New Hanover County Parks and Gardens
10-Year Master Plan

Adopted January 23, 2017
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I. Executive Summary

Introduction

New Hanover County recognizes the key role its system of parks, recreation amenities, and open spaces serves in providing a high quality of life for residents. The Parks and Gardens Master Plan serves as a guiding document for the provision of public parks and recreation services to residents of the County. This Plan builds off previous efforts and provides updated information about the County’s population, current trends in recreation, and a detailed evaluation of the existing system of the County parks and recreation amenities. This information, along with significant feedback from stakeholders and the public, served as the basis for the development of goals and recommendations for guiding investment in parks facilities and recreational services into the future.

New Hanover County Overview

New Hanover County covers approximately 192 square miles or 122,880 acres. The development in New Hanover County reflects a hub and spur pattern with residential development increasing around Wilmington, the central municipality in the area. The residential growth is predominately concentrated in the northern part of the County due to the availability of land both in area and in cost. The southern portions of New Hanover County are growing at a comparatively slower rate.

As this growth continues, the demand for recreational resources in the northern part of the County will increase. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the distribution of the parks within the geographic limits of the County and provide an evaluation on the equality of these facilities in terms of access by the populations they aim to serve.

Planning Process Summary

A project team that included County staff has guided this project. This team provided input to the consultant team throughout the planning process. This collaborative effort creates a plan that fully utilizes the consultants’ expertise and incorporates the local knowledge and institutional history that only community members can provide.
The project consisted of the following tasks:

**Community/Stakeholder Engagement and Statistically-Valid Survey**

**Comprehensive Facility Inventory and Level of Service Analysis**

**Assessment and Analysis**

**Needs Assessment**

**Operational and Marketing Analysis**

**Recommendations: Goals, Objectives, and Action Plan**

It is important to utilize various methods for gathering input and assessing community needs while developing a master plan. Each piece is vital to the process and should be looked at collectively. Communities that gather input via open forums and surveys, statistically-valid surveys, and national standards tend to get a more accurate depiction of needs.

**Key Issues and Recurring Themes Summary**

During the initial stages of the project, the following Key Issues were identified for focus around the following aspects of service provision:

**Organizational**

**Programs and Service Delivery**

**Facilities and Amenities**

**Level of Service (LOS)**

**Finance**

**Inventory Assessment Summary**

**Inventory Summary**

In general, the overall impression of the County’s park system is as follows:

- County has four large, well-used regional parks.
- Smaller parks are “lost” in the neighborhoods.
- Athletic facilities are aging and are showing signs of overuse.
- Basic park maintenance is performed at a high level of care.
- Playground equipment and distribution is clustered.
- Connectivity from parks to residential areas is primarily by car.
- Pedestrian access is limited based on locations and existing infrastructure.
Recommendations

After analyzing the Findings that resulted from this process (including the Key Issues Matrix, a summary of all research, the qualitative and quantitative data, inventory, LOS analyses, and input assembled for this study), a variety of recommendations have emerged to provide guidance in consideration of how to improve parks and recreation services and facilities in New Hanover County. Recommendations have been suggested to enhance the level of service and the quality of life with improvement through organizational efficiencies, financial opportunities, improved programming and service delivery, and maintenance and improvements to facilities and amenities. Details are provided in Section V.

Goal 1: Continue to Improve Organizational Efficiencies

Objective 1.1 – Establish and maintain a level of service goal.
In consideration of the overall park system, the prioritization of park improvements and expansion should be assessed against program requests. The maintenance and operation of sports-only facilities should be examined to determine if there are opportunities to enhance these single-use sites to provide additional recreational value to residents without requiring significant investments in additional land.

The existing condition of the facilities within the park system should be reviewed in order to focus the next phase of Repair and Renovation funds to improve the uniform quality of all facilities that are currently at a “meets expectations” ranking or below.

Objective 1.2 – Enhance and improve communications regarding Department activities and services.
The Parks and Gardens Department should develop a Marketing Plan that will guide its efforts in communicating and promoting activities and facilities. As part of the Marketing Plan, the Parks and Gardens Department should evaluate directional and Wayfinding signage to facilities on roadway, pathways, and within parks. The Department should develop signage standards for parks and update existing park signs as parks are renovated to meet the new standard. Additionally, the Marketing Plan should be updated every five years and should include marketing strategies that incorporate the efforts of partner departments and projects.

Objective 1.3 – Maintain existing quality standards for facilities and amenities.
The Department should continue to improve and upgrade existing facilities and amenities as well as address low scoring components through the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Additionally, the Department should develop both a Fixed Asset Replacement and a Deferred Maintenance Plan. Facility maintenance performed by third party vendors should be assessed bi-annually to ensure that standards are being followed and park quality is being maintained economically.

Objective 1.4 – Increase appropriate partnerships within the community.
The New Hanover County Parks and Gardens Department currently partners with a number of agencies to provide programs and activities to the community. The Department should continue to explore additional opportunities as well as build on its existing partnerships.

Objective 1.5 – Staff to meet current demand and maintain established quality of service.
It is important to evaluate staffing levels to maintain current performance standards. This may require new positions in the Department.
Goal 2: Increase Financial Opportunities

Objective 2.1 – Explore Additional Funding Options.
The Department should continue to explore opportunities and develop strategies to seek alternative funding sources that include donations, grants, and sponsorships.

Objective 2.2 – Establish a Best Practice Cost Recovery and Pricing Philosophy and Practice.
The Department currently has a fee schedule, but it varies based on the different service areas. The Parks and Gardens Department should consider a pricing methodology to determine a consistent method of pricing activities and services throughout the Department. The new resource allocation and cost recovery philosophy, model, and policy should be grounded in the values, vision, and mission of New Hanover County, while generating adequate revenues to sustain New Hanover County facilities, parks, programs, and services. It should be reviewed annually.

Objective 2.3 – Explore opportunities to increase sponsorships.
The Department should continue to explore additional sponsorship opportunities and build on existing sponsorships.

Objective 2.4 – Determine if and when it may be appropriate to finance particular projects within the long-term Master Plan.
Project financing would depend of project priority, cost, and the County’s overall capacity for debt at that given time.

Objective 2.5 – Pursue grant and philanthropic opportunities.
The Parks and Gardens Department should continue to pursue any and all grant opportunities at the federal, state, regional, and local levels.

Goal 3: Continue to Improve Programs and Service Delivery

Objective 3.1 – Explore opportunities to increase recreational opportunities based on demand and trends.
The Department should continue to look for opportunities to expand recreational programs and activities based on community demand and current trends. As new programs and services are developed and implemented, continue to create a balance between passive and active recreation.

Objective 3.2 – Explore opportunities to increase the number of community events based on demand and trends.
The Department should continue to look for opportunities to expand community special events.

Objective 3.3 – Work with other service providers to develop programs and service to meet demand and trends.
Continue to look for opportunities to expand programs while working with Other Service Providers within the County, and formalize these agreements in writing.
Goal 4: Maintain and Improve Facilities and Amenities

**Objective 4.1 – Maintain and improve existing facilities.**
The Department should continue to implement existing plans, the CIP, and the Master Plan. Additionally, through a Deferred Maintenance Plan, the Department needs to address the backlog of maintenance that will address low scoring components identified as part of the inventory.

**Objective 4.2 – Expand greenways, bike paths, trails, and connectivity.**
The Department should continue to implement the existing Comprehensive Greenway Plan and update as needed based on annual reviews.

**Objective 4.3 – Develop additional recreational facilities and amenities.**
The Department should continue to explore opportunities to add additional indoor recreation space through partnerships, purchase of an existing facility, or construction of a Community Center or Fieldhouse. Another area for expansion identified by the community was opportunities to provide non-traditional recreation opportunities such as pickleball, stand-up paddle boarding, or expanded equestrian services.

**Objective 4.4 – Develop new amenities at existing parks based on level of service analysis.**
The Department should look for opportunities to add parks and greenways, bike paths, and trails in new growth areas. In addition, based on the Level of Service analysis, the Department should look for opportunities to add new components at existing parks where the level of service is below threshold.

**Objective 4.5 – Develop individual Park Master Plans.**
Based on the Inventory and Level of Service recommendations in the Master Plan, develop individual park master plans to address low scoring components and repurpose spaces for better usage.

**Objective 4.6 – Improve parking at parks and popular venues.**
The Department should continue to monitor parking during peak usage times and explore the need to improve or develop parking plans to accommodate events.

**Objective 4.7 – Continue to improve ADA accessibility at all facilities.**
Parks and Gardens does not currently have an ADA Accessibility Transition Plan, which identifies needed changes during a self-evaluation process. The Department needs to conduct a self-evaluation and develop a comprehensive transition plan.

**Objective 4.8 – Upgrade convenience and customer service amenities to existing facilities.**
As the Department is making upgrades to and improving existing facilities, it should explore opportunities to add shade, storage, security lighting, synthetic turf, and other amenities appropriately at existing facility.

**Objective 4.9 – Identify gaps that are in need of service.**
Based on population growth and loss of developable land, the Department needs to continue to assess opportunities for future park development.
Objective 4.10 – Create plans that addresses development, acquisition, and use of vacant spaces. Develop a plan to identify the current inventory of available, developable parkland for future expansion. The plan should address the current inventory of available, unused, or under-used facilities for future redevelopment, expansion, repurpose, or sale for other uses. A plan should also be developed that inventories all the existing pathways, trails, greenways, and blueways to identify possible connections as well as gaps in connectivity.
II. The Master Planning Context

A. Introduction

New Hanover County recognizes the key role its system of parks, recreation amenities, and open spaces serves in providing a high quality of life for residents. The Parks and Gardens Master Plan serves as a guiding document for the provision of public parks and recreation services to residents of the County. This Plan builds off previous efforts and provides updated information about the County’s population, current trends in recreation, and a detailed evaluation of the existing system of the County parks and recreation amenities. This information, along with significant feedback from stakeholders and the public, served as the basis for the development of goals and recommendations for guiding investment in parks, facilities, and recreational services into the future.

B. New Hanover County Overview

New Hanover County covers approximately 192 square miles or 122,880 acres. The development in New Hanover County reflects a hub and spur pattern with residential development increasing around Wilmington, the central municipality in the area. The residential growth is predominately concentrated in the northern part of the County due to the availability of land both in area and in cost. The southern portions of New Hanover County are growing at a comparatively slower rate.

As this growth continues, the demand for recreational resources in the northern part of the County will increase. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the distribution of the parks within the geographic limits of the County and provide an evaluation on the equality of these facilities in terms of access by the populations it aims to serve.

New Hanover County Vision Statement
“"A vibrant, prosperous, diverse coastal community, committed to building a sustainable future for generations to come. “”

New Hanover County Mission
“"New Hanover County is committed to progressive public policy, superior service, courteous contact, judicious exercise of authority, and sound fiscal management to meet the needs and concerns of our citizens today and tomorrow. “”
### C. Timeline for Completing the Master Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Start-up</td>
<td>October 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Input Process</td>
<td>November 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inventory and Assessment of Existing Facilities</td>
<td>November 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic and Trends Analysis and Projections</td>
<td>January-February 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Needs Assessment Survey</td>
<td>February-April 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings Compilation Report and Presentation</td>
<td>March 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft Master Plan Recommendations</td>
<td>May 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft Master Plan</td>
<td>September 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption by the Board of County Commissioners</td>
<td>November 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. Our Community and Identified Needs

New Hanover County Demographic Profile

Understanding community demographics and needs is an important component of master planning for the New Hanover County Parks and Gardens Master Plan Update. The population data used in this demographic profile comes from Esri Business Information Solutions, and U.S. Census data. A summary of demographic highlights is followed by more detailed demographic analysis.

Table 1: Summary Demographics for New Hanover County, North Carolina – 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary Demographics</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>214,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Households</td>
<td>91,398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. Household Size</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>$50,504</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key demographic trends to reference for future park and recreation planning efforts in New Hanover County are summarized below.

- According to Esri, the estimated median household income for New Hanover County residents in 2015 was $50,504.
- The median age for New Hanover County in 2015 was 38.4, higher than the median age (37.9) for the United States.
- Gender distribution for New Hanover County is 48.7 percent male and 51.3 percent female.
- The annual growth rate for New Hanover County between 2015 and 2020 is projected at 1.38 percent compared to 1.1 percent for the State of North Carolina.

