SECTION 4: Public Input Process

4.1 OVERVIEW

The public consultation program for the Comprehensive Master Plan is multi-faceted and has collected extensive input from a variety of sources. The public participated in the process through the following methods:

- a random telephone survey of 895 households in Gwinnett County, conducted by the A.L. Burruss Institute of Public Service at Kennesaw State University (2002 Needs Assessment);

- a 24-member citizen steering committee was established to review and assess the Master Plan process;

- 5 open public meetings held in September 2003 at various locations throughout the County;

- a questionnaire distributed and collected at the public meetings in September 2003; and

- a similar questionnaire posted on the County's website from September 10 to September 26, 2003.

Input received from the public consultation process is provided in summary form below.

In addition to the public participation efforts, key <u>Gwinnett County staff</u> were also interviewed and a summary of their comments is contained within Appendix D.

4.2 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.

<u>Parkland - Findings</u>

- 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% prefer 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	Teens between 13 and 17 years old
swimming (31%)	basketball (27%)
using playground equipment (24%)	swimming (24%)
soccer (20%)	baseball (20%)
baseball (20%)	soccer (18%)
bicycling (20%)	football (17%)
basketball (17%)	running/jogging (9%)
football/cheerleading (16%)	softball (9%)
softball (9%)	cheerleading (8%)
tennis (9%)	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.

4.3 PUBLIC MEETINGS

In September 2003, the County and Consulting Team organized and facilitated five (5) public meetings. Total attendance at the five public sessions was estimated at 250 persons. The meeting schedule was as follows:

Date	Location	Attendees
September 10, 2003, 7p.m.	Grayson High School	83
September 11, 2003, 7p.m.	Norcross High School	21
September 16, 2003, 10a.m.	Gwinnett Sr. Center at Bethesda Park	68
September 16, 2003, 7p.m.	Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce	30
September 17, 2003, 7p.m.	Bogan Park Community Center	48

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 emerging needs for parks and recreation facilities, programs and services 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 (see below); other specific issues were also raised and discussed by those in attendance.

- What do you like about the parks and recreation in Gwinnett County? What do you dislike?
- What changes should be made to the parks and facilities?
- What parks and facilities are needed and where?
- What are the most important priorities?

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 each meeting. A full account of comments received at the public meetings is contained within Appendix G.

Grayson, September 10, 2003

- More soccer fields are needed in the area
- Need to accommodate activities for all ethnic communities
- There are many seniors near Tribble Mill Park - need a senior center and pool in this area; competition pool mentioned several times
- There is demand for more parkland in the southeast area of County
- Trail linkages and connections should be a priority
- Other facilities requested: basketball (indoor and outdoor) and volleyball courts, 10 mile mountain bike trail, trail for long distance runners (10 miles)

Norcross, September 11, 2003

- West District Aquatic Center is much needed and anticipated
- Meadowcreek cluster lacks accessible active parkland
- Better public transit is needed to park sites
- Other facilities/activities requested: skate park, bike trails (like Silver Comet trail), summer camps, fishing opportunities

Bethesda Park, September 16, 2003 (a.m.)

- Meadowcreek cluster lacks accessible active parkland
- More adult softball fields are needed for seniors
- Park linkages needed - would provide opportunity for longer trails for marathon runners
- Field/turf maintenance and overuse are problems
- Other facilities/activities requested: horseshoe pits, shuffleboard courts, mountain biking trails, youth center (hang-out), open space and historic site preservation, equestrian trails, indoor aquatic center

Chamber of Commerce, September 16, 2003 (p.m.)

- There is more demand for unpaved/nature trails in general; specifically, cross-country meet site (1.5 mile unpaved trail), bmx track, mountain biking trails and greenways needed
- Smaller pocket parks should be provided in some underserved areas (e.g., Steeplechase neighborhood)
- A map of parks and their features should be included in Gwinnett LIFE
- Other facilities/activities requested: skate parks, competitive swimming venue, summer camps, BMX track, gardening programs, wetland preserves, canoeing/kayaking, disc golf, handball, adult soccer

Bogan Park, September 17, 2003

- Facilities/activities requested: cross-country trail, open space and historical site preservation (Native American artifacts next to Little Mulberry), tennis wall, BMX track (possibly buy vacant retail plazas), senior softball and basketball, soccer fields, skate parks, water aerobics for seniors, equestrian trails, bucket swings and other play features for children with disabilities, racquetball courts, off-leash dog park,

In addition to the public meeting questionnaire responses, written submissions were received from a number of groups and individuals. Their input is summarized below:

- Yellow River Trail System: There is a need for a greenway and/or pocket park in the area of Highway 78 and Yellow River -the County's Department of Public Utilities currently owns a property near Lake Lucerne that may have the potential to meet this need. A

nature trail and viewing platform should also be developed by the marsh at Yellow River and Highway 29.

