

APPENDIX C:

**PARK DEPARTMENT
BENCHMARKING SUMMARY &
ANALYSIS**



Benchmarking Summary & Analysis

2004 Gwinnett County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update

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Gwinnett County Department of Community Services

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BENCHMARKING SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

To assist in developing an Update to the Gwinnett County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan, five (5) jurisdictions with similarities to Gwinnett County were studied through the administration of a benchmarking survey. The purpose of the benchmarking survey is to evaluate how Gwinnett County compares to other jurisdictions that are recognized nationally as leaders in the delivery of recreation services. The benchmarking survey collected a wide range of quantitative data and qualitative information on parks, recreation and cultural facilities, services, staffing, expenditures, revenues, and financing.

The main objective of the benchmarking survey is to generate a database that will be used in the development of appropriate service levels for Gwinnett County. It should be noted that the benchmarking survey will be only one 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.

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Methodology

An initial list of eleven jurisdictions was compiled. 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.

With the assistance of Gwinnett County staff, 5 jurisdictions were selected to participate in this exercise (see Table 1). These jurisdictions were 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 1: Benchmarking Communities

Jurisdiction	Rationale
Fairfax County Park Authority, Virginia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- 2002 Gold Medal Winner- similar government structure (County)- has a growing population that is 65% larger than Gwinnett's
Lee County, Florida	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- 2003 Finalist- similar government structure (County)- has a growing population that is 25% smaller than Gwinnett
Howard County, Maryland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- 2002 Finalist- similar government structure (County)- has a growing population, but is significantly smaller than Gwinnett
City of Mesa, Arizona	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- 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
City of Austin, Texas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- 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. As an incentive for completing the survey, each jurisdiction was offered a summary of the benchmarking results and a copy of Gwinnett's new Master Plan (once completed). Gwinnett County was also asked to complete the survey to allow for a basis of comparison.

Data Limitations

1. Each jurisdiction was asked to compile data on the parks and facilities that are controlled by their own agency. Each community, however, has one or more other agencies that are significant providers of parks, open space and/or recreation facilities. Many of these sites and facilities are accessible to the public and – to one degree or another – play a role in meeting the leisure needs of residents. Examples include state and federal agencies, the Columbia Association in Howard County, the Fairfax County Community Services Department, North Virginia Regional Park Authority, and incorporated cities in Lee, Fairfax and Gwinnett Counties. In order to develop comparable provision or service standards, all publicly accessible parks and facilities should be accounted for. Unfortunately, complete information on non-jurisdictional agencies was not available in many cases (e.g., Howard, Fairfax and Lee Counties). That being said, the Consultant made efforts to collect some of the key data for these agencies (e.g., the Columbia Association, Fairfax County Community Services Dept., and some incorporated cities) using external sources. Although "holes" in the data remain, this supplemental information has allowed for greater comparability among the communities.

To avoid confusion, all data refers to only those elements that are controlled by the primary jurisdiction unless otherwise noted in the text.

2. Population figures and service standards noted in this benchmarking analysis are based on year 2000 Census data. Data collected on parks and facilities is generally current as of July/August 2003 and does not include any facilities that are currently under design, planning or construction. Revenue, expenditure, and staffing data are based on the most current fiscal year for which data was available, which is typically 2002/2003.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Trends - 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. Parkland - 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. Community/Recreation Centers & Activity Buildings - 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. Aquatics - The climates and unique circumstances of the benchmarking communities make it difficult to draw comparisons related to the supply of indoor and outdoor aquatic facilities. It is evident, however, that communities are beginning to develop more leisure pools with interactive play features and are also moving toward developing outdoor splash pads.
5. Hard Courts - 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. Playing Fields - 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. Playgrounds - Compared to the other benchmarking agencies, Gwinnett County (including its cities and towns) offer significantly fewer playground locations.
8. Golf Courses - 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. Programming - Aquatics, camps, and sports are some of the most popular activities for children and youth, 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/youth and adults/seniors than does Gwinnett, which focuses more on child and youth services.
10. School partnerships - 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 impose both property taxes and the SPLOST give it an advantage over many of the other agencies in this regard.

ABOUT THE BENCHMARKING COMMUNITIES

Although each of the jurisdictions surveyed has experienced rapid growth, none have grown, or are expected to grow, as quickly as Gwinnett (see Table 2).

TABLE 2: Population Data

	1990 (Actual ¹)	2000 (Actual ¹)	Growth 1990-2000	2010 (Projected)	2020 (Projected)	Growth 2000-2020
Fairfax County VA	818,584	969,749	18%	1,116,100	1,176,600	21%
Howard County MD	187,328	247,842	32%	284,000	310,000	25%
Lee County FL	335,113	440,888	32%	565,703	678,335	54%
Austin TX	465,622	656,562	41%	771,397	940,329	43%
Mesa AZ	288,091	396,375	38%	537,875	617,836	56%
AVERAGE	418,948	542,283	29%	655,015	744,620	37%
Gwinnett County	352,910	588,448	67%	842,000	1,050,000	78%

¹ Source: 1990 and 2000 Census (U.S. Census Bureau)

Gwinnett County's population, land base and density are very similar to the average of the five jurisdictions that were surveyed (see Table 4).

TABLE 3: Land Area & Density (Square Miles)

	Land Area	2000 Population	Average Density (persons per sq.m.)
Fairfax County VA	395	969,749	2,455
Howard County MD	252	247,842	983
Lee County FL	804	440,888	548
Austin TX	252	656,562	2,605
Mesa AZ	125	396,375	3,171
AVERAGE	366	542,283	1,483
Gwinnett County	433	588,448	1,360

Source: 2000 Census (U.S. Census Bureau)

TABLE 4: Age of Department/Park Authority

	Year Established (approx.)
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	1950
Howard County MD	1966
Lee County FL	1973
Austin TX	1928
Mesa AZ	1936
Gwinnett County ¹	1987

¹ From 1971-1986, Gwinnett operated a partial system serving some Militia Districts.

Table 5 provides additional insight into the unique characteristics of each jurisdiction.

TABLE 5: Unique Characteristics / Implications on Parks and Recreation Services

Unique Characteristics / Implications on Parks and Recreation	
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Located in suburban Washington DC. - County has one of the highest average household incomes in the U.S.; also has a large proportion of well educated adults - results in citizens that are very involved in the park system (both as users and as political activists). - High average income results in a greater ability to fund service provision through user fees (half of the Authority's operating budget is recovered from user fees). - Park Authority is <u>not</u> a department of county government (it is separate from the Department of Community and Recreation Services). The Authority has the ability to hold title to land and issue revenue bonds. - Virginia is a "Dillon Rule state" and is limited in its ability to fund services through alternate taxes such as a sales tax. - Currently moving from a focus on land acquisition to an emphasis on facility development.
Howard County MD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Central location between Baltimore and Washington DC makes Howard County a desirable place to live, resulting in demand for quality services. - Population is aging and is highly affluent. In response, the County is increasing its focus on life-long recreational involvement and active senior programs. - Placing stronger emphasis on self-sustaining programs. - The County is heavily reliant on local schools for gymnasiums and playing fields, as well as a non-profit organization (Columbia Assoc.) for pools, fitness centers, parkland, and other significant recreation facilities.
Lee County FL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Located on the Gulf Coast. - Contains 5 independent cities, some of which provide their own parks and recreation services (Fort Myers, Cape Coral, etc). - Contains a number of beach areas and nature / wilderness preserves. - Has a much older population profile than Gwinnett (half of its population is 45 and over, while only one-quarter of Gwinnett's is this age). - Funding for maintenance of many regional parks provided through the Tourist Development Council. - County has a land acquisition program (Conservation 20/20) that is funded through property taxes (0.5 mil) to protect environmentally critical and sensitive lands; result has been acquisition of over 10,000 acres in five years. - Natural amenities mean that County is able to meet a wide range of needs through ability to offer different opportunities. - Demographic composition means that County has to serve many different groups. - County tries to develop programs that are unique to the community, while not duplicating services. - County's user fees are very low in comparison to other jurisdictions in the area. - Sports tourism is a significant industry in the area; County actively seeks tournaments/events. County is home to 3 professional baseball stadiums.

