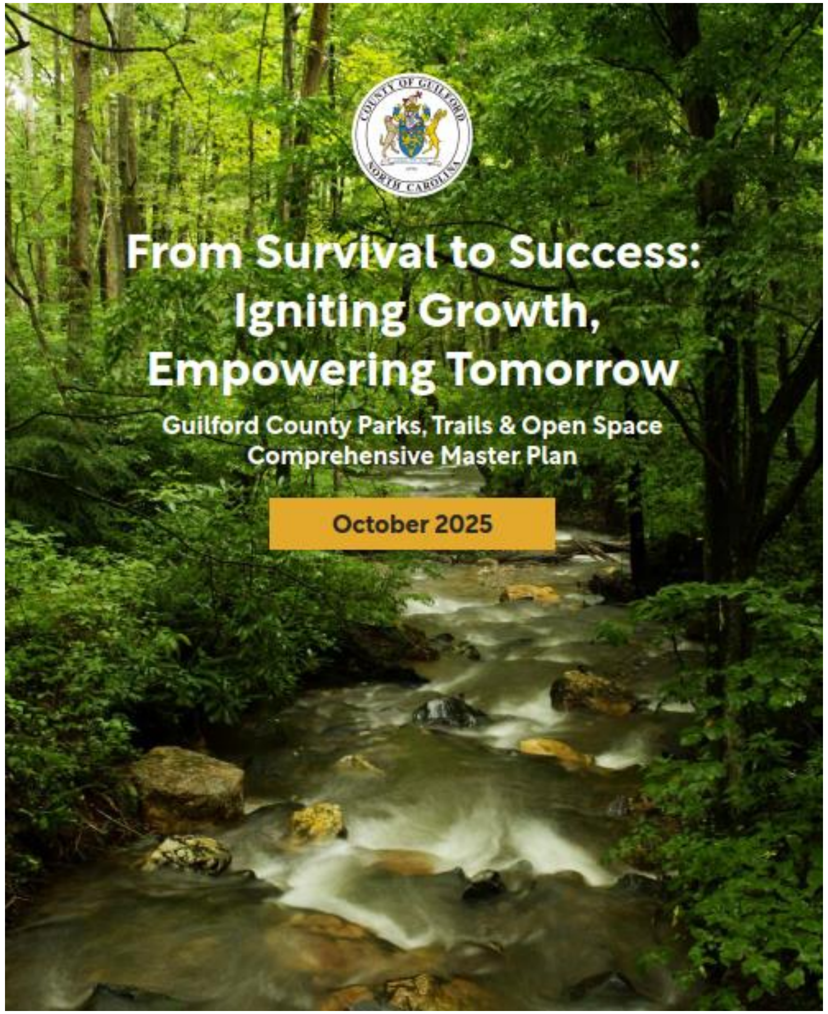
Guilford County Parks, Open Space & Trails Master Plan

"From Survival to Success: Igniting Growth, Empowering Tomorrow"

Dwight Godwin,
Parks Department Director
10/16/2025

Today's Objectives

- **Park System Overview**
  History, structure, and community engagement
- **Active vs. Passive Parks**
  Clarify Guilford County's approach
- **Key Findings**
  Facility conditions & investment priorities
- **Analysis Review**
  Benchmarking, service standards, SWOT
- **Strategic Direction**
  Guiding principles & 10-year recommendations
- **Funding & Budgeting**
  Support for implementation
- **Discussion**



County Parks System Unique Aspects

How are county park and recreation systems different from municipal park and recreation systems?

- County park systems typically cover larger geographic area and encompass multiple municipalities and unincorporated areas.
- County park systems serve more diverse and dispersed populations, as well as visitors from various regions.
- County systems often require more complex planning and management strategies due to the diverse needs of the population served and larger scale operations.
- County park systems often engage in partnerships and collaborations with various stakeholders, including municipalities, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and other government agencies, to enhance services and leverage resources.

Passive vs. Active System

as defined or outlined by NRPA

"Passive Parks System" - characteristics are low-intensity use areas focused on nature, open space, and unstructured activities like walking, picnicking, and wildlife viewing. These parks have minimal built amenities, such as trails, benches, and picnic tables, with a primary goal of preserving natural features and providing visitors with quiet enjoyment of the environment, distinguishing them from parks designed for structured, active recreation.

"Active Parks" system - is one that supports and encourages physical activity through integrated infrastructure, such as parks, trails, and greenways, combined with community engagement, programming, and public awareness.

This system aims to increase the use of these spaces for physical activity and improve the health and well-being of communities by ensuring equitable access to opportunities for movement.

Background History of System

- **2012**: Consolidated 5 municipal parks
- **2014**: (retreat) The BoCC, via a consensus vote, adopted the County Parks Model, with a focus on maintaining facilities, programming and programming staff would be contracted out using private entities and facilities would offer minimal number of large-scale special events
- **2021**: Became a stand-alone department

Expanded Facilities & Amenities

- 10 Pickleball courts added *
- New Aquatic Center at Hagan-Stone Park*
- Competition volleyball courts at Bur-Mil Park*
- Dog Park at Northeast Park
- Realigned Disc Golf Course at Northeast Park*
- Renovated Bur-Mil Event Center*
- Assumed County Farm management
- Added fishing pier, farm animals, hiking trails*
- Activated 11 passive parks opening. **1,497 acres** of new public parkland*

* Represents active facilities or amenities

Key Takeaway

Though designed as a passive park system, Guilford County Parks maintains an **active, community-focused system** balancing expanded facilities, recreation programs, and operational capacity.

Parks and Recreation Commission

- Robert G Cashion- Chairman
- Tim Marion- Vice Chairman
- Justin Washington
- Carl W Brower Jr
- Mary Beth Murphy- BOC Liaison
- Lamar Lee
- Jeffrey A Surgeon
- Carrie R Little
- Greg Rosendale

Plan Objectives

increase awarness of, participation in + attendance at Guilford County Parks	create a work plan for department staff	diversify department leadership + staff for inclusive representation + perspectives
address aging park infrastructure to prioritize projects + allocate resources effectively	create a legacy of parks + open space that reflect the community's aspirations + values	improve visibility among the public, stakeholders + elected officials regarding the park system as a significant asset for Guilford County
establish a unified Guilford County Parks brand	inform the County's trails and greenways program, policies +network recommendations	qualify for state + federal grant funding opportunities

McAdams, a leading planning and design consulting firm, was contracted by Guilford County Parks to develop our comprehensive 10-year Parks Master Plan.

