

# DeKalb County parks + recreation master plan 2010 - 2020

JUNE 2009

# Acknowledgments

The authors of this document wish to express appreciation to all the contributors to the 2010-2020 Comprehensive Master Plan for Parks and Recreation. The goal for this Master Plan is to set the direction for the Department by identifying the standards, policies and resources required to achieve the County's goals for parks and recreation.

The Parks and Recreation Department is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life of the citizens of DeKalb County by connecting communities to exceptional parks, recreational facilities, and cross-generational programs that promote healthy and active lifestyles.

This document provides DeKalb County with a 10-year action plan that is a living, dynamic document, constantly growing and changing to reflect the needs of the County. Invaluable information was obtained from all involved to make this a collaborative and realistic planning tool.

## DeKalb County Government

Burrell Ellis, Chief Executive Officer  
Elaine Boyer, Commissioner District 1  
Jeff Rader, Commissioner District 2  
Larry Johnson, Commissioner District 3  
Sharon Barnes-Sutton, Commissioner District 4  
Lee May, Commissioner District 5  
Kathie Gannon, Commissioner District 6  
Connie Stokes, Commissioner District 7

## DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Department

Marilyn Boyd Drew, Director of Parks and Recreation  
Marvin F. Billups Jr., Deputy Director of Park Planning and Development  
Gary Dalton, Deputy Director of Park Services  
Al Sheppard, Deputy Director of Recreation Services  
Revonda Moody, Project Manager, Park Planning and Development  
John Anderson, Project Manager, Park Planning and Development  
Susan Hood, Director of Parks, Bond and Greenspace  
Chris Bell, Greenspace Planner, Parks, Bond and Greenspace

## Consultant

EDAW, Inc.  
Leisure Vision, Inc.  
Malvada Consulting Group  
Total Leisure Consulting

## Citizens Advisory Board

Dan Magee, District 2 Appointee  
Gloria Raney, District 3 Appointee  
Deborah Williams, District 4 Appointee  
Mariama Boone, District 5 Appointee  
Richard Alvarez, District 6 Appointee  
Tonza Clark, District 7 Appointee

## Plan Advisory Committee

James Calloway  
(More names to be provided)

## Citizens of DeKalb County

# Table of Contents

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Vision Statement	1
1.3	Departmental Mission Statement	1
1.4	Purpose of the Plan	1
1.5	Demographics	1
1.6	Public Participation	1
1.7	Recommended Standards for DeKalb County	2
1.8	Recommended Park System Concepts for DeKalb County	3
1.9	Recommendations for Greenways and Natural Resource Areas	4
1.10	Recommendations for Land Acquisition to Expand Park System	4
1.11	Recommendations for Mini Parks	4
1.12	Recommendations for Neighborhood Parks	5
1.13	Recommendations for Community Parks	6
1.14	Recommendations for Regional Parks	6
1.15	Recommendations for Greenway “Nature” Parks	6
1.16	Recommendations for Special-Purpose Parks	7
1.17	Recommendations for Recreation Centers	7
1.18	Recommendations for Aquatic Facilities	8
1.19	Recommendations for Ballfields and Soccer Fields	8
1.20	Recommendations for Tennis Courts	9
1.21	Recommendations for Basketball Courts	10
1.22	Recommendations for Golf Courses	10
1.23	Recommendations for Playgrounds	10
1.24	Recommendations for Skate Parks	10
1.25	Recommendations for Off-leash Parks	11
1.26	Policy Recommendations	12
1.27	Economic and Financial Recommendations	12
1.28	Delivery Systems Recommendations	13
1.29	Fees Recommendations	17
1.30	Maintenance Recommendations	17
1.31	Security Recommendations	18
1.32	Health and Wellness Recommendations	19
1.33	Monitoring the Parks and Recreation Master Plan	19

<b>2.0</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>21</b>
2.1	Introduction	21
2.2	Vision Statement	22
2.3	Purpose of the Plan	22
2.4	Scope of the Plan and Summary of the Planning Process	23
2.4	Public Participation Process	24
2.5	Organization of the Report	25
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Overview of DeKalb County Parks and Recreation</b>	<b>27</b>
3.1	History	27
3.2	Departmental Mission	27
3.3	Demographics & Socioeconomics	29
3.4	Demographic Analysis	39
3.5	2000 DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan	40
3.6	Major Accomplishments since 2000	40
3.8	Changes since 2000	47
3.9	Inventory	48
3.10	County Facilities	49
3.11	City and State Facilities	49
3.12	Private Facilities	49
3.13	Consistency in Inventory	55
3.14	Park and Open Space Expansion	55
3.15	Funding	57
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Public Participation</b>	<b>59</b>
4.1	Overview	59
4.2	Public Survey	59
4.3	Public Meetings	61
4.4	Interviews with Department Employees	62
4.5	Interviews with Executive Team	62
4.6	Interviews with Board of Commissioners	63
4.7	Interviews with Citizens Advisory Board	65
4.8	Summary of Input to the Plan	65
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Park and Recreation Standards</b>	<b>67</b>
5.1	Comparison of Standards	67
5.2	Recommended Standards for DeKalb County	71
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Park Analysis and Recommendations</b>	<b>73</b>
6.1	Introduction	73
6.2	National Trends in Parks and Open Space	73

6.3	Recommended Park System Concepts for DeKalb County	74
6.4	Recommendations for Greenways and Natural Resource Areas	76
6.5	Recommendations for Land Acquisition to Expand Park System	77
6.6	Recommendations for Mini Parks	78
6.7	Recommendations for Neighborhood Parks	81
6.8	Recommendations for Community Parks	83
6.9	Recommendations for Regional Parks	87
6.10	Recommendations for Greenway “Nature” Parks	89
6.11	Recommendations for Special-Purpose Parks	91
<b>7.0</b>	<b>Facilities Analysis and Recommendations</b>	<b>93</b>
7.1	Introduction	93
7.2	Inventory	93
7.3	County Facilities	94
7.4	City and State Facilities	94
7.5	Private Facilities	94
7.6	Consistency in Inventory	95
7.7	National Recreation Facility Trends	95
7.8	Recommendations for Recreation Centers	96
7.9	Recommendations for Aquatic Facilities	99
7.10	Recommendations for Ballfields and Soccer Fields	103
7.11	Recommendations for Tennis Courts	111
7.12	Recommendations for Basketball Courts	113
7.13	Recommendations for Golf Courses	114
7.14	Recommendations for Playgrounds	117
<b>8.0</b>	<b>Planning and Implementation Strategies</b>	<b>119</b>
8.1	Introduction	119
8.2	Challenges and Opportunities for Parks and Recreation	119
8.3	Policy Recommendations	120
8.4	Economic and Financial Trends and Recommendations	122
8.6	Delivery Systems Trends and Recommendations	124
8.7	Fees Trends and Recommendations	137
8.8	Maintenance Trends and Recommendations	138
8.9	Security Trends and Recommendations	141
8.10	Health and Wellness Trends and Recommendations	142
8.11	Monitoring the Parks and Recreation Master Plan	144
<b>9.0</b>	<b>Next Steps and Priorities</b>	<b>145</b>
9.1	Priorities	145

<b>10.0</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>163</b>
10.1	Sources	163
10.2	Comprehensive Strategic Plan Steering Committee	163
10.3	Final Report of the Blue Ribbon Committee for DeKalb County Parks & Recreation 1996	164
10.4	Status of Health in DeKalb Report: Opportunities for Prevention and Community Service	164
10.5	DeKalb County Park and Recreation Department Parks Services Division Reorganization/Management Plan	165
10.6	DeKalb County Park and Recreation Comprehensive Strategic Plan 2000-2010	166
10.7	Parks and Recreation Citizen Survey - DeKalb County Department of Parks and Recreation, Leisure Vision, April 1999	166
10.8	Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation 2000 Capital Improvements Plan	166
10.9	Georgia Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)	167
10.10	SCORP: Planning for the Future of Outdoor Recreation in Georgia	168
<b>11.0</b>	<b>Appendix A-Description of Existing Parks</b>	<b>171</b>
11.1	Existing Parks	171
11.2	Notes from Site Visits	289
11.3	Index of Site Photos	297
11.4	Master Plans	314
<b>12.0</b>	<b>Appendix B-Additional Information</b>	<b>327</b>
12.1	Introduction	327
12.2	Significance of 2000-2010 Strategic Plan	327
12.3	Request to Clarify Inventory	329
12.4	Comparative Programs and Fees for Areas Surrounding DeKalb County	331
12.5	Notes on Rec Fees	335
12.6	Media and Advertisements	336
<b>13.0</b>	<b>Appendix C - Public Survey</b>	<b>345</b>
13.1	Public Survey	345
<b>14.0</b>	<b>Appendix D - Rec Center Survey &amp; Results</b>	<b>387</b>
<b>15.0</b>	<b>Appendix E - Inventory Matrices</b>	<b>395</b>

# List of Figures

Figure 3-1: DeKalb County	28
Figure 3-2: African American Population Percentage	30
Figure 3-3: Hispanic Population Percentage	30
Figure 3-5: White Population (DeKalb County)	31
Figure 3-6: DeKalb County Demogrphics	31
Figure 3-4: Hispanic Population (DeKalb County)	31
Figure 3-7: Asian-Indian Population in Atlanta	32
Figure 3-9: Caribbean Population in Atlanta	32
Figure 3-8: Brazilian Population in Atlanta	32
Figure 3-10: Central American Population	32
Figure 3-11: Chinese Population in Atlanta	33
Figure 3-13: East African Population in Atlanta	33
Figure 3-12: Cuban Population in Atlanta	33
Figure 3-14: Ethiopian Population in Atlanta	33
Figure 3-15: Nigerian Population in Atlanta	34
Figure 3-17: Pakistani Population in Atlanta	34
Figure 3-16: Iranian Population in Atlanta	34
Figure 3-18: Haitian Population in Atlanta	34
Figure 3-19: Japanese Population in Atlanta	35
Figure 3-21: Mexican Population in Atlanta	35
Figure 3-20: Korean Population in Atlanta	35
Figure 3-22: Russian Population in Atlanta	35
Figure 3-23: Southeast Asian Population	36
Figure 3-25: Vietnamese Population in Atlanta	36
Figure 3-24: South American Population	36
Figure 3-26: DeKalb County Age Group Projections: 2025	38
Figure 3-27: DeKalb County Age Group Projections: 2025	39
Figure 3-28: Population Density by Census Tract 2000	41
Figure 3-29: Population Density by Census Tract 2006	42
Figure 3-30: Population Density by Census Tract 2010	43
Figure 3-31: Population Density by Census Tract 2015	44
Figure 3-32: Population Density by Census Tract 2020	45
Figure 3-33: Percent Change in Population 2006-2020	46
Figure 3-34: DeKalb County Park System	50
Figure 3-35: Private Recreation Providers	51
Figure 3-36: Apartments with Recreation Facilities (select)	52

Figure 3-37: Churches with Recreation Facilities (select)	53
Figure 3-38: Subdivision with Recreation Facilities (select)	54
Figure 3-39: Park Expansions Since 2000 Parks and Recreation Plan (as of December 2005)	58
Figure 6-1: Neighborhood Parks with Service Areas	79
Figure 6-2: Potential Locations of New Neighborhood Parks	80
Figure 6-3: Map Showing Neighborhood Parks & Schools with Service Areas	82
Figure 6-4: Map Showing Community Parks with Service Areas	84
Figure 6-5: Potential Location of Community Parks	85
Figure 6-6: Regional Parks	86
Figure 6-7: Potential Location for Regional Park	88
Figure 6-8: Greenway / Nature Parks with Services Areas	90
Figure 7-1: Recreation Centers with Service Areas	97
Figure 7-2: Recreation Centers with Potential Parks	98
Figure 7-3: Aquatic Facilities with Service Areas	101
Figure 7-4: Potential Locations for New Aquatic Facilities	102
Figure 7-5: Existing Ballfields with Service Areas	104
Figure 7-6: Potential Locations for New Ballfields	105
Figure 7-7: Football Field Service Areas	106
Figure 7-8: Multi-use Field Service Areas	107
Figure 7-9: Soccer Field Service Areas	108
FiFigure 7-10: Tennis Court Service Areas	110
Figure 7-11: Potential Locations for New Tennis Courts	112
Figure 7-12: Golf Course Service Areas	115
Figure 7-13: Parks with Playgrounds with Services Areas	116



# List of Tables

Table 3-1: Population of the Atlanta Region, 1900-2006	29
Table 3-2: Historical Trends, DeKalb County, 1980-2005	30
Table 3-3: Population Projection, Dekalb County, 2000-2025	30
Table 3-4 Parks and Greenspace Program (as of December 31, 2008)	55
Table 3-5: Sources of Funding for Acquisition and Development	57

# 1.0 Executive Summary



## 1.1 Introduction

Parks and recreation are essential elements of DeKalb's quality of life, and their importance will only increase as the County becomes denser and more populous. The goal for this 2010 DeKalb County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan is to set the direction for the Department by identifying the standards, policies, and resources required to achieve the County's goals for parks and recreation.

## 1.2 Vision Statement

To Create and Connect Communities through People, Parks, and Programs.

## 1.3 Departmental Mission Statement

The Parks and Recreation Department is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life of the citizens of DeKalb County by connecting communities to exceptional parks, recreational facilities, and cross-generational programs that promote healthy and active lifestyles.

## 1.4 Purpose of the Plan

The primary purpose of the 2010 DeKalb County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan is to help create a collective vision for the County in regards to the types of parks and recreation services to be provided over the next decade. To achieve this goal, the DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Department initiated a process that builds upon previous planning efforts, seeks input from stake holders and constituents, and develops a plan of action that leads to improving recreational opportunities in the County. This document provides DeKalb County with a 10-year "action plan" that is a living, dynamic document, constantly growing and changing to reflect the needs of the County

## 1.5 Demographics

DeKalb County has experienced significant growth over the last twenty years, and that trend is expected to continue. Population in the County increased 40% between 1980 and 2000, and by the year 2020 the population is expected to be at 848,706, an increase of approximately 28%.

## 1.6 Public Participation

The public's vision, trust, and support drive the planning effort for the 2010 DeKalb County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Stakeholder involvement is paramount in generating enthusiasm and building broader community support for innovative parks, recreation, and open space planning in the years ahead.

An extensive outreach effort was undertaken as part of this planning process. A random public survey was conducted to obtain statistically valid responses from households across the County. In addition, five initial public meetings were conducted – one in each of the five

political Districts. Parks and Recreation employees were interviewed during four separate sessions, and division leaders were interviewed individually. Four of the seven County's Board of Commissioners were interviewed individually. The DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Department Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) was interviewed twice during the planning process.

Several themes emerged from the various groups:

- Parks and recreation are vital to a high quality of life in DeKalb as well as an economic development tool
- Passive open space, trails, neighborhood parks, and similar facilities have the highest priority among users
- Public safety is of paramount importance and visible police patrols are needed
- Better communication within the Department and between the Department and County residents would improve delivery of services
- Standardized Department procedures would enable better service delivery
- Fees should be affordable but have not been changed in several years and probably can be raised to cover more costs
- More Department revenue should stay within the Department
- Adult fitness activities have a high priority among the general population
- Partnerships with other recreation providers, and especially DeKalb County Schools, should be vigorously pursued
- Land acquisition and capital improvements are important, but more funds should be dedicated to maintenance of existing facilities
- Several recreation centers have outlived their useful lives and should be replaced or receive major overhauls
- Park facility maintenance should be managed by the Parks and Recreation Department

## 1.7 Recommended Standards for DeKalb County

This plan recommends that DeKalb County implement the following facility standards:

- Recreation Facilities – 1 recreation center per 70,000 people, with each center being a minimum of 50,000 SF
- Aquatic Facilities – 1 pool/20,000 people
- Athletic Fields – 1 ballfield/5,000 people
- Tennis Courts – 1 court/5,400 people
- Basketball Courts – 1 court/10,000 people
- Golf Courses – 1 course/200,000 people
- Skate Parks – 1 per 300,000 people
- Dog Parks – 1 dog park per 40,000
- Park Acreage – We recommend that DeKalb County implement the following standards:
  - Total Park Acreage - 18 acres/1,000 people
  - Mini Parks - .1 acres/1,000 people
  - Neighborhood Parks - 1 acre/1,000 people
  - Community Parks - 5 acres/1,000 people
  - Regional Parks - 5 acres/1,000 people
  - Greenway "Nature" Parks - 4 acres/1,000 people
  - Special Purpose Parks - 3 acres/1,000 people, but emphasis is more on facilities provided than the amount of acreage



Walkway along Buena Vista Park

## *Parks Recommendations*

### **1.8 Recommended Park System Concepts for DeKalb County**

This plan recommends that DeKalb County implement the following park system concept:

**Recommendation 1 – Implement the Recommended Park Classification System.**

**Recommendation 2 – Focus on Sustainability.** The County must develop a stronger focus on sustainable, less maintenance-intensive landscapes, and incorporate green landscape design into traditional parks.

**Recommendation 3 – Address Economics.** The County should expand on the concept of parks as economic resources, and develop a business plan for the Department based on the recognition that parks and recreation is a business.

**Recommendation 4 – Improve Access.** Improving access to outdoor recreation resources and facilities can be accomplished by establishing parks near places where people live and work.

**Recommendation 5 – Enhance Existing Parks.** Creating conceptual site master plans for each park will help establish a benchmark for developing future alternatives based on user supported programs.

**Recommendation 6 – Participate in GIS Inventory.** The Department needs to participate in a County-wide GIS inventory of all County property holdings to seek opportunities for utilizing existing resources.

**Recommendation 7 – Enhance Aesthetics.** The Department needs to invest more in horticultural applications such as the use of indigenous flowers and plants, and improving the overall aesthetic quality of the parks.

## 1.9 Recommendations for Greenways and Natural Resource Areas

The County has a comprehensive greenway and trail plan that explores opportunities for linking parks, open space, recreation facilities, and public gathering areas with residential areas and transportation routes. The County coordinates with PATH, which has developed a master trail plan that includes DeKalb County. Linear parks and greenways will help connect the other parks in the County's system.

**Recommendation 1 – Coordinate with SCORP.** The County should implement key recommendations to conserve and properly use natural resources from the Georgia Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2008-2013 report.

**Recommendation 2 – TAE.** Support the State's efforts to establish and provide resource data and tools by establishing a Technical Assistance Unit.

**Recommendation 3 – Land Use Planning.** Work with the Planning and Development Department to support land use planning that encourages conservation of natural resources and opportunities for outdoor recreation opportunities.

## 1.10 Recommendations for Land Acquisition to Expand Park System

The benchmark standard for park acreage recommended for DeKalb County is 18 acres per 1,000 people. Using this standard and based upon the current population, DeKalb County should have approximately 12,808 acres of park land. This would be expanded to 14,454 acres by the year 2015 due to projected population growth.

**Recommendation 1 – Acquisition Strategy.** The County should continue to acquire land for parks in a systematic manner, with a goal of obtaining 300 to 400 acres of park land per year.

**Recommendation 2 – Focus on Usable Lands.** DeKalb County should set a priority for acquiring park land that can be used for a combination of active and passive uses.

**Recommendation 3 – Equitable Distribution.** It is critical that acquisition strategies include efforts for to see an equitable distribution of parks and recreation opportunities to all parts of the County.

**Recommendation 4 – Coordination of Acquisition.** It is important to ensure that Parks and Recreation staff continues to be actively involved in determining land acquisition for new parks.

**Recommendation 5 – Identify land suitable for the development of DeKalb's signature park.**

## 1.11 Recommendations for Mini Parks

Mini parks are small gathering spaces, typically less than 5 acre in size. These parks can be walked to, and they typically include benches, landscaping, and other amenities that help define a small gathering area. The County should consider adding this type of park classification and construct such parks in selected parts of DeKalb County.

**Recommendation 1 – Standards for Mini Parks.** A standard of .1 acres per 1,000 people is recommended for mini parks. Based upon DeKalb County's 2005 population of 711,577, that standard requires that 71 acres of land are set aside for mini parks. We recommend that DeKalb focus on developing a few mini parks.

**Recommendation 2 – Location of Mini Parks.** Location of mini parks is recommended in urban areas where they would provide much needed passive recreation opportunities.

**Recommendation 3 – Service Area.** A walking distance of .25 miles is recommended as the defined service area for mini parks. Each park is expected to serve 500 to 2,500 people.

**Recommendation 4 – Maintenance Requirements.** One concern about mini parks is that they may result in an increase in overall maintenance requirements. Build partnerships with local businesses and organizations to handle maintenance.

## 1.12 Recommendations for Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks typically range in size from 5 acres to 25 acres, and they are often considered the foundation of most park systems. These parks typically serve both passive and active needs, and they do require parking. These parks usually include picnic areas, playgrounds, outdoor courts for basketball or tennis, walking paths, practice areas, informal athletic fields, shade trees, open lawn areas, and seating areas. The Public Survey indicated that a very high percentage of respondents (67%) wanted small neighborhood parks (67%). Input from the public meetings indicated similar thoughts.

**Recommendation 1 – Standards for Neighborhood Parks.** The recommended standard for neighborhood parks within DeKalb County is 1 acre per 1,000 residents. Based upon DeKalb County's 2005 population (711,577), 712 acres of land would need to be allocated for neighborhood parks. DeKalb County currently has 571 acres of neighborhood park land, so an additional 141 acres would need to be acquired.

**Recommendation 2 – Location of Parks.** Neighborhood parks should be within easy walking or bicycling distance. Ideally, residents should be able to access the parks without having to cross major streets.

**Recommendation 3 – Service Area.** Neighborhood parks serve a population within a half-mile radius around the park. They typically serve 2,000 to 10,000 people.

**Recommendation 4 – Partnership with Schools.** One option is for the County to partner with the school district and develop joint facilities that integrate neighborhood parks and elementary schools.



Brookwood Park



### 1.13 Recommendations for Community Parks

Community parks are large parks that are used by people throughout the county. They typically range in size from 25 to 100 acres. In general these parks serve both passive and active recreation needs, and they do require parking. Some of these facilities include the following: lighted athletic fields, indoor and outdoor recreation centers and pools, walking paths, picnic areas, playgrounds, tennis courts, special event areas, ponds, entertainment areas, concessions, restrooms, natural areas, gardens, and other amenities.

**Recommendation 1 – Park Standards.** A standard of 5 acres of community parks per 1,000 residents is recommended in DeKalb County. Using DeKalb County’s 2005 population (711,577), 3,558 acres of land is needed for community parks. Based on the DeKalb County 2015 population (802,996), 4,015 acres is recommended for community parks at that point in time. The County currently has 1,581 acres of community parks, so there is a significant shortage of community parks.

**Recommendation 2 – Location of Parks.** The service area for a community park should be two miles. A typical park would accommodate 10,000 to 50,000 users.

**Recommendation 3 – Size of New Parks.** New community parks should be a minimum of 25 acres in size, with 40 to 50 acres being recommended as a typical size.

**Recommendation 4 – Standard Configuration.** New community parks should provide a variety of uses, including a combination of active and passive uses.

### 1.14 Recommendations for Regional Parks

Regional parks are large parks that serve an entire region. These parks are typically more than 100 acres in size, provide a wide variety of facilities and activities, and attract a large number of visitors. They have a service area of 10 miles and can accommodate the needs of the County. DeKalb County has one regional park, Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve.

**Recommendation 1 – Park Standards.** For regional parks, we recommend that DeKalb County use a standard of 5 acres per 1,000 residents. Based on DeKalb County’s 2005 population (711,577), 3,558 acres of land is recommended for regional parks. Using the DeKalb County 2015 population (802,996), 4,015 is recommended for that point in time.

DeKalb County currently has 2,000 acres of regional parks, all in Arabia Mountain Park, so an additional 1,558 acres is needed to meet recommended standards.

**Recommendation 2 – Park Acquisition.** Given the presence of Stone Mountain State Park and the need for other types of parks within the County, we do not recommend the acquisition of any additional regional parks in the near future. There are other priorities for park acquisition.

### 1.15 Recommendations for Greenway “Nature” Parks

The intent of Greenway “Nature” Parks is to protect valuable green space as well as significant natural resources such as wetlands, forests, geologic features, and grasslands. Linear parks typically follow streams, power line corridor easements, railroad rights-of-way, highway rights-of-way, and drainage ditches, and are used for paths and trails.

**Recommendation 1 – Park Standards.** The recommended standard for natural resource, open space parks, and linear parks in DeKalb County is 4 acres per 1,000 residents. Based on DeKalb County’s 2005 population (711,577), 2,846 acres of land is recommended for regional parks. Using the DeKalb County 2015 population (802,996), 3,212 acres is

recommended for that point in time. DeKalb County currently has 2,927 acres of land that is classified as natural resource and open space, with 2,000 acres being in Arabia Mountain..

**Recommendation 2 – Promote Green Space.** The Department should continue to play a major role in protecting natural resources and preserving green space in the County.

**Recommendation 3 – Expand Linear Trail System.** During the Public Survey for this project, 30% of respondents indicated that walking and biking trails were the most important facilities for recreation opportunities.

**Recommendation 4 – Improve Access.** Access must be addressed at a broader level, including providing sidewalks and links to parks.

## 1.16 Recommendations for Special-Purpose Parks

Special-purpose parks typically focus on providing a specific type of recreational opportunity, such as skate parks, dog parks, tennis complexes, golf courses, athletic complexes, and aquatic centers. In DeKalb County, athletic complexes are the most common.

**Recommendation 1 – Park Standards.** The recommended standard for special-purpose parks in DeKalb County is 5 acres per 1,000 residents. Based on DeKalb County's 2005 population (711,577), 2,135 acres of land is recommended for special-purpose parks. Using the DeKalb County 2015 population (802,996), 2,409 acres is recommended for that point in time.

**Recommendation 2 – Development of Special Parks.** The County needs to develop a minimum of four new special use parks.

**Recommendation 3 – Classification of Special Use Parks.** The Department needs to change the way it classifies a special purpose park so that parks are not classified twice.

# Facilities Analysis and Recommendations

## 1.17 Recommendations for Recreation Centers

The current DeKalb County standard for recreation centers is one square foot per person. In 2000, there was a total of 224,975 square feet of space in recreation centers in 11 facilities, for an average of .38 square feet per person.

**Recommendation 1 – Facility Standards.** DeKalb County should utilize a standard of one recreation center per 70,000. Using this standard, the County should have ten recreation centers based on 2005 demographics. Based on the same standard, in 2015 the County should have eight recreation centers. Each new recreation center should be a minimum of 50,000 square feet per center. Some recreation centers may be up to 75,000 to 80,000 square feet in size depending upon the types of facilities being offered.

**Recommendation 2 – Current Facilities.** The County should reconsider its current policy for upgrading and maintaining existing facilities. Some existing facilities within the county should be sold, or torn down and replaced with newer facilities.

**Recommendation 3 – New Recreation Centers.** DeKalb County needs to construct a minimum of three new recreation centers in the next couple of years. One center should be located within a mile of I-285; one should be in the southwest part of the county; and one should be in the East within a mile of I-20.





Some pretty young ladies are getting ready for one a dance class at one of DeKalb County's recreation centers

**Recommendation 4 – New Regional Center.** The County should construct a new recreation center that functions as a regional center and hosts a variety of activities. A regional recreation center should be closer to 100,000 square feet in size. This regional recreation center should be a major revenue generator for the County. This center should be located west of I-285 near Memorial. One option is to utilize unused commercial or industrial sites.

## 1.18 Recommendations for Aquatic Facilities

At a national level, aquatic facilities are gaining popularity and are among the most popular new recreation opportunities offered. Aquatic facilities are typically high revenue producers and are among the most used facilities in parks and recreation system.

**Recommendation 1 – Facility Standards for Aquatic Centers.** A standard of one facility per 100,000 people is recommended for aquatic facilities in DeKalb County. Each new aquatic center that includes an indoor pool should be a minimum of 35,000 square feet in size and include a variety of aquatic facilities. The County currently has the one aquatic center at Browns Mill, but it has outdoor aquatic facilities.

**Recommendation 2 – Immediate Needs.** The County needs to add at least one major indoor aquatic center in the next two to three years. This facility should provide facilities for all members of the family, and should include therapeutic facilities, a competitive pool, and leisure facilities. This facility should be located in the northeast part of the county. at least 3 to 4 new aquatic centers should be developed over the next 10 years. Two to three new aquatic centers should be developed over the next 10 years.

**Recommendation 3 – Modernization.** Over the next ten years, all of the existing swimming pools should be renovated and updated to meet current standards.

## 1.19 Recommendations for Ballfields and Soccer Fields

Ballfields and soccer fields are typically part of large sports complexes that can accommodate leagues, tournaments, and other events. These facilities are typically high revenue producers because of the special tournaments they can attract.

**Recommendation 1 – Facility Standards for Ballfields.** The recommended standard is one ballfield for every 5,000 people. Utilizing these standards, the County should have 142 ballfields based upon its 2005 demographics, and 161 based on 2015 demographics. The County currently has 109 ballfields and 15 football fields, for a total of 124 fields. This means the County needs to add 37 ballfields by the year 2015. The majority of these fields need to be constructed in the northern part of the county.

**Recommendation 2 – Facility Standards for Soccer Fields.** The recommended standard for soccer fields in DeKalb County is one field for every 10,000 people. According to this standard, the County should have 71 soccer fields based on 2005 demographics, and 80 soccer fields based on 2015 demographics. The County currently has 33 soccer fields, so an additional 47 fields must be added by 2015 to meet standards.

**Recommendation 3 – Acquisition of Land.** The County needs to concentrate on acquiring sufficient land to accommodate active recreation uses, including ballfields and soccer fields. Acquisition of land suitable for this use should be a priority, even if the construction of ballfields and soccer fields does not occur immediately.

**Recommendation 4 – Ballfield and Soccer Field Maintenance.** To increase the usability of ballfields and soccer fields, some new facilities should utilize synthetic surfaces. Initial costs are higher, but in the long-term, reductions in maintenance and water requirements will help pay for the field.

**Recommendation 5 – Construct Specialty Fields.** The Department must construct specialty fields to meet specific demands in the County.

**Recommendation 6 – Expanding Facilities in Parks.** Where feasible, the Department should look at expanding existing ballfields and soccer fields in existing parks. Parks where new ballfields and soccer fields could be added include: Pleasantdale Park; Glen Emerald Park; Chapel Hill Park; Mcaffee-Starmount Park; and Hairston Park.

## 1.20 Recommendations for Tennis Courts

Tennis courts in DeKalb County are typically dispersed throughout community and neighborhood parks, or are located in tennis centers.

**Recommendation 1 – Facility Standards for Tennis.** The recommended standard for tennis courts in DeKalb County is one court for every 5,400 people. Based on this standard, the County should have 132 courts per 2005 demographics, and 149 courts based on 2015 demographics. The net total of tennis courts remains at 105. This means that the County needs 27 more tennis courts to meet current standards and 44 more courts to meet standards for 2015.

**Recommendation 2 – Tennis Centers.** The County should focus on developing a new tennis center instead of locating tennis courts in neighborhood parks. This new center should be constructed in the eastern part of the county south of Wade Walker Park.

**Recommendation 3 – Acquisition for Tennis Courts.** Existing park land may be able to accommodate development of some new tennis courts. Parks where new tennis courts may be added include: Glen Emerald Park; Peaceland Park; and Skyland Park.

**Recommendation 4 – Focus on Revenue.** Tennis centers should be a major source of revenue, particularly through major tournaments.

**Recommendation 5 – Expanding Tennis Facilities in Parks.** Where feasible, the Department should look at constructing new tennis courts in existing parks. Parks where new tennis facilities may be feasible include: Glen Emerald Park and Skyland Park.



## 1.21 Recommendations for Basketball Courts

Outdoor basketball courts are typically among the most heavily used park facilities. At a national level, basketball courts are extremely popular with older teenage and young adult males.

**Recommendation 1 – Facility Standards for Basketball.** The recommended standard for basketball courts is one court per 10,000 people. Using that standard, the County should currently have 71 courts, and 80 by the year 2015. There are currently 59 outdoor basketball courts in the County.

**Recommendation 2 – Priority of Basketball.** One of the priorities in the County should be to re-establish basketball as an activity, especially for young males. It would be beneficial for the County to develop a basketball complex that could be used for tournaments and scheduled leagues. Many of the basketball courts operated by the County are badly in need of repair.

**Recommendation 3 – Layout.** One recommended approach to create basketball courts with more opportunities for casual play is to utilize half-court layouts instead of full courts.

**Recommendation 4 – Expanding Basketball Facilities in Parks.** Where feasible, the Department should look at constructing new basketball courts in existing parks. New facilities may be feasible at Pleasantdale Park.

## 1.22 Recommendations for Golf Courses

The County currently has two golf courses, and in addition there are a number of other golf courses owned and operated by private entities, and some by other cities and counties.

**Recommendation 1. Facility Standards for Golf Courses.** The recommended standard for golf courses is 1 per 200,000 people, but we do not recommend the County construct any new courses in the near future. The County has other priorities in regards to parks and recreation, and these needs should be met before new golf courses should be considered.

**Recommendation 2. Revenue Generation.** Organization and management of the two existing golf courses should be revised to make each more efficient.

## 1.23 Recommendations for Playgrounds

The County has a significant shortage of playgrounds. The County should look at developing two types of playgrounds, small playgrounds for neighborhood parks and larger playgrounds that offer a wider variety of facilities. These larger playgrounds would be located in community, regional or special uses parks.

**Recommendation 1 – Facility Standards for Playgrounds.** Playgrounds should be provided in each of the County's neighborhood park. Where feasible, playgrounds should be added in existing parks.

**Recommendation 2 – The County should develop 3 or 4 community playgrounds that serve as regional draws.** These playgrounds are larger and more adventurous than those found in neighborhood parks. These should be constructed in community parks such as Browns Mill, Gresham, Mason Mill, Blackburn, or Shoal Creek.

## 1.24 Recommendations for Skate Parks

Skate parks are gaining in popularity around the country. DeKalb County currently has one skate park within Brook Run Park, and that facility appears to be very popular. The development of one or more additional skate parks in the County may be warranted.

**Recommendation 1 – Facility Standards for Skate Parks.** The County should establish a standard of 1 skate park per 350,000 people. That means the County should develop one more skate park. This new skate park should be located near the center of the county.

## 1.25 Recommendations for Off-leash Parks

In the more dense parts of the County, dog parks are an important way for pet owners to provide the necessary level of activity for their dogs. We recommend that the County focus on providing dog parks as part of neighborhood parks or community parks where appropriate.

**Recommendation 1 – Facility Standards for Off-leash Dog Parks.** The County should utilize a standard of 1 dog park per 40,000 residents, and open 6 to 8 dog parks in the next couple of years. Each park should be 1 to 3 acres in size. These dog parks should be dispersed throughout the county, and should be associated with neighborhood or community parks where space is available.



Hanging ten at Brook Run Skate Park

## Planning and Implementation Strategies

### 1.26 Policy Recommendations

There are a number of general policies that we recommend DeKalb County implements.

**Recommendation 1 – Become a Facilitator.** The County should focus more on becoming a recreation facilitator instead of a service provider.

**Recommendation 2 – Develop Advocates.** The Department needs to pursue the development of advocates to promote the goals of Parks and Recreation.

**Recommendation 3 – Change Legislation.** Existing enabling legislation should be modified to give the Director authority to implement needed changes.

**Recommendation 4 – Encourage Green Policies.** Implemented policies and practices should be environmentally friendly and sustainable.

**Recommendation 5 – Change Credit Card Policies.** The Department's policy on acceptance of credit cards needs to be revised so they can be used for transactions.

**Recommendation 6 – Develop Foundation.** The County needs to develop a Parks Foundation for greater control and flexibility over non-County funding.

**Recommendation 7 – Define Donor Policies.** DeKalb County needs to have clearly defined policies for working with potential donors.

**Recommendation 8 – Develop a Policy Manual.** The County should have a Policy Manual that defines all Department policies and procedures.

### 1.27 Economic and Financial Recommendations

Parks and recreation is generally accepted as integral to "quality of life;" however, it continues to be overlooked during budget discussions. In response to budget challenges, most parks and recreation service agencies are moving away from a reliance on taxes and traditional practices to funding their services from a wider variety of sources.

**Recommendation 1 – Pursue Alternative Funding.** DeKalb County must pursue a range of alternative funding sources and resources in order to continue to meet demands.

**Recommendation 2 – Keep Funds Generated by the Department.** One key to success is to keep funds generated from parks and recreation activities within the Department.

**Recommendation 3 – Take a Market-Driven Approach.** Public recreation and park delivery systems in DeKalb County should be market driven because of budget constraints.

**Recommendation 3A:** The Department should develop a clear policy as to which programs are expected to be self-sustaining, which the County will subsidize, and which (if any) should be revenue-producing.

**Recommendation 3B:** The Department should routinely track trends in program enrollment, and drop programs where interest is waning and increase opportunities for popular programs and activities.

**Recommendation 3C:** Some recreation facilities need a major overhaul in order to make them more financially viable.

**Recommendation 4 – Evaluate Lifecycle Costing.** Budgeting and maintenance should be considered over the entire lifecycle of a facility.

**Recommendation 5 – Establish a Dedicated Funding Source.** The County should establish adequate funding for the Department through a dedicated source of funding such as a special-purpose sales tax (SPLOST) or millage rate.

## 1.28 Delivery Systems Recommendations

### Annexation and Multi-Jurisdiction Consolidation

Multi-jurisdictional parks and recreation departments are gaining popularity, and DeKalb County should pursue these types of opportunities. It is more efficient to combine resources in an effort to meet recreational needs.

**Recommendation 1 – Consolidation.** The County should investigate the potential for a multi-jurisdictional consolidation for the service-specific purpose of parks, recreation, cultural, natural and historic preservation, conservation, and performing arts.



### Outsourcing

One major trend with parks and recreation departments around the country is to outsource selected tasks.

**Recommendation 1 – Outsourcing Maintenance.** The Department should consider outsourcing tasks that can be done more affordably with a better return on investment.

**Recommendation 2 – Outsourcing Programs.** The Department should evaluate outsourcing the management of specialized facilities and programs such as golf courses, tennis centers, aquatic facilities, senior centers, performing arts, pre-and after-school programs, and equestrian programs.

**Recommendation 3 – Outsourcing Other Tasks.** Other tasks that could be outsourced include food services, organization of special events, additional security for events, and other specialized activities.



### Existing Operational Structure & Department Organization

The key for most departments is to establish a strong set of policies and procedures that help ensure a consistent approach that focuses on quality.

**Recommendation 1 – Redefining Organization.** The Department needs to redefine its organizational structure and better delineate the roles and responsibilities of units and individual positions.

**Recommendation 2 – Bottom-up Approach.** The Department should consider revising the organizational structure to a “bottom-up” methodology, which can reduce numbers of employees, reduce response time, and help control costs.

### Defining County’s Core Services

A popular trend is for departments to provide basic services for free, but charge for other services; this seems to be consistent with the approach taken by DeKalb County.

**Recommendation 1 – Identify Basic Services.** It is important for the County to identify basic services that can be provided in each park and in each recreation center.

**Recommendation 2 – Determining Fees.** DeKalb County's approach should be to charge fees for the unique or specialized programs it offers.

**Recommendation 3 – Business Plan.** The Department needs to develop a business plan based on finding a balance between providing services and balancing budgets.

### Staffing and Volunteerism

Consistent with national trends, DeKalb County is not expected to increase staffing considerably due to budget constraints.

**Recommendation 1 – Determining Staff Needs.** The Department's base staffing needs should be determined by the defined direction of the Department and the recreation programs it offers.

**Recommendation 2 – Document Policies and Procedures.** DeKalb County needs to document policies and procedures to help minimize the impact that loss of institutional memory could have on the County.

**Recommendation 3 – Establish Volunteer Program.** DeKalb County needs to expand the existing volunteer program in an effort to bring in more volunteers to assist with parks and recreation activities.

**Recommendation 4 – Organize Volunteers.** The Department may consider hiring a full-time volunteer coordinator who would be responsible for recruiting, screening, training, supervising, and organizing volunteers.



One of DeKalb County's fearsome flag football teams

## Customer Service

Public parks and recreation must remain customer-oriented.

**Recommendation 1 – Ensure Communication.** The Department must be in regular communication with the park user group to ensure proper and adequate programming for its unique population of consumers.

**Recommendation 2 – Develop Web-based Applications.** The County should use interactive web-based applications that allow constituents to voice concerns online.

**Recommendation 3 – Survey.** The Department should develop ongoing instruments that assess the issues constituents consider important.

## Performance Measurement

The best argument for increased funding in parks and recreation is to demonstrate and prove benefits garnered from the use of public assets.

**Recommendation 1 – Determine Participation.** The County needs to evaluate participation rates, durations of use or enrollment numbers.

**Recommendation 2 – Work with Health Providers.** With an increasing emphasis on health and wellness and their relation to recreation and fitness, the key is to engage the public health community to learn the most effective surveillance and monitoring methods.

**Recommendation 3 – Establish Performance Measures.** The County should begin to measure the Department's performance and effectiveness on a yearly basis.

## Joint Ventures and Partnerships

More than 96% of parks and recreation departments around the country have formed some kind of partnership, with the most common partners being local schools, local government and non-profit organizations.

**Recommendation 1 – Work with Sports Organizations.** The Department needs to review existing partnerships with sports associations.

**Recommendation 2 – Work with other Youth and Recreation Organizations.** The Department should establish formal partnerships with charitable social organizations such as the YMCA/YWCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, Boy and Girl Scouts, and churches.

**Recommendation 3 – Continue Partnership with PATH.** PATH has developed the Trails Plan for DeKalb County, and they are leading the effort within the county to develop trails and greenways.

**Recommendation 4 – Work with Schools.** If a joint park/school program was resumed, ballfields could be used during the day by a school, and then in evenings and on weekends by parks departments.

**Recommendation 5 – Partner with Health Organizations.** There is a growing interest in the development of partnerships with health organizations.

**Recommendation 6 – Creative Partnerships.** Joint venturing with YMCA, churches, and other organizations could result in mutually beneficial operations.





## Recreation Programming

Creating new and innovative programming options is one of the top five issues that parks and recreation systems are concerned about. (Recmanagement.com)

**Recommendation 1 – At-Risk Youth Programs.** The Department should develop programs for at-risk youth..

**Recommendation 2 – Self-esteem Programs.** Emphasis should be on recreation programs for youngsters that promote enhancement of self-esteem, physical activity and development of skills.

**Recommendation 3 – Programs for Specific Groups.** The Department should offer a range of recreation programs for specific groups, such as: performing arts programs, such as dance, music or theater, adult sports teams, sports tournaments and races, personal training, youth sports teams, sport training and swimming programs.

**Recommendation 4 – Teacher-to-Student Ratio.** The ratio of counselors to students for after school programs needs to be lowered.

**Recommendation 5 – Conservation.** The Department should identify the conservation of natural resources and wildlife as a priority, and environmental education programs should be expanded.

**Recommendation 6 – Indoor Climbing.** Indoor climbing facilities should be installed to provide recreation opportunities for a wide variety of users, from casual climbers to experienced “rock jocks.”

**Recommendation 7 – Dropping Programs.** Given the reality of limited budgets, the County should drop programs that are losing participants and money.

**Recommendation 8 – Establish Programs for Immigrant Groups.** The Department needs to strengthen its focus on meeting needs of ethnic and immigrant populations.

**Recommendation 9 – Adventure Programs.** The County needs to better utilize existing parks for outdoor adventure-oriented activities.

**Recommendation 10 – Programs for Children.** The County needs to develop programs specifically for children, and define a policy in regards to providing opportunities for children.

## Communication and Marketing

The trend in communication is for departments across the U.S. to be more aggressive about reaching out to their constituents

**Recommendation 1 – Marketing.** The Department needs to expand the concept of marketing parks and recreation as a “quality of life” issue and economic development element.

**Recommendation 2 – Signage.** The Department needs to implement a uniform signage system as a base for all parks.

**Recommendation 3 – Being Proactive.** The Department needs to be more proactive about the services they provide, and the value they bring to a community.

**Recommendation 4 – Internet Presence.** The Department needs to utilize the Internet to reach potential and existing recreation users.

**Recommendation 5 – Increase Visibility.** The County needs to increase the visibility of the

Parks and Recreation Department. That means reaching out to the public as well as to other departments and decision-makers within the County.

## 1.29 Fees Recommendations

Most departments take the approach that they have a responsibility to provide recreation opportunities to their constituents. This is consistent with the approach being taken by DeKalb County. The county needs to ensure that fees are tied to specific services.

**Recommendation 1 – Increase Fees.** The Department needs to increase fees in order to help provide the funding needed to maintain and support parks and recreation facilities.

**Recommendation 2 – Variety of Fees.** The Department needs to implement a wide range of fees, including the following: entrance fees; admission fees; rental fees; special services fees; and user fees.



Table Tennis is one of the activities available in the Recreation Centers

**Recommendation 3 – Reciprocal Fees.** DeKalb County should implement a reciprocal fee arrangement with neighboring counties and municipalities that fall within the service area of DeKalb County citizens.

## 1.30 Maintenance Recommendations

Maintenance has become an issue in parks and recreation departments across the country.

**Recommendation 1 – Standard of Care.** DeKalb County needs to develop a Standard of Care to serve as a road map for the Department. The County currently has 135 people working in maintenance, and collectively they are in charge of 3,500 to 4,000 acres. A more detailed analysis needs to be conducted to see if current resources can meet the Standard of Care.

**Recommendation 2 – Lifecycle Costs.** It is important to look at budgeting and maintenance needs over the entire lifecycle of a facility, rather than just the initial cost of buying and installing equipment. The Department needs to re-emphasize the maintenance divisions's Resource Enhancement and Protection program that focuses on lifecycles.

**Recommendation 3 – Plan for Parks and Recreation Centers.** Developing a detailed maintenance plan for each park and for each recreation center will help the County prioritize tasks.

**Recommendation 4 – Field Maintenance.** Every sports field in the County needs to be evaluated before and after each season to determine its condition, potential maintenance requirements, and whether it should be pulled from play for the upcoming season.

**Recommendation 5 – Playground Maintenance.** The Department has to address dilapidated facilities and equipment that needs to be replaced.

**Recommendation 6 – Maintenance Agreement.** The County should consider a return to the former maintenance arrangement before splitting maintenance for parks and recreation was split and placed it under facilities management.

**Recommendation 7 – Maintenance Outsourcing.** The County should also conduct a cost analysis to compare the cost of completing specific maintenance items in-house versus contracting them out.



Community gardening is one way to get people involved with their local parks

### 1.31 Security Recommendations

Security is one of the top concerns in parks across the country. During public meetings, DeKalb County residents mentioned security as being a problem with some parks.

**Recommendation 1 – Coordinate with Police Department.** The County needs to continue to coordinate police activities to ensure that parks have an adequate level of security.

**Recommendation 2 – Eyes and Ears in Parks.** The Department needs to focus on putting “eyes and ears” in the parks. That means the more often people use a park, and the greater number of people there, the safer a park will be.



Stone Mountain State Park

### 1.32 Health and Wellness Recommendations

Health and wellness issues have increased in importance in recent years, and parks and recreation programs have a major role in promoting healthy lifestyles.

**Recommendation 1 – Leadership Role.** The Department needs to actively promote an overall increase in physical activity and assume a leadership role in making this happen.

**Recommendation 2 – Focus on Health & Wellness.** There needs to be more exercise equipment and opportunities located within the parks, and these could be donated by sponsors.

**Recommendation 3 – Creative Programming.** DeKalb County can help promote more creative programming that recognizes that fitness is evolving to much more than a room with weight and cardio machines.

### 1.33 Monitoring the Parks and Recreation Master Plan

One limitation with master plans is that they quickly become static and outdated. Also, they too often are filed away and are not used to guide the direction of a department.

**Recommendation 1 – Submittal of Plan.** The County needs to submit this completed Plan for adoption by the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners.

**Recommendation 2 – Review.** Rather than being viewed as a 10-year plan, this document should be considered a living plan that is reviewed and renewed annually over a 10-year period.

**Recommendation 3 – Accomplishment.** The Department should continue to annually prepare a listing of major accomplishments and achievements organized by division and/or as an overall department.



## 2.0 Introduction

### 2.1 Introduction

DeKalb County, located in the Atlanta Metropolitan area, is the second most densely populated county in Georgia. The population is growing fairly rapidly, no longer expanding at the rate it was in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, but it is still and is becoming more ethnically and culturally diverse.

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) forecasts the influx of a million new residents to the Atlanta Region by 2030, and a number of them will be settling in DeKalb County. This will present a complex and dynamic challenge to the DeKalb County Department of Parks and Recreation as it strives to provide services for residents. DeKalb County's total area comprises 268.3 square miles. It is a mature county, and it is approximately 87-percent developed. The population density of the County is 4.03 persons per acre, making it by far the most dense county in the Atlanta Region, as well as in the State of Georgia. Parks and recreation are essential elements of DeKalb's quality of life, and their importance will only increase as the County becomes denser and more populous.

The continued urbanization and scarcity of availability of land in the County presents both challenges and opportunities for providing local parks and recreational services.

The continued urbanization and scarcity of availability of land in the County presents both challenges and opportunities for providing local parks and recreational services. The DeKalb County Department of Parks and Recreation has an operating budget of approximately \$23 million and is divided into four collaborative divisions: Park Services, Park Planning and Development, Administration, and Recreational Services. The goal for this 2010 DeKalb County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan is to set the direction for the Department by identifying the standards, policies, and resources required to achieve the County's goals for parks and recreation. The Master Plan includes planning for operations, programs, facilities, open space, and park land needs.



One of the goals of the County is to meet the recreation needs of all age groups

## 2.2 Vision Statement

To Create and Connect Communities through People, Parks, and Programs.



## 2.3 Purpose of the Plan

Parks, greenways, open space, and recreation services are integral parts of the fabric of a healthy community. Each serves to strengthen structure, culture, connectivity, and unique sense of place for residents and visitors. For DeKalb County residents, the availability of places to walk, play, and recreate help to determine their quality of life. People enjoy spending time outdoors, and in a county as urbanized as DeKalb, public parks provide the greatest opportunity for this to occur.

The primary purpose of the 2010 DeKalb County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan is to help create a collective vision for the County in regards to the types of parks and recreation services to be provided over the next decade.

To achieve this goal, the DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Department initiated a process that builds upon previous planning efforts, seeks input from stake holders and constituents, and develops a plan of action that leads to improving recreational opportunities in the County.

The premise of the Master Plan is that strong parks and recreation programs have the ability to:

- Provide social benefits by connecting people with neighbors of other ages, incomes, backgrounds, and abilities. Parks and recreation build community pride and spirit.
- Provide economic benefits by improving the quality of life in the community and helping to attract businesses and residents to the County. First-rate parks and recreation programs and facilities are a competitive advantage for DeKalb County in economic development.
- Provide benefits to the environment by connecting people with and educating them about nature. Greenways and linear parks can provide alternative transportation opportunities. Parks and open space are essential in minimizing the impact of sprawl and environmental degradation.
- Provide benefits to individuals by promoting physical fitness and self-improvement. Opportunities for exercise and being outdoors result in greater physical fitness, emotional well-being, and connectivity to nature.

One goal of this Master Plan is to help establish the value and importance of parks, recreation, and open space in DeKalb County. The Master Plan will create a flexible strategy to enhance community character through the development and operations of parks and open space, as well as natural, manmade, cultural, and landscape elements. Public parks, open space facilities and leisure time services are not separate from the community, but instead serve to connect and strengthen the community. This connectivity will enhance quality of life as the population in DeKalb County continues to grow and develop.

## 2.4 Scope of the Plan and Summary of the Planning Process

This document provides DeKalb County with a 10-year “action plan” that is a living, dynamic document, constantly growing and changing to reflect the needs of the County. The plan should be reviewed annually, and adjustments made as needed to ensure the Master Plan is meeting its stated goals.

The result is a realistic plan that accounts for the needs of the citizens while enhancing community connectivity...

The objective of the planning process is to develop a plan with measurable implementation goals in which the parks, recreation and green space needs of the community are balanced with the fiscal responsibilities of the County. The result is a realistic plan that accounts for the needs of the citizens while enhancing community connectivity, including land use patterns and the realities of economics and politics.

The development of the 2010 DeKalb County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan included the following tasks:

- Project Initiation and Establishment of the Master Plan Direction – The purpose was to establish an understanding of what the plan would accomplish and to assure that the plan is responsive to the needs of DeKalb County.
- Public Participation & Involvement/Communications Plan – Because of the importance of stakeholder involvement, a comprehensive and inclusive public participation plan was developed to ensure the public had opportunities for input during the planning process. The Public Involvement/Communications Plan described how meetings would be publicized, how comments would be organized and responded to, and addressed all other public communications efforts.
- Data Collection – The necessary documents, plans, and other data that would benefit the planning process were compiled.
- Inventory of Existing Parks, Recreation, Open Space Areas and Facilities – Existing park assets and other resources were inventoried to determine what was currently available that could contribute to meeting existing and future standards. The inventory included County parkland, open spaces, trails, cultural areas, historic and environmental features, and other properties maintained as community resources.
- Inventory of Other Leisure and Recreation Providers -- Other recreation opportunities and leisure providers in the County that are owned and operated by other public, private or non-profit organizations were inventoried.
- Fee-based Programs Review – Fee-based programs in the County were analyzed, and policies to guide existing and future decisions about fee-based programs were recommended.
- Establish Needs – A County-wide needs assessment was conducted to determine the demand for services. The needs assessment, in association with the inventory of existing facilities, highlighted potential areas of shortfall or oversupply. The needs assessment included a survey of DeKalb County residents.
- Establishment of Park Standards – A standard classification system of parks, recreation opportunities, and open space types was recommended based upon an analysis of current DeKalb standards, the benchmark Counties of Gwinnett and Cobb, and National Recreation and Parks Association Standards and Guidelines.
- Review of Security Issues – Potential security and vandalism issues were reviewed, and strategies were recommended for making the parks safer.
- Development of Action Plan – This task focused on presenting recommendations and exploring methods of funding them.





A skateboarder trying his hand at Brook Run

## 2.4 Public Participation Process

The public's vision, trust, and support drive the planning effort for the 2010 DeKalb County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Stakeholder involvement is paramount in generating enthusiasm and building broader community support for innovative parks, recreation, and open space planning in the years ahead.

One of the first tasks was to prepare a Public Involvement and Communications Plan. This plan identified how many public meetings would be conducted, as well as a strategy for communicating with press, a web strategy, and all other communications efforts. The public involvement strategy included the following:

- Development of a short presentation, suitable for use at each subsequent meeting, to inform citizens about the planning process and opportunities for involvement.
- Interviews with key stakeholders.
- Public meetings to discuss project goals.
- Public meetings to present draft recommendations.

A more complete overview of the public participation process is presented in "Section 4: Public Participation" of this report.

## 2.5 Organization of the Report

Following the Executive Summary (Section 1) and this Introduction (Section 2), the report is organized as follows:

**“Section 3: Overview of DeKalb County Parks and Recreation”** examines the history of the Department, developments in Parks and Recreation, and changes in the County since 2000. There is a review of the update of the 2005 Greenspace Plan as well as demographic and socioeconomic information and an overview of parks and recreation facilities.

