

Public Input

Public input is the driving force behind all parks and recreation master plans. For the plan to be effective it must accurately reflect the facilities and programs most desired by the citizens of the community. The citizens are the participants in and users of the parks system, and without strong support and usage by them, the parks system becomes ineffective.

After a clear understanding of the demographic projections and composition, the next step is to evaluate what the desires of the population are currently and anticipate which of the programs will still have a mass appeal in the next ten years. The Cherokee County Parks and Recreation Master Plan process included extensive public input in the form of interviews with parks and recreation staff, county staff and elected officials, a steering committee workshop, two public meetings, in both Canton and Woodstock, and a user survey randomly distributed to 3,600 Cherokee County residents.

"I compliment CRPA for the organized manner in which you have sought input from the community."

"Good first step, please implement soon."

"Thanks for asking!"

"Thanks for caring."

- from public survey

Parks and Recreation staff interviews revealed information about the daily operations of the department and also offered insight into the opportunities and constraints that recreation staff are faced with on a day-to-day basis. Interviews revealed the need for new facilities to accommodate the increasing demand for services to Cherokee County residents. Staff reported problems associated with overuse of athletic fields and lack of available time for indoor facilities. Limited recreation programming space was also identified as an issue in some of the highly populated areas of the county preventing the addition of new programs or expansion of existing programs. Listed below are other comments from meetings with management, staff and public officials:

- There is an awareness of the flood that is coming with the booming population growth and a concern about future funding needs for park development, program expansion and land acquisition.
- There is general awareness that the system is stretched to capacity now.
- One big challenge facing the county is changing the perception by citizens, both in the county and incorporated areas, that Cherokee County will be able to maintain a strong parks and recreation department in spite of large turnovers in Authority members in the past.
- Management is complimented on good communication with staff and division directors by implementing regular meetings.
- Management and staff are to be complimented on both expressing an open mind to changes within the system and new ideas that would improve system delivery.

- There is a consensus that there is a need for more therapeutic and senior programming and that the county is not meeting the needs of the at-risk population with the parks and recreation department.
- Handicap accessibility at many parks needs attention.
- There is a breakdown in communication with the athletic associations resulting in the staff at the parks and rec headquarters not having sufficient information to keep the public informed or to give them correct information.
- There is an awareness that the system has focused almost entirely on active parks and sports participation and that re-focusing to include passive parks and greenway corridors is an imminent requisite.
- The north part of the county needs greater attention in the planning as the opportunities are significantly fewer than in the south part of the county.
- A large community/aquatic center is a front-burner project—much revenue is being lost to Roswell and Alpharetta due to the fact that the county does not have such a facility.
- Maintenance crews are currently given daily assignments; a yearly plan with specific assignments for monthly, weekly and daily chores needs to be implemented.
- There will be a pressing need for more office staff to accommodate increased marketing, management and maintenance demands.
- A workable system of purchase orders needs to be implemented as the department grows.
- The policy and procedures manual needs updating.
- There were many compliments given to the senior programming.

Community Meetings

Another form of public input utilized during the master plan involved two community meetings on April 29, 2004 at the Parks and Recreation Center in Woodstock and on May 5, 2004 at the Justice Center in Canton, where citizens were invited to attend and to offer suggestions and experiences regarding parks and recreation in Cherokee County. Attendance at the meetings was lighter than expected, but the input was valuable. There was a group of citizens who held property around Paul Weatherby Park who were concerned about the development of the new park; their concern centered around providing a good buffer around the park property as they did not want to see the park from their property. Other citizen comments addressed a strong desire for a place to walk in Cherokee County—many currently go to Roswell for trails. A breakfast concession in the park was suggested to serve the baby-boomers/empty-nesters who would be using the parks in the morning. There were also requests for boat/canoe ramps along the Etowah River as there are currently none since the outdated ones were removed. Soccer representatives at the public meeting expressed the need for more fields as the league had grown to over 1,100 participants. Another group present at the meetings was interested in expanded programs and facilities for special needs populations.

Citizens Steering Committee

In addition to holding a public meeting, a citizen's steering committee was formed and a workshop held to get input relative to recreation programs and facilities in Cherokee

County. The committee was made up of approximately 43 members representing a wide variety of athletic organizations, associations, civic groups and special interests. The committee met for 5 hours on the day of April 30, 2004 providing the planning team with an abundance of information about parks and recreation in the community. Discussion topics focused on areas of strengths and weaknesses within the system as well as desired programs and facilities. Participants were also asked to consider facility standards and opportunities and suggestions for funding the recommended improvements. The following provides a look at specific questions and responses that were recorded the night of the workshop.