	Unique Characteristics / Implications on Parks and Recreation
Austin TX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Austin has experienced considerable growth within the past few years. - The Highland Lakes provide recreational opportunities and for both residents and tourists. The city has an extensive trail system around the lakes. Nearby Texas Hill Country provides lush, green, year-round outdoor recreational opportunities. - The city has a youthful population, resulting in active lifestyles and extensive interest in outdoor recreational activities. - Austin is the State capital and receives additional support for local beautification and trails systems. - The University of Texas at Austin contributes to a youthful population. Due to Austin's environment, many graduates remain in the Austin area.
Mesa AZ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The City does not impose property taxes and is, therefore, heavily reliant upon its sales tax and utilities profits. In the absence of a stable and reliable revenue source, there is a need for increased impact fees to more accurately reflect the true costs of parkland acquisition. - Due to a weakening economy, sales tax revenue has declined dramatically and the City has had to defer major construction projects indefinitely. - The City has a widely diverse demographic profile (20% Hispanic/Latino). - Mesa also has a significant winter visitor population that uses facilities. - Mesa's politicians are majority conservative. Voters have turned down two bond questions to support Parks and Recreation. - In order to expand the inventory of field facilities, the City undertakes capital improvements and pays utilities for lighting fields on school property.
Gwinnett County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The county is large and is divided by several large freeways/roadways with no grid road pattern. Due to significant drive times and roads/rivers that divide the county, many facilities/services must be repeated and localized. - The western sector of the county has a dense population and it is a challenge to acquire land for recreation facilities. - Gwinnett County is now the most diverse county in the state in terms of ethnicity and household composition, which present challenges in the provision of recreation facilities. Though families with children are less than half of all households, the percentage of traditional families and the average family size is greater than most other counties in Georgia. - Gwinnett County has more incorporated cities than any other county in Georgia, yet there is no dominant city. Most of the land area and population is in unincorporated Gwinnett. As such, the County's provision of services has come to mimic that of a typical large city. - The County's capital program is dependent on citizen support for the passage of a Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST). The funding allocation for the parks and recreation portion of the program is a minimum of \$192 million for the period of 2001-2004. Parks and Recreation received \$60 million in the 1997-2000 SPLOST program. Frequent voter approval of SPLOST programs places a special burden on the County to match its offerings to the needs and desires of the voting population. - The County's operations expenses are funded by a dedicated countywide property tax. Gwinnett's dependency on this Recreation Tax causes concern over creating more park resources than they can afford to operate.

Note: Information from surveys supplemented by additional research.

TRENDS

Many of the recreation and leisure trends being experienced in Gwinnett are similar to those that are influencing the decisions of recreation departments in other jurisdictions. For example, family aquatics (indoor and outdoor), including features such as splash pads and water slides, are in very high demand in Lee and Fairfax Counties; in fact, all communities identified swimming as being one of the most popular activities! Soccer, and other sports requiring rectangular fields (e.g., lacrosse) continue to grow in popularity in Gwinnett, Fairfax and Mesa, to name a few. Austin believes that participation in adult soccer will increase because youth soccer has grown for the past decade. Other facilities and activities that were mentioned by two or more agencies as being emerging and growing trends include the demand for multi-use trails, skateboard parks, off-leash dog areas, and open space preservation (both Gwinnett and Fairfax are nearing build-out and land must be acquired while it is available and affordable).

Facilities and activities that are generally felt to be in decline include baseball/softball, football, and racquet sports (racquetball, squash and, to a lesser extent, tennis). It should be noted, however, that participation in some of these activities continues to grow or remain stable in some jurisdictions (e.g., baseball/softball in Howard County).

To some degree, the demographic compositions of each community and general strength of the local economies also dictate the degree of participation in various activities. For example, due to the higher than average income of Fairfax County residents, the area has higher than average levels on interest in fitness-related activities (group classes, fitness equipment) and golf. Mesa and Howard County are also very cognizant of their aging population and are tailoring their programming to this age group. Emerging and declining sports and leisure activities are summarized in Table 6.

TABLE 6: Emerging and Declining Sports and Leisure Activities

	Activities on the Rise	Activities in Decline
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - specialty fitness/mind body fitness (e.g., yoga, tai chi, pilates) - core strength training - aquatics classes - summer camps - outdoor adventure programs - specialty pet programs (dog training, agility, etc.) - golf 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - traditional fitness programs (high / low impact aerobics) - racquetball
Howard County MD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - softball/baseball - lacrosse - soccer - tennis - basketball - swimming - adventure programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - handball - racquetball - squash - horseshoes

	Activities on the Rise	Activities in Decline
Lee County FL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - soccer (youth and adult) - baseball (youth and adult) - basketball (youth) - dance (youth) - instructional classes (youth and adult) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - softball (youth and adult), particularly tournaments - flag football (adult)
Austin TX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - baseball & softball (adult) - golf (adult) - jazzercise (adult) - volleyball (adult) - basketball (youth) - soccer (youth) - gymnastics (youth) - skate parks (youth) - girl's fast pitch softball (youth) - swimming (youth & adult) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - none
Mesa AZ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - field sports - dog parks - aquatic programs and facilities - adult/senior fitness programs and facilities - picnicking - hiking - biking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - disc golf - tennis - racquetball - horseshoes
Gwinnett County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - baseball/softball (in some areas of the county) - football (in some areas of the county) - soccer - trail uses - picnicking - fishing - basketball 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - baseball/softball (in some areas of the county) - football (in some areas of the county)

PARKLAND & TRAILS

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 parkland than active parkland; the opposite is true for the two cities. Table 7 summarizes the supply of parkland.

TABLE 7: Parks Owned, Leased and/or Operated by each Jurisdiction

	# of Parks	Total Acreage	Acres per 1,000 pop. (Total)	% Active	Acres per 1,000 pop. (Active)	% Passive	Acres per 1,000 pop. (Passive)
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	387	22,543	23.2	39%	9.1	61%	14.2
Howard County MD	59	8,100	32.7	26%	8.5	74%	24.2
Lee County FL ¹	70	13,927	31.6	21%	6.6	79%	24.9
Austin TX	207	16,547	25.2	59%	14.9	41%	10.3
Mesa AZ ²	63	2,994	7.5	82%	6.1	18%	1.3
AVERAGE	157	12,822	23.6	41%	9.7	59%	13.9
Gwinnett County ³	47	7,361	12.5	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".

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 8 and 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 than 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 8: Non-jurisdictional Parkland, not including Schools (Acres)

	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 9: Total Parkland (Acres)

	Jurisdiction (Table 8)	Other Agencies (Table 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	12,813.8	10,684.8	23,495.2	43.3	9.8%
Gwinnett County	7,361	2,261	9,622	16.1	3.5%

It is interesting to note that each community uses a slightly different park classification system (see Table 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 10: Summary - Park Classification Systems

Park Classification	Fairfax	Howard	Lee	Austin	Mesa	Gwinnett
Neighborhood Park	5 acres or more 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

Park Classification	Fairfax	Howard	Lee	Austin	Mesa	Gwinnett
Other (specify)	urban park (<5 acres, 5 min. walk)	--	boat ramps	greenbelts	retention basis	community park - passive (20+ acres)

Trail provision standards range widely from one community to the next. With 46 miles of trails, Gwinnett County ranks fourth behind Austin, Howard, and Lee, but ahead of Mesa (see Table 11). Most of Gwinnett's trails are paved off-street greenways, whereas unpaved nature trails are the most abundant type in other jurisdictions. Provision standards for trails, however, are difficult to compare because trails are often a byproduct of natural features and opportunity, which is partly why Austin has over 100 miles of trails (many of which surround its urban rivers and lakes).

TABLE 11: Trails Owned and/or Operated by each Jurisdiction (Miles & Percentage of Total)

	Trails, Greenways & Bikeways (paved, off-street)	Nature Trails (unpaved)	Mountain Bike / Non-Motorized Trails (unpaved)	Designated Equestrian Trails	Other Trails	Total	Miles per 1,000 pop.
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth. ¹	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Howard County MD ²	25 35%	33.5 47%	n/a ³ n/a ³	13 18%	0 0%	71.5 100%	0.29 --
Lee County FL	23 33%	29 41%	6 9%	9 13%	3 4%	70 100%	0.16 --
Austin TX	44 39%	56 50%	n/a ³ n/a ³	3 3%	9 8%	112 100%	0.17 --
Mesa AZ	2 100%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 100%	0.01 --
AVERAGE	23 37%	30 48%	2 3%	6 10%	3 5%	63 100%	0.14 --
Gwinnett County	17.25 38%	8.75 19%	12 26%	8 17%	0 0%	46 100%	0.08 --

¹ Fairfax trail figures were not available.

² If the 90 miles of bikeways provided by the Columbia Association (Howard County) are included, the County's miles per 1,000 population would be 0.65.

³ Mountain bike trail mileage has been combined with nature trails.

The benchmarking communities were asked to describe their land acquisition priorities for the next five to ten years. The responses were as varied as the communities themselves:

- Howard County expects to continue to identify sensitive areas for protection and to acquire community and regional park sites to satisfy future demand and state-mandated acreage goals.

- Lee County will seek to preserve green space through the Conservation 20/20 program; the County will also seek parkland to enhance the provided core level of service (community and regional parkland).
- The City of Austin plans to focus on linear parkland that connects significant park nodes to stream and river corridors. These areas will have a full range of components including active & passive parks, trails and nature preserves.
- The City of Mesa will look to acquire 725 acres of parkland (mostly Metro and Community parkland).
- The Fairfax County Park Authority did not provide specific acquisition objectives, but did indicate that they use the following criteria to guide parkland acquisition:
 - availability;
 - contiguity of existing parkland or stream valley area;
 - demonstrated needs for parkland in service area;
 - supports priorities identified in green infrastructure mapping;
 - park use is supported in the County Comprehensive Plan;
 - park development is supported by demonstrated community response;
 - existing zoning and development conditions permit desired use;
 - site conditions support proposed development;
 - development costs are reasonable;
 - in less densely developed areas, parcels or assemblages are larger than 10 acres; and
 - in more densely developed areas, parcels or assemblages that support development of urban type parks.

