



## inventory + analysis



## INTRODUCTION

To establish a clear vision for the future of a parks and recreation system, the existing state of that system should be inventoried and analyzed to identify those elements that are working well, and those where there may be gaps. What follows is an inventory and assessment of the Town's parkland, programs, operations, and finances.





# parks and facilities





## PARKS AND FACILITIES

The Town of Holly Springs manages six parks, four joint-use facilities with Wake County Public School System, two indoor recreation facilities and more than 12 miles of greenway trails. Holly Springs’ park system includes 309.10 acres of developed parkland and 302 acres of undeveloped parkland. Recreation opportunities provided throughout the park system are varied; ranging from athletic fields, playgrounds, greenway trails and natural resource areas to the recreation center and cultural arts center. A clear effort has been placed on providing recreational opportunities for a diverse userbase.

### EXISTING PARKLAND

The Town of Holly Springs Parks and Recreation Department (the Department) is responsible for nearly 309 acres of developed parkland. The system provides a critical community resource that residents report adds to their quality of life by providing an access to nature, connection to each other, and beautification of the Town. While the system has traditionally been known for athletics, more diverse amenities and facilities have emerged, and the reputation is evolving.

Holly Springs’ parks generally range from 25 acres to 110 acres, apart from Veterans Park which is a little more than 9 acres. Nearly all parks are concentrated within the central area of the Town limits, East of Highway 55. The newly acquired 56 acres of former farmland is the only parkland located West of Highway 55. Additionally, all the parks located East of Highway 55 are within a two-mile radius of each other and typically located in single family residential areas. Coincidentally, the large gap on the western side of Highway 55 is where most of the new development is occurring. Though not classified as parkland, the area west of Highway 55 benefits from a large acreage of preserved open space at Shearon Harris Lake and Harris Lake County Park. This resource provides access to parkland in an area otherwise absent of open space or parks. Harris Lake County Park is managed by Wake County.

PARK NAME	TOTAL PARK ACRES
Womble Park	43.43
Veterans Park	9.76
Jones Park	24.38
Ting Park	35.83
Sugg Farm Park	110.47
Bass Lake Park	85.23
TOTAL	309.10

▲ Table 1- Existing developed and maintained parkland owned by Town of Holly Springs

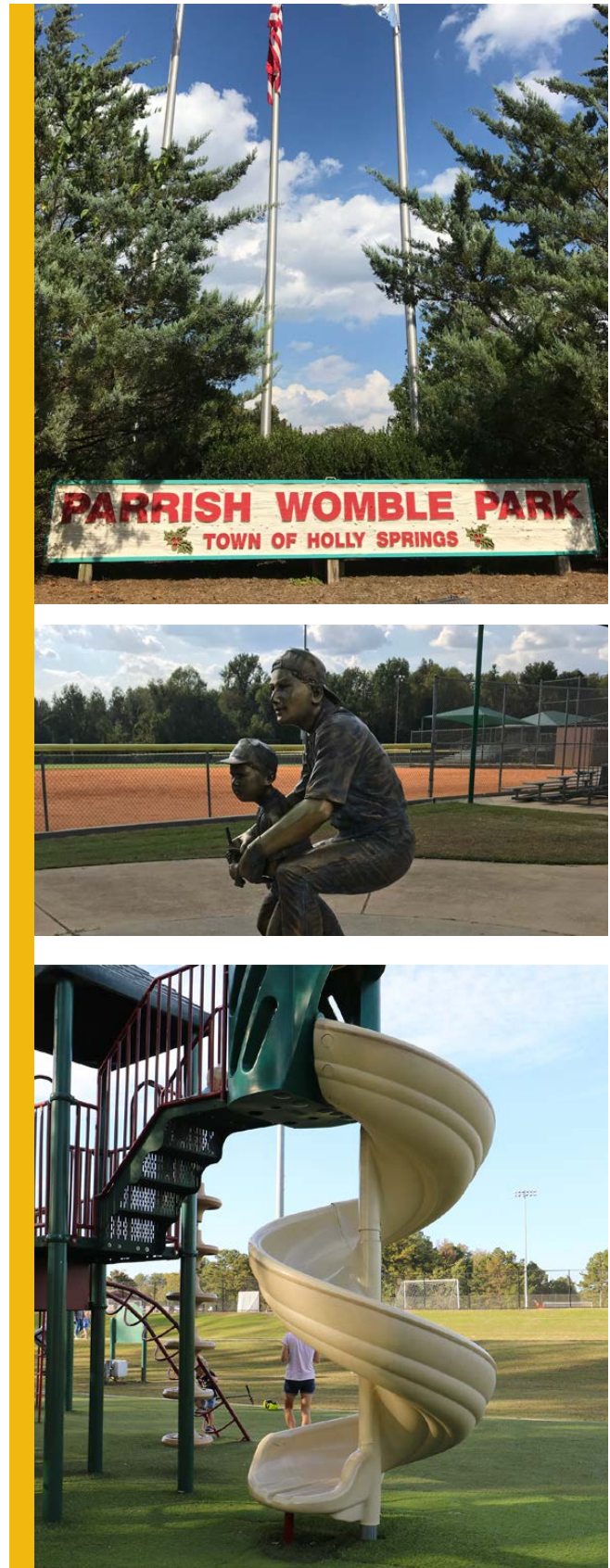
*\*Total park acreage is included as developed and open to the public and does not include joint-use or special-use parkland associated with the local school district or other entities.*

## Parrish Womble Park

Parrish Womble Park, located in the heart of Holly Springs adjacent to the W.E. Hunt Recreation Center, is a community park with a healthy balance of active and passive recreation opportunities including athletic facilities, concession building, tennis courts, a picnic shelter, playground, outdoor amphitheater, greenway trails, horseshoe pits, and sand volleyball courts. While the park is most known for its synthetic turf athletic fields that support the town's strong reputation in youth sports, the additional amenities add diversity to the park system's recreational offerings as alternatives to traditional bat and ball options. This park's expansive views, mature trees, open green space and visually pleasing stormwater pond yield a tranquil setting providing visitors respite from more urban areas and the hustle and bustle of today's fast-paced lifestyle.

While the park is well maintained and equipment appears in good condition, the synthetic turf fields are reaching the end of their lifecycle and will need replacing, parking is inadequate during peak use hours, and site lighting is insufficient. These shortcomings are typical of any well-used and beloved public park and with careful planning can be overcome. As with any park, an on-going schedule of maintenance and replacement items can be developed to anticipate costs. Underutilized areas of the park can be evaluated for parking expansion and pedestrian scale lighting can be added as funds are available.

The synthetic fields at this park support a number of Department sports leagues play, private-use rentals, and provide time for drop-in play each week. While a source of revenue, the rental use agreements should be evaluated to ensure equitable provisions for all parties involved and consideration for adequate open, public-use.



▲ Parrish Womble Park



## Veterans Park

Veterans Park is a centrally located neighborhood park surrounded by single family residential homes. As the name suggests, The War on Terror Memorial, Veterans Memorial and an American Liberty Elm tree are the significant features of the park. A play area and parking lot are located close to the Veterans memorial. A 10' wide asphalt greenway connects to a picnic pavilion with restrooms and provides a connection to a newly established fishing pier at the pond. Fitness stations located along this section of the trail provide an added opportunity for exercise. This greenway trail also provides connection to Jones Park on the southern end.

Shrubs in the parking lot create noncompliance with CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) guidelines which can be easily corrected by regular upkeep of landscape to maintain clear sightlines. Overall, this park is well maintained, and no major renovation needs were observed.



 Veterans Park

## Jones Park

Jones Park is located just south of Veterans Park, behind Holly Springs Elementary School, off Holly Springs Road. Jones Park is the third most visited park in Holly Springs, according to the results of the scientific survey. The Holly Springs Parks and Recreation Department maintains a joint-use agreement with the elementary school for park access and baseball field spectator area. According to the joint use agreement, the Town is maintaining the site for minimal use of school amenities in return.

Other existing amenities include a large play area, small picnic shelter, restroom building, disc golf course and a greenway trail connection to Veterans Park.

Because of the park's location behind the school property and absence of signage along School Days Lane off busy Holly Springs Road, it may be difficult for new visitors to locate Jones Park. Though there is new town wayfinding signage on the school property, a dedicated park entry monument will help guide visitors driving on Holly Springs Road. Similarly, improving sidewalk connection along Holly Springs Road and extending a greenway trail connection along School Days Lane would provide a pedestrian connection to the school from northern neighborhoods. Some of the Jones Park amenities including the playground area and safety surfacing are showing signs of wear and tear. Enhanced landscaping and the addition of diverse, small-scale family friendly amenities (for example, open lawn area, picnic shelter for family events, additional play elements, court games, etc.) would help bring a unique sense of place to this park.



▲ Jones Park



## Ting Park

Formerly known as the North Main Athletic Complex, Ting Park is a signature sports complex, located between Main Street and the Highway 55. Ting Internet, a fiber optic internet service provider is the official Naming Sponsor for Ting Park and Ting Stadium and has created a successful public-private partnership.

Ting Park is a regional destination famous for Holly Springs Salamanders summer collegiate baseball league, the Wake Futbol Club's youth soccer tournaments and community sports leagues for athletic programs. The Ting Park facility boasts a state-of-the-art 1700-seat multi-sport stadium with artificial turf, soccer fields and a tennis complex. Other amenities include two small basketball courts in the parking lot and a playground covered by a safety net from all sides to protect from stray balls from athletic fields. In addition, there is approximately 4 acres of vacant land for future expansion and a drone landing site in the southwestern corner of the site. With a separate partner, this location will be used as a landing site for drones to deliver food from restaurants across Highway 55.

Ting Park is well connected to the regional road network system, readily accessible from Highway 55 and minutes away from NC 540. Visitors are greeted by a large entry monument sign with digital display board showcasing upcoming events at the Park. The addition of wayfinding signage internal to the park would help orient and direct visitors to the various fields and park amenities. Consistent use of site furnishings, shade trees and additional landscape would help build the brand as a unique Town park. The park would also benefit from an additional restroom facility to support the large soccer events that are often held at the Park.

A facility management and maintenance plan should be created to take care of the regular maintenance items such as retaining wall leakage, concrete cracking at stairs and upper deck leakage at the stadium. The Town is currently working with contractors to deter birds from roosting at the park.

According to the staff, the existing stadium facility is underutilized, and the Town is focusing on attracting use by local colleges and hosting outdoor entertainment events such as music concerts. The Department recently completed a business plan for Ting Park which outlines goals for economic impact and recommends opportunities to maximize facility use.



Ting Park



## Sugg Farm Park

Sugg Farm Park is a large parcel of parkland located along Grigsby Avenue, just minutes from downtown Holly Springs. Formerly farmland, this property features pastures and woodlands. The property is protected from development by a conservation easement overseen by Triangle Land Conservancy. The Town currently hosts special events including the July 5<sup>th</sup> celebration and fireworks show, and HollyFest. Without defined amenities, structures, or space, and with only periodic events and programs, the Town is struggling to provide consistent maintenance for park upkeep and would benefit from a park-specific maintenance plan to address regular and long-term maintenance needs.

Existing features on the site include several farm structures such as a barn, horse stable, previous owner's residence, remote control (RC) field archery/parking field, main event field with electric capacity for vendors and a police k-9 training facility. A new restroom building, and dog park are under construction. While not currently used, the old barn structures could be repurposed for events if an architectural assessment deems them safely usable with minor renovations.

A major challenge for the park is the single road access point for auto-based visitors attending large events. However, there is an effective greenway connection for visitors on foot or bicycle, as the Carl Dean Greenway connects Parrish Womble Park, Sugg Farm, Bass Lake Park and several adjacent residential neighborhoods.