1. What are the five most critical issues facing the Cherokee County Recreation and Parks Authority?

Group 1

Finances

1. Purchase of additional land
 - growth accommodations
 - defray escalation of land cost
2. Staffing
3. Maintenance
4. Upgrading current parks and facilities
5. Affordability for all
6. Equipment

Programming

1. Diversity in programming
2. Geographic Diversity
3. Competition vs. Fun
4. Advertising – signage

Security

1. Prevent vandalism
2. Proper fencing/access
3. Prevent lawsuits
4. Protect families using facilities

Vision Planning

1. Plan for greenspace

Traffic Issues

1. Growing population
2. Group “Hispanic”

Group 2

1. Funding
2. Facilities – multi-use
3. Planning
4. Staff
5. Upgrading existing facilities

Group 3

1. Funding – Liabilities
2. Facilities – number/quality/variety/nature/pet friendly
3. Land
4. Population influx/diversity (age/user group)
5. Public awareness
6. Usage – Time/season/indoor – ex. swimming, basketball, senior services, track
7. Staff/volunteer coordination
8. North/South phenomenon

Group 4

1. Land and facilities
 - a) handicap/senior – lack of activities and facilities
 - b) aquatic facilities
 - c) passive recreation – walking, bird watching
 - d) cultural
2. Communication/PR
 - a) coordinate multiple providers
 - internet
 - hot line
 - mail outs
 - school systems
3. Funding operations of new facilities
4. Research on facility and program needs

Group 5

1. Funding
2. More park maintenance, more staff
3. Comply with unfunding mandates, 2005 coaches' background checks
4. Expand volunteers
5. Tax advantages for individual contributions

2. Identify the strengths and weaknesses for the Recreation and Parks Authority's program and facilities.

Group 1

Programs

Strengths

1. Family/community participation
2. Affordability
3. Volunteers
4. High Utilization
5. Diverse
6. Capable Staff
7. Strong leadership, experience
8. Organization structure, authority

Weaknesses

1. Always want more participation
2. Open free play, reserved, no structure, no cost

Facilities

Strengths

1. High utilization
2. Well maintained

Weaknesses

1. Greenspace
2. Lake Allatoona
3. Plan for population growth
4. Restrooms
5. Parking

Group 2

Programs

Strengths

1. Efforts to make improvements and new programs
2. Staff professional
3. Website

4. Response time with staff
5. Good relations with school board
6. Organization of major events

Weakness

1. Marketing and PR
2. Diversity, activities, ages, social economic, ethnic
3. Geographic offerings
4. Communication with private sector i.e. developers, partners

Facilities

Strengths

1. Even distribution of fields between north and south
2. Field's Landing Passive Park
3. This facility and Hobgood Park (baseball)
4. New effort for improvement
5. Walking trail and playgrounds
6. Scheduling facilities

Weaknesses

1. Upgrading existing facilities, parking, bathrooms, lighting, passive use areas
2. No proper swimming facilities

Group 3

Programs

Strengths

1. CRPA staff
2. Quarterly magazine
3. Collaboration, Corps of Engineers, SORBA, Coaches
4. Affordability
5. Team sport opportunities

Weaknesses

1. Staff size
2. Public awareness
3. Schedules (hours)
4. Indoor activities, water aerobics, basketball, volleyball, tracks, fitness center, learn to swim

Facilities

Strengths

1. New parks
2. Maintenance operation, field quality
3. Trees

Weaknesses

1. Older parks
2. Aquatic facility
3. Lack of family park, usage facility (source of revenue)
4. Indoor facilities
5. Lighting

Group 4

Programs

Strengths

1. Partnerships
2. Stable-long term leadership
3. Existing sports programs

Weaknesses

1. Communication exchange
2. Lack cultural, passive, aquatic, basketball
3. Smoke free environment

Facilities

Strengths

1. CRPA is very accessible to communicate with
2. Huge opportunities with Corps of Engineers
3. Works through local schools
4. Summer programs and use of existing facilities

Weaknesses

1. Upkeep and lack of follow up
2. Handicap accessibility
3. Geographic planning in future
4. Cultural facilities
5. Pet friendly areas

Group 5

Programs

Strengths

1. Leadership
2. Funding (short term)
3. Working w/non-profit

Weaknesses

1. Lack of volunteer involvement
2. Partnership programs with local schools
3. Long term funding (Splost)

Facilities

Strengths

1. Participation
2. Amphitheater
3. Availability

Weaknesses

1. Lack of diversified activities
2. Security
3. Limited parking
4. Maintenance of restrooms
5. Use of Etowah
6. Lack of 15/16 year old facility (baseball)
7. Lack of staff full time

3. If money and politics were not issues, what programs would you include in the ideal park system for Cherokee County? What facilities would you include?

