AREA = 3179 ACRES
 (EXPIRES 10/15)



PREPARED BY:
RMA
 Rindt-McDuff Associates, Inc.
 330 Cherokee Street - Marietta, GA 30060
 Phone: 770.427.9000
 Fax: 770.427.9800

CONTRACT NO. 10/15/00
 DATE: 10/15/00
 PROJECT: FIELDS LANDING MASTERPLAN
 SHEET 1 OF 2

Garland Mountain Horse & Hiking Trails

Location: 1411 Garland Mountain Way, Waleska, GA 30183

Size: 544 acres

Classification: Special Use – Horse & Hiking Trails

Amenities:

- 1 Restroom Building
- 1 Pavilion
- Horse Care Station
- ADA Access Platform
- 12 miles Equestrian Trails
- Gravel Parking Area



Review:

At the front of the park is a gravel area that is sized to provide adequate circulations for a large number of trucks with horse trailers. The modular restroom building located off the parking lot has several paved handicapped parking spaces next to it, though the parking striping is inadequate.

The amenity area includes a wooden picnic pavilion that is in good condition, as well as horse grooming stations and horse mounting stations. ADA access is not provided to either of these amenities and there are no paved ADA connections back to the handicapped parking area.

Several kiosk stations are provided at the trailhead located adjacent to the parking area. These kiosks provide all the necessary information regarding trail conditions and routing. Overall, the trail system is comprised of a network of soft surface trails that are utilized by horse riders and hikers only.

The county received a donation of an additional 405 acres adjacent to this park. This additional property provides the opportunity to create a new entrance to the park as well as additional amenities and more trails. The topography of this property makes it suitable mostly for development as passive recreation use such as trails and camping.

Recommendations:

- Provide additional paved ADA access from handicapped parking area to the pavilion and the trailhead/amenity area, and provide the necessary striping and signage.
- Develop master plan for newly added property to include passive recreation uses such as camping and additional trails.

Hickory Trails Park

Location: 3860 Hickory Road, Canton, GA 30115

Size: 24 acres

Classification: Neighborhood Park



Amenities:

- 1 Restroom Building
- 1 Gazebo
- 2 Small Pavilions
- 1 mile Pedestrian Trails
- Gravel Parking Area

Review:

Hickory Trails Park is a passive nature park with gravel and soft surface trails that explore the area woods. The layout of the park makes it difficult to provide ADA access from the parking area to the trails or the structures on site. The gravel parking lot includes a modular restroom building that has adjacent handicapped parking. This parking is not adequately striped or signed and does not provide a paved connection to the pedestrian bridge crossing.

Several stand-alone picnic tables and benches are provided across the site and along the trail loop at the top of the hill. The gazebo is in good condition but the small picnic shelters will require new roofing and paint, in addition to paved concrete pads for the picnic tables. The nature trail is soft surface and creates a loop from the parking lot to the hilltop in the center of the park.

The City of Holly Springs has acquired approximately 60 acres across Hickory Road for a future park. The county should work with the city to maximize recreation resources in this growing part of the county.

Recommendations:

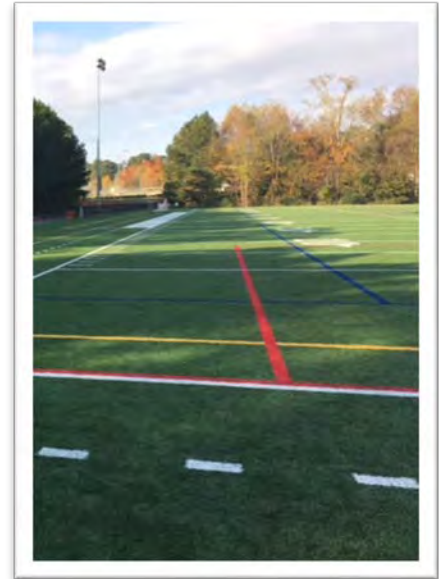
- The county should work with the City of Holly Springs to coordinate the improvements to this park alongside the development of the new city park in order to avoid duplication of services in the area.
- Resolve ADA compliance issues to provide access to the hilltop area and its structures. This will require adequate striping, signage and paved sidewalks to route to the hilltop area.
- Renovate the small pavilions and provide all new site furnishings.
- Expand the nature trail as necessary to make trail ADA accessible using a compacted granular surface.
- Pave the existing parking lot.
- Consider additional passive park uses that are lacking in the area such as dog parks, etc.

Hobgood Park

Location: 6688 Bells Ferry Road, Woodstock, GA 30189
Size: 60 acres
Classification: Regional Park

Amenities:

- 1 Multi-Purpose Field (Artificial Turf)
- 10 Baseball/Softball Diamonds
- 6 Batting Cages
- 2 Concession/Restroom Buildings
- 1 Event Lawn
- 1 Maintenance Facility
- ½ Mile Paved Trail Loop
- 4 Small Pavilions
- 1 Large Pavilion
- 1 Playground
- 3 Restroom Buildings
- 4 Tennis Courts
- 2 Horseshoe Pits
- Paved and Gravel Parking



Review:

The newly renovated softball complex is in good condition. The fields are well maintained and heavily used. Planners noted that ADA drain grates are missing in the plaza drains. Roofs on the dugouts are showing some wear and lights are missing from the pavilion near the restroom buildings. The perimeter walking track is in good condition. The paved parking lot serving the softball complex is in good condition and has adequate ADA access into the facilities it serves, including the playground area and the hilltop pavilions. A playground is located at the front of the park and includes two separate play structures for 2-5 year olds and 5-12 year olds. Overall ADA access is good at this location.

The four-court tennis complex at the park was recently renovated to repair damage to the court surfacing, install new sports lighting and overall ADA improvements. Overall, the courts are in good condition, as well as the pavilion and the restroom building. Other recent renovations at the park include the six-field baseball complex. These upgrades included new dugouts and sports lighting as well as overhead netting and improved ADA access from the lower parking lot. The complex's restroom/concession building was also renovated at this time and is in fair condition. The park's multi-purpose field was recently converted to artificial turf and renovations were recently made to the parking lot and sidewalks. Handicapped parking and ADA access to the field, restroom and pavilion have been greatly improved.

Additional parking is needed for the baseball complex. In order to provide additional parking, the tennis courts next to the baseball complex need to be relocated. There is an area in the center of the park that once served as an amphitheater that is large enough to meet the needs of the tennis courts. This may allow for the expansion of the tennis complex and addition of pickleball courts.

The park's maintenance complex is located behind the softball fields and features a small workshop. The yard is enclosed by a perimeter fence to secure equipment and materials. This area serves as the maintenance hub for the southwest portion of the county. The overall condition of the yard is good, although the facility is too small to accommodate the needs of the southwest maintenance zone.

Recommendations:

- Provide pedestrian grates at all paved areas to comply with ADA requirements.
- Pave gravel portion of lower parking lot.
- Develop a Master Plan for the park that would repurpose the amphitheater area for tennis courts, provide additional parking at the baseball complex, and expand the maintenance complex to serve as the base of operations for the maintenance of the parks in the southwest portion of the county.

J.J. Biello Park

Location: Brooke Boulevard & Druw Cameron Drive, Woodstock, GA 30188
Size: 470 acres
Classification: Regional Park

Within J.J. Biello Park are various recreation facilities and park areas on the 470-acre property. The sections below provide information on each area. In addition to the facilities that are listed below, there is an existing master plan for expansion of this park already approved by the USACE. The master plan calls for both active and passive park amenities including additional softball fields, trails, and support amenities. The addition of three more softball fields would bring the total at this park to eight. This would allow the county to host even larger tournaments and bring more revenue to the agency and county businesses.

Update the master plan to study adding items such as a river access, a dog park and disc golf to expand individual based recreation opportunities in this park. The updated master plan would have to be approved by the USACE.

Cherokee Tennis Center

Location: 155 Brooke Boulevard, Woodstock, GA 30188

Amenities:

- 1 Administrative Building (Pro Shop and Restrooms)
- 10 Tennis Courts (lighted)
- Paved Parking

Review:

The Cherokee Tennis Center is a heavily used facility that is well maintained. All of the courts are in good condition and have adequate ADA access from the paved parking lot. All courts are lit with low mast fixtures. Two sets of pods are comprised of three courts, which are generally less desirable due to excessive ball interference during play. The tennis center building is in good condition and provides ADA restrooms in addition to a player's lounge, pro shop, and check-in station and staff offices. The rear of the building is a covered patio to provide shelter for visitors. The center is sub-leased to a private operator.

Recommendations:

- Resurface tennis courts as needed.



The Valley Playground & Pavilion

Location: 175 Brooke Boulevard, Woodstock, GA 30188

Amenities:

- 1 Large Pavilion
- 1 Restroom Building
- 2 Large Playgrounds
- Paved Parking



Review:

The primary feature of this facility are the two large playgrounds, separated by age group, that include ramping structures, freestanding play items and swings. Overall ADA access to the facility is good, by using a long ramp leading from the parking lot to the playground below. Planners did note that only two handicapped parking spaces are located adjacent to this facility. Both play areas share a common gathering space that is landscaped and has bench seating. Overall, the playground is in fair condition.

Adjacent to the playground is a large community pavilion with grills and ADA tables. Overall, the pavilion is in fair condition. A modular restroom building and drinking fountain are also located in this area. Pedestrian lighting is lacking to provide security for visitors accessing or leaving the facility.

Recommendations:

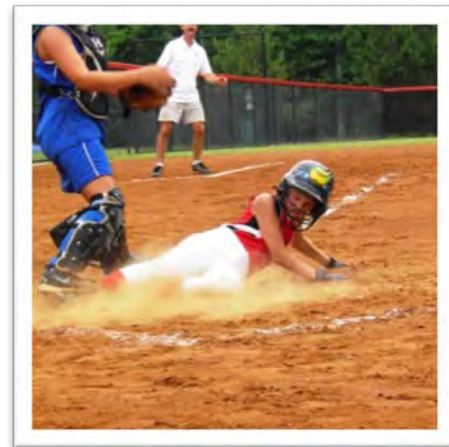
- Provide renovations to the playground as components begin to age.
- Provide maintenance and upkeep to the pavilion as it ages.
- Relocate additional striped parking closer towards the playground.
- Provide pedestrian lighting at access and egress points.

Twin Creeks Softball Complex

Location: 250 Brooke Boulevard, Woodstock, GA 30188

Amenities:

- 5 Softball Diamonds
- 6 Batting Cages
- 1 Restroom/Concession Building
- 1 Restroom/Storage Building
- Paved Parking



Review:

All fields are lighted and irrigated and are in excellent condition. Handicapped parking is available to serve all fields. Many of the common areas between the fields are mulched landscape beds filled with River Birch trees to provide shade for the picnic areas located beneath them. The primary restroom/concession building features a large covered patio area with picnic tables. Several of these tables are ADA compatible. Other rooms in the building provide for storage and umpire rooms, as well as a conference room and additional storage located on the second level. Overall, the condition of the structure is excellent. A second restroom/storage building is located between fields 4 and 5 and is in fair condition. Exterior door swings create a conflict for ADA access. The batting cages at this complex have artificial turf surfacing and portable mounds and are in excellent condition.

Recommendations:

- Address ADA deficiencies.
- Provide parking lot lighting.
- As part of master plan update, add three additional fields to the south to increase the ability to hold larger events.

Riverside Athletic Complex

Location: 610 Druw Cameron Drive, Woodstock, GA 30188

Amenities:

- 1 Restroom/Concession Building
- 1 Small Pavilion
- 1 Playground
- 6 Natural Grass Athletic Fields
- 1 mile Gravel Trail
- Maintenance Complex
- Gravel and Paved Parking



Review:

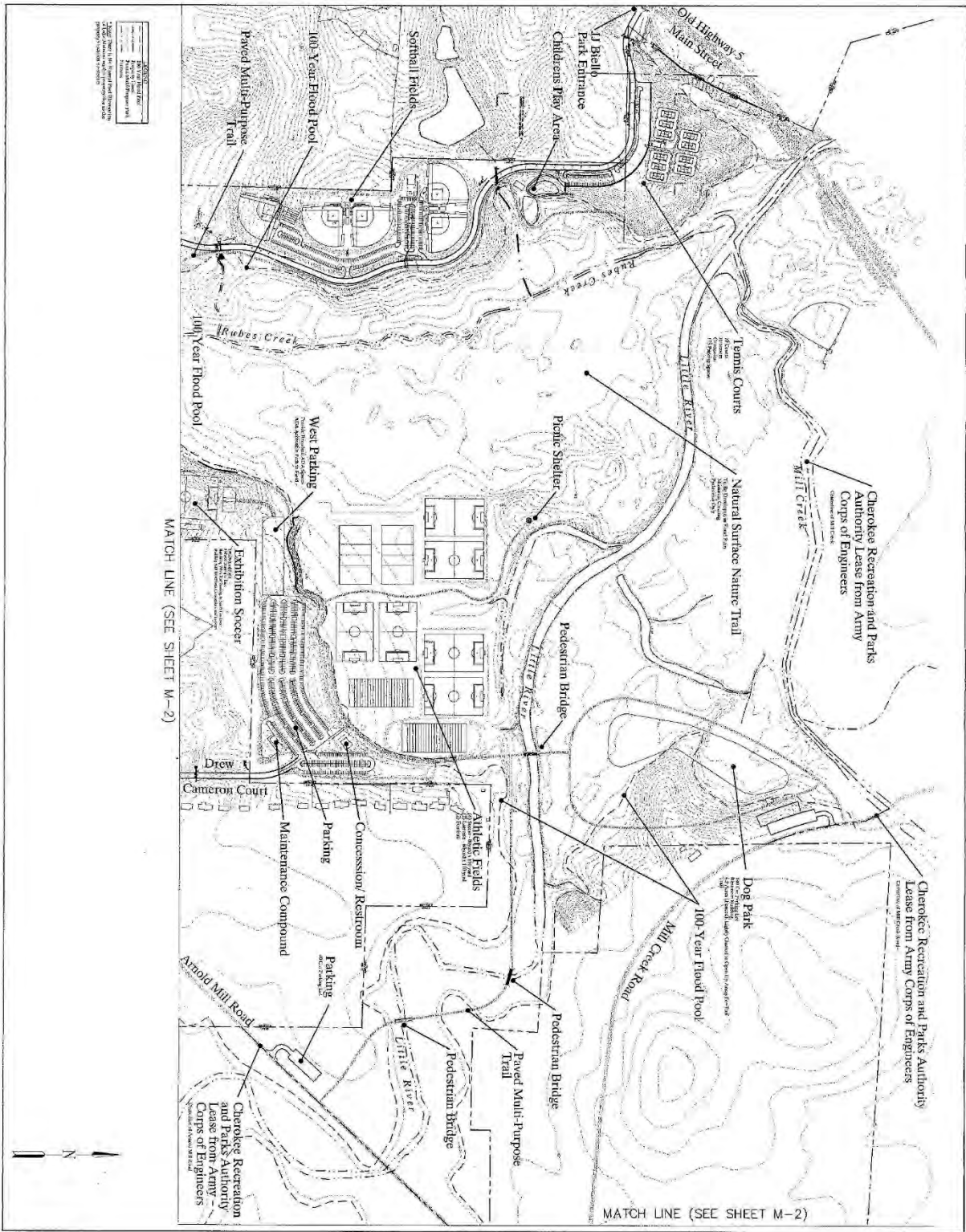
Because of existing wetlands and floodplain, development restrictions are apparent when viewing this complex. Neither the fields nor the parking lots are lighted and there is no permanent fencing present to control access around the fields. Pavement leading to the fields and spectator areas is limited. The field turf is in good condition but the fields are in high demand and some areas show signs of wear.

The small playground at the end of the parking lot is in good condition as well as the small pavilion that is adjacent to it. A wood deck encircles the playground to form the boundary and the deck boards are showing signs of wear and uplift. ADA access from the parking lot is not available unless some of the terminal bays are restriped accordingly.

The restroom/concession building is in fair condition and has acceptable ADA access from the parking lot and to the sidewalks leading to the field area. This area of the park houses the main maintenance facility to serve parks in the southeast portion of the county.

Recommendations:

- Improve general ADA access, where permitted, to all facilities.
- Provide paved sidewalk around the playground.
- Pave the final gravel portion of the parking lot.