- Saving Pool Mountain: a number of sites adjacent to Little Mulberry Park have environmental and historical significance and should be preserved.

- BMX Racing: Request 5 acres of land for a BMX track; national membership has doubled since 1996.

- Skate Park: More skate parks are needed in the County for youth; just need a place to skate - don't need anything elaborate; the community would even be willing to add certain elements (e.g., ramps, rails, etc.).

- Potential New Park: Should consider Old Lee Farm on Five Forks Trickum Road for a County park (it has a farmhouse and outbuildings on the Yellow River).

- Mountain Park Aquatic Center: Should have early morning hours (6 to 7 a.m.) so people can swim before going to work.

4.4 PUBLIC MEETING & WEB-BASED QUESTION-NAIRES

The public consultation program for the Master Plan included two nearly identical questionnaires – one that was distributed to attendees at the five public meetings and one that was posted on the County's web-site. The questionnaires were not intended to yield statistically valid results, but are useful in providing general indications of issues, concerns, needs, and priorities. The results are provided here for information only. For a more accurate and statically valid indicator of needs and participation patterns, the 2002 Needs Assessment should be referenced.

The surveys 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 Master Plan. Although the analysis of the close-ended questions was relatively straightforward, a greater degree of judgement was required in analyzing the open-ended questions.

Approximately 90 responses were received to the <u>public meeting questionnaire</u>.

The <u>web-based questionnaire</u> was posted on the County's website from September 10 to September 26, 2003. 719 completed surveys were logged during this time. As the survey results were being analyzed, it quickly became apparent that there were a number of "hot button" issues and that the respondents likely encouraged those with similar views to complete the survey. This is evident not only by the magnitude and similarity of responses, but also by the order in which they were submitted. The primary concerns that were raised through web-based questionnaire, in general order of submittal, include:

- additional mountain-biking trails;
- improvements to Rabbit Hill Park (soccer field lights, play equipment, etc.);
- a BMX track;
- additional adult baseball/softball diamonds;
- improvements to soccer facilities, most notably parking at George Pierce Park and lights and turf maintenance at George Pierce Park, Scott Hudgens Park and Pinckneyville Park; and
- an indoor competition pool.

Input received from the public meeting and web surveys is provided in summary form below and in greater detail in Appendices E, F and G. Comparisons with the 2002 Needs Assessment Survey have been noted, where applicable.

A. *In relation to existing parks and recreation facilities and programs, what needs to be changed or improved?*

For the public meeting questionnaire, this question yielded a wide variety of responses and significant overlap with Question B and C. Some discretion was used in tabulating the surveys to ensure that Question A dealt with improvements to existing parks/facilities, while Questions B and C addressed additional park/facility needs. Furthermore, where possible, responses were grouped by topic or theme. Changes and improvements suggested through the public meeting questionnaire included:

- Soccer - more soccer fields and lights needed, possibly at George Pierce Park, Dacula Park, Lucky Shoals Park, Shorty Howell Park (13)
- Security - more security / park police (7)
- Maintenance - better park maintenance (5)
- Meadowcreek - active parkland needed in Meadowcreek area (5)
- Pool - competition pool needed in West District (5)
- Skate Park - develop one at Bogan Park; better maintain the one at Pinckneyville Park (4)
- Best Friend Park - develop more/enlarge existing adult ball fields (3)
- General - more drink machines (3)
- General - more water fountains (3)
- Playgrounds - more shade over playground equipment (3)
- Programs - more senior athletic programs (3)
- General - better awareness of County programs, parks needed (2)
- Programs - more youth activities & opportunities needed (2)
- Trails - separate uses on trails (e.g., cycling from walking) (2)
- Tribble Mill Park - longer running trail needed (3 miles) (2)

This question on the web-based questionnaire prompted a wide variation of responses and comments. The detailed results have been incorporated into Appendix F.

B. *What types of parks, recreation facilities or programs does your community need more of? (open-ended)*

Table 4-1: Park & Recreation System Needs Identified Through Public Consultation

Web-Based Questionnaire	Public Meeting Questionnaire
Soccer Fields (300)	Trails - Unpaved for Biking (22)
Parking - more, paved, better access, etc. (144)	Soccer Fields (17)
Soccer Fields - lights (132)	Open Space / Meadow / Woodland (15)
Trails - Unpaved for Biking (93)	Pool - Indoor Competition (12)
Soccer Fields - turf maintenance (91)	Pool - unspecified type (11)
Trails - Paved Greenway / unspecified type (82)	Trails - Paved Multi-Purpose (8)
Pool - unspecified type (53)	Ball Diamonds - Adult (7)
Pool - Indoor Competition (43)	Skate Park (7)
BMX Track (42)	Playgrounds (7)
Skate Park (42)	Trails - Paved for Walking (7)
Playgrounds (34)	Trails - Unpaved for Nature Hiking (7)
Dog Park (33)	Youth Center (6)
Ball Diamonds - Youth/unspecified age (33)	Passive Parks (5)
Trails - Unpaved for Nature Hiking (32)	Basketball Courts - outdoor (5)
Restrooms (more, open, clean, etc.) (27)	Football Fields (5)
Passive Parks / Open Space / Green Space (26)	Picnic Areas (5)
Trails - Paved for Walking (25)	Tennis Courts (5)
Tennis Courts (21)	Trails - Linkages to parks, schools, etc (5)

