

TOWN OF OAK RIDGE, NORTH CAROLINA

# COMPREHENSIVE PARKS & RECREATION MASTER PLAN

DRAFT 1.6.2020



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Spencer Sullivan – Mayor  
Jim Kinneman – Mayor Pro Tem  
George McClellan – Councilman  
Doug Nodine – Councilman  
Ann Schneider - Councilwoman

### **Oak Ridge Parks and Recreation Advisory Board**

Tracy Street – Chair  
Phyllis Anders – Vice Chair  
Tom Collins – ORYA President  
Brady Young  
John Garrett  
Kyle Anders  
John Browning

### **Oak Ridge Town Staff**

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## SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 PURPOSES AND GOALS

The Town of Oak Ridge provides public recreation to its citizens as a means of supporting a high quality of life. Studies have shown that ‘quality of life’ issues are very important to residents and visitors. Lively programs and events can also have a major impact on community economic development.

The Town recognizes the importance of *planning* as a means of improving recreation opportunities for all its residents and visitors. As a result, the Oak Ridge Town Council hired McGill Associates to assist with the creation of a 10-year Comprehensive Recreation Master Plan – to include all existing and future park facilities and grounds.

The Town of Oak Ridge’s Comprehensive Recreation Master Plan 2019-2029 provides the framework for guiding The Town of Oak Ridge Council and Staff. The framework for this Master Plan is based upon conducting an inventory of the existing park system, recording site observations, and public comments made at community meetings. The assessment of the existing park facilities, or lack of facilities, will identify the immediate facility needs in the community and predict the future needs of residents.





The other purpose of the Master Plan is to analyze and recommend the addition or renovation of parks, programs, and recreational facilities. Not only does this document include recommendations but it also prioritizes certain projects, such as recommended park upgrades or possible expansion, taking into consideration the identification of user population and the development of recreation standards. The Master Plan is action-oriented and will provide The Town of Oak Ridge with a practical guide for the enhancement of its facilities and programs for the next ten years.

In preparing the Comprehensive Recreation Master Plan, Town Staff and the Recreation Advisory Board guided McGill Associate's team in the development of the public survey and Master Plan goals and recommendations. A key objective in the development of the Master Plan was the solicitation of community input, thereby identifying additional needs for Town residents, such as renovation, construction, property acquisition, development, and operational policies, for both now and in the future. Community input, along with the comparison to State and National standards are the initial steps in the Master Plan process.

State and National Standards were used as a guide to support the recommendations made for the Town of Oak Ridge recreation facilities. Using these standard guidelines, McGill Associates developed a plan which applied specifically to the resident and non-resident users of the Town's recreation facilities.

The Master Plan emphasizes practical and more desirable improvements to the existing recreation system including parks and recreational facilities. It is not designed to be exclusive, but rather to enhance recreational opportunities in the community.

Of the utmost importance, the Master Plan is intended to maintain the type of venue in the Town of Oak Ridge that fosters community spirit, activism, and bonding between local citizens.

The study of the demographic profile of Town residents' is a key factor in making specific and accurate recommendations.

Not only does the Master Plan make recommendations for a ten-year period (2019-2029), but it also suggests the means by which the identified objectives might be achieved. Opportunities for grants, partnerships, and outside funding are recommended as aids in the establishment of a Capital Improvement Plan and an Operating Budget.

The Master Plan focuses on providing the Town of Oak Ridge with an accurate, usable guide for decision-making as the Town begins to implement projects such as:



- Renovating existing facilities currently owned by the Town of Oak Ridge.
- Exploring the possibilities for developing new facilities.
- Developing facilities and programming for future parks and greenways
- Updating policy and ordinances to meet community needs and desires

The Comprehensive Recreation Master Plan is divided into six major component sections:

- Section 1 - Introduction
- Section 2 – Population Trends & Projections
- Section 3 – Existing Park Facilities
- Section 4 – Recreation Needs Assessment
- Section 5 – Goals & Recommendations
- Section 6 – Implementation Plan

## 1.2 TOWN HISTORY

Oak Ridge boasts a rich history of agrarian culture and is known for such gems as the 250-year-old 'Old Mill of Guilford' and Oak Ridge Military Academy.

According to the Town of Oak Ridge Historic District Design Guidelines Handbook, in 1926, Thomas Early Whitaker described the setting of his beloved Oak Ridge Institute (now Oak Ridge Military Academy) as “in the hill country of northwest Guilford, 1,040 feet above sea level; noted for its healthfulness; accessible to the cities of Piedmont North Carolina; ... a rural community of law-abiding, progressive citizens.”

More than a hundred years ago, Oak Ridge’s J.A. Holt, the then principal of the Institute, said Oak Ridge was "finely wooded and well watered with the finest of freestone water, and commanding an extensive view of mountain ranges and foothills. The Blue Ridge, the Pilot, Sauratown, Moore's Knob, the Pinnacles of Dan, all loom up ... within a range of fifty miles. The fine oak groves and natural shaded lawns make it an ideal place for a residence. “With affectionate pride, he concluded: “It has been called ‘God's Country.’”

## 1.3 PRESERVING LOCAL HISTORY AND HISTORIC SITES

The Town of Oak Ridge takes pride in their unique character and the historic places that have survived to tell the story of this Town. The Oak Ridge Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) is charged with preserving history by providing review and guidance concerning exterior changes to existing buildings and the character of proposed new structures.



It should be noted that both the existing Oak Ridge Town Park and proposed park expansion on the property directly behind Town Hall and along Oak Ridge Road exist within Oak Ridge's Historic District. Any new development within these properties may require adherence to appropriate Town ordinances including review by the HPC.



**- END OF SECTION -**

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## SECTION 2 POPULATION TRENDS & PROJECTIONS

### 2.1 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

A review of the demographic information for the Town of Oak Ridge has been evaluated to better understand the characteristics of the community. It also serves as a tool to identify future trends and projections that may influence recreation and park planning. Information concerning age and gender are important factors in determining the needs for recreation in the community. The table below contains the general demographic characteristics for full-time residents of Oak Ridge, as ascertained by the 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Population Estimate.

CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENT
<b>SEX</b>		
Male	3,348	49.8%
Female	3,380	50.2%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>6,728</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>AGE</b>		
Under 5 years	300	4.5%
5 to 9 years	572	8.5%
10 to 14 years	698	10.4%
15 to 19 years	335	5.0%
20 to 24 years	281	4.2 %
25 to 34 years	350	5.2%
35 to 44 years	912	13.6%
45 to 54 years	1,335	19.8%
55 to 59 years	653	9.7%
60 to 64 years	484	7.2%
65 years and over	808	12%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>6,728</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>RACE</b>		



White	5,027	74.7%
Black or African American	628	9.3%
Hispanic	258	3.8%
Asian	559	8.3%
American Indian/Alaska Native	91	1.4%
Some other race	45	0.7%
Two or more races	120	1.8%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>6,728</b>	<b>100%</b>

Sources: 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Population Estimate (factfinder.census.gov)

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, North Carolina’s population grew at an annual rate of 1.7 percent between 2000 and 2010, far exceeding the nation’s rate of 1.0 percent. Population estimates often vary from agency to agency. It should be noted the North Carolina State Demographer’s Office puts the 2017 Oak Ridge population at 7,377 up from 6,185 in 2010 (19.3% change). These population estimates point to the trend happening throughout Guilford County. Like the state as a whole, Guilford County has recently seen sustained growth linked with the growth of the Triad, City of Greensboro. “...some North Carolina counties are seeing higher growth that reflects the area’s popularity among retirees...In the Triad, for instance, 91 percent of the population growth was in Forsyth and Guilford counties from 2010 to 2016”. (Wesley Young BH Media, *Census: North Carolina’s ‘burbs are booming, Triad and Triangle come together*, News & Record, March 25, 2018).

Oak Ridge has also seen steady growth and this trend will likely continue as Guilford County and the communities within continue to be rated as some of the top places to live throughout the Nation. With the Town of Oak Ridge being so close to large urban hubs within the Triad it has become an increasingly popular place for families to call home. Home values, compared to other large urban areas across the United States, are relatively low and the multiple work opportunities within close proximity make Oak Ridge an ideal location. The Town is well connected with multiple state highways which provides easy access to the Greensboro-High Point Metro and Winston-Salem areas.

## 2.2 TOWN OF OAK RIDGE POPULATION PROJECTIONS

### Population Projections

Population projections can vary widely due to intervening factors such as the strength of the economy, availability of jobs, and housing prices. Population projections identify potential challenges and needs that may confront the



community in the future. The greater Greensboro and Winston-Salem areas are often on National lists for best places to live and Oak Ridge provides the location, amenities, and small town feel that many people are looking for in a community that they can call home.



*More youth and adults are seeking active lifestyles as part of their daily routines*

County population projections are provided by the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management (NCOSBM); however, municipal population projections are not. However, the State Demographer's population growth estimate for Guilford County indicates a population increase of 11.4% from year 2020 projections (544,715) to year 2030 (606,724). It is noted that this growth will mostly occur from migration into the county (46,236 individuals), while natural growth changes from births (69,306 individuals) and deaths (53,533 individuals) will have a minor change (increase of 15,773 individuals) in the county's population growth. It is also assumed that this trend of a majority in migration growth and minority in natural population growth will be the same for Oak Ridge. If this 11.4% increase is used to project Oak Ridge's 2030 population then Town could expect to see approximately 8,218 residents.

## 2.3 POPULATION TRENDS

According to the North Carolina Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2015-2020, senior citizens and children comprise two of the largest age groups. The senior population is expected to have significant impacts throughout society because of income levels, population, and unique needs.

In addition, the SCORP mentioned that the number of children between the ages of 5 and 14 will continue to increase. This phenomenon is known as the 'eco-boom'. The parents of these children have delayed childbirth until a later age to concentrate on their careers. This growing segment of our society is a significant user of recreational programming and facilities. The Parks and Recreation Department will have to increase the number and type of activities and facilities to effectively serve this population, both now, and in the future.



In 2018, the Town of Oak Ridge adopted a strategic plan to address future issues that will affect the Town as the population changes. The development of the strategic plan shows Oak Ridge’s desire to provide a high quality of life for both its residents and visitors to the area. As part of this planning effort, the Town of Oak Ridge Council developed a Vision Statement, agreed on focus areas to address, and then analyzed strengths, areas of needed improvement, and opportunities to achieve a collective vision. Recreation is noted as one of the four “Focus Areas” emphasized in the Strategic Plan. The other three focus areas include: Growth and Development, Infrastructure, and Preservation. The vision statement of the plan states as follows:

*“Oak Ridge is a safe and livable community that takes great pride in its natural beauty and small-town village charm. The Town’s rich history and rural roots inspire an independent, family-oriented community engaged in planning for the future while preserving its unique character, historic resources, and open spaces.”*

The Strategic Plan provides both goals and policies aimed at guiding future decision making regarding each of the four focus areas. Below are the goals and policies regarding recreation as outlined in the Strategic Plan:

RECREATION. The Recreation Focus Area includes strategies to address the Town’s active and passive recreation needs, including facilities for active organized youth and adult sports, and passive parkland for areas for walking, exercising, play, community gathering, and open space. Smaller neighborhood parks, wooded/natural areas, and open space, as well as walking paths and trails, are also addressed.

GOAL 1.1: The Oak Ridge Town Park will continue to be a vital community resource and gathering place. Future development at the Town Park must carefully consider the needs of multiple user groups and interests to ensure an appropriate balance of active recreation and passive open space.

POLICY 1.1.1: Small increases in active sports facilities may be accommodated at the Oak Ridge Town Park. No more than 20% of Park acreage should be devoted to active recreation.

POLICY 1.1.2: Potential uses of the Chester Redmon House will be explored after interior demolition and evaluation of structural issues and potential rehabilitation costs.

GOAL 1.2: The Whitaker property will be retained primarily as open space to be enjoyed by Oak Ridge residents for its scenic beauty. Active uses such as practice fields and tennis courts may also be appropriate.

POLICY 1.2.1: Preserve the scenic view along Oak Ridge Road as much as feasible.



POLICY 1.2.2: Provide a network of walking trails throughout the property and connecting with existing and proposed sidewalks and trails along Oak Ridge Road, Linville Road, and the Town Park.

POLICY 1.2.3: Investigate the need for practice fields and/or tennis courts on the portion of the Whitaker property closest to Scoggins Road and on the rear of the Town Hall property.

POLICY 1.2.4: Investigate the feasibility of incorporating equestrian uses into park designs.

GOAL 1.3: The Town will foster neighborhood recreational uses and connectivity through the private development process and by providing trail and sidewalk connectivity from neighborhoods to parks and open space.

POLICY 1.3.1: Public open space should be dedicated along floodplains and trail corridors during subdivision development.

POLICY 1.3.2: Working with the Mountains to Sea Trail (MST) Committee, the Town will support development of the MST through Oak Ridge, as well as additional trails to connect neighborhoods with the Town Park and Whitaker property.

When we couple the Town's Strategic Plan goals and policies with the Plan's vision statement and the desire to develop recreation services for the Town of Oak Ridge's residents becomes clear. To meet the needs and demands of residents and visitors, the Town's Parks and Recreation Department will have to continually evaluate its recreation and ancillary facilities as well as offer more types of recreational programs and trails as the population changes.

**- END OF SECTION -**





## SECTION 3 EXISTING RECREATION FACILITIES

### 3.1 FACILITY INVENTORY



To fully understand the depth of the recreation that the Town of Oak Ridge has access to, this section will look at all the facilities offered. These recreational facilities derive from many different sources, including the following:

- Town owned parks and other recreational facilities
- Privately owned facilities
- County owned facilities
- Other local municipalities
- Schools

A brief analysis of Oak Ridge recreation facilities was performed noting any visible improvements needed for that facility. The necessary improvements to existing facilities can be found in Section 5. This method of study served as a guide for the Town of Oak Ridge in its efforts to develop a plan for present and future needs.



Many of Oak Ridge’s residents and visitors’ recreational needs are met via the Town of Oak Ridge facility offerings. In addition to the facilities owned by the Town, the surrounding communities also provide recreational opportunities.

Guilford County school recreation facilities are made available for use by the public. There are three public schools that are within close proximity to the Town and have recreation facilities typical of most schools such as playgrounds, baseball/softball field, and gymnasiums.

The North Carolina Community Schools Act (G.S. 115C Art 13) was passed to allow “greater community use of public-school facilities.” The Guilford County Board of Education policy for these school facilities states that the Board “endorses community use of school facilities for appropriate purposes. Since school facilities represent an investment of the citizenry for the education of students and for the general benefit of the community and its citizens, their proper use and enjoyment shall be encouraged and permitted when such does not interfere with school activities.”

## **Recreation Facilities Owned and Operated by the Town of Oak Ridge**

### **Oak Ridge Town Park**

Oak Ridge Town Park is located directly across the street from Town Hall, the post office, and the fire department with entrances on Linville Road and Lisa Drive.



The park provides users access to:

- (2) Multi-purpose Fields
- (2) Baseball/Softball Fields
- (2.25 miles) Paved Trails
- (approx. 1.5 miles) Wooded Hiking/Mountain Bike Trails
- Picnic shelters with picnic tables
- (2) Playgrounds
- Dog Park
- Amphitheater/Outdoor Performance Stage
- Concession/Restroom Building
- (2) Small Restroom Buildings

Being within close proximity to the State’s long-distance Mountains to Sea trail there is also a small campground reserved for hikers along. Oak Ridge Park also offers a large open grassy field, a small pond, landscaping, doggie stations,



birdhouses, and seating making Oak Ridge Town Park a valuable local resource that enhances residents quality of life. The following is an inventory of recreation facilities available to residents of Oak Ridge.

## **Parks Owned and Operated by Other Government Entities**

### **Guilford County Parks**

#### **Cascades Preserve (130 acres)**

7359 Goodwill Church Rd  
Kernersville, NC 27284

- Picnicking
- Trails and overlooks



**Cascades Preserve**

#### **Bur-Mil Park (250 acres)**

5834 Bur-Mil Club Rd.  
Greensboro, NC 27410

- Golf driving range
- Wildlife Education Center
- Aquatic Center
- Picnic Shelters
- Playground
- Trails
- Community Center

#### **Hagen-Stone Park (409 acres)**

5920 Hagen-Stone Park Road  
Pleasant Garden, NC 27313

- Wildlife Refuge
- Historical Education Opportunities
- Aquatic Center
- Playground
- Picnic Shelters
- Cross-Country Trails

#### **Gibson Park (200 acres)**

5207 West Wendover Avenue  
Highpoint, NC 27265

- Historic Structures
- Historical Education Opportunities
- Baseball Fields (2)
- Soccer Fields (2)
- Playground
- Picnic Shelters
- Trails



### **Northeast Park (374 acres)**

3441 Northeast Park Drive  
Gibsonville, NC 27249

- Wildlife Refuge
- Historical Education Opportunities
- Aquatic Center
- Playground
- Picnic Shelters
- Cross-Country Trails

### **Southwest Park (513 acres)**

6309 Southwest Park Drive  
Greensboro, NC 27407

- Wildlife Refuge
- Historical Education Opportunities
- Aquatic Center
- Playground
- Picnic Shelters
- Cross-Country Trails

### **County Preserves/Passive Parks**

- Benbow Preserve
- Bold Moon Preserve
- Brooks Bridge Paddle Access
- Company Mill Preserve
- McCandless Woods Preserve
- Rich Fork Preserve
- Richardson-Taylor Preserve
- Saferight Preserve
- Thomas Built Bus Preserve
- County Farm (Mountains-to-Sea Trail, Agri-education, Horticultural exhibits)

## **Guilford County Trails**

### **Owl's Roost Trail (4.34 miles)**

The Owl's Roost Trail has been designated as part of the North Carolina Mountains-to-Sea Trail.

### **Big Loop Trail (2.06 miles)**

Big Loop Trail connects with the Atlantic-Yadkin Greenway.

### **Little Loop Trail (0.8 mile)**

The Little Loop Trail connects to the Atlantic-Yadkin Greenway



### **Wood Duck Way (0.1 mile)**

This trail incorporates scenic terrain with a natural outdoor classroom for learning and exploring.

### **Atlantic-Yadkin Greenway-Railtrail (7.5 miles)**

The Greenway is a paved trail that leads to the Guilford Courthouse National Military Park. Both the Nathanael Greene Trail and the Owl's Roost Trail intersect the Greenway.

## **Kernersville Parks**

### **Kernersville Community Recreation Center**

125 E Bodenhamer St.  
Kernersville, NC 27284

- Indoor basketball
- Indoor Volleyball
- Small multi-purpose area

### **Fourth of July Park**

702 W. Mountain St.  
Kernersville, NC 27284

- Picnic shelter
- Skate park
- Dog park
- Tennis/pickleball courts
- Basketball courts
- Trails
- Playground

### **Bagley Sport Complex**

4700 Old Hollow Rd.  
Kernersville, NC 27284

- Multi-purpose fields

### **Century Lake Park**

309 Century Blvd.  
Kernersville, NC 27284

- Fishing
- Canoe/Kayak launch
- Picnicking
- Spray fountain



### **Civitan Park**

309 Nelson St.

Kernersville, NC 27284

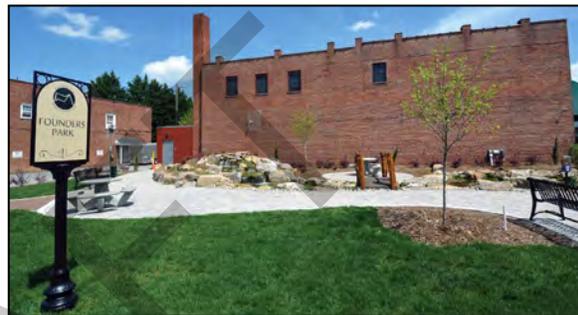
- Picnic shelters
- Sand volleyball
- Tennis
- Horse shoes
- Basketball
- Baseball/softball
- Walking trails
- Playground

### **Founders Park**

101 North Main St.

Kernersville, NC 27284

- Picnicking



**Founders Park**

### **Harmon Park**

152 South Main St.

Kernersville, NC 27284

- Picnic shelter
- Playground
- gazebo

### **Ivey M Redmon Sports Complex**

788 Beeson Rd.

Kernersville, NC 27284

- Baseball/softball fields
- Multi-purpose fields
- Soccer fields
- Hiking/running trails
- Concessions
- Playground

### **Kernersville Community Pool and Water Park**

1113 W. Mountain St.

Kernersville, NC 27284

- Swimming
- Splash pad

### **Kernersville Mountain Bike Park**

567 Smith Edwards Rd.

Kernersville, NC 27284

- Mountain bike trails



### **Old Kernersville Lake**

936 Lake Dr.

Kernersville, NC 27284

- Fishing
- Pond overlooks
- Picnicking
- Walking trails

### **Rotary Park**

134 E. Mountain St.

Kernersville, NC 27284

- Outdoor concerts
- Picnicking
- Farmers Market

## **North Carolina State Parks**

### **Haw River State Park (1,429 acres)**

9302, 339 Conference Center Dr.

Brown Summit, NC 27214

- Environmental Education Center
- Conference Center
- Picnicking
- Fishing
- Canoe/Kayak Portage
- 9-hole Disc Golf Course
- (2) Amphitheaters
- Multi-purpose fields
- Outdoor Pool
- Gymnasium
- Trails (2.5 mi.)

### **Mountains to Sea Trail (1,175 miles)**

The Mountains to Sea Trail (MST) is a part of the NC State parks trails program. The MST is a long-distance trail that spans from Clingman's Dome in western North Carolina to Jockey's Ridge on the Outer Banks. The MST runs through the Town of Oak Ridge utilizing Linville Rd as an on-street portion of the trail currently. A small campsite is located at Oak Ridge Town Park for hikers along the MST.





