

CABARRUS COUNTY

Active Living & Parks

MASTER PLAN

APPENDIX



CABARRUS COUNTY
Active Living & Parks



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Cabarrus County Demographic Profile

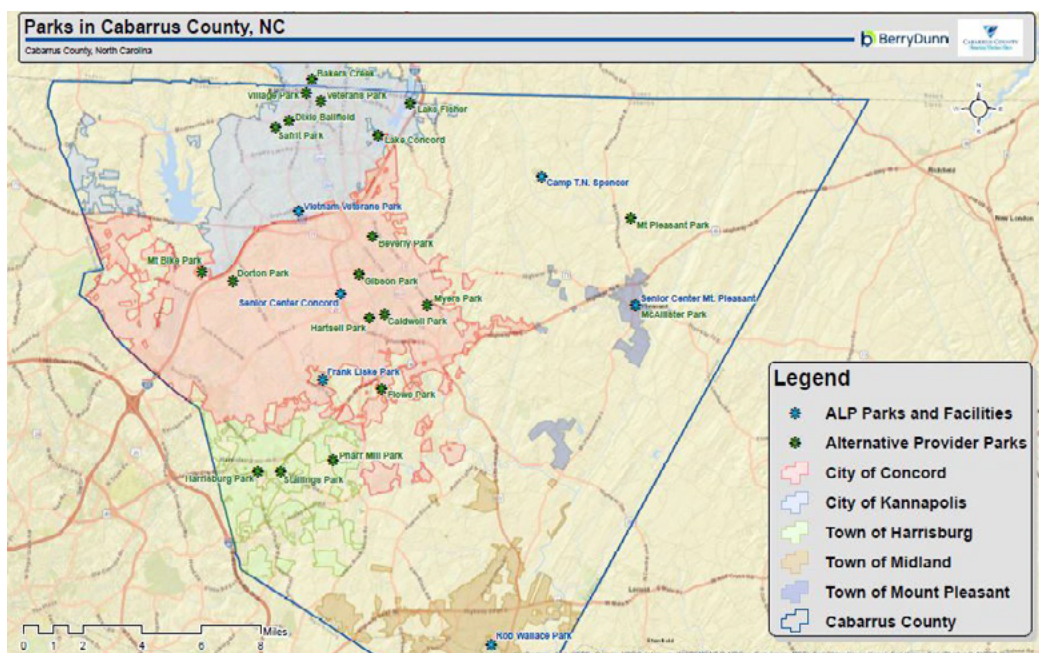
Active Living & Parks (ALP) manages recreational facilities and administers programs to residents throughout the County. It operates four parks and two active living centers, each with unique amenities. ALP is also in the process of building two additional facilities. Though parks are open to all residents, programming primarily focuses on adults ages 50 years and older. ALP also offers spring and summer break camps and nature programming. It is important to note that ALP actively coordinates services with cities and towns within the County (Figure 1).

BerryDunn completed a review of the County demographic profile, offering a detailed analysis of household and economic data. This demographic analysis aims to enhance comprehension of both historical trends and projected changes, providing valuable insights into factors that could impact the County. It also offers insight into the potential market for community parks, trails, and recreation programs/services by highlighting where and how the community will change.

BerryDunn sourced population, age distribution, income, race/ethnicity, and other household characteristic data from ArcGIS Business Analyst using February 2024 U.S. Census estimates. BerryDunn also compared North Carolina (NC) to U.S. data, where applicable, for additional context.

This analysis features various maps that visually represent demographic information, with data points color coded by block group. Block groups are statistical divisions of census tracts used by the U.S. Census Bureau, and they are often used in demographic studies to analyze and understand finer-scale population characteristics within specific geographic areas.

Figure 1: County Overview

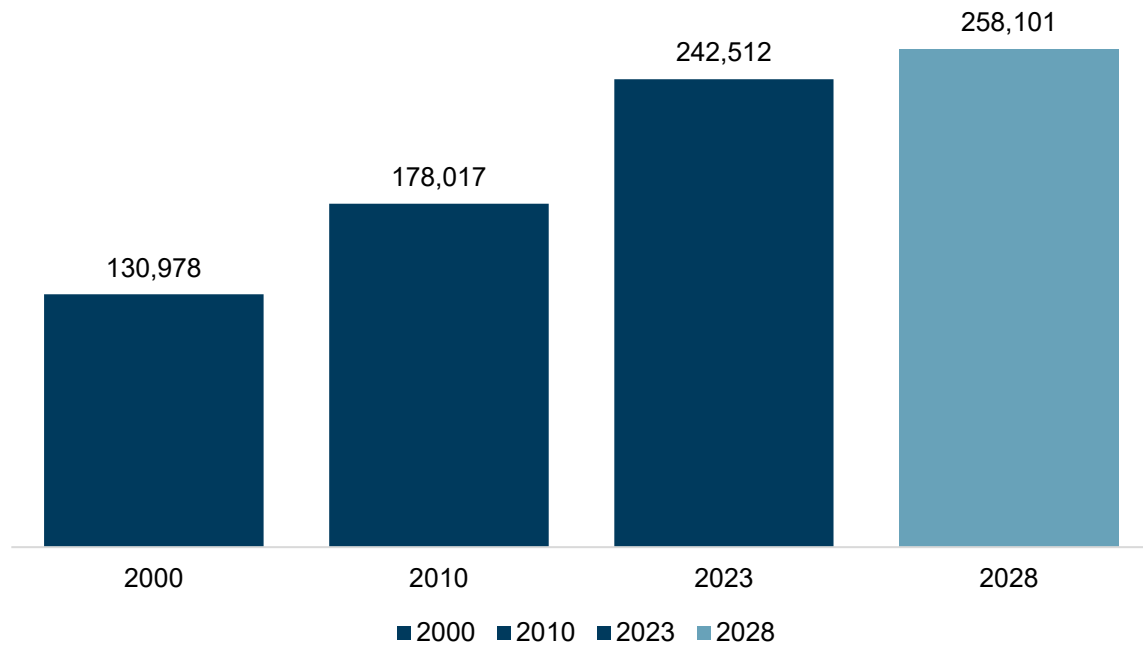


Source: ArcGIS Business Analyst (2024)

Population Characteristics

In 2023, Cabarrus County's population was estimated at 242,512 residents—an 85.2% increase from 2000 (130,978 residents). Future projections suggest slight growth, with an anticipated population of 258,101 by 2028 (Figure 2).

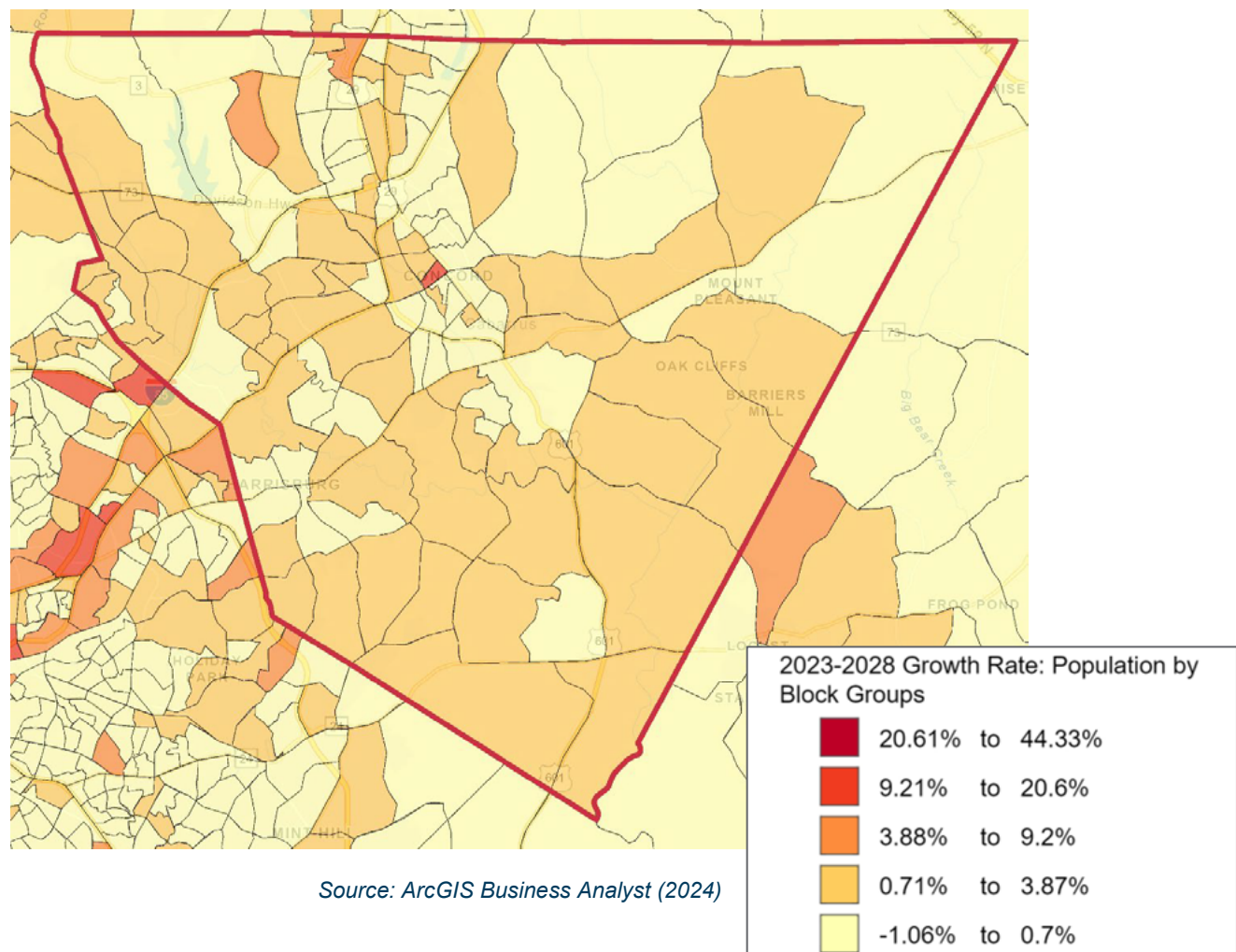
Figure 2: Population Change (2000 to 2028)



Population Growth Rate

The population growth rate from 2023 – 2028 is projected at 1.25% for **Cabarrus County**, higher than the growth rate in NC (0.53%) and the United States (0.30%). The map below shows the anticipated population growth rate by block group.

Figure 3: Cabarrus County Population Growth Rate by Block Group (2023 – 2028)



Source: ArcGIS Business Analyst (2024)

Age Distribution

The median age of residents in Cabarrus County was 38.7 years old in 2023, slightly younger than both the median age in NC (39.4) and the median age in the United States (39.1). The age groups making up the largest percentage of Cabarrus County's population were adult at 28% (35 – 54 years), youth at 27% (0 – 19 years), and older adult at 22% (55 – 74 years).

Figure 4: Cabarrus County Median Age by Block Group (2023)

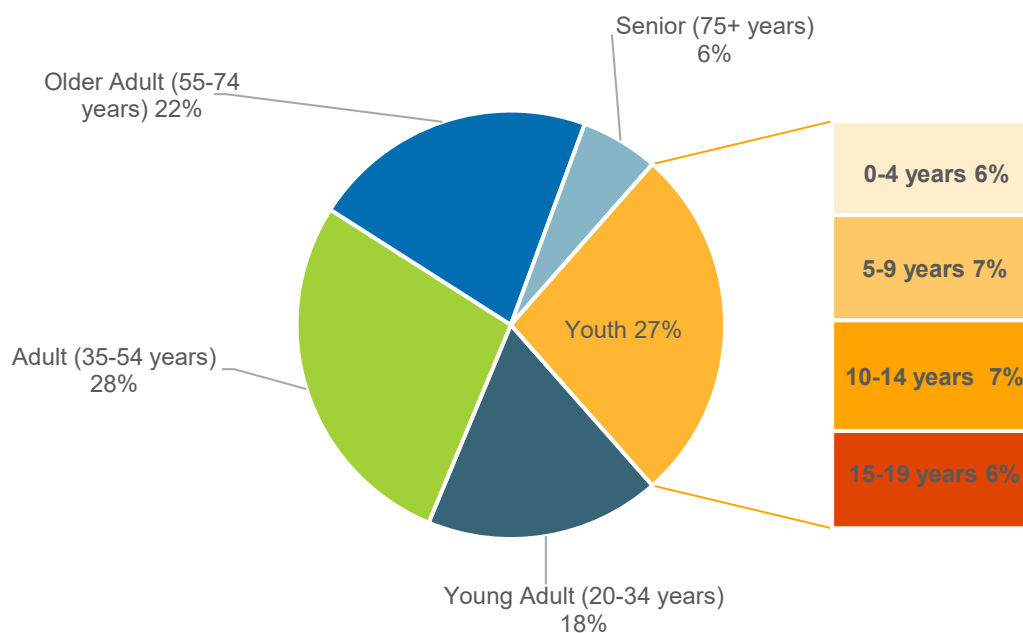
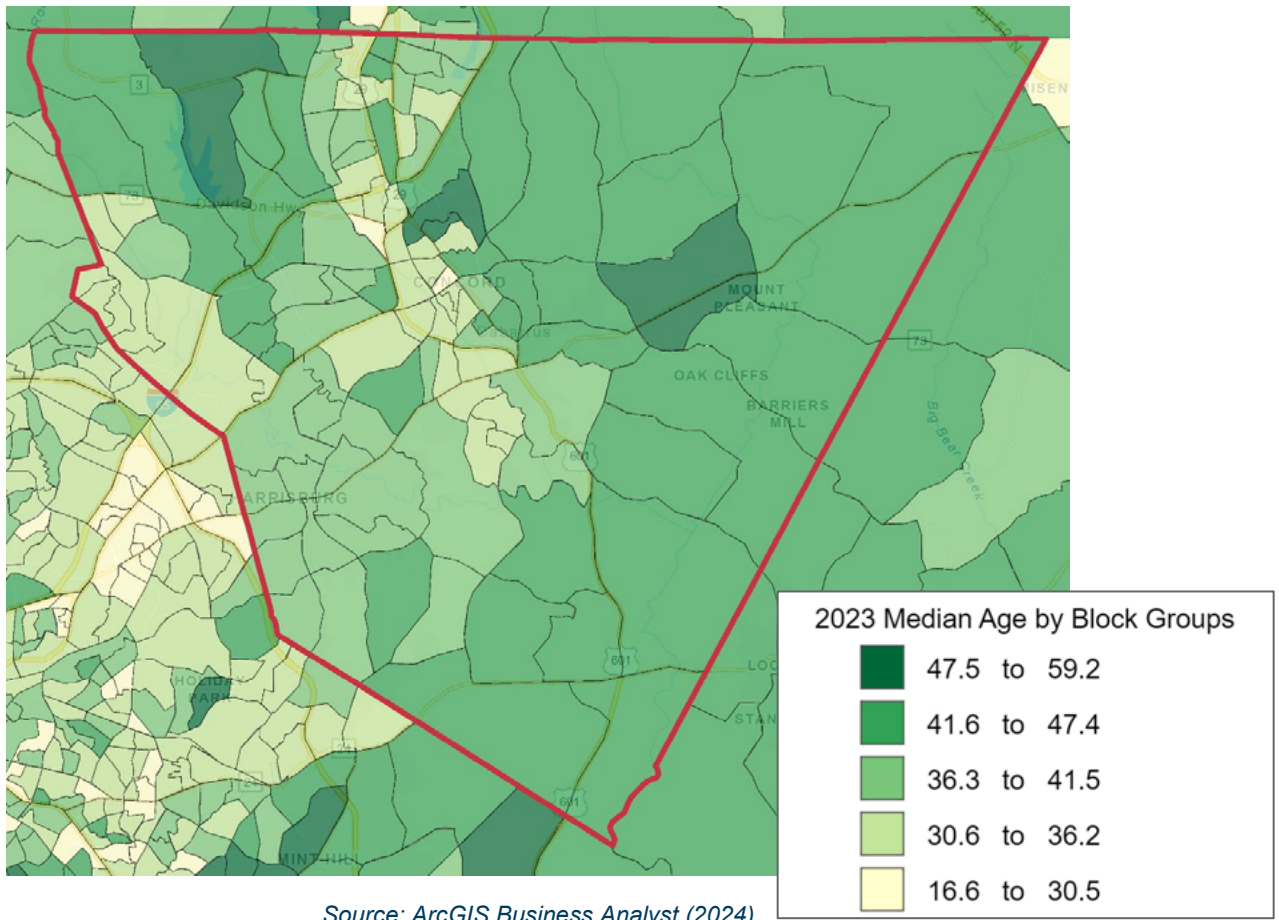


Figure 5 shows the median age by block group. The dark green areas have the oldest median block group (ages 47.5 – 59.2 years), while the areas in tan up to emerald green consist of youth and adults (16.6 – 47.4 years). This may indicate a current increased need for youth and adult programming and recreation opportunities.

Figure 5: Cabarrus County Median Age by Block Group (2023)

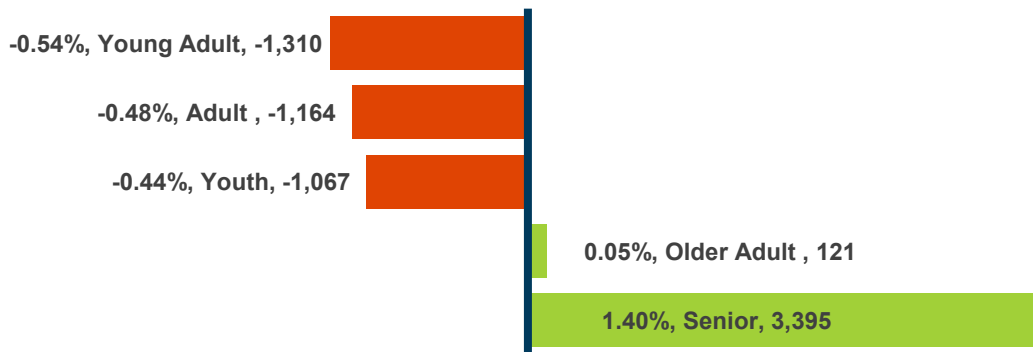


Source: ArcGIS Business Analyst (2024)

Age Change Over Time

Over the next four years, the young adult, adult, and youth age groups in Cabarrus County are expected to decline slightly (-0.54%). Conversely, the older adult and senior groups are expected to see a growth rate of up to 1.40% during the same period. Although youth and adult groups make over 50% of the population, there will be a growing need for increased senior programming and amenities in the near future.

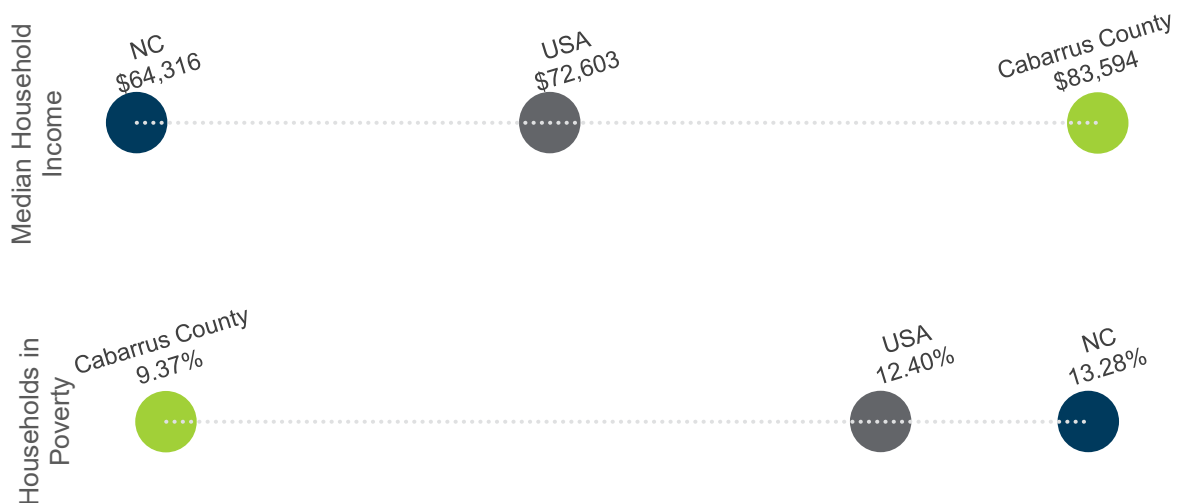
Figure 6: Cabarrus County Median Age by Block Group (2023)



Household Characteristics

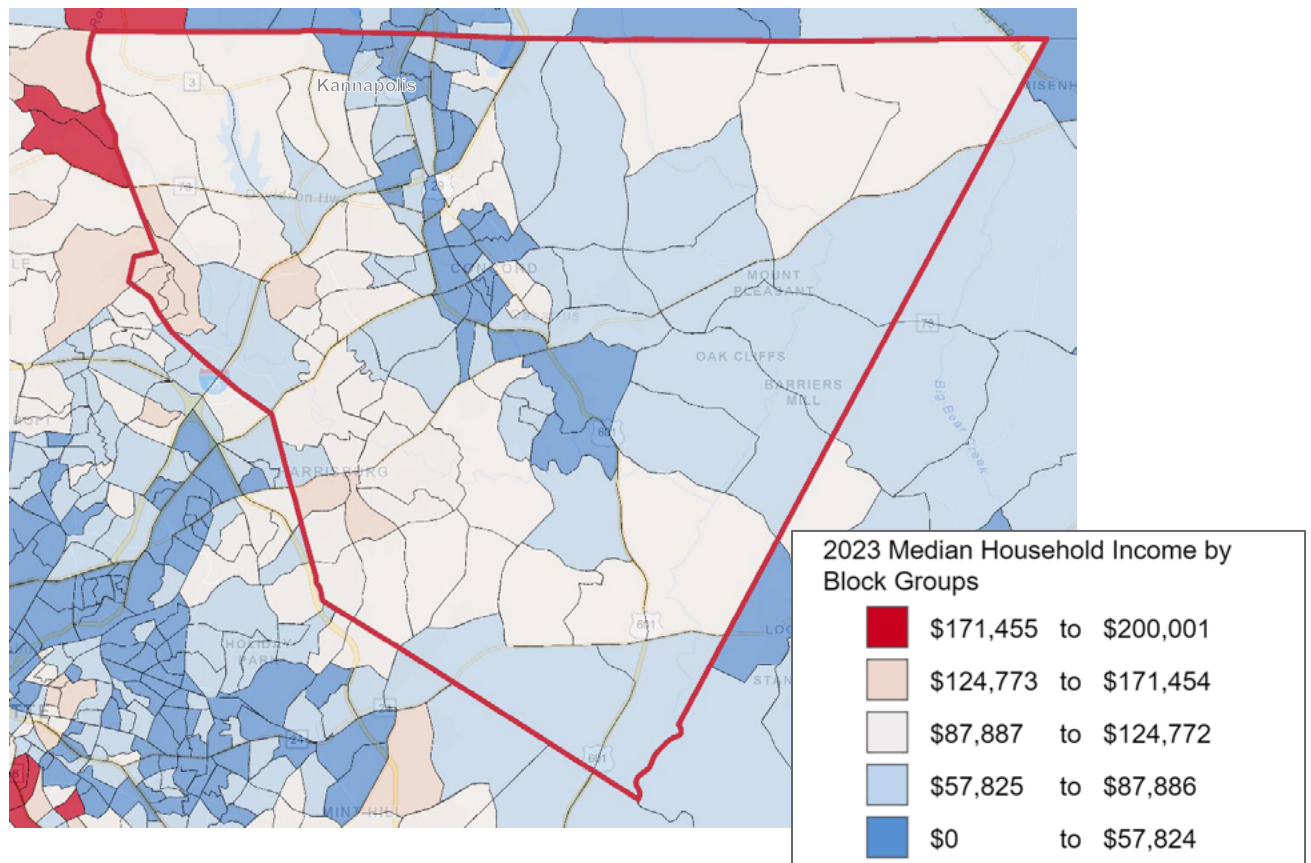
The household characteristics in Cabarrus County indicate that the community earns a higher median household income than NC as a whole (Figure 7). Less than 10% of the population lives below the federal poverty line, and the median household income is higher than the United States'.

Figure 7: Cabarrus Count Household Characteristics (2023)



The map below shows the median household income by block groups. Most of the County has an income between \$57,825 – \$124,000. A smaller segment extending from the central north section of the County through the center earns between \$0 – \$57,824 annually. The highest income-earning block groups (\$171,455 – \$200,001) fall just outside the northwest boundary and are marked in red.

Figure 8: Cabarrus County Median Household Income by Block Group (2023)

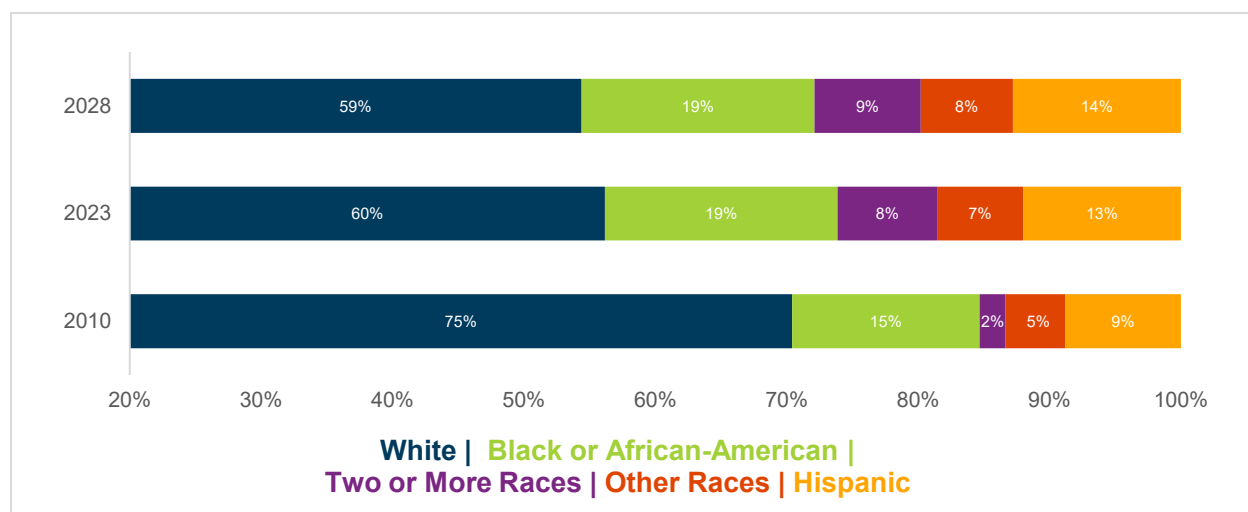


Source: ArcGIS Business Analyst (2024)

Racial Diversity

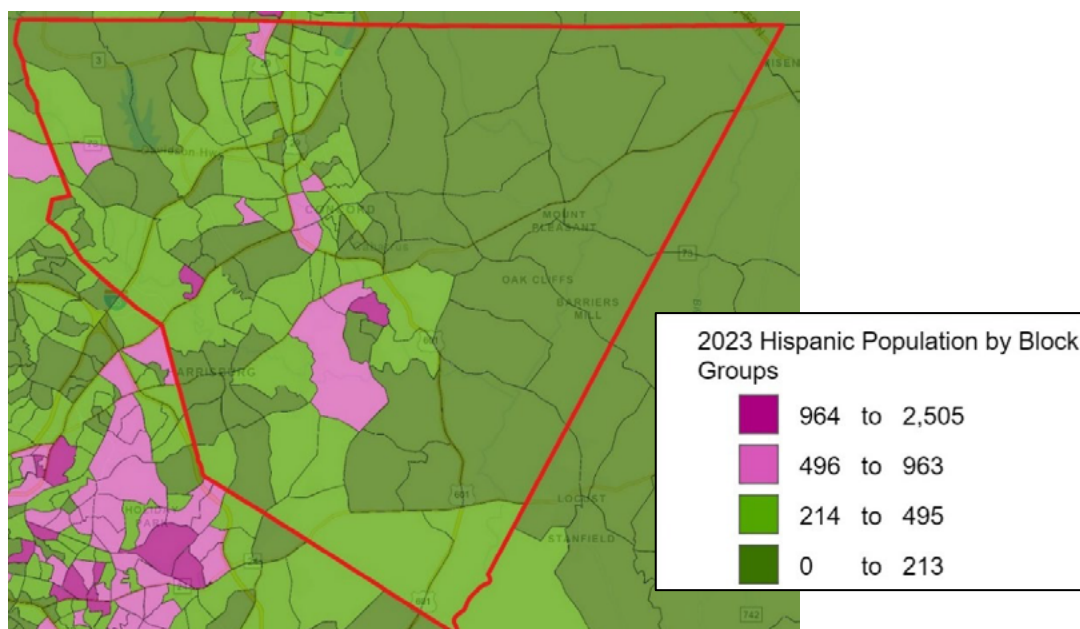
Cabarrus County became slightly more diverse from 2010 – 2023, with the white population decreasing by 16%. Those who identify as two or more races increased by 7%, while those who identify as being of Hispanic origin (regardless of race) increased from 9% to 13%. Notably, it is expected that there will only be a slight change in diversity over the next four years.

Figure 9: Change in Racial Diversity (2010 – 2028)



The block groups in purple indicate where higher populations of approximately 496 – 2,505 individuals who identify as Hispanic (regardless of race) reside.

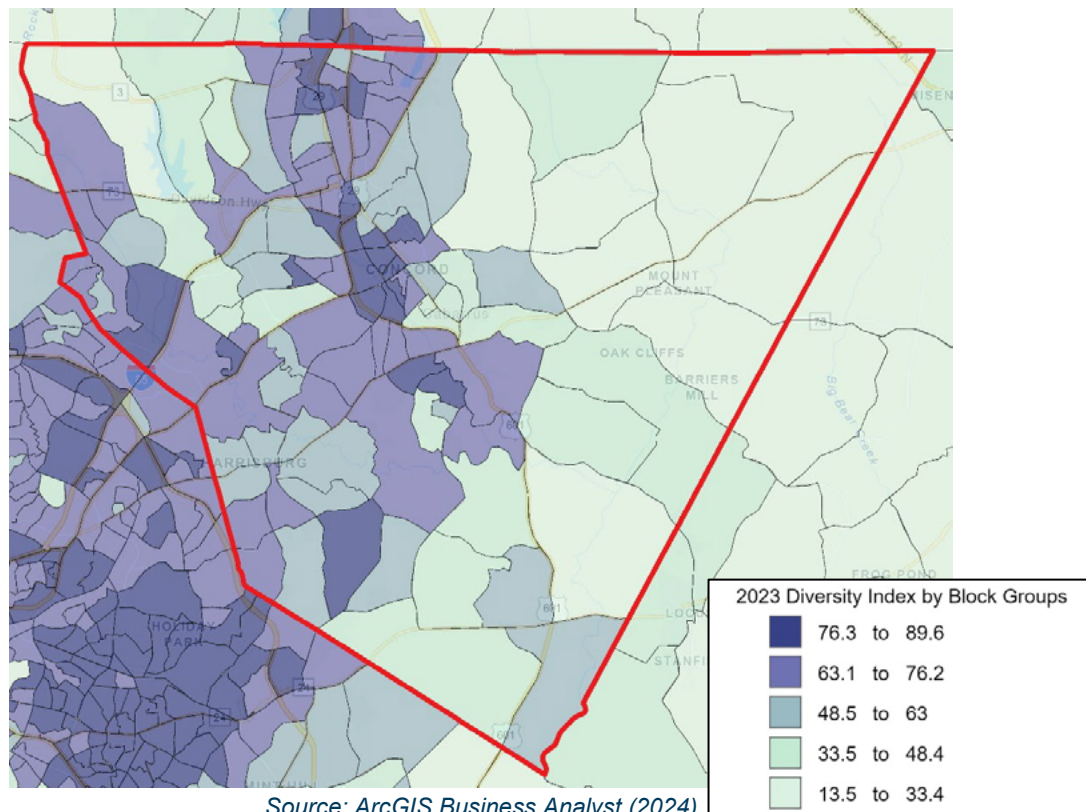
Figure 10: Cabarrus County Hispanic Population by Block Group (2023)



Source: ArcGIS Business Analyst (2024)

The diversity index from ArcGIS is a measurement that quantifies the variety and distribution of different demographic groups within a specific geographic area. Figure 11 displays the diversity index by block groups. The most diverse block groups make up most of the western half of the County, while the eastern half ranks lower on the index.

Figure 11: Cabarrus County Diversity Index by Block Group (2023)



Disabilities

According to the American Community Survey, 22% of the County's households include at least one individual who has a disability. This is lower than the percentage in NC (26%) and the U.S. percentage (26%), marking the need for accessibility, accommodations, and inclusive programming.

Figure 12: Percentage of Households That Include at Least One Person With a Disability (2023)

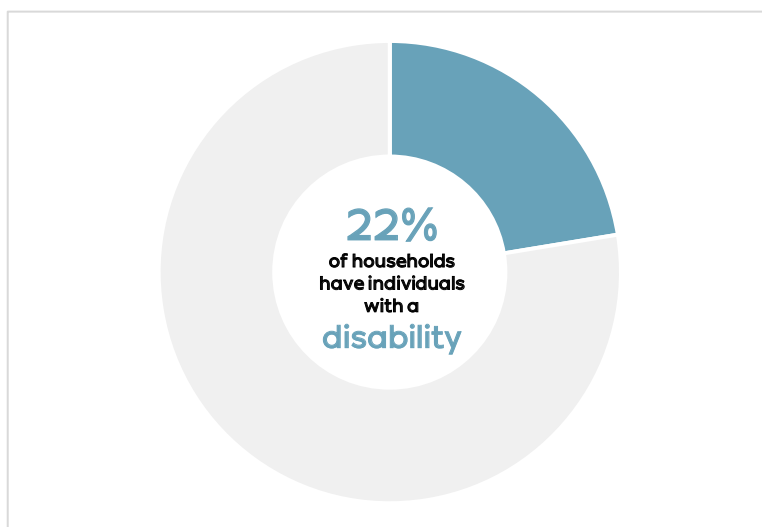
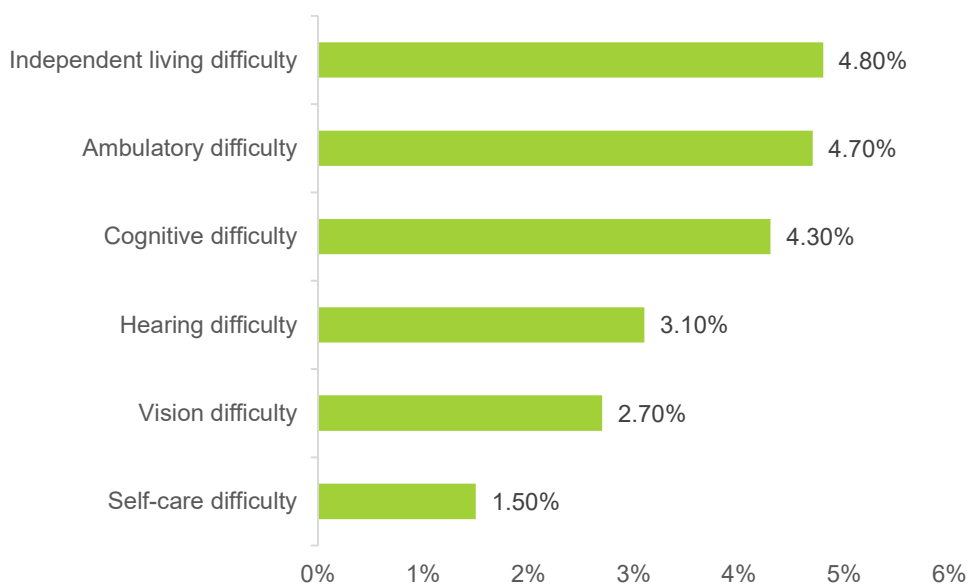


Figure 13: Types of Disabilities (2023)



Key Findings

Key findings regarding the demographic profile of Cabarrus County and the potential impact on parks and recreation services and facilities are:

- Cabarrus County has experienced steady growth in population since 2010 and is expected to continue to grow, which may increase demand for parks and recreation services and facilities.
- The County has a higher median household income (\$83,594) compared to NC and the United States, as well as a smaller percentage of households in poverty (9.37%). This suggests a potential opportunity for an increase in recreational and special events revenue.
- Over the next four years, the age groups of young adult, adult, and youth are expected to decline slightly, while the age groups of older adult and senior are expected to grow up to 1.40%. This suggests a need for a diverse range of parks and recreation programs and facilities that cater to different age groups, especially for the growing senior population.
- The County is expected to have minimal change in diversity over the next four years.
- About 22% of households in the County include at least one individual with a disability, highlighting the importance of providing accessible facilities and inclusive programming for people with disabilities.

Engagement Summary

Introduction

Community involvement played a crucial role throughout the Cabarrus County ALP master planning process. This report contains an overview of the various methods of community engagement that contributed to shaping the plan's recommendations.

To start the engagement phase, BerryDunn developed an Engagement Plan that emphasized seven areas of input: stakeholder interviews, focus group meetings, a needs assessment survey, digital and social media outreach, staff engagement, pop-up events, and a project-based website that included a QR code for access. BerryDunn presented findings from the engagement strategies for County staff review.

Outcomes from the engagement efforts helped to inform recommendations and action items for the Master Plan.