As mentioned earlier, the web-survey attracted an inordinate number of respondents with similar views -- this is evidenced by the fact that approximately half of those responding felt there was a need for improvements to the existing soccer facilities!

The most commonly requested facilities/improvements were: more soccer fields, paving and expanding the upper parking lot at George Pierce Park, installing lights on County soccer fields; and improving turf maintenance practices/drainage. Developing additional mountain biking trails and greenways were also popular suggestions, as was the development of additional swimming facilities. The public meeting questionnaire provides a more accurate and balanced view of community needs than does the web-based questionnaire (which provides a better indication of current and controversial issues). It is important to note, however, that trails, soccer fields and pools also ranked high on the list from the public meeting questionnaire.

C. From the list you provided above, please list your highest park, facility or program priorities, with #1 being your highest priority.

Table 4-2: Park & Recreation System Needs Identified Through Public Consultation (by Priority)

	Web-Based Questionnaire	**Public Meeting Questionnaire**
1st Priority	• Soccer Fields (171) • Soccer Fields - lights (58) • Parking - more, paved, better access, etc. (48) • Trails - Unpaved for Biking (46) • Pool - Indoor Competition (33)	• Soccer Fields (9) • Pool - Indoor Competition (8) • Open Space / Meadow / Woodland (7) • Trails - Unpaved for Biking (7) • Ball Diamonds - Adult (6)
2nd Priority	• Soccer Fields (56) • Parking - more, paved, better access, etc. (37) • Soccer Fields - lights (25) • Trails - Unpaved for Biking (24) • Trails - Paved Greenway / unspecified type (24)	• Soccer Fields (4) • Trails - Unpaved for Biking (4) • Open Space / Meadow / Woodland (3) • Trails - Paved for Walking Only (3) • Trails - Unpaved for Nature Hiking (3)
3rd Priority	• Soccer Fields (22) • Parking - more, paved, better access, etc. (20) • Soccer Fields - lights (19) • Trails - Paved Greenway / unspecified type (19) • Trails - Unpaved for Biking (13)	• Basketball Courts - outdoor (3) • Soccer Fields (3) • Ball Diamonds - Youth/unspecified age (2)

Soccer fields (including practice fields) ranked at the top on both the web-based and public meeting questionnaires, although the issue was clearly more dominant on the web-based survey. 44% of those responding to the web survey indicated that improvements to soccer facilities were their number one priority, whereas 13% suggested improved/additional trails. Although not making the "top five" list, BMX track, off-leash dog areas, skate parks, and playgrounds were also commonly requested items.

D. In the future, should the County develop its new parkland for "active" or "passive" recreational uses?

Table 4-3: Parkland Preferences Identified Through Public Consultation

	Web-Based Questionnaire	Public Meeting Questionnaire	2002 Needs Assessment
mostly passive recreational uses	12%	27%	37%
mostly active recreational uses	34%	26%	44%
both active and passive recreational uses in equal amounts	51%	35%	13%
no response	3%	12%	6%

The responses from the web-based survey showed a clear preference for active parks over passive parks, most likely due to the high response rate from soccer facility users. Despite the partiality to active parks, the results from both the web and public meeting questionnaires indicate that there should be some level of equity between active and passive recreational uses when acquiring and developing new parks.

E. Although all of the following options are important, in order to meet the needs of your household, which options would you like to see the County place the most emphasis on? Please identify your top 5 priorities by placing the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 next to the option, with a "1" being your highest priority.

Again, there were significant differences between the web survey results and public meeting survey results. Most notably, those who participated through the Internet placed a significantly higher priority in "expanding existing parks" (#2) and "building more facilities" (#4), while public meeting survey respondents would like to see more emphasis on "acquiring more parkland for passive recreational uses" (#1) and "providing more services for older adults and seniors" (#3). This is not surprising given the different composition of respondents between the two mediums.

There was, however, some agreement between the two surveys. Specifically, all respondents placed a very high priority on acquiring parkland for active recreational used. Furthermore, providing more opportunities for "structured" recreation was preferred over "spontaneous" recreation and services for children and teenagers placed higher than services for adults. The results also indicate that the preservation of historic sites and the development of more educational/interpretive facilities are lower priorities than the other options.

