

A New Era for Parks

Organizational Structures for Parks Coordination



Including:

- Departmental Coordination (ERCD and Recreation & Parks)
- The Continuum of Parks Planning
- Parks Design, Maintenance and Stewardship
- Future Resource Needs

November 29, 2001

Introduction

During budget worksessions this spring, the Board of Commissioners asked the County Manager to explore the needs related to future parks development and the relationship between the two County departments most involved in parks acquisition, planning and development – the Environment and Resource Conservation Department and the Recreation and Parks Department.

The following sections of this report explore:

- the substantial work to date on joint parks acquisition and development with the Towns
- the changes that have occurred (nationally and locally) in the concept of parks and open spaces in recent years
- the continuum of parks, including potential roles and responsibilities of ERCD and R&P as parks are acquired and created, and
- the important maintenance and stewardship opportunities and challenges that will be faced

I. Previous Efforts in Planning for Parks

The past five years have witnessed a significant amount of change in parks planning, both for Orange County government, and Countywide with other jurisdictions. A series of four reports from 1996-2000 broadened the scope and extent of parks planning, and the opening of the County's first true park in 2000, Efland-Cheeks Park, ushered in a new era of park facilities.

- The Report of the Recreation and Parks Work Group (1996), developed recommendations to “establish principles for coordinated county-wide recreation and park facility planning, foster greater cooperation in use of existing facilities, and support private recreation providers and public/private partnerships.” The work group developed a number of recommendations presented to the Assembly of Governments, including setting parks standards, an inventory of park and recreation facilities, and the inclusion of park facilities in new school sites.
- The Report on Coordination of Recreation and Parks Services in Orange County (1997) described different options for the improvement of services to the community through intergovernmental coordination of parks and recreation functions.

- a long-range plan for parks and recreation,
- acquisition and protection of good park sites,
- a lead role for Orange County in funding, acquisition, development, ownership, and maintenance of new facilities,
- coordination and work toward partial consolidation of selected functions, and
- a countywide bond proposal

This report set the stage for the successful 1997 Countywide Parks Bond.

- The Report of the Joint Master Recreation and Parks (JMRP) Work Group (1999), which followed up on many of the recommendations from the 1996 and 1997 reports. As a part of this report, an inventory of facilities and community parks needs was developed for each jurisdiction, and recommendations were forwarded on a variety of issues, including:
 - Formation of an Intergovernmental Parks Work Group to share information and explore collaboration opportunities,
 - Possible funding mechanisms,
 - Use of the County's Lands Legacy program as a vehicle for coordinated parkland acquisition, and
 - The need for a bond referendum to address the current parkland deficit.

- The Potential Joint Capital Funding for Parks report, presented to the Assembly of Governments in October, 2000, further explored the possibilities for joint parks – suggesting a mechanism for County and Town roles for future joint parks, including County lead in capital funding and land acquisition, and potential Town roles in operation and maintenance of joint facilities. No action has been taken on the ideas of this report to date.

The needs identified in these last two reports were precursors to the successful 2001 Parks, Recreation and Open Space bond.

Although many new ideas have been considered and implemented in the last five years, the idea of County departments coordinating internally on parks planning actually dates back many years. Since the first Recreation and Parks Element of the Plan was created in 1988, there has been coordination of parks planning and design in Orange County. The 1988 Recreation and Parks Element of the Comprehensive Plan was developed by resource preservation personnel in Planning and the Recreation and Parks Director.

With the creation of the Environment and Resource Conservation Department in December 1999 and the focus on resource preservation, this relationship has expanded between ERCD and Recreation and Parks. The 1999 Joint Master Recreation and Parks report and the 2000 Joint Capital Funding for Parks report were created by ERCD, in conjunction with Recreation and Parks.

Furthermore, as the Lands Legacy Program acquires new parklands as well as resource conservation lands, the nature of parks planning and design have changed. Parks surveys around the nation confirm an increased interest in “Olmsteadian” parks – i.e., flexible open spaces and meadows within parks, for a variety of current and future uses (please see Attachment A). As the County enters a new era of parks acquisition, design and operation, the need for examining and confirming the relationship and responsibilities between the two departments has become prudent and necessary.

