

Chapter Four – Operations Review & Recommendations

Introduction

The Operations section of the plan assesses the county’s staffing, operations, and budget for recreation and parks; and provides recommendations with a tiered implementation plan. In its assessments and recommendations, the planning team utilized input received from elected officials, staff, public workshops, and the community survey as well as the members' knowledge and experience. Other primary resources include the National Recreation and Park Association's (NRPA) PRORAGIS 2016 Field Report and the NRPA's Commission for Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies' (CAPRA) Standards for National Accreditation, which provides updated, national best practice standards for operating and managing parks and recreation agencies. The recently completed survey findings on park employees prepared by the Georgia Recreation and Parks Association is also referenced.

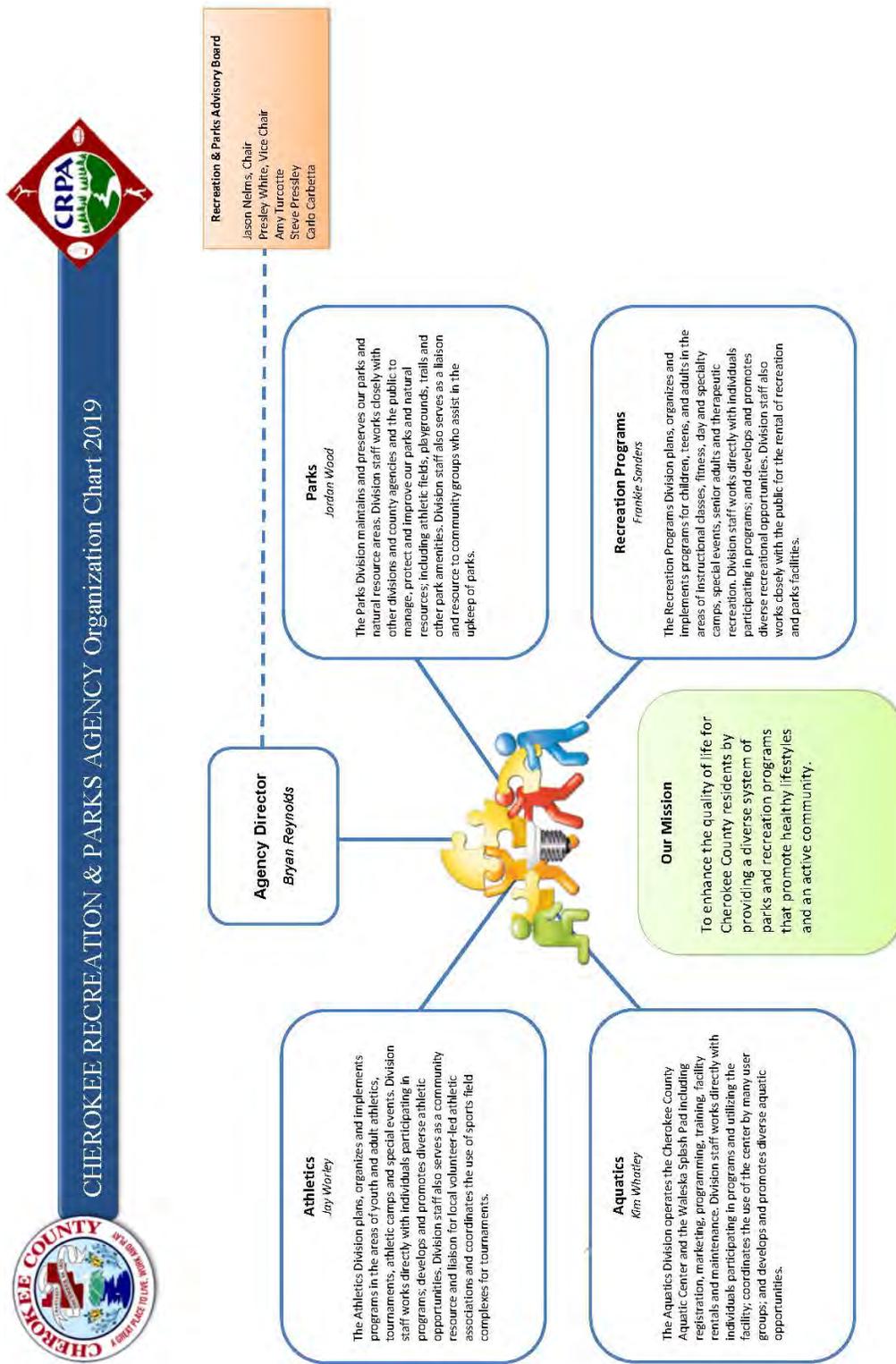
In the budget assessment of this section, the planning team compared Cherokee County to other similar communities. Benchmarking is a common assessment tool for master plan studies as it provides agencies with a view of how they compare with other agencies that deliver the same or similar services. Benchmarking parks and recreation services is more complex due to the variety and diversity of these types of facilities and services provided by different public agencies across the country. Every community is unique and offers multiple approaches to the provision of parks and recreation programs and services. This is in contrast to benchmarking other municipal services, such as police or fire, where the programs and services across jurisdictions are more standardized. With this caveat in mind, comparing staffing models, park facilities, service delivery models, budgets, programming, and other data provides valuable insights for communities evaluating service levels.

Agency Organization & Structure

The Cherokee Recreation and Parks Agency currently includes thirty-five (35) full-time staff. Contract instructors and more than 200 year-round and seasonal part-time staff supplement the full-time staff. The Agency Director leads the agency and reports to the County Manager. County Commissioners each appoint a member of a citizen Advisory Board that meets semi-monthly and provides recommendations to staff and the Board of Commissioners on matters related to recreation and parks.

Five divisions make up the agency: Administrative, Athletics, Aquatics, Parks Maintenance and Recreation Programs. The agency director oversees the Administrative Division. A Division Director who reports directly to the Agency Director oversees operations in each of the other divisions. Each division includes full time and part time staff. See below for a description of the specific roles of each division and the staff. See Figure 4.1 for the organizational chart.

Figure 4.1 – Cherokee Recreation & Parks Agency Organizational Chart



Administrative

The Administrative Division is responsible for the business and financial activities of the agency and overseeing the front desk staff at the Cherokee County Recreation Center. The division is the primary liaison to the county's Finance and Human Resources teams. They also assist with program registration and facility reservations. The Agency Director directs the division. In addition, the division has a Business Manager and part-time staff who oversee the reception desk and directly assist customers in person and over the phone with questions, registration and facility reservations.

Athletics

The Athletics Division oversees all youth and adult athletic activities whether directly operated by the agency or in partnership with volunteer athletic associations who use Cherokee County parks. The Division Director heads up this division and oversees the work of four Athletic Coordinators who make up the balance of full time staff in the division. The coordinators' duties include organizing athletic schedules for leagues, coordinating all sports tournament activities, sports camps, and overseeing contract or part-time employees, such as gym supervisors and scorekeepers. The largest program operated by the agency is the youth basketball program, which has over 4,500 participants each year. The Division Director and coordinators are responsible for developing the division budget and then overseeing the budgeted funds throughout the year. The one athletic program that the division does not oversee is competitive swimming.

Aquatics

The Aquatics Division oversees all activities for the indoor and outdoor pools and the programs that are conducted at the Cherokee County Aquatic Center and the splash pad at Cline Park. The Division Director oversees all full-time employees who work at the center including Aquatics Coordinators, a Customer Service Specialist, and Maintenance Worker. They handle all program registrations, direct part-time staff, lifeguards, and oversee the maintenance of the mechanical and pool systems at the center as well as custodial duties. The division also employs and multiple part-time positions including Managers on Duty, Head Lifeguards, Lifeguards, Swim Instructors, and part-time custodians. The Aquatics Division is also responsible for the competitive swim team(s), all swim meets and other events held at the center.

Recreation Programs

The Recreation Programs Division oversees all types of non-team athletic programs. The Division Director oversees three Recreation Coordinators and the Special Events/Marketing Coordinator. The Recreation Coordinators oversee all special population programs, active adult activities, camps, and recreation classes and programs. The Special Events/Marketing Coordinator oversees community-wide special events and coordinates the marketing for the agency. The Division Director and coordinators are responsible for developing the division budget and then overseeing the budgeted funds throughout the year.