A. New Hanover County Population and Demographic Trends

Population Projections

Although future population growth cannot be predicted with certainty, it is helpful to make growth projections for planning purposes. Table 2 contains 2000 and 2010 U.S. Census population figures for New Hanover County, Esri population estimate for 2015, and projected population in 2020. Based on this data, the County’s annual population growth rate from 2000 through 2010 was 0.82 percent. Esri projected growth rate for 2015 through 2020 is 1.38 percent for New Hanover County. This is higher than the projected 2015 through 2020 annual growth rate of 1.1 percent for the State of North Carolina, and 0.75 percent for the United States as a whole. Based on this projected rate of growth for the County, by 2025, the population is anticipated to be approximately 244,663. The population growth trend is represented in Figure 1.
Table 2: New Hanover County Population Projections, 2000--2025

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Projections</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000 Census</td>
<td>160,307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 Census</td>
<td>202,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 Estimate</td>
<td>214,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020 Projection</td>
<td>229,462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2025 Projection</td>
<td>244,663</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau and Esri Business Analyst

Figure 1: New Hanover County Population Growth Trend

Source: Esri Business Information Solutions

Population Age Distribution

A comparison of the estimated population break down by age for New Hanover County from 2010 to 2020 is shown in Figure 2. The gender distribution in 2015 was 48.7 percent male to 51.8 percent female. The median age projected for the County by Esri in 2015 was 38.4.
The age demographics from age 0–14 are projected to remain at about 16 percent of the population during the 10-year period from 2010 to 2020, while the percentage of residents in the 15–24 age range is expected to decline by about two percent during this period to represent 13.6 percent of the population in 2020. The cohort with the largest population percentage in New Hanover County is 25–34, which peaked at 15 percent of the population in 2015 and is expected to represent 14.1 percent of the population in 2020.

New Hanover County seniors (age 65–85+) are expected to experience a significant percentage growth of 4.3 percent over this time period to represent 18.2 percent of the population in 2020, with the 65–74 age cohort (9.5 percent in 2015) experiencing the greatest percentage growth in this time frame, from 7.7 percent in 2010 to 10.7 percent in 2020.

Race/Ethnicity
Figure 3 reflects the racial/ethnic population distribution for New Hanover County, North Carolina. Esri estimates that 78.8 percent of the population in 2015 was Caucasian, with an African American population at 14.2 percent and an Asian population at 1.5 percent.

The population of Hispanic origin provides a separate look at the population, irrespective of race. Hispanic origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person’s parents or ancestors before arriving in the United States. In the U.S. Census, people who identify as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish may be any race and are included in all of the race categories.
Figure 3 illustrates the population of Hispanic Origin for New Hanover County, as recorded in the U.S. Census. This population was estimated at 5.6 percent of the population in 2015.

- The Caucasian population percentage is trending slightly downward from 79.1 percent in 2010 to a predicted 78.3 percent in 2020.
- African American percentages are expected to decline from 14.8 percent in 2010 to 13.7 percent in 2020; Asian population percentages are increasing very slightly from 2010 to 2020 (from 1.2 percent to 1.9 percent).
- The population of Hispanic origin (irrespective of race), at 5.3 percent in 2010, is expected to represent 5.9 percent of the population by 2020.

Figure 3: New Hanover County Race/Ethnicity Statistics (2010, 2015, 2020)

Educational Attainment
As shown in Table 3, the highest ranking educational cohorts in New Hanover County are those with a Bachelor’s degree (24.8%), those with some college, no degree (22.0%), and high school graduates (17.5%), followed by those with a graduate or professional degree (13.7%). According to a census study, education levels had more effect on earnings over a 40-year span in the workforce than any other demographic factor, such as gender, race, and ethnic origin.¹

Table 3: New Hanover County Educational Attainment, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Attainment</th>
<th>Service Area Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 9th grade</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th to 12th grade, no diploma</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GED/Alternative Credential</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college, no degree</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or professional degree</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ESRI Business Information Solutions 2015 estimate based on the 2010 U.S. Census.

Employment

*Figure 4* provides a snapshot of the unemployment rate from December 2006 through December 2014 for New Hanover County and for the State of North Carolina as a whole. The unemployment rate for North Carolina was 5.6 percent, and for New Hanover County, it was 5.2 percent in December 2015.

*Figure 4: Snapshot of unemployment rates for New Hanover County and North Carolina from 2006 - 2014*

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Household Information

As reflected in *Table 4*, in 2015, New Hanover County had 107,675 housing units with a 48.6 percent owner-occupied housing rate, compared to a 36.3 percent renter-occupied rate. The owner-occupied and renter occupied housing rates have remained relatively steady since 2010, with a somewhat higher owner-occupied occupancy rate of 55.4 percent in 2000. The average household size in 2015 was 2.27.
Table 4: New Hanover County Housing Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total housing units</td>
<td>79,616</td>
<td>101,436</td>
<td>107,675</td>
<td>115,110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent owner occupied</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent renter occupied</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent vacant</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2010 U.S. Census; 2015 estimates and 2020 forecasts provided by ESRI Business Information Solutions.

Household Income
The estimated 2015 median household income for residents of New Hanover County was $50,504, and it is expected to grow to $56,010 by 2020. Figure 5 illustrates the full income distribution estimated for New Hanover County in 2015 and projected for 2020.

- In 2015, the largest income cohort was in the $50,000 – $74,999 income range (19.1%); followed by the $35,000 – $49,999 income range (14.6%).
- Income distribution in the $50,000 through $200,000+ income range is expected to grow by a total of 6.4 percent from 2015 to 2020.

Figure 5: Annual Household Income Distribution Comparison (2015 - 2020)

Source: ESRI Business Information Solutions, 2015.

Health Ranking
The United Health Foundation has ranked North Carolina 31st in its “State Health Rankings” in 2015, up from 37th in 2014. The State’s biggest strengths include:

- Low prevalence of excessive drinking
- High immunization among adolescent females for HPV
- High immunization coverage among children
Some of the challenges the State faces include:

- Large disparity in health status by education level
- Low per capita public health funding
- High infant mortality rate

Obesity levels in North Carolina vary by age. According to the United Health Foundation, 26.2 percent of those in the 18–44 age range are obese, with this percentage rising to 35.5 percent for the 45–64 age range, and dropping again to 25.7 percent for the 65+ age range. A report entitled “The State of Obesity in North Carolina,” found that in 2011 the obesity rate for 2–4-year-olds from low-income families was 15.4 percent, while the rate was 16.1 percent for 10–17-year-olds and 12.5 percent for high school students.\(^2\)

In the 2015 North Carolina County Health Rankings (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, countyhealthrankings.org), New Hanover County ranked 8\(^{th}\) out of 100 counties for health outcomes and 12\(^{th}\) for health factors. As explained in the Health Ranking Report, health outcomes represent how healthy a county is based on, “how long people live and how healthy people feel while alive,” while health factors represent what influences the health of the County. The Health Factor ranks are based on four measures, “health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic, and physical environment factors.”\(^3\)

B. Current Trends

It is a challenge and an opportunity for parks and recreation providing agencies to continue to understand and respond to the changing recreation interests of serviced populations. In this fast-paced society, it is important to stay on top of current trends. The following information highlights relevant regional and national outdoor recreation trends from various sources that may influence New Hanover County parks, recreation, and gardens planning for the next several years. The full trends report relevant to New Hanover County has been provided as a staff resource document.

Demographic Trends

- Millennials lead structured lives filled with rules and regulations. Less accustomed to unstructured play than previous generations and apprehensive of the outdoors, they spend most of their time indoors, leaving home primarily to socialize with friends and families. With an upbeat and with a can-do attitude, this generation is more optimistic and tech-savvy than its elders.

- With varied life experiences, values, and expectations, Baby Boomers are predicted to redefine the meaning of recreation and leisure programming for mature adults. Boomers are second only to Gen Y/Millennials (born between 1980 and 1999) in participation in fitness and outdoor sports. Boomers will reinvent what being a 65-year-old means.

- As Baby Boomers enter retirement, they will be looking for opportunities in fitness, sports, outdoors, arts and cultural events, and other activities that suit their lifestyles.

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• In our country, Hispanic participants and nonparticipants alike cite a lack of access to nearby places to participate in outdoor activities as a barrier to participation more often than other ethnicities.
• The most popular outdoor activities among African-Americans are running and jogging; fishing; and road, mountain, and BMX biking.
• Technology use for finding outdoor recreation opportunities is highest among Asian/Pacific Islander populations. The most popular outdoor activities among Asian/Pacific Islanders are running and jogging; road, mountain, and BMX biking; hiking; and camping (car, backyard, and RV).
• Young adults engage in mobile data applications at much higher rates than adults in age brackets 30 and older. It is also a fact that minority Americans lead the way when it comes to mobile internet access.

Facility Trends
• Design of a community’s infrastructure is directly linked to physical activity – where environments are built with bicyclists and pedestrians in mind, more people bike and walk. Higher levels of bicycling and walking also coincide with increased bicycle and pedestrian safety and higher levels of physical activity. Increasing bicycling and walking make a big impact on improving public health and life expectancy.
• In 2014, dog parks were the top planned addition to parks and recreational facilities in the country for the third consecutive year. Dog parks can be as simple as a gated area, or more elaborate with “designed-for-dogs” amenities like water fountains, agility equipment, and pet wash stations, to name a few.
• Communities around the country are considering adding shade structures as well as shade trees to their parks, playgrounds, and pools, in response to raising concerns of skin cancer.
• A connected system of trails increases the level of physical activity in a community has been scientifically demonstrated through the Trails for Health initiative of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Trails can provide a wide variety of opportunities for being physically active.
• Park and recreation agencies have begun installing “outdoor gyms,” with equipment comparable to what would be found in an indoor workout facility, such as leg and chest presses, elliptical trainers, pull down trainers, etc. Such equipment can increase the usage of parks, trails, and other outdoor amenities, while helping to fight the obesity epidemic and increase the community’s interaction with nature.
• There is an increasing trend toward indoor leisure and therapeutic pools. Additional amenities such as spray pads or interactive fountains are becoming increasingly popular as well. These amenities are defined as an artificially constructed depression or basin for use by children, into which potable water is sprayed but not allowed to accumulate in the bottom.

Programming Trends
• Figures from the Association for Interpretative Naturalists demonstrate that nature-based programs are on the rise. The growth of these programs is thought to come from replacing grandparents as the teacher about the “great outdoors.” It is also speculated that a return to natural roots and renewed interest in life’s basic elements was spurred as a response to September 11, 2001.
Participation in walking for pleasure and family gatherings outdoors were the two of the most popular activities for the U.S. population as a whole as reported in a 2012 report. These outdoor activities were followed closely in popularity by viewing/photographing wildlife, boating, fishing, and swimming. There has been a growing momentum in participation in sightseeing, birding, and wildlife watching in recent years.

In the context of urban development, from the early 1980s, there has been a process that can be characterized as “festivalization,” which has been linked to the economic restructuring of towns and cities, and the drive to develop communities as large-scale platforms for the creation and consumption of “cultural experience.” There are also a growing number of smaller, more local, community-based festivals and events in communities, most often supported by local councils that have been spawned partly as a reaction to larger festivals that have become prime economic-drivers. These community-based festivals will often re-claim cultural ground based on their social, educational, and participative value. For more information on the values of festivals and events, see the CRC Sustainable Tourism research guide on this topic.

Some of the top ten athletic activities ranked by total participation in the U.S. include exercise walking, swimming, exercising with equipment, camping, and bicycle riding.

Nationally, the top five outdoor activities with an increase in participation percentage in the past three years (2014 Topline Report) include adventure racing, triathlon (off-road), stand-up paddle boarding, kayak fishing, and recreational kayaking.

A national trend in the delivery of parks and recreation systems reflects more partnerships and contractual agreements reaching out to the edges of the community to support specialized services.

The majority of Americans agree that preserving undeveloped land for outdoor recreation is important. A large percentage of outdoor participants also believe that developing local parks and hiking and walking trails is important and that there should be more outdoor education and activities during the school day.

Funding Trends

According to Recreation Management magazine’s 2015 State of the Industry Report, survey respondents from parks and recreation departments/districts reporting about their revenues from 2012 through 2014 indicated a continued recovery from the impact of the Recession of 2008. From 2013 to 2014, 44.1 percent of respondents reported that their revenues had increased, and another 44.1 percent reported revenues staying steady. About 48.7 percent of respondents said they expected revenues to continue to increase in 2015, while 44 percent expected no change.

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Marketing Trends

- Mobile marketing is a growing trend. Social websites and apps are among the most used features on mobile phones. Popular social media marketing tools include Facebook, SocialWhirled, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Tagged, and LinkedIn. Private messaging apps such as Snapchat and WhatsApp are being used more and more for live media coverage.5

C. Community and Stakeholder Input

Public input was held in November of 2015 at various locations within New Hanover County. There were a total of nine meetings with focus groups, staff, and teens, in which 75 individuals that participated to give their input.

The meetings entailed focus groups, staff meetings, meetings with stakeholders, and an open public forum. Focus groups were by invitation extended via the Parks and Gardens staff with the idea of mixing area residents and stakeholders with differing points of view to solicit broad-based perspectives. Each meeting was approximately 90 minutes long. A series of questions were facilitated by GreenPlay to ensure that adequate input was received from all attendees.

Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement

The residents of New Hanover County enjoy great diversity of parks and associated amenities. They are generally well distributed geographically and have a variety of amenities at each location, with a small portion of underserved areas. A significant strength of the park system is Airlie Gardens. Many focus group participants remarked on how fortunate the County is to have such a wonderful facility. Moreover, those same participants were very complimentary of the Parks and Gardens staff. The citizens feel that the staff is very accommodating, schedules the facilities well, and communicates well. Conversely, there is some displeasure with the condition of some park amenities, specifically athletic fields. This should not be confused with the quality, though. Many of the athletic fields have reached the end of their life cycle and are in need of significant renovations. Given the County’s coastal location, athletic field drainage is a major source of consternation. General items such as lack of parking, restrooms, connectivity, and safety were all identified as opportunities for improvement. Along with physical improvements, improvement of communication and availability of information is also important to users.

Programming and locations

New Hanover County Parks and Gardens offers a very limited number of programs on its own, though they are very well received by the citizens. Programs like Wellness Walks, Food Truck Rodeo, and the various environmental education programs at Airlie are extremely popular. The Department works cooperatively with many nonprofit associations to administer a comprehensive youth sports program, serving primarily as a facility scheduler. Traditional recreational offerings such as group fitness, swim lessons, and after-school enrichment programming are facilitated by private organizations or neighboring localities. Although they are generally satisfied, they do have an apparent demand for more program offerings. Included among the additional programs are more events like the Food Truck Rodeo, pickleball, exercise/fitness classes, and a County-run introductory youth sports program. As new programs are developed, participants wanted to create a balance between passive and active recreation.

New facilities
When asked to “dream big” the following were suggestions for new parks and recreation facilities in the County:

- Renovate existing parks and amenities first
- Additional multiuse paths and trails that link parks
- WiFi access in parks
- More public access to the water (river, ocean)
- Synthetic athletic fields
- Athletic field lights
- Additional playgrounds

Values
New Hanover County residents value their parks system and feel like they get very good service from staff. Users would like to see an increased focus on safety within the parks as well as greater parking and accessibility, both in terms of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the general connectivity of parks. Citizens value a healthy, active lifestyle and wish for the Department to continue to be forward thinking, keeping up with current trends and community conditions. The Department’s commitment to the outdoors and sustainability is also greatly valued by the community.

D. Summary of Community Survey

Introduction & Methodology
The purpose of this study was to gather public feedback on New Hanover County parks and recreation facilities, services, and programs. This survey research effort and subsequent analysis were designed to assist New Hanover County’s Parks and Gardens Department in updating the Parks and Gardens Master Plan for future enhancements to existing and new facilities and services.

The survey was conducted using three primary methods: 1) a mail-back survey, 2) an online, invitation-only web survey to further encourage response from those residents already within the defined invitation sample, and 3) an open-link online survey for members of the public who were not part of the invitation sample. The analysis herein primarily focuses on responses from the invitation sample. However, open link responses are additionally analyzed and discussed in a separate section of the report, highlighting differences from the invitation sample. It is important to understand how the characteristics of these two sample groups differ, because their response patterns contrast on various questions. It should be noted that generally speaking, the open link respondents are more involved in parks and recreation and may have special interests, whereas the invitation respondents may not be familiar with conditions within the parks and may be making judgments based on their assumptions.
A total of 3,750 surveys were mailed to a random sample of New Hanover County residents in February 2016. After accounting for undeliverable addresses (28 total), 3,722 survey mailings were delivered and 511 responses were received, resulting in a relatively high response rate of 13.8 percent. The margin of error for the 511 statistically-valid responses is approximately +/- 4.3 percentage points calculated for questions at 50 percent response. Additionally, the open link survey received 1,034 completed responses.

**Summary of Selected Findings**

A brief overview of key findings in the survey. The summary focuses primarily on the statistically-valid invitation sample.

- **Familiarity with parks and recreation offerings is relatively strong.** A majority of invitation respondents reported that they are at least somewhat familiar with New Hanover County parks and recreation offerings.

- **Top priorities include pathway and trail connectivity, maintaining and improving existing amenities, and public water access.** Throughout the survey results, both quantitative and qualitative, a few priorities emerged as the most important areas of focus for New Hanover County Parks and Gardens. Respondents frequently identified pathways and trails, maintaining and improving existing amenities, and public water access/boat ramps as important amenities to their households, but amenities that require attention in order to more adequately meet community needs. The prioritization of these three areas was reinforced through the open-ended comments. Generally, respondents who live in a family household allocated a larger sum of money toward expanding aquatics, an indoor sports complex, and adding outdoor athletic fields and courts than those without children at home. In contrast, respondents without children were more likely to allocate funds toward making improvements/renovating existing park facilities and adding more pathways and trails. Ogden residents allocated the most money on average toward pathways and trails and expanding aquatics, while those in unincorporated north county put funding toward renovating and maintaining existing park facilities.

- **Safety and security is a concern.** Safety came up as an issue multiple times when respondents considered the most important areas that New Hanover County should address going forward. Lighting for trails and outdoor facilities was also rated to be highly important. Many respondents took the opportunity in the comment sections to mention that safety and security should be a priority.

- **Local media, the Internet, and email are the most effective forms of communication.** Roughly half of invitation respondents indicated that more communication from parks and recreation would help encourage them to use the County’s offerings more frequently. Local media, the Internet/New Hanover County Parks and Gardens website, and email were identified as the best forms of communication for this purpose.

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6For the total invitation sample size of 511, margin of error is +/- 4.3 percent calculated for questions at 50% response (if the response for a particular question is “50%”—the standard way to generalize margin of error is to state the larger margin, which occurs for responses at 50%). Note that the margin of error is different for every single question response on the survey depending on the resultant sample sizes, proportion of responses, and number of answer categories for each question. Comparison of differences in the data between various segments, therefore, should take into consideration these factors. As a general comment, it is sometimes more appropriate to focus attention on the general trends and patterns in the data rather than on the individual percentages.
Respondents are relatively supportive of additional user fees or bond referendum, but less supportive of taxes. Invitation respondents showed moderate support for increased user fees or a bond referendum. However, conversely, respondents lack support for new or updated taxes and some respondents voiced their concern about additional taxes in their open-ended comments, which conflicts with the notion of a bond referendum, which would require an increase in taxes for the payment of the debt.

Open link respondents are more involved in parks and recreation, have special interests, and are more willing financially to support the services. Open link respondents were more familiar with parks and recreation offerings in the County. Due to the dominant presence of family households in the sample, they showed particularly strong support for athletic fields and youth sports. Open link respondents were also more likely than invitation respondents to support all funding mechanisms.

Current Programs and Facilities
Respondents to the statistically-valid survey were asked to indicate the importance of the availability of local parks and recreation opportunities to their household on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning “not at all important” and 5 meaning “very important.” As indicated in Figure 6, invitation respondents generally noted that local parks and recreation is highly important to their household, with most respondents (85 percent) providing a “4” or “5” rating and an average rating of 4.4.

Respondents were also asked to rate their level of familiarity with current New Hanover County Parks and Gardens facilities, programs, and services on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means “not at all familiar” and 5 means “very familiar.” Familiarity ratings were somewhat lower than importance ratings, with 64 percent of invitation sample respondents indicating that they are familiar with NHCPG offerings (providing a “4” or “5” rating) and a 3.8 average rating.
Facilities and Amenities
Responses to the statistically-valid survey indicated that residents’ recreation facility needs are mostly met by the current County inventory of athletic fields, ball fields, community parks, playgrounds, and picnic shelters. Conversely, respondents indicated that their needs were generally not well met for aquatics and BMX facilities.

As illustrated in Figure 7, amenities rated as most important by survey respondents included:

- Community parks
- Pathways/Trails
- Beach Parks
- Performance/Festival Space
- Playgrounds
- Community Gardens
- Picnic Shelters
- Athletic Fields
- Boat Ramps
Plotting and comparing the facility ratings for level of importance and degree to which community needs are being met using an “Importance vs. Needs-Met” matrix is a useful exercise. Ratings are displayed in the matrix in Figure 8. Using the midpoints for both questions to divide into four quadrants. The Importance scale midpoint was 3.5 (the median importance rating across all facilities); the Needs-Met midpoint was 3.4.
Figure 8: Importance vs. Needs Met Matrix for Existing Parks and Recreation Amenities

Source: New Hanover County Parks & Gardens Master Plan Survey Final Results, March 2016
The upper right quadrant depicts facilities that have high importance to households in New Hanover County and also adequately meet community needs. As these facilities are important to most respondents, they should be monitored and maintained in coming years, but the average resident feels their needs are currently being met:
- Community parks
- Beach parks
- Playgrounds
- Picnic shelters
- Athletic Fields
- Community gardens (on the cusp of low needs met)

Facilities located in the upper left quadrant have a high level of importance but a relatively lower level of needs being met, indicating that these are potential areas for enhancements. Improving these facilities would likely positively affect the degree to which community needs are met overall:
- Pathways/trails
- Boat ramps
- Performance/festival space (on the cusp of high needs met)

Shown in the lower right quadrant are facilities that are less important to most households, yet are meeting the needs of the community well. Future discussions evaluating whether the resources supporting these facilities outweigh the benefits may be constructive:
- Ball fields
- Tennis courts
- Dog parks (on the cusp of low needs met)

Finally, facilities found in the lower left quadrant do not meet community needs well but are also important to a smaller part of the community. Deemed “niche” facilities, these amenities have a smaller but passionate following, so measurements of participation in discussions of future improvements may prove to be valuable:
- Aquatics
- Outdoor basketball courts
- Volleyball courts
- Skate parks
- Disc golf
- BMX facilities

As displayed in Figure 9, the top priorities for adding or expanding recreation amenities noted by survey respondents included pathways and trails, improved boat ramps, botanical/community gardens, improved park amenities, lights for trails, and an indoor aquatics facility. Two facilities were rated considerably lower as priorities for enhancement. These facilities were pickleball courts and horse/equestrian facility/trails.
Programs
When evaluating the degree to which community needs are currently being met by programs, respondents provided moderate ratings, with only a slim range between the top-rated and bottom-rated programs. The programs that were identified as best meeting needs include youth sports, senior programs, and special events.

Respondents provided fairly moderate importance ratings for all of the listed programs, with educational programs, and special events topping the list. Youth sports, cultural programs, and youth programs also received relatively high importance ratings. The lowest-rated programs in terms of relative importance were senior programs, adult sports, and adult programs, though again, the ratings were very similar for all of the programs.

The “Importance vs. Needs-Met” matrix illustrated in Figure 10 provides a comparison of programs based on level of importance and degree to which community needs are being met.
Programs located in the upper right quadrant are identified as having a high level of importance and are also perceived to be meeting community needs adequately. While improvements are less of an immediate priority for these programs, they are important to monitor so that community satisfaction stays strong:

- Educational programs
- Special events
- Youth sports

Source: New Hanover County Parks & Gardens Master Plan Survey Final Results, March 2016
Depicted in the upper left quadrant are programs that are generally important to households but have a lower level of community need being met. Therefore, enhancements to these programs may boost the degree to which respondents feel their overall community needs are being met:

- Cultural programs: dance, music, arts, heritage, poetry, etc.

The programs in the lower right quadrant are less important to respondents, but are also currently meeting the needs of the community. An evaluation of allocated resources for these programs may be beneficial to ensure that funding is best spent to support community needs:

- Senior programs

Finally, lower left quadrant programs have a low level of meeting community needs even though they are only important to a smaller group of households. These “niche” programs are not typically critical for the satisfaction of the whole community, but should be monitored to understand whether or not improvements would be constructive:

- Youth programs
- Adult sports
- Adult programs

As noted in Figure 11 respondents indicated whether their household has a need for various programs and events. The top two programs needed by far are community events (79%) and fitness and wellness programs (75%), with a myriad of additional programs and activities following with support from smaller shares of respondents.

**Figure 11: Household Need for Recreation Programs and Special Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Invitation Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community events</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness and wellness programs</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer opportunities</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental education classes</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult programs (non-sports)</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family programs</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic leagues - youth</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior programs</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic leagues - adult</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: New Hanover County Parks & Gardens Master Plan Survey Final Results, March 2016*
Comparison of Invitation Sample and Open Link Sample
Open link respondents were generally similar to the invitation sample responses across most topics. However, there were some minor differences noted in the open link responses.

- Higher familiarity with New Hanover County parks and recreation opportunities.
- Strong commitment to athletic fields. Many respondents noted that drainage on athletic fields needed to be addressed. Open link respondents also allocated twice as much on average to adding outdoor athletic fields and courts.
- Tendency to emphasize youth sports in importance and needs met ratings.
- Top three priorities for future facilities vary. While pathways and trails was the top facility to be added for both open link and invitation samples, open link respondents more commonly prioritized lights for outdoor facilities, an indoor sports complex, and new parks. Invitation only respondents placed greater preference on pathways and trails, boat ramps, botanical/community gardens, lights for trails, playgrounds, and exercise stations along trails in parks.
- Email is best communication method.
- More supportive of additional financial burdens.
IV. What We Have Now – Programs and Spaces

A. Existing Park System

The New Hanover County Parks and Gardens Department manages over 2,900 acres of green space, sporting areas, boat ramps, fishing areas, public spaces, and walking trails as well as non-park properties, including historic Airlie Gardens and the New Hanover County Executive Development Center. Of these parks and facilities, nine are dedicated sports field complexes, either stand-alone or part of larger school complex. Airlie Gardens is the primary ornamental garden maintained by the department. The Cape Fear Museum Park is an educational garden with outdoor exhibit/art spaces utilized by the museum.

