

DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan

DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Department

July 2000

prepared in consultation with
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with assistance from
Leon Younger/PROS
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ETC/Leisure Vision

and
the citizens of DeKalb County

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- A. Summary of Key Findings and Issues:
Citizen Survey, Public Input, Interviews and Focus Groups, Staff Interviews,
Summary of Demographic Analysis, Benchmark Agencies, Programs Audit,
Facilities Audit, Readiness Audit
- B. Criteria for Closing a Facility
- C. Model Department Organizational Realignment
- D. Acquisition Analysis
- E. Blue Ribbon Committee for DeKalb County Parks & Recreation Report

Additional technical reports are provided in a technical supplement, available at the DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Department.

I. Acknowledgements

DEKALB COUNTY GOVERNMENT

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PHOTO CREDIT

Cover photo of Davidson-Arabia Mountain, courtesy of Craig Tanner.

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I. Executive Summary

To be submitted separately

Executive summary continued

III. Introduction

As we enter the next century, DeKalb County is a vibrant, growing community with a diverse population, recognized as one of the country's "All-American Cities." This is an exciting time for the County, and parks and recreation should be an integral part of the County's image, character, and quality of life. **Specifically, strong parks and recreation programs have the ability to:**

- ***Provide social benefits*** by connecting people with neighbors of other ages, incomes, backgrounds, and abilities. Parks and recreation build community pride and spirit.
- ***Provide economic benefits*** by improving the quality of life in the community and helping to attract businesses and residents to the County. Top-rate parks and recreation programs and facilities are a competitive advantage for DeKalb County in economic development.
- ***Provide benefits to the environment*** by connecting people with and educating them about nature. In addition, greenways can provide alternative transportation opportunities. Parks and open space are essential weapons in the County's arsenal against sprawl and environmental degradation.
- ***Provide benefits to individuals*** by promoting physical fitness and self-improvement. Opportunities for exercise and being outdoors result in greater physical fitness, emotional well-being, and connectivity to nature.

Currently, the role of parks and recreation in DeKalb County is not as strong as it could be, and parks and recreation do not contribute as much as they could to the quality of life of DeKalb residents. As will be described in subsequent chapters, many of DeKalb's citizens are not familiar with the park system and programs, and many more, while aware, do not take advantage of existing opportunities. At the same time, the County has decreased its investment in parks and recreation facilities, and programs have not kept pace with changing preferences and needs of county residents. In short, parks and recreation in DeKalb County are not currently living up to their full potential as "crown jewels" of the community and major contributors to economic development and quality of life in the County. This situation is worsening every year; the County must adopt a new philosophy and strategies for delivering parks and recreation services.

To address these challenges, the Parks and Recreation Department embarked on a journey—a journey of self-assessment and of self-improvement, based on a program of actively listening to interest groups, stakeholders, decision-makers, staff, peers, and citizens. This report documents the historical context of Departmental planning and implementation, the results of the listening process, and the findings, recommendations, and new implementation strategies that will lead to the new century of parks and recreation in DeKalb County.

Purpose of the Plan

Two interrelated purposes have come together in this planning process, which provides a link between the past and the future—to build on previous planning efforts of the county, and to chart a new direction for DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Department. The Department is what it is today as a result of all that it has been since its beginnings in 1953. By building on the past, the traditions and culture serve as a foundation on which a new vision and mission arise. The present becomes the bridge between the past and the future.

The most recent county parks and recreation planning initiative was completed by the Blue Ribbon Committee for DeKalb County Parks and Recreation, culminating with the County's adoption of their final report in February 1996. The Blue Ribbon Committee's final report outlined a number of key issues and strategies for improving the DeKalb parks system. These key findings and strategies reflect a renewed commitment to facilities, programs, policies, and funding that address many of the current deficits in the system. A copy of the report can be found in Appendix D.

Since its beginnings in 1953, the Department has endeavored to provide quality recreation opportunities to DeKalb citizens, despite obstacles such as lack of funding, support and direction, as well as increasing pressure from population growth and development of the county's land resources. The last decade has seen many of these pressures escalate, and initiatives and efforts to identify and rectify these problems have not progressed. Many of the solutions identified in the work conducted by the Blue Ribbon Committee have not been implemented.

The Department's leaders and staff, however, remain committed to improvement. This vision embraces the community and identifies critical links between customers, staff, natural resources, and community leaders. Because of this commitment to vision, the Department initiated this strategic planning process, using existing plans and efforts such as the Blue Ribbon Committee as a starting point.

Goals for the Plan, the Planning Process, and the Department

At its basic level, the entire planning process may be viewed as a goal-setting, consensus-building exercise. This exercise will lead to the development of strategies for future actions, along with associated tactics, that reflect the immediate and future needs of the community. These strategies will result in a fresh look at the delivery of core services, and will help define the areas where the Department should concentrate its efforts and resources.

The Department identified five desired outcomes of the planning process:

1. **Define the Department's mission and basic service delivery philosophies.**
The new vision statement for the Department and service delivery philosophy and strategies are outlined in Chapter VI, Recommended Action Strategies.
2. **Set priorities for operation and capital improvement action plans.**
Some of these priorities are described in Chapter VI, Recommended Action Strategies. In some cases, additional baseline information is needed before specific recommendations can be made.
3. **Identify mechanisms for funding.**
These are described in Chapter VI, Recommended Action Strategies.
4. **Outline critical service delivery policies.**
Some of these policies are described in Chapter VI, Recommended Action Strategies. In some cases, additional baseline information is needed before specific recommendations can be made.
5. **Position the Department for national accreditation.**
This is a long-term goal; the Department will be in a better position to seek national accreditation once the plan has been implemented.

At the beginning of the process, Department staff also identified values that would be honored throughout the planning process, guiding the project team:

- The plan will always seek to identify what's right for the community. The plan will seek to ensure **equity in service delivery** for the entire community.
- The plan will respond to the needs of the community; that is, recommendations will be **community driven**.
- Department members will **keep an open mind** and be responsive to all suggestions of the community.
- Department and county **history will not be a barrier**.
- At the same time, **the plan must be sensitive to users and past programs** and financial arrangements; people must have time to grow into new situations.
- **Change must be accomplished in a positive way.**
- The department will look for **more than one right answer** to issues and problems.
- The Department is a **service provider to all people** of the county, regardless of status.
- The plan will seek to **maximize the four benefits of recreation**—positive environmental, economic, social, and individual impact.
- The Department will leverage support throughout the process to **establish a new partnership** between the Department and the community.
- The plan will **emphasize the economic benefits** of parks and recreation.

- The plan will **incorporate tourism considerations** to enhance economic development.
- The plan will be **sustainable**.

To maximize these values, departmental managers, staff, and stakeholders developed specific goals for the planning process. These goals were subsequently incorporated into a Vision Statement for the department. **Following these values, the visioning process incorporated the following aspects of the departmental environment.**

- The **history** of the county in relationship to open spaces and recreation areas.
- The **values** that the DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Department wants to integrate into their park system.
- **Park design trends**, that may or may not be applicable, but will be discussed with the key stakeholders and community leaders as opportunities to consider.
- **Common themes** that the county and community leaders would like the park system to be known for.
- **Partnerships** the Parks and Recreation Department can embrace with schools, churches, local nonprofit organizations and agencies, businesses and neighborhood groups that can be developed to keep the parks safe, beautiful, fun.
- **Amenities** that could be developed in the parks and what each amenity brings in terms of number of users, length of stay, maintenance costs, and uses compatible and attractive to the tourism industry.
- **Programming** the parks for use through a variety of structured programs, self-directed activities, environmental awareness, passive and active uses.
- The **internal readiness** of the department to accept the community's vision and direction.
- The advancement of DeKalb County Government's **Mission, Value Statements and Critical Success Factors**.
- Advance the implementation of **DeKalb County's Comprehensive Land Use Plan and other county planning and policy documents**.

These themes were carried forward from the earliest stages of the planning process. Goals and visions were discussed in many of the forums relating to the planning process. As the departmental vision was discussed, developed, and adopted, many of these themes were directly incorporated into the Vision Statement.

In an intensive staff workshop, the following **Vision Statement** was developed:

A dedicated and professional team commits to leading the community into the 21st century to make parks and recreation the community's connection to a prosperous future, through equitable levels of quality neighborhood and signature parks and recreation services that enhance quality of life and promote a thriving community.

This vision statement expresses the **Parks and Recreation Department's** commitment to:

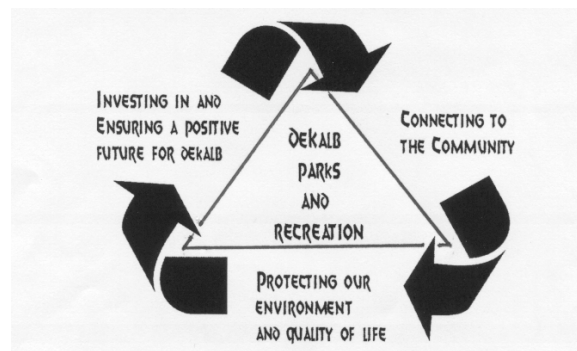
- Serving DeKalb citizens—a *dedicated* team.
- Upholding professional standards in the delivery of parks and recreation services—a *professional* team.
- Emphasizing the individual, social, economic and environmental benefits of parks and recreation—the *community's connection to a prosperous future; enhance quality of life and promote a thriving community.*
- Equity in parks and recreation service delivery—*equitable levels of...parks and recreation services.*
- High-quality facilities and programs—*quality...parks and recreation services.*
- Making parks and recreation a symbol of DeKalb County as an “All-American City”—*signature parks and recreation services.*

The Department also developed and adopted the following mission statement:

We create and connect communities through people, parks and programs.

The theme of connections illustrates the mission of the department to:

- Connect *people to the larger community*
- Connect *people to each other*
- Connect *people to nature*
- Connect *significant places in the County*



Planning Process

To help focus efforts and energy, a framework for the planning effort was adopted early in the process. This three-step planning process includes the following major elements:

Phase I - Findings

Phase II - Recommendations

Phase III - Implementation

Findings Phase

The first step in this process was the Findings Phase. The focus of all efforts in this phase was to gather data. The data consist of opinions, facts, and impressions of the entire parks system and all aspects of its operation. At this stage, there was no assessment of how well or poorly the system is working. There were no judgments on how to fix problems, or on how to improve the system, merely an attempt to gather as much information as possible concerning the status quo of the system as it stands.

One important function of the Findings Phase is that it provides a common baseline for understanding how the system and organization works. The later analysis of this unbiased collection of data identifies strengths and weaknesses in the system; it measures the effectiveness of service delivery; and it gauges the attitudes of staff, of citizens, of stakeholders, and of leaders. The intent was to hear from people, and in order to hear from them, multiple mechanisms and strategies were developed to encourage them to share opinions. The following are some of the steps included in the Findings Phase.

- The public was asked to provide input through a mail-out household survey and through a series of public meetings.
- An analysis of the existing local market and comparable markets across the nation was conducted. This market analysis included economic and demographic analyses of DeKalb County, as well as an analysis of existing parks and recreation competitors in the County. To complete this market analysis, other recreation agencies across the nation were studied and included as comparison (or “benchmark”) agencies.
- Stakeholder interviews were conducted with key department staff, line staff, other agency heads, elected officials, community leaders, and recreation groups (for example youth sports associations).
- Focus groups were used to gather information from special interests and special populations, such as diverse ethnic groups, seniors, teens, and environmental groups.
- Independent program and facilities audits and evaluations identified inefficiencies, opportunities for improvement, current conditions, and other characteristics.

Recommendation Phase

The second major phase in this planning process was the Recommendations Phase, in which all of the findings from the previous phase were summarized and analyzed. In the Recommendations Phase, various strategies and tactics were offered as possible solutions

to address the shortcomings and weaknesses of the system and organization. In addition, strengths and efficiencies of the department were identified and used as a foundation for further improvement and examples of excellence. One of the first products of the Recommendations Phase was the Vision Statement, which served as a catalyst and a guidepost for recommendations (and will follow through implementation).

Implementation Phase

Once recommendations have been adopted, the final phase of the planning process is the Implementation Phase. Recommendations, strategies, and tactics were summarized and prioritized, and the energies and efforts of the department will be focussed on the highest priority of these. Strong links between results from the Findings Phase and the Recommendations Phase should result in wide acceptance of the strategies and tactics, as well as the vision, which leads to a shared vision and to progress towards common goals.