Table 4-4: Park & Recreation System Preferences Identified Through Public Consultation

	Web-based Questionnaire - RANK	Public Meeting Questionnaire - RANK
Acquiring more parkland for active recreational uses (e.g., sports complexes, community centers, gyms, competition pools, etc.)	1	2
Expanding existing parks	2	9
Offering more opportunities for structured recreation (e.g., team sports, time-sensitive programs, etc.)	3	7
Building more facilities	4	15
Developing more trails to link parks, schools and communities together	5	6
Providing more services for youth (13-18)	6	4
Renovating existing facilities	7	12
Acquiring more parkland for passive recreational uses (e.g., trails, nature appreciation, playgrounds, fishing, picnics, leisure pools, etc.)	8	1
Providing more services for children (0-12)	9	5
Developing more looped trails within park sites	10	8
Offering more opportunities for spontaneous recreation (e.g., trails, drop-in programs, picnics, etc.)	11	11
Providing more services for adults (19-54)	12	17
Preserving more historic sites	13	14
Providing more services for older adults and seniors (55+)	14	3
Developing more educational and interpretive facilities	15	10
Providing more services for special needs populations	16	16

Although "providing more services for special needs populations" was not considered to be a high priority for many, this is not to say that it is unimportant, rather it likely affects only a small percentage of those participating in the survey. Those listing it as a high priority on the web questionnaire were asked to list specific suggestions. Most of the comments were very general, such as "accessible parks and facilities" or "programs and sports for the disabled", however, some specific comments were also received, most notably:

- wheelchair accessible trails / boardwalks along rivers and scenic vistas - pathways where they won't be in the way of cyclists;
- dedicated sports fields, programs and teams (baseball, soccer, etc.);
- more accessible playgrounds;
- more swimming opportunities, such as sensory integration water therapy (requires a separate indoor therapeutic pool);
- community programs for adults with disabilities (e.g., Parkinson's);
- coordination classes for motor skills and strength training / therapy;
- more events and outings; and
- sports for disabled children in the Suwanee, Peachtree Industrial, McGinnis Ferry Road area.

F.   What County or City park do you use the most?

Table 4-5: Most Frequently Used Park

Web-Based Questionnaire	Public Meeting Questionnaire	2002 Needs Assessment
• **George Pierce Park (31%)** • **Pinckneyville Park (18%)** • Scott Hudgens Soccer - Duluth (8%) • Yellow River Park (7%) • Bethesda Park (5%) • Rabbit Hill Park (5%)	• Bethesda Park (14%) • Tribble Mill Park (10%) • Bogan Park (9%) • George Pierce Park (9%) • Best Friend Park (8%) • Pinckneyville Park (8%)	• Lenora Park (15%) • Mountain Park Park (14%) • Collins Hill Park (13%) • Bogan Park (11%) • Bethesda Park (10%) • Rhodes Jordan Park (10%)

Users of George Pierce and Pinckneyville Park appears to be over-represented on the web-based survey, however, this explains the large amount of comments pertaining to existing soccer facilities.

G.   What issues or concerns do you have that have not been addressed by this questionnaire?

This question prompted a wide variation of responses and comments. The detailed results have been incorporated into Appendices E and F.

4.5   PARK SYSTEM BENCH-MARKING ANALYSIS

To assist in developing the Master Plan, five jurisdictions with similarities to Gwinnett County were studied through the administration of a benchmarking survey. The survey collected a wide range of quantitative data and qualitative information on parks, recreation and cultural facilities, services, staffing, expenditures, revenues, and financing.

The purpose of the benchmarking survey was to evaluate how Gwinnett County compares to other jurisdictions that are recognized nationally as leaders in the delivery of recreation services and assist in developing appropriate service levels for Gwinnett County.

With the assistance of Gwinnett County staff, the jurisdictions listed in Table 4-6 were selected to participate in this exercise. Each were national winners and finalists in the National Gold Medal Awards (Class 1 category - population over 250,000) sponsored by the National Sporting Goods Association's Sports Foundation and National Recreation and Parks Association from 1998 to 2003.

These jurisdictions were also selected because they meet one or more of the following criteria:

- they are growing in overall population;
- their population is similar to Gwinnett County's;
- they have a climate that is similar to Gwinnett County's;
- they have a government structure that is similar to Gwinnett County's; and/or

- their current mix/number of parks and facilities is similar to those in Gwinnett County.