The average park acreage is 55 acres. The smallest park is Riverside Park at under one acre. Veterans Park is the largest county owned park at 199 acres. The existing parks properties can be divided into three major categories – regional park, neighborhood park, and sports complex, which reflect the type of development and the user demand for each County facility. Trails End Park and River Road Park reflect a subset of parks focused on water access with some additional recreational capacity.

The neighborhood parks that New Hanover County manages are located in the older neighborhoods within the County. These parks provide the immediate neighborhood with greenspace, playground equipment, and in some cases, a picnic area. Organized sports fields/team play areas are limited. The neighborhood parks are Kings Grant, Parkwood, and Monterey Heights. The condition of these parks are reviewed in the summary section located at the end of this chapter.

Ogden, Northern Regional Park, Veterans Park, and Hugh MacRae are the regional parks maintained by New Hanover County. Hugh MacRae is centrally located within the City of Wilmington. The Northern Regional Park and Ogden are located in the northern portion of the county, while Veterans Park is located southwest in the county. All four parks have similar base assets. The Level of Service Inventory illustrates the dissimilarities between these regional parks. Hugh MacRae provides the largest variation of park assets including a dog park, garden, fitness loop, and even an equestrian ring. Hugh MacRae is most popular among general use due to the central location. The other sites provide similar capacity in terms of athletic fields.

New Hanover County is unique in North Carolina, as it is one of the coastal counties that has access to the intercostal waterway and the Cape Fear River, as well as coastal shoreline. A large portion of the population utilizes these water resources for recreational activities. Trails End and River Road Park provide fishing and boat access. Supplemental sites providing water access are managed by the Coastal Area Management Authority and several smaller municipalities within the County; however, this level of access will be discussed in the summary findings. The demand for water access will continue to increase as the population increases.

Areas per New Hanover GIS department, ParkPts dataset, 2016.
Map 1: Existing County Parks and Garden Properties

Existing County Parks and Gardens
New Hanover County

Legend
- New Hanover County Parks
- Hydrology
- Municipal Areas
- New Hanover County
- Major Roads

Source: New Hanover GIS, 2016 ParksPoly layer
Figure 12: Map of Publicly Owned Park Facilities within New Hanover County
B. Level of Service Analysis

Information in this section of the plan is from the Level of Service Analysis completed for the County’s parks and recreation system.

Inventory Overview
The inventory of the existing park system is vital for this planning process to understand the physical condition of the target parks and gardens. This inventory builds off the existing county geographic information database looking at each park in terms of park quality, park location, and park size.

Inventory Evaluation Criteria
The quality of each park within the overall county system is important in evaluating the current level of service. Parks that are not properly maintained or do not provide a certain quality of experience to the user will not attract park visitors. By examining how each park compares to one another, park management staff can evaluate and prioritize park improvement projects and identify gaps in coverage across the park system.

The park quality assessment occurred during the physical inventory. The following factors are the primary categories reviewed during the inventory:

1. Age of park
2. General condition of park amenities
3. Verification of park amenities
4. Review of park access
   a. Pedestrian connectivity
   b. Vehicular connectivity
5. Connection to surrounding context
6. Wayfinding

These factors are recorded into a matrix that is used to evaluate park scores and provide a ranking for each park across the entire system. A summary of the findings is discussed later within this section.

For each park, a score is assigned to the observed components within the park. These scores are qualitative in nature and are determined based on the observations of the personnel conducting the field inventory and compared to opinions formulated during the user surveys. The following scoring was provided:

- Poor (0) – the component or facility is not functional or able to function in regards to program intended.
- Below Expectations (1) – the component does not meet the expectation in terms of intended function or existing condition. This can be influenced by equipment’s age, intensity of use, and age.
- Meeting expectations (2) – the component was functional and in average condition when observed.
- Exceeding expectations (3) – the component is of high level of quality, function, well above the baseline program requirements.

These categories were evaluated based on the individual park’s condition as opposed to overall system during the inventory. If the equipment/facility was noted to exist in a condition well below that of
similar equipment within other parks, then it was noted within the matrix as such. The number values then were used to provide a numerical score for the park based on the number of opportunities and quality of opportunities offered.

**Level of Service Analysis Methodology**

Reviewing the level of service, or ability of the parks system to serve its population, requires an analysis that compares multiple factors together to identify trends and gaps in coverage. This level of service analysis will focus on the following relationships:

1. **Distance to nearest park (walkable and vehicular)**
2. **Distribution of park quality**
3. **Distribution of total open space**
4. **Availability of park amenities**

1. **Distance to nearest park**: Distance to the nearest park is an important gauge for understanding the balance between access and convenience of a given park to the target population. Traditionally, this relationship was mapped as a service area for the park using a radial dimension. Utilizing GIS, this study compares actual road travel distance to determine the distance from residential parcels to parks. A reverse of this approach is also conducted using distance from park entry points outward into the community to generate a service area map that reflects the travel distances along the road infrastructure in a more realistic way. Both allow for a comparison of average distance to park as well as the closest and farthest an individual resident may have to travel.

2. **Distribution of park quality**: Using the service areas defined above, the next step in analysis is to compare the quality of parks and how they are distributed across the County. This is done by weighting the parks based on the number and quality of amenities to allow for an evaluation of where the highest quality parks are in comparison to the residential centers within the County.

3. **Distribution of total open space**: Using the service area approach, a comparison of the amount of parkland available per person within the respective service area will help evaluate if the current facilities are large enough to adequately service the users. This is accomplished by comparing the service area to the underlying population estimates as derived from the US Census Bureau projections.

4. **Availability of park amenities**: The Inventory of Existing Parks utilizes park planning standards to compare the total aggregate of park elements to the overall population. Analyzing projected population growth can further determine what changes are needed in the future.

**Park Standards**

While there is not a single industry standard for evaluating park systems, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) collects and analyzes park system data from hundreds of communities nationwide and conducts yearly evaluations with findings being distributed to parks and recreation professionals. The primary tool for this data collection and analysis is the PRORAGIS system. The PRORAGIS system is a voluntary program within which parks administrators register and then input the key metrics of their respective park system including total land managed, budgets, staff totals, and amenity offerings.

Based on the 2016 Field Report, the current average nationwide is 9.5 acres of park land per 1,000 residents. This is based on the overall average of all participants within PRORAGIS. New Hanover County
has an estimated population density of approximately 1,058 people per square mile. When looking at just the counties similar to the size and density of New Hanover County, the park land per 1,000 people ranges from 3.9 acres to 14.9 acres. The median for these communities is 7.4 acres.

For New Hanover County, a long-term management goal would be to maintain the current level of service provided across the county. Beyond a maintenance approach, expanding the provided recreational opportunities to meet and exceed the average amount of parks and recreation opportunities offered by peer counties to New Hanover would have tangible benefits in terms of community retention and increased growth.

Within New Hanover County, there are park systems managed City of Wilmington, Carolina Beach, Kure Beach, and Wrightville Beach in addition to the facilities operated by the County. These other municipal offerings have been reviewed in conjunction to land area evaluations in order to provide a more realistic assessment of the available opportunities within the County for its residents. Table 5 provides a summary of parks and recreation opportunities available to residents within New Hanover County.

### Table 5: Summary of Parks per Jurisdiction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Acreage</th>
<th>Parks</th>
<th>Beach Access</th>
<th>River Access/ICWW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wilmington</td>
<td>646</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrightsville Beach</td>
<td>16.65</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kure Beach</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of North Carolina</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolina Beach</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hanover</td>
<td>1228</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,566.65</strong></td>
<td><strong>73</strong></td>
<td><strong>98</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*ICCW is the Intracoastal Waterway

Table 6 provides a summary of the park and recreation facilities based on the number of amenities recommended per a given population ratio. In addition to determining the count of amenities, this table also provides a guideline for travel distance that is recommended to provide access to these amenities.

### Table 6: Park Amenity Benchmarks

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Travel</th>
<th>Ratio Recommended</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>½ mile</td>
<td>1 court per 5,000</td>
<td>Generally, indoors, should have mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>½ mile</td>
<td>1 court per 2000</td>
<td>Lighted courts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>½ mile</td>
<td>1 per 5000</td>
<td>Locate at multi-purpose sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>½ mile</td>
<td>1 per 5000 (1 per 30,000 lighted)</td>
<td>Generally, part of larger complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>15-30-minute travel</td>
<td>1 per 20,000</td>
<td>Recommended as part of complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>1-2 miles</td>
<td>1 per 10,000</td>
<td>Depends on popularity, youth soccer on smaller fields near schools and neighborhood parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¼ mile running track</td>
<td>15-30-minute travel</td>
<td>1 per 20,000</td>
<td>Locate at community parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Softball</td>
<td>½ mile</td>
<td>1 per 5,000</td>
<td>Can share with little league</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming Pools</td>
<td>15-30-minute travel time</td>
<td>1 per 20,000</td>
<td>Combination of indoor and outdoor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table is provided only as one tool for evaluating the level of service. This analysis also utilizes the comparison analysis information provided by NRPA PRORAGIS. When utilized together, both evaluations will help identify areas of potential improvement as well as guide prioritization based on need.

**Methodology for Measuring Access**

The existing park system has been mapped utilizing Geographic Information Systems (GIS). The data is analyzed in GIS to review the relationships between parks and the served populations to determine if residents have access to the available open space. GIS is also utilized to identify gaps in service areas between parks.

The inventory of data measured to determine park access is as follows:

1. Park locations provided by New Hanover County Information Technology GIS Department
2. Park sites during field visits
3. Park access points added/moved to correspond with existing conditions
4. Residential properties compiled from parcel data within the land use dataset
5. Service areas using the verified access points and residential parcels
   a. Service area mapping includes barriers for pedestrian mapping
      i. Barriers included railroads, high speed vehicular roads, and property boundaries
b. Pedestrian service areas are based on road network. Roads above 35 mph are not included as these represent larger thoroughfares that pose both a physical and mental barrier.

6. Total acreage per parcel within ½ mile to determine equality of park distribution
7. Gaps in coverage identified between parks. All parks are mapped using ½ mile and 1-mile service areas. These represent a 15-minute walk and 5–10-minute drive time for most park users.

Summary of Findings for Parks

Park Condition Summary
The existing parks within New Hanover County, when compared to similarly sized systems across the state, will meet or exceed expectations in terms of opportunities and amenities the parks provide residents. This study has evaluated the parks within the County to each other in order to identify where improvements or efficiencies can be realized. In general, several trends were identified:

1. Large variety of age and condition of parks within system.
2. Improvements are focused at Northern Regional Park and Ogden Park.
4. The number of amenities recommended for the population represent potential for significant capital improvement costs.

The age of the parks follows the development pattern of New Hanover County. Due to aging facilities, improvements will be needed to upgrade the existing facilities to meet modern recommendations for playground equipment. Kings Grant and Monterey Heights should be assessed to identify the value of play vs. cost to maintain. How these parks may be utilized to provide additional park amenities will be discussed in the summary of amenities subsection.

The regional parks are the focus of the parks department for upgrades and providing locations for new amenities. The exception to this trend is Arrowhead Park, which is a community-scaled park larger than Kings Grant. These regional parks have a higher recreation value because of the greater number and variety of activities they can provide which draw more users to them.

Provided Parkland
Comparing overall park land to total population, New Hanover County provides over 89 percent of the total recommended parkland. If the acreage for the City of Wilmington, local municipalities, and State of North Carolina park areas are added in, this percentage is even higher. This type of comparison is important in planning for future park growth as it allows the park system to be compared to peer communities. This will help maximize opportunities provided, while limiting the amount of capital needed to close the gap in acreage as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Parkland Summary to Population based on 2015 population estimates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park availability</th>
<th>Provided Acreage</th>
<th>Acres of Parkland per 1,000 (current)</th>
<th>Acres of Parkland per 1,000 (proj 2025)</th>
<th>Deficit in acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

New Hanover County, North Carolina
Looking at the table above, there appears to be a relatively high level of managed parkland available for the residents of New Hanover County. Based on current population projections, there are roughly 12 acres per person of active parkland when all of the publicly owned active parks are included. Looking at just New Hanover County parks, the ratio drops to 5.51 acres per person. The current national average is 7.3 acres per 1,000 people per the 2016 annual report issued by the NRPA. Looking at a policy of maintaining the existing level of service, by 2025, a minimum of 167.95 acres will need to be added within the County to maintain the 5.51 acre per 1,000 population rate. If County leaders shift from a maintaining stance to one of being more competitive with peer counties, then a countywide goal of adding a minimum of 368.1 acres should be targeted.

