

Acknowledgements

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<p>Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Commission Advisory Committee</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Susan Bisulca</td> <td>Michael McNally</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Grover Linebarger</td> <td>Timothy Shuford</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Robert Grimes</td> <td>Charlie Hayes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Phyllis Michaux</td> <td>James Rogers</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Susan Sigler</td> <td>Douglas Locasio</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Elaine Seaver</td> <td>Tucker Bland</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mark Seaman</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Susan Bisulca	Michael McNally	Grover Linebarger	Timothy Shuford	Robert Grimes	Charlie Hayes	Phyllis Michaux	James Rogers	Susan Sigler	Douglas Locasio	Elaine Seaver	Tucker Bland	Mark Seaman		<p>Key Contributors Brian Frazier, Planning Director Dana Kaminske, Communications & Marketing Manager Melissa Mooney, Multimedia Coordinator Daniel Ezell, GIS Manager Jonathan Rosales, Budget Analyst Caleb Crow, Business Services Coordinator Kevin Tooley, Disability Advisor Taylor Dellinger, Western Piedmont Council of Governments</p>
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Letter from the Director



The City of Hickory Parks, Recreation and Sports Tourism Department crafts healthy lifestyles through high quality recreation programs, events, parks and facilities. Our vision is to be a leader in the areas of health and wellness by providing diverse, welcoming and innovative activities that strengthen the mind and body while enhancing the quality of life for our community.

In short...we aim to bring you Recreation: Well Crafted!

We are excited to introduce you to the 2023-2033 Comprehensive Parks, Recreation and Sports Tourism Master Plan! This plan will be our roadmap for the next 10 years and is founded on an analysis of where we are and where we need to be with as much public input to inform our efforts as possible. As our citizens made clear, during the compilation of this plan, parks and recreation is essential to the overall health and well-being of the City of Hickory...and we agree!

Using nationally recognized best practices, this comprehensive master plan will help our staff and leadership make data-driven decisions related to citizen desires to maximize the use of our amazing parks, trails, amenities, programs and events while planning for future needs. This plan will allow the City to increase its competitiveness for funding opportunities and accreditation while elevating the newest part of our mission...sports tourism. The addition of sports tourism is just one example of how this plan aligns with the City's strengths, strategic goals and identity. Equitable and inclusive access to recreation as well as an increased emphasis on environmental stewardship are also key to our recreation roadmap.

I would like to thank the citizens of Hickory, our stakeholders, staff, regional friends and City leadership for their important contributions to the compilation of this comprehensive master plan. It was truly a team effort! I'm excited about the next 10 years and what we will do, together, to make this plan a reality.

Mark Seaman

Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Director



Executive Summary

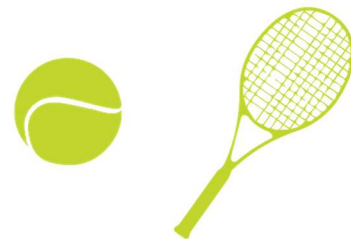
Welcome to the City of Hickory's roadmap for Recreation: Well Crafted!

As a community of doers and makers, the people of Hickory know that in order to have a well-crafted community, they need a well-rounded plan to facilitate fun and relaxation true to the City's character and personality. The City of Hickory is...

**Welcoming...Artistic...Knowledgeable...Nostalgic...
Active...Lively...& Connected**

Employing the crafting tools of robust community engagement and input gathering, multi-faceted analysis, benchmarking, and research, the *City of Hickory Recreation: Well Crafted 2023-2033 Comprehensive Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Master Plan* will help leadership and staff to benefit from a vast amount of data that will enable prioritization, power current and future decision making, position the City to take advantage of strategic financial opportunities, measure its success, emulate best practices and make more of its own. The plan ...

- Is a resource for improvement and growth in the next 10 years
- Focuses on prudential recommendations that improve existing conditions first
- Introduces sports tourism to the parks and recreation planning equation
- Reflects loudly the collective voice of citizens, stakeholders, staff, partners, leaders and friends from the region and uses that voice to inform recommendations
- Reflects the new department make-up and separate role played by the Public Services Department
- Is rooted in best practices and a broad analysis of current conditions, projected growth, comparisons to peer cities and national benchmarks
- Uses technology to increase the accuracy of the City's understanding of park and facility usage and patterns
- Establishes principles and objectives for decision making
- Lays the foundation for...
 - Growth Planning
 - Competitive Federal and State Grants
 - Eventual Accreditation
 - Data-driven Decision Making
 - Personnel Planning & Acquisition
 - Greater Administrative Infrastructure
 - Benchmarking/Level of Service Standards
 - Use of Best Practices
 - Promotion of Sports Tourism



The Executive Summary consists of a broad overview of...

Guiding Principles	The Planning Process	Demographics & Trends	Inventory & Analysis
Community Collaboration	Benchmarking & Level of Service Analysis	Recommendations	Application

Guiding Principles & Objectives

The guiding principles, which informed the objectives of the plan, emerged through feedback received via a robust analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). This was performed during a multi-faceted public engagement process and examination of the City’s articulated identity and goals reflected in its various master plans and brand. The Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Commission, citizens, stakeholders, patrons, City leadership, staff, focus groups and participants in a special study regarding individuals with disabilities helped to shape the following. Initial observations of obvious need were also incorporated.

Improvement & Maximization of Existing Assets



Communication of Existing Assets



Growth Planning



- **Sports Tourism**



Increased Focus on Natural Assets & Education



Equitable & Inclusive Access to Recreation



Continuity with City Strengths, Goals & Identity



Implementation of Nationally Recognized Administrative & Operational Practices



The overarching principle used to guide the construction of this plan was simply “Recreation: Well Crafted” with an eye to continuity with the City’s broader needs, goals and brand as reflected in its commitment to “Life: Well Crafted” for its citizens and visitors.

The Planning Process

In April of 2022, the City of Hickory officially began efforts to build a data-driven comprehensive master plan whose preceding documents included a 1997 Park and Recreation Master Plan and 2010 Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment. The process was broken down into four phases with the Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Commission acting as an advisory board.

Phase I: Information Gathering & Public Input

- Inaugural PR&ST Commission Advisory Meeting to Establish Collaboration
- General Orientation to Department, Related City Plans & Key Interviews
- Phase I Public Input Meetings (SWOT Analysis)
- Community Recreation Needs Survey (Launched in Phase II)
- Stakeholder & Focus Group Meetings (SWOT Analysis)
- Compilation of Findings & Discernment of Emerging Vision



Phase II: Inventory & Analysis

- Community Demographic Profile Compilation
- City, County, Unifour & State Inventories
- Key Community & Special Use Facility Inventory
- Level of Service Analysis & Future System Analysis



Phase III: Plan Development

- Synthesis of Information Collected in Phases I & II
- Phase III Public Meetings to Receive Public Comment
- Benchmark Analysis
 - Articulation of Trends in Public Recreation
- Construction of Recommendations for Land Use, Future Facilities & Programs
 - Administrative & Policy Recommendations
- Formulation of Draft 10 Year Action Plan
 - Target Time-frames/Order of Magnitude Costs/Funding Strategies to Include Capital Improvement/Grants/Strategic Projects



Phase IV: Adoption

- Presentation to PR&ST Commission
- Presentation to City Council
- Final Plan Adopted by City Council
- Implementation







Demographics & Trends

The recommendations of this master plan are enhanced by considerable demographic data. Such demographics are employed in assessing existing conditions and how they might reveal possibilities for the future. They assist with ensuring that decisions can be made systematically and have ample merit. In order to understand what the demands for parks and recreation are in a given area, existing conditions, population growth and changing demographics are always factored in. They are then linked to the articulated needs and desires of the community.

City Demographics

Population: 43,490 (2020 Census)

	Median Household Income <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Median Household Income for Hickory = \$53,117• Average Household Income for Hickory = \$78,735
	Median Age <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 38.3
	Education <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 89.3 % High School Graduate or Above• 36.7 % Bachelor's Degree or Above
	Race <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 68.4% White• 13.9% Black or African American• 0% American Indian and Alaska Native• 5.6% Asian• 3.5% Other Asian (Hmong)• 12.4% Hispanic or Latino• 0% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander• 5.5% Two or More Races

Source: 2020 US Census and 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) 5 Year Estimates.

Hickory Demographics at Master Plan Sunset

The following data represent growth in key demographic areas. This analysis was performed to inform the recommendations of this plan and to enable data-driven leadership decisions to unfold for the next 10 years.



Projections

According to the U.S. Census, the population of Hickory was 43,490 in 2020. The Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) Data Center estimates that the City of Hickory is likely to see a population of **49,274 in 2030** as well as a population of **52,230 in 2035**. The overall **projected gain is 8,740 residents**. The WPCOG was able to project the following at the time of this plan.

	2026	2031
Median Household Income	\$67,897	\$86,790
Median Age	39	39.7
% High School Graduate or Above	92.1%	94.2%
% Bachelor's Degree or Above	41.2%	45.4%
Population with Disability	6,032	6,769

Source: American Community Survey, US Census and WPCOG Data Center 2023.

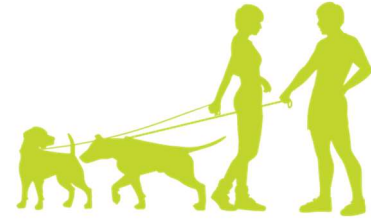
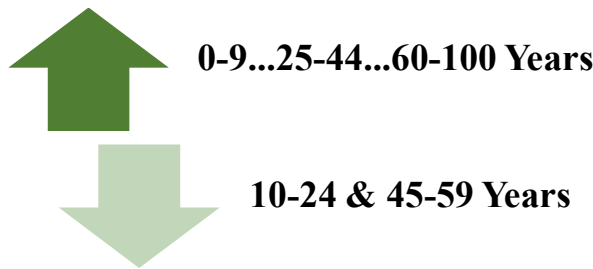
Projections by Race/Ethnicity



Race/Ethnicity	2010 Census	2020 Census	2030 Projection	2035 Projection
Total Population	40,010	43,490	49,274	52,230
% White	74.9%	66.5%	61.0%	58.4%
% African American	14.3%	13.8%	13.5%	13.3%
% American Indian	0.3%	0.7%	.9%	1.0%
% Asian American	3.2%	4.0%	4.8%	5.2%
% Other Race	5.1%	7.1%	7.9%	8.3%
% Mixed Race (Two or More Races)	2.2%	8.0%	11.9%	13.8%
% Hispanic (Any Race)	11.4%	12.8%	14.2%	15.0%
% White Not Hispanic	69.4%	64.6%	59.2%	56.7%

Source: US Census and WPCOG Data Center 2023.

Projected Increases & Decreases in Age



Source: NC Office of Management and Budget, 2023 and WPCOG Data Center. Numbers depict projections in Catawba County.



Residential Snapshot

A look at residential projects that were either permitted, in design review or under construction, in March of 2023, supports the projected growth above. At the time, there were approximately 1400 units projected for the Northeast Quadrant and 1200 projected for the Southeast Quadrant. These numbers could fluctuate and so must be regarded as “approximate” though their likelihood of completion is higher. Speculative projects were not accounted for in this analysis. **With regard to annexations,** the Northeast quadrant has a solid chance of seeing acquisition within the next 10 to 15 years. The Southeast Quadrant may also become a notable growth area.

Related Recommendation

Parks and amenities are gaining some needed ground in the Northeast Quadrant, thanks to Bruce Meisner Park as well as a potential state park down the line. Saint Stephen’s Park, operated by Catawba County, presents a potential partnership opportunity as well. Until plan sunset, an eye to the Southeast Quadrant and the development of recreation opportunities is also recommended. A look at development opportunities near Trivium and Catawba Valley Boulevard or south of Sweetwater have merit. Startown Road and south of Trivium are close to what will be residential centers.

The City...The Metropolitan Statistical Hub

The City of Hickory serves as the regional hub of the Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton metropolitan statistical area. According to estimates from Placer.ai, a service that estimates foot traffic and migration patterns, the City can see an average of 165,000 visits of at least 30 minutes every day. This can have an effect on parks and recreation which must account for these daily fluctuations and their projected increase over the next 10 years.

Population Projections

MSA

Regional projections, according to the WPCOG indicate the following...

2020 Census: 365,276

2030 Projections: 394,203

2035 Projections: 418,269

Source: WPCOG Data Center

Overview of Parks, Facilities, & Open Space

The Public Services Department is responsible for maintaining and operating 572 acres of parkland in full cooperation with the Parks Recreation and Sports Tourism (PR&ST) Department. PR&ST staff operate facilities. There are also approximately 172 acres of core open space available for potential park development in the future. The current system is made up of 27 parks and also features L.P. Frans Stadium which is home to the Hickory Crawdad's minor league baseball team located at Winkler Park. Of the 27 parks, over 30% feature facilities which include recreation centers, activity buildings, senior centers and more. The City has a total of 3 recreation centers, 2 senior centers, 5 gymnasiums, and 3 activity buildings at various levels of use. The vastness of the current park inventory was a notable point of pride for both citizens and stakeholders during the public input process of this master plan and was met with a lot of gratitude as well as interest in maximizing the inventory's potential. The City has already begun to tap into that potential with the strategic use of sports amenities to grow a vibrant Sports Tourism mission capable of enhancing the local economy.

City of Hickory parks feature a variety of active and passive amenities! Citizens have communicated an appreciation for parks that mix such amenities well and truly offer something for every member of the family. Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park was particularly highlighted as a "something for everyone" park during the master planning process.

Hickory's system currently features **4 Regional Parks, 4 Community Parks, 12 Neighborhood Parks, 1 City-wide Park, 1 Linear Park and 5 Civic/Garden Parks** in its inventory. Parks range in size from as small as .3 acres to as large as 96 acres. The City is also working with the State of North Carolina on a potential State Park in the future and will possibly contribute acreage to that project. For now, a majority of Hickory's park acreage can be found in the Northwest Quadrant while the least acreage can be found in the Southeast.

City Land Available for Possible Development in Next 10 Years

Sandy Pines Property (12 Acres)
Bruce Meisner Park (5 of 73 Acres Developed)
River Road Property (160 Acres)





27 parks and 572 acres of parkland offer a whole host of recreational opportunities for citizens and visitors both now and in the future. With regard to facilities, the City owns 106,694 square feet of indoor recreation space in the form of recreation centers, gyms, activity buildings and senior centers. There is much to work with! Among these facilities is the Winkler Museum which is now home to a ceramic's studio. Upon completion of the Hickory Trail project, the City is set to offer a combined total of 20 miles of trail, with a majority of trails being paved. This Linear Park will also offer various opportunities to stop off and have some fun or just relax. In addition to these offerings, the City benefits from a joint use agreement with Hickory Public Schools for the use of athletic facilities and has the potential to tap into more. Hickory has a large capacity for recreation and is meeting the greatest needs of its citizens.

The illustration, to the left, represents a summary of park and recreation amenities.



Park Classifications & City “Standards”

With this master plan, the City of Hickory currently utilizes 6 park classifications which are typical of many jurisdictions. The table below outlines the City’s current acreage versus its proposed “standard” articulated in the 2010 Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment. This table highlights the nuances of the City’s system with regard to meeting acreage proposals.

City Park Sites and Acreage Per Park Classification		
Neighborhood Parks	84.4 Acres	2010 = 107.5Acres
Community Parks	61.62 Acres	2010 = 107.5Acres
Regional Parks	285.3 Acres	2010 = 215 Acres
Citywide Park	70.5 Acres	N/A
Civic Parks & Gardens (Mini Parks)	9.8 Acres	N/A
Linear Parks	60 Acres	NA
Total Acres:	571.62 (572)	

It appears that, by its own “standards” proposed in 2010, the City exceeds its acreage standards with regard to Regional Parks however, it falls below for Community and Neighborhood Parks. Upon further examination, however, it should be noted that the City has re-introduced (from the 1997 master plan) both a Citywide and Linear Park classification with notable acreage. Also, its newest Regional Park, Bruce Meisner Park, has the potential to serve the dual purpose of being a Neighborhood Park in the Northeast Quadrant. It is not uncommon for parks to serve two classifications needs. Catawba County’s Saint Stephen’s Park may also help with this requirement in the sense that its proximity allows additional park access to citizens in the Northeast Quadrant. *It is important to remember that the NRPA is clear about park standards fitting the unique needs of the community and as such, it appears that the City can take this route. Level of service calculations, proposed in the Benchmark & Level of Service Analysis section, can combine with park classifications to present a potential pathway forward.*

The following is a breakdown of City parks and their classifications.

Park	Classification	Acreage		Park	Classification	Acreage
Bruce Meisner Park	Regional	73.3		McComb Park	Civic/Garden	2.5
Civitan Park	Neighborhood	7.5		Miracle of Hickory Park	Neighborhood	2.5
Cliff Teague Park	Neighborhood	8.1		Neill Clark Recreation Park	Community	8.2
Fairbrook Optimist Park	Neighborhood	6.7		Robinson Park	Civic/Garden	1.5
Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park	City-wide	70.5		Rotary-Geitner Park	Regional	96.0
Henry Fork River Park	Regional	66		Shuford House & Gardens	Civic/Garden	.9

Hickory City Park	Neighborhood	15.0		Southside Heights Park	Neighborhood	12.7
Hickory Optimist Park	Neighborhood	6.0		Stanford Park	Community	37.0
Highland Park	Neighborhood	2.7		Taft-Broome Park	Neighborhood	9.6
Ivey Arboretum at Sally Fox Park	Civic/Garden	4.6		Viewmont Park	Civic/Garden	.3
Jaycee Park	Neighborhood	5.0		West Hickory Park	Neighborhood	5.6
Kiwanis Park	Community	16.0		Westmont Recreation Park	Neighborhood	3.0
Lowe's Foods City Park	Community	.42		Winkler Park (Includes L.P. Frans Stadium)	Regional	50
Hickory Trail	Linear	60				

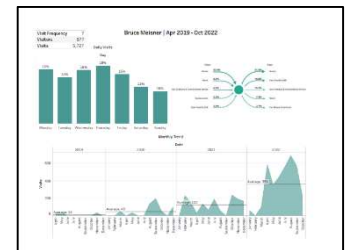
Current Facilities

Highland Recreation Center @ Stanford Park	(Anchor Facility)
Ridgeview Recreation Center @ Taft-Broome Park	(Anchor Facility)
Brown Penn Recreation Center @ Taft-Broome Park	(Age 15 & Under)
Brown Penn Senior Center @ Taft-Broome Park	(Rental Only)
Westmont Senior Center @ Westmont Recreation Park	(Limited Hours)
Westmont Gymnasium @ Westmont Recreation Park	(Rental Only)
Winkler Activity Building @ Winkler Park	(Rental)
Ceramics Studio (Winkler Museum) @ Winkler Park	(Limited Hours)
Hickory City Park Activity Building @ Hickory City Park	



Usage Analysis

The City was able to capture usage data, for a majority of parks, within the time period of January 2017 to October 2022. This analysis was made possible by a system known as Placer AI. Placer AI is the industry leader in accurate, reliable, accessible and privacy-preserving compliant location analytics. As a result of its use, the City was able to look at usage from the following perspectives:



Number of Visits...Most/Least Popular Days of Use...Most/Least Popular Months of Use...Prior/Post visits...Trends

Findings

The following chart summarizes usage analysis findings for parks with available Placer AI data. **The most visited parks are highlighted in green** while the **least used parks are highlighted in orange**. Bruce Meisner Park was analyzed for the period of April 2019 to October of 2022 due to its newness. It was not factored in as having a “highest or lowest” use though it appears that the park is increasing in popularity and should be measured, at a later date, to see how it compares with its counterparts. It is important to note that the type of activities, happening in parks, had impact on some visits (i.e. Henry Fork River Park...soccer tournaments and events) while proximity to amenities could have also affected the number of reported visits in others (Winkler Park). Regardless, the numbers below speak to general usage and can be helpful for creating maintenance schedules and planning for the balancing of the system when used within context.

Park	Acres	Visits*	Most Visited Days of Week	Average Monthly Visits in 2022	Most Popular Month for Visits in 2022	Least Visited Days of Week	Least Visited Month in 2022
Bruce Meisner Park	73	5,727	Thursday (18%) Monday & Wednesday (16%) Friday (15%)	359	August	Sunday (10%) Saturday (11%) Tuesday (14%)	February
#10 Least Used Civitan Park	7.5	75,444	Monday (17%) Saturday (16%) Sunday (15%)	1,269	April	Thursday & Friday (12%) Tuesday & Wednesday (14%)	July
#2 Least Used Cliff Teague Park	8.1	23,803	Tuesday (19%) Friday (16%) Wednesday/Thursday/Saturday (14%)	923	May	Sunday (12%) Monday (13%)	February
#7 Most Used Fairbrook Optimist Dog Park	6.7	148,140	Sunday (24%) Saturday (19%) Friday (13%)	2,458	May	Monday/Tuesday/Thursday (11%) Wednesday (12%)	June
#3 Most Used Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park	70.5	556,567	Saturday & Sunday (23%) Friday (12%) Monday (11%)	10,677	May	Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday (10%)	January
#1 Most Used Henry Fork River Park	66	1,153,750	Saturday (24%) Sunday (20%) Thursday (14%)	21,329	April	Friday (6%) Monday (12%) Tuesday (13%)	January
#6 Most Used Hickory City Park	15	336,522	Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday/Saturday (15%)	5,804	April	Friday (12%) Monday & Sunday (14%)	January
#5 Least Used Hickory Optimist Park	6	37,065	Wednesday & Sunday (16%) Thursday (15%) Monday & Tuesday (14%)	534	July/October	Friday (12%) & Saturday (13%)	January
#9 Least Used Ivey Arboretum at Sally Fox Park	4.6	56,030	Wednesday (17%) Thursday (15%) Monday/Saturday/Sunday (14%)	426	April	Tuesday (12%) & Friday (13%)	January
#4 Least Used Jaycee Park	3.5	36,997	Monday (18%) Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday (16%)	675	April	Sunday (6%) Friday & Saturday (14%)	February

#2 Most Used Kiwanis Park	16	623,333	Saturday (31%) Sunday (15%)	11,491	May	Monday/Tuesday/ Wednesday/ Thursday/Friday (11%)	January
Lowes Foods City Park	.4	76,139	Saturday (27%) Friday (16%) Wednesday (13%)	1,444	May	Monday & Tuesday (10%) Thursday (11%)	January
LP Frans Stadium	*	1,335,732	Saturday (24%) Friday (21%) Sunday (14%)	24,086	April	Monday (6%) Wednesday (9%) Tuesday (10%)	January
#6 Least Used McComb Park	2.5	45,408	Saturday (49%) Friday & Sunday (13%)	849	April	Monday/Tuesday/ Wednesday/ Thursday (6%)	January
#9 Most Used Miracle of Hickory Park	2.5	113,213	Wednesday (22%) Monday (21%) Tuesday (17%)	1,659	September	Sunday (5%) Saturday (9%) Friday (11%) Thursday (14%)	April
#10 Most Used Neill Clark Recreation Park	8.21	108,025	Saturday (28%) Thursday (16%) Tuesday (14%)	1,185	October	Friday (9%) Wednesday (10%) Monday (11%) Sunday (12%)	June/July
#5 Most Used Rotary- Geitner Park	96	361,333	Sunday (20%) Saturday (19%)	5,961	May	Tuesday (11%) Wednesday/Thursday/ Friday (12%) Monday (13%)	January
#8 Least Used Shuford House & Garden	.9	50,164	Saturday (43%) Friday (15%)	667	May	Monday (5%) Wednesday (6%) Tuesday & Thursday (10%) Sunday (11%)	January
#1 Least Used Southside Heights Park	13	21,918	Sunday (22%) Saturday (17%) Friday (16%)	491	May	Monday & Wednesday (10%) Tuesday (12%) Thursday (14%)	January
#4 Most Used Stanford Park	37	488,521	Saturday (32%) Sunday (13%) Monday & Wednesday (12%)	12,074	May	Tuesday (10%) Thursday & Friday (11%)	January
#8 Most Used Taft Broome Park	9.6	116,555	Tuesday (21%) Monday (19%) Wednesday & Thursday (16%)	1,925	August	Sunday (2%) Friday (11%) Saturday (15%)	March
#3 Least Used West Hickory Park	5.6	27,173	Monday (22%) Tuesday (18%) Saturday (16%) Thursday (14%)	386	May	Friday (9%) Sunday (10%) Wednesday (11%) Thursday (14%)	June
#7 Least Used Winkler Park	50	47,765	Saturday (29%) Sunday (19%) Wednesday (12%) & Friday (11%)	858	August	Monday (94%) Tuesday & Thursday (10%)	September

Note & Source: Placer AI data for Highland Park (2.7 Acres), Viewmont Park (.3 Acres) and Robinson Park (1.5 Acres) not available. Bruce Meisner Park data is not comparable due to the newness of the park. Winkler Park usage numbers may have been affected by games at LP Frans Stadium.

Pre to Post Pandemic Usage Analysis



The Covid-19 Pandemic had real-time and long-term impact on parks and recreation across the country. According to the Trust for Public Land’s 2020 special report “Parks & Pandemic,” parks were elevated to “essential service” status and it was common for the increase in park usage to overwhelm staff. During stakeholder meetings, City of Hickory staff reported experiences consistent with the Trust for Public Land’s report. On the master plan’s Recreation Needs Survey, 94% of respondents confirmed that citizens now see parks and recreation as an essential service.

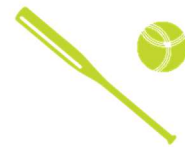


Park usage experienced notable growth during the pandemic. Using the top 5 parks visited between January 2017 and October 2022 as reference, here is how *monthly average* use was affected between 2019 and 2022. Analysis of these years’ accounts for pre-pandemic usage, full-fledged pandemic usage and residual usage.

Park	2019	2020	2021	2022
Henry Fork River Park	18,221	15,993	18,666	21,329
Kiwanis Park	7,539	7,578	9,788	11,491
Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park	5,805	8,579	9,971	10,677
Stanford Park	6,318	6,411	8,684	12,074
Rotary Geitner Park	4,775	7,758	5,025	5,961

Source: Placer AI data for April 2019 to October of 2022 & 2020 Trust for Public Land “Parks & Pandemic” Report

As can be seen above, park usage notably increased overall. This was seen, at the grass roots level, by staff who worked hard to meet the challenge of increased demand and who now work with a new baseline. Activities such as events and tournaments did have some bearing on these numbers.



Programs...Creating a New Baseline

The PR&ST Department is in many ways creating a new baseline of program offerings. The principal cause for this approach was born out of necessity due to the Covid 19 Global Pandemic. As a result of the pandemic, the department ceased a majority of programs and within that timeframe also brought a new director on board. This was looked at as an opportunity to build upon strengths but also to unleash the



creativity of the staff in order to create a fresh excitement that would reinvigorate and reacquaint the community and region with recreational programming even though parks had experienced a jump in public interest during the pandemic. Though the momentum is still growing, it is clear that the department has made a strong programming debut, post pandemic, as is evidenced by a **98% rating of Excellent or Good for programs** on the 2022 Recreation and Park Needs Survey. The team is finding that one-time specialty recreation events and competitions, such as pet festivals and trail races (especially nocturnal), are resonating with residents and becoming annual occurrences. An increased emphasis on programming for special populations has emerged during

this time as well. Recreation sports programming is back in “full swing” while the department continues to build on similar backbone programming such as open gym time, fitness classes and special events.

Conservation & The Environment

The City of Hickory knows that public lands increase the quality of life of their citizens and visitors who benefit from the preservation of natural resources, wildlife habitats, clean water, clean air and open space. Hickory citizens, through public input, are beginning to embrace a desire for greater emphasis in this area. In recent years, the City has been increasing its prioritization of what the National Recreation and Park Association notes as the benefits of conservation and environmental stewardship which include:



- Reduction of carbon through sustainable landscapes that cleanse air and water, replenish aquifers, reduce stormwater runoff, and protect wildlife habitats
- Public access to safe, affordable and healthy avenues to experiencing nature
- Contribution to the economic well-being of a community, conservation of energy and resources

Source: National Recreation & Park Association

There is also interest in restoring portions of park space to North Carolina native plants for environmental and maintenance benefits.

Operations & Maintenance

The City of Hickory features a collaborative effort between the PR&ST and Public Services Departments with regard to the operation and maintenance of its system. The Public Services Department takes center stage in ensuring that the City’s extensive offerings are well maintained and ready to supply both active and passive recreation opportunities. The PR&ST Department works to provide events and programming at both parks and facilities while taking the lead in operating facilities. Just a few short years ago, all operations and maintenance functions were housed under the umbrella of the PR&ST Department however, it was assessed that the best service delivery and staff capacity resided with a division of responsibilities between two departments. The finer details of collaboration are being worked out, post-pandemic. Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) best-practices are seen as a possible roadmap for building departmental capacity and future joint accreditation efforts.

Administrative Operations

Administrative operations were examined to identify strengths to build upon and growth opportunities to harness. While it is clear that citizens and visitors are being served with excellence, there are always more ways to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery. Two exciting tools for both departments to consider are formal staff credentialing and specialized education through the National Recreation & Park Association. A high-level assessment of the City’s ability to undertake the Commission for Accreditation of Park and

Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) accreditation process, prior to plan sunset, was also performed. It was found that the City would benefit most from continuing to lay groundwork for future accreditation consideration.

Financial Analysis

During a financial analysis, revenues and expenditures were assessed in order to identify notable financial trends and areas to explore. The cost centers that affect parks, recreation and sports tourism span two departments. The General Fund is heavily relied upon by the PR&ST Department and so, cost recovery was not a large component of this analysis though an analysis was conducted. The PR&ST Department has growth potential in relation to cost-recovery. The department was found to generate notable revenue from sources such as donations, sponsorships and concessions.



A benchmarking analysis using 2022 National Recreation and Park Association data found that among like-sized jurisdictions across the country, the PR&ST Department relied approximately 27% more on the general fund for operating expenditures than the median of agencies. Public Services does not facilitate cost recovery in relation to parks and recreation. To achieve future master plan related goals, the City may want to consider a larger focus on cost recovery models, enter into strategic public-private partnerships and maximize its pursuit of grants.

Walkability and Proximity Analysis

The ability to walk to parks, within a community, speaks to the overall health of the parks and recreation system. An analysis was performed, using municipal Geographic Information Systems (GIS), to determine how much of the City’s population is within a 5, 10 or 20 minute walk from a City park. This examination was based on time and not on available sidewalk networks though these are clearly master planned by the City and on its present and future radars. Below is a synopsis of walking times.



Time	Population Estimate	% of Population Estimate
5 Minutes	4,382	10%
10 Minutes	9,150	21%
20 Minutes	24,382	56%

Source: City of Hickory GIS June 2023 & 2020 US Census Population Data

The City recognizes the importance of creating greater walkable/bikeable routes to expand access and has invested in them substantially through its myriad of master planned projects. As is understandable, connectivity efforts will take years, however, they are well planned and prioritized as can be seen in the Walk. Bike. Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan. The Hickory Trail project is a great illustration of the City’s commitment.

8 out of 12 connectivity projects increase equitable access to parks and recreation related facilities in the Walk. Bike. Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan

Proximity Analysis

Driving is currently the main means of reaching parks and recreation opportunities. The main nodes for vehicular transportation include Highways 321, 127, and 70.



With regard to driving distance, there are gaps in driving access particularly in the Northeast Quadrant of the City. With additional residential projects on the horizon, this will become a more prominent focus.



When looking at proximity to parks, it can be seen that the system is strengthening. A very tangible sign of such strengthening is Hickory Trail.

	Number	% of Population
% of Population Within .5 Miles of Greenways & Trails	9,072	20.34%
% of Population Within 2 Miles of Parks & Facilities	39,559	90.87%
% of Population Within 2 Miles of Greenways & Trails	29,006	66.63%

Source: City of Hickory GIS June 2023 & 2020 US Census Population Data

Quadrant Analysis

While the master plan found that the City is offering a sufficient amount of park acreage for its current/projected population and is meeting their largest recreation needs, a special look at quadrant projections, usage, and distribution of amenities was taken. This analysis was conducted in order to plan for the future while considering the equitable distribution of recreation opportunities among quadrants. Using 2020 Census Data, available Hickory MPO Traffic Analysis Zone Projections and analytical expertise from the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Data Center, a glimpse of the City's direction was attained. Population growth was based on 2020 City boundaries.

What can be seen, at this point, is that the notable growth areas...at least to 2030...are in the Northeast and Southeast Quadrants. Limited infrastructure in the Southwest and the built-out nature of the Northwest seem to indicate less of a need to focus on new parks and amenities in those areas. Via public input, there seems to be an invitation to consider park revitalization particularly in the Northwest, which could also assist with balancing system usage overall.

Quadrant	2020 Population Estimate	2030 Population Projection	Change	% Change
Northeast	21,772	23,537	1,765	8.1%
Southeast	6,162	6,754	592	9.6%
Northwest	11,782	12,279	497	4.2%
Southwest	3,774	3,837	63	1.7%
Population Total	43,490	46,407*	2,917	6.7%

Source: 2020 US Census Population Data, Hickory MPO Traffic Analysis Zone Projections and WPCOG Data Center

*2030 projection varies from total in Race/Ethnicity projections due to use of differing data sources. Projections are estimates.



Quadrant Analysis Highlights	
<p>Northwest Quadrant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home to 50% of the City’s most visited parks • Home to 30 % of the City’s least visited parks • Contains the greatest amount of park acreage among the four quadrants • Has the second largest population of the four quadrants • Has the greatest amount of water-based recreation available including access to Lake Hickory • Has the second highest % of residential zoning • Has the most parks • Has the greatest number of recreation facilities of the four quadrants • Has the greatest amount of sidewalk miles with the Northeast quadrant very close behind • Has the greatest amount of trail opportunities including the most access to Hickory Trail • Has the most formal neighborhoods 	<p>Northeast Quadrant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the largest current population and projected population for 2030 • Has the largest % of residential zoning • Has the second largest number of parks in a given quadrant but half the neighborhood parks of each western quadrant • Only has 10% of the most visited parks • Is home to three of the top 10 underutilized parks identified in this plan • Has two highly used parks (includes Bruce Meisner Park) • Trails mainly consist of access to City Walk and a few loops within parks • Has two prominent county parks nearby • Does not have any water-based recreation with the exception of future water views at Bruce Meisner Park
<p>Southwest Quadrant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has 30% of the least visited parks in the City • Has 20% of the most visited parks in the City • Has the lowest projected population for 2030 • Has the lowest % of residential zoning among quadrants • Home to three recreation facilities, two of which need renovation and are used on a limited basis • One water-based recreation opportunity 	<p>Southeast Quadrant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a sparse population density • Has the least amount of parks • Has 20% of the most visited parks in the City • Has 10% of the least visited parks in the City • Has one, highly popular, water-based recreation opportunity

Source: 2020 US Census Population Data, Hickory MPO Traffic Analysis Zone Projections and WPCOG Data Center

A Focus on Sports Tourism



In 2019, the City of Hickory invested in a sports tourism market analysis and the addition of a sports tourism arm to the parks and recreation department. This synergistic decision aimed to advance the City’s ability to benefit from the economic rewards of sports tourism. 2018 Tourism Impact Numbers from Governor Roy Cooper and Visit North Carolina reported that visitors to Catawba County spent nearly \$3M that year alone. Residing within the sixth most visited state in the United States and a county ranked #16 out of 100 for visitor spending, this decision was embraced. This investment also aimed to maximize the usage of the existing City inventory while strategically partnering with organizations such as the Hickory Metro Convention Center and Visitors Bureau to bring tournaments and events centered upon sporting activities such as tennis, basketball, softball, fishing, gymnastics, and cycling to the area. A sports tourism inventory was added to the master

plan to highlight its separate but complimentary goals. A look at economic impact trends was also conducted and can be found in the Sports Tourism section of the plan.

A Note on Sports Tourism

Sports tourism can be facilitated at most parks, in some fashion, within the City’s inventory. Of note are the following parks.

- Henry Fork River Park (Soccer, Ultimate Frisbee & Lacrosse)
- Hickory City Park (Tennis)
- Highland Recreation Center & Stanford Park (Basketball, Softball, Baseball & Niche Sports)
- Kiwanis Park (Baseball & Softball)

When looking at the array of City parks, facilities, school systems, private schools and collegiate sports facilities in the area, it appears that sports tourism has notable growth potential via augmentation through courts, fields, gyms and amenities within the next 10 years. This is not counting the Hickory Metro Convention Center which is currently a key partner and expected to provide approximately 165,600 square feet for a variety of tournaments and events in the coming years.



Community Collaboration

Public input is the cornerstone of master planning! Recognizing this, the City of Hickory offered robust engagement opportunities that were substantive, equitable, creative and sustained. The bulk of public input offerings occurred in the first and third phases of the project, however, input was actually received throughout the majority of the plan’s construction. A combination of public drop-in meetings, pop-up stations/interactions, a statistically valid/representative recreation needs survey, traditional meetings and electronic means were employed. In addition, to



engagement of the general public, a series of stakeholder meetings and focus groups were conducted to gather qualitative data from those providing services or whose voice tends to be less heard in master planning efforts. *1200+ were engaged in the community collaboration process to include 700+ from the master planning process and input from an additional 500+ Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities participants.*

Engagement Summary



Traditional Meetings	Pop-up Input Stations	Additional Engagement
Highland Recreation Center (Phase I & III)	Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park	City Facebook Page
Ridgeview Recreation Center (Phase I & III)	Hickory City Park	Hotline
City Hall (Phase I & III)	Lowe's Foods City Park	E-Mail
Kiwanis Park	Kiwanis Park	On-location Flyers
 	Sails Concert/Union Square	City Partners
	LP Frans Stadium/Crawdads Game	2022 City of Hickory Recreation & Parks Survey
Patrick Beaver Memorial Library	Focus Groups	
Ridgeview Library	Senior Citizens, Youth, Individuals with Disabilities and Veterans	
Christmas Parade & Tree Lighting		



Summary of Internal Stakeholder Input

Strengths

- Large Inventory of Parks
- Diverse, Creative, Collaborative and Committed City Staff
- Family Atmosphere in Recreation Sports, Programming & at Events
- Increased Quality of Park Maintenance
- Affordability of Recreation
- Park Safety

Weaknesses

- Majority of Programs Based in Recreation Centers
- Magnitude of Deferred Maintenance/ADA Access
- Amount of Existing Inclusive Programming
- Communication of Offerings
- Some Parks Feature Too Many or Not Enough Features Which Impacts Use
- Lack of Parks & Recreation Presence in Southeast Quadrant

Opportunities

- Build PR&ST Specific Communication Strategy
- Standardization of Operations, Maintenance & Communication Policies and Procedures
- Increased Streams of Income & Funding Sources
- Increased Staff Support Via Office Space, Benefits & Compensation
- Integrate Technology into Park Operations
- Build on Post-pandemic Enthusiasm for Parks
- Build in More Tranquil/Passive Recreation Options at Parks
- Partner with App State Hickory

Threats

- National Worker Shortages
- Magnitude of Deferred Maintenance in Relation to Future Needs, Facility Capacity and Sports Tourism
- Staff Capacity to Specialize & Indoor Space Capacity to Program
- Increasing Demands in Level of Service without Increase in Staff
- Becoming Too Large to Maintain the Family-feel of Recreation Offerings
- Popular Parks Are Over Capacity, Creating Safety Issues, Alienating Residents and Turning Visitors Away

Summary of External Stakeholder Input

Strengths

- Sports Tourism Contributes to the Local Economy
- Park Safety
- Enthusiastic PR&ST Staff Who Are Great with Partnerships
- PR&ST Department's Ability to Draw Families/Business to Hickory
- Extensive Park & Programming Inventory Compared to Similar Cities

Weaknesses

- Lack of Venue for Extra Large Crowds (Concert/Tournament Capacity)
- People Don't Realize How Much Is Available to Them for Recreation
- Downtown Businesses Don't Have Regular Input on City Initiatives
- Travel Sports are Taking People Away from Local Recreation Sports
- Lighting at Parks Like Hickory City Park

Opportunities

- Indoor Recreation Space (Arenas for Tournaments/Access to Lake Hickory/Amphitheater)
- **100% Stakeholders Interested in Partnership with City**
- Partnerships with Duke Energy for Water Access
- Emerging Women's Sports Niche
- Re-imagine Park Inventory to Meet Current Needs & Maximize Green Space

Threats

- Perception of City Promises Not Fulfilled to Key Populations (i.e. Splash Pads in Each Quadrant)
- Lack of Connectivity = Less Accessibility to Parks & Programs for Citizens with Lower Income
- City-wide Challenges with Homelessness & Housing Effecting Parks & Recreation
- Lack of Growth in the Metro Area



Summary of Face to Face Public Input (Including Focus Groups)

Strengths

- Large Inventory, Variety and Good Distribution of Parks & Facilities
- High Quality Recreation Programs (Especially Recreation Sports & Unifour Games)
- Cleanliness of Parks
- Department Staff
- Low Cost of Recreation
- Trails...Especially City Walk & Lake Hickory Trails
- Park and Facility Improvements Over the Past 3 Years

Weaknesses

- People Don't Realize Everything Available to Them Via Parks & Recreation
- Lack of/Limited Programming, Updated Facilities and Free Options for Senior Citizens & People with Disabilities
- Recreational Access to Lake Hickory
- Cleanliness of Parks
- Underutilized Parks
- Safe Places to Walk
- Lack of Pools
- Access to Shade at Parks
- Number of Bike Lanes and Lack of Connectivity



Opportunities

- Amphitheaters Can Bring Tourism and Vibrancy
- Access to Lake Hickory Can Increase Recreation Opportunities for Citizens and Visitors
- Connect with the Growing Homeschooling Community
- Adult Playgrounds Would Offer Unique Recreation to Adults with Disabilities and Senior Citizens
- Multi-use Sports Facilities and Concert Venues

Threats

- Costs and Funding of Priorities
- Holes in Communication of Offerings
- Non-resident Use of Parks and It's Stress on Park Capacity
- Low Focus on Inclusivity
- Language Barriers
- Safety Concerns Regarding Homelessness & Illegal Activities in Some Parks



Recreation Needs Survey Highlights



Parks/Facilities Most & Least Visited	Facilities/Programs & Events	Top 3 Barriers to Park & Facility Use	Top 3 Facilities/Amenities Most Needed by Households	Misc.
Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park / Southside Heights Park	90% of Citizens Have Visited a Park in the <u>Last Year</u> 71% Have Used Trails	People Are Not Aware of What is Available to Them	Nature Trails/Greenways	79% of Survey Respondents See Hickory PR&ST as Their "Go To" for Fun
Lowes Foods City Park/ West Hickory Park	16% Participation in Programs with 98% Excellent/Good Satisfaction Rating	People Are Not Aware of What is Available to Them Regarding Trails	Water Access (Fishing/Kayaking/ Etc.)	94% Reported Parks & Rec as an Essential Service
Rotary Geitner Park/ Westmont Recreation Park	13% Participation in Events with 88% Excellent/Good Rating	Too Busy to Participate	Shaded Play & Seating	Most Important Recreation <u>Programs</u> Outdoor Music/Concerts Adult Fitness/Wellness Special Events/Family Festivals

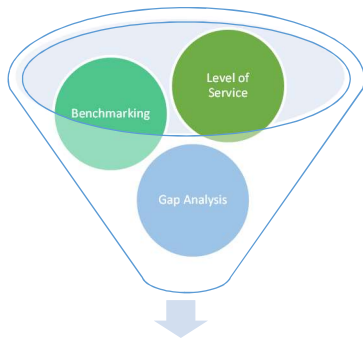
Summary of Key Findings

Trails received the highest priority investment rating = greatest positive impact on the most households and most representative of the desires of the community
There is a national trend of focusing on the updating/improvement of existing parks and facilities
Out of 16 choices, 84% were solidly supportive of pursuing needed park and facility updates
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 83% were supportive of developing nature trails Development of amphitheater, park/facility updates and development of nature trails were most selected
58% reported some need for additional parks and facilities
25% were not willing to increase financial support toward parks and recreation while 75% were willing to increase support in some way
Most important amenity to citizens = Nature Trails & Greenway Systems
59% of respondents noted trails as a need

Most Supported Actions for Improving Parks & Recreation	
Updating Existing Parks & Recreation Facilities	84%
Developing Nature Trails	83%
Updates to Recreational Facilities	82%



Benchmarking & Level of Service Analysis

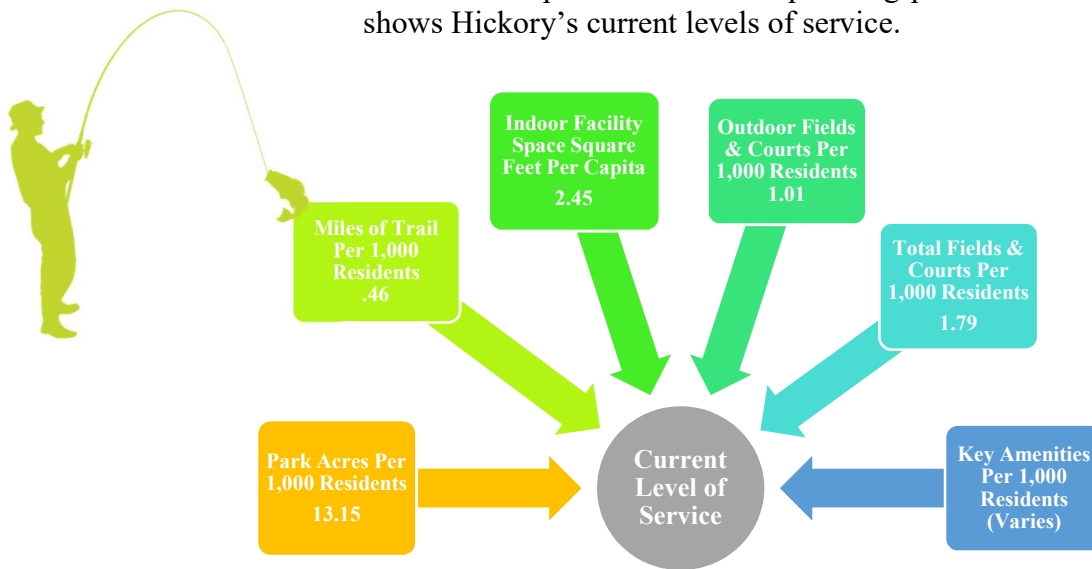


An Integrated Picture


An Integrated Look

Benchmarking, a level of service analysis and an eye to national trends are indispensable in assisting a community with analyzing present performance (levels of service) while addressing future growth. Parks, trails, amenities, programs, finances and operations were focused upon. This analysis of performance translates to proposed and flexible local-standards that act as a guidepost to maintain strengths, fill service gaps or take the community towards its recreation ideal.

In order to identify strengths and gaps in services rendered by the PR&ST and Public Services Departments within the park system, both a benchmarking and level of service analysis were conducted as part of the master planning process. The following chart shows Hickory’s current levels of service.


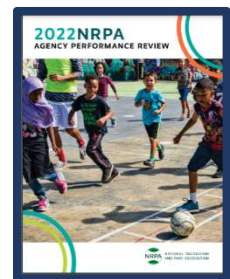


The following chart briefly describes the nature and purpose of each analysis along with their connection to a national peer review and its resulting “standards” as articulated by the National Recreation & Park Association.

Benchmarking Analysis	Level of Service Analysis
<p>A look at what other, similar, jurisdictions (aka Peer Communities) offer in the region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparison of data reveals areas of distinction and those needing expansion • Informs proposed level of service standards which include park acreage, trail miles, amenities and more • Contributes to recommendations regarding maintenance, operations, programming and administration 	<p>A look at what the City of Hickory offers and will need to consider offering in the next 10 years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on current population which becomes a proposed baseline standard for future planning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Considers population projections for further planning points • Calculates possible deficits or surpluses in parkland, amenities and facilities based on the population of the jurisdiction • Draws from the inventory of existing parks and facilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Synthesizes benchmarking data, national “standards” and staff input • Creates proposed level of service standards that reflect the needs of parks and recreation for the duration of the comprehensive master plan

National Peer Review, Standards & Best Practices
<p>A look at statistics garnered from parks and recreation agencies across the country.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data used to analyze current service levels & future needs • Acts in place of former NRPA Standards last updated in 1995 • Gauges best practices

Peer communities were determined based on cities already established by the City of Hickory as “peers” as well as National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA) Agency Performance Review jurisdictions with populations ranging within the City’s current measure and projections for plan sunset. *NRPA data was derived from the 2022 NRPA Agency Performance Review with over 1,000 agencies represented across the country. Regional peer communities included Holly Springs, Wilson and Burlington North Carolina along with Danville Virginia, Johnson City Tennessee and Rock Hill South Carolina.* UNC School of Government quasi-peer data was also used to add insights where applicable. Broader comparisons were considered due to Hickory’s role as a metro-statistical hub and its daytime population. In order to add depth, ETC Institute also performed a benchmark analysis in relation to recreation and park needs surveys administered to comparable communities, across the United States, from October 2020 to the time of the Hickory survey. It is important to note that the context of the City must be considered when it appears that there is a notable variation from a particular benchmark. Sometimes, context outweighs the benchmark as was found to be the case in some instances. The following areas were looked at...parks, trails, amenities, facilities, programs, operations and finance.

Important to Note: During the life of this master plan, the population of the City of Hickory is projected to surpass the NRPA’s jurisdiction benchmark range of 20,000 to 49,999. Population projections indicate that by 2035, the City of Hickory will have approximately 52,230 citizens which infers that the transition to a new NRPA jurisdiction benchmark range will occur approximately at plan sunset.

Summary of Findings

Through the PR&ST and Public Services departments, the City of Hickory is serving its citizens well as it keeps an eye on taking that service to the next level. Parks, trails, amenities, facilities, programs, finances and operations break down as follows.

Parks

The City of Hickory is slightly above median (2.55 acres) with regard to acres of parkland per 1,000 residents and will remain so (1.75 acres) even after it is measured by its projected National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA) Jurisdiction Population Range numbers, assuming other numbers remain constant.

The median rate for acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, among Hickory’s peer group, is 9.42. The City of Hickory is 3.73 acres above the median acreage and ranks as the second highest in park acreage per 1,000 residents.

Trails

When including the Hickory Trail project, the City of Hickory is currently well above median with regard to miles of trail. When measured by new NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range numbers for plan sunset, it remains slightly above median.

The measure of trails per 1,000 residents, among peer communities, shows Hickory as just above median. Among jurisdictions of a similar population size (41,000-57,000 range) it has the second highest trail miles per resident (.46).

Amenities

When examining 24 peer benchmark amenities, the City of Hickory is at or above median units per 1,000 population on 17 (71%). This includes being above median on lake access. Hickory is below peer median units per 1,000 population on 7 (29%) amenities which include soccer fields, tennis courts, recreation centers, unpaved trail, total trail mileage, splash pads and amphitheaters. Splash pads, amphitheaters and unpaved trail show the most notable differences in median.

Hickory citizens have a somewhat elevated access to 6 amenities when looking at peer community benchmarking medians. The amenities include playgrounds (17 above), inclusive playgrounds (2 above), basketball courts (6 above), pickleball courts (3.5 above), volleyball courts (2 above) and gyms (3 above).

Facilities

Hickory is in line with a majority of communities, reporting nation-wide, that they offer community and recreation centers. Only 2 in 5 communities offer senior centers, so Hickory is well positioned in this area as well.

Out of a peer community comparison of jurisdictions, the City of Hickory is .32 above median and is the third largest provider of square footage with regard to square footage per capita. Only Danville, VA and Rock Hill, SC surpass Hickory when strictly looking at square footage. Hickory has only 1.86 square feet less in indoor square footage than Rock Hill, SC which topped the list in available indoor space. This suggests that if the City of Hickory were to program all available indoor recreation space for the next 10 years, it would not need to provide additional indoor space when viewing through the lens of square footage only.

Programs

The City of Hickory offers 100% of key programming measured nationally, either directly or via partnership. The department concentrates least on Health & Wellness Education, Safety Training and Aquatics. Overall, Hickory is on target with agencies across the nation.

The City of Hickory offers 44% of targeted programming measured by the NRPA. The City offers the following on a limited basis...

- Summer Camps
- Senior Programs
- Teen Programs
- Programs for Individuals with Disabilities

Finances

When compared to agencies within its jurisdictional population range, the PR&ST Department relies on the general fund 27% more than the median. This would suggest that there is opportunity for the department to work towards a revenue policy which accounts for competing priorities and the comprehensive master plan's identified needs.

Operations

The City just matches the median FTEs per 10,000, as measured across the nation, for its jurisdiction population. Looking ahead to plan sunset, it appears that the number of employees is still just more than median if all other factors remained the same. Overall agency staffing slightly exceeds the median. When the City moves into its projected national jurisdiction population category, the City will significantly drop below the median. However, the lower quartile of the new jurisdiction levels currently resides at 38.7 if all other factors remained the same. Being a metro-statistical hub with sport tourism goals, it would be advisable for the City to exceed this lower quartile standard. The lower quartile is the value under which 25% of data points are found when they are arranged in increasing order.

The City of Hickory, when compared to peer communities, is above median by .3 for FTEs per 1,000 residents. This is notable due to its comparison to much larger jurisdictions. Among jurisdictions nearest its population (41,239-57,303), Hickory has the second lowest FTE's per 1,000 residents, differing by .58 from Danville VA which reported 1.43.

It is important to note that Hickory's calculations include Public Services staff who maintain and operate the City's parks.

Proposed level of service standards are contained in the Benchmarking & Level of Service Analysis section.

Trends in Public Recreation

A recreation and leisure trends analysis helps communities to tie into local, state and national recreation trends that provide value to data driven decisions. Current usage, participation rates, and demographic projections blend with what is trending nation-wide to help communities tailor recreation offerings. Information from Sportsman, Placer AI, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), the Sports & Fitness Industry Association, US Census and Hickory metrics were used to facilitate this analysis. Additional sources and data can be found in the Benchmarking & Level of Service Analysis section.



National Trends in Relation to Hickory

The top recreation trends of 2023 according to the NRPA consist of the following.

The Electrification of Parks and Recreation/Use of Renewable Energy Resources Such as Electric Maintenance Vehicles and Mowers	Digital Twin Mapping AKA Virtual Modeling of the Natural & Built Environments	Edible Utensils
Pickleball	Parks & Recreation as Anchor Institutions	
ATV Wheelchairs	Mindfulness, Nutrition and Stress Reduction	

Source: NRPA Top Trends in Recreation 2023

The PR&ST Department is recognized by the public as an essential service which may progress to a view of it being an anchor institution in the future. The City sees almost immediate use and growth with regard to pickleball offerings. This tracks with national trends that see pickleball as the fastest growing sport in the nation. In a 2022 report by the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) it was noted that for the first time since 2015, every racquet sport increased its total participation number compared to previous years. Racquet sports enjoy prominence in Hickory.



The Most Commonly Planned Additions to Parks in 2022	The Most Commonly Planned Programs in 2022
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Splash Play Areas 2. Synthetic Turf Sports Fields 3. Dog Parks 4. Playgrounds 5. Outdoor Fitness Areas & Fitness Trails 6. Bike Trails 7. Park Shelters 8. Park Restroom Structures 9. Community or Multi-purpose Centers 10. Open Spaces and Natural Areas 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fitness Programs (Up from #3) 2. Environmental Education Programs 3. Mind-body Balance Programs (Up from #4) 4. Group Exercise Programs (Down from #1) 5. Teen Programming (Down from #2) 6. Performing Arts Programs (Not in the 2021 Top 10) 7. Adult Sports Teams (Up from #9) 8. Educational Programs (Down from #6) 9. Special Needs Programs (Up from #10) 10. Day Camps & Summer Camps (Not in the 2021 Top 10)

Source: Recreation Management State of the Industry Report 2022

Lifestyle Activities

SFIA noted that in 2022, lifestyle activities such as tennis remained popular and grew more than 20% since 2019. Yoga grew more than 10% during the same time period. Trail running and day hiking have grown for the fifth consecutive year. Facility-based fitness activities such as stationary cycling, weight machines and ellipticals have not bounced back from pre-pandemic levels.

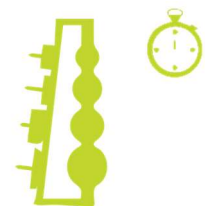
Mindfulness, Nutrition and Stress Reduction

The NRPA reports that for 2023, support for mental, emotional and social health are trending. Examples of activities include nature therapy, stress reduction classes, tai chi and guided meditation.

Sources: NRPA Top Trends in Recreation 2023
SFIA Topline Report 2022

Senior Citizens

During the life of the master plan, the City of Hickory is projected to possibly see its **largest increases** in the following age ranges based on numbers provided by the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Data Center (Catawba County numbers). The percentages represent a total increase from 2023-2033.



100 Years...216.7%	85-99 Years...57.9%	75-84 Years 29.3%
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National trends, according to the National Recreation & Park Association seem to be showing a renewed interest in senior programs and services after the Covid 19 pandemic. This is with a particular eye to senior center revitalization. During a 2019 study, it was found that the average age of adults using senior centers was 79 years old. According to an NRPA Healthy Aging in Parks Report provided in 2017, the senior population will grow to 82.3 million, nation-wide by 2040 equating to 21.7% of the total US population. This will be larger than the percentage of the population under 18 years. The report found the following trends.



The most common park and recreation offerings for older adults include...

Exercise Classes	Field Trips	Arts & Crafts Classes
Volunteer Opportunities at Recreation Centers	Events & Festivals for Older Adults	Evidence-based Programs for Older Adults
Partnerships with Area Agencies on Aging	Leadership in Providing Senior Services & Programming	

Source: 2017 NRPA Healthy Aging in Parks Report

Other notable age groupings projected to increase in the next 10 years are below.

25-34 Years 9.4%	35-44 Years 17.2%
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These local trends align with the City’s strategic goals to attract younger residents. With regard to local trends involving a decline in particular age ranges, the following are the most notable.

16-17 Years...-12.3%	15 Years...-11.7%	45-54 Years...-8.4%
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State Trends

Popular Niche Recreation: Disc Golf, Dog Parks, Court Games and Golf.	Parks & Recreation is seen as an essential service
Most Popular Outdoor Recreation Activities: Water-based Recreation, Walking, Visiting Parks, Hiking and Fishing	#1 Priority of Park Management = Operate Existing Parks
Barriers to Participation in Outdoor Recreation: Lack of Time, Lack of Facilities, Cost, Physical Health Limitations, and Quality/Condition of Facilities	Greenways are a priority for a majority of communities.
Travel to parks via walking or biking is not as common as driving though many communities have networks that lead to most facilities/parks.	Most dog parks are reported as attached to other facilities.

Source: North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan 2020 to 2025 & NC State Recreation Resources Service Municipal and County Parks & Recreation Services Trend Study 2017-2018

Local Trends

In addition to the Usage Analysis communicated earlier, an examination of attendance reports from January 2018 to December of 2022 revealed a few prominent trends that are helpful in planning for the next 10 years. The following offerings were consistently **most popular**, as measured by attendance from month to month and should be maximized further.

Fitness Center Usage at Highland & Ridgeview Recreation Centers	Open Gym at Highland, Ridgeview, and Westmont Recreation Centers	Recreation Sports Programming
Trailheads at City Parks... Hickory City Park Rotary-Geitner Park Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park	Pickleball	Special Events & Niche Programs

Among the myriad of classes offered, most traditional fitness and recreation classes saw less than 100 participants in a given month as examined via attendance reports from 2018 to 2022. Among classes, the most popular appeared to be Zumba, Cycling, Senior Gym Walkers, Total Body and Tai Chi.

Annual Participants in Athletic Programs	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023 Est.
	2,000	1,886	1,798	1,432	582	1,461	2,000

Participants in Non-athletic Programs	2022	2021	2022
	62,201	45,114	68,946

Source: Department Metrics





Key Recommendation Summary

First and foremost, the master plan should be used at the department level. It contains information that will assist in daily data-driven decisions based on the needs and desires of the public balanced with quantitative and qualitative analysis. The plan would then benefit leadership who will use its contents for strategic decision making and advocacy. *Below are some key recommendations based on the guiding principles of this plan.* A full list of recommendations is contained with the Recommendations section and is further developed in the Application section. It is important to *view these sections as a resource* supported by extensive public input, data and analysis *versus a mandate*. The application of the plan is not an event but a journey which requires flexibility. *It also presupposes that without proper resources such as funding and adequate staffing, some actions cannot be taken. Feasibility studies, project-level master plans, and cost forecasting should also be assumed as necessary along with the periodic updating of demographic data as it evolves with time.* Such efforts will help the City to understand the true cost of plan implementation and context which will pave the way for securing funding through grants, potential referendums, partnerships and out of the box fundraising.

Biggest Needs =
Equitable Distribution of Recreation...Revitalization of Existing Assets...Building Department Capacity

Improvement & Maximization of Existing Assets



Park Updates: Reflect Classifications...Balance Use...Meet Needs...Follow Trends...Enhance Aesthetics...Showcase the City's Personality
Strive Towards Universal Design
Revitalize Underutilized Parks
Investigate Placing Splash Pads in Each Quadrant
Seek Carolina Thread Trail Re-alignment & Foothills Conservancy Partnerships
Create Awareness of Park Safety Efforts in Place
Review Benefit of Improvements to Aging Facilities

Communication of Existing Assets

Develop Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Communication Plan
Market to Niche Interests
Leverage National Parks & Recreation Specific Communication Resources
Orient to Existing Assets (Lake Hickory) Using Specialized Inventories
Create Recreation Guide & Park Directory for Individuals with Disabilities
Make Strategic Use of Message Centers to Highlight Rest of System
Focus on Teens & Hard to Reach Groups Using Alternate Methods

Growth Planning

Consider Proposed Level of Service Standards
Focus on Park Amenities in Eastern Quadrants
Focus on Revitalization of Western Quadrants
Recruit Private Investors to Expand Key Amenities

Sports Tourism

Identify Sports Tourism Niche
Maximize Partnership with Hickory Metro Convention Center
Increase Mountain Biking Opportunities in Area
Explore Disability Sports Tourism
Magnify & Build New College Partnerships

Increased Focus on Natural Assets & Education



Create Community-wide Environmental Stewardship Program
Partner with Groups (i.e. CVCC Bio Club & NC Conservation Corps)
Involve Volunteers in Natural Landscape Enhancements/Maintenance
Introduce Nature-based Programming
Consider and Review 2018 Recreation & Sports Commission Natural Area Management Guide
Leverage North Carolina Native Plants for Conservation & Strategic Maintenance Uses

Equitable & Inclusive Access to Recreation



Strive to Equally Distribute Parks, Trails & Amenities Among Quadrants
Increase Walkability & Bikeable Footprint Through Prioritization of Walk. Bike. Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan
Use Census Tracts/Population Concentrations to Customize Parks & Trails
Create Synergy Between Offerings for Senior Populations & Individuals with Disabilities
Finalize ADA Transition Plan & Increase Staff Having ADA Certifications
Add Rating Systems for Effort to Amenities Such as Trails
Explore Inclusion Policy & Staff Training...Form Local Government Network
Elevate Adaptive Sports



Continuity with City Strengths, Goals & Identity



Use Goals of Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan to Guide Efforts
Establish Appropriate Levels of Local Funding Sufficient to Match Other Sources of Funds
Champion Priority Projects of Walk. Bike. Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan
Regularly Reference the City's Cache of Master Plans

Implementation of Nationally Recognized Administrative & Operational Practices



Create Plan and Invest in Staff Credentialing
Complete National Recreation & Park Association Annual Park Survey
Use CAPRA Standards to Develop Administrative, Operational, Planning & Maintenance Structure
Leverage Software (Munis & RecDesk)
Develop Standard Guidelines for Program Development & Evaluation



Appendix Highlights: Tools for Data-driven Decisions



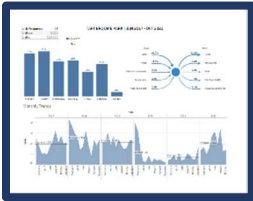
Key Funding Sources & Grant Opportunities

List of key federal, state, local, and public-private partnership related funding sources for parks and recreation related projects.



Topographic Inventory

Topographic maps for each park property. These maps will assist in assessing the feasibility of future park improvements and initiatives.



Park & Facility Usage Data (Placer AI)

Usage data for individual parks and facilities to assist with decision making regarding park improvements and initiatives as well as to inform maintenance scheduling.



Key Best Practices

Information on best practices helpful to the PR&ST Department.

**Welcoming...Artistic...Knowledgeable...Nostalgic...
Active...Lively...& Connected**

The Plan...The City

Overview

The City of Hickory knows how to deliver life...well crafted! According to the recently updated (2022) Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan, the City spans 31.14 square miles and is primarily located in the picturesque northwestern portion of Catawba County in western North Carolina. Some small portions of the City dip into both Burke and Caldwell Counties. The City features a vibrant city center, attractive neighborhoods, multiple parks, trails, Lake Hickory, a growing sports tourism presence and a forward-thinking entrepreneurial approach to the future. Always moving forward, the Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan acts as a springboard for the City’s comprehensive parks and recreation master plan and is reflected throughout. The Hickory by Choice plan empowers the City to strategically ensure the long-range

A Snapshot in Time
The information & data used to create this master plan represent a “snapshot” of existing conditions and available data during the plan’s construction.

health, safety and welfare of the community through goals and policies that guide regulatory and budgetary decision making. Such decisions are relative to land use, transportation, natural resources, parks and a myriad of other community development elements. This comprehensive parks and recreation master plan, in concert with the broader master planning efforts of the City, aims to customize parks, recreation and sports tourism through the unique insights of citizens, stakeholders and the analysis conducted.



The City of Hickory Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department, in collaboration with the Public Services Department, features 27 parks, 572 acres of parkland, and 20 miles of trail which include the Hickory Trail project (in progress) and a vast array of amenities. The City is home to the Hickory Crawdads, a Minor League Baseball Team of the South Atlantic League and a High-A affiliate of the Texas Rangers. In recognition of the value sports tourism brings to the local economy, citizens and the region the department expanded its mission and changed its name to the Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism (PR&ST) Department on July 1, 2019. This name change was shortly followed by the creation of a Sports Tourism Coordinator position to lead efforts.



Source: Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan

City Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Profile

Hickory citizens see parks, recreation and sports tourism as essential! Parks and key facilities experience exceptional use and the PR&ST Department is viewed as the top provider of fun in the community. Residents believe that they are receiving high-quality programming, world-class events and are eager to gain greater access to information so that they can learn more about the leisure opportunities that the City has to offer. There is notable support for maximizing existing assets in the form of park innovations and renovations. Trail projects are also clearly important. This is complementary to the emerging trend of passive recreation in the area. Lake Hickory and access to more water-based recreation is on the minds of citizens who are also envisioning future amenities and customized programming. Though they are looking to the future, there is a community-wide sense that investing in the current system will serve citizens well for the next 10 years. The City is already on top of many key identified needs and desires.

Past Plan Efforts & Notable Results

The City adopted a Park and Recreation Master Plan, facilitated by Gardner Gidley & Associates, in February of 1997. In 2010, the City worked with Site Solutions to conduct a Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment that focused on the specific needs of the City’s inventory as viewed through the lens of national and locally created recreation “standards.” *It is important to note that the 1997 plan anticipated the City of Hickory as having 45,000 citizens by 2017. To date, the City has not reached this population. The 2010 needs assessment recommendations were based upon a population projection of 50,000 residents by the year 2020. This, also, has not yet come to fruition.* This implies, at least in a general sense, that Hickory is ahead of the game with several notable achievements since the previous plan and assessment were compiled. The following table highlights some of these accomplishments



Achievement Highlights

Bruce Meisner Park	Regional park opened in 2022. Meets 2010 needs assessment goal of developing Cloninger Mill property, establishing a park in the Northeast Quadrant. Though classified as Regional, this park has the capacity to serve as a future Neighborhood Park. Catawba County's Saint Stephen's Park can also help with Neighborhood Park needs in this quadrant.
Lowe's Foods City Park	Community Park opened in 2017 thanks to a collaborative effort between the City of Hickory, Lowe's Foods and the Friends of Hickory. This inclusive park features unitary surfacing, a miniature splash pad, metal slide for individuals with cochlear implants and extensive fencing for safe and enjoyable play in an urban area.
Miracle of Hickory Park	Neighborhood Park introduced in 2019. This park is home to the Hickory Music Factory and site of the historic Miracle of Hickory hospital. The park features a picnic shelter, playground equipment, and open space.
Highland Park	Serene Neighborhood Park in Northeast Quadrant.
Installation of Turf Fields	Two turf fields installed at Henry Fork River Park to enable year-round play and to facilitate sports tourism related initiatives. 21 acres added. More turf fields are planned.
Significant Acreage Additions	Since the 2010 needs assessment, the City has gained over 140 acres, for citizen enjoyment, to include Linear Park acreage.
Multiple Bathroom Amenities Added to Inventory	Since the 2010 needs assessment, the City has installed bathroom amenities at more than seven parks and plans to add more.
Multiple Pickleball Courts	Several (13) pickleball courts were added to the City's inventory in order to meet local demands indicative of regional, state and national trends.
2 Community Gardens	The City has invested in two community gardens in the Northeast and Southwest Quadrants.
Strengthening Key Partnerships and Forging New Ones	The City of Hickory championed strong partnerships with organizations such as the Catawba Valley Youth Soccer Association, Hickory YMCA, Northwest North Carolina Mountain Bike Alliance, Hickory Music Factory, Dick's Sporting Goods, Catawba Valley Community College, Lenoir Rhyne University and more.
Preservation of Green Space & Riparian Areas	The City continues to address the preservation of green space and protection of riparian areas via its updated Sidewalk, Bikeway, Greenway and Trail Master Plan as well as its land development code.
Prioritization of Master Plan for Sidewalks, Bikeways, Greenways and Trails	Prioritization of key projects from the Master Plan for Sidewalks, Bikeways, Greenways and Trails was carried out through the addition of key projects to the City of Hickory Inspiring Spaces Master Plan, adopted in May 2014. Projects such as 1 st Street SW Urban Greenway were prioritized by way of the Hickory Trail bond project which is currently under construction.
Greenway Development in Conjunction with Public Entities (Such as Lenoir Rhyne University)	The City of Hickory has undertaken the multi-segment Hickory Trail bond project of which a completed portion (City Walk) facilitates linkage between Lenoir Rhyne University and Downtown Hickory.
Encouragement of Bike Lanes	Bike lane projects appear in the 2020 Walk. Bike. Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan. Among the top 12 priority projects, there are three bike lane projects within the top 5.
Development of City-wide Greenway & Bike Plan	The Walk. Bike. Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan was developed and adopted in December of 2020.

Since the 2010 Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment, it is easy to see that the City has been able to celebrate some large accomplishments such as the opening of Bruce Meisner Park (Cloninger Mill). Exceeding expectations, the City has also launched strategic initiatives capable of meeting both recreational and economic development aims via the 10-mile Hickory Trail Bond Project and sports tourism mission.

To fully understand existing conditions and the City’s capacity for parks and recreation related endeavors in the next 10 years, it is important to explore the context of the PR&ST Department as it existed at the time of this plan’s compilation.

The Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department... Creating a New Baseline



The PR&ST Department welcomed a new director in June of 2019 as it unknowingly faced the start of a global pandemic which would end up halting most of its normal programs, cause an increased interest in outdoor park use and necessitate a new kind of creativity in order to meet the needs of citizens who found themselves in isolation. Around this timeframe, a shift in park and facility maintenance responsibilities was being finalized with the Public Services Department. This large-scale transition challenged and stretched both departments who continue to refine their collaboration with regard to operations and maintenance. The sports tourism arm of this department was also born around this time as well.



Through hard work and ingenuity, the department has served citizens with distinction. It now finds itself with a unique opportunity to refine or even...redefine...its identity through a comprehensive master planning process which seeks to build on strengths of the past while innovating new offerings to meet the current and future needs of citizens, regional visitors and sports tourists. In many ways and due to leadership changes, a global pandemic and cessation of its maintenance responsibilities, the PR&ST Department is creating a new baseline. To facilitate this new chapter, the department updated its mission and vision during the master planning process. These statements were informed by extensive feedback and plan findings. Their mission and vision were affirmed by the Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Commission who acted as this plan’s Advisory Committee.



PR&ST Department Mission

Crafting healthy lifestyles through high quality recreation programs, events, parks and facilities.

PR&ST Department Vision

Be a leader in the areas of health and wellness by providing diverse, welcoming and innovative activities that strengthen the mind and body while enhancing the quality of life for our community.

Values

Quality...Diversity...Welcome...Innovation...Community



Summary of What the Comprehensive Master Plan Does

Replaces the 1997 master plan and 2010 needs assessment with a 10-year decision making tool for leadership, planning resource for staff work and information hub for citizens.
Provides goals based on citizen, stakeholder and staff input regarding needs and desires for park and recreation related offerings. Goals are further based on extensive analysis of population projections, trends and more.
Assists with qualification/competitiveness for state, federal and private funding.
Enhances the efforts of co-equal master plans such as the Walk. Bike. Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan.
Establishes a focus on the use of best practices articulated via Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) Accreditation. Lays a foundation for accreditation if desired by the City.
Provides guidance on the improvement of parks, facilities, trails, sports tourism initiatives, programs, events, operational practices, maintenance practices and finances.
Gives leadership and citizens a clear picture of existing conditions and future opportunities.
Proposes well-informed goals for the next 10 years.
Validates decisions related to parks, recreation and sports tourism.
Elevates citizen sentiment of parks, recreation and sports tourism as an essential service.
Draws from the strengths of other communities, through benchmarking and best-practices, to craft effective goals and map out efficient actions.
Acts as a tool for identifying and evaluating needs and how to meet them.

Understanding the City's History

Like the PR&ST Department, it is helpful to understand a brief history of the City of Hickory in order to see how its context plays into its recreational needs. A short historical outline is provided for this purpose. For a broader historical context of the City, readers are invited to view the Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan available on the City's website. Here are some brief yet applicable historical highlights to consider from the Hickory by Choice plan.

- The City of Hickory was established in 1889.
- The City of Hickory was the first jurisdiction in North Carolina and third in the United States to adopt the Council/Manager form of government. This occurred in 1913.
- Hickory began as a late nineteenth-century trading community and became a twentieth-century manufacturing center for furniture, hosiery and textiles. By 1961, the City had 46 furniture plants, 89 hosiery mills, 27 manufactories and a population of 37,000 people.
- The 1980s saw the move-in of the fiber optic industry.

- The past 20+ years have featured an increased focus on the arts and sciences as well as the...
 - Development of the 321 Corridor
 - Introduction of minor league baseball to the area via the construction of LP Frans Stadium
 - Collaborative efforts among institutions of higher learning including Lenoir-Rhyne University, Catawba Valley Community College and Appalachian State University.
- From 2000 to 2012, over 45,000 jobs were lost and 25% of young adults left the area
- By 2007, the City of Hickory was named “All America City” for the third time
- In 2012, the City took an aggressive and strategic approach to revitalization, forming the Inspiring Spaces Committee
- In 2014, the City passed a bond referendum and subsequently launched a \$90M program combining \$40M in bonds and over \$50M in grants to produce a robust revitalization effort yielding gateways, a 10-mile multi-modal trail, and Trivium Corporate Center. The City has seen great success in these endeavors thus far.

Source: Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan

City Accomplishments

In 2022, U.S. News ranked the Hickory MSA as **#1 in Most Affordable Places to Live in the United States** and it **held it's spot in 2023!** Hickory was ranked **#3 in Best Places to Live in North Carolina in 2022** and **#31 in Best Places to Live in the United States**. In 2023, Hickory moved to the **#25 spot for Best Places to Live in the United States**.

Hickory is a **three-time All-America City** and was **recognized in 2018 by National Geographic Travel as one of the Best Small Cities in America**. Additionally, Hickory was recognized by **Forbes magazine for being first in the nation for lowest business costs**, at 25% below the U.S. average. Other accolades from 2022 and 2021 include...

Hickory Named Most Affordable Metro & Ranked Among Best Places to Live in America (US News & World Report 2022)

Hickory Among Top 100 Best-Performing Cities (Milken Institute 2022)

Hickory Ranked No. 15 of Top 20 Hottest Housing Markets in December 2021 (Realtor.com 2021)

Hickory Listed Among America's 10 Best Places to Live Near the Mountains (US News & World Report 2021)

Hickory Ranked No. 2 Best Place to Retire in North Carolina (Smart Asset Hickory Study 2021)

Hickory Among Best and Most Affordable Places to Live (US News & World Report 2021)



Source: City of Hickory & News Sources Named Above

Understanding the Region

As previously stated, the City of Hickory is located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains along the Catawba River, approximately 50 miles north of Charlotte and 80 miles east of Asheville in North Carolina's Piedmont region. The City encompasses approximately 31.14 square miles and is crossed by Interstate 40, US Highway 321 and US Highway 70. It is mostly located in Catawba County but is also partially situated in Burke and Caldwell Counties.



The City...The Metropolitan Statistical Hub

The City of Hickory serves as the regional hub of the Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton metropolitan statistical area (MSA) which is the state's 8th largest. The MSA features approximately 24 municipalities. According to estimates from Placer.ai, a service that estimates foot traffic and migration patterns, the City can see approximately 165,000 different visits of at least 30 minutes within a 24-hour period. This can have an effect on parks and recreation which should be considered in the overall 10-year picture.

Population Projections

MSA

Regional projections, according to the WPCOG indicate the following...

2020 Census: 365,276

2030 Projections: 394,203

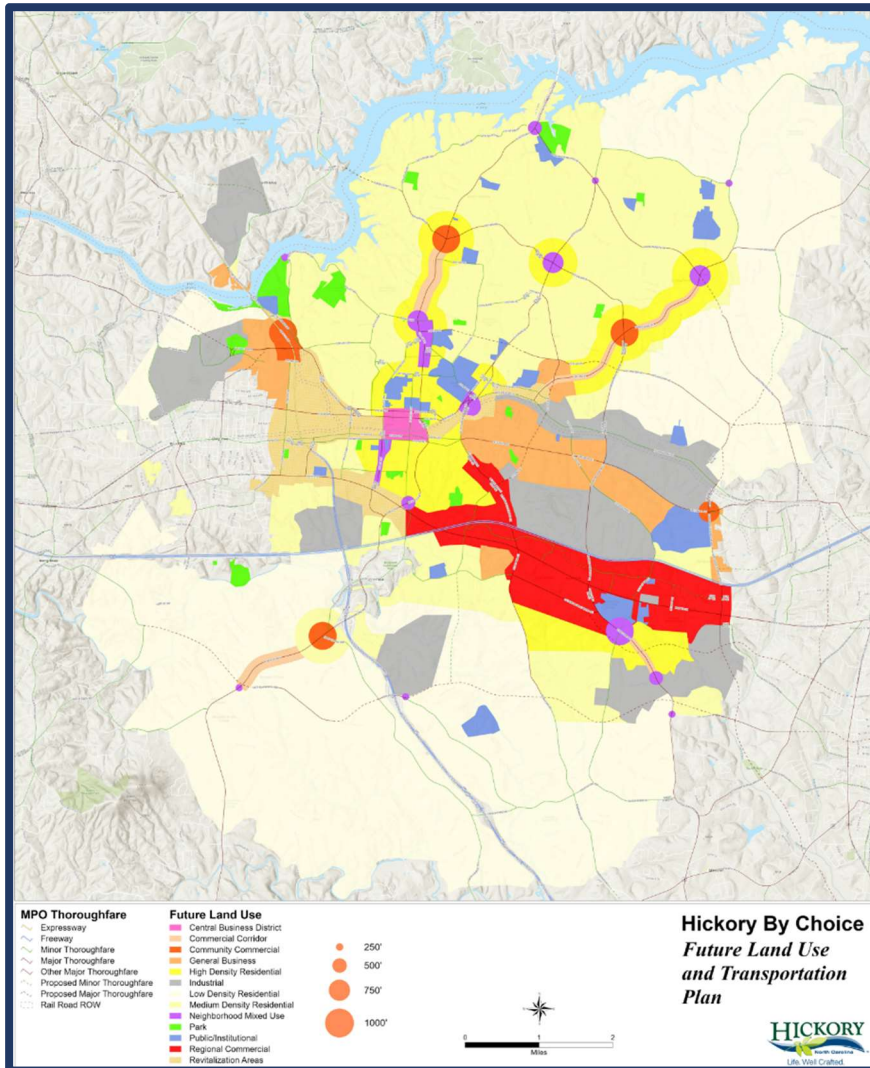
2035 Projections: 418,269

Source: Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan & WPCOG Data Center



Hickory by Map

In order to gain an even greater understanding of the City, its existing conditions and future opportunities, it is important to highlight a few key representations in the form of maps. Such maps communicate a “bigger picture” in which this master plan must reside.



Source: City of Hickory Planning Department

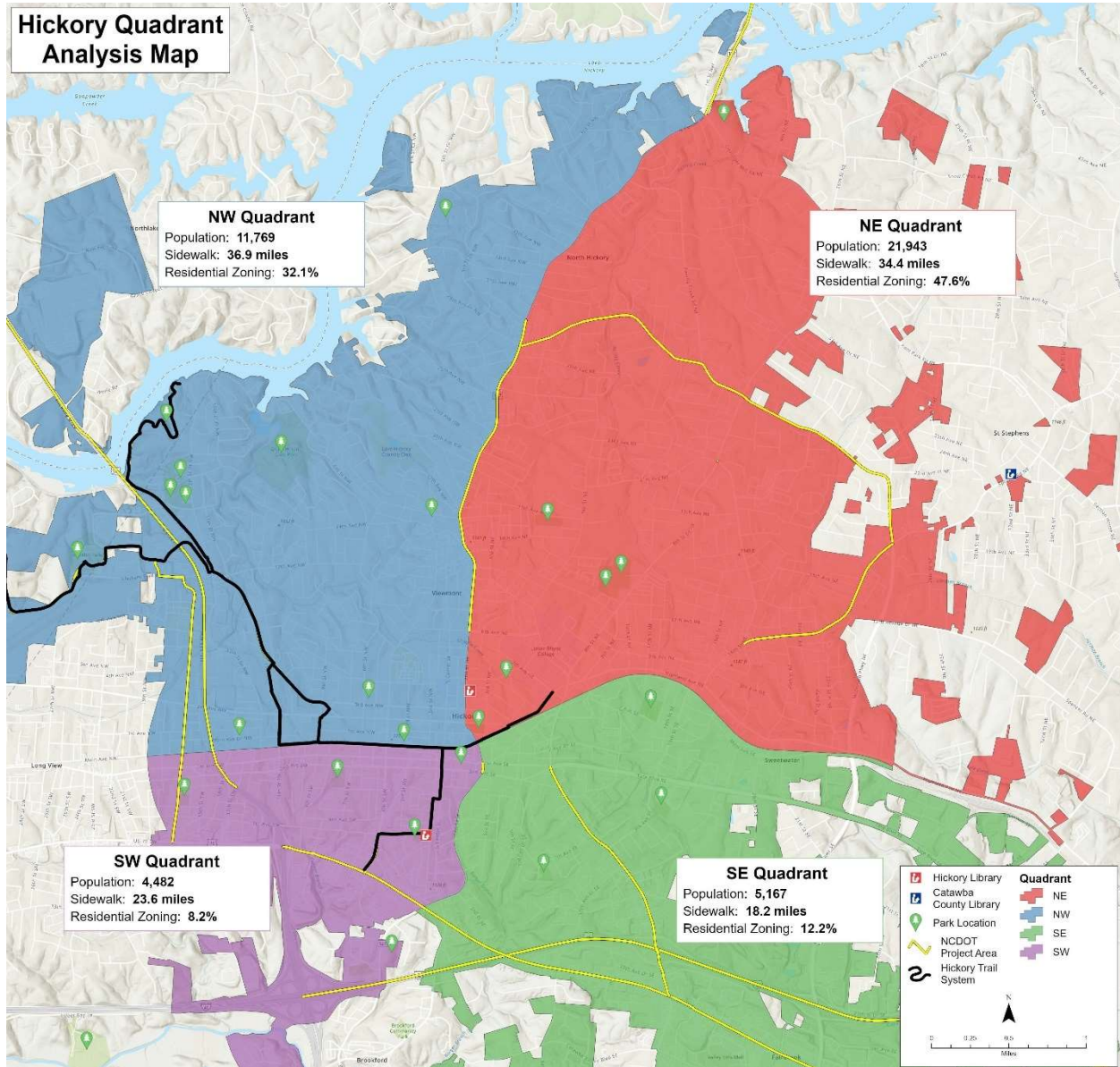
The Hickory by Choice Future Land Use Map

was updated in 2022. This map is used by City leadership to guide decisions on land use. It reflects current uses as well as uses the City sees as complimentary to its long-range goals. As new opportunities arise, this map helps to ensure that such opportunities fit well into the overall planning vision of the City. With regard to parks, the map depicts existing locations however, there is great flexibility as to where a park can be placed per zoning ordinance. This bodes well for any necessary adjustments that might be made to ensure the equitable distribution of parks in the future.

City Land Available for Possible Development in Next 10 Years

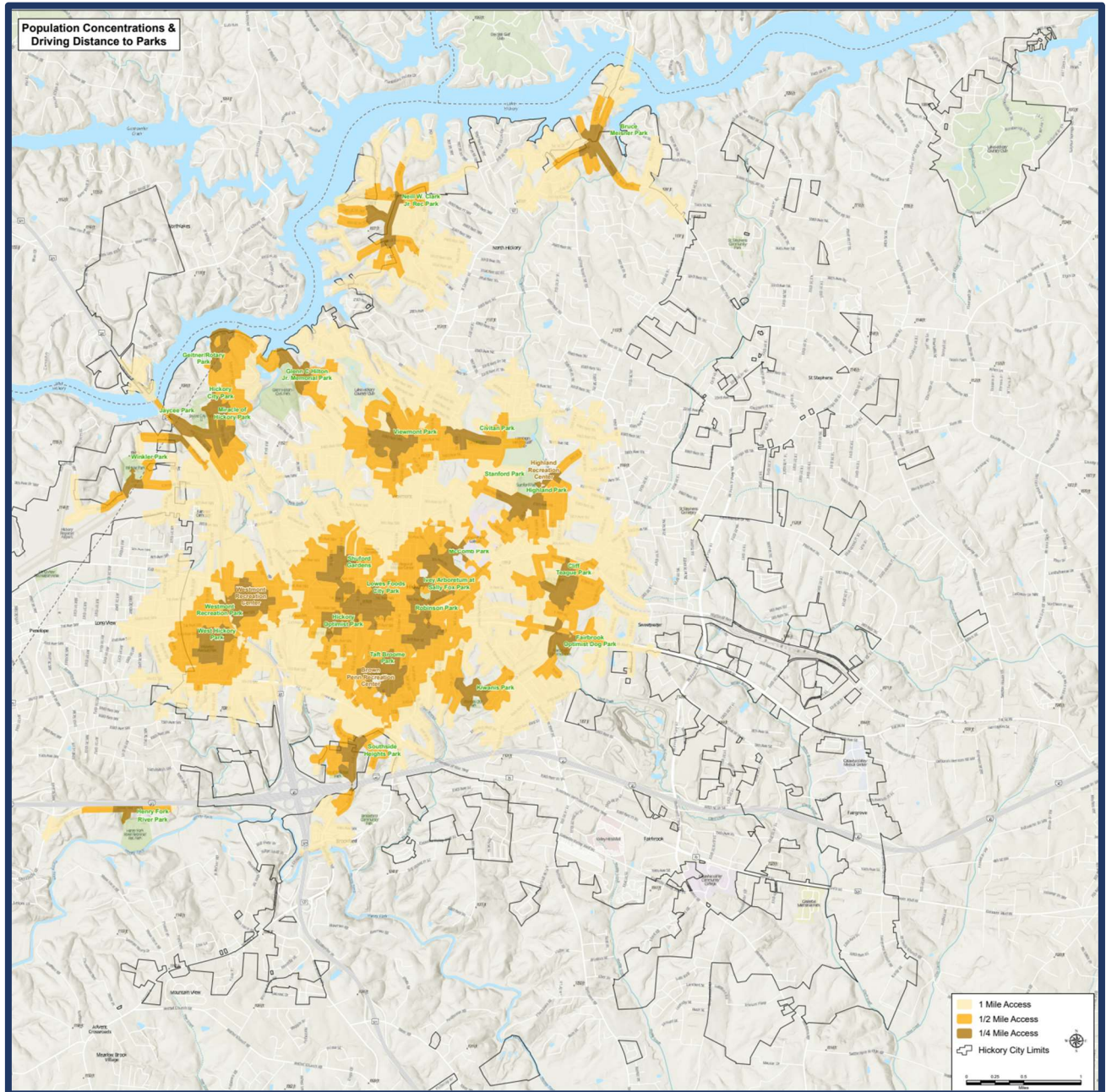
- Sandy Pines Property (12 Acres)
- Bruce Meisner Park (5 of 73 Acres Developed)
- River Road Property (160 Acres)

The quadrants of the City help to delineate equitable distribution of recreation resources when additional context is provided (i.e. available infrastructure, population, etc.). The following map depicts the current population for each quadrant along with sidewalk miles and residential zoning. This information appears in a quadrant analysis later in this plan.



Sources: US Census & Hickory GIS Sidewalk Feature Layer and Zoning Layer

As the City of Hickory strives for, and is achieving, greater connectivity within its system, this population concentration & driving distance map provides a visual depiction of how the primary means of accessing parks and facilities (driving) relates to the population at this time. The Walk. Bike Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan is yielding projects to change the need for driving to an option for walking and biking where possible. See the Inventory and Analysis section for both a walkability and proximity analysis.



Source: US Census & Hickory GIS

Natural Resources

The City of Hickory knows that public lands increase everyone's quality of life via the preservation of natural resources, wildlife habitats, clean water, clean air and open space. Hickory citizens are beginning to embrace a desire for greater emphasis in this area.



The 2022 City of Hickory Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment Survey revealed that 92% of respondents believe or strongly believe that parks, nature preserves and trails protect open space and the environment. Environmental education was noted as a medium priority with outdoor adventure programs listed as high priority. This is important to consider within the growing conversation of environmental stewardship, nation-wide. Environmental education also made it into the top 10 of households estimated as needing certain forms of recreation programming though only 18% of participants said they would sign up for an environmental education program. 89% of households reported that the need for environmental education was not met or partially met. These numbers suggest that there is room for considering a greater focus on environmental stewardship and program offerings.

In recent years, the City has been increasing its emphasis on what the National Recreation and Park Association notes as the benefits of conservation and environmental stewardship which include:

- Reduction of carbon through sustainable landscapes that cleanse air and water, replenish aquifers, reduce stormwater runoff, and protect wildlife habitat
- Public access to safe, affordable and healthy avenues to enjoy nature
- Contribution to the economic well-being of a community, conservation of energy and resources

There is also interest in restoring portions of park space to North Carolina native plants for environmental and maintenance benefits. According to the North Carolina Cooperative Extension, “native plants are those species that evolved naturally in a region without human intervention.” There are an estimated 3,900 species of plants recognized as native to North Carolina. The Extension notes that “landscaping with native plants empowers gardeners to care for nature and enhance the local environment while adding beauty and diversity to their homesites. By planting natives, gardeners support native pollinators and connect with the natural heritage of a region.”

Sources: National Recreation & Park Association and North Carolina Cooperative Extension

The City of Hickory resides within the *Northern Inner Piedmont Ecoregion* of North Carolina. Ecological regions are large, defined, areas with a similar climate and pattern of ecosystems. They are often used for conservation purposes and to inform landscapers of their best options for native flora. There are over 70 species of invasive exotic plants in North Carolina.



Invasive species are important to address for the following reasons.
Invasive species...

1. Cause extinction of native plants and animals.
2. Reduce biodiversity.
3. Compete with native organisms for limited resources.
4. Alter habitats.

Sources: NC DOT Invasive Exotic Plants of North Carolina

The Northern Inner Piedmont Ecoregion is characterized by...

Physiography	Dissected irregular plains, low to high hills, ridges, and isolated monadnocks; low to moderate gradient streams with mostly cobble, gravel, and sandy substrate. Elevations range from 360-2035 feet.
Geology	Quaternary to tertiary sandy clay saprolite and micaceous clay to silty clay saprolite; Cambrian gneiss, schist, and amphibolite, some Ordovician and Precambrian gneiss and granite.
Soil <small>(Common Series)</small>	Clifford, Fairview, Halifax, Toast, Bannertown, Stott Knob, Rhodhiss, Westfield, and Woolwine.
Climate	Mean Annual Precipitation in Inches: 45-55 Mean Temperatures Jan Min/Max & July Min/Max (F): 25/48 & 65/87
Potential Natural Vegetation	Mixed oak forest, oak-hickory-pine forest. Mostly white oak, southern red oak, black oak, mockernut and pignut hickories, some Virginia pine and shortleaf pine; on monadnocks chestnut oak; on more mesic sites beech, northern red oak, tulip poplar, red maple, and hemlock.
Land Use & Cover	Mixed forest, deciduous forest, pasture; hay, cattle, poultry, and tobacco production.

Source: Environmental Protection Agency NCSC Characteristics of Ecoregions of North Carolina and South Carolina



The City of Hickory articulates its natural status and goals in the Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan. There is a **sustainability vision** for Hickory that incorporates *ecological integrity, economic security, equal opportunity and social well-being* into the fabric of its future. Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism uniquely contributes to this vision.

Here is an elaboration of Hickory’s natural resources and sustainability vision as articulated in the Hickory by Choice

2030 Comprehensive Master Plan.

- Hickory does not contribute to environmental degradation
- The City is full of green spaces that support mixed use and minimize pollution
- Lake Hickory is protected from contaminants and overuse
- Rainwater reclamation = use of recycled water for landscaping and potable needs
- Residents are healthy and not exposed to pollutants

The City of Hickory sees recreation and parks as a key component to its vision in the following ways.

- Hickory is full of parks and recreation opportunities with easy access to residents
- Residents are proud of healthy community options
- Pedestrian and bicycle enhancements are provided in many areas

In 2018, the City of Hickory was presented with a draft Natural Area Management Guide for consideration, through the Parks and Recreation Commission at the time. Some of its key suggestions as well as its continuity with the Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan are represented in this master plan update. The full proposal is recommended for consideration. Keeping a balance between the natural and built environment was a key recommendation with regard to the protection and/or restoration of air, land, and water quality as well as the overall quality of life of residents. It also suggested that the City be attentive to ensuring that nature is leveraged as a motivator for citizens to avail themselves of its benefits for local stay-cations and recreational options. Natural areas, located within parks were also suggested as a way to ensure sustainability while simultaneously lessening the intensity of maintenance management. Five areas to concentrate on are as follows...

- Early Succession Broom-sedge Fields
- Mixed Pine and Hardwood Woodlands
- Climax Forest Woodlands
- Wetlands
- Aquatic and Stream Habitats

Healthy natural areas were noted as having benefits in the following ways...

Improved air and water quality as well as stormwater management and mitigation of heat island effects	Connectivity of fragmented habitat and ecosystems
Support of biodiversity and providence of habitat for vegetation and wildlife	Overall regional environmental health
Leisure and learning opportunities	Increased economic value of adjacent properties
Areas for research and education	Preservation of natural and cultural heritage
Improvement of individual and community wellness	

Source: 2018 Parks and Recreation Department Natural Area Management Guidance Proposal

At the time of this plan, numerous steps toward the stewardship of natural resources have been explored and taken by the City with special regard for park maintenance and beautification facilitated by the Public Services Department. The Hickory Litter Quitter program is one key way that the City has formalized environmental stewardship and beautification effectively.



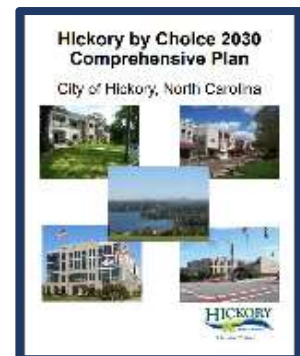
It appears that a greater formalization of environmental education, programming, communication, policies and procedures are the most feasible next steps for the City with regard to having a nature-based focus in the next 10 years. Recommendations regarding increased emphasis on the City’s natural assets, environmental stewardship, education, partnerships and programming are contained in the Recommendation section of this master plan.

Planning Documents Related to Master Plan

The following key planning documents were considered and incorporated, as appropriate, into this comprehensive master plan. This is not an exhaustive representation but rather, an illustration of the most prominent source documents.

Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan (2022 Update)

The long-range Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan was used as a foundational document to ensure that the new parks, recreation and sports tourism comprehensive master plan drew from and complimented its guidance on development, preservation of land use, transportation, connectivity, vision for natural resources, and park utilization. The plan was published in 2010 with its latest update in 2022 during the compilation of this master plan. Individual plans should still be consulted for implementation.



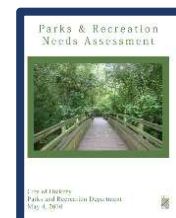
Park and Recreation Master Plan (1997)



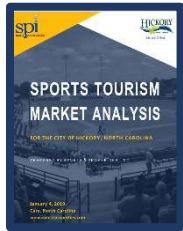
The 1997 Park and Recreation Master plan was used as a reference to assess proposed City “standards”, past conditions and key accomplishments made since its development.

Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment (2010)

The 2010 Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment was performed as a supplement to the 1997 Park and Recreation Master Plan and was used to evaluate “standards”, City progress in meeting its goals and potential gaps in service or facilities.

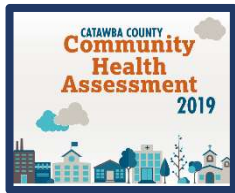


Sports Tourism Market Analysis (2019)



In 2019, the City of Hickory hired Sports Properties Incorporated to perform a Sports Tourism Market Analysis of the greater Hickory sports market. The purpose of this analysis was to provide recommendations for the strategic growth of sports tourism in Hickory. This analysis was used to assess sports tourism assets and opportunities as related to the next 10 years of recreation for the City of Hickory.

Catawba County Health Assessment (2019)

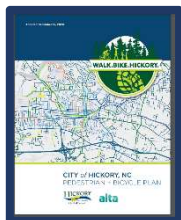


The Catawba County Health Assessment is based on a collaborative, community-led, effort to identify needs, priorities, opportunities and strengths related to health and what impacts it in Catawba County. It was used to obtain an overview of key health indicators that can be used by the City to enhance the health of its citizens. This effort takes place every three years but was briefly paused during the global pandemic. A 2023 updated effort was under way during the time of the master plan's final stages of development and so, the 2019 data was used.

Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities Project Report (2022)



In 2022, the City of Hickory conducted a study to assess existing conditions, strengths, gaps in service and best practices associated with serving individuals with disabilities. Extensive input from individuals with disabilities and their caregivers was received. This project included an assessment of parks and recreation offerings and other key elements related to this field. Results were used to formulate recommendations for equitable access to recreation within this plan. This project document is a reference only document and has not been adopted as a plan for the City.



Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan

The Walk...Bike...Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan addresses the freedom and ability to walk from one's home to a chosen destination within the City of Hickory. Parks and recreation facilities are popular destinations. At the time this plan was written, Hickory's roads were not designed to accommodate both vehicular traffic and walkers/bicyclists. This plan is a comprehensive analysis of the City's opportunities for creating a walk-bike friendly community. The plan was consulted in order to identify key projects that would affect the park and recreation system with regard to mobility, safety, health, the environment and quality of life. It was also used to illustrate Hickory's existing commitment to connectivity. Plans represented within this plan include the Sidewalk, Bikeway, Greenway + Trail Master Plan (2005), Catawba County Health Partners Walkability Strategic Action Plan (2011) and the Western Piedmont Bicycle Plan.

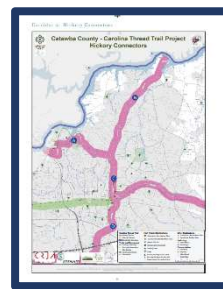
Inspiring Spaces Plan (2014)



This plan for public space improvements was developed to encourage private investment, increase economic development and champion revitalization. Using this plan, the City successfully launched a \$90M bond project resulting in many accomplishments to include Hickory Trail, a 10-mile multi-modal path that is currently under construction and/or completed in certain sections. Hickory Trail is fast becoming recognized as a parks and recreation amenity and new venue for programming. This plan was used to create continuity between its successes and the successes that will come in the next 10 years for the Parks, Recreation and Sports Tourism Department.

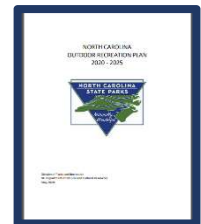
Carolina Thread Trail Master Plan (Catawba County) (2011)

The Carolina Thread Trail Master Plan for Catawba County was consulted to ascertain pending projects and opportunities to link to the Carolina Thread Trail brand as well as citizen interest in fostering additional trail projects.



The North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan 2020 to 2025...a State-wide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

As part of the North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan for 2020 to 2025, the North Carolina Division of Parks & Recreation conducted a public survey to “evaluate demand for, participation in, and perceptions of outdoor recreation.” The survey garnered 17,000 responses and broadly addressed “areas such as outdoor recreation participation, satisfaction, barriers to participation, and attitudes about the recreation provider’s priorities.” Information from this plan was used in helping to assess state-wide recreation trends.



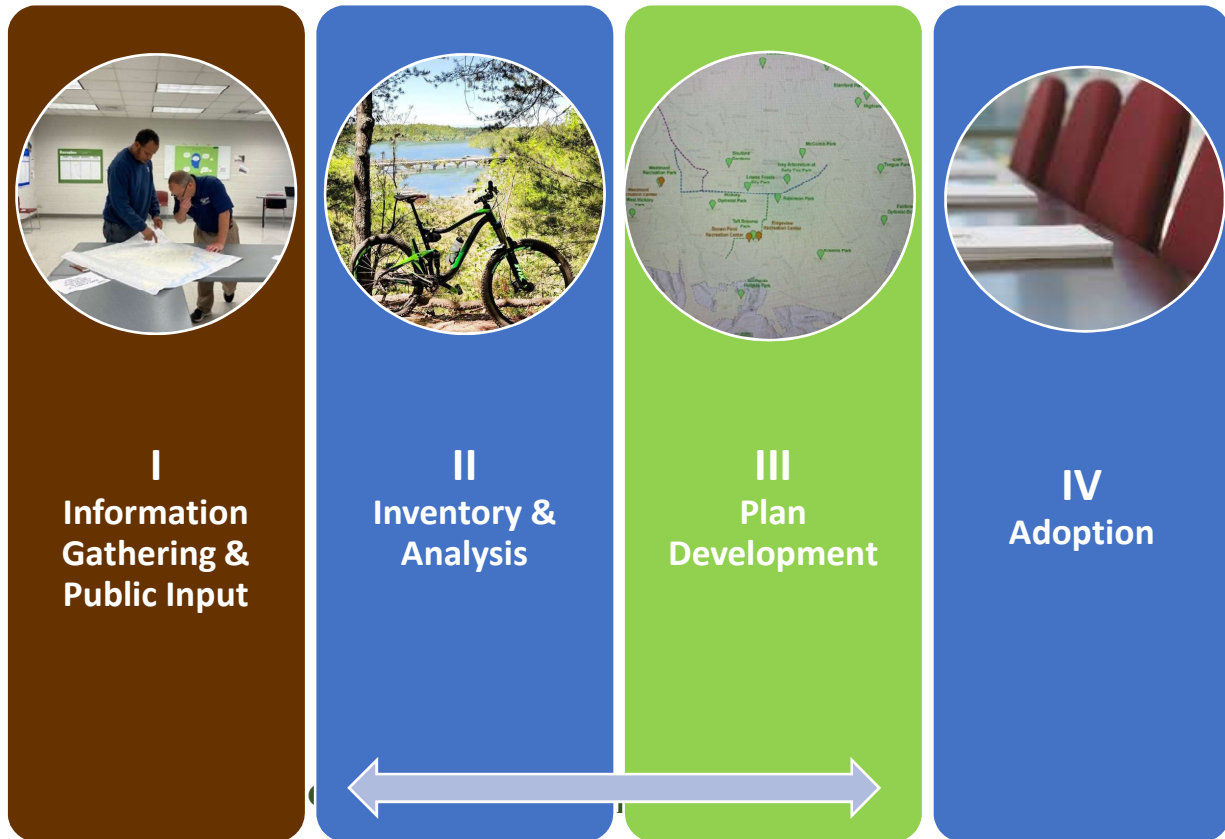
Catawba County Parks & Recreation Master Plan (2015)

With the majority of the City of Hickory residing in Catawba County, the Catawba County Parks and Recreation Master Plan was consulted to identify existing conditions and future plans that might overlap with the needs of the City of Hickory or present unique partnership opportunities within the next 10 years.



The Planning Process

In April of 2022, the City of Hickory officially began efforts to build a data-driven comprehensive master plan whose preceding documents included a 1997 Park and Recreation Master Plan and 2010 Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment. The process was broken down into four phases with the Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Commission acting as an advisory board.



Work Breakdown Structure

The following is a general description of elements comprising each master planning phase along with the associated timeline used as a general reference. Phases overlapped as needed.

Phase I: Information Gathering & Public Input

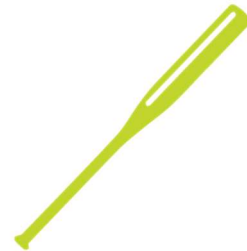
- Inaugural PR&ST Commission Advisory Meeting to Establish Collaboration
- General Orientation to Department, Related City Plans & Key Interviews
- Phase I Public Input Meetings (SWOT Analysis)
- Community Recreation Needs Survey (Launched in Phase II)
- Stakeholder & Focus Group Meetings (SWOT Analysis)
- Compilation of Findings & Discernment of Emerging Vision

End Goals: To establish the background knowledge and collaborative relationships necessary for plan construction. To engage the public in order to understand their current view of what the City provides and their desires for the future in a way that such feedback could be accurately meshed with analysis and reflected in the master plan's recommendations

Phase II: Inventory & Analysis

- Community Demographic Profile Compilation
- City, County, Unifour & State Inventories
- Key Community & Special Use Facility Inventory
- Level of Service Analysis & Future System Analysis

End Goals: To compile relevant demographic data for inclusive future planning while simultaneously cataloging existing City facilities and programs as well as County, State and special use assets that help to form a true picture of the level of service being received by citizens. To determine projected growth and bench-mark peer city systems to establish City of Hickory system needs for the future. To analyze key findings for master plan incorporation and to receive the ongoing feedback of the PR&ST Commission



Phase III: Plan Development

- Synthesis of Information Collected in Phases I & II
- Phase III Public Meetings to Receive Public Comment
- Benchmark Analysis
 - Articulation of Trends in Public Recreation
- Construction of Recommendations for Land Use, Future Facilities & Programs
 - Administrative & Policy Recommendations
- Formulation of Draft 10 Year Action Plan
 - Target Time-frames/Order of Magnitude Costs/Funding Strategies to Include Capital Improvements/Grants/Strategic Projects

End Goals: To use the discoveries of Phases I and II to create a draft plan that also includes an analysis of relevant best-practices from other similar or aspirational jurisdictions. To afford the public the opportunity to provide further comment on the master plan, taking shape, including the emerging vision. To construct recommendations and propose a general action plan.

