

# COMPREHENSIVE PARKS PLAN (2013-2022)



May 29, 2013



Town of Chapel Hill

# Acknowledgements

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*Citizens enjoy a summer concert*

## Executive Summary

The wonderful blend of academic excellence and small town southern charm make Chapel Hill one of the country's most desirable places to live. The Town's parks and greenways are an important aspect of that desirable quality of life.

This Comprehensive Parks Plan will help ensure that the Town Council, Parks and Recreation Department, and citizen leaders have a road map to guide decision-making and actions as the community grows and becomes more urban. It will provide a ten year vision (2013-2022) for the Department. This guide was carefully crafted by staff, the public, volunteers, and with the help of outside experts to ensure that future generations will have adequate parks, trails, and open space.

The Plan starts with a description of how information was gathered and a summary of previous long-term planning efforts. Section One is a detailed description of current park land and facilities. Section Two describes the stakeholder population - The People of Chapel Hill. Section Three covers accepted recreation standards, both past and present. Section Four describes proposed improvements to facilities and space and improvements in operating procedures. Finally, the Plan makes recommendations about a way forward in hard economic times. The Plan is comprehensive, and our best thinking in 2013 about how to proceed over the next 10 years.

## GETTING STARTED: PUBLIC INPUT

Parks and Recreation staff retained Site Solutions to help collect and analyze data and craft a draft plan. Then Commissioners and staff edited and massaged the Plan. The most important aspect of the planning study was identifying the public's desire for parks and recreation facilities and programs. The public was offered the opportunity to participate through:

- Two public workshops
- A town-wide survey sent to households through a random sampling process
- One-on-one interviews with over twenty community stakeholders
- A master plan website that included access to an online survey (Survey Monkey)
- Working closely with the Parks and Recreation Department staff to understand needs already expressed
- Many public events which gathered input during the Town's 2020 Planning Process

Findings from these public outreach efforts, as well as a summary of the methodology, can be found in Section Two: The People of Chapel Hill.

## CHAPEL HILL 2020 VISION PLAN

The development of this Comprehensive Parks Plan coincides with the Town's 2020 Our Town, Our Vision plan. Almost every key theme of the 2020 Vision Plan involves parks and recreation in some way, so it is important to align the two documents.

The 2020 Vision Plan addresses the following issues directly related to the Town's park and recreation system:

- Public Art
- Healthy Lifestyles
- Connectivity Through Greenways
- Neighborhood Parks
- Community Events
- Community Gathering Spaces
- Environmental Awareness
- Open Space

See Section Three for more details on the recommendation of the 2020 Vision Plan and how they can be realized through the Town's park system.

## GROWTH AND POPULATION

In addition to gathering public input, a critical step in developing this plan is understanding the demographic and population changes that are occurring in the community. With the recent completion of the 2010 census data and the Town's detailed population assessment from the 2009 Chapel Hill Data Book (see Appendix 2-A), very good information on population and demographics were available for use in this planning study.

A decision in the park and recreation planning process is identifying the agency's service population. The service population for the Department for this planning study was defined as citizens living within the Town limits but not living on the UNC campus. Students living on campus have most of their recreational needs met through student recreation facilities and services offered by the University. The Town's 2010 census population was 57,233, but this population count includes students living on campus ( $\pm 9,800$ ). Removing these students from the census count results in a service population of  $\pm 47,500$ .

The Town's Planning Department has projected a 1.5% annual growth rate for the Town's population for the coming decade. Utilizing this growth rate and adjusting for future growth of students living on campus, the anticipated 2022 service population will be approximately 55,000; very similar to the 2022 projections of the 2002 plan. The Town's 2020 Vision Plan reflects a higher population base for the Town because it includes the student population in its census data.

See Section Two: The People of Chapel Hill for additional information on the demographic characteristics of the Town's citizens.

## PARK AND RECREATION FACILITY NEEDS

As described in Section Three: Recreation Standards and Needs Assessment, a community's park system is typically comprised of eight park types. These park types include:

- Mini Parks
- Neighborhood Parks
- Community Parks
- Sport Complexes and District Parks
- Regional Parks
- Greenways
- School Parks
- Special Use Facilities

Typically, each of these park types provide recreation opportunities that meet citizens' recreational needs. A number of public and private agencies/entities provide leisure services in the community. Municipal agencies typically focus on mini parks, neighborhood parks, community parks, greenways, school parks, and special use facilities. County and state agencies often address larger park facilities (district and regional parks). Schools, universities, churches, and private entities usually provide additional recreation facilities. This comprehensive plan addresses all recreation providers in the community with particular emphasis on the Town's role.