BerryDunn focused on both internal and external engagement. Internal engagement included interviews with leadership, staff, and the County Managers office. External engagement included focus groups with:

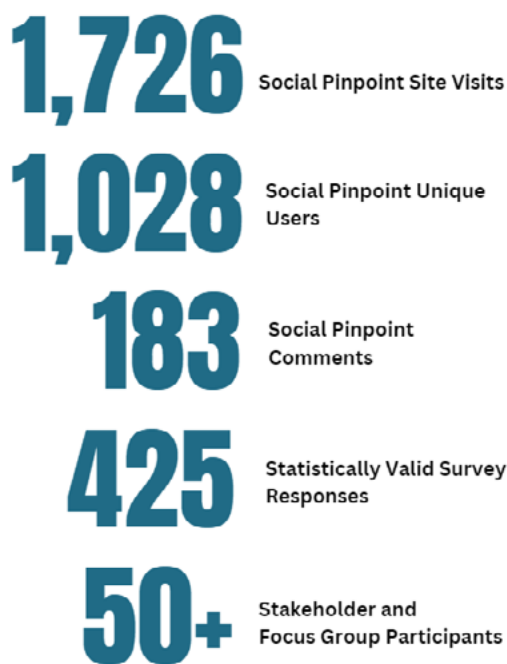
- Leadership at Kannapolis, Concord, and Harrisburg
- Partners including CHA, El Puente, and the Cabarrus Chamber of Commerce
- Active Living and Parks Commission
- Active Living Advisory Board

Resident Participation

The outreach strategy included five elements of participation:

- Stakeholder interviews—in-depth conversations centered on the strengths, weaknesses, priorities, and future vision for the Department
- Discovery session interviews that focused on Department strengths, weaknesses, priorities, facilities, park amenities, and programs
- A Social Pinpoint website for residents to share ideas, make comments, and provide connectivity options through a mapping exercise

Engagement Participation



- Staff engagement that provided ALP employees an opportunity to provide their perspectives about the future direction of the Department
- A statistically valid survey that was mailed to randomly selected households within the County

Stakeholder Meetings

Programs and Facilities Frequented

Participants noted the following activities as their favorites to enjoy when participating in Cabarrus County Active Living & Parks programs and facilities:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| • Regional events | • Senior Games | • Outdoor exercise equipment |
| • Bocce courts | • Pickleball | • Archery |
| • Environmental programs | • Line dancing | • Rental space |
| • Senior center | • Tai Chi | • Walking trails |
| • Senior programs and games | • Frank Liske Park | • Pool at Camp Spencer |
| • Fitness classes | • Rob Wallace Park | |
| • Fitness center | • New pickleball courts at Frank Liske | |

Department Strengths

The strengths of the Cabarrus County ALP Department lie in the Department's overall approach to community well-being, blending diverse recreational offerings with a steadfast commitment to environmental conservation. Stakeholders who engaged in discussions about the strengths of the County's ALP Department noted the following:

- The team sets the bar high when working together
- Staff are efficient with their time and consistently look for ways to improve
- Nature education is a core program area
- The ALP Department has strong working advisory boards who are engaged and effective
- Senior programming is strong
- Parks are actively used
- The Department serves the public well and provides excellent service
- The new barn at Frank Liske Park is an asset

- The new pickleball courts at Frank Liske Park have been well received
- The bike trails at Rob Wallace
- The Camp Spencer facility is remote, but provides great opportunities
- The environmental education piece has been great for the schools
- The parks are well maintained

Future Opportunities for Programs and Services

Having the vision to approach recreation opportunities with innovation and sustainable management practices has been a leading method within ALP. Their direction focuses on well-maintained parks, engaging programs with a senior focus, and fostering a sense of vitality across the County. Common themes in stakeholders' feedback for future opportunities for programs and services are noted below:

- Develop a program plan that focuses on all segments of the County rather than just seniors
- Offer programming focused on the Latino population and their specific needs
- Diversify staff, including adding team members who are fluent in Spanish
- Add events or programs for those between the ages of 18–35
- Develop partnerships for transportation, as it is difficult for some individuals to get to programs and facilities
- Add more nature and environmental programming
- Add technology and e-gaming offerings
- Build on existing parks
- Add more multigenerational programming
- Capitalize on programming with the St. Stevens facility
- Coordinate with clubs that offer hiking and walking opportunities
- Increase programs for differently-abled individuals
- Offer woodworking
- Incorporate evening classes similar to computer classes, lunch and learns, fitness, fine art, crafting, and music

Opportunities for Facility Improvements

There are opportunities for further enhancing the recreational experience of residents. Investing in state-of-the-art amenities such as upgraded sports fields and expanded trail networks can

cater to evolving preference and increase visitor satisfaction. In addition, maintaining and continuing to foster partnerships with local businesses and community organizations can unlock resources, helping to ensure the Department remains at the forefront of providing quality facilities for all. Common themes that emerged from stakeholder engagement regarding opportunities for improvements to facilities included:

- Develop greater connectivity of trails and greenways, including the Carolina Thread Trail
- Add aquatic facilities, such as splashpads
- Research locations for a potential cricket field
- Add dog parks
- Provide ADA-accessible playgrounds and pathways
- Upgrade the Senior Center restroom
- Provide Wi-Fi on the trails
- Provide safety and lighting at facilities
- Provide bilingual communication and signage
- Ensure geographic equity of amenities and facilities
- Provide additional pickleball courts within park locations
- Enlarge the fitness room at the Senior Center
- Expand the bike trail at Rob Wallace Park

Department Challenges

When asked about the major issues facing ALP and the County over the next five years, stakeholders expressed concern regarding the growth of the County and its impact on services, budget, and staffing. Other challenges mentioned during stakeholder engagement included:

- The Department's ability to meet the demand for services, programs, and facilities
- Timely communication of programs and events; need a marketing plan
- Funding
- Adapting to new technology such as Apple Pay, tap to pay, and scheduling software
- Staffing/human capital for new programs and events to meet upcoming growth
- Need for additional facilities
- Connection to the Carolina Thread Trail
- Some programs limited to certain areas of the county

- Internal communication

Strengthening Partnerships

Partnerships with other organizations, towns, municipalities, and business are critical to the success of all local government bodies. ALP stakeholders reported that the existing relationship with the local school district could be more flexible. Stakeholders discussed increased collaboration with the athletic user groups, with the suggestion that the user groups contribute more financially for their use. Stakeholders also suggested ALP develop new partnerships with constituents such as community clean-up events, environmental programming, trails, and bike club days, as well as others within the parks.

Pop-Up Events

Another component of the community engagement phase was hosting pop-up booths at popular Cabarrus County events. Pop-up engagement events have a great impact on community interaction and engagement during the development of a parks and recreation master plan. The pop-up booth is an unstructured opportunity for community members to learn about the project and share ideas. Overall, there were a total of four pop-up events with over 2,020 visitors. Participation locations and number of participants at each pop-up event was as follows:

- The Senior Christmas Party at the Fairgrounds – 700+ participants
- The Harrisburg Tree Lighting – 120+ visitors
- Kannapolis Christmas Event at Village Park – 200+ visitors
- Senior Health and Wellness Expo – 1,000+

By encouraging active participation and promoting a sense of belonging, attendees had the opportunity to provide feedback on three statements:

1. Need for Improvement/Change in ALP
2. Desired Amenities and Offerings from ALP
3. Appreciated Aspects of ALP

The pop-up events serve as catalysts for community building, breaking down barriers, and creating memorable experiences that resonate after the event ends. Moreover, these initiatives often inspire ongoing interest and support for ALP programs, creating a stronger sense of community pride and stewardship. Those who participated in the pop-up events shared the following information:

Needs for Improvement/Changes:

- Diverse options for Friday night dances at the center
- Timely and effective communication and marketing
- Expansion of walking trails and bike trails, with a focus on safety and getting off roads

- More amenities for seniors, including water pool therapy, higher toilets, and increased programming
- Greater geographical equity of amenities, and bilingual communication to engage diverse communities
- Enhanced facilities such as indoor basketball courts, bigger gyms, and updated technology
- Introduction of new activities like archery, pickleball courts, and line dancing
- Consideration of community feedback for equity, amenities, and programming

Desired Amenities and Offerings:

- Additional programs and classes, including tai chi, line dancing, and crafts
- Expansion of recreational facilities such as dog parks, splash pads, and indoor pools
- More social events like bingo, dances, and day trips
- Opportunities for engagement and involvement through volunteer opportunities and partnerships
- Inclusion of specialized programming for various demographics, including teens, the Spanish speaking community, and individuals with disabilities

Appreciated Aspects:

- Friendly and helpful staff at the senior center
- Enjoyment of existing amenities such as walking trails, parks, and exercise classes
- Positive experiences with specific activities like chair yoga and pickleball
- Affordability and community-friendly fees for programs and services
- Love for the senior center and appreciation for its role in the community

Survey

The BerryDunn team worked closely with the ETC Institute to administer an ALP needs assessment survey for the County. The survey's purpose was to gather feedback on the County's ALP offerings and to help County leaders identify and address opportunities and challenges facing the community.

Methodology

The ETC Institute mailed a survey packet to a random number of households in Cabarrus County. Each survey packet contained a cover letter, a copy of the survey, and a postage-paid return envelope. Residents who received the survey were given the option of returning the survey by mail or completing it online at *CabarrusCountyParkSurvey.org*.

After the surveys were mailed, the ETC Institute followed up with residents to encourage participation. To prevent people who were not residents of Cabarrus County from participating, or for any one resident or group from completing the survey multiple times, everyone who completed the survey online was required to enter their home address before submitting it. The ETC Institute then matched the addresses entered online with those originally selected for the random sample. If the address from a survey completed online did not match one of the addresses selected for the sample, the online survey was not included in the final database for this report.

The goal of the survey process included collecting a minimum of 400 completed responses from residents, and this target was surpassed with 425 completed surveys collected. The overall results for the sample of 425 residents have a precision of at least ± 4.75 at the 95% level of confidence.

ETC maintains a database of responses from approximately 1,000 agencies, which helps to provide context to some of the results from similar questions. These benchmark comparisons are listed throughout the following narrative.

Below is key highlights from the survey results.

Overall Active Living Centers and Parks Use

Of the respondents, 87% indicated that they visit Cabarrus County ALP centers and parks during a typical year. This compares to the ETC benchmark data of 82% park visitation. Of the residents that do not visit any Cabarrus County ALP centers or parks, the top reasons given for not visiting were they are not aware of park or facility locations (35%), they are too far from home (28%), or they use other city, county, state, private, or HOA facilities (19%).

Thirty-eight percent of Cabarrus County residents reported participating in ALP programs during the last year. This compares to the ETC benchmark of 32% of households participating in programs. Of the residents who have not participated in any programs provided by Cabarrus County, the top reason was that residents did not know what is offered (67%).

When asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the overall value that their household receives from programs and services, 64% were either very satisfied or satisfied with the overall value they receive. Only 8% of residents were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the overall value they received.

Satisfaction with Services

Residents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with nine Cabarrus County ALP Department services. The top-rated services (a combination of "very satisfied" and "satisfied" responses) were the cleanliness of County ALP centers and parks (89%), the maintenance of park trails (89%), and the upkeep of County ALP centers and parks (87%).

The lowest-rated services (a combination of "dissatisfied" and "very dissatisfied") were the registration process for classes offered at County ALP centers (64%), the fees charged for programs offered at County ALP centers and parks (59%), and the schedule of programs offered at County ALP centers and parks (56%).

Statements About Cabarrus County’s ALP Centers and Parks

When asked to rate their level of agreement with nine statements about Cabarrus County’s ALP centers and parks, the statements with the highest level of agreement (combination of “strongly agree” and “agree” responses) by residents were “they improve my or my household’s physical health and fitness” (81%), “they preserve open space and protect the environment” (81%), and “they help provide opportunities for constructive activities” (76%).

The lowest levels of agreement were with the following statements: “they positively impact economic and business development” (63%), “they provide information and assistance in navigating resources and County services” (53%), and “they provide fulfilling volunteer opportunities” (43%).

Residents were also asked about another eight statements and their level of agreement with them. Residents agreed (combination of “strongly agree” and “mostly agree” responses) most with “the parks are well maintained” (90%), “I feel welcome in County parks, programs, and facilities” (88%), and “facilities are well maintained” (86%).

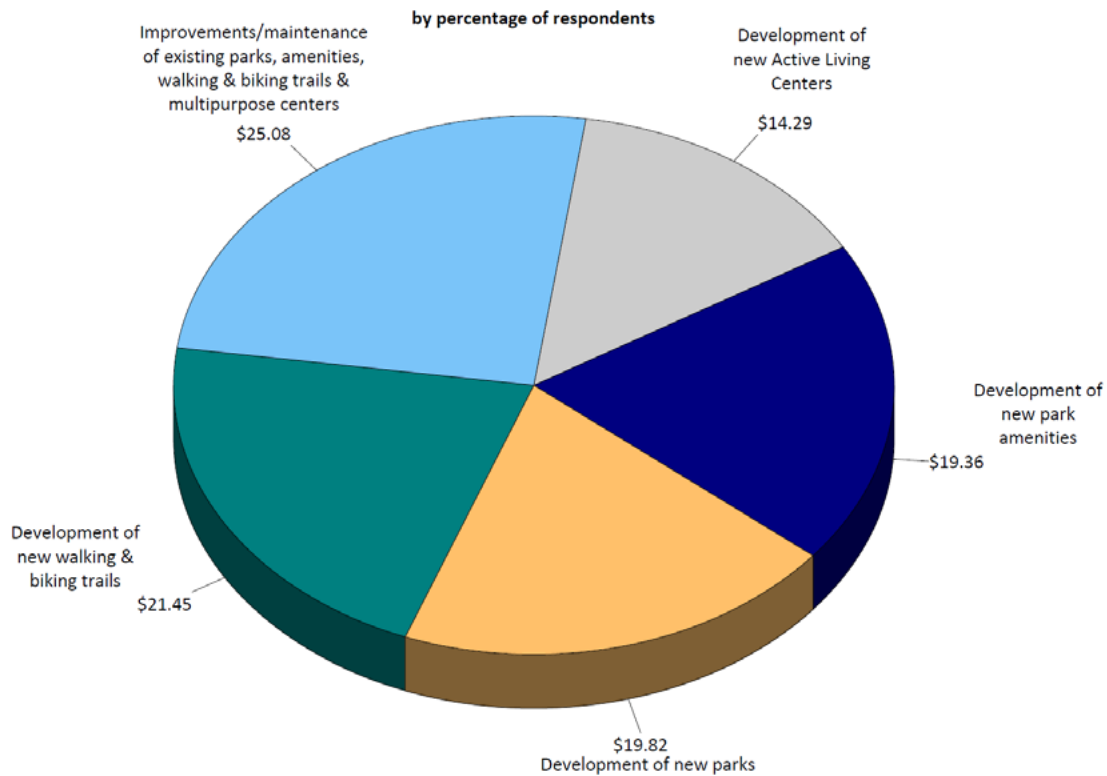
Improvements for ALP Centers and Parks

When asked to rate their level of support for 12 types of improvements for the ALP centers and parks, the highest levels of support (combination of “very supportive” and “somewhat supportive” responses) by residents were for “improve and maintain existing parks” (98%), “improve and add restroom facilities” (96%), and “expand and improve existing trail system” (95%).

When asked to pick three improvements that would be most important to their household, residents indicated a top three of “expanding and improving existing trail system” (40%), “developing new walking and biking trails” (40%), and “improving and maintaining existing parks” (32%).

Residents were given a hypothetical budget of \$100 and asked how they would allocate the funds to five services provided by Cabarrus County ALP Department. The average allocation residents made for each service is noted within the pie chart below:

Figure 14: Average Allocation



Communication

Residents currently learn about ALP Department programs and activities through emails from the County (53%), County social media (49%), and banners at parks or facilities (46%).

When asked about their preferred methods for learning about ALP Department programs and activities, emails from the County emerged as the top choice, with 52% expressing a preference for this method, followed by County social media (45%).

The findings indicate an alignment between where residents currently get information about ALP Department programs and activities and where they would prefer to get information. It is imperative for the County to uphold and bolster these communication avenues, fostering stronger connections between residents and these channels.

Social Pinpoint

Social Pinpoint is a powerful web-based tool that helps agencies gather feedback and insights from stakeholders. By using advanced mapping and engagement features, Social Pinpoint allows agencies to easily collect and analyze feedback from a wide range of stakeholders, including community members, customers, businesses, and employees.

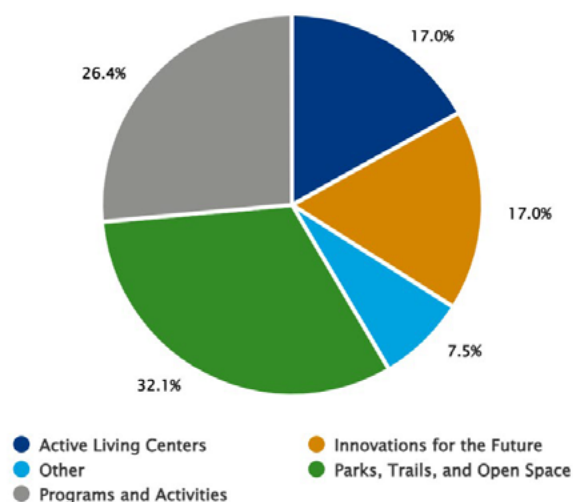
The purpose of this analysis is to provide insights that can inform decision-making and help ALP better meet the needs and expectations of the community. These insights can help drive positive change and improve outcomes for all stakeholders involved.

The Social Pinpoint site for the Cabarrus County ALP Comprehensive Plan saw 1028 unique users who generated 65 Idea Wall comments, 75 Budget responses, 24 Map comments, and 19 Forum comments. This section provides some key findings from Social Pinpoint; the full report can be found in **Appendix** .

Ideas Wall

The Ideas Wall, which received 65 comments, allowed community members to share their ideas and feedback regarding parks, trails, and open space, programs and activities, Active Living Centers, innovation for the future, and miscellaneous topics regarding the County's Comprehensive Plan. Figure 15 illustrates the breakdown of comments based on each idea. Program and activities received the highest response with 26.4%. Community members could submit their feedback anonymously and view other submissions on the platform.

Figure 15: Ideas Wall Comment Topics



Key requests from the Ideas Wall:

- Larger parks that are 50+ acres with a vast trail system that connects to other parks, trails, and greenway
- More camping options like Rowan County's Dan Nicholas Park
- Additional dog parks
- Expanded mountain bike trails, especially along the Carolina Thread Trail
- Interconnected parks particularly in the western part of Concord
- Full-day summer programs, 4H programs, and more half-day camps/activities for kids ages 8 – 12
- Nature educator positions to serve adults, schools, students, and camps

- Active Living Centers in each town
- Inclusive programming
- Bilingual instructors

Forum

Community members provided 19 comments on the Forum that asked, “What offerings, programs, and services would you like to see at Cabarrus County Active Living Centers and Parks?” In response, community members shared their desires for a range of enhancements to promote community well-being and engagement. Some key findings from their feedback:

- Walking challenge program(s) for the community
- More nature education and trails
- Development of a County-wide greenway, with trails that are not near sewer access
- Increased camping opportunities, including for RVs
- Summer sports camps and more nature preserves
- Senior centers in every town, including programs/activities for seniors, safe walking trails with benches, day trips, and a combined senior center and library
- Improved options for citizens with disabilities
- Recreational centers with indoor pools like Harrisburg and Mount Pleasant
- More dog parks
- Educational programs on native pollinators and perennials
- Classes outside of working hours
- More sports facilities for children

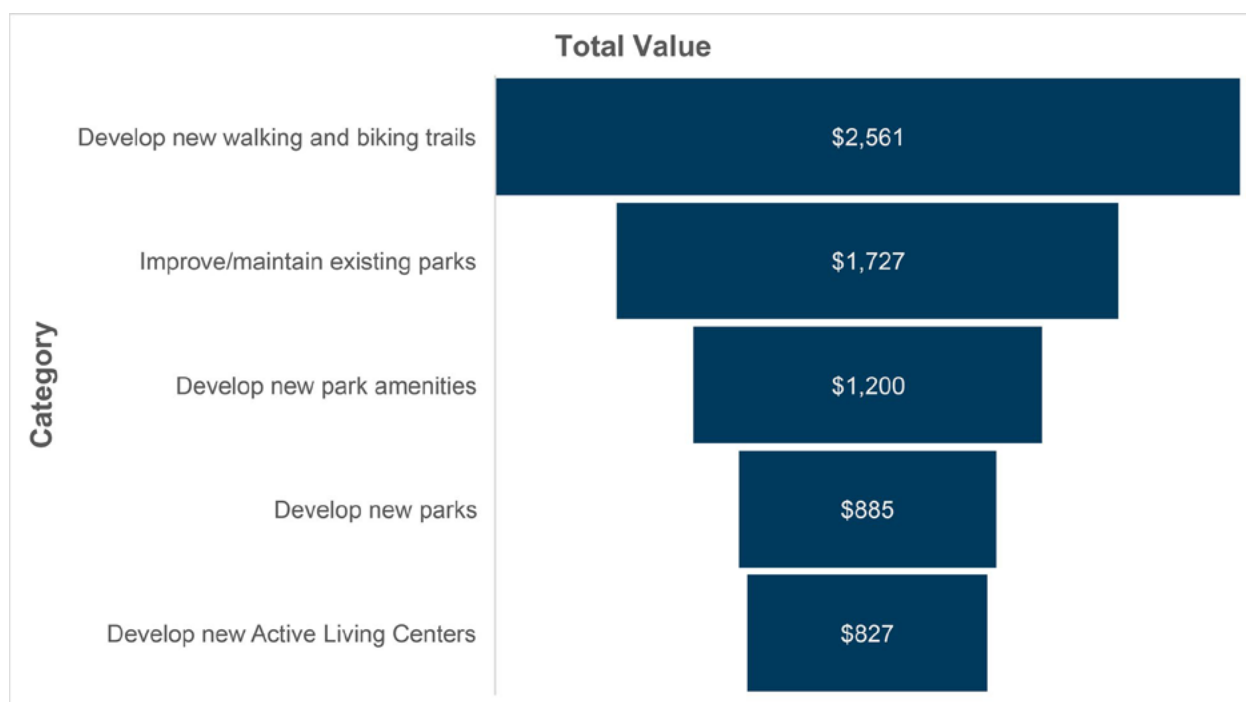
Budget Priorities

Community members were given a budget of \$100 to divide within six areas: develop new parks, improving maintaining parks, developing new amenities, developing new parks, developing new Active Living Centers, or none of the above. The budget data, which received 75 total responses, provides insights from community members into perceived total value of various recreational amenities within the community.

New walking and biking trails emerged as the most valued, with a total value of \$2,561, followed by:

- Improving/maintaining existing parks, with a total value of \$1,727
- Developing new amenities, with a total value \$1,200
- Developing new parks, with a total value of \$885
- Developing new Active Living Centers, with a total value of \$827

Figure 16: Total Value Allocated



Interactive Map

The interactive mapping tool provided community members with an opportunity to share their ideas and suggestions, comments, and something they like in Cabarrus County. Respondents were able to pin their comments in their desired locations within County boundaries anonymously and view other submissions on the platform. The complete breakdown of the mapping tool comments can be found with more detail in **Appendix**.

The mapping tool received 199 site visits and 24 pinned comments made across different map layers. The ideas and suggestions category received the most engagement (58%), followed by comments (25%), and liked things (16.7%).

Engagement Conclusion

The community engagement process represents collaboration, belonging, and opportunity for feedback. Collecting community feedback is vital for many reasons. First, it fosters a sense of inclusivity and ownership among community members, making them feel heard and valued in decision-making processes. This in turn, builds trust and strengthens the relationship between the community and its leaders including the staff of ALP. Additionally, gathering feedback allows for a better understanding of community needs, concerns, and preferences, enabling more informed and targeted initiatives for consideration. Engagement serves as a mechanism for continuous improvement, facilitating the identification of areas for growth or areas that may require attention.

Through this active engagement process, individuals not only have contributed to the betterment of their County, but also had the opportunity to cultivate meaningful connections and develop a deeper understanding of ALP needs. With ongoing dialogue, the vision of ALP can continue to serve the community for generations to come.

Evaluation of Existing Conditions – Operations Assessment

Introduction

The process of developing the Comprehensive Master Plan and Strategic Plan also involved an operations assessment to evaluate strengths and areas of improvement ALP. The primary objective of this assessment is to help guarantee the successful implementation of ALP's plans. This operational review serves as a complementary step in the planning process, helping to ensure the work environment aligns with recommendations outlined in the plans.

A significant component of the operations assessment included focus group meetings with approximately 24 employees from all areas of the Department. The process also included a review of existing and proposed organization charts, the newly developed County Strategic Plan, and an organizational analysis report prepared by an ALP staff member.

The operations assessment comprises three components:

- Employee Engagement
- Areas of Focus for ALP
- Recommendations

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement included a series of focus groups that covered a variety of topics, from Department strengths and challenges to internal communication and process improvements. The full operational assessment with a complete summary of employee comments exists in a separate document. This section summarizes comments from employee meetings for a few of the questions asked. The comments represent the thoughts and perspectives of staff. Questions asked of staff included:

- Department strengths
- Improvement areas needed
- Future challenges
- Review of organization structure
- Ideas for future positions
- Processes and policies needing improvement
- Collaboration and support
- Departmental communication
- Description of organizational culture
- Internal support from other departments
- Resources needed to be successful
- Training and development opportunities

The following narrative describes a summary of some of the employee responses.

What are Department strengths we need to build upon?

The employees view the inventory of parks and facilities as a key strength of the Department, enabling them to offer a wide range of unique and diverse programs and services. Staff members feel valued by the public and are passionate about delivering high-quality service, and fostering a welcoming atmosphere for patrons. They also recognize the experience and expertise within the team as a major asset. Additionally, the Department benefits from strong community connections, with a culture that emphasizes collaboration and mutual support.

What do you consider the biggest challenges the Department will face in the next five years?

Employees shared a variety of comments regarding upcoming challenges. Addressing these challenges within ALP involves a strategic focus on various fronts. According to employees interviewed, having a plan will help unify everyone around a common vision.

ALP faces a common constraint: balancing increasing demands with fewer resources. With the County's continued growth, ALP will need to continuously expand services. Another challenge is to keep abreast of industry trends, which necessitates continuous staffing updates and skill development.

With new facilities coming online, the Department must continue to grow staff numbers and help ensure these staff have the requisite skills to take on new responsibilities and streamline operations. Additionally, constantly changing demographics will influence the types of services and programs offered in the future.

ALP will need to help ensure that this planning process results in measurable accountability, which will result in future success.

How would you describe ALP's organizational culture? Any ideas for improvement?

According to employees, the overall culture within ALP is generally positive. There is a strong sense of friendliness and a tight-knit atmosphere.

The atmosphere is described as a family, with a supportive environment and an excellent work/life balance. The Department is viewed as fun, challenging, enjoyable, and rewarding, with an emphasis on a supportive environment. The impact of the past years of COVID-19-related separation has been acknowledged, but the prevailing sentiment is that ALP remains a close-knit family. Additionally, there is a desire for more team building opportunities.

Overall, there is a call for continued efforts to bridge the gap between leadership and frontline staff, enhance team building initiatives, and maintain the positive, familial aspects of the organizational culture.

Overall Themes from Employee Engagement

- The organizational culture is generally healthy.
- Relationships with other County departments are good.
- There is an interest in promotional opportunities.
- Collaboration and communication are good throughout ALP, with recognition that these can always be improved.
- Training and development opportunities are a strength.
- There is significant interest in a review of the organizational structure expressed by employees.
- Recruitment and retention are an issue; ensuring positions pay adequately is important for retaining good employees.

Areas of Focus for ALP

The following narrative provides details about various areas of focus for ALP, including best practice approaches to strengthening overall performance.

Organization structure. The operational assessment included a review of the organization structure and how it works informally and formally. In addition, future positions were identified to correspond with continued population growth in the County, as well as identifying future changes based on continuously changing operating environment.

Employees recognize the need for continued growth in concert with County population growth. Employees look forward to continued growth, opportunities for promotions, and additional responsibilities. As the Department continues to grow, it will be important to identify future positions and provide employees with information about future promotional opportunities.

Continued leadership development. Staff acknowledged ALP's leadership for fostering a supportive atmosphere, displaying a genuine interest in employee development, and staying abreast of current trends. Planning for promotional opportunities necessitates succession planning not only for the Director position but also for other leadership roles.

A pivotal aspect of effective leadership involves operationalizing the County's mission, vision, and values. Adapting services to dynamically respond to changes in consumer behavior requires intentional efforts; innovation needs to be fostered at all levels within the Department. Additionally, to help ensure accountability, it is crucial to develop performance measures that can gauge and track progress effectively.

Employees appreciate the opportunity to provide good service to patrons. ALP employees are known for providing good service. Employees develop relationships with the patrons at senior centers because they visit the centers regularly. To continue the customer service focus, ALP should develop performance standards to provide a consistent customer experience.

The state of the existing organizational culture is healthy. Employees shared similar sentiments when asked about the Department’s culture, including words such as “fun,” “enjoyable,” “tight-knit,” “family,” and “supportive.”

Organizational values can help reinforce the desired culture. The County Strategic Plan included three values of teamwork, integrity, and communication. These three values can create the framework for strengthening ALP’s culture and creating a more formal approach. This can all be reviewed as part of an ALP onboarding process.

Exerting accountability. One of the intended outcomes of the current Comprehensive Master and Strategic Plans is to develop ways of measuring organizational performance. As a result, it is important for ALP to develop a succinct list of performance measures or key performance indicators (KPIs). KPIs assess and evaluate effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of predetermined goals and objectives. In starting the KPI development process, begin with the most vital focusing on 15 to 20 measures. KPIs can be developed at the organization and department level and are usually reported quarterly along with an annual performance reviews or annual reports.

Communication. Leadership has recognized the need to continuously strengthen communication throughout the Department and has initiated several methods to improve communication. These include the following methods:

- All staff meetings which began in January 2024
- Weekly meetings with all Concord Senior Center staff
- Monday morning virtual manager’s meetings
- Department newsletter

These are commendable ideas that should strengthen employees’ satisfaction of overall Departmental communication.

Recommendations

- Create individual development plans for employees—as several employees expressed great interest in having promotional opportunities or more responsibilities—to serve as road maps for what employees need to do to advance their skills.
- Develop a succession plan for key management positions.
- Reinforce the values established in the County Strategic Plan.
- Develop KPIs. Identify how and their frequency of measurement. Establish targets for each KPI after a year of measurement.
- Develop an ALP orientation program, including a review of County mission, vision, and values, as well as a review of the desired organizational culture within ALP. A small team of ALP employees could document the existing culture and create a narrative of the desired culture, including recommendations about how to work toward the desired state.
- Develop internal communications strategic guidelines that identify root causes of communication challenges and create solutions for improvement. One way this can be achieved is through a communications workshop in which challenges are discussed through exercises showing cause and effect relationships (i.e., fishbone exercise). An area to highlight could be relationships between departments and solutions for improved relationships (i.e., ongoing meetings).

Facility Inventory

Park Types

The NRPA recognizes that different types of parks contribute to an overall system when assessing and reviewing needs within a community. Cabarrus County, North Carolina, is home to a vast range of park sizes and types, provided by multiple towns and cities, including neighborhood, community, sports complexes/district parks, greenways, school and special-use facilities within its over 361 square mile service area. As a county system in North Carolina, ALP primarily operates District Parks, which are defined as larger parks developed to serve specific recreational needs within a designated area. They often provide basic recreational opportunities, both active and passive, with a focus on major outdoor or indoor facilities that are utilized by many different groups for specific events. Parks typically range up to 200 acres in size, are often located centrally for easier access for all user groups, and often include additional amenities to support larger tournaments and events that occur on a regular basis and provide environmental education and experiences.

For frame of reference, the consulting team has included a description of the other park types that can be found in Cabarrus County below.

- **Neighborhood Parks**

Neighborhood parks serve local informal/unorganized recreational needs. They are primarily walk-to facilities serving a community within a 0.5-mile walkable network and typically range from 1 to 15 acres in size. Although they may offer substantial amenities, they are focused on the needs of nearby neighborhood and typically create a sense of place within a neighborhood. Neighborhood parks typically include areas for passive and active recreation such as playgrounds and picnicking.

- **Community Parks**

Community parks are larger than neighborhood parks and serve a greater number of the population. They often range in size from 16 to 99 acres and serve a multiple-mile geographical area. Community parks often support organized programming with staff and frequently generate revenue. They typically contain facilities such as recreation centers, swimming pools, or programmed recreation complexes. Passive recreation opportunities such as walking and picnicking also occur in community parks. These are major sites that draw a significant portion of users from outside their location's limits.

- **Greenways**

Often known as linear parks, greenways tie park system components together to form a larger connect network of recreational opportunities or places of interest. An emphasis on the natural environment and protection of wildlife corridors is a major component of greenways, as is the safe movement of pedestrians between destinations. Greenways are often significant lengths to connect one destination to another and provide walking,

jogging, or biking recreation opportunities, promoting an active lifestyle within an outdoor recreational environment.

- **School Parks**

School parks often combine park elements on a school site that can fulfill the need of other park types and can be utilized for multiple user groups. An example of a school park feature is an athletic field or a playground that is geared toward youth. Joint-use agreements must be in place to determine maintenance, liability, use and programming, but often fill a void in areas where open space is not available.

- **Special-Use Facilities: Gymnasiums, Senior Centers, Aquatics Facilities**

These park types serve a specific need and draw visitors from a bigger regional area for specific uses and programming. They are typically heavily programmed and scheduled with more focus on indoor recreation opportunities.

- **Sports Complexes**

Dedicated to a variety of sports and activities, sports complexes can include indoor and outdoor facilities that often host tournaments or specific leagues that attract large crowds. These sites are large and include multiple amenities for athletes and spectators alike.

- **Preserves**

Preserves are properties designated as parks to protect a natural resource, that have minimal built amenities, and provide access to natural areas and open space that are utilized for passive forms of recreation for the enjoyment of nature. Preserves can be of any size.

Methodology

This component of the comprehensive master planning process was completed by BerryDunn's partner Bolton and Menk. Bolton and Menk used a site assessment form to document each park visited in combination with an ArcGIS application to geolocate program items in real-time. The assessment includes:

- General site description
- Current vs. recommended maintenance level
- Signage types
- Strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities
- Any identified corrective actions needed
- Overall site condition

The inventory team used the following three tier rating system to evaluate each component on such things as the condition of the component, size or capacity relative to the need at that location, and its overall quality:

- B = Below Expectations (1)
- M = Meets Expectations (2)
- E = Exceeds Expectations (3)

The setting for a component and the conditions around it affect how well it functions. In addition to scoring the amenity components, each park site was given a set of scores to rate its comfort, convenience, and ambient qualities. This includes traits such as the availability of restrooms, drinking water, shade, scenery, etc.

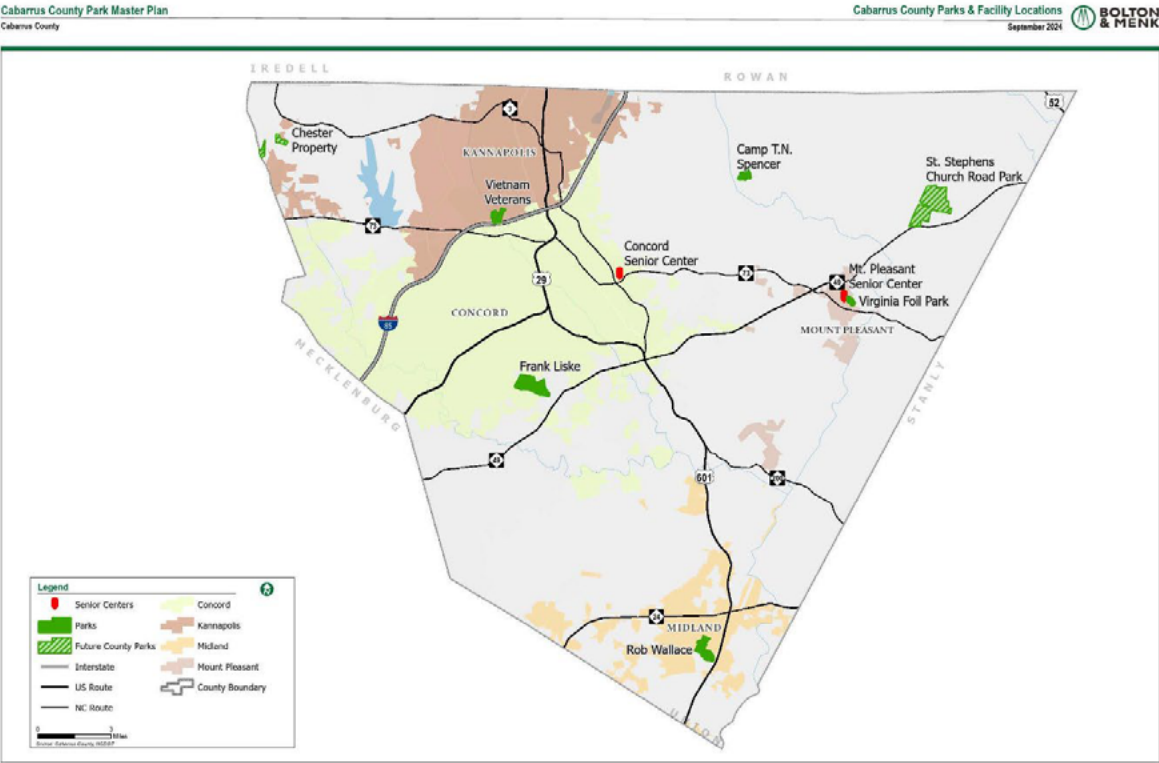
ADA compliance was also evaluated during this process. The site inventory and analysis include a review of accessible routes to park components.

The Bolton & Menk team visited six (6) sites during a three-day review period:

- Camp T.N. Spencer
- Frank Liske Park
- Rob Wallace Park
- Vietnam Veterans Park
- Mt. Pleasant Senior Center
- Concord Senior Center

An illustration of parks is included in Figure 17, while Figure 18 provides an overview of amenities at each park.

Figure 17: Map of all Parks managed by Cabarrus County Active Living and Parks



Cabarrus County Parks and Active Living Recreation Facilities	
Location	
Camp I.N. Spencer Park	1
Chester Property (*Future)	
Frank Liske Park	
Rob Wallace Park	
St. Stephens Church Road Park (*Future)	
Vietnam Veterans Park	
Virginia Foil Park	
Archery Range	
Aquatic Spray	
Basketball Court	
Bike Course	
Boating Access (Non-motorized)	
Camping	20
Concessions	1
Cornhole	2
Diamond Fields, Baseball/Softball	
Disc Golf	
Dog Park (Dog Runs)	
Educational Experience	1
Event Space	18
Fishing	3
Fitness Stations	5
Garden, Community	
Horseshoe Court	2
Miniature Golf Course	
Natural Area	1
Pickleball Court	33
Picnic Area	2
Picnic Shelter	1
Playground, Local	1
Playground, Natural	1
Public Art	
Rectangular Field, Multi-use	
Shuffleboard Courts	
Skate Park	
Swimming Pool	1
Tennis Court	
Trail, Multi-use	
Trail, Primitive	1
Volleyball Court (Sand)	1
Park Acres (GIS Data)	50
	92
	238
	143
	615
	3
	40
	1
	30

* Future Park Locations are listed but not included in the total since they are not currently open and operational

Cabarrus County Existing Parks

Camp T.N. Spencer Park

50 Acres

3155 Foxford Road, Concord, NC, 28025



Camp T.N. Spencer Park, a District Park, opened in 2003 as a partnership between the County and the Cabarrus Boys and Girls Club under a long-term lease agreement. This park serves the north portion of Cabarrus County.

