



Executive Summary

The initiation of the Suwanee, Georgia Recreation and Open Space Needs Assessment was the response to a ten-year population growth rate of 262 percent that saw the development of the vast majority of the community's farms and wooded natural environments. Also influenced by the Georgia Greenspace Program and efforts by Gwinnett County to identify critical land for preservation and recreation, the study's focus was on identifying undeveloped parcels within the Suwanee City limits that would be fundamental to maintaining the rural character and providing recreation outlets for citizens. Secondary to identifying green space preservation opportunities was the assessment of recreation programs and activities available to Suwanee citizens through county, private and athletic association organizations.

An important aspect of the master plan was developing an understanding of the characteristics of Suwanee's population and growth. From 1990 to 2000, Suwanee's population grew from 2,412 to 8,725. Projections for the next ten years reflect a growth rate that could see Suwanee propel to a population of over 20,000 people by the year 2020. Demographic research revealed a community that is increasing in ethnic diversity while maintaining a young population (39.4 percent between the ages of 25-44). Economic statistics show a community that is becoming increasingly more affluent with a median household income over \$8,000 greater than other residents within Gwinnett County.

The master plan involved an extensive public input process that included interviews with city staff and interested citizens, a workshop comprised of members of a citizens steering committee, public meetings and a survey mailed randomly to 600 Suwanee residents. The survey, which had a scientifically significant response rate of 21 percent, revealed the number one priority of respondents was the preservation of natural habitats found within the city limits. This was followed by a desire to purchase land for the development of safe pedestrian routes throughout the city. Top priorities identified in the various other public input phases included:

- open space for youth activities
- small non-programmed spaces
- trails providing better connection around the community
- keep the community green
- purchase land strictly for preservation
- develop partnerships with schools and other community organizations for shared cost of facilities
- develop a clear strategy for plan implementation
- build community support and educate citizens about the plan
- address the swimming needs of the community
- purchase critical pieces of property around the community to prevent development by the private sector



Analysis completed of Suwanee's existing public recreation facilities found five city owned parks and one county owned park. Prevalent throughout the city is the existence of neighborhoods with private recreation areas that include tennis courts, swimming pools and other amenities. Using standards established by the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) for park and facility distribution within a community, the planning team identified shortages and inadequacies in the existing recreation service offerings.

Following the NRPA suggested park land ratio of 10.5 acres per 1,000 population, the planning team found Suwanee to be very well served with over 330 acres of available park land. This high park acreage is attributable to the existence of George Pierce Park, a county owned facility making up 304 acres of the city's overall park acreage. Figure ES.1 provides a look at existing city, county and private recreation area acreages in and around Suwanee.

Private/Neighborhood Homeowner's Association Facilities*	Acreage
Chattahoochee Run	
Subdivision/Chattahoochee Point	11.55
Landsdowne	1.66
Stoneridge/Forest Plantation	1.78
Caswyk-McGinnis	5.16
Harrington Farms	2.52
Martins Farm	1.24
Maple Ridge	6.41
Ruby Forest	2.05
Bayswater Commons	3.25
Barrington	2.00
Total	35.62
City Owned Park Facilities	
City Hall Park	.50
Martins Farm Road Park	14.00
Moore Road Park	4.41
Main Street Park	.50
Richard Trice Trail*	9.00
Total	28.41
County Owned Park Facilities	
George Pierce Park	304.00
Settles Bridge Road	217.00
Total	521.00

Figure ES.1

Analysis of the service areas of existing parks reveals that the community is not well served in terms of accessible parks to residents. The NRPA suggests at a minimum parks be located within ½ mile of all residents. The existing city owned parks in Suwanee are primarily found central to the city. The existence of private recreation facilities within neighborhood associations provides recreation outlets for many residents, however others have no accessible parks within close proximity to their homes.

A park the size of George Pierce with a variety of amenities provides a services radius of 2 miles. This service radius meets most Suwanee residents with the exception of those found in the extreme northwest and southwest portions of the city. While most residents are within the service area of George Pierce Park, accessibility via trails and sidewalks is limited due to barriers presented by roads such as Peachtree Industrial Boulevard, Buford Highway and Lawrenceville Suwanee Road.