Currently, the parks are concentrated in clusters within the county; this is a combined result of locating facilities where population growth was occurring and where available land was both economical as well as developable. As the park system is expanded in the future, it will be important to consider the following points:

1. Athletic field access is predominately found in the north portion of the county.
2. The county maintains small neighborhood parks in several neighborhoods; low usage was recorded during on-site inventory.
3. Consider need for facilities in northeast portion of county near Porter’s Neck vicinity.
4. Future athletic facility construction needs to be evaluated based on improving geographic distribution of fields around the county to better serve the populations based on the road infrastructure.
5. Transportation to the park sites is predominately car based.

A different way of looking at this is illustrated in Figure 13, which shows the distribution of park acreage across the whole county. The symbols are scaled to represent the percentage of the total park maintained by the County. This allows for a visual comparison of the park area across the county. As shown in the dots, the majority of park land operated by the County is located in the northern part of the County. This distribution is further defined when looking at how the service areas overlap the specific clusters of parks based on the current access routes.

---

Figure 13: Existing Park Distribution by Percentage of Acreage

Distribution of Park Area
Symbol by Size in Acres

- Riverside Park
- Northern Regional
- Blue Clay Bike Park
- Trask MS
- Smith Creek Park
- Parkwood Park
- Kings Grant Park
- Ogden Park
- EDC
- Airlie Gardens
- Hugh MacRae Park
- Trails End Park
- Arrowhead Park
- River Road Park
- Veterans Park
- Myrtle Grove MS
- Monterey Heights
- Snows Cut Park

Legend

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acreage of Park / Total Park System</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.00 - 0.570</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.571 - 2.36</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.37 - 5.37</td>
<td>▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.38 - 11.0</td>
<td>▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.1 - 17.2</td>
<td>▲</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Roads
- Major Roads
- Hydrology
- County Boundary

DRAFT
January 2016

New Hanover County, North Carolina
Provided Amenities
Using the guidelines listed in the section above, the total provided amenities have been compared to both the estimated 2015 and 2025 populations. These are the two estimates provided by the U.S. Census Bureau. **Table 8** summarizes the total amenities provided within the County compared to park guidelines initially published by the National Recreation and Park Association (Lancaster 1990).

These figures are provided as a loose guideline only using historical NRPA findings, these numbers do not reflect the capacities maintained by peer communities to New Hanover County. The intent of this table is to provide a neutral comparison of the current level of service provided to residents of New Hanover County.

**Table 8: Park Amenities Provided**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amenity type</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
<th>Recommended</th>
<th>Provided (element)</th>
<th>Total Publicly Owned within NHC</th>
<th>Lighted Public field/court</th>
<th>Est. 2015</th>
<th>Est. 2025</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/4 Mile Track</td>
<td>1 per 20,000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>220,261</td>
<td>245,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+4.0</td>
<td>+2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>1 per 5,000</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-22</td>
<td>-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>1 per 5,000</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-8.5</td>
<td>-14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog Park</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing access</td>
<td>1 per 10,000</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-14</td>
<td>-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>1 per 20,000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frisbee Golf</td>
<td>1 per 20,000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-8.0</td>
<td>-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>1 per 50,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-3.0</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayak Access</td>
<td>1 per 50,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Boat Access</td>
<td>1 per 50,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+7</td>
<td>+7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain Bike Trail</td>
<td>1 per 10,000</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-13</td>
<td>-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skate Park (coming 2016/2017)</td>
<td>1 per 20,000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-8</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>1 per 10,000</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>+7.5</td>
<td>+4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Softball</td>
<td>1 per 5,000</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-22</td>
<td>-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming Pool</td>
<td>1 per 20,000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-8</td>
<td>-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>1 per 2,000</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td>-28</td>
<td>-44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While **Table 8** illustrates a number of potential deficiencies in terms of facilities provided to population, New Hanover County meets and exceeds several peer counties in terms of facilities provided and overall open space area.
The largest issues are with how the ratios are determined, in a county like New Hanover where the population is predominately middle aged or older with a lower under 18 population, these ratios do not coincide with the survey results conducted as part of the site assessment and public outreach part of the master plan process.

A key example of shortcomings for ratio-based evaluations is regarding the quantity of soccer and baseball fields. Using a straight ratio method, over 44 baseball fields and 22 soccer fields are needed. This ratio does not account for the use of lighting, which can greatly increase play times/service windows for each field. Based on current needs and projected demand, there is a need for at least 10 of the existing fields to be lighted in order to increase capacity. In addition, the need for adding new fields should also be considered in order to continue to meet current population growth and increased program use by both the schools and the recreational users. Increasing the playability of the fields through the conversion of natural turf fields to synthetic turf fields will also further improve on the capacity by reducing/eliminating the impact that seasonal rain can have on the availability of the field.

In contrast, the survey showed that the general users felt there were enough athletic fields for soccer and baseball ranked as high needs and of being met adequately. The quality of the current fields and their usability during periods of seasonal rain and at evening hours was an issue that results in a higher demand than the number of facilities can provide. This is based both on the drainage capacity of a number of the existing fields as well as the hours of access available based on current shared use schedules as well as whether or not the fields are lit providing extended evening play during fall and winter months.

*Table 9* provides a comparison of how the New Hanover park system compares to county peers on PRORAGIS. When looking at this table, it is of note that New Hanover matches or exceeds Cabarrus in terms of parks maintained and acreage provided. In other areas, based on the data reporting from PRORAGIS, New Hanover is deficient in programming and amenities when compared to these listings. Additional categories have New Hanover in a top three of providers.
# Table 9: New Hanover County and Benchmarked Communities

## GENERAL PARK SITES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>New Hanover County Parks &amp; Gardens, NC</th>
<th>Cabarrus County Active Living and Parks, NC</th>
<th>Frederick Co Parks &amp; Recreation, MD</th>
<th>Martin County Parks and Recreation, FL</th>
<th>McHenry Co. Conservation District, IL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Data</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of parks maintained</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total acres of parks maintained (do not include non-park sites)</td>
<td>1,228</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>2,096</td>
<td>1,521</td>
<td>25,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total parkland acres that are developed</td>
<td>49.0%</td>
<td>97.9%</td>
<td>85.0%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total acres of developed parkland that your agency maintains</td>
<td>1,182</td>
<td>1,750</td>
<td>682</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Park Facilities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aquatics - outdoor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaches</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boat Ramps/Water Entry</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Splash Pads</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming Pools</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball Courts</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball Courts - half courts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis Courts - poured surface</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Athletic Fields</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diamonds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball - Youth</td>
<td>17 w/lights</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball Adult</td>
<td>4 (3 w/lights)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Softball Fields - Youth</td>
<td>3 (w/lights)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Softball fields - Adult</td>
<td>2 (1 w/lights)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tee-Ball</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rectangular Fields</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-purpose Rectangular Fields</td>
<td>27.5 (12.5 w/lights)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cricket Field</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Field Hockey Field</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football Field</td>
<td>11 (8 w/lights)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer field - Adult</td>
<td>27 (12 w/lights)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Winter Facilities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice rink (outdoor only)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sledging Hill</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skate Park</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playgrounds</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Accessible</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totlots</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BMX track</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archery range</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Picnic tables</strong></td>
<td>154</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>426</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Picnic shelters</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>144</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Restrooms (Restroom buildings)</strong></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parking spaces</strong></td>
<td>424</td>
<td>897</td>
<td>2,800</td>
<td>4,982</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concessions (Concession buildings)</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multi-use trails</strong></td>
<td>7/4.5 miles</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dog Park</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Park Quality

The difference in facility condition among the sports complexes is evident. This difference in condition is likely linked to age and type of facility. The sports facilities located at Northern Regional Park and at Veterans Park exceed expectations for a park system of this size. Each of the regional parks has a unique character while providing the same level of service overall. Veterans Park is mostly used as a multi-sport complex with facilities distributed amongst the fields. The fields, both soccer and baseball, were designed for positive drainage and walkways connect the main competition fields to the parking areas. Parking is spread around the perimeter of the park, providing uniform coverage to the baseball and central soccer fields.

Northern Regional Park recently finished an expansion project that adds capacity to the soccer fields. It is a popular park for the playground and picnic shelters within the shaded/wooded areas of the park. The Frisbee golf course is well known in the area and is very popular when it is not flooded out due to rain.

In contrast, the Myrtle Grove Athletic complex is a much older facility that provides a level of service much lower to that of the athletic fields of the regional parks. Myrtle Grove is located behind the school that shares its name with access to parking at a remote location. The fields are well-used and appear ready for renovation to improve drainage. The dugouts, while serviceable, are not on the same level as those at Veterans Park.

Based on specific user input, the capacity of the soccer fields within New Hanover that are managed by the parks department are overloaded. This is based on information provided by the Cape Fear Soccer League. This experience is a culmination of both available field resources and the conditions of the existing fields. At the time of inspection, a large number of the fields visited exhibited signs of excessive wear in the center of the playing fields as well as potential drainage issues as noted in the detailed site inventories. Refer to the appendices section for the detailed photo inventories and park score sheets.

Park Accessibility

Utilizing the GIS based service area analysis; both the vehicular and pedestrian service areas were evaluated. The development pattern of New Hanover County has followed a hub and spur approach, which translates to large thoroughfares connecting the major population nodes within the County. Connectivity between these population nodes is limited by the fractured nature of the road network, creating longer drive times and resulting “costs” to reach park areas. Costs represent both a commitment of time and resources necessary to reach the facilities.

Based on the vehicular service area, the majority of park land is located in the northern half of the County. Considering all of the park and athletic complexes, residential areas to the northeast and to the southeast of county are not within existing park service areas. Figure 14 illustrates the vehicular service and pedestrian service areas combined. Wilmington parks are not included in this analysis and would provide coverage within the City limits.
Figure 14: Service Area Analysis - New Hanover Parks Department Facilities
The service area analysis helps illustrate the gaps in coverage when using the travel distance as the means to develop the area each park serves. Based on the symbology, the darkest purple represents the recommended distance to most of the park amenities represented by the park standards. If just the dark purple is isolated, the preliminary gaps in coverage are focused in the south and the northeast of the County. The northeast of the County also shows signs of insufficient coverage if residential development continues to occur in this area. The northwest portion of the county near 421 is primarily industrial lands intermixed with some light commercial and a large amount of undevelopable wetlands.

Using the same data, a second analysis has been completed to show the relationship of park land to residential properties regardless of the set service area distance. Table 10 shows the average drive time and average distance from residential parcels to the nearest park. This table also shows the maximum distance to the nearest park.

Table 10: Park Distribution Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Driving time to nearest park</td>
<td>3.6 mins</td>
<td>12.8 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance to nearest park</td>
<td>2.34 miles</td>
<td>9.3 miles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While this coverage is very good in comparison to similar counties as noted in Table 10 above, conducting the same analysis with all of the parks in New Hanover County including those in Wilmington, Carolina Beach, Wrightsville Beach, Coastal Area Management Access points, and State Parks provides a complete look of the resources available to the residents within the County. The locations of these additional parks were added to the base service area analysis with driveway entry points verified by current aerial photography.

The overall depiction of distance between residential parcels to nearest parks is shown in Figure 15. This figure utilizes ArcGIS to measure the distance and travel time along the road network. The importance of this map is that it shows where there are concentrations of underserved populations.
Figure 15: Analysis Driving Distance to New Hanover Parks

Gap Analysis
New Hanover County

Legend

Distance to Nearest Park
- 0.04 - 1.00 Miles
- 1.00 - 2.00 Miles
- 2.00 - 4.00 Miles
- 4.00 - 9.16 Miles

Background Layers
- New Hanover County Parks
- Parcels
- Major Roads
- Hydrology
- County
As another means of evaluating the access of residents to park areas, the gap mapping of additional park areas. The study facilities in *Figure 16* shows the overall access of parks by residents within the County. This map assumes driving to the parks based on the overall transportation complexion of the County.

*Figure 16: Service Areas of Publicly Owned Park Facilities*
Using 1 mile as a cutoff, Figures 17, 18, and 19 depict the relationship of existing parks to residential parcels. This method quickly depicts graphically where residential areas are adjacent to parks, but based on the road infrastructure available, shows that physical access can create a perceptive barrier for users of the park. If the drive to the park requires more effort than the value of the activity, then users will not utilize the park resource. This mostly impacts parks that are isolated like Flemington Soccer Park and Riverside Park. Shared facilities like Trask MS help provide coverage, but due to limitations in hours of operation and restricted assets, the limited recreational value would cause it to be looked at as a gap in coverage for anything but soccer/sports users.

Conversely, as shown in Figure 17, the Hugh McRae Park is a highly valuable park in terms of recreational opportunities and it has a high level of residences around it that can utilize the road network to access the park. Further improving the pedestrian connectivity would improve its capacity by connecting users that do not want to have the cost of driving to the park negates the value of using the park.
Figure 17: NW corner of the County

Park Service Area Coverage - Northwest
New Hanover County
Figure 18 shows the clustering of Ogden, Kings Grant, Smith Creek, and Parkwood Parks. The residences have a high level of access to these parks, which is a stark comparison when looking at the residences along the intercostal waterway. The need for connectivity and or a new recreational offering may be warranted to provide service to residences in the northeastern portion of this map as shown.