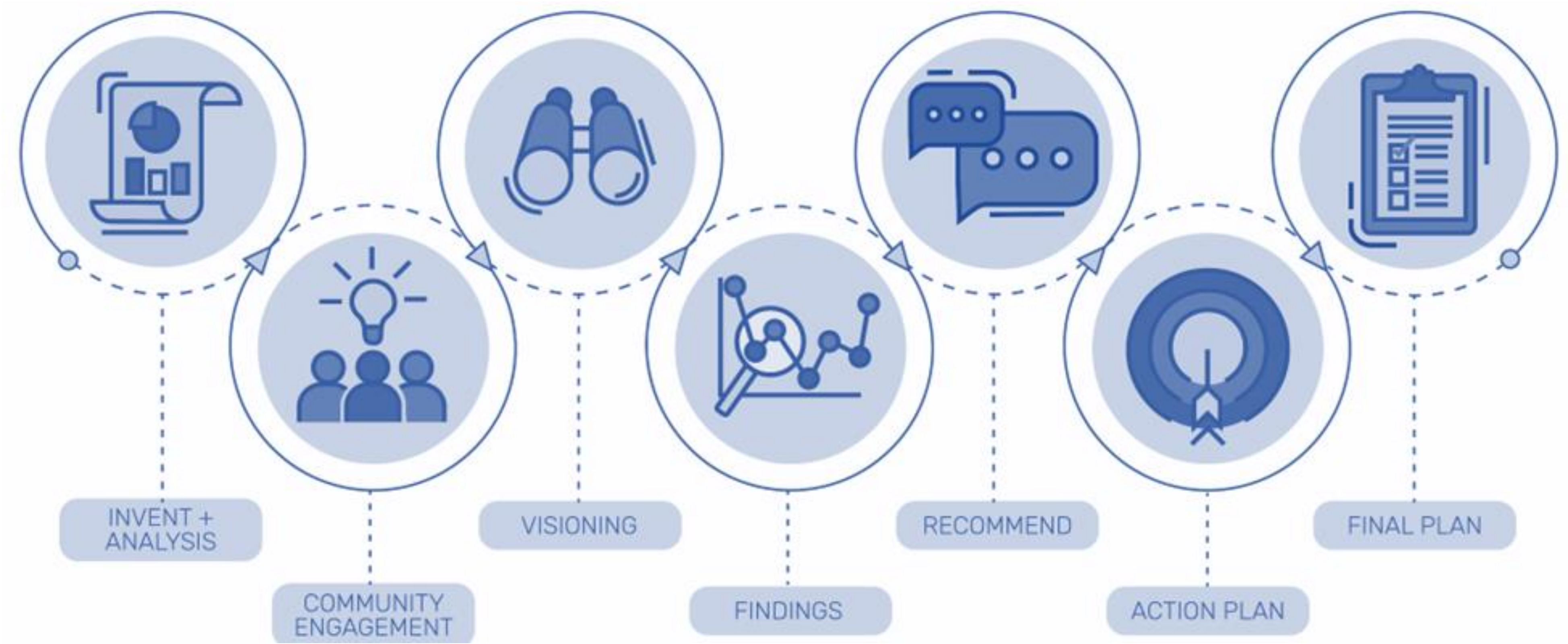
Their team conducted extensive community engagement, data analysis, and facility assessments to guide future investments. Today, they will present the key findings and recommendations from that plan.

Project Overview

Shweta Nanekar, Practice Lead, Parks Planning
McAdams

Project Process

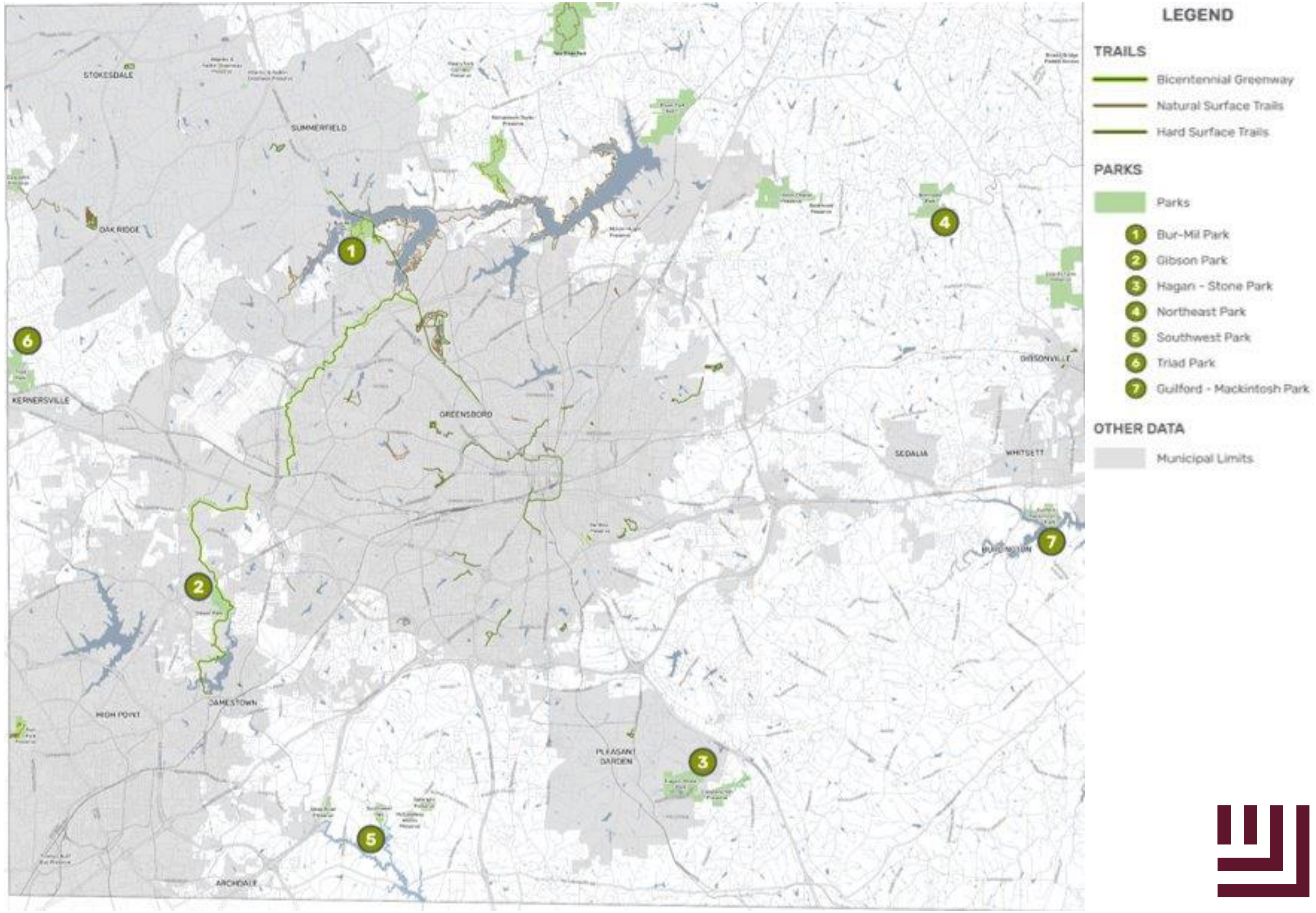
We are here!



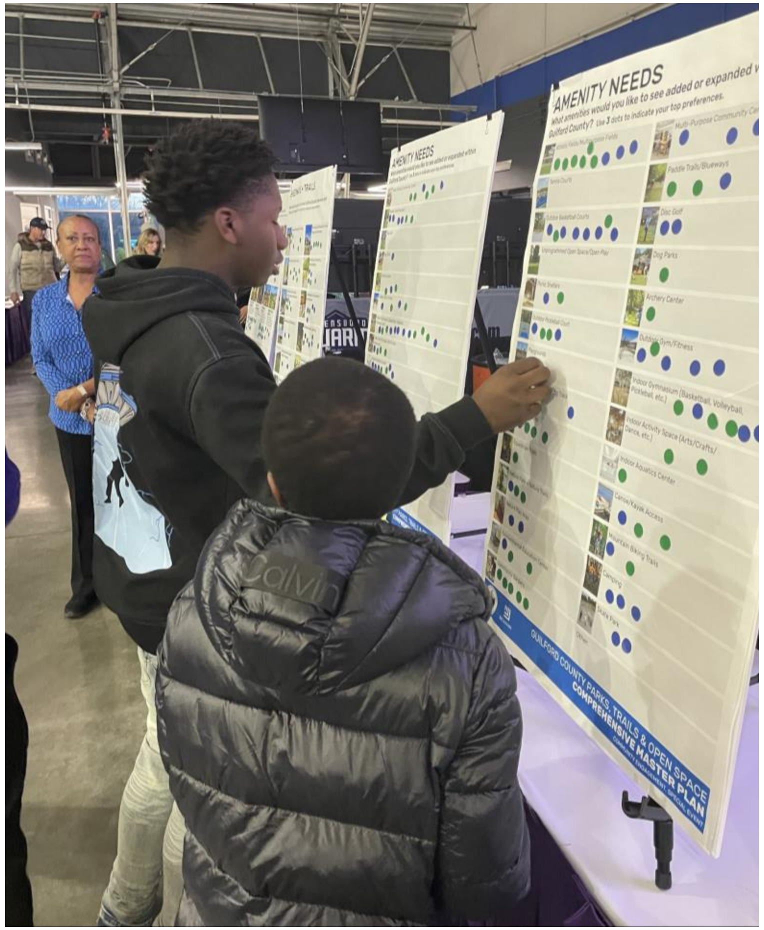
INVENTORY + ANALYSIS | VISIONING | RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTION + IMPLEMENTATION

