

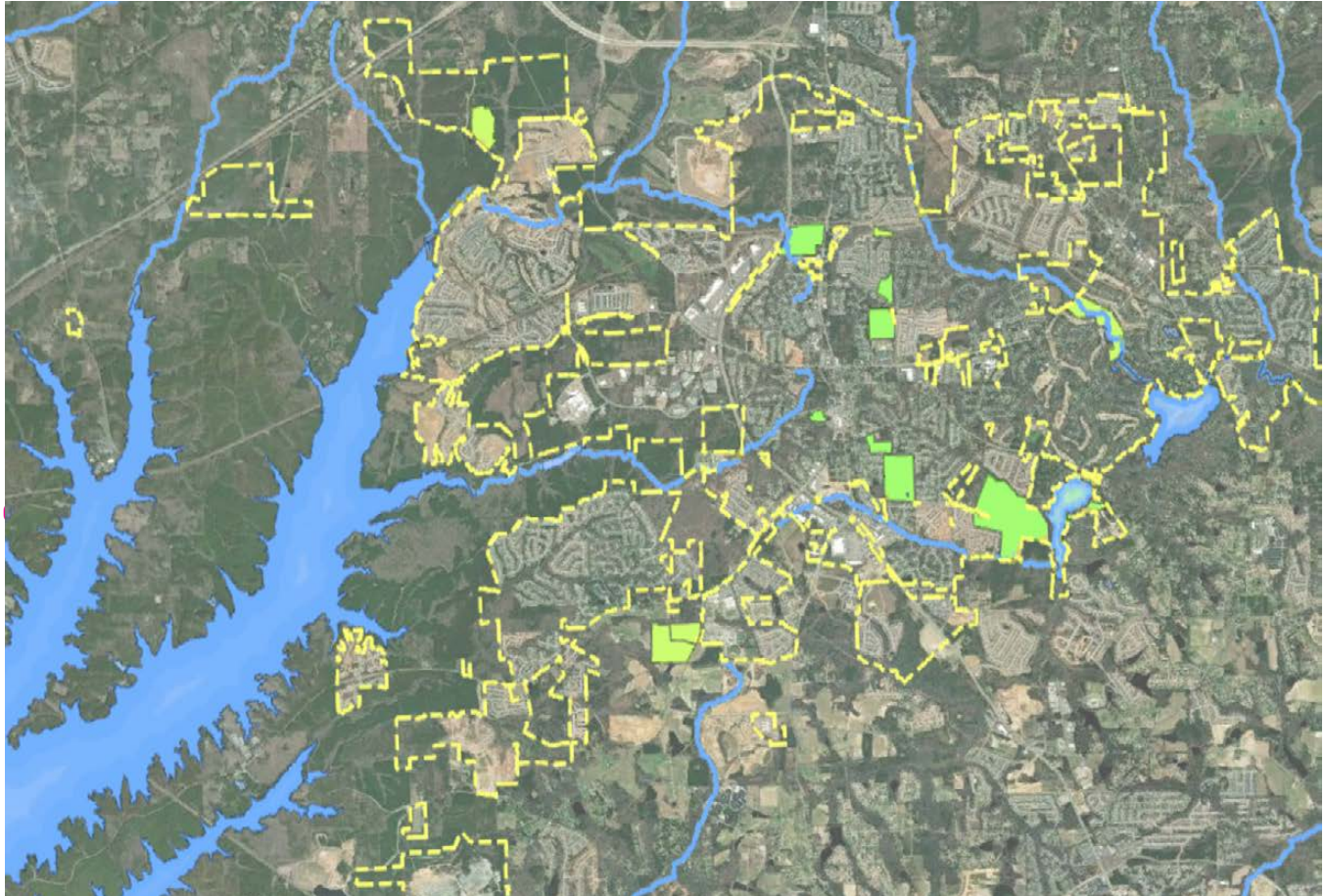


executive summary



Built on the strong foundation of robust community engagement, the Holly Springs Parks, Recreation, and Greenways Master Plan has established a vision for the Parks and Recreation System and created a work plan to bring that vision to fruition. Over the next ten years, the parks and recreation system comprehensive plan (the Plan) will help guide the development of new parks, facilities, and programs; enhance community connectivity via greenway trails; develop strategies and policies for protection of natural resources; and ensure a stable and financially successful system.

