



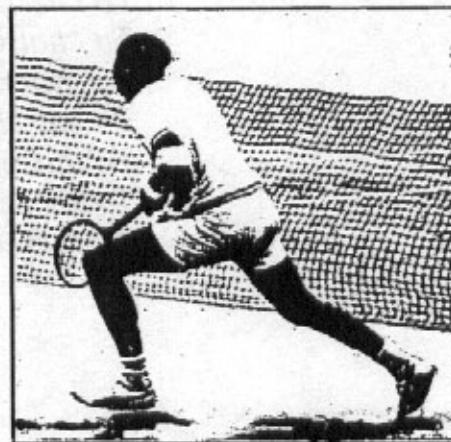
ARTS



ENVIRONMENT



PARKS



RECREATION

# ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY LEISURE SERVICES MASTER PLAN

*To cherish the environment  
To challenge the physique  
To express the spirit  
To enlighten the mind  
To nurture friendship  
To share community  
To recreate oneself*

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- District 3. Mr. John Taylor
- District 4. Mr. John Barrow
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- District 8. Mr. Ken Jorden
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# INTRODUCTION

## PREFACE

This master plan has arisen from the conviction that leisure services are a fundamental service of the Athens-Clarke County Government. It represents a comprehensive planning process to determine ways that leisure services can be efficiently and effectively delivered to the citizens of Athens-Clarke County. It is a plan of action for the next fifteen years that addresses organization, management, parks, facilities, and programming.

Currently, leisure services are provided by two government departments -- Recreation and Parks, and Arts and Environmental Education. Together they represent the full spectrum of leisure services and in this report they are jointly referred to as the leisure service departments.

The personnel of these departments work diligently to deliver quality leisure services. The recommendations of this plan are not intended to diminish the value of their dedication. It is a necessary consequence of seeking to improve the delivery of leisure services that the planning process has identified weaknesses, as well as strengths. The plan's recommendations have been built upon these strengths, while weaknesses have been eliminated. The plan is a reflection of the unique conditions of Athens-Clarke County, nationwide trends, and successful leisure service delivery in comparable communities.

A study of this magnitude could not have been accomplished without the cooperation and assistance of many individuals, groups, staff, and elected officials. The consulting team would like to thank all for their time, effort and contribution.

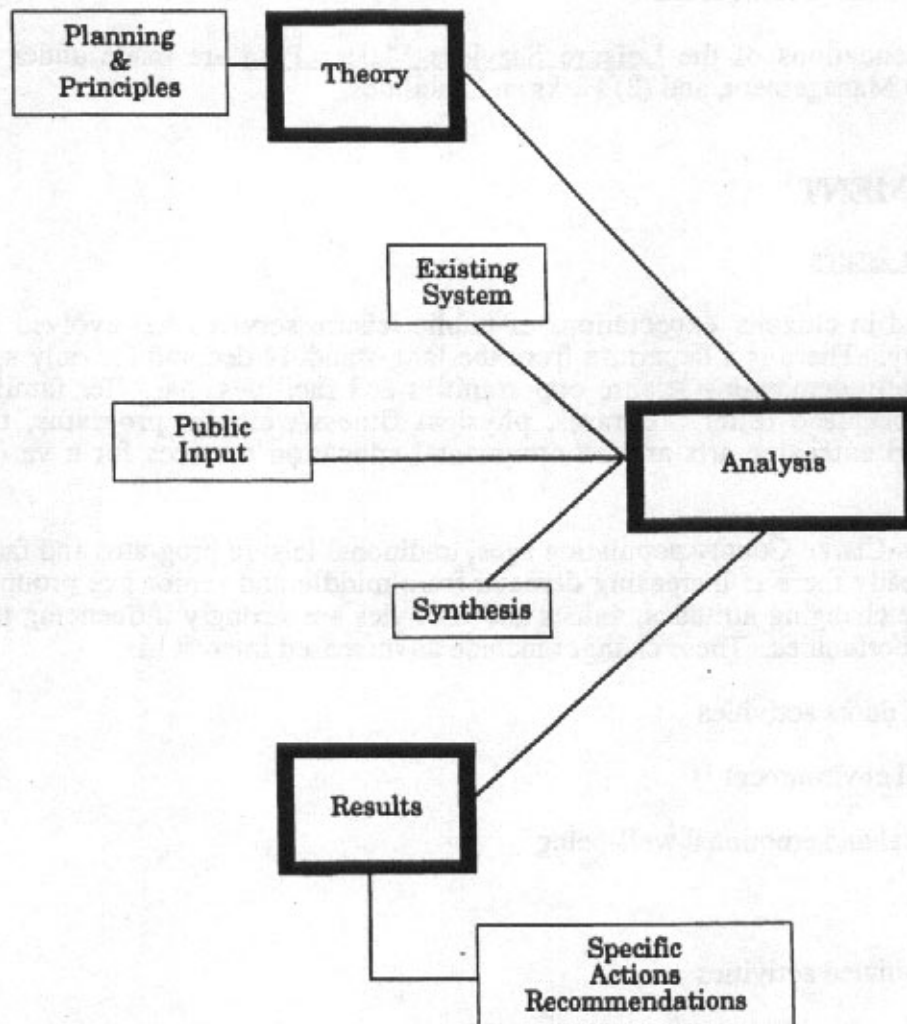
Recently, a region-wide study indicated that by the year 2000 the following is predicted for leisure services:

- 75% of citizens will want more leisure services.
- 91% of public leisure departments will experience an increase demand for older population programs.
- 77.3% of public leisure departments will experience pressure to increase revenue-producing facilities, programs and events.
- 78.1% of departments will increase cooperative agreements, eg... school systems.

With such predictions to consider, Athens-Clarke County has made a major step forward in developing this master plan, which is now referred to as the Athens-Clarke County Leisure Services Master Plan. This name reflects the broad scope of recreation in Athens-Clarke County today.

## PLANNING PROCESS

The Athens-Clarke County Leisure Services Master Plan was developed from the theoretical to the specific in that it begins with planning principles and ends with a list of priority recommendations to be undertaken by the unified Athens-Clarke County Government. Bridging the gap between theory and practice are sections on facts and findings, existing system analysis and public input.



**Figure 1.**  
**Planning Process Methodology Diagram**

## RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

Leisure services in Athens-Clarke County are at a critical time. The government is newly consolidated; the population is growing in numbers and diversity; new land use patterns are developing; and demand for leisure services has never been greater. This is happening during a time when the leisure service departments have not ranked as a priority in government funding, and at a time when current parks, facilities, and programs are inadequate to meet present needs.

The recommendations of the Leisure Services Master Plan are made under two broad headings: (1) Management; and (2) Parks and Facilities.

### MANAGEMENT

#### Management Issues:

A major trend in citizens' expectations of public leisure services has evolved in Athens-Clarke County. There is a departure from the long-standing demand for only sports. The public is greatly demanding leisure opportunities and facilities that offer family-oriented activities, workplace relief programs, physical fitness/wellness programs, therapeutic programs, and extensive arts and environmental education services for a variety of age groups.

As the Athens-Clarke County population ages, traditional leisure programs and facilities will change. Already there is increasing demand from middle and senior age groups for more services. The changing attitudes, values and lifestyles are strongly influencing the demand for leisure opportunities. These changes include an increased interest in:

- out-of-doors activities
- natural environment
- physical and emotional well-being
- arts
- self-initiated activities
- spontaneous, non-structured involvement
- non-competitive and social activities
- higher quality and diversity of opportunities

The Athens-Clarke County changing family structure requires a different response by the leisure services departments to provide facilities and services in ways and at times and places



that fit. The trend towards both parents working and more single parent families require leisure services to be provided differently.

Participation in leisure activities and involvement in quality volunteer opportunities should be enhanced. The increasing number of displaced workers resulting from early retirements or layoffs requires alternative life styles.

The financial constraints that exist in Athens-Clarke County require the leisure services departments to increase cost-sharing for facilities and services that are offered above basic levels. Creative solutions must be sought to build facilities and design programs that encourage tourism and economic benefits.

Below is a summary of the major management recommendations found in the plan. Several have time schedules, funding source and cost estimates.

**Figure 2.  
Management and Programming  
Recommendations Summary**

<b>MANAGEMENT AND PROGRAMMING RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>TIME SCHEDULE</b>	<b>FUNDING SOURCE/COST ESTIMATE</b>
<b>Administration</b> Consolidate mission statements Consolidate the two departments Create <u>Leisure Services Director</u> position Create <u>Superintendent</u> Position (four) Improve morale Budget Increase revenue by 10% Enhance public information process Develop joint-use agreements Enhance volunteerism Improve planning process	1 month 6 months 2 months 3-6 months  1 year 8 months On-going On-going On-going	Budget 38,000-59,000 32,000-48,000  Increase % each year
<b>Budget</b> Develop budget based on goals with quantifiable measures Develop capital projects based on comprehensive plan recommendation Develop a revenue incentive program Increase involvement of staff levels in budget process	On-going  On-going 1 year  1 year	
<b>Financial Reporting/Purchasing/ Cash Accounting</b> Build accountability to include all supervisory levels Decentralize small purchases Identify location of revenue and reward the program/area	 On-going 2 months  3 months	



<b>Revenue</b> Develop blanket fees and charges policy Develop a non-resident permit system Develop/create rate system (membership, family, etc.) Develop gift catalog Enhance intergovernmental and private provider agreements	3 months 1 year 6-8 months 6 months 1 year	Creative Revenue
<b>Personnel</b> Re-organize current personnel based on job skills Develop internship program Establish staff and volunteer orientation Improve professional development	6 months On-going 6 months On-going	Budget Budget - 8 per volunteer 500- 1,000 per staff member
<b>Safety</b> Develop safety inspection process Create safety awareness campaign ADA self-evaluation should be developed with plan of action Implement standard agreement regarding liability responsibilities Develop Risk Management Plan	3 months 6 months  On-going On-going	On-going
<b>Security</b> Create intergovernmental security team Establish level of security need (hard-core, soft-core or educational) Train all staff with a basic safety/security course	6-8 months 4 months On-going	Budget
<b>Public Information/Marketing</b> Create a <u>Public Information Officer</u> position Develop a Public Information Plan Enhance public information material Develop a round table forum Enhance image	4 months On-going 6-8 months On-going	23,000-34,000 Creative Revenue Budget/Creative Revenue
<b>Volunteer Program</b> Create department-wide <u>Volunteer Coordinator</u> position Develop volunteer plan Develop volunteer handbook/awards program	2 months 6 months 8 months	20,000-29,000 35 per volunteer Budget, Creative Revenue Grant
<b>Planning</b> Create a <u>Citizens Leisure Services Advisory Board</u> Improve leisure services planning process Develop public involvement process Implement study regarding leisure services impact on the local economy and tourism	6 months On-going 2 months 1 year	Budget meeting expenses Grant, Donation

<b>Maintenance</b>		
Consolidate the two departments' maintenance functions	6 months	Budget
Develop a maintenance plan	1 year	
Enhance specialized training	On-going	Budget, Grant
Develop a "contact team" to more efficiently interact with public works	On-going	
Create preventive maintenance standards	On-going	
<b>Programming</b>		
Decentralize the programs	On-going	Budget, Grant
		Creative Revenue
Diversify program services	On-going	Creative Revenue, Fees
Increase services to special populations in all program areas	On-going	Budget, Revenue, Grant
Enhance the environmental educational and natural resources program	On-going	Grant, Revenue
Develop program evaluation system	3 months	
Increase multi-generation services	On-going	Creative Revenue, Fees
Reduce exclusive use	1 year	
Enhance service level with fee-based system	On-going	
Establish program <u>time tables</u> to better meet the public needs	1 year	
Explore possibilities of supporting local artist	3-6 months	Creative Revenue
Determine the need for expanding the Lyndon House for more diverse programming and outreaching to all communities	3 months	
Develop a wellness/fitness program	1 year	Budget, Grant, Revenue
Develop county-wide interpretive programs/exhibits	1 year	Budget, Revenue
Develop format for enhancing environmental resources protection and preservation	On-going	
Examine the Grand Slam Program and re-organize it to better meet program objectives and serve different locations	6 months	Grant, Donations

## **PARKS AND FACILITIES**

Athens-Clarke County is seriously deficient in park land. By 1995 it will be short seven hundred fifty (750) acres. The number and quality of facilities for almost all activities, from arts to sports, are also deficient. Existing facilities are showing the stress of overuse and lack consistency in quality.