### **Park Needs Assessment**

In the next ten years, the Town should focus its park and recreation efforts in the following areas:

#### **Mini Parks**

Chapel Hill currently has two mini parks (Westwood and Burlington).

The national trend in public park development is to minimize reliance on mini parks for the delivery of park and recreational services. Their small size limits the recreational opportunities offered and the citizens they can adequately serve. The limited service area provided by these parks also requires numerous small parks distributed throughout the community. This service pattern results in higher overall maintenance costs.

For these reasons, the Town should maintain its existing mini parks but minimize its efforts in developing this park type in the future.



*Shelter located in Umstead Park*

#### **Neighborhood Parks**

Neighborhood parks play an important role in providing both active and passive recreation opportunities in municipal settings. The Town's 2020 Vision Plan identifies the important role of neighborhood parks.

Currently, Chapel Hill offers its citizens six neighborhood parks (Hargraves, Pritchard, Meadowmont, North Forest Hills, Ephesus, Oakwood) on approximately 98 acres of park land. While some of these parks are in reasonably good condition, most of the Town's neighborhood parks require some level of renovation. See Section One: Inventory and Assessment for park assessments, and a list of renovations needed.

In addition to renovating its existing parks, there are several areas of the Town that are not currently being served by a neighborhood park. A strategic recommendation of this plan is the development of four new neighborhood parks by 2022.

#### **Community Parks**

The Town has four existing community parks covering approximately 195 acres. The recent development of Southern Community Park greatly expands and improves the offerings of the Town's community parks, but there are still improvements needed in this park category. One of the Town's oldest community parks, Cedar Falls Park, is outdated and in need of significant renovations. In addition, the Town's most used park, Community Center Park, is extremely

small by community park standards and limited in expansion by space and zoning regulations. An option for relieving the stress and overuse of this community park is the expansion of land and facilities at Ephesus Park. See Section Four: Proposals and Recommendations for additional details on this recommendation.

### **District Parks and Sports Complexes**

District parks (also known as sports complexes) with an emphasis on team sports (soccer, baseball, lacrosse) are a relatively new park type that focuses on active recreation. Typically the sports complex is a large park (50-100 acres) dedicated to league and tournament play. Often these events provide opportunities for economic development.

With the limited amount of developable land in the Town's corporate limits, finding a site for a district park/sports complex is highly unlikely. One possibility for the development of this type of facility may be found in a joint venture with Orange County. The County owns approximately 79 acres of land along Millhouse Road north of Town. The County may be interested in pursuing a joint development agreement with the Town on this property.

As noted in Section Five: Action Plan, agencies working together through cooperative agreements are an important method of developing facilities and delivering services. The value of partnership agreements was also emphasized in the Town's 2020 Vision Plan. The opportunity to work in conjunction with Orange County on a sports complex would provide a win/win for everyone.

### **Regional Parks**

Typically municipal agencies do not provide regional park facilities.

Regional parks are large (200 to 1,000 acres) tracts of land that provide environmental protection, education, and passive recreation opportunities. While a few large municipal agencies provide regional parks, most regional parks are provided by county or state agencies. As the name implies, these parks have regional service areas and are typically "drive to" facilities. The citizens of Chapel Hill have access to several regional park facilities including

William B. Umstead State Park, Eno River State Park, Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area, and Jordan Lake State Recreation Area.

Through these large parks, the citizens of Chapel Hill have adequate access to regional parks. The Town should not focus its financial resources on the development of a regional park.



*Camping is an example of passive recreation at regional parks*

### **Facility Needs Assessment**

We examined facilities within parks and special use facilities (such as ball fields and playgrounds) to determine if there is adequate recreation facilities to meet current and future demand. This assessment begins with establishing standards for facility development. Based on public input and staff/planning consultant review of the 2002 standards, several changes have been made. These changes are discussed in Section Three and listed in Table 3A-Facilities (FAC), Recreation Facility Standards.

As shown on the next page, most all recreation activities have at least some facility needs.

The "Existing Facilities" column indicates the number of existing recreation facilities the Town currently provides. The "2022 Need" column identifies the total number of additional facilities needed by 2022 (ten year need). The "Current Need" column further refines the Town's recreation facility needs by identifying the number of new facilities currently needed (this number is included in the "2022 Need" column).



As an example of how the needs assessment is presented; consider playgrounds. Currently the Town has 10 existing playgrounds. Based on the Standards for Facility Development that have been recommended for the Town (one playground for every 3,000 people in the service population), there is a current demand for 16 playgrounds ( $47,500 \div 3,000 = 16$ ); therefore the Town should construct 6 additional playgrounds (demand of 16 – 10 existing playgrounds) to meet the current demand. By 2022, with the increase in population, the demand will grow to 18 playgrounds ( $55,000 \div 3,000 = 18$ ); therefore by 2022, the Town will need to build a total of 8 new playgrounds.

