



6 recommendations



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The cornerstone of any great plan is the principles it stands on. When making recommendations for the Town’s parks and recreation future, guiding principles serve as the foundation. While the action items of this plan may evolve over time with changing demographics, industry trends, policy or availability of resources, the guiding principles remain constant. Grounded in community values and aspirations, this plan has established seven guiding principles that are pursued in every aspect of the recommendations and action plan.

This plan aligns its recommendations with other Town-wide initiatives and policy to ensure a cross-sector approach to achieving community goals. While developed through a separate and independent process, the guiding principles developed for this Parks, Recreation and Greenway Master Plan parallel with those recently developed from the Town’s Strategic Plan. The similarities between this plan’s Guiding Principles and the priority areas of the Town’s Strategic Plan are encouraging, suggesting Town residents, staff and elected officials share similar values and a vision for the Town’s future.

Methodology

The guiding principles developed for this plan are derived from the public engagement process and feedback received from the Town Council, steering committee, focus groups, Town officials from neighboring jurisdictions, as well as County and Town staff. This feedback was arranged into similar themes and values that formed the foundation for guiding principles development. These themes are noted below:

1. Meet the needs of the growing community;
2. Provide equitable and inclusive access to ALL residents of Holly Springs;
3. Prioritize health and wellness of the Holly Springs community;
4. Offer a connected recreation system throughout the community;
5. Establish a financially sustainable department;
6. Commit to the protection of natural resources;
7. Seek excellence in everything the Town provides for its residents.

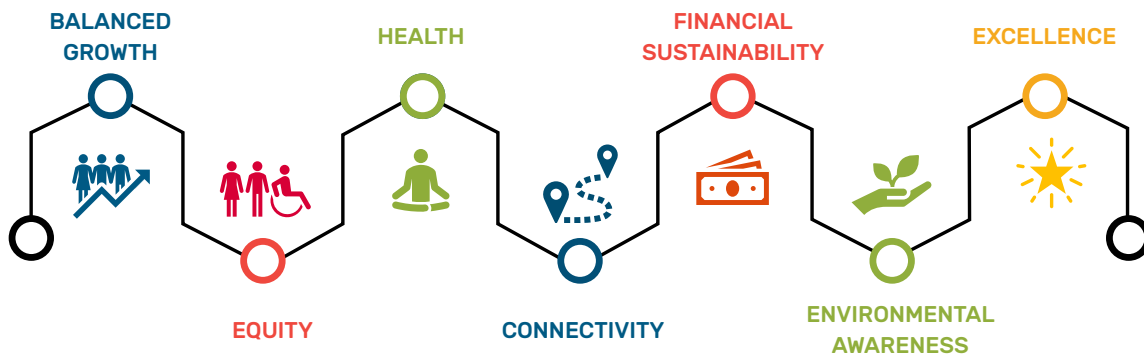


Figure 1 - Guiding Principles



BALANCED GROWTH

Meet the Needs of a Growing Community

One cannot dispute that the Town of Holly Springs is growing and feeling growth pressures in many ways. Evidenced by continued population growth, diminishing vacant property, recreation facilities at capacity, and wait lists for various programs, the Town is not currently poised to accommodate the growth it has experienced in the last ten years. At the same time, this plan acknowledges the Town’s desire to retain its small-town charm, character and history. Thus, a balanced approach is most appropriate; one that promotes an enhanced level of service while ensuring the small-town character of the Town is preserved across the built environment and within service delivery.

Recommendations related to the Balanced Growth guiding principle are divided into following three subcategories and described in detail on the following pages:

1. Land Acquisition and Development
 - > Level of service
 - > Park search areas
2. Indoor Community and Recreation Space
3. Diverse Programs, Parks, and Facilities
 - > Facilities and amenities
 - > Programming

Land Acquisition & Development

Level of Service

One way to expand an agency’s level of service is to acquire additional open space for future parkland development. Currently, the Town is providing a level of service of 7.4 acres of developed parkland per 1,000 residents. While this is above the benchmarking median of 6.4 acres of developed parkland per 1,000 residents, industry best practice is 9.6 acre per 1,000 residents¹. To retain the current level of services, the Town must develop 186 acres of land by 2030. To elevate the Town’s level of services to industry best practice, the Town must develop 337 acres by 2030.

G-1

Acquire and develop an additional 186 acres of parkland by 2030, especially in areas devoid of parkland and not currently served by the 10-minute walk analysis.

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¹ National Recreation and Park Association’s 2020 NRPA Agency Performance Review And NRPA Park Metrics. Metrics include only statistics from communities in the same population range as Holly Springs, 20,000 to 49,999.

PARKLAND DEVELOPMENT (IN ACRES) REQUIRED TO MEET LEVEL OF SERVICE (LOS) STANDARDS BY 2030			
Existing 7.4 Ac / 1,000 pop	Benchmarking Median 6.4 Ac / 1,000 pop	Industry Best Practice 9.6 Ac / 1,000 pop	Recommendation
186 AC	121.6 AC	337 AC	9.6 Ac / 1,000 pop

Table 1 - Parkland needed to meet level of service standards

The community engagement process revealed the public has a strong sentiment for preserving the natural environment and enhancing sustainable development through implementation of this plan. One strategy for accomplishing this is to establish a level of service goal for conservation land to be administered by the Town. The recommended proportion of developed parkland to conservation parkland is 70 percent to 30 percent. Thus, this plan recommends evaluating total parkland for development and land acquisition to account for the Town conservation goals. While the Town can seek land of exceptional conservation value, one strategy for attaining conservation lands would be to engage the development community through land dedication.

G-2
 Engage the development community to acquire parkland that contributes to the conservation land goals.

This strategy is particularly timely given the recently adopted Section one of comprehensive plan- Land Use and Character Plan which specifies conservation neighborhoods and natural areas as part of land use patterns which allows for increased development density in exchange for greater dedication of open space. The Town should consider the upcoming changes to the Unified Development Ordinance to reflect this conservation goal. While parkland dedicated by developers is typically covered with stream buffers, wetlands, floodplain, steep slopes or other features unsuitable for development, these lands also have great ecological functionality and environmental value rendering them ideal for preserved open space. Land dedicated to the Town could be used to meet conservation goals. A developer-driven approach to achieving conservation goals should aim for 2 AC of dedicated conservation land per 1,000 population. The table below represents the recommended ratio of developed parkland to conservation parkland acreage, resulting in a total recommended level of service for parkland.

TOTAL ACRES REQUIRED TO MEET LEVEL OF SERVICE (LOS) STANDARDS BY 2030		
70% Developed Parkland (9.6 AC / 1,000 pop)	30% Conservation Parkland (+/- 2 AC / 1,000 pop)	Total Parkland
337 AC	141.5 AC	478.5 AC

Table 2 - Developed and conservation parkland required to meet level of service standards

Currently the Department has total of 302.12 acres of undeveloped open space. Of this, 150 acres appear suitable for development, thus an additional 186.18 acres of land would need to be acquired and developed as parkland by the year 2030. It should be noted that detail site suitability analysis will be needed to calculate accurate acreage of developable land on these sites. Any undisturbed land or land unsuitable for development should be considered for preservation and as part of conservation land. The sites currently owned by the Town, which are considered suitable for development include:

PROPERTY	ACREAGE	RECOMMENDATION
Mims Property	17.48	Review and update the existing concept plan for a special use park that responds to the site's downtown location and historic context.
Holly Glen Property	1.78	Natural Pocket Park, Public Art, Walkable Destination
Woodcreek	50.69	Trailhead/Parking Area (Lockley), Neighborhood Park with Play Area
Cass Holt	55.87	Develop site specific master plan for a community park.
Carolina Springs	25 *	Develop site specific master plan for a neighborhood park.
TOTAL	150.82 acres	

Table 3- Recommendations for Town owned properties

*Note: Town of Holly Springs does not hold the title to the parkland in the Carolina Springs development as of January 2021. The acreage for the parkland to be updated after the land dedication.

The remainder of the existing open space can be preserved and counted as conservation land (151.3 acres), which already meets the of the conservation land needed by 2030. If any of the open space is developed as trailheads, greenway connections, additional conservation land will need to be acquired to maintain the level of service.

Acquiring and developing additional parkland will expand the Town's level of service while the location and type of land are equally important considerations. Too often departments accept vacant land at a reduced price or even as a donation, to discover environmental features prevent development or that development is cost-prohibitive due to subsurface

G-3
 Develop the 150.82 acres of vacant parkland currently owned by the Department.

conditions, lengthy utility extensions, or off-site road improvements to name a few. This plan recommends completing a site suitability study to confirm the parcel(s) in question are suitable for parkland development. The process for completing a site suitability study is provided in the Appendix.

Lastly, the location of land for acquisition should be given considerable attention. Equitable geographic distribution of parkland ensures all residents have access to parkland regardless of where they live. The Inventory and Analysis chapter identified geographic gaps in parkland primarily on the western side of Highway 55. When proposing new parks, these areas should receive priority attention.

This plan identifies nine proposed park search areas. The park search areas are based on closing gaps in service and alignment with surrounding and future land uses. For each park search area, this plan identifies options for park classifications and possible park amenities. When searching for potential parcels to acquire, the suitability study will ensure a given subject parcel can support the type of park and amenities proposed. It is important to note these are general guidelines and should be considered flexible to evolve with land availability, market conditions and changes in industry trends.