County Parks System

- Home to municipalities of varying sizes – from urban to rural
- Steady county-wide growth
- Well-spread county parks and emerging greenway connectivity
- Diverse mix of recreation offerings that support the physical, mental, and social health of the community

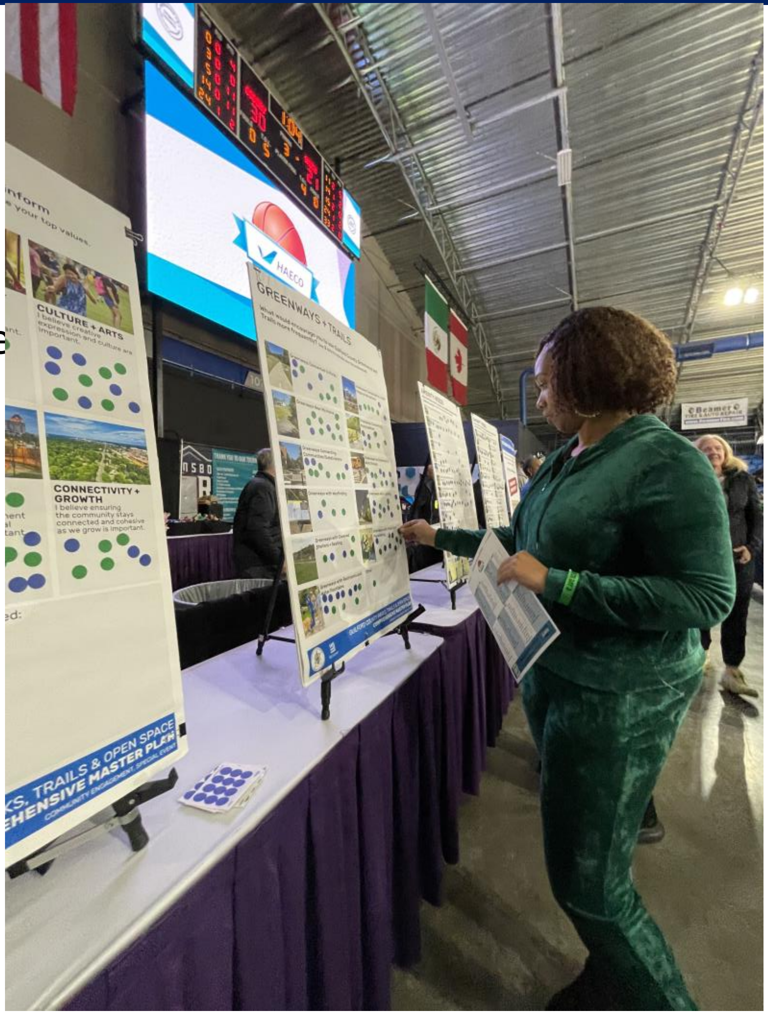


Community Engagement



Community Engagement

- Scientific Survey – Spring 2024
- Public Opinion Survey – Summer 2024
- Pop-up Events – October 2023- January 2024
- Two - Countywide Drop-In Meetings – February 2024
- Focus Groups – Jan. 24, 2024 (Trails + Greenways, Parks + Facilities, Adaptive + Specialized Recreation)
- Staff Listening Sessions – November 2023
- Interjurisdictional Roundtable – January 2024
- Parks & Recreation Commission Listening Sessions – January 2024
- Guilford County Commissioners Retreat – March 8, 2024
- Parks & Recreation Commission Listening Sessions – August 2024
- Staff Listening Sessions – August 2024
- Staff + Parks & Recreation Commission Reviews and Updates – 2024-2025
- Open House for Plan Recommendations – August 2025



Guiding Principles

Transparency & Communication

Accessibility

Accountability

Service Outcomes Excellence

Our People Matter

Findings - Key Highlights

STARS Assessment

★★★★★	Superior
★★★★	Tops Most Peers
★★★	Acceptable
★★	Consider Renovation
★	Subject to Improvement

- Well cared parks (Acceptable + Tops Most Peers)
- Diverse amenities to cater to different interests
- Large events hosting
- Natural areas to enjoy nature + wildlife
- Regional draw to water-related amenities
- Continued need for capital renovation and maintenance to ensure safety and compliance with codes

Park Conditions Assessment Report

Conditions Assessment Categories

- Condition description
- Recommendation
- Priority Category – critical, not critical, code compliance
- Deficiency Category – type of maintenance, capital renewal or improvement
- Impact of Failure
- Probability of Failure
- Risk Score – critical to low
- Estimated Useful Life
- Remaining Useful Life

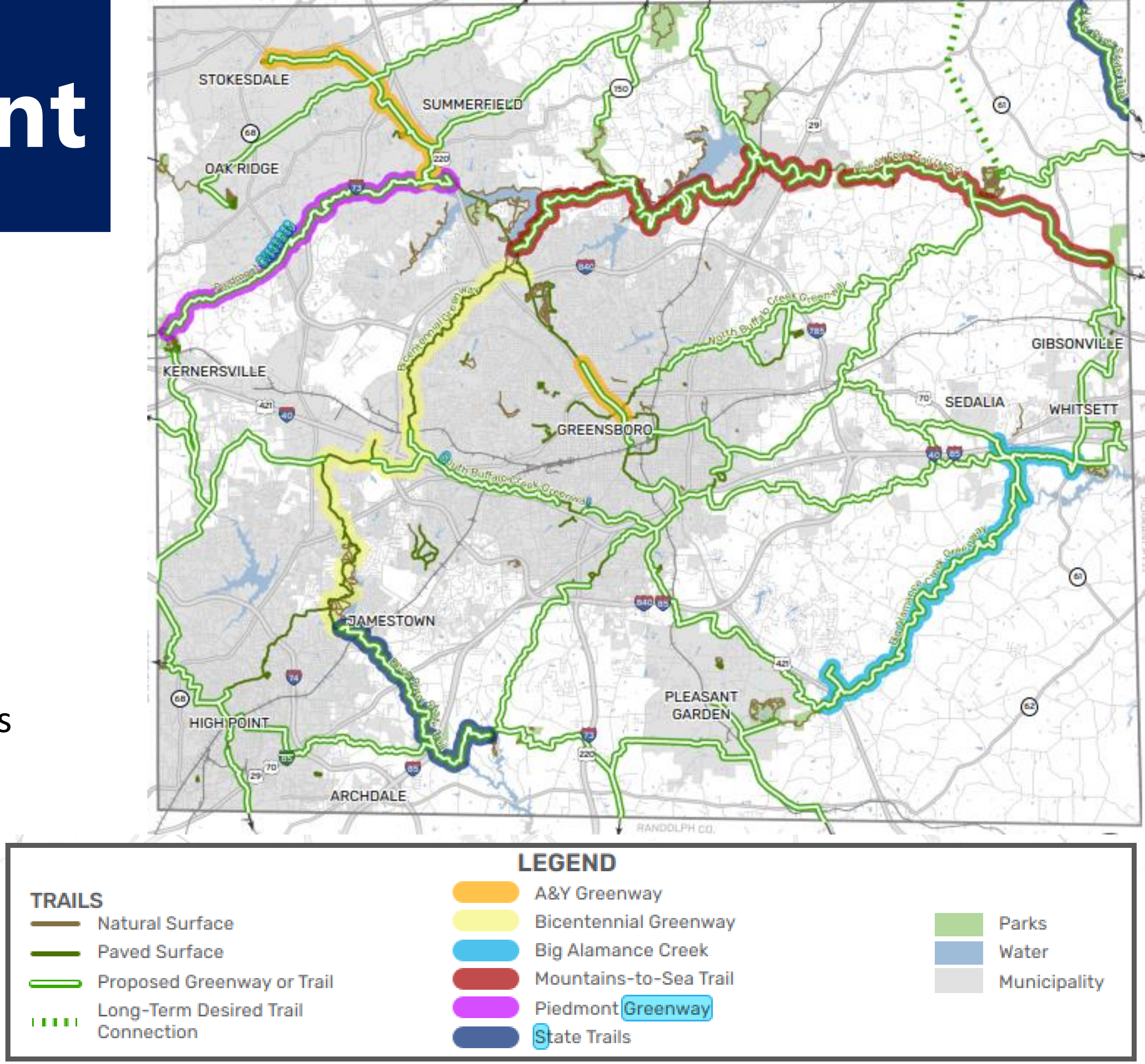
Deficiency	Definition
SM	Scheduled Maintenance
DM	Deferred Maintenance
CR	Capital Renewal
EN	Energy & Sustainability
CI	Capital Improvement