Aerial view of Town of Holly Springs



**PARKS &
FACILITIES**

**GREENWAY
TRAILS**

PROGRAMMING

**OPERATIONS &
MAINTENANCE**

FINANCE

COMPONENTS OF PARKS AND RECREATION SYSTEM PLAN

The Town of Holly Springs is a small community in the rapidly growing Wake County area of North Carolina. While the Town boasts its almost 150 years of history and small-town character, the highly educated and diverse population is also seeking modern and innovative recreation opportunities and protection of its unique natural resources.

The Town of Holly Springs Parks, Recreation and Greenways Master Plan is created to guide the Parks and Recreation Department in serving all users of the Town's parks and recreation services. The Town will continue to grow over the period of next ten years, evolving with local, state and worldwide trends. This plan positions the Parks and Recreation Department to meet the needs of a growing community while remaining flexible and able to adapt to changing trends and available resources, while maintaining the excellent level of service they have come to be known for.

The Town had established three overarching principles to guide the development of this plan- Connect, Inspire, and Play. The project goal was to create a plan for **everyone**, regardless of whether they are current users of the system. The Department wanted the updated plan to reflect the community as a whole and set an example for communities around Holly Springs while inspiring residents to try new activities and explore new places.

This plan:

- Represents a collaborative Town-wide effort including the community, stakeholders, partners, staff, and decision makers;
- Uses the voice of the community as the foundation for recommendations;
- Analyzes multiple facets of the current parks, greenway trails and program offerings;
- Establishes guiding principles on which to base evolving recommendations and action items as the Town continues to grow;
- Serves as the guiding document and work plan for the next 10 years of the Department's growth, improvement, and expansion;
- Serves many benefits including: requirement for state and federal grant funding, data driven decisions based on community engagement, benchmarking, industry standards, and framework for department growth planning process



The Planning Process

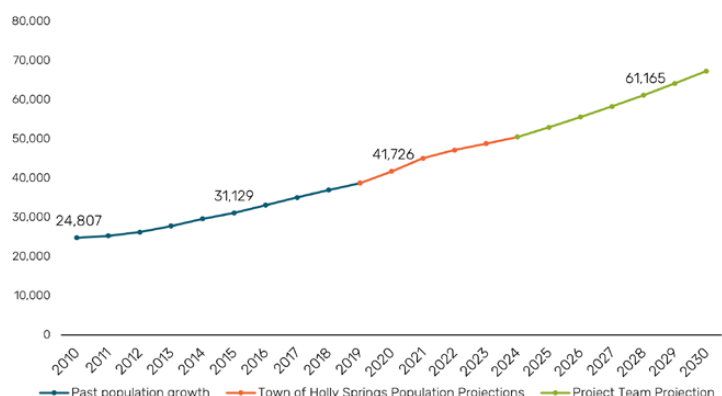
The planning process for Holly Springs Parks, Recreation and Greenways Master Plan established the vision and goals of the Department based on the community's current needs. Rooted in the community engagement process and cross-sector collaboration, guiding principles were developed and informed recommendations, action items, and project implementation priorities.



FINDINGS

Demographics

The Town of Holly Springs population almost doubled from year 2010 to 2020 and is expected to grow at a rate of 4.9 percent annually during the next 10 years increasing the current estimated population of 41,726 residents in 2020 to a projected 64,160 residents in 2030. This rate of annual growth is almost five times North Carolina's projected average annual growth rate of 1 percent for the same period. This population growth will result in additional demands on the existing parks system. With higher educated population and lower unemployment rate than the state average, Holly Springs median household income is also higher than the median household income of North Carolina. The increasing household income levels indicate the ability to pay for parks and recreation services. Regardless of rising income for some community members, residents with lower incomes must still have affordable or no-cost access to parks and recreation services. Holly Springs also has lower median age than the state average which suggests the need for adult and youth athletics as well as family-oriented and intergenerational



programming. Despite the overall younger population than statewide trends, it is important to ensure that older adults are adequately served through facilities and programming. All parks and facilities should feature amenities and design elements that universally include people with all abilities.

