

2015 PARKS MASTER PLAN **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – OVERALL PLAN**

INTRODUCTION

Catawba County adopted the first Parks Master Plan in December 2007. Since this was the first master plan, and the Catawba County Parks system was flourishing and gaining patronage an update was anticipated in five to ten years.

MASTER PLAN DOCUMENT

The 2015 Master Plan (as in the original 2007 document) has seven sections:

- Section 1 Introduction – States Catawba County Parks mission and briefly outlines the goals of the Parks.
- Section 2 Population Trends and Projections – Looks at the County in its entirety, and breaks down these statistics by Small Area Plan.
- Section 3 Existing Plans and Documents – Ties existing documents to goals in the Parks Master Plan.
- Section 4 Existing Park Facilities – Identifies existing recreational facilities and programming opportunities countywide.
- Section 5 Recreation Needs Assessment – Contains results of the survey conducted during plan creation, and input from public forum participants.
- Section 6 Goals and Recommendations – Sites studies indicating the benefits of parks. Outlines steps that should be taken to provide Catawba County citizens with optimal park service.
- Section 7 Action Implementation Plan – Provides funding possibilities to realize plan goals.

PLAN CREATION PROCESS

The updated 2015 Plan used the same structure as the original 2007 Plan; however, all data and changes in park operations were updated. Updates include revised population and demographic data, additions of parkland, partnerships, sponsored activities, current needs assessment, and community expectations.

At the time of the 2007 Plan, needs assessments were heavily based on activity types compared to total population numbers. Currently, grant sources require needs assessments to be based on citizen desires and requests obtained from survey and in-person community input sessions.

Updating the 2015 Parks Master Plan involved several public drop-in sessions and a survey. The survey gathered in-depth data from both park users and non-



park users. It was available at the public forum sessions, the parks, and on-line. A total of 655 completed surveys were received.

The drop-in session forums were advertised through area newspapers, County e-newsletters, website pages, social media, and e-mail blasts. Introductory phone calls were made to area non-profit groups, followed by e-mail “press releases”. Parks Advisory Committee members took several hard copies of advertising flyers and posted them at local businesses. They also forwarded electronic copies to their own membership organizations, contacts, friends, and family to invite and encourage attendance at the public forums.

Four community open house sessions were held to gather input, followed by one additional countywide forum to present the survey and input results and allow the public another opportunity for comment. The following table shows the dates, locations, and number of attendees at each open house.

Date	Location	Attendance
2/18/14	• Mountain View Southwest Library	46
2/25/14	• Catawba County Gov. Center, Newton	41
2/27/14	• Highland Recreation Center, Hickory	27
3/5/14	• Sherrills Ford-Terrell Fire & Rescue	34
4/22/14	• Catawba County Gov. Center, Newton – Review of results	13
	Total Attendees	161

Large maps were displayed at each public forum showing:

- County Park Locations;
- Service Areas of Each Existing and Proposed Park;
- Carolina Thread Trail/Duke Relicensing/Agri-Tourism sites;
- Countywide Public Parks and Recreation Facilities with Amenities; and
- Churches.

In addition to the maps at the public forums were large “choice sheets”—one for each park—containing a list of amenities that were already in the park and others that were not in the park. The sheets were posted on the walls at the open houses, and each participant was given six dots which were to be placed on the amenities they felt were most important.

Section 5 Needs Assessment of the Plan details public forum and survey results. A summary can be seen below.

PUBLIC INPUT SUMMARY

The public open house forums and surveys revealed the following data and comments:

- Most people come to the parks for the outdoor experience and exercise/wellness opportunities;
- Operate on a six-day week schedule, and be staffed during open hours to enhance both safety and park maintenance. Fewer days of access impedes visitor's daily health hiking routines, the ability of schools to use parks, and loses competitive points under the grant programs. Hikers and dog park patrons appreciate staff for safety reasons;
- Favorite amenities were trails, with canoeing/kayaking, educational events, and picnicking also important;
- Improve existing trails;
- Add more trails;
- Expand park acreage when beneficial to park activities and natural habitats;
- Expand picnic and sitting areas;
- Add primitive camping to one or more parks;
- Add a community meeting/education center at Bakers Mountain and other sites as appropriate;
- Develop an expanded consistent schedule of guided environmental education programs for individuals and families. Invite elementary schools to have a park visit on the curriculum and use parks as outdoor labs for science and history classes;
- Add events featuring music, astronomy, art, and physical fitness sessions in the parks;
- Add mileage markers and identify the difficulty of park trails as severe, moderate, or easy to help the user determine the route that best matches their objective;
- Increase interpretative signage to identify environmental, natural, or historical features;
- Continue to purpose and implement innovative concepts to help the park system provide health, educational, and economic benefits;
- Continue to enhance partnerships, and approach new potential partners to create mutually beneficial outcomes. Ex. CVCC, LR, Science Center, Elementary Schools;
- Bunker Hill was chosen more often as the higher priority in the development of future parks; and
- A park is needed in the southeast area of the County.

RECOMMENDATIONS – AS FUNDING BECOMES AVAILABLE

Section 6 Goals and Recommendations of the Plan includes a detailed listing of citizen and staff recommendations. Recommendations are categorized as

General Recommendations, Recommendations for Existing Parks, Recommendations for Future Parks, and Existing Special Use Facility Parks. Recommendations in each category are listed in the order of priority to the extent practical; however, many of these recommendations should be occurring simultaneously. A summary of recommendations can be seen below.

General Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Operating Hours and Staffing

- Catawba County Parks should be operated and staffed on a schedule that includes at least six days a week with seasonal hours and holidays.

Recommendation #2: Facility and Program Accessibility

- Assess all facilities to ensure compliance with current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.

Recommendation #3: Design and Daily Maintenance

- Park facilities should be maintained and improved so they are inviting places which are desirable to visit.

Recommendation #4: Contiguous Property Acquisition

- When property that is contiguous to existing and future parks becomes available, efforts should be made to evaluate, and acquire the property if deemed beneficial.

Recommendation #5: Acceptance of Fee Simple Land Donation

- Land donations should be accepted for use as a park, or accepted and sold with funds going in the Parks Trust Fund for other park improvements or land purchase.

Recommendation #6: Educational Programming

- Expand the frequency of scheduled guided environmental education programs.

Recommendation #7: Stewardship/Volunteerism Programs

- Develop stewardship and community volunteer programs for the Parks.

Recommendation #8: Parks Advisory Committee

- Continue to gain insight from the Parks Advisory Committee to further expand ways that the Parks can help provide health, educational, and economic benefits to Catawba County citizens.

Recommendation #9: Signage

- Expand the signage system for parks and greenways.

Recommendation #10: Intergovernmental Cooperation

- Continue to meet periodically with the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG), municipalities and school systems within Catawba County to discuss development and recreation projects that are planned or are underway within the County.

Recommendation #11: Connectivity and Greenway Funding

- Connect greenways and public facilities through trails. Protect natural habitat corridors through connected preservation buffers.

Recommendation #12: Park Donations.

- Allow for monetary park donations which can be designated for specific purposes.

Recommendation #13: Walkable Communities

- Promote land uses and site designs that make walking/bicycling convenient and enjoyable.

Recommendation #14: Partnership Agreements

- County staff should meet with existing and potential partners to determine needs and explore opportunities.

Recommendation #15: Green Building

- It is recommended that the Parks implement green building components into existing and future park facilities to conserve energy and help educate the public on beneficial conservation techniques.

Recommendation #16: Update/Complete Beneficial Planning Documents.

- Update/complete the *Inventory of Significant Natural Areas of Catawba County*.

Recommendation #17: Recreation Marketing Plan and Communications

- Develop a countywide marketing plan for the parks.

Recommendations for Existing Parks

Recommendation #18: Bakers Mountain Park

- Increase parking since often there are not enough spaces during weekend peak times or for educational events. Due to a lack of land area with suitable topography for parking, additional land would need to be purchased;
- Purchase additional land suitable for expanded parking. See Appendix Map 6 - *Bakers Mountain Park* for adjacent parcels that meet the requirements for the Parks Division;

- Renovate and improve existing trails;
- Design and build additional trails;
- Install additional park benches along trails;
- Construct an indoor meeting building;
- Expand educational programming; and
- Consider primitive camping.