Priority	Definition
I	Currently Critical
II	Potentially Critical
III	Necessary / Not yet Critical
IV	Recommended
V	Appearance
VI	Does Not Meet Codes / Standards

Risk	Definition
Critical	Critical (4-8)
High	High (9-13)
Medium	Medium (14-16)
Low	Low (17-20)

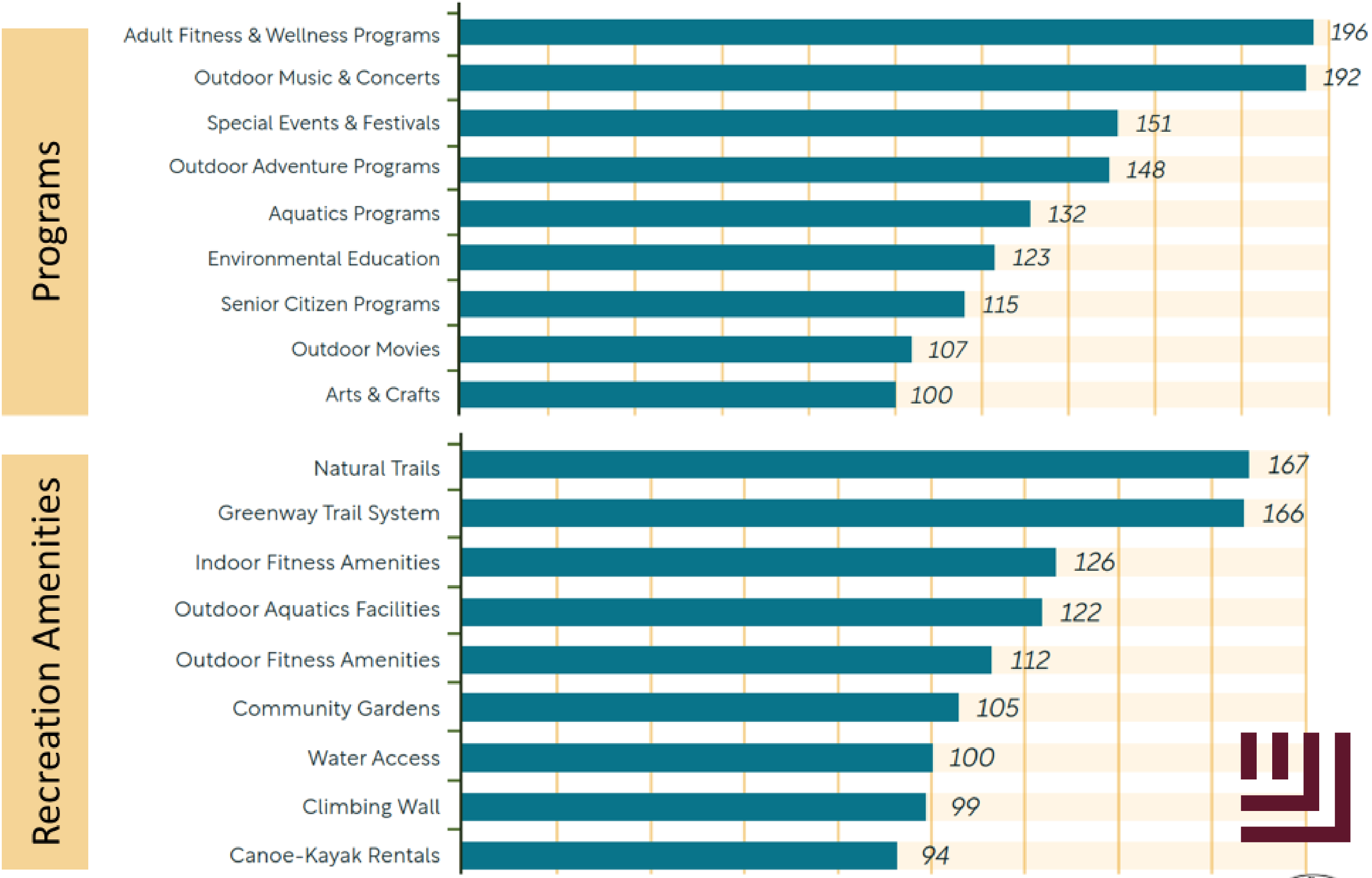
Greenways Assessment

- County-wide – 60 miles; County maintained - 27.5 miles
- Bicentennial Greenway – longest between Jamestown and Greensboro
- Detailed inventory of greenways and mileage
- Prioritization criteria
    - Connects to Schools or Colleges
    - Connects to Parks or Recreation Centers
    - Connects to Existing Bicycle or Pedestrian Facilities
    - Provides Connections Across a Major Barrier
    - Connects to Disadvantaged or Underserved Communities
    - Provides Regional or Statewide Connectivity



The Priorities (Priority Investment Ratings)

- **Deferred Maintenance**
  - Cabin Repairs, Fall zone protection at play areas, care for historic structures
- **New Projects**
  - Trails and Greenways
  - Amenities to enhance health
    - Fitness stations
    - Wellness programs
    - Water access programs
    - Amphitheater – movies, concerts, socialization



Level of Service + Benchmarking

Side-by-Side Comparative Analysis of Guilford County Parks Metrics and NRPA Medians		
Metric	Guilford County	NRPA Median
Park Acres per 1,000 Residents	12.34 Acres	10.06
Trail Miles	60	110.05
Indoor Recreation Space (Square Feet)	0.022 SF/Resident	2 SF/Resident*
Operating Expenditures Per Capita	$10.56	$46.60
Operating Expenditure per Full-Time-Equivalent (FTE) Staff	$187,986	$102,346
Operating Expenditure per Park Acre	$855.48	$3,722
Agency Staffing (FTEs)	31	289
Staffing (FTEs) per 10,000 Residents	0.56	4.7

- Peer Counties Comparison
  - Middle-range offerings and investments
  - Focused on passive recreation
  - 1st Comprehensive parks plan
  - Parks Foundation option
  - Reliance on spray grounds instead of an aquatic facility
  - Camping – opportunity for more cost recovery
  - Low operating budget and low staff
  - Data tracking opportunity

Findings - Key Highlights

STRENGTHS

- Strong natural resource base with extensive preserve lands
- Emphasis on health, social connection, and equitable access
- Desire for more nature-based experiences, indoor fitness, and community events
- Park assets vary in quality, visibility, and sense of welcome
- Strong support to improve + enhance parks and trails

OPPORTUNITIES

- Evolving System with aging infrastructure
- Funding needs for deferred maintenance
- Park usage is limited by distance and lack of awareness
- Low staffing compared to the NRPA, County staff are eager to grow
- At par for parks acreage, low on trails/ greenways mileage