**“Section 4: Public Participation”** provides an overview of the public involvement process and a summary of comments from a public survey; public meetings; and interviews with Department employees, the Executive Team, representatives of the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners, and the County’s Parks & Recreation Advisory Board.

**“Section 5: Parks and Recreation Standards”** provides an overview of standards for parks and facilities, and studies how they should be applied in DeKalb County.

**“Section 6: Park Analysis and Recommendations”** provides an overview of parks and includes recommendations on the type, number, size, and location of new parks in the County.

**“Section 7: Facility Analysis and Recommendations”** explores the existing facilities in the County and makes recommendations about the type, number, and location of new facilities.

**“Section 8: Planning & Implementation Strategies”** presents a series of recommendations on a variety of issues. These include: delivery services, economics and finances, fees, maintenance, health and wellness, and social programming.

**“Section 9: Next Steps & Priorities”** provides direction on implementing the recommendations in this plan, and it also sets priorities on these recommendations.

**“Section 10: Sources”** provides documentation on all materials used in the development of this report.

**“Section 11: Appendix”** includes notes, surveys, forms, a detailed inventory, and other information used to identify trends, make recommendations, and provide support for decisions.



## 3.0 Overview of DeKalb County Parks and Recreation

### 3.1 History

DeKalb County was established from parts of Henry, Fayette and Gwinnett Counties. The General Assembly of the State of Georgia appointed five commissioners who picked land lot 246 in the 15th militia district as the County site. The County was named after Baron Johann de Kolb, a native of Germany and self-proclaimed baron who aided the colonists in their fight for independence. The county seat was named for Stephen Decatur, a naval hero in the War of 1812.

Once a mostly rural county, DeKalb now has a number of fairly dense urban areas... Understanding the County's demographics and socioeconomics is important for developing recreation opportunities

The County established the Parks and Recreation Department in 1953. The Department took a major step forward in 1987 with its People for Parks Bond program. Many in the County felt that despite its potential, the People for Parks Bond program did not achieve its stated goals.

In response to the 1987 People for Park Bond program, a planning initiative was completed for DeKalb County Parks and Recreation in 1996 by a Blue Ribbon Committee. The Committee's final report highlighted a variety of issues and trends that were the impetus for the effort. The report determined that rapid urbanization, changes in demographic patterns, and budgetary restraints created a need for re-evaluation of the current system.

The 2000-2010 DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan explains that the Blue Ribbon Committee's "key findings and strategies reflect a renewed commitment to programs, policies, facilities, and funding that address many of the current deficits in the system."

### 3.2 Departmental Mission

The Vision of the DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Department is "To Create and Connect Communities through People, Parks, and Programs."

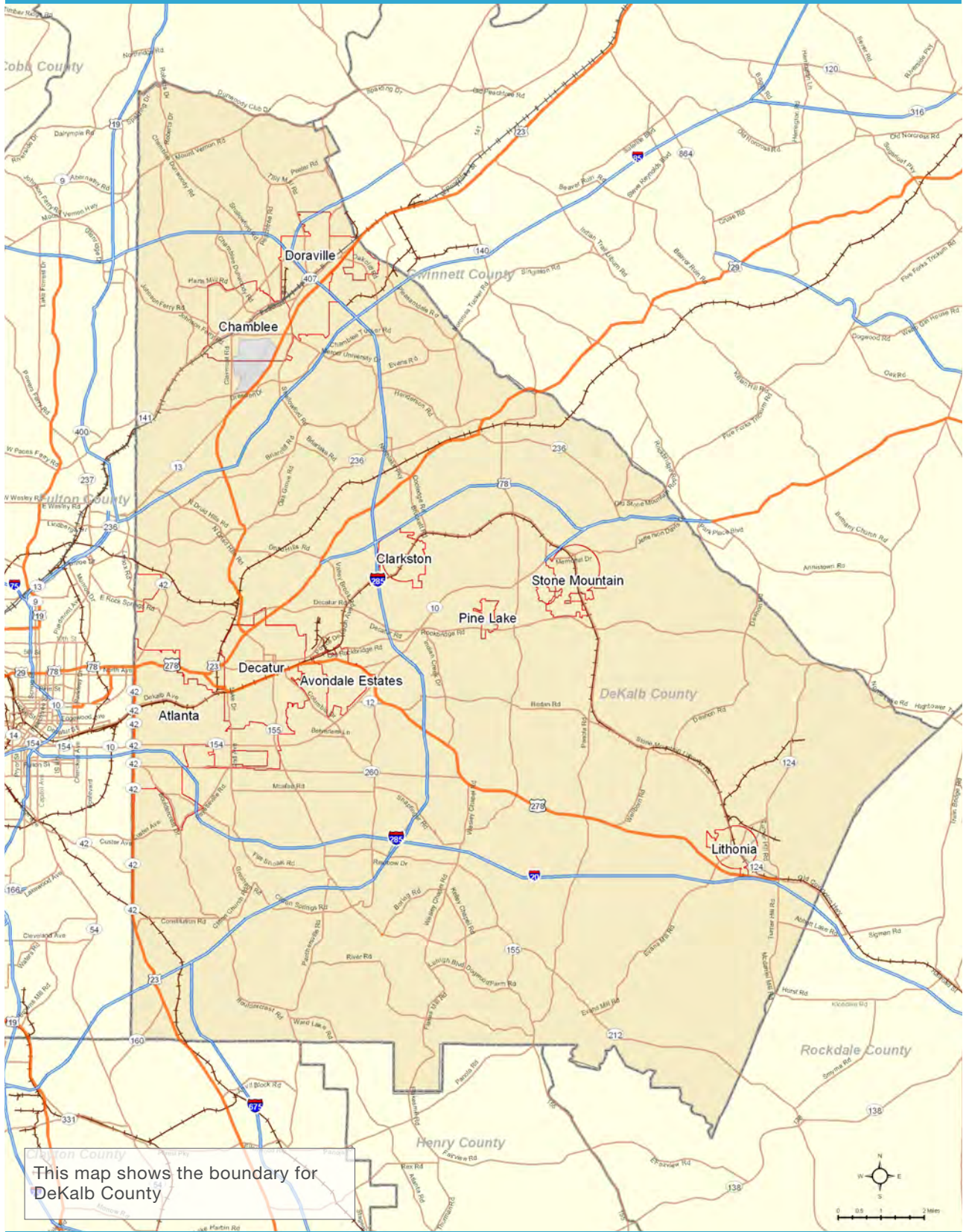
The Mission Statement for the Department is as follows:

"A dedicated and professional team commits to leading the community into the future to make parks and recreation opportunities the community's connection to a prosperous future; through equitable levels of quality neighborhood and signature parks and recreation services that enhance the quality of life and promote a thriving community.

The 2008 Departmental Goals are to:

- Implement standards to protect physical and natural resources and assets.
- Ensure the highest level of safety and security throughout the park system.
- Maximize resources by fostering collaborations and strategic alliances and partnerships.
- Develop and implement effective internal and external marketing strategies.
- Provide quality diverse programs and services for citizens of all ages.
- Establish a sustainable capital improvement program.
- Implement Continuous Improvement Processes.
- Ensure the highest level of fiscal integrity and accountability.
- Maintain a workforce of employees prepared for excellence.

Figure 3-1: DeKalb County



This map shows the boundary for DeKalb County

### 3.3 Demographics & Socioeconomics

DeKalb County has undergone significant changes in recent years. Once a mostly rural county, DeKalb now has a number of fairly dense urban areas. The rest of the County is primarily suburban. Understanding the County’s demographics and socioeconomics is important for developing recreation opportunities.

**Table 3-1: Population of the Atlanta Region, 1900-2006**

Year	Total Population	Population increase per year	Percent increase per year
1900	274,912		
1910	357,324	8,241	2.7%
1920	437,557	8,023	2.0%
1930	540,319	10,276	2.1%
1940	620,034	7,972	1.4%
1950	792,211	17,218	2.5%
1960	1,093,220	30,101	3.3%
1970	1,500,823	40,760	3.2%
1980	1,896,382	39,556	2.4%
1990	2,557,800	66,142	3.0%
2000	3,429,379	87,158	3.0%
2005	3,813,700	76,864	2.1%
2006	3,925,400	111,700	2.9%

Note: 1990 population is adjusted for Census undercount.  
Source: Atlanta Regional Commission

#### Regional Demographics

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) is the official planning and intergovernmental coordination agency for a 10-county region that includes DeKalb County. ARC’s 2006 Population and Housing in the Atlanta Region presents population and housing estimates for the City of Atlanta and the 10 counties in the Atlanta Region as of April 1, 2006. The information in this document comes from the ARC report.

As of April 1, 2006, the population in the 10-county Atlanta region was 3,925,400, an increase of 496,021 from the 2000 Census (see Table 1). The region has averaged more than 85,000 new residents per year since 1990, and this growth has had a tremendous impact on the overall character of the County.

DeKalb is currently the third most populated county in the region with 710,400 people (based on the 2005 Census Bureau estimate). It is interesting to note, though, that DeKalb County’s share of the region’s population declined from 25.1-percent in 1980 to 18.1-percent in 2006. (Source: ARC 2006 Population and Housing)

#### DeKalb County Demographics

DeKalb County has experienced significant growth over the last twenty years, and that trend is expected to continue. Population in the County increased 40% between 1980 and 2000 (from 483,024 people to 665,865), and by the year 2020 the population is expected to be at 848,706, an increase of approximately 28%. (See Tables 2, 3, and 4.)

The 2000 Strategic Plan stated, “DeKalb County continues to grow but at a slower rate than most of the other metro Atlanta counties, mostly due to lack of developable land.” Growth in the

**Table 3-2: Historical Trends, DeKalb County, 1980-2005**

Year	Total Population	Change from Previous Census	Percent change from Previous Census	Change Since 1980
1980	483,024	x	x	x
1985	514,430	31,406	6.50%	6.50%
1990	545,837	62,813	13.00%	13.00%
1995	585,400	39,563	7.25%	21.19%
2000	665,865	120,028	21.99%	37.85%
2005	711,577	45,712	6.87%	47.32%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census; DCA DataViews (Figure 6)

**Table 3-3: Population Projection, DeKalb County, 2000-2025**

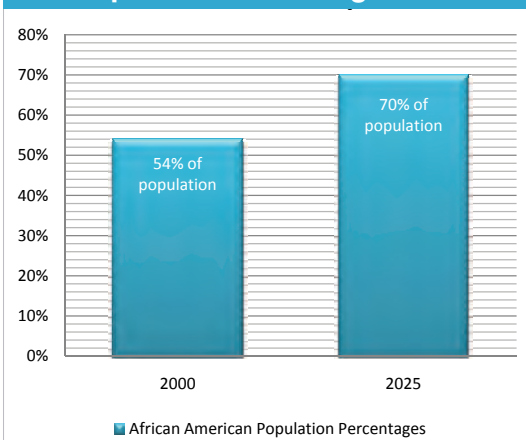
Year	Total Population	Change from Previous Census	Percent change from Previous Census	Change Since 2000
2000	665,865	120,028	21.99%	x
2005	711,577	45,712	6.87%	6.87%
2010	757,286	91,421	13.73%	13.73%
2015	802,996	45,710	6.04%	20.59%
2020	848,706	91,420	12.07%	27.46%
2025	894,416	45,710	5.39%	34.32%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census; DCA DataViews

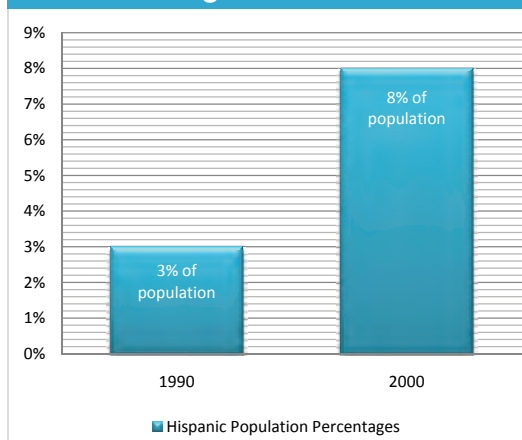
County occurred much faster than most predicted, and as a result parks and recreation facilities in the County have not been able to meet demands.

Since the mid 1990's, growth has accelerated south of Interstate-20, and that trend is continuing. South DeKalb is attracting the greatest number of new residents, and most growth is expected to continue in the southeastern portions of the County because that is where vacant land is located. (Source DeKalb Comp Plan 2005-2025)

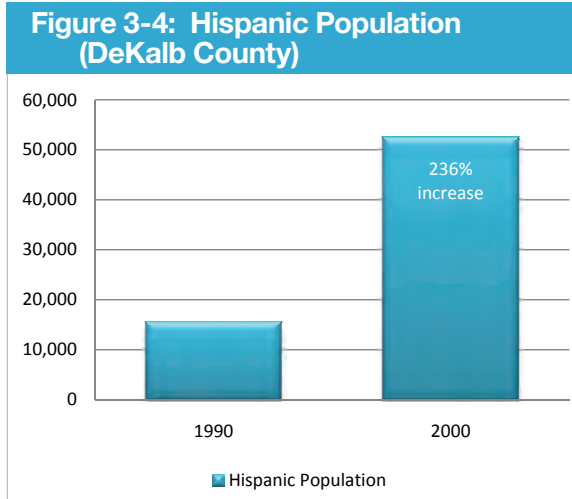
**Figure 3-2: African American Population Percentage**



**Figure 3-3: Hispanic Population Percentage**



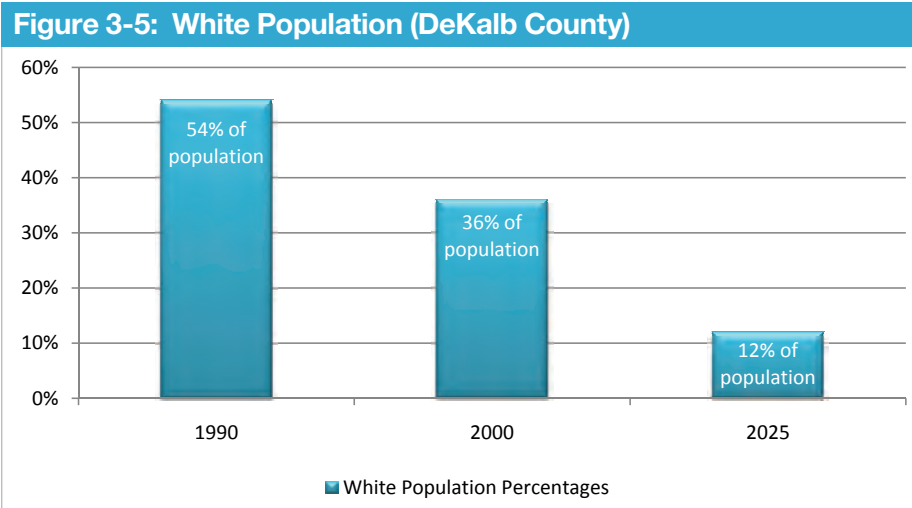
As the population in DeKalb County continues to increase, so too does the need for public open space. The pace of development within the County has resulted in a loss of its green space, and that trend is expected to continue. As population density increases, the amount of vacant or available land decreases. Also, as land costs continue to rise, the availability of affordable land suitable for future parks will continue to decrease.



**Population by Race and Ethnicity**

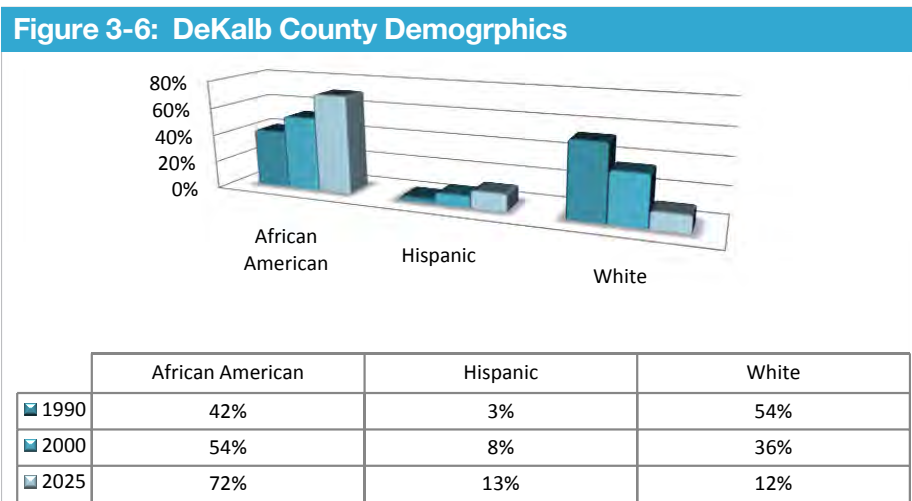
The ethnic makeup of the population in DeKalb County has changed significantly in the last decade. The majority population of DeKalb is African American, comprising 54% of the population in 2000. Projections indicate this number will rise to more than 70% by 2025. A large number of immigrants are classified as African American, with many being from Sub-Saharan African nations. (Source: DeKalb Comprehensive Plan 2005-2025)

The Hispanic population, although not a separate ethnic classification, is one of the fastest growing populations in DeKalb County. The population has increased from 15,619 in 1990 to 52,542 in 2000, an increase of 236%, and is expected to rise in coming years. The number of persons classified under “other race” also increased dramatically and will continue to do so. (Source DeKalb Comp Plan 2005-2025)



In contrast, 36% of the population in the County was classified as White in 2000, compared to 54% in 1990. That number is expected to drop to less than 12% by 2025.

DeKalb County has a very diverse ethnic population. The Atlanta Regional Commission produces their Global Atlanta Snapshots publication series, which is designed to increase familiarity with the culture, language and customs of the diverse population within the region, and it includes DeKalb County. The different ethnic communities that are addressed include: Asian Indians; (PDF) Bosnians; Brazilians; Central Americans; Chinese; Cubans; East Africans; English-Speaking Caribbeans; Ethiopians/Eritreans; Haitians; Iranians; Japanese; Koreans; Mexicans; Nigerians; Pakistanis; South Americans; Southeastern Asians; Russia/ Former Soviets; and Vietnamese. The Snapshots introduce and portray information about each community.



Asian-Indian residents - DeKalb County has two clusters of Asian-Indian residents: one just north of I-285, and one near the central part of the County. There were 4,731 in the County in 2000, making it the second only to Gwinnett County (6,575) in the



These maps, which show ethnic diversity in the Atlanta region, are from Atlanta Regional Commission's Global Atlanta Snapshots publication series

Figure 3-7: Asian-Indian Population in Atlanta

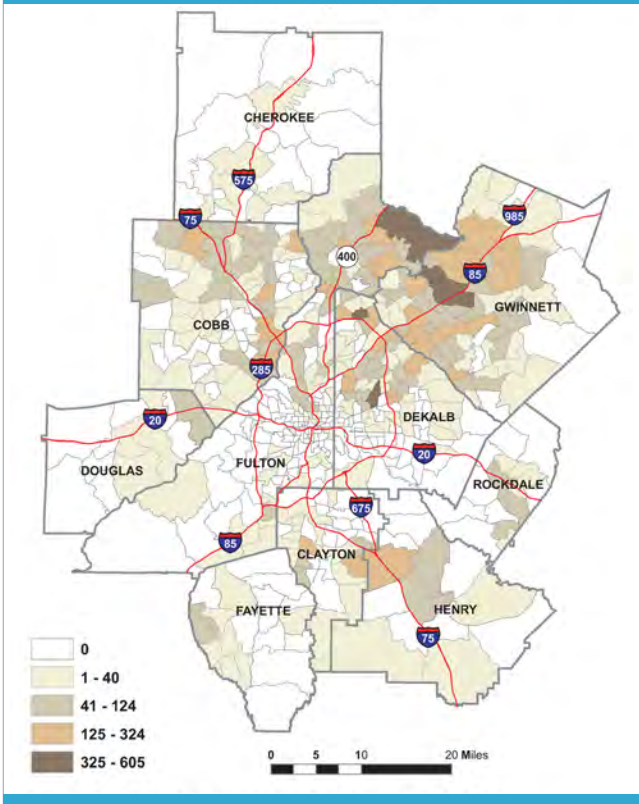


Figure 3-8: Brazilian Population in Atlanta

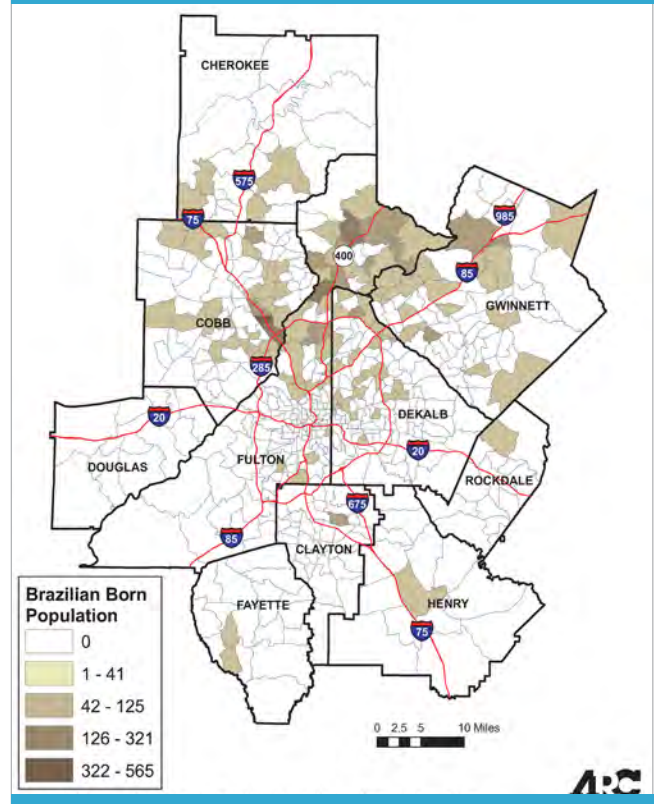


Figure 3-9: Caribbean Population in Atlanta

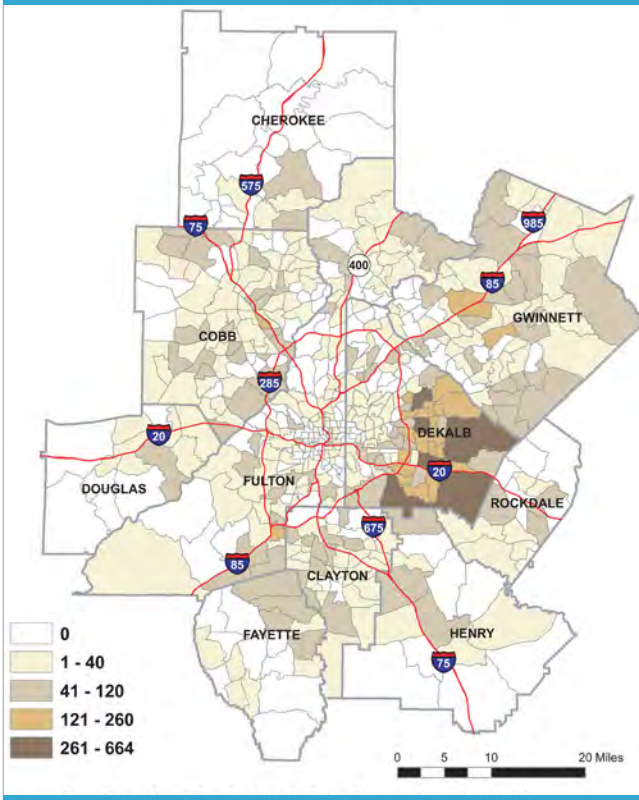
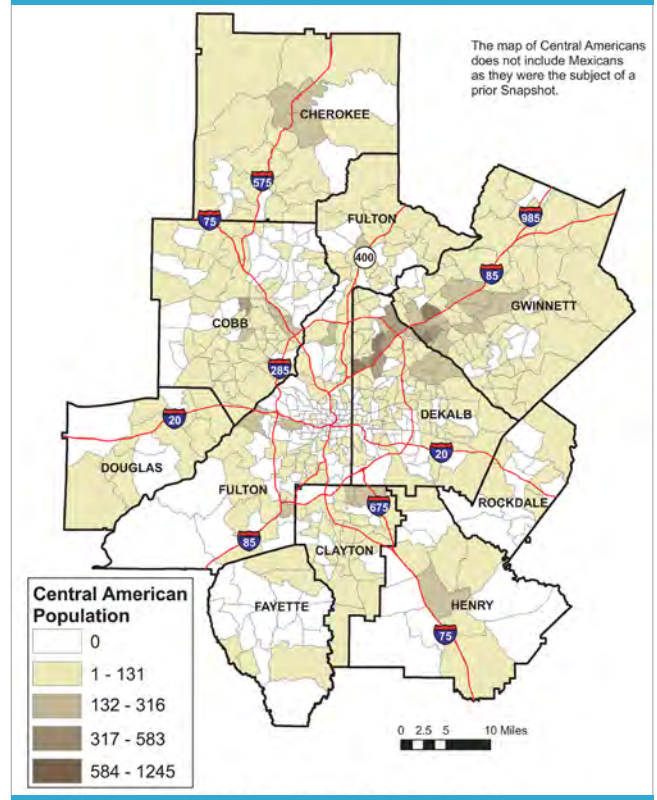


Figure 3-10: Central American Population



These maps, which show ethnic diversity in the Atlanta region, are from Atlanta Regional Commission's Global Atlanta Snapshots publication series

Figure 3-11: Chinese Population in Atlanta

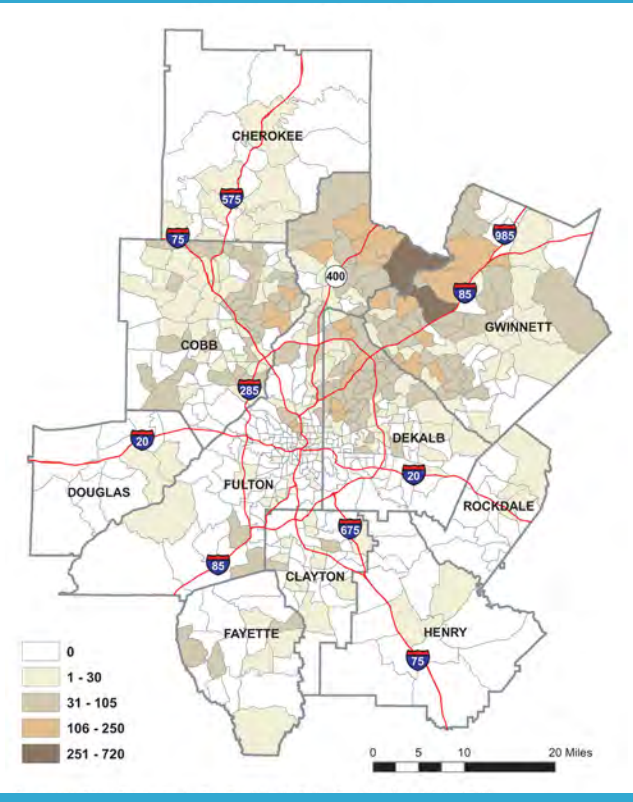


Figure 3-12: Cuban Population in Atlanta

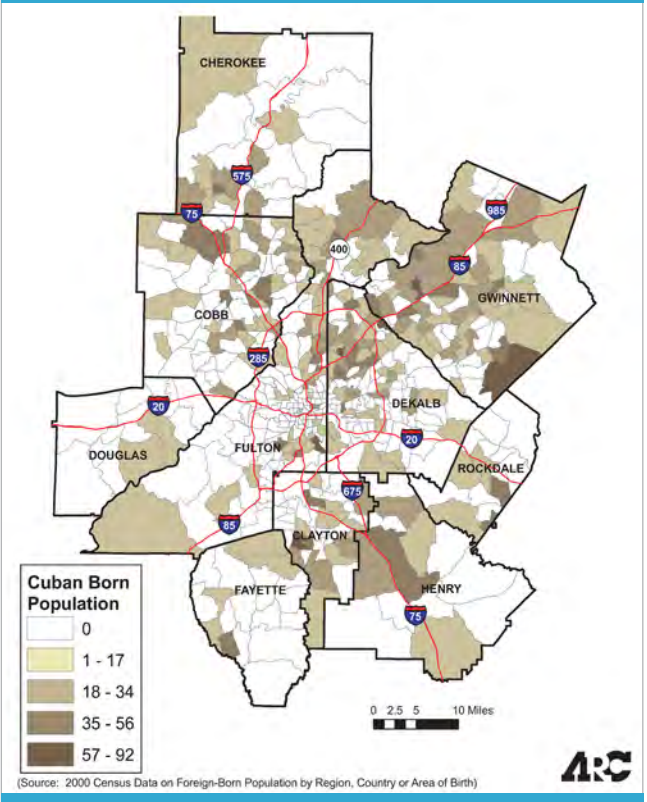


Figure 3-13: East African Population in Atlanta

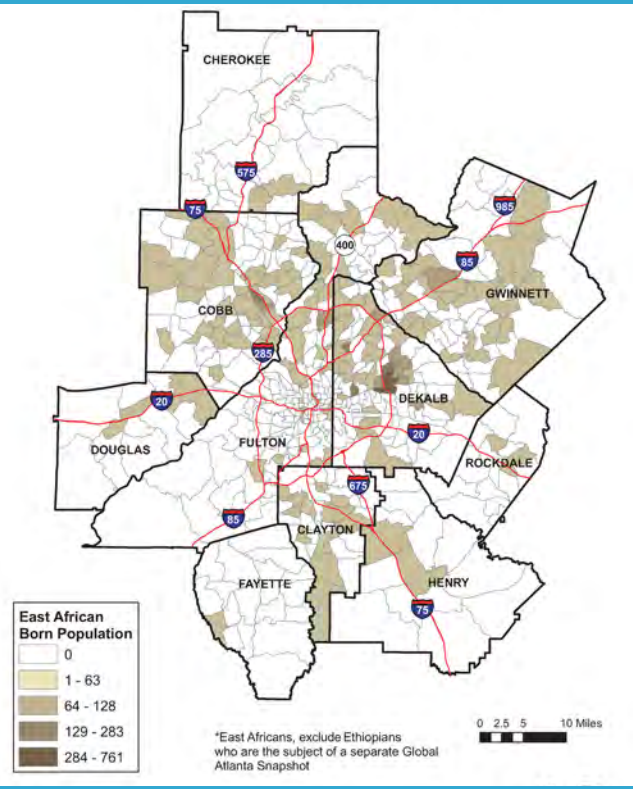
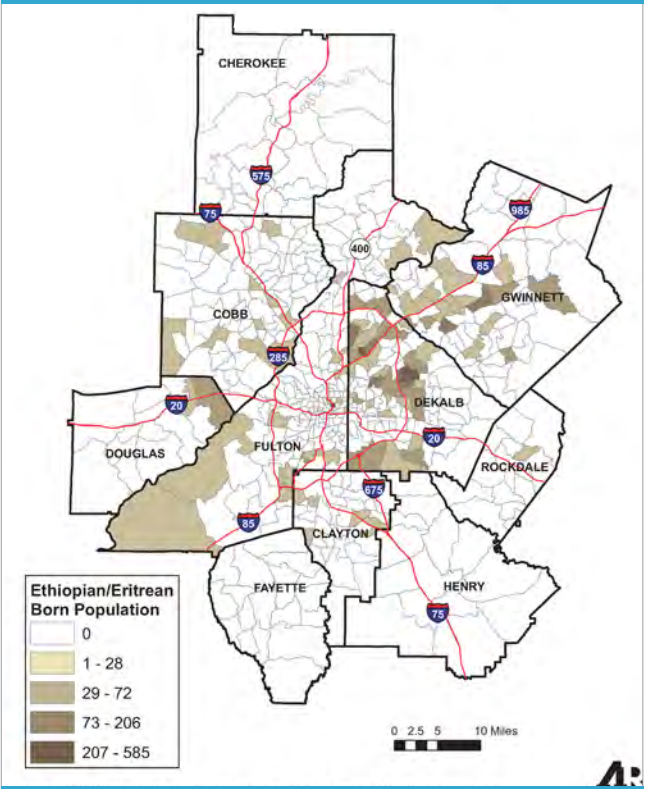


Figure 3-14: Ethiopian Population in Atlanta



These maps, which show ethnic diversity in the Atlanta region, are from Atlanta Regional Commission's Global Atlanta Snapshots publication series

Figure 3-15: Nigerian Population in Atlanta

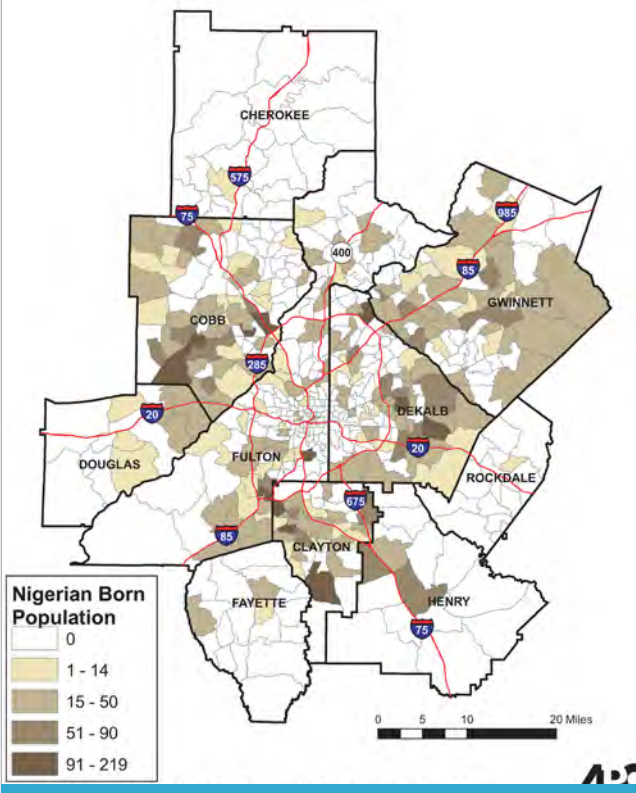


Figure 3-16: Iranian Population in Atlanta

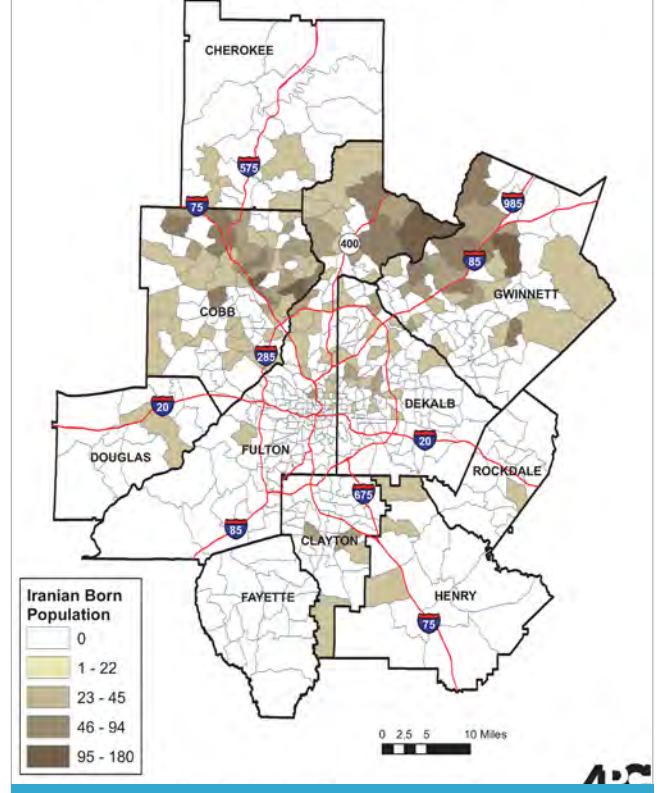


Figure 3-17: Pakistani Population in Atlanta

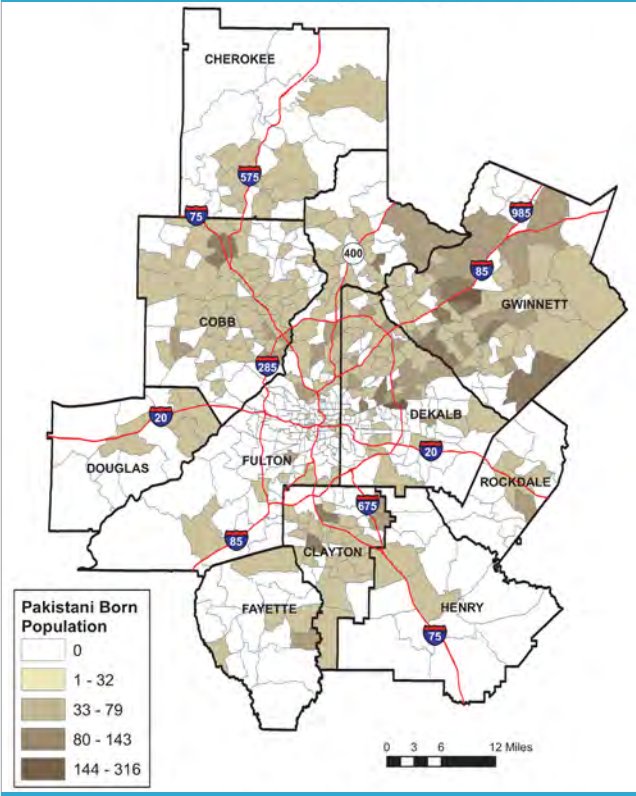
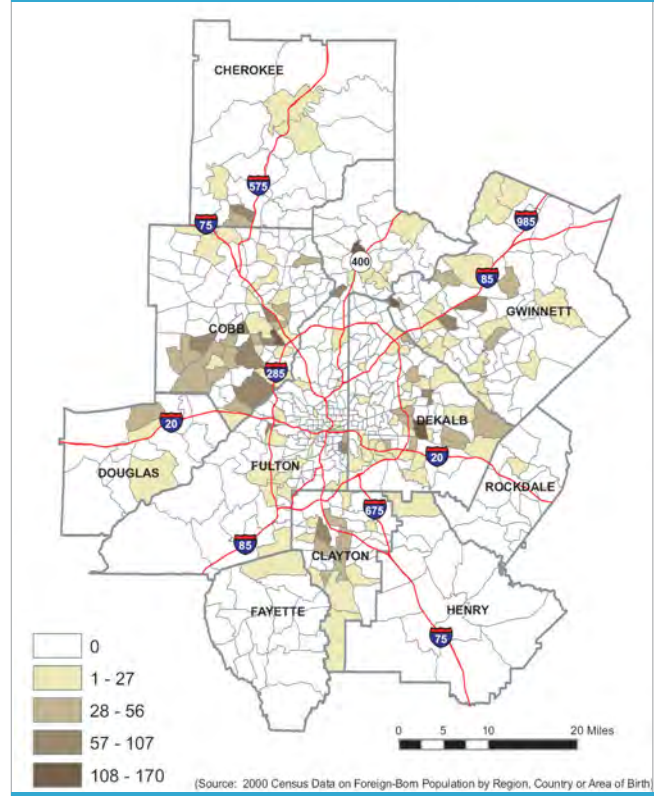


Figure 3-18: Haitian Population in Atlanta



(Source: 2000 Census Data on Foreign-Born Population by Region, Country or Area of Birth)

These maps, which show ethnic diversity in the Atlanta region, are from Atlanta Regional Commission's Global Atlanta Snapshots publication series

Figure 3-19: Japanese Population in Atlanta

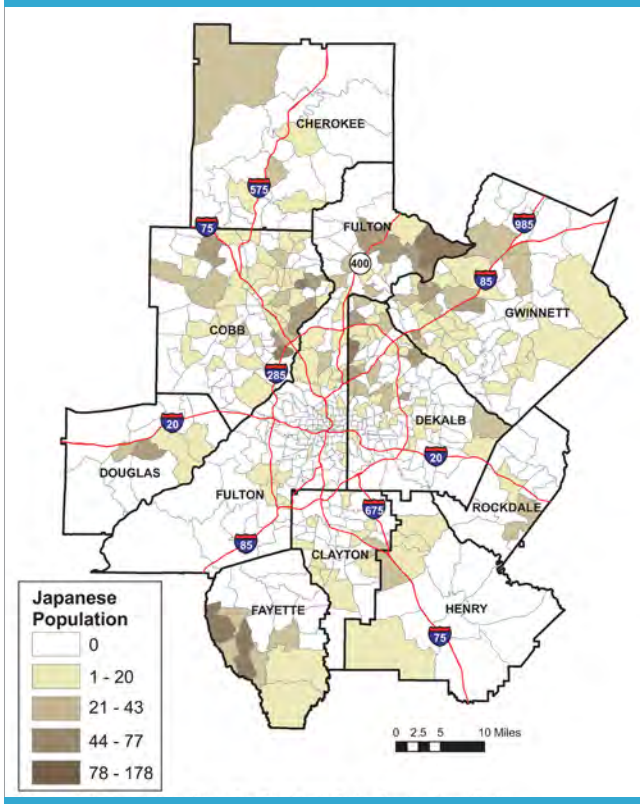


Figure 3-20: Korean Population in Atlanta

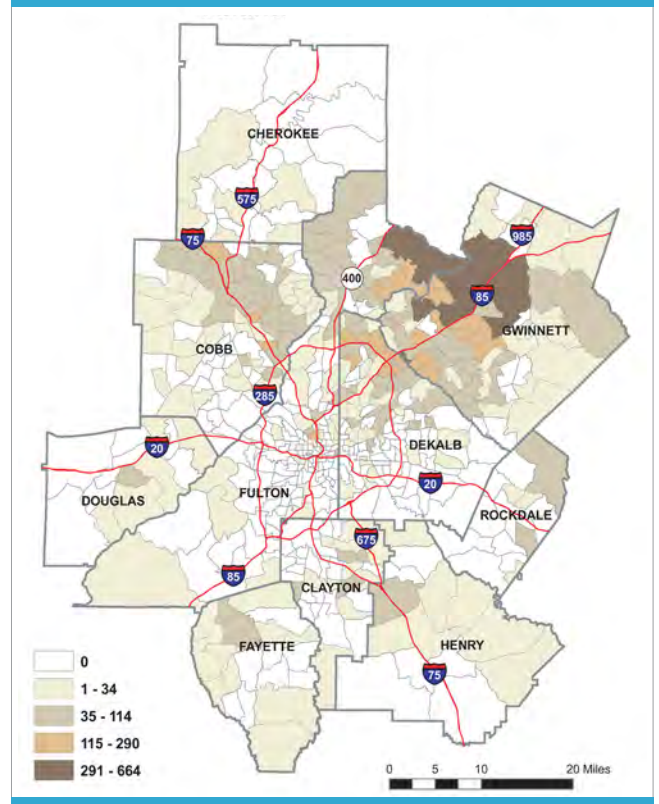


Figure 3-21: Mexican Population in Atlanta

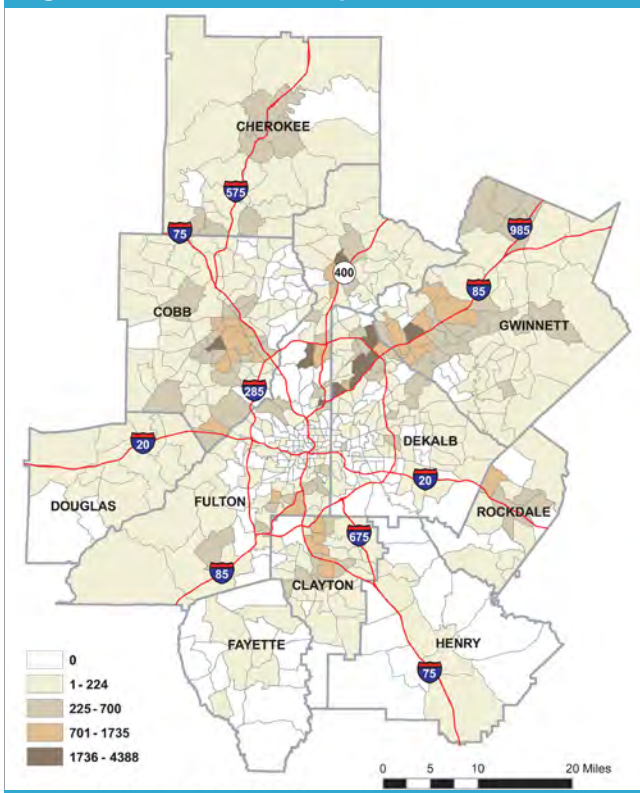
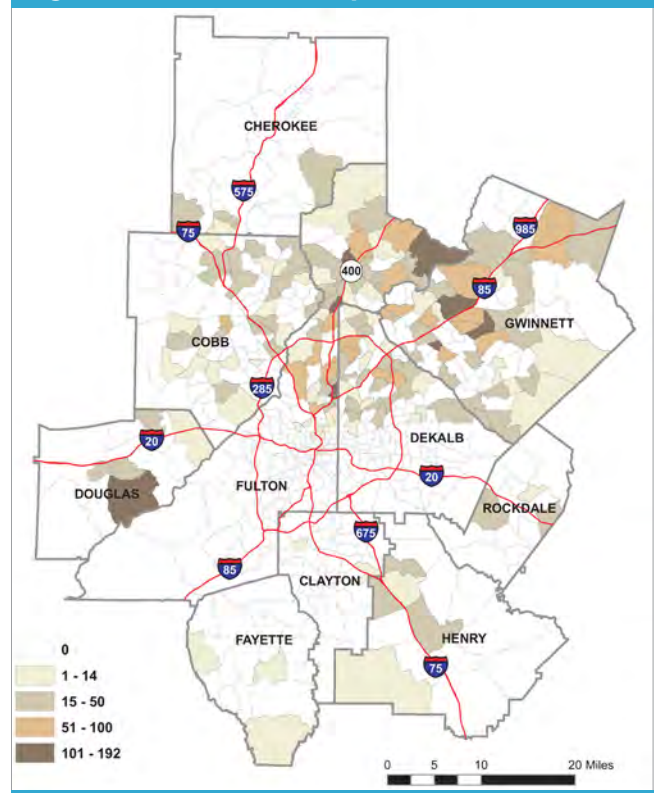
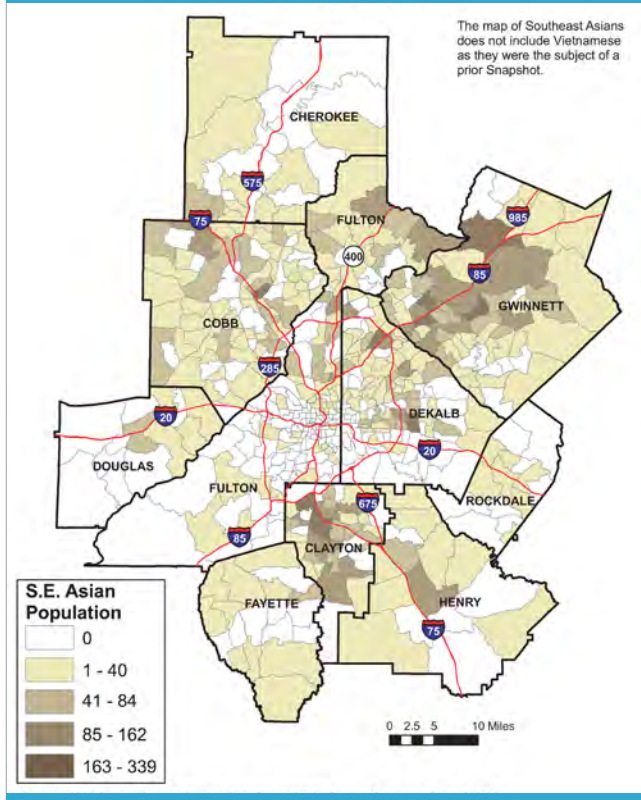


Figure 3-22: Russian Population in Atlanta

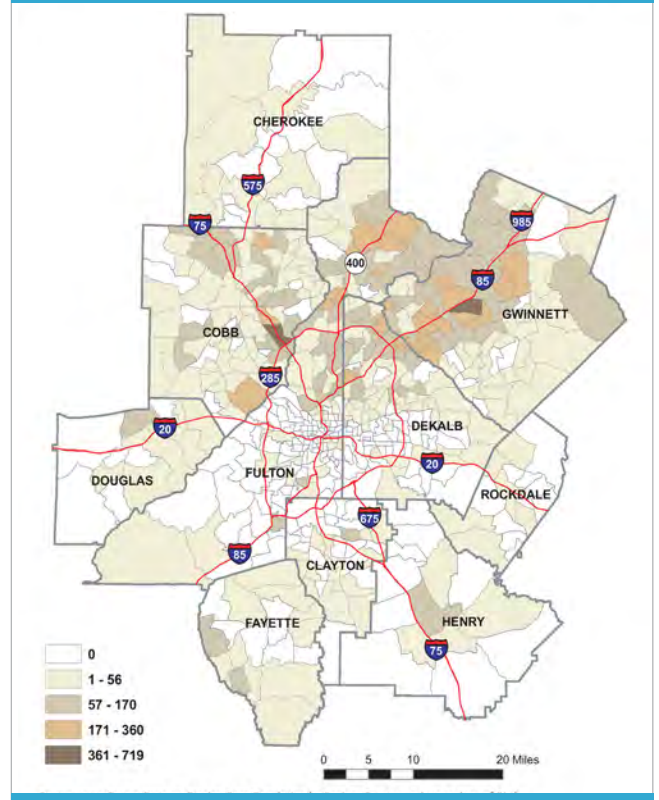


These maps, which show ethnic diversity in the Atlanta region, are from Atlanta Regional Commission's Global Atlanta Snapshots publication series

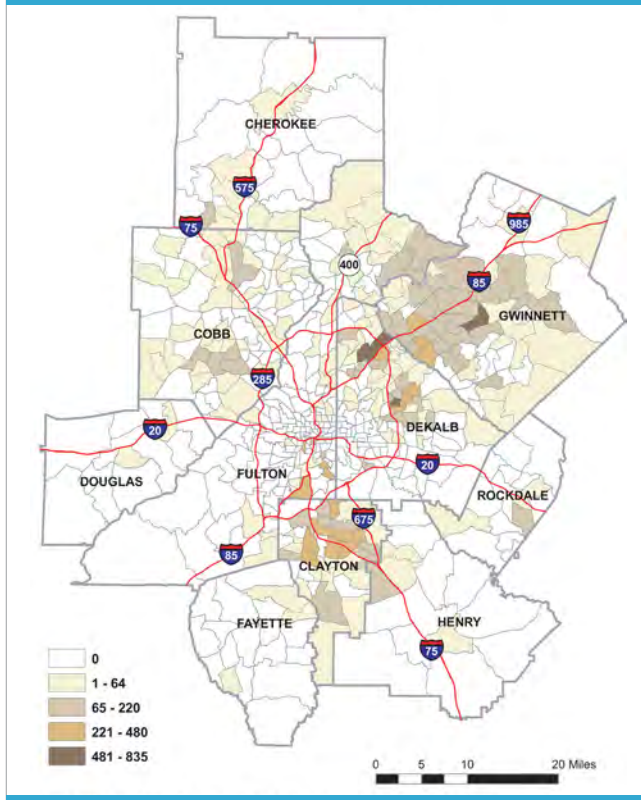
**Figure 3-23: Southeast Asian Population**



**Figure 3-24: South American Population**



**Figure 3-25: Vietnamese Population in Atlanta**



Atlanta Region.

Bosnians - The Bosnian community is centered in DeKalb County (2,400 residents) and Gwinnett County (1,200). DeKalb County is home to 53 percent of the Bosnians in the Atlanta region and 51 percent of the Bosnians living in Georgia. These people are located primarily in central, east, and the northern part of the County.

Brazilians - There are 4,557 Brazilians in the Atlanta Region, with most residing in Cobb County (1,813) and Fulton County (1,721). There are 353 Brazilians that live in DeKalb County, with most in the northern part of the county.

Central Americans - There are 24,804 Central Americans in the Atlanta Region. DeKalb County is home to the largest population, with 8,454, followed closely by Gwinnett with 7,367. Combined, DeKalb and Gwinnett are home to 64 percent of the Central Americans in the Atlanta region and 41 percent of the Central Americans living in Georgia. The greatest density of Central Americans in both counties is along the I-85 corridor.

Chinese - There are 110,789 Asians living in the region, and 13,500 of them are Chinese. Gwinnett County is home to the largest population of Chinese (3,868), followed by Fulton County (3,503) and DeKalb County (2,958). In DeKalb, Most of the Chinese in DeKalb County are along the I-85 corridor.

Cubans - There are 4,715 Cubans in the Atlanta Region, with 1,206 in DeKalb County and 1,018 in Gwinnett County. Fulton County is next with 926. DeKalb and Gwinnett are home to 43 percent of the Cubans in the Atlanta region and 32 percent of the Cubans living in Georgia.

East Africans - Within the 10-county region there are 7,054 East Africans. Overwhelmingly, DeKalb County is home to the largest population of East Africans with 4,217. DeKalb County is home to 60 percent of the East Africans in the Atlanta region and 52 percent of the East Africans living in Georgia. The largest concentrations of East Africans are found in DeKalb County along I-285 in Clarkston.

English-speaking Caribbean - DeKalb County is home to the largest population of English-speaking Caribbean with 10,210. This is by far the largest concentration of persons born in those countries. Almost half of English-speaking Caribbeans live in DeKalb County.

Ethiopians - DeKalb County is home to the largest population of Ethiopians with 3,024. Gwinnett County is next with 547. DeKalb County is home to 69 percent of the Ethiopians in the Atlanta region and 65 percent of the Ethiopians living in Georgia.

Haitians - Cobb County has approximately 1,376 Haitians, while DeKalb County is second with 1,225.

Iranians – DeKalb has the fourth largest number of Iranians (286), with Cobb County (1,341), Fulton County (1,175), and Gwinnett County (819) having the most.

Japanese - Cobb County has the largest population of Japanese, with 948, followed by DeKalb with 845.

Koreans – There are 17,465 Koreans in the Atlanta Region, with Gwinnett County having the largest population of Koreans, 7,499. Fulton County is second with 3,225, followed by DeKalb County (3,043) and Cobb County (2,476).

Mexicans – There are 112,925 Mexicans who live in the Atlanta region, with a large percentage living along the I-85 corridor. Most live in Gwinnet County (26,682), Cobb County (21,492), Fulton County (24,219), and DeKalb County (24,054).

Nigerians - DeKalb County is home to the largest population of Nigerians, with 2,192. This is more than a quarter of the 8,031 Nigerians who live in the area.

Pakistani – There are 4,852 Pakistani living in the Atlanta area, with many living in Gwinnett County (2,063). DeKalb County is next with a population of 764.

