

SECTION 4: Public Input Process

4.1 OVERVIEW

The public consultation program for the Capital Improvement Plan collected input from a variety of sources. The public participated in the process through 5 open public meetings held in June 2007 at various locations throughout the County. Questionnaires were completed at these public meetings and were also distributed to leaders of several ethnic communities in the County. In addition, a focus group session was held with representatives of the local Hispanic community.

In addition to the public participation efforts, Gwinnett County staff also participated in a workshop/interview session to provide insight into needs and challenges. Also of note, the random telephone survey of 895 households, conducted by the A.L. Burruss Institute of Public Service at Kennesaw State University as part of the 2002 Needs Assessment was also reviewed as this remains a relevant source of public opinion.

4.2 PUBLIC MEETINGS

To assist in the preparation of the Capital Improvement Plan Update, five public meetings were held between June 11 and 13, 2007 in an effort to gather input on local parks and recreation needs. These meetings were held in the following locations and were attended by over 120 citizens:

June 11, 2007	Pinckneyville Community Center
June 11, 2007	Centerville Community Center
June 12, 2007	Rhodes Jordan Community Center
June 12, 2007	George Pierce Community Center
June 13, 2007	Gwinnett Senior Center (morning)

The purpose of these meetings was to hear the principal wishes and concerns of citizens regarding park facility development in Gwinnett County. A summary of the County's demographic characteristics, leisure trends, and the inventory of parks and recreation assets by sub-geographic area was presented to the public based on the work completed to date. Following the presentation, the public was given an opportunity to discuss a series of questions posed by the Consulting Team; other specific issues were also raised and discussed by those in attendance.

Questions and ideas for the County's parks system were abundant, as were compliments for the County's recent park acquisition and development efforts. Overall, the issues and themes that emerged from the discussion period were the same as those that were identified by the questionnaires completed by attendees. The "hot button" issues did, however, vary slightly from one meeting to the next, depending on the needs and priorities of the area in which the session was being held. The following is a brief summary of the issues and suggestions raised at the meetings. Topics raised at the meetings, but that are outside the scope of the Capital Improvement Plan (e.g., program delivery, parks operations, public transit, marketing) have not been identified.

Key themes emerging from two or more meetings included:

- there is a very high level of satisfaction with Gwinnett County parks; citizens recognize that the County is a leader in parks and open space provision and design;
- the desire to connect County parks through the use of greenways, sidewalks, and bike lanes;
- demand for additional equestrian trails as more and more private properties become unavailable for riding as they are lost to development;
- demand for more soccer fields and more opportunity for unstructured soccer play;
- demand for more parkland, particularly passive open space that can accommodate trails; and
- an indoor pool to accommodate the County's semi-annual swim meets, possibly developed in partnership with Gwinnett County Board of Education, Georgia Gwinnett College or private swim providers.

Specific park and facility requests were also received for (in no particular order):

- an off-leash dog park near Buford;
- improvements to the roller hockey rink at Pinckneyville Park (including adding a roof);
- safety and design improvements at Shorty Howell Park and Jones Bridge Park;
- development of the Beaver Ruin and Palm Creek Park Sites as passive parks;
- providing a County-owned and operated indoor ice rink;
- lacrosse fields to serve this growing sport;
- community garden plots;
- more soccer fields in areas B, C, or E;
- a plaza style park like the town square in Suwanee with a splash pad;
- outdoor amphitheatres for public concerts and events;
- badminton courts (or at least gymnasium floors marked for courts);
- demand for additional lap lane times at Mountain Park Aquatic Center during early morning hours in the summer;
- more community meeting space, additional Arts Centers or programs, shuffleboard courts, and indoor competition pool (possibly in Lenora Park) in the eastern part of the County;
- more active parks in RPA C;
- need a gym with exercise equipment in Bethesda Park;
- desire for the proposed park on Highway 29 in Lilburn to be a passive park with walking trails instead of soccer;
- a 50-meter pool, possibly in partnership with local schools or swim providers;
- more adult ball diamonds (or possibly allowing usage of youth ball diamonds by adults when they are not in use);
- indoor playground to allow children to play out of the heat;
- purchasing the Stone Mountain Tennis Center and redeveloping it as an indoor multi-use sports venue;
- canoe and kayak rentals at Tribble Mill Park;
- don't close the trail in Tribble Mill Park and try to expedite construction at Harbins Park
- concerns over the quality of certain mountain bike trails at Tribble Mill; local groups have offered to assist where possible with trail maintenance
- wildlife centers and preserves.