II. The Continuum of Parks Responsibilities –

ERCD & Recreation and Parks

To assist in evaluating the process by which new parks can be created, a continuum of the parks process has been developed from inception to completion.

The table on the following pages examines the stages of creating and operating a park, and explores the possible roles of the two departments given their mission and charge and their relevant expertise.

It should be noted that the tables address only the County's internal departmental duties and assignments. In each step, it is implicit that the progress of parkland acquisition and park development includes regular guidance provided by the County Manager and the Board of Commissioners.

The Park Process Continuum – Current and Potential Roles and Responsibilities

Step	Activity	Possible Roles
1.	Planning (<i>Consistency with adopted Parks Plan, needed updates to the adopted plan, ensuring funding secured, gaining approval to proceed to identify sites</i>)	ERCD currently coordinates this step, with the involvement of R&P for consistency
2.	Site identification and evaluation	ERCD, using the Lands Legacy Program, is charged with this activity, The R&P Director is kept in the loop on progress
3.	Land acquisition (<i>includes negotiation, site evaluation, closing and transaction activities</i>)	ERCD handles this step, with the guidance of the Manager and Board of Commissioners. The R&P Director is kept apprised of progress and included on site evaluation visits
4.	Concept planning	With background in coordinating special projects and work groups, ERCD would take the lead in this effort. This step would heavily involve the new ERCD Open Space Design Specialist, with assistance from the R&P Director and Parks Services Supervisor, Planning Director and others as needed.
5.	Park site design (<i>construction drawings, infrastructure plans</i>)	ERCD staff and R&P jointly might handle this step. Outside consultants will likely be needed to complete architectural drawings
6.	Park construction oversight / project management	Both departments would have

		important roles in this step. The two new positions mentioned above, overseen by the two department directors, could take the lead responsibilities for this critical step.
7.	Programming the facilities	Once the project is completed, responsibility would shift for active recreation programming, operation & maintenance to R&P, via the Director and proposed Parks Superintendent. ERCD would be involved in programming and maintenance of low-impact recreation and natural areas
8.	Park maintenance and operation	R&P personnel would be responsible for routine maintenance and operation. ERCD would be involved regularly in advising on stewardship and maintenance, design changes of trails, maintaining integrity of natural areas.

Elaboration on the Steps Above

Step 1 – When a new park is proposed or scheduled in CIP, the ERC Director (with the assistance of the Land Conservation Manager and the Recreation and Parks Director), review the proposed park’s consistency with the Parks Element and the Land Use Element, identify and verify funding availability, and prepare a report outlining the steps needed to move forward on parkland acquisition. The BOCC then determines whether to proceed with park acquisition.

Step 2 – As done now, the ERC Director leads a team comprised of the Land Conservation Manager and Recreation and Parks Director to begin the process of site identification and evaluation for parks. The Comprehensive Resource GIS Database is used to evaluate suitable sites using the known parameters and needs for the park. This team will identify potential sites, develop a preliminary evaluation of the sites using previously-adopted criteria, and report to the Board. The Board narrows the list of sites to a small group of candidate sites. The Land Conservation Manager contacts the landowners of the finalist sites to ascertain their interest, and an evaluation is prepared of all candidate sites. The Board reviews the evaluation and instructs the Manager and ERC Director on site(s) where the County wishes to enter negotiation.

Step 3 – As currently done, the Land Conservation Manager and ERC Director prepare a full site evaluation and negotiate the acquisition of property in question, including appraisals and other reports where needed. Upon satisfactory completion of the negotiation process, the Land Conservation Manager oversees the transaction related activities (Phase I environmental assessments, surveys, appraisals), working with the County Attorney, and coordinates closing activities resulting in successful closing of the property.