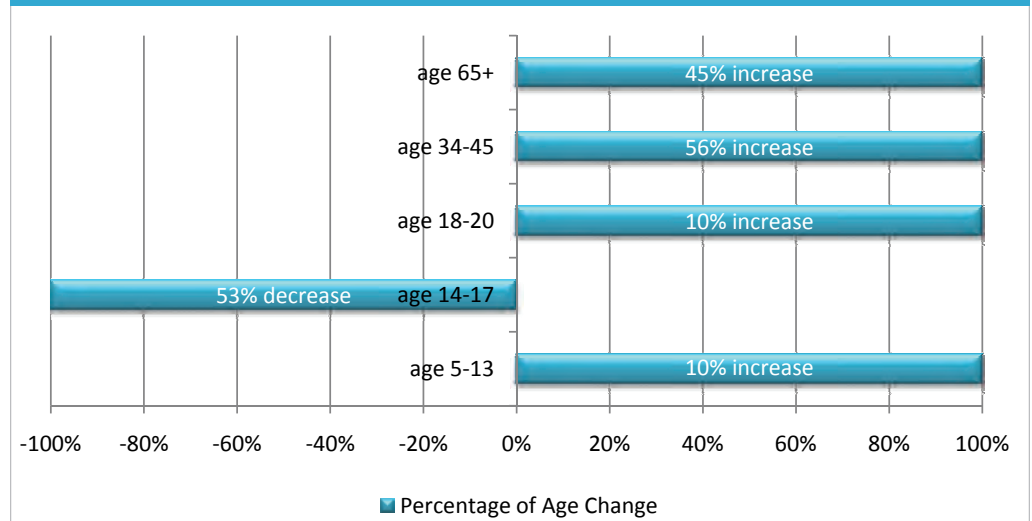
South Americans - Gwinnett County is home to the largest population of South Americans with 7,286. DeKalb (5,686), Cobb (5,645) and Fulton (5,430) also have large numbers of South Americans living in their county.

Southeast Asian - 14,025 Southeast Asians live in the area. Gwinnett County has the largest population with 4,045, followed by Clayton County (2,422), Cobb County (2,306), and DeKalb County (2,219)

Russians – There are 5,246 Russian/Former Soviet Citizens living in the Atlanta Region. Fulton County (1,701), Gwinnett County (1,650), and DeKalb County (796) having the greatest populations.

Vietnamese – In the Atlanta Region there are 21,047 Vietnamese living in the area. The greatest number live in Gwinnett County (6,077), DeKalb County (6,051), and Clayton County (4,047).

**Figure 3-26: DeKalb County Age Group Projections: 2025**

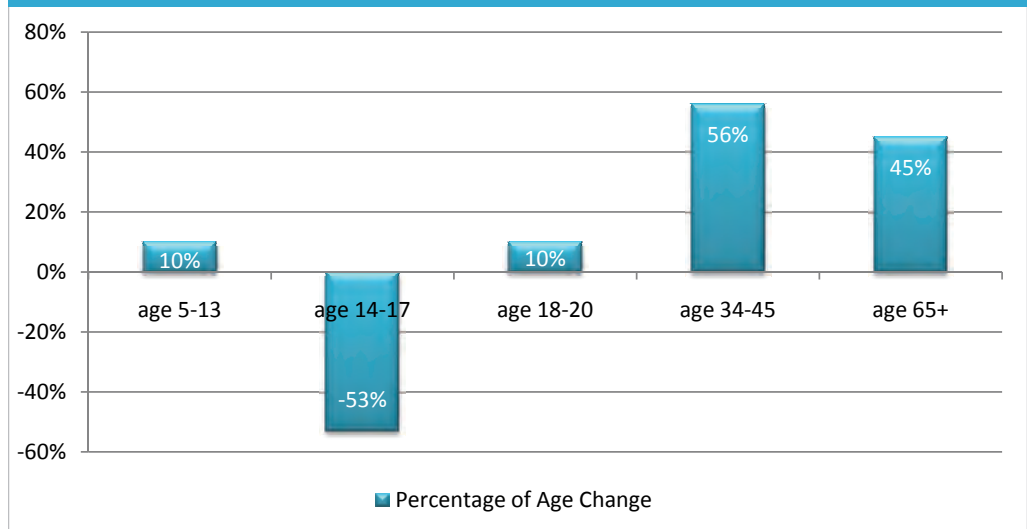


### Population by Age

In DeKalb County, the population is aging overall. According to projections, the largest population increase will occur within the 35-44 age group (56%) and the senior population of 65 and older (45%). According to the County Action Plan for Senior Services 2003-2007, DeKalb County has the second largest population of seniors 60 years and older in metropolitan Atlanta. (Source DeKalb Comp Plan 2005-2025)

In contrast, the 14-17 age group is expected to experience a substantial decrease (53%). This trend will have a significant impact on the types of recreation facilities provided by the County. This suggests that facilities used frequently by this age group, such as skateboard parks and sports courts and fields will be in less demand. The 5-13 and 18-20 age groups have increased slightly in recent years, but at a slower rate than other age groups.

Figure 3-27: DeKalb County Age Group Projections: 2025



### Housing

The region's housing stock increased by 276,015 units between 2000 and 2006, with single-family detached accounting for two out of every three units built during this time period. The region has an average of 2.63 persons per household. (Source: ARC 2006 Population and Housing)

One trend over the past decade is that residential lots have decreased significantly in size... There is not sufficient space for children to throw a baseball or play football in their backyard

A significant portion of DeKalb County's housing is relatively new, with a 40% increase in total available housing since 1980. The majority of housing units constructed during this period are single-family detached and multiple-unit structures such as triplexes and small apartment buildings. Total housing units are expected to increase by 28% between 2005 and 2025 to meet population demands. (Source DeKalb Comp Plan 2005-2025)

In DeKalb County, the number of multi-family homes is significantly higher than in other parts of the metro-Atlanta region. The County hosts a number of townhouses, cluster home developments, and apartments. The County's Comprehensive Plan 2005-2025 encourages the development of single-family residential homes.

One trend over the past decade is that residential lots have decreased significantly in size, so yards are no longer a viable option for active recreation. There is not sufficient space for children to throw a baseball or play football in their backyard. In addition, the high percentage of multi-family homes and apartments in the County means that many families do not have private yards.

### 3.4 Demographic Analysis

Parks and recreation use is being influenced by the generation known as the "Baby Boomers." This is true in DeKalb County as well as in other parts of the country. Nationally, the two largest demographic groups that have to be addressed are the Baby Boomers, which are in and nearing retirement, and their children, who are in their late 20's and 30's and are starting their own families. Much of the pressure to provide recreation opportunities for the entire family is coming from the Baby Boomer generation.



Shifts in ethnicity and culture have an impact on recreation preferences. Therefore, it is important to understand the barriers or constraints to recreation participation, such as discomfort due to the perception of discrimination and possible language barriers.

The ability to pay for outdoor recreation can vary considerably as a result of income disparities. Outdoor recreation opportunities must also accommodate a growing active senior population, in addition to an expanding youth and special needs populations.

Due to population growth in the County, demand for outdoor recreation will soon out-pace the supply of land and available recreation resources, as well as the ability of recreation providers, including local and state government, to afford to meet this need. (Source SCORP).

The greatest population density is in the western and northern part of the county. The northern part of the county has the greatest demand for parks and recreation, due in part to the number of people here, but also because of the lack of recreational facilities. The northern part of the county is also the most diverse, so the types of facilities will have to be addressed.

The southern and eastern parts of the county have the lowest density, and they are much more rural in character than are other parts of the county. These areas are among the fastest growing in the county, but that is primarily because this is where land is most available. Recreation demand in these areas is less simply because there are future people.

The overall demographic pattern in the county is projected to remain pretty much the same over the next 20 years or so. The entire county will continue to grow and become denser, and the availability of land for potential new parks will continue to decrease.

### **3.5 2000 DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan**

The 2000-2010 Plan sought to engage the public through systemized involvement opportunities such as kick-off meetings, mail surveys, and public meetings. It also established a base-line of data that could drive level-of-service guidelines and benchmarks. Thus, the Plan was largely a fact-finding effort to document the existing conditions of DeKalb County's parks and recreation facilities. The Plan also attempted to incorporate consideration of state and national influences on the demand for park services by focusing on trends analysis. A variety of trends were assessed, including performance-based budgeting, land value, recreation facility trends, and matrix management.

The 2000 Plan not only presented data, but made a series of recommendations for the Department. It recommended the Department move to a market-driven system that could leverage County resources to pursue or acquire other public funds. The final assessment declared that \$260 million was needed for capital improvements. Moreover, it specified that the parks system needed a consistent revenue stream and a commitment of General Fund dollars for park upkeep and maintenance.

### **3.6 Major Accomplishments since 2000**

The County has undertaken a number of development and improvement projects for parks and recreation in recent years. The funding for these projects was provided by a \$125 million Parks Bond program issued in 2001. The majority of the Bond's funds went toward acquisition,

Figure 3-28: Population Density by Census Tract 2000

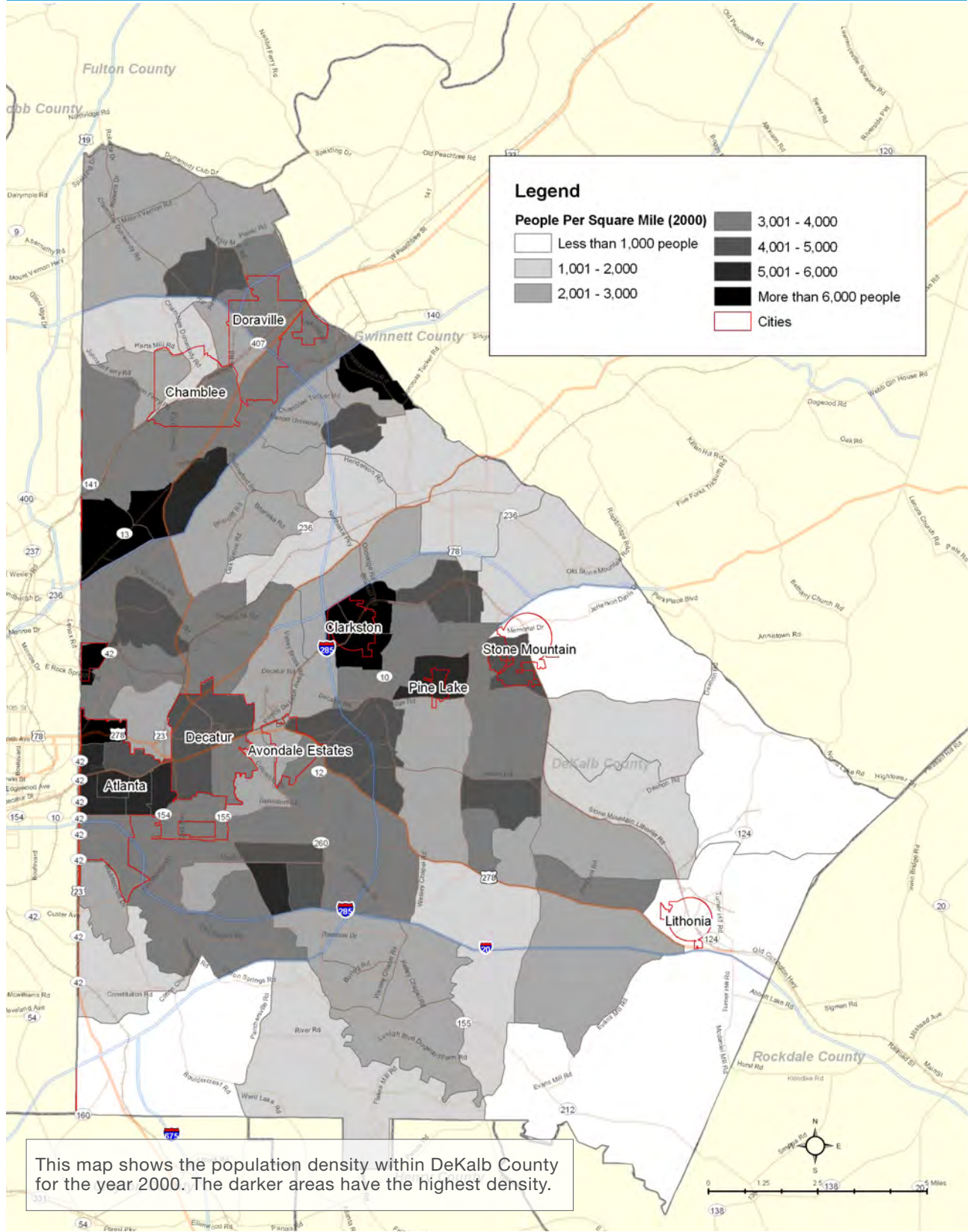


Figure 3-29: Population Density by Census Tract 2006

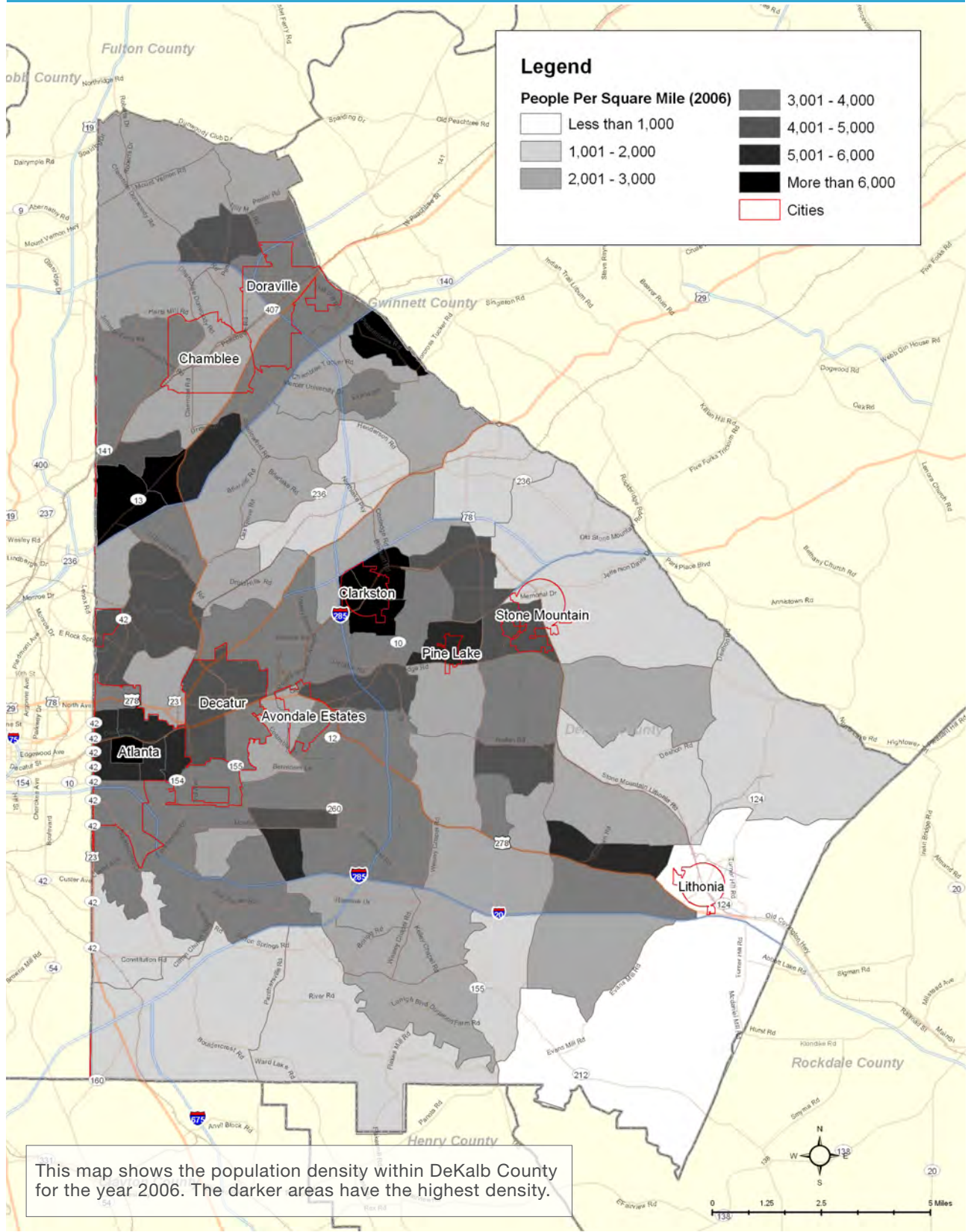


Figure 3-30: Population Density by Census Tract 2010

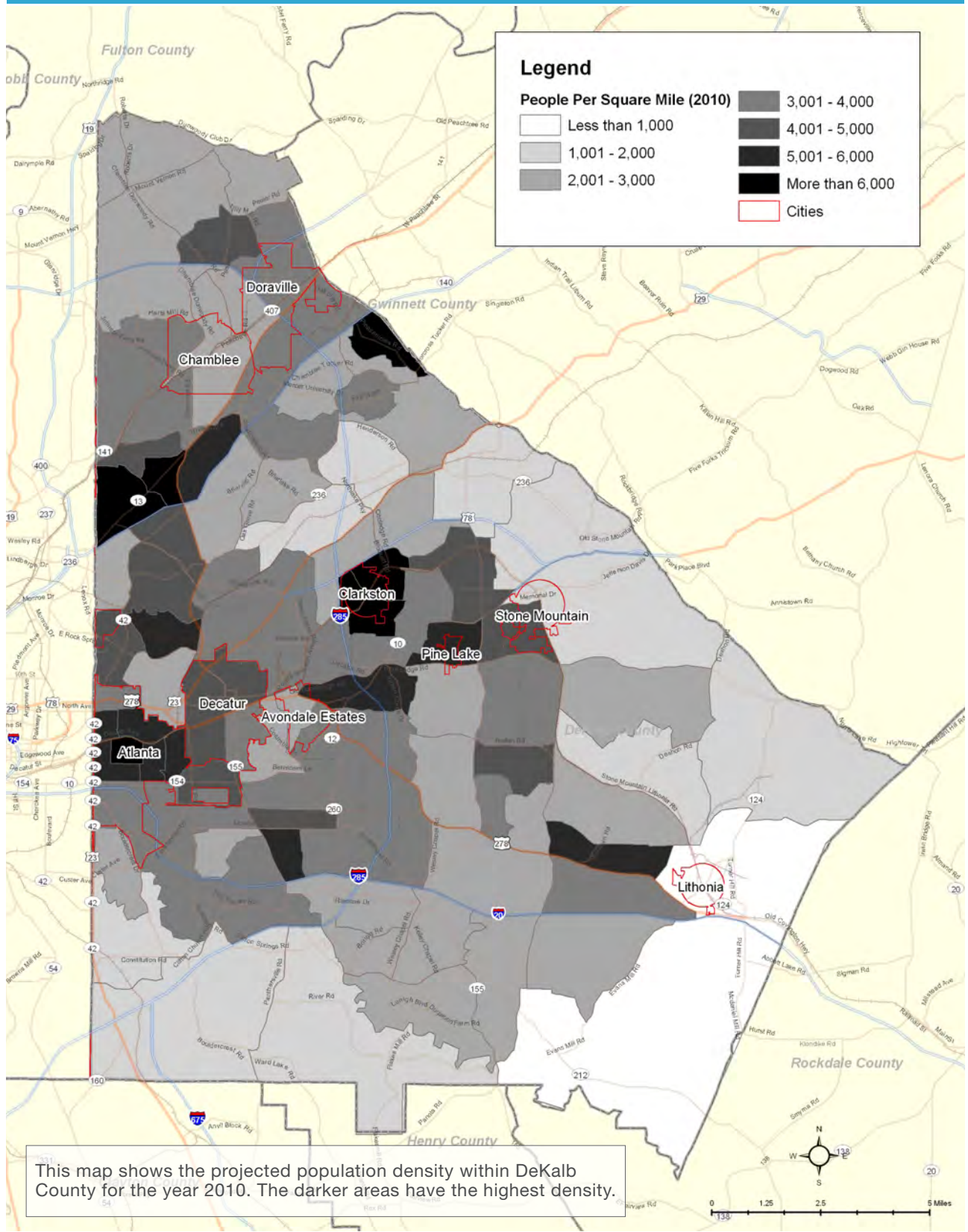


Figure 3-31: Population Density by Census Tract 2015

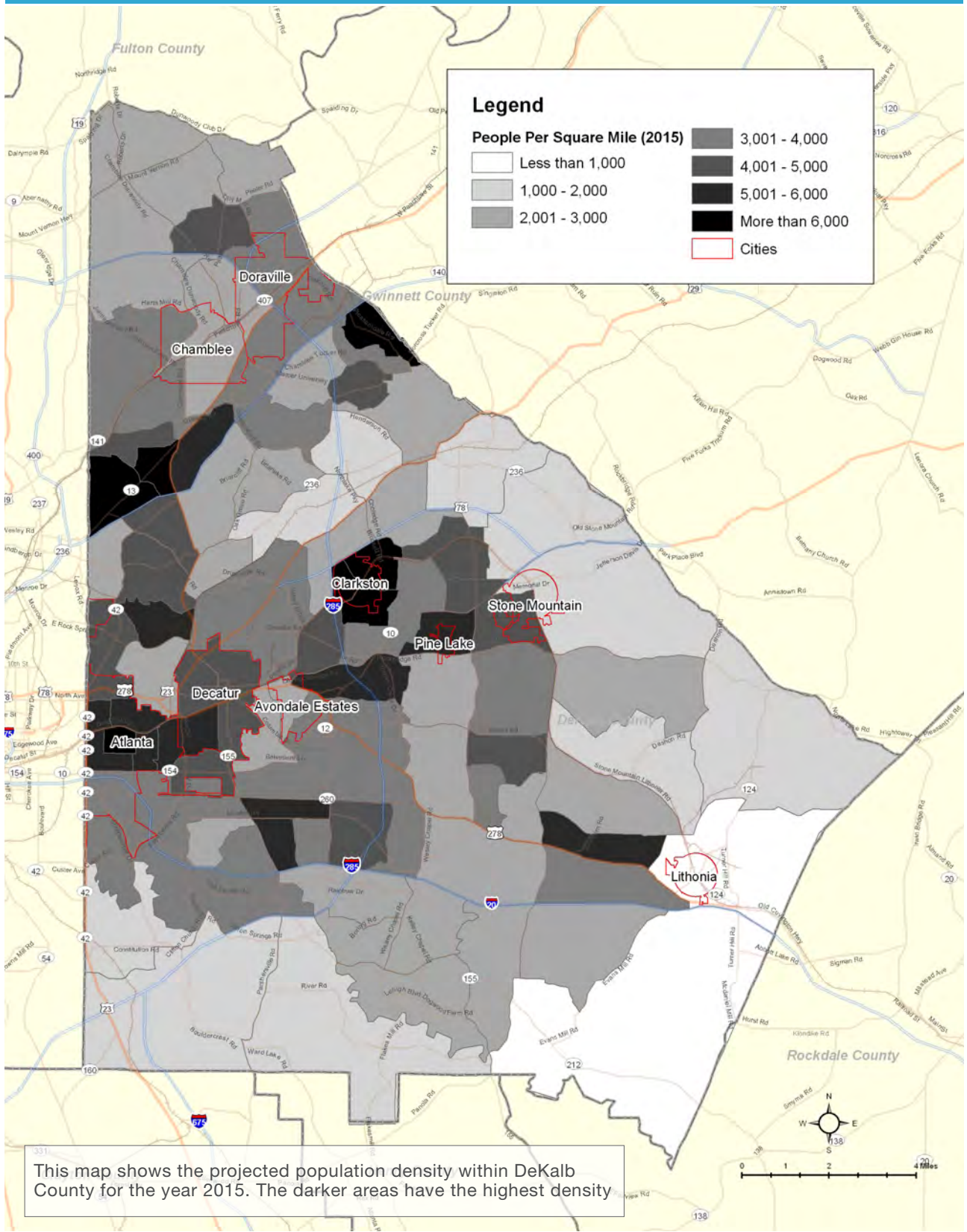


Figure 3-32: Population Density by Census Tract 2020

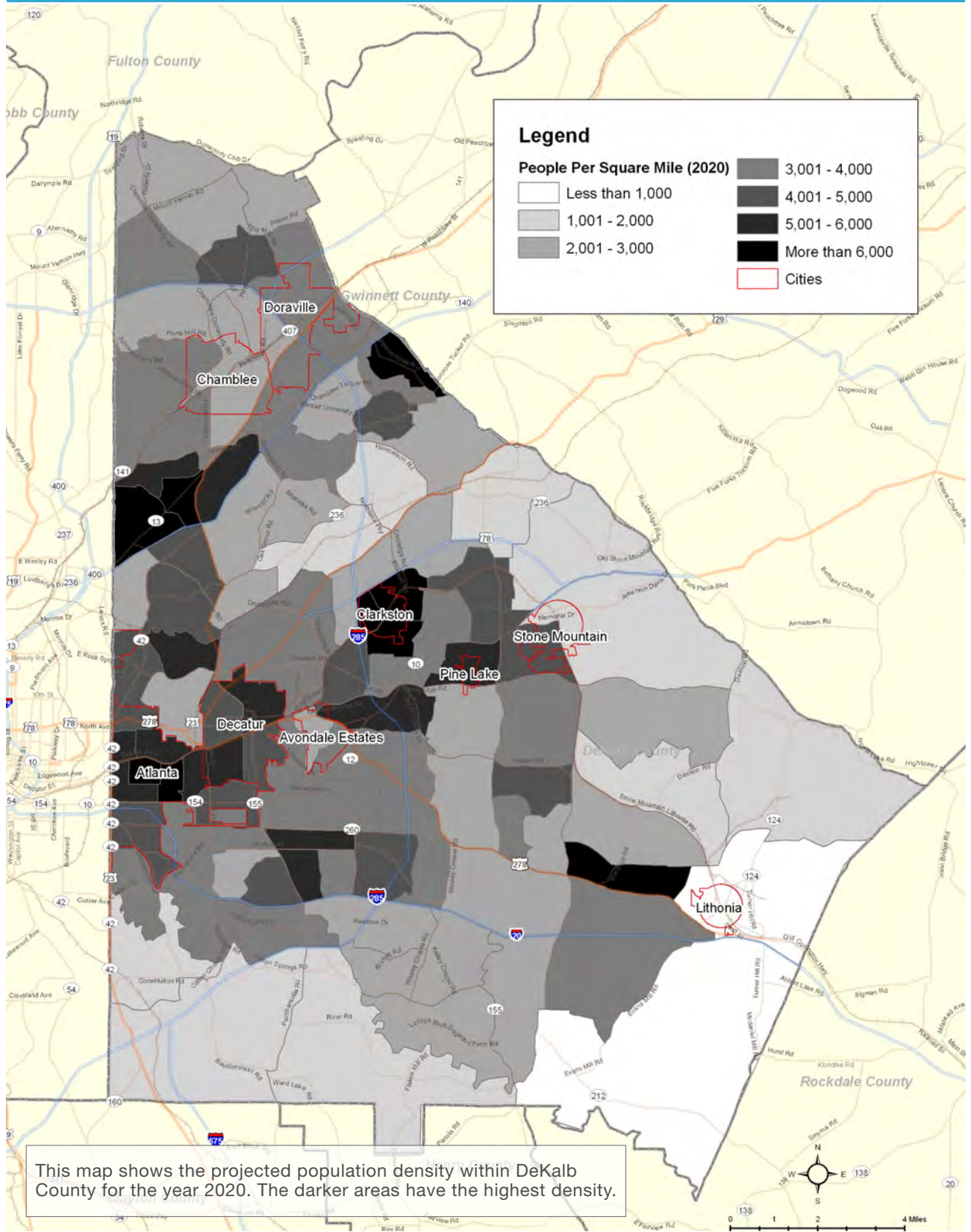
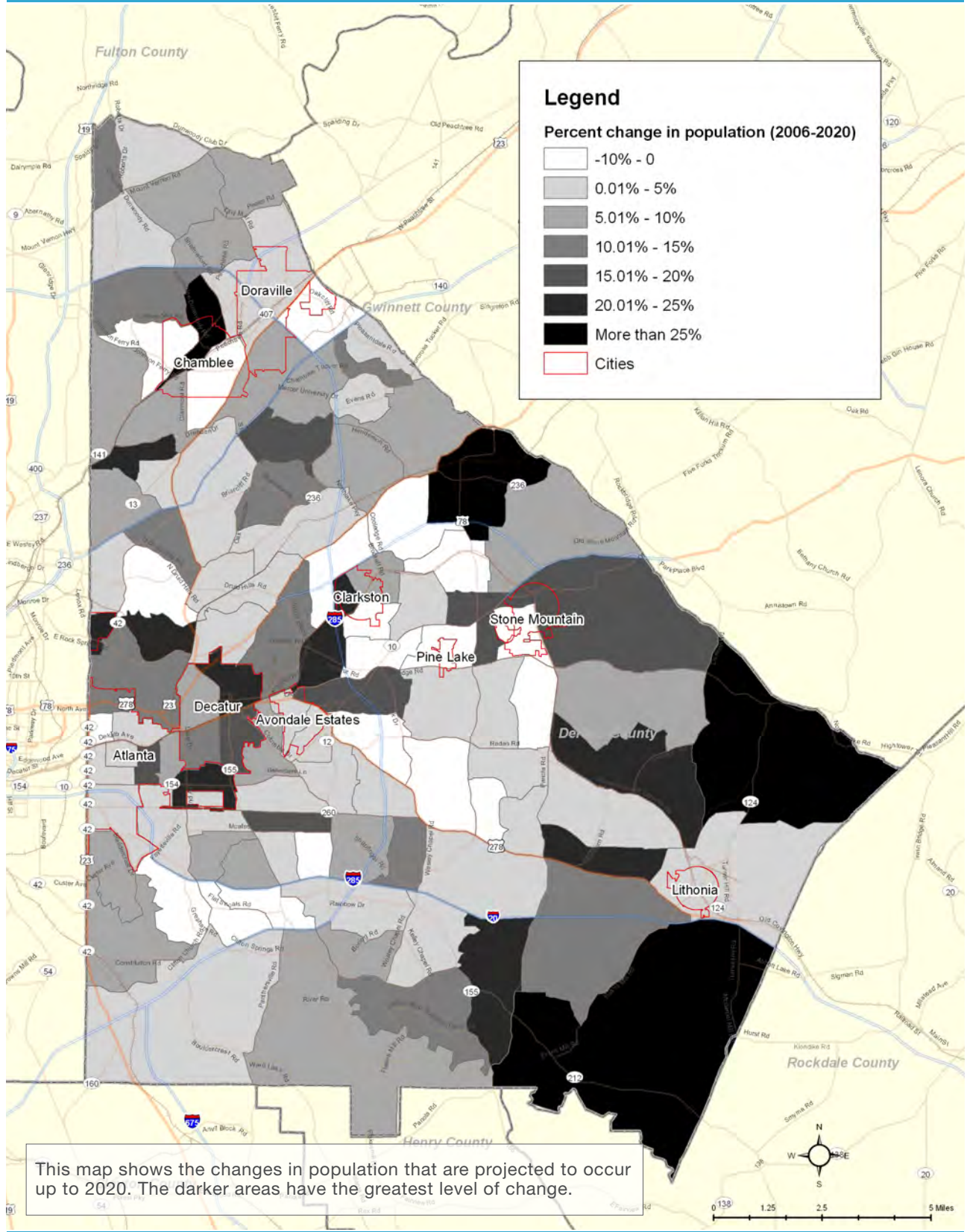


Figure 3-33: Percent Change in Population 2006-2020



but \$38 million was allocated for facilities maintenance and construction. As of April 2006, the Department had completed, or had under contract, \$21,829,866 in development projects.

As of April 2006, 39 of the county's 158 athletic fields had received substantial renovations and additions. Improvements generally focused on larger athletic complexes, such as Murphy Candler, and included new lighting, dugouts, turf replacements, and irrigation. Additionally, 92 sets of aging wooden bleachers were replaced with new aluminum bleachers, and 55 tennis courts and 11 multi-purpose courts were improved in 16 different parks. Projects included repaving, site drainage, windscreen installation, new fencing, and new basketball goals for multi-purpose courts.



The County has developed a number of bike paths through its partnership with PATH

Aside from athletic facilities, the County invested in a host of improvements to its other recreational facilities. Thirteen swimming pools received needed upgrades and repairs, including replacement of gas chlorination systems with saline systems, assessments of pool tanks, diving boards, and bath houses. Likewise, playground projects at eight of the County's parks resulted in new swing sets, modular play structures, and impact-absorbing surfaces.

Funds from the Bond enabled the County to invest in new recreation facilities and redevelopment projects. Twenty-five new park master plans were created, and studies of 18 dams and lakes were conducted. Three notable examples are the redevelopment of Wade Walker Park, the Children's Adventure Garden, and Brook Run Park.

### 3.8 Changes since 2000

Aside from demographic shifts, DeKalb County has experienced changes that have implications for parks and recreation. The County has been rapidly approaching build-out in recent years, and this has resulted in increased density.



Sixty-five-percent of DeKalb County residents still live in single-family homes, but in recent years, sales of attached housing have been outstripping those of detached homes by a growing margin. The increase in urban density has led to a scarcity of potential open space.

Policies designed to provide incentives for positive development have been enacted in recent years. Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) grants are available from the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) to cities or unincorporated areas in DeKalb County. ARC created the LCI program in 1999 to leverage federal transportation dollars and encourage cities and communities to devise Smart Growth land use and transportation policies. Notable LCI plans have been developed for Tucker, Doraville, Brookhaven, and Avondale in the County. Another incentive-based policy, the Empowerment Zone program, has encouraged economic development throughout the County. A number of corridors have been designated as Empowerment Zones, which provides business incentives for investment in designated areas.

A major event in the County was the announcement by General Motors that its Doraville manufacturing plant was closing. The plant employed 3,100 workers. Numerous proposals have been put forth to redevelop the site of the plant after its closing, perhaps as a mixed-use development.

### 3.9 Inventory

For this master plan, the inventory in the 2000 Plan has been updated and expanded to include additional private facilities such as selected churches and private recreation providers. For each park and recreation site, the inventory identifies the following:

- Site Code
- Maintenance District
- Public Safety Precinct
- Commission District
- Super District
- Park Class
- Site Acreage

The inventory also identifies the types of facilities available at each site, including:

- Softball/Baseball fields
- Football
- Soccer
- Tennis Court
- Multi-Use Court
- Picnic Shelter
- Playground
- Pool
- Nature Trail
- Lake
- Nature Preserve
- Parking Lot
- Recreation Center
- Golf Course (holes)

Recreational use patterns do not always respect political boundaries; if you want to play tennis, you frequently use courts close to where you live or work, even if they are located in a different county. As a result, city, county, and state facilities within a one-mile radius of the county boundary were inventoried since these facilities are likely used by DeKalb County residents.

Among others, these facilities included Piedmont Park, Yellow River Park, North Fulton Tennis Center, Mountain Park Aquatic Facility, and Big Tree Forest Preserve.

**A complete copy of the inventory is located in Appendix A and E of this report.**

### 3.10 County Facilities

DeKalb County has a diverse park and recreation system. Parks range from small neighborhood parks to regional parks and recreation centers that serve a much larger number of people. Parks with ballfields, tennis courts, and swimming pools are very active, while other parks are more passive and are intended for walking and sitting, and help preserve valuable natural resources. The largest County recreation facility is the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area, which is 1,799 acres in size. It is rich in natural, historic and cultural resources and provides opportunities for recreation, environmental education and heritage preservation.

There is a wide range of options for recreation within DeKalb County, and residents take advantage of these opportunities. In the Public Survey conducted for this project, DeKalb County Parks and Recreation was the most frequently mentioned organization that respondent households use for parks and recreation programs and services (41%), followed closely by the State of Georgia Parks (39%), churches (35%), private/public schools (29%), and cities in DeKalb County (22%).

### 3.11 City and State Facilities

There are 44 city facilities in or around DeKalb County (see Table 7 in Appendix E). These include facilities in Doraville, Clarkston, Atlanta, Decatur, Chamblee, Avondale Estates, and Stone Mountain. Collectively, these facilities provide almost 329 acres of parks and open space. They have a significant impact on recreational use within the County, and residents make extensive use of the various recreation opportunities. Stone Mountain Park, owned by the State of Georgia, also provides DeKalb residents with opportunities for recreational activities.

### 3.12 Private Facilities

There are numerous recreation opportunities in DeKalb County, many of which are outside the purview of the County. This plan considers selected samples of private recreation providers in order to develop a basic understanding of how they influence recreation patterns in the County. Collaborative efforts between the private and public sectors can result in better appreciation, protection, and stewardship of park and recreation resources.

The consulting team conducted a preliminary inventory to get a feel for the types of opportunities available from private recreation providers in the County. This inventory consists of a sampling of churches, private facilities, neighborhoods and subdivisions, and apartment complexes.

Private recreation providers offer recreation opportunities for a fee. Private facilities primarily include golf clubs, fitness clubs, pools, tennis centers, and YMCA. Most require some type of membership fee to use the facilities. Many of these private facilities are located in or near neighborhoods, and it is logical to assume that many of the members are from that particular area.

There are numerous townhouse and apartment complexes in the County, and many provide recreation facilities, such as a club house, game room, basketball court, tennis court, or swimming pool. Several neighborhoods include trails, playgrounds, and open space for more informal activities. These facilities are typically managed and maintained by a homeowners association. Many newer housing developments include a clubhouse, pool, fitness center, and other recreation opportunities. (See Table 6 in Appendix E).

Figure 3-34: DeKalb County Park System

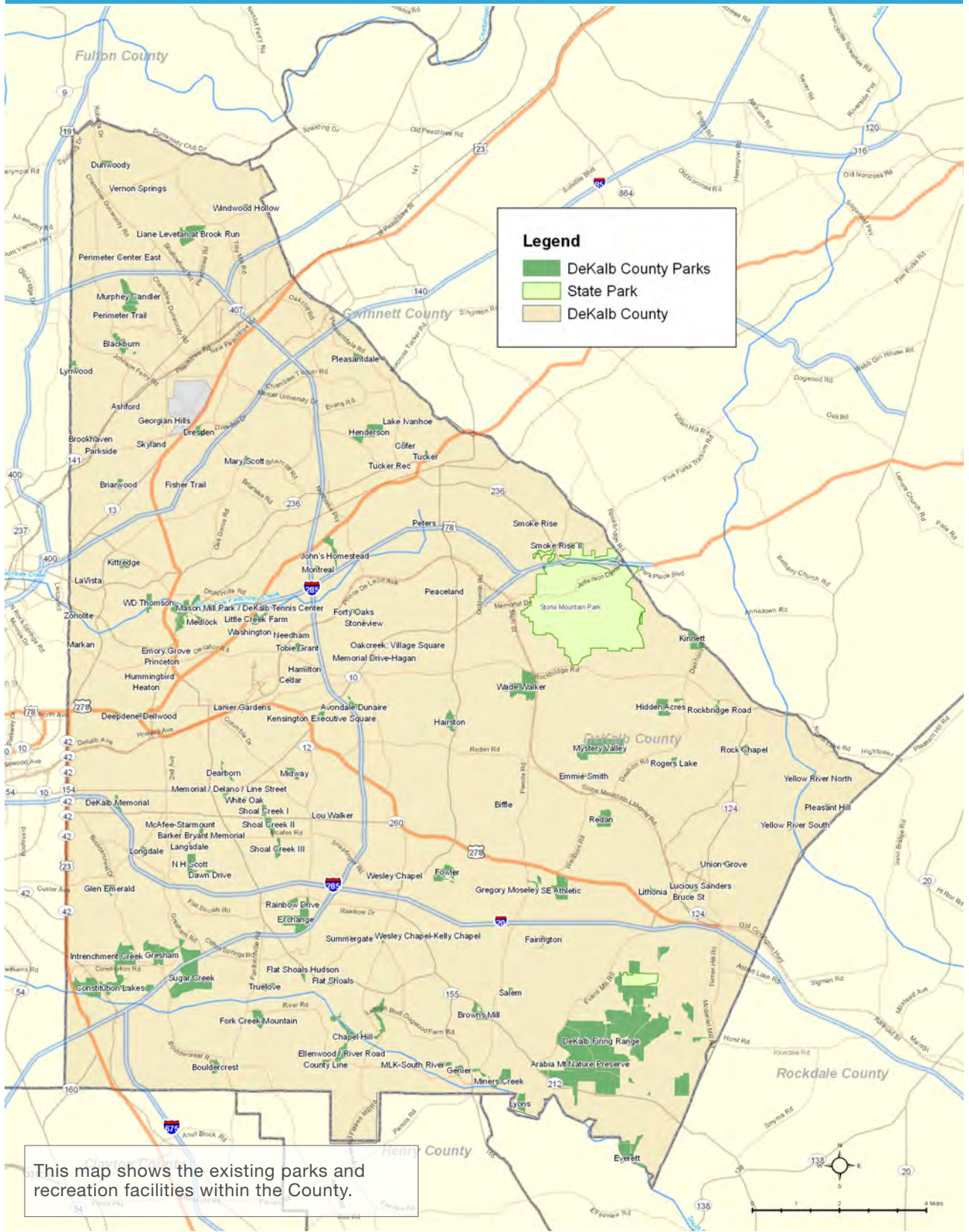


Figure 3-35: Private Recreation Providers

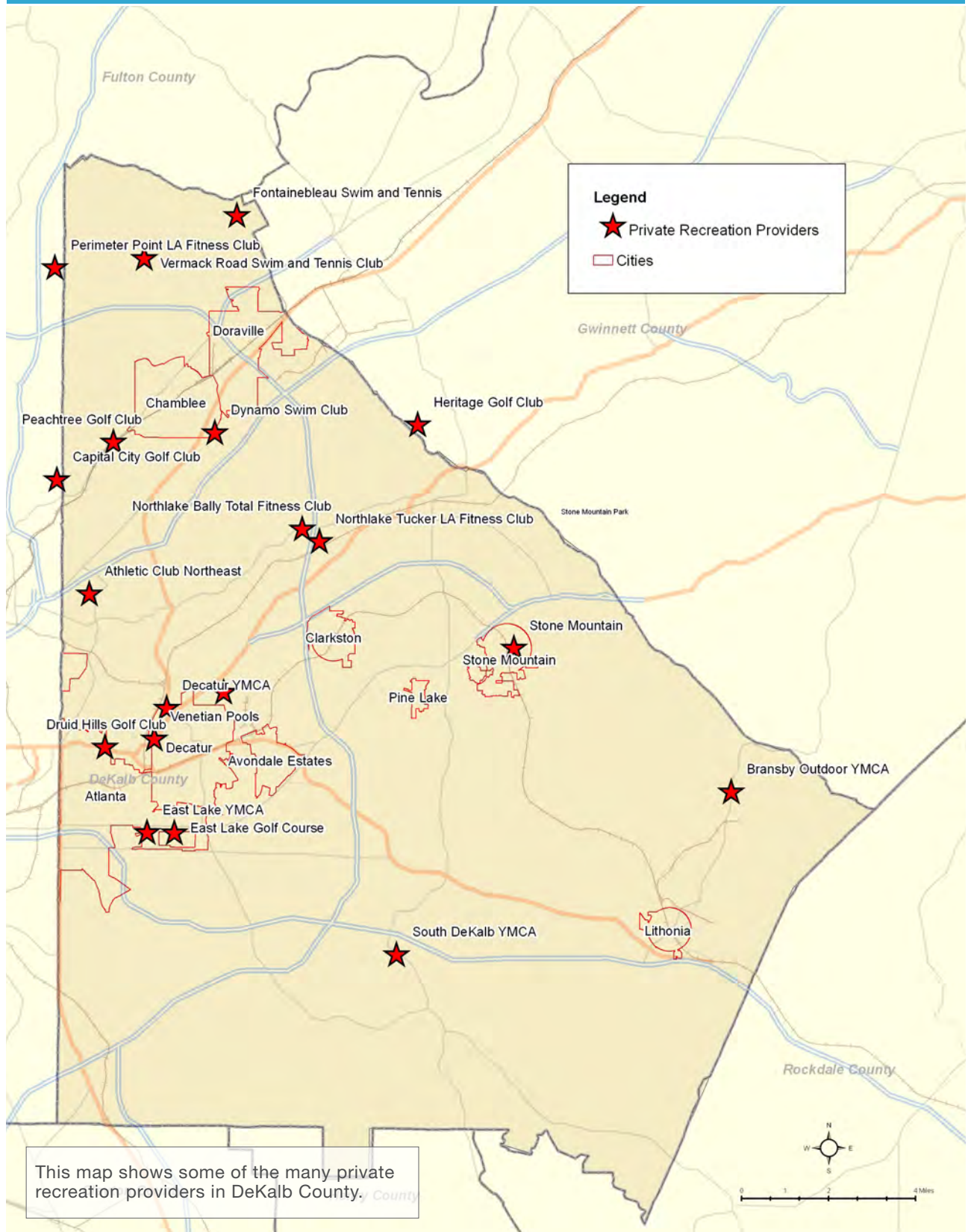


Figure 3-36: Apartments with Recreation Facilities (select)

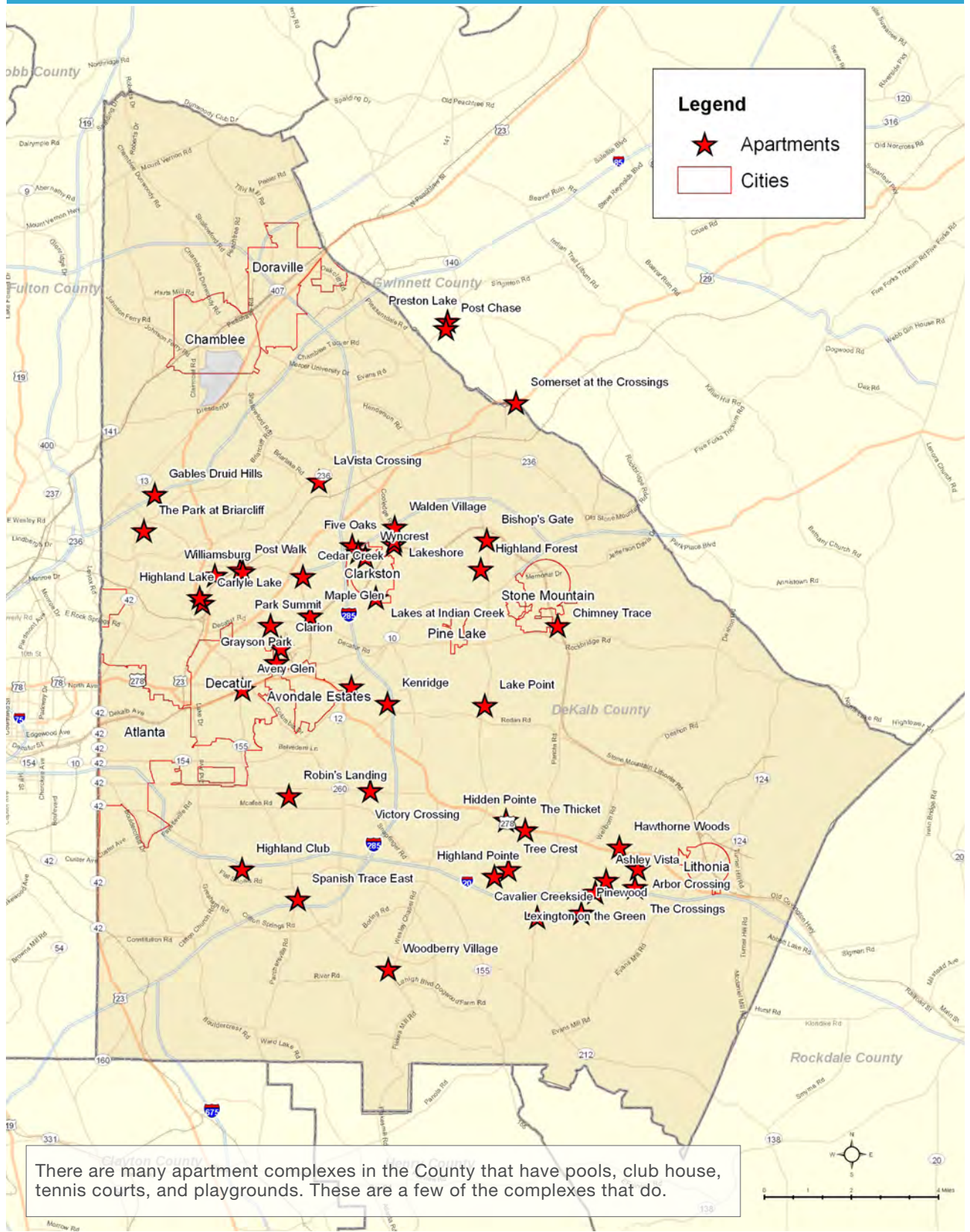
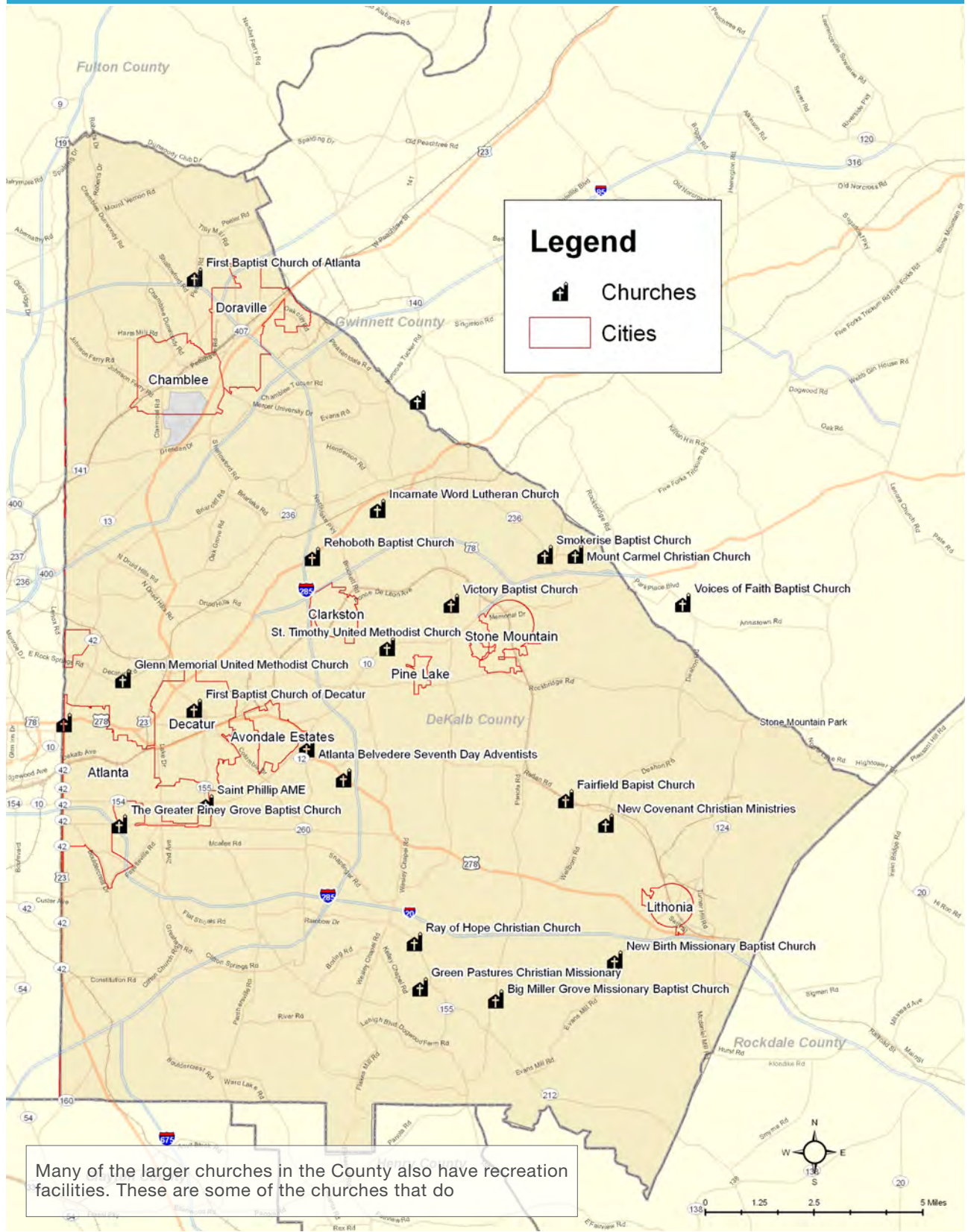
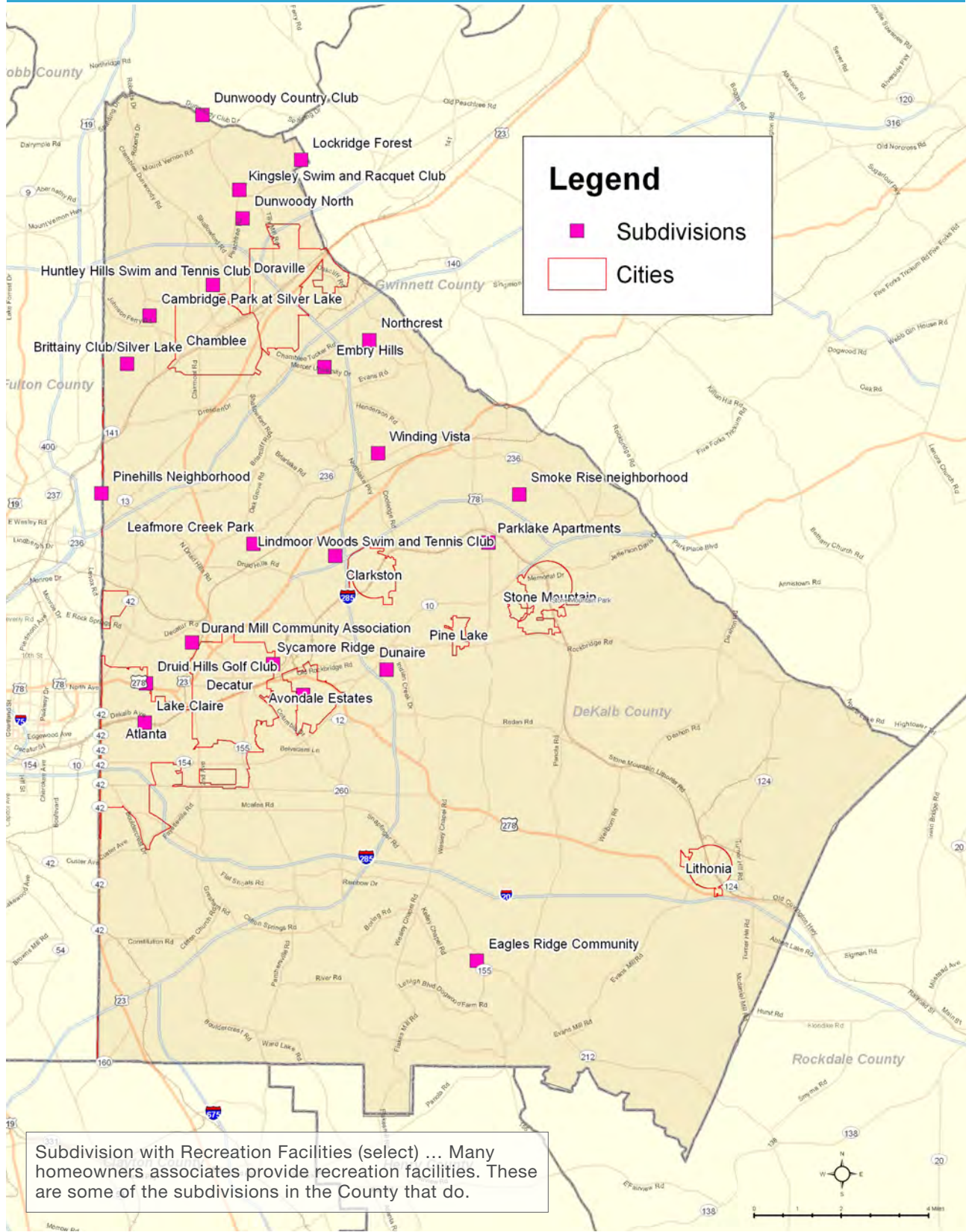


Figure 3-37: Churches with Recreation Facilities (select)



Many of the larger churches in the County also have recreation facilities. These are some of the churches that do

Figure 3-38: Subdivision with Recreation Facilities (select)



Many churches in DeKalb County also provide recreation facilities as well as programmed activities. Some of the larger churches have gymnasiums for members, and these have indoor basketball courts, volleyball courts, racquetball courts, and fitness centers. Many churches also provide ballfields and open space that can be used for a variety of active and passive recreation activities. Several churches also provide playgrounds.