Parks Maintenance

The Division Director, who has two direct reports, the Park Managers, directs the Parks Maintenance Division. The Park Managers oversee the daily operations of the division and coordinate with various user groups and volunteer organizations that lend support in the maintenance of county parks. The Division Director and Park Managers are responsible for preparation of the division budget, equipment, and material purchases. Three Crew Leaders in the division report directly to the Parks Managers.

The county is divided into three geographic zones: southeast, southwest and north. Each zone includes one maintenance hub and consists of multiple parks. The southeast hub is located at J.J. Biello Park. The southwest hub is located at Hobgood Park. The north hub is located at Cherokee Veterans Park. Within each zone, a Crew Leader directs the operation of Lead Parks Workers, Parks Maintenance Workers and part-time Parks Workers. Crews are responsible for all aspects of park maintenance with the exception of interior building maintenance, which is handled by a separate division of the county government.

Additionally, two Inmate Work Details augment park maintenance. Adult Detention Center Officers with the Cherokee County Sheriff’s Office direct the work of these details. The officers pick up the inmates daily, transport them to county parks, oversee the work performed and return them to the adult detention center at the conclusion of the day. Crew Leaders work directly with officers to determine schedules and work to be performed on a daily basis.

One measure of an agency’s ability to maintain the parkland is the ratio of full-time equivalent employees (FTE) to the number of acres maintained. Figure 4.2 below includes the current service level for Cherokee along with national standards for comparison.

Figure 4.2 Park Maintenance Service Levels	
Cherokee County Current Ratio	15.62
NRPA PRORAGIS	Average: 13.5
International City Managers Association	General Standard: 18-20; Best Practice: 12

Using a combination of full-time maintenance staff, part-time staff and inmate work details, Cherokee County currently has 20.5 fulltime equivalents (FTE) performing daily maintenance tasks in county parks. They maintain approximately 320 acres of parkland. This equates to a ratio of 15.62 acres per FTE. This ratio is below the national average. As the county adds parks, it will need to add maintenance personnel to maintain these parks at a level consistent with current standards. **In addition, if the county desires to raise the level of maintenance in its current parks, it will need to add additional personnel.**

Staffing Levels

As previously stated, thirty-five (35) full-time employees currently operate the agency. One measure of recreation service delivery is to compare staffing levels on a per capita basis. Figure 4.3 is a comparison of staffing levels of the 10 most populated counties in the state prepared by the Georgia Recreation and Parks Association (GRPA) in 2014.

Figure 4.3 Parks Employees per Capita – Top 10 Georgia Counties			
County	Total Employees	Population	Employees / 10k Persons
Forsyth County	72	175,511	4.10
Clayton County	84	259,424	3.24
Cobb County	174	688,078	2.53
Gwinnett County	182	805,321	2.26
Henry County	39	203,922	1.91
Chatham County	47	265,128	1.77
Hall County	30	179,684	1.67
DeKalb County	109	691,893	1.58
Cherokee County	35	247,573	1.41
Fulton County	36	920,581	0.39

Of the ten largest counties, only Fulton County has a lower staffing level per 10,000 residents served than Cherokee County. Fulton County’s low staff ratio is attributed to the large number of municipal recreation departments in the county, which is not the case in Cherokee County. A direct comparison of employees with the benchmark communities selected for this plan reveals that Cherokee has the lowest employee-staffing ratio of all the communities, as illustrated in Figure 4.4 below.

Figure 4.4 – Parks Employees per Capita – Benchmark Communities			
County	Total Employees	Population	Employees / 10k Persons
Douglas County	24	42,356	5.67
Forsyth County	72	175,511	4.10
Bartow County	23	100,157	2.30
Gwinnett County	182	805,321	2.26
Cherokee County	35	247,573	1.41

While low staffing ratios are good for controlling costs, if ratios are too low, it can result in service delivery deficiencies. If there are not enough staff, the agency is unable to maintain parks properly or offer programs that citizen’s desire.

Staff Additions

As the county continues to grow and the agency implements the facility and program recommendations found in this plan, additional staff will be needed to maintain the facilities and to operate new programs and facilities. With staff growth, the agency will have to review how it is structured. See below for a brief description of recommended staff changes.

Maintenance Workers

As new parks are developed, additional maintenance workers will be needed in order to maintain the current ratio of acres of parkland per number of park maintenance workers, as discussed above in the assessment of the Parks Division.

New Recreation Center Staff

This plan recommends at least one new multi-purpose recreation center. This center will offer multiple sport courts for basketball, volleyball, pickleball, etc.; indoor multi-purpose gym for other sports; additional programming rooms, spaces available for rent and office and support space. Additional staff will be needed to operate this facility including reception staff, programming staff and custodial staff. These positions should be included as part of a business plan for the operation of the new facility and added to future operating budgets when the center is complete. Staff would be responsible for all aspects of operating the center including budgeting, staff oversight, and program delivery. They would also supervise all part-time staff who will operate the front desk and other areas within the center.

Active Adult Program Coordinator

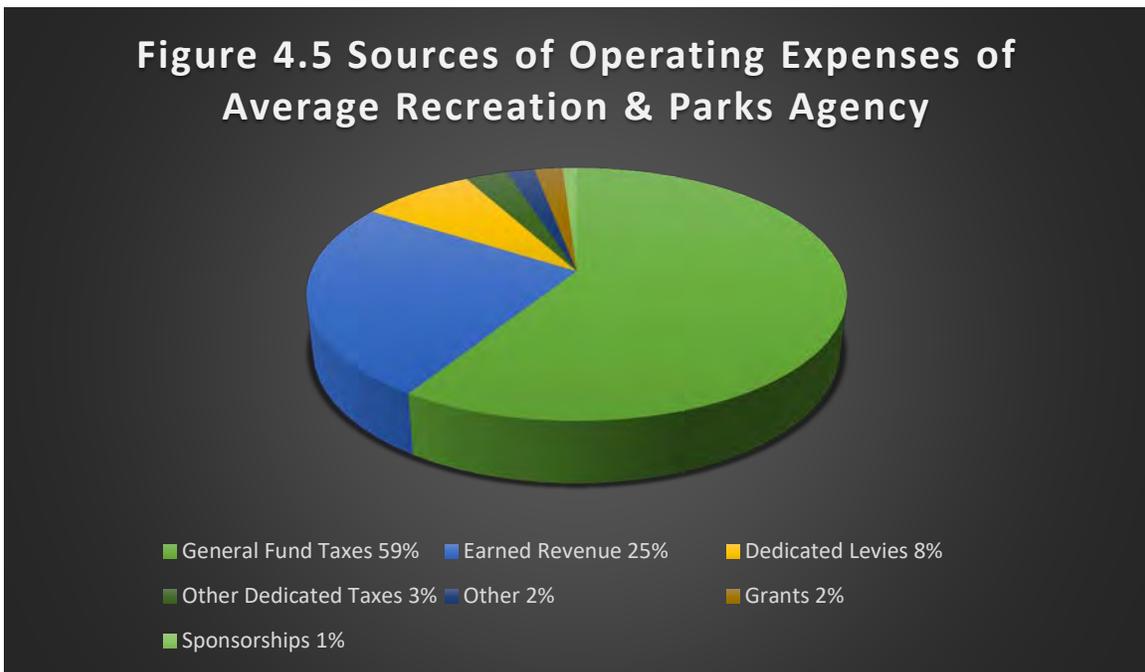
The population of older adults in Cherokee County is expected to grow significantly over the next ten years. See Chapter One for details on the demographics of the county. With this growth, the county will need to plan to serve these residents whether organized within the county's Senior Services agency or within the recreation and parks agency. The county can also collaborate with municipalities, non-profit agencies and other organizations within the county to address programming needs. See the section below on Programming for Older Adults.

Budgeting & Funding

The FY2019 CRPA operating budget is \$5,421,239. The largest portion of the funding comes from Fees and Charges for Services, which totals \$2,770,685. The agency has two other significant funding sources: \$1,100,000 in excise tax on beverages sold in unincorporated portions of the county and \$1,491,954 from the general fund. Other miscellaneous contributions make up the balance of the operating budget.

The 2016 NRPA PRORAGIS Field Report, Park and Recreation Agency Performance Benchmarks provides national data on spending levels as well as funding sources for parks and recreation agencies. Public recreation and park agencies receive 59% of their total funding from the general fund on average. In Cherokee, the current level of general fund support is 28% of the total budget. Conversely, the national average of agency-generated revenues as a percentage of the overall budget is 25% compared to 51% in Cherokee. See Figure 4.5 below for a breakdown on source of operating revenues of the average recreation and parks agency.