Public Involvement

The county is, first and foremost, the people who live here, their relationship to community, and to each other. The opinions, needs, desires, and priorities of county residents are of paramount importance. Because of this importance, it is imperative that the plan reflect the thinking of DeKalb citizens, because the community built today, along with the changes set into motion by the planning process, will become the community of tomorrow. Residents of today have the most to gain, and the most to lose.

To assure that DeKalb County residents were adequately heard in this process, several mechanisms were developed to encourage public involvement. The first of these was a public kick-off meeting to initiate the planning process and to introduce the process to the public. At this meeting, the various planning efforts were discussed, and attendees were invited to participate in the visioning process. The results of this meeting were incorporated into subsequent findings. As the Findings Phase progressed, results were presented in public forums. Five public meetings were held in April 1999, one in each of the commission districts. Preliminary results of the Findings Phase were presented at these public meetings, and attendees were able to ask questions, clarify their understanding of the findings, and recommend solutions to problems or other obstacles. Finally, as the planning process moved forward to the Recommendations Phase, the proposed strategies and tactics were presented to the public in a third round of public meetings. These public meetings were conducted as open-house sessions with no formal presentations. Departmental staff were present for these meetings (there were two meetings during this third round of public meetings) to discuss issues one-on-one or in small groups, and to collect comments from meeting attendees on proposed departmental direction, strategies, and tactics.

In addition to the public meetings, another critical element of public involvement was a household mail survey. This effort was designed to solicit opinions and recreational use patterns from county residents, both users and non-users of the DeKalb County Parks and Recreation system. The responses from this statistically valid survey research effort reflect the socioeconomic make-up of the county. In addition, the responses are

statistically representative from each of the five commission districts, so results may be analyzed either for the entire county or by each commission district.

In order to assure continuity between this planning effort and earlier planning efforts (such as the Blue Ribbon Committee), to enhance the involvement of stakeholders and community leaders, and to afford additional opportunity for public involvement, the department organized a strategic plan Steering Committee. At key points in the process, the current status of the planning process was reported, reviewed, modified and endorsed. Department executive staff identified members of the Steering Committee for their experience and expertise as community leaders, each with a special interest in local parks and recreation. Several members of the Steering Committee were also members of the Blue Ribbon Committee.

These public involvement efforts are described in more detail, along with results from the efforts, in Appendix A.

Organization of the Report

Following this introduction, the report is organized as follows:

- Chapter IV: “Findings: Standards and Level of Service” provides a discussion of service delivery standards and provides recommendations for service delivery goals for DeKalb County.
- Chapter V: “Analysis of Findings and Conclusions” analyzes the findings and leads to the formulation of recommendations.
- Chapter VI: “Recommended Action Strategies” describes the 16 strategies developed by the department to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the findings.
- Chapter VII: “Implementation Plan” provides a list of specific recommendations for each strategy, a timeline of actions to be taken by the department, and a capital improvements list.
- Appendix A summarizes the major components of the Findings Phase, including the citizen survey, public meetings, interviews and focus groups staff interviews, demographic analysis, analysis of model or “benchmark” agencies, programs and facilities audits, and an assessment of the departmental organization and readiness to effect change. Detailed results of various findings components are found in subsequent appendixes.
- Several additional appendixes provide detailed information about findings and recommendations.

IV. Standards and Level of Service

Introduction

This chapter presents information about existing levels of parks and recreation service in DeKalb County and proposes new standards for levels of service to be achieved by 2010, based on population projections. In addition, this chapter presents models for new parks and facilities, as well as criteria for acquiring land and closing programs or facilities discussed in Appendix B.

Levels of Service

Several strategies may be used to assess need for facilities and programs. One method is to **compare supply of facilities and programs against demand**. If demand outstrips supply, then there is a shortage of facilities or programs. If demand is less than supply, then there is excess capacity, and no immediate need for additional facilities or programs.

One of the techniques that has proven effective and that is easy to understand is to **develop standards**. The community first agrees on the number of facilities or resources (such as acreage of land) that is desirable. The standard is generally based on population; an example would be *5,000 people per ballfield*. Communities around the world have developed recreation (and other levels of service) standards. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) encourages communities to develop standards that reflect the values of the community.

Service area analyses may also be developed. Where standards are normally presented in tabular format, a service area analysis is developed from census estimates or projections. This method evaluates equity of access, that is, how far are users from a given facility. If a community decides, for example, that all citizens should have a pool located within two miles of their residences, the map can easily show which areas of the county do not have that level of access.

The analyses presented here are starting points for discussion. They are based in large part on the findings of the planning process, including current and historically expressed needs. **For any of the facility or resource types, these level-of-service standards may and should be adjusted to match community preferences and desires as the population changes and preferences adjust.**

Demographics

A brief discussion of the demographics of DeKalb County is in order before we turn to Models and Standards, because the demographics of DeKalb County have an effect on recreation demand.

DeKalb County continues to grow but at a slower rate than most of the other metro Atlanta counties, mostly due to lack of developable land. The population of the county is getting more diverse and more affluent while it is aging and reducing household size.

During the 1990s population growth in the county has generally occurred in its eastern and southern portions and, as a result, Commission Districts 4 and 5 have grown larger than the other districts. Population forecasts indicate that Districts 4 and 5 will continue to grow, but more slowly, and that the other districts will lose some population during the coming years.

Figures 1 and 2 summarize the growth patterns and resulting population density. Figure 1: Changing Population shows the rate of growth that is expected to occur over the next decade, by census tract. The most rapid increases in population, the two categories that together show greater than 20% growth, mainly concentrate in the eastern and southern part of the county with some in-fill high growth in the Chamblee-Doraville area north of I-285. Figure 2: Population Density shows the county's density at the end of the planning period. In 2010, the majority of the county (with the exception of two census tracts) is projected to have population densities above 1000 people per square mile.

Household trends have varied greatly by commission district. Districts 1, 2, and 3 all experienced sharp declines in their average household sizes from 1990 to 1998. District 5, the least densely developed district, has seen just the opposite happen, indicating that many families with children are moving to the southeastern portion of DeKalb County.

District 2, as the urban portion of the county, has the fewest number of children and the greatest number of senior citizens. Conversely, the largely suburban and semi-rural District 4's population has many more residents under 20 than over 60. It is also interesting to note that the young population of DeKalb County will continue to cluster in its southern portion.

Wealth in DeKalb County has historically been concentrated in its northern portion, but that trend is changing. In the other four districts, the number of households earning over \$100,000 per year has more than doubled in the past eight years, and in Districts 4 and 5, the number has more than tripled.

All five districts' minority populations grew during the 1990s, with simultaneously decreasing White populations. In four of the five districts, Black population has grown the most in absolute numbers, but the Asian and Hispanic populations have grown at higher percentages. The only exception is District 1, in which the Asian population, despite only being half the size of the Black population, actually grew more in absolute numbers from 1990 to 1998.

Figure 1 growth rate here

Figure 2 Density here

Models

This section on models discusses the facilities recommended for DeKalb County. **Models are typical facility types that are currently being built in other communities in the region and nation.** Wherever possible, partnership and collocation with schools is desirable to take advantage of economies of scale concerning land acquisition, parking and other features.

Recreation Centers Model

Recreation centers today are designed to serve all demographic groups in one setting. These include preschool, grade school, middle school, high school, single adults, young families, extended families, and seniors. Designated spaces for seniors and teens are usual components of these facilities. These facilities range from 50,000 sq. ft. up to 100,000 sq. ft. Since they serve large population areas versus neighborhood specific areas, they are high revenue generators.

They can also contain the following amenities:

- Two to three gyms
- Indoor walking track
- Game rooms
- Tutorial spaces
- Three to four meeting rooms
- Indoor or outdoor aquatic spaces
- Cardiovascular and free weight fitness rooms
- Aerobic/dance rooms
- Art or performing art spaces
- Kid fit and preschool areas
- Climbing walls
- Locker rooms
- Wet areas
- Adequate storage space
- Offices
- Community gathering spaces
- Concession or restaurant spaces

Family Aquatic Centers

Warm water pools typically drive outdoor and/or indoor aquatic facilities. Bather capacity levels are a minimum of 450 indoor and 1,200 outdoor. The facilities are very high revenue producers. They usually include a minimum of three separate pools, with the following amenities:

- Zero depth entry
- In-water playgrounds
- Water slides
- Learn to swim areas
- Lazy rivers
- Resistant water areas
- Therapeutic pools
- Lap swim areas
- Water polo and basketball areas
- Some deep water
- Picnic and birthday party areas
- Concessions
- Restrooms
- Zoned by targeted groups

Ballfield Complexes

Today, ballfield complexes are designed for baseball, softball, football and soccer in 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, and 16 field complexes. These facilities are high economic revenue producers because of the special tournaments they can attract. In return, hotel rooms are sold, and food and entertainment establishments benefit.

Softball complexes for adults and girls are usually designed in 4, 5, 6, 8, or 10 field complexes. Complexes include lights, concessions, batting cages, picnic areas, irrigated fields, scoreboards, quality sound systems, covered dugouts, good quality turf and covered play areas for children are some amenities provided in these type of sports complexes.

Baseball and football complexes are targeted to boys ages 6 to 18 and include the same amenities and design as Softball complexes.

Soccer Complexes are typically designed in 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, and 16 field complexes that can serve all levels of players. The complexes include lights, concessions, warm-up areas, irrigation, picnic areas, playgrounds, parking, restrooms, and fields that can easily be changed to reduce wear. The complexes range in size from 15 to 40 acres.

Community Parks

Community parks are generally **40 to 200 acres** and contain active and passive spaces. Active and passive spaces could include lighted gamefield complexes, indoor and outdoor recreation centers and pools, walking paths, picnic areas, playgrounds, tennis courts, special event areas, ponds, entertainment areas, concessions, restrooms, natural areas, a nature center, gardens, and fountains. A special attraction like a dog park, spray fountains, skateboard park or horticulture center could also be added. **Community parks generally serve a population residing in a two-mile radius around the park.**

Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks range from **4 to 10 acres** and include a picnic area, playground, outdoor courts for basketball or tennis, inline paths or walking paths, no restrooms and limited parking, low level lighting, and practice areas for baseball, softball, or soccer. **Neighborhood parks generally serve a population residing in a half-mile radius around the park.**

Nature Preserves and Greenspace

The county should play an important role in the protection of natural resources and the preservation of green space. Lands with significant natural features, such as critical wildlife or plant habitat, wetlands, rock outcroppings, stream buffers, and other features are fragile and should be protected by the county. Often such lands are appropriate for use as undeveloped open space. Nature preserves, greenways, linear parks, and passive parks are important features of any park system and should be developed by the county as a way of protecting important natural resources.

Standards

Overview

Standards are recommended for a number of facility types and resources. These proposed standards are based on a number of sources, including historical provision of services, public preferences determined by a number of sources including survey research, NRPA guidelines, and recreational facilities in other benchmark communities.

The following tables and maps were developed from various sources, including inventory and facilities classification information from the DeKalb Parks and Recreation Department, benchmark agency data from ERA, standards information from Leon Younger and PROS, and EDAW. While there were common assumptions and data used to develop the tabular data and maps, there are some differences. The table was derived from several sources of data and information, so the derivation of recommended standards and projected needs is the result of some professional judgement and subjective decisions.

The benchmark agencies represent five county parks and recreation agencies from across the United States. ERA and DeKalb County Parks and Recreation staff chose these five agencies as benchmarks for standards. In March 1999 ERA surveyed five agencies and combined their results into benchmarked standards to be used in testing levels of service for DeKalb County Parks and Recreation. The benchmark agencies are:

- Fairfax County, VA
- Gwinnett County, GA
- Hamilton County, OH (*not including* the city of Cincinnati)
- Johnson County, KS
- Wake County, NC (*including* the city of Raleigh and the town of Cary)

Figure 3 illustrates the location of existing parks in DeKalb County. Each county facility has been given a reference number; the table of reference numbers and park names is located on the facing page.

The existing DeKalb level of service is based on the 1998 estimated population of DeKalb County and the inventory of existing DeKalb parks and recreation facilities. The existing DeKalb standards do not take into account planned but not funded facilities, since this strategic plan recommends updates of all master plans, and many of the currently planned facilities may not be carried forward into the updated master plans. Estimates of needs for future facilities in Tables 1 and 2 were derived using the 2010 population projections. As described in Appendix B, almost all of the population growth between 2000 and 2010 will occur in Districts 4 and 5.