Findings - Key Highlights

WEAKNESSES

System-related	Operations-related
Lack of coordinated system-wide vision for parks and greenways	Lack of staff to operate the system
Lack of site-specific plans to recommend improvements	Need for a functional organizational staffing structure
Small maintenance facilities without sufficient resources	Lack of SOPs – partnerships, pricing policy, data tracking
Amenity-focused approach rather than system-focused	Insufficient dedicated funding for park operations and support to fundraise

THREATS

Key Recommendations

Transparency & Communication

- Interdepartmental communication
- Parks system identity through placemaking
- Align resources to accomplish shared goals

Accessibility

- Improve access to all residents
- Promote programs and events that celebrate different cultures in the community

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Key Recommendations

- Budgeting to support system expansion and enhancement
- Maintenance standards and asset management
- Scalable organization structure

- Flexibility to adapt to changing needs
- Expand programs, activities, events, etc.
- Establish park districts

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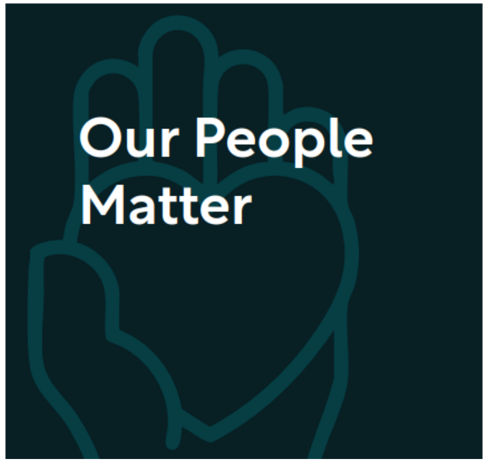
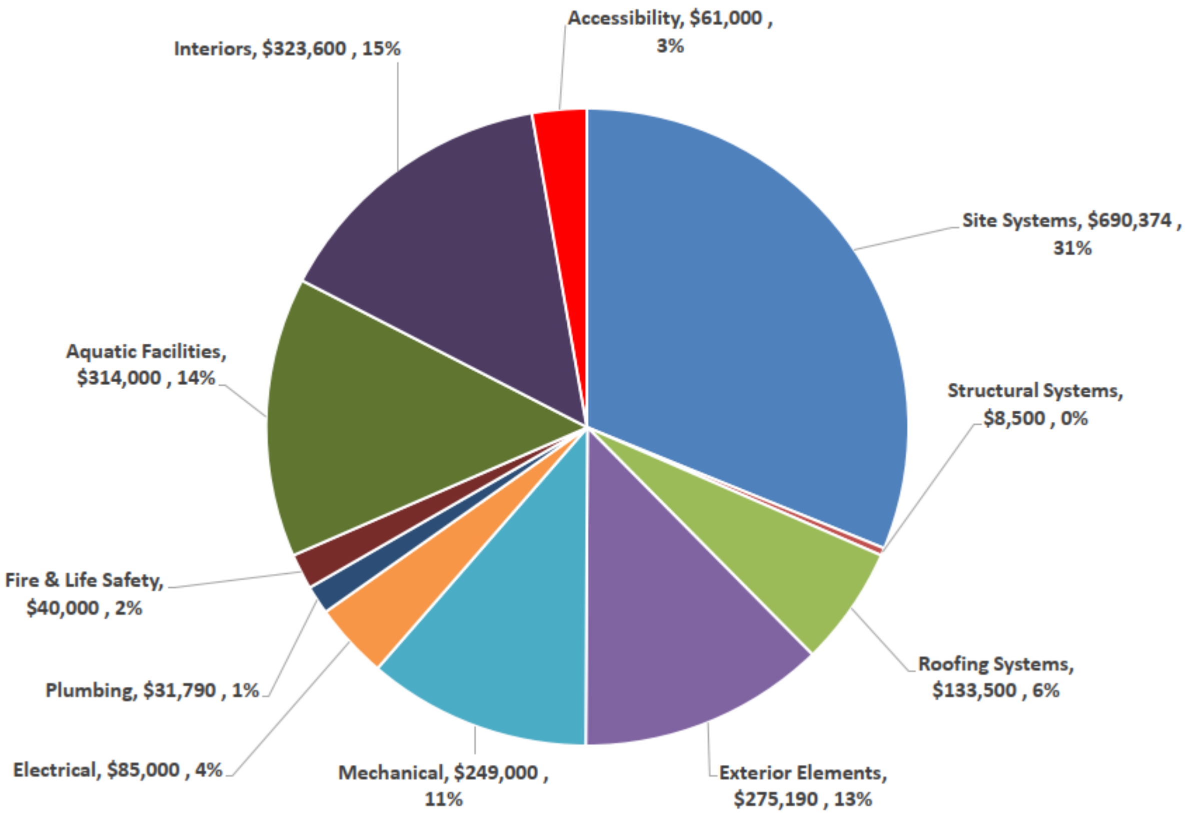
Key Recommendations



- Relationship building between the Department and the community
- Support staff for professional development and leadership development

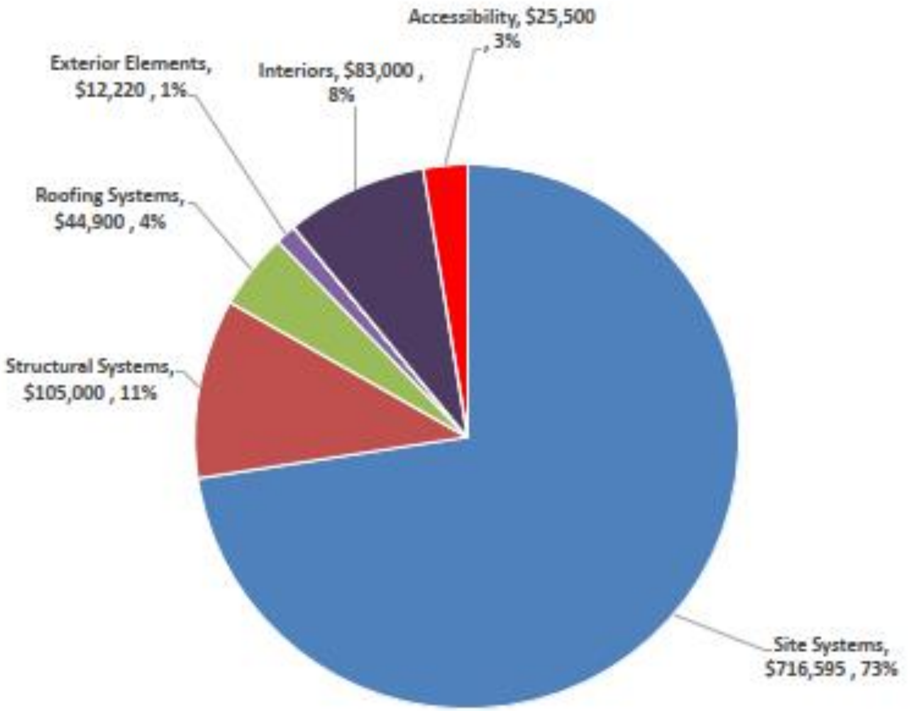
Park-specific Identified Needs – Bur Mil Park

- BUR-MIL PARK (~2.6M)
  - ADA accessibility at building and parking areas
  - Repairs to access road and localized repairs for sidewalks
  - Parking lot resurfacing
  - Playground replacements
  - Pool repairs – paint, filters, pump, etc.
  - Buildings repairs
    - Roofing replacements (leaking)
    - HVAC repairs
    - Upgrade fire alarm system at the education center