Most recreation facilities associated with churches, homeowners associations, apartment complexes, and the like are not intended for public use. They do have an impact on the total recreational demands of the county, though, because a family that has access to a swimming pool in their neighborhood has less of a need to use County facilities.

### 3.13 Consistency in Inventory

Comparing the facility inventory from the 2005 Greenspace report with the inventory developed by the Department reveals some minor discrepancies. The size of the parks don't always match, and some of the parks inventoried in the Greenspace report are not listed in the County's new inventory matrix, and vice-versa. This discrepancy could be due in part to name changes for specific parks. There are also discrepancies between the County's inventory matrix and the County's GIS. Where it was feasible, the GIS data base was upgraded to reflect minor updates. For purposes of this report we utilized the County's inventory matrix and their GIS database.

### 3.14 Park and Open Space Expansion

There have been significant changes to the DeKalb County Parks and Recreation system since 2000. The most noticeable change is the increased park acreage within the County.

The County has been proactive in acquiring new park land. As of December 31, 2008, 2,070 acres of park expansion lands were acquired. At Arabia Mountain, for example, 1,701 acres were purchased at a cost of \$31.23 million, and this acquisition dramatically increased the size of the park. An additional 952 acres were procured and used to create 35 new parks.

**Table 3-4 Parks and Greenspace Program (as of December 31, 2008)**

Park Expansions	Acres	Cost (in millions)*
Arabia Mountain	1701	\$31.23
Rock Chapel	70	\$1.04
Fowler	33	\$0.05
Gresham Greenway	32	\$0.13
Kittredge	29	\$5.87
Gresham/Bouldercrest Exchange	21	N/A
Fork Creek Mountain	21	\$1.22
Mason Mill	19	\$0.26
Hidden Acres	18	\$0.25
Sugar Creek Expansion	18	\$0.80
South East Athletic Complex	17	\$1.74
Gregory Mosley	14	\$0.45
Arabia Mountain Trail (3 parcels)	12	\$0.27



<b>Table 3-4 Parks and Greenspace Program (as of December 31, 2008)</b>		
<b>Park Expansions</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Cost (in millions)*</b>
Hairston (7 Parcels)	13	\$1.19
Henderson	7	\$1.55
Browns Mill	7	\$1.27
Avondale Dunaire (8 parcels)	6	\$1.39
Shoal Creek	5	\$0.22
Dearborn (10 Parcels)	5	\$0.10
Yellow River South	4	\$0.04
Exchange Park	3	\$0.54
Tucker Recreation (BOE Land Exch)	3	N/A
Blackburn Park (HA Land Exch)	2	N/A
Glen Emerald Rock Garden	2	\$0.01
Redan	2	\$0.24
Dresden	2	\$1.20
Miners Creek Trails	2	\$0.13
Chapel Hill-River Rd Connection (Notrom Cove)	1	\$0.02
Gresham Athletic Complex	1	\$0.24
<b>Total Park Expansions</b>	<b>2070</b>	<b>\$ 51.45</b>
<b>New Parks/Greenspace</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Cost (in millions)*</b>
Intrenchment Creek Connection	142	\$0.80
Intrenchment Creek	127	\$4.23
Constitution Lakes	125	\$1.26
South River Initiative:		
- Bouldercrest & Sugar Creek Drive	67	\$0.55
- Lyons Road	48	N/A
- River Road near Snapfinger Road	26	\$0.42
- MLK (BOE Land Exchange)	20	N/A
- Flat Shoals & Warriors Path	18	\$0.82
- Panola Rd at Snapfinger	6	\$1.02
North Deshon	60	\$3.11
River Road - Ellenwood	46	\$0.83
Little Creek Farm	40	\$4.47
Chestnut Lakes	27	\$0.03
Twin Brothers Lakes	24	\$1.56
Lawrenceville Highway - John Homestead	23	\$4.72
Rockbridge Road	19	\$0.05
Flat Shoals Parkway	18	\$2.45
Rogers Lake (BOE Land Exchange)	15	N/A

<b>Table 3-4 Parks and Greenspace Program (as of December 31, 2008)</b>		
<b>New Parks/Greenspace</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Cost (in millions)*</b>
Memorial Drive - Delano	13	\$0.60
Hugh Howell Road	10	\$0.34
Mary Scott Park (Briarcliff Road)	11	\$2.13
Memorial Drive Hagan	10	\$0.02
Tucker Park (Lawrenceville Highway)	9	\$1.20
Memorial Drive - Kensington	8	\$4.97
Perimeter Trail (3 parcels)	7	\$0.33
Dawn Drive	7	\$0.08
Lilburn Stone Mountain Road	6	\$0.39
Wesley Chapel / Kelly Chapel	5	\$0.57
Central Drive / Kelton Drive	5	\$0.67
Chamblee Dunwoody - Chestnut	3	\$1.21
Perimeter Center - MetLife	3	\$0.01
Flat Shoals Parkway Expansion	2	\$0.25
South Fork Peachtree Creek Trail (2 parcels)	1	\$0.06
Rainbow Drive	1	\$0.31
Markan	0.2	\$0.07
<b>Total New Parks/Greenspace</b>	<b>952</b>	<b>\$ 39.53</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>3,022</b>	<b>\$ 90.98</b>

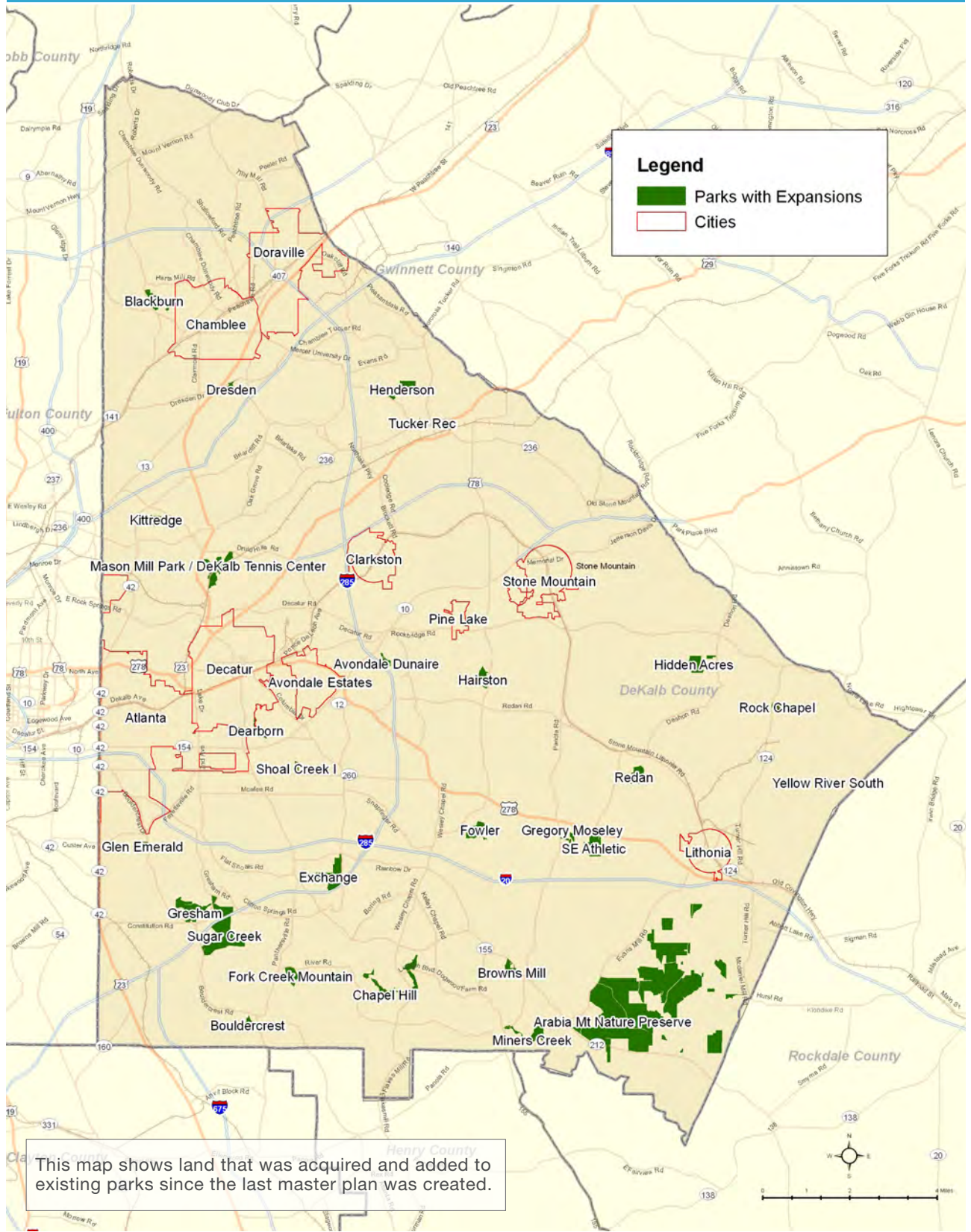
### 3.15 Funding

DeKalb County's budget for parks and recreation has increased in recent years. In 2005, the budget for the Department was \$17,676,770. In 2008, the budget had increased to \$22,535,938. The largest increase in the budget was in the category of Personal Services and Benefits, which went up from \$10,830,671 in 2005 to \$13,339,056 in 2008.

The County has also been able to increase the availability of funds for parks. As of January 1, 2006, the County's Office of Parks Bond and Greenspace had overseen the expenditure of approximately 68% of the more than \$151 million in acquisition funds allocated from a number of sources. \$130 million was allocated by the Parks Bond Funds, which were approved by DeKalb County citizens on March 20, 2001. These bonds are to be repaid from property tax revenue levied in the unincorporated portions of the County.

<b>Table 3-5: Sources of Funding for Acquisition and Development</b>	
2001 Parks and Greenspace Bond Issue	\$132,387,000
2006 Parks and Greenspace Bond Issue	\$96,460,000
Georgia Greenspace Grants	\$6,300,000
The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation	\$4,300,000
Other Governmental and Private Funding	\$8,709,000
Georgia Land Conservation Partnership	\$75,000
<b>Total Parks and Greenspace Funding:</b>	<b>\$248,231,000</b>

Figure 3-39: Park Expansions Since 2000 Parks and Recreation Plan (as of December 2005)



## 4.0 Public Participation



### 4.1 Overview

An extensive outreach effort was undertaken as part of this planning process. A random public survey was conducted to obtain statistically valid responses from households across the County. In addition, five initial public meetings were conducted – one in each of the five political Districts. At each meeting, citizens had an opportunity to provide input during small group sessions, and all of their comments were documented.

Parks and Recreation employees were interviewed during four separate sessions. The employees offered input about how to improve parks, facilities, operations and programs in the County. Division leaders were interviewed individually, and their comments were also recorded.

The County's Board of Commissioners serves as the legislative branch of the DeKalb County government. The Board is comprised of seven part-time commissioners, all elected to a four-year term. DeKalb County is divided into five districts with one commissioner serving each district. There are also two "super districts," one on the east end of the County and the other on the west end, each making up about half of the County population. Each super district is served by one commissioner. Four of the seven Commissioners were interviewed individually.

The DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Department Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) consists of 11 members; each of the County Commissioners appoints one member, and one is appointed by the CEO, one by the DeKalb Municipal Association, one by the DeKalb County Board of Education, and one by the DeKalb Legislative Delegation. The purpose of the board is "to provide advice on the types of activities, necessary facilities, general direction and to assist the Park and Recreation Department in their efforts to provide leisure services to all citizens of DeKalb County." The CAB was interviewed twice during the planning process – the first being early in the process, and the second after the public meetings were completed.

### 4.2 Public Survey

DeKalb County conducted a survey in the summer of 2007 to obtain statistically valid results from households throughout the County. The survey was administered by a combination of mail and phone contact. Leisure Vision, a national research organization, worked with DeKalb County officials and the EDAW project team to develop the survey. Leisure Vision mailed surveys to a random sample of 5,000 households in DeKalb County. Approximately three days after the surveys were mailed, each household that received a survey also received an electronic voice message encouraging them to complete the survey. Two weeks after the surveys were mailed, Leisure Vision began contacting households by phone. Those who indicated that they had not returned the mail survey were given the option of completing it via phone.

The goal of the survey was to obtain a minimum of 1,000 completed responses. This goal was exceeded, with a total of 1,076 surveys returned. The results of the random sample households have a 95% level of confidence that is accurate to within +/-3.0%. A summary of the major survey findings is as follows:

- 70% of respondent households visited DeKalb County parks and recreation facilities during the past year. Of these, 60% rated the facilities as either "excellent" (10%) or "good" (50%).

- 15% of respondent households have participated in recreation programs offered by DeKalb County during the past year. Of these, 69% rated the programs as either excellent (19%) or good (50%).
- 54% of the respondents who participated in DeKalb County programs and activities learned about these programs from friends and neighbors.
- DeKalb County Parks and Recreation was the most frequently mentioned organization that 41% of respondent households use for parks and recreation programs and services, followed closely by the State of Georgia Parks (39%), churches (35%), private/public schools (29%), and cities in DeKalb County (22%).
- The types of DeKalb County parks and recreation facilities that the highest percentage of respondents rated as either “excellent” or “good” are: park sites (49%), trails (37%), playgrounds (36%), picnic shelters/pavilions (36%) and outdoor athletic fields (33%).
- The parks and recreation facilities that the highest percentage of respondents have a need for are: small neighborhood parks (67%), walking and biking trails (64%), picnic areas and pavilions (60%), nature trails and nature centers (50%), historic sites and museums (49%), large regional parks (49%) and indoor fitness and exercise facilities (49%).
- For all 32 facilities in DeKalb County, less than 25% of respondent households indicated the facility completely meets the needs of their household.
- Facilities that respondents rated as the most important are: walking and biking trails (30%), small neighborhood parks (27%) and indoor fitness and exercise facilities (17%).
- The programs that the highest percentage of respondent households have a need for include: adult fitness and wellness programs (56%), water fitness programs (41%), nature programs (38%), special events (33%) and adult art, dance, and performing arts (33%).
- For all 18 programs offered by the County, less than 20% of respondents indicated that the program completely meets the needs of their household.
- The programs ranked as the most important are: adult fitness and wellness programs (38%), water fitness programs (18%), senior adult programs (16%) and adult art, dance, and performing arts (16%).
- Based on the sum of their top 4 choices, the programs that respondent households participate in the most are: adult fitness and wellness programs (21%) and nature programs (10%).
- There are five actions that over 50% of respondents are very supportive of DeKalb County taking: renovate existing playgrounds and picnic areas (60%), purchase land to develop passive parks/recreation facilities (59%), purchase land to preserve open space (55%), renovate existing walking and biking trails (54%), and develop new walking and biking trails (53%).
- Based on the sum of their top four choices, the actions that respondents would be most willing to fund include: purchase land to preserve open space (28%), purchase land to develop passive parks/recreation facilities (26%), renovate existing playgrounds and picnic areas (23%), and develop new walking and biking trails (22%).
- 63% of respondents are either very supportive (29%) or somewhat supportive (34%) of implementing or increasing the fees for recreation and cultural facilities, programs, and services to help pay for increased operating expenses.
- Respondents indicated they would spend \$30 out of every \$100 allocation of park funding for improvements within existing parks and facilities.
- 73% of respondents indicated they would either vote in favor of (47%) or might vote in favor (26%) of a bond referendum to fund the acquisition, improvement, and development of the parks, trails, green space, and recreation facilities.
- 66% of respondents indicated they were either very supportive (37%) or somewhat supportive (29%) of a dedicated DeKalb County funding source for the parks and recreation system in the County.

- 90% of respondents indicated that parks and recreation is either very important (70%) or somewhat important (20%) to the livability of DeKalb County.

### 4.3 Public Meetings

The Department conducted five public meetings throughout the County from June 25th through July 16th, 2007. The intent of the meetings was to engage members of the public in the planning process and to assess the needs and desires of constituents. Each meeting included a short presentation, a question and comment portion, and small group sessions geared toward public input. Each meeting was unique, but a number of common issues emerged.

The first public meeting was held on June 25th at the Gresham Recreation Center in south DeKalb County. Participants broke into two focus groups for discussions. A number of attendees felt that recreational facilities and programs were in short supply, and that more should be provided. Attendees also identified a need for increased recreational opportunities for senior citizens. There was input on safety and security in parks as many participants noted the lack of lighting in and around facilities. Maintenance was identified as a significant issue, and as one reason recreational facilities are underused. Some noted that some programs and facilities are not affordable to many residents. Lack of awareness of assets and programs was identified as a problem, and this was attributed to poor communications on the part of the County. Summer

Stakeholder involvement is paramount in generating enthusiasm and building broader community support . . .

programming for youth, walking trails, and greenspace were noted as strengths of the Department.

A second public meeting was held on June 28th at the Hamilton Recreation Center in Scottdale. Biking was identified as an important issue to many attendees, and suggestions were made to expand trails for biking and other uses. Skate parks were also important to participants. The most pervasive theme at the meeting was the need for increased publicity and use of parks. Participants suggested the County develop promotional events and activities. Green space and youth summer activities were identified as strong points in recreational services. Many felt parks were unsafe and poorly maintained. Some also suggested that better coordination between schools and the County is necessary.

The third public meeting was held on July 9th at Luscious Sanders Recreation Center in Lithonia. A major theme at this meeting was the need for expanded opportunities for tennis. Security and maintenance were major concerns for users. Many wanted additional lighting for tennis courts. Affordability of programs was a concern, but there were also suggestions to raise fees to pay for needed improvements. One concern was poor communication between residents and the Department. Some expressed frustration over the previous planning of Wade Walker Park, and this project resulted in distrust with the Department. Many gave high points for playgrounds, green space, and senior programs. Some also noted that the Citizen Advisory Board is a useful institution that should be maintained.

The fourth public meeting was held on July 12th in Decatur at the Mason Mill Recreation Center. One issue was the desire for more trails for mountain biking and other uses. Attendees also expressed a desire to increase the number of multi-use facilities. Several noted the need to improve opportunities for private initiatives, such as volunteering and philanthropic giving. Maintenance, security, communications, and information about available programs were identified as areas that need improvement. Participants felt that these issues contributed to underuse of recreational facilities and parks.

The fifth and final meeting was held on July 28th at the Lynwood Recreation Center in northern

DeKalb. Security and maintenance were areas identified in need of improvement. These issues, along with poor communication and lack of awareness among residents, were associated with under use of County facilities. Lack of parking was another issue. Summer youth programs were identified as a strong point.

#### 4.4 Interviews with Department Employees

Interviews with Department employees were conducted in four separate on-site sessions over a two-day period in 2007. Interviews revealed a number of common issues, including: security, equipment, marketing, administrative structure, recreational programming, budgeting, financial administration, maintenance, policies and procedures, and human resources issues.

Most of the issues identified by employees relate to the overarching issue of resources in terms of availability, organization, and distribution. Employees noted that the lack of capital improvement financing has left the Department under-financed. Lack of funding has implications for a number of areas, such as maintenance scheduling, where the Department is forced to choose between emergency repairs, and long-term or deferred maintenance. Vandalism was identified as a major problem. Some suggested that higher fees be charged for facility usage to mitigate budget shortfalls.

Lack of funding has resulted in understaffing and un-met equipment needs. Understaffing has wide-ranging implications, from administration to maintenance, and has contributed to low-morale and high turnover in the Department. Organization and employee distribution were also identified as concerns. In terms of administrative structure, a common theme throughout the interviews was that, while hierarchical structure is clearly defined, communication is lacking, and employees feel they are sometimes unable to perform their jobs as a result.

The need for more and better assets was pervasive throughout the interviews. Another theme was the need for efficiency in managing Department resources. Information and communication, as well as administrative structure, are key issues in this regard. A number of employees noted that they are not empowered to make decisions on day-to-day operations, and that communication with superiors is often limited. Some interviewees suggested that more standardization in operations would improve efficiency. Among the suggestions were: alignment of financial decision-making, an automated work order system for maintenance, more clearly defined procedures, and a manual of policies and procedures.

#### 4.5 Interviews with Executive Team

The Executive Team consists of the heads of the four divisions in the Department as well as the Department Director. A prevalent issue that emerged from interviews with the Executive Team is that the Department needs a clear vision and direction for the future. The desire was to focus on future goals and objectives and the means of achieving those results.

Some felt the Department was 'top-heavy' and too many decisions and responsibilities fell on those in senior and executive positions. Some thought the Department could be restructured so decision-making is more dispersed. Some suggested a more codified approach to administration, in which policies, procedures, and expectations are better defined.

One concern is that emphasis has been placed on new facility construction, while other needs, such as maintenance and modernization of current facilities, are not being met.

Funding is another major concern. Most felt that a sustainable source and system of funding is essential, not only to expand services and facilities, but also to maintain the current level

of service. Some suggested the need for CIP funding for maintenance and traditional capital improvements.

Maintenance was one of the most pervasive issues. Many of the County's community centers were built some 50 years ago, and are in dire need of modernization or replacement. Some facilities do not have air conditioning, which has obvious implications for their use in the summer. Funding is only one concern in regards to maintenance issues. Prioritization of existing funding allocations and a focus on efficiency could significantly improve maintenance problems.

A prevalent issue that emerged from interviews with the Executive Team is that the Department needs a clear vision and direction for the future. The desire was to focus on future goals and objectives and the means of achieving those results.

Maintenance is currently largely reactionary, focusing on things like mowing and litter pick-up, while a majority of funds are focused on programming at the expense of long-term maintenance needs. A suggestion was made for a standardized system of maintenance provision, including: a standard of care manual, time lines on deliverables, individual maintenance plans for each park, a refined preventive maintenance program, and a standardized work order system.

Interviewees recognized the importance of a two-way dialogue between the department and the public. However, many also noted that the Department currently has no formal feedback mechanisms in place. Marketing for recreational facilities and programs could be improved, along with the website as part of a wider effort to reach out to the public in an organized, seamless and systematic manner.

Better coordination with partners, especially schools and athletic associations, is needed. A management plan is needed to lay out the various responsibilities of both the Department and the associations to improve efficiency and to ensure that assets will remain available for future generations.

Security is also clearly a concern. One interviewee suggested a special parks police unit be created that would report both to the Parks Department and the DeKalb Police. Another issue to emerge is a general concern about walkability and connectivity between the parks and enhanced public accessibility. Interviewees also noted the importance of affordability when it comes to facilities and programs provided by the County. Fees should not be so high that residents are financially barred from participating in recreational activities.

## 4.6 Interviews with Board of Commissioners

The overall feeling of the Commissioners was that parks and recreation should enhance quality of life for all DeKalb County residents. The consensus was that there is an overall lack of public open space within the County. One issue is that the County does not have a signature park, such as Piedmont Park for Atlanta, Grant Park in Chicago, or Central Park in New York City.

Several commented that the County needs more spaces for playing fields and active uses, and that it should build parks where the people are. One thought was that the Department needed to be creative in acquiring land for new parks. For example, the two existing golf courses run by the County have land not used for golf, and this could be converted into park land. Watershed management provides an opportunity for acquisition, as does the redevelopment of housing, apartments, malls, and other larger structures. There was a call for all County property holdings to be evaluated for possible park and/or green space use.

One commissioner strongly supports providing small parks closer to where people live, and mentioned the need for sidewalks. There is a need to make better utilization and improvement of existing parks a top priority. Another commissioner commented that many existing recreation



facilities had reached the end of their life cycle and the best solution is to secure bond money, tear them down, and start over.

. . . Commissioners interviewed felt there needed to be an emphasis on creative public/private partnerships, especially with schools. “Coordinating new schools with new parks just makes good fiscal, physical and functional sense,” . . .

Safety was viewed as a major issue, because if people do not feel safe they will not use the parks. Seeing police officers patrolling the parks will help. Another option would be to have an adopt-a-park program or a park watch program. It is important to get communities involved in making their parks safe. Increased site lighting and reorientation of site elements are suggested to improve passive surveillance by security controls and citizens.

Several commissioners indicated there needs to be a stronger focus on healthcare and wellness. Poor nutritional habits and sedentary life styles that result in obesity were cited as being a big problem, especially among children. One suggestion was to look into sponsors donating exercise equipment to help fill the need for more exercise equipment and opportunities located within the parks. There was discussion about youth at-risk, but also concerns about senior citizens at-risk. One suggested approach was a mentoring program that would

bring the two populations together.

The Commissioners interviewed felt there needed to be an emphasis on creative public/private partnerships, especially with schools. “Coordinating new schools with new parks just makes good fiscal, physical and functional sense,” said one commissioner. One approach would be to commit to a pilot study as the first step of working together. Joint venturing with YMCA, churches, and other organizations could result in mutually beneficial operations. For example, a partnership with the YMCA could involve them being in charge of indoor programs and the Department handling outdoor programs and activities.

Funding was viewed as a critical issue that would most likely get worse. The feeling was that there is not sufficient staff or funding to implement all the programs that are needed. It will be important to evaluate budgets and determine what is effective and what needs to be revised or eliminated. There is a need to address fee programs due to the general feeling that existing fees are reasonable, but that more effort must be made to increase revenue and to provide programs that pay for themselves. Fees have not been increased in the recent past, and they are not structured against real costs or market trends.

Another concern is that the County is reaching a crisis on the burden of maintaining a public labor force. Volunteerism and outsourcing were mentioned as ways to address this issue, but with an underlying understanding that staff are required to manage contracts and to organize volunteers. There needs to be an organized core of volunteers that can provide meaningful value in all areas of park and recreation operations.

All of the commissioners interviewed believed that marketing was critical to the success of Parks and Recreation. The goal is to introduce people to these assets, and there needs to be a strong outreach effort to reach constituents. This should include working with local churches and schools as well as local media and newspapers. There could be more activities in the parks, including parties, festivals, concerts, and other events. Marketing needs to take advantage of the County-hosted web page and television station.

One commissioner said one of the biggest mistakes was to split maintenance for parks and recreation under the Department and within facilities management, and a return to the former maintenance arrangement was suggested.

One option mentioned was the development of an independent park district, while another option would be a multi-jurisdictional approach to guard against irrevocable losses and increased hindrances brought about through pending municipal annexations.



## 4.7 Interviews with Citizens Advisory Board

Interviews with the Citizens Advisory Board, conducted on August 28th, focused on future directions for parks and recreation in DeKalb County. An overriding theme was to take a holistic and futuristic look at the parks and to provide something for every member of the family. It was pointed out that politics should be taken out of the process and parks and recreation should be viewed as a whole system rather than as individual districts.

One issue brought up was communication with constituents. It was emphasized that parks and recreation need to be re-evaluated on a regular basis. One interviewee recommended continuing to build on the recommendations of the 2000 Parks and Recreation Plan, and another suggested an online survey.

Emphasis needs to be placed on the acquisition of multi-purpose facilities, and it is important to serve seniors, teens, younger children, toddlers, and the handicapped. Marketing for the recreation department is important, since people need to know about opportunities and activities. Sometimes children do not have the money to get involved, and the County must address this issue through creative funding methods.

Specific issues included: lighting for tennis centers; establishment of multi-purpose recreation facilities that serve as regional attractors; renovation of existing structures in parks; Wi-Fi in the parks; emphasis on horticulture; more aquatic centers; art programs; playground equipment for children under the age of three; facilities for pre-school; fitness equipment, and outdoor classrooms. Health and wellness for all ages and levels of ability was considered a major issue.

Maintenance was also identified as a major concern. There are insufficient funds to maintain existing facilities. There needs to be dedicated, ongoing funding for maintenance. It was felt that money needed to be allocated to County parks and recreation so the Department did not have to be totally dependent on bond referendums.

The CAB felt that public/private partnerships are critical to the success of the Department. Emphasis was on developing partnerships and sharing resources. It was stressed that the Department needs to think outside of the box and get different associations, agencies and organized groups involved. The school board, police department, Board of Commissioners, and CEO should all be working together to help with parks and recreation. There were discussions about the roles that private organizations, such as sports associations, play in providing recreation opportunities. Some thought the best approach with sports organizations is a combination of private for-profit groups, as well as some groups that are part of Parks and Recreation. Private organizations could also assist with maintenance and in the renovation of sports fields and amenities.

Equitable distribution of parks and recreation to all parts of the County was emphasized. There is and will be a need for more parks. All existing parks need to be brought up to a consistent standard. Some parks were viewed as an eyesore and require the decision to restore or demolish. Access needs to be addressed at a broader level, including providing sidewalks and links to parks. Parks need to be close to where people live, work and gather. For example, it would be nice to have a park or open space within ten blocks of each resident, and major regional parks such as Arabia Mountain should be within 10 miles.

## 4.8 Summary of Input to the Plan

Several themes emerged from the various groups:

- Parks and recreation are vital to a high quality of life in DeKalb as well as an economic development tool

- Passive open space, trails, neighborhood parks, and similar facilities have the highest priority among users
- Public safety is of paramount importance and visible police patrols are needed
- Better communication within the Department and between the Department and County residents would improve delivery of services
- Standardized Department procedures would enable better service delivery
- Fees should be affordable but have not been changed in several years and probably can be raised to cover more costs
- More Department revenue should stay within the Department
- Adult fitness activities have a high priority among the general population
- Partnerships with other recreation providers, and especially DeKalb County Schools, should be vigorously pursued
- Land acquisition and capital improvements are important, but more funds should be dedicated to maintenance of existing facilities
- Several recreation centers have outlived their useful lives and should be replaced or receive major overhauls
- Park facility maintenance should be managed by the Parks and Recreation Department

## 5.0 Park and Recreation Standards

Standards provide a quantifiable method for determining if there are sufficient parks and recreation facilities to meet the needs of the County, and whether the geographic distribution of facilities is appropriate. EDAW compared DeKalb County's current standards with those of Cobb County, Georgia; Gwinnett County, Georgia; and the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA). This chapter concludes with a discussion of current standards and recommendations for new standards for DeKalb County.

### 5.1 Comparison of Standards

#### Current DeKalb County Standards

Current DeKalb County standards were developed from a number of sources, including historical provisions of service, public preferences, NRPA guidelines, and the standards of "benchmark" communities. A detailed inventory was combined with feedback from the public and benchmark and national standards to determine a realistic "Target Standard" for the County.

A detailed inventory was combined with feedback from the public and benchmark and national standards to determine a realistic "Target Standard" for the County.

**Recreation Centers** – The current standard groups all indoor community facilities under the single classification of "Recreation Center." Recreation Centers can include a broad range of amenities from indoor basketball courts to meeting rooms. The standard assumes that facilities typically range from 50,000 SF to 100,000 SF, and serve virtually every sector of the population. The average center is currently 20,452 SF, which is undersized and cannot serve the population optimally. The current standard is 1 SF/person.

**Aquatic Centers** – The existing standard groups all swimming pool facilities into the single model: "Family Aquatic Centers." According to the standard, each aquatic center typically includes a minimum of three separate pools with varying complementary amenities. The target standard of .24 SF/person was based on what was thought to be reasonably be achieved by 2010.

**Athletic Fields** – The current standard defines two categories, "Ballfields" and "Soccer fields," for ball/athletic fields. Ballfields is a broad category that groups all of the major field types, including baseball, softball, and football. The existing standards for athletic fields are:

- 4,275 people per baseball/softball/football field
- 10,000 people per soccer field

**Tennis Courts** – According to the current standard, appropriate areas for tennis courts are community parks and neighborhood parks. The standard is 1 court/5,400 people.

**Basketball Courts** – The standard suggests that community and neighborhood parks are appropriate sites for basketball courts, and the standard is 1 court/10,000 people.

**Golf Courses** – An inventory of existing facilities in 2000 showed that the County had 1 course/299,300. The target standard for golf courses is set at 1 course/200,000 people

**Park Acreage** – DeKalb's standards include two types of parks, neighborhood and community parks. The recommended standard for parkland is 23 acres/1,000 people, but the standards set a target of 18 acres/1,000 people.

## Cobb County

The Cobb County Parks and Recreation System Master Plan serves in part to evaluate the existing Cobb County facilities against NRPA standards. For facilities without NRPA standards, new standards were developed during the planning process. The Cobb Plan also recommends the development of a joint city/county committee tasked with developing appropriate levels of service standards based on current and projected participation trends.

**Recreation Centers** – The Cobb Plan considers requirements for various categories of recreation centers, using both NRPA standards and those developed by the planning team. NRPA standards for Multiple Recreation Courts are 1 facility per 10,000 persons. Standards for other categories of recreation centers developed by for the Plan are:

- Gymnasium: 1 facility per 20,000 persons
- Community Center: 1 facility per 50,000 persons

The recommended size of a community center is 50,000 to 80,000 square feet, depending upon the desired uses of the facility. The recommended size of a Community Center/Multi-generational area is 50,000 to 80,000 square feet (Community Park).

**Aquatic Centers** – The Cobb Plan identifies both aquatic centers and outdoor pools, but applies standards for the generic NRPA category “swimming pool” to each. The NRPA minimum standard for swimming pools is 1 facility per 20,000 persons.

**Athletic Fields** – NRPA recommendations exist for baseball/softball fields, football fields, and soccer fields. The Cobb Plan also tallies the number of multiple recreation fields, but does not apply a specific standard for its evaluation. The Plan also acknowledges other standards for soccer fields (1 facility per 4,000 persons), and evaluates the County’s deficiency based on both these and NRPA standards. NRPA standards for athletic fields are:

- Baseball/Softball fields: 1 facility per 2,500 persons
- Football fields: 1 facility per 20,000 persons (2 acres/field)
- Soccer fields: 1 facility per 10,000 persons (2 acres/field)

The Cobb Plan recommends dimension requirements for various athletic fields based on whether the park is a “mini park” or “community park.” Standards by field type and park category are:

- Baseball/Softball fields:
  - Community Park: 15 acres per field if lighted adult softball complex; 8-10 acres per field if lighted youth baseball complex
- Football fields:
  - Mini Park: 2 acres per field
  - Community Park: 2 acres per field
- Soccer fields:
  - Mini Park: 2 acres per field

**Tennis Courts** – Standards for the provision of tennis courts are also informed by NRPA. The baseline standard is 1 facility per 2,000 persons. The minimum requirement for tennis complexes in community parks is 2 acres.

**Basketball Courts** – NRPA standards are set for both outdoor basketball courts and multiple recreation courts. Outdoor court requirements are 1 facility per 5,000 persons, and multiple recreation court requirements are 1 per 10,000. The Cobb Plan recommends that mini park basketball courts be no smaller than 10,000 square feet and that community park basketball courts be 1-2 acres.



**Golf Courses** – NRPA standards for golf facilities are:

- Golf course (18-hole): 1 facility per 50,000 persons
- Golf driving range: 1 facility per 50,000 persons

Regulation-size, par-72 golf courses should be at least 140 acres, while executive courses (par 60) may require only 100-120 acres.

**Gwinnett County**

The Gwinnett County Parks & Recreation Master Plan was developed using a combination of accepted industry standards (based upon NRPA standards), market-driven factors, and past and present circumstances of the community. Standards were established by:

- Compiling the required demographic data (historic and projected, by age cohort groupings and census tract)
- Completing detailed inventory of all publicly-accessible parks and facilities within Gwinnett County in order to identify distribution of each facility type
- Reviewing the standards proposed by the NRPA, as well as those employed by other jurisdictions
- Identifying trends in recreation participation and facility design to assess their implications on facility provision in the county
- Undertaking public consultation programs to identify issues and discuss facility provisions that are over or under supply
- Recreation Centers – The Gwinnett Plan includes a broad category for “Indoor Community Facilities,” and within that category are five distinct types: Community Centers, Activity Buildings, Senior Recreation Centers, All of the Above (large facilities that include the above types), and Gymnasiums. There is no single standard listed for the greater classification, but a standard is listed for each type (See table.)
  - Community Centers: 1 per 100,000 people
  - Activity Buildings: 1 per 50,000 people
  - Senior Recreation Centers: 1 per 75,000 people
  - All of the Above: 1 per 30,000 people
  - Gymnasiums: 1 per 20,000 people

**Aquatic Centers** – Four types of aquatic facilities are identified, including Indoor lane/competition pools, Indoor leisure/family pools, Outdoor lane/competition pools, and Outdoor leisure/family pools. The Plan also lists a standard for All Outdoor Pools, which is simply the sum of the standards of the two outdoor pool types. The Plan is primarily concerned with provision of outdoor leisure pools because they offer the greatest variety of options for the community.

- Indoor Lane/ Competition Pools: 1 per 80,000 people
- Indoor Leisure/Family Pools: 1 per 200,000 people
- Outdoor Lane/Competition Pools: 1 per 80,000 people
- Outdoor Leisure/Family Pools: 1 per 80,000 people
- Outdoor Pools - All: 1 per 40,000 people

**Athletic Fields** – Three types of fields are defined under the heading “Sports Fields,” including “Baseball/Softball Diamonds,” “Soccer Fields,” and “Football Fields.” The plan notes that participation rates appear to be leveling off among youth; however, participation among ethnic communities is expected to remain strong, and participation of adults is expected to increase in the coming years. Baseball/Softball Diamonds have the highest participation rate for organized sports. Gwinnett County utilized the following standards for its athletic and sports fields:



Basketball is a popular recreation activity for young men and women

- Baseball/Softball Diamonds: 1 per 5,000 people
- Soccer Fields: 1 per 6,000 people
- Football Fields: 1 per 35,000 people

**Tennis Courts** – The Gwinnett Plan lists tennis courts, along with basketball courts and sand volleyball courts, under the broader category of “Outdoor Courts.” The County’s Plan recommends a standard of 1 court/4,000 people. The Plan states that tennis courts should be supplied in nearly every community park.

**Basketball Courts** – Basketball courts, along with tennis courts and sand volleyball courts, are listed collectively as “Outdoor Courts.” The plan notes that basketball courts are essential in meeting the needs of youth recreation. The recommended standard is 1 court/10,000 people.

**Golf Courses** – The Gwinnett County standards do not include golf courses.

**Park Acreage** – The Gwinnett County Plan lists five classifications for park acreage under the broad heading of “Parkland.” The standards of provision for each category are:

Parkland-County, City, Federal:	20 acres/1,000 people
Parkland-County Only (All) :	15 acres/1,000 people
County Parkland (Community):	7 acres/1,000 people
County Parkland (Open Space):	7 acres/1,000 people
County Parkland (Other):	1 acres/1,000 people

### NRPA Standards

**Recreation Centers** – The 1990 NRPA handbook does not include a standard for recreation centers.

**Aquatic Centers** – The NRPA lists a single category for “swimming pool.” The standard is 1 pool/20,000 people.

**Athletic Fields** – The NRPA handbook lists six classifications that correspond to athletic/ ball fields. The type classifications are: Baseball (Official), Baseball (Little League), Field

Hockey, Football, Soccer, and Softball. Official baseball fields tend to be part of neighborhood complexes. NRPA recommends that Little League baseball fields be lighted and be part of a larger community complex. Field hockey fields and football fields are often part of a baseball, football, or soccer complex in a community park or adjacent to a high school. For soccer fields, the handbook recommends evaluating the popularity of the sport in the area before applying the standards. It also suggests that soccer fields be included in neighborhood parks. The standard for each classification is:

- Baseball (Official): 1 field/5,000 people
- Baseball (Little League): 1 field/30,000 people
- Field hockey: 1 field/20,000 people
- Football: 1 field/20,000 people.
- Soccer: 1 field/10,000 people
- Softball: 1 field/5,000 people

**Tennis Courts** – NRPA suggests 1 tennis court/2,000 people. The handbook also recommends that courts be constructed in batteries of 2-4 and be included in neighborhood and/or community parks, or adjacent to schools.

**Basketball Courts** – The NRPA has a single category for basketball courts, so it does not distinguish between outdoor and indoor basketball courts. The handbook suggests a standard of 1 court/5,000 people. The organization also suggests that outdoor courts be included in neighborhood and community parks, as well as active recreation areas in other park settings.

**Golf Courses** – The NRPA has three classifications for “Golf,” which include 3 (18-hole), “9-hole Standard,” and “18-hole Standard.” For a 9-hole Standard course, the NRPA suggests a standard of 1 course/25,000 people. For an 18-hole Standard course, a standard of 1 course/50,000 people is suggested.

**Park Acreage** – The NRPA suggests that any park system, at a minimum, be composed of a “core” system of parklands with a total of 6.25 to 10.5 acres of developed open space per 1,000 people. A total of at least 6.25 to 10.5 acres per 1,000 people is suggested for local or “close-to-home” space. The Park Acreage category is broken into three subclasses that include “Mini-park,” “Neighborhood Park,” and “Community Park,” whose standards are defined below. A standard provision of 15-20 acres/1,000 people is recommended for “Regional Space,” which is further broken down into “Regional/

Metropolitan Parks,” and “Regional Park Reserves.” A standard of 5 to 10 acres/1,000 people is recommended for Regional/Metro Parks; however, a standard is not provided for Regional Park Reserves.

- Mini-park: .25 to .5 acres/1,000 people
- Neighborhood Park: 1 to 2 acres/1,000 people
- Community Park: 5 to 8 acres/1,000 people

The NRPA suggests that any park system, at a minimum, be composed of a “core” system of parklands with a total of 6.25 to 10.5 acres of developed open space per 1,000 people.

## 5.2 Recommended Standards for DeKalb County

Based on an analysis of the current DeKalb standards, NRPA Standards, the standards being used in Gwinnett and Cobb Counties, and input from the public, this plan recommends that DeKalb County implement the following facility standards:

- Recreation Facilities – 1 recreation center per 70,000 people, with each center being a minimum of 50,000 SF.
- Aquatic Facilities – 1 pool/20,000 people



- Athletic Fields – 1 ballfield/5,000 people. As the general population ages, the need for the athletic/ball fields will begin to decline, so this standard should be adjusted in the near future.
- Tennis Courts – 1 court/5,400 people
- Basketball Courts – 1 court/10,000 people
- Golf Courses – 1 course/200,000 people
- Playgrounds - 1 /Neighborhood Park
- Off Leash Dog Parks - 1 /40,000 people
- Skate Parks - 1 park/350,000 people
- Park Acreage – We recommend that DeKalb County implement the following standards:
  - Total Park Acreage - 18 acres/1,000 people
  - Mini Parks - .1 acres/1,000 people
  - Neighborhood Parks - 1 acre/1,000 people
  - Community Parks - 5 acres/1,000 people
  - Regional Parks - 5 acres/1,000 people
  - Natural Resource, Open Space, Linear Parks - 4 acres/1,000 people
  - Special Purpose Parks - 3 acres/1,000 people, but emphasis is more on facilities provided than the amount of acreage

*(Note: Please see Chapter 6 for a complete discussion of park land standards and recommendations.)*

It should be noted that due to its current deficit in existing park land, DeKalb County will not be able to meet all of these standards over the next few years; however, the County should strive to meet these standards as longer-term goals.

### **Skate Parks**

Traditionally, skate parks have not been an integral part of most community parks and recreation systems, but that is changing. The general consensus for communities that include standards for skate parks is a range from 1 park per 30,000 residents to 1 park per 40,000. This does not appear to be a viable standard for DeKalb County. The County currently has one skate park within Brook Run Park, and the development of one or more additional skate parks in the County may be warranted.

### **Off-leash Parks**

NRPA standards call for 10 acres of dog parks per 1,000 residents, but the shortage of park land and low intensity of use in existing parks will make this difficult for DeKalb County to accomplish. We recommend that the County focus on providing dog parks as part of neighborhood parks or community parks where appropriate.

A more manageable goal would be for the County to adopt a standard of 1 dog park per 40,000 residents, and to open 6 to 8 dog parks in the next couple of years. Each park should be 1 to 3 acres in size, and should include a fenced-in turf area with fresh water available to dogs, shade, benches, and other seating opportunities for people. All of the dog parks should have proper infrastructure, including irrigation systems. They should also be large enough so that their daily use is not interrupted by maintenance such as sectioning off of areas to be re-seeded.

## 6.0 Park Analysis and Recommendations

### 6.1 Introduction

The process for determining the need for park land in DeKalb County is based on defining park standards, comparing those standards to the County's existing park inventory, and then assessing if additional park land is needed. Although the total amount of park land in DeKalb County is important, more critical measures are the type of park land, where it is located, and how it is being used.

### 6.2 National Trends in Parks and Open Space

Recommendations for DeKalb County are based in part on an analysis of national and regional trends in parks and recreation. Understanding these trends gives us a better idea of the opportunities that should be considered for the County.

Parks, trails, open space and greenways are an essential component of every parks and recreation department. One common national trend is that the demand for parks and open space continues to increase. One reason for this demand is that populations are growing faster than the ability to provide recreation opportunities. The scarcity of space for facilities such as trails, soccer fields, ball fields, play equipment areas and community centers is a major issue for most communities, especially in urban areas.

Greenway corridors can be developed from major drainage ways, existing easements, rights-of-way, and abandoned transportation links through a community. These greenways offer diverse recreational opportunities within a natural setting, including: walking, jogging, sightseeing, bird watching, picnicking, and interpretation.

In a national survey, playgrounds, park structures, trails, and open spaces were most frequently mentioned as components found within a park. Outdoor sport courts, spectator areas, outdoor seating, natural turf sports fields, and concession areas were also frequently found in parks, according to survey respondents. (Recmanagement.com) Many parks and recreation departments have emphasized redesigning existing parks and facilities to meet user needs. These improvements focus on sustainable practices, multiuse recreation opportunities, improving accessibility, and adding flexibility in meeting user demands. One frequent comment from the DeKalb public meetings was the need to upgrade existing parks. Renovating and improving parks will enable the County to address concerns about safety, accessibility, maintenance problems, and other issues identified during public meetings.

A current national trend is to link parks, schools, neighborhoods and similar destination points together with green corridors and trail systems. Most parks and recreation departments have developed a comprehensive greenway and trail plan. Greenway corridors can be developed from major drainage ways, existing easements, rights-of-way, and abandoned transportation links through a community. These greenways offer diverse recreational opportunities within a natural setting, including: walking, jogging, sightseeing, bird watching, picnicking, and interpretation. In metro Atlanta, the PATH Foundation, a non-profit organization founded in 1991 by three friends who wanted to develop greenway trails, has taken the lead in developing these types of links. The group developed what they called the "PATH Standard" for trail construction, and they have the past twenty-eight years developing more than 100 miles of trails, including a number in DeKalb County.

In “Americans Outdoors,” a 1987 report from the President’s Commission, the protection of natural resources and open space was the highest priority. This is still a priority around the country, and there is also an emphasis on utilizing park lands more efficiently in order to meet recreational needs. DeKalb County does seek to find a balance between protecting natural resources and providing recreation opportunities.

Another trend is to develop parks based on the concept of walkability. That means developing parks that are within walking distance of neighborhoods, providing sidewalks and trails that connect to these parks, and including walking trails within the parks themselves. A limitation in DeKalb County is that most parks are not currently conducive to walking. Many neighborhoods in the County are designed around dead-end cul-de-sacs, and these do not provide opportunities for connectivity. For example, even people who live close to Wade Walker Park do not walk there because of man-made, natural, and artificial barriers such as fencing, steep topography, the dead-end street layout, and the restrictive design of the park itself. The Department is continuing to work with the County’s Public Works Department to link parks via sidewalks and trails. The addition of mini parks and neighborhood parks within walking distance of businesses, residents, and schools would help improve walkability.

For playgrounds, there is a national trend away from more traditional equipment and toward equipment that is age-appropriate, challenging, and creative. There is an emphasis on “play value,” which refers to things that spontaneously encourage children to challenge themselves. Instead of traditional playground equipment such as slides and swings, climbing walls, boulders, and other creative facilities are being constructed in parks.

Rather than the “one-size-fits-all” approach that was offered by playgrounds of the past, parks now provide equipment that is appropriate for age, interest and ability. It is increasingly common to find one playground for infants, another for young children, another for older children and adults, and yet another for physically challenged park users. Play spaces for adults and senior citizens are gaining in popularity.

Nationally, parks are being redeveloped to include more interaction between children and adults. Linear parks, for example, can be used for long walks or long bike rides by both children and adults. As noted earlier, DeKalb County has a shortage of such parks. Continuing to partner with groups such as the PATH Foundation will help the County address this shortage.

Parks departments across the country are seeking to adopt forward-looking policies that help protect natural resources, encourage sustainable economic development, and preserve a standard of living. There is a sense of urgency for conserving natural resources and wildlife in the state due to expected population growth, resulting urbanization, and land use competition. DeKalb needs to continue to adopt this philosophy as it expands recreation opportunities in the County.

## 6.3 Recommended Park System Concepts for DeKalb County

This section includes recommendations for a classification system for DeKalb County, as well as additional recommendations for building and renovating existing parks and park facilities. As noted earlier, many existing parks in DeKalb County need to be updated in order to make them more efficient, accessible, and consistent with the goals, objectives, and mission statement of the park system.

### **Recommendation 1 – Implement the Recommended Park Classification System.**

**Recommendation 2 – Focus on Sustainability.** The County must develop a stronger focus on sustainable, less maintenance-intensive landscapes, and incorporate green landscape design into traditional parks. The County has already taken steps in this direction by

establishing its goal of becoming a leader in sustainability. In 2007, the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners recommended that all capital construction buildings with an estimated construction cost of \$5 million or greater be designed and constructed to achieve LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification. LEED is a standard for sustainable buildings developed by the U.S. Green Building Council. The Board also advised that construction projects costing less than \$5 million should be evaluated to determine if achieving LEED certification would be viable. These recommendations are in keeping with the County's stated intent to "make a positive impact on the environment and minimize long-term operating costs by applying various measures to its capital construction building projects." (DeKalb BOC business agenda, June 12, 2007)

**Recommendation 3 – Address Economics.** The County should expand on the concept of parks as economic resources, and develop a business plan for the Department based on the recognition that parks and recreation is a business. This will enable the County to address some of its financial concerns. In addition, all revenue generated by parks and recreation facilities should stay within the Department.

**Recommendation 4 – Improve Access.** Improving access to outdoor recreation resources and facilities can be accomplished by establishing parks near places where people live and work, and by exploring ways to connect existing facilities for pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles (bikes, in-line skates, horses, etc.). Developing new neighborhood parks will help accomplish this objective.



Playgrounds are an important element for neighborhood parks

**Recommendation 5 – Enhance Existing Parks.** Creating conceptual site master plans for each park will help establish a benchmark for developing future alternatives based on user supported programs. Each site plan would present a functional vision of what each park could be, and would address issues such as potential uses, response to change, accessibility, circulation and transportation, security, maintenance, aesthetics, programming, and cost.

Emphasis should be placed on "play value," which refers to things that spontaneously encourage visitors to challenge themselves and reach out beyond traditional play and climbing equipment. Provide playground equipment that is age and ability-appropriate, challenging, creative, durable and safe. Climbing walls, boulders, and other creative approaches that include natural elements can be featured. It is also important to provide open space that users can utilize in more spontaneous ways.

The County should utilize existing technologies to enhance recreational opportunities. For example, adding wireless Internet nodes to major parks may encourage citizens to get outside and use the parks more often, even if in a primarily passive way.

Parks must be developed to provide for a greater flexibility of spaces. Some playing fields should be designed as a large, continuous open area; this allows for soccer goals and other equipment to be moved on a regular basis to prevent a wear pattern from forming in the turf. Including large, level open areas in new parks will allow for informal games and activities.

**Recommendation 6 – Participate in GIS Inventory.** The Department needs to participate in a County-wide GIS inventory of all County property holdings to seek opportunities for expansion, trade, joint venturing, and/or disposition of existing County resources. This approach will help ensure that park acquisition and development is consistent with other County-wide decisions.

**Recommendation 7 – Enhance Aesthetics.** One recommendation is for DeKalb County to invest more in horticultural applications such as the use of indigenous flowers and plants, and improving the overall aesthetic quality of the parks. The County could explore options for acquiring discontinued or discounted plants from nurseries and home supply stores. One approach is to provide space for community gardens in selective parks. These help promote interaction and provide another way to draw people into the parks. The County could assign community gardeners "allotment" plots in public gardens and also encourage sponsorships and "friendly" competitions within sites and among parks.

## 6.4 Recommendations for Greenways and Natural Resource Areas

The County has a comprehensive greenway and trail plan that explores opportunities for linking parks, open space, recreation facilities, and public gathering areas with residential areas and transportation routes. The County coordinates with PATH, which has developed a master trail plan that includes DeKalb County. Linear parks and greenways will help connect the other parks in the County's system.

**Recommendation 1 – Coordinate with SCORP.** The County should implement key recommendations to conserve and properly use natural resources from the Georgia Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2008-2013 report. SCORP defines the direction the State is taking in regards to outdoor recreation, and it also makes the state eligible to receive and distribute federal funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). The recommendations in SCORP include expanding the inventory of outdoor recreation resources and other GIS databases to identify lands suitable for conservation.

**Recommendation 2 – TAU.** Support the State's efforts to establish and provide resource data and tools by establishing a Technical Assistance Unit within the Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites Division to aid local governments that are focusing on land conservation needs in accordance with SCORP 2008-2013, the Georgia Land Conservation Plan and the Georgia Wildlife Action Plan.

**Recommendation 3 – Land Use Planning.** Work with the Planning and Development Department to support land use planning that encourages conservation of natural resources and opportunities for outdoor recreation opportunities.

## 6.5 Recommendations for Land Acquisition to Expand Park System

The benchmark standard for park acreage recommended for DeKalb County is 18 acres per 1,000 people. Using this standard and based upon the current population, DeKalb County should have approximately 12,808 acres of park land. This would be expanded to 14,454 acres by the year 2015 due to projected population growth.

DeKalb County currently has 6,328.5 acres of park land, which averages to about 9 acres per thousand residents. Based on the recommended standard for the County of 18 acres per 1,000 people, the County is about half way to achieving this goal. It should be noted, though, that Stone Mountain State Park, which is also in DeKalb County, is used frequently by local residents. The 3,200-acre park is not a County facility; therefore, it is not included in the County's total for park acreage, but it does have a significant impact on available recreation opportunities. If the acreage from Stone Mountain Park is added to the total for the County, it yields 9,528.5 acres of park land, which is around 13 acres per thousand people.

The consensus of input from the public is that there is an overall lack of public open space within the county. One concern mentioned is that the County does not have a signature park that is a focal point, such as Piedmont Park is for Atlanta.

Acquiring land for parks and open space is becoming more difficult for many departments around the country. Land is becoming more expensive while budgets are tightening, and that is certainly true in DeKalb County.

Support for parks is apparent in the County. In the public survey, seventy-three percent (73%) of respondents indicated they would either vote in favor of (47%) or might vote in favor (26%) of a bond referendum to fund the acquisition, improvement, and development of parks, trails, green space, and recreation facilities. Sixty-six percent (66%) of respondents indicated they were either very supportive (37%) or somewhat supportive (29%) of a dedicated DeKalb County funding source for the parks and recreation system in the County.

