



Chapel Hill Skateboard Park at Homestead Park

Section Four

Proposals & Recommendations

Introduction

Chapel Hill has a history of supporting parks and recreation programs. The survey conducted as part of this comprehensive planning process confirms that the citizens of the community respect and appreciate the Town's long term commitment to these services. Over half (54.3%) of those surveyed felt the Town's greenways were above average, and 43.5% felt the parks were above average. Likewise, the vast majority of respondents believe that parks and recreation facilities improve the economic health of the community (95%), enhance physical and mental well being (98%), and reduce crime (73%).

Chapel Hill is a rapidly growing and changing community. The continued growth of the University of North Carolina and UNC Health Care has spurred an increase in population and an influx of new ideas and a diversity of lifestyles. In the next ten years, the Town's population will increase significantly. This growth will result in the continued urbanization of Chapel Hill, and much of southern Orange County. This increase will give rise to a broadening of citizen expectations with regards to parks and recreation. The citizens of Chapel Hill recognize the importance of both recreation and parks (and open space), and they expect civic leaders to take a lead role in ensuring that park needs are met.

This community expectation is reinforced in the Town's 2020 Vision Plan that states Chapel Hill "will be a vibrant community that creatively balances future visions of entrepreneurship and clean natural stewardship with the firm hold on sustainability." The role of parks and recreation facilities runs through many aspects of the 2020 Vision Plan. The 2020 Vision Plan identifies the importance of providing connectivity (through its greenways), protecting the natural environment (through open space preservation), and providing programs and facilities for community events, the arts, and the Town's youth. The recommendations in this comprehensive parks plan are intended to help the Town reach goals established in the 2020 Vision Plan.

Section Three: Recreation Standards and Needs Assessment identifies the needs for both park acreage and recreation facilities as the Town's population grows. Finding land in tracts with adequate acreage for parks and open space will be a challenge. This challenge will increase as available land increases in cost.

The Town's ten year park needs are significant. By 2022, over six new parks and ten miles of greenways will be needed. Many of the Department's older parks will require major renovations. In addition to these park needs, there will be a need for several special use facilities (aquatics facilities, recreation center, gymnasium, etc). Many of these park and recreation facilities will require land acquisition as well as development capital.

Chapel Hill is not alone in its mission to provide parks and athletic facilities to the community. In addition to its classrooms, Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools offers students a wide range of athletic facilities. While there is currently some joint use of existing facilities, the exploration and expansion of joint use opportunities would benefit taxpayers.

Orange County offers programs and facilities through the Department of Environment, Agriculture, Parks and Recreation. Adjacent communities (Carrboro, Durham, etc.) also offer park and recreation programs. In addition to these County and municipal facilities and programs, the State of North Carolina operates several state parks within an hour's driving time of the Town.

The University, through its student recreation programs, offers a wide range of indoor and outdoor recreation facilities. While most of these facilities are limited to students and staff, many of the users are also Town residents and included in the Department's service population. Coordination between the Town's parks and recreation efforts and the University will lead to opportunities to maximize facility use and improve recreational opportunities for everyone.



UNC Chapel Hill provides outstanding facilities for students and staff

All of these governmental recreation providers offer the citizens of Chapel Hill facilities and services that influence their demand for facilities and programs. Each of these agencies should be considered as Chapel Hill develops its proposals and recommendations for future parks. Likewise, each of these agencies should meet on a regular (semi-annual) basis to discuss park and recreation issues and share information about future initiatives.

Another major player with the mission of improving citizens' health and quality of life is UNC Health Care and its flagship hospital on the campus of UNC. The Town should look for opportunities to partner with the hospital in the promotion of healthy lifestyles.

The importance of working with these community agencies was emphasized in the 2020 Vision Plan. Through interagency partnerships, resources can be conserved, programming and facilities can be expanded, and duplication can be minimized.

The private sector also plays an important role in providing recreational opportunities in the community. Private sector facilities include championship golf

courses, numerous swim and tennis clubs, health clubs, and a Boys and Girls Club (proposed). While the use of most of these facilities is not free, they are meeting the recreational and fitness needs for many residents and reduce the demand for some public facilities. In addition, the private sector may play a role in providing recreation facilities to residents through potential public/private ventures. Public agencies are linking with private vendors to provide recreation opportunities in many communities throughout North Carolina. Examples of public/private joint ventures may include health/fitness facilities, swim clubs, and RV camping facilities.

To determine specific park and recreation recommendations for Chapel Hill, it is essential to clearly understand how the Town will interface with the other recreational providers in the community. This cooperative effort will eliminate duplication of facilities and services. The proposals and recommendations of this Comprehensive Plan are based on what each recreational provider is anticipated to offer through the ten year planning period (2013-2022).



William B. Umstead State Park is a short drive from Chapel Hill

State of North Carolina

Several state parks (William B. Umstead State Park, Eno River State Park, Oconeechee Mountain State Natural Area, and Jordan Lake State Recreation Area) are within a relatively short drive of Chapel Hill. It is anticipated that the State of North Carolina will continue to maintain and operate all state parks within the region. The Town, along with other nearby government agencies, should express their interest to see these parks enhanced to their utmost

potential. This may include the expansion of facilities and recreational opportunities. The State should continue to offer a variety of recreational facilities and programs on a regional basis. In addition, the State should be the provider of regional state parks that include opportunities for camping, fishing, biking, and special facilities of regional and statewide interest.

Orange County

Orange County, through its Department of Environment, Agriculture, Parks and Recreation, offers a variety of parks and recreation facilities throughout the county. However, most of the County's operating facilities are located in the northern and western areas of the county. There are no developed County parks with a service radius in the Chapel Hill area. The County does own property south of Eubanks Road and adjacent to Millhouse Road, which is planned for future development.

Many of the residents in the underserved areas of the county utilize Town of Chapel Hill facilities to meet their recreational needs. This is evident in the number of County residents using the Town's facilities and programs.

As recommended in the Town's 2020 Vision Plan, Town and County recreation professionals should work together to minimize duplication and explore opportunities for joint development and use of facilities. Examples could include the coordination of the two department's trail system and to prioritize and initiate development of the properties on Millhouse Road and Eubanks Road.

Surrounding Park and Recreation Agencies

The Chapel Hill Parks and Recreation Department is not the only municipal recreation provider in the area. The Town of Carrboro has a Recreation and Parks Department and offers park and recreation programs through both indoor and outdoor facilities. In addition, the City of Durham also provides municipal recreation facilities and parks. All park and recreation agencies operating within the region should communicate with each other in an effort to minimize duplication and maximize cooperative planning.