Phase IV: Adoption

- Presentation to PR&ST Commission
- Presentation to City Council
- Final Plan Adopted by City Council
- Implementation

End Goal: To adopt and implement the City of Hickory “Recreation: Well Crafted” 2023-2033 Parks & Recreation Comprehensive Master Plan.

Master Plan Advisory Board

The City of Hickory Parks, Recreation and Sports Tourism Commission acted as the advisory board for the master planning process via an initial SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis consultation and monthly meetings which included project updates and regular solicitation of feedback. The Commission’s normal function is to advise the City’s Parks, Recreation and Sports Tourism Department in the operation of recreational facilities and activities for all age groups in order to enhance the quality of life of Hickory citizens. They provide input on a wide range of community recreational needs to include programming, facilities and maintenance. The Commission is comprised of a diverse group of individuals from each ward of the City as well as members at-large. Membership included senior citizens and teens. An additional individual, outside of this group, acted as an advisor for matters related to individuals with disabilities to ensure equitable representation of all abilities.

Guiding Principles and Objectives

The guiding principles, which informed the objectives of the plan, emerged through feedback received via a robust analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). This was performed during a multi-faceted public engagement process and examination of the City’s articulated identity and goals reflected in its various master plans and brand. The Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Commission, citizens, stakeholders, patrons, City leadership, staff, focus groups and participants in a special study regarding individuals with disabilities helped to shape the following. Initial observations of obvious need were also incorporated.

Improvement & Maximization of Existing Assets



Communication of Existing Assets



Growth Planning



- **Sports Tourism**



Increased Focus on Natural Assets & Education



Equitable & Inclusive Access to Recreation



Continuity with City Strengths, Goals & Identity



Implementation of Nationally Recognized Administrative & Operational Practices



The overarching principle used to guide the construction of this plan was simply “Recreation: Well Crafted” with an eye for continuity with the City’s broader needs, goals and brand as reflected in its commitment to Life: Well Crafted for its citizens and visitors.

Community Demographic Profile

The recommendations of this master plan are data driven and are strengthened by bedrock information such as jurisdictional demographics. Such demographics are key in evaluating existing conditions and opportunities for the future. They assist with ensuring that decisions can be made with a firm foundation in place. In order to understand what the demands for parks and recreation are in a given area, population growth and changing demographics are always factored in. They are then linked to community feedback which reflects both needs and desires.

Key Sources of Data

Data for the community demographic profile was derived from the following sources.

U.S. Census Bureau

Data from the U.S. Census Bureau was most relied upon for the demographic analysis performed for this master plan. This is due to its high degree of accuracy and precision in data gathering. The “Decennial Census of Population and Housing” counts each resident of the country where they live on April 1, every ten years ending in zero. The Constitution mandates this enumeration to determine how to apportion the House of Representatives among the states. The data is also used in countless ways, among leaders, for planning and decision-making. The following census resources were used.

2020 Decennial Census of Population and Housing

2021 American Community Survey (ACS) 5 Year Estimates

2019 American Community Survey – 5 Year Estimates (CEPID Report)

Western Piedmont Council of Government Data Center

Projections for both the City and region were facilitated by the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Data Center. Timeframes from the American Community Survey were used as available.

Source: US Census

Hickory Demographics

Based upon the 2020 Census, the City of Hickory was reported to have a population of 43,490. Catawba County was reported as having a population of 160,610 and the Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton Metro-statistical Area was reported at 365,276.

The most current data available for this master plan was the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) 5 Year Estimates. This data, along with 2020 Census numbers will make up the foundation of analysis. Below is a synopsis of key data points for Hickory. The data, immediately following, was derived from the 2021 ACS -5 Year Estimates Report.

Household Income



- Median Household Income for Hickory = \$53,117
- Average Household Income for Hickory = \$78,735

Median Age



- 38.3



Education



- 89.3% High School Graduate or Above
- 36.7% Bachelor's Degree or Above

Race



- 68.4% White
- 13.9% Black or African American
- 0% American Indian and Alaska Native
- 5.6% Asian
- 3.5% Other Asian (Hmong)
- 12.4% Hispanic or Latino
- 0% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- 5.5% Two or More Races

According to the recently updated Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan, the City of Hickory has experienced significant residential and non-residential growth in the last five years.

Hickory Demographics at Master Plan Sunset

The following data represents growth in key demographic areas. This analysis was performed to inform the recommendations of this plan.



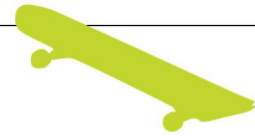
Population Projections

According to the U.S. Census, the population of Hickory was 43,490 in 2020. The Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) has reported that the City of Hickory is likely to see a population of **49,274 in 2030** as well as a population of **52,230 in 2035**. The overall projected gain of citizens is 8,740.

Demographic Projections

	2026	2031
Median Household Income	\$67,897	\$86,790
Median Age	39	39.7
% High School Graduate or Above	92.1%	94.2%
% Bachelor's Degree or Above	41.2%	45.4%
Population with Disability	6,032	6,769

Source: American Community Survey, US Census and WPCOG Data Center 2023.



Projections by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	2010 Census	2020 Census	2030 Projection	2035 Projection
Total Population	40,010	43,490	49,274	52,230
% White	74.9%	66.5%	61.0%	58.4%
% African American	14.3%	13.8%	13.5%	13.3%
% American Indian	0.3%	0.7%	.9%	1.0%
% Asian American	3.2%	4.0%	4.8%	5.2%
% Other Race	5.1%	7.1%	7.9%	8.3%
% Mixed Race (Two or More Races)	2.2%	8.0%	11.9%	13.8%
% Hispanic (Any Race)	11.4%	12.8%	14.2%	15.0%
% White Not Hispanic	69.4%	64.6%	59.2%	56.7%

Source: US Census and WPCOG Data Center 2023.

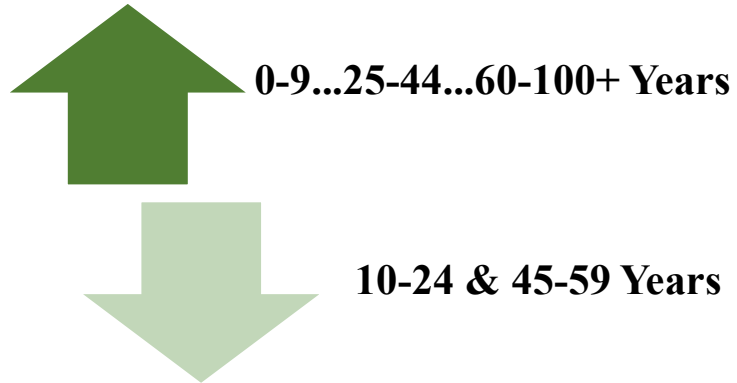
Age Projections

Due to a lack of state information on population projections for cities, information from Catawba County was provided by the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Data Center to analyze which age groups the City should plan for. 2023, 2028 and 2033 numbers, by age group and the change in numbers between 2023-2033 were provided.

Age Group	2023	2028	2033	Change 2023-2033	% Change 2023-2033
Age 0 to 2	5,041	5,558	5,891	850	16.9%
Age 3 to 4	3,298	3,557	3,826	528	16.0%
Age 5	1,657	1,735	1,876	219	13.2%
Age 6 to 9	6,823	6,625	7,255	432	6.3%
Age 10 to 13	7,560	7,202	7,156	-404	-5.3%
Age 14	2,049	1,927	1,893	-156	-7.6%
Age 15	2,151	1,967	1,900	-251	-11.7%
Age 16 to 17	4,438	4,099	3,890	-548	-12.3%
Age 18 to 19	4,334	4,226	4,069	-265	-6.1%
Age 20 to 24	10,845	10,984	10,361	-484	-4.5%
Age 25 to 34	20,187	21,481	22,094	1,907	9.4%
Age 35 to 44	18,273	19,313	21,408	3,135	17.2%
Age 45 to 54	21,697	20,264	19,871	-1,826	-8.4%
Age 55 to 59	11,512	11,712	10,705	-807	-7.0%
Age 60 to 64	11,358	11,472	11,720	362	3.2%
Age 65 to 74	18,874	20,832	21,812	2,938	15.6%
Age 75 to 84	10,772	12,474	13,929	3,157	29.3%
Age 85 to 99	2,958	3,656	4,672	1,714	57.9%
Age 100	18	29	57	39	216.7%
Total	163,845	169,113	174,385	10,540	6.4%

Source: NC Office of Management and Budget 2023 and WPCOG Data Center.

In the next 10 years, parks and recreation within the City will see a greater use of and demand for both amenities and programs that accommodate ages **0-9, 25-44 and 60-100+ years**. Public input gathering revealed desires for programming for both very young children (toddlers & preschoolers) and senior citizens. This was congruent with age projections.



Notably, ages **10-24 and 45-59 are projected to decline**, in the county, by 2033. This suggests the potential for less focus in these programming areas though during public input, citizens did express a desire for more teen programming and adult programs to include recreation sports. A strategic goal of the City is to welcome young families in. The projected increase of individuals, ages 25-44 is encouraging in relation to this goal and could be a focal point for recreation planning efforts in order to create a synergy with City aims.

The adjacent chart depicts population projections for 2022-2042.

Source: NC Office of Management and Budget 2023 and WPCOG Data Center.

Quadrant Population Projections

While the master plan found that the City is offering a sufficient amount of park acreage for its current and projected population, a special look at quadrant projections was taken in order to analyze where the population was trending so as to further analyze the equitable distribution of parks. Using 2020 Census Data, available Hickory MPO Traffic Analysis Zone Projections and analytical expertise from the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Data Center, a glimpse of the City’s trajectory was attained and found congruent with past plan findings. Population growth is based on the 2020 boundaries of the City.

What can be seen, at this point, is that the notable growth areas, at least to 2030, are in the Northeast and Southeast Quadrants. Limited infrastructure in the Southwest and the built-out nature of the Northwest Quadrants seem to indicate less focus for new parks and amenities in the next 10 years. Though this may be the case, infrastructure improvements in the Southwest are occurring.

Age Group	2022 Estimate	2042 Projection	Change 2022-42	% Change 2022-42
Under 5 Years	8,235	9,583	1,348	16.4%
5 to 9 Years	8,592	9,690	1,098	12.8%
10 to 14 Years	9,835	10,498	663	6.7%
15 to 19 Years	10,835	10,925	90	0.8%
20 to 24 Years	10,775	10,078	-697	-6.5%
25 to 34 Years	19,892	21,377	1,485	7.5%
35 to 44 Years	18,359	23,789	5,430	29.6%
45 to 54 Years	21,900	23,784	1,884	8.6%
55 to 59 Years	11,575	10,860	-715	-6.2%
60 to 64 Years	11,260	11,292	32	0.3%
65 to 74 Years	18,631	23,009	4,378	23.5%
75 to 84 Years	10,224	17,007	6,783	66.3%
85 Years and Over	2,929	6,916	3,987	136.1%
Total	163,042	188,808	25,766	15.8%

Quadrant	2020 Population Estimate	2030 Population Projection	Change	% Change
Northeast	21,772	23,537	1,765	8.1%
Southeast	6,162	6,754	592	9.6%
Northwest	11,782	12,279	497	4.2%
Southwest	3,774	3,837	63	1.7%
Population Total	43,490	46,407*	2,917	6.7%

Sources: Projections based on the 2017-2021 ACS results using data from 2012-2016 ACS with an application of the rate of change for that 5-year period for the next two five-year periods to come up with some 2031 projections.

*2030 projection varies from total in Race/Ethnicity projections due to use of differing data sources. Projections are estimates.

Residential Snapshot



A look at residential projects that were either permitted, in design review or under construction in March of 2023, supports the projected growth above. At the time, there were approximately 1400 units projected for the Northeast Quadrant and 1200 projected for the Southeast Quadrant. *These numbers could fluctuate for various reasons and so must be regarded as “approximate.”* Speculative projects were not accounted for in this analysis.

With regard to annexations, the Northeast quadrant has a solid chance of seeing acquisition within the next 10 to 15 years. The Southeast Quadrant may also become a notable growth area.

Related Recommendation

Parks and amenities are gaining ground in the Northeast Quadrant thanks to Bruce Meisner Park as well as a potential state park down the line. Until plan sunset, an eye to the Southeast Quadrant and the development of recreation opportunities is recommended. A look at development opportunities near Trivium and Catawba Valley Boulevard or south of Sweetwater have merit. Startown Road and south of Trivium are close to what will be residential centers.

Overall Projected Regional Gain 2020 to 2035: 52,993

The City of Hickory is truly a regional leader and this is reflected in its profile. According to the 2020 Census, the Hickory Metro (Catawba/Caldwell/Burke/Alexander Counties) had flat population growth since 2010. Hickory and Catawba County prevented a loss of population, during this time. *Hickory represented 55% of Catawba County's overall growth.* The population

growth challenges chart, below, was presented in the 2022-2023 adopted City budget and provides a helpful picture.

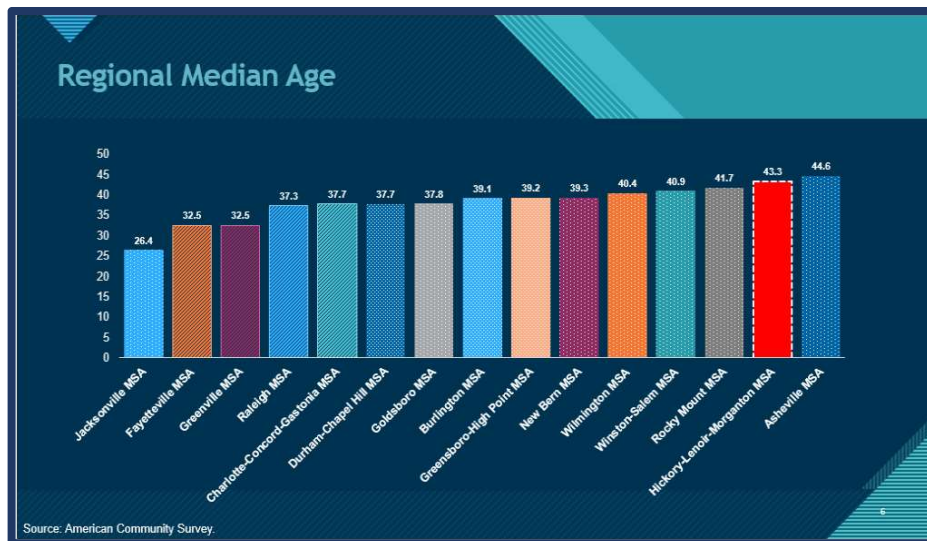
According to the City's 2022-2023 adopted budget document, the City hopes to grow around 2% annually if possible. The budget document also noted that due to the rural character of the entire Hickory Metro area, a 1% goal for its growth, annually, would be reasonable.



With regard to regional population trends, the following comparison to other North Carolina MSAs is offered. Considerations for Hickory include its economic dependency on residents from surrounding communities (shopping/dining/medical care/working).

A concern for Hickory, is that the age demographics in our region are not favorable to expanding or sustaining the local economy over the next 10 years unless Hickory continues to improve its quality of life in order to attract new residents. **This makes the implementation of an**

innovative and effective parks, recreation and sports tourism master plan key to the future of the City itself. With articulated goals of changing the region's demographic trend over the next ten years, the plan can contribute to the desired outcomes of a growing population, increasing workforce, and a median age that



encompasses more young families. Quality of life initiatives are pivotal the success and parks, recreation and sports tourism are a natural fit. Attracting and retaining people from all walks of life, serving our most salient age groupings and maintaining a special focus on working-age people will be the focus of this plan along with caring for those identified as underserved.

Sources: 2020 Census and 2022-2023 Adopted Budget for the City of Hickory & Catawba County Youth Council Presentation (2022)

City and County Health

Parks, recreation and sports tourism offerings play an integral role in the health and well-being of Hickory citizens. The 2019 Catawba County Community Health Assessment provides helpful data that can be used to assess the current state of health in the City while simultaneously acting as a tool for data-driven decision-making regarding park amenities, locations and recreation programs. Information from the 2021 Hickory Study of Equity, Economic and Demographic Data was also included, where possible, in order to provide an even greater focus on the health of the City.



The 2019 Catawba County Community Health Assessment highlighted the following relevant topics and related data.

- Social Determinants of Health
 - Health Care System
 - Community & Social Context
 - Food
 - Education
 - Built Environment
 - Economic Stability



Many social determinants of health (SDH) intersect with parks and recreation. Some of those intersections include health literacy, social integration, support systems, and community engagement. Parks, playgrounds, walkability and air/water quality are important links.

Health outcomes depend upon the SDH and include life expectancy, health status and functional limitations. Parks, recreation and sports tourism contribute to the area's overall health equity, especially in light of the City's status as a metro-statistical hub. According to the 2019 Catawba County Community Health Assessment, *all residents should have the opportunity to make choices that allow them to live long, healthy lives regardless of income, education, ethnic background or abilities.* Parks and recreation service delivery is greatly enhanced by paying attention to and applying the following information both at the department and leadership levels.

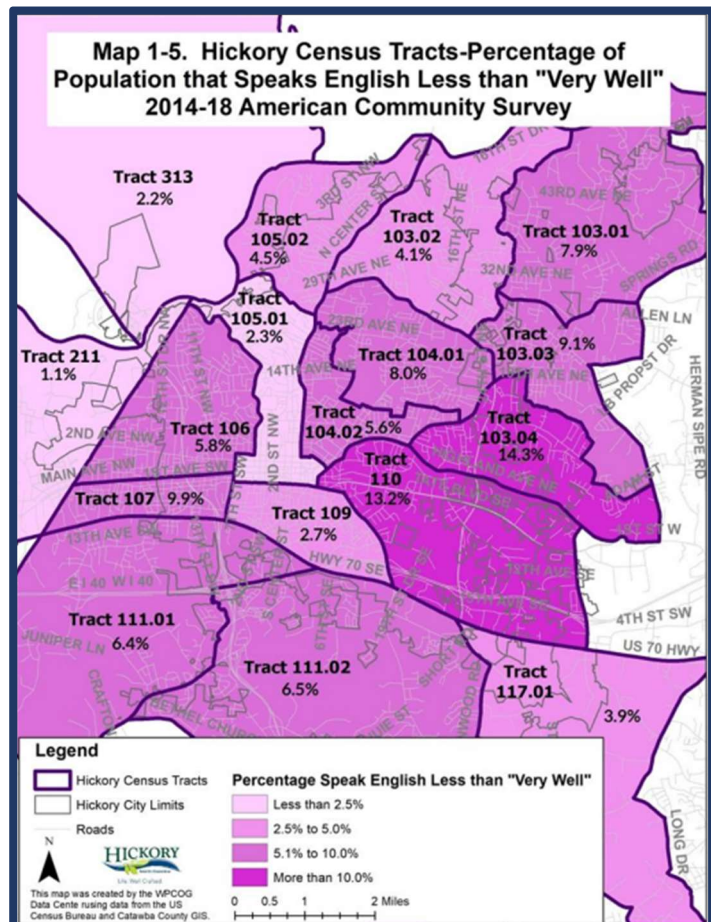
Language, Poverty Rate and Census Tracts

According to the 2019 Catawba County Community Health Assessment, 12.5% of the County population speaks a language other than English at home. 8.3% of the population speaks Spanish. The City of Hickory, through its 2021 study of equity, economic and demographic data compiled the following, using two available forms of the American Community Survey data led by the U.S. Census Bureau. The following chart should be considered when planning services.

Language

Table 1-15. Hickory Language Spoken at Home, 2009-2013 ACS to 2014-2018 ACS			
Language Spoken at Home	2009-2013 ACS	2014-2018 ACS	Percentage Change
Population 5 years and over	37,762 (100.0%)	38,299 (100.0%)	-----
English only	86.7%	83.4%	-3.3%
Language other than English	13.3%	16.6%	3.3%
Speak English less than "very well"	6.8%	6.4%	-0.4%
Spanish	10.0%	11.2%	1.2%
Speak English less than "very well"	5.5%	4.0%	-1.5%
Other Indo-European languages	1.5%	1.4%	-0.1%
Speak English less than "very well"	0.6%	0.6%	0.0%
Asian and Pacific Islander languages	1.7%	3.8%	2.1%
Speak English less than "very well"	0.8%	1.7%	0.9%
Other languages	0.0%	0.2%	0.2%
Speak English less than "very well"	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

It is helpful, also, to note where speaking English may be notably less prevalent so that translation services might be organized. It was found that Census Tracts 110 and 103.04, in particular, hold the highest percentage of individuals reporting a need for translation services. These tracts are contiguous with **Highland Recreation Center, Stanford Park and Civitan Park (104.01)** which also reside within a Census tract with greater need for language assistance. Language related services or resources might be highly beneficial in relation to these parks and facilities while also keeping an eye on projected growth.



Poverty Rates

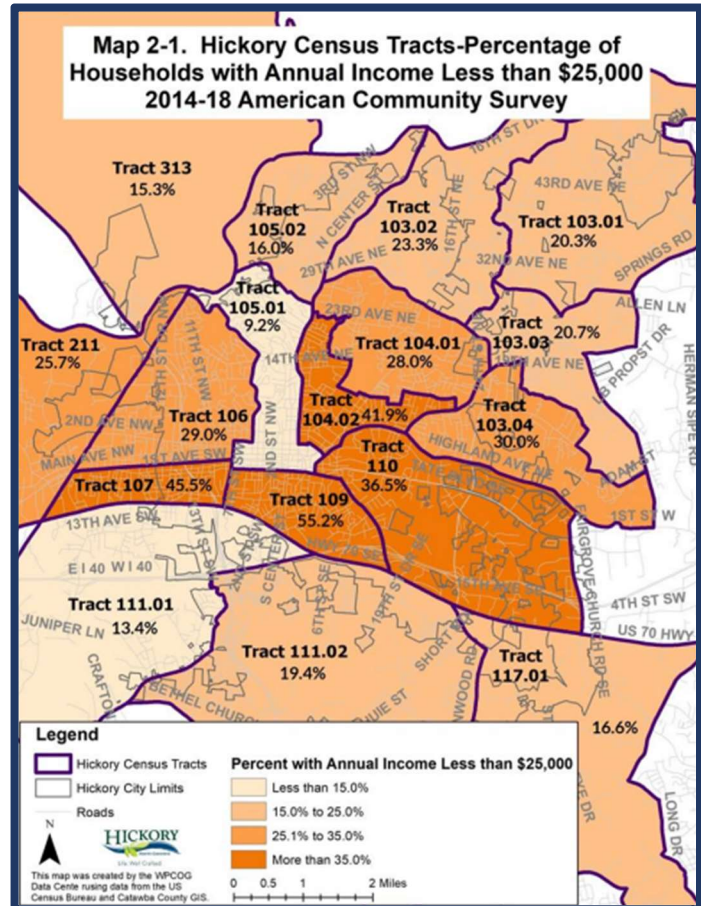
Catawba County reported the following poverty rates...

- Whites.....10.8%
- Asian.....17%
- Black.....28%
- Hispanic/Latino.....31.2%
- Overall.....13.2%

In taking a look at the City of Hickory, all race/ethnic groups rate higher in poverty than Catawba County, except for those who identified as Hispanic or Latino.

Table 2-6. Poverty Rate (All Persons) Comparisons, 2014-2018 ACS					
Race/Ethnic Group	Hickory	Catawba County	Hickory MSA	North Carolina	United States
Population for whom poverty status is determined	16.3%	13.2%	15.3%	15.4%	14.1%
White	11.9%	10.4%	13.2%	12.1%	11.6%
Black or African American	28.2%	22.1%	25.7%	23.5%	24.2%
Asian-American	23.0%	17.0%	14.3%	11.9%	11.5%
Two or more races	28.8%	18.5%	22.9%	21.5%	17.5%
Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	24.8%	29.6%	31.3%	28.5%	21.0%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	11.6%	9.9%	13.0%	10.6%	10.0%

This census tract map gives parks and recreation planners great insight into areas where social determinants of health can be enhanced by the department's mission and vision.



Chronic Diseases

Chronic diseases, most prevalent in Catawba County, are also those listed as the leading causes of death above.

Healthy Weight

- 46.7% of women in NC reported being overweight or obese in 2017
 - African-American & Latina women were at higher risk of being overweight and obese
- 1 in 3 adults (31.3%) age 20+ reported a Body Mass Index greater than or equal to 30 (obese)



Physical Activity

- Residents reported that the top five most popular places for them to exercise, in order of greatest to least, are...
 - Home
 - Walking Track or Trail
 - Private Gym
 - Park
 - Public Recreation Center
- More than 1 in 4 respondents reported not engaging in any physical activity (lasting at least 30 minutes) during out-of-work time
- Those reporting higher income also reported higher levels of regular physical activity
- Only 15.4% of males and 12.5% of females reported a likelihood of physical activity 5 times a week



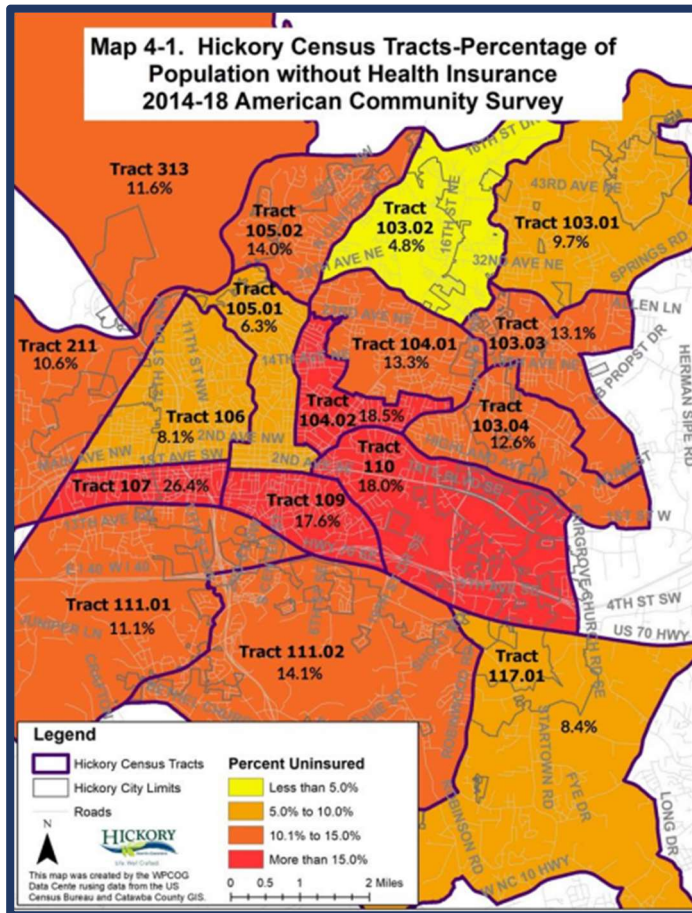
Transportation

- 5% of county households do not have a vehicle
- **75% of Catawba County Health Assessment participants stated a desire for more transportation options in the county**

Sources: 2019 Catawba County Community Health Assessment & 2021 Hickory Study of Equity, Economic and Demographic Data



One Additional Factor...Health Insurance



While policies have changed since the census numbers used for the City’s 2021 equity, economic and demographic report, the attached information can still be used to assist with a park and recreation professional’s understanding of the likelihood of those they serve, having access to healthcare.

It can be seen that many census tracts have high percentages of individuals reporting a lack of healthcare. This makes health and wellness programming as well as park accessibility even more of a priority. The PR&ST Department has a tangible opportunity to truly serve in a way that promotes healthy lifestyles that reduce a need for medical care where possible.



Knowing key census tracts can aid in strategic offerings for citizens. The

numbers below show how Hickory compares to Catawba County, the MSA, North Carolina and the United States overall.

Race/Ethnic Group	Hickory	Catawba County	Hickory MSA	North Carolina	United States
Total Civilian Noninstitutionalized Population	12.2%	10.8%	11.6%	11.1%	9.4%
White	8.7%	9.0%	10.2%	9.8%	8.4%
African-American	13.2%	14.0%	14.9%	11.7%	10.8%
Asian-American	16.1%	11.2%	11.0%	9.7%	7.5%
Other Races	37.0%	29.8%	31.9%	30.6%	20.8%
Two or more races	15.6%	11.0%	8.3%	9.1%	8.1%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	31.3%	26.5%	29.2%	30.8%	19.2%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	8.0%	8.5%	9.9%	8.1%	6.3%

Sources: 2019 Catawba County Community Health Assessment & 2021 Hickory Study of Equity, Economic and Demographic Data

Helpful Data from the Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities



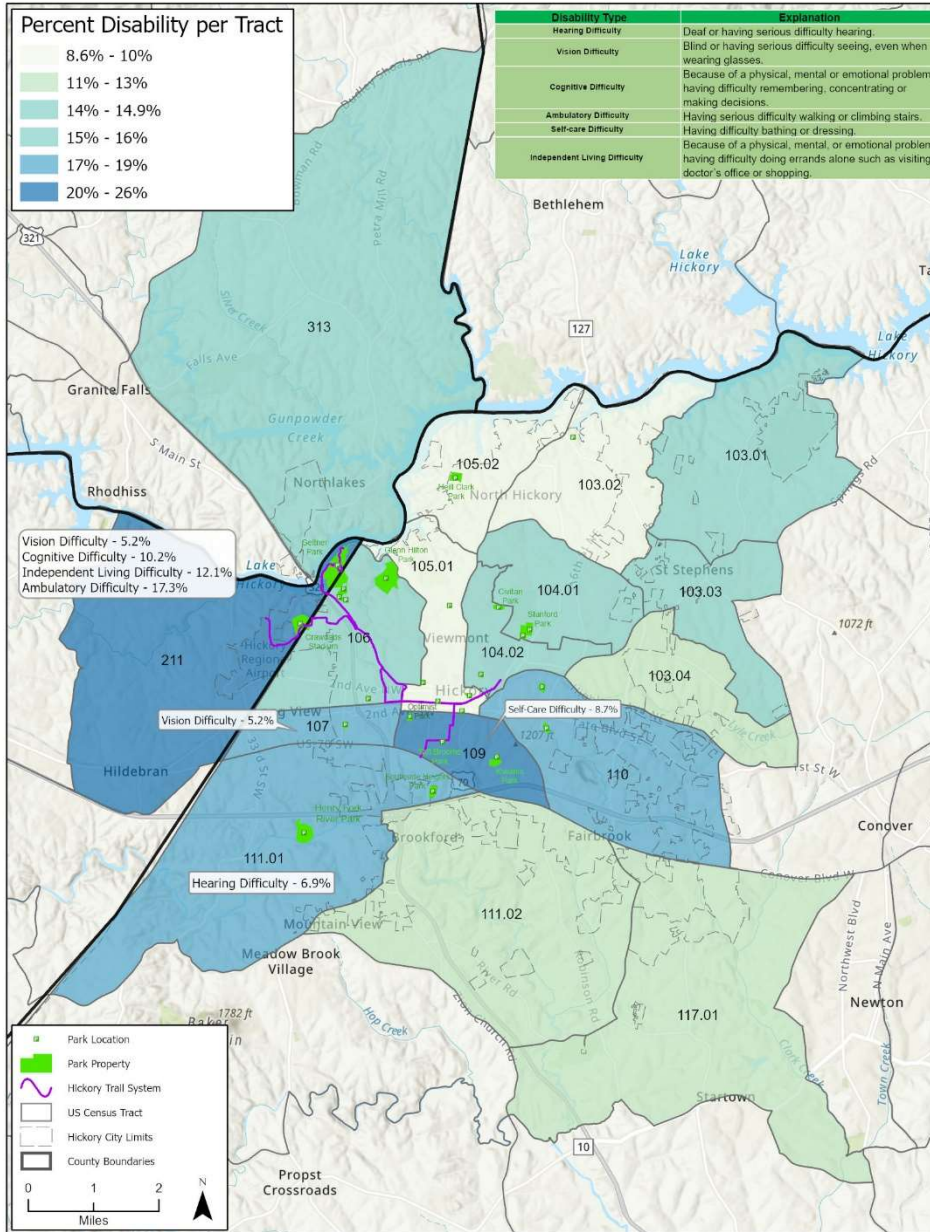
Completed in 2022, the Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities study yielded unique data helpful to planning for equitable facilities and services. The main source of data used was the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 5 Year Estimates: Disability Characteristics. Special attention was given to what is known as the “Six Question Set” used to ascertain disability types as explained below. This information was combined with census tracts to create unique, data-driven, planning opportunities.

A collection of key findings is provided below in order to ensure that this comprehensive master plan adequately plans for individuals with disabilities who are often overlooked or underrepresented in communities across the country. Individuals with disabilities are among every race, color, religion or creed, national origin, sex, age, and veteran status.

	Local Noninstitutionalized Population with Disability	Comparison State Percentage of Noninstitutionalized Population with Disability of 13.4%	Comparison National Percentage of Noninstitutionalized Population with Disability of 12.6%
City of Hickory	12.8%	- 0.6% Below State Percentage	+ 0.2%
Catawba County	14.2%	+ 0.8% Above State Percentage	+ 1.6%
Caldwell County	18.6%	+ 5.2%	+ 6.0%
Burke County	20.2%	+ 6.8%	+ 7.6%
Alexander County	17.8%	+ 4.4%	+ 5.2%

Source: 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 5 Year Estimates: Disability Characteristics.





Most of the non-institutionalized population of Hickory, with a reported disability type, is over the age of 65 with **census tracts 211, 111.01, 109, and 107 showing the greatest prevalence of distinct disability types within their tract.** It is important to note that much of tract 211 (Hickory/Burke County) is credited with the highest prevalence of Vision, Cognitive, Independent Living and Ambulatory Difficulties. As can be seen below, four out of five age groupings touch upon this tract.

Source: 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 5 Year Estimates: Disability Characteristics.

Age Grouping	Census Tract (s) With Largest % of General Disability in Age Grouping Among All Tracts
5 to 17 Years	211 (20.7%) & 111.01 (14.1%)
18 to 34 Years	211 (11.1%) & 117.01 (9.6%)
35 to 64 Years	109 (33%) & 211 (27.9%)
65 to 74 Years	211 (42.7%) & 110 (41.9%)
75 + Years	104.02 (69.4%) & 313 (Caldwell County) (66.9%)

Due to the fact that the City of Hickory occupies such a small portion of Tract 211, the following tracts are noted as having the second highest prevalence of disability types for Cognitive, Independent Living and Ambulatory Difficulty. Please note that Tracts 211 and 107 were tied for most reported cases of Vision Difficulty. Tract 111.01 is credited with the greatest occurrence of Hearing Difficulty and Tract 109 as Self Care Difficulty.

Second Highest Prevalence of Disability Types, in the City of Hickory, as Accounted for in Tract 211	
Cognitive	Tract 109 (9.90% of Population with Disability in Tract)
Independent Living	Tract 106 (10.7% of Population with Disability in Tract)
Ambulatory	Tract 109 (15% of Population with Disability in Tract)

When considering the data above, five **initial observations** can be made for further consideration and planning of facility improvements and programming. Many more can be derived.

1. LP Frans Stadium, Winkler Park, Hickory Airport and Parts of the Future Aviation Walk reside within the census tract (211) with the highest concentration of Vision, Cognitive, Independent Living and Ambulatory Difficulties reported in the 2019 ACS 5 Year Estimates: Disability Characteristics.

2. Taft Broome Park, Kiwanis Park and Optimist Park reside within the census tract (109) with the highest concentration of Self Care Difficulties reported in the 2019 ACS 5 Year Estimates: Disability Characteristics.

3. West Hickory Park resides within the census tract (107) with the highest concentration of Vision Difficulty reported in the 2019 ACS 5 Year Estimates: Disability Characteristics. Please note that this tract was tied with Tract 211 for highest percentage of reported visual difficulties.

4. One gap noted by individuals with disabilities and their service providers was a **lack of opportunities for adults, particularly young adults**. When exploring where to fill that gap it appears that Tract 211 and 117.01 have the greatest concentration of young adults, age 18 to 34 years and so, some of the best facilities to consider using would be the LP Frans Stadium, Winkler Park and its activity building.

5. Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Park has been noted as a park frequented by individuals with disabilities via public input. It also happens to reside within the tract (106) reported as having the second highest concentration of individuals with Independent Living Difficulty. Independent Living

Difficulty is characterized by a person having difficulty in doing errands alone due to physical, mental or emotional problems. Such information can be taken into consideration when developing park programming, amenities, marketing or an opportunity to travel to the park.

Source: Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities

There is a unique opportunity for the City of Hickory to use census tracts and disability related data to serve the underserved and strategically plan for niche opportunities in recreation, programming and sports tourism.

A Note on the Impact of the Global Pandemic on Parks & Recreation

The Covid-19 Pandemic had real-time and long-term impact on parks and recreation across the country. According to the Trust for Public Land’s 2020 special report “Parks & Pandemic,” parks were elevated to “essential service” status and it was common for the increase in park usage to overwhelm staff. North Carolina State Parks saw an increase in applications for conservation projects which is attributed to a spike in public demand for access to trails, parks and natural areas during the pandemic. During stakeholder meetings, City of Hickory staff reported experience consistent with the Trust for Public Land’s report. On the master plan’s Recreation Needs Survey, 94% of respondents confirmed that citizens see parks and recreation as an essential service. Overall, the impact of the pandemic Hickory’s parks and recreation offerings can be summarized in the words “creating a new baseline” especially with regard to programs and maintenance.

Source: NC Department of Health & Human Services & Trust for Public Land 2020 Special Report “Parks & Pandemic”



Inventory & Analysis

The City of Hickory has a firm foundation from which to build the next 10 years of parks, recreation programs and sports tourism efforts. An inventory and analysis were conducted to examine the current state of the Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department and Public Services Department functions directly related to the overall mission of parks, recreation and sports tourism. This effort was made in order to assist with the assessment of strengths and gaps that will be further developed in the Benchmark & Level of Service Analysis and final recommendations of this comprehensive master plan.

The inventory and analysis were facilitated via site visits, multiple meetings with staff and leadership, public input, online research and the cross-referencing of key plans such as City master plans, needs assessments and the Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan. Comparisons to National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA) classification “standards,” Commission for Accreditation of Park & Recreation Agency standards, Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities highlights and NRPA Management of Park & Recreation Agency recommendations were also made.

Key Inventories Include...

- City Parks
- Facilities
- Trails
- Impactful Parks in the Unifour
- Key Community & Special Use Facilities
- State Parks
- Programs
- Partnerships



Please note that the inventories represent a snapshot in time. It is recommended that the expanded cache of inventories be used for helping to communicate niche interests. A separate Sports Tourism inventory was created to highlight the unique mission of this newest element of Hickory parks and recreation and can be found in the next section of this plan.

Other features of the inventory and analysis include a look at water-based recreation and access to Lake Hickory as a recreation asset, open space as an asset, walkability/drivability/proximity to parks, and recommendations for inclusivity based upon the needs of individuals with disabilities.

Observations from various analysis can be found throughout this section of the master plan, however, there were key subjects of targeted interest which included...

- Quadrant Comparison to Understand Distribution of Assets
- Park Usage
- Programs
- Walkability/Proximity
- Administrative Operations
- Maintenance/Operations
- Facilities
- Finance
- Impactful Projects



Overview of Parks, Facilities, & Open Space

The Public Services Department is responsible for maintaining and operating 572 acres of parkland in full cooperation with the PR&ST Department. There are also approximately 172 acres of core open space available for potential park development in the future. The current system is made up of 27 parks and also features L.P. Frans Stadium which is home to the Hickory Crawdad's minor league baseball team located at Winkler Park. Of the 27 parks, over 30% feature facilities which include recreation centers, activity buildings, senior centers and more. The City has a total of 3 recreation centers, 2 senior centers, 5 gymnasiums, 3 activity buildings at various levels of use and two historical homes (one in use). The vastness of the current park inventory was a notable point of pride for both citizens and stakeholders during the public input process of this master plan and was met with a lot of gratitude as well as interest in maximizing the inventory's potential. The City has already begun to tap that potential with the strategic use of sports amenities to grow a vibrant sports tourism mission capable of enhancing the local economy.

City of Hickory parks feature a variety of active and passive amenities! Citizens have communicated an appreciation for parks that mix such amenities well and truly offer something for every member of the family. Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park was particularly highlighted as a "something for everyone" park during the master planning process.

Hickory's system currently features 4 Regional Parks, 4 Community Parks, 12 Neighborhood Parks, 1 City-wide Park, 1 Linear Park and 5 Civic/Garden Parks in its inventory. Parks range in size from as small as .3 acres to as large as 96 acres. The City is also working with the State of North Carolina on a potential State Park in the future and will possibly contribute acreage to this project. For now, a majority of Hickory's park acreage can be found in the Northwest Quadrant while the least acreage can be found in the Southeast. A Quadrant Analysis appears in this section in order to give a picture of the distribution of assets and how they reflect equitable access.

Open Space Highlights

Sandy Pines Property (12 Acres)
Bruce Meisner Park (5 of 73 Acres Developed)
River Road Property (160 Acres)
Pockets of Open Space Throughout System

City of Hickory Park System, Classification & Acreage

The City currently uses 5 park classifications that illustrate how each park meets the needs of the individuals that access it. Each classification includes a service area that will be explored to understand how served, under-served or overserved a particular portion of the City may be. Classifications also include service “standards” that focus in upon quantifying the number of acres each park should have available per population. The National Recreation & Park Association recommends 2 acres for every 1,000 residents as a base standard. Below is a depiction of parks, acreage and current classifications outlined in the 2022 Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan.



Park	Classification	Acreage	Park	Classification	Acreage
Bruce Meisner Park	Regional	73.3	McComb Park	Civic/Garden	2.5
Civitan Park	Neighborhood	7.5	Miracle of Hickory Park	Neighborhood	2.5
Cliff Teague Park	Neighborhood	8.1	Neill Clark Recreation Park	Community	8.2
Fairbrook Optimist Park	Neighborhood	6.7	Robinson Park	Civic/Garden	1.5
Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park	City-wide	70.5	Rotary-Geitner Park	Regional	96.0
Henry Fork River Park	Regional	66	Shuford House & Gardens	Civic/Garden	.9
Hickory City Park	Neighborhood	15.0	Southside Heights Park	Neighborhood	12.7
Hickory Optimist Park	Neighborhood	6.0	Stanford Park	Community	37.0
Highland Park	Neighborhood	2.7	Taft-Broome Park	Neighborhood	9.6
Ivey Arboretum at Sally Fox Park	Civic/Garden	4.6	Viewmont Park	Civic/Garden	.3
Jaycee Park	Neighborhood	5.0	West Hickory Park	Neighborhood	5.6
Kiwanis Park	Community	16.0	Westmont Recreation Park	Neighborhood	3.0
Lowe’s Foods City Park	Community	.42	Winkler Park	Regional	50
Hickory Trail	Linear	60			

Current Facilities

The following list outlines the facilities found at parks throughout Hickory’s system.

Highland Recreation Center @ Stanford Park	(Anchor Facility)
Ridgeview Recreation Center @ Taft-Broome Park	(Anchor Facility)
Brown Penn Recreation Center @ Taft-Broome Park	(Age 15 & Under)
Brown Penn Senior Center @ Taft-Broome Park	(Available for Rental Only)
Westmont Senior Center @ Westmont Recreation Park	(Limited Hours)
Westmont Gymnasium @ Westmont Recreation Park	(Rental Only)
Winkler Activity Building @ Winkler Park	(Rental)
Ceramics Studio (Winkler Museum) @ Winkler Park	(Limited Hours)
Hickory City Park Activity Building @ Hickory City Park	
Cabin @ Robinson Park	(No Entry Available)

Snapshot of Progress: 1997 to Present

Before considering the current state of the system further, it is important to briefly revisit the 1997 Park and Recreation Master Plan as well as the 2010 Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment. Taking a look at “standards”, key projections and recommendations from these documents has helped to provide perspective on existing conditions and further possibilities.

The 1997 Park and Recreation Master Plan projected Hickory’s population to reach 45,000 citizens by 2017. This projection proved to be a good estimate when compared to the City’s 2020 Census population of 43,490. It will be seen that the 2010 assessment, however, increased this projection. At the time of the 1997 master plan, park classifications included Tot Lots, Neighborhood Parks, District Parks, City Wide and Special Areas as well as Open Space & Linear Parks. A responsibility comparison was conducted on an expanded list of park types to include Tot Lots, Ornamental Parks, Neighborhood Parks, Community Parks, District Parks, Open Space Parks and Regional Parks. The 1997 plan also communicated acreage “standards” for Regional, Community and Neighborhood Parks which can be seen below.

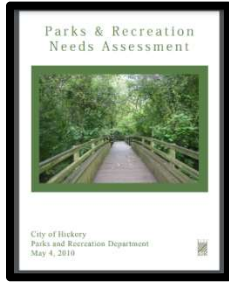


Neighborhood Parks = 2.5 Acres/1,000

Community Parks = 2.5 Acres/1,000

Regional Parks = 5 Acres/1,000

It is important to note that the 1997 plan listed County and State/Federal entities as responsible for Regional Parks and private developers as a responsible party for providing recreation services for various Tot Lots, Ornamental Parks, Neighborhood Parks and Open Space Parks. As of present day, the City of Hickory Public Services Department is responsible for all of the City’s inventory.

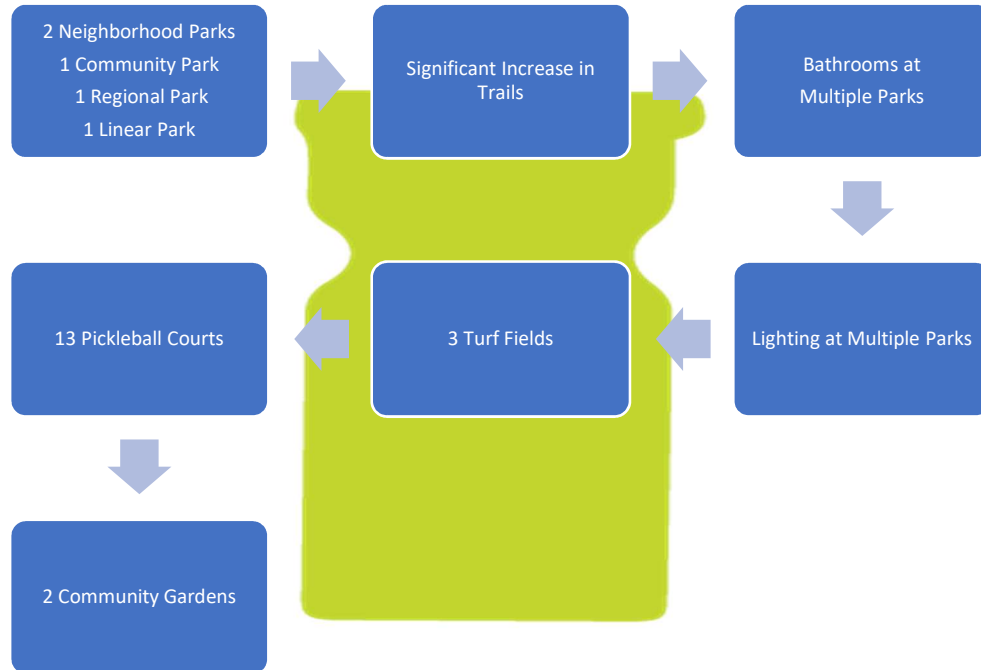


The 2010 Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment, updated the City’s population projection to 50,000 residents by the year 2020. With 2020 Census numbers at 43,490, the 2010 plan projected a variance of 6,510 citizens. This variance either positively or neutrally impacts the 2023-2033 Comprehensive Master Plan. According to current projections calculated by the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Data Center, it is possible for the City to see a population of 49,274 in 2030 (still under the 2010 projections) as well as a population of 52,230 in 2035.

With regard to park classifications, the 2010 needs assessment seemed to bring the City closer to the familiar park classifications of the National Recreation and Park Association and facility “standards” of the North Carolina Department of Environmental and Natural Resources. It also established “standards” for park and facility development based upon a review of standards used by other agencies of similar size and those suggested by national and state associations such as the National Recreation and Park Association. When looking at the needs assessment’s recommendations, the following is most notable in its evolution to present day.

2010 Recommendation	Outcome
<p>Add 100 acres of additional developed parks by 2020 (2 Neighborhood Parks & 1 Community Park) in the Northeast Quadrant. Look to Cloninger Mill and Sandy Pines to meet most of these needs.</p>	<p>In 2010, the City had 428 acres of parkland. By 2023, the City counted 572 acres in its inventory (includes Hickory Trail as Linear Park). The City added to its inventory via the Cloninger Mill property, as recommended, in the form of Bruce Meisner Park which is considered a Regional Park (being developed in phases) in the Northeast Quadrant. The City also partnered to develop Lowes Foods City Park which is a Community Park on the border of the Northwest and Southwest Quadrants and designated Highland Park as a Neighborhood Park in the Northeast Quadrant. Miracle of Hickory Park was added to the inventory as a Neighborhood Park in the Northwest Quadrant but it should be noted that this park was once part of Jaycee Park. <i>Overall, the City brought one Regional Park, one Community Park, two Neighborhood Parks and 1 Linear Park online since 2010 in spite of population growth not reaching the 50,000 expected.</i> At this time, the Sandy Pines Property remains undeveloped.</p>

The City of Hickory has been hard at work to provide new recreation opportunities and improve those that already exist. Here are a **few** highlights that depict additions occurring between 2010 and 2023!



Park Classifications & Descriptions

The Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan gives a brief overview of the City’s existing conditions and community needs as well as a goal and policy framework focused on the City’s recreation and park considerations. Within its summary of existing conditions, the City has classified its parks using a mixture of National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), North Carolina Department of Environmental and Natural Resources (NCDENR), previous master-planning precedent and local designations. These designations remain largely in-tact within this comprehensive master plan.

It is important to note that the NRPA, in a 1995 report titled “Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines,” determined that there are “no national standards” for park development, recommending instead that each community is unique and should have standards that reflect as such. While this is true, the NRPA remains heavily consulted on this topic and affords communities the most consistent way to compare among entities, evaluate offerings and craft measurable goals. For that reason, a brief insight into NRPA classification “standards” is offered below.

NRPA Park Classification “Standards”

The National Recreation & Park Association has been instrumental in helping communities to categorize parks to assist with understanding current infrastructure and how to frame future needs. Classifications include the following:

- Size (Acreage)
- Service Radius (Estimated Region the Park Will Draw Visitors From)
- Facility Offerings (Amenities and Recreation Opportunities)
- Level of Service Standards (# of Acres of Classification Per 1,000 people)

The chart below communicates National Recreation & Park Association classifications and corresponding acreage. This a baseline reference and it can be seen that the City of Hickory has customized away from this in some areas.

Park Classification & Approximate Acreage	
Pocket Park	0 -3 Acres
Neighborhood Park	3-10 Acres
Community Park	10-30+ Acres
Regional Park	>100 Acres
Sports Complex	4-16 Sports Fields/Courts
Special Use Park or Facility	Varies
Greenways/Multi-Use Paths	30’RW with 10’Paved Path
Open Space/Natural Areas	Varies

Source: National Recreation & Park Association Parks and Open Space Classifications

In-depth descriptions of classifications are co-located with their corresponding inventory categories for ease of use.



City of Hickory Classifications

The following table depicts the City of Hickory’s proposed standards as communicated in the 2010 Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment.

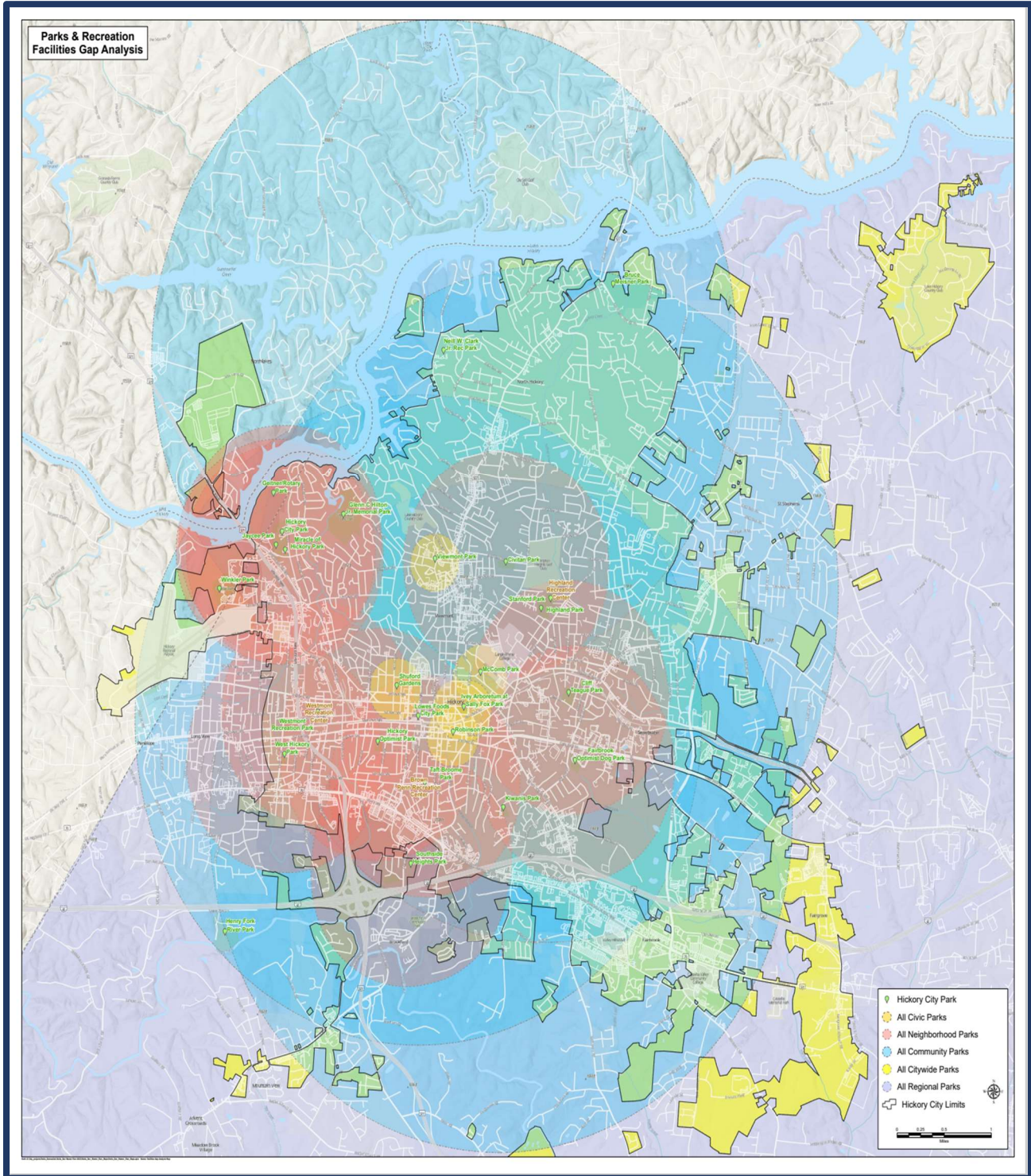
Park Classification	
Neighborhood Park	5-10 Acres & 2.5 Acres/1,000
Community Parks	15-50 Acres & 2.5 Acres/1,000
Regional Parks	Varies & 5 Acres/1,000
Citywide Parks	Varies
Civic Parks & Gardens	NA

The next table outlines the City’s current acreage versus its adopted standard. This table highlights the nuances of the City’s system with regard to meeting acreage needs.

City Park Sites and Acreage Per Park Classification		
Neighborhood Parks	84.4 Acres	2010 = 107.5Acres
Community Parks	61.62 Acres	2010 = 107.5Acres
Regional Parks	285.3 Acres	2010 = 215 Acres
Citywide Park	70.5 Acres	N/A
Civic Parks & Gardens (Mini Parks)	9.8 Acres	N/A
Linear Parks	60 Acres	NA
Total Acres:	571.62 (572)	

It appears that, by its own “standards” proposed in 2010, the City exceeds its acreage standards with regard to Regional Parks however, it falls below for Community and Neighborhood Parks. Upon further examination, however, it should be noted that the City has re-introduced (from the 1997 master plan) both a Citywide and Linear Park classification with notable acreage. Also, its newest Regional Park, Bruce Meisner Park, has the potential to serve the dual purpose of being a Neighborhood Park in the Northeast Quadrant. It is not uncommon for parks to serve two classifications needs. Catawba County’s Saint Stephen’s Park may also help with this requirement in the sense that its proximity allows additional park access to citizens in the Northeast Quadrant. *It is important to remember that the NRPA is clear about park standards fitting the unique needs of the community and as such, it appears that the City can take this route. Level of service calculations, proposed in the Benchmark & Level of Service Analysis section, can combine with park classifications to present a potential pathway forward.*

The following map provides a visual gap analysis in relation to parks and recreation facilities, with special attention to park classifications. Service areas included a **.25 mile radius for Civic Parks**, **.5 to 1 mile radius for Neighborhood Parks**, a **.5 mile to 3 mile radius for Community Parks** along with a **city-wide radius for City-wide Parks** and a **county-wide radius for Regional Parks**.



As can be seen on the preceding map, the Northeast and Southeast Quadrants are notably served by parks meant to accommodate the entire community or region versus Neighborhood Parks. With population and residential projections, this is good to consider even though, overall, citizens have great access to parks and recreation when compared to national and regional peers. As mentioned before, parks like Regional Parks, can serve the roles of more than one classification with the right amenities and proximity to population accounted for. The City should consider to what extent this approach can be taken, in order to fulfill potential Neighborhood Park needs while maximizing its existing inventory of developed/undeveloped parkland and its county/state partnership potential. It does not appear that significant land acquisition is needed in the next 10 years though there is merit in exploring land in the south for a potential recreation center if needed.



Civic Parks	
Ivey Arboretum at Sally Fox Park	444
McComb Park	587
Robinson Park	329
Shuford Gardens	613
Viewmont Park	544
Neighborhood Parks	
Civitan Park	10,060
Cliff Teague Park	5,664
Fairbrook Optimist Dog Park	2,958
Hickory City Park	3,425
Hickory Optimist Park	5,560
Jaycee Park	3,188
Miracle of Hickory Park	3,285
Southside Heights Park	3,635
Taft Broome Park	5,185
West Hickory Park	5,382
Westmont Recreation Park	6,013
Community Parks	
Kiwanis Park	34,366
Lowes Foods City Park	36,136
Neill W. Clark Jr. Rec Park**	33,975
Stanford Park	45,112
Citywide Park	
Glenn Hilton	43,532
Regional Parks	
Bruce Meisner Alexander + Catawba County Population	198,376
Henry Fork River Burke + Catawba County Population	249,343
Rotary – Geitner Burke + Caldwell + Catawba County Population	329,806
Winkler Burke + Caldwell + Catawba County Population	329,806

This chart provides estimates of individuals served by each park type using GIS in November of 2022. As is illustrated by the preceding map, service overlaps in several areas. Community, City-wide and Regional parks are doing the heavy lifting for the City and its neighbors, particularly in the northeast and southeast.

Source: 2022 GIS. *Does not include estimate of population served by Hickory Trail...a newly designated Linear Park.

** It should be noted that Neill Clark Recreation Park has decreased significantly in acreage since the 2010 Needs Assessment.

Existing Conditions: Parks

Parks were visited, during the master planning process, to gain an understanding of current amenities, maintenance needs, operations and untapped opportunities. Observations from the Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities were also incorporated in order to enhance the City's focus on equitable access to recreation amenities. Due to the dynamic nature of time and maintenance schedules, macro-level observations and themes were concentrated upon in the City's parks. This approach was also chosen in recognition of the tremendous and detailed work being performed by the Public Services Department who, since it's assumption of park maintenance duties, has been strategically using the City's 5 Year Capital Improvement Program to make serious updates to park amenities such as play systems, while simultaneously focusing on park safety, accessibility and aesthetics. With notable support from the Public Services team, each park in the inventory was visited for assessment.

Specific items examined in park visits included the following...

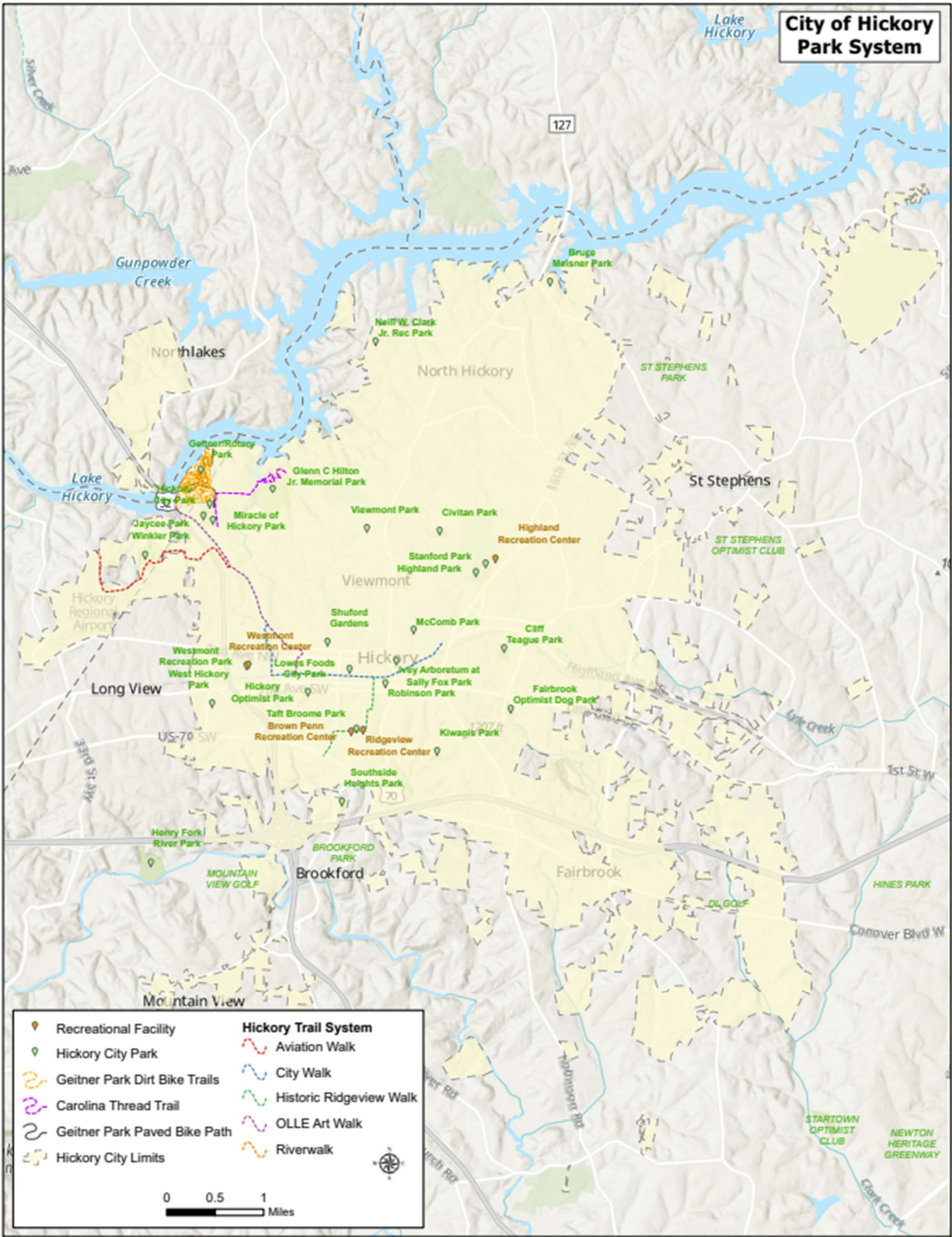
- Existing Amenities & Their Condition
- Level of Access to Amenities
- Maintenance & Safety
- Opportunities to Expand Recreation Offerings
- Currency and Relevance of Amenities
- Comparison to Trends and Needs



As a result of visits, the following themes emerged...

- City Parks Have A Lot to Offer Now...& In the Future
- There Are Several Open Spaces That Can Be Tracked and Used for Small Events, Rentals and Recreation Programming
- Tasteful, Standardized and Strategically Placed Interpretive & Wayfinding Signage Additions Could Increase Effectiveness of Park Use & Experiences
- The City is Systematically Increasing Inclusive Recreation Opportunities via Play-systems
- Amenities Can Be Chosen, to a Greater Degree in the Future, Based on Needs and Trends Identified in the Master Plan
- Parks Need More Shade Opportunities
- Aesthetic, Functionality & Maintenance Improvements Are in Motion
 - Nation-wide & Local Worker Shortages Are Affecting the Pace of Improvements
- There Are Small Improvements That Can Be Made to Achieve Big Accessibility Impact
- Litter Control Could Be Facilitated by Community Groups to Augment Paid Workforce

Themes are incorporated into the recommendations of this plan.



Park Inventory & Proposed Classification Adjustments

The following inventory combines park descriptions with a breakout of current amenities and notables for individuals with disabilities. There is special consideration for notable strengths and challenges which may lend themselves to the level of enjoyment possible for the most vulnerable members of the community. For the purpose of this inventory, “notable” is defined as something that goes beyond minimum standards or falls noticeably below them. Parks are addressed by classification and their descriptions are derived from the City’s current articulation with additional content as necessitated.

The Linear Park classification has been re-presented to coincide with substantial community interest in this amenity and the City’s robust Hickory Trail project. Linear parks are described in many ways and the National Recreation & Park Association does not have set guidelines as to their definition. That being said, a linear park is commonly understood to be an outdoor area that connects, parks and open spaces for passive or active recreation. According to Productive Parks, these parks often stretch through urban areas, include river-walks and more. Linear parks may even spawn parklets and it is sure that they create more opportunities for active recreation. Here are a few more benefits of linear parks.

- Provide More Access to Green and Open Spaces
- Allow Parks to Be Accessible to More People
- Draw Visitors to Other Parts of the Community They May Not Typically Visit
- Get More People Outdoors & Form Tighter Community Bonds
- Allow for Business Opportunities Along the Park
- Increase Nearby Land Values
- Make Abandoned Sites Useful Again

In addition to the items above, this inventory includes an emphasis upon niche interest areas in the form of additional inventories. One example is the addition of a trail inventory to match the community’s interest. Water-based recreation such as splash pads, Lake Hickory access, notable partnerships and more are highlighted. Sports Tourism is given a special spotlight in the next chapter of this plan in order to highlight its unique emergence, contributions and focus. Salient recommendations are made, as appropriate, within this inventory and at the end of this master plan.

Source: Productive Parks.com

Regional Parks

The City of Hickory currently offers four regional parks. Regional parks are typically very large sites, encompassing unique qualities that exemplify the natural features, the diverse land formations, and the variety of vegetation and wildlife found in the region. Examples of the types of facilities provided in a regional park include environmental centers, camping, nature trails, observation decks, picnic areas, disc golf or novelty amenities such as miniature golf courses. Regional parks can also provide space for special use facilities. Open fields for non-structured activities, such as frisbee throwing or kite flying, are also generally found in these parks. Land chosen for future preserves or the expansion of existing sites should contain the previously mentioned characteristics accompanied with natural water features such as beach areas, rivers, and creeks. The majority of the site is often reserved for passive recreation, with the remaining acreage used for active recreation.



Service Area: Countywide

City of Hickory Acreage/Population Ratio: 5 acres per 1,000 persons = 6.56 Actual

Typical Size: 100+ acres

Typical Facilities & Amenities Found in Regional Parks: Environmental Center, Picnic Tables, Grills, Restrooms/Vending, Primitive Camping, Beach, Group Camping, Swimming, Recreational Vehicle Camping, Boating, Nature Trails, Fishing Piers/Boat Docks, Observation Deck, Parking, Picnic Shelters with Grills and a Caretaker's House.

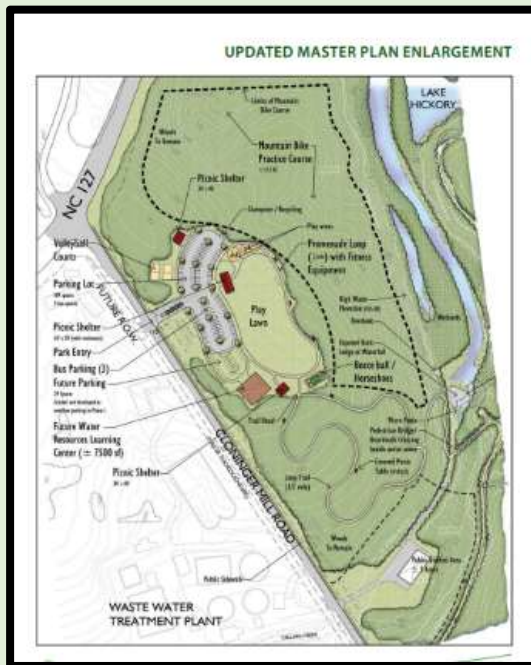
Regional parks are typically provided by federal, state, or county agencies, but may also be provided by large municipal agencies as in the case of the City of Hickory.

Source: 2010 City of Hickory Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment



Regional Park Inventory

Bruce Meisner Park



Bruce Meisner Park is comprised of 73 acres of parkland containing almost a half mile of Falling Creek and will provide views of Lake Hickory. The park is valued for its open space, conservation opportunities and ability to serve the Northeast Quadrant. Development of this park is taking place in phases with the first completed. A time-frame has not yet been established for additional phases of this park.

Current amenities include playground equipment, a paved walking trail, picnic shelter with restrooms, outdoor grills and permanent cornhole boards.

Notables for individuals with disabilities include a paved walking track and accessible shelter as well as ground-level play features and accessibility ramp to playground. The conceptual master plan proposes fencing between the playground and parking lot as well as unitary surfacing near the playground.

Key Considerations: Future residential projections suggest that this park will also fulfill the role of a Neighborhood Park. This park has also been considered as a potential 5K Cross Country course site candidate. According to the park's current master plan, future amenities might include nature trails and potential lake access (viewing only). The following recommendations would enhance the park's ability to serve all citizens.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on trails during next phase • Consider opportunity for Cross-Country course within trail design • Construct lower trail as accessible • Provide accessible route to waterfall • Furnish additional shade structures • Ensure fencing for elopement • Ensure network of sidewalks/walkways for easy access to amenities <p>It is suggested that by this master plan’s sunset, additional phases of the park be considered for completion to assist with equitable access to recreation. This would include creating opportunities for citizens to walk or bike to this park from their homes.</p>
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Henry Fork River Park



Henry Fork River Park is a 66 acre active/passive recreation park and sports tourism anchor in the Southwest Quadrant of Hickory. The City projects lighting improvements, additional amenities and more synthetic turf fields in the future.

Current amenities include an 8,000-square-foot picnic shelter with a catering kitchen, restrooms, picnic tables and grills, nine soccer fields (including two artificial turf fields), two playgrounds, a concession stand, paved walking trail, canoe launch, and horseshoe pits.

Key Considerations: Being a sports-tourism anchor, the park is already seeing parking-related challenges on tournament days. With the installation of additional turf fields foreseen, a parking study and possible parking expansion would be valuable to explore by plan sunset. The following recommendations would enhance the park’s ability to serve all citizens.

- Greater surface access to play areas via ramps and paths
- Incorporation of universal design concepts into all future phases

**Rotary-Geitner Park
(+Future Deidra Lackey Memorial Park)**



Rotary-Geitner Park is a 96 acre park that is home to the future Deidra Lackey Memorial Park, the City’s new Riverwalk segment of the Hickory Trail and access to the Lake Hickory Trail system.

Current amenities include a gazebo, paved bikeway, walking/nature trails (Lake Hickory Trails) and restrooms.

Notables for individuals with disabilities include accessible views of Riverwalk.

Key Considerations: It is proposed that Deidra Lackey Memorial Park will feature access to Riverwalk, feature a Lake House, have an amphitheater, green space, terraces, event space and restrooms. The following recommendations would enhance the park’s ability to serve all citizens.

- Give universal design prominence in the final plans of the park
- Disability accessible routes/amenities related to Lake Hickory
- Implement system to communicate the accessibility of the greenway and level of effort needed to use it.

Winkler Park



Winkler park is a 50 acre park that encompasses L.P. Frans Stadium and will, in the future, enjoy ease of access to the Hickory Trail's Aviation Walk. The City projects a new play system within the next five years.

Current amenities include nature trails, Winkler Museum Building with ceramics studio, playground equipment, restrooms, a picnic shelter with grills, Winkler Activity Building and capacity for horseshoe pits. Adjacent to Aviation Walk.

Notables for individuals with disabilities include an accessible picnic shelter and activity building for programming. Accessible parking, restrooms and sidewalks.

Key Considerations: Winkler Park will enjoy easy access to Aviation Walk and thus connectivity to a large portion of the City's park system in the future. It is recommended that...

- Current internal trails receive repair and greater marketing to increase use
- Additional nature trails be developed on the property due to its capacity for them and community interest
- Implement system to communicate the accessibility of the greenway and level of effort needed to use it.

The following recommendations would enhance the park's ability to serve all citizens

- Add accessibility ramps for wheelchairs/assistive devices to enter all playground areas
- Increase accessible routes to all park features

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider unitary surfacing for play areas whose engineered wood fiber surface washes out during rainfall. This surfacing can be installed in key areas while engineered wood fiber remains in others as a cost saving measure. • Emphasize tie-in to Hickory Trail (Aviation) and use park as rest area or point of entry. for individuals with disabilities, to the trail. • Replace a portion of existing swings with adaptive swings as currently there are no adaptive swings available.
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City-wide Park
Local Designation
Standards Vary



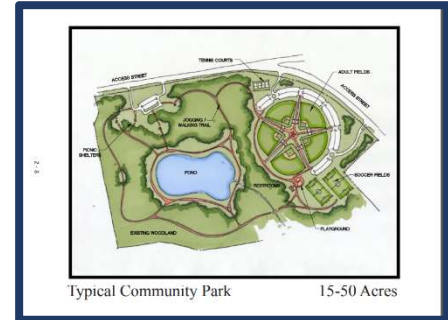
City-Wide Park Inventory	
<p>Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park</p>	<p>Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park is a highly popular 70.5 acre City-wide Park featuring something for everyone.</p> <p>Current amenities include five picnic shelters with tables and grills, two playgrounds, restrooms, gazebo, lighted and paved walking trail, nature boardwalk, 24-hole disc golf course, canoe launch, horseshoe pits, and a memorial garden.</p> <p>Notables for individuals with disabilities include three accessible disc golf holes, accessible fishing area and boardwalk, accessible parking/restrooms, sidewalks and new playground near parking lot with inclusive features and a message center dedicated to individuals with disabilities.</p>

	<p>Key Considerations: With projected population growth and community interests, this park will continue to see an increase in visitors and will need assistance from other “release valve” parks that offer similar amenities. With regard to specific improvements, the following recommendations are made.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use programable green space to stretch use of park• Focus on preservation of park’s natural resources given its high traffic• Dredge water feature to enhance canoeing/kayaking options• Maximize use of boardwalk feature through structural and aesthetic enhancements• Increase access to creek• Install more benches (with less distance between them) for seniors using the walking path <p>The following recommendations would enhance the park’s ability to serve all citizens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Add additional shade structures near playgrounds when possible• Create accessible routes to play structures that are not part of the recent play-system upgrade/move• Continue to assess, expand and advertise opportunities for individuals with disabilities at this park. It was noted, by staff, as a favorite via public input and has been noticed for its frequency in hosting individuals with disabilities.• Implement system to communicate the accessibility of the greenway and level of effort needed to use it.
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Community Parks

The City of Hickory has four community parks.

Community parks provide for the recreation needs of several neighborhoods or large sections of the community. A range of facilities is typically provided and may support tournament competition for athletic and league sports or passive recreation. These parks also present opportunities for nontraditional types of recreation. Fifty percent of the community park site should ideally be developed for passive recreation. These relatively undisturbed areas may serve as buffers around the park and/or act as buffers between active facilities.



Community park sites should have varying topography and vegetation. Forested areas should have a variety of tree species. Cleared areas should be present for active recreational facilities. One or more natural water feature, such as a lake, river, or creek, are desirable in community parks. Parkland should be contiguous and strategically located in order to be accessible to all users within the neighborhoods it serves.

Service Area: .5 - 3 mile radius

Acres/Population Ratio: 2.5 acres per 1,000 persons = 1.4 Actual

Typical Size: 10-30+ Acres

Typical Facilities & Amenities Found in Community Parks: Recreation Center, Picnic Tables, Grills, Basketball Courts, Benches or Bench Swings, Tennis Court (lighted), Nature Trails, Baseball/Softball Fields (lighted), Restrooms/Concessions, Multipurpose Fields, Parking, Soccer Fields (lighted), Playgrounds, Swimming Pool, Volleyball Courts, Amphitheater, Disc Golf, Observation Decks, Lakes, Picnic Shelters, Paddle Boat/Canoe Harbor, Picnic Shelters with Grills, Fishing Piers/Boat Docks

Ideally fifty percent of the community park site should remain undeveloped for passive recreation/open space. Specialty facilities may be added to or substituted for other facilities depending on community need or special site characteristics. Development of community parks may fall within the responsibility of the municipality or the county agency.

Source: 2010 City of Hickory Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment





Community Park Inventory

Kiwanis Park



Kiwanis park features 16 acres of fun and is the City’s best example of inclusivity and universal park design.

Current amenities include two picnic shelters with tables and grills, tennis court, outdoor basketball court, four lighted baseball fields, two batting cages, restrooms, two concession stands, Charles D. Dixon Memorial Splash Pad, and two playgrounds, including the Zahra Baker All Children’s Playground and Treehouse.

Notables for individuals with disabilities include the Zahra Baker All Children’s Playground and Treehouse which offer a welcoming play space for people of all ages and abilities. In honor of Zahra Baker, the playground includes wheelchair-accessible ramps and rides, multiple ground-level activities, educational and sensory elements, and inclusive play products. A message center, dedicated to resources for individuals with disabilities is also co-located with the all-children’s playground along with signage helping patrons to get the most out of their adaptive play experience.

There are two newly installed play-systems with shade.

Key Considerations: Upgrade shelter. Consider the following measures to enhance the inclusive strengths of this park, making it even more of a resource to individuals with disabilities.

- Install fencing for children with elopement challenges
- Install communication boards, such as PEC boards, for alternate means of communication
- Create splash pad guidelines that explicitly allow for disability-related needs such as adaptive equipment and swim diapers
- Consider making waterproof wheelchairs available to create greater inclusivity and to allow those with electronic wheelchairs to protect their equipment
- Duplicate the Zahra Baker playground in whole or in part, in other parks, to spread inclusive opportunities and potentially decongest Kiwanis Park.
- Consider implementing days/times that individuals with disabilities and their families can have priority at the playground and splash pad.


Lowe's Foods City Park



The result of a collaborative partnership with Lowe's Foods, CommScope, Corning Inc. Foundation and the Friends of Hickory this .42 acre inclusive downtown park serves both a recreational and economic purpose due to its proximity to Union Square.

Current amenities include an unrestricted play space with unitary surfacing, interactive water feature/miniature splash pad, shaded seating and fencing.

Notables for individuals with disabilities include unitary surfacing capable of accommodating mobility devices, a metal slide that can be used by children with cochlear implants, ample fencing to protect children who wander, accessibility to an interactive water feature, accessible ramp to 3D globe, sensory music play area, shade and accessible bathrooms.

	<p>Key Considerations: This little park is power packed for children who may need a more inclusive environment. The following recommendations would enhance the park’s ability to serve all citizens.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertise park’s inclusive features • Consider scheduling times for individuals with disabilities to have special use of the park • Install clear signage outlining rules • PEC communication board • Changing pads in bathrooms • Improve/replace worn unitary surfacing
<p>Neill W. Clark Jr. Recreation Park</p> 	<p>This 8.21 acre Community Park features a dynamic partnership with Hickory Christian Academy who now owns the main building while the City owns the Neill W. Clark Jr. Gymnasium and two lower fields.</p> <p>Current amenities include two lighted soccer fields, horseshoe pits, restrooms (not outdoor), and the Neill W. Clark Jr. Gymnasium. Turf field to be installed by Hickory Christian Academy with a shared-use agreement in place.</p> <p>Notables for individuals with disabilities: NA</p> <p>Key Considerations: The following recommendations would enhance the park’s ability to serve all citizens.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure presence of accessible restrooms

Stanford Park



This 37 acre park is home to Highland Recreation Center as well as the Parks, Recreation and Sports Tourism administrative offices.

Current amenities include three softball/baseball fields, restrooms, a concession stand, graffiti wall, outdoor basketball court, picnic shelter, two playgrounds, paved walking trail, walking track around building in the works and outdoor skate park. The City projects a new play-system and amenity improvements within the next five years.

Notables for individuals with disabilities include a recreation center with programmable rooms and gym space as well as ground-level amenities attached to play systems.

Key Considerations: The following recommendations would enhance the park's ability to serve all citizens.

- Create accessible routes to play structures
- Consider updating/upgrade of skate park amenity (concrete) and potential alternate location

Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks provide the basic unit of the park system. These parks are usually located within walking distance of the area serviced and provide a variety of activities of interest to all age groups. While their small size requires intense development, fifty percent of each site should remain undisturbed to serve as a buffer between the park and adjacent land users.



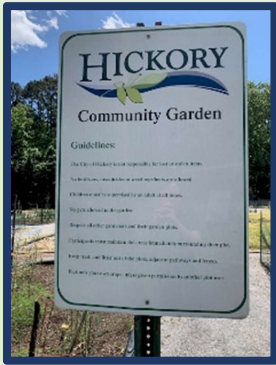
Service Area: .5 to .75 mile radius to serve walk-in recreation needs of surrounding populations
City of Hickory Acreage/Population Ratio: 2.5 acres per 1,000 persons =1.94 Actual
Typical Size: 3-10 acres

Typical Facilities & Amenities Found in Neighborhood Parks: Playground, Picnic Shelters, Grills, Court Games, Picnic Tables and Grills (not under shelter), Informal Play Field, Benches or Bench Swings, and Volleyball. 50% of Site to Remain Undeveloped Trails/Walkways

Where municipal jurisdiction is available, neighborhood parks are typically developed by the municipality.

Source: 2010 City of Hickory Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment



Neighborhood Park Inventory	
<p>Civitan Park</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin: 20px 0;">  </div>	<p>This 7.5 acre park is home to the City’s most active community garden. Newly installed restrooms and ADA accessible walkway to playground and shelter.</p> <p>Current amenities include a picnic shelter with tables, grills, two tennis courts, an outdoor basketball court, lighted softball field, playground, restroom and concession stand.</p> <p>Notables for individuals with disabilities include accessible parking and walkway to restrooms, play equipment and shelter.</p>

	<p>Key Considerations: The following recommendations would enhance the park's ability to serve all citizens.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider reconfiguration of garden to accommodate individuals with assistive devices and their access to the garden plots • Add sensory garden on different portion of property <p>Additional Consideration: Expand Civitan ballfield to a 60/90 to increase recreation capacity.</p>
<p>Cliff Teague Park</p> 	<p>This 8.1 acre park has great opportunity to maximize its potential.</p> <p>Current amenities include a tennis court, playground equipment, outdoor basketball court, horseshoe pits, and restrooms.</p> <p>Notables for individuals with disabilities include an accessible route to play areas and ample shade.</p> <p>Key Considerations: The following recommendations would enhance the park's ability to serve all citizens.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add ground-level features, near play-system until its upgrade which should feature an increase in inclusive features • Add adaptive swings, ramps/pathways to play features
	

Fairbrook Optimist Dog Park



This 6.7 acre park is home to the City’s only dog park.

Current amenities include separate fenced areas for large and small dogs, obstacle courses, pet stations, dog water fountains, individual covered shelters, park benches, and restrooms. This dog park is unsupervised.

Notables for individuals with disabilities include an accessible bathroom.

Key Considerations: The following recommendations would enhance the park’s ability to serve all citizens and greater enjoyment for pets.

- Add accessible route to main area along with additional walkways for individuals using mobility devices
- Add ADA accessible parking
- Install water tap and hose
- Install additional shade opportunities

Hickory City Park

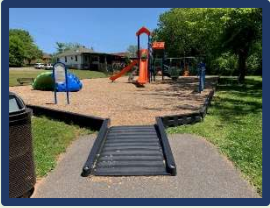

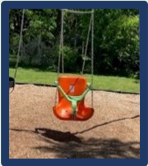






This 15 acre park is a tennis hub for the City and a trailhead to the Lake Hickory Trails which are good for biking and hiking.

Current amenities include eight lighted tennis courts, a multi-purpose facility with an activity building, paved bikeway, an outdoor covered shelter, and restrooms. Additional site amenities are projected, by the City, within the next five years.

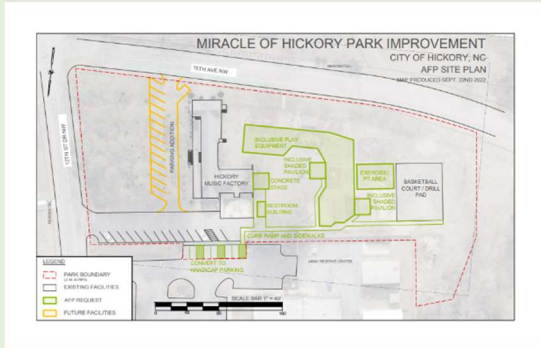
Notables for individuals with disabilities include tennis courts in close proximity to accessible parking.

Key Considerations: The following recommendations would enhance the park’s ability to serve all citizens.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement system to communicate the accessibility of the greenway and level of effort needed to use it.
<p>Hickory Optimist Park</p>     	<p>This 6 acre park is packed with great features yet was found to be underutilized during the master planning process.</p> <p>Current amenities include a picnic shelter with tables and grills, community room building with restrooms and catering kitchen, outdoor basketball court, four pickleball courts, playground, outdoor fitness equipment zone, paved walking trail, restrooms and youth softball field.</p> <p>Notables for individuals with disabilities include a paved walking trail, outdoor exercise equipment and recently upgraded play-system with inclusive features.</p> <p>Key Considerations: Upgrade shelter. The following recommendations would enhance the park’s ability to serve all citizens.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider this location for a future <u>Miracle Field practice field</u> which requires approximately one acre of land plus nearby bathrooms and parking. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This location could also be viable for the installation of additional pickleball courts • Consider use of this park for programming that caters to individuals with disabilities and seniors due to several features of interest for them • Continue to include inclusive elements to new playground installations around City

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and post visual guide to inclusive features of park to include play equipment. See Zahra Baker Children’s Park for model.
<p>Highland Park</p> 	<p>This tranquil 2.7 acre park features a greenspace with seating.</p> <p>Notables for individuals with disabilities include: NA</p> <p>Key Considerations: The following recommendations would enhance the park’s ability to serve all citizens.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create smooth route to seating • Add features typical of a Neighborhood Park
<p>Jaycee Park</p> 	<p>This 5 acre park has current amenities such as a lighted baseball field, batting cage, restrooms, and a concession stand. The park is home to P.D. Fowler Field.</p> <p>Notables for individuals with disabilities include: NA</p> <p>Key Considerations: The following recommendations would enhance the park’s ability to serve all citizens.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create accessibility features for park users and their caregivers to include a drop-off zone sign, in front of P.D. Fowler Field for those with mobility challenges.

Miracle of Hickory Park



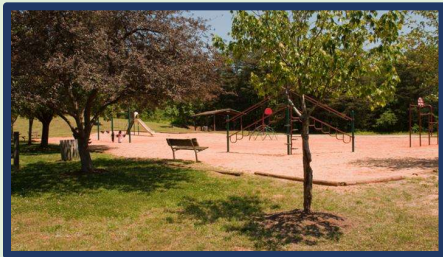
Featuring the Hickory Music Factory, this 2.5 acre park includes **current amenities such as** an outdoor basketball court, and playground. The City projects a new play-system. This park has an adopted master plan that includes a focus on veterans, individuals with disabilities and senior citizens.

Notables for individuals with disabilities include an accessible route to Miracle of Hickory obelisk display and master plan for future inclusive elements.

Key Considerations: The following recommendations would enhance the park’s ability to serve all citizens.

- Implement park’s current master plan

Southside Heights Park



A 12.7 acre park with **current amenities such as** a picnic shelter with tables and grills, outdoor basketball court, playground, multipurpose field, and restrooms.

Notables for individuals with disabilities include: NA

Key Considerations: Upgrade shelter. The following recommendations would enhance the park’s ability to serve all citizens.

- Consider this park for niche sports tourism opportunities such as wiffle ball fields or Miracle Fields and co-located inclusive playgrounds
- Create smooth routes to existing play structures

Taft-Broome Park



This 9.6 acre park has **current amenities such as** two picnic shelters with tables and grills, one tennis court, three outdoor pickleball courts, two outdoor basketball courts, lit Samuel I. Davis multipurpose field, two playgrounds, horseshoe pits, restrooms, community garden, Brown Penn Recreation Center, Brown Penn Senior Center, and Ridgeview Recreation Center.

Notables for individuals with disabilities include a network of flat, wide sidewalks.

Key Considerations: The following recommendations would enhance the park’s ability to serve all citizens.

- Create direct routes to play features
- Allow for greater access to bathroom facilities
- Increase picnicking opportunities

West Hickory Park



This 5.6 acre park has **current amenities such as** an outdoor half basketball court, lighted softball field, playground, picnic shelter, and restrooms.

Notables for individuals with disabilities include: NA

Key Considerations: The following recommendations would enhance the park’s ability to serve all citizens.

- Due to its proximity to the West Hickory Senior Center, create more navigable routes for seniors to access and use the park (i.e. crosswalk)
- **Re-imagine park using NRPA** “Rejuvenating Neighborhoods & Communities Through Parks” Guide

Westmont Recreation Park



This 3 acre park has **current amenities such as** six outdoor pickleball courts, an outdoor basketball court, horseshoe pits, playground, gymnasium, restrooms, and Westmont Senior Center.

Notables for individuals with disabilities include: NA

Key Considerations: The following recommendations would enhance the park's ability to serve all citizens.

- Install new outdoor shuffleboard courts
- Install ramps for play system
- Ensure ease of access to pickleball courts (now lit)
- Create great accessibility to pickleball courts (ramps)

Civic Parks/Gardens

City-specific designation. These parks can be likened to Mini Parks which are a recognized park designation by the National Recreation and Park Association.

Mini parks are the smallest park classification. These parks are located within walking distance of the area serviced, and they provide limited recreational needs. Mini parks' small size requires intense development and allows little to no buffer between the park and adjacent land users is provided.



Service Area: .25 mile radius to serve walk-in recreation needs of surrounding populations
Acreage/Population Ratio: .25 acres per 1,000 persons = 2.25 Actual
Typical Size: 1-4 acres



Typical Facilities & Amenities Found in Civic Parks/Gardens: Playground, Picnic Tables, Grills (not under shelter), ½ Basketball Courts, Benches or Bench Swings, Open Play Area, Landscaped Public Use Area




Mini parks are typically found in very urban environments. Where municipal jurisdiction is available, mini parks are typically developed by the municipality. Many agencies in North Carolina

choose not to develop mini parks, or substitute them with small civic gardens as is the case with Hickory.

Source: 2010 City of Hickory Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment



Civic Parks/Gardens	
<p>Ivey Arboretum at Sally Fox Park</p> 	<p>A 4.6 acre park with current amenities such as public art benches, sculptures by local artists, and approximately 250 different species of trees and plantings. Newly installed Japanese stone walkway.</p> <p>Notables for individuals with disabilities include: NA</p> <p>Key Considerations: The following recommendations would enhance the park’s ability to serve all citizens.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider addition of accessible on-street parking spaces • Add sensory-friendly plants/sensory garden to current offerings • Make this park a potential rest-stop for individuals with disabilities or seniors using City Walk
<p>McComb Park</p> 	<p>This 2.5 acre park has amenities such as a water feature, seating area, gazebo, and a beautiful memorial garden.</p> <p>Notables for individuals with disabilities include: NA</p> <p>Key Considerations: Consider using parklet model to create an experiential element to the park that reflects the desires of citizens articulated during public input.</p>

<p>Robinson Park</p> 	<p>This 1.5 acre park features wooded natural areas and an 1820's era log cabin. This park is not open for public use.</p> <p>Notables for individuals with disabilities include: NA</p> <p>Key Considerations: Create route to allow for up-close examination of on-site cabin and photo opportunities</p>
<p>Shuford House & Gardens</p> 	<p>.9 acres of beauty featuring both a house and garden area with amenities such as a formal courtyard and large fountain area. This park is a destination for weddings and special occasions throughout the year.</p> <p>Notables for individuals with disabilities include flat sidewalks throughout the garden and an accessible ramp for entrance to the Shuford House.</p> <p>Key Considerations: The following recommendations would enhance the park's ability to serve all citizens.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize accessibility to citizens and visitors after repair of walkways • Consider sensory friendly plantings • Aesthetic repair of Shuford House
<p>Viewmont Park</p> 	<p>This .3 acre park offers a serene setting to sit and enjoy the outdoors via an artistic bench.</p> <p>Notables for individuals with disabilities include: NA</p> <p>Key Considerations: Consider parklet model to add character and functionality to this space.</p>

Citizen Feedback Highlights for Parks

Within the 2022 City of Hickory Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment Survey, participants had a chance to give open-ended answers to key questions. Many of their observations and suggestions have been incorporated into the comprehensive master plan. Below are some feedback highlights for City officials and staff to consider.




Some Desired Improvements & Additions to Parks

- Greater accessibility to park features throughout the system via sidewalks and paths
- More scheduled activities/programs offered at parks
- Increased shade opportunities in parks (play equipment & seating for parents)
- Focus on increasing quality of under-used parks
- Signage to encourage patrons to contribute to better air quality (i.e. refrain from idling vehicles)
- More parks with features like Zahra Baker Playground
- Splash pads at additional parks
- Additional directional/wayfinding signage in parks
- More focus on security...increased monitoring
- Interesting play equipment like Catawba Meadows Park in Morganton
- Visible City staff, at parks, on a regular basis
- Enclosed slides, climbing walls and ropes mentioned
- WiFi service in parks (fits with national trends)
- Cameras in parks such as Hickory City Park
- Clear signage of park rules within each park
- Consideration/signage to help with eliminating food allergy hazards in picnic and play areas
- More lighting along trails
- Children's toilets for parks frequented by small children (i.e. Lowe's Foods City Park)
- More disc golf courses
- More features for toddlers
- More pickleball
- Public beach access
- Bike lanes
- Updated/upgraded restrooms
- More vending machines, in general

Additional public input will be covered in the Community Engagement section of this master plan.

Special Use Parks & Facilities

Special-use parks are designed to meet the needs of a specific user group. An example of a special-use park would be a baseball stadium or golf course. There are also special use facilities which cater to a singular purpose. Examples of special use facilities include an aquatic center, zoo, museum or senior center. A typical feature of these parks and facilities is their ability to be good revenue generators though this need not be the case. Senior Centers can be considered as special use facilities. In this master plan, such centers are included with the general facilities inventory.

Special Use Park Inventory	
<p>L.P. Frans Stadium</p> 	<p>L.P. Frans Stadium is located in Winkler Park. The stadium is primarily used for baseball, and is the home field of the Hickory Crawdads minor league baseball team. It was built in 1993 and has 4,000 fixed seats.</p> <p>Notables for individuals with disabilities include an ADA compliant experience.</p> <p>Key Considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner on expansion of stadium use to include additional events related to Special Olympics, Walkin’ Roll and a potential Miracle League in the future.

Hickory City Schools: Priority Use Agreement



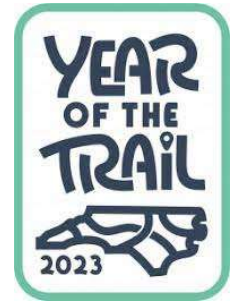
The City has a robust relationship with Hickory City Schools, in the form of a priority use agreement updated in July 2021 (expiring in 2031). The agreement makes the operation of PR&ST programs, activities and events possible. 25+ athletic facilities are made available to the City through this agreement. Additional details, to include an inventory, are located in the Sports Tourism section of this master plan.

Linear Parks

As mentioned in previously, this master plan utilizes a Linear Park designation mentioned but never emphasized in earlier plans. The Hickory Trail project and North Carolina's 2023 Year of the Trail provide a perfect opportunity to highlight this important park classification due to its potential for active and passive experiences. The Hickory Trail project and a growing public sentiment toward



it as a parks and recreation amenity furthers the case for resurrecting this designation. This sentiment was clearly reflected in 2022 City of Hickory Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment Survey results as well as public input received via the various platforms offered during the master planning process. Public support of trails, a statewide trail focus and national trends in favor of trail development solidify the value of using this



designation. Beyond this, Hickory Trail is becoming what is known as a **high-performance public space** in which generates economic, social and environmental benefits.

Linear parks are built connections that link parks together and usually accommodate more than one mode of recreational travel such as biking, jogging, or walking. Active play areas are sometimes incorporated into these and there are no specific National Recreation and Park Association standards for such parks other than that they protect resources and provide maximum usage. Hickory Trail provides... on-site or nearby access to the following parks and recreation destinations...


- Rotary-Geitner Park (Future Deidra Lackey Memorial Park)
- Hickory City Park
- Winkler Park & L.P. Frans Stadium
- Jaycee Park
- Miracle of Hickory Park
- Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park
- Westmont Recreation Center
- Hickory Optimist Park
- Lowe's Foods City Park
- Taft Broome-Park
- Ridgeview Recreation Center
- Brown Penn Recreation Center
- Ivey Arboretum at Sally Fox Park
- Robinson Park



Hickory Trail Points of Interest: 2023 Summary

Lenoir Rhyne University (City Walk)	SALT Block (City Walk) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catawba Science Center • Hickory Choral Society • Hickory Museum of Art • United Arts Council • Western Piedmont Symphony 	Patrick Beaver Memorial Library (City Walk)
Julian G. Whitener Municipal Building/Hickory City Hall	Murals & Monuments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome to Hickory 117 Government Ave SW • The Miracle of Hickory 241 1st Ave NW • Historic Beginnings 234 Union Square • Under the Umbrella 246 1st Ave NW • Waterfall Spacescape 246 1st Ave NW • Old Hickory Tavern Monument 232 Government Ave SW • Flying Around Hickory 87-A 4th St NW 	Downtown Hickory (City Walk)
Hickory Community Theater (City Walk)	Lowes Foods City Park	Lake Hickory (River walk)
Lake Hickory Trails	Rotary-Geitner Park (Riverwalk)	Aviation Museum (Aviation Walk)
L.P. Frans Stadium (Aviation Walk)	Winkler Park (Aviation Walk)	



Linear Park Inventory	
<p>Hickory Trail (Upon Completion)</p> 	<p>The Hickory Trail project features a 10 mile, paved multi-modal trail with the potential to transform the community! When finished, the trail will span 60 acres of the City. Segments include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> City Walk Riverwalk Aviation Walk Historic Ridgeview Walk OLLE Art Walk <p>See Trail Inventory for additional details.</p>



The Carolina Thread Trail

The Carolina Thread Trail, though not currently a notably active presence in Hickory, does have a 1.5 mile greenway, comprised of sidewalk and paved trail, available to citizens.

There are both sidewalk and road connections through a residential area to help with the facilitation of future linkage to the regional trail. The Hickory Greenway provides access to Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park and runs in front of Miracle of Hickory Park.

Trail Inventory

The following inventory highlights a collection of greenways, multi-use paths, trails and walking loops that have grown in size, number and complexity since previous plans and needs assessments. With a notably large interest in trails, as articulated by citizens throughout the master planning process, it is especially important to highlight trails in their many forms. The 20 miles accounted for in this master plan are comprised of the City’s main trails to include the Hickory Trail, Lake Hickory Trails and Winkler Park Trails. Internal walking paths and loops were not calculated into the City’s overall trail mileage however, such opportunities are highlighted to assist with the identification and communication of niche interests...in this case being, walking.

Greenways & Trails

Greenways and trails often twist and turn through neighborhoods and natural areas, providing a common thread that connects key elements of communities together (greenways) or sometimes an isolated internal system (trails) of enjoyment within a given property. Offering both wide (8-10 feet) natural or paved experiences for their users, greenways and trails can act as transportation platforms and recreation hubs for silent sports like running, walking and biking. As an added bonus, these amenities offer environmental benefits, economic development opportunities, and tourism appeal.

In 2020, the City developed a pedestrian and bicycle plan for sidewalks, bikeways, greenways and trails to identify corridors for development, establish budgetary priorities for land acquisition/construction, and create a plan of action for greenway development. Following this plan should be among the City’s top priorities.


Connectivity is key...but a comprehensive system of trails happens in segments...over time.

Since the 2010 Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment, the City has indeed made trails a great priority through the Hickory Trail project. The 2010 assessment noted that the City should develop greenways in conjunction with public entities such as Lenoir-Rhyne University. The Hickory Trail project is evidence of that as well.

Below is a trail inventory that captures both existing conditions and funded projects in the process of completion.

Source: 2010 Park and Recreation Needs Assessment

Trail Inventory

Trail System	Trail Name	Location & Description	Miles	Trail Type
Hickory Trail			10	
	City Walk (Segment)	City Walk has been developed along Main Avenue from Lenoir-Rhyne University through Downtown Hickory to 11 th Street NW and up to Old Lenoir Road (future OLLE Art Walk).		Multiuse Path/Greenway (Paved)
	Riverwalk (Segment)	Riverwalk was developed, from Geitner Park along the river, and will be a feature of Deidra Lackey Memorial Park (proposed) in the future.		Multiuse Path/Greenway (Paved)
	Aviation Walk (Segment)	Aviation Walk is a paved trail featuring a pedestrian bridge over U.S. 321, route to L.P. Frans Stadium and the Hickory Regional Airport.		Multiuse Path/Greenway (Paved)
	Historic Ridgeview Walk (Segment)	This segment will connect from the Ridgeview Community to downtown and U.S. 70.		Multiuse Path/Greenway (Paved)
	OLLE Art Walk (Segment)	The OLLE Art Walk project is a critical pedestrian and bicycle connection for the City of Hickory and will potentially tie together a number of ongoing trail projects and parks. Original plans included 9 key connections.		Multiuse Path/Greenway (Paved)

Lake Hickory Trails			8	
	Geitner Trail	Trail situated between Hickory City Park & Rotary Geitner Park. Scenic greenway that provides access to Hickory’s new Riverwalk. Also considered a bikeway.		Paved
	Hickory Springs Loop	Loop located between Hickory City Park & Rotary Geitner Park. Considered to be a beginner friendly loop that is great for all ages.		Natural Surface
	Broyhill Trail	Nestled between Hickory City Park & Rotary Geitner Park. Intermediate loop with spectacular views of Lake Hickory, fast flowy berms and more.		Natural Surface
	Rock n Road Pump Track & Jump Line	Located between Hickory City Park & Rotary Geitner Park. One of the biggest pump tracks in the region. Jump line is an advanced 1/8 th mile jump.		Natural Surface
	Hickory Greenway 	Combination of a sidewalk connection, road connection and paved trail through a residential area. Part of the Carolina Thread Trail.	1.5 Miles One Way	Paved
Internal Walking Loops/Tracks*				
	Bruce Meisner Park Walking Loop	Walking track at Bruce Meisner Park		Paved
	Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial	Lighted walking path at Glenn C. Hilton Jr Memorial Park.		Paved

	Park Walking Trail			
	Henry Fork River Park Walking Trail	Henry Fork River Park walking path.		Paved
	Hickory Optimist Park Walking Trail	Hickory Optimist Park walking path connecting to nearby neighborhood.		Paved
Winkler Park Trails				
	Laurel Hill Trail	Nature Trail	1/4 Mile	Natural Surface
	Piney Woods Trail	Nature Trail	1/8 Mile	Natural Surface
Total Trail Mileage	19.88			

* Total miles do not reflect walking loops/tracks/trails. Winkler Park Trails included due to potential for expansion and integration with system.

Over 13 Miles of Paved Trail...Over 6 Miles of Unpaved Trail...



Open Spaces...An Underestimated Asset

Open space can be one of the most valuable assets in a parks and recreation system. Simply put, if a person can see across the space the space is “open space” and place for outdoor classes, events. There is also what is which can benefit ecosystems by source for water or promoter of term, open space can play a role in recreation AND conservation.



(i.e. without trees in the way, for example) depending upon its surface can become a relaxation or even small private or public known as **Undeveloped Open Space** acting as a habitat for wildlife, filtration clean air. Whether temporary or long

During the inventory and analysis phase of the master planning process, a specific look at open spaces, within existing parks, was taken. This was done in order to identify additional opportunities for the City to program within parks, rent space for public use and/or promote conservation. 17 open space opportunities were identified within the City’s parks. It is advised that the City examine these spaces for their potential enhancement to parks and recreation offerings.

Number of Potential Programmable Open Spaces Within Existing Parks

Regional Parks

Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park – 1
Henry Fork River Regional Recreation Park – 1
Rotary-Geitner Park – 2
Winkler Park – 1

Community Park

Stanford Park - 3

Neighborhood Parks

Cliff Teague Park - 3
Fairbrook Optimist Park - 1
Hickory City Park - 1
Highland Park - 1
West Hickory Park - 1

Civic Parks/Gardens

Ivey Arboretum at Sally Fox Park – 1
Robinson Park – 1

Total Open Space Opportunities Within Existing Parks = 17

Undeveloped Parks as Open Space

Sandy Pines Property – 12 Acres
Undeveloped Portion of Bruce Meisner Park – 68 Acres
River Road Property – 160 Acres
Total Acres of Undeveloped Park Open Space = 240



Community Enhancement for Individuals with Disabilities

The City of Hickory is uniquely equipped with the ability to highlight what is available for individuals with disabilities while also identifying how what is offered can be enhanced for the future. This was made possible via a year-long, internal, study project known as the Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities. Recommendations for improvement are contained within the overall recommendations made in this report. Below is a snapshot of notable offerings for individuals with disabilities as of the date of this plan.

Most Notable Parks with Features for Individuals with Disabilities

Park/Facility	Notable Offering to Individuals with Disabilities
Rotary-Geitner Park (Future Deidra Lackey Memorial Park)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access to Riverwalk (paved). 2. Accessible seating at Lake House. (Future)
Bruce Meisner Park	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ADA Accessible paved walking track. 2. ADA Accessible shelter and picnic tables. 3. Network of sidewalks to access playground, shelter, and park building.
Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Three accessible disc golf holes. 2. Accessible fishing area and boardwalk. 3. Accessible parking and restrooms. 4. New play area with, inclusive features near upper parking lot. Includes inclusive message center.
Hickory Optimist Park	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Outdoor exercise equipment. 2. New play area with inclusive features. 3. Accessible parking and restrooms.
Hickory Trail	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Extra-wide surface for wheelchairs/medical assistive devices. 2. Frequent rest opportunities via seating walls. 3. Union Square’s accessible parking/ restrooms. 4. Links to additional parks such as Winkler Park.
Kiwanis Park/Splash Pad/Zahra Baker Playground	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wheelchair accessible swing and high-backed adaptive swings with straps. 2. Unitary surfacing for maneuverability of assistive devices. 3. Shade structures for sun-allergies & related considerations. 4. Ground-level Slide n’ Learn play panel for sensory learning. 5. Wide Glide Slide for caregiver assisted sliding. 6. Crater Arch panel for parallel play. 7. Vortex for sensory spinning. 8. Glide Slide accessed by transfer system. 9. 35” rise accessible stairs to slides. 10. Ground to deck wheelchair accessible ramp. 11. Aero Glider with wheelchair accessible ramp and capacity for caregivers to ride along. 12. Sensory music station. 13. Ground level crawl through. 14. Rock blocks accessible climbing tunnel. 15. Wheelchair accessible treehouse. 16. Wheelchair accessible EZ sand digger. 17. Play-webs. 18. Color contrasts for the visually impaired. 19. Transfer systems, ground panels, calming areas and flush transitions. 20. Message center for individuals with disabilities to include illustrative map on how to use the features of the playground.
Lowes Foods City Park	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Metal Slide for children with cochlear implants. 2. Accessible interactive water feature. 3. Accessible ramp to globe feature.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Sensory music play area. 5. Ample fencing for elopement. 6. Unitary surfacing and features located predominantly at ground level.
Winkler Park & Activity Building	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tiered walkway down to main level of the park. 2. Accessible picnic shelter and activity building for programming. 3. Accessible parking and restrooms. 4. Sidewalks appear accessible. 5. Proximity to LP Frans Stadium which hosts disability related events such as sports camps and t-ball games.