In DeKalb County, lands, programs, services and facilities need to continuously be expanded to accommodate future parks and recreation users. Acquiring land for parks and open space is becoming more difficult for many departments around the country. Land is becoming more expensive while budgets are tightening, and that is certainly true in DeKalb County. In areas that are growing rapidly it can be difficult to find suitable undeveloped land in sufficient acreage to accommodate a park. The dilemma, though, is if a department does not acquire land now, it may be unavailable or too costly in the near future. In parts of DeKalb County this is already a major concern. It will be difficult for the County to acquire large tracts of land for new community parks, regional parks, or special use parks.

**Recommendation 1 – Acquisition Strategy.** The County should continue to acquire land for parks in a systematic manner, with a goal of obtaining 300 to 400 acres of park land per year. At this recommended rate, DeKalb County would have close to 10,000 acres of park land

by 2020. Lands, programs, services and facilities need to be expanded to accommodate the future influx of park and recreation users. Lands not acquired now may be unavailable or too costly in the near future. One avenue is establishment of a land bank program to acquire and hold properties for future generations. The County should focus on the types of land being acquired and how this land could be used rather than simply pursuing a program that focuses on the acquisition of large quantities of new park land. The quality of the new park land is important since this will help determine potential uses for the land.

One County Commissioner mentioned the possibility of utilizing land around the two County golf courses for new parks. Other opportunities may arise due to the redevelopment of housing, apartments, malls, and other larger structures. There exists a need to evaluate all County property holdings for possible park and/or green space use.

**Recommendation 2 – Focus on Usable Lands.** DeKalb County should set a priority for acquiring park land that can be used for a combination of active and passive uses. One approach is to accept an impact fee in lieu of land if developers do not have suitable land to donate for parks. These fees could be placed into a fund for future land banking.

**Recommendation 3 – Equitable Distribution.** It is critical that acquisition strategies include efforts for to see an equitable distribution of parks and recreation opportunities to all parts of the County. All existing parks must be brought up to a consistent standard. Some parks were viewed as an eyesore and require the decision to restore or demolish.

**Recommendation 4 – Coordination of Acquisition.** It is important to ensure that Parks and Recreation staff continues to be actively involved in determining land acquisition for new parks. The Greenspace Office manages land acquisition, and they coordinate with the Department on acquisition strategies. Opportunities should be continued for citizens to make recommendations on park acquisitions.

**Recommendation 5 – Identify land suitable for development as DeKalb’s signature park.** The ideal site would be generally centrally located, comprise at least 100 acres, have good vehicular and transit access, and be suitable for development with large unprogrammed open spaces, natural areas, and areas suitable for special events.

## 6.6 Recommendations for Mini Parks

Mini parks are small gathering spaces, typically less than 1 acre in size. These parks can be walked to, and they typically include benches, landscaping, and other amenities that help define a small gathering area. These types of parks are typically near major pedestrian activities and are most often implemented in urban areas.

DeKalb County does not currently have any parks that are defined as “mini parks,” but there are several existing parks that are similar in size and function. Mini parks are an effective way to enhance walkability in the more urban areas of the County. The County should consider adding this type of park classification and construct such parks in selected parts of DeKalb County.

**Recommendation 1 – Standards for Mini Parks.** A standard of .1 acres per 1,000 people is recommended for Mini parks. Based upon DeKalb County’s 2005 population of 711,577, that standard requires that 71 acres of land are set aside for mini parks. But instead of focusing on the number of acres, we recommend that DeKalb focuses on developing a few mini parks to evaluate how well they meet the needs of its citizens. There are other priorities within the County regarding acquisition of large numbers of acres for new parks. The addition of mini parks would be secondary to these other needs.

Figure 6-1: Neighborhood Parks with Service Areas

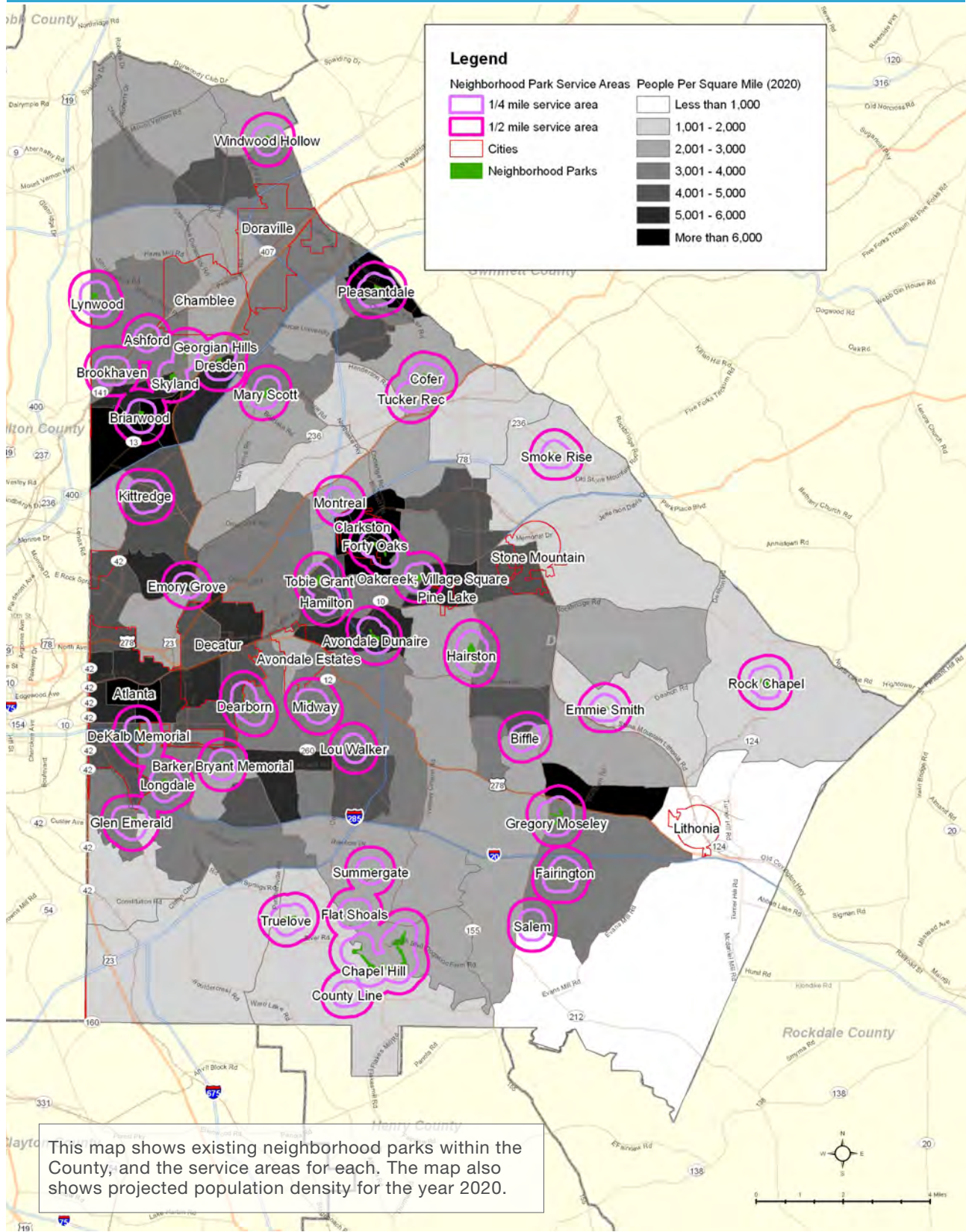
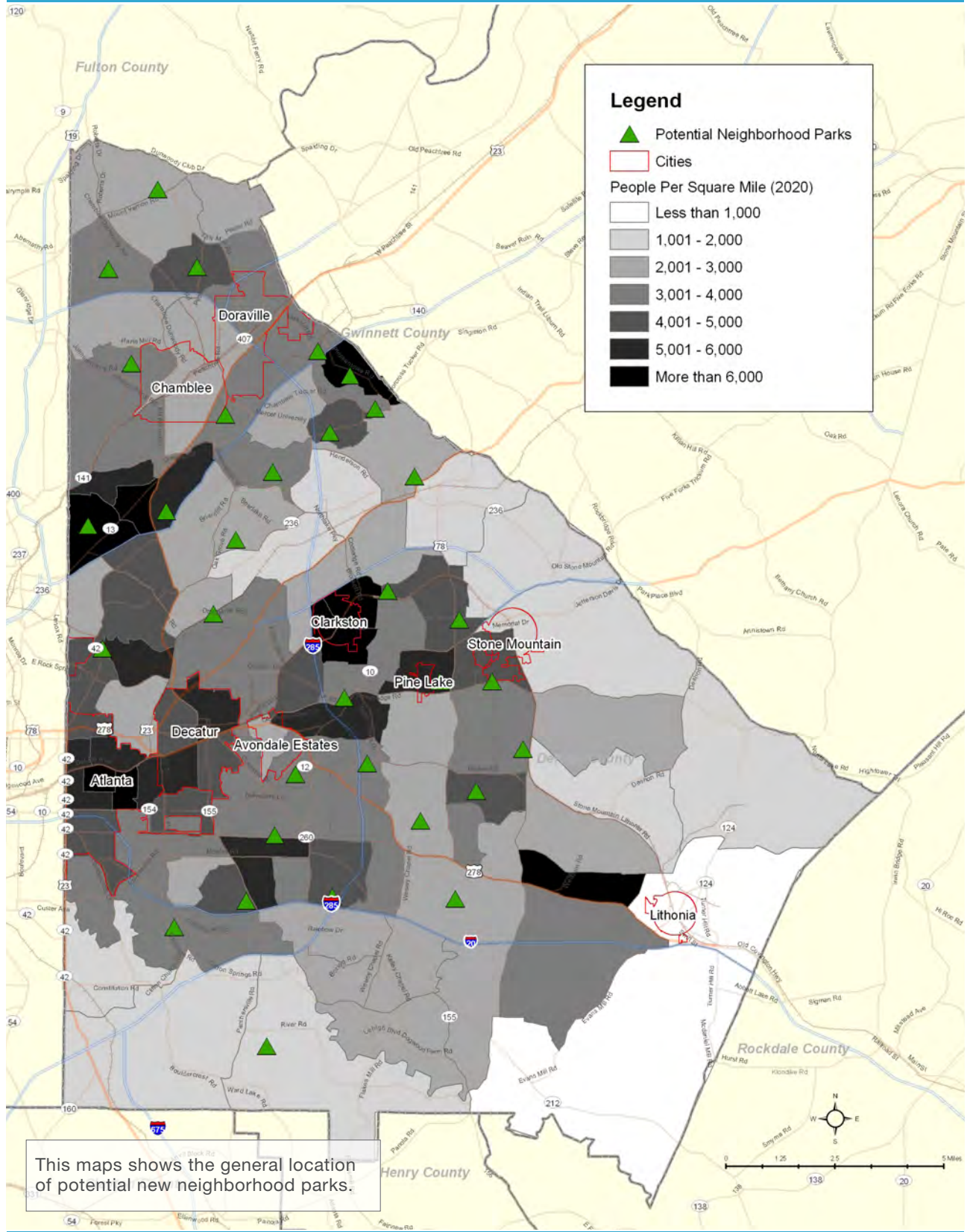




Figure 6-2: Potential Locations of New Neighborhood Parks



**Recommendation 2 – Location of Mini Parks.** Location of mini parks is recommended in urban areas where they would provide much needed passive recreation opportunities. In these urban areas, mini parks could serve as a valuable amenity and landmark.

**Recommendation 3 – Service Area.** A walking distance of .25 miles is recommended as the defined service area for mini parks. Mini parks should be located in highly visible areas where people feel safe. Without this level of comfort people would not utilize these small parks.

**Recommendation 4 – Maintenance Requirements.** One concern about mini parks is that they may result in an increase in overall maintenance requirements. Smaller parks are typically more costly to maintain per acre than larger parks. Given the maintenance challenges the County is already facing, there must be a clearly defined plan in place to ensure the mini parks are maintained. One option would be for local businesses to take over responsibility of maintaining mini parks near them. This would be a viable option since these businesses should benefit from the enhanced walkability in their areas.

## 6.7 Recommendations for Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks typically range in size from 1 acre to 10 acres, and they are often considered the foundation of most park systems. These parks usually include picnic areas, playgrounds, outdoor courts for basketball or tennis, walking paths, practice areas, informal athletic fields, shade trees, open lawn areas, and seating areas.

The main purpose of neighborhood parks is to provide facilities and recreation space for the entire family. Neighborhood parks typically do not include restrooms and have limited parking since most users are expected to walk to the park from their homes. Outdoor lighting is typically not included on sports fields and tennis courts because of the impact they would have on surrounding residential areas. Neighborhood parks are to be used during the day, and should be closed at night.

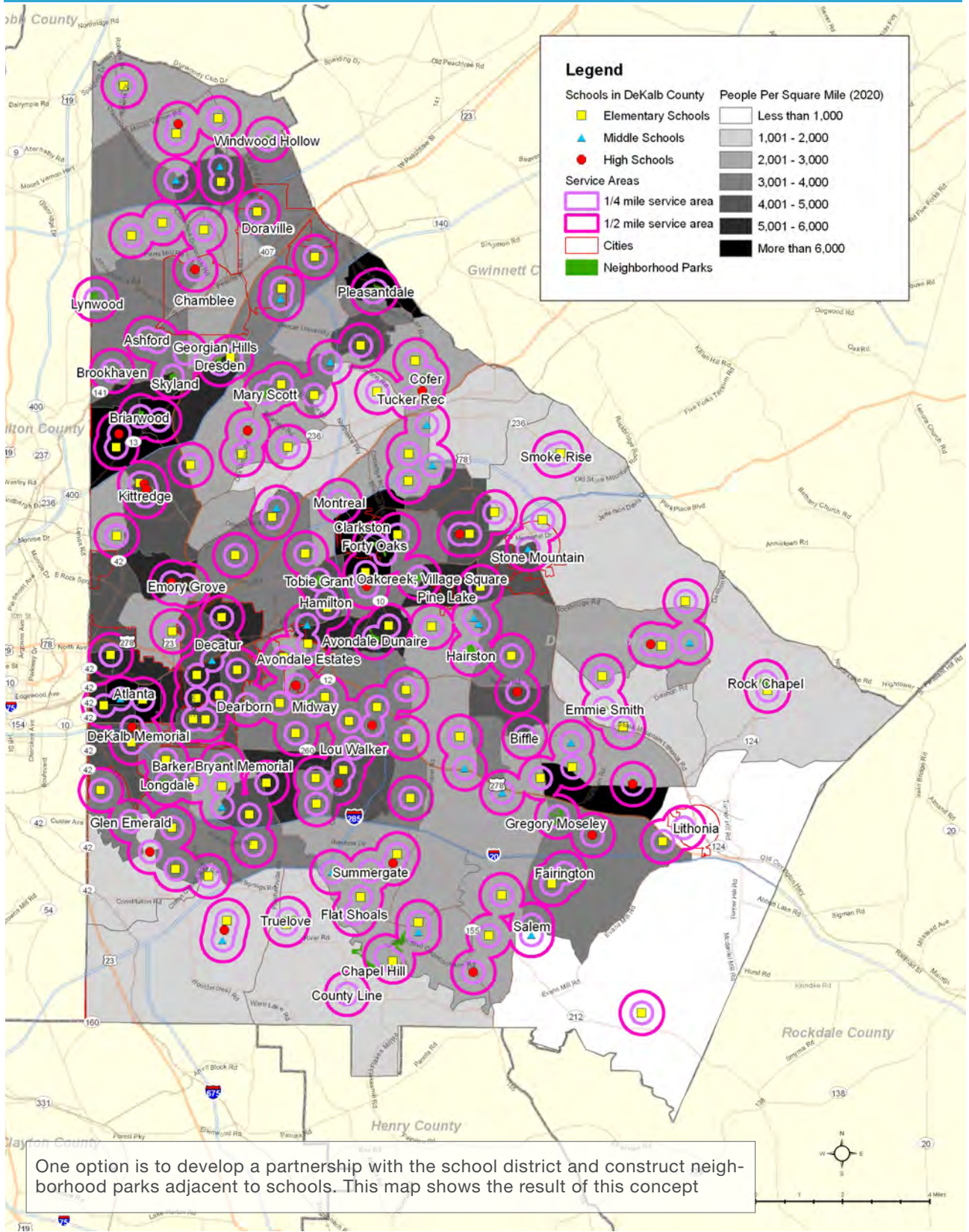
The Public Survey indicated that a very high percentage of respondents (67%) wanted small neighborhood parks (67%). Input from the public meetings indicated similar thoughts.

**Recommendation 1 – Standards for Neighborhood Parks.** The recommended standard for neighborhood parks within DeKalb County is 1 acre per 1,000 residents. Based upon DeKalb County's 2005 population (711,577), 712 acres of land would need to be allocated for neighborhood parks. DeKalb County currently has 571 acres of neighborhood park land, so an additional 141 acres would need to be acquired to meet these recommended standards.

DeKalb County must assess the distribution of new neighborhood park acreage throughout the County in order to ensure that all residents have access to neighborhood parks. There are some areas in the County that lack neighborhood parks. Prioritization should be on locating new neighborhood parks in established residential areas and in the most populated parts of the County. General recommended locations for new neighborhood parks are shown in Figure 6-2. Using the DeKalb County 2015 population (802,996), 803 acres is recommended for neighborhood parks at that point in time.

**Recommendation 2 – Location of Parks.** Neighborhood parks should be within easy walking or bicycling distance. Ideally, residents should be able to access the parks without having to cross major streets. A neighborhood park typically serves one large or several smaller neighborhoods. Neighborhood streets should include sidewalks in order to improve walkability and make it easier to access the parks. The cities of Decatur, Doraville, Chamblee, Avondale Estates, and Atlanta all have parks in or near DeKalb County that function as

Figure 6-3: Map Showing Neighborhood Parks & Schools with Service Areas



neighborhood parks. These need to be taken into account when considering the addition of new neighborhood parks in the County.

**Recommendation 3 – Service Area.** Neighborhood parks serve a population within a half-mile radius around the park. A long-term goal for DeKalb County, however, should be to establish a quarter-mile service radius, which would support the goal of creating more walkable communities. A quarter-mile service area is consistent with NRPA standards. Each neighborhood park is expected to serve 2,000 to 16,000 people.

**Recommendation 4 – Partnership with Schools.** One option is for the County to partner with the school district and develop joint facilities that integrate neighborhood parks and elementary schools. Neighborhood parks are frequently located adjacent to elementary schools. This approach would be an efficient way for DeKalb County to utilize available land to meet recreation needs.

## 6.8 Recommendations for Community Parks

Community parks are large parks that are used by people throughout the county. They typically range in size from 10 to 100 acres and provide for different active and passives uses. A community park should be large enough to host a variety of facilities while still leaving open space for natural areas and unstructured recreational activities. Some of these facilities include the following: lighted athletic fields, indoor and outdoor recreation centers and pools, walking paths, picnic areas, playgrounds, tennis courts, special event areas, ponds, entertainment areas, concessions, restrooms, natural areas, gardens, and other amenities.

Community parks are usually reached by automobile, so parking, traffic, and congestion can be issues. The NRPA recommends a minimum of five parking spaces per acre for general park use, and additional parking for athletic fields and other activities. Community parks generally serve a population residing in a one to two mile radius around the park.

**Recommendation 1 – Park Standards.** A standard of 5 acres of community parks per 1,000 residents is recommended in DeKalb County. Using DeKalb County’s 2005 population (711,577), 3,558 acres of land is needed for community parks. Based on the DeKalb County 2015 population (802,996), 4,015 acres is recommended for community parks at that point in time.

The County currently has 1,581 acres of community parks, so there is a significant shortage of community parks. The County needs to focus on acquiring land in areas that have the densest population and where community parks do not currently exist.

The current DeKalb County Plan recommended the acquisition and development of four new community parks. This would certainly help meet the demand for community parks, but it is still insufficient. The County needs to more-than-double the amount of land used for community parks.

**Recommendation 2 – Location of Parks.** The service area for a community park should be two miles. Existing community parks in the County are fairly well distributed, but there are some areas that are outside the two-mile service area for a park. General recommended locations for potential new community parks are indicated on Figure 6-5.

It should be noted that Stone Mountain Park is a regional park, but it functions as community parks in many ways for residents who live close to it.

Figure 6-4: Map Showing Community Parks with Service Areas

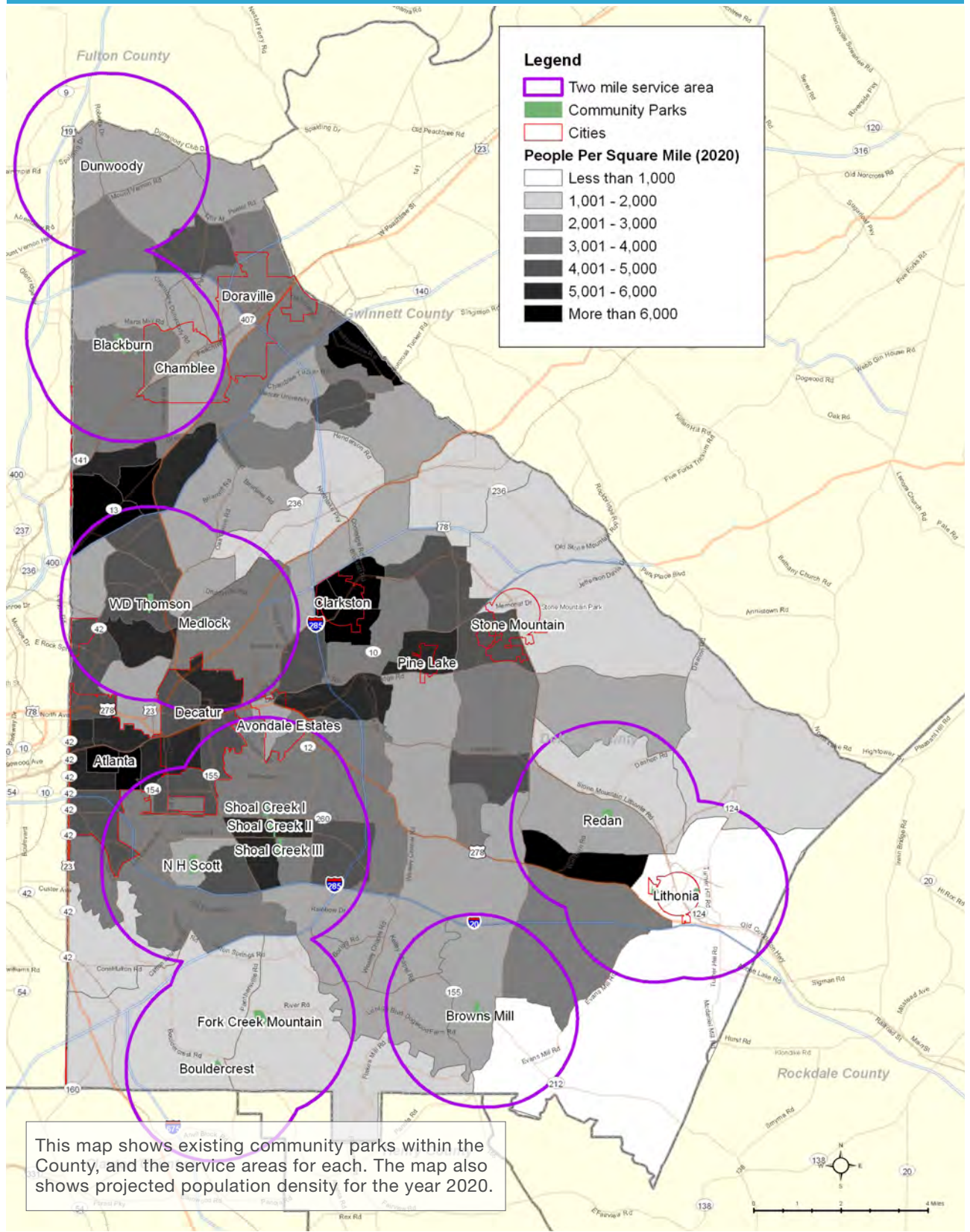


Figure 6-5: Potential Location of Community Parks

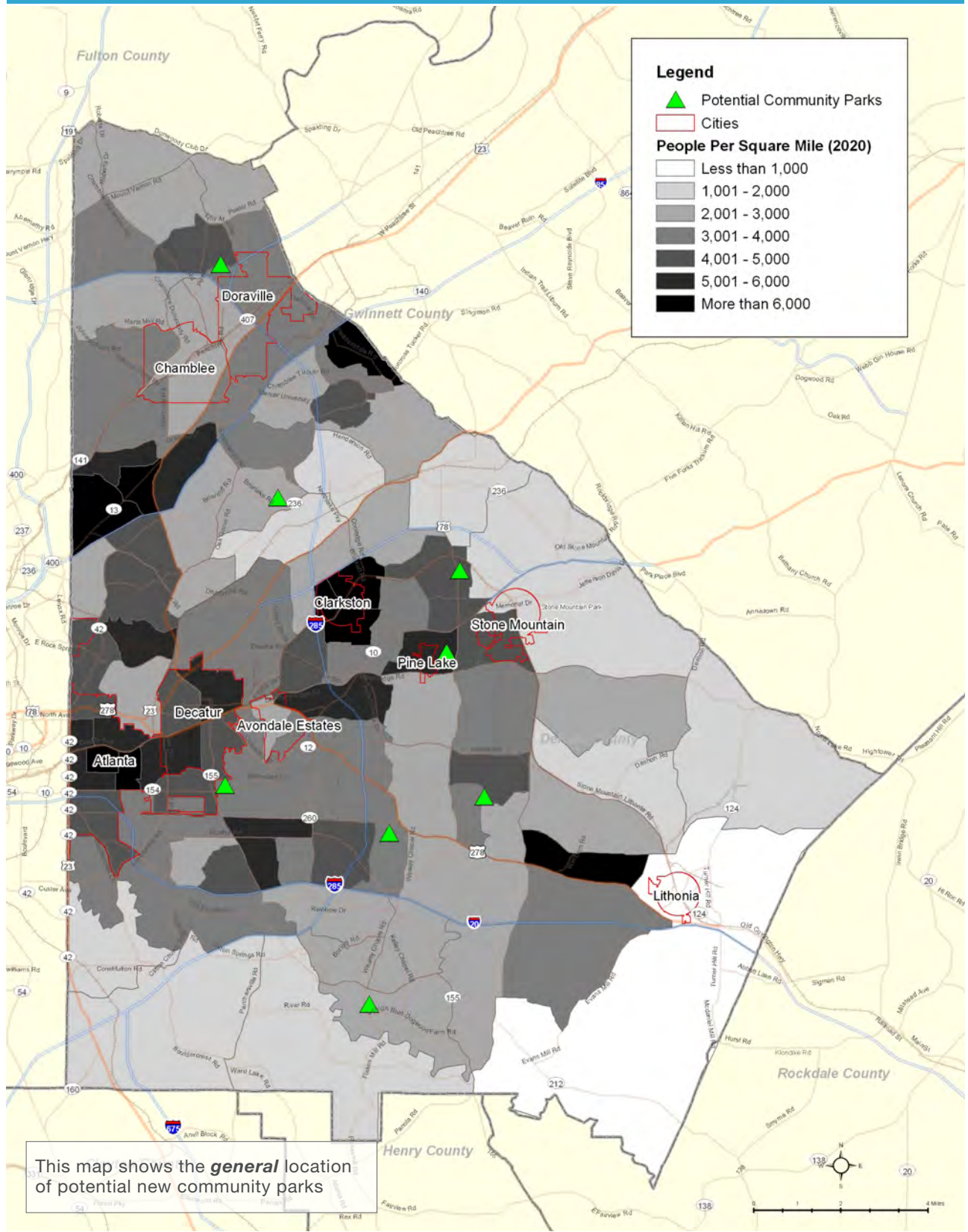
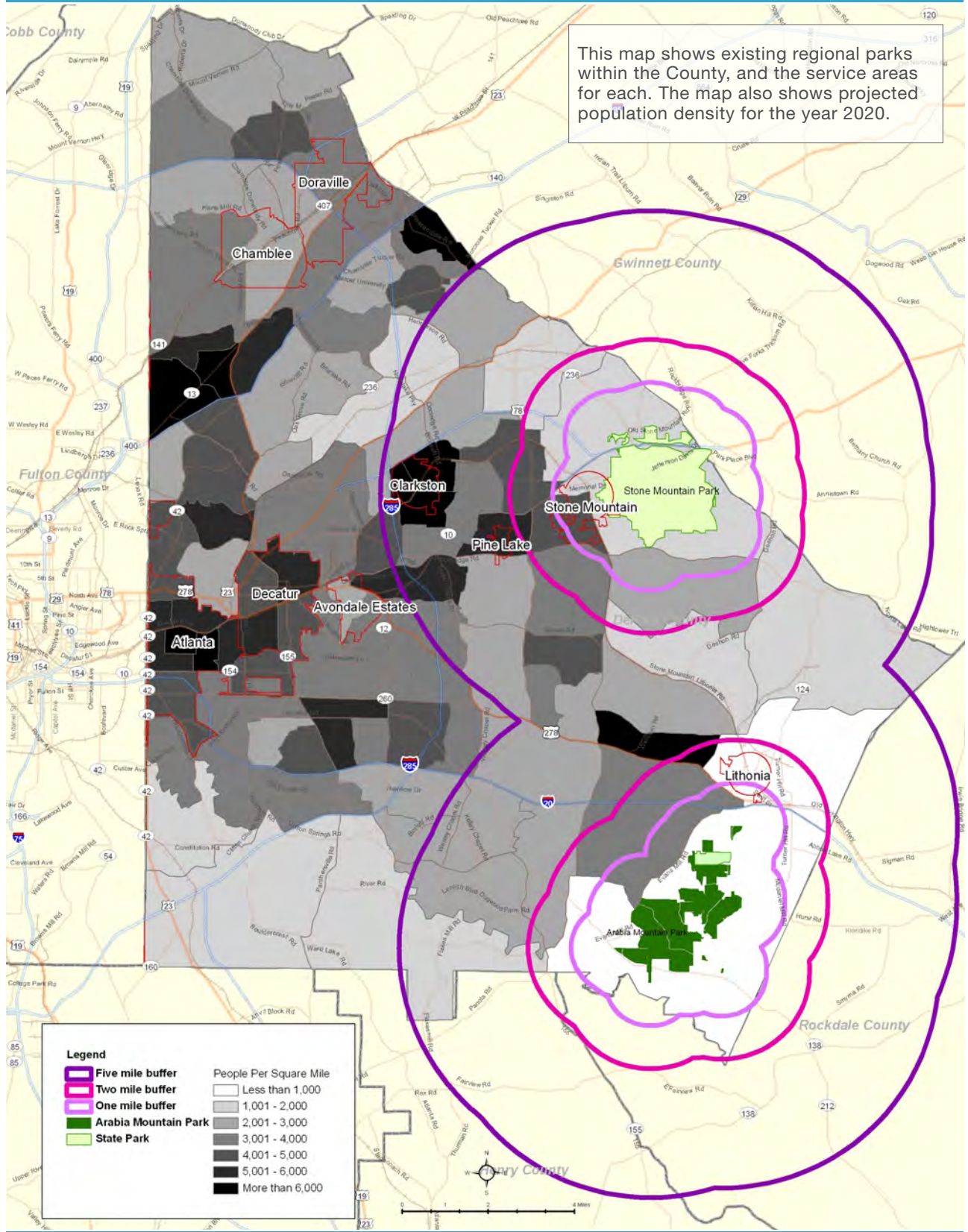


Figure 6-6: Regional Parks



There are also a couple of city parks in or around DeKalb County that also function as community parks. These include Atlanta's Candler Park and Chamblee's Keswick Park.

**Recommendation 3 – Size of New Parks.** New community parks should be a minimum of 10 acres in size, with 40 to 50 acres being recommended as a typical size. The types of recreational facilities developed in these new community parks should be based upon needs of the specific area where they are located.

**Recommendation 4 – Standard Configuration.** New community parks should provide a variety of uses, including a combination of active and passive uses. A new park should include open spaces, trails, gazebos, special uses such as community gardens, activity centers, and interpretive opportunities. It should also include some combination of basketball, tennis, soccer, athletic fields, and other recreational facilities such as cricket fields, lacrosse, etc.

## 6.9 Recommendations for Regional Parks

Regional parks are large parks that serve an entire region. These parks are typically more than 100 acres in size, provide a wide variety of facilities and activities, and attract a large number of visitors. DeKalb County has one regional park, Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve. The Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve is a protected nature area containing a large granite rock outcropping that is millions of years old. The park is approximately 2,000 acres in size and it provides a wide variety of uses for DeKalb County residents as well as residents from neighboring counties. It should be noted that Wade Walker, Mason Mill, and Brook Run parks also draw from a wide area and function as regional parks even though due to their size they are classified as community or special use parks.

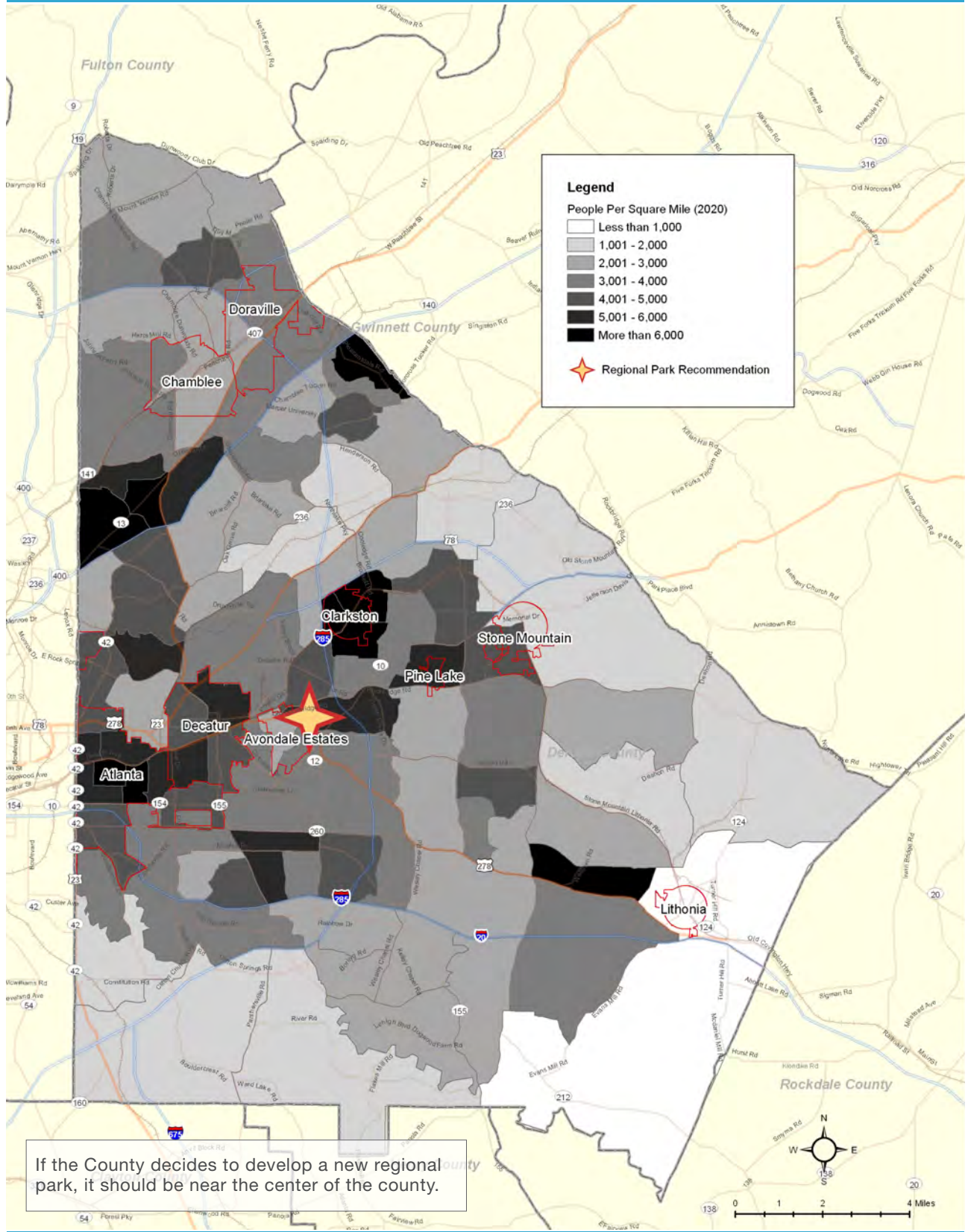
It should also be noted that Stone Mountain Park functions as a regional park, even though it is not operated by the County. This State park is Georgia's most popular attraction, with an average of more than 4 million annual visitors.



Arabia Mountain Park



Figure 6-7: Potential Location for Regional Park



If the County decides to develop a new regional park, it should be near the center of the county.

Because people typically drive to regional parks, traffic and congestion are often issues, and expansive parking areas are usually required. Regional parks are typically good locations for festivals and other outdoor activities where large open space and parking are needed to accommodate a large number of visitors.

**Recommendation 1 – Park Standards.** For regional parks, we recommend that DeKalb County use a standard of 5 acres per 1,000 residents. Based on DeKalb County’s 2005 population (711,577), 3,558 acres of land is recommended for regional parks. Using the DeKalb County 2015 population (802,996), 4,015 is recommended for that point in time.

DeKalb County currently has 2,000 acres of regional parks, all in Arabia Mountain Park, so an additional 1,558 acres is needed to meet recommended standards. As mentioned earlier, the 3,200 acre Stone Mountain Park is not included in this total, although it serves as a regional park within the County.

**Recommendation 2 – Park Acquisition.** Given the presence of Stone Mountain State Park and the need for other types of parks within the County, we do not recommend the acquisition of any additional regional parks in the near future. There are other priorities for park acquisition.

## 6.10 Recommendations for Greenway “Nature” Parks

The intent of Greenway “Nature” Parks is to protect valuable green space as well as significant natural resources such as wetlands, forests, geologic features, and grasslands. These parks also provide access for citizens to natural and open areas, which is crucial in an urbanizing County such as DeKalb.

Linear parks typically follow streams, power line corridor easements, railroad rights-of-way, highway rights-of-way, and drainage ditches. They are frequently used for paths and trails that help connect parks, recreation facilities, open space, and other public areas with neighborhoods and population centers.

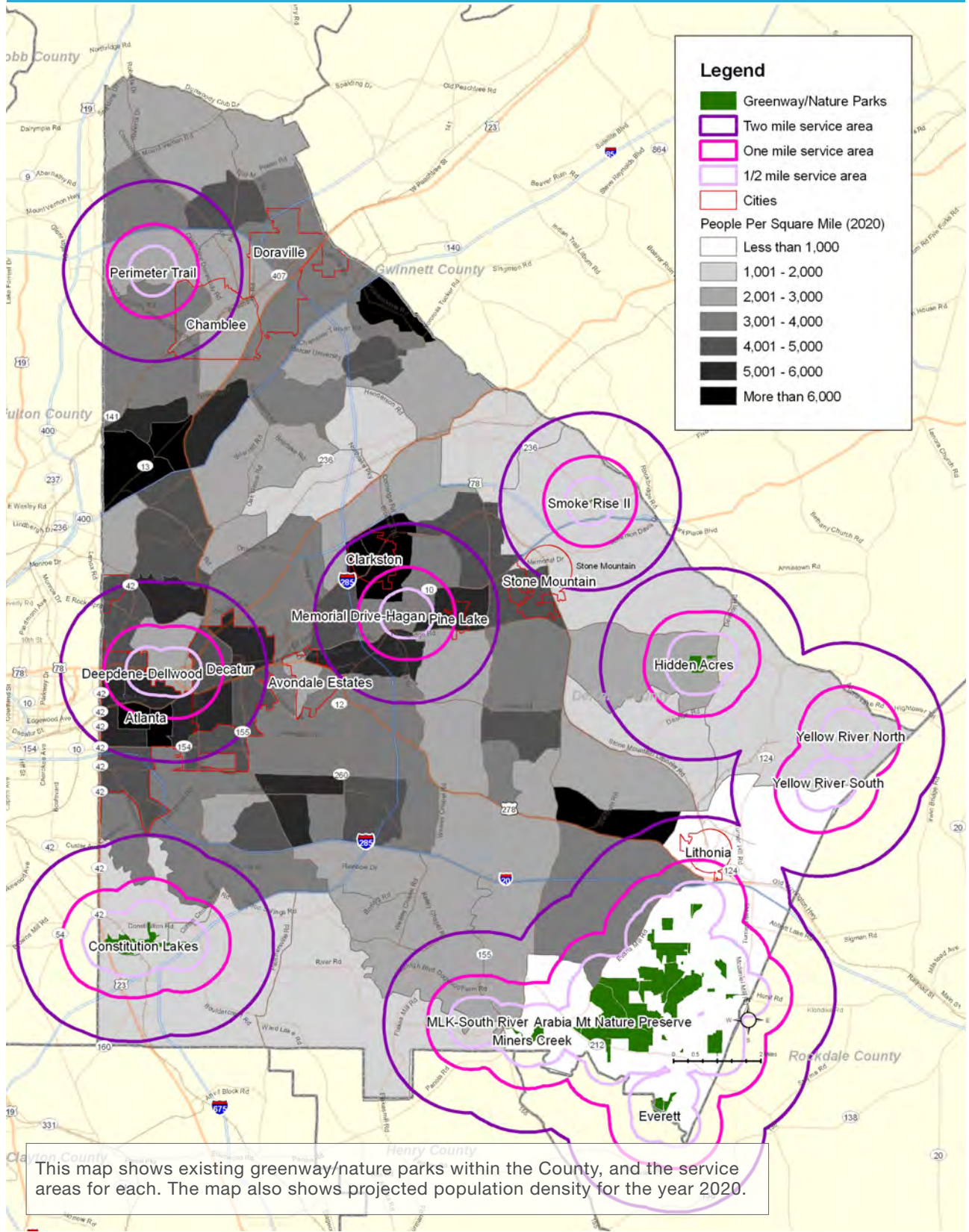
Linear parks typically follow streams, power line corridor easements, railroad rights-of-way, highway rights-of-way, and drainage ditches.

**Recommendation 1 – Park Standards.** The recommended standard for natural resource, open space parks, and linear parks in DeKalb County is 4 acres per 1,000 residents. Based on DeKalb County’s 2005 population (711,577), 2,846 acres of land is recommended for regional parks. Using the DeKalb County 2015 population (802,996), 3,212 acres is recommended for that point in time.

DeKalb County currently has 2,927 acres of land that is classified as natural resource and open space. This is very close to the recommended standard for these types of parks. It should be noted, though, that DeKalb County only has one park that is defined specifically as a linear park, and that is Deepdene-Dellwood, which is 23 acres in size. There are trails associated with Stone Mountain Park and Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve, and although these parks are not classified as linear parks, they do help meet the intention of linear parks in some ways.

**Recommendation 2 – Promote Green Space.** The Department should continue to play a major role in protecting natural resources and preserving green space in the County. Nature preserves, greenways, linear parks, and passive parks are important features of any park system and should be developed by the County as a way of protecting important natural resources. Under-utilized parks such as Zonolite could be developed as natural resource parks.

Figure 6-8: Greenway / Nature Parks with Services Areas



**Recommendation 3 – Expand Linear Trail System.** During the Public Survey for this project, 30% of respondents indicated that walking and biking trails were the most important facilities for recreation opportunities. This emphasizes how important the acquisition of more land for linear parks is to meeting recreation needs of the County.

The County has developed extensive trails with the PATH Foundation, a non-profit organization that focuses on developing interlinking greenway trails throughout the metro Atlanta region. PATH has developed a master plan for 124 miles of trails through DeKalb County. PATH's DeKalb Greenway System plan is the adopted County plan. One existing trail is the 17-mile pathway from the Martin Luther King Jr. Center in Atlanta to Stone Mountain Park. Fourteen miles of this trail are greenway trails, with the remaining three miles on road.

The most recent addition for the DeKalb Trail System is the Arabia Mountain Greenway Trail, which connects historic downtown Lithonia to Stonecrest Mall and the Arabia Mountain Nature Center. Arabia Mountain and Stone Mountain both contain significant natural resources that are an important part of the character of each park.

One goal for DeKalb County should be to utilize linear parks as a means to helping create walkable communities. The current Plan recommends development of 8 miles of greenways per year. This standard is consistent with those used by many parks and recreation departments around the country for linear parks. Since 2000, more than four miles of trails have been added each year. A reasonable goal for the County is to continue to develop a minimum of 4 miles of greenways per year for the next ten years. This will help establish a linear park framework that can be used as the foundation for future developments. The development of linear parks in the most densely populated parts of the County should be established as a priority. These are identified in the DeKalb Trail Plan developed by PATH.

**Recommendation 4 – Improve Access.** Access must be addressed at a broader level, including providing sidewalks and links to parks. Parks need to be close to where people live, work and gather. A park or open space should be located within ten blocks for each resident.

## 6.11 Recommendations for Special-Purpose Parks

Special-purpose parks typically focus on providing a specific type of recreational opportunity, such as skate parks, dog parks, tennis complexes, golf courses, athletic complexes, and aquatic centers. In DeKalb County, athletic complexes are the most common.

**Recommendation 1 – Park Standards.** The recommended standard for special-purpose parks in DeKalb County is 5 acres per 1,000 residents. Based on DeKalb County's 2005 population (711,577), 2,135 acres of land is recommended for special-purpose parks. Using the DeKalb County 2015 population (802,996), 2,409 acres is recommended for that point in time.

According to the County's park classification, there are 474 acres of special purpose parks and 580 acres of special facilities in DeKalb County. The special facilities are the two golf courses in the County. As for the other land classified as special purpose parks, that number is difficult to define. Smokerise School Park is the only park in DeKalb County that is identified only as a "special purpose park." All other special purpose parks in the County are also classified as either a neighborhood or community park. Smokerise School Park includes a multi-use field, basketball court, multi-use court, playground, picnic area and nature trails.

**Recommendation 2 – Development of Special Parks.** The County needs to develop a minimum of four new special use parks. These parks should have a regional appeal, and should help increase the visibility of DeKalb County Parks. These new "special purpose" parks would most likely be developed as part of new community parks.



A skateboarder at Brook Run Skate Park

**Recommendation 3 – The Department needs to change the way it classified a special purpose park so that parks are not classified twice.** Due to the County's method of defining its special purpose parks category, most parks are counted twice, first as a community or neighborhood park and then as a special purpose park. This method of classifying parks makes it more difficult to evaluate whether DeKalb County needs to develop additional special purpose parks. A better way to consider whether there is a need for more special purpose parks is to analyze whether the recreational needs of DeKalb citizens are being met. Are there enough ballfields, tennis courts, and other types of recreational facilities? Additional land is needed to accommodate these types of facilities. Most likely, that land will come in the form of community parks that also function as special purpose parks.

There may be an opportunity to purchase the Hidden Hills Golf Course. If the course is acquired, it should be converted to open space.

# 7.0 Facilities Analysis and Recommendations

## 7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a current inventory of DeKalb County parks and recreation facilities and compares the existing inventory to goals and standards, resulting in recommendations for additional facilities (a complete inventory of facilities is included in Appendix A and E).

## 7.2 Inventory

An inventory of facilities provides a picture of existing parks and recreation facilities, which is the starting point for the master plan. For this master plan, the inventory has been updated and expanded to reflect recent changes in the County.

As with all jurisdictions in the United States, DeKalb County enjoys the benefits of municipal, state, and private recreation providers. The national, local, and recommended standards in Chapter 5 have been developed with the understanding that some portion of the County's recreation demand is satisfied by non-County facilities. Nonetheless, to provide the reader with a complete understanding of the delivery of parks and recreation facilities and services in DeKalb, this inventory includes state, city and private facilities such as selected churches and private recreation providers.

For each park and recreation site, the inventory identifies the following:

- Site Code
- Maintenance District
- Public Safety Precinct
- Commission District
- Super District
- Park Class
- Acreage

The inventory also identifies the types of facilities available at each site, including:

- Softball/Baseball fields
- Football
- Soccer
- Tennis Court
- Multi-Use Court
- Picnic Shelter
- Playground
- Pool
- Nature Trail
- Lake
- Nature Preserve
- Parking Lot
- Recreation Center
- Golf Course (holes)

There is also an opportunity to identify special features and add notes for each park and facility.

## 7.3 County Facilities

A look at the parks and recreation opportunities in DeKalb County will show the diversity and richness of the County's parks and recreation system. Parks range from small neighborhood parks to regional parks and recreation centers that serve a much greater number of people. Parks with ballfields, tennis courts, and swimming pools are very active, while other parks are intended for walking and more passive activities, and help preserve valuable natural resources. See Table 3 in Appendix E for a complete listing of DeKalb County parks and recreation facilities.

## 7.4 City and State Facilities

There are 44 city facilities in or around DeKalb County. (See Table 7 in Appendix E) These include facilities in Doraville, Clarkston, Atlanta, Decatur, Chamblee, Avondale Estates, and Stone Mountain. Collectively, these facilities provide almost 329 acres of parkland. They have a significant impact on recreational use within the County, and residents make extensive use of the various recreation opportunities offered.

## 7.5 Private Facilities

There are numerous recreation opportunities in DeKalb County, many of which are outside the purview of the County. This master plan analyzes selected private recreation providers in order to understand recreation patterns in the County. Collaborative efforts between private and public sectors can best meet the park and recreational needs of DeKalb County residents.

Private providers offer recreation opportunities for those able to pay for the services. Examples of such opportunities include amusement parks, gaming centers, exercise and fitness centers, golf courses, and skating rinks. Some of these facilities are targeted for children or adults, while other facilities accommodate both. Although some DeKalb County residents may not be able to afford some of these private recreation opportunities, private providers do satisfy some portion of demand for recreation facilities and services. Table 6 provides an overview of selected private recreation providers in DeKalb.

There are numerous townhouse and apartment communities in DeKalb County, and many of these provide recreation facilities such as a club house, game room, basketball court, tennis courts, or swimming pool. The availability of these facilities undoubtedly has an impact on how DeKalb County residents recreate.

Many of the larger churches in DeKalb County also provide recreation opportunities. These range from facilities such as those mentioned above to programmed activities that require few, if any, facilities other than interior or exterior spaces. Some of the larger churches have constructed gymnasiums that include indoor basketball courts, volleyball courts, racquetball courts, and fitness centers. Many churches also provide ballfields and open spaces that can be used for a variety of active and passive recreation activities. Several churches also provide playgrounds.

Private facilities include golf clubs, fitness clubs, pools, tennis centers, and YMCA. Most require a membership fee to use the facilities. Many are located in or near neighborhoods, and it can be assumed that many of the members are from that particular geographic area.

Several homeowners associations (HOAs) include trails, playgrounds, and open spaces for more informal activities. Many newer developments include a clubhouse, pool, fitness center, or

This master plan analyzes selected private recreation providers in order to understand recreation patterns in the County. Collaborative efforts between private and public sectors can best meet the park and recreational needs of DeKalb County residents

other recreation opportunities. (See Table 6 in Appendix E) A number of apartment complexes and townhouse complexes have small swimming pools, fitness centers, and occasionally other facilities such as trails, tennis courts, basketball courts, and playgrounds.

Recreation facilities constructed by churches, homeowners associations, and apartment complexes are not intended for public use. These facilities have an impact on recreational demands within the County, though, because a family that has access to a swimming pool in its neighborhood would probably use County swimming facilities less often.

## 7.6 Consistency in Inventory

Comparing the 2005 facility inventory from the Greenspace report with the facility inventory developed by the DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Department reveals some minor differences. There are discrepancies in acreage, but for the most part this appears to be due to park expansion or park boundary adjustments. Some parks inventoried in the Greenspace report are not listed in the County's inventory matrix, and vice-versa. This discrepancy could be due in part to name changes for specific parks.

For purposes of inventory for this master plan, we utilized an inventory matrix that the County updated as part of this project.

## 7.7 National Recreation Facility Trends

In a national survey of parks and recreation professionals, nearly three-quarters of respondents expected increases in recreation facilities. This poses the fundamental question of how to pay for these new facilities.

How recreation facilities are being built is also changing. In the past, most programs at recreation centers have focused on kids and have become youth centers. This is changing, though, and programs are now being targeted at a wider demographic.

Instead of boxed buildings with walled-off rooms, newer recreation centers are more spatially exciting and offer greater visual experiences and opportunities for interaction. There is more focus on space allocation. For example, instead of building a gymnasium, there is greater revenue potential in allocating the same space for multiple uses. One trend is construction of community centers with a fitness area and multipurpose rooms to serve programming needs such as yoga and educational classes. Pilates and spinning courses are among the most popular current trends. Swimming pools that include interactive water features as part of the facility attract a greater number of users and offer a wider variety of potential applications.

A key to flexibility is to figure out ways to incorporate multiple demographics into a single facility. Instead of building separate senior centers and other types of senior facilities, community centers are being constructed to accommodate their needs. The senior citizen center in DeKalb County, for example, has a list of more than 1,600 senior citizens waiting for recreation opportunities (as of summer, 2007). The needs of these citizens could be addressed in a recreation center.

There is also a trend toward constructing new facilities that are more environmentally friendly. Many believe that parks and recreation departments should become leaders in constructing buildings certified by the U.S. Green Building Council with the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System. Construction costs on LEED buildings may be higher, but the savings in long-term energy costs can be significant.



Finally, locker rooms in recreation centers, in particular, are being influenced by changing demographics and expectations. Some recreation departments are doing away with traditional locker rooms and moving toward cabana-style wet and dry lockers.

One major concern at a national level is that young people are not as physically active as past generations, and they are not experiencing natural resources. The National Audubon Society is encouraging the creation of family-focused nature centers that would help address this concern.

## 7.8 Recommendations for Recreation Centers

The current DeKalb County standard for recreation centers is one square foot per person. In 2000, there was a total of 224,975 square feet of space in recreation centers in 11 facilities, for an average of .38 square feet per person. That is approximately one-third of what the County should have based on NRPA standards.

In 2009 the County conducted a survey of the 11 recreation centers, completed by recreation center staff.

**Recommendation 1** – DeKalb County should utilize a standard of one recreation center per 70,000. Using this standard, the County should have ten recreation centers based on 2005 demographics. Based on the same standard, in 2015 the County should have eight recreation centers. Each new recreation center should be a minimum of 50,000 square feet per center. Some recreation centers may be up to 75,000 to 80,000 square feet in size depending upon the types of facilities being offered

**Recommendation 2 – Current Facilities.** The County should reconsider its current policy for upgrading and maintaining existing facilities. Some existing facilities within the county should be sold, or torn down and replaced with newer facilities because they have reached the end of their usable life. Conventional wisdom dictates that a facility should be replaced or removed if the cost to renovate or remove exceeds the total value of the structure and the site. A detailed facilities assessment needs to be conducted by the County to determine which facilities need to be closed.