TABLE 4-6: Benchmarking Communities

Jurisdiction	Rationale
Fairfax County Park Authority, Virginia	- 2002 Gold Medal Winner - similar government structure (County) - has a growing population that is 65% larger than Gwinnett's
Lee County, Florida	- 2003 Finalist - similar government structure (County) - has a growing population that is 25% smaller than Gwinnett's
Howard County, Maryland	- 2002 Finalist - similar government structure (County) - has a growing population, but is significantly smaller than Gwinnett's
City of Mesa, Arizona	- 2000 Gold Medal Winner - City is located in a growth area (grew by nearly 40% from 1990 to 2000) - population is approximately 30% smaller than Gwinnett's
City of Austin, Texas	- 2001 Finalist - City is located in a growth area (grew by over 40% from 1990 to 2000) - population is similar to Gwinnett's (Austin is 10% larger)

A nineteen (19) page survey, complete with cover letter and glossary, was prepared and distributed to each selected jurisdiction. Gwinnett County was also asked to complete the survey to allow for a basis of comparison.

4.5.1 Key Findings from the Benchmarking Exercise

1. <u>Trends</u> - Many of the other communities are experiencing the same pressures as Gwinnett and are trying to meet growing demand for aquatics, soccer, multi-use trails, skateboard parks, off-leash dog areas, and open space preservation. Conversely, baseball/softball, football, and racquet sports are in decline in many jurisdictions.

2. <u>Parkland</u> - Gwinnett is at the **lower** end of the parkland provision range, with 12.5 acres of County parkland per 1,000 residents; the average is 23.6 acres per 1,000 population. The gap between Gwinnett and the benchmarking average widens further when non-jurisdictional parkland is included in the level of service as state and other local agencies play a considerably larger role in open space preservation and parkland provision in most of the other benchmarking communities. Also of note, each of the benchmarking communities provide neighborhood level parks that are generally less than 20 acres in size; in Gwinnett, it is the responsibility of cities and towns, as well as subdivisions, to provide neighborhood parks.

3. <u>Community/Recreation Centers & Activity Buildings</u> - The provision of community centers and activity buildings in Gwinnett is similar to that of the Fairfax County Park Authority, however, for Gwinnett to employ a standard similar to Austin, Lee and Howard, it would need to double its supply to approximately 20 facilities.

4. <u>Aquatics</u> - Only Fairfax and Gwinnett counties operate indoor aquatic facilities; the warmer climates of Austin, Mesa and Lee County allow these jurisdictions to rely more heavily on outdoor pools, many of which are open year-round. Gwinnett County's provision of aquatic facilities is the most balanced (indoor and outdoor), while in terms of overall provision, Gwinnett has slightly **fewer** pools than the benchmarking average. Also of note, many areas are beginning to develop more leisure pools with interactive play features and are also moving toward developing outdoor splash pads.

5. <u>Hard Courts</u> - Gwinnett's supply of outdoor basketball courts is significantly **lower** than the benchmarking communities, indicating a severe shortage. Gwinnett County's supply of tennis courts is considerably lower than the benchmarking average, although private clubs and local cities help to alleviate this shortage.

6. <u>Playing Fields</u> - Gwinnett County's supply of soccer fields is substantially **lower** than the benchmarking average, although private sector and city fields may assist in meeting some of this demand. Gwinnett offers dedicated fields for football and soccer, while each of the benchmarking communities combine these uses and classify them as "multi-purpose fields". Gwinnett's overall supply of ball diamonds is generally consistent with the other communities.

7. <u>Playgrounds</u> - Compared to the other benchmarking agencies, Gwinnett County (including its cities and towns) offer significantly **fewer** playground locations.

8. <u>Golf Courses</u> - Gwinnett and Lee Counties are the only two jurisdictions that do not operate public golf courses. Public golf courses provide a significant monetary contribution to the governments that provide them, helping to offset losses in other areas.

9. <u>Programming</u> - Aquatics, camps, and sports are some of the most popular activities for children and teens, while fitness/wellness, sports and arts/crafts remain popular with adults and seniors. On the whole, the benchmarking communities provide a greater balance of programming opportunities between children/teens and adults/seniors than does Gwinnett, which focuses more on child and teen services.

10. <u>School partnerships</u> - A wide variety of creative agreements exist between the benchmarking communities and local schools, ranging

from the interim use of future and former school sites to joint facility development and maintenance to permitting.

11. Staffing - Gwinnett County's complement of full-time staff is **well below** that of the other communities, especially within its administrative division. Only Howard County has less total staff per capita than Gwinnett.

12. Expenditures - Gwinnett's per capita capital spending in 2002 was nearly twice as much as the benchmarking average and was heavily focused on land acquisition as opposed to design and construction. Gwinnett's per capita operating expenditures were **lower** than most of the benchmarking communities, largely due to lower than average spending on personnel.

13. Revenues - Gwinnett's per capita 2002 revenues are in line with the benchmarking average, although most other jurisdictions received significantly more money from program and user fees. Gwinnett's revenue covered approximately 32% of its expenditures, ranking it **higher** than most of the other communities; the County's ability to apply both property taxes and the SPLOST give it an advantage over many of the other agencies in this regard.