In view of this current situation and the magnitude of projected demand, the following recommendations are made. All should be implemented within ten(10) years to achieve the goal of keeping abreast of the growing demand for leisure services in Athens-Clarke County. Some, however, are more urgent than others and should be undertaken first. This is indicated by a priority rating. "Priority 1" is the most urgent and should be undertaken immediately. Where possible, a budget planning figure has been given. Recommendations for parks and facilities are listed under three (3) headings:

- **General Recommendations**
- **Property Acquisition**
- **Development**

### **General Recommendations:**

- Repair existing facilities that conform to the master plan.  
Priority: 1  
Budget: 1,300,000
- ✓ Establish a formal agreement with the Board of Education for development of neighborhood parks at elementary and middle schools.  
Priority: 1
- Prepare master plan for Greenway System. Work with the Oconee Rivers Greenway Commission and the Land Coservation Trust of the Oconee.  
Priority: 1  
Budget: 75,000
- Develop a total graphic signage system for parks, greenway facilities, and trails.  
Priority: 1 and on-going  
Budget: 10000 for design
- Develop a Park Design and Maintenance Standards Manual to guide site development and maintenance of the park system.  
Priority: 1  
Budget: 10,000
- Plan and implement a bicycle and pedestrian linkage system in conjunction with planning commission and all departments of transportation.  
Priority: 1 and on-going
- Improve public transportation service to community and regional parks.  
Priority: 1

### **Property Acquisition:**

- Acquire land for Greenway.  
Priority: on-going
- Acquire land for Heritage Trail portion of Greenway, including area for amphitheater.  
Priority: 1
- ✓ Acquire land for East Athens Community Park (100 acres).  
Priority: 1
- Acquire land for South Athens Community Park (100 acres).  
Priority: 1
- Acquire 70 acres adjacent to Burton Park for community park or acquire 100 acres suitable for the construction of a community park in West Athens.  
Priority: 1
- Acquire or lease performing arts rehearsal space in downtown Cultural District.  
Priority: 1
- Acquire land contiguous to Sandy Creek Park (400-600 acres).  
Priority: 3

### **Development:**

#### **Linear Parks/Greenways:**

##### Heritage Trail

- Development of Heritage Trail (downtown portion of Greenway).  
Priority: 1 on-going

##### Greenway

- Develop greenway trails, access points, and facilities.  
Priority: 2 on-going

##### Cooks Trail / Sandy Creek Greenway

- Incorporate as extension of greenway system and develop as necessary to support that effort.  
Priority: 3

## **Neighborhood Parks:**

### **Elementary and Middle Schools**

- Neighborhood park development for 16 school sites.  
Priority: 1  
Budget: 500,000

### **Dudley Park**

- No new development, aside from improvements related to the greenway, as defined by greenway master plan.

### **East Athens Community Center and Park**

- Develop additional un-lighted space for field sport practice and unscheduled, non-competitive play.  
Priority: 1  
Budget: 10,000
- Other future developments guided by neighborhood park classification.  
Priority: 1  
Budget: 50,000
- Close and remove pool facility when community-wide aquatics facility is operational. Perform required maintenance services to sustain pool use until such time.  
Priority: 3

### **Pope/Reese Street Park**

- The park should be closed.  
Priority: 1

### **Rocksprings Park**

- Other future developments guided by neighborhood park classification.  
Priority: 2  
Budget: 10,000
- Close and remove pool facility when community-wide aquatics facility is operational. Perform required maintenance services to sustain pool use until such time.  
Priority: 3



#### Satterfield Park

- Remove lighting when replacement fields are operational in nearby community park.  
Priority: 2
- Maintain tennis court lighting until replacement courts are operational in nearby community park. Existing courts should remain available for daylight use and maintained until they are no longer serviceable. At that time they should be removed.
- Other future developments guided by neighborhood park classification.  
Priority: 3  
Budget: 25,000

#### Thomas Lay Community Center and Park

- Close and remove pool facility when community-wide aquatics facility is operational. Perform required maintenance services to sustain pool use until such time.  
Priority: 3
- Other future developments guided by neighborhood park classification.

#### Winterville Tennis Courts, Wesley Whitehead Park, Winterville City Park

- Shared-use agreements with City of Winterville.

#### **Community Parks:**

##### New Community Parks

- Development of one new community park (East Athens, South Athens, or West Athens).  
Priority: 1  
Budget: 3,000,000
- Development of one new community park (East Athens, South Athens, or West Athens).  
Priority: 2  
Budget: 3,000,000
- Development of one new community park (East Athens, South Athens, or West Athens).  
Priority: 3  
Budget: 3,000,000

#### Bishop Park

- Close and remove pool facility when community-wide aquatics facility is operational. Perform required maintenance services to sustain pool use until such time.  
Priority: 3
- Discontinue gymnastics program in gymnasium when new community-wide gymnastics facility is operational.  
Priority: 3

#### Burton Park

- Burton Park should remain as part of the greenway system.

#### Memorial Park

- Discontinue use of multi-purpose rooms for Athens Creative Theater, when new location is found in Cultural District.  
Priority: 1
- Bear Hollow Wildlife Trail should be relocated to more suitable facilities at Sandy Creek Nature Center.  
Priority: 3
- Until then the Wildlife Trail should remain operational. Minor repairs necessary to ensure the safety of visitors and animal specimens should be pursued in accordance with independent consulting report (see page L-50). Major repairs that involve utility replacement, restroom building construction, extensive site grading, or other expensive repairs should not be undertaken.
- If a commitment for relocation is not arranged, the facility should be closed or at least have its scope of operations reduced.
- Convert Wildlife Trail area to picnic facilities and walking trails.  
Priority: 3  
Budget: 100,000
- Maintain swimming pool until a county-wide family aquatic center is operational, then close.  
Priority: 3
- Develop a new entrance and parking on the east side of the park.  
Priority: 3

#### North Park (Youth Sports Complex)

- Develop non-sports related facilities to balance existing sports facilities in order to make this park function as a community park.  
Priority: 3  
Budget: 500,000

## **Regional Parks:**

### **Sandy Creek Park**

- Strengthen functional connection to Sandy Creek Nature Center by shuttle transportation.  
Priority: 1
- Develop RV Campground (as per completed construction documents).  
Priority: 2  
Budget: 700,000
- Enhance visibility/image from Hwy. 441. This can be done through better signage, parkway, or land acquisition.  
Priority: 3
- Implement a destination-enhancement program for Sandy Creek Park, as determined by a feasibility study.  
Priority: 3

### **Sandy Creek Nature Center**

- Incorporate wildlife exhibit of Memorial Park into Nature Center, on basis of feasibility study.  
Priority: 3
- Develop demonstration farm/homestead.  
Priority: 3  
Budget: 100,000

## **Cultural District:**

### **Lyndon House**

- ✓ Develop a new Visual Arts Center on the Lyndon House site, on the basis of a special feasibility study.  
Priority: 2  
Budget: 2,500,000

### **Morton Theater**

- Purchase or lease suitable rehearsal and work space in proximity to Morton Theater.  
Priority: 1

## **Special Purpose Facilities**

- Develop county-wide special purpose facilities (e.g. family aquatic center, competition tennis center, gymnastic center) in new community parks, on the basis of special feasibility studies.  
Priority: 3

## MANAGEMENT ANALYSIS

The Parks and Recreation Training and Consultation Group

### ADMINISTRATION

*"Leisure, once considered a luxury, is now recognized as a necessity. Research shows that everyone, young or old, physically challenged or able-bodied, not merely wants, but truly needs leisure opportunities." Leisure System, 1991 Murphy, Niepoth, Jamieson and Williams.*

Recent economic and demographic trends in Athens-Clarke County have revealed the increasing ineffectiveness of traditional approaches to leisure service management. If all citizens of Athens-Clarke County are to receive the leisure opportunities they need, a new approach to leisure service management is necessary. In this analysis, the consultants have established the basic purpose of leisure management as the delivery of services that are consistent with the citizens' needs, characteristics, and circumstances; and with the government's philosophy and resources. It should be clarified that the Departments of Arts and Environmental Education and Recreation and Parks will be referred to in this assessment as the leisure services departments.

Athens-Clarke County Government provides two kinds of leisure services, direct and indirect with various classifications and formats. Directly, there are tournaments, classes, exhibits, special events, festivals, hobbies, interpretive, educational and competitive programs. Indirectly, public areas and facilities create an environment within which leisure activities occur. These include parks, greenways, trails, zoo, swimming pools, centers, natural areas, theatre, and camps. Athens-Clarke County facilitates leisure services that help people develop useful skills, knowledge, and attitudes. While strong in many areas, such as environmental education, the leisure services departments have been weak in therapeutic forms of service for the public customer.

The leisure services departments participate in a few jointly sponsored programs and attempt to provide assistance to other leisure providers. The departments are weak in their role to inform the citizens (customers) about the available services and lack a process to encourage participation and evaluate results.

Interviews and public meetings revealed that the leisure services departments not only need to provide adequate services, but should better preserve and maintain the areas and facilities they manage.



## MISSION STATEMENT

It is recommended that the mission statements of the leisure service departments (*see Existing Mission Statements, Attachment A*) be consolidated. The proposed draft consolidated mission statement is as follows:

The mission of the Athens-Clarke County leisure service departments is to provide a safe and well-maintained leisure service system that will improve and enrich the quality of life for the citizens of Athens-Clarke County.

This mission will be achieved through a unified approach of providing diversified programs and services; quality facilities; and interpretive and educational appreciation of natural and cultural resources.

The departments will strive to obtain professional personnel, trained volunteers, and cooperative utilization of public and private funds and community resources.

The consolidated mission statement allows the departments to provide a broad scope leisure services delivery system that projects the interrelationship between humans living, playing, and learning in harmony with the environment. The mission specifies the following:

- a unified leisure services effort
- provision of diversified programs, services, and facilities
- maintained and safe parks, facilities, areas and programs
- professionally trained staff and volunteers
- cooperation among all community resources
- utilization of public and private funds

## ORGANIZATION

The current leisure services departments are structured independently. (*see current organization charts, Attachment B*). While both structures are workable, it would be a mistake to accept either as the most effective and efficient approach to organizing the leisure services delivery system of Athens-Clarke County. The consultants recommend an organizational structure that will streamline the departments into one (1) unified system by collectively grouping like functions, and eliminating duplication



The current Department of Arts and Environmental Education has five (5) divisions as follows:

1. Administration
2. Environmental Education
3. Outdoor Activities
4. Arts
5. Maintenance

The current Department of Recreation and Parks has four (4) divisions as follows:

1. Administration
2. Park Services/Maintenance
3. Recreation Services
4. Special Activities

### **Recommendations:**

The single most important administrative recommendation to impact the development of a new approach to meeting the leisure services needs of Athens-Clarke County is to consolidate the two (2) existing departments into one delivery system. This consolidated approach would project the interrelationship between humans living, playing, and learning in harmony with the land. It would create a professional management team responsible for evaluating, assessing, and planning all activities, services and leisure activities in relation to arts, recreation, parks, and environmental ethical standards.

This new vision would help prevent the arts from being perceived as a single-line process for a limited few; recreation and parks would be viewed more as stewards rather than just activity oriented; and environmental education would unite the system together as joint allies.

The proposed organizational chart recommends that the two departments be consolidated into one system, creating a new Leisure Services Director position. The newly established position would be responsible for managing, organizing, developing, planning, motivating and evaluating the consolidated leisure services delivery system for Athens-Clarke County. This position should require extensive knowledge of leisure services administration practices and principles, with an accredited degree (Masters preferred) in Recreation and Parks Administration, Public Administration, Environmental Education, Natural/Cultural Resources or other related field. The director should be a Certified Leisure Professional (CLP) or be certifiable with a minimum of six (6) years of progressive related experience (*see draft job description, Attachment C*). An Assistant Leisure Services Director position is recommended to assist the director in day to day operations (*see draft job description, Attachment C*).