Group 1

Programs

1. Non-competitive kids sports
2. Free special events
3. Expand on current programs – diversity
4. County funding
5. More non-traditional, handicap, horseshoes

Facilities

Ideal world, we're #1, scheduled rainfall and 78 temp year round

1. Domed fields
2. Hiking/county wide trail system
3. Stocked fishing ponds
4. Paintball/skateboard/Frisbee golf
5. Aquatic centers/rec centers
6. Affordable goals
7. New amphitheater
8. Civic center/hotel/restaurants
9. Sport specific complexes
10. Allatoona Park, fishing piers, camping, boating ramps, canoe/kayak center, trails, day use, marina, jet ski ramp, water park

Group 2

Programs

1. Comprehensive aquatics program, competition and recreation, water safety, swim lessons, water aerobics.
2. Therapeutic recreation, programs and camps
3. Everything we have now and more
4. Agility training
5. Equestrian training
6. Senior services
7. Different levels of programs
8. Recruit national level tournaments (could be additional revenues)
9. Skateboarding
10. Paintball

Facilities

1. Hotels/motels to accommodate tourism
2. Aquatics facilities
3. Many multi-use facilities (i.e.-softball, baseball, tennis, football, soccer, golf course, conference rooms)
4. Training facilities
5. Senior Center
6. Skateboard park
7. Equestrian Center
8. Facility for concerts (stand alone)

Group 3

Programs

1. Public golf course
2. Kids cycling
3. Skateboard park
4. Theatrical
5. Large outdoor basketball facility
6. Senior programs (facility)
7. Fitness center
8. Special needs programs
9. Baseball/softball complex
10. Aquatics programs
11. Volleyball
12. Cultural events/nature programs (hiking, camping)
13. Non competition swimming

Facilities

1. Pet park
2. Theater
3. Bike trails, walking trails, hiking trails
4. Picnic areas
5. Frisbee Course
6. Large playground
7. Concession stand
8. Family/passive park with facilities (indoor or outdoor)
9. Community Center
10. Track
11. Cultural Center
12. Aquatic center (family/competition, multi-use)
13. Mega Complex near Lake Allatoona
14. Indoor basketball
15. White water center on Etowah River

Group 4

Programs

1. Swimming lessons
2. Full-time older adult programs
3. Bilingual programs
4. Noncompetitive fun programs, kids and adults, exercise programs, aerobics
5. Motor boating safety
6. Cultural and educational activities
7. Coaches training/certification

Facilities

1. Aquatic leisure pool, indoor warm water pool, competition pool
2. Radio controlled items
3. Trail systems, variety
4. Etowah River/Little River, natural areas, canoes, markers to note history and types of birds and trees
5. Dog park
6. Senior center, multi-use
7. Indoor track
8. Outdoor multi-lane fitness center
9. Cultural theater
10. Pavilions
11. Restroom improved
12. Parking areas
13. Tennis Courts
14. Equestrian trails/arena
15. Indoor Gym space
16. Skate park
17. BMX track
18. Bike trail
19. Free ride mountain biking
20. Kid's biking areas
21. Outdoor basketball
22. Soccer fields, sports field
23. Football field
24. Lacrosse fields
25. Multi-use sport field

Group 5

Program

1. Mobile programs, arts and crafts
2. Swimming
3. Golf/Frisbee
4. Frisbee
5. Mountain biking
6. Canoe – Etowah River
7. Hiking
8. Horseback riding
9. Videoweb membership
10. Cook-off
11. Facility directors

Facilities

1. Mobile programs, arts and crafts, existing
2. Swimming, new
3. Golf/Frisbee, new
4. Frisbee, new
5. Mountain biking, new and existing
6. Canoe – Etowah River, new
7. Hiking, new
8. Horseback riding, new
9. Videoweb membership, existing and new
10. Cook off, existing
11. Facility directors, new
12. Banquet facilities, new

Upon completion of question 3, workshop participants were asked to consider existing standards that were developed by the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) for facility amenities in a park system. Committee members were provided with an existing facility inventory as well as a comparison to NRPA standards. They were then asked to determine if the existing NRPA standard was too high, too low or appropriate for the community based on current interests. The result of this task is shown in **Figure 3.1** on the following page.