Source: Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities

Additional Features for Individuals with Disabilities at Parks & Facilities

Park/Facility	Notable Offering for Individuals with Disabilities
Hickory City Park	Tennis courts are located close to accessible parking.
Highland Recreation Center/Stanford Park	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programmable rooms. 2. Ability to provide gym time. 3. Ground-level amenities/play systems.
Ivey Arboretum & Sally Fox Park	Ties into City Walk.
Miracle of Hickory Park	Accessible obelisk display.
Shuford House & Gardens	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Flat-sidewalks throughout garden. 2. Accessible ramp to entrance of Shuford House.
Southside Heights Park	Accessible parking.
Taft Broome Park	Great terrain for accessibility.
Viewmont Park	Good flat surfaces to navigate.

Source: Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities

Existing Conditions: Facilities

The master planning process incorporated a visit to facilities used for recreation in the City of Hickory. Visits were conducted to assess current amenities, maintenance needs, operations and untapped potential. A tour of a sample of recreation facilities was conducted with the involvement of the Project Manager, Public Services and PR&ST staff. This tour allowed for the compilation of a general picture of existing conditions mainly through observation methods. This tour was an extension of a 2022 tour conducted for the Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities which yielded key observations as well. In lieu of listing out maintenance needs the staff was already aware of, themes were annotated. This report does not constitute an ADA audit. This report is not intended to provide a complete list of necessary maintenance repairs or upgrades as was the style of the 2010 Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment. The facilities assessment provides a snapshot of opportunities and challenges that both the Public Services Department and PR&ST Department should explore in the next ten years.

Specific items examined in facility visits included the following:

- Safety & Maintenance
- Accessibility
- Exterior aesthetics, accessibility, windows, roofing, walls and moisture concerns

- Interior HVAC, walls, floors, ceilings, accessibility and obvious electrical considerations
- Opportunities to Expand Use
- Currency and Relevance of Amenities
- Alignment with Trends and Needs

As a result of visits, the following themes emerged...

- Facilities could be more inclusive with regard to accessibility
- Both senior centers need considerable aesthetic and maintenance repairs. They appear to have renovation needs that require a cost-benefit analysis to determine if renovation is actually best. This should be a priority of the City due to its population projections regarding senior citizens.
 - Citizen input related to the Westmont Senior Center supports an overhaul and/or replacement of the facility
- Bathroom updates in both Brown Penn facilities are needed
- Moisture issues exist at Ridgeview Recreation Center and the Westmont Senior Center
- An incomplete network of surveillance exists at older facilities
- There is limited use of some facilities due to facility conditions

Themes are incorporated into the recommendations for this plan.



Facilities Inventory

Recreation Centers	
<p>Highland Recreation Center Ridgeview Recreation Center Brown Penn Recreation Center</p>	<p>Highland Recreation Center and Ridgeview Recreation Center are the heart of recreation facilities for the City. Both were constructed or renovated since 2000 (2004 and 2002 respectively). Brown Penn Recreation Center is a facility, constructed originally in the 1940s, which is now used primarily for children ages 15 and under, operating Monday through Saturday.</p> <p>Highland Recreation Center (40,250 sq. feet)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fitness Center with wide variety of equipment for fitness to include cardiovascular, free weight, weight machines and more. • Aerobics Studio/Spin Room • TRX Room • Gymnasium • Game Room • Locker Rooms • Community Room • Catering Kitchen • PR&ST Administrative Offices <p>Key Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore alternate location for administration who is currently growing out of the space and will likely do so as the population grows. This space can be repurposed for growing recreation needs • Perform Life Cycle cost analysis for mechanical equipment, electrical systems and exterior. Use formal deferred maintenance/work-order program to facilitate, moving forward. <p>Ridgeview Recreation Center (25,500 sq. feet)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fitness Center with cardio equipment including treadmills, ellipticals, bikes and free weights. • Aerobics Studio • Gymnasium with Stage • Community Room • Catering Kitchen • Restrooms/Showers • Game Room • TV Lounge • Office <p>Key Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to invest financially in this facility • Repair water issues in community room • Perform Life Cycle cost analysis for mechanical equipment, electrical systems and exterior. Use formal deferred maintenance/work-order program to facilitate, moving forward.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine life cycle of roof. <p>Brown Penn Recreation Center (9,000 sq. feet) *Local Designation as Historical Site</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newly Upgraded Gymnasium with Stage • Game Room • Office • Community Room • Restrooms <p>Key Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform Life Cycle cost analysis for mechanical equipment, electrical systems and exterior. Use formal deferred maintenance/work-order program to facilitate, moving forward. • Invest in greater accessibility. • Examine life cycle of roof. • Ensure accessibility to stage and related bathrooms. • Increase secure means of blocking off basement stairs for safety.
Senior Centers	
<p>Brown Penn Senior Center Westmont Senior Center</p>	<p>The Brown Penn Senior Center is currently being used for rent only while the Westmont Senior Center is being used for a total of 6 hours per week plus rentals.</p> <p>Brown Penn Senior Center (2,560 sq. feet) This facility is for rental only.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Room • Lounge • Kitchen • Restrooms <p>Key Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do a cost-benefit analysis regarding the renovation of this building. Options for seniors should be accounted for in the immediate area. • Renovate restrooms to make them accessible • Ensure greatest accessibility possible • Perform Life Cycle cost analysis for mechanical equipment, electrical systems and exterior. Use formal deferred maintenance/work-order program to facilitate, moving forward. <p>Westmont Senior Center</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Program Room • Game Room with Billiards <p>Key Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renovate exterior of building to include removal of water issues and associated staining • Improve accessibility of routes to building • Improve accessibility of restrooms

Gymnasiums	
Neill W. Clark Jr. Gymnasium Westmont Gymnasium	<p>The Neill W. Clark Jr. Gymnasium is co-located with a recreation park, now operated by Hickory Christian Academy, featuring amenities such as two lighted soccer fields and a future turf field to be shared by the City of Hickory and Hickory Christian Academy. Westmont Gymnasium is available for rental only.</p> <p>Neil W. Clark Jr. Gymnasium (13,250 sq. feet)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gymnasium with Stage Area • Game Room • Fitness Center • Restrooms/Showers • Concessions <p>Key Considerations: Perform Life Cycle cost analysis for mechanical equipment, electrical systems and exterior. Use formal deferred maintenance/work-order program to facilitate, moving forward.</p>
Activity Buildings	
Winkler Activity Center	<p>The Winkler Activity Center (2,250 sq. feet) is an open/programmable space co-located with Winkler Park.</p> <p>Key Considerations: Perform Life Cycle cost analysis for mechanical equipment, electrical systems and exterior. Use formal deferred maintenance/work-order program to facilitate, moving forward.</p>
Ceramics Studio @ The Winkler Museum	<p>The Ceramics Studio at the Winkler Museum building (2,370 sq. feet) offers a kiln and an opportunity for citizens to show their artistic side via studio sessions performed at scheduled times during each week.</p> <p>Key Considerations: Perform Life Cycle cost analysis for mechanical equipment, electrical systems and exterior. Use formal deferred maintenance/work-order program to facilitate, moving forward.</p>
Hickory City Park Activity Building	<p>The Hickory City Park Activity Building is a multi-purpose facility used mainly by the Greater Hickory Tennis Association.</p> <p>Key Considerations: Perform Life Cycle cost analysis for mechanical equipment, electrical systems and exterior. Use formal deferred maintenance/work-order program to facilitate, moving forward.</p>

Drop-In Recreation Center Users

# Drop-In Users of Recreation Centers (Monthly Average)	FY 16/17	FY 17/18	FY 18/19	FY 19/20	FY 20/21	FY 21/22
	5,300	5,900	15,629	11,292	2,356	7,381

Source: City Budgets FY 2015/2016 - FY 23/24

As can be seen above, the monthly average for drop-in recreation center users seemed to spike in FY 18/19 and dropped significantly during the pandemic (FY 20/21). Since FY 21/22, there has been a steady climb back towards pre-pandemic levels with a goal of seeing 8,200 in FY 23/24.

Estimated Recreation Center Membership Users...



Source: Sportsmen Membership Reports.



A Look at Walkability and Proximity

Walkability and Proximity to Amenities Are Strengthening in Hickory

Walkability Analysis: Parks & Facilities

The ability to walk to parks, within a community, speaks to the overall health of the parks and recreation system. An analysis was performed, using municipal Geographic Information Systems (GIS), to determine how much of the City’s population is within a 5, 10 and 20 minute walk from a City park. This examination is based on time and not on available sidewalk networks though these are clearly master planned by the City and on its present and future radar. Below is a synopsis of walking times followed by a walking time map for illustration. **It is important to note that this information is then followed by some very positive strides being taken by the City to increase access to recreation, to include trails.**

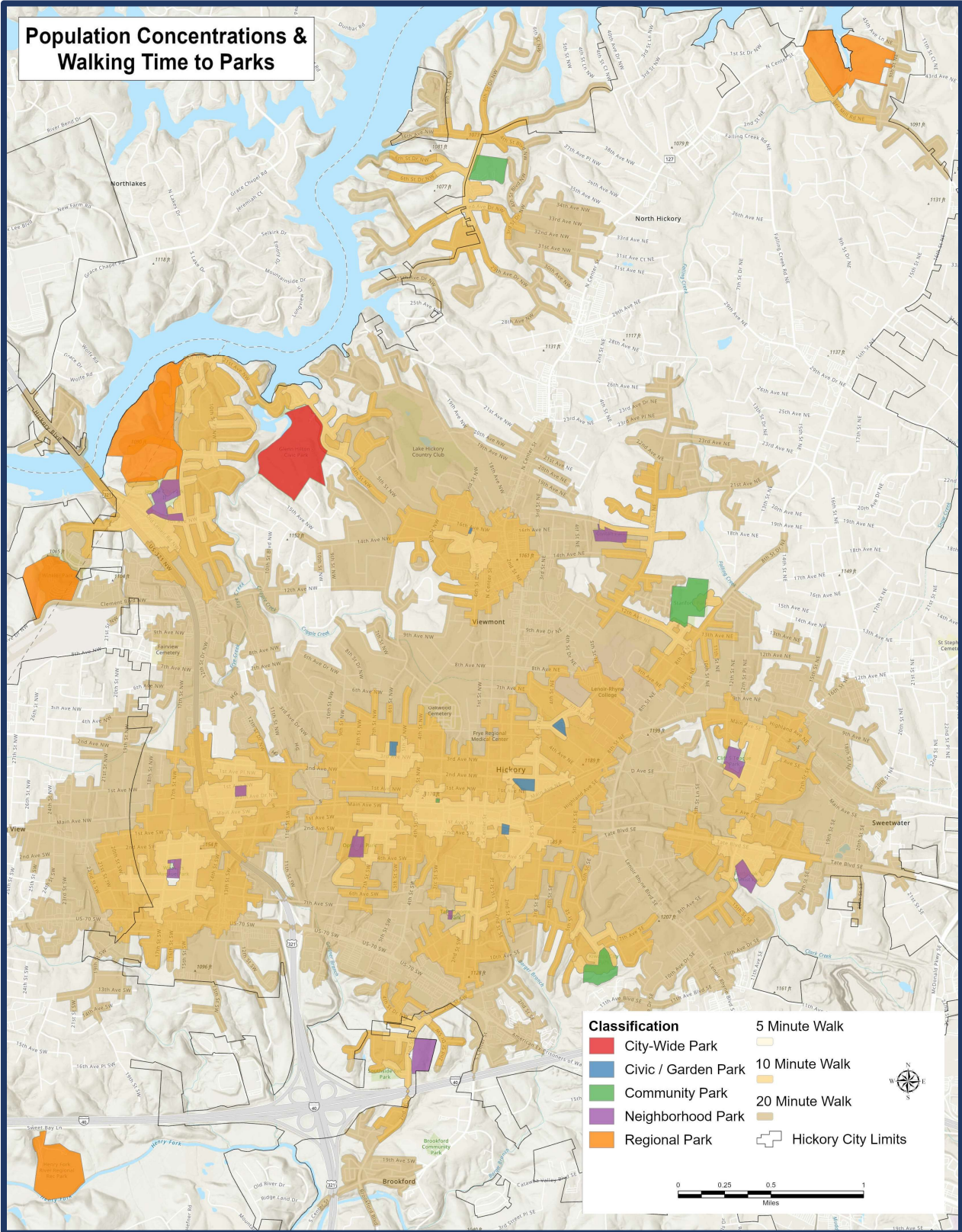
Time	Population Estimate	% of Population Estimate
5 Minutes	4,382	10%
10 Minutes	9,150	21%
20 Minutes	24,382	56%

Source: City of Hickory GIS June 2023 & 2020 US Census Population Data

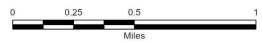
The following map depicts population concentrations and walking time to parks. **The City recognizes the importance of creating greater walkable and bikeable routes to expand access and has invested in them substantially through its myriad of master planned projects. As is understandable, connectivity efforts will take years, however they are well planned and prioritized as can be seen in the Walk. Bike. Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan.** The Hickory Trail project is particularly a massive step forward.

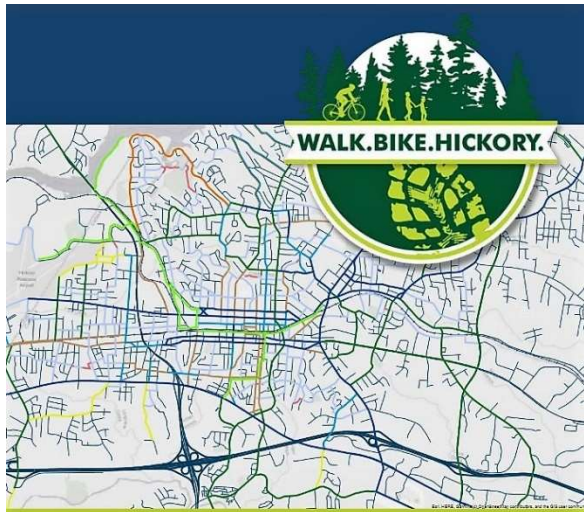


Population Concentrations & Walking Time to Parks



Classification	
■	City-Wide Park
■	Civic / Garden Park
■	Community Park
■	Neighborhood Park
■	Regional Park
	Hickory City Limits





CITY of HICKORY, NC
PEDESTRIAN + BICYCLE PLAN

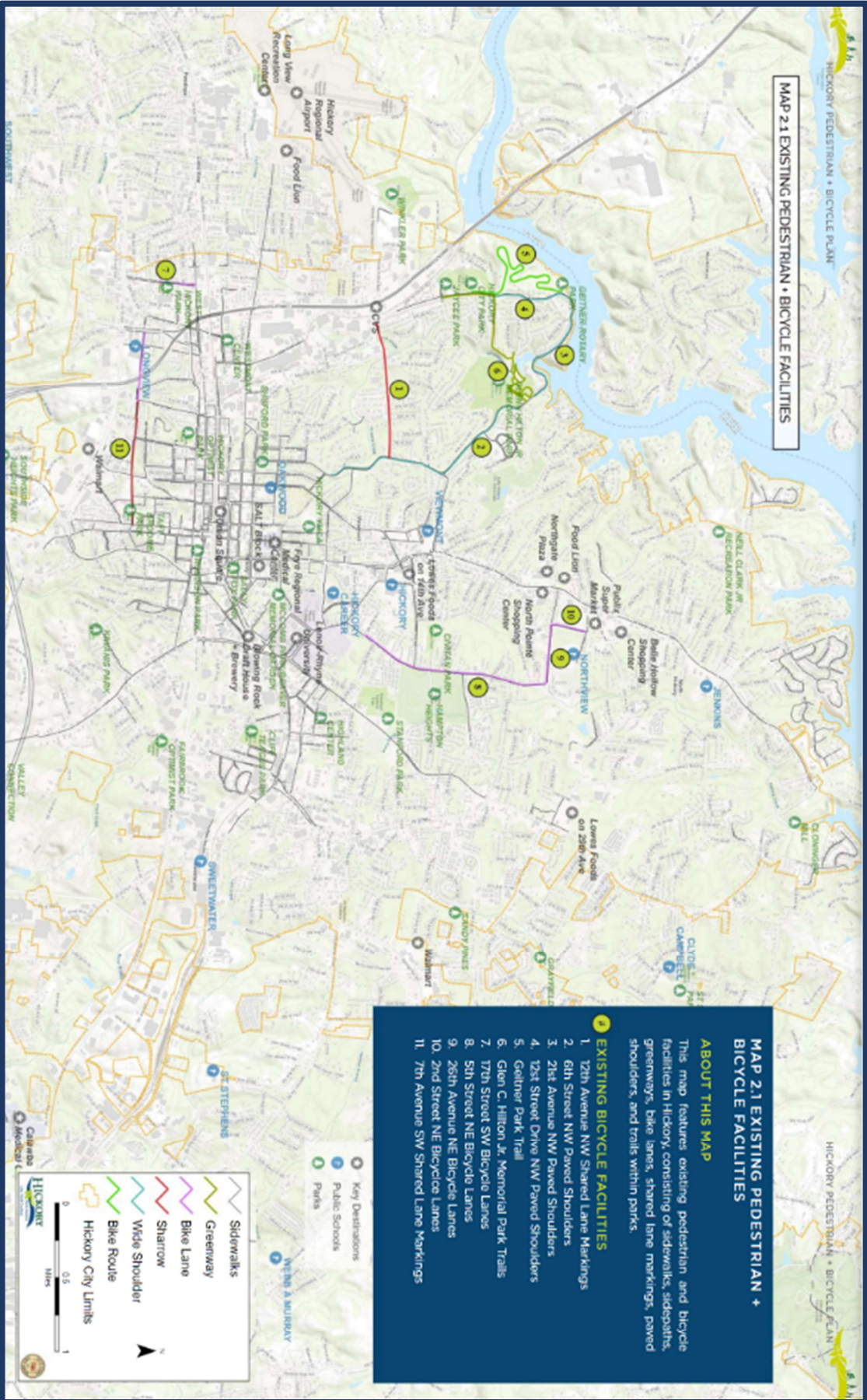


parks. Please note that this map does not include the Hickory Trail project or “Bruce Meisner Park” but does include Cloninger Mill (the future Bruce Meisner Park). The map is followed by additional maps that illustrate extensive recommendations for connectivity projects, some of which have already seen movement since the plan’s inception.

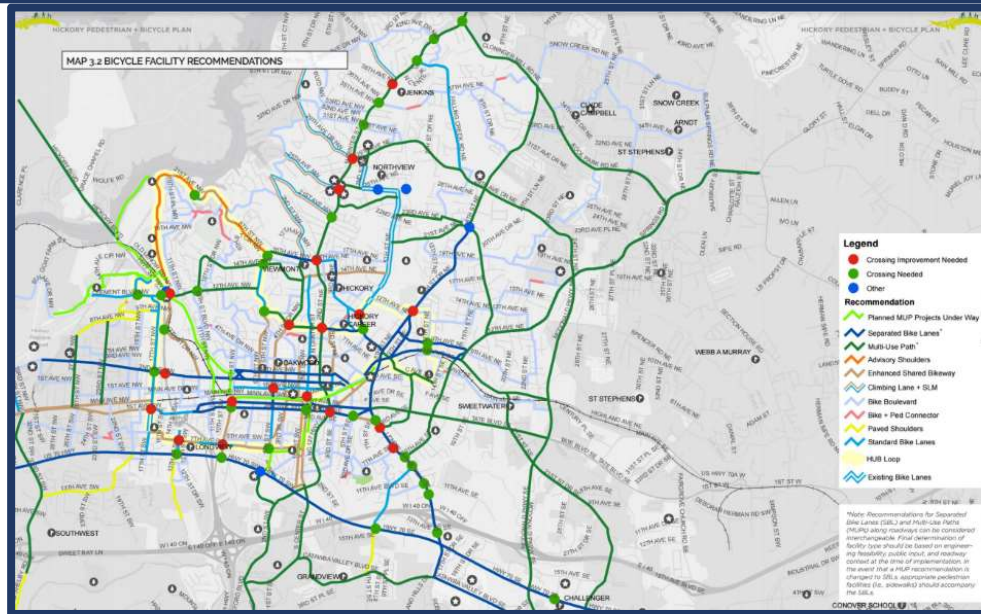
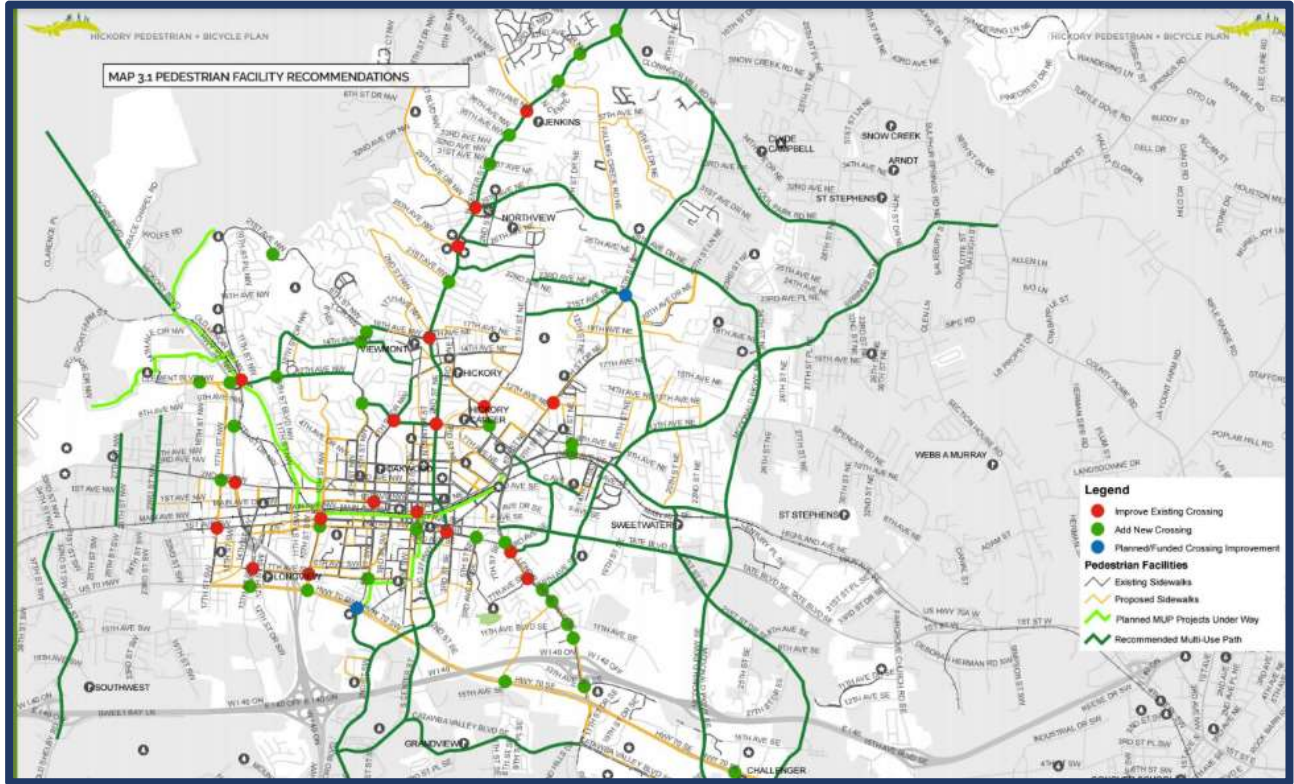
Bicycle Plan aims to address demands for walking and bicycling for recreation and transportation. This aim includes a promotion of equity and access for all through the creation of a network of bike and pedestrian routes that allows all Hickory residents to access parks, Lake Hickory, downtown, and activity centers by walking and biking. This, in turn, contributes to increased safety, health, livability, dedication of areas for future greenways and the providence of sidewalk networks capable of giving access to key destinations. This matches with the desires of citizens which were voiced during the public input process of this master plan.

The following map shows pedestrian and bicycle facilities in Hickory, in 2020, consisting of sidewalks, side-paths, greenways, bike lanes, shared lane markings, paved shoulders, trails and





The following maps depict pedestrian and bicycle facility recommendations. Though connectivity at the time of the parks and recreation comprehensive master plan development is a work in progress, it is clear that the City aspires to equitable access to recreation and has a good finger on the pulse of the citizens.



Walk. Bike. Hickory...Priority Projects and Park Accessibility

8 out of 12 connectivity projects increase equitable access to parks and recreation related facilities in the Walk. Bike. Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan

Priority projects include a scenic bicycle route that connects cyclists with Lake Hickory as well as bike lanes connecting bicyclists to **Winkler Park, LP Frans Stadium** and **Aviation Walk** via bike lanes on Clement Blvd, from 17th St NW to Aviation Walk. Listed projects show sidewalk gaps in the southeast quadrant being filled by a sidewalk connection on the west side of 3rd St SE benefitting citizens in a highly residential area close to **Kiwanis Park**. Key segments include 8th Ave SE and 3rd St SE, from 5th St SE to 10th Ave SE. Listed projects also show access to **West Hickory Park** made possible by sidewalks on 7th Ave SW, 3rd Ave SW, and 15th St SW as well as pedestrian crossings at 7th Ave and 13th St SW. Pedestrian access to **Civitan Park** is provided by a sidewalk on 17th Ave NE from 5th St NE to 4th St Drive NE. Within the priority projects, **Cliff Teague Park** benefits from a multi-use path project on 8th Ave NE and C Ave SE from 8th Ave NE to 13th St SE. Pedestrian access to the Hickory YMCA is shown and would be facilitated by a multi-use path on 8th Ave NW and 9th Ave NW, from 2nd St NE to 6th St NW.

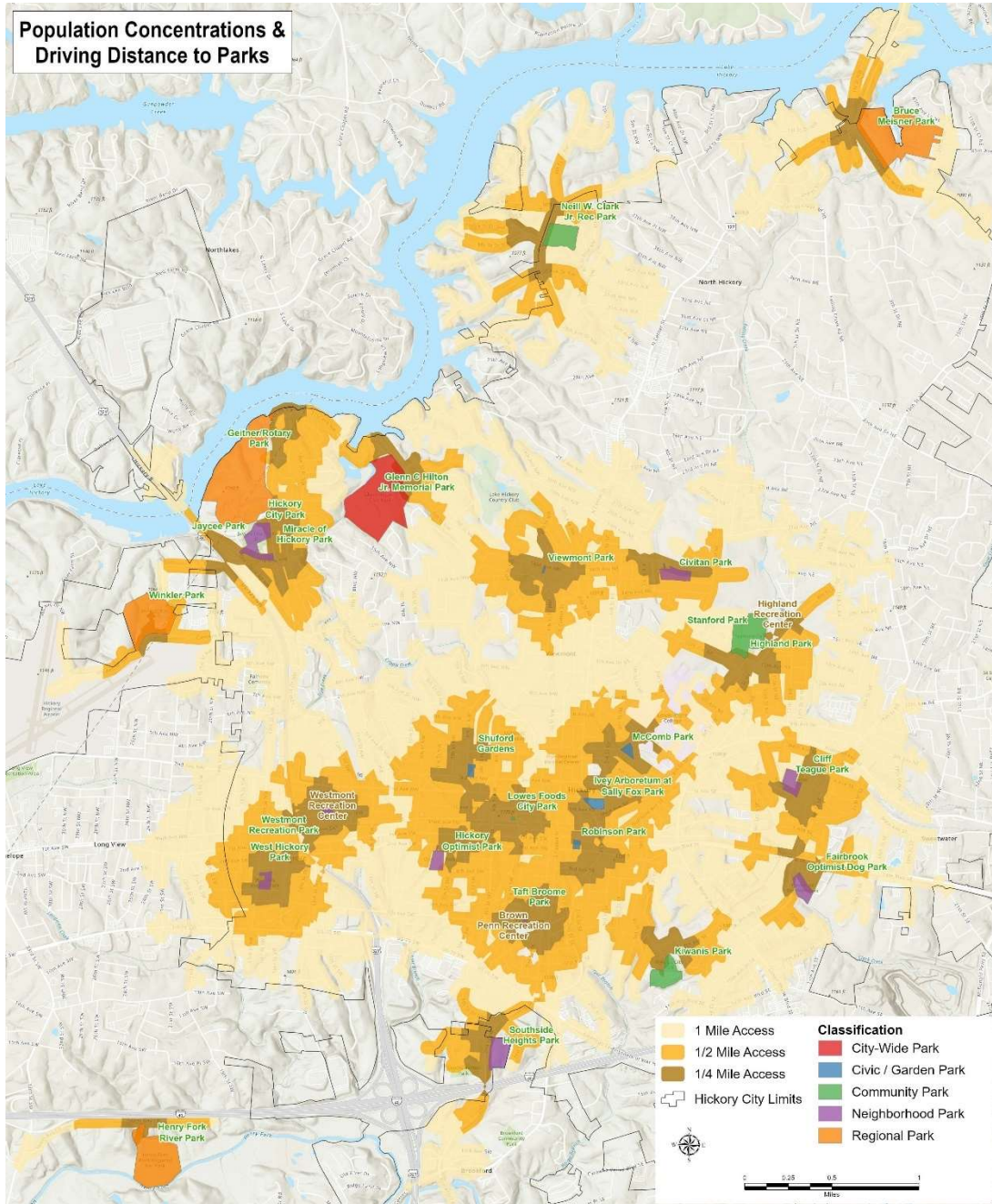
Related Program Recommendations...

- Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator Staff Position
- Become Designated as a Bicycle and Walk Friendly Community
- Bicycle Facility Maintenance
- Safety Campaign to Educate Motorists, Bicyclists and Pedestrians
- Map or Mobile App with Bike Routes and Greenways
- Open Streets Events
- Signage & Wayfinding
- Greenway & Trail Maintenance
- Signal Detection and Actuation for Bicyclists



Proximity Analysis

Driving is currently the main means of reaching parks and recreation opportunities. The main nodes for vehicular transportation include Highways 321, 127, and 70. With regard to driving distance, it can be seen on the following map that there are gaps in driving access particularly for the Northeast Quadrant of the City. With additional residential projects on the horizon, this will become a more prominent challenge for the City to tackle.



When looking at proximity to parks, it can be seen that the system is strengthening. A very tangible sign of such strengthening is Hickory Trail.

	Number	% of Population
% of Population Within .5 Miles of Greenways & Trails	9,072	20.34%
% of Population Within 2 Miles of Parks & Facilities	39,559	90.87%
% of Population Within 2 Miles of Greenways & Trails	29,006	66.63%

Source: City of Hickory GIS June 2023 & 2020 US Census Population Data

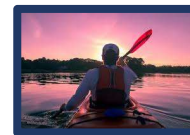
It is helpful to mention that **multiple parks will noticeably or even indirectly benefit from the Hickory Trail project which will provide on-site or nearby access to the following parks and recreation destinations...**

- Rotary-Geitner Park (Future Deidra Lackey Memorial Park)
- Hickory City Park
- Winkler Park & L.P. Frans Stadium
- Jaycee Park
- Miracle of Hickory Park
- Westmont Recreation Center
- Hickory Optimist Park
- Lowe’s Foods City Park
- Taft Broome-Park
- Ridgeview Recreation Center
- Brown Penn Recreation Center
- Ivey Arboretum at Sally Fox Park
- Robinson Park
- McComb Park



The City of Hickory is on the move when it comes to connectivity and equitable access to parks, recreation, trails and more!





Water-Based Recreation

The City of Hickory offers the following ways for citizens and visitors to get wet or enjoy the beauty of water.

Splash Pads/Interactive Water Features	
Charles D. Dixon Memorial Splash Pad at Kiwanis Park	Full scale splash pad featuring a non-slip surface, various nozzles to shower, spray, rain, mist and shoot streams of water as well as a water dumping bucket.
Lowes Foods City Park Interactive Water Feature	Small scale interactive water feature with just enough to get wet...but not drenched. The splash pad has random waterspouts, beautiful mosaic tiles, and shade near the splash zone.
Swimming Lessons	
Hickory Foundation YMCA Swim Program	Free swimming lessons for residents, ages 6 months to 12 years old, at the Hickory Foundation YMCA. Multiple sessions available every year.
Fishing Piers/Boardwalks	
Rotary-Geitner Park Fishing Pier	Docks available for fishing.
Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park Fishing Pier	Nature boardwalk.
Trails with Notable Water Views	
Rotary-Geitner (Riverwalk)	Developed from Rotary-Geitner Park, along the river. Part of the 10-mile Hickory Trail project.
Broyhill Trail (Lake Hickory Trail System)	Intermediate loop with spectacular views of Lake Hickory.
Kayaking/Canoeing/Boating	
Henry Fork River Park Canoe Launch	Two canoe access areas to enjoy the Henry Fork River. Henry Fork is a 39.78 mile long 4 th order tributary to South Fork Catawba River in Burke and Catawba Counties.
Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park Canoe Launch	Access to the Upper Catawba River Trail
Future Deidra Lackey Memorial Park	Waterfront park with <u>potential</u> boat dock, lake house, fishing dock, canoe launch, paddle boarding area and more.
Lake Hickory	
Lake Hickory	Part of the Catawba River Chain of Lakes, Lake Hickory covers nearly 4,223 acres with 105 miles of shoreline. Fishing, boating, kayaking, jet skiing and other water sports are all enjoyed on this lake

Nearby Pools Not Operated by the City of Hickory... YMCA, Kool Park Pool, Catawba Valley Medical Center and Lenoir-Rhyne University. See additional inventories for swimming opportunities.

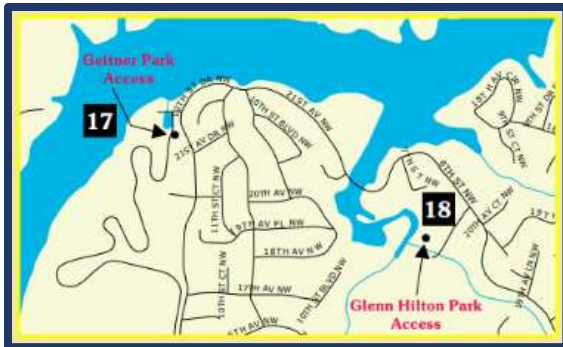
Access to 82 Miles of River Trail

Hickory citizens and visitors have access to an 82 mile river trail...right in their own back yard! As part of the North Carolina Trail System, the Upper Catawba River Trail extends over 82 miles from Black Bear Access on Lake James to Lookout Access on Lake Lookout Shoals. With 22 access points, one future site and four portages around dams, the trail covers 18 free-flowing miles and 64 reservoir miles.



Hickory Access Points...

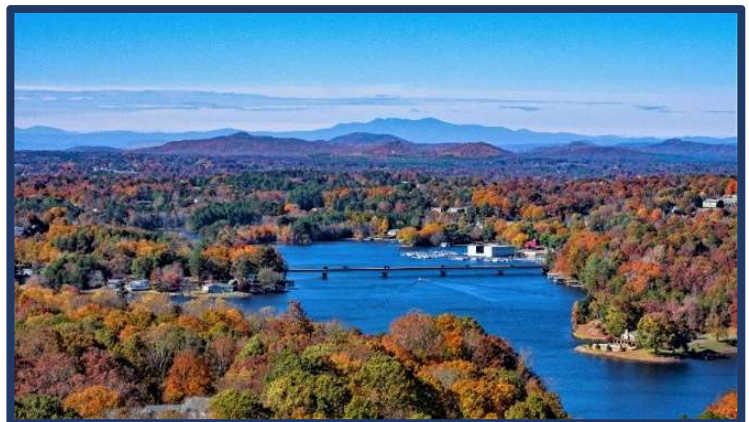
Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park & Rotary-Geitner Park are credited with providing access points to this tremendous water amenity. With Glenn Hilton being the most formal. With 22 access points, this can make for a great water adventure.



Source: Upper Catawba River Trail Map/Duke Power

Lake Hickory...

Access to Lake Hickory was frequently voiced as a need and desire for individuals who participated in the public input process. Recognized as an asset, Lake Hickory is seen as a recreation destination with even more potential. Part of the Catawba River Chain of Lakes, Lake Hickory covers nearly 4,223 acres with 105 miles of shoreline. Fishing, boating, kayaking, jet skiing and other water sports are all enjoyed on this lake. The City of Hickory offers some unique and beautiful ways to access this liquid playground.



Riverwalk, Rotary-Geitner Park & the Future Deidra Lackey Memorial Park

Riverwalk, a segment of Hickory Trail and important public access point for Lake Hickory, is a 10-foot wide multi-use trail with concrete decking. Users can enjoy scenic views of Lake Hickory with access to a pedestrian bridge that will go out over the lake. Currently, Rotary-Geitner Park features picnicking with water views, a fishing pier and future canoe/kayak launch for park users. The future Deidra Lackey Memorial Park project will potentially feature a boat dock, amphitheater, lake access, paddle boarding area and more.



Bruce Meisner Park, in the future, will be a destination from which the beauty of Lake Hickory can be viewed. Long Shoals and Lookout Shoals have also been identified as two potential access areas to explore. The Wittenburg Access Area swim beach, in Hickory (Alexander County), is another notable planned for opening in early 2024. Nearby beaches also include Taylorsville Beach in Conover. Many privately-owned marinas offer access to the Lake as well as boat rentals.

This master plan voices the public’s desire to access more of Lake Hickory and its vast amount of recreational potential, which the City has anticipated.

Riverwalk at Rotary-Geitner Park



Access at Future Deidra Lackey Memorial Park

Lake Hickory Trails

The Lake Hickory Trail system provides 8 miles of nature and mountain biking trails, spanning 111 acres across two City parks. Five main sections make up the system with Geitner Trail providing access to Hickory’s new Riverwalk and Broyhill Trail which offer spectacular views of Lake Hickory. Trails are available thanks to a partnership with the Northwest North Carolina Mountain Bike Alliance.



More Lake Hickory Access Opportunities...Now & In the Future

Public Access Areas

Within 8 miles of City Hall, citizens can access Lake Hickory for boating, swimming (Spring 2024), fishing, picnicking and more via the following access areas.

Access Area	Miles from City Hall	Amenities
Wittenburg Access Area (Spring 2024) (Hickory NC/Alexander County)	6.4 Miles	6 boat ramps, 3 courtesy docks, 1 fishing platform, and parking. Also includes fishing and a trail. Swim beach projected in Spring of 2024 along with picnic shelters, concessions, restrooms, outdoor showers and an office. <i>Accessible to individuals with disabilities.</i>
Lovelady Access Area (Granite Falls NC)	7.4 Miles	2 boat ramps, 1 courtesy dock, and parking.
Gunpowder Access Area (Granite Falls NC)	7.5 Miles	2 boat ramps, 1 courtesy dock, and parking.

Additional access areas within 14 miles of City Hall include the Oxford Access Area (11.1 Miles/Catawba County), and Dusty Ridge Access Area (13.3 Miles/Alexander County).

Public Swim Beaches Within 15 to 25 Minutes of City Hall

<p>Wittenburg Access Area Swim Beach (Spring 2024)...6.4 Miles (15 minutes) from City Hall Taylorsville Beach...13.36 Miles (25 minutes) from City Hall</p>
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Private Recreation Opportunities on Lake Hickory

Marinas and cruises in the dinner, party or charter categories are also available for those wishing to access Lake Hickory for fun. Restaurants, boat rentals, and campgrounds also appear at a variety of locations around the lake. Several waterfront residential real estate locations featuring private access to home-owners are also accessible to interested parties.



Key Partnership Inventory

The City of Hickory has developed strong partnerships and collaborations with organizations to increase recreation opportunities, for its citizens, exponentially. The following partnerships represent those of which there is a **formal agreement** between the City of Hickory and an outside entity. Numerous short-term partnerships are facilitated for the purpose of offerings such as special events and programs. These are not highlighted here but should be acknowledged as an important part of service delivery.

Hickory City Schools: Priority Use Agreement



The City has a robust relationship with Hickory City Schools, in the form of a priority use agreement updated in July 2021 (expiring in 2031). The agreement makes the operation of PR&ST programs, activities and events possible. **25+ athletic facilities are made available to the City through this agreement.**

YMCA: Swim Lessons for Hickory Citizens



The City partners with the Hickory Foundation YMCA to offer free swim lessons to City of Hickory residents. The YMCA swim program is for youth ages 6 months to 12 years old. Multiple sessions are offered per year.

West Hickory Senior Center: Senior Activities



The City works with the West Hickory Senior Center to provide events and activities for Catawba County seniors as well as the marketing of and space to hold those events. Highland Recreation Center is the main venue for this partnership.

Hickory Music Factory: Music Lessons, Performances & More



The Hickory Music Factory (HMF), via its partnership with the City, offers introductory music lessons to citizens designated as either community or scholarship-based. In addition, the HMF provides drum circles and downtown performances through events like “Swingin’ Under the Stars,” an Oktoberfest Music Showcase, and music for the annual Tree Lighting.

Catawba Valley Community College: Softball Home Field



Catawba Valley Community College has partnered with the City to use Stanford Park for its softball home field for the past 3 years.

Hickory Christian Academy: Priority Use Agreement



The Hickory Christian Academy has entered into an agreement, with the City, to construct a turf field at Neill Clark Jr. Recreation Park.

Catawba Valley Youth Soccer Association: Field Use Agreement for Henry Fork River Park



CVYSA is granted use of 5 fields at Henry Fork River Park in this agreement.

Northwest North Carolina Mountain Bike Alliance



The Lake Hickory Trails, through a partnership with the Northwest North Carolina Mountain Bike Alliance, were re-opened in 2018 after an overhaul funded by community sponsors and donors. The Alliance maintains the Lake Hickory Trail system and seeks to raise funding for additional trails.

Greater Hickory Tennis Association



The City has an agreement with the Greater Hickory Tennis Association (GHTA) related to the care, improvement, scheduling and facilitation of Hickory City Park and its expansive tennis capacity, to include league and tournament play.

Sponsor-Based Partnership Opportunities

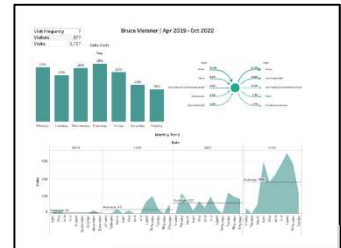
In addition to formal sponsorship agreements such as memorandums of understanding, the PR&ST Department offers official sponsorship opportunities for youth sports, special events, Saturday screenings, park accessories, facility amenities and other events.



Park Usage Analysis

The City was able to capture park usage data in the time period of January 2017 to October 2022, for the majority of parks in order to assess usage. This analysis was made possible by a system known as Placer AI. Placer AI is the industry leader in accurate, reliable, accessible and privacy-preserving compliant location analytics. As a result of its use, the City was able to look at usage from the following perspectives:

- Number of Visits
- Most/Least Popular Days of Use
- Most/Least Popular Months of Use
- Prior/Post Visits
- Trends Extrapolated from Overall Content



Source: <https://www.placer.ai>

Summary of Park Visits & Relevant Data

The following chart summarizes usage analysis findings for parks with available Placer AI data. The most visited parks are highlighted in green while the least used parks are highlighted in orange. Bruce Meisner Park was analyzed for the period of April 2019 to October of 2022 due to its newness. It is important to note that the type of activities, happening in parks, had notable impact on visits for some parks (i.e. Henry Fork River Park...soccer tournaments and events) while proximity to amenities could have also affected the number of reported visits in others (Winkler Park). Regardless, the numbers below speak to general usage and can be helpful for creating maintenance schedules and planning for the balancing of the system, when used within context.

Park	Acres	Visits*	Most Visited Days of Week	Average Monthly Visits in 2022	Most Popular Month for Visits in 2022	Least Visited Days of Week	Least Visited Month in 2022
Bruce Meisner Park	73	5,727	Thursday (18%) Monday & Wednesday (16%) Friday (15%)	359	August	Sunday (10%) Saturday (11%) Tuesday (14%)	February
#10 Least Used Civitan Park	7.5	75,444	Monday (17%) Saturday (16%) Sunday (15%)	1,269	April	Thursday & Friday (12%) Tuesday & Wednesday (14%)	July
#2 Least Used Cliff Teague Park	8.1	23,803	Tuesday (19%) Friday (16%) Wednesday/Thursday/Saturday (14%)	923	May	Sunday (12%) Monday (13%)	February
#7 Most Used Fairbrook Optimist Dog Park	6.7	148,140	Sunday (24%) Saturday (19%) Friday (13%)	2,458	May	Monday/Tuesday/Thursday (11%) Wednesday (12%)	June
#3 Most Used Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park	70.5	556,567	Saturday & Sunday (23%) Friday (12%) Monday (11%)	10,677	May	Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday (10%)	January

#1 Most Used Henry Fork River Park	66	1,153,750	Saturday (24%) Sunday (20%) Thursday (14%)	21,329	April	Friday (6%) Monday (12%) Tuesday (13%)	January
#6 Most Used Hickory City Park	15	336,522	Tuesday (15%) Wednesday (15%) Thursday (15%) Saturday (15%)	5,804	April	Friday (12%) Monday & Sunday (14%)	January
#5 Least Used Hickory Optimist Park	6	37,065	Wednesday & Sunday (16%) Thursday (15%) Monday/Tuesday (14%)	534	July/October	Friday (12%) & Saturday (13%)	January
#9 Least Used Ivey Arboretum at Sally Fox Park	4.6	56,030	Wednesday (17%) Thursday (15%) Monday/Saturday/ Sunday (14%)	426	April	Tuesday (12%) & Friday (13%)	January
#4 Least Used Jaycee Park	3.5	36,997	Monday (18%) Tuesday/Wednesday/ Thursday (16%)	675	April	Sunday (6%) Friday & Saturday (14%)	February
#2 Most Used Kiwanis Park	16	623,333	Saturday (31%) Sunday (15%)	11,491	May	Monday/Tuesday/ Wednesday/Thursday/ Friday (11%)	January
Lowes Foods City Park	.4	76,139	Saturday (27%) Friday (16%) Wednesday (13%)	1,444	May	Monday & Tuesday (10%) Thursday (11%)	January
LP Frans Stadium	*	1,335,732	Saturday (24%) Friday (21%) Sunday (14%)	24,086	April	Monday (6%) Wednesday (9%) Tuesday (10%)	January
#6 Least Used McComb Park	2.5	45,408	Saturday (49%) Friday & Sunday (13%)	849	April	Monday/Tuesday/ Wednesday/Thursday (6%)	January
#9 Most Used Miracle of Hickory Park	2.5	113,213	Wednesday (22%) Monday (21%) Tuesday (17%)	1,659	September	Sunday (5%) Saturday (9%) Friday (11%) Thursday (14%)	April
#10 Most Used Neill Clark Recreation Park	8.21	108,025	Saturday (28%) Thursday (16%) Tuesday (14%)	1,185	October	Friday (9%) Wednesday (10%) Monday (11%) Sunday (12%)	June/July
#5 Most Used Rotary- Geitner Park	96	361,333	Sunday (20%) Saturday (19%)	5,961	May	Tuesday (11%) Wednesday/Thursday/Fri day (12%) Monday (13%)	January
#8 Least Used Shuford House & Garden	.9	50,164	Saturday (43%) Friday (15%)	667	May	Monday (5%) Wednesday (6%) Tuesday & Thursday (10%) Sunday (11%)	January
#1 Least Used Southside Heights Park	13	21,918	Sunday (22%) Saturday (17%) Friday (16%)	491	May	Monday & Wednesday (10%) Tuesday (12%) Thursday (14%)	January
#4 Most Used Stanford Park	37	488,521	Saturday (32%) Sunday (13%) Monday & Wednesday (12%)	12,074	May	Tuesday (10%) Thursday & Friday (11%)	January

#8 Most Used Taft Broome Park	9.6	116,555	Tuesday (21%) Monday (19%) Wednesday & Thursday (16%)	1,925	August	Sunday (2%) Friday (11%) Saturday (15%)	March
#3 Least Used West Hickory Park	5.6	27,173	Monday (22%) Tuesday (18%) Saturday (16%) Thursday (14%)	386	May	Friday (9%) Sunday (10%) Wednesday (11%) Thursday (14%)	June
#7 Least Used Winkler Park	50	47,765	Saturday (29%) Sunday (19%) Wednesday (12%) & Friday (11%)	858	August	Monday (94%) Tuesday & Thursday (10%)	September

Note & Source: Placer Data for Highland Park (2.7 Acres), Viewmont Park (.3 Acres) and Robinson Park (1.5 Acres) not available. Bruce Meisner Park data is not comparable due to the newness of the park. Winkler Park usage numbers may have been affected by games at LP Frans Stadium, inside the park.

Pre to Post Pandemic Usage Analysis

Using the top 5 parks visited between January 2017 and October 2022 as reference, here is how monthly average use was affected between 2019 and 2022. Analysis of these years' accounts for pre-pandemic usage, full-fledged pandemic usage and residual usage.

Park	2019	2020	2021	2022
Henry Fork River Park	18,221	15,993	18,666	21,329
Kiwanis Park	7,539	7,578	9,788	11,491
Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park	5,805	8,579	9,971	10,677
Stanford Park	6,318	6,411	8,684	12,074
Rotary Geitner Park	4,775	7,758	5,025	5,961

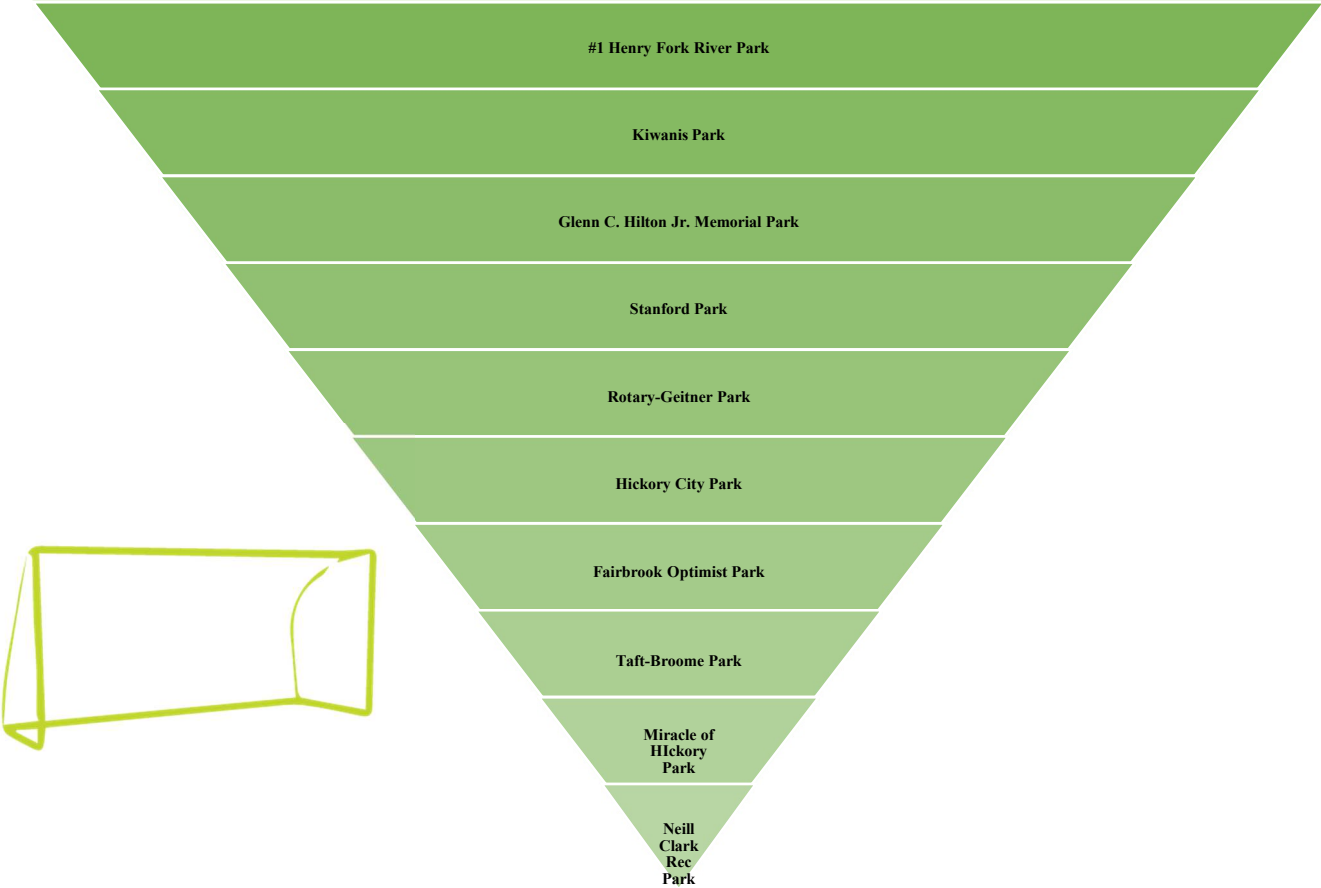
Source: Placer AI data for April 2019 to October of 2022

As can be seen above, park usage notably increased overall. This was seen, at the grass roots level, by staff who worked hard to meet the challenge of increased demand and who now work with a new baseline. Activities such as events and tournaments did have bearing on these numbers.



10 Most Visited Parks Between January 2017 & October 2022

Source: Placer AI



*Does not include LP Frans Stadium

Comparison to Survey Results for 10 Most Visited Parks*

The chart below illustrates the relationship between Placer AI data and park usage reported in the 2022 City of Hickory Recreation & Park Needs Survey. Looking at citizen reported use and actual use is important in order to gain a more complete picture of park usage. It can be seen that there is the most continuity between Placer AI Data and parks visited/used in the last year when it comes to Hickory City Park.



Placer AI Data Most Visits in Last 6 Years	Recreation Needs Survey Parks Visited in Last Year	Recreation Needs Survey Parks Used Most Often in Last Year
Henry Fork River Park (#1)	Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park (73%)	Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park
Kiwanis Park	Lowes Foods City Park (46%)	Lowes Foods City Park
Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park	Rotary-Geitner Park (41%)	Rotary-Geitner Park
Stanford Park	Henry Fork River Park (29%)	Kiwanis Park
Rotary-Geitner Park	Highland Park (AI Data Not Available) (28%)	Henry Fork River Park
Hickory City Park	Hickory City Park (28%)	Hickory City Park
Fairbrook Optimist Park	Kiwanis Park (25%)	Highland Park
Taft-Broome Park	Bruce Meisner Park (New) (21%)	Neill W. Clark Jr. Recreation Park
Miracle of Hickory Park	Neill W. Clark Jr. Recreation Park (15%)	Bruce Meisner Park
Neill Clark Recreation Park	Jaycee Park (15%)	Jaycee Park

*Based on Placer AI Data covering January 2017 to October 2022

**Comparison made with Q1: Parks or Facilities Households Have Used During the Past Year. Park only information used for comparison. Taken from the 2022 City of Hickory Recreation and Park Needs Survey. Q1a. Parks and Facilities Used Most Often



10 Least Visited Parks Between January 2017 & October 2022*

Source: Placer AI



Comparison to Survey Results for 10 Least Visited Parks

The chart below illustrates the relationship between Placer AI data and park usage reported in the 2022 City of Hickory Recreation & Park Needs Survey. Looking at citizen reported use and actual use is important in order to gain a fuller picture of park usage. It can see that there is the most continuity between Placer AI Data and parks visited in the last year when it comes to Southside Heights Park.

Placer AI Data (Citizen & Visitor Data)	Recreation Needs Survey Parks Visited in Last Year	Recreation Needs Survey Parks Used Most Often in Last Year
Civitan Park	Hickory Optimist Park (9%)	Shuford House & Garden
Ivey Arboretum at Sally Fox Park	Fairbrook Optimist Park (9%)	Hickory Optimist Park
Shuford House & Gardens	Miracle of Hickory Park (7%)	McComb Park
Winkler Park	McComb Park (7%)	Viewmont Park
McComb Park	Stanford Park (6%) (AI Data Not Available)	Cliff Teague Park
Hickory Optimist Park	Viewmont Park (AI Data Not Available) (6%)	Miracle of Hickory Park
Jaycee Park	Cliff Teague Park (5%)	Westmont Recreation Park
West Hickory Park	Taft-Broome Park (3%)	West Hickory Park
Cliff Teague Park	West Hickory Park (3%)	Southside Heights Park
Southside Heights Park (Least Visited)	Southside Heights Park (2%)	Taft-Broome Park

*Based on Placer AI Data covering January 2017 to October 2022 Data

**Comparison made with Q1: Parks or Facilities Households Have Used During the Past Year. Park only information used for comparison. Taken from the 2022 City of Hickory Recreation and Park Needs Survey.

Key Community & Special Use Facility Inventory

Below is a snapshot of key community facilities offering recreation amenities for a fee. Such facilities are accessed by citizens of Hickory, in addition to City-owned offerings.

Additional Facility	Description
Hickory Foundation YMCA	Gymnasium, fitness center, aerobic room, indoor track, outdoor track, 6 tennis courts, rock climbing tower, cycling studio, and yoga studio. Indoor pool, whirlpool, outdoor pool, and sauna.
Hickory American Legion Fairgrounds	1 baseball field and 1 multipurpose field.
Reep Park	4 softball/baseball fields and 1 multipurpose field.
Select Sportsplex	Home of Carolina Select Volleyball Club
Equestrian	
Rock Barn Country Club, Equestrian Center & Court Sports Facility	Outdoor arena and 1 small indoor arena with 22 boarding stalls. Four hydro clay courts with permanent pickleball lines = 8 pickleball courts. Olympic size swimming pool and gated toddler pool along with a state-of-the-art fitness center. Located in Conover.
Gymnastics	
Foothills Gymnastics Training Center	Largest gymnastics center in Hickory.

Hickory Gymnastics	15,000 sq. ft gymnastics and cheerleading facility.
Golf	
Lake Hickory Country Club	9 hole course and multi-use practice facility with driving range and chipping/short range practice area. 8 tennis courts and 4 pickleball courts.
Catawba Country Club	8 lighted tennis courts, 18-hole golf course, three workout rooms, and outdoor pool.
Catawba Springs Golf Course	27 hole golf course.
Players Ridge Golf Course	18 hole golf course.
Rock Barn Country Club	Two 18 hole golf courses.
Hickory Motor Speedway	Stock car short track with .363 mile asphalt oval. Seating capacity of 9,600 with 3,600 additional lawn seats.
Pools (In Addition to Listings Above)	
Kool Park Pool	Privately run seasonal pool.
Catawba Valley Medical Center	Pool available for swim lessons and therapeutic needs.
Lenoir-Rhyne University	Pool for faculty, students and occasional partners.
	Summary: 22 tennis courts, 6 pools, 5 golf courses, 2 gymnastics centers, 1 volleyball center, 1 indoor running track, 1 outdoor running track, 5 baseball fields, 4 softball fields, 12 pickleball courts, 1 equestrian center (indoor & outdoor arenas), 2 multi-purpose fields and 1 stock car short track.



Impact Inventory & Analysis: Unifour Parks & Recreation

Surrounding counties were inventoried in order to identify areas that the City of Hickory might notably overlap via parks, facilities, amenities and programming both now and in the future. Unique opportunities for the City of Hickory to distinguish itself from other municipalities can be explored as a result of this inventory. Notable duplication of offerings, unique gaps or niche offerings for the City of Hickory to fill were considered impactful. One such niche of concentration resides relates to a focus on individuals with disabilities. In the Unifour, it appears that only the City of Conover and Town of Granite Falls have fully adopted ADA Transition Plans while the City of Hickory is also enacting an ADA transition, in its parks, through the 5 Year Capital Improvement Plan.



A summary of regional findings regarding parks, facilities and programs with offerings for individuals with disabilities can be found next.

Informal accommodation/inclusion is the main programmatic service to individuals with disabilities. No apparent therapeutic recreation is offered as is evidenced by feedback received and research conducted.

Information on the accessibility of parks, recreation and facilities is constrained to general information related to ADA and seems to be inconsistently communicated across the spectrum of offerings.

Only a few municipalities indicated specific goals for the improvement of parks, facilities and programs as related to individuals with disabilities.

Overall, ADA compliance seems to be the standard for service to individuals with disabilities however, accessibility and inclusion can definitely be seen in parks especially located in the City of Morganton and City of Hickory. Many offerings are organic in nature (paved trails). Counties and municipalities, as a whole, do not appear to be engaging in a great degree of disability-specific offerings but focus, rather, on “accommodation upon request” as their main form of service to individuals with disabilities.

Very few county and municipal websites specifically list what is available to individuals with disabilities beyond accessible parking and restrooms.

A focus on inclusivity through above-average accessibility to parks, amenities and programs is a key way in which the City of Hickory can distinguish itself especially in light of its projections for the senior population and the findings of the Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities.

Catawba County

Catawba County Parks & Facilities	Features
Baker’s Mountain Park (Hickory)	Though this park is operated by the Catawba County Parks & Recreation Department, many see it as a Hickory asset. This park offers 189 acres of Chestnut Oak forest and 6 miles of trails which appeal to citizen desires for more trails and passive recreation. The park is located in Southwest Catawba County, approximately 5.6 miles (10 minutes) from Henry Fork River Park which is a regional park and sports tourism anchor for the City. The existence of this park coupled with the lowest population projections among Hickory’s four quadrants (Southwest) eases the focus of passive and active recreation upgrades for Hickory’s Southwest Quadrant in the next 10 years.
Riverbend Park (Conover)	Named after its idyllic location along the Catawba River, this 690-acre parks' 19.7-mile trail system winds through two distinct habitats that are home to a variety of wildlife: densely wooded upland forest popular with hikers and preserved native grasslands affectionately known as "trail runner's heaven." Visitors to Riverbend also enjoy river access for paddling, a dog park, and an

	observation deck perfect for viewing Oxford Dam or casting a line.
St. Stephen's Park (Hickory)	Though this park is operated by the Catawba County Parks & Recreation Department, many see it as a Hickory asset. The park is 9 acres and is considered a passive park. It features a 1/3 mile hiking loop, LITeracy Trail/Garden Walk featuring 18 literacy stations for children, picnicking, a fenced-in dog park, wildlife/habitat observation, and indoor meeting facility for educational programs.
Mountain Creek Park (Sherrill's Ford)	A regional mountain biking destination located on the northwestern tip of Lake Norman in Sherrill's Ford, this 606-acre park features an extensive 19.52-mile multi-use trail network designed to optimize mountain biking and a host of other amenities including an adventure playground, a mountain bike skills course and tool stations, pickleball courts, a dog park, fishing pier, canoe/kayak launch, an outdoor classroom, an observation platform, picnic shelters and a paved ADA accessible trail that winds through a quiet cove.

Sources: <https://www.catawbacountync.gov/parks>, <https://www.visithickorymetro.com/listing/riverbend-park/215/>
Interviews/questions related to respective locations (Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities).

Catawba County aims to continue to specialize in passive recreation, looking to municipalities to provide active recreation such as recreation athletics. There is ongoing interest in the development of Carolina Thread Trail connections in collaboration with municipalities. The County sees itself as the primary provider of passive recreation within the county but is interested in partnerships with municipalities via the Unifour Recreation and Open Space Task Force.

City of Claremont Parks & Facilities	Features
Claremont City Park	Paved quarter-mile trail and updated accessible playground equipment.

City of Conover Parks & Facilities	Features
City Park	½ mile of asphalt walking trails, two playgrounds for all abilities, and accessible splash pad.
Gateway Park	Paved linear park.
Lyle Creek Greenway	Natural surface segment of the Carolina Thread Trail

City of Newton Parks & Facilities	Features
Heritage Trail Greenway	ADA compliant segment of the Carolina Thread Trail.
Newton Swimming Pool & Splash Pad	Outdoor swimming pool and splash pad.
Southside Park	27-acre park with open air amphitheater.

Sources: Respective park sites and interviews/questions related to respective locations (Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities).



Path: Z:\hky_projects\Parks_Recreation\Parks_Rec Master Plan Name: Catawba Parks

Alexander County

Alexander County Parks & Facilities	Features
Courthouse Park & Rotary Stage	Stage and lawn seating.
Dusty Ridge Park (Taylorsville)	Access to Lake Hickory

Bethlehem Parks & Facilities	Features
Wittenburg Access Area (Bethlehem)	Access to Lake Hickory

Hiddenite Parks & Facilities	Features
Rocky Face Mountain Recreational Area	6 miles of hiking and primitive backpacking camp sites. Rock climbing.

Sources: Respective park sites and interviews/questions related to respective locations (Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities).

Alexander County, through the Wittenburg Access Area, will be offering a nearby opportunity for Hickory residents to access Lake Hickory (in collaboration with Duke Energy).

Burke County

Burke County Parks & Facilities	Features
MLK Jr. Park (Morganton)	Pour n' play surface combined with engineered wood fiber, pathways to all activities, and fencing with gated entry to address wandering. Playground equipment, adaptive swing, accessible splash pad, ground level sensory features and accessible picnic shelter.
Martha's Park (Morganton)	Pour n' play surface with ADA features, ample fencing and gated play area.
Catawba Meadows (Morganton)	Wheel-chair swings and ADA ramps with accessible shelters and ADA picnic tables. Play equipment featuring multiple ramps and uncommon ground-level attractions such as hanging ropes or adaptive swings in cubbies. Play equipment also features chill zones to lessen sensory stimulation.
Aquatic Center (Morganton)	25-yard pool with five lanes as well as lifts and ramps to enter pools. ADA picnic tables.

Morganton Parks & Facilities	Features
Aquatic Center Indoor Pool	See above.
Bethel Park	9-hole disc golf course and dog park.
Catawba Meadows Park	See above.
Collett Street Outdoor Pool	Outdoor pool.
Drexel Heritage Park	Perimeter fence.
Catawba River Soccer Complex	Pentanque court, lacrosse field, soccer field, and dog park.
Martha's Park	See above, Burke County.
Martin Luther King Jr. Park	See above, Burke County.
Morganton Greenway System (Catawba River Greenway, Freedom Trail Greenway & Green Street Greenway)	Fully accessible 3.8 mile Catawba River Greenway.
Morganton Skeet and Trap Range	3 lit skeet fields, 1 combination trap and skeet field and clubhouse.

Connelly Springs Parks & Facilities	Features
South Mountains State Park	<p>Amphitheater, auditorium with classroom, camping sites and more. For individuals with disabilities, there are ample parking spaces, a level entrance to the visitor center, a primitive campsite with wheelchair accessibility, two equestrian campsites and an accessible picnic shelter.</p> <p>At Jacob Fork: 47 miles of hiking trails, 17 miles of biking trails, 35 miles of horseback riding, and fishing.</p> <p>At Clear Creek: 3.5 miles of hiking, 2 miles of horseback riding, paddling and fishing.</p>

Hildebran Parks & Facilities	Features
Walkin' Roll Activity Building (Non-municipal)	Multi-purpose space for multiple activities related to individuals with disabilities. Recreation activities include T-Ball, swimming, dancing, game-nights and group activities for all ages and abilities.

Valdese Parks & Facilities	Features
Valdese Aquatics & Fitness Center	10-lane, 25-yard pool available for lap swimming, swim meets and water aerobics. The pool is available year-round.
McGalliard Falls Park	Features 45-foot waterfall in a nature-focused setting.
Valdese Lakeside Park	300-acre forested property. 8.5 miles of hiking, kayak launch, dog park and 160 foot suspension bridge.
Valdese Family Splash Park	Splash pad, playground and picnic shelter with multipurpose building.

Sources: Respective parks sites and interviews/questions related to respective locations (Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities).

Burke County Parks and Recreation is looking to grow its youth athletic programs, especially with regard to youth baseball, and softball. Burke County has had successful collaboration with Hickory PR&ST at Stanford Park, Highland Recreation Center and on the Lake Hickory Trails. They are interested in additional partnerships, moving forward.

Caldwell County

Caldwell County Parks & Facilities	Features
Mulberry Recreation Center (Lenoir)	Features skate park and amenities very similar to Highland Recreation Center (i.e. pickleball courts, basketball courts, etc.).
MLK Center (Lenoir)	4 lit shuffleboard courts.
Lenoir Aquatics & Fitness Center (Lenoir)	Indoor pool with slide. Outdoor pool, water slide and toddler pool. ADA lift for swimming pool.
Lenoir Greenway	ADA accessible greenway and bike trail. Trails for running, cycling and mountain biking available as well.

Town of Blowing Rock Parks & Facilities	Features
Robins Pool	Outdoor, heated, pool with smaller wading pool.

Town of Granite Falls Parks & Facilities	Features
Lakeside Park	Visited by Hickory Hiker's PR&ST program.
William B. Shuford Recreation Center	Zero entry public swimming pool, and 18 ADA children's playground activities. Adding future ADA walkways, new splash pad with ADA activities (2023). Adult outdoor exercise equipment with ADA activities and two additional ADA restrooms. All programs are open to individuals with disabilities. Host of the annual Caldwell County Special Olympics Polar Plunge

Town of Hudson Parks & Facilities	Features
McCreary Family Aquatic Center	Outdoor pool.
Redwood Pool	Outdoor Pool

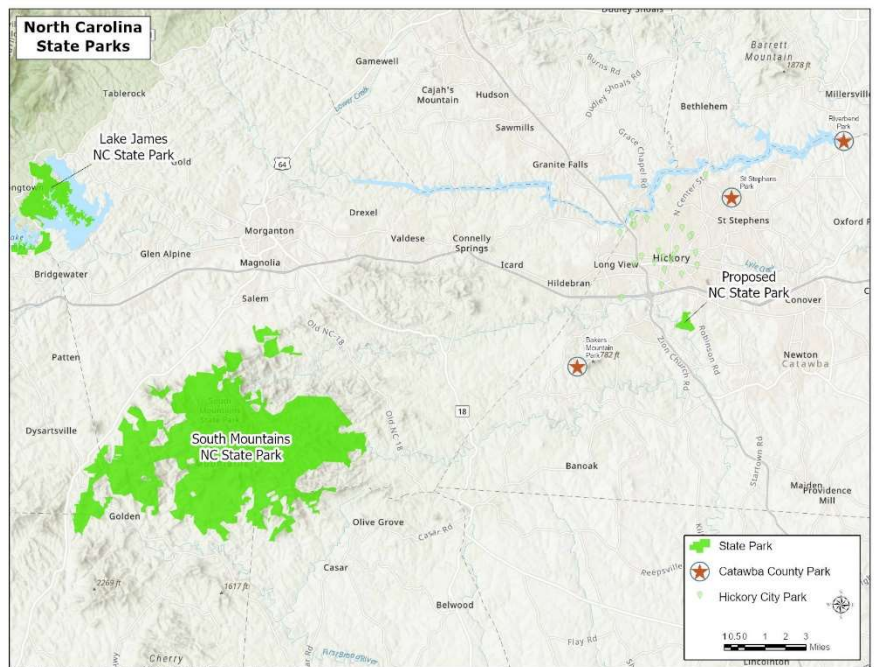
Town of Lenoir Parks & Facilities	Features
Lenoir Greenway	9 mile ADA accessible greenway.
Martin Luther King Jr. Center	Lit shuffleboard courts.

Sawmills Parks & Facilities	Features
Baird Park & Disc Golf Course	18 hole disc golf course.

Sources: Respective parks sites and interviews/questions related to respective locations (Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities).

State Park Inventory

The City of Hickory is fortunate to have two state parks, within an hour's drive, that its citizens can enjoy. The City may also participate in the launch of an additional state park, closer in proximity to its citizens, within the next 10 years. The location of this proposed park can be seen on the map listed as "proposed NC state park." It will be important for the City to use this comprehensive master plan to inform its potential collaboration with the state so as to create a win-win scenario for the state and its citizen's. The map and table below give greater detail on existing state parks and the immediate benefits to Hickory citizens.



State Parks	Description
<p>Lake James State Park</p>	<p>Located in Burke and McDowell counties 50 miles northeast of Asheville, Lake James State Park includes two areas to access this picturesque lake which is perfect for boating, swimming, and fishing. Campsites at both Catawba River and Paddy's Creek accesses provide an opportunity to spend the night by the lake, with some sites accessible only by paddling. Trails include bike trails at Paddy's Creek, the kid-friendly Holly Discovery Trail, the historic Overmountain Victory Trail, and the Fonta Flora State Trail.</p> <p>Camping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tent Sites (including backpacking and paddle-in sites) • Showers (not at paddle-in sites) • Firewood <p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiking (22 miles at Paddy's Creek, 4.5 miles at Catawba River) • Biking (14 miles, at Paddy's Creek only) • Paddling • Swimming (at Paddy's Creek only) • Fishing • Picnicking <p>Amenities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boat Ramps • Boat Rentals (seasonal) • Concession Stand (seasonal) • Amphitheater • Picnic Shelters • Beach Access (lake, seasonal) • Bathhouse (seasonal)
<p>South Mountains State Park</p>	<p>Located in Burke County 55 miles east of Asheville, South Mountains State Park is situated at the crossroads of the Appalachian Mountains and the Foothills to provide the ultimate backcountry experience. The park boasts elevations of up to 3,000 feet, an 80-foot waterfall, and nearly 50 miles of trail for hikers, horseback riders, and mountain bikers. Water recreation is offered via the Jacob Fork River, which hosts designated trout waters, or to the far west at the separate Clear Creek access that features the namesake lake.</p>

	<p>Camping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tent Sites (including backpacking sites) • Trailer and RV Sites (some with electric hookups) • Equestrian Campsites • Showers • Firewood <p>Activities at Jacob Fork</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiking (47 miles) • Biking (17 miles) • Horseback Riding (35 miles) • Fishing • Picnicking <p>Activities at Clear Creek</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiking (3.5 miles) • Horseback Riding (2 miles) • Paddling • Fishing <p>Amenities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amphitheater • Auditorium and Classroom • Picnic Shelter • Visitor Center and Exhibits • Bathhouse • Horse Trailer Parking (at Jacob Fork and Clear Creek)
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Sources: <https://www.ncparks.gov/state-parks/lake-james-state-park> and <https://www.ncparks.gov/state-parks/south-mountains-state-park>

Programming Analysis & Inventory

The City of Hickory PR&ST Department is in many ways creating a new baseline of program offerings. The principal cause for this approach was born out of necessity due to the global pandemic which took place from 2020 to the beginning of 2022. As a result of the pandemic, the department ceased a majority of programs and within that timeframe also brought a new director on board. This was looked at as an opportunity to build upon strengths, eliminate known weaknesses and begin filling identified gaps. At this time, the creativity of the staff was unleashed. This was done to create a fresh excitement that would reinvigorate and reacquaint the community/region to recreational programming in order to achieve equal enthusiasm related to parks, which had acted as a much-needed resource during



a tough time. Though the momentum is still growing, it is clear that the department has made a strong post-pandemic programming debut, as is evidenced by a 98% rating of Excellent or Good for programs on the 2022 Recreation and Park Needs Survey.

A program analysis and inventory were performed, during the master planning process, to gain an understanding of current programming and opportunities to grow in excellence. Observations from the 2022 Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities were also incorporated in order to enhance the City’s focus on equitable access to recreation. Programs were examined at the macro-level beginning with core programs followed by post-pandemic innovations. It is important to note that a lifecycle analysis was not conducted due to the impact of the global pandemic on department programming. It is advised that such an analysis be included with a subsequent strategic plan. This will allow for the compilation of enough data, concerning new programming, to yield useful results.

<p>City of Hickory PR&ST Core Programming Recreation Athletics Health & Fitness Special Events</p>
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The core programs of the PR&ST Department can be thought of as a stable “tree-trunk” from which smaller programs or “branches” can emerge. Core programs usually have deep roots in the community and citizens can count on their ongoing existence. Generations of citizens often grow up with these programs, having fond memories, as is often the case in recreation athletics where many learn how to play a particular sport for the first time. Core programs are the recipient of a notable portion of their department’s budget, dedicated personnel and often enjoy facilities to match. These programs are also a stable part of the local market which often cannot meet community recreation needs, by itself. In fact, private services are often seen as a supplement to or next step from those of the municipality. Citizens reflected this to be the case when collecting public feedback.



The PR&ST Department has three core program areas which include recreation athletics, health/fitness and special events. A dive below the surface of each area can be experienced below.

Core Program 1: Recreation Athletics

Recreation athletics programs, for both youth and adults, have been serving Hickory citizens for generations. Youth are the primary focus of programming while there are definite opportunities for adults as well. Youth sports programs help athletes learn the fundamentals of sports, build their skills as competitors, and practice good sportsmanship. They also ensure that athletes receive the well-established benefits of recreation sports...physical fitness, mental health, and socialization. Adult programs allow for the same physical, mental, and social benefits experienced by the younger generations with perhaps a greater focus on socialization and stress reduction. *Sports are available, throughout the year and are free to City of Hickory residents. Non-residents can pay a nominal fee of \$40 to join in.* This no-to-low cost model makes the benefits of team sports available to the broadest audience possible and was lauded by citizens during the public input phase of the master plan's development.



Recreation Athletics Programs

Youth Sports

Baseball (Spring/Fall) 6U T-Ball, 8U, 10U, 12U, & 15U	Football Youth 7-12 Years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pee Wee Division 8U • Junior Varsity 10U • Varsity 12U 	Lacrosse Co-ed 6U Elementary & Middle School Girls 8U, 10U, 12U & 14U Boys
Soccer (Fall/Winter) Co-ed 5U & 7U 10U Boys & 10U Girls 13 U Boys & 13 U Girls	Basketball <i>Boys Division</i> 8U, 10U & 12U <i>Girls Division</i> 8U, 10U & 13U <i>Co-ed</i> 6U & 15U	Girls Softball (Spring/Fall) 8U, 10U & Possible 13U
Indoor Soccer Co-ed 8U, 10U, 12U & 15U	Volleyball Co-ed Volleyball 11U & 15U	



Adult Sports

Basketball	Dodgeball/Kickball (Offered When Enough Interest Is Expressed)	Volleyball
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2022 Sports Highlights

1700 Athletes in Youth Sports	Hosted Western Youth All Star Basketball Tournament	Completed 3 rd Year of CVCC Softball Partnership at Stanford Park
Launched Inaugural Summer Adult Basketball League	Hosted 8U Baseball District All-Star Tournament	Hosted 12U Softball District All-Star Tournament

Annual Participants in Athletic Programs	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
	2,000	1,886	1,798	1,432	582	1,461

The City was in the midst of experiencing a downward trend in annual participation in athletic programs, leading up to the pandemic, however it is seeing a strong come-back. It is estimated that FY 22/23 will reach at least 1,889 participants with a goal of reaching 2,000 in FY 23/24.

% Increase in Number of Adult Athletic Programs	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
	10%	0%	0%	0%	100%	90%

% of Residents/Non-Residents in Athletic Programs

2016-2017 = 80%...20%
 2017-2018 = 81%...19%
 2018-2019 = 80%...20%
 2019-2020 = 80%...20%
 2020-2021 = 77%...23%
 2021-2022 = 66%...34%



Free Play/Open Gym

A highly popular core offering that exists at the convergence of recreational athletics, exercise and fitness programs is the department’s Free Play/Open Gym program. This exercise and socialization opportunity provides a free play setting for a variety of sports without the commitment of joining a recreational team. Sessions are available for youth, adults and senior citizens in the following sports...

Adult Full Court Basketball	Adult Softball	Pickleball for Seniors
Volleyball	Pickleball	Indoor Soccer
Fit Kids	Ping Pong	and More...

Core Program 2: Health & Fitness

Exercise and fitness offerings abound for the citizens of Hickory. The department offers numerous classes and settings that foster both physical and mental health as well as opportunities to spend time with fellow health-minded individuals.

Health & Fitness Opportunities

- Cycling
- Zumba
- Total Body
- Low Impact Exercise
- Seated Aerobics
- Tai Chi
- Fitness Belly Dancing
- Yoga



Popular Programming

An examination of attendance reports from January 2018 to December of 2022 revealed a few prominent trends that are helpful in planning for the next 10 years. The following offerings were consistently most *popular*, as measured by attendance from month to month and should be maximized further.

Fitness Center Usage at Highland & Ridgeview Recreation Centers	Open Gym at Highland, Ridgeview, and Westmont Recreation Centers	Recreation Sports Programming
	Pickleball	Special Events & Niche Programs

Among the myriad of classes offered, most traditional fitness and recreation classes saw less than 100 participants in a given month as examined via attendance reports from 2018 to 2022. **Among classes, the most popular appeared to be Zumba, Cycling, Senior Gym Walkers, Total Body and Tai Chi.**

Core Program 3: Special Events

(Signature & Special Event Programs)

Signature events are those which are most well-known and counted upon by the citizens and neighbors of Hickory. Some have been well-established while others have made a strong debut with consistent interest and successes that merit the keeping of statistics. The following events are considered “special events” by the department and are distinct from smaller programs that are similar in nature.

Special Events Summarized

- Christmas Parade & Tree Lighting
- Unifour Senior Games
- Spring Bark Festival
- Children’s Easter Egg Hunt
- Trick or Trot
- Back to School Bash
- Lunch with Santa
- Skate Jam
- Mountain Bike Series
- Lightening Bug Boogie 5K Trail Run
- KidFest
- Trunk or Treat



Community Event Participation	2020	2021*	2022
	4,563	1,861	4,741

Source: Department Metrics

*Numbers affected by global pandemic



More Programming/Offerings

Pet Events: My Furry Valentine, Doggie Olympics, Halloween Pet Parade and Dog Walk with Santa	Pickleball Programming: Clinics, Men's Tournaments, Women's Tournaments, and Winter League	Hiking Club: Monthly Hikes in Partnership with the City of Hickory Library	Teen Night: Summer program at Highland Recreation Center	Afterschool Program: Partnered with Viewmont Elementary School to Support Their Afterschool Programming
Teacher Workday Camps: Day Camps for Days That School is Not in Session	New Group Exercise Classes: Zumba Gold & Belly Dancing			

Participants in Non-athletic Programs	2022	2021	2022
	62,201	45,114	68,946

Source: Department Metrics

Niche Events/Programs

Among many successful efforts, the department has learned that there are some post-pandemic niche events/programs that are consistently successful with regard to attendance. Emerging niches include pet events, school-related day camps, nocturnal offerings and holiday themed events/programs.



Since the start of its new baseline, the department has increased its focus on inclusivity via programs for individuals with disabilities. Though it has always gladly provided accommodations, there are now an emerging cache of dedicated programs such...

- Walking on Sunshine Walking Group
- Fitkids Open Gym
- Autism Awareness Walks (In Partnership)
- Seasonal Arts & Crafts
- Bingo



Such programs were identified as needed and desirable during the 2022 Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities. Seizing on the opportunity to create a new baseline and staff creativity, the department has started to identify and act upon meeting the needs of citizens

through greater inclusivity while capitalizing upon programs and events that identified themselves as striking a positive chord in the community.

Hickory Area Sports Club Inventory

Basketball	
Carolina Hounds Basketball Team	Community basketball team for high school students.
Hickory Hoops Basketball	Basketball organization focused on making boys and girls better players through emphasis on the fundamentals of basketball and the increase of a player's knowledge via boys and girls team play.
Team Hickory Basketball Club	Non-profit 501c3 basketball organization/amateur sports team.
Boxing	
Fight Club Hickory	Fight Club Hickory pushes boxers to be the best conditioned athletes in the world through workouts that are a combination of cardio and strength.
Rock Steady Boxing	Non-contact boxing to benefit individuals with Parkinson's Disease.
Cheerleading	
Cheer Energy All-Stars	Cheer Energy All-Stars offers competitive cheer teams for ages 4-18, a special needs team, tumbling classes, choreography training for school teams, and private lessons.
Top Notch All-Stars	Cheer and tumbling for a variety of ages.
Fencing	
Hickory Fencer's Club	The Hickory Fencing Club is an Olympic fencing club coached by a certified coach in foil, epee, and saber.
Gymnastics	
Foothills Gymnastics Training Center	Foothills Gymnastics Training Center offers gymnastics, dance, cheerleading and martial arts.
Shooting Stars of Hickory	Shooting Stars Gymnastics is equipped with the safest Olympic state-of-the-art gymnastics, cheerleading, and tumbling equipment. Martial Arts is also provided.
Lacrosse	
Foothills Lacrosse	Foothills Lacrosse is an organization dedicated to teaching the basic fundamentals of lacrosse and promoting the love and spirit of the game to young men between the ages of 7 and 17 through camps, clinics, summer travel teams, and youth lacrosse tournaments.
Martial Arts	
Bushido Martial Arts of Hickory	At Bushido Martial Arts of Hickory refining technique is a primary focus. Additional themes that are incorporated through instruction are discipline, goal setting and personal achievement in everyday life.
Family Self Defense Center	The ultimate purpose at FSDC is to prepare the individual for defense in the real world. There is a focus on defending oneself rather than competition.
Fenix Jiu Jitsu	Brazilian Jiu Jitsu training for youth and adults.
Hickory Academy of Martial Arts	Hickory Academy of Martial Arts offers karate classes for kids starting as young as 4 years old up to teens. The academy also teaches Gracie Jiu-Jitsu, adult karate and individual instruction, such as cardio kickboxing or boxing. The academy also offers a book on bullying help and women's self-defense.

Samurai Institute	Aikido and aikido arts instruction for children and adults. Corporate self-awareness and defensive training available.
Mixed Martial Arts	
Atlantic MMA	Atlantic MMA teaches the basics of Functional Fitness, MMA, Muay Thai, Boxing, and Jiu Jitsu for fun, fitness, or competition to boys and girls.
Soccer	
Catawba Valley Youth Soccer Association	CVYSA offers a fun, encouraging and competitive environment where players, through professional coaching, develop both on and off the field. There are teams for U7-U19 age groups.
YMCA of Catawba Valley Soccer Club (Eagles)	The YCVSC offers competitive soccer in Catawba County. It is comprised of several Classic, Select, and Academy teams.
Swimming	
Catawba Valley Aquatic Club	The Catawba Valley Aquatic Club teaches children the necessary skills for performing well in the sport of swimming. They have a booster club that is responsible for providing the support for the swim program through fundraising and volunteer manpower.
YMCA Seahorse Swim Team (YSST)	The YSST seeks to actualize its vision by maintaining a structured, multi-level program that fosters participation at all ages and ability levels. A comprehensive year-round swimming program is provided from professional coaching.
Tennis	
Greater Hickory Tennis Association	The GHTA is a recreational non-profit organization whose mission is to raise awareness about tennis and make it more available to citizens. They promote tennis through putting on tennis related events such as 10 and under workshops as well as by providing Spring, Singles, Summer, Tri-level, Combo and Flex Leagues.
Track & Field	
Grandview Eagles in Hickory Track & Field Club	Grandview Eagles helps athletes of all skill levels in various sports of track and field to grow and reach their full potential. Grandview Eagles serves Hickory and surrounding areas in the state of North Carolina.
Hickory City Panthers Elite Track & Field Club	The HP Panthers Elite Track & Field Club based in High Point, Hickory and Charlotte NC, provides guidance and training for student athlete's ages 6-18 years old. The organization is designed to enhance the lives of student athletes through reinforced self-confidence, development of people skills and exposure to some of the nation's top student athletes thru friendly competition.
Volleyball	
Carolina Select Volleyball Club	The mission of CSVC is to help young athletes promote a positive attitude and develop exceptional volleyball and leadership skills while playing at higher levels of competition.
Team Life Volleyball Club	Team Life Volleyball Club exists to help young girls not only grow as athletes, but as young women. They focus on helping each athlete get stronger, smarter, and be prepared to enter college as a college athlete if she desires.
Other	
Foothills Pickleball Association	Association dedicated to providing information about opportunities to play pickleball in Catawba County. Such opportunities relate to available courts, tournaments, and instruction.
Hickory Velo Club	Club dedicated to organizing bike rides and promoting bike safety in and around Hickory.

St. Stephen's Optimist	St. Stephens Optimist offers football, cheerleading, baseball, and softball for younger aged kids.
Unifour Flying Object Disc Golf Club	Club dedicated to organizing meet ups and competitions involving disc golf and its general promotion.
Individuals with Disabilities	
Cheer Energy All-Stars (Cheer)	Cheer Energy All-Stars offers competitive cheer teams for ages 4-18, a <i>special needs team</i> , tumbling classes, choreography training for school teams, and private lessons.
Special Olympics of Catawba County (Multiple Sports)	Special Olympics of Catawba County serves nearly 400 children and adults with intellectual disabilities throughout the county. Training and competition programs are offered in eight sports: basketball, bowling, flag football, golf, softball, soccer, swimming and tennis. Through the power of sport, Special Olympics strives to create a better world by fostering the acceptance and inclusion of all people. Special Olympics gives children and adults with disabilities opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other athletes and the community.
Walkin' Roll Activities League (T-Ball)	The Walkin' Roll Activities League, Inc. supports and nurtures individuals with developmental disabilities by providing team building opportunities through T-ball, bowling, swimming, dancing and other group activities.
We Rock the Spectrum (Gym)	The only kid's gym that offers an inclusive philosophy which includes uniquely designed sensory equipment that is specifically designed to aid children with sensory processing disorders. All children, however, are able to benefit greatly from this equipment and the interactions it fosters.

Source: 2019 Sports Tourism Market Analysis & 2022 Organization Sites

Administrative Operations Analysis

Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department

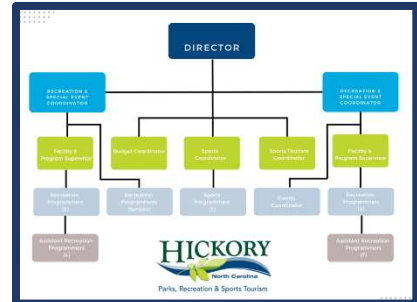
Administrative operations were examined to identify areas of strength to build on as well as growth opportunities in operations management. In doing so, a broader context of the department was discovered along with additional ways to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of delivering park, recreation and sports tourism related opportunities. A high-level assessment of the department's ability to undertake the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) accreditation process prior to plan sunset was also performed. The department may or may not elect to pursue this accreditation however, it is advised to emulate its standards to the extent possible due to their rooting in best practices and benefit to those served.



Management

Creating a new baseline...

The PR&ST Department is comprised of a diverse, enthusiastic and committed team of professionals. An analysis of tenured versus seasoned employees was performed by the City of Hickory Human Resources Department in May of 2023. It was found that 45 total employees make up this dynamic department with a breakdown of 18 in full-time status and 27 in part-time status. 42% of employees have been with the department for less than a year which still balances in favor of emerging longevity but by a small margin. The Director was appointed in 2019 and the sports tourism arm of the department officially launched in 2022.



Two of 45 employees are credentialed as Certified Parks & Recreation Professionals by the National Recreation & Park Association. It is advised that the department invest in credentialing its remaining employees per CAPRA standards. As can be seen, the department is in many ways,

May 2023
1 Full Time Vacancies
1 Seasonal Vacancy
<u>3 Part Time Vacancies</u>
= 5 Vacancies

young, with regard to its leadership, staffing and sports tourism character. Following a global pandemic, the department has been returning to strengths such as recreation sports programming and special events while largely re-imagining itself in several areas such as programming, administration, and the stand-up of the

sports tourism function. It is also important to note that the department has been adjusting to the shift of park and facility maintenance administration, to the Public Services Department, while still having many of the same support needs which now must be coordinated with an outside entity. Creating a new baseline presents leadership's most pressing challenge.

Other important management considerations include staff capacity to specialize, lack of perception that advancement opportunities exist by some staff, competitive pay and multiple duties for individual staff members who will see the community grow to over 50,000 within the life of this plan. With a majority of department funding coming from the general fund, the City would benefit from considering the feasibility of adopting cost recovery models and alternate streams of income to keep pace with citizen needs, offer competitive pay for staff, elevate to national standards of service and fund the priorities that are presented in this master plan.

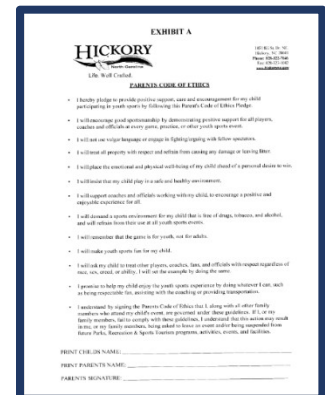
Last but not least, department management is encouraged to maximize its access to tools and metrics available through the National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA). Contributing to and drawing from such resources enables the compilation of metrics for real-time and future decision making and the support of programs, projects and grants. The NRPA, for example, offers an annual survey that when filled out, can yield multiple reports capable of producing data comparisons to determine levels of service and standing among peers. The PR&ST Department has just begun to participate in this annual survey and is encouraged to maximize its potential.

Processes

The department currently operates under the general policies of the City and a departmental document known as the “Roadmap to Success.” The departmental document is designed as a “one stop shop” for staff and includes the following broad areas of which processes are in place.

Mission & Vision	Facilities & Programs	Culture
Expectations	Time Off/Work Schedule Guidance	Financial Procedures
Accident/Injury Reports	Transportation/Travel	Van & Mini Bus Guidelines
Emergency Procedures	Co-worker Discount Guidance	Athletic Guidelines
Out of Town Tournaments	Lightning/Thunder Policy & Procedures for Outdoor Facilities & Events	Guidance on Rentals & Fees
Inflatable Structure Guidelines	Policy & Regulations Governing Indoor Recreational Facility Group Meetings & Functions	

With an interest in potentially pursuing CAPRA accreditation, the department is in the perfect position to build a robust administrative framework using national best practices. A high-level review of the 36 fundamental standards of CAPRA revealed that the department has a mixture of formal and informal representations of such standards with fulfillment of some under the larger umbrella of City administration. *Key areas in which the department would benefit from formalizing or developing policies and procedures include internal communication, public information, a comprehensive revenue policy, management information systems, a formal recreation programming plan and formal procedures for staff outreach to diverse underserved populations.* This information is presented as a summary and it is advised that the department use the National Accreditation Standards (6th Edition) to gain full detail and guidance. It is important to note that in addition to 36 fundamental standards, CAPRA requires that 106 of 118 non-fundamental standards be met for initial accreditation and 112 of 118 met for re-accreditation.



It is also important to highlight a need for inclusive policies that benefit underserved groups such as individuals with disabilities. Inclusion is largely facilitated at the informal level at this time. The NRPA has made policy templates and research available to departments that find themselves in need of this investment.

Marketing & Communication

The PR&ST Department is never without something to offer the public. At this time, individual staff members are mainly responsible for advertising their programs, events and offerings. Primary tools for spreading the word include social media, flyers, e-mail distribution lists, cross-promotion with other departments (i.e. Library) and support from the City Office of Communications.



The Office of Communications focuses primarily on signature events, monthly electronic newsletters and some social media. They have expressed openness to greater assistance with promotion of PR&ST offerings. Public input, to include surveys, showed considerable citizen desire to receive even more information on what is available via parks, recreation and sports tourism.

Technology

Prior to the pandemic, the department did not make significant use of technology, outside of general computer and office suite applications, to facilitate department responsibilities. Since the pandemic, the department adopted Sportsman Software and subsequently RecDesk which are capable of facilitating activity, facility and online registrations as well as membership management, point of sale, patron communication, attendance tracking, admittance control, inventory control, rentals, patron communication and more. This has taken services to the next level!

Maintenance/Operations Analysis

Public Services Department



The City of Hickory features a collaborative effort between the Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department (PR&ST) and Public Services Department Parks & Public Properties Landscape Division with regard to operations and maintenance of its system. These divisions take center stage in ensuring that the City's extensive offerings are well maintained and ready to offer both active and passive recreation opportunities. The PR&ST works to provide events and programming at both parks and facilities but as of recent, houses most programs at brick and mortar facilities that they also operate. Just a few short years ago, all operations and maintenance functions were housed under the umbrella of the PR&ST Department however, it was assessed that the best service delivery and staff capacity resided with a division of responsibilities between two departments.

Management

Due to its role, the Public Services Department was the only department examined in relation to maintenance. It should be noted that the PR&ST Department does manage some minor cleaning contracts and perform light maintenance duties in relation to events and programs mainly related to recreation centers. Outside of these examples, however, it is the Public Services Department that has primary responsibility.

The Public Services Department took the lead on maintaining park properties and facilities in December of 2018. Under the umbrella of Parks & Public Properties, the divisions directly responsible for maintenance are the Parks Maintenance Division and Landscape Services for downtown City properties such as Ivey Arboretum. The Building Services Division also oversees the maintenance of recreation and senior centers. The department also maintains L.P. Frans Stadium in accordance with a lease agreement between the City of Hickory and Hickory Baseball, Inc and is taking on the care of the Hickory Trail with City Walk, Riverwalk and Aviation Walk now on its radar. With 27 parks and the aforementioned offerings, the department finds itself in a very challenging position of ensuring that it has enough staff to meet the magnitude of the responsibility. This is further exacerbated by an imbalance of use that sees parks like Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park experiencing an overflow of use while other parks see underuse. The department desires to increase its ability to assign specific staff to specific parks however, this imbalance hampers that strategy. A greater balance of use among parks would help Public Services determine a clearer way forward.

Since the adoption of maintenance by the Public Services Department, park maintenance quality has improved thanks to increased access to the necessary tools needed for upkeep and improvement. Department members feel very supported by leadership, with regard to funding, in order to perform the work needed. Public Services Department ownership of maintenance operations has lessened the time it takes to make needed repairs at parks and facilities and has increased proactivity with facility “touch ups” according to staff. This is in spite of a significant increase in park usage attributed to the global pandemic which caused significant stress amidst hiring shortages. Since taking on parks and recreation properties, a focus on aesthetics and a systematic approach to play-system and site furnishing replacement was implemented by an internal process using a master-plan approach and an internal 20 year capital improvement forecast that feeds into the City’s official 5 year capital improvement plan, approved by City Council annually. This plan was needed, partially, because many of the play systems were installed at the same time and thus their life-cycles were ending nearly at the same time. This approach has acted as the department’s “deferred maintenance plan” and has included a commitment to the inclusion of ADA improvements and maximization of Community Development Block Grant funds which have been very effective.

The shift from the PR&ST Department maintenance responsibilities to Public Services can be seen below via the increase of actual and budgeted positions. FY 22-23 saw significant challenges with filling positions, however, additional strategies have started yielding positive results. Part-time positions have remained a challenge.

Staffing Analysis for Parks & Public Properties

In FY 21-22, 25 additional positions were added to the Landscape Services Division with Building Services seeing 4 additional positions semi-related to this transition. An analysis of tenured versus seasoned employees was performed by the City of Hickory Human Resources Department in May of 2023. This analysis concluded that approximately 60% of full-time employees dedicated to parks and facilities had been employed with the City for over a year while 60% of part-time employees had been employed with the City for under a year.

In May of 2023, the department saw itself with 11 open full-time positions and a total of 22 open positions. This, coupled with varied longevity among staff, has contributed to the department finding itself in a reactive versus proactive position with regard to the management and operation of parks and recreation related facilities. This is reflected somewhat in public input though a notable amount voiced that improvements had been noticeable within the past few years.

May 2023
11 Full Time Vacancies
<u>11 Vacancies</u>
= 22 Open Positions

% Staffed in May 2023 = 58% (52 positions – 22 open positions = 30 Staffed or 58% Staffed)
 Source: FY 22/23 City Budget/Budgeted Amounts & May 2023 HR Staffing Analysis

The Public Services and PR&ST Departments would benefit from increased formalization and standardization of administrative processes and matters that overlap. Areas of overlap include contract management with private partners, PR&ST staff requests for Public Services Support and the joint facilitation of grant contracts. Some coordination on such efforts was already being brokered at the time of this analysis.

Example of National Maintenance and Operations Management Standards Through CAPRA

If the City is to earn accreditation from the Commission for the Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA), a sizeable partnership between the Public Services and PR&ST Departments will need to take place. At this time, departments are operating mostly independently with formalized policies that meet CAPRA standards varying. It is advised that the Public Services Department adjust current policies, should they choose to pursue accreditation, using the following CAPRA standard. It is estimated that pursuit of accreditation is more likely past plan sunset.

The agency shall have established maintenance and operations standards, that are reviewed periodically for management, of all park and recreation areas and facilities including specialty facilities such as marinas, ice rinks, golf courses, zoological facilities, equestrian facilities, aquatic or athletic facilities, and nature centers where applicable. Parks, facilities and other recreational elements should be identified according to the intended use of the area, ranging from heavily used and high developed areas to those that are lightly used and less developed via a park classification or maintenance classification system. Each of these areas should be assigned an appropriate set of maintenance standards including both recommended frequency and acceptable quality.

Evidence of Compliance: Provide the maintenance standards for all parks, facilities and specialty areas, including evidence of park maintenance classification according to the intended use of the area, ranging from heavily used and high developed areas to those that are lightly used and less developed. Provide the most recent review or update.

Source: Management of Park and Recreation Agencies, (2016), 4th Ed., Chapter 9 - Environmental Resource Management, pp. 242-251; Chapter 10 - Managing Maintenance Operations, pp. 264-271.

Processes

When looking at today's processes and operations, playground inspections were noted as one of the team's largest time commitments. Inspections are conducted on a monthly basis by a certified inspector with the use of paper recording. In addition, daily safety inspections are conducted by several team members. Any issues, noticed during daily inspections, are communicated and remedied. The team may benefit from additional certified members to assist with the 40 playgrounds furnished by the City.

Scheduling and prioritization of tasks is facilitated by the Park Maintenance Supervisor while facilities receive their direction from the Building Services Coordinator. Safety is the primary focus. Once safety concerns are corrected or access to the concerns is restricted, daily maintenance becomes the priority during the growing season. Daily maintenance primarily consists of trash removal and general clean-up with special attention given to restroom cleanliness. In the non-growing season, carpentry and painting projects are focused upon and completed along with pruning and the like.

Procedures for directing staff are informal and would benefit from standardization through CAPRA models as the department grows. With regard to cost of service, the department is hoping to meet this tracking need with the adoption of the City's MUNIS public sector software which tracks capital assets, inventory, and work orders/maintenance. The formal capturing of this information will assist in the calculation of cost of service moving forward.

With regard to equipment, every piece used for park maintenance is on a maintenance schedule. Repairs for both small and large equipment are handled, in house. Park maintenance staff handle small repairs while the Public Services garage staff handle the rest. Preventative maintenance is performed on applicable equipment.

Marketing & Communication

Though the Public Services Department does not market parks, per se, they do work with the Office of Communications to communicate relevant safety and operational messaging pertaining to parks and facilities. The main means of communication include social media, the City website and on-site signage. Public input has yielded suggestions regarding an increase in wayfinding and environmental stewardship-related messaging within parks. This comes in the midst of an effort, by the City, to decrease signage in order to increase the aesthetic experience for the park patron. An assessment of necessary/standardized signage and/or the consolidation of messaging would be advisable in order to balance aesthetics and beneficial information.



Technology

The Public Services Department's acquisition of park maintenance duties came with a considerable amount of deferred maintenance and renovations that will take years to catch up to. This, along with staffing shortages and the elevation of parks and recreation to "essential service" as the result of a pandemic, makes the increase of staffing and the

formalization of maintenance management via software critical. Staff desire to use formal maintenance software to track, update and manage inventory, account for depreciation, facilitate replacement schedules and manage deferred maintenance. Some of these needs can be met via the City’s adoption of MUNIS, a software for public sector needs such as tracking of capital assets, inventory, work orders/maintenance, and more. An assessment of whether supplemental software will be needed is being conducted.

Professional Development Needs

In many ways, professional development is an “on the job” experience for the team members performing parks and recreation maintenance functions. Formal professional development, in the parks and recreation arena, would be beneficial on topics such as playground maintenance, arboriculture, landscaping and parks maintenance management. Many of these topics are covered by certifications offered by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and would benefit Public Services team members in forming even more cohesion between their department and the PR&ST Department. Public Services staff already hold the NRPA’s Certified Playground Safety Inspector certification. Holding additional parks and recreation-specific certifications, employing recreation industry knowledge and concentrating on related standards will be crucial to future CAPRA accreditation.



Recommended Education Opportunities, Certifications & Accreditations

Education

NRPA Park & Recreation Maintenance Management School
 NRPA Playground Maintenance Course
 Audubon Society Based Education

Certifications

NRPA Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) (Additional Staff)
 International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Arborist Certification

Accreditations

Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) Accreditation



Financial Analysis

Department revenues and expenditures were assessed in order to identify notable financial trends that will help in decision making over the next 10 years. *The Parks, Recreation and Sports Tourism Department (PR&ST) was concentrated upon due to its fiscal responsibility of collecting funds in such areas as recreation services, sponsorships, rental and class fees.* A dive into City budget actuals reported in approved City budgets for FY 18/19 through FY 22/23 yielded valuable insights. The National Recreation & Park Association 2022 Agency Performance Review was also utilized to compare the City of Hickory to similar jurisdictions, across the country, with regard to operating expenditures. Public Services park/facility maintenance expenditures were factored in, where possible, thanks to the help of the City Budget office.



The following areas were assessed to include national trend comparisons:

- Latent Cost Recovery/Self-Generated Revenue (Sample)
- Current and Untapped Sources of Revenue (Revenue Per Capita Comparison)
- Distribution of Operating Expenditures (Staffing Costs as % of Operating Budget)
- Sources of Operating Expenditures
- Operating Expenditures Per Capita
- Value of Deferred Maintenance Projects
- Financial Strategies & CAPRA Standards



A look at best practices for fiscal management, as articulated by the National Recreation and Park Association, was also performed and included where applicable.