Step 4 – This step involves preliminary planning for the use of the property. A Parks Design Team including the ERC Director, Land Conservation Manager, Recreation and Parks Director and Planning Director will work with the new Open Space Design Specialist (new position, approved last year effective 1/1/02) and other County resources as needed. It is also anticipated that, for most parks, a work group would be formed comprised of Commissioners, citizens and others with an interest in the park to develop the concept plan. With a design background, the Open Space Design Specialist would coordinate the actual design drawings and perspectives of the park concept plan. The Open Space Design Specialist, working with other staff, should allow for future park concept plans to be developed in house as opposed to hiring consultants for each concept plan. The cost of consultants for a concept plan can range from \$40,000-\$100,000.

Step 5 – This stage of the park process is the preliminary step to facility development. In this stage, the ERC Director, Land Conservation Manager and Recreation and Parks Director will work closely with the Open Space Design Specialist and other resources such as the County Engineer, Purchasing Department as well as survey and/or engineering firms to develop the construction and infrastructure plans for the park – plans that will be used during construction. The possibility of a consulting engineer or value-engineering firm may also be desired at this step.

Step 6 – This is the actual construction of the park facility. The Open Space Design Specialist will be closely monitoring and advising construction firms on adherence to “design with nature”, low-impact recreation areas and avoidance of sensitive natural or environmental areas. The proposed Parks Services Specialist (see Section III) would also assist construction personnel and ensure that active facilities are appropriately constructed. Appropriate staff from Planning may also need to be involved from Inspections and Erosion Control.

Step 7 – Once the facility is designed, the responsibilities will shift to the Recreation and Parks Director and Parks Services Supervisor to oversee active recreation programming and use of the facility. The Open Space Design Specialist will continue to oversee and coordinate maintenance of low-impact recreation areas and advise the Recreation and Parks Department on other needed stewardship for the overall environmental health and safety of the park.

Step 8 – Please see Section III. Since the County has not had parks to maintain, necessary staff and equipment do not exist. It is proposed that Recreation and Parks be responsible for maintenance of parks, which will require new personnel and equipment.

Part III. Parks Resource Needs

For all practical purposes, Orange County has not had a parks program - in the sense that most local governments in the State do. Until the opening of Efland-Cheeks Park last year, the County had no parks of its own (except for the playground at Fairview Park and the ballfield at Northern Human Services Center). Understandably, the expertise and resources in the Recreation and Parks Department has been focused on recreation programming (hence the order of the department's name).

This lack of parks has created a backlog of needs in the County as documented in the 1999 Joint Master Recreation and Parks report, but it also offers an opportunity to take a fresh, comprehensive look at parks planning, development and operation - outside of the conventional arrangements that most local governments are bound to by time and experience.

The County is also unique in that it has a department dedicated to resource preservation and the acquisition of critical natural and cultural resource lands (including parks). Only a handful of environmental departments exist at the County level in N.C., although several counties have recently begun to explore following the lead of Orange County in creating a department focused on resource conservation - and the topic has received discussion at the National Association of Counties level.

With the unique situation that exists in Orange County and the substantial recent research into parks, it may be possible to offer several basic statements regarding exploration of the roles of the two departments:

1. THE COUNTY, BECAUSE IT HAS NOT HAD A PARKS SYSTEM, HAS NOT DEVELOPED EXPERTISE IN PARKS DESIGN, OPERATION OR MAINTENANCE
2. CONVERSELY, THE COUNTY IS NOT FINANCIALLY OR THEORETICALLY BOUND TO TRADITIONAL METHODS OF PARK PROVISION
3. NATIONALLY AND LOCALLY, THE PUBLIC INTEREST IN PARK DESIGN AND USES HAS BEEN MOVING AWAY FROM HEAVY EMPHASIS ON INTENSIVE ACTIVE RECREATION FIELDS AND TOWARD A BALANCE OF PLAYING FIELDS, LOW-IMPACT TRAILS, MEADOWS AND OPEN SPACES
4. THE PROVISION OF RECREATION PROGRAMS IS ESSENTIALLY A HUMAN SERVICES FUNCTION - REFLECTED BY THE FACT THAT THE RECREATION AND PARKS DEPARTMENT IS GROUPED WITH OTHER HUMAN SERVICES FUNCTIONS IN THE COUNTY'S HIERARCHY
5. THE ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT OF PARKS IS ESSENTIALLY A RESOURCE ACQUISITION AND DESIGN FUNCTION - FUNCTIONS PERFORMED BY THE ERCDD WITH EXISTING AND APPROVED (BUT NOT YET HIRED) PERSONNEL.