The consultants recommend the creation of four (4) Division Superintendent positions to re-organize the top management team as follows:

1. Arts & Cultural Resources Superintendent
2. Recreation Resources Superintendent
3. Environmental Education & Natural Resources Superintendent
4. Parks & Facilities Maintenance Superintendent  
(*see draft job descriptions, Attachment C*).

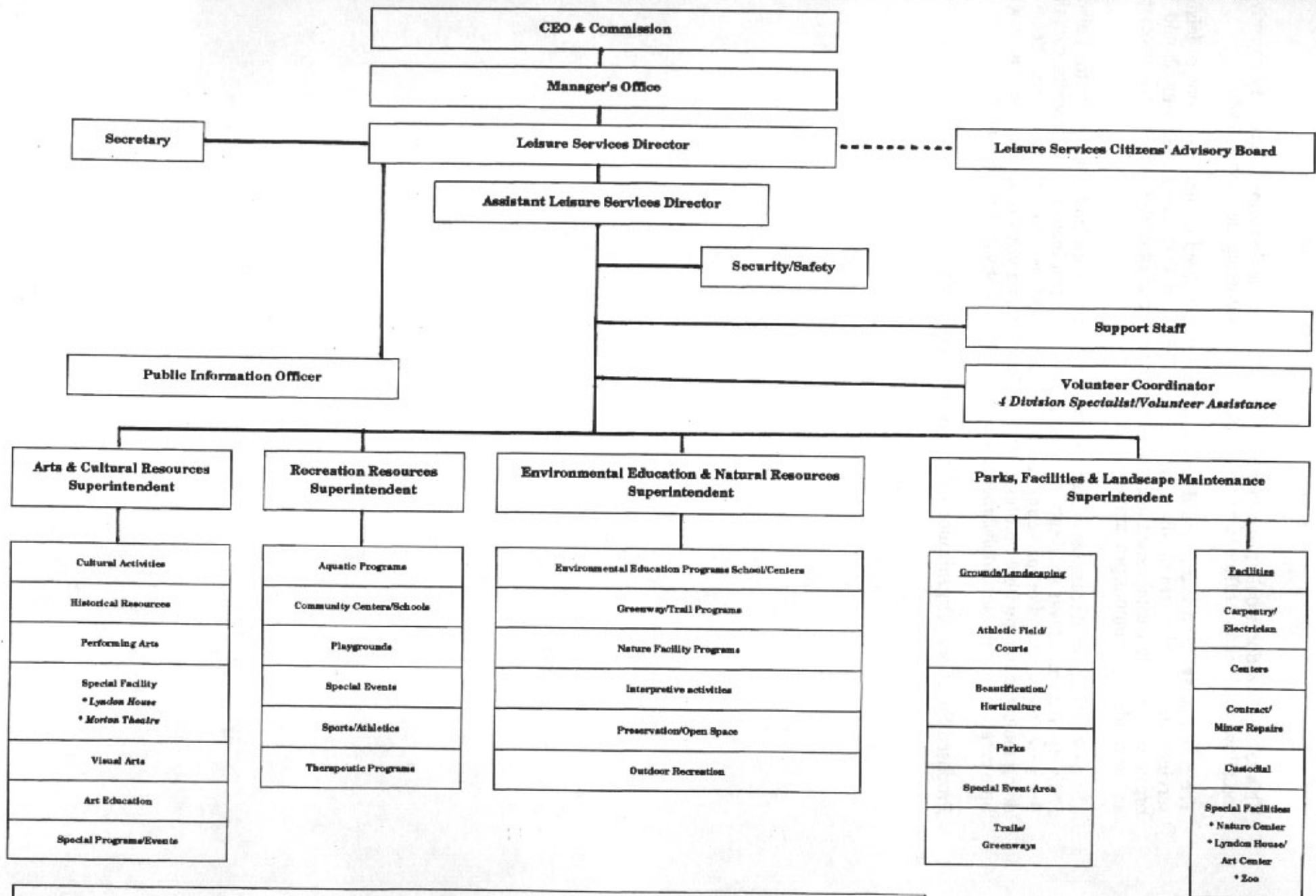
This re-organization would place more responsibility on the divisions to quantify objectives and allow the director's office to be more effective in evaluating the service level.

The new management team should formally become involved in the total scope of leisure services instead of a single division focus. Weekly management meetings should be organized to review established tasks to achieve goals and objectives (problems/successes) and to conduct continuous pro-active planning.

The new management team may offer a way to infuse new ideas and vitality into the Leisure Delivery System. It was strikingly clear during the course of interviews, site visits, etc., that few new programs and/or marketing ideas have been implemented for a long time. Years of doing the same thing without professional development and years of financial cutbacks with little creative revenue accomplishments have led to staff motivational stagnation.

Proposed Functional Organizational Chart is shown in Figure 3.

# PROPOSED FUNCTIONAL ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY LEISURE SERVICES DEPARTMENT



This proposed organizational chart is based on functional needs in developing an effective and efficient Leisure Services Department System. It is not reflective of current staff.

## GOALS

The only way to be effective in the complex business of delivering leisure services to the community is to work within a systematic, interrelated, goal-oriented framework.

In the existing leisure services departments goals and objectives are vague. Most of the staff interviewed could better express specific objectives, than overall goals. Most could not offer the consultants in print the underlying philosophy of the Athens-Clarke County leisure services delivery system nor list department-wide goals and objectives.

The lack of sufficiently defined goals and objectives increases the difficulty in managing the quantity and quality of leisure services.

The consultants recommend the following goals for each functional division of the leisure services delivery system. Specific objectives and action steps need to be developed by the staff.

### **Administration Goals:**

#### Comprehensive Services:

- To administer a well balanced leisure services delivery system.

#### Community Needs:

- To continually assess the needs of the community through an organized input system.

#### Communicate:

- To continually communicate through an open information system.

#### Effective Management:

- To plan, organize, direct, coordinate, and centralize the Athens-Clarke County Leisure Services Department so that the Mission can be achieved effectively and economically.

#### Fiscally Sound:

- To use tax and revenue dollars in such a manner that costs are minimized while benefits are maximized.

#### Community Relations:

- To develop a comprehensive public information system for positive contacts with volunteers, special interests, media and the general citizenry.



## **Arts and Cultural Resources Goals:**

### **Diversified Services:**

- To provide arts and cultural resources for all segments of the community regardless of age, sex, race, religion, origin, beliefs, economic status or challenged abilities.

### **Participation:**

- To encourage and broaden the participation of all citizens in arts and cultural resources.

### **Public Awareness:**

- To conduct ongoing public awareness that will effectively promote arts and cultural resources.

### **Effective Management:**

- To effectively plan, organize control, communicate, evaluate and coordinate arts and cultural programs with a balanced selection of program/activities.

### **Fiscal Control:**

- To develop and manage a budget for arts and cultural resources which provides sufficient staff, improvements, equipment, supplies and storage for a quality operation.

### **Community Involvement:**

- To be sensitive to the needs of the arts and cultural resources community.

### **Preservation:**

- To ensure the preservation of historic and cultural resources for the education and general interest of the community.



## **Environmental Education and Natural Resources Goals:**

### **Diversified Services:**

- To provide the opportunity for a broad spectrum of environmental educational programs, activities and services relative to the needs and desires of the total community.

### **Participation:**

- To encourage and broaden participation to all areas of the community, including natural areas, parks, greenways, schools, centers, public housing and nature center.

### **Public Awareness:**

- To conduct an on-going public awareness program to promote good communication with the public, special interest groups, associations and advisory committees.

### **Effective Management:**

- To plan, organize, communicate, direct, coordinate, evaluate and control the operations to achieve the departmental mission.

### **Fiscal Control:**

- To optimize use of available funds through efficient budgeting procedures.

### **Community Involvement:**

- To support, recruit, and assist citizens who will work cooperatively in providing environmental services.

### **Preservation Services**

- To ensure the preservation of natural resources for the enjoyment, education and general benefit of the community.

## **Recreation Resources Goals:**

### **Diversified Services:**

- To provide leisure services that are comprehensive in content to all citizens regardless of age, sex, race, religion, national origins, personal beliefs, economic status or physical or mental disability.

### **Participation:**

- To encourage and broaden participation in all programs and services throughout the county in parks, centers, schools, etc.

### **Current Trends:**

- To keep the programs and services offered in line with the best trends in leisure services.

### **Community Involvement:**

- To involve, support and assist the citizens who work cooperatively in providing recreation services.

### **Public Awareness:**

- To conduct on-going public awareness programs to promote good communication with special interest groups, associations and advisory committees.

### **Effective Management:**

- To plan, organize, communicate, direct, coordinate, control and evaluate recreation resources so that the mission of the department can be achieved.

### **Fiscal Control:**

- To develop and manage a budget that will provide sufficient staff, growth, supplies and equipment for both fee and no fee program services.

## **Parks and Facility Maintenance Goals:**

### **Physical Appearance:**

- To preserve and improve the physical appearance and functional quality of all parks, areas and facilities.

### **Safety:**

- To continually provide a high level of services that will insure safe leisure environments.

### **Community Relations:**

- To promote good public relations by providing areas and facilities where people have an opportunity to participate in quality leisure experiences.

### **Efficient Maintenance:**

- To provide clean, orderly, safe and attractive grounds and structures in accordance with their intended use through an efficient maintenance program.

### **Effective Management:**

- To provide skilled measurable leadership working with and through personnel and other resources.

### **Fiscal Control:**

- To optimize use of available funds through efficient budgeting procedures.

### **Energy:**

- To implement energy saving procedures and energy control systems for lighting, heating/air conditioning, and vehicle fuel consumption, etc.

## BUDGET

Currently the existing departmental directors prepare and submit budgets to the County Manager's Office with little or no input from the division managers and support staff. During the course of staff interviews, questions were continually raised about their input into the budget and their knowledge of revenue. The answers were usually "I don't know". The staff members were aware that the departments have had several years of financial hard times, no pay raises since 1991, but few were aware of specific impacts their division had on the issue. This prevents the staff from accepting ownership of the problems or analyzing creative ways to improve revenue or save budget dollars.

In the 1992 Georgia Recreation Services Study compiled by the University of Georgia Institute of Community and Area Development, Athens-Clarke County's expenditures are compared to the metropolitan (Metro) Georgia region.

- 52.6% of the Athens-Clarke County leisure services operating expenditures were salary and wage expenditures. The Metropolitan (Metro) Georgia Region average was 52.8%.
- Athens-Clarke County leisure services departments were 5.4% of the Athens-Clarke County Government total expenditures. (Metro Georgia's average was 5.6%.)
- Athens-Clarke County's leisure services departments operating expenditure per capita was \$43.70. The Metro Georgia average was \$28.58.
- Athens-Clarke County's leisure services departments capital expenditures per capita was \$12.54 - compared to Metro Georgia average of \$5.12.
- The 1993/94 Athens-Clarke County leisure services budget of \$3.48 million is basically financing services at diminishing levels.

### Recommendations:

The consultants recommend that the Leisure Services Department set forth a philosophy whereby all employees are responsive to the changing economic conditions and contribute to maintaining sound financial conditions which balance the community's needs for services with available budget and revenues.

- Increase cost sharing and user fees towards advanced and specialized services.
- In spite of increasing pressure on the departments' budget Athens-Clarke County should continue the policy of providing no charge services for basic services.
- The Leisure Services Department budget should reflect the perceived needs of the community based on pro-active planning which includes measurement of performance.
- To perform a comprehensive analysis of the operating and capital budget at mid-year and present the results of that analysis to the County Manager's Office for action.



- The operating and capital budget should be developed with the objective of funding all well-justified department goals which do not exceed expenditures and revenue.
- User fees should be continually reviewed to insure that they recover the cost of leisure services that provide services beyond basic leisure services, as defined by the department.