Parks, Facilities, and Greenway Trails

The Department provides a variety of amenities, facilities, and greenway trails across 611 acres of parkland and open space and an additional 137 acres of land shared with the local school system through joint use agreements. The Department provides 54,163 square feet of indoor recreation space in the form of a recreation center, cultural center, and nature center facility. The Department’s trail mileage currently totals 12.83 miles and is an element of the parks and recreation system that the Town is actively seeking to expand.

Parkland and facilities are concentrated in the more developed, eastern part of the Town and are for the most part, absent west of Highway 55. While the existing parks were found to be well maintained with a variety of amenities to meet residents’ needs, this plan recommends system-wide and site-specific improvements. System-wide improvements include consistent wayfinding signage, design standards, ADA compliance and incorporating Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles into overall design and maintenance of facilities. Site specific recommendations include development vacant land at Ting Park, community gardens and permanent farmers market pavilion at Sugg Farm, and facility expansion at Bass Lake Park, Cultural Center, and W. E. Hunt Recreation Center.



WOMBLE PARK

43.43 acres

- Enhance entrances
- Parking Expansion
- Improved site lighting
- Amenity Renovations-
Turf fields, restrooms,
bandshell relocation



VETERANS PARK

9.76 acres

- Engage youth and add
amenities to activate the
park
- Add trailhead
- Trim vegetation and
maintain sight lines to
improve “eyes on the
park”



JONES PARK

24.38 acres

- Trail head and greenway
connection
- Parking expansion
- Environmental education
opportunity at ‘Turtle
Pond’
- Address runoff and
drainage
- Additional shelter



TING PARK

35.83 acres

- Destination teen space
- Public-private
partnerships
- SMART park
- Full-size basketball courts
- Permanent building
with restroom, offices, &
storage



SUGG FARM PARK

110.47 acres

Validate master plan within limits of conservation easement

Evaluate barn structures

Repave entrance road

Permanent farmers market pavilion w/ community garden and farm-to-table programming



BASS LAKE PARK

85.23 acres

Facility expansion for dedicated event space

Upgrade existing building as a dedicated environmental education facility

Parking expansion



CULTURAL CENTER

19,110 square feet

Relocate and expand farmers' market

Analyze storage and office space needs

Expand various programs and amenities to adjacent Mims Property

Collaborate with Wake County for potential building expansion



W. E. HUNT RECREATION CENTER

40,132 square feet

Playground replacement
Improved controlled access to building entrance

Renovations to community room, gymnasium, and locker rooms

Maximize program capacity through flexible spaces

Repurpose the outdoor spaces and 'the pit' with new amenities

Town of Holly Springs residents have expressed a strong support and need for development of greenway trails throughout the public engagement process. This plan has proposed a comprehensive network of greenway trails, sidepaths, and shared-use lanes (sharrows) to connect Holly Springs to neighboring jurisdictions (community connectors), local destinations such as schools, parks, and shops (destination connectors), and other neighborhoods (neighborhood connectors). Participants from the second public input session supported connecting to Town of Apex and American Tobacco Trail via community connector network as a priority project.

Programming

The Department provides a broad range of recreation and leisure programming for all ages at the existing dedicated parks and facilities. Existing eight core programming areas include arts and cultural, athletics, childcare, special events, fitness, nature, seniors, and special interest programs. This plan has identified two unique facilities including Farmers Market and Ting Stadium for expanded program opportunities. The Town also manages several successful partnerships including the school system, athletic program providers, and healthcare providers such as Rex Healthcare. The public engagement process revealed a need for diverse programming that caters to all ages, abilities, and special needs populations. The plan recommends establishing a special events division to focus

on specialized programs that are not only economic drivers but also support programming for health, wellness, and building social capital. The Department needs to encourage volunteerism programs which builds trust and community ownership. In addition, the Department needs to update program pricing strategies to align them with the customer's ability to pay. Finally, the Department needs to adopt the total Cost of Service / Ownership model and Cost Recovery Model for programming to achieve financial sustainability.