Figure 4.5 Sources of Operating Expenses of Average Recreation & Parks Agency



A comparison to other benchmark communities in Figure 4.6 documents that Cherokee County's per capita spending is \$21.89, which is the lowest per capita spending level of benchmark communities. Forsyth County has the highest per capita spending, and is the only benchmark agency that exceeds the national average based total population.

Many factors influence funding and expenditures for a recreation and parks agency. In reviewing the budgets of the benchmark agencies, one item that stands out is the number of indoor facilities provided by the benchmark agencies when compared to Cherokee. Most all of the benchmark agencies have multiple recreation centers or other types of indoor facilities that affect staffing levels and overall operating costs. As the agency expands recreation opportunities in the future and builds more indoor facilities, spending levels will need to increase. Indoor facilities also have the greatest opportunity to recover costs through fees.

Figure 4.6 Per Capita Operating Expenses for Parks and Recreation – Benchmark Communities			
County	Population	2019 Budgeted Expenditures	Parks and Recreation Per Capita Expenditures
Forsyth County	212,438	\$9,622,800	\$45.30
<i>National Average</i>	<i>500/sq. mile</i>		<i>\$41.23</i>
Gwinnett County	895,823	\$32,593,754	\$36.38
Clayton County	273,995	\$9,697,136	\$35.39
Bartow County	102,747	\$2,617,000	\$25.47
Henry County	217,739	\$5,343,167	\$24.54
Cherokee County	247,573	\$5,421,239	\$21.89

Percentage of Total County Operating Costs

Budgets establish priorities. The percentage of the County's operating expenses allocated for parks and recreation serves as a measure of commitment to these services. In the Community Survey, notably, 90% of respondents feel that a good parks and recreation system is just as important as schools, fire, and police protection. Figure 4.7 below provides a comparison of Cherokee County with the Benchmark communities.

Figure 4.7 Parks and Recreation Operating Budget as a % of the Total County Operating Budget	
Forsyth County	8.9%
Clayton County	5.3%
Henry County	4.0%
Bartow County	3.7%
Gwinnett County	2.9%
Cherokee County	1.7%

When comparing the recreation budget to Cherokee County's overall budget, we see that parks and recreation accounts for 1.7% of the County's total expenditures. Compared to neighboring benchmark communities, Cherokee County's recreation spending is a lower percentage of the overall budget than all other benchmark communities.

Staffing Budget

Staffing represents the largest commitment of funding for public parks and recreation agencies across the country. Cherokee County's FY19 budget includes a total of \$2,833,478 in compensation, benefits and payroll taxes for full and part-time employees. Table 4.8 shows staffing costs as a total of the benchmark counties' total operating parks and recreation budgets.

Figure 4.7 Personnel Services as a % of Operating Budget	
Clayton County	56%
<i>National Average</i>	55%
Forsyth County	54%
Gwinnett County	52%
Cherokee County	52%
Henry County	42%
Bartow County	Not Available

Cherokee County's FY19 staffing budgets as percentage of the total operating budget for parks and recreation is consistent with other benchmark communities. Only Henry County falls below the 50% rate for staff funding. Cherokee personnel cost expenditures are also below the national average which is 55% of total operating cost.

Maintenance Budget & Operations

Maintenance of park facilities is a core responsibility for recreation and park agencies. In this plan, additional new facilities are recommended to be developed over the next 10 years. These new facilities will increase maintenance

needs and require additional dollars to be allocated to the maintenance budget. As the agency continues to develop facilities, the maintenance budget will need to increase. New equipment will be needed for the staff as well.

Maintenance Standards

Staff follows regular maintenance practices on a daily basis throughout the year. Trash is collected on Mondays and Fridays, and in-season mowing is conducted Tuesday through Thursday. Normally, minor equipment repairs and servicing is done on Fridays. During the non-mowing season, regular maintenance practices occur, such as gathering leaves, mulching limbs, replacing infield mix, and doing minor repairs in parks.

While the written maintenance standards are outdated, staff have a good idea of the daily maintenance activities because many of the staff have been with the agency for several years. As retirements start to occur, along with other staff turnover, this institutional knowledge of daily practices could be lost. The division needs to update the maintenance standards manual, which should outline all maintenance duties on a seasonal basis for both site-based and roving crews. The manual should cover the various levels of maintenance for each type of facility and include things such as a mowing schedule for sports fields and a mowing schedule for open lawns and play areas. Each new maintenance employee should receive training on these practices as part of the orientation process.

Work Order System

What is more variable are the unexpected items that occur on a daily or weekly basis. Currently, the department does not use a written or electronic work order system to prioritize the non-routine maintenance activities. A best practice for maintenance divisions is to have a work order system in place that includes a written record of maintenance repairs and activities that need to occur. This will allow staff in all divisions to record a maintenance request and allow the Division Director and Park Managers to prioritize and track the work.

Equipment Maintenance Schedules

Another best practice is to develop equipment maintenance and replacement schedules. While most staff knows to change the oil in a pickup truck per the owner's manual, they may not have the same type of knowledge about servicing mowers and small engine tools. The equipment maintenance schedules should summarize manufacturers' recommended maintenance standards for all equipment that is utilized by the division.

Cost Recovery & Resource Allocation

Revenues generated for parks and recreation services are expressed as a percentage of the operating costs and reported as the Cost Recovery Rate. The implementation of financial sustainability practices, in the form of revenue and pricing policies, has risen in importance with parks and recreation agencies across the country. Best practice agencies establish a philosophical basis for revenue recovery rates that vary by program type, service level tier and population served with fees based on the cost of service.

Revenues collected by communities for parks and recreation services can be used to offset to the cost of operating the parks and recreation agency. Figure 4.8 shows the sources and percentages of direct revenue generated as profiled and compiled in PRORAGIS.

Figure 4.8 Parks and Recreation Sources of Direct Revenue		
Source	National Average	Cherokee County (FY18)
Programs and Class Fees and Charges	62.5%	64.9%
Facility Entry Fees and Memberships	14.6%	13.9%
Facility Rentals	11.8%	17.7%
Concession, Resale Items	10.6%	3.2%
Facility or Property Leases	2.0%	0.2%
Other	0.4%	0%
Sale of Real Property	0.1%	0%

Programs drive revenue in parks and recreation, as evidenced in Figure 4.8. Cherokee offers a wide variety of programs but the analysis reveals the lack of facilities and staffing levels are preventing growth of new recreation programs. As the county continues to grow, the need for additional programming space and staff will be critical to maintaining current revenue generation levels.

The County should consider revenue generation when designing new parks and facilities. For example, incorporating food and beverage and retail sales at most new facilities where large groups of users are anticipated can increase sales. When developing parks, consider facilities that can host a large variety of tournaments and sports training camps in addition to programs that citizens are willing to pay for.

Revenue generation at park facilities is highest at indoor facilities that operate on a year-round basis. Cherokee County should balance the development of indoor facilities to offset the cost of operating facilities such as greenways and playgrounds that have little revenue generating potential. New recreation centers should include spaces that can be programmed and rented for revenue generation.

Although not included in the PRORAGIS database, sponsorships for teams, programs and facilities (naming rights) and grants are also important revenue sources that should not be excluded in the Cost Recovery Rate calculation. In FY18, less than 1% of CRPA’s revenue was generated through sponsorships, donation and contributions.

The following Figure 4.9 illustrates the cost recovery rates for Cherokee County and the benchmark counties. It is clear from the comparison that Cherokee is well ahead of other agencies in terms of earned revenue. It also points out that in terms of general fund support the other jurisdictions are funded at a much higher rate than Cherokee County.

Figure 4.9 Revenue Recovery Rate as % of Operations	
Cherokee	51%
Forsyth	28%
Clayton	25%
<i>National Average</i>	<i>25%</i>
Gwinnett	13%
Henry	9%
Bartow	Not Available

Income levels are an indicator of the ability to pay. The average household income levels, as documented in the study's Community Profile and included in Figure 4.9, compares Cherokee County to the benchmark communities and demonstrates that Cherokee County has a higher median household income than other communities do, except Forsyth County. This would indicate that residents should have disposable income to participate in recreation programs.