The Town has previously created a concept plan for this project, however, given the community growth, changing demographics and emerging recreation trends, as well as the site development limitations imposed by the conservation easement, the Town will want to revisit and validate the amenities proposed in the concept plan.




▲ Sugg Farm Park

## Bass Lake Park

Bass Lake Park is the topmost visited park in Holly Springs, according to the scientific survey. A favorite spot for fishing, Bass Lake has been loved by the Holly Springs community for several decades. Outdoor amenities at Bass Lake Park include boating and fishing and just under two miles of mulched trails along the lake shoreline that provide users with an opportunity to enjoy the native flora and fauna. The mulched trail is popular, although costly to maintain. With its regular use, the Town should consider alternative surfacing that would limit on-going maintenance costs. The Town's Tree Advisory Committee is currently working on making a "Tree Trail" where different tree species are labeled along the trail route.

The popularity of this park has resulted in facility wear and tear along with inadequate parking and programmed space at capacity. The communities' love for lake views, fishing, nature walks and environmental education should be met with on-going maintenance and expanded facilities, and nature-focused spaces.



 Bass Lake Park



## UNDEVELOPED PARKLAND

The Town owns a 17-acre historic property known as the Mims Property in the downtown area, close to the Town Hall and adjacent to the Cultural Center. A park concept plan was developed in 2012 for this property (Figure 1). With rapidly changing trends in recreation and an influx of new residents, the Town should consider updating the concept plan based on the priority needs identified in this master plan.

Most recently (2019), the Town acquired a former farmstead across the street from Holly Springs High School on Cass Holt Road for use as future developed park. Just under 56 acres, the parcel remains the only Town-owned park property on the western side of Highway 55 and will provide residents their first recreational park in this growing area. The Southwest part of Town, currently more rural in character, does not have dedicated parkland, although it is situated closer to the preserved natural areas as identified by the Future Land Use Plan. As the Town continues to grow, developing these open spaces will provide a valuable opportunity to serve the Town's growing population and equitably distribute parks and recreation resources throughout the community.



Figure 1- Mims Property Master Plan

OPEN SPACE NAME	ACREAGE
Mims Property	17.48
Holly Glen Property	1.78
Tallicud Property	77.68
Wescott Property	8.67
Woodcreek	50.69
Bridgewater	37.42
Cass Holt Land - 2 parcels	55.87
Sunset Lake Open Space	27.53
Carolina Springs Property *	25.0
<b>TOTAL AREA</b>	<b>302.12</b>

Table 2- Town owned undeveloped parkland 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.

## FACILITIES

The Town of Holly Springs manages three indoor facilities that support a range of organized programs and self-directed activity. Each of these facilities provides unique offerings from traditional gymnasium space to performance space and environmental education.

PARK NAME	TOTAL BUILDING SQUARE FOOTAGE
W. E. Hunt Recreation Center	40,132
Cultural Center	10,771
Bass Lake Retreat & Nature Center	3,260
<b>TOTAL AREA</b>	<b>54,163</b>

▲ Table 3- Existing Town owned facilities

*\*The total square footage of Cultural Center only includes the area of the building for the center. It does not include the library area which is operated by Wake County Public Libraries.*

### W.E. Hunt Recreation Center

The W. E. Hunt Recreation Center is located about half mile from downtown Holly Springs along Grigsby Avenue. The center stands on the grounds of the historic Holly Springs Elementary School for black children from the mid-1920s to around 1970. Named after William E. Hunt, who served as principal for the elementary, most of the recreation center is new construction, with the gymnasium a preserved wing of the old building. A historic marker commemorating the historic school that served young black students during the time of segregation was recently added to the site.

The recreation center houses a gymnasium, walking track, fitness center, game room, group exercise rooms, several multi-purpose classrooms, small kitchen and outdoor fenced in play area. As the only recreation center in Town, this facility's popularity has resulted in high-use spaces impacting for building systems that need replacement or repair. This facility would benefit from a detailed maintenance plan including an assessment of building systems (roof, HVAC, structural, windows / doors, etc.)

With growth of the community comes expansion of the Department's staff needs, storage and additional demand for new programs and updated equipment. The capacity of parking and indoor space is limiting the growth of programs and various building elements simply do not function well for their intended use. Without controlled access at the centers main entrance, safety is an on-going concern. Limited office space has forced staff to use storage space as make-shift offices resulting in the need for evaluating building code compliance. As the Town addresses growth, expansion of indoor recreation facilities, office and storage space should be a priority.



▲ W. E. Hunt Recreation Center



## The Cultural Center

The Holly Springs Cultural Center, located in the downtown area, is a joint use facility with Wake County where the Town occupies one half of the building for cultural arts programming while the other half of the building is home to a branch of the Wake County Public Library. Residents seeking thrills in theater, dance or music may frequent the Holly Springs Cultural Center. Like other recreational facilities this building space is already too small for the creative energy and performing arts interests Holly Springs has cultivated. From storage space to the stage, the functional and performance spaces are bursting at the seams with enthusiasm for recreation opportunities outside of traditional bat and ball play.

A class act rather than a one-act, the circular drive to the cultural center serves as a backdrop for the Town's year-round Farmers Market. With the introduction of a "moonlight market" featuring food trucks and one-of-a-kind vendors, the demand for the Town's newest family fun night is expanding. The Farmers Market also remained open in the summer of 2020 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic as an essential food source. According to the results of the scientific survey, the farmers market was the fourth top selection for the importance placed on a recreation facility (see the appendix for the full report). Similarly, the scientific survey reports a farmer's market pavilion ranked the third highest priority for investment. The Town should consider identifying a new, larger civic space with improved facilities to meet the growing demand for access to locally sourced foods.

While offering performing arts programming at a cultural center with a theater is a unique recreation opportunity and worth touting, the center has its shortcomings. Like so many of the Town's facilities, this one reached capacity shortly after its construction. The theater capacity is limited for performances large enough to generate notable revenue, the dance room is undersize with poor floors and without adequate storage space and needs to be evaluated for fire code compliance.



^ Cultural Center

### Bass Lake Park and Nature Center

Bass Lake Park indoor facilities feature a small retreat center with conference room and access to a veranda and 2,000 sq foot deck overlooking the 54-acre Bass Lake, and a North Carolina certified environmental education nature center. For those interested in spending their day with slithering salamanders or learning about North Carolina's nocturnal forest animals, this stop is a must. The nature center offers native animal exhibits, an information desk and a reference library. A service window sells bait for fishing and offers small snacks and beverages for visitors. The conference room is available for rent and has hosted small weddings, business meetings and other events and classes.



▲ Bass Lake Park and Nature Center



## JOINT USE

Town of Holly Springs Parks and Recreation Department has contracted joint use agreements with the Wake County Public School System for use of the sports fields on school grounds after school hours. Maintenance of the amenities under these joint use agreements such as sports fields and tennis courts are managed by Town of Holly Springs Parks and Recreation Department, along with some parking lots and access roads. All the joint use agreements have expiration between year 2030-2035.

PARK NAME	AMENITIES	TOTAL SITE ACRES
Holly Springs High School	Softball field	57.56
Holly Grove Middle School	Multipurpose field, walking track, softball field	25.32
Holly Springs Elementary School	Multipurpose field, basketball court, playground, walking track	19.22
Holly Ridge Middle School	Multipurpose field, basketball court, softball field	35.55
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>137.65</b>

Table 4- Existing joint use facilities with Wake County Board of Education

*\*Site acres includes school property areas including the building and the grounds.*

While joint use agreements are necessary for a robust parks and recreation system, they often favor one party and rarely have clearly understood or fair terms. When renegotiating the terms of joint use agreements, the Town should consider the benefits of the agreements and reciprocate with an equally appropriate level of maintenance and use flexibility. In the meantime, the Town should consider establishing Town-owned and operated facilities to gain increased independence from the school system.



Holly Springs High School

Source: <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/c0/b6/d8/c0b6d8f4c4a98b7f0a46e597d3669c77.jpg>



Holly Springs Elementary School

Source: <https://12oaksnc.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/HollySpringsElementary.jpg>



Holly Springs High School

Source: [https://www.codeelec.com/files/3015/0152/2799/1\\_Holly\\_Grove.jpg](https://www.codeelec.com/files/3015/0152/2799/1_Holly_Grove.jpg)

## INVENTORY SUMMARY

The table below is a summary of the Town of Holly Springs’ parks and recreation inventory of parkland, trails, indoor facility space, outdoor fields and courts and park amenities. A detailed breakdown of amenities found at each park can be found in the appendices.






 <b>PARKLAND</b>	 <b>TRAILS</b>	 <b>INDOOR FACILITY SPACE</b>	 <b>OUTDOOR FIELDS + COURTS</b>	 <b>PARK AMENITIES</b>
<b>309.10 acres</b> of developed parkland  <b>137.65 acres</b> of Joint Use Land ---  <b>6</b> Parks  <b>4</b> Joint Use School Facilities  <b>2</b> Sports complexes  <b>1</b> Nature park  <b>2</b> Future parkland properties	<b>12.83 miles</b> of Greenway Trails  <b>9.23</b> miles of hard surface trails (asphalt & boardwalk)  <b>3.60</b> miles of soft surface trails (mulch)	<b>54,163 sq. ft.</b> of indoor recreation space  <b>1</b> Recreation Center  <b>1</b> Nature center  <b>1</b> Cultural center	<b>39</b> outdoor fields and courts including Joint Use Facilities  <b>16</b> Ball fields  <b>21</b> Tennis and Pickleball courts  <b>2</b> Sand Volleyball courts  <b>2</b> Basketball courts	<b>3</b> picnic shelters  <b>4</b> playgrounds  <b>10</b> restrooms  <b>1</b> disc golf course  <b>3</b> fishing piers  <b>1</b> dog park (in 2021)

Table 5- Existing amenities summary



## Park Classification System

The Town currently does not have a parkland classification system based on park size or acreage. Given the timeframe the parks were developed and their centralized location within the Town, this could reflect an older park development model focused on consolidating amenities into larger park parcels for ease of maintenance and management. A park classification system provides a way to catalog existing parks and facilities, monitor maintenance needs and evaluate existing conditions for best practices in park design. Similarly, it provides a way to ensure future parks and facilities meet the goals of the recreation system in terms of frequency of use, equitable financial investment, access, location and excellence in design. A proposed parks classification system to improve the organization of existing and future Town of Holly Springs Parkland is discussed detail in the appendices.

## PARKS SYSTEM ASSESSMENT

The project team conducted site assessments of the Town's existing parks and facilities. The assessment is organized by five evaluation criteria, including connectivity, general condition, accessibility and safety, sense of place and green infrastructure. The themes are standard best practices and intended to be a summary of the realities, opportunities and challenges of the current conditions observed throughout the entire Town of Holly Springs park system.



### Connectivity

Does the park connect to its surroundings through sidewalks, greenways and trails? Does the network support pedestrians and bikers?



### Accessibility + Inclusivity

Is the park designed so people of all abilities can access the park and all its amenities? Does the park meet or exceed most or all requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?



### General Condition + Safety

Is the park maintained to department standards? Do the park amenities and facilities need to be updated? How old are the amenities and facilities? Are the park amenities and facilities showing signs of wear and tear? Does the park feel safe and encourage user safety?



### Sense of Place

Does the park design create an enjoyable place to pursue those activities? Does the park appear to reflect the history or identity of the Town? Are people able to identify this park as a Town of Holly Springs Park? Has public art or other unique features been used to express the unique qualities of the park?