The recommended standard, in association with future facilities needed, is based on the projected 2010 population. These standards assume that municipal and other public facilities (such as those operated by churches and other non-profit groups) will remain in service and continue to satisfy a portion of the county's recreation demand.

DEKALB COUNTY PARKS SYSTEM

| | | | |
|----|------------------------------------|-----|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Mark Trail | 54 | Cedar |
| 2 | Dunwoody (Athletic) | 55 | Washington |
| 3 | Midway | 56 | Deepdene Dellwood |
| 4 | Medlock | 57 | Hummingbird |
| 5 | Shoal Creek I | 58 | Peters |
| 6 | Tobie Grant | 59 | Lanier Gardens |
| 7 | Wade Walker | 60 | Dearborn |
| 8 | Murphey Candler | 61 | Emmie Smith |
| 9 | Blackburn | 62 | Parkside |
| 10 | Pleasantdale | 63 | Skyland |
| 11 | Lynwood | 64 | Biffle |
| 12 | Redan | 65 | DeKalb Memorial |
| 13 | Browns Mill | 66 | Brookhaven |
| 14 | Shoal Creek II | 67 | Georgian Hills |
| 15 | Henderson | 68 | Ashford |
| 16 | Dresden | 69 | Windwood Hollow |
| 17 | Cofer | 70 | Meadowdale |
| 18 | Shoal Creek III | 71 | Hairston |
| 19 | Hamilton | 72 | Glen Emerald |
| 20 | Mason Mill | 73 | Bruce Street |
| 21 | Fairington | 74 | Bouldercrest |
| 22 | Tucker Recreation | 75 | Buena Vista |
| 23 | Briarwood | 76 | Summergate |
| 24 | Truelove | 77 | County Line |
| 25 | Gresham | 78 | Longdale |
| 26 | Rock Chapel | 79 | Chapel Hill |
| 27 | Exchange | 80 | Wesley Chapel |
| 28 | Lucious Sanders Recreation | 81 | Salem |
| 29 | Lithonia | 82 | Gregory Moseley |
| 30 | Avondale Dunaire | 83 | Vanderlyn |
| 31 | Miners Creek | 84 | Fernbank |
| 32 | Chapel Hill Property | 85 | Atherton |
| 33 | Fork Creek Mountain | 86 | Smokerise |
| 34 | Everett Property | 87 | Skyhaven |
| 35 | Forty Oaks | 88 | McDaniel |
| 36 | Yellow River South | 89 | Rehoboth |
| 37 | Davidson Arabia Mt Nature Preserve | 90 | Marbut Road |
| 38 | Zonolite | 91 | Henderson Mill |
| 39 | Stephenson Rd | 92 | Mystery Valley |
| 40 | Yellow River North | 93 | Sugar Creek |
| 41 | Dunwoody Nature Center | 94 | DeKalb Firing Range |
| 42 | Fowler | 95 | SE Athletic |
| 43 | Needham | 96 | Fisher Trail |
| 44 | Princeton | 97 | Pleasant Hill |
| 45 | Emory Grove | 98 | Lake Ivanhoe |
| 46 | Lavista | 99 | Starmount McAfee |
| 47 | Stoneview | 100 | Brook Run |
| 48 | Oakcreek | 101 | Water Works Property Laurelwood |
| 49 | Emory Grove | 102 | Union Grove |
| 50 | W.D. Thomson | 103 | Langsdale |
| 51 | Heaton | 104 | Vernon Springs |
| 52 | Montreal | 105 | White Oak |
| 53 | Kittredge | 106 | Stone Mountain Park (State facility) |

Figure 3 here

Target Facility Standards

An important tool for planning a balanced park system is facility standards. **Facility standards consist of formulas used to project the amount or number of a given type of facility required to serve a given population.** These formulas are applied to population projections in order to give planners a rough measure of future needs. They provide a general map or direction for the department to focus its resources.

It should be understood that the recommendations are conceptual in nature and will need to be adjusted as more information becomes available.

Table 1, on the next page, focuses on the demand standards which identify how many people a specific type of facility would serve. Geographic distribution also affects the availability of a facility and will be considered in facility distribution. Table 1 illustrates target standards based upon 1998 DeKalb population of 598,600.

The table is organized as follows:

- Number of Existing Facilities is based upon the DeKalb County current inventory. Other public facilities are not included in this column, but the analysis assumes that other providers will continue to provide facilities and programs. (If they did not continue, the level of service provided by the County could increase.)

- DeKalb County Existing Level of Service is based on current county facilities and the current county population in 1999.

- Benchmark Standard is the level of service provided by the model agencies studied (see Appendix A), or a standard level of service found generally in the U.S

- Target Standard for DeKalb is intended to be an optimum goal toward which the county can strive, based upon the current level of service; priorities derived from the citizen survey; public meetings, and other public input; and benchmark and other national standards.

Table 1. Facility Standards/Existing and Proposed Target Standards

| Facility | Number of Existing Facilities in DeKalb | DeKalb County Existing Level of Service * | Benchmark Standard | Target Standard |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| Recreation Centers | 224,975 sq. ft (11 facilities) | .38 sq. ft/person | 1 sq. ft/person | 1.00 sq. ft/person |
| Aquatic Facilities ⁽¹⁾ | 63,175 sq. ft (12 facilities) | .11 sq. ft/ person | .6 sq. ft/person | .24 sq. ft/person |
| Ballfields | 128 Fields | 4,677 people/field | 5,000 people/field | 4,275 people/field |
| Soccer Fields | 34 fields | 17,605 people/field | 10,000 people/field | 10,000 people/field |
| Tennis Courts | 105 courts | 5,700 people/court | 5,379 people/court | 5,400 people/court |
| Basketball Courts | 59 courts | 10,146 people/court | 10,000 people/court | 10,000 people/court |
| Golf Courses | 2 courses | 299,300 people/course | 138,617 people/course | 200,000 people/course |
| County Park Acreage | 3,752 acres | 6 acres/1,000 people | 23 acres/1,000 people | 18 acres/1,000 people |

Notes:

* DeKalb County Existing Level of Service is based on 1998 population and current inventory.

⁽¹⁾ This standard includes ONLY pool water surface area.

Source: EDAW, ERA, DPRD.

Table 2 illustrates the needs for facilities by commission district. In other words, the target standards are applied to each commission district, considering the number of existing facilities and projected 2010 population. This analysis is based upon current commission district boundaries. The needs should be reviewed again after the commission district boundaries are redrawn based upon the 2000 Census results.

Table 2. Target Facility Standards by Commission District

| | Commission Districts | | | | | |
|---|----------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Totals |
| 1998 Population | 119,364 | 114,178 | 109,986 | 128,124 | 126,948 | 598,600 |
| 2010 Population | 117,899 | 109,228 | 106,521 | 139,734 | 145,970 | 619,353 |
| No. of Existing Facilities by Type--1998 | | | | | | |
| Recreation Centers | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 11 |
| Aquatic Facilities | 3 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 12 |
| Ballfields | 27 | 16 | 20 | 32 | 17 | 112 |
| Soccer Fields | 8 | 2 | 0 | 21 | 3 | 34 |
| Tennis Courts | 29 | 27 | 23 | 13 | 13 | 105 |
| Basketball Courts | 12 | 7 | 17 | 12 | 11 | 59 |
| Golf Courses | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Park Acreage* | 602 | 310 | 544 | 925 | 1,371 | 3,752 |
| Population Per Facility--1998 | | | | | | |
| Recreation Centers | 59,682 | 57,089 | 54,993 | 32,031 | 126,948 | 54,418 |
| Aquatic Facilities | 39,788 | 38,059 | 54,993 | 32,031 | 0 | 49,883 |
| Ballfields | 4,421 | 7,136 | 5,499 | 4,004 | 7,468 | 5,345 |
| Soccer Fields | 14,921 | 114,178 | 0 | 6,101 | 42,316 | 18,139 |
| Tennis Courts | 4,116 | 4,229 | 4,782 | 9,856 | 9,765 | 5,701 |
| Basketball Courts | 9,947 | 16,311 | 6,470 | 10,677 | 11,541 | 10,146 |
| Golf Courses | 0 | 0 | 109,986 | 128,124 | 0 | 299,300 |
| Park Acreage* | 5 | 3 | 5 | 7 | 11 | 6 |
| Forecasted Total 2010 Demand** | | | | | | |
| Recreation Centers | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 12 |
| Aquatic Facilities *** | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 13 |
| Ballfields | 28 | 25 | 25 | 33 | 34 | 145 |
| Soccer | 12 | 11 | 10 | 14 | 15 | 62 |
| Tennis Courts | 22 | 20 | 20 | 26 | 27 | 115 |
| Basketball Courts | 12 | 11 | 10 | 14 | 15 | 62 |
| Golf Courses | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Park Acreage/per 1,000 people* | 2,122 | 1,966 | 1,917 | 2,515 | 2,627 | 11,148 |

*Park Acreage does not include 3,200 acres for Stone Mountain Park, located in District 1; City of Atlanta and City of Decatur Parks, located in Districts 2 and 3; Doraville Parks, located in District 1; and Chamblee Parks, located in District 2. City parks total 495 acres.

** County-wide facility demand calculated in Table 1 has been allocated to districts proportionally based on 2010 population projections.

*** Two types of aquatic facilities are recommended: community aquatic centers with water surface areas of approx. 10,000 sq ft (two per commission district); and three signature aquatic centers with approx. 20,000 sq ft of water surface areas, county-wide.

Source: DeKalb Parks & Recreation Department, Economics Research Associates, and EDAAW.

Conclusions from Levels of Service, Demographics, Models and Standards

Analyses of the maps and tables, on pages 9-20, suggest the following conclusions.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DEMAND, AS WELL AS DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF STANDARDS IS AN IMPORTANT ONGOING PROCESS THAT SHOULD BE FINE-TUNED AS THE COMMUNITY CHANGES.

Feasibility studies and market analysis should be conducted before initiating any major construction effort. This analysis should establish the demand for and features of a new facility.

In changing the way Parks and Recreation is handled in DeKalb County, a new approach to facility development is required—an approach that reflects the department's goals and visibly creates the image of a vital, directed community. Facilities should be evaluated for how they contribute to the overall impression of the department.

- Do they appear to be well maintained?
- Do they engender a sense of security?
- Are they accessible and do they create a positive, inviting appearance?
- Do they provide a balance of active and passive spaces?
- Do they promote the core values of the Department?
- Do they make the system more visible?

Recommendations for DeKalb Facilities

The recommendations that follow reflect the revisions to the target standards expressed in Tables 1 and 2. They have been evaluated and revised to reflect the reality of what can reasonably be achieved in the next ten years. Each facility type is discussed in general terms as to where it is needed, what it should encompass, suggested capital budget (exclusive of land acquisition which may or may not be necessary), priority of need and potential funding sources.

Table 3 on page 32 showcases the composite impact of the facility recommendations.

Please note that in many cases additional land will have to be acquired. These sites will need to accommodate not only the facility and supporting development such as parking lots, detention areas, graded slopes and buffers, but also supporting open space areas to be used for unstructured activities. In some cases these can be an expansion of an existing park site or could be developed in conjunction with a partner such as a school. In any event, when site specific planning occurs, budgets estimates must be adjusted based on the potential need for land acquisition.

Recreation Centers Summary

The *Recreation Centers Service Areas* map shows a typical two-mile service area around each of the recreation centers in the county. The size and range of services delivered by these facilities vary widely. Some of the facilities consist of only a gymnasium, while several are larger and offer meeting rooms and other amenities. The average center currently in the DeKalb parks system is 20,452 square feet.

Compared to the model standards, they are significantly undersized. The map shows gaps in service in portions of District 5 (east and west), District 4 (north), and District 3 (east), and smaller areas in Districts 1 and 2. The population and facility analysis in Table 2 illustrates that the greatest need for recreation centers is in District 5.

Generally, a recreation center can serve one person per square foot. (For example, a 50,000 square foot facility can be expected to serve about 50,000 people.) The smaller facilities cannot support the population base that the larger ones would. Facilities that consist of only a gym cannot be expected to deliver services to a population base much larger than 5,000 to 10,000 residents.

It is recommended that future development of recreation centers be large, signature facilities featuring meeting space, practice and game space, classrooms, sports equipment, and other amenities to the community in the 50,000 – 100,000 SF range. These kinds of facilities would draw customers from a much larger area than a neighborhood area.