Latent Cost Recovery/Self-Generated Revenue

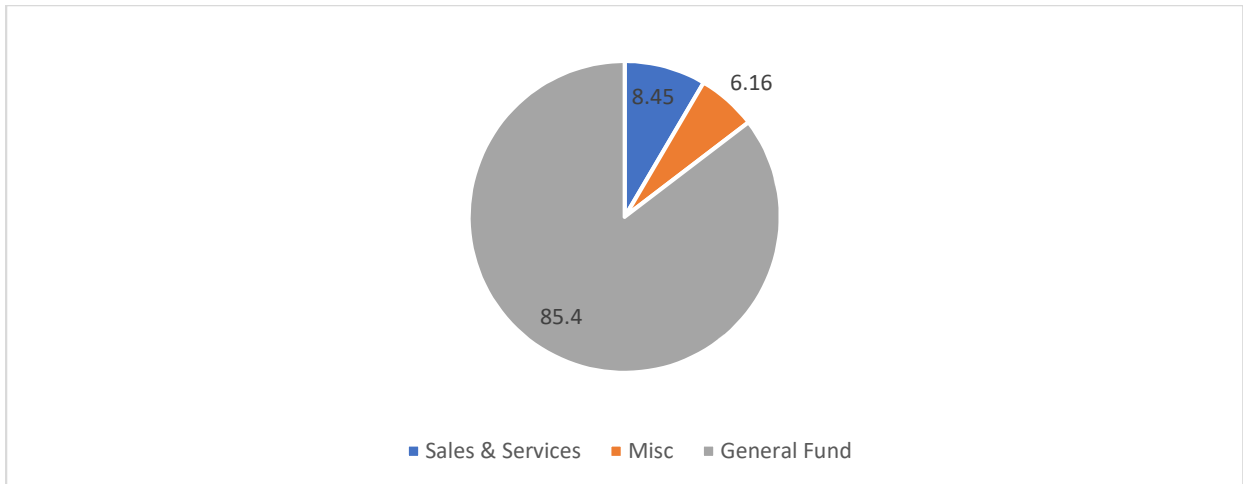
The General Fund (tax-base) is the PR&ST Department's main source of revenue followed by Sales and Services which include...

- Recreation Services (Sponsors/Fees/Classes/Rentals/etc.)
- Special Activities (Senior Games)
- Concessions
- Miscellaneous Funds (Donations/Scholarship/Partnerships)

The revenue sources, listed above, were considered to be the main, latent, revenue sources though some nominal revenue is generated in other accounts.

When examining the sources above, the average cost recovery between fiscal years FY 17/18 to FY 21/22 was 9.6%. The pre-pandemic year of FY 19/20 showed a cost recovery of 8% and gives a good picture of how each component makes up the department's overall revenue picture. As can be seen in Figure 1 below, 85.4% of department revenue came from the General Fund with 8.45% coming from Recreation Services and 6.16% from Miscellaneous Funds. In 2022, 88% is noted.





Source: Actuals from approved City budget for FY 19/20
Figure 1

A cost-recovery model is not officially employed in the department however some cost-recovery does occur and is a viable way of stretching tax dollars. The Public Services division does not facilitate cost recovery in relation to parks and recreation and was thus only concentrated upon where applicable to other facets of this analysis.

This analysis took a look at the cost recovery (expenditure recovery) that *is* taking place in the PR&ST Department, *using a sample of budget codes*, in order to assess whether additional revenue capturing is possible and to assist with a big-picture view of just how much it might take to move to such a model. Needs and desires for the future of the department may require a notable increase in funding. This will need to come from various sources and one such source could be through increased cost recovery. Some municipalities believe that cost-recovery policies conflict with their beliefs on serving the public and providing equity. As the City of Hickory moves forward this next decade, it may find it beneficial to bridge the gap between its philosophy of General Fund and Pro-rata Reimbursement usage and cost-recovery models. A significant start seems to be coming through its adoption of sports tourism. Fortunately, there are additional best practices that the City can emulate and make its own. One such example could be meshing scholarships and strategic partnerships with increased/additional fees in order to subsidize costs incurred by citizens and avoiding access barriers. A specific example of this approach can be found via Prince William County which launched a program called “Count-Me-In” (CMI). This program’s goal was to ensure that all children could attend any program of their choice regardless of an ability to pay for such a program. Summer camps, for example, were subsidized by private partnership versus a discount model requiring the forgoing of revenue for registration slots so that costs were passed on to a third party. A foundation was created in order to assist with the facilitation of this model.

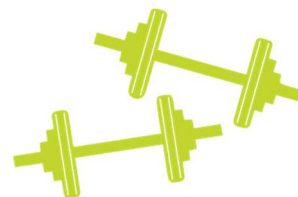
The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has noted that a **best practice for cost-recovery, in a given department, can range between 20% and 30%**. With an average cost recovery of **9.6%** the PR&ST Department would need to increase its ability to recover cost by 10.4% to reach 20% cost recovery. This would take a multi-pronged approach which would not necessarily look to an increase in fees as a first solution. Sports tourism is starting to have an impact. Self-generated revenue increased 1.35% between FY 20/21 and FY 21/22. This translated

to \$211,059 additional dollars (non-miscellaneous) which appears to have occurred in the recreation revenues category which houses items such as field rentals. **Other ways to increase cost recovery include** the subsidization of existing programs, via strategic partnerships, which could be an initial way to increase department cost recovery in order to stretch tax dollars to meet goals for the next 10 years. Grants, additional partnerships and a low to moderate increase in fees (with private partnership subsidies to avoid access gaps) could be the additional steps. The PR&ST Department should discern, formalize and carry out a department cost recovery model to include specific goals that pertain to it.

A look at PR&ST self-generated revenue/cost recovery was also performed in light of the department's revenue per capita which was found to equate to \$42.55 per citizen using the 2020 US Census population number of 43,490 and FY 22/23 City budget numbers. Compared to its peers nation-wide, the PR&ST Department averages \$15.56 in revenue per capita, over the median. This revenue generation equates to 1,850,499.50.

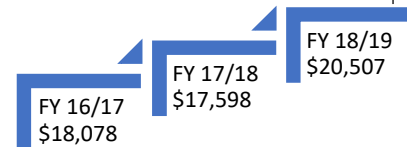
According to the National Recreation and Park Association's (NRPA) guidance on the management of park and recreation agencies, financial management in the public sector borrows principles from the private sector, liberally, however the notable differences in organizational goals between the two sectors (i.e. bring a service to all citizens in the public sector) is cause for differing approaches in deriving primary revenue sources (i.e. taxpayer dollars in the public sector). Though it is very common for the general fund to be used as a main means of revenue for a parks and recreation department, stewardship of taxpayer dollars as well as citizen demands/interests, economic conditions, a growing population, competition, increasing higher professional standards (CAPRA) and competing priorities somewhat necessitates that the department look at increasing its capacity for self-generated revenue.

Source: <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2023/january/incorporating-equity-into-cost-recovery/>



Keeping an Eye on Concessions

Prior to the pandemic, concession revenues reached \$20,507 in FY 18/19. This was the culmination of a three year upward trend with an average of 46.66% profit when factoring concession supply prices alone (personnel not included). The pandemic produced a steep decline in concession revenue generation with as much as a 71% drop from its peak in FY 18/19. With the decline of the pandemic and dawn of sports tourism, however, it appears that concessions are becoming a noteworthy revenue generating resource. *In FY 21/22, the department estimated a generation of \$43,351 in concessions...more than doubling its FY 18/19 earnings. In FY 22/23, the Y-T-D actual was \$47,859* with final numbers not available at the time of this analysis. This upward trajectory, coupled with City plans to increase the availability of concessions, may have significant potential for the future. It is advised that the department perform further analysis to determine a business model that might help to maximize capacity for revenue generation and to harness the conditions surrounding this explosion of revenue so as to focus it strategically.



Source: FY 16/17-FY 18/19 City Budget Numbers

Typical Funding Sources for Departments

The NRPA notes the following as the main sources of revenue that can be accessed by departments.

Taxation (General Fund)	Grants	Fees & Charges
Gifts & Donations	Corporate Sponsorships	Partnerships
Bonds	Membership Dues	Concession Operations
Fundraising		

The PR&ST Department currently relies mostly upon the General Fund for revenue. The chart above depicts the degree to which the department avails itself of other revenue sources being accessed by departments. With regard to **grants**, the department has worked with the Public Services Department to leverage Community Development Block Grant funds for qualifying parks and related upgrades as well as small amenity-specific grants capable of funding items like a message center. The department has applied for North Carolina Trust Fund grants but will become more competitive when able to present an updated comprehensive master plan during the application process. **Gifts and donations** are accepted within statute but not emphasized or highly pursued with fundraising also showing room for growth.

The City's recent past includes a large-scale **bond** referendum to fund a number of strategic projects such as the Hickory Trail. Nearing completion, these projects may have slowed community enthusiasm for additional parks and recreation related bond referendums. Though a competing priority now, there is likely to be an eventual appetite for a like means of revenue generation given the elevation of the department's status to "essential service" as seen in the public input process. The 2022 Recreation & Park Needs Survey asked respondents to rate how willing they would be to pay a slight increase in taxes or financial support towards parks and recreation in

Hickory. Most respondents (59%) were either not willing (25%) or only somewhat willing (34%) and 41% were either willing (25%) or very willing (16%). The department should be ready to articulate what that City’s greatest parks and recreation need is when the public is ready to entertain another investment.

Sources: 2022 NRPA Agency Performance Report
 Management of Park & Recreation Agencies 4th Edition, NRPA, pg. 525- 527

Increasing Financial Capacity in the Next 10 Years

The increased pursuit of grants is one of the most straightforward ways for the department to increase its financial capacity to carry out the recommendations of this master plan. Leveraging sports tourism, additional public-private partnerships, a potential expansion of concessions and fundraising are all within the department’s grasp.

CDBG Grant Funded Park Improvements

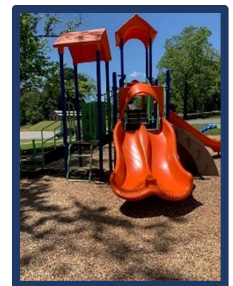
The City has done an excellent job of using Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to improve parks that reside in low to moderate income areas (LMI). LMI’s are defined as any census tract with at least 50% of households having an income of less than 60% of the Area Median Gross Income or which have a poverty rate of at least 25%. CDBG funds used in LMI areas benefit the entire neighborhood. According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), CDBG funds can supplement funds being used through the City’s General Fund for park improvements. It is important to note that CDBG funds can assist with ADA compliance regarding park equipment, walkways in parks, etc. and the City has really been harnessing this opportunity as well. CDBG funds are also used for public infrastructure such as sidewalks.

Since 2018, the City has made improvements to nearly all CDBG eligible parks using such grant funds. 2023 saw plans to replace the picnic shelter, play equipment, amenities and resurface the basketball court at Civitan Park. This is an example of how CDBG funds synergistically enhance tax dollars dedicated to the same kinds of park improvements that have been reported as priority among the citizens engaged in this master planning process. The City is encouraged to continue this use of funds and is eligible to return to parks, already improved, for additional improvements in the future.



CDBG Eligible Neighborhood Parks

- Civitan Park
- Cliff Teague Park
- Fairbrook Optimist Dog Park
- Hickory Optimist Park (Recent Improvements Illustrated in Photos)
- McComb Park
- Taft Broome Park
- West Hickory Park



Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Financial Trends

Along with not operating from a cost recovery model, the PR&ST Department does not employ an enterprise fund model. Below is a list of what the department uses to generate revenue.

Sponsorships	Concessions	Building Rentals
Gym Rentals	Court Rentals	Field Rentals
Community Garden Plots	Shelter Rentals	Recreation Fees (Sport & Non-Sport)
Recreation Center Memberships	Catering Kitchen Rentals	Garden Rentals

The department's efforts directly relate to the economic vitality of the Hickory metro via sports tourism. See the Sports Tourism section of this master plan for specific contributions to the local economy.

The following charts analyze the department's revenues, expenditures and estimated cost recovery in the areas of general operations, parks, recreation, administration and capital project funding. Where necessary, numbers from the Public Services Department are included to reflect the overlapping mission of both departments as it relates to park maintenance and operations. A look at the period of 2018 – 2022 was chosen in order to identify noteworthy trends.

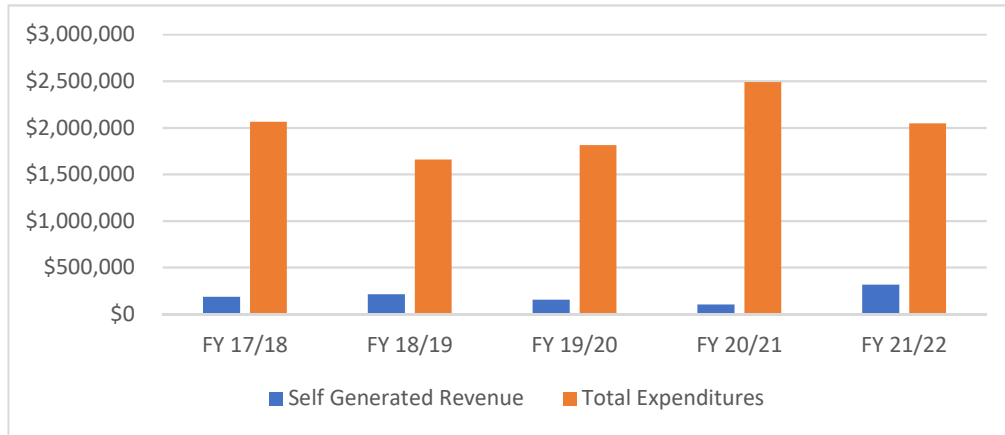
Department Revenues, Expenditures & Cost Recovery

	FY 17/18	FY 18/19	FY 19/20	FY 20/21	FY 21/22
Total Self-Generated Revenue	\$185,342	\$211,850	\$153,249	\$104,113	\$315,172
Total Expenditures	\$2,064,351	\$1,660,483	\$1,814,143	\$2,491,151	\$2,047,390
Department Cost Recovery	9%	12%	8%	4%	15%
					9.6% Avg.

Source: City of Hickory Budget Office & Actuals from Adopted Budgets for FY 17/18-FY 21/22
Figure 2

Figure 2 is based on Sales & Services for the Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department which include recreation services, sponsorships, fees, classes, senior games and recreation concessions. Public Services maintenance numbers were not included. The pandemic makes it difficult to see trends in department cost recovery however, the sports tourism mission seems to be positively impacting overall revenue generation. At this time however, it is incumbent upon the department to look at cost recovery as one way in which it can meet its goals for the next 10 years. With the bounce-back of participation rates and a rise in concession revenues, there is reason to be optimistic about an upward trend.

PR&ST Department Only
(Does Not Represent Cost to Serve)



Source: Actuals from FY 17/18 – FY 21/22 Adopted City Budgets
Figure 3

It can be seen, in Figure 3, that the global pandemic affected the department’s ability to generate revenue, however, a significant jump in revenue generation occurred in FY 21/22 which could be attributed to increased sports tourism pursuits and related bookings in 2022.

According to the National Recreation & Park Association 2022 Agency Performance Review, the median for park and recreation revenues, per capita, for communities ranging in population from 20,000 to 49,999 is \$26.99. Hickory reports the following for 2020 US Census numbers and its projected population for plan sunset.

Park & Recreation Revenues Per Capita

	2020 Population	Projected Population
NRPA Jurisdiction Population Median Revenue Per Capita for Hickory	\$26.99	\$26.68
Hickory	\$42.55	\$42.55
Difference	\$15.56 More	\$15.87 More

Source: FY 22/23 Approved City Budget, US Census and Population Projected by the WPCOG Data Center for Plan Sunset.
Figure 4

Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department Only.
Assumes no change in spending rate, per capita, at larger population.

Though cost-recovery is essentially a non-factor for the department at this time, it can be seen, in Figure 4, that the City is actually \$15.56 ahead, when factoring in the 2020 population, and is projected to stay ahead at the conclusion of this plan and its projected population.

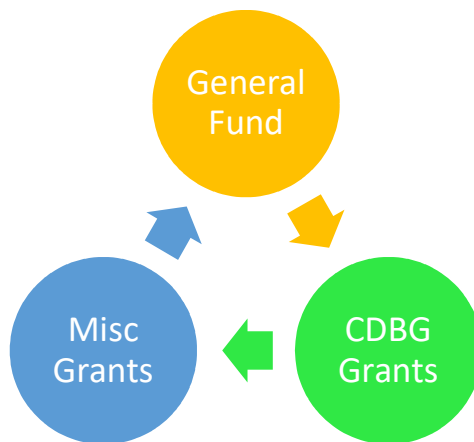
Small and medium sized park and recreation departments are known for generating more revenue, per capita. Hickory sits and will continue to sit on the lower-end of department sizes even at the end of this master plan’s life cycle. This presents a potential opportunity for the City, which has demonstrated a noticeable capacity to generate revenue, if it is paired with an official pursuit of

cost recovery. Earning capacity and increased cost recovery could benefit the funding needs of this plan’s priorities.

Record keeping for park-specific revenues/expenditures as well as program-specific revenues/expenditures and fee-related financials can be highly beneficial. Having this information would assist the department with data-driven decision making, cost-to-serve calculations and increased fodder for grant packages or partnership building. The PR&ST Department would benefit from tracking financials and metrics at a more granular level as it moves through the next 10 years.

Capital Project Funding

The City’s 5 Year Capital Improvement Project Plan houses parks and recreation related needs primarily in relation to the Public Services Department who oversees the acquisition and installation of park assets as well as the repair and replacement of amenities. Given that within the past few years, the Public Services Department took this mantle from the PR&ST, it was determined that the benefit of analyzing capital project funding via a comparison of total self-generated revenue, expenditures and cost recovery would not yield helpful data. That being said, play equipment updates and deferred maintenance...at the time of analysis... seem to make up the majority of capital projects though it should be noted that a formal deferred maintenance program would be beneficial. Capital funding is sourced by the following:



More National Comparisons

Data from this plan’s Benchmarking and Level of Service Analysis is being highlighted to assist with understanding existing conditions as well as key future considerations to keep on the City’s radar. Using the 2022 National Recreation & Park Association Agency Review, Hickory’s actuals were compared to peer communities with a jurisdictional population range of 20,000 – 49,999. Where possible and in anticipation of future population growth, the jurisdiction range of 50,000 – 99,999 was used to give an idea of how Hickory’s current offerings might have to grow by plan sunset. Lastly, the population numbers used to facilitate this analysis were both Hickory’s 2020 US Census number of 43,490 and its projected population of 52,230 by 2035, facilitated by a

special analysis done by the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Data Center. Public Services budget numbers are factored into these calculations as the result of budget calculations rendered by the City Budget Analyst who determined percentages for park and facility maintenance as well percentage of personnel time dedicated to park operations and maintenance.



as

Sources of Operating Expenditures

	2020 Population
NRPA Jurisdiction Population Typical Support from General Fund for Hickory	61%
Hickory	88%
Difference	27% More Reliance on General Fund

Source: FY 22/23 Approved City Budget and US Census
Figure 5

Figure 5 shows that the PR&ST Department relies on the general fund 27% more than the median, in FY 22/23, for agencies across the nation. This would suggest that there is opportunity for the department to work towards increasing its revenue especially in light of competing priorities among other departments.

Distribution of Operating Expenditures (Staffing Costs as % of Operating Budget)

	2020 Population
NRPA Jurisdiction Population Median for Distribution of Operating Expenditures (All Agencies)	54%
Hickory	60% (PRST & PS Combined)
Difference	6% More

Source: FY 22/23 Approved City Budget, US Census and Population Projected by the WPCOG Data Center for Plan Sunset.
Figure 6

The City of Hickory, in Figure 6, sees itself spending more than the median on staffing costs for all agencies surveyed in the NRPA Agency Review. This may be due to an overlapping of departments as well as a valuing of personnel.

Operating Expenditures Per Capita

	2020 Population	Projected Population
NRPA Jurisdiction Population Median for Operating Expenditures Per Capita	\$110.32	\$104.38
Hickory	\$112.87	\$112.87 (If Kept Same Spending Per Capita)
Difference	\$2.55	\$8.49

Population NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range: 20,000-49,999

Projected NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range at Plan Sunset: 50,000-99,999

Projected Population for City of Hickory (2035): 52,230

Source: City of Hickory FY 21-22 Adopted Budget & Inclusion of (50% for Landscape Services & 10% for Building Services)

Figure 7

Value of Deferred Maintenance Projects

	2020 Population	Projected Population
NRPA Jurisdiction Population Median Value of Deferred Maintenance Projects	\$341,845	\$400,000
Hickory	\$2,256,033	
Difference	\$1,914,188 More	

Source: FY 22/23 Approved City Budget, US Census and Population Projected by the WPCOG Data Center for Plan Sunset.

Figure 8. Calculated from Public Services budget, 5 Year CIP Landscape Services and PR&ST line items.

The City had nearly \$2M more in deferred maintenance projects than the median at the time of analysis, however, the average amount of deferred maintenance costs for a community within the City’s current jurisdiction population is \$5,430,337. This shows that, on average, **the City of Hickory is actually \$3,174,304 below average on its value of deferred maintenance projects.** As it moves into a larger jurisdiction population category by plan sunset, the City will be comparing itself with an average value of deferred maintenance projects of \$7,129,846 if all remained constant. The City currently sees itself very close to the upper quartile (75% of agencies).



Examples of Financial Strategies for Capital Needs, Deferred Maintenance and Priorities

• Use earned income to augment expense budgets
• Pursue federal, state and local grants (max Community Development Block Grants)
• Seek private foundation funds
• Institute park impact fees for non-residents
• Reallocate unspent dollars in the general fund
• Build structured volunteer force to offset some staffing costs
• Maximize naming rights opportunities
• Increase pursuit of corporate sponsorships

Possible Financial Goals

- Institute basic cost recovery model for areas this is feasible to do so (some areas must be subsidized)
- Develop goals for cost recovery
- Develop full cost of service for each program
- Employ additional funding strategies, as suggested above, to increase capacity to meet capital goals, fund deferred maintenance and meet growth related challenges

Key Projects That Will Impact the Next 10 Years of Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism

The City of Hickory is crafting or carrying out projects that will impact parks and recreation for the next 10 years. Below are a few key endeavors of positive consequence. The PR&ST Department, through each of these projects, has obtained additional venues for the execution of programs, partnership opportunities, sports tourism capabilities and more if the opportunities are sought and harnessed.



Hickory Trail Project: 10 Miles of Trail Encompassing 60 Acres

The Hickory Trail project features a 10-mile, paved trail with the potential to transform the community! It is part of a \$40M Bond Program elevated by an additional \$58M furnished in the form of grants. When finished, the trail will span the City and connect popular destinations and amenities for those traveling by bicycle or walking. Walkability, the local economy, and quality of life are already being enhanced in positive ways.

From a parks, recreation and sports tourism perspective, this project is particularly important. The master plan's recreation needs survey showed clearly that citizens already view City Walk as a recreation amenity they enjoy and desire to have more of. Hickory Trail, in addition to being a strategic project of the City, is a linear park. When fully developed, this park will have the capacity to host active and passive recreation opportunities, department programming and regional competitions.



The Hickory Trail project links the downtown area to Lenoir-Rhyne University. This linkage has potential to provide for further partnership opportunities between the City and this anchor institution. Of particular note is LR's potential to increase collaboration with the City in the area of Sports Tourism.

Trivium Corporate Center Natural Trail System

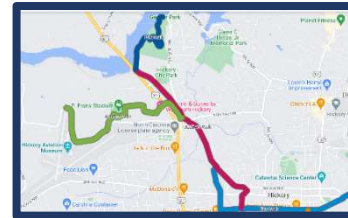
In August of 2022, City Council approved moving forward to contract for and build 18,500 linear feet (3.5 miles) of natural trails with ditch crossings on the Trivium Campus. Through a potential public-private partnership, this trail system could become host to running practices or meets for local and regional teams.



Appalachian State University: Hickory



Appalachian State University Hickory will become a key contributor to the Hickory community over the next 10 years. With proposed improvements to Clement Boulevard as well as the school's close proximity to the Hickory Trail and City-owned property, this institution could see itself meshing with parks and recreation. There may also be opportunities for public-private partnerships that lend themselves to recreation options for students which simultaneously serve citizens. Academic



partnerships might yield department internships, collaborative efforts in environmental stewardship or research opportunities. It is advised that the PR&ST Department explore ways to create recreational synergy with this new addition to the community.

PRIORITY PROJECT #4:
Two Lanes on Clement Blvd. from 17th St. NW to Wallace Park, "Skateway Way"

Clement Boulevard is a currently four-lane, center-traffic travel lane in each direction, and a two-lane bike lane. The average daily traffic counts are only 3,500 vehicles per day. Redesigning the project area to reduce the number of lanes from four to two will create space that can be converted to bike lanes in either side.

This segment of bike lanes will provide a dedicated bicycle facility along Clement Boulevard connecting downtown to Wallace Park and Home Stadium. The project also completes another section of the Hickory Urban Bikeway (HUB) Loop, connecting the proposed bike lanes on 17th Street NW and the 17th Street extension to the bike lanes recommended for 18th Street Lane NW and to the proposed multi-use path. "Skateway Way" that will cross over US 22 to Winter Park, Sawahills, and also recommended for the highway and one-way street in the cross-section below for Asheville proposals, but they are not included in the cost estimate.

ROADWAY CONFIGURATIONS (Elevated)

- 17th St: 1,500 sq ft per day
- Speed Limit: 25 mph

Legend

- Proposed Bike Lane
- Proposed Multi-Use Path
- Proposed Street Light
- Proposed 17th Street Lane NW Extension

Project Area

17th St NW, 18th St NW, 19th St NW, 20th St NW, 21st St NW, 22nd St NW, 23rd St NW, 24th St NW, 25th St NW, 26th St NW, 27th St NW, 28th St NW, 29th St NW, 30th St NW, 31st St NW, 32nd St NW, 33rd St NW, 34th St NW, 35th St NW, 36th St NW, 37th St NW, 38th St NW, 39th St NW, 40th St NW, 41st St NW, 42nd St NW, 43rd St NW, 44th St NW, 45th St NW, 46th St NW, 47th St NW, 48th St NW, 49th St NW, 50th St NW, 51st St NW, 52nd St NW, 53rd St NW, 54th St NW, 55th St NW, 56th St NW, 57th St NW, 58th St NW, 59th St NW, 60th St NW, 61st St NW, 62nd St NW, 63rd St NW, 64th St NW, 65th St NW, 66th St NW, 67th St NW, 68th St NW, 69th St NW, 70th St NW, 71st St NW, 72nd St NW, 73rd St NW, 74th St NW, 75th St NW, 76th St NW, 77th St NW, 78th St NW, 79th St NW, 80th St NW, 81st St NW, 82nd St NW, 83rd St NW, 84th St NW, 85th St NW, 86th St NW, 87th St NW, 88th St NW, 89th St NW, 90th St NW, 91st St NW, 92nd St NW, 93rd St NW, 94th St NW, 95th St NW, 96th St NW, 97th St NW, 98th St NW, 99th St NW, 100th St NW

• Curb and gutter areas

• Number of lanes (including center turn lane)

Proposed Facility Fees:

- Fee 1.0: Base lane
- Fee 1.0: Base lane
- Fee 1.0: Base lane

Project Length & Estimated Cost:

- 0.50 miles
- \$10,000,000
- Construction Scale: 200



Deidra Lackey Memorial Park



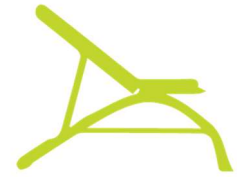
Thanks to a partnership between the City of Hickory and the Lackey Family, Rotary-Geitner Park will welcome Deidra Lackey Memorial Park featuring a Lake House, amphitheater, family area, boat dock, conservatory, access to Riverwalk and more. **This project meets the public's desires for greater access to Lake Hickory and an amphitheater, in particular.**

Hickory Metro Convention Center Expansion



The Hickory-Conover Tourism Development Authority, Hickory City Council, and Conover City Council joined for a special meeting on September 15, 2022, to approve plans for an expansion and renovation to the Hickory Metro Convention Center. Once completed, the Hickory Metro Convention Center facility will have approximately 132,000 usable square feet for meetings and events. This facility will significantly increase the City's sports tourism capacity. See Sports Tourism section for additional details.

Bruce Meisner Park



The City of Hickory celebrated the grand opening of its 26th park on April 8, 2022. Bruce Meisner Park offers a paved walking trail or promenade, a picnic shelter with restrooms, playground, permanent cornhole boards, outdoor grills and 73 acres for park visitors to enjoy the natural beauty of the landscape and a wide variety of recreation activities. At this time, 5 of the 73 acres is developed. With the City's growing parks and recreation needs, this park's further development will be key in the next 10 years.

Henry Fork River Park



Additional turf field installation, at this popular park, will further enhance the City's capacity for sports tourism in the next 10 years.



Quadrant Analysis

Northwest Quadrant		
<p>Quadrant Population: 11,769</p> <p>Projected Population (2030): 12,279</p> <p>Population Density: Medium</p> <p>Residential Zoning: 32.1%</p>	<p>Total Park Acres*: 263.31 <small>*Does not include Hickory Trail Acreage</small></p> <p>Park Types in Quadrant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional (2) • City-wide (1) • Community (2) • Neighborhood (4) • Civic Park/Garden (2) 	<p>Total Parks in Quadrant: 11 + Stadium</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park • Hickory City Park • Jaycee Park • Lowes Foods City Park • LP Frans Stadium • Miracle of Hickory Park • Neill W. Clark Recreation Park • Rotary-Geitner Park • Shuford House & Gardens • Viewmont Park • Westmont Recreation Park • Winkler Park <p>(5 of top 10 most visited parks and 3 of top 10 least visited parks)</p>
<p>Recreation Facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winkler Park Ceramics Building (Winkler Museum) • Winkler Activity Building • Westmont Senior Center • Westmont Gymnasium • Neil W. Clark Jr. Gymnasium • Hickory City Park Activity Building • Shuford House 	<p>Sidewalk Miles: 36.9</p>	<p>Trails/Walking Loops</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lake Hickory Trails • Hickory City Park Bikeway • Rotary Geitner Paved Bikeway • Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park Loop • Hickory Greenway • Riverwalk • Aviation Walk • Olle Art Walk (Future) • City Walk • Winkler Park Laurel Hill Trail • Winkler Park Piney Woods Trail
<p>Special Use Facility L.P. Frans Stadium</p>	<p>Neighborhoods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oakwood • Hillcrest • Forest Hills • Westmont 	<p>Water Based Recreation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lake Hickory Views via Rotary-Geitner Park • Lowe’s Foods Interactive Water Feature • Rotary-Geitner Park Fishing Pier • Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park Fishing Pier • Water Views on Riverwalk • Water Views on Broyhill Trail (Lake Hickory Trail System) • Future Deidra Lackey Memorial Park • Access to Upper Catawba River Trail at Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park
<p>County Parks Nearby: None</p>		

Sources: 2020 US Census data, Hickory GIS Sidewalk Data, Hickory Planning Department, WPCOG Data Center, Placer AI Data, PR&ST Comprehensive Master Plan and Trail Inventories.

Northeast Quadrant	Total Park Acres*: 127.30 <small>*Does not include Hickory Trail Acreage</small>	
Quadrant Population: 21,943 Projected Population (2030): 23,537 Population Density: High Mixed with Low Density Residential Zoning: 47.6%	Park Types in Quadrant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional (1) • Community (1) • Neighborhood (2) • Civic Park/Garden (2) 	Total Parks in Quadrant: 6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bruce Meisner Park • Civitan Park • Highland Park • Ivey Arboretum at Sally Fox Park • McComb Park • Stanford Park <p>(1 of the top 10 most visited parks and 3 of the top 10 least visited parks)</p>
Recreation Facilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highland Recreation Center 	Sidewalk Miles: 34.4	Trails/Walking Loops <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Walk • Bruce Meisner Park Walking Loop • Stanford Park Walking Trail
Special Use Facility: None	Neighborhoods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claremont • Highland 	Water Based Recreation: None
County Parks Nearby <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. Stephens Park • Riverbend Park 		

Sources: 2020 US Census data, Hickory GIS Sidewalk Data, Hickory Planning Department, WPCOG Data Center, Placer AI Data, PR&ST Comprehensive Master Plan and Trail Inventories.



Southwest Quadrant	Total Park Acres*: 100.2 <small>*Does not include Hickory Trail Acreage</small>	
Quadrant Population: 4,482 Projected Population (2030): 3,837 Population Density: Sparse Residential Zoning: 8.2%	Park Types in Quadrant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional (1) • Neighborhood (4) 	Total Parks in Quadrant: 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Henry Fork River Park • Hickory Optimist Park • Southside Heights Park • Taft Broome Park • West Hickory Park (2 of top 10 most visited parks & 3 of top 10 least visited parks)
Recreation Facilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brown Penn Recreation Center • Brown Penn Senior Center • Ridgeview Recreation Center 	Sidewalk Miles: 23.6 miles	Trails/Walking Loops <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic Ridgeview Walk (Future) • Henry Fork River Park Walking Trail • Hickory Optimist Walking Loop
Special Use Facility: None	Neighborhoods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Park • West Hickory • Portion of Ridgeview Community 	Water Based Recreation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Henry Fork River Park Canoe Launch
County Parks Nearby <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bakers Mountain Park (Catawba County) • Reep Park (Burke County) 		

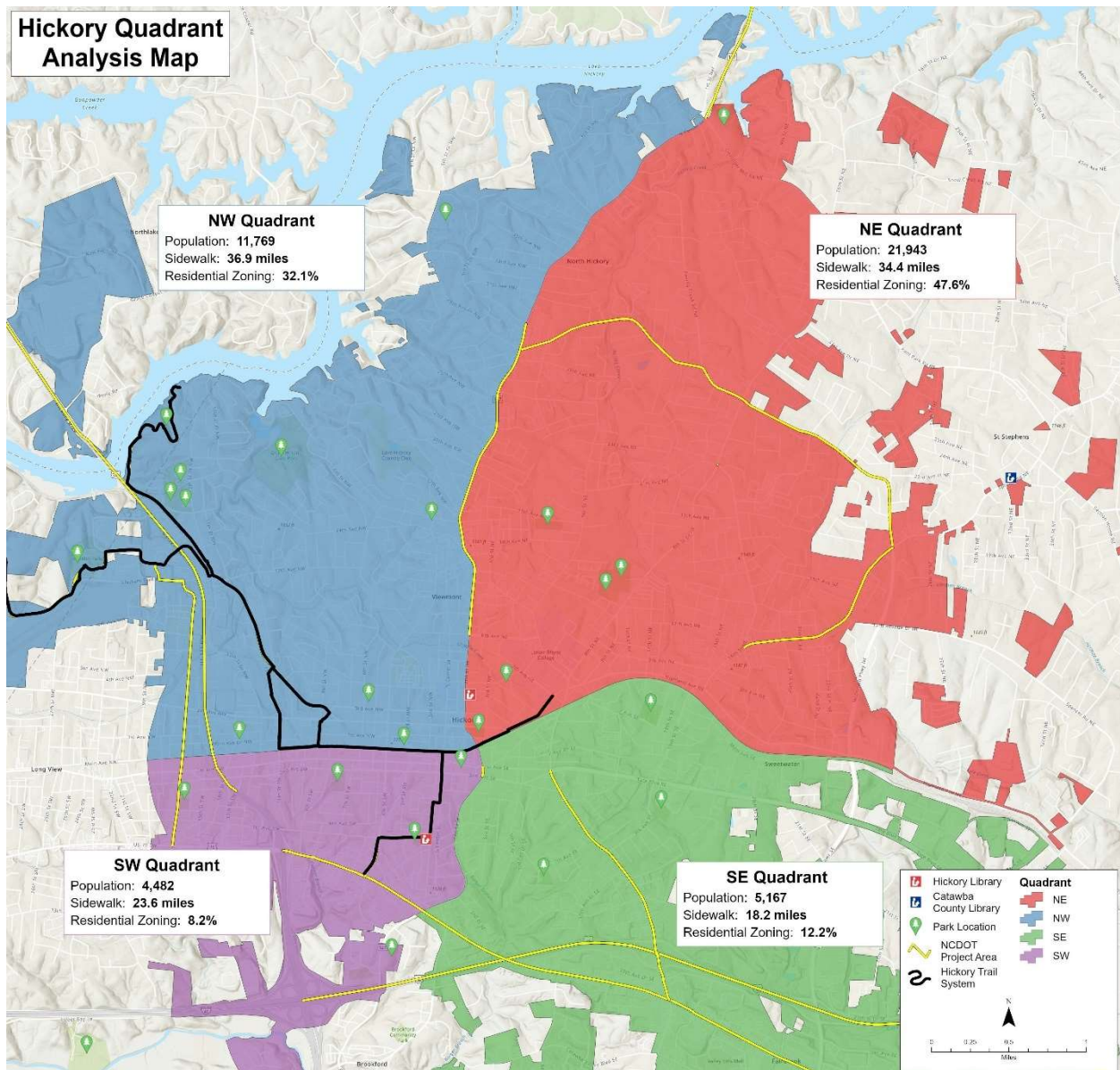
Sources: 2020 US Census data, Hickory GIS Sidewalk Data, Hickory Planning Department, WPCOG Data Center, Placer AI Data, PR&ST Comprehensive Master Plan and Trail Inventories.



Southeast Quadrant	Total Park Acres*: 32.3 <small>*Does not include Hickory Trail Acreage</small>	
Quadrant Population: 5,167 Projected Population (2030): 6,754 Population Density: Sparse Residential Zoning: 12.2%	Park Types in Quadrant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community (1) • Neighborhood (2) • Civic Park/Garden (1) 	Total Parks in Quadrant: 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cliff Teague Park • Fairbrook Optimist Park • Kiwanis Park • Robinson Park (2 of top 10 most visited parks and 1 of top 10 least visited parks)
Recreation Facilities: None	Sidewalk Miles: 18.2	Trails/Walking Loops: None
Special Use Facilities: None	Neighborhoods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kenworth • Portion of Ridgeview Community 	Water Based Recreation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charles D. Dixon Memorial Splash Pad
County Parks Nearby: None		

Sources: 2020 US Census data, Hickory GIS Sidewalk Data, Hickory Planning Department, WPCOG Data Center, Placer AI Data, PR&ST Comprehensive Master Plan and Trail Inventories.

Quadrant Analysis Findings	
Northwest Quadrant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home to 50% of the City’s most visited parks • Home to 30 % of the City’s least visited parks • Contains the greatest amount of park acreage among the four quadrants • Has the second largest population of the four quadrants • Has the greatest amount of water-based recreation available including access to Lake Hickory • Has the second highest % of residential zoning • Has the most parks • Has the greatest number of recreation facilities of the four quadrants • Has the greatest amount of sidewalk miles with the Northeast quadrant very close behind • Has the greatest amount of trail opportunities including the most access to Hickory Trail • Has the most formal neighborhoods 	Northeast Quadrant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the largest current population and projected population for 2030 • Has the largest % of residential zoning • Has the second largest number of parks in a given quadrant but half the neighborhood parks of each western quadrant • Only has 10% of the most visited parks • Is home to three of the top 10 underutilized parks identified in this plan • Has two highly used parks (includes Bruce Meisner Park) • Trails mainly consist of access to City Walk and a few loops within parks • Has two prominent county parks nearby • Does not have any water-based recreation with the exception of future water views at Bruce Meisner Park
Southwest Quadrant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has 30% of the least visited parks in the City • Has 20% of the most visited parks in the City • Has the lowest projected population for 2030 • Has the lowest % of residential zoning among quadrants • Home to three recreation facilities, two of which need renovation and are used on a limited basis • One water-based recreation opportunity 	Southeast Quadrant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a sparse population density • Has the least amount of parks • Has 20% of the most visited parks in the City • Has 10% of the least visited parks in the City • Has one, highly popular, water-based recreation opportunity



Sources: US Census & Hickory GIS Sidewalk Feature Layer and Zoning Layer

Quadrant Population Projections

While the master plan found that the City is offering a sufficient amount of park acreage for its current and projected population, a special look at quadrant projections was taken in order to analyze equity of recreation opportunities. Using 2020 Census Data, available Hickory MPO Traffic Analysis Zone Projections and analytical expertise from the Western Piedmont Council of Governments data analysts, a glimpse of the direction that the City is headed was attained. Population growth is based on the 2020 boundaries of the City. What can be seen, at this point, is that the notable growth areas, at least to mid-plan, are in the Northeast and Southeast Quadrants. Limited infrastructure in the Southwest and the built-out nature of the Northwest seem to indicate less focus for new parks and amenities in the next 10 years. Though this may be the case,

infrastructure improvements in the Southwest are occurring however notable residential opportunities are not foreseen at this time.

Quadrant	2020 Population Estimate*	2030 Population Projection	Change	% Change
Northeast	21,772	23,537	1,765	8.1%
Southeast	6,162	6,754	592	9.6%
Northwest	11,782	12,279	497	4.2%
Southwest	3,774	3,837	63	1.7%
Population Total	43,490	46,407	2,917	6.7%

Source: WPCOG Data Center.

*Note that 2020 population estimates differ slightly from GIS estimates in Quadrant Analysis.



Residential Snapshot Recap

A look at residential projects that were either permitted, in design review or under construction, in March of 2023, supports the projected growth above. At the time, there were approximately 1400 units projected for the Northeast Quadrant and 1200 projected for the Southeast Quadrant. These numbers could fluctuate and so must be regarded as “approximate” though their likelihood of completion is higher. Speculative projects were not accounted for in this analysis.

With regard to annexations, the Northeast quadrant has a solid chance of seeing acquisition within the next 10 to 15 years. The Southeast Quadrant may also become a big growth area.

Related Recommendation

Parks and amenities are gaining some needed ground in the Northeast Quadrant, thanks to Bruce Meisner Park as well as a potential state park down the line. Saint Stephen’s Park, operated by Catawba County, presents a potential partnership opportunity as well. Until plan sunset, an eye to the Southeast Quadrant and the development of recreation opportunities is also recommended. A look at development opportunities near Trivium and Catawba Valley Boulevard or south of Sweetwater have merit. Startown Road and south of Trivium are close to what will be residential centers.

Sports Tourism Inventory & Analysis

Sports tourism is a term associated with travel to sporting events for the purpose of participation in or observation of the event. Such travels provide communities with notable economic impact through an ingress of visitors who have a variety of needs and desires related to their stay. Visits range from a single day to a weekend or more. Spending normally occurs at the sporting event via registrations, ticket sales, concessions and branches out into the local community via hotel accommodations (usage tax), restaurants, shopping, entertainment and more. Sports tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors in tourism and was credited with generating over \$90 billion in economic impact across the United States in 2021 by the Sports Events and Tourism Association. Though sports tourism is often happening organically in a community, at least in some ways, a formal commitment and concentration upon it can elevate the use of local sports infrastructure, turning facilities into revenue generating entities. Sports tourism efforts raise the profile of the community they are hosted within and this, in turn, benefits the residents in a number of ways which are most notably seen in economic impact. In the previous section, it was suggested that the PR&ST Department look at alternative ways to generate revenue. Sports tourism is definitely an important part of that equation and due to its youth, will continue to see its direct and regional economic benefits unfold.

The Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department's sports tourism coordination...in partnership with the Hickory Metro Convention Center and Visitors Bureau along with other key organizations...is bringing an economically impactful variety of sports tournaments and events to Hickory. Represented sports include soccer, basketball, softball, fishing, gymnastics and cycling.



In 2019, the City of Hickory hired Sports Properties Incorporated to perform a Sports Tourism Market Analysis of the greater Hickory sports market. The purpose of this analysis was to provide recommendations for the strategic growth of sports tourism in Hickory. The components of the analysis included a market review, site visits, venue tours, community leader interviews, an online research and trend analysis as well as a comparative analysis of other cities, sports and events. Sports Properties Incorporated facilities databases were also used. The general conclusion of the analysis was that the City had a good base of venues and solid demographics for attracting and supporting sports tourism. It was also noted that the City's location made it a great alternative to the Charlotte area and other sports tourism strongholds.

The 2019 Sports Tourism Market Analysis was used to form the foundation of this master plan's sports tourism inventory as well as recommendations later in this document. To ensure the currency of the inventory, a supplemental analysis was performed to capture key additions that have occurred since the 2019 analysis closed out. A combination of stakeholder meetings, site visits, and online research were also used to form this plan's sports tourism inventory and approach to the future which is articulated in the Recommendations section of this master plan. Special thanks are extended to the City's Sports Tourism Coordinator, Jeff Taylor, for providing detailed insights and content featured in this section.

At the time of this master plan’s formulation, there were three overarching goals for sports tourism to be facilitated by the Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department. The goals were as follows...

- **Maximize the use of City of Hickory facilities**
- **Increase area events and maximize their attendance**
- **Explore additional options to expand sports tourism offerings**

It is clear that these goals are being pursued and met by the PR&ST Department. This master plan furthers the reach of such goals.

Source: <https://www.nrpa.org/blog/sports-tourism-what-does-it-mean-for-you-and-your-community/#:~:text=In%20conclusion%2C%20sports%20tourism%20has,new%20businesses%20to%20the%20area>.

From 2019 to Today: Initiatives Implemented

A number of recommendations put forth in the 2019 Sports Tourism Market Analysis were implemented or initiated by the close of 2022. A summary chart highlights the most salient efforts.

<p>1 The Hickory Parks and Recreation Department was renamed and is now known as the Hickory Parks, Recreation and Sports Tourism Department (PR&ST). In addition, a new Sports Tourism Coordinator position was added and filled (2021) with a highly qualified staff member. The primary focus of the new staff member has been the management of field rentals to groups seeking venues for sporting events as well as concessions, recruitment of new sporting events, maximization of existing facilities and the fostering of a strategic partnership with the Hickory Metro Convention Center and Visitors Bureau to facilitate events and track economic impact in the Hickory metro area.</p>	<p>2 The 2019 Sports Tourism Market Analysis reported stakeholder feedback that indicated a need for the parks and recreation department to change policies in order to facilitate sports tourism at City-owned venues. Though there has not been a formal change in policy as of yet, new leadership in the Parks, Recreation and Sports Tourism Department has brought with it a change in philosophy which has adeptly facilitated the use of city owned sports venues. Sports tourism is really gaining a foothold in the community as a result of this leadership.</p>
<p>3 The Sports Tourism Coordinator and local partners have already been successful in bringing multiple events and organizations to the Hickory metro area or closely tracking those that already exist. This effort is still under development and is expected to become more robust as processes and procedures continue to unfold.</p>	<p>4 Henry Fork River Park has added a second synthetic turf soccer field to its portfolio. This brings the complex total to seven grass fields and two synthetic turf fields. There are plans to add two additional turf fields and follow those additions with a long-term transitioning of the remaining fields. Henry Fork River Park was</p>

	measured as the most visited park via this plan’s park usage analysis and the addition of turf capabilities is not expected to change this status.
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Source: Sports Tourism Coordinator, Stakeholder Interviews & 2019 Market Analysis

Off to an Amazing Start in Spite of a Pandemic

Sports tourism, in general, weathered a global pandemic with existing offerings recovering to near pre-pandemic participation levels by the end of 2022. This is mentioned because sports tourism had been taking place prior to making it an official mission of the department. **Hickory Crawdads** baseball, the **Hickory Motor Speedway**, **Lenoir-Rhyne (LR) athletics** and **Catawba Valley Community College (CVCC) athletics** schedules were comparable in 2022 to what they were in 2019. **Local high school sports**, both public and private are now fielding sports at a rate equal to or greater than 2019. Other sporting events have continued with varying degrees of success and availability. Basketball is a sport that continues to grow. The following synopsis is a snapshot in time compared to the dynamic ramping up of sports tourism happening at the time of this plan’s completion.

Continuing on with a look at sports tourism, the annual holiday high basketball school tournament, long a tradition in the Hickory metro has continued to thrive, now featuring Dick’s Sporting Goods as title sponsor. The **Great Smokies Shootout** basketball tournament, held every year over Memorial Day weekend saw a decline in attendance during 2020 and 2021 but rebounded strongly in 2022 and continues to flourish. The 2022 tournament used 15 local gyms and hosted 105 teams. A new fall basketball tournament, the **Hickory Classic**, was added the weekend after Labor Day. While not as large as the Great Smokies Shootout, at the time of the master plan’s compilation, it was attracting 40 teams and an estimated 300 players to the area.



Softball, primarily played at **Stanford Park and Kiwanis Park** complexes is also a sport that has grown in the number of events played and the number of players and fans that travel to the Hickory metro for competition. In 2022, twenty-one weekends saw travel tournaments played. **S&A Sports, PG Sports and USA Softball** were the organizations bringing events to Hickory. Additionally, **Lenoir-Rhyne University and CVCC softball programs** played full seasons in 2021 and 2022 in both fall and spring. Both schools also hosted prospect tournaments that utilized both on- campus and Hickory parks.

Henry Fork River Park soccer complex continued to host two major events in May and November. **The Rotary Shootout and the Autumn Blast** hosted approximately 100 teams each in 2022. There continues to be three primary tennis events hosted at **Hickory City Park** by the **Greater Hickory Tennis Association** with a summer and fall tournament for adults and late summer events for youth players.



There are now three primary gymnastic events in the Hickory metro with **Foothills Gymnastics** hosting one and two now being held at **Highland Recreation Center** in the spring and fall. Disc golf has grown with there now being five events held in the area, up from three in 2019. Two of

the events are held at **Glen C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park** and three at **The Bear Disc Golf Club**, formerly Mt. View Golf Course in the Mt. View area of Hickory. 2022/23 opened up two new fishing tournaments being hosted on **Lake Hickory. Fishing University (October 22) and Fishers of Men (November 22)** were brought on to showcase the most prominent geographical resource in the Hickory metro.

Some events listed in the “2019 Sports Tourism Market Analysis” did not survive into 2022. ROX the Night Beach Volleyball, Foothills Lacrosse Rage by the River, and disc golf events that were held at Hampton Heights golf course, which is now closed.

Source: Sports Tourism Coordinator, Stakeholder Interviews & 2019 Market Analysis

Location	Key Sports Tourism Events & Tournaments as of 2022
Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park	Disc Golf Tournaments (2 out of 5 in area).
Henry Fork Soccer Complex	Annual Autumn Blast Soccer Tournament in the Fall, CommScope Cup Youth Soccer Tournament and Rotary Shootout in the Spring.
Hickory City Park	Greater Hickory Tennis Association Events (x3).
Hickory Metro Convention Center	Annual basketball tournament, Great Smokies Shootout and Catawba County Sports Hall of Fame. The convention center hosts events including toy, hobby, sports, a NASCAR show, U.S. Regional and N.C. Gymnastics competitions, martial arts tournaments and the Carolina Home & Garden Show.
Highland Recreation Center	NC Silver/Diamond/Sapphire State Championship and NC USA Gymnastics Tournament.
Hickory Motor Speedway	Venue for NASCAR's club racing division, the Whelen All-American Series.
Lake Hickory	Fishing University and Fishers of Men tournament.
LP Frans Stadium	Hickory Crawdads baseball games, South Atlantic League Finals and three South Atlantic League All-Star Games.
Stanford Park	S&A Sports, PG Sports and USA Softball travel tournaments. Lenoir-Rhyne University and CVCC softball programs/tournaments.
Tarlton Complex	Dick's Sporting Goods Classic high school basketball tournament.

2022 Sports Tourism Highlights

In addition to the great work done by the PR&ST Department and Sports Tourism Coordinator, the following highlights are shared in order to lend greater perspective on momentum.

Soccer Foothills Classic CVYSA/Rotary 3,185 People \$204,750 Impact to Local Economy	Hosted Great Smokey Shootout Basketball Tournament 100 + Teams \$165,000 Impact to Local Economy	30+ Baseball & Softball Tournaments Hosted
Hosted Tennis, Mountain Biking, Soccer, Gymnastics, Baseball/Softball, Basketball, Ultimate Frisbee Tournaments Throughout the Year	North Carolina Independent Schools Athletic Association State Track & Field Championships \$100K Impact on Local Economy in One Weekend	Cyclecross 910 Participants 2,275 People \$140,000 Economic Impact

Increasing Sports Tourism Capacity

The Hickory Metro Convention Center will be increasing its sports tourism capacity via the addition of four full sized basketball courts, eight volleyball courts and twelve pickleball courts. While this venue will not be exclusively used for athletics, it will provide a venue that can allow Hickory to realistically compete for more travel tournaments, as well as high school and college events. In addition to basketball, volleyball and pickleball, this new venue will have the capability to host gymnastics, wrestling, cheer competitions and possibly indoor track and field. Once completed, the Hickory Metro Convention Center facility will be approximately 165,600 square feet, all on one level, with 132,000 usable square feet.



Interest in additional venues was expressed via the stakeholder input process and included a few notables, below.

- An indoor venue dedicated exclusively to sports with amenities similar to the Hickory Metro-Convention Center but on a full-time basis. Such a facility could be used for travel teams, high school, college and adult competitions in at least ten different sports. Such a facility would build capacity to go beyond hosting regional events which would require courts in the double digits. This would have a residual impact on hotel inventories which would need to expand in order to accommodate the influx of visitors.
- A complex of ball fields that could be used for softball and baseball interchangeably and which would have synthetic turf. A four-field pinwheel design with an additional feature stadium for softball and another for baseball adjoining the pinwheel. Currently the PR&ST Department only has one baseball field that meets the requirements for high school or college play.
- Creation of a mountain biking venue near L.P. Frans Stadium. This venue could connect with the existing mountain biking venue at Hickory City Park via Aviation Walk and Riverwalk.



Celebrity Sports Tourism Potential: The Catawba County Sports Hall of Fame

The Catawba County Sports Hall of Fame is organized to honor, recognize and memorialize individuals for their excellence and remarkable achievements that have contributed to Catawba County’s rich sports history. Celebrity sports tourism involves visits, by sports legends, to halls of fame and venues so that individuals can meet them. This could become an opportunity for the PR&ST Department to build upon in the future. The Catawba County Sports Hall of Fame is located at Highland Recreation Center and features the following famous inductees...

Ned Jarrett – NASCAR Racing
 Bryan Harvey – Major League Baseball
 Ernie Warlick – National Football League
 Bob Patterson – Major League Baseball



Economic Impact Trends*

Economic impact related to sports tourism has been notable. Studying the chart that follows, steady economic growth can be seen from 2020 through 2022 and that trend is continuing. Catawba Valley Youth Soccer Association tournaments were the highest revenue generator both in 2020 and 2022, with the North Carolina Independent College Athletic Association (NCICAA) making a strong showing in 2021. These organizations and their particular tournaments may be considered sports tourism “anchors” in need of ensuring a continued presence in the City.

	Total Teams	Total People	Total Economic Impact	Types of Tournaments Hosted	Tournament with Greatest Economic Impact
2020	673	19,480	\$1,918,750	Basketball, softball, soccer, gymnastics, baseball, and bass fishing.	Catawba Valley Youth Soccer Association (CVYSA) Autumn Blast
2021	1,628	20,575	\$2,039,750	Fastpitch softball, tennis, soccer, and volleyball.	NCICAA DII Tournament (CVCC)
2022	2,110	25,198	\$2,303,250	Softball, basketball, mountain biking, ultimate frisbee, cycle-cross, gymnastics, tennis, and fastpitch softball.	Catawba Valley Youth Soccer Association (CVYSA)/Rotary Foothills Classic
TOTAL	4,411	65,253	\$6,261,750		

Source: PR&ST Department metrics.

*Does not include significant sports tourism impact generated by schools.


A Note on Concession Revenue

Sports tourism appears to be having an impact on concession revenue, as illustrated in the previous Inventory & Analysis, Financial Analysis section. This illustrates its local economic value in addition to its regional economic value.




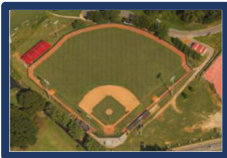
Sports Tourism Inventory






The following venues represent an abridged snapshot of the most salient locations that sports tourism can take place within the City of Hickory. This inventory is based upon the 2019 Sports Tourism Market Analysis as well as inventory efforts from this master plan, along with stakeholder feedback. The inventory includes municipal facilities, City parks and recreation facilities, college/university facilities, and school facilities. It is important to note that there are several athletic courts and/or fields sprinkled around the City. Ideally, a tournament would take place at a location that has more than one of the same type of amenity (i.e. 8 soccer fields in one location) or has an amenity large enough to accommodate multiple teams. This is something to consider for future park improvements in light of the City’s new commitment to sports tourism. Should the City or its partners want to conduct an asymmetric tournament that makes use of all of a particular court/field, regardless of location, such amenities are noted below.



Facilities	
<p>Hickory Metro Convention Center</p>  <p>Capacity: 3,800 people</p>	<p>76,000 square feet of meeting space capable of hosting US Regional and NC gymnastic competitions, cheer and dance competitions, martial arts tournaments, wrestling, weightlifting, powerlifting, and more. The Hickory Metro Convention Center will be increasing its sports tourism capacity via the addition of four full sized basketball courts, eight volleyball courts and twelve pickleball courts. While this venue will not be exclusively used for athletics, it will be a venue that can allow Hickory to realistically compete for more travel tournaments, as well as high school and college events. New improvements may make <u>indoor track and field</u> possible as well. Once completed, the Hickory Metro Convention Center facility will be approximately 165,600 square feet all on one level with 132,000 usable square feet.</p>
City of Hickory Parks & Recreation Facilities	
<p>Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park</p>	<p>City-wide park featuring five picnic shelters with tables and grills, two playgrounds, restrooms, gazebo, lighted and paved walking trail, nature boardwalk, 24-hole disc golf course, canoe launch, horseshoe pits, and a memorial garden.</p>
<p>Henry Fork River Regional Park (Pepsi Regional Soccer Complex)</p>	<p>Regional park featuring 9 soccer fields (2 Turf), kayak launch area, walking trails and an 8,000 square foot picnic shelter with a catering kitchen. More turf fields are projected.</p>

Hickory City Park	15 acre park with 8 lighted tennis courts , an indoor meeting room, paved greenway, and access to Lake Hickory Trails which feature mountain biking, hiking and a pump track.
Hickory Optimist Park	6 acre park with 4 outdoor pickleball courts , an outdoor basketball court , a paved walking trail, a youth softball field and community room building with catering kitchen.
Highland Recreation Center & Stanford Park	Recreation center and park featuring 3 - 300 ft. lighted softball/baseball fields , 2 - 94 ft. by 50 ft. indoor basketball courts , indoor and outdoor restrooms, concessions, 4 indoor pickleball courts , an outdoor basketball court , outdoor picnic areas, 2 outside playgrounds, a paved walking trail and a 12,000 square foot outdoor skate park .
Kiwanis Park	Neighborhood park with 4 youth baseball/softball fields with 210 ft. fences , 2 batting cages, a tennis court , an outdoor basketball court , concession stand, restrooms, Zahra Baker All-Children's Playground and Charles D. Dixon Memorial splash pad.
Neill Clark Gymnasium & Turf Fields	Neill W. Clark Jr. Gymnasium and 2 lighted soccer fields . Future home of a turf field shared between the City of Hickory and Hickory Christian Academy
L.P. Frans Stadium	Home of the Hickory Crawdads, a Minor League Baseball team, and the Catawba Valley Stars of the collegiate summer Carolina-Virginia Collegiate League. Features a professional baseball field , picnic pavilion, VIP section, 3 outdoor party patios, Crawdads Cafe, suites, and a concourse. Located in Winkler Park along Aviation Walk.
Rotary-Geitner Park	96-acre regional park that is home to the future Deidra Lackey Memorial Park, the City's new Riverwalk segment of the Hickory Trail and access to the Lake Hickory Trail system which consists of paved bikeways and nature trails.
Taft Broome Park/Ridgeview Recreation Center/Brown Penn Recreation Center/Brown Penn Senior Center	This 9.6 acre park has current amenities such as two picnic shelters with tables and grills, a tennis court , 3 outdoor pickleball courts , 2 outdoor basketball courts , a lighted multipurpose field , two playgrounds, shaded play, horseshoe pits, restrooms, community garden, Brown Penn Recreation Center (a full basketball court), Brown Penn Senior Center, and Ridgeview Recreation Center with a full basketball court .
Westmont Recreation Park	This 3-acre park has current amenities such as 6 outdoor pickleball courts , an outdoor basketball court , horseshoe pits, playground, gymnasium , game room, fitness center, restrooms, and Westmont Senior Center.
Parks and Facilities with Auxiliary Amenities	Civitan Park: 7.5 acre neighborhood park with community garden. Newly installed restrooms and ADA accessible walkway to playground and shelter, tables, grills, 2 tennis courts , an outdoor basketball court , lighted softball field and concession stand.

	<p>Cliff Teague Park: 8.1 acre neighborhood park with a tennis court, playground equipment, outdoor basketball court, horseshoe pits, and restrooms.</p> <p>Miracle of Hickory Park: 1 outdoor basketball court.</p> <p>Jaycee Park: 5-acre neighborhood park with a lighted baseball field, batting cage, restrooms, and a concession stand. The park is home to P.D. Fowler Field.</p> <p>West Hickory Park: This 5.6 acre park has amenities such as an outdoor half basketball court, lighted softball field, playground, picnic shelter, and restrooms.</p>
College & University Facilities	
<i>Lenoir-Rhyne University Facilities</i>	
<p>Helen & Moretz Stadium</p>  <p>Seating Capacity: 8,500</p>	<p>Football and lacrosse facility with new turf field and lighting.</p>
<p>Shuford Memorial Gymnasium</p>  <p>Seating Capacity: 3,200</p>	<p>Gymnasium for basketball and volleyball.</p>
<p>The Moretz Sports-Athletic Complex</p> 	<p>Collegiate soccer field and track.</p>
<p>Bears Field (Baseball)</p>  <p>Seating Capacity: 500</p>	<p>Baseball field with lighting, a batting cage, press box and locker rooms.</p>



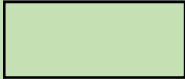




<p>Bears Field (Softball)</p>  <p>Seating Capacity: 500</p>	<p>Softball field with press box and lighting.</p>
<p>Shuford Physical Education Complex</p> 	<p>Physical education complex for men's and women's swimming with 1, 6 lane (25 yards) indoor pool open to students.</p>
<p>The Robert Miller Short Game Facility</p> 	<p>Short game golf facility with 30' X 40' putting green, fringe, rough, a sand trap and four hitting areas.</p>
<i>Catawba Valley Community College</i>	
<p>Tarlton Complex</p>  <p>Seating Capacity: 2,100 (with bleachers) or 2,800 (with event-style seating)</p>	<p>63,778 square foot complex with court for basketball and volleyball, indoor running track, 4 classrooms, weight room and aerobics studio.</p>
School Facilities	
<i>Hickory City Schools</i>	
<p>Hickory High School</p> 	<p>Football field, gymnasium, soccer field, softball field, 6 tennis courts, and a baseball field. In 2021, the school installed turf at the David Elder Field in Barger Stadium. The school is featuring a renovation now to be known as the David Craft Baseball Complex featuring a three-lane covered batting and pitching area for softball and baseball teams. Also, a renovation of the playing surface at Washam Fields and a netted backstop have been made possible by donors.</p>
<p>Grandview Middle School</p>	<p>Gymnasium, 2 soccer fields, and 2 softball/baseball fields.</p>
<p>Northview Middle School</p>	<p>Gymnasium, 1 soccer field and 2 softball/baseball fields.</p>
<p>Jenkins Elementary School</p>	<p>Gymnasium/multipurpose room</p>
<p>Longview Elementary School</p>	<p>Gymnasium/multipurpose room, outdoor basketball court and multipurpose field.</p>
<p>Oakwood Elementary School</p>	<p>Gymnasium/multipurpose room.</p>
<p>Southwest Primary School</p>	<p>Gymnasium/multipurpose room.</p>











Viewmont Elementary School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room and multipurpose field.
<i>Catawba County Schools in Hickory</i>	
St. Stephen's High School	Baseball field, gymnasiums (main and auxiliary), 2 football fields (main field and practice field), soccer field, softball field and 6 tennis courts.
Maiden High School	Baseball field, gymnasium, football field, multipurpose field, soccer field, softball field and 6 tennis courts.
H.M. Arndt Middle School	Baseball field, football/soccer field with running track, gymnasium, softball field and 2 tennis courts.
Clyde Campbell Elementary School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room and multipurpose field.
Mountain View Elementary School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room.
Snow Creek Elementary School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room and multipurpose field.
Webb A. Murray Elementary School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room.
<i>Catawba County Schools Outside of Hickory</i>	
Bandy's High School	Baseball field, football field/track, gymnasium, soccer field, softball field and 6 tennis courts.
Bunker Hill High School	Baseball field, 2 football fields (with track), gymnasium, soccer field (with track), 4 softball fields and 6 tennis courts.
Fred T. Foard High School	Baseball field, football field/track, gymnasium, soccer field, softball field and 6 tennis courts.
Maiden High School	Baseball field, gymnasium, football field/track, multipurpose field, soccer field, softball field and 6 tennis courts.
Jacob's Fork Middle School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room and softball/baseball field.
Maiden Middle School	Baseball field, football field, gymnasium/multipurpose room, softball field and 6 tennis courts.
Mill Creek Middle School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room, multipurpose field, 2 softball fields and 2 tennis courts.
River Bend Middle School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room, football field, soccer field, 2 softball fields and 2 tennis courts.
Balls Creek Elementary School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room.
Banoak Elementary School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room.
Blackburn Elementary School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room and multipurpose field.
Catawba Elementary School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room and softball field.
Claremont Elementary School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room and softball field.
Lyle Creek Elementary School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room, softball field and walking path.
Maiden Elementary School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room and multipurpose field.
Oxford Elementary School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room and multipurpose field.
Sherrills Ford Elementary School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room and multipurpose field.
St. Stephen's Elementary School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room and multipurpose field.
Startown Elementary School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room and multipurpose field.
Tuttle Elementary School	Gymnasium/multipurpose room and multipurpose field.
<i>Private Schools</i>	
Hickory Christian Academy	1 future soccer field (Conversion to Turf).
Hickory Day School	Multi-purpose field and outdoor basketball court.
St Stephen's Lutheran School	Gymnasium and multi-purpose field/softball field.

Sources: 2019 Sports Tourism Market Analysis & 2023 Master Plan Verification

Sports Tourism Inventory Summary of Potential (Parks, Facilities, and Educational Institutions in Hickory)

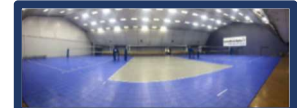
Below is a summary of facilities and sports, by interest. It captures amenities at *Hickory City Parks, within the Hickory and Catawba school systems, private schools and collegiate sports facilities located at Lenoir Rhyne University and Catawba Valley Community College.* This compilation of facilities illustrates an **estimate** of sports tourism *capacity potential* assuming proper agreements would be obtained by the City and outside entity in the future. County parks are not factored into the inventory due to their focus on passive recreation. Numbers do not count future Hickory Metro Convention Center additions.

Sport	Facility Estimates
Gymnasiums/ Multi-purpose Room 	<p style="text-align: center;">43+</p>
Basketball Courts  	<p style="text-align: center;">23+ Outdoor 12+ Indoor</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Does not account for school gymnasium courts.</p>
Soccer Fields 	<p style="text-align: center;">24+</p>
Tennis Courts 	<p style="text-align: center;">42+</p>
Baseball Fields 	<p style="text-align: center;">10+</p>
Baseball/Softball Fields 	<p style="text-align: center;">17+</p>

<p>Softball Fields</p> 	<p>15+</p>
<p>Multipurpose Fields</p> 	<p>16+</p>
<p>Football Fields</p> 	<p>12+</p>
<p>Tracks</p> 	<p>6+ Outdoor</p>
<p>Disc Golf</p> 	<p>1</p>
<p>Pool</p> 	<p>1 Indoor Competition Pool</p>
<p>Skate Park</p> 	<p>1</p>
<p>Pickle Ball Courts</p> 	<p>13+ Outdoor 20+ Indoor</p>
<p>Trails</p> 	<p>3 (Lake Hickory Trails) + 5 Segments of Hickory Trail (Present/Future)</p>
<p>Indoor Volleyball</p> 	<p>6+</p>

Source: 2019 Sports Tourism Market Analysis
2023 Master Plan Verification

Additional Facilities



The following facilities have regional sports tourism value.

Additional Facility	Description
Hickory Foundation YMCA	6 tennis courts, 1 outdoor basketball court, indoor running track, outdoor running course, outdoor pool and splash pad. Aerobics room, yoga studio, and spin room.
Mountain View Recreation Center	Volunteer run community recreation center. Operates softball games, around the region, including Fate Huffman Park and St Stephen's Optimist Club (2 softball fields, 1 baseball field) in Hickory.
Hickory American Legion Fairgrounds	1 baseball field and 1 multipurpose field.
Reep Park (Burke County)	4 softball/baseball fields and 1 multipurpose field.
Select Sportsplex	Home of Carolina Select Volleyball Club. 19 competitive teams housed at this facility during the 2023 volleyball season.
Equestrian	
Rock Barn Country Club, Equestrian Center & Court Sports Facility	Outdoor arena and a small indoor arena with 22 boarding stalls. Four hydro clay courts with permanent pickleball lines = 8 pickleball courts. Olympic size swimming pool and gated toddler pool along with a state-of-the-art fitness center. Located in Conover
Gymnastics	
Foothills Gymnastics Training Center	Largest gymnastics center in Hickory.
Hickory Gymnastics	15,000 sq. ft gymnastics and cheerleading facility.
Golf	
Lake Hickory Country Club	9-hole course and multi-use practice facility with driving range and chipping/short range practice area.
Catawba Springs Golf Course	27-hole golf course.
Players Ridge Golf Course	18-hole golf course.
Rock Barn Country Club	Two 18-hole golf courses.
See Inventory Above for Lenoir Rhyne Short Game Facility	
Automotive	
Hickory Motor Speedway	Stock car short track with .363-mile asphalt oval. Seating capacity of 9,600 with 3,600 additional lawn seats.
	Summary: 10 tennis courts, 1 basketball court, 2 pools+ toddler pool, 5 golf courses, 2 gymnastics centers, 1 volleyball center, 1 indoor running track, 1 outdoor running track, 6 baseball fields, 6 softball fields, 8 pickleball courts, 1 splash pad, 1 equestrian center (indoor & outdoor arenas), and 2 multi-purpose fields.



Community Collaboration

Public input is well known as the cornerstone of master planning! Recognizing this, the City of Hickory offered robust engagement opportunities that were equitable and creative. The bulk of public input offerings occurred in the first and third phases of the comprehensive master planning timeline, however, input was welcomed and received throughout the entire process. A combination of public drop-in meetings, pop-up stations/interactions, a statistically valid/representative recreation needs survey and electronic means were employed. In addition to engagement of the general public, a series of stakeholder meetings and focus groups were conducted to gather qualitative data from those who are impacted by services, collaborating with the City to provide services, or whose voice tends to be less heard in master planning efforts. *Nearly 700 individuals and 30+ external organizations were engaged in the community collaboration process for the master plan with additional input from nearly 500 individuals participating in the Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities!*



This section will explore the specifics of input efforts along with key information and salient themes assessed as impactful to planning the next 10 years of recreation, well crafted. Below is a chart that summarizes feedback mechanisms used for community collaboration.

Traditional Meetings	Pop-up Input Efforts	Additional Engagement
Highland Recreation Center (Phase I & III)	Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park	City Facebook Page
Ridgeview Recreation Center (Phase I & III)	Hickory City Park	Hotline
City Hall (Phase I & III)	Lowe's Foods City Park	E-Mail
Kiwanis Park	Kiwanis Park*	On-location Flyers
	Sails Concert/Union Square	City Partners
	LP Frans Stadium/Crawdads Game	2022 City of Hickory Recreation & Parks Survey
	Patrick Beaver Memorial Library	Focus Groups
	Ridgeview Library	Senior Citizens, Youth, Individuals with Disabilities and Veterans
	Christmas Parade & Tree Lighting	



Public Input Meetings & Pop Ups

Just over a month into the master planning process, citizens were invited to attend one of four public input meetings to construct not only a baseline of information but an initial trajectory to be used in the formulation of a statistically valid survey. These “drop-in” style meetings featured interactive materials aimed at conducting a community-wide SWOT analysis that sought feedback, in each City quadrant, in a variety of ways. Citizens were asked to share their feedback on current parks, recreation and sports tourism related strengths to build upon, weaknesses to improve, opportunities to explore and threats (aka challenges) that they believed might hinder the City from taking parks, facilities, programs, events and services to the next level. Citizens



were invited to provide their thoughts while also learning about the current offerings of the PR&ST Department.

A multi-faceted communication campaign was employed to ensure the greatest awareness of input opportunities. Efforts included press releases, social media marketing, radio announcements, City newsletter ads, Parks & Recreation newsletter ads, flyers in areas known to have residents with limited electronic access, park kiosk postings and more. In order to engage a greater amount of the population, City staff and volunteers traveled to special events, City facilities and the parks to meet people where they were at during this process. These “pop ups” were very successful in garnering a greater amount and depth of public input and were well-received by the citizens. In Phase III...similar outreach took place using targeted questions shaped by emerging themes and trends.



Summary of Face to Face Public Input

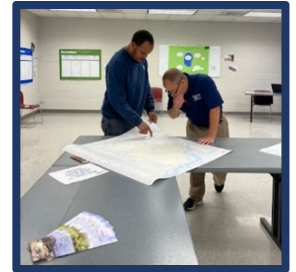
Strengths

- Large Inventory, Variety and Good Distribution of Parks & Facilities
- High Quality Recreation Programs (Especially Recreation Sports & Unifour Games)
- Cleanliness of Parks
- Department Staff
- Low Cost of Recreation
- Trails...Especially City Walk & Lake Hickory Trails
- Park and Facility Improvements Over the Past 3 Years



Weaknesses

- People Don't Realize Everything Available to Them Via Parks & Recreation
- Lack of/Limited Programming, Updated Facilities and Free Options for Senior Citizens & People with Disabilities
- Recreational Access to Lake Hickory
- Cleanliness of Parks
- Underutilized Parks
- Safe Places to Walk
- Lack of Pools
- Access to Shade at Parks
- Number of Bike Lanes and Lack of Connectivity



Opportunities

- Amphitheaters Can Bring Tourism and Vibrancy
- Access to Lake Hickory Can Increase Recreation Opportunities for Citizens and Visitors
- Connect with the Growing Homeschooling Community
- Adult Playgrounds Would Offer Unique Recreation to Adults with Disabilities and Senior Citizens
- Multi-use Sports Facilities and Concert Venues

Threats

- Costs and Funding of Priorities
- Holes in Communication of Offerings
- Non-resident Park Usage and Resulting Stress on Park Capacity
- Low Focus on Inclusivity
- Language Barriers
- Safety Concerns Regarding Homeless & Illegal Activities in Some

INTERNAL STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are your general perceptions of Hickory's park system, recreation programs and sports tourism?
2. What are the **strengths** of Hickory's parks, recreation and sports tourism opportunities that we need to build upon in our new plan?
3. What are the **weaknesses** of Hickory's parks, recreation and sports tourism opportunities that we need to address through this plan?
4. What are our most important indoor/outdoor facility needs?
5. How balanced do you think the parks and recreation system is in terms of park types, facilities, programs and equitable distribution of recreation opportunities?
6. How would you describe the values of the residents and visitors we serve?
7. What are the key issues (**threats**) facing the City of Hickory as a whole?

Stakeholders Meetings

In tandem with the collection of input from the general public, both internal and external stakeholder meetings were conducted to draw from the collective wisdom of City staff (internal), community leaders and organizations in the region (external). For the purpose of the plan, a stakeholder was defined as a person, organization or group whose interests may impact or be impacted by a comprehensive parks and recreation master plan update and the carrying out of its recommendations. Information was used to identify and understand trends in needs, seek recommendations, discern themes and compliment the general public input SWOT Analysis used for plan development. Below is a summary of key feedback received. This information is noted, as needed, throughout the plan and once again, impactful to its overall recommendations.

Internal Stakeholders (Staff Input Meetings)

Internal stakeholders were asked to participate in an interview that consisted of 10 questions.

Multiple meetings were held with both groups and individuals to garner detailed feedback that included strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as they pertain to the City park system, programs, operations, maintenance, finances and marketing facilitated primarily by the PR&ST Department and Public Services Department.

Internal stakeholders (referred to as "staff") for the master plan included City Management and key individuals such as the...

- Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Director
- Public Services Director
- Planning Director
- Police Chief
- Risk Manager
- Communications & Marketing Manager

8. What role do you see parks, recreation and sports tourism playing in the long-term sustainability of the City of Hickory?

9. Are there **opportunities** for partnering or other funding sources in the City for the development or the delivery of recreation facilities or programs?

10. If you could change one thing in parks and recreation for the City of Hickory, in the next 10 years what would it be?

- Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Staff
- Public Services Staff

Below is a summary of feedback on four main topic areas. The largest voices, reflected below, are those from the PR&ST and Public Services Departments. Remaining feedback has been used in a broader manner so as to inform the make-up of the master plan.

Summary of Feedback

Parks

Staff members communicated pride in the vastness and diversity of the City’s park inventory, seeing it as a strength to be capitalized on. While the quantity and variety of parks were seen in a positive light, the deferred maintenance needs of the parks were viewed as a challenge that has been improved upon noticeably since the Public Services Department took the lead on park maintenance. Several leaders and staff members noted parks as well maintained. Staff reported that they would like to see the positive momentum continue to grow with regard to aesthetic improvements and renovations. Keeping up with the pace of a growing population, visitor base, aging infrastructure, available workforce, new housing development and changing demographics were noted as key challenges. ADA compliance improvements, being facilitated in conjunction with the City’s capital improvement program were noted as a movement forward in quality and inclusivity. It was clear, among departments, that they understood that profound staffing shortages were a threat to maintenance and operational progress, making the work that has been done that much more impressive. With regard to park capacity, staff suggested that some parks (i.e. Kiwanis Park) may have too many features which contribute to overuse and consequently an underuse of other parks. They provided numerous suggestions, many of which have been included in the make-up of this master plan, for making underused parks more attractive. With regard to themes in feedback related to park amenities, staff noted that an increase in parking at the following locations would be beneficial based upon their observation:

- Kiwanis Park
- Henry Fork River Park
- Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park
- Rotary-Geitner Park
- Miracle of Hickory Park

Additional mountain biking trails and access to water recreation (i.e. Lake Hickory) were also themes of benefit. Of a final and significant note, staff shared that they would love to increase the use of parks as program venues for the public. Most programming, at the time of interviews, was happening in the recreation centers of which Highland Recreation and Ridgeview Recreation hosted most offerings.

Facilities

Overall, the staff communicated pride in the number of facilities the City offers, noting such strengths as Highland Recreation Center and multiple indoor/outdoor courts. Aside from this,

however, deferred maintenance and its resulting need for upgrades, retrofits and aesthetics at indoor facilities were focused upon heavily. Facilities such as the Westmont and Brown Penn Senior Centers were especially noted as needing significant attention. Staff felt that if such facilities were improved, more citizens would access them. It was also suggested that the City look at whether the distribution of outdated facilities was equitable. Splash pads, in all quadrants, were a frequent suggestion along with increased staff to maintain facilities and more office space for staff who are already experiencing space shortages.

Other facilities mentioned as needed for the City included indoor play rooms for hot days, a walking track around Highland Recreation Center, a swimming pool, off-site concrete skate park and trail connections between City Hall, the YMCA, Lenoir Rhyne University and Highland Recreation Center. With an eye to sports tourism, staff were especially excited about the expansion of recreation opportunities at the Hickory Metro Convention Center and produced several suggestions incorporated into the construction of this master plan. They also shared that they believed additional sports facilities would be needed to increase recreation capacity in light of a sports tourism focus.

Programs/Events

PR&ST Department staff have appreciated the opportunity to show their creativity in program development over the past few years and would like to continue to have the open-minded reception of their ideas. Themed events, such as pet-friendly offerings, were noted as exceptionally successful and to be built upon. Signature events such as the Unifour Senior Games and Christmas Parade were emphasized as great community building contributions. This being said, staff recognized the value of developing standard guidelines for program development and evaluation in order to harness strengths, eliminate weaknesses, maximize resources and make a case for future funding or support.

Staff shared that the City had a good foundation of collaborative partnerships with organizations such as the YMCA and this should be built upon as well. As mentioned before, the staff would like to see greater programming in the parks versus concentrated at the recreation centers. An exciting opportunity discussed was the new opportunity to program Hickory Trail. Staff communicated that they believe the “small town/personal approach” to recreation programming was something to be kept and emphasized. Generations of family members have played, coached and cheered thanks to Hickory rec. This fits well with the City’s brand of Life: Well Crafted.

Operations & Maintenance

Staff are very cohesive, committed and largely agree that the City is a great place to work and to serve others. With regard to the PR&ST Department, many staff work within a generalist framework with additional duties in a specific area of concentration such as senior programming. While this has positive benefits, there is a belief that there will be a deficit in the staff’s future capacity to specialize in areas identified as needed for the next 10 years. Staff have already expressed that they wish they could do more with regard to specialized programming. Specialization in fitness was communicated as of particular concern, moving forward.

The division between PR&ST Department and Public Services duties were noted by both departments as a growth area with particular regard to the standardization of cross-department processes for requesting support and communication in general. Existing policies and procedures for park inspections and work orders were noted as needing a more formalized framework though inspections are meeting standard. Future growth will make the need for additional formal policies and procedures even greater.

A sustained nation-wide worker shortage may affect operations and maintenance, long term, which will in turn affect goals for parks, facilities, programs and administration. Feelings of being understaffed with limited opportunity for advancement were shared in departments by a few. Some staff also expressed a challenge with career advancement opportunities, pay scales, and employee discounts as incentives for them to rent facilities.

Finances

Staff believes, overall, that citizens and visitors are receiving great value for their tax dollars with regard to the breadth and depth of park, facility and program offerings. They communicated a desire to identify more streams of income through grants and sponsorships. Such an increase in funding could increase the City's capacity for recreation offerings and address much needed deferred maintenance issues. Staff were very cognizant of the benefits of looking into additional partnerships and cost recovery measures. They were also well-versed in the big picture benefits of sports tourism and how it would help the local economy.

Marketing

Communication of offerings was an area that staff would love to continue to work on improving. They see what they offer as hidden gems that people love when they find them. They believe in what they do and want others to enjoy the results of their hard work. Individuals are responsible for promotion of their programs and results vary without articulated guidance. One common result is that of seeing the same people at multiple events versus new faces. The Office of Communications assists with communication (mainly signature events) and was seen as a resource to tap into at a greater level. To enhance communication, staff suggested the following.

- A department-specific communication plan or campaign
- Standardized guidance, workflows and timelines
- Early and frequent engagement between departments
- Production of evergreen advertisements
- One to two PR&ST points of contact to manage an increased communication workflow between the PR&ST and Communication Departments

Staff were excited about the prospect of streamlining communications processes to maximize outcomes. They also suggested the use of technology, such as electronic signs, as a means to getting the word out at the parks, where allowable by ordinance.

Summary of Key Internal Stakeholder Input

Internal stakeholder input merged into a few main themes that are captured within the SWOT analysis framework.

Strengths

- Large Inventory of Parks
- Diverse, Creative, Collaborative and Committed City Staff
- Family Atmosphere in Recreation Sports, Programming & at Events
- Increased Quality of Park Maintenance
- Affordability of Recreation
- Park Safety

Weaknesses

- Majority of Programs Based in Recreation Centers
- Magnitude of Deferred Maintenance/ ADA Access
- Amount of Existing Inclusive Programming
- Communication of Offerings
- Strategic Usage of Parks (Too Many Features/Too Few/Parks as Program Venue)
- Lack of Parks & Recreation Presence in Southeast Quadrant

Opportunities

- Build PR&ST Specific Communication Strategy
- Standardization of Operations, Maintenance & Communication Policies and Procedures
- Increased Streams of Income & Funding Sources
- Increased Staff Support Via Office Space, Benefits & Compensation
- Integrate Technology into Park Operations
- Build on Post-pandemic Enthusiasm for Parks
- Build in More Tranquil/Passive Recreation Options at Parks
- Partner with App State Hickory & Other Universities

Threats

- National Worker Shortages
- Magnitude of Deferred Maintenance in Relation to Future Needs, Facility Capacity and Sports Tourism
- Staff Capacity to Specialize & Indoor Space Capacity to Program
- Increasing Demands in Level of Service without Increase in Staff
- Becoming Too Large to Maintain the Family-feel of Recreation Offerings
- Popular Parks Are Over Capacity, Creating Safety Issues, Alienating Residents and Turning Visitors Away

External Stakeholders

Over 30 external stakeholders were asked to participate in an interview that consisted of 12 questions that complimented the SWOT analysis but also got into specific areas meant to assess both a current understanding of parks, recreation and sports tourism as well as future recommendations that could potentially impact City efforts. Stakeholders consisted of representatives and groups from the following...

Hickory NAACP	Centro Latino	City of Hickory Youth Council (Focus Group)
Hickory Metro Sports Commission	Community Enhancement Project for Individuals w/ Disabilities Stakeholders	Catawba County Council on Aging
Hickory Parks, Recreation and Sports Tourism Commission	PR&ST Recreation Sports Parents	PR&ST Coaches & Volunteers
PR&ST Recreation Center Cardholders	Hickory Crawdads	Hickory Public Schools Athletic Directors
Lenoir Rhyne University	App State Hickory	Catawba Valley Community College (Cross Country)
Catawba County	Caldwell County	Burke County
Hickory DAV	Hickory Chamber of Commerce	Hickory Downtown Development Association
Hickory Young Professionals	Unifour Flying Object Disc Golf Club	Hickory Music Factory
Neighborhood Liaisons	Humane Society of Catawba County	Walkin' Roll Activities League
Carolina Thread Trail	Catawba Valley Youth Soccer Association	Hickory Metro Convention Center
Hickory Velo Club	Hickory YMCA	Salt Block Foundation
Northwest Mountain Bike Alliance	Greater Hickory Tennis Association	Special Olympics
Skateboarding Community Reps	Carolina Select Volleyball	Rotary Club of Hickory
Veterans Helping Veterans	Westmont Senior Center Users (Focus Group)	West Hickory Senior Center Users (Hickory Citizens)
Friends of Hickory		

Additional stakeholders were pursued but could not be reached after multiple attempts. Due to the magnitude of stakeholder input, a summary of salient feedback is provided. Additional input received is represented throughout the master plan as applicable.

EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

As it relates to your organization...

1. How aware are you of the park, recreation and sports tourism opportunities offered by the City of Hickory? What are the main ways in which you receive information?
2. What are your general impressions of Hickory's park system, recreation programs and sports tourism?
3. What are the **strengths** of Hickory's parks, recreation and sports tourism opportunities that we need to build upon in our new plan?
4. What are the **weaknesses** of Hickory's parks, recreation and sports tourism opportunities that we need to address through this plan?
5. Have you had an opportunity to partner with the PR&ST in the past? Do you foresee any opportunities to do so in the future?

Summary of Key External Stakeholder Input

External stakeholder input merged into a few main themes that are captured within the SWOT analysis framework below.

Strengths

- Sports Tourism Contributes to the Local Economy
- Park Safety
- Enthusiastic PR&ST Staff Who Are Great with Partnerships
- Department's Ability to Draw Families/Business to Hickory
- Extensive Park & Programming Inventory Compared to Similar Cities

Weaknesses

- Lack of Venue for Extra Large Crowds (i.e. Concert/Tournament Capacity)
- People Don't Realize How Much Recreation Is Available
- Downtown Businesses Don't Have Regular Input (i.e. Rec Initiatives)
- Travel Sports are Taking People Away from Local Rec Sports
- Lighting at Parks Like Hickory City Park
- Childcare in Relation to Recreation Opportunities

Opportunities

- Indoor Recreation Space Development (i.e. Arenas for Tournaments/Aquatics Center/Amphitheater)
- **100% Stakeholders Interested in Partnership with City**
- Partnerships with Duke Energy for Water Access
- Emerging Women's Sports Niche
- Re-imagine Park Inventory to Meet Current Needs
- Maximize Green Space
- Use Indoor Space to Facilitate Play on Inclement Days

Threats

- Perception of Unfulfilled Promises (i.e. Splash Pads in Each Quadrant)
- Lack of Connectivity = Less Accessibility to Parks & Programs for Citizens with Lower Income
- Challenges with Homelessness & Housing
- Lack of Growth in the Metro Area
- Greater Emphasis on Safety

EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW

6. What are our most important indoor/outdoor facility needs?

7. How balanced do you think the parks and recreation system is in terms of park types, facilities, programs and equitable distribution of recreation opportunities?

8. How would you describe the values of the residents and visitors we serve?

9. What are the key issues (**threats**) facing the City of Hickory as a whole?

10. Have you used any of the City of Hickory's parks, recreation facilities, and/or programs? If so, what facilities or programs have you used?

11. Have you used other recreation agencies including public, private or not-for-profit in the City or County? How do they compare to the City of Hickory's facilities and programs?

12. If you could change one thing in parks and recreation for the City of Hickory, in the next 10 years, what would it be?

Focus Groups



Focus groups were employed in order to provide a special opportunity for senior citizens, youth, individuals with disabilities and veterans to provide targeted input. Group members were sourced from the West Hickory Senior Center (Hickory Citizens), Westmont Senior Center, Hickory Youth Council, Foothills Veterans Helping Veterans group, and the Hickory Disabled American Veterans. Veterans groups gave input during public input sessions dedicated to a unique park plan. Input from

individuals with disabilities was also garnered from a 2022 year-long study known as the Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities (CEPID) which included a robust focus on recreation and programming. To bridge the study with the master plan process, the City worked with a volunteer disability advisor.

Below is a summary of the most prominent input received from the City’s senior citizens and youth.

<p>Senior Citizens Westmont Senior Center Patrons West Hickory Senior Center Patrons (Hickory Citizens Only) # Engaged = 20</p>	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open Centers = Health Benefits of Seniors Connecting Socially • The Unifour Games • City Staff Who Serve Seniors Are Awesome and Go the Extra Mile • Transportation Related to Senior Programs • Keeping Westmont Senior Center Open • Cleanliness of Parks • Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park and Kiwanis Park <p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of What is Offered by Parks & Rec is Limited • City Offers Limited Recreation Opportunities During Limited Hours • Senior Centers Need Major Interior & Exterior Renovations • Condition of Senior Centers is Perceived as Cause for Low Participation Rates for What is Offered • Transportation to Different Parts of the City • Older Parks Appear Forgotten About • Lack of Shade and Ample Seating at Parks • Don’t have Safe Places to Walk • Can’t Get from West Hickory Senior Center to West Hickory Park by Walking • Restroom Access at Parks is Not Always a Given • No Pool or Place for Seniors to Swim for Free • Lack of Water Activities (Including Boat Related)
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	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The More Recreation Opportunities Are Offered for Seniors the Greater Overall Participation Will Become • Free Options for Seniors May Be Able to Be Underwritten by Sponsors • Theaters (with Chairs) in Parks • Large Expected Growth of Seniors in the Next 20 Years Can Help to Tailor Park and Recreation Priorities <p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illegal Activity Seen at Some Parks Makes Seniors Avoid Them • There Will Be a 54% Increase in the Senior Population in the Next 20 Years (Catawba County) and There are Already Not Enough Recreational Resources for Them <p>Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build an Adult Playground that Seniors Can Use • Offer Programs for Dancing, Jazzercise, Tai Chi, Billiards, Indoor Movies, Finance Classes, Computer Classes, Music & Bring Back Water Aerobics at Lenoir Rhyne • Offer More Senior Trips • Build New/Centrally Located Senior Center <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ In Short Term, Fully Open Existing Centers • Bring Pre-pandemic Programming Back & Advertise to Seniors • Walkway from West Hickory Senior Center to West Hickory Park • Put Benches and Shade in Closer Proximity to Each Other • Provide a Free Place (Indoor) for Seniors to Swim • Provide Free Outdoor Exercise Equipment • Social Events for Seniors (ex. Single Seniors) • Quiet Sails Concert (Instrumental/Symphonic Music) • Intergenerational Programs (Interact with Youth) • Pay Attention to Homeless or Homebound Seniors • Have Bus Stops at Parks
<p>Youth Hickory Youth Council # Engaged = 30</p>	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zahra Baker Playground’s Offerings for Individuals with Disabilities <p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not A Lot of Teen Events Offered • Teens Are Not Seeing What PR&ST is Offering • The General Public is Not Aware of What PR&ST Has • Basketball Courts at Neill Clark Gym Not Open Much • Informational Signage to Direct People (i.e. Don’t Feed the Ducks Human Food) <p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emulate Conover Splash Pad and Gym Equipment • Maximize Social Media to Educate Citizens on Nature and Department Offerings Such as Sports Areas <p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes Feeling Unsafe at Parks <p>Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase Number of Playgrounds Like Zahra Baker Playground • Work with Schools to Inform Youth of What PR&ST is Offering

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjust Social Media Efforts to Attract Teen Followers (Tik Tok & Instagram) • Create Teen-focused Activities Such as a Teen Hike and Advertise to Teens • Partner with Schools for Recreation Opportunities on Their Properties, Outside of School Hours
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Veterans...

Over 20 veterans from the Foothills Helping Veterans group and Hickory Disabled American Veterans group provided valuable insights regarding how Hickory might be able to serve veterans through parks and recreation. The Catawba County Veteran Services Officer was also consulted during this process. All were in favor of the City working toward a park focused upon veterans, especially veterans with disabilities, who might want to enjoy the park or take their loved ones there. Veteran feedback mainly focused upon taking care of veterans who have sacrificed a lot for their country. Recommendations from these groups included...

- Create Veteran Focused Park
 - Honor those who have served
 - Make the park accessible and a resource to those who have acquired physical and mental disabilities due to their service
- Form Partnerships to Benefit Veterans
 - Work with local guard units and veteran groups to create recreation programming and access to resources for veterans
 - Incorporate veteran resources into events (Catawba County Veteran Services Officer presence)
- Form Partnerships to Educate Community
 - Work with groups to bring patriotic education (i.e. flag etiquette) to parks
- Create Safety Resources Within Parks
 - Install police call boxes and more cameras
- Ensure Universal Design in Parks
 - Include multiple seating areas, restrooms with features at wheelchair height (i.e. seating at a safe height for those with mobility challenges and handrails below toilet paper rolls, etc.)
- Offer Adaptive Sports Opportunities
 - Create spaces for gathering and healthy competition among veterans, especially those who are disabled
- Increase Amount of Hard Surface Trails Available
- Consider PTSD Triggers and Account for Them in Park Design and Programming
- Ensure Shaded Seating Areas in Parks

Individuals with Disabilities...(Unifour)

Input from the 2022 Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities (CEPID) was used due to its compilation of focus group data from five separate focus groups which totaled over 60 from the Unifour. To bridge the study with the master plan process, the City worked with a volunteer disability advisor. Below is a summary of key focus group information which directly relates to this comprehensive master plan. It represents an important focus on inclusivity.



- Free/Low Cost Recreation Options are Critical to Individuals with Disabilities
- More Accessibility, Amenities and Programs for People with Disabilities Are Greatly Desired
 - Sensory-friendly events would be highly beneficial
 - Activities in smaller group settings are helpful
- Transportation to Recreation Opportunities is a Significant Barrier
 - Bus routes are not always helpful
- Disabled Veterans Would Benefit from Local Government Focus on Recreation for Them
- Trails Are Desired and Used for Recreation by People with Disabilities
 - Information on inclines and strenuousness would help with pre-planning
- Water Recreation Such as Splash Pads, Pools and Beaches Are Desired
- Bowling is a Particularly Popular Form of Recreation
- Adult Day Groups Need More Recreation Options
- Walkin' Roll Activities League and the Special Olympics Offer the Most Recreation Opportunities for Individuals with Disabilities
- Individuals with Disabilities Would Love to Volunteer in Areas Like Parks & Recreation
- Fun Park Amenities Should Be Available for Adults with Disabilities...Not Just Kids
- Individuals with Disabilities Would Participate More in Recreation if Just Invited to Do So
 - Many like and could use many amenities typical at parks
- Churches Offer A Lot of Recreation/Social Opportunities That the City Doesn't
- The Community Would Benefit from Being Educated About Common Disabilities
 - This education would include anti-bullying information
 - Safe-community spaces for individuals with disabilities are needed
- Recreation Programs for People with High-Functioning Disabilities are Needed
- Recreation Opportunities for Those with "Invisible Disabilities" Such as Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Would Be Highly Beneficial
- Parks and Recreation Can Play a Bigger Role in Meeting the Social, Recreational, and Educational Needs of Individuals with Disabilities

Additional Engagement Opportunities



Additional engagement opportunities, furnished by the City, included social media posts, a telephone hotline, e-mail invitations, and non-solicited contacts. The following chart represents input received.



<p>More Mountain Bike Trails: Hickory has real potential to be one of the state’s top mountain biking areas/regions. Lake Hickory is a great trail system. Bakers Mountain could be a great place for amazing trails.</p>
<p>Public Beach (Multiple Social Media Posts) & Access to Lake Hickory: Public access is more so for boaters at this point. Swim beaches and paddle boat rentals would be appreciated.</p>
<p>Hickory Needs Pools (Multiple Social Media Posts): Pool at Highland Recreation Center; pool to support a swim team, water polo, white water rafting practice and scuba. Pools in each quadrant.</p>
<p>Focus on Air Quality: Hickory should not allow cars, in parks, to idle as this decreases air quality.</p>
<p>Increase Current Amenities & Programs: Pickleball courts and co-located bathrooms could be increased. Good basketball courts & multiple courts in one location. More areas for tennis, soccer fields and baseball. Lacrosse available for more than one season.</p>
<p>Sports Tourism Additions: Sports Tourism is a financial draw for the community and could benefit from a multi-sport facility that can serve as a competitive and recreational venue. It could include 50m/25y comp pools, volleyball, basketball, softball/baseball, and more.</p>
<p>Light Rail: The City of Hickory should consider a light rail system to connect downtown to Charlotte.</p>
<p>Annexation & Zoning: Zoning appears to prevent walkability between parks. People believe that recent annexations have had a negative impact on citizen ability to recreate.</p>
<p>Bike Lanes: Helpful in diminishing car traffic and increasing bike/foot traffic. Make lanes separate.</p>
<p>Fencing: Fencing at parks to protect kids with special needs.</p>
<p>Concrete Skate Park: Build in lieu of current skate park that often needs repairs.</p>
<p>Recreation Center: Build center at the old Westmont area or across Highway 321 near Longview border.</p>
<p>New Amenities: Sand volleyball courts for all ages;</p>
<p>Splash Pads: Hickory needs more splash pads.</p>

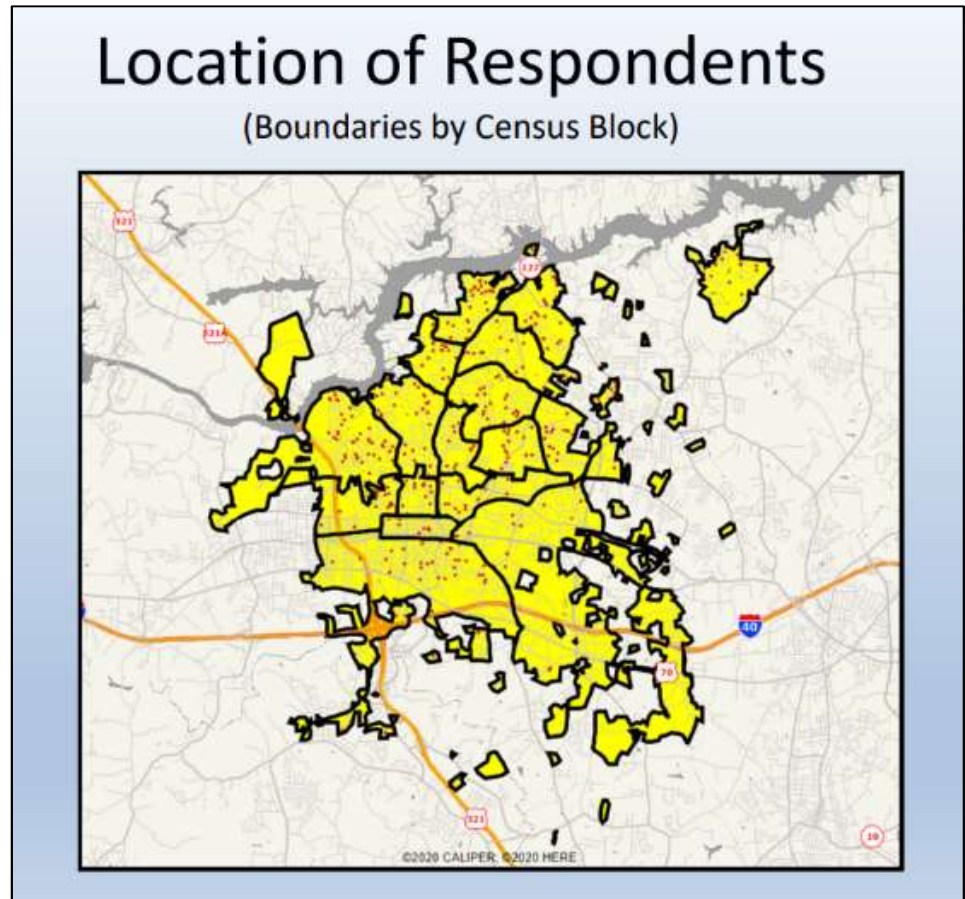
Recreation & Park Needs Assessment Survey



To counter-balance the qualitative nature of public input gathering and to ensure that a representative sample of the citizens were given a formal voice, the City hired an independent consulting company, ETC Institute, to administer

a recreation and parks needs survey. Drawing from the feedback garnered from the community-wide SWOT analysis and benchmark community surveys, a customized survey was created for the citizens of Hickory.

ETC Institute mailed a survey packet to a random sample of households in the City. Citizens were given the option of returning a hard-copy survey by pre-paid envelope or taking it electronically. Language translation and assistance opportunities for individuals with disabilities were made available to ensure that everyone could participate. The goal was to receive a minimum of 400 completed surveys from residents in order for the survey to be statistically valid. Within two weeks, 438 completed surveys were received and the overall results for the same had a precision of at least +/- 4.6 at the 95% level of confidence.



Survey Highlights

There is much that can be extrapolated from the City's recreation and parks needs survey. The community is trending with the nation when it comes to its greatest parks and recreation investment priority...trails... which received the highest priority investment rating and almost doubled the expressed unmet need of pools. Priority investment ratings identify the facilities and programs residents think should receive the highest priority investment, reflect unmet needs and will have the greatest potential to have a positive impact on the most households. *It is important to note that information contained within the comprehensive master plan was taken from the ETC Institute Findings Report and that the City was provided with cross-tabs to assist in future feasibility studies and analysis regarding pursuits based in whole or part on survey findings.*

The top three improvements that citizens reported their greatest willingness to fund were...

- Outdoor amphitheater and event space
- Needed updates at existing parks and recreation facilities
- Development of trails



75% of question respondents were willing, at least in some way, to increase financial support to see parks and recreation improvements. This is an invitation for the City to explore public sentiment further. There was also significant interest in focusing on the updating/improvement of existing parks and facilities. Out of 16 improvement choices, 84% were solidly supportive of pursuing needed park and facility updates and 83% were supportive of developing nature trails. 82% of respondents were also supportive of updating recreation facilities (i.e. recreation centers, etc). 58% reported some need for additional parks and facilities.

With regard to programs, the following are the top four most important programs to residents:

- Outdoor music/concerts (36%)
- Adult fitness and wellness programs (31%)
- Special events/family festivals (21%)
- Aquatic programs (18%) and Outdoor adventure programs (18%)

The chart below depicts a summary of key survey findings that further develop a framework that the City can use for data-driven project selections, budgetary priorities and more.

Findings Report Highlights

Taken from the 2022 Recreation and Parks Needs Survey Findings Report, completed by the ETC Institute, the following information is furnished to assist in highlighting the primary findings and context within which they should be viewed. This compilation is broad and the City has been given additional data in order to perform cross-tabulations as its ability to pursue recommendations is given its normal due diligence. It is important to remember that the survey is based on a random sample of residents and in and of itself, is not authoritative. Its contents should be considered within the broader compilation of public input and various analysis contained within this master plan. With this in mind, the survey indeed is very important to the overall equation and bears notable weight based upon its guarantee of being statistically valid and representative in a way only achievable through its means. A copy of the survey instrument can be found in the Appendix.

Parks/Facilities Most & Least Visited	Facilities/Programs & Events	Top 3 Barriers to Park & Facility Use	Top 3 Facilities/Amenities Most Needed By Households	Misc
Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park / Southside Heights Park	90% of Citizens Have Visited a Park in the Last Year 71% Have Used Trails	People Are Not Aware of What is Available to Them	Nature Trails/Greenways	79% of Survey Respondents See Hickory PR&ST As Their "Go To" for Fun
Lowe's Foods City Park/ West Hickory Park	16% Participation in Programs with 98% Excellent/Good Satisfaction Rating	People Are Not Aware of What is Available to Them Regarding Trails	Water Access (Fishing/Kayaking/Etc)	94% Reported Parks & Rec as an Essential Service
Rotary Geitner Park/ Westmont Recreation Park	13% Participation in Events with 88% Excellent/Good Rating	Too Busy to Participate	Shaded Play & Seating	Most Important Recreation Programs Outdoor Music/Concerts Adult Fitness & Wellness Special Events & Family Festivals

Parks and Recreation Facilities Use

Use of Parks and Recreation Facilities. *Respondents were asked to select all the parks and facilities their household used during the past year.* The most popular parks/facilities (reported as used in the last year) were the Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park (73%), Lowe's Foods City Park (46%), and the Rotary-Geitner Park (41%). Respondents could select more than one park on the corresponding question. Respondents also **visited** Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park (60%), Lowe's Foods City Park (30%), and Rotary-Geitner Park (28%) **most often**. In the past year, respondents said they visited parks and facilities most commonly a few times a month (27%) or every couple of months (27%) followed by 2-3 times a week (23%).

Use of Trails. *Respondents who used greenways* most often accessed them via walking (45%) or driving (42%). In the past year respondents most often used trails 1-5 times (34%) followed by never (30%) and 25 times or more (14%). This is considered to be a positive level of usage that should be paid attention to. Respondents most often said they would like to use trails a few times

a month (34%), a few times a year (24%), or a few times a week (22%). Respondents would most like to access natural areas and open space (83%), parks and playgrounds (61%), and shops/restaurants (53%) via trails.

Barriers to Use. *Respondents were asked to indicate the reasons why they didn't use facilities and parks or didn't use them more often;* multiple selections could be made. The highest number of respondents listed lack of information/didn't know what was offered (43%), lack of information about existing trails (38%), and busy schedules (33%). Forty-nine percent (49%) of respondents can safely walk/bike to a nearby park, trail, or recreation center. *It should be noted that the top two barriers relate to communication. Compared to other barriers typically reported on surveys, this is a more desirable challenge that can be overcome.*

Perspective on Parks and Recreation. *Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with 7 statements regarding Hickory Parks, Recreation, and Sports Tourism.* The highest number of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that public parks add to the quality of life in the community (94%), recreation and park services are an essential service provided by the City (92%), and they are aware of sports tourism opportunities and their positive impact on the local economy (55%). Respondents were then asked to rate their level of agreement with benefits from parks, nature preserves, and trails. Respondents most often agreed or strongly agreed that they provide healthy recreational opportunities (93%), improves quality of life in Hickory (93%), and preserves open space and the environment (92%). Overall, respondents feel the existence of public parks and recreation areas is very important (67%) or important (24%) (91% very important/important). *The City would benefit from communicating these high levels of satisfaction to a broader audience.*

Parks and Recreation Programs Participation

Participation in Programs. *Respondents were asked if they had participated in any Hickory Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism programs within the past year.* Sixteen percent (16%) of respondents said someone in their household had participated. This is lower than average which usually sits at 1 in 3. Those respondents were then asked to rate the overall quality of those programs: most respondents (61%) rated them good, 37% said excellent, and 1% said fair. *98% of respondents rated programs good/excellent which is notable and worth sharing with a broader audience.*

Special Events. Thirteen percent (13%) of *respondents had participated in special events offered by the City of Hickory over the past year.* This participation rate is considered low. Of those respondents, 46% rated the events as good, 42% said excellent, and 12% said fair. *An 88% good/excellent rating is notable and worth sharing with a broader audience.*

Organizations Used for Recreation. *Respondents were asked to select all the organizations that provide parks, facilities, and recreation programs that their household uses.* Most common were the City of Hickory Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism (79%), Catawba County Parks and Recreation (59%), and state or federal parks (52%). Hickory Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism (50%) was most often used by respondents.