Chapel Hill - Carrboro City Schools

Value of Joint Use Agreements – Parks, Recreation and Schools

The Parks and Recreation Department has a tradition of collaborating with other agencies and organizations in the delivery of quality leisure experiences and the development and management of parks and recreation areas and facilities. The Town has partnered with Chapel Hill - Carrboro City Schools to develop outdoor and indoor facilities that serve the needs of both the schools and citizens as public park facilities.

The justification for the creation of joint use agreements is based on the premise that the majority of costs for developing and operating schools and recreation facilities come from the same source, local taxpayers. The development of duplicate facilities by those entities could constitute a waste of public funds. A shortage of affordable land and rapidly increasing construction costs are reasons enough for encouraging the efficient use of land and tax revenue. Combining resources allows for greater potential in the development of school and recreation facilities that neither entity is likely to afford if pursued independently. Other potential advantages of joint development and management include:

- The development of centralized public facilities usually requires less land than would be required if the schools and the parks department were to develop separate facilities. The creation of a Capital Facilities Review Committee for Parks and Recreation would be a very positive step in helping to assure the coordination and cost-effectiveness of any new facilities.
- Centralized locations for town services (including schools and parks) allows for the convenience of all citizens, particularly parents, by facilitating their children's participation in various education and recreation pursuits.
- Centralized school/park developments can eliminate the duplication of maintenance functions and result in overall cost savings.
- Many of the outdoor areas and facilities needed for schools are also necessary for park and recreation services. Partnering in the development and management of facilities minimizes the duplication of land acquisition and development needs and represents an efficient use of public resources.



The Parks and Recreation Department leases the soccer fields at Rashkis Elementary School, which is adjacent to Meadowmont Park

- Joint developments are eligible for grants from the North Carolina Park and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF).
- School/Park partnerships encourage the development of positive after-school and weekend enrichment activities focused on the development of the “whole child”.
- Park systems usually have the resources for developing and maintaining higher quality sports fields than can be found in most school systems.

Joint use agreements between local park and recreation agencies and school systems are very prevalent across the country. Examples of school/park and recreation joint use agreements in North Carolina can be found in Cumberland, Scotland, Watauga, Wake, and New Hanover counties.

With all of the advantages, Chapel Hill should work diligently to ensure joint use agreements are enacted and maintained wherever feasible.

UNC Chapel Hill

The Town has a unique opportunity to partner with the University in providing recreation opportunities to Chapel Hill residents and students. There are a number of departments and services on the UNC campus that the Town could partner with to expand recreation programs.

Campus Recreation provides a wide variety of indoor and outdoor recreation opportunities for students and staff. Seeking avenues for joint use of

facilities between the University and the Town could present opportunities to conserve resources at a time when both entities are faced with budget concerns. Other opportunities for collaborative activities could be with the School of Public Health, the Program on Health Outcomes, the Public Health Leadership Program and the Exercise and Sport School. Each of these programs or departments are engaged in areas that touch on issues important to the Town's Parks and Recreation Department. Finding areas of mutual interest could help enhance delivery of parks and recreation programs and facilities to both Chapel Hill residents and university students.

The importance of working with UNC was expressed in the 2020 Vision Plan. Likewise, creating a community wide healthy lifestyles initiative was a recommendation of the 2020 Vision Plan. Collaborating with UNC departments could meet both of these important recommendations.

UNC Health Care

Chapel Hill is home to one of North Carolina's finest health care systems. Its flagship facility, located on the campus, provides residents of Chapel Hill and the surrounding region with outstanding health care. Recent studies on obesity and healthy lifestyles have made it apparent that a community's health is linked to regular physical activity. Many of these activities are offered by the Town's Parks and Recreation Department.

The Hospital and Parks and Recreation Department should explore opportunities to work together to assist citizens in achieving a more active lifestyle.



The Town should look for partnership opportunities with UNC Health Care

TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Town of Chapel Hill, through its Parks and Recreation Department, currently affords its citizens a variety of recreation opportunities with thirteen parks. These parks provide opportunities for both active and passive recreation. The offerings of the Department are varied. There is a good balance between large parks (community) and the smaller "walk-to parks" (neighborhood and mini). The Town also offers an array of special use facilities in addition to the traditional park types.

Some of the Town's parks are well designed and maintained, and are in relatively good condition. Several of the parks are older facilities and could be significantly improved (both in appearance and function) by redesign and/or renovation. Likewise, the Town owns several under-developed parcels that will require facility development if they are to reach their true park and recreation potential.

The Town's existing parks provide a solid foundation of recreation facilities and green space, however, there are a number of areas where expansion and improvements are needed. This is especially important if the Town is to keep pace with its population growth and rapid urbanization.

One of the most important roles the Parks and Recreation Department can play in the future of the community is the preservation of green space and the protection of riparian areas. The importance of preserving green space and protecting the community's natural environment was identified in several themes found in the 2020 Vision Plan.

The Parks and Recreation Department must work with other Town departments and other agencies in the community to provide the park land and facilities that will be required. This collaborative effort should include working with the local school board, University, and adjacent municipal departments to minimize duplication of facilities by developing and maintaining joint use agreements wherever possible.

Through the planning and public involvement process, the standards established in the 2002 Parks

and Recreation Comprehensive Plan have been updated to reflect current community demand. These standards were defined in Section Three: Standards and Needs Assessment and identified in Table 3A-Park Acreage (PA) and Table 3A- Facilities (FAC).

Utilizing the modified standards for development and applying them to the Town’s current and projected population, a needs assessment for both parks and recreation facilities was developed. The summary of this needs assessment is found in the tables at the end of Section 3.

While the tables provide “the numbers” of the needs assessment, this section will define the reasoning behind the numbers and a description of how the numbers are used to provide recommendations that will ultimately guide the Department in the coming decade.

We begin with a overview of the different park types found in the Town’s system, and how these parks will be developed in the future.

Flexible Design

In a changing world it is important to design and build all facilities in such a way that they can be inexpensively re-purposed at a later date or used for multiple programs at any time. Buildings, fields, and other facilities should be investigated for opportunities to practice Flexible Design early in the programming and design phases of any future capital project.

Regional Parks

Regional parks are typically large, passive oriented parks that highlight, utilize and protect a unique feature. These parks, as the name implies, serve people from across a region; therefore, most people have to travel to enjoy these park types. As noted in Section Three, regional parks are typically offered by national, state, or county agencies. Occasionally municipalities with populations of 100,000 or more may provide a regional park.