### Environmental Sustainability

Does this park promote green building practices, environmental sustainability and education? Are the maintenance methods promoting department cost savings?

## Connectivity

Essential to successful parks systems is interconnectivity by way of alternate modes of transportation. Sidewalks and greenway trails provide safe alternatives to vehicular access and recreational activities such as running, walking and biking are preferred by the public when they connect destination places. The concept of park connectivity through greenway trails promotes these activities and helps to improve the overall health of the community. Further connections to regional greenways and trail systems have local and regional economic development potential. In addition, because greenways are often located in utility easements and stream buffers, they not only help users connect to nature, but preserve ecological corridors for wildlife habitat.



Throughout the Town of Holly Springs, trails and greenways appear to be constructed in fragments or localized within the park properties, leaving several parks disconnected from an overall interconnected park system. While trails in Womble Park and Bass Lake Park are examples of well-used trails internal to parks, greenway trail connections between parks appear to be few.

Veterans Park, Jones Park, W.E. Hunt Recreation Center and Parrish Womble Park are connected to a large extent through a network of side paths and greenway trails within residential neighborhoods and further connect to Sugg Farm Park and Bass Lake through a sidewalk. While some sidewalks are of adequate width to accommodate safe pedestrian travel, there are other sidewalks along roads with narrow right-of-way. Improved connections that accommodate appropriate design dimensions for pedestrian and bicycle facilities will need careful consideration. A continuous pedestrian connection via sidewalk exists from Holly Springs Road intersection along Bass Lake Road that connects to Bass Lake Park. Ting Park is the newest developed sports venue park, regionally connected via Highway 55 and NC 540. Opportunities exist to connect this park by greenway trails to other parks and recreation facilities within the Town as well as surrounding residential developments.

Overall, a lack of wayfinding signage along public pedestrian corridors was observed. The absence of wayfinding signage makes it difficult to identify and navigate the public pedestrian connections that do exist. This is especially true in residential neighborhoods where sidewalks are connecting parks but are not marked as publicly accessible.

As a part of this master plan, an in-depth exploration of the existing trail system and the opportunities that exist to connect parks via a complete greenway network is provided in the Greenways chapter.

### Accessibility & Inclusivity

As a public agency, the Holly Springs Parks and Recreation Department has a responsibility to provide facilities and amenities that are accessible by all ages and ability levels. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) outlines minimum standards for compliance with regulations that govern public accommodations to provide goods and services to people with disabilities on an equal basis<sup>1</sup>. The NRPA has also undertaken an inclusivity initiative to ensure all people have access to the benefits of local parks and recreation. The NRPA defines inclusion as removing barriers, both physical and theoretical, so that all people have an equal opportunity to enjoy the benefits of parks and recreation<sup>2</sup>.

In a system with many well-established parks and facilities such as Holly Springs, older facilities may not meet the standards outlined by the ADA. As standards and regulations evolve it is very common for existing facilities to fall behind. Many of the older parks and their amenities do not provide sidewalks and walkways at the recommended frequency creating disjointed park offerings that are not reachable by users of all ability levels. For example, the playground at the Hunt Recreation Center exhibits a play structure that is disconnected from the sidewalk infrastructure and as a result inaccessible though it has a wheelchair ramp within its use zone boundary. At the Cultural Center, it was observed that there is no accessible evacuation route from the theatre area. Overall, the amenities in Holly Springs' parks are well connected via ADA compliant sidewalks to parking lots and other amenities and support facilities such as restrooms and drinking fountains were found to be ADA compliant. The Town is in the initial stages of developing a Town-wide ADA Transition Plan to evaluate Town facilities for ADA compliance.

Few inclusive amenities were observed throughout the system. Inclusivity tends to exceed the requirements of the ADA and encourage built environment enhancements that increase access to parks for people with cognitive disabilities, the LGBTQ community, and racial and ethnic minorities. Popular inclusive park amenities are sensory gardens, inclusive playgrounds, Miracle League courts, bilingual signage and non-gender specific restrooms. The Town should consider expanding opportunities for inclusive access to recreation amenities.

### General Condition

The general condition of parks, amenities and facilities affects residents' perceptions and level of satisfaction which influences their use and perceived safety. Well managed and maintained parks and facilities are typically considered safe and inviting by residents whereas parks showing neglected overgrown landscape, poor lighting levels, graffiti and vandalism deters park visitation by residents and attracts antisocial activities. Similarly, indoor facilities like the community center, recreation center and other facilities that provide safe and pleasant experiences are appreciated, used appropriately and have more visitors.

When analyzing the Holly Springs parks system, it appears that the Town has invested in managing and maintaining their existing facilities. However, many of the parks are now showing signs of aging, such as outdated play equipment, worn court surfacing, deteriorating restroom buildings and overgrown landscaping. While some park systems across North Carolina have a clear hierarchy of park sizes and service areas such as parklets, neighborhood parks, community parks and regional parks, the parks system in Holly Springs lacks this hierarchy both in size and clear distinction of basic and special use amenities. Lack of landscape buffers or transition spaces obscure park boundaries with the adjacent uses. For example, at Jones Park, the bleachers for baseball field are located on the Wake County Public School property and both properties lack the separation by some physical feature like fencing or a landscape buffer.



In general, all the park properties have a natural character. The natural landscape of piedmont woodlands has been preserved where appropriate and supplemented with additional landscape elements along main entrances, parking lots and key destination amenities within parks. Some areas were observed to be planted with nonnative and invasive vegetation such as Privet and Bradford pears. While this was a more common practice among park designers in the 1990's and early 2000's, there is a renewed focus on sustainable landscapes that promote native and adaptive plant species.

The parks and recreation facilities including Hunt Recreation Center (the Recreation Center) and the Cultural Center have concerns of being over capacity, show signs of aging mechanical and HVAC systems, offer limited office space for growing staff, and provide limited space for programming and storage. Being part of an old school building, the recreation center needs renovations, including the gym, community room and storage space. Specifically, the recreation center staff has concerns over ingress/egress from staff offices during emergencies. Limited office space within the center has resulted in a large closet used as an office. The Recreation Center also lacks controlled access making monitoring users coming and going nearly impossible.

Park safety, whether perceived or real, can affect park utilization and the public's overall perception of the park system. Evidenced by open site lines, cleanliness, separation between vehicular and pedestrian circulation, and well-staffed facilities, the project team found the overall system offers both real and perceived safe park surroundings. All these factors contribute to higher rates of park utilization and continual activity resulting in "eyes on park," a natural surveillance system that contributes to improved safety by discouraging undesirable behavior.

Perceived feelings of safety may be compromised at few park sites by overgrown vegetation that obstructs sightlines. This overgrown vegetation or planting large shrubs instead of dwarf shrub species, combined with low site lighting levels can impair site lines and create places for wrong doers to hide. These overgrown areas were observed at Veterans Park and Womble Park parking lots. Additionally, while the overall park system presents few safety concerns, some of the older park amenities are showing signs of wear and tear. Equipment that falls into disrepair can present safety or non-compliance concerns. For example, the safety surface at the Jones Park playground is uneven and loose in some places. The playground at Ting Park seems to be an afterthought and it is adjacent to ball fields. To avoid the danger of flying balls, the play structure is covered on all sides by a safety net, giving it an appearance of a batting cage and not an inviting play area.



### Sense of Place

Parks present an opportunity to communicate a community's unique image and brand, distinct community characteristics and ensure vibrant shared public spaces. Most often, this is accomplished by balancing consistency of signage, furnishings and materiality with the flexibility to express each park's individual appeal. Elements that typically contribute to sense of place are vegetation, wayfinding signage, brand recognition, public art, historic elements and building materials characteristic of a certain geographic location or time period. Insistence on integration of community involvement and public art into all park design projects contributes to a unique sense of place at each park and allows expression of historic, cultural and social narratives.



One of the best ways to promote park identity unique to the Town of Holly Springs and project high quality recreation spaces is through a consistent hierarchy of site elements at each park. This in turn creates a unique and recognizable image for the Town's park system and streamlines replacement. While the picnic shelters exhibit similar architectural style, the overall park system appears to lack consistency among park furnishings such as trash receptacles, benches, water fountains, etc. The models and colors for the furnishings vary at each park site which otherwise would have helped create a unified appearance throughout the parks system.

Both branding and wayfinding can help create a sense of place within parks. Parks which have a strong sense of place exhibit a specific visual and contextual identity that is felt by visitors. Wayfinding refers to the use of signage or other visual cues to guide visitors to their destinations in a safe and enjoyable way. Like other site elements, wayfinding uses a hierarchy of scales, fonts and colors to communicate locations of parks and site amenities within the parks.

Much of the park system can be identified through its primary entrance signage. The typical entry monument signs observed at park properties were low signs on wood, in a blue, white and red color scheme. Ting Park has a unique entry monument sign with digital display and red brick façade. Similarly, the Veterans Park sign is built with stone façade and metal lettering and the Sugg Farm sign is a large metal gateway. Overall, though each park has an entry monument sign for identification, the color schemes and materiality differ considerably.

Like the main entry signage, supplemental wayfinding signage within the large parks is minimal, making it difficult for new users to find amenities. For example, at Womble Park, the ball fields are located on the southern end of the property and without any signage it is difficult to locate them if users are entering the park from the northern end where soccer fields are located. It was also noted that Womble Park and Ting Park have multiple vehicular entry points and minimal signage to inform visitors' directional priorities, leading to increased opportunities for confusion. Jones Park is behind the Holly Springs Elementary School and not visible from Holly Springs Road. Though there is a large wayfinding sign, an entry monument at School Days Lane would be helpful. The distribution of amenities through parks covering many acres, coupled with multiple entry points, a hierarchy of entrance signage and internal way finding signage would contribute to improved visitor orientation, safety and overall experience.

The Town of Holly Springs recently updated their community brand and installed town-wide wayfinding signage with the new logo and fresh color scheme. These wayfinding signs on major roads identify park locations. However, the individual parks signage has not been updated to reflect this new branding and marketing effort.

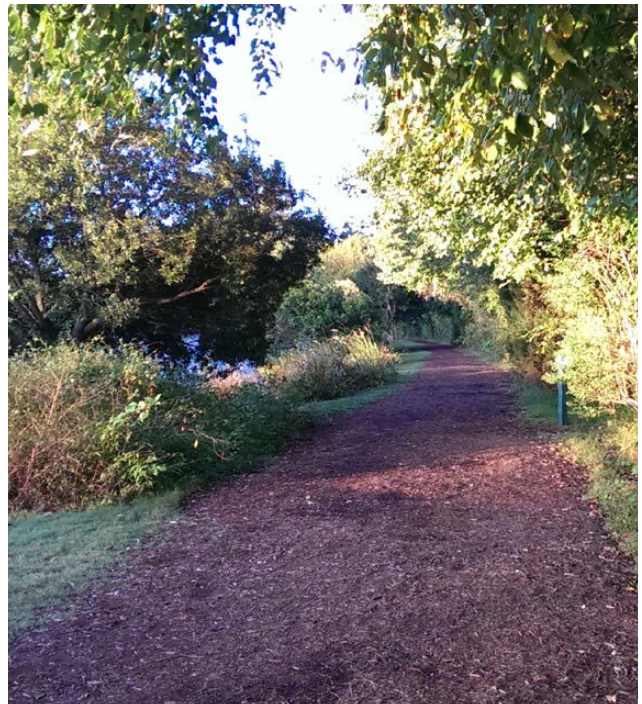
When touring Holly Springs parks and facilities the project team noticed that the two greatest contributors of sense of place are the system's natural park-like character and the type of programming offered. For Sugg Farm Park and to some extent for Womble Park, the mature tree canopy has been preserved in pockets of areas throughout the sites. This canopy is native to the Piedmont region comprised of Oak, Hickory and Pines. The trails within these parks offer the opportunity to walk beside the mature tree buffer lines creating a sense of being close to nature. Bass Lake Park immerses park visitors into the native habitats of piedmont flora and fauna and offers opportunities for environmental education.