## **Private Facilities Near Oak Ridge**

### **Merchants of Oak Ridge**

8315 Linville Rd.  
Oak Ridge, NC 27310

### **Oak Ridge Swim Club**

2039 Oak Ridge Rd  
Oak Ridge, NC 27310

### **Mustang Fitness/CrossFit of Oak Ridge**

8309 Linville Rd.  
Oak Ridge, NC 27310

## **Local Golf Courses**

### **Pine Knolls Gold Club**

1100 Quail Hollow Rd.  
Kernersville, NC 27284

## **Public Schools near the Town of Oak Ridge**

Oak Ridge is part of the Guilford County public school system. The public schools serving Oak Ridge include:

### **Oak Ridge Elementary School**

2050 Oak Ridge Rd.  
Oak Ridge, NC 27310

### **Northwest Middle School**

5300 NW School Rd.  
Greensboro, NC 27409

### **Northwest Guilford High School**

5240 NW School Dr.  
Greensboro, NC 27409



Oak Ridge Elementary School

## **Private Schools near the Town of Oak Ridge**

### **Oak Ridge Military Academy**

2317 Oak Ridge Rd.  
Oak Ridge, NC 27310

- END OF SECTION -



## Section 4 Recreation Needs Assessment

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The degree of need for parks, recreation, and open space is most directly influenced by the expectations of the Town of Oak Ridge residents, relating strictly to the ‘quality of life’ to which they aspire. This Comprehensive Recreation Master Plan addresses, as its first priority, the parks and recreation facility needs envisioned by the residents and visitors of the Town of Oak Ridge.

Section 3 of this Master Plan inventories the Town of Oak Ridge’s existing park facilities as well as listing the recreation facilities available at local schools, local municipalities, and private recreation facilities near the Town. It also looks at County parks within proximity to Town. This detailed inventory includes the facilities which are available within each park to create a better understanding of the existing recreation opportunities within the Town. The demographic and population trends (found in Section 2 of this Master Plan) provide information needed to understand the expected growth of the Town of Oak Ridge in the future. This Master Plan will be used as a guide for improving recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

Help Improve Recreation in Oak Ridge!  
**Community Survey**  
Please visit the link or use the QR code below:  
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/OakRidgeRecreation>  
This effort will help inform the Town of Oak Ridge's planning efforts for Parks and Recreation in the community. Thanks for your participation!

Community input and recreation standards were used as the primary method in determining the adequate types and number of park facilities needed for the Town of Oak Ridge. This Comprehensive Recreation Master Plan compares standards developed by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), an independent, non-profit professional organization for park/recreation departments nationwide. In 1996, NRPA published a manual entitled, *Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Guidelines*, which is a widely accepted reference standard for communities.

Standards are guidelines, *not requirements*, for use by communities in estimating the demand for recreation in their given geographic areas. To assure that the Town of Oak Ridge’s System-wide Recreation Master Plan contains distinctiveness, yet versatility, input was sought from its integral components: The Project Steering Committee, Town of Oak Ridge Staff, Town Council, and citizen representatives.



## 4.2 TYPES OF PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

A comprehensive park system is made up of a variety of park types ranging from small neighborhood playgrounds to larger parks with athletic fields, playgrounds, community centers, and open space. The type of park reflects the differing recreational preferences of diverse users. Park models are used as guidelines for fulfilling the future recreational needs of communities. Not all of these types of parks are the responsibility of the Town government; several agencies (federal, state, county, and other local municipalities) play roles in providing recreational opportunities. To further understand the Town's role in providing recreation services to its citizens, it is necessary to understand the elements of a comprehensive park system. These types of parks and recreation facilities may or may not be included in comprehensive park systems and are delineated in the following pages of this section:

- Regional Parks
- District Parks
- Community Parks
- Neighborhood Parks
- Mini Parks
- Linear Parks/Greenways
- Special Use Facilities
- Open Space

### **Regional Parks**

Regional parks are typically very large sites. On these sites, the unique qualities that exemplify the natural features found there, such as diverse land formation, vegetation, and wildlife, are preserved. Most regional park facilities contain environmental centers, campsites, nature trails, observation decks, picnic areas, and open fields for non-structured activities, such as Frisbee-throwing or kite-flying.



**HAGEN-STONE PARK**

When land is acquired for the development of regional parks (or the expansion of existing sites), the land should be comprised of the previously mentioned characteristics and whenever possible accompanied by natural water features such as lakes, rivers, or creeks. The majority of the site should be reserved for passive recreation, with the remaining acreage used for active recreation. Both the acquisition and the development of regional parks are typically undertaken by a federal or state agency.

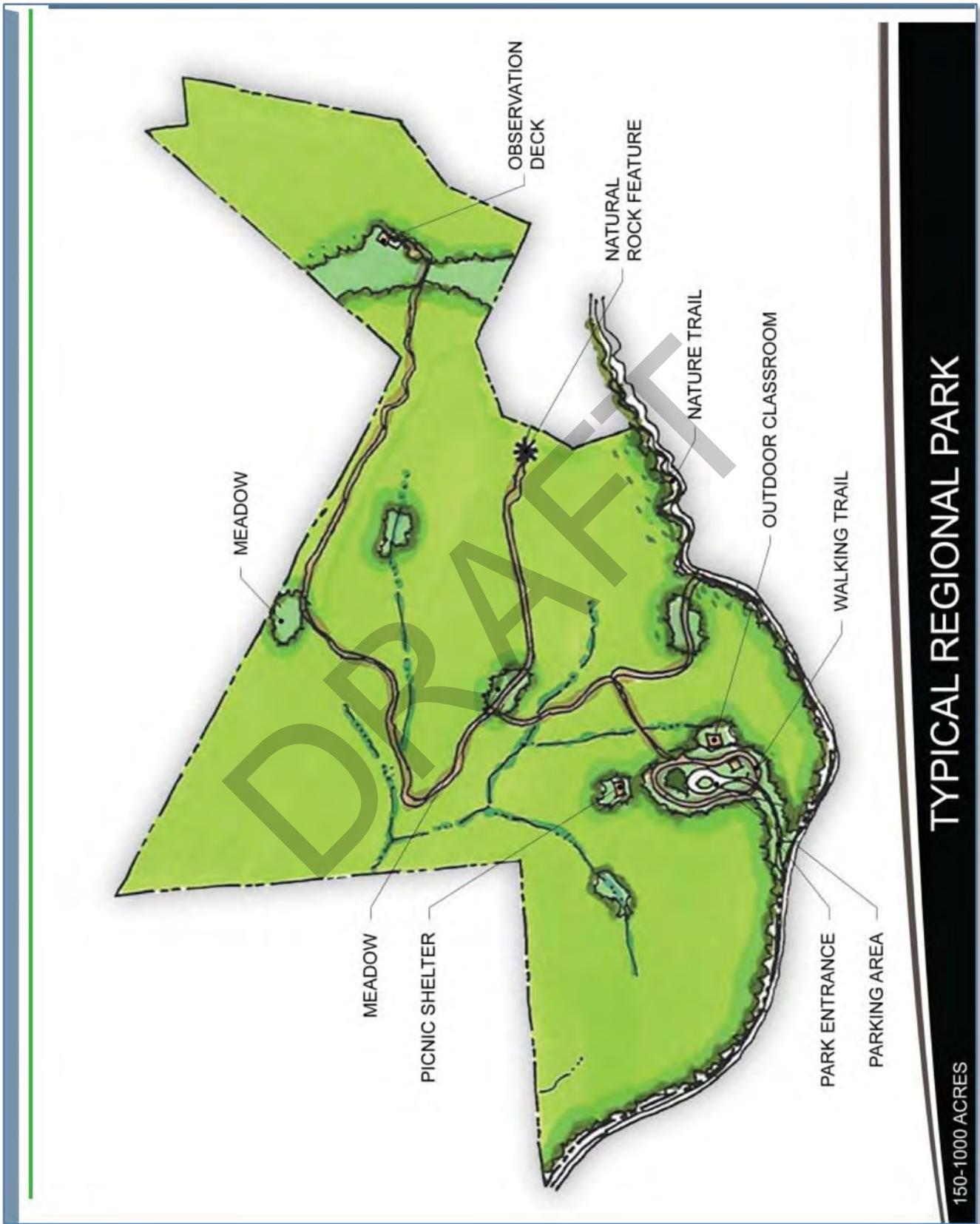


**Specific standards/criteria for developing regional parks are as follows:**

<b><u>Service area:</u></b>	Region-wide
<b><u>Acreage/Population Ratio:</u></b>	10 acres per 1,000 persons
<b><u>Minimum Size:</u></b>	150-1,000 acres minimum with sufficient area to encompass the resources to be preserved and managed (10% of the site may be developed with facilities found in Community Parks.)
<b><u>Typical Facilities:</u></b>	
Environmental Center	Caretaker's House
Equestrian Center	Primitive Camping
Group Camping	Recreational Vehicle Camping
Nature Trails	Observation Deck
Picnic Shelters and Grills	Swimming
Boating	Restrooms/Vending
Parking	Picnic Tables with Grills (not under shelter)
Fishing Piers/Boat Docks	

See diagram of a regional park on the next page.

DRAFT





## **District Parks**

A district park functions as the major source of active recreation for several neighborhoods within a community. District parks are intensely developed offering a multitude of facilities in order to serve their intended geographic user area. Activities are balanced between active and passive recreation. District Parks are typically developed to accommodate athletic league sporting events and tournament competitions. Passive recreation opportunities such as walking for pleasure, wildlife observation, and picnicking are found in the undisturbed areas, preferably within surrounding buffers. District parks present great opportunities for non-traditional types of recreation.



*District Parks often support large athletic facilities*

Sites for district parks should be relatively level to alleviate excessive grading for the active facilities. When possible, there should be an equal balance of wooded and cleared areas. If a natural water feature is present, then the adjoining land should be developed primarily for passive recreation. Accessibility to neighborhoods should be an important consideration when choosing sites. The development of district parks is typically the responsibility of Town or municipal agencies.

### **Specific standards/criteria for developing district parks are as follows:**

**Service area:** 1 to 2 ½ mile radius

**Acreage/Population Ratio:** 5 acres per 1,000 persons

**Desirable Range:** 75-200 acres

**Desirable Size:** +100 acres

#### **Typical Facilities:**

Playgrounds	Full or Half Size Basketball Courts
Volleyball Courts	Baseball/Softball/Multi-Purpose Field
Soccer/Football Field	Soccer Practice Field (movable goals)
Nature Trail	Picnic Tables with Grill (with/without shelter)
Restrooms/Concessions	Benches or Bench Swings
Parking/Service Yard	50% of Site Remains Undeveloped
	Tennis Courts (lighted)



**\*Alternate Facilities:**

Tennis Center	Amphitheatre
Observation Decks	Fishing Piers/Boating/Boat Dock
	Recreation Center

\* Alternate facilities may be added or substituted.

See diagram of a district park on the next page.

DRAFT



# TYPICAL DISTRICT PARK

75-200 ACRES



## **Community Parks**

Community parks focus on meeting community-based recreational needs as well as preserving unique landscapes and open spaces. Compared to district parks, community parks have a smaller range of recreation facilities and may host athletic league sporting events and provide passive recreation. Fifty percent of the community park property should be developed for only passive recreation, with these relatively undisturbed areas serving as buffers around the park and/or acting as buffers between active facilities.



**Oak Ridge Town Park**

Community park sites should have varying topography and vegetation. A number of different tree species should also be present in forested areas. Community parks should contain cleared areas for the purpose of locating active recreational facilities. At least one natural water feature (lake, river, or creek) is desirable in community parks. The land acquired for use as a community park should be contiguous in nature and strategically located in order to serve all users within the designated community. The development of community parks typically falls within the realm of municipal responsibilities.

### **Specific standards/criteria for developing community parks are as follows:**

**Service area:** 1 to 2-mile radius

**Acreage/Population Ratio:** 2-5 acres per 1,000 persons

**Desirable Range:** 15-50 acres

**Desirable Size:** 25 acres

**Typical Facilities:**

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Playgrounds              | Full Size or Half Size Basketball Courts  |
| Swimming Pool            | Tennis/Volleyball Courts                  |
| Nature Trails            | 50% of Site to Remain Undeveloped         |
| Restrooms/Concessions    | Soccer/Multi-Purpose Fields               |
| Baseball/Softball Fields | Benches or Bench Swings                   |
| Parking                  | Picnic Tables/Shelter with/without Grills |



---

**\*Alternate Facilities:**

Recreation Center

Disc Golf

Observation Decks

Natural Water Features

Amphitheatre

\*Alternate facilities may be added or substituted.

See diagram of a typical community park on the next page.

DRAFT





## **Neighborhood Parks**

Neighborhood parks offer the public a convenient source of recreation while serving as the social focus point of neighborhoods. Usually located within walking distance of the area serviced, neighborhood parks provide both active and passive recreation opportunities that are of interest to all age groups. The smaller size of neighborhood parks, compared to those previously mentioned, requires intense development with fifty percent of each site remaining undisturbed to serve as a buffer between the park and adjacent property owners.



*Neighborhood parks serve as gathering places.*

**Specific standards/criteria for neighborhood parks are as follows:**

**Service area:** ¾ to 1-mile radius to serve walk-in

**Acres/Population Ratio:** 2 acres per 1,000 persons

**Desirable Size:** 7-15 acres

**Typical Facilities:**

- Softball or Baseball Field
- 50% of Site to Remain Undeveloped
- Multi-Purpose Field
- Half Basketball Courts
- Picnic Tables with Grills (not under shelter)
- Picnic Shelter with Grill
- Benches or Bench Swings, Playground

**\*Alternate Facilities:**

- Nature Trails
- Tennis Courts

\*Alternate facilities may be added or substituted

See diagram of a typical neighborhood park on the next page.



**TYPICAL NEIGHBORHOOD PARK**

7-15 ACRES



## **Mini Parks**

The function of a mini park is to provide limited, isolated, or unique recreational needs. Mini parks are the smallest classification of parks. They are often provided by school and church playgrounds. These parks are located within walking distance of the area served and they provide limited recreational activities. Their very small size requires intense development and there is little or no buffer between mini parks and adjacent property owners.



*Mini Parks maximize space and provide access to recreation near popular destinations.*

### **Specific standards/criteria for mini parks are as follows:**

**Service area:** ¼ to ½ mile radius to serve walk-in recreation needs of surrounding populations

**Acreeage/Population Ratio:** 0.5 acres per 1,000 persons

**Desirable Size:** ±1 acre

#### **Typical Facilities:**

Half Basketball Courts  
Picnic Tables with Grills (not under shelter)  
Benches or Bench Swings  
Open Play Area Playground

#### **\*Alternate Facilities:**

Nature Trails  
Tennis Courts  
\*Alternate facilities may be added/substituted.

See diagram of a typical mini park on the next page.



TYPICAL MINI PARK



## **Linear Parks/Greenways**

A linear park is an area developed for one or more varying modes of recreational travel, such as hiking and biking. Linear parks are developed for several reasons:

- To connect existing recreational facilities
- To facilitate public Right-of-ways
- To connect destination points
- To meet public demand



*Greenways can connect communities*

The length and size of linear parks may vary considerably depending on the terrain of the park land and the distance between entities to be connected such as parks, schools, homes, businesses, and cultural/historical resources. In some cases, a linear park is developed within a large land area designated for protection and management of the natural environment, with recreation opportunities as a secondary objective.

## **Unique or Special Use Facilities**

The unique or special use facilities are park types that exist for the sole purpose of enhancing or utilizing a special man-made or natural feature. They can include beaches, parkways, historical sites, sites of archeological significance, swimming pools, conservation easements, and flood plains. Minimum standards relating to acreage or population have not been established by the park and recreation industry for this category of park. A size that is sufficient to protect and interpret the resource, while providing optimum use, is considered desirable.

## **Open Space**

While it is realistic and appropriate to adopt population based standards for park land and facilities, it is not realistic to establish open space standards. The more reasonable method of establishing appropriate standards for open space is to determine the criteria necessary for the protection of significant natural areas contained therein.





Public open space is defined as any land acquired for the purpose of keeping it in a primarily undeveloped state. The functions of open space include:

- Preservation of drainage areas for water supplies (watersheds)
- Protection of areas which are particularly well suited for growing crops (farmland preservation)
- Protection of communities to prevent urban sprawl (greenbelts)
- Protection of wildlife habitat (sanctuaries)
- Protection of approach and take-off areas near airports (clear zones)
- Protection of undevelopable land (landfills)
- Protection of areas aesthetically pleasing for a corridor (Viewshed)

While these areas are some of the more common open spaces, many others exist.

### **4.3 PUBLIC INPUT NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

The methodology used in establishing a Comprehensive Recreation Master Plan should always include citizen input. In order to ensure a successful study, it is vital that the public users of recreational facilities be able to share their issues, needs, and desires.

#### **Community Involvement**

To facilitate community input, two public meetings were conducted during the Master Plan process. These workshops were held at existing community events on June 1<sup>st</sup> and August 21<sup>st</sup> 2019. The public meetings, along with the community survey, were advertised by the Town on their website and social media. The promotion of the public meeting and survey was also made available through word of mouth and project information cards that were distributed at different locations throughout Oak Ridge. These meetings were conducted so that residents would be able to voice their opinions on the topic of recreation. Approximately 237 participants attended the meetings and provided much needed feedback.

The community meetings were held at two local events. The first was during Ridgefest on Saturday June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 from 4:30-8:00 p.m. The second meeting was held during Oak Ridge Elementary School's Open House on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019 from 5:00 p.m-7:00 p.m. The information shared included mapping and visual preference exercises as well as open dialog and question/answer opportunities. The meetings encouraged attendees to interact and discuss their experiences with the Oak Ridge Recreation system in an open setting that promoted opportunities to share comments, see amenity examples, and ask questions. This is a crucial step to ensure that all who want to are able to be heard, voice their concerns, and receive clarification.



## First Community Meeting - Saturday, June 1, 2019

The first community meeting was held at the Oak Ridge Ridgefest event. Approximately 95 participants engaged in open conversation related to their opinions on the state of the existing recreation system including facilities and programs as well as their concerns and questions. Written notes were used to record participant comments and opinions. A visual preference survey of various park amenities gave participants the opportunity to place a sticker next to the amenities they felt would be good additions to the town park system. Each participant was limited to two stickers. Two large maps provided participants with the existing locations of each of the Recreation System's existing facilities and other destinations such as private facilities and schools. Participants were asked to provide insight into where potential new recreation facilities might be located. These boards gave everyone an opportunity to share their opinions and thoughts to create a list of hopeful changes to the existing recreation system.

Common concerns that were addressed included:

- The need for connectivity between Town Park and neighboring communities via safe pedestrian routes
- Desire for more trails and preservation of existing open space
- Desire for a Splash Pad
- Desire for tennis and basketball courts

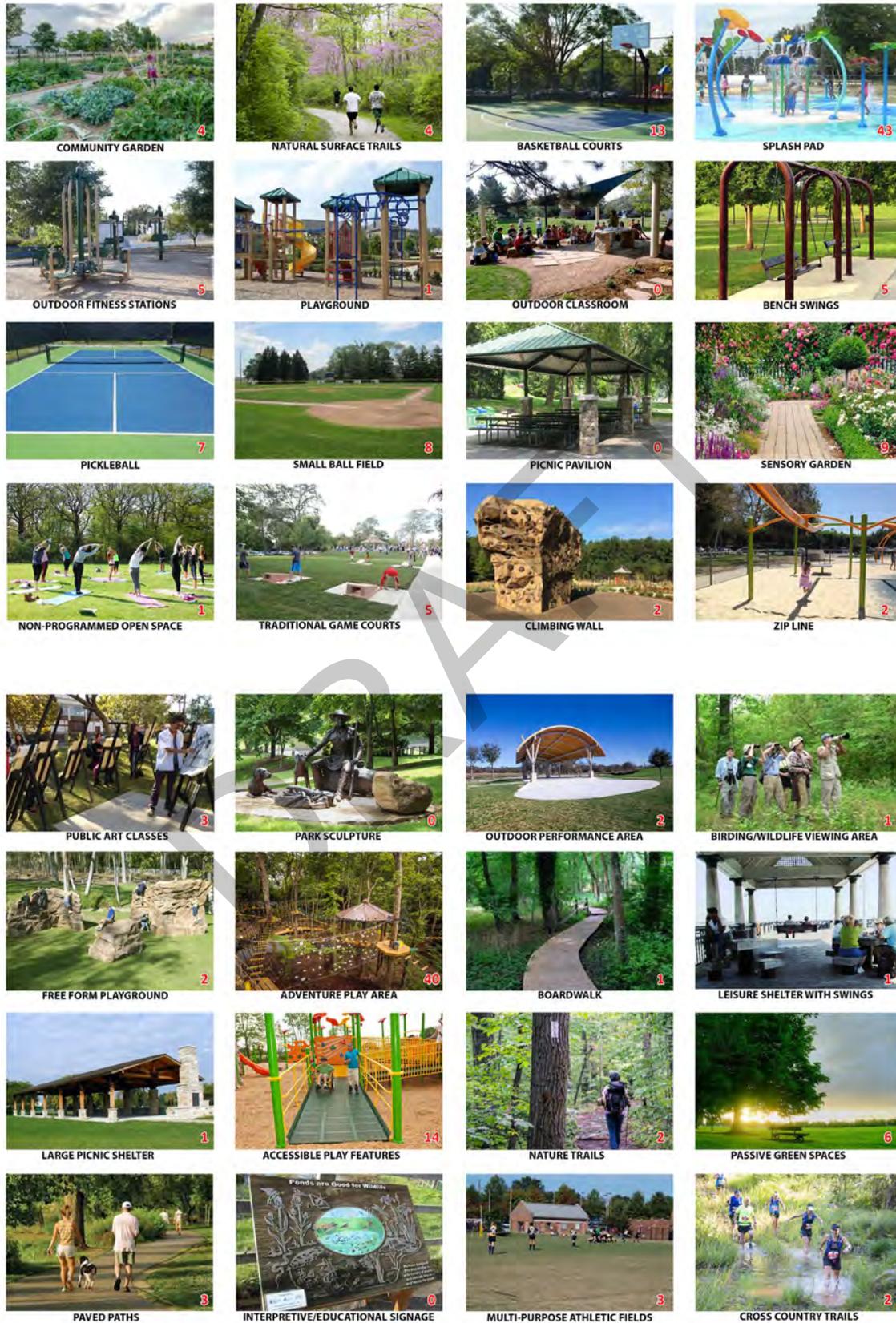
## Meeting 1 - Visual Preference Exercise Results

The following is a compilation of the individual votes for each image presented on the meeting preference boards. (See Appendix B, Park Facility Preferences). Participants were asked to choose two amenities that they would most like to see offered by Oak Ridge's Parks and Recreation system. They were each given two yellow sticker dots and asked to place them next to an image that best correlated with amenities they would like to see. It is clear from the selections that the participants want facilities that provide spaces for both passive and active recreation.

