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# community engagement



## INTRODUCTION

Community input is an essential part of any planning process and the most effective plans are firmly rooted in the realities and visions of the community that created them. This plan uses a combination of input from the community, the steering committee, focus groups and Department staff to inform the community engagement portion of the information-gathering process.

## METHODOLOGY

The Department and project team designed the public engagement process to maximize the amount of input and feedback from community members and Department staff. The process was intended to be equitable and inclusive, offering a variety of input opportunities and methods for all community members to have a comfortable platform for expressing their input.

Though each input meeting had its own purpose and outcomes, the meetings towards the beginning of the planning process had a broader approach with the Department and project team intending to inform participants about the planning process and solicit input regarding community values, customer satisfaction and the recreational needs and wants of the community. Meetings later in the process took a more focused approach, seeking feedback on proposed recommendations. Input from all meetings drove the creation of the Department's vision statements, which are the foundation for this plan's recommendations and action and implementation plan. The scientific survey was conducted to ensure community engagement reaches all geographic areas of the Town. It provided an opportunity to reach individuals who would not typically attend a meeting or otherwise participate in a public engagement process. This survey focused on community's recreation needs, priorities and support for funding.

The public engagement process included the following elements:

- ▶ Two public input meetings
- ▶ A scientific survey
- ▶ Three Public Opinion Surveys (1 General, 2 following Public Meetings)
- ▶ Three meetings with the Steering Committee
- ▶ Six staff input meetings
- ▶ Interdepartmental and multi-jurisdictional meeting for greenways
- ▶ Farmers Market pop up booth
- ▶ Focus Groups meetings
- ▶ Strategic partners meeting

In addition to targeted community outreach, additional four information sessions were conducted with the Town of Holly Springs Council. A special workshop session was conducted for asset mapping, the results of which are documented in the appendices.

The summary of the meetings, input strategy and the outcomes are described in the following pages.

STEERING COMMITTEE/ ELECTED OFFICIALS	SCIENTIFIC SURVEYS	VIRTUAL PUBLIC MEETING/ ONLINE SURVEYS	FOCUS GROUPS
<p>+/- 57 participants</p> <p>4 Elected officials meetings</p> <p>3 Steering committee meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Asset mapping sessions</li> <li>› Plan progress updates</li> <li>› Mapping feedbacks</li> <li>› Online Surveys</li> </ul>	<p>351 households</p> <p>Mailed in surveys</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Use &amp; ratings of parks/ facilities</li> <li>› Participation &amp; ratings of programs &amp; events</li> <li>› Barriers that prevent parks &amp; facilities use</li> <li>› Facility Needs &amp; Priorities</li> <li>› Program Needs &amp; Priorities</li> </ul>	<p>271 participants</p> <p>2 virtual meetings 2 online surveys</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Community Values</li> <li>› Greenway trails use</li> <li>› Greenway trails experience</li> <li>› Parks amenity needs</li> <li>› Program needs</li> <li>› Prioritization criteria</li> </ul>	<p>+/- 40 participants</p> <p>3 virtual meetings 1 mail in survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Seniors</li> <li>› Youth</li> <li>› Special needs</li> <li>› Strategic partners</li> <li>› Interjurisdictional meetings</li> <li>› Needs</li> <li>› Challenges</li> <li>› Priorities</li> </ul>



## Scientific Survey

### Purpose

To solicit feedback on the recreational needs and wants of the community. Responses are reflective of the Town's demographics.

### Number of Responses

351 households, exceeding the goal of 300 residents.

### Methodology

ETC Institute administered the scientific survey in the Spring of 2020 as part of the Town's efforts to develop parks, facilities and recreation programs. ETC mailed a survey packet to a random sample of households in Holly Springs who were given the option to return the survey response by mail or complete it online on [www.HollySpringsSurvey.org](http://www.HollySpringsSurvey.org). A total of 1,800 surveys were mailed out and 351 responses were returned with a precision of at least +/- 5.2% and the 95 % level of confidence.

A more detailed description of ETC Institute's methodology for ensuring statistically valid results is contained in Appendices.