Figure 4.9 Median Household Income	
Forsyth	\$85,492
Cherokee	\$69,711
<i>State of Georgia</i>	<i>\$65,018</i>
Henry	\$60,269
Gwinnett	\$59,492
Bartow	\$53,675
Clayton	\$40,314

Revenue Policy and Pricing Strategy

Cherokee County does not currently have a revenue policy to guide the pricing of recreation programs. Revenue policies define tiered service levels such as basic services, supplemental services, and special facilities with fees set to recover a specified percentage of the cost to deliver the service. Tiered service levels address both populations served and the level of exclusivity of the use. For example, the cost recovery rate for an exercise class as a part of a senior program may be less than the cost recovery rate for an adult program exercise class. The current sports field policy contains tiered rental costs and is a good example of how fees vary for different user groups. As another example, a pavilion rental by a private company would be considered an exclusive use and would be expected to cover all costs, at a minimum.

The county should develop a tiered revenue policy that is adopted by the Cherokee County Board of Commissioners. This will establish a precedent for pricing programs and allow staff to develop new programs with a consistent level of pricing based on the adopted revenue policy. The implementation of revenue policies requires staff training to understand the cost of service in order to calculate fees. Scholarship opportunities should be made available as a component of the policy in order to maintain equity and access to recreation programming across all segments of the population.

Recreation Programming

Recreation programs are an essential component of any recreation agency. With a good balance of offerings, programming greatly benefits the people of the community by enhancing their overall health and quality of life. However, there has to be a strong commitment to providing diverse recreation programs to function effectively as a modern park and recreation agency. Unlike most other government agencies, recreation and park staff engage and interact with the people of the community daily and on a more personal level. Programming encourages people to interact with one another. Depending on the type of program, it can also promote teamwork and self-improvement. Cherokee County encourages its patrons to visit their parks and participate in programming and special events as a variety of recreation opportunities exist.

A well-rounded and diverse park and recreation agency provides many benefits to the community it serves. As discussed in the 1995 National Recreation and Park Association publication, *Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines*, the four categories of benefits are personal, economic, social, and environmental. Each benefit is consequential to the community and has specific rewards.

Personal Benefits of a comprehensive delivery system include a full and meaningful life, good health, stress management, self-esteem, positive self-image, a balanced life, achieving full potential, gaining life satisfaction, human development, positive lifestyle choices, and an improved quality of life.

- **Economic Benefits** include preventive health care, a productive work force, and big economic returns on small investments, business relocation and expansion, reduction in high cost vandalism and criminal activity, tourism growth, and environmental investments that pay for themselves.
- **Social Benefits** include building strong communities while reducing alienation, loneliness, and anti-social behavior; promoting ethnic and cultural harmony; building strong families; increasing opportunity for community involvement, shared management, and ownership of resources; and providing a foundation for community pride.
- **Environmental Benefits** include environmental health, environmental protection and rehabilitation, environmental education, environmental investment increasing property values, and insurance for a continuing healthy environmental future.

Further National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) studies have shown that parks and recreation have three principles that make them essential services to communities: economic value, health and environmental benefits, and social importance. Parks improve the local tax base and increase property values, in turn restoring initial investments. As previously mentioned, the contribution of parks and recreation to the health of children, adults, and seniors is clear as the sedentary lifestyle of the working and school-aged plagues the human race. Modern parks are a tangible reflection of the quality of life in a community. They can bring about a sense of pride for many members of society.

NRPA promotes three pillars that should be a part of every parks and recreation agency.

- Conservation
- Health and Wellness
- Social Equity

By offering a wide variety of park programs, CRPA can expose citizens to these three pillars and thus build a community that lives together and plays together. Conservation programs can expose people to the beauty that nature has to offer. Athletic programs, exercise classes, 5k runs, walking, biking, and equestrian trails all improve health through active lifestyles and stress relief. Programs for special populations, seniors, and different ethnic and economic populations bring social equity to a community.

An analysis of recreation programming is a basic component of this plan, as an agency should offer a myriad of programs for all ages, from youth to older adults. Offering diversified programming creates the chance to include citizens who may have never participated in recreation activities. The following assesses the current programming available from Cherokee County and provides a number of recommendations to broaden and deepen the agency's offerings to reach a greater audience.

Analysis of Existing Programs

Through the recreation and parks agency and in partnership with other organizations, Cherokee County currently provides a variety of programs, activities, and events throughout the year. Programming includes activities, camps, athletics, aquatics, and special events. These are held in parks and facilities across the county and reach individuals of all age groups. CRPA publishes a quarterly publication of activities providing an overview of programs and events held during that quarter. Information is also available on the CRPA website. Below is a list of many of the programs offered by the agency. *Note: This list is not all-inclusive.*

- Activities
 - Instructional Programs including Dance, Gymnastics, etc.
 - Fitness & Wellness
 - Teen Programs
- Camps
 - Summer Camps
 - Sports Camps
 - Aquatic Camps
 - Specialty Camps
- Athletics
 - Youth Athletics
 - Adult Sports
- Aquatics
 - Swim Lessons
 - Safety Programs including Lifeguard Training, etc.
- Competitive Swim Teams
- Aqua Fitness
- Special Events
- Special Events
 - 5k's
 - Holiday Themed Events
 - Touch a Truck
 - Fall Festival
- Older Adults
 - Silver Roamers Club
 - Fitness & Wellness Programs
- Therapeutic Programs (Special Populations)
 - Instructional Programs
 - Camps
 - Day Trips
 - Veterans Programs

Program Diversity

As stated previously, a diverse and well-rounded park and recreation department provides many benefits to its residents. In evaluating the diversity of the programs offered by the Cherokee Recreation and Parks Agency, we looked at NRPA's 2016 Field Report, which identifies core recreation programming offered by over 60% of recreation agencies across the country. The following figure illustrates those programs and the percent of recreation agencies that offer the programming.

Figure 4.10 Core Recreation Programs		
Activity	Percent of Agencies Offering	Offered by Cherokee County
Team Sports	84%	Yes
Fitness Enhancement Classes	83%	Yes
Health & Wellness Education	81%	Yes
Safety Training	69%	Yes
Visual Arts	67%	Yes
Trips and Tours	66%	Yes
Martial Arts	60%	Yes
Performing Arts	60%	Yes
Aquatics	60%	Yes

Program Opportunities

The current programs offered by the agency cover the core programs offered by most recreation agencies. The survey responses reveal that the primary programs people are currently involved in are youth and adult sports, active adult health classes and activities, and senior trips. However, there are real opportunities to expand the current program offerings. By utilizing park resources currently available and adding new facilities recommended by this plan, additional programming can be added.

The community survey showed there are a number of activities that are desired for the youth, adult and senior populations. Figure 4.2 below shows those activities.

Figure 4.11 Top Youth, Adult and Senior Activities Desired by Survey Respondents		
Youth Sports	Adult Sports	Older Adults
Soccer League	Disc Golf	Shuffle Board
Volleyball League	Soccer Leagues	Dance Classes
Adaptive Sports for Special Needs	Kickball Leagues	Hiking Club
Skateboarding	Volleyball Leagues	Aerobic Classes
BMX	Pickleball	Fishing

While the county currently offers some of these programs, others are not currently available. Where the activity is currently offered, this may indicate the need for additional marketing or the use of different marketing channels. Some of these activities will require new facilities or expanded partnerships in order to offer the programs; others, such as volleyball leagues, senior classes, and adult soccer programs, are currently limited by space availability at the existing recreation center and parks.

In addition to the community center, meeting rooms in fire and police facilities can be used for some of the desired classes. However, a new recreation center would provide much needed space for many of the desired programs and activities.

Major programming areas that should be expanded include outdoor recreation programs, active adult programs, special population programs, and other programs that bring the community or groups of the community together.

Outdoor Programs

The agency has significant parklands that abut lakes, rivers, and streams. Much of this land offers diverse forest habitat and open areas that are perfect for outdoor recreation programs. These parklands lend themselves to both land-based programs and water-based activities. Many of the outdoor recreation programs require little cost to offer and can be revenue generators for the county. In FY19, the county has established an Outdoor Recreation Coordinator using existing staff. The addition of this position will enable CRPA to develop programming in the realm of outdoor recreation.

Special Populations

Programming for special populations is an ever-growing area of public recreation services. Across the nation, recreation agencies are seeking out ways to serve all population groups, including those with special needs. This population group needs recreation programs that are tailored to their ability. Many citizens who fall into the special population category are served by the public school system to the age of 18. After that point, they then

lose the main provider of services. This is where recreation agencies can fill the void and deliver group activities and programs that provide relief to both the individual with special needs and their caregiver.