Using these basic statements and principles, the following subsections assess current and future resource needs.

A. Resource Needs - Park and Open Space Design

With the advent of a new era in County parks planning and development, and mindful of the evolving responsibilities in this area, ERCD requested an Open Space Design Specialist position in last year's budget. This position was approved "in escrow" effective 1/1/02, pending this report and discussion of the departmental responsibilities.

Currently, the ERCD Director and Land Conservation Manager provide sufficient staff to identify, evaluate and acquire lands of critical park, natural and cultural resource interest. However, existing staff would not be able to undertake the more specific tasks involved in parks site design, concept plans and stewardship oversight without compromising other work and gaining new expertise.

The Open Space Design Specialist, as approved, would have background and expertise in environmentally-sensitive landscape architecture, or to borrow an oft-used phrase, "design with nature." The Open Space Design Specialist would understand and develop designs for parks and public open spaces in the conventional fashion, but with the addition of an eye to natural features and ecological design. This position would be responsible for ensuring that environmental concepts and natural areas are not compromised in the park design and development process.

The Open Space Design Specialist would also be responsible for regular stewardship of County parks and open spaces, regularly performing site visits and conducting or overseeing necessary stewardship of low-impact recreation and natural areas in parks. The position would work closely with Recreation and Parks staff in programming and maintenance of facilities.

The Open Space Design Specialist may offer an immediate and long-term cost savings in parks design, as it is expected that this position would have sufficient design expertise to work with staff and citizens to develop concept plans for parks – potentially saving \$40,000 - \$100,000 per park in consultant fees. This position would be able to produce the type of designs and recreation open space concepts that are usually prepared by consultants in concept plans. As a point of reference, the County paid its consultant for Efland Cheeks Park \$60,000 for concept plan and construction drawings several years ago. The Town of Chapel Hill expects to pay \$75-100,000 for its concept plan consultants for Southern Park alone.

In summary, the Open Space Design Specialist will be needed to accomplish needed stewardship and environmentally-sensitive parks design, skills which do not exist within current County staff. With the potential for several parks to be developed in coming years, this position could save as much as \$300-500,000 in consultant fees. It is expected that work towards new park designs may occur over the next five years and beyond, and stewardship needs will be perpetual.

Other resource needs for this position will include standard office equipment, and computer design software. As noted when approved, the position would be housed in a portion of the converted small conference room of the Planning and Agricultural Center.

B. Resource Needs - Parks Maintenance

As previously stated, the County has not developed parks maintenance expertise and personnel, largely because there were no parks to administer. The Recreation and Parks Department has no outdoor staff for parks, with the exception of summer temporary personnel that do field preparation work. The Public Works Department does not have sufficient resources to provide maintenance at parks, due to its other maintenance duties at County buildings and facilities, and has been unable to provide any maintenance at newly-acquired sites for this reason.

There are two broad types of needs in this area for parks:

Maintenance – the upkeep and grooming of more-intensively used active recreation facilities, and

Stewardship – the care and management of the natural resources in a park, including low-impact recreation and natural areas

Presently, the Recreation and Parks Department hires part-time seasonal staff to mow and prepare athletic fields for league play. With the opening of Efland-Cheeks Community School Park in June 2000, more acres and park amenities now need to be maintained. Some mowing, weeding and mulching has also been contracted out. Independent contractors have also been hired to aerate, re-seed, fertilize, and remove dead trees at various park sites. On many occasions the Program Staff have held “field days” at various sites to perform routine clean-up and maintenance.

A summary of basic needs at current sites is provided as Attachment B.

Park operation and maintenance, while often more mundane than park acquisition and design, is nonetheless crucial to a system of efficient and safe parks. Some jurisdictions have CIP lines for parks operation and maintenance to help understand the long-term costs of operating facilities. (please see Table 2). Many organizations, such as Triangle Land Conservancy, add 10-15% of the total cost of land into a stewardship fund, to account for future stewardship and maintenance costs.