Communication Methods. *Respondents most often learned about parks, facilities, and special events from* social media (59%), word of mouth (58%), the city newsletter (53%). Respondents most preferred methods are social media (55%), the city newsletter (52%), or the City of Hickory Recreation and Parks website (34%). *It should be noted that the high percentage of “word of mouth” learning indicates positive communication. The City may benefit from pushing a combination of social media and the newsletter with an intent to also direct individuals to the website. This strategy aligns use and preference.*

Value of Parks and Recreation Allocation of Funds

Need for Parks/Facilities. *Respondents were asked to indicate the level of need for additional parks and facilities in Hickory.* Most respondents (58%) said there was some need and 20% said there was great need. *This data indicates support for some projects though it’s thought that support will be conditional based upon the project proposed versus general support overall.*

Increase in Funding. *Respondents were asked to rate how willing they would be to pay a slight increase in taxes or financial support towards parks and recreation in Hickory.* Most respondents (59%) were either not willing (25%) or only somewhat willing (34%) and 41% were either willing (25%) or very willing (16%). *This equates 75% being willing to help, in some way, overall. It is advised to continue to touch base with citizens on this should the City consider pursuing a bond referendum.*

Support for Improvements/ Developments. *Respondents were provided a list of 16 potential actions to improve parks and recreation.* Respondents were most supportive (selecting “supportive” or “very supportive”) of pursuing needed updates at existing parks and recreation facilities (84%), developing natural trails (83%), and pursuing needed updates at recreational facilities (82%). Respondents were also asked to select the top three improvements they would be most willing to fund. These were the three items selected most often:

1. Develop outdoor amphitheater and event space (30%)
2. Pursue needed updates at existing parks and recreation facilities (27%)
3. Develop natural trails (25%)

Facilities and Amenities Needs and Priorities

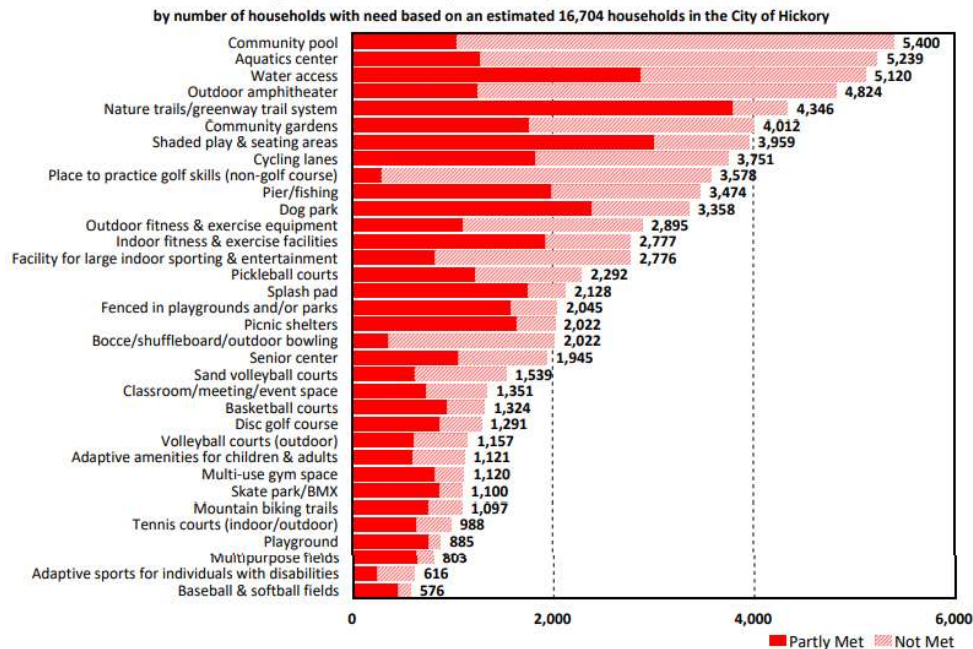
Facility/Amenity Needs: *Respondents were asked to identify if their household had a need for 34 facilities/amenities and to rate how well their needs for each were currently being met.* Based on this analysis, ETC Institute was able to estimate the number of households in the community that had the greatest “unmet” need for various facilities/amenities.

The three facilities/amenities with the highest estimated number of households that have an unmet need:

1. Community Pool – 5,400 households
2. Aquatics center – 5,239 households
3. Water access – 5,120 households

The estimated number of households that have unmet needs for each of the 34 facilities/amenities assessed is shown in the chart below.

Q11c. Estimated Number of Households in Hickory Whose Facility/ Amenity Need Is Only "Partly Met" or "Not Met"



Important Contextual Note from ETC Institute

Amenities that do not currently exist within a community usually show prominence as an unmet need. Consult Priority Investment Ratings for further clarity.

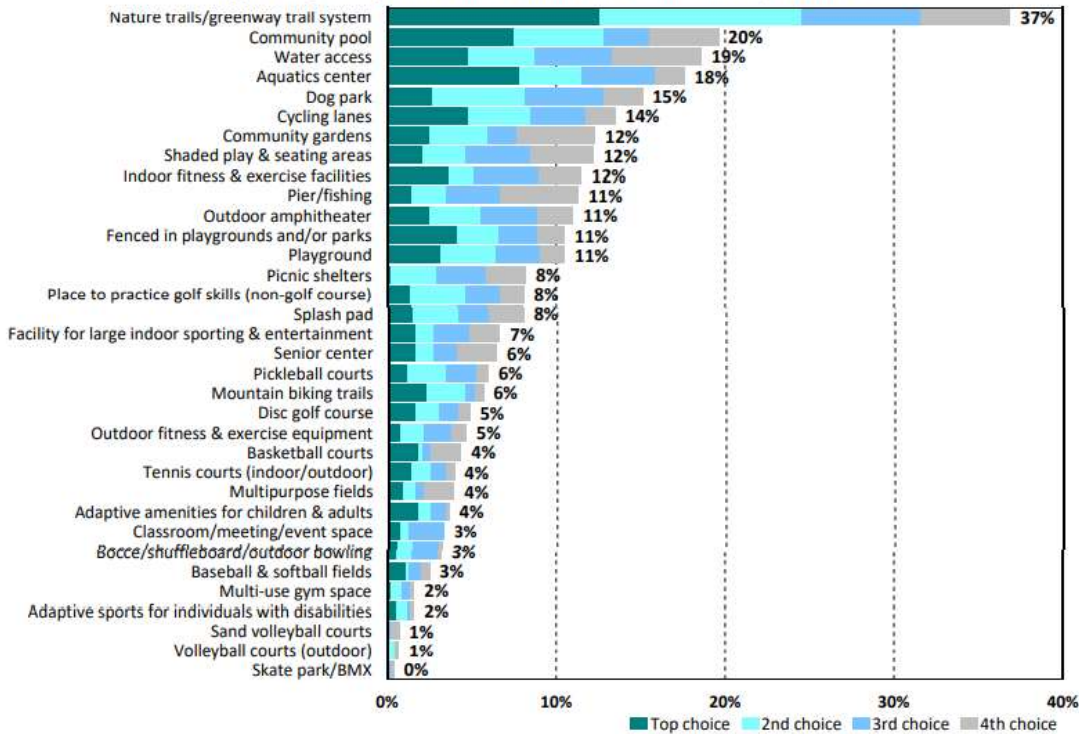
Facilities and Amenities Importance: In addition to assessing the needs for each facility/amenity, ETC Institute also assessed the importance that residents placed on each item. Based on the sum of respondents' top four choices, these were the four most important amenities to residents:

1. Nature trails/greenway trail systems (37%)
2. Community pool (20%)
3. Water access (19%)
4. Aquatics center (18%)

The percentage of residents who selected each facility/amenity as one of their top four choices is shown in the chart below.

Q12. Most Important Facility/Amenity to Households

by percentage of respondents who selected the items as one of their top four choices



Important Contextual Note from ETC Institute

Nature trails and greenways are listed as almost double in importance to pools. This tracks well with current City priorities and national trends. That being said, water-based recreation is clearly a desire for citizens as is seen in the chart above.

Priority Investment Rating Hickory, North Carolina

The **Priority Investment Rating (PIR)** was developed by ETC Institute to provide governments with an objective tool for evaluating the priority that should be placed on parks and recreation investments. The Priority Investment Rating was developed by ETC Institute to identify the facilities and programs residents think should receive the highest priority for investment. The priority investment rating reflects the importance residents place on items (sum of top 4 choices) and the unmet needs (needs that are not met or only partly met) for each facility/program relative to the facility/program that rated the highest overall. In other terms, the PIR puts a face on numbers. Since decisions related to future investments should consider both the level of unmet need and the importance of facilities and programs, the PIR weights each of these components equally.

The PIR reflects the sum of the Unmet Needs Rating and the Importance Rating as shown in the equation below:

$$\text{PIR} = \text{UNR} + \text{IR}$$

For example, if the Unmet Needs Rating for Community Gardens were 98.9 (out of 100) and the Importance Rating for Community Gardens were 21.6 (out of 100), the Priority Investment Rating for Community Gardens would be 120.5 (out of 200).

How to Analyze the Charts:

- **High Priority Areas** are those with a PIR of at least 100. A rating of 100 or above generally indicates there is a relatively high level of unmet need and residents generally think it is important to fund improvements in these areas. Improvements in this area are likely to have a positive impact on the greatest number of households.
- **Medium Priority Areas** are those with a PIR of 50-99. A rating in this range generally indicates there is a medium to high level of unmet need or a significant percentage of residents generally think it is important to fund improvements in these areas.
- **Low Priority Areas** are those with a PIR below 50. A rating in this range generally indicates there is a relatively low level of unmet need and residents do not think it is important to fund improvements in these areas. Improvements may be warranted if the needs of very specialized populations are being targeted.

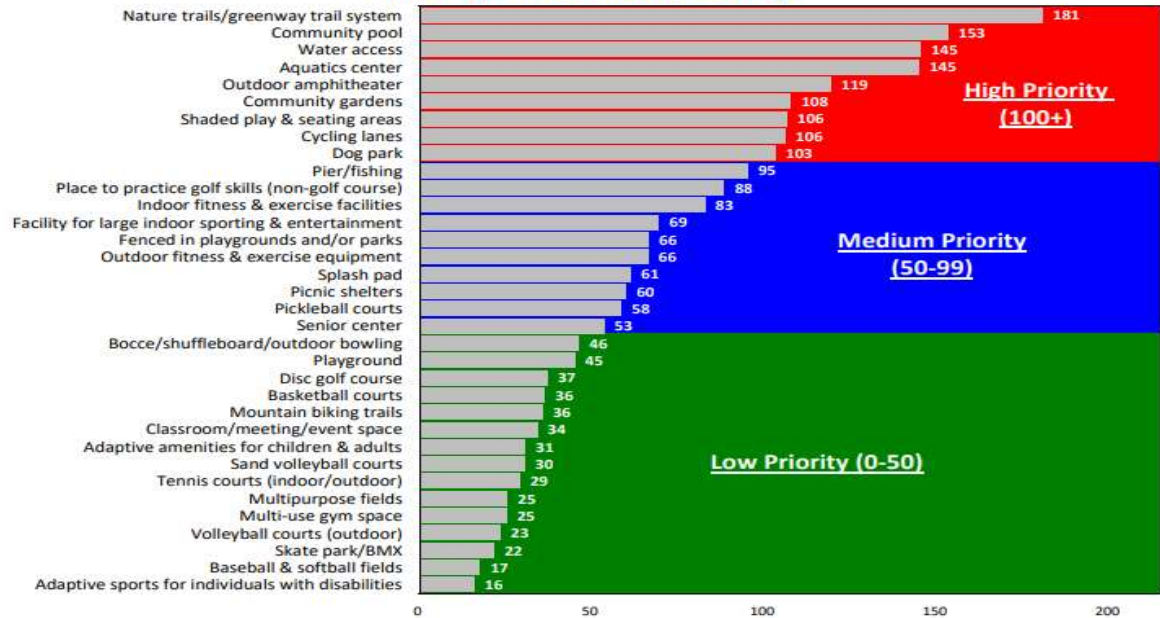
Priorities for Facility Investments: The **Priority Investment Rating (PIR)** was developed by ETC Institute to provide organizations with an objective tool for evaluating the priority that should be placed on recreation and parks investments. The Priority Investment Rating (PIR) equally weights (1) the importance that residents place on amenities/facilities and (2) how many residents have unmet needs for the facility/amenity.

Based the Priority Investment Rating (PIR), the following parks and recreation facilities/amenities were rated as high priorities for investment:

- Nature trails/greenway trail system (PIR=181)
- Community Pool (PIR=153)
- Water access (PIR=145)
- Aquatics center (PIR=145)
- Outdoor amphitheater (PIR=119)
- Community gardens (PIR=108)
- Shaded play and seating areas (PIR=106)
- Cycling lanes (PIR=106)
- Dog park (PIR=103)

The chart below shows the Priority Investment Rating for each of the 34 facilities/amenities assessed on the survey.

Top Priorities for Investment for Facility/Amenity Based on Priority Investment Rating



Important Contextual Note from ETC Institute

Nature trails and greenways can be seen as the clear investment choice. Improvements in this area are likely to have a positive impact on the greatest number of households and be more in line with the City’s strategic goals. Items in green do not necessarily mean not to fund them. These areas often contain the needs of special populations that will not appear in the majority. It is important to include low priority items in planning for this reason.

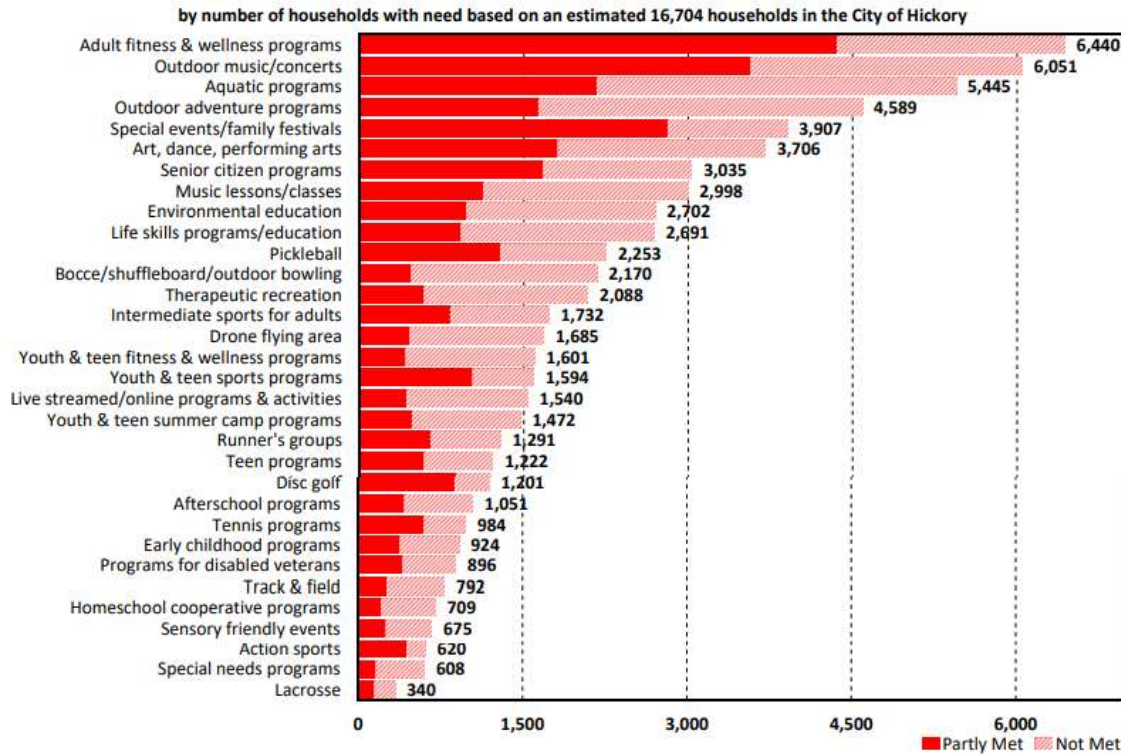
City of Hickory Recreation Program Needs and Priorities

Program Needs: Respondents were asked to identify if their household had a need for 32 programs and to rate how well their needs for each were currently being met. Based on this analysis, ETC Institute was able to estimate the number of households in the community that had the greatest “unmet” need for various facilities/amenities. The three programs with the highest estimated number of households that have an unmet need:

1. Adult fitness and wellness programs – 6,440 households
2. Outdoor music/concerts – 6,051 households
3. Aquatic programs – 5,445 households

The estimated number of households that have unmet needs for each of the 32 recreation programs assessed is shown in the chart below.

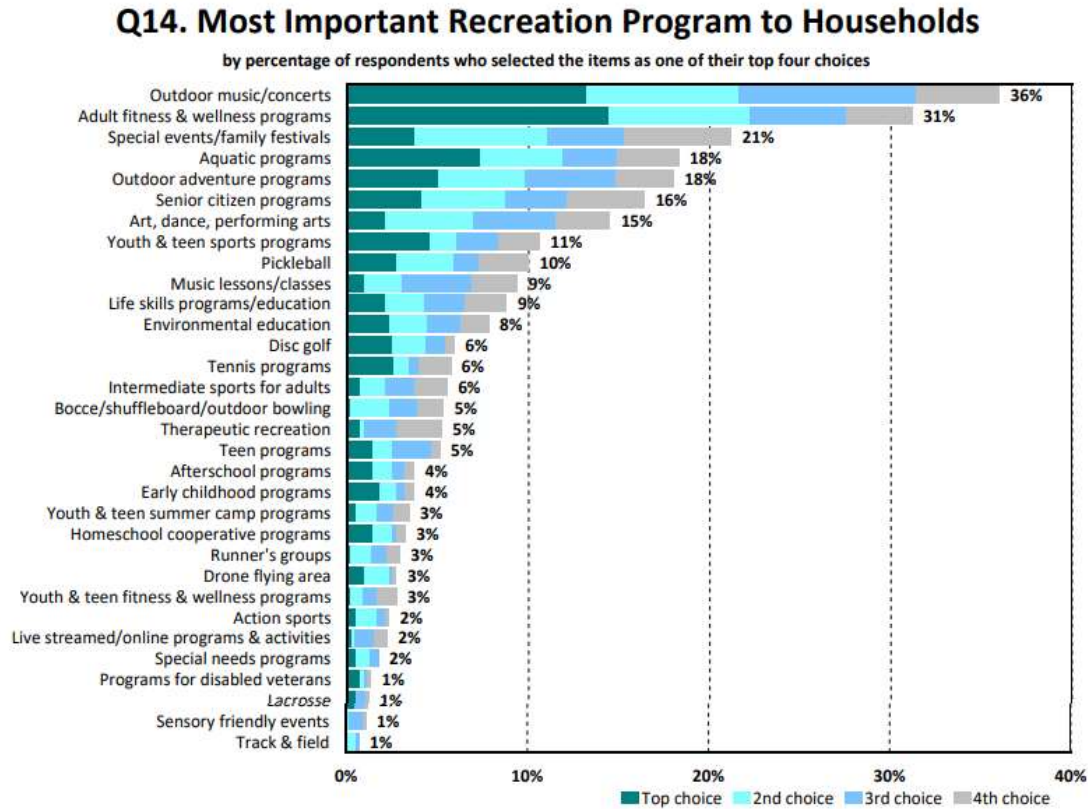
Q13c. Estimated Number of Households in Hickory Whose Recreation Program Needs Are Only "Partly Met" or "Not Met"



Programs Importance: In addition to assessing the needs for each program, ETC Institute also assessed the importance that residents placed on each item. Based on the sum of respondents' top four choices, these are the four most important programs to residents:

1. Outdoor music/concerts (36%)
2. Adult fitness and wellness programs (31%)
3. Special events/family festivals (21%)
4. Aquatic programs (18%)
5. Outdoor adventure programs (18%)

The percentage of residents who selected each program as one of their top four choices is shown in the chart below.



Important Contextual Note from ETC Institute

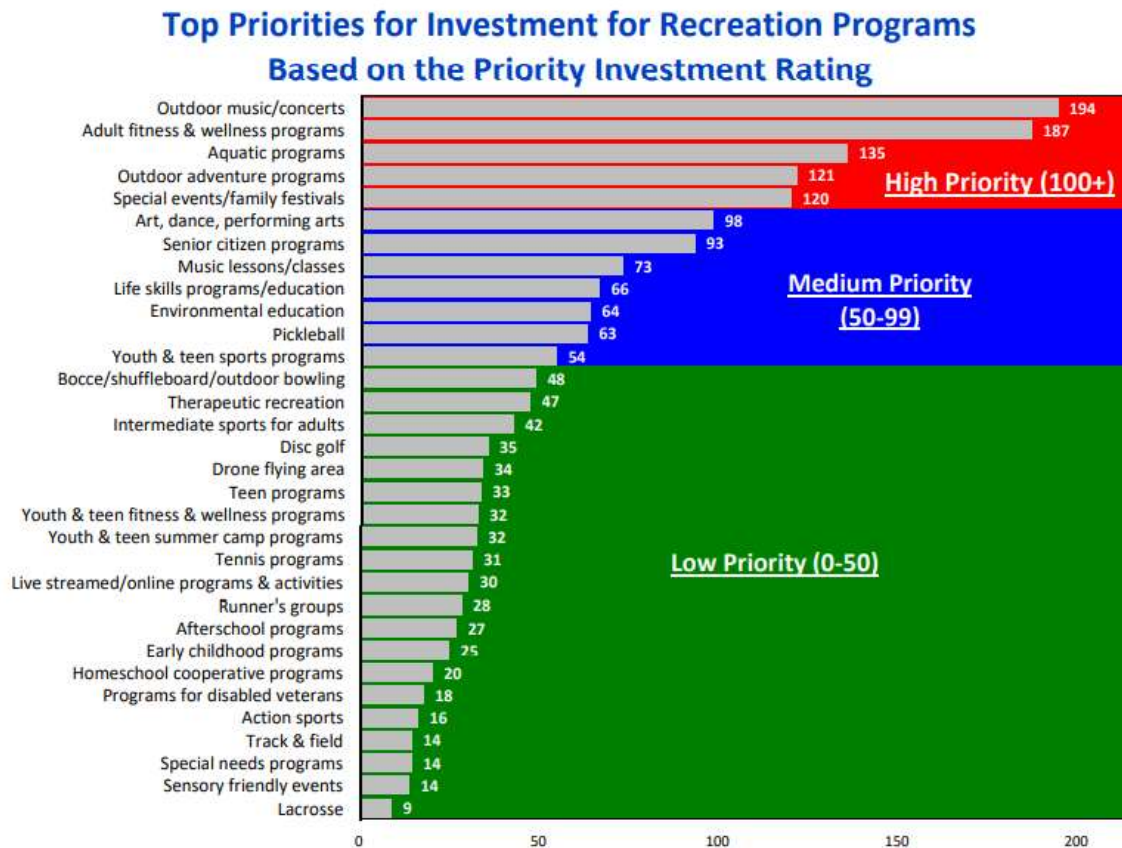
Regardless of age or ability, the top seven programs represent the majority of the community.

Priorities for Program Investments: The **Priority Investment Rating (PIR)** was developed by ETC Institute to provide organizations with an objective tool for evaluating the priority that should be placed on recreation and parks investments. The Priority Investment Rating (PIR) equally weights (1) the importance that residents place on each program and (2) how many residents have unmet needs for the program.

Based the Priority Investment Rating (PIR), the following City of Hickory programs were rated as high priorities for investment:

- Outdoor music/concerts (PIR=194)
- Adult fitness & wellness programs (PIR=187)
- Aquatic programs (PIR=135)
- Outdoor adventure programs (PIR=121)
- Special events/family festivals (PIR=120)

The chart below shows the Priority Investment Rating for each of the 32 programs assessed



Important Contextual Note from ETC Institute

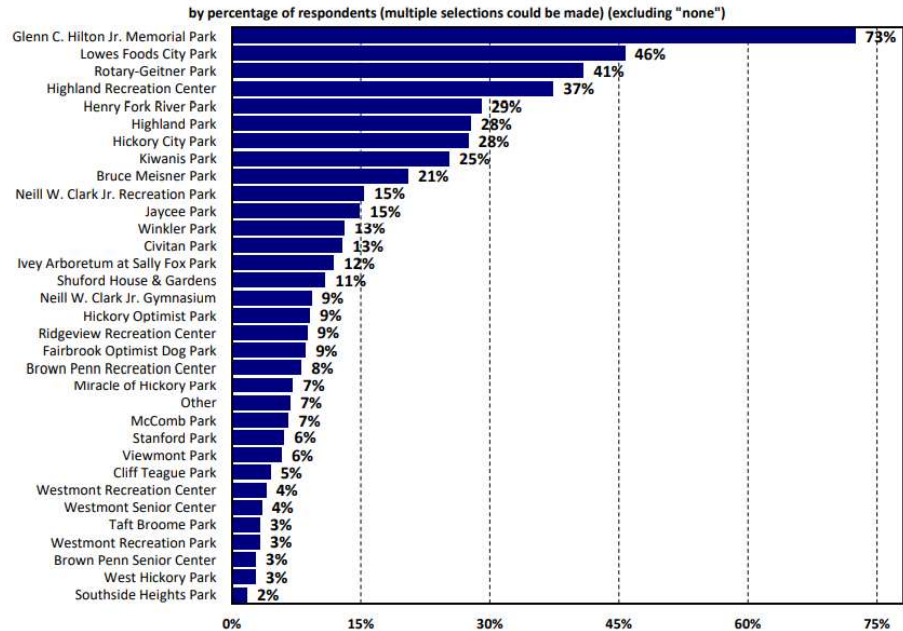
Items in green do not necessarily indicate that a community should not fund them. These areas often contain the needs of special populations that will not ever appear in the majority. It is important to assess and include low priority items in planning for this reason.

Summary of Open-ended Responses

Nine survey questions featured an opportunity for open-ended responses. A treasure trove of useful feedback was garnered for present and future consideration. Present consideration items were forwarded to appropriate City leadership for immediate analysis and action as appropriate. Future considerations are factored into this master plan and also remain a reference for City leadership and staff as they implement the master plan itself. Below is a listing of questions along with a summary of notables, obtained through key word-searches and observations, from feedback received.

Q1—“Other”: Please CHECK ALL of the following City of Hickory Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department parks and facilities that you or other members of your household have used in the past 12 months.

Q1. Parks or Facilities Households Have Used During the Past Year



Open ended responses to this question indicated that City Walk is being viewed as a City of Hickory Parks, Recreation and Sports Tourism facility. They also confirmed a need to educate the public on which facilities are owned and operated by the City of Hickory versus Catawba County and beyond.

Q1c—“What improvements or additions would you like to see made to the parks you and the members of your household visit most often?”

Over 210 individual entries, from this question, provided a helpful amount of present and future oriented feedback. 36 points of key feedback were shared regarding trails of which most were asking for more. Other trail feedback included increased maintenance and locations for additional trails such as Bruce Meisner Park, along waterfronts and attached to the urban system. Bathroom maintenance, updating, availability for use and additions to some parks such as Civitan and Jaycee Park were mentioned, a combined amount, of 27 times. Handicap parking and accessibility related suggestions were reported a combined 8 times while “more pickleball” was asked for 5 times. There was a notable interest in increased safety/security in parks with citizens mentioning a desire to see greater police presence (9) and cameras. Safety and security were mentioned a combined 9 times with some concern expressed specifically about Zahra Baker Park and break-ins at the time of the survey. A desire to have staff, as an assigned presence at the parks, was noted by more than one citizen. These findings were furnished to the Chief of Police during the review process. A variety of maintenance items were contained within this section and were forwarded to the Director of Public Services for further evaluation/action. Among those items, the wooden boardwalk at Glenn Hilton Park was mentioned frequently as well as a need for overall cleanliness. Though this section focused on improvements and additions, several citizens took the opportunity to express

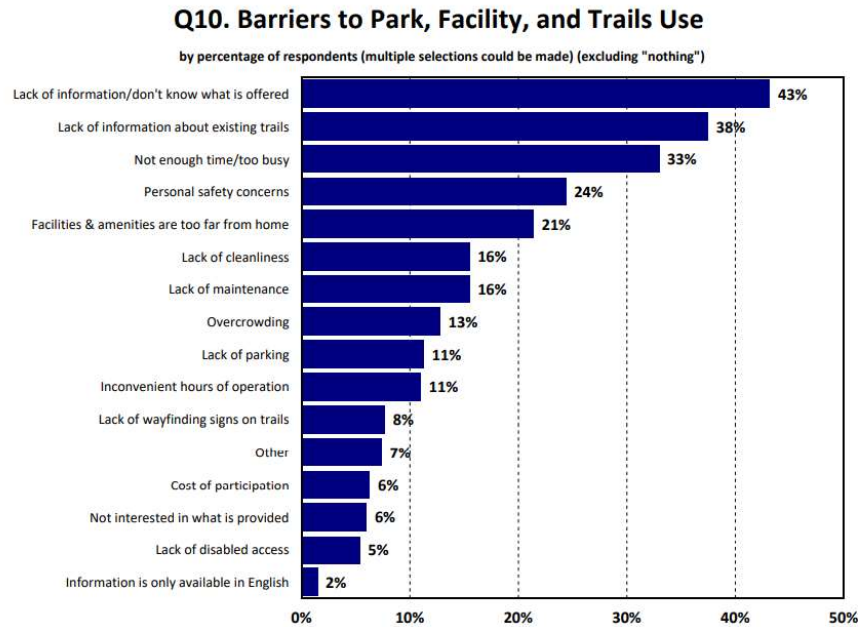
their positive satisfaction noting the adequacy of what they had and noticeable improvements seen in the area of park maintenance.

Some frequent and/or unique suggestions from citizens:

- Give residents first choice to reserve (i.e. shelters, etc)
- More splash pads
- Maps at each park, listing all other parks available
- West Hickory Park and the Westmont Gym need attention
- Signage alerting park users to food/drink guidelines for food allergy safety
- More disability friendly equipment, including fenced in play areas for elopement
- Fix flooding issues at Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park
- Full time park attendants
- Accessible swimming at Lake Hickory
- Connectivity from park to park (bike lanes and expansion of urban trails)
- Ability to reach a park by walking from home
- Water features/splash pads at Glenn Hilton...
- Events and vendor nights in parks
- Paddle ball court
- Walking trails in plain view
- Lighting on trails and key park areas for increased safety
- Changing rooms at splash pads
- Community greenhouse
- Use of native plants in lieu of grass
- Increased wayfinding signage in parks
- More disc golf
- More parks with playgrounds for kids older than 10+ years
- More places to fish
- More fun for toddlers
- More social media marketing for park class offerings/make website more user friendly
- Pools
- Groups for Advanced Age
- Collaborations with Black Greek Chapters to increase programming geared toward mental/physical health and civic engagement

Q10—“Other”: Please CHECK ALL of the following reasons that may prevent you or other members of your household from using the parks, facilities, and trails offered by the City of Hickory Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department (or, if you currently use them, what prevents you from using them more often)

Among responses given to this question, 31% cited personal health issues. Transportation and/or lack of sidewalks and parking, combined, accounted for 23%.



Q18—“Non-profit organizations”: Please CHECK ALL of the following organizations that provide the PARKS, FACILITIES, and RECREATION PROGRAMS that you and other members of your household use.

Of choices given in this question, the YMCA was the non-profit organization most noted. The remaining entries portrayed a variety of organizations such as the Catawba Lands Conservancy (Carolina Thread Trail), local sororities and fraternities, the Hickory Music Factory and more.

Q18—“Private clubs”: Please CHECK ALL of the following organizations that provide the PARKS, FACILITIES, and RECREATION PROGRAMS that you and other members of your household use.

Of private clubs listed by respondents, the Lake Hickory Country Club received 25% of the responses with a variety of private clubs listed.

Q18—“Fitness Centers”: Please CHECK ALL of the following organizations that provide the PARKS, FACILITIES, and RECREATION PROGRAMS that you and other members of your household use.

Top 3

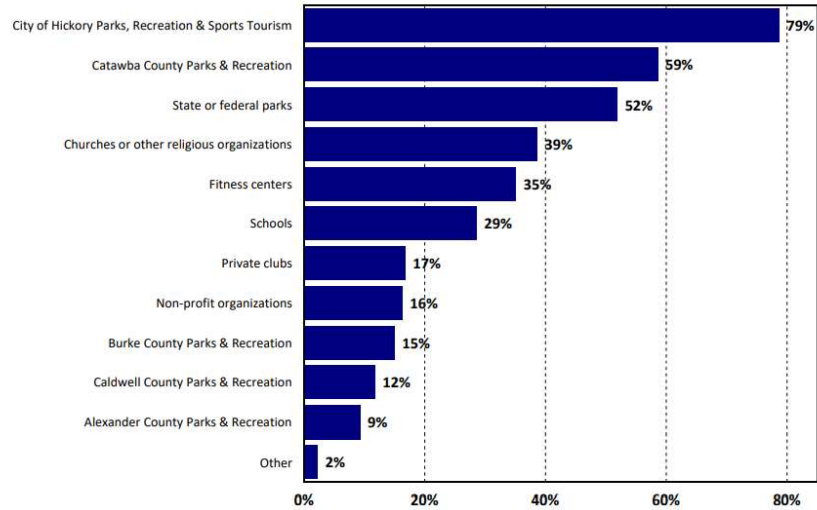
- YMCA=16
- Planet Fitness=11
- Highland Rec=8

Q18—“Other”: Please CHECK ALL of the following organizations that provide the PARKS, FACILITIES, and RECREATION PROGRAMS that you and other members of your household use

In this general category, the YMCA was listed along with private schools, private property, CVYSA and yoga studios.

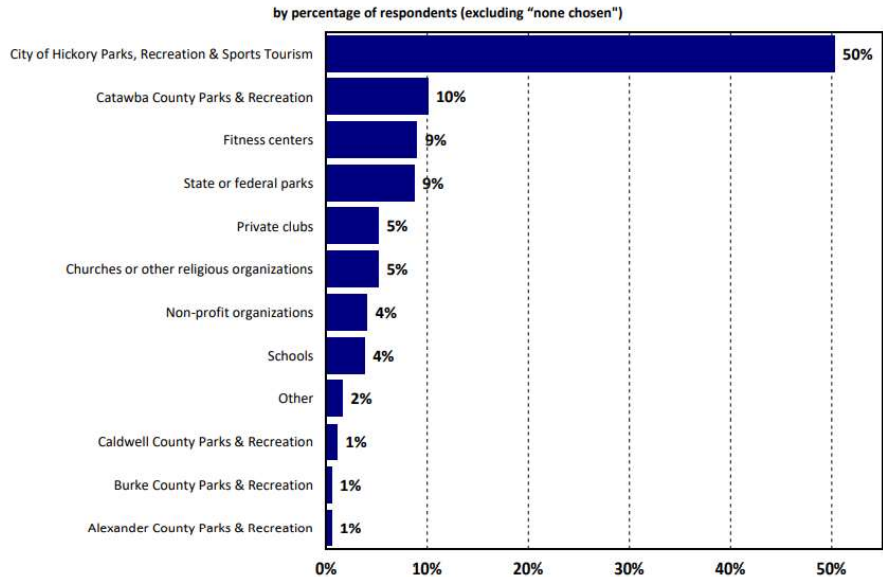
Q18. Organizations that provide the PARKS, FACILITIES, and RECREATION PROGRAMS that households use.

by percentage of respondents (multiple selections could be made) (excluding "none of these")



Q19a—“Please provide a reason for your response to Question 19”: Of the organizations listed in Question 18, which ONE do you USE MOST for your household's recreation needs?

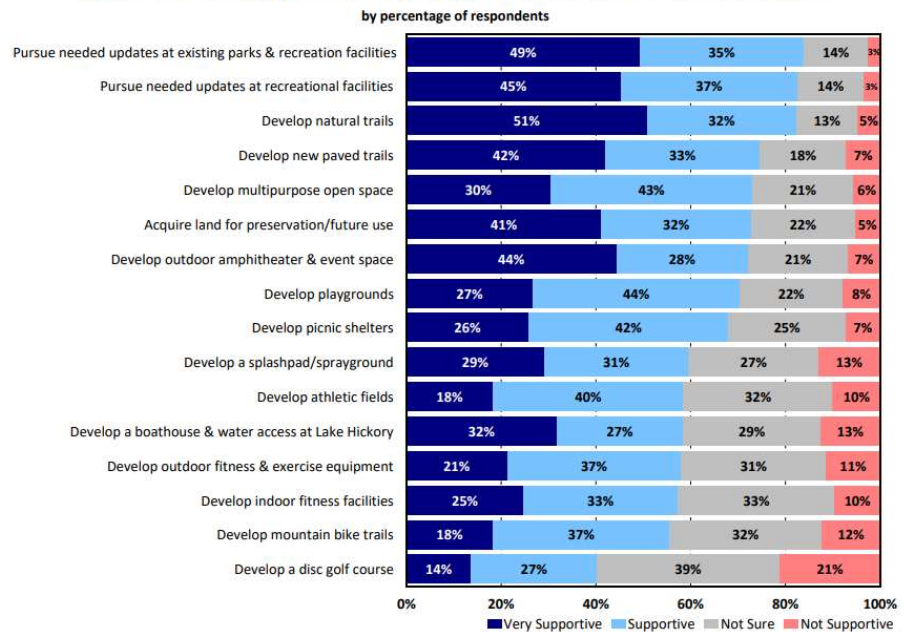
Q19. Of the organizations listed in Question 18, which ONE do you USE MOST for your household's recreation needs?



Among the many reasons cited for choosing an organization as used the most, the most frequently cited reason was that of convenience and proximity. Over 30% of respondents reported this as a factor. There was not a close second in reasoning.

Q20—“Other”:
Please indicate how supportive you would be of the City of Hickory taking the following actions to improve the parks and recreation system in the City.

Q20. Level of Support for Improvements to Parks and Recreation



8 citizens expressed support for a pool with two mentions of an aquatic center and 2 of swimming. Other helpful points of feedback included support for the

improvement and integration of natural habitats, healthy living among young adults, bus service to parks, lake access for everyone, an adopt a park program and police officers at every park.

Community Collaboration Conclusion

The multi-pronged approach to community collaboration resulted in data that can be used for years to come. Not only did it provide a pulse on existing conditions but it also provided key information for data-driven decision making. Multiple elements from this section have been used throughout the master plan and inform the recommendations and action plan that appear in this document.

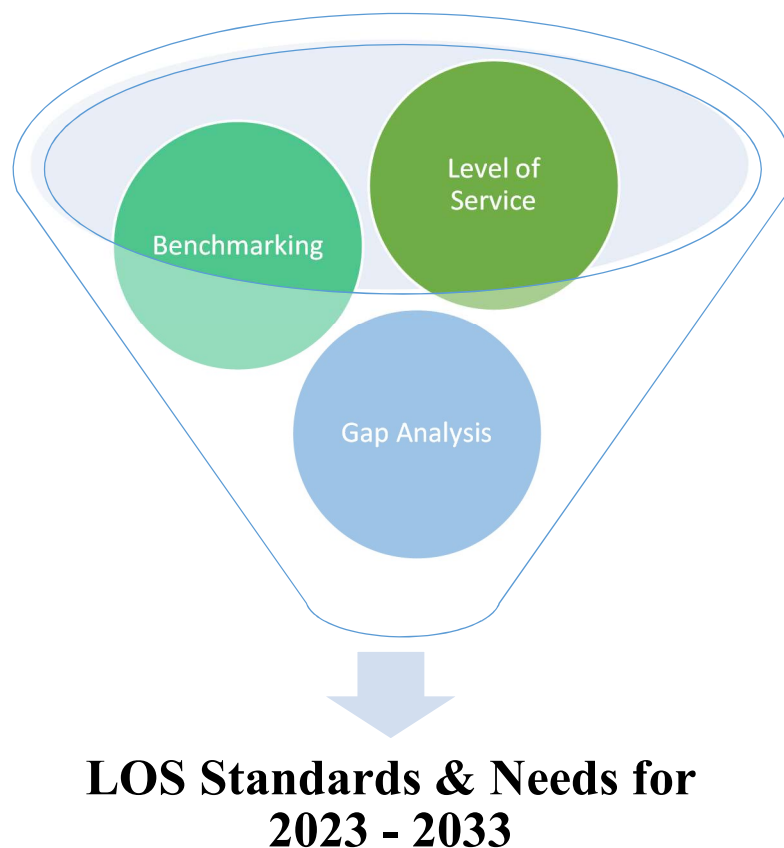


An Integrated Look: Benchmarking & Levels of Service

An integrated look at benchmarking and levels of service helps to set the trajectory for the next 10 years by looking at both present performance and its potential for the future. Performance is often associated with access to parks, trails, amenities, facilities, programs and services. This analysis of performance then translates to proposed and flexible local targets or standards that act as a guidepost to maintain strengths, fill service gaps or take the community towards its recreation ideal.

This integrated section of the master plan will feature quantitative data which is meant to mesh with qualitative knowledge obtained via public input gathering, stakeholder interviews and subject-specific analysis compiled during the plan's writing. This integration can then be considered as substantive guidance that can be used by leadership and staff, moving forward. It also informs the recommendations and action plan that follow.

In order to identify strengths and gaps in service rendered by the PR&ST Department and related Public Services divisions within the park system, both a benchmarking and level of service analysis were conducted as part of the master planning process.



The following chart briefly describes the nature and purpose of each analysis along with their connection to a national peer review performed by the National Recreation & Park Association.

Benchmarking Analysis	Level of Service Analysis
<p>A look at what other, similar, jurisdictions (aka Peer Communities) offer in the region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparison of data reveals areas of distinction and those needing expansion • Informs proposed level of service standards recommended which include park acreage, trail miles, amenities and more • Contributes to recommendations regarding maintenance, operations, programming and administration 	<p>A look at what the City of Hickory offers and will need to consider offering in the next 10 years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on current population which becomes a proposed baseline standard for future planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Considers population projections for further planning points • Calculates possible deficits or surpluses in parkland, amenities and facilities based on the population of the jurisdiction • Draws from the inventory of existing parks and facilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Synthesizes benchmarking data, national “standards” and staff input • Creates proposed level of service standards that reflect the needs of parks and recreation for the duration of the comprehensive master plan

National Peer Review, Standards & Best Practices
<p>A look at statistics garnered from parks and recreation agencies across the country.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data used to analyze current service levels & future needs • Acts in place of former NRPA Standards last updated in 1995 • Gauges best practices

The integrated analysis aims to help the City make useful comparisons to communities with similar population sizes and characteristics or the aspirational versions of such. It is important to note that such communities have their own unique circumstances and contexts however, this methodology uses statistical components recognized, nationally, as being effective in comparing “apples to apples” or exploring future opportunities. Having the resulting information will assist leadership



with creating more objective ways to evaluate assets, make informed decisions, set goals and avoid subjectivity to the extent possible. Ultimately, the outcome of this analysis will contribute to the City’s proposed and flexible level of service “standards” that can used for the next 10 years of crafting recreation. It is important to note that while comparisons to national and regional benchmarks are crucial to this analysis, the unique character and needs of the City of Hickory will be enveloped in the final recommendations. *Not meeting a particular benchmark, in some cases, is a cause for considering some form of change while in others can be considered “not applicable” based on the context of Hickory itself.*

Important to Note: During the life of this master plan, the population of the City of Hickory is projected to surpass the NRPA’s jurisdiction benchmark range of 20,000 to 49,999. Population projections indicate that by 2035, the City of Hickory will have approximately 52,230 citizens which infers that the transition to a new NRPA jurisdiction benchmark range will occur approximately at the 2033 plan sunset.

	Hickory Population & Projections	
2020 Census	43,490	
2030 Population Projections	49,274	13.3% Increase
2035 Population Projections	52,230	6% Increase

Benchmarking Analysis Sources

The benchmarking analysis was performed using jurisdictions recognized by the City of Hickory as Peer Communities. Population size, department make-up, strategic goals, community context, benchmarks, best practices and similar aspirations were among the reasons for choosing each location. The City of Hickory regularly looks at these communities as part of big-picture planning, which includes parks, recreation and sports tourism quality of life initiatives. Electronic questionnaires, interviews and online searches were used to obtain peer data. To normalize data, per population rates were used as is standard in parks and recreation master planning.



The City of Hickory recognizes the following jurisdictions as peer or aspirant communities for this master plan. Wilson NC and Roanoke VA are CAPRA accredited.

<p>Holly Springs, NC Population: 41,239 Acres of Parkland: 409 Miles of Trail: 18</p> <p>Mission Statement: To promote participation and develop public awareness of the benefits of Parks and Recreation and leisure services to enhance the quality of life for the individual, community and society.</p>	<p>Roanoke, VA Population: 100,011 Acres of Parkland: 1,360 Miles of Trail: 100</p>  <p>Mission Statement: Build a welcoming community through play.</p>
<p>Wilson, NC Population: 47,851 Acres of Parkland: 400 Miles of Trail: 7.5</p>  <p>Mission Statement: We strive to provide unsurpassed services and recreational activities to better enhance the quality of life of all citizens of our community with a central theme of growth, fitness, and recreation.</p>	<p>Johnson City, TN Population: 71,046 Acres of Parkland: 634 Miles of Trail: 22.11</p> <p>Mission Statement: To enhance the quality of life of our citizens and to ensure we create an environment where we can all grow and thrive.</p>
<p>Burlington, NC Population: 57,303 Acres of Parkland: 750 Miles of Trail: 9.33</p> <p>Mission Statement: To connect diverse and dynamic public spaces and programs which grow, inspire and create inclusive social interaction through land, water and people.</p>	<p>Rock Hill, SC (Sports Tourism) Population: 74,732 Acres of Parkland: 595 Miles of Trail: 34</p> <p>Mission Statement: To provide a wholesome program of leisure, recreational, tourism and cultural opportunities and facilities to enhance the quality of life for Rock Hill residents and visitors.</p>
<p>Danville, VA Population: 42,590 Acres of Parkland: 753.5 Miles of Trail: 39.5</p> <p>Mission Statement: Engaging community and enhancing lives through people, places and services.</p>	

Population Based on 2020 Census

For Further Insight

The City of Hickory participates, annually in the UNC School of Government Benchmarking Project which provides quantitative comparisons to both peer and non-peer jurisdictions. For in-state comparisons, UNC School of Government quasi-peer data from the FY 20/21 UNC School of Government (UNC SOG) Benchmarking Project was also used to provide additional insights. These numbers were not, however, factored into Level of Service standards. The UNC project was established in 1995 to allow municipalities to compare their service and performance trends with other participating units. Data from fiscal years 2017 through 2021 were available for use in this analysis. Current partners include Apex, Chapel Hill, Concord, Charlotte, Goldsboro, Greensboro, Greenville, Hickory, Raleigh, Wilson, and Winston-Salem. These broader comparisons were considered due to Hickory’s dual role as a metro-statistical hub and its daytime population which is estimated to see, on average, over 165,000 visits of at least 30 minutes every



day...some to parks and recreation offerings. It is important to note that the COVID 19 global pandemic directly affected 2020 and 2021 numbers. The City of Hickory population used for the UNC SOG analysis was derived from the 2020 North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM) population estimate of 43,578. All other analysis in this comprehensive master plan was based on the 2020 US Census population number for Hickory of 43,490. “Core Parks & Recreation” is defined as: Parks, multi-purpose recreation facilities, athletic facilities, greenways, trails, programs and events.



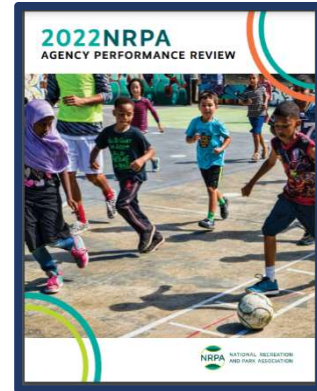
For Further Insight

In order to work better within the context of the City, ETC Institute performed a benchmark analysis in relation to the Recreation and Parks Needs Survey derived from ETC Institute surveys administered to comparable communities, across the United States from October 2020 to the time of the City’s survey in 2022. Resulting information was also considered as insight for this analysis.



A Jurisdictional Comparison that Spans Across the Country

The 2022 National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA) Agency Performance Review was consulted for this section's analysis. Comparisons were made between the City of Hickory and jurisdictions with populations residing within Hickory's current range. To gauge potential gaps that may occur by plan sunset, an analysis using Hickory's 2035 projected population was also performed. The City of Hickory had the benefit of using data, derived from over 1,000 agencies, to perform this analysis. The NRPA Agency Performance Review is a staple resource for parks and recreation professionals.



A Note on Level of Service Calculations...Local Standards & Median Values

Level of service calculations help to pin-point potential shortcomings and excesses associated with parks and recreation systems and their offerings. Park acreage, trail mileage and amenities are commonly calculated based on a rate per 1,000 residents and indoor facility space is normally calculated using a per capita rate (rate per 1 resident). The National Recreation and Park Association's approach (this methodology) assists with the creation of local targets or standards. When facilitating peer comparisons, 2020 US Census population numbers were used to maintain continuity. It is also important to note that median values were focused upon. A median is calculated by taking the middle value, the value for which half of the observations are larger and half are smaller. Medians are the most informative measure of central tendency (single value representative of an entire distribution) especially when there are outliers or potential skews in numbers. The use of medians helped to navigate variations in population size among peers.

Integrated Analysis

The following color codes assist in identifying the types of benchmarks and/or levels of service analyzed within this integrated analysis. Chosen as the most salient within a broader range of data sets, National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA) jurisdictional data and Peer Community data are displayed together along with UNC School of Government benchmarks for insight where applicable. ETC Institute benchmarking data is also provided for additional context. Data affecting the Level of Service proposals at the end of this section consists of current levels of service for the City, informed by NRPA and Peer data as well as input garnered during the planning process. Data sets, by design, are not used uniformly throughout this section.

2022 National Recreation & Park Association Agency Performance Review (National)



Peer Community Benchmarks (Regional Level) – Key Measurement Areas Only
(Key Measurement Areas Only)

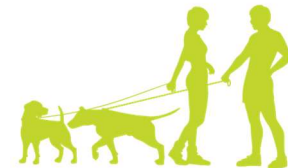


UNC School of Government Benchmarks (Additional Insights from the State Level)
(Key Measurement Areas Only)



Parks, Amenities, Trails & Facilities

Knowing the level of citizen access to parks, amenities, trails and facilities can help the City to determine if what is offered is enough to meet current and future needs. If it is found that appropriate citizen access cannot be sustained, additional property, amenities, trails or facilities may need to be acquired or developed. A look at peer jurisdictions can further refine the City’s sense of which needs are met or should be projected after the subsequent conduct of a feasibility study, planning and eventual financing. The following sections take a deeper dive into how the City looks at this time and could look in the future.



Parks

In order to determine how much park acreage residents have access to, a rate of acres of parkland per 1,000 residents is the industry’s way of measuring. This comparison was made on a national and peer community level. To further inform an assessment of how the City is keeping up with growth, a national look at residents per park was taken. Per population numbers account only for park acreage in use (in whole or in part in a given park).

Acres of Parkland per 1,000 Residents

	2020 Population	Projected Population *
NRPA Jurisdiction Population Median Benchmark for Hickory	10.6 Acres Per 1,000	9.2 Acres Per 1,000
Hickory	13.15	10.95
Difference	2.55 Above Median	1.75 Above Median

Based on 572 Acres
 Population NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range: 20,000-49,999
 2020 Population: U.S. Census Population of 43,490
 Projected NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range at Plan Sunset: 50,000-99,999
 Projected Population for 2035 of 52,230*
 Calculation: acres/population x 1,000

Findings

The City of Hickory is above median with regard to acres of parkland per 1,000 residents and will remain so even after it is measured by new National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA) Jurisdiction Population Range numbers at plan sunset. The City's current acreage actually exceeds both the current median for communities with more than 250,000 people and even if not increased, will remain above that median in 2035. This suggests no need to increase park acreage within the next 10 years *if the City is strictly looking at how it compares to the median of communities measured across the country.*

Residents Per Park

	2020 Population	Projected Population*
NRPA Jurisdiction Population Median Benchmark for Hickory	1,941	2,516
Hickory	1,611	1,934
Difference	330 Below Median	582 Below Median

Based on 27 parks.

Population NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range: 20,000-49,999

2020 Population: U.S. Census Population of 43,490

Projected NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range at Plan Sunset: 50,000-99,999

Projected Population for 2035 of 52,230*

Findings

The City of Hickory is 330 below median when it comes to residents per park. It will remain below median by 582 when measured by new NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range numbers, assuming that the number of parks remains constant. This implies that there is room for growth, in a general sense, at Hickory parks. This does not account for actual park usage and uneven usage patterns but does, however, support the implementation of strategies to increase the use of underutilized parks in order to more evenly distribute system usage. Per population numbers account only for parkland in use (in whole or in part in a given park). Peer departments may include acres used for alternate means or that are considered open space for future development. This also applies to the calculations below.

Park Acreage per 1,000 Residents

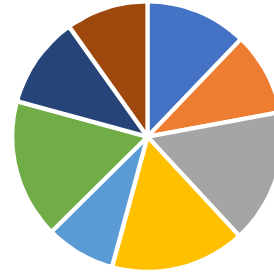
Peer Cities	Acres	Population	Acres of Parkland per 1,000 Residents
Holly Springs, NC	409	41,239	9.92
Wilson, NC	400	49,310	8.11
Burlington, NC	750	57,303	13.09
Hickory, NC	572	43,490	13.15
Danville, VA	290	42,590	6.81
Roanoke, VA	1,360	100,011	13.60
Johnson City, TN	634	71,046	8.92
Rock Hill, SC	595	74,102	8.03
		Median	9.42

Based on 2020 US Census Populations & Acreage Reported by Peer Communities

Findings

The median rate for acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, among Hickory's peer group, is 9.42. The City of Hickory is 3.73 acres above the median acreage and ranks as the second highest in park acreage. Roanoke Virginia ranks highest among peers with only .45 more acres per 1,000 while Danville Virginia ranks lowest with 6.34 acres between it and the City. Among its peers, the City of Hickory appears firm with regard to residential access to parks.

Acres Per 1,000 Residents



- Holly Springs 9.92 ■ Wilson 8.11 ■ Burlington 13.09
- Hickory 13.15 ■ Danville 6.81 ■ Roanoke 13.60
- Johnson City 8.92 ■ Rock Hill 8.03

Amenities

In order to create a target/standard for the number of amenities the City of Hickory should provide, amenities were calculated per 1,000 population. Peer community numbers were used to create the benchmarking median. This information will contribute to the City's overall level of service picture.

Amenities	Hickory Actual	Hickory Amenities Per 1,000 Population	Peer Community Benchmarking Median	Median Units Per 1,000 Population
Playgrounds	40	.92	23	.47
Inclusive Playgrounds	4	.09	2	.03
Baseball/Softball Fields	12	.28	16	.27
Soccer Fields	11	.25	15.5	.27
Basketball Courts	18	.41	12	.19
Tennis Courts	13	.30	14.5	.31
Pickleball Courts	17	.39	13.5	.19
Picnic Shelters	19	.44	20.5	.40
Turf Fields	3	.07	1.5	.03
Volleyball Courts	4	.09	2	.04
Indoor Facilities	Hickory	Hickory Indoor Facilities Per 1,000 Population	Benchmarking Median	Median Units Per 1,000 Population
Recreation Centers	3	.07	4.5	.08
Gymnasium	5	.11	2	.04
Senior Center	2	.05	1	.02
Activity Building	3	.07	0	0

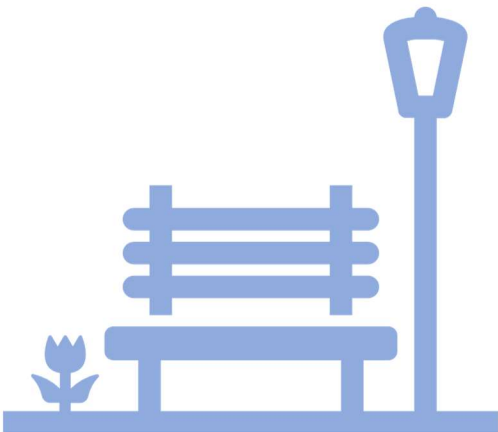
Trails*	Hickory	Hickory Trails Per 1,000 Population	Benchmarking Median	Median Units Per 1,000 Population
Unpaved	6.77 Miles	.16	12.1	.21
Paved	13.11 Miles	.30	12.05	.27
Mountain Bike Trails (Counted as Unpaved for Hickory)	5.69 Miles	.13	4.85	.1
Total Miles (19.88 Rounded Up)	20	.46	22.5	.46
Other Amenities	Hickory	Hickory Amenities Per 1,000 Population	Benchmarking Median	Median Units Per 1,000 Population
Splash Pads	1	.02	1.5	.03
Community Gardens	2	.05	1	.02
Skate Park	1	.02	1	.01
Amphitheater	0	0	2.5	.04
Lake Access (Beaches/Boat Launches, etc.)	3	.07	2.5	.06
Disc Golf	1	.02	1.5	.02

Based on data provided by Peer Communities. Wilson NC and Rock Hill Data unavailable for this analysis.

*Does not include internal walking trails/loops or sidewalk segment of Carolina Thread Trail known as the Hickory Greenway.

Findings

When examining the 24 benchmark amenities above, the City of Hickory is at or above median on 17 (71%). Hickory trails its peers notably in unpaved trails and amphitheaters and was found to be slightly under in soccer fields, tennis courts, recreation centers, total trail miles, and splash pads.



Athletic Fields per 10,000 Population

Counts number of formal athletic fields, including rectangular fields, diamond fields, and non-designated fields. Natural and turf fields included.

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020*	2021*
Hickory	6.18	6.15	6.11	5.55	5.28
Average	3.87	4.04	3.97	4.06	3.91

Based on UNC School of Government Benchmarking Project Performance and Cost Data for FY 20/21
Comparison of Apex, Chapel Hill, Charlotte, Concord, Goldsboro, Greensboro, Greenville, Hickory, Raleigh, Wilson and Winston Salem North Carolina. *Global Pandemic

When compared to municipalities taking part in the UNC School of Government Benchmarking Project, the City of Hickory was seen as consistently above average on athletic fields per 10,000 population. This above average offering is compared to municipalities with populations as small as 34,156 and as large as 468,977. Hickory shows above average access to athletic fields within its borders.

Playgrounds per 10,000 Population

Playgrounds relative to the population. More than one playground can be located in a given park.

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020*	2021*
Hickory	9.89	9.84	9.77	9.66	9.18
Average	4.11	4.16	3.33	3.40	3.22

Based on UNC School of Government Benchmarking Project Performance and Cost Data for FY 20/21
Comparison of Apex, Chapel Hill, Charlotte, Concord, Goldsboro, Greensboro, Greenville, Hickory, Raleigh, Wilson and Winston Salem North Carolina. *Global Pandemic

The City of Hickory is seen as well above average with regard to the number of playgrounds it offers per 10,000 population. The City has had as much as 6.44 more playgrounds per 10,000 than the reported average.

Trails

Trails are a priority for communities, nation-wide. A look at trail mileage in relation to Hickory's NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range along with a peer community comparison has yielded helpful insights regarding the present and future. Additional insights are provided via the UNC benchmarking project. Trail mileage accounts for both paved and unpaved trails. In Hickory's case, the entire Hickory Trail project (10 miles) is factored in due to its fully funded planning and execution status. Ratios of per 1,000 and 10,000 residents can be seen in this analysis.

Miles of Trail

	2020 Population	Projected Population
NRPA Jurisdiction Population	8	14
Median Benchmark for Hickory		
Hickory	20*	20
Difference	12 Additional Miles	6 Additional Miles

Population NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range: 20,000-49,999

2020 Population: U.S. Census Population of 43,490

Projected NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range at Plan Sunset: 50,000-99,999

Projected Population for 2035 of 52,230

*Includes build out of Hickory Trail project

Findings

When including the Hickory Trail project, the City of Hickory is currently well above median with regard to miles of trail. When measured by new NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range numbers, it remains above median suggesting that, excluding any strategic goals of the City and sports tourism, the City does not need to add additional trail mileage to its inventory in the next 10 years. When looking at Hickory's daytime population, it's important to note that the City could dip to a below average number of trail miles for short periods of time but this cannot be gauged. Given the nature of Hickory Trail and it's potential to draw visitors, it's worth considering the impact of the daytime population as the Hickory Trail project is fully realized and the full extent of its use can be measured.

Trail Mileage per 1,000 Residents

Counts paved and unpaved trails used for walking, running, hiking, biking and equestrian riding.
(Includes Those Indicated as Designed and Under Construction)

Peer Cities	Miles	Population	Trail Miles Per 1,000 Residents
Holly Springs, NC	18	41,239	.44
Wilson, NC	7.5	49,310	.15
Burlington, NC	9.33	57,303	.16
Hickory, NC	20	43,490	.46
Danville, VA	39.5	42,590	.93
Roanoke, VA	100	100,011	1.0
Johnson City, TN	22.11	71,046	.31
Rock Hill, SC	34	74,102	.46
		Median	.44

Based on 2020 US Census Populations

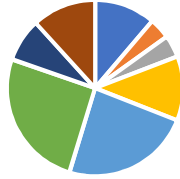
Mileage provided by peer communities.

Calculation: mileage/population x 1000

Findings

The measure of trails per 1,000 residents, among peer communities, shows Hickory at just above median. Among jurisdictions of a similar population size (41,000-57,000 range) it has the second highest trail miles per 1,000 residents.

Trail Miles Per 1,000 Residents



- Holly Springs .44 ■ Wilson .15 ■ Burlington .16
- Hickory .46 ■ Danville .93 ■ Roanoke 1.0
- Johnson City .31 ■ Rock Hill .46

Miles of Land Trails per 10,000

Counts paved and unpaved trails used for walking, running, hiking, biking and equestrian riding.

Note: Based on 16 miles & OSBM population estimate of 43,578 for FY 20-21.

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020*	2021*
Hickory	2.96	3.95	3.92	3.86	3.67
Average	2.37	2.37	2.30	2.45	2.30

Based on UNC School of Government Benchmarking Project Performance and Cost Data for FY 20/21 which notes 16 miles of trail for Hickory and an OSBM population estimate of 43,578 for FY 20-21. Comparison of Apex, Chapel Hill, Charlotte, Concord, Goldsboro, Greensboro, Greenville, Hickory, Raleigh, Wilson and Winston Salem North Carolina. *Global Pandemic

The City of Hickory is consistently above peer benchmark average with regard to trails per 10,000 residents.



See peer amenities breakdown for additional information on paved, unpaved and mountain bike trails.

Facilities

Community & Recreation Centers



Residents must not only have access to parks, trails and outdoor amenities but indoor recreation space as well. This comes in the form of recreation centers, activity buildings, senior centers and gymnasiums. Square footage per capita measures the level of access that residents have to indoor recreation space. Square footage does not include structures such as picnic shelters or concession stands. The NRPA measures in general terms.

	2020 Population	Projected Population
NRPA Jurisdiction Population Median Benchmark for Hickory	Majority have community & recreation centers. 2 in 5 offer senior centers.	Majority have community & recreation centers. 2 in 5 offer senior centers.
Hickory	In line with standards.	In line with standards.

Population NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range: 20,000-49,999
 2020 Population: U.S. Census Population of 43,490
 Projected NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range at Plan Sunset: 50,000-99,999
 Projected Population for 2035 of 52,230

Findings

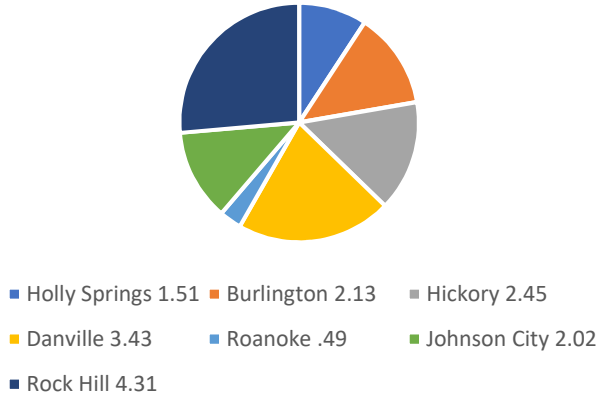
The City of Hickory is in line with a majority of park and recreation agencies when looking at its quantity of recreation centers, senior centers and gyms. The City is also among only 40% of agencies who offer senior centers. It should be noted, however, that the Highland and Ridgeview Recreation Centers are considered to be recreation anchors while Westmont Senior Center sees limited weekly hours and Brown Penn Senior Center is used on a “rental only” basis.

Square Footage of Indoor Recreation Space per Capita

Peer Cities	Square Footage	Population	Square Footage of Indoor Recreation Space per Capita
Holly Springs, NC	62,375 square feet	41,239	1.51 square feet
Wilson, NC	Not Available	49,310	Not Available
Burlington, NC	121,969 square feet	57,303	2.13 square feet
Hickory, NC	106,694 square feet	43,490	2.45 square feet
Danville, VA	145,927 square feet	42,590	3.43 square feet
Roanoke, VA	49,155 square feet	100,011	.49 square feet
Johnson City, TN	143,720 square feet	71,046	2.02 square feet
Rock Hill, SC	319,122 square feet	74,102	4.31 square feet
		Median	2.13 square feet

Based on 2020 US Census Populations
 Accounts for loss of square footage from Neil Clark Recreation Building in Hickory
 Square footage provided by peer communities through survey or master plan.
 Calculation: Square Footage/Population = Square Footage of Indoor Recreation Space Per Capita

Square Footage of Recreation Space Per Capita



Findings

Out of a peer community comparison of jurisdictions, the City of Hickory is .32 above median and is the third largest provider of square footage with regard to square footage per capita. Only Danville, VA and Rock Hill, SC surpass Hickory when strictly looking at square footage. This does not reflect the amount of usage but rather, existence.

Hickory has only 1.86 square feet less in indoor square footage than Rock Hill, SC which topped the list in available indoor space. This suggests that if the City of Hickory

were to program all available indoor recreation space for the next 10 years, it would not need to provide additional indoor space when viewing through the lens of square footage.

Programming

Programming is a key service offered to citizens. It enhances quality of life and can be one way of gauging the livability of a community. A look at key and targeted programming, offered by parks and recreation agencies across the country was taken in order to measure where the City is currently at and to identify any gaps that might exist. A brief look at cost recovery was also taken though technically, the PR&ST Department does not focus on this model. Cost recovery, in the context of programming, can shine a light on the extent to which certain programs are subsidized. This step was taken to see which peer communities are employing a cost recovery approach and to what extent. This knowledge will aid Hickory in considering a cost recovery philosophy, in the future, which will result in creating greater capacity to take on components of this master plan.



Key Programming (General)

Programming Typically Offered by Park & Recreation Agencies	Key programming offered by at least 7 in 10 recreation agencies includes:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Themed Special Events (90%) • Social Recreation Events (88%) • Fitness Classes (82%) • Health & Wellness Education (80%) • Individual Sports (76%) • Safety Training (72%) • Racquet sports (71%) • Aquatics (70%).

Findings

The City of Hickory offers 100% of key programming measured, either directly or via partnership. The department concentrates least on Health & Wellness Education, Safety Training and Aquatics. Overall, Hickory is on target with agencies across the nation.

Targeted Programming

Targeted Programming Offered by Park & Recreation Agencies	Key programming offered by at least 7 in 10 recreation agencies includes:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer Camps (88%) • Specific Senior Programs (80%) • Specific Teen Programs (62%) • Programs for People with Disabilities (58%) • STEM Programs (50%) • After-School Programs (48%) • Pre-school (37%) • Before-school Programs (20%) • Full Daycare (6%)

Findings

The City of Hickory offers 44% of targeted programming measured by the NRPA. The City offers the following on a limited basis...

- Summer Camps
- Senior Programs
- Teen Programs
- Programs for Individuals with Disabilities

Cost Recovery for Specific Programming Types & Overall Cost Recovery

Based on FY 21-22 Data

In order to gain insight into the cost recovery efforts of peer communities and what is possible for the City of Hickory, a request for information on programming specific cost recovery was made to peer departments. It was found that while many peer communities employed cost recovery, many did not track such recovery by specific programs (considered a best practice to do so). It was also found that Hickory was not alone in its current philosophy of using the General Fund as its primary revenue stream. While this is true, this continued approach may make it difficult to carry out the recommendations of this master plan. The City of Hickory PR&ST Department does not employ an official cost recovery model, however, inherent cost recovery and thus its potential were estimated via the financial analysis captured in the Inventory & Analysis section of the master

plan. The chart below depicts information garnered from peer communities able to furnish requested data.

Holly Springs, NC	Holly Springs obtains 30% cost recovery for special events , 65% for summer camps , 86% for athletics and experiences with a total program cost recovery of 68%.
Danville, VA	Danville recovers 50% of costs from youth programs , 115% of costs from adult programs , 50% from senior programs , 115% from summer camps , 50% from programs for people with disabilities , and 115% from adult athletics .
Rock Hill, SC	Rock Hill recovers 81% of costs for senior programs, approximately \$73.4M annually in special events , 89% from summer camps , 57% from programs for people with disabilities , 104% for youth athletics , and 83% for adult athletics .

Findings

Danville’s Approach...

Danville Virginia designates Youth, Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities as protected groups whose fees are subsidized and cost recovery lessened as a result. Remaining programs concentrate on a high rate of cost recovery to off-set the protected groups except in the case of special events which seek sponsorships to off-set costs. As Hickory grows, this methodology could be considered.

Operations, Maintenance & Finances

Operations

Operations are facilitated by the men and women who make parks and recreation happen for the citizens, every day. Full time employees (FTEs) per 1,000 and 10,000 residents can give a sense of the level of service that is being received by citizens. To understand this level of service is to understand how the City compares nationally and among its peers.

Park & Recreation FTEs per 10,000 Residents

	2020 Population	Projected Population
NRPA Jurisdiction Population Median for FTEs per 10,000 Residents	11.1	9.6
Hickory	11.58 (Includes Dedicated Public Services)	11.58
Difference	.48 More	1.98

Population NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range: 20,000-49,999
 Projected NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range at Plan Sunset: 50,000-99,999
 Projected Population for City of Hickory (2035): 52,230

Findings

The City just matches the median FTEs per 10,000 as measured across the nation for its jurisdiction population. Looking ahead to plan sunset, it appears that the number of employees is still just more than median if all other factors remained the same. Given the goals of the City and recommendations of this master plan, staff additions are highly likely by plan sunset.

Park & Recreation Agency Staffing

	2020 Population	Projected Population
NRPA Jurisdiction Population Median for Park & Recreation Agency Staffing	34.2	64.1
Hickory (PR&ST (19FT) & Public Services (18FT) Combined)	37	37
Difference	2.8 More	27.1 Less

Population NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range: 20,000-49,999
 Projected NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range at Plan Sunset: 50,000-99,999
 Projected Population for City of Hickory (2035): 52,230

Findings

Agency staffing slightly exceeds the median. When the City moves into its projected jurisdiction population category, the City will significantly drop below the median. However, the lower quartile of the new jurisdiction levels currently resides at 38.7 if all other factors remained the same. Being a metro-statistical hub with sport tourism goals, it would be advisable for the City to exceed this lower quartile standard. The lower quartile is the value under which 25% of data points are found when they are arranged in increasing order.

Park & Recreation FTEs per 1,000 Residents

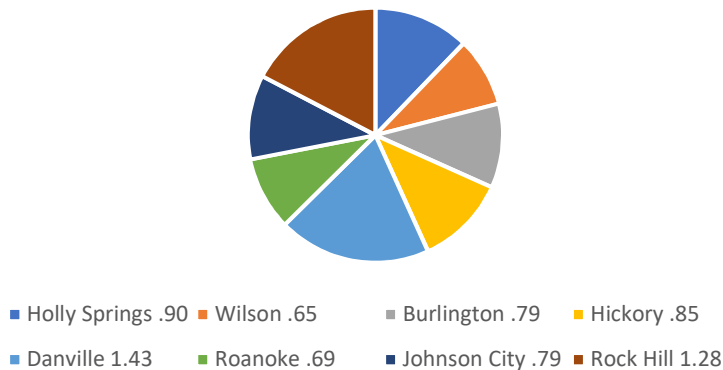
Peer Cities	Full Time Staff	Population	Full Time Staff Per 1,000 Residents
Holly Springs, NC	37	41,239	.90
Wilson, NC	32	49,310	.65
Burlington, NC	45	57,303	.79
Hickory, NC	37	43,490	.85
Danville, VA	61	42,590	1.43
Roanoke, VA	69	100,011	.69
Johnson City, TN	56	71,046	.79
Rock Hill, SC	95	74,102	1.28
		Median	.82

Based on 2020 US Census Populations
 Staffing numbers provided by peer community budget documents depicting FY 22 staffing levels. Authorized and actual positions used based on available data.
 Calculation: Full time staff/population x1,000

Findings

The City of Hickory, when compared to peer communities, is above median by .3 for full time staff per 1,000 residents. This is notable due to its comparison to much larger jurisdictions. Among jurisdictions nearest its population (41,239-57,303), Hickory has the second lowest FTE's per 1,000 residents, differing by .58 from Danville VA which reported 1.43. It is important to note that Hickory's calculations include Public Services staff who maintain and operate the City's parks.

Park & Recreation FTEs per 1,000 Residents



Key Responsibilities of Park & Recreation Agencies

Key Responsibilities of Park & Recreation Agencies	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 98% Operate & Maintain Park Sites • 94% Provide Recreation Programming & Services • 91% Operate & Maintain Indoor Facilities • 87% Have Budgetary Responsibility for Administrative Staff • 81% Operate/Maintain/Manage Trails/Greenways/Blueways • 81% Conduct Jurisdiction-wide Special Events • 73% Operate/Maintain/or Manage Special Purpose Parks & Open Spaces • 71% Include in Its Operating Budget the Funding for Planning & Development Functions • 69% Operate & Maintain Non-Park Sites • 67% Operate/Maintain/Contract Outdoor Swim Facilities or Water Parks • 63% Operate/Maintain/Contract Racquet Sport Activities/Courts/Facilities • 56% Administer or Manage Tournament/Event-Quality Outdoor Sports Complexes • 45% Administer Community Gardens

<p>City of Hickory Findings</p>	<p>The PR&ST and Public Services Departments provide <u>all or a portion of 100%</u> of the key responsibilities of parks and recreation agency services and provide additional services not listed such as partnering with auxiliary recreation entities. The PR&ST Department alone covers approximately 69%, whole or in part, of the functions measured including...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide Recreation Programming & Services • Operate & Maintain Indoor Facilities (Partial) • Have Budgetary Responsibility for Administrative Staff • Operate/Maintain/Manage Trails/Greenways/Blueways (Partial) • Conduct Jurisdiction-wide Special Events • Include in Its Budget the Funding for Planning & Development Functions (As Needed) • Operate and Contract Racquet Sport Activities/Courts • Administer or Manage Tournament/Event Quality Outdoor Sports Complexes (Partial) • Administer Community Gardens
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Park & Recreation Policies Typical of Park & Recreation Agencies

<p>Park & Recreation Policies Typical of Park & Recreation Agencies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tobacco Use Ban in Parks (53% at All Locations) • Policy Allowing Consumption of Alcohol by Legal Aged Adults on Premises (59% at Select Locations) • Agency Sells Alcohol to Legal Adults on Premises (50% Do Not and 47% Do at Select Locations) • Healthy Food Options in Vending Machines (42% Sell at Select Locations) • Healthy Food Options at Concession Stands (48% Sell at Select Locations) • Parking Fees at Parks and Facilities (83% Do Not Charge & 16% Do) • Admission Fees for Facility Entry (83% Do Not Charge & 16% Do) • Admission Fee for Park Entry (83% Do Not Charge Admission)
<p>City of Hickory Findings</p>	<p>Parks and recreation policies are mainly articulated via park signage. The following list outlines the City of Hickory as compared to the NRPA.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tobacco use is not prohibited, by ordinance, in parks though it is prohibited in facilities • Alcohol use is prohibited in parks and facilities except in cases of event permit or within a designated social district • Healthy food options are not emphasized or part of a policy for vending machines or concession stands • Parking fees are not charged in relation to facilities or parks • Membership fees are collected for fitness centers • There are no fees for park admission

Agencies with Hiring Priorities and Policies that Promote a Diverse Workforce

Park & Recreation	92% have hiring policies that promote a diverse workforce
City of Hickory	The City of Hickory has hiring policies that promote a diverse workforce. The PR&ST Department proudly has a diverse team.

Findings

The City of Hickory is in line with other parks and recreation agencies, across the nation, when it comes to hiring policies that promote a diverse workforce.

Agencies with an Expressed Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in Their Foundational Documents

Park & Recreation	80% of agencies have expressed commitment to DEI in their foundational documents (vision/mission/strategic plan)
City of Hickory	The City values DEI and has invested in it.

Finances

The amount of funds, spent by a department (s) to provide and maintain parks is an indication of its level of service which can be illustrated by its operating expenses, per capita. It is inferred that the more money a department spends on its citizens, the more services they are receiving. This is not always the case but is used as a general rule. A look across the nation and to its peers shows Hickory's current standing and future potential.

	2020 Population
NRPA Jurisdiction Population Typical Support from General Fund for Hickory	61%
Hickory	88%
Difference	27% More Reliance on General Fund

Population NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range: 20,000-49,999
Source: City of Hickory FY 21-22 Adopted Budget

Findings

When compared to agencies within its jurisdictional population range, the PR&ST Department relies on the general fund 27% more than the median. This would suggest that there is opportunity for the department to work towards a revenue policy which accounts for competing priorities and the comprehensive master plan's identified needs.

Operating Expenditures Per Capita

	2020 Population	Projected Population
NRPA Jurisdiction Population Median for Operating Expenditures Per Capita	\$110.32	\$104.38
Hickory	\$112.87	\$112.87
Difference	\$2.55	\$8.49

Population NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range: 20,000-49,999

Projected NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range at Plan Sunset: 50,000-99,999

Projected Population for City of Hickory (2035): 52,230

Source: City of Hickory FY 21-22 Adopted Budget & Inclusion of (50% for Landscape Services & 10% for Building Services)

Findings

When comparing nationally, the City of Hickory is spending \$2.55 per capita above median and will positively widen that gap by plan sunset.

Operating Expenditures Per Capita Among Peer Communities

Peer Cities	Population	Total Operating Expenditures	Operating Expenditures Per Capita
Holly Springs, NC (Cost Recovery Dept)	41,239	\$5,023,801	\$121.82
Wilson, NC	49,310	\$5,703,810	\$115.67
Burlington, NC	57,303	\$7,675,560	\$133.95
Hickory	43,490	\$4,908,526	\$112.87
Danville, VA (Cost Recovery Dept.)	42,590	\$3,465,255	\$81.36
Roanoke, VA	100,011	\$6,266,174	\$62.65
Johnson City, TN	71,046	\$7,622,598	\$107.29
Rock Hill, SC (Cost Recovery Dept)	74,102	\$15,526,970	\$209.53
		Median	\$114.27

Sources: Actuals & Projections from Adopted FY21/22, Peer City Budget Documents

Population is based on 2020 US Census Data.

Operating costs include employee salaries and related benefits. Includes core parks and recreation and related maintenance expenses. Excluded capital overlays. When necessary, averaged FY 21 & 22 data

Findings

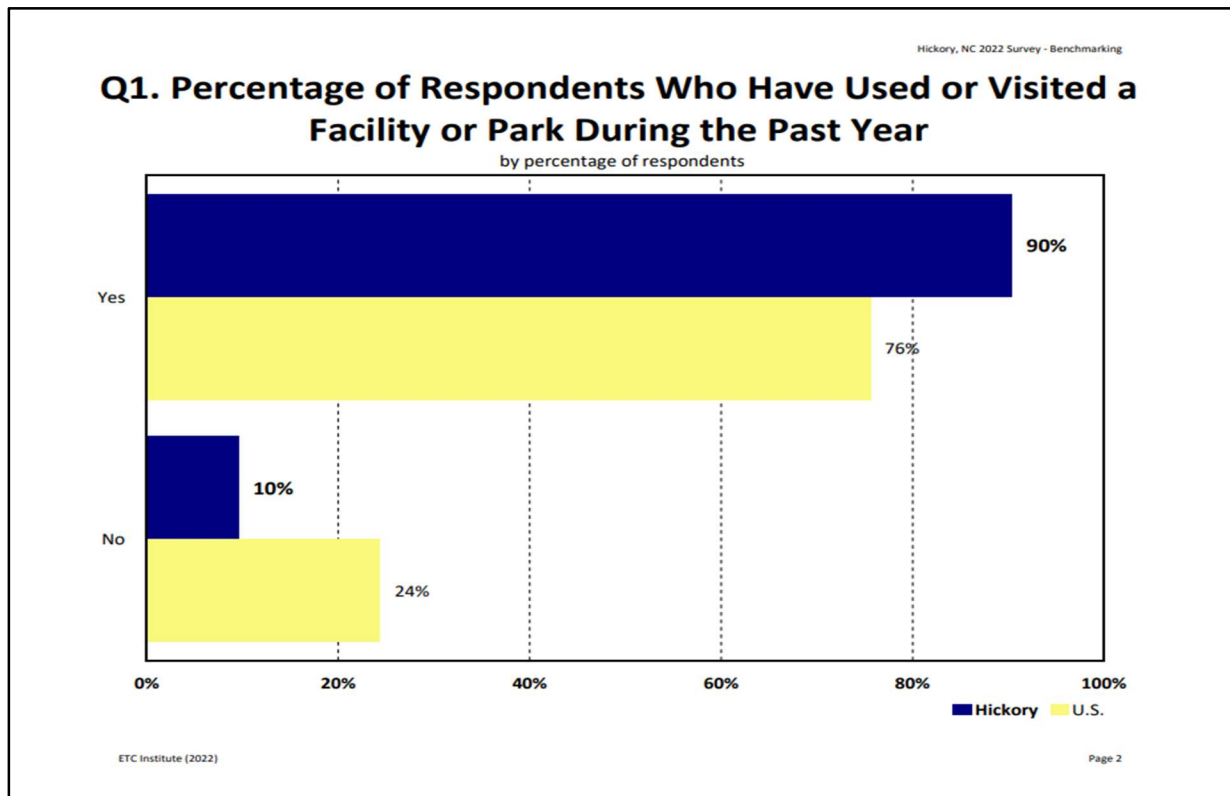
When looking at operating expenditures, per capita, the City of Hickory is only slightly below median when compared amongst its peers.

ETC Institute Benchmark Analysis...For Greater Insight

Using recreation and park needs survey data, ETC Institute compared the City of Hickory with the United States using benchmarking data derived from ETC Institute surveys administered from October 2020 to the time of the City's survey. Most data came from 2021 and 2022 results due to the global pandemic and its role in decreasing the amount of surveys administered in 2020. The results and their relevance can be seen below in the form of...

- Use & Visits of Facilities or Parks in the Past Year
- Program Participation & Quality
- Sources of Information
- Barriers to Participation & Use of Parks, Facilities & Programs
- Use of Other Parks & Recreation Providers
- Facility & Program Needs

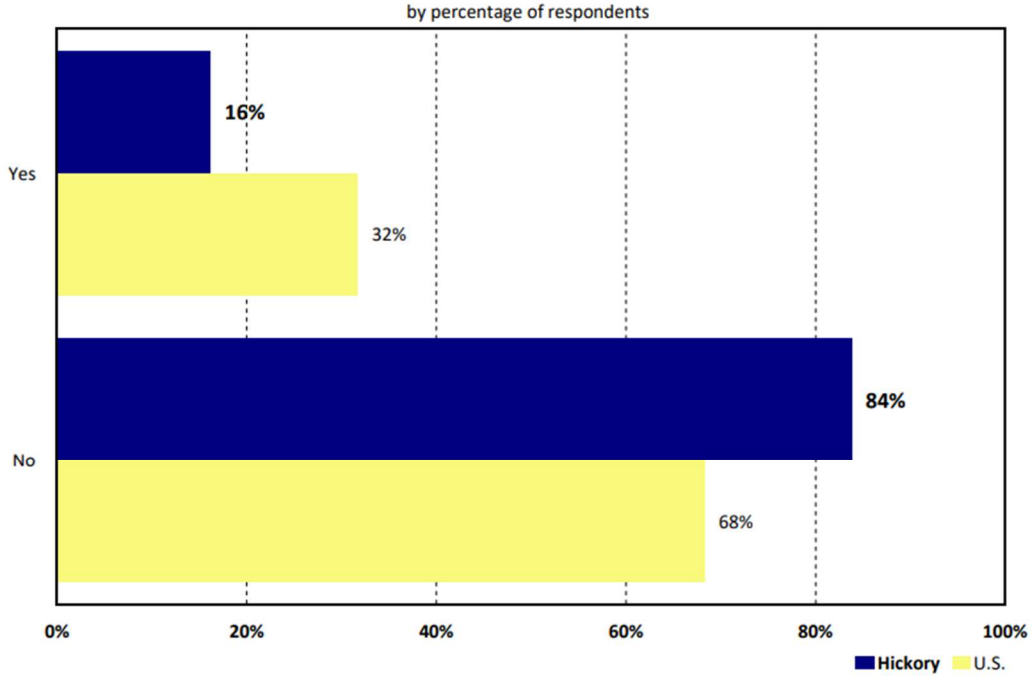
Visuals are taken from the ETC Benchmark report.



Findings

Among its peers across the United States, the City of Hickory was 14% above average with regard to use and visits to parks. This positive response reflects the great community enthusiasm seen during the public input process of master plan development and should be seen as a momentum worth investing in. Parks are notably valued in the City of Hickory.

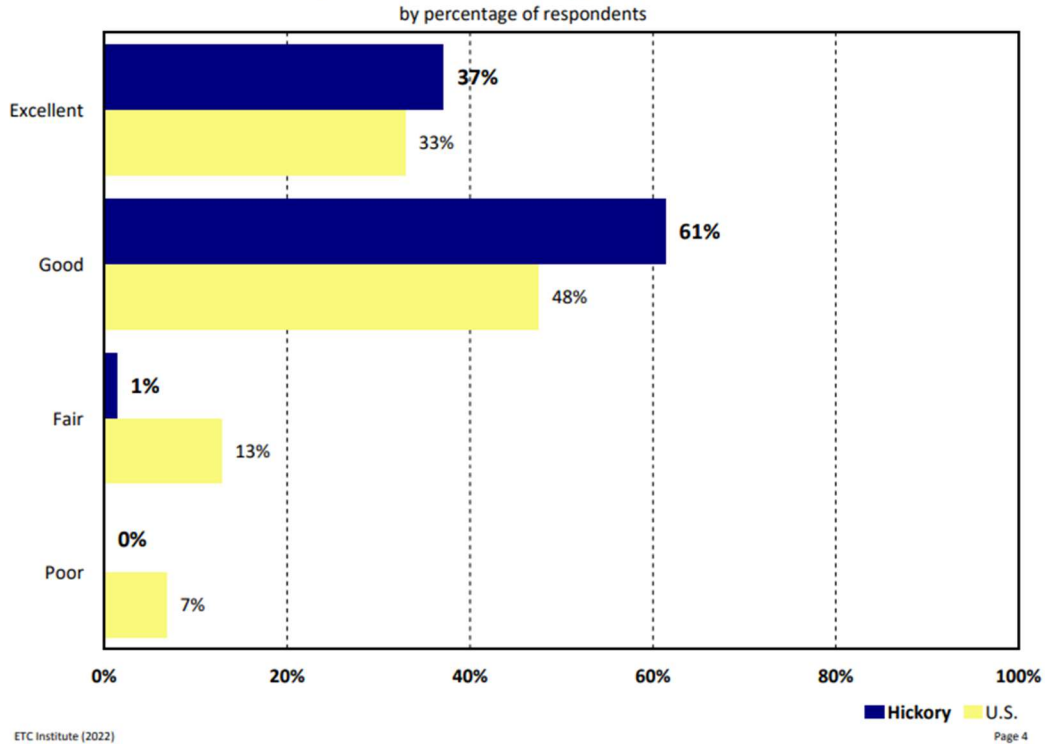
Q3. Percentage of Respondents Who Have Participated in a Program or Activity During the Past Year



Findings

16% of respondents reported that they had participated in a program or activity offered by the PR&ST Department in the past year. Most indicated that they had not participated (84%) which could have been notably affected by the pandemic. It should be considered, however, that lack of information was reported as the #1 barrier to usage and participation. For this reason, the department should consider efforts to communicate its offerings in a more robust manner as it simultaneously rebuilds its post-pandemic momentum.

Q3a. Rating the Quality of Programs Respondents Have Participated in During the Past Year

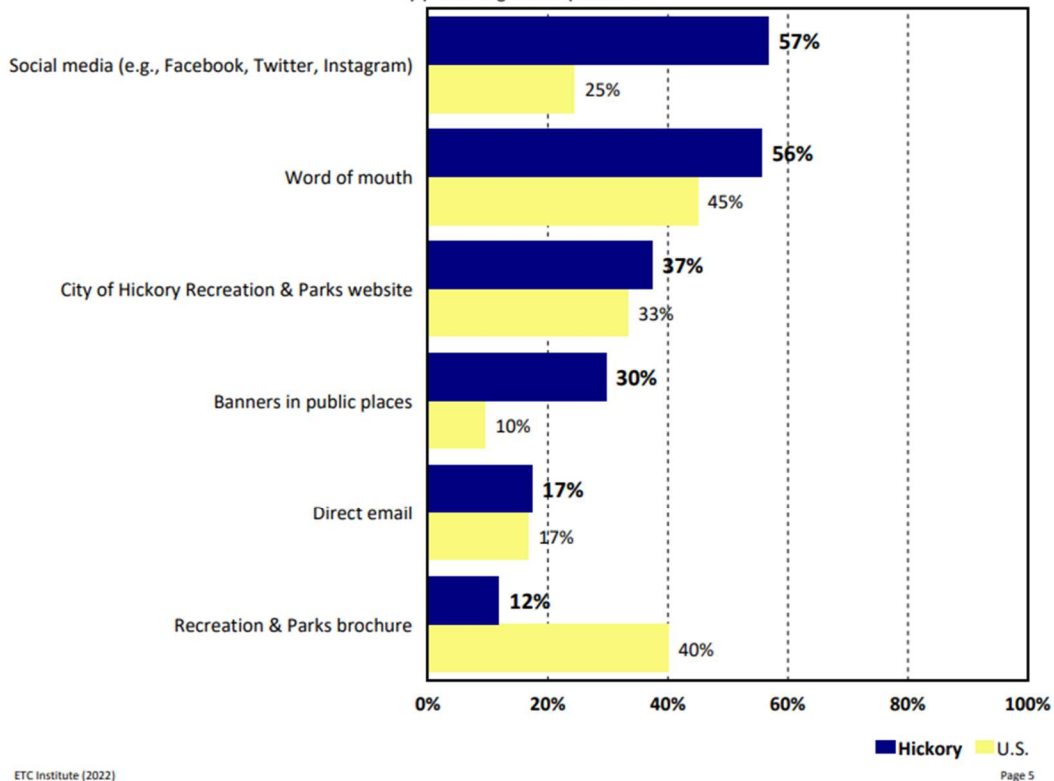


Findings

Hickory residents are favorable about the quality of programs they are taking part in through the PR&ST Department. Both Excellent and Good ratings were given at an above average rate with some as much as 13% more in approval (Good) as compared to peers across the U.S. The U.S. average reported fair and poor ratings while Hickory essentially did not...showing a mere 1% reporting of a fair experience.

Q8. Sources of Information

by percentage of respondents



ETC Institute (2022)

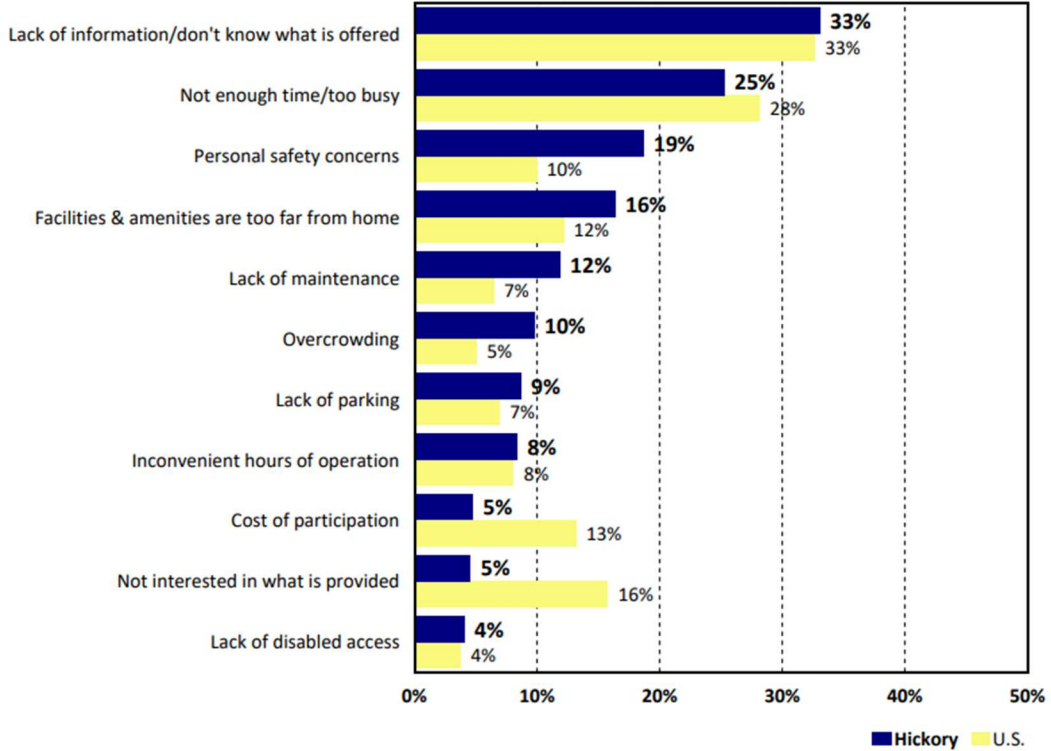
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Findings

It appears that the City’s population has a notable preference, by as much as 32%, for gaining its parks and recreation related information from social media as compared to other jurisdictions across the U.S. Interestingly, Hickory citizens noted their second most preferred means of communication as “word of mouth” which also appeared to be 11% more than reported by similar communities. These responses indicate a need for the City to ensure a combination of new technology and “old school” marketing to achieve a greater awareness of parks and recreation offerings in the community. The use of banners in public spaces was also reported as much more prevalent in the City of Hickory while citizens of other jurisdictions reported a much heavier usage of parks and recreation brochures as a solid resource for information.

Q10. Barriers to Usage and Participation

by percentage of respondents



ETC Institute (2022)

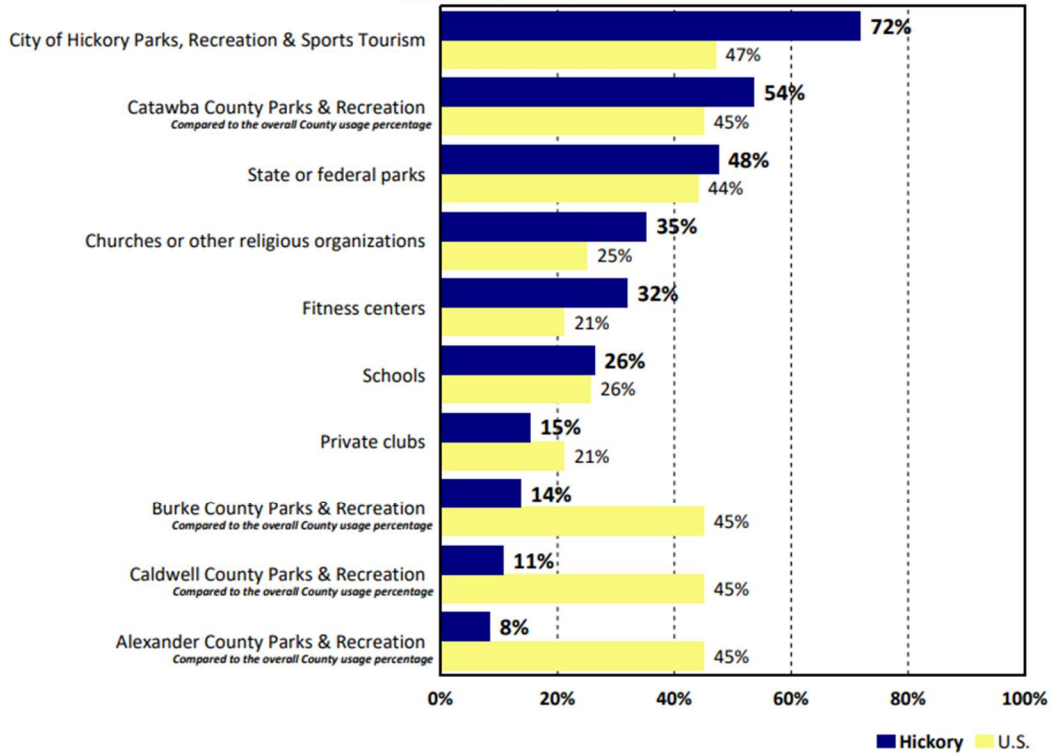
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Findings

Among like jurisdictions across the country, the City is not unique in having its citizens report that “lack of information/don’t know what is offered” is the #1 barrier to use. It also tracks closely with “not enough time/too busy,” “lack of parking,” and perfectly with “inconvenient hours” as barriers. The barrier “personal safety concerns,” for Hickory is 9% higher than reported across the U.S. which suggests a need to communicate the City’s robust safety efforts, particularly being taken in the last year, while simultaneously assessing this feedback further. Detailed citizen input was provided to the Hickory Police Department, for further evaluation, during this process.

Q18. Usage of Other Parks and Recreation Providers

by percentage of respondents



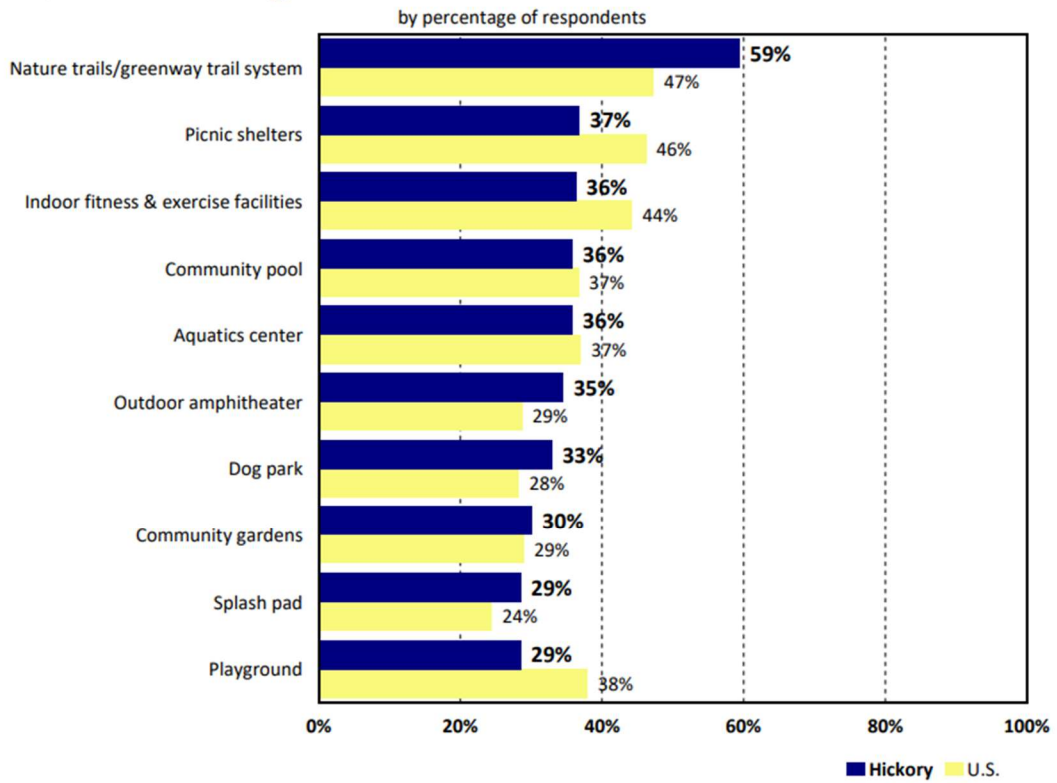
ETC Institute (2022)

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Findings

The City’s PR&ST Department is seen as the primary source of recreation for surveyed citizens, by 72%, over benchmark responses. This impressive comparison indicates a strong presence and satisfaction in the community. Private fitness centers were reported as used, in Hickory, 11% more than other like communities. Citizens also indicated an above average use of churches/religious organizations as recreation providers while indicating an underuse of private clubs. Hickory leads Catawba County Parks & Recreation by 18% which might be slightly affected by some citizen perception that Catawba County Parks, within Hickory, are owned/operated by Hickory.

Q11. Percentage of Households With a Need for Facilities



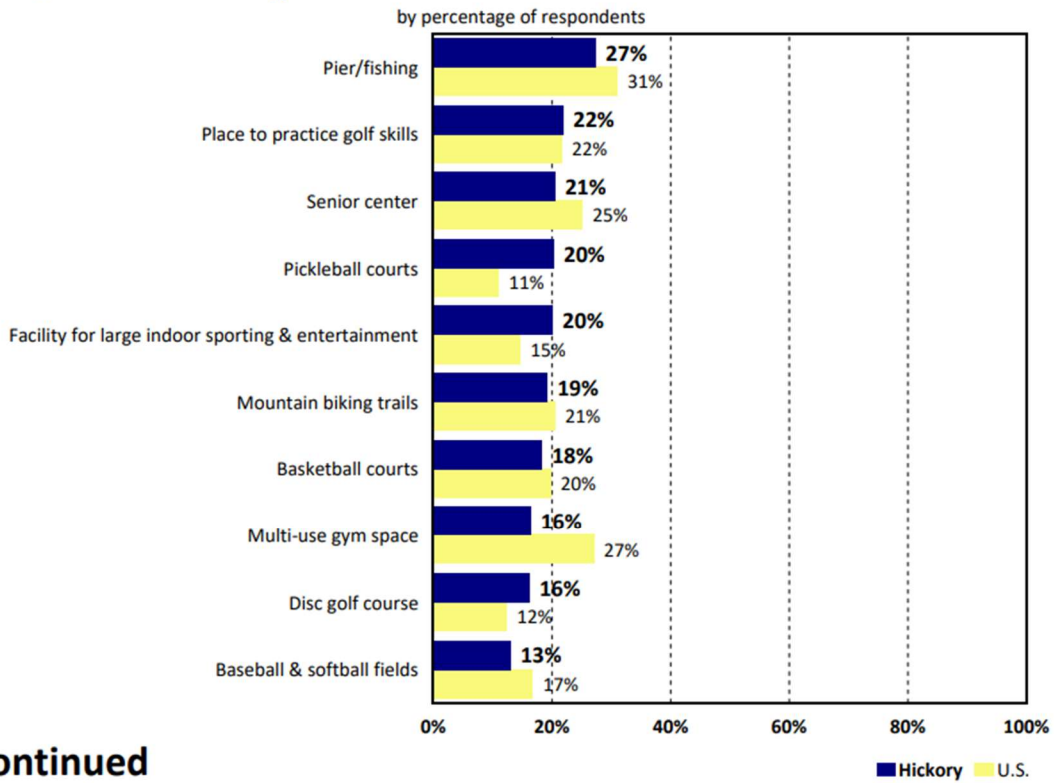
ETC Institute (2022)

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Findings

Hickory respondents reported nature trails and a greenway trail system as a household need 12% more than respondents nation-wide. Most needs, otherwise, track closely between Hickory and its peer jurisdictions. Playgrounds were reported as less of a need by Hickory citizens which may reflect its current robust offerings. Hickory citizens mirror peer communities in their identification of pools and aquatic centers as needs which implies that many peer communities do not currently offer such amenities.

Q11. Percentage of Households With a Need for Facilities



Continued

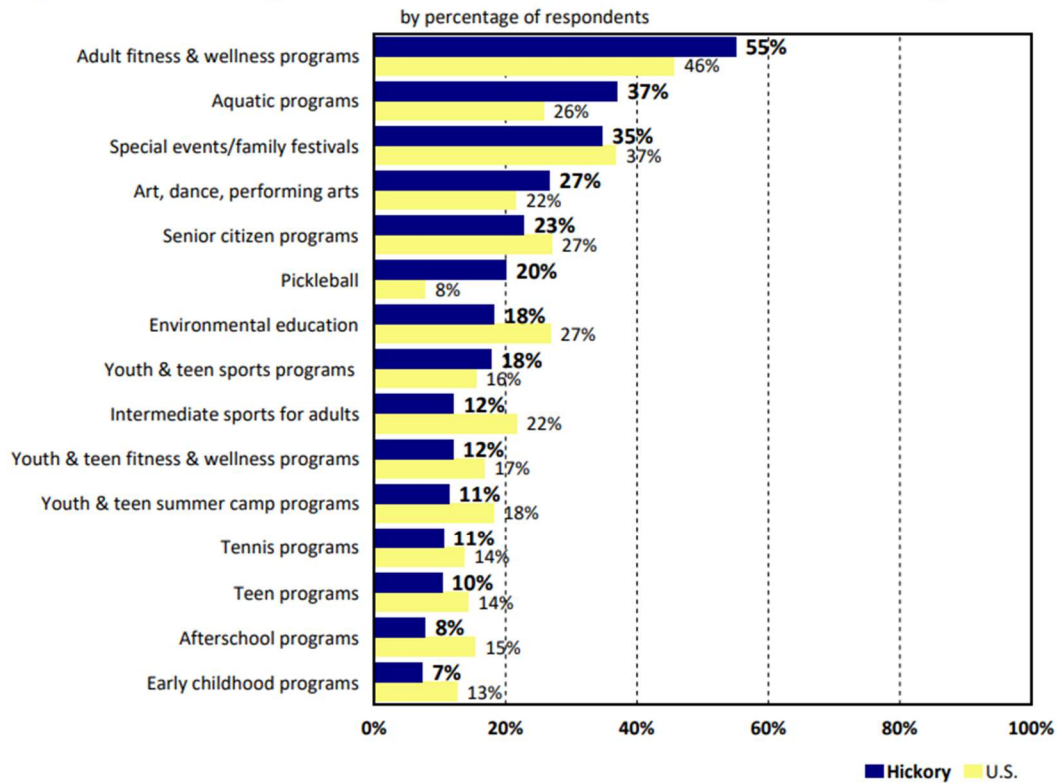
ETC Institute (2022)

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Findings

Hickory citizens reported 9% more need for pickleball courts and 11% less need for multi-use gym space than similar communities across the United States. Facilities for large indoor sporting and entertainment were reported 5% above responses received from like communities while the remaining facilities were nearly on par between local and national respondents.