Chapel Hill is located in an area with several regional parks. The State of North Carolina, through its State Parks Division, operates four regional parks in the

Chapel Hill area. William B. Umstead State Park, Eno River State Park, Occaneechee Mountain State Natural Area, and Jordan Lake State Recreation Area provide a wide variety of active and passive recreation opportunities, as well as environmental education and public open space.



Jordan Lake State Recreation Area affords the citizens of Chapel Hill a wide variety of recreation activities

The existence of these excellent parks within easy driving distance of Chapel Hill, allows the Town to focus its park development and operational efforts on other park types.

District Park/Sports Complex

District Parks, or Sports Complexes, are another large park type often provided by county agencies or larger municipalities. These parks are typically in the 80 acre range, and provide a wide variety of recreational opportunities. The popularity of team sports, particularly youth team sports, has encouraged many communities to develop this park type with a focus on league and tournament play. These parks can provide economic benefits through sports tourism.

While the development of this type of facility typically falls to the county agency, it seems unlikely that Orange County will develop a district park in the Chapel Hill service area. The County purchased land on Millhouse Road for a District Park.

With the limited availability of land in the Town’s corporate limits, and with the need for additional soccer/lacrosse fields, the Town should explore the possibility of forming an agreement with the County to develop a sports complex on their property on Millhouse Road. Obviously there would be many

details to work through to make this complex a reality, but a joint development venture with the County could be an excellent solution.

Community Parks

Community parks are perhaps the most important component of a typical municipal park and recreation system. These parks are usually large enough (20-50 acres) to provide both valuable active recreation opportunities and preservation of undeveloped open space and passive recreation areas.

Chapel Hill has four community parks (Community Center, Homestead, Southern Community, and Cedar Falls). The newest of these parks, Southern Community Park, was recently constructed and provides a variety of active recreation opportunities. The park is well designed and meets all current ADA regulations. Homestead Park, located in the northern section of town, is also relatively new and provides a wide variety of facilities in good condition.

Community Center Park, located in the central section of town, is one of the Town's older parks. While in relatively good condition, Community Center Park is extremely small by community park standards, and is somewhat limited by its size. It is one of the Town's most heavily used parks. This public demand creates challenges with park programming and operation.

Cedar Falls Park, located in the north central section of town, is one of the Town's older parks. It serves an important role in providing both active and passive recreation, however, the years have taken a toll on park facilities. As noted in the assessment in Section One, extensive renovations are needed in this park. The extent of these improvements warrant serious consideration for the need of complete renovation of the park. A master plan should be developed prior to making renovations.

The eastern section of Chapel Hill is not served by a community park. The closest community park to this area is Community Center Park; which, as noted above is much smaller than a typical community park.

One option for meeting the community park needs of the eastern section of Chapel Hill and relieving



Ribbon cutting at Community Center Park art wall.

some over use of Community Center Park may be the expansion of Ephesus Park. Ephesus Park could be expanded by 1) adding facilities in undeveloped areas of the existing park property, 2) working with the school to expand/improve facilities on school property, and 3) purchasing or leasing acreage from the adjacent property owned by American Legion Post 6.

Through a combination of these expansion options, Ephesus Park could be changed into a community park. This would allow for more park land and a wider range of recreation facilities.

Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks play an important role in providing both active and passive recreation in most municipal park systems. These parks, usually in the 5 - 20 acre range, are large enough to include both active and passive recreation opportunities. Most community parks also serve as a neighborhood park to those citizens living within a half mile radius.

Chapel Hill has seven neighborhood parks (Ephesus, Hargraves, Meadowmont, North Forest Hills, Oakwood, Pritchard, and Umstead). These parks are located throughout the corporate limits, but there are a number of areas that are not served by an existing neighborhood or community park.

As indicated in the needs assessment (see Section Three: Recreation Standards and Needs Assessment), the Town has an immediate need for three new neighborhood parks. This need will increase to four

new neighborhood parks by 2022. The ultimate location of these future parks should be carefully selected to ensure they are placed in areas not currently served and where they can be reached by the largest numbers of pedestrians and bicyclists. The Town currently owns land on Homestead Road and Erwin Road that may be considered for neighborhood park development.

The Town should improve several of its existing neighborhood parks. Improvements to Ephesus Park were discussed in the section on Community Parks. The Town should also make major improvements to Umstead Park. Frequent flooding creates a constant maintenance problem in this park. All facilities in the flood plain should be relocated to higher areas of the park, possibly in the area currently used as a pick-up youth field.



Hargraves Park is one of seven neighborhood parks

Master plans should be developed for both Ephesus and Umstead Parks. While Umstead and Ephesus have the greatest need for major renovation and expansion, all of the Town's neighborhood parks have need for improvements. Section One: Inventory and Assessment provides a summary of recommended improvements.

Mini Parks

Mini parks are the smallest of the park types. These parks typically are less than an acre and provide a limited range of activities (playground, picnic shelter, benches, etc.). There are only two mini parks within the Town's park and recreation system. These are Westwood and Burlington. These two parks contain approximately four acres of parkland.

Many municipal park agencies place less emphasis on mini parks because their small size limits their recreational use. In addition, because these small parks are geographically dispersed, they require considerably more maintenance effort and cost than larger parks. With this understanding, it is recommended that the Town not increase its inventory of mini parks. Existing mini parks should be maintained as long as neighborhood use is high enough. Only under special or unique circumstances should the Town invest in additional parks of this type. The Town should explore options for converting mini parks into open space areas if appropriate or to contract with neighborhood associations for maintenance purposes if willing and able partners can be found.

Civic Parks

Civic parks are community spaces that often provide a sense of place for a town or city. The size and form of civic parks may vary considerably. Likewise, how the spaces are used and programmed vary. Civic parks may include urban plazas, community green spaces and lawns, memorials, etc. Currently the Town has one civic park in the downtown area at Wallace Plaza. This urban park includes an amphitheater and public seating. It is used as a people gathering area in downtown and provides a venue for concerts and special community events. The Town's 2020 Vision Plan identifies the importance of creating attractive gathering areas, promoting festivals to attract tourism and provide public art. All of these initiatives would be realized through the development of civic parks.

Greenways

The most popular form of outdoor recreation in the nation is walking. This popularity was reflected in the survey that was conducted as part of this planning study and in comments made during the public meetings. Likewise, the importance of greenways was identified in the 2020 Vision Plan. Greenway trails are typically off-road trails that meander through neighborhoods and natural areas providing transportation corridors and recreational opportunities for walkers, joggers, roller bladers, and cyclists. The trail surface can either be natural or paved. Paved trails are normally ten feet in width. Natural surface trail widths can vary based on conditions.