Standards established by NRPA for recreation amenities such as athletic fields, athletic courts, walking

trails, swimming facilities and recreation centers also provide a baseline for communities to follow. Review of the current facilities in Suwanee finds shortages for tennis, basketball and volleyball courts, playgrounds, a gymnasium, swimming pool and trail system. The majority of available facilities are found in George Pierce Park. Future development planned by the county in George Pierce will provide tennis courts, youth



ball fields, volleyball courts and a community center. Other amenities that have been discussed but to date have not been funded are a swimming pool and gymnasium in the new George Pierce Park community center. Figure ES.2 provides a look at existing facilities as well as needs based on future growth projections.

NRPA Standards for Park Facilities* (Based on projected population growth provided by the Suwanee Comprehensive Town Master Plan)	NRPA Recommendations	Existing Number of Park Facilities	*2000 Facility Need based on a pop. of		
			8,725	*2010 Facility Need based on a pop. of 15,065	*2020 Facility Need based on a pop. of 21,407
Acreage	10.5/1,000	332.41	91.61	158.18	224.77
Outdoor Basketball	1/5,000	1	1.75	3.01	4.28
Hand Ball	1/20,000	0	0.44	0.75	1.07
Tennis	1/2,000	0	4.36	7.53	10.70
Volleyball	1/5,000	0	1.75	3.01	4.28
Baseball/Softball	1/2,500	5	3.49	6.03	8.56
Football	1/20,000	1	0.44	0.75	1.07
Soccer	1/4,000**	5	2.18	3.77	5.35
Golf Course	1/50,000	0	0.17	0.30	0.43
Golf Driving Range	1/50,000	0	0.17	0.30	0.43
Trail System	1 mile/5,000**	2.1	1.75	3.01	4.28
Swimming Pools	1/20,000	0	0.44	0.75	1.07
Running Track	1/20,000	0	0.44	0.75	1.07
Playgrounds	1/2,500	2	3.49	6.03	8.56
Gymnasiums	1/20,000	0	0.44	0.75	1.07
Community Centers	1/50,000	0	0.17	0.30	0.43
Community Room	N/A	1	N/A	N/A	N/A
Indoor Pools	1/50,000	0	0.17	0.30	0.43
Indoor Roller Hockey	1/100,000**	0	0.09	0.15	0.21
Outdoor Roller Hockey	1/25,000**	0	0.35	0.60	0.86
Racquetball	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Inline Skating Court	1/25,000**	0	0.35	0.60	0.86
Picnic Pavillion	1/2,000	5	4.36	7.53	10.70

**Standards Developed By Lose & Associates, Inc.

Figure ES.2

planning teams experience with other communities, recommendations have been formulated to improve the availability of parks and protect the natural characteristics that exist in Suwanee today. The following are recommendations to help achieve the goals that have been expressed by the citizens of Suwanee.

- Zoning Review and Modifications
 - Formulate modifications to mixed-use district zoning category for placing permanent protection on donated open space
 - Reevaluate the goals of the buffer requirements to include connectivity
 - Increase buffer or landscape strips along right-of-ways
 - Shift goals of tree ordinance from replacement to protection

Analysis of the recreation delivery system in Suwanee finds many private providers in addition to the county. Review of public opinion regarding programs revealed most citizens feel their needs are being met. The leading opinion was one of placing priority on supplementing county facilities and acquiring land for future park development.

Through comparisons with other communities similar to Suwanee that provide an organized parks and recreation department, it was determined that Suwanee could expect to spend approximately \$1.2 million annually to operate a full service parks and recreation department. Considered a lower priority at this time by citizens, a recommendation has been made to fund a parks and recreation maintenance crew to operate under the Public Works and Inspections Department.

Based on comparisons to national standards, input from the various public input phases, and the



- Modify ordinance to separate trees required for parking lots and buffers from the total tree density requirements
- Include incentives for developers to protect existing trees
- Make open space requirements necessary in all zoning categories

- **General Policy Recommendations**

- **Greenways**

1. Provide a system of trails, sidewalks and bike lanes that connect schools, parks, community open space and public facilities.
2. Develop a Comprehensive Greenway and Bicycle Master Plan.
3. Adopt greenway standards that, a) separate them from vehicular traffic whenever possible, b) are attractively landscaped to promote safe use for citizens, c) promote resource preservation and enhancement in all design aspects, d) have crossings at major roadway sections that are vertically separated from vehicular travel lanes, and e) connect to proposed county or regional greenway facilities.