### Environmental Sustainability

For the purposes of this assessment, the project team assessed the existing parks and recreation systems' provision of green practices by analyzing each park's offering of green infrastructure, environmental education and sustainable maintenance practices. As reported by the scientific survey, 78 percent of respondents are very supportive and somewhat supportive of implementing sustainability measures to minimize environmental impact of parks and recreation facilities. With the degree of importance residents place on this approach, the Department should consider environmental sustainability as a pillar of their park development and maintenance operations.

Few Holly Springs parks explicitly exhibit the promotion of green infrastructure which is usually characterized by the presence of environmental education, native plant materials, reduction of pollutants, stormwater management, reduced maintenance and increased environmental equity<sup>3</sup>. Many of the parks protect the natural character of the site, but few appear to promote environmental green infrastructure outwardly.

Most of the parks offer limited environmental education. Sugg Farm Park and Bass Lake Park can incorporate educational materials and signage because of the existing vegetation, natural character and existing natural surface trails. These parks also have the potential to support environmental education programs. Additionally, the recently acquired undeveloped former farmstead site appears to have great potential for the inclusion of ecologically sustainable design practices illustrated to residents through educational programming, signage and exhibits.



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<sup>3</sup> *Green Infrastructure in Parks: A Guide to Collaboration, Funding, and Community Engagement*; "[https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2017-05/documents/gi\\_parksplaybook\\_2017-05-01\\_508.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2017-05/documents/gi_parksplaybook_2017-05-01_508.pdf)"



## KEY FINDINGS:

- › Most parks are concentrated in the center of Town with gaps on the west side of the Highway 55 where most of the growth and new development is taking place.
- › There is potential to close the gaps in providing recreation amenities on the west side of the Town with recently acquired property. In addition, the undeveloped properties on the eastern side, once developed, can help further provide opportunities within walking distance of established neighborhoods.
- › Recreation facilities are at capacity which is limiting the growth of programs. There is inadequate space for storage or staff offices.
- › Many building systems are at the end of their lifecycle or are in need of repair.
- › While most parks and facilities generally meet ADA guidelines, some have areas of non-compliance and few exhibit true universal design or inclusive features.
- › The Department relies on a partnership with Wake County Public Schools for access to athletic fields. While these agreements provide access to valuable resources with a reduced initial capital investment, they limit the flexibility of the Department's athletics programming and increase their maintenance burden.
- › The parks and facilities are well-maintained, welcoming, and clean. Residents report feeling safe in Town parks, although this sentiment could change if aging facilities are not improved.
- › The sense of place at each park could be improved to highlight the Town's unique history and culture. The use of consistent site furnishings, wayfinding, architecture, and materiality would give visitors a visual cue they are in a Town of Holly Springs park while public art and unique amenities can be used to individualize each park.
- › Environmental sustainability is valued by residents but not outwardly expressed or considered across the park system. Elements such as integrated stormwater management, water reuse and locally sourced materials should be considered while education opportunities for the public should be promoted.



programs

## PROGRAMS

This program assessment offers an in-depth perspective of program and service offerings and helps identify strengths, challenges and opportunities regarding recreational programming. The assessment also assists in identifying core programs, program gaps within the community, key system-wide issues, areas of improvement, and future programs and services for residents and visitors.

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

### FRAMEWORK

The mission of the Department is to “foster engaged, healthy and active lifestyles for the enrichment of Holly Springs residents and visitors by offering exceptional experiences, affordable recreation & cultural activities, well-maintained parks & facilities, and stewardship of our natural resources.”

The Department provides a broad range of recreation and leisure programming for all ages. These program offerings are supported with dedicated spaces which include six major parks, Ting Park’s Multi-Sport Stadium, Hunt Recreation Center, Bass Lake Retreat Center and the Holly Springs Cultural Center.





## CORE PROGRAM AREAS

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

- ▶ The program area has been provided for a long period of time (over 4-5 years) and/or is expected by the community.
- ▶ The program area consumes a relatively large portion (5% or more) of the agency's overall budget.
- ▶ The program area is offered 3-4 seasons per year.
- ▶ The program area has a wide demographic appeal.
- ▶ There is a tiered level of skill development available within the program area's offerings.
- ▶ There is full-time staff responsible for the program area.
- ▶ There are facilities designed specifically to support the program area.
- ▶ The agency controls a significant percentage (20% or more) of the local market.

This plan identifies eight existing core program areas currently being offered.



Figure 2- Core program areas

## CORE PROGRAM AREA DESCRIPTIONS, GOALS & EXAMPLE PROGRAMS

 <p>Arts / Culture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Description:</b> Programming offered for all ages in all areas of the arts. This includes (but is not limited to) dance, visual arts, theater arts (drama), culinary arts, crafts, and music.</li> <li>➤ <b>Goals:</b> Provide quality arts programs for members of the community to explore creative outlets.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Crafts 4 Kids</li> <li>➤ Preschool Tap</li> <li>➤ Coed Hip Hop</li> <li>➤ Musical Theater</li> <li>➤ Holly Singers Youth Choir</li> </ul>
 <p>Athletics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Description:</b> Sports leagues and programs offered for youth and adults.</li> <li>➤ <b>Goals:</b> Provide the opportunity for sports skill development, sportsmanship and fun in a participation-based atmosphere.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Youth Soccer</li> <li>➤ Intro to T-Ball</li> <li>➤ Youth Tackle Football</li> <li>➤ Adult Tennis</li> <li>➤ Softball Camp</li> </ul>
 <p>Childcare</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Description:</b> Programs offered for children while parents are working and children are not in school.</li> <li>➤ <b>Goals:</b> Provide a fun and safe environment for children while parents are working at an affordable rate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Before School</li> <li>➤ After School</li> <li>➤ Track Out</li> <li>➤ Traditional Summer Camp</li> <li>➤ Kid's Day off</li> </ul>
 <p>Festivals, Events, Performances</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Description:</b> Special events occurring at Town Parks Facilities.</li> <li>➤ <b>Goals:</b> Provide a diverse range of entertainment and education opportunities in a larger setting than traditional recreational activities, while also helping to build a sense of community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Clean Comedy Series</li> <li>➤ Turtlefest</li> <li>➤ HollyFest</li> <li>➤ Dog Day in the Park</li> <li>➤ July 5th Celebration</li> </ul>
 <p>Fitness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Description:</b> Programs that provide exercise, health education and wellness activities to all ages.</li> <li>➤ <b>Goals:</b> Provide fitness facilities, opportunities for all levels of fitness and group classes/programs across a broad spectrum of exercise-based disciplines.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mommy and Me Yoga</li> <li>➤ Tae Kwon Do 7+</li> <li>➤ Personal Training</li> <li>➤ Recreational Sport Fencing</li> <li>➤ Cross Country Club</li> </ul>
 <p>Nature</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Description:</b> Programs that teach and help people learn more about nature.</li> <li>➤ <b>Goals:</b> Provide quality nature programs for all ages that support outdoor learning and adventure experiences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Discovery Nature</li> <li>➤ Toddler Exploration</li> <li>➤ Catch N Cook</li> <li>➤ Fun Forts</li> <li>➤ Archery 101</li> </ul>
 <p>Seniors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Description:</b> Programming offered to those ages 55+.</li> <li>➤ <b>Goals:</b> Provide quality opportunities for education, physical exercise, social interaction and mental stimulation to the population of 55+ members.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Fit Advantage</li> <li>➤ Senior Yoga</li> <li>➤ Senior Outings</li> <li>➤ Technology Workshops</li> <li>➤ Bridge Club</li> </ul>
 <p>Special Interest</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Description:</b> Variety of programming offered to spark the interest of every age.</li> <li>➤ <b>Goals:</b> Provide new programming areas for people to explore other interests. Most of these programs are offered at a low cost or very reasonable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Nerf Night</li> <li>➤ Family Bingo</li> <li>➤ Photo Club</li> <li>➤ Robotics with LEGO</li> <li>➤ Garden Club</li> </ul>

While not considered traditional core program areas, Holly Springs has two unique programming opportunities that should be accounted for as part of the recreation program assessment.

### Holly Springs Farmers Market

The Farmers Market is a North Carolina producer/grower market committed to providing local food for the community. Originally established in 2007 by the Town's Planning & Zoning Department, the market moved under the Parks and Recreation Department in 2018. The market operates on Saturdays year-round with a traditional weekly summer schedule from May through October and a bimonthly winter schedule from November through April. Part-time staff manage the program, under the direction of the Cultural Center Manager. Its current location is on Ballentine Street, adjacent to the Cultural Center. Vendors offer fresh seasonal produce year-round as well as free range eggs, pasture-raised meats, local honey, NC seafood, breads and other baked goods, sauces, condiments, coffee and tea, pickles, preserves, confections, prepared foods and much more. The market has been voted North Carolina's most celebrated farmers market—eight years in a row according to the 2019 American Farmland Trust "Farmers Market Celebration" contest.

Although the market has grown significantly in the last two years, more expansion of services is warranted. Staff recommend adding SNAP/EBT benefit access to the market, allowing community members with these benefits to purchase food from vendors using their EBT cards. Demand for a weekly winter market schedule and weeknight market services have grown among vendors and customers. These additions to the traditional Farmers' Market Saturday service would require additional staffing resources. In the long term, it is recommended that the Farmers Market Coordinator (now a permanent part-time position capped at 25 hours per week) upgrade to a full-time position. In the short-term, adding additional part-time Assistant Coordinator positions would help increase services, as suggested above, without significant staff cost increases. In the next decade, the Farmers Market needs a permanent site plan. The market now operates by closing a busy downtown road during market hours. Already this location has maxed out its capacity to increase the number of vendors. Visitors frequently fill most of the downtown car parking during the height of the summer season. Given the regional popularity of the market, a larger and permanent location fosters future increase of services and products, as well as increases accessibility for parking and pedestrian access. Staff offices and equipment storage would also be essential. This site could also exist as a secure location for other Town functions, like small festivals and weekday programming or rentals.



▲ Farmers Markets offer locals direct access to fresh produce. Source: <https://fee.org/articles/why-we-love-farmers-markets/>



## Ting Park Stadium

Formerly known as the North Main Athletic Complex, Ting Park is a signature sports complex which is home to the summer college baseball team, the Holly Springs Salamanders. The facility boasts a state of the art 1,800-seat multi-sports stadium with artificial turf, soccer center and a tennis complex. Additional amenities include basketball courts and a playground.

The name Ting Park was realized through a naming rights agreement with Canadian based Internet provider, Ting, Inc. The original agreement was for a three-year term and the Town recently renewed this naming rights arrangement for another three-years.

Prior to the park opening in 2015, the Town entered into two, 10-year licensing agreements for use of the facilities at the park with local sport organizations. These private-public partnerships have served the Town and its constituents well by providing funds to off-set the athletic complex operations.