4.4 PUBLIC MEETING QUESTIONNAIRE

The public consultation program for the Capital Improvement Plan included a questionnaire that was distributed to attendees at the five public meetings as well as leaders in several ethnic communities in the County. The questionnaire was not intended to yield statistically valid results, but is useful in providing general indications of issues, concerns, needs, and priorities. The results are provided here for information only. For a more accurate and statistically valid indicator of needs and participation patterns, the 2002 Needs Assessment should be referenced.

The survey consisted of a variety of open and close-ended questions, many with multiple parts. It bears noting that the manner in which the surveys were answered varied considerably. Comments did not always pertain to the question that was being asked, nor were all comments pertinent to the scope of the Capital Improvement Plan. Although the analysis of the close-ended questions was relatively straightforward, a greater degree of judgment was required in analyzing the open-ended questions.

The questionnaire was completed by 120 participants; 44% were present at the meeting held at the Rhodes Jordan Community Center, 22% at the Pinckneyville Community Center, 13% at the Gwinnett Senior Center, 12% at the George Pierce Community Center, and 10% at the Centerville Community Center. The parks most used by respondents are Tribble Mill Park (17%), Little Mulberry Park (14%), Pinckneyville Park/Soccer Complex (13%), and Yellow River Park (13%). In addition to the public meeting attendees, 9 people at the Hispanic focus group session completed the questionnaire and their answers have been included in the charts outlined below.

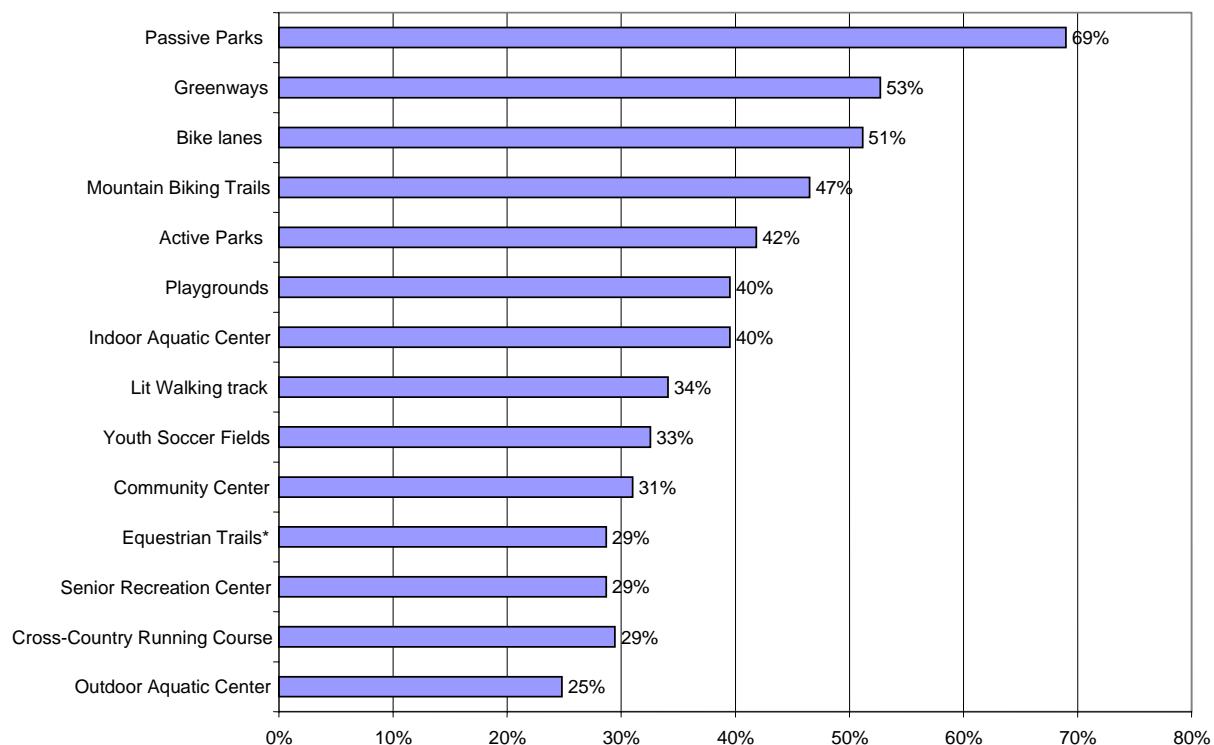
The questionnaire is not statistically significant and should not necessarily be considered representative of the views of the majority of Gwinnett County residents (unlike the 2002 Needs Assessment, which was a County-wide random sample survey).