Figure 3.1
NRPA and Steering Committee Standards

NRPA Standards for Park Facilities	NRPA Recommendations	Steering Committee Desired Level of Service
Acreage	10.5/1000	10.5/1000 local
		4.5/1000 w/Corps
Outdoor Basketball	1/5,000	1/10,000
Tennis	1/2,000	1/4,000
Volleyball	1/5,000	1/10,000
Baseball/Softball	1/2,500	1/2,500
Football	1/20,000	1/20,000
Soccer	1/10,000	1/2,500
Swimming Pool	1/20,000	1/20,000
Running Track	1/20,000	1/100,000
Indoor Roller Hockey	1/100,000	1/100,000
Golf Course (18 Hole)	1/50,000	1/100,000
Golf Driving Range	1/50,000	1/100,000
Multiple Recreation Court	1/10,000	1/20,000
Developed Standards for Park Facilities	Developed Standard	Steering Committee Desired Level of Service
Trail System	1mile/3,000	1/1,500
Indoor Courts	1/20,000	1/10,000
Playground	1/1,000	1/5,000
Cultural Center	1/100,000	1/100,000
Community Center	1/50,000	1/50,000
Picnic Pavilion	1/2,000	1/5,000
Soccer	1/4,000*	1/5,000
Outdoor Roller Hockey	1/25,000*	1/50,000
Inline Skating Court	1/25,000*	1/25,000
Skate Park	1/100,000*	1/100,000

* Standard developed by Lose & Associates, Inc. to respond to recreation trends and growth in certain sports since 1983.

For the final task, workshop participants were asked to provide a prioritization for the desired facilities and programs that were identified in question 3. Results for this task are shown in **Figure 3.2**, below, in order of importance to workshop participants.

Figure 3.2
Facility and Programming Ranking Chart

Facilities	Total	Rank	Programs	Total	Rank
Indoor Multi-Purpose Center	19	1	Swimming (lessons, aerobics, competitive)	19	1
Indoor Aquatic Leisure Pool	18	2	Fitness (exercise, aerobics)	17	2
Soccer Fields	14	3	Senior Programs	16	3
Multi-Use Senior Center	13	4	Nature Program (hiking camping)	14	4
Allatoona Complex	11	5	T. R. Programs (special needs)	13	5
Indoor Competition Pool	11	5	Older Adult Programs	11	6
Trail Network	10	7	Non-comp/fun Program	11	6
Cultural Facility (Theater, Arts, Music)	8	8	Basketball	11	6
Expanded Parking	8	8	Free Special Events	10	9
Football Field	8	8	Coach Training/Certification	9	10
Multi-Use Sports Field	8	8	Videoweb	8	11
Regional Multi-use Parks (Tennis, Softball, Football)	6	12	Theater Program	8	11
Stocked Fishing Ponds	6	12	Cultural/Education	8	11
Whitewater on Etowah	6	12	Canoe	7	14
Baseball/Softball Complex	5	15	Mountain Biking	6	15
Bike Trail	5	15	Golf	6	15
Concert Facility	5	15	Non-traditional Sports (horse shoes)	4	17
Large Playground	5	15	Volleyball	3	18
Dog Park	4	19	Tournament Recruitment	3	18
Improved Restrooms/Concessions	4	19	Bilingual Programs	3	18
Passive Parks	4	19	Paintball	2	21
New Amphitheater	3	22	Cook-offs	2	21
Lacrosse Fields	2	23	Agility Training	2	21
Outdoor Track	2	23	Skate Boarding	1	24
Skate Park	2	23	Motor Boating Safety	1	24
Sport Specific Complex	2	23	Mobile Program	1	24
Training Facilities	2	23	Kid's Cycling	1	24
Equestrian Trails/Arena	1	28	Frisbee	1	24
Mountain Bike Course	1	28			
Pavilions	1	28			
Public Golf Course	1	28			
Resort Center (Restaurant, Civic Center, Hotel)	1	28			

"Aquatic heated pool would be excellent with therapeutic classes for arthritis and fibromyalgia."

"...we would like to have more pools for swimming available..."

"We need a public swimming pool"

"Need indoor pool available after 5pm for working adults that do not lap swim."

"I continue to be amazed that there is not a single outdoor public pool in the entire county..."

"People need to learn how to swim it should take priority over everything..."

"...we really need a pool...I'm tired of going to Fulton County."

"We have lived all over the country (including Alaska) and this is the only place we have lived without county swimming facilities!!"

"Our only 'complaint' is that we would like to see a county pool for all use but especially High School swim teams."

- from public survey

User Survey

With the completion of the steering committee workshop and interviews, a survey was developed based on comments received during the early stages of public input (See Appendix D). A twenty-question survey was distributed to 3,600 Cherokee County residents. Recommendations were that the surveys be distributed: 585 to incorporated areas and 3,015 to unincorporated areas with the incorporated areas broken down: 255 to Woodstock, 210 to Canton, 80 to Holly Springs, 20 to Ball Ground and 20 to Waleska.