As County park facilities come on line, operation and maintenance (O&M) will become an area of increasing importance. The provision of playing fields – particularly soccer fields to meet the soccer needs - will present a challenge, as maintenance for these fields tends to be labor-intensive and the expectation for playing field quality is high, as witnessed by recent usage of fields in Chapel Hill parks. Stewardship will also be needed for the substantial natural and low-impact components of parks.

In looking at approaches from other nearby jurisdictions, there is a divergence of approaches to parks maintenance. Some jurisdictions have Public Works departments provide needed maintenance. Others locate equipment and staff for parks maintenance in the Recreation departments. Table 2 provides an overview of approaches:

Table 2. Overview of Parks Budgets from Other Jurisdictions

Wake County	Recreation & Parks Public Works & Contracts as Needed	\$2,200,000	** Staff, equipment and supplies	School Parks - 225 acres County Parks - 1700 acres
Durham	Property & Facility Management Department	\$896,000	** Staff, equipment and supplies	1600 acres
Chapel Hill	Public Works	\$566,000	Staff, equipment and supplies	182 acres (452 acres total)
Carrboro	Public Works	\$280,000	Staff, equipment and supplies	85 Acres
Burlington	Recreation & Parks / Lake Division Staff Public Works as Needed	\$427,500	* Equipment and supplies	623 acres
Cumberland County	Recreation & Parks	\$337,875	* Equipment and supplies	463 acres
Mebane	Recreation & Parks Public Works as Needed	\$200,000	Staff, equipment and supplies	270 acres
Orange County	Recreation & Parks Contracts as Needed	\$17,000	* Equipment and supplies	16 acres

* Personnel expenses not included

** Also includes site facilities

Additional information on other counties available

1. Options for Addressing Stewardship and Maintenance

In order to evaluate the options for providing operation, maintenance and stewardship of parks, a common expectation of parks development is needed to provide grounds for comparison.

One means of comparison might be the number of parks and recreational facilities that could be developed and opened during a 10-year "CIP" timeframe.

As of October, 2001, the County has acquired land for three new parks (Cedar Grove Park, Chapel Hill Township Park/Educational Campus and Little River Regional Park), and expressed interest in opening two other nature preserves to public access (McGowan Creek Preserve and Seven-Mile Creek Preserve). This is in addition to the two facilities (Fairview and Efland-Cheeks Park) that are fully or partially open now.

Table 3. Proposed Facilities and Possible Opening Dates

Park/Facility	Acquired	Open	Potential Opening Date*
Mapleview Field	Leased	No	Fall 2002
Little River Regional Park	Yes	No	Fall 2002
Fairview Park	Yes	Phase I open (playground and 1 field)	Remainder of park - by 2005
Efland Cheeks Park	Leased	Phase I open	Phase II – by 2005
Cedar Grove Park	Yes	1 field in use	Remainder of park – by 2005
Chapel Hill Township Park/Educational Campus	Yes	No	Phase I – Fall 2003
McGowan Creek Preserve	Yes	No	Trail only – Fall 2002
Seven-Mile Creek Preserve	Yes (part)	No	Trail and primitive campsite – Fall 2006

* - These opening dates are best estimates based on current information, and will need to be adjusted as final decisions are made

If the County were to develop facilities at these parks and nature preserves (phased in over the next several years), there are two primary options for O&M:

1. Recreation and Parks (and ERCDC for low-impact and natural area stewardship), or
2. Contracting with outside firms or other units of local government (such as the Towns within the County)

The two options are not mutually exclusive – for example, while a Town may be interested in discussing O&M for some parks, Cedar Grove Park is removed from all of the Towns and may not be a candidate for Town O&M. There are also significant issues, financial and otherwise, that relate to outside operation and maintenance of facilities that are not explored in this report.