DATE:	12/20/2011	BY:	JJ BIELLO
PROJECT:	JJ BIELLO PARK	SCALE:	1" = 200'
TITLE:	JJ BIELLO MASTER PLAN	SHEET NUMBER:	M-1
CONTRACT:	150497 (A-1)		

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS
CERULEA
 400 UNIVERSITY AVENUE, SUITE 2000
 ATLANTA, GA 30308
 TEL: 404.525.4444
 WWW.CERULEA.COM

**MASTER PLAN
 JJ BIELLO PARK
 ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS LEASE
 CHEROKEE COUNTY RECREATION AND
 PARKS AUTHORITY**

SCALE

foresite group

Forensic Group, Inc.
 3040 Indaco Parkway, Ste. 500
 Marietta, GA 30067
 P: 770.362.1299
 F: 770.360.1844
 www.foresitegroupinc.com

Kenney Askew Park & Hunkey Mauldin Sports Complex

Location: 1080 Univeter Road, Canton, GA 30115
Size: 60.5 acres
Classification: Community Park

Amenities:

- 2 Restroom/Concession Buildings
- 1 Multi-Purpose Field
- 4 Tennis Courts
- 6 Baseball Diamonds
- 10 Batting Cages
- 1 Playground
- Paved Parking

Review:



Kenny Askew Park is the oldest park in the county system and is also home to the Malon D. Mimms Boys & Girls Club. Parking for the BGC is shared with the park's multi-purpose field and one of the restroom/concession buildings. Parking is asphalt paved and lighted. ADA connections are not provided to bleachers, tennis courts, and tee ball field. Site furnishings throughout are a mixture of styles.

The multi-purpose field features irrigation, modern lights, and ADA accessibility. Fencing at the multi-purpose field is in need of repair or replacement. The field is used primarily as a practice facility. The restroom/concessions building is in fair condition. The restrooms are ADA compliant. The playground equipment, consisting of a 5-12-year-old structure is in good condition. The playground has no swings. Drainage structures are not functional and are in need of cleaning and repair/replacement.

The tee-ball field is lit but does not have ADA access. Amenities include wood dugouts and a scoreboard. The four tennis courts have 30-foot light fixtures and bleachers but the courts are seldom used. Lack of ADA access needs to be addressed. The county should consider converting two of these tennis courts to Pickleball courts when the courts are resurfaced. Since these courts are under-utilized the county should also consider converting two courts to a skate park.

The baseball complex is a new addition to the park. The facility is in good shape. Amenities include a restroom/concession building, ten batting cages, and a paved/lighted parking lot. Ball fields are lighted, irrigated and have good ADA access. The batting cages are covered, lighted and have artificial turf. Infields drain to the backstops, causing washing on infield material onto concrete pavement. Drainage issues were observed in the complex pavement. Parking lot drainage includes bio-swales.

Recommendations:

- Provide ADA access ramp into playground.
- Replace or remove chain link fence around multi-purpose field.
- Replace site furnishings to match park standards.
- Install ADA accessible walk to multi-purpose field and tennis courts from parking lot.
- Provide curb around landscape islands in the baseball complex.
- Develop a Master Plan for the park that would consider converting two tennis courts to Pickleball courts and two courts to a skate park; consider adding a playground at the new baseball complex; and consider adding additional sidewalks to connect the baseball complex to original parts of the park.

Lewis Park

Location: 200 East Bells Ferry Road, Woodstock, GA 30189

Size: 57 Acres

Classification: Community Park

Amenities:

- 2 Picnic Pavilions
- 1 Outdoor Classroom
- 1 ½ Mile Walking Trail
- 1 Playground
- Gravel Parking Lot (Paved ADA Spaces)
- 1 Restroom Building



Review:

Lewis Park consists of a playground, a single-occupant restroom building, picnic shelter, and walking trails. The playground is not ADA accessible from the parking area.

The parking lot is gravel, with concrete paved ADA spaces that are not striped or identified with signs. These spaces need to be appropriately marked. The parking lot is not lighted. The restroom building is a single-occupancy modular structure. A wood pavilion structure is in the park, with a shingled roof and furnishings. All items appear to be in good condition; however, the pavilion is not ADA accessible from the parking lot.

The 1 ½-mile trail is a soft surface, gravel trail with signage.

Recommendations:

- Make necessary improvements throughout the park area to bring paths, parking and associated areas up to ADA standards, including parking signage and accessible walkways to the pavilion and playground.
- Provide lighting at the parking lot.

Patriots Park

Location: 200 East Bells Ferry Road, Woodstock, GA 30189

Size: 57 Acres

Classification: Community Park

Amenities:

- 1 Artificial Turf Adaptive Use Baseball/Softball Diamond
- 2 Natural Grass Baseball/Softball Diamonds
- 2 Fenced Off-Leash Dog Parks (1 for Large Dogs; 1 for Small Dogs)
- Accessible & Inclusive Playground
- An Open Meadow with Picnic Pavilion
- 3/4 Mile Paved Walking Path Around the Park
- 1/5 Mile Paved Walking Path Around the Meadow
- Concessions
- Restrooms



Review:

Patriots Park opened in April 2017. The park is in very good condition. It includes all the amenities listed above. The park is nearly fully developed. The county should consider adding batting cages and an additional pavilion near the playground. The county may also consider adding additional shade structures in the dog parks.

Recommendations:

- Add a pavilion near the playground.
- Add two batting cages.
- Add shade structures to the dog parks.



Recreation Center

Location: 7545 Main Street, Woodstock, GA 30189

Size: 14 Acres

Classification: Neighborhood Park

Amenities:

- Administration Offices
- Aerobics/Fitness Room
- Meeting Room
- Concessions/Kitchen
- Gymnasium
- Outdoor Roller Hockey Rink
- Picnic Pavilion (w/ Grill)
- Playground
- Stage
- Multiple Restroom Facilities



Review:

The Recreation Center has an outdoor roller hockey rink, an indoor gym, meetings rooms, aerobics/fitness rooms, picnic pavilion, playground, concessions, and a stage. The facility is in good condition overall.

The outdoor roller hockey rink appears heavily used. Items such as the pavement, grandstands, railings and ADA access show signs of aging. The rink is not fully ADA accessible due to non-compliant access points, and a non-compliant ADA spectator area. However, an ADA accessible viewing platform has been added by the County. The rink is lit, has a concessions stand and storage shed.

The picnic pavilion is wood, has ADA accessibility, two grills, and is in fair condition. However, the concrete slab does have significant cracking. The restroom is a two-unit modular facility with good ADA access. Parking is paved and lighted, noted to be in good condition.

The Recreation Center has staff offices, indoor gymnasium with six goals, rubber flooring, heat and air conditioning, mid-court partition, portable bleachers, three storage rooms, and an ADA accessible stage. The stage is not programmed as traditional stage but is used regularly as a program space for classes and activities. Redevelopment of the stage into a programming room would improve how the space is used.

Recommendations:

- Renovate existing in line hockey rink.
- Investigate the potential to relocate this rink to open up space for open lawn.
- Replace concrete slab under pavilion.
- Continue to maintain recreation center.

Riverchase Park

Location: 150 Riverglen Drive, Woodstock, GA 30188

Size: 10 Acres

Classification: Neighborhood Park



Amenities:

- Playground
- Passive Area
- Picnic Pavilion
- Outdoor Basketball Court

Review:

Riverchase Park is located within the boundaries of the Riverchase subdivision. The park was deeded to the county many years ago as part to the development of the neighborhood. It should have been part of a neighborhood HOA but the developer did not establish one, instead opting to donate the area to the county. Because this park is located within a neighborhood and does not have adequate parking or ADA access, it is not recommended for improvements or upgrades.

The park has several passive amenities, such as a playground, picnic pavilion, grassed fields and an old, paved tennis court and basketball court. The tennis and basketball courts have pavement beyond its serviceable life. The tennis courts have no equipment or fence. ADA access is provided for the tennis courts, while the basketball courts are not ADA accessible.

The playground consists of an older 5-12-year-old structure. This structure is not ADA accessible. The pavilion is a wood structure with shingle roof, and is in need of paint and a new roof. The parking area is paved without striping, lighting and ADA parking.

Recommendations:

- It is recommended that this park be converted to green space due to its location deep in a neighborhood creating poor public access and the condition of the equipment. This will reduce maintenance demands on this remote park that experiences very little visitation.

Sequoyah Park

Location: 7000 Vaughn Road, Canton, GA 30115
Size: 39 Acres
Classification: Community Park

Amenities:

- 4 Baseball/Softball Diamonds
- 2 Batting Cages
- 1 Multi-purpose field
- 1 ½ Mile Walking Trail
- 18-Hole Disc Golf Course
- Playground
- Concession/Restroom Building
- 2 Modular Restroom Facilities

Review:



Sequoyah Park is a large park with four baseball/softball diamonds, one multi-purpose field, playground, walking trail, picnic areas, and a small storage building for maintenance. The park needs directional signage from the main roads.

Fields 1 and 2 (baseball/softball) have paved parking with scattered ADA parking spaces. The two fields are lit by concrete masts (19 years old) and share a gravel spectator area. Each field has wood dugouts with shingle roofs, a mixture of site furnishings, and two bleachers on concrete pads, functioning irrigation, and overhead netting between the fields. The complex is ADA accessible to the minimal standard, with gravel areas requiring maintenance and fill to provide smooth/flush transitions to concrete areas at dugouts and bleachers. Fields 3 and 4 (baseball/softball) have a paved and lighted parking lot with ADA spaces. Each field has a score tower, lighting, metal dugouts, and functional irrigation. Both fields share a spectator plaza and modular restroom building.

The multi-purpose field has paved parking and lighting in need of upgrades. Two ADA spaces are provided but are not compliant. The stepped entry from the parking lot to the fields requires replacement for ADA compliance. The field is a large natural turf field with low mast wood pole lighting and four-foot-high chain link fence perimeter. The irrigation is functional and the backstop nets need replacement.

Metal structures on the playground need paint. The playground has no ADA connection to parking, and is accessed by pedestrians via a single lane park road. Walking/running trails are a slate scape 1 ½ mile loop. The disc golf course consists of 18 holes and concrete pads at the tees. The picnic pavilion is an open-truss wood structure with concrete pad, four picnic tables, and waste receptacles. The pavilion does not have ADA access to the multi-purpose field or playground. The roof is in need of replacement. The restroom building is an ADA accessible modular structure connected to septic sewer system.

Recommendations:

- Replace roof on picnic pavilion.
- Replace backstop netting at multi-purpose field.
- Provide directional signage into park from main roads.

Develop a Master Plan for the park that considers converting the multi-purpose field to artificial turf and expanding the parking lot that serves this field, provides ADA accessible surfacing within baseball complex spectator area and consolidates ADA parking at baseball complex parking lot and provides ADA access between shelter, playground, multi-purpose field and baseball complex.

Union Hill Community Center

Location: 1780 A J Land Road, Canton, GA 30115

Size: 3 Acres

Classification: Special Use - Banquet Hall

Amenities:

- Banquet Hall
- Activities/Meeting Room
- Playground
- Restrooms
- Concessions/Kitchen
- Stage



Review:

The Union Hill Community Center is a restored historic schoolhouse that has a banquet hall with stage, activities/meeting room, concessions/kitchen, restrooms, and a playground. The restrooms are ADA accessible and accommodate two men and two women each. The gravel parking lot has two ADA spaces with access to the rear of the building. The playground consists of an old swing set in a mulched area with timber perimeter. The playground equipment needs to be updated. The playground is not ADA accessible.

Recommendations:

- Continue necessary repairs and maintenance to this historic structure.
- Replace playground equipment.
- Provide ADA route to playground.
- Pave the parking lot.

Waleska Park

Location: 150 Ball Field Road, Waleska, GA 30183

Size: 18 Acres

Classification: Neighborhood Park

Amenities:

- 3 Baseball/Softball diamonds
- 3 Batting Cages
- Playground
- Concessions/Restroom Building

Review:

Waleska Park is a recently renovated park with a large concrete plaza, playground, concessions/restroom building, and batting cages. The lower parking lot is paved and lighted with ADA spaces that connect to all areas of the softball/baseball complex. The upper parking lot is gravel. The softball/baseball fields are lighted and irrigated. Storm inlet grates located within the paved spectator area of the complex are not ADA compliant.

Recommendations:

- Add shade pavilion near fields and concession stand.
- Pave upper parking lot.
- Replace storm drain inlet grates in pedestrian areas with ADA compliant grates.



Weatherby Park

Location: 100 Worley Road, Canton, GA 30114

Size: 17 Acres

Classification: Neighborhood Park

Amenities:

- 3 Baseball/Softball diamonds
- Multi-Purpose Field
- Playground
- Concessions/Restroom Building
- 4/10 Mile Walking Trail



Review:

Weatherby Park is a sports complex with baseball/softball fields with three fields sized for baseball/softball, and a multi-purpose field used for football, soccer and lacrosse. The park also has a playground, several picnic areas, a pavilion, and walking trail that is 4/10 mile in length.

The baseball/softball complex and the multi-purpose field are lighted, irrigated and ADA accessible. Dugouts at the complex have an architectural wood roof with chain link sides. The complex has a paved central plaza with a restroom/concessions building with storage rooms that is in need of paint, and the building concession window and restroom stalls are not ADA compliant. The plaza also needs updated landscaping and replacement storm inlet grates that are ADA compliant.

The park is circled with a paved walking trail, has a playground and picnic shelter near the parking lot. The parking lot is paved and lighted with ADA spaces and access to all park components.

Recommendations:

- Paint concessions/restroom building and architectural dugout roofs.
- Replace storm inlet grates with ADA compliant grates.
- Update landscaping in complex plaza.
- Bring concessions/restroom building up to ADA compliance.
- As the county continues to grow, the county should consider converting this multi-purpose field to artificial turf to improve playability. Other areas of the county are experiencing higher demand, though, and this field will likely fall into the future category.

Recommended Capital Improvement Plan

The planning team recommends a number of new facilities and improvements to existing facilities. These recommendations are based on information received through the public input process, the recommended community standard levels of service, and evaluation of the current facilities, as well as consideration of the county's current and anticipated populations. The planning team analyzed all the data including:

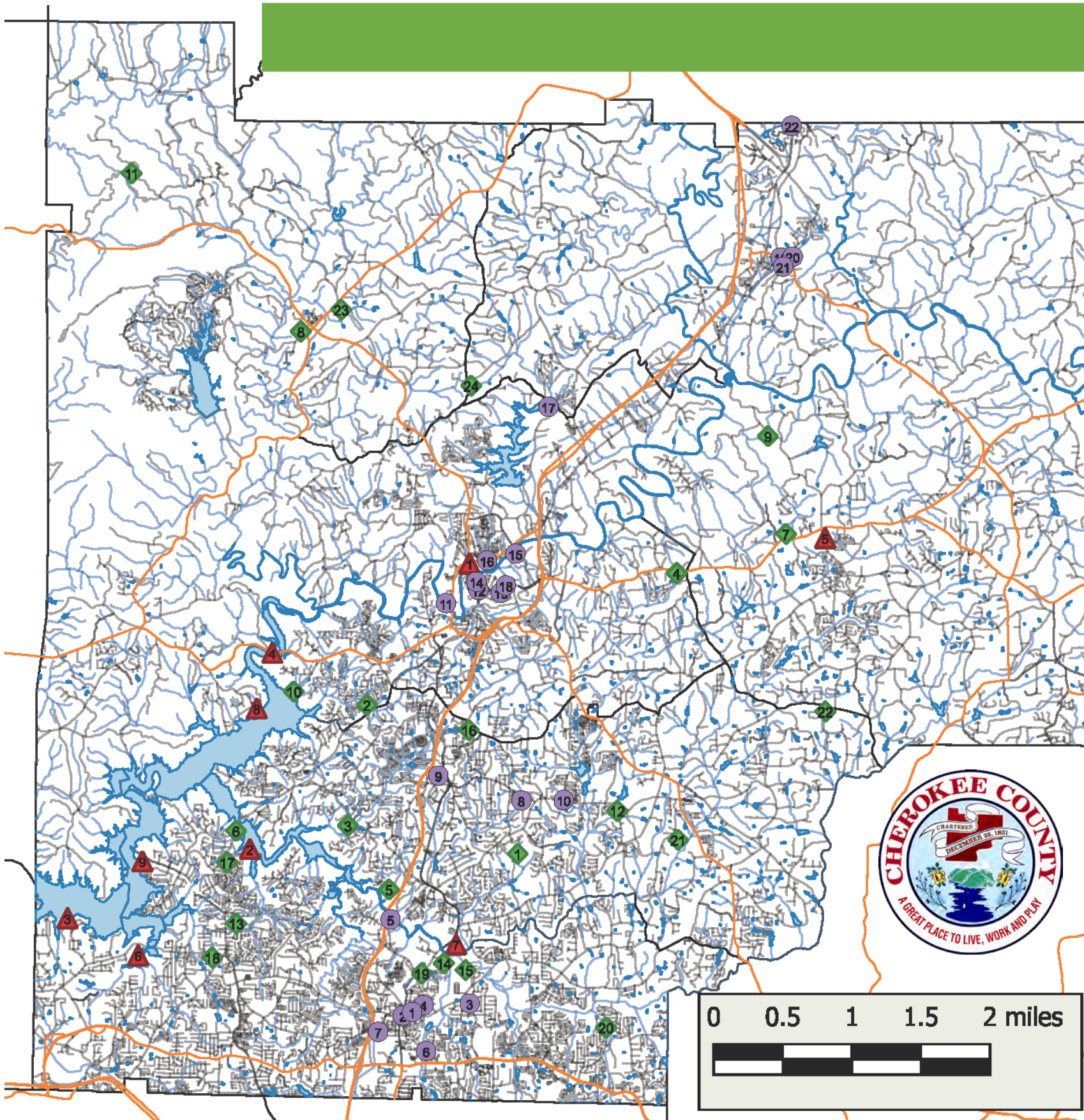
- The current Level of Service provided by County, City and Association facilities,
- Public Input from the Steering Committee, Focus Groups, Public Meetings and the Survey, as well as,
- The analysis of existing gaps in service plus any expected gaps by the end of the plan.