Participants of the first meeting predominantly preferred the Splash Pad and Adventure Play Area in that order but following at third was Accessible Play Features and at fourth was Basketball Courts.

See meeting 1 visual preference results next page.

Town of Oak Ridge Parks & Recreation  
 2019 – Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Master Plan





## **Second Community Meeting – Wednesday, August 21, 2019**

The second community meeting was held at Oak Ridge Elementary School's Open House event. Participants engaged in open conversation related to their opinions on the state of the existing recreation system including facilities and programs as well as their concerns and questions. Comment cards and large writing boards were used to capture participant comments and opinions. A visual preference survey of various park amenities gave participants the opportunity to place a sticker next to the amenities that they felt would be good additions to Oak Ridge's recreation system. Each participant was limited to two stickers. Two large maps provided participants with the existing locations of the nearby recreation facilities and other destinations such as private facilities and schools. Participants were asked to provide insight into where potential new recreation facilities might be located. These boards gave everyone an opportunity to share their opinions and thoughts and help form a list of desired changes to the existing recreation system.

Common concerns that were recorded were similar to the first community meeting and included:

- Hope for additional trails and sidewalks throughout town
- Splash pad, adventure type play amenities and basketball courts
- Inclusion of additional multipurpose fields
- There were many comments related to the need for more playgrounds and a public pool. When asked why a pool, many participants noted not being satisfied with overcrowding and costs of the nearby private swimming pool.

### **Meeting 2 – Visual Preference Exercise Results**

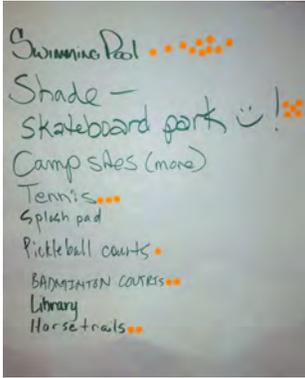
The following is a compilation of the individual votes for each image presented on the second meeting preference boards. (See Appendix B, Park Facility Preferences). Participants were asked to choose two amenities that they would most like to see offered by Oak Ridge's Parks and Recreation system. They were each given two yellow sticker dots and asked to place them next to an image that best correlated with amenities they would like to see. It is clear from the selections that the participants want facilities that provide spaces for both passive and active recreation.

Participants of the second meeting predominantly preferred the Adventure Play Area and Splash Pad in that order but following at third was Basketball Courts and at fourth was the Zip Line play feature.

See meeting 2 visual preference results on next page.

Town of Oak Ridge Parks & Recreation  
2019 – Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Master Plan





In order to capture additional ideas not represented via the images shown on the visual preference boards, a large pad of paper was set up for participants to add other desired amenities. Participants had the option to add their vote sticker next to these options as well. Interestingly, a swimming pool was mentioned by at least ten residents, prompting discussion about a town pool since a private pool is already available in Town.

Overall, the combined responses from the two community meetings for the visual preference exercise included these top 10 preferences (with ties).

- |                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1) Adventure Play Areas - 110 | 2) Splash Pad - 108                         |
| 3) Basketball Courts - 28     | 4) Accessible Play Features – 23            |
| 5) Pickleball (TIE) - 15      | 6) Sensory Garden (TIE) - 15                |
| 7) Zipline (TIE) – 14         | 8) Multi-Purpose Athletic Fields (TIE) - 14 |
| 9) Small Ball Field - 10      | 10) Playground (TIE) - 9                    |
| 11) Paved Paths (TIE) – 9     |   |





## **Community Survey**

The active participation of residents in the Town of Oak Ridge is crucial in developing a Master Plan that reflects the true needs of the Town. With this in mind, community input was solicited throughout the entire planning process. Together with Town guidance, the project team created a public survey to gather information concerning the existing and future

needs of the Town's recreation system. A project marketing card was developed to encourage awareness of the project and provide both a web address to the community survey as well as a QR code that interested individuals could use via smartphone/mobile devices to reach the online survey and provide their input. Cards were made available through Town Hall, Parks and Recreation, and they were distributed at all community meetings and focus group meetings. Members of each meeting volunteered to take stacks of cards to distribute throughout the community.



To gather further public input and reach the broadest cross-section of Town residents, a printed version of the Master Plan surveys was also made available at the town meetings and mailed out to residents using a Town provided mailing list. Over 2,600 surveys were mailed. The following sub-section summarizes the results of the community survey (See Appendix C for a summary of survey results for both the mail out and online based surveys.

The Town received a total of 845 completed surveys representing about 1,788 residents. These results included both the survey handouts, online survey, and mail out survey results. The surveys provided data collection from all persons in the household of the survey respondent. The survey data collected was a representative cross section of the Town of Oak Ridge in terms of age and household size.

The surveys were designed to elicit answers on resident's needs and desires for recreation opportunities. It included a section where respondents rated their use of existing facilities both within the town limits and outside the town limits. The survey instructed respondents to rank the programs and facilities in order of importance to their household and to list the facilities they would like to see added to the park and recreation system. Results of the survey are as follows:

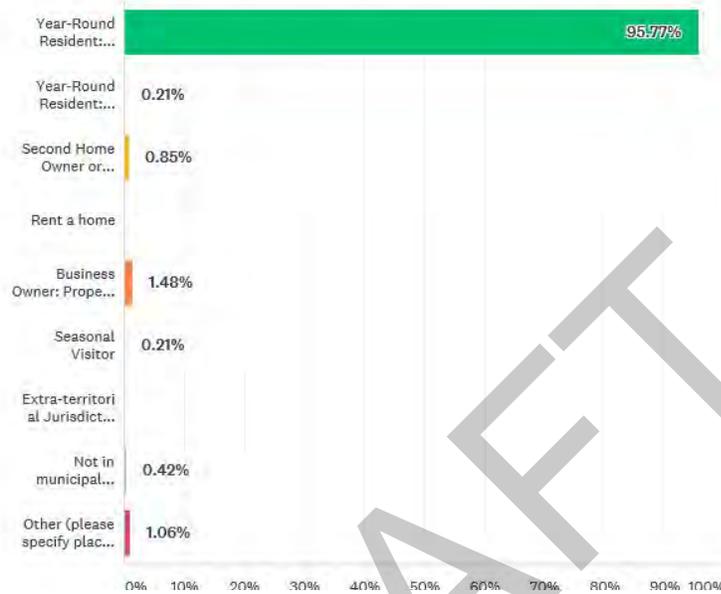


## Town of Oak Ridge Parks and Recreation Master Plan Survey

### Demographics Representation

Which statements describes your relationship to the Town of Oak Ridge?

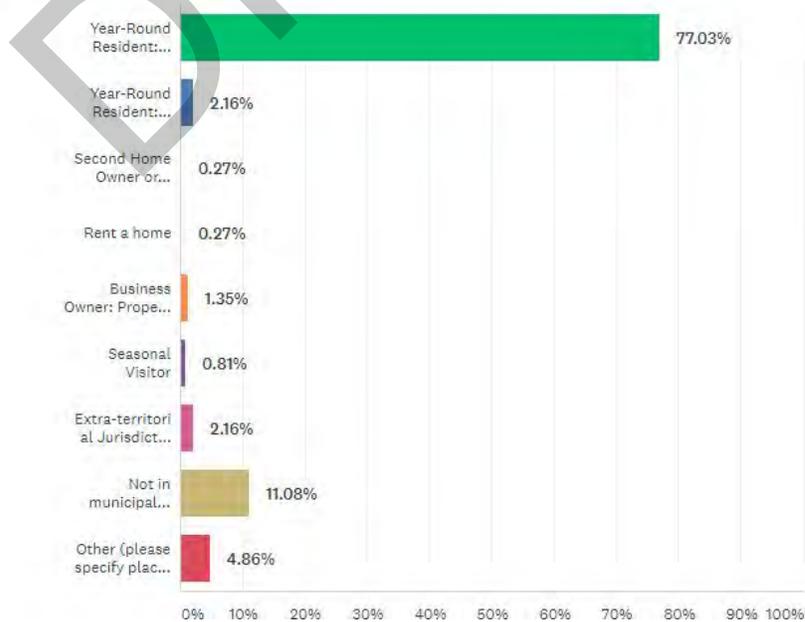
Answered: 473 Skipped: 1



Q1: Mail-out Survey

Which statements describes your relationship to the Town of Oak Ridge?

Answered: 370 Skipped: 2

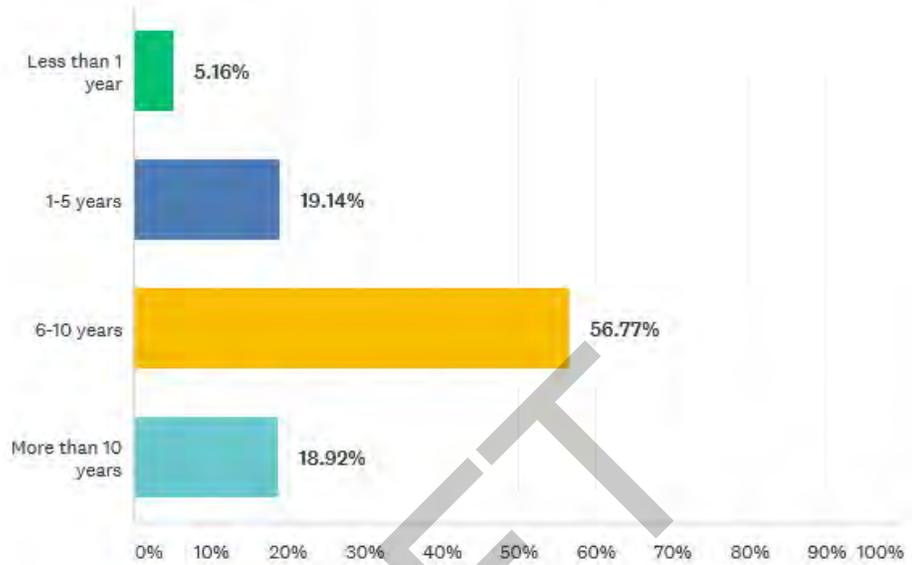


Q1: Online Survey



## How long have you lived in the Town of Oak Ridge?

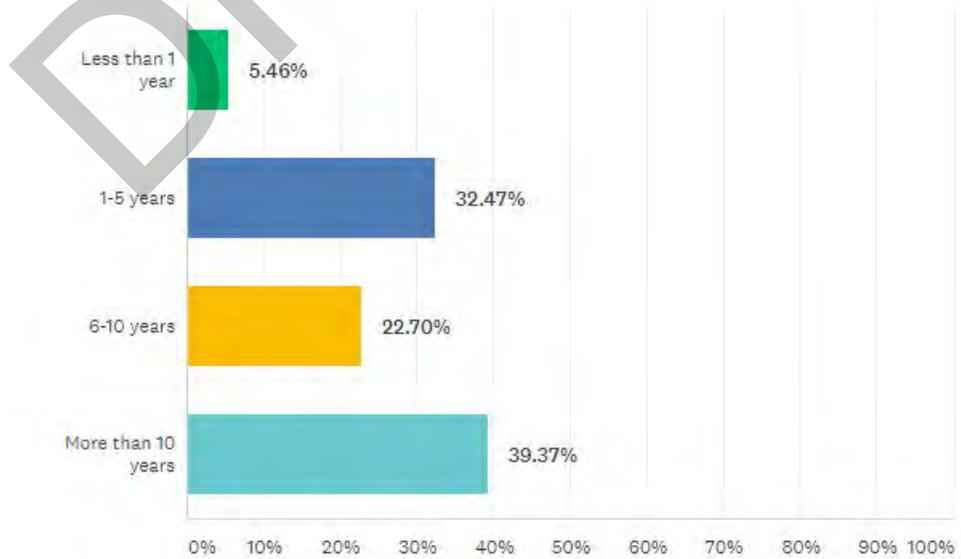
Answered: 465 Skipped: 9



Q2: Mail-out Survey

## How long have you lived in the Town of Oak Ridge?

Answered: 348 Skipped: 24

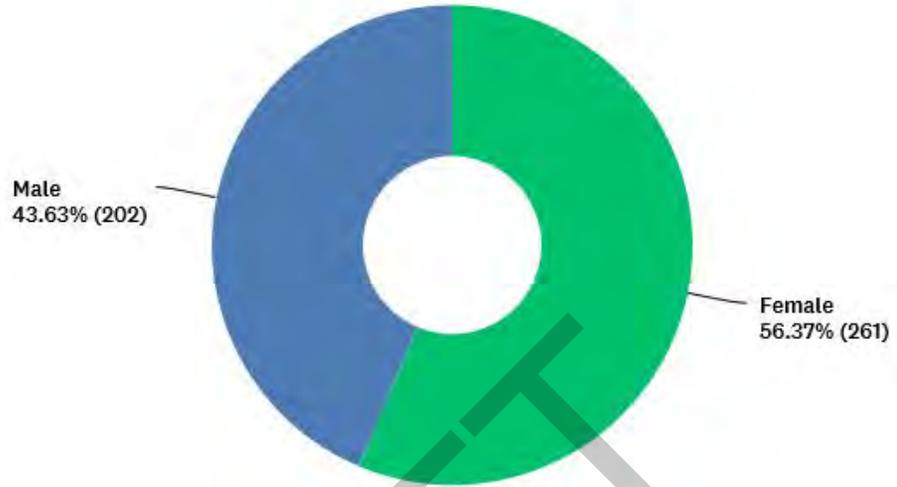


Q2: Online Survey



Please provide your gender:

Answered: 463 Skipped: 11



Q3: Mail-out Survey

Please provide your gender:

Answered: 368 Skipped: 4



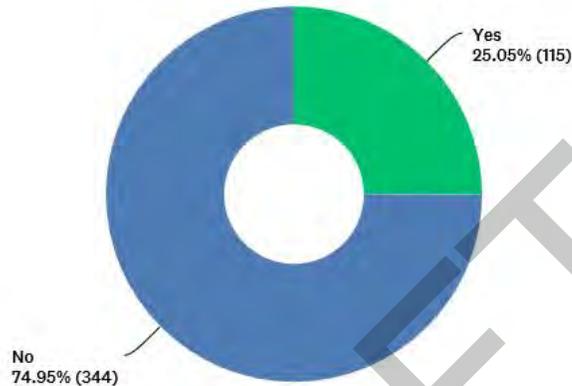
Q3: Online Survey



## General Responses

Does a child in your family currently participate, or is likely to participate in the next three years, on any Oak Ridge Youth Association (ORYA) athletic team?

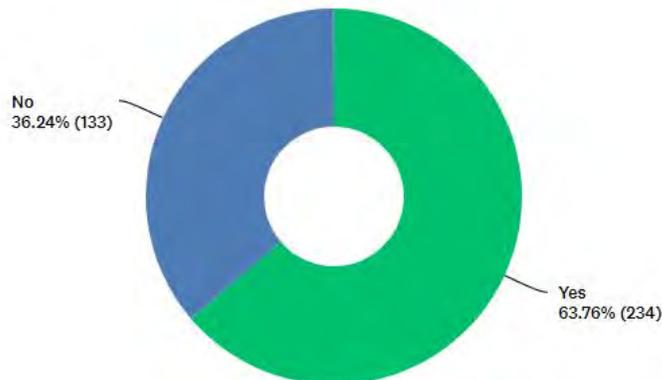
Answered: 459 Skipped: 15



Q4: Mail-out Survey

Does a child in your family currently participate, or is likely to participate in the next three years, on any Oak Ridge Youth Association (ORYA) athletic team?

Answered: 367 Skipped: 5

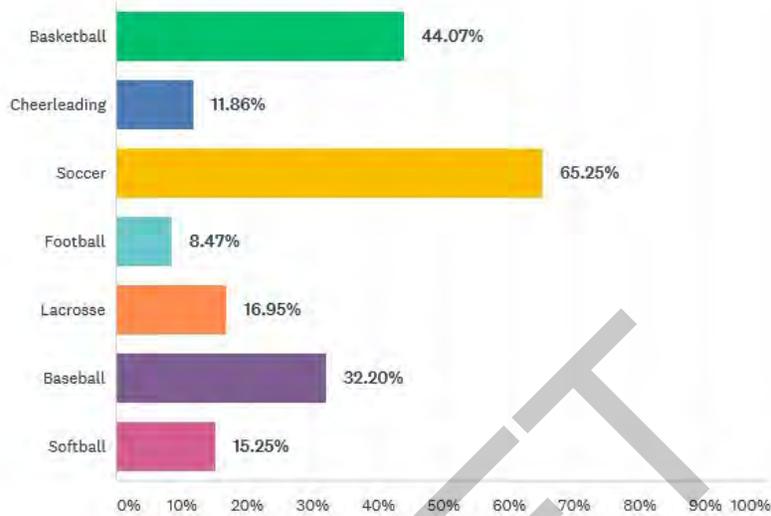


Q4: Online Survey



If you answered 'yes', with what athletic team does your child participate?

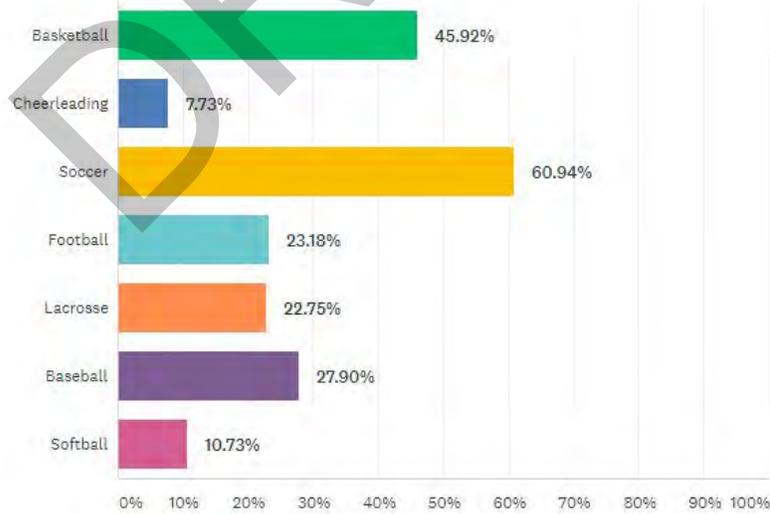
Answered: 118 Skipped: 356



**Q5: Mail-out Survey**

If you answered 'yes', with what athletic team does your child participate?

Answered: 233 Skipped: 139

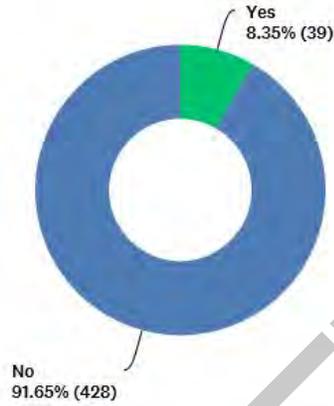


**Q5: Online Survey**



Do you or members of your immediate family, require special assistance facilitates (e.g. walkers, wheel chairs, handicapped tables or swings) when using Oak Ridge Town Park?

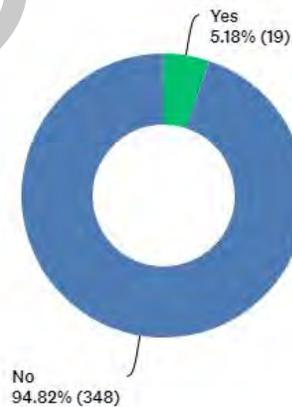
Answered: 467 Skipped: 7



**Q6: Mail-out Survey**

Do you or members of your immediate family, require special assistance facilitates (e.g. walkers, wheel chairs, handicapped tables or swings) when using Oak Ridge Town Park?

Answered: 367 Skipped: 5

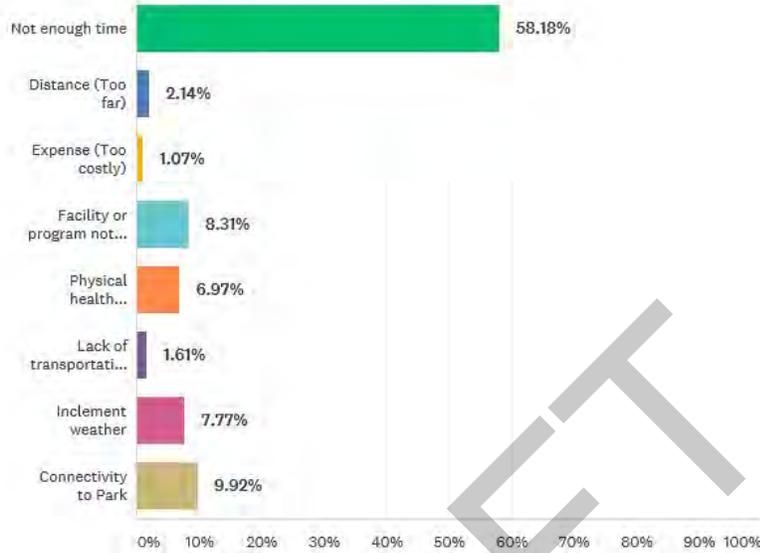


**Q6: Online Survey**



What is the greatest barrier to your household's regular use of public parks or recreational facilities?

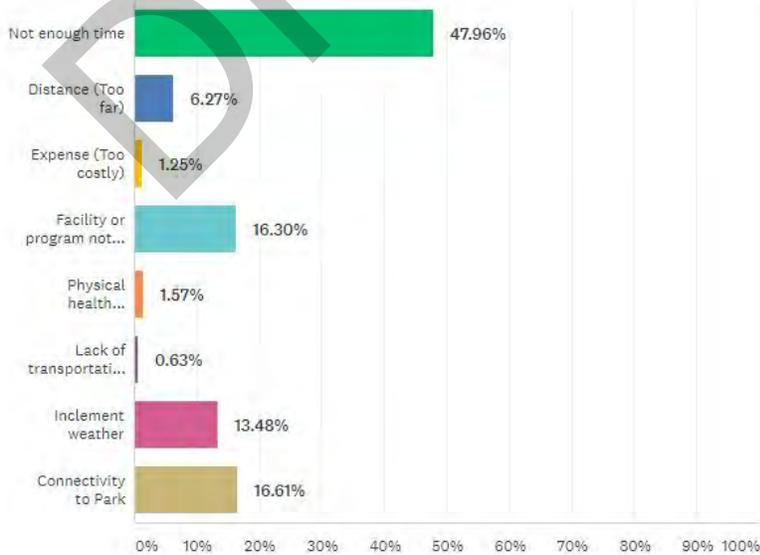
Answered: 373 Skipped: 101



**Q7: Mail-out Survey**

What is the greatest barrier to your household's regular use of public parks or recreational facilities?