INDOOR FACILITIES

The analysis of recreation facilities uses the term "actual standard of supply". This standard is expressed as the number of a particular facility per capita. These standards are also often referred to as provision or level of service standards.

Tables 12 and 13 indicate the number of major and minor community/recreation centers in each jurisdiction. Major recreation/community centers are those facilities that are staffed full-time and include multiple components, such as a gymnasium, indoor aquatic facility, fitness rooms, meeting rooms, etc. Minor recreation/community centers are generally smaller than major centers, have fewer features, and are not staffed on a full-time basis. Gwinnett refers to minor centers as "activity buildings".

The average standard of supply of major centers is 1:90,381, which is higher than Gwinnett's current standard of 1:196,149 (soon to change to 1:147,112). The average standard, however, is skewed by the abundance of major centers in the City of Austin (17); no other community has more than 9. Gwinnett has fewer major community centers per capita than Austin, Fairfax County, and Howard County (if the Columbia Association's 3 centers are counted).

TABLE 12: Provision & Descriptions of Major Community/Recreation Centers

	#	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	9	1 per 107,750 population <u>or</u> 0.5 square feet/person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 centers were built in 1987 - currently building a ninth center - average size is 58,000ft² - each has an indoor pool and fitness center (except for one) - recommended standard is 1.1 sq.ft./ capita
Howard County MD	1	1 per 247,842 population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - contains a pool, fitness center, classrooms, after school care area - if the Columbia Assoc.'s 3 major centers are included, the standard would be 1 per 61,961
Lee County FL	2	1 per 220,444 population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - multi-purpose facilities over 5,000ft² - last one built in 1985 - recommended standard (all community centers) is 0.25 sq.ft./ capita
Austin TX	17	1 per 38,621 population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - last one built in 1996 (18,000 sq.ft.) - 2 mile recommended service area
Mesa AZ	1	1 per 396,375 population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - center is 64,000 sq.ft. & built in 1999 - replacement cost is \$7.2 million (est.) - construction of an additional major center has been deferred indefinitely - recommended standard (all community centers) is 1 sq.ft./capita
AVERAGE	6	1 per 90,381 population	
Gwinnett County	3	1 per 196,149 population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pinckneyville Community Center (20,000ft²), Bogan & Rhodes Jordan - new CC planned for George Pierce in 2004/05 (for a total supply of 4)

The provision of minor community centers is fairly consistent amongst the benchmarking communities, with an average of 1:108,457. If the minor centers operated by the Fairfax County Community and Recreation Services Department are counted, this average lowers to 1:84,732. Gwinnett's current standard is 1:147,112, however proposed projects will soon change this to 1:98,075, keeping it in line with the other communities.

TABLE 13: Provision & Descriptions of Minor Community/Recreation Centers

	#	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	0	n/a	- the Fairfax County Community and Recreation Services Dept. provides 7 minor community centers
Howard County MD	4	1 per 61,961 population	- most are very small and contain one or more meeting rooms and studios
Lee County FL	12	1 per 36,741 population	- less than 5,000ft ² - last one built in 2002
Austin TX	5	1 per 131,312 population	- last one built in 1996 (12,900 sq.ft.) - 2 mile recommended service area
Mesa AZ	4	1 per 99,094 population or 0.3 sq.ft. per capita ¹	- range from 6,000 to 18,500 sq.ft. - latest one built in 1999 contains gymnasium and meeting rooms; built in partnership with local schools; replacement cost is \$2.5million (est.)
AVERAGE	5	1 per 108,457 population	
Gwinnett County	4	1 per 147,112 population	- have activity buildings at George Pierce, Jones Bridge, Singleton Rd., & Mtn. Park - new activity buildings to be built at Shorty Howell (7,951 sq.ft.), Mtn. Park Aquatic & Dacula; the activity bldg. Activity Bldg. at George Pierce will be replaced by new community center (for a total supply of 6) - Health & Human Services Dept. also operates 1 minor community center

¹ Includes square footage of major community center.

When minor and major community/recreation centers are combined, the actual standard of supply (including other public facilities owned by local agencies) is approximately 1:30,000 for Austin, Lee County, and Howard County, 1:60,000 for Fairfax County, and 1:80,000 for Mesa. Gwinnett's current standard of 1:84,000 will soon change to 1:59,000, which will bring it in line with Fairfax. For Gwinnett to employ a standard similar to Austin, Lee and Howard, it would need to double its supply to approximately 20 minor/major centers (2000 population); the County currently has 10 existing or planned centers.

Each benchmarking community provides at least one senior recreation center, but none offer more than three (see Table 14). Although most of these facilities are located in their own building (i.e., not shared with other age groups or activities), the most recent trend appears to be the incorporation of dedicated seniors' space into multi-purpose community centers.

TABLE 14: Provision & Descriptions of Senior Recreation Centers

	#	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	1	1 per 969,749 population	- combined with recreation center - Fairfax County's Community and Recreation Services Dept. provides 13 senior recreation centers (12 are stand-alone facilities)
Howard County MD	1	1 per 247,842 population	- combined with recreation center - County's Community Services Dept. owns and operates another center (for a total of 2 in the County)
Lee County FL	2	1 per 220,444 population	- multi-purpose, stand-alone facilities under 5,000ft ²
Austin TX	3	1 per 218,854 population	- stand-alone facilities - 2-3 mile recommended service area
Mesa AZ	2	1 per 198,188 population	- senior centers are owned by City, but operated by a non-profit organization - one of the senior centers is located within the major recreation center
AVERAGE	1.8	1 per 301,268 population	
Gwinnett County	1	1 per 588,448 population	- Gwinnett Sr. Center at Bethesda Park (16,500 sq.ft.); stand alone - Health & Human Services Dept. also operates 3 senior centers

Only one of the jurisdictions provides a dedicated teen/youth center (Austin), although other organizations (e.g., Columbia Association in Howard County, and the Community and Recreation Services Department in Fairfax County) provide teen centers for public use (see Table 15). Gwinnett currently does not have any dedicated youth centers.

TABLE 15: Provision & Descriptions of Teen/Youth Centers

	#	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	0	n/a	- Fairfax County's Community and Recreation Services Dept. provides 9 teen centers (most are within schools or recreation centers)
Howard County MD	0	n/a	- the Columbia Assoc. provided 1 teen center
Lee County FL	0	n/a	n/a
Austin TX	1	1 per 656,562 population	- built in 1997; 20,000 sq.ft.
Mesa AZ	0	n/a	n/a
AVERAGE	0.2	1 per 2.7 million pop'l	
Gwinnett County	0	n/a	n/a

Although four of the five benchmarking communities have one or two arts and cultural centers, half of these facilities are operated by other agencies (e.g., other governmental department, non-profit organizations, etc.). Gwinnett does not have any publicly operated stand alone arts and cultural centers, but does offer arts space at the Pinckneyville Community Center and also has the privately operated Civic and Cultural Center (see Table 16).

TABLE 16: Provision & Descriptions of Arts and Cultural Centers

	#	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	0	n/a	n/a
Howard County MD	0	n/a	- 2 arts centers are operated by non-profit organizations and 1 by the Columbia Assoc.
Lee County FL	1	1 per 440,888 population	- located beside a minor community center - built in 1995 for \$120,300
Austin TX	1	1 per 656,562 population	- contains a theater, art gallery and arts school
Mesa AZ	0	n/a	- Mesa has one arts center, but it is operated by the Arts and Cultural Division
AVERAGE	0.4	1 per 1.35 million pop'l	
Gwinnett County	0	n/a	- dedicated arts space is located in Pinckneyville Community Center - privately operated performing arts center at the Gwinnett Civic & Cultural Center

TABLE 17: Provision & Descriptions of Indoor Family Aquatic Centers & Competition Pools

	#	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	8	1 per 121,219 population	- 3 50-meter pools, 5 25-meter pools - all are within recreation centers and have leisure elements (e.g., zero depth entry, beach area, slides, etc.) - building a ninth pool in 2004
Howard County MD	0	n/a	- Columbia Assoc. provides 3 indoor competition pools and one family aquatic center
Lee County FL	0	n/a	- County has 1 outdoor competition pool and 4 outdoor community pools that are open year-round
Austin TX	0	n/a	
Mesa AZ	0	n/a	- construction of an indoor aquatic center has been deferred indefinitely (cannot afford)
AVERAGE	1.6	1 per 338,927 population	
Gwinnett County	3	1 per 196,149 population	- Bogan Park has leisure & lap pools that serve as both a family aquatic center and a competitive venue - other competitive pool is Collins Hill - family aquatic center planned for Bethesda Park - competitive pool planned for Bethesda Park & under construction at Mtn Park Aquatic

Table 17 examines the provision of indoor aquatic facilities; this category includes both competition pools (lane/lap pool) and family aquatics centers (leisure pool with interactive play features). Lee County, Austin and Mesa do not have any indoor pools due primarily to their warm climate and the ability to use outdoor pools year-round. Mesa does have plans to build an indoor facility, however, the City could not afford to operate it given its current financial crisis. Fairfax and Howard Counties offer the best comparison for Gwinnett - Fairfax County has 8 indoor aquatic facilities (1:121,219) and is building a ninth, each containing lane and leisure pool elements; Howard County does not have any indoor pools, but the Columbia Association provides 4 facilities to its 100,000 residents (1:25,000). Gwinnett, on the other hand, currently has 3 indoor aquatic facilities (1 at Collins Hill and 2 at Bogan Park) and 3 more are planned or under construction, bring the per capita standard to 1:98,075; these 6 facilities will be located at 4 sites.