Based on this analysis, the following Capital Improvement Plan is recommended for existing parks and new facilities in order to meet the growing demand for recreation opportunities within Cherokee County over the course of this plan.

- Develop a Countywide plan for a system of Linear Parks & Greenways that connects high priority locations throughout the county and coordinates with plans for Greenways within the cities. Work with the cities and bordering counties to coordinate trail locations where jurisdictions meet.
- Develop a multi-generational Recreation Center at Cherokee Veterans Park. This center will decrease the gap of much needed indoor recreation space, bring an indoor facility to the north side of the county and add much needed programming space. It should be developed in such a way to allow for the addition of future phases.
- Develop a Community Park in the southwest portion of Cherokee County. This park should include elements that are not currently located in the southwest quadrant of the county.
- Develop additional synthetic multipurpose athletic fields. By adding synthetic fields, the county can effectively increase the amount of field space available because of the increased playability of synthetic turf. The county should consider converting existing natural grass fields in each quadrant of the county beginning with Sequoyah Park and Badger Creek Park.
- As part of any new active park, the county should consider adding the following facilities which show a deficit over the next ten years:
 - Rectangular Athletic Fields (football, soccer, lacrosse) including synthetic and natural turf,
 - Running Track,
 - Tennis & Pickleball Courts, and
 - Skate Park.
- Develop canoe/kayak launches at strategic points along the Etowah and Little Rivers.
- The County should develop more parks that are passive and/or expand existing passive parks. As part of new passive parks or the expansion of existing parks, the county should continue to develop the following amenities which show a deficit over the next ten years:
 - Dog Parks,
 - Trails,
 - Canoe/Kayak launches, and
 - Disc Golf Courses.
- Develop pickleball courts to meet the growing demand. Adding additional courts at Cherokee Veterans Park will reduce the gap. In addition, the county should consider converting some underused tennis courts at Kenney Askew Park to pickleball courts.

- The county should plan to renovate those parks not improved under the most recent capital improvement program. Existing parks were evaluated as part of this plan. Those evaluations and the recommendations are included in this chapter.
- The County should develop a multi-generational recreation center in the southwest portion of the county to serve this growing and underserved population with indoor recreation space.
- Develop a Community or Regional Park at the Thacker Property. This park should include elements such as, but not limited to, multipurpose fields, trails, a boat launch and outdoor archery range.
- Develop a Community or Regional Park at the Yellow Creek Road Property along with a canoe/kayak launch and other passive amenities.
- The county should monitor demand for baseball/softball diamonds over the next ten years. While local demand is currently being met, there is growing demand for additional facilities. The county has two facilities where additional diamonds are planned (Twin Creeks Softball Complex and Cherokee Veterans Park) and each of these projects would increase the county's ability to meet future demand as well as expand the ability to host baseball and softball tournaments.
- The county should seek to acquire land for Neighborhood and Community Parks in areas where service gaps exist and growth is expected to continue.

Map 3.1 Existing Parks & Recreation Facilities



Existing County Parks & Recreation Facilities

1. Badger Creek Park
2. Barnett Park
3. Blankets Creek Bike Trails
4. Buffington Park & Gym
5. Cherokee County Aquatic Center
6. Cherokee Mills Park
7. Cherokee Veterans Park
8. Cline Park
9. Dwight Terry Park
10. Field's Landing Park
11. Garland Mt. Horse / Hike Trails
12. Hickory Trails Park
13. Hobgood Park
14. J.J. Biello Park West
15. J.J. Biello Park East
16. Kenney Askew Park
17. Lewis Park
18. Patriots Park
19. Recreation Center
20. Riverchase Park
21. Sequoyah Park
22. Union Hill Community Center
23. Waleska Park
24. Weatherby Park

City Parks

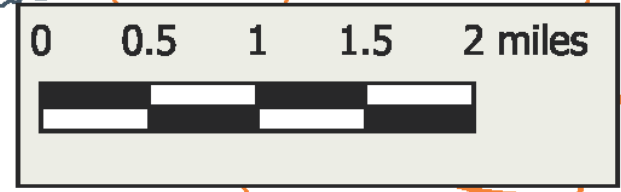
1. Northside Hospital Amphitheater
2. Park at City Center
3. Dupree Park
4. Dobbs Road Park
5. Olde Rope Mill Park
6. Springfield Park
7. Woofstock Park
8. Barrett Park
9. JC Mullins Field
10. JB Owens Park
11. Boling Park
12. Brown Park
13. Burge Park
14. Cannon Park
15. Etowah River Park
16. Heritage Park
17. Hickory Log Reservoir
18. McCannless Park
19. Ball Ground City Park
20. Calvin Farmer Park
21. Lions Club Field
22. Nelson City Park

Other Recreation Facilities

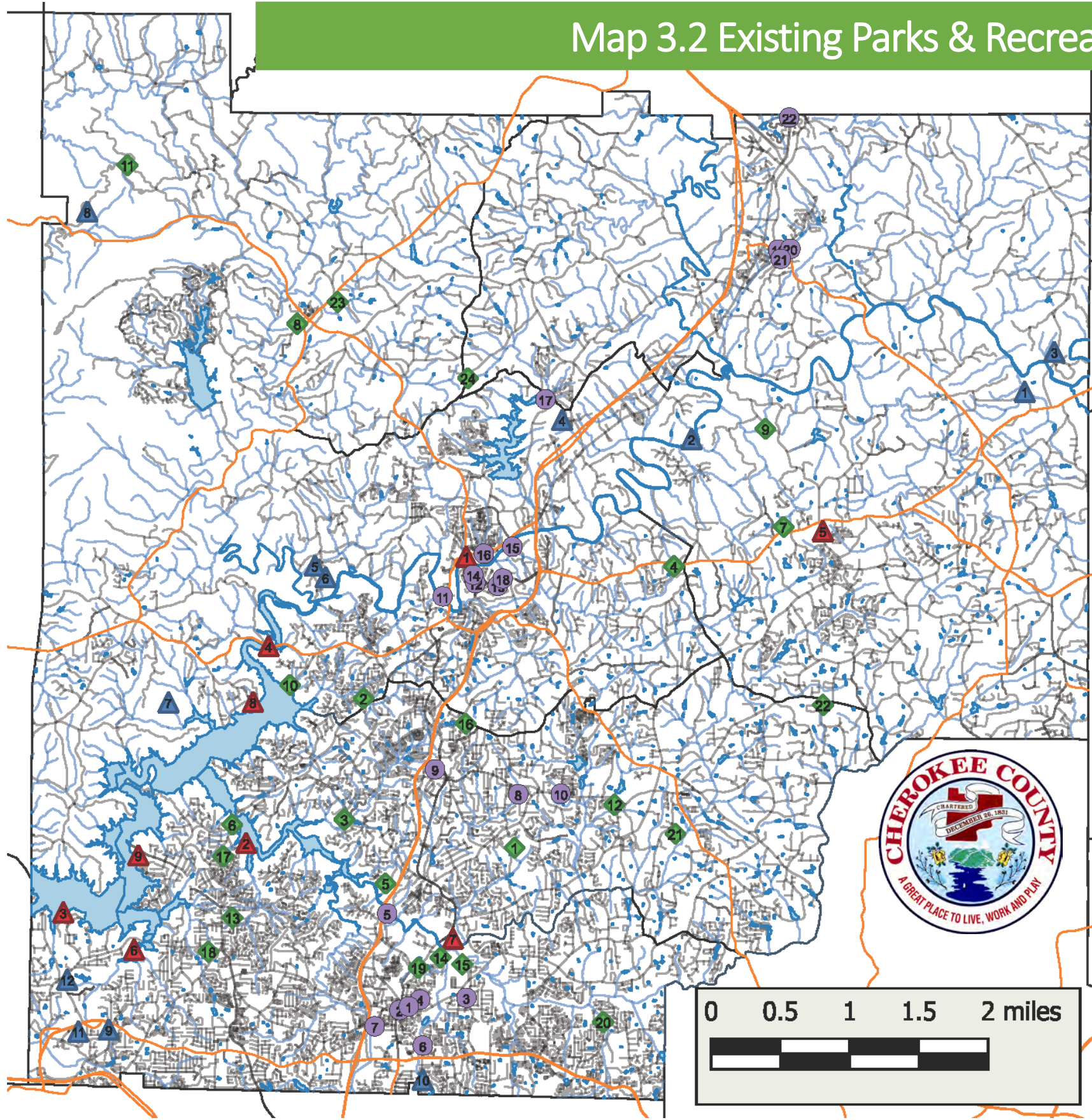
1. Cecil Pruitt YMCA
2. Cherokee Outdoor YMCA
3. Galts Ferry Day Use Area
4. Knox Bridge Boat Ramp
5. Macedonia Baseball
6. Payne Boat Ramp
7. SCRA
8. Sweetwater Creek Day Use Area
9. Victoria Day Use Area

Legend

- ◆ Existing County Parks & Recreation Facilities
- City Parks
- ▲ Other Recreation Facilities



Map 3.2 Existing Parks & Recreation Facilities and Undeveloped County Properties



Existing County Parks & Recreation Facilities

1. Badger Creek Park
2. Barnett Park
3. Blankets Creek Bike Trails
4. Buffington Park & Gym
5. Cherokee County Aquatic Center
6. Cherokee Mills Park
7. Cherokee Veterans Park
8. Cline Park
9. Dwight Terry Park
10. Field's Landing Park
11. Garland Mt. Horse / Hike Trails
12. Hickory Trails Park
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17. Lewis Park
18. Patriots Park
19. Recreation Center
20. Riverchase Park
21. Sequoyah Park
22. Union Hill Community Center
23. Waleska Park
24. Weatherby Park

Other Recreation Facilities

1. Cecil Pruitt YMCA
2. Cherokee Outdoor YMCA
3. Galts Ferry Day Use Area
4. Knox Bridge Boat Ramp
5. Macedonia Baseball
6. Payne Boat Ramp
7. SCRA
8. Sweetwater Creek Day Use Area
9. Victoria Day Use Area

City Parks

1. Northside Hospital Amphitheater
2. Park at City Center
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4. Dobbs Road Park
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10. JB Owens Park
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14. Cannon Park
15. Etowah River Park
16. Heritage Park
17. Hickory Log Reservoir
18. McCannless Park
19. Ball Ground City Park
20. Calvin Farmer Park
21. Lions Club Field
22. Nelson City Park

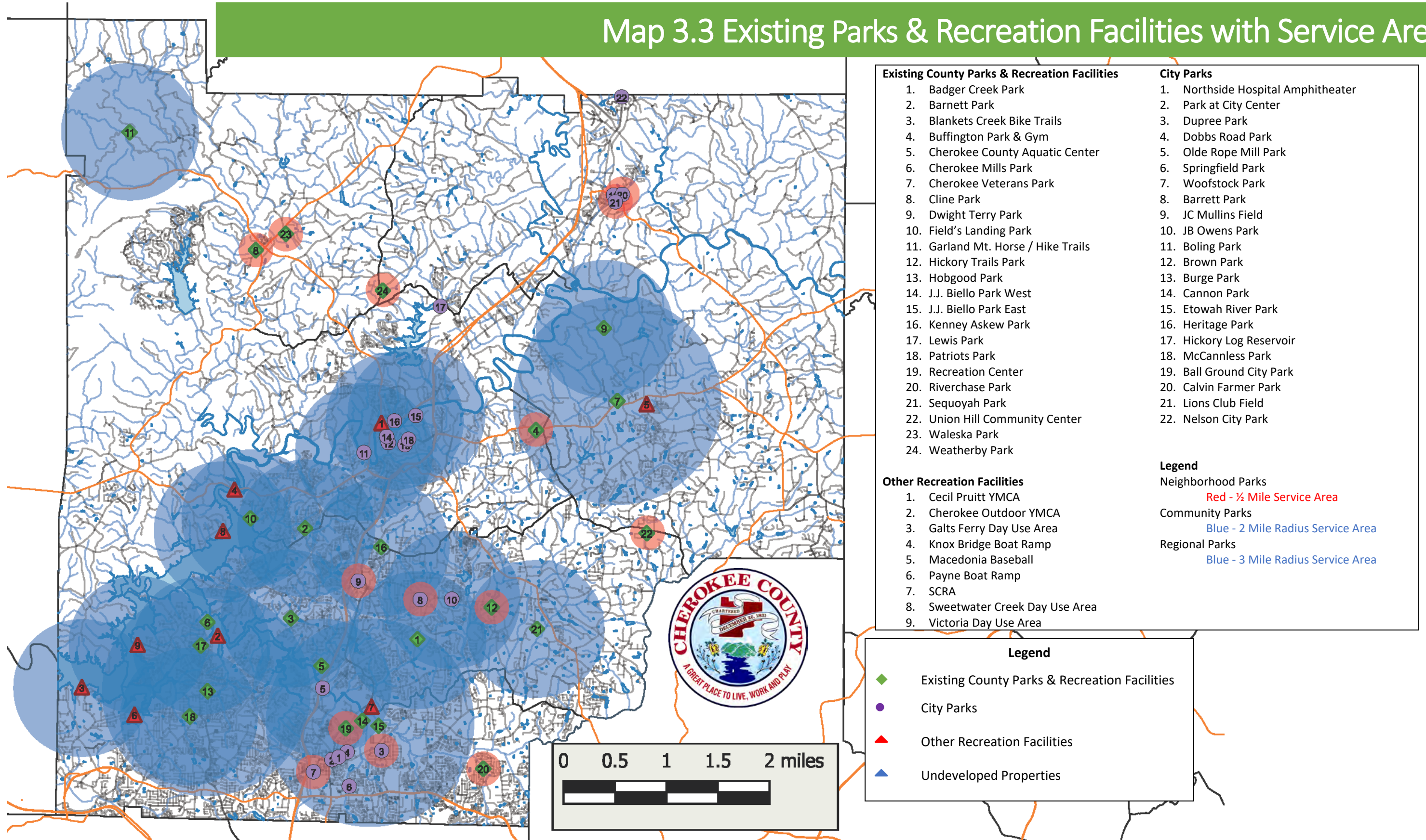
Undeveloped County Properties

1. Rebecca Ray Park
2. Thacker Property
3. Yellow Creek Road Property
4. Park Village
5. John Ford Property
6. Forestar Property
7. Willoughby-Sewell Property
8. Hudgens Property
9. Priest Road Property
10. Rubes Creek Greenspace
11. Dunn Property
12. Thompson Property