Answered: 319 Skipped: 53



**Q7: Online Survey**



Select the number of persons in your household including yourself who are in the age brackets below:

Answered: 434 Skipped: 40

46-60 years old	197
61 and over	171
36-45 years old	110
6-12 years old	98
20-35 years old	96
13-16 years old	83
17-19 years old	58
5 years and younger	48

**Q8: Mail-out Survey**

Select the number of persons in your household including yourself who are in the age brackets below:

Answered: 372 Skipped: 0

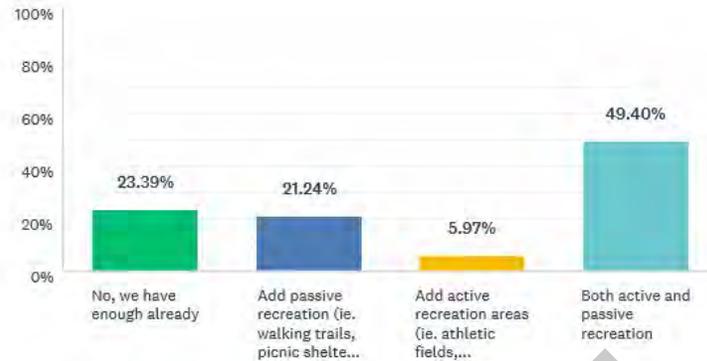
6-12 years old	208
36-45 years old	181
46-60 years old	147
13-16 years old	105
5 years and younger	102
20-35 years old	84
61 and over	56
17-19 years old	47

**Q8: Online Survey**



Would you support adding additional recreation opportunities in Oak Ridge?

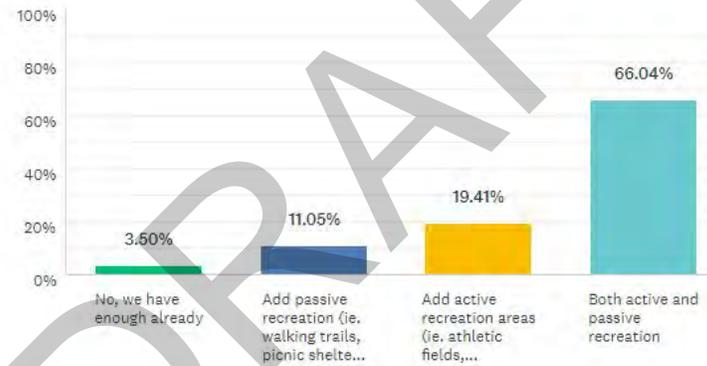
Answered: 419 Skipped: 55



**Q9: Mail-out Survey**

Would you support adding additional recreation opportunities in Oak Ridge?

Answered: 371 Skipped: 1



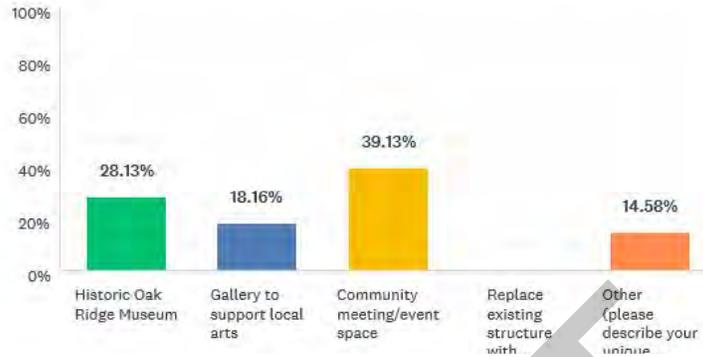
**Q9: Online Survey**

The mail-out and online survey respondents largely agree that both active and passive recreation opportunities are desired. The older demographic predominantly represented by the mail-out survey group reported feelings there were enough recreation opportunities. Families with children predominantly represented by the online survey desired adding more recreation areas. These responses appear to reflect stage of life differences between the predominant demographic groups represented in each survey.



Please select potential uses from the list below for the white house (life estate at Oak Ridge Town Park) on the corner of Lisa Drive and Linville Road:

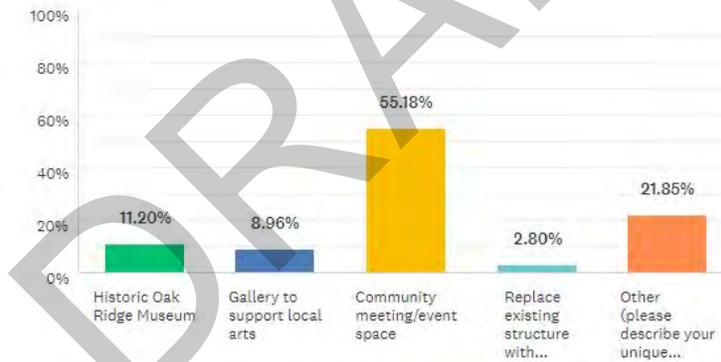
Answered: 391 Skipped: 83



**Q10: Mail-out Survey**

Please select potential uses from the list below for the white house (life estate at Oak Ridge Town Park) on the corner of Lisa Drive and Linville Road:

Answered: 357 Skipped: 15



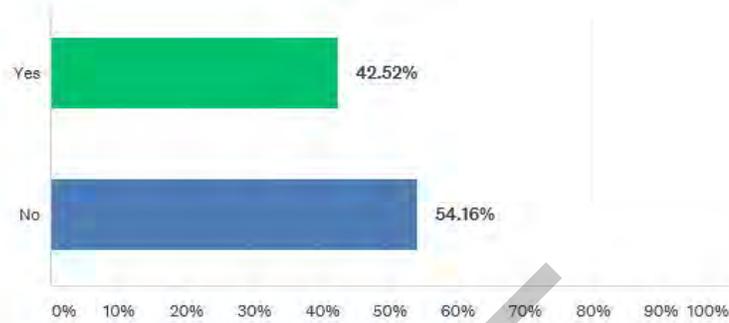
**Q10: Online Survey**

Survey participants agree that the best use for the white house on Lisa Drive is a community meeting/event space. This type of use would not preclude historic/educational signage components or gallery exhibitions. Other notions included demolition or replacement of the structure.



Within the last year have you needed to travel out of the Town of Oak Ridge to use a recreation facility or program? (excluding vacation trips)

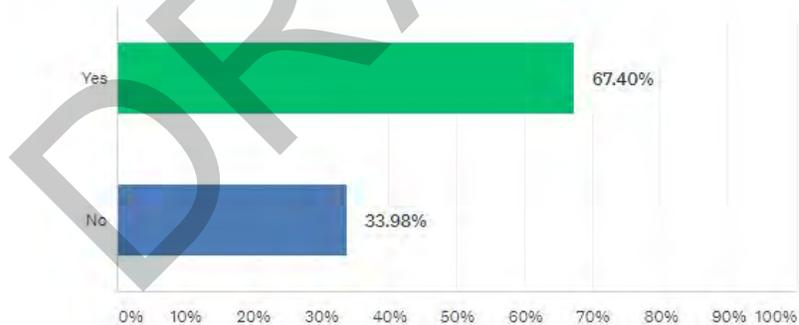
Answered: 421 Skipped: 53



**Q11: Mail-out Survey**

Within the last year have you needed to travel out of the Town of Oak Ridge to use a recreation facility or program? (excluding vacation trips)

Answered: 362 Skipped: 10



**Q11: Online Survey**



Check below how frequently you or others in your household have visited the following facilities in the past year.

Answered: 426 Skipped: 48

Walking Paths/Trails	39.00%	163
Biking Trails	9.14%	32
Baseball/Softball Fields	6.96%	24
Playgrounds	16.39%	60
Soccer/Football/Lacrosse Fields	14.45%	51
Amphitheater	7.50%	27
Bark Park	5.93%	21
Picnic Shelters	5.69%	21

**Q12: Mail-out Survey**

Check below how frequently you or others in your household have visited the following facilities in the past year.

Answered: 370 Skipped: 2

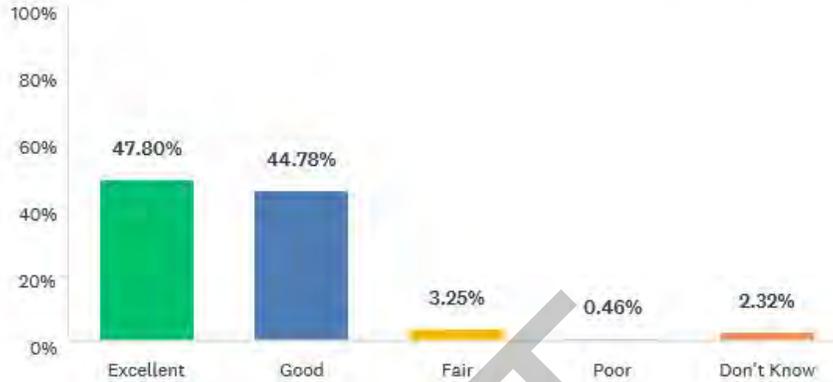
Walking Paths/Trails	39.24%	144
Soccer/Football/Lacrosse Fields	39.72%	143
Playgrounds	35.73%	129
Baseball/Softball Fields	19.43%	68
Picnic Shelters	12.01%	43
Biking Trails	9.71%	34
Amphitheater	8.50%	30
Bark Park	8.22%	29

**Q12: Online Survey**



### Overall, how do you rate the Existing Oak Ridge Town Park?

Answered: 431 Skipped: 43



**Q13: Mail-out Survey**

### Overall, how do you rate the Existing Oak Ridge Town Park?

Answered: 369 Skipped: 3



**Q13: Online Survey**

Respondents of both surveys report positive ratings for the existing Town Park.



### Overall, how do you rate the Town playgrounds?

Answered: 430 Skipped: 44



### Overall, how do you rate the Town playgrounds?

Answered: 371 Skipped: 2

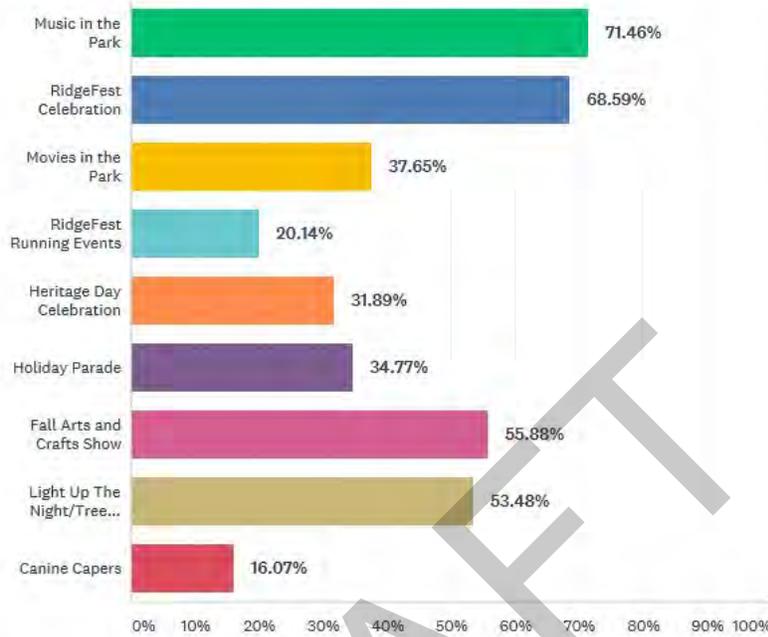


**Q14: Online Survey**



In which of the following recreation programs and special events would you or others in your household participate on a regular basis?

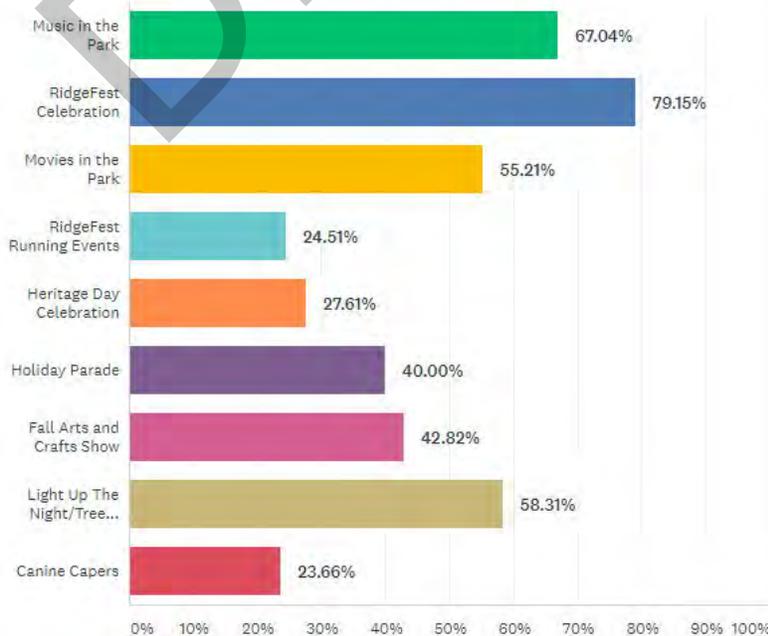
Answered: 417 Skipped: 57



**Q15: Mail-out Survey**

In which of the following recreation programs and special events would you or others in your household participate on a regular basis?

Answered: 355 Skipped: 18

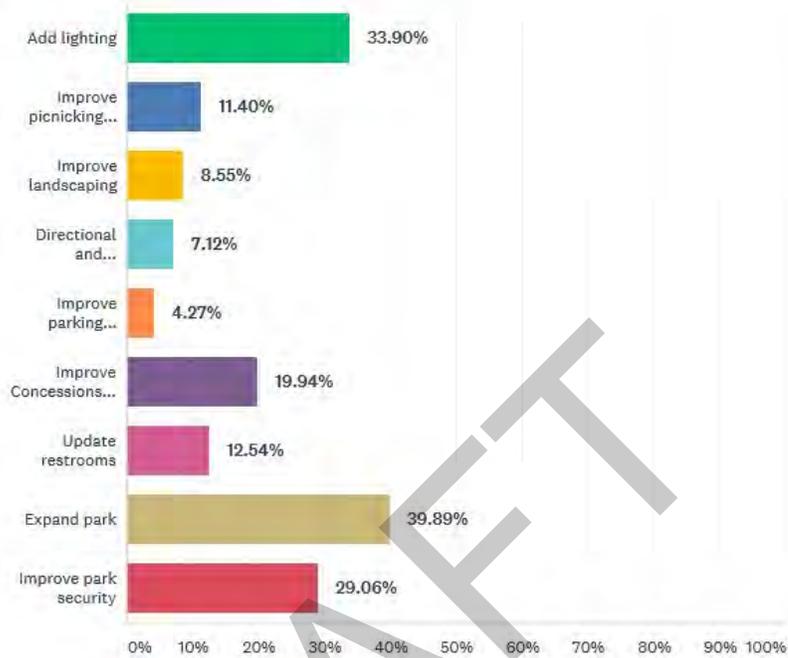


**Q15: Online Survey**



Check below improvements that you would like to see made to the EXISTING Oak Ridge Town Park.

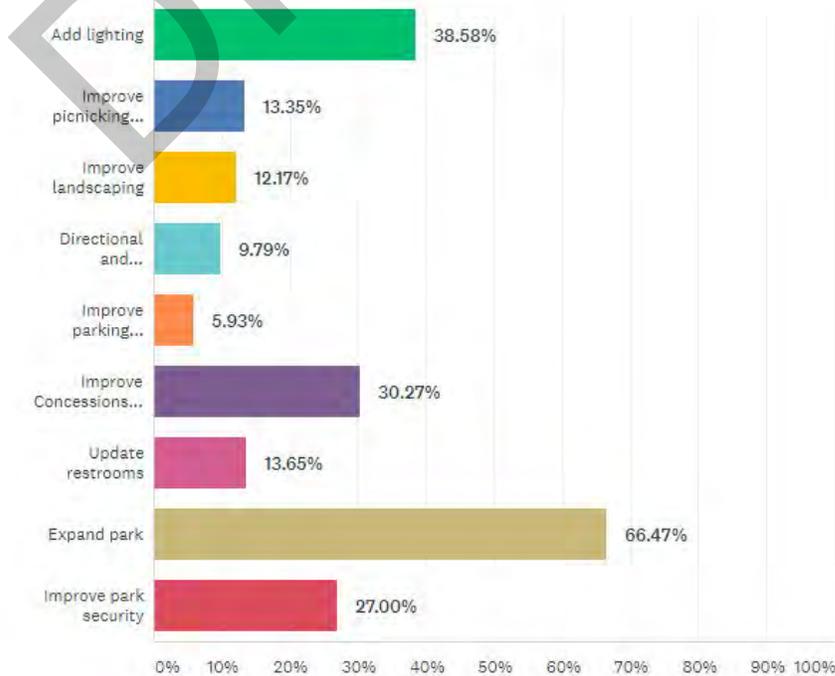
Answered: 351 Skipped: 123



**Q16: Mail-out Survey**

Check below improvements that you would like to see made to the EXISTING Oak Ridge Town Park.

Answered: 337 Skipped: 36



**Q16: Online Survey**



Q17 Please list below, any recreation programs or special events that you would like to see offered:



**Q17: Mail-out Survey**

Q17 Please list below, any recreation programs or special events that you would like to see offered:



**Q17: Online Survey**

The open-ended responses from both the mail-out and online surveys were analyzed using the word cloud method where frequency of words and ideas are counted to gain an understanding of what topics were most often shared by survey participants (topic most discussed is larger/bolder). Both survey groups mentioned several similar recreational amenities such as trails, tennis, basketball, etc. (see word cloud graphics above). Both groups expressed a general desire for improving the community and quality of life through enhancing recreation areas in Town. Most of the differences appear to reflect demographic aspects of the survey participants. The mail-out survey responses typically reflected an older group of long-time residents where the online surveys leaned more towards families with children that may have become residents more recently. The differences seem to point to stage of life differences between these groups. While both groups' opinions and concerns are valid the Town should consider what compromises must be made to best accommodate the broad range of residents that make up the Town.



The following is a list of recreation activities that could be offered or improved at a public park or recreation facility. Select from "Most" to "Least" important. Please consider other members of your household.

Answered: 365 Skipped: 8

	MOST IMPORTANT
Jogging/Walking Trails	73.93% 258
Open Space/Natural Areas	47.38% 154
Nature Based Recreation (Nature Walks, Wildlife Observation Areas)	45.65% 152
Bicycle Trails (paved)	30.15% 98
Tennis Courts	28.04% 90
Spray-ground/Splash Pad/Interactive Water Feature	26.32% 85
Outdoor Playground	28.05% 85
Picnic Areas	26.42% 84
Community Center	23.89% 75
Outdoor Performance Area	20.33% 62

**Q18: Mail-out Survey**

While respondents of the mail-out survey feel trails are the most important activity, they responded that less active types of programmed spaces, like open areas and observation areas, are important.



The following is a list of recreation activities that could be offered or improved at a public park or recreation facility. Select from "Most" to "Least" important. Please consider other members of your household.

Answered: 365 Skipped: 8

	MOST IMPORTANT
Jogging/Walking Trails	38.64% 131
Outdoor Playground	33.64% 111
Spray-ground/Splash Pad/Interactive Water Feature	31.88% 110
Multi-purpose Field	31.87% 109
Outdoor Basketball Courts	29.71% 104
Open Space/Natural Areas	27.76% 93
Community Center	24.93% 85
Indoor Gymnasium	24.05% 82
Nature Based Recreation (Nature Walks, Wildlife Observation Areas)	22.29% 76
Tennis Courts	20.88% 71
Indoor Fitness Facility	21.26% 71

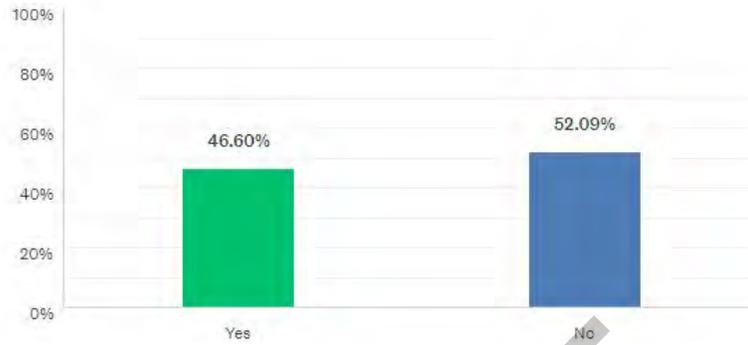
**Q18: Online Survey**

Interestingly, the online survey participants agree that trails are the most important activity, but they responded that more active type amenities are important.



Do you use any school or private facilities (Oak Ridge Swim Club, private fitness clubs, etc.) for recreation or leisure activities?

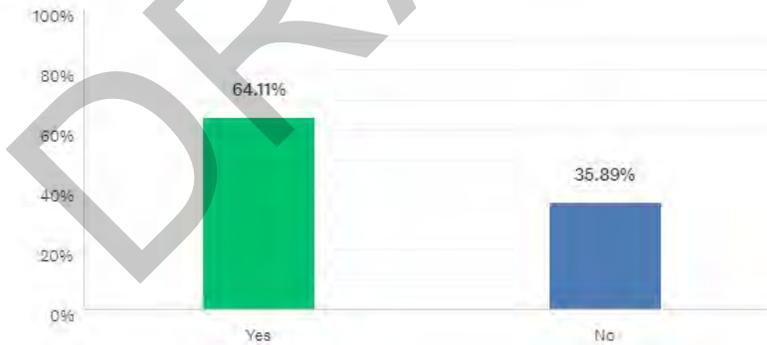
Answered: 382 Skipped: 92



**Q19: Mail-out Survey**

Do you use any school or private facilities (Oak Ridge Swim Club, private fitness clubs, etc.) for recreation or leisure activities?