Survey research shows that a statistical accuracy of 95% with a $\pm 5\%$ sampling error can be achieved with a response of 245 completed surveys in a community the size of Cherokee County. Based on previous experience, planners assumed a 10% return could be expected and therefore mailed 3,600 surveys to random addresses. The final response rate was over 16% with 592 surveys tabulated. The response was higher than expected and proved to be the highest response rate of all surveys conducted by the planning team.

The response from survey participants was extremely complimentary to the existing Parks and Recreation system with a high percentage stating they felt the image maintained by the parks and recreation department was good (58%). Only 51 respondents, or 8.6% disagreed with the remainder either not answering or answered "don't know."

- The highest ranking was to the question regarding the importance of parks and recreation to a community—486, or **82%, agreed that parks are as important as other community services such as schools, public safety, streets and utilities.**

High marks were also given to the level of maintenance in the parks as well as to the affordability of the programs offered and to the supervision provided for activities and programs. These results provide support for continued emphasis on maintaining a strong park system.

The greatest challenges to the existing parks system mentioned were the inequitable distribution of the county’s parks, the lack of aquatic facilities, lack of tournament-quality sports fields and the large number of county residents driving to Roswell and Alpharetta to use their facilities because CRPA does not offer needed programs.

“We need more recreation facilities in East Cherokee County.”
“We’ve driven to Fulton County...because they are larger, they are geared towards multiple ages...they have bathroom and picnic facilities. A great example is Roswell Park...”
“We CONSTANTLY use Fulton County & Roswell City programs, activities and parks.”
“We use Roswell Parks and Recreation since they are closer to us...”
“I usually end up taking classes at Roswell Park & Rec because they have more classes to offer and comparable price.”

- from public survey

A detailed look at responses to each question provided the planning team with a good understanding of the perceptions of residents of the community and also helped to confirm information received in the public meetings and workshop.

Program Participation Preferences

The first question of the survey asked participants to identify those programs that they or members of their family have participated in or would be interested in. The top ten responses are shown below:

Concerts in the parks -	61.15%
Running/walking -	51.69%
Playgrounds -	50.84%
Special Events -	43.92%
Swim Lessons -	42.91%
Arts and Crafts -	42.74%
Nature/Outdoor Programs -	41.22%
Hiking -	38.18%
Youth Soccer -	36.82%
Youth Basketball -	35.98%

“Would like more community events that are cultural (outdoor theater or music concerts...”
“We would like to see more trails – well-marked available for pedestrian, dog, bike use.”
“GIVE ADULTS SOMETHING TO DO.”
“...too much attention is paid to revenue making facilities,...rather than greenway and passive parks.”
“I think we sorely need more nature/hiking trails. As you get older non-

*impact, non-boring activities and exercise become much more important.”
“Concert area for free or low cost summer concerts. Greater activities for the elderly.”*

“...especially having a place to take our dog and enjoy music and concerts...”

“I feel that all of the energy of the P & Rec goes into paid sports. Walking is the best form of exercise for the majority of people no matter what age.”

“We definitely need renovation and more park areas for families in Woodstock!”

“We need more good parks with playground, picnic tables and bike trails.”

“BUILD MORE PARK & RECREATION FACILITIES!”

- from public survey

Recreation activities are often classified for the value they provide to the community. The value is often attributed to the number of citizens the program reaches. The classifications commonly used are Community, Family, Team/Organized and Individual. A community program is one that reaches a large segment of the population. Community programs, such as special events held during holidays, touch a large segment of the population and cater to all ages. Programs labeled family are those that allow entire families to participate. Team/Organized activities are most commonly geared toward athletics while individual program activities allow for the enjoyment of participants without the involvement of others. All programs fall into one or several of these classification systems. An evaluation of the top ten programs identified in question one revealed only two that would fall under team/organized activities. All others fell under community, family or individual activities, a surprising result in a community with parks that are largely geared towards athletics and active recreation.

It is interesting to compare the responses to random mailing questions with those from public meeting inputs. Attendees at public meetings are composed generally of current users of the parks and participants in park programs; thus, their input is a reflection of how the current facilities and programs are meeting the needs of current users. The random survey responses include many responses from non-users and may reflect where the system delivery is failing to provide needed and desired recreation for citizens. It is a valuable tool in future facility and program planning.