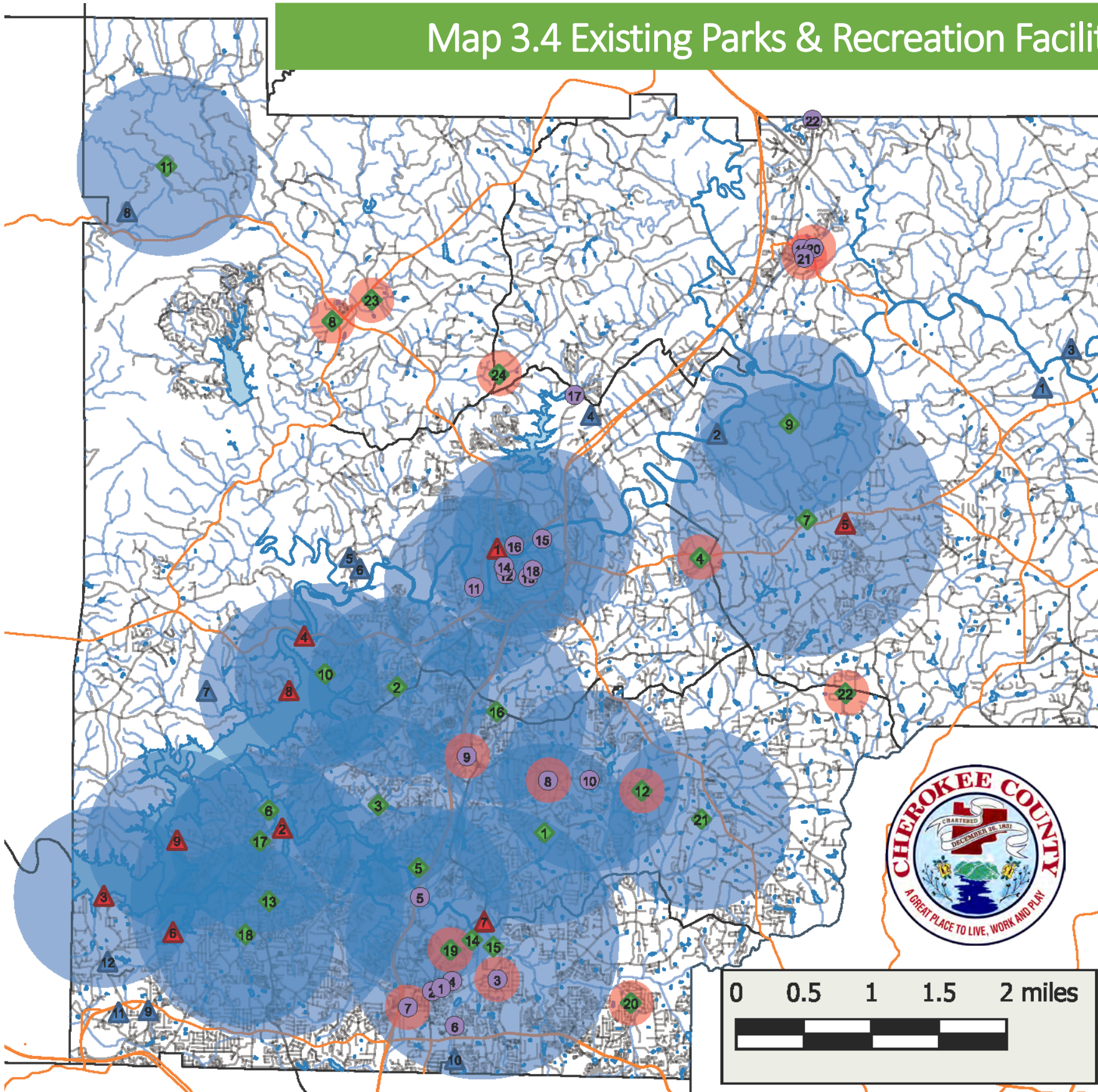
Legend

- ◆ Existing County Parks & Recreation Facilities
- City Parks
- ▲ Other Recreation Facilities
- ▲ Undeveloped Properties

Map 3.3 Existing Parks & Recreation Facilities with Service Areas



Map 3.4 Existing Parks & Recreation Facilities with Service Areas & Undeveloped Property



Existing County Parks & Recreation Facilities

1. Badger Creek Park
2. Barnett Park
3. Blankets Creek Bike Trails
4. Buffington Park & Gym
5. Cherokee County Aquatic Center
6. Cherokee Mills Park
7. Cherokee Veterans Park
8. Cline Park
9. Dwight Terry Park
10. Field's Landing Park
11. Garland Mt. Horse / Hike Trails
12. Hickory Trails Park
13. Hobgood Park
14. J.J. Biello Park West
15. J.J. Biello Park East
16. Kenney Askew Park
17. Lewis Park
18. Patriots Park
19. Recreation Center
20. Riverchase Park
21. Sequoyah Park
22. Union Hill Community Center
23. Waleska Park
24. Weatherby Park

Other Recreation Facilities

1. Cecil Pruitt YMCA
2. Cherokee Outdoor YMCA
3. Galts Ferry Day Use Area
4. Knox Bridge Boat Ramp
5. Macedonia Baseball
6. Payne Boat Ramp
7. SCRA
8. Sweetwater Creek Day Use Area
9. Victoria Day Use Area

City Parks

1. Northside Hospital Amphitheater
2. Park at City Center
3. Dupree Park
4. Dobbs Road Park
5. Olde Rope Mill Park
6. Springfield Park
7. Woofstock Park
8. Barrett Park
9. JC Mullins Field
10. JB Owens Park
11. Boling Park
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15. Etowah River Park
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18. McCannless Park
19. Ball Ground City Park
20. Calvin Farmer Park
21. Lions Club Field
22. Nelson City Park

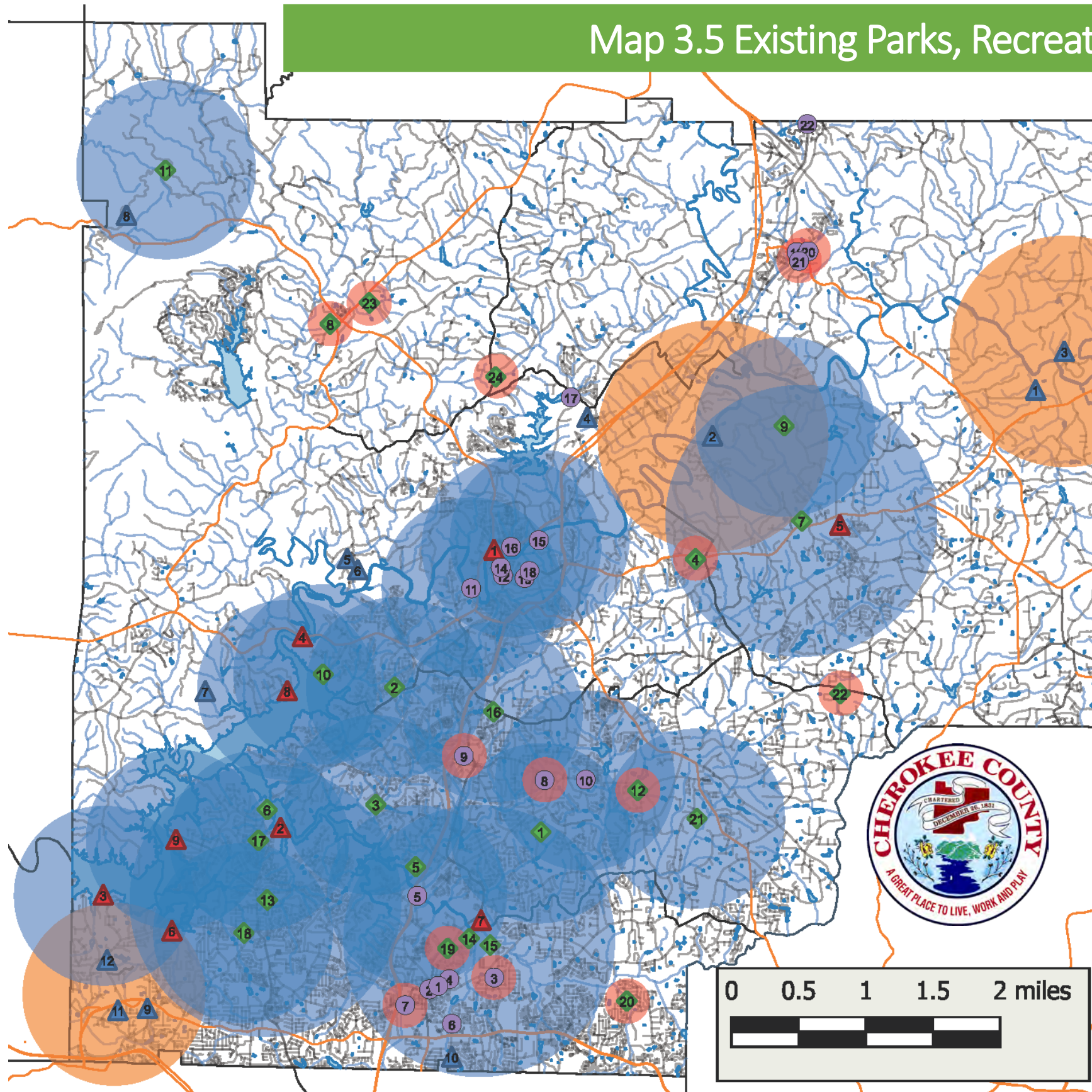
Undeveloped County Properties

1. Rebecca Ray Park
2. Thacker Property
3. Yellow Creek Road Property
4. Park Village
5. John Ford Property
6. Forestar Property
7. Willoughby-Sewell Property
8. Hudgens Property
9. Priest Road Property
10. Rubes Creek Greenspace
11. Dunn Property
12. Thompson Property

Legend

- ◆ Existing County Parks & Recreation Facilities
- City Parks
- ▲ Other Recreation Facilities
- ▲ Undeveloped Properties
- Neighborhood Parks
- Red - 1/2 Mile Service Area
- Community Parks
- Blue - 2 Mile Radius Service Area
- Regional Parks
- Blue - 3 Mile Radius Service Area

Map 3.5 Existing Parks, Recreation Facilities & Proposed Parks with Service Areas



Existing County Parks & Recreation Facilities

1. Badger Creek Park
2. Barnett Park
3. Blankets Creek Bike Trails
4. Buffington Park & Gym
5. Cherokee County Aquatic Center
6. Cherokee Mills Park
7. Cherokee Veterans Park
8. Cline Park
9. Dwight Terry Park
10. Field's Landing Park
11. Garland Mt. Horse / Hike Trails
12. Hickory Trails Park
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17. Lewis Park
18. Patriots Park
19. Recreation Center
20. Riverchase Park
21. Sequoyah Park
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23. Waleska Park
24. Weatherby Park

Other Recreation Facilities

1. Cecil Pruitt YMCA
2. Cherokee Outdoor YMCA
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4. Knox Bridge Boat Ramp
5. Macedonia Baseball
6. Payne Boat Ramp
7. SCRA
8. Sweetwater Creek Day Use Area
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City Parks

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12. Brown Park
13. Burge Park
14. Cannon Park
15. Etowah River Park
16. Heritage Park
17. Hickory Log Reservoir
18. McCannless Park
19. Ball Ground City Park
20. Calvin Farmer Park
21. Lions Club Field
22. Nelson City Park

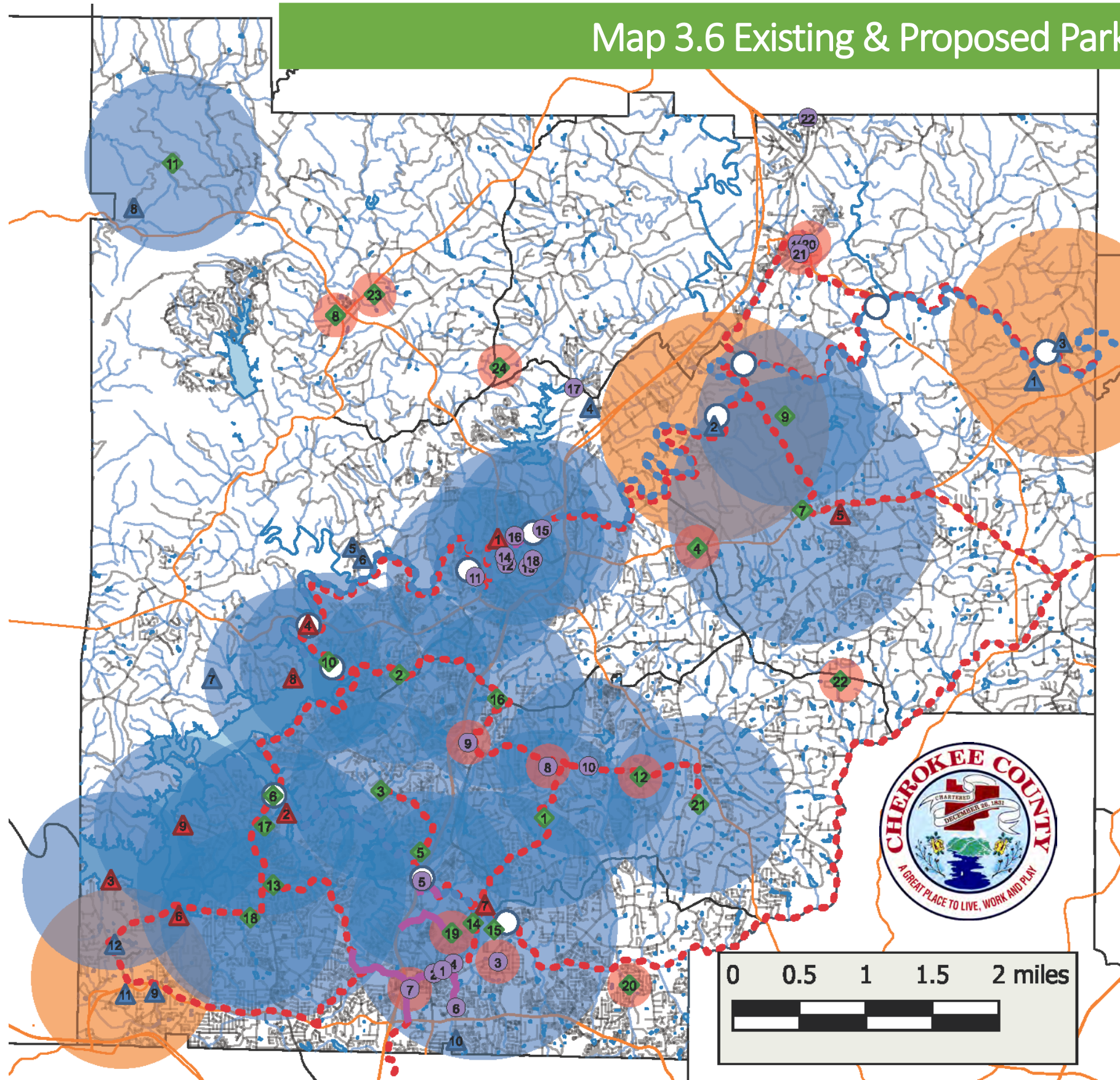
Undeveloped County Properties

1. Rebecca Ray Park
2. Thacker Property
3. Yellow Creek Road Property
4. Park Village
5. John Ford Property
6. Forestar Property
7. Willoughby-Sewell Property
8. Hudgens Property
9. Priest Road Property
10. Rubes Creek Greenspace
11. Dunn Property
12. Thompson Property

Legend

- Existing County Parks & Recreation Facilities
- City Parks
- Other Recreation Facilities
- Undeveloped Properties
- Neighborhood Parks
- Community Parks
- Regional Parks
- Proposed Parks
- Red - 1/2 Mile Service Area
- Blue - 2 Mile Radius Service Area
- Blue - 3 Mile Radius Service Area
- Orange Service Area

Map 3.6 Existing & Proposed Parks Greenways and Blueways with Service Areas



Existing County Parks & Recreation Facilities	City Parks	Undeveloped County Properties
1. Badger Creek Park	1. Northside Hospital Amphitheater	1. Rebecca Ray Park
2. Barnett Park	2. Park at City Center	2. Thacker Property
3. Blankets Creek Bike Trails	3. Dupree Park	3. Yellow Creek Road Property
4. Buffington Park & Gym	4. Dobbs Road Park	4. Park Village
5. Cherokee County Aquatic Center	5. Olde Rope Mill Park	5. John Ford Property
6. Cherokee Mills Park	6. Springfield Park	6. Forestar Property
7. Cherokee Veterans Park	7. Woofstock Park	7. Willoughby-Sewell Property
8. Cline Park	8. Barrett Park	8. Hudgens Property
9. Dwight Terry Park	9. JC Mullins Field	9. Priest Road Property
10. Field's Landing Park	10. JB Owens Park	10. Rubes Creek Greenspace
11. Garland Mt. Horse / Hike Trails	11. Boling Park	11. Dunn Property
12. Hickory Trails Park	12. Brown Park	12. Thompson Property
13. Hobgood Park	13. Burge Park	
14. J.J. Biello Park West	14. Cannon Park	
15. J.J. Biello Park East	15. Etowah River Park	
16. Kenney Askew Park	16. Heritage Park	
17. Lewis Park	17. Hickory Log Reservoir	
18. Patriots Park	18. McCannless Park	
19. Recreation Center	19. Ball Ground City Park	
20. Riverchase Park	20. Calvin Farmer Park	
21. Sequoyah Park	21. Lions Club Field	
22. Union Hill Community Center	22. Nelson City Park	
23. Waleska Park		
24. Weatherby Park		

Other Recreation Facilities	Legend
1. Cecil Pruitt YMCA	Existing Greenways
2. Cherokee Outdoor YMCA	Solid Purple Line
3. Galts Ferry Day Use Area	Proposed Greenways
4. Knox Bridge Boat Ramp	Dashed Red Line
5. Macedonia Baseball	Proposed Blueways
6. Payne Boat Ramp	Dashed Blue Line
7. SCRA	
8. Sweetwater Creek Day Use Area	
9. Victoria Day Use Area	

Chapter Four – Operations Review & Recommendations

Introduction

The Operations section of the plan assesses the county's staffing, operations, and budget for recreation and parks; and provides recommendations with a tiered implementation plan. In its assessments and recommendations, the planning team utilized input received from elected officials, staff, public workshops, and the community survey as well as the members' knowledge and experience. Other primary resources include the National Recreation and Park Association's (NRPA) PRORAGIS 2016 Field Report and the NRPA's Commission for Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies' (CAPRA) Standards for National Accreditation, which provides updated, national best practice standards for operating and managing parks and recreation agencies. The recently completed survey findings on park employees prepared by the Georgia Recreation and Parks Association is also referenced.