In addition, many groups and individuals have expressed needs for more diverse space than a community center could provide. Seniors have expressed needs for programming space; diverse multicultural groups have expressed similar needs, as have advocates for the disabled.

The *Recreation Centers Service Areas map (figure 4 on the next page)* shows the greatest need for new recreation centers are in the eastern, central and southern portions of the county. Other areas that are underserved include the northern portion of the county, and the areas north of Atlanta but south of I-85. The population analysis shows the greatest need in District 5.

Standards call for 12 new centers with a minimum of 50,000 sq ft, but this may be an unachievable goal so five new recreation centers are recommended.

Recreation Centers Summary

DeKalb's Existing Facilities & Level of Service: (see figure 4 on the next page)

224,975 sq ft total (11 facilities)

.38 square foot per person

Benchmark: 1 square foot per person

Difference between benchmark and DeKalb: -.62 square foot per person

* DeKalb has less than 1/3 of the facilities it should have based on its population.

DeKalb's Target Standard: 1 square foot per person

Recommendation:

* Implement 1 square foot per person as standard.

* DeKalb should renovate or replace existing and outdated facilities to meet the 1 square foot per person standard.

* DeKalb should build five new multi-purpose centers (1 per commission district, beginning in District 5) to replace any closed facilities unable to be renovated or redirected to alternate uses.

* By 2010, DeKalb should have a total of 12 multi-purpose centers (avg. 50,000 sq ft to meet its population's recreational needs).

Capital cost: \$6.25 million per facility (~\$125/square foot for a 50,000 sq ft facility)

Priority: High (however, existing centers' programs and costs must be assessed before the County can make informed decisions about the appropriate location and function of new centers)

Funding source: Corporate sponsors (potentially with naming rights), revenue bonds, user fees, membership programs, partnerships with other service providers.

Figure 4 Map here

Figure 5 Map here

Athletic Fields Summary, including soccer, baseball, softball, and football

Interest in and demand for soccer fields is increasing with DeKalb's growing diverse population. The demand for baseball/softball/football fields is also beyond current supply. Compared with the benchmark agencies, and with the standards analysis, the current availability of baseball/softball/football fields is much greater than that of soccer.

The recommendation is for 45 new fields: 28 soccer and 17 baseball/softball/football.

As shown on the *Soccer Field Service Areas map (see figure 6 on the next page)*, much of the county is underserved for soccer, in particular the diverse populations in the Buford Highway/Doraville/Chamblee area. This suggests that developing soccer fields, at new, existing or expanded parks, should be a high priority in the short and long terms.

DeKalb's Existing Facilities & Level of Service: (see figure 6 on the next page)

128 fields for population of 598,000
1 soccer field per 17,600 people = 34 fields

Benchmark: 120 fields for a population of 598,600
1 soccer field per 10,000 people = 60 fields

Difference Between Benchmark and DeKalb: DeKalb County has 8 fields above the standard for athletic fields for its population. Youth sports is a strength in this county and the youth associations have made a strong case for additional fields.

DeKalb's Target Standard: 4,275 people per baseball/softball/football field
10,000 people per soccer field

Recommendation:

* Implement a standard of one field per 4,275 people. By 2010, DeKalb should build 28 new soccer and 17 new baseball/softball/football fields to meet the population growth.

* New soccer fields should be located in all districts except District 4; new baseball/softball/football fields to be concentrated in District 5.

* Consider the impact and public accessibility of soccer fields proposed for Stone Mountain Park.

Capital cost: \$250,000 per field (could be less depending upon how many fields in one location)

Priority: Soccer high; baseball/softball/football medium. To be located in new community parks or existing parks according to revised master plans

Funding source: Corporate or non-profit sponsors, recreation associations, capital funds, youth sports groups, grants

Figure 6 map

Tennis Courts Summary

Approximately half of the tennis courts in the DeKalb County inventory are at three parks: Blackburn (District 1), Mason Mill (District 2), and Sugar Creek (District 3). Tennis centers with pro shops have the potential to generate revenue. The county should consider closing community courts and constructing a tennis center to bring money into the county.

The *Tennis Courts Service Areas map* (see figure 7 on the next page) indicates that there are significant gaps throughout the mostly unincorporated areas of the county, especially in the eastern and central portions.

There have been a number of comments in public forums expressing the need for enhanced maintenance of existing tennis facilities. The trends for tennis should be monitored to assess the life cycle of the sport in this region. **The recommended standard of 1 court per 5,400 residents county-wide would be achieved by developing 10 additional tennis courts.**

The Department should closely monitor use levels at all tennis courts and consider closing those that do not meet the required threshold (see Appendix B for a discussion of criteria for closing facilities).

DeKalb's Existing Facilities & Levels of Service: (see figure 7 on the next page)
1 court per 5,700 people (total 105 courts)

Benchmark: One court per 5,400 people (total 111 courts per 598,600)

Difference between Benchmark and DeKalb: DeKalb is not far from the benchmark standard.

DeKalb's Target Standard: 1 court per 5,400 people

Recommendation:

* Apply the one court per 5,400 people standard for a total of 115 courts by 2010.

* Build 10 tennis courts, to be located in one revenue generating complex in Districts 4 or southeast District 5.

Capital cost: \$2 million per complex

Priority: Low (tennis was not mentioned as a high priority by any group)

Funding source: Corporate sponsors, revenue bonds, capital funds

Figure 7 map

Basketball Courts Summary

DeKalb County is very close to meeting standards that are comparable to the benchmark standards of 1 court per 10,000. Some members of the public have expressed a preference for additional basketball; in addition, links have been suggested between such opportunities and reducing youth crime and other at-risk behaviors. Considering the public's strong desire for facilities for teens, basketball should be a priority.

There are opportunities for developing a facility that could be signature and revenue producing. Indoor or outdoor-supervised basketball complexes, perhaps combined with community centers or teen rooms, would not be land-intensive and can be considered at existing as well as new parks.

DeKalb's Existing Facilities & Level of Service: (see figure 8 on the next page)

10,146 people per court
59 courts total

Benchmark: 10,000 people per court

Difference between Benchmark & DeKalb: DeKalb is close to the benchmark in terms of sheer number of courts.

Target Standard: 1 court per 10,000 people.

Recommendation:

* Apply standard of 1 court per 10,000 people.

* Build three signature basketball facilities recommended in District 4 or 5. Look for opportunities to add basketball facilities in conjunction with new recreation centers.

* Depending on its success, the County may wish to duplicate the facility around the County.

Capital cost: \$400,000 per facility

Priority: High

Funding source: Corporate or non-profit partners, capital funds, revenue bonds

Golf Courses Summary

One new county-owned golf course is recommended. Since the existing two courses are located in the eastern and south portions of the County, the new facility should be located in north DeKalb.

DeKalb's Existing Facilities & Level of Service:

one course per 299,300 people

Benchmark: one course per 138,617 people

Difference between Benchmark and DeKalb: DeKalb County is underserved in public golf courses.

DeKalb's Target Standard: one course per 200,000

Recommendation:

* Apply standard of one course per 200,000 people since the benchmark of one course per 138,617 people would be unachievable in DeKalb.

* Build or acquire one new 18-hole golf course in District 1 or 2 by 2010.

Capital cost: \$3.5-5.5 million

Priority: Medium

Funding source: Corporate sponsors, revenue bonds, private management

Park Land Summary

DeKalb County has a significant inventory of parks in terms of number, but many of the areas designated as community parks are smaller than the standard size for community parks. Parks designated as community parks vary widely in size and amenities, with the smallest being 14 acres (Midway) and the largest being approximately 175 acres (Wade-Walker and Exchange are each approximately 175 acres). Parks should be accessible to a community and to all neighborhoods.

A system of large and small parks and parklands contribute to a vibrant and connected community. The *County Park Service Areas map* (see figure 8 on the next page) illustrates a half-mile radius around each neighborhood park, and a two-mile service area radius around each community park. As the *County Park Service Areas* map shows, a few pockets of the County are not within a service area of any DeKalb or other public park. The map also shows the location of elementary schools (with a half-mile radius) to illustrate the impact that shared use of school facilities has on parks and recreation services.

Several other issues should be considered when evaluating the need for additional park land. One is the provision of other public park land by the state of Georgia (Stone Mountain Park) and the municipalities in DeKalb. Stone Mountain Park contributes approximately another 3,200 acres and the cumulative acreage for city parks is 495.

Another issue is the availability of unprogrammed space in the parks. Parks should offer space for unsupervised play as well as more the more structured facilities such as athletic fields. Therefore, some combination of new neighborhood parks and community parks is recommended.

DeKalb's Existing Facilities & Level of Service: (see figure 8 on the next page)

3,752 total acres/ 6 acres per 1,000

Benchmark: 23 acres per 1,000 people x 620,000* = 14,260 acres

Target Standard: apply national standard of 18 acres per 1,000 x 620,000* = 11,160 acres

* 620,000 is the projected DeKalb population in 2010

Recommendation: Add 200 acres per year; located in all districts. Over the next ten years, 2,000 acres would be added, resulting in almost 12 acres per 1,000 by the year 2010. By incorporating the state and city parks, the ratio would be 15 acres per 1,000. Pursue opportunities created by the Georgia Governor's Green Space Program and partnerships with Board of Education.

Capital cost: \$10 million per year (average \$50,000/acre)

Priority: High

Funding source: Corporate sponsors, capital funds

Figure 8 Map here

Recommended New Facility Development

Table 3 below shows a summary of recommended new facilities by the year 2010. The numbers are intended to be planning concepts and budget numbers. Costs are estimates based on December 1999 dollars. Figures may vary due to acquisition requirements and other factors.

Recommended development is based on target standards, trends, expressed demand, analysis of current service levels and comparison to model jurisdictions. **In order to ensure appropriateness of these recommendations, all new development will be preceded by:**

- * feasibility studies, market analysis and cost benefit analysis
- * geographical distribution adjustments
- * active public participation and partnership support
- * action by the Board of Commissioners, as appropriate

**Table 3. Recommended New Facility Development, By Commission District
Year 2000-2010**

| Facility Type | Number Recommended | Average Cost Each | District Impacted | Priority | Total Cost |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Recreation Center | 5 centers | \$6.25M | All | High | \$31.25M |
| Aquatic Facility | 3 facilities | \$5M | 1,2,3,5 | High | \$15M |
| Athletic Fields | 28 soccer 17 base/soft/football | \$250,000 \$250,000 | 1,2,3,5 Concentrate in 5 | High Medium | \$7M \$4.2M |
| Tennis Complex | 1, 10-court complex | \$2M | 4 or 5 | Low | \$2M |
| Golf Course | 1, 18-hole course | \$5M | 1 or 2 | Medium | \$5M |
| Basketball Complex | 3 complexes | \$400,000 | 4 or 5 | High | \$1.5M |
| Total Facilities Costs | | | | | \$65.65M |

Introduction

The Analysis of Findings and Conclusions chapter and Appendix A present the major results of each of the specific elements of the Findings phase. In this chapter, we examine national trends affecting parks and recreation. Following the discussion of national trends, we turn to the Findings concerning the DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Department. These findings (regardless of source) are grouped into several topical areas. Each topic area reports a list of findings, their associated strategic action conclusions and policy directions recommended.

National Trends

National trends affecting parks and recreation departments were researched to help provide DeKalb County with tools required to make informed decisions. Results of the research are found below.

Land Values

Discussions of land values and smart growth go hand-in hand when counties begin to consider acquiring land for open space, parks and conservation. Nationally, smart growth has become a buzz phrase that has already begun to make appearances in political arenas. But to truly grow smart, a community must decide which lands to protect for recreation, community character, the conservation of natural resources, and open space.

Accumulating evidence suggests that smarter, denser growth is an economical way for communities to grow. This is one reason why the American Planning Association, The U.S. Conference of Mayors, The National Association of Counties and many business leaders are getting behind the smart growth movement.

In 1998, the Trust for Public Land funded studies that examined the relationship between land conservation and property taxes. In the short term, one study found that taxes did rise after the land conservation project because property was removed from the tax rolls. However in the long term, the Massachusetts towns that had protected the most land enjoyed, on average the lowest property tax rates—perhaps because they had less development, requiring less roads, schools, sewer and water infrastructure, and other services.