Facility Preferences

Responses to the second question, regarding the prioritization that should be placed on the development or renovation of facilities, revealed 83% percent of survey participants feel a large community center should be considered a high priority (adding numbers 1 and 2 together) for development in the community. Following a close second at just over 82% was support for bike and pedestrian trail networks. There was 73% support for a large regional park with multiple activities and sports fields. Large playground received

70% support and an indoor aquatic leisure pool received 67%. These represented the top five most supported facilities and were compatible with the programs most requested or already most used by the citizens. Items that were considered a low priority included skate park (32%), a dog park (37%), stocked fishing ponds (40%), indoor competition pool (43%) and passive parks (45%). Many of the items that received a low priority rating by respondents are those which typically have a more limited following; however, that does not negate the importance of having these types of facilities as part of the overall park system.

**Figure 3.3
Facility Preferences**

Facility	1	2	1&2	Percentage	3	No Answer
Large community center	375	116	491	82.94%	47	54
Bike/pedestrian trail network	361	126	487	82.26%	46	59
Regional park with multiple activities	275	158	433	73.14%	85	74
Large playgrounds	248	168	416	70.27%	84	91
Indoor aquatic leisure pool	247	151	398	67.23%	123	71
Multi-use senior center	187	200	387	65.37%	115	90
Multi-use sports fields	169	216	385	65.03%	102	105
Large recreation complex on Lake Allatoona	203	169	372	62.84%	143	77
Soccer fields	169	192	361	60.98%	139	92
Concert facility	135	220	355	59.97%	141	96
Baseball/softball complex	146	172	318	53.72%	167	107
Cultural arts facility	97	187	284	47.97%	202	106
Passive parks	91	173	264	44.59%	120	208
Indoor competition pool	99	158	257	43.41%	235	100
Stocked fishing ponds in parks	98	137	235	39.70%	262	95
Dog park	113	108	221	37.33%	275	96
Skate park	80	111	191	32.26%	294	107

Travel Modes and Times

A look at the primary mode of transportation utilized by park visitors shown in questions three and four revealed that 93% drive while only 3% walk and less than 1% ride a bike. When asked how far they would be willing to walk to a park, 51% of survey participants said they would walk up to 2 miles while 6% would walk two to five miles and 32% would not walk at all. This 32% is a disturbing number when viewed in light of today's issues with obesity and general lack of healthy activity, particularly for teens and youth. This issue may deserve some review in planning programs or incentives for activity.

Review of distances residents are willing to drive revealed over 87% are willing to drive up to 30 minutes to participate in activities. Only 6 % indicated a willingness to drive over 30 minutes to a facility. When evaluating the likelihood of residents to ride a bike

to park facilities, 36% would not bike while 34% would bike up to two miles. Another 15% would bike two to five miles while 3% would bike five to ten miles. These statistics stress the importance of safe, alternative routes to park facilities. The development of greenways and sidewalks could serve to alleviate parking problems that currently exist in many park locations and help to promote a healthier lifestyle for Cherokee County residents.

“If there was a network of trails, we could walk or bike to several area parks and enjoy them more.”

“I drive 15 miles to the next county for water exercise for seniors...”

“Extend hiking trails between parks. Thank you.”

- from public survey

General Input

Question five asked survey respondents to indicate if they agree, disagree or don't know about a series of parks and recreation-related items. Responses to question five revealed

Statement	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Compared to other priorities (public safety, streets, utilities), parks and recreation is important to a community.	486	27	79
The Recreation & Parks Authority maintains a good image in the community.	344	51	197
Recreation facilities and parks are well maintained.	341	106	145
Recreation programs and activities are reasonably priced.	330	84	178
Additional sport fields are needed.	292	89	211
Advertisements about upcoming events and programs are adequate.	230	229	133
Recreational activities and programs are well supervised.	216	46	330
Existing facilities need to be renovated.	199	113	280
Additional meeting/program space is needed.	166	105	321
Sports leagues are well organized.	165	78	349
Recreation facilities and parks are well supervised.	156	99	337
The programs currently offered by the Recreation & Parks Authority adequately meet my family's leisure needs.	141	294	157
Parks are well distributed throughout the county.	140	230	222

a high regard for parks and recreation especially related to maintenance of facilities, reasonable pricing of programs, the image of the department in the community and the priority parks should have in the overall government system. **Figure 3.4**, on the following page, summarizes these responses. The “Don't Know” and “No Answer” columns have been combined on the assumption that those who did not answer simply did not know.

Figure 3.4
General Input

While these responses were extremely positive about the department's performance, other noteworthy results were for the large segment of survey participants who indicated they did not know about particular programs or whether the park's delivery system was meeting the needs of their family—a total of 68%. One of the most evident responses is that new/renovated facilities are desperately needed to provide more program space and the distribution within the county needs to be in greater balance.