The location, size and site amenities create an opportunity to provide additional programming for the community beyond baseball and other sporting events. The Town's investment in such a venue was made with local economic impact in mind. Since 2015, Ting Stadium has slowly developed and followed a set pattern of scheduled programs, rentals and partner-run events. The annual structure includes the Holly Springs Salamanders using the venue for their Coastal Plain League games and a variety of rentals which included a baseball academy, several travel baseball tournaments, a yearly scouting event for talented high school prospects and hosting a handful of college games. The Town hosts the 15U parks and recreation baseball league in the spring, tackle and flag football leagues in the fall, local college practices and games, travel soccer and lacrosse tournaments, and the Holly Springs Half Marathon. The scheduled rentals and events have routinely satisfied the yearly fiscal benchmarks set by the Council, but the stadiums potential has not been realized. Higher-end collegiate games and mid-major concerts are untapped opportunities that should be considered for the future.



📍 Ting Stadium

## PROGRAM STRATEGY ANALYSIS

### Age Segment Analysis

The table below depicts each core program area and the most prominent age segments they serve. Recognizing that many core program areas serve multiple age segments, primary (noted with a 'P') and secondary (noted with an 'S') markets are identified.

AGE SEGMENT ANALYSIS						
Core Program Area	Preschool (5 & Under)	Elementary (6-12)	Teens (13-17)	Adult (18+)	Senior (55+)	All Ages Programs
Arts/Cultural	P	P	P	S	S	S
Athletics	S	P	S	S	S	P
Childcare		P	S			
Festivals, Events, Performances	S	S	S	S	S	P
Fitness	S	S	S	P	S	P
Nature	P	P	S	S	S	S
Seniors					P	
Special Interest	S	P	S	P	S	

Table 6 – Holly Springs Program Priority by Age Segment

For this report, an age segment analysis was completed by core program area, exhibiting an over-arching view of the age segments served by different program areas and displaying any gaps in segments served. It is also useful to perform an age segment analysis by individual programs, in order to gain a more nuanced view of the data. Based on the age demographics of the Town, current programs seem to be fairly well-aligned with the community's age profile. With roughly 30% of Holly Springs' population falling between 0-17, it is fitting that the youth segments are highly catered to.

The lack of primary programs dedicated to the adult segment is noticeable.

### Program Lifecycle

A program lifecycle analysis involves reviewing each program offered by the Department to determine the stage of growth or decline for each. This provides a way of informing strategic decisions about the overall mix of programs managed by the agency to ensure that an appropriate number of programs are "fresh" and that relatively few programs, if any, need to be discontinued. This analysis is not based on strict quantitative data, but rather, is based on staff members' knowledge of their program areas. The following table shows the percentage distribution of the various lifecycle categories of the Town's programs. These percentages were obtained by comparing the number of programs in each individual stage with the total number of programs listed by staff members.

LIFECYCLE	DESCRIPTION	ACTUAL PROGRAMS DISTRIBUTION		RECOMMENDED DISTRIBUTION
Introduction	New Programs; modest participation	7%	69%	50%-60% Total
Take-Off	Rapid participation growth	14%		
Growth	Moderate, but consistent participation growth	48%		
Mature	Slow participation growth	23%	23%	40%
Saturation	Minimal to no participation growth; extreme competition	5%	8%	0-10% Total
Decline	Declining participation	3%		

Table 7 – Program lifecycle table

**The lifecycle analysis depicts a slightly skewed program distribution.** Approximately 70% of all programs fall within the beginning stages (introduction, take-off & growth). It is recommended to have 50-60% of all programs within these beginning stages because it provides the Department an avenue to energize its programmatic offerings. Eventually, these programs will begin to move into the mature stage, so these stages ensure the pipeline for new programs is there. It is key to continue adding new programs in the introduction stage as those programs are meant to progress through the lifecycle stages.

According to staff, 23% of all program offerings fell into the mature stage. This stage anchors a program portfolio and it is recommended to have roughly 40% of programs within the mature category in order to achieve a stable foundation.

Additionally, 8% of programs are saturated or declining. It is a natural progression for programs to eventually evolve into saturation and decline. However, if programs reach these stages rapidly, it could be an indication that the quality of the programs does not meet expectations or there is not as much of a demand for the programs.

As programs enter into the decline stage, they must be closely reviewed and evaluated for repositioning or elimination. When this occurs, the Department should modify these programs to begin a new lifecycle with the introductory stage or to add new programs based upon community needs and trends.

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 key 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.



## Program Classification

Conducting a classification of services analysis informs how each program serves the overall organization mission, the goals and objectives of each core program area, and how the program should be funded with regard to tax dollars and/or user fees and charges. How a program is classified can help to determine the most appropriate management, funding and marketing strategies.

Program classifications are based on the degree to which the program provides a public benefit versus a private benefit. Public benefit can be described as everyone receiving the same level of benefit with equal access, whereas private benefit can be described as the user receiving exclusive benefit above what a general taxpayer receives for their personal benefit.

For this exercise, the Department used a classification method based on three indicators: essential services, important services and value-added services. Where a program or service is classified depends upon alignment with the organizational mission, how the public perceives a program, legal mandates, financial sustainability, personal benefit, competition in the marketplace and access by participants. The following graphic describes each of the three program classifications.

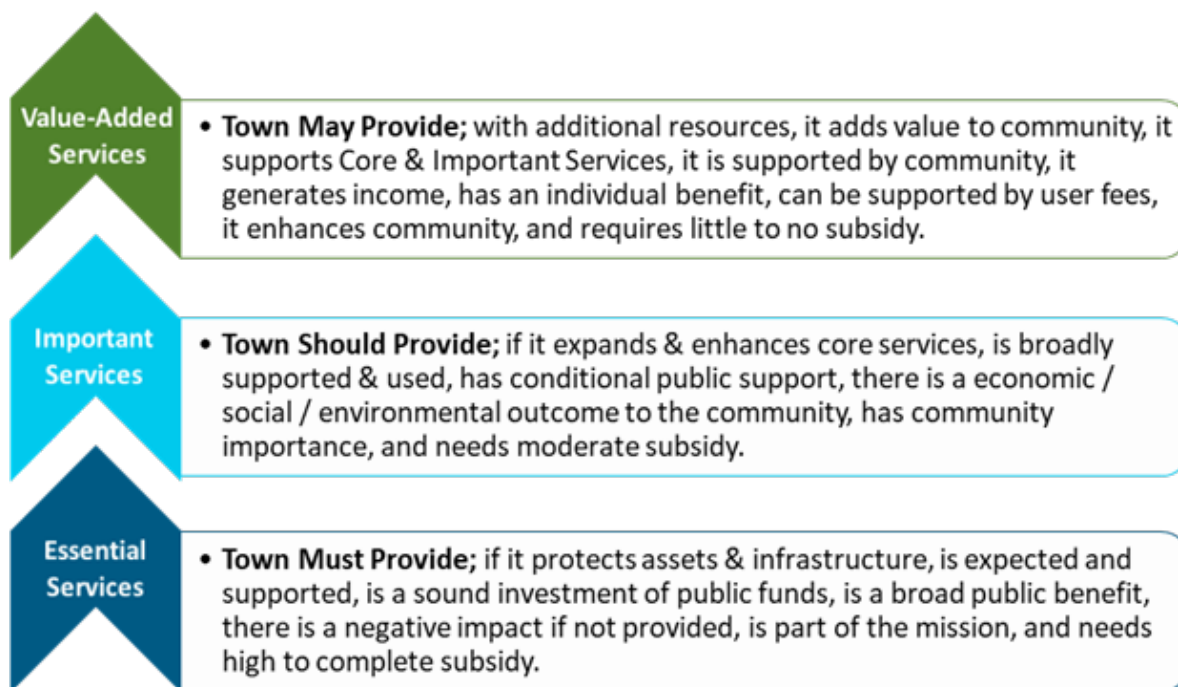


Figure 2 – Program classifications

With assistance from staff, a classification of programs and services was conducted for all of the recreation programs offered by the Department. The results presented in the following table represent the current classification of recreation program services. Programs should be assigned cost recovery goal ranges within those overall categories. A full program list organized by core area can be found in the appendices.

HOLLY SPRINGS PROGRAM CLASSIFICATION DISTRIBUTION		
Essential	Important	Value-Added
11%	71%	18%

Table 8- Holly Springs program classification distribution

As the Department continues to evolve to better meet the community’s needs, there could be an added benefit to managing the services if they all were classified according to the cost recovery model for sustainable services depicted below in Figure 3. **The percentages indicate level of cost recovery goal desired.**

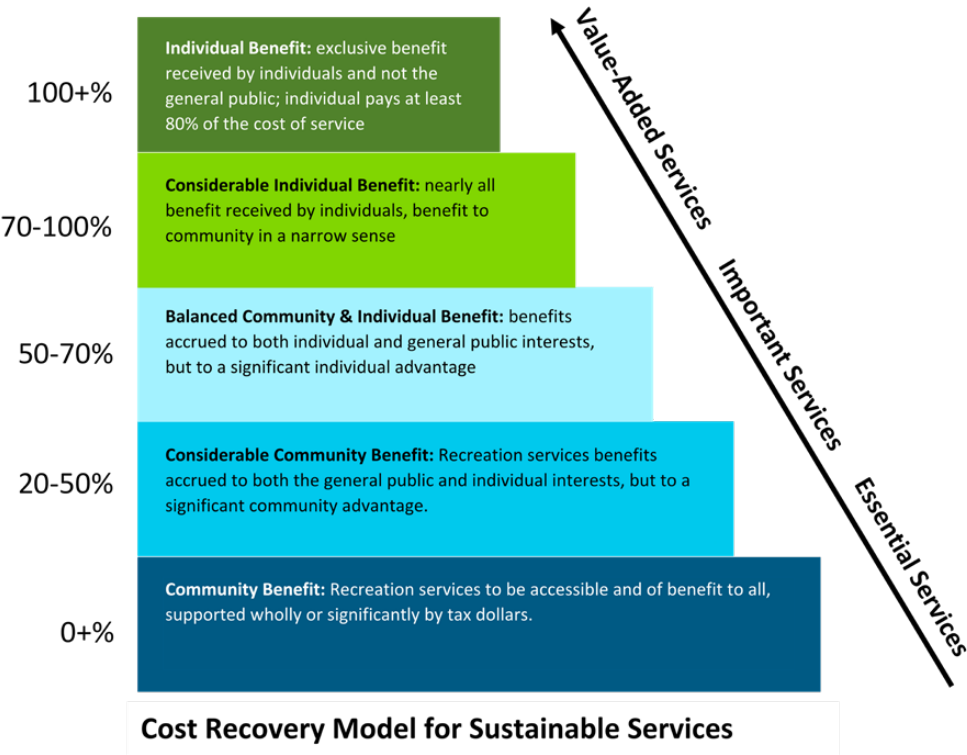


Figure 3 - Cost recovery model

Given the broad range of cost recovery goals (i.e., 0% to 40% for Essential Services or 40% to 80% for Important Services), it would be helpful to further distribute programs internally within sub-ranges of cost recovery as depicted in the previous Figure. This will allow for programs to fall within an overall service classification tier while still demonstrating a difference in expected / desired cost recovery goals based on a greater understanding of the program’s goals (e.g., pure community services versus mostly community services or community and individual mix versus mostly individual mix).

### Cost of Service and Cost Recovery

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

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

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

The following provide more detail on steps 2 & 3.

### Understanding the Full Cost Recovery

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



Figure 4 – Cost of service analysis



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

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

### Current Cost Recovery

The Department’s program staff also utilize an internal budget work sheet for each program, this tool is useful to review quarterly, seasonally or annually depending on set goals for each core area. Table 9 provides the existing cost recovery percentages by core program area. It should be noted, however, that all Department cost recovery percentages utilize *direct costs* and are not reflective of indirect costs. Since personnel costs and pricing structures vary by the park agency, there is no example the best practice cost recovery range presented for *direct costs*.