Operations and Maintenance

The operations and maintenance overview analyzes the Department's delegation of maintenance tasks based on cost, timeliness, experience, and quality. Currently ten full time maintenance staff members take care of developed parkland, facilities, and greenways. There are no seasonal, part time staff or stable volunteer staff in place. The recommendations for this plan include asset management plan, capital improvement program, deferred maintenance plan, and written maintenance standards. In addition, clear career development path to retain staff and focus on staff training to continue to provide excellent customer services are included in the staffing recommendations. A new business development staff position is recommended 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.

Finance

The Financial Assessment process by the project team involved a review of their last three years financial statements and financial questions and answers by the staff and the Finance Department from internal financial operations meetings. One of the challenge for Holly Springs Parks and Recreation Department is to manage their operating budget in pace with the community growth and be able to provide programs and facilities for a growing population where the current facilities have reached capacity. The Department should consider other dedicated funding sources outside of property taxes to help support the residents' needs. The Town should also adopt a cost recovery policy, set up a cost recovery goal, establish pricing policy for programs, and focus on the business development aspects of the Department by adding a new staff position for business development.

Community Engagement

COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact on the Master Planning Process

The Town of Holly Springs Parks, Recreation, and Greenways Master Plan process was unexpectedly impacted by the COVID-19 global pandemic when the public engagement process was initiated. The process was adapted to respond to the restrictions and guidelines recommended by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) which replaced all the in-person meetings with a virtual engagement platform. The following summarizes the adaptive strategies used to solicit broad community input throughout the process:

1. Focus group meetings for teens and special needs population were conducted virtually while the senior focus group responded to a printed feedback questionnaire. Teens were also given the opportunity to fill out written responses.
2. The two public open houses made use of virtual presentations, streamed live on Town's website and social media platforms. The public provided additional feedback using web-based public opinion surveys which were available for additional 2-3 weeks.
3. Virtual work sessions were arranged for staff, interdepartmental staff, strategic partners, and interjurisdictional partners to provide comments on proposed greenway corridor maps, park search areas, and recommendations.

GLOBAL IMPACT ON PARKS AND RECREATION SYSTEMS

The following excerpt is derived from the 2020 Trust for Public Land special report –Parks and Pandemic. The report highlights following challenges and changes as they are affecting the parks systems.

Health: Parks and open spaces have become critical resources for all the physical and mental health benefits they provide. The pandemic has resulted in closings of restaurants, bars, malls, etc. where people socialize, and parks and open spaces are helping fill that gap while also helping communities deal with the trauma and stress that comes with a global health crisis. The report also notes that the pandemic has revealed a significant gap in the nation's poor neighborhoods which lack access to the quality green spaces, thus depriving them of the health benefits.

Usage: As the businesses and non-essential services have closed across the nation, people have found respite in close to home neighborhood parks, open spaces, and greenway trails to stay physically active and meet other people while maintaining the 'social distance'. Parks and greenway trails are seeing unprecedented high levels of usage proving their importance in this health crisis. This has also led to the overwhelmed parks and recreation systems and many communities had to come up with innovative ways to encourage people to maintain distance and use open spaces in accordance with CDC guidelines. Some of the strategies included markings for people to keep distance, educational signs, one way loops for greenway trails, opening up athletic fields for walking and passive recreation activities, and voluntary sign ins for people to use spaces on certain days of the week.

Policy: Across the country, the pandemic has led parks departments to consider a range of policy changes by closing off amenities, athletic programs, and facilities that result in large gatherings. While the communities have kept access to open spaces, portable toilets, restrooms, drinking fountains are shut down. In major cities, the problem of equitable access became apparent when parking lots were closed to manage heavy traffic in parks which in turn created a barrier for people not within the walking distance of the parks.