It is recommended that Athens-Clarke County continue to maintain and improve the funding commitment to the leisure services departments. While the per capita expenditures of Athens-Clarke County leisure services is commendable, the departments are in a catch-up stage in creative revenue sources (*see Revenue Review*).

New program diversification and upgrading deteriorating facilities are going to cost money. It is recommended that all funding requests and commitments be tied to the comprehensive plan as dollars allow.

## **FINANCIAL REPORTING PURCHASING AND CASH ACCOUNTING**

According to several staff members interviewed, current financial reporting is limited to top management. This prevents the supervisory staff from taking ownership.

During interviews, concerns were raised regarding purchasing - i.e. that the procedure was too cumbersome through central purchasing and was not consistent.

Many staff interviewed believe that fees, vending machine collection, etc., should be retained at the facility or used for the facilities and programs.

### **Recommendations:**

The financial reporting process should be reviewed to ensure involvement of all staff levels.

It is recommended that the county government review its purchasing process to determine if there are delay problems. It is recommended that all supervisory personnel be given a short training course on purchasing and that the county provide written purchasing guidelines to each supervisor. It is recommended that purchases above \$500.00 continue to be made through a centralized purchasing department. Small purchases could be decentralized, if it does not require additional staff, duplicate material or reduce savings realized by buying in bulk.

Collected revenue should continue to go through the county accounting system. However, revenue considerations should be entered in the budget and shared with the facility, program or division.

## REVENUE

Generating revenue is not a new practice for the Athens-Clarke County leisure service departments. In 1992, the departments generated \$406,578. However, the generated total was 36% below the Metro Georgia revenue average of \$637,260.

The departments are constantly faced with decisions pertaining to what is an appropriate revenue generating practice. Currently, most of the revenue is generated from fees and charges, predominantly: athletic fees (adults), entrance fees, and special instructional programs. The policies regarding fees and charges are not formalized in a "blanket fees and charges plan". Each request for a fee must be placed on the commission agenda for approval.

The revenue dollars generated go into the general fund. There was little evidence of revolving accounts for specific programs or membership fees/annual fees.

There is an "established understanding" that seniors and economically disadvantaged population are included, if necessary, through a scholarship program. Non-resident fees are established on specific programs. Again, not a blanket policy. The Department of Arts and Environmental Education has a written policy regarding program participation scholarships. According to staff, the Department of Recreation and Parks is incorporating this policy into their programs rather than the previous "established understanding".

The departments recover little revenue from "sale for profit" items and indirect coordinated programs.

The department's have historically applied for state and federal grants but have not had a system-wide, comprehensive plan to support the requests.

Records indicate few corporate sponsors for on-going services. Sponsors get little for their sponsorship dollars in terms of publicity or adequate community recognition.

Recruiting volunteers was not viewed as a strong avenue for revenue, except at the nature center.

Foundations and other contributions through gift catalog, etc., have not been a strong source for dollars.

In the overall review of the departments, few strategies have been explored regarding alternative funding opportunities.

### **Recommendations:**

- The leisure services departments should have a written fees and charges policy, so each new program/service does not require commission approval.
- It is most important in a fees and charges policy to spell out what the tax dollar will fund as basic services. It is generally accepted that fees and charges are acceptable for all activities offered above and beyond basic services. What is not generally

accepted is the definition of what basic services are. It will be the responsibility of staff with commission approval to make this determination.

Fees and charges policy should address the following:

- General statement (reason for policy)
- Program and service goals
- General public programs and services
- Special programs, facilities and services
- Annual review of charges by commission
- Insuring participation (opportunities for all)
- Waiver of fees
- Non-resident participation
- Accounting for funds
- Expendable or consumable materials
- Pro-rating general and administrative costs
- Service charge
- Transportation costs (if applied)
- Program fee refunds

*(See Model Fees and Charges Policy, Attachment D)*

- Non-resident users should be tracked more closely and a non-resident permit system established, which allows them to pay the same as residents, if they have paid the permit fee.
- Family rates should be implemented to strongly encourage family participation.
- Increase membership to specific program areas.
- Department-wide gift catalog should be created.
- Intergovernmental agreements need to be enhanced, e.g., Board of Education, University of Georgia, Athens Housing Authority.
- A volunteers program needs to be enhanced department wide with more emphasis on the volunteers investment in time, assistance and expertise in lieu of financial costs.
- Individual/group contributions need to be enhanced, e.g., selling portions of a proposed walking trail. The proceeds could be used to match a grant.
- Develop agreements with private providers who have facilities that are not used to capacity, and with public utilities which have recreation potential, such as power line corridors.
- Enhance incentives to transfer land, such as, option to purchase, right-of-first-refusal, easements, long term lease agreements, and donations.

The national trend is moving toward an increase in fees and charges because of the following:

- It requires non-residents to pay something.
- It creates higher quality of leisure services.
- People appreciate the services more and take better care of facilities/areas when they pay for them.
- The fees system can be set based on actual cost, to cover excessive cost or to make a profit.



## PERSONNEL

Public leisure services are rendered by professionals to enhance the quality of life of the citizens. Participants' satisfaction with services depends heavily on how the services are performed. The effective selection, use, and management of personnel is a must if Athens-Clarke County is to provide satisfactory services at a reasonable cost. Based on employee interviews, records, etc., most of the management team had a college degree. However, several had unrelated degrees in respect to the tasks of the job they were performing. Because of the lack of education credentials, or the wrong credentials, several management staff members can not qualify as Certified Leisure Professionals (CLP's) on the state and national level. A few were grandfathered into the system because of their years of service in the leisure field. Currently, GPRA is developing a proposal for a more recognized system to certify professionals as CLP's. The project is headed by Professor Mike Taylor, president of GPRA.

Professional certification identifies qualified professional and technical personnel with the leisure services field. It is a relatively new process based on education, experience, oral and written testing.

In Georgia, there is a state certification process as well as the national certification process. While lack of professional certification does not necessarily indicate a lack of ability, its presence is a plus regarding trends, ensuring quality, vision, scope, planning, and skills to manage a diversified leisure services delivery system.

In both departments, staff members interviewed indicated a recognized level of employee favoritism and little direction and vision.

Most were concerned about the lack of performance reviews, job plans, and incentives.

Current professional development/training is weak, greatly due to a lack of funds in the budgets. Few of the employees attend state or national meetings/training that relate to their responsibility.

### Recommendations:

- Encourage the hiring of personnel who are certified or certifiable.
- Develop job descriptions that are measurable for performance evaluations.
- Develop an ongoing internship program with University of Georgia, Athens.
- Establish orientation procedures for full-time and part-time employees, such as:
  - Develop introduction process for new staff.
  - Review employee handbook (Department Rules and Regulations).
  - Explain organization chart, levels of authority.
  - Review forms, records process.
  - Review risk management process.

- Outline specific conditions of employment, performance appraisals, disciplinary action, grievance procedures, etc.
- Review job description and develop specific work plan, with a six-month interim review.
- Improve in-service training and professional development.
- Improve or develop personnel files that are maintained by supervisors, i.e. performance, weekly time planning reports.
- Develop a specific training/professional development calendar be developed for each employee, based on a training assessment.
- In-house training opportunities should be created or expanded by networking with other agencies, e.g.. University of Georgia, Athens.
- Re-create or establish the following positions (*see Draft Job Descriptions, Attachment C*):
  - Leisure Services Director
  - Assistant Leisure Services Director
  - Arts & Cultural Resources Superintendent
  - Environmental Education and Natural Resources Superintendent
  - Recreation Resources Superintendent
  - Parks & Facility Maintenance Superintendent
  - Department-wide Public Information Officer
  - Department-wide Volunteers Coordinator

## SAFETY

Several safety factors were identified in the facility and program evaluation. Safety is not a program or object the public readily identifies. It is often not apparent until an accident occurs that the public customer recognizes the need for a safety conscious leisure service department. Athens-Clarke County does not provide "a standard of care".

Liability claims have not been exorbitant within departments, but the management team should be concerned about injury/damages to their customers and the potential financial loss if safety or security failures occur. Currently most of the responsibility for safety/security is placed on the county's risk management staff and police department. The current departments have many outstanding risk management programs in place that need to be incorporated into a department wide system.

### **Recommendations:**

- Develop Risk Management Plan (Use as guide - Risk Management for Park, Recreation and Leisure Service by Peterson and Hronek)
- Develop an improved facility and equipment inspection process (at least monthly). Maintenance divisions need to insure that items identified on inspections have been corrected. An effective rating system needs to be established. Highly rated items such as playground equipment should be repaired the same workday it is inspected. Otherwise, it should be tagged and, if possible, removed or disconnected until it is repaired. In addition to the rating system, a multiple copied inspection checklist should be developed. The inspector(s) would retain a copy, a copy would go to the supervisor who develops work orders and sees that the work is done, and another copy would go to the maintenance superintendent. Work orders also should be multi-copied and the previously listed positions should receive a copy.
- A safety awareness campaign should be developed. Safety is the responsibility of everyone, not just the safety staff and police. A popular campaign is to account for the number of departmental man-hours without time lost to an accident. For liability purposes, a similar campaign could be run, such as number of leisure programs without a citizen/customer injury or security problem.
- During the interviews, it was discovered that selective maintenance of facilities are the responsibilities of associations or interest groups. It is recommended that if these facilities or properties are owned by Athens-Clarke County, that (1) such maintenance become the responsibility of the leisure services departments or (2) maintenance (including standards and inspections) be part of the agreements with the association or interest group. This recommendation is not a condemnation of work done by associations and interest groups, but rather a recognition of liability by the Athens-Clarke County Government.
- All relationships with outside organizations should be inventoried and put in writing. Standard legal agreements should be drawn up to clearly define liability and responsibilities.

- The Americans with Disabilities Act requires specific legislation to be implemented regarding the needs of challenged populations. A department inventory needs to be completed and renovation implemented as schedule and dollars allow.
- Swimming pools are a high risk liability problem. There needs to be stricter pool operating/safety standards.



## SECURITY

The success of the current security program within the leisure service departments depends on the cooperation it receives from the county sheriff and police departments. A proposed security plan was presented to the county commission but did not get approved. There has not been a complete study of the security levels needed to justify the plan. Management has concentrated on trying to eliminate all potential problems by controls, e.g., closing the facilities, limited use and behaviors.

### **Recommendations:**

- A security appraisal of the departments should be performed. Once the appraisal is completed, a plan should be developed as to the level of security needed at specific areas e.g., trained police officer or community relations/park ranger staff. An intergovernmental security committee should be established to develop the security plan. The committee should not be an accident-review committee, but rather a team charged with the implementation and success of a good security program. The police and sheriff's departments should define a police team that specifically patrols the leisure services departments facilities, areas and programs.
- The leisure services department should be responsible with county police support, for public security, but they should be reasonable in developing programs to do this. It becomes a matter of balancing the security of citizens "customers" with the type of activity or park and the potential consequences of the decision. Certain areas require maximum safety standards, while others require only minimum (usually informational) security levels.
- The security plan both (1) insure the citizens a safe enjoyable experience and; (2) protect natural/historical and developed resources. A security plan with goals and objectives should be developed with specific actions which can be integrated into all the departments that provide safety and security.

The Plan should include two (2) primary programs:

1. Enforcement.
2. Maintenance/Protection.

The enforcement levels need to be identified, i.e.. hard-core, soft-core, educational

The hard-core level should address programs designed to enforce laws and regulations. This is frequently interpreted as flashing lights, special uniforms and sidearms. Hard-core officials must uphold the law but too much identification with (outside) law enforcement may reduce the overall effectiveness of public security within. It is a fine line to clearly distinguish between the two.

The soft-core level addresses programs to encourage or discourage certain kinds of behavior. It does not usually require personnel as skilled and trained as a law enforcement officer, nor is it as costly.

Because hard-core on-site enforcement is very expensive, Athens-Clarke County should rely on the soft-core approach, except in critical areas.

The Educational approach to security and safety needs to be enhanced by making the public aware of the value of parks and facilities and the role of individual citizens in protecting these resources. Law enforcement can be called for citations, violations, etc., but in order to have a total security and safety program a positive approach must be developed to emphasize education and environmental design.