**Recommendation 3 – New Recreation Centers.** DeKalb County needs to construct a minimum of three new recreation centers in the next couple of years. Recreation Centers can include a broad range of amenities from indoor basketball courts to meeting rooms. They should be designed to accommodate users of all ages. Some of the amenities can include:

- gymnasiums
- indoor walking tracks
- game rooms
- classrooms
- meeting rooms
- aerobic and dance rooms
- art studios
- performing art spaces
- climbing walls
- fitness and free weight rooms
- community gathering spaces

Figure 7-1: Recreation Centers with Service Areas

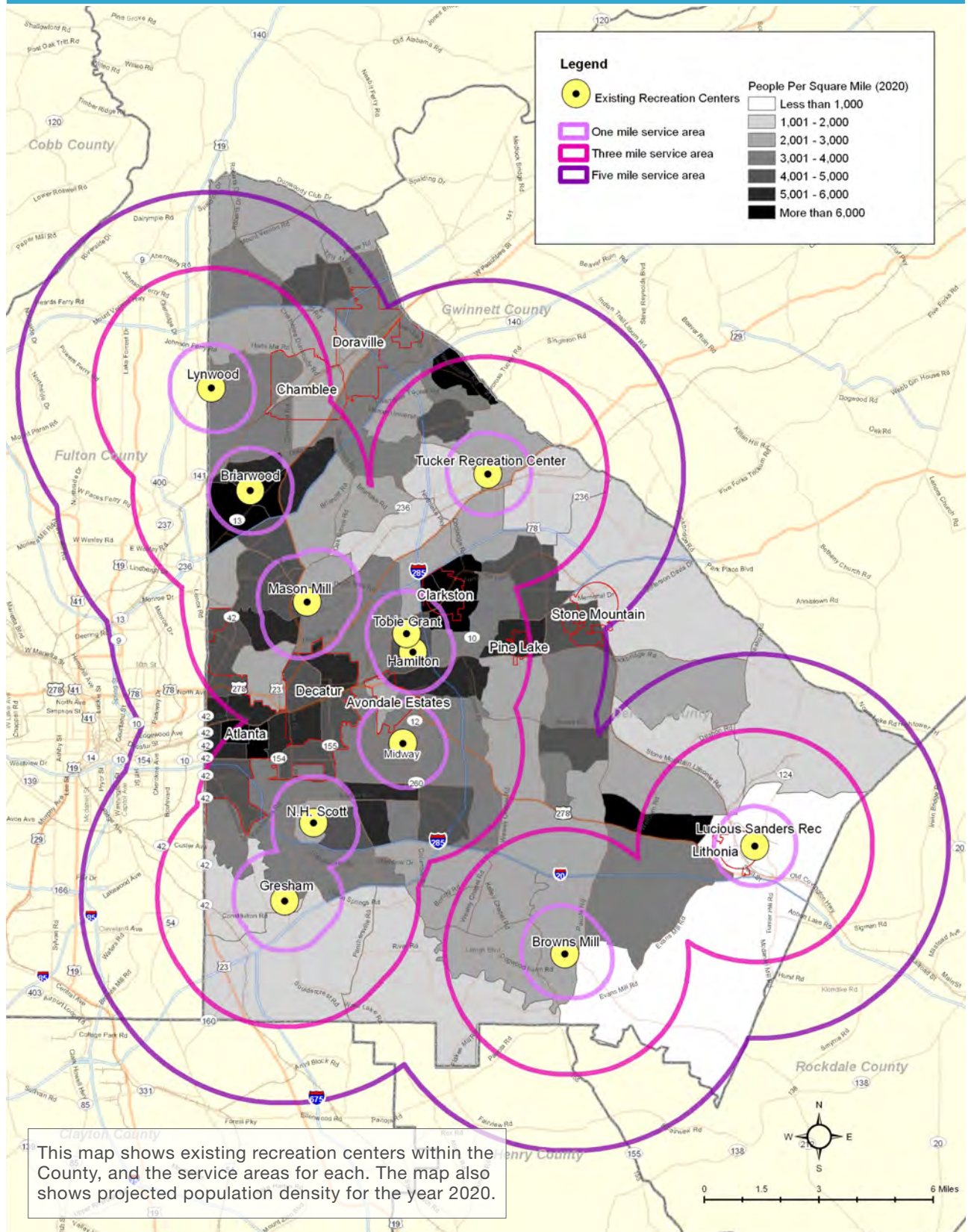
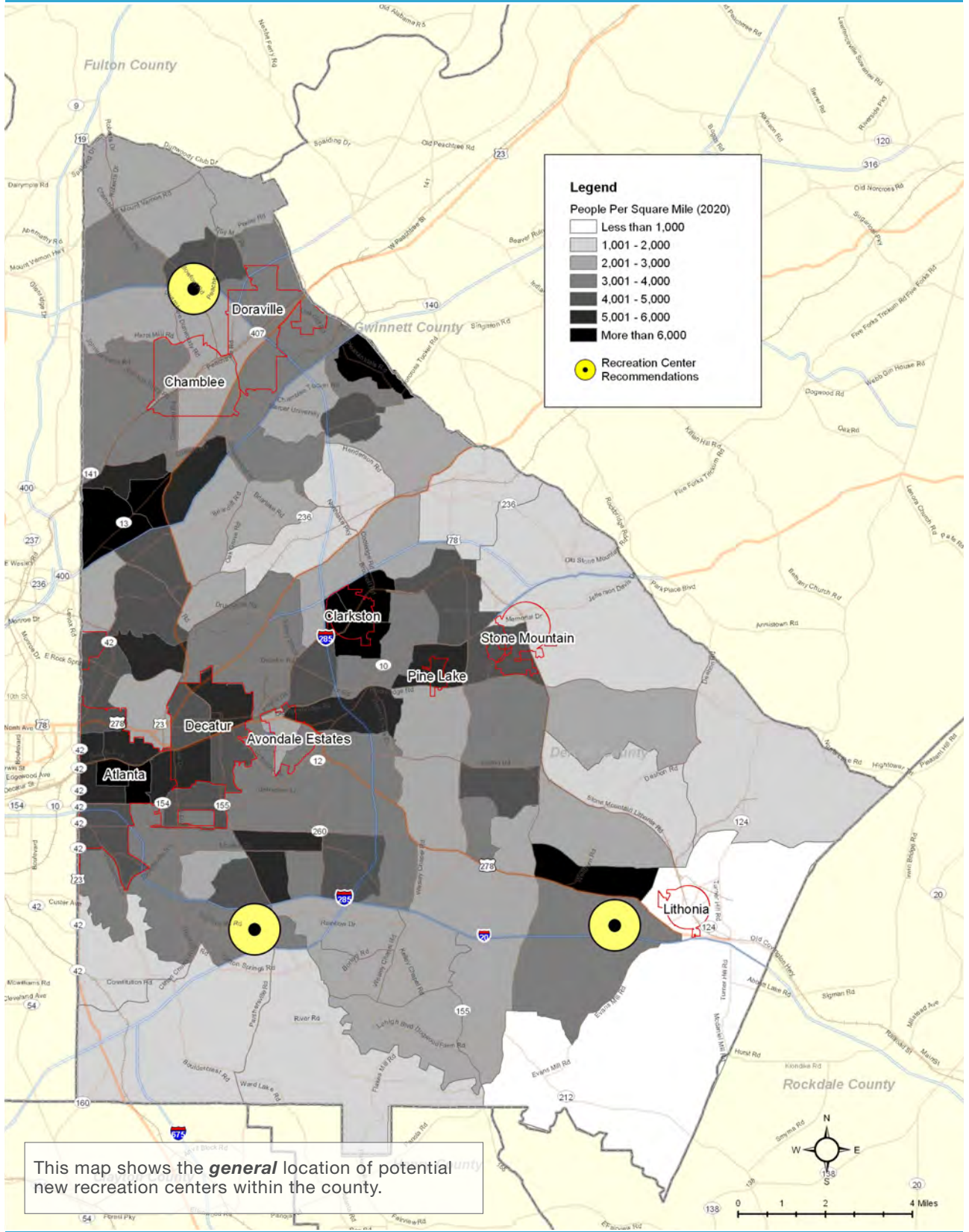


Figure 7-2: Recreation Centers with Potential Parks



They also include more utilitarian spaces, including:

- locker rooms
- administrative offices
- storage space
- concession areas
- restaurants

For new recreation centers, it is important to ensure that planning for new recreation centers help minimize the need for staffing and maintenance. For example, relationship diagrams should ensure that adequate sight lines allow for staff manning a front desk to also monitor movement throughout the facility. It is also important that recreation centers have sufficient critical resources to function effectively. For example, not every center has access to a multi-passenger van. Inability to transport people can negatively impacts a center’s ability to host specific programs. The recommended minimum size for a recreation center is 50,000 square feet. Constructing new recreation centers with multiple floors is recommended because it reduces the building footprint. In 2000, the average recreation center in DeKalb County was 20,452 square feet, which is undersized and cannot serve the population optimally.

New recreation centers should include cross training fitness areas and multipurpose rooms to serve various programming needs such as yoga, educational, social and exercise programs. Emphasis should be on developing multipurpose spaces that can be quickly and easily adjusted to meet specific needs, and on facilities that provide opportunities for the entire family.

**Recommendation 4 – New Regional Center.** The County should construct a new recreation center that functions as a regional center and hosts a variety of activities. These are more focused on team activities such as gymnastics and basketball. More bleachers and other formal seating opportunities need to be provided to accommodate spectators. There also needs to be large spaces that can function as exhibit halls, and these would be augmented by meeting rooms that could be used for conventions and exhibitions. A regional recreation center should be closer to 100,000 square feet in size.

This regional recreation center should be a major revenue generator for the County. It’s success is dependent upon having quality facilities that meet the needs of specific groups and individuals



Dancers showing off their talent

## 7.9 Recommendations for Aquatic Facilities

At a national level, aquatic facilities are gaining popularity and are among the most popular new recreation opportunities offered. Aquatic facilities are typically high revenue producers and are among the most used facilities in parks and recreation system. Amenities offered at an aquatic center may include the following:

- zero-depth water entry
- in-water playgrounds
- water slides
- lap pools
- therapeutic pools
- resistant water areas
- diving wells
- deep water areas
- lazy rivers
- other water play areas

These aquatic centers can also include lockers, restrooms, concession areas, and multipurpose rooms for activities and rentals.

The NRPA lists a single category for “swimming pool,” and it suggests a standard of one pool for every 20,000 people. This standard is rather generic and does not address the size of a particular pool, or the types of activities planned. NRPA recommends a benchmark of .60 square feet of swimming pool per person. The current County standard is .24 square feet per person. A two-to-five mile service area is typically recommended for Aquatic Centers.

The County currently has 12 swimming pools that are opened every year. All of DeKalb County’s aquatic facilities are open to the public and staffed with American Red Cross Certified lifeguards. The Browns Mill Aquatic Center was opened in the summer of 2008. This 34,776 sq ft. aquatic center consists of several water features, including a tot pool, lazy river, and leisure pool. The facility has restrooms with showers, a first-aid station, an information plaza, and three areas with water features for the entire family. The total cost of the facility was estimated to be \$7 million. In addition to County aquatic facilities, there are six swimming pools located in city parks that are in or around DeKalb County. These include Candler Park (Atlanta), Ebster Park (Decatur), Flowers Park (Doraville), Glenlake Park (Decatur), Mckoy Park (Decatur), and Milam Park (Clarkston).

**Recommendation 1 – Facility Standards for Aquatic Centers.** A standard of one aquatic center per 100,000 people is recommended for aquatic centers in DeKalb County. Each new aquatic center should be approximately 35,000 square feet in size and include a variety of aquatic facilities. The County currently has one aquatic center at Browns Mill, but it has outdoor aquatic facilities.

**Recommendation 2 – Immediate Needs.** The County needs to add at least one major indoor aquatic center in the next two to three years. This facility should provide facilities for all members of the family, and should include therapeutic facilities, a competitive pool, and leisure facilities. This facility should be located in the northeast part of the county. at least 3 to 4 new aquatic centers should be developed over the next 10 years. Two to three new aquatic centers should be developed over the next 10 years.

**Recommendation 3 – Modernization. Over the next ten years, all of the existing swimming pools should be renovated and updated to meet current standards.**

Capital costs for aquatic facilities are typically high. The aquatic center at Browns Mill cost approximately \$7 million, and this gives us an order-of-magnitude cost for future DeKalb facilities. Additional facilities are expected to cost between \$8 and \$12 million.

Figure 7-3: Aquatic Facilities with Service Areas

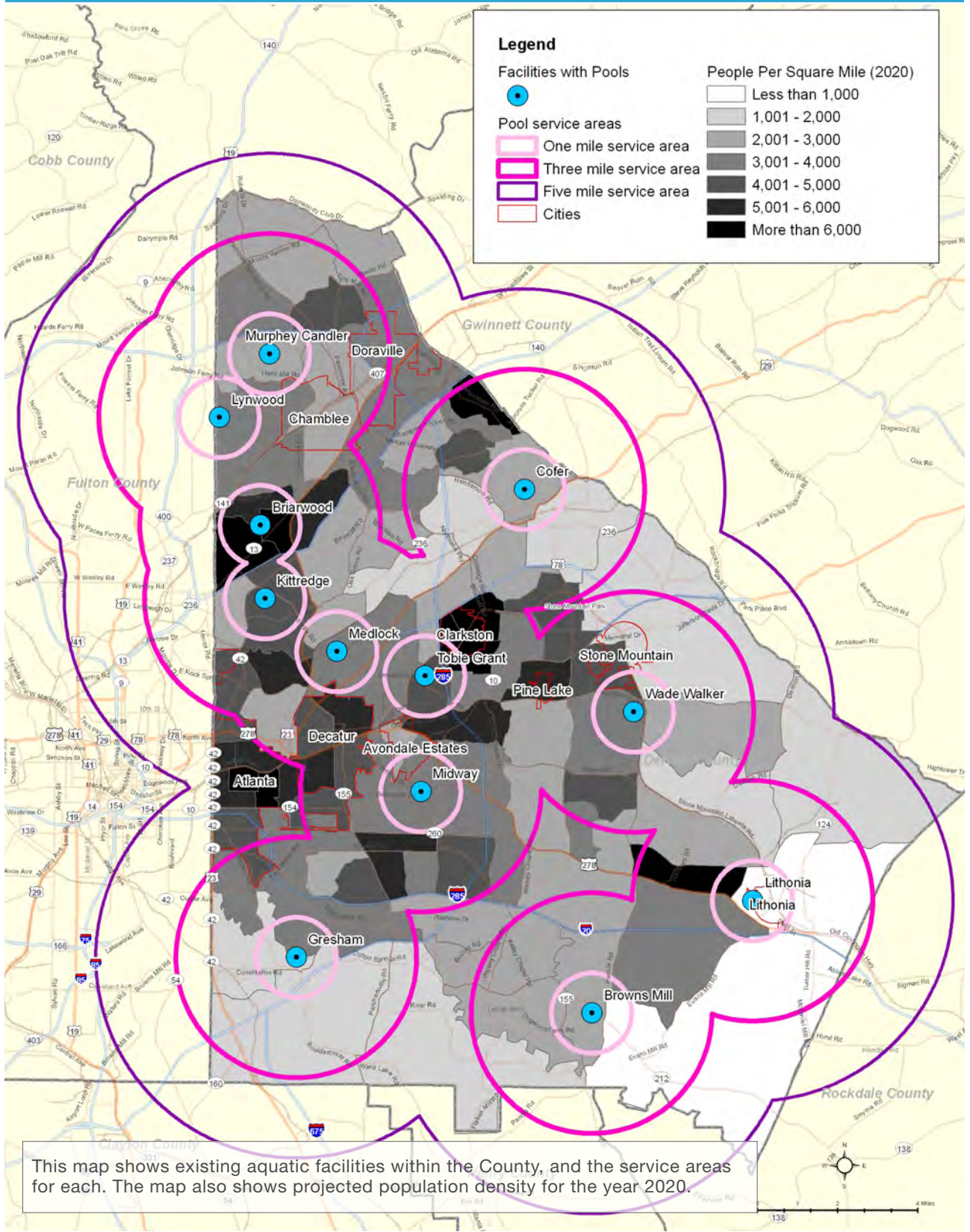
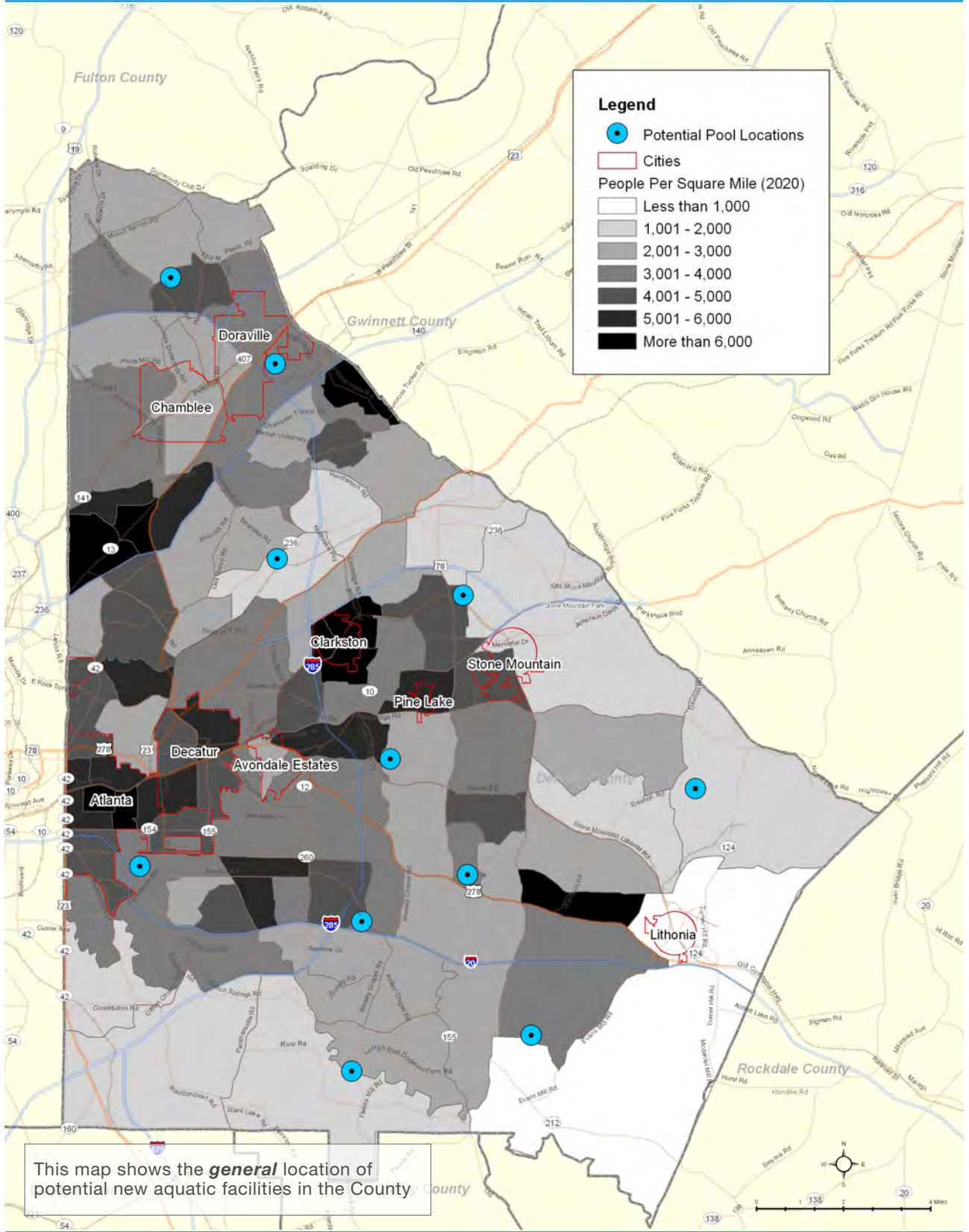


Figure 7-4: Potential Locations for New Aquatic Facilities



## 7.10 Recommendations for Ballfields and Soccer Fields

Athletic fields are divided into two categories, “Ballfields” and “Soccer fields.” Both ballfields and soccer fields are typically part of large sports complexes that can accommodate leagues, tournaments, and other events. These facilities are typically high revenue producers because of the special tournaments they can attract. Sports associations are actively involved in organizing and managing tournaments and leagues. Sports complexes typically range in size from 15 to 40 acres and are defined in the “special uses” category. Amenities typically found in these complexes include the following:

- a variety of types of size of fields
- lighting
- concessions
- restrooms
- batting cages
- picnic areas
- irrigated fields
- scoreboards
- sound systems
- covered dugouts
- play areas for children



Soccer is one of the most popular sports in the county.

A number of ballfields and soccer fields are also located in community parks within the County. It appears that in the past, the County has constructed ballfields wherever there was sufficient space to do so. The current standard is one ballfield for every 4,275 people and one soccer field for every 10,000 people.



Figure 7-5: Existing Ballfields with Service Areas

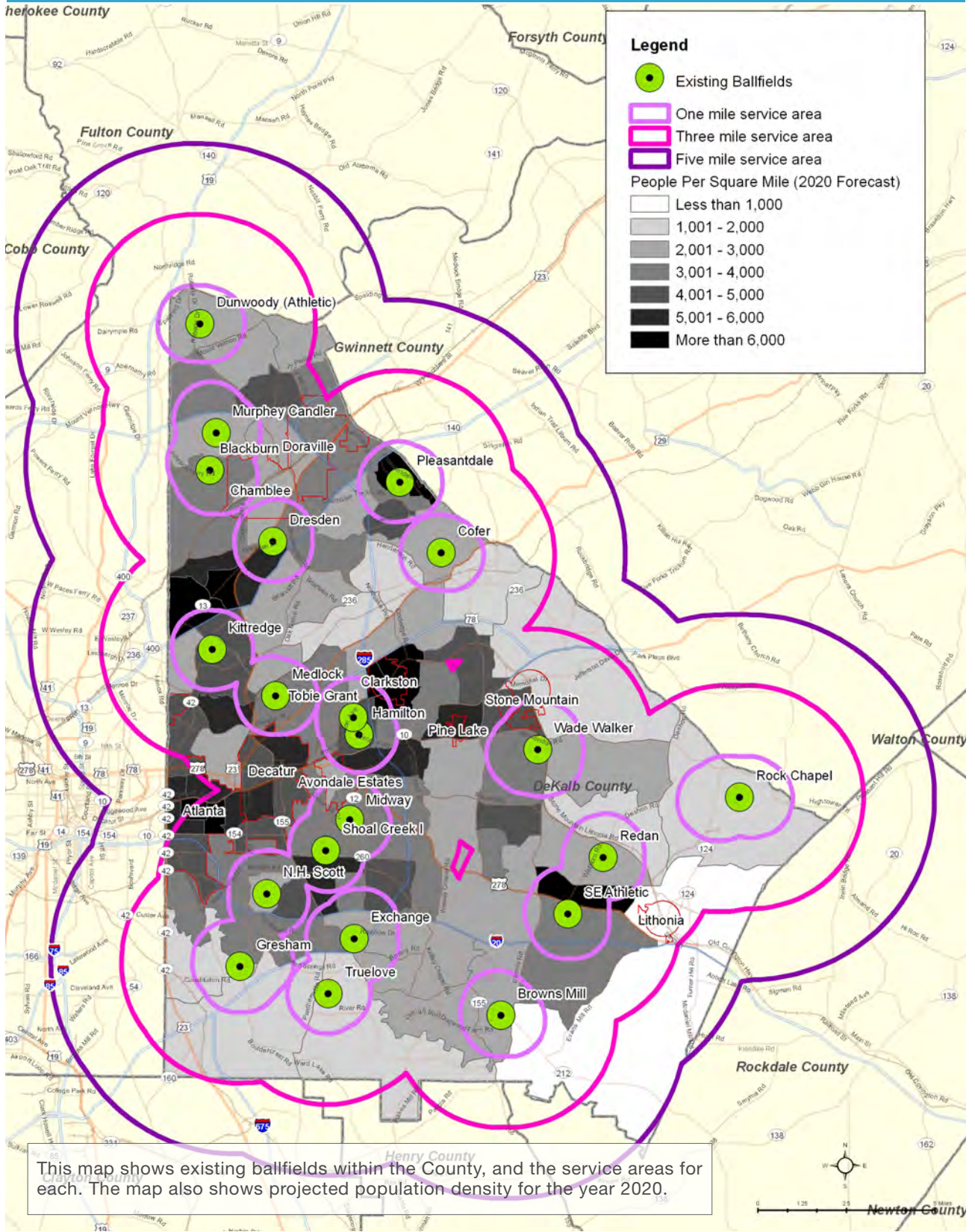


Figure 7-6: Potential Locations for New Ballfields

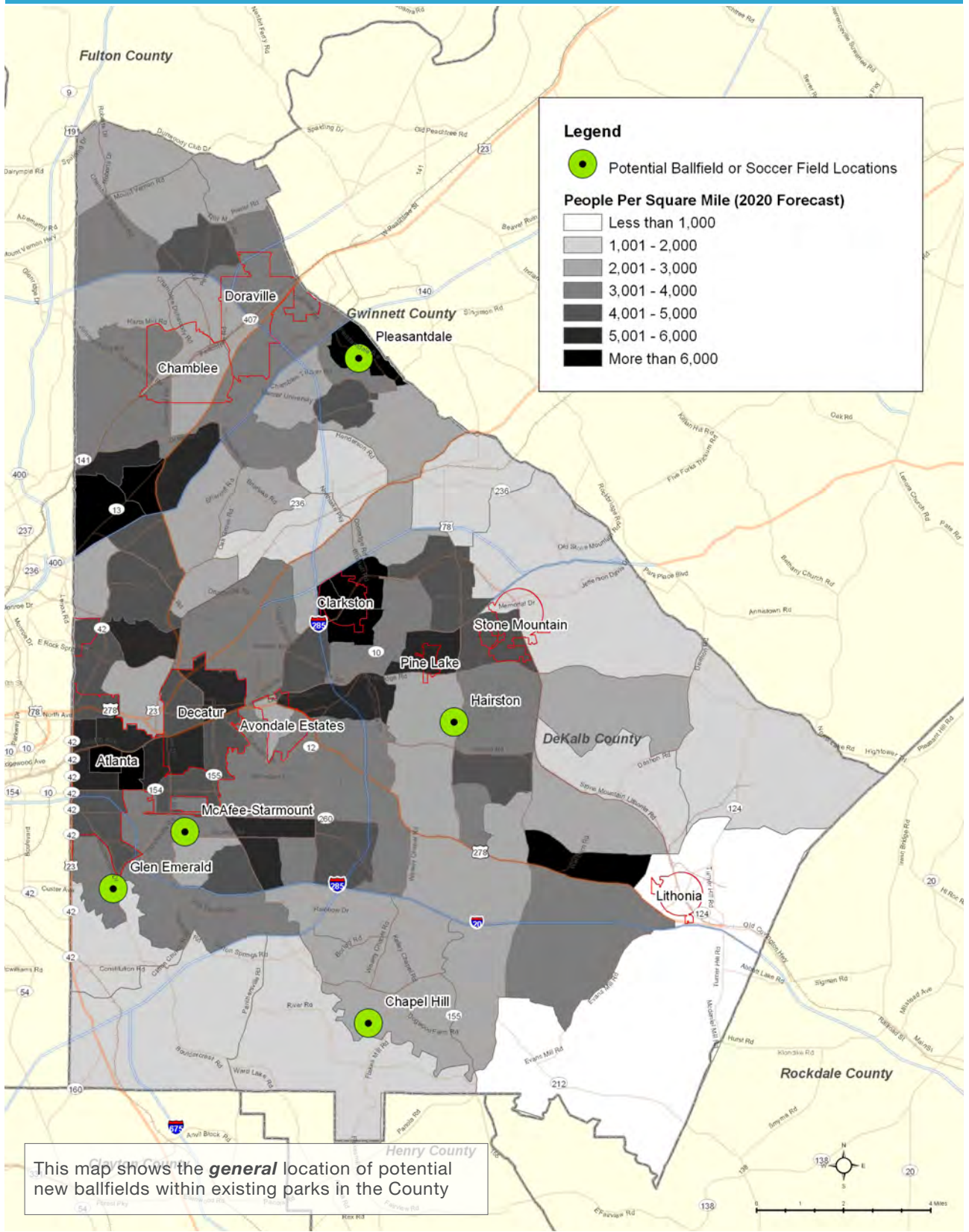


Figure 7-7: Football Field Service Areas

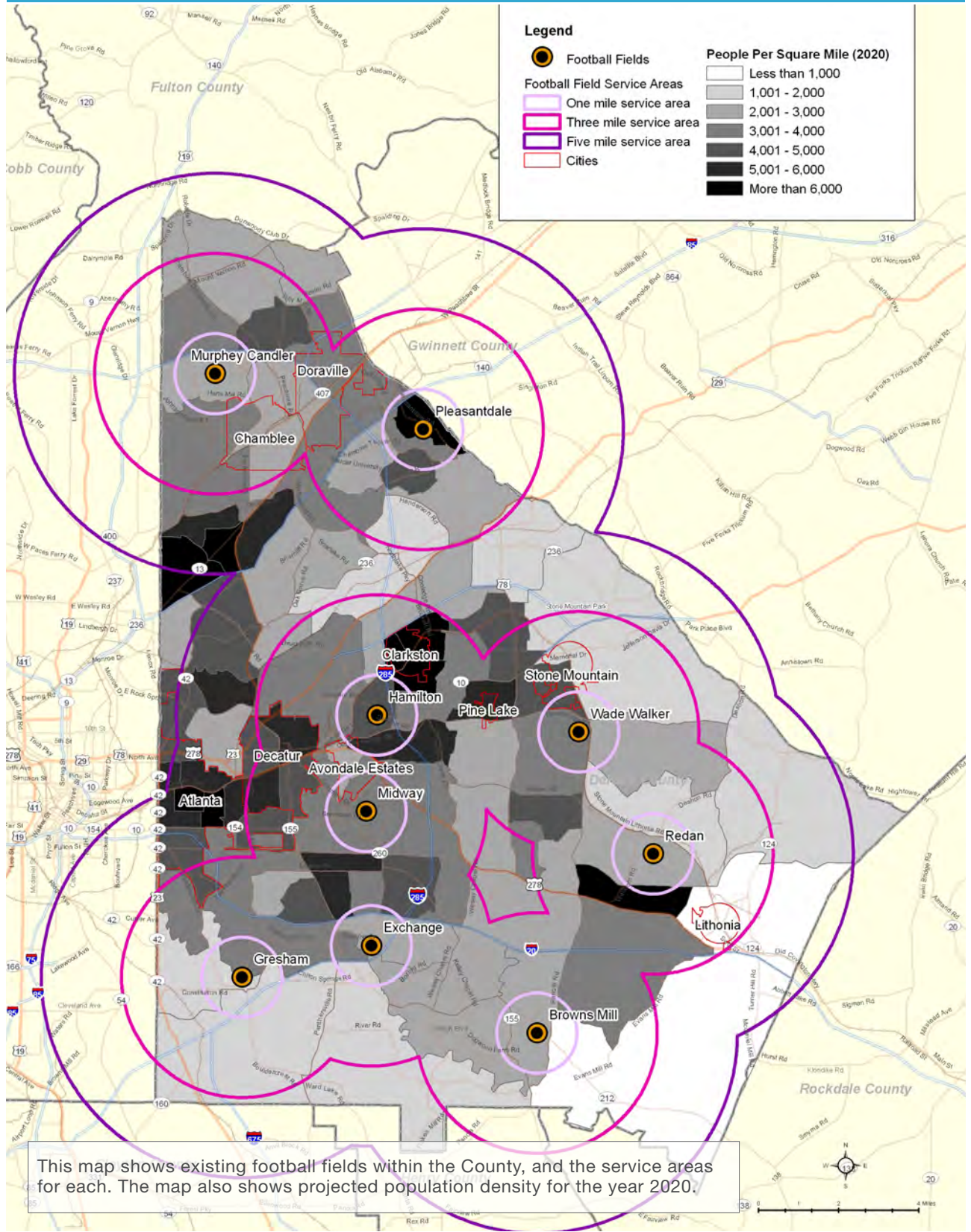


Figure 7-8: Multi-use Field Service Areas

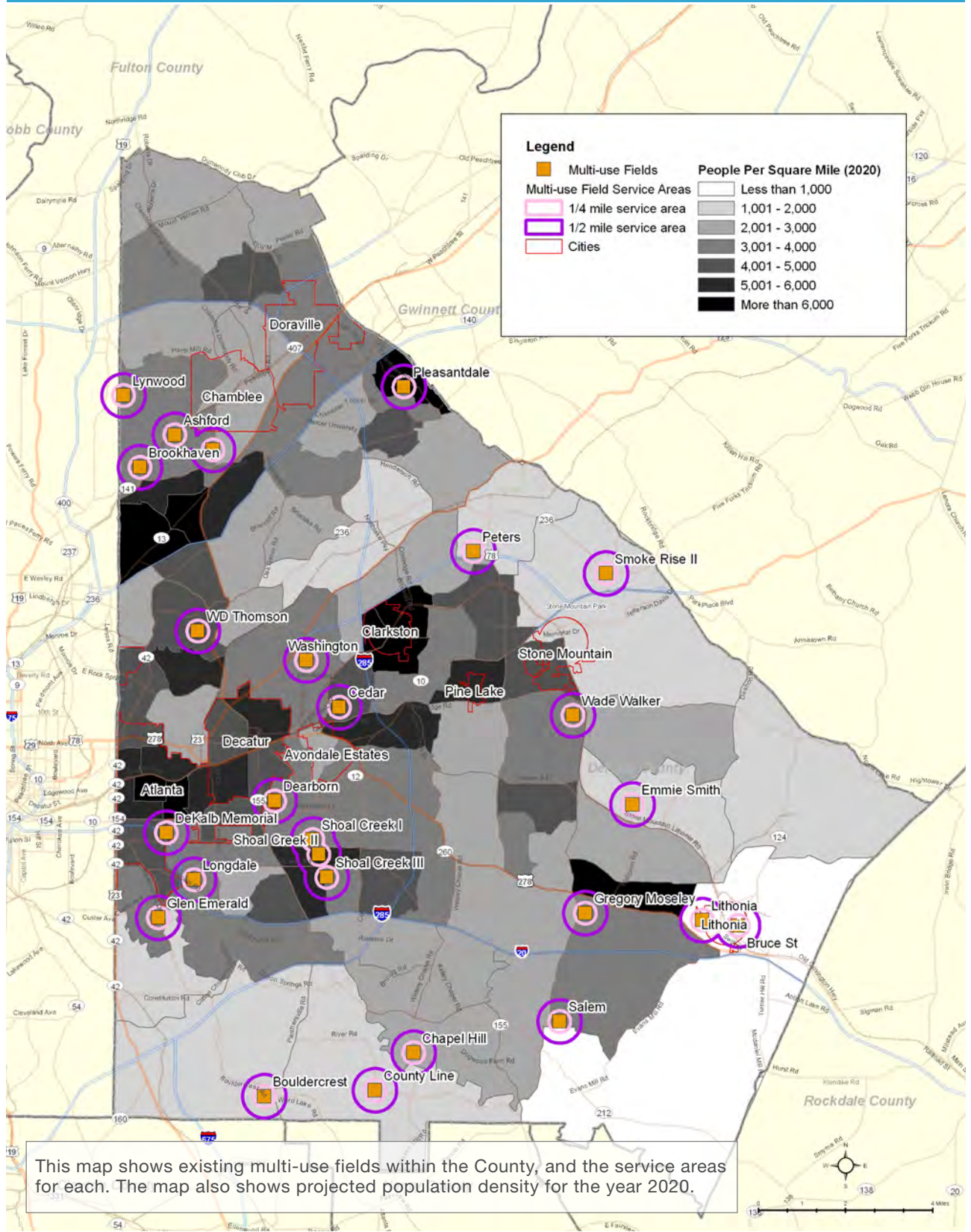
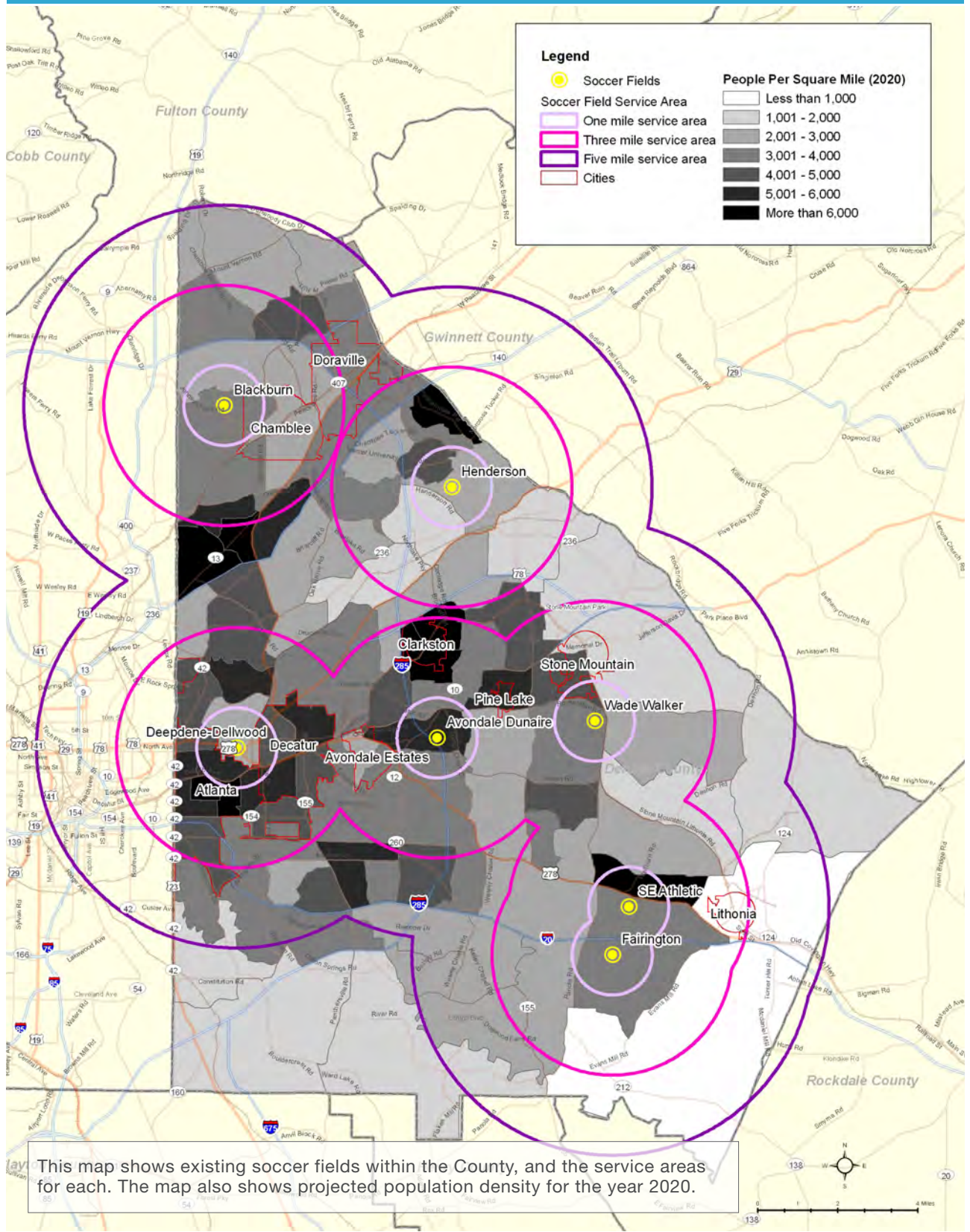


Figure 7-9: Soccer Field Service Areas



**Recommendation 1 – Facility Standards for Ballfields.** The recommended standard is one ballfield for every 5,000 people. This standard is based in part on the changing demographics in the County. As the population of the County ages, fewer ballfields will be needed. Utilizing these standards, the County should have 142 ballfields based upon its 2005 demographics, and 161 based on 2015 demographics.

The County currently has 109 ballfields and 15 football fields, for a total of 124 fields. This means the County needs to add 37 ballfields by the year 2015. This will only be possible if the County acquires additional land that can be developed as active recreation areas. Most of the undeveloped or unclassified land currently owned by DeKalb County is not suitable for ballfields because the land is too steep, too narrow, or too wet to accommodate this use. Ballfields and soccer fields are among the most widely used facilities in the County. Even with the expected demographics changes, the demand will continue to increase, and the County already has a deficit in these facilities.

**Recommendation 2 – Facility Standards for Soccer Fields.** The recommended standard for soccer fields in DeKalb County is one field for every 10,000 people. According to this standard, the County should have 71 soccer fields based on 2005 demographics, and 80 soccer fields based on 2015 demographics. The County currently has 33 soccer fields, so an additional 47 fields must be added by 2015 to meet standards. As mentioned previously, this will require the addition of more park land that can be developed for active recreation. According to Department staff, there appears to be a sufficient number of soccer fields south of I-285, so emphasis should be on building new fields to the north.

Even though the County lacks ballfields and soccer fields, there are other opportunities for DeKalb residents to access these types of facilities. Many of the schools in the County have ballfields and/or soccer fields, as do many of the larger churches. For example, Cobb Futbol Club (CFC) is an organization that offers soccer programs for various levels of expertise. All practices are held at local DeKalb County schools and church fields. Games are played at Cofer Park and Mason Mill Park, both of which are DeKalb County parks.

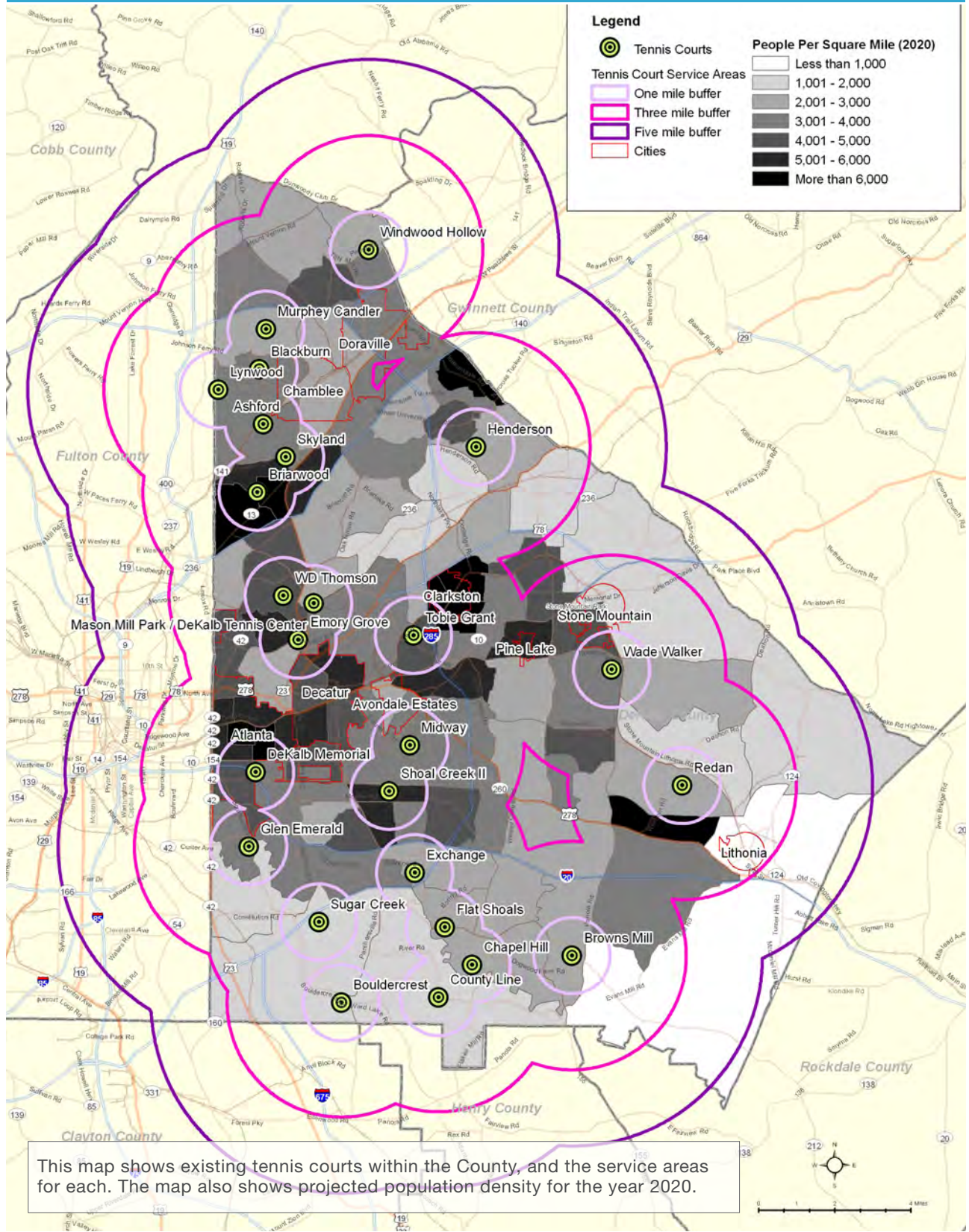
**Recommendation 3 – Acquisition of Land.** The County needs to concentrate on acquiring sufficient land to accommodate active recreation uses, including ballfields and soccer fields. Acquisition of land suitable for this use should be a priority, even if the construction of ballfields and soccer fields does not occur immediately. The biggest cost associated with the development of new ballfields and soccer fields is the land required. In locations where existing parks will accommodate new fields, costs will be much lower.

**Recommendation 4 – Ballfield and Soccer Field Maintenance.** To increase the usability of ballfields and soccer fields, some new facilities should utilize synthetic surfaces. Initial costs are higher, but in the long-term, reductions in maintenance and water requirements will help pay for the field.

**Recommendation 5 – Construct Specialty Fields.** The Department must construct specialty fields to meet specific demands in the County. For example, multipurpose athletic fields are useful for some sports, but they cannot accommodate cricket, which requires a consistent slope on the field. Specialty fields exist in N.H. Scott Park and Lithonia, as well as a practice field at Shoal Creek, but additional fields are needed. The demographic analysis indicates that there is a larger Caribbean/East Indian population in the northern part of the County, so cricket fields should be constructed here.

**Recommendation 6 – Expanding Facilities in Parks.** Where feasible, the Department should look at expanding existing ballfields and soccer fields in existing parks. Parks where new ballfields or soccer fields could be added include: Pleasantdale Park; Glen Emerald Park; Chapel Hill Park; Mcafee-Starmount Park (informal); and Hairston Park (informal).

FiFigure 7-10: Tennis Court Service Areas



## 7.11 Recommendations for Tennis Courts

Tennis courts in DeKalb County are typically dispersed throughout community and neighborhood parks, or are located in tennis centers. Uses of these courts vary depending upon location. Courts in community and neighborhood parks are used more informally, while tennis centers are geared toward leagues, tournaments, and lessons.

Some schools in the County have their own tennis courts, and many of the larger homeowners associations and apartment complexes also provide courts for their residents. These additional facilities help alleviate some needs in the County in regards to tennis. There are also 32 tennis courts scattered across 13 city parks in or around DeKalb County. Decatur's Glenlake Park has five tennis courts, while Atlanta's Candler Park and Wesley Coan Park have four courts each.



Tennis is a sport for all ages

**Recommendation 1 – Facility Standards for Tennis.** The recommended standard for tennis courts in DeKalb County is one court for every 5,400 people. Based on this standard, the County should have 132 courts per 2005 demographics, and 149 courts based on 2015 demographics. In 2000, the County had 105 tennis courts and was close to meeting the recommended benchmark standard. The County population has grown considerably since, and few new tennis courts have been added. The net total of tennis courts remains at 105. This means that the County needs 27 more tennis courts to meet current standards and 44 more courts to meet standards for 2015.

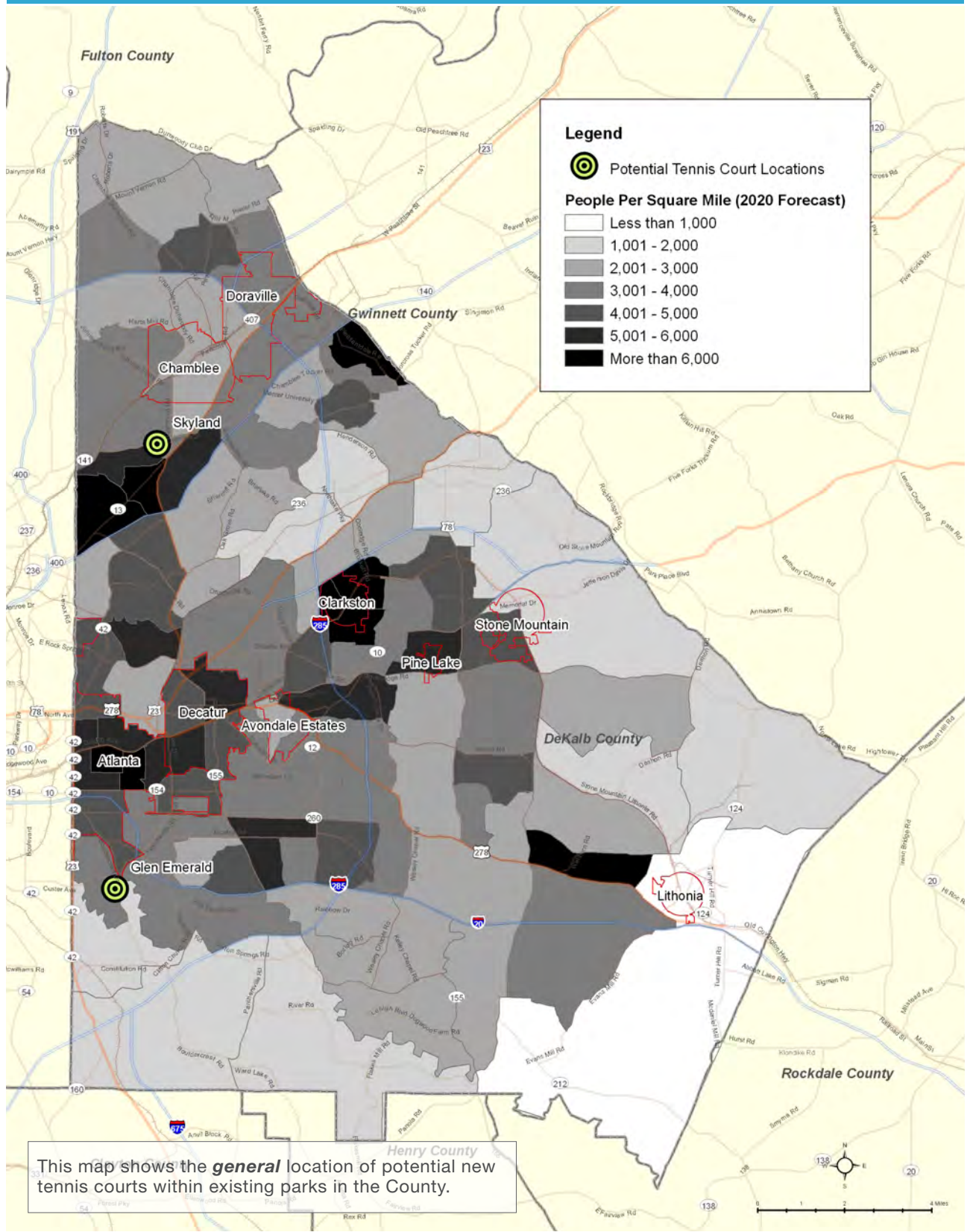
A major theme that emerged at one of the public meetings conducted during this project was the need for expanded opportunities for tennis. Many of the meeting attendees also wanted additional lighting for tennis courts.

The County is short on tennis courts, but in comparison to other facilities, this deficit is not as critical as some.

**Recommendation 2 – Tennis Centers.** The County should focus on developing a new tennis center instead of locating tennis courts in neighborhood parks. A new tennis center would help generate funds and could be used for league play.



Figure 7-11: Potential Locations for New Tennis Courts



**Recommendation 3 – Acquisition for Tennis Courts.** Existing park land may be able to accommodate development of some new tennis courts. It is recommended, however, that land for a new tennis center be acquired if ample existing land is not available.

**Recommendation 4 – Focus on Revenue.** Tennis centers should be a major source of revenue, particularly through major tournaments. Emphasis should be on leagues and tournaments that generate income, and fees should be set at a rate comparable to neighboring tennis facilities.

**Recommendation 5 – Expanding Tennis Facilities in Parks.** Where feasible, the Department should look at constructing new tennis courts in existing parks. Parks where new tennis courts may be able to be added include: Glen Emerald Park; and Skyland Park.

## 7.12 Recommendations for Basketball Courts

Outdoor basketball courts are typically among the most heavily used park facilities. At a national level, basketball courts are extremely popular with older teenage and young adult males. Basketball is a primary recreation activity for this age group, so these courts serve a particular need. However, due to the aggressive nature of the sport and the age group often involved, basketball courts are also viewed as a potential source of conflict within a park. A second potential concern is that outdoor basketball courts often draw patrons from outside a neighborhood to use them. Due to popularity of the courts among older males, younger age groups may not have as many opportunities to participate.

At a national level, basketball courts are extremely popular with older teenage and young adult males.

**Recommendation 1 – Facility Standards for Basketball.** The recommended standard for basketball courts is one court per 10,000 people. Using that standard, the County should currently have 71 courts, and 80 by the year 2015. There are currently 59 outdoor basketball courts in the County. New recreation centers slated for construction by the County also provide opportunities for indoor basketball courts.

Many schools in the County have outdoor basketball courts, which are used by school kids. A number of churches, homeowners associations, and housing and apartment complexes also have outdoor basketball courts. The inventory of city parks in or around DeKalb County



Basketball is not just for kids

did not specifically include a category for basketball courts, but the inventory did indicate that there are 11 multiuse courts in these parks. There are also five indoor basketball courts.

**Recommendation 2 – Priority of Basketball.** One of the priorities in the County should be to re-establish basketball as an activity, especially for young males. Many of the basketball courts operated by the County are badly in need of repair. Repairing these should be a higher priority than constructing new courts. Some parks where basketball courts need to be improved include: Ashford Park; NH Scott Park; Glen Emerald Park; and Georgian Hills Park.

New basketball courts should be located within parks so that they are clearly visible and can be easily monitored. Courts should not be a part of parking lots since this could result in potential conflicts.

**Recommendation 3 – Layout.** One recommended approach to create basketball courts with more opportunities for casual play is to utilize half-court layouts instead of full courts. The most intense basketball games are typically played on regulation-sized goals on full courts.

**Recommendation 4 – Expanding Basketball Facilities in Parks.** Where feasible, the Department should look at constructing new basketball courts in existing parks. Parks where new tennis courts may be able to be added include Pleasantdale Park.



There are a number of opportunities to play golf within the county

## 7.13 Recommendations for Golf Courses

The County currently has two golf courses, and in addition there are a number of other golf courses owned and operated by private entities, and some by other cities and counties.