Park search areas

Proposed park search areas developed for this plan are overlaid with the future land use map to ensure compatibility of land uses with proposed park typologies and recreation opportunities provided for future users. The details of each character area are described in detail in the Land Use & Character Plan section of the comprehensive plan document. The illustration below shows land use pattern as one of the elements that contributes to the overall community character and place making. The plan proposes mixed land uses to create more activated and economically viable developments and each mix thereby generates need for diversity of recreation opportunities. The detail descriptions of park search areas and recommended park typologies and amenities are described in detail in the appendices.

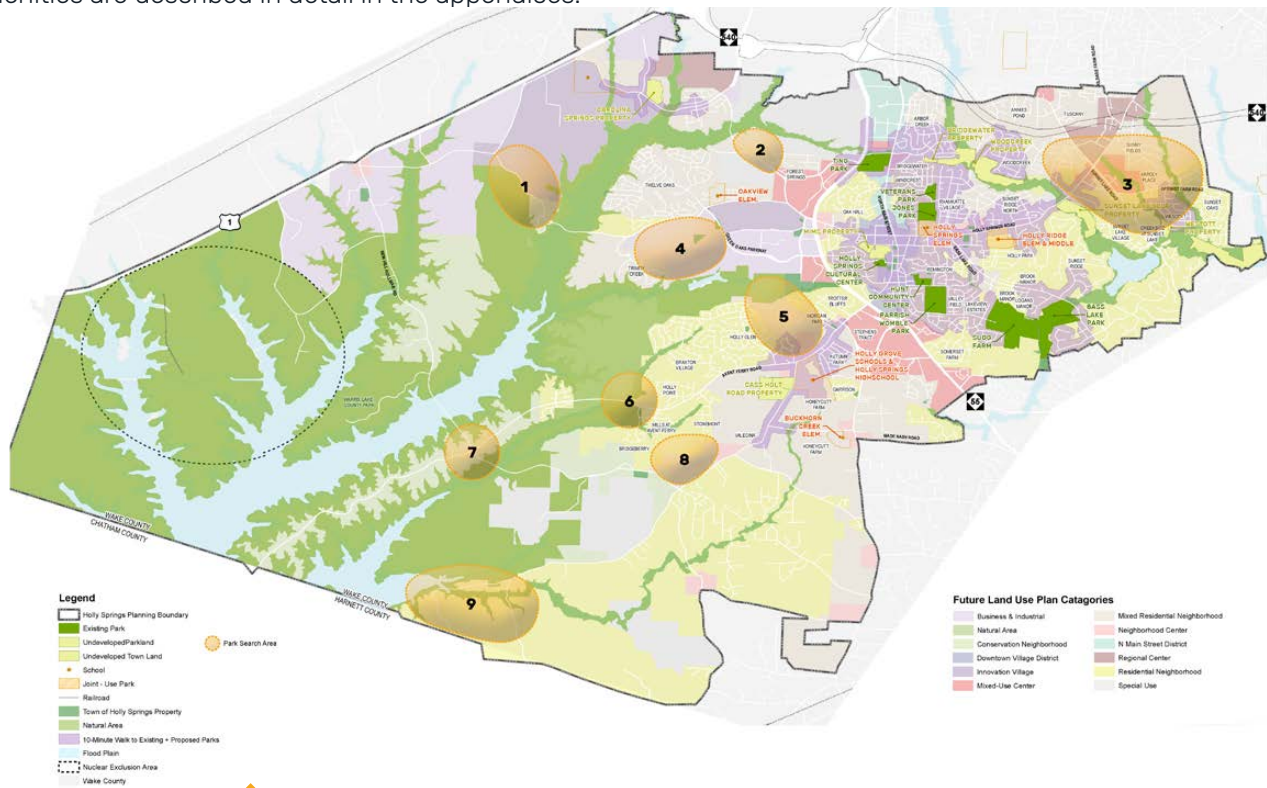


Figure 2- Park search areas

Indoor Community & Recreation Space

While there is not a published industry standard for square feet of indoor recreation space per resident, the NRPA Agency Performance Review Report (2020 Edition) indicates that the Town, at its current population, is serving nearly twice as many residents per facility as peer communities for recreation centers, community centers and stadiums. Furthermore, according to the NRPA Agency Performance Review Report a community the size of Holly Springs should have at least one senior center. It should be noted that the square footage for an individual facility will depend upon the types of amenities provided at that facility, such as number of offices, gym space, number of rooms to accommodate variety of programs, storage space, and any special programs like aquatics, indoor walking track or commercial kitchen to hold cooking classes. Depending on community’s need for certain type of programming the square footage of the building should be considered.

G-4
 Construct 53,518 square feet to 80,439 square feet of additional space by 2030

G-5
 Develop indoor recreation space to prioritize aquatics, athletic courts, dedicated space for senior and special population programming and office and storage space

The inventory and analysis and staff interviews revealed a significant shortage of indoor recreation space. Lack of office space, storage space and space to expand recreation programming is limiting the Department’s ability to meet current needs and expand to meet future demands from a programmatic and operational perspective. This is further reinforced in the benchmarking and level of service analysis, showing the Town having the second lowest square feet of indoor recreation space per resident when compared to peer communities. This plan recommends the Town increase the indoor recreation space to range of a level of service standard from 1.6 square feet per resident to 2 square feet per resident, resulting in the construction of a range of 53,518 square feet to 80,439 square feet of additional space by 2030. A range of level of service standard is provided as a recommendation to include additional square footage needed should the Town decide to pursue developing an aquatics facility.

MEDIAN NUMBER OF RESIDENTS PER FACILITY		
Facility Type	Existing Town of Holly Springs Population	Median of Peer Agencies (2020 Population)
Recreation Center	41,726	25,716
Community Center	41,726	26,280
Senior Center	NA	32,639
Performance Amphitheaters	41,726	30,577
Nature Centers	41,726	35,854
Stadiums	41,726	24,910
Aquatics Center	NA	NA

Table 4- Median number of residents per facility

Based on these metrics, the significant resident and staff support for aquatics and indoor courts, and the aspiration to provide diverse, equitable programs, this plan recommends the additional indoor recreation space accommodate:

- › Indoor pool / aquatics
- › Indoor courts (gymnasiums) and active recreation space Dedicated space for seniors and special population programming
- › Offices and storage for program supplies and site equipment

Diverse Programs, Parks, and Facilities

Parks and recreation agencies across the nation have moved toward offering diverse programs and amenities rather than a narrow repertoire to residents with key interests. This allows agencies to serve a broad participant base, offering the many benefits of parks, recreation and cultural programs to more people. As the Town of Holly Springs continues its quest to promote fulfilling and rewarding lifestyles with abundant, healthy living options², providing recreation and cultural arts opportunities with wide appeal should be top of mind.

G-6

Offer diverse recreation and cultural arts programs and amenities.

Furthermore, the growth the Triangle region is experiencing is primarily from individuals, families and businesses relocating from other parts of the country, sometimes from communities with very high standards for parks and recreation programming. These expectations place high demand on the Town for diverse programs and amenities.

Finally, this “diversity where everyone is served” approach can leverage the Parks and Recreation Department’s community influence to launch larger cross-sector goals such as health and wellness, equity, resilience, economic prosperity and a safe and welcoming small-town feel.

Impact of COVID on Programming³

The 2020 COVID crisis highlighted the critical need and importance of parks and recreation services and programs. While the open spaces and greenway trails provided people an opportunity to be outdoors and active, other important amenities like playgrounds, courts, and fields were closed impacting the Departments’ revenue stream significantly. Agencies across the country adapted to delivering programming virtually which included:

- › Family engagement activities
- › Fitness classes
- › Self-care and well-being topics
- › Education classes; including literacy, STEM, environment

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² Priority area from the Town of Holly Springs Strategic Plan.

³ <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2020/june/nrpa-surveys-track-covid-19s-impact-on-pr/>

In addition, agencies also adapted their traditional programs to cater to the needs of most critically impacted populations within their community by:

- › Serving or distributing food to older adults and/or families
- › Opening recreation centers and other agency facilities to serve as emergency shelters
- › Providing childcare to the children of essential agency staff, healthcare providers and first responders

Amenities and Facilities

Once known for athletics, the Town has experienced a growing demand for more diverse amenities and programs. Seen throughout the community engagement process, participants voiced desires for more greenway trails, aquatics and splash pads, a farmers market pavilion, natural play, outdoor adventure programs, and indoor and outdoor athletic courts. Based on the Priority Investment Rating for facilities and amenities, as the Town renovates existing parks or constructs new parks, facilities and amenities should include:

- › Greenway trails (see Greenway Trails chapter) and trailheads.
- › Aquatics / outdoor water feature / splash pad
- › Farmers market pavilion
- › Dog park
- › Miniature golf
- › Community garden

Furthermore, throughout the public input process, staff and focus group interviews, program demands and feedback from elected officials, great support was voiced for:

- › Athletics courts (basketball, pickleball, volleyball – both indoor and outdoor)
- › Inclusive playground and social gathering spaces for special needs populations
- › Dedicated space for adult programs

Programming

To address current gaps and address the future programming needs of the community, the Department should consider expanding their core program areas, diversifying program age segments served, monitoring program lifecycles on an annual basis and classifying programs based on a cost recovery model.

Expand Core Program Areas - The existing core program areas generally provide a well-rounded and diverse array of programs that could serve the community at present. However, for a community the size of Holly Springs, and with substantial anticipated growth, this plan recommends a minimum of 10 core program areas to assist in fulfilling existing unmet need. Based on community input, residents have a need for additional athletic programs, specifically adult athletics, as well as more fitness program offerings. Similarly, based on the results from the scientific survey, Holly Spring residents have a strong “need” for aquatic programs and outdoor adventure programs. Both of these program areas received a very high Priority Investment Rating (PIR) base on resident responses as well as a strong household need rating. (See the scientific survey results in the Appendix)

In addition to the eight existing core program areas, staff identified two supplementary program areas that are unique and should be given special consideration: the farmers market and Ting stadium.