- All staff members should have some public safety/security training. This would enable them to handle problem situations until other needed assistance arrives on the scene.
- The five (5) key requirements for a Security Plan are as follows:
  1. Review all facility and area plan designs for good security/safety features.
  2. Maximize education and information efforts.
  3. Delineate by written process staff and other agencies roles and responsibilities. These roles must be delineated and coordinated so that an effective, total security program can be created.
  4. Maintain immediate response capability in terms of both crime, prevention or emergency.
  5. Adequate staff (hard-core for police department, soft-core for leisure services department, staff, volunteers) must be maintained and able to respond on a 24-hour basis.

## PUBLIC INFORMATION

One of the most important functions of the Athens-Clarke County Leisure Service Department is to develop and maintain an effective public information system. In reviewing the current departments' public information process, the consultants discovered the function to be grossly inadequate. The leisure services departments lack a consolidated visual identity with respect to departmental responsibilities, printed material, signage, logos, uniforms, etc. Such an inconsistent image breeds unfavorable public opinion. Most program flyers were unprofessional. News releases and public service announcements were handled by each division. News response was random, reactive and inconsistent. However, few brochures were exceptions to this evaluation.

The leisure services departments' divisions may be reaching "citizen-customers" with different interests, but the public information channel should have one "focus point".

### Recommendations:

- A public information officer position should be created to enhance the leisure services departments' image by giving a professionally focused public information system (*see draft job description, Attachment C*).
- A leisure service public information plan should be developed to make the public aware of programs, services, facilities, and events. It is not enough for the department to establish programs or develop facilities; it must sell them for participation.
- The departments need to develop a better image by requiring every employee to take full responsibility for promoting good public relations. Employees must be more conscious of their image. The success of a good public information and community relations program is determined by public perception. It was perceived that free program services and facility use will make up for the lack of quality service and good staff relations. This does not hold true. A favorable community image should be striven for but the image must be more than demagoguery. A special training course needs to be developed regarding "citizen-customer" relations.
- The public information budget needs to be reviewed and adequate dollars allocated for public information. It is not wise to expect only free public service to meet the public information needs.
- A stronger communications link with other leisure providers needs to be established. It is recommended that a roundtable forum be organized to meet regularly (quarterly) to discuss schedules, co-sponsorships, etc.
- The leisure services departments should develop a speakers bureau to promote community awareness of department service and increase leisure literacy.

Athens-Clarke County citizens, like those in most communities, see government in restrictive roles e.g. collecting taxes, giving traffic tickets, etc. Citizens need to appreciate the role of

leisure services as the promoter of non-restrictive services (not necessarily always free). It is important to establish public information goals that demonstrate:

- The value of leisure services to the community.
- The varied interest, populations, ages, etc., they reach.
- The leisure services emphasis on volunteers and community support (associations, schools, university, community groups).



## VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

The Sandy Creek Nature Center is strongly supported by an outstanding volunteer program. While the use of volunteers is visible throughout the departments in other services; it is not reinforced as a major management component.

There is no department-wide catalyst to coordinate volunteer services between the different divisions. Volunteers are not generally perceived as legitimate co-workers which often effects their performance and morale. Many volunteers are becoming stagnant or burned out. Effective planning, evaluation, brainstorming and training has been identified as a critical problem with existing volunteer use. There are a few exceptions.

### Recommendations:

A properly developed and managed system-wide volunteer program would be an asset to the leisure services department, a valuable experience for the volunteer, and an opportunity for direct involvement by the community.

Volunteers supplement paid staff and often permit expansion of services that would not otherwise be possible. The volunteer brings with them a wealth of skills, knowledge and abilities. The development of a department-wide volunteer coordinator position (*see draft job description, Attachment C*) would improve the Athens-Clarke County leisure services delivery system. Volunteer responsibilities should be organized more efficiently as follows:

- Preparation and Planning.
- Recruitment Screening/Placement.
- Orientation.
- Training/Supervision.
- Record Keeping.
- Recognition.
- Evaluation.

The coordinator of the volunteer program should involve the management/supervisory staff in planning the volunteer program. The staff needs to understand why volunteers are being involved and how volunteers can extend and enhance leisure services. The preparation and planning of a volunteer program should include:

- Development of a budget for the major responsibilities such as recruitment, orientation, training, recognition, supplies, etc.
- Development of written job description for each volunteer position outlining commitment, time, duties and skills needed.
- Development of a record keeping system to include applications, volunteer personnel records, evaluations and recognition records.

The current volunteer handbook for the Sandy Creek Nature Center is an excellent tool that should be expanded department-wide. The consultants recommend the following contents for a department-wide Leisure Services Department Volunteer Handbook:

- Welcome and appreciation
- Background history and philosophy of department
- Organizational chart
- Listing and map of parks, areas, and facilities
- Policies relating to the volunteer
- Accident and complaint procedures
- Volunteer program goals
- Job descriptions

## PLANNING

Based on staff interviews, the departments work with the County Planning Department because neither departments have a professional planner on staff specifically for recreation planning. The leisure service departments should work toward creating a more effective evaluation system for programs, facilities and staffing. The basic strategies for a more effective planning process should include:

- On-going public involvement.
- Clearer direction.
- Priorities.
- Improved overall department performance.
- Team work and expertise.

There are numerous relationships between the leisure services departments and boards/commissions. Most of the boards/commissions are designed for a specific service/program e.g. nature center, sports/athletics, arts. In many instances they are legally formed groups responsible for the actions and operations of the program. They are very different in status, structure and role. Many are doers, financial contributors, fund raisers, planners, while others simply function as rubber stamps for staff decisions.

One of the primary concern repeatedly discussed in the interviews was lack of communication. The boards/Commissions generally suffer from vague and ill-defined parameters of their jurisdiction and responsibility. The boards/commissions indicate the need to carry out the functions/obligations designated in their by-laws, etc.

### Recommendations:

- Develop a closer team with the planning commission for short and long range planning.
- Create a Citizen's Leisure Services Advisory Board. The board should address youth, minorities, special populations, special interest groups, and county-wide and community representation. All non-profit (501C3) chartered organizations which have a direct relationship to the department's delivery of leisure services should be officially represented on the board.

The board should be formally established with By-Laws and appointed by the CEO and commission. The leisure services director should serve as liaison between advisory board, manager's office, the CEO, and commission.

The Leisure Services Departments should not operate in a vacuum. They need citizens with diverse interests to react as catalysts throughout the leisure services delivery system. The current working relationships between the departments and board/commissions should continue.

The Leisure Services Advisory Board should act as ambassadors, negotiators, monitors, reviewers, advisors and supporters for on-going public input of the Leisure

**Services Department.** The legitimate functions of the Leisure Services Advisory Board should address the following:

- Carry out designated by-laws.
- Serve as review body with management regarding policy and operations.
- Review established department operational goals and emphasize quality planning.
- Support the Leisure Services Department in the growing competition for funds.
- Serve as community relations advocates.
- Encourage creative revenue projects to enhance the leisure services delivery system.

The Leisure Services Advisory Board should be coordinated with the Manager's Office, but work directly with the Leisure Services Department (*see proposed organizational chart*).

- Develop on-going public involvement process.
- The Leisure Services Department should aggressively emphasize the impact leisure services has on the local economy and tourism.



## MAINTENANCE

Maintenance is spread over several sub-units within the current two (2) departments, public works, and central services. Provincialism and fragmentation distract from the overall purpose of providing quality maintenance and meeting the demands of the public customers. The public interviewed perceives the leisure services department, as responsible for these most unique and heavily used areas and facilities.

- The lack of maintenance schedule options is a problem.
- Response to customers is often too slow.
- Maintenance training is predominantly on the job.
- The lack of performance measurement is a problem.
- The follow-up process for repairs are inadequate and fragmented.
- Pro-active maintenance costs are not analyzed. There is a lack of preventative maintenance on facilities, grounds and for programs within the leisure services department.
- There is lack of accountability to "standards of care" for specific leisure services maintenance.

### **Recommendations:**

- As recommended in the proposed organizational chart, maintenance of parks, facilities and landscaping should become a separate Division and be responsible for all maintenance of parks, open space, greenways, bikeways, beautification areas and related facilities.

The current centralized function within Central Services to purchase supplies, coordinate design work, and development projects, etc. is efficient. However, the routine operation of maintenance and landscaping should be decentralized and placed within the Leisure Services Department. Since the Leisure Services Department has the responsibility of providing opportunities for all ages to have positive leisure experiences, and the responsibility of protecting the natural resources, the leisure services department should take full ownership of maintenance and landscaping as an important component of their function. Without proper and efficient maintenance of areas and facilities, all efforts to provide high quality programs/services will fail.

The functions of a good maintenance/landscaping program should include the following:

1. To provide clean, safe facilities, areas, greenways, bikeways, and beautification areas that promote healthful and enjoyable recreation experiences.

2. To conserve capital investments by prolonging the life and usefulness of improvements.
3. To ensure proper and effective functioning of all skilled resources.
4. To promote positive attitudes toward the agency services and customers. Especially, the public user.

Specialized skills are necessary for an effective system because of the uniqueness of the sites and the intense use level of all areas and facilities.. Maintenance standards should be categorized into levels of maintenance based on size and user frequency for each area, facility, greenway, bikeway, or landscape/beautification area. It is recommended that maintenance staff attend specialized training, e.g., Wheeling West Virginia Maintenance Management School.

It is recommended that maintenance workload and scheduling be calculated and that long-term scheduling (A Maintenance Plan) be implemented. The Maintenance Plan should impact the department's capital budget, safety program and leisure programming, including greenway and bikeways.

The following is a step-by-step procedure for developing a specialized maintenance plan for leisure services:

1. Develop goals and objectives.
2. Conduct a complete assessment of the current maintenance needs of the leisure services system.
3. Set priorities as prescribed.
4. Establish a timetable for accomplishing your goals. One by month for a yearly period, one based on projection for the future.
5. Establish a level of service.
6. Ensure equipment, staffing, and budget is adequate to accomplish goals.
7. Establish procedures and standards for each area, along with task assignments for staff.
8. Develop an adequate records system for tracking all phases of the maintenance division.
9. Evaluate efforts after each season and make the necessary improvements.
10. Repeat the process annually.

This type of maintenance plan would enable the Leisure Services Department to develop an effective computer system. However, because of the need to be flexible, the main system must be able to respond to immediate use, emergencies and make every effort not to inconvenience the public customer from active or passive use.

- It is recommended that a preventative maintenance program be developed based on standards.
- Interaction and cooperation with public works and central services needs to be continued because of the broad functions of these two divisions.. There needs to be established procedures on centralized functions, such as development, specific equipment, and planning.
- The Leisure Services Department needs to expand the landscaping/beautification program, working cooperatively with other agencies. This is especially important due to the anticipated increased development of greenways, bikeways, etc.
- The Leisure Services Department should be held accountable for all parks, related facilities and beautification areas. Often a citizen's first and only impression of the Leisure Services Department is the view of one site or the use of one facility. Only with skilled, flexible maintenance can the Leisure Services Division maintain a high quality of service.

## PROGRAM EVALUATION OVERVIEW

Leisure Programs are provided by two (2) departments [Arts and Environmental Education (AEE) and Recreation and Parks (R&P)] within the unified county system. The two departments try not to overlap programming responsibilities. AEE concentrates on outdoor/interpretive recreation, environmental education and the arts. R&P is more directly concerned with neighborhood parks, swimming pools, community centers, and sports and athletics. Both plan and direct special events.

The programs are offered by the departments in two (2) ways: Directly and Indirectly.

- Directly they operate programs at their facilities and/or contract facilities through organized instruction, free play, competition, club, special events, leadership training and outreach.
- Indirect programming is provided in the form of liaison and/or facility supply (contract/rental, etc.).

Each program site was identified by classification(s) and program format. The evaluation is based on results of a program questionnaire (*See Attachment G*) provided to program supervisors, examination of yearly program flyers, interviews, public meetings, and site visits.

The following program evaluation focused on causes of existing program shortages or on factors that threaten to limit program supply in the future. It sites only weaknesses in the leisure service delivery system for Athens-Clarke County.