Q13. Percentage of Households With a Need for Programs



ETC Institute (2022)

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Findings

With regard to programming, City residents reported a notable need for adult fitness & wellness, aquatic programs and pickleball. 9% reported more of a need for adult fitness & wellness than similar jurisdictions while 11% more Hickory respondents found aquatics to be a need and 12% more voiced a need for pickleball. Offerings reported as a low need included environmental education, intermediate sports for adults, after-school programs and early childhood programs. This differs from public input sessions where each topic area was emphasized as a need. With regard to environmental education, in particular, numbers may indicate a lack of connection between environmental stewardship and citizens that has been seen throughout the compilation of master plan data.

Summary of Findings

Through the PR&ST and Public Services departments, the City of Hickory is serving its citizens well as it keeps an eye on taking that service to the next level. Parks, amenities, trails, recreation centers, programs, maintenance, operations and finances break down as follows.

Parks

The City of Hickory is slightly above median (2.55 acres) with regard to acres of parkland per 1,000 residents and will remain so (1.75 acres) even after it is measured by new National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA) Jurisdiction Population Range numbers, assuming other numbers remain constant.

The median rate for acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, among Hickory's peer group, is 9.42. The City of Hickory is 3.73 acres above the median acreage and ranks as the second highest in park acreage per 1,000 residents.

Trails

When including the Hickory Trail project, the City of Hickory is currently well above median with regard to miles of trail. When measured by new NRPA Jurisdiction Population Range numbers for plan sunset, it remains slightly above median.

The measure of trails per 1,000 residents, among peer communities, shows Hickory as just above median. Among jurisdictions of a similar population size (41,000-57,000 range) it has the second highest trail miles per resident (.46).

Amenities

When examining 24 benchmark amenities, the City of Hickory is at or above median units per 1,000 population on 17 (71%). This includes being above median on lake access. Hickory is below peer median units per 1,000 population on 7 (29%) amenities which include soccer fields, tennis courts, recreation centers, unpaved trail, total trail mileage, splash pads and amphitheaters. Splash pads, amphitheaters and unpaved trail show the most notable differences in median.

Hickory citizens have a somewhat elevated access to 6 amenities when looking at peer community benchmarking medians. The amenities include playgrounds (17 above), inclusive playgrounds (2 above), basketball courts (6 above), pickleball courts (3.5 above), volleyball courts (2 above) and gyms (3 above).

Facilities

Hickory is in line with a majority of communities, reporting nation-wide, that they offer community and recreation centers. Only 2 in 5 communities offer senior centers, so Hickory is well positioned in this area as well.

Out of a peer community comparison of jurisdictions, the City of Hickory is .32 above median and is the third largest provider of square footage with regard to square footage per capita.

Only Danville, VA and Rock Hill, SC surpass Hickory when strictly looking at square footage. Hickory has only 1.86 square feet less in indoor square footage than Rock Hill, SC which topped the list in available indoor space. This suggests that if the City of Hickory were to program all available indoor recreation space for the next 10 years, it would not need to provide additional indoor space when viewing through the lens of square footage only.

Programs

The City of Hickory offers 100% of key programming measured nationally, either directly or via partnership. The department concentrates least on Health & Wellness Education, Safety Training and Aquatics. Overall, Hickory is on target with agencies across the nation.

The City of Hickory offers 44% of targeted programming measured by the NRPA. The City offers the following on a limited basis...

- Summer Camps
- Senior Programs
- Teen Programs
- Programs for Individuals with Disabilities

Finances

When compared to agencies within its jurisdictional population range, the PR&ST Department relies on the general fund 27% more than the median. This would suggest that there is opportunity for the department to work towards a revenue policy which accounts for competing priorities and the comprehensive master plan's identified needs.

Operations

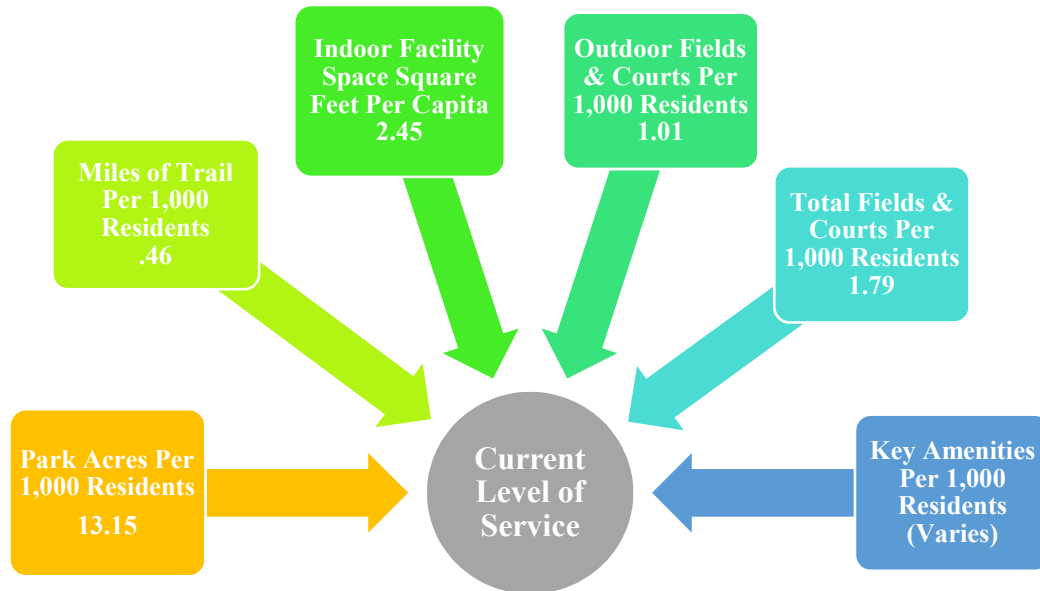
The City just matches the median FTEs per 10,000, as measured across the nation, for its jurisdiction population. Looking ahead to plan sunset, it appears that the number of employees is still just more than median if all other factors remained the same.

Agency staffing slightly exceeds the median. When the City moves into its projected national jurisdiction population category, the City will significantly drop below the median. However, the lower quartile of the new jurisdiction levels currently resides at 38.7 if all other factors remained the same. Being a metro-statistical hub with sport tourism goals, it would be advisable for the City to exceed this lower quartile standard. The lower quartile is the value under which 25% of data points are found when they are arranged in increasing order.

The City of Hickory, when compared to peer communities, is above median by .3 for full time staff per 1,000 residents. This is notable due to its comparison to much larger jurisdictions. Among jurisdictions nearest its population (41,239-57,303), Hickory has the second lowest FTE's per 1,000 residents, differing by .58 from Danville VA which reported 1.43. It is important to note that Hickory's calculations include Public Services staff who maintain and operate the City's parks.

Level of Service Standards: Proposal and Context

As mentioned earlier in this section, level of service calculations help to pin-point potential shortcomings and excesses with regard to park acreage, trail mileage, facilities and amenities. They are often seen as performance measures. The current population is used as a baseline for



future planning, with an eye to the population projected for the end of the plan. Deficits and surpluses are based on the current population, drawing from the existing inventory. They are then synthesized with benchmarks and key data from the master plan process in order to create a customized level of service standard, or target, for the City. The chart above indicates current levels of service for the City of Hickory. These numbers were used to analyze gaps and surpluses in access.

From this data, a determination of proposed level of service standards/targets was made for the City of Hickory to consider for the next 10 years. Both the current population and projected population were factored into this analysis as well as Hickory's unique context. National and peer comparisons, along with public input were also considered. The following chart illustrates proposed level of service standards and what is needed to attain them. Standards consider sports tourism but mainly focus on adequate service to citizens.



Proposed Level of Service Standards for 2023-2033 Comprehensive Master Plan & Summary of Finding

2023-2033 Park Acreage * = 11.18 Acres/1,000

The City of Hickory technically offers sufficient park acreage now and is projected to remain so at plan sunset when compared to NRPA peer jurisdictions across the country. The median acreage per 1,000 residents, among regional peers, is 9.42. With Hickory’s projected population of 52,230, its level of service would adjust to 9.2 acres per 1,000 at plan sunset. This plan suggests the possible addition of parks in the eastern quadrants which, if developed, would see the City exceed its projected level of service hence the elevated number of 11.18. Such land, to be used, would likely come from the City’s available open space, at least initially.

2023-2033 Trail Mileage = .56 Miles/1,000

The City of Hickory offers 12 miles above median trail mileage when compared to NRPA peer jurisdictions and is projected to be 6 miles over median at plan sunset, even if more mileage were not added. The City’s level of service is .46 miles of trail per 1,000 residents which is slightly above the median of its peer communities. With the large interest in trails, articulated through public input and national trends, the City should consider adding to its trail inventory not for the sake of mileage but equitable access and strategic benefit.

2023-2033 Proposed Amenity Standards for Amenities, Indoor Facilities and Trails*

	Standard Per 1,000 Residents	Units Needed to Achieve Proposed Standard by Plan Sunset	Estimated Units in Inventory by Plan Sunset	Additional Recommendations and Comments
Playgrounds	.47	0	40	Adopt universal design standards and make new playgrounds inclusive, moving forward. Some parks may benefit from removal of equipment to distribute usage to alternate parks, create open space or cater to a growing interest in passive recreation. 2023 City level of service substantially over peer median units per 1,000
Baseball/Softball Fields*	.28	3	15	
Soccer Fields*	.27	3	14	
Basketball Courts	.38	2	20	Accounts for 2 courts at future recreation center. 2023 City level of service substantially over peer median units per 1,000

Tennis Courts*	.31	3	16	
Pickleball Courts*	.39	4	21	Pickleball is the fastest growing sport in the country. If the City invests beyond the standard, it will still receive a great return on investment. 2023 City level of service substantially over peer median units per 1,000 however, City trends and public input support additional investment in pickle ball courts.
Picnic Shelters	.40	2	21	Standard anticipates Sandy Pines development.
Turf Fields*	.08	1	4	Accounts for field at Neill Clark Recreation Park (Hickory Christian Academy)
Volleyball Courts*	.10	1	5	
Multipurpose Fields	.04	*	2	Consider adding additional multi-purpose fields to increase programming capacity
Recreation Centers	.07	1	4	Potential placement of recreation center in SE Quadrant. Feasibility study needed.
Gymnasiums	.13	2	7	Gymnasiums can be housed in new recreation center if deemed feasible. This does not consider possible elimination of Westmont Gymnasium.
Senior Centers	.04	0 if Renovations Occur	2	2 Fully Functioning Senior Centers + Support of West Hickory Senior Center Efforts
Activity Buildings	.06	0	3	
Unpaved Trails	.23	4.23 Miles	11 Miles	2023 City level of service substantially under peer median units per 1,000. Supported by public input.
Paved Trails	.34	5 Miles	18 Miles	
Mountain Bike Trails	.19	4.23 Miles	9.92 Miles	Factor into increase of unpaved trail.
Total Trail Miles	.56	9.23 Miles	29.23 Miles	Speaks to public interest and connectivity.
Splash Pads	.06	3	4	Consider for quadrants without splash pads.
Community Gardens	.04	2	4	Community gardens are important to citizens are proposed for each quadrant
Skate Park	.01	0	1	Renovation and possible movement of current skate park keeps count steady.
Amphitheater	.04	2	2	Amphitheaters were noted as a desired amenity via the public input process. One amphitheater is projected for Deidra Lackey Memorial Park.
Lake Access Points	.09	2	5	

Disc Golf	.03	1	2	Consider installing planned disc golf course at Bruce Meisner Park.
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*Some amenity numbers may need to increase to reach levels capable of holding tournaments or meeting evolving public desires.

Trends in Public Recreation

A recreation and leisure trends analysis help communities to tie into local, state and national trends that provide value to data driven decisions. Trends affect local needs and demands. When meshed with demographic estimates and projections, leaders can gauge the relevancy of current offerings and potential scenarios for the future. It is important to highlight that there is a certain degree of assumption that must be included in future planning since numbers fluctuate. For the purpose of this master plan, key recreation trend resources were cross-referenced in order to produce actionable considerations for the City of Hickory. These key resources included local Sportsman and Placer AI data as well as data from the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), Sports & Fitness Industry Association, US Census Data and the XplorRecreation 2023 Parks & Recreation Trends report. Insights from the comprehensive, state-wide, 2020-2025 North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan have also been included to illustrate what the state sees as recreation vectors.



Notable Local Trends

Population growth projections, trends, preferences and advancing demographics illustrate the evolving demand for parks and recreation in the City. A summary of notable local trends is presented below. Additional demographics are available in the “The Plan...the City” section of this master plan.



City of Hickory	Key Demographic Projections
Population Growth Projection	52,230 by 2035 (Gain of 8,740 residents from 2020 Census)
Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) Growth Projection	418,269 by 2035 (Gain of 52,993 residents in MSA from 2020 Census)
Quadrant Population Projections	6,754 (9.6% Increase) in Southeast Quadrant by 2030 (Gain of 592 since 2020) 23,537 (8.1% Increase) in Northeast Quadrant by 2030 (Gain of 1,765 since 2020) 12,279 (4.2% Increase) in Northwest Quadrant by 2030 (Gain of 497 since 2020) 3,837 (1.7% Increase) in Southwest Quadrant by 2030 (Gain of 63 since 2020)
Median Age Projection	39.7 in 2031 (Gain of 1.5 years from 2020 median age)
Median Household Income Projections	\$86,790 by 2031 (Gain of \$38,137 from median household income in 2020)

Population with Disability	6,032 by 2026 & 6,769 by 2031
Race/Ethnicity Projections	<p>Most Notable Race/Ethnicity Gains/Decreases</p> <p>58.4% White <i>(Decrease of 8.1% since 2020)</i></p> <p>13.8% Mixed Race* (2 or More) <i>(Gain of 5.8% since 2020)</i></p> <p>15% Hispanic (Any Race)* <i>(Gain of 2.2% since 2020)</i></p> <p>56.7% White (Not Hispanic)* <i>(Decrease of 7.9% since 2020)</i></p> <p>*</p> <p>Mixed Race (2 or More) = Combination of two or more race categories from among the choices of White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or Some Other Race.</p> <p>Hispanic (Any Race) = Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.</p> <p>White (Not Hispanic) = All persons having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East.</p>
Age Projections	<p>Age Ranges Projected for Greatest Growth</p> <p>0-9 Years</p> <p>25-44 Years</p> <p>60-100 Years</p> <p>Age Ranges Projected for Notable Decline</p> <p>10-24 Years</p> <p>45-59 Years</p>
Sources: U.S. Census American Community Survey; Western Piedmont Council of Governments Data Center & Catawba County Projections (age); Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan	The City of Hickory’s annual population growth, at the time of plan development, was .51%. Steady population growth is projected for the life of the comprehensive master plan.

Quick Demographic Analysis

As can be seen by the summary above, Hickory is projected to experience an increase of 8,740 residents just past plan sunset with 66% of that growth occurring by 2030. Due to its status as a metro-statistical hub, population projections become more pressing in light of the MSA’s projected growth of almost 53,000 residents by 2035. Many of those residents rely on Hickory for parks and recreation needs and therefore would need to be factored into system planning. Hickory’s 2035 projection of 52,230 residents nearly matches the entire estimated growth of the MSA. Given that Hickory’s 2010 Needs Assessment and previous plan foresaw the City being at 50,000 by 2020, further attention should be paid to maximizing current assets, evening out system usage and building additional capacity to serve. This is especially the case in the eastern quadrants which have the greatest projection of population growth and infrastructure to accommodate it.

While median age is not estimated to change to a great degree, the City is seeing and will continue to see a notable increase in household median income which by 2031 would have seen an increase of nearly \$39,000 since 2020. This may prove helpful in garnering support for the funding of additional parks and recreation priorities.

Age projections indicate that individuals 0-9 years, 25-44 years and 60-100 years will grow the most in the next 10 years and therefore should receive attention with regard to the selection of amenities, services and offering of programs. With regard to race and ethnicity, notable increases in mixed race and Hispanic groups are estimated while the City will see a slight decline in African American (.5%) residents and sharp decline in White residents (8.1% between 2020 & 2035). It is estimated that Asian Americans will slightly increase (1.2%) during this same timeframe as will

those categorized in Other Race (1.2%) and American Indian (.3%). Those identifying as White (Not Hispanic) are estimated to decrease notably (5.4% between 2020 & 2035).

It appears that Hickory will experience greater demand for parks, amenities and programs that speak to the needs and interests of the following groups as it simultaneously ensures equitable access to recreation for all.

Senior Citizens
Families with Young Children
Mixed Race & Hispanic Citizens
Underserved Populations (Individuals with Disabilities & Residents in Eastern Quadrants)



Sources: U.S. Census American Community Survey; WPCOG Data Center & Catawba County Projections (age); Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan

The populations above, coupled with identified gaps and a philosophy of equity should be the lens through which local and national trends are viewed.

Hickory PR&ST Trends

In many respects, recent trends for the PR&ST Department are associated with a post-pandemic comeback however, there are still some helpful notables that should be paid attention to.



Post Pandemic Participation Bounce-back

Annual participation in athletic programs was affected by the pandemic in FY20/21 and is steadily climbing back to pre-pandemic levels. As can be seen below via actual participation rates, athletic program participation took a dip in FY 20/21 but has been climbing to pre-pandemic levels. It is estimated that 1,889 participants took part in play during FY 22/23 and that an attainable goal for FY 23/24 is 2,000.

Annual Participants in Athletic Programs	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
	2,000	1,886	1,798	1,432	582	1,461

Source: City of Hickory Adopted Budgets

In FY 16/17, 20% of participants in athletic programs were non-residents. During the pandemic, the percentage ascended to 23% in FY 20/21 and found its way to 34% in FY 21/22. Estimates indicate that it may trend downward. As for participation in non-athletic programs, it appears that participation is on the rise.

Popular Facilities & Programming

An examination of attendance reports from January 2018 to December of 2022 revealed a few prominent trends that are helpful in planning for the next 10 years. The following offerings were consistently most popular, as measured by attendance from month to month and should be maximized further.

Fitness Center Usage at Highland & Ridgeview Recreation Centers	Open Gym at Highland, Ridgeview, and Westmont Recreation Centers	Recreation Sports Programming
Trailheads at City Parks... Hickory City Park Rotary-Geitner Park Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park	Pickleball	Special Events & Niche Programs

Among the myriad of classes offered, most traditional fitness and recreation classes saw less than 100 participants in a given month as examined via attendance reports from 2018 to 2022. Among classes, the most popular appeared to be Zumba, Cycling, Senior Gym Walkers, Total Body and Tai Chi.

Park Usage

Please see the Inventory & Analysis section for a park Usage Analysis.

Sports Tourism Footprint

Sports Tourism tournaments and related events are in the growth phase and are certainly trending upward. It will be important to continue tracking progress as the City grows into this unique mission. See the Sports Tourism section of this master plan for more details on this effort's progress.

National Perspectives & Trends

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is the leading voice on countless parks and recreation topics. By listening to this voice, the City can identify where it meshes with national trends and where it might have opportunity to advance. The Sports & Fitness Industry Association, US Census and XplorRecreation also supply a national perspective. Here are some highlights from these sources, which would be beneficial for the City of Hickory to consider in its planning for the next 10 years.



The top recreation trends of 2023, according to the **NRPA**, consist of the following.

The Electrification of Parks and Recreation/Use of Renewable Energy Resources Such as Electric Maintenance Vehicles and Mowers	Digital Twin Mapping AKA Virtual Modeling of the Natural & Built Environments	Edible Utensils
Pickleball	Parks & Recreation as Anchor Institutions	
ATV Wheelchairs	Mindfulness, Nutrition and Stress Reduction	

Three trending issues include...

Dissatisfaction of Park & Recreation Workers	Pickleball Related Noise Complaints	Pot & Alcohol in Parks
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Source: NRPA Top Trends in Recreation 2023

Hickory relates to the trends, above, in a few key ways. First, the PR&ST Department is recognized by the public as an essential service which may progress to a view of it being an **anchor institution** in the future. Secondly, the City has seen almost immediate use and growth with regard to pickleball offerings when launched. This tracks with national trends that see pickleball as the fastest growing sport in the nation. In a 2022 report by the **Sports & Fitness Industry Association** it was noted that for the first time since 2015, every racquet sport increased its total participation number compared to previous years. Racquet sports enjoy prominence in Hickory...especially pickleball.



According to the **Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA)**, team sports did not reach 2019 rates in 2022 though they got closer than ever. Core participation, across sports, seems to suggest that athletes are playing but not as much as they used to. Basketball, outdoor soccer and flag football all posted three year increases of over 4.5%. Basketball increased by 13% since 2019. Hickory should keep an eye on these trends as it steps through the next 10 years.

Of Interest to Hickory...Lifestyle Activities

The Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) noted that in 2022, lifestyle activities such as tennis remained popular and grew more than 20% since 2019. Yoga grew more than 10% during the same time period. Trail running and day hiking have grown for the fifth consecutive year. Facility-based fitness activities such as stationary cycling, weight machines and ellipticals have not bounced back from pre-pandemic levels. The City of Hickory matches to these trends with regard to the public's emphasis on trails during the public input process however, the City is actually seeing growth in recreation center drop-in users as well as memberships.

Source: <https://sfia.org/resources/sfias-topline-report-shows-physical-activity-rates-increased-for-a-fifth-consecutive-year/>

Additional 2023 Parks & Recreation Trends

The following trends are having significant impact on departments around the country according to XplorRecreation. The top two trends, along with post-pandemic programming support local trends and plan recommendations.

Diversity...Equity...Inclusion: 1 in 3 departments are investing in formal diversity, equity and inclusion programs with 9 out of 10 having activities/policies to promote DEI. 81% of US adults want parks and recreation to ensure inclusivity through policies and practices. 88% of US adults want their local park and recreation agencies to provide adaptive and inclusive recreation programming so people of all abilities



may participate. Inclusive play equipment with features such as wide ramps, sensory play opportunities and braille panels are being used to ensure support for physical, social, emotional and cognitive development needs. 98% of US adults agree that providing youth with equitable access to sports opportunities is important.

Labor Shortages have affected department abilities to find staff with staffing below pre-pandemic levels. Fewer part time and seasonal staff are available. This is very impactful to parks and recreation departments who need people in these roles for a variety of programs, seasonal offerings and operations. Pay is noted as the biggest challenge as departments are now competing, more than ever, with big name private sector companies such as Starbucks and Amazon. Better pay, benefits and flexible hours are the biggest factors for those choosing to work.



Stretched Budgets: Inflation and rising prices are affecting departments around the country. 65% of US consumers are concerned about rising prices and inflation. Consumer spending on recreation is on its way to making a full recovery to pre-pandemic levels though the impact of inflation has yet to unfold. Memberships and variable pricing can attract recreators on tight budgets. Departments are needing to show how they contribute to community priorities in order to avoid budget cuts. Attracting funding from additional sources is becoming more and more important.



Digital Transformation is happening in departments around the country. Facility management is going high-tech to include self-maintained toilets, automated mowing equipment, robotic cleaning systems, semi-autonomous inspections drones and more. An example of digital transformation can be seen in Albertville, Alabama, approximately 55,000 plants are being watered via a remote system. In addition, more and more parks are providing Wi-fi for guests that have come to expect this amenity. This facilitates some digitally based programming like augmented reality walks, games or exhibits. Technology is also enabling outdoor learning. Parks are providing check-in locations for social media in order to make it easier for patrons to load their photos. Technology is also being used to streamline bookings, payment and access to what parks and recreation has to offer.



Post-pandemic Programming is seeing trends. In 2021, the most common programs were holiday/special events (82.8%), youth sports teams (73%), day/summer camps (67.9%), educational programs (62.2%), group exercise programs (61.9%), arts/crafts programs (61.2%), programs for older adults (60.8%), adult sports teams (59.1%), fitness programs (55.8%) and festivals/concerts (53.2%). 44.8% of park organizations are planning to add more programs to their facilities and the most common additions include: group exercise programs, teen programming, fitness programs, mind-body balance programs, programs for active older adults, environmental education programs, holidays & other special events, adult sports teams, special educational needs and disability programs. E-sports (electronic sports) is being used to engage hard to reach audiences such as teens and young adults. Sports sampling programs are also being introduced in order to get kids/teens involved. The inclusion of group socials, after fitness classes is on the rise as are more and more pickle ball opportunities.



A Note on Aging Populations

National trends, according to the National Recreation & Park Association seem to be showing a renewed interest in senior programs and services after the Covid 19 pandemic. This is with a particular eye to senior center revitalization. During a 2019 study, it was found that the average age of adults using senior centers was 79 years old. According to an NRPA Healthy Aging in Parks Report provided in 2017, the senior population will grow to 82.3 million, nation-wide by 2040 with representation of 21.7% of the total US population which will be larger than the percentage of the population under 18 years. Hickory is projected to have its largest growth, in the next 10 years, within the senior population. The report found the following trends that the City of Hickory should consider.

The most common park and recreation offerings for older adults include...

Exercise Classes	Field Trips	Arts & Crafts Classes
Volunteer Opportunities at Recreation Centers	Events & Festivals for Older Adults	Evidence-based Programs for Older Adults
Partnerships with Area Agencies on Aging	Leadership in Providing Senior Services & Programming	

Source: <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/research-papers/healthy-aging-in-parks-survey-results/>

Recreation Management... State of the Industry Report 2022

Recreation Management compiles the latest trends in park, recreation, sports, fitness and more. Information is based upon feedback from professionals in the recreation, sports and fitness industry across the country. The report is based on a survey conducted for Recreation Management by Signet Research, Inc, an independent research company, which took place between January 27, 2022 and March 16, 2022. The following lists represent the most commonly planned additions, for parks and recreation agencies, in 2022. Many additions match current City offerings and/or recommendations in this plan.

The Most Commonly Planned Additions to Parks in 2022

1. Splash Play Areas
2. Synthetic Turf Sports Fields
3. Dog Parks
4. Playgrounds
5. Outdoor Fitness Areas & Fitness Trails
6. Bike Trails
7. Park Shelters
8. Park Restroom Structures
9. Community or Multi-purpose Centers
10. Open Spaces and Natural Areas



The Most Commonly Planned Programs in 2022

1. Fitness Programs (Up from #3)
2. Environmental Education Programs
3. Mind-body Balance Programs (Up from #4)
4. Group Exercise Programs (Down from #1)
5. Teen Programming (Down from #2)
6. Performing Arts Programs (Not in the 2021 Top 10)
7. Adult Sports Teams (Up from #9)
8. Educational Programs (Down from #6)
9. Special Needs Programs (Up from #10)
10. Day Camps & Summer Camps (Not in the 2021 Top 10)



Source: Recreation Management State of the Industry Report 2022



Focusing on Climate Change: The Trust for Public Land, in a report titled “The Power of Parks to Address Climate Change: A Special Report” noted that parks and recreation departments in the 100 most populous cities in the United States have reported the following.

- 85% are adapting parks and recreation facilities to address climate change
- 77% are enlisting parks to counter urban heat
- 67% are improving surfaces to reduce flooding and runoff from rains
- 20% are managing parks and woodlands to sequester carbon dioxide

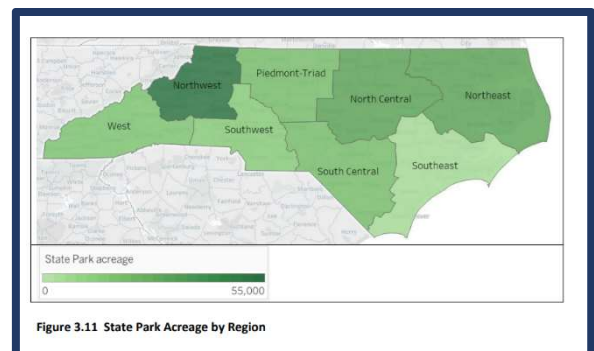
Source: Trust for Public Land “The Power of Parks to Address Climate Change: A Special Report”

State Trends

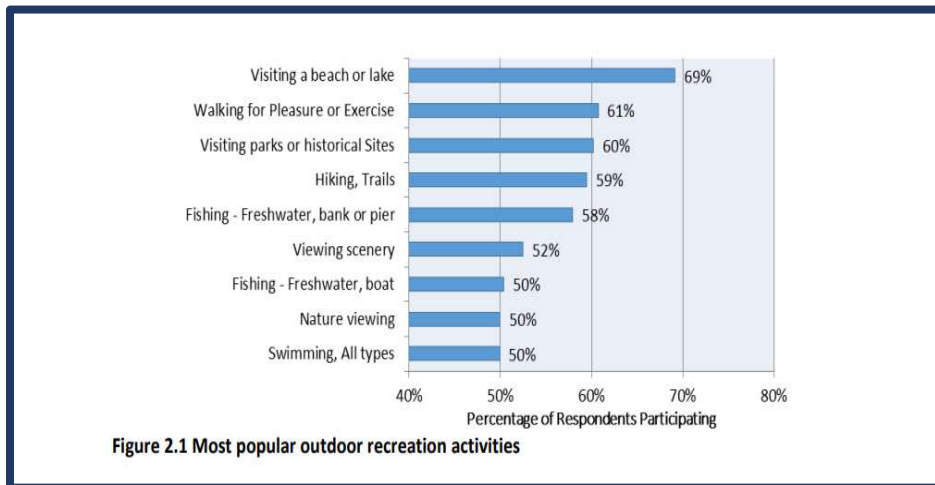
The North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan 2020 to 2025

As part of the North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan for 2020 to 2025, the North Carolina Division of Parks & Recreation conducted a public survey to “evaluate demand for, participation in, and perceptions of outdoor recreation.” The survey garnered 17,000 responses and broadly addressed “areas such as outdoor recreation participation, satisfaction, barriers to participation, and attitudes about the recreation provider’s priorities.”

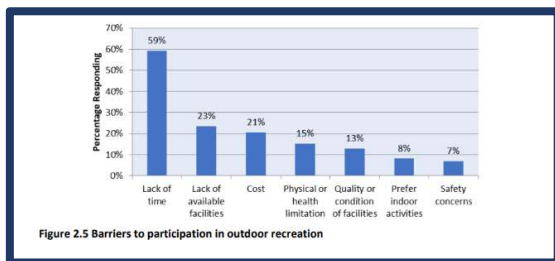
According to this plan, trending and niche recreation consisted of disc golf, dog parks, court games and golf (depending upon the region). 90% of survey responses also indicated that local and state parks are extremely important which matches the sentiment of Hickory residents. Below are a few other key areas that give clues to state-wide trends and how they converge or diverge from what Hickory citizens have shared.



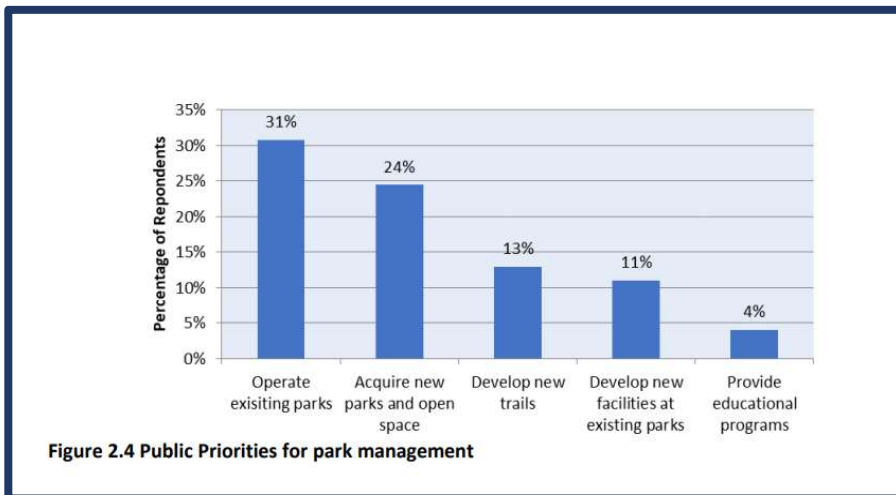
Indicating trends and popularity, state survey results show some keys priorities that also appeared at the local level. In particular, water-based recreation as well as walking and hiking via trails all fit closely



via trails all fit closely with what Hickory citizens expressed as current activities and/or desires for the future. Like the citizens of Hickory, residents across the state placed a high priority on operation of existing parks. Among three core priorities expressed, state respondents



placed the operation of existing parkland as three times the importance of developing new parks. City and state respondents diverged slightly with regard to having an appetite for acquiring new parks and open space with Hickory citizens having less interest. A shared interest was that of developing new trails as well as a budding interest in educational programs.



Nearly a quarter of respondents indicated a lack of facilities as a barrier and this is important due to North Carolina’s ever-increasing population and rapid urbanization. It appears that there will be an increasing demand for new recreation facilities and a greater use/strain on existing facilities.

Source: North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan 2020 to 2025

NC State Recreation Resources Service Municipal and County Parks & Recreation Services Trend Study

Each year the Municipal and County Parks and Recreation Services Study (MCPRSS) seeks to assess the status of local government parks and recreation departments in North Carolina based on several rotating metrics. The goal of the MCPRSS is to provide data to parks and recreation agencies as well as local governments in North Carolina as they evaluate current services to assist in budget planning, preparation, and justification for leisure services. The trends study is intended to shed light on current issues and new practices on the local parks and recreation level and excerpts appear below. Information is divided into sections based on trends which include...



Greenways

Approximately **two thirds of responding agencies have a greenway masterplan or are in the process of developing one**, and **this is evenly distributed across population classes**. The earliest masterplan reported is from 1976, but **most plans have been developed since the mid-2000s**.

More than 70% of responding departments already have some amount of greenway in place. As for trails in greenway corridors, **more trail miles are hard surface than natural surface**, and **large cities have many more miles than less populated communities**. Nonetheless, departments from across the state have greenway trails.

Just under half of respondents indicated that their greenway system is connected to a regional trail system of some variety. While more than a dozen trail systems were mentioned, the **Mountains-to-Sea State Trail and Carolina Thread Trail were overwhelmingly the most common systems listed**. The East Coast Greenway, American Tobacco Trail, Haw River Trail, and the Mecklenburg County Greenway system were also mentioned more than once.

Active Transportation

Active transportation uses only a person's physical activity for travel. The most common forms are walking and cycling, but other activities, like skateboarding or rollerblading, are also popular. More than half of respondents indicated that most of their facilities are accessible by active transportation, and many maintain infrastructure, like greenway trails.

Half of respondents promote or market active transportation to their constituents. Nonetheless, *respondents estimate that relatively few park visitors walk or bicycle to travel to and from their park facilities*. These results are relatively consistent across Prosperity Zones and population classes. Bike share programs were reported in only six communities.

Bond Referendums

Eighteen respondents reported 48 bond referendums went before the public. Twenty, about 41 percent, were approved by voters. Total funding reported was \$228.9 million

Dog Parks

Just under half of responding departments had at least one dog park. Most dog parks are reported to be attached to other park facilities, although there are some stand-alone. Most departments believe that their constituents are satisfied with current dog park offerings. Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that conflicts between dog parks users and other facility users are rare

Source: <https://bt.e-ditionsbyfry.com/publication/frame.php?i=749539&p=&pn=&ver=html5>



Recommendations

The City of Hickory is ready to take crafting recreation to the next level! This comprehensive master plan contains information that will assist in daily data-driven decisions based on needs and desires of the public balanced with quantitative and qualitative analysis. The document will benefit leadership who will use its contents for strategic decision making and advocacy. *It is important to view this plan and its recommendations as a resource versus a mandate.* The application of this plan is not an event, but a journey and presupposes that without proper resources such as funding and adequate staffing, some actions cannot be taken. Feasibility studies, project-level master plans, and cost forecasting should also be assumed as necessary with key recommendations.



The recommendations for this plan are not only based upon findings collected from the comprehensive master planning process but the City's existing articulation of its identity, values and priorities which can often be seen in its myriad of master plans and most especially the Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan. It is important to note that the proposed action items of this plan, in some ways, represent a snapshot in time and could morph based upon changing demographics, trends, resource availability, emerging values, public support and shifting priorities due to unforeseen events and circumstances. This fact is an invitation to revisit the



plan, periodically, to recalibrate efforts. Recommendations for this master plan are categorized using guiding principles which have become the objectives of the plan. In many cases, recommendations could be categorized under more than one grouping. This will be evened out in the Action Plan that follows. *By design, recommendations are not all encompassing, leaving room for staff and leadership to use the master plan as a resource for data-driven planning and decisions needing to be made in real time and within changing circumstances. Also, there may be more than one recommendation for a given property, program or service to illustrate multiple possibilities that can be explored.*

Guiding Principles & Objectives

The guiding principles, which informed the objectives of the plan, emerged through feedback received via a robust analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). This was performed during a multi-faceted public engagement process and examination of the City's articulated identity and goals reflected in its various master plans and brand. The Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Commission, citizens, stakeholders, patrons, City leadership, staff, focus groups and participants in a special study regarding individuals with disabilities helped to shape the following. Initial observations of obvious need were also incorporated.



Guiding Principles & Objectives

Improvement and Maximization of Existing Assets	
Communication of Existing Assets	
Growth Planning	
Sports Tourism	
Increased Focus on Natural Assets and Education	
Equitable & Inclusive Access to Recreation	
Continuity with City Goals, Strengths & Identity	
Implementation of Nationally Recognized Administrative & Operational Practices	

In addition to such themes, the City’s identity should be incorporated into the fiber of recommendations since it is both current and aspirational in nature. This vision acts as a touchstone for plan execution. Hickory is and strives to be...

**Welcoming...Artistic...Knowledgeable...Nostalgic...
Active...Lively...& Connected**

The Lenses Through Which Recommendations Should Be Viewed...

While striving to serve all citizens and visitors, it is very important to remember that Hickory will experience greater demand for parks, amenities and programs that speak to the needs and interests of the following groups...

Senior Citizens
Families with Young Children
Underserved Populations (Individuals with Disabilities & Residents in Eastern Quadrants)
Mixed Race & Hispanic Citizens



Improvement & Maximization of Existing Assets



The City of Hickory is a recreation “go-to” for the region and has been recognized as such by its citizens who regard the Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department as their premier recreation provider. This fact is also inherent in its status as a metro-statistical hub. 572 acres and 27 parks offer a myriad of exciting opportunities for a customization of assets that notably increases service to citizens and attracts visitors.

Recommendation	
1.0 Elevate Hickory Trail to Linear Park Status	Update Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan and related City communications such as its website.
1.2 See “Inventory & Analysis” for Additional Park & Facility-specific Recommendations	The master plan’s Inventory & Analysis section contains detailed recommendations regarding adjustments to parks and facilities. These recommendations are purposefully not exhaustive due to the execution of the day to day maintenance mission of the Public Services Department as well as the passing of time between observations and the completion of the master plan. Observations necessarily represent a snapshot in time. The snapshot along with public input, however, has revealed helpful themes that can be considered as staff work toward the improvement and maximization of existing assets.
Parks & Facilities	
1.3 Prioritize Use of Public Input from Master Plan Process for Parks & Facility Decisions	Ensure the use of public input, contained in this master plan, to the extent possible when planning both at the department and leadership levels.
1.4 Begin to Update Parks to... Reflect Classification Balance Usage Meet Identified Needs Capitalize on Trends Enhance Aesthetics Showcase the City’s Personality	<p>Throughout the plan’s needs assessment, citizens and stakeholders clearly articulated their support for the improvement of existing parks and facilities, even over the delivery of new and desired amenities in some cases. The most popular parks in the City appear to be those that strike a balance between active and passive use, appeal to multiple ages at once, offer water-based recreation, showcase sports and feature inclusive fun.</p> <p>Reflect Classification Some parks do not reflect the character of their classification and may need adjustment to do so or receive a new classification. Due to the distribution of parks needed, it is recommended that the City make meaningful adjustments versus change classifications. Neill Clark Recreation Park, for example, recently lost acreage and remaining land will need neighborhood park amenities to maintain its status. Though Southside Heights Park may have amenities that reflect a neighborhood park, its lack of connectivity and sparse population density surrounding it, call for a re-evaluation of the park’s usage.</p> <p>Balance Usage Some parks, like Kiwanis Park, experience explosive use while others like Southside Heights Park see light usage. The following strategies can assist with balancing park usage more evenly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove known barriers to usage (i.e. accessibility issues, lack of communication, transportation impediments, etc)

- Utilize NRPA “Rejuvenating Neighborhoods & Communities Through Parks” Guide for Park Transformations in Difficult Areas
 - Consider this tool specifically for West Hickory Park
- Offer programs at underutilized parks
- Duplicate or move popular amenities to underutilized parks
- Launch robust communications campaigns to introduce lesser known parts of the park-system
- Incentivize individuals to visit new parks via programs that reward them for visiting a new location (i.e. scavenger hunts, passports, etc)

Southside Heights Park, Cliff Teague Park, West Hickory Park, Jaycee Park, Hickory Optimist Park and McComb Park may have the capacity to provide relief, in whole or in part, for the following parks which were found to be “overused” based on visits, parking patterns and staff observations.

NW Quadrant: Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park, Hickory City Park, Miracle of Hickory Park and Rotary Geitner Park

NE Quadrant: Stanford Park

SW Quadrant: Henry Fork River Park and Taft-Broome Park

SE Quadrant: Fairbrook Optimist Park and Kiwanis Park

McComb Park is too small to provide relief to Stanford Park. Bruce Meisner Park, however, may be able to take some of the passive and children’s play pressure off of Stanford Park.

Hickory Optimist Park...A Park to Elevate

During an analysis of park usage, Hickory Optimist Park was among those least used between January of 2017 and October of 2022. This 6-acre park is power-packed with amenities akin to larger, more popular, parks. Amenities include...

- Outdoor Fitness Equipment Zone
- 4 Pickleball Courts
- New Playground with Inclusive Features
- Paved Walking Trail
- Picnic Shelter
- Community Room Building with Restrooms & Catering Kitchen
- Youth Softball Field



This park has potential to relieve over-used parks and host programming.

Meet Identified Needs

Use needs assessment (public input/survey results) to choose upgrades and additions to parks on City’s improvement rotation which converges with the Inventory & Analysis in this plan. Consult US Census Tract population information to make strategic need/location-based decisions.

Continue City trend of installing high quality play-systems with adaptive features via 5 Year Capital Improvement Program.



	<p>Public input and inventory efforts have revealed the following “small investment/big impact” adjustments that can be made at existing parks, some of which are related to greater inclusivity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shade • Increased Aesthetics • Visible Presence of Security Measures • Litter Control Measures <p>Capitalize on Trends Organizations, such as the National Recreation & Park Association, publish information on trends, annually. This information, when coupled with local trend information, can help departments strategically select or advertise offerings that are more likely to attract and effectively serve the population. The most commonly planned additions to parks, in 2022 were...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Splash Play Areas 2. Synthetic Turf Sports Fields 3. Dog Parks 4. Playgrounds 5. Outdoor Fitness Areas & Fitness Trails 6. Bike Trails 7. Park Shelters 8. Park Restroom Structures 9. Community or Multi-purpose Centers 10. Open Spaces and Natural Areas  <p>Enhance Aesthetics Fresh paint and landscaping are two straightforward ways the City is already elevating the look and feel of parks.</p> <p>Showcase the City’s Personality The City is already investing in site furnishings that reflect its personality as articulated on Hickory Trail and on Union Square. This growing continuity, among parks, will pay visual dividends and increase community pride.</p>
<p>1.5 Strive Toward Universal Design Standards in Current System and New Projects</p>	<p>According to the North Carolina State University Center for Universal Design, Universal Design is simply a “design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, <i>without the need for adaptation or specialized design</i>.” The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design gives a slightly modified version of this definition, making the point that access to the greatest extent possible relates to all <i>people regardless of their age, size, ability and disability</i>.</p> <p>Public input has indicated a desire for Universal Design at a greater level than encountered and national trends support this. Amenities such as playgrounds can be built to simultaneously accommodate people with a variation of cognitive and chronological age, senior citizens, people with disabilities, children and parents who want to play with their kids. This is one example of a cost savings measure and synergy booster.</p>

	<p>Universal Design concepts are already being employed by the City of Hickory and municipalities, in the Unifour. A broader implementation of its principles can become a means of cost savings in the long term.</p> <p>It is recommended that the City adopt and regularly use The NC State Center for Universal Design's seven principles. These principles can be applied to evaluating existing design or guiding the design environments.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Equitable Use: The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.2. Flexibility in Use: The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.3. Simple and Intuitive Use: Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.4. Perception Information: The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.5. Tolerance for Error: Design minimizes hazards and adverse consequences of accidental actions.6. Low Physical Effort: The design can be used efficiently, comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.7. Size and Space for Approach and Use: Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size posture or mobility. <p>If the principles are applied to future environments, research suggests a cost savings. The General Services Administration and Access Board make a case for savings as related to Universal Design via the following infographic.</p>
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The Case for Universal Design

UNIVERSAL DESIGN is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be **accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible** by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.

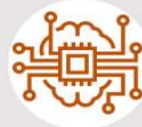
- Centre for Excellence in Universal Design

SAVE MONEY



Universal Design costs less in the long term, as "unmet and unforeseen" user requirements can be captured in the beginning

DRIVE INNOVATION



Universal Design leads to better, innovative products, as multidisciplinary teams work together to address unique user requirements, creating solutions accessible for all

ENGAGE THE WORKFORCE



Universal Design empowers more employees to use and access content, making it easier to attract, retain and develop employees with and without disabilities

Sources:

The Center for Universal Design - Universal Design Principles (ncsu.edu)

The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design | Centre for Excellence in Universal Design

Infographic: The Case for Universal Design | Section508.gov

The following amenities can easily boost the City's offering of universal design at existing parks.

Adaptive Swings = The presence of an adaptive swing is affordable and adds an immediate increase in park inclusivity.

ADA Ramps = ADA ramps help wheelchairs and assistive devices to get to play equipment/features.

Adult Changing Stations = There are adults with disabilities who are in need of using adult incontinence pads. Having a dignified space for changing is important.

Fencing = Fencing protects park patrons who may be prone to elopement (wandering) such as those with Autism and Down Syndrome.

Best Practice: City of Morganton

The City of Morganton has parks with many inclusive features. A notable best practice is their use of fencing in urban areas or those with terrain that could be hazardous. MLK Jr. Park and Martha's Park are great examples of fenced in parks.

Shade Structures = Shade structures protect individuals with disabilities who often have photo-sensitivities due to medications taken or diagnosis. Shade benefits everyone and was one of the most popular amenities requested during the public input process.

Waterproof Wheelchairs at Splash Pads + Adaptive Guidelines = Waterproof wheelchairs make splash pads more accessible to individuals with disabilities and senior citizens. Create adaptive guidelines to explicitly allow for adaptive equipment such as swim diapers.

Inclusive Signage = See recommendations on Equitable & Inclusive Access

**1.6
Emulate Best Practice Parks
in Future Design & Current
Adjustments**



Adult Playgrounds for Individuals with Disabilities

According to www.cityofpaloalto.org, Magical Bridge Playground is heralded as the nation’s most innovative and inclusive playground made up of play areas for everyone and everybody, at every stage of life. This intergenerational playground is 100% inclusive, innovative and enriching. Notable



features include distinct play zones, retreat spaces, seamless surfaces, wheelchair access to a two-story playhouse/treehouse and top of slide mound. Fully accessible equipment includes bucket swings, joyful spinning features, wide slides, a sway boat, and a merry-go-round flush with the ground. The playground touts far surpassing ADA requirements with its design facilitated by inclusive play experts, educators, therapists, families living with various disabilities, and leading landscape architects. Some of the most popular features include an artist-designed 24-string laser harp, whimsical artwork, seamless turf, as well as custom wooden structures for tactile and visual impact.

Source: www.paloalto.org

**1.7
Integrate Sensory Garden
Experiences into
Underutilized Spaces, Existing
Arboretum, Community
Gardens or the City’s
Smallest Parks**

The City of Hickory can consider transforming underutilized spaces, portions of the Ivey Arboretum or its smallest of parks into sensory gardens.

Sensory Gardens are special places that engage the five senses in a calm environment. They are known to be very beneficial to individuals with sensory integration challenges such as those with a diagnosis on the Autism spectrum. According to Asperia USA, a sensory garden is “an outdoor garden environment designed to stimulate a person’s senses. Using a combination of landscape, aromas and colors of plants and flowers and possibly some stimulating interactive sensory equipment, you can transform **any** outdoor space into a sensory garden to help encourage sensory play. It is important to note that a sensory garden can be as complicated or simple as it is made. It appears that with the right knowledge, such as through a group of volunteer Master Gardeners and a good guide, a sensory garden could be as simple as a standard

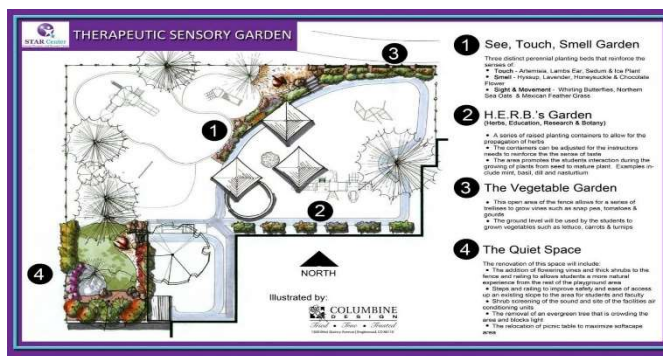
landscaping project that just needs a small communication plan to accompany it.”

Source: Asperia USA

Best Practices

Star Center: Therapeutic Sensory Garden

The STAR Institute is located in Colorado and features gardens where children can see, touch and smell different plants (1). They also feature an Herb Garden with raised planters that allow children to experience herbs and other plants (2). Since visitors come year-round, they also have a vegetable garden (3) where children can actually harvest plants and integrate them into cooking opportunities as part of camps. Finally, they have a quiet space garden (4) where certain plants create a calming effect, away from playground equipment, when a sensory break was needed.



Source: Star Institute

Sensory Walk at Chestnut Ridge Park...A Linear Sensory Garden Orchard Park, New York



According to a representative from Kanics Inclusive Design Services, the city of Orchard Park wanted to install a “sensory walk” along a pathway to their parking lot at Chestnut Ridge Park. They installed sensory nodes such as drums, chimes and play panels. Benches were also installed to allow parents to rest. The City of Hickory should consider using this concept for key trail segments within the City such as ones that reside near key census tracts known for a high concentration of individuals with disabilities. This is scalable and can link to the usage of underdeveloped properties along Hickory Trail.

Source: Kanics Inclusive Design

<p>1.8 Partner with Catawba County Council on Aging to Explore the Feasibility of Creating a Network of Senior Focused Amenities at Existing Facilities</p>	<p>Demographic projections and existing facilities for seniors give merit to the exploration of enhanced offerings in the next 10 years.</p> <p>It is recommended that the City form an exploratory partnership with the Catawba County Council on Aging to examine the feasibility of creating a network of senior focused amenities utilizing existing assets that may reach beyond established senior centers. The aim of this endeavor would be to build capacity for serving seniors within the next 10 years.</p>
<p>1.9 Explore Programmable Open Space Identified During Inventory & Analysis</p>	<p>During the inventory and analysis phase of the master planning process, a specific look at open spaces, within existing parks, was taken. This was done in order to identify additional opportunities for the City to program within parks, rent space for public use and/or promote conservation. Open space at the following parks should be assessed for the possibility of use in the context noted above.</p> <p>Regional Parks: Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park (1), Henry Fork River Park (1), Rotary-Geitner Park (1) and Winkler Park (1).</p> <p>Community Parks: Stanford Park (3)</p> <p>Neighborhood Parks: Cliff Teague Park (3), Fairbrook Optimist Park (1), Hickory City Park (1), Highland Park (1), and West Hickory Park (1).</p> <p>Undeveloped Parks or Park Space: Sandy Pines Property (12 Acres) Until Developed, and Bruce Meisner Park (68 Acres).</p>
<p>Facilities</p>	
<p>1.10 Review the Benefits of Improvements to the Westmont Senior Center</p>	<p>National trends, according to the National Recreation & Park Association seem to be showing a renewed interest in senior programs and services after the Covid 19 pandemic. This is with a particular eye to senior center revitalization. During a 2019 study, it was found that the average age of adults using senior centers was 79 years old. According to an NRPA Healthy Aging in Parks Report provided in 2017, the senior population will grow to 82.3 million, nationwide by 2040 with representation of 21.7% of the total US population which will be larger than the percentage of the population under 18 years.</p> <p>It is recommended that the City review the possibility of renovating the exterior and interior of the Westmont Senior Center. It is further recommended that the inside of the center follow along with an evaluation of the expansion of the center's hours and days available</p> <p>The following should also be considered...</p> <p>The most common park and recreation offerings for older adults include...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise Classes • Volunteer Opportunities @ Recreation Centers • Partnerships with Area Agencies on Aging • Field Trips • Events & Festivals for Older Adults (Unifour Games) • Leadership in Providing Senior Services & Programming • Arts & Crafts Classes • Evidence-based Programs for Older Adults

<p>1.11 Perform Official Cost-Benefit Analysis Regarding the Usage of Brown Penn and Westmont Facilities</p>	<p>Both Brown Penn facilities and Westmont Gym, circa 1930's and 1940's have significant repair needs that outweigh their current use. In 2010 a Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment was conducted, identifying several challenges ranging from accessibility to costly renovations, many of which have not been fully invested in. With renovation costs now estimated as triple the proposed costs in 2010, it would be beneficial to perform a cost-benefit analysis regarding usage moving forward. Further data-driven decisions may need to be made as a result.</p> <p>The City uses the Brown Penn Recreation Center for limited teen and basketball programming. Brown Penn Senior Center is used for by-request rentals, and Westmont Gym is rarely used due to its condition. Some accessibility improvements along with recent HVAC replacements and basketball floor replacement have constituted the bulk of improvements invested in.</p> <p>*It should be noted that Brown Penn Facilities have a local historical designation.</p>
<p>1.12 Inclusive Splash Pad Presence in Each Quadrant</p>	<p>Investigate splash pads in NW, NE and SW quadrants throughout the life of this plan.</p> <p>Splash pads, which have been termed the “new public pool” or “urban beaches” are a conservation-friendly way of providing fun water-based recreation to citizens of all ages and abilities. Cities such as Los Angeles are replacing public pools with splash pads. Due to their small planning, construction and maintenance cost footprint, splash pads can be more readily replicated in multiple locations across a municipality. This increases aquatic equity. Less support for infrastructure, labor, equipment, operating costs and supplies make for an even stronger case for their actualization.</p> <p>With competing priorities and a need for the equitable distribution and usage of the City’s park system, splash pads and partnerships resembling the current swim lesson program with the YMCA are the City’s clearest path to providing a substantial boost in water-based recreation while meeting other needs and challenges in the next 10 years.</p> <div> </div> <p>Currently, there is a splash pad located in the at Kiwanis Park. This splash pad is extremely popular and has made a case, by itself, for the installation of more like amenities. The master plan’s public input process revealed strong citizen desires for water amenities and the fulfillment of past City interest in installing splash pads in communities such as Ridgeview.</p>
<p>Trails</p>	
<p>1.13 Program Hickory Trail</p>	<p>It is recommended that Hickory Trail become a community hub for programming and events. This amenity, once complete, will be capable of hosting 5 K races, triathlons, biathlons, adaptive races, biking events, themed walks and more.</p>
<p>1.14 Take Partnership with the Northwest Mountain Biking Alliance to the Next Level</p>	<p>The City has successfully partnered with the Northwest Mountain Biking Alliance to bring natural surface trails to its citizens. With the expressed interest of citizens to increase trails, it is recommended that the City explore improvements to biking trails through partnership.</p>

**1.15
Seek Re-alignment of
Conceptual Routes in
Carolina Thread Trail Master
Plan to Match Emerging
Needs**

**Re-engage with the Catawba
Lands Conservancy's
Carolina Thread Trail
Program to Build Public
Support for Trail
Implementation and Consider
Bringing Trail Master's
Program to Hickory**

+

**Seek Carolina Thread Trail
Grant for Desired Projects**

Currently, the City of Hickory showcases one segment of the Carolina Thread Trail known as the Hickory Greenway. This segment largely consists of pavement and stretches approximately 1.5 miles, one way. During master planning stakeholder meetings, the CTT expressed interest in elevating its presence in Hickory and the Unifour. With high citizen interest in trails and limited budgets, a partnership with the Carolina Thread Trail could create a win-win scenario. This exploration would need to take place in light of the City's Hickory Trail project which may necessitate modification of the CTT's conceptual trail routes related to Hickory. It is recommended that the City and CTT explore mutually beneficial routes ripe for future collaboration.

The Carolina Thread Trail master plan., containing conceptual trail routes, was adopted by the City of Hickory on December 7, 2010. Priority destinations, in the plan, included the SALT Block, Ivey Arboretum, Hickory Greenway and existing parks. Hickory's Town Center and downtown were also listed as a focus along with Lenoir-Rhyne University, Catawba Valley Community College and the Appalachian State University Extension. The Claremont Historic District was also a focal point. The master plan sites several other Hickory related connections.

The Greater Hickory Recreation/Tourism Plan was prepared in 2006 by Woolpert Incorporated for the Western Piedmont Council of Governments and the Unifour Recreation and Open Space Task Force. The stated purpose of this Plan is to reposition the region's economy by leveraging the natural, cultural, and recreational resources for sustainable economic growth and prosperity". Among one of the strategies included to leverage these resources is the establishment of a connected greenway system throughout the region. This speaks to Hickory's connectivity goals.

Source: Carolina Thread Trail Master Plan

Carolina Trail Master Certification

The Carolina Thread Trail is created by volunteers. Trail project leaders are known as Trail Masters and have received formal training in constructing sustainable trails and maintaining them. The City of Hickory could explore hosting this important training course to foster expertise in the local community and connect further with the mission of the Carolina Thread Trail.


Carolina Thread Trail Grants

Unlike many endeavors of this type, private funds are serving as a catalyst for creating the Carolina Thread Trail. Local communities and partners in the 15-county area are invited to participate in planning and building the Thread Trail. Communities and partner organizations are empowered through financial and technical support from the project to create and implement their own community-based trails. The communities, working together, may apply for grants from the private pool of capital that can serve as catalytic funding and help attract public funding sources.

Source: www.carolinathreadtrail.org

Maintenance	
<p>1.16 Adopt Tiered Maintenance Approach</p>	<p>It is recommended that the Public Services Department review maintenance level standards and adjust them based upon usage and priorities. A possible approach can be seen in the best practice below.</p> <p>Best Practice</p> <p>High Point Maintenance Standards</p> <p>Level 1 Maintenance – High profile areas where the entire area is visible to foot traffic such as entrances to community centers and areas where funding permits a higher level of maintenance. Example of maintenance activities include: Mowing and edging twice per week during peak growing season, 95 percent turf coverage at start of season with 5% weeds and 0 percent bare area, edging once per week, tree pruning cycle once annually, litter pickup twice per week.</p> <p>Level 2 Maintenance – Moderate to heavy use typical of most parks. Example maintenance activities include: Mowing and edging once per week, 80 percent turf coverage at start of season with 5-10% weeds and 5 percent bare area, tree pruning cycle every several years, litter pickup once per week.</p> <p>Level 3 Maintenance – Typical for low usage parks or when funding is limited very limited. Example maintenance activities include: Mowing and edging every 2 weeks, 80 percent turf coverage at start of season with 20 percent weeds, edging once per week or every 2 weeks in off-season, tree pruning cycle every 10 years, litter pickup every other week. In areas where turf does not impact quality of experience (i.e., dog parks) or non-landscaped open space areas, demand-based maintenance is provided according to funding availability.</p> <p>Source: High Point Parks & Recreation Master Plan</p>
<p>1.17 Use Natural Means to Enhance Maintenance Efforts on Difficult Slopes</p>	<p>Establish native grass areas on “difficult to maintain slopes” in most parks.</p>
<p>1.18 Continue to Leverage Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Funds to Improve Eligible Parks</p>	<p>The City of Hickory has created synergy between Community Development Block Grants (CDBGs) and its Capital Improvement Plan. CDBG funding has been used to augment funds earmarked for park and infrastructure improvements that include streets and sidewalks that assist in community connectivity. Parks eligible for CDBG assistance, within the City of Hickory include Civitan Park (2023), Hickory Optimist Park (2022), West Hickory Park (2019), Cliff Teague Park (2018/2019), McComb Park, Fairbrook Optimist Park, and Taft-Broome Park (2020). The years, annotated next to park names above, indicate the year CDBG funds were last used for park improvements. It is recommended that the City continue to leverage CDBG funds to meet the needs of this master plan. It is allowable to obtain and use CDBG funds to make improvements to facilities that have used such funds in the past.</p>
<p>1.19 Increase Flexibility of Use for Each Park</p>	<p>Parks, by their very nature, are flexible spaces. It is recommended that staff analyze and formally document additional ways that parks can be stretched to allow for expanded use. One such example could be the use of “pop up” amenities to add another layer to a park’s existing focus.</p>

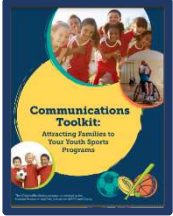

<p>1.20 Create Plan for PR&ST Staff Office Space</p>	<p>In the next 10 years, it is guaranteed that staff will grow to meet the demands of Hickory’s evolving population. Offices are mainly located at Highland and Ridgeview Recreation Centers. They are already considered as at “near capacity.” Additional office space will need to be identified if staff grows. Ideally, this space will be built into new facilities approved by the City. It is recommended that the department explore its inventory of existing office space options and advocate for space in future facilities if staff grows.</p>
<p>1.21 Complete Miracle of Hickory Park Project</p>	<p>It is recommended that the City complete the approved Miracle of Hickory Park Master Plan currently/partially funded via a Rotary Club grant. This project received tremendous support during its master planning process.</p>
<p>1.22 Add Adaptive Biking Opportunities and Events to Hickory Trail</p>	<p>The Hickory Trail is a great place to bike! This multi-modal pathway is safe, wide and a great place for individuals with disabilities to recreate. The City of Hickory should consider exploring the feasibility of bringing adaptive biking to this new City amenity as its segments are completed.</p> <div> </div> <p>Best Practice</p> <p>The City of Charlotte partners with organizations such as Charlotte Tandems US and iCan Shine to provide adaptive biking experiences for individuals with disabilities on their paved trails and sidewalks. Some programs offer free tandem and tag-along bicycle rentals to anyone with a disability or additional need.</p>
<p>Programs & Events</p>	
<p>1.23 Prioritize Use of Public Input from Master Plan Process in Program Planning</p>	<p>The following three programs were voiced as important to citizens and appear to be feasible to explore in the near term.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult Fitness and Wellness Programs • Special Events/Family Festivals • Outdoor Adventure Programs <p>See Community Collaboration Section for full information.</p>
<p>1.24 Make Strategic Use of Trend Information for Program Enhancements, Development, Communication and Connecting with Opportunities Emerging at the National Level</p>	<p>The current PR&ST Department offerings and programs, below, trended as having the highest interest and participation. These programs should be continued but also leveraged strategically to introduce participants to other areas of recreation as well as a foundation for making adjustments to welcome in key members of the community projected to be a more significant presence in the City in the next 10 years. This would include senior citizens, families with young children, individuals of mixed race, Hispanic citizens and underserved populations such as individuals with disabilities and those living in the eastern quadrants of the City. An expansion of programs and alternate timing may also be ways to reach these populations with core programming.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fitness Center Usage • Open Gym • Recreation Sports Programs • Trailhead Usage • Pickleball • Special Events

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Niche Programs (i.e. pet programs/events) • Classes: Zumba, Cycling, Senior Walkers, Total Body and Tai Chi • Nationally trending programs to consider... • Mindfulness, Stress Reduction and Nutrition • Additional Basketball, outdoor soccer, and flag football • Lifestyle sports (i.e. tennis....) <p>The Most Commonly Planned Programs in 2022</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fitness Programs (Up from #3) 2. Environmental Education Programs 3. Mind-body Balance Programs (Up from #4) 4. Group Exercise Programs (Down from #1) 5. Teen Programming (Down from #2) 6. Performing Arts Programs (Not in 2021 Top 10) 7. Adult Sports Teams (Up from #9) 8. Educational Programs (Down from #6) 9. Special Needs Programs (Up from #10) 10. Day Camps & Summer Camps (Not in the 2021 Top 10) 
<p>1.25 Increase Program Facilitation at Parks</p>	<p>A majority of parks and recreation programming currently takes place at recreation centers. To encourage park usage and increase the capacity to offer programming, the PR&ST Department should look to the parks for flexible space and foster partnerships to program the parks if necessary.</p>
<p>1.26 Increase Program & Event Participation</p>	<p>The community needs survey and public input platforms used for master planning revealed a high degree of satisfaction with programming and events yet a low overall participation rate. It is recommended that a robust use of the proposed PR&ST Communication Plan be employed to increase participation.</p>
<p>1.27 Perform Post-Pandemic Lifecycle Analysis of Programs</p>	<p>Since a new baseline of programming was still being developed at the time of the plan’s compilation, it is advised that a post-pandemic analysis of programs and their life cycles be performed after the implementation of the plan. See Appendix for a model.</p>
<p>1.28 Continue to Increase Program & Event Partnership/ Sponsorship Relationships</p>	<p>The PR&ST Department is adept at forming and fostering partnerships that result in bringing great programs and events to the area. Given population projections, esteem for programming and a future commitment to robust communication, it will be important to deepen existing relationships with outside entities and bring new relationships to the forefront. The master plan’s Inventory & Analysis section can assist staff with identifying new opportunities.</p>
<p>1.30 Create Park Safety Communication Plan</p>	<p>To address public safety input received during the master planning process, it recommended that the City formalize existing efforts, such as Community Response Units, through a communication framework that highlights the police department’s efforts at park safety and how they have been extending their eyes and ears over the past year.</p>

Communication of Existing Assets



Recommendation	
<p>2.0 Develop Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism-Specific Marketing & Communication Plan</p>	<p>Use City Office of Communications as a resource partner. Coordinate with staff to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify Frequently Asked Questions & Provide Talking Points for Consistent Messaging • Do's and Don'ts in Communication...When to Use City Office • Develop and Implement Matrix for Timely/Effective Communications • Implement Brand Identity & City Personality Characteristics Training • Train Staff on Marketing Basics • Meet Quarterly to Train, Assist or Guide <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Internal PRST Marketing/Communications Meeting to Help POC ▪ Articulate Approval Process & Empower Where Possible ▪ Include Grass-roots Marketing for Residents Who Don't Use Electronic Media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use Parks as Information Hubs • Cross Promotion...Promote at Events • Recruit Volunteers to Post in Areas Frequented by Seniors or Individuals with Disabilities <p>Best Practices</p> <p>NRPA Marketing & Communication for Parks and Recreation Certificate</p> <p>Leverage State & National Resources (i.e. NRPA Toolkits)</p>
<p>2.1 Elevate Brand of "Recreation: Well Crafted" & Plug into City's Personality Traits of Being Welcoming, Artistic, Knowledgeable, Nostalgic, Active, Lively and Connected</p>	<p>The Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department benefits from the brand-awareness that comes through the City's overall efforts. If the brand "Recreation: Well Crafted" were implemented more frequently at the department level, the awareness-related benefits of branding could be maximized.</p> <p>The City's Inspiring Spaces Plan systematically identified the seven key personality characteristics of the City of Hickory. The personality characteristics are described as "welcoming, active, lively, nostalgic, artistic, and knowledgeable." The PR&ST Department can make a case for how they can help citizens and visitors develop the same good qualities.</p>
<p>2.2 Communicate the PR&ST Department as an Anchor Institution</p>	<p>National trends indicate that parks and recreation departments are being considered as anchor institutions. Local public input has clearly indicated that the PR&ST Department is seen as an anchor institution via it being noted as providing essential services. It is recommended that this be emphasized to the community as a form of promotion.</p>

<p>2.3 Increase Awareness of Park Safety</p>	<p>Park safety was noted noticeably in public feedback. It is recommended that the Office of Communications assist with educating the populace on park safety measures and how the Hickory PD keeps them safe.</p>
<p>2.4 Plug Into & Leverage National Communication Resources</p>	<p>The City can utilize data-driven marketing toolkits, produced by the NRPA, for areas of interest such as youth sports. Toolkits contain materials based on parent, caregiver and staff focus group input as well as national survey data to inform suggested marketing language. This resource also utilizes the language found to be most successful at reaching specific recreators. This strategic resource can be incorporated into the City’s communication framework, enhancing the likelihood of desired outcomes. It can also be used by the department for additional communication and grass-roots efforts.</p>  <p>Source: NRPA</p>
<p>2.5 Maximize Participation in Annual Parks & Recreation Month as a Platform to Introduce or Reintroduce Citizens and Visitors to all PR& Offerings ST</p> 	<p>Departments, across the nation, tap into the branding and exposure afforded them by Parks & Recreation Month, sponsored by the NRPA. Full outreach resources are provided for communities who use the month of July to showcase their parks and recreation offerings. The City of Hickory has connected with this month but has ample opportunity to take greater advantage of linking to their profession on the national stage.</p> <p>It is recommended that the City increase efforts to harness this resource.</p> <p>Source: NRPA</p>

**2.6
Market to Niche Interests/Create
Directory of Niche Interests**

Individuals seeking recreation opportunities are often looking for a specific amenity or feature. To assist in the quick identification of niche offerings, it is recommended that the City consider pictorial layouts.

Best Practice: Discover Greensboro Catalog

The City of Greensboro, within their Discover Greensboro catalog, provides pictorial charts for niche interests and key information for parks, facilities, and trails. This illustration includes items of particular interest to individuals that need to plan their trips ahead.

Source: <https://user-kcmpnye.cld.bz/Discover-Greensboro-Winter-Spring-2023/29>



**2.7
Adjust City Website to Assist Recreators
Looking for Specific Forms of Recreation
or Amenities**

The City's current website offerings, with regard to parks and recreation, are comprehensive with regard to its accounting of amenities and interests. At this time, individuals wishing to identify multiple locations featuring a particular amenity (i.e. pickleball courts) are not able to do so. It is recommended that website adjustments be made to foster niche searches.

**Best Practice: Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Recreation Search**




Source: <https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/parksandtrails/#list>

**2.8
Give Focused Attention to Connecting
with Teens Regarding Parks and
Recreation Offerings for Them**

During stakeholder interviews, teens expressed a notable interest in having the PR&ST Department/City reach out to them via the ways that they communicate most (i.e. TikTok & Instagram). They also expressed a desire to receive more information on parks and recreation programs/events for them via local schools.

**Adjust Social Media Strategy to Attract
Teen Followers**

<p>2.9 Orient Community to Current Water-based Recreation & Private Opportunities & Promote Use</p> <p>Emphasize Proximity of Nearby Lake Hickory Access</p>	<p>Use City’s communication channels to provide full picture of existing water-based recreation opportunities offered by the City of Hickory as well as available private opportunities.</p> <p>Promote public access areas within or near parks and trails as well as those within close proximity to the City. For example, the Wittenburg Access Area is 6.4 miles from City Hall and resides in the Alexander County portion of Hickory. It includes 6 boat ramps, 3 courtesy docks, 1 fishing platform, and parking. Also includes fishing and a trail. Swim beach projected in Spring of 2024 along with picnic shelters, concessions, restrooms, outdoor showers and an office. Accessible to individuals with disabilities.</p>
<p>2.10 Create Recreation Guide & Park Directory for Individuals with Disabilities</p> <p>Include Materials on City Website & Advertise Through Social Media</p>	<p>Individuals with disabilities have many considerations when planning to recreate. Not only do they need to know where accessible options are located but also how to plan for their trip there. The City’s current directory provides a general framework for park users. A comprehensive guide, designed for individuals with disabilities would benefit from featuring the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Maps and Preparation Guides for Hickory Trail ○ Best Parks for Individuals with Disabilities ○ How to Make the Best Use of Accessible Playgrounds & Features ○ Inclusive Programs & Events Calendars ○ Recreation Partners ○ Regional Recreation Opportunities <p>It would be important to make this guide available in alternative formats, such as braille, which meet the needs of those with particular disabilities.</p>
<p>2.11 Create Videos to Promote & Educate the Population on Accessibility Features of Park Amenities & Programs</p>	<p>It is recommended that the City produce videos to highlight the accessibility features of parks or programs. Ensure the articulation of the benefits of simple features, such as unitary surfacing, to help viewers understand what is being offered to a greater extent. Emphasize accessibility to the primary user and those that might accompany them such as parents and caregivers. Place videos on the City website and social media to bring about greater awareness of accessible amenities in the City and region. Consider regional travel videos for a collection of parks that one could visit or a video featuring how an individual with a disability can enjoy Hickory Trail.</p> <p>Best Practice</p> <p>Yellowjacket Park, Rockwall Texas, Playground Video</p> <p>Rockwall Texas is one of many communities who have made YouTube videos about what inclusive parks can bring to the population and who can specifically benefit. This video emphasizes the benefits of unitary surfacing, often taken for granted.</p> 

	<p>It also highlights the often forgotten point that parents who bring kids to a playground might be the ones with disabilities and in need of inclusivity.</p> <p>Source: Playworld - Inclusive Playground Feature: Rockwall, TX - YouTube</p>
<p>2.12 Install Inclusive Signage at Parks</p>	<p>Install PEC Boards, near playgrounds, at the most accessible parks in the inventory. This project may be a good candidate for a Catawba Collaborative grant which is the same grant award received for the Zahra Baker Message Center.</p> <p>Best Practice</p> <p>Non-verbal Communications Boards with Braille/PEC Boards</p> <p>Two parks in Ellicott City Maryland installed nonverbal communication boards which allow nonverbal children to easily communicate with parents and other children without the use of personal augmentative and alternative communication devices. The boards feature pictures that express thoughts and feelings. Children are able to point to appropriate pictures, on the board, as a form of communication. These boards were created by speech-language pathologists specifically for use on playgrounds. Not only do they aid in communication but they also aid in disability awareness when viewed by neurotypical park users.</p>  <p>Source: Communication Boards - Howard County Autism Society (howard-autism.org)</p>
<p>2.13 Make Strategic Use of Message Centers in Parks</p>	<p>Message centers provide on-site information for park users. They can be used to promote the features of the park they reside in and to make the most of its amenities. Beyond this, message centers can act as a springboard to other parks and amenities that might be of similar interest which, in turn, can help with balancing system usage. Message centers are also helpful to imparting information to underserved people who may not frequent social media or whom have special interests or needs.</p> <p>It is recommended that the City explore the strategic use of message centers, at the City’s most popular parks, to communicate information regarding other parks with like amenities and to promote a greater awareness of the park system. Include information on how to make the best use of inclusive amenities, if applicable.</p> <p>Best Practice</p> <p>Message Centers at Zahra Baker Playground & Glenn C. Hilton Memorial Park</p>

<p>2.14 Install Electronic Signage at High Use Parks without Sign Restrictions</p>	<p>Highly visible electronic signage can be a great tool for promoting parks and recreation opportunities. Capable of remote updating, electronic signs are a great companion to static message centers which are capable of holding different kinds of information. It is recommended that the City consider installing electronic signage at high use parks, where feasible.</p>
<p>2.15 Create Electronic, Paper & Alternate Forms of Communication for Individuals with Disabilities Who Need to Plan Recreation Outings Ahead of Time</p>	<p>The Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities revealed great need for “plan ahead” materials so that individuals with disabilities can know what is available to them and what they might be getting themselves into with regard to exertion and availability of key resources. Shade availability, amount of physical exertion to be expected, frequency of availability to accessible restrooms, navigability of routes, accessible furniture availability, navigable routes and potential safety hazards are among key considerations. According to the National Ability Center, “whether it’s a physical disability, or a cognitive or mental health challenge, the more information you can provide somebody, the more confident they’re going to be in that experience to be able to accomplish it.” Source: https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/people-living-disabilities-want-broader-park-experience</p> <p>Best Practice...Access North Carolina Travel Guide</p> <p>The ACCESS Carolina Travel Guide, though not recent, is an example of a resource that communicates accessible travel options to individuals with a disability. Aside from a compilation like this, information on accessible travel destinations is sparse and scattered. Source: ACCESS North Carolina 2015_0.pdf (nc.gov)</p>

Growth Planning



Recommendation	
<p>3.0 Level of Service Standards for the Next 10 Years</p>	<p>It is recommended that the City review parks and facilities for usage and needs, based on this master plan, to determine level of service needs. See Benchmark & Level of Service Analysis section (page 284) for proposed level of service standards/targets.</p> <p>Additional Recommendation</p> <p>Consider Staffing Within the Next 10 Years</p> <p>The City just matches the median FTEs per 10,000 as measured across the nation for its jurisdiction population. Looking ahead to plan sunset, it appears that the number of employees is still just more than median if all other factors remained the same. Agency staffing slightly exceeds the median. When the City moves into its projected jurisdiction population category, the City will significantly drop below the median. However, the lower quartile of the new jurisdiction levels currently resides at 38.7 if all other factors remained the same. Being a metro-statistical hub with sports tourism goals, it would be advisable for the City to exceed this lower quartile standard. The</p>

	<p>lower quartile is the value under which 25% of data points are found when they are arranged in increasing order.</p> <p>The City of Hickory, when compared to peer communities, is above median by .3 for full time staff per 1,000 residents. This is notable due to its comparison to much larger jurisdictions. Among jurisdictions nearest its population (41,239-57,303), Hickory has the second lowest FTE's per 1,000 residents, differing by .58 from Danville VA which reported 1.43. It is important to note that Hickory's calculations include Public Services staff who maintain and operate the City's parks.</p>
<p>3.1 Review Parks, Facility and Program Efforts with Consideration of Demographic Projections & Underserved Populations</p>	<p>Senior citizens, families with young children, mixed race and Hispanic individuals were found to have the most significant population increases projected in the next 10 years. Parks, facilities and programs should be reviewed accordingly. Families with young children are a particular group that the City hopes to recruit in order to promote healthy population growth and economic vitality. Individuals in eastern quadrants and those with disabilities have been noted as particularly underserved via amenities and programs and should be focused upon as well. Review park, facility and program efforts with such demographics in mind.</p>
<p>3.2 Focus on Increasing Facility & Recreation Amenities in Eastern Quadrants</p>	<p>Consider Remaining Phases of Bruce Meisner Park to Gain Full Use of 73 Acres</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate Neighborhood Park characteristics to allow for this park to serve a dual role of Regional and Neighborhood park for the City • Ensure natural surface trails for mountain biking and cross-country practices/races • Prioritize citizen connectivity to this park <p>Consider development of Sandy Pines Property as Neighborhood Park (12 Acres)</p> <p>Elevate Revitalization of Cliff Teague Park as Release Valve for Kiwanis Park</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider sports tourism as an element of revitalization • Consider "NRPA Rejuvenating Neighborhoods and Communities Through Parks" guidance which is based on asset mapping and community collaboration <p>Scope Out Recreation Development Opportunities Near Trivium and Catawba Valley Boulevard as Well as South of Sweetwater and Startown Road</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use residential projects as markers for neighborhood park pursuits ○ Possible residential centers estimated near Startown Road & South of Trivium <p>Explore Adding Recreation Center in Southeast Quadrant Near End of Plan Sunset or Into New Planning Period</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to projected housing projects and a lack of amenities in the southeast, a recreation center should be explored. • Level of service standards support the possibility of an additional recreation center in the City if deemed necessary <p>Explore Connectivity Between Neighborhoods and Parks via Subdivisions</p> <p>It is important to note that the City may participate in the launch of an additional state park, of significant acreage, in the southeast during the lifespan of this master plan. The Southeast Quadrant, in particular, would benefit from this park which will bring desired amenities, such as trails, to the forefront. Also, there may be land opportunity near the Catawba Valley Medical Center as well as Henry Fork River Park.</p>

<p>3.3 Focus on Park Revitalization in Western Quadrants</p>	<p>6 out of 10 of the least visited parks reside in the western quadrants. The Southwest Quadrant, in particular, shows the greatest promise for revitalization with Hickory Optimist Park, West Hickory Park and Southside Heights Park. As noted in other recommendations, revitalization can be assisted by using the NRPA process of rejuvenation. It is recommended that underutilized parks, in the western quadrants, be revitalized.</p> <p>It is also important to note that the proximity of Southside Heights Park could potentially be harnessed for service delivery to the southeast though walkability would be a challenge. This is worth exploring further.</p>
<p>3.4 Leverage Lower Density Areas for Sports Tourism</p>	<p>Consider sports tourism venues in lower density areas. Parks in lower density areas include...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Southside Heights Park • Cliff Teague
<p>3.5 Conduct Parking Studies Due to Park Popularity or Projected Popularity</p>	<p>It is recommended that a parking study and subsequent action be performed for the following parks.</p> <p>Kiwanis Park Henry Fork River Park (CVYSA)...parking study ITW Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park Rotary-Geitner Park Miracle of Hickory Park</p>
<p>3.6 Consider Additional Strategic Partnerships to Provide Programming and Amenities</p>	<p>It is important to note that 100% of stakeholders, during the master planning process, expressed interest in some form of parks and recreation related partnership with the City. It is recommended that the PR&ST Department explore this potential.</p> <p>Partnerships are a key way in which the recreational capabilities of a community are stretched past their initial supply of resources. The PR&ST Department and City itself have demonstrated a powerful capacity to make and maintain strategic partnerships that benefit citizens and stretch tax dollars. It is recommended that the City and department seek additional strategic partnerships with the following types of partners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical Systems Such as the Catawba Valley Health System • Managed Care Organizations Such as Partners Behavioral Health • Universities Such as Lenoir Rhyne and Appalachian State Hickory • Downtown Businesses <p>Best Practice: The Prisma Health Swamp Rabbit Trail, Greenville South Carolina The Swamp Rabbit Trail is a 19.9 mile mutli-use train in Greenville, South Carolina, sponsored by Prisma Health. This project is known for its effective benefit to the community. While Hickory Trail is a great success, the Swamp Rabbit Trail shows what is possible through a municipal/medical system partnership. The City of Hickory should explore ways that it can partner with the Catawba Valley Health System on the identified needs of this plan.</p>

<p>3.7 Consider Recruitment of Private Investors to Provide Key Amenities Expressed as Desired by Citizens but Found Not to Be Possible Within the Next 10 Years Due to Competing Priorities and/or Other Factors</p>	<p>The City of Hickory would benefit from recruiting investors to expand amenities it cannot prioritize.</p> <p>The master planning process, informed largely by citizen input and data analysis, has revealed a myriad of priorities...all of which cannot be undertaken. The next 10 years will largely focus on maximizing existing assets, ensuring equitable access to parks and recreation in all quadrants, heightening service to the most vulnerable, creating a connected system, balancing focus to include natural assets and creating a more advanced administrative infrastructure that includes a greater capacity for revenue generation and employment of best practices. Due to these priorities, some amenities that have been voiced as an unmet need or desire by citizens and would benefit from private investment brokered in a way that makes recreation accessible to the majority of citizens.</p>
<p>3.8 Create Lake Hickory Task Force with Goal of Finding Creative Ways to Increase Public Access to the Lake Hickory Waterfront Through the...</p> <p>Assessment of the Feasibility of Potential Access Areas</p> <p>&</p> <p>the Education of the Public via Promotion of Existing Access In/Around Hickory (to Include the Future Deidra Lackey Memorial Park)</p>	<p>Public access to Lake Hickory was a prominent desire voiced by citizens during the public input process. The City is already addressing this desire through the future Deidra Lackey Memorial Park Project. Beyond that, there is no easy solution to providing desired access, however, there are creative ways to maximize existing assets, create strategic partnerships and leverage case studies to open up more opportunities. It is recommended that the City assemble a task force comprised of City staff and citizens to creatively find solutions.</p> <p>Waterfront mapping and inventories do exist, at least in part, via Duke Energy’s Recreation Information website which features Recreation Sites & Water Access. https://www.duke-energy.com/community/lakes/recreation-information/recreation-sites-water-access . Tools that can be used to create greater access to Lake Hickory, in the future, include the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public-private Partnerships that Allow Public Access Private Investment in Offering Public Access Focused Studies & Planning Land Conservation & Acquisition Zoning Adjustments Additional Waterfront Mapping & Inventories Taxation Options State Laws & Regulations Local Government Efforts Waterfront Revitalization Education <p>Best Practice: California Sea Grant Access to the Waterfront Study</p> <p>The California Sea Grant Access to the Waterfront Study examined access issues and solutions happening across the nation. The City of Hickory is not unique in having public access challenges to an amenity such as Lake Hickory. This study outlines creative solutions that the City could explore through a staff/citizen task force.</p> <p>Source: https://caseagrants.ucsd.edu/sites/default/files/Waterfront_Access_ME_SG.pdf</p> <p>Potential Future Access Areas to Explore</p> <p>Long Shoals and Lookout Shoals are two potential access areas to explore. Access to the Lake is also planned at the future Deidra Lackey Memorial Park.</p> <p>Education on Existing Access</p> <p>See Inventory & Analysis section for more information.</p>


<p>3.9 Grow Department’s Ability to Serve Individuals in the Hispanic & Hmong Communities</p>	<p>Ensure that services to prominent cultural groups, such as those in the Latino and Hmong communities, are present and known. Examples include effective translation of recreation opportunities and subsequent communication efforts. Partner with groups such as Centro Latino to get the word out. Grow opportunities to receive feedback from these communities. Emphasize that the City’s assets are for all and can be used for all. Explore providing sports opportunities of interest such as indoor soccer for individuals in the Latino community and tennis for the Hmong community.</p>
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Sports Tourism Recommendations

Sports Tourism is a key component of the City’s future recreation and economic success. Public and stakeholder input, along with a look at growth projections has fostered key recommendations for the next 10 years.





Capacity Growth & Sports Tourism Offerings

Recommendation	
<p>4.0 Maximize Partnership with Hickory Metro Convention Center</p>	<p>The Hickory-Conover Tourism Development Authority, Hickory City Council, and Conover City Council joined for a special meeting on September 15, 2022, to approve plans for an expansion and renovation to the Hickory Metro Convention Center. Once completed, the Hickory Metro Convention Center facility will be approximately 132,000 usable square feet for meetings and events. This facility will significantly increase the City’s sports tourism capacity. See Sports Tourism section for additional details.</p>
<p>4.1 Conduct Feasibility Study to Build Arena/Multi-use Facility with Flexible Indoor/Outdoor Space</p> <p>Identify/purchase/earmark land for development of such a facility along the Startown Corridor or Near St. Stephen’s.</p>	<p>Look at 6K capacity to accommodate events beyond Western Regionals. Consider indoor soccer, football, basketball and an indoor track. Delay of realizing such a facility may result in missing an opportunity to obtaining the land to build on.</p> <p>Best Practices</p> <p>Cabarrus Arena & Events Center, Concord NC Lincoln Memorial University Gym, Harrogate TN Boutwell Memorial Auditorium, Birmingham AL Albuquerque Convention Center, Albuquerque NM</p> <p>FEATURE: The RISE Indoor Sports, Bermuda Springs NC</p> <p>RISE is one of the largest and most accessible indoor sports complexes in the southeast. The facility is versatile enough to serve everyone from the general public to elite athletes — from local sports and fitness programs to large-scale tournaments.</p> <p>With over 123,000 square feet of regulation courts, fields and amenities, the Rise is dedicated to providing best-in-class health, wellness and performance year-round through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local programming for leagues, camps, clinics, and sport-specific training • tournament competitions for teams throughout the U.S. 

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • family fitness for all ages • court rental and special events <p>Concessions, a game-day lounge, community meeting rooms and a variety of other amenities are also available.</p> <p>Source: https://www.riseindoorsports.com/about-rise/</p>
4.2 Increase Gym Space	A Hickory Metro Convention Center expansion will significantly increase the capacity of the community to host several sports-related tournaments and events. Stakeholder and public input, however, have recognized a need for gym space that goes beyond this new capacity.
4.3 Increase Lacrosse Venues	It is recommended that the PR&ST Department explore a partnership with universities and schools to increase access to lacrosse venues.
4.4 Build Schools for Future Community Capacity	It is recommended that the City collaborate with local school systems to identify and build sports tourism capacity into future schools.
4.5 Magnify College Partnerships	The Sports Tourism inventory revealed a plethora of college facilities that can be considered for sports tourism offerings. It is recommended that the City maximize college partnerships to increase the City’s sports tourism capacity.
4.6 Explore Partnership with Entities to Attract High School Level Travel Baseball	It is recommended that the City increase its 60/90 capacity to attract high school level travel baseball to the area.
4.7 Explore Partnership with Duke Energy and the Hickory Metro Convention Center to Build Fishing Tournament Capacity	It is recommended that the PR&ST Department pursue efforts to build a fishing tournament capacity that accommodates 40 boats, equating to an 80 person tournament.
4.8 Identify Sports Tourism Niche	Identify sports area to specialize in versus general efforts duplicated in other cities unless such offerings would benefit from greater capacity. See separate recommendation regarding niches to explore.
4.9 Explore Indoor Venue Capable of Full Time Use	<p>A full-time indoor venue dedicated exclusively to sports, with amenities similar to the Hickory Metro-Convention Center, could eventually benefit the City. Such a facility could be used for travel teams, high school, college and adult competitions in at least ten different sports. Such a facility would build capacity to go beyond hosting regional events which would require courts in the double digits. This would have a residual impact on hotel inventories which would need to expand in order to accommodate the influx of visitors.</p> <p>It is recommended that the City review indoor venues dedicated exclusively to sports tourism.</p>
4.10 Explore Softball/Baseball Complex Possibilities	Currently the PR&ST Department only has one baseball field that meets the requirements for high school or college play. A complex of ball fields that could be used for softball and baseball, interchangeably, would be helpful to the sports tourism mission. Synthetic turf and a four-field pinwheel design, additional feature stadium for softball and another for baseball adjoining the pinwheel would be worth further exploration.

<p>4.11 Increase Mountain Biking Opportunities in the Area</p>	<p>Explore creation of a mountain biking venue near L.P. Frans Stadium. This venue could connect with the existing mountain biking venue at Hickory City Park via Aviation Walk and Riverwalk.</p>
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Sports Tourism Niche Opportunities to Explore

Recommendation	
<p>4.12 Women’s Sports</p>	<p>Consider creating niche, which does not currently exist in the region, for women’s sports such as volleyball and softball.</p>
<p>4.13 Division II Championships</p>	<p>The local area does not currently have a lot of competition for hosting DII Championships. It is recommended that the City attempt to create a strategic plan to bring the championships to the Hickory Metro area.</p>
<p>4.14 Wiffle Ball Parks</p>	<p>Southside Heights Park...A Potential Sports Tourism Niche Opportunity</p> <p>Located off of Hwy 127 and surrounded by low population density, Southside Heights Park has tremendous sports tourism niche potential while serving the local community in a fun way. During a usage analysis performed for this master plan, the park was found to be the least visited park in the City’s inventory. The western portion of the property lends itself to sports fields needing a small footprint (1+ acre) such as Miracle Fields or Wiffle Ball Fields as seen in the picture of “Little Fenway” above. Considering significant topography on the eastern portion of the property, the parcel is also prime for natural surface trails capable of serving cross country teams, competitive mountain bikers and low-intensity hikers. Increased parking capacity will need to be a component of any future plan.</p>   <p>Source: Wiffle Ball Fields Stadium Directory Field Ideas (ejourneytohealth.com)</p>
<p>4.15 Promote Celebrity Sports Tourism</p>	<p>It is recommended that the PR&ST department explore working to create a celebrity sports tourism presence by inviting existing sports celebrities to become a larger and more regular presence in the City.</p> <p>The Catawba County Sports Hall of Fame is organized to honor, recognize and memorialize individuals for their excellence and remarkable achievements that have contributed to Catawba County’s rich sports history. Celebrity sports tourism involves visits, by sports legends, to halls of fame and venues so that individuals can meet them. This could become an opportunity for the PR&ST Department to build upon in the future. The Catawba County Sports Hall of Fame is located at Highland Recreation Center and features the following famous inductees...</p> <p>Ned Jarrett – NASCAR Racing Bryan Harvey – Major League Baseball Ernie Warlick – National Football League Bob Patterson – Major League Baseball</p>

**4.16
Explore Incorporation
of Adaptive Sports &
Disability Sports
Tourism through The
Miracle League**

According to Sports Travel Magazine, the total economic impact of adapted and para sport-related events nationwide totaled approximately \$77.8 million in 2022 which was a near recovery of pre-pandemic levels. A great example of a successful marriage of adaptive sports and sports tourism which serves the local community and beyond is the Miracle Field Program. It is recommended that the City of Hickory seriously explore bringing the Miracle League to the community, making it a strategic sports tourism niche and service to the metro-statistical area.

The Miracle League is an organization dedicated to removing barriers for individuals with disabilities. It currently partners with over 325 cities both in the United States and abroad to bring accessible ballfields and inclusive parks to a community. Miracle League projects happen via public private partnerships where a 501c3 works with a municipality to increase the capacity of the project to seek grants and fundraise in ways local government could not do on its own. Among the myriad of best practices studied, the Miracle League appears to be a cog in the wheel of inclusive parks, adaptive sports and strategic fundraising.

The Miracle League is currently supported by the Texas Rangers and was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. With the Hickory Crawdads as an existing affiliate of the Texas Rangers, a potential partnership is hopeful.

It is recommended that Southside Heights Park be considered as a possible location for a Miracle Field and associated park. This park is the most recommended for exploration due to its acreage (12 acres), highway proximity and its ability to attract visitors to a less traveled portion of the City. Southside Heights Park is also located in Census Tract 111.01 which is noted for having the most individuals with hearing difficulty while also being in close proximity to tracts 109 and 107 which have reported the most individuals with self-care and vision difficulty. Not only is this location good for visitors but locals as well. One challenge to this location may exist with some topography currently unseen due to the woods. Wayfinding would also be very important to getting visitors to the park.

Best Practices

Miracle Park: Rock Hill South Carolina



Miracle Park, in Rock Hill South Carolina is the result of a public-private partnership between the City of Rock Hill, York County Disabilities Foundation (Maxabilities) and Winthrop University. **It is the only facility of its kind to be recognized as a Gold Level Universal Design park in the world.** The park resides on 13 acres and is going through a phased construction process. The park, when fully complete, features two Miracle Fields (adaptive ball field), concessions area, one-of-a kind inclusive playground, sensory walks, family restrooms, adult changing stations, a traditional baseball field, universal design elements, multi-purpose field, adaptive challenge course, therapeutic fishing pond, golf element, Little Free Library, Story Walk, and retail spaces that employ individuals with disabilities.




	Sources: https://www.sportstravelmagazine.com/economic-impact-study-shows-adapted-sport-events-total-nearly-78-million-annually/ Adapted Sport Economic Impact Survey https://www.sportstravelmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/LABS-2022-Economic-Impact-Presentation.pdf
4.17 Skateboarding	Tap into the skateboarding scene with additional tournaments and related events. With a renovated skate park, Hickory has an opportunity to elevate its skating scene and tap into competition opportunities such as skate jams and the ESPN Street League. It would also be beneficial to explore Do-It-Yourself Skate venues, such as in Hickory near Hickory Trail, for possible broadening of venues and competition partnerships.
4.18 Pickleball	Pickleball is the fastest growing sport in the country. Local trends show a “build it and they will come” result with courts being used at maximum capacity. Planning for regional sporting events, centered around this sport, shows great promise.
4.19 Cross Country	Explore Bruce Meisner Park as potential site for 5K cross country course when future phases are built.

Increased Focus on Natural Assets & Education



Recommendation	
5.0 Create Community-wide Environmental Awareness & Stewardship Education Program	Environmental education was noted as a medium priority with outdoor adventure programs listed as high priority. This is important to consider within the growing conversation of environmental stewardship, nation-wide. Environmental education also made it into the top 10 of the estimated number of households, in Hickory, with a need for recreation programs, though only 18% of participants said they would sign up for an environmental education program. 89% of households reported that the need for environmental education was not met or partially met. These numbers suggest room for a greater focus on environmental stewardship and program offerings. It is recommended that the City explore programs to increase public understanding and commitment to environmental awareness and stewardship.
5.1 Seek Partnerships That Promote Natural Education, Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability	Hickory is fortunate to have institutions of higher learning, medical systems and more at its fingertips. For example, one of Hickory’s newest arrivals, Appalachian State, has expressed interest in combining academic expertise with City needs. It is recommended that the City explore partnerships with organizations, like App State Hickory, in order to provide its citizens with environmental education so as to foster environmental stewardship.
5.2 Grow Hickory Litter Quitter Program	Hickory has successfully used its Litter Quitter program to beautify and care for its public lands. To support maintenance efforts that will grow with an increasing population, it is recommended that the Litter Quitter Program be looked at as a long-term way to potentially augment Public Services litter removal efforts at parks.
5.3 Introduce Nature-based Programming	It is recommended that the PR&ST Department explore nature-based programming thanks to citizen input and a need to elevate environmental stewardship in the community. There are some existing programs, such as the Hickory Hiking Club, that lend themselves well to nature-based programming.

<p>5.4 Involve Community Volunteers in Natural Landscape Enhancement/Maintenance as Appropriate</p>	<p>Citizens have begun to assist with landscaping needs in the City. It is recommended that this be fostered, further, using events like the “Invasive Species Removal Day” sponsored by Catawba County.</p> 
<p>5.5 Consider Partnership with the Conservation Corps of North Carolina to Increase Focus on Stewardship of Natural Assets and the Augmentation of Natural Area Maintenance</p>	<p>Conservation Corps North Carolina (CCNC) works to accomplish critical conservation projects while providing young adults with an opportunity to learn about land management issues and challenges. Partnering becomes a win/win situation for the community, for members, and for land managers, all while the project providers attain project goals. There are Adult and Youth Crews that can be formed in the Hickory area. These crews can work on a range of projects such as trail maintenance, habitat restoration, forestry, landscaping and more.</p> <p>Generous funders and supporting partners make it possible for Conservation Corps North Carolina to operate programs that empower individuals to positively impact their lives, their communities and the environment.</p> <p>Source: https://corpsnc.org/partner</p>
<p>5.6 Assess Feasibility & Implement Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Commission Recommendations</p>	<p>It is recommended that the City consider and review the following recommendations from the proposed 2018 Recreation & Sports Commission Natural Area Management Guide.</p> <p>Restore natural areas in the parks by removing invasive, non-native flora, reducing the long-standing storm damaged trees and slash while also reintroducing habitat appropriate native deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs to these locations. Leverage grant sources with matching commitments from bond revenues and stakeholders.</p> <p>Adopt and implement a seasonal water quality monitoring program at surface watercourses in parks where the public may be exposed to waterborne pathogens.</p> <p>Reduce turf grass surface area to levels needed for sports, recreational use, and limited aesthetic requirements. Re-establish native prairie margins that require less intensive maintenance. Take appropriate measures to identify and stabilize slopes that deposit mud on roads, parking surfaces and into the storm drains at park facilities.</p> <p>Designate recreation centers, the public library, Hickory Metro Convention Center, Julian Whitener Municipal Office Building, Hickory YMCA, and others as Climate Stress Refuges, Cooling Centers, Winter or Storm related shelters. Create, test, and adopt protocols for resource management and activation with American Red Cross, State and Federal Emergency Management, and National Guard.</p> <p>Establish regular, reliable scheduled Greenway Transportation routes and stops at significant park and recreation facility locations within the City of Hickory. Accommodate underserved citizens that are confronted with transportation challenges.</p> <p>Identify and make site selections in the two other quadrants of the City to emulate the Civitan Park Community Garden in NE Hickory and Taft Broome Park Community Garden in SW Hickory. Excess production in these gardens can be offered To the Hickory Soup Kitchen, Salvation Army, and other charitable nutrition programs.</p>

	<p>Continue promotion and oversight of park enhancement and maintenance by volunteers as exemplified by CVCC Service Learning program. Cultivate relationships with others interested and willing to work within resource management guidelines.</p> <p>Adopt and implement an interpretive policy; create uniform signage and web presence that encourages appreciation and conservation of the parks natural and historic features.</p> <p>Evaluate use demand and install photovoltaics, storage, and inverter systems on all recreation centers that present satisfactory orientation to the sun.</p>
<p>5.7 Emulate Environmental Stewardship Trends</p>	<p>Parks and recreation departments in the 100 most populous cities in the United States have reported the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 85% are adapting parks and recreation facilities to address climate change • 77% are enlisting parks to counter urban heat • 67% are improving surfaces to reduce flooding and runoff from rains • 20% are managing parks and woodlands to sequester carbon dioxide <p>It is recommended that the City explore how it can increase its connection to these trends.</p> <p>Source: https://bt.e-ditionsbyfry.com/publication/frame.php?i=749539&p=&pn=&ver=html5</p>

Equitable & Inclusive Access to Recreation 

Recommendation	
<p>6.0 Strive to Equally Distribute Parks, Trails and Amenities Among City Quadrants</p>	<p>See Growth</p>
<p>6.1 Increase Walkability & Bikeable Footprint of City Through Prioritization of the Walk. Bike. Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan</p>	<p>Currently, 20.34% of the City’s population resides .5 miles from a park or trail while 90.87% of the population is within 2 miles of parks and recreation facilities. 66.63% live 2 miles from greenways and trails. 10% of the City’s population could walk to a park in 5 minutes while 21% are within a 10 minute walk and 56% within a 20 minute walk.</p> <p>8 out of 12 projected connectivity projects in the Walk. Bike. Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan increase equitable access and walkability to parks and recreation related facilities.</p> <p>Related Program Recommendations Include...</p> <p>Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator Staff Position Become Designated as a Bicycle and Walk Friendly Community Bicycle Facility Maintenance Safety Campaign to Educate Motorists, Bicyclists and Pedestrians Map or Mobile App with Bike Routes and Greenways Open Streets Events Signage & Wayfinding Greenway & Trail Maintenance</p>

	<p>Signal Detection and Actuation for Bicyclists</p> <p>It is recommended that the walkable and bikeable environment be focused upon in order to increase equitable access to recreation opportunities. The Walk. Bike. Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan can help with this.</p>
<p>6.2 Emphasize Hickory Trail as Key to Community Connectivity</p>	<p>Though driving has been identified as the main way citizens get to parks, via the 2022 City of Hickory Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment Survey, the City itself has several system-related connectivity projects prioritized via the Walk. Bike. Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan.</p> <p>Multiple parks will also benefit from the Hickory Trail project which will provide on-site or nearby access to the following parks and recreation destinations...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rotary-Geitner Park (Future Deidra Lackey Memorial Park) • Hickory City Park • Winkler Park & L.P. Frans Stadium • Jaycee Park • Miracle of Hickory Park • Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park • Westmont Recreation Center • Hickory Optimist Park • Lowe’s Foods City Park • Taft Broome-Park • Ridgeview Recreation Center • Brown Penn Recreation Center • Ivey Arboretum at Sally Fox Park • Robinson Park
<p>6.3 Reference US Census Disability, Racial, and Age-Related Population Centers to Customize Amenities and Offerings in Nearby Parks and on Trails.</p>	<p>The City can increase the ability of parks, facilities and trails to serve underserved parts of the community through the strategic use of census tracts as they pertain to disability, race and age. See the “The Plan...The City” section for specific information that can be used for customization.</p>
<p>6.4 Create Synergy Between Offerings to Senior Population & Individuals with Disabilities</p>	<p>As the City plans for a large increase in the senior population over the next 10 years, it is recommended that facilities, amenities and programs be evaluated for the dual role of serving individuals with disabilities and senior citizens who often exhibit similar needs. This approach will maximize taxpayer dollars while serving two traditionally underserved populations, one of which will show the most growth in the next 10 years. One example of such a synergy could be a partnership with We Rock the Spectrum Gym to use their indoor space for adaptive programming and senior outings.</p>
<p>6.5 Focus on Health Equity When Designing Programs & Improving the Built Environment</p>	<p>Many social determinants of health (SDH) intersect with parks and recreation. It is recommended that the department focus upon the following when designing programs or improving parks and facilities.</p> <p>Health Literacy Social Integration Support Systems Community Engagement</p> <p>The built environment consists of parks, playgrounds, walkability, air and water quality. Use Catawba County Community Health Assessments with intentionality in order to shape department efforts and collaboration with Public Services. Consider language, poverty rate and census tracts in decision making along with life</p>

	<p>expectancy, leading causes of death, prevalent chronic diseases, weight trends, transportation options, availability of health insurance and top locations for exercise reported by residents. Another helpful area to focus upon is mental health which can be facilitated by partnerships with professionals (i.e. psychologists) who can bring their expertise to public programs.</p>
<p>6.6 Finalize ADA Transition Plan for City’s Public Spaces & Increase Number of Staff with ADA Certifications for Its Implementation</p>	<p>The City has been diligently working to make Americans with Disabilities (ADA) related improvements at its parks and recreation facilities, in tandem with the implementation of its 5 Year Capital Improvement Plan. It is recommended that the City review its ADA Transition Plan document and make upgrades as able. It may also be beneficial for additional staff, in the Public Services Department, to earn official ADA certifications to assist the City’s ADA Coordinator with coordinating efforts to comply with Title II, investigate complaints, audit programs, policies and services to ensure ongoing compliance.</p> <p>Best Practice ADA Transition Strategy: Town of Mooresville North Carolina</p> <p>During an interview with the Risk & Safety Manager from the Town of Mooresville, it was learned that one effective strategy for implementing the Town’s ADA Transition Plan was to have ADA Ambassadors. An ADA Ambassador is a staff member, trained in ADA, that is out and about at facilities often. This person can identify and fix barriers more quickly than having one staff member versed in ADA could.</p> <p>It is recommended that the City designate Public Services staff members as ADA Ambassadors, making them responsible for accessibility zones. Their main role would be to identify and remove barriers along with helping to actively implement the City’s ADA Transition Plan.</p>
<p>6.7 Adopt Rating System for Trails That Accounts for Individuals with Disabilities</p>	<p>Trail difficulty systems (i.e. low/moderate/high) do not include the level of detail needed for a person with a disability or other chronic condition to adequately know if they can enjoy the amenity, in advance. As a result, such amenities are avoided due to the unknowns or accessed with a disappointing and sometimes dangerous experience for a person with a physical, cognitive or emotional challenge. A comprehensive rating system would enhance equitable access to trails.</p> <p>Best Practice</p> <p>The group “Disabled Hikers” developed a “Spoon Rating System” to assist people with disabilities, anxiety, fatigue, pain and other chronic conditions in assessing how much effort a trail might take. “Spoons represent how accessible a hike is but differ from traditional “difficulty” rating systems that are based on individuals without disabilities or chronic conditions.” One example would be...</p> <p>4 Spoons = elevation changes over 500 feet or longer than .5 miles. Trail is often muddy or has other obstacles and is 3-5 miles in length. Requires advanced planning.</p> <p>Source: DisabledHikers.com</p>

<p>6.8 Increase Accessibility at Events</p>	<p>It is recommended that the PR&ST Department use tools, such as the Guide to Accessibility for Temporary Events to enhance the experience of participants who need some form of accommodation when able. The enhancement of event safety measures can be folded into this effort as well.</p> <p>Source: https://adata.org/guide/planning-guide-making-temporary-events-accessible-people-disabilities</p>
<p>6.9 Create & Implement Disability Awareness & Training Plan for Staff</p>	<p>It is recommended that the PR&ST Department review its level of disability awareness. It is also recommended that the department foster disability awareness, to include providing staff with inclusion training to assist patrons with disabilities. This could possibly include forming an “inclusion team” of existing staff in order to build an internal inclusion program that fosters disability awareness and practical training on an ongoing basis. Training related to this program can be performed by municipalities, such as Greensboro or Rock Hill, who already exhibit expertise in techniques, policy and more. This is a cost-effective way to get started.</p>
<p>6.10 Increase Focus on Inclusion in Existing Department Programs</p>	<p>Review inclusion initiatives, particularly for individuals with disabilities and facility accessibility. Increase and formalize inclusion initiatives, particularly for individuals with disabilities, based on internal training, disability awareness programs and facility accessibility modifications in order to provide above average accommodations and remove barriers to recreation for individuals with disabilities and senior citizens...both of which are represented in every protected class of the United States Civil Rights Act.</p>
<p>6.11 Balance Inclusion Services for Individuals with Disabilities with Therapeutic Recreation Programs +</p> <p>Prioritize Inclusive Programming for Individuals with Disabilities in the PR&ST Department. Use as Bedrock for Therapeutic Recreation Feasibility Study.</p>	<p>The PR&ST Department has always made customized accommodations for individuals with disabilities accessing existing programs. In the past few years, the department has started to offer singular therapeutic recreation programs. This is to be applauded and it is recommended that this continue with an eye on taking service to the next level.</p> <p>According to the National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA), while inclusion services provide accommodations to individuals with disabilities without fundamentally altering existing programs, therapeutic recreation programs are separate and aim to meet the physical, social, emotional and cognitive needs of their participants which cannot always occur within a regular program that has been adapted. The NRPA recommends that there be a balance of both inclusion services and specialized therapeutic recreation programs to provide a more comprehensive community offering. This could begin with one dedicated Therapeutic Recreation Specialist which could start out as a professional volunteer, referral source or advisor to staff.</p> <p>Recreational Therapists help people reduce depression, stress and anxiety; recover basic physical and mental abilities; build confidence; and socialize effectively. They use interventions, such as arts and crafts, dance or sports to help those they serve. An additional consideration could be a Licensed Recreational Therapist & Certified Recreational Therapist.</p> <p>The PR&ST Department is encouraged to explore a long-term goal of having a therapeutic division which can serve both individuals with disabilities as well as senior citizens who statistically make up a significant portion of individuals reporting disabilities via the Census.</p>

Best Practice

The City of Greensboro North Carolina employs the “AIR” program which stands for Adaptive and Inclusive Recreation. The department uses multi-age programming, disability focused information manuals, multi-jurisdictional adaptive sports partnerships, collaboration with a 501c3 committee for persons with disabilities, surveys, dedicated therapeutic recreation staff, training and adaptive sport programs for veterans.