Investment: Exacerbated usage of parks and open spaces has underscored the need for increase in parks and recreation as essential infrastructure investment and leverage the momentum of communities' interest to be outdoors and focused on health benefits. Cities and Towns across the nation are facing the financial challenges with decreased revenue, employment loss, and budget cuts. Elected officials and decision makers need to realize the importance of parks and recreation as an essential service in this pandemic and ensure a steady investment to continue offering the quality service to their communities.

Future: The Trust for Public Land report also highlights that the pandemic has called attention to the fact that access to the outdoors is considered a privilege when it should be a right. With the data to pinpoint where parks are most needed, we can address the equality challenge across the communities. Experts in the field are suggesting that this is the crucial time to continue supporting the operational needs of parks to maintain their high quality, especially in the underserved areas where there is a higher chance of them falling victim to antisocial activities.

An additional outreach booth was set up by the Town staff at the Farmers Market to share draft greenway map with public. While the pandemic has not impacted the results and recommendations of this master plan directly, the long-term effects of this crisis will be seen on the parks and recreation systems in the communities across the nation for years to come. Communities have developed a newfound appreciation for the outdoors while the parks and recreation departments are facing budget cuts with economic downfall. From the community engagement perspective, the virtual engagement platforms have been successful in participation from residents which has far exceeded the traditional in-person engagement. The scientific surveys provided an opportunity for non-park users and residents who may not have access to internet to mail in their survey responses.

This plan has considered COVID impacts on the parks and recreation system throughout the document as it relates to facilities, greenway trails, and programming.

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

Benchmarking

The benchmarking analysis indicates how the Department compares to other similar agencies for metrics including level of service per 1,000 population for parkland, greenway trails, and indoor facility space, programming budget per capita, cost recovery, capital budget, full time equivalent (FTE) staff per acre of developed parkland, and FTE per 1000 population. The results of the benchmarking analysis indicate that the Department is successfully providing a high level of service for developed parkland and staff led recreation programming in comparison to benchmarked communities and can certainly achieve the level of service provided by the NRPA gold medalist communities including Westerville, OH and Coppell, TX. The NRPA Gold Medal is recognized as the “Highest award to honor communities that demonstrate excellence in long-range planning, resource management and innovative approaches to delivering superb park and recreation services with fiscally sound business practices.” The Town is working strategically towards the goal to achieve high level of service with greenway trails with the strong support expressed by the community.

This benchmarking analysis summarizes data for the following categories to compare peer communities.

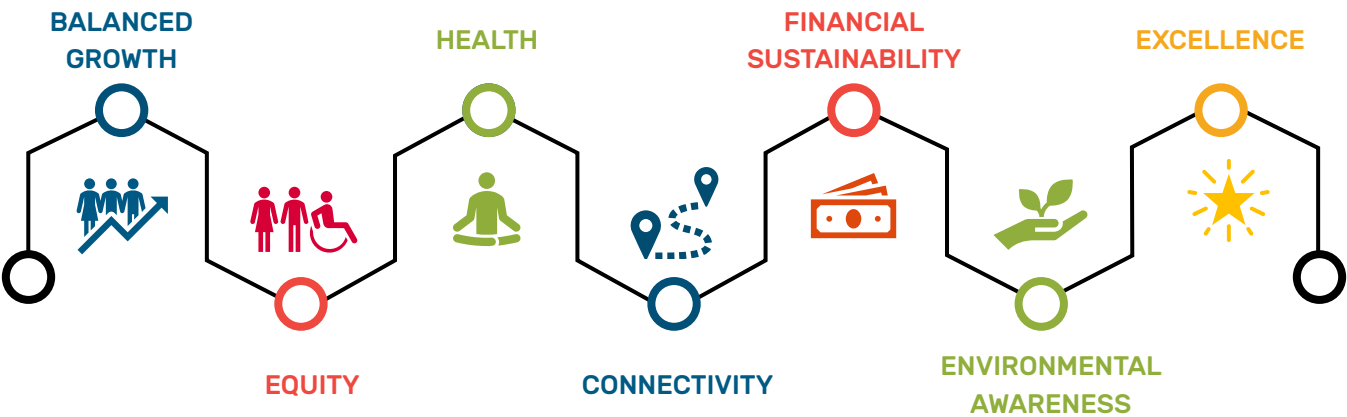
- › Parkland
- › Trails
- › Indoor Facility Space
- › Programming
- › Finances
- › Capital Improvement Budget
- › Staffing