Answered: 365 Skipped: 8

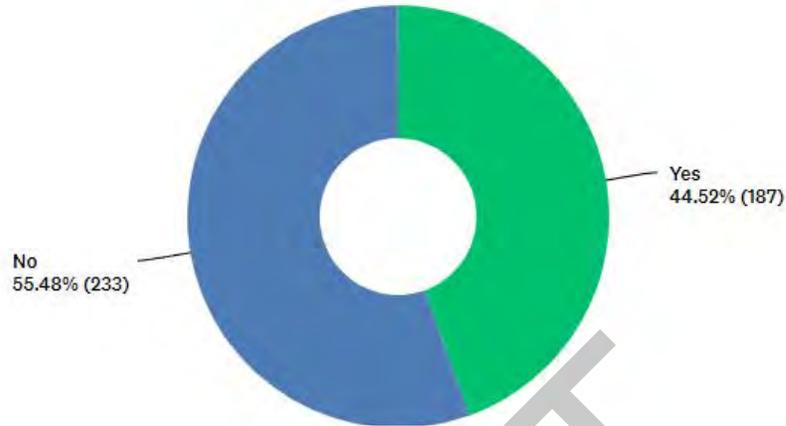


**Q19: Online Survey**



Do you feel there is a need for additional park land in Oak Ridge?

Answered: 420 Skipped: 54

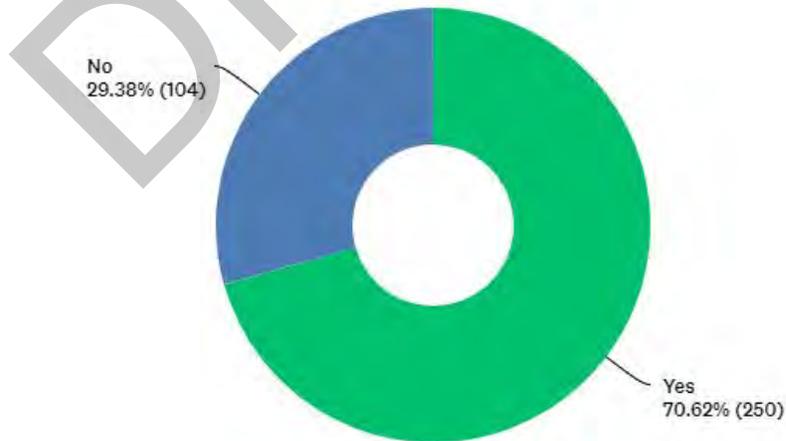


**Q20: Mail-out Survey**

A narrow majority of respondents of the mail-out survey don't feel there is a need for additional park land in Oak Ridge.

Do you feel there is a need for additional park land in Oak Ridge?

Answered: 354 Skipped: 19



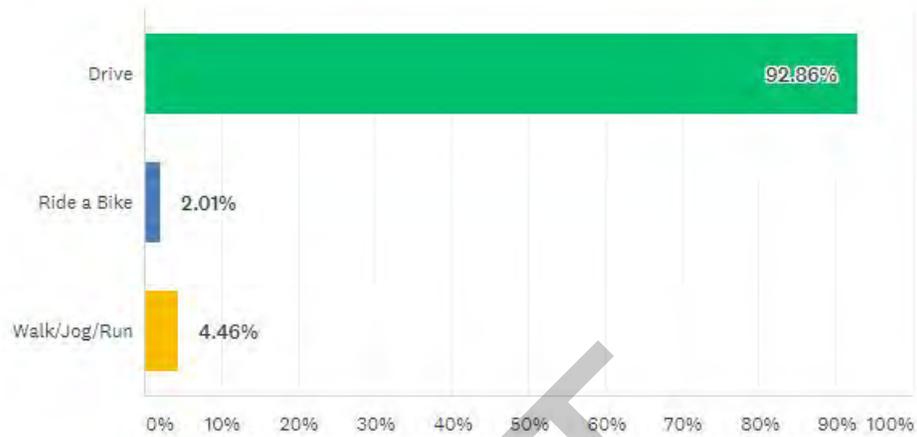
**Q210 Online Survey**

A large majority of respondents of the online survey feel there is a need for additional park land in Oak Ridge.



## How do you typically get to Oak Ridge Town Park?

Answered: 448 Skipped: 26

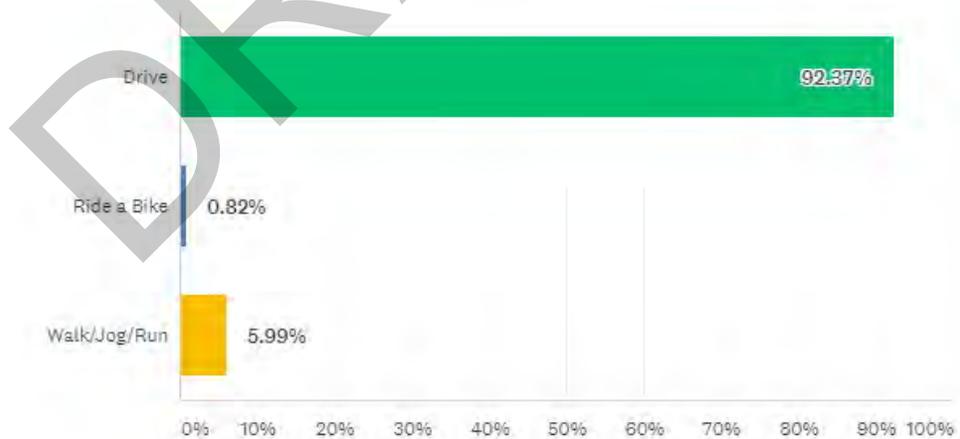


**Q21: Mail-out Survey**

Overwhelmingly, survey participants report driving to Town Park

## How do you typically get to Oak Ridge Town Park?

Answered: 367 Skipped: 6

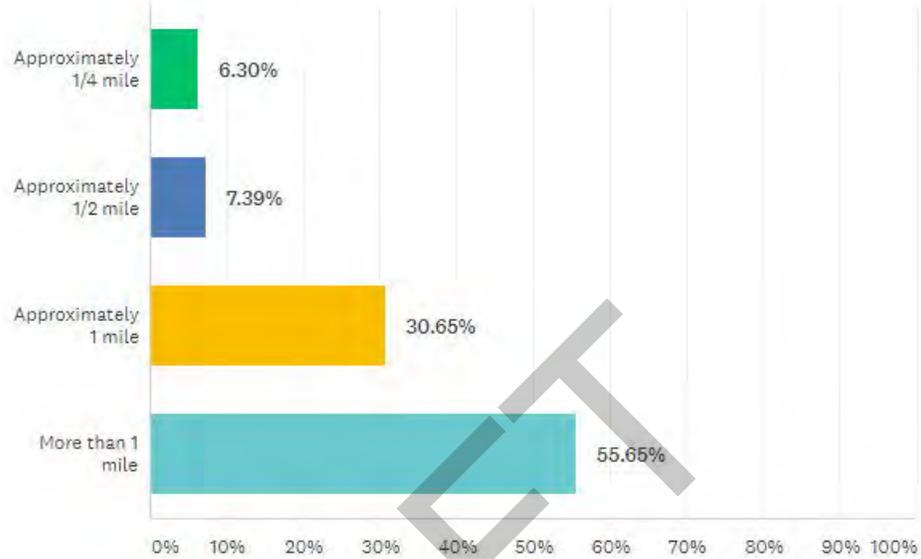


**Q21: Online Survey**



## How far do you live from Oak Ridge Town Park?

Answered: 460 Skipped: 14

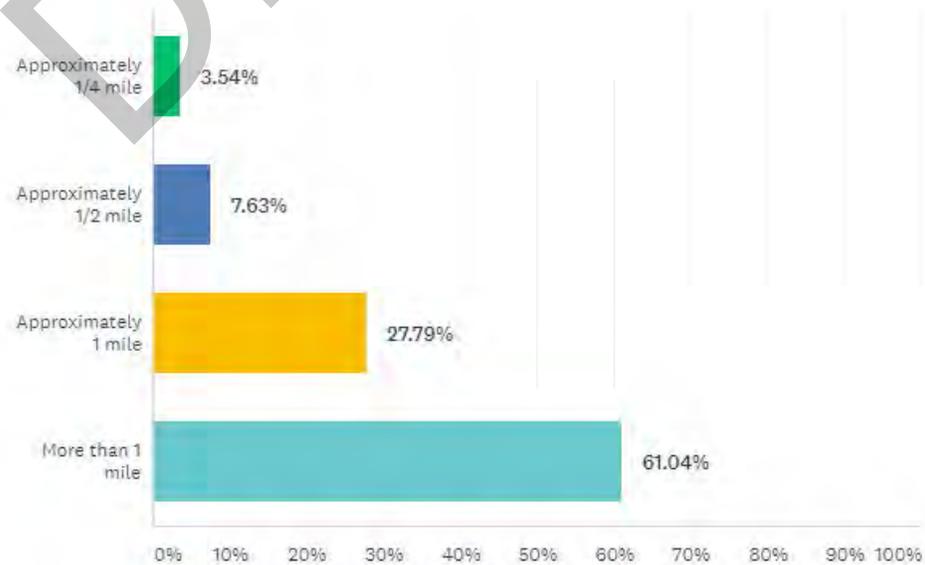


**Q22: Mail-out Survey**

The majority of participants from both survey groups report living more than a mile from Town Park.

## How far do you live from Oak Ridge Town Park?

Answered: 367 Skipped: 6

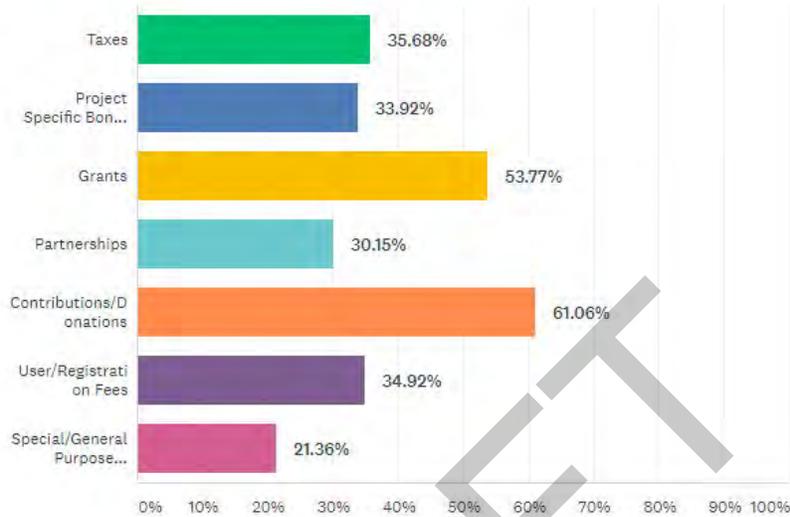


**Q22: Online Survey**



What, if any, sources of funding are you willing to support in order to make improvements, build new facilities, and create programs? Check all that apply.

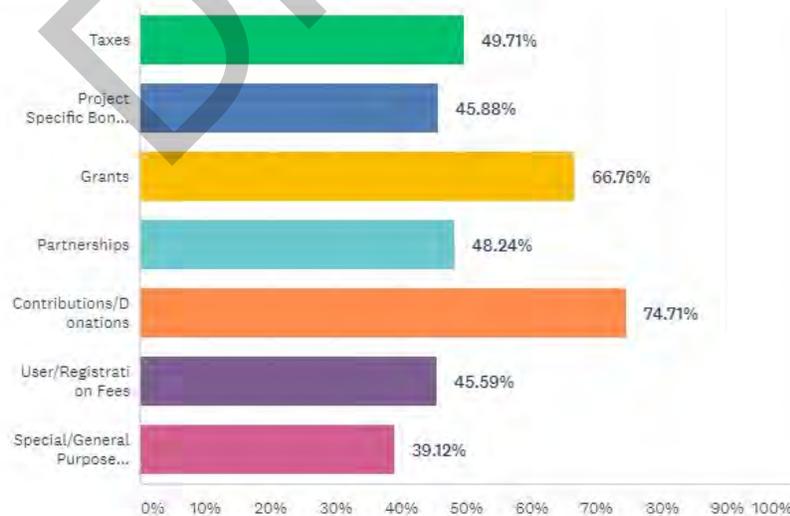
Answered: 398 Skipped: 76



**Q23: Mail-out Survey**

What, if any, sources of funding are you willing to support in order to make improvements, build new facilities, and create programs? Check all that apply.

Answered: 340 Skipped: 33

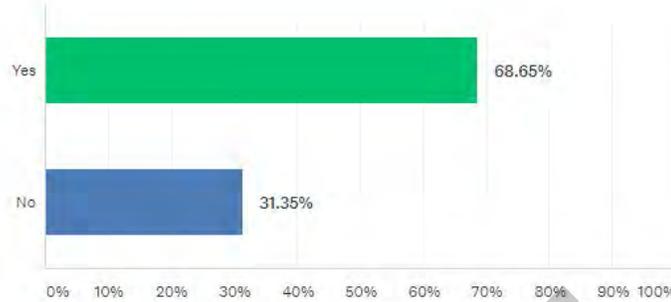


**Q23: Online Survey**



Would you be willing to pay a nominal fee to attend an event or use a special facility?

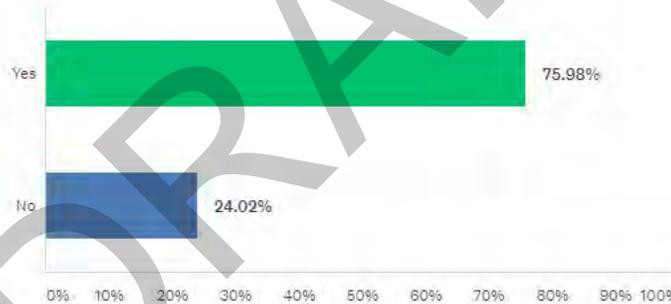
Answered: 437 Skipped: 37



**Q24: Mail-out Survey**

Would you be willing to pay a nominal fee to attend an event or use a special facility?

Answered: 358 Skipped: 15



**Q24: Online Survey**

Survey participants show support for paying nominal fees to attend events or use special facilities.



pay taxes love community small fields beautiful pay great think tennis used  
sports need spending taxes spend money park funds town  
Increase Oak Ridge ball fields want tennis courts sidewalks Walking  
money raising taxes Keep Please trails people

**Q25: Mail-out Survey**

taxes much people way recreation attending great build additional athletic fields add offer  
Thank nominal fee fee nice fields programs see questions Oak Ridge feel  
use spaces town addition park love see need wonderful  
facilities including keep increase think provide better amazing  
community open space love residents pay local land know events move Oak Ridge  
sports activities places

**Q25: Online Survey**

Question 25 was an open-ended opportunity for survey participants to offer any additional comments. These additional comments included: both praise for and critiques of existing facilities and the Recreation department, commentary on the need to assess how best to pay for recreation services, the need for both passive and active facilities, and the need for better connectivity and walkability within Oak Ridge. From the responses provided it was clear that survey participants appreciated existing recreation system facilities and programming, but comments regarding expanding the existing offerings were often noted.

## Conclusions

As the Town of Oak Ridge desires to continue providing quality parks and recreation facilities they will need to understand what kind of facilities and programming the community desires and should analyze how to fairly pay for such amenities. The input provided by the community at the public meetings and via survey responses indicate a desire to strengthen Town Park through minor updates and new multi-generational amenities. Some of these include adding more sidewalks from residential areas to recreation destinations, adding shade structures at all playgrounds, fitness stations, management and maintenance of



open spaces, and multi-purpose fields. There is a desire for more trails, basketball courts, tennis courts, an indoor community center, and more natural areas for passive recreation opportunities. Strong desires of the community include some kind of water-based activity such as a splash pad, interactive fountain or public swimming pool. Other desires included developing new natural open spaces, and multi-purpose fields. Notable but less often mentioned was a desire for equestrian trails, a skateboard park, a badminton court, and a library.

Oak Ridge has many options on how it chooses to meet the desires of the community. Possible solutions may include redeveloping the existing Town Park to include additional recreational amenities or acquiring land to develop smaller neighborhood parks to provide amenities throughout the community.

A comparison of the above findings with similar state and national studies are listed below.

#### **4.4 STATE AND NATIONAL ASSESSMENTS**

Surveys that were designed to determine the demand for outdoor recreation and facilities have been conducted on both the federal and state levels by private, non-profit, and governmental agencies. Significant facts have evolved from these surveys, as follows:

- The top ten most popular outdoor recreational activities (nationwide) are:
  1. Running/Jogging
  2. Hiking
  3. Road Biking
  4. Freshwater Fishing
  5. Car Camping
  6. Wildlife Viewing
  7. RV Camping
  8. Hunting
  9. Saltwater Fishing
  10. Birdwatching
  
- The most rapidly growing outdoor activities (nationwide) are:
  1. Stand Up Paddling
  2. Cross Country Skiing
  3. BMX Bicycling
  4. Adventure Racing
  5. Boardsailing/Windsurfing
  6. Kayak Fishing
  7. Trail Running/Triathlon
  8. Hiking



- The top ten most popular outdoor activities (North Carolina) are:
  1. Visiting a beach or lake
  2. Walking for pleasure or exercise
  3. Visiting parks or historical sites
  4. Hiking, trails
  5. Freshwater fishing
  6. Viewing scenery
  7. Fishing from a boat
  8. Picnicking
  9. Swimming, all types
  10. Gardening
  
- Local governments (cities, towns, and counties) own the smallest percentage of public land in the United States but provide key access to public recreational opportunities due to their proximity to population density.

#### 4.5 EVALUATION OF PARK LAND NEEDS

When comparing a park system to national standards, one method is to examine the total acreage of the park system. The NRPA Park land guidelines (in acres) for the total service population of the Town of Oak Ridge are provided in the following table. Population figures in this analysis are estimated at 7,377 (2017-NC State Demographer’s Office). The acreage requirement is based on the population ratio method (acres of park land per population of 1,000) pre-established for each classification of park.

**Table 4.5-1 Town of Oak Ridge Owned Parks**

TOWN OF OAK RIDGE EXISTING PARK ACREAGE	
Oak Ridge Park (Community Park)	75.42 acres
Future Park on Oak Ridge Road (Community Park)	58.32
<b>TOTAL TOWN OF OAK RIDGE PARK ACREAGE</b>	<b>133.74 acres</b>

Presently, the Town of Oak Ridge’s recreational facilities serve the entire Town. These facilities are a mix of active and passive recreation. Regional and District park resources are provided by State, and County systems that are within proximity to the Town.

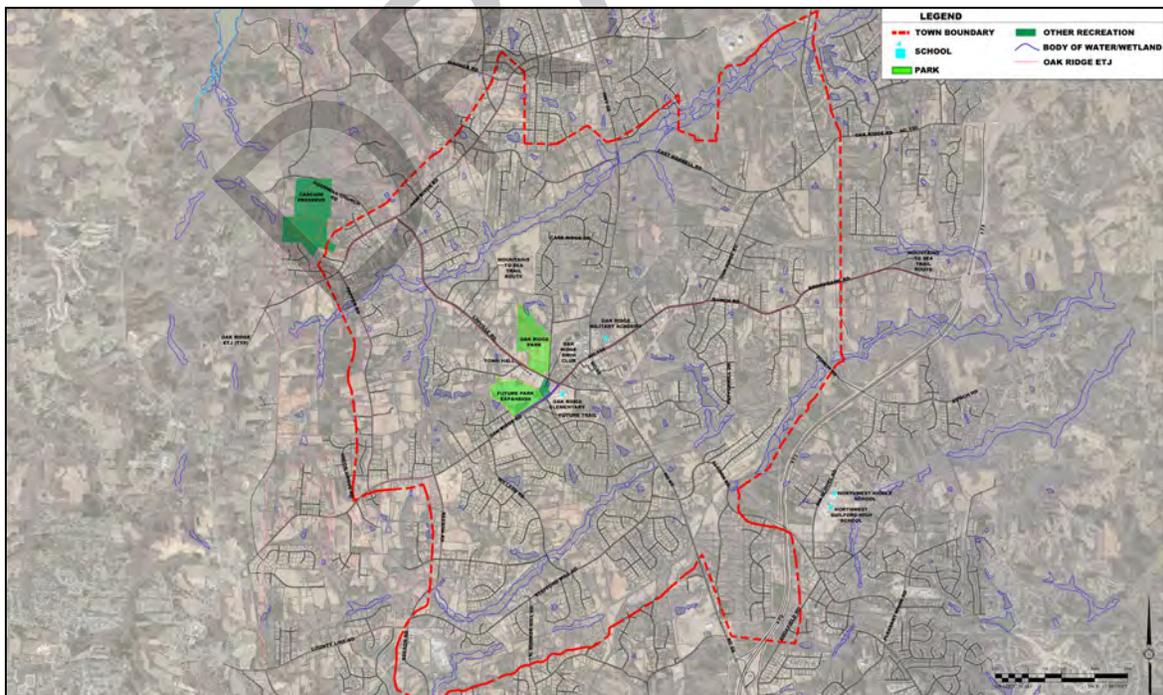


**Table 4.5-2 Town of Oak Ridge Park Types**  
**PARK ACREAGE BY CLASSIFICATION (Based on historic NRPA Guidelines)**

TYPE OF PARK	Existing** Town of Oak Ridge Acreage	Recommended for 2019 Population 7,377	Recommended for 2029 Population 8,218*
<b>REGIONAL PARK (NPS&amp;NC)</b> 1,000 acres or 10 acres/1,000 persons	NA	NA	NA
<b>DISTRICT PARK</b> 5 acres/1,000 persons	0 acres	36.89 acres	41.09 acres
<b>COMMUNITY PARK</b> 2.5 acres/1,000 persons	133.74 acres	18.44 acres	20.55 acres
<b>NEIGHBORHOOD PARK</b> 2 acres/1,000 persons	0 acres	14.75 acres	16.44 acres
<b>MINI PARK</b> 0.5 acres/1,000 persons	0 acres	3.69 acres	4.11 acres

\*Figure represents Town Population Projections based on NC State Demographer's County projections

\*\*See Chart 4.5-1 for individual park acreage.



See larger 11"x17" Existing Conditions Map in Appendix A

The map above shows Oak Ridge's existing facilities.