- The departments have placed a high priority on introductory level programs, predominantly to youth.
- AEE operates many of its programs with a strong trained volunteer staff. R&P's is associated with volunteers on a more limited basis. Many volunteers are close to burnout because of over-utilization and limited resources. Also, the economic pressures, such as cost of gasoline and two income families, has discouraged would be volunteers.
- The primary impetus for programs (new and continuing) comes from the staff or administration, not the community. It is perceived that the department's are not committed to public involvement regarding program planning because of the lack of a formal procedure of keeping the public informed. The primary public voice is through the elected county commission and the limited organized boards, i.e. nature center, athletics, arts.
- The departments' primary program communication tools are brochures which create a one way communication, limited in scope and timing. Word of mouth is the second most used communication tool. There are no formal marketing or public relations plans developed by the departments.



- Program registration system is designed predominantly for one way communication.
- Transportation is a major concern for some communities e.g. East Athens. Many of the organized programs are held at Bishop, Sandy Creek, Memorial and the Sports Complex.
- Ramps, lifts and railings are important factors in the lack of special population participation.
- Lack of storage space is a consistent complaint for specialized activities or classes, i.e. dance, arts, etc.
- The current outdated purpose of many of the departments' facilities hinders the potential for maximum skill development and diverse program use.
- Special events require considerable effort, organization and financial support. The highly promoted Grand Slam Program has developed a high risk factor for failure. It is not meeting the intended goals. There is little organization to the program offered. The crowd is too large to control without diverse planned activities and effective leadership.
- Program timetables for many programs do not appear to be consistent with age group needs, i.e. shift workers, nine-five workers, etc. Many of the facilities are closed early in the evening and on weekends.
- Accessibility to school facilities for programs is limited in total time available and reliability of scheduled timetables. There is no overall formal school/leisure service agreement for the departments' use. Specific programs have contracts, e.g. environmental education, athletics, etc.
- The most pronounced lack is in adult programming, special populations and family leisure programs.
- The departments do not have an evaluation system to check planning objectives. There was little evidence of formal written objectives or evaluation forms.
- Program Annual Reports are prepared by both departments. However, there is no established system to compare the programs offered, evaluate duplication of services, or assess non-duplication of participation.
- There is a public perception that program registration by the departments is confusing. It is difficult to know which department is responsible for what program.
- There is concern for the overall poor maintenance of facilities to adequately serve program needs.
- Many questions were raised about the need for diversified programming. It was determined that adequate programs are not offered in several of the existing centers/parks because of poor/outdated facilities, lack of staff motivation, budget/revenue dollars and lack of specialized staff skills.
- Many citizens expressed they would use the public swimming pools if there was a shift away from traditional pools to a more spontaneous creative opportunity. Traditional pools are no longer appropriate.

- There was great support for additional park land, especially, close to home recreation, trail linkage, and interpretive programs.
- Overall support for a fee and charge system or free programming was about equal. Most believed that if the service level was increased they would be willing to pay higher fees. There was strong support for higher fees regarding adult programming. Everyone expressed the need to continue to manage the public leisure departments so that no one was excluded from participation in basic recreation services.
- Organized interest groups, i.e. cultural, sports, etc., expect to grow in general participation and competitive programs. They demand specialized facilities to be available somewhere.
- Quality of existing programs and geographical distribution is uneven throughout the county.
- Some facilities are under-utilized for programs and need evaluation.
- Most facilities need some attention/up-grading for better aesthetics, and for modification for the disabled, etc. However, exclusive needs to accommodate elderly, special population, etc., puts a strain on current budget.
- There was a new focus on organized family programs and a keen interest in out-door opportunities with non-organized free-time use of facilities.
- There is a demand for more and better facilities/parks for diverse use.
- Present space for performing, creative and visual arts fall short of demand.
- Existing multi-use space (indoor or outdoor) is inadequate for special events, especially for programs that would attract large crowds. Also, existing space does not accommodate current specific program needs, i.e. gallery space, fitness facilities, theatre space, regulation fields, etc.
- Current interest groups monopolize program access. New groups/citizens have a difficult time getting involved.
- Permitting is a reactive method used to control program supply distribution. It is perceived as confusing, inefficient and unfair. There are few facilities available for spontaneous use, or for new users.
- Environmental education and interpretive programs should be incorporated more into the R&P department, parks, natural areas, and county school system.
- Many programs are not coordinated by the departments but by community organizations, i.e. tournaments, leagues, special events. These successful programs reflect commitment from volunteers, but not always the commitment of the departments and county government. The volunteers believe that the government should evaluate the tourism potential that many of these programs generate and provide a more significant role with professional staff support.
- The departments need a community liaison for diverse issues/interests. There is not a county leisure services citizens advisory board.

- Changing demographics indicate a shift from youth focused services to adult/senior focused services.
- There is a perception that too much emphasis has been placed on team sports.
- The newly developed Arts non-profit organization, has completed a study indicating specific needs, but feels frustrated with the lack of support from the county leisure departments to implement plan.
- There is a wide spectrum of learning opportunities in Athens-Clarke County for the arts, from community groups to university courses. However, these are insufficient and do not answer the needs of the community.
- There are no opportunities for artists to exhibit, demonstrate or sale their crafts.
- The arts community would like to have a centrally located facility devoted to the arts for education, performing and visual arts which would contribute to identity, cohesiveness and continuity. There is some concern regarding the opportunities for artists to exhibit, demonstrate, or sell their crafts.
- There is a demand for more non-competitive co-ed sports, minority participation, and access to programs in low income areas.
- Sports clinics and demonstration classes need to be established in a variety of recreation programs.
- Activities/programs associated with trails, greenways and open space are of demand. Trail linkages between destination points are promoted. A trail policy promoting developed trail loops would benefit use.
- There is an increased demand for year-round outdoor recreation use due to the mild local winter climate. Citizens want support facilities open, i.e. parking, restrooms, concessions, etc.
- There was strong support for recreation/environmental programming to be developed along the river. Currently, access is insufficient.
- Natural areas have not been considered a high priority for recreation planning purposes, i.e. environmental education, passive recreation, etc. Also, safety in natural areas is a concern. There is high public awareness of the value of passive open park land close to home.
- There is strong public support for system wide beautification. Increased street tree planting, sidewalks and flower beds are a continuing demand. There is an interest to create a softer image in all parks and beautification areas.
- There is a lack of landscaping or it is of inconsistent quality around the departments' parks.
- The department of AEE and R&P does an adequate job maintaining grounds/facility maintenance, but because several other government departments are responsible for maintenance, it is insufficient to keep pace with program schedule demands, i.e. athletic fields.



- The departments' hours of operation are not adequate for program participation, often closed on weekdays, in the evening and weekends.
- There is need for programming to go beyond traditional theme to include extended services, e.g. child care, alternative to drugs, etc.
- Program longevity is not consistent. Some programs are deleted without notification.
- The greatest lack of programs exist in East Athens and the southeastern part of the county.
- Program fees need to be evaluated and adjusted for non-county residents.
- Most facilities lack classroom space.
- The departments need to establish a focal point for the other leisure providers.

### **Recommendations:**

The Leisure Services Departments must respond to community needs by providing a variety of leisure services to all citizens. These services should contribute to the general well being of all Athens-Clarke County citizens and enrich their quality of life.

- Additional specialized and certified staff is needed to diversify services, i.e., arts, special population, etc.
- Enhance the level of special events in the Arts & Cultural Activities Division, Environmental Education & Natural Resources Division, and Recreation Resources Division by cooperatively working with more co-sponsors and the Public Information Office.
- Develop a department-wide evaluation system for all program services to include:
  - Accountability for the program needs and budget requests.
  - Input from participants.
  - Evaluation suggestions from general public.
  - Assurance that goals are synonymous with community needs.
  - Goals setting and constructive staff self-appraisal.

The evaluation tools could be through interviews, written survey, outside evaluator, program records and participant growth or decline reports.

The Leisure Services program evaluation must be cyclical. Consideration must be given to fill needs, demographic statistics, and leisure patterns.

- Increase program services for special populations.
- Improve programs offered so they are multi-generation and family-oriented.



- Develop a fitness/wellness program. This program should be designed to contribute to personal fitness levels and should include beginner/intermediate/advanced levels for all ages.
- Decentralize the programs to all areas of Athens-Clarke County. Especially southeast and east Athens.
- The leisure services facilities should be open to meet the citizens needs for open use and organized program services. Specific complaints were made regarding inadequate scheduled weekend programs.
  - There should always be a developed scholarship program.
  - Program registrations needs to have a more flexible process.
  - Establish consistent program time tables.
  - Current programs need to be examined for effectiveness, i.e., re-organize the Grand Slam Program to several different locations and enhance the program delivery to more effectively direct the participants.
  - Reduce exclusive use programs/activities.
  - Develop more demonstration classes above the introductory level.
  - Encourage more interpretive programming and activities associated with trails, such as running, walking, cycling and horseback riding.
  - Offer more workshops, seminars or master classes with professional artists.
  - Explore possibilities of supporting professional artists in Athens-Clarke County.
  - Enhance special events to attract tourism income. There is good potential for linking with other cities/counties festivals and Olympics.
  - Encourage more community groups to sponsor programs.

**Aquatics Programs** - Expand beyond "learn to swim". They should include classes for the older citizens, working population, safe boating classes, swimnastics, etc. Implement more non-traditional water recreation.

**Sports and Athletics** - Continue the current level of sports. Increase coordination with other recreation providers and act more as a liaison with sports groups to maintain a responsible and non-exclusive use standard for athletic programs, especially at the Youth Sport Complex. Develop a balance of team sports [baseball, softball, soccer and dual/individual competitions (tennis, golf, jogging, etc.)]. Games at the individual recreation centers should be enhanced to include more diversity (shuffleboard, board games, chess, etc.).

**Clubs** - Enhance club participation (doll collectors, photographers, airplane flying, bird watchers, etc.) for social interaction and the opportunity to share common interests, exhibits and participate in competition.

Arts and Cultural Activities - Increase arts and cultural programs on a community level (both instructional, and recreational) with dance, crafts, exhibits, drama, music and other activities that require developed skills.

- Determine the need and feasibility of expanding the Lyndon House to serve more participants and diverse programs.
- Increase awareness of and promote cooperation with various community groups, schools, centers and individual artists relative to the areas of Arts and Cultural Resources.
- Develop and implement quality brochures and a marketing plan for Arts and Cultural Resources county-wide.
- Increase county-wide exhibitions and events.

After School Programs - Enhance programs to offer self-directed and supervised leisure activities. Here is where joint-use agreements with schools would be of great benefit.

Senior Citizens - Increase the variety of programs and resources for the older adult. Allow the seniors to be involved in organizing, planning and implementing their programs and services.

Special Populations - The staff in each division should be trained to deal with the specialized needs of the physically and mentally challenged population. Increase integration of special populations into all program services to encourage mainstreaming (camps, swimming, arts, exercise classes, hikes, etc).

Camps - Camps should be developed as part of the department-wide summer programs in all the program services, e.g., music, arts, outdoor/nature, etc.).

Community Services/Outreach - Enhance the relationship with community organizations. Encourage co-sponsorships. Become a greater alternative to drugs, alcohol, stress and deviant behavior.

Teens - Develop a stronger teen program. Allow the teens to organize and plan their own program services. It is recommended that a teen advisory council be developed to represent all areas of the Athens-Clarke County.

- Emphasize to the staff who work with teens that it's important to work with and through them rather than over and above them.
- Enhance internships with University of Georgia, Athens. Internships should be an on-going process each semester.

Environmental Education and Natural Resource Programs - The current programs are innovative, diverse and project a deep concern for the environment. However, they need to expand into more facilities (recreation centers, public housing, etc.). Adopt an environmental education program for all parks and include an interpretation program. Do not exclude heritage and history interpretation. The emphasis of a greenway system will create more nature/outdoor interpretive area for programming. Currently, outdoor adventure activities concentrate at a few select locations.

- Develop format for enhancing the environmental education and natural resources protection literacy. Conduct an on on-going public awareness program to inform the citizens of the stewardship of natural resources.
- Develop interpretive programs based upon family and community needs throughout the community.