## KEY FINDINGS

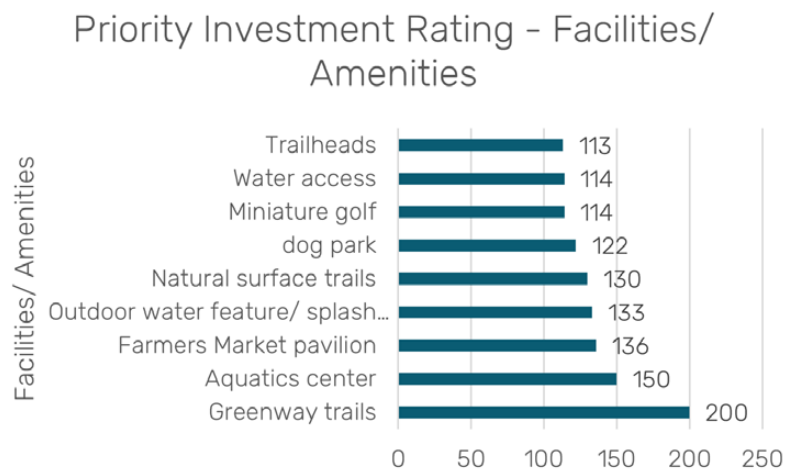
**Priority investment rating** – The priority investment rating is an objective tool to evaluate the priority that should be placed on investments in parks and recreation facilities, amenities and programs, especially as resources become available. The priority investment rating combines measures of:

1. The importance residents place on certain facilities, amenities and programs and
2. How many residents have unmet needs for that facility, amenity or program.

Appendices to this report include a more detailed description of the methodology for determining the priority investment rating.

### High Priority Facilities

- ▶ Greenway trails
- ▶ Aquatic center
- ▶ Farmers market pavilion
- ▶ Outdoor water feature or splash pad
- ▶ Natural surface trails
- ▶ Dog Park
- ▶ Miniature golf
- ▶ Water access
- ▶ Trailheads



▲ Figure 1- Priority Investment Rating - Facilities and Amenities

### High Priority Programs

- › Outdoor movies and concerts
- › Aquatic programs
- › Fitness and wellness programs
- › Outdoor adventure programs
- › Adult athletics

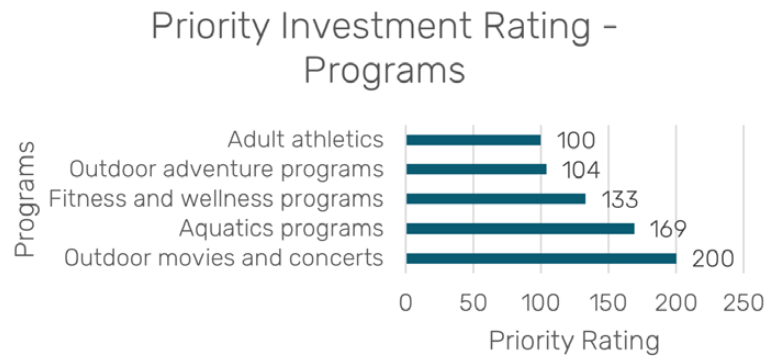


Figure 2- Priority Investment Rating - Programs

### Priority Improvements

The highest levels of support for potential improvements to parks and the recreation system, based on the sum of “very supportive” and “somewhat supportive” were:

- › Developing greenway trails to connect Town’s existing greenway trail segments (88%),
- › Investing in improvement and upkeep of existing facilities (86%),
- › Constructing a permanent farmers market pavilion (78%), and
- › Implementing sustainability measures to minimize environmental impact of parks and recreation facilities (78%)

### Summary

**Program participation ratings** – Twenty percent of households surveyed indicated they had participated in a recreation, athletic or youth/teen program the Department offered during the past 12 months. Eighty-five percent of those who have participated in a program gave an “excellent” or “good” rating when asked to rate the overall quality of the programs they participated in. Only fifteen percent gave a “fair” rating and no respondents gave a “poor” rating.

**Organizations used for parks and recreation facilities** – The organizations that responding households use most for recreation parks and facilities were; Town of Holly Springs (86%), County parks (71%), and State parks (71%). Forty-two percent (42%) of respondents use the Town of Holly Springs most for their household’s recreation needs.

**Barriers to park, facility and program usage** – Respondents were given a list of fourteen (14) various reasons that prevent them or members of their household from using Town parks/facilities. The top four reasons were: lack of information/don’t know what is offered (42%), not enough time/too busy (33%), cost of participation (19%), and overcrowding (19%).

**Community perceptions of the Department** – The highest levels of agreement with various statements regarding the Town Parks and Recreation, based on the sum of “strongly agree” and “agree” responses among residents who had an opinion, were: public parks add to quality of life in the community (98%), recreation and parks are an essential service to the Town (97%), and I feel safe when visiting parks in Holly Springs (95%).

**Methods of learning** - Responding households were asked to indicate all the ways they learn

about Town parks, facilities and special events.