Provision of gymnasiums (Table 18) varies widely amongst the benchmarking communities, from zero in Howard County (they rely on school gyms) to 10 in Austin. The average standard for gymnasiums is 1:142,706 and all are located with recreation centers. Gwinnett's current standard of one gym per 196,149 will soon change to 147,112 with the construction of a gym at Bogan Park, which will bring it more in line with the average standard of supply in the other jurisdictions.

TABLE 18: Provision & Descriptions of Gymnasiums

	#	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	2	1 per 484,878 population	- all are within recreation centers
Howard County MD	0	n/a	- use school gymnasiums
Lee County FL	2	1 per 220,444 population	- located in major community center
Austin TX	10	1 per 65,656 population	- located in major recreation centers - 2 mile recommended service area
Mesa AZ	5	1 per 79,275 population	- one gym in each recreation center
AVERAGE	3.8	1 per 142,706 population	
Gwinnett County	3	1 per 196,149 population	- single gyms at Best Friend, Lenora and Best Friend Parks - one under construction at Bogan Park

OUTDOOR FACILITIES

Not surprisingly, outdoor pools are significantly more prevalent in the warmer climates of Lee County (10), Mesa (12) and Austin (34), none of which have any indoor aquatic facilities (see Table 19). The Columbia Association in Howard County supplies its residents with a significant number of outdoor pools (23), resulting in a standard of 1:4,348 for this unique community. The overall average standard of supply of outdoor pools is 1:46,749 (not including the Columbia Association pools), which is more than twice that of Gwinnett's level of service (1:98,075). Two jurisdictions (Lee County and Mesa) have agreements with local schools for the construction and/or use of pools on school property. It would also appear that many of the benchmarking communities, Gwinnett included, are beginning to develop more pools with interactive play features (e.g., beach entry, slides, lazy rivers, SCS features, etc.).

TABLE 19: Provision & Descriptions of Outdoor Family Aquatic Centers & Competition Pools

	#	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	1	1 per 969,749 population	- consists of slides, sprays, lazy river
Howard County MD	1	1 per 247,842 population	- "Z-shaped" with diving area and zero depth entry (25 meter) - if the Columbia Assoc.'s 23 outdoor pools (5 with beach entry) are included, the standard would be 1 per 10,327 population
Lee County FL	10	1 per 44,089 population	- have 1 competition pool built in 2003 for a cost of \$4.7 million; located on university grounds; consists of a 50 meter tank and a 25 yard tank - 4 pools are on County land and are open year-round, while 5 pools are on school land and are open during the summer only
Austin TX	34	1 per 19,311 population	- most are traditional lane pools - also have 12 wading pools and two lake/spring fed swimming areas - 1-2 mile recommended service area
Mesa AZ	12	1 per 33,031 population	- 3 of the pools have water play features, zero depth entry, slides, etc - 10 pools host competitions - most are built by City on school sites and are jointly programmed - recommended standard is one pool per 30,000-40,000 population
AVERAGE	11.6	1 per 46,749 population	
Gwinnett County	6	1 per 98,075 population	- 3 family aquatic centers (Collins Hill, Rhodes Jordan & Best Friend Parks) and 3 lane pools (Mtn. Park Park, Dacula, and Best Friend Parks) - outdoor aquatic centers planned for Mtn. Park Aquatic and Lenora Park - Mtn. Park Park and Best Friend pools will be demolished; Mt. Park Park pool will be replaced with outdoor aquatic center

Lee County and Austin have both recently developed outdoor splash pads and Mesa and Gwinnett have plans to install such a facility (see Table 20). Splash pads, which provide unstructured play and aquatic opportunities for children, are clearly an emerging facility trend.

TABLE 20: Provision & Descriptions of Outdoor Splash Pads

	#	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	0	n/a	n/a
Howard County MD	0	n/a	n/a
Lee County FL	1	1 per 440,888 population	- built in 2000
Austin TX	1	1 per 656,562 population	- built in 2002 - 1 mile recommended service area
Mesa AZ	0	n/a	- have one in the planning stages (funding not secured)
AVERAGE	0.4	1 per 1.35 million pop'l	
Gwinnett County	0	n/a	- one is planned for Graves Road Park

With the exception of Mesa, the provision of tennis courts ranges from 1:3,687 to 1:8,645 (see Table 21). Gwinnett's current level of service (1:17,307) is similar to that of Mesa's and is more than twice that of the other four communities. If the approximately 130 courts provided by the private sector and incorporated cities are counted, Gwinnett's standard would change to 1:3,588.

TABLE 21: Provision & Descriptions of Outdoor Tennis Courts

	#	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	263	1 per 3,687 population	
Howard County MD	45	1 per 5,508 population	- if the Columbia Assoc.'s 29 outdoor and 4 indoor courts are included, the standard would be 1 per 3,177 pop.
Lee County FL	51	1 per 8,645 population	- joint venture with Tennis Assoc.
Austin TX	102	1 per 6,437 population	- 1-2 mile recommended service area
Mesa AZ	22	1 per 18,017 population	- 115 school courts available (1 per 2,893 when school courts included) - recommended standard is 1 court to 2,500-3,5000 population
AVERAGE	97	1 per 5,614 population	
Gwinnett County	34	1 per 17,307 population	- Best Friend (16), Collins Hill (2), Lucky Shoals (2), Mtn. Park (6), Rhodes Jordan (8)

Gwinnett's supply of outdoor basketball courts (1:73,556) is significantly lower than the benchmarking communities (1:11,321 average), indicating a considerable shortage (see Table 22). If the 12 courts provided by the private sector and incorporated cities are counted, then benchmarking average would still be two-and-a-half times greater than Gwinnett's actual standard.

TABLE 22: Provision & Descriptions of Outdoor Basketball Courts

	#	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	34	1 per 28,522 population	- most are full courts
Howard County MD	35	1 per 7,081 population	- most are full courts
Lee County FL	27	1 per 16,329 population	- most are full courts with lights
Austin TX	89	1 per 7,377 population	- 78 full courts and 22 half courts - 1-2 mile recommended service area
Mesa AZ	54.5	1 per 7,273 population	- most are full courts with lights - schools provide 334 additional courts
AVERAGE	48	1 per 11,321 population	
Gwinnett County	8	1 per 73,556 population	- at Best Friend (2), Bogan (2), Lucky Shoals (2) and Collins Hill (2) - proposed for George Pierce (1) and Five Forks (2 half courts)

Notes: Half basketball courts (i.e., one net) are equivalent to 0.5 full courts.

Tables 23 and 24 examine the provision of youth and adult baseball and softball diamonds. The average standard for youth diamonds is 1:12,381 compared to Gwinnett's supply of 1:7,846. Gwinnett has the greatest per capita supply of youth ball diamonds and also has the highest ratio of lighted fields.

TABLE 23: Provision & Descriptions of Youth Baseball/ Softball Diamonds

	#	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	108	1 per 8,979 population	- 22 diamonds have lights - recommended standards are 1 youth baseball diamond per 7,200 persons and 1 youth softball diamond per 8,800 persons
Howard County MD	4	1 per 40,320 population	- the County does not classify diamonds as "youth" or "adult" - rely largely on school diamonds for youth play
Lee County FL	38	1 per 11,602 population	- mainly 60' base paths - 4 diamond complex built in 2003 - most have lights
Austin TX	39	1 per 16,835 population	- 31 are lighted - 3-5 mile recommended service area - some of City's 79 neighborhood-level multi-purpose fields may be used for ball
Mesa AZ	30	1 per 13,213 population (1 per 4,775 population when school diamonds are included)	- 28 diamonds have lights - 53 diamonds are available at schools - recommended supply is 1 field per 5,000 persons
AVERAGE	44	1 per 12,381 population	
Gwinnett County	75	1 per 7,846 population	- at Bethesda (7), Bogan (7), Collins Hill (7), Dacula (7), George Pierce (7), Lenora (6), Lillian Webb (1), Lucky Shoals (5), Mtn. Park (7), Pinckneyville (7), Rhodes Jordan (7) and Shorty Howell (7) - all but 1 diamonds are lighted - 8 fields proposed for Bay Creek Park

Conversely, Gwinnett has the lowest ratio of adult ball diamond per capita (1:73,556 compared to an average of 16,946). This paradox between youth diamonds (apparent oversupply) and adult diamonds (apparent undersupply) in Gwinnett may be a result of how the other benchmarking communities classify their fields. An examination of all diamonds (youth and adult) reveals that Gwinnett has an overall supply of 1 diamond per 7,090 residents, which ranks the County in the middle of the benchmarking range (1:4,426 in Howard County to 1:11,128 in Austin).