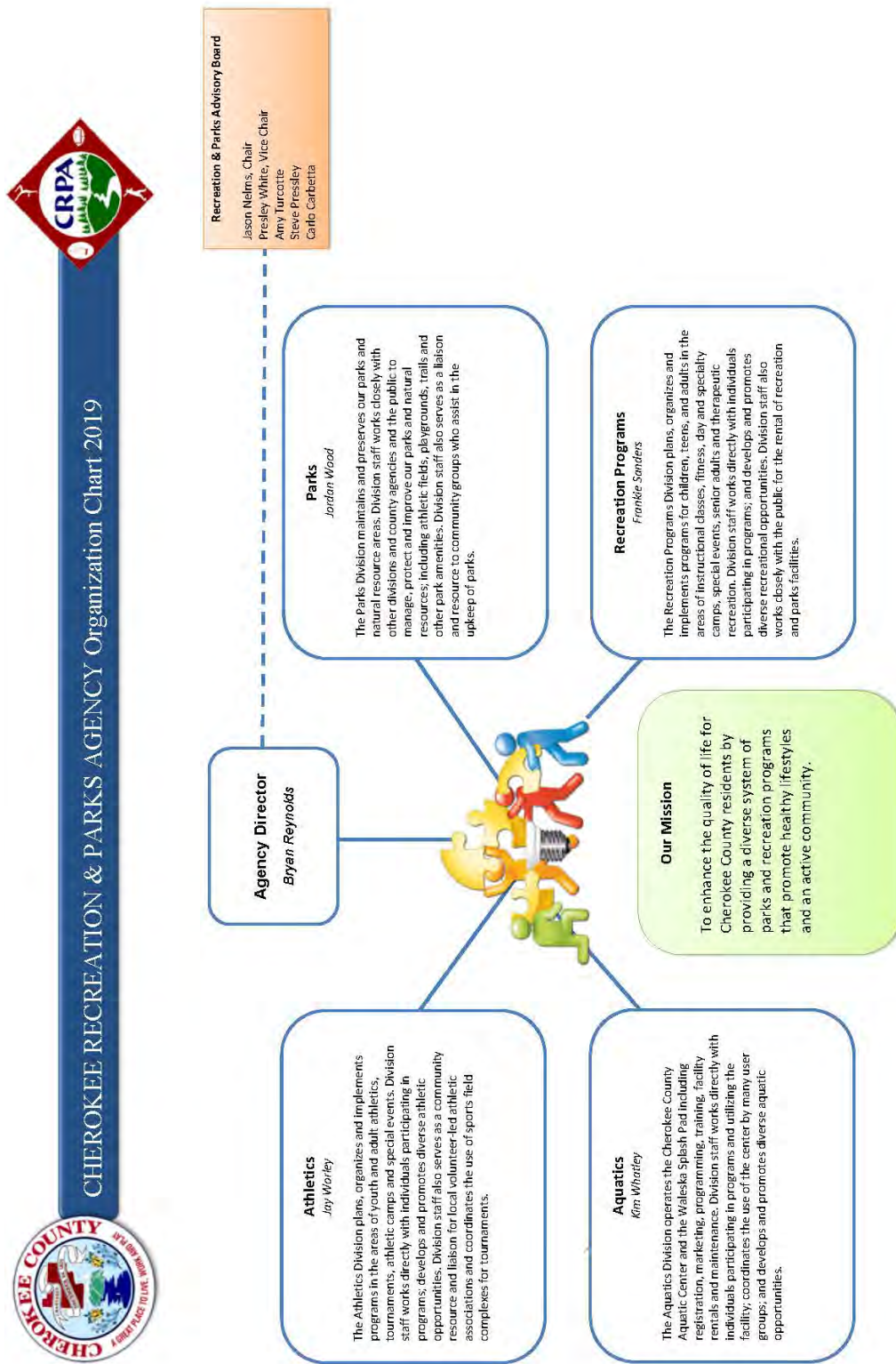
In the budget assessment of this section, the planning team compared Cherokee County to other similar communities. Benchmarking is a common assessment tool for master plan studies as it provides agencies with a view of how they compare with other agencies that deliver the same or similar services. Benchmarking parks and recreation services is more complex due to the variety and diversity of these types of facilities and services provided by different public agencies across the country. Every community is unique and offers multiple approaches to the provision of parks and recreation programs and services. This is in contrast to benchmarking other municipal services, such as police or fire, where the programs and services across jurisdictions are more standardized. With this caveat in mind, comparing staffing models, park facilities, service delivery models, budgets, programming, and other data provides valuable insights for communities evaluating service levels.

Agency Organization & Structure

The Cherokee Recreation and Parks Agency currently includes thirty-five (35) full-time staff. Contract instructors and more than 200 year-round and seasonal part-time staff supplement the full-time staff. The Agency Director leads the agency and reports to the County Manager. County Commissioners each appoint a member of a citizen Advisory Board that meets semi-monthly and provides recommendations to staff and the Board of Commissioners on matters related to recreation and parks.

Five divisions make up the agency: Administrative, Athletics, Aquatics, Parks Maintenance and Recreation Programs. The agency director oversees the Administrative Division. A Division Director who reports directly to the Agency Director oversees operations in each of the other divisions. Each division includes full time and part time staff. See below for a description of the specific roles of each division and the staff. See Figure 4.1 for the organizational chart.

Figure 4.1 – Cherokee Recreation & Parks Agency Organizational Chart



Administrative

The Administrative Division is responsible for the business and financial activities of the agency and overseeing the front desk staff at the Cherokee County Recreation Center. The division is the primary liaison to the county's Finance and Human Resources teams. They also assist with program registration and facility reservations. The Agency Director directs the division. In addition, the division has a Business Manager and part-time staff who oversee the reception desk and directly assist customers in person and over the phone with questions, registration and facility reservations.

Athletics

The Athletics Division oversees all youth and adult athletic activities whether directly operated by the agency or in partnership with volunteer athletic associations who use Cherokee County parks. The Division Director heads up this division and oversees the work of four Athletic Coordinators who make up the balance of full time staff in the division. The coordinators' duties include organizing athletic schedules for leagues, coordinating all sports tournament activities, sports camps, and overseeing contract or part-time employees, such as gym supervisors and scorekeepers. The largest program operated by the agency is the youth basketball program, which has over 4,500 participants each year. The Division Director and coordinators are responsible for developing the division budget and then overseeing the budgeted funds throughout the year. The one athletic program that the division does not oversee is competitive swimming.

Aquatics

The Aquatics Division oversees all activities for the indoor and outdoor pools and the programs that are conducted at the Cherokee County Aquatic Center and the splash pad at Cline Park. The Division Director oversees all full-time employees who work at the center including Aquatics Coordinators, a Customer Service Specialist, and Maintenance Worker. They handle all program registrations, direct part-time staff, lifeguards, and oversee the maintenance of the mechanical and pool systems at the center as well as custodial duties. The division also employs and multiple part-time positions including Managers on Duty, Head Lifeguards, Lifeguards, Swim Instructors, and part-time custodians. The Aquatics Division is also responsible for the competitive swim team(s), all swim meets and other events held at the center.

Recreation Programs

The Recreation Programs Division oversees all types of non-team athletic programs. The Division Director oversees three Recreation Coordinators and the Special Events/Marketing Coordinator. The Recreation Coordinators oversee all special population programs, active adult activities, camps, and recreation classes and programs. The Special Events/Marketing Coordinator oversees community-wide special events and coordinates the marketing for the agency. The Division Director and coordinators are responsible for developing the division budget and then overseeing the budgeted funds throughout the year.

Parks Maintenance

The Division Director, who has two direct reports, the Park Managers, directs the Parks Maintenance Division. The Park Managers oversee the daily operations of the division and coordinate with various user groups and volunteer organizations that lend support in the maintenance of county parks. The Division Director and Park Managers are responsible for preparation of the division budget, equipment, and material purchases. Three Crew Leaders in the division report directly to the Parks Managers.

The county is divided into three geographic zones: southeast, southwest and north. Each zone includes one maintenance hub and consists of multiple parks. The southeast hub is located at J.J. Biello Park. The southwest hub is located at Hobgood Park. The north hub is located at Cherokee Veterans Park. Within each zone, a Crew Leader directs the operation of Lead Parks Workers, Parks Maintenance Workers and part-time Parks Workers. Crews are responsible for all aspects of park maintenance with the exception of interior building maintenance, which is handled by a separate division of the county government.

Additionally, two Inmate Work Details augment park maintenance. Adult Detention Center Officers with the Cherokee County Sheriff’s Office direct the work of these details. The officers pick up the inmates daily, transport them to county parks, oversee the work performed and return them to the adult detention center at the conclusion of the day. Crew Leaders work directly with officers to determine schedules and work to be performed on a daily basis.

One measure of an agency’s ability to maintain the parkland is the ratio of full-time equivalent employees (FTE) to the number of acres maintained. Figure 4.2 below includes the current service level for Cherokee along with national standards for comparison.

Figure 4.2 Park Maintenance Service Levels	
Cherokee County Current Ratio	15.62
NRPA PRORAGIS	Average: 13.5
International City Managers Association	General Standard: 18-20; Best Practice: 12

Using a combination of full-time maintenance staff, part-time staff and inmate work details, Cherokee County currently has 20.5 fulltime equivalents (FTE) performing daily maintenance tasks in county parks. They maintain approximately 320 acres of parkland. This equates to a ratio of 15.62 acres per FTE. This ratio is below the national average. As the county adds parks, it will need to add maintenance personnel to maintain these parks at a level consistent with current standards. **In addition, if the county desires to raise the level of maintenance in its current parks, it will need to add additional personnel.**

Staffing Levels

As previously stated, thirty-five (35) full-time employees currently operate the agency. One measure of recreation service delivery is to compare staffing levels on a per capita basis. Figure 4.3 is a comparison of staffing levels of the 10 most populated counties in the state prepared by the Georgia Recreation and Parks Association (GRPA) in 2014.

Figure 4.3 Parks Employees per Capita – Top 10 Georgia Counties			
County	Total Employees	Population	Employees / 10k Persons
Forsyth County	72	175,511	4.10
Clayton County	84	259,424	3.24
Cobb County	174	688,078	2.53
Gwinnett County	182	805,321	2.26
Henry County	39	203,922	1.91
Chatham County	47	265,128	1.77
Hall County	30	179,684	1.67
DeKalb County	109	691,893	1.58
Cherokee County	35	247,573	1.41
Fulton County	36	920,581	0.39

Of the ten largest counties, only Fulton County has a lower staffing level per 10,000 residents served than Cherokee County. Fulton County’s low staff ratio is attributed to the large number of municipal recreation departments in the county, which is not the case in Cherokee County. A direct comparison of employees with the benchmark communities selected for this plan reveals that Cherokee has the lowest employee-staffing ratio of all the communities, as illustrated in Figure 4.4 below.

Figure 4.4 – Parks Employees per Capita – Benchmark Communities			
County	Total Employees	Population	Employees / 10k Persons
Douglas County	24	42,356	5.67
Forsyth County	72	175,511	4.10
Bartow County	23	100,157	2.30
Gwinnett County	182	805,321	2.26
Cherokee County	35	247,573	1.41

While low staffing ratios are good for controlling costs, if ratios are too low, it can result in service delivery deficiencies. If there are not enough staff, the agency is unable to maintain parks properly or offer programs that citizen’s desire.

Staff Additions

As the county continues to grow and the agency implements the facility and program recommendations found in this plan, additional staff will be needed to maintain the facilities and to operate new programs and facilities. With staff growth, the agency will have to review how it is structured. See below for a brief description of recommended staff changes.

Maintenance Workers

As new parks are developed, additional maintenance workers will be needed in order to maintain the current ratio of acres of parkland per number of park maintenance workers, as discussed above in the assessment of the Parks Division.

New Recreation Center Staff

This plan recommends at least one new multi-purpose recreation center. This center will offer multiple sport courts for basketball, volleyball, pickleball, etc.; indoor multi-purpose gym for other sports; additional programming rooms, spaces available for rent and office and support space. Additional staff will be needed to operate this facility including reception staff, programming staff and custodial staff. These positions should be included as part of a business plan for the operation of the new facility and added to future operating budgets when the center is complete. Staff would be responsible for all aspects of operating the center including budgeting, staff oversight, and program delivery. They would also supervise all part-time staff who will operate the front desk and other areas within the center.

Active Adult Program Coordinator

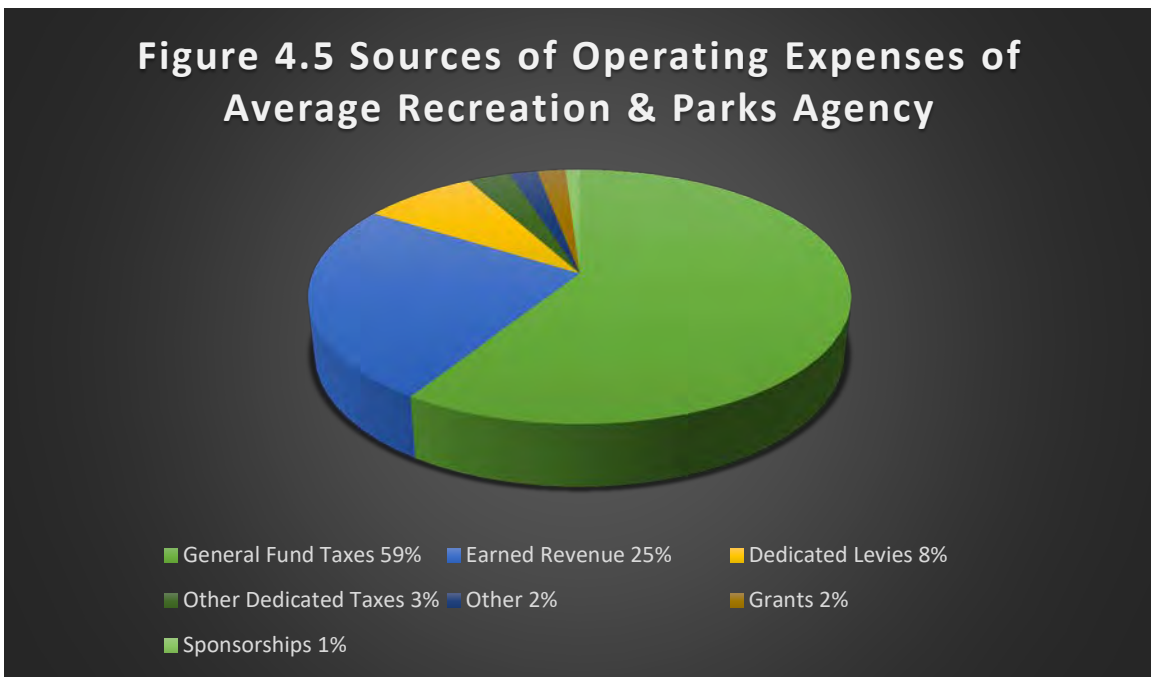
The population of older adults in Cherokee County is expected to grow significantly over the next ten years. See Chapter One for details on the demographics of the county. With this growth, the county will need to plan to serve these residents whether organized within the county's Senior Services agency or within the recreation and parks agency. The county can also collaborate with municipalities, non-profit agencies and other organizations within the county to address programming needs. See the section below on Programming for Older Adults.

Budgeting & Funding

The FY2019 CRPA operating budget is \$5,421,239. The largest portion of the funding comes from Fees and Charges for Services, which totals \$2,770,685. The agency has two other significant funding sources: \$1,100,000 in excise tax on beverages sold in unincorporated portions of the county and \$1,491,954 from the general fund. Other miscellaneous contributions make up the balance of the operating budget.