Relative to the lack of knowledge about the department, 72% of survey respondents said they do not use the parks and recreation website to gain information about programs, schedules and facilities. The majority indicated they learn about programs through word of mouth from friends, neighbors and coaches. Marketing of programs has had limited success except through word of mouth, the Parks and Recreation Brochure and hand-outs/flyers. There is a wide opportunity here to market the website to reach a market not currently participating. This is evident by the number of answers reflecting no knowledge about the programs or how to get information about the parks system.

When asked about the adequacy of programs, the largest group of answers was in the "not sure, I am not involved in programs for youth (or adults)" category. The general response from current participants was that additional programs were needed for all ages.

Understanding that desires by the community for new park facilities will require increased funding for operations and capital improvements, the survey polled participants for the most desirable and palatable funding options. When asked to provide a rank order, the largest support for funding new parks was through impact fees. Following that, the majority of respondents gave no answer indicating a not-so-unusual lack of awareness of the general public about funding resources. Typically, the most popular funding mechanisms (i.e. impact fees, hotel/motel tax) are the least likely sources to fund large capital improvements. When given the choice, the majority will always choose to not pay higher taxes.

However, when asked if participants would support increased county funding from current revenues for Recreation and Parks, a dominant majority, 441 (75%), replied YES.

Respondent Demographic Profile

Of great importance to the planning team was a good understanding of the demographic make up of survey respondents. Questions targeted at determining the regions with high incidence of survey responses as well as the age, income level and family structure help identify the background of citizen responses and provide an understanding of why certain elements receive higher priority over others. One of the rationales for the low response to some of the questions about programs and facilities was perhaps due to the fact that over half of the surveys (300, or 51%) came from residents in the county where recreation opportunities are fewer than in the incorporated areas. We have already

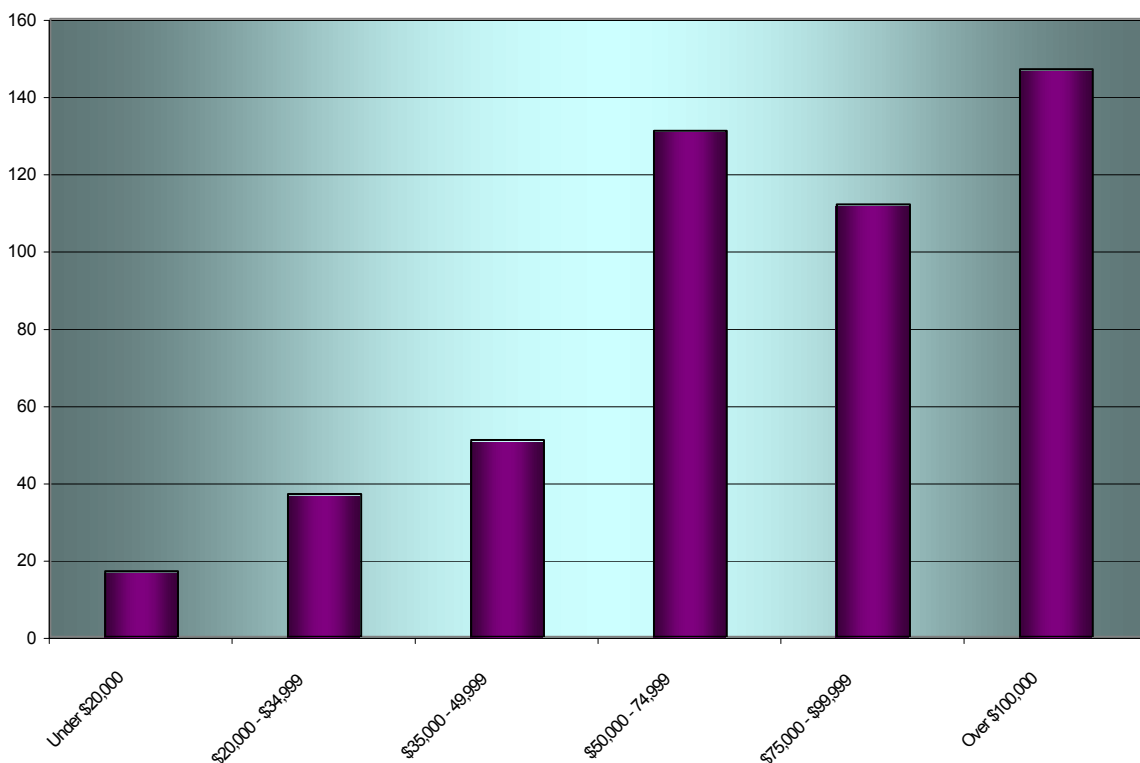
established that this is the large underserved market since most facilities are concentrated in the incorporated cities and towns. The highest response from incorporated areas came from Woodstock with 190 responses or 32%. The response from Canton was unusually low for its population with only 45 returned, or 8%. Holly Springs returned 25, Waleska 8 and Ball Ground 6.

