



Recreation Delivery Analysis

In addition to completing analysis and recommendations for open space and facilities, the planning team was charged with conducting a recreation needs assessment regarding programming available for Suwanee residents. The citizens of Suwanee are currently served by programs offered through the Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation Department and various private organizations throughout the city.

Private recreation providers located in the City of Suwanee at the time this plan was developed included the Suwanee Sports Academy, Creative Movement and Dance, North Georgia Academy of Dance, Ladies' Workout Express, Bodyplex, and various martial arts centers. Cooperative efforts between Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation and various athletic associations provide additional opportunities for Suwanee adults and youths in sports.

Gwinnett County offers a wide variety of programming for citizens of all ages. The range of opportunities provided include martial and cultural arts, archery, athletics, bowling, card clubs and a long list of others. Many programs are held at the George Pierce Community Building and athletic fields, providing accessible programs for citizens of Suwanee.

Review of public opinion regarding programs revealed that over 50 percent of residents were not sure if programs were inadequate for adults and youths. An average of 22 percent felt programs were adequate, while remaining respondents believed there were inadequacies for one of four groups- youth males, youth females, adult males or adult females. These numbers are difficult to use when making an assessment of the overall satisfaction of the community for recreation programs.

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The large portion of respondents who indicated they were not sure of the adequacy of programs serves to confirm one of two things: 1.) that they or their families do not participate in programs, or 2.) that the programs in which they are interested are offered through an organization and therefore they have no programming complaints.

During the various stages of the public input process, minimal comments were heard regarding the adequacy of programs offered in the community. Most residents who were involved in the process had bigger concerns on issues related to facilities. Members of the community identified the inability to use athletic fields located in George Pierce, Collins Hill or Bogan Parks due to year round programming by the county for athletic associations, tournaments and county-sponsored programs. Residents expressed a need to have parks and open space inclusive of practice fields for team sports and unorganized pick-up play. Other issues were for residents who do not live in subdivisions with swim/tennis amenities. The unavailability of those facilities in county or city-owned parks in Suwanee requires those residents to travel to Collins Hill or Bogan Parks to access pools and tennis courts.

A major goal of this master plan's recreation and facilities assessment was to determine if there is a current need for the City of Suwanee to provide additional programming and facilities through an organized parks and recreation department. Through the vari-



ous stages of the public input process, a need was determined to improve on the existing recreation opportunities that exist in Suwanee. However, those needs could be accomplished through a variety of methods free from the development of an organized department. The cost of a full service parks and recreation department would take valuable city funds that could be utilized for other, more critical recreation needs.

In 1996, a study completed by the Institute of Community and Area Development found that, on average, cities with a total population of 15,000 or less with an organized parks and recreation department spent \$24.44 per capita on operating expenditures and \$8.41 per capita on capital expenditures. Snellville, Roswell, Duluth and Kennesaw are four communities similar in size and characteristic to Suwanee that fund an organized parks and recreation department in the Atlanta metropolitan region.

In 1996, Snellville had a population of 14,456 and employed 45 full and part-time parks and recreation staff. The total operating cost equaled nearly \$560,000 with another \$16,000 dedicated to capital expenses. The city of Roswell reported spending \$6.1 million for operating and capital expenses with a staff of over 370 full and part time people. The city of Duluth spent an estimated \$1.4 million in 1996, with \$155,000 of that total dedicated to operating expenditures.

An interview with the Kennesaw Parks and Recreation Department revealed that their operating budget for 2000 was approximately \$850,000. Capital expenditures totaled an additional \$350,000. The parks department operates with four administrative staff and twelve maintenance staff. Figure 5.1 provides the per capita operating and capital expenditures as well as total staff numbers for each department. Statistics for Snellville, Roswell and Duluth were based on 1996 estimates, while Kennesaw statistics were based on 2000 funding values.

	Population	Per Capita Operating Expenditures	Per Capita Capital Expenditures	Total Full-Time Staff	Total Part-Time Staff
Snellville	14,456	\$38.68	\$1.10	5	40
Roswell	54,909	\$89.88	\$22.04	72	300
Duluth	12,602	\$12.28	\$99.62	3	1
Kennesaw	22,000	\$38.64	\$15.91	16*	
Less than 15,000		\$24.44	\$8.41	3	10

*Total includes full and part-time staff. Accurate breakdown not available.

Figure 5.1

Using the 1996 per capita spending of \$24.44 and \$8.41, and an inflation multiplier of 5% per capita for five years, the current average operating and capital costs would be \$46.52. This would place operating expenses for Suwanee at around \$405,887 annually to operate an average department. To operate at a higher level, similar to Roswell, the city would spend \$112.02 per capita or \$977,374 annually for operations and capital projects. Adjusted for inflation the cost would be \$1,247,404.

In the City of Suwanee for fiscal year 2001-2002, a one mill property tax increase generates approximately \$316,000 per year. As such, it would require 1.5 mills to fund a department at the adjusted state average, or 4 mills to fund operation of a department at a level similar to Roswell's.



Recreation Recommendations

The critical needs for the City of Suwanee are primarily related to park land, open space and facilities. Amenity shortages identified by the community such as practice fields, playgrounds, swimming facilities, multi-purpose trails and tennis courts will require development by the county, city or other entities. Current plans by the county for George Pierce Park include the construction of two additional youth baseball/softball fields, tennis courts and a community center with a possible swim facility. The completion of those facilities will remove the burden of the city to provide a pool and tennis courts for public use. It should be the goal of the City of Suwanee to supplement the county offerings by providing practice facilities, open space, multi-use trails and passive park amenities.

At this time, an organized recreation department funded by the city appears to be a lower priority than protecting land. Therefore, it is not recommended that a department be formed. Although development of an organized parks and recreation department is not currently recommended, the city should continue to monitor participation trends of county and athletic association programs. At such time that interest exceeds the ability of existing entities to provide programming needs, the city should reconsider a formal parks and recreation department option. Joint programming opportunities with not-for-profit organizations, such as the YMCA or a Boys and Girls Club, should be explored to share operations and development costs.

Until such time that a formal department is required, the city should add a parks and recreation maintenance crew to operate under the supervision of the Public Works and Inspections Department. The maintenance crew should be responsible for the regular maintenance of park facilities including trails, practice fields and recreation open space. Fields that are utilized by athletic associations should be self-scheduled by the associations with final approval granted through city council. Fields should not be allowed for scheduling greater than 50% of the available time and the city should reserve the right to use the fields during prime times. All field grooming, lining and replacement of nets on soccer goals should be the responsibility of the athletic associations. Funding for facility maintenance should be identified and consistently provided. Maintenance cost projections have been provided in section 7 of the master plan report.

The future of recreation in Suwanee rests on the decisions that are made today. As land is consumed by development, the ability to locate additional parks within the city limits will become more difficult. As the population continues to grow the need for expanded recreation programming will be inevitable. The task at hand is to secure the remaining valuable land for open space and recreation to ensure a positive future for current residents and those of the next generation.