TABLE 24: Provision & Descriptions of Adult Baseball/Softball Diamonds

	#	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	42	1 per 23,089 population	- 26 diamonds have lights - recommended standards are 1 adult baseball diamond per 24,000 persons and 1 adult softball diamond per 22,000 persons
Howard County MD	52	1 per 4,776 population	- the County does not classify diamonds as "youth" or "adult" - 9 of these diamonds are lighted
Lee County FL	34	1 per 12,967 population	- 90' base paths - 30 diamonds have lights
Austin TX	20	1 per 32,828 population	- all diamonds have lights - some of City's 79 neighborhood-level multi-purpose fields may be used for ball
Mesa AZ	12	1 per 33,031 population (1 per 7,623 population if school diamonds included)	- all diamonds have lights - 40 diamonds are available at schools - recommended supply is 1 field per 7,500 - 10,000 persons
AVERAGE	32	1 per 16,946 population	
Gwinnett County	8	1 per 73,556 population	- at Best Friend (2), Bethesda (3), George Pierce (3)

Gwinnett's supply of soccer fields ranks behind that of every community except for Austin (Austin's supply, however, would be dramatically increased if neighborhood fields are counted). The average level of service is 1:12,381, whereas Gwinnett's supply is 1:22,632 (see Table 25). Fairfax and Howard County lead the way with ratios of 1:8,149 and 1:8,546 respectively. If the 28 fields provided by the private sector and incorporated cities are counted, Gwinnett's standard would change to 1:10,897, bringing it more in line with the benchmarking average.

TABLE 25: Provision & Descriptions of Soccer Fields

	#	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	119	1 per 8,149 population	- 22 of the fields are lighted - many are also used for football
Howard County MD	29	1 per 8,546 population	- 6 fields are lighted
Lee County FL	26	1 per 16,957 population	- most are full-size, have lights and can be used for football
Austin TX	23	1 per 28,546 population	- 2 fields are lighted - some of City's 79 neighborhood-level multi-purpose fields may be used for soccer
Mesa AZ	22	1 per 18,017 population (1 per 14,156 population when school fields are included)	- all fields are 360ft. x 225ft. - 14 fields have lights - 6 more fields are allocated at schools - recommended supply is 1 field per 7,500 - 15,000 persons
AVERAGE	44	1 per 12,381 population	
Gwinnett County	26	1 per 22,632 population	- at Bethesda (4), George Pierce (5), Harmony Grove (3), Jones Bridge (3), Pinckneyville (5), Rabbit Hill (6)

The average level of service for soccer fields is 1:33,066, however, this may be somewhat inflated as all communities classify football and soccer fields as "multi-purpose fields", even though not every field would be used for both purposes. In fact, Gwinnett is the only jurisdiction that does not use the "multi-purpose field" approach, instead deciding to offer dedicated football fields and dedicated soccer fields. Gwinnett's average of 1 field per 58,845 population ranks considerably lower than the average (which is skewed by the abundance of fields in Howard County), but is generally consistent with the provision levels in Austin and Mesa (see Table 26).

TABLE 26: Provision & Descriptions of Football Fields

	#	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	22	1 per 44,080 population	- use soccer fields (rectangular fields) - only lighted fields have been counted (there are 97 unlighted fields that can accommodate football)
Howard County MD	29	1 per 8,546 population	- use soccer fields - 6 fields are lighted
Lee County FL	13	1 per 33,914 population	- 2 field complex built in 2002 for a cost of \$504,000 - most are lighted and used for soccer
Austin TX	12	1 per 54,714 population	- all fields are multi-purpose
Mesa AZ	6	1 per 66,063 population	- use school multi-purpose fields (which are also used for soccer)
AVERAGE	16	1 per 33,066 population	
Gwinnett County	10	1 per 58,845 population	- 3 are free-standing, 7 are overlays - 4 new free-standing fields proposed, as is 1 overlay; 2 overlays will be eliminated

Table 27 indicates that Gwinnett's level of service for playground locations is 1:22,632, which is considerably higher than the average of 1:6,440. Gwinnett County, however, does not provide neighborhood-level parks - which are common locations for play equipment - while each of the other benchmarking agencies do. If the 14 playground provided by Gwinnett's incorporated cities and towns are included, the County's actual standard changes to 1:14,711, which is still higher than the other communities (with the exception of Lee County).

TABLE 27: Provision & Descriptions of Playgrounds with Children's Play Equipment

	#	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	150	1 per 6,465 population	
Howard County MD	37	1 per 6,698 population	- if the Columbia Assoc.'s 165 tot lots are included, the standard would be 1 per 1,227 population
Lee County FL	28	1 per 15,746 population	- last one installed in 2000 for \$43,000
Austin TX	158	1 per 4,155 population	- 1-2 mile recommended service area
Mesa AZ	48	1 per 8,258 population	- 55 schools also provide playgrounds
AVERAGE	84	1 per 6,440 population	
Gwinnett County	26	1 per 22,632 population	- some parks contain more than one playground area

Outdoor sand volleyball courts are provided in varying degrees by each community - from a ratio of one court to approximately 13,000 population in Austin and Howard County to a ratio of 1:323,250 in Fairfax County. Despite ranking fourth out of the six communities, Gwinnett's supply of 1:73,556 is substantially lower than the average of 1:28,547.

TABLE 28: Provision & Descriptions of Outdoor Sand Volleyball Courts

	#	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	3	1 per 323,250 population	
Howard County MD	18	1 per 13,769 population	
Lee County FL	3	1 per 146,963 population	
Austin TX	51	1 per 12,874 population	- 37 sand courts and 14 grass courts
Mesa AZ	20	1 per 19,819 population	- all courts have lights; schools provide 5 additional courts
AVERAGE	19	1 per 28,541 population	
Gwinnett County	8	1 per 73,556 population	- at Bogan (5), Jones Bridge (1), Dacula (1), and Collins Hill (1)

Gwinnett and Lee Counties are the only two jurisdictions that do not operate public golf courses (see Table 29). Fairfax, Austin and Mesa each noted the importance of the golf facilities as they all operate at a profit and help to offset losses in other areas. In Gwinnett, the private sector is the primary provider of golf courses, with a level of service of 1 golf hole per approximately 1,720 residents; this ratio is consistent with Mesa's recommended standard of 1 hole per 1,200 to 2,000 persons (all courses).

TABLE 29: Provision & Descriptions of Municipal Golf Courses

	# of holes	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	135	1 per 7,183 population	- total of 8 courses, 4 driving ranges and 5 mini-golf courses - one course currently under construction (counted in standard)
Howard County MD	18	1 per 13,769 population	- one municipal golf course; Columbia Assoc. provides 2 courses
Lee County FL	0	n/a	
Austin TX	99	1 per 6,632 population	- 6 courses and one pitch and putt
Mesa AZ	27	1 per 14,680 population	- recommended standard is 1 hole per 1,200 to 2,000 persons (including private, semi-private, and public courses)
AVERAGE	56	1 per 9,718 population	
Gwinnett County	0	n/a	- the County leases Collins Hill Golf Club to a private operator

Off-leash dog areas are an emerging trend in facility provision and at least one dog park is provided by each of the benchmarking communities (see Table 30). Austin offers the most off-leash areas (12), establishing a 1 to 2 mile service area for each. Gwinnett does not currently have any dog parks, however, 4 are or will soon be under design or construction, which will bring Gwinnett in line with the average standard established by the other communities.

TABLE 30: Provision & Descriptions of Off-Leash Dog Parks/Areas

	#	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	4	1 per 242,437 population	- 1 acre or less in size
Howard County MD	1	1 per 247,842 population	- 2.5 acres; designated in 2002
Lee County FL	2	1 per 220,444 population	- last one designated in 2001
Austin TX	12	1 per 54,714 population	- 1-2 mile recommended service area
Mesa AZ	1	1 per 396,375 population	- designated in 1999 (3 acres)
AVERAGE	4	1 per 135,571 population	
Gwinnett County	0	n/a	- 4 are (or will soon be) under design or construction (Kanhoda, Five Forks, Graves Rd., & Lenora parks)

Skateboarding and freestyle inline skating is growing in popularity and the benchmarking communities are responding to this by providing skate parks - each jurisdiction has one such facility (Lee County has separate facilities for skateboarders and rollerbladers). Gwinnett is in line with this trend by providing a skate park (and having one more under design) - see Table 31.