The park has operated as a private summer camp since the late 1940's. The Boys and Girls Club continues to operate an annual eight-week summer camp

program. Since taking control of park operations, Cabarrus County ALP has contributed significant investment into the renovation, addition and improvement of structures and park features, offering visitors an amenity rich experience, including the addition of a nature playground. This park is utilized regularly by local schools, childcare programs, and private organizations, and continues to host outdoor/environmental educational programs to patrons. The pool is open seasonally and is available for use by camp participants and general park visitors. The county is currently developing a master plan for T.N. Spencer.

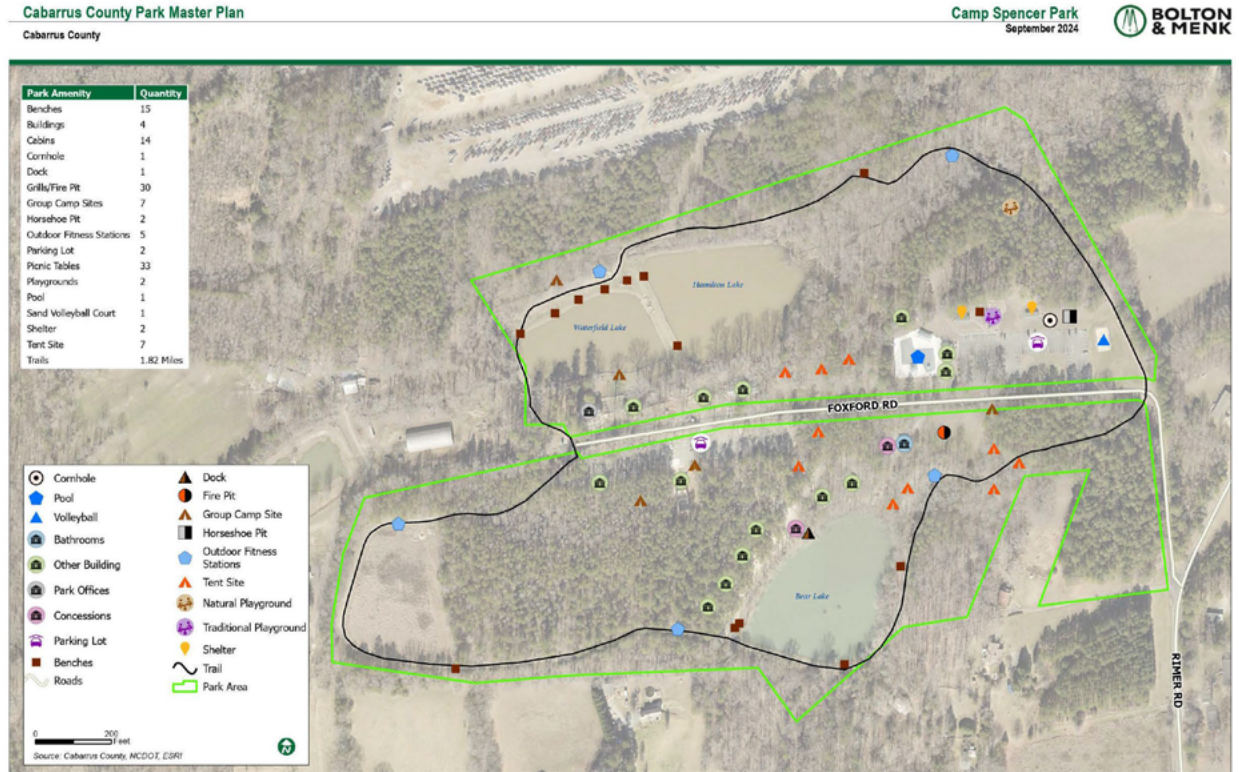
Camp T.N. Spencer Park current features include the following:

- Community buildings (available for rental)
- Picnic shelters (available for rental)
- Cabins (available for rental)
- Tent sites (available for rental)
- Group camping site (available for rental)
- 1.5-mile natural surface walking trail
- Playground
- Nature playground
- Community garden
- Sand volleyball court
- Fishing ponds
- Meadow/environmental education site
- Dock
- Benches/swinging benches
- Picnic sites
- Horseshoe pits
- Outdoor fitness stations
- On-site parking
- Restrooms
- Concessions
- Bathhouse
- Swimming pool (open each year from Memorial Day to Labor Day)

Figure 19: Camp T.N. Spencer Amenities and Score

Camp T.N Spencer Park - 50 Acres 3155 Foxford Road Concord, NC, 28025			Hours: 8am - 5pm Daily
PARK AMENITY	QUANTITY	CONDITION	NOTES Condition = (1=Below Expectations, 2=Meets Expectations, 3=Exceeds Expectations)
Archery Range	1	3	
Bathhouse	1	3	
Benches	15	3	
Cabins	6	3	Available for rental
Community Buildings	18	2	Available for rental
Community Gardens	1	2	
Concessions	1	3	vending machine is well stocked and secure
Cornhole	2	2	Standing water
Dock with Water Access	1	2	Boards need replacing
Fishing Pond	3	3	
Fitness Stations	5	2	
Grills/Fire Pits	30	3	
Group Camping Site	7	2	Available for rental
Horseshoe Pits	2	1	
Natural Surface Walking Trail	1	3	Distance: 1.5 miles
Natural Playground	1	3	
On-site Parking	2	3	1 Lot; Total Parking Spaces available: ~100
Picnic Shelter	2	3	Available for rental
Picnic Tables	33	3	
Playground	1	3	
Restrooms	4	3	4 buildings with restrooms located in park
Sand Volleyball Court	1	2	
Swimming Pool	1	3	Open Memorial Day to Labor Day
Swinging Benches	3	3	
Tent Sites	7	3	Available for rental
OVERALL PARK SCORE:			2.6

Figure 20: Camp T.N. Spencer GIS Image



Frank Liske Park

238 Acres

4100 Stough Road, Concord, NC, 28027



Frank Liske Park, located in the central part of Cabarrus County, was established on a former working farm. The District Park includes a recently built barn to replace the original structure that was destroyed in a fire. The existing barn is heated and cooled and is a popular rental venue for events.

The park hosts numerous athletic events each year including softball, soccer, cross-country meets, road races, pickleball, and tennis tournaments. Sports camps,

classes, community events, and environmental education programs are offered in this location year-round, and summer camp programs are offered annually for an eight-week period. The soccer complex is operated in partnership with Charlotte Soccer Academy and the City of Concord Parks and Recreation Department.

Frank Liske Park is also managed as a wildlife and nature preserve and includes a 10-acre lake that provides water access for recreational use including fishing and paddle boating.

Planning is currently underway to renovate and improve existing structures and program elements offered at the park. Maintenance issues include areas of current washout at the tennis court sidewalk and the parking overflow lot. Future improvements or additions include a boat dock, a splash pad, amphitheater renovations, and parking improvements.

Frank Liske Park features include the following:

- Amphitheater (available for rental)
- Barn (available for rental)
- Picnic shelters (available for rental)
- Walking and natural surface trails
- Nature trail
- 18-hole disc golf course
- 18-hole miniature golf course
- Playgrounds
- Fitness stations
- Sand volleyball courts
- Pickleball courts (12 lighted)
- Tennis courts (2 lighted)
- Multiuse athletic fields (11 total; 2 lighted)
- Softball fields (4 lighted)
- 10-acre lake with fishing and non-motorized boat access
- Dock
- Community garden
- Benches
- Picnic sites
- Horseshoe pits
- On-site parking
- Restrooms
- Concessions

Figure 21: Frank Liske Park Amenities and Score

Frank Liske Park - 238 Acres 4100 Stough Road Concord, NC, 28027			Hours: 8am - 5pm Daily
PARK AMENITY	QUANTITY	CONDITION	NOTES Condition = (1=Below Expectations, 2=Meets Expectations, 3=Exceeds Expectations)
Amphitheater	1	3	Available for rental; shrubs may obstruct view; ADA access to seating an issue
Barn	1	3	Available for rental
Benches	43	3	Old but in good condition/weathered
Community Garden	1	2	Rental
Concessions		3	
Disc Golf Course	1	3	18-holes
Dock with Water Access	1	2	
Fitness Stations	11	2	Not all stations are ADA accessible
Grill/Fire Pit	30	3	Grills only, in good condition
Horseshoe Pits	11	2	Not ADA accessible
Lake with Water Access	1	3	10-acres; fishing and non-motorized boats
Multi-use Athletic Field	11	2	2 fields lighted;
Natural Surface Walking Trail	4	3	Distance: trails add up to 4 total miles (jogging trail, fitness trail, nature trail, and lake circle)
Natural Playground	1	2	
Nature Trail	1	2	Well maintained
Miniature Golf Course	1	3	18-holes, undergoing renovation
On-site Parking	5	2	Parking lots. Total Parking Spaces available:
Pickleball Court	12	3	Lighted
Picnic Shelter	8	2	Available for rental; not all have an ADA accessible path
Picnic Sites	3	2	Not all picnic areas are ADA accessible
Picnic Tables	165	2	Not all are accessible
Playground	5	2	Not all playgrounds are ADA accessible, shade sail issues above playground equipment
Restrooms	5	3	5 buildings with restrooms located within the park
Sand Box	2	1	
Sand Volleyball Court	8	2	Posts crooked; sand migration from courts; some courts hold water
Softball Field	4	3	Lighted
Tennis Court	2	3	Lighted
OVERALL PARK SCORE:			2.5

Figure 22: Frank Liske Park GIS Image



Rob Wallace Park

143 Acres

12900 Bethel School Road, Midland, NC, 28107

Rob Wallace Park, a new passive District Park, was established to preserve and protect green space for the enjoyment of outdoor recreation by the community. A 90-foot-deep pond, a former slate quarry, is a popular feature on this site, with fishing access and a walking trail that wraps around the pond. The park was designed to be built in multiple phases to address current and future recreational needs and uses. This park generally serves the southeastern portion of Cabarrus County.

Maintenance of specific areas will need future consideration, including an evaluation of existing stormwater management, improvements to current drainage culverts, and stream bank restoration. Future phases of the park will expand the acreage of the property to include parking, a campground site, a nature center, a multi-purpose community building, additional play areas, piers, and additional trails. A ropes adventure course is under consideration for the park, which would allow visitors to experience the park from a tree-top view.

Rob Wallace Park features include the following:

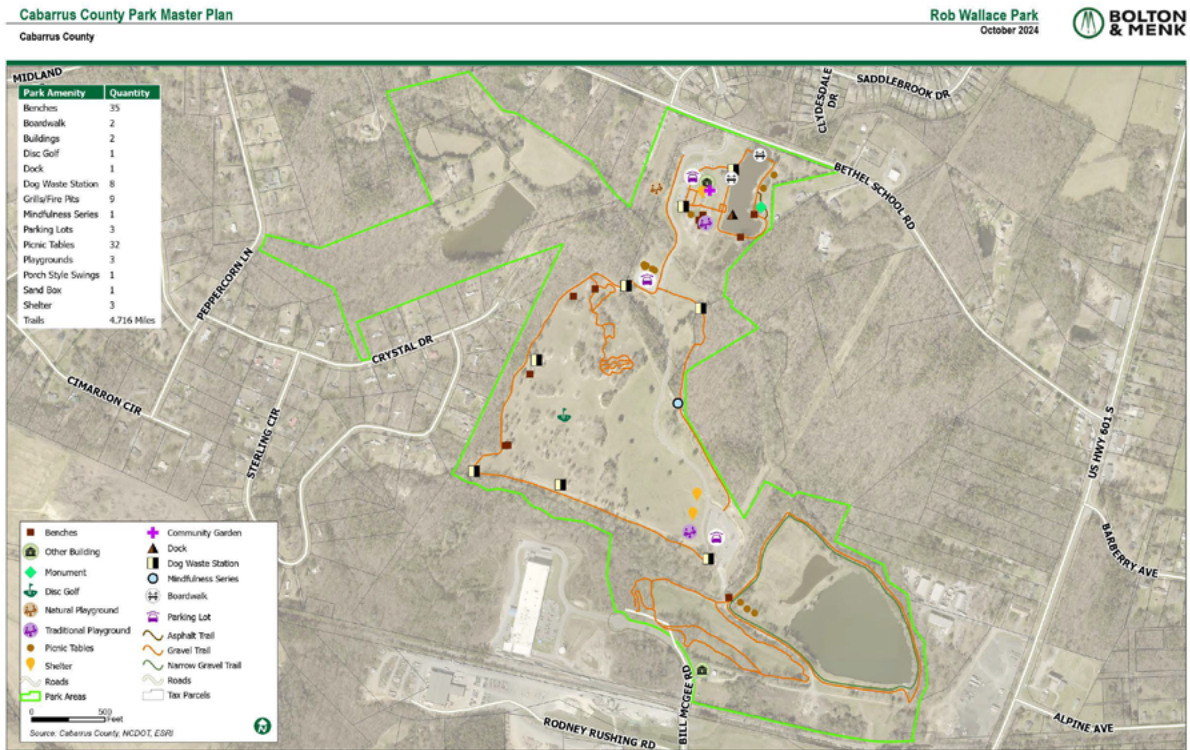
- Picnic shelters (available for rental)
- Walking and natural surface trails
- Nature trail
- Bike trails
- Community garden
- 9-hole disc golf course
- Playgrounds
- Lake with fishing access
- Boardwalk
- Dock
- Benches
- Picnic sites
- On-site parking
- Restrooms
- Park office



Figure 23: Rob Wallace Amenities and Score

Rob Wallace Park - 143 Acres 12900 Bethel School Road Midland, NC 28107			Hours: 8am - 5pm Daily
PARK AMENITY	QUANTITY	CONDITION	NOTES Condition = (1=Below Expectations, 2=Meets Expectations, 3=Exceeds Expectations)
Benches	35	3	Good condition
Bench Swings	1	3	
Bike Trail	1	3	Includes skills area; Distance: 0.5 miles
Boardwalk	1	3	
Community Garden	1	3	Total Plots: 6 raised beds
Disc Golf Course	1	3	9-holes; 2 tee boxes for each hole (short and long); starts in good location relative to parking
Dock with Water Access	1	2	
Grills/Fire Pits	9	3	
Lake with Water Access	2	3	Fishing
Natural Surface Walking Trail	1	2	Runs parallel to road with minimal buffer for a portion; Distance: 4.7 miles
Natural Playground	1	3	Bad location due to proximity to road and no pedestrian crossing
On-site Parking	3	2	Parking Lots; Total Parking Spaces available:~200 (excluding gravel lot) ;Gravel lot is unfinished/overflow parking
Park Office	1	3	Didn't go inside but exterior in good shape
Picnic Shelter	3	3	Available for rental; South shelters brand new in 2024
Picnic Tables	32	3	
Playground	2	3	Good condition; South playground brand new in 2024
Restrooms	2	3	2 buildings/shelters with restrooms located in park
Sandbox	1	2	Needs to be refilled, poured on uneven ground so starting to shift to one side
Veterans Memorial	1	3	
OVERALL PARK SCORE: 2.8			

Figure 24: Rob Wallace Park GIS Image



Vietnam Veterans Park

40 Acres

760 Orphanage Road, Concord, NC, 28027

Located along the Carolina Thread Trail, Vietnam Veterans Park, a District Park, offers passive opportunities for recreation in Cabarrus County. The park was opened in 2002 in a collaborative effort among Cabarrus County, the City of Kannapolis, and the Church of God Children's Home. The land has been leased to Cabarrus County to build and maintain the park through August 2026. Thereafter, the park may be under the jurisdiction of the City of Kannapolis. This park generally serves the northwestern portion of Cabarrus County.

Developed to provide resilience in an area that annually floods, the natural beauty of the site is exemplified by the passive recreation amenities that have been implemented on the site. Popular amenities include the group picnic area and swinging benches. Maintenance is an issue in the park and areas were noted where the creek is eroding the trails. Options are currently being reviewed to replace the boardwalk with a material that would last longer and require less maintenance. Community events and wildlife education classes are held throughout the year.



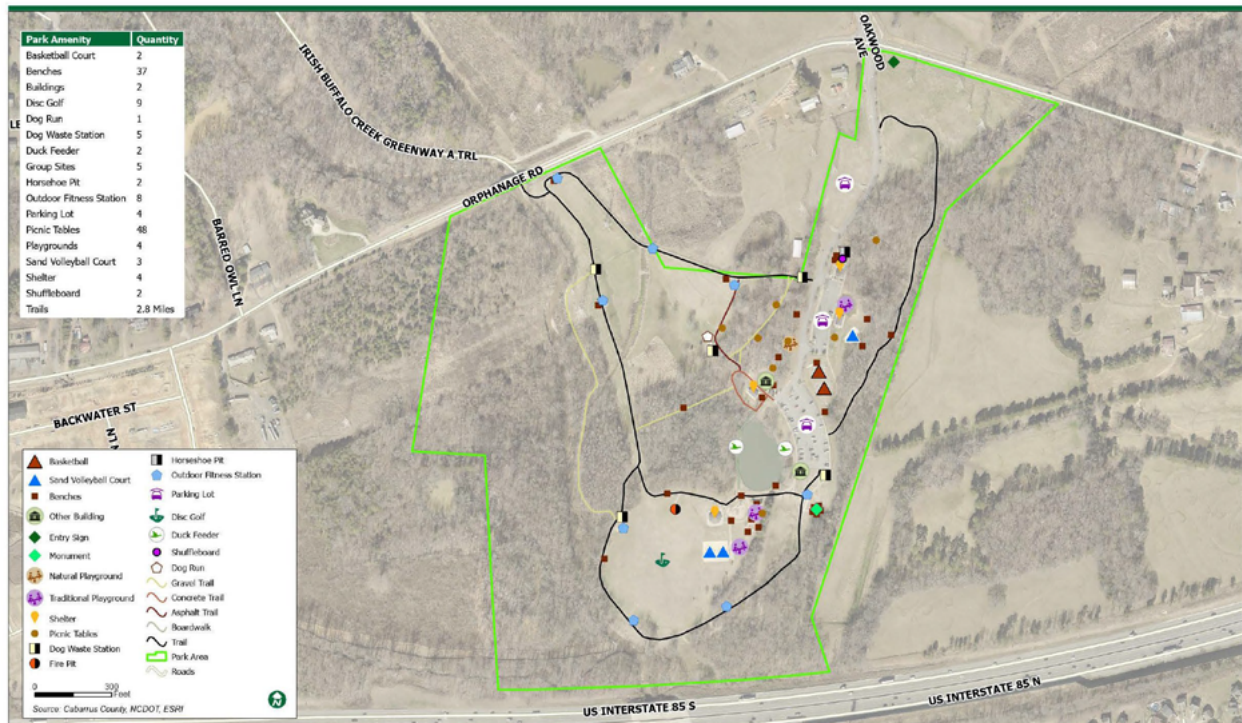
Vietnam Veterans Park features include the following:

- Picnic shelters (available for rental)
- Walking and natural surface trails
- Wetlands nature trail
- 9-hole disc golf course
- Playgrounds
- Sand volleyball courts
- Basketball courts
- Fitness stations
- Lake
- Boardwalk
- Benches
- Bench swings
- Picnic sites
- Horseshoe pits
- On-site parking
- Restrooms

Figure 25: Vietnam Veterans Park Amenities and Score

Vietnam Veterans Park - 40 Acres 760 Orphanage Road Concord, NC, 28027			Hours: 8am - 5pm Daily	
PARK AMENITY	QUANTITY	CONDITION	NOTES Condition = (1=Below Expectations, 2=Meets Expectations, 3=Exceeds Expectations)	
Basketball Court	2	3		
Benches	37	2	Not all benches are ADA accessible; older benches in need of repair	
Boardwalk	1	3	Old but in good condition/weathered	
Buildings	2	3		
Disc Golf Course	1	3	9-holes; wide open visibility	
Dog Run	1	2	Fenced, drains well	
Duck Feeding Station	2	2	One station covered with plastic; signage needed	
Fire Pit	1	2	Stones missing from firepit	
Fitness Stations	8	3		
Horseshoe Pits	2	3		
Lake with Water Access	1	3	Fishing	
Natural Playground	1	2	Not ADA accessible	
Natural Surface Walking Trail	1	3	Distance: 1.7	
On-site Parking	4	3	Parking Lots; Total Parking Spaces available:~165	
Picnic Shelter	4	2	Available for rental; locations to be reviewed	
Picnic Tables	48	2		
Playground	4	2	Playground locations to be reviewed	
Restrooms	1	3	1 building with restrooms located in park; Clean	
Sand Volleyball Court	3	2	Some sand erosion, drainage issues	
Shuffleboard Courts	2	2	Court lines need repainting	
Swinging Bench	3	3	Some locations not ideal	
OVERALL PARK SCORE: 2.5				

Figure 26: Vietnam Veterans Park GIS Image



Chester Property

92.45 Acres

Davidson Road, NC, 28026

This property has been acquired and is intended to support future passive recreation and environmental education uses in western Cabarrus County. To date, a master plan has not been completed, and further study of the property will be necessary to determine future use.

Library and Active Living Center at Mt. Pleasant and Virginia Foil Park

30 Acres

1111 North Washington Street, Mt. Pleasant, NC, 28124

Currently under construction, this 30-acre, District Park and Special-Use Facility will help accommodate the demand for additional programming space in the region. Overall the facility will be approximately 20,000 square feet,

accommodating larger events with a multi-purpose space and a new fitness center. The Center will adjoin the Virginia Foil Park which includes a playground, three lighted ballfields, restrooms and a concession stand, as well as a loop walking trail that will feature exercise stations. In addition



to the new park, the center will include library services and accommodations for larger groups and events, ample parking, and full accessibility.

Figure 27: Virginia Foil Park Amenities and Score

Virginia Foil Park - 30 Acres 1111 North Washington Street Mt. Pleasant, NC 28124			Hours: 8am - 5pm Daily
PARK AMENITY	QUANTITY	CONDITION	NOTES Condition = (1=Below Expectations, 2=Meets Expectations, 3=Exceeds Expectations)
Baseball/Softball Fields	3		Lighted*
Benches			(Future Phase)
Concessions	1		*
Fitness Stations			(Future Phase)
Natural Surface Walking Trail	1		*
On-site Parking			Total Parking Spaces available*
Pet Waste Stations			(Future Phase)
Picnic Shelter			(Future Phase)
Picnic Sites			(Future Phase)
Playground	1		*
Restrooms	1		*
*Currently under construction			

Figure 28: Virginia Foil Planned Development

Virginia Eury Foil Athletic Complex | Conceptual Site Plan
Mt. Pleasant, North Carolina



Cabarrus County | 01.25.2022
0 50 100 Feet



allard schwartz & associates | 2000 morehead road ne hawthorne, ga 30626 | 404.266.1000
www.benesch.com | 770.521.9880

St Stephens Church Road Park

615 Acres

St. Stephens Church Road, Mt. Pleasant, NC, 28124

This future passive recreation District Park will be the newest addition to the Cabarrus Park system and will be focused on nature exploration, agriculture, forestry, and ecology. Currently a portion of the park land is farmed for non-GMO crop production as part of an agricultural agreement with a fourth-generation local farmer. The site itself varies from agricultural land, to forested woodlands, and an upland bog swamp at the base of the Uwharrie Mountains.

Future park amenities will include parking, meadow and wetland restoration areas, a trailhead and walking trails (primitive and accessible) connecting to the Carolina Thread Trail, scenic overlooks, a nature center for environmental education opportunities, picnic shelters, and restrooms. The nature park will focus on preserving and restoring the oak hickory wooded setting for passive recreation with minimal disturbance. It will also allow for commercial harvests and prescribed burns in the loblolly pine plantation, increasing the diversity of the species in the long run for future generations to observe and enjoy. The park is intended to be a foundation of good stewardship for future ecology and sustainability practices within the region and will continue to provide habitat for wildlife within the region.

This future park is currently in the planning stages.

Figure 29: St. Stephens Planned Development

Master Conceptual Plan

- Park main entry at North end of park with minimal site impact (no tree clearing)
- Secondary park entry / Maintenance at South end of park
- Minimal development impact in interior forest area
- Visible Natural Center from the road
- Minimal park drive impact



Cabarrus County, North Carolina | St. Stephens Church Road Park Master Plan | 2023.06.09

Mt. Pleasant Senior Center

8615 Park Drive Mt. Pleasant, NC, 28124

This active living, special-use facility, provides a location in Mt. Pleasant where older adults can participate in individual and group recreational activities. The facility is geared toward the growing senior population. The interior space includes classroom space, a fitness area, restrooms, and a kitchen. Limited exterior recreational opportunities are available in this location.

The Mt. Pleasant Senior Center, open daily, offers a variety of drop-in programs (games, crafts, etc.) that are free, do not require registration, and are regularly scheduled throughout the week. The center also offers special programs that last multiple weeks, geared toward specific topics, and require advanced registrations at a nominal fee. Classes, including dance, tai chi, and strength training, are offered for a variety of fitness and skill levels. A few classes are offered daily. The fitness center within the facility offers walk-in fitness opportunities. Information regarding classes and Senior Center hours are located at the facility as well as online for easy access for members of the community.

This Senior Center will be relocated to the Cabarrus County Library and Active Living Center at Mount Pleasant and Virginia Foil Park upon completion in late October 2024. Current features were not rated due the future relocation.

Mt. Pleasant Senior Center includes the following features:

- On-site parking
- Restrooms
- Fitness area
- Kitchen
- Community gathering space



Concord Senior Center

331 Corban Avenue SE, Concord, NC, 28025

The Concord Senior Center is an active living, multi-purpose special-use facility, where older adults can participate in individual and group recreational activities. The Senior Center was constructed in 1991 and geared toward accommodating the growing senior population. The interior includes a classroom, a computer lab, fitness facility, restrooms, and a kitchen.

Exterior recreational opportunities include an outdoor fitness center, a paved trail, picnic shelter and activity courts (bocce, horseshoe, and shuffleboard). When needed, this facility is utilized as an emergency shelter with a backup generator system.

The Concord Senior Center, open daily, offers a variety of drop-in programs (games, billiards, photography, etc.) that do not require registration, are free in cost, and are regularly scheduled throughout the week. The center also offers specialty programs that last multiple weeks, geared



toward specific topics and require advanced registration, often for a nominal fee. Classes such as yoga, tai chi, and dance are offered for a variety of fitness and skill levels. Four to twelve classes are offered daily. The fitness center within the facility offers reservation and walk-in fitness opportunities. Information regarding classes and Senior Center hours are located at the facility as well as online for easy access for members of the community.

In addition to the Concord Senior Center, the administrative offices for the Cabarrus County Active Living and Parks department are located within this building.

Concord Senior Center includes the following features:

- Outdoor fitness center/fitness stations
- Kitchen
- Community gathering space(s)
- On-site parking
- Restrooms
- Bocce courts
- Horseshoe pits
- Shuffleboard courts
- Paved/concrete walking trail
- Benches
- Bench swing

Figure 30: Concord Senior Center Amenities and Score

Concord Senior Center 331 Corban Avenue SE Concord, NC, 28025			Hours: 8am - 5pm Daily
PARK AMENITY	QUANTITY	CONDITION	NOTES Condition = (1=Below Expectations, 2=Meets Expectations, 3=Exceeds Expectations)
Benches		2	Quantity to be verified due to renovation
Bocce Courts	4	3	Artificial turf; overhead shade
Community Gathering Space	1	3	Artificial turf; overhead shade; minimal seating; multi-use space; well maintained
Fitness Area	1	2	Interior
Fitness Stations	1	3	Multiple pieces in one central location; shaded
Horseshoe Pits	2	2	Under renovation
Kitchen	1	2	
Walking Trail	1	2	Paved trail with connections and ADA access; Little Free Library box on trail
On-site Parking	1	2	~60 spaces
Outdoor Fitness Center	1	2	Large covered area; lacking seating (multi-use area)
Pet Waste Stations	1	2	
Restrooms	1	2	
Shuffleboard Courts	2	2	Covered
Swinging Bench	1	2	Swing over mulch area, next to ADA access
OVERALL CENTER SCORE:			2.2

Other Service Providers

Cabarrus County ALP is designed to complement parks and facilities owned and maintained by the cities of Concord and Kannapolis, as well as the towns of Mt. Pleasant, Midland, and Harrisburg. Concord, Kannapolis, and Harrisburg each operate their own park and recreation departments. The following pages provide a high-level overview of the parks managed by these departments that provide park and recreation opportunities to Cabarrus County residents.

Figure 31: Park and Recreation Facilities Per Population (Towns, Cities, and County Facilities)

Park & Recreation Facilities Per Population										
Type of Facility	Median Number of Residents Per Facility		Cabarrus County		Kannapolis	Concord	Harrisburg	Mt. Pleasant	Others	Total*
	All Agencies	100,000 to 250,000	# of Facilities Needed to Meet NRPA Metrics	# of Existing County Facilities	# of Existing Kannapolis Facilities	# of Existing Concord Facilities	# of Existing Harrisburg Facilities	# of Existing Mt. Pleasant Facilities	# of Existing County Facilities by Others	
Playgrounds	3,759	5,024	48.3	16	4	10	4	1	19	(35)
Basketball Courts (Outdoor)	7,404	8,792	27.6	2	1	5		0	6	(8)
Tennis Courts (Outdoor)	5,860	7,797	31.1	2	4	14	3	0	21	(23)
Baseball Fields - Youth	6,863	14,564	16.7	3	1	13 (shared w/Softball)	2 (shared w/Softball)	1	17	20
Softball Fields - Adult	15,345	26,508				13 (shared w/Baseball)	2 (shared w/Baseball)	0	18	18
Multi-Purpose Fields (Rectangular)	9,177	14,471	16.8	11	2	6	5	0	13	24
Dog Parks	43,532	78,526	3.1	2	0	2		0	2	4
Outdoor Swimming Pool	38,635	67,267	3.6	1	0	1		0	1	(2)
Community Gardens	31,395	17,703	13.7	4		3		0	3	(7)
Multiuse Courts - Basketball, Volleyball (Indoor)	17,475	40,667	6.0	0	3	3	0	0	6	6
Multiuse Courts - Tennis, Pickleball (Outdoor)	15,948	36,876	6.6	0	0		3	0	3	(3)
Multi-Purpose Synthetic Field	36,884	57,011	4.3	0				0	0	(0)
Skatepark	53,144	110,000	2.2	0	0			0	0	(0)
18-hole Golf Course (Regulation)	94,109	114,842	2.1	0	1	1		0	2	2
Pickleball Courts	13,922	29,836	8.1	12	0	6	2	0	8	20
Cabarrus County Population =	242,512									

*School facilities in Cabarrus County have not been included in this total

*Blank fields indicate that data could not be confirmed

City of Concord Existing Parks

Beverly Hills Park – 4 Acres – 631 Miramar Street NE, Concord, NC, 28025

Neighborhood Park amenities:

- Playground
- Tennis Courts (1)
- Picnic Shelter (reservable)
- Restrooms

Burrage Road Park – 10 Acres – 946 Burrage Road, Concord, NC, 28025

Neighborhood Park amenities:

- Outdoor Learning Center
- Future Improvements

Gibson Field – 2.6 Acres – 265 Misenheimer Drive, Concord, NC, 28025

Neighborhood Park amenities:

- Restrooms
- Concessions (currently closed)
- Batting Cage
- Baseball/Softball Field (lighted)

Hartsell Park – 14 Acres – 65 Sunderland Road, Concord, NC, 28027

Neighborhood Park amenities:

- Playground
- Swings
- Picnic Shelter (reservable)
- Sand Volleyball
- Horseshoes
- Restrooms (currently closed)

J.W. (Mickey) McGee, Jr. Park – 14 Acres – 219 Corban Avenue, SE, Concord, NC, 28025

Neighborhood Park amenities:

- Playground
- Swings
- Greenway Parking (McEachern Greenway, Downtown Loop)
- Picnic Shelter (reservable)
- Restrooms

Les Myers Park – 21 Acres – 338 Lawndale Avenue, Concord, NC, 28025

Neighborhood Park amenities:

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| • Playgrounds (2) | • Restrooms |
| • Swings | • Concessions (currently closed) |
| • Greenway Parking (McEachern Greenway, Downtown Loop) | • Amphitheater |
| • Walking Trail | • Skating Circle |
| • Picnic Shelters (reservable) | • Horseshoes |
| • Gazebos (reservable) | • Table Tennis |
| • Community Building | • Tennis Courts (8) |
| | • Baseball/Softball Field |

Wilson Street Park – 7 Acres – 106 Wilson Street, NE, Concord, NC, 28025

Neighborhood Park amenities:

- Greenway Parking (McEachern Greenway)

James L. Dorton Park – 24 Acres – 5790 Poplar Tent Road, Concord, NC, 28027

Community Park amenities:

- Tennis Courts (3)
- Playgrounds (2)
- Swings
- Soccer fields (2)
- 9-hole Disc Golf Course
- 1.1-mile Gravel Walking Trail
- Picnic Shelters (reservable)
- Restrooms
- Concession Stand (currently closed)

Marvin Caldwell Park – 24 Acres – 362 Georgia Avenue, SW, Concord, NC, 28025

Community Park amenities:

- Playgrounds (2)
- Swings
- Walking Trail
- Picnic Shelters (reservable)
- Community Building
- Concession Stand (currently closed)
- Restrooms
- Amphitheater
- Skating Circle
- Horseshoes
- Tennis Courts (2)
- Baseball/Softball Fields (lighted) (2)
- Football Field (lighted)
- Basketball Courts (4)

McAllister Field – 160 Crowell Drive NW, Concord, NC, 28025

Community Park amenities:

- Restrooms
- Concessions (currently closed)
- Greenway Parking (Village Greenway)
- Baseball/Softball Field (lighted)

W.W. Flowe Park – 44 Acres – 99 Central Heights Drive, Concord, NC, 28025

Community Park amenities:

- Playground (currently closed)
- Swings
- Walking Trail
- Picnic Shelters (reservable)
- Restrooms
- Sand Volleyball
- Batting Cages
- Horseshoes
- Baseball/Softball Fields (lighted) (4)
- Soccer Field

Weddington Road Bark Park – 56 Acres – 8955 Weddington Road, Concord, NC, 28027

Community Park amenities:

- 0.5 Acres small dog park
- 1.5 Acre large dog park
- Playground
- Restrooms
- Greenway Parking (Hector Henry Greenway, Riverwalk)

Webb Field – 161 Academy Avenue NW, Concord, NC, 28025

Historic Community Park amenities:

- Restrooms
- Stadium Seating
- Concessions (currently closed)
- Greenway Parking (Village Greenway)
- Baseball/Softball Field (lighted)
- Football Field (lighted)

Hartsell Ballfield Complex – 60 Hartsell Road, Concord, NC, 28027

Sports Complex amenities:

- Restrooms
- Concessions (currently closed)
- Batting Cages
- Pickleball Courts (2)
- Basketball Court
- Baseball/Softball Fields (lighted)(3)
- Soccer Field

Academy Recreation Center – 147 Academy Avenue NW, Concord, NC, 28025

Special-Use Facility amenities:

- Arts & Crafts Room
- Fitness Studio
- Cardio Room
- Weight Room
- Restrooms
- Lounge
- Gymnasium
- Billiards Tables
- Basketball Courts
- Volleyball Courts

Brown Mill Mountain Bike Trail Park – 7 2nd Street SW, Concord, NC, 28027

Special-Use Facility amenities:

- 4.25 miles of beginner to high skill mountain bike trails

David Phillips Activity Center – 946 Burrage Road NE, Concord, NC, 28025

Special-Use Facility amenities:

- Classrooms
- Kitchen
- Fitness Studio
- Restrooms

Hartsell Recreation Center – 60 Hartsell School Road, Concord, NC, 28027

Special-Use Facility amenities:

- Classrooms
- Fitness Studio
- Cardio Room
- Weight Room
- Restrooms
- Gymnasium
- Billiards Table
- Foosball Table
- Air Hockey Table
- Table Tennis
- Basketball Courts
- Volleyball Courts
- Pickleball Courts (2)

John F. McInnis Aquatics Center – 151 Academy Avenue NW, Concord, NC, 28025

Special-Use Facility amenities:

- Pool (open seasonally, May-August)

Logan Multi-Purpose Center – 184 Booker Drive SW, Concord, NC, 28025

Special-Use Facility amenities:

- Classrooms
- Arts & Crafts Room
- Cardio Room
- Weight Room
- Lounge
- Restrooms
- Gymnasium
- Billiards Table
- Table Tennis
- Basketball Court
- Volleyball Court
- Pickleball Courts (2)

Afton Run Greenway – Concord, NC

Greenway amenities:

- 0.5 Mile Paved Asphalt Trail
- Connection between Dorton Park and the Rowan Cabarrus YMCA

Clarke Creek Greenway/Cox Mill Loop – Concord, NC

Greenway amenities:

- 5.2 Mile Planned Trail (not completed)
- Connection of Allen Mills, Winding Walk, Highland Creek, Cristenbury, Granary Oaks and Edenton neighborhoods with future parks, trailheads, and schools
- Intention is to connect to future path along Cox Mill Road, creating a loop

Coddle Creek Greenway – Concord, NC

Greenway amenities:

- Future Greenway with connections to local parks and the City of Kannapolis

George W. Liles Greenway – Concord, NC

Greenway amenities:

- 1.3 Mile paved asphalt/concrete out-and-back trail (2.6 miles total)

Hector H. Henry II Greenway – Concord, NC

Greenway amenities:

- 3 unique segments
- Wildlife, wetland habitats and environmental education displays
- Part of the Carolina Thread Trail system
- Moss Creek: 1.35 Mile trail
- Riverwalk: 2.75 Mile trail
- The Mills at Rocky River: 2.67 Mile natural surface trail

Irish Buffalo Creek Greenway – Concord, NC

Greenway amenities:

- Village Greenway: 0.5 Mile Concrete Trail
- Terminates at site of future skate park and bike pump track

McEachern Greenway – Concord, NC

Greenway amenities:

- 2.2 Mile Paved Trails
- McEachern Downtown Connector includes fitness stations along the trail
- Downtown Greenway Loop approximately 4-miles along paved trails/sidewalks connecting the overall system starting at McGee Park

Town of Harrisburg Existing Parks

Harris Depot Park – 3.91 Acres – 6960 Harris Depot Road, Harrisburg, NC 28075

Community Park amenities:

- Bike Trail
- Cornhole
- Fishing Pond
- Historic Post Office
- Log Cabin
- Natural Areas
- Picnic Shelters (reservable)
- Restrooms
- Paved Walking Trails
- Mountain Bike Trail Access
- Harrisburg Farmers Market (April-October)

Harrisburg Park – 33.68 Acres – 191 Sims Parkway, Harrisburg, NC, 28075

Community Park amenities:

- Multi-purpose Fields
- Concession Stand
- 0.54 Mile Walking Track
- Biking Trails
- Picnic Shelters (reservable)
- Playground
- Splash Pad
- Amphitheater
- Open Space
- Connection to Harrisburg Library

Pharr Mill Park – 37.31 Acres – 6775 Pharr Mill Road, Harrisburg, NC, 28075

Community Park amenities:

- Bike Trail
- Boardwalk
- Fishing Pond
- Natural Areas
- Picnic Shelters (reservable)
- Playground
- Restrooms
- Sand Volleyball Courts (2)
- Walking Trail

Stallings Park – 12.72 Acres – 4050 Stallings Road, Harrisburg, NC 20875

Community Park amenities:

- Baseball/Softball Fields (2)
- Picnic Shelters (reservable)
- Playground
- Restrooms
- Tennis/Pickleball Courts (3/2)
- Walking Trail

Veterans Park – 1.0 Acres – 4281 Harris Square Drive, Harrisburg, NC 28075

Community Park amenities:

- Passive Park
- Memorial Fountain
- Open Lawn Area
- Swinging Arbors

Holcomb Woods Athletic Complex – 13.58 Acres – 12443 Plaza Road Extension, Charlotte NC 28215

Sports Complex amenities:

- Multi-purpose Fields (lighted) (2)
- Restroom
- Shelter
- Playground

City of Kannapolis Existing Parks

Bakers Creek Park – 40.0 Acres – 1275 West A Street, Kannapolis, NC 28081

Community Park amenities:

- Picnic Shelters (reservable)
- Playground
- Mini-golf Course
- Volleyball Courts (2)
- Tennis Courts (4)
- Horseshoes
- Half-Basketball Court
- Softball Field (lighted)
- Restrooms
- Concessions
- Greenway Access

Walter M. Safrit Park – 17.0 Acres – 1314 Bethpage Road, Kannapolis, NC 28081

Community Park amenities:

- Picnic Shelters (reservable)
- Playground
- Softball Fields (lighted)(2)
- Soccer Field
- 0.5-mile Paved Walking Trail
- Restrooms
- Concessions

Atrium Health Ballpark – 40.0 Acres – 1 Cannon Baller Way, Kannapolis, NC 28081

Special-use amenities:

- Home of the Kannapolis Cannon Ballers (minor league baseball team)
- 4,930 Seat Capacity
- Family Picnic Areas
- 20,000 SF Children's Area
- Splash Pad
- 6,000 SF Banquet Space
- Event Space (rentable)
- Walking Track
- Open to the public on non-game days (sunrise-sunset)

Dale Earnhardt Plaza – 0.75 Acres – 109 West A Street, Kannapolis, NC 28081

Special-use/Civic amenities:

- Plaza Space (reservable)
- Tribute to local racing legend

Veterans Park – 1.4 Acres – 119 North Main Street, Kannapolis, NC 28081

Special-use/Civic amenities:

- Walkways
- Fountains
- Green Space
- Pavilion
- Community Gathering/Event Space
- Historic Memorial Honoring Branches of Military Service

Village Park – 16.0 Acres – 700 West C Street, Kannapolis, NC 28081

Special-use Park amenities:

- Picnic Shelters (reservable)
- Rotary Express Train
- Carousel
- Splash Pad
- Playgrounds
- Amphitheater (Events/Concerts)
- Multi-purpose Building (reservable)
- Trails
- Restrooms
- Concessions

West Avenue Park –Downtown Kannapolis, NC 28081

Special-use/Civic Park amenities:

- Encompasses West Avenue, portions of Main Street, Oak Avenue, Vance Street, and Cannon Baller Way
- Restrooms
- Fountains
- Entertainment Stages
- Putting Green
- Urban Swings
- Dining Areas

Bakers Creek Greenway – Kannapolis, NC

Greenway amenities:

- 2.0 Mile Paved Trail connecting 8th Street Greenway with Bakers Creek Park and Village Park
- Part of the Carolina Thread Trail

8th Street Greenway – Kannapolis, NC

Greenway amenities:

- 2.0 Mile Paved Trail
- Connects to Bakers Creek Greenway

Irish Buffalo Creek Greenway – Kannapolis, NC

Greenway amenities:

- 2.7 Mile Paved Trail connecting Bakers Creek Park, Safrit Park and Vietnam Veterans Park
- Pedestrian Bridges
- Part of the Carolina Thread Trail

Town of Midland Existing Parks

Pharr Family Preserve Trail – 66.0 Acres – 9111 Mt. Pleasant Road South, Midland, NC 28107

Preserve amenities:

- 1.7 Mile Natural Surface Trail
- Canoe and Kayak launch (Rocky River Blueway/Cabarrus Midland Blueway)

Town of Mount Pleasant Existing Parks

Mount Pleasant Town Park – Park Drive, Mount Pleasant, NC 28124

Community Park amenities:

- Baseball Field (Lighted)
- Playground
- Shelter

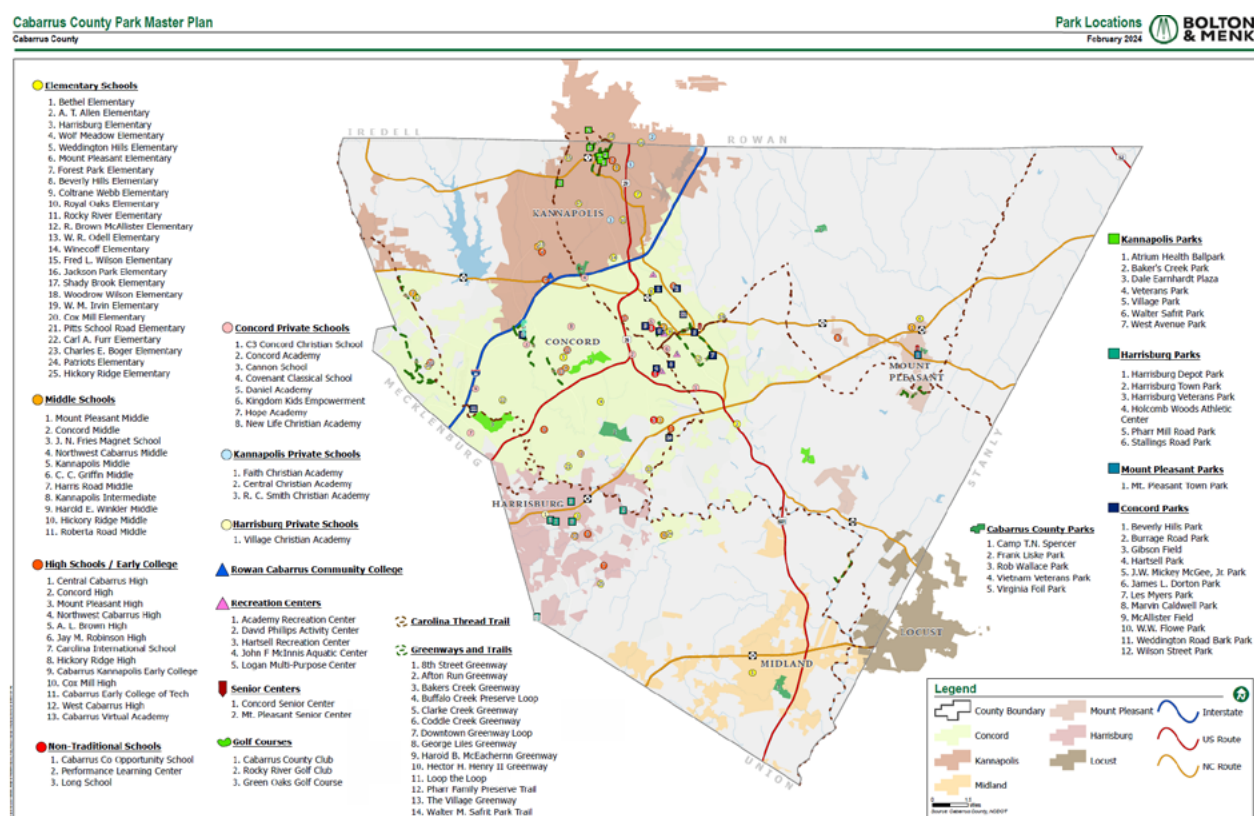
Level of Service

Inventory Analysis

BerryDunn's partner, Bolton & Menk, conducted in-person site assessments over a three-day period in December 2023 and January 2024. These assessments establish a baseline understanding and "snapshot" of the system's existing conditions and amenities. This assessment will be utilized with other technical research reports and national comparative data to assist with the final Active Living and Parks Department Comprehensive Master Plan update including recommendations and action strategies.

Cabarrus County Active Living and Parks Department currently oversees and maintains four District Park facilities and two Active Living Centers within the County park system. Two additional County district parks are underway, either in the construction or the planning phase. In addition, segments of the Carolina Thread Trail weave through Cabarrus County in various locations, adding to the connectivity and greenway recreation opportunities. Within the County limits, the parks system includes the following parks: neighborhood, community, special use, historic, and other open space parcels maintained by towns or cities. Other recreational and green space resources such as trails, golf courses, and schools are identified in Figure 32.

Figure 32: Map of Cabarrus County Parks



The planning area for the Cabarrus County Active Living and Parks Department is the same as the service area. Several facilities, parks, and programs offered by the County have a regional influence. Cabarrus County's parks currently provide a variety of experiences to residents that typically have high participation rates.

The inventory was rated in one of three ways:

- **Exceeds Expectations (rating of 3):** Excellent facilities/amenities and feature little or no maintenance problems. Facilities do not feature any major design issues that contribute to diminished use or maintenance.
- **Meets Expectations (rating of 2):** Good facilities/amenities and feature only minor maintenance problems. Generally, most maintenance issues with these facilities appear to be the result of age and/or heavy use. Facilities may only feature minor design issues that contribute to diminished use or maintenance (i.e., drainage, structural, utilities, etc.).
- **Below Expectations (rating of 1):** Poor Facilities/amenities and clearly show ongoing maintenance problems that ultimately may result in suspended use for repair/replacement. Maintenance issues with these facilities are the result of age and heavy use, and generally are compounding over time due to being deferred because of budget and/or resource limitations. Facilities may feature major design issues that contribute to diminished use or maintenance (i.e. drainage, structural, utilities, etc.).

For further information, please see data tables provided per park in the inventory section of this report.

Gap Analysis

The Parks Gap Analysis examines the area of the County being serviced by community, neighborhood, special use, and historical parks. Community parks and special use parks are given a one-mile radius as these parks feature shared community resources that are frequently

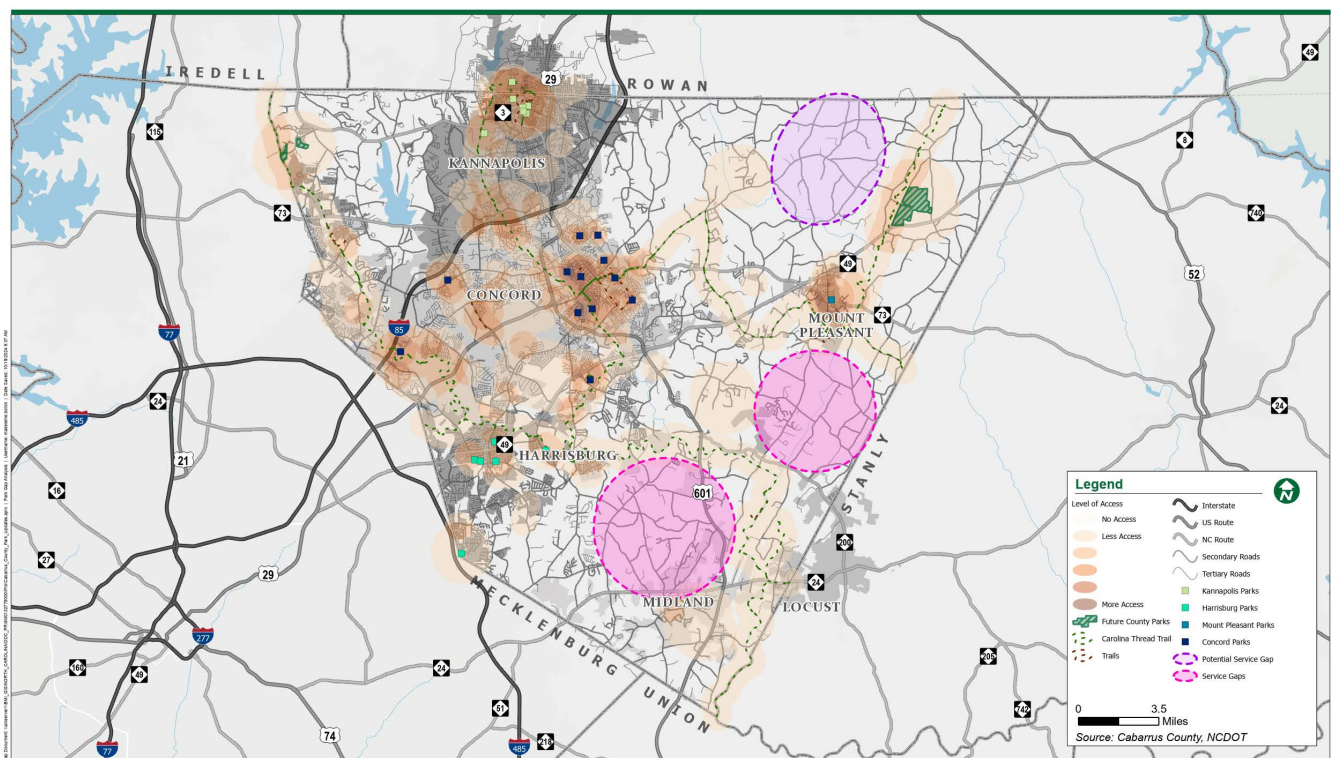
SYSTEM STRENGTHS

- Distribution is increasing within the County limits.
- Well-maintained parks in terms of mowing, cleaning, trash removal, and restroom cleaning.
- Multiple sources of rental amenities.
- Established, successful long-term partnerships within the community.
- Proactively acquiring additional land and planning for additional park space to meet the needs of its residents.
- Offers a variety of recreation opportunities for its patrons.
- Updated playgrounds are dispersed across the system.
- Contains outdoor exercise areas are excellent and include trail connectivity.

accessed by car, even though they may also serve as neighborhood parks for their local area. Neighborhood parks are assigned a ½-mile service radius, as these park types typically are accessed by foot or bike by the surrounding residents. Because of the shared resources on school district property, elementary, middle, and high schools are included as a recreational resource at the neighborhood level (½-mile radius).

By overlaying the park service radii on a map of the County, the resulting diagram (Figure 33) shows where gaps may exist in the area served (or underserved) by the existing park locations.

Figure 33: Gap Analysis Cabarrus County



From the mapping of parks and trails serving the County, one can visually see the areas within Cabarrus County that are lacking proximity to park access or recreation facilities. While the service gaps may occur frequently through larger areas within the County, it is important to recognize that some of the areas identified are not representative of dense populations or are in areas where recreational opportunities may not be highly utilized or desired. Visualizing these gaps allows for further analysis and discussion as to the reason the gaps occur and whether to consider adding park access, connectivity, and facilities to these areas in order to fulfill the mission and the vision of the Cabarrus County Active Living and Parks Department in conjunction with neighboring municipalities, schools, or partnership providers to fill the voids within the County as a whole.

Level of Service (LOS)

LOS evaluate how parks, open spaces, and facilities in Cabarrus County serve the community and meet the needs of County residents. The NRPA provides information to guide park system assessments to determine the service levels of each park system based upon national data gathered annually. This data is used to benchmark current conditions and to direct future planning efforts and indicates the ability of people to connect with nature and pursue active lifestyles, which have implications for health and wellness, the local economy, and quality of life. Further, LOS for a park and recreation system tends to reflect community values. It is often representative of people's connection to their communities and lifestyles focused on outdoor recreation and healthy living. The LOS was examined by studying what facilities exist presently in the inventory and evaluating the quality and location of those existing facilities in Cabarrus County.

LOS standards are guidelines that define service areas based on population that support investment decisions related to parks, facilities, and amenities. LOS standards can and will change over time as the program lifecycles and demographics of a community fluctuate. By applying these standards to the population of Cabarrus County, gaps or surpluses in park and facility types are revealed. With this information, a community can understand the equity of its parks and recreation services.

Bolton & Menk evaluated park facility standards using a combination of resources. These resources included market trends, demographic data, recreation activity participation rates, community and stakeholder input, data from NRPA, findings from the statistically valid community survey, and general observations.

SYSTEM WEAKNESSES

- ADA accessibility could be improved.
- Amenities need updating.
- Connectivity, access, and distance is a challenge for some of the park locations.
- Erosion and drainage issues due to wear and tear or heavily used.
- Lack of Shade.
- No real presence of dog parks within the County system.

Importantly, these LOS standards should be viewed as a guide. The standards are to be coupled with conventional wisdom and judgment related to the situation and needs of the community.

The NRPA no longer publishes national standards for facility quantity, as they believe communities serve different residents with distinct needs and recreational preferences. However, they do distribute metrics based on evaluations of park and recreation agencies across the United States. Current data from the 2023 NRPA “Agency Performance Review” based on a survey of over 1,000 agencies indicate the following for the typical community of 100,000 to 250,000 residents:

Based upon the NRPA median mentioned earlier, Cabarrus County is providing **1 park per 48,502 residents population**, which fails to meet either County or similar sized population medians, meaning Cabarrus County is lacking in parks to meet the needs of their residents and should continue to see access to future park land to serve their residents.

- 8.9 acres for every 1,000 residents
- 1 park for every 3,240 residents (median)
- 1 park for every 8,263 residents at the County level (median)

In addition:

- Over 90% of respondents offer playgrounds
- 63% of respondents offer indoor recreation centers with gyms, while approximately 41% offer senior centers

The population of Cabarrus County is approximately 242,512 residents. Cabarrus County has seen 36.2% growth since 2010 and is estimated to grow to 258,101 by 2028. Typical comparison of agency services are broken down by population size of 100,000 to 250,000 by NRPA in their 2023 Agency Review Report and within their Park Metrics database. Once the County exceeds 250,000 residents the data should be compared in the higher population brackets. It will be critical for Cabarrus County to enter park data annually into this valuable tool to consistently understand national comparative information as the County grows and services are added.

Understanding the demand for parks within a County system starts with the evaluation of access to parks. NRPA evaluates access to parks by determining how many residents there are per park in similar jurisdictional populations. Cabarrus County is providing 1 park per 48,502 residents population, which—based upon the NRPA median mentioned earlier—fails to meet either County or similar sized population medians, meaning Cabarrus County is lacking in parks to meet the needs of their residents and should continue plan for future park land to serve their residents.

The typical agency serving jurisdictions under 250,000 manages approximately 8.9 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents and 10.2 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents at the County level. Importantly, the limitation of parks per 1,000 population does not take into account the size and type of park. A more meaningful metrics is number of acres per 1,000 population.

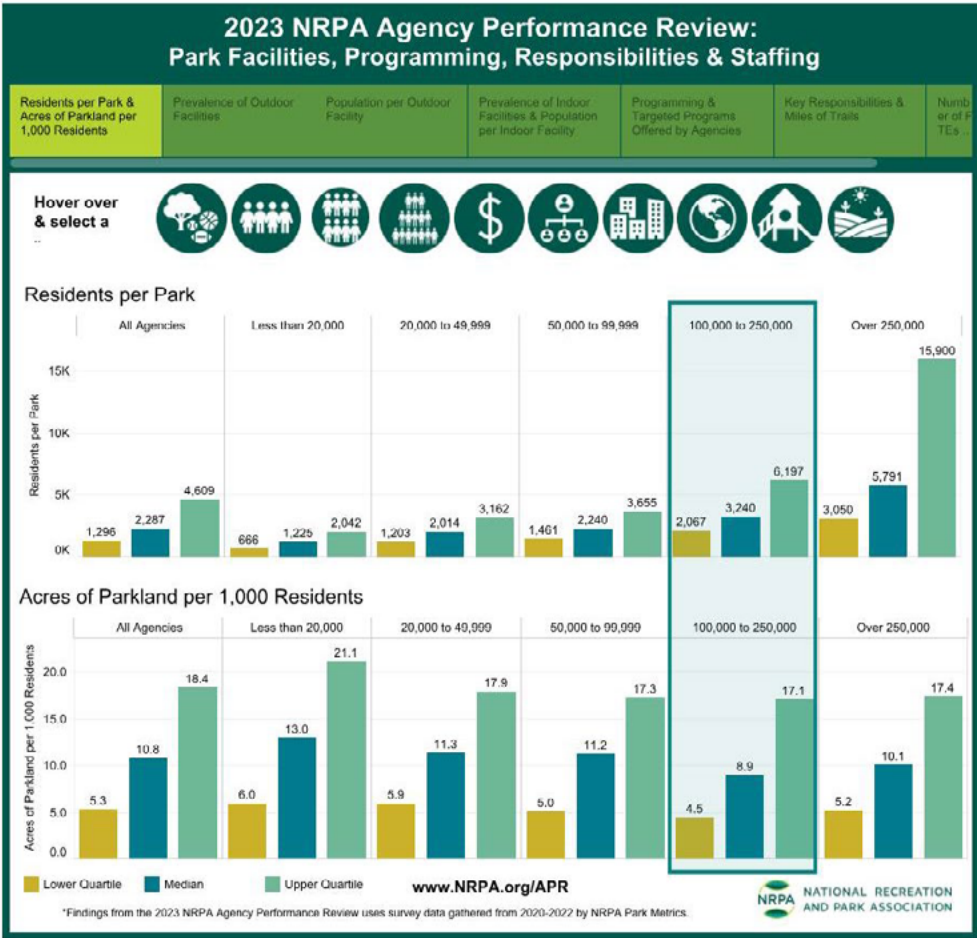
Using the current population in Cabarrus County of 242,512 and the total current park acreage of 521, the County is currently only providing 2.1 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents which is well below the median for population and County level of park acres per 1,000 residents. With the addition of future parks on the current land the County already owns, a total of 1,258 acres, Cabarrus County would be providing 5.2 park acres per resident, which would exceed the lower quartile of similar sized populations up to 250,000 residents and at the County level.

Additionally, approximately 1,799 acres of parks exist in the County when adding other service providers, excluding schools, to the total acreage. This quantity of park acreage provides 7.4 park acres per 1,000 residents, which is still shy of the median NRPA Park Metrics averages for both population size and at the County level, however it does exceed the lower quartile for both of these measures.

As the County continues to grow, additional acreage to meet growth and recreational demand should be acquired to provide a median LOS in park acreage to the County residents. The County should also evaluate the most effective means of increasing park acreage to serve residents and visitors through internal and external discussions with other service providers.

Figures 34 through 36 further illustrate agency performance provided through NRPA.

Figure 34: 2023 NRPA Agency Performance Comparison: residents per Park and Acres of



Parkland per 1,000 Residents

Figure 35: 2023 NRPA Agency Performance Comparison: residents per Park and Acres of Parkland per 1,000 Residents County Level

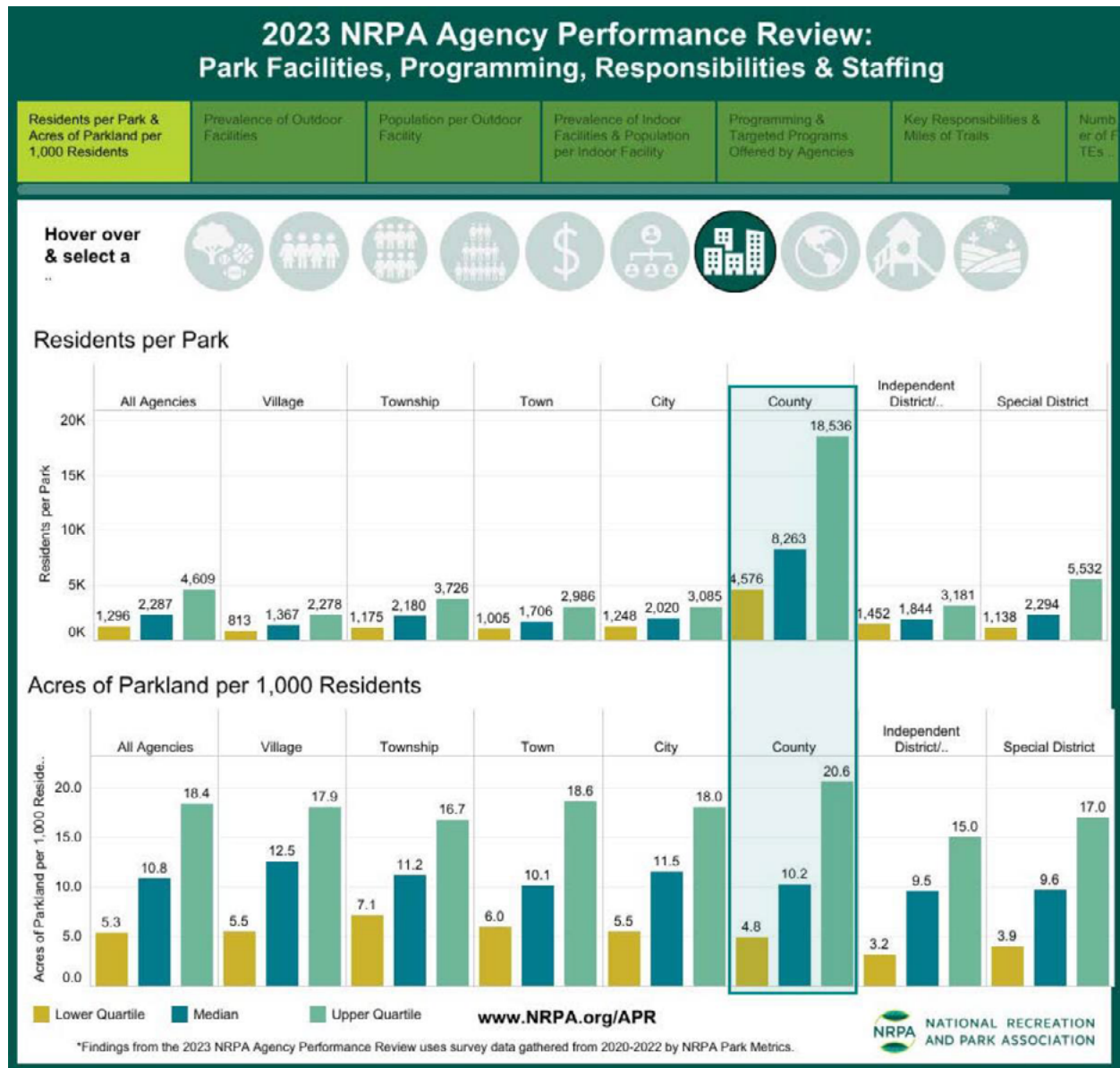
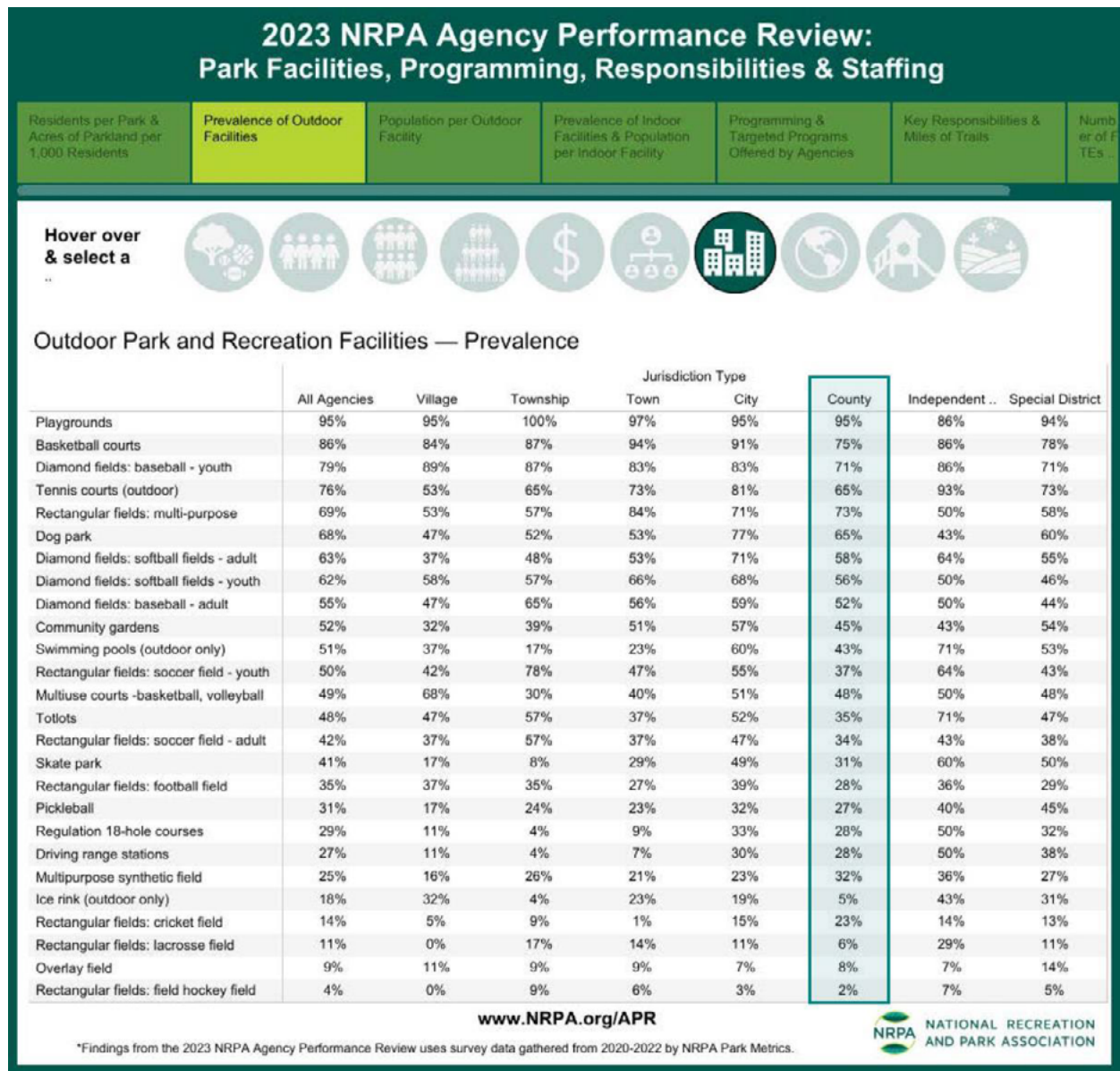


Figure 36: 2023 NRPA Agency Performance Comparison: Outdoor Facilities County Level



Facilities

When determining the LOS Cabarrus County is providing to its residents, it is important to look at the facilities within their system and the demand for those facilities. Currently, the County is lacking in facilities such as playgrounds, outdoor basketball courts, tennis courts, outdoor swimming pools, community gardens, synthetic fields, and skateparks, and these facility needs are not being met through other service providers within the County based upon the NRPA population per facility data. As the County grows and expands, it will be important to consider the addition of these facilities during planning efforts within the County park system due to lack of current availability. In addition, local demand will need to be considered when prioritizing future park features, land acquisition and seeking partnerships.

Currently, the County is lacking in facilities such as playgrounds, outdoor basketball courts, tennis courts, outdoor swimming pools, community gardens, synthetic fields, and skateparks, and these facility needs are not being met through other service providers within the County based upon the NRPA population per facility data.

Figures 37 and 38 illustrate NRPA performance comparisons by population.

Figure 37: 2023 NRPA Agency Performance Comparison: Outdoor Facilities by Population Level

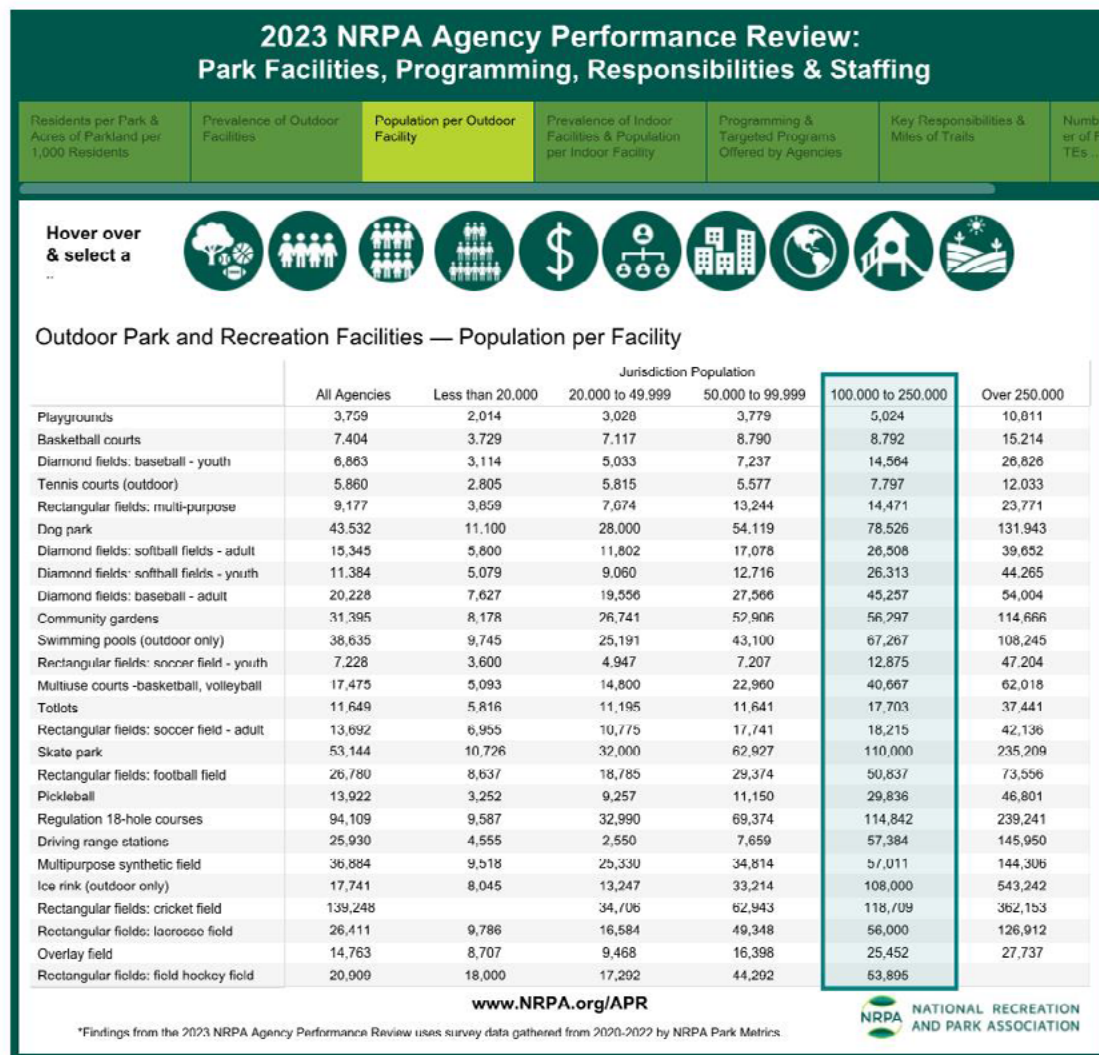
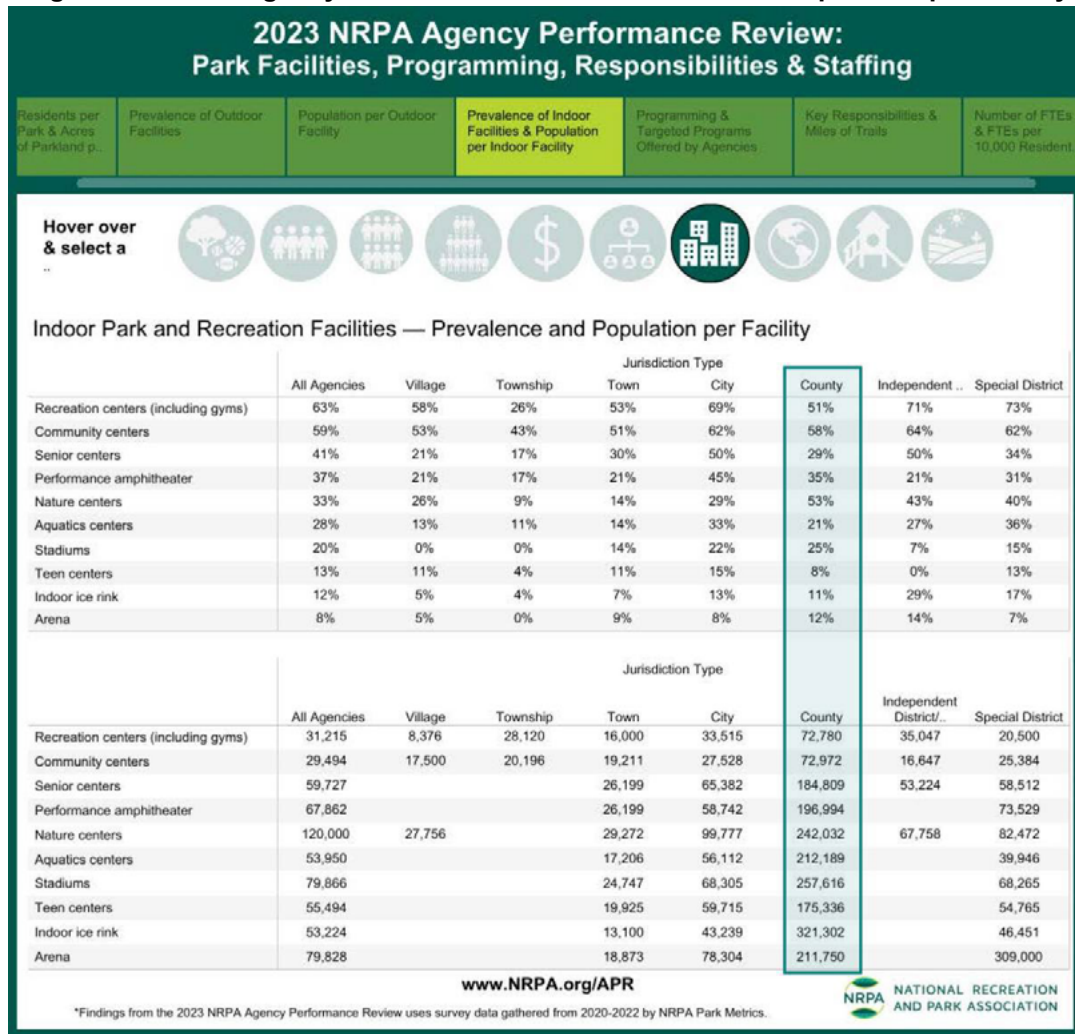


Figure 38: NRPA Agency Performance Indoor Facilities and Population per Facility



Greenways, Blueways, and Trails

The trend for greenways, blueways, and trails continues to rank high when looking at parks and recreation systems within the local area, regionally, statewide, and at a national level. Cabarrus County currently offers numerous opportunities to serve this recreational need through its parks and exceeds the median of 31 miles of trail when including surrounding service providers at the current population level. Importantly, once the population exceeds 250,000 residents, the median miles of trails will increase to 88.5 and the County and its current other service providers will not meet that expectation.