Land conservation has other economic benefits. In Bowdoinham, Maine, city government chose to purchase the development rights to a 307-acre dairy farm when research indicated that anticipated property revenues would not meet the costs of supporting the development. “Undeveloped land is the best tax break a town has,” concluded selectman George Christopher.

One 1998 real estate industry analysis predicts that over the next 25 years, real estate values will rise fastest in the communities that incorporate traditional elements of successful cities: a concentration of amenities, and integration of commercial and residential districts and a pedestrian friendly configuration.

V. Analysis of Findings and Conclusions

In Salem, Oregon, urban land next to a greenbelt was worth \$1,200 more per acre than urban land 1,000 feet away. (*Healing Americans Cities* 1994) In Boulder, Colorado, the average value of property adjacent to a greenbelt was found to be 32% higher than a comparable home 3,200 feet away.

These studies and more point to the advantageous economics of open space and park planning. Land will generally not get less expensive than it is today, so securing open space and recreation land now is a good investment in a growing community.

Georgia Green Space Program

Georgia, like many other states, is recognizing the valuable link between green space and physical and mental health, environmental quality, economic stability and quality of life within communities. Green space provides recreation and transportation benefits, as well as environmental protection. It also enhances the sense of community and neighborhood in a more natural, green setting. Fundamentally, community green space is a local asset that increases the community's desirability as a place to live, work and play. The important trend of protecting and preserving green space, especially in rapidly urbanizing areas, is clearly evident nationwide. Parks and green space positively affect the public's quality of life, as well as the economy through such factors as tourism, public health and crime prevention.

The Georgia Green Space Program has set an aggressive goal of bringing 20% of the state's land into a protected status. It supports that goal with a \$30 million fund available to developing communities for land acquisition. **Both the funding and innovative planning concepts promoted by the program create opportunities for DeKalb to reach its green space goal of 34,666 acres.**

DeKalb County Parks and Recreation is also participating in the development of a green space plan for DeKalb County.

Economic Impact

In parks and recreation management today, more agencies are tracking the economic impact of recreation facilities and events in a community.

Parks stimulate tourism activity nationwide. Two thirds of all visitors to Oregon stopped at a state park in 1993, generating an annual economic impact to the state estimated at \$500 million. Oregon ranks 31st nationally in the amount of state park land and comes in fourth nationally in park usage. (*Oregon State Parks-1994*)

At county and local levels parks also stimulate tourism by providing additional activities for visitors, thereby prompting them to extend their stay in the area. In addition, local parks provide location for community events from fundraising events and concerts to runs and parades. These local celebrations can bring other visitors into the local economy.

V. Analysis of Findings and Conclusions

Quality of life is not a mysterious concept. Its pragmatic nature is obvious from corporate site relocation consultants and real estate executives. Recreational amenities usually rank in the top ten factors at the core of business local and retention decisions. In one 1989 survey by Cushman & Wakefield quality of life for employees was found to be the third most important factor in locating a business.

American cities large and small are creating parks as focal points for economic development and neighborhood renewal. In *The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space*, the Trust for Public Land discusses several parks that have had a big economic development impact, including Meridian Hill Park in Washington DC and Atlanta's own Freedom Parkway and the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site. The Freedom Parkway and MLK Site have helped spur the re-investment in "Sweet Auburn" neighborhood as well as the neighborhoods surrounding the Parkway. Bruce Gunther, a housing developer in the area says, "this is pure market economics at work. There are eight neighborhoods that surround the parkway and they will be strengthened. The whole point is to try and keep the middle-class families that are living there and to attract others. The park is a real anchor for an in-town middle class."

Partnerships

Partnerships are the way of the future for park and recreation agencies across the Country. These include public/public, public/private, and public/not-for-profit partnerships. Each type requires a policy approach that is different from the others due to the outcomes the partners are expecting from each type.

Public/Public Partnerships seek to acquire a 50/50 equity level of resources both partners provide to the partnership. It is very important that the partners involved share a common vision, values, and an understanding that by partnering they are growing their impact for serving the community. Typical public/public partnerships include:

- County Park and Recreation/School District
- County Park and Recreation/County Libraries
- County Park and Recreation/Colleges and Universities
- County Park and Recreation/City Park and Recreation Services
- County Park and Recreation/State Parks
- County Park and Recreation/Other County Departments

Public/Private Partnerships focus on the public sector gaining revenue from profits of the private sector partner. These partnerships are based on efficient businesses operating public attractions or operating services the County does not provide. Public/Private partnerships require the County to track good output measurements to hold the private partner accountable because they are operating as an agent of the County and must adhere to a level of standards and expectations.

V. Analysis of Findings and Conclusions

Typical County Park and Recreation and Private Partnerships include:

- Golf Course Management of all operations including maintenance
- Tennis Center Management
- Catering Services
- Restaurant Services
- Marina Operations
- Hospitality and Conference Management
- Camping and Campground Services
- Concession Management at Sports Complexes

Public/private partnerships generally cover three to four years for management contracts and 10, 15, and 20 years for lease management contracts. The private partner invests \$2 - \$10 million in a public attraction and requires time to gain a return on their investment.

Public/Not-for-Profit Partnerships typically share the cost to provide the facility or program services. The not-for-profit typically has more flexibility to provide a service than the County and it allows both partners to gain revenues or efficiencies in operations from that partnership agreement. Depending on the amount of the not-for-profit investment, the partnerships are based on three, five, ten, or fifteen-year agreements. Both partners must establish a common vision and values. A good activity based costing system is required to track and demonstrate the value both partners are putting into the partnership agreement.

Examples of public/not-for-profit partnerships on a County basis include:

- County Parks and Recreation/Youth or Adult Sports Associations: Developing sports complexes jointly. Managing of the respective sport is done by the not-for-profit organization.
- County Parks and Recreation/Hospital: Providing health and wellness services inside a multi-dimensional recreation center.
- County Parks and Recreation/Environmental Associations: partnering on land trusts, environmental centers, and greenway development coordination.
- County Parks and Recreation/Friends of Specific Attractions: Raising funds or assisting in managing an attraction.

All three types of partnerships are designed to allow a County Park and Recreation Department to leverage their resources and build additional public advocacy and support.

V. Analysis of Findings and Conclusions

Budget Trends

The latest trend in budget development is focused on **Performance Budgeting**. **Revenues are created from many options including a designated funding source. These are tracked against inputs, outputs, measurable outcomes, performance levels, and is based on what the department achieves against the dollars requested.**

This requires the department to implement a sound activity based costing system to create good baseline data. They must measure the results of the products and services against a set of performance measures. **Typical measures include the following:**

- Customer satisfaction levels met
- Cost per experience
- Revenues to expenses achieved
- Capacity levels obtained
- Cost per unit to deliver a service
- Retention levels obtained
- Partnering resources leveraged

Total operating budgets for County Parks and Recreation range from 35% to 50% self-supporting in this country due to counties developing regional-type recreational facilities that are specialized and serve several demographic groups in one setting.

Management Trends

Management trends are moving away from cylinder management to matrix management. Matrix management focuses on moving more decisions to lower levels in the organization. This allows work teams to exist between divisions in order to achieve results without pushing decision making up to supervisors and management levels. All work teams have outcomes to be achieved. Managers focus on achieving outcomes and reducing bureaucracy versus micromanaging details. Supervisors work in the field and lead many of the work teams. In cylinder management, all decisions are forced up to various levels based on the magnitude of the decision. Approval is sought in one division before seeking approval in another division. This impacts the results of the division wanting to move a decision forward. Bureaucracy is heightened, not reduced.

Other management trends focus on outsourcing inefficient operations to businesses that can provide higher quality of services at a lower price. **Examples for outsourcing services in other counties around the United States include:**

- Golf Management
- Tennis Management
- Horticulture Management
- Turf Management
- Construction Management
- Custodial Management
- Safety Management
- Concession Management
- Trash Collection
- Wellness and Fitness Management

The County must know their true direct and indirect costs to compete against the private sector in order to evaluate efficiently outsourcing opportunities. To measure this, the County will develop a Request for Proposal process that seeks to establish which delivery method will bring the highest level of service for the most efficient price.

Recreation Facility Trends

Recreation facility trends focus on multi-dimensional design and intergenerational use in one setting. These include large multi-dimensional recreation centers and aquatic centers that can serve the entire family. Other trends include:

- Golf learning centers targeted to youth and beginning golfers
- Skateboard parks
- Dog parks
- Outdoor adventure centers
- Inline skate parks
- Sports complexes that are six, twelve, or twenty plus courts or fields in one setting
- Ice related facilities
- Basketball academies
- Health and Wellness Centers

These types of facilities are usually open 90 to 105 hours a week and can be high revenue producers. These facility types have the capability to cover operating and capital costs.

Recreation Program Trends

Recreational trends focus on quality over quantity, intergenerational activities, pricing services to benefits, and programs that are shorter in length.

- Senior Programs: Focus on providing different levels of senior services by target generation – 50 to 60, 60 to 70, 70 to 80, and 80+ programs. Each ten-year target group has separate needs and abilities. Most seniors feel 15 years younger than they are and programs need to reflect that feeling.
- Family Programs: Parents and children participate in activities together versus the parent observing the child. Programs include sports, arts, special events, wellness and fitness, trips, outdoor and environmental programs, aquatics, high-end computer games, and life skill courses.
- Roller Sports: Activities targeted to in-line skating, hockey, skateboarding, BMX tracks and cycling.
- Teen Services: Provide after-school, evening, and weekend social spaces for music, dancing, computer games, computer learning, places to hang out and co-ed activities.
- Outdoor Adventure: Programs in canoeing, sailing, fishing, kayaking, white water rafting, rock climbing, mountain biking, camping and skateboarding.
- Sports Development Programs: Targeted to skill camps, tournaments, and specialty leagues for youth, teens, and adults. Co-ed sports programs for teens in soccer, softball, basketball, and volleyball are very popular. Older Adult sports are very popular. Women and girls sports are growing tremendously.

Local Findings - Public Perception and Needs

Finding 1 - Public Awareness

There is a low level of awareness among the general public about the Department and its facilities and programs. The survey showed that 42% of respondents were not aware of these programs and facilities; in most communities that figure is 10% or less.

Participants in public meetings indicated that many of the parks and recreation facilities should be more visible to the average DeKalb County citizen. Parks in general are not well marked; people don't know where they are.

Strategic Action Conclusion: This finding suggests that a public awareness program and more effective marketing of available facilities and programs are needed. In addition, the visibility of many parks from major roads needs to be improved. Taken together, these will result in enhanced public support and increased advocacy.

Policy directive:

- Develop a strong marketing program.
- Improve visibility of parks. Create site plans and improvements that present parks to the street
- Target acquisitions with road frontage.

Finding 2 - Most Important Facilities

The most important parks and recreation facilities to residents of the County based on the sum of the top choices given by respondents are: walking and biking trails (41%), neighborhood parks (37%), picnic facilities (25%), playgrounds (23%), nature preserves/environmental centers (21%), and large multi-use parks (21%).

Strategic Action Conclusion: While the County has a great number of ballfields and other programmed facilities, the facility audit noted the lack of open space at many parks and the predominance of fences and athletic fields. This suggests that future emphasis should be placed on non-programmed recreation facilities, such as open (unprogrammed) fields, trails, and nature areas.

Policy directive:

- Emphasize open space, non-programmed recreation facilities, and trails.

Finding 3 - Safety & Security

Safety and security are pressing issues. Parks are not perceived to be safe places.

Strategic Action Conclusion: The Department needs a renewed emphasis on safety in parks. This emphasis includes safe recreation policies and procedures (including maintenance procedures). Future design and programming needs to take into account security and safety concerns, as well as law enforcement and crime prevention.

Policy directive:

- Renew emphasis on safety.
- Create Security Coordinator position to oversee a dedicated park patrol
- Coordinate a Park Ambassador program with staff
- Develop a Park Watch program with volunteers

Local Findings - Public Perception and Needs

Finding 4 - Service Delivery

Perceptions of inequity in service delivery are common. Residents of the northern area of the County feel that they don't get their fair share of recreation services, as do residents of the south.

Strategic Action Conclusion: As illustrated on the maps in the previous section, there are gaps in service delivery (i.e., convenient access to parks) in all areas of the county. In general, the southern and eastern parts of the county have experienced rapid development that justifies providing additional facilities. In the east-central portion of the county, some recreation and open space needs are satisfied by Stone Mountain Park, but athletic fields and other county-type facilities are not available to east-central DeKalb residents. There is a particular need for soccer fields in the Doraville/Chamblee/Buford Highway area. In the southern portion of the county, gaps exist in the southeast corner and in an area generally in the area north and east of the I-20 Wesley Chapel Road exit. (See Figure 8.) The county's first priority for land acquisition should be in south and east-central DeKalb, which are also the fastest growing area, as well as the areas with the most children.