## CONCLUSION

## **PARKS AND FACILITIES**

### **OVERVIEW OF NEED**

The demand for parks, facilities, and leisure services in Athens-Clarke County has never been greater and continues to grow. The key issues surrounding need relate to total park acreage; the distribution of that acreage throughout the county; and the diversity, number, location, and quality of facilities. These factors directly define, for each resident, his or her opportunity for meaningful recreation.

Present needs already exceed the capacity of the county's existing parks and facilities. According to national standards of the National Recreation and Parks Association, by 1995 the county will be short 750 acres (See figure 4). This shortage is the product of a growing population and the absence of an on-going park acquisition program.

With very few exceptions, the numbers and kinds of facilities have similarly not kept pace with the county's present and emerging demographics (See figure 5).

Coupled with a dramatic shift in the distribution of population, existing parks and facilities are not conveniently located to the areas that are growing most. The western and southeastern areas of the county that have the most new residents have little or no public park land. Public access to park land is also impaired by the limited availability of public transportation, pedestrian, and bicycle connections to parks. Currently, primary access to most parks and facilities is by private automobile.

Throughout the county the most immediate need is for neighborhood parks and for community parks, such as Bishop Park, that offer a variety of facilities. Additionally, there is a significant demand for certain special use facilities, such as a visual arts center, family aquatic center, a tennis center, and a gymnastics center.

As the community grows, so too does its special populations. There is a need to broaden the scope of facilities and to insure accessibility.

Finally, there is the community-wide need to incorporate public open space into the land use pattern. While Athens-Clarke County offers a number of individual park sites for direct recreation, it lacks a network of public greenways that protect environmental resources, such as the Oconee Rivers, and link the places where people live, work, shop, and play.



### **Recommendations:**

- Establish an on-going land acquisition program to correct existing park land shortages and to keep up with growing open space needs. Do this in conformance with the Land Acquisition Plan (Figure 7).
- Establish a land use policy that actively promotes the inclusion of public open space into the overall land use pattern of the community.
- Institute mechanisms within comprehensive land use planning, zoning and subdivision regulation that: (1) add to the supply of public open space, and (2) develop an interconnected pedestrian and bicycle system that links parks, public opens spaces, and other community resources.
- Negotiate a cooperative agreement with the Board of Education to develop neighborhood parks on elementary and middle school sites.
- Correct current facility shortages as soon as possible, and meet growing needs by using the adjusted park and facility standards provided in Figures 4 and 5. The type and location of new facilities should be based on documented needs in conformance with the master plan map (Figure 6).
- Improve access to recreation facilities through better public transportation routing and scheduling.
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle access to recreation facilities.

<b>PLANNING AREA:</b> Total County <b>YEAR:</b> 1995 <b>POPULATION:</b> 95,752							
PARK OR OPEN SPACE TYPE:	RECOM. TOTAL ACRES	RECOM. SIZE PER PARK ACRES	RECOM. NUMBER PARKS	EXISTING TOTAL ACRES	EXISTING NUMBER PARKS	NO. PARKS SURPLUS (DEFICIT)	PARK ACRES SURPLUS (DEFICIT)
Neighborhood Park	180	10	18	61	9	(9)	(119)
Community Park	622	100	6	166	3	(3)	(456)
Regional Park	1,436	600	2	1268	3	1	(168)

<b>PLANNING AREA:</b> Total County <b>YEAR:</b> 2010 <b>POPULATION:</b> 114,035							
PARK OR OPEN SPACE TYPE:	RECOM. TOTAL ACRES	RECOM. SIZE PER PARK ACRES	RECOM. NUMBER PARKS	EXISTING TOTAL ACRES	EXISTING NUMBER PARKS	NO. PARKS SURPLUS (DEFICIT)	PARK ACRES SURPLUS (DEFICIT)
Neighborhood Park	214	10	21	61	9	(12)	(153)
Community Park	741	100	7	166	3	(4)	(575)
Regional Park	1,711	600	3	1268	3	0	(443)

**Figure 4.**  
**Park Land Standards and Need Projection**

<b>PLANNING AREA:</b> Total County <b>YEAR:</b> 1995 <b>POPULATION:</b> 95,752					
		2000	2005	2010	
		103,936	108,986	114,035	
PARK FACILITY TYPE:	ADJ. RECOM. FACILITY STANDARD	EXISTING FACILITIES TOTAL	1995 FACIL. SURPLUS (DEFICIT)	2010 FACIL. SURPLUS (DEFICIT)	COMMENTS
Nature Center	1/Cnty*	1	0	0	
Equestrian Center	1/Cnty*	0	(1)	(1)	Can be revenue generator
Organized Camps	2/Cnty	0	(2)	(2)	Can be revenue generator
Campsites (R/V and Tent)	50/Cnty	0	(50)	(50)	Can be revenue generator
Trails:					
Fitness	1mi/10000 Pop	0	(9)	(11)	
Hiking	1 mi/2500 Pop	17	(21)	(29)	
Mountain Biking	1mi/15000 Pop	0	(6)	(8)	
Equestrian	1mi/7500 Pop	3.5	(9)	(12)	
Visual Arts Center	1/Cnty*	1	0	0	Existing facility too small to meet current demand
Performing Arts Center	2/Cnty*	2	0	0	One facility too small to be practical
Multi-purpose Community Centers	1/10000 Pop	9	(1)	(2)	Existing centers too small.
Basketball	1/5000 Pop	21	2	(4)	Existing courts in poor condition
Tennis Courts	1/2500 Pop	19	(19)	(27)	Shortage of lighted and competition grade courts
Baseball/Softball Fields	1/2500 Pop	20	(18)	(26)	Shortage of lighted and competition grade fields
Soccer Fields	1/5000 Pop	9	(10)	(14)	Shortage of lighted and competition grade fields
Racquetball/Handball Courts	1/20000 Pop	0	(5)	(6)	
Golf Courses	1/Cnty	0	(1)	(1)	Can be revenue generator
Swimming Pools	1/20000 Pop	5	0	(1)	Existing pools in deteriorating condition
Gymnasiums	1/10000 Pop	3	(6)	(8)	Gymnastics center can be revenue generator.
Multi-purpose Fields	1/5000 Pop	9	(10)	(14)	Most suitable for neighborhood parks

\* National Standards not available

**Figure 5.**  
**Park Facility Standards and Need Projection**

## PARK SYSTEM

To be effective, parks and facilities must be part of a total park system that comprehensively meets the leisure needs of the community. There must be:

- Greenways that create a network of public open space and park land extending throughout the county
- Neighborhood parks, where children and families can do a variety of spontaneous activities within walking distance of home
- Community parks, located in the main sections of the county, which like Bishop Park, offer many different kinds of outdoor and indoor facilities
- Regional parks that encompass large natural areas and offer resource based outdoor recreation
- Special facilities for the arts, environmental education, and sports
- Pedestrian and bicycle path network to provide access to parks and facilities.

Each of these components has a vital role to play in the total recreation system. Each offers a different set of recreation opportunities. Together they offer a "balanced diet" of leisure time pursuits that enhances the total community's quality of life.

While the county's parks and facilities are more or less operated as a single system, they are not functionally interrelated. Most function independently as autonomous units, rather than as part of a dynamic system. There is presently no park classification system that prescribes a role for each park, its location requirements, and its physical characteristics.

Also missing, from the system-wide point of view, is comprehensive access to recreation facilities by multiple modes of transportation -- pedestrian, bicycle, public transportation, and automobile. Linkages between parks, neighborhoods, schools and other community and facilities are incomplete. Few pedestrian or bicycle connections exist and public transportation service to recreation facilities is inadequate.

### Recommendations:

- Establish a park and open space classification system to clarify the basic functional goals, design intent, use characteristics, and location requirements for each park. The following classification system for parks and public open space in Athens-Clarke County is recommended:

## **Greenways**

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**Functional Role:** Interconnected, linear open spaces that (1) protect natural landscape features such as rivers; (2) provide linkages to parks; and (3) offer opportunities for linear recreation, such as hiking, canoeing, bicycle riding.

**Land Requirement:** Varies, but lands should be interconnected to create a network of open spaces.

**Location and Access:** Located in conjunction with natural and man-made terrain features, such as streams, rivers, and right-of-ways; and interconnected to create a network of open spaces. Trail heads and parking areas should be located off of major collector or larger streets.

**Development:** Appropriate to the character of the land, development may include hiking trails, landscaped parkways, bike paths, canoe put-ins, parking areas at key access points, picnic facilities, and playgrounds.

## **Neighborhood Parks**

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**Functional Role:** Close to home, unstructured, family-oriented recreation opportunities during the daylight hours.

**Land Requirement:** 5-10 acres minimum.

**Location and Access:** Associated with elementary and middle schools or otherwise within residential districts; accessible by foot and bicycle.

**Development:** Multi-purpose, low maintenance facilities, providing unstructured play, practice fields, and passive areas for picnicking and trails.

## **Community Parks**

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**Functional Role:** Diversified indoor and outdoor recreation facilities and areas, serving a population within 10-15 minutes driving time.

**Land Requirement:** 100 acres minimum. Land characteristics to include areas suitable for sports fields, wooded areas, and areas of some scenic or environmental quality.

**Location and Access:** Access off of major arterial roadway, served by public transportation.

**Development:** 3 major components: (1) High impact facilities (50 acres +/-) such as community center, gymnasium, competition fields and courts; (2). Open space and free play areas including lawns and picnic groves (25 acres +/-); (3) Natural Areas (25 acres +/-). The natural areas in community parks are part of an overall recreation diversity that addresses whole family use. They are intended to offer limited environmental opportunities within the context of a community park and should not be considered as a substitute or replacement for natural resource based recreation at the regional parks.



## **Regional Parks**

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**Functional Role:** Natural resource-based, destination-oriented outdoor recreation, serving a population within one hour's drive. Day, evening, and overnight use.

**Land Requirements:** 500-1000 acres of land containing diverse, scenic natural and cultural environments, and features, such as lakes, streams, rock outcrops, and historic structures.

**Location and Access:** Convenient to major regional highway; served by public transportation.

**Development:** Facilities that are appropriate to the maintenance of an overall natural, and scenic character, including environmental education, picnicking, boating, horseback riding, fishing, hiking, camping, and bicycling. May also include special use facilities such as a golf course, equestrian center, historic or natural interpretive demonstration area, and meeting center.

## **Regional Cultural District**

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**Functional Role:** Cultural resource-based, destination oriented recreation serving a population within one hour's drive. Day and evening use.

**Land and Property Requirements:** Varies according to specific facilities within district

**Location and Access:** Existing downtown business and cultural district

**Development:** Appropriate facilities includes theaters, visual arts centers, amphitheaters, rehearsal studios, and plazas. Development should include unified graphics, streetscape enhancement and beautification.

## **Special Purpose Facilities**

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**Functional Role:** To satisfy the need for specialized recreation pursuits, such as gymnastics, aquatics, and visual arts.

**Land Requirements:** As per specific facility.

**Location and Access:** Locate within community or regional parks, where they are easily accessible from all parts of the county.

**Development:** Appropriate to specific facility.

## **Bicycle and Pedestrian Linkages**

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**Functional Role:** To provide non-vehicular access to parks and facilities, and to accommodate recreational walking and biking.

**Land Requirements:** Use public right-of-ways and utility easements.

**Location and Access:** Interconnected and linked to parks and facilities.

**Development:** appropriate pavement and signage.

## **PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN**

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan is the product of meeting Athens-Clarke County's recreational need through the establishment of a functional park system in the context of the county's terrain and land use. The plan (see figure 6) shows the following key components beginning with the greenway that knits the park system together.

### **Greenway**

The Greenway follows the principal rivers and streams of Athens-Clarke County, and forms the basic skeleton of the park system. It permanently establishes public open space within the increasingly urbanized landscape of the county and offers both conservation and recreation benefits. Along its length, sections of the Greenway may be left in a natural state or contain some combination of natural resource based recreation elements, including walking trails, bikeways, canoe trails, picnic areas, and natural and cultural interpretive areas. The Greenway will be accessible by trails from neighborhoods, the university, the downtown, parks and from special vehicular parking areas. All of the community parks, with the exception of Bishop Park, are directly adjacent to the Greenway. Some neighborhood parks are a part of the Greenway, while others are linked to it by pedestrian and bicycle trails.

