

MEMORANDUM

TO: Roger L. Stancil, Town Manager

FROM: Ray (Butch) Kisiah, Parks and Recreation Director
Bill Webster, Assistant Parks and Recreation Director

SUBJECT: Parks and Trails Assessment Report

DATE: June 22, 2009

PURPOSE

This memorandum provides an introduction and summary to the *Chapel Hill Parks & Trails Assessment* that was completed in December 2008. We will refer the report to the Parks & Recreation Commission as soon as possible and then schedule time for a more in-depth discussion of the report and the physical status of the Town's park system at a Council meeting in the fall of 2009.

BACKGROUND

In May 2008 the Town executed a \$30,000 contract with a consultant for an assessment of the Town's park and trail system. Work on the assessment started in May 2008 and concluded in December 2008. The assessment attempted to address several major goals related to the physical condition of our park and trail system including:

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

The consultant has concluded that the Town's park and trail system is in generally poor condition due to the age of facilities, lack of funding for routine maintenance, and lack of funding for larger renovation projects.

The consultant has identified over \$4,088,000 in deficiencies in our existing park and trail system, expressed in 2008 valuation. A detailed cost analysis can be found in Appendix C. We believe that the real costs are likely significantly higher for a number of reasons including:

- The consultant studied only 5 parks and 1 trail in depth. It is likely that other deficiencies would have been uncovered if a more detailed study had been performed on all park facilities.
- The consultant suggests, and we agreed, that certain of our older parks should be completely redesigned and rebuilt. If this course is taken it would likely mean that aging recreation and support facilities would be demolished and replaced, often in new locations. The cost of removing and replacing aging equipment would likely be higher

than simply repairing and renovating older equipment on a case-by-case basis in their current locations.

The consultation studied most aspects of the park system including:

- Parking lots
- Landscaping, turf, and irrigation
- Recreation facilities and small buildings
- Paths and trails
- Utilities
- Park furnishings, signs, and fencing
- Playgrounds

Due to the limited budget for the assessment the consultant was asked to provide a detailed evaluation of only Burlington Park, Cedar Falls Park, Hargraves Park, Oakwood Park, Umstead Park, and the Bolin Creek Greenway. These parks were selected for more detailed analysis because of their age and known deficiencies. The remainder of the Town's parks and trails received a less detailed level of study. Larger buildings such as community centers and gymnasiums were not included in the study.

Individual Evaluations by Park and Trail: Beginning on page 7 of the Report are individual evaluations of each park and trail in the Town's system. The report identifies deficiencies at each location and provides recommendations for corrective action. Cedar Falls Park was identified as the park with the greatest number of deficiencies.

System Recommendations: Beginning on page 61 the consultant has presented a list of recommendations to address the issues related to park deficiencies. These recommendations range from long term goals such as developing new master plans for some parks to identification of immediate maintenance needs to address Life Safety Issues.

Operational Recommendations: The consultant studied the Town's current organization structure as it relates to park and trail maintenance. This evaluation begins on page 73 of the report. The consultant found that the Town spends \$41.50 per capita on landscape services, while the average amount spent for similar services in the Piedmont region of North Carolina is \$83.08 per capita. The consultant recommends that the Town take the following actions:

- Develop an annual maintenance plan
- Develop a parks maintenance manual and related training
- Implement a safety and user response program
- Increase funding for maintenance

DISCUSSION

We have reviewed the document and agree with its major findings and recommendations. We have taken the following steps to immediately address some of the issues raised by the consultant:

1. Life Safety Deficiencies – The consultant defines Life Safety as “Issues related to public safety”. In practice Life Safety deficiencies range from clear, identifiable hazards to more

general issues such as older playground equipment that no longer meets the most current version of national safety standards. We have corrected or are currently addressing 24 of the 30 Life Safety deficiencies identified in the report, including those that we think represented the greatest safety issues. Most of the remaining projects would require funding sources that have not been identified as of this time. The major items remaining are:

- Replacement of a bridge at Burlington Park. We are in the process of closing one of the two bridges mentioned in the report. We believe the remaining bridge will function safely for some time. We intend to replace the bridge as soon as funds are available.
 - Installation of a retaining wall at Hargraves Park between the gymnasium and pool. This is a major project that will require design services and significant funding.
 - Renovation of walkways and a retaining wall at Cedar Falls Park. Some work has already been accomplished. This is a major project that will require design services and significant funding.
 - Replacement of playgrounds at Burlington, Umstead, and Westwood Parks. In addition, we also believe that the playground at Oakwood Park is a candidate for replacement. We intend to replace one play area per year. This replacement program is dependent on funding.
 - Replacement of the timber steps adjacent to the Hargraves ballfield.
 - Removal of downed, dead, and damaged trees along Bolin Creek Trail. We intend to start work on this project in the summer of 2009.
2. Landscape Division Reorganization – The Landscape Division has been reorganized to better manage resources and limit travel time between destinations by moving from a zone strategy to a geographic based strategy. We have also started to contract out more routine items such as grass cutting in order to allow existing staff to manage other responsibilities. Separate cemetery and ballfield crews have been organized to increase service levels.
 3. Maintenance Management Plans – We are in the process of developing plans. The first plans should be available by January 2010.
 4. We will continue to address identified deficiencies using all financial sources at our disposal.

Next Steps: We will next refer the report to the Parks and Recreation Commission at their next regular meeting. We will then schedule a discussion item for a Council meeting in the fall in order to present specific recommendations.

FISCAL NOTE

The consultant has identified over \$4,088,000 in deficiencies in our existing park and trail inventory. We think that the figure is probably low.

In order to address these issues we believe that a number of potential solutions could be explored in the future including:

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

- Increase in the Small Parks section of the Capital Improvement Program to address capital renovation projects.
- A Parks bond issue dedicated primarily to capital renovation of the Town's parks, trails, and landscape areas.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Council receive the report at this time and discuss the issue in greater depth in the fall of 2009.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Chapel Hill Parks & Trails Assessment Report