Policy directive:

- Acquire land throughout the County, with emphasis in the south. All areas need greater access to recreation services.

Finding 5 - Changing Demographics

The demographics of DeKalb County are changing. The Department needs to respond better to recreation needs of international populations, teens, seniors, and families.

Strategic Action Conclusion: To date the majority of the County's recreation resources have been expended for the benefit of children ages 5-12 who play organized sports. While this is an important group, according to survey respondents and others who were interviewed, other constituencies, such as teens, younger children, families, and senior citizens should not be ignored. In addition, the changing demographics of the County indicate that the Department should begin to plan for older as well as more international populations. Active seniors programs and non-traditional team sports were mentioned most often as needing attention. Renewed attention to programming should include routine market analysis, customer satisfaction surveys, detailed accounting of participation rates and costs, and outreach to the communities served by individual facilities.

Policy directive:

- Work closely with communities to ensure that programs are meeting citizens' needs.
- Evaluate recreation programs and respond to market demand and customer satisfaction.

Local Findings - Partnerships

Finding 1 - Support for Partnerships

Partnerships with other organizations such as schools and non-profit groups receive strong support from survey, focus group and interview respondents. Most people believe that the County should place a much stronger emphasis on partnerships.

Strategic Action Conclusion: Without exception all groups surveyed and interviewed believe strongly that the County should work harder to secure sponsorships and partners for programs as well as renovating and building facilities. The swimming facility at Lynwood Park, sponsored by Post Properties, is an excellent example of how this can work effectively. To leverage shrinking County resources, the Department should dedicate the necessary resources to developing partnerships, including volunteer programs, corporate sponsors, adopt-a-park program, etc.

Policy directive:

- Dedicate the resources necessary to aggressively promote and implement partnerships with public, private, and non-profit entities.

Local Findings - Parks and Facilities

Finding 1 - Improve Existing Facilities

Survey respondents, as well as most interviewees, believe that the first priority for expenditures should be improving existing facilities. Department maintenance crews take pride in their facilities, but most facilities are not in top condition, and maintenance staff believes that there are inefficiencies in maintenance procedures and policies, as well as the need for investments in equipment and training.

Strategic Action Conclusion: The facilities audit noted many specified parks and facilities in need of update and repair. In addition, there is a need for new maintenance policies and procedures to ensure maximum efficiency and improved parks maintenance. A resource management study, along with an activity-based-costing system, will allow the County to evaluate and revise maintenance policies and procedures. Once these programs are in place, the County may wish to consider outsourcing some functions if it appears that significant cost savings would result.

Policy directive:

- Be a good steward of land and facilities by upgrading and repairing parks and facilities as needed.
- Collect necessary data to allow for objective evaluation of costs and efficiencies. Implement cost-saving measures.

Local Findings - Parks and Facilities

Finding 2 - Implement Master Plans

Some interviewees and public meeting participants expressed frustration that master plans for some parks have not been implemented.

Strategic Action Conclusion: To respond to changing needs and demographics, the County should update master plans. These updates should be accomplished with community input, and incorporate a plan for timely funding and implementation.

Policy directive:

- Establish consistent funding for timely implementation of newly master planned parks (fund within master plan adoption).
- Increase community relations to stay in touch with affected community.

Finding 3 - Improve Park Image

Landscaping needs more attention; the visual image of most parks is dominated by fencing. Parks do not appear inviting, due to maintenance, fencing, and sign issues.

Strategic Action Conclusion: While well maintained generally, many parks appear to be out of date and lack appeal. The County should address the need to update many of the parks by embarking on a program to upgrade facilities, landscaping, lighting, and signs to improve the appearance of the system and respond to changing program needs. An aggressive program of updating master plans, landscaping, lighting and signs is needed.

Policy directive:

- Improve the appearance of parks through a standard image, improved signs and landscaping, and renovations and repairs.

Finding 4 - Acquire Open Space

Acquiring new open space received strong support from many different sources. Walking/biking trails, neighborhood parks, nature preserves, picnic facilities, large multi-use parks, playgrounds, and open space ranked as the most important facilities in the citizen survey. The need for passive, unprogrammed open spaces and attractive connections were mentioned repeatedly in the focus groups and public meetings. DeKalb County is very deficient in park land whether you apply the national average of 18 acres of park land per 1,000 people or the Georgia Community Green Space goal of protecting 20% of the county's land area.

Strategic Action Conclusion: Land will never be any less expensive than it is now, and the amount of undeveloped land in the County is decreasing quickly. Many needs can be addressed by acquiring new parkland and connected corridors; including equity, diversity of use, access, and an enhanced ability to meet current and future recreation needs.

Policy directive:

- First priority is to seek funds to acquire land, possibly through the Georgia Governor's Green Space Program.
- Develop cooperative initiatives that encourage the provision of accessible open space.
- Identify strategies and tools, in a DeKalb Green Space Program, that result in every home having access, within a 10-minute walk, to a park, greenway or nature preserve.

Local Findings - Parks and Facilities

Finding 5 - Improve Park Images/Create Signature Facility

DeKalb County's parks do not have a strong image. There is no "signature" facility that people can point to with pride, or that gives identity to the community.

Strategic Action Conclusion: The County should consider identifying new or existing parks that can be developed with signature facilities such as community gathering places to enhance community spirit and identity.

Policy directive:

- Develop signature facilities.
- Develop an image plan for the park system.
- Develop a plan to make park entrances more attractive and visible.

Local Findings - Programs and Services

Finding 1 - Collect & Evaluate Program Data

Not enough information exists about current programs. There is no way to know which programs are successful and which are not.

Strategic Action Conclusion: The Department needs to initiate a system of collecting information about program costs and participation rates, as well as levels of satisfaction among program participants. A year of baseline data is needed to make an informed decision about which programs to continue and which to replace.

Policy directive:

- Establish systems for activity-based-costing and systematic program evaluation.

Finding 2 - Programs

Survey respondents, as well as others interviewed, believe strongly that the County should provide facilities and programs for children and teens as a top priority, with seniors also given special consideration. Compared to benchmark and other agencies, DeKalb's recreation facilities are heavily weighted toward youth athletics. This may be why many citizens are not aware of and do not participate in County programs—there is little offered for citizens without youth aged 5-16.

Strategic Action Conclusion: As described above, the County should continue its strong programs for youth, while developing additional opportunities for teens and seniors. Market-based programming will allow County staff to ensure that programs offered respond to the needs of the community they serve.

Policy directive:

- Seek opportunities to provide facilities and programs for teens and seniors.

Local Findings - Parks and Facilities

Finding 3 - New Marketing Program/Market-based Programming

Programs may not offer an up-to-date, diverse range of activities for a diverse population. Marketing materials do not attract large numbers of participants.

Strategic Action Conclusion: A new marketing program and market-based programming will alleviate these weaknesses. Careful attention to cost-per-experience analyses and closer relationships with the populations the County wishes to serve will allow the County to offer programs that are responsive to constituents' needs. In addition, by seeking partners for programs, the County will ensure that there is a constituency for each program offered, enhancing the probable success of each program.

Policy directive:

- Work closely with communities to ensure that programs are meeting citizens' needs.
- Evaluate recreation programs and respond to market demand and customer satisfaction.

Finding 4 - Identify Program Specialities

Recreation centers are generally not specialized, that is, each center offers the similar programs and activities. More variety would be possible if some centers specialized in signature opportunities, offering high-quality programs and recreation opportunities to the county and the community at large.

Strategic Action Conclusion: The results of the activity-based-costing analysis will allow the county to assess accurately the effectiveness of programs at each location. If it appears that programs are unnecessarily duplicative, the Department can re-program certain facilities to ensure maximum utility of facilities and resources.

Policy directive:

- Work closely with communities to ensure that programs are meeting citizens' needs.
- Evaluate recreation programs and respond to market demand and customer satisfaction.

Finding 5 - Computerize Registration

Registration for department programs is decentralized, inconvenient, and difficult to enroll many potential program participants.

Strategic Action Conclusion: A computerized, centralized registration system that allows for the use of credit cards is essential if the department is to offer an up-to-date program experience for participants.

Policy directive:

- Establish centralized, computerized registration system.

Local Findings - Funding and Resources

Finding 1 - Funding Sources

Compared to benchmark and other agencies, DeKalb's Recreation Department has a low budget and poor mechanisms for providing ongoing funding. In DeKalb, the Department recovers a relatively small portion of its costs from fees and other outside sources of revenue (**DeKalb recovers only about 11 percent, while other agencies in the benchmark study may recover 30 percent or more of costs.**)

In addition, many successful parks agencies around the country are able to leverage County resources through Parks and Recreation Authorities. The existence of an authority, usually appointed by the members of the elected governing body, allows a department more flexibility in contracting, purchasing, land acquisition, and other functions. An authority generally allows an agency to work outside the governmental system, with checks and balances and reasonable limits.

Most benchmark agencies have **dedicated sources of funding**, including tax revenue. Many in the community would like to see the Department's role evolve into more revenue generation, economic development, environmental protection and education, land-banking, and leadership in partnership and cooperation.

Strategic Action Conclusion: Without increased revenues, the Department essentially doesn't have the ability to acquire land, improve or even maintain existing facilities, or offer state-of-the-art programs. Given the current level of support, the only sensible course of action is for the Department to become more entrepreneurial and less dependent upon tax revenues for funds.

Policy directive:

- Make facilities and programs more self-supporting.
- Establish an entrepreneurial ethic among Department staff.
- Establish a Park Authority

Finding 2 - Dedicated Funding Source

The necessity of competing with all other important County programs (such as police and fire) for annual capital and operating funds has led to uncertainty and inadequate funding levels. At the same time, there is currently little public or political support for any additional tax for parks and recreation.

Strategic Action Conclusion: The Department needs to re-energize the park and recreation system to become more self-sufficient while, at the same time, build support for a dedicated funding source.

Policy directive:

- Build support for a dedicated funding source.

Local Findings - Funding and Resources

Finding 3 - Entrepreneurial Operation

The lack of resources—funding, technology, equipment, staff—leads to burnout, attrition, and low morale.

Strategic Action Conclusion: The change to a more entrepreneurial, market-based system should re-energize staff while providing increased resources.

Policy directive:

- Make facilities and programs more self-supporting, and establish an entrepreneurial ethic among Department staff.

Finding 4 - Concentrate on Park & Recreation Service Delivery

Department resources are spread thin. The Department is involved in many activities that do not relate to parks and recreation.

Strategic Action Conclusion: The Department should seek to transfer responsibilities that do not directly relate to parks and the delivery of recreation services.

Policy directive:

- Concentrate solely on parks and recreation service delivery.

Finding 5 - Establish Market-Based Pricing

Fees for programs are generally low. Most citizens can afford higher fees, and most think user fees should offset a greater percentage of the Department's expenses.

Strategic Action Conclusion: A program that enhances self-sufficiency needs to include higher fees based on market rates. The Department needs to develop a system to ensure that County residents who truly cannot afford to pay are not excluded from facilities or programs due to the new fee structure. This can be accomplished through scholarships, vouchers, work credits and programs that offer free or reduced fees for participants who donate time or services.

Policy directive:

- Establish market-based recreation fees.

Finding 6 - Reorganize Department/Update Programs and Procedures

Reorganizing the Department and updating programs and procedures could result in significant savings (up to \$1 million per year).

Strategic Action Conclusion: Concurrent with raising user fees and seeking outside partners, the Department should evaluate the existing organizational structure and policies and procedures. The activity-based-costing system will determine the true cost of maintaining each facility and providing each program.

With this information, the Department will be able to identify areas where costs can be saved. Where appropriate, the County may also wish to achieve cost savings through outsourcing certain functions.

Local Findings - Funding and Resources

Finding 6 - Reorganize Department/Update Programs and Procedures

Policy directive:

- Establish market-based recreation fees.
- Evaluate Department operations and aggressively pursue opportunities for increased efficiency.
- Integrate the activity-based costing (ABC) process of tracking and cost analysis.

Local Findings - Support and Vision

Finding 1 - Increase Support

There is little perceived political support for parks and recreation. Parks and recreation are not seen as integral to the community's welfare and attractiveness as a place to live or do business.