Respondents were asked to indicate the priority the County should place on providing additional types of parks and facilities.

The chart below identifies the main facilities that respondents ranked as 'highest' and 'high' priority (top 2 on a 5-point scale).

- As illustrated in the preceding chart, respondents feel that the highest priority needs are: passive parks (69%); greenways (53%); bike lanes (51%); and mountain biking trails (47%).
- Non-programmed facilities comprise the 8 out of the top 10 facility needs, with indoor aquatic centers and community centers being the only notable departures.
- The facilities that rank as the lowest priorities are: cheerleading areas; skateboard parks; adult ball diamonds; and football fields.

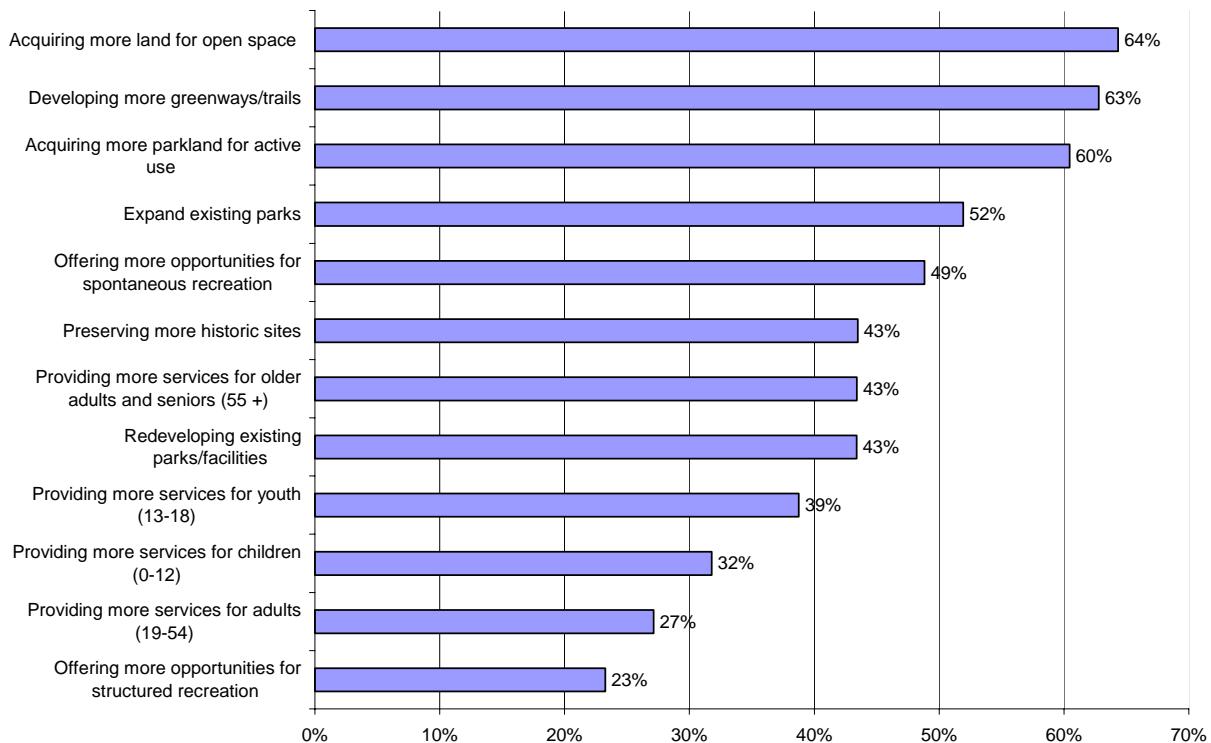
Priority for Additional Supplies of the Facility ("Highest" & "High" Response)



