

Orange County Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2030

Open House & Public Hearing Summary

May 17/ May 28

What's Going On?

Orange County's master plan for parks and recreation is 25 years old and in need of update. The plan, which includes recommendations and planned actions for the future, has served the county well and many of the things called for in 1988 have come to pass. A new master plan has been drafted and will soon be presented to County officials for consideration.

What Do We Know?

To create a new master plan, three different community needs assessment surveys were conducted, and 832 persons responded. Here is a brief summary of the results:

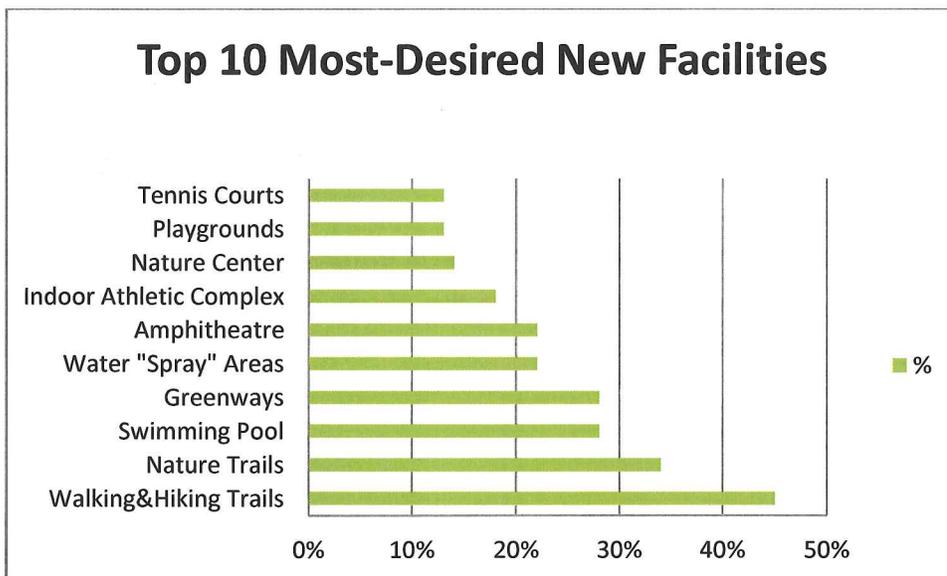
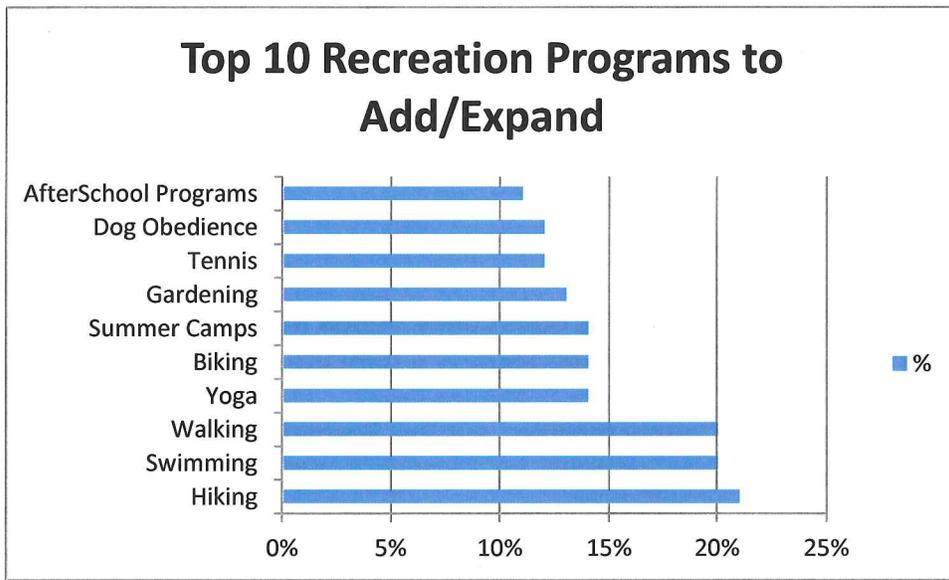
- The most commonly-used County facilities are the Sportsplex and Central Recreation Center in Hillsborough, Little River Regional Park, and Eurosport Soccer Center.
- **82%** of those surveyed think the County should expand active outdoor recreation opportunities.
- **79%** think the County should expand low-impact/passive recreation opportunities.
- **89%** said the County should expand or provide a trail system linking various areas of the county.
- Between **89% and 94%** feel County facilities are safe, well-maintained and well-operated.
- **93%** think that parks and recreation programs enhance economic health of the community, and **96%** think they enhance the physical and mental well-being of residents.