Figure 7-12: Golf Course Service Areas

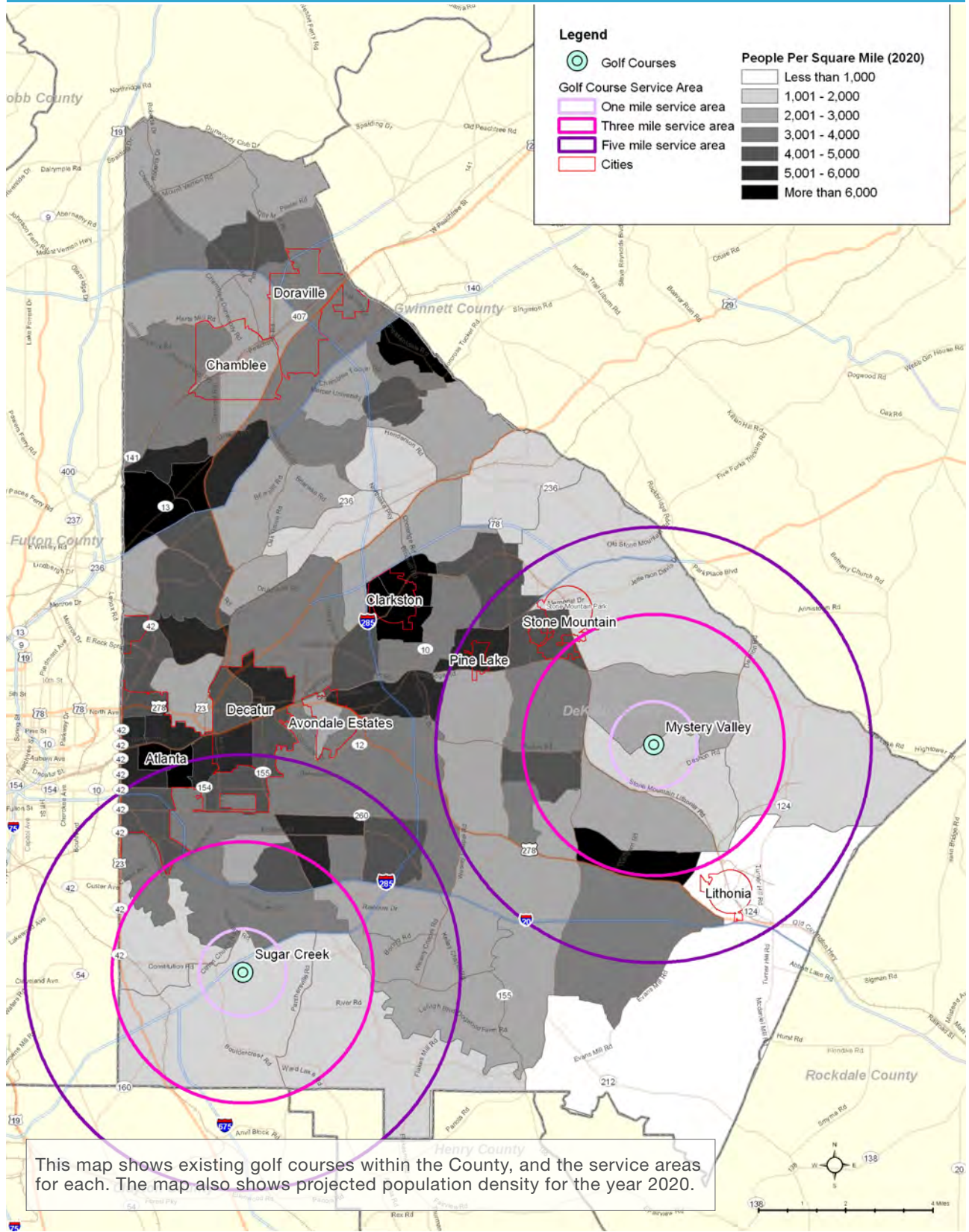
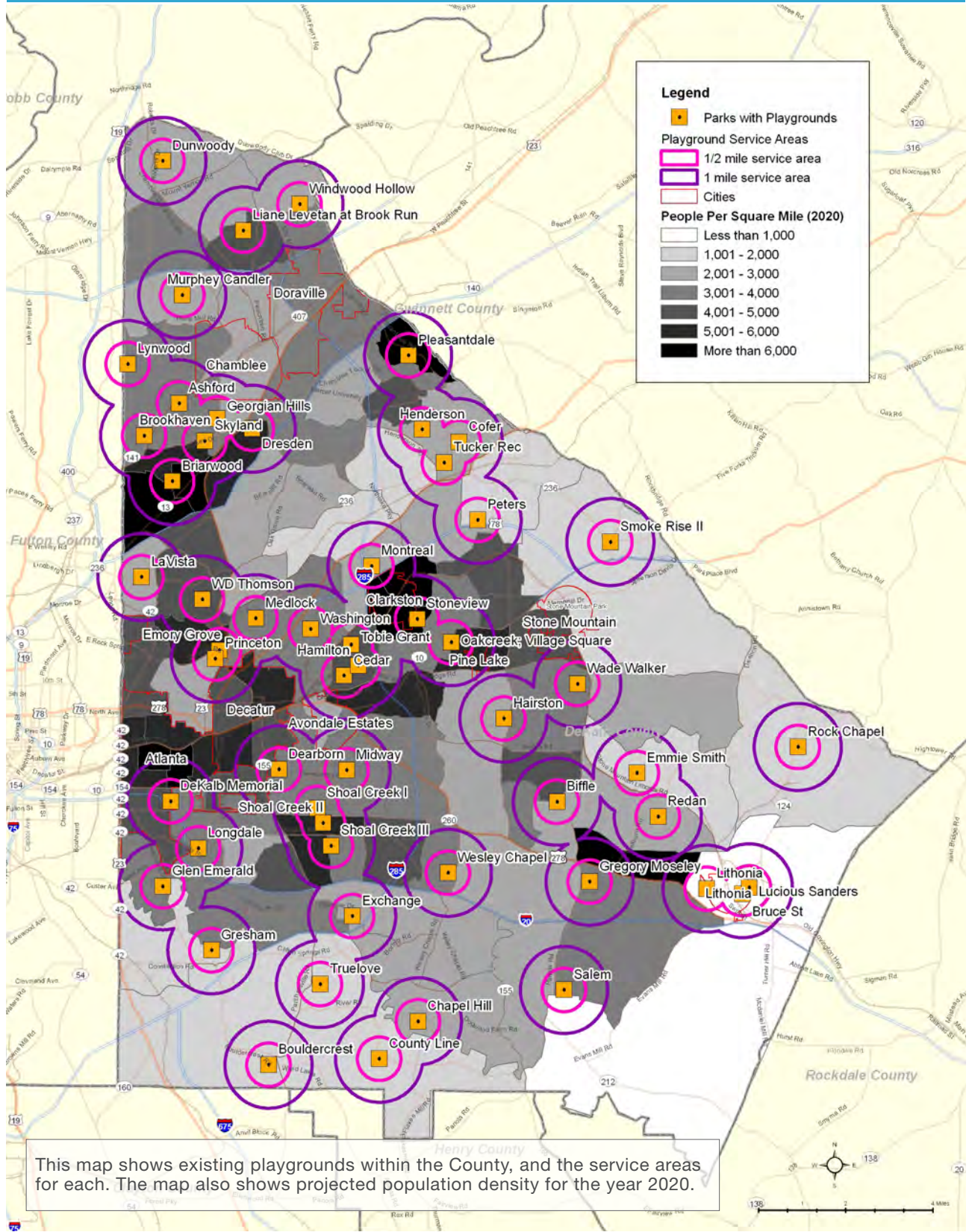


Figure 7-13: Parks with Playgrounds with Services Areas



This map shows existing playgrounds within the County, and the service areas for each. The map also shows projected population density for the year 2020.

Currently, both courses operate in the red and have to be subsidized by the County. Golf should be one sport that is a revenue generator

**Recommendation 1 – Facility Standards for Golf Courses.** The recommended standard for golf courses is 1 per 200,000 people, but we do not recommend the County construct any new courses in the near future. The County has other priorities in regards to parks and recreation, and these needs should be met before new golf courses should be considered.

**Recommendation 2 – Revenue Generation.** Organization and management of the two existing golf courses should be revised to make each more efficient. Currently, both courses operate in the red and have to be subsidized by the County. Golf should be one sport that is a revenue generator.

## 7.14 Recommendations for Playgrounds

The County has a significant shortage of playgrounds. The County should look at developing two types of playgrounds, small playgrounds for neighborhood parks and larger playgrounds that offer a wider variety of facilities. These larger playgrounds would be located in community, regional or special uses parks.

**Recommendation 1 – Facility Standards for Playgrounds.** Playgrounds should be provided in each of the County’s neighborhood park. Where feasible, playgrounds should be added in existing parks. Potential locations for playgrounds include: Tucker Nature Preserve; Pleasantdale Park; Constitution Lakes; Gresham Park; Peaceland Park; Mcaffee-Starmount Park; Hummingbird (O.L. Adams) Park; and Briarwood Park.

**Recommendation 2 – The County should develop 3 or 4 community playgrounds that serve as regional draws.** These playgrounds are larger and more adventurous than those found in neighborhood parks. The could be developed around specific themes that are appropriate for the region within which they are located.



Playgrounds are a critical part of childhood development



Hanging out at Brook Run

## 7.15 Recommendations for Skate Parks

Skate parks are gaining in popularity around the country. DeKalb County currently has one skate park within Brook Run Park, and that facility appears to be very popular. The development of one or more additional skate parks in the County may be warranted.

**Recommendation 1 – Facility Standards for Skate Parks.** The County should establish a standard of 1 skate park per 350,000 people. That means the County should develop one more skate park.



Dogs need a place to play, too

## 7.16 Recommendations for Off-leash Parks

In the more dense parts of the County, dog parks are an important way for pet owners to provide the necessary level of activity for their dogs. We recommend that the County focus on providing dog parks as part of neighborhood parks or community parks where appropriate.

**Recommendation 1. Facility Standards for Off-leash Dog Parks.** The County should utilize a standard of 1 dog park per 40,000 residents, and open 6 to 8 dog parks in the next couple of years. Each park should be 1 to 3 acres in size.

## 8.0 Planning and Implementation Strategies

### 8.1 Introduction

This section includes recommendations for strategies to address the design, development, and acquisition of park land, as well as the construction of and upgrades to recreation facilities. Strategies should also consider broader issues such as policies, staffing, maintenance, and fees, just to name a few.

### 8.2 Challenges and Opportunities for Parks and Recreation

An understanding of the current environment for the delivery of parks and recreation services is essential as the population increases and the rate of demographic change accelerates. Political, social, economic and technological changes all influence how people recreate. The parks and recreation departments of today are much different than they were even five years ago. Some of the public parks and recreation trends across the country that present challenges and opportunities for building successful systems are listed below. All of these issues also affect delivery of parks and recreation services in DeKalb County.

- The top issue of concern for parks and recreation departments around the country is budget. Traditional funding sources are shrinking at the same time service demands and variety are increasing.
- Deteriorating park and recreation infrastructure resulting from age, use, abuse and deferred maintenance practices
- More local, state and federal requirements and expectations
- Enhanced demands for services for a diverse population
- Increased concern about holistic health and wellness
- Greater diversity of program requirements serving different lifestyles
- Greater cultural diversity
- A changing workforce
- Increasing competition for shrinking federal, state, and local funding resources
- Movement toward out-sourcing of operations
- Increased computerization
- Changing priority and public image of the importance of parks and recreation in competition with police, transportation, and other infrastructure needs
- Increasing crime, violence, drug use, and vandalism in communities and parks
- Declining quality of life in urban areas
- Increased public demand for participation, accountability, productivity and transparency in government

Across the country, people are recreating in less traditional ways than five years ago. Studies by the National Sporting Goods Association and American Sports Data, a research firm, show a dramatic decline in outdoor activities over the past decade. (Louv, 2007)

According to the Georgia SCORP 2008-2013 report, rapid urbanization and demographic shifts are resulting in loss of natural resources, a greater demand for outdoor recreation opportunities, and a need for diverse recreational offerings. Georgia's population is growing and will reach



According to the Georgia SCORP 2008-2013 report, rapid urbanization and demographic shifts are resulting in loss of natural resources, a greater demand for outdoor recreation opportunities, and a need for diverse recreational offerings

nearly 11 million by 2015. Statewide, over 106 acres are lost each day to development—55 acres per day in Atlanta alone. Georgia is also home to an increasingly diverse population in terms of ethnicity, age and income. Forty-percent of Georgia's new residents are foreign-born. By 2015, ten-percent of Georgia's population will be Hispanic and Georgia will have the largest proportion of African Americans in the top ten most populous states. As we grow more diverse, we are also seeing increases in both elderly and youth populations. (SCORP 2008-2013) The SCORP Report also identified Georgians' increasingly sedentary lifestyles and disconnection from nature as major concerns that are resulting in alarming health declines and a diminished conservation ethic. These concerns should be considered as DeKalb County makes decisions about its park system.

Another trend is that Americans and Georgians are financially supporting outdoor recreation at record levels. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of Georgians support public investments in parks and outdoor recreation areas, according to the telephone survey conducted for SCORP. Georgians are demonstrating support for city and county bond referendums for local park improvements in record numbers. Citizens of DeKalb County have shown their support by voting for the previous bond program for parks. In the Public Survey conducted for this project, sixty-three percent (63%) of respondents are either very supportive (29%) or somewhat supportive (34%) of implementing or increasing the fees for parks and recreation.

### 8.3 Policy Recommendations

Written policies and procedures are essential for a parks and recreation department to ensure it has a clearly defined blueprint for how to accomplish its stated goals. Properly written and enforced policies and procedures will help provide consistency in operations and expectations, as well as provide a professional organizational structure.

DeKalb County, like many county parks and recreation departments, is suffering from the typical challenges that accompany growth from a rural and suburban community to an urban center. There are a number of general policies that we recommend DeKalb County implements.

**Recommendation 1 – Become a Facilitator.** A recommended policy change is for the County to focus more on becoming a recreation facilitator instead of a service provider. There are a number of private providers in the County that do help meet recreation needs. The County should develop partnerships with organizations such as YMCA, local churches, and non-profit organizations such as PATH to help meet the recreation needs of residents.

**Recommendation 2 – Develop Advocates.** The Department needs to aggressively pursue the development of advocates to promote the goals of Parks and Recreation. Currently the Parks Advisory Board is the only organization that serves that role. It is important that more people within the County understand the role that Parks and Recreation plays in enhancing their quality of life. In particular, the key decision makers in the County, as well as the economic development community, need to be made aware of this role so they will provide the support needed for the Department.

**Recommendation 3 – Change Legislation.** Existing enabling legislation should be modified to give the Parks and Recreation Director the authority to implement the changes needed within the Department.

**Recommendation 4 – Encourage Green Policies.** Implemented policies and practices should be environmentally friendly and sustainable. These include policies about recycling,

the use of sustainable and recycled materials, the use of native plants that require less water and fertilizer, energy efficiency, and minimizing surface runoff, just to name a few.

**Recommendation 5 – Change Credit Card Policies.** The Department’s policy on acceptance of credit cards needs to be revised. In 2001, the decision was made not to accept credit cards due to the 1.5% cost per transaction for using credit cards. The loss associated with bounced checks and misplaced cash, however, most likely matches or exceeds the cost associated with using credit cards. A fee structure that utilizes only credit cards will help improve efficiency. The system can then be expanded to include registration and reservation fee payments collected via the Internet.

**Recommendation 6 – Develop Foundation.** The County needs to develop a Parks Foundation as a means for greater control and flexibility over non-County funding to address increased public and private service needs. This foundation can seek funding and in-kind donations from a wide variety of sources, including fees, donations, grants, bonds, sales, interagency agreements, the private sector, and more. They can create and manage a “development fund” similar to corporate venture capital. This would greatly improve the County’s ability to address financial concerns associated with parks and recreation.



Play is all about exploring

**Recommendation 7 – Define Donor Policies.** DeKalb County needs to have clearly defined policies for working with potential donors. It should be easy for interested individuals and organizations to make donations (of time, money, and in-kind) that are beneficial to Parks and Recreation. This includes developing procedures that allow donors to select choices from a detailed menu of opportunities and to see how their contribution is spent. The County also needs to implement local “adopt-a-park” and park watch programs from within local communities and service areas that will help make parks safer and will also reduce maintenance requirements.

**Recommendation 8 – Develop a Policy Manual.** The County should have a Policy Manual that defines all Department policies and procedures, and this manual should be available to all workers within the Department.

## 8.4 Economic and Financial Trends and Recommendations

In the past, parks and recreation departments across the country have traditionally been able to rely on a consistent “piece of the pie” from local and state budgets for funding of operational and capital needs to sustain services. As funding has decreased, sustainability has become less assured. Some funding has also been re-allocated to reflect increased competition for the limited monies available.



Golf is more than a good walk spoiled, it is a good excuse to be out in the sun

Parks and recreation is generally accepted as integral to “quality of life;” however, it continues to be overlooked during budget discussions. The value of parks and recreation opportunities has been somewhat devalued by headline-grabbing stories, such as the bridge collapse in Minnesota, a major steam line rupture in New York, , the need for sewer and water upgrades in Atlanta, and the lack of air conditioning in local schools during record-breaking heat. Funding for parks and recreation becomes a lower priority as questions about local infrastructure deterioration arise. That is certainly true in DeKalb County, as well as in most other parts of the country.

Competition for parks-related funding is increasing across the country, and it is unclear where this funding will come from. Reliance on Federal grants for local parks and recreation initiatives is decreasing due to a shift from Federal to local control and initiatives to solve and pay for local needs. State funding is available, but allocations for parks and recreation are rarely enough to sustain growth.

In response to budget challenges, most parks and recreation service agencies are moving away from a reliance on taxes and traditional practices to funding their services from a wider variety of sources. Agencies can no longer base their existence on budgetary precedence within an ever-increasing competitive environment. Rather, agencies must justify budgets in quantitative terms by successfully meeting the needs of the individual, the family, the community and the environment. Programs and services must be results-oriented and measured against accepted standards.

The explosive population and business growth within the State of Georgia has required an increase in funding to meet infrastructure demands. Greater growth gives rise to increased annexation, and this movement further reduces funding available due to decreased tax revenue available for existing county services. This is expected to continue to be a concern for DeKalb County.

**Recommendation 1 – Pursue Alternative Funding.** There appears to be an assumption that parks and recreation departments will continue to have to do more with less. Research certainly supports this, as operating expenditures are projected to increase at a rate much slower than that of other governmental agencies. (Recmanagement.com) To meet this challenge, DeKalb County must pursue a range of alternative funding sources and resources in order to continue to meet demands. Many federal, state and foundational grants are available to parks and recreation agencies, and DeKalb County should be more aggressive in pursuing these funding options. Grant opportunities exist for a wide variety of purposes and many can help pay for park and recreation needs. DeKalb County needs to increase its

grants expectations. Currently, very little of the County's needs are met via grants. Pursuing federal, state and foundational grants available to parks and recreation agencies could be a big boost for the County. These grant opportunities are dwindling to some degree, but many are still available. Another approach is to aggressively pursue sponsorship opportunities to help reduce operating costs, increase exposure, or reduce costs to users through scholarship and supplemental revenue. Sponsorships for special events would also help reduce costs.

The County should also explore the option of generating revenue by selling advertising space on scoreboards, fences, and other structures that are visible to the public, and consider selling the naming rights for new facilities. If this option is approved, clearly defined criteria need to be established to ensure that advertising is done in a way that is visually acceptable. It is also important for these funds to be kept within the Department to address future parks and recreation needs.

The County should formalize the policy of charging location fees for commercials, photo shoots, and other activities, establish consistent fees, and promote these types of events. These additional fees could help augment the County's budget.

**Recommendation 2 – Keep Funds Generated by the Department in the Department.**

One key to success for DeKalb County is to keep funds generated from parks and recreation activities within the Department. Currently some recreation fees stay within the Department, but others go into the County's general fund..All rental fees, entrance fees, and program fees should stay within the Department to help defray costs.

The Department needs to offer the recreational opportunities that are most desirable to residents with discretionary funds. The Department also needs to proactively develop new or expanded customer bases. New developments can provide revenues for additional facilities to be established or for existing facilities to be improved

**Recommendation 3 – Take a Market-Driven Approach.** Public recreation and park delivery systems in DeKalb County should be market driven. Today throughout the country, there is a definite trend toward this management philosophy, primarily because of budget constraints. With public, private, and not-for-profit entities all vying for the same markets, it is critical to know when, where, and how much to invest in a particular facility or program. The Department needs to offer the recreational opportunities that are most desirable to residents with discretionary funds. The Department also needs to proactively develop new or expanded customer bases. New developments can provide revenues for additional facilities to be established or for existing facilities to be improved.

**Recommendation 3A:** The Department should develop a clear policy as to which programs are expected to be self-sustaining, which the County will subsidize, and which (if any) should be revenue-producing.

**Recommendation 3B:** To accomplish this, the Department should routinely track trends in program enrollment, and drop programs where interest is waning and increase opportunities for popular programs and activities. Regular surveys will also provide information about new programs in which citizens have interest.

**Recommendation 3C:** In addition, some recreation facilities need a major overhaul in order to make them more financially viable. A thorough facilities assessment and evaluation should be conducted to determine if some facilities should be sold or closed down, and whether new facilities should be constructed. Currently, both the tennis center and golf course at Sugar Creek lose money for the Department and have to be subsidized.

**Recommendation 4 – Evaluate Lifecycle Costing.** Budgeting and maintenance should be considered over the entire lifecycle of a facility, rather than just the initial cost of buying and installing equipment. In addition, cost versus performance needs to be evaluated when

purchasing equipment. For example, a mower with a larger cutting area may be more expensive, but it will reduce the time required for regular lawn maintenance.

**Recommendation 5 – Establish a Dedicated Funding Source.** DeKalb citizens have demonstrated their support for parks and recreation funding through support of bond referenda as well as the survey undertaken as part of this planning process. The County should establish adequate funding for the Department through a dedicated source of funding such as a special-purpose sales tax (SPLOST) or millage rate. This funding could then support a Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for facility replacement and construction, as well as a more robust maintenance fund. A dedicated funding stream is critical if the Department to meet the demands of its constituents.

## 8.6 Delivery Systems Trends and Recommendations

### Annexation and Multi-Jurisdiction Consolidation

Multi-jurisdictional parks and recreation departments are gaining popularity, and DeKalb County should pursue these types of opportunities. It is more efficient to combine resources in an effort to meet recreational needs. A common approach is for cities and counties to join forces since there is frequently an overlap in the services they offer. In Georgia, the City of Athens and Clarke County have established such a multi-jurisdictional entity.

The trends toward service-specific consolidation are driven by many proven factors, including:

- Lower cost per any measurable unit of output
- Shared benefits
- Reductions in staffing levels
- Reduced asset redundancies
- Reduced taxes (millage rate)
- increased program opportunities

The Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area is an example of a multi-jurisdictional initiative that protects and interprets natural and cultural resources in DeKalb, Rockdale and Henry Counties. The State of Georgia is working with each of these jurisdictions, the Arabia Alliance and local community groups to create a green corridor that will connect Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve, Panola Mountain State Park, the South River, and the Monastery of the Holy Spirit to other resources in the area.

**Recommendation – Consolidation.** The County should investigate the potential for a multi-jurisdictional consolidation for the service-specific purpose of parks, recreation, cultural, natural and historic preservation, conservation, and performing arts.

### Outsourcing

One major trend with parks and recreation departments around the country is to outsource selected tasks. Some tasks can be performed more affordably with private labor as opposed to County labor. As County labor budgets shrink, a higher level of service may be able to be maintained by outsourcing. The Department should conduct a study to determine which functions should be outsourced, as described below.

**Recommendation 1 – Outsourcing Maintenance.** The Department should consider outsourcing tasks that can be done more affordably with a better return on investment. These could include maintenance tasks such as mowing, electronics, and other tasks that were once considered a staple of a parks department.



Interpretive opportunities help DeKalb citizens learn more about their environment

**Recommendation 2 – Outsourcing Programs.** The Department should evaluate outsourcing the management of specialized facilities and programs such as golf courses, tennis centers, aquatic facilities, senior centers, performing arts, pre-and after-school programs, and equestrian programs. Some entities are also outsourcing all-inclusive management of recreation centers.

**Recommendation 3 – Outsourcing Other Tasks.** Other tasks that could be outsourced include food services, organization of special events, additional security for events, and other specialized activities. Outsourcing will become more common due to limitations in funding.

### Existing Operational Structure & Department Organization

Parks and recreation departments continue to work toward improving operational efficiencies while meeting the needs of their constituents. The key for most departments is to establish a strong set of policies and procedures that help ensure a consistent approach that focuses on quality.

**Recommendation 1 – Redefining Organization.** The Department needs to redefine its organizational structure and better delineate the roles and responsibilities of units and individual positions. These roles and responsibilities should be formalized in writing. There is also a need to streamline functional operations through the elimination of management redundancies and gaps in areas of responsibilities among employees at all levels. Reducing the reliance on a middle managers tier within the organization is feasible because of the increased reliance on technology to convey information and instructions.

**Recommendation 2 – Bottom-up Approach.** The Department should consider revising the organizational structure to a “bottom-up” methodology, which can reduce numbers of employees, reduce response time, and help control costs. This allows for the creation of decision-making networks that have fewer levels in their chains-of-command. Further, this approach will result in efficient and attainable career paths for all levels of employees that include the potential for promotions.

## Defining County's Core Services

It is important that DeKalb County clearly defines its role and limitations in providing recreation services. This is an issue that many parks and recreation departments have had to address in recent years. A popular trend is for departments to provide basic services for free, but charge for other services; this seems to be consistent with the approach taken by DeKalb County.

**Recommendation 1 – Identify Basic Services.** It is important for the County to identify basic services that can be provided in each park and in each recreation center. A common approach is to not charge for access to a park, or for activities such as playgrounds, picnic areas, open play areas, trails, and other similar features traditionally paid for through tax dollars. The costs to build, upgrade and maintain these areas are value-added expenses absorbed by government to help create healthy and wholesome communities. The Department is in the process of establishing core programs that every center will offer. These include specific fitness, wellness, arts and crafts, sports and games, and community involvement. Centers should be able to offer additional classes, but they must first meet the core requirements.

Many staff members and community members have noted that fees have not been raised in several years and are artificially low. The Department has recently undertaken a review of user fees in other metro jurisdictions; that information should be used to evaluate and adjust program fees

**Recommendation 2 – Determining Fees.** DeKalb County's approach should be to charge fees for the unique or specialized programs it offers. Although public parks are not expected to generate profits, unique or specialized programs are expected to return a reasonable portion of recognized cost. For example, fitness centers typically require additional staff who serve as trainers or equipment monitors who calibrate and clean equipment after use. Further, fitness equipment requires cost for replacement on a regular basis to reduce agency risk exposure. User fees can generate sinking funds to help offset these added costs without compromising other budget line items.

Many staff members and community members have noted that fees have not been raised in several years and are artificially low. The Department has recently undertaken a review of user fees in other metro jurisdictions; that information should be used to evaluate and adjust program fees. (Fee information is also found in Appendix B of this document.)

**Recommendation 3 – Business Plan.** The Department needs to develop a business plan based on the recognition that recreation is becoming a business, and it must find a balance between providing services and balancing budgets.

## Staffing and Volunteerism

Staffing issues are closely connected to budget challenges. Mostly due to budget constraints, respondents in a national survey from parks and recreation departments expect minimal changes in the number of paid employees staffing their facilities in the next few years. Most departments expect minor increases in full-time and part-time staff, with slight decreases in numbers of seasonal and temporary workers. (Recmanagement.com)

Consistent with national trends, DeKalb County is not expected to increase staffing considerably due to budget constraints. In fact, in 2009, the County plans to reduce full-time staff positions by 1% and part-time positions by 50%. This undoubtedly will have an impact on how the County provides recreation opportunities for its citizens. Staffing allocations need to be driven by the recreation programs offered by the Department. New positions must be established to support the vision established in this plan, and other staff positions that are no longer critical to help meet this goal should be phased out.

**Recommendation 1 – Determining Staff Needs.** The Department’s base staffing needs should be determined by the defined direction of the Department and the recreation programs it offers. Supervisors should clearly define responsibilities and share them with staff. It is also important to empower and authorize staff to encourage them to be more accountable and responsible. By emphasizing these concepts, the County can increase efficiency of existing staff.



Softball is a popular sport in the county

**Recommendation 2 – Document Policies and Procedures.** DeKalb County needs to begin the process of documenting policies and procedures to help minimize the impact that loss of institutional memory could have on the County. A national trend shows that parks departments experience incredible losses in skill and experience when park professionals from the baby-boomer generation retire. (Westrup, 2006) These same retiring individuals can be seen as an important source of knowledgeable, reliable and experienced volunteers. Replacement workers may lack the training, management skills, education, and experience to effectively provide the vision and leadership needed to move an organization forward. For the DeKalb County Department of Parks and Recreation, which has not developed a comprehensive policy and procedure manual or career path opportunities for new employees, this loss of institutional memory is having a significant impact.



Techniques recommended to help improve staffing efficiency within the Department include the following:

- Refining job descriptions to more accurately reflect work performed and expected
- Improving performance evaluation procedures through a more efficient and up-to-date system
- Increasing employee training opportunities
- Improving employee morale by offering spot bonuses, awards and recognition
- Empowering staff and allowing them to be more accountable and responsible for their actions



Some recreational programs should be geared specifically for kids

**Recommendation 3 – Establish Volunteer Program.** There is also a trend to bring in volunteers and/or outsourcing of basic responsibilities instead of hiring additional staff. Also, a full staff may not be needed during all operating hours. DeKalb County needs to expand the existing volunteer program in an effort to bring in more volunteers to assist with parks and recreation activities.

The County can limit the legal exposure of the Department and its volunteers by establishing the following guidelines:

- Develop volunteer position descriptions
- Use volunteer applications and carefully screen applicants
- Fingerprint and run background checks on any volunteer who will be in contact with minors, and additionally, credit checks for volunteers handling money
- Train and closely supervise volunteers
- Advise volunteers of all applicable policies they must follow
- Promptly investigate and respond to any complaints or concerns regarding a volunteer's action
- Secure insurance protection for volunteers

Members of the Board of Commissioners expressed that the County's burden of maintaining a public labor force is reaching a crisis level, and that volunteerism and outsourcing are among the best ways to address this issue. It was pointed out, though, that it takes staff to manage contracts and to organize volunteers. There needs to be an organized core of volunteers that can provide meaningful value in all areas of parks and recreation operations.

Volunteers often contribute because they have an interest in giving back to their community. Short-term volunteers usually work on special events, such as senior outings, trail maintenance, or creek or river clean-up events, that last a day, a weekend or for a specific number of consecutive days. Minimal job skills, training and supervision are needed to accomplish the required tasks. Long-term volunteers work scheduled hours on long-term projects, so they require position descriptions, job training, on-going supervision, communications and regular evaluations. Examples of long-term projects are staffing community centers and seasonal instructor or program aides.

**Recommendation 4 – Organize Volunteers.** The Department may consider hiring a full-time volunteer coordinator who would be responsible for recruiting, screening, training, supervising, and organizing volunteers. It takes staff time to help organize and coordinate volunteers and to ensure their efforts are being utilized in the most beneficial way. Some of the responsibilities of a volunteer coordinator include the following:

- Working with the agency's staff to create a volunteer manual
- Targeted marketing and recruitment plan
- Training staff in volunteer management
- Recruiting volunteers for various activities, events, projects and programs
- Screening and selecting volunteers
- Matching volunteer skills to the needs of the agency
- Working with staff members to orient the volunteers
- Organizing training
- Coordinating all volunteer work
- Motivating and acknowledging the volunteers' work (award parties, etc.)
- Scheduling, coordinating and preparing for events and projects
- Preparing newsletters and event flyers
- Assessing and monitoring the effectiveness of the role of volunteers versus staff (Westrup, 2006)

## Customer Service

Public parks and recreation must remain customer-oriented. Several professional studies support the contention that the experiences of one consumer can influence the purchasing decisions of several hundred other consumers.

The high cost of losing a customer can be measured as follows:

- The average wronged customer will tell 8 - 16 others
- 92% of unhappy customers never purchase the service/goods again
- It costs five times as much to recruit a new customer than to retain an old customer

**Recommendation 1 – Ensure Communication.** The Department must be in regular communication with the park user group to ensure proper and adequate programming for its unique population of consumers. One of the biggest complaints from parks and recreation users in DeKalb County is that they do not feel like their voices are heard. The County

needs to expand opportunities for people to be involved with decisions regarding parks and recreation opportunities. We recommend holding one public meeting per quarter to be held at various locations around the County. County staff could use the meetings to announce changes or events in the Department, but the main agenda item would be to listen and respond to concerns of recreation users and other County residents.

**Recommendation 2 – Develop Web-based Applications.** Other departments around the country are exploring interactive web-based applications that allow constituents to voice concerns online. The agency typically responds promptly and provides the constituent with instructions for tracking how the concern is being actively addressed. Everyone that registers for a recreation class or park activity could be asked to provide an e-mail address so they may be included in future communications regarding parks and recreation activities.

**Recommendation 3 – Survey.** The Department should develop ongoing instruments that assess the issues constituents consider important. These tools would include ongoing surveys seeking input on the types of programs the public wants offered. These could be paper surveys that are picked up and turned in at recreation centers, schools, and libraries. It could also be an ongoing web-based survey. The Department has not conducted a regular survey to determine the types of programs that would be of interest to the public, but instead has relied on feedback from questionnaires completed at the end of current programs. Mail out surveys enjoy greater success if mailed out with utility bills and returned with the payment.

## Performance Measurement

The best argument for increased funding in parks and recreation is to demonstrate and prove benefits garnered from the use of public assets. DeKalb County must track and evaluate how the health of the users of its facilities, spaces and programs improves over time, as well as the overall effectiveness of its parks and recreation facilities and programs. Performance measures are being used by departments all across the U.S. to respond to increased demands for accountability and greater interest from public officials concerned with evaluating program effectiveness and allocating resources.

We need to determine the long-term health and economic benefits associated with access to park and recreation resources. The County should work with community service providers and public health specialists

**Recommendation 1 – Determine Participation.** The County needs to evaluate participation rates, durations of use or enrollment numbers. Regular record-keeping will allow the Department to evaluate attendance trends and adjust program offerings accordingly.

**Recommendation 2 – Work with Health Providers.** With an increasing emphasis on health and wellness and their relation to recreation and fitness, the key is to engage the public health community to learn the most effective surveillance and monitoring methods. We need to determine the long-term health and economic benefits associated with access to park and recreation resources. The County should work with community service providers and public health specialists. Public health surveillance systems, such as the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), School

Health Policies and Programs Study (SHPPS), Youth Media Campaign Longitudinal Survey (YMCLS), Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance System (YRBSS) and National Household Transportation Survey (NHTS) provide alternatives for measuring performance of parks and recreation services in relation to public health.

**Recommendation 3 – Establish Performance Measures.** There are also other ways to measure performance. Input indicators assess the amount of resources used for a specific service or program. Output/workload indicators measure the units produced or services



Recreation can help address health and wellness issues

provided by a program. Efficiency/cost-effectiveness indicators tell us how the quantity of services compares to the costs of labor. Outcome/effectiveness indicators report the results, including the quality of programs and services. The County should choose one of these methods and begin to measure the Department's performance and effectiveness on a yearly basis. By establishing performance measures, the Department will be able to work with other public officials, other department managers, and the community to evaluate the effectiveness and quality of public services. As mentioned in another recommendation, feasibility studies need to be conducted for new facilities, land acquisitions, and major redevelopment projects that combine market analysis, physical planning, and financial projections to determine if a project or activity has an acceptable return on investment.

### Joint Ventures and Partnerships

One common trend is that parks and recreation departments are making more of an effort to form partnerships with other public and private organizations. More than 96% of parks and recreation departments around the country have formed some kind of partnership, with the most common partners being local schools, local government and non-profit organizations. The key is to look for partnerships that can grow and bring lasting value, rather than a one-time convenience arrangement. In DeKalb County there are a number of opportunities for these types of partnerships.

**Recommendation 1 – Work with Sports Organizations.** The Department needs to review existing partnerships with sports associations. They control most of the youth sports activities in the County and are among the most common partners for parks and recreation departments. DeKalb County currently operates under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) when it works closely with sports associations. The MOU must be reevaluated each year when it is renewed; this has not always happened in the past.

**Recommendation 2 – Work with other Youth and Recreation Organizations.** The Department should establish formal partnerships with charitable social organizations such as the YMCA/YWCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, Boy and Girl Scouts, and churches. These groups provide outdoor recreation facilities for public use, some for a user fee. Facilities typically consist of high-infrastructure sites such as athletic fields for softball, baseball and soccer programs. Churches in urban areas, particularly the large “mega” churches, are increasingly providing high-infrastructure facilities for their congregations and in many cases for the surrounding community.

**Recommendation 3 – Continue Partnership with PATH.** One significant example of a non-profit partner in the provision of outdoor recreation opportunities is the PATH Foundation. PATH has developed the Trails Plan for DeKalb County, and they are leading the effort within the county to develop trails and greenways.

**Recommendation 4 – Work with Schools.** The Department should work with public and private school systems. For decades, there have been discussions about schools and park departments working together to share resources. A DeKalb County School park Program, which is a cooperative agreement between DeKalb County Government and the DeKalb County School system, was initially discussed in 1979. In 1980 a series of pilot sites was identified and operational scenarios were developed for each site. All nine school parks were completed and operational in 1990, and there were discussions about utilizing a similar approach with all elementary schools in DeKalb County. In recent years, the program has not been active, but it should be revived.

If a joint park/school program was resumed, ballfields could be used during the day by a school, and then in evenings and on weekends by parks departments. For before-and-after-school programs, a parks and recreation department could utilize school facilities to offer programs for school-age kids.

**Recommendation 5 – Partner with Health Organizations.** There is a growing interest in the development of partnerships with health organizations. Lack of available or proper programming space has caused parks departments to actively seek alternative solutions. Among current choices we find decentralized programs provided in store fronts, schools, churches, hospitals, community centers, and assisted living centers. Community-based initiatives such as NRPA’s Health and Livability Summit provide opportunities for parks and recreation departments from around the country to describe how they incorporate public engagement in healthy behaviors in parks and recreation programs.

**Recommendation 6 – Creative Partnerships.** The County Commissioners interviewed felt there needs to be an emphasis on creative public/private partnerships, especially with the schools. The Commissioners agreed that coordinating new schools with new parks makes good fiscal, physical and functional sense. One approach would be to commit to a pilot study as the first step of working together. Joint venturing with YMCA, churches, and other organizations could result in mutually beneficial operations. For example, a partnership with the YMCA could involve them being in charge of indoor programs and the Department handling outdoor programs and activities. There are also opportunities to build playgrounds throughout the County by developing partnerships with Home Depot, the nation’s largest home improvement retailer, and KaBOOM!, a national non-profit organization that focuses on building safe play spaces.

## Recreation Programming

There have been significant changes in the types of programming offered by parks and recreation departments across the U.S. in recent years. Creating new and innovative

programming options is one of the top five issues that parks and recreation systems are concerned about. (Recmanagement.com) The problem that most departments currently face is that existing budgets are fairly lean, so priorities must be set in regards to which programs should be offered.

In a national survey, the programs most commonly offered by parks and recreation departments surveyed included holiday events and other special events, programming for youth sports teams, arts and crafts, day camps and summer camps and educational programs. Also popular is programming for adult sports teams, active older adults, swimming, sport training such as golf or tennis instruction, sports tournaments and competitions, teens, fitness programs and mind/body balance programs such as yoga and tai chi. (Recmanagement.com)

The top 10 programs that parks and recreation departments in the U.S. plan to add within the next three years include:

1. Environmental education
2. Fitness programs
3. Teen programming
4. Mind/body balance programs
5. Performing arts
6. Educational programs
7. Programs for active older adults
8. Holiday and other special events
9. Day camps and summer camps
10. Trips

(Recmanagement.com)

According to SCORP, the top 5 outdoor recreation activities in Georgia are:

1. Walking, jogging or running (62%)
2. Picnicking or outdoor social gatherings (50%)
3. Swimming outdoors (42%)
4. Viewing, identifying & photographing nature (39%)
5. Fishing (33%)

In the Public Survey, the programs viewed as being the most important were:

1. Adult fitness and wellness programs (38%)
2. Water fitness programs (18%)
3. Senior adult programs (16%)
4. Adult art, dance, and performing arts (16%).

**Recommendation 1 – At-Risk Youth Programs.** The Department should develop programs for at-risk youth. Recreation opportunities can give these youth a chance to discover healthy interests and strengthen leadership skills in safe environments. They also provide opportunities for youth to positively socialize with peers and to relieve stress. (Sprouse and Klitzing, 2005) The County should develop programs that focus on social and leadership skills and provide a sense of belonging and safety. Other components should focus on self-esteem; communication; managing stress; relationships; decision-making; and education on alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Offering family education programs on substance abuse and chemical dependency; geriatric issues; family roles; community resources; raising drug-free children; and other related issues would also be beneficial.

**Recommendation 2 – Self-esteem Programs.** Emphasis should also be on recreation programs for youngsters that promote enhancement of self-esteem, physical activity and development of skills. They should also provide knowledge and skills to enhance protective factors and counter the risks that the County's youth often face. The Department should offer programs that the entire family can become involved in, rather than focusing on specific age groups. More non-traditional recreation programs that present opportunities for socialization should be offered. These include board games, table games, book clubs, public speaking, music/art appreciation, pre/post natal care, cooking-for-one, travel club, bocce ball, table tennis, and other similar activities.

The County should develop environmental education programs such as trail guides, nature guides, bird watching, astronomy, botany, geology, forestry, agriculture, and classes on environmental impact and sustainability. A walking program could also be incorporated into environmental education programs and coordinated to use PATH trails

**Recommendation 3 – Programs for Specific Groups.** The Department should offer a range of recreation programs for specific groups. The Department should add performing arts programs, such as dance, music or theater, adult sports teams, sports tournaments and races, personal training, youth sports teams, sport training and swimming programs. Opportunities for youth participation and leadership should be expanded through programs offered by city recreation departments, libraries, museums, schools and other organizations. Art programs for all ages should be provided, including ceramics, pottery, drawing, photography, computer graphics, and other activities. In addition, seniors are looking for more active recreation opportunities. One trend is toward non-traditional recreation programs that offer opportunities for socialization. These include board games, card games, bocce ball, table tennis, lawn bowling, SCUBA, day trips, organized vacations, special interest clubs, and other similar activities. Community gardening programs supported by non-profit volunteer organizations and private partners could also be developed.

Efforts to adequately meet the needs of physically and mentally challenged people also need to be expanded.

**Recommendation 4 – Teacher-to-Student Ratio.** The ratio of counselors to students for after-school programs needs to be lowered. Currently the ratio is one-to-fifteen, which has been the standard since 2003. The ratio should be one-instructor-to-ten students.

**Recommendation 5 – Conservation.** The Department should identify the conservation of natural resources and wildlife as a priority, and environmental education programs should be expanded. Spending time in nature is a family-oriented activity, and it is consistent with other programs identified as goals for the Department. There are documented economic benefits and environmental quality benefits of conservation. As noted in the Georgia Land Conservation Partnership Plan, the most important benefits that conservation lands can provide are clean and abundant water, clean air, and biodiversity. The County should develop environmental education programs such as trail guides, nature guides, bird watching, astronomy, botany, geology, forestry, agriculture, and classes on environmental impact and sustainability. A walking program could also be incorporated into environmental education programs and coordinated to use PATH trails.

**Recommendation 6 – Indoor Climbing.** Indoor climbing facilities should be installed to provide recreation opportunities for a wide variety of users, from casual climbers to experienced "rock jocks." There are many different types and sizes of indoor, outdoor and portable climbing facilities across the country, and interest in climbing continues to grow. Training courses, competitions, and climbing exhibitions are often offered to help encourage a greater level of participation. One approach is to link indoor and outdoor climbing activities by teaching courses inside, then taking climbers outside once they have developed sufficient skills. Instructors certified by the American Mountain Guides Association help ensure that the students learn safe ways to climb.



Providing programmed activities is an important part of the County's recreational goals

**Recommendation 7 – Dropping Programs.** Given the reality of limited budgets, the County should drop programs that are losing participants and money. Considering limited resources, emphasis should be on programs that generate higher participation rates and are more economically viable. It should be noted, though, that at public meetings it was pointed out that participation in programs and use of facilities is unaffordable to many residents.

**Recommendation 8 – Establish Programs for Immigrant Groups.** The Department needs to strengthen its focus on meeting needs of ethnic and immigrant populations. The County is currently not serving seniors in immigrant groups very well, and the liaison to the Latino community is through the police department. The Department needs to develop programs specifically for these groups.

Recreation programming should be adjusted to fit the demographics and needs of a given part of the County. In the northern part of the County, there needs to be more programming for seniors.

**Recommendation 9 – Adventure Programs.** The County needs to better utilize existing parks for outdoor adventure-oriented activities. This means taking advantage of natural resources, and implementing overnight camps, nature programs, fishing programs, and other activities that connect kids to nature.

**Recommendation 10 – Programs for Children. The County needs to develop programs specifically for children, and define a policy in regards to providing opportunities for children.** There are a number of “latchkey” kids in low-income neighborhoods within DeKalb County that come home after school and lock themselves inside their home because their parent, or parents, are at work. These kids would likely participate in after school recreation programs if there was no charge for them. The accepted trend in these cases usually involves active sponsorships and grants for scholarships, as well as sustained funding to help offset reoccurring costs.

## Communication and Marketing

Communication and marketing are critical for every parks and recreation department. The trend in communication is for departments across the U.S. to be more aggressive about reaching out to their constituents. Potential park visitors expect to have adequate signage to find a park and a recreation center, and they expect to be given up-to-date information about programs



and special events. Programs and activities will not be successful if potential users do not know about the event or cannot easily find the location. Effective marketing plans and signage programs are basic ingredients for success.

The Board of Commissioners interviewed for this project stated that marketing was critical to the success of Parks and Recreation within the County. They stated there needs to be a strong outreach effort to reach constituents, including working with local churches and schools as well as local media and newspapers. There could be more activities in the parks, including parties, festivals, concerts, and other events.

**Recommendation 1 – Marketing.** The Department needs to expand the concept of marketing parks and recreation as a "quality of life" issue and economic development element. Public recognition of the benefits associated with parks and recreation needs to be expanded. The County can improve marketing by developing an annual marketing plan and budget. This plan should utilize in-house abilities, identify opportunities for partnering with other organizations, and determine potential outsourcing options. One major limitation is that the Department does not currently have the resources to adequately address marketing issues.

The Department needs to implement a uniform signage system as a base for all parks. One comment from the public meetings was a recommendation to add marquee boards at the entrance to parks to post important information, such as game cancellations or fields closed due to inclement weather.

The County should also be using a regular system of fliers and other printed documents to reach constituents. In the past, the Department produced a family fun guide; it would be beneficial to continue that practice. Most major parks departments around the country produce such a guide, and it is an effective way to generate excitement about the upcoming season. Much, if not all, of the costs of this a family fun guide can be covered by sponsorships, partnerships, grants, or advertisements.

**Recommendation 2 – Signage.** The Department needs to implement a uniform signage system as a base for all parks. One comment from the public meetings was a recommendation to add marquee boards at the entrance to parks to post important information, such as game cancellations or fields closed due to inclement weather. Automated signs are recommended since they will be most effective at updating information in a timely manner. Once basic signage is addressed, individual parks can install custom signs to help create a sense of identity. (Signs should be developed in accordance with DeKalb County sign regulations.)

**Recommendation 3 – Being Proactive.** The Department needs to be more proactive about the services they provide, and the value they bring to a community. Marketing and increasing participation was one of the top-five current issues of concern for parks and recreation professionals in a national survey. (Recmanagement.com)

**Recommendation 4 – Internet Presence.** The Department needs to utilize the Internet to reach potential and existing recreation users. It is typically used to share information with users, and most departments allow interested individuals to sign up for recreation classes and pay for them online. This greatly streamlines the process while reducing cost to the County. DeKalb County needs to update its web page to reflect current assets inventory, program offerings, special events, project status, online registration and reservations; and make it interactive to encourage feedback. Putting control of the Parks and Recreation web site in the hands of the Department will help ensure that changes and updates can be completed in a timely manner. Making the Internet an integral part of how the Department communicates with its constituents will help build a stronger foundation for parks and recreation within the County.

One recommendation is to provide online access to recreation opportunities and programs, and ensure the information is updated in a timely manner. If a class is cancelled, for example,



that information needs to be posted immediately. It should also be possible for interested individuals to sign up and pay registration fees online. This will greatly improve efficiency, lower administrative costs, and should result in a significant increase in participation.

**Recommendation 5 – Increase Visibility.** The County needs to increase the visibility of the Parks and Recreation Department. That means reaching out to the public as well as to other departments and decision-makers within the County. One way to increase visibility of parks and recreation within the County is to conduct more special events and holiday activities in parks. By increasing marketing for special events, the number of people participating would likely increase considerably. The Department could develop regular programs for the internal DeKalb County TV channel. Currently the Department does not utilize the TV channel at all. There could be scheduled programs that feature different recreation opportunities and highlight a different park, facility, speaker, topic or center each week. Special events could also be advertised.

Another way to increase visibility and provide a public service is to offer more day camps and summer camps. Existing summer camps offered by the County are in high demand, and new camps could offer a greater variety of programs and reach a broader base of users. These camps could be expanded to become more of a regional draw. Specialty camps are growing in popularity with training focused on areas such as sports, cheerleading, gymnastics, music, art, adventure trips, education and more.

Utilizing a County-wide survey similar to the one used in the master planning process will help establish a benchmark and produce a local area needs assessments. This approach will give the public an opportunity to continue to be involved in the planning process. This practice will help highlight the unique differences and needs found within each service area.

Public meetings should continue to be conducted on a regular basis in order to give the public an opportunity to express its needs and concerns. Holding media events, community forums and site visits to local programs is a way to keep recreation needs in the spotlight.

The County also needs to meet with the Board of Commissioners (BOC) on a regular basis. The BOC can be one of the biggest advocates for the Department and the more they can be involved the better. It is also recommended that the Department more proactively work with other departments in the County, many of which have little understanding of what is being done in Parks and Recreation.

## 8.7 Fees Trends and Recommendations

The issue of fees is always difficult for parks and recreation departments to address. Most departments take the approach that they have a responsibility to provide recreation opportunities to their constituents. This is consistent with the approach being taken by DeKalb County. People generally express their displeasure with higher fees and their unwillingness to pay for park and recreation opportunities, in part because of the basic premise that they are already paying taxes that support their parks. However, when confronted with the reality of closing parks, residents typically demonstrate support for fees. Input from the public suggests that people in DeKalb County are willing to pay to support parks and recreation.

**Recommendation 1 – Increase Fees.** The Department needs to increase fees in order to help provide the funding needed to maintain and support parks and recreation facilities. That becomes an issue, though, if the increased fees prevent residents from participating in recreation opportunities. The SCORP survey found that 40% of residents Statewide reported that “not having enough money” was a barrier to their participation in outdoor recreation activities.

In the Public Survey, sixty-three-percent (63%) of respondents indicated that they are either very supportive (29%) or somewhat supportive (34%) of implementing or increasing the fees for recreation and cultural facilities, programs, and services to help pay for increased operating expenses. The key is to ensure that these increased fees are targeted at programs that the citizens support.

The need to increase fees is particularly true of golf, tennis, and athletic activities. For other programs, fees are generally \$6 per hour in DeKalb County, while other jurisdictions are charging \$10-\$12 on average. Updates to fees should be based upon research into current practices and local fees to help establish benchmark fees, annual increases, free versus funded programs, and to seek supplemental/sustaining support as required. The LERN Research Report, "#02-883 - How to Measure and Improve the Financial Success of Recreation Programs," is a valuable resource for determining appropriate fees.

Even if fees increase, though, recreation services need to be accessible to low-income groups, single parents, and homeless people. One way to do this is to offer special classes, or provide fee waivers for those with demonstrated need.

**Recommendation 2 – Variety of Fees.** The Department needs to implement a wide range of fees, including the following:

- Entrance fees
- Admission fees
- Rental fees
- Sales revenues from concessions
- License and permit fees
- Special services fees
- User fees

Given the budget constraints of the Parks and Recreation Department, the fees brought in should help meet the costs of existing programs. The more the County can develop economically sustainable programs, the easier it will be to meet the recreation needs of citizens. As mentioned earlier, it is also important that all parks and recreation funds be kept within the Department for future recreation needs.

It is also advisable to explore alternatives for reducing fees associated with activities offered by sports associations and other private partners. For example, instead of charging for facilities, the Department could require a sports association to accept a larger responsibility for maintenance. The savings could result in lower fees and lower operational costs for the Department. There are also options for privatization, including: subcontracting park maintenance, security services, golf operations, building maintenance, tree trimming, and other tasks.

**Recommendation 3 – Reciprocal Fees.** DeKalb County should implement a reciprocal fee arrangement with neighboring counties and municipalities that fall within the service area of DeKalb County citizens. Residents of these neighboring counties use DeKalb facilities and vice versa.

## 8.8 Maintenance Trends and Recommendations

Maintenance has become an issue in parks and recreation departments across the country. A fundamental question is what does it take to implement a standard of care? Every parks department is trying to determine what kind of service they can provide with their respective resources. Expectations need to be clearly understood, agreed upon, and met to make things happen.



Playing at Stone Mountain Park

The Executive Team for the County, in a series of interviews, stated that maintenance is one of the most pervasive issues the County has to deal with. Many of the County's community centers were built some 50 years ago, and are in need of modernization or replacement. Some facilities do not have air conditioning, which has obvious implications for their continuing use, particularly during summer months. While funding is a concern when considering maintenance issues, it is only one of many operational issues mentioned. Prioritization of existing funding allocations and a focus on efficiency could significantly improve maintenance problems. Maintenance is currently largely reactionary, focusing on things like mowing and litter pick-up, while a majority of funds are focused on programming, often at the expense of long-term maintenance needs. A suggestion was made for a standardized system of maintenance provision, including a standard of care manual, time lines on deliverables, individual maintenance plans for each park, a refined preventive maintenance program and a standardized work order system.

The size and maturity of a park system directly affects the specific issues a Department must deal with. Older park systems frequently have structures that require major work, such as roof repairs, heating and air conditioning repairs, and field replacements. DeKalb County is dealing with issues associated with older park systems, such as deteriorating parks and antiquated layouts. The County's park system is not that old, but many of its structures are hand-me-downs and are outdated. The DeKalb County park system has grown significantly since 2001, and it has been difficult for the Department to keep up with these changes.

**Recommendation 1 – Standard of Care.** DeKalb County needs to develop a Standard of Care to serve as a road map for the Department. To establish a Standard of Care, a maintenance division has to establish records of how long it takes to complete tasks. Lack of this information makes it impossible to schedule tasks and have a reasonable expectation of work completed in a timely manner. Once a Standard of Care Manual is established, it needs to be revisited periodically to gauge performance and updated as needed. Supervisors have to understand the Standard of Care, and be able to direct workers on how to complete specific tasks.

The more that maintenance crews understand what is expected of them, the better they will be able to do their jobs. One trend is regular training, including field trips, so the crews can



see other facilities. It would also help to develop a catalog of photographs showing examples of the type of quality expected for a particular type of maintenance project.

The County currently has 135 people working in maintenance, and collectively they are in charge of 3,500 to 4,000 acres. A more detailed analysis needs to be conducted to see if current resources can meet the Standard of Care.