	Existing Facilities	Current Need	2022 Need
Adult Baseball Fields	2	-	-
Youth Baseball Fields	4	4	5
Softball Fields	2	-	-
Football Fields	1	1	1
Soccer Fields	8	8	10
Basketball Courts	8	2	3
Tennis Courts	21	3	6
Volleyball Courts	0	3	4
Shuffleboard Courts	0	3	4
Horseshoe	0	3	4
Picnic Shelters	8	11	14
Playground	10	6	8
Miles of Hiking/ Jogging Trails	11.4	5.7	8.5
Rec. Center w/Gym	3	-	1
Rec. Center w/out Gym	1	1	2
Outdoor Swimming Pool	1	1	2
Competition Pool/Indoor	3	-	-
Amphitheater	0	1	1
Disc Golf	1	1	1
Skateboard Park	1	-	-
Dog Park	2	1	2

The majority of these facility needs can be met in the improvements to existing parks, and the development of a new district park, a new or expanded community park, and four new neighborhood parks as identified in the Park Needs Assessment.

## SPECIAL USE FACILITIES

The list of facility needs identified in the previous section contains a wide range of facilities. Some of the recreational facility needs are relatively small and will require only limited space and/or capital investment. Picnic shelters, horseshoe courts, and playgrounds fall into this category of park improvements.

The needs assessment also includes a number of facilities that will require significant investment of the Town's resources. The development of these facilities will have significant impact on the Town's recreation programming and delivery of services. These facilities include:

### Aquatics Facilities

Aquatics facilities are a popular component of the Town's recreational programming. The Department currently offers a wide range of aquatic programs. With three indoor pools and one outdoor pool, the Town has an excellent aquatics facility base. Even with its existing pools, demand outweighs supply and there is a need for one additional outdoor swimming pool.

In addition to the construction of another swimming pool, the Town should expand its aquatics offerings by developing community spraygrounds. These water play areas are one of the nation's most popular responses to the need for water play. While not a true swimming pool, spraygrounds provide a fun filled water play experience without the construction and operational cost of a pool. By developing several spraygrounds strategically around the town, water play can be provided to citizens more economically.

### Community Centers/Gymnasiums

The Town currently operates two stand-alone gymnasiums (Community Center and Hargraves Center) and one gymnasium associated with Chapel Hill/Carrboro City Schools (Rashkis). These facilities provide valuable athletic programming space; however, they cannot meet the current demand for gymnasium space and provide very little opportunity for meeting and classroom space for non-athletic programming.



*By 2022, there will be a need for an additional gymnasium.*

The Town has significant need for additional community center space. The ideal community center would include 10,000 – 15,000 s.f. of programmable space for meetings, classes and other recreation activities. The Town should conduct a programming study to determine the appropriate size and location of this facility.

In addition to the community center meeting space, there is a need for an additional gymnasium. Space for this additional gymnasium was included in the master plan for Southern Community Park, but current use is already placing a strain on park infrastructure. Another location for this future gymnasium may be an addition to the Homestead Aquatics Center (HAC). The HAC was designed to accommodate a gymnasium expansion. One other option for a future gymnasium may be on school property.

### **Skate Park Expansion**

The Town currently provides a skate park facility at Homestead Park. This facility is operated by a private vendor, is extremely popular, but should be expanded and improved. The Master Plan for the park provides space for this expansion. The new facility should include concrete bowls and ramps and expand upon the existing experiences that are provided.

### **Arts Center**

The desire/demand for expanding the Town's arts programming was expressed in all public input initiatives (meetings, survey, and interviews). Community Arts was also an important component of the Town's 2020 Vision Plan. It is apparent

from the public's response that public art and arts programming is a valued community endeavor.

In 2010, the Town explored the possibility of converting 523 E. Franklin Street into an arts center. Detailed architectural and engineering assessment of the building determined the renovation cost may be prohibitively expensive.

The Town should continue to seek opportunities to develop a center for arts programming. Program components of the arts center should include:

- Arts and crafts
- Music
- Dance and gymnastics
- Rehearsal space

The anticipated size of the facility is  $\pm 15,000$  s.f. This facility could be incorporated into a multi-use facility. Combining an arts center with new offices for the Parks and Recreation Department could provide a very functional multi-purpose building. See Section Four - Proposal and Recommendations for additional details on this proposal.