The 2016 NRPA PRORAGIS Field Report, Park and Recreation Agency Performance Benchmarks provides national data on spending levels as well as funding sources for parks and recreation agencies. Public recreation and park agencies receive 59% of their total funding from the general fund on average. In Cherokee, the current level of general fund support is 28% of the total budget. Conversely, the national average of agency-generated revenues as a percentage of the overall budget is 25% compared to 51% in Cherokee. See Figure 4.5 below for a breakdown on source of operating revenues of the average recreation and parks agency.

Figure 4.5 Sources of Operating Expenses of Average Recreation & Parks Agency



A comparison to other benchmark communities in Figure 4.6 documents that Cherokee County's per capita spending is \$21.89, which is the lowest per capita spending level of benchmark communities. Forsyth County has the highest per capita spending, and is the only benchmark agency that exceeds the national average based total population.

Many factors influence funding and expenditures for a recreation and parks agency. In reviewing the budgets of the benchmark agencies, one item that stands out is the number of indoor facilities provided by the benchmark agencies when compared to Cherokee. Most all of the benchmark agencies have multiple recreation centers or other types of indoor facilities that affect staffing levels and overall operating costs. As the agency expands recreation opportunities in the future and builds more indoor facilities, spending levels will need to increase. Indoor facilities also have the greatest opportunity to recover costs through fees.

Figure 4.6 Per Capita Operating Expenses for Parks and Recreation – Benchmark Communities			
County	Population	2019 Budgeted Expenditures	Parks and Recreation Per Capita Expenditures
Forsyth County	212,438	\$9,622,800	\$45.30
<i>National Average</i>	<i>500/sq. mile</i>		<i>\$41.23</i>
Gwinnett County	895,823	\$32,593,754	\$36.38
Clayton County	273,995	\$9,697,136	\$35.39
Bartow County	102,747	\$2,617,000	\$25.47
Henry County	217,739	\$5,343,167	\$24.54
Cherokee County	247,573	\$5,421,239	\$21.89

Percentage of Total County Operating Costs

Budgets establish priorities. The percentage of the County's operating expenses allocated for parks and recreation serves as a measure of commitment to these services. In the Community Survey, notably, 90% of respondents feel that a good parks and recreation system is just as important as schools, fire, and police protection. Figure 4.7 below provides a comparison of Cherokee County with the Benchmark communities.

Figure 4.7 Parks and Recreation Operating Budget as a % of the Total County Operating Budget	
Forsyth County	8.9%
Clayton County	5.3%
Henry County	4.0%
Bartow County	3.7%
Gwinnett County	2.9%
Cherokee County	1.7%

When comparing the recreation budget to Cherokee County's overall budget, we see that parks and recreation accounts for 1.7% of the County's total expenditures. Compared to neighboring benchmark communities, Cherokee County's recreation spending is a lower percentage of the overall budget than all other benchmark communities.

Staffing Budget

Staffing represents the largest commitment of funding for public parks and recreation agencies across the country. Cherokee County's FY19 budget includes a total of \$2,833,478 in compensation, benefits and payroll taxes for full and part-time employees. Table 4.8 shows staffing costs as a total of the benchmark counties' total operating parks and recreation budgets.

Figure 4.7 Personnel Services as a % of Operating Budget	
Clayton County	56%
<i>National Average</i>	55%
Forsyth County	54%
Gwinnett County	52%
Cherokee County	52%
Henry County	42%
Bartow County	Not Available

Cherokee County's FY19 staffing budgets as percentage of the total operating budget for parks and recreation is consistent with other benchmark communities. Only Henry County falls below the 50% rate for staff funding. Cherokee personnel cost expenditures are also below the national average which is 55% of total operating cost.

Maintenance Budget & Operations

Maintenance of park facilities is a core responsibility for recreation and park agencies. In this plan, additional new facilities are recommended to be developed over the next 10 years. These new facilities will increase maintenance

needs and require additional dollars to be allocated to the maintenance budget. As the agency continues to develop facilities, the maintenance budget will need to increase. New equipment will be needed for the staff as well.

Maintenance Standards

Staff follows regular maintenance practices on a daily basis throughout the year. Trash is collected on Mondays and Fridays, and in-season mowing is conducted Tuesday through Thursday. Normally, minor equipment repairs and servicing is done on Fridays. During the non-mowing season, regular maintenance practices occur, such as gathering leaves, mulching limbs, replacing infield mix, and doing minor repairs in parks.

While the written maintenance standards are outdated, staff have a good idea of the daily maintenance activities because many of the staff have been with the agency for several years. As retirements start to occur, along with other staff turnover, this institutional knowledge of daily practices could be lost. The division needs to update the maintenance standards manual, which should outline all maintenance duties on a seasonal basis for both site-based and roving crews. The manual should cover the various levels of maintenance for each type of facility and include things such as a mowing schedule for sports fields and a mowing schedule for open lawns and play areas. Each new maintenance employee should receive training on these practices as part of the orientation process.

Work Order System

What is more variable are the unexpected items that occur on a daily or weekly basis. Currently, the department does not use a written or electronic work order system to prioritize the non-routine maintenance activities. A best practice for maintenance divisions is to have a work order system in place that includes a written record of maintenance repairs and activities that need to occur. This will allow staff in all divisions to record a maintenance request and allow the Division Director and Park Managers to prioritize and track the work.

Equipment Maintenance Schedules

Another best practice is to develop equipment maintenance and replacement schedules. While most staff knows to change the oil in a pickup truck per the owner's manual, they may not have the same type of knowledge about servicing mowers and small engine tools. The equipment maintenance schedules should summarize manufacturers' recommended maintenance standards for all equipment that is utilized by the division.

Cost Recovery & Resource Allocation

Revenues generated for parks and recreation services are expressed as a percentage of the operating costs and reported as the Cost Recovery Rate. The implementation of financial sustainability practices, in the form of revenue and pricing policies, has risen in importance with parks and recreation agencies across the country. Best practice agencies establish a philosophical basis for revenue recovery rates that vary by program type, service level tier and population served with fees based on the cost of service.

Revenues collected by communities for parks and recreation services can be used to offset to the cost of operating the parks and recreation agency. Figure 4.8 shows the sources and percentages of direct revenue generated as profiled and compiled in PRORAGIS.

Figure 4.8 Parks and Recreation Sources of Direct Revenue		
Source	National Average	Cherokee County (FY18)
Programs and Class Fees and Charges	62.5%	64.9%
Facility Entry Fees and Memberships	14.6%	13.9%
Facility Rentals	11.8%	17.7%
Concession, Resale Items	10.6%	3.2%
Facility or Property Leases	2.0%	0.2%
Other	0.4%	0%
Sale of Real Property	0.1%	0%

Programs drive revenue in parks and recreation, as evidenced in Figure 4.8. Cherokee offers a wide variety of programs but the analysis reveals the lack of facilities and staffing levels are preventing growth of new recreation programs. As the county continues to grow, the need for additional programming space and staff will be critical to maintaining current revenue generation levels.

The County should consider revenue generation when designing new parks and facilities. For example, incorporating food and beverage and retail sales at most new facilities where large groups of users are anticipated can increase sales. When developing parks, consider facilities that can host a large variety of tournaments and sports training camps in addition to programs that citizens are willing to pay for.

Revenue generation at park facilities is highest at indoor facilities that operate on a year-round basis. Cherokee County should balance the development of indoor facilities to offset the cost of operating facilities such as greenways and playgrounds that have little revenue generating potential. New recreation centers should include spaces that can be programmed and rented for revenue generation.

Although not included in the PRORAGIS database, sponsorships for teams, programs and facilities (naming rights) and grants are also important revenue sources that should not be excluded in the Cost Recovery Rate calculation. In FY18, less than 1% of CRPA’s revenue was generated through sponsorships, donation and contributions.

The following Figure 4.9 illustrates the cost recovery rates for Cherokee County and the benchmark counties. It is clear from the comparison that Cherokee is well ahead of other agencies in terms of earned revenue. It also points out that in terms of general fund support the other jurisdictions are funded at a much higher rate than Cherokee County.

Figure 4.9 Revenue Recovery Rate as % of Operations	
Cherokee	51%
Forsyth	28%
Clayton	25%
<i>National Average</i>	25%
Gwinnett	13%
Henry	9%
Bartow	Not Available

Income levels are an indicator of the ability to pay. The average household income levels, as documented in the study's Community Profile and included in Figure 4.9, compares Cherokee County to the benchmark communities and demonstrates that Cherokee County has a higher median household income than other communities do, except Forsyth County. This would indicate that residents should have disposable income to participate in recreation programs.

Figure 4.9 Median Household Income	
Forsyth	\$85,492
Cherokee	\$69,711
<i>State of Georgia</i>	<i>\$65,018</i>
Henry	\$60,269
Gwinnett	\$59,492
Bartow	\$53,675
Clayton	\$40,314

Revenue Policy and Pricing Strategy

Cherokee County does not currently have a revenue policy to guide the pricing of recreation programs. Revenue policies define tiered service levels such as basic services, supplemental services, and special facilities with fees set to recover a specified percentage of the cost to deliver the service. Tiered service levels address both populations served and the level of exclusivity of the use. For example, the cost recovery rate for an exercise class as a part of a senior program may be less than the cost recovery rate for an adult program exercise class. The current sports field policy contains tiered rental costs and is a good example of how fees vary for different user groups. As another example, a pavilion rental by a private company would be considered an exclusive use and would be expected to cover all costs, at a minimum.

The county should develop a tiered revenue policy that is adopted by the Cherokee County Board of Commissioners. This will establish a precedent for pricing programs and allow staff to develop new programs with a consistent level of pricing based on the adopted revenue policy. The implementation of revenue policies requires staff training to understand the cost of service in order to calculate fees. Scholarship opportunities should be made available as a component of the policy in order to maintain equity and access to recreation programming across all segments of the population.

Recreation Programming

Recreation programs are an essential component of any recreation agency. With a good balance of offerings, programming greatly benefits the people of the community by enhancing their overall health and quality of life. However, there has to be a strong commitment to providing diverse recreation programs to function effectively as a modern park and recreation agency. Unlike most other government agencies, recreation and park staff engage and interact with the people of the community daily and on a more personal level. Programming encourages people to interact with one another. Depending on the type of program, it can also promote teamwork and self-improvement. Cherokee County encourages its patrons to visit their parks and participate in programming and special events as a variety of recreation opportunities exist.

A well-rounded and diverse park and recreation agency provides many benefits to the community it serves. As discussed in the 1995 National Recreation and Park Association publication, *Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines*, the four categories of benefits are personal, economic, social, and environmental. Each benefit is consequential to the community and has specific rewards.

Personal Benefits of a comprehensive delivery system include a full and meaningful life, good health, stress management, self-esteem, positive self-image, a balanced life, achieving full potential, gaining life satisfaction, human development, positive lifestyle choices, and an improved quality of life.

- **Economic Benefits** include preventive health care, a productive work force, and big economic returns on small investments, business relocation and expansion, reduction in high cost vandalism and criminal activity, tourism growth, and environmental investments that pay for themselves.
- **Social Benefits** include building strong communities while reducing alienation, loneliness, and anti-social behavior; promoting ethnic and cultural harmony; building strong families; increasing opportunity for community involvement, shared management, and ownership of resources; and providing a foundation for community pride.
- **Environmental Benefits** include environmental health, environmental protection and rehabilitation, environmental education, environmental investment increasing property values, and insurance for a continuing healthy environmental future.

Further National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) studies have shown that parks and recreation have three principles that make them essential services to communities: economic value, health and environmental benefits, and social importance. Parks improve the local tax base and increase property values, in turn restoring initial investments. As previously mentioned, the contribution of parks and recreation to the health of children, adults, and seniors is clear as the sedentary lifestyle of the working and school-aged plagues the human race. Modern parks are a tangible reflection of the quality of life in a community. They can bring about a sense of pride for many members of society.

NRPA promotes three pillars that should be a part of every parks and recreation agency.

- Conservation
- Health and Wellness
- Social Equity

By offering a wide variety of park programs, CRPA can expose citizens to these three pillars and thus build a community that lives together and plays together. Conservation programs can expose people to the beauty that nature has to offer. Athletic programs, exercise classes, 5k runs, walking, biking, and equestrian trails all improve health through active lifestyles and stress relief. Programs for special populations, seniors, and different ethnic and economic populations bring social equity to a community.

An analysis of recreation programming is a basic component of this plan, as an agency should offer a myriad of programs for all ages, from youth to older adults. Offering diversified programming creates the chance to include citizens who may have never participated in recreation activities. The following assesses the current programming available from Cherokee County and provides a number of recommendations to broaden and deepen the agency's offerings to reach a greater audience.

Analysis of Existing Programs

Through the recreation and parks agency and in partnership with other organizations, Cherokee County currently provides a variety of programs, activities, and events throughout the year. Programming includes activities, camps, athletics, aquatics, and special events. These are held in parks and facilities across the county and reach individuals of all age groups. CRPA publishes a quarterly publication of activities providing an overview of programs and events held during that quarter. Information is also available on the CRPA website. Below is a list of many of the programs offered by the agency. *Note: This list is not all-inclusive.*

- Activities
 - Instructional Programs including Dance, Gymnastics, etc.
 - Fitness & Wellness
 - Teen Programs
- Camps
 - Summer Camps
 - Sports Camps
 - Aquatic Camps
 - Specialty Camps
- Athletics
 - Youth Athletics
 - Adult Sports
- Aquatics
 - Swim Lessons
 - Safety Programs including Lifeguard Training, etc.
- Competitive Swim Teams
- Aqua Fitness
- Special Events
- Special Events
 - 5k's
 - Holiday Themed Events
 - Touch a Truck
 - Fall Festival
- Older Adults
 - Silver Roamers Club
 - Fitness & Wellness Programs
- Therapeutic Programs (Special Populations)
 - Instructional Programs
 - Camps
 - Day Trips
 - Veterans Programs

Program Diversity

As stated previously, a diverse and well-rounded park and recreation department provides many benefits to its residents. In evaluating the diversity of the programs offered by the Cherokee Recreation and Parks Agency, we looked at NRPA's 2016 Field Report, which identifies core recreation programming offered by over 60% of recreation agencies across the country. The following figure illustrates those programs and the percent of recreation agencies that offer the programming.

Figure 4.10 Core Recreation Programs		
Activity	Percent of Agencies Offering	Offered by Cherokee County
Team Sports	84%	Yes
Fitness Enhancement Classes	83%	Yes
Health & Wellness Education	81%	Yes
Safety Training	69%	Yes
Visual Arts	67%	Yes
Trips and Tours	66%	Yes
Martial Arts	60%	Yes
Performing Arts	60%	Yes
Aquatics	60%	Yes

Program Opportunities

The current programs offered by the agency cover the core programs offered by most recreation agencies. The survey responses reveal that the primary programs people are currently involved in are youth and adult sports, active adult health classes and activities, and senior trips. However, there are real opportunities to expand the current program offerings. By utilizing park resources currently available and adding new facilities recommended by this plan, additional programming can be added.

The community survey showed there are a number of activities that are desired for the youth, adult and senior populations. Figure 4.2 below shows those activities.

Figure 4.11 Top Youth, Adult and Senior Activities Desired by Survey Respondents		
Youth Sports	Adult Sports	Older Adults
Soccer League	Disc Golf	Shuffle Board
Volleyball League	Soccer Leagues	Dance Classes
Adaptive Sports for Special Needs	Kickball Leagues	Hiking Club
Skateboarding	Volleyball Leagues	Aerobic Classes
BMX	Pickleball	Fishing

While the county currently offers some of these programs, others are not currently available. Where the activity is currently offered, this may indicate the need for additional marketing or the use of different marketing channels. Some of these activities will require new facilities or expanded partnerships in order to offer the programs; others, such as volleyball leagues, senior classes, and adult soccer programs, are currently limited by space availability at the existing recreation center and parks.

In addition to the community center, meeting rooms in fire and police facilities can be used for some of the desired classes. However, a new recreation center would provide much needed space for many of the desired programs and activities.

Major programming areas that should be expanded include outdoor recreation programs, active adult programs, special population programs, and other programs that bring the community or groups of the community together.

Outdoor Programs

The agency has significant parklands that abut lakes, rivers, and streams. Much of this land offers diverse forest habitat and open areas that are perfect for outdoor recreation programs. These parklands lend themselves to both land-based programs and water-based activities. Many of the outdoor recreation programs require little cost to offer and can be revenue generators for the county. In FY19, the county has established an Outdoor Recreation Coordinator using existing staff. The addition of this position will enable CRPA to develop programming in the realm of outdoor recreation.

Special Populations

Programming for special populations is an ever-growing area of public recreation services. Across the nation, recreation agencies are seeking out ways to serve all population groups, including those with special needs. This population group needs recreation programs that are tailored to their ability. Many citizens who fall into the special population category are served by the public school system to the age of 18. After that point, they then

lose the main provider of services. This is where recreation agencies can fill the void and deliver group activities and programs that provide relief to both the individual with special needs and their caregiver.