- ▶ 65% learn from the Town newsletter •
- ▶ 58% learn from the Town website
- ▶ 56% learn from social media
- ▶ 53% learn from word of mouth

The sources of information that respondents most prefer to use to learn about Town parks, facilities, and special events, based on the sum of respondents' top two choices, were: Town newsletter (41%), social media (39%), and the Town website (31%).

**Funding support** - The potential improvements that respondents indicated they would be most willing to support with tax dollars, based on the sum of respondents' top three choices, were: developing greenway trails to connect Town's existing greenway trail segments (57%), constructing an indoor aquatics facility (33%), and constructing a permanent farmers market pavilion (31%). Eighty-one percent (81%) of respondents are "very supportive" (42%) or "supportive" (39%) of the funding of parks and recreation improvements/expansions to be funded with a future bond financed **within the existing property tax rate** structure.

## Public Opinion Survey 1

### Purpose

To provide a feedback tool in the form of a web-based public opinion survey in conjunction with the virtual public engagement meeting.

### Number of responses

120 (June 2020)

### Methodology

The project team used the Town's virtual public engagement platform publicinput.com to get feedback on the information presented at the first virtual public meeting. The questions were directed towards understanding the community's values, experience with existing parks and facilities, and the community's needs for future recreation opportunities. Detail results of the public opinion survey are provided in the appendices.

"As a 22 year resident of Holly Springs I have been very pleased with the growth of Parks and Rec and the dedication of its staff."

"Include teen oriented programs- life skills, volunteering opportunities, tutoring/coaching, and career development"

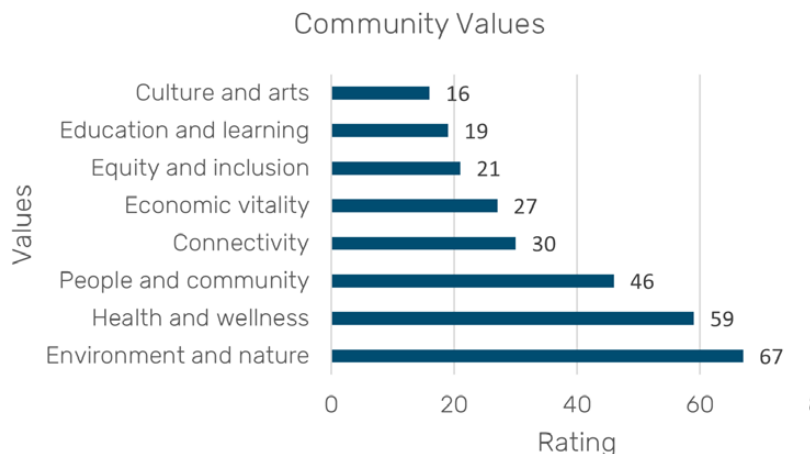


Figure 3- Community Values

## KEY FINDINGS

Many of the public opinion survey results are consistent with the scientific survey results, showing that the community’s needs across various interest groups and demographics are similar in nature. The overall public opinion survey findings show a strong support for greenway trails and bike-ped facilities, for their health and wellness benefits. Outdoor programs and events are the topmost community need with some interest for innovative opportunities for youth programming. The survey participants want the Department to prioritize meeting community needs for future investment in parks and recreation. Several of the open-ended comments included support and concern for future greenway trail development and support for preserving the natural resources within the Town.

## Focus Group Meetings

### Purpose

To understand the recreation needs of otherwise underrepresented groups in the community engagement process.

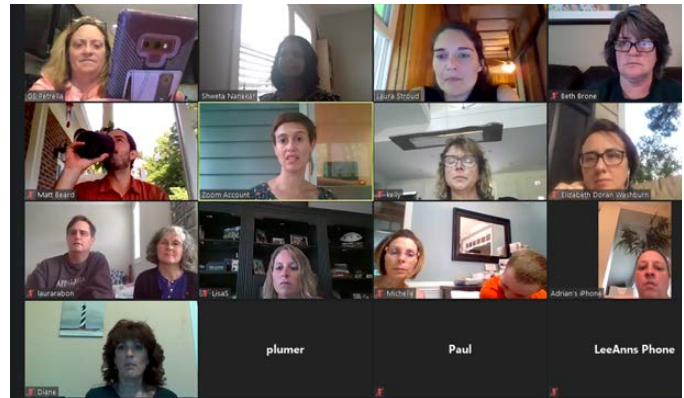
### Number of responses

+/- 40 across all focus groups

### Methodology

The project team identified the following focus groups at the Steering Committee meeting:

- ▶ Special needs population
- ▶ Active adults
- ▶ Youth



▲ Virtual meeting with Special Needs Population Focus Group

One of the biggest challenges in getting more participants coincided with the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The engagement process was adapted to fit the state-wide regulations regarding group gatherings. Virtual work sessions were conducted with two of the groups while the active adults group received a mailed questionnaire. Each focus group was asked a consistent set of questions to get their feedback on parks and facility usage and overall needs for the target population. In addition, the discussion was focused on specific concerns and barriers of usage for parks, facilities and program participation.