Figure 18: NE corner of the County
Figure 19: South area of the County
The southern portion of the County is comprised of several jurisdictions including the City of Wilmington, Kure Beach, Carolina Beach, as well as un-incorporated areas. Unlike the northern portions of the campus, the parks within this part of the County are more uniformly distributed within the residential areas. There is facility clustering between Veterans Park, Monterey Heights, and River Road Park. All three of these parks provide users with a variety of activities. Trails End Park is a water access point that provides recreational value to county residents, but is limited to providing waterfront access. The same is similar for Myrtle Grove, which provides recreational fields but does not provide access to other activities such as playgrounds or walking trails.

A large component of the New Hanover Parks and Gardens Department is providing athletic fields for use by residents and sports groups. Figure 19 depicts the distribution of sports fields in relation to residential areas using service areas generated by 2.5 and 5 miles respectively. The pattern that emerges from this map is the clustering of sports fields in the northern portion of the County. The south is served by Veterans Park in comparison to the north having service from Northern Regional, Ogden, and several shared use facilities. This service area map includes Flemington Soccer Complex, which is a privately owned facility. It also shows coverage including Cape Fear Optimist Park, which is operated by a non-profit organization.
Figure 20: Sports Fields Distribution Based on Drive Distance

Sports Field Access
New Hanover County

Legend

- Major Roads
- Sports Complexes

Distance by Road
- 0-2.40 Miles (5-10 min drive)
- 2.5-6.0 Miles (10-15 min drive)
- Residential Parcels
- Hydrology
- Municipal Areas

Miles
0 0.5 1 2 3

WILMINGTON
WRIGHTSVILLE BEACH
CAROLINA BEACH
KURE BEACH


C. Level of Service Recommendations

Upon review of the Level of Service Analysis, it can be determined that New Hanover County has a comprehensive park system. Immediate issues are focused primarily on providing a variety of amenities and deferred maintenance.

Recommendations for Existing Facilities

1. Soccer fields are heavily used by soccer league and will need renovation.
   a. Improvements to drainage may allow for higher capacity of play to existing facilities.
   b. Parking improvements and access improvements may allow for a higher capacity of users.
2. ADA access to amenities should be addressed during individual park Capital Improvement Projects.
3. ADA compliant facilities, including playgrounds, should be incorporated into individual Capital Improvement Projects.

Renovation of joint sites to improve functionality will better utilize current assets.

Recommendations for Additions/Future Facilities

1. Water access to river and intercostal waterways should be increased.
   Based on inventory findings, there are multiple beach access points within the County that are maintained by the other municipalities including the Coastal Area Management Authority. Providing additional boat access for both motorized craft and paddle craft would improve facility capacity to keep up with user demand by both residents and tourists. The boat access points should be distributed between the river as well as the intercostal waterway.

2. Accessible playgrounds that are equally spread around the county.
   The County recently developed an all access playground for children of varied capabilities at Hugh MacRae Park. In addition to this project, improving existing park facilities to meet Americans with Disabilities Act Standards of 2012 requirements. This includes smaller projects such as modernization of bleachers and accessible routes. The County also co-developed an accessible playground with the City of Wilmington at Olsen Park.

3. Renovation or transfer of neighborhood park management may improve operations and maintenance within system.
   The County needs to determine Parks and Gardens core services and evaluate existing facilities for providing these services. Current park development is focused on enhancing the regional parks by adding additional facilities and improving on capacity. The neighborhood parks are not large draws for users that are not located within the immediate vicinity and may be better managed by Home Owners Associations, repurposed or sold. If County leadership wants to continue operating the neighborhood parks, expanding on park facilities at each park may improve user volume.


4. Designation of joint ownership facilities to improve in public input. The joint use facilities, specifically the school parks/fields are clearly identified for park users. Improvements should look at better wayfinding to direct users to access points, designated parking areas, and park hours.

5. Additional lighted soccer and multi-purpose fields are recommended. While the County provides a large number of fields, the current trends reflect a high community demand for soccer programs. Based on current field conditions and distribution, additional fields are recommended to better improve the availability of facilities and flexibility of scheduling. As many of the fields were not lit for night play, increasing the number of lit fields will further expand the capacity of existing facilities to assist in demand.

Based on the participation of users within the County, as new fields are developed, distribution of fields should be considered to close the service gaps in the southern portion of county was well as northeastern portion of the county. Currently the locations are densely clustered in the central portion of the County with difficulty accessing during peak travel times.
V. Great Things to Come – Recommendations and Action Plans

After analyzing the findings that resulted from this process (including the Key Issues Matrix, a summary of all research, the qualitative and quantitative data, inventory, LOS analyses, and input assembled for this study), a variety of recommendations have emerged to provide guidance in consideration of how to improve parks and recreation services and facilities in New Hanover County. This section describes ways to enhance the level of service and the quality of life with improvement through organizational efficiencies, financial opportunities, improved programming and service delivery, and maintenance and improvements to facilities and amenities.

Goal 1: Continue to Improve Organizational Efficiencies

Objective 1.1 – Establish and maintain a level of service goal.
New Hanover County currently has a Level of Service of just under six acres of active park land per 1,000 population. Based on the level of service analysis, park land provided by the municipalities within the county, and state parks is meeting the majority of the needs of the community. With the potential for a County population of 244,663 by 2025, maintaining the current level of service provided through park acreage should be established as a management goal. A minimum of 167.95 additional acres of park land will be needed. Included within this acreage should be the development of additional large multi-purpose fields that will facilitate current and expanded athletic programs within the county.

Currently, the County does not provide an existing county maintained beach access. These access points are maintained by the shore communities within the County and the Coastal Area Management Authority (CAMA). Additionally, where the population density will support it (East of I-40), the County should update and expand connectivity between parks and residential areas to ensure walkability for users within .5-.75 miles of each park.

In consideration of the overall park system, the prioritization of park improvements and expansion should be assessed against program requests. The maintenance and operation of sports-only facilities should be examined to determine if there are opportunities to enhance these single use sites to provide additional recreational value to residents without requiring significant investments in additional land.

Reviewing the existing condition of the facilities within the park system, internal policy should be studied in order to focus the next phase of Repair and Renovation funds to improve the uniform quality of all facilities that are currently ranked as “meeting expectations” or below. The focus should be to improve uniformity of park quality at each park. During this process, it is also recommended to consider options for the isolated neighborhood parks and how these may be supplemented through neighborhood groups or joint ventures, or sold for future residential development.
Objective 1.2 – Enhance and improve internal and external communication regarding Department activities and services.
The Parks and Gardens Department should develop a Marketing Plan that will guide its efforts in communicating and promoting its activities and facilities. This will create great awareness and should include all the recommendations in the Master Plan for programs, services, and facility upgrades. As part of the Marketing Plan, the Parks and Gardens Department should evaluate directional and wayfinding signage to facilities on roadways, pathways, and within parks. The Department should develop signage standards for parks and update existing park signs as parks are renovated to meet the new standard. Improved Wayfinding signage will contribute to a greater connectivity of parks, facilities, and pathways. Additionally, the Marketing Plan should be updated every five years and include marketing strategies that incorporate the efforts of partner departments and projects.

Objective 1.3 – Maintain existing quality standards for facilities and amenities.
There was a great public response to make sure that Parks and Gardens maintains and improves existing facilities. The Department should continue to improve and upgrade existing facilities and amenities as well as addressing low scoring components through the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Additionally, the Department should develop both a Fixed Asset Replacement and a Deferred Maintenance Plan. The Department would then continue to maintain and update their Deferred Maintenance Plan to ensure consistent application of maintenance standards and cost efficiencies.

Objective 1.4 – Increase appropriate partnerships within the community.
The New Hanover County Parks and Gardens Department currently partners with a number of agencies to provide programs and activities to the community. The Department should continue to explore additional opportunities as well as build on their existing partnerships. Where not already in place, the Department should ensure that all existing and future partnerships are accurately portrayed in a signed partnership agreement (Sample Partnership Policy has been provided as a staff document).

Objective 1.5 – Staff appropriately to meet current demand and maintain established quality of service.
As recommendations in the Master Plan for programs, services, new facilities, greenways, bike paths and trails, parks, and facility upgrades are implemented, it is important to evaluate staffing levels to maintain current performance standards. This may require new positions in the Department.

Goal 2: Increase Financial Opportunities

Objective 2.1 – Explore Additional Funding Options.
The Department should continue to explore opportunities and develop strategies to seek alternative funding sources that include donations, grants, and sponsorships.

Objective 2.2 – Establish a Best Practice Cost Recovery and Pricing Philosophy and Practice.
The Department currently has a fee schedule, but it varies based on the different service areas. The Parks and Gardens Department should consider a pricing methodology to determine a consistent method of pricing activities and services throughout the Department. The new resource allocation and cost recovery philosophy, model, and policy should be grounded in the values, vision, and mission of New Hanover County, while generating adequate revenues to sustain New Hanover County facilities, parks, programs, and services. It should be reviewed annually.
Objective 2.3 – Explore opportunities to increase sponsorships.
The Department currently has sponsorship arrangements for special events and activities, and it should continue to explore additional sponsorship opportunities and build on existing sponsorships. All existing and future sponsorships should be evaluated to ensure that they are accurately portrayed in a signed sponsorship agreement (Sample Sponsorship Policy has been provided as a staff document).

Objective 2.4 – Pursue grant and philanthropic opportunities.
The Department currently takes advantage of grant opportunities available for facility improvements. Within the last year, the Department has secured a grant from Trillium Health Resources (inclusive playground) and the Tony Hawk Foundation, and initiated an IndieGoGo crowdfunding effort (Skate Park). The Parks and Gardens Department should continue to pursue any and all grant opportunities at the federal, state, regional, and local levels.

Goal 3: Continue to Improve Programs and Service Delivery

Objective 3.1 – Explore opportunities to increase recreational opportunities based on demand and trends.
The Department should continue to look for opportunities to expand recreational programs and activities based on community demand and current trends. The community would like to see additional programs for all ages as well as more special events. As new programs are developed, continue to monitor recreational trends to stay current with programming and demand. As popularity in program offerings and activities increases, continue to look for opportunities to expand programs around working hours and commuting citizen’s schedules. As new programs and services are developed and implemented, continue to create a balance between passive and active recreation.

Objective 3.2 – Explore opportunities to increase the number of community events based on demand and trends.
The Department should continue to look for opportunities to expand community special events. In order to ensure that events reflect the diversity of the community, the Department should engage the community in event development. Community events like the Food Truck Rodeo have been very well received and attended.

Objective 3.3 – Work with other service providers to develop programs and service to meet demand and trends.
As popularity in program offerings and activities increases, continue to look for opportunities to expand programs while working with other service providers within the County, and formalize these agreements in writing.

Goal 4: Maintain and Improve Facilities and Amenities

Objective 4.1 – Maintain and improve existing facilities.
The Department should continue to implement existing plans, the CIP and the Master Plan. Additionally, through a Deferred Maintenance Plan, the Department needs to address the backlog that will address low scoring components identified as part of the inventory. Priority should be given to parks that serve the highest number of residential units. These plans should be reviewed annually and updated as needed.
Objective 4.2 – Expand greenways, bike paths, trails, and connectivity.
The Department should continue to implement the existing Comprehensive Greenway Plan and update as needed based on annual reviews. Expansion of greenways, bikeways, and blue ways will help improve the service areas of the individual park sites and as a result improve the level of service provided to the residents. As new and existing greenways, bike paths, and trails are designed and renovated, the Department should consider appropriate surface materials and construction methods. Crossings at major thoroughfares should be studied in conjunction with NCDOT CIP plans in order to improve the pedestrian experience at Hugh MacRae Park as well as at Ogden Park.

Objective 4.3 – Develop additional recreational facilities and amenities.
Based on feedback from focus group participants and the survey results, there is a need for additional indoor recreation space. The Department should continue to explore opportunities to add additional indoor recreation space through partnerships, purchase of an existing facility, or construction of a Community Center or Fieldhouse. The community also had an interest in an indoor aquatic facility. An opportunity exists to develop a partnership with the YMCA and UNC-Wilmington to construct and operate a County indoor aquatic facility. Also based on popularity and success, the County should continue to find opportunities to install Splash Pads at existing facilities. Through the success of the Trillium grant program, the addition of accessible playgrounds will improve the social and physical accessibility of the overall park system. Additional existing sites should be evaluated for future grant opportunities with a goal of having an accessible playground at each major park within the county corresponding with the overall population distribution.