Respondents were asked to indicate the priority the County should place on a list of park system issues. The chart below identifies the issues that respondents ranked 'highest' or 'high' (top 2 on a 5-point scale).

- The top park system priorities according to questionnaire respondents are: acquiring more land for open space (64%); developing more greenways and trails (63%); acquiring more parkland for active use (60%); and expanding existing parks (54%).
- Offering more opportunities for structured recreation received the least support (23%) of all available options.

Priority Of Park System Issues ("Highest" & "High" Response)



Participants were also given an opportunity to provide qualitative input into the Plan. When asked to state one thing that could be done to support, enhance, or improve parks and recreation in Gwinnett County, the most common responses were:

- additional or improved bike trails (specifically mountain bike) (14% of questionnaires);
- additional or improved equestrian trails (13% of questionnaires); and
- increased park security measures (6% of questionnaires).

When asked to state other issues or concerns that had not been addressed by the questionnaire, the most common responses were: lack of park connectivity by way of paths or trails (8% of questionnaires) and a concern for park safety (5% of questionnaires).

4.4 ETHNIC COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

In an attempt to ensure all residents of Gwinnett would have the opportunity to express their opinion regarding the range and location of recreational facilities, translators were hired to call identified leaders of the Bosnian, Korean, Vietnamese, and Hispanic communities to invite them to focus group meetings. Only the Hispanic community responded to the request for a focus group meeting and, despite other community leaders indicating that they would complete the questionnaire, only nine individuals representing the Hispanic community did so.

The primary issue raised at the Hispanic Community Focus Group session centered on a serious deficiency in the number of soccer fields needed to meet their needs. With all of the redevelopment and development happening in their part of the County (mainly in the

southwest), they are losing the areas where they use to be able to practice. More residential development means more children, resulting in more portables at the schools, which are replacing their practice fields on the school yards.

Generally speaking, the Spanish community has more children per household so the issue is even greater as there are more children that need to be accommodated within even smaller areas. For example, where there were 4 houses there are now 30 to 40 houses – this results in more kids and less land to play soccer on.

In this part of the County they play soccer – not baseball or tennis or football – therefore, they feel they need more soccer fields, even if it means removing tennis courts, ball diamonds, or football fields. The group suggested that if the football fields were made a little wider they could also serve as soccer fields (soccer is a year round sport while football is seasonal).

The group pointed out that in the Hispanic community the people stay home – they don't have cottages or go on vacations – and, therefore, they need something to do. If they find a piece of land, most often it turns out to be private or there is no parking. They end up playing on cul-de-sacs or in the middle of the street.

Besides soccer, the group indicated that they would like more trails ("the more the better"), as well as picnic areas. It was suggested that the barbecue areas not be so close together (people often take ownership of the barbeques – claiming them for the whole day – so that no one else can use them). They also pointed out that there are not enough water parks – they cannot afford the pools so outdoor spray pads would be fabulous. Free activities are seen as being very valuable to this community.