Benchmarking Survey - Parkland Comparisons

The total number of parks ranges from a low of 47 in Gwinnett to 387 in Fairfax County. Fairfax County, however, along with the cities of Austin and Mesa own a number of smaller, neighborhood-level parks while the other jurisdictions focus more on larger community and regional size parks. Gwinnett is at the lower end of the parkland provision range, with 12.5 acres per 1,000 residents; the average is 23.6 acres per 1,000 population. Gwinnett's ratio of active to passive parkland is relatively consistent with the other counties, which tend to have more passive than active parkland; the opposite is true for the two cities. Table 4-7 summarizes the supply of parkland.

TABLE 4-7: Benchmarking - Parks Owned, Leased and/or Operated by each Jurisdiction (as of August 2003)

	# of Parks	Total Acreage	Acres per 1,000 pop. (Total)
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	387	22,543	**23.2**
Howard County MD	59	8,100	**32.7**
Lee County FL[1]	70	13,927	**31.6**
Austin TX	207	16,547	**25.2**
Mesa AZ[2]	63	2,994	**7.5**
AVERAGE	**157**	**12,822**	**23.6**
Gwinnett County[3]	47	7,361	**12.5**

(…continued)

(…continued)

TABLE 4-7: Benchmarking -Parks Owned, Leased and/or Operated by each Jurisdiction (as of August 2003)

	% Active	Acres per 1,000 pop. (Active)	% Passive	Acres per 1,000 pop. (Passive)
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	39%	**9.1**	61%	**14.2**
Howard County MD	26%	**8.5**	74%	**24.2**
Lee County FL[1]	21%	**6.6**	79%	**24.9**
Austin TX	59%	**14.9**	41%	**10.3**
Mesa AZ[2]	82%	**6.1**	18%	**1.3**
AVERAGE	**41%**	**9.7**	**59%**	**13.9**
Gwinnett County[3]	27%	**3.3**	73%	**9.2**

[1] All of Lee County's passive parkland (11,000 acres) is in preserves that are not yet developed for the public (open for walking and nature appreciation).

[2] The City of Mesa also owns 134 retention basins that are used for passive recreation (not included in parkland total).

[3] Only 24 of Gwinnett County's 47 park sites are developed and open to the public; does not include sites that are classified as "Green Space" or "Other". Current as of August 2003.

Considerable amounts of additional parkland are provided by other governmental agencies in Fairfax County, Howard County and Austin, significantly increasing their overall supply of publicly accessible parks and open space (see Tables 4-8 and 4-9). With the exception of Mesa, the four benchmarking communities provide 38 to 94 acres of parkland for every 1,000 residents, while Gwinnett only offers 16 acres/1,000 population. It appears that state and other local agencies (e.g., regional commissions, incorporated cities, etc.) play a considerably larger role in open space preservation and parkland provision in Fairfax, Howard, Lee and Austin that they do in Gwinnett. Parks and open space comprise approximately 3.5% of Gwinnett's land base, compared to 14.5% in Fairfax County, despite having similar total land areas.

TABLE 4-8: Benchmarking - Non-jurisdictional Parkland, not including Schools (Acres) (as of August 2003)

	Other Local Agencies [1]	State Agency	Federal Agency	Other [2]	Total	Acres per 1,000 pop.
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	8,142	1,800	4,102	0	14,044	**14.5**
Howard County MD	3,180	9,752	0	2,200	15,132	**61.1**
Lee County FL	96	1,853	713	0	2,662	**6.0**
Austin TX	20,239	961	0	377	21,577	**32.9**
Mesa AZ	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
AVERAGE	**6,331.6**	**2,873.2**	**963**	**515.8**	**10,683**	**19.7**
Gwinnett County	657	51	1,553	0	2,261	**3.8**

[1] "Other local agencies": Fairfax County Park Authority (County's Community and Recreation Services Dept., the North Virginia Regional Park Authority, and three incorporated towns and cities); Howard County (Columbia Association); Lee County (incorporated cities); Austin (City's Water and Wastewater Dept. owns a large portion of the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve); Gwinnett County (Dept. of Public Utilities, incorporated cities and towns).

[2] "Other": Howard County (Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission); Austin (Travis County).

[3] Three significant County, State and National Parks totaling nearly 3 million acres are directly adjacent to the City of Mesa.