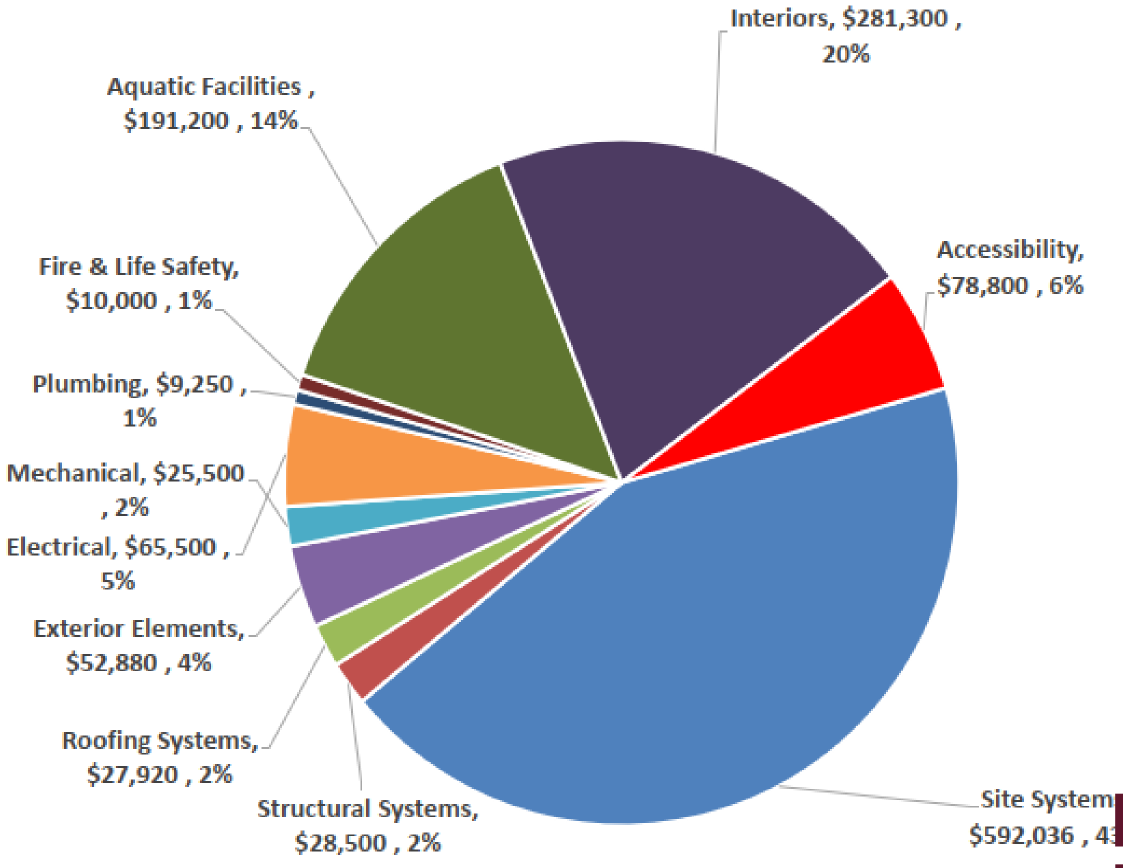
Park-specific Identified Needs – Gibson Park

- GIBSON PARK (~1.1m)
  - Accessibility upgrades to pathways to amenities
  - Trail surfacing
  - Bridge repairs
  - Parking lot surfacing
  - Play structure replacement
  - Structural repairs of Deep River cabin
  - Building upgrades – roof, paint, etc.
  - Upgrade restrooms (ADA compliant)



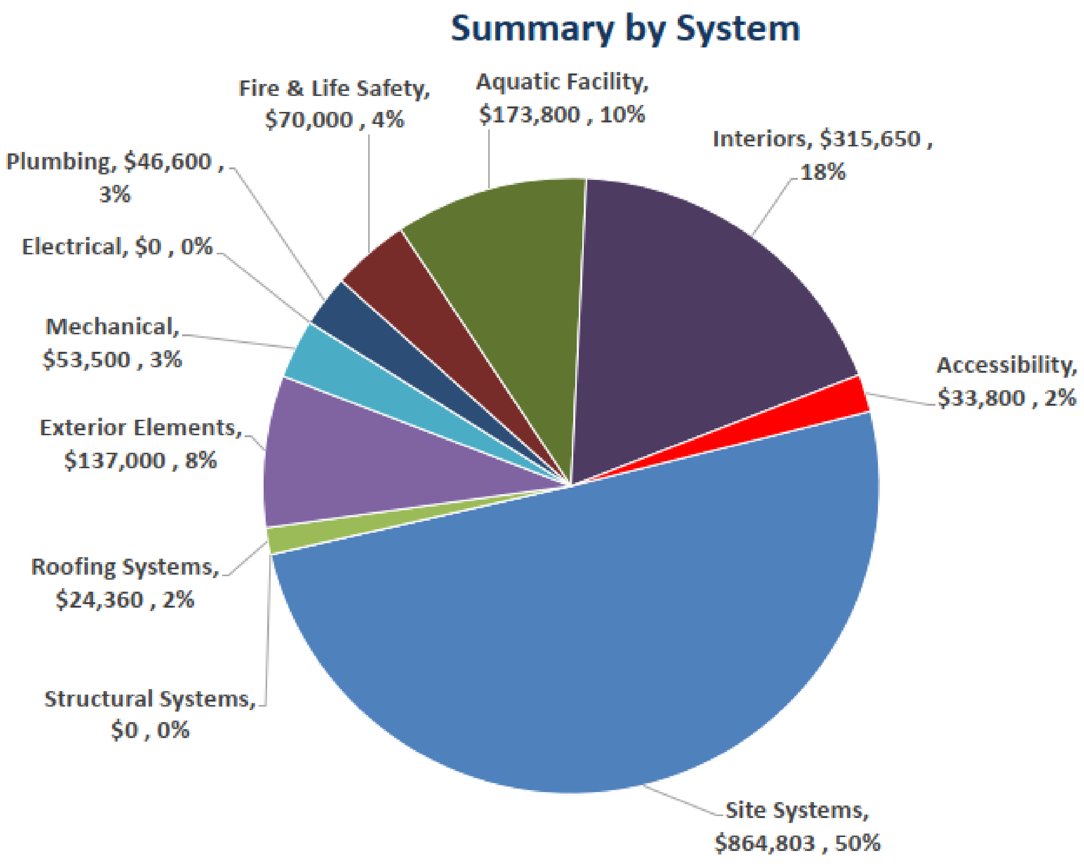
Park-specific Identified Needs – Hagan Stone Park

- HAGAN STONE PARK (~1.4m)
  - High priority electrical work
  - Cabin upgrades/ repairs
  - Building systems
    - Roof, Gutters, Paint
  - Site drainage
  - Parking and road repairs
  - Playground safety surface
  - Pool repairs