- ▶ **Farmers Market:** It is recommended that the Department develop a specific business plan for the Farmers Market. This plan can help address some of the operation needs such as full-time/part-time staffing, storage facilities, formal policies and procedures as well as identifying a new permanent location. Ideally, this new location would be within a centralized park with ample parking and restroom facilities. Additionally, it is recommended this location to have covered/indoor space in case of inclement weather.
- ▶ **Ting Park and Stadium:** To help Ting Park reach its full potential, it is recommended that the Department continue to utilize the recently developed business plan for the park. In doing so, the Department will be able to better implement possible untapped opportunities. Similar sport venues around the country have begun offering non-sport programs during their off seasons to assist with increasing the facility's usage. Such programs/events include: yoga, movie nights, concerts, watch parties, festivals, etc.

Department staff should evaluate core program areas and individual programs, on an annual basis, to ensure offerings are relevant to evolving demographics and trends in the local community.

Diversify Program Age Segments – the program assessment revealed current programs are well aligned with the community's age profile yet there is a lack of primary programs dedicated to the adult age segment. Moving forward, it is recommended that the Department considers introducing new programs to address any unmet needs. With approximately 50% of the Town's overall population falling between 18-54 years-old, offering an adequate number of adult programs is essential for the Departments success.

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



EQUITY

Provide equitable and inclusive access

A public park system must ensure the equitable provision of parkland and amenities to all members of the community regardless of age, race, income, ability, education or access to an automobile as a means of transportation. The benefits of parks are many. From improved health to deeper social bonds within a community, parks have been shown to improve quality of life and contribute to more livable communities. For these reasons, equitable access to parks should be a guiding principle of every public park and recreation agency.

Improving equity across a park system can be achieved through attention to three key indicators:

- ▶ Equitable geographic distribution of parkland,
- ▶ Distribution of investment in parks across the system, and
- ▶ Accessibility and inclusivity.

Equitable Geographic Distribution of Parkland

One way to achieve equitable access to parks across a system is to provide equitable geographic distribution of parks across a community. The Inventory and Assessment identified many geographic gaps where no parks currently exist, especially west of Highway 55. The park search areas described above have specifically been located to close such gaps and provide an equitable distribution of parkland to increase the percentage of residents who live within ten-minute walk of the park which corresponds to half mile distance. National Park Service and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention use half a mile measure to when linking park and public health⁴.

NRPA'S WORKING DEFINITION OF EQUITABLE PARK & RECREATION ACCESS:

Just and fair quantity, proximity and connections to quality parks and green space, recreation facilities, as well as programs that are safe, inclusive, culturally relevant and welcoming to everyone. When people have just and fair access, our health and social wellbeing improve, and our communities can protect and better recover from environmental, social, and economic challenges.

E-1

Acquire and develop parkland to achieve an equitable distribution of parkland and increase the percentage of residents who live within 10-minute walk of a park

E-2

Ensure equitable distribution of financial investment across the park system

E-3

Increase the percentage of residents within a ten-minute walk of a park from 41 percent to 55 percent.

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⁴ Merriam, D.; Bality, A.; Stein, J.; Boehmer, T. (2017). "Improving Public Health through Public Parks and Trails: Eight Common Measures. Summary report. US Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and US Department of the Interior, National Park Service"

Distribution of Investment

The second indicator of an equitable parks system relates to providing comparable investment in parks regardless of their location or community context. Based on the qualitative results from the plans' parks audit, little evidence exists that suggests any one park is ignored or overlooked. This is further supported by the results of the scientific survey indicating that an overwhelming majority (95 percent) of respondents gave the overall quality of parks / facilities a good or excellent rating.

Similarly, when evaluating social vulnerability indices with park locations and walkability, there is no correlation between highly vulnerable populations and gaps in park access or quality of parkland. Based on the scientific survey and staff interviews, the greatest barriers to use are lack of information on offerings, not enough time to participate, the cost of participation and overcrowding. The only barrier relating to equitable access is the cost of participation. With 19 percent of respondents indicating the cost of participation is a barrier to engaging in recreation, the Town should consider evaluating their fee structure to broaden strategies that include a greater degree of subsidy for residents with lower incomes.

One way to guarantee equitable financial investment across the park system is to quantify the distribution of park assets by tracking operating expenditures per park and capital investment in park development / renovations. Both metrics can be normalized on a per-acre basis.

Accessibility & Inclusivity

Physical access to parks is the third indicator of equity. Parks must be accessible to users of all ages and ability levels, by way of all forms of transportation including walking, biking, public transit, and driving. Thus, physical access can refer to the way a user gets to a park or experiences the park once they have arrived. The Department should ensure that parks are accessible along public transportation routes and should continue to promote connectivity of parks with a connected greenway system, ensuring bicycle and pedestrian access. The Department should coordinate with the public transportation system to ensure access to all recreational centers as well as regional and community parks. Providing specialized transportation to and from recreation centers and parks for demographics that may lack mobility, such as seniors, is a value-added service to consider.

E-4

Offer recreation access to people of all ages and ability levels

One strategy for ensuring equitable access to parks is to implement a 10-minute walk standard. As indicated in the Walkability Assessment, 41 percent of residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, which is slightly below the national average of 55 percent. The assessment is consistent with the Town's development patterns, reflecting walkability to most parks in the developed areas in the center of Town. Given the large tracts of undeveloped and rural land in the western and southern areas of the Town limits, a goal of a ten-minute walk time for all residents may be unrealistic. This plan recommends the Town strive to increase the percentage of residents within a ten-minute walk of a park to 55 percent, matching the national average.

This plan recommends the integrated principles of universal design and inclusivity into the park design, development and programming process.

According to the Gehl Institute, inclusion is both an outcome and a deliberate process that actively engages people and cultivates trust among them, and a critical tool for achieving social and health equity. To be inclusive is to seek to understand the community context, to support inclusion in the process, to design and program public space to enhance access and safety and to invite diversity and foster social resilience.⁵

Embracing these principles of inclusion in the planning, implementation, and evaluation process is essential for achieving the goals of a healthier community. An agency can achieve inclusivity by improving individual park elements, or by considering an inclusive experience as part of park redesigns and redevelopments.

Specifically, the Town should consider providing dedicated inclusive amenities such as an inclusive playground and supporting infrastructure. Strategies to promote inclusion are:

- ▶ Clear messaging in promotional materials about inclusivity
- ▶ Intentional facility improvements such as restrooms, changing rooms, and locker rooms to create safe and comfortable spaces for all community members
- ▶ Trained staff to promote gender neutral interactions and inclusive language related to physical appearance
- ▶ Intentional community engagement to bring trust and transparency in the process

Parks and Recreation agencies should meet the needs of these groups by providing increased opportunities through program offerings such as⁶:

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

Quick Resource:

A Checklist for Existing Facilities. This checklist will help identify accessibility problems and solutions in existing facilities in order to meet an agencies' obligation under the ADA.

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

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

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5 Gehl Institute (2018). *Inclusive Healthy Places*. Accessed at https://gehl.institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Inclusive-Healthy-Places_Gehl-Institute.pdf. November 20, 2018.

6 <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/b1f3a10f8b58405d907b053edb803282/parksforinclusion-lgbtq.pdf>



HEALTH

Prioritize health and wellness

“Investment in parks is an investment in health.” Parks are a critical part of the community’s public health infrastructure and there is a growing body of scientific research to support this claim as recognized by the NRPA as one of the three pillars of parks and recreation. COVID-19 crisis of 2019-2020 has highlighted the critical need for open spaces and natural areas where people can safely engage in physical activity and socially connect with others, emphasizing the fact that parks are essential service for the community.

Historically, the first parks in the United States were developed in the 19th century as public health resources. Conceived as ‘green refuges’ in urban areas, parks were designed with the aim of improving the health and the quality of life for all residents by offering places for recreation, spiritual transformation through nature, exposure to fresh, clean air, and social interaction that transcended class⁸. Since that time, public investment in parks has been a priority for every level of government and the evidence suggesting that parks are ‘green health spaces’ has grown. Among an endless list of benefits, some of the documented health-related benefits of parks are increased physical activity, reduced stress, improved mental health, and increased social connectivity⁹. It is thus not difficult to make the case for the integral relationship between parks and health. Stated simply, access to parks and recreation can lead to improved health outcomes within a community.

The Vision Holly Springs Comprehensive Plan’s Land Use and Character Plan section and the strategic plan priority areas have already laid the foundation for creating healthful living opportunities through parks and recreation. This cross-sector alignment of goals builds the integral relationship between parks and health and strengthens the case for creating recreation spaces including parks, greenways, and open spaces that promote active living, improved mental health, and increased social interaction.

As part of the 2019 Wake County Community Health Needs Assessment¹⁰, the southern service area (which includes Holly Springs and Fuquay-Varina) focus group meeting was conducted. The summary of findings as it relates to Town of Holly Springs is described on the next page.