Based on the information contained in Table 4.5-2, the Town of Oak Ridge does not meet the national standard guidelines for District, Neighborhood, and Mini park acreage needs. It should be noted that Regional and District parks are not typically an amenity provided by small or medium sized municipalities. However, due to ample acreage for Community Parks and the small, close-knit nature typical of Oak Ridge, the acreage listed above is not required for immediate implementation. Community workshops, Town Staff, and the recreation survey results will be used as important guides in prescribing the specific recommendations for the Town of Oak Ridge parks and recreation development, for both current and future needs.

## 4.6 EVALUATION OF FACILITY NEEDS

The level of service standards were established based upon information gathered from the National Recreation & Parks Association (NRPA), *Sports, Fitness and Leisure Activities Topline Participation (SFIA) Report, 2019 Physical Activity Council's Overview Report on U.S. Participation*, and historical evidence from professional experience. Recommendations based upon these standards have been compiled in Table 4.6-1 (below) in order to assess the current and projected future (up to 10 years) facility needs for recreation facilities in Oak Ridge.

**Table 4.6-1: Existing and Projected Demand for Public Facilities**

Facility	Recommended Standards	Existing Facilities	2019 Recommended per Population	2030 Recommended per Population
Town of Oak Ridge facilities*			Population: 7,377	Projected Population: 8,218
<b>Fields</b>				
Adult Baseball	1/5,000	2	2	2
Youth Baseball	1/5,000	2 (1)	2	2
Softball	1/5,000	2 (1)	2	2
Football	1/10,000	1	1	1
Soccer	1/5,000	4	2	2
Lacrosse	1/5,000	2	2	2
<b>Courts</b>				
Basketball	1/5,000	0	2	2
Tennis	1/2,000	0	4	4
Volleyball	1/5,000	0	2	1
Pickleball	1/5,000	0	2	2



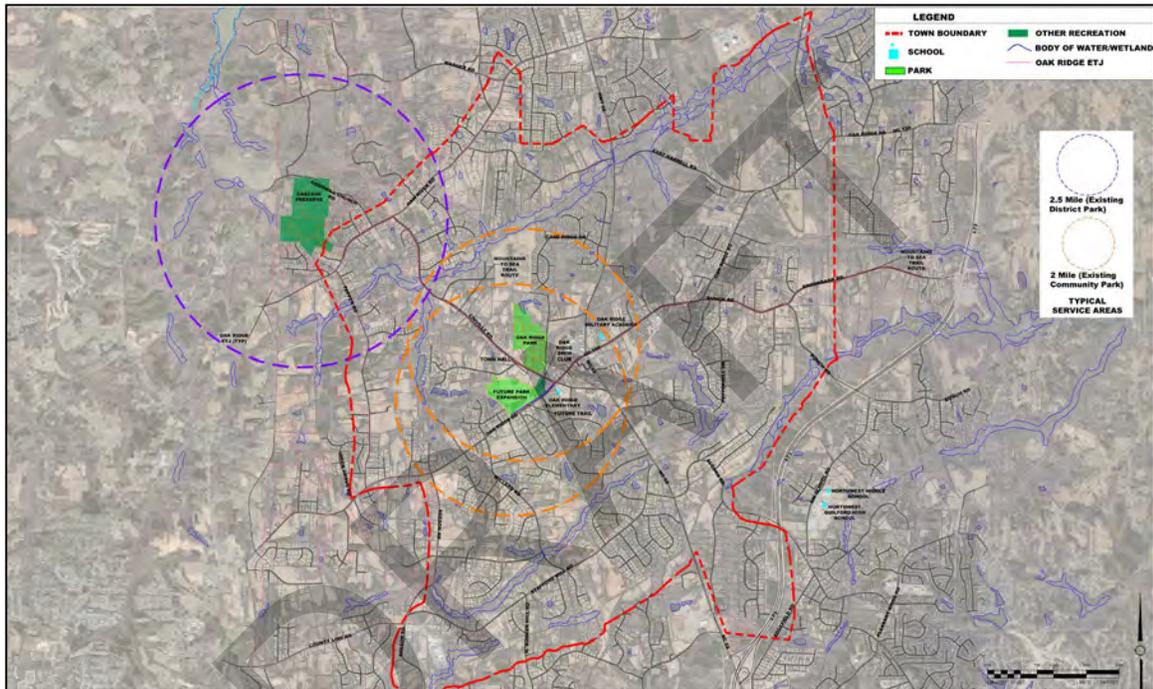
Horseshoes	1/2,000	2	4	4
<b>Outdoor Areas</b>				
Picnic Shelter	1/3,000	3	3	3
Playground	1/2,500	2	3	3
Amphitheater	1/20,000	1	NA	NA
<b>Activities</b>				
Walking	0.25 mi./1,000	2.25 miles	1.84 miles	2.05 miles
Equestrian	0.5 mi./2,000	0	1.84 miles	2.05 miles
Camping	2.5 sites/1,000	1	18 sites	21 sites
Archery Area	1/50,000	0	NA	NA
<b>Specialized</b>				
Community Center	1/20,000	0	NA	NA
Swimming Pool	1/20,000	0	NA	NA
Golf Course	1/25,000	0	NA	NA
Auditorium	1/20,000	NA	NA	NA
<b>Canoeing/Boating/Water Access</b>				
Streams/Lakes	0.2 mi./1,000	0 miles	NA	NA

\*Existing Facilities include only the facilities owned by Town of Oak Ridge Parks & Recreation. Additional quasi-public (i.e. school facilities) are in parentheses.

The chart above depicts the results of the current and future recreational facility needs assessment based on the level of service standards developed for this plan. The charts do not consider community input, which is the primary guide for the development of the Master Plan.



To better understand not only what recreation resources a community has but how accessible those facilities and programs may be to the general population this study looked at typical service areas. Typical service areas for each type of recreation facility was previously discussed in this section. The map below (See Appendix A for larger version) illustrates what portions of the community lie within or near the typical recreation service areas. The outcome of this exercise reveals that portions of the community live far enough from Town owned facilities that they cannot easily be accessed. Populations typically effected include children and seniors that do not drive. Both these user groups generally have greater leisure time and can directly benefit from access to park facilities.



**Map 2 Existing Recreation Service Areas**

Based on the information contained in Tables 4.6-1, the Town of Oak Ridge meets most of the recommended standard guidelines for many of the typical recreational facilities for their permanent population, in a few categories the number of existing facilities exceeds the level of service recommendations. Keep in mind that the standards do not take into account a community's desire to have facilities for tournament type sporting events and environmental or cultural resources. Projected population counts may differ from expectations. The Town should be prepared to adjust services based on regular assessments of growth.

Due to Oak Ridge's proximity to Greensboro, Wake Forest, and Kernersville, residents have many recreation options within a short drive. For this reason,



some of the facilities listed above may not be urgently needed for implementation. As future growth occurs, facility needs should be reevaluated.

Solutions to improving recreation in Oak Ridge includes not only providing facilities and amenities that residents desire and need, but also considering where such facilities and amenities should be located. Existing recreation service areas illustrated above indicate that the areas outside the Town core have the least access to parks. Planning for future Parks and Recreation system expansion the Town should consider developing facilities outside of the Town's core. As new residential and large commercial developments are planned the Town should take an active role in working with developers on what types of recreation amenities should be provided per Town Development Ordinance requirements.

This Comprehensive Plan considers community workshops, recreation survey findings, projected demand, service area analysis, and Town Staff input as the primary guides in prescribing the current and future recommendations for the Town of Oak Ridge Parks and Recreation development. The following section (Goals & Recommendations) describes those recommendations in more detail.

DRAFT

**- END OF SECTION -**



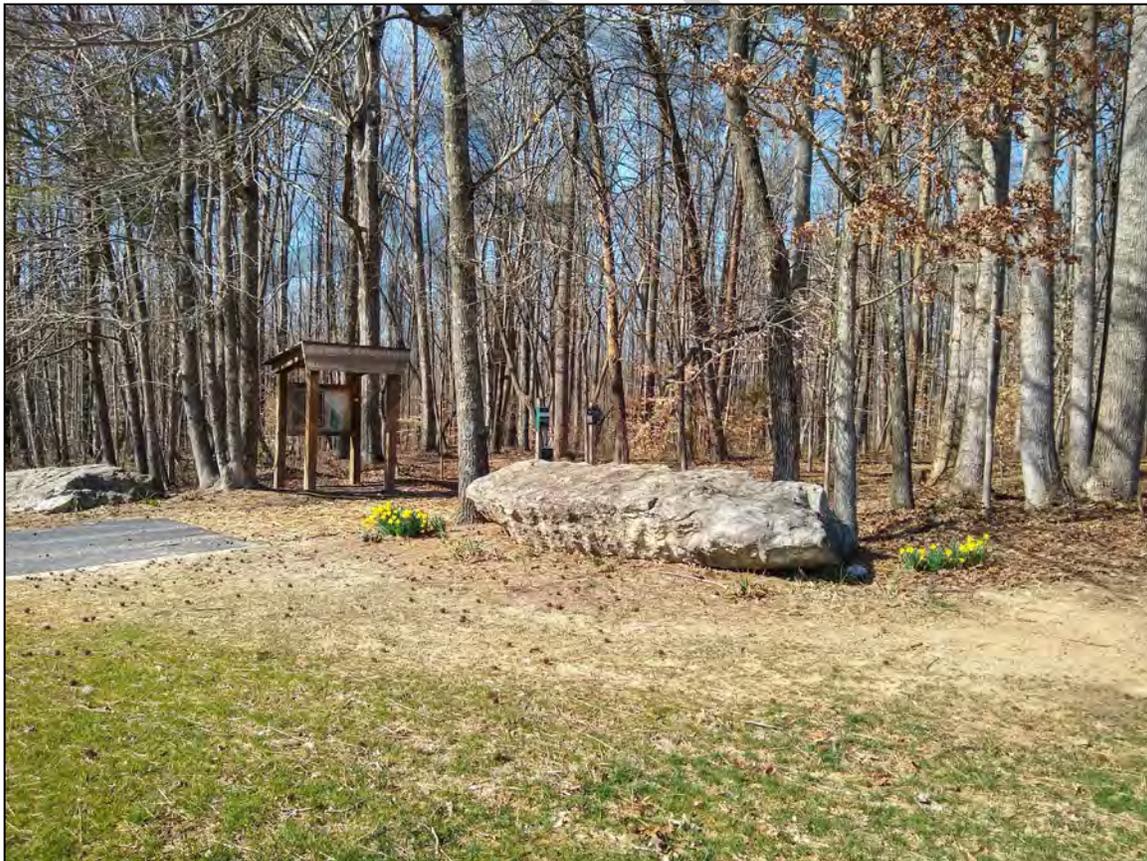


## SECTION 5 GOALS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This Master Plan serves as a map for the future development of recreation facilities for the Town of Oak Ridge. The plan incorporates recommendations to accomplish the objectives set forth by the Town Council, the Steering Committee, and community members. These recommendations are divided into the following categories:

- Roles of the Town of Oak Ridge
- Roles of Other Recreation Providers
- Park Proposals and Recommendations
- Facility Proposals and Recommendations
- Staffing and Maintenance Recommendations
- Priorities for Development





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## 5.2 ROLE OF THE TOWN

To avoid overextending their staff, the Town needs to investigate partnerships with other recreation providers and community groups. Current partnerships need to continue, and the possibility of new partnerships need to be explored.

## 5.3 ROLES OF OTHER RECREATION PROVIDERS

### Public Sector

#### **Guilford County**

The Town of Oak Ridge located within Guilford County plays an active role in providing recreation opportunities to both County and Town residents. The Town should encourage the County and other adjacent municipalities to develop greenway trails that connect to destinations such as parks and sidewalks in both the County and Town. As the demand for the future of recreational facilities continues to increase, the Town should coordinate future planning efforts with County Recreation Departments, to identify recreation programming, facility expansion, and potential partnerships.

#### **Other Local Municipalities**

Oak Ridge's neighboring communities offer various recreation facilities and programming opportunities to the public. These public facilities help shape the expectations and recreational experience of the greater community including Oak Ridge residents.

**Kernersville** – Kernersville Park and Recreation maintains and manages ten public parks, several cultural landmark sites, hosts seasonal special events and athletic tournaments.

**Summerfield** – Parks and Recreation in Summerfield consists of Community Park, Summerfield Athletic Park, trails and greenways (Vine Trail, A&Y Greenway, portions of the Mountains to Sea Trail) and seasonal events.

**Stokesdale** – The Stokesdale Parks and Recreation department consists of Stokesdale Town Park, and Stokesdale Community Park (private park). Stokesdale Gym, and Athletic programming is privately operated by the SP&R company.

**Greensboro** - The City of Greensboro Parks and Recreation Department currently oversees over 8,500 acres of parks, trails and greenways, lakes and reservoirs, public gardens, and other recreation facilities and host numerous cultural and special events.



## **Private Developers**

Private developers are an important component for the Town by providing resources and opportunities for the Town's recreation system. Private developers can assist Oak Ridge by the dedication, construction, and/or reservation of future park sites, open space, and/or greenway corridors during the overall development process.

## **5.4 PARK PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **General Recommendations**

General recommendations are designed to provide guidance for the operations, goals, administration, and growth of the Town of Oak Ridge. Many of these recommendations depend upon successful collaboration between the Town and other Town offices, such as the Planning Department.

#### **Recommendation #1: Facility and Program Accessibility**

*Every park and recreation facility the Town of Oak Ridge operates should respect and provide the needs of the disabled population through design and programming. All new facilities should be designed to meet current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. Currently, the Town is in compliance with these regulations at existing facilities; however, as new facilities are acquired or developed, priority should be given to the continual upgrading of existing facilities that could become non-compliant.*

#### **Recommendation #2: Design and Daily Maintenance**

*The facilities owned and operated by the Town of Oak Ridge should appeal to residents of the Town and visitors to the area. Priority should be given to improving the design of facilities such that they are architecturally, functionally, and ecologically progressive. Daily maintenance practices should be implemented to improve the cleanliness and longevity of all facilities.*

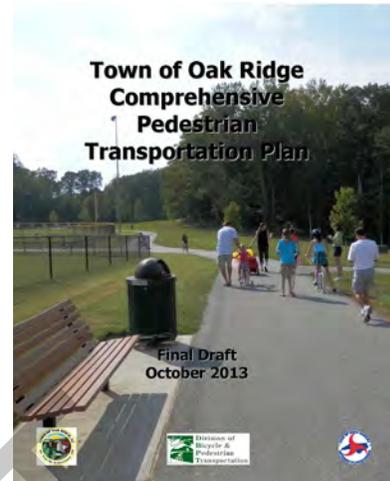
*Master planning should always be completed for park improvements or new facilities prior to final budgeting and/or design thereby making the phasing/development more transitional and of higher quality. Design (and redesign) of all facilities should embrace ecologically responsible elements and methods such as the use of native plants for landscaping, the incorporation of wildlife habitats, the use of permeable surfaces to reduce stormwater runoff where possible, and "green" building practices for structures.*



### **Recommendation #3: Walkable Communities**

*The Town of Oak Ridge should promote land uses and site designs that make walking and bicycling convenient and enjoyable. They should also encourage the inclusion of public greenways or trails in private developments and the establishment of connectivity to and/or between both current and future public schools, parks, and other public destinations.*

*The Town should refer to the Town of Oak Ridge Comprehensive Pedestrian Transportation Plan for additional information, project lists, and maps highlighting recommended projects. To facilitate these projects the Town should continue efforts to work with Guilford County and neighboring municipalities to develop a walkable community.*



### **Recommendation #4: Greenways/Multi-use Trails**

*Based on state and national studies, walking and biking are highly desired activities, which are continually increasing. North Carolina's 2015-2020 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) found that 61% of survey participants reported that "walking for pleasure" is the most common outdoor recreational activity. The plan also indicated that 81% of respondents found it was important for "local park/site" trails to connect to outdoor recreation opportunities while 57% of respondents felt trails should also link to other jurisdictions.*

*The Town of Oak Ridge should encourage the coordination and planning for future utility easements with greenway facilities. The easements should be established to allow for the inclusion of recreation facilities where possible. Where new development occurs, the Town should work with the developer to provide rights-of-way or easements for proposed and future greenway facilities.*

### **Recommendation #5: Greenway Funding**

*The Town of Oak Ridge should consider including "language" in a Development Ordinance for fee in-lieu of sidewalk to fund greenway land acquisition and construction where the need for pedestrian connections cannot rely on the timing of private property development.*



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### **Recommendation #6: Bicycle Facilities**

*Given the high cost of fuel for vehicular transportation, air quality concerns, and the need to increase the health/fitness of the population a planned network of bike trails, bike lanes, and shared roadways should be developed to support alternative transportation to recreation facilities and travel within the Town of Oak Ridge. Future roadway construction within the Town should include provisions to accommodate pedestrian and bicycle travel. This network should connect both existing, as well as future park facilities and greenways. In addition, bike racks (sheltered at schools and other potential high-use areas) should be installed at all publicly-owned facilities within the Town.*

### **Recommendation #7: Way Finding**

*The Town of Oak Ridge should consider utilizing guide pamphlets and informational kiosks to promote Town owned, and other nearby parks and recreation facilities and destinations. Highlighting and mapping the existing park offerings will provide people with the opportunity to locate recreational destinations throughout Town as well as present a cohesive message to users that the Town supports a high quality of life for its residents.*

### **Recommendation #8: Intergovernmental Cooperation**

*The Town of Oak Ridge should seek to coordinate planning efforts with the Guilford County Recreation Department and local municipalities to provide greenway and park facilities. Representatives of the Town and of these agencies should meet periodically to discuss development and recreation projects that are planned or are underway within the area. The purpose of these meetings is to discuss upcoming project opportunities and development trends in demographics and growth, newly identified citizen needs in recreation and open space, and recreation master plan updates for Guilford County, local municipalities, and adjacent communities. This will also ensure that redundancy in services is prevented and that all opportunities for partnerships and connectivity are being utilized.*

### **Recommendation #9: Developers**

*The Town should encourage new developments in Oak Ridge to incorporate open space and park land into their development plans. The inclusion of public greenways and trails in private developments should also be encouraged. If no suitable land for park or greenway development is available, the Town should consider allowing developers to pay into the fee-in-lieu of parkland dedication.*



### **Recommendation #10: Partnership Agreement**

*It is recommended that the Town Staff meet with existing and potential partners to determine needs and possible partnership opportunities. These partners can include but not be limited to local chapters of community clubs and organizations, private firms and companies within close proximity to the Town, non-profit organizations, and land conservancy organizations. The Town should begin this process by developing an approach to each potential partner to establish an understanding of each entity's needs and ultimately, result in a partnership agreement. The process will require periodic progress meetings with each partner to facilitate the partnerships goals and objectives. This may entail presentations to the partner's board or committee.*

### **Recommendation #11: Interpretative Signage**

*The Town of Oak Ridge should consider placing signage that would identify any historic and natural landmarks along pedestrian corridors. This type of signage would not only enhance the pedestrian experience but also provide educational and cultural information to users.*

### **Recommendation #12: Educational and Stewardship Programming**

*The Town of Oak Ridge should develop a consistent environmental education program and interpretative facilities at park locations and along future greenway corridors as opportunities arise for future park development. These programs should include stewardship and community volunteer programs geared to the management of natural areas and wildlife habitats.*

### **Recommendation #13: Green Building**

*It is recommended that the Town implement green building components into the existing and future parks facilities. Green building techniques consist of building materials and construction practices which reduce environmental impacts (green house gases, water pollution, and air pollution) and promote energy efficient building materials/methods. These necessary efforts will improve environmental stewardship for park facilities and educate park users.*



### **Recommendation #14: Contiguous Property Acquisition**

*When property that is contiguous to existing parks becomes available, all reasonable efforts should be made to acquire the property. Large acreage parks offer recreation amenities that can only be achieved on large sites. The*



*acquisition of contiguous property next to Town Parks should be of high priority to the Town of Oak Ridge. Efforts should be made immediately to seek first option on all contiguous properties. At the time these options are sought, other possibilities should be presented to the property owner as well. Some property owners may be receptive to conservation easements while retaining the title to the property. Conservation easements will allow the Town the opportunity to use properties for recreation while providing the immediate benefits of preservation. Numerous grant sources can be used for land acquisition. Extreme care should be exercised in choosing the correct process(es) and timing for acquisition to meet the full potential afforded by grants.*

### **Recommendation #15: Acceptance of Fee Simple Land Donation**

*If land is offered to the Town of Oak Ridge as donation by fee simple title with no restrictions, the property should be surveyed for natural heritage significance and relationship to existing plans and parks. If the land contains no environmental hazards, restrictive covenants, or restrictive easements it can be useful and beneficial for the Town to assume ownership. Not all donated land has to be developed into a park in order to be useful. Any land donation to the Town serves a great public need even if it is banked for the future because the development and public needs of the distant future (over 50 years) is unknown. If donated property were properly managed, the revenue and future significance of the property would far exceed its current contribution to the tax base. If the Town chooses not to accept land donation of a particular property, efforts should be made to assist the property owner with contacting an agency that accepts land donations or conservation easements. Land donations (which the Town has no interest in owning) could be donated to the Local Parks Foundation.*

### **Recommendation #16: Natural and Cultural Heritage Inventory**

*The Town of Oak Ridge should encourage the preparation of an Inventory of Significant Natural and Cultural Areas within the Town of Oak Ridge and planning jurisdiction. The intent of this study would be to identify areas deemed to be significant natural and/or cultural resources, which should be evaluated for consideration of preservation.*

### **Existing Park Recommendations**

In Section 4 specific facility needs were identified for the Town of Oak Ridge by both the recreation guidelines set forth by the National Recreation and Parks Association and the community input process. Subsequently, Section 5 summarizes the Town's needs for their existing facilities and makes recommendations for activities to be considered in the future development of their park system.



## Oak Ridge Town Park

- Consider including additional small picnic shelters and shade structures near playgrounds and along walking paths.
- Update playground equipment to include multi-generational amenities and fitness stations (consider “adventure” themed elements).
- Consider appropriate instructional signage for any fitness station activities.
- Define existing percentages of active and passive use areas to be able to enforce Strategic Plan Policy 1.1.1.
- Consider restoration of the white house at Lisa Drive and Linville Road as a cultural center for community gathering, historical preservation and local arts.