The Department’s current core program area with the greatest average cost recovery is childcare (145%). The core program area with the next highest average cost recovery is Special Interest (69%)

COST RECOVERY GOAL BY CORE PROGRAM AREA			
Core Program Area	Current Cost Recovery (Direct Costs)	Core Program Area	Current Cost Recovery (Direct Costs)
<b>Arts/Cultural</b>	Min: 30%	<b>Fitness</b>	Min: 20%
	Max: 83%		Max: 186%
	Avg: 39%		Avg: 49%
<b>Athletics</b>	Min: 30%	<b>Nature</b>	Min: 14%
	Max: 153%		Max: 135%
	Avg: 47%		Avg: 67%
<b>Childcare</b>	Min: 108%	<b>Seniors</b>	Min: 63%
	Max: 226%		Max: 63%
	Avg: 145%		Avg: 63%
<b>Festivals, Events, Performances</b>	Min: 27%	<b>Special Interest</b>	Min: 40%
	Max: 42%		Max: 121%
	Avg: 35%		Avg: 69%

Table 9 – Cost recovery by core program area

## Pricing

Pricing strategies are one mechanism agencies can use to influence cost recovery. Overall, the degree to which the Department uses various pricing strategies is fairly limited. Pricing tactics are concentrated on residency rates and customers’ ability to pay. However, some core areas also use age segment pricing, and market competition rates.

The core area with the largest variety of pricing strategies would be Fitness programs which utilize five of the ten options. Considering weekday/weekend rates, prime/non-prime time rates, group discounts and by location pricing are also valuable strategies when setting prices. These untapped pricing strategies are useful to help stabilize usage patterns and help with cost recovery for higher quality amenities and services. The consulting team recommends that all core program areas utilize cost recovery as a major factor in determining pricing and look at underutilized pricing strategies to bolster participation and revenue.

Staff should continue to monitor the effectiveness of the various pricing strategies they employ and make adjustments as necessary. It is also important to continue monitoring for yearly competitors and other service providers (i.e., similar providers) as found in the appendices. The table below details pricing methods currently in place by each core program area and additional areas for strategies to implement over time.

PRICING STRATEGIES										
Core Program Area	Age Segment	Family/ Household Status	Residency	Weekday/ Weekend	Prime / Non- Prime Time	Group Discounts	By Location	By Competition (Market Rate)	By Cost Recovery Goals	By Customer's Ability to Pay
Arts/Cultural			X					X		X
Athletics			X					X		X
Childcare			X							X
Festivals, Events, Performances	X					X	X	X		
Fitness	X	X	X					X		X
Nature	X		X							
Seniors			X							X
Special Interest			X							X

Table 10 – Existing Pricing Strategies

## MARKETING, VOLUNTEERS, AND PARTNERSHIPS

### Current Recreation Marketing and Communications

The Department follows a marketing plan which currently communicates with residents through printed and online program guides, the Town's website, flyers/brochures, email blast, online newsletters, in-facility signage and various social media channels.

Effective communication strategies require striking an appropriate balance between the content with the volume of messaging while utilizing the "right" methods of delivery. The Department has a broad distribution of delivery methods for promoting programs. It is imperative to develop and continue updating the marketing plan annually to provide information for community needs, demographics and recreation trends.

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

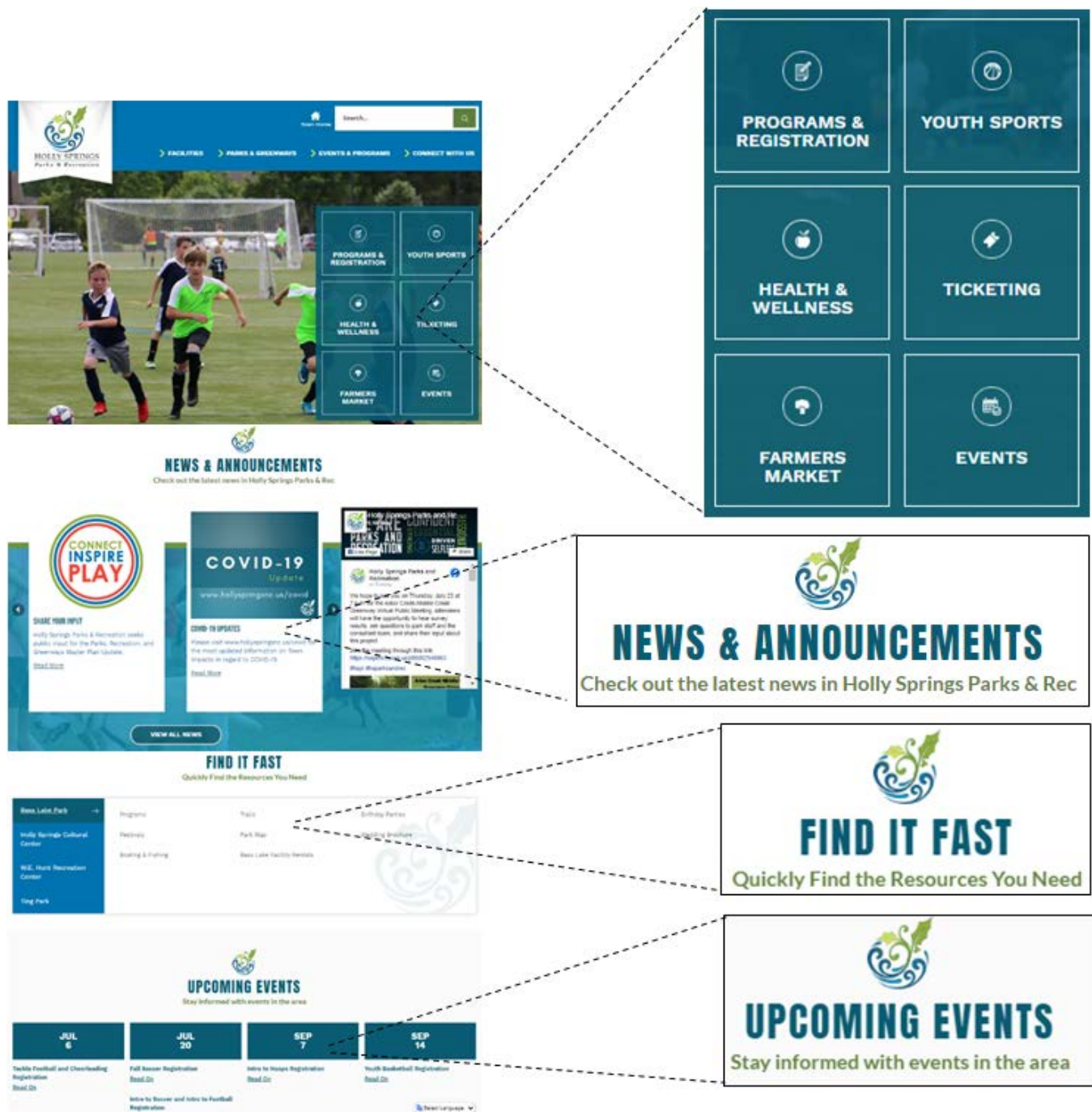




## Website

The Department's newly updated website has several features making it easy to navigate and user friendly. There is a navigation bar located at the top of the homepage as well as six action buttons located on the top-right, both assist users in finding specific information on secondary pages.

Further down the homepage users will find "News & Announcements", "Find it Fast" and "Upcoming Events" sections which are all great tools to assist residents in quickly finding desired information such as upcoming programs/events, locations of parks/facilities, and cancelations.



## Social Media

The Town of Holly Springs uses of Web 2.0 technology with Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Next-door, and LinkedIn. The key to the successful implementation of a social network is to move the participants from awareness to action and create greater user engagement. This could be done by:



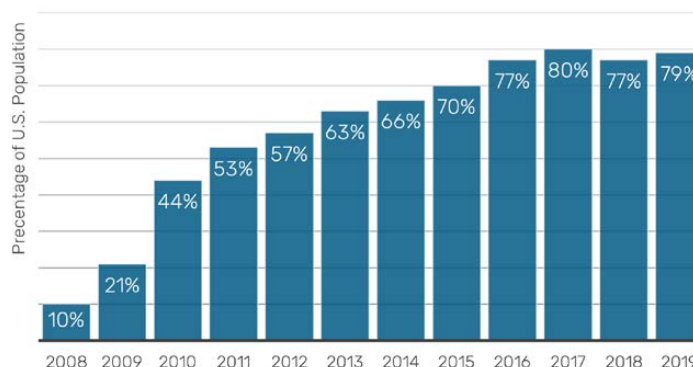
Source: [www.dreamgrow.com/top-15-most-popular-social-networking-sites/](http://www.dreamgrow.com/top-15-most-popular-social-networking-sites/)

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

## Social Media Users

Over the last decade, social media has become one of the country's fastest growing trends. With only ten percent of the country using social media in 2008, an estimated seventy-nine percent of the U.S. population is using some form of social media. With such a large percentage of the population using these online media platforms in their daily lives, it has become essential for the Town to take advantage of these marketing opportunities. Social media can be a useful and affordable tool to reach current and potentially new system users. Platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter or LinkedIn are extremely popular with not only today's youth but also young and middle-aged adults.

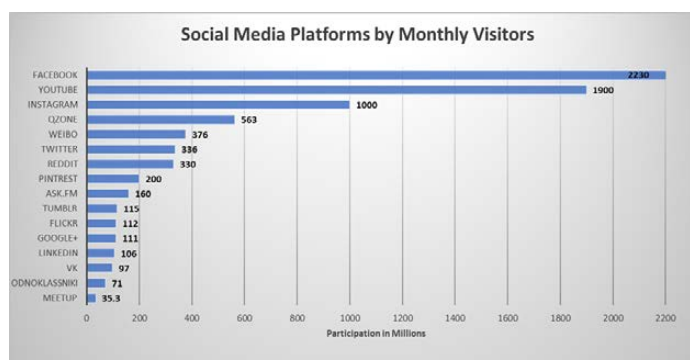
Percentage of U.S. Population Who Currently Use Any Social Media



## Social Media Platforms

Below is a chart that depicts the most frequently used social media sites throughout the world. As of August 2019, Facebook stands out as the most heavily trafficked social media platform, with an estimated 2.2 billion visitors per month. YouTube is second with 1.9 billion visitors per month.

Social Media Platforms by Monthly Visitors



## Mediums Used to Access the Internet

The neighboring image is taken directly from Statista.com and depicts the number of internet users in the United States, number of available Wi-Fi locations and internet penetration in the US. Only 10% of surveyed adults state they do not use the internet in 2019. As of 2018 Statista, the United States has the largest online market in the world with 312 million users. Source: [www.statista.com/topics/2237/internet-usage-in-the-united-states/](http://www.statista.com/topics/2237/internet-usage-in-the-united-states/)

## Volunteer and Partnership Management

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

### Current Volunteer Management

When managed with respect and used strategically, volunteers can serve as the primary advocates for the Town and its offerings. Currently, the Department has volunteer opportunities posted on the Department website, underneath the "Connect with Us" dropdown tab. At this time, some current park and recreation volunteer opportunities include:

- ▶ Athletics -- youth sports coach
- ▶ Bass Lake Park -- park support/beautification
- ▶ Cultural Center -- ticket taker/usher
- ▶ Hunt Recreation Center -- various positions depending on interest
- ▶ Special Events – set-up/break-down support, information booth workers, etc.

The management of volunteers currently differs across various core program areas. Some programs utilize formal volunteer policies which include tracking individual volunteers and hours volunteered. Tracking volunteer hours can be used in budget discussions showing how well the Department is able to leverage limited resources. The image below represents the volunteer information available online.