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7 *The Benefits of Parks: Why America Needs More City Parks and Open Space.* Paul Sherer. Trust for Public Land, San Francisco, CA, 2006.
Accessed at: <https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/cloud.tpl.org/pubs/benefits-park-benefits-white-paper12005.pdf>

8 *The Benefits of Parks: Why America Needs More City Parks and Open Space.* Paul Sherer. Trust for Public Land, San Francisco, CA, 2006.
Accessed at: <https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/cloud.tpl.org/pubs/benefits-park-benefits-white-paper12005.pdf>

9 Barret, Meredith, Miller, Daphne, and Frumkin, Howard. *Parks and Health: Aligning Incentives to Create Innovation in Chronic Disease Prevention.* *Preventing Chronic Disease*, 11:130407. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.58888/pcd11.130407>

10 <http://www.wakegov.com/wellbeing/Documents/FINAL%202019%20CHNA.pdf>

<p>Elements of a healthy community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Walkability – sidewalks downtown › Transportation › Access to health providers › Recreation centers › Low density housing › Plenty of foliage and access to nature › Food share programs
<p>Pressing health concerns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Transportation within town › Transportation/access issues for low income › Senior citizen/aging › Affordable resources › Identifying and treating the root causes of health issues to truly make healthier community › Need more health information distribution channels › Need more school nurses and social workers to help promote healthy behaviors earlier in age
<p>Overlooked/ Vulnerable populations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Seniors › Low income › Mental health specifically › Children/teen › Access to and availability of after school and summer programs › Bullying › Special needs adults
<p>Most important issues to address</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Transportation › Mental health

Many of these key findings directly correlate to the recommendations of this plan, specifically, those centered around public, multimodal transportation, access to parks and recreation opportunities, and improving mental health. As described above in the guiding principle addressing equitable park access, public transportation and increasing the number of residents within a 10-minute walk time to parks clearly enhance an individual’s opportunity to access parks thus the opportunity for improve health outcomes.

While improved access to parks inherently improves the health and wellness of an individual, there are ways the Town can actively plan, design and program the parks and recreation system to improve health outcomes. Health outcomes should consider physical fitness, mental health, healthy eating and social connections.

H-1
 Plan, design and program parks to improve outcomes related to physical fitness.

H-2
 Plan, design and program parks to improve outcomes related to mental health.

H-3
 Plan, design and program parks to improve health outcomes related to social cohesion.

H-4
 Plan, design and program parks to improve health outcomes related to healthy eating.

Physical Fitness

Physical inactivity has been identified as a primary cause of most chronic health conditions¹¹ including, cardiovascular disease, Type II Diabetes, obesity, certain cancers, depression and anxiety. One study estimated that 11% of all deaths in the United States are attributable to physical inactivity and projected that life expectancy in the United States would be increased by .78 years with the elimination of physical inactivity.¹² The direct and indirect cost burden of chronic illnesses associated with physical inactivity exceeds \$500 billion a year in the U.S.¹³

Physical fitness can be improved by providing amenities and programs that specifically engage users in leisure, moderate and vigorous physical activity. All three levels of activity should be provided to engage users of different age groups. Similarly, the Town should explore innovative programming that encourages active lifestyles and keep health and wellness as a core service component in the Town’s program offerings.

Mental Health

The consequences of the high prevalence of mental illness in the United States are significant. Depression, anxiety and chronic stress are also major public health concerns. In 2016, approximately 1 in 5 adults in the U.S.—43.8 million— had a mental illness.¹⁴ More than a third of these adults (16 million) were living with major depression. Anxiety disorder is even more prevalent. It is estimated that 18% of American adults (42 million) are living with anxiety disorder.¹⁵ Among youth the prevalence is high as well. 20% of youth ages 13-18 live with a mental health condition, 11% have depression, and 8% have an anxiety disorder.¹⁶ Sadly, these numbers have been on the rise the past few years. Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States and the 3rd leading cause of death for youth ages 10-24. For every suicide death, it is estimated that there are 11.4 hospital visits for suicide attempts. Notably, 90% of those who die by suicide had an underlying mental illness with depression being the most common underlying disorder (30% to 70% of suicide victims).¹⁷

While these statistics are daunting, the opportunity for parks planning to yield improved outcomes is encouraging. A growing number of studies find that exposure to nature is linked to benefits such as recovery from mental fatigue, stress reduction, reductions in crime, violence and aggression, reduced morbidity in multiple disease categories and better self-reported health. Specifically for children and youth, the positive effects of nature exposure include improved cognitive functioning (including increased concentration, greater attention capacities and higher academic performance), better motor coordination, reduced stress levels, increased social interaction with adults and other children and improved social skills.¹⁸

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11 Booth FW, Roberts CK, Laye MJ. Lack of exercise is a major cause of chronic diseases. *Compr Physiol*. 2012;2(2):1143-211.

12 Lee IM, Shiroma EJ, Lobelo F, et al. Effect of physical inactivity on major non-communicable diseases worldwide: an analysis of burden of disease and life expectancy. *Lancet*. 2012;380(9838):219-29.

13 A Smart Investment for America’s Health. Codevilla, B., *The Land and Water Conservation Fund*. City Park Alliance, 2015. Accessed at: https://www.cityparksalliance.org/storage/documents/Mayors_for_Parks/CPA_SMART_INVEST_FINAL_RPT_L_1.pdf

14 Any Mental Illness (AMI) Among Adults. (n.d.). Retrieved November 16, 2018, from <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/any-mental-illness-ami-among-adults.shtml>

15 <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/major-depression.shtml>

16 <https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-By-the-Numbers>

17 *ibid*

18 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3162362/>

It should be the goal of the Department to increase resident access, exposure and involvement in parks and programming to reduce the percentage of residents who report poor mental health or persistent feelings of sadness / hopelessness. The Town should develop partnerships with local organizations, extension services and private businesses to provide educational resources for residents suffering from mental health illness. The Town should also consider programs and amenities targeted at reducing stress and anxiety such as yoga, meditation, labyrinths, and easy access to nature.

Social Cohesion

While social cohesion is a broader and less measurable concept, there is evidence of its importance for fostering a healthy community. Healthy People 2020 identified social cohesion as a key issue in shaping social determinants of health. According to Health People 2020, social relationships, which are conceptualized with concepts like social cohesion, social capital, and social support, are important for health and well-being. Eighteen studies have found that social capital, for example, is associated with mortality and social support serves as a protective factor against risk factors that cause poor health. Another study of social cohesion and health found that countries with higher levels of social inclusion, social capital, and social diversity had populations who were more likely to report good health.¹⁹ Global economists, political scientists, and social scholars have gone as far as arguing that social cohesion is an important factor in promoting economic growth and population health worldwide.²⁰

Case Study
City of Coppell, TX has some of the robust initiatives around community outreach that include farmers market and community garden. The community garden has been established as a 501 (c) nonprofit and the funds generated are used to support the farmers' market.

Parks have been shown to serve as places where people of different cultures interact, acting as a catalyst for interactions between people of different backgrounds. Similarly, casual interactions among park-goers have been shown to foster a sense of community and feelings of inclusion. To improve social cohesion and feelings of social connectedness, the Town should develop amenities and programs that promote social interaction and connection to the larger community. This can be achieved by increasing the number of gather spaces in existing and future parks, such as amphitheaters, picnic shelters, and community gardens to name a few. From a programming perspective, the Town can increase the number of community events hosted each year, along with pro-social activities for youth, active adults and seniors including after school programs and weekend / summer programs.

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19 Social Cohesion Matters in Health. Ying-Chih Chuang, Kun-Yang Chuang. *International Journal for Equity in Health*: 2013 1287 <https://doi.org/10.1186/1475-9276-12-87>
20 Foa, R. (2011). *The economic rationale for social cohesion—the cross country evidence*. In *The international conference for social cohesion*. OECD. Paris, OECD.

Healthy Eating and Access to Healthy Food

Parks and recreation agencies nationwide work to provide access to healthy food through a variety of options. Many agencies fill the role of the nutrition provider to adults and children of low-income and vulnerable families. Other agencies simply want to provide education and a leading example for families to establish healthy eating habits of their own.

One/A September 2018 NRPA article²¹ states that farmers markets and other community-supported agriculture initiatives (CSA) have seen a steady growth nationwide. One of the greatest benefits of farmers markets and CSAs is the ability to connect community members to locally sourced, healthy, seasonal, and fresh produce. They provide an opportunity for local governments to partner with nonprofit organizations and agricultural community and bring the culture of collaboration within the community that provides economic as well as health and wellness benefits.

H-5

Develop strong community partnerships with organizations striving to improve outcomes related to physical fitness, mental health, healthy eating and social connections.

Opportunities for the Town to provide access to healthy food include summer camps, nutrition programs, after-school programs, and community gardens. This plan recommends the Town enhance access to healthy food options by incorporating additional community gardens, edible landscapes and agritourism facilities into parks. The popularity of the existing farmers market provides an excellent platform for educating and marketing healthy food options, locally sourced produce, and the agrarian lifestyle of our ancestors. When expanding or relocating the farmers market, the Town should consider a location that is accessible to a broad resident base with the possibility of satellite markets to enable equitable access. When designing the space, consider amenities for farm-to-table exhibits and events.

- ▶ Incorporate nutrition programs as age-appropriate recreation program activity
- ▶ Expand programming opportunities to around outdoor adventure activities
- ▶ Develop nature-based outdoor recreation programs for all ages, particularly youth.

Finally, the Town should identify potential partner organizations who strive to improve health outcomes related to physical fitness, mental health, social cohesion and healthy eating. Such organizations may include Wake County Human Services, healthcare providers, the Holly Springs Food Cupboard, or subject matter experts from local universities or technical colleges to name a few.