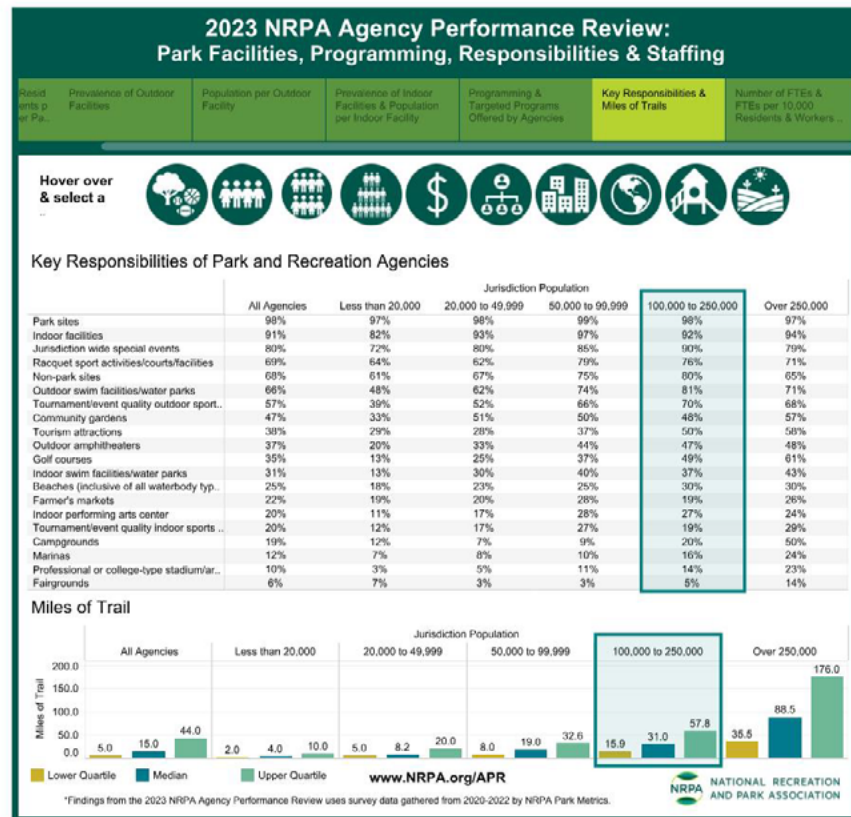
With trails ranking high as a form of active living and wellness, better access, additional trails, and connectivity to parks should continue to be part of planning efforts as well as providing direct connections to larger trail systems, such as the Carolina Thread Trail.

With trails ranking high as a form of active living and wellness, better access, additional trails, and connectivity to parks should continue to be part of planning efforts as well as providing direct connections to larger trail systems, such as the Carolina Thread Trail. Greenways and trails not only provide recreation, but offer alternative transportation methods, cultural experiences, and are often sources of economic development.

Blueways and paddle trails offer an alternate form of trail connectivity and outdoor nature experiences. Currently, this need is being served by other service providers within the County, such as canoe or kayak access to the Rocky River Blueway/Cabarrus Midland Blueway via the Carolina Thread Trail. This access allows connectivity to neighboring towns for approximately 49 miles. Partnerships or direct park connectivity should be considered to add future blueway connection options to provide greater access.

National data on trails is provided in Figure 39.

Figure 39: NRPA Agency Performance Comparison Miles of Trail by Population Level



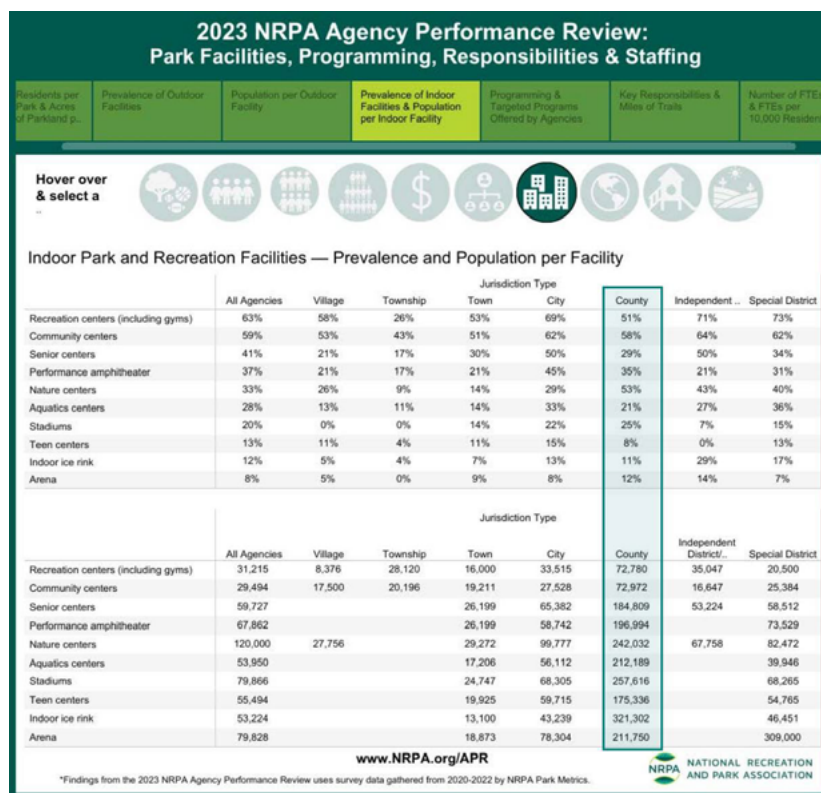
Indoor Community Space and Active Living Centers

The need for indoor community space has been addressed and met at the County level with a focus on senior populations. With planned new additions to the Active Living facilities, Cabarrus County will exceed national standards and be in line with the County's initiative to provide recreation opportunities for active senior living.

While senior populations greatly benefit from this resource, it is important to consider the entire community and their need for indoor recreation opportunities as well. Currently, the need for recreation centers and community centers for all population ages within Cabarrus County is not being met at the County level or when considering other local service providers. Cabarrus County should consider expanding their offerings of indoor recreation to meet national benchmarks. Other indoor recreation facilities including amphitheaters, nature centers, aquatics centers, and stadiums are being provided by other local service providers to meet the needs of Cabarrus County residents. Indoor teen centers and expansion of services should be an indoor space consideration in the future for the County and or its local partners as the County population continues to expand.

With planned new additions to the Active Living facilities, Cabarrus County will **exceed national standards and be in line with the County's initiative to provide recreation opportunities for active senior living.**

Figure 40: 2023 NRPA Agency Performance Comparison: Indoor Recreation by County



Quality and Distribution

As Cabarrus County grows, continuing to provide a high-quality facilities for its residents should be a priority. Proximity, availability of transportation, pedestrian barriers, and size of the County are relevant factors affecting Cabarrus' levels of service. Continued support for expansion, improvements, and increased access to park features should be sought when considering additions to the current system.

As land is evaluated for future park access, it is recommended the County evaluate opportunities in the service gap areas as identified to distribute parks more equitably within the County. The LOS in these areas can be increased by acquiring land or developing partnerships to address the needs of residents that are greater than 2 miles from a park. Seeking REACH grant funding through the Cabarrus Health Alliance, could help facilitate and guide the County to develop and plan for priority areas, highlighting low cost and high investment solutions, where 'health gaps' exist as identified to provide additional parks, trails, greenways, and recreational facilities in a more equitable and accessible manner.

The diversity in offerings to residents is important, whether it is classes, activities, and programming, or parks and facilities. Looking at and evaluating those items on a regular basis and comparing them to the NRPA Metrics will help guide future recommendations. Trends in recreation are also critical to follow to understand the current needs and desires of a community. Current data suggests more passive uses are desired among community members.

Lastly, the maintenance and improvement of existing Cabarrus County Park facilities will be a priority as the County growth continues. Maintaining sites in good working order, updating features and elements as needed, replacing worn and old items, and increasing quantities of popular features all contribute to a better overall LOS to Cabarrus residents. Maintenance needs to be planned for and accounted for accordingly to promote less downtime when parks and facilities are under renovation to keep park access available to the community at all times.

Land Acquisition and Sustainability Practices

BerryDunn's partner, Bolton and Menk (BMI), conducted a detailed review of ALP's current parks and facilities, as detailed in the inventory assessment, which informed recommendations for future land acquisition needs and sustainability practices.

Land Acquisition Considerations and Approach: Gap Analysis

Each year, the NRPA publishes Park Metrics for agencies to use as a tool to guide decisions within their system in comparison to peer agencies of similar characteristics, at local, regional, and national scales. During BMI's process, Park Metrics was utilized to help guide land acquisition considerations by comparing acres of parkland currently available to residents in Cabarrus County to the NRPA median metrics of acres of parkland available per 1,000 residents. Utilizing this data, ALP currently provides approximately 2.1 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents—or 48,502 residents per park. However, with the additional parks slotted to open in the near future—approximately 1,258 acres—ALP's ratio increases to 5.2 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. This calculation does not include local county resources such as schools, other provider parks, golf courses or public amenities which significantly contribute to the total amount of park land offered throughout the county. However, knowing the County is expected to continue to grow, ALP should consider adding the NRPA Park Metrics level of roughly 1,367 acres of park land over the next five years to meet the current growth trends.

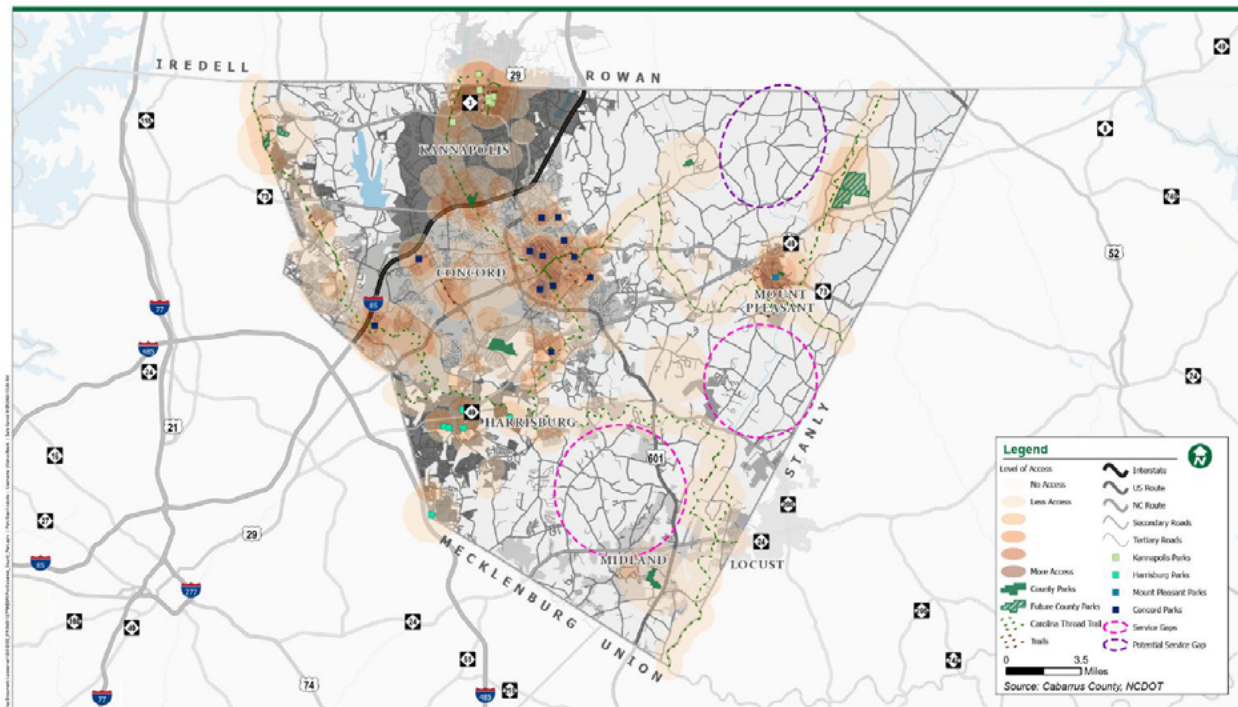
BMI also conducted a gap analysis to identify areas of the County that are currently underserved by both the County and municipalities within (Figure 41). Gaps include areas where residents are greater than 2 miles from a park or recreational opportunity.

As land is evaluated for purchase and future park use, it is also recommended the County evaluate opportunities that exist in current service gap areas for equitable distribution, ease of access, and areas that serve the needs of the community as identified in the needs assessment.

Based on feedback received during the engagement phase, including results from the Statistically Valid Survey, residents support expansion and improvements to increase access to park features within the County. The County has also expressed desire to purchase land as it becomes available in the short-term due to anticipated growth knowing land resources will become scarce and prices will be unattainable for the County to purchase over time. The County may need to seek other methods of obtaining land, including land donations, or partnerships, to continue to grow their system. Importantly, the County currently has an additional 737 acres of undeveloped parkland.

Knowing the County is expected to continue to grow, **ALP should consider adding the NRPA Park Metrics level of roughly 1,367 acres of park land over the next five years to meet the current growth trends.**

Figure 41: Park Gap Analysis



Best Practices

Connectivity is often a challenge for park systems in rural counties, such as the case in Cabarrus County. While the idea of paths and trails connecting all park locations directly to the community is appealing, it is often not realistic for a host of reasons. Reinforcing and encouraging walkability in safe and convenient ways to access quality parks and green spaces is an important dialogue for ALP to consider as the parks and the areas around them grow in use and population.

Offering connectivity options through sidewalks, trails, or other modes of transportation should be studied further, especially knowing walking and trails rank as high priorities among county residents as recreation options and are forms of recreation that are easily achieved without having direct access to a park. Additionally, trails can provide linkages for commuting, offering an alternative to motor vehicles, and promoting a healthier community approach to transportation.

Cabarrus County is fortunate to already have access to greenways, such as the Carolina Thread Trail, Clark Creek Greenway, and blueways, including the Rocky River Blueway. Connecting each of these trails with additional access to the communities around them will enhance the connectivity within Cabarrus County and diversify the use of their parks. The average 10-minute walk is a 1/2 mile in distance. Encouraging more trails within a 1/2 mile in distance, while an aggressive approach, should be considered with future park planning efforts

to start lessening the gaps of recreation options over time as the County system continues to grow.

Most residents in Cabarrus County drive to work, parks, and for leisure activities. Addressing vehicular access to public park services will need to be a consideration when identifying land to purchase. Historically, those who must travel a greater distance to get to the park are less likely to use the park on a regular basis.

Sustainability Practices

Cabarrus County has initiated sustainable practices throughout County facilities and parks, promoting their active living, wellness, and education improvements to the quality of life of residents. As stated on the County website, “Cabarrus County, as a government and community member, is committed to following the principles of sustainability to ensure a well-run organization capable of meeting the needs of residents and business owners and, in turn, to provide a better quality of life for all who live and work in Cabarrus County.”

Currently the County implements the following sustainable approaches:

- **Energy Conservation:** efficient lighting, motion-sensors, automated computer shutdown systems, charting of energy usage, and automated HVAC systems.
- **Environmentally-Minded Products:** implemented through their Environmental Preferable Purchasing Policy, products include post-consumer recycled materials, green cleaning products (reducing exposure to chemicals and improving indoor air quality), low VOC paints, adhesives and carpeting.
- **Recycling:** curbside or designated locations throughout the County.
- **Smart Driving** techniques and tips.
- **Water Conservation:** rain storage tanks installed at the Governmental Center, the Concord Senior Center, and the Ground Maintenance facility to conserve water. Low flow nozzles in County building sinks. Use of xeriscape projects at the Concord Senior Center, Rowan Cabarrus Community College, and Frank Liske Park.
- **Conservation Education:** Soil and Water Conservation District offers environmental education programs and events to County residents and visitors.

Long-term, with these practices being implemented and future practices considered, environmental benefits will result in public cost savings and extend educational opportunities beyond the County facilities for the public to consider and utilize within their homes, offices, etc.

As with any change to a County Park system, common barriers include a lack of funding, lack of dedicated staff, and limited knowledge of implementable solutions. Adoption of practices that are attainable immediately, in the short-term and long-term should be considered and weighed to determine the overall benefit. Tracking of the sustainable cost savings over time to see patterns and impacts will provide data to make verifiable decisions for future measures.

In addition to their current practices, Cabarrus County can promote further sustainability within their park system by providing opportunities for healthy activities in nature including:

- Increasing accessibility of park facilities by making them more walkable, bikeable, and providing public transportation options to access any park within the County.
- Conservation and maintenance of trail systems and corridors that connect parks and provide wildlife habitat, including connections to the regional Carolina Thread Trail.
- Establishing and promoting community gardening opportunities that utilize native planting practices and methods.

ALP can protect and manage existing wildlife habitats by:

- Controlling and managing invasive species in and around park sites and along connecting trail systems.
- Promoting habitat conservation in County parks with consideration of human-wildlife interactions.
- Protecting species that are rare or endangered within their parks.
- Inventorying species, habitats, and communities within the park system to identify patterns, changes, and adaptations.

Further, Cabarrus County can provide responsible land management within their park system by:

- Planting native or regionally appropriate species of plant materials.
- Increasing tree canopy or preserving the existing canopy to promote better air quality.
- Utilizing toxic or non-toxic methods of controlling invasive plants.
- Introducing and following sustainable turf and pest management practices and guidelines.

The reduction of landfill waste can be captured and quantified within the Cabarrus County ALP facilities by:

- Adding more recycling opportunities.
- Providing additional special recycling events (electronics, batteries, etc.).
- Composting yard debris to promote healthier plants without the use of chemicals.
- Promoting the reduction of plastic bottles at each facility.

Adopt additional environmentally friendly building practices for County facilities including:

- Using LED lighting, especially in parks and sports facilities.
- Purchasing energy-star rated appliances when initially installing or replacing outdated or non-functioning equipment.
- Installing low flow water stations, plumbing fixtures, and water fountains, at all park facilities.
- Using recycled content materials for new construction projects or require a certain amount of building materials to be recycled when constructed.
- Adopting a sensitive reuse or rehabilitation policy of historic structures or buildings on County property.
- Utilizing high quality materials within their parks, that will require less frequent replacement, maintenance, and upkeep.

Additional public outreach and education opportunities can be provided to Cabarrus County residents and staff as part of a sustainability strategy. Implementation includes:

- Additional environmental education opportunities within ALP parks or programs.
- Educational signage, kiosks or displays in public settings.
- Demonstration gardens and green roof displays that show community members how they can be beneficial.
- The promotion of public/private partnerships that promote sustainable practices within the community.
- Volunteer opportunities for park clean up days and sustainable beautification.
- Classes on how to implement sustainability within the community.
- Workforce training to promote careers in a sustainable industry.

The introduction of green infrastructure practices to create a more resilient park system within the County includes implementing the following:

- Constructing rain gardens, wetlands, bioswales, and other green infrastructure methodologies within existing and proposed parks as natural climate solutions for resiliency.
- Reducing the quantity of impermeable surfaces within parks to reduce stormwater runoff and flooding or the use of permeable surfaces for new park infrastructure.
- Using natural systems, products, and vegetation to reduce erosion.
- Using rain barrels and stormwater harvesting techniques to gather and reuse rainwater on site.
- Installing green roofs on public and or park buildings.
- Protecting watersheds by adopting natural resource management practices, protecting local cultural resources and historic sites, and developing or expanding partnerships that enable cultural education and conservation or resource protection should be considered.
- Purchasing green equipment and the adoption of transportation methods that include fuel efficient vehicles, machinery, and providing electric vehicle charging stations within the County is a practice and cost saving measure.
- Consider the use of renewable energy sources such as solar, geothermal, wind or biomass for all park facilities, new and old. When considering these elements, an audit on current systems can be performed to determine cost, future savings, and overall reduction in use of energy sources.

In conclusion, knowing the measurable impact of an agency's efforts and the health or environmental benefits can help leaders and stakeholders when seeking support from the community and investment from taxpayers while creating transparency regarding financial upgrades to a park or County system and their long-term benefits.

Program Assessment

The residents of Cabarrus County have many opportunities to participate in a variety of recreational activities—from a quiet walk along the trails of parks to participating in competitive sports, senior programs and activities, fitness opportunities, and special events—there is something for everyone.

Access to recreational opportunities fosters healthy lifestyles and community well-being, serving as a key draw for both residents and visitors alike. ALP programming supports diverse levels of engagement, aiming to enhance local and regional offerings. Having the assessment in place aims to guide ALP in delivering programs and services that benefit the community and bolster regional opportunities. Centered on effective programming, this assessment provides ALP with the following:

1. An analysis of programs to help guide current and future programming efforts while addressing evolving needs.
2. Identification of program categories, programming gaps, and future considerations for programming.
3. Guidance in determining the most effective and efficient programs and delivery.

Furthermore, this assessment informs the expansion of recreational opportunities within a growing community catering to multiple generations for sports, fitness, events, and leisure activities, aiding ALP in long-term planning. BerryDunn has leveraged this assessment to review broader community needs across all age groups, evaluating existing programs and their lifecycles with information gathered from internal meetings with staff, key leadership, focus group and stakeholder interviews, and results from the Statistically Valid Survey.

Engagement Approach

Why We Engaged–The Process

The foundation for the recreation assessment was an extensive community engagement process facilitated by BerryDunn and department staff. The process included pop-up booths at popular events throughout the County and interviews that focused on how residents and community stakeholders recreate today and how they hope to in the future.

Who We Engaged

Ensuring that all voices were represented, the outreach sessions included residents of Cabarrus County, partners from key community organizations, local recreation users, and partnering organizations. Participants in the outreach sessions are listed below and have been actively involved in process.

- Community Members – Residents, users, and individuals who participate in County-registered programs
- External Stakeholders – Partnering organizations within the community that provide recreation facilities
 - Recreation and Parks Directors from the Towns of Concord, Kannapolis, and Harrisburg
 - Community organizations such as Cabarrus Health Alliance and Cabarrus County Chamber of Commerce
 - ALP Advisory Council
 - Cabarrus County Public Libraries
 - ALP Senior Advisory Council
- Internal Stakeholders
 - County Administrators

How We Engaged

RESOURCES	DESCRIPTION		STATS	AUDIENCE
Engagement Opportunities				
	Public Survey	The Statistically Valid Survey was the primary tool used to collect data and feedback from residents.	425 completed surveys	Residents of Cabarrus County
	Stakeholders Workshops Interviews	Workshops were held with representatives from local community organizations and staff interviews.	11 interviews, 24+ staff, 6 partners groups	Stakeholder Groups and Staff
Communication Network				
	Emails	An email with information on the assessment and survey was sent to registrants of recreation programs.	Numerous emails were sent through registration program	Public
	Email Invitations	Direct emails were sent to stakeholder organizations		Stakeholder Groups
	Social Pinpoint	Interactive website to gather feedback throughout the community.	1,028 unique users, 65 ideas wall suggestions, 75 budget responses, 24 map comments, 19 forum comments	Public
	Department signage and displays	Project postcards were displayed throughout the department and other County facilities and special events.		Public

Essential Takeaways-Findings

During the engagement process, program providers and stakeholders contributed valuable insights to the Recreation Programming Assessment. Key recurring themes and ideas included:

- **An Interest in Outdoor and Self-Guided Programming:** Stakeholders and participants indicated that the County has great outdoor opportunities to participate in through self-guided participation.
- **Future Planning Initiative of Multi-functional Outdoor Spaces:** Spaces should be provided as programming opportunities for medium to large outdoor events and potential activity space.
- **Inclusive and Accessible Recreation:** There is a strong desire for recreational opportunities that are inclusive and accessible to residents of all ages and abilities, addressing challenges like transportation barriers, which BerryDunn recognizes is out of ALP's control.
- **Participation – The Statistically Valid Survey noted that only 38%** of Cabarrus County residents participated in Active Living Centers or Parks programs during the past year. Many (67%) cited lack of awareness as the primary reason for non-participation, along with transportation and health concerns.

The Conversations

Stakeholder Engagement Summary

Collaboration with stakeholders and focus groups plays a crucial role in enhancing decision-making and project management effectiveness. Engagement with stakeholder and focus groups is an important aspect of effective decision-making and project management.

In total, over 50 individuals participated in these discussions, offering insights on ALP's strengths, challenges, and opportunities. Common themes that emerged from the discussions are detailed below:

Strengths

- Classes at the Active Living Centers are popular
- Unique programs such as archery, bocce, and jam session are well-received
- Fitness and wellness classes fill quickly
- Fees for programs are “community friendly”
- The bog at St. Stephens Church Road Nature Park will be a great asset
- Ample volunteer opportunities are available
- Senior Games are organized well
- Nature programming in the schools is appreciated
- Excellent facilities offer potential for expanded programs
- Special Events are nice
- Senior Christmas Party provides a day of entertainment at the arena
- Senior Health Expo is beneficial for senior citizens
- Holiday events are appreciated for their inclusivity

Challenges

- Accessibility and use of facilities for seniors
- Equitable distribution of amenities and programs across the County
- New programs that appeal more to men
- Not enough class slots
- Marketing and communication to all with a focus on seniors
- Spanish-language programming and communications
- Evening gatherings for young adults, such as vibrant concerts, etc.
- Outdoor programming options across the County

Opportunities

- Inclusivity in programming for families, young adults, and children
- Heat mapping to assess program accessibility countywide
- Outdoor environmental, cultural, nature programs (including bogs), and a nature center
- Hiking and walking clubs
- More programs tailored for teens
- Activities for individuals with disabilities
- Programming opportunities for equestrian activities
- Health and wellness programs
- Information dissemination about programs and services
- Re-visit joint-use and programming agreements to optimize and create versatile spaces for the community

Additional Comments

- Improve and enhance bike trails and safe transportation options
- Improve timeliness of communication and marketing efforts
- Staffing to accommodate any new program ideas

These insights, gathered through stakeholder collaboration, highlight key priorities for future program planning in Cabarrus County.

Parks and Recreation Programs

Household participants of the survey had a list of amenities that catered to existing and future programming opportunities that were important to their household. Participants noted that walking trails, indoor fitness and wellness spaces, canoeing, kayaking, paddle boat activities, and a nature center were a few of the top categories that fell within the category of being most important to their household.

ALP Amenities Priority Investment Rating

One component of the Statistically Valid Survey was a comparison of community needs versus gaps in service. Using data from the survey, ETC developed a Priority Investment Rating (PIR) used to identify priorities for ALP recreation and parks investments. PIR compares the importance that residents place on amenities versus unmet needs. Based on the PIR, the following amenities were rated as high priorities for investments and can be directed toward planning for future programming opportunities.

- **Walking trails** within parks had the highest PIR of 147 followed by a top choice of importance to their household at 52%.
- **Natural and Conservation Areas** rated the second highest PIR at 124 and 30% as the second top choice in their household.
- **A Nature Center** carried a PIR of 120 as within the High Priority ranking area however ranked lower on the level of importance to their household at 10%.

Other areas that fell within the High Priority category on the survey's PIR scale which can also be correlated to programming included:

- Canoeing, Kayaking, and Paddle Boat Activities (115)
- Community Gardens (115)
- Indoor Fitness & Wellness Spaces (109)
- Outdoor Public Art (102)

Program Assessment and Strategy

Parks and recreation core program areas can typically include a variety of activities and services. In most instances, areas of core programs are designed to promote leisure, community well-being, physical activity, and environmental stewardship. It is common for many departments to offer core programming areas within their programming line-up. Agencies may vary their programs slightly depending on the overall goals established by the department, but generally aim to enhance the quality of life for residents.

Figure 42: Programming Areas for Parks and Recreation Agencies



ALP's core programming areas are included in **Table 1**, with a description defining the program purpose as established by staff. It should be noted that ALP considers facility rentals to be part of its core program offering as well.

Table 1: ALP Core Programs & Description

Core Program Area	Program Description
Environmental Education	Classes and programs designed to educate participants on the importance of our natural world.
Fitness & Wellness	Exercise, fitness, and wellness activities and education to promote healthy lifestyles for all ages.
Active Older Adults	Physical activity and social programs that are geared toward those 50 and older to get them out of their home and engaging in physical activity and socialization.
Special Events	Annual themed community events to bring the local community together for a day of fun activities, connecting with each other and local services, and learning.
Youth Camps and Programs	Camps and programs that provide education and fun through recreation.
Cultural Arts	Programs, classes, and competitions to allow people to express their artistic side or learn a new artistic skill.
Rentals	Outdoor picnic shelters, indoor event space, sports field/court space for reservations for groups to host family and community events.
Adult Athletics	Adult softball leagues, pickleball tournaments and clinics, disc golf tournaments.

As core program areas, **Table 2** below lists the program areas categorized by age group or market segments within ALP. Each program area is symbolized by Primary (noted with “P”) and Secondary (noted with “S”). The gray sections represent age groups where there may be a gap in service or may be offered by other municipalities within the County. These age segments could be considered for new programming opportunities.

Table 2 Core Program Market Segments

Core Program Area	Preschool <5	Youth Ages 6-12	Teens Ages 13-17	Adult Ages 18+	Senior Adults Ages 55+	All Age Programs
Environmental Education	P	P	P	P	P	P
Fitness & Wellness	S	S	S	P	P	S
Active Older Adults					P	
Special Events	P	P	P		P	P
Youth Camps and Programs	P	P	P			
Cultural Arts				P	P	
Rentals				P	P	P
Adult Athletics				P	P	

P-Primary Programming
S-Secondary Programming

Following the identification of core areas, the BerryDunn team compiled a programming matrix consisting of NRPA Park Metrics and compared those programs to what is currently being offered by Cabarrus County and surrounding municipalities within the County. NRPA Park Metrics serves as a source for peer organizations to build benchmarks in various capacities and is often used to gain funding support and improve operations in order to better serve their community. The BerryDunn team was able to utilize NRPA Park Metrics in conjunction with information gathered from parks and recreation agencies located within the county to note gaps in programming services. The table below provides an analysis of existing programs with the opportunity of adding or re-visiting programming through ALP.

Table 3: Countywide Programming Comparisons and Gaps

Programs	NRPA Metrics	Cabarrus	Concord	Kannapolis	Harrisburg
After-School Programs	38.5%				
Arts, Crafts	NA	X			X
Aquatics-Swim Lessons and Open Swim	40.6%		X		
Before-School Programs	7.7%				
Cultural Arts	56.2%		X		
eSports/eGaming	15.6%				
Fitness Enhancement Classes	62.5%	X	X		
Full Day Care	15.4%				
Golf	28.1				
Health & Wellness Education	65.6%	X			
Individual Sports	50%	X	X		X
Martial Arts	37.5%				
Natural and Cultural History Activities	62.5%				X
Outdoor Adventure & Education	NA	X	X		
Performing Arts	37.5%	X		X	
Preschool	26.9%				
Programs for People with Disabilities	65.4%%				
Racquet Sports	53.1%	X	X		X
Running/Cycling Races	43.8%	X		X	X
Safety Training	71%				
Social Recreation Events	71.9%	X	X	X	X
Senior Programs	73.1%	X	X		
Specialty Camps	NA			X	X
STEM Programs	52%	X			
Summer Camps	74.1%	X	X		X

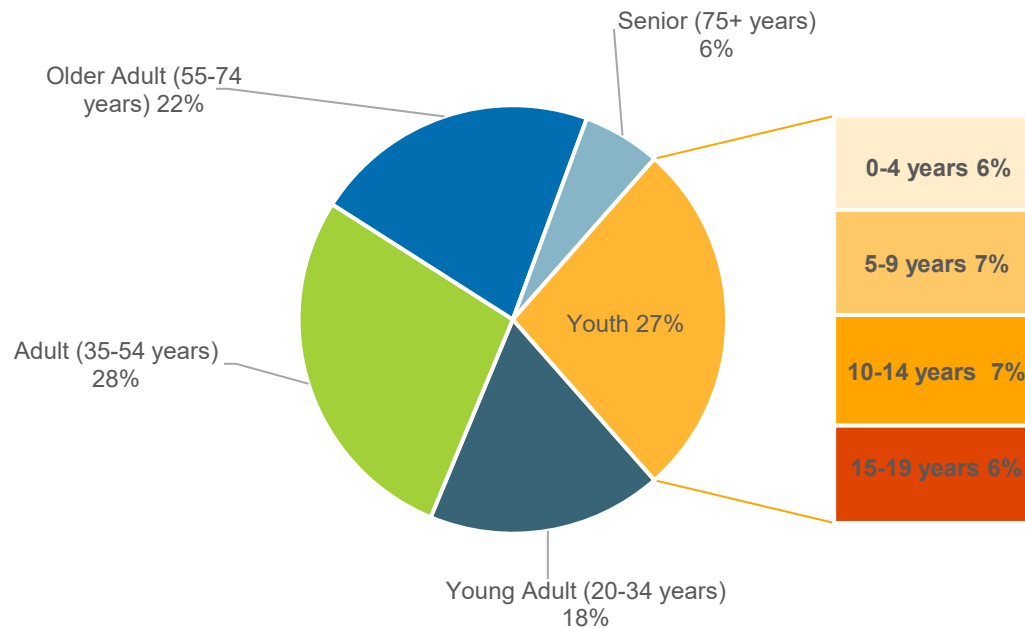
Programs	NRPA Metrics	Cabarrus	Concord	Kannapolis	Harrisburg
Team Sports	62.5%	X	X	X	X
Teen Programs	73.1%		X	X	X
Themed Special Events	78.1%	X	X	X	X
Trips and Tours	59.4%	X		X	
Visual Arts	43.8%	X			
Youth Council	NA		X	X	X
Sport Offerings		Softball, pickleball, and disc golf	Baseball, Softball, Basketball, Volleyball, Flag Football	Softball, Baseball, Soccer, Flag Football, Cheerleading, Basketball	Baseball, Basketball, Flag Football, Cheerleading, Soccer, Pickleball, Tennis, Weightlifting, and Softball
*NA signifies that activity has not been tracked by NRPA					

Programming Demographics

Understanding the demographics of the County is crucial when developing tailor activities and facilities to meet the specific needs of a diverse population. By analyzing the demographic data such as age, ethnicity, income level, and household composition, ALP can identify areas where there may be gaps in programming or unmet needs. According to the Demographics Report found in another section of the **Appendix**, the median age for in the County was 38.7 years old in 2023, which is slightly younger than both the median age in NC (39.4) and the median age in the United States (39.1).

In addition to the median age, ALP should also be mindful of the age groups within the County. In **Figure 43** the age groups that represent the largest population in Cabarrus County were adults between the ages of 35 – 54 (28%) followed by those between the ages of 0 – 19 (27%), and older adults ages 55 – 74 at (22%).

Figure 43: Population Age Groups



With consideration given to the demographic information above and Core Program Market Segments (areas noted in gray), ALP can utilize this information in developing recreation programming that fosters community engagement, promotes healthy lifestyles, and enhances overall quality of life for its residents. In addition to analyzing programming opportunities, ALP may also want to consider other local government providers and partners within the County to evaluate and determine if the duplication of services is warranted.

Ethnic diversity is also a consideration when developing programs. As outlined in the accompanying Demographics Report, those individuals that identify as Hispanic origin increased to 13% in the County. This increase, as well as community and stakeholder feedback, indicates that ALP should offer classes targeting the language and programming needs of this ethnic group.

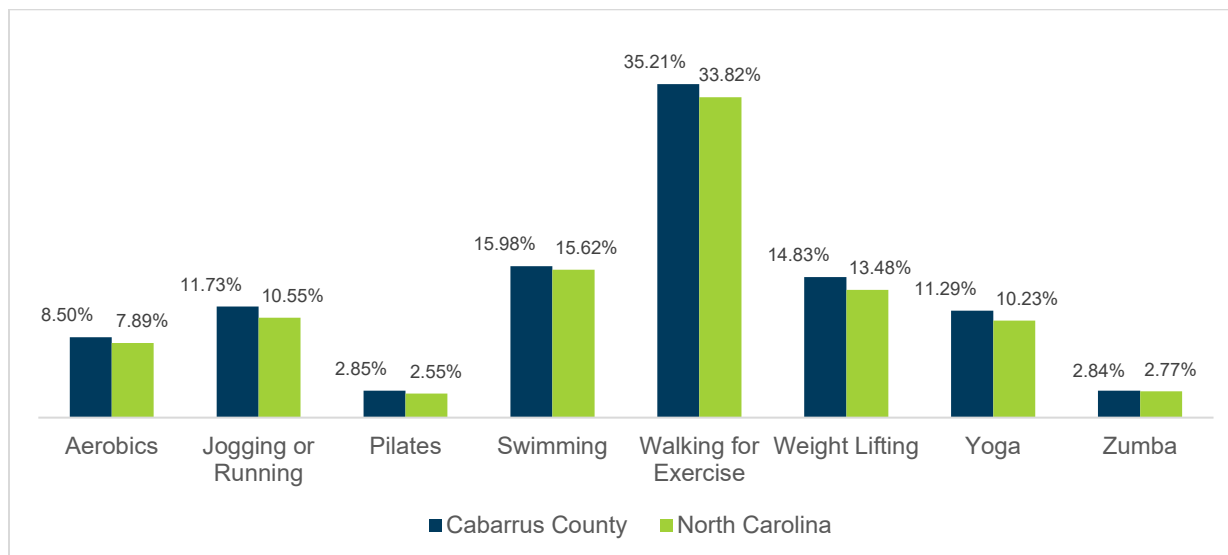
Programming Trends

Evaluating recreation program trends in the County is an important task as it enables stakeholders to adapt and enhance offerings to meet the evolving needs and interests of the community. By closely analyzing participation rates, activity preferences, and demographic shifts, decision-makers can help to ensure that resources are allocated efficiently and that programs remain relevant and inclusive.