TABLE 31: Provision & Descriptions of Outdoor Skateboard / Rollerblade Parks

	#	Actual Standard of Supply	Characteristics / Description / Notes
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	1	1 per 969,749 population	- being built this year
Howard County MD	1	1 per 247,8423 population	- portable unit - Columbia Assoc. provides 1 park
Lee County FL	2	1 per 220,444 population	- one skateboard park and one rollerblade park
Austin TX	1	1 per 656,562 population	- temporary conversion of tennis court
Mesa AZ	1	1 per 396,375 population	- built in 2000
AVERAGE	1.2	1 per 451,903 population	
Gwinnett County	1	1 per 588,448 population	- located at Pinckneyville Park - one under design at Five Forks Park

Other facilities of note include:

- amphitheaters (Austin, 6)
- baseball stadium (Mesa, 12,500-seats)
- baseball training facilities (Mesa, 2)
- cheerleading areas (Gwinnett, 1)
- disc golf courses (Austin, 5)
- equestrian center (Howard - Columbia Association)
- horticultural centers (Fairfax & Austin)
- indoor ice arena (Howard - Columbia Association)
- museums (Austin, 4)
- nature centers (5 in Fairfax & 1 in Austin)
- outdoor roller hockey rink (Howard)
- outdoor wall climbing apparatus (Lee)
- racquetball courts (Lee, 2)
- shuffleboard courts (Lee, 28)

PROGRAMMING

Tables 32 and 33 provide program registration data for children and youth (ages 0-18). The program offerings and participation levels for each community vary widely and are difficult to compare because of their variety and reporting methods. What is clear, however, is that aquatics, camps, and sports are some of the most popular activities - this is consistent for each jurisdiction.

TABLE 32: Number of Children/Youth (ages 0-18) Registered in Programs offered by Jurisdiction

	Fairfax Cty. Park Auth. ¹	Howard County ²	Lee County ³	Austin	Mesa ⁴	AVG.	Gwinnett County
Aquatics	23,029	1,261	1,206	5,296	16,804	9,519	163,549*
Arts / Crafts	3,469	972	286	66,756*	26,993	19,695	814
Camps	32,438	7,198	8,763	5,000	6,563	11,992	5,790
Dance	1,164	1,035	310	500	n/a	602	967
Drop-in Activities	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	79,911*	15,982	815*
Fitness/Wellness/Martial Arts	1,530	558	384	100	4,069	1,328	1,355
History	52,849*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10,570	n/a
Instructional/Special Interest	535	1,302	123	1,000	1,059	804	n/a
Nature / Environment	52,890*	876	62	n/a	n/a	10,766	285
Special Events / Trips	n/a	594	585	500	n/a	336	18,315*
Special Needs	413	n/a	87	n/a	n/a	100	n/a
Sports	5,491	16,929	1,083	4,000	9,127	7,326	2,306
Other	11,216	8,000	292	n/a	10,332*	3,726	3,000*
TOTAL	185,024	38,725	13,181	83,152	154,858	92,746	197,196

¹ Registration data for Fairfax County Park Authority "nature/environment" and "history" programs is not available by age group (figures provided are estimates calculated by Monteith Planning Consultants). "Other" category refers to tots.

² Howard County "other" category refers to child care.

³ Lee County registration data was extrapolated from list provided.

⁴ City of Mesa "dance" classes are combined under "fitness"; City of Mesa "other" category refers to open gym program attendance.

* number of individual visits; may or may not also include program registrants

TABLE 33: Number of Children/Youth (ages 0-18) Registered in Programs offered by Jurisdiction (by rank order of magnitude)

	Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	Howard County	Lee County	Austin	Mesa	AVG. RANK¹	Gwinnett County
Aquatics	4	5	2	2	3	4	1
Arts / Crafts	7	7	8	1	2	1	9
Camps	3	3	1	3	6	2	3
Dance	9	6	6	6	n/a	9	7
Drop-in Activities	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	n/a	8
Fitness / Wellness	8	10	5	8	7	7	6
History	2	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Instructional/Special Interest	10	4	9	5	8	8	n/a
Nature / Environment	1	8	11	n/a	n/a	3	10
Special Events / Trips	n/a	9	4	6	n/a	10	2
Special Needs	11	n/a	10	n/a	n/a	11	n/a
Sports	6	1	3	4	5	5	5
Other	5	2	7	n/a	4	6	4

¹ Average rank calculated from average attendance column in Table 32. Drop-in activities and History programs have not been allocated an average rank due to the low level of response among the communities.

Tables 34 and 35 provide program registration data for adults and seniors (ages 19+). Like children and youth, the program offerings and participation levels for this age group vary widely by community and are difficult to compare. It would appear, however, that some of the most popular activities are fitness/wellness, sports and arts/crafts. Fitness/wellness and sports programs, despite being well attended programs for most of the benchmarking communities (and money-makers in some instances), are not key elements of Gwinnett County's program offerings.

It is also interesting to note that Howard County, Austin and Mesa each have more adult/senior registrants than they do children/youth. Although this is likely due to a mixing of program (multiple visits) and drop-in/event (single visit) data, these communities stand out in stark contrast to Lee County, which targets 91% of its programming to children and youth. 62% of Gwinnett's programming is attended by children and youth, which is considerably greater than the average of 42%.

TABLE 34: Number of Adults/Seniors (age 19+) Registered in Programs offered by Jurisdiction

	Fairfax Cty. Park Auth. ¹	Howard County	Lee County ²	Austin	Mesa ³	AVG.	Gwinnett County
Aquatics	10,576	202	2	255	747	2,356	10,056*
Arts / Crafts	1,840	815	83	149,397*	19,951	34,417	1,331
Camps	64	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	13	n/a
Dance	5,367	1,329	158	500	n/a	1,471	311
Fitness / Wellness	13,407	6,754	548	1,000	179,089*	40,160	881
History	33,572*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	6,714	70
Instructional/Special Interest	401	869	68	1,500	2,305	1,029	815
Nature / Environment	30,882*	1,930	181	50	n/a	6,609	327
Special Events / Trips	n/a	39,103*	67	500	n/a	7,934	91,810
Special Needs	592	n/a	80	n/a	n/a	134	n/a
Sports	2,592	20,000	170	30,000	78,044	26,161	n/a
Other	3,209	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	642	16,965
TOTAL	102,502	71,002	1,357	183,202	280,136	127,640	122,566

¹ Registration data for Fairfax County Park Authority "nature/environment" and "history" programs is not available by age group (figures provided are estimates calculated by Monteith Planning Consultants).

² Lee County registration data was extrapolated from list provided.

³ City of Mesa "dance" classes are combined under "instructional".

* number of individual visits; may or may not also include program registrants

TABLE 35: Number of Adults/Seniors (age 19+) Registered in Programs offered by Jurisdiction (by rank order of magnitude)

	Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	Howard County	Lee County	Austin	Mesa	AVG. RANK*	Gwinnett County
Aquatics	4	8	9	7	5	6	3
Arts / Crafts	8	7	5	1	3	2	4
Camps	11	n/a	10	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Dance	5	5	4	5	n/a	7	8
Fitness / Wellness	3	3	1	4	1	1	5
History	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	9
Instructional/Special Interest	10	6	7	3	4	8	6
Nature / Environment	2	4	2	8	n/a	5	7
Special Events / Trips	n/a	1	8	5	n/a	4	1
Special Needs	9	n/a	6	n/a	n/a	9	n/a
Sports	7	2	3	2	2	3	n/a
Other	6	n/a	10	n/a	n/a	n/a	2

* Average rank calculated from average attendance column in Table 34. Camps, History and Other programs have not been allocated an average rank due to the low level of response among the communities.

SERVICE DELIVERY

The benchmarking survey inquired about the ways in which each community accommodates of special needs citizens in their programs and facilities. Each community offers inclusive programs (open to all residents regardless of mental or physical ability) and some also offer specialized programs for people with disabilities. Some unique approaches that were mentioned include:

- a 24-hour ADA hotline for questions/complaints (Fairfax)
- an accessibility guide detailing accessible park features (Fairfax)
- sponsorship of paralympic clinics and classes (Fairfax & Mesa)
- consulting people with disabilities in the planning and design of new facilities (Fairfax & Gwinnett)
- new and renovated facilities go beyond the legal requirements by incorporating ADA accessibility guidelines (Fairfax)
- physical support and additional staff ("inclusion companions") to support inclusion opportunities in classes (Fairfax & Howard)

Each benchmarking community has formal and/or informal agreements with local schools for the usage, maintenance, operation and/or development of recreation facilities. These approaches illustrate different ways that municipalities can attenuate the demand for indoor and outdoor facilities and to maximize the benefit of available resources. The details of some of these arrangements are described below:

- Fairfax County Park Authority has a collection of interim use agreements that allow the Park Authority to develop and use recreation facilities at 15 former and future school sites.
- Howard County uses school gymnasiums and fields for some of its programs and also facilitates the usage of these facilities by the community through permits.
- Lee County maintains outdoor pools on school property, which are open to the public during the summer. The County also uses school gymnasiums and baseball fields to some degree.
- Austin operates a joint use Community Center / Elementary School (the gymnasium is the primary shared element). The City also develops and maintains 30 playground sites on school property for their summer playground program.
- Mesa uses many school facilities and has installed lights on 45 school fields.
- Gwinnett assists with the funding of community education programs that utilize school facilities. The County also coordinates the scheduling of elementary & middle school gymnasiums and fields for user groups.