Strategic Action Conclusion: If the Department is able to leverage resources and create an improved park and recreation system, political support will increase. At the same time, Department staff should be sure that county residents understand the benefits of recreation—individual, social, environmental, and especially economic. This may be accomplished through improving the system, enhancing visibility, and becoming more customer-driven.

Policy Directive:

- Increase support for parks and recreation through enhanced levels of service and promotion of the four benefits of recreation.
- Establish a Park Authority

Local Findings - Internal Readiness

Finding 1 - Establish Performance Measures

The Recreation Services Division has no performance measures, standards, or activity-based tracking system for program costs and revenues in place. The Parks Service Division is undertaking a resource management plan to obtain baseline information.

Strategic Action Conclusion: The Recreation Services Division does not currently have the information necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of programs. New systems, training, and procedures are needed in the areas of performance measures, entrepreneurial management, and activity-based costing.

Computer hardware and software and staff training will be needed to conduct and implement the resource management plan. Organizational structure of the Parks Service Division may need to be changed to maximize productivity. Once baseline information is available, outsourcing of some functions may be indicated. Several maintenance functions, such as golf course maintenance, contract management, the centralized maintenance facility, will need to be evaluated.

Local Findings - Internal Readiness

Finding 1 - Establish Performance Measures

Policy Directives:

- Establish baseline information for performance measures as soon as possible to allow for evaluation of service delivery costs.
- Once new policies and systems are established, provide necessary training for staff.

Finding 2 - Greenways & Trails

The Parks Service Division is not prepared to maintain greenways and trails.

Strategic Action Conclusion: The PATH Foundation has a joint agreement with the county to plan build and maintain multi-use trails. The walking/nature trails within park sites are not adequate. The department should support PATH's efforts. A trails maintenance program needs to be developed; partnerships with user groups will be important. One solution would be to set up a new section with responsibility for trails management.

Policy directive:

- Establish trails planning, implementation, and maintenance measures.

Finding 3 - Establish Procedures for Natural Resource Management

Currently there are no formal policies or procedures for natural resources management.

Strategic Action Conclusion: The Parks Service Division needs to develop systems and procedures for maintaining natural areas, including lakes and other water features.

Policy directive:

- Develop natural resources management policies and systems.

Finding 4 - Increase Marketing Efforts

The marketing plan is an integral part of the strategic plan; the Marketing Section will have a crucial role to play in its development and implementation.

Strategic Action Conclusion: The Marketing Section needs to work more closely with the Recreation Division in planning and marketing effective programs.

Policy directive:

- Coordinate marketing and programming functions.

Finding 5 - Enhance Planning Efforts

The planning function is closely related to Parks Service Division activities.

Strategic Action Conclusion: The function should be realigned with the Parks Service Division or as an independent function.

Policy directive:

- Evaluate planning function and its organizational position.

Local Findings - Internal Readiness

Finding 6 - Develop Policies & Procedures Manual

The Department lacks formal policies and procedures in several areas.

Strategic Action Conclusion: The Planning and Support Services Division, with the help of other Divisions, should take the lead in developing a standard policies and procedures manual.

Policy directive:

- Develop standard policies and procedures manual.

VI. Recommended Action Strategies

In an intensive day-long workshop, the planning team analyzed the key findings summarized in Chapter V and developed a department vision statement, as well as 16 key strategies that the department will use to work toward the vision articulated in the vision statement. **The vision statement is:**

A dedicated and professional team commits to leading the community into the 21st century to make parks and recreation the community's connection to a prosperous future, through equitable levels of quality neighborhood and signature parks and recreation services that enhance quality of life and promote a thriving community.

By pursuing this vision, DeKalb County will approach the delivery of parks and recreation services in new way. **Important features of this new approach include:**

- Changing the focus of the Department to an entrepreneurial, market-driven system that responds quickly and seamlessly to community preferences and needs.
- Changing the focus of the Department to generate more revenues from park programs.
- Reinvesting savings, efficiencies and revenue back into the department's budget.
- Placing a heavy emphasis on partnerships with other governmental, non-profit, and private agencies to leverage County investment and increase resources for parks and recreation facilities and programs.
- Creating signature parks to enhance the image of DeKalb County and its parks system.
- Eliminating duplicative services and programs.
- Acquiring parkland and greenways to meet the growing demand in the county, particularly south DeKalb.
- Emphasizing programs and facilities for youth and seniors.
- Emphasizing safety and stewardship of existing resources.
- Raising citizen awareness of the park system through marketing and image programs.
- Putting internal systems in place to allow tracking of customer satisfaction and specific costs of providing programs and services.
- Making internal changes where necessary to implement the plan, including potential outsourcing of certain services.

To realize the new vision, and to respond to the issues raised in the Findings Phase, the Department commits to the following strategies:

Action Strategy 1: Implement a management program to protect physical and natural assets.

This strategy will ensure that the County remains a good steward of its natural resources, land, and facilities. It also responds to the wishes of stakeholders that the Department has as its first priority maintenance of current assets.

To accomplish this strategy, the County will need to prepare a resource management plan to implement an activity-based-costing system specific to park maintenance. This will allow the Department to evaluate staff productivity levels in meeting maintenance standards outlined in the management plan. By establishing partnership agreements with internal and external agencies, the Department can recover some maintenance costs. The resource management plan will help evaluate and set priorities for capital improvement needs based on program requirements within the Department and County. In addition, implementing the capital improvements plan (see Strategy 15 and Table 5) will ensure the protection of the County's investment in existing natural resources and facilities.

Action Strategy 2: Strive to ensure the highest level of safety in parks to increase use and enjoyment.

This strategy ensures the safe use and enjoyment of parks and facilities by visitors and employees. This was identified as a priority in the citizen survey.

This strategy will require the County to establish safety standards for parks, as well as a safety improvement budget. A Park Ranger unit, coordinated with the Public Safety Department, will help protect the physical safety of park visitors and assets. Similarly, the rejuvenation of a park volunteer program will add to actual and perceived user safety. Safety signs, emergency telephones, and increased visibility of parks from major roads will also enhance visitor safety at County parks.

Action Strategy 3: Embrace a partnership philosophy to leverage services with other providers before offering new programs or services.

This strategy increases the resources available to the Department by leveraging County dollars with private donations, volunteer resources, and other outside sources. This is an essential element in the Department's new strategy of becoming more self-reliant.

Partnerships will be a cornerstone of the future DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Department. Partnerships with other governmental agencies, non-profit groups, and for-profit corporations will allow the Department to leverage County funds and ensure community participation in all aspects of Department activities. The Department will seek partnerships in funding construction, maintenance, programs, and all other aspects of parks and recreation service delivery.

Action Strategy 4: Measure and actively promote the benefits of parks and recreation services, including economic development benefits.

This strategy will raise the awareness and enjoyment of parks and recreation facilities and programs throughout the County.

Implementation of this strategy will allow parks and recreation to move to the forefront of the County's image and marketing program. By developing a marketing plan for Department facilities and programs, the Department will ensure that all new facilities and programs are responsive to community needs and desires. Re-establishing the adopt-a-park program and gathering information about the economic impact of parks and recreation in DeKalb County will allow the Department to strengthen the profile of parks and recreation and its importance to the DeKalb economy.

Action Strategy 5: Update, realign and implement recreation programs that are economical and market-driven, focusing on youth, teens, seniors, wellness and environmental programs.

This strategy sets a new course for recreation programs in the County, focusing on market research, partnerships, customer satisfaction, and reasonable user fees.

A major review of programs will lead to a set of program offerings that is responsive to market demand and citizen needs. This plan provides a set of criteria based on participation rates (see Appendix B) to consider when deciding whether to continue an existing program. In addition, establishing a policy that all programs must cover direct costs (to be phased in for existing programs and established immediately for all new programs) will ensure that programs are responsive to market needs. Establishing partnerships for new and existing programs will also help make sure that programs continue to be fresh and relevant.

Making program registration easier and more accessible will also lead to more satisfied customers. The plan recommends establishing a centralized computer registration system.

Action Strategy 6: Establish parks and open space standards based on equity of access, optimal level of service and cost effectiveness, and a positive and inviting image.

This strategy provides the tools necessary to evaluate the equity of park access and recreation opportunities throughout the county. In addition, it provides the basis for setting priorities for new lands and facilities.

Chapter IV: Standards and Level of Service describes the recommended standards for park facilities and parkland. These standards represent goals toward which the County should strive in acquiring land and developing new facilities. The standards should be revisited and re-analyzed every few years to ensure that they remain relevant to current population characteristics and needs.

Action Strategy 7: Maximize the utility of existing park properties and recreation facilities according to established standards and guidelines.

This strategy ensures that the County will receive maximum efficiency and utility from existing resources.

Existing park master plans should be updated to ensure that they continue to respond to current population needs and recreation trends. The Department will also seek partners to help develop park amenities, provide services, and maintain parks and recreation areas.

Action Strategy 8: Update and expand a minimum of five special facilities to generate revenue and provide destination parks.

This strategy will increase the visibility of parks in the community, while enhancing County revenue. The focus of this strategy is to allow the Department to develop facilities specifically for the purpose of generating revenue to help offset the costs of other programs and facilities.

The Department will need to evaluate parks for their potential as destination parks with revenue-producing capability. As part of the action plan to implement the strategic plan, the Department will identify which parks are suitable for development of special-use facilities and produce business plans for each of the selected parks and facilities. This strategy also involves identifying other revenue opportunities in existing parks, such as concessions, corporate sponsorships, and leasing of park elements. The Department will also prepare a development plan for Brook Run, focusing on revenue potential.

Action Strategy 9: Using creative financing, create four new community parks that provide a balance of active and passive spaces.

This strategy addresses the shortage of parkland and facilities in certain areas of the community.

Similar to the previous strategy, implementation of this initiative will result in greater revenue-generating potential for the Department. The creation of four new community parks will also respond to the demand for additional open space, including non-programmed open space suitable for all types of outdoor recreation.

Action Strategy 10: Acquire 200 acres of open space per year to provide for parks, multi-dimensional recreation facilities, and trails.

Like Strategy 9, this strategy provides for the acquisition of needed lands in developing areas before it becomes too expensive. Although ambitious, the plan to acquire 2000 acres will still leave the County short of its goal of 18 acres per thousand people in the year 2010.

Establishing a consistent dedicated funding source will be crucial in achieving this goal. In addition, the County will need to establish a plan for acquisition, including criteria for setting priorities for which lands to acquire. (A draft list of acquisition site evaluation criteria is provided in the Technical Supplement.) As with all aspects of the plan, establishing acquisition partners will also be crucial.

Recommended Action Strategies

These could include partnering with land trusts, seeking donations for land acquisition, and partnering with organizations such as the Board of Education. In addition, developing zoning and land development standards that recognize the need for and value of open space will assist the County in meeting its goal of 2000 additional acres by 2010.

Action Strategy 11: Develop 80 miles of greenways as connections to nature for people (8 miles per year).

This strategy responds to public comments and results of the citizen survey.

A greenways and trails master plan will establish priorities for land acquisition and trails development. In addition, the Department will need to identify a staff member to be responsible for plan implementation, including seeking partners and managing land acquisition and trails construction.

Action Strategy 12: Maximize and promote the value of natural resources in the County to increase access and connection to citizens.

This strategy responds to public comments and results of the citizen survey, as well as the County's need to be a good steward of its natural resources.

Establishing management standards to protect and enhance natural resources will assist the County in implementing this strategy. A strong public education program will also enhance stewardship of the County's natural resources. Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve can be developed as the signature natural conservation area in the County's park system.

Action Strategy 13: Re-align the organizational structure of the Department to accommodate the phased implementation of the strategic plan, and, if necessary, establish funding for the new alignment.

This strategy responds to funding issues as well as issues that are outlined in the Department Readiness report. The Department needs to be reorganized to respond to the new mission and new way of doing business.

A recommended organizational realignment is presented in Appendix C. The ultimate alignment and reorganizational plan will be developed as a part of the Strategic Plan's Implementation Action Plan currently underway within the Department.

Action Strategy 14: Recognize "core businesses" of the Department; concentrate resources on providing those facilities and services.

This strategy will allow the Department to focus on the areas that are most important to DeKalb's citizens, concentrating resources on the areas in which the Department will strive to achieve excellence, and avoiding spending resources in less important areas.