The county has already recognized that, in some cases, special facilities are needed to serve these citizens. The development of an adaptive use field at Patriots Park is a good example of a specialized facility. This field will allow citizens of all ages with special needs to interact with other able-bodied citizens in recreation activities. While special facilities are not needed for many activities, staff who have special training to work with participants is needed. In 2017, CRPA hired the county's first Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist. With a dedicated staff member and adequate staff support of part-time or volunteer assistance, the agency can develop new programs to meet the needs of the special population citizens of the county.

Programming for Older Adults

The Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Aging (AoA) predicts that, by 2030, the senior population, defined as 65 years or older, will be doubled from that of 2000. In 2009, seniors represented one out of every eight Americans, or approximately 12% of the population and that number is expected to rise to 19% of the population in 2030. US Census Bureau data shows that Georgia's senior population, at 11.5%, tracks closely to that of the national statistic. Cherokee County's Community Profile, as presented in Chapter One, indicates that the fastest growing population by age groups are the 60 to 64 and 65 to 70 age groups. This will have a direct impact on the need for expanded programs for older adults.

Baby Boomers, as defined by the US Census Bureau, were born between 1946 and 1964. The oldest Boomers are approaching 70 years of age, and the youngest Boomers are in their fifties. This generation has changed the profile of the traditional senior citizen recreation program. The Boomers do not view themselves as senior citizens and are not likely to participate in a program located in the old style "senior" center or a program for "golden agers." They are active and intend to remain active, especially running/jogging, walking, and hiking. They swim and take exercise classes for fitness. This generation is knowledgeable about fitness and is interested in educational classes and social activities.

Parks and recreation agencies' traditional approach to programming for older adults will be extended to meet the more active needs of the new generation of aging Americans. At the same time, the role of social responsibility, in terms of improving the lives of the seniors, will remain an important emphasis. In the December 2013 issue of Parks & Recreation Magazine, Dr. John Crompton, a noted Texas A&M professor in Leisure Studies research, concluded that "focusing on this senior demographic will impact the viability of park and recreation agencies in the near future, and forward-thinking agencies are already adjusting operations to better serve seniors."

In planning for the increased senior population and how best to serve them, the county will need increased staff and additional indoor recreation space. This can be accomplished either by the county's Senior Services agency, Cherokee Recreation & Parks Agency or in partnership by coordinating staff and available space in existing community centers, as well as future space.

The programs for older adults should balance fee-based programs that cover program costs and, in some cases, generate retained revenue as in the case with more extensive senior trips and non-fee-based activities, such as card games, computer labs, and game rooms.

Program Implementation

NRPA's Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) standards provide the best resource for identifying standards and best practices for recreation programming. A *Recreation Programming Plan* is a fundamental standard for park and recreation agencies. The following provides key administrative and organizational best practices for developing and implementing successful parks and recreation programs.

Community Assessment

Programs should be based on the assessed needs of the community. The Public Input section of this study provides the beginning point for assessing the recreation programming needs for the agency. The planning team recommends that CRPA conduct a program needs assessment on five-year intervals moving forward to continue to understand the needs and desires of the community, particularly as the county population continues to grow.

Performance Measurement

A systematic approach to recreation program evaluation is a CAPRA fundamental standard for parks and recreation. Goals and standards should be established for all programs, and the programs should be measured against the goals and standards. The evaluation results are used to determine if programs should be continued, modified or discontinued. At a minimum, CRPA should develop a user survey to receive feedback from participants in the current programs offered by the agency. Going forward, the agency should develop and implement a systematic evaluation process.

Marketing & Advertising

Marketing activities are essential to the modern parks and recreation agency as they try to serve the active lifestyles of today's modern families and citizens. Improved marketing efforts can also increase revenue generation by informing citizens about programs that they may have otherwise missed in print media or by word-of-mouth.

Feedback provided from the community survey reveals that the primary source for information used by citizens to find out about agency programs and activities is the Cherokee Recreation and Parks Agency website. The agency has recognized the importance of the website and recently updated it to make it more user-friendly. Citizens find out about programs and activities through other sources, such as print media, including local magazines and newspapers. Word-of-mouth was the fourth most common way to hear about programs.

Over the next ten years, as technology continues to evolve, the department will need to continue to utilize all forms of social media to provide information on agency programs and activities. In the community survey, 64% of respondents said they would like to receive a monthly newsletter via email. The newsletter should cover upcoming programs and events as well as topics such as new facilities, new staff, changes in park policies, and other information relating to the agency. The newsletter should be supplemented by other email blasts, which announce registration dates for programs, reminders about special events, or required training sessions for coaches. The newsletter and other marketing materials can be used to brand the agency and create loyalty among participants.

Partners in Recreation

The increased importance of partnerships is a growing trend in parks and recreation. The recession's impact on local government budgets required creative solutions for continuing recreation programming. Partnerships

extend the reach of parks and recreation and provide alternative programs and program delivery models, but they also build advocacy for parks and recreation. The National League of Cities 2010 Report illustrates the importance of collaborating. Figure 4.12 below shows the percentage of recreation and parks departments that partner with other organizations, such as schools and businesses.

Figure 4.12 Parks and Recreation Partnerships	
Partner Organizations	Percent of Agencies
Schools	75%
Other Local Governments	69%
Non-Profits	60%
State Government	43%
Businesses	38.5%

Source: National League of Cities 2010 Report

Many parks agencies depend on partnerships with other public or private organizations to offer services to their citizens. Such partnerships can promote outreach, increase programming, and ease the burden of agency staff in developing programs that the public desires. The following is an overview of the various organizations that the agency works with in the delivery of programming in Cherokee County. The agency should continue to develop these and other partnerships, as they deem necessary.

The agency has many partners and partnership agreements in place that allow the agency to provide recreation programs and services throughout the county. One of the largest partners is the Cherokee County School District. The school district allows the agency to use all the school gyms for the agency's basketball programs, which is the largest program offered by the county and the school district has a bus sharing agreement with the county for transporting campers enrolled in CRPA camps. The school district uses the Cherokee County Aquatic Center and other athletic facilities as part of their partnership.

The agency also has several agreements with youth athletic associations who operate programs at county park facilities. These agreements range from managing sports programs to paying for the maintenance activities for portions of the parks. These agreements are instrumental in allowing the agency to maintain lean staffing numbers while also providing activities for county residents.

When it comes to partnership agreements, the county has a good understanding of the type of legal language that should be in the documents. The documents are laid out clearly and stress items such as coaches' background checks, a best practice when dealing with youth athletic associations.

Municipalities

Woodstock and Canton both have recreation staff that oversee parks and recreation facilities. The other incorporated communities do not have official parks and recreation departments but do have some recreation facilities located in their communities. Each of these communities received funds for the development of recreation facilities in the last bond program passed in the county thereby increasing the overall access to parks and recreation facilities throughout the county.

The City of Woodstock has focused their efforts on the development of greenways and trails. They currently have the most extensive system of greenways in the county and continue to add greenways in conjunction with the Greenprints Alliance, a greenways friends group.

The City of Canton used bond funds to develop new park facilities in their downtown area along the Etowah River and ball fields at the county-owned Kenney Askew Park by constructing the Hunkey Mauldin Sports Complex. The City of Waleska purchased park property, and the City of Ball Ground used bond funds to renovate several existing city parks. The City of Holly Springs used their funds to purchase a piece of property and developed J.B. Owens Park.

Cherokee County, through CRPA, should continue to take a leadership role in promoting recreation and parks opportunities throughout the county and serve as a clearinghouse and conduit for increased cooperation for each of the municipalities. Increased communication and cooperation will maximize available resources while reducing duplication of services.

Volunteers

Parks and recreation agencies would not function without volunteerism. Volunteers provide the foundation of parks and recreation service delivery. CRPA currently uses volunteers as coaches, bike trail and equestrian trail supporters, and other association members to expand program opportunities. Additional volunteers help with Special Olympics activities and special events that take place in the county. The county holds a volunteer appreciation banquet annually to express gratitude to all the volunteers. The county should continue to promote volunteer opportunities where appropriate.

National Accreditation

The Commission for Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) was established in 1992 to create standards of organization and operation for all public park and recreation agencies. Standards include important operation issues such as planning, organization, human resources, financial management, programming, facility & land management and risk management. Accreditation is based on an agency's compliance with the 151 standards for national accreditation. To achieve accreditation, an agency must comply with all 37 Fundamental Standards and 103 (90%) of the 114 Non-Fundamental Standards upon initial accreditation and 108 (95%) of the 114 Non-Fundamental Standards upon reaccreditation.