	HOLLY SPRINGS, NC	APEX, NC	COPPELL, TX	WAKE FOREST, NC	WESTERVILLE, OH
Population	41,726	63,500	41,100	48,000	39,737
NRPA Gold Medal Finalist	No	No	Yes	No	Yes



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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. 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 the guiding principles noted below.



	BALANCED GROWTH	Meet the needs of the growing community
	EQUITY	Provide equitable and inclusive access to ALL residents of Holly Springs
	HEALTH	Prioritize health and wellness of the Holly Springs community
	CONNECTIVITY	Offer a connected recreation system throughout the community
	FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY	Establish a financially sustainable department
	ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS	Commit to the protection of natural resources
	EXCELLENCE	Seek excellence in everything the Town provides to its residents



BALANCED GROWTH

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

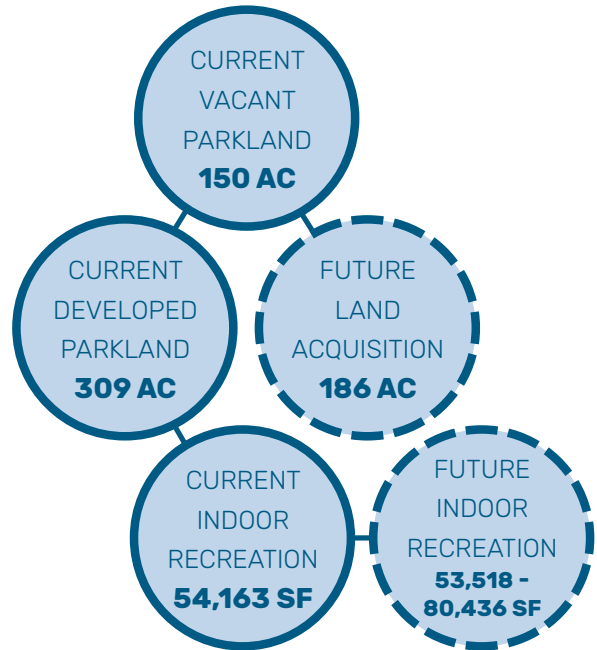
- › Acquire and develop an additional 186 acres of parkland by 2030
- › Develop the 150 acres of available parkland currently owned by the Department
- › Construct 53,518-80,439 additional square feet of indoor recreation by 2030

SCIENTIFIC SURVEY FINDING

Participants indicated top three priority investment areas should be:

Greenway Trails
Aquatics Center
Farmers Market Pavilion

ONLINE SURVEY FINDING



STRATEGIES FOR ACTION ITEMS

MEET THE NEEDS OF THE GROWING COMMUNITY BY:

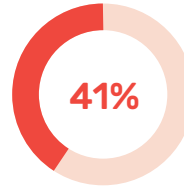
- › Level of service standard for developed parkland , conservation parkland, indoor facilities
- › Land acquisition strategies
- › Expanded programming



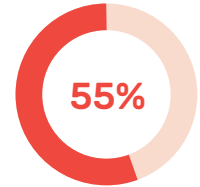
EQUITY

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Acquire and develop parkland to achieve an equitable distribution of parkland
- Increase the percentage of residents within a ten-minute walk of a park from 41 percent to 55 percent
- Offer recreation access to people of all ages and ability levels
- Ensure equitable distribution of financial investment across the park system
- Develop program plan for special needs populations



Holly Springs Current Walkability Rating per Trust for Public Land



Holly Springs Goal for Walkability Rating for Year 2030

SCIENTIFIC SURVEY FINDING

97% participants indicated parks and recreation is an **essential service** to the Town.

36% participants indicated that it takes them approx. 20 minutes to walk to nearest park, facility or greenway trail.

