



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DeKalb County

parks + recreation
master plan

2010 - 2020

JULY 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.

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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
- Playgrounds - 1 / Neighborhood Park
- Off Leash Dog Parks – 1 / 40,000 people
- Skate Parks – 1 per 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
 - 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



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 development of a signature park.

1.11 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. DeKalb County has a number of parks that are defined as "mini parks." Many of these are defined as "Future Mini Parks" because they are not developed at this point, and do not have any facilities.

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. The County currently has 110.3 acres of park land defined as Mini Parks, or Future Mini Parks. A couple of these parks will most likely be reclassified because of their size. There are other priorities within the County regarding acquisition of land for new 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 1 acre to 10 acres, and they are the 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 1534 acres of neighborhood park land, so at least based upon acreage, no additional land is needed. However, there are some areas in the County that lack neighborhood parks.

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 10 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 427 acres of community parks, so there is a significant shortage of community parks. Some of the parks currently classified as neighborhood parks should be reclassified as 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. DeKalb County has eight regional park, with all of them being more than a hundred acres in size.

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 1,155.5 acres of regional parks, so an additional 2,402.5 acres is needed to meet recommended standards. 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 as a priority, although land for new regional parks needs to be acquired 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 2,523 acres of land that is classified as natural resource and open space.

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, and 2,409 is recommended for the 2015 population (802,996). There are 280.4 acres of special purpose parks, or special facilities in DeKalb County.

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; McAfee-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 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.