## Whitaker Park (Future)

- *Open space to be maintained to preserve viewshed from highway 150/Oak Ridge Road.*
- Begin planning process for park development.
- Seek funding for park design and construction.
- Investigate the need for and scale of passive and active recreation amenities to be offered.
- Investigate feasibility of equestrian uses.
- Work with group responsible for design and development of future Veteran's Memorial to determine appropriate scale and location of project.

## Other Future Park Development Recommendations

### 5.5 FACILITY PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Section 4.6 specific facility needs were identified for the Town of Oak Ridge by the community input process and the recreation guidelines set forth. This section follows up on these needs and provides facility recommendations for the Town's existing and proposed park sites. These facilities will provide users with multiple recreation opportunities within the park system.

#### Basketball

The Town currently has no basketball courts. Based on the recommended guidelines the Town should consider providing two basketball courts to meet the existing needs of the community. It is recommended that Town carefully consider where courts should be located to maximize visibility, and safety.



### **Baseball/Softball**

The Town currently has three (3) baseball/softball fields. Based on the recommended guidelines the Town meets the minimum standards. However, Town should investigate the need for additional fields as the population increases.

### **Football**

The Town currently has one (1) area used as a football field. Based on the recommended guidelines the town meets the minimum standards. To mitigate conflicts with other activities that may have use of the field area, the Town should consider developing one additional field suitable for football programming.

### **Soccer**

Soccer has become a very popular sport among youth in this country and is a growing trend among young adults. The recommended standards show a need for at least two (2) soccer fields for the Town of Oak Ridge's population. Currently, the Town exceeds the guidelines by providing four (4) designated soccer fields. It should be noted that three of these fields are merely striped for smaller U8 (under 8), U10 (under 10), and U12 (under 12) play areas out of one standard multipurpose field. Existing field demand from other activities complicates activity programming. Town should consider the need to provide at least one additional multipurpose field to help mitigate activity programming conflicts.

### **Lacrosse**

According to a US Lacrosse study from 2015 the sport saw youth participation jump 47.0% for boys and 43.1% for girls from 2010 to 2015. The NCAA also reports Lacrosse as the fastest growing college sport from 2010 to present. The recommended standards developed for this plan show a need for at least two (2) lacrosse fields for the Town of Oak Ridge. Currently, the Town meets the guidelines by providing (2) lacrosse fields, however they are shared with soccer programming. Since soccer and lacrosse seasons overlap it is recommended that Town consider developing at least one additional multipurpose field to help mitigate activity programming conflicts.

### **Tennis Courts**

According to park standards (Section 4), the Town of Oak Ridge currently provides no public tennis courts. Based on the recommended guidelines the



Town should consider developing four (4) courts to meet the standards developed for this plan.

### **Picnic Shelters and Tables**

The Town currently has three (3) dedicated shelters with picnic tables at various facilities. According to the standards developed for this plan, the Town meets the requirements. However, based upon comments from the community survey and public input sessions, it is recommended that one (1) additional large picnic shelter be installed in a central location. Smaller picnic shelters should be considered for all future park developments.

### **Playground Activities**

According to recreation standards established in this document, Oak Ridge needs to provide one (1) additional playground to meet the necessary requirements for playground equipment. According to the results of the public input sessions and the community survey it is recommended that the current playground equipment be updated to offer multigenerational activities such as fitness stations. The playground equipment should be accessible to all ages and physical abilities. Community interest in adventure themed amenities was strong and as such should be considered as future improvements are made.

### **Walking /Hiking Trails and Bikeways**

Currently, the Town provides an adequate distance of trails for walking or bicycling. Due to the proximity of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, which runs through the middle of town, a walker/hiker's culture is being developed that should serve the community well.

According to community input it is recommended that more walking paths be considered at future park developments and as connections between recreation facilities and significant destinations such as downtown and residential areas. To meet the multigenerational needs of Oak Ridge residents, ancillary features such as water stops, shade, seating, convenient parking, clear signage and ample restroom access should be considered in the design of new and improvement of existing facilities.

## **5.6 FUTURE PARK DEVELOPMENTS**

While this plan's recreation service standards indicate that most individual facilities meet minimum standards, issues with recreation access do exist. Existing pressures on park facilities will continue to grow as the population increases. Part of the issue is that the Town's recreation facilities are centrally located meaning that the existing and future developments not already located within near proximity of Town Park will be forced to drive to the park to take

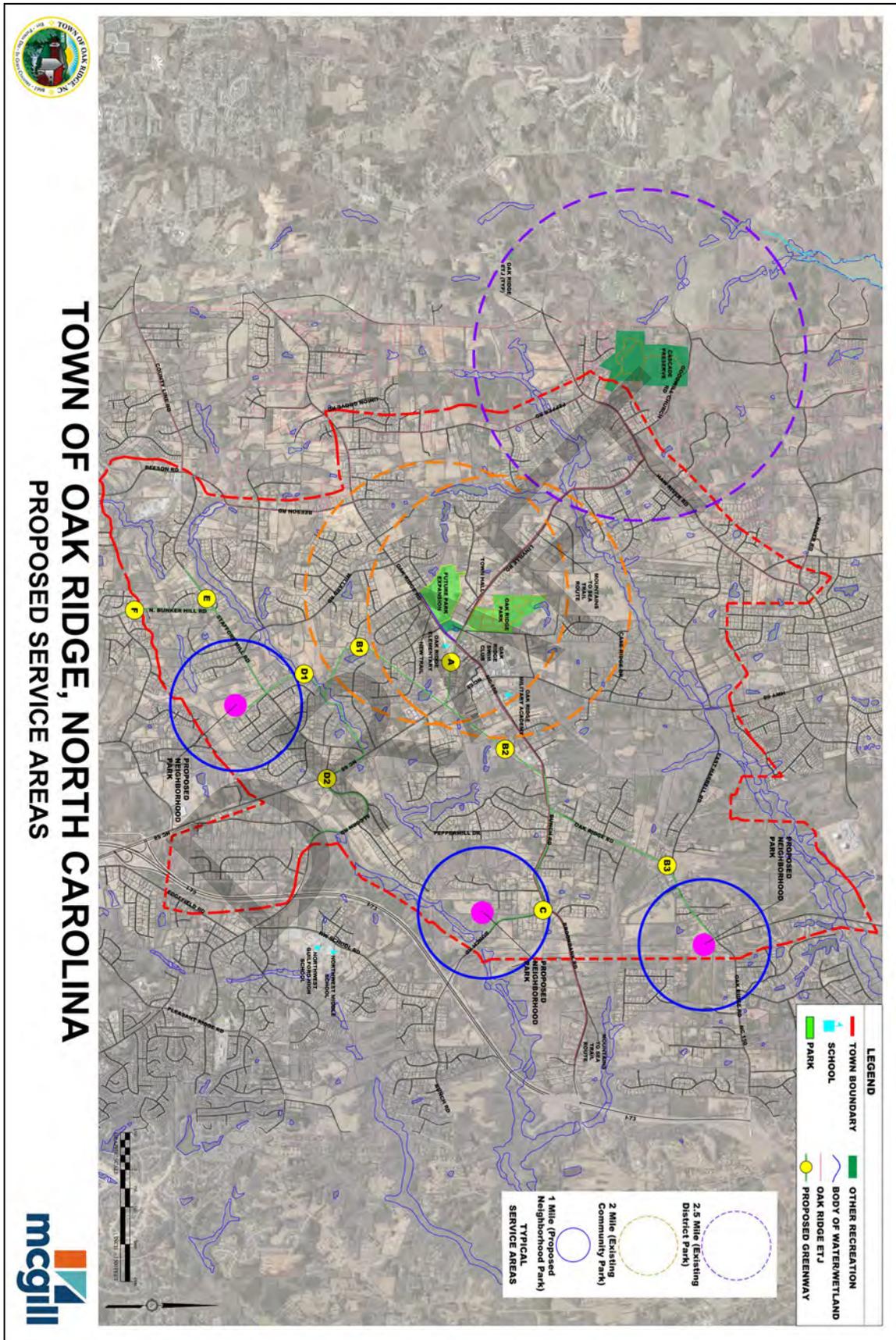


advantage of Public recreation offerings. Aside from being an inconvenience, this excludes those residents such as seniors and children that are reliant on others to drive them to and from facilities. The other part of the issue is that community activities such as organized sports find it difficult to schedule activities that require available athletic field space within overlapping seasons. One example of this is between soccer and lacrosse programming.

One possible solution is that smaller neighborhood parks may be developed in outlying areas to serve some of the most basic of recreational needs such as public gathering places, walking paths, multiuse fields, picnic shelters, playgrounds, etc. These neighborhood parks would have the ability to improve resident's quality of life by providing safe public space within a closer distance from where residents live or work.

While park facilities are an important part of any parks and recreation system, connectivity of these facilities to other destinations is also critically important for the success of the system and improvement of the quality of life of residents. The proposed services map also proposes greenway routes that can serve to link Town Park and proposed new neighborhood parks across Oak Ridge. The proposed routes are conceptual in nature but utilize traditionally practical utility and roadway easements instead of seeking numerous easements across private properties.

This plan recommends that Town consider developing new neighborhood parks and greenways that can serve to extend Oak Ridge's parks and recreation services throughout the community. These new facilities could support community gathering and social interactions, exercise and basic respite from everyday life. The proposed services map on the following page (larger version in Appendix A) highlights proposed projects that should be considered for further planning and development.



Proposed Service Areas Map



## 5.7 STAFFING AND MAINTENANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

This Master Plan covers a planning period of 10 years. The facilities to be implemented during that time as part of the recommendations may require some level of additional staffing and additional funding for facility operation and maintenance. Consideration of these budgetary impacts should be made prior to facility implementation.

Multiple factors may come to influence what the future staffing needs of the Town of Oak Ridge Parks and Recreation Department will encompass. Those may include population growth, available tax dollars, Capital Improvement Plans, development of tourism efforts, etc.

Maintaining adequate staffing for Parks and Recreation facilities and programs will be necessary to foster a good quality of life for Town residents, and prospective businesses that may seek to relocate to the Town of Oak Ridge. The existing and proposed staffing levels for the Oak Ridge Parks and Recreation Department are as follows:

### **Existing Staffing Levels:**

#### **Full-time Positions**

- Director of Parks and Recreation (1)
- Park Maintenance Crew Leader (1)
- Park Maintenance Groundskeepers (4)

### **Proposed Additional Staffing Positions**

As the Town of Oak Ridge Parks and Recreation system grows in the next 10 years, it should assess the need for one (1) additional Park Maintenance staff member. This may provide the director with additional time to develop and manage partnerships with other recreation providers in the community. This may also free up the position to help organize special events and develop future programming opportunities for residents and visitors.

## 5.8 PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

### **Priority Methodology**

The park system for the Town of Oak Ridge should continue to grow and respond to changes in Town demographics. Future planned facilities should be implemented incrementally to provide for these changes. This section describes how the recommended facilities for the Town are prioritized. The following



factors guided the prioritization of individual segments of the Master Plan and were derived from input and desires specified by the residents of Oak Ridge:

- Needed improvements to existing Town of Oak Ridge owned facilities
- Development of planned facilities to meet the *current* needs of recreation for Town residents
- Development of planned facilities to meet the *future* needs of recreation for Town residents

## **Priorities for Development**

The park facility prioritization is an essential tool that provides the Town of Oak Ridge's Parks and Recreation Department with a breakdown of the priority for each capital improvement. Given the magnitude of the budgets for improvements to existing parks and for new park and greenway facilities, prioritization of these needs is important. The following is a list of priorities based upon the need's assessment process:

## **Prioritized Project Tasks**

### **2019-2024**

- *Analyze opportunities to partner with neighboring Recreation Departments, and private recreation providers on shared programming of active recreation and how best to manage existing fields.*
- *Begin planning/design/site development for Whitaker property*
- *Pursue North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund grant to help fund improvements at Whitaker property.*
- *Construct utilities, parking and restrooms at Whitaker property*
- *Determine options for park surveillance system*
- *Construct trails at Whitaker property*
- *Coordinate with Special Events Committee on design and development of Town Veteran's Memorial*
- *Establish goals and expectations for Town Park Community Center (Lisa Rd. structure)*
- *Construct 200' baseball/softball field at Town Park*

### **2025-2029**

- *Install accessible play features and shade structure(s) at Whitaker Property*
- *Construct large picnic shelter at Whitaker property*
- *Construct two (2) multipurpose fields at Whitaker property*
- *Design and Construct splashpad at Town Park*
- *Construct Tennis courts at Whitaker property*
- *Construct Basketball court at Whitaker property*



- *Investigate feasibility of land acquisition for park expansion (neighborhood parks - see proposed service area map Appendix A.)*
- *Undertake planning and seeking funding for system expansion (neighborhood parks)*
- *Begin planning for proposed greenway routes connecting to new neighborhood parks.*
- *Expand trail system focusing on connectivity of area destinations*
- *Include multigenerational features (i.e. fitness stations, art, etc.) at Town Park playground*

DRAFT

**- END OF SECTION -**





## **Section 6** **Action Implementation Plan**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

This section describes how the Town of Oak Ridge can implement a safe, convenient, and usable park and recreation system through the execution of its established goals in the Comprehensive Parks Master Plan. The strategy for achieving goals involves the recommended park and recreation facilities/programs previously discussed in Section 5. Section 6 exhibits strategies and opportunities, key implementation steps and policies, and methods for developing facilities. Together, these sections form the implementation program.



The results of the Town of Oak Ridge Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Master Plan 2019-2029 are based on the following discovery methods:

1. A review of the study area that is within the Town limits
2. An analysis of the existing parks and facilities
3. Community input
4. Recreation standards that have been generically developed for municipalities and Town governments.

The Master Plan is designed to be action-oriented and serve as a tool in the improvement and enhancement of the park system for the Town of Oak Ridge.

### **6.2 FUNDING**

Identification of sufficient funding is a crucial element that is required to implement the Master Plan. The North Carolina Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan is a guide by which funding sources for park and recreation facilities may be identified. Funding for future projects will be a key issue that will need to be addressed in the upcoming years if governments continues to provide basic minimum services.

To meet the existing and future needs of the Town of Oak Ridge the goals and objectives that are identified in the Master Plan must be seriously considered for implementation. The Town will need to update their annual budget for the Parks and Recreation Department based on projected capital improvement costs, staffing needs, and operations/maintenance costs.



## Park and Recreation Capital Expenditures

The population estimates used in this report were certified county and municipal estimates in July 2013. The estimates were provided by the 2014-15 M CPRSS (*North Carolina Municipal and County Parks and Recreation Services Study Executive Report*). The figures can be found online at <https://rrs.cnr.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2014-2015-Executive-Summary.pdf>. The per capita expenditure figures are also from the *North Carolina Municipal and County Parks and Recreation Services Study, Fiscal Year 2014-2015*.

Table 6.2-1 shows government entities that represent North Carolina municipalities with populations similar to Oak Ridge.

**Table 6.2-1**

Municipalities	Population Estimate 2012-2013	Per Capita Expenditures 2012-2013
Oak Ridge	6,600	\$61.56
Gibsonville	6,619	\$158.96
Aberdeen	6,726	\$44.57
Mills River	6,892	\$41.12
Oak Island	6,950	\$151.89

### RECOMMENDED CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

A Capital Improvement Program for the development of park facilities is designed to encompass, at a minimum, a 10-year period of the Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The proposed costs are based on 2019 material/labor costs. Capital improvement costs include general expenditures such as site preparation, building structures, access, site utilities, parking, and specific recreation improvements. The capital improvement plan also includes estimates for planning or design fees.

The proposed Capital Improvements Plan found in table 6.2-2 would cover a 10-year period and would serve to set recreation expenses for each fiscal year for implementation of specific projects. The opinions of cost are preliminary in nature and are for planning purposes only. As the time approaches to consider the recommended improvements it will be necessary to receive up to date opinions of cost.

Town of Oak Ridge Parks & Recreation  
2019 – Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Master Plan



Table 6.2-2 (2019 Oak Ridge Recreation CIP Appendix D)

Town of Oak Ridge - PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN 2019-2036 10 Year Capital Improvements Plan Summary													
CATEGORY / IMPROVEMENT	Priority	COST*	YEAR 1 2020-2021	YEAR 2 2021-2022	YEAR 3 2022-2023	YEAR 4 2023-2024	YEAR 5 2024-2025	YEAR 6 2025-2026	YEAR 7 2026-2027	YEAR 8 2027-2028	YEAR 9 2028-2029	YEAR 10 2029-2030	FUTURE
<b>Oak Ridge Town Park</b>													
Add small picnic shelters		\$46,000						\$40,000					
Update playground equipment with multi-generational playground		\$69,000					\$65,000						
Add picnic structure		\$20,000					\$25,000						
Add fitness station activities		\$25,000		\$25,000									
Lighted 200' baseball/softball field	6	\$260,000					\$4,000	\$250,000				\$120,000	
Splash Pad	10	\$120,000											
Surveillance System		\$80,000		\$80,000									
Rehab of white house at Lisa Dr. & Linville Rd.	2	\$200,000				\$200,000							
<b>Sub-total</b>		<b>\$794,000</b>											
<b>Whittaker Park (Future)</b>													
Walking trail shelter	3	\$160,000											
Lighted Multi-use Fields	8	\$160,000			\$250,000					\$150,000			
Restrooms	1	\$300,000									\$300,000		
Parking	1	\$260,000			\$250,000								
ADA Playground	7	\$120,000							\$120,000				
(6) Lighted Tennis Courts	11	\$700,000											\$700,000
Basketball Court	12	\$70,000											
Site Development		\$360,000		\$30,000									
Surveillance System		\$80,000		\$80,000									
Warren's Memorial	2	NA											
<b>Sub-total</b>	4	<b>\$2,430,000</b>											
<b>Proposed Southern Neighborhood Park</b>													
Land acquisition allowance		\$300,000											\$300,000
Outdoor Basketball Courts		\$300,000											\$300,000
Multi-use Field		\$160,000											\$160,000
Accessible playground		\$120,000											\$120,000
Picnic Shelter		\$75,000											\$75,000
Restrooms		\$250,000											\$250,000
Parking		\$400,000											\$400,000
Site Development		\$400,000											\$400,000
<b>Sub-total</b>		<b>\$1,825,000</b>											
<b>Proposed Northern Neighborhood Park</b>													
Land acquisition allowance		\$300,000											\$300,000
Tennis Courts		\$200,000											\$200,000
Picnic Shelter		\$75,000											\$75,000
Walking Trails		\$300,000											\$300,000
Restrooms		\$250,000											\$250,000
Parking		\$400,000											\$400,000
Site Development		\$400,000											\$400,000
<b>Sub-total</b>		<b>\$1,725,000</b>											
<b>Proposed Eastern Neighborhood Park</b>													
Land acquisition allowance		\$300,000											\$300,000
Multi-use Field		\$160,000											\$160,000
Baseball/Softball Field		\$200,000											\$200,000
Playground		\$120,000											\$120,000
Picnic Shelter		\$75,000											\$75,000
Restrooms		\$250,000											\$250,000
Parking		\$400,000											\$400,000
Site Development		\$400,000											\$400,000
<b>Sub-total</b>		<b>\$1,770,000</b>											
<b>Future Greenway Development</b>													
Trail A 0.5 miles of 12 foot wide asphalt trail		\$600,000											\$600,000
Trail B1 1.25 miles of 12 foot wide asphalt trail		\$1,700,000											\$1,700,000
Trail B2 1.25 miles of 12 foot wide asphalt trail		\$1,000,000											\$1,000,000
Trail C 1.25 miles of 12 foot wide asphalt trail		\$1,100,000											\$1,100,000
Trail D1 1.75 miles of 12 foot wide asphalt trail		\$1,600,000											\$1,600,000
Trail D2 1 miles of 12 foot wide asphalt trail		\$800,000											\$800,000
Trail E 1.25 miles of 12 foot wide asphalt trail		\$1,000,000											\$1,000,000
Trail F .75 miles of 12 foot wide asphalt trail		\$650,000											\$650,000
<b>Sub-total</b>		<b>\$9,350,000</b>											
<b>Grand Total*</b>		<b>\$17,950,000</b>	<b>\$600,000</b>	<b>\$190,000</b>	<b>\$276,000</b>	<b>\$600,000</b>	<b>\$75,000</b>	<b>\$290,000</b>	<b>\$720,000</b>	<b>\$160,000</b>	<b>\$300,000</b>	<b>\$120,000</b>	<b>\$15,070,000</b>



This Total recreation capital improvement cost of \$17,594,000 represents the proposed, cumulative figure (opinion of probable costs) to be spent for park and recreation development, improvements, and renovations by the year 2030 and future recommended improvements as stated in the recreation CIP. Removing the future projects (those beyond 2030) and greenway development (\$15,070,000) from the total CIP costs brings the total 10-year probable costs to \$2,524,000. The total figure does not consider an inflation rate over the 10-year period through the year 2030 and is approximate in nature intended for planning purposes only. It should also be noted that the Town Veteran’s Memorial project is not designed as of the writing of this document. Therefore, a probable cost for this project has yet to be calculated.

### 6.3 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Studies have shown that economies are impacted *positively* where bicycle and pedestrian tourism is fostered, promoted, and where investments are made in bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The number of people who feel comfortable walking or riding bicycles is a measurement of the quality of life in that area.

#### Multi-Use Trails

Multi-use trails are extremely popular amenities for vacationing bicyclists and pedestrians. Tourists and visitors to the area often return to communities that provide places which are safely removed from busy roads for walking and bicycling. Multi-use trails offer scenic recreation, which is suitable for a wide range of ages and abilities. Many times, lodging is in close proximity to popular trails thereby increasing occupancy for the owner. For residents in these locales, investments in trails and greenways can increase property values and improve the overall livability of a community, as well as contribute to attracting, retaining, and expanding tourism and the associated revenues.



Investing dollars in multi-use trails yield substantial community-wide returns. These returns are in the form of increased property values, business attraction, recreation revenue, and reduced water treatment and flooding costs. Not only are tourists attracted to these areas, but business leaders are selecting sites for the relocation and expansion of industries and corporations where the quality of life is high and recreation opportunities are abundant. Increasingly, corporations are recognizing the benefits of convenient fitness and recreation for their employees and are seeking these greenway amenities for potential locations.