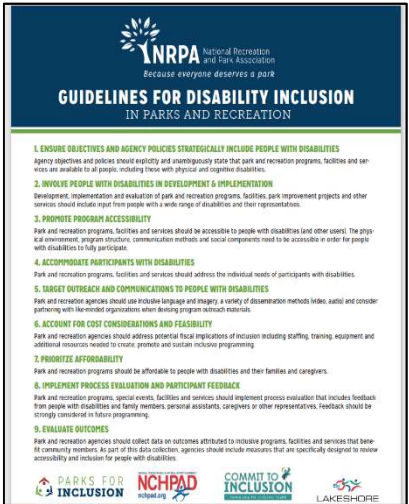
Other cities are doing great things in inclusive recreation. Hickory should explore programs in Rocky Mount North Carolina, Arlington Virginia, and Raleigh North Carolina to emulate best practices on an appropriate scale.

Adaptive/supportive materials, specially trained staff, alternative print materials, individualized emergency plans, and environment modifications are some ways that the PR&ST Department can take inclusion to the next level regardless of adopting a formal therapeutic recreation division.

Inclusion can be the City of Hickory’s most attainable goal. The City can consider internship opportunities for Lenoir-Rhyne students who are enrolled in the Occupational Therapy Program as one way to leverage partnerships to the good of the community.

**6.12
Create Inclusion Policy for Parks, Amenities and Programs & Ensure Full Staff Commitment to Its Execution**

According to Xplorrecreation, **81% of US adults** want parks and recreation to ensure inclusivity through policies and practices. 88% of US adults want their local park and recreation agencies to provide adaptive and inclusive recreation programming so people of all abilities may participate. Inclusive play equipment with features such as wide ramps, sensory play opportunities and braille panels are being used to ensure support for physical, social, emotional and cognitive development needs. **98% of US adults** agree that providing youth with equitable access to sports opportunities is important.



It is recommended that the PR&ST Department explore a framework that includes the key elements of NRPA inclusion templates. It’s important to remember that inclusion takes everyone and while there may be a staff member that heads up policy implementation, it will take the entire staff to ensure that the policy takes root and flourishes.

**Best Practice
National Recreation and Park Association Inclusion Policy Guide**

The National Recreation and Park Association has studied and articulated helpful guidelines for disability inclusion. Not only can the concepts be used for traditional

	<p>parks and recreation departments but can be adjusted to fit the needs of other service areas as well.</p> <p>Source: NRPA Parks for Inclusion Policy Guide</p> <p>Ford Foundation Disability Inclusion: U.S. Disability Rights Program</p> <p>The Ford Foundation seeks to go beyond serving individuals with disabilities by meeting minimum ADA standards and puts forth a model that can be adjusted to municipalities who also share a desire to go above and beyond for their citizens. These efforts to combat ableism, expand inclusion, champion diversity and also include a grant-making program known as the U.S. Disability Rights Program. Here are a few hallmarks of their efforts which can be applied at the local level. According to www.fordfoundation.org some of these hallmarks are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Launched U.S. Disability Rights Program with input of about 200 disability leaders. -Developed best practices around event accessibility to include accessible invitations, access guides in advance (with many accommodations). -Reviewed every aspect of the hiring process with attention to disability inclusion. -Invested in anti-ableism training for employees. <p>A very important best practice from the Ford Foundation is what is known as the Disability Inclusion Toolkit. It is a comprehensive guide that covers topics such as disability inclusion diagrams, hiring practices, event accessibility and language guidelines. It can be found below.</p> <p>Source: Disability Inclusion Toolkit (fordfoundation.org)</p>
<p>6.13 Consider Multi-age Programming & Inclusive Amenities</p>	<p>Service gaps with regard to chronological age and mental age were found in the Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities. Some adults with disabilities, for example, highly benefit from the use of amenities and programs traditionally designed for children. Cities such as Greensboro, offer multi-age programs to address common needs.</p> <p>Best Practice Camp Joy: City of Greensboro Parks & Recreation</p> <p>Camp Joy is a multi-age day camp experience for individuals with disabilities as young as 5 years of age and as seasoned as 80+ years of age. This is exceptionally helpful for individuals who may differ in chronological versus cognitive age and addresses the common need for adults with disabilities to have a fun and affirming place to interact with others during the summer months. The entire camp experience operates on the foundation of inclusion and Therapeutic Recreation is built into the curriculum. The camp is well documented and provides an information manual for advance planning. The camp allows for personal assistants to accompany campers and welcomes volunteers from the local community.</p>  <p>Source: City of Greensboro</p>

<p>6.14 Strategically Elevate Adaptive Sports in the Region & Form Local Government Network</p>	<p>To date, the PR&ST Department has brought adaptive sports to citizens via partnerships with organizations such as the Special Olympics of Catawba County, Greater Hickory Tennis Association and Walkin’ Roll Activities League. Such partnerships have largely, but not exclusively, consisted of providing recreation space. Adaptive sports can serve as a niche in sports tourism while providing for the recreational needs of individuals with disabilities who overwhelmingly communicated such needs via the Community Enhancement Project for Individuals with Disabilities.</p> <p>Best Practice Multi-jurisdictional Adaptive Sports Committee: City of Greensboro</p> <p>The need for adaptive sports is great and can often reside beyond the capacity of one particular department to facilitate. As an answer, the City of Greensboro partners with the City of High Point, Town of Kernersville, City of Winston Salem and Wake Forest Baptist Health to form an Adaptive Sports Committee that works together, synergistically, to share resources in order to provide more adaptive sports opportunities than a single community could. Committee members agree to actively refer individuals to the community that best meets recreation needs. Many sports are available, including Adaptive Lacrosse.</p> <p>It is recommended that Hickory explore a local government network to meet needs similarly.</p>
<p>6.15 Investigate Micro-transit Transportation Options for Those Experiencing Lack of Transportation as a Barrier to Accessing Parks & Recreation Opportunities</p>	<p>Ride-sharing is becoming a solution to public transportation service gaps. According to Uber over 500 agencies, many of which are public transit authorities, work with companies like Uber and Via to provide transportation to groups, such as individuals with disabilities, by allowing them to find on-demand rides at controlled costs. Microtransit scales to fit needs, supplements busy bus routes, covers rural areas and larger transit zones and can leverage existing assets, such as Uber or via, driver availability. Companies, such as Via, specifically specialize in working with local government to provide subsidized micro-transit to underserved populations.</p> <p>Best Practice</p> <p>A North Carolina Example of Micro-transit Innovation Wilson, North Carolina</p> <div> </div> <p>RIDE Program</p> <p>According to the North Carolina Department of Transportation, the City of Wilson launched an on-demand ride-sharing service in 2020 that is now being recognized nationally by the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) for Best Use of Innovation and Technology. The program is done in partnership with Via and gives users the capability to schedule trips through an app, online or via phone at any time. Rides do include the pick-up of additional riders, along the route, if applicable. The program is a result of a partnership between NCDOT and Via. NCDOT, in partnership with the City of Wilson, was awarded \$250,000 from the Federal</p>

	<p>Transit Administration’s Accelerating Innovative Mobility Grant to help fund the RIDE program. The program replaced the fixed route bus system in September of 2020.</p> <p>RIDE operates Monday through Friday from 5:30am to 7:00pm and on Saturdays from 7:00am to 6:00pm. The cost of a trip is \$1.50 per ride with the option of bringing an extra person along for an additional \$1.00. Individuals with disabilities and seniors are eligible for discounted pricing. With regard to accessible vehicles, passengers can select a “Wheelchair Accessible” option when scheduling their trip.</p> <p>The City of Wilson launched their program in 2020, during the height of the global pandemic and saw 4,000 trips, per week, in the first year and sees an average of 3,000 trips per week now. The program was started as a means of upgrading the public fixed route transportation system and now serves the entire city limits. Some partners, such as Via, may provide vehicles and employees and can customize parameters to meet the community. Wilson differs from Hickory because it is not part of a regional system. That being said, Via’s services are scalable and can be part of an agreement among communities. Programs like Wilson can be managed by one person. NCDOT is working to put micro-transit software on state contract. Communities such as Statesville, Salisbury, Wilmington, and Wake County are looking at pursuing micro-transit as a supplement to or solution for their transit system needs. Individuals using micro-transit can pay as low as \$1.50 per ride with remaining costs being subsidized by local government or a regional partnership of municipalities.</p> <p>The Western Piedmont Local Coordinated Public Transportation Plan Update of 2021 included a focus upon transportation equity as related to individuals with disabilities. The plan noted a need for a diverse set of transportation options to meet the needs of special populations, citing specialized demand response, ridesharing and volunteer drivers as options.</p> <p>As a leading voice, the City of Hickory can engage the Greater Hickory Metro Planning Organization and Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority in the exploration of micro-transit as an additional measure to enhancing transportation for individuals with disabilities, especially in rural areas. Potential cost savings may offset concerns regarding an increase in needing 5310 funds for current proposed solutions. Other sources of income such as from the Federal Transit Administration’s Accelerating Innovative Mobility Funding Program are showing that the innovative solutions that micro-transit is bringing are being welcomed.</p> <p>Source:https://41caa07a-56ba-4c1e-bb60-4d43c53aa7ab.filesusr.com/ugd/960958_78279085c765485c84d0b74404ea9dc9.pdf Wilson Microtransit Program Recognized Nationally as a Focus Technology (ncdot.gov)</p>

<p>6.16 Greenway Transportation Awareness & Eventual Expansion</p>	<p>Continue to work with Greenway Transportation to bring stops as close to parks and amenities as possible. Route 1 currently goes to the West Hickory Senior Center. With crosswalk support, this route can support access to West Hickory Park. The Hickory Transit Center location at 285 1st Ave SW does not appear to truly benefit access to particular parks. That being said, paratransit services are available.</p>
<p>6.17 Partner with Counties & Municipalities to Form a Network of Offerings for Individuals with Specialized Needs</p>	<p>It is recommended that the PR&ST Department explore the creation of a formal network of counties and municipalities that consists of partners actively filling particular niches and referring individuals to the best resource. An example would be for the City of Hickory to send an individual to Morganton to enjoy an accessible pool at their community center.</p> <p>Best Practice</p> <p>City of Greensboro network with partners such as High Point.</p>
<p>6.18 Use Census Tracts/Population Concentrations to Customize Parks & Trails to Best Serve Populations</p>	<p>Consider the following when customizing parks, trails and recreation offerings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than half of the population in Census Tract 109 (Ridgeview) are African-American • Only about half of the population in Census Tract 110 (L-R Blvd to Fairgrove Church Road) are White • Over 30% of the population in Census Tract 110 are Hispanic • Close to 30% of Census Tract 103.04 (Highland Ave N to Springs Road) are Hispanic • Tracts 105.01, 105.02, 211 and 313 have less than 5% of a Hispanic population

Continuity with City Strengths, Goals & Identity



Goals from the Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan & Recommendations for Reaching Them

In 2022, the City of Hickory affirmed its commitment to providing a system of parks and greenways along with a range of recreation programs that would respond well to community needs. The parks and recreation comprehensive master plan is the framework to be used in reaching these goals and acts as an update to the previous plans cited. The goals are provided below as an overarching guide that should be meshed with the goals stated in other objectives, for the next 10 years.

Parks, Recreation and Sports Tourism Goals

Goal 1: Expand recreation facility offerings and public access to recreation and resource areas.

The City has a commitment to enhancing its recreational offerings, and this goal emphasizes the importance of continually improving the community's recreational experience. It also emphasizes the City's commitment to providing access to its open spaces, for both active and passive recreation.

Policy A: Plan and design facilities and programs to take full advantage of all existing resources, both natural and man-made.

Policy B: Develop neighborhood parks and open spaces in northeast Hickory.

Policy C: Improve public access to Lake Hickory.

Policy D: Provide a variety of land and water areas adequate in size and strategic in location for both active and passive leisure pursuits and for visual enhancement and conservation.

Policy E: Establish appropriate levels of local funding sufficient to match other sources of funds; sustain a program of land acquisition, facility construction and program administration.

Source: Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan

Goal 2: Distribute recreational opportunities equitably.

While the City recognizes the need to enhance its overall recreational offerings, it is particularly sensitive to the needs of the neighborhoods and the desire for all Hickory residents to enjoy access to recreational facilities, regardless of socioeconomic status.

Policy A: Distribute recreation areas and facilities equitably and conveniently throughout the City to provide recreation opportunities for all.

Policy B: Adopt the standards recommended in the Parks and Recreation Plan, as updated, as minimums for: publicly-owned acreage for recreation and open space; convenient and equitable site location; and facilities for indoor and outdoor recreation programs.

Policy C: Prioritize park and recreation development based on the amount of benefits a project provides the community.

Source: Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan

Goal 3: Provide options for all ages and for active and passive uses.

This goal underscores Hickory’s commitment to design its recreational facilities to address the breadth of community demand. Young and old, athletes and non-athletes, all should be able to enjoy Hickory’s recreational spaces and satisfy their leisure needs.

Policy A: Provide diverse facilities and programs to meet the basic needs of children, teenagers and adults.

Policy B: Continue to provide police enforcement for public parks and facilities.

Policy C: Maintain all recreation areas and facilities to their appropriate design standards.

Source: Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan

Goal 4: Coordinate offerings with other recreation providers.

There are multiple providers of recreational facilities and services in and around Hickory. Not all users of Hickory’s recreational resources are Hickory residents, and not all recreational resources used by Hickory residents are owned and operated by the City of Hickory. This goal recognizes that providing comprehensive recreational access relies on partnerships, either formal or informal, and that the City should collaborate with other recreation providers to ensure its citizens are served.

Policy A: Continue to coordinate a long-range open space initiative with state and local governments and civic organizations.

Policy B: Offer programs, services and facilities which complement and supplement those provided by other public and private agencies.

Source: Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan

Goal 5: Collaborate regionally for improved arts and culture programs.

Recreation involves more than just parks, golf courses, and gymnasiums. Many Hickory residents recreate by walking and bicycling. This goal recognizes what is a popular community pastime and directs the City to meet the needs of pedestrians and cyclists.

Policy A: Provide sidewalks and direct access to mixed use centers from residential areas.

Policy B: Implement and update greenway, trails, and sidewalk planning efforts as indicated in the Sidewalk, Bikeway, Greenway and Trail Master Plan amended in February 2005.

Policy C: Provide walking and biking trails for community wellness and fitness options.

Policy D: Sponsor promotions, events, and activities that encourage bicycling and walking.

Source: Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan

Goal 6: Collaborate regionally for improved arts and culture programs

Hickory is a regional center for arts and culture which provides for leisure pursuits and educational opportunities. Hickory’s arts and cultural assets attract a wide variety of visitors. This goal builds on that regional position, seeking to enhance the community’s arts and culture programs by emphasizing collaborations with regional jurisdictions and those who sponsor arts and cultural activities.

Policy A: Create partnerships that expand the resources available for municipal programs focused on public art, preservation, and beautification.

Policy B: Partner with other communities for increased access to park and recreation facilities.

Community Health Goals and Recommendations (Select Goals Applicable to PR&ST)

Goal 1: Increase the number of citizens achieving the recommended amounts of daily physical activity.

Policy A: Improve pedestrian and bike connectivity to parks and recreation facilities and commercial areas. Ensure safe routes to parks and schools. Identify strategic gaps in sidewalk infrastructure that will increase access to city parks, facilities, schools and commercial areas.

Policy B: Review the 2005 Sidewalk, Bikeway, Greenway, and Trail Master Plan to determine if updates are needed.

Goal 4: Various Goals

Policy A: Continue support for efforts such as the Active: Well Crafted initiative, which aims to increase physical activity in the community.

Policy B: Support local health fairs and community events that provide information about community health issues, including health screenings, nutritious foods, and the benefits of increased activity.

Policy C: Continue working with Catawba County Public Health and Catawba County Health Partners on influencing community well-being through collaborative and evidence-based strategies.

Parks & Recreation Design Directives

The Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan articulates several design directives. Below are the directives that relate to the PR&ST Department’s mission and/or collaboration with the Public Services Department.

- Ensure that open space and natural resource areas are preserved and protected
- Integrate parks and recreation citywide

Future Land Use

The City has recognized a need for new park development in the southern and northeastern portions of the City. Sandy Pines, in the northeast, was proposed as a 12 acre district park to be located east of 16th Street NE.

Objectives for Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation

Provide a pedestrian and bicycle system that allows greater access to and links between public transit, schools, parks and other major activity centers.	Partner with local, county, and state agencies to encourage bicycling and pedestrian activities across different populations.
Develop a system that integrates pedestrian and bicycle modes of travel with motor vehicle transportation and connects inter-regionally with existing bike and pedestrian infrastructure (such as the Carolina Thread Trail).	Recommend that new or widened roadways are designed to include new bicycle routes, emphasizing separation from vehicular areas when possible.
Increase pedestrian and bicycling activity for both transportation and recreation to promote healthy, active living and improve public health.	Encourage the delineation of safe pedestrian ways and bicycle routes, emphasizing separation from vehicular areas when possible.
Promote, through public education, the economic, environmental, and health benefits of walking and biking as practical modes of transportation.	Recommend the installation of signage when bicycle routes or pedestrian facilities are integrated with roadways.

Bicycle & Pedestrian

In 2020, the City of Hickory amended its 2005 Sidewalk, Bikeway, Greenway and Trail Master Plan to further expand its existing and proposed greenways and to **add facilities defined as urban trails**. The **2005 update of the greenway component of the Master Plan identifies 21 specific greenways and urban trails, which collectively total 48.39 miles**. While subject to the availability of funding, the implementation of the plan is divided into three time periods. Short-range projects should be implemented within the first 12 years of the Plan. Medium range projects have a 12-20 year implementation period and long-range projects have a horizon period of over 20 years.


Transportation Goals (Related to PR&ST)


Goal	Policy
Provide Connectivity for Pedestrians and Vehicles	Develop a continuous network of sidewalks and bikeways to allow people to walk or bicycle to shopping, employment areas, schools, parks and neighborhoods.
Provide a Transportation Network That Services Automobiles, Pedestrians, Bicyclists, Public Transit and Aviation	Integrate pedestrian and bicycle facilities with school, open space, recreation, transit and land development planning.

Recommendation	
7.0 Focus on Hickory by Choice 2030 Goals	<p>The overarching principle used to guide the construction of this plan was simply “Recreation: Well Crafted” with an eye for continuity with the City’s broader needs, goals and brand as reflected in its commitment to Life: Well Crafted for its citizens and visitors. The following are recommended as overarching goals for the next 10 years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand Recreation Facility Offerings and Public Access to Resource Areas • Distribute Recreational Opportunities Equitably • Provide Options for All Ages and for Active/Passive uses • Coordinate Offerings with Other Recreation Providers • Promote/provide Walking and Cycling Opportunities Throughout the City
7.1 Champion Big picture Recommendations from the Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan	<p>Assist Public Services Department in fostering the momentum of Walk. Bike. Hickory Bicycle + Pedestrian Plan projects already in motion. The following are two ways the PR&ST Department can do so.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist with Ways to Strategically and Proactively Fund and Build Priority Projects (i.e. collaborative grant writing) • Implement Programs that Support and Encourage Walking + Bicycling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider Efforts Similar to NRPA 10 Minute Walk Campaign
7.2 Perpetually Refer to City’s Cache of Master Plans to Ensure Continuity and Efficiency of Efforts	<p>The City has adeptly planned for the future via a myriad of master planning documents and studies. These plans and studies should be referred to, regularly, when planning and evaluating PR&ST Department efforts.</p>

Implementation of Nationally Recognized Administrative & Operational Practices

Recommendation	
8.0 Actively Use Department Mission & Vision Statements to Steer Department	<p>Mission and vision statements are a best practice for organizations of all shapes and sizes. It is recommended that the PR&ST Department regularly re-visit and proudly display these statements to maintain focus on them.</p>

<p>8.1 Create Plan and Invest in Staff Credentialing</p>	<p>There are currently two PR&ST staff members who are Certified Parks & Recreation Professionals through the National Recreation & Park Association. The CPRP is the national standard for all parks and recreation professionals on the forefront of the parks and recreation profession. This credential signifies a commitment to the highest standards of ethical and professional practice in the delivery of park and recreation programs as the holder’s knowledge/understanding of key parks and recreation concepts. It is recommended that the department invest in the certification of as many staff members as possible. This will ensure the spread of best practices and prepare the department for CAPRA Accreditation down the line. A Certified Park and Recreation Executive (CPRE) designation is also available as a next step for those in leadership roles.</p>  <p>The department also employs one individual who is a Certified Adaptive Recreation and Sports Specialist (CARSS). This gives the department a potential foothold in offering formalized adaptive sports in the future. It is recommended that additional staff seek this certification as the department strives for greater adaptive and inclusive offerings.</p> <p>With regard to maintenance, it is recommended that an investment be made, by the Public Services Department, in the following educational programs and certifications which will create a bridge between the parks and recreation profession and Public Services realm.</p> <p>Maintenance Related Education & Certifications NRPA Park & Recreation Maintenance Management School NRPA Playground Maintenance Course Audubon Society Based Education NRPA Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) (Additional Staff) International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Arborist Certification</p>
<p>8.2 Complete National Recreation & Park Association Annual Survey</p>	<p>It is recommended that staff increase its compilation of benchmark data tracked by the National Recreation & Park Association and that such data be used to populate the NRPA’s annual survey. Regular participation in this survey will expand the department’s capacity to compare itself to peer communities, on a regular basis, while creating efficiencies, fostering data-driven decision making, enhancing future planning and increasing competitiveness for grants.</p>
<p>8.3</p>	<p>The prestigious CAPRA accreditation recommends peak performance in the parks and recreation field. Recommendations, therefore support both fundamental and advanced standards prescribed by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and CAPRA. Even if CAPRA were not ultimately pursued, it is prudent for the City to use it as a guide to build a framework the City can tailor even further to its needs. The City’s PR&ST Department will be able to meet the goals of this master plan, seek accreditation and navigate the future with an increased commitment to the formalization and standardization of its policies, procedures, goals, objectives and more. Integral to this will be the building of department capacity to compare metrics and local standards to national standards in order to gauge performance on an ongoing basis. Primary to this will be the use of the annual NRPA agency survey. CAPRA accreditation practices will also strengthen the collaborative efforts of the PR&ST and Public Services departments.</p>

<p>Use Commission for Accreditation of Park & Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) Standards to Develop Administrative, Operational, Planning and Maintenance Infrastructure in Both the PR&ST Department and As Applicable in the Public Services Department</p> 	<p>During the master planning process, it was found that the PR&ST department has many strong, yet unformalized, practices in place. Use of the CAPRA framework can assist with formalization and strengthening to the benefit of citizens and staff.</p> <p>Source: NRPA</p>												
<p>8.4 Leverage Maintenance Software (Munis)</p>	<p>Public Services staff desire to use formal maintenance software to track, update and manage inventory, account for depreciation, facilitate replacement schedules and manage deferred maintenance. Some of these needs can be met via the City's adoption of MUNIS, a software for public sector needs such as tracking of capital assets, inventory, work orders/maintenance, and more. An assessment of whether supplemental software will be needed, should be conducted.</p>												
<p>8.5 Develop Standard Guidelines for Program Development and Evaluation</p>	<p>Staff recognized the value of developing standard guidelines for program development and evaluation in order to harness strengths, eliminate weaknesses, maximize resources and make a case for future funding or support. There are several great models for this effort. It is recommended that the PR&ST Department explore standard guidelines for program development and evaluation.</p>												
<p>8.6 Add New Streams of Revenue Generation to Existing Practices to Meet Demands of Next 10 Years</p>	<p>Departments typically rely on the following sources of revenue to deliver parks, facilities and programs.</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Taxation (General Fund)</td> <td>Grants</td> <td>Fees & Charges</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gifts & Donations</td> <td>Corporate Sponsorships</td> <td>Partnerships</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bonds</td> <td>Membership Dues</td> <td>Concession Operations</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fundraising</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>The vast majority of the PR&ST Department's operating dollars come from the General Fund as compared to the median of similar sized jurisdictions across the country. To a much lesser degree, the department sees revenue from partnerships, sponsorships, fees, and dues. Concession sales, through sports tourism, are seeing an upward trend that should be watched and harnessed. With a higher reliance on the General Fund and the projections contained within this master plan, additional revenue generation is a must and will likely come in the form of collaboration between the PR&ST and Public Services departments. The following are initial considerations for growing the City's capacity to deliver parks and recreation in the next 10 years.</p> <p>Grants</p> <p>With a newly adopted comprehensive master plan, the PR&ST Department will be more competitive for key grants such as the North Carolina Trust Fund PARTF Grant. It should seek federal, state and local grants to grow its capacity. The data contained within this plan will also assist in making a case for why Hickory should receive funding. It is recommended that the department make a strong commitment to seeking</p>	Taxation (General Fund)	Grants	Fees & Charges	Gifts & Donations	Corporate Sponsorships	Partnerships	Bonds	Membership Dues	Concession Operations	Fundraising		
Taxation (General Fund)	Grants	Fees & Charges											
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	<p>grant funding through various means. Several grant sources can be found in the Appendix of this master plan.</p> <p>501c3 Fundraising Incredible advances in the offering of parks, facilities and programs come with the collaboration of a municipality and 501c3 organization who believe in the mission of parks and recreation. For example, the City of Rock Hill is in the process of bringing a \$9M park online, with the vast majority of this cost coming from fundraising facilitated by a partner 501c3. The City of Hickory itself saw great success through a partnership with the Friends of Hickory and signature sponsor, Lowes Foods, resulting in Lowe’s Foods City Park. During a stakeholder interview, the Friends of Hickory voiced that they are open to a new collaboration. It is recommended that the City connect with this amazing group to discern the best project to collaborate on.</p> <p>Bonds The 2022 Recreation Needs survey revealed that there is some willingness of citizens to entertain assisting with the funding of projects pertaining to the updating/improvement of existing parks and facilities, trail development and outdoor amphitheaters. It is recommended to further gauge public support of using bonds to implement key portions of the master plan in light of the bonds already approved for the Hickory Trail project. This may be a long-term consideration.</p> <p>Public Private Partnerships For the parks and amenities that cannot be funded by the City, in whole or in part, it is recommended that the City seek private entities interested in bringing such amenities to the community with appropriate support.</p> <p>Strategic Fee Adjustments One strategy can be to increase fees, using some of that increase to subsidize fees for underserved/vulnerable populations. It is important to note that during the public input process, many citizens shared their appreciation of the low cost of recreation so great care must be taken when using fee-based strategies.</p> <p>Additional Potential Funding Sources Private Foundation Funds Park Impact Fees for Non-residents Structured Volunteer Force to Off-set Increase Staff Capacity</p> <p>Recommended Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institute a Basic Cost Recovery Model • Develop Goals for Cost Recovery • Develop a Full Cost of Service Picture for Each Program
<p>8.7 Continue Embracing Digital Transformation</p>	<p>The PR&ST Department has significantly increased its capacity to efficiently serve citizens and visitors, digitally, through its public-facing platform, RecDesk. The web-based tool assists the department with membership management, online & in-house registration, master calendaring, facility scheduling, facility check-ins, point of sale, online reservations, forms, billing and invoicing. This helpful tool is the departments recent upgrade from Sportsman which was the department’s first outward facing digital platform.</p> <p>Other digital transformation areas to explore include...</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WiFi in Parks for...<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digitally Based Programs Such as Augmented Reality Walks• Educational Opportunities• Social Media Check ins at Key Park Destinations• Facility Management Tools<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Semi-autonomous Inspection Drones
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Application

10 Year Action Plan


Recreation: Well Crafted Priority & Implementation Strategy

The Application section of this plan is proposed in order to assist the City with taking action on recommendations and valuable information contained within this comprehensive master plan.

It is important to *view this section, as well as recommendations in the previous section, as a resource* supported by extensive public input, data and analysis *versus a mandate*. The application of the plan is not an event but a journey which requires flexibility. It also *presupposes that without proper resources such as funding and adequate staffing, some actions cannot be taken. Feasibility studies, project-level master plans, and cost forecasting should also be assumed as necessary*. Such efforts will help the City to understand the true cost of plan implementation which will pave the way for securing a variety of funding sources to include grants, potential referendums, partnerships and out of the box fundraising.

The resource below outlines guiding objectives, actions, responsible teams, prioritization and order of magnitude costs. High priority recommendations are influenced by community input, identified gaps and future projections obtained during the master planning process. Furthermore, an item may also be noted as high priority due to a link with existing City goals and objectives as depicted in adopted master plans. Responsible teams are largely self-explanatory in the chart below. Such teams were purposefully kept broad to make space for the judgement of leadership in task assignments. Order of magnitude estimates were provided for general planning purposes amidst a shifting economic landscape. The following chart is provided as a key to assist with navigating the application resource.



<h1>Key</h1>																
Guiding Objectives for Each Time-Period	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Improvement & Maximization of Existing Assets 2 Communication of Existing Assets 3 Growth Planning 3A Sports Tourism 4 Increased Focus on Natural Assets and Education 5 Equitable & Inclusive Access to Recreation 6 Continuity with City Goals, Strengths & Identity 7 Implementation of Nationally Recognized Administrative & Operational Practices <p>Action Plan objectives will reference specific recommendation numbers to refer to for further details.</p>															
Responsible Teams	<table border="0"> <tr><td>PR&ST</td><td>Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department</td></tr> <tr><td>PS</td><td>Public Services Department</td></tr> <tr><td>CL</td><td>City Leadership</td></tr> <tr><td>PL</td><td>Planning Department</td></tr> <tr><td>OC</td><td>Outside Consultant</td></tr> <tr><td>CM</td><td>Communications & Marketing</td></tr> <tr><td>PD</td><td>Police Department</td></tr> </table>		PR&ST	Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department	PS	Public Services Department	CL	City Leadership	PL	Planning Department	OC	Outside Consultant	CM	Communications & Marketing	PD	Police Department
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Order of Magnitude Costs (OMC)	<table border="0"> <tr><td>\$</td><td>< \$50,000</td></tr> <tr><td>\$\$</td><td>\$50,000 - \$100,000</td></tr> <tr><td>\$\$\$</td><td>\$100,000 - \$500,000</td></tr> <tr><td>\$\$\$\$</td><td>\$500,000 - \$1,000,000</td></tr> <tr><td>\$\$\$\$\$</td><td>\$1,000,000 +</td></tr> </table>		\$	< \$50,000	\$\$	\$50,000 - \$100,000	\$\$\$	\$100,000 - \$500,000	\$\$\$\$	\$500,000 - \$1,000,000	\$\$\$\$\$	\$1,000,000 +				
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During a plan’s life-span, it is not uncommon for new projects to emerge, priorities to change or innovations to be proposed. This usually happens in relation to unforeseen community needs or a chance to seize strategic opportunities. It is recommended that the comprehensive plan be revisited, to assess such shifts, on a semi-annual basis, and adjustments made/adopted as needed.

Near Term Projects & Initiatives: 0-3 Years

Improvement & Maximization of Existing Assets



Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
Elevate Hickory Trail to Linear Park Status	Update Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan and related City communications such as its website. Recommendation: 1.0	PL, CM	HP	NA
Begin to Update Parks to... Reflect Classifications, Balance Usage, Meet Identified Needs, Capitalize on Trends, Enhance Aesthetics and Showcase the City's Personality	Use recommendations to reflect classifications, balance usage, meet needs, harness trends, enhance aesthetics and showcase the City's personality. Recommendation: 1.4	PR&ST, PS, CL, PL	OG	\$\$\$\$ Life of Plan
Strive Toward Universal Design Standards in Current System and New Projects	Incorporate universal design into park and facility upgrades and the planning of new projects. Recommendation: 1.5	PR&ST, PS, CL, PL	OG	\$\$\$\$ Life of Plan
Review the Benefits of Improvements to the Westmont Senior Center	Review exterior and interior of Westmont Senior Center and evaluate its days and hours of use. Keep metrics to assess true capacity to serve current and projected seniors. Recommendation: 1.10	PR&ST, PS, CL, PL, OC	HP	\$\$\$\$
Create Park Safety Communication Program	Formalize existing efforts, such as Community Response Units, through a communication framework that highlights the police department's efforts at park safety and how they have been extending their eyes and ears over the past year. Recommendation: 1.30	PD, PR&ST, CM	HP	NA

Adopt Tiered Maintenance Approach	Review official maintenance level standards and adjust based on usage and priorities. Recommendation: 1.16	PS	MP	NA
Use Natural Means to Enhance Maintenance Efforts on Difficult Slopes	Establish native grass areas on difficult to maintain slopes in parks with need. Recommendation: 1.17	PS	HP/OG	\$
Continue to Leverage Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Funds to Improve Eligible Parks	Continue to apply CDBG funds to park improvements for eligible parks. Recommendation: 1.18	PS, PL	OG	NA
Prioritize Use of Public Input from Master Plan Process for Program Planning	Consider adult fitness/ wellness programs, special events, family festivals, and outdoor adventure programs when prioritizing programming. Recommendation: 1.23	PR&ST	OG	NA
Make Strategic Use of Trend Information for Program Enhancements, Development, Communication and Connecting with Opportunities Emerging at the National Level	Build on local popularity trends for PR&ST programming, national trends and those reported as most commonly planned across the country. Recommendation: 1.24	PR&ST	OG	NA
Increase Program Participation	See Communication of Existing Assets section below for main strategy. Recommendation: 1.25	PR&ST, CM	HP	\$
Explore Programmable Open Space Identified During Inventory & Analysis	Study open space at regional, community, neighborhood and undeveloped parks. Create list and plan to use space for programming, events and public rentals. Reserve key spaces for conservation. Recommendation: 1.9	PR&ST,	MP	NA

Continue to Increase Program & Event Partnership/ Sponsorship Relationships	Deepen existing sponsorship/partnership relationships and seek new ones based upon the recommendations of this plan. Recommendation: 1.28	PR&ST	OG	NA
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Communication of Existing Assets



Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
Develop Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism-Specific Marketing & Communication Plan	Use City Office of Communications as a resource partner. Recommendation: 2.0	CM, PR&ST	H	\$
Elevate Brand of “Recreation: Well Crafted” & Plug into City’s Personality Traits of Being Welcoming, Artistic, Knowledgeable, Nostalgic, Active, Lively and Connected	Create brand-awareness for parks and recreation, leveraging the personality traits of the City articulated in the Inspiring Spaces Plan. Recommendation: 2.1	CM, PR&ST	M	NA
Communicate the PR&ST Department as an Anchor Institution	Communicate that both national and local trends have made the PR&ST Department an “anchor institution.” Recommendation: 2.2	CM, PR&ST	M	NA
Increase Awareness of Park Safety	Assist with educating the populace on park safety measures and how the Hickory PD keeps them safe. Recommendation: 2.3 & 1.30	CM, PD, PR&ST	H	NA
Plug Into & Leverage National Communication Resources	Use data-driven toolkits, designed by the National Recreation & Park Association, to promote areas of interest. Recommendation: 2.4	CM, PR&ST	H	\$


<p>Maximize Participation in Annual Parks & Recreation Month as a Platform to Introduce or Reintroduce Citizens and Visitors to all PR&ST Offerings</p>	<p>Leverage national parks and recreation month to promote usage at local level.</p> <p>Recommendation: 2.5</p>	<p>PR&ST, CM</p>	<p>M</p>	<p>NA</p>
<p>Market to Niche Interests/Create Directory of Niche Interests</p>	<p>Create pictorial layouts to quickly show individuals where/how they can access a specific amenity in the City.</p> <p>Recommendation: 2.6</p>	<p>CM, PR&ST</p>	<p>H</p>	<p>\$</p>
<p>Adjust City Website to Assist Recreators Looking for Specific Forms of Recreation or Amenities</p>	<p>Create niche specific buttons on City website for individual sports, leisure activities (i.e. water based recreation), and information for special needs. Buttons should contain a collection of all locations a person could access a given interest (i.e. all pickleball courts in Hickory and how to gain use of them). Other pertinent information on how to access the amenities should be given as well.</p> <p>Recommendation: 2.7</p>	<p>CM, PR&ST</p>	<p>H</p>	<p>\$</p>
<p>Give Focused Attention to Connecting with Teens Regarding Parks and Recreation Offerings for Them</p> <p>Adjust Social Media Strategy to Attract Teen Followers</p>	<p>Engage school system to filter tailored information to teen students regarding recreation programming. Maximize social media platforms currently used by teens.</p> <p>Recommendation: 2.8</p>	<p>CM, PR&ST</p>	<p>M</p>	<p>NA</p>
<p>Orient Community to Current Water-based Recreation, Private Opportunities & Promote Use</p> <p>Emphasize Proximity of Nearby Lake Hickory Access</p>	<p>Use communication channels to provide information on how and where citizens can access Lake Hickory and water-based recreation such as canoeing/kayaking, swimming lessons and splash pads.</p> <p>Highlight the City’s water-based efforts such as Riverwalk and the future Deidra Lackey Memorial Park project.</p> <p>Recommendation: 2.9</p>	<p>CM, PR&ST</p>	<p>H</p>	<p>NA</p>

<p>Create Recreation Guide & Park Directory for Individuals with Disabilities</p> <p>Include Materials on City Website & Advertise Through Social Media</p>	<p>Create a comprehensive guide with parks and recreation information for individuals with disabilities. Ensure that this guide can be accessed online and by alternate means of communication.</p> <p>Recommendation: 2.11</p>	<p>CM, PR&ST</p>	<p>H</p>	<p>\$</p>
<p>Make Strategic Use of Message Centers in Parks</p>	<p>Explore the use of message centers, at the City's most popular parks, to communicate information regarding other parks with like amenities and to promote a greater awareness of the park system.</p> <p>Include information on how to make the best use of inclusive amenities, if applicable.</p> <p>Recommendation: 2.13</p>	<p>CM, PS, PR&ST</p>	<p>M</p>	<p>\$</p>

Growth Planning



Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
<p>Level of Service Standards for the Next 10 Years</p>	<p>Review parks and facilities for usage and needs to determine the level of service.</p> <p>Recommendation: 3.0</p>	<p>PS, CL, PR&ST</p>	<p>OG</p>	<p>\$\$\$\$ Life of Plan</p>
<p>Review Parks, Facility and Program Efforts with Consideration of Demographic Projections & Underserved Populations</p>	<p>Review parks, facilities and programs through growth projections and with the underserved in mind.</p> <p>Recommendation: 3.1</p>	<p>PS, PR&ST, CL</p>	<p>OG</p>	<p>Variable Life of Plan</p>
<p>Consider Additional Strategic Partnerships to Provide Programming and Amenities</p>	<p>Work towards partnerships with medical systems, managed care organizations, universities, non-profits and downtown businesses.</p>	<p>PR&ST, CL</p>	<p>OG</p>	<p>NA</p>

	Recommendation 3.6			
Consider Recruitment of Private Investors to Provide Key Amenities Expressed as Desired by Citizens but Found Not to Be Possible Within the Next 10 Years Due to Competing Priorities and/or Other Factors	Recruit private investors to expand amenities. Recommendation 3.7	PR&ST, CL	OG 	Variable

Sports Tourism

Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
Maximize Partnership with Hickory Metro Convention Center	Work closely with convention center for maximum use of its facility for sports tourism. Recommendation 4.0	PR&ST	OG	NA
Identify Sports Tourism Niche	Identify sports area to specialize in versus general efforts duplicated in other cities unless such offerings would benefit from greater capacity. Earnestly explore women's sports, skateboarding, Division II Championships, Wiffle Ball parks, celebrity tourism, adaptive sports/disability sports tourism, pickleball, and cross country. Recommendations: 4.8, 4.12-4.19	PR&ST	H	NA

Increased Focus on Natural Assets & Education



Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
Create Community-wide Environmental Awareness & Stewardship Education Program	Explore programs to increase public understanding and commitment to environmental awareness and stewardship. Recommendation: 5.0	PR&ST, PS, CM	H	\$
Grow Hickory Litter Quitter Program	Partner with the Litter Quitter program to augment Public Services litter removal efforts at parks, compatible with City growth and leadership discretion. Recommendation: 5.2	PS, CM, PR&ST	H	\$
Introduce Nature-based Programming	Explore nature-based programming. Consider partnerships with outside organizations to augment City staff. Recommendation: 5.3	PR&ST	M	\$
Involve Community Volunteers in Natural Landscape Enhancement/Maintenance as Appropriate	Increase citizen involvement in helping with landscaping needs at parks. Consider an “Invasive Species Removal Day” in key areas. Recommendation: 5.4	PS	M	NA
Assess Feasibility & Implement Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Commission Recommendations	Consider and review 2018 Natural Area Management Guide recommendations from Parks Recreation & Sports Tourism Commission. Recommendation: 5.6	PS	H	\$\$

Equitable & Inclusive Access to Recreation

Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
Strive to Equally Distribute Parks, Trails and Amenities Among City Quadrants	See Growth Recommendation: 6.0	CL, PS, PR&ST		
Increase Walkability & Bikeable Footprint of City Through Prioritization of the Walk. Bike. Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan	Champion recommendations of the Walk. Bike. Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan. Recommendation: 6.1	PS, CL, PR&ST	H/OG	\$\$\$\$ Life of Plan
Emphasize Hickory Trail as Key to Community Connectivity	Communicate Hickory Trail’s value, in relation to the connectivity of the <i>park system</i> , frequently and widely. Recommendation: 6.2	CM, PR&ST	OG	NA
Reference US Census Disability, Racial, and Age- Related Population Centers to Customize Amenities and Offerings in Nearby Parks and on Trails.	Use census tract information to customize amenities and offerings in nearby parks and trails. Recommendation: 6.3	PS, PR&ST	OG	Variable Life of Plan
Create Synergy Between Offerings to Senior Population & Individuals with Disabilities	When planning the renovation or new construction of parks, facilities and amenities, consider amenities that can serve both senior citizens and individuals with disabilities as a high service/low cost approach. Recommendation: 6.4	PS, PR&ST, CL	OG	Variable
Focus on Health Equity When Designing Programs & Improving the Built Environment	Focus on health literacy, social integration, support systems and community engagement when improving programs and the built environment. Recommendation: 6.5	PR&ST, PS, CL	OG	Variable

Finalize ADA Transition Plan for City’s Public Spaces & Increase Number of Staff with ADA Certifications for Its Implementation	Review ADA Transition Plan document and upgrade as able. Recommendation: 6.6	PS, CL	H	\$
Adopt Rating System for Trails That Accounts for Individuals with Disabilities	Post level of difficulty information for recreation amenities, such as trails, that require various levels of exertion. Recommendation: 6.7	PS, CL	M	\$\$
Increase Accessibility at Events	Add, when able, resources to increase accessibility at City events. Recommendation: 6.8	PR&ST, PS	H	\$
Create & Implement Disability Awareness & Training Plan for Staff	Review and foster disability awareness and provide staff with inclusion training to assist patrons with disabilities. Recommendation: 6.9	PR&ST	OG	NA
Increase Focus on Inclusion in Existing Department Programs	Review inclusion initiatives, particularly for individuals with disabilities. Recommendation: 6.10	PR&ST	H	\$
Create Disability Inclusion Policy for Parks, Amenities and Programs & Ensure Full Staff Commitment to Its Execution	Explore an inclusion policy based on a framework that includes the key elements of NRPA inclusion templates. Recommendation: 6.12	PR&ST, PS	H	NA/\$

Continuity with City Strengths, Goals & Identity



Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
Focus on Hickory by Choice 2030 Goals	<p>Expand recreation facility offerings and public access to resource areas.</p> <p>Distribute recreational opportunities equitably.</p> <p>Provide options for all ages and for active/passive uses.</p> <p>Coordinate offerings with other recreation providers.</p> <p>Promote/provide walking and cycling opportunities throughout the City.</p> <p>Recommendation: 7.0</p>	PR&ST, PS, CL, PL, OC	OG	\$\$\$\$ Life of Plan
Champion Big picture Recommendations from the Hickory Pedestrian + Bicycle Plan	<p>Facilitate Walk. Bike. Hickory plan by identifying strategic/proactive funding for priority projects and implementing programs that support/encourage walking/cycling.</p> <p>Recommendation: 7.1</p>	PR&ST, PS, CL, PL, OC	OG	\$\$\$\$ Life of Plan
Perpetually Refer to City's Cache of Master Plans to Ensure Continuity and Efficiency of Efforts	<p>Use adopted master plans of the City, on a regular basis, to continue moving them forward.</p> <p>Recommendation: 7.2</p>	PR&ST, PS	OG	Variable

Implementation of Nationally Recognized Administrative & Operational Practices



Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
Actively Use Department Mission & Vision Statements to Steer Department	Regularly revisit mission and vision, with staff, to ensure success in implementation. Recommendation: 8.0	PR&ST	OG	NA
Create Plan and Invest in Staff Credentialing	Invest in NRPA certifications and parks/recreation specific professional training for both PR&ST and PS staff. Recommendation: 8.1	PR&ST, PS	OG	\$
Complete National Recreation & Park Association Annual Survey	Participate regularly in annual NRPA survey. Recommendation: 8.2	PR&ST	OG	NA
Use Commission for Accreditation of Park & Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) Standards to Develop Administrative, Operational, Planning and Maintenance Infrastructure in Both the PR&ST Department and As Applicable in the Public Services Department	Use CAPRA accreditation framework to build administrative, operations, financial and maintenance structure of PR&ST Department and related divisions of Public Services department. Recommendation: 8.3	PR&ST, PS	OG	NA
Leverage Maintenance Software (Munis)	Make full use of Munis capabilities to facilitate scheduling, maintenance, asset tracking and work orders. Recommendation: 8.4	PS	OG	NA
Develop Standard Guidelines for Program Development and Evaluation	Explore standard guidelines for program development and evaluation. Recommendation: 8.5	PR&ST	OG	NA

Add New Streams of Revenue Generation to Existing Practices to Meet Demands of Next 10 Years	Pursue grants, 501c3 fundraising through partnership, bonds, public-private partnerships, strategic fee adjustments and additional means to improve service delivery. Recommendation: 8.6	PR&ST	H	NA
Continue Embracing Digital Transformation	Explore and attempt having Wi-fi availability in parks. Test facility management tools at parks and facilities. Recommendation: 8.7	PR&ST	M	\$\$



Mid-term Projects & Initiatives: 4-6 Years

Improvement & Maximization of Existing Assets

Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
Partner with Catawba County Council on Aging to Explore Feasibility of Creating a Network of Senior Focused Amenities in Existing Facilities	Conduct feasibility study using SWOT approach. Examine the implementation of a network of amenities based on existing assets. Recommendation: 1.8	PR&ST, PS, CL, PL, OC	HP	Variable

<p>Perform Official Cost-Benefit Analysis Regarding the Usage of Brown Penn and Westmont Facilities</p>	<p>Perform Cost-Benefit Analysis of renovating Brown Penn and Westmont Facilities. If found to be beneficial, prioritize in next comprehensive master plan.</p> <p>Recommendation: 1.11</p>	<p>PR&ST, PS, CL, PL, OC</p>	<p>MP</p>	<p>\$</p>
<p>Inclusive Splash Pad Presence in Each Quadrant</p>	<p>Investigate splash pads in NW, NE and SW Quadrants throughout the life of the plan.</p> <p>Recommendation: 1.12</p>	<p>PR&ST, PS, CL, PL</p>	<p>HP, OG</p>	<p>\$\$\$\$ Life of Plan</p>
<p>Program Hickory Trail</p>	<p>Create action plan to offer programming on various stretches of Hickory Trail.</p> <p>Recommendation: 1.13</p>	<p>PR&ST</p>	<p>MP</p>	<p>\$</p>
<p>Increase Flexibility of Use for Each Park</p>	<p>Analyze and formally document additional ways parks can be stretched to allow for expanded use. Consider partnerships with outside entities.</p> <p>Recommendation: 1.19</p>	<p>PR&ST</p>	<p>MP</p>	<p>\$</p>
<p>Create Plan for PR&ST Staff Office Space</p>	<p>Explore expansion of City staff commensurate with population projections.</p> <p>Recommendation: 1.20</p>	<p>PR&ST, PS</p>	<p>MP</p>	<p>NA</p>
<p>Seek Re-alignment of Conceptual Routes in Carolina Thread Trail Master Plan to Match Emerging Needs+</p> <p>Re-engage with the Catawba Lands Conservancy’s Carolina Thread Trail Program to Build Public Support for Trail Implementation and Consider Bringing Trail Master Program to Hickory+</p> <p>Seek Carolina Thread Trail Grant for Desired Projects</p>	<p>Work with proper authorities to re-align Carolina Thread Trail master plan and avail City of CTT resources such as Trail Masters, volunteers and grants.</p> <p>Recommendation: 1.15</p>	<p>PR&ST, PS, CL</p>	<p>MP</p>	<p>NA</p>

Take Partnership with the Northwest Mountain Biking Alliance to the Next Level	Work with mountain bike alliance to identify improvement to mountain biking trails through partnership. Recommendation: 1.14	PR&ST, PS, CL	H	NA
Complete Miracle of Hickory Park Project	Complete existing master plan to include partnership with Army National Guard for additional parking capacity. Recommendation: 1.21	PR&ST, PS, CL	H	\$\$\$
Perform Post-Pandemic Lifecycle Analysis of Programs	Give post-pandemic programs time to deepen. Perform life-cycle analysis to discern future programming plan of action. Recommendation: 1.27	PR&ST	H	NA



Communication of Existing Assets



Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
Create Videos to Promote & Educate the Population on Accessibility Features of Park Amenities & Programs	Create videos, post and promote. Recommendation: 2.11	CM, PR&ST	M	\$
Install Inclusive Signage at Parks	Install signage, such as PEC boards and braille additions for those who communicate by alternate means. Recommendation: 2.12	CM, PS, PR&ST	M	\$\$
Create Electronic, Paper & Alternate Forms of Communication for Individuals with Disabilities Who Need to Plan Recreation Outings Ahead of Time	Create communication materials specific to the needs of individuals with disabilities. Recommendation 2.15	CM, PR&ST	H	\$

Growth Planning



Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
Focus on Park Revitalization in Western Quadrants	Revitalize underutilized parks in the City. Recommendation: 3.3	PS, PR&ST, CL	H	\$\$\$\$
Leverage Lower Density Areas for Sports Tourism	Consider parks, with a lower population density around them, for sports tourism offerings. Recommendation: 3.4	PS, PR&ST, CL	M	Variable
Conduct Parking Studies Due to Park Popularity or Projected Popularity	Conduct parking studies for Kiwanis Park, Henry Fork River Park, Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park, Rotary-Geitner Park and Miracle of Hickory Park. Include whether parking for the disabled is actually functional. Recommendation: 3.5	PS	H	Variable
Grow Department's Ability to Serve Individuals in the Hispanic & Hmong Communities	Ensure services to prominent cultural groups, such as the Latino and Hmong communities. Recommendation: 3.9	PR&ST	H	NA

Sports Tourism



Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
Increase Gym Space	Locate additional gym space for sports tourism, beyond Hickory Metro Convention Center Recommendation: 4.3	PR&ST	M	NA
Increase Lacrosse Venues	Develop partnership with schools and universities to increase play of Lacrosse in the area. Recommendation: 4.3	PR&ST	M	NA
Magnify College Partnerships	Maximize college partnerships via plethora of college facilities revealed in sports tourism inventory. Recommendation: 4.5	PR&ST	H	NA
Explore Partnership with Entities to Attract High School Level Travel Baseball	Increase 60/90 capacity. Recommendation: 4.6	PR&ST	M	NA
Explore Partnership with Duke Energy and the Hickory Metro Convention Center to Build Fishing Tournament Capacity	Pursue efforts to build fishing tournament capacity that accommodates 40 boats. Recommendation: 4.7	PR&ST	M	NA
Increase Mountain Biking Opportunities in the Area	Explore creation of a mountain biking venue, near L.P. Frans Stadium, which can connect with Hickory City Park via Aviation Walk and Riverwalk. Recommendation: 4.11	PR&ST, PS, OC, CL	H	\$\$\$

Increased Focus on Natural Assets & Education

Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
Seek Partnerships That Promote Natural Education, Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability	Explore official partnerships with organizations to focus on environmental education and stewardship specific to the needs of Hickory. Recommendation: 5.1	PR&ST, CL	M	\$
Emulate Environmental Stewardship Trends	Explore how to increase the City’s connection to environmental stewardship trends and act upon as much as is possible among priorities. Recommendation: 5.7	PR&ST, PS	H	\$\$



Equitable & Inclusive Access to Recreation

Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
Consider Multi-age Programming & Inclusive Amenities	Offer multi-age programs that provide for a differentiation of cognitive age from chronological age. Consider adapting select existing programs, first, where possible. Recommendation: 6.13	PR&ST	H	\$
Investigate Micro-transit Transportation Options for Those Experiencing Lack of Transportation as a Barrier to Accessing Parks & Recreation Opportunities	Engage Greater Hickory Metro Planning Organization and Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority in exploration of micro-transit opportunities. Recommendation: 6.15	PS, PL, PR&ST, CL	M	NA

Greenway Transportation Awareness & Eventual Expansion	Continue to work with Greenway Transportation to bring stops as close to parks and amenities as possible. Recommendation: 6.16	PS, PL, PR&ST, CL	H/OG	NA
Partner with Counties & Municipalities to Form a Network of Offerings for Individuals with Specialized Needs	Explore the creation of a formal network of counties and municipalities that consists of partners actively filling particular niches and referring individuals to the best resource. Recommendation: 6.17	PR&ST	M	NA



Continuity with City Strengths, Goals & Identity



Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
See Near-term Objectives.			OG	

Implementation of Nationally Recognized Administrative & Operational Practices



Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
See Near-term Objectives.			OG	

Long-term Projects & Initiatives: 7-10 Years

Improvement & Maximization of Existing Assets



Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
Add Adaptive Biking Opportunities and Events to Hickory Trail	Seek partnership with organizations such as iCan Shine to provide adaptive biking experiences. Consider working with/becoming a home-town for Ainsley's Angels to facilitate races. Recommendation: 1.22	PR&ST, PS, CL	MP	\$
Integrate Sensory Garden Experiences into Underutilized Spaces, Existing Arboretum, Community Gardens or the City's Smallest Parks	Consider sensory gardens in existing and underutilized spaces. Recommendation: 1.7	PR&ST, PS	MP	Variable

Communication of Existing Assets



Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
Install Electronic Signage at High Use Parks without Sign Restrictions	Install electronic signage at high-use parks where feasible. Recommendation: 2.14	CM, PS, PR&ST	H	\$\$

Growth Planning



Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
<p>Focus on Increasing Facility & Recreation Amenities in Eastern Quadrants</p>	<p>Consider completing remaining phases of Bruce Meisner Park.</p> <p>Consider developing Sandy Pines property.</p> <p>Elevate revitalization of Cliff Teague Park.</p> <p>Scope out recreation opportunities near Trivium and Catawba Valley Boulevard + Sweetwater and Startown Road.</p> <p>Explore adding recreation center in Southeast Quadrant (long-term consideration).</p> <p>Explore connectivity between neighborhoods and parks via subdivisions.</p> <p>Explore developer-based donations of land for recreation use.</p> <p>Recommendation: 3.2</p>	<p>PS, PR&ST, CL, PL</p>	<p>H/OG</p>	<p>\$\$\$\$\$</p>
<p>Create Lake Hickory Task Force with Goal of Finding Creative Ways to Increase Public Access to the Lake Hickory Waterfront Through the...</p> <p>Assessment of the Feasibility of Potential Access Areas &</p> <p>Education of the Public via Promotion of Existing Access In/Around Hickory (to Include the Future Deidra Lackey Memorial Park)</p>	<p>Create task force to explore ways to open up access to Lake Hickory for citizens.</p> <p>Recommendation: 3.8</p>	<p>PS, CL</p>	<p>H</p>	<p>NA</p>



Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
<p>Conduct Feasibility Study to Build Arena/Multi-use Facility with Flexible Indoor/Outdoor Space</p> <p>+</p> <p>Identify/purchase/earmark land for development of such a facility along the Startown Corridor or Near St. Stephens.</p>	<p>Look at 6K capacity to accommodate events beyond Western Regionals. Consider indoor soccer, football, basketball and an indoor track.</p> <p>Recommendation: 4.1</p>	PR&ST, CL, PL, PS	M	\$/\$\$\$
<p>Build Schools for Future Community Capacity</p>	<p>Collaborate with local school system on building sports tourism capacity into future facilities.</p> <p>Recommendation: 4.4</p>	PR&ST, CL	M	NA
<p>Explore Indoor Venue Capable of Full Time Use</p>	<p>Review indoor venues dedicated exclusively to sports tourism.</p> <p>Recommendation 4.9</p>	PR&ST, PS	M	NA
<p>Explore Softball/Baseball Complex Possibilities</p>	<p>Increase the City’s singular capacity for high school/college play through potential complex.</p> <p>Recommendation: 4.10</p>	PR&ST, CL	M	NA

Increased Focus on Natural Assets & Education



Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
<p>Consider Partnership with the Conservation Corps of North Carolina to Increase Focus on Stewardship of Natural Assets and the Augmentation of Natural Area Maintenance</p>	<p>Explore partnership with the Conservation Corps of North Carolina. If feasible, enact. Expand any previous partnerships.</p> <p>Recommendation: 5.5</p>	PS, PR&ST	M	NA/\$

Equitable & Inclusive Access to Recreation



Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
<p>Balance Inclusion Services for Individuals with Disabilities with Therapeutic Recreation Programs +</p> <p>Prioritize Inclusive Programming for Individuals with Disabilities in the PR&ST Department. Use as Bedrock for Therapeutic Recreation Feasibility Study.</p>	<p>Explore long-term goal of having a PR&ST Therapeutic Recreation Division which would benefit individuals with disabilities and senior citizens.</p> <p>Recommendation: 6.11</p>	PR&ST	M	\$\$\$
<p>Strategically Elevate Adaptive Sports in the Region & Form Local Government Network</p>	<p>Work with neighboring municipalities to create a local government network for adaptive sports.</p> <p>Recommendation: 6.14</p>	PR&ST, PS	M	Variable

Continuity with City Strengths, Goals & Identity



Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
See Near-term Objectives.			OG	

Implementation of Nationally Recognized Administrative & Operational Practices



Objectives	Action	Responsible Team	Priority	OMC
See Near-term Objectives.			OG	



Strategies for a Successful Comprehensive Master Plan Implementation

<p style="text-align: center;">Regularly Use the Plan for Department Level Planning & Initiatives</p> <p>Comprehensive master plans are helpful in making informed day to day decisions using public input, data, and analysis that reflect the needs and priorities of the community. From choosing a new program to launch to deciding upon where best to place the next park, the master plan can help staff take the “guess work” out of what to offer and prioritize. The master plan can be used as basis for funding requests inside and outside of the City while also acting as a touchstone for evaluating new proposals for parks and recreation related initiatives.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Use the Plan for Data-driven Leadership Decisions and Pursuit of Alternate Funding</p> <p>The comprehensive master plan is meant to increase leadership’s ability to make data-driven decisions. This framework can articulate and maintain established community priorities while acting as a touchstone for evaluating new proposals for parks and recreation related initiatives. The master plan can also be used as a basis for competitive applications and alternate funding opportunities such as grants and public-private partnerships.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Track Progress</p> <p>After sharing the comprehensive master plan with the public, keep a detailed record of the plan’s actual use (i.e. what has been implemented/when/what’s left). This will not only help to articulate how much of the plan has been implemented but will also act as a catalyst for ensuring that the plan continues to be viewed and used as a resource. Sharing progress creates accountability and has the potential to create positive momentum related to the projects within the plan itself.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Make the Community & Stakeholders a Part of the Journey</p> <p>Public input is an integral component of a comprehensive master plan. To maintain this support, it’s important to stay in touch during implementation. This will foster good will and enhance the City’s ability to ensure that it is serving citizens and neighbors well. Consider soliciting public input on implementation of the plan in the form of meetings, small surveys, or other forms of comment solicitation enhanced by proven communication strategies. Connect with unique groups, such as African-American youth, to capture great ideas on how to customize offerings to the needs of citizens even better than before.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Have a Plan Manager</p> <p>The master plan is multi-faceted and will require the cooperation of several internal and external stakeholders. A Plan Manager can be the cog in the wheel that ensures that the wheel spins and keeps spinning. This person can monitor progress, track data, act as a subject matter expert for leadership inquiries and manage individuals who take on significant initiatives contained within the plan. This manager would ideally act as an extension of the Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Director.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Celebrate Successes...Small & Large</p> <p>The comprehensive master plan contains multiple initiatives capable of bringing significant value to the residents of Hickory as well as visitors. Celebrating successes through ceremonies and communication strategies will help to ensure awareness of offerings, increase use, and create a momentum of support for future projects.</p>

Paving the Way...

Commission for Accreditation of Park & Recreation Agencies (CAPRA)

This comprehensive master plan was constructed based on standards prescribed in section 2.4 of the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) National Accreditation Standards publication, Sixth Edition. This was done in order to facilitate the building of foundational framework for the City. Future plan updates can build upon this foundation. The PR&ST Department would benefit from using CAPRA standards to build its administrative infrastructure with the Public Services Department following suit, where applicable. Following 2.4 are additional elements necessary for a comprehensive master plan. These elements have been accounted for in this plan and should be reviewed/further developed in subsequent plan updates.



Park and Recreation System Master Plan (2.4)

Standard: The agency shall have a comprehensive park and recreation master plan that provides recommendations for provision of facilities, programs and services; parkland acquisition and development; maintenance and operations; and administration and management. The plan shall be officially adopted by the policy-making body, updated periodically and linked with a capital improvement budget and a phased development program. The system master plan shall implement policies adopted in the comprehensive plan for the jurisdiction. Interested and 14 affected agencies, organizations, and groups shall be engaged in the planning process.

Agency Mission (1.4)

Standard: There shall be an established mission statement that defines the direction and purpose of the agency. The agency mission is the purpose or reason for the existence of the agency and establishes the long-term direction for the agency services and activities.

Agency Goals and Objectives (1.4.1)

Standard: There shall be established, measurable goals and objectives for the agency and for each organizational component within the agency. Such goal and objectives shall be directed toward accomplishing the agency mission, be reviewed periodically, and distributed to all appropriate personnel.

Recreation and Leisure Trends Analysis (10.5.1)

Standard: The agency shall assess periodically societal and local recreation and leisure trends and determine how those trends impact existing and projected user populations.

Needs Assessment (10.4)

Standard: The agency shall periodically conduct an assessment of assets and needs to identify existing and projected gaps in service and determine land, facility and service priorities. Needs assessments are used to help determine priorities for developing services with the agency. Needs assessments can use a variety of methods to obtain input from the community, including focus groups, advisory boards, forums and surveys.

Community Inventory (10.5.2)

Standard: The agency shall compile a complete and current inventory of parkland and recreation facilities, programs and services in the service area, including those provided by the agency and those offered by schools and other alternative public, private, and non-profit providers.

Level of Service Standards (10.3.1)

Standard: The agency shall have level of service (LOS) standards for provision of land, facilities and services within the jurisdiction. LOS standards are a type of performance measure associated with equitable provision of service, such as the number of facilities per 1,000 residents in a service area or facilities available within a designated travel distance or travel time, e.g. percent of population that have a park within a 10 minute walk. LOS standards can also address other dimensions of equitable access, such as connectivity, maintenance and affordability, e.g. percent of parkland connected to the trail network.

Key Funding Sources & Grant Opportunities

The following entries represent an abridged compilation of alternative funding sources that the City of Hickory can pursue in order to take the master plan to reality.

Summary of Funding Opportunities

Local Funding Opportunities	State Funding Opportunities	Federal Funding Opportunities
Taxation	North Carolina Parks & Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF)	Catalog of Federal Assistance
Gifts & Donations	North Carolina Trust Fund Accessibility for Parks Grant (AFP)	Outdoor Recreation Park Legacy Grant
Bonds	Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)	Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)
Fundraising Partnerships with 501c3s (i.e. Friends of Hickory)	Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)	National Endowment for the Arts Our Town Grant
Corporate Sponsorships	NC DOT Transportation Improvement Program	Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development Transportation Discretionary Grants (BUILD)
Public-Private Partnerships	NC Department of Commerce	Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP)
Local Grants	Golden LEAF Foundation	US DOT Federal Highway Administration
Fees/Charges	MPO Planning Funds	Recreational Trail Program (RTP)
Cost-Recovery Model Adoption	Clean Water Management Trust Fund	Safe Routes to School (SRTS)
Concession Operations	NC State RRS Grant Locator Info Resource: Places & Spaces...Health & Well-being...Travel & Tourism...Community Development...Athletics Grants www.rrs.ncsu.edu/grant-resources	Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG)
Capital Improvement Plan	WebGrants Program	Access and Mobility Partnership Grants
Duke Energy Foundation	NC Trails Program	Infrastructure for Rebuilding American Discretionary Grant Program (INFRA)
Carolina Thread Trail	NC Department of Environmental Quality	Federal Transit Administration Capital Funds (FTA)
	NCDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning Grant Initiative	Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ)
	NC Forest Service Urban & Community Forestry Grant Program	Highway Safety Improvement Program
	EPA Smart Growth	National Highway Performance Program
	NC Arts Council	Federal Transit Administration Accelerating Innovative Mobility Competitive Funding

Key Grants & Alternative Funding Sources

Level	Funding Tool	Type	Source	Description
Local	Carolina Thread Trail	Grant	Carolina Thread Trail	Greenway and trail construction projects including design, land acquisition, corridor planning, and canoe/kayak launch construction.
Local/Non-Profit	Friends of Hickory	Public Private Partnership	Friends of Hickory/Partners for Parks General Fund	Develops and supports projects in Hickory that improve the attractiveness and livability of the community, especially as related to parks, greenways, open spaces and recreation.
State	PARTF	Grant	North Carolina Parks & Recreation Trust Fund	PARTF awards matching grants to local governments for parks, public beach access, and improvements in state parks. The statewide program helps local governments reach their park and public access goals to improve the quality of life in their communities. PARTF grants have a maximum grant amount of \$500,000 for a single project.
State	Accessibility for Parks Grant (AFP)	Grant	North Carolina Parks & Recreation Trust Fund	The Accessibility for Parks (AFP) program provides \$10 million for parks and recreation grants to benefit children and veterans with disabilities in North Carolina. Local governments, including some public authorities, are eligible to apply for the matching grants. The program is administered through the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation

				<p>and the N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.</p> <p>The matching grants can be used to build accessible facilities or adapt existing facilities that meet the unique needs of children and veterans with physical and developmental disabilities. Local governments can request a maximum of \$500,000 with each application and must match the grant with at least \$1 of local funds for every \$5 in grant funds.</p>
Federal	Community Development Block Grant	Grant	U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development	<p>Grants provided to states, cities and counties to develop viable urban communities. Grants focus on benefitting low and moderate income persons and can fund projects related to property acquisition, construction of public facilities, and the rehabilitation/ conversion of non-residential structures. Projects need to relate to benefitting low to moderate income individuals, prevention or elimination of slums/blight, or address community development needs having a particular urgency because of existing conditions that pose a serious/immediate threat to the health and welfare of the community if funding were not available. CDBG Building Reuse awards are limited to \$750K per local</p>

				government. The grant amount cannot exceed \$20K per job for priority projects and \$12K per job for all other projects.
Federal	Our Town	Grant	National Endowment for the Arts	Funding for creative place-making that incorporates the arts in a way that creates strategies to strengthen communities by elevating community assets, issues and voices of residents and new ways of overcoming challenges. Grant awards can range from \$24K to \$150K.
Federal	Access and Mobility Partnership Grants	Transportation Grant	Federal Transit Administration	Funds for innovative capital projects for the transportation disadvantaged that improve the coordination of non-emergency medical transportation. Up to 80% of the project is funded by the federal share.
Federal	Federal Transit Administration Accelerating Innovative Mobility Competitive Funding	Transportation Project Funding Opportunity	Federal Transit Administration	With \$14M awarded in 2020, this competitive funding source focuses on activities leading to the development and testing of innovative mobility, such as implementing and operating a new service model and evaluating project results.
Non-Profit	Community-Built Playspace Grant	Grant	Kaboom	Partnership between the community, a dedicated funding partner and Kaboom to design, plan and build a new play space using the Kaboom signature community-build model. Eligible communities can secure

				approximately \$15K for projects.
Non-Profit	Creative Play Grants	Grant	Kaboom	Imagination Playground and Rigamajig grants are available, specific times a year, for portable playgrounds that can be used indoors to include gyms and libraries. Such playgrounds can be used as pop-up opportunities at recreation centers and in libraries. Eligible communities can secure approximately \$15K for projects.
For Non-Profit Partners (501c3 Eligible)	American Academy of Dermatology Association Grant	Shade Structure Grant	American Academy of Dermatology Association Shade Structure Grant Program	Program provides funds for permanent shade in parks where children learn and play. The monetary award can be as much as \$8,000 covering the cost of the shade structure and installation.
Non-profit	National Aging & Disability Transportation Center Grants & Funding	Grant(s)	NADTC Grants	NADTC grants are awarded to support community efforts to expand accessible transportation options. Past grants have focused upon key needs such as transportation in rural areas. Up to \$20K can be awarded to a community.
Non-profit	National Aging & Disability Transportation Center Applicant Toolkit for Competitive Funding Programs at USDOT	Grant Toolkit	NADTC Grant Information	Toolkit to provide guidance as part of the Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success Initiative.
Corporate	Panthers Charities Grant	Community Grant	Carolina Panthers	Through a public-private partnership with a 501c3 capable of receiving this grant, the Carolina Panthers can provide funding for educational, athletic,

				and human services needs to agencies that concentrate on these areas. \$5K is typically awarded for one-time or ongoing projects.
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Parks & Recreation Professional Guide to Fundraising

The **National Recreation and Park Association** has formulated a comprehensive strategy for departments to obtain the additional funding needed to make the enhancements to facilities and programs desired. The association has created a roadmap known as the “Park and Recreation Professionals’ Guide to Fundraising.” This comprehensive guide takes organizations, step by step, from establishing teams to assessing needs to the fundraising process and beyond. This guide, if followed, is the perfect roadmap to expand the capabilities of the PR&ST Department and can be shared with neighboring departments to increase opportunities in the region.

Source

<https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/a867f5d151c2404ba5f4510bd83abdd6/nrpa-fundraising-guide.pdf>

Grants Made Possible Through Public-Private Partnerships with 501c3 Entities.

Source: Playworld

A Note on Public Private Partnerships

Numerous municipalities partner with non-profit organizations to accomplish phenomenal projects that benefit communities. The private entity, within this partnership, drastically increases fundraising capacity by leveraging their ability to pursue grants and additional streams of income not permissible to local government. With the help of legal counsel, the make-up of the partnership makes what would not be possible by either singular entity, possible. The City of Hickory, in partnership with the Friends of Hickory, employed this strategy with great success via Lowe’s Foods City Park. A great many best-practice projects, from around the country, have relied upon public private partnerships and it is advisable to assume that this will be a necessary strategy for key initiatives contained within this master plan, especially as they pertain to inclusive amenities.

The following compilation of grant opportunities can be provided to non-profit entities who may wish to work with the City on providing park, recreation, program and sports tourism offerings in the coming years. Electronic links to grant sources are provided below each description.

Campbell Soup Foundation

Description: As of 2019, the Campbell Soup Foundation has moved to an invitation-only grant process. Running two primary grant programs, one focused on healthy school communities, which will begin as a pilot program with a select group of nonprofit partners. The second is our Community Impact Grants program, which utilizes a designated group of employee nominators from across our U.S. footprint to nominate local community organizations to apply for a grant. To be eligible, an organization's work must align with the mission and strategies of our Foundation. Check for additional eligibility and evaluation criteria.

[Campbell Soup Foundation - Campbell Soup Company](#)

GSK

Description: Through the GSK IMPACT Awards, seeking to recognize and honor small and medium-sized exemplary nonprofit organizations with programs that focus on these community health factors: Diet and exercise, Education, The built environment, Employment, and Family and social support. Up to 10 nonprofit organizations located in Chatham, Durham, Granville, Person, Orange, and Wake Counties in North Carolina will earn an IMPACT Award.

[IMPACT Awards | GSK US](#)

Humana Foundation

Description: The purpose of this funding is to support an organization that is focused on initiatives in childhood health - supporting efforts that improve physical activity and nutritional habits of children and families; intergenerational health fostering shared, healthy activities between generations or Active lifestyles promoting fun, physically active living as a way of life.

[The Humana Foundation](#)

Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust

Description: The Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust is dedicated to improving health and wellness in North Carolina. The Trust is committed to making a difference by existing to protect and improve the lives of those who need it most vulnerable populations, the under-served, and the economically disadvantaged. [Funding Opportunities - Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust \(kbr.org\)](#)

Knight Foundation

Description: Knight is a national foundation with deep local roots and offices in eight cities where the Knight brothers once published newspapers. They work through community foundations to foster informed and engaged communities for a healthy democracy. The Foundation invests in spaces such as parks, trails, and libraries to engage and connect residents to each other and to the places where they live.

[Programs – Knight Foundation](#)

North Carolina Community Foundation

Description: The North Carolina Community Foundation partners with 60 affiliate foundations to provide local resource allocation and community assistance in 67 counties across the state.

[Grants - North Carolina Community Foundation \(nccommunityfoundation.org\)](http://nccommunityfoundation.org)

Truman Heartland Community Foundation

Description: It is the mission of the Truman Heartland Community Foundation to improve area communities by promoting private giving for public good. Funding priorities include Education; Fostering a Sense of Community Spirit; Leadership Development for Youths and Adults; Positive Youth Development and more.

[Grants - Truman Heartland Community Foundation \(thcf.org\)](http://thcf.org)

Nationwide Grant Opportunities

[Playground Grant Resources - Nationwide and International - Landscape Structures \(playlsi.com\)](http://playlsi.com)

Action for Healthy Kids

Description: Schools need resources to implement health and wellness practices that help students eat better and be physically active. Thanks to our partners, Action for Healthy Kids has provided \$6.6 million in grants to schools since 2009. School Grants for Healthy Kids can help your school health team achieve its goal to make every kid healthy and ready to learn.

[Grants & Support - Action for Healthy Kids](#)

American Academy of Dermatology

Description: The AAD's Shade Structure Grant Program awards grants of up to \$8,000 to public schools and non-profit organizations for installing permanent shade structures for outdoor locations that are not protected from the sun, such as playgrounds, pools, or recreation spaces.

[Shade Structure grants \(aad.org\)](#)

Bridgestone America's Trust Fund

Description: The Trust Fund focuses on organizations with missions supporting beneficiaries who will benefit from support of education, environment and conservation and youth development.

[Bridgestone Americas Community Involvement](#)

Childhood Obesity and Rapid Response Fund

Description: The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the American Heart Association, and a team of experts from across the childhood obesity movement have teamed up through the Childhood Obesity Rapid Response Fund. The mission of the fund is to make effective strategic investments in ongoing state, local, and tribal public policy campaigns in order to increase public policy impact on healthy weight and living among children. This funding is mostly targeted at passage of new public policy, however proposals for defense of existing critical policy as well as addressing policy implementation deficiencies are also eligible.

[ucm_454582.pdf \(heart.org\)](#)

Childhood Obesity Prevention Challenge Area

Description: The direction of AFRI is to encourage a variety of project types to address the problem of childhood obesity, multi-function Integrated Research, Education, and Extension projects that emphasize health disparities and cultural influences. The AFRI Childhood Obesity Prevention RFA calls for a focus on behavioral and environmental approaches to obesity prevention in children, but the particular issues to be addressed and how to address them will be developed by the investigator(s).

[Access denied | National Institute of Food and Agriculture \(usda.gov\)](#)

Children's Obesity Fund

Description: The Children's Obesity Fund seeks to educate parents and children about the rising obesity rates in America, reverse the statistics and dangerous trends, and help prevent the next generation from continuing down this alarmingly unhealthy road. The fund would like to give money and support nonprofit organizations who share the goal of eliminating the epidemic of childhood obesity.

[Grant/Fundraising FAQ – Children Obesity Fund \(childrensobesityfund.org\)](#)

Cigna Foundation

Description: Voices for Healthy Kids is a new collaboration between the American Heart Association and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation working to engage, organize and mobilize people to improve the health of their communities and reverse the childhood obesity epidemic. Voices for Healthy Kids Strategic Campaign Fund is awarding grants with a mix of lobbying and non-lobbying resources to support strategic issue advocacy campaigns focused on fighting childhood obesity through state, local, and tribal public policy campaigns aligned with the Voices for Healthy Kids policy priorities.

[Cigna Foundation | Cigna Corporate Responsibility](#)

Donors Choose

Description: Don't see a grant that fits your needs? Try posting a project on DonorsChoose.org. Public school teachers nationwide are eligible to participate.

[DonorsChoose: Support a classroom. Build a future.](#)

Finish Line Youth Foundation

Description: The Finish Line Youth Foundation supports youth programs that are effective and inclusive, funding opportunities for participation in youth programs that place an importance on youth development and an active lifestyle. Grants generally range from \$1,000 to \$5,000, although the Foundation may occasionally make significant, larger grants to maximize funding impacts in its interest areas.

[Youth Foundation Grants | Finish Line](#)

Fuel Up to Play 60

Description: Funding is available to K-12 schools enrolled in Fuel Up to Play 60. The competitive, nationwide funding program can help your school jump-start and sustain healthy nutrition and physical activity improvements. Funds can be used to conduct in-school promotions focused on creating a healthier school and to implement Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Plays. Funds can also be used for professional development, nutrition education materials, and physical education equipment and materials.

[Funding | Fuel Up To Play 60](#)

Go! Grants

Description: Jump-start more movement at your elementary school with the GO! Grant. \$1,000-\$5,000 GO! Grants (Mini PEP Grants) support more minutes on the move before, during, and after school through funds and gear for new classroom and playground programs.

[Nonprofit providing youth sports grants | Every Kid Sports](#)

Henry E. Niles Foundation

Description: The mission of the Henry E. Niles Foundation is to help in the nurturing and uplifting of people in need by strengthening education, fighting economic hardships through self-help opportunities, and enhancing public health. The Foundation is offering grants to organizations that promote partnerships and collaborative efforts among multiple groups and organizations. The majority of grant-making is focused in the northeast, but occasionally grants may be awarded in other regions of the country.

[Grant Application & Report - Henry E. Niles Foundation, Inc. \(henryniles.org\)](#)

Humana Foundation

Description: The purpose of this funding is to support an organization that is focused on initiatives in childhood health - supporting efforts that improve physical activity and nutritional habits of children and families; intergenerational health - fostering shared, healthy activities between generations or Active lifestyles - promoting fun, physically active living as a way of life.

[The Humana Foundation](#)

James M. Cox Foundation

Description: The James M. Cox Foundation provides funding for capital campaigns and special projects in communities where Cox Enterprises Inc. does business. The Foundation is concentrating its community support in several priority areas: Conservation and Environment; Early Childhood Education; Empowering Families and Individuals for Success; Health.

[James M. Cox Foundation | Cox Enterprises](#)

KABOOM!

Description: Playground grants to help communities build safe places for kids to play. KaBOOM! has ongoing grant opportunities including Build it with KABOOM!, Build it Yourself and Play Everywhere. Landscape Structures is proud to partner with KABOOM! as their primary supplier of playground equipment.

[Grants - KABOOM! Playground and Playspace Grants for Communities](#)

Lego Group

Description: The LEGO Community Fund U.S. (LCFUS) seeks to help the Builders of Tomorrow reach their potential by 11 supporting programs benefitting children 0-14, primarily in the areas of learning, creativity or creative problem solving. Supporting programs in the U.S. communities where the LEGO Group operates, and will give preference to programs benefitting disadvantaged children.

www.legocommunityfund.org/grants-opportunities

Lids Foundation

Description: With a mission to support young people in our communities, the LIDS Foundation works to engage them in sports-related activities. These activities promote active and healthy lifestyles as well as leadership and growth opportunities. The LIDS Foundation turns this belief into action primarily through offering resources, be it in the manner of time, expertise, funds, or materials, to non-profit organizations whose goals and values align with those of the LIDS Foundation.

[Lids Foundation – Cover your Head, Discover your Heart.](#)

Lockheed Martin Foundation

Description: Lockheed Martin’s strategic focus areas: science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education and military and veteran causes, or provide support to address the needs of the communities where our employees live and work.

[Applying for Contributions | Lockheed Martin](#)

Meet Me at the Park Play Spaces Grant Program

Description: National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) and The Walt Disney Company have come together to improve access to outdoor play through the Meet Me at the Park Play Spaces Grant Program. Thanks to a \$1 million donation from Disney, grant funding is available to provide additional communities with increased access to inclusive play spaces in local parks for children and families. As part of this program, park and recreation agencies in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. Territories are invited to share their best ideas on increasing access to inclusive play spaces for children and families in underserved communities. Agencies with the most innovative, scalable and impactful project ideas will receive grants to build their projects.

This investment supports NRPA and Disney’s combined goal of providing one million kids and families with greater access to play.

[Meet Me at the Park | Initiatives | National Recreation and Park Association \(nrpa.org\)](#)

MetLife Foundation

Description: MetLife Foundation supports projects to empower people to lead healthy, productive lives and strengthen communities. The Foundation makes grants in health, education, civic affairs and culture. Underlying the Foundation’s programs is a focus on education at all ages and a commitment to increasing access and opportunity. The Healthy Habits program seeks to promote healthy habits and physical fitness for illness prevention, especially among children.

[MetLife Foundation | MetLife](#)

Newman's Own, Fisher House Foundation, and Military Times

Description: Newman's Own, Fisher House Foundation, and Military Times (Gannett Government Media Corporation) join together in presenting \$200,000 in grants to the most creative military quality of life improvement plans. Every day, service members, Veterans, and their families rise to the challenge of maintaining a healthy lifestyle while facing the unique trials that come with having dedicated their lives in service to our nation.

[Newman's Own Grant - Fisher House Foundation](#)

Rite Aid Foundation

Description: The Rite Aid Foundation is offering funding to nonprofit organizations that focus on health and wellness in the communities in which Rite Aid operates.

[The Rite Aid Foundation | Charitable Community Giving](#)

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and American Heart Association

Description: Voices for Healthy Kids is a new collaboration between the American Heart Association and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation working to engage, organize and mobilize people to improve the health of their communities and reverse the childhood obesity epidemic. Voices for Healthy Kids Strategic Campaign Fund is awarding grants with a mix of lobbying and non-lobbying resources to support strategic issue advocacy campaigns focused on fighting childhood obesity through state, local, and tribal public policy campaigns aligned with the Voices for Healthy Kids policy priorities.

[Robert Wood Johnson Foundation \(rwjf.org\)](http://rwjf.org)

The Fraternal Order of Eagles

Description: Grants from the various funds of the F.O.E. Charity Foundation are made available every year to 501 (c) 3 organizations. Grants may only be given to non-profit institutions, as dictated under the Articles of Incorporation of the Eagles and must conform to IRS requirements for non-profit institutions. Children's Fund grants are available to establishments and/or institutions caring for and/or treating mentally and physically impaired children (under the age of 18) and to hospitals treating children or researching the diseases of children.

[Fraternal Order of Eagles > Charities > Requesting Grants \(foe.com\)](#)

The Kresge Foundation

Description: Deploying an array of grantmaking and social investing tools – usually in partnership with nonprofit, public, private and philanthropic organizations – to address society’s most intractable problems.

[Homepage - Kresge Foundation](#)

The Quality of Life Grants Program/Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation

Description: The Quality of Life Grants Program, created by the late Dana Reeve, strives to empower individuals with disabilities and their families by providing grants to nonprofit organizations that improve quality of life through inclusion, access, independence, opportunities for community engagement, and other life-enhancing endeavors.

[Funding for nonprofits - Reeve Foundation \(christopherreeve.org\)](#)

W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Description: The Kellogg Foundation makes grants to organizations that embrace a similar mission of creating communities, systems, and nations in which all children have an equitable and promising future; one in which all children thrive. Our grants will fund programs and projects that support children, families, and communities as they strengthen and create conditions that propel children to achieve success as individuals and as contributors to the larger community and society.

[Grantseekers - W.K. Kellogg Foundation \(wkkf.org\)](#)

Youth Service America

Description: YSA invests in youth as problem solvers to address the most important challenges facing our world.

[Grants – Youth Service America \(YSA\)](#)

International Grant Opportunities

[Playground Grant Resources - Nationwide and International - Landscape Structures \(playlsi.com\)](#)

Bank of America

Description: Bank of America is guided by a common purpose to help make financial lives better, through the power of every connection. They deliver on this through responsible growth with a focus on our environmental, social and governance (ESG) leadership. As part of this work, they develop strong partnerships with nonprofit organizations addressing issues fundamental to economic mobility, bringing our collective networks and expertise as part of our commitment to help fuel economic and social progress in low- and moderate-income communities.

This foundation supports local and regional revitalization efforts taking a holistic approach to building thriving communities, create economic opportunity and livable neighborhoods including arts and cultural institutions that contribute to the overall vitality of the community.

[Bank of America Charitable Foundation philanthropic strategy](#)

Kiwanis Club

Description: The Kiwanis Children's Fund provides grants only to Kiwanis family clubs and districts for programs sponsored or supported by the club or district. Other funding requests will not be considered. Grant request must come directly from the club or district. The Kiwanis Children's Fund committee gives priority to projects that involve young children.

[Kiwanis Children's Fund](#)

The Coca-Cola Foundation

Description: As the global philanthropic arm of The Coca-Cola Company, The Coca-Cola Foundation, strives daily to be responsive to the citizenship priorities in the global communities where they live and work. The Foundation's community investment priorities reflect the global and local nature of their business and focuses on those global pillars where The Coca-Cola Company can make a unique and sustainable difference including empowering women, protecting the environment and enhancing communities.

[Community Engagement & Empowerment | The Coca-Cola Company](#)

The Scoular Foundation

Description: The Scoular Foundation was established to put a portion of profits to help people, organizations and projects where they do business and where their employees live throughout portions of the U.S. and Canada. The Scoular Company believes in giving back to communities supporting children & youth, education, social service, public health and arts & culture and are committed to acting on the issues, needs and concerns of these communities.

[Community involvement | Scoular](#)

Walmart Foundation

Description: Walmart Foundation's mission is to create opportunities, so people can live better. Central to their commitment to operating globally and giving back locally are the grants they award to organizations of all sizes in communities around the globe. Whether it's a small grant to a local school or a large grant to a hunger relief organization working across several states, the Foundation engages in opportunities that align with the key areas of focus including Opportunity, Sustainability and Community.

[How We Give \(walmart.org\)](#)

Playground Community Build

Community build projects, according to General Recreation Incorporated, are known for being beneficial by increasing community spirit, pride of ownership, easier fundraising, increased political support and substantial cost savings. **Community build projects can save up to 30% or more of the total cost of the playground project.** Such an approach requires an interactive planning process that regularly involves the community in the design, organization and creation of a given project. The time, talents and passion of volunteers make such projects successful. The City of Hickory should explore the feasibility of a community build project for future park upgrades and/or installations if it has not already.

The community build concept can translate to smaller projects that involve the updating of existing facilities so as to increase community involvement and cost savings throughout the life of a capital improvement plan. With an overall goal of making each park more inclusive as regularly scheduled updates are made, expectations can be managed for the size of the project.

Source

<https://www.communitybuildplaygrounds.com/benefits-of-community-builds.html>

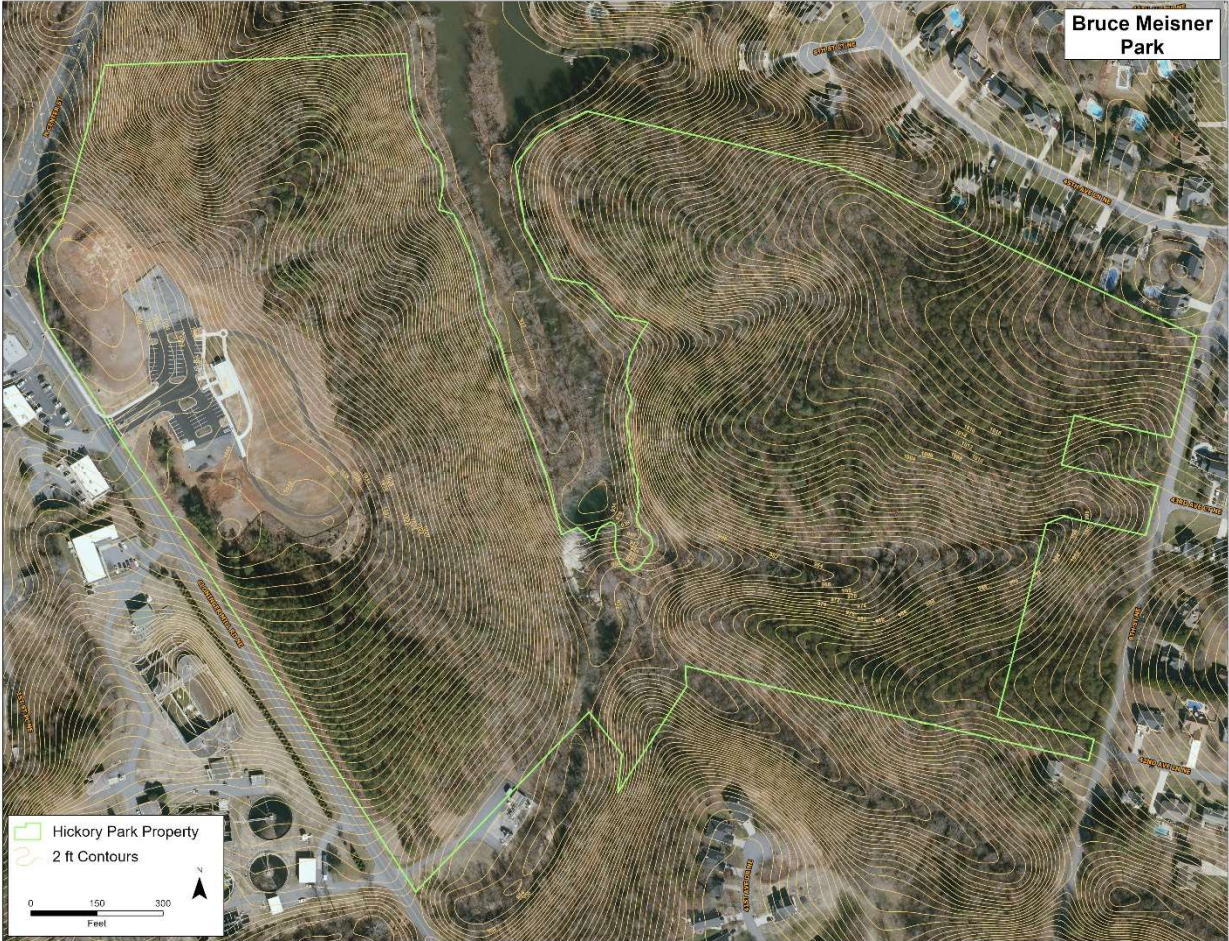
General Fundraising Resources

According to the National Recreation and Park Association, the following resources can prove valuable in identifying funding and grants, via the internet.

- 1/ **Candid** (Formerly Foundation Center and GuideStar): Provides training and research information on corporate grant programs and acts as a grants database. <https://candid.org/>
- 2/ **Chronicle of Philanthropy**: The Chronicle is a newspaper for nonprofit news publishing, fundraising trends, resources and recent grants. <https://www.philanthropy.com/>
- 3/ **Hoovers**: Profiles millions of U.S. companies. It is a great source for employee contact information.
- 4/ **Fortune Magazine**: A resource for identifying companies by state and industry. <https://fortune.com/>
- 5/ **Leadership Connect**: Connect to specific government leadership to facilitate funding strategies. <https://www.leadershipconnect.io/>
- 6/ **Newspapers and Magazines**: Wall-Street Journal, Newsweek and New York Times.
- 7/ **Search Engines**: Yahoo Finance, Google and More.

Park Topographical Inventory

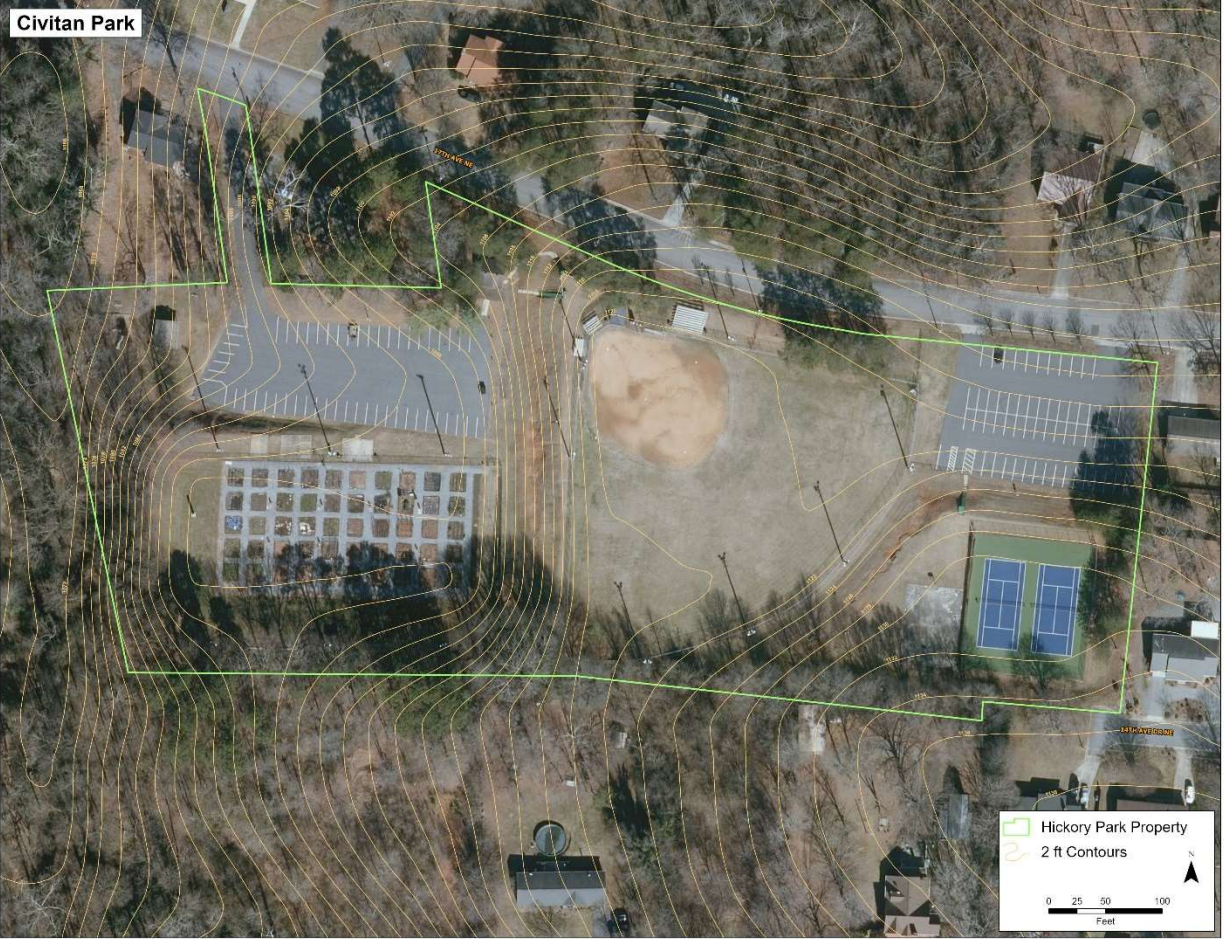
To assist in making data-driven decisions for existing park improvements, a topographical inventory has been included in this master plan.