The county has already recognized that, in some cases, special facilities are needed to serve these citizens. The development of an adaptive use field at Patriots Park is a good example of a specialized facility. This field will allow citizens of all ages with special needs to interact with other able-bodied citizens in recreation activities. While special facilities are not needed for many activities, staff who have special training to work with participants is needed. In 2017, CRPA hired the county's first Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist. With a dedicated staff member and adequate staff support of part-time or volunteer assistance, the agency can develop new programs to meet the needs of the special population citizens of the county.

Programming for Older Adults

The Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Aging (AoA) predicts that, by 2030, the senior population, defined as 65 years or older, will be doubled from that of 2000. In 2009, seniors represented one out of every eight Americans, or approximately 12% of the population and that number is expected to rise to 19% of the population in 2030. US Census Bureau data shows that Georgia's senior population, at 11.5%, tracks closely to that of the national statistic. Cherokee County's Community Profile, as presented in Chapter One, indicates that the fastest growing population by age groups are the 60 to 64 and 65 to 70 age groups. This will have a direct impact on the need for expanded programs for older adults.

Baby Boomers, as defined by the US Census Bureau, were born between 1946 and 1964. The oldest Boomers are approaching 70 years of age, and the youngest Boomers are in their fifties. This generation has changed the profile of the traditional senior citizen recreation program. The Boomers do not view themselves as senior citizens and are not likely to participate in a program located in the old style "senior" center or a program for "golden agers." They are active and intend to remain active, especially running/jogging, walking, and hiking. They swim and take exercise classes for fitness. This generation is knowledgeable about fitness and is interested in educational classes and social activities.

Parks and recreation agencies' traditional approach to programming for older adults will be extended to meet the more active needs of the new generation of aging Americans. At the same time, the role of social responsibility, in terms of improving the lives of the seniors, will remain an important emphasis. In the December 2013 issue of Parks & Recreation Magazine, Dr. John Crompton, a noted Texas A&M professor in Leisure Studies research, concluded that "focusing on this senior demographic will impact the viability of park and recreation agencies in the near future, and forward-thinking agencies are already adjusting operations to better serve seniors."

In planning for the increased senior population and how best to serve them, the county will need increased staff and additional indoor recreation space. This can be accomplished either by the county's Senior Services agency, Cherokee Recreation & Parks Agency or in partnership by coordinating staff and available space in existing community centers, as well as future space.

The programs for older adults should balance fee-based programs that cover program costs and, in some cases, generate retained revenue as in the case with more extensive senior trips and non-fee-based activities, such as card games, computer labs, and game rooms.

Program Implementation

NRPA's Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) standards provide the best resource for identifying standards and best practices for recreation programming. A *Recreation Programming Plan* is a fundamental standard for park and recreation agencies. The following provides key administrative and organizational best practices for developing and implementing successful parks and recreation programs.

Community Assessment

Programs should be based on the assessed needs of the community. The Public Input section of this study provides the beginning point for assessing the recreation programming needs for the agency. The planning team recommends that CRPA conduct a program needs assessment on five-year intervals moving forward to continue to understand the needs and desires of the community, particularly as the county population continues to grow.

Performance Measurement

A systematic approach to recreation program evaluation is a CAPRA fundamental standard for parks and recreation. Goals and standards should be established for all programs, and the programs should be measured against the goals and standards. The evaluation results are used to determine if programs should be continued, modified or discontinued. At a minimum, CRPA should develop a user survey to receive feedback from participants in the current programs offered by the agency. Going forward, the agency should develop and implement a systematic evaluation process.

Marketing & Advertising

Marketing activities are essential to the modern parks and recreation agency as they try to serve the active lifestyles of today's modern families and citizens. Improved marketing efforts can also increase revenue generation by informing citizens about programs that they may have otherwise missed in print media or by word-of-mouth.

Feedback provided from the community survey reveals that the primary source for information used by citizens to find out about agency programs and activities is the Cherokee Recreation and Parks Agency website. The agency has recognized the importance of the website and recently updated it to make it more user-friendly. Citizens find out about programs and activities through other sources, such as print media, including local magazines and newspapers. Word-of-mouth was the fourth most common way to hear about programs.

Over the next ten years, as technology continues to evolve, the department will need to continue to utilize all forms of social media to provide information on agency programs and activities. In the community survey, 64% of respondents said they would like to receive a monthly newsletter via email. The newsletter should cover upcoming programs and events as well as topics such as new facilities, new staff, changes in park policies, and other information relating to the agency. The newsletter should be supplemented by other email blasts, which announce registration dates for programs, reminders about special events, or required training sessions for coaches. The newsletter and other marketing materials can be used to brand the agency and create loyalty among participants.

Partners in Recreation

The increased importance of partnerships is a growing trend in parks and recreation. The recession's impact on local government budgets required creative solutions for continuing recreation programming. Partnerships

extend the reach of parks and recreation and provide alternative programs and program delivery models, but they also build advocacy for parks and recreation. The National League of Cities 2010 Report illustrates the importance of collaborating. Figure 4.12 below shows the percentage of recreation and parks departments that partner with other organizations, such as schools and businesses.

Figure 4.12 Parks and Recreation Partnerships	
Partner Organizations	Percent of Agencies
Schools	75%
Other Local Governments	69%
Non-Profits	60%
State Government	43%
Businesses	38.5%

Source: National League of Cities 2010 Report

Many parks agencies depend on partnerships with other public or private organizations to offer services to their citizens. Such partnerships can promote outreach, increase programming, and ease the burden of agency staff in developing programs that the public desires. The following is an overview of the various organizations that the agency works with in the delivery of programming in Cherokee County. The agency should continue to develop these and other partnerships, as they deem necessary.

The agency has many partners and partnership agreements in place that allow the agency to provide recreation programs and services throughout the county. One of the largest partners is the Cherokee County School District. The school district allows the agency to use all the school gyms for the agency's basketball programs, which is the largest program offered by the county and the school district has a bus sharing agreement with the county for transporting campers enrolled in CRPA camps. The school district uses the Cherokee County Aquatic Center and other athletic facilities as part of their partnership.

The agency also has several agreements with youth athletic associations who operate programs at county park facilities. These agreements range from managing sports programs to paying for the maintenance activities for portions of the parks. These agreements are instrumental in allowing the agency to maintain lean staffing numbers while also providing activities for county residents.

When it comes to partnership agreements, the county has a good understanding of the type of legal language that should be in the documents. The documents are laid out clearly and stress items such as coaches' background checks, a best practice when dealing with youth athletic associations.

Municipalities

Woodstock and Canton both have recreation staff that oversee parks and recreation facilities. The other incorporated communities do not have official parks and recreation departments but do have some recreation facilities located in their communities. Each of these communities received funds for the development of recreation facilities in the last bond program passed in the county thereby increasing the overall access to parks and recreation facilities throughout the county.

The City of Woodstock has focused their efforts on the development of greenways and trails. They currently have the most extensive system of greenways in the county and continue to add greenways in conjunction with the Greenprints Alliance, a greenways friends group.

The City of Canton used bond funds to develop new park facilities in their downtown area along the Etowah River and ball fields at the county-owned Kenney Askew Park by constructing the Hunkey Mauldin Sports Complex. The City of Waleska purchased park property, and the City of Ball Ground used bond funds to renovate several existing city parks. The City of Holly Springs used their funds to purchase a piece of property and developed J.B. Owens Park.

Cherokee County, through CRPA, should continue to take a leadership role in promoting recreation and parks opportunities throughout the county and serve as a clearinghouse and conduit for increased cooperation for each of the municipalities. Increased communication and cooperation will maximize available resources while reducing duplication of services.

Volunteers

Parks and recreation agencies would not function without volunteerism. Volunteers provide the foundation of parks and recreation service delivery. CRPA currently uses volunteers as coaches, bike trail and equestrian trail supporters, and other association members to expand program opportunities. Additional volunteers help with Special Olympics activities and special events that take place in the county. The county holds a volunteer appreciation banquet annually to express gratitude to all the volunteers. The county should continue to promote volunteer opportunities where appropriate.

National Accreditation

The Commission for Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) was established in 1992 to create standards of organization and operation for all public park and recreation agencies. Standards include important operation issues such as planning, organization, human resources, financial management, programming, facility & land management and risk management. Accreditation is based on an agency's compliance with the 151 standards for national accreditation. To achieve accreditation, an agency must comply with all 37 Fundamental Standards and 103 (90%) of the 114 Non-Fundamental Standards upon initial accreditation and 108 (95%) of the 114 Non-Fundamental Standards upon reaccreditation.

CAPRA accreditation is a five-year cycle that includes three phases: development of the agency self-assessment report, the on-site visitation, and the Commission's review and decision. The on-site visitation follows the agency's development of its self-assessment report. If the Commission grants accreditation, the agency will develop a new self-assessment report and be revisited every five years. Within each of the four years between on-site visits, the agency will submit an annual report that addresses its continued compliance with the accreditation standards.

The accreditation process sets high expectations on those agencies that are committed to the process; ultimately making them better departments. There are currently 166 accredited agencies in the United States, including eleven in Georgia.

The move toward accreditation takes time. Most agencies develop a plan to reach the required standards over a 2 to 3 year period. The county should set a goal of becoming accredited within the next 2 years.

Summary, Key Observations & Recommendations

In summary, the planning team recommends the following steps in the further development of the operations of the Cherokee Recreation and Parks Agency:

Near-Term: 0 to 24 Months

- Develop a Revenue Policy based on the cost of service with a three-tiered service level system and a phased approach to move toward a more self-sustaining system.
- Update maintenance standards; develop a work order system, and equipment maintenance schedules to standardize maintenance practices.
- Begin offering outdoor recreation programs and classes.
- Expand recreation programs for older adults and special populations.
- Expand athletic programs to include new programs identified in community survey.
- Develop program surveys for all programs.
- Expand programming opportunities for fee generation.
- Expand marketing efforts to ensure that citizens are aware of the programs offered by CRPA.
- Continue to develop and expand partnership opportunities.
- Complete the self assessment process to CAPRA accreditation. Submit the preliminary application.
- Schedule and complete the on-site visit for CAPRA accreditation.

Mid-Term: 25 to 60 Months

- Develop more indoor facilities that have year-round revenue production potential.
- Hire full- and part-time staff to operate and manage the proposed recreation center once complete.
- Hire additional maintenance staff to maintain the current ratio of acres of parkland per park maintenance as additional parks are developed.
- Continue to expand programming for older adults with the addition of a multi-generational community center.
- Continue evaluating program offerings and conducting program surveys.
- Conduct a recreation programs needs assessment survey.
- Based upon surveys and needs assessment, evaluate programming and adjust offerings.

Long-Term: 61 to 120 Months

- Hire additional maintenance staff to maintain the current ratio of acres of parkland per park maintenance as additional parks are developed.
- Continue with program evaluations and surveys and periodic recreation programs needs assessment surveys, and make changes as necessary.
- Maintain CAPRA accreditation through annual reports and re-accreditation process every five years.

Chapter Five – Opinion of Probable Cost & Funding Options

Opinions of Cost

In the development of the plan update, a ten-year spending plan was created. Figure 5.1 provides opinions of probable costs for projects including both proposed and existing parks and greenway facilities. These are based on current construction costs and cost escalation is included for projects slated for the end of plan.

Included are all recommended minor improvements and maintenance needs at existing recreation and parks facilities, major renovations and expansions recommended for existing parks, new park development including greenways and blueways, new indoor facilities as well as estimates for architectural/engineering services, administrative costs, and a program wide 10% contingency. All recommended projects are detailed in Chapter Three – Facilities Assessments and Recommendations.

Figure 5.1: Cherokee County Recreation, Parks, Greenspace & Trails Master Plan Capital Improvements Opinions of Cost	
Capital Improvement	Ten Year Total
Existing Recreation & Parks Facilities Improvements	
Barnett Park	\$215,000
Blankets Creek Bike Trails	\$20,000
Cherokee County Aquatic Center	\$920,000
Cline Park	\$95,000
Dwight Terry Park	\$275,000
Hickory Trails Park	\$95,000
Hobgood Park	\$65,000
JJ Biello Park	\$280,000
Kenney Askew Park	\$95,000
Lewis Park	\$15,000
Patriots Park	\$75,000
Recreation Center, South Annex	\$275,000
Sequoyah Park	\$40,000
Union Hill Community Center	\$150,000
Waleska Park	\$125,000
Weatherby Park	\$125,000
Subtotal	\$2,865,000
Major Park Renovations/Expansions	
Badger Creek Park	\$2,400,000
Cherokee Mills Park	\$3,000,000
Cherokee Veterans Park Baseball/Softball Complex	\$5,000,000
Cherokee Veterans Park, Other Additions	\$975,000
Fields Landing Park	\$3,000,000
Garland Mountain Horse & Hiking Trails Expansion	\$1,225,000
JJ Biello Park Twin Creeks Softball Complex Expansion	\$5,500,000

Figure 5.1: Cherokee County Recreation, Parks, Greenspace & Trails Master Plan Capital Improvements Opinions of Cost	
JJ Biello Park Mill Creek Road Entrance (<i>new</i>)	\$3,200,000
Sequoyah Park	\$2,450,000
Subtotal	\$26,750,000
New Park Development	
Thacker Parcel	\$9,900,000
Thompson or Dunn Parcels (SW)	\$7,500,000
Greenway Plan & 10 Miles of Trails	\$12,000,000
Canoe / Kayak Launches	\$900,000
Subtotal	\$30,300,000
Indoor Facilities	
LB Ahrens Recreation Center @ Cherokee Veterans Park	\$16,000,000
Recreation Center, SW portion of Cherokee County	\$10,500,000
Subtotal	\$26,500,000
Subtotal of All Categories	\$86,415,000
A/E Fees (7%)	\$ 6,049,050
Administrative Costs (4%)	\$ 3,456,600
Contingency (10%)	\$ 9,592,065
Total Capital Improvement Estimate	\$ 105,512,715

Moving Forward with Funding

Cherokee County's elected officials and citizens have expressed goals of increasing recreation opportunities throughout the county as well as increasing tourism through the development of additional tournament facilities. Benchmarking comparisons indicate that Cherokee County is not funding park operations at the same level as comparison communities, so transforming Cherokee County's parks and recreation opportunities will be a significant undertaking requiring additional funding.

To meet the expressed goals, a combination of funding is necessary, which could include redirecting existing general funds to parks; utilizing available special taxes and fees; creating a dedicated millage for park operations and capital projects; and securing grants and private funding. In addition, it would allow for an increased operating budget, which is needed in order to improve facility maintenance and increase the number of programs offered throughout the year.

Going forward, the county needs to increase funding for parks above the current 1.7% of the total county operating budget to address the deferred maintenance issues in existing parks as well as expand and operate new facilities that will generate revenue and attract visitors the county. The ten-year spending plan has identified over \$105,000,000 in funding needs for projects. Funding of this level can best be addressed by a combination of sources.

Historically, the main sources of capital funding for parks and recreation agencies in the state of Georgia are:

- Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST)
- General Obligation Bonds

- Local Option Sales Tax (LOST)
- Impact or Other Development Fees
- General Fund Tax Dollars
- State and Federal Grants
- Program User Fees

The county has a .503 millage rate that is paying the debt service on a series of general obligation bonds that funded a capital development program for new park facilities and renovation projects. Park operations are funded by variety of funding sources, the largest being earned revenue from program fees and charges. It is clear the county will need to explore other methods to increase funding in order to improve the overall quality of park facilities and programs. In the following paragraphs, alternative funding options are explored.

Return on Investment in Parks

An investment in the park system will have many benefits beyond just providing improved recreational opportunities for the county. By developing improved tournament sports facilities, the county should see revenue increase from the hotel tax and an increase in earned revenue from concession sales, gate receipts, program fees, and rentals. These increases in revenue can then be used to help offset the additional operational costs at new facilities. The county should also see a reduction in maintenance costs as outdated facilities are updated. Improved parks can also be an important tool in attracting new residents and businesses. Improved parks attract more use, getting people outdoors and active, which has proven health benefits.

As the county continues to grow, with a projected 70,000 new residents over the next ten years, the county will have to maintain existing facilities, provide new facilities and operate a growing recreation agency. In this section of the report, we document current funding practices and identify opportunities to gain additional funding and tools for the continued development of recreation and parks services in Cherokee County.