CAPRA accreditation is a five-year cycle that includes three phases: development of the agency self-assessment report, the on-site visitation, and the Commission's review and decision. The on-site visitation follows the agency's development of its self-assessment report. If the Commission grants accreditation, the agency will develop a new self-assessment report and be revisited every five years. Within each of the four years between on-site visits, the agency will submit an annual report that addresses its continued compliance with the accreditation standards.

The accreditation process sets high expectations on those agencies that are committed to the process; ultimately making them better departments. There are currently 166 accredited agencies in the United States, including eleven in Georgia.

The move toward accreditation takes time. Most agencies develop a plan to reach the required standards over a 2 to 3 year period. The county should set a goal of becoming accredited within the next 2 years.

Summary, Key Observations & Recommendations

In summary, the planning team recommends the following steps in the further development of the operations of the Cherokee Recreation and Parks Agency:

Near-Term: 0 to 24 Months

- Develop a Revenue Policy based on the cost of service with a three-tiered service level system and a phased approach to move toward a more self-sustaining system.
- Update maintenance standards; develop a work order system, and equipment maintenance schedules to standardize maintenance practices.
- Begin offering outdoor recreation programs and classes.
- Expand recreation programs for older adults and special populations.
- Expand athletic programs to include new programs identified in community survey.
- Develop program surveys for all programs.
- Expand programming opportunities for fee generation.
- Expand marketing efforts to ensure that citizens are aware of the programs offered by CRPA.
- Continue to develop and expand partnership opportunities.
- Complete the self assessment process to CAPRA accreditation. Submit the preliminary application.
- Schedule and complete the on-site visit for CAPRA accreditation.

Mid-Term: 25 to 60 Months

- Develop more indoor facilities that have year-round revenue production potential.
- Hire full- and part-time staff to operate and manage the proposed recreation center once complete.
- Hire additional maintenance staff to maintain the current ratio of acres of parkland per park maintenance as additional parks are developed.
- Continue to expand programming for older adults with the addition of a multi-generational community center.
- Continue evaluating program offerings and conducting program surveys.
- Conduct a recreation programs needs assessment survey.
- Based upon surveys and needs assessment, evaluate programming and adjust offerings.

Long-Term: 61 to 120 Months

- Hire additional maintenance staff to maintain the current ratio of acres of parkland per park maintenance as additional parks are developed.
- Continue with program evaluations and surveys and periodic recreation programs needs assessment surveys, and make changes as necessary.
- Maintain CAPRA accreditation through annual reports and re-accreditation process every five years.

Chapter Five – Opinion of Probable Cost & Funding Options

Opinions of Cost

In the development of the plan update, a ten-year spending plan was created. Figure 5.1 provides opinions of probable costs for projects including both proposed and existing parks and greenway facilities. These are based on current construction costs and cost escalation is included for projects slated for the end of plan.

Included are all recommended minor improvements and maintenance needs at existing recreation and parks facilities, major renovations and expansions recommended for existing parks, new park development including greenways and blueways, new indoor facilities as well as estimates for architectural/engineering services, administrative costs, and a program wide 10% contingency. All recommended projects are detailed in Chapter Three – Facilities Assessments and Recommendations.

Figure 5.1: Cherokee County Recreation, Parks, Greenspace & Trails Master Plan Capital Improvements Opinions of Cost	
Capital Improvement	Ten Year Total
Existing Recreation & Parks Facilities Improvements	
Barnett Park	\$215,000
Blankets Creek Bike Trails	\$20,000
Cherokee County Aquatic Center	\$920,000
Cline Park	\$95,000
Dwight Terry Park	\$275,000
Hickory Trails Park	\$95,000
Hobgood Park	\$65,000
JJ Biello Park	\$280,000
Kenney Askew Park	\$95,000
Lewis Park	\$15,000
Patriots Park	\$75,000
Recreation Center, South Annex	\$275,000
Sequoyah Park	\$40,000
Union Hill Community Center	\$150,000
Waleska Park	\$125,000
Weatherby Park	\$125,000
Subtotal	\$2,865,000
Major Park Renovations/Expansions	
Badger Creek Park	\$2,400,000
Cherokee Mills Park	\$3,000,000
Cherokee Veterans Park Baseball/Softball Complex	\$5,000,000
Cherokee Veterans Park, Other Additions	\$975,000
Fields Landing Park	\$3,000,000
Garland Mountain Horse & Hiking Trails Expansion	\$1,225,000
JJ Biello Park Twin Creeks Softball Complex Expansion	\$5,500,000

Figure 5.1: Cherokee County Recreation, Parks, Greenspace & Trails Master Plan Capital Improvements Opinions of Cost	
JJ Biello Park Mill Creek Road Entrance (<i>new</i>)	\$3,200,000
Sequoyah Park	\$2,450,000
Subtotal	\$26,750,000
New Park Development	
Thacker Parcel	\$9,900,000
Thompson or Dunn Parcels (SW)	\$7,500,000
Greenway Plan & 10 Miles of Trails	\$12,000,000
Canoe / Kayak Launches	\$900,000
Subtotal	\$30,300,000
Indoor Facilities	
LB Ahrens Recreation Center @ Cherokee Veterans Park	\$16,000,000
Recreation Center, SW portion of Cherokee County	\$10,500,000
Subtotal	\$26,500,000
Subtotal of All Categories	\$86,415,000
A/E Fees (7%)	\$ 6,049,050
Administrative Costs (4%)	\$ 3,456,600
Contingency (10%)	\$ 9,592,065
Total Capital Improvement Estimate	\$ 105,512,715

Moving Forward with Funding

Cherokee County's elected officials and citizens have expressed goals of increasing recreation opportunities throughout the county as well as increasing tourism through the development of additional tournament facilities. Benchmarking comparisons indicate that Cherokee County is not funding park operations at the same level as comparison communities, so transforming Cherokee County's parks and recreation opportunities will be a significant undertaking requiring additional funding.

To meet the expressed goals, a combination of funding is necessary, which could include redirecting existing general funds to parks; utilizing available special taxes and fees; creating a dedicated millage for park operations and capital projects; and securing grants and private funding. In addition, it would allow for an increased operating budget, which is needed in order to improve facility maintenance and increase the number of programs offered throughout the year.

Going forward, the county needs to increase funding for parks above the current 1.7% of the total county operating budget to address the deferred maintenance issues in existing parks as well as expand and operate new facilities that will generate revenue and attract visitors the county. The ten-year spending plan has identified over \$105,000,000 in funding needs for projects. Funding of this level can best be addressed by a combination of sources.

Historically, the main sources of capital funding for parks and recreation agencies in the state of Georgia are:

- Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST)
- General Obligation Bonds

- Local Option Sales Tax (LOST)
- Impact or Other Development Fees
- General Fund Tax Dollars
- State and Federal Grants
- Program User Fees

The county has a .503 millage rate that is paying the debt service on a series of general obligation bonds that funded a capital development program for new park facilities and renovation projects. Park operations are funded by variety of funding sources, the largest being earned revenue from program fees and charges. It is clear the county will need to explore other methods to increase funding in order to improve the overall quality of park facilities and programs. In the following paragraphs, alternative funding options are explored.

Return on Investment in Parks

An investment in the park system will have many benefits beyond just providing improved recreational opportunities for the county. By developing improved tournament sports facilities, the county should see revenue increase from the hotel tax and an increase in earned revenue from concession sales, gate receipts, program fees, and rentals. These increases in revenue can then be used to help offset the additional operational costs at new facilities. The county should also see a reduction in maintenance costs as outdated facilities are updated. Improved parks can also be an important tool in attracting new residents and businesses. Improved parks attract more use, getting people outdoors and active, which has proven health benefits.

As the county continues to grow, with a projected 70,000 new residents over the next ten years, the county will have to maintain existing facilities, provide new facilities and operate a growing recreation agency. In this section of the report, we document current funding practices and identify opportunities to gain additional funding and tools for the continued development of recreation and parks services in Cherokee County.

Traditional Primary Funding Methods

Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST)

In Georgia, the largest and most commonly used funding source for capital is the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) program. SPLOST referendums are placed on the ballot by county governments, and as such, the county controls when and if this type of funding will become available. As part of the process, projects which are to be funded by the collected tax dollars must be identified prior to the vote so voters know what is to be constructed. Once a SPLOST is passed, the county can choose to fund projects as the tax revenues are collected; or to use a general obligation bond to advance project schedules, using the revenue collected to retire the bond debt.