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²¹ <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2018/September/farmers-markets/>



CONNECTIVITY

Offer an interconnected recreation system

Connectivity is an important consideration in building an integrated system of parks, recreation facilities, open spaces, natural resource areas, and other important community resources that are linked by a bike and pedestrian friendly multimodal transportation system. Safe and accessible connections to parks and recreation facilities provide many benefits including active and healthy living, connection to nature, social interactions, natural resources protection and stronger economy.

The Greenway Trails chapter in this master plan report is dedicated to this guiding principle. It provides details regarding current challenges in Holly Springs, benefits of greenway trails, design standards, and principles that guide the proposed greenway trails system framework.



FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Offer a financially sustainable department

A recreation department's ability to maintain financial sustainability as local, state, federal and global determinants such as economics, politics, health, environmental and social circumstances fluctuate will ensure recreation services remain without interruption or alarm. Several factors contribute to establishing a financially sustainable department, most of which fall under two categories: understanding and tracking the Department's costs and identifying diverse funding sources to finance those costs.

One of most valuable approaches to understanding the Department's costs of providing recreational services to the community is the completion of a true cost of service / ownership assessment. This assessment will identify direct and indirect costs associated with parks and programs, yielding the total cost of the service or ownership. Based on the total cost of service / ownership, the Town can better establish cost recovery goals for programs and facilities. Cost recovery goals should directly inform pricing strategies and identify the remaining operational and maintenance costs needing subsidy. It is important to note a Department's pricing policy should reflect the community's approach to funding parks and recreation programs. Communities that believe their agency should subsidize most recreation costs have lower price-points and thus lower cost recovery goals.

F-1

Complete a true cost of service / ownership assessment for each park and program in the system to understand and project on-going operations and maintenance costs.

F-2

Establish cost recovery goals for programs and facilities

F-3

Classify programs according to a cost recovery model

F-4

Establish a diverse pricing policy that reflects cost recovery goals and community values.

F-5

Develop a clear funding strategy to fund park improvements and on-going operations and maintenance costs.

Alternatively, communities with a pay-to-play attitude tend to have higher fees for programs and access to value added amenities, and thus higher cost recovery goals.

Classifying Programs According to a Cost Recovery Model

Moving toward a model of classifying programs according to a cost recovery model for sustainable services will benefit the Department. Agencies use the above total cost of service approach to determine what financial resources are required to provide specific programs at specific levels of service. Results are used to determine and track cost recovery as well as to benchmark different programs provided by the Department between one another. Cost recovery goals are established once cost of service totals have been calculated.

The process for implementing this classification model is described in detail in the program assessment. Because this classification model is rooted in cost recovery goals and the total cost of service, it is important the Town establish a philosophy for balancing user fees and Town subsidized services.

Cost recovery targets should reflect the degree to which a program provides a public versus individual good. Programs providing public benefits (i.e., essential programs) should be subsidized more by the Department; programs providing individual benefits (i.e., value-added programs) should seek to recover costs and/or generate revenue for other services. To help plan and implement cost recovery policies, the project team has developed the following definitions to help classify specific programs within program areas.

- ▶ Essential programs-category are critical to achieving the organizational mission and providing community-wide benefits and, therefore, generally receive priority for tax-dollar subsidization.
- ▶ Important or value-added program classifications generally represent programs that receive lower priority for subsidization.
- ▶ Important programs contribute to the organizational mission but are not essential to it; therefore, cost recovery for these programs should be high (i.e., at least 80% overall).
- ▶ Value-added programs are not critical to the mission and should be prevented from drawing upon limited public funding, so overall cost recovery for these programs should be near or in excess of 100%.

Once total cost of service / ownership is understood, the Town can develop a funding strategy plan to finance initial capital projects and ongoing operational and maintenance costs. Park and Recreation Departments often rely on the same narrow portfolio of funding sources for their projects, programs, and capital improvements as well as their ongoing operations. This limited approach can prove troublesome as the availability of funds in each source fluctuates. For example, the availability of grant funding varies based on local, state, and federal revenues, some of which are sourced with tax dollars. When resident investment is reduced, grant funding is in turn more limited. Similarly, bond approvals can oscillate depending on the current political landscape. In the 2020 November election, 96% of all park and recreation ballot issues passed compared to 87% just four years earlier. While we can only surmise, it is logical to conclude that the demand for parks during the COVID-19 pandemic may have influenced the increased approval rate.

Understanding the various funding opportunities available can be valuable to the financial sustainability of a parks and recreation system. This plan recommends the Town expand the types and sources of Department funding through a clear funding strategy plan that identifies the category, source, requirements, and feasibility of various options. As with personal financial planning, a diverse portfolio of revenue will ensure the Town has available funds when normal funding channels change unexpectedly.

These three categories are examples of funding sources considered to be viable methods used in the parks and recreation industry.

1. Dedicated Funding

These funds (often in the form of various tax options) are appropriated or set aside for a limited purpose. The options that should be most considered would include the following dedicated funding options.

Examples include:

- ▶ Nationally, Impact Fees are used for sewer and water facilities, parks, roads, and schools, however, North Carolina local governments have more limited authority than those in many other states. Town of Holly Springs currently uses park fee in lieu for land dedication and capacity fees for utilities which are allowed by North Carolina General Statutes (See G.S. 160A-372).
- ▶ Land dedication ordinance that requires developers to give the Town a portion of the land they are developing to the park system to develop the site for a neighborhood park or cash in lieu of land. The key element is that the land that is given to the Town must be developable for a neighborhood park.
- ▶ A percentage of hotel taxes that can be used to support facilities developed that bring in visitors to the Town in the form of overnight guest that participate in regional sports tournaments, special events, endurance races put on by the parks and recreation department of the Town.
- ▶ Tax Increment Finance funds on new or redevelopment. TIF is a public financing method that is used for community improvement projects. The intent of TIF is to stimulate private investment. Municipalities typically divert future property tax revenues increases from a defined area or district toward an economic development project or a public improvement in the community such as a community center, library or school.
- ▶ Food and beverage taxes on restaurant food or drinks which can include fast food places that a half cent is dedicated for parks and recreation. This does not apply to buying grocery items.

2. Earned Income

Revenue generated by membership fees, facility rentals, program fees and other sources where the agency is paid for services or what they are providing that residents are willing to pay for access.

3. Financial Support

These monies are acquired by applying for grants from foundations, corporations, organizations, as well as state and federal sources.

Parks and Recreation Foundation

Holly Springs Parks and Recreation should consider the development a parks and recreation foundation for the park system. The three primary goals of a park foundation are to:

- ▶ Help acquire park land through individual or family gifts,
- ▶ Raise money for developing park and recreation amenities in existing parks and
- ▶ Support scholarships for youth and families to attend programs offered by the Department.

A park and recreation foundation operates independently of the Town's Parks and Recreation Department and Town Council but the Director of the Parks and Recreation system typically sits on the park foundations board as a non-voting member to inform and guide the park foundation of the park and recreation needs of the department in the three areas outlined. Park foundations also raise matching money for grants when appropriate. A detailed list of possible funding sources from each category can be found in the Appendix.



ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

Commit to protect natural resources

Environmental awareness is an important guiding principle for the growing community because it supports protection of natural resources, wildlife habitats, and water and air quality. Protection of the environment, open space, and natural resources are gaining priority in communities across the US. According to the March 2020 Park Pulse Survey²² by NRPA, ninety-one percent of U.S. adults want children to learn or participate in conservation efforts, including:

- › Waste reduction (74%)
- › Nature-based recreation (62%)
- › Nature health benefits (58%)
- › Gardening (57%)
- › Wildlife preservation (56%)
- › Planting trees (56%)
- › Climate education (50%)

This trend is echoed in the Town of Holly Springs, evidenced throughout the community engagement process. Reported in the scientific survey, 78 percent of respondents are “very supportive” or “supportive” of implementing sustainability measures to minimize environmental impact of parks and recreation facilities. Additionally, during the first public input meeting, one of attendee’s greatest concerns was the impact developing greenways and parks can have on the environment. Finally, this guiding principle also aligns with the initiatives highlighted in the Holly Springs Strategic Plan that focus on natural resource protection, transportation, watershed management and waste management.

Benchmarking communities used in this master plan report have incorporated various environmental sustainability practices into their department programs, facilities, and operations. Examples include air quality programs, environmental education and outreach programs, solar installations, recycling options at all parks and facilities, multimodal transportation alternatives, and native and non-invasive landscapes. The City of Coppell, TX has established a “Green Team” comprising of interdepartmental city-wide collaborative sustainability efforts that focus on all the three pillars of sustainability – people, planet, and profit.

Sustainable Land Development Practices

Through community support and alignment with Town-wide strategic goals, Holly Springs’ Parks and Recreation Department can foster positive environmental impacts on a larger scale. The Department should adopt environmentally sustainable practices such as protecting natural resources, minimizing development impacts to natural resources and using green building practices. Protecting natural resources can be achieved before development takes place through conserving riparian buffers, wetlands, and ecologically sensitive habitats for local flora and fauna. Similarly, when selecting new park sites or greenway corridors, protection of contiguous open space corridors for the protection of wildlife habitat should receive priority. When the Department is planning to construct parks or facilities, development should minimize negative impacts to natural resources. Strategies include grading with the natural contours of the land to minimize extensive grading and excavation; orientation of facilities to maximize sun exposure and maintaining natural drainage patterns to the extent possible.