In addition to providing environmental protection and recreation opportunities, greenways can produce economic development. The North Carolina Department of Transportation Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation recently conducted a study on a bicycle trail constructed along the northern Outer Banks region. This study determined that a \$6.7 million investment in off-road bike paths and shoulder improvements produced an estimated \$60 million annually in economic benefit. In addition, the study found that:

- Bicycle facilities in the area are an important factor to many tourists visiting the region.
- Investments in the bicycle facilities improved the safety of the area's transportation system.
- Bicycle activities include the benefits of health, fitness, quality of life, and the environment.

Greenways also offer a valuable alternative to automotive transportation. A greenway trail often provides a linkage between communities, schools, churches, businesses, and parks. The importance of this connectivity and alternative transportation source was reflected heavily in the Town's 2020 Vision Plan.

In 2006 the Town developed a greenway master plan to identify corridors for development, establish a budget for land acquisition and construction, and create a plan of action (with schedule) for greenway development. This plan recommended greenway projects with over 28 miles of proposed greenways and/or sidewalk trails.

The implementation of this plan, and the construction of the initial phases of a greenway system, has been one of Chapel Hill's highest park improvement priorities. Walking, jogging, and biking (all activities that occur on greenways) ranked extremely high in all of the public input responses.

Greenways should be developed in conjunction with other park and recreation providers in the area (UNC, Carrboro, Durham, and Orange County) to ensure they are coordinated with other planning efforts and that there is continuity between plans.

An update to the Town's greenways master plan was conducted as part of this master planning process.

Findings from that study can be found in the greenway master plan update.

Bikeways

The need for bikeable roads and the development of greenways for biking was repeatedly mentioned in many of the interviews and in the public meetings. With the focus on healthy lifestyles, the environment, and alternative transportation, there is a great need to develop and implement a bike plan.

The Town should encourage the State to include bike lanes whenever roadway improvements are made or new roads constructed. This plan should also address the Town's subdivision process to ensure developers provide bicycle (and pedestrian) routes in the roadway improvements they construct as part of the development process.

The Town should consider applying for federal SAFETEA program non-vehicular transportation funds that encourage alternative means of transportation. These funds have been used to construct bike lanes and greenway trails in communities throughout North Carolina.



Greenways and bikeable roads are a high priority for the citizens of Chapel Hill

The development of a town-wide greenway, linked with the Town's bike plan, would provide an important amenity that would benefit residents. As documented in the NCDOT study on bicycle facilities along the northern Outer Banks, the development of a

bicycle/pedestrian trail system can have a significant economic impact on a community.

The expansion of the Town’s bikeways also supports the recommendation made in the 2020 Vision Plan.

Open Space

Chapel Hill currently has about 2,565 acres of land either permanently or temporarily protected as open space. These lands have achieved protected status primarily through the work of two government agencies.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is the single largest owner of open space in Town. The University (and its aligned Botanical Garden Foundation) owns about 1,679 acres of open space in or near the Town’s corporate limits. These properties are owned primarily in fee simple, but some are also protected through the use of conservation easements.

NC Botanical Garden Properties	832 acres
Carolina North	
(outside the campus development area)	720 acres
Parker Property	127 acres
Total UNC Open Space Lands	1,679 acres

The Town has preserved 786 acres or about 5% of the Town’s total land area of 21.1square miles in the form of open space. This preserved open space is shown on the map of Town Owned Properties shown on page 4-21. Approximately 103 acres have been preserved as part of the undeveloped portions of Town parks. For example large portions of Southern Community, Meadowmont, and Cedar Falls Parks have no significant facilities and remain mostly wooded. The remaining 683 acres are in the form of lands that were acquired primarily for open space preservation and/or greenways purposes. In addition to these lands the Town also owns about 47 acres of open space outside of the Town’s corporate limits.

Most of the Town’s open space preservation areas are primarily centered along the Town’s creeks; especially along Bolin, Booker, Dry, Little, and Morgan Creeks.

The Town further benefits from open space protection outside its corporate boundaries. The Town of Carrboro has worked with Orange County to preserve a significant tract along Bolin Creek at its border with Chapel Hill. Carrboro has also preserved many acres along other stretches of Bolin Creek and along Morgan Creek.

Duke University, Orange County, Durham County, and the Triangle Land Council have made significant acquisitions of open space along New Hope Creek to the north and east of Chapel Hill, New Hope Preserve and Hollow Rock Access. These bodies have managed to protect most of New Hope Creek from central Orange County to the Army Corp lands in Durham County.



North Carolina Botanical Gardens

The Army Corp of Engineers protects many large tracts of land to the southeast of Chapel Hill as part of the Jordan Lake project. These lands and easements extend up New Hope, Little, and Morgan Creeks; in some cases protecting lands in Chapel Hill itself.

The importance of open space was reflected in the recommendations and goals established in the Town’s 2020 Vision Plan. Participants in the 2020 planning process emphasized the importance of “maintaining and adding open space, managing and safeguarding our natural resources.” Two of the plan’s six themes (Theme 4: Good Places and New Spaces and Theme 5: Nurturing our Community) identify the importance of open space, rural buffers, and the importance of

protecting the environment. Goals related to open space listed in the 2020 Vision Plan include:

- Support the rural buffer, acknowledging its impact on the nature of the Town; such as forcing higher density development within the town.
- Preserve and protect the rural buffer.
- Protect, acquire and maintain natural spaces, green spaces for parks, greenways, entranceways to protect wildlife corridors and provide recreation and connections to schools.
- Maintain and improve water quality.
- Raise community awareness of the benefits of resource protection.
- Develop local measures to address climate change and lower our carbon footprint.

In addition to these goals specifically related to open space and resource preservation, the 2020 Vision Plan calls for collaboration between the Town of Chapel Hill and other public agencies operating in the area. This includes:

- Town of Carrboro
- City of Durham
- UNC Chapel Hill
- Orange County
- State of North Carolina

As noted earlier, all of these agencies have potential roles in saving open space in the region. The 2020 Vision Plan calls on the Town to work with these agencies in protecting open space and the environment.



Jordan Lake

The recommendations on open space in the 2020 Vision Plan go beyond the realm of parks and recreation. An underlying theme in the recommendations is creating a more urban form of

development in the town. Under this vision, some areas of the town would be developed to much higher densities, while other areas in the town would be left as open spaces (public or simply protected). This pattern of development would protect drainage areas, provide wildlife habitat, and enhance mass transit. Under this scenario, much of the future open space in the town could be acquired, or at least protected, through the land development process.