STRATEGIES FOR ACTION ITEMS

PROVIDE EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE ACCESS TO ALL RESIDENTS OF HOLLY SPRINGS BY:

- 10-minute walk
- Design interventions
- Education
- Partnerships
- Financial assistance

ONLINE SURVEY FINDING





- › Plan, design and program of the parks and recreation system to improve health outcomes related to
 - › Physical fitness
 - › Mental health
 - › Social cohesion
 - › Healthy eating
- › Identify potential partners and organizations who strive to improve the above-mentioned health outcomes



Participants indicated fitness and wellness programs as one of the top priority for investment with a priority rating of 133/200.

PRIORITIZE HEALTH AND WELLNESS OF THE HOLLY SPRINGS COMMUNITY BY:

- Amenities that encourage physical activity
- Program offerings
- Access to healthy food
- Partnerships

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CONNECTIVITY

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Build a well-connected parks and recreation system within the Town
- ▶ Connect to national, regional, and adjacent communities' greenway systems

SCIENTIFIC SURVEY FINDING

Participants indicated **Greenway Trails** as topmost priority investment areas with priority rating at 200/200.

52% of survey respondents indicate greenway trails as most important facilities.

ONLINE SURVEY FINDING



STRATEGIES FOR ACTION ITEMS

OFFER A CONNECTED RECREATION SYSTEM THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY BY:

- ▶ Cross sector collaborations
- ▶ Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) update
- ▶ Developer built greenway trails
- ▶ Connected destinations
- ▶ Wayfinding and signage



FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Complete a true cost of service / ownership assessment for each park and program
- Establish cost recovery goals and develop diverse pricing policy for programs and facilities,
- Develop a clear funding strategy to fund park improvements and on-going operations and maintenance costs.



SCIENTIFIC SURVEY FINDING

81% of survey respondents are supportive of future bond within existing property tax structure to fund parks and rec improvements and expansion.

ONLINE SURVEY FINDING



STRATEGIES FOR ACTION ITEMS

PROVIDE EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE ACCESS TO ALL RESIDENTS OF HOLLY SPRINGS BY:

- Total Cost of Service / Ownership model
- Staff training
- Cost Recovery Model for programming
- Diverse funding sources
- Economic value of partnerships and volunteer base



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish goal to conserve 30% parkland as undisturbed open space
- Maximize sustainability practices: design, construction, maintenance & operations
- Additional programs to raise environmental awareness
- Cross-sector approach to protection of natural resources as Town-wide initiatives



SCIENTIFIC SURVEY FINDING

86% of survey respondents support implementing sustainability measures to minimize environmental impact of parks and recreation facilities.

STRATEGIES FOR ACTION ITEMS

COMMIT TO THE PROTECTION OF NATURAL
RESOURCES BY:

- ▶ Natural resource preservation
- ▶ Sustainable sites
- ▶ Green building strategies
- ▶ Tree canopy goals
- ▶ Carbon reduction and energy conservation
- ▶ Waste reduction
- ▶ Educational outreach

ONLINE SURVEY FINDING





EXCELLENCE

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- › Implement best practices in planning and design of parks: CPTED, deferred maintenance, ADA compliance, wayfinding signage.
- › Balance 'uniqueness and consistency' of parks and facilities
- › Develop and support a culture of innovation, technology, and adaptability to respond to on-going local, national, and global challenges
- › Establish best practices to pursue national awards and CAPRA accreditation

SCIENTIFIC SURVEY FINDING

93% of respondents rated the overall quality of programs / special events as excellent.

ONLINE SURVEY FINDING



STRATEGIES FOR ACTION ITEMS

SEEK EXCELLENCE IN EVERYTHING THE TOWN PROVIDES TO ITS RESIDENTS BY:

- › Best practices in designing facilities
 - › Placemaking
 - › ADA compliance
 - › CPTED Guidelines
 - › Universal and Inclusive Design principles
- › Key performance indicators
- › Updated technology
- › Staff training
- › Special events division
- › Business development staff position
- › Branding