Most Popular Recreation Programs

1. Youth Soccer
2. Youth Basketball
3. Open Gymnasium
4. Little River Trail Run
5. Volleyball

Most Popular Special Events

1. Egg Hunt
2. Halloween Spooktacular
3. Fishing Rodeo
4. Earth Day Fair



Draft Master Plan Findings – What Does the Plan Indicate?

Existing Parks and Recreation Facilities and Programs

1. County residents overwhelmingly approve of the way current parks and recreation facilities are operated and maintained. They feel safe in these facilities, and find them easy to get to and accessible. County staff are seen as helpful and professional.
2. In the 15 years since the County opened its first park, additional park facilities and recreation centers have been created that serve a variety of community needs – and get high marks for providing quality opportunities to recreate – but maintenance and equipment replacement needs are on the horizon for some facilities.
3. The County has successfully acquired parkland and constructed parks in low-income and minority communities over the past 15 years, providing a needed outlet for physical activity, reflection in nature and outdoor recreation that meets social, mental and physical needs for both individuals and the public.
4. Residents believe strongly that park facilities and recreation programs:
 - a. Enhance economic health of Orange County;
 - b. Enhance physical and mental well-being of residents, and
 - c. Help reduce crime.

Future Park and Recreation Facilities and Programs

5. There is strong interest among county residents to expand both active recreation and low-impact recreation opportunities (especially hiking, walking and biking trails, and a swimming pool).
6. Residents are less sure and largely split on whether the County should pursue indoor facilities for arts/leisure activities, but somewhat more in favor of additional indoor athletic facilities.
7. Some residents are unsure about whether future athletic programs or parks are needed, but among those expressing an opinion, a significant majority favor new programs and parks.
8. The highest levels of interest in new/expanded programs are for walking, hiking, swimming, biking, summer camps and yoga.
9. Likewise, the top choices for new parks facilities are walking trails, nature trails, biking trails, greenways, a swimming pool and water parks.
10. Residents are almost universally supportive of funding new parks and recreation facilities through grants and corporate donations.
11. Residents express strong support for financing future parks and recreation opportunities through voter-approved bonds or existing local taxes. There is less support for charging user fees, and increasing local taxes (other than property taxes) is not a desired solution.
12. The County has successfully acquired sites for new parks identified in the 1988 Master Plan, with the exception of the Bingham District, and four new parks are projected in the County's Capital Investment Plan, along with additions and improvements to existing parks.
13. The creation of nature preserves in important natural areas of the county offers an opportunity for public access and low-impact recreation in addition to protection of natural resources.

Opportunities and Challenges

14. The County has in recent years seen success in pursuing public/private or public/non-profit partnerships for new facilities, and should continue to pursue these opportunities where mutually-beneficial.
15. With the County having land-banked several park sites for future use, and little room for new parks inside the town borders, there may be unprecedented opportunities for partnerships between County and towns for developing new park or recreation facilities.
16. There are likely also financial benefits to coordination and collaboration among the towns and County for future parks.
17. While not growing at the rate of the 1970's-1990's, the County continues to be a very-desirable place to live with a high quality of life, and population growth is expected to continue, adding another 36,000 residents by the year 2030. These new residents will likely be split between persons in the towns and those in the rural and suburban areas of the County.

18. The County's Lands Legacy Program has wiped out the parkland deficit identified in 1999, and secured a number of future parks, open spaces and nature preserve sites at strategic locations for future needs.
19. The 1988 Master Recreation and Parks Plan served the County well as a blueprint for future needs, and most of the facilities and programs anticipated in that plan have been built, secured or implemented. Many of the basic philosophical and physical tenets of that plan are still valid. However, a solution to a park site for Bingham Township remains to be addressed.
20. Opportunities for coordinated school/park planning with the school systems appear to exist.

Proposed Recommendations

Important Note: *These are draft recommendations and are subject to change.*

1. Enhance and protect our investment in existing park and recreation facilities.
2. Build the planned future parks (all planned parks open within 10 years).
3. Complete Nature Preserves in a way that provides for public access and recreation.
4. County should work with towns, school systems and others to build new facilities.
5. In some manner (whether on rural rustic trails or along rural roadways), develop a plan and complete Orange County section of the NC Mountains-to-Sea Trail.
6. Build more trails, and connect County/town open spaces and parks with trails?
7. Improve access to parks and trails, and design parks for healthy lifestyles.
8. Look at new program needs and consider new partnerships.
9. Examine the role of community centers in providing recreation, other services.

Issues for Further Study

- Ultimate Level of Service for the County Parks system.
- Review methods of park funding and acquisition.
- Coordination between Sportsplex and County programs.
- Further examine need for a public pool?
- Artificial turf versus natural playing surfaces.
- Frequency of surveys and plan updates.

Want to view the master plan – or share thoughts and comments online or by email? Go to http://orangecountync.gov/deapr/parks_master_plan.asp and click on the master plan link, or comments link. Email us at deapr@orangecountync.gov or call 919-245-2510.