## KEY FINDINGS

**Special needs population** - Ten people participated in this focus group meeting. Overall, the group is satisfied with the level of inclusivity the Parks and Recreation Department offers in their programs, facilities and particularly the recent special events targeted towards special population such as Sensory Santa, and a Halloween event at Sugg Farm. etc. Participants were interested in dedicated inclusive play area with signage, buddy programs (teaming up special needs person with neurotypical person for programming) and providing more social opportunities for this group.

**Active adults** – Six people participated in this focus group. All of the participants had participated in the Town programs targeted for this age group while none of them visited greenway trails in the past twelve months. Reasons for not using the parks, programs and greenway trails included cost of participation, location of facilities, lack of maintenance and lack of parking. Participants mentioned a need for senior center, additional athletic programs, surfacing repairs to greenway trails and the need for parks within walking distance of homes. All participants stated that they use the Department HURRAHS program guide to access program information. Overall, the group commended Department staff for their services.

**Youth** - Five participants ages 10-17 attended the virtual focus group session. A variety of teen friendly programs were mentioned as future needs, including volleyball, indoor and outdoor basketball, water-related activities, greenways and esports. Transportation is a challenge for this group to access parks and facilities without direct greenway trails or sidewalk connections and without being transported by an adult. Participants were conflicted to some degree about perceived safety using parks and greenway trails. The group would like program information to be provided at schools and other public spaces as well as neighborhood apps.

## Strategic Partners Meeting

### Purpose

To hear from the Department’s partners about the nature of their partnerships, levels of satisfaction, visions for the future and identify potential challenges. The results of this meeting will be used to guide programming recommendations to ensure partnerships are equitable, productive, and in service to the Department’s vision.

### Number of responses

±11 responses

### Methodology

The project team conducted a virtual work session with the representatives from the following organizations. A short presentation was made in the beginning to introduce the project followed by a series of questions. The responses to the questions were recorded using *polleverywhere.com* software.

- › Wake Futball Club (WFC)
- › Western Wake Tennis Association (WETA)
- › Martin Luther King, Jr. Committee (MLK)
- › Holly Springs Food Cupboard (HSFC)
- › Holly Springs Salamanders
- › Rex Healthcare
- › Wake Health
- › Holly Springs Half Marathon (HSHM)
- › Holly Springs High School Athletics
- › Holly Springs Community Band
- › Holly Springs Chamber of Commerce



### Key Findings

Most of the existing partnerships with the Department have been in operations between 5-10 years and a few partnerships have been for over a decade. The partners seemed happy and excited for this long-term successful relationship with the Town. Five out of eleven organizations have formal partnership agreement with the Town, one is considered a vendor, and one was unsure about the nature of agreement. Some participants were not aware of the time and financial investment Town is making in the partnership agreement because of the lack of written conditions, however they all strongly appreciated the support received. All participants contributed instances where their organization promotes economic development, health and wellness, or arts and culture within Holly Springs which ties in with the overall parks and recreation goals. While many acknowledged the biggest challenge as COVID-19 pandemic, they also shared many positive comments regarding recreation opportunities offered in Holly Springs. The most commonly stated needs were better communication, increased marketing support, and automated processes for event applications and sponsorships.

Many program partners have a future vision of growth and expansion. This is consistent with the Town's current demographics. Partners overall shared a well-rounded vision for the Town's future that includes many quality-of-life recreation amenities.

## Multi-Jurisdictional Meetings

### Purpose

To hear from the neighboring jurisdictions and the county officials about the current and future greenway trails development in their respective jurisdictions to recommend regional greenway trail network on the edges of Holly Springs.

### Number of participants

The following jurisdictions participated in the meeting:

- Town of Apex
- Town of Cary
- Town of Fuquay-Varina
- Wake County
- Harnett County

### Methodology

The project team conducted a virtual work session with the staff from the above jurisdictions. A draft proposed greenway trail map was shared with the participants to solicit their feedback on the best locations for future regional or community connectors.