TABLE 4-9: Benchmarking - Total Parkland (Acres) (as of August 2003)

	Jurisdiction (Table 4-8)	Other Agencies (Table 4-9)	Total	Acres per 1,000 pop.	% of Total Land Area
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	22,543	14,044	36,587	**37.7**	14.5%
Howard County MD	8,100	15,132	23,232	**93.7**	14.4%
Lee County FL	13,927	2,662	16,589	**37.6**	3.2%
Austin TX	16,547	21,577	38,124	**58.1**	23.6%
Mesa AZ	2,944	0	2,944	**7.5**	3.7%
AVERAGE	**12,811.4**	**10,682**	**23,495.2**	**43.3**	**9.8%**
Gwinnett County [1]	7,361	2,261	9,622	**16.1**	3.5%

[1] Gwinnett County parkland total includes all Community, Passive Community, Open Space, and Special Purpose Parkland as of August 2003.

It is interesting to note that each community uses a slightly different park classification system (see Table 4-10). "Neighborhood Parks" are provided by all jurisdictions with the exception of Gwinnett County. Austin is the only agency not to use the "Community Park" classification; Gwinnett's standard of 140 or more acres is greater than the 10 to 100 acre range employed by the other communities. The names "District", "Metro", "Countywide" and "Regional" are used nearly interchangeably to describe large parks (i.e., approx. 200 acres) that contain multiple active and passive recreation amenities. Five jurisdictions use a "Special Facility or Park" classification to describe golf courses, stadiums, art centers, museums, ice rinks, horticultural centers, tennis centers, and even aquatic and athletic complexes in some cases. Gwinnett County's "Passive Community Park" classification was unique among the five benchmarking agencies.

TABLE 4-10: Benchmarking - Park Classification Systems

Park Classification	Fairfax	Howard	Lee	Austin	Mesa	Gwinnett
Neighborhood Park	5 acres +; 15 minute walk	1-20 acres	n/a	5-30 acres 1 mile	3-15 acres	--
Community Park - Active	10-50 acres; 5-10 min. drive/ 3mi.	20-100 acres 2 miles	3 miles	--	15-40 acres	140+ acres
District Park	50-200 acres	--	--	30-200 acres; 2 miles	--	--
Metro Park	--	--	--	200+ acres; citywide	40-200 acres; 1.75 miles	--
Countywide/ Regional Park	n/a	over 100 acres 5 miles	n/a	--	200+ acres	--
Open Space / Preserves	under countywide	n/a	n/a	--	--	200+ acres
Special Facilities / Parks	under countywide	yes	--	yes	yes	single purpose only
Other (specify)	urban park (<5 acres, 5 min. walk)	--	boat ramps	greenbelts	retention basis	community park - passive (20+ acres)

Benchmarking Survey - Staffing Comparisons

Table 4-11 indicates that Gwinnett County's complement of full-time staff is well below that of the other communities (0.2 staff per 1,000 residents compared to an average of 0.5 for the other jurisdictions). The lack of full-time staff is most evident in administration, where Gwinnett has 9 staff and the other agencies have an average of 27. Similar differences exist in relation to Gwinnett's full-time operations and facility maintenance staff. Overall staffing levels for part-time and seasonal positions is relatively consistent with the other communities, although it is interesting to note that the more northern climates of Howard and Fairfax Counties have more seasonal park maintenance staff, whereas the park maintenance staff in the southern communities tend to be more full-time. Only Howard County has less staff per capita than Gwinnett, while Austin, Mesa, and Fairfax have two to three times more staff per capita than Gwinnett.

TABLE 4-11: Benchmarking - Staffing Summary

	Full-time Staff			Part-time & Seasonal Staff		
	Total	Staff per 1,000 Population	Acres of Parkland per Staff	Total	Staff per 1,000 Population	Acres of Parkland per Staff
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	596	0.6	38	2,088	2.2	11
Howard County MD	123	0.5	66	57	0.2	142
Lee County FL	208	0.5	67	445	1.0	31
Austin TX	419	0.6	39	1,811	2.8	9
Mesa AZ	138	0.3	22	1,101	2.8	3
AVERAGE	**297**	0.5	43	**1,080**	2.0	12
Gwinnett County	145	0.2	51	600	1.0	12

Benchmarking Survey - Financial Comparisons

As documented in Table 4-12, per capita annual capital expenditures (2002 fiscal year) for parks and recreation range from $12.20 in Mesa to $130.32 in Howard County (most of which was a result of land acquisition. Gwinnett's per capita capital spending of $81.82 was nearly twice as much as the average and was second to only Howard County. Design and construction costs contributed to nearly 70% of the capital spending for the benchmarking communities, whereas it only accounted for 21% of Gwinnett's spending; conversely, 71% of Gwinnett's capital budget went toward land acquisition.