Understanding trends also fosters a proactive approach to addressing emerging challenges, such as changing leisure habits or population dynamics. The Program Lifecycle found later in this report, serves as an evaluation tool for identifying successful initiatives that can be expanded upon, as well as areas that may need improvement or innovation. Ultimately, by staying in tune with recreation trends, ALP can better enrich the lives of its residents, promote physical and mental well-being, and strengthen the fabric of the community.

The Trends Report found in Appendix explains that general fitness categories of walking for exercise, swimming, and weightlifting were the activities with the most participation for the County and State. Figure 44 below provides the data to support the ArcGIS finding.

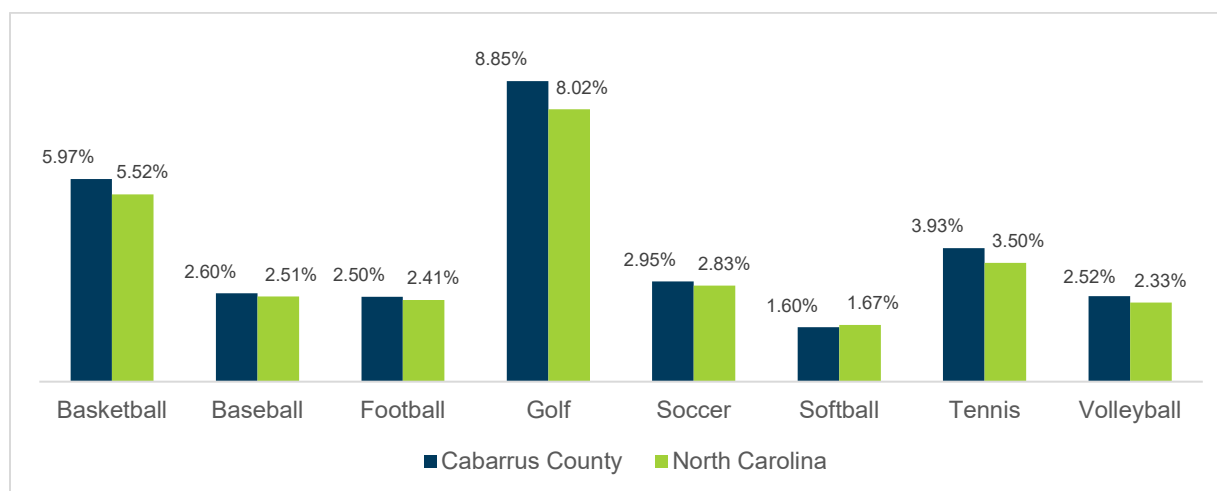
Figure 44: Local Participation in Fitness Activities



Sport participation for adults 25 and older was highest in Cabarrus County and North Carolina for golf, basketball, and tennis. Some sports, such as futsal and pickleball—which will also be high on the list—are not included because ArcGIS Business Analyst does not currently capture those sports.

Figure 45 provides additional focus areas for ALP to consider when evaluating and developing new programming.

Figure 45: Local Participation in Sport Activities



Outdoor and Adventure Recreation Trends

It is common for adventure excursions to be hosted by private outfitters; however, more county governments have started to offer exciting experiences such as ziplining, challenge/obstacle courses, and other risk-taking elements on a local level. These agencies may form partnerships with specialized companies to provide adventure packages. Private companies may hire and train their own staff, maintain equipment, and develop marketing campaigns. A lease agreement may grant the County a certain percentage of gross revenues that would benefit the County overall.

Cabarrus is positioned nicely to add a robust outdoor adventure division within its programming line-up. During engagement, residents expressed a strong interest in outdoor programming. The desire of residents is to keep moving which highlights the fact that individuals are walking, running, and looking toward the outdoors for their form of physical activity rather than being indoors.

Positive Activation

Positive activation is the practice of injecting vitality into public spaces, transforming parks into dynamic hubs of community engagement. By programming a space with activities, such as fitness classes, cultural events, and festivals, parks become lively areas that cater to various interests. This activation attracts visitors and may deter crime.¹

Community and Special Events

Community-wide events and festivals often act as essential place-making activities for residents, economic drivers, and urban brand builders. According to the 2023 Eventbrite Trends Report, the following trends are expected to impact event planners and community builders in the coming years.²

- **Re-Emergence of Live Events:** There is a significant enthusiasm for in-person events. Older age groups, who had been reluctant to venture out due to COVID-19, are now willing to engage more. Hence, events that target older audiences, like symphonies or theaters, might see a boost in attendance.
- **Economic Considerations but Continued Interest:** Inflation and the economy are concerns for many, yet most people do not plan to cut their event spending. Event organizers are largely maintaining ticket prices.
- **Music's Essential Role:** Music events, especially at local and independent venues, will continue to be a favorite. People are willing to pay higher prices for favorite performers.

¹ City Parks Alliance. May 2019. "Active Parks, Healthy Cities." *City Parks Alliance*. Accessed December 14, 2023.

<https://cityparksalliance.org/resource/active-parks-healthy-cities/>

² Eventbrite. n.d. *2023 Event Trends Report*. Eventbrite. Accessed December 14, 2023.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/blog/asset/event-trends-report-2023/>

- **Value of Connection and Immersion:** Events counter social isolation and bring joy and feelings of connection. Immersive experiences, which blend music, video, live performers, and augmented reality, are trending.
- **Preference for Familiarity:** People prefer attending familiar events close to home, going with friends, and seeing familiar performers. This could be due to post-pandemic cautiousness or cost considerations.
- **Experiences Over Material Gifts:** People prefer experiences over physical gifts, emphasizing intimate personal connections that events offer.
- **Catering to Sensitivities:** Many people have sensitivities to loud noises and crowds. Event organizers should consider sensory rooms and quiet spaces to allow people to recharge without the noise.
- **Virtual Events Remain Relevant:** While live events are making a comeback, virtual events are not disappearing. The convenience, cost-effectiveness, and comfort that online events offer still appeal to a large segment.

Trending Programs in 2024

- Family engagement nights
- Seasonal festivals and programming
- Fitness programming
- Holiday karaoke
- “Eldertainment”
- Games and activities for “kidults”
- Library partnerships

Cultural and Bilingual Events

Parks and recreational spaces are evolving into vibrant hubs of cultural exchange where diversity is celebrated through a tapestry of cultural and bilingual events. These initiatives go beyond traditional programming, embracing the rich culture of the community. Cultural events showcase a variety of traditions, art forms, and cuisines, creating an inclusive space where residents can connect with and appreciate the cultural diversity within their community. By incorporating bilingual elements into events, parks become an accessible platform for all.

Recreation for All

There is growing recognition that access to parks and recreational spaces is not equitable. According to the NRPA, in many locations across the United States, there are fewer quality parks in proximity to residents with low incomes and communities of color.³

In addition, data from the Outdoor Participation Report shows participation rates among diverse groups are evolving quickly but still do not reflect the diverse populations throughout the country.⁴ Black Americans represent approximately 12.4% of the population but only 9.4% of

³ NRPA. April 2020. “Is COVID-19 Uncovering Park Inequities?” *National Recreation and Park Association*. Accessed September 2019. <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2020/may/is-covid-19-uncovering-park-inequities/>

⁴Outdoor Foundation. 2021. *Outdoor Participation Trends Report. 2021: Participation Rates by ethniCity*. Outdoor Foundation. Accessed September 14, 2023. <https://outdoorindustry.org>

outdoor participants. Those who identify as Hispanic make up almost 18% of the population, but only 11.6% of outdoor participants. These two groups are particularly underrepresented, although they are rising over time.

As a result, many counties have begun establishing data-driven criteria to guide investment in public recreation to improve equity. The City Parks Alliance⁵ identified five common elements critical to developing, implementing, and evaluating a data-driven equitable investment strategy:

1. **Leverage leadership from one or more sectors.** Strong leadership is critical to make the case for creating and implementing an equitable approach. In addition to various governmental bodies, involving local foundations and those from the nonprofit sector can help to bring the need for equity into focus.
2. **Define equity goals and collect data to support the goals.** Data collection and analysis must be reliable, consistent, transparent, and guided by agreed-upon equity goals. The data collected in each city may vary but often includes statistics on poverty, crime, health, youth population, park access, unemployment, past capital and maintenance investment, and access to parks.
3. **Educate and engage the community on equity data.** Educating all levels of government, residents, nonprofits, foundations, and the private sector on data findings is important for building awareness, cultivating buy-in, and establishing a commitment to implementation. Extensive outreach and engagement are critical to help to ensure the data aligns with reality and that the process builds ownership of the results.
4. **Establish and sustain equitable funding practices.** A variety of strategies can be implemented to help to ensure that equity becomes a reality, including new ordinances, voter-approved measures, strategic plans, and internal reorganization.
5. **Institute consistent tracking and evaluation procedures.** Tracking new funding initiatives with an oversight committee that is required to produce an audit, report, or study results helps to ensure consistent implementation over time.

As the recreation field continues to function within a more diverse society, race and ethnicity will become increasingly important in every aspect of the profession. More than ever, recreation professionals will be expected to work with, and have significant knowledge and understanding of, individuals from many cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds.

⁵ City Parks Alliance. July 1, 2019. *Investing in Equitable Urban Park Systems: Case Studies & Recommendations*. City Parks Alliance. <https://cityparksalliance.org/resource/investing-equitable-urban-park-systems-case-studies-recommendations/>

Program Lifecycle

When evaluating programs, it is important to review each core program in reference to stages of a program lifecycle. Developing a review will help to define which programs are in the “introduction” stage and may also include programs that are in the “growth” phase. The second stage is the “mature” phase followed by the third stage of “decline” phase. This analysis includes a balance of qualitative and quantitative data combined with the knowledge of staff members who oversee programs and the option to develop new and innovative programs or phases by associating those with success or declining numbers.

The table below outlines lifecycle stages and provides the department with the opportunity to determine the department percentage in each stage as programs are evaluated. By creating an inventory of key factors that are important to ALP such as revenue and/or expense drivers in core service categories, staff can determine which stage in the “lifecycle” the program or programs are in. It is also important to understand that much of the lifecycle analysis is tied to participation, demand, and competition as well.

ALP staff were provided a program inventory workbook for a deep dive into all of ALP’s programming. When evaluating the 42 programs listed by staff, all but one program fell within the slow participation growth lifecycle or Stage 2. The outlier was Archery Camps/Programs which fell in Stage 1 of growth with consistent participation.

Table 4: Stages of Program Lifecycle

Lifecycle Stage		Description
1 st Stage	Introduction	New program; heavy marketing; modest participation
	Growth	Moderate, but consistent participation growth; registration taking off
2 nd Stage	Mature	Continue but slowing participation growth
3 rd Stage	Decline	Declining participation

ALP should consider creating more programs in the introductory phase as it will be important to address the growth and vitality of the county. By investing in diverse activities, the county can attract more participants while promoting physical and mental health among residents and potential newcomers.

Best Practices

Implementing best practices for ALP should include several key strategies that can significantly enhance effectiveness and sustainability. First, establishing a robust cost recovery model can help to ensure that programs are financially viable, potentially through user fees, sponsorships, or partnerships with local businesses and organizations. The County's current cost recovery model targets 100% coverage for all direct costs and free programs are subsidized by paid events and programming.

Secondly, understanding the metrics within programming such as participation numbers, user satisfaction surveys/evaluations, and economic impact assessments are essential for evaluating program success and guiding future improvements.

Third, developing a comprehensive program plan that aligns with the community's needs and interests by setting clear goals, timelines, and resource allocations. Lastly, integrating business plans for revenue generation, marketing strategies, and long-term financial sustainability will help to ensure that Active Living and Parks offerings remain resilient and adaptable to changing community dynamics.

Successfully implementing new programming opportunities is based on the foundation that ALP should develop key performance indicators and complete an annual assessment of programs. At the end of the year, a review of the programs should take place and documentation of any changes to the programming objectives should be noted along with action items to reflect changes in priorities of each program.

Programming Strategies – Recommendations

The Recreation Programming Assessment provides an overview of programming opportunities for the department. Developing recreation programs for people of all ages is crucial for fostering a healthy and inclusive community. While recreation programs often focus on senior citizens in Cabarrus County, it is essential to broaden the scope to cater to diverse demographics. By offering recreational activities for all age groups, communities promote social interaction, physical well-being, and mental health. Children benefit from structured play that aids in their cognitive and social development, while teenagers find outlets for self-expression and stress relief through sports and creative endeavors. Adults juggling work and family life can benefit from recreational activities as a means of relaxation and rejuvenation. In summary, inclusive recreation programs encourage intergenerational bonding, fostering understanding, and empathy across age groups. By helping to ensure access to recreation programs for everyone, ALP will promote holistic well-being and strengthen social cohesion across the County.

The table below, provides recommended programming strategies for the County to consider as they move forward. These strategies can help facilitate the programming evaluation process so that ALP can continue to evolve through new and innovative programming ideas and concepts.

Table 5: Recommended Program Strategies

Strategy	Time frame	Impact-Approach
	S-Short-Term (1-3 years)	
	M-Mid Term (3-5 years)	
	L-Long-Term (5+ years)	
ORGANIZATION		
Redefine core program areas of focus based on program	S	Staff time and registration reports
Develop a department-wide Program Plan that is based on community feedback from Social Pinpoint.	S	Staff time
Create an individual program plan for each core program.	S	Staff time for the development of a program plan to measure success.
Create and leverage partnership opportunities to grow programmatic inventories and effectively utilize limited department resources.	S	Adopt a program partnership philosophy and framework for potential partners with fees or in-lieu of or on a contractual basis
Diversify programming staff to help ensure it reflects community demographics.	S	Focus on bilingual and culturally diverse programming staff
Consider expanding general program menu to better align with community feedback (fitness and wellness, nature programs, special events).	M	Staff time-Review the survey assessment, focus group and stakeholder engagement, and determine potential program modifications
Add an Outreach Coordinator to focus on promoting ALP programming	S	Increase awareness of programs and offerings
Continue to track revenues and expenses for recreation programming against cost recovery and cost of service goal.	M	Staff time, revenue goalsetting, program expense projections, and cost recovery thresholds
Establish and sustain equitable funding practices.	M	This can be accomplished by developing new development ordinances, and voter-approved measures
DATA TRACKING		
Institute Program Lifecycle Analysis and increase the number or percentage of introductory and growth programs.	S	Staff training and development on lifecycle analysis

Strategy	Time frame	Impact-Approach
	S-Short-Term (1-3 years)	
	M-Mid Term (3-5 years)	
	L-Long-Term (5+ years)	
ORGANIZATION		
Establish metrics for measurement of department goals (program cancellation rate, program marketing, and new programs).	M	Host a staff workshop to re-visit the mission, vision, and values of the department and develop programming reflective of those
PROGRAMMING OPPORTUNITIES		
Diversify programming to capture participation of all ages.	S	Evaluate programming needs and develop a short-term plan to offer new and focused programming for all
Develop programs with a health and wellness foundation. Consider partnerships with the medical profession.	S	Staff time tracking participation numbers and health metrics. Work with the Cabarrus Health Alliance
Focus on outdoor and environmental programming.	S	Strengthen environmental stewardship and conservation
Help ensure that programs are strategically located throughout the County.	M	Evaluate population density and access to programs by integrating programming partners with facility opportunities
Assess community and cultural preferences for Hispanic participants and develop programming opportunities.	S	Research popular recreational activities in Hispanic cultures and design programs that reflect that heritage and interest. Collaborate with organizations in the Hispanic community
Develop a Programming Summit.	S	Host a summit with city and towns in the county to discuss and analyze current offerings and develop a strategic vision on what each organization offers

Financial Assessment

As part of this master planning process, BerryDunn reviewed Cabarrus County's Active Living and Parks Department (ALP) financials. This analysis included a detailed look at the revenue and expenditures for fiscal years 2019 – 2023.

The ALP's finances are organized into two cost centers: Active Living and Parks, and Senior Center. The Active Living and Parks cost center encompasses various parks, including Frank Liske, Camp Spencer, Rob Wallace, and Vietnam Veterans. The Senior Center cost center includes financial activities for the Concord Senior Center and the Mount Pleasant Senior Center. Departmentwide expenses are distributed between these two cost centers.

A review of the department's revenues and expenditures for 2019 – 2023 shows a consistent increase in both income sources and expenditures. Total income grew from \$674,465 in 2019 to \$745,538 (10.5%) in 2023, while total expenditures rose from \$2,283,218 to \$2,794,915 (22.4%) over the same period.

From 2019 to 2023, ALP experienced increases in both income and expenditures. Income sources rose from \$406,449 to \$494,209, and expenditures increased from \$1,608,314 to \$2,021,916.

During the same period, the Senior Center cost center displayed a trend of rising expenditures, with a slight decrease in income source. Revenues ranged from \$268,016 in 2019 to \$251,330 in 2023. Expenditures for the Senior Center increased from \$674,904 to \$772,998.

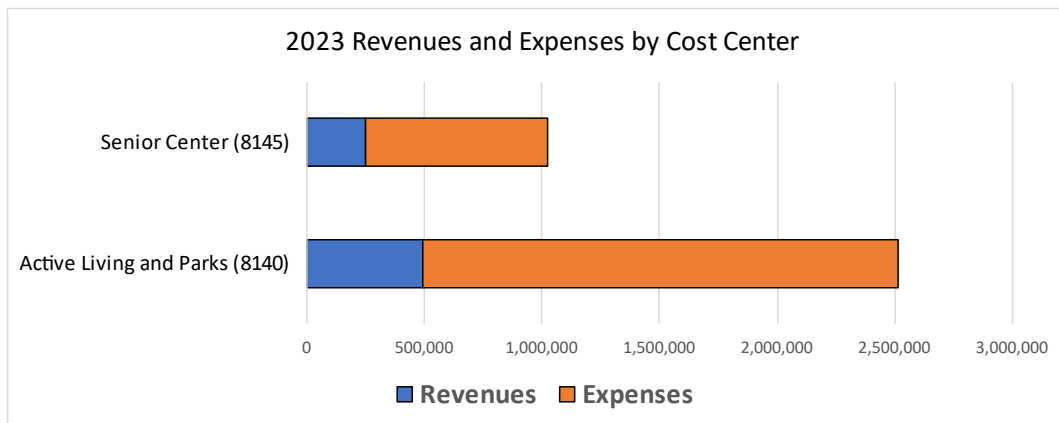
Table 6 shows a rollup of departmentwide revenues and expenses organized by cost center.

Table 6 – Department Revenues and Expenses

Cabarrus County Parks and Recreation Financial Summary					
	2019 Actual	2020 Actual	2021 Actual	2022 Actual	2023 Actual
REVENUES					
Active Living and Parks (8140)	406,449	247,970	249,446	364,542	494,209
Senior Center (8145)	268,016	204,045	144,390	200,287	251,330
Total Revenues	674,465	452,015	393,837	564,829	745,538
EXPENSES					
Active Living and Parks (8140)	1,608,314	1,641,772	1,660,467	2,076,655	2,021,916
Senior Center (8145)	674,904	682,230	586,882	698,538	772,998
Total Expenses	2,283,218	2,324,002	2,247,349	2,775,193	2,794,915

ALP is the larger of the two cost centers. In 2023, it made up 66% of the department’s revenues and 72% of its expenses. **Figure 46** below shows the ratio of revenues and expenses by cost center.

Figure 46: 2023 Revenues and Expenses by Cost Center



Active Living and Parks

ALP revenues and expenditures are organized into five groupings:

- **General:** Represents broad-based funding and revenue sources not tied to a specific park, which could include athletics, grants, citations, fees, and revenues from the county.
- **Frank Liske Park:** Income and expenses generated specifically from activities, rentals, and services at Frank Liske Park.
- **Camp Spencer Park:** Income and expenses from various activities and services at Camp Spencer Park, including cabin rentals, program fees, and other park-specific revenue streams.
- **Rob Wallace Park:** Income and expenses from activities, and services at Rob Wallace Park.
- **Vietnam Veterans Park:** Income and expenses from activities and services at Vietnam Veterans Park.

Table 7 shows revenues and expenses for each of these groupings for 2019 – 2023.

Table 7: Active Living and Parks Revenues and Expenses 2019 – 2023

Cabarrus County Parks and Recreation Financial Summary					
	2019 Actual	2020 Actual	2021 Actual	2022 Actual	2023 Actual
Active Living and Parks (8140)					
REVENUES					
General	170,532	128,935	108,906	172,013	248,583
Frank Liske Park	114,470	48,723	65,199	86,167	120,024
Camp Spencer Park	104,425	62,868	57,612	82,708	101,575
Rob Wallace Park	5,773	2,001	5,512	7,898	9,831
Vietnam Veterans Park	11,249	5,444	12,217	15,755	14,195
Total 8140 Revenues	406,449	247,970	249,446	364,542	494,209
EXPENSES					
General	1,364,132	1,441,878	1,446,357	1,827,010	1,840,264
Frank Liske Park	93,900	92,142	97,794	119,310	85,546
Camp Spencer Park	96,911	87,340	94,628	79,587	70,357
Rob Wallace Park	48,534	15,596	17,771	45,606	21,779
Vietnam Veterans Park	4,836	4,815	3,917	5,142	3,970
Total 8140 Expenses	1,608,314	1,641,772	1,660,467	2,076,655	2,021,916

From 2019 to 2023, ALP experienced overall growth in both revenues and expenses. Revenues increased by 21.6%, driven mainly by the rise in General Revenue and contributions from major parks like Frank Liske and Camp Spencer. Expenses grew by 25.7%, with General Expenses showing the most significant increase.

- **General**
 - **Revenue:** Increased by 45.8%, from \$170,532 in 2019 to \$248,583 in 2023. The most significant rise was between 2021 and 2023, with a 57.9% increase.
 - **Expenses:** Grew by 34.9%, from \$1,364,132 in 2019 to \$1,840,264 in 2023. The largest increase was between 2021 and 2022, with a 26.3% rise.
- **Frank Liske Park**
 - **Revenue:** Fluctuated, dropping by 57.4% from \$114,470 in 2019 to \$48,723 in 2020, but rebounded to \$120,024 in 2023, marking a 4.8% increase from 2019.
 - **Expenses:** Varied, increasing until 2022 with a peak of \$119,310, but decreased to \$85,546 in 2023, which is still an 8.9% decrease from 2019.
- **Camp Spencer Park**
 - **Revenue:** Declined by 44.8% from \$104,425 in 2019 to \$57,612 in 2021, then rose to \$101,575 in 2023, only 2.7% below the 2019 level.
 - **Expenses:** Decreased steadily from \$96,911 in 2019 to \$70,357 in 2023, a reduction of 27.4%.
- **Rob Wallace Park**
 - **Revenue:** Dropped significantly by 65.3% from \$5,773 in 2019 to \$2,001 in 2020, but increased to \$9,831 in 2023, a 70.3% rise from 2019.

- **Expenses:** Fluctuated, peaking at \$45,606 in 2022 before dropping to \$21,779 in 2023, a 55.1% reduction from 2019.
- **Vietnam Veterans Park**
 - **Revenue:** Decreased by 51.6% from \$11,249 in 2019 to \$5,444 in 2020, then increased to \$14,195 in 2023, a 26.2% rise from 2019.
 - **Expenses:** Remained relatively stable, with a slight decrease from \$4,836 in 2019 to \$3,970 in 2023, an 18.0% reduction.

Senior Center

Senior Center revenues and expenditures are organized into three groupings:

- **Concord Senior Center:** This category covers revenues and expenses specifically associated with the Concord Senior Center, including programs, building rentals, and costs related to food, supplies for parties, game rooms, and contract employee instructors for classes.
- **General:** This category encompasses broad-based revenues and expenses not tied to a specific senior center. It includes general grants, program fees, one-time grants, and overall operational costs.
- **Mount Pleasant Senior Center:** This category focuses on the revenues and expenses related to the Mount Pleasant Senior Center. It includes program fees, special event revenues, and costs associated with contract employee instructors, program fees, and specific operational expenses for the center.

Table 8 shows revenue and expenses for each of these groupings for 2019-2023.

Table 8: Senior Center Revenues and Expenses 2019 – 2023

Cabarrus County Parks and Recreation Financial Summary					
	2019 Actual	2020 Actual	2021 Actual	2022 Actual	2023 Actual
Senior Center (8145)					
REVENUES					
Concord Senior Center	100,811	64,195	48,367	80,401	115,011
General	136,279	120,560	96,241	116,974	133,876
Mount Pleasant Senior Center	30,926	19,290	-218	2,912	2,443
Total 8145 Revenues	268,016	204,045	144,390	200,287	251,330
EXPENSES					
Concord Senior Center	116,341	72,947	20,892	74,685	125,283
General	551,968	604,347	565,907	621,583	642,195
Mount Pleasant Senior Center	6,595	4,937	82	2,270	5,520
Total 8145 Expenses	674,904	682,230	586,882	698,538	772,998

Overall, the Senior Center (8145) saw fluctuations in both revenues and expenses from 2019 to 2023. However, it should be noted that during this time period, ALP, like all other agencies, was impacted by the pandemic. Concord Senior Center revenues dropped over 50% by 2021 and then rose 130% by 2023, while Mount Pleasant revenues fell over 100% by 2021 and recovered 1,200% by 2023. General expenses increased 16%, Concord expenses dropped 80% by 2021 and rose 500% by 2023, and Mount Pleasant expenses fell 100% by 2021 and increased 6,600% by 2023.

From 2019 to 2023, the Senior Center experience revenue growth of 7% and expense growth of about 15%.

- **Concord Senior Center**

- **Revenue:** Revenue decreased from \$100,811 in 2019 to \$48,367 in 2021 but then increased to \$115,011 in 2023. Overall, this category saw fluctuations with a general upward trend in the later years.
- **Expenses:** Expenses saw significant fluctuations, starting at \$116,341 in 2019, dropping to \$20,892 in 2021, and then rising to \$125,283 in 2023. Included in this category are program fees (e.g., class fees, special events, senior games, and health programs), building rentals, and costs related to food, supplies, game rooms, and contract employee instructors for classes.

- **General**

- **Revenue:** This category saw a decrease from \$136,279 in 2019 to \$96,241 in 2021, followed by an increase to \$133,876 in 2023.
- **Expenses:** This category consistently held the highest expenses, increasing from \$551,968 in 2019 to \$642,195 in 2023. Included in this category are expenses not tied to a specific senior center, including general grants, program fees, general operational costs, contract employee instructors, and other miscellaneous costs.

- **Mount Pleasant Senior Center**

- **Revenue:** Revenue for this category experienced a significant drop, going from \$30,926 in 2019 to a negative value in 2021, before recovering to \$2,443 in 2023.
- **Expenses:** Expenses remained relatively low but showed variability, starting at \$6,595 in 2019 and ending at \$5,520 in 2023, with minimal expenditure in 2021. Includes program fees, special event revenues, costs for contract employee instructors, program fees, and specific operational expenses for the center.

Findings and Recommendations

The financial analysis reveals a well-run, professional department with sophisticated tracking systems in place. Despite the fluctuations in revenues and expenses, the detailed financial records demonstrate a strong commitment to financial transparency and effective resource management.

Based on the analysis, BerryDunn proposes two key recommendations to enhance financial management and reporting for the department: complete a cost recovery study and normalize the use of project codes for budget tracking.

Cost Recovery Study and Philosophy

An important tool the department could use to help financial performance is a cost recovery study. ALP's current cost recovery model is structured to cover 100% of all direct costs for both youth and adult programming. Free programs are subsidized by paid events/programming. BerryDunn recommends conducting another cost recovery study to further identify direct and indirect costs of services for all revenue-generating operations. This study could also establish criteria for cost recovery rates for different types of services and provide the department better information for service offerings decision-making.

Completing a cost recovery study does not mean the department would stop providing services with low cost recovery rates, because other criteria such as community benefit of programs are contemplated in the accompanying cost recovery philosophy. Rather, a cost recovery study allows the department to manage increasing expenses by providing an understanding of the true costs of services.

Project Codes Normalization

Another key recommendation is to normalize the use of project codes within the department's accounting system. Currently, there is inconsistency in how project codes are applied. Sometimes they are used for specific projects, sometimes for ongoing initiatives, and other times for one-time events. Similar items, such as grants, are sometimes tracked in different ways.

For consistency and ease of understanding, especially for future personnel who may lack institutional knowledge, it is important to standardize the use of project codes. This technical recommendation will enhance clarity, improve financial reporting, and facilitate better financial management.

Benchmarking Analysis

Benchmarking communities of similar jurisdiction population, and size can be an effective tool in fostering a deeper understanding of high-performing agencies' operations and budgets. This type of analysis often clarifies how other agencies manage their budgets, generate revenue, offer programs, and run their facilities.

BerryDunn completed this benchmarking analysis for Cabarrus County Active Living Center (ALP) to understand how the County compares to similar agencies related to workforce, finances, operations, programs, and service offerings.

The intent of benchmarking is not to make a one-to-one comparison with other agencies, as each jurisdiction has its own identity, ways of conducting business, and community needs. The political, social, economic, and physical characteristics of each community make the policies and practices of parks and recreation agencies unique. Additionally, organizations do not typically measure or define various metrics the same way for parks, trails, facilities, and maintenance.

Cabarrus County ALP selected the North Carolina County peer agencies for this study due to similarities in operations and levels of service. Data was sourced directly through a benchmark survey shared with the agency and NRPA Park Metrics.

The agencies compared in this study were:

- Gaston County Parks and Recreation (Gaston)
- Rowan County Parks and Recreation (Rowan)
- Iredell County Parks and Recreation (Iredell)
- Union County Parks and Recreation (Union)

Tables throughout this report highlight ALP or Cabarrus County in blue and other agencies in green. Charts in this report, however, intend to provide a visual benchmarked comparison. These data points are arranged from smallest to largest.

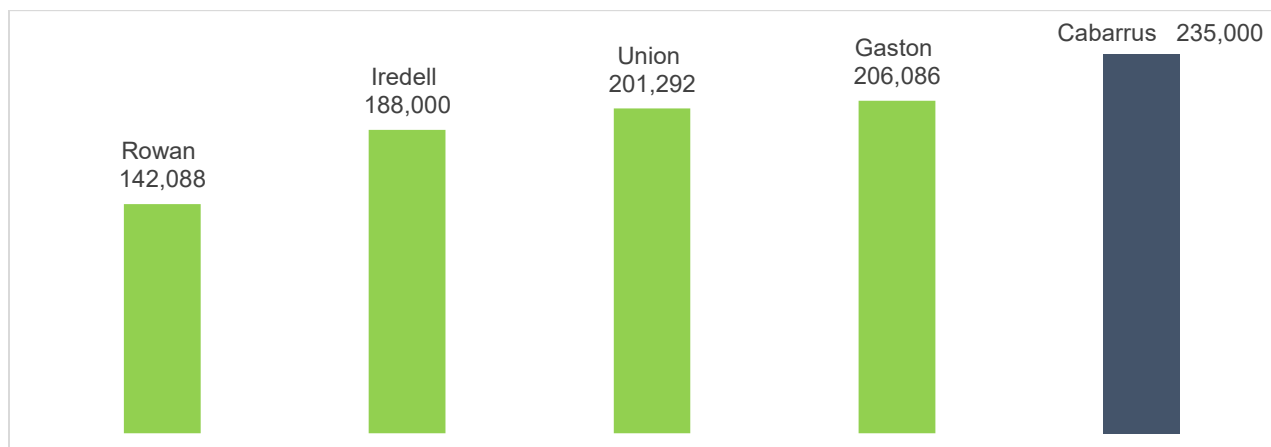
Highlights

- ALP has an operating budget of \$3.8 million and total earned revenue of \$745,000, placing it in the lower range compared to peer agencies. Gaston has an operating budget of \$3.1 million and total earned revenue of \$252,000, while Rowan County has the highest revenue at \$1.48 million.
- ALP has 12 miles of natural surface trails. In comparison, Union and Gaston each have 20 miles, and Rowan County leads with 24 miles.
- There are opportunities for ALP to introduce new programs such as pre-teen, teen, adult, and senior programming to align with offerings from other peer agencies.
- ALP has 24 full-time equivalent employees (FTEs), placing it in the upper-highest range compared to other agencies, which range from 16 to 25 FTEs.

Population and Jurisdiction Size

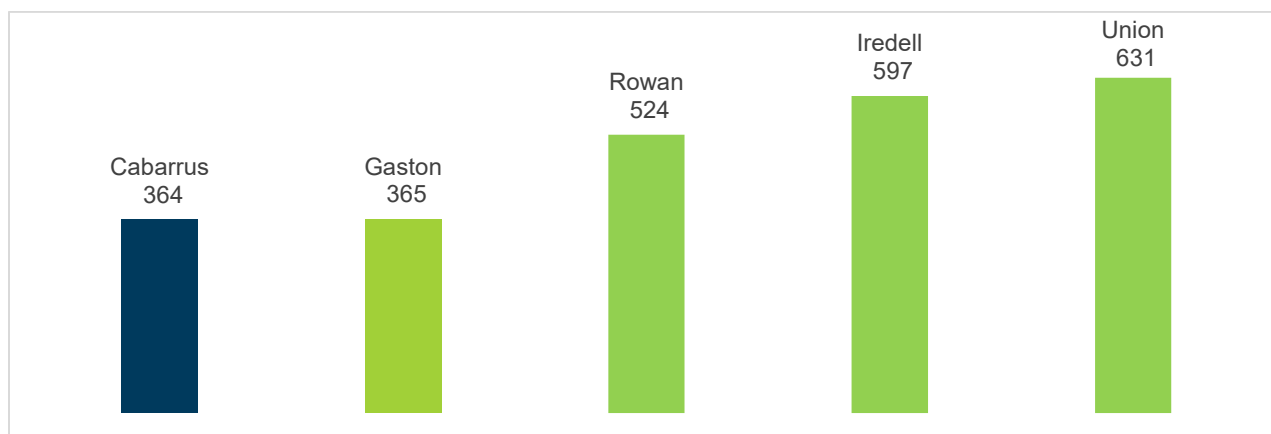
The agencies in this study have similar population sizes and square mileage. Their populations generally range from 142,000 – 235,000 residents, with Cabarrus County being the highest number of residents at 235,000 residents.

Figure 46: Jurisdiction Population



In terms of jurisdiction size measured in square miles, the benchmarked agencies range from 364 square miles (Cabarrus) to 631 square miles (Union). Cabarrus is the smallest in size, just shy of Gaston's 365 square miles.

Figure 47: Jurisdiction Size in Square Miles



Workforce

ALP has an estimated 24 FTEs in 2024, which falls in the upper to highest range when compared to other agencies (16 to 25 FTEs). For part-time and seasonal employees, ALP has 9 and 60 staff, respectfully. In comparison to peer agencies, ALP has similar number of FTEs, but is at the lowest end of the spectrum for part-time staff and is about midrange for the number of seasonals as benchmarked counties.