What type of facilities would be in existence if the parks in the table above are open during the next 10 years? While final decisions remain to be made on the specific facilities, an estimate of fields and facilities requiring maintenance at these parks, based on the recent bond discussions, would include the following:

1. Cedar Grove Park – 1 youth baseball field (existing), 1 soccer field, 1 playground, basketball courts, nature trail and picnic area
2. Chapel Hill Township Park (Phase I) – Two soccer/playing fields, picnic area, nature trail, parking area, house and buildings.
3. Little River Regional Park – meadow area, hiking and other trails, parking
4. Fairview Park – 2 playing fields (one existing), playground (existing), picnic area
5. Efland Cheeks Park – 1 playing field, basketball courts, picnic area, nature trail. All except nature trail existing.
6. Seven-Mile Creek Preserve – Nature trail, primitive campsite, parking area
7. McGowan Creek Preserve – Nature trail, parking area
8. New park (TBA) – 2 playing fields, trail, picnic area

Attachment 4 provides a table categorizing the potential parks, recreation and open space projects.

As discussed in subsection B, there are differing approaches among local governments as to whether Public Works or Parks departments handle O&M issues. For purposes of this report, it has been assumed that the existing limitations and demands on Public Works – plus the benefits of having staff

focused on specific parks maintenance needs - would make Recreation and Parks the preferred option for County operation and maintenance.

Option 1 – Recreation and Parks

In order for the County to assume O&M for the parks and nature preserves listed above, the following personnel and equipment resources will be needed. *It should be noted that these needs would be phased in over time as parks are opened, but other needs such as equipment, the Parks Services Supervisor and Open Space Design Specialist, would be more immediate.*

Table 4. Equipment Needs for Parks Maintenance and Stewardship

Equipment	Projected Cost
1 pickup truck	\$20,000
1 turf mower	\$12,000
1 Trail Maintenance vehicle ("golf cart" style vehicle)	\$11,000
1 Turf Aerator	\$3,500
Tools	\$3,000
Radio System	\$1,500
TOTAL	\$51,000

Personnel

It is estimated that three permanent staff positions will be needed to provide park services that will include routine maintenance, trail repair, turf management, litter control and general park operations (in addition to ERCD involvement in park stewardship, and continuing to hire temporary seasonal employees in Recreation and Parks):

- **Park Services Supervisor**

As previously described, this position would oversee operation and maintenance issues of the park, supervise maintenance staff, and coordinate with volunteer groups on park projects. The Open Space Design Specialist would oversee maintenance of park natural areas and low-impact recreation areas.

The Park Services Superintendent would be responsible for maintaining the athletic fields according to appropriate turf management guidelines, and would be certified in the proper use of herbicides and the applications of nutrients. The Supervisor would be responsible for appropriate safety inspection of the public access areas such as picnic shelters, playground equipment, trails and athletic fields. This person would coordinate with

the Open Space Design Specialist on other site issues and general park health, as needed.

- **Park Services Technician**

This position would perform actual fieldwork, along with the Park Services Assistant below. This person would operate appropriate equipment (mowers, tractors) required to maintain the athletic fields and active program areas. This position would be responsible for scheduling regular park services such as litter control, servicing the picnic shelters, restrooms, etc. and provide assistance setting up equipment for special events.

- **Park Services Assistant**

This position would assist the technician with the daily maintenance of the park sites as scheduled.

Staff will develop estimated annual operating costs, including salaries, during the upcoming budget and CIP process.

Option 2 – Contract with Private Firms or Towns

Note: Due to limited information and the lack of concrete data on this option, the discussion that follows is necessarily general in scope. If this option is one that merits further research, staff will gather financial and other data regarding the potential for contracted O&M services

A second option for providing maintenance would be to contract out some of all of park O&M work (not including stewardship of natural areas and low-impact areas, which are recommended to be retained by the County).