Recommendation #19: Riverbend Park

- Renovate and improve existing trails;
- Design and build additional trails;
- Install additional park benches along trails;
- Add a natural or conventional playground designed to be compatible with the environment. There are no other playground facilities in the general area;
- Improve/enlarge water access; and
- Consider primitive camping. It is recommended that the County add approximately 20 camp sites at Riverbend Park. A 24-hour park staff presence would be needed when facilities are in use.

Recommendation #20: St. Stephens Community Park

- Expand the dog park to include a separate section for small dogs;
- Add more amenities to the dog parks;
- Renovate, improve and pave existing trails;
- Design and build additional trails;
- Install additional park benches along trails; and
- Obtain land and expand the park into the unused land behind Clyde Campbell Elementary School which abuts St. Stephens.

Recommendation #21: Mountain View Recreation Center

- Meet with the Recreation Resources Services (RRS) representative to review grant obligations and render an opinion on priorities, accessibility requirements, and possible functionally obsolete amenities; and
- Periodically review contractual agreement for maintenance and operations with Mountain View Recreation Association.

Recommendation #22: Birding Affiliations

- Continue to participate in the NC Birding Trail program.

Recommendations for Future Parks

Recommendation #23: Mountain Creek Park (Future)

- Water amenities including swimming, boat, canoe and kayak access, and fishing areas;
- Trails: natural surface, mountain biking trails and paved trails;

- Park benches along trails;
- Picnic facilities;
- Multi-purpose building;
- Primitive camping; and
- Playground equipment: natural or conventional facilities which fit into the environment.

Recommendation #24: Trails: Greenways, Blueways, and Bike Paths

- Continue to implement the recommendations of the Carolina Thread Trail and the Western Piedmont Council of Government Bike Plan.

Existing Special Use Facility Parks

Recommendation #25: Bunker Hill Covered Bridge Park and Greenway (Future)

- Multi-use building providing educational and community meeting space for a minimum of 50 occupants, restrooms, and office facility;
- Paved trails meeting ADA requirements and natural surface walking trails designed to be compatible with topographical constraints;
- Additional park benches along trails;
- More picnic facilities; and
- An outdoor amphitheater.

Recommendation #26: Murray’s Mill (Future)

- Facilities for educational and community meetings, restrooms, and office;
- Paved trails meeting ADA requirements and natural surface walking trails designed to be compatible with topographical constraints;
- Additional park benches along trails; and
- Picnic facilities.

Priorities for Development

- Maintenance/improvements to existing parks;
- Land acquisition for contiguous property as needed and land becomes available;
- Bunker Hill Covered Bridge development; and
- Mountain Creek Park development.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

A summary of Community Forum “choice sheet” responses can be found in *Section 5.3 Executive Summary – Community Meetings*. A detailed listing of responses can be seen in *Sec. 5.4 Community Meeting Data Collection*.

A summary of Survey responses can be found in *Sec. 5.5. Executive Summary—Community Survey*. Responses to each survey question can be found in *Section 5.6 Community Survey Data Collection*.

WORKSHOP/APPROVAL DATES

The Parks Advisory Committee (PAC) had several workshops to determine objectives for the Parks Master Plan, create a survey, determine open house formats, dates and locations, and develop “choice sheets” which were to be used at the forums to gather input. PAC workshops were held on 10/1/13, 11/5/13, 12/3/13, 2/4/14. A special meeting was held on 4/16/14 to view survey results prior to the final public forum. Another special meeting was held on 6/18/14 to discuss the draft Plan and make any additional revisions. PAC members were involved throughout the process in distributing flyers and surveys and attending all public forums.

On 10/8/14, the Parks Advisory Committee met to make final revisions and recommended the Plan to the Planning Board and Board of Commissioners for adoption. The Planning Board voted unanimously to recommend the plan to the Board of Commissioners on 10/27/14. The Board of Commissioners approved the Plan unanimously on 5/18/15.