Multi-use trails having vegetated buffers located adjacent to waterways act as “filters” to clean the water, trapping nonpoint source pollutants. These pollutants include sediment, pesticides, fertilizers, oil, gas, and other chemicals that are transported into streams, rivers, and/or lakes by stormwater when rain or snow events occur.

### **Trail Development**

The ongoing construction of bicycle and pedestrian facilities is proving to be a wise economic investment for the communities through which they pass. Oak Ridge’s Parks and Recreation department should annually assess and include funding towards the maintenance of popular Town trails to preserve the value that they contribute to the community. Trails and pathways have a positive effect on nearby property values with homebuyers and business owners



*Property values increase where trails have been developed.*

realizing the effect that such facilities bring to a community. According to research by the *Rails to Trails Conservancy*, there are vast amounts of people who are using rail trails. It is easy to understand how communities can profit economically by meeting the needs of trail users. Entrepreneurs who invest in restaurants, convenience stores, bicycle and other merchandise shops, campgrounds, and alternate lodging attribute the location of a nearby trail to at least a portion of their success. Realtors and homebuyers alike are recognizing the benefits of properties located near trails. Both locally and nationally, the construction of trails has proven to be a cost-effective use of public funds. Multi-use trails allow more visitors and residents to replace automobile trips with non-motorized trips, thereby moving the citizenry closer to achieving public health objectives, including increased opportunities for physical exercise.

### **Parks**

Research has substantiated the direct proportion between economic growth and the existence of parks and open space in communities and municipalities around the country. This growth includes increased property values in residential, urban, and industrial communities, as well as the increased revenue from tourists.

### **Increased Property Value**

The real estate market consistently demonstrates that residents throughout the country are willing to invest larger amounts of money in properties that are



located close to parks and open space areas than they would for homes that do not offer these types of amenities. The higher values of these homes produce higher property taxes in the affected area. In some instances, additional property taxes are enough to recoup the annual debt charges on bonds, which were originally used to finance park acquisition and development.

Studies have shown that property values typically increase when parks or outdoor facilities, such as outdoor festivals, movies, and restaurants, are in the immediate locale. Studies indicate that “commercial asking rents” near park property exceed rents in surrounding submarkets.



### **Revitalization of Businesses**

In recent years, there has been a trend to revitalize inner-town and urban areas to improve their quality of life. The success of this revitalization has included the addition of parks and recreational activity in downtown areas. Generally speaking, people do not want to live or work in an environment where they have no refuge from downtown buildings without having any place to go for a stroll, walk the dog, or just enjoy the outdoors. In studies of downtown revitalizations, the top recommendations include the dramatic expansion of parks and open spaces.

### **Tourism**

A park often becomes the signature attraction for a community or municipality, and it is often used as a marketing tool to attract residents, tourists, conventions, and businesses. Parks often shape the identity of the area and give residents a sense of pride.

Organized events held in public parks, such as art festivals, athletic events, food festivals, concerts, and plays, often bring substantial positive economic impacts to their communities by filling hotel rooms and restaurants and bringing customers to other local business enterprises.

## **6.4 OPPORTUNITIES AND STRATEGIES**

### **Dedicated Source of Local Funding**

In order to leverage and provide matching funds for many of the programs listed above, the Town of Oak Ridge should evaluate the existing departmental budget and funding for capital improvements to include the following:



- Property/sales tax
- Bonds
- Fee in-lieu of contributions
- User fees/registration fees

### **Property/Sales Tax Revenues**

General tax revenues traditionally provide sources for general operations and maintenance of park systems for local governments. Parks and recreation development is scheduled along with health, public safety, and utilities in regular budgets established by the Town. Assessed valuation of real and personal property tax and sales tax provides the framework for the major portion of the tax base for the Town.

Traditionally ad valorem tax revenue has been the primary source of funding for the park and recreation enhancement of properties/facilities owned by local governments, 'Recreational opportunities' are considered a public service and are often a standard line item on general funding budgets. Creative financial opportunities are possible; however, ad valorem taxes will continue to be the major revenue source to support the system. Communities often vote to raise their local tax rate temporarily in support of their park and recreation systems.

### **General Obligation Bonds**

Many communities issue bonds, that are typically approved by the shareholders, to finance site development and land acquisition costs. The State of North Carolina grants local governments the authority to borrow funds for parks and recreation through the issuance of bonds. The amount is not to exceed the cost of acquisition or improvement of park and recreation facilities. Total bond capacities for local governments are limited for parks and recreation to a maximum percentage of assessed property valuation. Since the issuance of bonds relies on the support of the voting population, the implementation of awareness programs is absolutely essential prior to a referendum vote.

General Obligation bonds are the preferred financing approach of the North Carolina Local Government Commission and the general securities market because these instruments are backed by the full faith and credit of the issuer. That simply means that the bonds represent an encumbrance against the property tax base of the issuing jurisdiction and therefore offer the best available security to the bond holder. The State of North Carolina gives the issuance of bonds not to exceed the total cost of improvements (including land acquisition). In view of the recommended capital improvements suggested in this plan, the Town may consider continuing to use General Obligation bonds to develop new facilities. Total bonding capacities for local government is limited for parks and recreation to a maximum percentage of assessed property valuation.



The following are key factors to consider before using this financing instrument:

- In North Carolina, the issuance of General Obligation bonds requires a referendum of the voters within the issuing jurisdiction.
- The term of the debt may be extended to 20-30 years.
- The debt is publicly sold, so there are costs associated with the sale. These costs generally total 3% to 5% of the total bond principal. The issuance costs offset the lower interest rate and, therefore, this instrument becomes more attractive as the size of the issuance increases and the issuance costs are spread over the larger debt. It has been found that this financing option becomes financially superior as the debt principal exceeds \$10-\$12 million.
- Generally, prepayment of the debt cannot be accomplished until reaching a call date. This usually is around 75% of debt retirement.

Failure of the General Obligation Bond to be ratified by referendum could mean that the Town could not go forward with an alternative approach to financing without substantially changing the scope of the project.

### **Fee in-Lieu of Contributions**

According to Oak Ridge's code, developers are required to set aside a predetermined amount of land based on the type and quantity of structures constructed of any residential development to be maintained as open space. The Town should consider providing developers with an option to pay a 'fee in lieu of' rather than to dedicate land for open space or recreation within conventional subdivisions. This program has



*Developers utilize UDO for revenue source.*

proven to be successful for many local governments in providing a dedicated source of revenue earmarked for park development.

### **User Fees/Registration Fees**

Communities throughout the nation employ a wide variety of user fees for public use of recreational programs and services within their recreation departments. The amount of the fee is usually determined by a portion of the recreation costs needed for improvements and operations. These user fees are typically levied for special facilities such as water parks and golf courses; however, they can also be charged for the use of trails and ball fields. The Town of Oak Ridge should continue to generate revenue by charging user fees for use of facilities such as picnic shelters in order to cover operation and administrative costs. In addition,



the Town should continue to have a separate fee rate structure for residents and non-residents. As the park system continues to develop, the Town should examine their fee structure to identify opportunities for additional revenue. The current user fees appear to be fair and reasonable for a majority of the Town residents and non-residents. Elected officials should determine the fees and charges based on departmental input; the fees should not be so high that persons of modest income would ultimately be denied the use of park facilities.

## **Other sources of funding**

### **Funding/Acquisition Sources**

Implementing the recommendations of this Comprehensive Parks Master Plan will require a combination of funding sources that include local, state, federal, and private money. This Section provides a listing of the most commonly used funds for park and greenway facility projects in North Carolina. Fortunately, the benefits of protected greenways and parks are many and varied. This allows programs in The Town of Oak Ridge to access money earmarked for a variety of purposes including water quality, hazard mitigation, recreation, air quality, alternative transportation, wildlife protection, community health, and economic development. Competition is always stiff for state and federal funds. It becomes imperative that local governments work together to create multi-jurisdictional partnerships and to develop their own local sources of funding. These sources can then be used to leverage outside assistance. The long-term success of this plan will almost certainly depend on the dedication of local revenue stream for park and greenway projects.

It is important that the Town of Oak Ridge fully evaluate its available options and develop a funding strategy that can meet community needs, maximize local resources, improve quality of life, and leverage outside funding. Financing will be needed to administer the continued planning and implementation process, acquire parcels or easements, and manage and maintain facilities. Further research into these programs is recommended to determine requirements for specific grants.

McGill Associates advises the Town of Oak Ridge to pursue a variety of funding options. Below is a list of park and greenway funding opportunities that are typically sought by communities. Creative planning and consistent monitoring of funding options will likely produce new opportunities not listed below.

## **Grants**

State and federal agencies offer numerous grants to assist municipalities in the financing of their parks and recreation projects. This source of funding should definitely be investigated and pursued by the Town of Oak Ridge for present and future park and recreation improvements.



### **North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF):**

PARTF was established for local governments and the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation in 1994 as a funding source for the development and/or improvement of parks and recreation facilities, and for the purpose of land acquisition. A state-funded program, PARTF matches monies spent by municipalities on parks and recreation, with each sharing 50% of the cost. The maximum matching fund amount provided by PARTF is \$500,000. Contact the Recreational Resources Service for additional information at (919) 515-7118.

### **Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF):**

A federally funded program, LWCF, was established for local and state governments in 1965 as a funding source for outdoor recreational development and land acquisition. LWCF monies are derived from the sale or lease of nonrenewable resources, primarily offshore oil and gas leases, and surplus federal land sales. Acquisition and development grants may be used for a wide variety of outdoor projects such as town parks, tennis courts, bike trails, outdoor swimming pools, and support facilities (roads, water supply, et cetera.) Facility design must be rather basic rather than elaborate and must remain accessible to the general public. No more than 50% of the project cost may be federally funded by LWCF, although all or part of the project sponsor's matching share may be obtained from certain other federal assistance programs.



### **North Carolina Natural Heritage Trust Fund**

The North Carolina Natural Heritage Trust Fund (NHTF) provides supplemental funding to select state agencies for the acquisition and protection of important natural areas, to preserve the state's ecological diversity and cultural heritage, and to inventory the natural heritage resources of the state. Eligible agencies include the Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources, the Wildlife Resources Commission, the Dept. of Cultural Resources, and the Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Although the Town of Oak Ridge cannot be the applicant, there are state agencies, which could acquire properties, institute programs, et cetera in the Town for preservation or education purposes. Grants are awarded for the following:

- The purchase of lands that represent the state's ecological diversity to ensure their preservation and conservation for recreational, scientific, educational, cultural, and aesthetic purposes.
- The purchase of additions to state parks, state trails, aesthetic forests, wild or scenic rivers, and fish/wildlife management areas.



- The development of a balanced state program of historic properties.
- The inventory and conservation planning of natural areas by the Natural Heritage program.

### **Federal Aid Construction Funds**

These funds are included in the National Highway System (NHS), Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBG), and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ). The funds provide for the construction of pedestrian and bicycle transportation facilities. The primary source of funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects is STBG Enhancement Funding

### **Safe Routes to School Program (SRTS)**



The Safe Routes to Schools Program is a Federal-Aid program of the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The Program is a sub-program of the Transportation Alternatives Program, falling under the Surface Transportation Program. Under TAP the SRTS Program is combined with the Recreation Trails Program (RTP) to provide financial assistance to projects that fall under alternative transportation. Communities must come up with 20% of a project cost while the remaining 80% is funded through grant competitions. All TAP projects are administered by State Departments of Transportation (DOT's).

The Federal program provides funds to the States to improve the ability of primary and middle school students to walk and bicycle to school safely. The purposes of the Safe Routes to Schools program are outlined below:

- To enable and encourage children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school.
- To make bicycling and walking to school a safer and more appealing transportation alternative, thereby encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age.
- To facilitate the planning, development and implementation of projects and activities that will improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption and air pollution in the vicinity (approximately 2 miles) of primary and middle schools (Grades K-8).

For more information on North Carolina's Safe Routes to School Program visit <https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/BikePed/pages/safe-routes-to-school.aspx>.

### **North Carolina Ecosystem Enhancement Program**

The N.C. Ecosystem Enhancement Program (NCEEP) combines a wetlands-restoration initiative by the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality with



ongoing environmental efforts by the Dept. of Transportation to restore, enhance, and protect its wetlands and waterways. NCEEP provides:

- High-quality, cost-effective projects for watershed improvement and protection
- Compensation for unavoidable environmental impacts associated with transportation, infrastructure, and economic development
- Detailed watershed-planning and project-implementation efforts within North Carolina's threatened or degraded watersheds

### **The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act of 2004 (SAFETEA).**

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act of 2004 (SAFETEA), approved by the federal government in 2004, is a primary source for financing bicycle, pedestrian, and greenway projects throughout the country, at both the local and state levels. Providing as much as 80% for development and construction costs, this grant is earmarked for facilities such as sidewalks, rail-trails, bike-lanes and greenways. The Enhancement Program (a section of SAFETEA) is used primarily by municipalities since this section focuses on bicycle and pedestrian corridors, environmental mitigation, historic preservation and scenic byways. 20% matching funds are required by the applying entity and applicants must meet several other criteria as well. Prior to applying for this grant, a thorough engineering assessment should be performed to determine construction costs.

### **Recreation Trails Program**

The Recreation Trails Program (RTP) is an assistance program of the Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). RTP makes recreation funds available for state allocation to develop and maintain recreation trails and trail-related facilities for both non-motorized and motorized recreation trail users. RTP funds are distributed to states by a legislative formula: half of the funds are distributed equally among all states and half are distributed in proportion to the estimated amount of non-highway recreational fuel used in each state. Non-highway recreational fuel typically used by snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, off-road motorcycles, and off-road light trucks.



*RTP distributes funds equally among states.*



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## **Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF)**

Created in 1996 by the North Carolina General Assembly, the Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF) grants monies to local governments, state agencies and not-for-profit conservation groups. The money is to help finance projects that specifically address water pollution issues. CWMTF will fund projects that contribute toward a network of riparian buffers and greenways for environmental, educational and recreational benefits. There is no match required by local municipalities, however the suggestion of a match is highly recommended.

## **Watershed Protection and Flood Protection**

The USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) assists state and local governments in their operation and maintenance of watersheds whose areas are less than 250,000 square acres. The NRCS provides both financial and technical assistance to eligible projects for the improvement of watershed protection, flood prevention, sedimentation control, public water-based fish and wildlife enhancements and recreation planning. The NRCS requires a 50% local match for public recreation and fish/wildlife projects.

## **State Construction Funds**

These funds (not including the Highway Trust Fund for Urban Loops and Interchanges) may be used for the construction of sidewalks and bicycle accommodations that are a part of roadway improvement projects.

## **The North Carolina Conservation Tax Credit**

This program provides an incentive (in the form of an income tax credit) for landowners that donate interests in real property for conservation purposes. Property donations can be fee simple or in the form of conservation easements or bargain sale. The goal of this program is to manage stormwater, protect water supply watersheds, preserve working farms and forests and set-aside greenways for ecological communities, public trails and wildlife corridors. Additional information is available at <http://ncctc.enr.state.nc.us/>.

## **Contributions**

The solicitation of contributions is an acceptable method of fund-raising for recreation departments. These donations, typically in the form of land, cash, labor, and materials, could be solicited to assist the Town of Oak Ridge with its enhancement program. Corporations, civic organizations,





individuals, and other groups generally donate to a specific park project; however, donations may also be solicited for multiple project improvements or additions. The National Recreation and Park Association recommend the use of private, not-for-profit, tax-exempt foundations as a means of accepting and administering private gifts to a public park system.

## Park Foundations

Foundations are another source of financing by making direct contributions within communities, states, or the nation. These types of funds are usually described as special program foundations, general-purpose foundations, or corporate foundations. Foundations can provide the needed resources to support park projects. Foundations generally have very few restrictions and/or limitations and are typically received from local entities. A list of appropriate foundations can be found at <http://foundationcenter.org>.

## Partnerships

To implement the recommendations contained in the comprehensive master plan, the Town of Oak Ridge should expand their partnership agreements with other public agencies and private-sector organizations. There are many different types of partnerships that can be formed to achieve the goals established by the Town. In fact, many local governments throughout the nation are utilizing partnerships with public and private-sector interests to accomplish community goals.



Listed below are the various types of partnerships that the Town should consider in its efforts for the improvement and addition of parks and recreational facilities:

- Programming partnerships to co-sponsor events and facilities or to allow qualified outside agencies to conduct activities on properties which are municipally owned.
- Operational partnerships to share the responsibility for providing public access and use of facilities.
- Development partnerships to purchase land and/or build facilities.
- Management partnerships to maintain properties and/or facilities.

Private-sector partnerships can be beneficial to municipalities. Developers can use private funds to develop facilities on municipal property and lease it to the Town long term. Over a period of time, the developer returns a portion of the revenue to the Town and at the end of the lease the facility is turned over to public ownership. This type of arrangement would typically be a large capital investment for a special use facility.



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## **Land Acquisition and Development**

### **Life Estate**

A life estate is a gift, whereby a donor retains the land during his/her lifetime and relinquishes title of the property after his/her death. In return, the owner (or family) is relieved of property tax for the given land.

### **Local Gifts**

Donations of land, money, labor and construction can have significant impact on the acquisition and development of park property. The solicitation of local gifts is highly recommended and should be organized thoroughly with the utilization of specific strategic methods. This often-untapped source of obtaining funds requires the contacting of potential donors such as individuals, institutions, foundations, and service clubs.

### **Easement**

An easement is the most common type of 'less-than-fee' interest in land. An easement seeks to compensate the property owner for the right to use his/her land in some way or to compensate for the loss of his/her privileges to use the land. Generally, the landowner may still use the land and therefore continues to generate property tax revenue for the Town.

### **Fee Simple Purchase**

Fee simple purchase is the most common method used to acquire municipal property for park facilities. Although it has the advantage of simplifying justification to the general public, fee simple purchase is the most difficult method to pursue due to limited monetary resources.

### **Fee Simple with Lease-Back or Resale**

This method allows local governments to acquire land by fee simple purchase yet allows them to either sell or lease the property to prospective users with restrictions that will preserve the land from future development. The fee simple with lease-back or resale method of development commonly results from situations in which land owners, who have lost considerable monetary amounts in property value, determine that it is more economical to sell the land to the Town (with a lease-back option) than to keep it.

### **Long-Term Option**

Long-term options allow municipalities to purchase property over a long period of time. This method is particularly useful because it enables the Town to consider



a particular piece of land that may have future value, though it is not currently desired or affordable. Advantages to this method of property acquisition are that the Town can protect the future of the land without purchasing it upfront, the purchase price of the land will not increase, and the Town will have the right to exercise its option. The disadvantage to the Town is that all privileges relinquished by the landowner require compensation in the form of securing the option.

## 6.5 PLAN ADOPTION

The first step in implementation of the Oak Ridge Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan is adoption of the plan by the Town of Oak Ridge. By adopting the Comprehensive Parks Master Plan, the community is able to help shape larger regional decisions so that they fit within the goals of the plan. The Town also gives itself greater authority in shaping local land use decisions so that they achieve the goals and vision of this plan. In addition, the adoption of this Master Plan is essential in order to maximize available grant opportunities.

Among the opportunities available to promote the recommendations contained in the Master Plan is the ability to build upon an already committed and active base of residents, visitors and enthusiasts in the area. Through their organizations, institutions, publications, and networks the Town of Oak Ridge can promote both the improved and new parks and greenway facilities and programs.

Second among the opportunities is the availability of the existing park facilities such as amenities, programs, and existing trails. Though some changes are being suggested in the short-term and an expanded network is suggested for the long-term, the presence of an existing network provides a strong foundation from which to build. Many Town residents are already accustomed to using the existing park facilities and should become use to seeing new park amenities, programs, signage, and other improvements. Building on their existing awareness of what is available is much easier than building on no awareness.

### Action Steps

Upon adoption of this plan, implementation of specific recommendations can begin. Many of these will occur simultaneously and include policy and facility improvement changes. The action steps are:

1. Secure a dedicated source of revenue to address the 10-year and beyond Capital Improvement Program and address the goals of the Master Plan.





2. Provide staffing necessary to support and oversee the implementation of this plan and the proper maintenance and operation of the facilities that are proposed.
3. Develop and implement educational and awareness programs such as public events and promotion of parks awareness by civic and environmental advocacy groups. These programs can be used to announce new park facilities and upcoming projects.
4. Begin working on the recommendations that are listed in the 10-year and beyond Capital Improvement Program. From these opportunities come the framework for an initial implementation strategy. These recommendations include:
  - Aggressively begin to establish potential funding mechanisms for future park expansions. This high priority goal is essential for realizing the proposed recommendations for the future growth and development of Oak Ridge's parks and recreation facilities.
  - Use the nucleus of park patrons to expand the awareness of the amenities and programming of the Town of Oak Ridge parks and recreation system.
  - Expand and modify the existing park system into a comprehensive, multi-use system, distributed so that it better meets the needs of the community, provides opportunities to all and enhances the current park system.
  - Continue making the critical pedestrian and bicycle connections between destination points that will allow for preservation of open space and offer an alternative mode of transportation.

The steps above represent the core of the implementation strategy. As the individual policy recommendations and physical recommendations are addressed, they should each fit within one of these four primary strategies.

- The Town needs to ensure that facility planning is integrated with other regional planning efforts at the state and local levels and with long-range and current land use, economic development, parks, environmental, and community planning. The following are mechanisms to achieve this action step:
  - 1) Expand local capital improvements program for yearly appropriation for greenway and park development.
  - 2) Set aside money for future land acquisition, construction, and maintenance of parks and recreation facilities.
  - 3) Pursue and request future greenway (pedestrian/bicycle) projects to be added to NCDOT TIP.
  - 4) Pursue developing and expanding existing and new partnerships.
  - 5) Apply for PARTF Grants and other related recreation grants for future parks and recreation projects



- 6) Seek other sources of revenue funding for parks and greenway improvements, such as including local assessment districts and developer exactions.
- 7) Pursue funding from other sources listed in this section.

## 6.6 CONCLUSION

This Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan has recommended a set of strategies for expanding and developing a safe, convenient, and usable park system. The plan has assessed the study area, analyzed the existing facilities, received and analyzed community input, reviewed recreation standards, developed recommendations, and provided strategies for implementing the plan. The Comprehensive Parks Master Plan is a comprehensive guide to be used in the improvement and enhancement of the park system for the Town of Oak Ridge.

**- END OF SECTION -**