Where critical open space property is identified, but is unlikely to be saved through dedication, the Town may team with land trusts, like the Triangle Land Conservatory, working in the region to protect these resources.

Another option for purchasing public open space is creating and passing a bond referendum for open space acquisition. This is the most expensive option and will pass both capital and operational cost on to the Town.

Renovation and Expansion of Existing Parks

While the focus of the previous recommendations has been on the acquisition and development of new parks, there is also a need to improve and expand facilities at many of the Town's existing parks. As part of the ongoing planning and budgeting process, the Town's Parks and Recreation Department annually establishes a list of capital improvement projects. This list of capital improvement needs is then used by the Department and elected officials to establish yearly capital improvement budgets. Many of the projects currently listed on the Town's Capital Improvement Plan have been included in the Capital Improvement Plan listed in Table 5-1.

As noted in previous sections, master plans should be developed for many of the Town's existing parks and recreation buildings. Parks and facilities that warrant special study include:

- Cedar Falls Park
- Umstead Park
- Ephesus Park
- Community Arts Facility
- Administrative Offices

Facility Proposals and Recommendations

This report recommends the Town should construct five new parks, add several recreation buildings, expand its greenway trail system, and renovate many of its existing parks by the year 2022. The improvements that will be made as part of these renovations and expansions will add many new facilities to the parks inventory. The Town should consider the list of facility needs established in Section Three and described in greater detail on the following pages:

Adult Baseball

Over the past five to ten years, the popularity of adult baseball has waned, both locally and across the nation. The Town's 2002 Comprehensive Plan recommended a standard of one field per 20,000 people for the development of adult baseball fields. Utilizing this standard of field development, the Town does not have a need for an additional adult baseball field.



Youth Baseball

Youth baseball is very popular in North Carolina. The 2002 Comprehensive Plan established an extremely aggressive criteria for the development of youth baseball fields (one field per 4,000). Based on this standard for youth baseball, the Town exhibits a demand for this sport greater than that expressed in the national, state, and other similar municipal department standards. The standard for facility development of youth baseball fields has been adjusted to one field per 6,000 people. This is still significantly greater than the national and

state standards (one field per 10,000). Utilizing this standard for development results in a current need for four additional youth baseball fields, with a total of five additional fields needed by 2022.

Softball

Men's adult softball has traditionally been a very popular sport in North Carolina. NRPA and NCDENR standards (one field per 5,000 people) reflect that popularity. While the sport is still popular in some areas, there has been a shift in demand of men's adult softball in many communities. The standard used in the 2002 plan was extremely aggressive (1 field/4,000), and does not reflect local demand. The 2002 standard has been changed to 1 field/20,000. Based on this new standard, the Town does not have a need for additional softball fields.

It should also be noted that changes in demand have now placed additional emphasis on women's softball. In the future, softball fields should be designed to accommodate this new area of play, or alter some of the existing fields should be retrofitted to allow for women's play.

Football

Football's popularity as a community based youth sport has been reduced by the emergence of soccer and (most recently) lacrosse. With this understanding, the standard for development of football fields is one field for every 30,000 people within the service community. This new standard of development is significantly less than the standard used in 2002. This new standard results in the demand for football being met.

Soccer

Soccer is one of the fastest growing sports in America. The sport has far surpassed the demand for youth football in this country. This master plan reflects this demand by establishing a standard of one field for every 3,000 people within the service population. Like many communities, this standard significantly exceeds national and state standards. Utilizing this standard for development, the Town will need 8-10 soccer fields in the future. The development of a district park or sports complex could accommodate this number of fields.



The Town should consider lighting its soccer fields, which can effectively double their use. Likewise, the development of synthetic turf fields could greatly increase playing time on existing fields and reduce the number of fields needed.

A final note on soccer. The demand for multi-purpose fields will be made more intense by the new interest in lacrosse. Played on a field very similar to a soccer field (they are slightly larger than soccer fields), lacrosse will likely increase in popularity and should be planned for as the Town reviews its soccer field needs. The new sport should be taken into consideration since play for both sports can be programmed on similar fields. One method to accommodate the variety of field games (soccer, lacrosse, rugby, football) is to develop larger multi-use fields that can be used for play by a variety of field games.



Basketball

Basketball remains an extremely popular sport in the United States. Played by a variety of ages, and increasingly by females, this sport can be played either indoors or out. The development of outdoor

basketball courts cost considerably less than indoor gymnasiums. Currently the Town provides eight outdoor courts and three gymnasiums (including the gymnasium at Rashkis Elementary School). Based on national and state standards of development of one basketball court per 5,000 people, the Town currently has a need for two additional outdoor courts. By 2022, that need will increase to three additional courts.

Outdoor courts are relatively inexpensive to construct and do not require significant space in a park. They require careful placement because activity around the court is often aggressive, male dominated, and may not mix well with other youth activities.

See the section on community centers and gymnasiums for the community’s need for indoor courts.



Tennis

Tennis has not experienced the same growth and interest as some of the nation’s newer sports (soccer, lacrosse, etc.), but as the baby boomers move into their 50s and retirement, the demand for sports that keep people active without physical contact will likely increase. This assessment was reinforced as part of the interview with stakeholders.

Utilizing a standard of facility development matching the national and state standards (one court per 2,000 people), there is a need for three additional tennis courts. By 2022, this need will increase to six additional courts.

Chapel Hill currently has 21 existing courts, but many of these are in poor condition. Courts at Ephesus Park and Cedar Falls Park should be reconstructed. In addition to court improvements, there is a need for a community tennis center. This tennis center would provide a centralized facility for tennis lessons as well as team and tournament competition.

Sand Volleyball

The Town currently does not have a sand volleyball court. Courts should be added as soon as funds are available. Volleyball courts are relatively small and can easily be added to existing parks.



Shuffleboard

There has been no expressed demand for outdoor shuffleboard courts from citizens of Chapel Hill; therefore, the Town does not have any courts. This activity provides a recreational outlet and opportunities for social interaction, particularly for older citizens.

The Town should consider building shuffleboard courts in parks if there is a demand for this activity in the future. Like volleyball courts, shuffleboard courts are relatively small and can easily be added to existing parks.



Horseshoes

There has been no expressed demand for horseshoe pits in the community; therefore, the Town does not have any pits in its park system. This activity provides a recreation outlet for social interaction, particularly for older citizens. The Town should consider building horseshoe pits if there is demand for this activity in the future. Like shuffleboard courts, horseshoe pits are relatively small and can easily be added to existing parks.