While the minimum extent of the Greenway will be determined by the width of the floodplain, natural, cultural and recreational factors will determine the optimum dimensions that offer resource-based recreational destinations to the public..

A special master plan for the greenway should be prepared to guide land acquisition, conservation, recreational development, and environmental management. It should be based on an inventory and analysis of natural and cultural resources and land use. The master planning of the greenway should include consideration of the river corridor's extension into Jackson, Madison, and Oconee counties. Serious consideration should be given to the impact of the proposed water supply reservoir in Madison County on the environmentally sensitive land along Bear Creek and on the Middle Oconee River.

The Greenway should be shown and updated on all land use and subdivision documents of the Planning Commission. A land use mechanism should be implemented so that the Greenway is automatically and systematically considered, when any proposed land use conversion is reviewed. Incentives for the dedication of lands or conservation easements to the Greenway should be implemented.

### **Neighborhood Park**

There are twenty-two (22) neighborhood parks, located throughout the county convenient to residential areas. While a few presently exist, the majority of neighborhood parks shown on the plan are proposed and are located at elementary and middle schools. Schools already function as important centers of neighborhood life. In almost all cases the county's school sites are large enough to accommodate park development, without interfering with school

functions or long range expansion needs. Both the schools and the families that live in the area benefit from park development. This mutual benefit is the basis of a recommended cooperative agreement between the Department of Leisure Services and the Board of Education.

Neighborhood Parks are attractively landscaped and provide a wide range of informal leisure opportunities. They are designed to accommodate short term activities by small groups of people during daylight hours. Neighborhood parks range in size from 5-10 acres but may reach 20 acres or more.

The exact size and content of each neighborhood park will depend on the characteristics of the specific site. Emphasis is on multi-purpose and low maintenance outdoor facilities, including:

- Grassed open space and free play areas
- Woodland trails, demonstration gardens, wildflower meadows, etc.
- Informal sports fields suitable for soccer and softball practice or pick up games.
- Playground equipment, picnic tables, benches, etc.
- Paved walking paths

### **Community Parks**

There are six (6) community parks, that are located in the principal districts of the county. They are:

- Bishop Park (existing), located in west central Athens-Clarke;
- East Park (new), located in East Athens-Clarke;
- Memorial Park (existing), located in south central Athens-Clarke;
- North Park (existing, renamed), located in north Athens-Clarke;
- South Park (new), located in southeast Athens-Clarke;
- West Park (new), located in west Athens-Clarke.

While each community park has its own special character, each provides a combination of intensive and non-intensive development ranging from natural areas to competitive sports facilities. The objective of community park development is to offer a diversity of recreational opportunities so that an entire family can follow their recreational preferences in some proximity to one another. Community Parks accommodate large numbers of people for a wide variety of day and evening uses.

The recommended size of a community park is 100 acres and generally serves a population within 10-15 minutes driving time. Each is located in an area accessible by a variety of transportation alternatives. All community parks are positioned for relatively easy access to the Perimeter Highway, and should be conveniently connected to public transportation. All should be supported by a well designed bicycle and pedestrian access system.



Each community park contains three (3) major areas.

1. Natural Area:

- Minimum 25 contiguous acres of high quality natural environment
- 2-5 miles of well marked hiking/walking trails
- Interpretive trail system and/or outdoor interpretive shelter

2. Open Space and Free Play Area:

- 25 acres spread throughout the park
- Several grassed and landscaped free play areas 1-5 acres each in size
- 2-5 miles of paved walking paths/sidewalks connecting all areas of park
- 1-2 major age-appropriate playscape apparatus
- 4 full service barbecue shelters
- 10-15 Picnic shelters with tables
- Appropriate landscaping, lighting, and site furniture.

3. Facility Intensive Area:

- 2-4 lighted youth baseball fields
- 2 lighted adult softball/baseball fields
- 2-4 lighted youth soccer fields
- 1 lighted adult soccer field
- 1 lighted multi-purpose field
- 4 lighted outdoor basketball courts
- 6 lighted tennis courts
- Community Center that includes a minimum of 6 large multi-purpose class or instructional rooms as well as storage space and administrative offices.
- Gymnasium with men's and women's locker facilities
- A 5-10 acre site suitable for future construction of special-use facility such as gymnastic center, aquatic center, competitive sports tournament facilities, etc. should be reserved near Community Center.
- Parking facilities for a minimum of 300 vehicles

The exact allocation of the components found within each community park depends upon specific site characteristics, community needs, and citizen demand. The goal of providing a broad diversity of leisure opportunities within the context of the entire park system should be the overall guide.

## **Regional Park**

The master plan shows one (1) regional park, Sandy Creek Park, which already exists and includes Sandy Creek Nature Center. It is recommended that contiguous, additional lands (400-600 acres) be acquired to accommodate future regional park demand.

It is recommended that Sandy Creek Park be enhanced as a regional destination, whereby the park offers a variety of pursuits for the entire family to fulfill a one day or longer stay. Feasibility studies should determine additional or expanded facilities that are appropriate to the park's character and function. Possibilities include an equestrian center, an RV campground, and a golf course. Feasibility depends on user demand, cost, revenue potential, compatibility with existing facilities, and land suitability. It is recommended that the functional connection to Sandy Creek Nature Center be strengthened by shuttle transportation



and bicycle access. The presentation of the park to the arriving public on Highway 441 should be enhanced through signage, the development of a parkway, or land acquisition for frontage.

Sandy Creek Nature Center continues to be the center of environmental education. It is recommended that (1) the wildlife exhibit of Memorial Park be incorporated into Sandy Creek, on the basis of a feasibility study; and (2) a demonstration farm/homestead exhibit be developed.

### **Cultural District**

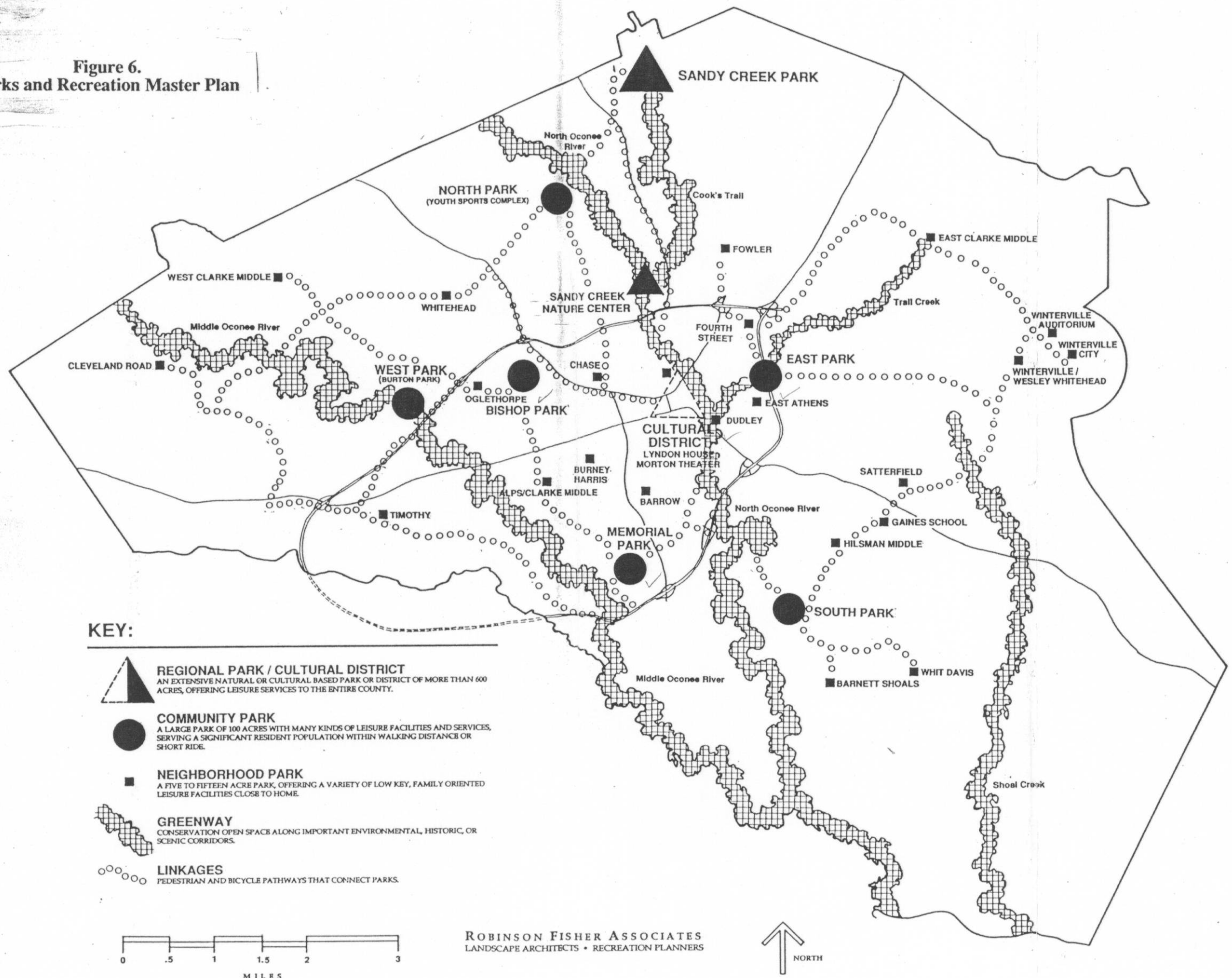
Downtown Athens is the cultural and historical center of the county. The master plan recommends that its cultural and historical resources be managed and highlighted in a way analogous to how natural resources are managed and showcased at Sandy Creek Park. Within the public indoor and outdoor spaces of the Cultural District, there will be cultural programming from theater events to painting classes, from historic tours to festivals. The Cultural District will draw participants from a multi-county region and, with the university, is the county's principal tourist destination. Principal facilities and public spaces of the Cultural District include:

- Lyndon House
- Morton Theatre,
- government buildings
- College Square and public streetscape
- Brumby House and Welcome Center
- proposed Civic Center
- proposed Foundry Street development, including museum
- proposed Amphitheater and Plaza
- proposed Heritage Trail development of the Greenway

### **Linkages**

The master plan shows every park connected to a system of bicycle and pedestrian paths. These are located within public road right-of-ways or within electric power or gas pipeline utility easements. The bike and pedestrian path system should be planned and implemented cooperatively with the Planning Commission and the State and County Departments of Transportation. The system should be shown and updated on all land use and subdivision documents of the Planning Commission. A land use mechanism should be implemented so that the trail system automatically and systematically grows with land use conversion and development.

**Figure 6.**  
**Parks and Recreation Master Plan**



# ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

## PROPERTY ACQUISITION

To create the park system required for the next 15 years, a property acquisition plan (Figure 7) is recommended. A program for its implementation should acquire the long term public use of land through fee simple ownership, lease, easements, and cooperative use agreements. The plan indicates zones within which land should be acquired. Based on the functional requirements of the park system, it is critically important to adhere to these zones, especially in the case of land for community parks. While special opportunities for acquisition should not be overlooked, they should not dictate park distribution.

The acquisition program should proactively seek land where it is needed rather than reactively acquiring land where it is easily available. The result of the latter approach will be parks located on the fringes of the county that are remote from where people live, poorly accessible and unconnected to the rest of the park system. The Youth Sports Complex is an example of this. While it is positioned to meet future demand some ten years from now, its location seriously impairs its service to current demand. Acquiring land for future need is an intelligent part of an on-going acquisition program, but it does not eliminate the necessity to meet current demand in the areas where it exists.

The Greenway should be implemented through an acquisition and conservation easement program, based on a Greenway Master Plan. The Leisure Services Department should work cooperatively with the Oconee Greenways Commission and the Land Conservation Trust of the Oconee.