Objective 4.4 – Develop new amenities at existing parks based on level of service analysis.
Demand for usage of New Hanover County parks and athletic facilities continues to grow, and the Department should look for opportunities to add new amenities to enhance the experience for users. As New Hanover County continues to grow, the Department should look for opportunities to add parks and greenways, bike paths, and trails in those new growth areas. In addition, based on the Level of Service analysis, the Department should look for opportunities to add new components at existing parks where the level of service is below threshold. Where existing trails are available in parks, the County should look to add outdoor fitness equipment as well as playgrounds to enhance family recreational opportunities. Pickleball is one of the fastest growing sports in the nation; focus group participants indicated a need for dedicated pickleball courts in the County. Northern Regional Park would be a good location to develop pickleball courts for both recreational play as well as possibly hosting tournaments.

Objective 4.5 – Develop individual Park Master Plans.
Based on the Inventory and Level of Service recommendations in the Master Plan, develop individual park master plans to address low scoring components and repurpose spaces for better usage.

Objective 4.6 – Improve parking at parks and popular venues.
Parking was an issue that was identified at most of the focus groups. The Department should continue to monitor parking during peak usage times and explore the need to improve or develop parking plans to accommodate events. Another consideration would be to explore alternative transportation options to reduce parking demand.
Objective 4.7 – Continue to improve ADA accessibility at all facilities.
According to the ADA.gov website, “Access to civic life by people with disabilities is a fundamental goal of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). To ensure that this goal is met, Title II of the ADA requires State and local governments to make their programs and services accessible to persons with disabilities... One important way to ensure that Title II's requirements are being met in cities of all sizes is through self-evaluation, which is required by the ADA regulations. Self-evaluation enables local governments to pinpoint the facilities, programs, and services that must be modified or relocated to ensure that local governments are complying with the ADA.”

Parks and Gardens currently does not have an ADA Accessibility Transition Plan, which identifies needed changes during a self-evaluation process. The Department needs to conduct a self-evaluation and develop a comprehensive transition plan. Once the ADA Transition Plan is developed and adopted, it should be updated at least every five (5) years.

Objective 4.8 – Upgrade convenience and customer service amenities to existing facilities.
As the Department is making upgrades to and improving existing facilities, it should explore opportunities to add shade, storage, security lighting, synthetic turf, and other amenities appropriately at existing facility.

Objective 4.9 – Identify gaps that are in need of service.
The Department needs to continue to find and purchase additional land for future park development. Focus should be given to areas experiencing additional residential development in the northeast of the County and the south. The southern portion of the County is experiencing rapid development of the large remaining land tracks and should be considered as a priority. The northern end of the County is also undergoing development along the eastern edge in association with the coastal access points, as opportunities arise the County should look to provide additional water access. The Nature Preserves within the County provide opportunities to maintain water quality while increasing open space for County residents with the installation of Nature Trails for passive recreation.

Objective 4.10 – Create plans that addresses development, acquisition, and use of vacant spaces.
Develop a plan to identify the current inventory of available, developable parkland for future expansion. The plan should address the current inventory of available, unused, or under-used facilities for future redevelopment or expansion. A plan should also be developed that inventories all the existing pathways, trails, greenways and blueways to identify possible connections as well as gaps in connectivity.
The Action Plan

The following Goals, Objectives, and Action Items for the recommendations are drawn from the public input, inventory, level of service analysis, findings feedback, and all of the information gathered during the master planning process. The primary focus is maintaining, sustaining, and improving New Hanover County parks, gardens, recreation, and greenways/trails/bike paths. All cost estimates are in 2016 figures where applicable. Most costs are dependent on the extent of the enhancements and improvements determined.

Timeframe to complete is designated as:
- Short-term (up to 3 years)
- Mid-term (4-6 years)
- Long-term (7-10 years)
- Ongoing (occurs on a continuous basis)

Goal 1: Continue to Improve Organizational Efficiencies

Objective 1.1: Establish and maintain a level of service quality to citizens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Capital Cost Estimate</th>
<th>Operational Budget Impact</th>
<th>Timeframe to Complete</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1.a</td>
<td>Continue maintaining the park acreage/1,000 population ratio.</td>
<td>Purchase and development of 168 acres by 2025</td>
<td>Staff Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.b</td>
<td>Where population densities will support it, consider a Level of Service Standard that accounts for components within parks and a radius of .5 miles per component.</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Staff Time</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Objective 1.2: Enhance and improve internal and external communication regarding department activities and services

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Capital Cost Estimate</th>
<th>Operational Budget Impact</th>
<th>Timeframe to Complete</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.2.a</td>
<td>Develop a Marketing Plan.</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Staff Time</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2.b</td>
<td>Review Marketing Plan annually. Update the Marketing Plan every five years.</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Staff Time</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2.c</td>
<td>Consider contracting with or creating an internal position for greater resource development and outreach. Contractor/position could also contribute to the Department’s donation efforts.</td>
<td>Potential Matching Funds TBD</td>
<td>% of successful donations/$40,000-$50,000 annually</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Objective 1.3:
*Maintain existing facilities and amenities*

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<tr>
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<th>Operational Budget Impact</th>
<th>Timeframe to Complete</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.3.a</td>
<td>See CIP Plan</td>
<td>Staff Time</td>
<td>Short-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.b</td>
<td>Based on Deferred Maintenance Plan</td>
<td>Staff Time</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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### Objective 1.4:
*Increase appropriate partnerships within the community*

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<th>Actions</th>
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<th>Operational Budget Impact</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1.4.a</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Staff Time TBD Potential increased revenue or decreased expenses</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.4.b</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Staff Time</td>
<td>Short-Term</td>
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### Objective 1.5:
*Staff appropriately to meet current demand and maintain established quality of service*

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<tr>
<td>1.5.a</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5.b</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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**Goal 2: Increase Financial Opportunities**

### Objective 2.1
**Explore Additional Funding Options**

<table>
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<th>Operational Budget Impact</th>
<th>Timeframe to Complete</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1.a</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Staff Time</td>
<td>Short-Term</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continue to seek alternative funding sources that includes donations, grants, and others.</td>
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### Objective 2.2: Establish a Best Practice Pricing Philosophy

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<th>Operational Budget Impact</th>
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<td>2.2.a</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Staff Time</td>
<td>Short-Term</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop a resource allocation and pricing philosophy model that is grounded in the values, vision, and mission of New Hanover County.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.2.b</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Staff Time</td>
<td>Short-Term</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establish a pricing methodology that continuously reflects community values, while generating adequate revenues to sustain New Hanover County facilities, parks, gardens, programs, and services. Reviewed annually.</td>
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### Objective 2.3
**Explore opportunities to increase sponsorships**

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<th>Operational Budget Impact</th>
<th>Timeframe to Complete</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.3.a</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Staff Time TBD</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore additional sponsorship opportunities and build on existing sponsorships.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.b</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Staff Time</td>
<td>Short-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure all existing and future sponsorships are accurately portrayed in a signed sponsorship agreement (Sample Sponsorship Policy provided as a staff document).</td>
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### Objective 2.4: Pursue funding for Parks and Gardens Facility Improvements

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<th>Capital Cost Estimate</th>
<th>Operational Budget Impact</th>
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<tr>
<td>2.4.a</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Staff Time</td>
<td>Short-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine needs, timing, and cost estimate by park project for the long-term needs of the park system with those projects being prioritized.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.b</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Staff Time</td>
<td>Short-Term On-going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore options of financing, including pay go, where needed including determining what the County’s overall debt capacity is projected to be in the future.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Capital Cost Estimate</td>
<td>Operational Budget Impact</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Objective 2.5:</strong> Pursue grant and philanthropic opportunities</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.5.a</strong> Continue to pursue grant opportunities and philanthropic donations.</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Staff Time</td>
<td>Short-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.5.b</strong> Consider contracting with a dedicated grant writer to research, submit, and track federal, regional, state, and local grants.</td>
<td>Potential Matching Funds TBD</td>
<td>% of successful grants TBD</td>
<td>Short-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.5.c</strong> Consider contracting with or creating an internal position for greater resource development and outreach. Contractor/position could also contribute to the Department’s marketing efforts.</td>
<td>Potential Matching Funds TBD</td>
<td>% of successful donations/$40,000-$50,000 annually</td>
<td>Short-Term</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Goal 3: Continue to Improve Programs and Service Delivery**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Capital Cost Estimate</th>
<th>Operational Budget Impact</th>
<th>Timeframe to Complete</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective 3.1:</strong> Explore opportunities to increase recreational opportunities based on demand and trends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.1.a</strong> Expand program opportunities for fitness/wellness, environmental education, and adult non-sport programs.</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Varies based on programs Paid staff or Contracted</td>
<td>Short-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.1.b</strong> As new programs and services are developed and implemented, continue to create a balance between passive and active recreation.</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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</table>

**Objective 3.2:**

Explore opportunities to increase the number of community events based on demand and trends

<table>
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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.2.a</strong> Continue to look for opportunities to expand community special events throughout the County.</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Varies based on events and event management</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Objective 3.3:**

Work with other service providers to develop programs and service to meet demand and trends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.3.a</strong> Continue to look for opportunities to expand programs while working with the Other Service Providers within the County, and formalize these agreements in writing.</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Goal 4: Improve Facilities and Amenities

### Objective 4.1
*Maintain and improve existing facilities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.1.a</strong> Continue to implement existing plans, CIP, Master Plan, and, through the development of a Deferred Maintenance Plan, address maintenance backlog for low scoring components.</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Staff time</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Objective 4.2:
*Expand greenways, bike paths and trails connectivity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.2.a</strong> Continue working with other County Departments and partner agencies to develop and expand greenways, bike paths, and trails to connect communities, neighborhoods, and parks.</td>
<td>Will vary based on material and construction Range is $125-$170 per linear foot</td>
<td>Based on length added- Additional staff/contract maintenance costs</td>
<td>Short-Term Mid-Term Long-Term</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Objective 4.3:
*Develop additional recreational facilities and amenities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.3.a</strong> Explore partnership opportunities to provide additional indoor recreation space.</td>
<td>$110-135.00 square foot</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mid-Term Long-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.3.b</strong> Explore the opportunity to partner with the YMCA and UNC-Wilmington to construct an additional indoor aquatic facility.</td>
<td>50,000 sq. ft. $280-$320 per square foot cost (highly variable based on features)</td>
<td>Additional staff time and maintenance</td>
<td>Mid-Term Long-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.3.c</strong> Explore opportunities to provide additional lighted multipurpose rectangular fields.</td>
<td>Varies based on land costs</td>
<td>Additional staff time and maintenance</td>
<td>Mid-Term Long-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.3.d</strong> Explore opportunities to increase public waterfront access.</td>
<td>Varies based on type and location</td>
<td>Additional staff time</td>
<td>Long-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.3.e</strong> Install additional Splash Pads at existing parks, especially at Ogden Park.</td>
<td>$300,000-$500,000 Based on site and utilities</td>
<td>$1,500 year maintenance</td>
<td>Short-Term Mid-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.3.f</strong> Explore opportunities to provide additional lighted baseball/softball fields.</td>
<td>$500,000-$750,000 per field should be budgeted based on site</td>
<td></td>
<td>Short-Term Mid-Term</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Objective 4.4:
*Develop new amenities at existing parks based on current level of service analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.4.a</strong> Look for opportunities to transition some natural turf multipurpose rectangular fields to synthetic fields at regional parks.</td>
<td>$2-3 per square foot for drainage repairs and $5-6 per square foot for turf Plan for $800k-$1,000,000 per field</td>
<td>Reduces cost of maintenance and scale of mowing needs Increased play time reducing demand for new/additional fields.</td>
<td>Short-Term Mid-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.4.b</strong> Look for opportunities to add additional lights to parks and athletic fields, especially at Eaton, Veteran’s, and Hugh MacRae Parks.</td>
<td>$120-$160k per field</td>
<td>$2,000-$5,000 per field annually</td>
<td>Short-Term Mid-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.4.c</strong> Look for opportunities to increase connectivity between public spaces through the development of greenways/bike paths/trails.</td>
<td>Will vary based on material and construction Range is $125-$170 per linear foot</td>
<td>Additional staff time and maintenance</td>
<td>Short-Term Mid-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.4.d</strong> Install outdoor fitness equipment at existing parks with fitness trails.</td>
<td>$10,000-$20,000 depending on kits</td>
<td>Staff Time + needed maintenance</td>
<td>Short-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.4.e</strong> Construct lighted pickle ball courts at Northern Regional Park for recreational play as well tournament play.</td>
<td>$200,000, tournament needs 6-8 courts</td>
<td>Staff time + $500-1,000 per court for maintenance and long term renovation</td>
<td>Short-Term Mid-Term</td>
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### Objective 4.5:
*Develop individual Park Master Plans*

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.5.a</strong> Based on the Inventory, develop individual park master plans to address low scoring components and repurpose spaces for better usage.</td>
<td>Varies based on project estimate $15,000 for small park up to $50,000 per large park</td>
<td>Staff Time</td>
<td>Short-Term Mid-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.5.b</strong> Continue to verify that Other Service Providers are not filling gaps in LOS.</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Staff Time</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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### Objective 4.6:
*Improve parking at parks and popular venues*

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.6.a</strong> Explore the need to improve and potentially add more parking at appropriate parks and amenities.</td>
<td>Varies based on project. $3,500-$5,200 per space.</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Short-Term Mid-Term</td>
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## Objective 4.7:
*Continue to improve ADA accessibility at all facilities*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.7.a</td>
<td>$80-$100,000 planning fees</td>
<td>Staff time + monitoring and reporting</td>
<td>Short-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7.b</td>
<td>$15,000-$20,000</td>
<td>Staff Time</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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## Objective 4.8:
*Upgrade convenience and customer service amenities to existing facilities*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.8.a</td>
<td>Varies based on project</td>
<td>Ongoing maintenance</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
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## Objective 4.9:
*Identify gaps that are need of service*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.9.a</td>
<td>Varies based on property</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9.b</td>
<td>Varies based on project</td>
<td>Staff Time and maintenance</td>
<td>Short-Term</td>
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## Objective 4.10:
*Create a plan that addresses development, acquisition and use of vacant spaces*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.10.a</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Staff Time</td>
<td>Short-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10.b</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Staff Time</td>
<td>Short-Term</td>
</tr>
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Appendix A: Public Input Summary

New Hanover County Public Engagement Sessions

New Hanover County Parks and Gardens Master Plan

Engagement Sessions Introduction
Public engagement sessions were organized by the consultants in conjunction with Parks and Gardens staff. They were held primarily in the County’s Executive Development Center. One session, geared toward teens, was held at Hoggard High School and another session, as well as the public report out, was held in the County’s Government Center. The sessions were held at a variety of times in an effort to solicit as much participation as possible. Participants were asked at each meeting to sign in with their name and email address.