Picnic Shelters

Picnicking was one of the most popular recreational activities listed by respondents in the Town's survey. Chapel Hill currently has only eight shelters in its park system. Based on a standard of one shelter per 2,500 people, there is a need for fourteen additional shelters by 2022.

Playgrounds

The Town has ten playgrounds in its parks. As new parks are developed, Chapel Hill should look for locations for additional playgrounds. Larger parks may warrant more than one playground.

As new playgrounds are completed and existing playgrounds renovated, the department should replace wood fiber and sand surfaces with poured in place (PIP) safety surfacing. PIP surfaces provide wheelchair accessibility and reduces maintenance and lifecycle costs of the playgrounds.

Pedestrian Trails

Walking is the number one outdoor recreational activity in the United States. Trail use scored high in the public survey ($\pm 70\%$ indicated they are currently using trails).

With this level of public demand, the development of walking trails should be a priority for future park development. As noted previously in this section, the Town should continue to work on implementation of its Greenway Master Plan. In addition to greenways, a priority should be placed on walking trail development in all existing and future parks. A paved walking trail is an important component of all park types, and should be provided in all neighborhood and community parks as well as sports complexes.

Biking Trails

Based on the survey, approximately a third of Chapel Hill's citizens are interested in, or currently participate in biking. As discussed earlier in this section, the Town should expand opportunities for biking through the development of a greenway trail system, including paths suitable for biking in existing and future parks, and through encouraging NCDOT to develop roads with bike lanes or wider shoulders to accommodate bikers. The Parks and Recreation Department should work with other stakeholders to help promote and facilitate new bikeways throughout the Town.

Amphitheaters and Neighborhood Performing Areas

Currently the Town has one small stage located at Wallace Plaza. This facility provides a venue for concerts and special events. Over a third (38%) of those surveyed indicated they would like to attend outdoor performances. The Town should consider development of another venue to address this demand.

The 2020 Vision Plan identifies the need for creating economic impact through festivals and community events. The development of an outdoor performing arts area could support this recommendation.

The Town should also make provisions for smaller, neighborhood gathering places for plays, small

concerts, and other special events. These facilities would provide a small stage and space for gathering in a more informal manner when compared to a large amphitheater.

Special Use Facilities

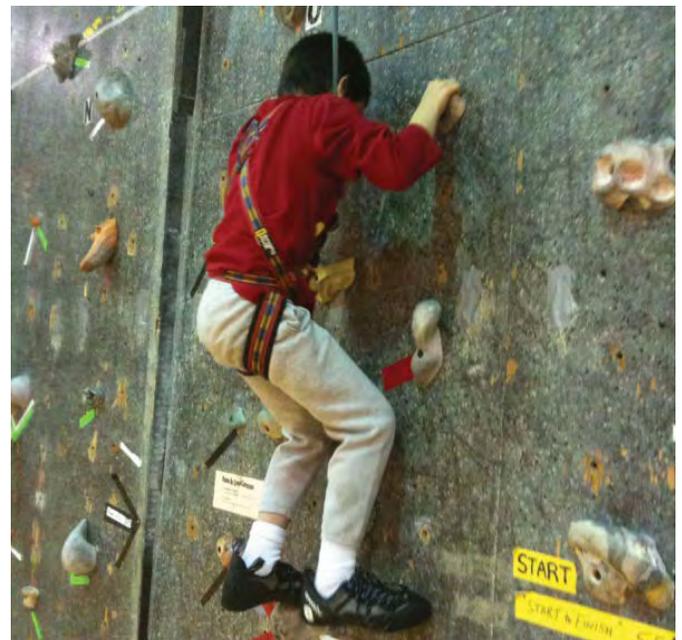
Community Centers and Gymnasiums

Chapel Hill currently provides two recreation centers with gymnasiums (Community Center and Hargraves Center). In addition to these public facilities, there is a gymnasium at Rashkis Elementary School.

As the town grows, there will be a need for one additional public Community Center with a gymnasium and one additional Community Center without a gymnasium.

Climbing Walls

One of the more unique facilities offered by the Town is the climbing wall at the Chapel Hill Community Center. The climbing wall was constructed almost 25 years ago. At the time, it was a state of the art facility. Through the years rock climbing has evolved. Today, the climbing wall does not meet the demand for bouldering and provides conflicts with the Town's basketball program. The Town should build a new climbing facility in one of its future recreation facilities.



Swimming Pools and Spraygrounds

In the past, NRPA and NCDENR provided a standard for pool development of one pool for every 20,000 people. This standard was based on the concept of multi neighborhood or community pools. Today, with the high cost of operation and construction of swimming pools, very few agencies develop neighborhood/community pools to that old standard. Instead they typically provide more centralized facilities where one pool may serve a greater population.

The Town of Chapel Hill has an excellent aquatics program. With two indoor pools and one outdoor pool, the Town offers a wide variety of water programs. Swimming in a pool was the second most popular recreation activity (after walking) listed in the public survey. Over 40% of the Town's population indicated they either participated in swimming or had interest in swimming. This strong demand creates a need for an additional outdoor swimming pool.



Spraygrounds are growing in popularity.

The Town should also consider building several spraygrounds, which are growing in popularity across the country. In addition to offering a water-based play experience, the play structures, sprays, etc. afford children of all ages a total play environment and are much more economical to operate than a standard swimming pool. A properly designed, large water park sprayground can serve as a regional draw, provide revenue to the Department, and provide a beneficial economic impact to the surrounding areas.

Potential sites for splash parks include a space reserved for that purpose at Southern Community Park, the

existing concrete deck at Community Center Park, and the Wallace Parking Deck downtown. Other sites could also be considered.

Arts Center

The Town has historically supported arts and arts programs throughout the community. Recently the Town's Public and Cultural Arts Department was placed in the Parks and Recreation Department. This was a wise decision by Town management, because there are many similarities and connections between recreation programs, parks, and the arts.

Chapel Hill residents realize the value of arts as a community asset. The demand for expanding the Town's arts programs was expressed in all public input initiatives (public workshops, survey, and stakeholder interviews). The importance of art in the community was further expressed by the public as part of the 2020 Vision Plan process. It is apparent the public values art and arts programming and believes the Town should provide programs and opportunities to promote the arts.

The Town should explore options to buy, lease, or construct a center for the arts. Detailed decisions on the size and function of this facility is beyond the scope of this comprehensive plan. A separate programming study should be conducted to determine the types of programs to be included. This programming study will provide better definition on facility size (square footage) and features. The Town should consider leasing vacant space on a temporary basis until such time as a permanent home for an art center can be found.

