

SECTION 1: Introduction

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

Gwinnett County, with a current estimated population of 776,347 people, is a dynamic, progressive and increasingly diverse community that continues to attract new residents and investment at a record pace. The County's excellent parks system provides a significant contribution to the community's high quality of life. As residents continue to demand more and better recreational opportunities, efforts must be made to expand and improve the wide range of parks and leisure facilities within the County.

The 2007 Capital Improvement Plan is an update to the County's 2004 Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan and 2000 Capital Improvement Plan. Considerable progress has been made since these plans were developed – the County has increased its parkland inventory and countless facilities have been built, expanded, and renovated in order to keep pace with the demands of a growing population. Proactively addressing the changing needs of its residents has been a characteristic of the Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation Division since its inception and this Plan will assist the County in maintaining this legacy.

The time is right to re-examine and evaluate the parks and recreational needs of Gwinnettians. At the end of 2008, County residents will be asked if they want to extend the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) for another four years. The SPLOST is a self-imposed County-wide sales tax, part of which may be allocated to fund improvements to the parks system. In order to ensure that these funds are spent wisely and in those areas with the greatest needs, this Capital Improvement Plan has proposed a prioritized list of capital projects that are consistent with the current and emerging needs of residents.

Specifically, this updated Capital Improvement Plan accomplishes three major tasks. It:

- 1) evaluates the current status of the County's ability to provide service based upon its enhanced array of capital facilities;
- 2) analyzes service gaps and needs within the County due to changes in population and distribution of existing facilities, and
- 3) proposes a refined Capital Program for the period following the current (2005) SPLOST program.

The Plan was prepared by the Gwinnett County Department of Community Services, under the direction of the Recreation Authority, and with the assistance of Monteith Brown Planning Consultants and The Jaeger Company.

1.2 SCOPE OF THE PLAN

The Capital Improvement Plan will guide the development and expansion of parks, greenways, and recreation facilities in Gwinnett County for the period of 2009 to 2012, inclusive. This timeframe aligns with the County's next SPLOST, should it be approved by local voters.

The full range of parks and facilities that fall under the broad definition of "leisure" or "recreation" (e.g., community centers, gymnasiums, soccer fields, aquatics, cultural space, playgrounds, nature trails, etc.) are addressed in this Plan. Recreation and parks services and programs are outside the scope of this study.

1.3 IMPETUS FOR THE PLAN

Recreation plays a vital role in Gwinnett County and there is a need to continue to enhance the quality of life through improvements to the parks and recreation system. A number of factors have necessitated the need for an updated Capital improvement Plan:

- The County's population is growing at a very rapid pace and is also aging and becoming more ethnically diverse.
- The County's high growth rate requires that sufficient parkland be acquired before it is lost to development.
- Leisure trends are shifting and new approaches in recreation planning are emerging. For instance, there is growing demand for unstructured and self-scheduled forms of leisure; initiatives such as greenway expansion (which is a significant focus of this Plan) can be quite successful in addressing this demand.
- The "bar has been raised" through previous efforts and residents have greater expectations for parks and recreation services.
- There is a need to coordinate the Capital Improvement Plan with other recent initiatives, such as the Unified Plan.
- The County has a history of proactively addressing its parks and recreation needs and planning for the future in a forward-thinking, fiscally responsible manner and this must continue to be a high priority.

The County has succeeded in responding to many of these challenges. This Capital Improvement Plan builds upon this momentum and refocuses the County's future efforts through a review and assessment of needs and priorities.

1.4 SUMMARY OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

The Capital Improvement Plan process commenced in April 2007 with the first meeting of the Recreation Authority and Consultants. This planning process was constructed to capitalize on past efforts and initiatives (with particular emphasis on the County's 2004 Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan), to be comprehensive in nature, and to provide clear and justifiable direction for the future provision of parks and recreation facilities.

A complex methodology was employed as part of the planning process for the Capital Improvement Plan, including:

- A set of goals and strategies was developed to guide the Plan and provide a framework for subsequent analysis and implementation of recommendations.
- An analysis of Gwinnett County's demographic characteristics was undertaken in order to identify any factors which may influence the way in which parks and recreation facilities are offered.
- Local and national trends considered pertinent to recreation and leisure were assessed in order to understand key areas of growth, innovations in delivering services, etc.
- A comprehensive inventory was compiled which documented the County's parks and recreation facilities, as well those offered through the various cities.
- Consultations with the general public, key stakeholders, and County staff and officials were conducted in order to gain an intimate knowledge of the issues and opportunities surrounding the parks and recreation system.
- A detailed needs assessment of parks and recreation facilities falling under the scope of the Plan, through application of demand-based standards was carried out.
- The development of facility-specific recommendations required to meet the needs of Gwinnett County's residents.