There are a variety of different approaches or combinations of approaches that could be pursued. Some of these might be:

- Pursue contracting operation and maintenance of all parks to Towns or outside firms
- Pursue contracting only operation OR maintenance to Towns or outside firms
- Pursue contracting operation and maintenance to Towns, only for “joint parks” projects – County assumes responsibility for all others
- Pursue contracting with school systems for maintenance of parks co-located or in proximity to schools
- Pursue contracting maintenance with UNC for some or all facilities in proximity to campus or UNC lands

Within the County, there is one case of contracting facility operation – the batting cage and skate park at Chapel Hill's Homestead Park are operating by a private firm. The degree to which the Town's or school systems may be interested in O&M of County parks is currently unknown. However, the October 2000 Joint Capital Funding for Parks report did outline the potential for such a role for Towns in joint park facilities, developed by County and Towns.

Because of the variety of potential combinations for contract options, all of the potential approaches have not been examined. Cost estimates are also unavailable for the likely annual cost of contracting out O&M of parks. However, there are a few notes worth mention in the potential for such arrangements.

1. The Town of Carrboro has expressed interest in maintaining and operating the new Chapel Hill Township Park. This is tied to a request from the Town for the sale of lands for a public works facility.
2. With continuing interest in co-locating schools and parks, an arrangement with either or both school systems might be worth pursuing, especially for sites where playing fields and amenities are shared between the schools and park.
3. If future park facilities include new or non-traditional facilities (skate parks, etc), outside firms may have more expertise than County staff
4. Based on limited discussions to date, where other local governments have considered contracted maintenance, issues of accountability have been raised regarding the adequacy of maintenance, playground safety inspections and protection of the natural environment inside the park.
5. Some County parks may be removed from municipalities, making efficient contracted maintenance more difficult.
6. If operation of parks were contracted to the Towns, significant programming issues between the County and Towns would need to be addressed.

Staff is attempting to gather cost information from the few local governments that contract out operation and or maintenance of parks. For example, Wake County does have an O&M arrangement with the Wake County Schools at its school/parks.

E. Potential Cost Saving Measures for Park Development and Maintenance

Park facility development and operation and maintenance can be a costly endeavor. However, there are some approaches that can help mitigate these

costs. One, the existence of park design capability on staff (the Open Space Design Specialist) has already been addressed.

Developing Playing Field Design Prototypes

There is a wide variety in the cost of developing playing fields, depending on the type of turf, irrigation, lighting, configuration and other amenities.

All park sites and fields are different, so flexibility in design and approach is always needed on a park-by-park basis. However, a concept developed by the Board to help control costs on school buildings may also be able to be applied to playing fields, as to scope and configuration.

A series of **prototype playing fields**, in different configurations, could be developed by staff, to help gain an understanding of what types of fields and design arrangements are most efficient and desirable. The series of prototypes might include multi-purpose field, dedicated soccer field, youth baseball and softball field arrangements.

A staff work team comprised of the ERC Director, Open Space Design Specialist, Recreation Director, Parks Superintendent – with assistance from the Planning Director and County Engineer – could develop these prototype concepts for the Board's consideration.

For example, basic design component decisions could be integrated into a series of prototypes that address:

- playing surface (what type of turf, usage patterns, exploration of alternative surfaces such as cinder fields used in Europe)
- irrigation methods (subsurface or above-ground)
- lighting and field grouping (if multiple fields are to be built, they can be designed in a fashion where lighting fixtures and costs are minimized and other amenities are clustered)
- the best design of multi-purpose fields (for example, fields may be designed so as to provide two youth baseball fields with adjoining outfield areas that can be together used as a soccer field)

Again, while keeping flexibility for specific park concept plans and related design issues that will vary on park-to-park basis, prototype fields could also be used in park concept planning and expanded to address:

- Whether a park should have dispersed fields versus a playing complex
- Whether sod or seeded fields will yield the best results
- Which fields should be lighted and irrigated

The development of basic field prototypes would also offer an opportunity for recreation organizations to participate in field design. For example, a soccer organization that wished to have a different, upgraded feature at certain fields could participate financially in such an upgrade, if appropriate.