Core programs that the Department will focus on are land management, program facilitation and community building. Specific core businesses are youth athletics; teen programs, wellness and sports fitness, youth day camps, unstructured open space, senior programs, special population programs, aquatics and environmental programs.

Action Strategy 15: Establish a Park and Recreation Authority to create flexibility and focus in the Department.

The creation of a Parks and Recreation Authority in accordance with Georgia law will provide greater flexibility in funding and administering parks and recreation facilities and programs, while providing for enhanced feedback and guidance from the community.

Action Strategy 16: Implement a Capital Improvements Plan to construct new facilities and rehabilitate existing parks.

The implementation of the CIP is essential in carrying out the mission of the Department; in providing state-of-the-art facilities and programs; and in responding to the needs of DeKalb citizens in a safe and productive manner.

Detailed actions related to these strategies are presented in Chapter VII: Implementation Plan.

Introduction

The framework for making changes in DeKalb's parks is expressed in the sixteen strategies. These strategies illustrate how the Department will realize its vision and accomplish its mission. For each of these strategies, the plan provides specific recommendations for implementation.

Some of the recommendations will involve changes in policy by the Board of Commissioners, other departments, and the Parks and Recreation Department. In order to begin implementation of the plan and affect the recommended strategic actions, DeKalb County must be prepared to embrace a new way of doing business. As outlined in the Recommended Action Strategies, we must commit to re-tooling the department to operate more efficiently and responsibly, generating greater revenue where possible.

In accordance with the Comprehensive Strategic Plan, the Department will strive to recover new costs through entrepreneurial management and business practices. It is important to note that the rate of recovery is directly controlled by the pace of implementation of the strategic plan action strategies. We must also commit to fund and support the parks system of our future by acquiring land and building needed recreation facilities within our community.

Many factors will influence implementation. The Department must work closely with DeKalb's leadership to prescribe specific funding commitments and actions based on continuous analysis, definition of need and feasibility studies, and active public involvement. The recommendations which follow should be used as a guide for focusing energy and resources; and for evaluating the staff's progress.

Action Strategies & Recommendations

Table 4 on the following pages illustrates the specific actions related to each of the 16 action strategies described in the previous section. The planning team developed these actions as specific implementation measures that will help the County and the Department realize the new vision for DeKalb County Parks and Recreation. The Department should evaluate progress on this list of actions on an annual basis; adding, deleting, and adjusting actions as appropriate to respond to changing priorities and conditions.

This will be a dynamic list of actions, which the Department should examine and re-evaluate at least every two years. In doing so, however, the Department should retain the vision statement and the 16 strategies as the constant goal and framework toward which all actions contribute. For each action, Table 4 indicates which finding the action responds to, the priority or importance of each action to the success of the vision and the plan, a general schedule or performance measure, and an estimated cost.

Table 5 provides a chronological list of actions to be taken by the Department to achieve the strategies. As illustrated by the table, many actions, particularly baseline research and planning efforts, need to begin as quickly as possible to prepare the groundwork that is needed in order for real change to be possible.

Tables 4 and 5 here

Capital Improvement Program/Major Maintenance

This Comprehensive Strategic Plan outlines critical actions that must be achieved in order to transform DeKalb's struggling parks system into the quality of life asset the citizens desire. This section outlines and illustrates the expenditures needed to implement the 10-year plan. The recommendations reflect the conclusions of the findings and analysis and should be considered guides to focus energy and commitment.

It is critically important to note that the identification of capital improvement needs and cost projections is a dynamic process that requires continuous review and adjustment. The actions and progression of events outlined herein reflect a starting point for this dynamic process. They represent a best case scenario of action in order to achieve the 10-year plan.

It is abundantly understood that many factors will influence the ultimate actions taken by the county. The department must work closely with DeKalb's leadership to prescribe specific funding commitments and actions based on further analysis of need, feasibility and cost benefit analysis, active public engagement and support, and compliance to the new approach to service delivery as outlined in Chapter VI.

Since the department has not had consistent or adequate capital resources, the system needs are great. Furthermore, lack of adequate operation and maintenance dollars to care for these parks and facilities has attributed to the deterioration the system is experiencing. Through an audit of current inventory and projected need, the planning team is recommending aggressive capital enhancements to meet DeKalb County's needs.

We recommend that the County dedicate dollars for three separate funding areas: acquisition, development, and major maintenance. The table below summarizes recommended funding in each of these three areas. A summary of need for each area follows.

Capital Improvement Overview

Major Maintenance/Asset Protection

| | |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| Cyclical Asset Protection (1) | \$ 34,000,000 |
|-------------------------------|---------------|

| | |
|-------------|---------------|
| Acquisition | \$100,000,000 |
|-------------|---------------|

Development

| | |
|----------|--------------|
| Planning | \$12,300,000 |
|----------|--------------|

| | |
|------------------|--------------|
| Site Improvement | \$45,600,000 |
|------------------|--------------|

| | |
|------------------|--------------|
| New Construction | \$65,650,000 |
|------------------|--------------|

| | |
|--------|--------------|
| Trails | \$ 2,640,000 |
|--------|--------------|

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| | <u>\$126,190,000</u> |
|--|----------------------|

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| Total Capital Improvement Cost Through 2010 (2) | \$260,190,000 |
|--|----------------------|

(1) This cost is recurring and a yearly figure in proposed budgets, \$3.4 million per year.

(2) This total is based upon current assets and resources. This total may vary.

The pie chart on the next page represents the recommended 10-year CIP program.

insert 10-year CIP overview pie chart

Major Maintenance/Asset Protection

The parks system is in dire need of a continuous infusion of money that will allow for the continual maintenance for existing assets and new facilities. Major maintenance is defined as any asset needing replacement due to wear or age. Examples of major maintenance tasks include court resurfacing and/or reconstruction; pool shell plastering, deck replacement filter/mechanical system replacement; painting of recreation centers, golf/tennis centers, etc.; major landscape renovations, park road/parking lot paving or resurfacing; field lighting; and HVAC.

Based upon our current estimated asset value of approximately \$65 million (February 1999 estimated insurance valuation) and percentages used nationally to define funds needed for to provide major maintenance, a steady funding level of \$3.4 million per year is needed. As with our other categories, this figure will fluctuate based upon our asset value at a given year, and needs for asset protection at that time.

Acquisition

The department must dedicate substantial resources to acquiring acreage for future park needs. It must also develop and commit to a county-wide green space acquisition plan in accordance with the Georgia Green Space Program. The total described on the Capital Improvement overview on p.79 reflects acquisition of important "in-holdings" properties adjacent to existing parks, as well as new land to satisfy deficiencies in certain areas of the County, as identified in the plan. Several factors will influence the actual properties acquired and mechanisms to achieve the acquisition. Opportunities for partnering and grants will be explored to minimize cost and maximize outcomes.

Acquisition parcels have been identified adjacent to the following parks: Gresham, Redan, Arabia Mountain, Browns Mill, Fort Creek Mountain, and South River. Acquisition search areas have also been suggested to accommodate recommended new parks and facilities.

Development

The development section is inclusive of recommended new construction and enhancements, expansions, and site improvements needed at existing facilities based on currently documented need and projected rehabilitations. It also provides for necessary planning dollars (site and master) at a standard rate of 10% of the cost of development.

As with any plan, this list is dynamic and based upon current projections and existing resources. It will be greatly affected by the upcoming Resource Management System Audit and the Activity Based Costing analysis. Ultimately, as further information is gathered and as the park system changes, the figure will change accordingly.

Timeline, Financial Goals and Projections

The capital improvement figures represented on page 79 show development that will need to be phased in to make the plan flow and accommodate for revenue enhancement and cost avoidance. Accomplishing the goals set forth in this plan will require the department to implement the strategies included in the plan. As with many situations, certain tasks must be achieved for other milestones to be accomplished.

The plan has documented that certain actions, non-capital related, must occur for many improvements and initiatives to happen. The restructuring of the department, the creation of an authority, and the adoption of a dedicated millage are but a few situations that must happen for this plan to be a reality. While many goals may be met using a blend of methods to lead to an outcome, each recommendation has a strategic role in leading the department to meet the challenges and goals set forth.

As previously stated, cost projections for implementing the recommendations is highly dynamic. **Table 6 illustrates a conceptual action plan of annual revenues and expenditures based on a best case scenario.** It projects milestone actions which must occur in order for subsequent actions to succeed. As with any future forecast, these are estimates based upon today's dollars, and the table must be used with that in mind. It is a "snapshot" of the system now, and what is needed in the future to meet community need and demand.

Table 7 provides a detail of recommended capital investments by type and annual expenditure milestones. It is followed by **Figure A which graphically illustrates the progression and source of best case scenario capital outlays.** It is important to note in this Figure that the rate of increases in General Fund subsidies is expected to remain relatively constant while the source of newly generated or realized revenue increases greatly.

Figure B illustrates an additional view of best case financial goals and practices by showing the relationship of funds achieved through dedicated taxation and newly generated funds. It also indicates the relationship of these capital outlays to the department's projected operating budget.

Both Tables and Figures should be used as a progressive planning guide for scheduling activities and critical actions. The ultimate capital improvement schedule and associated funding sources must be continuously monitored and updated as progress is made toward implementation.

insert table 6

insert table 7

insert figure A

insert figure B

Suggested Funding Strategies

The following action items reflect recommendations or strategies that the consulting team has identified as critical to the success of the plan.

Creation of an Authority – The County needs to adopt the creation of a recreation authority or district to create an atmosphere that would allow the department to initiate long term successes. Many successful park districts exist throughout the country and facilitate creative business approaches to leisure services that some governmental entities cannot provide. The planning team views this action as key to plan success.

Dedicated Millage - A consistent source of funding is crucial to the department's ability to perform major maintenance, conduct park master planning, and acquire critical properties. Currently, one mill equates to approximately \$7 million. The County should strongly consider the positive and immediate impact on this level of consistent funding for plan implementation.

Impact Fees - The collection of impact fees is a popular and highly feasible approach to providing critically needed park improvement funds. The County should consider this funding option and move quickly to craft a plan for the establishment of impact fees, particularly to benefit the rapidly growing eastern and southern areas of the county.

Rental Car Tax - The County could generate approximately \$900,000 from the imposition of a rental car tax to benefit park acquisition and development. This fee has minor impact on DeKalb citizens and would provide a source of immediate funding.

Bond Referendum – The plan recommends massive capital needs, renovation and new, to meet the needs and demands of residents of DeKalb County. The plan recommends that two referendums be sought beginning in 2002. These bonds would be general obligation bonds initiated through Board of Commissioners approval and citizen vote. The figure represented is an estimate and actual dollar amounts would be derived from community involvement and discussion with the Board and CEO's office.

Partnerships – This vital category includes many options. While the traditional role would be in the provision of programs, the planning team reviewed and expanded the options to be more in line with national trends. Examples of new alliances include potential development partners, operating partners (facility management), and facilitation partners (using non-County staff or facilities) to name but a few. The benefits could range from direct revenue enhancement to cost avoidance by forming the partnership. The partnership dollars would blend into other categories listed.

Grants – This section includes grants, foundations, and service programs. To take full benefit of experiencing the potential dollar amount listed, the County must dedicate resources to facilitate grant acquisition. The recommended grants position in the plan and partnering with an outside agency that would specialize in seeking and writing park and recreation grants are critical to plan success.

Suggested Funding Strategies

Fees/Charges – The plan has documented that the Department is far undervalued and must position its fees and charges to be market-driven and based on both public and private facilities. The potential outcome of revenue generation is consistent with national trends relating to public park and recreation agencies, which generate an average 35% to 50% of operating expenditures.

Revenue Bond – The plan recommends that twice during the life of the plan, the County explore a bond issue that would allow for the construction of revenue producing. Possible facilities may include a golf course, water park, or wellness centers. The Department would take the role of facilitator, tenant, or program provider, based upon the partner involved. This revenue bond position would not obligate the County to finance these facilities through regular general obligation bonds, and make the facilities truly revenue-driven. The figure represented is merely an estimate and would be better determined as the plan develops and milestones reached.

Cost Avoidance – The department must take a position of not being everything for everyone. It must be driven by the market and stay with the department's core businesses. By shifting its role as direct provider, the County will experience savings by deciding whether or not to provide that facility or program. This is a cost avoidance. The estimated savings listed could be realized through partnering, outsourcing, or deferring to another provider in the provision of a service and/or facility.