TABLE 4-12: Benchmarking - Capital Expenditures (thousands. 2002 $, approximate)

	Design & Constr.	Land	Misc. / Other	Equip.	Debt (Interest)	Total	Per Capita
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	10,628	4,210	--	--	--	**$14,838**	**$15.30**
Howard County MD[1]	10,080	20,051	626	82	1,458	**$32,298**	**$130.32**
Lee County FL	21,755	n/a	--	--	--	**$21,755**	**$49.34**
Austin TX	34,807	6,443	--	--	--	**$41,250**	**$62.83**
Mesa AZ[2]	2,284	2,174	--	379	--	**$4,837**	**$12.20**
AVERAGE	**15,911**	**6,576**	**125**	**92**	**292**	**$22,996**	**$42.41**
Gwinnett County	10,282	34,466	3,010	430	--	**$48,188**	**$81.89**

[1] Howard County's land acquisition expenses were significantly higher than previous years due to the purchase of a 300-acre park for $10.7 million.

[2] Since fall 2001, Mesa began reducing its budget as a result of a weakened economy and lower-than-expected sales tax revenue. Directly affecting the City's ability to proceed with projects such as land acquisition and capital upgrades of existing facilities is the need for a bond authorization approval in 2004. Although the City has the funds to build new facilities, they lack the necessary funds to operate them at this time.

Table 4-13 illustrates gross operating expenditures for each community. Per capita spending on operational elements was more consistent amongst the various jurisdictions than capital spending, with a range of $31.24 (Lee County) to $75.80 (Howard County); Gwinnett's per capita spending of $36.29 ranks second behind Lee County. An average of 50% of the total operational costs for the benchmarking communities is allocated to personnel, whereas personnel account for only 37% of Gwinnett's budget.

TABLE 4-13: Benchmarking - Operating Expenditures (thousands, 2002 $, approximate)

	Personnel	Operating	Capital Outlay	Debt Service	Other	Total	Per Capita
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	36,070	19,154	14,415	1,488	--	**$71,127**	**$73.35**
Howard County MD	10,274	7,313	26		1,174	**$18,787**	**$75.80**
Lee County FL	7,125	6,115	423	--	81	**$13,775**	**$31.24**
Austin TX[1]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	**$39,615**	**$60.34**
Mesa AZ[2]	10,840	10,134	--	--	--	**$20,975**	**$52.46**
AVERAGE	**16,077**	**10,679**	**3,716**	**372**	**314**	**$32,856**	**$60.59**
Gwinnett County	7,930	6,894	3,132	2,503	898	**$21,357**	**$36.29**

[1] The breakdown of operating expenses for Austin was not available. Austin experienced across-the-board cutbacks in 2002 due to a downturn in the high-tech market, which resulted in reduced property tax and sales tax revenue.

[2] Mesa continues to face challenges due to national economic downturns, a reduction of state-shared revenues by the Arizona Legislature, slowing local development and new retail development in neighboring communities-lessening our sales tax collections. The City of Mesa relies heavily on sales tax revenue (as the City has no property tax), which has continued to steadily decline.

Parks and recreation related revenues were varied (see Table 4-14). Lee County, which has a philosophy to not cover expenses but to provide a core level of service to the community, had the least amount of overall revenues ($6.67 per capita), while Fairfax County was able to recover $68.81 per capita. Gwinnett's per capita revenue of $38.08 was in line with the benchmarking average of $36.65. On average, more than half of all revenues came from charges for programs and services, although nearly

80% of Gwinnett's revenues came from the recreation fund and more than half of the Fairfax County Park Authority's revenues came from County transfers.

TABLE 4-14: Benchmarking - Revenues (thousands, 2002 $, approximate)

	Charges for Services / Programs	Facility/ Field Rental	Other Govts. & Bonds	Gifts & Donations	Special Fund / Other	**Total**	**Per Capita**
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	26,635	2,554	36,184	704	650	**$66,727**	**$68.81**
Howard County MD	8,355	--	341	--	2,361	**$11,057**	**$44.61**
Lee County FL	1,776	145	380	30	640	**$2,941**	**$6.67**
Austin TX	10,966	1,249	--	134	26	**$12,397**	**$18.88**
Mesa AZ	5,926	241	55	78	13	**$6,243**	**$15.75**
AVERAGE	**10,732**	**838**	**7,392**	**175**	**738**	**$19,873**	**$36.65**
Gwinnett County	3,369	--	854	--	18,188	**$22,411**	**$38.08**

Fairfax County's revenues covered 78% of their expenditures compared to an average of 36% for all of the benchmarking communities. It should, however, be noted that the Fairfax County Park Authority is not a department of county government, and therefore has slightly different funding arrangements; nonetheless, the County's affluent population allows the Authority to recover a significant amount of its expenses through user fees. Gwinnett ranked second behind Fairfax with a recovery rate of 32%. Gwinnett, however, has the authority to impose both property taxes and a special sales tax, powers that not all of the benchmarking communities have.

A full summary of the benchmarking survey results is compiled in Appendix C. It should be noted that the benchmarking survey is only <u>one</u> input used to develop appropriate standards of supply for Gwinnett; other variables include NPRA standards, trends, public input and demand analysis using participant data and service area analysis.