#### VOLUNTEER & SPONSORSHIP



##### Volunteer

Holly Springs Parks & Recreation has volunteer opportunities for all interests. Volunteers help make it possible to provide affordable programs and services for the community. Learn more about the ways you can get involved. Depending on the role, some volunteer positions may have certain requirements including but not limited to passing a background check.

##### Athletics

Interested in coaching? Holly Springs Parks and Recreation is continuously accepting coach applications for youth sports. [Click here for more information.](#)

##### Bass Lake Park

Volunteers are needed to help with trails and keeping the park in great shape. Individuals or groups can call park staff at (919)557-2496 for information and opportunities.

##### Cultural Center

Sign up at the Cultural Center front desk to volunteer as an usher or a ticket taker for events. The schedule ranges from some mornings to nights and weekends. Contact the Cultural Center at (919) 567-4000, by [email](#) or in person for details.

##### Hunt Recreation Center

A variety of volunteer opportunities are open depending on your skills and interests. Contact the Center manager at (919)557-4283 to learn about current volunteer needs.

##### Special Events

Individuals or organizations can contact the Special Events Coordinator to volunteer at town events in a variety of capacities like set-up, clean-up, information booths, etc. Please email [rachel.dowd@hollingspringsnc.gov](mailto:rachel.dowd@hollingspringsnc.gov) for more details.

##### Sponsorship

Support Holly Springs Parks and Recreation while advertising your business. [Click here to complete an online interest form.](#) Sponsorships are available for festivals, special events, athletics, and field signage. To learn about all of our sponsorship opportunities, [click here to review the Parks & Recreation Sponsorship Brochure.](#)

See the best practices in volunteer management.



### Recreation Program Partnerships

The Department currently works with several different types of partners throughout the community. These partnerships support the facilitation of programs and sponsorships of community events. As with tracking of volunteer hours, tracking partnerships helps show leadership how well staff are able to leverage resources. In many instances, partnerships are inequitable to the public agency and do not produce reasonable shared benefits between parties. It is not suggested that the Department's existing partnerships are inequitable; rather, in general many park and recreation agencies' partnerships tend to be inequitable.

The following recommended policies will promote fairness and equity within the existing and future partnerships while helping staff to manage against potential internal and external conflicts. Certain partnership principles must be adopted by the Department for existing and future partnerships to work effectively. These partnership principles are as follows:

- ▶ All partnerships require a working agreement with measurable outcomes and will be evaluated on a regular basis. This should include reports to the agency on the performance and outcomes of the partnership including an annual review to determine renewal potential.
- ▶ All partnerships should track costs associated with partnership investment to demonstrate the shared level of equity.
- ▶ All partnerships should maintain a culture that focuses on collaborative planning on a regular basis, regular communications, and annual reporting on performance and outcomes to determine renewal potential and opportunities to strengthen the partnership.

Additional partnerships can be pursued and developed with other public entities such as neighboring towns/cities, colleges, state or federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, as well as with private or for-profit organizations. There are recommended standard policies and practices that will apply to any partnership, and those that are unique to relationships with private, for-profit entities.

See the Appendices for best practices for partnerships.

## KEY FINDINGS

- › The Town’s existing core program areas provide a generally well-rounded and diverse array of programs that could serve the community at present.
- › Overall, the **program descriptions** effectively communicate the key benefits and goals of each core program area.
- › **The age segment distribution** is good but needs to be monitored annually to ensure program distribution aligns with community demographics.
- › **Program lifecycles:** Approximately 6% of the system’s current programs are categorized in the introduction stage; while 3% of programs fall into the decline stage. A complete description of Lifecycle Stages can be found in **Section 1.3.2**.
- › The Town’s **volunteer program** allows residents and organizations to easily get involved and give back to the community through various volunteer opportunities, special events, programs, etc.
- › From a **marketing and promotions** standpoint, the staff utilizes a variety of marketing methods when promoting their programs including: printed and online program guides, the Town’s website, flyers/brochures, email blast, online newsletters, in-facility signage, and various social media channels. As a part of the marketing mix:
  - › The Department would benefit from identifying a marketing return on investment (ROI) for all marketing initiatives.
  - › The Department should explore the opportunity to increase the number of cross-promotions.
- › Currently, **customer feedback methods** are rather limited. Moving forward, it is highly recommended that the Department begins incorporating user feedback, on a more consistent basis, as a key performance measure that can be tracked over time. Specifically, pre-program evaluation and lost customer surveys are highly recommended feedback tools that should be considered to move forward.
- › **Pricing strategies** vary across the board. Currently, the most frequently used approaches include: residency rates and customers’ ability to pay. These are good practices and must be continued. In addition, it is essential to understand the current cost of service in order to determine ideal cost recovery goals.
- › **Financial performance measures** such as cost recovery goals are currently being utilized for the majority of programs. Moving forward, it is recommended for staff to continue tracking cost recovery for all program areas. When doing so, the staff should factor in all direct and indirect costs pertaining to programming. A focus on developing consistent earned income opportunities would be beneficial to the Department’s overall quest for greater fiscal sustainability.



## operations and maintenance



## **Operations + Maintenance**

The objective of the maintenance management assessment is to provide an overall evaluation of how the Holly Springs Parks and Recreation Department provides maintenance services for its facilities, greenways, parks, athletic fields and open spaces. The project team understands that the parks system is relatively new and has grown considerably over the last 10 years. As the Town population continues to increase, the Parks And Recreation Department will need to have a robust maintenance plan to ensure sustained service for existing amenities while developing new parks and facilities to meet the growing demand.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The maintenance management assessment methodology process involved a review of questions posed to the Parks Maintenance staff regarding operational processes and practices. The information provided by staff regarding maintenance of facilities, athletic fields, neighborhood and community and greenways was then benchmarked against nationwide best practices in the parks and recreation industry. Field observations were also conducted to provide additional perspectives and insight. The outcomes set the stage for recommendations for a systemwide master plan for the Department.

### **OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE ANALYSIS**

**Staff interviews and field observations are summarized below:**

#### **Parks and Open Space**

- ▶ Holly Springs Parks and Recreation is a young system at just 25 years old. The Department was formed in 1996. A voter-approved parks bond was passed in 2011 that stimulated the acquisition and development of the parkland and amenities that are present today. The Town population has continued to grow since that time and the public has high expectations of having more parks and recreation facilities to meet their needs. Following the recommendations in this Master Plan will require additional capital and operational maintenance dollars to achieve community support. Many facilities operate at capacity and are in high-demand for use. As a result, the physical condition of amenities are starting to show their age and use. Continued wear and tear are only expected to increase as demand is not expected to lessen as the community grows.
- ▶ The operating budget for park maintenance is \$1.24 million for 2020, of which 49% is made up of staff salaries and benefits. This is a good standard for staff cost versus other maintenance expenses in the department. As the system ages and amenities begin to move towards the end of their useful life, the Town will require more staff to keep the system at its current operational level.
- ▶ The ten full-time Parks Maintenance staff take care of all the parks in the system which includes 611 acres of parklands of which 302 acres is undeveloped. This requires the full-time staff to maintain 40 acres per person which is a very high and difficult acreage level to meet on a yearly basis. The best practices are typically 1 FTE to 24-27 acres. Lack of existing part-time and or seasonal staff needs to be evaluated to meet the level of care expected as the system grows.
- ▶ The Department does not currently have any formal maintenance management plan prepared for park operations. A detailed maintenance plan including all direct and indirect costs associated with the maintenance of each facility and amenity is needed to inform the key leaders of what it costs to maintain a mile of trail, an acre of park land, or a sports field to achieve the level of care expected by the community. A maintenance plan will also enable the Town to better predict the operational expenses for future parks and facilities as they are planned.

- ▶ As indicated in the 2020 budget, \$52,800 is available for capital equipment, which is a low investment for the size of the system. The standard most cities and towns across the United States use as a capital standard for ongoing asset management is 3-5% of asset value less land value that is budgeted each year. This capital budget is very low for capital investment already made in the system today. The current asset value of the park system less land value is over 23 million dollars. They use this number for insurance purposes. If the department would invest 3% of their asset value now in ongoing capital improvements, it would equate to \$690,000 yearly to take care of what the system already owns.
- ▶ Adding new parks to keep pace with the growth of the Town will be a challenge. The Town recently purchased 55 acres for a future park near Cass Holt and Avent Ferry Roads. This is an important investment, as it is planned to be the first public park west of Highway 55, a growing, but underserved area in Town. The Town is also anticipating the donation of 25 acres on Woods Creek Road, along west of Highway 55. As site plans are developed for these parks, an operational and maintenance management plan should be included so the elected officials can appropriate the level of staffing and equipment needed to take of what is expected to build at the quality of care that is present today in the park system.
- ▶ The Town assists in managing approximately 14,000 street trees. The park staff often assumes the responsibility to plant and replace the trees in the Town as needed. A tree inventory and maintenance management plan with pruning guidelines established at 7-8 years is considered best practices. As the park system continues to grow the Department will have to ensure staffing needs for additional forestry staff.
- ▶ The Town does not have an asset management plan in place to anticipate when amenities, like playgrounds or courts, will need to be replaced. The asset management plan allows staff to keep up with managing existing assets to the end of their useful life with an appropriate level of maintenance and replacement schedules. This must be viewed as a priority.
- ▶ Furthermore, in order to avoid or reduce a backlog of maintenance needs, the asset management will help anticipate and plan for these larger expenses.
- ▶ Currently, there is not a strong Capital Improvement program to take care of assets owned by the Town nor how these projects will be funded. Some five-year CIP planning is in place, but the Master Plan should demonstrate how this should be improved in the future.
- ▶ A new vehicle replacement program is currently being evaluated by the Fleet Division of Public Works, which includes Parks Maintenance vehicles and some types of equipment. Vehicle and equipment replacement can be an ongoing problem if not scheduled to be replaced based on miles used, hours used or high repair costs. The staff are using an eight-year replacement schedule for mowers and it is planned to add dump trucks and trailers (up to 18 feet long) to a future replacement schedule.
- ▶ The Town has invested in a work order system called CityWorks, which is also being utilized by the Public Works Department. The Parks Maintenance crew are motivated to implement it. It will be used to capture the parks' daily maintenance data and costs as they apply to maintaining sports fields, taking care of an acre of park land or a mile of trails. The data collected from his new system will be helpful for current and future maintenance planning.
- ▶ Key Performance Measures for the Parks Maintenance division have not been identified or developed. It is important to have these metrics identified and reported to demonstrate efficiency or effectiveness. Ideally, with the new CityWorks software program staff will be able to demonstrate their key performance measures in a more consistent manner.
- ▶ Many maintenance tasks in the parks that require skilled trades (electric, plumbing, masonry, etc.) are not currently performed by staff, but are usually hired out with skilled contractors. The Town's Public Works Department will sometimes provide some assistance to the Parks division if the schedule allows.
- ▶ Holly Springs does not have a formal volunteer program established in the parks. Typically, volunteer hours make up 5 to 8% of total agency work force hours if managed correctly and in some agencies, it is as high as 15%. Volunteers are great advocates for parks and recreation and can help with passing bond issues and getting the message out when used properly and made to feel appreciated.