### **Greenways**

The demand for greenway trails was expressed in the public workshops, both surveys, and in the stakeholder interviews. The public loves the Town's existing greenways and expects the Town to continue to develop and improve these pedestrian/biking corridors.

As part of this planning process, the Town's Comprehensive Greenways Master Plan has been updated. The 2006 Plan was a well thought out, well written plan; therefore, the update was not a major rewrite of the plan, but simply an effort to reflect current conditions and make minor updates.

As part of the greenways master plan update, the following recommendations or changes were made:

- Changes to address new federal, state, and local funding sources that have become available since 2006.
- Revisions to the plan to reflect several significant land development projects that have been planned or constructed since 2006. These projects affect transportation,

land use, and connectivity. The updated plan discusses intersection priorities and makes recommendations for improving bicycle and pedestrian safety at these locations.

- Neighboring jurisdictions have changed their trail and open space plans in ways that affect the Town's plan. These changes are addressed in the updated plan.
- New initiatives have occurred since 2006 to encourage alternative transportation choices for Town citizens. Close examination of potential connections among the Town's existing and proposed bicycle, pedestrian, and trail networks is recommended to continue the objective of making Chapel Hill more bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly.
- The updated greenway master plan includes recommendations to ensure future greenway development reflects the 2020 Vision Plan.

See the updated plan for additional information/details on plan changes.

### **Parks and Recreation Administrative Office**

The Parks and Recreation Department Administrative offices are currently located in a small building in Community Center Park. Portions of the building are shared with a studio that serves the Town's Community Clay Studio. The building is too small to serve both functions. Relocation of the administrative offices to a new facility would allow much needed expansion for both users.

A more detailed study on the Department's space needs is needed, but a building in the 10,000 to 12,000 s.f. range should meet current and future office needs. This square footage would provide adequate office space, conference rooms, and storage. The administrative office use would be very compatible with the anticipated uses of an art center or community center. Combining these facilities into a single building would minimize construction and operational cost.

The Town should initiate an architectural program and master plan study for both the Administrative Services and the Arts and Crafts component. Section Four: Proposals and Recommendations provides additional information on preliminary ideas for both these spaces.

## **RENOVATIONS TO EXISTING PARKS**

An important component of this comprehensive planning effort was a detailed assessment of the Town's existing facilities. Many of the existing parks are over 40 years old and need repairs. Section One: Inventory and Assessment of Existing Facilities and Appendix 1: Facility Assessment Detailed Cost Estimates, describes in detail improvements needed at each park. The order of magnitude cost estimate developed with the facilities assessment identifies ± \$12 million in needed improvements/renovations.

Many parks need only minor renovations. However, several parks (Cedar Falls, Umstead, and Ephesus) require significant work; the Town should consider developing new master plans for these parks. A detailed planning study, with appropriate public involvement will result in the most economical and effective renovations to these parks.

## **OPERATIONAL NEEDS**

The expansion of park facilities described above will greatly improve the Town's park and recreation offerings, but will come with a cost. In addition to the capital cost noted in the previous section, adding new parks and new recreation buildings will increase operational and maintenance costs. Section Five: Action Plan Implementation provides some general guidelines on anticipated staff needs, as well as program and maintenance costs. Section Four: Proposals and Recommendations also provides an assessment of the Town's current maintenance program and offers recommendations for future improvements.

## **JOINT USE OPPORTUNITIES**

The public is best served when government agencies work together. There are a number of public agencies operating in the Chapel Hill area that have facilities and programs that potentially serve the public's need for parks and recreation. The importance of collaboration and joint use was stressed in the 2020 Vision Plan. The Town should explore working with other agencies to provide services and attain common goals.

The following agencies have missions that may be in alignment with the Town's Parks and Recreation Department:

- Chapel Hill - Carrboro City Schools
- Orange County Recreation and Parks
- Carrboro Recreation and Parks
- University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill
- Private recreation providers
- UNC Healthcare

Section Four: Proposals and Recommendations provides greater detail on the roles of these agencies in the community and avenues for partnerships.

## **CAPITAL NEEDS**

The development of a district park, a community park, four neighborhood parks, 8.5 miles of greenway, and a number of special use facilities will require a significant financial commitment from the Town over the next 10-15 years. These new improvements, along with ±\$12 million in park renovations, would require a capital improvement program of ±\$48 million if fully implemented.

Section Four: Proposals and Recommendations and Section Five: Action Plan Implementation provide greater detail on improvements included in the capital improvements budget. Likewise, these sections provide strategies for funding the recommendations made as part of the comprehensive plan.