City of Hickory Park



Civitan Park

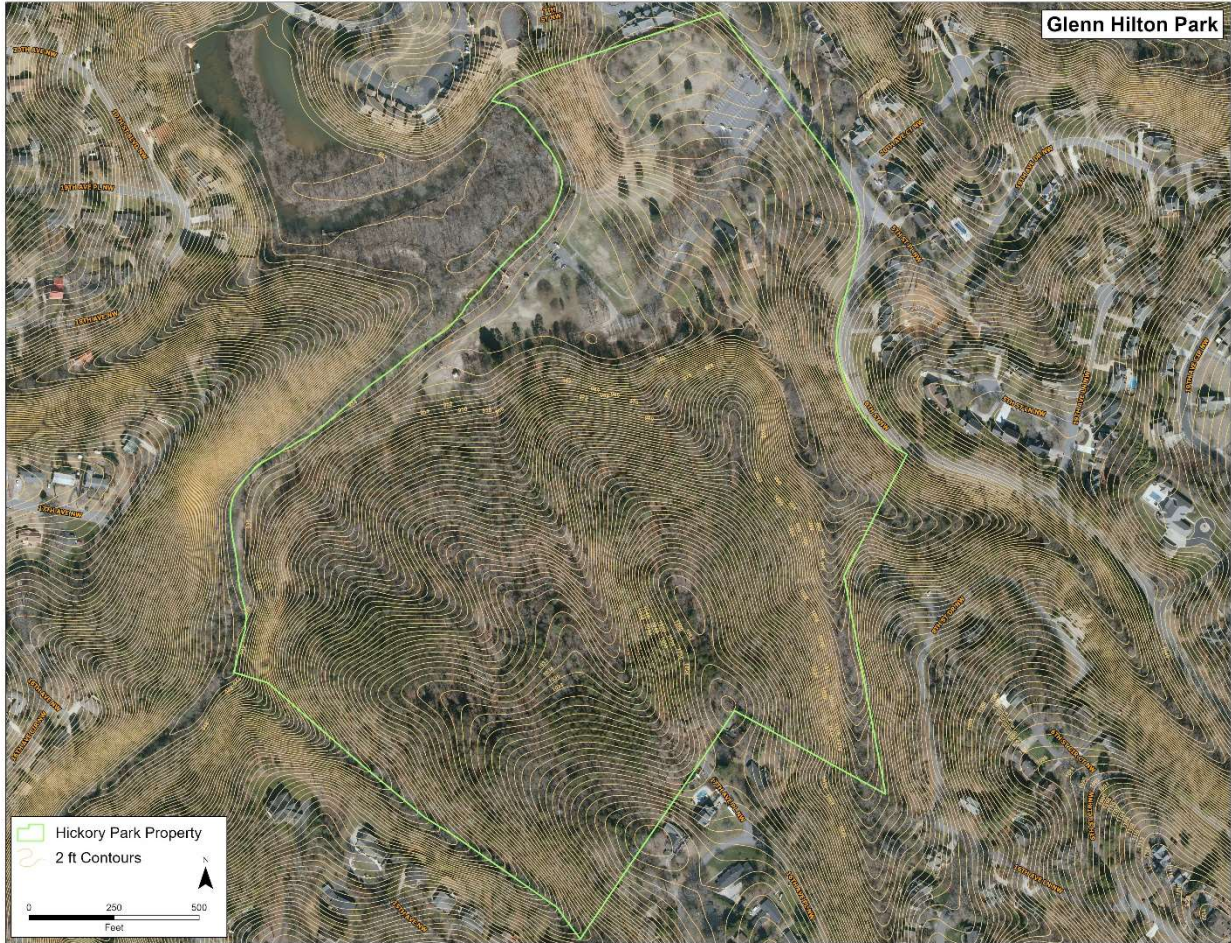


Cliff Teague Park



Fairbrook Optimist
Dog Park



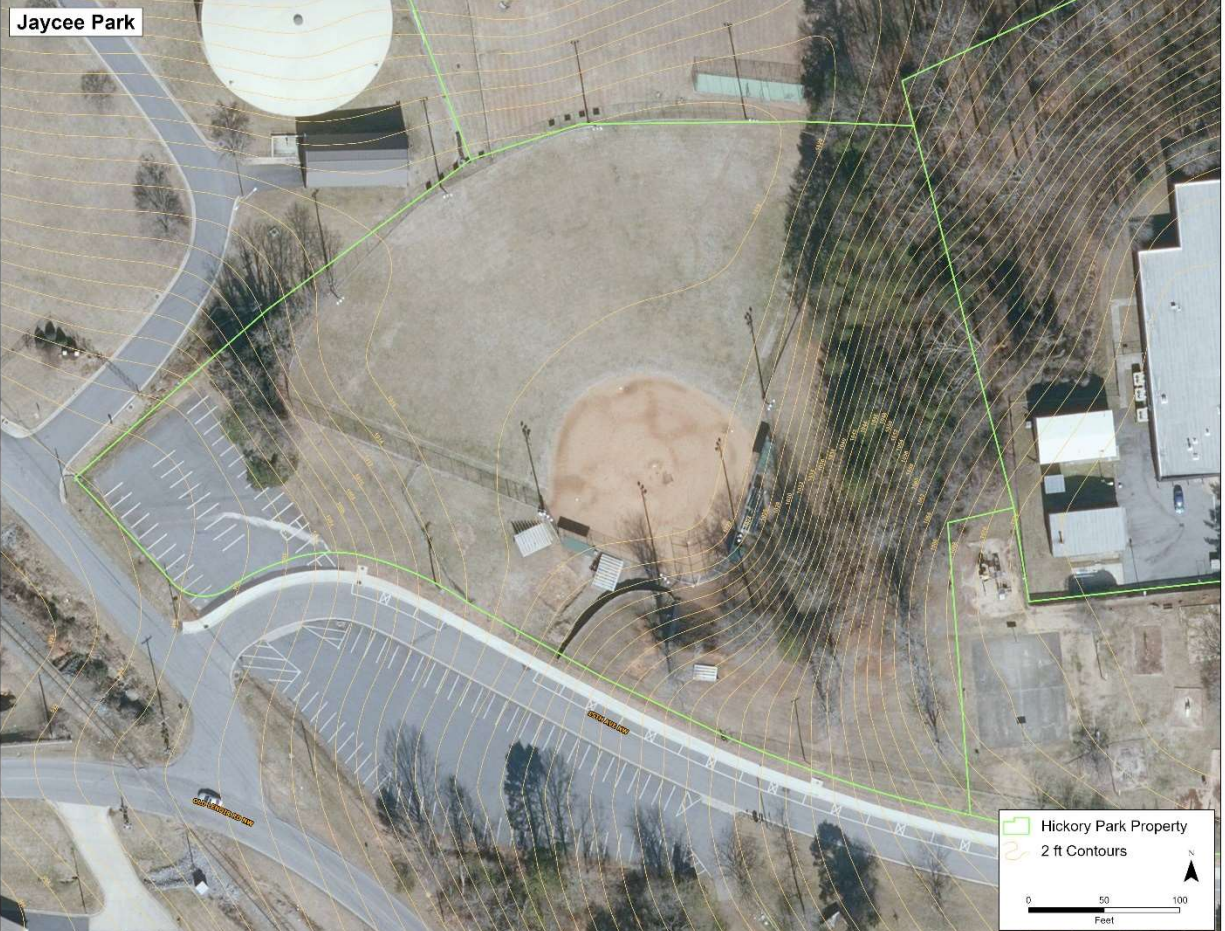








Jaycee Park

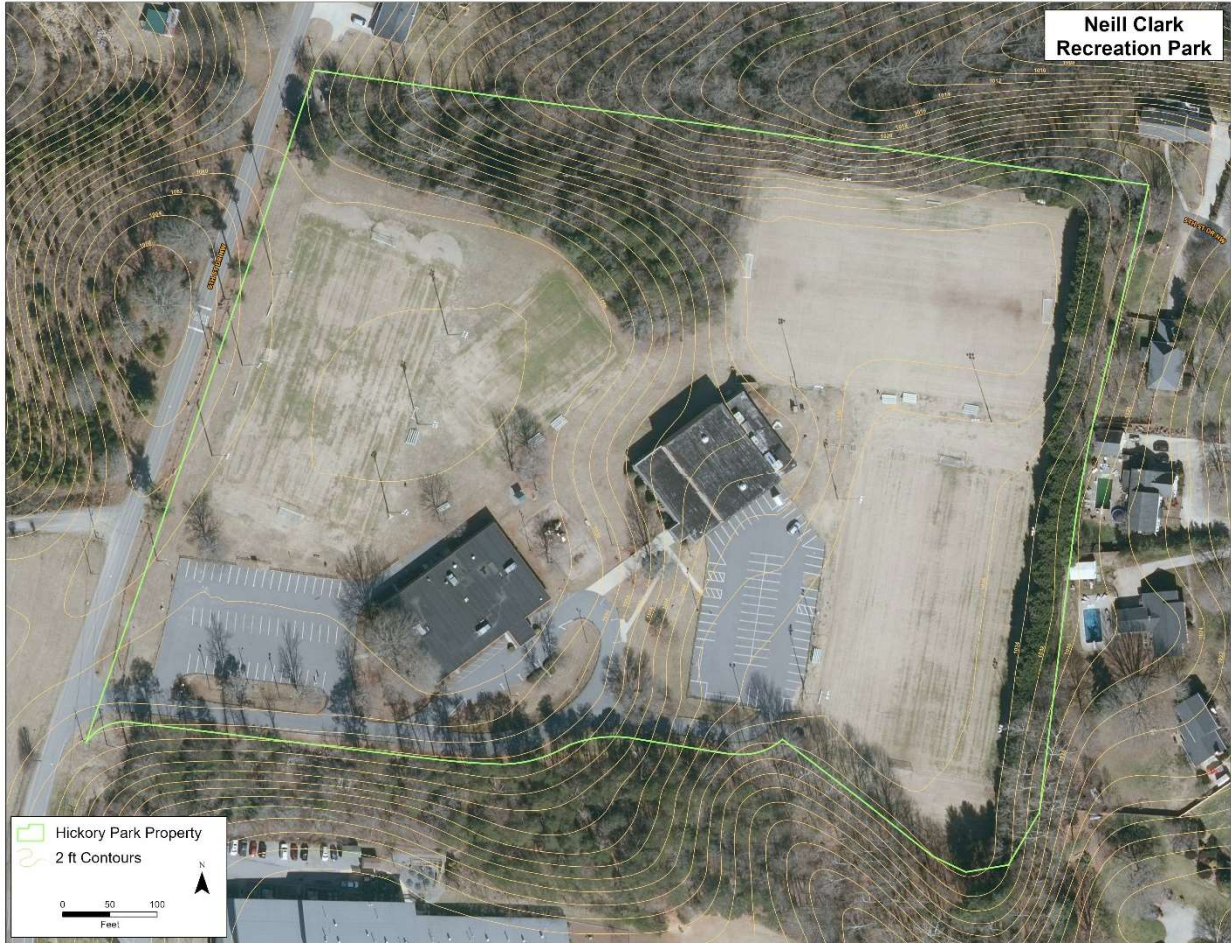


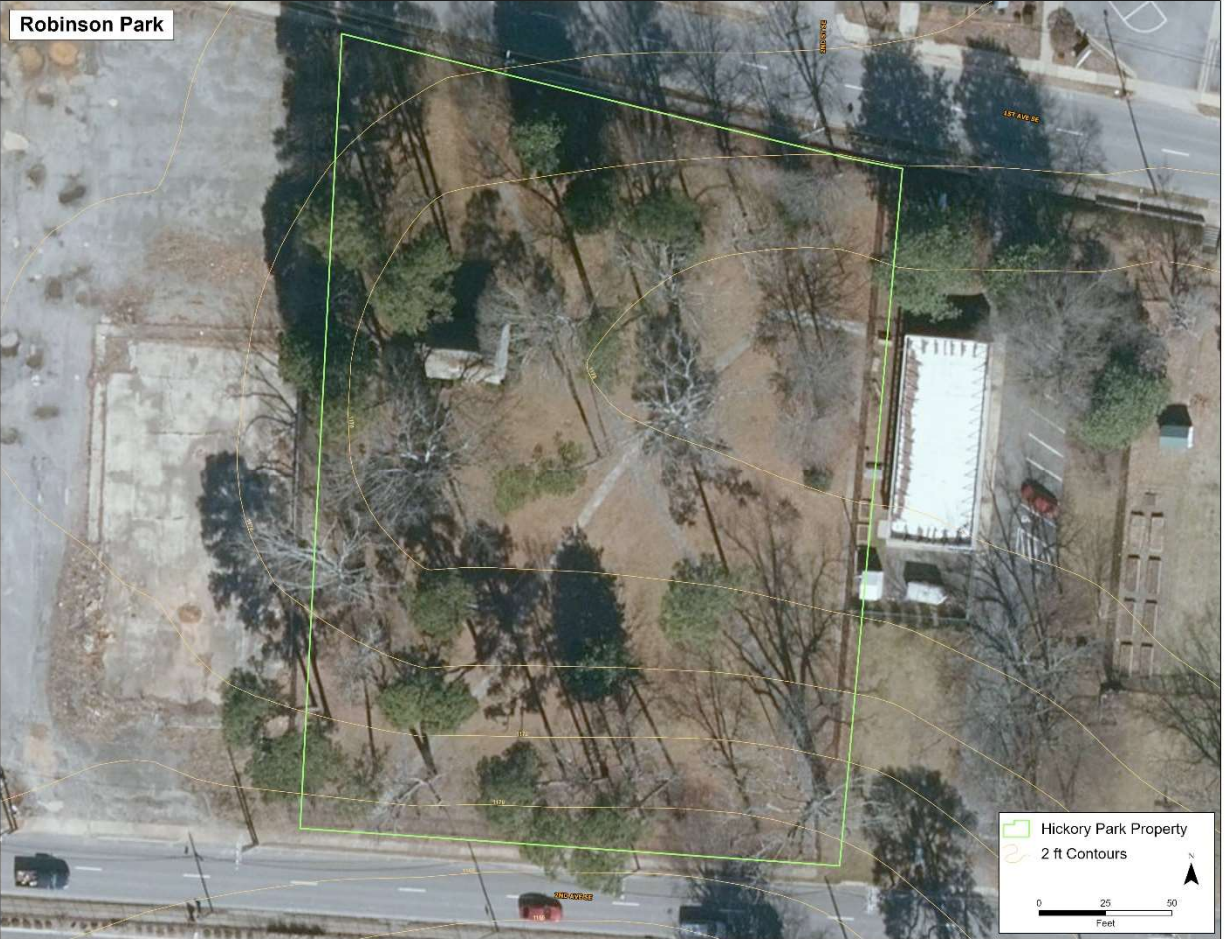
Kiwanis Park











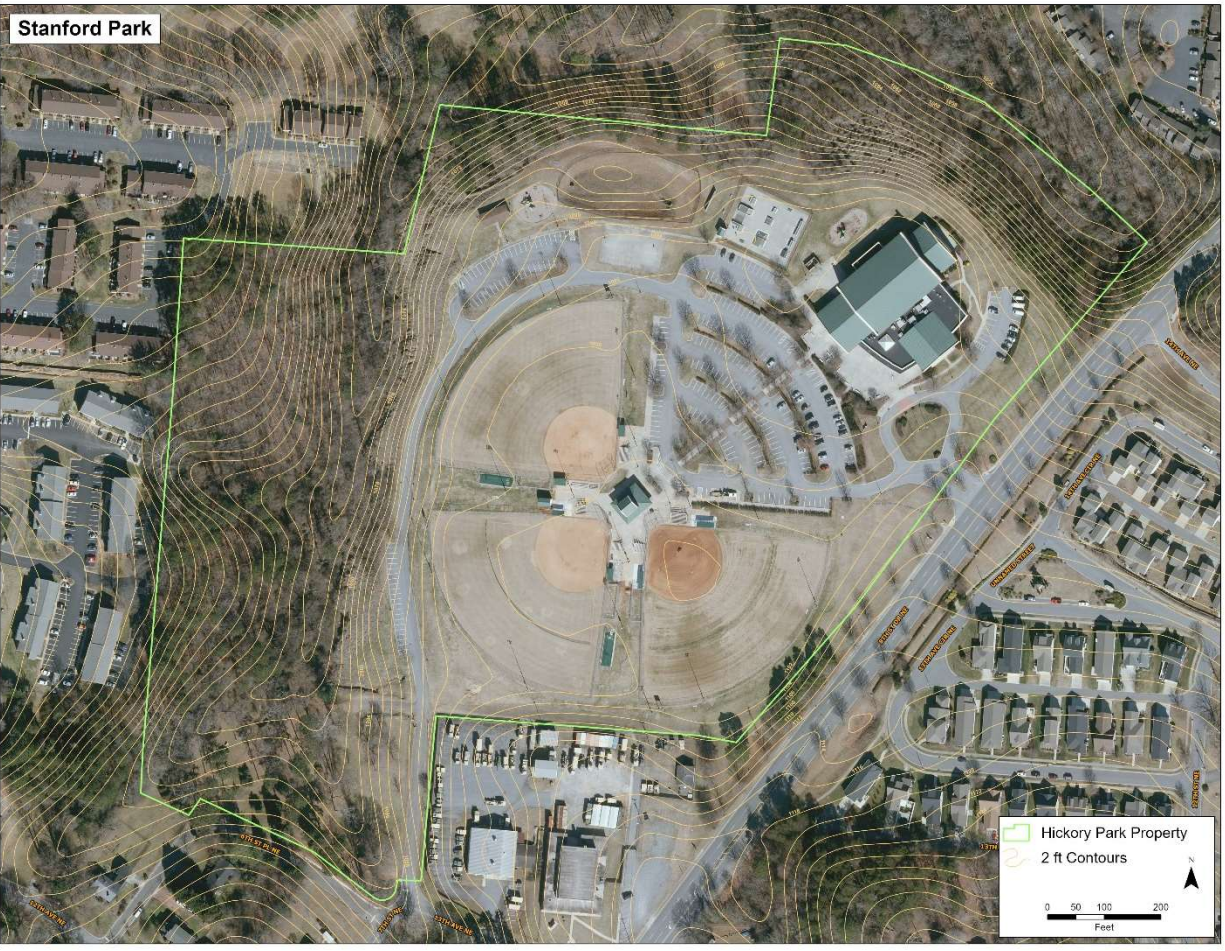
Rotary-Geitner Park





Southside Heights Park



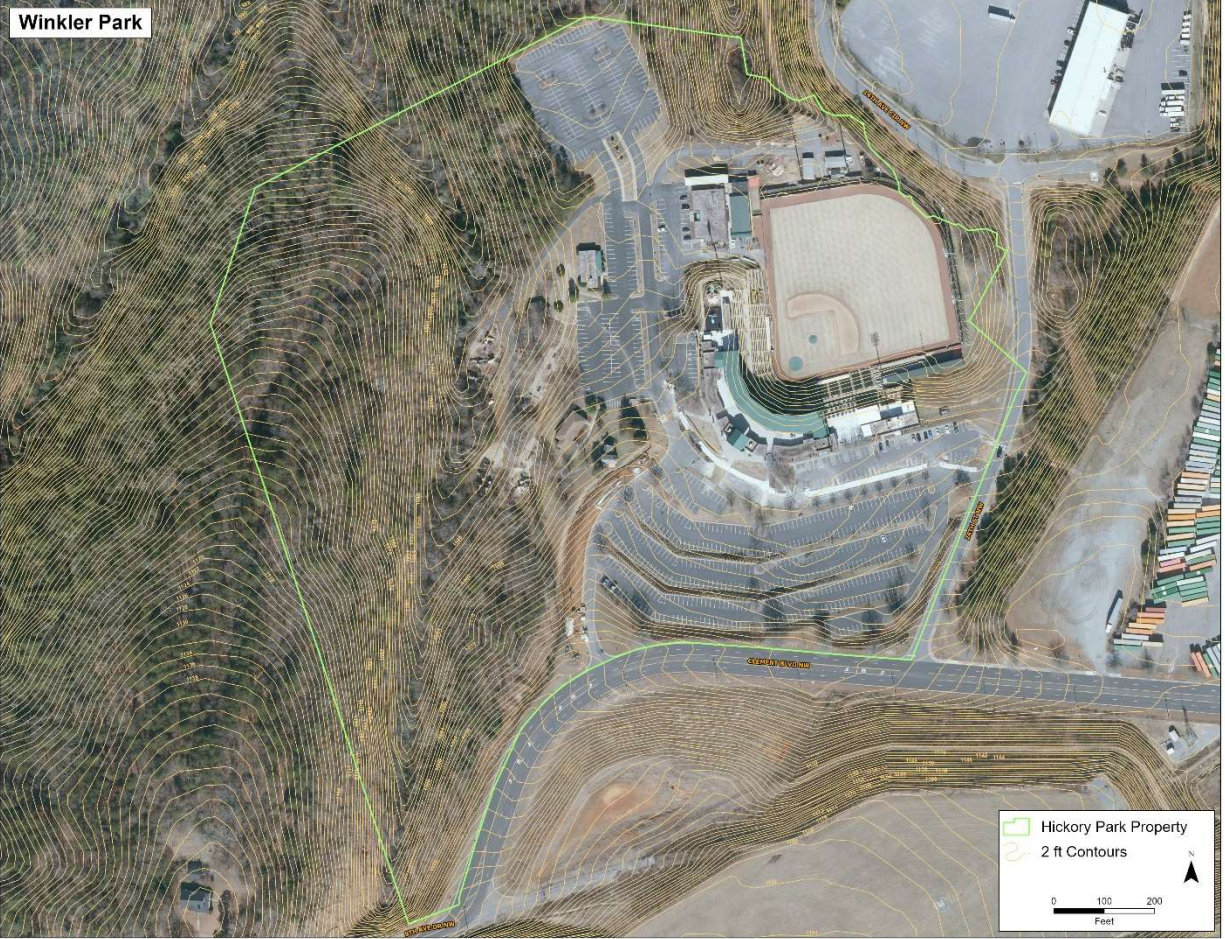




West Hickory Park



Winkler Park

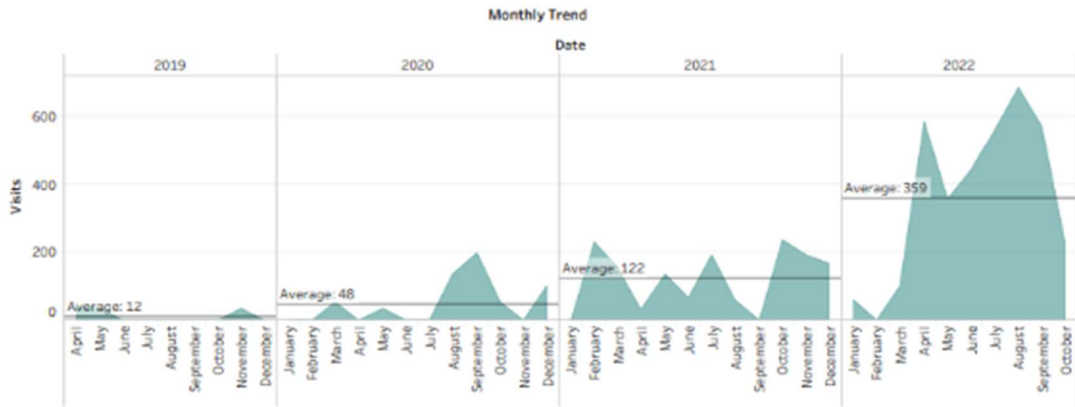


Park & Facility Usage Data by Location

(Available for Select Locations)

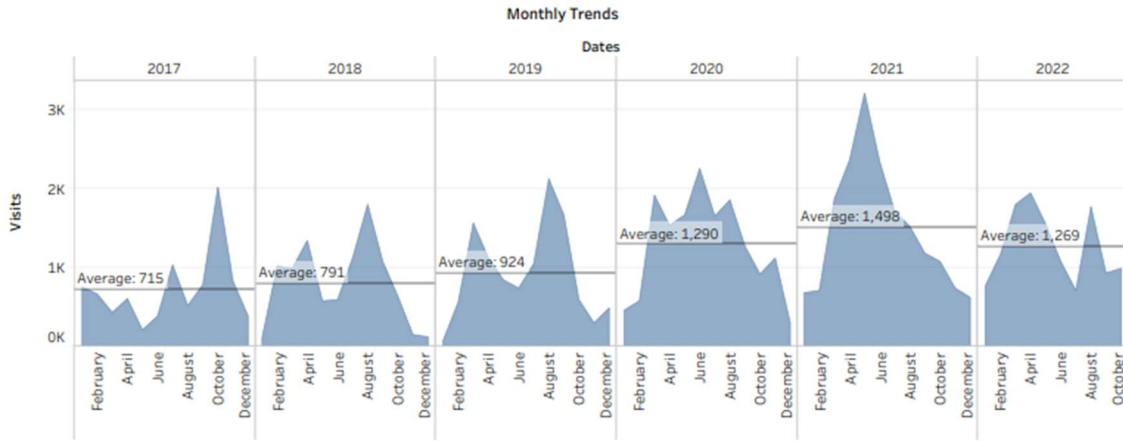
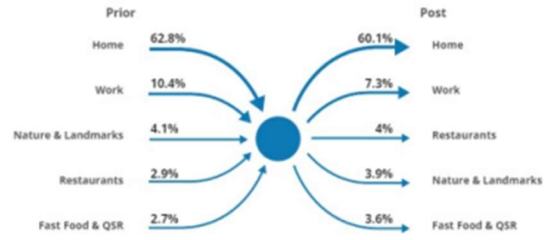
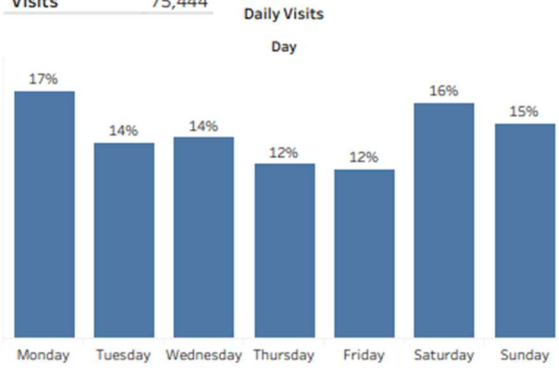
Visit Frequency	7
Visitors	877
Visits	5,727

Bruce Meisner | Apr 2019 - Oct 2022



Visit Frequency	14
Visitors	5,526
Visits	75,444

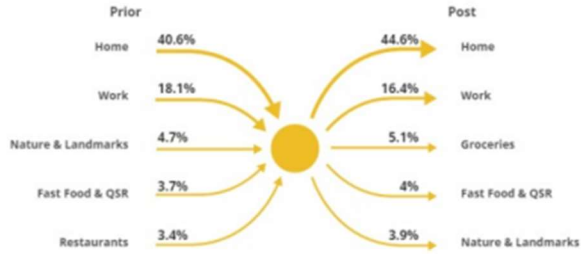
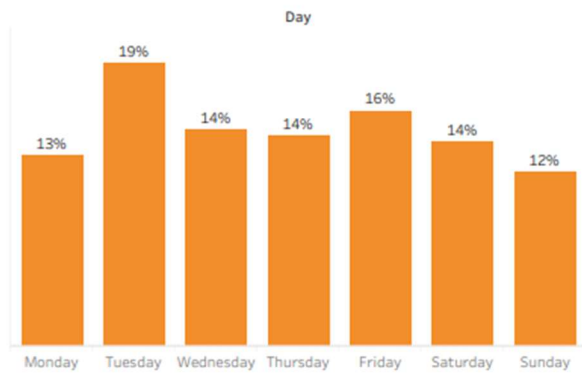
CIVITAN PARK | JAN 2017- OCT 2022



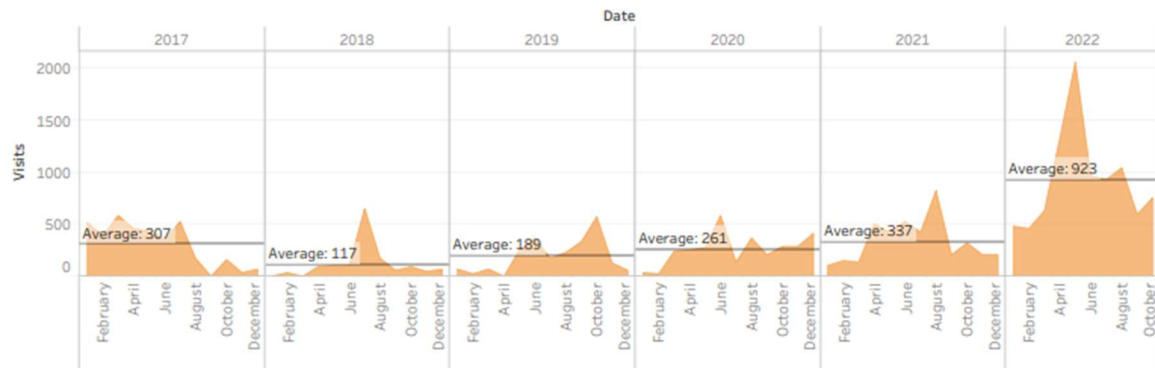
Visit Frequency	13
Visitors	1,791
Visits	23,803

CLIFF TEAGUE | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022

Daily Visits



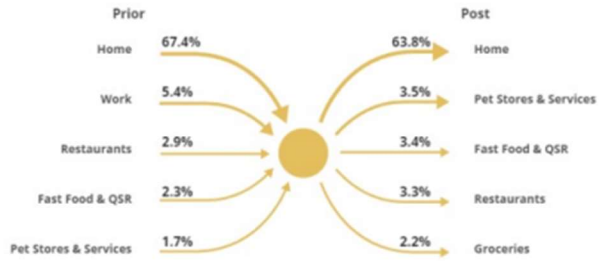
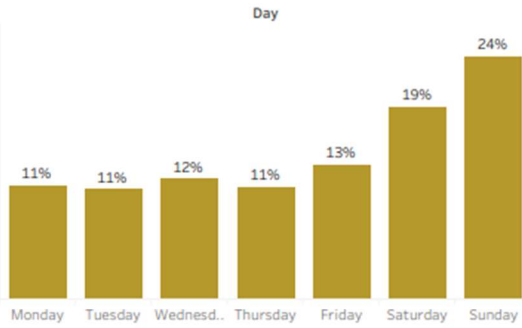
Monthly Trends



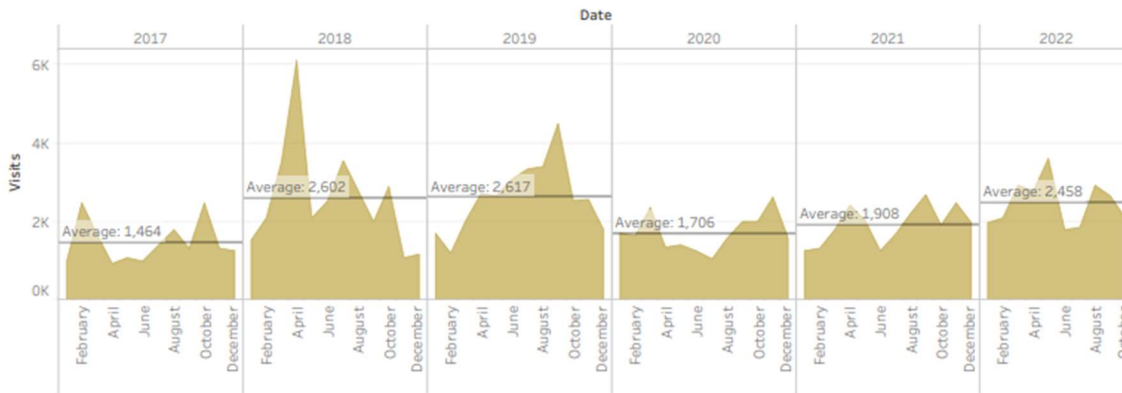
Metrics	
Visit Frequency	13
Visitors	10,986
Visits	148,140

FAIRBROOK OPTIMIST | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022

Daily Visits

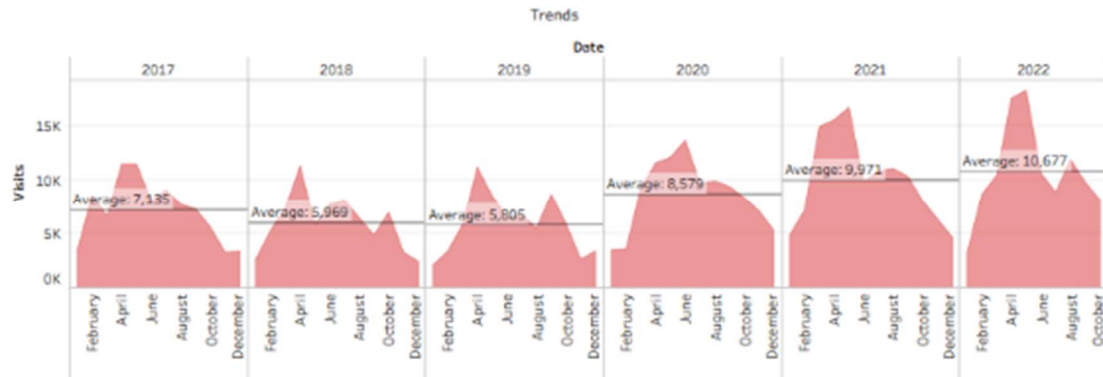
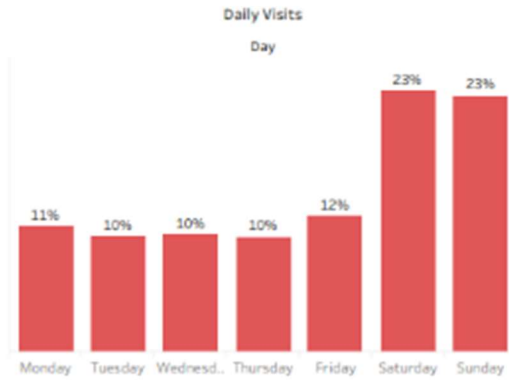


Monthly Trends



Visit Frequency	8
Visitors	70,541
Visits	556,567

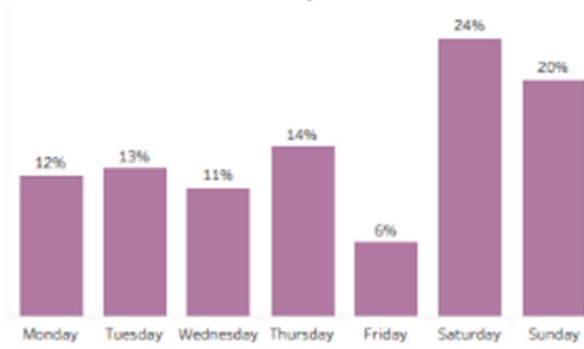
GLENN HILTON MEMORIAL | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022



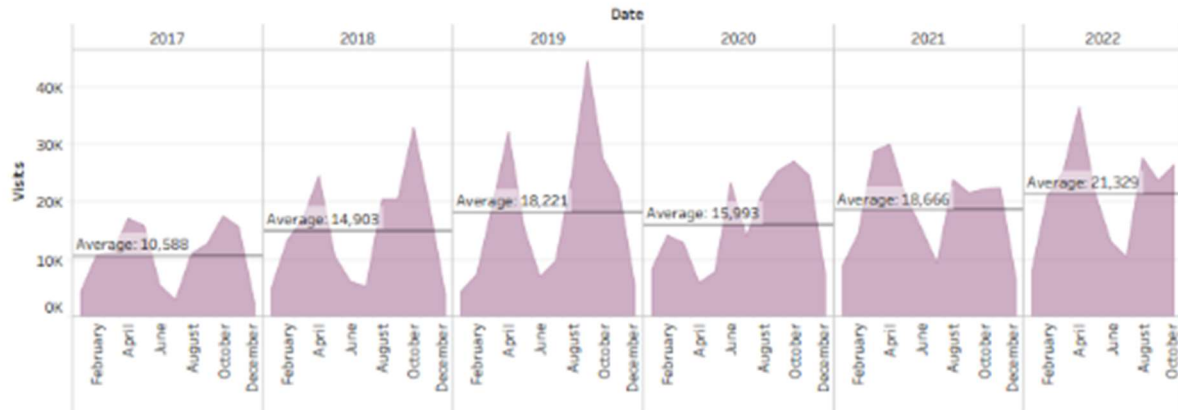
Visit Frequency	15
Visitors	75,524
Visits	1,153,750

HENRY FORK RIVER PARK | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022

Daily Visits

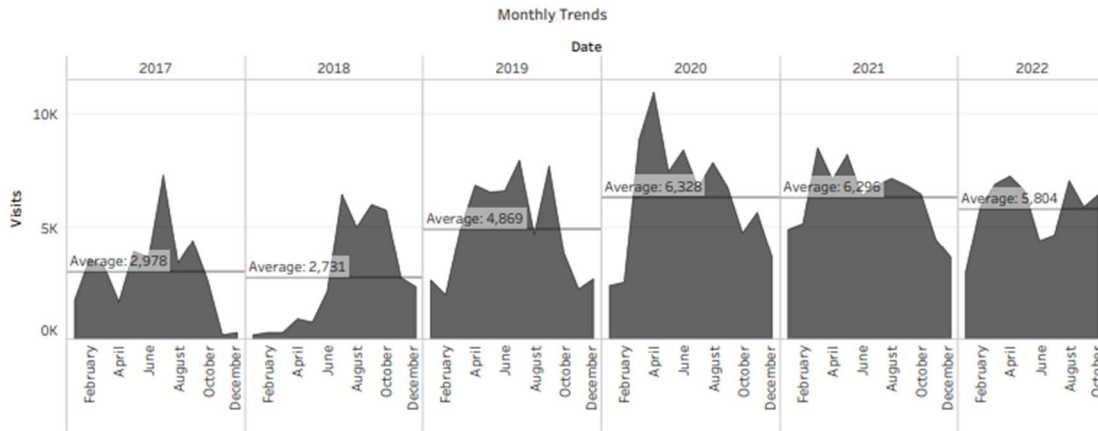
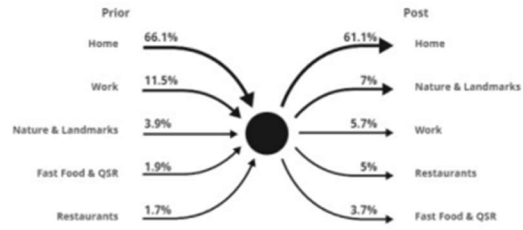
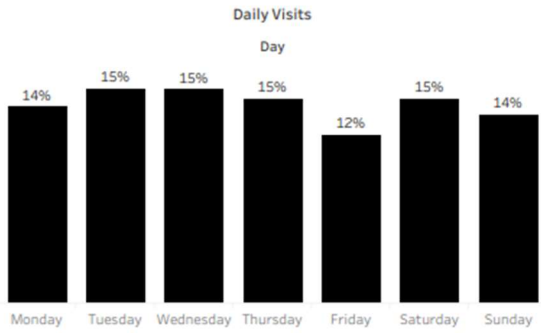


Monthly Trends



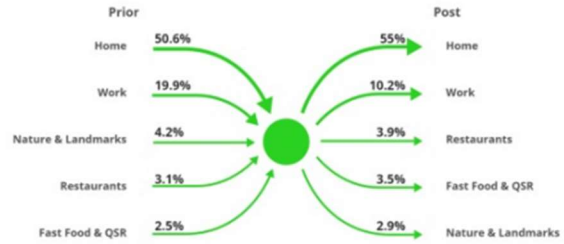
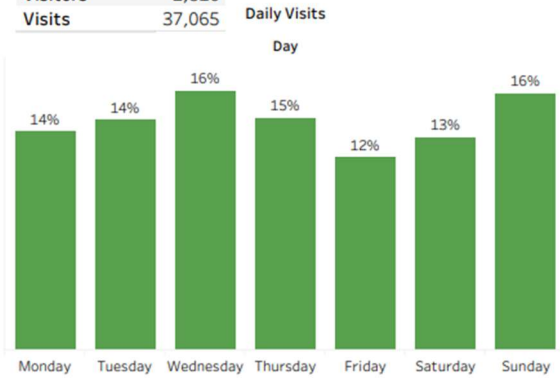
Visit Frequency	15
Visitors	22,126
Visits	336,522

HICKORY CITY PARK | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022

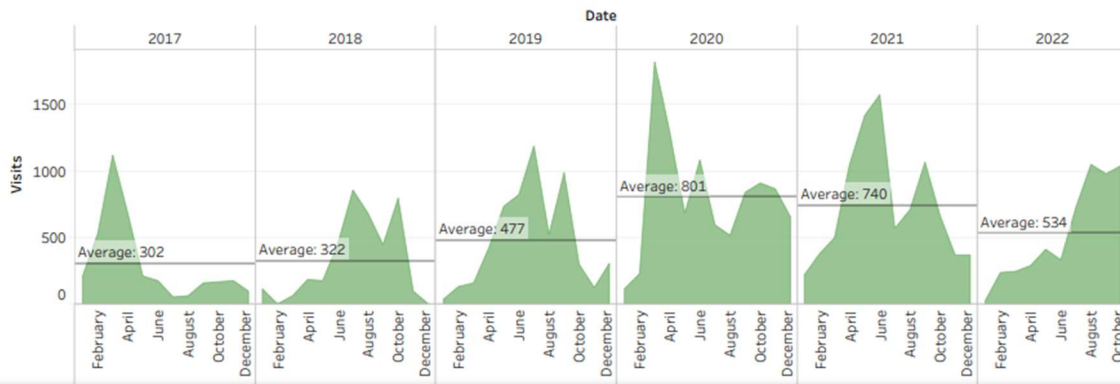


Visit Frequency	13
Visitors	2,816
Visits	37,065

HICKORY OPTIMIST PARK | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022



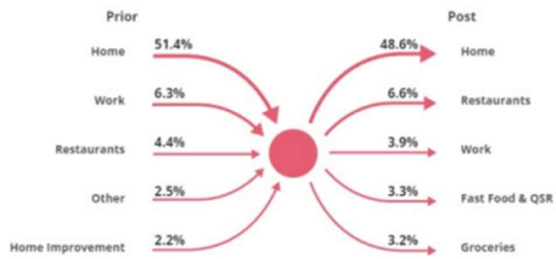
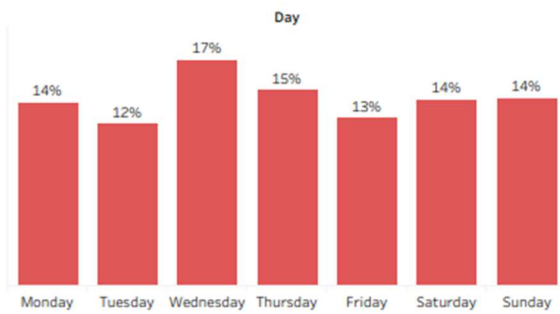
Monthly Trend



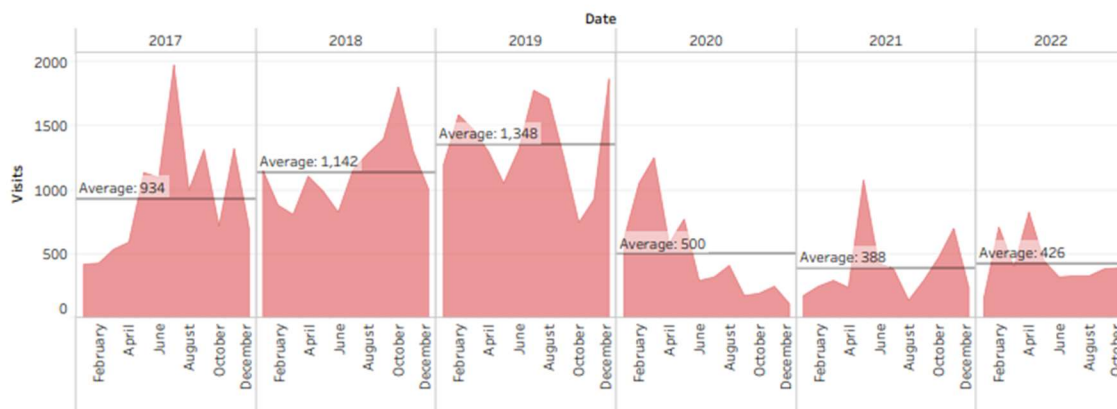
Visit Frequency	17
Visitors	3,234
Visits	56,030

IVEY ARBORETUM AT SALLY PARK | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022

Daily Visits



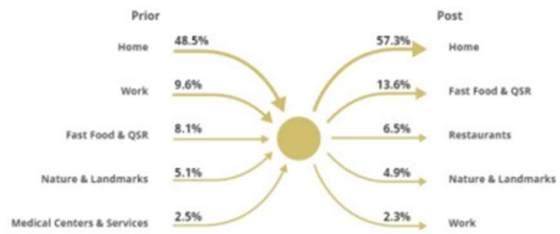
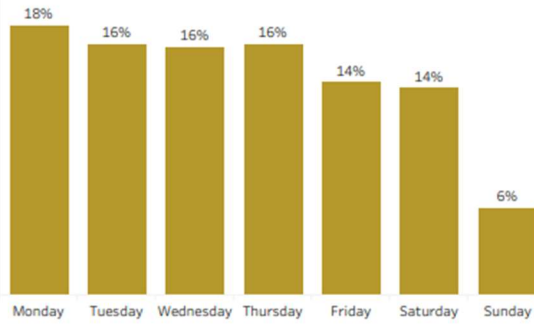
Monthly Trend



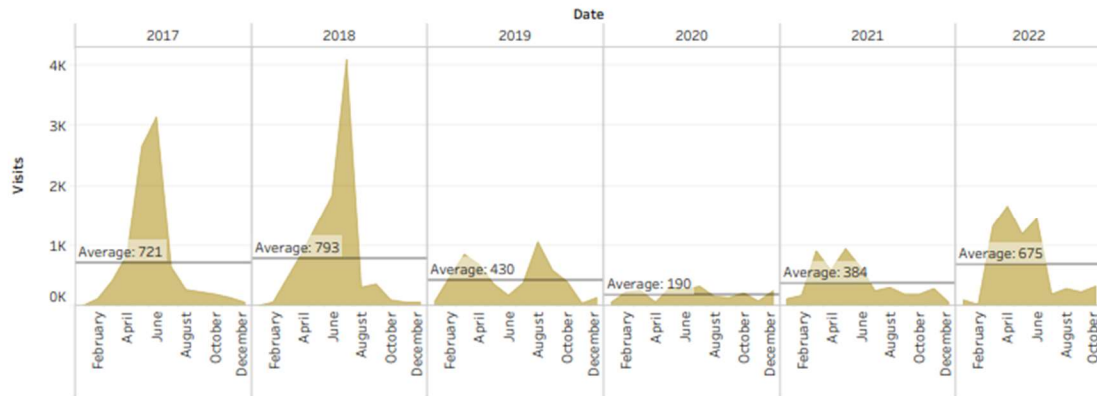
JAYCEE PARK | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022

Visit Frequency	13
Visitors	2,789
Visits	36,997

Daily Visits
Day

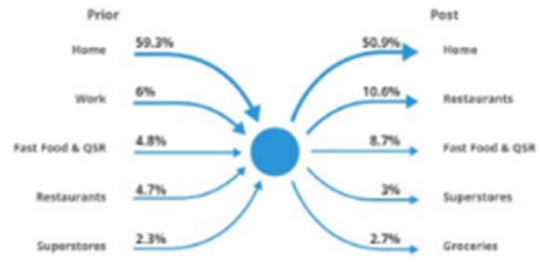
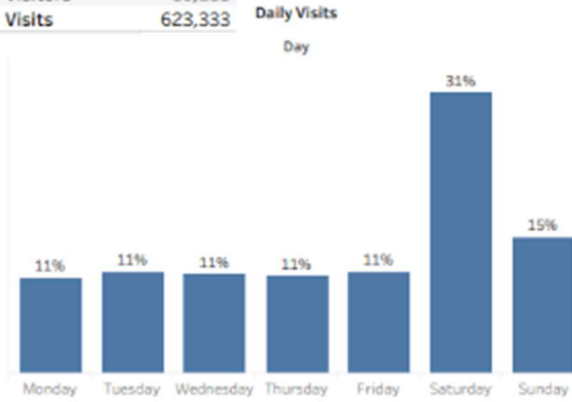


Monthly Trends

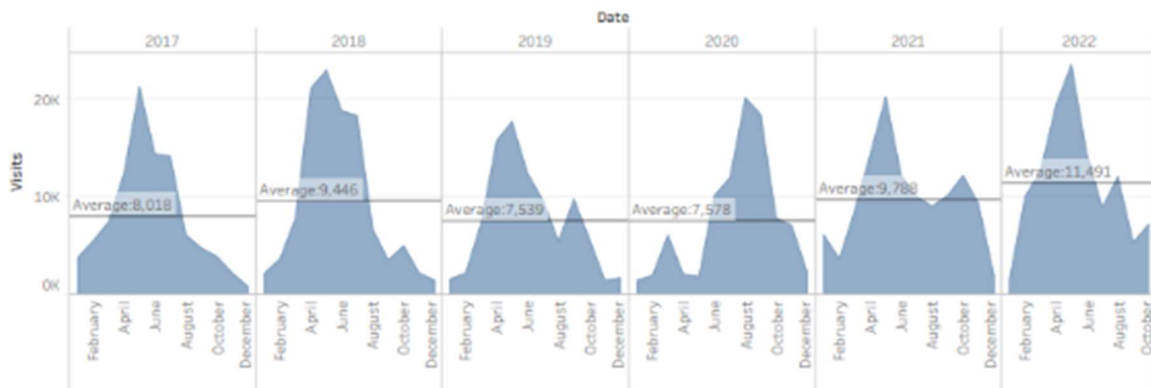


Visit Frequency	8
Visitors	80,183
Visits	623,333

KIWANIS PARK | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022

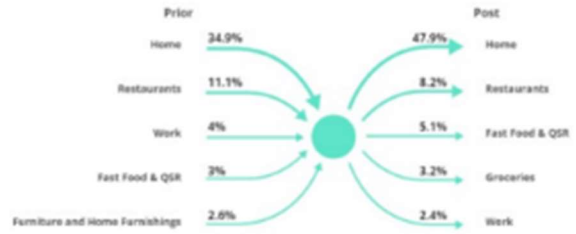
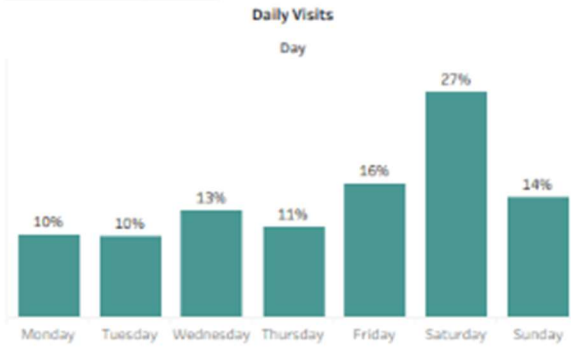


Monthly Trend

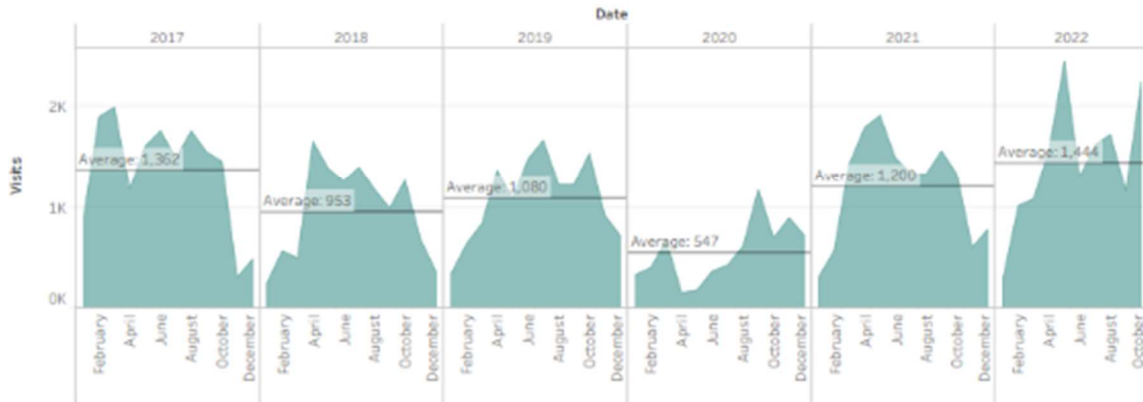


Visit Frequency	6
Visitors	13,219
Visits	76,139

LOWES FOOD CITY PARK | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022

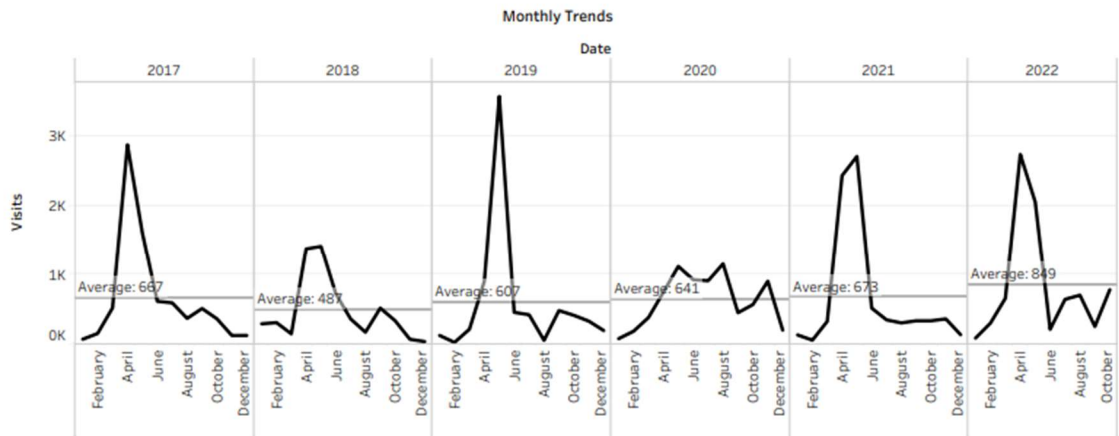
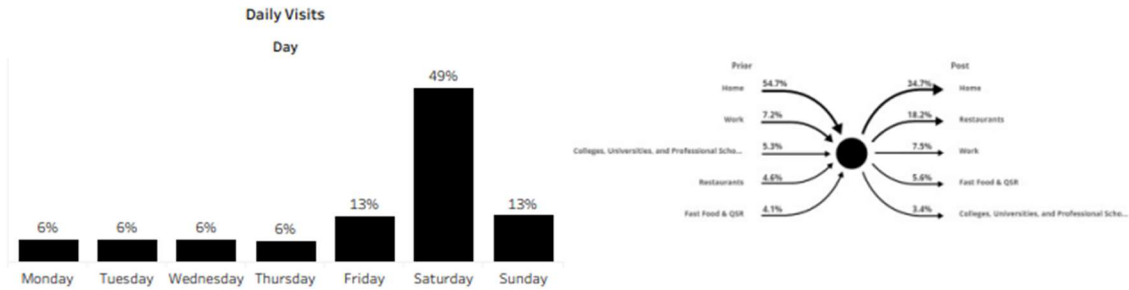


Monthly Trends



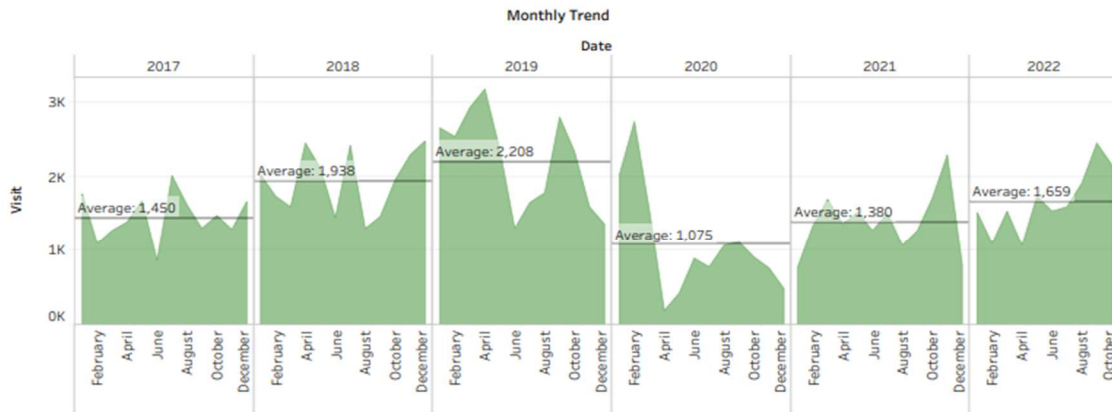
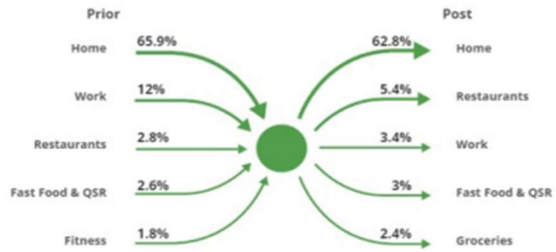
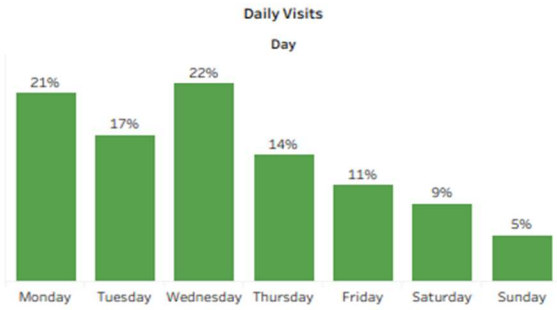
Visit Frequency	4
Visitors	10,308
Visits	45,408

MCCOMB PARK | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022



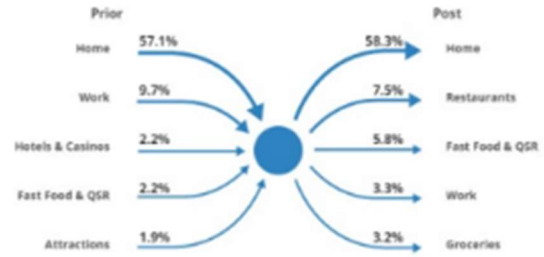
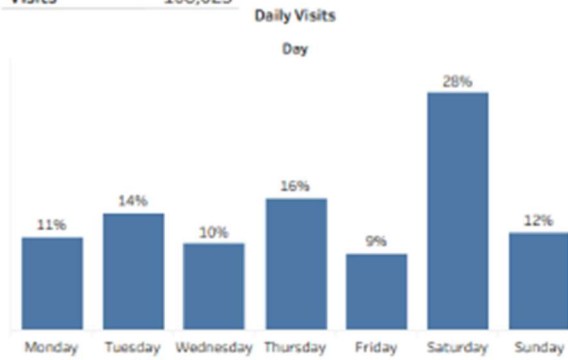
Visit Frequency	19
Visitors	5,876
Visits	113,213

MIRACLE OF HICKORY PARK | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022

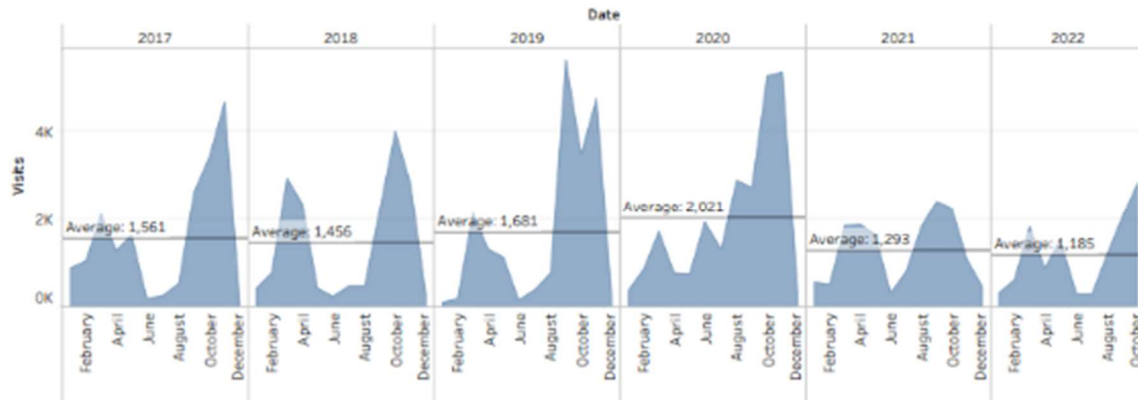


Visit Frequency	9
Visitors	12,453
Visits	108,025

NEILL CLARK RECREATION PARK | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022



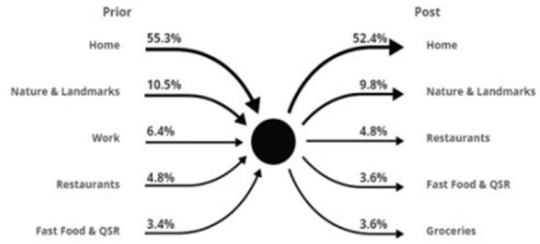
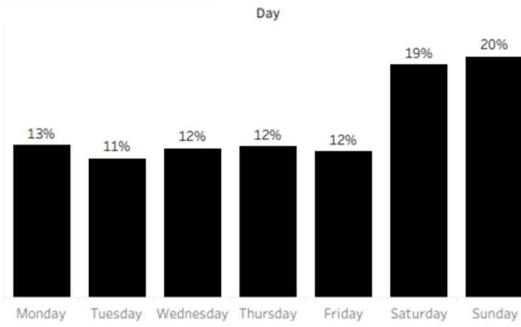
Monthly Trends



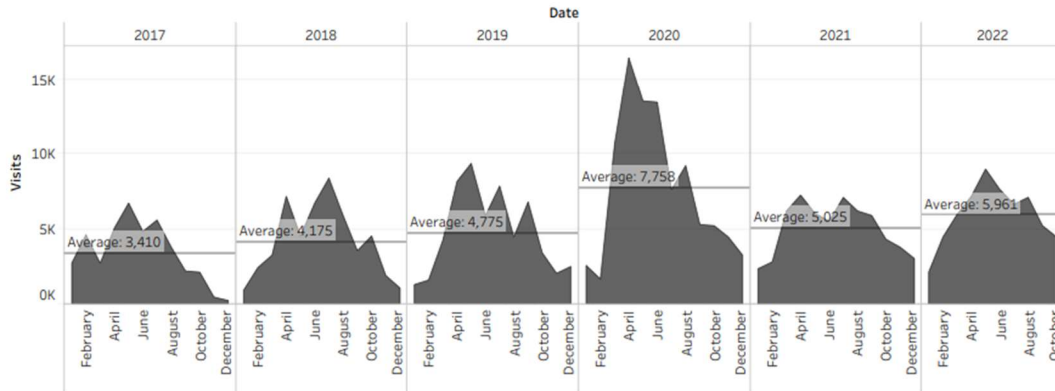
GEITNER/ROTARY PARK | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022

Visit Frequency	8
Visitors	44,098
Visits	361,333

Daily Visits

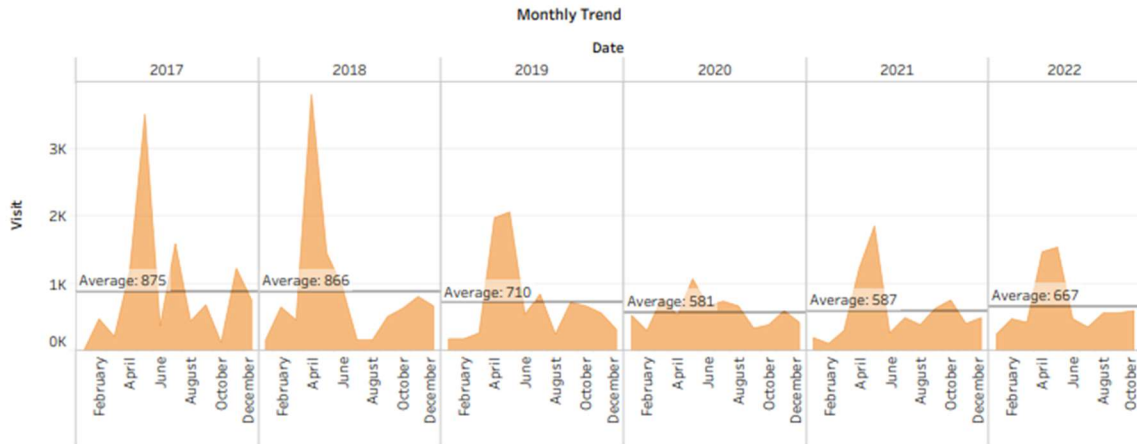
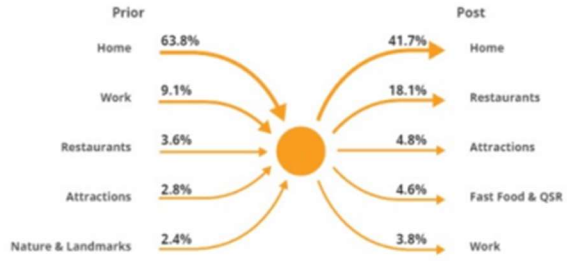
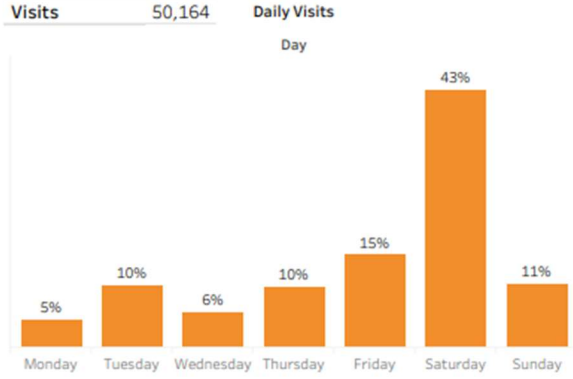


Monthly Trend



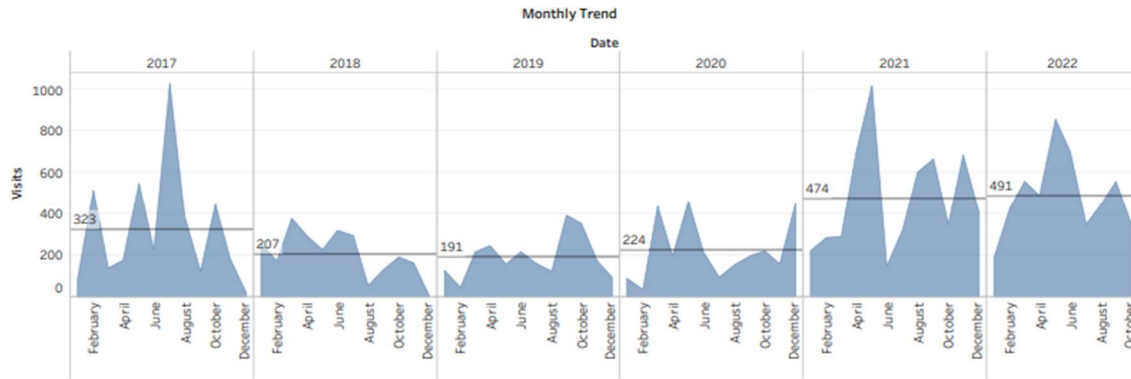
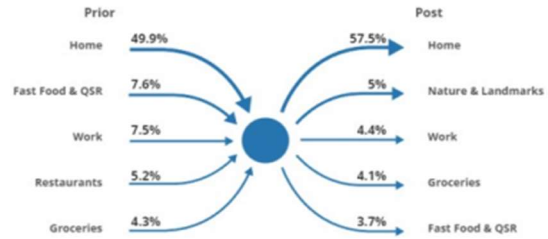
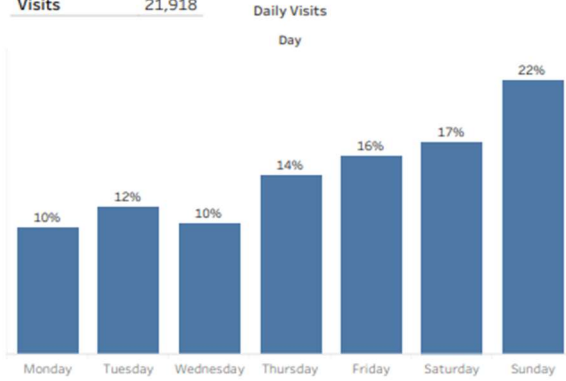
SHUFORD HOUSE AND GARDEN | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022

Visit Frequency	6
Visitors	8,735
Visits	50,164



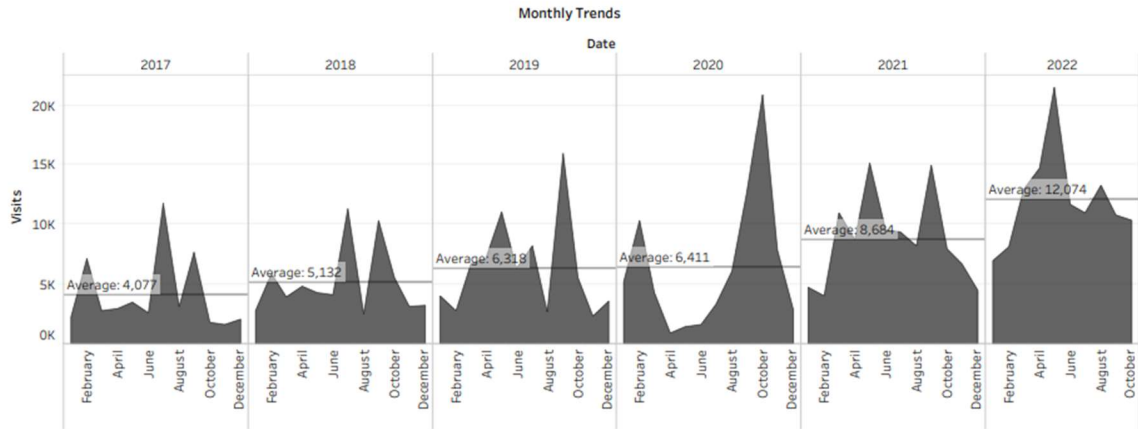
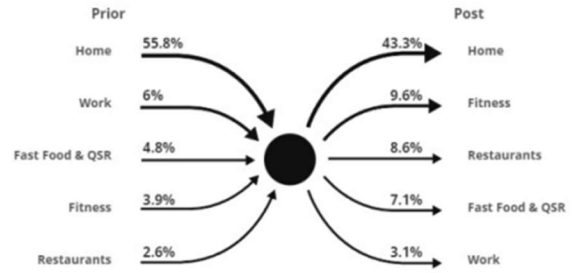
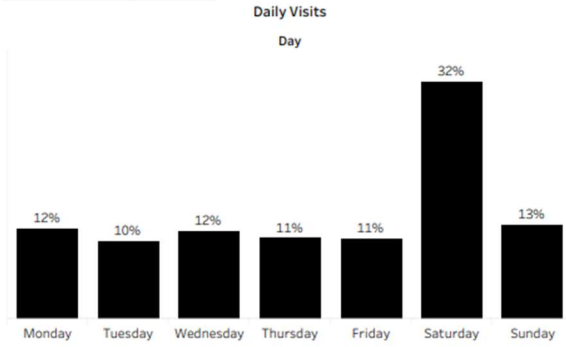
Visit Frequency 8
 Visitors 2,912
 Visits 21,918

SOUTHSIDE HEIGHTS | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022



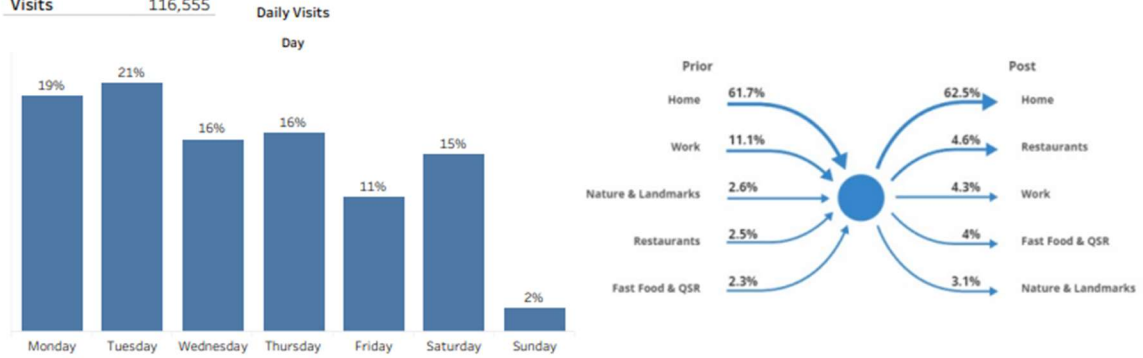
Visit Frequency	9
Visitors	55,175
Visits	488,521

STANFORD PARK | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022

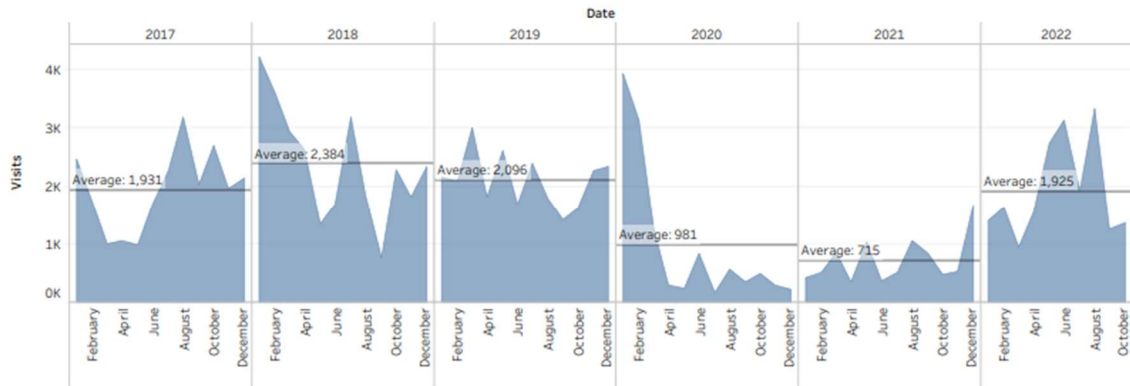


Visit Frequency	18
Visitors	6,556
Visits	116,555

Taft Broome Park | Jan 2017 - Oct 2022



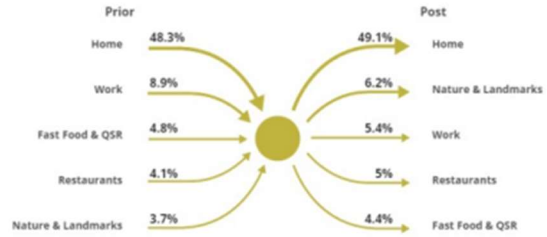
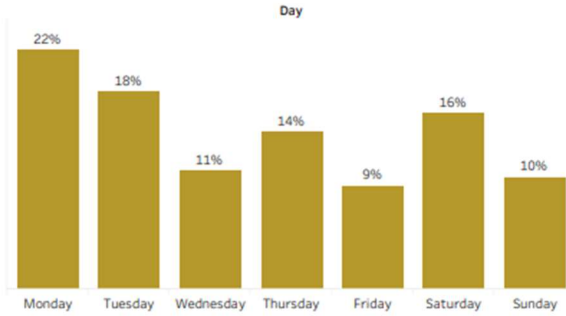
Monthly Trends



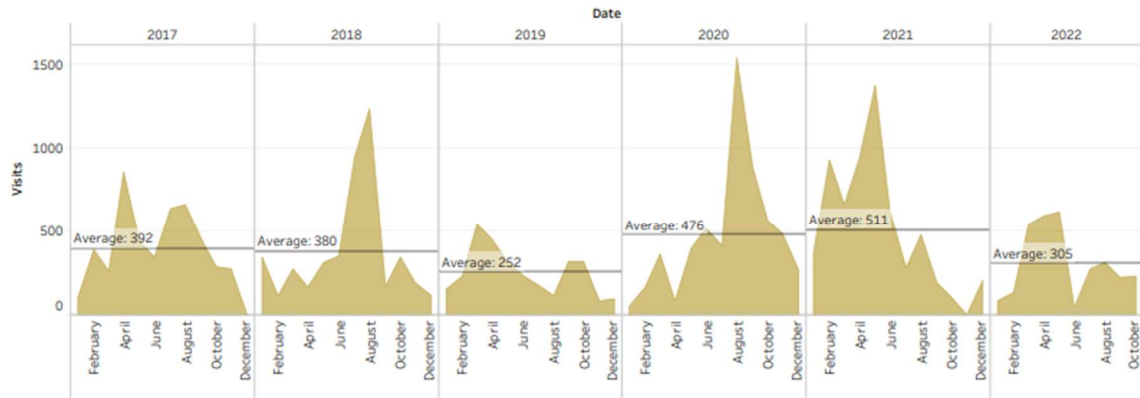
Visit Frequency	12
Visitors	2,193
Visits	27,173

WEST HICKORY PARK | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022

Daily Visits



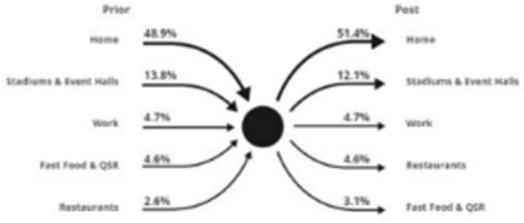
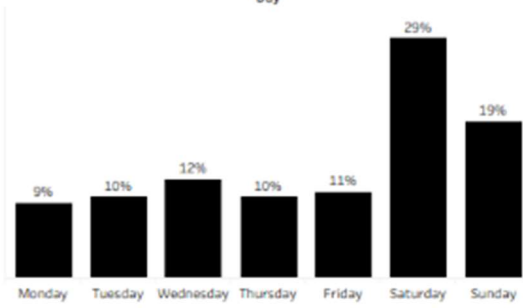
Monthly Trends



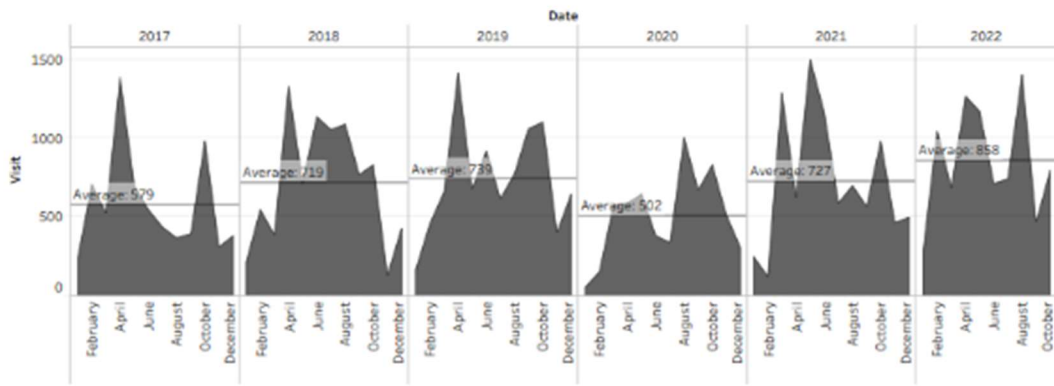
WINKLER PARK | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022

Visit Frequency	5
Visitors	9,274
Visits	47,765

Daily Visits

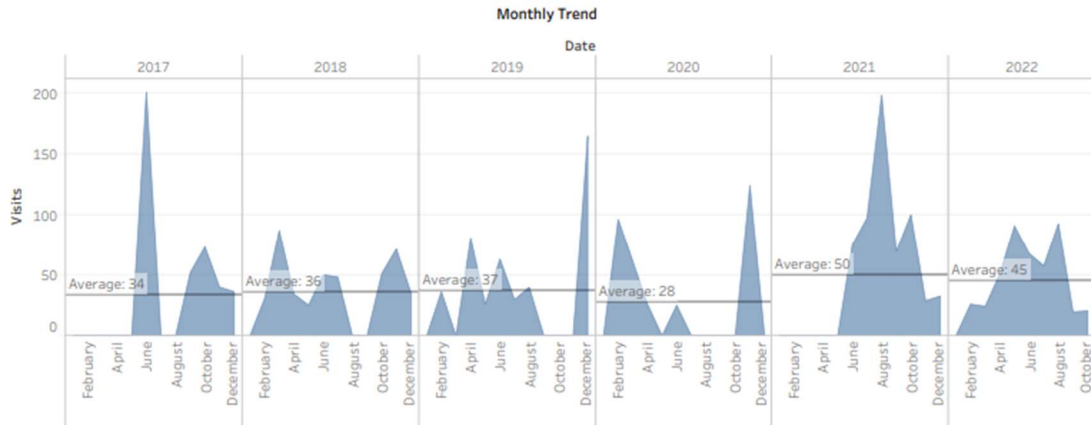
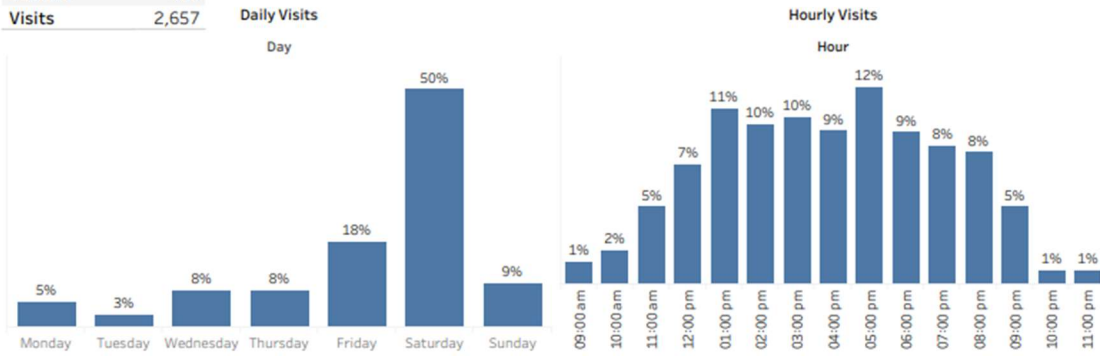


Monthly Trends



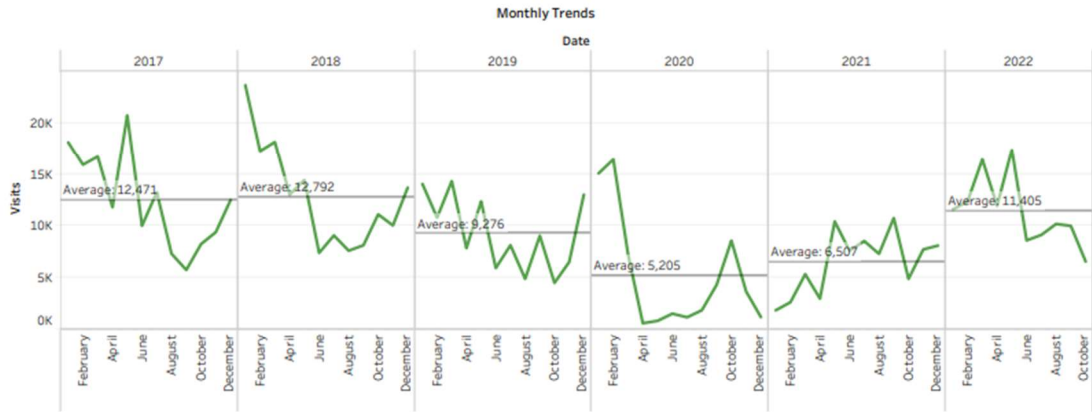
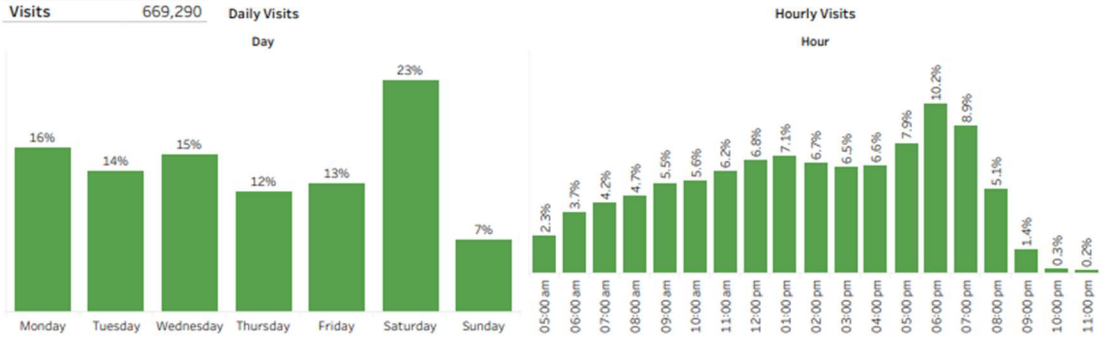
BROWN PENN SENIOR CENTER | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022

Visit Frequency	6
Visitors	460
Visits	2,657



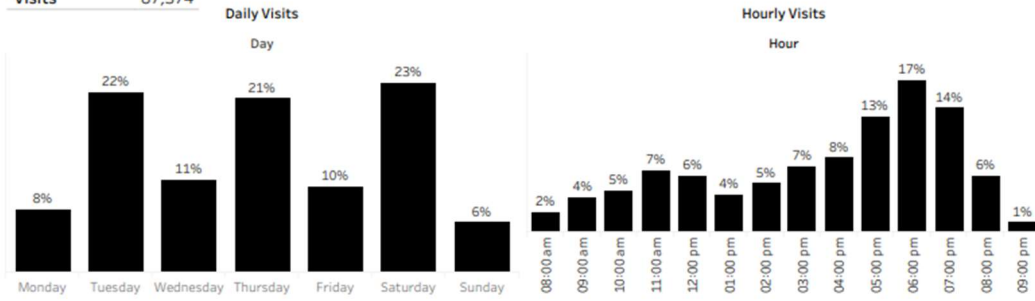
HIGHLAND RECREATION CENTER | JAN 2017- OCT 2022

Visit Frequency	16
Visitors	42,597
Visits	669,290

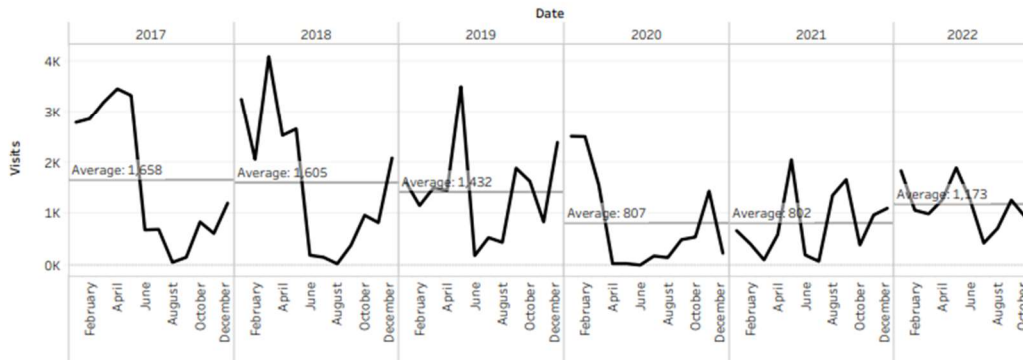


Visit Frequency	9
Visitors	9,829
Visits	87,374

NEILL CLARK GYMNASIUM | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022

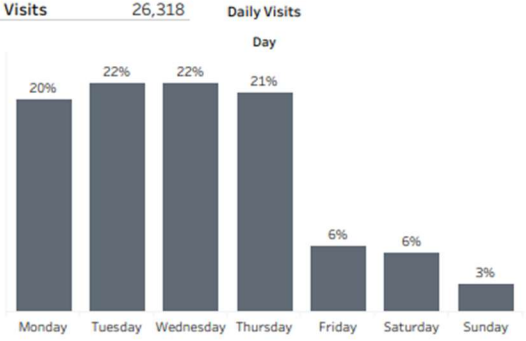


Monthly Trend

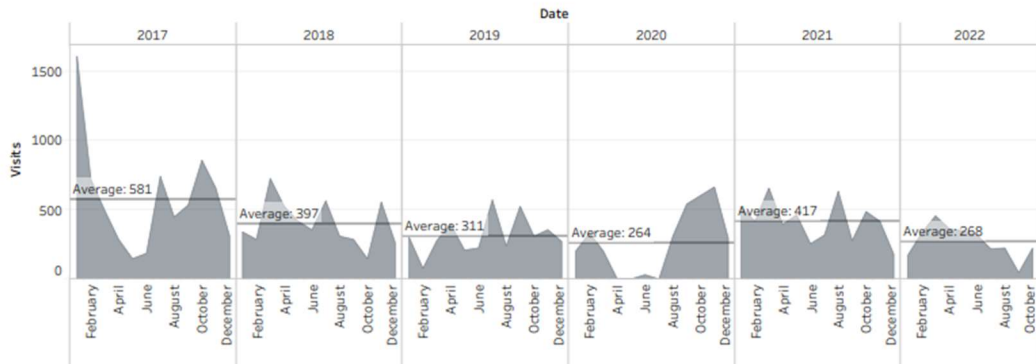


Visit Frequency	13
Visitors	2,004
Visits	26,318

NEILL CLARK REC CENTER | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022



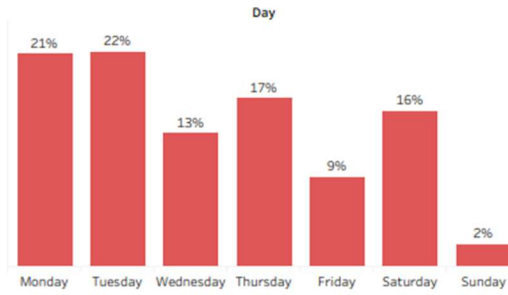
Monthly Trend



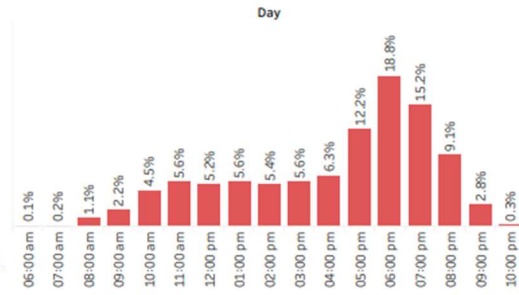
Visit Frequency	15
Visitors	3,715
Visits	54,219

RIDGEVIEW REC CENTER | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022

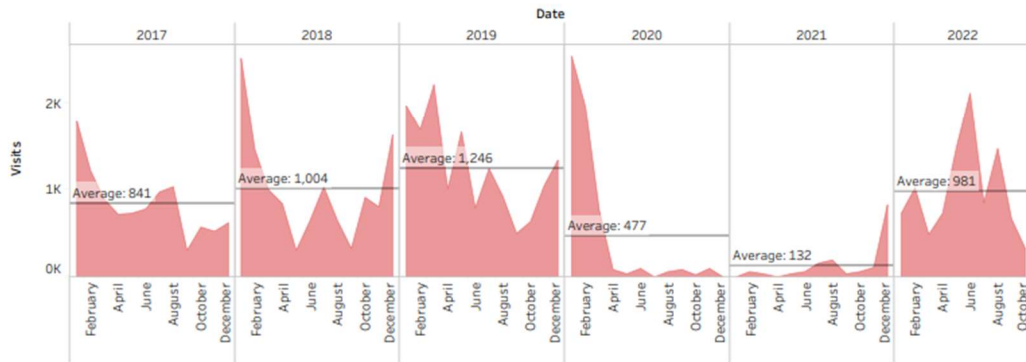
Daily Visits



Hourly Visits

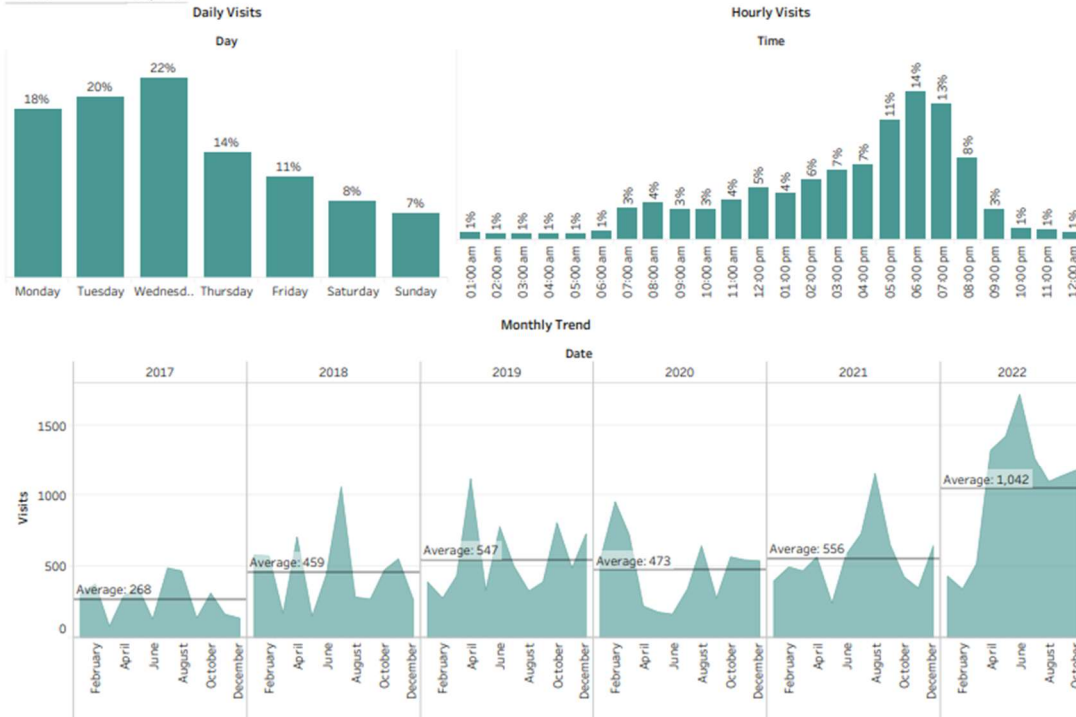


Monthly Trends



Visit Frequency	13
Visitors	2,864
Visits	38,173

WESTMONT RECREATION CENTER | JAN 2017 - OCT 2022



Note: Data labeled as “Westmont Senior Center” actually contains data from both the senior center and recreation center.

Recreation and Parks Needs Survey Instrument

2022 City of Hickory Recreation and Parks Survey

Your input will be used to assess community recreation and parks needs and priorities for the City of Hickory Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department. If you prefer, you may complete the survey on-line at HickoryParkSurvey.org.

1. Please CHECK ALL of the following City of Hickory Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department parks and facilities that you or other members of your household have used in the past 12 months.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> (01) Brown Penn Recreation Center | <input type="checkbox"/> (18) Miracle of Hickory Park |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (02) Brown Penn Senior Center | <input type="checkbox"/> (19) Neill W. Clark Jr. Recreation Park |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (03) Bruce Meisner Park | <input type="checkbox"/> (20) Neill W. Clark Jr. Gymnasium |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (04) Civitan Park | <input type="checkbox"/> (21) Ridgeview Recreation Center |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (05) Cliff Teague Park | <input type="checkbox"/> (22) Rotary-Geitner Park |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (06) Fairbrook Optimist Dog Park | <input type="checkbox"/> (23) Shuford House and Gardens |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (07) Glenn C. Hilton Jr. Memorial Park | <input type="checkbox"/> (24) Southside Heights Park |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (08) Henry Fork River Park | <input type="checkbox"/> (25) Stanford Park |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (09) Hickory City Park | <input type="checkbox"/> (26) Taft Broome Park |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (10) Hickory Optimist Park | <input type="checkbox"/> (27) Viewmont Park |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (11) Highland Park (Co-located with Highland Rec/Stanford Park) | <input type="checkbox"/> (28) West Hickory Park |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (12) Highland Recreation Center | <input type="checkbox"/> (29) Westmont Recreation Center |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (13) Ivey Arboretum at Sally Fox Park | <input type="checkbox"/> (30) Westmont Recreation Park |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (14) Jaycee Park | <input type="checkbox"/> (31) Westmont Senior Center |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (15) Kiwanis Park | <input type="checkbox"/> (32) Winkler Park |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (16) Lowes Foods City Park | <input type="checkbox"/> (33) Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (17) McComb Park | <input type="checkbox"/> (34) None of the above [Skip to Q2.] |

1a. Which THREE parks or facilities listed above do you visit or reserve MOST OFTEN? [Write in your answers below using the item numbers from the list in Question 1.]

1st: ____ 2nd: ____ 3rd: ____

1b. In the past 12 months, approximately how often have you or members of your household visited any City of Hickory parks or facilities?

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> (1) Every couple of months | <input type="checkbox"/> (3) A few times a month | <input type="checkbox"/> (5) 2-3 times a week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (2) Once a month | <input type="checkbox"/> (4) Once a week | |

1c. What improvements or additions would you like to see made to the parks you and the members of your household visit most often?

2. Can you safely walk/bike to a nearby park, trail, or recreation center?

- (1) Yes (2) No (3) Not sure

3. In the past 12 months, have you or any member of your household participated in any programs (e.g., adult fitness classes, youth lacrosse, camps) offered by the City of Hickory Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department?

- (1) Yes [Answer Q3a.] (2) No [Skip to Q4.]

3a. How would you rate the overall quality of PROGRAMS that you and members of your household have participated in?

- (4) Excellent (3) Good (2) Fair (1) Poor

4. In the past 12 months, have you or any member of your household participated in any special events (e.g., Easter egg hunts, mountain biking competitions) offered by the City of Hickory Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department?

___(1) Yes [Answer Q4a.] ___(2) No [Skip to Q5.]

4a. How would you rate the overall quality of special events that you and members of your household have participated in?

___(4) Excellent ___(3) Good ___(2) Fair ___(1) Poor

5. In the past 12 months, approximately how many times have you or members of your household visited any trails such as one of our Lake Hickory Trails like Broyhill or City Walk which is a segment of the five-trail Hickory Trail project currently under-way.

___(1) Never ___(3) 6-10 times ___(5) 21-25 times
___(2) 1-5 times ___(4) 11-20 times ___(6) 25+ times

6. How often do you or other members of your household WANT to use trails?

___(1) Never ___(3) A few times a month ___(5) Daily
___(2) A few times a year ___(4) A few times a week

7. Please CHECK ALL of the following places that you or other members of your household would most like to get to by trails.

___(01) Libraries or recreation centers ___(06) Public transportation
___(02) Natural areas and open space ___(07) School
___(03) Other trails ___(08) Shops and restaurants
___(04) Parks and playgrounds ___(09) Other: _____
___(05) Place of work ___(10) None; I do not want to use trails

8. From the following list, please CHECK ALL of the ways you learn about City of Hickory Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department parks, facilities, and special events.

___(01) Banners in public places ___(07) City newsletter
___(02) Bulletin boards ___(08) Social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
___(03) Conversation with staff ___(09) Search engine (e.g., Google, Yahoo, Bing)
___(04) Direct email ___(10) Word of mouth
___(05) City of Hickory Recreation and Parks website ___(11) Other: _____
___(06) Recreation and Parks brochure ___(12) None of these

9. Which THREE of the sources of information listed in Question 8 do you MOST PREFER to use to learn about City of Hickory Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department parks, facilities, and special events? [Write in your answers below using the item numbers from the list in Question 8, or circle "NONE."]

1st: ___ 2nd: ___ 3rd: ___ NONE

10. Please CHECK ALL of the following reasons that may prevent you or other members of your household from using the parks, facilities, and trails offered by the City of Hickory Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department (or, if you currently use them, what prevents you from using them more often)?

___(01) Cost of participation ___(10) Information is only available in English
___(02) Facilities and amenities are too far from home ___(11) Not enough time/too busy
___(03) Inconvenient hours of operation ___(12) Not interested in what is provided
___(04) Lack of cleanliness ___(13) Overcrowding
___(05) Lack of disabled access ___(14) Personal safety concerns
___(06) Lack of information/don't know what is offered ___(15) Lack of wayfinding signs on trails
___(07) Lack of information about existing trails ___(16) Other: _____
___(08) Lack of maintenance ___(17) Nothing; I am actively using the City's parks, facilities, and trails
___(09) Lack of parking

11. Please indicate if you have a need for each of the following recreation facilities or amenities by circling either "Yes" or "No." If "Yes," answer the question in the shaded area to the right.

Facilities and Amenities	Do you have a need for this facility or amenity?		If "Yes," how well are your needs being met?			
	Yes	No	Fully Met	Mostly Met	Partly Met	Not Met
01. Adaptive amenities for children and adults (i.e., playgrounds/swings, bike sharing, and waterproof wheelchairs for splash pads)	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
02. Adaptive sports for individuals with disabilities	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
03. Aquatics center	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
04. Baseball and softball fields	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
05. Basketball courts	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
06. Bocce/shuffleboard/outdoor bowling	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
07. Classroom/Meeting/Event space	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
08. Community gardens	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
09. Community pool	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
10. Cycling lanes	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
11. Disc golf course	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
12. Dog park	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
13. Facility for large indoor sporting and entertainment events	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
14. Fenced in playgrounds and/or parks	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
15. Indoor fitness and exercise facilities	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
16. Mountain biking trails	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
17. Multipurpose fields (e.g., football, soccer, lacrosse)	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
18. Multi-use gym space (e.g., basketball, volleyball)	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
19. Nature trails/greenway trail system	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
20. Outdoor amphitheater	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
21. Outdoor fitness and exercise equipment	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
22. Pickleball courts	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
23. Picnic shelters	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
24. Pier/fishing	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
25. Place to practice golf skills (non-golf course)	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
26. Playground	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
27. Sand volleyball courts	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
28. Senior center	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
29. Shaded play and seating areas	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
30. Skate park/BMX	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
31. Splash pad	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
32. Tennis courts (indoor/outdoor)	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
33. Volleyball courts (outdoor)	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
34. Water access (e.g., boating, kayaking, canoeing, rentals)	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
35. Other: _____	Yes	No	4	3	2	1

12. Which FOUR of the facilities or amenities from the list in Question 11 are MOST IMPORTANT to your household? [Write in your answers below using the item numbers from the list in Question 11, or circle "NONE."]

1st: ____ 2nd: ____ 3rd: ____ 4th: ____ NONE

13. Please indicate if you have a desire to participate in each of the following recreation programs or activities by circling either "Yes" or "No." If "Yes," answer the question in the shaded area to the right.

Programs and Activities	Do you have a desire to participate in this activity?		If "Yes," how well are your needs being met?			
	Yes	No	Fully Met	Mostly Met	Partly Met	Not Met
01. Action sports (e.g. skateboarding, BMX)	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
02. Adult fitness and wellness programs	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
03. Afterschool programs	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
04. Aquatic programs (e.g. swim lessons, fitness)	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
05. Art, dance, performing arts	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
06. Bocce/shuffleboard/outdoor bowling	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
07. Disc golf	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
08. Drone flying area	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
09. Early childhood programs	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
10. Environmental education	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
11. Homeschool cooperative programs	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
12. Intermediate sports for adults	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
13. Lacrosse	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
14. Life skills programs/education (e.g., cooking, budgeting)	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
15. Live streamed/online programs and activities	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
16. Music lessons/classes	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
17. Outdoor adventure programs (e.g., canoeing, camping)	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
18. Outdoor music/concerts	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
19. Pickleball	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
20. Programs for disabled veterans	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
21. Runner's groups	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
22. Senior citizen programs	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
23. Sensory friendly events	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
24. Special events/family festivals	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
25. Special needs programs	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
26. Teen Programs	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
27. Tennis Programs	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
28. Therapeutic recreation	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
29. Track and field	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
30. Youth and teen fitness and wellness programs	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
31. Youth and teen sports programs (baseball, softball, basketball, cheerleading, volleyball, soccer, flag/tackle football, wrestling, etc.)	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
32. Youth and teen summer camp programs	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
33. Other: _____	Yes	No	4	3	2	1

14. Which FOUR of the programs and activities listed in Question 13 do you think are MOST IMPORTANT to your household? [Write in your answers below using the item numbers from the list in Question 13, or circle "NONE."]

1st: ____ 2nd: ____ 3rd: ____ 4th: ____ NONE

15. Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements regarding the City of Hickory Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Department, where 5 is "Strongly Agree" and 1 is "Strongly Disagree."

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
1. I am aware of the parks, facilities and events that are offered	5	4	3	2	1	9
2. I am satisfied with recreation opportunities I receive for my tax dollars	5	4	3	2	1	9
3. I am satisfied with the variety of parks, facilities and events the City offers	5	4	3	2	1	9
4. Recreation and parks are an essential service to the City	5	4	3	2	1	9
5. Public parks add to the quality of life in the community	5	4	3	2	1	9
6. I am aware of sports tourism opportunities and their positive impact on the local economy	5	4	3	2	1	9
7. I participate or have a family member that participates in sports tourism programming	5	4	3	2	1	9

16. The following are some of the benefits that you and your household may receive from parks, nature preserves and trails. For each potential benefit, please indicate your level of agreement with the benefits being provided by parks, nature preserves and trails by circling the corresponding number.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
01. Improve physical health and fitness	5	4	3	2	1	9
02. Help reduce crime	5	4	3	2	1	9
03. Improve the quality of life in Hickory	5	4	3	2	1	9
04. Preserve open space and the environment	5	4	3	2	1	9
05. Increase property values in surrounding area	5	4	3	2	1	9
06. Improve water and air quality	5	4	3	2	1	9
07. Contribute to a sense of community	5	4	3	2	1	9
08. Help attract new residents and businesses	5	4	3	2	1	9
09. Protect historical attributes	5	4	3	2	1	9
10. Provide healthy recreational opportunities	5	4	3	2	1	9
11. Provide tourism venues and contribute to the City's tourism economy	5	4	3	2	1	9

17. How willing are you to pay a slight increase in taxes, or financially support in some other way, to help the City of Hickory implement recreation programs, develop new recreation facilities, or implement City sponsored recreational programs in the City of Hickory?

___(4) Very Willing ___(3) Willing ___(2) Somewhat Willing ___(1) Not Willing

18. Please CHECK ALL of the following organizations that provide the PARKS, FACILITIES, and RECREATION PROGRAMS that you and other members of your household use.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ___(01) City of Hickory Parks, Recreation and Sports Tourism | ___(07) State or Federal Parks |
| ___(02) Schools | ___(08) Non-profit organizations: _ |
| ___(03) Catawba County Parks and Recreation | ___(09) Private clubs: _ |
| ___(04) Caldwell County Parks and Recreation | ___(10) Fitness centers: _ |
| ___(05) Burke County Parks and Recreation | ___(11) Churches or other religious organizations |
| ___(06) Alexander County Parks and Recreation | ___(12) Other: _ |
| | ___(13) None of these [Skip to Q20.] |

19. Of the organizations listed in Question 18, which ONE do you USE MOST for your household's recreation needs? [Write in your answer below using the numbers from the list in Question 18.]

Organization used most: _____

19a. Please provide a reason for your response to Question 19: _____

20. Please indicate how supportive you would be of the City of Hickory taking the following actions to improve the parks and recreation system in the City.

How supportive are you of:	Very Supportive	Supportive	Not Sure	Not Supportive	Don't Know
01. Acquire additional land for preservation/future use	4	3	2	1	9
02. Develop a splashpad/sprayground	4	3	2	1	9
03. Develop a disc golf course	4	3	2	1	9
04. Develop athletic fields	4	3	2	1	9
05. Develop mountain bike trails	4	3	2	1	9
06. Develop multipurpose open space	4	3	2	1	9
07. Develop outdoor amphitheater and event space	4	3	2	1	9
08. Develop a boathouse and water access at Lake Hickory	4	3	2	1	9
09. Develop outdoor fitness and exercise equipment	4	3	2	1	9
10. Develop new paved trails	4	3	2	1	9
11. Develop picnic shelters	4	3	2	1	9
12. Develop indoor fitness facilities	4	3	2	1	9
13. Develop playgrounds	4	3	2	1	9
14. Develop natural trails	4	3	2	1	9
15. Pursue needed updates at recreational facilities	4	3	2	1	9
16. Pursue needed updates at existing parks and recreation facilities	4	3	2	1	9
17. Other: _____	4	3	2	1	9

21. Which THREE of the items in Question 20 would you be most willing to support with your tax dollars? [Write in your answers below using the item numbers from the list in Question 20, or circle "NONE."]

1st: ____ 2nd: ____ 3rd: ____ NONE

22. Based on what you know or have heard, which of the following options best describes your opinion on additional public parks and recreation facilities in the City of Hickory?

- ____(1) There is a great need for additional parks and facilities
- ____(2) There is some need for additional parks and facilities
- ____(3) There is little need for additional parks and facilities
- ____(4) There is no need for additional parks and facilities

23. In your opinion, how important is the existence of public parks and recreation areas to the quality of life in the City of Hickory?

- ____(5) Very Important ____ (3) Neutral ____ (1) Not at all Important
- ____(4) Important ____ (2) Not Important

Demographics

24. Including yourself, how many people in your household are...

- Under age 5: ____ Ages 15-19: ____ Ages 35-44: ____ Ages 65-74: ____
- Ages 5-9: ____ Ages 20-24: ____ Ages 45-54: ____ Ages 75+: ____
- Ages 10-14: ____ Ages 25-34: ____ Ages 55-64: ____

25. What is your age? ____ years

26. **Approximately how many years have you lived in the City of Hickory?** [Write "0" if less than one year.]

_____ years

27. **Your gender:** ____ (1) Male ____ (2) Female ____ (3) Prefer to self-describe: _____

28. **Please CHECK ALL of the following that best describe your race/ethnicity.**

____ (01) Asian or Asian Indian ____ (05) Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
____ (02) Black or African American ____ (06) Hispanic, Spanish, Latino/a/x
____ (03) American Indian or Alaska Native ____ (99) Other: _____
____ (04) White (not Hispanic)

29. **What is your household income?**

____ (1) Under \$25,000 ____ (4) \$75,000-\$99,999
____ (2) \$25,000-\$49,999 ____ (5) \$100,000 or more
____ (3) \$50,000-\$74,999

30. **What is the highest level of education you have received?**

____ (1) Less than high school degree ____ (4) Bachelor's degree
____ (2) High school degree ____ (5) Professional degree (JD, MD)
____ (3) Associate degree ____ (6) Post graduate degree (master's, doctorate)

31. **If you would like to receive future information regarding the City of Hickory's Parks, Recreation and Sports Tourism department or updates on our comprehensive master plan, please provide your contact information below.**

Name: _____

Mobile Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

This concludes the survey. Thank you for your time!
Please return your completed survey in the enclosed postage-paid envelope addressed to:
ETC Institute, 725 W. Frontier Circle, Olathe, KS 66061

Your responses will remain completely confidential. The information printed to the right will ONLY be used to help identify unmet needs for leisure and recreation services in our community. If your address is not correct, please provide the correct information. Thank you!

Definitions

Amenity: Accessory structures, within parks, such as athletic fields, playground equipment, kayak launches, picnic shelters, and sports courts.

Facility: A structure whose primary purpose is recreation, such as a senior center or activity building.

Land Usage: Percentage of space identified for either passive use or active use in a park.

Maintenance Standards: Levels of maintenance intensity.

Open Space: Undeveloped and undisturbed parkland which may be reserved for future development or conservation.

Parkland: Developed or undeveloped acreage dedicated to public recreation.

Programming: Activities which are planned, administered and facilitated by a department. Programs can include camps, sports or niche offerings.

Rental Facilities (2022 Fees)

Rental Facilities				
Location	Amenity	Damage Deposit	Fee(s)	Details
Brown Penn Senior Center	Center	\$100	\$100-\$175	
Civitan Park	Court 1 & 2	\$0	\$0	Must be a resident to reserve.
Glenn C. Hilton Park	Shelters 1-5	\$40	\$60 - \$90	
Hickory City Park	Tennis Courts 1 - 8	\$0	\$0	Must be a resident to reserve.
Highland Recreation Center	Community Room			
	*Half Room with Kitchen	\$100	\$130-\$230	Bathrooms/Chairs (40)/WiFi/Kitchen
	*Half Room No Kitchen	\$100	\$130-\$230	Bathrooms/Chairs (40)/WiFi/White Board
Kiwanis Park	Shelters 1 & 2	\$40	\$60-\$90	
McComb Park	McComb/Beaver Memorial Gardens	\$40	\$65-\$94	
Neill W. Clark Recreation Center	Community Room			Coming Soon
Ridgeview Recreation Center	Community Room	\$100	\$25-\$40	Tables (15), Chairs (75).
Samuel William Davis Field		\$0	\$25 - \$40	
Winkler Park	Activity Center	\$100	\$175 - \$275	Seats 50 comfortably at six foot tables, 50 chairs, kitchen, and restrooms
Totals for Reservable Amenities				
Shelters		7		
Community Rooms		3		
Half Rooms		2		
Tennis Courts		8		
Activity Centers		1		

Best Practices

Several best practices are contained within the Recommendation of this plan. Additional best practices and/or resources are provided below for the benefit of the City.

Two Critical Resources

Management of Park and Recreation Agencies, 5th Edition, NRPA

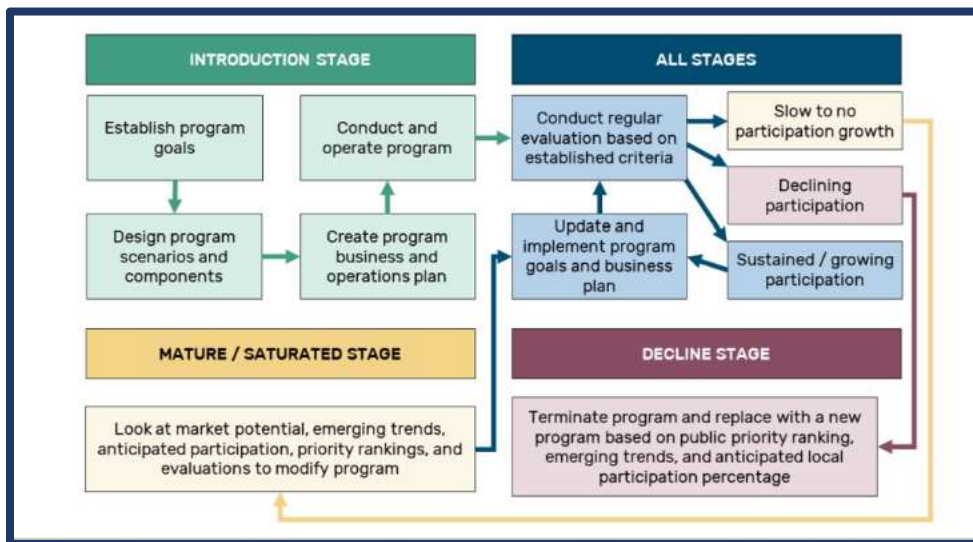
This comprehensive management guide contains management functions, roles and frameworks as well as information on law and jurisdiction, politics, advocacy, organizational structure, administrative operations, planning for strategic management, program management, service management, participant and volunteer supervision, physical resource planning, environmental resource management, maintenance operations, information technology, marketing, employment, partnerships, financial management, risk management and more.

CAPRA Accreditation Handbook, 18th Edition, NRPA

This handbook is a roadmap to accreditation by the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies however, even if accreditation is not sought, the elements contained within the manual reflect the country's best practices for operating a world-class parks and recreation department.

Program Evaluation Cycle & Decision-Making Matrix

The following model can be used to evaluate programs and their life cycle. In turn, decisions can be made as to the programs being offered.



Source: City of High Point Parks & Recreation Master Plan