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²² <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2020/april/conservation-education-starts-with-parks-and-recreation/>

Lastly, the Department should emphasize green building practices when developing new parks and facilities. Examples include proposing sustainability harvested and locally sourced materials for facility development and department operations; incorporating low impact development approaches to stormwater management to enhance water quality; introducing aspects of stream restoration or flood mitigation; and utilizing native and adapted vegetation as landscape.

Parks and recreation systems across the nation are implementing such practices through programs such as SITES certification for sustainable site development or pursuing LEED certifications for buildings. While securing such certifications can be expensive, the Department should consider adopting the development policies and practices they promote and referencing their programs for best practices.

Sustainability Initiatives

Net-Zero Resource Consumption - The Department should consider developing goals around minimizing water and energy consumption and carbon emissions. Achieving Net Zero energy or water status or generating the same amount of energy / water that a park would consume, is one strategy gaining momentum across the nation. Achieving net-zero status is best achieved through a combination of resource demand reduction and provisions for renewable resources such as solar, wind or thermal power. Similarly, water reuse and rain harvesting practices can provide alternative water sources, reducing demand on municipal potable systems.

Waste Reduction - The 2018 declaration by Chinese government to not accept certain recyclables and more stringent "acceptable recyclables" has caused a new challenge to communities across the nation who were once considered 'successful' in managing their trash. Parks and recreation agencies must educate the public about recycling and waste reduction and the negative impact of comingled trash which ultimately ends up in the landfill. Focusing on reducing food waste during special events, camps, and social gatherings and using compostable products can help significantly reduce landfill waste. While the science and practice of trash management is still evolving, it is a necessity for communities to be adaptable and 'future ready.'

Town of Holly Springs Parks and Recreation department can demonstrate leadership in waste management programs targeted towards maintaining facilities and Department operations. Establishing policies to include recycling bins along with trash receptacles at facilities, smart technology trash compactors (E.g. Big Belly Trash Compactor) at key locations, bottle filler stations instead of drinking water fountains, composting at recreation centers are some of the strategies to reduce waste that the Department can take on.

N-1

Develop parks, facilities and greenways in an environmentally sustainable way

N-2

Maximize sustainability initiatives to minimize resource consumption, reduce waste and promote use of renewable resources

N-3

Expand core program offerings to include environmental education

N-4

Adopt a cross-sector approach to supporting and implementing Town-wide initiatives related to natural resource protection and environmental awareness

Education and Outreach

Resident education and awareness can cultivate support and initiate action for natural resource protection initiatives. By establishing environmental education as a core program, the Department can provide tools and techniques to residents who are interested in the effort but lack the direction. Programs and events can also generate new interest, fostering new ideas and momentum. Many communities are hosting special events on Earth Day or Arbor Day that bring likeminded community groups, nonprofit organizations, and even environmental artists together.

Education and outreach efforts for Holly Springs should be targeted by following priority topic areas determined by the Department and further expanded to align with Town-wide initiatives. Examples to consider include programs focused on:

- ▶ Stormwater: water quality, low impact development, and Town-wide green infrastructure projects
- ▶ Native and non-invasive landscapes, local flora and fauna; reduction in the use of pesticides
- ▶ Green learning “laboratories” for students enforcing STEM curricula
- ▶ Watershed management

Cross-Sector Approach

A cross sector approach can be used to protect natural resources and the Town’s environmental heritage in a more impactful way. The Department should intentionally collaborate with other Town departments such as Development Services and Utilities & Infrastructure to develop policies that reinforce goals around resource protection and environmental awareness. One such opportunity exists while the Town is developing updates to comprehensive plan sections including Land Use & Character Plan and Comprehensive Transportation Plan, as well as updates to the Unified Development Ordinance. New regulations for conservation subdivisions provide an opportunity for the Department to secure conservation land through exactions. The Town recently completed their Strategic Plan, which outlines specific initiatives related to sustainability, natural resource protection and environmental preservation. The Department should support these initiatives through their day-to-day operations and future projects. Similarly, the Department can collaborate with local and state transportation agencies to implement projects that meet connectivity, park access and carbon emissions reduction goals. Finally, the Department should work with the Tree Advisory Committee to establish tree canopy goals for parks and recreation facilities.



Excellence, or the quality of being outstanding, is so admirable because it is hard to find. Achieving excellence should be the common direction all staff within the Department are aligned toward, and this sentiment cultivated by Department leadership. This guiding principle serves as framework for how the Department can operationalize this aspiration. These recommendations should be used to engage and motivate employees to deliver products, services, and experiences that users perceive to be outstanding. Particularly for the Parks and Recreation Department, excellence can be achieved through attention to:

- ▶ High quality parks and facilities
- ▶ On-going maintenance
- ▶ Recreation programs
- ▶ Technology
- ▶ Staff and operations
- ▶ Marketing and communications
- ▶ Partnerships

High Quality Parks & Facilities

High quality parks and facilities create a positive impact on the local economy while providing much needed health benefits. Well-maintained parks and facilities are welcoming and safe for all users and they mirror the unique community character they are located in. High quality parks and recreation services is one of the factors cited often when measuring quality-of-life in a community. Similarly, many studies have cited that businesses choose to locate their offices in places where employees can experience a high quality-of-life, making parks and recreation an essential service in the economic development of a community.²³

X-1
Adhere to best practices in planning and design of parks and facilities.

X-2
Emphasize 'placemaking' to focus on the imageability of the parks system

The Department can provide excellent quality parks and facilities by ensuring best practice design guidelines, regulatory code compliance, and systematic tracking of maintenance and management schedules. Responding to current recreation trends, engaging in 'creative placemaking,'²⁴ and adhering to principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) to ensure residents have modern, imaginative and safe places to recreate are key components of high-quality parks. The Department should continue to review industry trends and utilize surveys to understand evolving recreation interests, needs and wants. Considering a one-percent public art dedication and engaging residents and artists in the design process will enhance placemaking aspects of parks. A one-percent art dedication commits the Department to dedicating a small portion of a park's construction budget to public art installations. While the Department does not have a history of violence or vandalism at local parks, adherence to (CPTED) principles will minimize the change of future problems.

23 <https://www.nrpa.org/siteassets/nrpa-economic-development-report.pdf>

24 <https://www.tpl.org/field-guide-creative-placemaking-and-parks>

On-going Maintenance

The way in which a Department maintains their facilities is an outward expression of pride within a parks system. Establishing maintenance management standards will not only operationalize the Town's maintenance program but allow the Department to better track maintenance costs and needed staffing levels. This degree of oversight results in improved aesthetic, playability and land management.

X-3

Develop and implement maintenance management plans for existing and future parks and facilities.

This plan recommends the Town develop a maintenance management plan for the entire Department to maximize cost, enhance use and productivity of space. As new parks, trails, sports fields, playgrounds and indoor / outdoor facilities come online, written maintenance standards should be developed and implemented.

As maintenance management plans are developed, the Departments should incorporate Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) which enable the Department to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the maintenance management plan by park maintenance staff. The Department can celebrate successful implementation and adjust where improvements are needed. Standard KPI's include:

- ▶ Acres of recreational value maintenance per employee versus non recreational value lands per employee.
- ▶ Track travel time costs for staff to determine level of productivity.
- ▶ Work orders timelines completed.
- ▶ Customer service complaints resolved by a set time.
- ▶ Establish unit cost for game fields for (competitive, recreational and practice fields).
- ▶ Track landscaping acres maintained in house versus a contractor's costs.
- ▶ Customer complaints resolved by set timeline.
- ▶ Workplace accident percentage for employees in maintenance.
- ▶ Ratio of employees; by acre, by buildings square footage, by linear ft. of trails maintenance.
- ▶ Track current assets value versus percentage saved for asset replacement.
- ▶ Track fleet vehicles and equipment cost based on employee requirements to be as productive and efficient as possible.
- ▶ Track part-time employees versus overtime cost for full-time employees versus the cost of contract work.
- ▶ Part-time retention average turnover pay-out versus salary savings.

Recreation Programs

Monitor Program Lifecycles - Viewing recreation programs through a life cycle model provides the opportunity to increase program production efficiency. Identifying a program at the end of its maturity phase before it reaches the decline phase helps achieve efficiency in program delivery. Based on the program assessment, the Department is only providing 22 percent of all program offerings within a mature stage whereas the recommended distribution is 40 percent. A typical program life cycle goes through four phases of development: beginning or developmental phase, maturity, decline, and termination.

At the maturity phase, programs are at their highest efficiency with least cost investment and highest returns generated because of high level of participation. Program delivery does not need initial time investment although minor updates or customization for a specific audience may be needed. Overall, the mature program has fixed any negative feedback from participants, and the program delivery is near flawless with evaluations and attendance

high. It is important for the program staff to keep tracking the program performance to make any necessary changes and updates before the program starts to see the decline phase.

Using the Lifecycle analysis, and other established criteria, program staff should evaluate programs on an annual basis to determine program mix. This can be incorporated into the program operating/business plan process. During the introductory stage, program staff should establish program goals, design program scenarios and components, and develop the program operating/business plan. Regular program evaluations will help determine the future of a program.

X-4
 Increase the percentage of program offerings in the mature phase to the recommended distribution of 40 percent.

Staff should complete a program lifecycle analysis on an annual basis and ensure that the percentage distribution closely aligns with desired performance. Furthermore, the Department could include annual performance measures for each core program area to track participation growth, customer retention, and percentage of new programs as an incentive for innovation and alignment with community trends.