Traditional Primary Funding Methods

Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST)

In Georgia, the largest and most commonly used funding source for capital is the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) program. SPLOST referendums are placed on the ballot by county governments, and as such, the county controls when and if this type of funding will become available. As part of the process, projects which are to be funded by the collected tax dollars must be identified prior to the vote so voters know what is to be constructed. Once a SPLOST is passed, the county can choose to fund projects as the tax revenues are collected; or to use a general obligation bond to advance project schedules, using the revenue collected to retire the bond debt.

The most recent SPLOST passed overwhelmingly in Cherokee County in November 2017. Level One projects in this edition of the county’s SPLOST program include expansions of the courthouse and jail, and an upgrade to the county’s emergency communications system. Other projects include roads and bridges, fire facilities and equipment. Minor recreation and parks projects were included totaling less than \$3,000,000. **As part of the next SPLOST referendum, the county should consider including several of the larger, high priority projects in this plan.**

Impact Fees

An impact fee is a fee imposed by a local government on new development to account for the cost of expanding public infrastructure, facilities and services to serve the new homes and businesses. Since 2000, Cherokee County

has collected impact fees for libraries, fire protection, sheriff's patrol, public safety, parks & recreation and road improvements. The fees are designed to help our growing jurisdiction maintain the same level of service from these important community resources. In 1990 The Georgia Development Impact Fee Act (DIFA) was enacted into law to;

- Ensure that adequate public facilities are available to serve new growth and development;
- Promote orderly growth and development by establishing uniform standards by which municipalities and counties may require that new growth and development pay a proportionate share of the cost of new public facilities needed to serve new growth and development;
- Establish minimum standards for the adoption of development impact fee ordinances by municipalities and counties; and
- Ensure that new growth and development is required to pay no more than its proportionate share of the cost of public facilities needed to serve new growth and development and to prevent duplicate and ad hoc development exactions.

According to recent national surveys, about 60 percent of all cities with over 25,000 residents and almost 40 percent of all metropolitan counties use some form of impact fees.

Impact fees for parks and recreation are collected only on residential development including single-family detached housing, apartments and condominiums/townhouses. The current Cherokee County Impact Fee Schedule has that fee shown as \$283.741.

Recent capital improvements through the Parks Bond have greatly increased the recreation and parks level of service (LOS) provided by the county. **During the next review and update to the county's Impact Fee program, it is strongly recommended that the county consider increasing these fees due to recent increased level of services.**

General Obligation Bond

In November 2008, Cherokee County voters overwhelmingly supported the issuance of general obligation bonds up to \$90 million for the purpose of improving and expanding recreation and parks opportunities within the County. The Cherokee County Board of Commissioners began issuing those bonds in 2009 for the purpose of fulfilling the commitment to the citizens of Cherokee County.

The debt service on these bonds is repaid through property tax revenue generated by a dedicated millage rate levied county-wide. That millage rate is set by the Board of Commissioners each year at the same time that the County's M&O and Fire District rates are set.

Figure 5.2 shows the dates and amounts of each series of bond that were issued. Note that in 2016, the County refunded the 2009 series by issuing the 2016 series. This did not increase the amount available for projects but it did generate a significant savings for the County and the citizens.

Figure 5.2 Park Bond Issuances

Series	Date Issued	Amount (Millions)	Callable	Date
5Bond-Series 2009 ¹	2/26/2009	\$45.0	Yes	4/1/2019
6Bond-Series 2010	8/25/2010	\$10.767	Yes	4/1/2020
7Bond-Series 2012	1/26/2012	\$11.410	Yes	2/28/2019
8Bond-Series 2015	7/26/2014	\$22.823	Yes	4/1/2024
9Bond-Series 2016 ¹	4/1/2016	\$28.45	No	4/1/2029

¹ The Series 2009 bond was refunded and replaced with the Series 2016.

In 2008, prior to the ballot referendum, the estimated property tax impact to a \$200,000 home was \$62.00 per year. Figure 5.3 shows the Park Bond millage rate assessed since 2009 and the impact to a \$200,000 home, as well as the impact to the average home in Cherokee County each year. The actual impact to a \$200,000 home has averaged \$52.69 per year since 2009, about 15% less than originally estimated.

Figure 5.3 Park Bond Millage Rates

Year	Park Bond Millage Rate	Cherokee County Average Home Fair Market Value	Tax on an Average Home (Park Bond)	Tax on a \$200,000 Home (Park Bond)
2009	0.580	\$205,908	\$47.77	\$46.40
2010	0.628	\$189,348	\$47.56	\$50.24
2011	0.641	\$169,300	\$43.41	\$51.28
2012	0.780	\$163,642	\$51.06	\$62.40
2013	0.776	\$167,574	\$52.01	\$62.08
2014	0.744	\$182,000	\$54.16	\$59.52
2015	0.744	\$212,300	\$63.18	\$59.52
2016	0.609	\$229,300	\$55.86	\$48.72
2017	0.581	\$248,100	\$57.66	\$46.48
2018	0.503	\$256,300	\$51.57	\$40.24
Average	0.659	\$202,377	\$52.42	\$52.69

If the county desires to accelerate park and recreation projects, but prefers not to incur additional debt, it will need to consider ways to accelerate the repayment of the existing general obligation bond debt such as the refunding of the Series 2009 bond with the Series 2016 bond or increased payments. Given the strong support for parks and recreation projects, citizens are likely to support future referendums that continue to show a good return on their investment.

User Fees

User fees assessed by parks and recreation agencies are wide and varied. Fees can be charged for facility maintenance, added to program registrations, or charged for park access on a daily or annual basis. Other user fees include membership to special facilities and program fees charged for instructional programs.

Program user fees are a collection of entry fees and program registrations. Collected funds are primarily used to offset operating expenses in providing services to participants. Current program fees and revenue generation is a major funding source for the agency. Fee collections make up more than 50% of the annual budget. To maintain or grow this high level of cost recovery, new facilities that have the ability to generate revenue are needed along with new programs. **Development of a cost recovery and resource allocation policy is recommended.**

It is in the agency's best interest to evaluate the existing pricing strategies; develop a cost recovery philosophy; create goals for both county-sponsored and association-sponsored programs that truly reflect the community's values placed on recreation and parks services; and provide for the agency's sustainability. CRPA should examine their current fee structure to identify where increases may be appropriate. Factors, such as inflation rates, rising energy costs, land values, higher maintenance levels provided by the county, and new facility development, should all be taken into account.

Non-Resident Fees

Non-resident fees are charged to facility users and program participants who do not reside within the county. An example would be a non-resident fee at an aquatics center or for participation in a sports league. Residents pay one fee and non-residents pay a higher fee. Currently, Cherokee County does not utilize non-resident fees. Moving forward, the county should evaluate facilities and programs to determine where non-resident fees may be appropriate.

Financial Aid Policy

The cost recovery policies should also include a financial aid policy to assist low-income families with the cost of recreation services.

Dedicated Millage

Another method for funding park operations and capital projects is to establish a dedicated millage for parks. Numerous agencies in Georgia as well as around the country have established dedicated millage rates for parks just as they have for schools.

Regulatory Funding or Development Sources

The employment of regulatory means to aid in the development of parks and greenways is used by many county governments across the country. In the case of parks, land set aside or a fee in lieu of land set aside are common practices, which provide either needed parkland or funds necessary for the acquisition of parkland. The parkland dedication is generally tied to the development of residential property on a per unit basis. This would include both single family and multifamily housing units.

Right-of-Way or Greenway Easement Dedication

Another potential tool for Cherokee County is a mandatory right-of-way (ROW) dedication for multi-use greenway development outside of the roadway system. As new developments are planned along proposed greenways, there is no provision for the mandatory dedication of ROW's or greenway easements for the multi-use greenways recommended in this plan. These non-road routes are equally important to the development of a comprehensive greenway system; therefore, the dedication of ROW's or easements should be explored by the county's planning staff. These types of dedications will primarily benefit the county in areas where new development is occurring.

Alternative Funding Sources

Partnerships

The county is blessed to have many highly organized and active volunteer groups that use the park system, including athletic associations, bicycle and equestrian groups, and trail builders. These groups have a history of raising money for park maintenance, assisting with construction projects, and organizing volunteers. The county should continue to cultivate these partnerships as a means of expanding recreation opportunities.

Guidelines should be developed for these groups to identify facility improvements they would like to make in a park. Once in place, these groups can submit a project they would like to develop in a park. If the project is

approved and the group raises the necessary funds to construct the project, it should then be allowed to move forward.

A good example would be the development of camping facilities at equestrian and bicycle trail facilities. Focus group representatives from both of these park user groups should be encouraged to develop a plan in association with the County staff. Once their plan is approved, they can begin raising funds to construct the facilities.

Fundraising

Local fundraising is a mechanism that has worked effectively in communities across the country. Although a strong local effort is involved, this mechanism typically generates a vast amount of support and publicity. Local businesses, organizations, and private individuals can pledge funding over a specific period.

In most communities, a recreation and parks advisory board plays an active role in the fundraising for their department. One of the primary responsibilities of a board is to assist in the development, acquisition, and management of agency resources. Cherokee County has an advisory board and its members should play a vital role in providing guidance, expertise, advocacy, political support, fundraising efforts, and representation of the agency's constituents.

Board members can be more proactive by initiating a variety of fundraising tasks, such as collaborating with the user groups to send direct mail letters, promoting sponsorship of programs and naming rights, seeking in-kind donations, hosting special events (e.g., golf tournaments, fundraiser dinners, events to honor volunteers, silent auctions, and themed socials), and soliciting charitable donations of money and lands.

Naming Rights / Advertising in Parks

In the 1990s, naming rights became prominent when larger sports venues and cultural spaces were named after a company or individual. Public naming rights have been growing due to tighter agency budgets. The attraction of public venues is the varied tiers of naming rights that can be allowed. In a large sports complex, for example, agencies can solicit naming rights for the entire facility for a prescribed amount of money, or they can tailor it toward naming a locker room within the facility for a lesser fee. Agencies are creative in selling not only spaces but placing products within the department to generate new revenues.

Cherokee County has used this mechanism previously at the Cherokee County Aquatic Center. In partnership with Northside Hospital Cherokee, funds are provided for operational costs in exchange for naming rights at the aquatic center, displays on scoreboards in county parks and electronic and print media advertising.

Additional scoreboards are available in multiple county parks. **The county should continue to seek advertising and marketing partners in the local business community as well as naming rights for future facilities.**

Exclusive Beverage Rights

Many communities leverage the right to be the sole beverage supplier to a county or to the parks and recreation department by soliciting annual payments for soft drink suppliers. These sole supplier agreements usually cover a five-year period to allow the supplier to make a good return on their investment. Cherokee County already has an agreement with the Coca-Cola Bottling Company that provides sponsorship fees and rebates on sales in county parks. This revenue is used to offset operating costs within the agency.

Friend of the Parks Group

Many parks and recreation agencies have a friends group tasked with raising awareness and funds for parks. Metro Nashville Davidson County Parks and Recreation is a good example as they have numerous friends groups that are set up as 501(c)3 nonprofit groups that raise money for individual parks and the greenway system. These groups

sponsor large community festivals and functions that generate hundreds of thousands of dollars annually that go toward capital projects and programs. Some companies, such as Cabela's, have a grant program for outdoor recreational activities. One stipulation for many grant programs is that the group must be a 501(c)3, so in order for the county to be eligible for these grants, they would have to have a separate 501(c)3 group in place that could qualify. The county should consider a not-for-profit friend of the parks group that utilizes volunteers to raise awareness and funds for parks.

Grants and Programs

Transportation Enhancements (TE)

The Transportation Enhancements (TE) program, the largest source of funding for trails and related facilities, supports a wide variety of transportation-related community projects. Transportation Enhancement projects must relate to surface transportation, and they must compete among numerous projects. Greenways and other recreational trails are eligible for TE funding as long as the project has a transportation element being funded.

There are variety Transportation Enhancement categories. The three that most relate to greenways and recreational trails are pedestrian and bicycle facilities, pedestrian and bicycle safety and educational activities, and conversion of abandoned railway corridors to trails. The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) is the agency responsible for administering Transportation Enhancement funds. The county could possibly fund portions of the recommended greenway system through annual applications to GDOT. These grants are 80 percent federal and 20 percent local funding.

Website: <http://www.dot.ga.gov/IS/Funding/TE>

Recreational Trails Program (RTP)

Initiated through the TEA-21 legislation, Georgia's Recreational Trails Program (referred to frequently as "RTP"), provides funding for trail construction, trail maintenance and trail education. The Recreational Trails Program awards grants to city governments, county governments, federal agencies, authorized commissions, as well as state agencies.

Like the Transportation Enhancements program, the RTP is a matching grant with 80 percent federal funding and 20 percent local funding. The United States Congress appropriates funding for the Program, and the Federal Highway Administration manages the Program, but it is administered at the state level. In Georgia, administration is handled by staff of the Department of Natural Resources. The purpose of the RTP is to provide and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities identified in, or that further a specific goal of, the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Grants are generally awarded on an annual basis. Funds may be used for:

- New trail construction,
- Trail restoration,
- Trail head facilities,
- Lease of heavy equipment,
- Purchase of hand tools to construct / renovate trails,
- Land acquisition for trail purposes,
- Water trail facilities, and
- Safety and educational programs.

Website: <https://gastateparks.org/RTP>

Community Development Block Grants

Although this program funds housing, public facilities, economic development, and community projects, recreation can be a minor component of the project. For example, a mini-park could be constructed on land purchased through the housing project that services primarily low- to moderate-income individuals. The program is administered through the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

Website: <https://www.dca.ga.gov/community-economic-development/funding-programs/community-development-block-grants-cdbg>

Land and Water Conservation Fund

Since the mid-1960s, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program has provided funds for outdoor recreation acquisition and development; however, over the last few years, the funding has been extremely limited. In Georgia, administration of LWCF is handled by staff of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Division of Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites. Funding for this program varies from year to year based on funding from the United States Congress.

Website: <https://gastateparks.org/LWCF>

Other Transportation Grant Opportunities

Because the Atlanta Regional Commission is under federal mandate to improve air quality, there are several other specific grants available through GDOT to fund alternative transportation. CRPA should work closely with the county's Department of Transportation to pursue funds for sidewalks, trails, and bike lanes to connect to the community's parks, many of which are in close proximity to schools.

Funding Recommendations Summary

Survey responses indicate support to fund capital projects at a virtual tie between passing SPLOST and a parks bond program. The third most popular funding method was increased impact fees on development. Implementing a dedicated millage received the lowest support. When asked if they were willing to increase the property tax to improve park maintenance and programs, 95% of survey respondents said they would support an increase.

It is clear that additional funding will be needed if the goal of improving park facilities quickly is to be achieved. Several comments received through the public input process stated the citizens' desire for expanded parks and recreational programs and facilities. The county should explore the best combination of funding sources, take the necessary actions to secure the funding sources.

Other steps that will increase the rate of park and greenway development but on a much smaller scale include the following:

- Implement regulatory tools for parkland and greenway rights-of-way or easements in the zoning code. This is one of the few no-cost options for the county and is a standard requirement in many communities across the country.
- Develop a fees-and-charges policy. The policy should clearly define the various levels of general funds that will be used to support each type of program so that earned revenue goals for the agency can be set for individual programs as well as the agency as a whole. Increasing earned revenues will be a vital part of the increased funding for the agency, but it is dependent on providing adequate park facilities.
- Build on existing partnerships. Building stronger relationships with current park user groups, nonprofit groups, and others could allow the agency to provide services through allied providers to keep operational

cost low and raise funds for capital projects. The county should continue to make parkland available for local groups who raise money to fund improvements.

- Any agreements with these partners should be in writing in the form of intergovernmental agreements (IGA), memorandums of understanding (MOU), memorandums of agreement (MOA), or other similar written agreement formats to ensure that all parties understand their roles and responsibilities.
- Seek grants, and leverage existing funds as potential matches. Expand the level of grant writing done by the agency. Grants have been and will continue to be a credible funding source for special projects and plans. Grants should not be sought as a primary revenue source but as a supplement to agency and capital funding.

Action Steps

Capital Projects

0 to 12 months

- Determine highest priority projects and identify potential funding sources.
- Using existing SPLOST & Impact Fees, complete small capital improvement projects.
- Reevaluate Impact Fees for Parks and Recreation based on the increased Level of Service.

Year 2-10

- Continue to use existing SPLOST & Impact Fees to complete small capital improvement projects.
- Include high priority projects in the next SPLOST program.

Other Actions

0 to 12 months

- Organize a friends group.
- Implement new regulatory processes to allow for parkland and ROW donations.
- Apply for grants for trails, sidewalks, and bike improvements.
- Develop a cost recovery and resource allocation policy.
- Increase operations revenue through more advertising and sponsorship partnerships.

Year 2-10

- Continue to apply for grants.
- Conduct friends group fund raising programs.