Numerous meetings with County staff and the Recreation Authority were held throughout the duration of the project in order to gather information, review the Plan's progress, and to provide direction for the Plan's goals and priorities.

1.5 RECREATION AUTHORITY / PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

The Capital Improvement Plan is most certainly a product of community input and participation. County staff, officials and the community at large have been consulted and asked to participate throughout the process through meetings and consultation events.

Public consultation efforts were concentrated near the beginning of the planning process in order to focus on information gathering and issue identification. Five public meetings were held at various locations in the County and those attending were invited to participate by expressing their opinions and completing a questionnaire. Efforts were also made to distribute the questionnaire to leaders in the several of the County's ethnic communities. Furthermore, this study incorporates and builds upon the community needs identified in the 2004 Gwinnett County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan and 2002 Needs Assessment Survey prepared by the A.L. Burruss Institute of Public Service (Kennesaw State University).

Regular meetings with the Gwinnett County Recreation Authority assisted in developing the overall goals for this Plan, providing feedback on completed work and deliverables, and prioritizing the park and facility recommendations.

1.6 PLAN GOALS AND PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

With the assistance of the Recreation Authority, a set of goals was developed to guide the capital project prioritization process. Specific strategies to realize many of the goals were also formulated. The goals and strategies address the most appropriate range of means to ensure service expansion to:

- meet the needs of a growing population;
- manage and maximize the capacity of existing facilities; and
- provide for new or expanded facilities and efficient operations.

The goals and strategies are based upon public input, the analysis of facility and parks needs, and the experiences of similar agencies and are described below in priority order.

The six goals for the 2007 Parks and Recreation Capital Improvement Plan are identified below. Overriding these goals is the following statement:

Gwinnett County will strive to provide for the diverse needs of all age groups including the growing segment of older adults. A balanced approach to the provision of parkland and recreational opportunities will continue to be sought by acquiring and developing both structured and unstructured, active and passive parkland and recreational facilities. The County will coordinate its efforts with other agencies, departments, cities, and boards to maximize project funding and benefits to local residents. Cooperation and partnerships will be sought to maximize improvements, help revitalize under-served communities, and enhance safety.

1. GREENWAYS

Work toward achieving pedestrian and bicycle linkage or connectivity between parks and other points of interest such as schools, libraries, institutional land uses, and commercial nodes. Work with the DOT to encourage the construction of sidewalks and/or the paving of wider shoulders to assist in the development of a “linked Gwinnett”, wherever feasible and where full trail development is not reasonably achievable.

The highest priority efforts should be made to link parks, libraries, schools and communities to increase biking, walking and jogging opportunities (not only for recreation but also as an alternative mode of transportation). To achieve this goal, the County should proceed to develop the highest priority greenways while being cognizant of the fact that priorities may shift slightly as opportunities present themselves.

2. PARKLAND ACQUISITION – Under-serviced areas

Proceed with the acquisition of parkland in under-serviced areas.

There continues to be a concern about the areas of the County that do not have favorable parkland to population ratios. Although it is acknowledged that equity amongst the Recreation Planning Areas will never be fully achieved, attempts need to continue to be made to address parkland needs in under-served areas. Special attention should be given to soccer field and informal play field development everywhere (but in particular, seek out opportunities in RPAs B, C, and E).

3. PARKLAND ACQUISITION – Developing areas

Continue with the acquisition of parkland in developing areas.

While there is a need to address under-serviced areas, the newly developing areas will also require parks and there is no better time to acquire parkland than before residential development occurs. This is particularly true if the County wishes to acquire and develop a site suitable for bolstering soccer opportunities and to develop suitable community parks in conjunction with new school clusters.

4. PARK DEVELOPMENT – Existing parks and sites

Complete the construction of planned phases of development within existing parks and undeveloped sites.

In developing Master Plans for individual park sites, extensive public consultation occurs. Although funding is not always available for all components of an existing park site, completion of planned phases needs to move forward.

5. PARK REDEVELOPMENT

Renovate and/or redevelop existing parks and recreation facilities on an as-needed basis, in keeping with identified local needs.

No park facility lasts forever; because neighborhood needs change over time and since Gwinnett County has set a high standard for parkland development, older existing parks will also need to be refreshed and/or repurposed.

6. COST OF OPERATIONS

Continue to calculate the cost of operations for CIP facilities to assure affordability of operating facilities within budget (or to identify shortfalls for budgeting consideration), while ensuring the sustained quality to the parks and facilities inventory.

1.7 RECREATION PLANNING AREAS

For the purposes of analyzing park and facility needs only, this Capital Improvement Plan makes use of the five Recreation Planning Areas (RPAs) established in the 2004 Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Analysis by RPA allows for a “local” analysis and also accounts to a degree for geographic barriers and travel patterns.