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

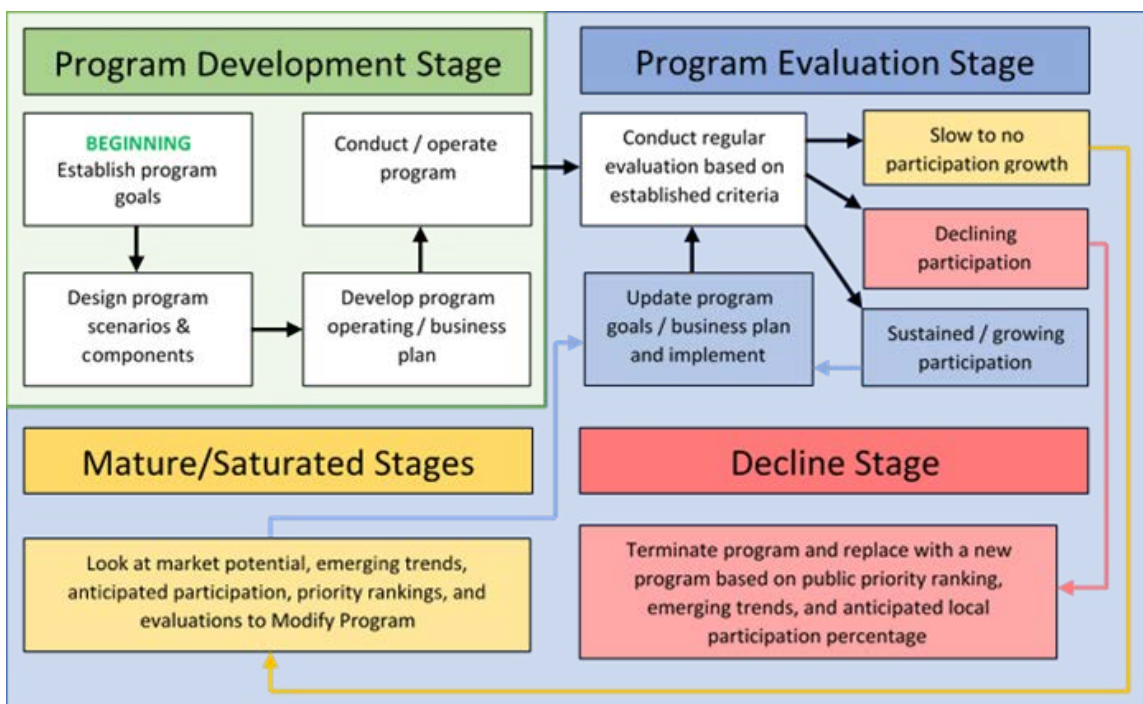


Figure 3 - Evaluation Cycle with Program Lifecycle Logic Matrix

In general, the Department program staff should continue the cycle of evaluating programs on both individual merit as well as the program mix. This can be completed at one time on an annual basis, or in batches at key seasonal points of the year, as long as each program is checked once per year.

Program Development & Decision-Making Matrix

When developing program plans and strategies, it is useful to consider all the core program areas and individual program analysis discussed in the Program Assessment. Lifecycle, age segment classification, and cost recovery goals should all be tracked, and this information along with the latest demographic trends and community input should be factors that lead to program decision-making. Community input can help staff focus in on specific program areas to develop new opportunities in what group of citizens to target including the best marketing methods to use.

Marketing & Promotion Methods				
Program Idea (Name or Concept): _____				
Marketing Methods	Content Developed	Contact Information	Start Date	
Amenity Guide	Internal Factors			
Website	Priority Ranking: High Medium Low			
Newspaper Article	Program Area: Core Non-core			
Radio	Classification: Essential Important Discretionary			
Social Media	Cost Recovery Range: 0-40% 60-80% 80+%			
Flyers - Public Places	Age Segment: Primary Secondary			
Newspaper Ad	Sponsorship/Partnership			
Email Notification	Potential Partnerships: Monetary Volunteers Partner Skill Location/Space			
Event Website	Potential Sponsors: Monetary Volunteers Sponsor Skill Location/Space			
School Flyers/Newsletters	Market Competition			
Television	Number of Competitors: _____			
Digital Sign	Competitiveness: High Medium Low			
Friends & Neighbors Group	Growth Potential: High Low			
Staff Participation @ Events				

Figure 4 -Marketing Methods (example for graphics purpose)

A simple, easy-to-use tool as shown above (figure 4) will help compare programs and prioritize resources using multiple data points, rather than relying solely on cost recovery. In addition, this analysis will help staff make an informed, objective case to the public when a program in decline, but beloved by a few, is retired. If the program/service is determined to have strong priority, appropriate cost recovery, good age segment appeal, good partnership potential, and strong market conditions the next step is to determine the marketing methods

Technology

While the benefits of nature-based recreation and disconnecting from screen time is an important function of parks, attracting younger generations requires balancing the use of technology with outdoor access. Incorporating state of the art technological features into park environments has caught the attention of agencies and designers alike. Integrated wi-fi network, smart playgrounds, solar powered site furnishings, apps to track park usage, activities, special events registrations etc., and incorporating VR technologies to create ‘smart parks’ are few of the latest trends. “SMART Park” is a new concept defined as a park that uses technology (environmental, digital, and materials) to achieve a series of values: equitable access, community fit, enhanced health, safety, resilience, water and energy efficiency, and effective operations and maintenance.²⁵ The UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation has created a toolkit for developing ‘smart parks which described a compilation of technologies that can be used in parks to make them SMART.

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 25 <https://innovation.luskin.ucla.edu/sites/default/files/ParksWeb020218.pdf>

X-5
 Develop and support a culture of innovation, technology, and adaptability to respond to on-going local, national, and global challenges.

For Holly Springs, Ting Park is a perfect opportunity to implement design and operational technological advancements to make it a state-of-the-art sports destination. The sports industry is being revolutionized by the Cloud, artificial intelligence, 5G and extended reality and though it may seem a futuristic for a community like Holly Springs, it is a predictable reality that the Town can leverage these resources as they become available.

The Department should cultivate a culture of innovation, technology, and adaptability to respond to ongoing location, national and global challenges using new operational technologies and high-tech experiences for park users. For example, COVID-19 pandemic has required people maintain social distancing while outdoors and agencies have incorporated an autonomous line-marking paint robot into their operations to paint sports field lines and 'safe zones' for open areas and ensure safety of park users as well as operations staff who would otherwise be in close proximity to paint these areas.²⁶

There are several other technological advancements that the Town can implement to increase their operational efficiencies. Some features the Department should consider include:

- ▶ Enhance the current online reservation and payment system for transactional services and program registration.
- ▶ Implement work order system software for the Parks Maintenance division.
- ▶ Incorporate a GPS tracking system to track staff's commute time to parks and facilities.
- ▶ Experiment with small scale new technologies or develop pilot projects that significantly reduce staff time and costs such as smart trash compactors, sensors on lights and irrigation, stormwater management, landscape and hardscape performance, and other technological advances that track data and operational performance.
- ▶ The Town should continue to make technology improvements in park maintenance to save operational dollars through efficiencies as they are learned.

Staffing and Operations

At the Department level, competent staff, and operations and maintenance policies play a crucial role in ensuring the tax payers dollars are being spent efficiently. This effort should result in providing first class experiences to residents from responsive customer service to exemplary user experiences at parks, facilities, and in programs. . Operations of the parks and recreation system depend on a well-trained and dedicated staff responsible for planning and delivering programs, maintaining the land and facilities, and administering and promoting the system.

Operations – This plan recommends the Department develop an Asset Management Plan within the CityWorks software program the Town has purchased as it applies to accurately estimating unit costing

²⁶ <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2020/august/using-technology-to-help-keep-people-safe/>

X-6

Develop an Asset Management Plan within the CityWorks software program

X-7

Create a capital improvement plan for new improvements outlined in this master plan

X-8

Leverage the parks system as a source of economic development.

for park maintenance of parks (cost per acre), tree management per tree, trails (cost of a mile of trail), sports fields (cost per field), capital replacement of existing facilities and amenity upgrades when needed. This would include timeline replacement or upgrades of major assets such as playgrounds, artificial turf sports fields, community center upgrades, trails, rental facilities, and sports courts.

Staffing - Employees are considered one of the Departments' greatest assets. If an agency focuses on its employees, ultimately the customers will benefit. Parks and recreation departments are often the most public facing departments in a community, making employees the cornerstone of customer service. Staff are brand ambassadors, reflecting community and Department values through their work, interactions with the public and the experiences they deliver.

This plan recommends the Town cultivate a strong work culture to promote positivity, personal growth, training, and constructive feedback. Ideas should be heard from the lowest level up, acknowledging all input is valued and even the smallest efforts contribute to the common goals of the Department. Maintaining employee moral can often be linked to work-life balance, clearly defined career paths, and gestures of appreciation.

An efficient department with minimal burn-out typically has a combination of full-time, part-time and seasonal staff. The Parks Maintenance division currently only has full-time employees, limiting potential efficiencies and cost containment through part-time and seasonal staff. This plan recommends the Town establish the right balance of full-time equivalent's or FTE's between full-time and part-time staff to achieve 27 acres per FTE which is best practice for park maintenance departments across the United States. Similarly, the Department should continue to balance all areas of the Maintenance division with employees that have skills in trades, data-tracking, natural resource management, and forestry to meet the expectations of the community. Identifying tasks that can be outsourced more efficiently than completed in-house can also provide cost savings for the Department.

X-9

Cultivate a strong work culture to promote positivity, personal growth, training, constructive criticism. Ideas should be heard from the lowest level up.

X-10

Update the organizational structure of the department to improve functionality.