Figure 48: Total Number of FTEs

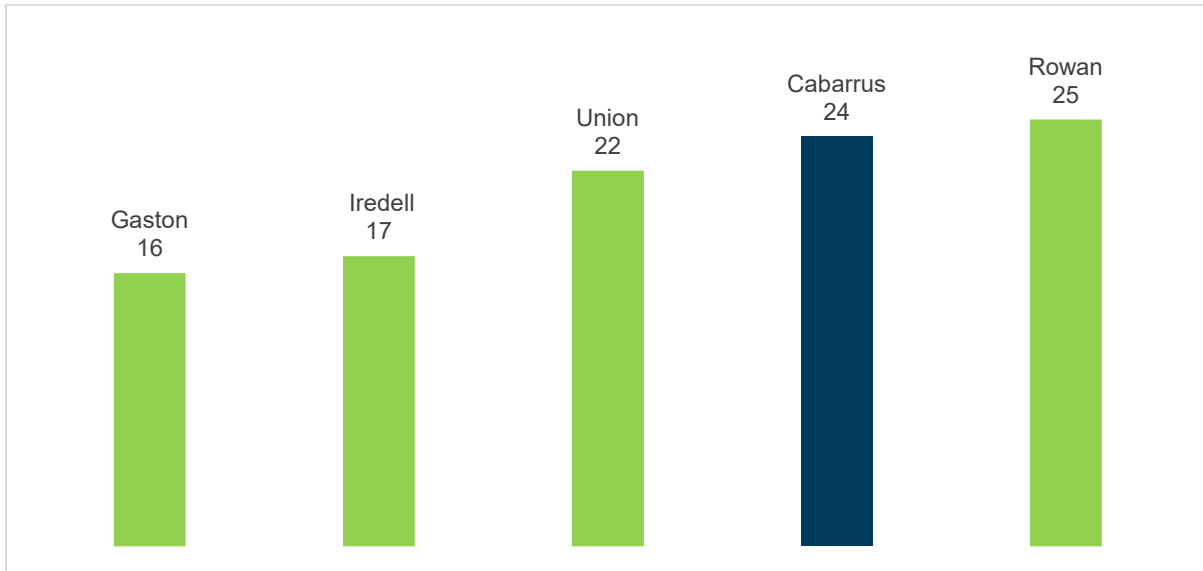


Figure 49: FTEs per Capita

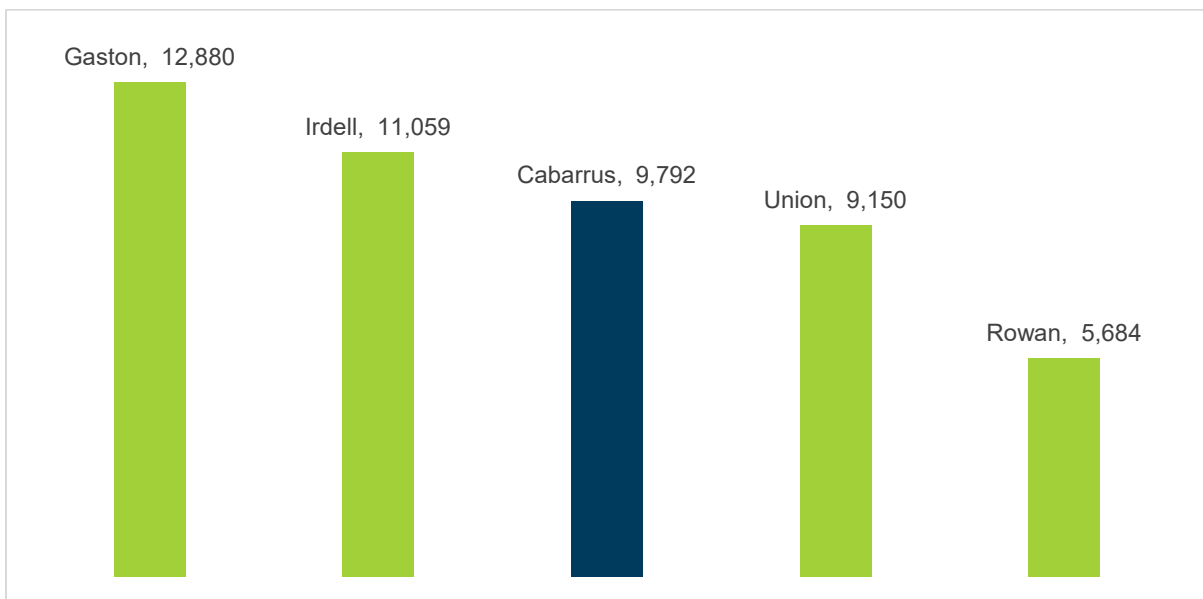


Figure 50: Total Number of Part-Time Staff

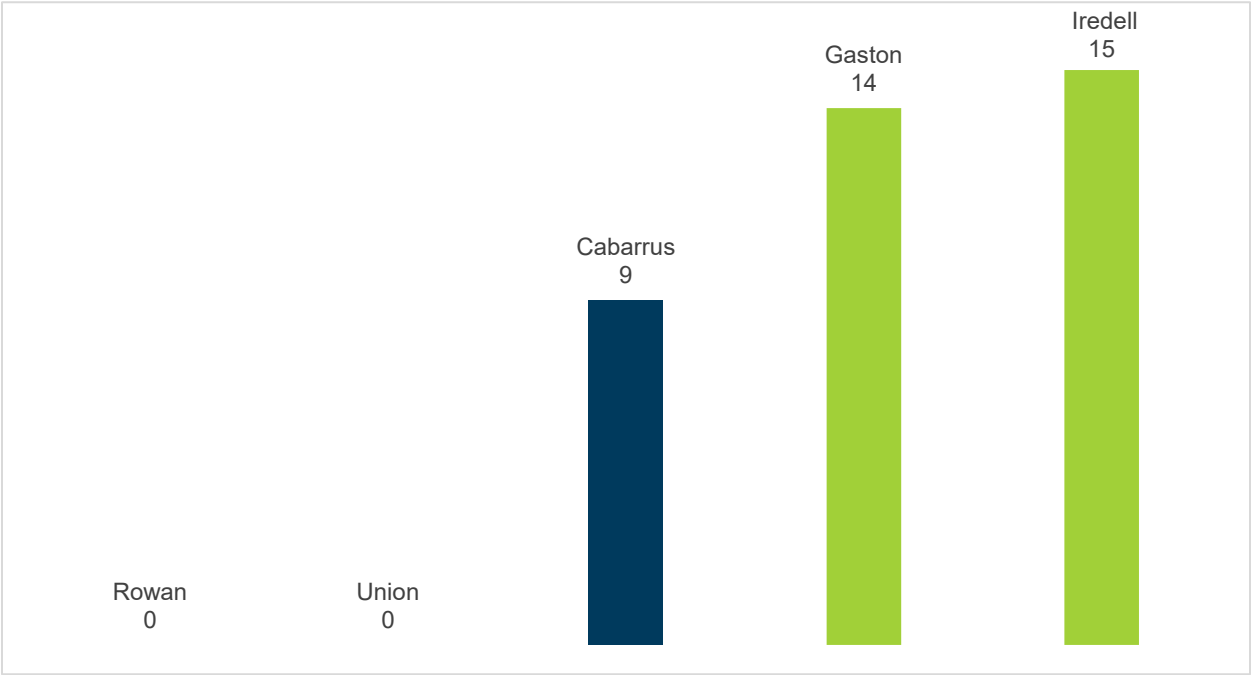


Figure 51: Total Number of Seasonal Staff

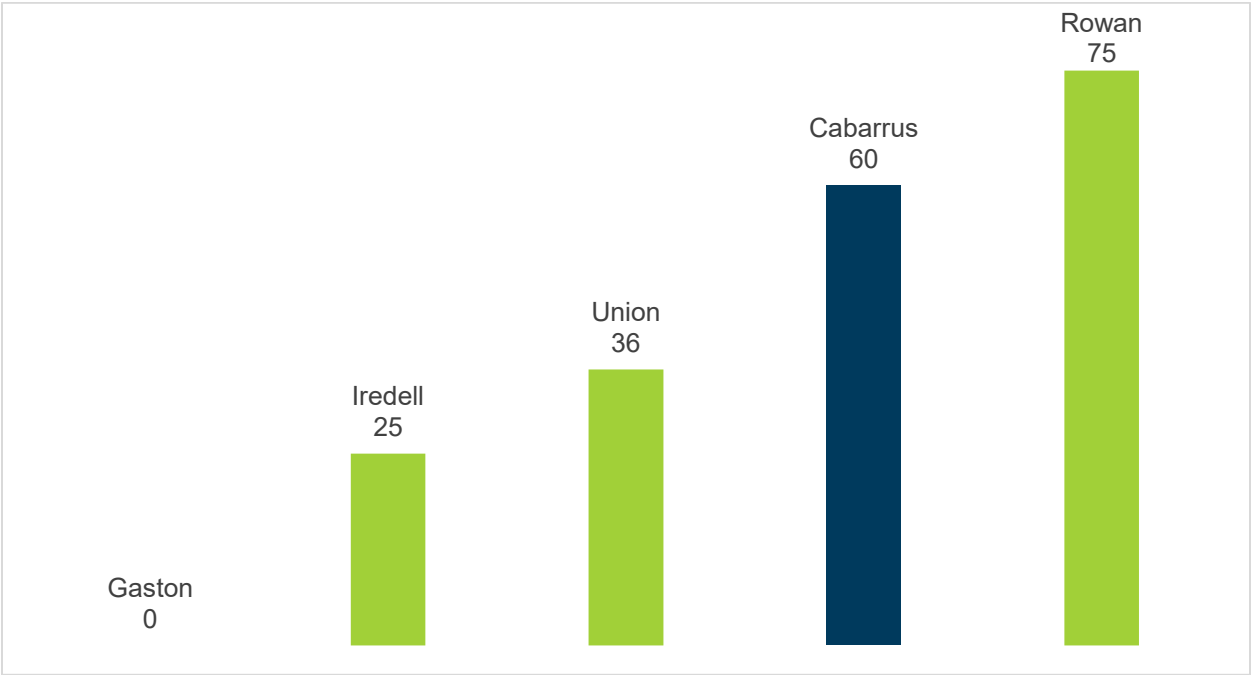


Table 6: Type of Seasonal Staff

	Cabarrus	Gaston	Iredell	Rowan	Union
Type of Seasonal Staff	• Park Ranger • Counselors • Recreation Facility Operator • Lifeguard	N/A	N/A	Seasonal with some of those working throughout the year until they have met 999 hours.	• Park Ranger • Park Attendant • Office Attendant • Campground Manager • Lifeguard

Table 7: Marketing and/or Outreach Position

	Cabarrus	Gaston	Iredell	Rowan	Union
Marketing/ Outreach Position	No	Yes	Yes	No	No

Operating Budget, Revenue, and Per Capita Overview

Data from the study indicates that 2024 operating budgets ranged between \$2.5 million and \$3.8 million, while the total revenue earned varied from \$200,000 to \$1.5 million, as seen in Table 11 and Figure 53 below. ALP ranked in the higher-range at an operating budget of \$3.8 million and in the lower range for total earned revenue at \$745,000 in 2023. In comparison, Gaston had an operating budget of over \$3 million and an earned revenue of nearly \$252,000.

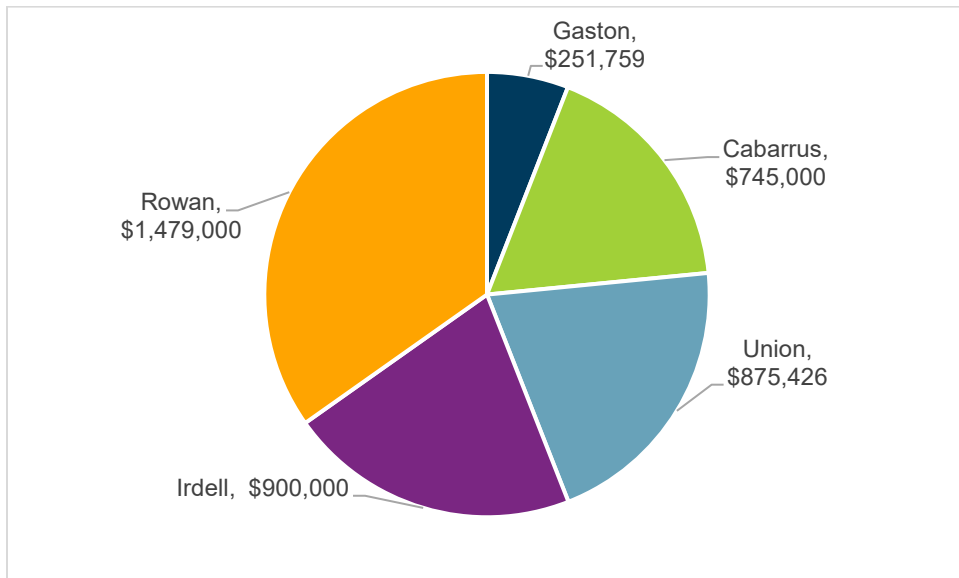
Table 8: Agency Operating Budgets and Total Earned Revenue (2024)

	Cabarrus	Gaston	Iredell	Rowan	Union
Operating Budget	3,800,000	\$3,086,852	\$3,500,000	\$2,603,611	\$2,800,000
Earned Revenue	\$745,000	\$251,759	\$900,000	\$1,479,000	\$875,426

Figure 52: Agency Operating Budget – Benchmarked Comparison



Figure 53: Agency Total Earned Revenue – Benchmarked Comparison



Operating Expenditures and Revenue Per Capita

The next section identifies each agency's overall operating expenditures and the total revenue per capita. ALP is in the mid-range for both metrics among the benchmarked agencies. Cabarrus has operating expenditures for \$10 per capita, compared to Union at \$11 and Rowan leading with \$20. Revenue per capita ranges from \$0 to \$13 dollars, with Cabarrus having \$3.17 in revenue per capita.

Table 9: Average Operating Expenditures and Revenue Per Capita (2023)

	Cabarrus	Gaston	Iredell	Rowan	Union
Operating expenditures per capita	\$16.17	*	\$9	\$20	\$11
Revenue per capita	\$3.17	\$13.19	\$0	\$0	\$4

***Data not provided**

Parks, Acreage, and Trails

ALP currently manages 521 acres of developed park land, with a total of 1,258 planned with the recent acquisition of two new properties. Today ALP has four parks. In comparison, Rowan County has 848 acres and six parks, while Gaston County has 1,399 acres and 10 parks. Additionally, Cabarrus County has 12 miles of natural surface trails, compared to Union and Gaston counties, each with 20 miles, and Rowan County leading with 24 miles.

Figure 54: Total Number of Parks Per Agency– Benchmarked Comparison

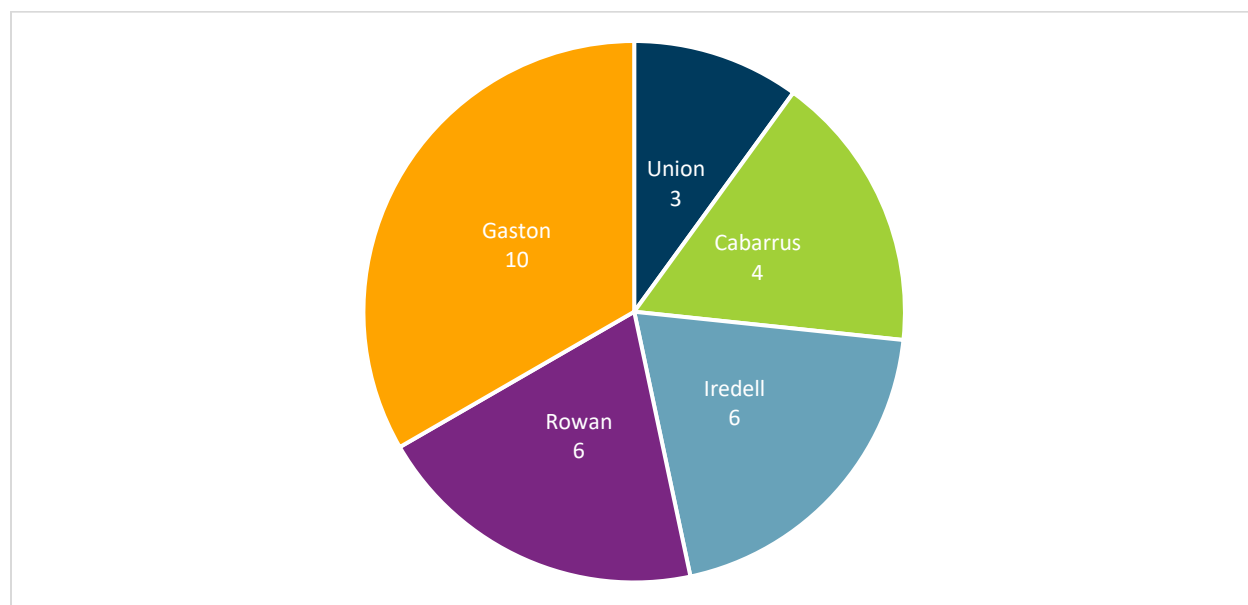


Figure 55: Agency Total Park Acres – Benchmarked Comparison

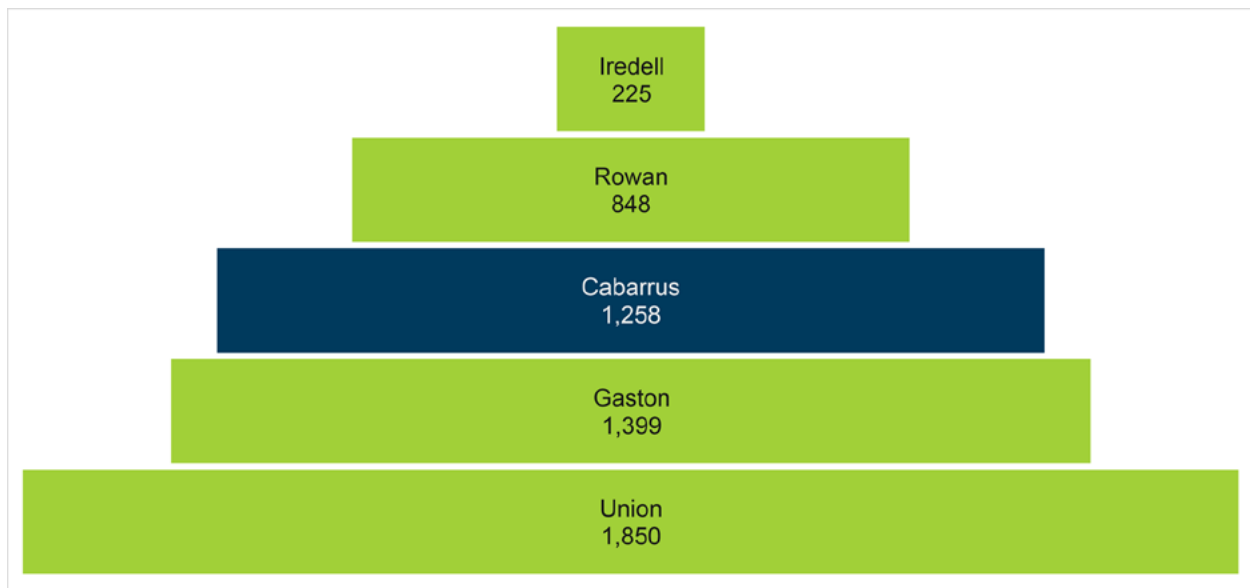
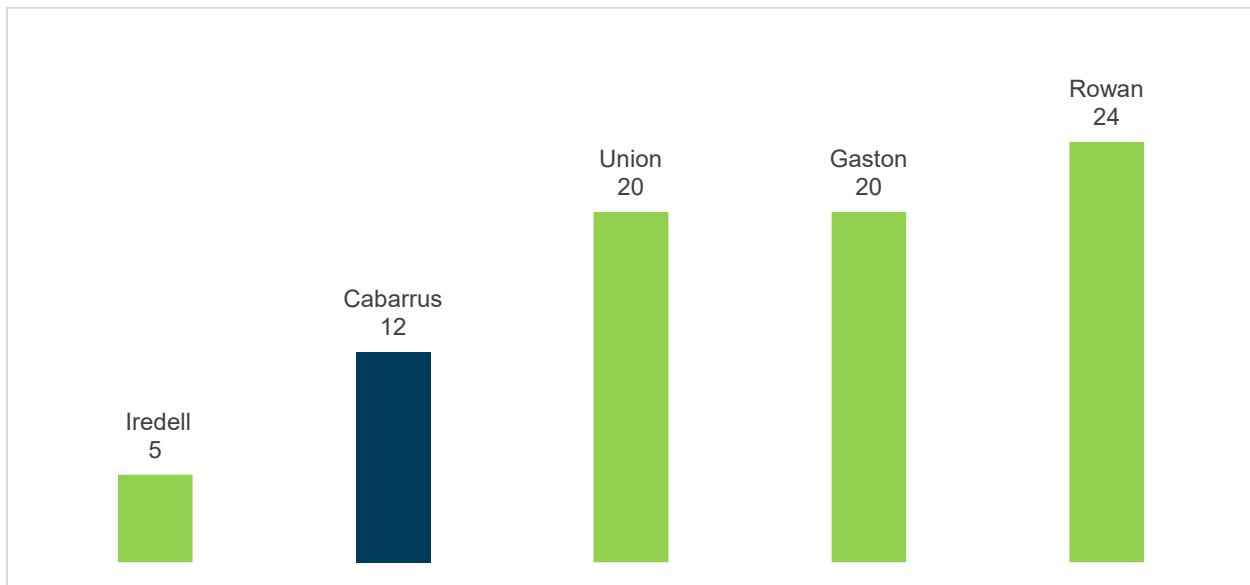


Figure 56: Agency Total Miles of Natural Surface Trails – Benchmarked Comparison



Successful Programs

Recreation programs are core services of park and recreation agencies. Program type varies by several factors, including facility space, staff/instructor availability and expertise, alternative service providers in the area, benefit to the community, and program demand.

All agencies compared in this study offer successful pre-teen, adult, and senior programs.

Table 10: Programming Offered by Parks and Recreation Agencies

	Gaston	Iredell	Rowan	Union
Pre-Teen Program	Kids Catfish Tournament	Summer Camps	Nature Center Programs Gem Mine Programs	Pop-up Programs include: Archery Kayaking Paddle Boarding
Teen Program	Halloween-Fest	Not shared	Not shared	Pop-up Programs include: Archery Kayaking Paddle Boarding
Adult Program	Cotton Ginning Days Festival	Arts/Crafts	Special Olympics	Lake Paddle Tours (Sunset and Sunrise)
Senior Program	Dances/Senior Games	Day Trips	Senior Games and Arts	Senior Games collaboration with City of Monroe
Holiday Programs	Not shared	Not shared	Not shared	Easter St. Patrick's Day Halloween in Campground

Facilities

ALP currently operates two centers, the barn at Frank Liske Park, and two additional sites are planned in the near future. The County currently operates more centers than Gaston, Iredell, and Union, each with one center, and Rowan County, which does not operate any centers. In terms of square footage, Iredell has 30,000 square feet, followed by Gaston with 6,200 square feet, and Union with 1,700 square feet. ALP manages approximately 30,000 square feet.

Maintenance management varies across counties:

- Cabarrus does not manage facility maintenance.
- Gaston handles grounds maintenance for all parks and buildings, with Public Works managing interior maintenance.
- Iredell performs its own maintenance.
- Rowan performs most maintenance and relies on third parties for specialized work.
- Union has a Maintenance Supervisor and four Maintenance Technicians for their maintenance needs.

Table 11: Agency Total Number of Operating Facilities and Number of Square Feet

	Cabarrus	Gaston	Iredell	Rowan	Union
Total Number of Centers	2	1	1	0	1
Total Number of Square Feet	30,000	6,200	30,000	0	1,700

Table 12: Agency Maintenance Management by Parks and Recreation and/or Other Department

	Cabarrus	Gaston	Iredell	Rowan	Union
Facility Maintenance by Agency and/or Other Department	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Conclusion

The benchmarking analysis for Cabarrus ALP provided an understanding of Cabarrus's relative position among peer agencies and identified potential areas for improvement or expansion.

Key takeaways from the analysis include:

- ALP operates more facilities yet with similar FTE staffing levels of its peer agencies, however, ALP has less part-time and seasonal staff. To continue to maintain and enhance services, particularly as the County grows, ALP may want to add additional staff
- Peer agencies offered a variety of successful programs that draw people to their parks. Implementing similar programs could help increase awareness of ALP parks and facilities.
- Compared to peer agencies, ALP has less operating budget to support the county residents.

As mentioned previously, benchmarking is a valuable comparative tool but should not be the sole basis for decision-making. Local needs, demands, and resources must be considered in the master planning process. BerryDunn will utilize this data as one of many tools to help the County respond to—and prepare for—current and future needs.

Mobility Data Analysis

To gain insights into visitor behaviors and patterns, BerryDunn analyzed mobility data from Cabarrus County ALP through Placer.ai. Placer.ai obtains anonymous and aggregated data of geolocated devices—such as smartphones—providing our team with insights into park visitation, time spent in parks, pre- and post-visit travel patterns, and more.

Information received from Placer.ai is anonymous, aggregated, and verified by data scientists before delivery; therefore, user data is scrubbed of any personal information. This mobility data may help Cabarrus County ALP make data-driven decisions based on the following:

- Visitor demographics
- Consumer profiles
- Annual, monthly, daily, and hourly visits
- Length of time spent at the facility or park
- Distance traveled to access the facility or park
- Pre- and post-visit journeys

BerryDunn analyzed the following locations and determined geographical boundaries using geographic information system (GIS) files, except for Mount Pleasant Senior Center and Concord Senior Center, which did not have sufficient data. The boundaries for each senior center are an estimate, and some data may be limited because Placer.ai protects sensitive

locations and does not provide data on those visitors. For example, the data for Mt. Pleasant Senior Center may be limited due to its proximity to several places of worship and the fire department.

- Camp T.N. Spencer Park
- Frank Liske Park
- Rob Wallace Park
- Vietnam Veterans Park
- Mt. Pleasant Senior Center
- Concord Senior Center

Cabarrus County has a large population of older adults, which might affect the level of data collected. Because Placer.ai obtains mobility data through smartphones – and approximately 61% of adults 65 years and over own a smartphone⁶ – nearly 40% of seniors will not be captured in this review.

Visitor Demographics

Figure 57 reflects visitor demographics for each park or facility over the past 12 months. Demographic information from Placer.ai—sourced using 2021 U.S. Census information—examines visitors in each location’s trade area. The trade area is a geographic region where visitors are coming from and represents the market where visitors either reside or work. The following information is a high-level overview of the visitor demographics across Cabarrus’s parks and facilities.

- The median household income for visitors ranges from \$62,200 to \$76,800.
- Approximately 29.7% to 42.1% of visitors have a bachelor’s degree or higher.
- The most common race of visitors is white.
- The average people per household ranges from 2.72 to 2.87 people.

⁶ Faverio, M. January 13, 2022. “Share of Those 65 and Older Who Are Tech Users Has Grown in the Past Decade.” *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/01/13/share-of-those-65-and-older-who-are-tech-users-has-grown-in-the-past-decade/>

Figure 57: Visitor Demographics Overview

Audience Overview

Summary					
Properties	Median Household Income	Bachelor's Degree or Higher	Median Age	Most Common Ethnicity	Persons per Household
Camp T.N. Spencer ... Foxford Rd, Concord, NC	\$62.2K	29.7%	37.0	White (52.7%)	2.72
Frank Liske Park Stough Rd, Concord, NC	\$74.1K	42.1%	35.0	White (50.2%)	2.77
Rob Wallace Park Bethel School Rd, Midla...	\$68.4K	32.3%	36.0	White (55.7%)	2.80
Vietnam Veterans P... Orphanage Rd, Concord...	\$64.7K	32.1%	35.8	White (52.2%)	2.86
Mt. Pleasant Senior ... N Main St, Mount Pleasa...	\$65.3K	30.6%	37.1	White (62.3%)	2.75
Concord Senior Cent... Corban Ave SE, Concord...	\$76.8K	35.9%	38.8	White (62.3%)	2.87
Apr 1st, 2023 - Mar 31st, 2024 Data Source: Census 2021 Data provided by Placer Labs Inc. (www.placer.ai)				Placer.ai	

Consumer Profiles

To understand profiles of park visitors, BerryDunn reviewed the Experian Mosaic data set within Placer.ai. Experian categorizes household consumer segments based on demographics, lifestyle, and behavior data, which can be helpful in conducting market research, targeted marketing, and determining visitor behaviors. The most common audience profiles—and their key features across all locations —are highlighted in Table 16.⁷

Table 13: Consumer Profiles for Cabarrus County Active Living Parks

Audience Profile	Description	Key Features	Top Audience Location(s)
Booming With Confidence	Prosperous, established couples in their peak earning years living in suburban homes	- Affluent - Environmental philanthropists - Highly educated - Savvy investors - Tech apprentices - Upscale housing	- Mt. Pleasant Senior Center - Concord Senior Center
Family Union	Middle-income, middle-aged families living in homes supported by solid blue-collar occupations	- Bilingual - Blue-collar jobs - Financially cautious - Large households - Married with kids - Team sports	- Rob Wallace Park - Mt. Pleasant Senior Center
Flourishing Families	Affluent, middle-aged families and couples earning prosperous incomes and living very comfortable, active lifestyles	- Affluent - Athletic activities - Charitable contributors - Family-oriented activities - High credit card use - Saving for college	Frank Liske Park
Power Elite	The wealthiest households in the U.S. living in the most exclusive neighborhoods and enjoying all that life has to offer	- Active and fit - Charitable giving - Highly educated - Politically conservative	- Frank Liske Park - Vietnam Veterans Park

⁷ Experian. 2019. *Experian Mosaic E-Handbook*. New York: Experian. Accessed April 3, 2024. https://assets.cengage.com/gale/help/dnow/DataMethodology/MosaicUSA_Handbook.pdf

Audience Profile	Description	Key Features	Top Audience Location(s)
		• Wealthy • Well invested	
Singles and Starters	Young singles starting out; some starter families living a city lifestyle	• Digitally savvy • Foodies • Politically disengaged • Rental housing • Single adults	• Camp T.N. Spencer Park • Frank Liske Park • Vietnam Veterans Park • Concord Senior Center
Suburban Style	Middle-aged, ethnically diverse suburban families and couples earning upscale incomes	• Comfortable lifestyle • Family-centric activities • Financial investments • Parents • Politically diverse • Suburban living	• Camp T.N. Spencer Park • Concord Senior Center • Vietnam Veterans Park • Rob Wallace Park
Thriving Boomers	Upper-middle-class, baby-boomer-age couples living comfortable lifestyles settled in suburban homes	• 60s/70s music lovers • Married couples • Middle class • Nature enthusiasts • Politically independent • Suburban	• Camp T.N. Spencer Park • Rob Wallace Park • Mt. Pleasant Senior Center

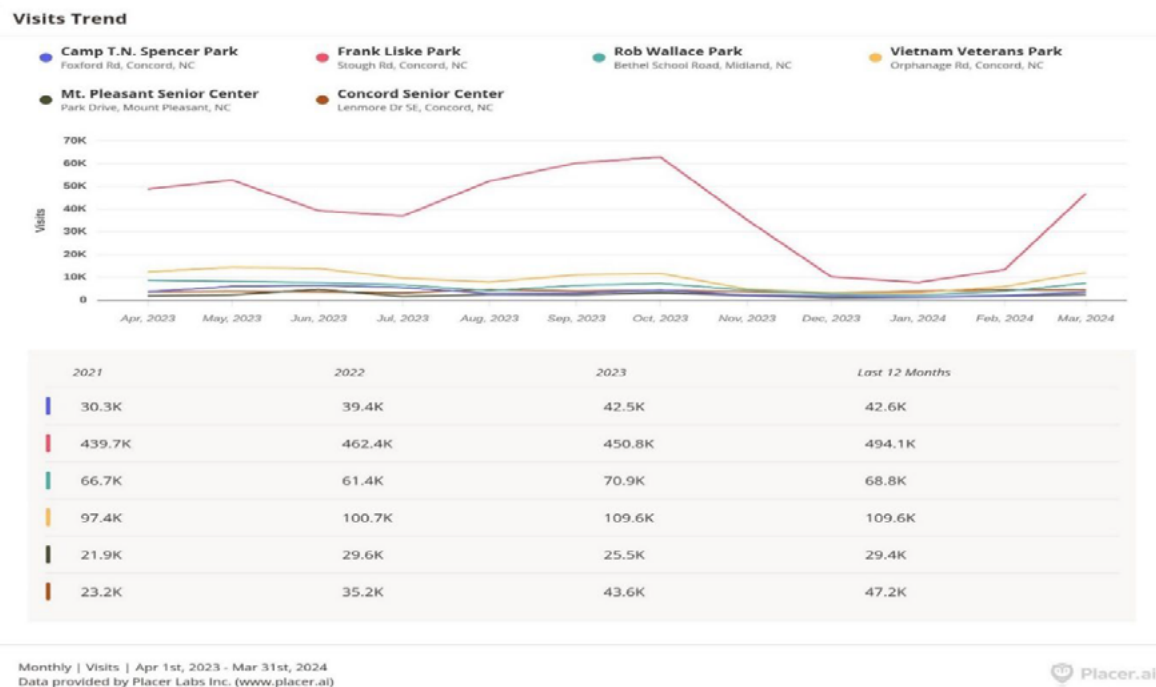
Visitor Trends Annual

The following sections reflect mobility data, including when guests are most often visiting facilities through the year, week, and day.

Annual and Monthly Visits

Figure 58 reflects visitation trends from the past 12 months by facility as well as total visits from the last 12 months and for years 2021 – 2023. Frank Liske Park had the most visitors overall in 2023 (more than 450,000). Mt. Pleasant Senior Center had the least visitors in 2023, seeing just over 25,000 visitors. October witnessed the greatest number of visitors across the facilities, with Frank Liske Park seeing nearly 63,000 visitors, followed by Vietnam Veterans at nearly 12,000.

Figure 58: Visitation



Visits Trend

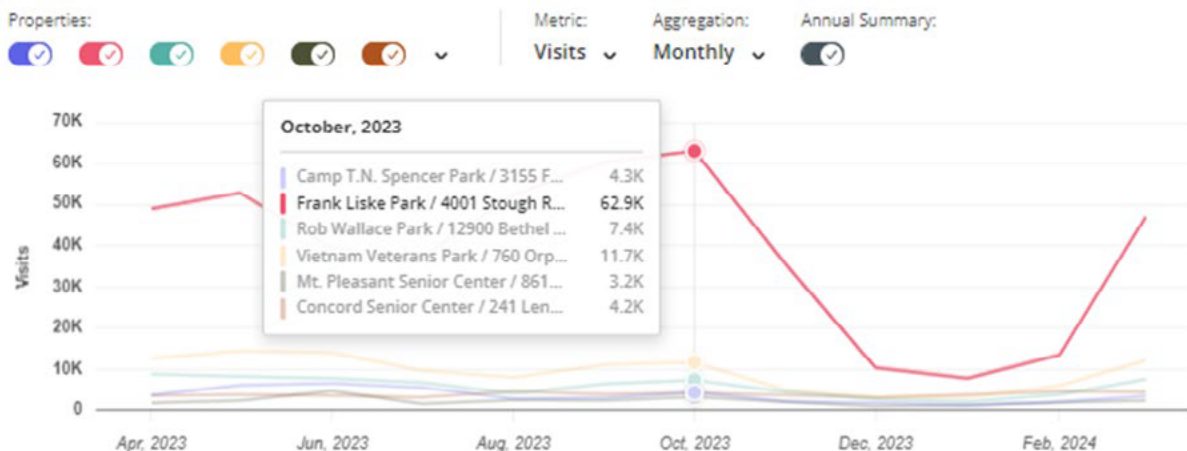


Table 17 provides a more in-depth look at the visitation trends over the past 12 months. Orange cells reflect the months with the lowest attendance, and green cells reflect the months with the highest attendance.

Table 14: Monthly Visitation

	Camp T.N. Spencer Park	Frank Liske Park	Rob Wallace Park	Vietnam Veterans Park	Mt. Pleasant Senior Center	Concord Senior Center
April 2023	3,612	48,849	8,688	12,462	1,791	3,531
May 2023	6,033	52,753	8,182	14,440	2,257	3,699
June 2023	6,480	39,320	7,710	13,919	4,616	3,566
July 2023	5,561	36,972	6,716	9,595	1,552	3,090
August 2023	2,709	52,307	4,128	7,909	2,380	4,579
September 2023	2,967	60,319	6,460	11,052	2,253	3,852
October 2023	4,299	62,946	7,352	11,672	3,197	4,211
November 2023	2,120	35,254	4,399	4,840	1,929	3,584
December 2023	1,802	10,263	2,625	3,124	989	3,108
January 2024	1,198	7,711	2,105	3,053	1,169	3,789
February 2024	2,018	13,431	3,795	5,985	1,811	4,549
March 2024	3,401	46,910	7,504	12,098	2,352	4,461
Highest Attendance		Lowest Attendance				

Daily

Figure 59 reflects daily visitation over the past 12 months. Saturday is the most popular day of the week to visit for all locations except for the Concord Senior Center, which sees peak attendance on Thursdays.

Figure 59: Daily Visitation



Hourly

Figure 60 reflects hourly visitation trends over the past 12 months. The most popular time to visit Camp T.N. Spencer Park, Frank Liske Park, and Rob Wallace Park is between 2 and 3 p.m. Vietnam Veterans Park seeing the greatest number of visitors between 4 and 5 p.m. Mt. Pleasant Senior Center sees peak attendance between 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. Concord Senior Center sees peak attendance around 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.

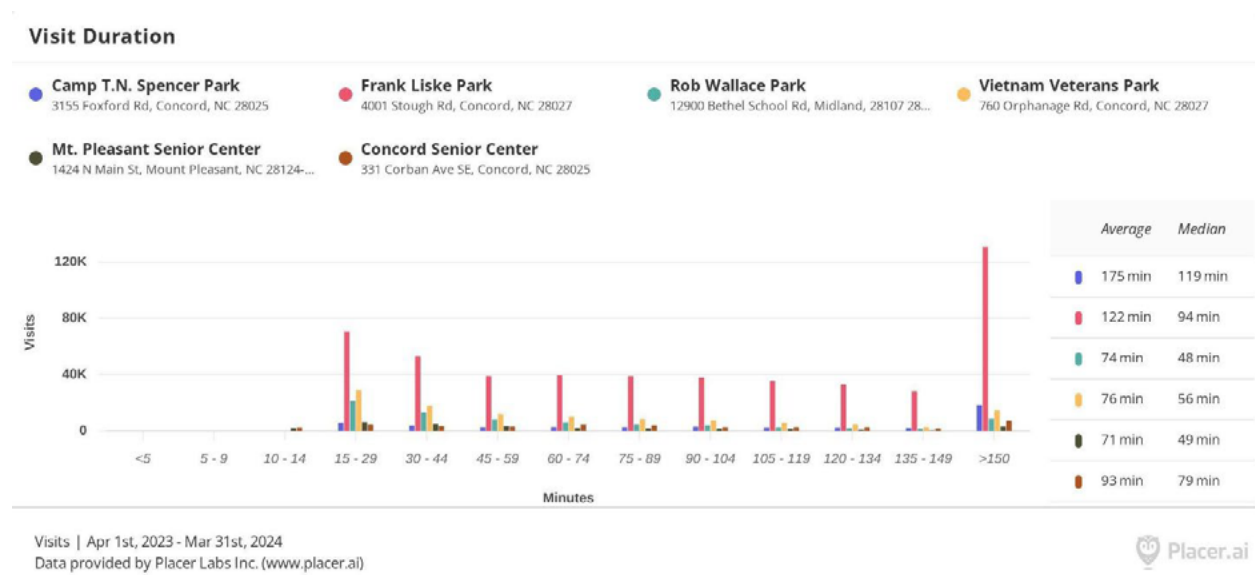
Figure 60: Hourly Visitation



Dwell Time

Figure 61 reflects the average length of time—or dwell time—visitors spend at each park or facility. On average, visitors spend between 74 to 175 minutes at park locations and 71 to 93 minutes at senior center locations. Camp T.N. Spencer Park visitors dwell the longest at more than 170 minutes.