This Public Engagement Summary is a synopsis of issues that were identified during nine meetings with the public, staff, and teens. There were a total of 75 individuals that participated to give their input.

Questions were developed by GreenPlay with assistance from New Hanover County Parks and Gardens staff. The input listed below is a summary of comments made in focus group meetings. Participants in the focus groups expressed general agreement with this input.

Public Engagement Meeting Schedule:

Main Public Meetings
- Monday, November 16, 2015 @ 9:00 AM – Executive Development Center
- Monday, November 16, 2015 @ 2:00 PM – Executive Development Center
- Tuesday, November 17, 2015 @ 10:30 AM – Executive Development Center
- Tuesday, November 17, 2015 @ 5:30 PM – County Government Center

Stakeholder Meetings
- Local Jurisdictions – Monday, November 16, 2015 @ 10:30 AM – Executive Development Center
- UNC Wilmington – Monday, November 16, 2015 @ 11:30 AM – Executive Development Center
- Teens – Tuesday, November 17, 2015 @ 3:30 PM – Hoggard High School

County Employees Meetings
- Parks and Gardens Staff – Tuesday, November 17, 2015 @ 7:30 AM – Executive Development Center
- Project Team – Wednesday, November 18, 2015 @ 8:30 AM – County Government Center
Meeting Attendance
- November 16, 9:00 AM – Executive Development Center: 6
- November 16, 10:30 AM – Executive Development Center: 6
- November 16, 2:00 PM – Executive Development Center: 4
- November 16, 11:30 AM – Executive Development Center: 3
- November 17, 7:30 AM – Executive Development Center: 10
- November 17, 10:30 AM – Executive Development Center: 6
- November 17, 3:30 PM – Hoggard High School: 19
- November 17 – County Government Center: 16
- November 18 – County Government Center: 5

Total Public Attendance: 60
Total Staff Attendance: 15

Engagement Topics
The same set of 18 questions were asked at each public engagement meeting to facilitate discussion and get a sense of community needs, opinions, ideas, and desires. The questions were as follows:

1) How long have you been a resident of New Hanover County?
   ______ <5 years
   ______ 5-9 years
   ______ 10-19 years
   ______ 20+ years
   ______ Not a resident but use programs/facilities

2) What are the strengths of the Parks and Gardens Department that should be continued over the next several years?

3) Conversely, what are the major weaknesses that need to be addressed through the Parks and Gardens Master Plan?

4) How satisfied are you with the quality of current programs offered? Why?
   ______ 5 Excellent
   ______ 4 Very Good
   ______ 3 Good
   ______ 2 Fair
   ______ 1 Poor

5) What additional programs or activities do you feel the Parks and Gardens Department should offer that are currently not available?
6) How satisfied are you with the overall quality of the existing park and recreation facilities provided by the Parks and Gardens Department? Why?

   ____ 5 Excellent
   ____ 4 Very Good
   ____ 3 Good
   ____ 2 Fair
   ____ 1 Poor

7) How would you rate the overall level of maintenance at the facilities owned or operated by the Department? Please identify the location and specifics of any maintenance concerns.

   ____ 5 Excellent
   ____ 4 Very Good
   ____ 3 Good
   ____ 2 Fair
   ____ 1 Poor

8) What improvements are needed at existing facilities? Where are these improvements needed?

9) Are there any portions of the community that are underserved? Please explain (i.e., where and what type of amenities are needed, what market segment needs more attention, etc.).

10) What additional park and recreation facilities would you like to see the community provide?

11) Are there any facilities and/or programs currently available that should be eliminated? If so, which ones and why?

12) How would you rate the quality of customer service provided by the Parks and Recreation staff? Please elaborate.

   ____ 5 Excellent
   ____ 4 Very Good
   ____ 3 Good
   ____ 2 Fair
   ____ 1 Poor

13) How effective is the Department in seeking feedback from the community and users on improving its performance?

   ____ 5 Excellent
   ____ 4 Very Good
   ____ 3 Good
   ____ 2 Fair
   ____ 1 Poor
14) The Parks and Gardens Department’s programs and facilities are currently funded through a combination of revenue sources, including General Fund, User Fees, Impact Fees, and Partnerships. Do you think this is an appropriate way to fund the department?

_____ Yes  
_____ No  
_____ Do Not Know

15) Who are the key partners and stakeholders in the community concerning assisting with the implementation of this plan?

16) What are the key issues and values in the New Hanover community that need to be considered while developing this Master Plan Update?

17) Are there any political sensitivities we should be aware of that could impact the success of the Parks and Gardens Department’s planning efforts?

18) During the next 5-10 years, what are the top parks, recreation and culture priorities for the Parks and Gardens Department?
General Community Response – All Engagement Meetings

Each meeting was conducted by at least two members of the consultant team. One would facilitate the meeting and the other would note the public input and responses. One document of notes compiled all the public feedback and the responses to each question were either emphasized or added on over the course of all of the engagement meetings. The following question responses were the most prevalent and consistently recurring comments voiced across all engagement meetings. They represent the strongest opinions, concerns, needs, ideas, and desires of the citizenry county wide. Items followed by one or more asterisks (*) were mentioned that number of times throughout the public meetings. This does not include County Staff, Committee members, and stakeholder feedback, only New Hanover County Residents who attended the engagement meetings. Please refer to notes and reference materials for County employees’ feedback and responses.

1) How long have you been a resident of New Hanover County?
   - 1 <5 years
   - 2 5-9 years
   - 6 10-19 years
   - 6 20+ years
   - 1 Not a resident but use programs/facilities

2) What are the strengths of the Parks and Gardens Department that should be continued over the next several years?
   - Staff is accommodating *
   - Good facility scheduling
   - Diversity of parks and amenities *
   - Staff listens to different user groups/good communication*
   - Accessibility
   - Cleanliness and safety*
   - Arboretum / Airlie
   - Variety of opportunities / amenities / user groups / distribution**
   - Balance between active and passive recreation
   - Number of parks
   - Affordability

3) Conversely, what are the major weaknesses that need to be addressed through the Parks and Gardens Master Plan?
   - Lack of a dedicated softball complex
   - Budget constraints, lack of funding
   - Size of the area, no new land
   - Knowing the difference between what’s city and what’s county
   - Lack of adequate facility for youth football
   - County resources spent on schools
   - Scheduling of school facilities, general communication
   - Limited field space, overused*
   - Drainage/condition of the fields*
   - Lack of a facility to accommodate large tournaments indoor and outdoor*
   - Lack of athletic field lighting*
   - Adequate staff to maintain current facilities
   - Marketing/Communication
No synthetic fields
Lack of variety of amenities for all ages and user groups
Contention with NHPS
Overlap between City and County

4) How satisfied are you with the quality of current programs offered? Why?
   7  5 Excellent
   9  4 Very Good
   6  3 Good
   1  2 Fair
   1  1 Poor

5) What additional programs or activities do you feel the Parks and Gardens Department should offer that are currently not available?
   - Pickleball **
   - Additional environmental education programs
   - Exercise/Fitness
   - Events/Drop in programs/demonstrations
   - More food truck events and events like it
   - County-run introduction youth sports leagues

6) How satisfied are you with the overall quality of the existing park and recreation facilities provided by the Parks and Gardens Department? Why?
   1  5 Excellent
   2  4 Very Good
   6  3 Good
   1  2 Fair
   1  1 Poor

7) How would you rate the overall level of maintenance at the facilities owned or operated by the Department? Please identify the location and specifics of any maintenance concerns.
   5  5 Excellent
   8  4 Very Good
   1  3 Good
   1  2 Fair
   1  1 Poor
8) What improvements are needed at existing facilities? Where are these improvements needed?
   - Rotate scheduled use for increased maintenance
   - Improve field turf*
   - Better enforcement of park rules – field closures
   - Drainage on fields***
   - Lights**
   - Concessions
   - Restrooms
   - Bleachers/seating
   - Parking: better, improved
   - Shade structures

9) Are there any portions of the community that are underserved? Please explain (i.e., where and what type of amenities are needed, what market segment needs more attention, etc.).
   - Public water access – beaches, backwater, non-motorized, etc.
   - Southern County
   - Central County
   - Downtown Wilmington kids

10) What additional park and recreation facilities would you like to see the community provide?
    - Rectangular fields*****
    - Softball complex*
    - Water access/boat launch*
    - Indoor recreation facility*
    - More lighted facilities*
    - Synthetic*
    - Splash pads
    - Swimming pool – outdoor
    - Indoor tennis courts
    - Trails/sidewalks/bike paths

11) Are there any facilities and/or programs currently available that should be eliminated? If so, which ones and why?
    - Low participation sports facilities repurposed for higher participation sports facilities
    - Spend money on bricks, mortar, maintenance and not programs offered by others

12) How would you rate the quality of customer service provided by the Parks and Recreation staff? Please elaborate.
    
    4 5 Excellent
    5 4 Very Good
    3 4 Good
    2 3 Fair
    1 2 Poor
13) How effective is the Department in seeking feedback from the community and users on improving its performance?

    2  5 Excellent
    5  4 Very Good
    2  3 Good
    2  2 Fair
    1  1 Poor

14) The Parks and Gardens Department’s programs and facilities are currently funded through a combination of revenue sources, including General Fund, User Fees, Impact Fees, and Partnerships. Do you think this is an appropriate way to fund the department?

    9  Yes
    1  No
    1  Do Not Know

    User fees at the same level for all users for use of fields
    Field maintenance fee per player
    Additional markets that could be tapped into
    Educating the community about true costs of services
    Review payment structures for tournaments/field use/race entry fees
    Standardize facility rentals/usage fees within the region

15) Who are the key partners and stakeholders in the community with regards to assisting with the implementation of this plan?

    City of Wilmington
    Business community
    Medical community
    UNCW
    Friends groups
    Youth and adult sports associations
    Local land trust
    Cape Fear Community College
    Land Trust
    Individual donors
    Grants and foundations
    Board of Commissioners
    Youth/teens/community service/Boy & Girl Scouts
    Senior groups
    Service organizations
    Water sports associations
16) What are the key issues and values in the New Hanover community that need to be considered while developing this Master Plan Update?
   - Taxes – ability to pay for things
   - Safety
   - Location
   - Accessibility
   - Parking
   - Restrooms, concessions
   - Committed to the outdoors
   - Sustainability
   - Forward thinking/staying current with trends
   - Community health/activities
   - Connectivity
   - Mixed use development in the County; live, work and play

17) Are there any political sensitivities we should be aware of that could impact the success of the Parks and Gardens Department’s planning efforts?
   - City of Wilmington/ City/County “They don’t play nice”*
   - Budget
   - Cave to pressure/sticking with decisions
   - Good old boy network/perception of power/sense of entitlement
   - Inclusion/diversity
   - Taxes

18) During the next 5-10 years, what are the top parks, recreation and culture priorities for the Parks and Gardens Department?
   - Increase facilities**
   - Increase awareness and outreach to use facilities
   - Relationship with NHPS
   - Solicit sponsorships
   - Trail connectivity between localities*/neighborhood/businesses
   - Playgrounds, amenities
   - Additional parks, trails
   - Additional rectangular fields with lights***
   - Lights on existing fields
   - Major sports complex for hosting tournaments
   - WiFi access in parks
   - New Hanover County Parks app