With regard to other significant recreation facility and program providers, the private sector takes the lead in providing the following facilities:

- ice hockey (Fairfax, Lee, Mesa, Gwinnett)
- equestrian riding (Fairfax, Howard, Mesa, Gwinnett)
- golf courses (Howard, Lee, Mesa, Gwinnett)
- gymnastics (Fairfax, Gwinnett)
- skate parks (Howard)
- arts/culture facilities (Howard)

Sport and recreation tourism plays an important role in many of the benchmarking communities. Lee County estimates that its local economy receives an annual boost of \$30 million from professional sports and \$40 million from amateur sports. Tourists make use of the County's beaches, preserves, nature trails, regional parks, professional and amateur sporting events, and special events. Lee County also considers itself to be a regional tournament capital for many sports. Sport tourism is also important to Gwinnett County, which has staff to coordinate and promote athletic events; the County does not, however, focus its operations or facility development on sport tourism. Gwinnett County also operates historical sites, museums, leisure pools, sports complexes, a trail system, fishing lakes, large passive open spaces, pavilions, and an art gallery, that cater to and/or attract tourists and out-of-county visitors.

Sport tourism is not a major emphasis in Fairfax County, Mesa or Austin, however, the professional sports industry does have a significant impact on the local economies in the latter two cities. Howard County has a strong relationship with its Tourism Office and sponsors several tournaments; tournament expansion is limited in Howard County due to community demand for these facilities.

STAFFING

Table 36 provides an indication of the primary areas of responsibility for each benchmarking agency. Local parks and recreation departments (or the Park Authority in the case of Fairfax County) perform most of the functions that are listed, although some roles are shared with other governmental departments, school boards or not-for-profit organizations. The functions most likely to be shared with other agencies are those relating to the operation and maintenance of seniors' recreation centers and arts/cultural facilities. It is important to keep these areas of responsibility in mind when examining the financial and budget information for each community as they may have an impact on staffing and revenues/expenditures.

TABLE 36: Responsibilities of Parks and Recreation Departments/Park Authority

✓ - full responsibility ○ - shared responsibility ✗ - no involvement	Fairfax Cty. Park Auth. ¹	Howard County ²	Lee County	Austin	Mesa ³	Total	Gwinnett County
Parks planning	✓	○	✓	✓	✓	4.5 of 5	✓
Facility planning	✓	○	✓	✓	✓	4.5 of 5	✓
Parks operation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 of 5	✓
Parks maintenance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 of 5	✓
Recreation facility operation	✓	○	✓	✓	✓	4.5 of 5	○
Recreation facility maintenance	✓	○	✓	✓	✓	4.5 of 5	○
Seniors' recreation facility operation	✗	○	✓	✓	✗	2.5 of 5	○
Seniors' recreation facility maintenance	✓	○	✓	✓	✗	3.5 of 5	○
Arts/Cultural facility operation	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	2 of 5	○
Arts/Cultural facility maintenance	✗	○	✓	✓	✗	2.5 of 5	○
Historic Site operation	✓	○	✓	✓	✗	3.5 of 5	○
Historic Site maintenance	✓	✓	✓	○	✗	3.5 of 5	○
Programming	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 of 5	○
Community development	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	4 of 5	✓
Special events and marketing	✓	✓	✓	○	○	4 of 5	✓
Customer services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 of 5	✓

¹ In Fairfax County, the Community and Recreation Services Dept. is responsible for operating senior recreation centers.

² In Howard County, the Parks and Recreation Dept. shares many of these responsibilities with the Dept. of Public Works, Dept. of Community Services, Board of Education, and non-profit organizations.

³ In Mesa, the City's Arts and Cultural Division is responsible for arts/cultural facilities and historic sites, while Mesa Senior Services Inc. is primarily responsible for senior's recreation facilities.

Tables 37 to 39 contain information on full-time, part-time and seasonal staffing levels for each agency. Table 40 provides a summary of staffing based on park acreage and population. While an effort was made to ensure that the data was placed in the appropriate categories to allow for comparability between communities, some anomalies remain, especially with regard to programming staff and contracts.

Both Howard County and the City of Austin feel that all areas of their parks and recreation departments are under-staffed. Mesa indicated that it requires more park maintenance and park ranger staff, while Gwinnett County may require additional staff for aquatics, cultural arts, grounds/maintenance, youth athletics, parks management, and a greenspace coordinator.

TABLE 37: Number Full-time and Contract Employees

	Admin	Programming	Operations	Park Maintenance	Facility Maintenance	Other ¹	Total
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	45	30	203	195	58	65	596
Howard County MD	17	30	16	53	7	0	123
Lee County FL	28	41	24	75	33	7	208
Austin TX	23	198	178		20	0	419
Mesa AZ ³²	20	41		69		8	138
AVERAGE	27	--	--	--	--	16	297
Gwinnett County	9	28	10	82	7	9	145

¹ "Other": Fairfax County Park Authority (39 in park planning/development; 26 in program support services); Lee County (7 park rangers); City of Mesa (8 park rangers); Gwinnett County (8 development staff).

² City of Mesa contracts with the private sector for routine park maintenance services.

Note: Some staff allocations could not be separated amongst the functional categories provided.

TABLE 38: Number Permanent/Contracted Part-time Employees

	Admin	Programming	Operations	Park Maintenance	Facility Maintenance	Other ¹	Total
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	0	0	8	0	0	0	8
Howard County MD	0	11	2	3	0	0	16
Lee County FL	0	6	0	5	4	2	17
Austin TX	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mesa AZ ²	4	605		39		3	651
AVERAGE	1	--	--	--	--	1	138
Gwinnett County ³	0	436	0	0	0	0	436

¹ "Other": Lee County (2 park rangers); City of Mesa (3 park rangers)

² City of Mesa contracts with the private sector for routine park maintenance services.

³ Gwinnett County issued 436 programmatic contracts in 2002.

TABLE 39: Number Seasonal Part-time Employees

	Admin	Programming	Operations	Park Maintenance	Facility Maintenance	Other ¹	Total
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	4	1,928		95	27	26	2,080
Howard County MD	1	2	8	30	0	0	41
Lee County FL	0	311	0	6	11	0	328
Austin TX	0	1749	62		0	0	1,811
Mesa AZ ²	0	450		0	0	0	450
AVERAGE	1	--	--	--	8	5	942
Gwinnett County	4	152	1	3	2	2	164

¹ "Other": Fairfax County Park Authority (7 in park planning/development; 19 in program support services); Gwinnett County (8 development staff).

² City of Mesa contracts with the private sector for routine park maintenance services.

Note: Some staff allocations could not be separated amongst the functional categories provided.

An examination of Table 40 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 (see Table 37). 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 40: Staffing Summary

	Full-time Staff			Part-time & Seasonal Staff		
	Total	Staff per 1,000 Population	Acres of Parkland per Staff	Total	Staff 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

FINANCES

Per capita annual capital expenditures (2002 fiscal year) range from \$12.20 in Mesa to \$130.32 in Howard County (most of which was a result of land acquisition) - see Table 41. 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 41: Capital Expenditures (2002 \$, approximate)

	Design and Construction	Land Acquisition	Misc. / Other	Equipment	Debt (Interest)	Total	Per Capita
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	10,627,820	4,210,326	--	--	--	\$14,838,146	\$15.30
Howard County MD ¹	10,080,418	20,050,583	626,309	82,301	1,458,187	\$32,297,798	\$130.32
Lee County FL	21,755,285	n/a	--	--	--	\$21,755,285	\$49.34
Austin TX	34,807,079	6,442,921	--	--	--	\$41,250,000	\$62.83
Mesa AZ ²	2,284,167	2,173,770	--	379,050	--	\$4,836,987	\$12.20
AVERAGE	15,910,953.8	6,575,520	125,262	92,270	291,637	\$22,995,643.20	\$42.41
Gwinnett County	10,282,243	34,466,417	3,009,822	429,662	--	\$48,188,1444	\$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 42 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 42: Operating Expenditures (2002 \$, approximate)

	Personnel	Operating	Capital Outlay	Depreciation	Debt Service	Other	Total	Per Capita
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	36,070,049	19,153,931	14,414,650	--	1,487,876	--	\$71,126,506	\$73.35
Howard County MD	10,274,000	7,313,000	26,000	39,000		1,135,000	\$18,787,000	\$75.80
Lee County FL	7,125,362	6,115,389	423,305	--	--	80,732	\$13,774,788	\$31.24
Austin TX ¹	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	\$39,615,178	\$60.34
Mesa AZ ²	10,840,400	10,134,267	--	--	--	--	\$20,974,667	\$52.46
AVERAGE	16,077,453	10,679,147	3,715,989	9,750	371,969	303,933	\$32,855,628	\$60.59
Gwinnett County	7,929,618	6,893,978	3,132,074	--	2,503,340	897,650	\$21,356,660	\$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. This trend is expected to continue for 3 to 5 years.

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.