**Recommendation 2 – Lifecycle Costs.** Departments are also realizing that it is important to look at budgeting and maintenance needs over the entire lifecycle of a facility, rather than just the initial cost of buying and installing equipment. Failure to look at these issues in the past has led to a backlog of maintenance. For many departments, including DeKalb County, deferred maintenance backlog is at a crisis stage, and unfortunately, doing nothing is the most expensive choice. In certain circumstances deferred maintenance will yield increased risk exposure and asset closure.

The Department needs to re-emphasize the maintenance division's Resource Enhancement and Protection program that focuses on lifecycles. Apparently many of the records were lost and others were not kept up-to-date. The division needs to start collecting that data again, put it in a digital format that can be cross-referenced with other data, and then back it up to ensure the data is not lost again. The Department also needs to balance lifecycle costs versus performance when it comes to purchasing equipment. For example, a mower with a larger cutting area may be more expensive, but if it substantially reduces the time required for regular maintenance, it would quickly pay for itself. It may also be possible for the Department to expand their services, such as cutting the grass for a particular school, in return for the shared use of facilities for programs.

**Recommendation 3 – Plan for Parks and Recreation Centers.** Developing a detailed maintenance plan for each park and for each recreation center will help the County prioritize tasks. The plan should include a list of all maintenance tasks required for a particular facility, the time it takes for each task, how often the maintenance should occur, and if it is a seasonal plan, when the plan starts and ends. A consistent policy for maintaining recreation centers is also needed. Of the eleven existing recreation centers, nine are currently maintained by park employees, while two are maintained by contract employees.

Sports fields cannot be used on a continuous basis. They must be allowed to rejuvenate, which requires taking them out of play.

Otherwise a field gets worn down and the cost to repair it far exceeds the cost in regular maintenance, also resulting in increased downtime for the facility

A maintenance plan needs to be developed for each park and recreation center in DeKalb County. The plan should include a list of all maintenance tasks required for that particular facility, the time it takes for each task, how often the maintenance needs to occur, and if it is a seasonal plan, when it starts and ends. The plan also needs to address involvement with other organizations, such as sports associations. On occasion maintenance departments receive assistance from athletic associations for tasks such as mowing, field dressing, and other maintenance directly associated with ballfields. One problem is that sometimes there is confusion over what the associations are doing. It would be a serious problem, for example, if the Department fertilized the fields, and then one of the sports associations did the same the following week.

**Recommendation 4 – Field Maintenance.** Every sports field in the County needs to be evaluated before and after each season to determine its condition, potential maintenance requirements, and whether it should be pulled from

play for the upcoming season. Sports fields cannot be used on a continuous basis. They must be allowed to rejuvenate, which requires taking them out of play. Otherwise a field gets worn down and the cost to repair it far exceeds the cost in regular maintenance, also resulting in increased downtime for the facility.

When possible, designing the field as one big open area is much better than laying out a true soccer field. Using portable goals and backstops, and changing the direction and location of fields helps alleviate wear and tear in these areas. In baseball, 85% of the game occurs in the infield, so that part of the field has more wear and tear than the outfield. Some fields are designated as "game-only" and are not allowed for practice. Using more soil amendments such as sand and compost with plug aeration in the center of a field helps provide a cushion, so even after damage occurs the grass root zone will rejuvenate more quickly.

Some athletic fields should be closed during the off-season to reduce wear and tear. At least one field should be left open for public use. It is recommended to close one-in-five soccer fields from play in a given season to allow it to rejuvenate. That means every field will have a chance to recover a minimum of every five years. When a field is pulled from play, signs should be installed to explain the need to allow the field to rejuvenate. This will help alleviate misconceptions about not utilizing all of the fields.

**Recommendation 5 – Playground Maintenance.** The Department has to address dilapidated facilities and equipment that needs to be replaced. For example, playgrounds have a functional lifecycle of about 12 to 15 years, so the County should implement a playground replacement program based on this lifecycle.

**Recommendation 6 – Maintenance Agreement.** One County Commissioner said one of the biggest mistakes the County had made was splitting maintenance for parks and recreation and placing it under facilities management. The change was made to eliminate duplicate efforts, but the results have not been positive. The Commissioner suggested a return to the former maintenance arrangement. There are a number of ways the County can reduce maintenance costs. Utilizing native grasses and wildflowers in specific areas will help reduce time spent mowing. Expanding the amount of maintenance required of athletic associations will alleviate some pressures for the Department. These tasks could include mowing, field dressing, and other maintenance directly associated with ballfields. Sports associations could also help fund sod and turf replacement between seasons. If an agreement can be reached with local schools to have access to their athletic fields outside of school hours, Parks and Recreation could perform the maintenance, and the school could use the fields for its normal activities and special events.

**Recommendation 7 – Maintenance Outsourcing.** The County should also conduct a cost analysis to compare the cost of completing specific maintenance items in-house versus contracting them out. If the in-house cost estimate cannot match or significantly (>10%) undercut bids, then the work should be outsourced.



## 8.9 Security Trends and Recommendations

Security is one of the top concerns in parks across the country. When parks, trails and greenways are not well-maintained or security is a concern, people are hesitant to visit these facilities. During public meetings, DeKalb County residents mentioned security as being a problem with some parks. The County needs to identify security as a top priority and take a more proactive role in developing a greater security presence in the parks. This could include purchasing and installing deterrents to crime, such as cameras, alarms, gates, lighting, and other devices.

Safety was viewed as a major issue by the Board of Commissioners. A common feeling was that if people do not feel safe, they will not use the parks. One option suggested was to have police offers patrol the parks. Another option is to implement an adopt-a-park program or a park watch program. It is important to get communities involved in making their parks safe. Increased site

lighting and reorientation of site elements are suggested to improve passive surveillance by security controls and citizens.

**Recommendation 1** – Coordinate with Police Department. The County needs to continue to coordinate police activities to ensure that parks have an adequate level of security.

Formal procedures need to be established to ensure security is adequately addressed in each park. Supposedly there are one-to-two officers dedicated to DeKalb parks, but their responsibilities are not clearly defined. The County must increase the presence of police in the parks during heavy recreational hours. Procedures for non-911 calls also need to be defined.

**Recommendation 2 – Eyes and Ears in Parks.** The Department needs to focus on putting “eyes and ears” in the parks. That means the more often people use a park, and the greater number of people there, the safer a park will be. Some cities and counties promote Adopt-a-Park programs while others focus on Park Watch programs. Organized activities such as sports activities, group walks or exercise courses, community gardens, and other actions all bring people into a park. DeKalb County needs to look at each individual park to determine the best approach for that specific area. For all parks, a policy for the overnight parking and possible abandonment of vehicles within park sites must be established.

## 8.10 Health and Wellness Trends and Recommendations

Health and wellness issues have increased in importance in recent years, and parks and recreation programs have a major role in promoting healthy lifestyles. According to an article in TrendsCan (“Adolescents Increasingly Inactive,” UCLA Health Policy Brief, April 2005), 74% of Americans are not active. One-in-four teens nationally have no safe park or open space near their home. Only six-percent of kids between the ages of 9 and 13 play outside on their own during a typical week. (Louv, 2007) Adults are also not as active as in the past; their lifestyles have become more sedentary.

Many of the national problems associated with health and wellness trends are present in DeKalb County. The Status of Health in DeKalb Report (2005) is the sixth in a series produced



Activities such as rock climbing provide great exercise

by the DeKalb County Board of Health. The report describes time and geographic patterns of diseases and injuries, birth trends, leading causes of death and premature death, and health behaviors. The purpose of the Status of Health report series is to identify priority areas for health improvement and to serve as a catalyst for community action. It analyzes available data through 2003 for leading health issues and some of the risk factors associated with these issues in DeKalb County.

Compared to national averages, DeKalb County high school students in grades 9-12 are more overweight, have worse dietary habits, and are less physically active. In 2003, 17% were overweight, and 12% were obese . . . These nutrition and physical activity behaviors indicate that DeKalb youth are at increased risk for cardiovascular disease and cancer-related problems later in life.

Compared to national averages, DeKalb County high school students in grades 9-12 are more overweight, have worse dietary habits, and are less physically active. In 2003, 17% were overweight, and 12% were obese. Only 23% of students engaged in moderate physical activity (compared to the U.S. rate of 25%), and 58% of students engaged in vigorous physical activity (compared to the U.S. rate of 63%). Sixty-six percent (66%) of DeKalb students did not attend physical education class on a daily basis (compared to the U.S. rate of 56%). These nutrition and physical activity behaviors indicate that DeKalb youth are at increased risk for cardiovascular disease and cancer-related problems later in life.

The recreation programs, facilities, and opportunities in the County should be oriented toward activities that will help promote increased physical involvement. It would be beneficial for DeKalb County to establish a Wellness Coordinator to take the lead in addressing the integration of health issues with parks and recreation.

Communities in north DeKalb County have a higher proportion of Hispanics and Asians than the southern part of the County. Residents in north DeKalb are more likely to be foreign-born, to speak a language other than English at home, and to be linguistically isolated. Hispanic high school students are more likely to be overweight than other races/ethnicities and are less likely to engage in vigorous physical activities. Hispanic students also report a higher percentage of current tobacco use. Hispanics and Asians face numerous challenges, such as language and cultural barriers and limited access to adequate health care. It is suspected that additional health disparities affect immigrants and refugees, but details are lacking because existing data sources do not record whether a person is an immigrant or refugee.

Approximately 35% of DeKalb County adults are overweight, 21% are obese, and 36% were trying to lose weight. Less than half of adults surveyed reported that they engage in vigorous physical activities such as running or aerobics. Given the fact that the population in DeKalb County is getting older, providing more adult-oriented physical activities will help address health concerns.

Because of the diversity in the County, there are health disparities based on certain characteristics (race/ethnicity, gender, education, income, disability, geographic location, sexual orientation, etc.). Based on 2000 U.S. Census data, communities in south DeKalb County have a higher proportion of African Americans, persons with lower educational attainment, and lower economic status than the northern part of the county. Communities in south DeKalb have a higher rate of premature death due to chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease. Overall, premature death rates from cancer are higher in blacks than whites. The premature death rate of diabetes is 1.7 times greater in south DeKalb when compared to the remainder of the County. The premature death rate for heart disease is 2.3 times higher for black females than for white females.

**Recommendation 1 – Leadership Role.** The Department needs to actively promote an overall increase in physical activity and assume a leadership role in making this happen. The Department should work with statewide organizations such as the Department of Natural



Resources, the Georgia Recreation and Park Association and others to develop programs that promote health and livability and to incorporate those programs into local outdoor recreation. The Department should also focus on developing creative partnerships with health providers within the County.

**Recommendation 2 – Focus on Health & Wellness.** Board of Commissioners members interviewed felt there needs to be stronger focus on health care and wellness. Poor nutritional habits and sedentary lifestyles resulting in obesity was cited as being a big problem, especially among children. One suggestion by a Board member was to look into sponsors donating exercise equipment. There needs to be more exercise equipment and opportunities located within the parks, and these could be donated by sponsors.

**Recommendation 3 – Creative Programming.** DeKalb County can help promote more creative programming that recognizes that fitness is evolving to much more than a room with weight and cardio machines. Cross-training among disciplines is highly desirable and offers greater balance to the fitness experience. Fitness programs must provide opportunities to cross-train that utilize progressive resistant equipment, running, swimming, free weights, cardiovascular and aerobic training. Many departments across the country are developing creative partnerships with health providers.

## 8.11 Monitoring the Parks and Recreation Master Plan

One limitation with master plans is that they quickly become static and outdated. Also, they too often are filed away and are not used to guide the direction of a department. A county often grows faster than expected, the economy changes, bonds for park expansion are passed, facilities are constructed, and the assumptions used to develop recommendations change. For DeKalb County, the changes since the 2000 Plan are significant.

**Recommendation 1 – Submittal of Plan.** The County needs to submit this completed Plan for adoption by the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners. This will enable the Plan to serve as a roadmap for the Department over the next ten years and will ensure it is followed even if there are changes in administration.

**Recommendation 2 – Review.** Rather than being viewed as a 10-year plan, this document should be considered a living plan that is reviewed and renewed annually over a 10-year period.

**Recommendation 3 – Accomplishment.** The Department should continue to annually prepare a listing of major accomplishments and achievements organized by division and/or as an overall department. This is currently done as part of the Department's end-of-year report. This data should be shared with the public and with other departments in the County in an effort to keep them informed about what the Department is doing. The County should establish an annual target date for completion of the annual review and distribution of updates to stakeholders. The update should contain a revised table of contents, annual report, page updates, and instructions on properly updating personal copies of the current Plan.

## 9.0 Next Steps and Priorities

The recommendations in Section 6 (Parks Analysis and Recommendations), Section 7 (Facilities Analysis and Recommendations) and Section 8 (Planning and Implementation Strategies) were analyzed to determine which recommendations should be priorities. The basic idea is to help the County determine which recommendations should be implemented first.

The priorities were established based upon input from the public, Parks & Recreation Advisory Board, Parks & Recreation staff, and local stakeholders. That input was combined with our analysis of local, regional, and national trends, and we then used our professional judgment to determine which recommendations were high, which were low, and which were somewhere in between.

### 9.1 Priorities

Priorities were established by looking at how important it was to implement a specific recommendation. So recommendations need to be implemented immediately because they lay the foundation for future decisions. For example, the County needs to adopt the recommended standards for each park classification since this has an impact on how many parks are needed and how big they should be.

Some recommendations, such as the acquisition of land for new parks, is a priority because the amount of available land in DeKalb County is disappearing. This is particularly true in the denser parts of the county where recreation demands are the highest.

Other recommendations, such as coordinating with SCORP, are important, but there is not the same sense of urgency since this coordination could also happen at a later date. Low priority recommendations should be addressed when it is appropriate, and as time and budget permits.

Priorities are classified as being:

- High – recommendations that need to be implemented immediately
- Medium – recommendations that are important, but can be delayed for a short time without having a negative impact on recreational opportunities within the county
- Low – recommendations that should be addressed eventually as budget becomes available, but can be delayed

### Estimated Cost

For each recommendation, a magnitude of cost was developed. During the decision making process, it is important to know what it will cost to implement specific recommendations. Costs are divided into three categories:

- High (H) – over \$250,000
- Medium (M) – between \$50,000 and \$250,000
- Low (L) – less than \$50,000

Some recommendations, such as the development of a new aquatics center, are extremely high. For example, an aquatics center would cost somewhere between \$8 to \$12 million. The county will have to budget for these types of major construction items.

Given budget limitations, the County will find it easiest to implement High Priority recommendations that have a Low estimated cost.

DeKalb County Parks & Recreation Master Plan Implementation Strategy Matrix (2009)		Priority			Estimated Cost		
		High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
<b>Parks &amp; Recreation</b>							
<b>GOAL:</b>	Create a collective vision for DeKalb County in regards to the types of parks and recreation services to be provided over the next decade.						
<b>OBJECTIVE:</b>	Provide DeKalb County with a 10-year "action plan" that is a living, dynamic document, constantly growing and changing to reflect the needs of the County.						
<b>TOPIC:</b>	<b>ACTION:</b>						
Facility Standards for DeKalb County	Implement facility standards for the following: Recreation Facilities, Aquatic Facilities, Athletic Fields, Tennis Courts, Basketball Courts, Golf Courses, Skate Parks, Dog Parks, Park Acreage for each park classification.	X					X
<b>Parks Recommendations</b>							
Recommended Park System Concepts for DeKalb County	Implement the Recommended Park Classification System.	X					X
Recommended Park System Concepts for DeKalb County	Focus on Sustainability. The County must develop a stronger focus on sustainable, less maintenance-intensive landscapes, and incorporate green landscape design into traditional parks.		X			X	
Recommended Park System Concepts for DeKalb County	Address Economics. The County should expand on the concept of parks as economic resources, and develop a business plan for the Department based on the recognition that parks and recreation is a business.	X					X
Recommended Park System Concepts for DeKalb County	Improve Access. Improving access to outdoor recreation resources and facilities can be accomplished by establishing parks near places where people live and work.		X			X	
Recommended Park System Concepts for DeKalb County	Enhance Existing Parks. Creating conceptual site master plans for each park (in addition to those already developed) will help establish a benchmark for developing future alternatives based on user supported programs.		X			X	
Recommended Park System Concepts for DeKalb County	Participate in GIS Inventory. The Department needs to participate in a County-wide GIS inventory of all County property holdings to seek opportunities for utilizing existing resources.			X		X	
Recommended Park System Concepts for DeKalb County	Enhance Aesthetics. The Department needs to invest more in horticultural applications such as the use of indigenous flowers and plants, and improving the overall aesthetic quality of the parks.		X			X	

DeKalb County Parks & Recreation Master Plan Implementation Strategy Matrix (2009)		Priority			Estimated Cost		
		High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
Recommendations for Greenways and Natural Resource Areas	Coordinate with SCORP. The County should implement key recommendations to conserve and properly use natural resources from the Georgia Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2008-2013 report.			X			X
Recommendations for Greenways and Natural Resource Areas	TAE. Support the State's efforts to establish and provide resource data and tools by establishing a Technical Assistance Unit.			X			X
Recommendations for Greenways and Natural Resource Areas	Land Use Planning: Work with the Planning and Development Department to support land use planning that encourages conservation of natural resources and opportunities for outdoor recreation opportunities.		X				X
Recommendations for Land Acquisition to Expand Park System	Acquisition Strategy. The County should continue to acquire land for parks in a systematic manner, with a goal of obtaining 300 to 400 acres of park land per year.	X			X		
Recommendations for Land Acquisition to Expand Park System	Focus on Usable Lands. DeKalb County should set a priority for acquiring park land that can be used for a combination of active and passive uses.	X				X	
Recommendations for Land Acquisition to Expand Park System	Equitable Distribution. It is critical that acquisition strategies include efforts for to see an equitable distribution of parks and recreation opportunities to all parts of the County.		X			X	
Recommendations for Land Acquisition to Expand Park System	Coordination of Acquisition. It is important to ensure that Parks and Recreation staff continues to be actively involved in determining land acquisition for new parks.	X					X
Recommendations for Land Acquisition to Expand Park System	Identify land suitable for development as DeKalb's signature park.		X		X		

DeKalb County Parks & Recreation Master Plan Implementation Strategy Matrix (2009)		Priority			Estimated Cost		
		High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
Recommendations for Mini-Parks	Standards for Mini-Parks. A standard of .1 acres per 1,000 people is recommended for pocket parks. Based upon DeKalb County's 2005 population of 711,577, that standard requires that 71 acres of land are set aside for pocket parks. We recommend that DeKalb focus on developing a few mini-parks.	X					X
Recommendations for Mini-Parks	Location of Mini-Parks. Location of mini-parks is recommended in urban areas where they would provide much needed passive recreation opportunities.		X			X	
Recommendations for Mini-Parks	Service Area. A walking distance of .25 miles is recommended as the defined service area for mini-parks.		X			X	
Recommendations for Mini-Parks	Maintenance Requirements. One concern about mini-parks is that they may result in an increase in overall maintenance requirements. One option is to partner with local businesses and organizations and have them be responsible for a specific mini-park.		X				X
Recommendations for Neighborhood Parks	Standards for Neighborhood Parks. The recommended standard for neighborhood parks within DeKalb County is 1 acre per 1,000 residents. Based upon DeKalb County's 2005 population (711,577), 712 acres of land would need to be allocated for neighborhood parks. DeKalb County currently has 571 acres of neighborhood park land, so an additional 141 acres would need to be acquired.	X					X
Recommendations for Neighborhood Parks	Location of Parks. Neighborhood parks should be within easy walking or bicycling distance. Ideally, residents should be able to access the parks without having to cross major streets.		X				X
Recommendations for Neighborhood Parks	Service Area. Neighborhood parks serve a population within a half-mile radius around the park.		X				X
Recommendations for Neighborhood Parks	Partnership with Schools. One option is for the County to partner with the school district and develop joint facilities that integrate neighborhood parks and elementary schools.			X			X

DeKalb County Parks & Recreation Master Plan Implementation Strategy Matrix (2009)		Priority			Estimated Cost		
		High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
Recommendations for Community Parks	Recommendation 1 - Park Standards. A standard of 5 acres of community parks per 1,000 residents is recommended in DeKalb County. Using DeKalb County's 2005 population (711,577), 3,558 acres of land is needed for community parks. Based on the DeKalb County 2015 population (802,996), 4,015 acres is recommended for community parks at that point in time. The County currently has 1,581 acres of community parks, so there is a significant shortage of community parks.	X					X
Recommendations for Community Parks	Location of Parks. The service area for a community park should be two miles.		X				X
Recommendations for Community Parks	Size of New Parks. New community parks should be a minimum of 10 acres in size, with 40 to 50 acres being recommended as a typical size.		X				X
Recommendations for Community Parks	Standard Configuration. New community parks should provide a variety of uses, including a combination of active and passive uses.		X				X
Recommendations for Regional Parks	Park Standards. For regional parks, we recommend that DeKalb County use a standard of 5 acres per 1,000 residents. Based on DeKalb County's 2005 population (711,577), 3,558 acres of land is recommended for regional parks. Using the DeKalb County 2015 population (802,996), 4,015 is recommended for that point in time.	X					X
Recommendations for Regional Parks	Park Acquisition. Given the presence of Stone Mountain State Park and the need for other types of parks within the County, we do not recommend the acquisition of any additional regional parks in the near future. There are other priorities for park acquisition.			X			X

DeKalb County Parks & Recreation Master Plan Implementation Strategy Matrix (2009)		Priority			Estimated Cost		
		High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
Recommendations for Natural Resource, Open Space Parks, and Linear Parks	Park Standards. The recommended standard for natural resource, open space parks, and linear parks in DeKalb County is 4 acres per 1,000 residents. Based on DeKalb County's 2005 population (711,577), 2,846 acres of land is recommended for regional parks. Using the DeKalb County 2015 population (802,996), 3,212 acres is recommended for that point in time. DeKalb County currently has 2,625 acres of land that is classified as natural resource and open space.	X					X
Recommendations for Natural Resource, Open Space Parks, and Linear Parks	Promote Green Space. The Department should continue to play a major role in protecting natural resources and preserving green space in the County.		X				X
Recommendations for Natural Resource, Open Space Parks, and Linear Parks	Expand Linear Trail System. During the Public Survey for this project, 30% of respondents indicated that walking and biking trails were the most important facilities for recreation opportunities.		X			X	
Recommendations for Natural Resource, Open Space Parks, and Linear Parks	Improve Access. Access must be addressed at a broader level, including providing sidewalks and links to parks.	X				X	
Recommendations for Special-Purpose Parks	Park Standards. The recommended standard for special-purpose parks in DeKalb County is 5 acres per 1,000 residents. Based on DeKalb County's 2005 population (711,577), 2,135 acres of land is recommended for special-purpose parks. Using the DeKalb County 2015 population (802,996), 2,409 acres is recommended for that point in time.	X			X		
Recommendations for Special-Purpose Parks	Development of Special Parks. The County needs to develop a minimum of four new special use parks.		X		X		
Recommendations for Special-Purpose Parks	Classification of Special Use Parks. The Department needs to change the way it classifies a special purpose park so that parks are not classified twice.			X			X

DeKalb County Parks & Recreation Master Plan Implementation Strategy Matrix (2009)		Priority			Estimated Cost		
		High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
<b>Facilities Analysis &amp; Recommendations</b>							
Recommendations for Recreation Centers	Facility Standards. DeKalb County should utilize a standard of one square feet per person for recreation centers. Using this standard, the County should have 711, 577 square feet of recreation space based on 2005 demographics. Based on the same standard, in 2015 the County should have 802, 966 square feet of recreation space. The County needs to provide one recreation center for every 50,000 people, with a minimum size of 50,000 square feet per center. Some recreation centers may be up to 75,000 to 80,000 square feet depending upon the types of facilities being offered.		X		X		
Recommendations for Recreation Centers	Current Facilities. The County should reconsider its current policy for upgrading and maintaining existing facilities. Some existing facilities within the county should be sold, or torn down and replaced with newer facilities.	X			X		
Recommendations for Recreation Centers	New Recreation Centers. DeKalb County needs to construct a minimum of three new recreation centers in the next couple of years.	X			X		
Recommendations for Recreation Centers	New Regional Center. The County should construct a new recreation center that functions as a regional center and hosts a variety of activities. A regional recreation center should be closer to 100,000 square feet in size. This regional recreation center should be a major revenue generator for the County.		X		X		
Recommendations for Aquatic Centers	Facility Standards for Aquatic Centers. A standard of one aquatic center per 100,000 people is recommended for aquatic centers in DeKalb County. Each new aquatic center should be approximately 35,000 square feet in size and include a variety of aquatic facilities. The County currently has the one aquatic center at Browns Mill that meets this standard.		X		X		
Recommendations for Aquatic Centers	Immediate Needs. The County needs to add at least one more indoor aquatic center in the next two to three years. This facility should be similar to the one at Browns Mill in terms of providing facilities for all members of the family. A new facility should include therapeutic facilities, a competitive pool, and leisure facilities.		X		X		
Recommendations for Aquatic Centers	Phasing. Over the next ten years, all of the existing swimming pools should be phased out, and new aquatic centers that meet the recommended standards should be constructed. This is a long-term process, but at least 3 to 4 new aquatic centers should be developed over the next 10 years.		X		X		



DeKalb County Parks & Recreation Master Plan Implementation Strategy Matrix (2009)		Priority			Estimated Cost		
		High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
Recommendations for Ballfields and Soccer Fields	Facility Standards for Ballfields. The recommended standard is one ballfield for every 5,000 people. Utilizing these standards, the County should have 142 ballfields based upon its 2005 demographics, and 161 based on 2015 demographics. The County currently has 109 ballfields and 15 football fields, for a total of 124 fields. This means the County needs to add 63 ballfields by the year 2015.		X		X		
Recommendations for Ballfields and Soccer Fields	Facility Standards for Soccer Fields. The recommended standard for soccer fields in DeKalb County is one field for every 10,000 people. According to this standard, the County should have 71 soccer fields based on 2005 demographics, and 80 soccer fields based on 2015 demographics. The County currently has 33 soccer fields, so an additional 47 fields must be added by 2015 to meet standards.	X			X		
Recommendations for Ballfields and Soccer Fields	Acquisition of Land. The County needs to concentrate on acquiring sufficient land to accommodate active recreation uses, including ballfields and soccer fields. Acquisition of land suitable for this use should be a priority, even if the construction of ballfields and soccer fields does not occur immediately.	X			X		
Recommendations for Ballfields and Soccer Fields	Ballfield and Soccer Field Maintenance. To increase the usability of ballfields and soccer fields, some new facilities should utilize synthetic surfaces. Initial costs are higher, but in the long-term, reductions in maintenance and water requirements will help pay for the field.		X		X		
Recommendations for Ballfields and Soccer Fields	Construct Specialty Fields. The Department must construct specialty fields to meet specific demands in the County.		X		X		
Recommendations for Ballfields and Soccer Fields	Expanding Facilities in Parks. Where feasible, the Department should look at expanding existing ballfields and soccer fields in existing parks.		X			X	
Recommendations for Tennis Courts	Facility Standards for Tennis. The recommended standard for tennis courts in DeKalb County is one court for every 5,400 people. Based on this standard, the County should have 132 courts per 2005 demographics, and 149 courts based on 2015 demographics. The net total of tennis courts remains at 105. This means that the County needs 27 more tennis courts to meet current standards and 44 more courts to meet standards for 2015.	X				X	
Recommendations for Tennis Courts	Tennis Centers. The County should focus on developing a new tennis center instead of locating tennis courts in neighborhood parks.	X			X		
Recommendations for Tennis Courts	Acquisition for Tennis Courts. Existing park land may be able to accommodate development of some new tennis courts.		X			X	
Recommendations for Tennis Courts	Focus on Revenue. Tennis centers should be a major source of revenue, particularly through major tournaments.		X				X
Recommendations for Tennis Courts	Expanding Tennis Facilities in Parks. Where feasible, the Department should look at constructing new tennis courts in existing parks.		X			X	

DeKalb County Parks & Recreation Master Plan Implementation Strategy Matrix (2009)		Priority			Estimated Cost		
		High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
Recommendations for Basketball Courts	Facility Standards for Basketball. The recommended standard for basketball courts is one court per 10,000 people. Using that standard, the County should currently have 71 courts, and 80 by the year 2015. There are currently 59 outdoor basketball courts in the County.		X			X	
Recommendations for Basketball Courts	Priority of Basketball. One of the priorities in the County should be to re-establish basketball as an activity, especially for young males. Many of the basketball courts operated by the County are badly in need of repair.	X				X	
Recommendations for Basketball Courts	Layout. One recommended approach to create basketball courts with more opportunities for casual play is to utilize half-court layouts instead of full courts.		X			X	
Recommendations for Basketball Courts	Expanding Basketball Facilities in Parks. Where feasible, the Department should look at constructing new basketball courts in existing parks.		X			X	
Recommendations for Golf Courses	Facility Standards for Golf Courses. The recommended standard for golf courses is 1 per 200,000 people, but we do not recommend the County construct any new courses in the near future. The County has other priorities in regards to parks and recreation, and these needs should be met before new golf courses should be considered.			X			X
Recommendations for Golf Courses	Revenue Generation. Organization and management of the two existing golf courses should be revised to make each more efficient.	X					X
Recommendations for Playgrounds	Facility Standards for Playgrounds. Playgrounds should be provided in each of the County's neighborhood park. Where feasible, playgrounds should be added in existing parks.		X			X	
Recommendations for Playgrounds	The County should develop 3 or 4 community playgrounds that serve as regional draws. These playgrounds are larger and more adventurous than those found in neighborhood parks.		X			X	
Recommendations for Skate Parks	Facility Standards for Skate Parks. The County should establish a standard of 1 skate park per 350,000 people. That means the County should develop one more skate park.		X		X		
Recommendations for Off-leash Parks	Facility Standards for Dog Parks. The County should utilize a standard of 1 dog park per 40,000 residents, and open 6 to 8 dog parks in the next couple of years. Each park should be 1 to 3 acres in size.		X			X	

DeKalb County Parks & Recreation Master Plan Implementation Strategy Matrix (2009)		Priority			Estimated Cost		
		High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
<b>Planning &amp; Implementation Strategies</b>							
Policy Recommendations	Become a Facilitator. The County should focus more on becoming a recreation facilitator instead of a service provider.	X					X
Policy Recommendations	Develop Advocates. The Department needs to pursue the development of advocates to promote the goals of Parks and Recreation.		X				X
Policy Recommendations	Change Legislation. Existing enabling legislation should be modified to give the Director authority to implement needed changes.	X					X
Policy Recommendations	Encourage Green Policies. Implemented policies and practices should be environmentally friendly and sustainable.		X				X
Policy Recommendations	Change Credit Card Policies. The Department's policy on acceptance of credit cards needs to be revised so they can be use for transactions.		X				X
Policy Recommendations	Develop Foundation. The County needs to develop a Parks Foundation for greater control and flexibility over non-County funding.	X					X
Policy Recommendations	Define Donor Policies. DeKalb County needs to have clearly defined policies for working with potential donors.		X				X
Policy Recommendations	Develop a Policy Manual. The County should have a Policy Manual that defines all Department policies and procedures.	X				X	
Economic and Financial Recommendations	Pursue Alternative Funding. DeKalb County must pursue a range of alternative funding sources and resources in order to continue to meet demands.	X					X
Economic and Financial Recommendations	Keep Funds Generated by the Department. One key to success is to keep funds generated from parks and recreation activities within the Department.	X					X
Economic and Financial Recommendations	Take a Market-Driven Approach. Public recreation and park delivery systems in DeKalb County should be market driven because of budget constraints.	X					X
Economic and Financial Recommendations	The Department should develop a clear policy as to which programs are expected to be self-sustaining, which the County will subsidize, and which (if any) should be revenue-producing.	X					X
Economic and Financial Recommendations	The Department should routinely track trends in program enrollment, and drop programs where interest is waning and increase opportunities for popular programs and activities.		X				X
Economic and Financial Recommendations	Some recreation facilities need a major overhaul in order to make them more financially viable.	X			X		
Economic and Financial Recommendations	Evaluate Lifecycle Costing. Budgeting and maintenance should be considered over the entire lifecycle of a facility.		X				X
Economic and Financial Recommendations	Establish a Dedicated Funding Source. The County should establish adequate funding for the Department through a dedicated source of funding such as a special-purpose sales tax (SPLOST) or millage rate.	X					X

DeKalb County Parks & Recreation Master Plan Implementation Strategy Matrix (2009)		Priority			Estimated Cost		
		High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Annexation and Multi-Jurisdiction Consolidation	Consolidation. The County should investigate the potential for a multijurisdictional consolidation for the service-specific purpose of parks, recreation, cultural, natural and historic preservation, conservation, and performing arts.		X			X	
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Outsourcing	Outsourcing Maintenance. The Department should consider outsourcing tasks that can be done more affordably with a better return on investment.		X			X	
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Outsourcing	Outsourcing Programs. The Department should evaluate outsourcing the management of specialized facilities and programs such as golf courses, tennis centers, aquatic facilities, senior centers, performing arts, pre- and after-school programs, and equestrian programs.		X				X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Outsourcing	Outsourcing Other Tasks. Other tasks that could be outsourced include food services, organization of special events, additional security for events, and other specialized activities.		X				X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Existing Operational Structure & Department Organization	Redefining Organization. The Department needs to redefine its organizational structure and better delineate the roles and responsibilities of units and individual positions.	X					X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Existing Operational Structure & Department Organization	Bottom-up Approach. The Department should consider revising the organizational structure to a "bottom-up" methodology, which can reduce numbers of employees, reduce response time, and help control costs.			X			X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Defining County's Core Services	Identify Basic Services. It is important for the County to identify basic services that can be provided in each park and in each recreation center.		X				X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Defining County's Core Services	Determining Fees. DeKalb County's approach should be to charge fees for the unique or specialized programs it offers.		X				X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Defining County's Core Services	Business Plan. The Department needs to develop a business plan based on finding a balance between providing services and balancing budgets.		X				X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Defining County's Core Services	Define Policies for Children. The County needs to define a policy in regards to providing opportunities for children.	X					X

DeKalb County Parks & Recreation Master Plan Implementation Strategy Matrix (2009)		Priority			Estimated Cost		
		High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Staffing and Volunteerism	Determining Staff Needs. The Department's base staffing needs should be determined by the defined direction of the Department and the recreation programs it offers.	X					X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Staffing and Volunteerism	Document Policies and Procedures. DeKalb County needs to document policies and procedures to help minimize the impact that loss of institutional memory could have on the County.		X				X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Staffing and Volunteerism	Establish Volunteer Program. DeKalb County needs to expand the existing volunteer program in an effort to bring in more volunteers to assist with parks and recreation activities.	X				X	
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Staffing and Volunteerism	Organize Volunteers. The Department may consider hiring a full-time volunteer coordinator who would be responsible for recruiting, screening, training, supervising, and organizing volunteers.		X			X	
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Customer Service	Ensure Communication. The Department must be in regular communication with the park user group to ensure proper and adequate programming for its unique population of consumers.	X					X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Customer Service	Develop Web-based Applications. The County should use interactive web-based applications that allow constituents to voice concerns online.	X					X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Customer Service	Survey. The Department should develop ongoing instruments that assess the issues constituents consider important.	X				X	
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Performance Measurement	Determine Participation. The County needs to evaluate participation rates, durations of use or enrollment numbers.	X					X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Performance Measurement	Work with Health Providers. With an increasing emphasis on health and wellness and their relation to recreation and fitness, the key is to engage the public health community to learn the most effective surveillance and monitoring methods.	X					X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Performance Measurement	Establish Performance Measures. The County should begin to measure the Department's performance and effectiveness on a yearly basis.		X				X

DeKalb County Parks & Recreation Master Plan Implementation Strategy Matrix (2009)		Priority			Estimated Cost		
		High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Joint Ventures and Partnerships	Work with Sports Organizations. The Department needs to review existing partnerships with sports associations.		X				X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Joint Ventures and Partnerships	Work with other Youth and Recreation Organizations. The Department should establish formal partnerships with charitable social organizations such as the YMCA/YWCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, Boy and Girl Scouts, and churches.		X				X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Joint Ventures and Partnerships	Continue Partnership with PATH. PATH has developed the Trails Plan for DeKalb County, and they are leading the effort within the county to develop trails and greenways.	X					X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Joint Ventures and Partnerships	Work with Schools. If a joint park/school program was resumed, ballfields could be used during the day by a school, and then in evenings and on weekends by parks departments.		X				X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Joint Ventures and Partnerships	Partner with Health Organizations. There is a growing interest in the development of partnerships with health organizations.	X					X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Joint Ventures and Partnerships	Creative Partnerships. Joint venturing with YMCA, churches, and other organizations could result in mutually beneficial operations.	X					X

DeKalb County Parks & Recreation Master Plan Implementation Strategy Matrix (2009)		Priority			Estimated Cost		
		High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Recreation Programming	At-Risk Youth Programs. The Department should develop programs for at-risk youth.		X			X	
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Recreation Programming	Self-esteem Programs. Emphasis should be on recreation programs for youngsters that promote enhancement of self-esteem, physical activity and development of skills.		X			X	
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Recreation Programming	Programs for Specific Groups. The Department should offer a range of recreation programs for specific groups, such as: performing arts programs, such as dance, music or theater, adult sports teams, sports tournaments and races, personal training, youth sports teams, sport training and swimming programs.		X			X	
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Recreation Programming	Teacher-to-Student Ratio. The ratio of counselors to students for afterschool programs needs to be lowered.	X				X	
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Recreation Programming	Conservation. The Department should identify the conservation of natural resources and wildlife as a priority, and environmental education programs should be expanded.		X			X	
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Recreation Programming	Indoor Climbing. Indoor climbing facilities should be installed to provide recreation opportunities for a wide variety of users, from casual climbers to experienced "rock jocks."		X			X	
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Recreation Programming	Dropping Programs. Given the reality of limited budgets, the County should drop programs that are losing participants and money.	X					X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Recreation Programming	Establish Programs for Immigrant Groups. The Department needs to strengthen its focus on meeting needs of ethnic and immigrant populations.	X				X	
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Recreation Programming	Adventure Programs. The County needs to better utilize existing parks for outdoor adventure-oriented activities.		X			X	

DeKalb County Parks & Recreation Master Plan Implementation Strategy Matrix (2009)		Priority			Estimated Cost		
		High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Communication and Marketing	Marketing. The Department needs to expand the concept of marketing parks and recreation as a "quality of life" issue and economic development element.	X				X	
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Communication and Marketing	Signage. The Department needs to implement a uniform signage system as a base for all parks.		X			X	
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Communication and Marketing	Being Proactive. The Department needs to be more proactive about the services they provide, and the value they bring to a community.		X				X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Communication and Marketing	Internet Presence. The Department needs to utilize the Internet to reach potential and existing recreation users.	X					X
Delivery Systems Recommendations: Communication and Marketing	Increase Visibility. The County needs to increase the visibility of the Parks and Recreation Department. That means reaching out to the public as well as to other departments and decision-makers within the County.	X					X
Fees Recommendations	Increase Fees. The Department needs to increase fees in order to help provide the funding needed to maintain and support parks and recreation facilities.		X				X
Fees Recommendations	Variety of Fees. The Department needs to implement a wide range of fees, including the following: entrance fees; admission fees; rental fees; special services fees; and user fees.	X					X
Fees Recommendations	Reciprocal Fees. DeKalb County should implement a reciprocal fee arrangement with neighboring counties and municipalities that fall within the service area of DeKalb County citizens.		X				X



DeKalb County Parks & Recreation Master Plan Implementation Strategy Matrix (2009)		Priority			Estimated Cost		
		High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
Maintenance Recommendations	Standard of Care. DeKalb County needs to develop a Standard of Care to serve as a road map for the Department.	X				X	
Maintenance Recommendations	Lifecycle Costs. It is important to look at budgeting and maintenance needs over the entire lifecycle of a facility, rather than just the initial cost of buying and installing equipment.		X				X
Maintenance Recommendations	Plan for Parks and Recreation Centers. Developing a detailed maintenance plan for each park and for each recreation center will help the County prioritize tasks.	X				X	
Maintenance Recommendations	Field Maintenance. Every sports field in the County needs to be evaluated before and after each season to determine its condition, potential maintenance requirements, and whether it should be pulled from play for the upcoming season.	X				X	
Maintenance Recommendations	Playground Maintenance. The Department has to address dilapidated facilities and equipment that needs to be replaced.	X				X	
Maintenance Recommendations	Maintenance Agreement. One County Commissioner said one of the biggest mistakes the County had made was splitting maintenance for parks and recreation and placing it under facilities management.	X					X
Maintenance Recommendations	Maintenance Outsourcing. The County should also conduct a cost analysis to compare the cost of completing specific maintenance items in-house versus contracting them out.		X			X	
Security Recommendations	Park Police Unit. A Department Park Police Unit would have a significant impact on improving security in the parks.		X			X	
Security Recommendations	Eyes and Ears in Parks. The Department needs to focus on putting "eyes and ears" in the parks. That means the more often people use a park, and the greater number of people there, the safer a park will be.	X					X

DeKalb County Parks & Recreation Master Plan Implementation Strategy Matrix (2009)		Priority			Estimated Cost		
		High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
Health and Wellness Recommendations	Leadership Role. The Department needs to actively promote an overall increase in physical activity and assume a leadership role in making this happen.		X				X
Health and Wellness Recommendations	Focus on Health & Wellness. There needs to be more exercise equipment and opportunities located within the parks, and these could be donated by sponsors.	X				X	
Health and Wellness Recommendations	Creative Programming. DeKalb County can help promote more creative programming that recognizes that fitness is evolving to much more than a room with weight and cardio machines.		X				X
Monitoring the Parks & Recreation Master Plan	Submittal of Plan. The County needs to submit this completed Plan for adoption by the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners.	X					X
Monitoring the Parks & Recreation Master Plan	Review. Rather than being viewed as a 10-year plan, this document should be considered a living plan that is reviewed and renewed annually over a 10-year period.		X				X
Monitoring the Parks & Recreation Master Plan	Accomplishment. The Department should continue to annually prepare a listing of major accomplishments and achievements organized by division and/or as an overall department.		X				X

Cost Key:

- (H) High > \$250,000
- (M) Medium \$50,000-\$250,000
- (L) Low < \$50,000



## 10.0 Sources

### 10.1 Sources

A Look at Trends in Parks & Community Recreation Centers <http://www.recmanagement.com/200706fe04.php>

Dolesh, Richard J. Charting a Course for the Future: A new Congress brings new challenges. NRPA, February 2006.

Dolesh, Richard J., Monica Hobbs Vinluan and Ken Rosenfeld. Adopting an Urban National Agenda: A call to action for urban parks and recreation in America. NRPA, May 2006.

Louv, Richard. "Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder."

Russell, Ruth V. PUBLIC PARK AND RECREATION TRENDS: A STATUS REPORT. Indiana University

Spangler, Kathy, and Monica Hobbs Vinluan. Facilitating Youth Sports: Park and recreation organizations need to advance their leadership role in youth sports. NRPA, July 2006.

Sprouse Julie K.S., and Sandra Wolf Klitzing. Youth at Risk: Recreation and Prevention. NRPA, January 2005/

Strigas, Athanassios (Ethan). Making the Most of Volunteers: A study shows volunteers are giving their time in exchange for community and social benefits. NRPA, April 2006.

Vinluan, Monica Hobbs. Linking Health to Parks and Recreation: Communities need to promote health and wellness to improve quality of life. NRPA, December 2006.

Westrup, Laura. Recreation Trends Worth Talking About. CA State Parks, June 2006.

Westrup, Laura. Volunteers: What Park and Recreation Professionals Want to Know. California State Parks, 2006.

## ABSTRACTS OF KEY SOURCES

### 10.2 Comprehensive Strategic Plan Steering Committee

This document consists of information put together to help the Steering Committee develop a comprehensive strategic plan. The five goals in the strategic planning effort, as stated in the document, are:

1. Create a vision and mission for the department and outline basic service delivery philosophies;
2. Outline policies and processes for critical service delivery issues;
3. Create and prioritize five-year actions plans – operational and capital improvement and acquisition;
4. Develop strategies and recommend mechanisms for funding;
5. Position the department for national accreditation.

The objective of the process is to develop a plan with realistic implementation goals in which the recreational needs of the community and the fiscal responsibility of the County are balanced.

The document includes a copy of the project understanding and approach, and scope of work developed by EDAW. Also included is a list of stakeholders, the 1999 survey developed by ETC Institute, 1999 budget and budget history, statistics about the park system, and a copy of the 1996 Final Report of the Blue Ribbon Committee for DeKalb County Parks & Recreation.

### **10.3 Final Report of the Blue Ribbon Committee for DeKalb County Parks & Recreation 1996**

This report contains recommendations by the Committee, which assessed the current issues and conditions facing the DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Department. The report was made available in public facilities throughout the county.

The charge of the Committee was to:

- Create a vision for the future of parks and recreation;
- Generate long-range goals and objectives which will direct the parks and recreation master planning effort;
- Identify critical issues facing parks and recreation in the community;
- Build a set of initiatives to fulfill those issues;
- Assist in identifying the desired future for parks and recreation services in the county by charting a course which the county and the department may follow to manage future growth and achieve common goals.

Ten town hall meetings were conducted to give citizens an opportunity to participate in the process. Following the meetings, the Committee held a 2-day conference to synthesize information and outline a recommended growth management plan. The report includes a series of issues, opportunities, and strategic actions.

### **10.4 Status of Health in DeKalb Report: Opportunities for Prevention and Community Service**

**Presented by the Status of Health in DeKalb Committee and the DeKalb County Board of Health. 2005**

This report is the sixth in a series produced by the DeKalb County Board of Health that describes time and geographic patterns of diseases and injuries, birth trends, leading causes of death and premature death, and health behaviors. The purpose the Status of Health report series is to identify priority areas for health improvement and to serve as a catalyst for community action. The 2005 report analyzes available data through 2003 on the leading health issues and some of the risk factors associated with these issues in DeKalb County. It emphasizes information related to priority areas and provides specific opportunities for prevention in these areas. The report is broken up into chapters that include: Demographics in DeKalb County; Health Priority Areas; Health Behaviors; Infectious Diseases and Leading Causes of Hospitalizations; Causes of Death; Opportunities for Prevention; and Appendices.

The report identifies opportunities for preventing diseases and premature death in the County. These include:

- Actions for Healthy Lifestyles
- Increase physical activity and eat better
- Avoid tobacco

- Drive responsibility and practice injury prevention
- Actions for the Health Care System
- Increase culturally competent resources
- Promote comprehensive plan for health and disease prevention
- Actions for Healthy Policies
- Support clean indoor air ordinances
- Develop healthy workplaces
- Implement a plan for healthy schools
- Actions for a Healthy Environment
- Build and maintain safe communities
- Participate in partnerships with community groups

## 10.5 DeKalb County Park and Recreation Department Parks Services Division Reorganization/Management Plan

### October 2003

The objective of this document is to enhance service and streamline operations in DeKalb County through the development and implementation of a reorganization and management plan. The plan takes into consideration a number of factors, including: existing resources available; current park system inventory; new acquisitions; maintenance programs (existing and proposed); and industry standards relating to parks, grounds, and natural resource management.

The major objectives of the plan are:

- Structure the organization to maximize productivity
- Re-District: Create a third maintenance district.
- Create “zones” within each District to promote accountability and pride, and provide a presence in the parks.
- Compress the number of existing classifications by eliminating several classifications.
- Remove layers of supervision
- Design specific functional units to promote the use of volunteers and create partnerships to assist with maintenance.
- Create support functions to address park system needs
- Enhance and expand the Natural Resource Management Unit to include management programs relating to environmental stewardship, urban forestry, horticultural management and park image.
- Enhance administrative functions relating to work order processing, cost accounting, performance measurements, safety and training.

The report looks at the efficiencies and outcomes associated with selected initiatives. There is also an analysis of the time spent on selective tasks. For example, the time required to mow, aerate, fertilize, weed, seed, lime, or remove clippings is documented, as is the number of times this service would have to be performed. There are also comparisons of the existing management structure to a proposed structure, and the existing park maintenance structure versus a proposed structure. A new organization chart defines key staff roles, responsibilities, and expectations.

## 10.6 DeKalb County Park and Recreation Comprehensive Strategic Plan 2000-2010

September 2000.

The Strategic Plan is a conceptual planning document that incorporates the County's Comprehensive Land Use Plan, and is intended to help guide the management and growth of the County. It begins the process of making parks and recreation programs a catalyst for positive change within the County. The final draft of the document was made available to the public at recreation centers, special facilities, and libraries within the County. To ensure adequate public involvement, a kick-off meeting was conducted, five public meetings were held – one in each of the Commission Districts, a household survey was sent out to County residents, and a Steering Committee was formed to insure continuity between this planning effort and previous planning projects. The plan looks at existing services and facilities in the County, analyzes standards and level of service, and makes recommendations for future action strategies.

A three-step planning process was used for the planning effort. The first stop was the Findings Phase, which focused on gathering data to serve as a common baseline for making decisions. The second step is the Recommendations Phase; in this phase, all data from the first phase is analyzed. Strategies are developed to address potential concerns, and one of the products was a Vision Statement that served as a catalyst and a guidepost for recommendations. Once recommendations are adopted, the Implementation Phase begins.

## 10.7 Parks and Recreation Citizen Survey - DeKalb County Department of Parks and Recreation, Leisure Vision, April 1999

DeKalb County Department of Parks and Recreation, Leisure Vision, April 1999.

This document includes the results of a 1999 survey by ETC of residents in DeKalb County. The survey asked 31 questions that, collectively, provided information about how DeKalb residents were currently using parks and recreation facilities and programs, the level of satisfaction for existing facilities, what types of activities and facilities they thought were most important, and what types of programs and facilities they wanted to see in the future. The responses are categorized into two groups: DeKalb Black/African American Residents, and DeKalb White Residents.

Each question is broken down into the number and percentage of respondents for each option. Also listed is the percentage of participants in the questionnaire that responded to a particular question.

## 10.8 Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation 2000 Capital Improvements Plan

EDAW, Leon Younger, and PROS, March 2000

The purpose of the plan was to provide both a planning framework and a context for a specific recommendations and funding direction. The planning process was used to provide a forum for public involvement, as well as a mechanism for incorporating the concerns of the public into the plan. Features of this update include a revised inventory of the park system and its facilities, analysis of current levels of service within the County, a narrative description of salient issues, and an updated Capital Improvement Plan.

The document includes: an introduction; inventory; demographics and service area analyses; park service concepts, and a capital improvements plan. Under Park System Concepts, the

plan discusses three features of the Gwinnett County park system: the community park concept, facilities for teens, and open space. The purpose of this section was to amplify, expand, and update the park system concepts included in and adopted as part of the 1996 Gwinnett County parks plan. The recommended capital improvements were developed in response to priorities developed by the Recreation Authority, as well as needs expressed in the public meetings and other venues. The plan includes a balance of land acquisition and development, as well as a balance of active and passive activities.

## 10.9 Georgia Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

<http://gastateparks.org/net/content/go.aspx?s=132975.0.1.5>

The Georgia Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) consists of a comprehensive statewide recreation policy developed by the Department of Natural Resources' Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites Division (PRHSD). The plan, which is updated every five years, meets the eligibility requirements of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which provides funding for grants that support state, county and city outdoor recreation projects.

Because Georgia's current SCORP expires in September 2007, PRHSD has partnered with the University of Georgia, local communities, and organizations across the state to develop SCORP 2008 - 2013. This updated plan will assess Georgia's outdoor recreation opportunities as well as reflect the attitudes, needs, and priorities for and about outdoor recreation in Georgia as well as set the direction for the future of outdoor recreation statewide. (SCORP web site)

Fundamental elements of Georgia SCORP 2008-2013 include:

- Extensive public involvement
- A thorough inventory of all existing public-access land and water recreational facilities (federal, state, county and city; major quasi-public and private)
- An examination of social, demographic and recreation trends for Georgia based on data from the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment
- Application of GIS technology to map important factors such as existing recreational areas and greenspace, important natural habitats, socio, demographic and economic trends, etc.
- Surveys of Georgians and stakeholders to determine supply, needs, demand and attitudes, and to establish priorities for future outdoor recreation actions and policies
- Review and analysis of other guiding policy documents such as the 2003-2007 Georgia SCORP, Georgia Land Conservation Act, the Georgia Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, the Georgia State Parks and Historic Sites New Day, New Way Strategic Plan and other statewide or regional conservation and recreation plans including those developed by ACCG, GMA and others.
- Establishment of clear roles and responsibilities for public, quasi-public and private outdoor recreation service providers
- Discussion of the benefits of outdoor recreation to include economic, health, natural and social
- Recommendations regarding messaging and marketing of the benefits of outdoor recreation
- Presentation of data so that it can be reported statewide and/or excerpted by local jurisdiction as well as by congressional and state legislative district
- Clear short and long-term action priorities for policy directives, LWCF criteria and implementation options and recommendations
- Discussion of issues and options to implement plan recommendations



Upon completion and following public review and comment, the Georgia Board of Natural Resources will adopt the Georgia SCORP 2008 – 2013 and then forward it to the Governor for execution. It will then be forwarded to the National Park Service for approval by September 2007.

## **10.10 SCORP: Planning for the Future of Outdoor Recreation in Georgia**

**Becky Kelley, Director of State Parks & Historic Sites, Georgia Department of Natural Resources**

**November 7, 2006**

SCORP allows Georgia to receive federal grants from the Land and Water Conservation Fund that supports state, county and city outdoor recreation projects in three categories: land acquisition, facility development and rehabilitation. An essential part of the update process is to gather public input from outdoor recreation users, and DNR is using a series of town hall meetings and an on-line survey to assess preferences.

In addition to public meetings and an online questionnaire, the DNR conducted random telephone surveys, as well as focus groups with land management agencies and companies, government agencies and user groups.

The draft document will be presented to the DNR Board during spring 2007 and made available for public comment, and the final SCORP document will be completed by late 2007.

Established in 1965, the LWCF is administered in Georgia by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and provides grants for outdoor recreation projects by both state and local governments. Since its inception, LWCF has provided over \$72 million in matching funds for recreation-related land purchases, facility development, and rehabilitation of existing facilities throughout Georgia.

The 2003 SCORP had four goals:

- Assess the adequacy of existing recreation opportunities in Georgia.
- Determine the demand and need for additional recreation opportunities.
- Identify major issues facing recreation providers.
- Recommend an implementation plan to address these issues.

The SCORP planning process consists of seven steps:

1. Gathering input from users and providers.
2. Analyzing recreation trends.
3. Examining the supply of recreation resources.
4. Determining recreation demand and needs.
5. Identifying issues of statewide significance.
6. Recommending programs and policies.
7. Developing an implementation program.

### **Conclusions**

The following conclusions about the demand for recreation may be drawn from the various local, state, and national sources:

- The continuing rapid increase in Georgia's population has inevitably produced an increased demand for outdoor recreation areas and facilities.

- Demand exists for both active and passive recreational facilities at all provider levels.
- Demand exists for support services and facilities, including improved maintenance and increased staff, as well as for recreation itself.
- The mix of popular recreation activities, as always, is in a state of flux as newer activities—such as skating/ rollerblading, off-road cycling, water parks, and dog parks—compete with traditional activities for Georgians' discretionary time.