X-11

Establish the right balance of FTE's between fulltime and part-time maintenance staff to achieve the industry standard of 27 acres per FTE.

X-12

Support professional development and succession planning for all staff levels.

This plan also recommends updates to the current organizational chart to improve the functionality of the Department by eliminating duplication of effort and competition between divisions for people, money, and priorities. The following changes are proposed and reflected in the below organization chart:

Consider a business development position to oversee earned income development, partnership equity, to set up and oversee a parks and recreation foundation, seek sponsorships, develop and track data on key performance metrics that are recommended in the master plan.

- ▶ Consider establishing a special events division and incorporate town-wide events tied to the Farmers Market.
- ▶ Functionally align the sport facilities and programs together so that both service areas have access to the resources they need.
- ▶ Align reservations, permits and customer service as one division serving the entire department as well as reservations in parks and at the Hunt Community Center.
- ▶ Move the Bass Lake Park Maintenance Tech position to the Parks Maintenance division to eliminate redundancy in services.

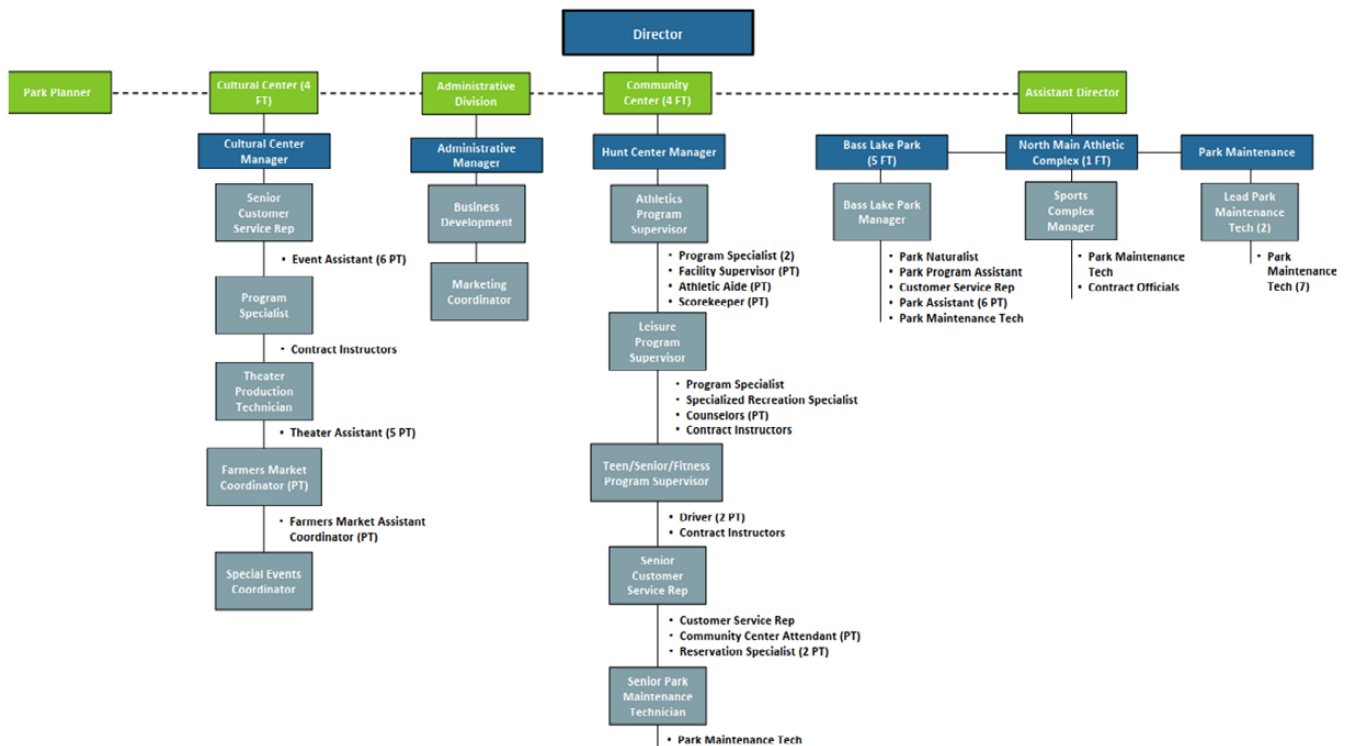


Figure 5 - Proposed organization structure

Professional development and succession planning for all staff levels will result in continuity of operations and provide employees with opportunities for career growth and advancement. The Department should encourage and support parks maintenance leadership staff to attend park maintenance and management schools. Additional training should also be provided in the areas of natural resource management, conservation, and sustainability practices across all park’s personnel. Finally, the Department should commit to clear career development paths for employees by establishing an organizational hierarchy of job responsibilities.

Marketing and Communications

Marketing and communications are vital for successful program delivery. These two areas of community outreach not only convey information about the programs being offered, but also educate people about the benefits of participation and generate interest among nonparticipants to try something new. A large proportion of Holly Springs residents who participated in the scientific survey are newcomers who have recently relocated to the area and one of the reasons cited in the survey for non-participation in programs is lack of information. The Department needs to adapt their marketing strategies to reach the newer population through an appropriate communications platform.

X-13
Increase awareness, branding, & marketing of parks, programs, greenways & services.

Additional strategies for increasing participation through improved marketing efforts include:

- ▶ Develop marketing plan based on the strategies discussed in the inventory + analysis chapter.
- ▶ Establish priority segments to target in terms of new program/service development and communication tactics.
- ▶ Establish and review regularly performance measures for marketing; performance measures can be tracked through increased use of customer surveys as well as web-based metrics.
- ▶ Leverage relationships with partners to enhance marketing efforts through cross-promotion that include defined measurable outcomes.

Branding is an essential component of marketing and communications and should be considered an economic investment. Building on the Town’s recent efforts on rebranding, the Department has an opportunity to develop a parks and recreation brand for all published material including parks and greenway trails maps, information brochures and flyers. The branding can be clearly articulated by logo and color scheme use, typography, email signatures, tone and language, and social media advertising²⁷. The Department should extend the branding initiative to create a sense of place (described in the inventory + analysis chapter) in the parks and facilities using wayfinding and signage.

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²⁷ <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2017/september/five-steps-to-unlock-your-agencys-marketing-and-branding-potential/>

Partnerships

Parks and recreation departments across the nation are developing strategies to partner with other agencies and organizations to provide innovative programming opportunities for residents that otherwise may be missed because of limited resources available within the agency. Local businesses, donors, developers, nonprofit organizations, and third-party recreation providers who have a similar vision as the Department can help close gaps and meet the demands of a growing community.

X-14

Nurture existing partnerships that are mutually beneficial and develop new partnerships.

X-15

Establish best practices to pursue national awards and CAPRA accreditation.

The Department currently has a strong network of recreation program partners. Therefore, the following recommendations are both an overview of existing partnership opportunities available to the Department, as well as a suggested approach to organizing partnership pursuits. This is not an exhaustive list of all potential partnerships that can be developed, but this list can be used as a reference tool for the agency to develop its own priorities in partnership development. The following five areas of focus are recommended:

- ▶ **Operational Partners:** Other entities and organizations that can support the efforts of the Department to maintain facilities and assets, promote amenities and park usage, support site needs, provide programs and events, and/or maintain the integrity of natural/cultural resources through in-kind labor, equipment, or materials.
- ▶ **Vendor Partners:** Service providers and/or contractors that can gain brand association and notoriety as a preferred vendor or supporter of the Town or Department in exchange for reduced rates, services, or some other agreed upon benefit.
- ▶ **Service Partners:** Nonprofit organizations and/or friends' groups that support the efforts of the agency to provide programs and events, and/or serve specific constituents in the community collaboratively.
- ▶ **Co-Branding Partners:** Private, for-profit organizations that can gain brand association and notoriety as a supporter of the Department in exchange for sponsorship or co-branded programs, events, marketing and promotional campaigns, and/or advertising opportunities.
- ▶ **Resource Development Partners:** A private, nonprofit organization with the primary purpose to leverage private sector resources, grants, other public funding opportunities, and resources from individuals and groups within the community to support the goals and objectives of the agency on mutually agreed strategic initiatives.

Once probable partners in these areas have been identified, the Town should establish formal volunteer and partnership policies and agreements according to best practices listed in the Appendix. As an on-going practice, the Town should continue to monitor, and update established volunteer and partner policies and agreements which are tailored to the different types of volunteers and partnerships the Department encounters. Finally, to demonstrate and quantify the benefits of partnerships, the Department should begin tracking volunteer metrics which include individual volunteers used annually and volunteer hours donated annually. Lastly, continue background checks for all volunteers working with all programs.

CAPRA Accreditation

No other gesture declares excellence more than seeking the NRPA's CAPRA Accreditation. Commission for Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) accreditation is a national level recognition for parks and recreation agencies for their excellent services and operations.

CAPRA provides the following benefits to a park and recreation agency:

- ▶ Proves that the agency is developing and using the best practices
- ▶ in programs, facilities, safety, financial, human resources, and operations to serve the community;
- ▶ Provides standards to assist with relevance with elected officials and decision makers;
- ▶ Allows an agency to stand apart from peers;
- ▶ Set the agency up with strong data and standards to receive grants and funding;
- ▶ Increases national network of high performing park departments that may give advice or become a mentor;
- ▶ Sets the agency up for continual evaluation and improvement;
- ▶ Improves the opportunities for securing grant funding as it provides confidence to grant selectors that they are selecting experts in the field.