Average total expenditures (capital and operating) for the benchmarking jurisdictions are \$103 per capita (see Table 43). Gwinnett's 2002 spending was slightly higher than the average at \$118 per capita, while Mesa spent only \$65 per capita and Howard County doubled the average at \$206 per capita. The average breakdown of expenditures was 59% operating versus 41% capital, although Gwinnett, Howard and Lee Counties each allocated more monies to their capital budgets.

TABLE 43: Capital and Operating Expenditures Compared (approximate)

	Operating + Capital Per Capita	% Operating	% Capital
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	\$88.65	83%	17%
Howard County MD	\$206.12	37%	63%
Lee County FL	\$80.58	39%	61%
Austin TX	\$123.17	49%	51%
Mesa AZ	\$64.66	81%	19%
AVERAGE	\$103.00	59%	41%
Gwinnett County	\$118.18	31%	69%

Revenues were equally varied (see Table 44). Lee County, which has a philosophy to not cover expenses but to provide a core level of service to the community, had by far 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 Park Authority's revenues came from County transfers.

TABLE 44: Revenues (2002 \$, approximate)

	Charges for Services / Programs	Facility/ Field Rental	Special Fund	Contributions from Other Gov. & Bonds	Gifts & Donations	Other	Total	Per Capita
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	26,635,411	2,554,027	--	36,183,933	703,740	650,102	\$66,727,213	\$68.81
Howard County MD	8,355,000	--	2,361,000	341,000	--	--	\$11,057,000	\$44.61
Lee County FL	1,776,000	145,000	--	380,000	30,000	640,000	\$2,941,000	\$6.67
Austin TX	10,966,484	1,248,625	--	--	133,517	25,963	\$12,397,389	\$18.88
Mesa AZ	5,925,920	241,114	--	55,000	7,557	13,000	\$6,242,591	\$15.75
AVERAGE	10,731,763	837,753	472,200	7,391,987	174,963	265,813	\$19,873,039	\$36.65
Gwinnett County	3,369,422	--	17,691,733	853,931	--	495,732	\$22,410,818	\$38.08

Fairfax County's revenues covered 78% of their expenditures compared to an average of 36% for all of the benchmarking communities (see Table 45). 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.

TABLE 45: Expenditures and Revenues Compared (approximate)

	Revenues as a % of Expenditures	Shortfall
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	78%	\$19.2 million
Howard County MD	22%	\$40.0 million
Lee County FL	8%	\$32.6 million
Austin TX	15%	\$68.5 million
Mesa AZ	24%	\$19.6 million
AVERAGE	36%	\$36.0 million
Gwinnett County	32%	\$47.1 million

Table 46 illustrates the funding sources for parks and recreation. Gwinnett's funding is considerably different than the other communities due to its reliance on the SPLOST (68%). Austin and Mesa also both rely on sales taxes, however, this is balanced with a greater reliance on property taxes.

TABLE 46: Funding Sources (2002, approximate)

	Property Taxes/ General Fund	Charges for Services/ Enterprise Funds	Intergovernmental Revenues	Other Taxes	Licenses and Permits	Bonds	Grants/Donations / Proffers	Impact Fees/Funds	Other	Total
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	42%	40%	5%	--	--	12%	1%	--	--	100%
Howard County MD	33%	37%	23%	--	--	7%	--	--	--	100%
Lee County FL	28%	22%	8%	4%	1%	--	--	--	37%	100%
Austin TX	31%	16%	19%	27%		--	--	--	7%	100%
Mesa AZ ¹	41%	4%	4%	30%	--	17%	--	5%	--	100%
AVERAGE	35%	24%	12%	12%	0%	7%	0%	1%	9%	100%
Gwinnett County	6%	4%	68%	19%	--	--	3%	--	1%	100%

¹ Mesa does not impose property taxes; its General Fund is generated from sales taxes, state-shared revenues, utilities profits and development fees and permits.

Funding shortages are prevalent amongst the benchmarking communities, with Mesa, Austin and Howard County indicating that the financial downturn has impacted their ability to fund projects and operations; this crisis is exacerbated in Mesa and Austin due to their reliance on sales taxes. The following approaches are being used to address the various funding issues:

- Howard County attempts to use grants and program revenues in creative ways in order to compensate for funding shortages.
- The City of Austin is critically under-funded in the area of infrastructure maintenance. In response, the City is attempting to develop favorable public/private partnership arrangements.
- Mesa is formalizing a 2004 bond question, but there are concerns that political support for an adequate funding proposal is absent. Because development continues, the opportunities to secure parkland diminish due to escalating land costs and the inability to compete with private sector developers. Mesa needs to secure adequate bond funding to acquire park sites now and in the near future. Mesa also needs a dependable and stable revenue source (i.e. a property tax) to provide the funding for the operations and maintenance of existing and future facilities.
- Fairfax County Park Authority indicates that the maintenance and renovation of existing facilities is an area that is currently under-funded. To remedy this, the Authority is considering the following strategies:
 - developing a life cycle replacement program for all infrastructure and capital facilities;
 - identifying funding requirements for the most immediate infrastructure and capital facility needs prior to development of the 2004 park bond referendum;

- developing a more comprehensive schedule of short and mid-term needs for maintenance, equipment and repairs that match the categories of need with the categories of potential funding;
- working with the County to obtain consistent funding from the County Construction Fund commensurate with maintenance and renovation needs at park facilities; and/or
- updating the agency's Needs Assessment; a key outcome of this plan will be a comprehensive capital improvement program that will identify funding needs for renovation, new construction and land acquisitions.

Table 47 illustrates the percentage of the total tax levy that is allocated to parks, recreation and cultural services. Gwinnett Parks and Recreation receives 7.5% of the County's general fund, which is slightly above the average of the five benchmarking communities.

TABLE 47: Percentage of Total Tax Levy (General Fund) Allocated to Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services

	Percentage
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	4.0%
Howard County MD	1.4%
Lee County FL	8.9%
Austin TX	10.8%
Mesa AZ	7.3%
AVERAGE	6.6%
Gwinnett County	7.5%

An examination of specific facilities and programs reveals that golf courses, fitness programs and some facility rentals are the most likely to cover expenses or even draw a profit (see Table 48). Conversely, aquatics, after-school programs and park-related operations are among the least financially viable services; interestingly, these are also often among the most demanded services and facilities.

TABLE 48: Financial Viability of Services, Programs, and Facilities

	Least Financially Viable	Most Financially Viable
	Service (% Cost Recovery)	Service (% Cost Recovery)
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - nature centers, historic sites, farm & horticultural park (19%) - lake parks (68%) - county employee fitness center (68%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - golf enterprises (123%) - recreation centers (110%) - programs at school and contractor sites (101%)
Howard County MD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - after-school programs (10%) - therapeutic programs (20%) - seniors program (33%) - aquatic programs (50%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - licensed child care (100%) - golf course (100%) - picnic pavilions (100%) - specialized camps (100%)
Lee County FL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - none
Austin TX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - park operations (12%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - softball (108%) - golf (102%) - recreation (100%)
Mesa AZ ¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - aquatic programs - after-school youth and summer recreation programs - programs for the disabled - city parks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - golf (operates at a profit) - tennis - fitness programs - special interest classes
Gwinnett County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - regional programmer (8%) - county wide events (12%) - senior center (29%) - environmental (44%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - facility rentals (105%) - aquatics (86%) - athletics (84%) - historic courthouse (88%) - cultural arts (70%) - area facilitators (68%) - tennis (65%) - area programs (58%)

¹ The City of Mesa's only major community center is currently operating at a 60% cost recovery level. Also, during the recent biennial budget process, the Mesa City Council approved the Parks and Recreation Division's recommendations to increase fees for adult sports in order to achieve a 100% cost recovery. The goal established in the Parks and Recreation Division's Master Plan is to achieve a 30% cost recovery, overall, by 2007.

Each community was asked what facilities or services receive the greatest amount of public support and satisfaction (see Table 49). Among the items that were most frequently mentioned were trails (4), summer camps (4), parks (3), sports/athletics (3), recreation centers (2), inclusion services (2), and picnic shelters (2).

TABLE 49: Areas of Greatest Public Support and Satisfaction

	Areas of Greatest Public Support and Satisfaction	
Fairfax Cty. Park Auth.	<u>High Satisfaction:</u> - horticulture/garden park - nature/history programs and tours - summer camps - historic sites - nature centers - recreation centers - park trails	<u>Political Power:</u> - athletics (specifically fields sports) - stewardship/nature activities <u>High Usage:</u> - community parks - lake parks - park trails - recreation centers
Howard County MD	- sports programs - recreational licensed childcare - inclusion service - adult fitness and general interest classes - youth camp programs	
Lee County FL	- open recreation programs - summer camps - special needs programs - athletics - special events - instructional programs	
Austin TX	- recreation centers - golf - hike & bike trail system	
Mesa AZ	- neighborhood parks - walking and biking paths - picnic facilities and shelters - playgrounds for children	
Gwinnett County	- open spaces (free play) - rentals (Gwinnett Historic Courthouse) - cultural arts - pavilions & reservations - walking, biking & equestrian trails	

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