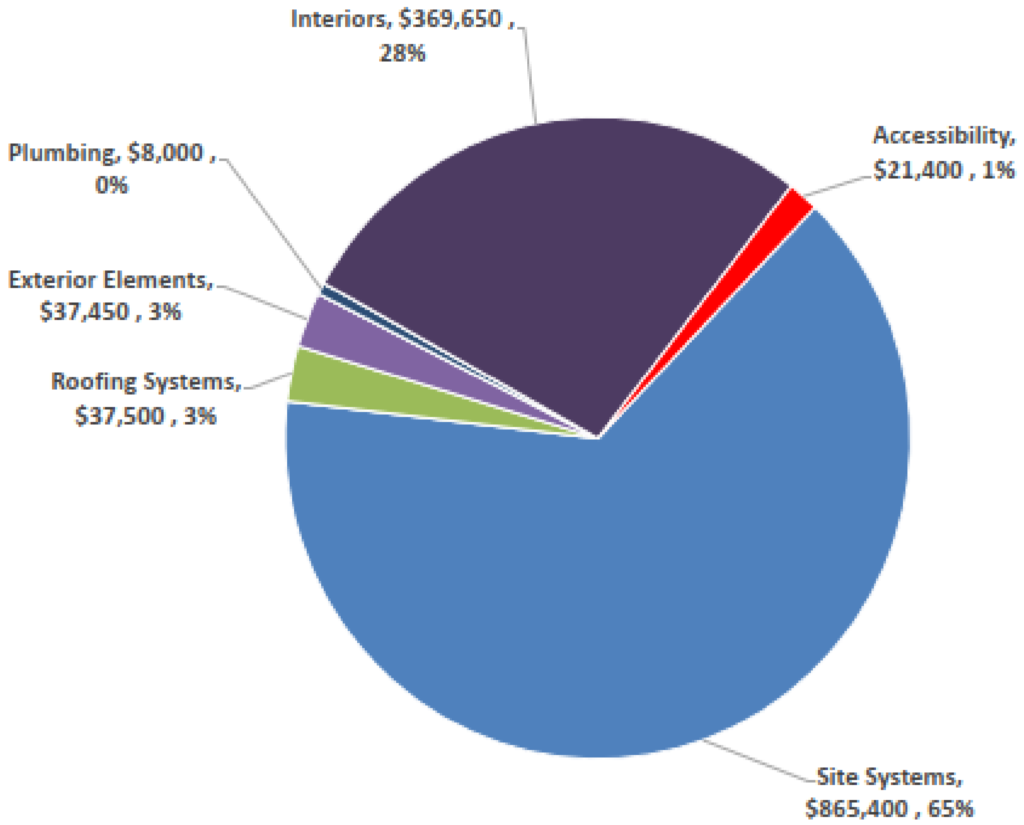
Park-specific Identified Needs – Northeast Park

- NORTHEAST PARK (~2m)
  - Building systems
    - Roof, Gutters, Paint, soffits, siding
  - Repair and protect historic buildings
  - Dehumidification system – community center
  - Fire and sprinkler system at community center
  - Restroom repairs and upgrades
  - Water heater and plumbing upgrades



Park-specific Identified Needs – Southwest Park

- SOUTHWEST PARK (~1.6m)
  - Accessibility upgrades to parking, amenities
  - Minor parking lot and sidewalk repairs
  - Playground structure replacement
  - Safety surfacing
  - Erosion and stormwater drainage
  - Exterior repairs to all site buildings
  - Plumbing upgrades

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Highest Priorities (short, mid, long-term)

Short term
- Staffing capacity increase
- Deferred maintenance – high priority items that relate to safety + code compliance
- Regional collaboration for Bicentennial Greenway

- **Mid-term**
- Continue staff additions
- Maintenance items – medium priority items
- Continue to minimize greenway gaps

- **Long-term**
- Complete comparable staffing model
- Low priority maintenance items and continue to track life cycle
- Continue to track park system's role and accomplishments as an active system

Highest Priorities Cont.

Projects identified as short-term priorities in the Parks Master Plan that include maintenance and capital

Park Facilities

- Bur-Mil Park
- County Farm
- Gibson Park
- Hagen Stone Park
- Rick Fork Preserve
- Southwest Park
- Northeast Park

Capital Expansion Priorities

Projects Identified as short-term and mid-term priorities in the Parks Master Plan that are capital expansion projects:

Additional positions to support capital expansions are factored into the staffing model.

- Paved Greenway
- Surface Trail
- Trail Head
- Outdoor Amphitheatre & Band Shell
- Challenge Adventure Course
- Tree House

The Request – Need for the next 10 years

- **NRPA Benchmark:** 263 FTEs for agencies serving over 250,000 residents as the only parks and recreation department serving the whole community

Staffing	Operations	Capital Expansion
+24 Additions (Current 32 FTE)	Increase from 4M+ to 10M+ in ten years	+12M Trails & Facilities
2-3 positions/ year High-quality parks and programs; Support population growth	Close critical budget gaps 24 staff additions Deferred maintenance ~1% Annual Growth	Supplement with Bonds & Grants New recreation amenities Trails, Trailheads Large event venue

The Request – Staffing Model

+24 Additional Staffing Over 10 Year

<u>Additional Staffing to Support:</u>

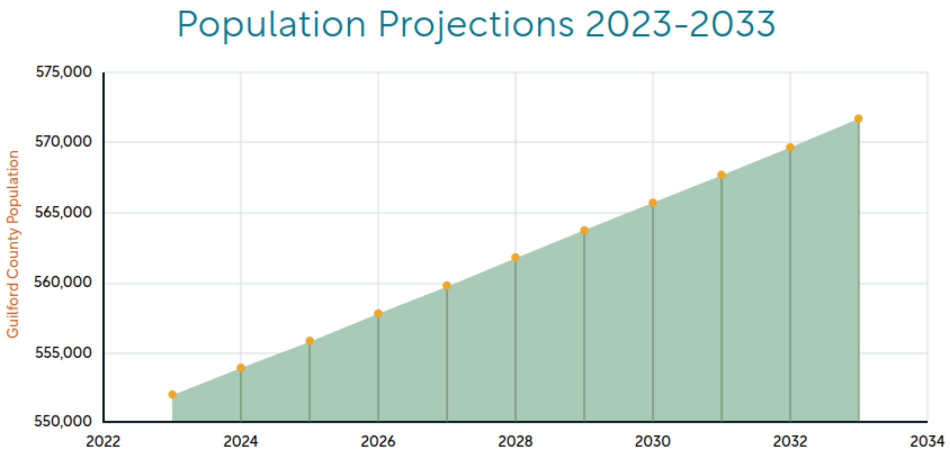
Maintain due to steady population growth (0.35% annual)

Support the expansion of capital priorities

Upkeep and care for existing assets

Continue excellent customer service

Shift from Part-Time to Full-time staffing to create ownership of work



Funding to Implement the Plan

Don Warn, Chief Financial Officer

Toy Beeninga, Budget and Management Services Director

Guiding Principles for Debt Model

1. Address County **current and future capital needs and deferred major maintenance** in a timely manner to provide adequate public facilities and services.
2. Protect County's ability to **provide and enhance other services** for our residents.
3. Design a **stable funding model that fits existing revenue sources** as much as possible.
4. **Reduce overall cost of infrastructure** for our residents by incorporating a more **fiscally conservative "Pay-as-You-Go" model** for construction, renovation, and maintenance.
5. **Limit change in property tax rate** to provide **predictability and stability** for our residents and businesses.

Fiscal Year 2026 Baseline Funding

- No current dedicated funding to support Parks capital needs
- $2 million included in the 2022 Two-Thirds Bond Program for Bryan Park and Hagan Stone Bathroom
- $189,500 is included in the FY26 Major Equipment Plan for equipment replacement
- $72,000 is included in the operating budget for routine maintenance
- $60,000 is included for Greenway Repairs
- $6,000 is included for Pond Restoration

Implementation – Recommendations from Plan

1. **Increase Staffing Levels**
   - +24 additional staff over ten years in the following categories: Maintenance, Park Site Management, Programming, Administration
     - Drivers that will impact staffing levels include (1) stabilizing current operations (2) programming staff to support an active parks system (3) population and system growth (4) establishment of parks districts

- **$2 million over 10 years**
- **Year 1 staffing requests will be evaluated against strategies included in the plan.**

Implementation – Recommendations from Plan

2. **Routine and Preventative Maintenance**
    - Investment in annual deferred maintenance including repairs, painting, landscaping, equipment replacement, and preventative maintenance.

- **$2.8 million to address identified deferred capital repairs**
- **Additional annual funding, $0.2 million to increase preventative maintenance to avoid getting into a future gap ($2 million over 10 years)**

Implementation – Recommendations from Plan

3. **Capital Renewal and Renovation**
   - Investment in major repairs including roofing, HVAC, water/sewer infrastructure, and other significant repairs.