- **Open Space**

1. Provide open space at all public facilities developed by the City of Suwanee.
2. Open space should be a major component of the Old Town area.
3. Open space purchased for neighborhood park facilities should include a balance of forested and open field areas.
4. Landscape strips at a minimum of 40' should be established along major roadways. No tree removal or impervious materials should be allowed within landscape strips.
5. Remnants of historic farms should be protected and interpreted as part of the open space program.
6. Standards for open space maintenance should be developed that reflect the desired level of citizen use and access.
7. Stream corridor buffers should be increased to a minimum of 100' from the top of the bank on both sides of all streams with watersheds greater than 20 acres.

- **Recreation**

1. The City should provide neighborhood parks within one-half mile of all residential areas that are not served by county or homeowners' association recreation areas.
2. The City should provide basic team sport practice facilities within selected neighborhood parks. Others should provide playgrounds, picnic facilities and open play fields and trails.
3. Access to the Chattahoochee River should be provided from federal, state, county or city-owned park property.
4. Open space, parks and greenways within the City should be maintained in a safe and aesthetically pleasing manner. Perpetual funding should be identified and maintained for all facilities.
5. The City should seek out funding partnerships with the county and other organizations.



Review of existing park service radius', connectivity, and open space has resulted in the recommendation of 13 property acquisitions for the development of a city-wide park system including a network of trails linking neighborhoods to community services. Various levels of development have been recommended in each of the five neighborhood parks (NH), six mini parks (MP), and two town centers (TC). Listed below are the total opinions of probable cost for each category of development.

Development and Land Acquisition Cost Summary

• (5) Neighborhood Parks	\$8,987,767
• (6) Mini Parks	\$4,531,000
• (2) Town Center Developments	\$4,800,000
• Greenway Development (9.5 Miles)	\$7,125,000

With limited available funds for costly land acquisitions and facility developments, the following represent a list of priorities based on key property acquisitions and needed park developments.

Tier One – 1st Priority

	<u>Land Cost</u>	<u>Acreage</u>
NH #1	\$2.8 Million	62 acres
TC #1	\$1.8 Million	24 acres
TC #2	\$3.0 Million	10 acres
NH #4	\$1.2 Million	160 acres
MP #5	\$20,000	2 acres

Tier Two – 2nd Priority

	<u>Land Cost</u>	<u>Acreage</u>
MP #3	\$600,000	4 acres
MP #6	\$625,000	5 acres
MP #1	\$250,000	5 acres
MP #2	\$85,000	1.7 acres
NH #2	\$720,000	10 acres
NH #5	\$125,000	30 acres
NH #3	\$650,000	10 acres

Tier Three – 3rd Priority

	<u>Land Cost</u>	<u>Acreage</u>
MP #4	\$2,000,000	10 acres
Greenway Development	\$7,125,000	9.5 miles



The master plan includes a variety of funding options as well as projected costs for maintaining each of the new park sites. Figure ES.3 provides a look at projected maintenance costs. Costs were based on required man hours (as established in NRPA standards), multiplied by the salary of the employee performing the work. Salaries were based on the hourly rate of a typical Suwanee public works employee of \$17.55/hr, which includes 35% for the cost of benefits.

Park	Size Category	Acres	Costs
NH #1*	Mini	61	\$ 18,252
NH #2	Mini	10	\$ 18,252
NH #3	Mini	10	\$ 18,252
NH #4	Community	160	\$ 217,900
NH #5	Neighborhood	25	\$ 36,504
TC #1	Community (intense maintenance)	24	\$ 217,900
TC #2	Mini	10	\$ 18,252
MP #1	Mini	5	\$ 18,252
MP #2	Mini	2	\$ 18,252
MP #3	Mini	4	\$ 18,252
MP #4	Mini	10	\$ 18,252
MP #5	Mini	2	\$ 18,252
MP #6	Mini	5	\$ 18,252

*NH #1 should be calculated at a lower rate, since the majority of the site is to remain natural.

Figure ES.3

The following options for funding land acquisition and facility development have been discussed in great detail in the master plan report.

- Grant Funds
- Georgia Greenspace Program
- Bond Program
- Joint Ventures
- Private Partnerships
- Impact Fees