Based on input received as part of this planning effort, this facility would be for art classes and instruction, would include rehearsal space (but not performance space), and would require 10,000 to 15,000 square feet of space.

The development of an arts center could potentially incorporate the existing community clay studio currently located in Community Center Park. This would allow arts programming to be located at one facility.

One option would be to include this facility with a new building to house the Department's administrative offices.

Art in Parks and Recreation

A number of recommendations in this planning document support the development of facilities and programming for art education. In addition to these efforts, it is important for the department to promote the use of art into the built environment. Art, if planned and implemented properly, can add dimension to the park and greenway experience. Art can entice exploration and reveal nature, highlight the senses, mark natural changes or offer an aesthetic approach to park and greenway infrastructure.



Children's art incorporated into the gate at Oakwood Park

When planning for parks, greenways, or renovations to existing park inventory, art should be considered part of the planning and design process by:

- Broadly identifying opportunities for integrating art into the context of park inventory.
- Identifying sources of funding for incorporating the art (percent for art program funds, park bond, possible in lieu of funds, etc.).
- Involving the Town's Public and Cultural Arts Commission and artist early in the planning process for identifying opportunities to integrate art into the context of park or greenway projects. Opportunities might include, artist-design amenities, play spaces, artist-in residence, landscape design, etc.

- Incorporating art to reflect the Town values of sustainability and environmental stewardship.
- Incorporating art that follows established guidelines for community involvement and education.
- The Public and Cultural Arts Commission should develop a Public Art Overlay Plan based on this comprehensive park plan document to address the above.

Golf Courses

Golf courses are expensive to construct and operate. Existing public courses appear to be meeting current demand. A municipal golf course is not a community need.

Archery

Archery is a skill sport enjoyed by relatively few people. Demand for an archery range was not expressed in any public input venue. The development of an archery range should not be a priority.

Parks and Recreation Administrative Office

The Department's administrative offices are located in a small metal out building on the southern edge of Community Center Park. The Department shares this building with the Community Clay Studio. The building is not large enough to serve both the office and storage needs of the department and the community's growing demand for studio space.

The expansion of the existing facility in Community Center Park is not a viable option due to the size of the park and lack of parking. Instead, the Town should look for suitable sites to construct a new and larger building for the Parks and Recreation Department's administrative offices. While detailed architectural studies are needed to accurately determine departmental needs, it is anticipated that the office should be in the 10,000 s.f. range. This size facility would allow adequate office and storage space, and would provide for some future growth.

The development of a new building for the administrative functions of the department would allow other departmental uses (program or operational) of the existing building.

Trends in Park and Recreation Facilities

We live in a rapidly changing world. Recreational needs and interest change as well. Demand for various recreational activities increase and decrease based on these changes. These shifts in demand are reflected in changes in the Town’s standards for facility development that were discussed in Section Three.

Changes in the public’s demand for recreational activities have also given rise to new recreational pursuits and new expectations for existing facilities.

The following trends in parks and recreation facilities should be considered as the Town develops parks in the future.

Skateboard Parks and Extreme Sports

The Town currently provides a 10,000 s.f. skate park at Homestead Park. The skate park is operated by a private vendor, Vertical Urge. This facility is extremely popular and should be expanded. The expansion should provide more space for skaters, and provide a wide range of skate experiences. A concrete bowl should be included in this expansion. The Master Plan for Homestead Park provides space for this expansion.



Skateboard Park at Homestead Park

Rock Climbing/Bouldering

Climbing is an extremely popular sport in Chapel Hill. The rock climbing wall at the Chapel Hill Community Center is heavily used, but is outdated and should be replaced.

The Town should construct a new climbing wall with bouldering capability at one of the future indoor recreation facilities.



Rock climbing wall at the Chapel Hill Community Center

Disc Golf

The popularity of disc golf continues to grow. The Town has one disc golf course. This course is heavily used and should be improved. Additional courses should be considered at new or existing parks.

Off-leash Dog Areas

Off-leash dog areas are one of the newest trends in park development. The popularity of these facilities (also known as dog parks), is a response to the nation’s love of pets. Communities throughout North Carolina are now constructing dog parks.

Dog parks take many forms, but are primarily a place within a park where park users can bring their dogs to run, walk, and recreate. They usually include a fenced open area where dogs, accompanied by their owner, are allowed to run free. Often the off-leash dog area is divided into sections for large and small dogs.

Chapel Hill currently has two dog parks (Homestead Park and Southern Community Park). The facilities have received tremendous use and have had a very favorable response from users. An additional dog park in the central or eastern area of town should be considered in the future.

Community Gardens

Community gardens provide a wide variety of community enhancements. They offer health benefits by providing local gardeners with fresh vegetables and increased exercise as they tend the gardens. They also provide environmental benefits by reducing transportation cost for food production and providing more plant cover, which reduces urbanization impacts on climate change. In addition, community gardens provide a venue for social interaction that reduces isolation and supports community involvement.

With the many benefits provided by community gardens, many Parks and Recreation agencies are implementing community garden programs. The Town should consider development of community gardens in some of its existing parks.

There are a number of approaches to the development, management, and maintenance of community gardens. The Town should conduct a study of the various options prior to implementing a community garden program.

Park Maintenance

The level of maintenance practiced by the Department of Parks and Recreation might be described as average, or basically adequate. Some parks cannot be maintained at a high level due to their poor condition while others had better design and construction that makes quality maintenance easier to accomplish. The primary activity of the Department's Division of Landscape Services and Park Maintenance is mowing. Other functions of the Division include the care of trees, shrubs and planting beds; athletic field maintenance; litter removal; playground inspections and maintenance; and the maintenance of greenways and trails. Other less traditional responsibilities include the maintenance of four cemeteries, five park-and-ride lots, 14 public housing areas, five fire stations, four town entrance signs, ten town office building areas and two boulevards.