### Key Findings

Participants shared the information about their jurisdiction's current and future greenway trail development projects that could potentially provide connections to Holly Springs. Wake County staff shared information about current jurisdictional projects that are receiving funding assistance from the County.

## Steering Committee and Staff Meetings

### Purpose

To hear from the Department staff about the current state of operations, finances, and their vision for the parks and recreation growth for the next ten years. The steering committee represented appointed community members from Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, Tree Advisory Committee, Town Planning Board and two members of the Mayor's Teen Advisory Board and provided feedback during the course of the project on parks and facilities, focus groups, and vision and recommendations.

### Number of meetings

Six staff meetings

Three steering committee meetings

### Methodology

The project team conducted a combination of in person and virtual work sessions with the staff and steering committee. The initial engagement process involved asset mapping sessions with each group where the participants brainstormed on series of questions related to the current state of the system and establishing the vision for the future parks and recreation system. Throughout the course of the project, the participants were engaged at key milestones to provide input on needs assessment and recommendations.

### Key Findings

Several key themes emerged from the asset mapping sessions and update meetings including greenway trails connectivity, focus on community health and wellness, diverse program offerings, challenges of a growing community and the need for continued financial investment in the parks and recreation system. The detailed results of asset mapping sessions are provided in the appendices.



^ Steering Committee meeting

## Public Opinion Survey 2

### Purpose

To provide a feedback tool in the form of a web-based public opinion survey in conjunction with the virtual public engagement meeting.

“Work with neighborhoods and their HOA’s on connections to greenways.”

### Number of responses

151 (December 2020)

### Methodology

The project team used the Town’s virtual public engagement platform *publicinput.com* to get feedback on the information presented at the second virtual public meeting. The questions were directed towards understanding the community’s need to establish priorities for action items derived from the recommendations shared with them during the virtual open house. Detail results of the public opinion survey are provided in the appendices.

Priority Action Items for Positive Health Outcomes

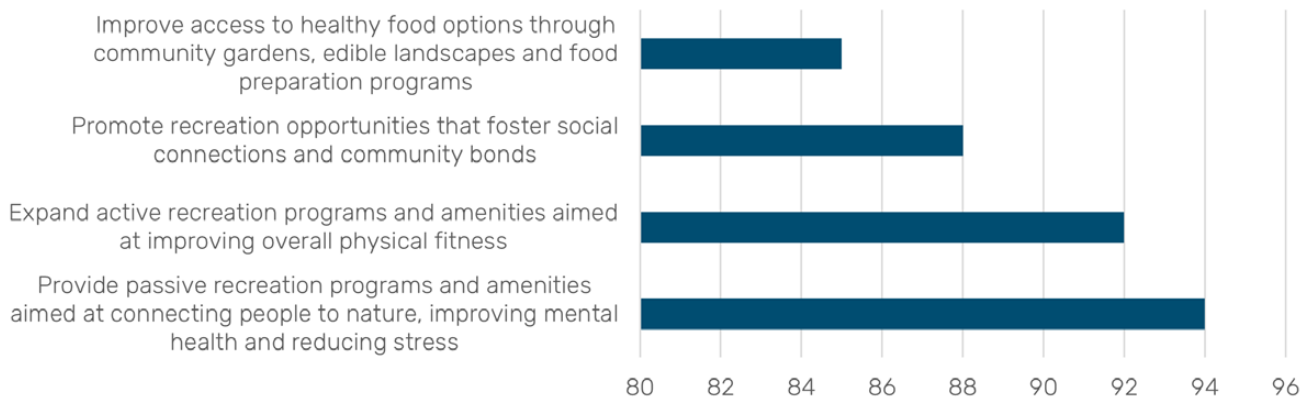


Figure 4- Priority Investment Rating - Programs

### Key Findings

The public opinion survey results show an overall focus on parks and recreation development on the West side of highway 55. This includes acquisition of new parkland, development of existing park properties, and prioritizing greenway connections to American Tobacco Trail. 90% of the participants ranked greenway trail development as the top priority. Diversity of amenities and programs for all ages and ability levels, connecting people to nature to improve health and wellness, and establishing conservation goal for undisturbed parkland were ranked as the highest priorities. Participants also prioritized establishing a business office to seek alternative funding sources.

### Development of Guiding Principles and recommendations

Ideas and outcomes that emerged from the community engagement process along with the inventory and assessment findings were used to create themes or guiding principles upon which the recommendations for that future parks and recreation system are based. Follow up public meetings, staff and steering committee meetings were conducted to receive feedback on recommendations and priorities for implementation. These guiding principles, and recommendations are explained in detail in the Recommendations chapter.

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