A look at the age of survey participants reveals that the highest response came from residents aged 35 – 44 (42%) followed by those aged 45 – 54 (23%). Surveys completed by residents aged 55+ accounted for 12% of returned surveys. The smallest response group was represented by those under 24 years of age and above 65 years of age. A large majority of all survey participants (72%) reported their household make-up was a couple or single parent with children in the home. The rest of the respondents were either single adults, retired with no children in the home, or couples with no children in the home.

Respondents were asked to give the number of children in their home in three categories: Under 6, 6 – 11 and 12 – 18. The 6 -11 and 12 – 18 were fairly even with 228 and 218 respectively. Under 6 reported 155. This breakdown would coincide with the age of respondents listed above.

Income levels reported by survey participants revealed nearly 25% have household incomes above \$100,000 while 19% have a household income above \$75,000, 22% between \$50,000 and \$75,000 and only 18% under \$50,000. The remaining respondents did not list their income. Less than 1 percent reported a household income under \$20,000 while only 4 percent reported an income under \$35,000.

Figure 3.5
Survey Respondents Household Income



These statistics tell us that survey results were largely made up of upper middle class families with children of all ages. There are, however, enough respondents in the under-\$35,000 category to consider subsidy programs or sponsorship of fees for lower-income families.

Public Input Summary

In summary, the most impressive and revealing facts to surface from the combined public input include an unusually high public interest in and support of the Cherokee County Parks and Recreation system. Not only were input participation rates among the highest we have seen, they were relatively consistent in desires and also highly complimentary of the existing Cherokee County P & R staff and programs. The inadequate provision of programs and facilities outside the incorporated areas was seen as a major challenge to be addressed during this master plan.

Quite often the mailed survey responses differ somewhat from the public meetings and face-to-face interviews as they did in this survey. Reasons for this include the fact that the random survey respondents are not necessarily current park users, whereas the public meeting participants have a vested interest in continuing their park participation and have strong ideas about the viability of new facilities and programs. The mail-in survey gave a much higher priority to passive park participation, and the public meeting input focused more on sports activities and needed facilities. Both have a place in the future planning in that those who are not current park users may become active participants if the programs that attract them were offered. The current users are the backbone of the department and are in touch with other communities' sports associations and tournament play. They may have a better understanding of the economic impact that tournament-quality facilities would have on the county.

Marketing is an ever-present challenge for parks departments; it was evident that few people knew about the website. Word-of-mouth is always an effective marketing tool, but becomes less effective in markets with such rapid growth as Cherokee. In addition, comments from the public survey indicated a desire for online registration and the ability to pay by credit card.

"Would like to be able to register, pay & print receipt via internet. Very thankful for our park system."

"The website needs to be more user/information-friendly."

- from public survey

It was also enlightening to study the age of the respondents of the survey participants – almost 30% were the 45-65 age group identified earlier as those who are current or soon-to-be empty-nesters and recent retirees. Their responses were in direct response to their current interests; however, planning must take into consideration where they will be in ten years. Even though there was some concern about the past effectiveness of the governing body over Parks and Recreation, the most important result of the public input is that the Cherokee Recreation and Parks Authority has the support of the community,

which is a community who puts a high value on recreation activity as an integral part of their quality of life.

"As I have lived in different areas of the country, the value of parks within a community has been huge. The quality of life improves. The interaction among members of the community increases...and ultimately even the prices of housing are affected. Overall everyone benefits regardless of whether they use the facilities or not."

"Need to consider multi-purpose facility."

"We need more parks and playgrounds"

"I believe CRPA places too much of its resources into competitive, organized sports."

"I have visited in 3 parks in Gwinnett and they far outshine anything that we have."

"Soccer fields are seriously poor and cost this county in lost revenue as we are not capable in hosting a tourney."

"I am tired of all activities being done in Woodstock and Towne Lake. Our children deserve nice parks too."

"I compliment CRPA for the organized manner in which you have sought input from the community."

"A large portion of the next SPLOST should be dedicated to park expansion."

"Many people move to Cherokee from Fulton and Cobb because they don't want to pay high property taxes- however they complain that Cherokee doesn't offer the same amount of recreation. So – I say impact fees should go towards improving and maintaining parks and recreational activities."

"There is a dire need for a large multi-use senior center in So. Cherokee County to accommodate the needs of the increasing number of older adults who are retiring in this area of the county."

"... more trips programs for women in 50-70+age category"

"Very thankful for our park system."

- from public survey