RPAs are assigned letters from A through E and are illustrated on **Map 1-1**. Based on 2007 population estimates, the populations of the RPAs range from 139,263 to 180,050. The profiles and projections for the RPAs are discussed in detail in Section 3.

The Recreation Planning Areas are referenced throughout this Plan, most notably in relation to the projection of park and facility requirements and recommended locations for new recreational infrastructure.



GWINNETT COUNTY, GEORGIA

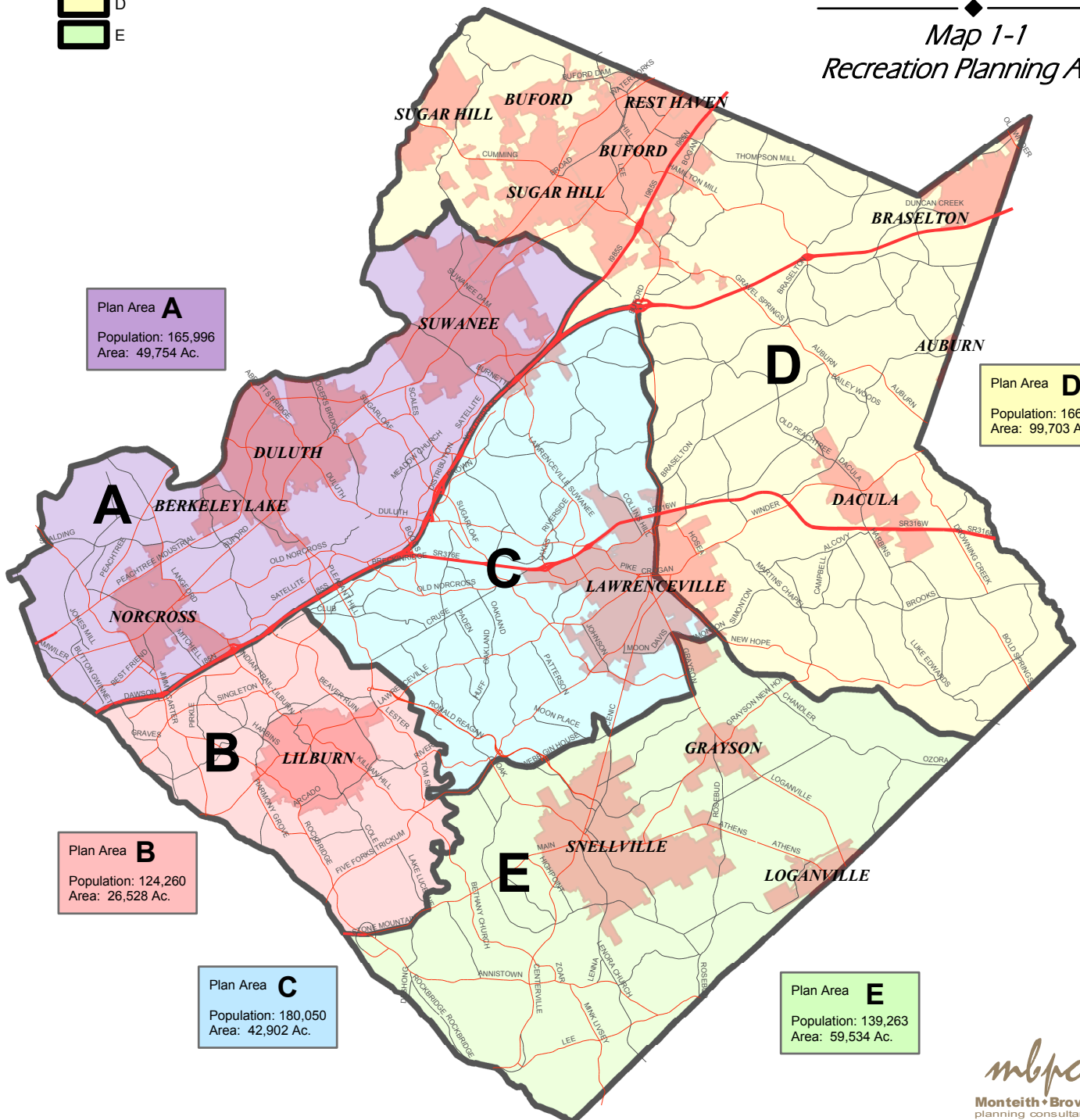
Parks & Recreation Capital Improvement Plan (2007 Update)

Map 1-1 Recreation Planning Areas

Legend

Recreation Planning Area

- A
- B
- C
- D
- E



Plan Area **D**
Population: 166,778
Area: 99,703 Ac.

Plan Area **A**
Population: 165,996
Area: 49,754 Ac.

Plan Area **B**
Population: 124,260
Area: 26,528 Ac.

Plan Area **C**
Population: 180,050
Area: 42,902 Ac.

Plan Area **E**
Population: 139,263
Area: 59,534 Ac.