Lawn maintenance is a large part of the maintenance budget

Based on numerous interviews with the Superintendent of Landscape Services and Park Maintenance, a review of proposed maintenance plan documents, the Department and Division organizational documents and inspections of every park in the Chapel Hill system, a number of options are suggested to improve the quality of maintenance at parks and other public areas:

1. Park Renovations – Renovating some existing parks will result in areas and facilities that are easier to maintain at a higher level.
2. Boulevards – Increasing the frequency of mowing, removing litter, edging curbs, and planting beds will significantly improve the appearances of these important corridors. It is important to recognize that for many citizens the physical appearance of public areas, including boulevards, may be their only way to judge the performance of those responsible for their upkeep.
3. Maintenance Standards – Establishing a park classification system will identify those parks, areas within parks, and public landscaped areas that should receive a higher level of maintenance.
4. Athletic Fields – Establishing a formalized classification system for maintaining athletic fields would result in their increased use and improved appearance. As funds are available for the renovation of existing athletic fields, or the development of new ones, synthetic turf should be considered in that it allows for much greater use with much less maintenance than grass turf without compromising physical appearances.

5. Maintenance Management Plan – Parks and recreation leaders have developed a prototype plan for the management of maintenance functions at all parks and greenways. The plan assumes that the level of maintenance at all parks and greenways will increase. The process of developing and using this plan will be very valuable to the Department of Parks and Recreation. The plan will provide clear expectations and priorities, identify personnel and equipment needs, and measure performance levels of park and greenway maintenance.
7. Contract Services - The Department may want to explore the possibility of contracting out specific services. However, experience is mixed; some park systems have found that contracting services ended up costing more than completing the same tasks at the same level with their own employees.
8. The Division should consider the purchase of a small dump truck, which would provide greater capacity and more options than using standard pick up trucks.
9. The development of a park and recreation maintenance management plan, should include the development of a Landscape and Park Maintenance Operations Manual with information to help orient new employees and to assure high quality services.

The Maintenance Management Plan should include the following:

- An updated inventory of all park assets to be maintained.
- Identify specific maintenance tasks to be performed at each park asset.
- Establish frequency of maintenance tasks.
- Determine personnel needs to complete each task.
- Establish average time estimates to complete each task at each park asset to be maintained.
- Determine equipment, supplies and materials needed to complete each task.

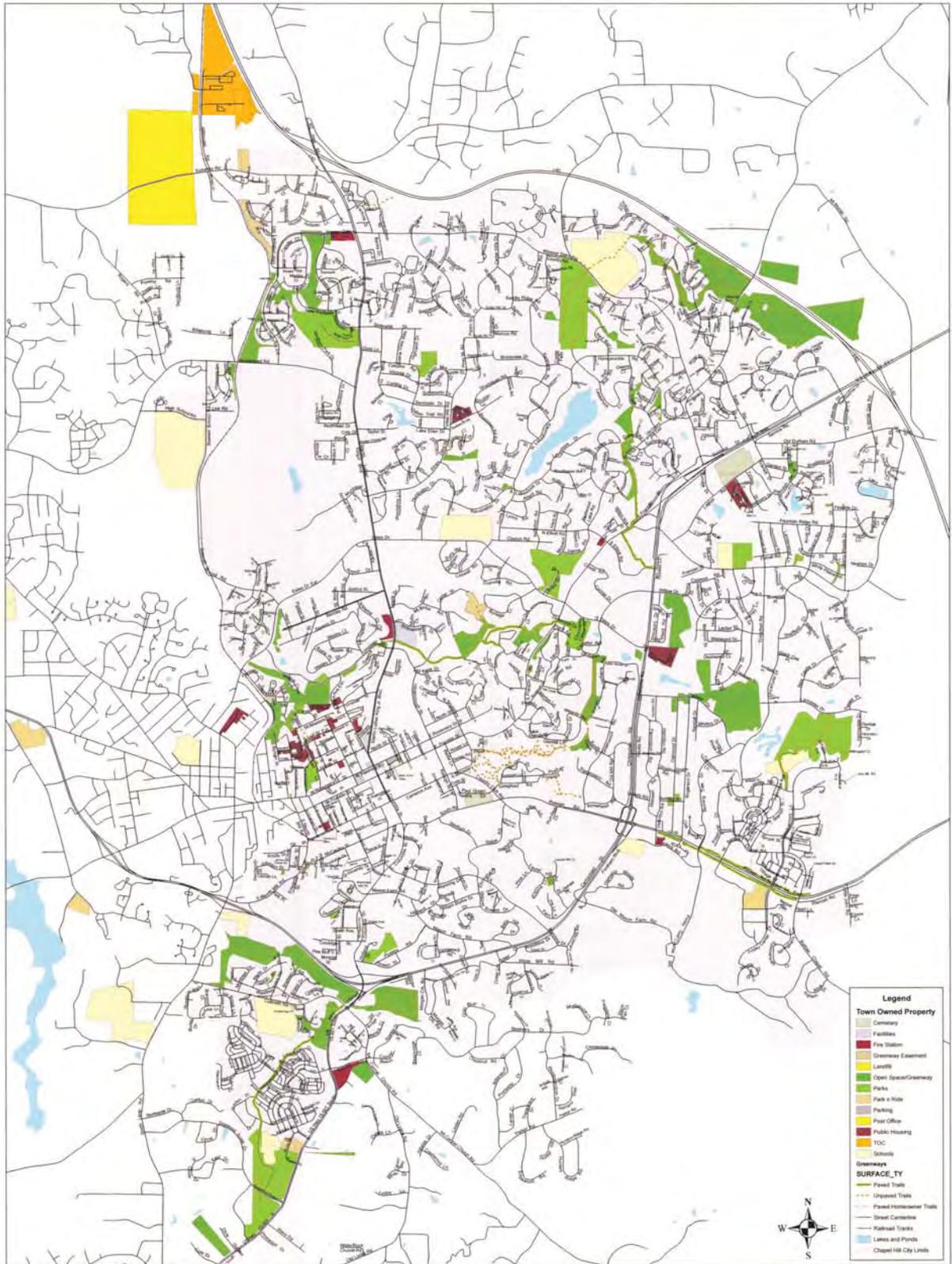
Note: Computerized maintenance management systems are available to guide the development of a maintenance management system. One with good reviews is offered by Vermont Systems.

6. Work Order System –The development of a formalized work order system should be considered to accurately determine maintenance standards, frequency of tasks, and the cost of maintaining all parks and other properties for which the Parks and Recreation Department is responsible. A work order system would also help determine the life cycle of all physical assets in order to anticipate capital improvement needs, staffing, and equipment necessary to meet the expectations of the community and Town leaders. This is especially true as new parks and recreation facilities are developed.

Note: The full report describing the current level of maintenance with recommendations for making improvements is located in Appendix 4 of this document.

Town of Chapel Hill

Town Owned Properties



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 Feet
g/arcmapplotting_maps/town_owprop

Map Prepared by Chapel Hill GIS
 Public Works Dept Engineering & Design Division
 April 2011

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