- ▶ While many of the Parks Maintenance staff members hold college degrees, none have attended any formal industry maintenance management programs, like the NRPA Parks Maintenance Supervisor School typically held in Oglebay, WV. Many staff hold playground safety certifications and pesticide licenses. Professional development for the Parks Maintenance division is important for increased efficiency and safety reasons.
- ▶ Staff focus more “on the job training” instead of a process improvement training. Both are important and should be made a priority for the future.
- ▶ The Town has a central Fleet Maintenance division as part of the Public Works Department, however, in order to maintain efficiency, the Parks division should have a mechanic on staff to perform preventative maintenance and repairs for mowers, gators, or small equipment.
- ▶ Formal maintenance standards would provide a clear and realistic plan for parks and recreation services as well as cost to help the Department demonstrate their needs through the budget process. Updated maintenance standards will be made as part of the master plan process.
- ▶ Using data regarding the seasonal nature of necessary park maintenance tasks, the Department should analyze the benefits of full-time, part-time and seasonal workers based on the current and future needs of the Department. National standards trend toward 26 FTE’s per acre maintained and is a reasonable target to achieve over time.
- ▶ While playground safety inspections are a regular part of the maintenance process, additional staff with playground certifications will increase efficiency and help formalize and document this important requirement.
- ▶ Several parks have water irrigation systems, however, maintenance and operational standards for these systems are lacking. Consideration should be given to develop standards and the establishment of best-practices for water usage in parks.
- ▶ Care, cleaning, and picking up trash at Town Hall, as well as snow removal from decks, parking lots, and walkways is performed by the Facility Maintenance staff.
- ▶ The Parks Maintenance division has a contract with a local landscape company to maintain the street medians and a few smaller parks in the Town. Creating a set maintenance standard that can be adopted by the yearly budget will keep leaders informed of the cost to manage each area in the Town.
- ▶ The Facilities Maintenance staff transitioned to the Public Works Department in October of 2020.

## Sports Fields

- ▶ The Parks Maintenance crew takes care of nine sports fields: six of which are natural grass fields, two are large synthetic turf fields and one turf- stadium field that seats 1,700 people. Parks Maintenance also cares for many of the school sports fields in the Town as part of a Joint Use Agreement with the Wake County Public Schools System (WCPSS). The condition of the fields is excellent based on observations, but additional staff will be required if the Town continues to add more sports fields to its inventory.
- ▶ Staff reported that due to high demand for sports field use, it is difficult to keep teams off the fields when they are closed for maintenance or due to the weather. There are few quality practice fields available. Ideally the Town and school district should work together to improve school fields for both practices and competitive play. game level fields. Additional fields are needed in the inventory to allow for proper rest and maintenance.
- ▶ The Department has a joint use agreement for several school fields and courts with the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS). The 25-year agreement was extremely beneficial for both public and private use before the Town was able to build its own fields and courts. The use agreements provide provisions to have the Department maintain certain outdoor areas and in return the Department is able to use or rent the fields and collect revenue. Some school fields and areas are no longer utilized and the agreement should be evaluated to determine if the provisions remain fair and equitable.
- ▶ The Department does not have written maintenance standards in place but based on observations the team does a good job in maintaining parks and sports fields. Park and sports field maintenance standards will be made a part of the master plan document for staff to follow.



### Greenways and Trails

- › The Parks Maintenance staff spends a good amount of time maintaining the wooden boardwalk sections of the Town's greenway system. More details on greenway design and maintenance are discussed in the greenway chapter.
- › All greenways in Town are the responsibility of the Park Maintenance division. This task will require many enhancements and standards to follow. As new greenways are built by, or accepted by the Town, additional staffing needs must be considered to maintain or improve the current level of service.

### Natural Resources

- › The Department does not have a solid natural resource management plan as part of its maintenance operations. Considerations of native plant material, limited pesticide use, recycled water for irrigation, etc. are just a few ideas that could be considered for the best management approach.

### KEY FINDINGS

- › Holly Springs Park Maintenance Operations does an excellent job for maintaining the parks, sports fields and trails with the existing manpower they have in place.
- › The current standard of 40 acres per full-time maintenance person is high for any park system. As the park systems grows in acquiring and developing more parks and trails it will be imperative that increase staffing levels follow.
- › Now that the parks maintenance operations is in Public Works Department, it will still require that the Parks and Recreation Director stay focused on the level of maintenance expected. Only 10% of the parks maintenance work required for a parks and recreation system are managed through a Public Works Department.
- › Incorporating park maintenance standards for parks, sports fields and greenways will need to be incorporated as the system grows.
- › Incorporating a natural resource management plan into the maintenance operations should be made a priority.
- › Establishing a asset replacement program that incorporates money into a set aside budget for that purpose should also be made a priority.



finance



The objective of the Financial Assessment is to provide an overall evaluation of how the Town of Holly Springs Parks and Recreation Department manages its finances regarding the use of tax dollars for operational and capital costs as well as earned income in the development and operations of parks and facilities. This would include how well the Town manages on-going capital components of the assets already owned and daily operations of facilities and programs. The project team understands that the parks and recreation system is relatively new and has grown considerably over the last 10 years. As the Town and the Park and Recreation system grows, there will be a great deal of catch up by the system to deliver parks, recreation facilities, programs, and services, in a fast-growing community like Holly Springs.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The Financial Assessment process by the project team involved a review of the last three years' financial statements. The project team met with both the Finance Department and Parks & Recreation staff to get additional information about internal financial processes and operational challenges. The responses provided information about how financial management is currently performed in the Town for parks and recreation. Based on the information collected, the project team will share the best practices for the development of a systemwide master plan for the Parks and Recreation Department of Holly Springs.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

- ▶ The Department has limited funding sources from dedicated taxes and from earned income to support the development and operations of the system as it continues to grow. This limits the Department in acquiring future park land for neighborhood and community parks as well as implementing capital improvements for parks, trails and for recreation amenities such as aquatic facilities based on need and with a goal of equity across the system.
- ▶ From both general tax dollars and user fees, the Town of Holly Springs spends \$154 dollars per capita, that creates a \$5.79 million-dollar operating budget for the Department. This compares financially well with other communities of similar size regarding the funding of their parks and recreation system. The challenge is that the Town is growing at a fast pace and most of the amenities developed to date have similar asset life which means that as these facilities and amenities age out or come to the end of their lifecycle all at the same time. Funding will need to be available to replace these amenities. Due to the rapid growth of Holly Springs, many of the facilities that have been created are undersized to serve the increased population in the Town. One such example is the Hunt Recreation Center.
- ▶ Just considering the general tax funding amount of \$100.54 per capita, Holly Springs is about \$19.00 above the national average of \$81.19. The Town has made a strong commitment to parks and recreation with tax support, but consideration of other dedicated funding sources outside of property taxes is needed to provide long-term investment to maintain a high-service level department.
- ▶ Currently, the Department does not have a cost recovery policy in place for staff to work towards in terms of how program fees are determined. Developing a cost recovery policy would help manage finances more effectively. The Department is currently operating at a 35% cost recovery level with earned revenues totally \$2.03 million and expenses totaling \$5.8 million. The national cost recovery standard currently being used by many departments across the United States is approximately 37% for suburban systems but this target varies



by the size of the town, the number of parks and facilities and the wealth of the municipal agency. In fiscal year 2020, the Parks and Recreation Department's operating budget was calculated to be 20% of the entire Town's operating budget. This high percentage demonstrates a strong commitment by the Holly Springs Town Council and from residents of the Town for investing in parks and recreation facilities and programs.

- ▶ The asset value of the department is \$23.62 million, less land value. Typically, municipal agencies invest approximately 5% of their total asset value into an asset replacement fund to keep up with what has already been built to keep facilities and amenities in great condition. Using this best practice, it is recommended that the Department should budget \$1,181,000 a year to maintain the service level of parks, trails and facilities.
- ▶ As part of the current budgeting process, every Department division establishes a revenue goal annually. The Athletics division has historically produced the greatest cost recovery outcome. This is good practice for the Department to continue to follow.
- ▶ In fiscal year 2020, the Bass Lake division projected cost recovery at 21.7%. This is low for the value of the experience visitors have at this unique park. If the Department would create a true 'cost of service' model for the park to capture direct and indirect costs associated with operation and implement with an updated pricing policy effort, it is projected that the cost recovery percentage would be much greater and more in-line with the rest of the Department.
- ▶ The Town has a land dedication / fee in lieu policy in place for acquiring park land or collecting developer fees. These "impact fees" are important to help with meeting the demand of services as the Town grows. The revenues from this policy are put into the park system's reserve fund and should be earmarked for land purchases as when park land opportunities become available so the Town has the money to acquire the land as a future park.
- ▶ The Department does not currently have a uniform or equity-based pricing policy. A pricing policy or philosophy is needed to help better understand the cost of services and how to price services based on public and private good associated with the delivery of these program services.
- ▶ While the Department does project revenue by division, there is not a set cost recovery goal for core programs or core facilities. Setting cost recovery goals for core programs and core facilities needs to be a high priority for the Department to avoid creating entitlement with existing or future special interest groups. Special interest groups become entitled when they do not know what the true cost of their special interest is to the Town on the front end of their involvement and they feel they are entitled to the existing investment the Town is making them now and, in the future, and don't want the Town to reduce it or eliminate if it becomes necessary. If the Town provides them the true cost of the services both direct costs and indirect costs the Town is making in them and what they are paying for the access and the level of exclusive use of a government facility it helps to curb entitlement which has been the downfall of many park and recreation systems across the United States because of their inability to change anything about the use or fees involved with the special interest group. Informing users of what it truly costs to provide services based on their individual or group benefit above a local taxpayer receives on the front end resolves this problem.
- ▶ The Department has a scholarship policy in place which enables access to programs for all residents regardless of ability to pay. This is a great practice, so the community knows parks and recreation is for all residents. Most agencies set certain amount each year in their budget for scholarships which is in the range of 3-5% of their operational budget.
- ▶ Once a pricing policy is established, staff will need to be trained in how to effectively communicate this new model to users and community groups.

- ▶ A pricing policy should be established with program service classifications – including core essential, important, or value added. Each classification should then have an associated cost recovery goal. To determine the user fee, both direct and indirect costs need to be included in the calculation targeting the cost recovery percentage.
- ▶ The Department does not have a dedicated person to assist with business development. It is recommended that a position be created in the future to work on creating equitable partnership agreements with public / public partners, not-for-profit partners, and private partners to maximize the Town's resources. This position should also focus on earned income opportunities such as grants and sponsorships and manage the parks foundation for the future. A good business development person will earn eight times their salary if they are doing their job effectively.
- ▶ The software the Department utilizes, RecTrac, monitors revenue and helps track costs for programs and services. The Department should use this data to track Key Performance Measures to demonstrate the efficiency and effectiveness of the work in all divisions within the Department.
- ▶ The Town does not have a non-profit partner like a park foundation or "friends of" group as part of its operations. It is highly recommended that a non-profit fundraising entity be established. Non-profit affiliates like a park's foundation can help raise money in a variety of key areas, including help to acquire park land, developing new or replacement amenities like playgrounds or sports courts and they can help to support programs for people in need primarily for youth programs. Non-profit foundations can also raise money for matching grant programs.
- ▶ Based on recent data from revenue reports, the Town is underserved with recreation facilities. As the Town continues to grow, the demand shows the justification for larger and diversified facilities. Two areas that indicate a growing need include an aquatics center and a larger multigenerational recreation center.
- ▶ Several years ago, the Town conducted a space analysis, as well as an RFP for a new indoor recreation center, but it lacked leadership support at the time. To prepare for the future, a feasibility study should be established for any type of recreation facility to demonstrate its need, cost, cost recovery capability and how it will be used and operated. This is a best-practice that the Department has not historically employed. A study of this type helps the key leadership and the community to understand how it would be developed and operated and who will benefit from the facility or amenity.

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