- **$6.0 million to address deferred capital renovation**
- **Additional annual funding to develop a CIP to stay caught up ($3 million over 10 years)**

Benchmark Data

	Amount for FY26	Notes
Wake	$1,550,000 Existing Bonds	$1.55m is the FY26 new funding. Issued $120m in Parks Bonds in 2018 with $81 million in remaining unspent funding
Charlottle - Mecklenburg	$75,000,000	Adopted a 5-year CIP from 24-28. Total parks amount over 5 years is $437 million
Durham	$500,000	$9m over 10 years. Operate four passive parks. No parks department, just Open Space Program
Forsyth	$1,500,000	$1.5m programmed for FY26. Identify $5.05m of new projects over next 10 years.

Key Takeaway:

- Annual funding set aside is common approach to address repairs and renovations
- Utilizing bond process (GO or 2/3rds) is common approach to address large projects
- Master Plan identifies both addressing current deferred needs + funding to maintain moving foward

Implementation – Recommendations from Plan

Recommend exploring a two-thirds bond program aggregated by park location

PARK NAME	Routine and Preventative Maintenance	Capital Renewal and Renovation	15% Contingency, Inflation, and Project Management	Total
Bur-Mil Park	$ 952,000	$ 1,260,000	$ 331,800	$ 2,543,800
County Farm	$ 229,000	$ 852,000	$ 162,150	$ 1,243,150
Gibson Park	$ 347,000	$ 641,000	$ 148,200	$ 1,136,200
Hagen Stone Park	$ 621,000	$ 772,000	$ 208,950	$ 1,601,950
Northeast Park	$ 511,000	$ 1,208,000	$ 257,850	$ 1,976,850
Rick Fork Preserve	$ 39,000	$ 32,000	$ 10,650	$ 81,650
Southwest Park	$ 82,000	$ 1,257,000	$ 200,850	$ 1,539,850
	$ 2,781,000	**$ 6,022,000**	**$ 1,320,450**	**$ 10,123,450**

Program would likely require additional project management support, via third party project management, to expedite repairs and move more quickly to implement the plan.

Implementation – Recommendations from Plan

Series 2027-GO
County

FY	Coupon	Principal	Interest	Total
2024			$ -	$ -
2025			-	-
2026			-	-
2027		-	253,086	253,086
2028		-	506,173	506,173
2029		-	506,173	506,173
2030	5.000%	562,414	492,112	1,054,526
2031	5.000%	562,414	463,991	1,026,405
2032	5.000%	562,414	435,871	998,285
2033	5.000%	562,414	407,750	970,164
2034	5.000%	562,414	379,629	942,043
2035	5.000%	562,414	351,509	913,923
2036	5.000%	562,414	323,388	885,802
2037	5.000%	562,414	295,267	857,681
2038	5.000%	562,414	267,147	829,560
2039	5.000%	562,414	239,026	801,440
2040	5.000%	562,414	210,905	773,319
2041	5.000%	562,414	182,785	745,198
2042	5.000%	562,414	154,664	717,078
2043	5.000%	562,414	126,543	688,957
2044	5.000%	562,414	98,422	660,836
2045	5.000%	562,414	70,302	632,716
2046	5.000%	562,414	42,181	604,595
2047	5.000%	562,414	14,060	576,474
2048			-	-

$10.1 million in bond eligible capital projects.

- two-thirds GO bonds
- 20-year term
- 5% interest rate
- level principal payments

Implementation – Recommendations from Plan

Park expansion items included in the plan can also be funded with two-thirds bonds

Project	Cost
10’ Paved Greenway Trails (per mile)	$1,900,000
10’ Compacted Stone Surface Trail	$1,700,000
Trail Head	$1,500,000
Outdoor Amphitheatre & Band Shell	$3,200,000
Challenge Adventure Course	$2,000,000
Tree House	$2,000,000
	$12,300,000

Master Plan includes following assumptions:

- 5% cost escalation
- 15% contingency

Would explore utilizing project management staff support to expedite projects.

Implementation – Recommendations from Plan

Series 2027-GO
County

FY	Coupon	Principal	Interest	Total
2024			$ -	$ -
2025			-	-
2026			-	-
2027		-	306,805	306,805
2028		-	613,611	613,611
2029		-	613,611	613,611
2030	5.000%	681,790	596,566	1,278,356
2031	5.000%	681,790	562,477	1,244,266
2032	5.000%	681,790	528,387	1,210,177
2033	5.000%	681,790	494,298	1,176,087
2034	5.000%	681,790	460,208	1,141,998
2035	5.000%	681,790	426,119	1,107,908
2036	5.000%	681,790	392,029	1,073,819
2037	5.000%	681,790	357,940	1,039,729
2038	5.000%	681,790	323,850	1,005,640
2039	5.000%	681,790	289,761	971,550
2040	5.000%	681,790	255,671	937,461
2041	5.000%	681,790	221,582	903,371
2042	5.000%	681,790	187,492	869,282
2043	5.000%	681,790	153,403	835,192
2044	5.000%	681,790	119,313	801,103
2045	5.000%	681,790	85,224	767,013
2046	5.000%	681,790	51,134	732,924
2047	5.000%	681,790	17,045	698,834
2048			-	-

$12.3 million in bond eligible capital projects.

- two-thirds GO bonds
- 20-year term
- 5% interest rate
- level principal payments

Implementation – Recommendations from Plan

Series 2027-GO

County

FY	Coupon	Principal	Interest	Total
2024			$ -	$ -
2025			-	-
2026			-	-
2027		-	559,892	559,892
2028		-	1,119,783	1,119,783
2029		-	1,119,783	1,119,783
2030	5.000%	1,244,204	1,088,678	2,332,882
2031	5.000%	1,244,204	1,026,468	2,270,672
2032	5.000%	1,244,204	964,258	2,208,461
2033	5.000%	1,244,204	902,048	2,146,251
2034	5.000%	1,244,204	839,837	2,084,041
2035	5.000%	1,244,204	777,627	2,021,831
2036	5.000%	1,244,204	715,417	1,959,621
2037	5.000%	1,244,204	653,207	1,897,411
2038	5.000%	1,244,204	590,997	1,835,200
2039	5.000%	1,244,204	528,787	1,772,990
2040	5.000%	1,244,204	466,576	1,710,780
2041	5.000%	1,244,204	404,366	1,648,570
2042	5.000%	1,244,204	342,156	1,586,360
2043	5.000%	1,244,204	279,946	1,524,149
2044	5.000%	1,244,204	217,736	1,461,939
2045	5.000%	1,244,204	155,525	1,399,729
2046	5.000%	1,244,204	93,315	1,337,519
2047	5.000%	1,244,204	31,105	1,275,309
2048			-	-

$22.4 million in bond eligible capital projects.

- $10.1 million aggregated park projects
- $12.3 million recommended capital projects
- two-thirds GO bonds
- 20-year term
- 5% interest rate
- level principal payments

Implementation – Recommendations from Plan

1.	Baseline Funding	**$6.1 million**
2.	Staffing Enhancements	**+ $2.0 million** over 10 years
3.	Operating Support	**+ $0.2 million** to increase preventive maintenance
4.	Equipment Replacement	Maintain current plan of ~$0.2 million per year
5.	Capital Renovation	**+ $0.3 million** to work CIP for capital repair **+ $0.8 million** in annual debt service
6.	Capital Expansion	**+ $1.0 million** in annual debt service

- These additional investments should maintain total Parks and Recreation budget at ~1% of the general fund budget over the next ten years.
- These strategies support a structural balance budget by setting aside funding vs. large future debt issuances to address deferred capital
- Master Plan does not include other needs that may be identified at Triad Park, Bryan Park, or Guilford Mackintosh

Next Steps

<u>Purpose of Adopting a Master Plan</u>

1. Establishes a non-binding vision and direction
2. Reflects community input
3. Guides budgeting and capital investments with a focus on structural balance
4. Supports identification of future land acquisition
5. Strengthens grant eligibility

Discussion

1. Does the Board wish to update the County's philosophy and move from a passive parks system to an active parks system?

2. How would the Board wish to move forward to develop a funding sustainability plan to move forward with Master Plan Recommendations?