The most recent SPLOST passed overwhelmingly in Cherokee County in November 2017. Level One projects in this edition of the county’s SPLOST program include expansions of the courthouse and jail, and an upgrade to the county’s emergency communications system. Other projects include roads and bridges, fire facilities and equipment. Minor recreation and parks projects were included totaling less than \$3,000,000. **As part of the next SPLOST referendum, the county should consider including several of the larger, high priority projects in this plan.**

Impact Fees

An impact fee is a fee imposed by a local government on new development to account for the cost of expanding public infrastructure, facilities and services to serve the new homes and businesses. Since 2000, Cherokee County

has collected impact fees for libraries, fire protection, sheriff's patrol, public safety, parks & recreation and road improvements. The fees are designed to help our growing jurisdiction maintain the same level of service from these important community resources. In 1990 The Georgia Development Impact Fee Act (DIFA) was enacted into law to;

- Ensure that adequate public facilities are available to serve new growth and development;
- Promote orderly growth and development by establishing uniform standards by which municipalities and counties may require that new growth and development pay a proportionate share of the cost of new public facilities needed to serve new growth and development;
- Establish minimum standards for the adoption of development impact fee ordinances by municipalities and counties; and
- Ensure that new growth and development is required to pay no more than its proportionate share of the cost of public facilities needed to serve new growth and development and to prevent duplicate and ad hoc development exactions.

According to recent national surveys, about 60 percent of all cities with over 25,000 residents and almost 40 percent of all metropolitan counties use some form of impact fees.

Impact fees for parks and recreation are collected only on residential development including single-family detached housing, apartments and condominiums/townhouses. The current Cherokee County Impact Fee Schedule has that fee shown as \$283.741.

Recent capital improvements through the Parks Bond have greatly increased the recreation and parks level of service (LOS) provided by the county. **During the next review and update to the county's Impact Fee program, it is strongly recommended that the county consider increasing these fees due to recent increased level of services.**

General Obligation Bond

In November 2008, Cherokee County voters overwhelmingly supported the issuance of general obligation bonds up to \$90 million for the purpose of improving and expanding recreation and parks opportunities within the County. The Cherokee County Board of Commissioners began issuing those bonds in 2009 for the purpose of fulfilling the commitment to the citizens of Cherokee County.

The debt service on these bonds is repaid through property tax revenue generated by a dedicated millage rate levied county-wide. That millage rate is set by the Board of Commissioners each year at the same time that the County's M&O and Fire District rates are set.

Figure 5.2 shows the dates and amounts of each series of bond that were issued. Note that in 2016, the County refunded the 2009 series by issuing the 2016 series. This did not increase the amount available for projects but it did generate a significant savings for the County and the citizens.

Figure 5.2 Park Bond Issuances

Series	Date Issued	Amount (Millions)	Callable	Date
5Bond-Series 2009 ¹	2/26/2009	\$45.0	Yes	4/1/2019
6Bond-Series 2010	8/25/2010	\$10.767	Yes	4/1/2020
7Bond-Series 2012	1/26/2012	\$11.410	Yes	2/28/2019
8Bond-Series 2015	7/26/2014	\$22.823	Yes	4/1/2024
9Bond-Series 2016 ¹	4/1/2016	\$28.45	No	4/1/2029

¹ The Series 2009 bond was refunded and replaced with the Series 2016.

In 2008, prior to the ballot referendum, the estimated property tax impact to a \$200,000 home was \$62.00 per year. Figure 5.3 shows the Park Bond millage rate assessed since 2009 and the impact to a \$200,000 home, as well as the impact to the average home in Cherokee County each year. The actual impact to a \$200,000 home has averaged \$52.69 per year since 2009, about 15% less than originally estimated.

Figure 5.3 Park Bond Millage Rates

Year	Park Bond Millage Rate	Cherokee County Average Home Fair Market Value	Tax on an Average Home (Park Bond)	Tax on a \$200,000 Home (Park Bond)
2009	0.580	\$205,908	\$47.77	\$46.40
2010	0.628	\$189,348	\$47.56	\$50.24
2011	0.641	\$169,300	\$43.41	\$51.28
2012	0.780	\$163,642	\$51.06	\$62.40
2013	0.776	\$167,574	\$52.01	\$62.08
2014	0.744	\$182,000	\$54.16	\$59.52
2015	0.744	\$212,300	\$63.18	\$59.52
2016	0.609	\$229,300	\$55.86	\$48.72
2017	0.581	\$248,100	\$57.66	\$46.48
2018	0.503	\$256,300	\$51.57	\$40.24
Average	0.659	\$202,377	\$52.42	\$52.69

If the county desires to accelerate park and recreation projects, but prefers not to incur additional debt, it will need to consider ways to accelerate the repayment of the existing general obligation bond debt such as the refunding of the Series 2009 bond with the Series 2016 bond or increased payments. Given the strong support for parks and recreation projects, citizens are likely to support future referendums that continue to show a good return on their investment.

User Fees

User fees assessed by parks and recreation agencies are wide and varied. Fees can be charged for facility maintenance, added to program registrations, or charged for park access on a daily or annual basis. Other user fees include membership to special facilities and program fees charged for instructional programs.

Program user fees are a collection of entry fees and program registrations. Collected funds are primarily used to offset operating expenses in providing services to participants. Current program fees and revenue generation is a major funding source for the agency. Fee collections make up more than 50% of the annual budget. To maintain or grow this high level of cost recovery, new facilities that have the ability to generate revenue are needed along with new programs. **Development of a cost recovery and resource allocation policy is recommended.**

It is in the agency's best interest to evaluate the existing pricing strategies; develop a cost recovery philosophy; create goals for both county-sponsored and association-sponsored programs that truly reflect the community's values placed on recreation and parks services; and provide for the agency's sustainability. CRPA should examine their current fee structure to identify where increases may be appropriate. Factors, such as inflation rates, rising energy costs, land values, higher maintenance levels provided by the county, and new facility development, should all be taken into account.

Non-Resident Fees

Non-resident fees are charged to facility users and program participants who do not reside within the county. An example would be a non-resident fee at an aquatics center or for participation in a sports league. Residents pay one fee and non-residents pay a higher fee. Currently, Cherokee County does not utilize non-resident fees. Moving forward, the county should evaluate facilities and programs to determine where non-resident fees may be appropriate.

Financial Aid Policy

The cost recovery policies should also include a financial aid policy to assist low-income families with the cost of recreation services.

Dedicated Millage

Another method for funding park operations and capital projects is to establish a dedicated millage for parks. Numerous agencies in Georgia as well as around the country have established dedicated millage rates for parks just as they have for schools.

Regulatory Funding or Development Sources

The employment of regulatory means to aid in the development of parks and greenways is used by many county governments across the country. In the case of parks, land set aside or a fee in lieu of land set aside are common practices, which provide either needed parkland or funds necessary for the acquisition of parkland. The parkland dedication is generally tied to the development of residential property on a per unit basis. This would include both single family and multifamily housing units.

Right-of-Way or Greenway Easement Dedication

Another potential tool for Cherokee County is a mandatory right-of-way (ROW) dedication for multi-use greenway development outside of the roadway system. As new developments are planned along proposed greenways, there is no provision for the mandatory dedication of ROW's or greenway easements for the multi-use greenways recommended in this plan. These non-road routes are equally important to the development of a comprehensive greenway system; therefore, the dedication of ROW's or easements should be explored by the county's planning staff. These types of dedications will primarily benefit the county in areas where new development is occurring.

Alternative Funding Sources

Partnerships

The county is blessed to have many highly organized and active volunteer groups that use the park system, including athletic associations, bicycle and equestrian groups, and trail builders. These groups have a history of raising money for park maintenance, assisting with construction projects, and organizing volunteers. The county should continue to cultivate these partnerships as a means of expanding recreation opportunities.

Guidelines should be developed for these groups to identify facility improvements they would like to make in a park. Once in place, these groups can submit a project they would like to develop in a park. If the project is

approved and the group raises the necessary funds to construct the project, it should then be allowed to move forward.

A good example would be the development of camping facilities at equestrian and bicycle trail facilities. Focus group representatives from both of these park user groups should be encouraged to develop a plan in association with the County staff. Once their plan is approved, they can begin raising funds to construct the facilities.