4.5 2002 NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY DATA

In 2002, the A.L. Burruss Institute of Public Service at Kennesaw State University prepared a Needs Assessment Survey. The major component of the Needs Assessment was a telephone survey with 895 randomly selected adults living in the county. The purpose of the Needs Assessment was to:

- identify the favorite recreational and leisure activities of Gwinnett residents,
- determine the extent to which they utilize county operated parks and other recreational facilities for these activities,
- obtain residents' general evaluations of various aspects of the county facilities, and
- gauge levels of support for the use of SPLOST monies to pay for future parkland acquisition and park development.

Parkland - Findings

- 50% said there are enough county parks in the area where they live. 39% felt the county should provide more facilities in their areas.
- 63% said it takes them 10 minutes or less to get to the park they use most often. 50% said they would use a county park more often if one were located closer to their home.
- When asked what type of park development should receive top priority if the SPLOST is extended in 2004, 44% preferred "active park development," 37% said "passive park

development," while 13% preferred to maintain a balance between the two types of development.

Facilities & Activities - Findings

- When asked what types of improvements should receive highest priority for the funds generated by any future SPLOST extension, the responses were:
 - park maintenance and security issues (19%)
 - more trails (walking, jogging, biking) (17%)
 - open-space parks/greenways (15%)
 - athletic fields (15%)
 - after-school programs (14%)
 - children's programs (12%)
 - swimming facilities (10%)
 - community centers (7%)
 - more parks (general reference)/land acquisition (7%)
 - arts and cultural programs (6%)
 - mixed-use parks (5%)
 - gymnasiums/indoor facilities (5%)
 - preservation of historical sites (5%)
- According to the respondents with children under the age of 13 and/or teenagers (13-17 year olds) living in their households, the favorite activities of these age groups are:

Children under the age of 13

swimming (31%)
using playground equipment (24%)
soccer (20%)
baseball (20%)
bicycling (20%)
basketball (17%)
football/cheerleading (16%)
softball (9%)
tennis (9%)

Teens between 13 and 17 years old

basketball (27%)
swimming (24%)
baseball (20%)
soccer (18%)
football (17%)
running/jogging (9%)
softball (9%)
cheerleading (8%)
watching television (7%)
bicycling (7%)

Other relevant findings

- For those who did express opinions, a majority of respondents indicated the county does only a "fair" or "poor" job of meeting the needs of the physically handicapped. A substantial number of respondents also believe the county could be doing a better job of addressing the needs of teenagers, young adults ages 20-30 and seniors.
- When asked about the parks' biggest security issues, 21% said the lack of an adequate police presence. 12% mentioned lack of adequate lighting.

The 2002 Needs Assessment also conducted focus group sessions with the Hispanic and Korean communities to identify special recreational needs of these minority groups and to identify any potential problems that may dissuade members of these groups from utilizing county recreational facilities. The ethnic and racial diversity of Gwinnett County has grown significantly over the past ten years and there has been a considerable increase in the population of these two communities. The following is a summary of the activity preferences and park/facility needs identified at the focus group sessions.

Hispanic Community Focus Group

- Favorite recreational activities include soccer, running, volleyball, baseball, bicycling, basketball, and fishing. Other popular activities that may be unique to the culture are "socializing with their friends and neighbors" and "danza (native dancing)".
- Would like to more facilities that allow for live music (mostly small bands) and a suitable area for dancing (preferably paved/concrete).
- Several respondents mentioned that they had a hard time finding a suitable location for a "pick-up" game of ball or soccer.
- Often have difficulty getting to parks - more neighborhood-level parks were suggested, as were better/more sidewalks.

Korean Community Focus Group

- Favorite recreational activities include soccer, baseball, basketball, volleyball, tennis, walking, jogging and swimming. Other less traditional activities include ping pong, billiards, watching movies, church activities, Chinese checkers/chess, singing (choral and karaoke), and traditional dancing.
- Utilization of county operated parks appears to be low among members of the Korean community.
- Desired facilities include an inexpensive retreat facility with overnight housing capabilities that could cater to smaller community groups and a Korean Community Center that would serve as a focal gathering place for members of their community.
- There is a desire for more educational and/or informational classes that would provide their community with the skills and knowledge needed to better adapt to the political, economic and social structures in Gwinnett County.