

MEMORANDUM

TO: Roger L. Stancil, Town Manager
FROM: Ray L. Kisiah, Jr., Parks and Recreation Director
SUBJECT: Parks and Trails Assessment Report
DATE: November 23, 2009

PURPOSE

This memorandum provides an overview of the key points addressed in the 2008 *Chapel Hill Parks & Trails Assessment* and additional information from the staff concerning the current condition of our parks and trails. In addition, we have provided information for the Council's consideration related to future planning for how to improve the Town's park system.

BACKGROUND

At the 2009 retreat, the Council established two goals involving the condition of the Town's park and trail system. These goals were to:

- (1) Present the park and trails assessment to the Council by June of 2009.
- (2) Begin the development of a needs assessment for Parks and Recreation facilities. Both of these goals were to serve as the basis for the development of a capital financing plan for improvements to the Town's parks and greenways.

In May 2008 the Town executed a \$30,000 contract with a consultant for an assessment of the Town's park and greenway trail system. Work on the assessment started in May 2008 and concluded in December 2008. The assessment was presented to the Council in June, 2009. The Council referred the report to the Parks and Recreation and Greenways Commissions for their recommendations. The Council also asked the Manager to schedule a broader discussion of the issues for the fall of 2009.

DISCUSSION

The *Chapel Hill Parks & Trails Assessment* serves as a "representative sample" of the conditions found within the Town's park and trail system. Funding was insufficient to complete a comprehensive study of all the Town's parks and greenways. The assessment contains twelve chapters and five appendices that attempt to evaluate the physical condition of our park and trail system and the Town's maintenance program. More detailed information on the assessment can be found in the attachment: Responses to findings presented in the Parks and Trails Assessment Report.

Specific goals of the assessment report included:

- Identification of life safety issues, code violations, Americans with Disability Act (ADA) deficiencies, deferred maintenance, and aesthetic issues
- Provision of cost estimates to address deficiencies
- Analysis of current maintenance practices
- Identification of issues related to the creation of a maintenance plan

The consultant has identified over \$4,088,000 in deficiencies in our existing park and trail inventory. Based on comparisons between the costs identified in the assessment and conditions observed in other parks, staff believes that the actual figure is probably in the range of \$6,000,000 to \$10,000,000. Based on the assessment and our knowledge of the facilities, we believe that we have a large number of deficiencies with our park and trail system that should be addressed and that we would benefit from a complete and thorough assessment of the system.

We have made some progress in correcting many of the deficiencies found in the assessment. All of the life/safety issues have been addressed and we have also made progress on correcting other issues utilizing the resources we have available.

We recognize that finding additional, substantial resources will be difficult with the challenging economic conditions the Town is currently experiencing. We continue, though, to recommend that the Council consider a strategy for longer term planning that would allow us to take advantage of a future improvement in the Town's financial condition.

In the short term, we recommend the following:

1. Increase the amount of funding in the maintenance operating budget for items such as contract mowing and repair work.

This would allow us to shift the responsibility of general and routine, but time consuming work to local landscape companies contracted to perform mowing and trimming operations on the major roadways in town and in the Town's public housing areas. It would allow us to shift duties of the staff currently performing this work to more technical duties in the horticultural and arboricultural areas with a greater emphasis on our parks and greenways system and an improved appearance of all Town properties thereby furthering our goal of creating a "Town within a park".

2. Increase the Small Parks section of the Capital Improvement Program to address capital renovation and maintenance projects.

This would allow the Town to address smaller capital improvement/renovation needs within the parks and greenways system.

3. Develop a new master plan for the Parks and Recreation Department.

The current plan was adopted in 2002 and includes action items only through 2011. We think that any such master plan should address the physical deficiencies in our park system, gaps in recreation programming and services, needs for additional park and trail facilities, and trends that would guide future decisions. The 2008 *Parks and Trail Assessment* could serve as a foundation for an updated master plan. This plan would establish local standards for number and type of park facilities and give the public significant opportunity to provide ideas and suggestions which would assist in determining the town-wide park system. As part of this master planning process, we would also address the findings of the *Parks and Trails Assessment* by developing park specific development plans for each park and trail.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Council consider implementing a number of options to improve the condition of the Town's parks and trails including:

- Authorize the Manager to provide a proposal in the 2010-11 budget that would develop a comprehensive master plan. We estimate that such a comprehensive master plan could cost about \$140,000.
- Authorize the development of a financial plan for parks and recreation capital development, based on the proposed update of the comprehensive master plan.
- Increase the amount of funding in the parks and recreation maintenance operating budget for items such as contract mowing and repair work in the 2010 – 2011 fiscal year operating budget. We can bring specific recommendations to the Council during next year's budget deliberations. Our preliminary estimate is that an increase in maintenance funding to meet our proposed objectives could be about \$150,000 to \$170,000.
- Increase the Small Parks section of the Capital Improvement Program to address small capital renovation projects within the parks and trails system. We will make specific recommendations to the Council during the 2010-11 CIP process. We believe an appropriate level of funding could be about \$100,000 annually (current year's funding is \$60,000).

ATTACHMENTS

1. Chapel Hill Parks and Trails Assessment Report (p. 4).
2. Greenways Commission Recommendations (p. 155).
3. Parks and Recreation Commission Recommendations (p. 156).
4. Responses to Findings Presented in the Parks and Trails Assessment Report (p. 157).