## **IMPACT OF CURRENT ECONOMIC CONDITIONS**

In the past four years our country has experienced the greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression. Unemployment rates over the past several years have been higher than those experienced since the 1930s. The housing bubble burst, resulting in millions of foreclosures and falling home prices. The failing economy has resulted in significant reductions in government funds. Budget cuts in Washington and Raleigh have placed even greater stress on municipal and county agencies.

Chapel Hill, like communities across the country, is

faced with difficult decisions. Lower home values mean a smaller tax base, and a smaller tax base means making harder decisions about community services. Parks and recreation services are an important component of community life. Studies show that recreation resources add to the quality of life in communities that support parks. Even with this understanding, elected officials must carefully consider how to allocate funds for day to day operation and facility expansion.

The park and recreation needs identified in this planning document are significant, and it is understood that not all recommendations will be acted upon in the next ten years. Instead, it is the intent of this plan to identify a vision for the Town's park system and provide recommendations for reaching that vision. Parks and Recreation staff, working with community leaders and elected officials, will implement the recommendations as financial conditions allow.

**Table 5-1**  
**CHAPEL HILL PARKS AND RECREATION**  
**CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

<b>Capital Improvement and Land Acquisition</b>	<b>10 Year Total</b>	<b>2013-2016</b>	<b>2017-2022</b>
<b>Existing Parks Renovation/Improvements</b>			
Specific Renovations to Existing Parks			
Cedar Falls Park	\$3,859,000	\$3,859,000	
Community Center Park	\$924,318	\$924,318	
Homestead Park	\$2,497,000	\$2,497,000	
Southern Community Park	\$237,000	\$237,000	
Ephesus Park	\$913,000	\$913,000	
Hargraves Community Center	\$410,000	\$410,000	
Meadowmont Park	\$169,000	\$169,000	
North Forest Hills Park	\$212,000	\$212,000	
Pritchard Park	\$132,000	\$132,000	
Umstead Park	\$691,000	\$691,000	
Oakwood Park	\$285,000	\$285,000	
Burlington Park	\$394,000	\$394,000	
Westwood Park	\$114,000	\$114,000	
Wallace Plaza	\$246,000	\$246,000	
Planning & Design (10%)	\$1,112,000	\$1,112,000	
<b>Renovation Total</b>	<b>\$12,195,318 *</b>	<b>\$12,195,318 *</b>	<b>\$0</b>
<b>Land Acquisition</b>			
N2 - North Central Neighborhood Park (5 acres at \$100,000)	\$500,000	\$500,000	
N3 - Central Park (5 acres at \$100,000)	\$500,000		\$500,000
N4 - Southwest Neighborhood Park (5 acres at \$100,000)	\$500,000		\$500,000
Community Park (20 acres at \$100,000)	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000	
District Park / In partnership with Orange County	NA	NA	N/A
Greenways (40 acres @ 25,000 per acre)	\$1,000,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
<b>Land Acquisition Total</b>	<b>\$4,500,000</b>	<b>\$3,000,000</b>	<b>\$1,500,000</b>
<b>Park Development</b>			
Neighborhood Parks			
N1 - Northeast Neighborhood Park	\$500,000	\$500,000	
N2 - North Central Neighborhood Park	\$500,000	\$500,000	
N3 - Central Neighborhood Park	\$500,000		\$500,000
N4 - Southwest Neighborhood Park	\$500,000		\$500,000
Community Park	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	
District Park	\$5,000,000		\$5,000,000
Planning and Design (10%)	\$1,000,000	\$400,000	\$600,000
<b>Park Development Total</b>	<b>\$11,000,000</b>	<b>\$4,400,000</b>	<b>\$6,600,000</b>
<b>Special Use Facilities</b>			
Community Center	\$2,000,000		\$2,000,000
Gymnasium	\$1,500,000		\$1,500,000
Swimming Pool	\$1,500,000		\$1,500,000
Parks and Recreation Administrative Office	\$2,000,000		\$2,000,000
Cultural Arts	\$3,000,000		\$3,000,000
8.5 Miles of Greenway Trail (\$1,000,000 per mile)**	\$8,500,000	\$4,250,000	\$4,250,000
Planning & Design (10%)	\$1,850,000	\$425,000	\$1,425,000
<b>Special Use Facilities Total</b>	<b>\$20,350,000</b>	<b>\$4,675,000</b>	<b>\$15,675,000</b>
<b>Total Capital Improvement Budget Cost</b>	<b>\$48,045,318</b>	<b>\$24,270,318</b>	<b>\$23,775,000</b>

\* Costs for existing park renovations/improvements have been rounded to the nearest thousandth dollar.

See Section One for breakdown of cost.

\*\* Greenways cost estimate from 2013 Greenways Master Plan