Involvement of Other Agencies

There are other agencies within the County structure that will be drawn in to provide cost-saving assistance on parks operation and maintenance. The following departments may be able to help in the development and maintenance of parks:

- **Cooperative Extension**
With the ability to call on expertise in turf management and landscaping, Cooperative Extension could play a role in advising staff on appropriate land management
- **Planning/Erosion Control**
The Planning Department could assist with transportation matters and park design, the compatibility of adjoining land uses, and the Erosion Control Division could provide important assistance on design of any stormwater and erosion control measures.
- **Soil and Water/NRCS**
With available expertise in water conservation and streamside buffers, Soil and Water could offer valuable advice to the design and maintenance teams.
- **County Engineer**
The County Engineer could provide valuable review and design advice to the Open Space Design Specialist and the firms handling park construction.
- **Environmental Health**
A key question at some parks will be on-site water and wastewater disposal. Environmental Health personnel have expertise in advising on the potential techniques and methods of providing for these services.
- **Purchasing and Central Services**
Purchasing and Central Services would provide assistant in contractual work and value engineering of parks facilities
- **Economic Development**
Working with soccer organizations and soccer facilities

IV. Programming and Capital Funding

A. Recreation Programming – Current Status and Future Trends

Presently, there are several agencies and organizations, both public and private, that provide a variety of recreational activities for the citizens of Orange County. The Recreation and Parks Departments of Carrboro, Chapel Hill, and Orange County currently offer programs that require active recreation facilities such as athletic fields for baseball, softball, lacrosse, field hockey, football, and soccer. These departments also offer a variety of low impact recreation programs that require park space. As an example, the County Department provides special events at park sites for the Senior Citizens Picnic, Special Populations Programs, Egg Hunts, Summer Camp Field Days, Hiking Trips, Kite Flying Contests, and Fishing Rodeo, to name a few. The Carrboro and Chapel Hill Departments offer a number of special events that require park space as well.

The citizens of Orange County are fortunate to have many diverse recreational programs available. Many are offered by the private or independent athletic associations that provide opportunities for both youth and adults. The Hillsborough Youth Athletic Association (HYAA) and the Fairview Eagles offer baseball programs for several hundred youth. Soccer enthusiasts of all ages can participate in programs offered by the Durham-Chapel Hill Strikers, Rainbow Soccer, United Futbol, and the new Latino League.

Independent or private associations providing athletic leagues in cooperation with public recreation agencies is not unique. Many county and city agencies across the State have formed public/private partnerships to develop facilities and provide recreation programs. In these cases, the public agencies are responsible for scheduling use of fields by associations, while providing open time for the general public.

As an example, Orange County is working with all of the soccer associations in developing the soccer field at Maple View Farm. These associations have met many times in joining together to cooperate and coordinate the use of fields. The Recreation and Parks staff will provide the scheduling of Maple View Soccer Field with each association having appropriate field time as well as providing open time on weekends.

With the acquisition and development of new parks around the County, athletic fields will become available for use, whether by baseball, softball, soccer, or other sports. Based on the expectation of continued partnerships, the parks and recreation departments in the County will likely be responsible

for agreements with athletic associations and provide appropriate field scheduling. With the availability of more athletic fields, the potential for cooperation with current and future athletic associations will continue to grow, and the resultant public/private partnerships may offer new opportunities for the growing population of Orange County to participate in athletic leagues.

V. Conclusion

Orange County is on the cusp of a new era in parks. During this decade, the County will move from no parks at the outset of the decade, to several open parks featuring a variety of amenities and opportunities for the County's citizens. The very lack of parks services in the past may, interestingly, offer an chance for the County to blaze a new path in the way local governments provide park services in North Carolina. The upcoming activities in parks and open space provision offer a myriad of opportunities, yet these tasks also pose challenges organizationally and financially.

The intent of this report is to provide sufficient information on structural questions to confirm the County's current and future role, and elicit questions about the ideas and mechanisms herein.

The preceding sections attempt to provide an organizational structure that has been discussed and defined by staff. As such, staff welcomes any suggestions, comments or questions the Board may have – this report is not intended to reflect a definitive statement but rather one approach to accomplishing the needs of the future.

The Manager recommends that the organizational structure, resource needs and timing of parks services be discussed over the next several months, culminating in final decisions concurrent with the budget process.