Fundraising

Local fundraising is a mechanism that has worked effectively in communities across the country. Although a strong local effort is involved, this mechanism typically generates a vast amount of support and publicity. Local businesses, organizations, and private individuals can pledge funding over a specific period.

In most communities, a recreation and parks advisory board plays an active role in the fundraising for their department. One of the primary responsibilities of a board is to assist in the development, acquisition, and management of agency resources. Cherokee County has an advisory board and its members should play a vital role in providing guidance, expertise, advocacy, political support, fundraising efforts, and representation of the agency's constituents.

Board members can be more proactive by initiating a variety of fundraising tasks, such as collaborating with the user groups to send direct mail letters, promoting sponsorship of programs and naming rights, seeking in-kind donations, hosting special events (e.g., golf tournaments, fundraiser dinners, events to honor volunteers, silent auctions, and themed socials), and soliciting charitable donations of money and lands.

Naming Rights / Advertising in Parks

In the 1990s, naming rights became prominent when larger sports venues and cultural spaces were named after a company or individual. Public naming rights have been growing due to tighter agency budgets. The attraction of public venues is the varied tiers of naming rights that can be allowed. In a large sports complex, for example, agencies can solicit naming rights for the entire facility for a prescribed amount of money, or they can tailor it toward naming a locker room within the facility for a lesser fee. Agencies are creative in selling not only spaces but placing products within the department to generate new revenues.

Cherokee County has used this mechanism previously at the Cherokee County Aquatic Center. In partnership with Northside Hospital Cherokee, funds are provided for operational costs in exchange for naming rights at the aquatic center, displays on scoreboards in county parks and electronic and print media advertising.

Additional scoreboards are available in multiple county parks. **The county should continue to seek advertising and marketing partners in the local business community as well as naming rights for future facilities.**

Exclusive Beverage Rights

Many communities leverage the right to be the sole beverage supplier to a county or to the parks and recreation department by soliciting annual payments for soft drink suppliers. These sole supplier agreements usually cover a five-year period to allow the supplier to make a good return on their investment. Cherokee County already has an agreement with the Coca-Cola Bottling Company that provides sponsorship fees and rebates on sales in county parks. This revenue is used to offset operating costs within the agency.

Friend of the Parks Group

Many parks and recreation agencies have a friends group tasked with raising awareness and funds for parks. Metro Nashville Davidson County Parks and Recreation is a good example as they have numerous friends groups that are set up as 501(c)3 nonprofit groups that raise money for individual parks and the greenway system. These groups

sponsor large community festivals and functions that generate hundreds of thousands of dollars annually that go toward capital projects and programs. Some companies, such as Cabela's, have a grant program for outdoor recreational activities. One stipulation for many grant programs is that the group must be a 501(c)3, so in order for the county to be eligible for these grants, they would have to have a separate 501(c)3 group in place that could qualify. The county should consider a not-for-profit friend of the parks group that utilizes volunteers to raise awareness and funds for parks.

Grants and Programs

Transportation Enhancements (TE)

The Transportation Enhancements (TE) program, the largest source of funding for trails and related facilities, supports a wide variety of transportation-related community projects. Transportation Enhancement projects must relate to surface transportation, and they must compete among numerous projects. Greenways and other recreational trails are eligible for TE funding as long as the project has a transportation element being funded.

There are variety Transportation Enhancement categories. The three that most relate to greenways and recreational trails are pedestrian and bicycle facilities, pedestrian and bicycle safety and educational activities, and conversion of abandoned railway corridors to trails. The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) is the agency responsible for administering Transportation Enhancement funds. The county could possibly fund portions of the recommended greenway system through annual applications to GDOT. These grants are 80 percent federal and 20 percent local funding.

Website: <http://www.dot.ga.gov/IS/Funding/TE>

Recreational Trails Program (RTP)

Initiated through the TEA-21 legislation, Georgia's Recreational Trails Program (referred to frequently as "RTP"), provides funding for trail construction, trail maintenance and trail education. The Recreational Trails Program awards grants to city governments, county governments, federal agencies, authorized commissions, as well as state agencies.

Like the Transportation Enhancements program, the RTP is a matching grant with 80 percent federal funding and 20 percent local funding. The United States Congress appropriates funding for the Program, and the Federal Highway Administration manages the Program, but it is administered at the state level. In Georgia, administration is handled by staff of the Department of Natural Resources. The purpose of the RTP is to provide and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities identified in, or that further a specific goal of, the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Grants are generally awarded on an annual basis. Funds may be used for:

- New trail construction,
- Trail restoration,
- Trail head facilities,
- Lease of heavy equipment,
- Purchase of hand tools to construct / renovate trails,
- Land acquisition for trail purposes,
- Water trail facilities, and
- Safety and educational programs.

Website: <https://gastateparks.org/RTP>

Community Development Block Grants

Although this program funds housing, public facilities, economic development, and community projects, recreation can be a minor component of the project. For example, a mini-park could be constructed on land purchased through the housing project that services primarily low- to moderate-income individuals. The program is administered through the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

Website: <https://www.dca.ga.gov/community-economic-development/funding-programs/community-development-block-grants-cdbg>

Land and Water Conservation Fund

Since the mid-1960s, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program has provided funds for outdoor recreation acquisition and development; however, over the last few years, the funding has been extremely limited. In Georgia, administration of LWCF is handled by staff of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Division of Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites. Funding for this program varies from year to year based on funding from the United States Congress.

Website: <https://gastateparks.org/LWCF>

Other Transportation Grant Opportunities

Because the Atlanta Regional Commission is under federal mandate to improve air quality, there are several other specific grants available through GDOT to fund alternative transportation. CRPA should work closely with the county's Department of Transportation to pursue funds for sidewalks, trails, and bike lanes to connect to the community's parks, many of which are in close proximity to schools.

Funding Recommendations Summary

Survey responses indicate support to fund capital projects at a virtual tie between passing SPLOST and a parks bond program. The third most popular funding method was increased impact fees on development. Implementing a dedicated millage received the lowest support. When asked if they were willing to increase the property tax to improve park maintenance and programs, 95% of survey respondents said they would support an increase.

It is clear that additional funding will be needed if the goal of improving park facilities quickly is to be achieved. Several comments received through the public input process stated the citizens' desire for expanded parks and recreational programs and facilities. The county should explore the best combination of funding sources, take the necessary actions to secure the funding sources.

Other steps that will increase the rate of park and greenway development but on a much smaller scale include the following:

- Implement regulatory tools for parkland and greenway rights-of-way or easements in the zoning code. This is one of the few no-cost options for the county and is a standard requirement in many communities across the country.
- Develop a fees-and-charges policy. The policy should clearly define the various levels of general funds that will be used to support each type of program so that earned revenue goals for the agency can be set for individual programs as well as the agency as a whole. Increasing earned revenues will be a vital part of the increased funding for the agency, but it is dependent on providing adequate park facilities.
- Build on existing partnerships. Building stronger relationships with current park user groups, nonprofit groups, and others could allow the agency to provide services through allied providers to keep operational

cost low and raise funds for capital projects. The county should continue to make parkland available for local groups who raise money to fund improvements.

- Any agreements with these partners should be in writing in the form of intergovernmental agreements (IGA), memorandums of understanding (MOU), memorandums of agreement (MOA), or other similar written agreement formats to ensure that all parties understand their roles and responsibilities.
- Seek grants, and leverage existing funds as potential matches. Expand the level of grant writing done by the agency. Grants have been and will continue to be a credible funding source for special projects and plans. Grants should not be sought as a primary revenue source but as a supplement to agency and capital funding.

Action Steps

Capital Projects

0 to 12 months

- Determine highest priority projects and identify potential funding sources.
- Using existing SPLOST & Impact Fees, complete small capital improvement projects.
- Reevaluate Impact Fees for Parks and Recreation based on the increased Level of Service.

Year 2-10

- Continue to use existing SPLOST & Impact Fees to complete small capital improvement projects.
- Include high priority projects in the next SPLOST program.

Other Actions

0 to 12 months

- Organize a friends group.
- Implement new regulatory processes to allow for parkland and ROW donations.
- Apply for grants for trails, sidewalks, and bike improvements.
- Develop a cost recovery and resource allocation policy.
- Increase operations revenue through more advertising and sponsorship partnerships.

Year 2-10

- Continue to apply for grants.
- Conduct friends group fund raising programs.