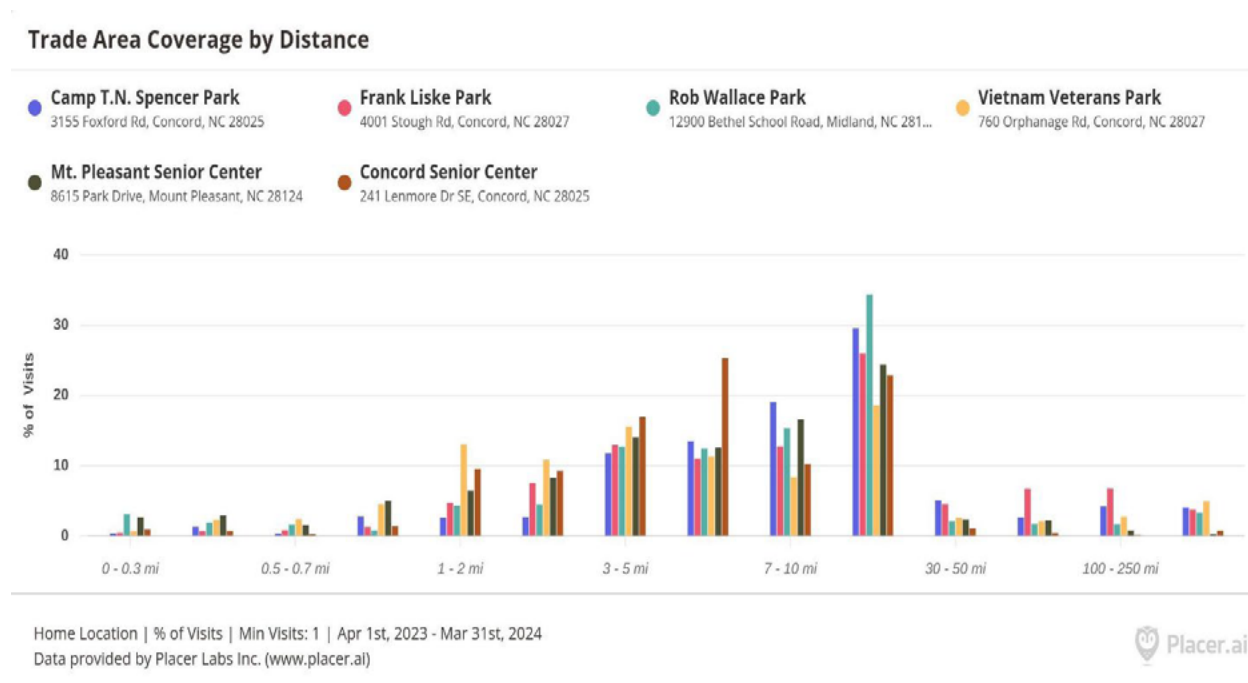
Figure 61: Length of Stay



Distance Traveled

Figure 62 reflects the number of miles visitors travel to reach each park or facility. Most visits come from people who live within 10 to 30 miles from the park or facility. There are also a number of visitors traveling between 5 and 7 miles.

Figure 62: Distance Traveled to Facility or Park



Figures 63 through 68 provide more insight on the exact regions where visitors are traveling from. The most common ZIP codes for each location are as follows:

- Camp T.N. Spencer Park – Concord, NC 28025
- Frank Liske Park – Concord, NC 28027
- Rob Wallace Park – Midland, NC 28107
- Vietnam Veterans Park – Concord, NC 28027
- Mt. Pleasant Senior Center – Concord, NC 28025
- Concord Senior Center – Concord, NC 28025

Figure 63: Camp T.N. Spencer Park Visitor Origin

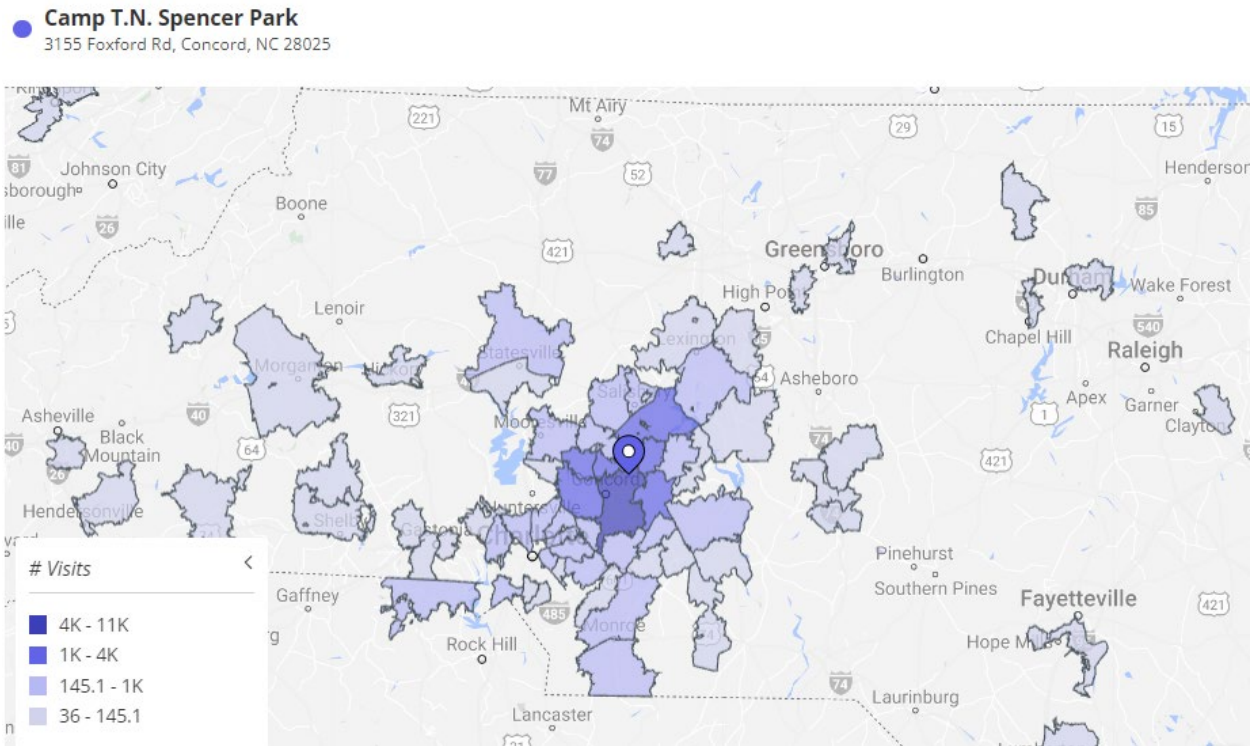


Figure 64: Frank Liske Park Visitor Origin

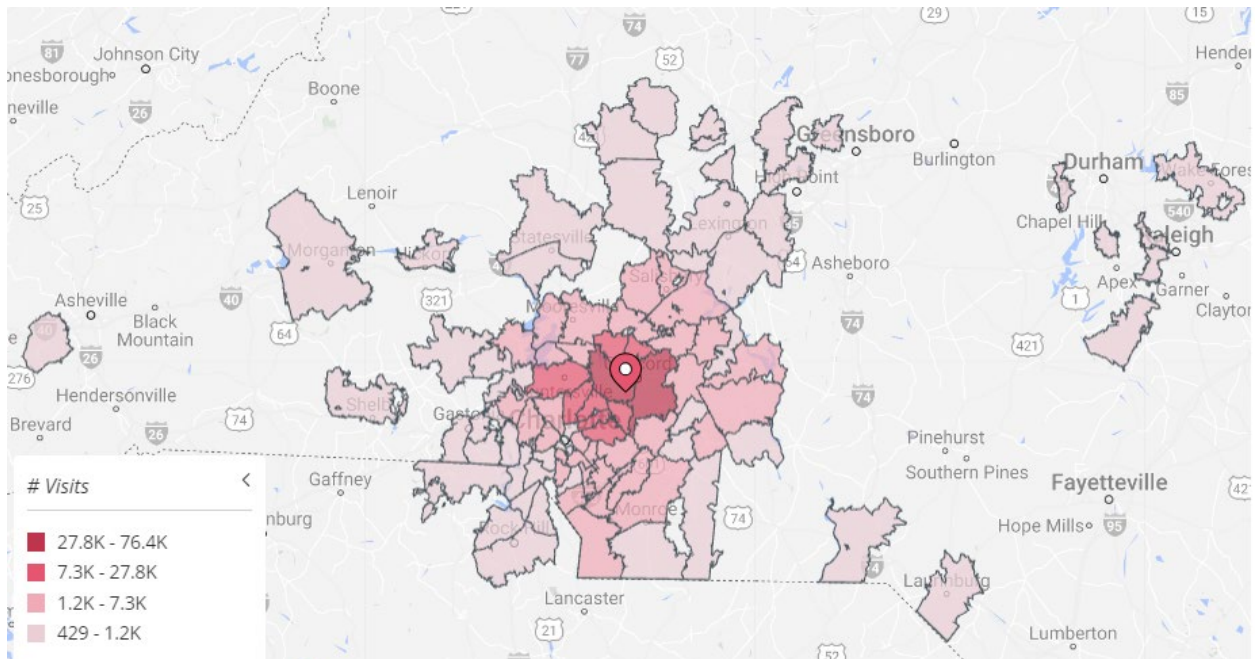


Figure 65: Rob Wallace Visitor Origin

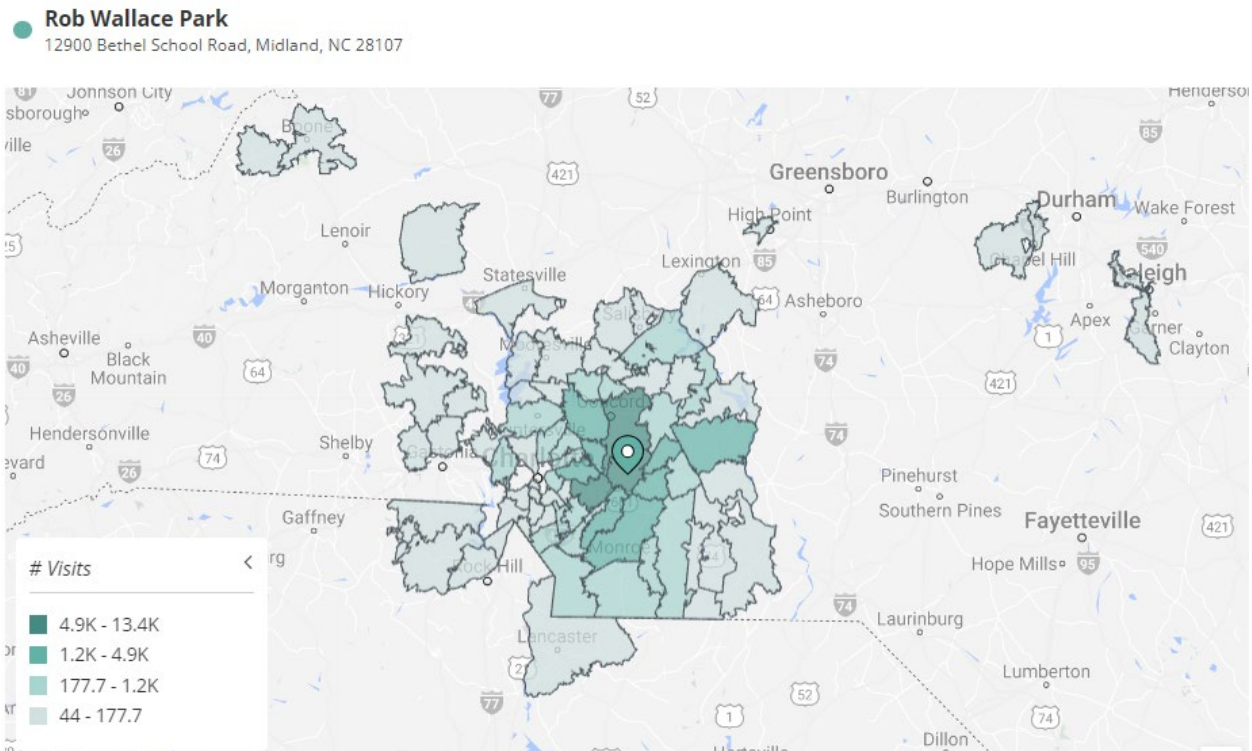


Figure 66: Vietnam Veterans Park Visitor Origin

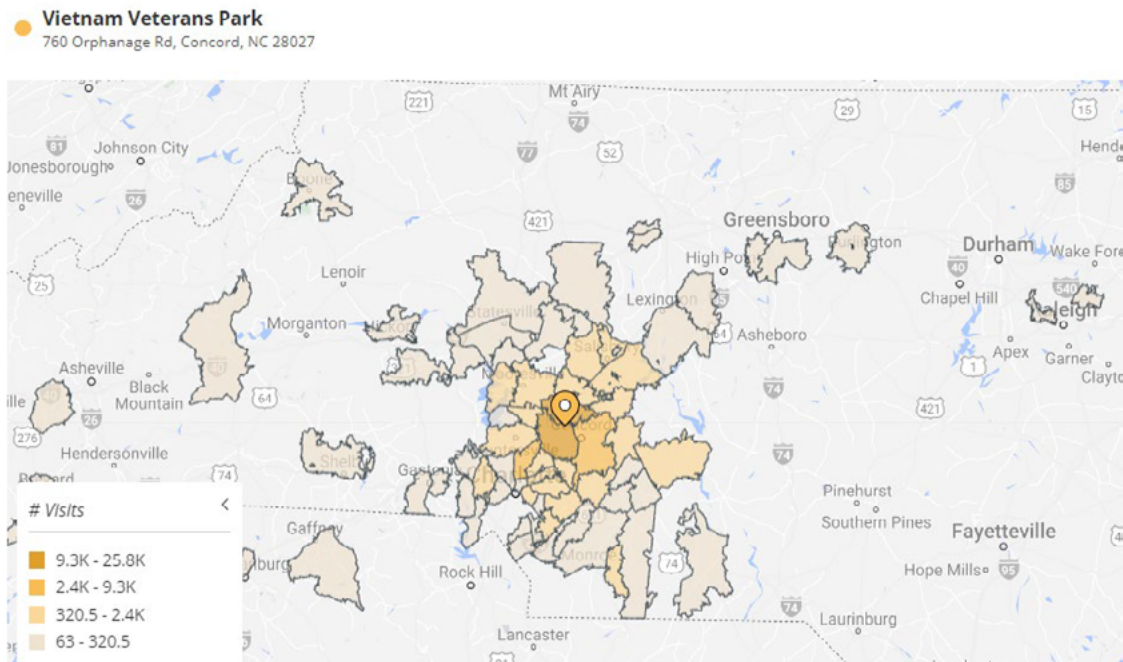


Figure 67: Mt. Pleasant Senior Center

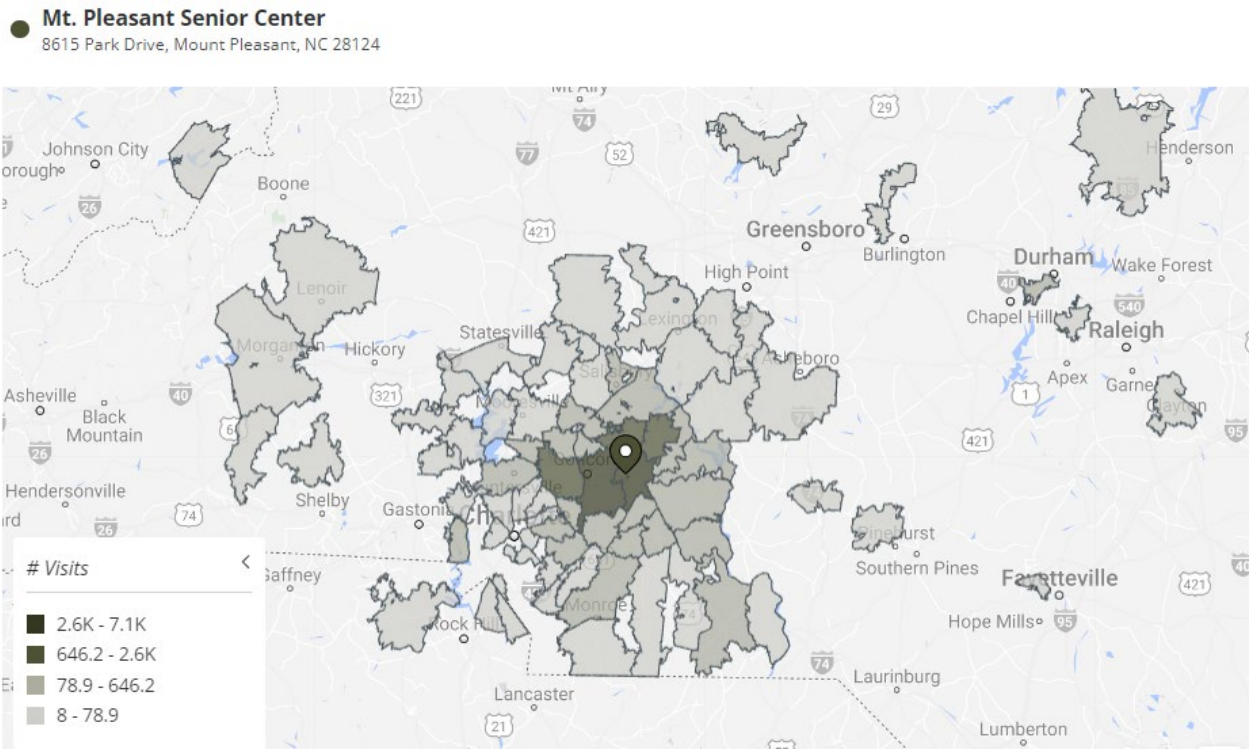
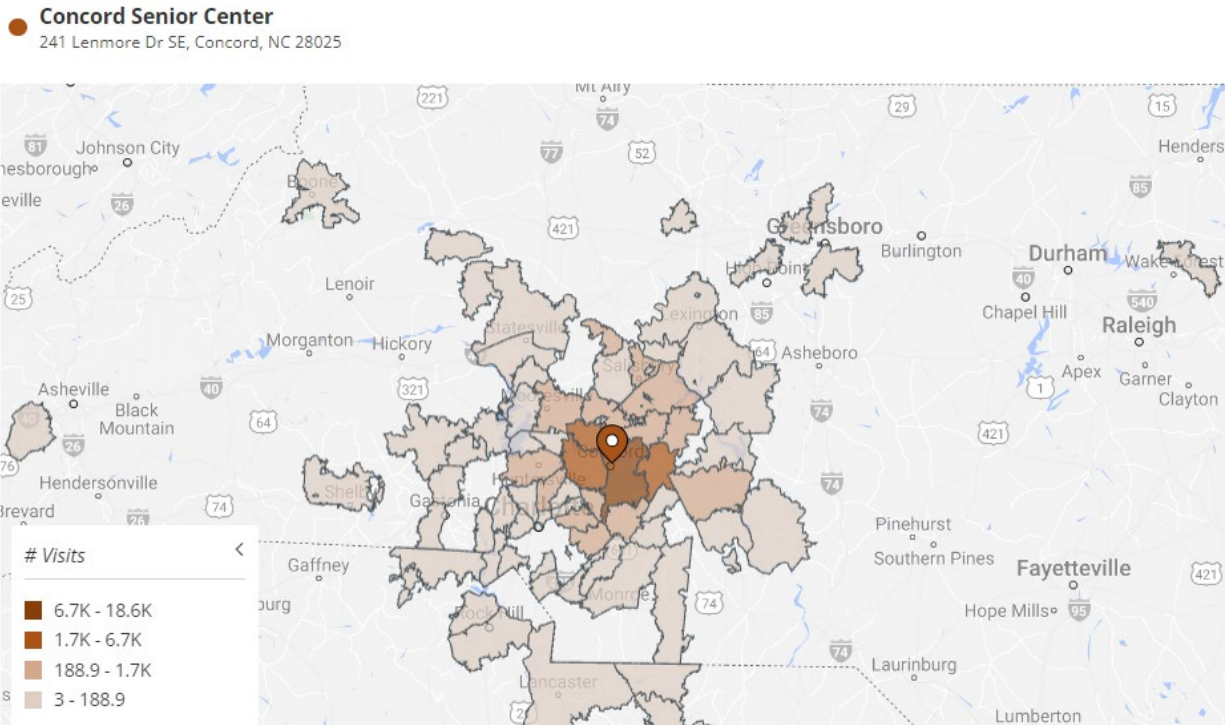


Figure 68: Concord Senior Center



Visitor Journey

Figures 69 through 74 offer insights into where visitors are going before and after visiting a park or facility. Most visitors across all locations are traveling from or to work, home, or restaurants. These insights can be particularly helpful when considering sponsorships or concessions at each park.

Figure 69: Camp T.N. Spencer Park Visitor Journey

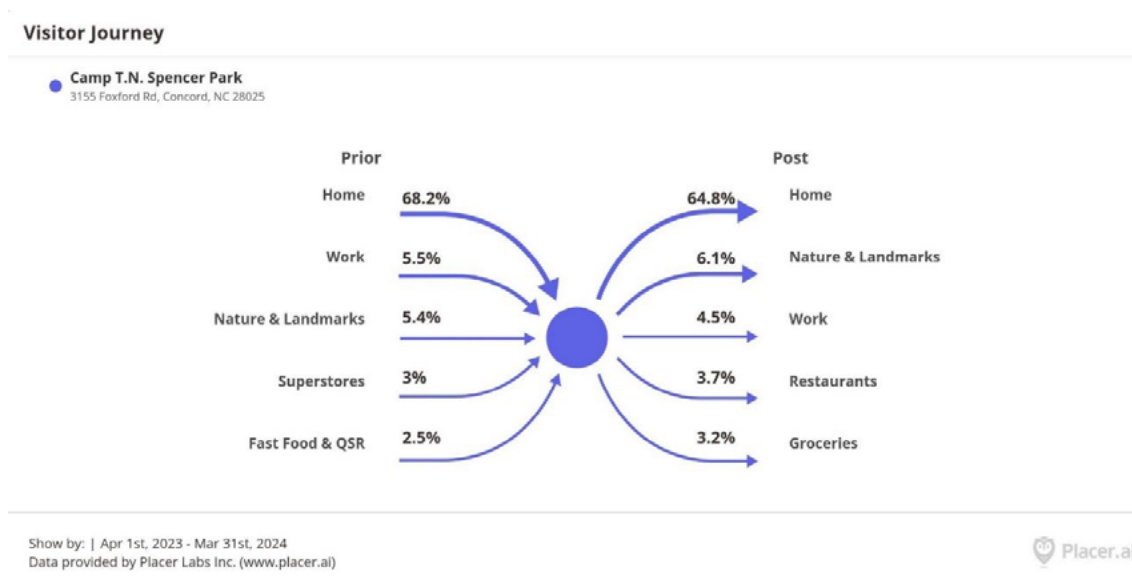


Figure 70: Frank Liske Park Visitor Journey

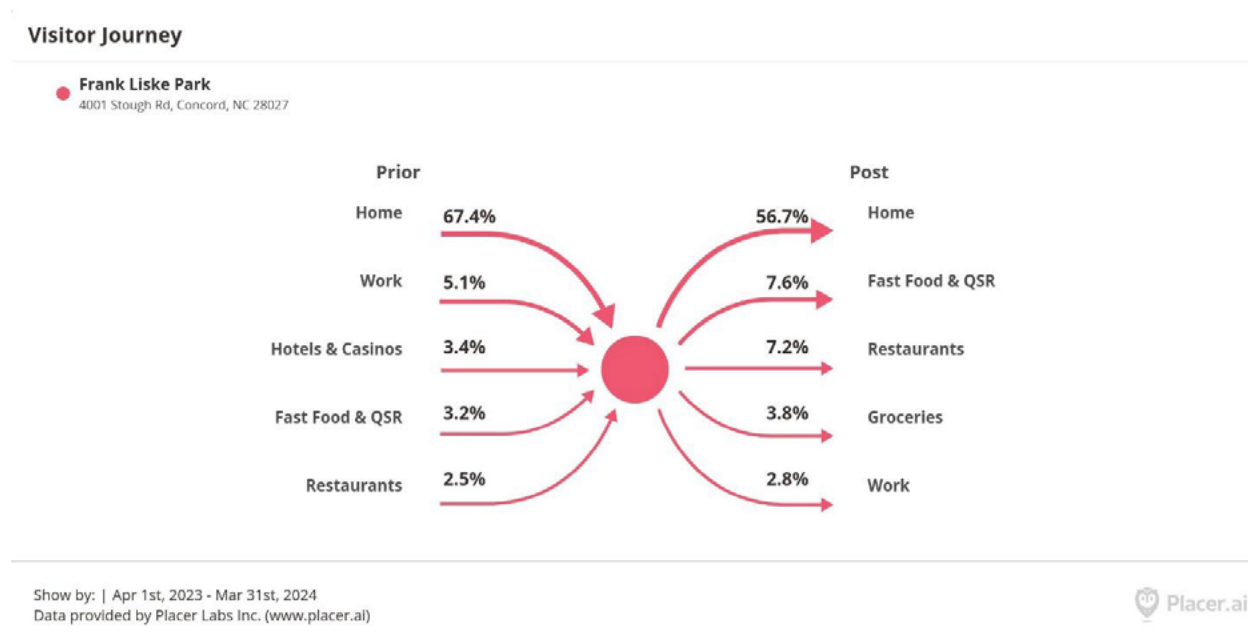


Figure 71: Rob Wallace Park Visitor Journey

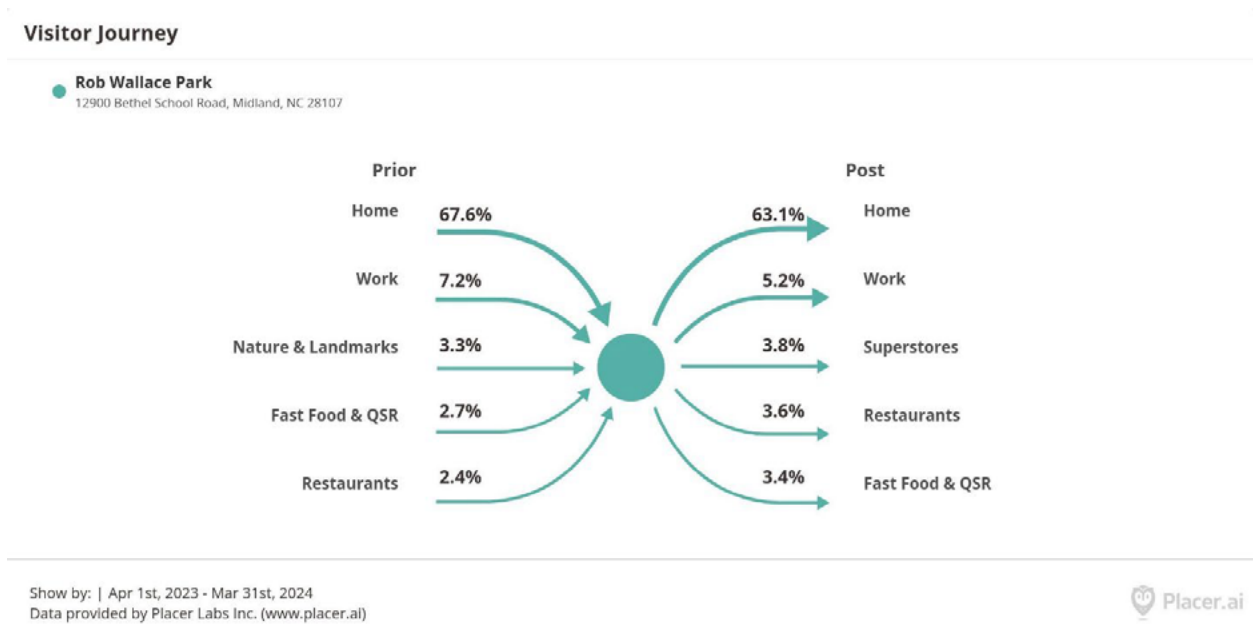


Figure 72: Vietnam Veterans Park Visitor Journey

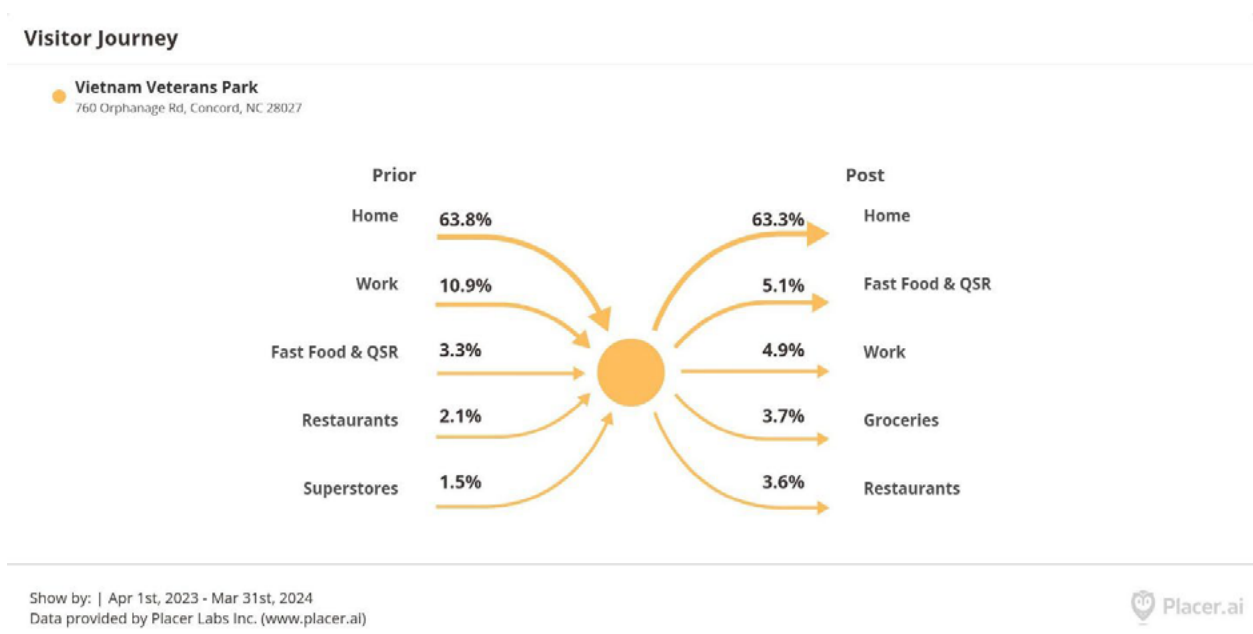


Figure 73: Mt. Pleasant Senior Center Visitor Journey

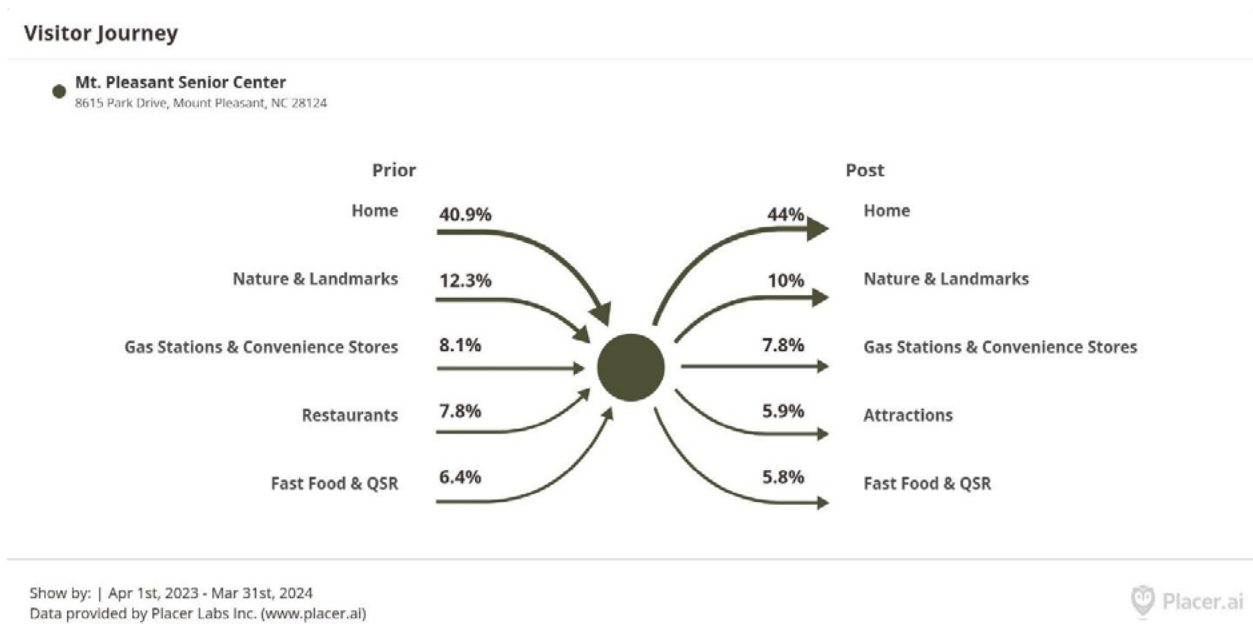
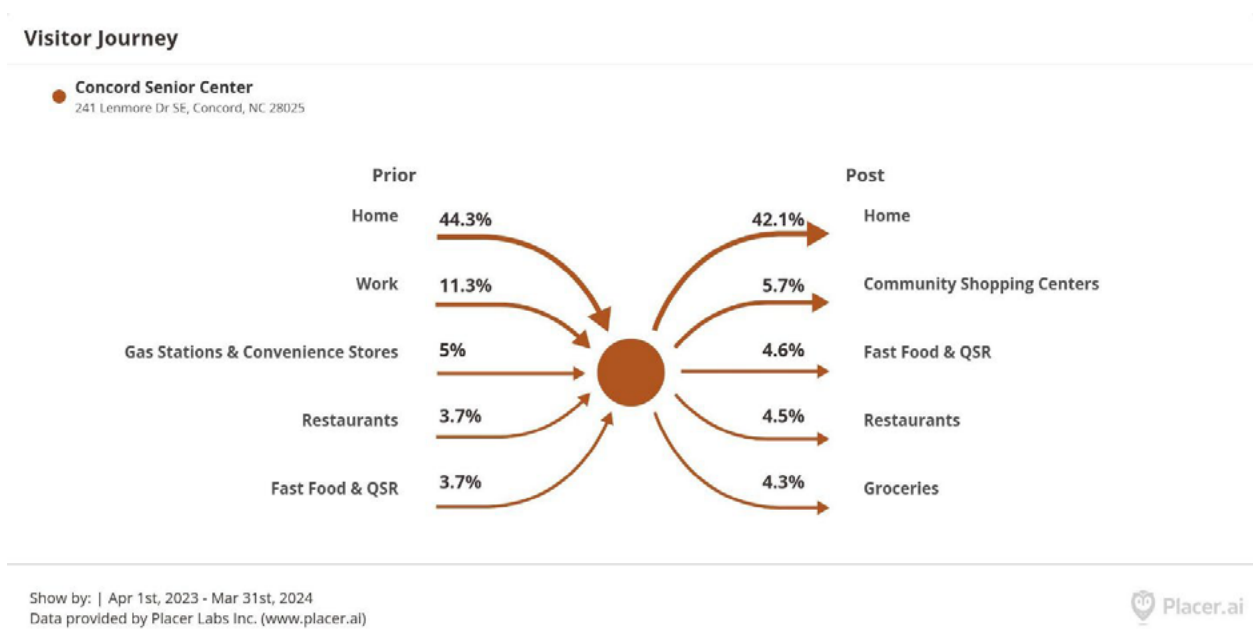


Figure 74: Concord Senior Center Visitor Journey



Conclusion

This data analysis can provide Cabarrus County's Active Living and Parks Department valuable insights into visitation trends and behaviors across its parks and facilities over the past 12 months.

Frank Liske Park emerged as the most popular location, attracting more than 450,000 visitors annually since 2021. Concord Senior Center has had the fewest number of visitors since 2021.

The analysis of visitation trends by month, day, and hour demonstrated consistent patterns across each facility and park. Saturdays were the busiest days for each location—except for Concord Senior Center which saw peak attendance on Thursdays. Visitors most often frequent parks in the afternoon between 2 and 7 p.m.

Understanding the average length of stay offers insight into visitor engagement and preferences. A typical visitor will spend between 74 to 175 minutes at a park or 71 to 93 minutes at a senior center. ALP can use this information in a variety of ways:

- Predict staffing needs at each location.
- Help schedule events or determine the need for maintenance due to high visitor attendance.
- Identify concession opportunities.
- Partner with local restaurants and retailers for sponsorship or advertising.

Additionally, understanding the geographical origin of visitors can assist ALP with targeted marketing and outreach strategies. Most visitors are coming from 10 to 30 miles away, with many coming from the 28025, 28027, 28107, and 28124 ZIP codes.

Cabarrus County can leverage this information to enhance the visitor experience and optimize park and facility management and maintenance strategies. Some suggestions for ALP based on the data include:

- Developing targeted marketing campaigns to communities within a 10- to 30-mile radius.
- Hosting events during non-peak attendance hours/days to attract more visitors on quiet days or hosting events during peak attendance hours when visitors are likely more available.
- Optimizing amenities and services to align with peak attendance times, including performing routine maintenance during high visitation hours.
- Using visitor demographics and preferences to guide program and facility development as well as resource allocation.

Trends

Introduction

To understand the future of Cabarrus County, BerryDunn examined current and future recreation programming trends, levels of interest, and participation in various activities, relevant to ALP. This report provides insights into those evolving needs and preferences of the community and focuses on local and national recreation trends. These include:

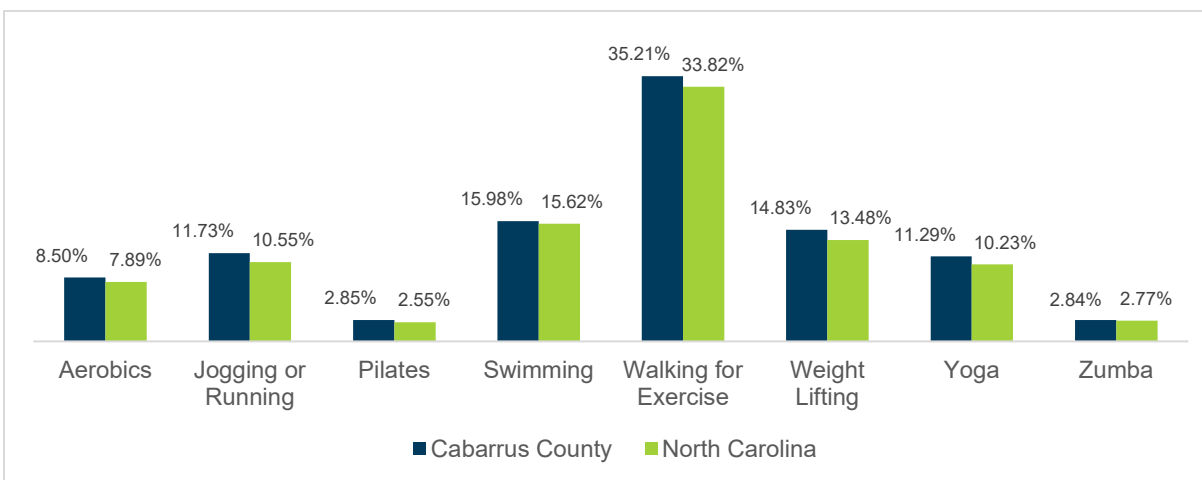
- Overall sports participation trends, with a focus on senior programming
- Top trending sports and five-year growth
- Estimated local adult participation for fitness and sports
- Inactive aspirational activities by age (youth to seniors)

This information will help ALP determine how they can further support Cabarrus County residents in the future and identify any gaps not filled by the towns and cities throughout the county.

Estimated Local Adult Participation for Fitness and Sports

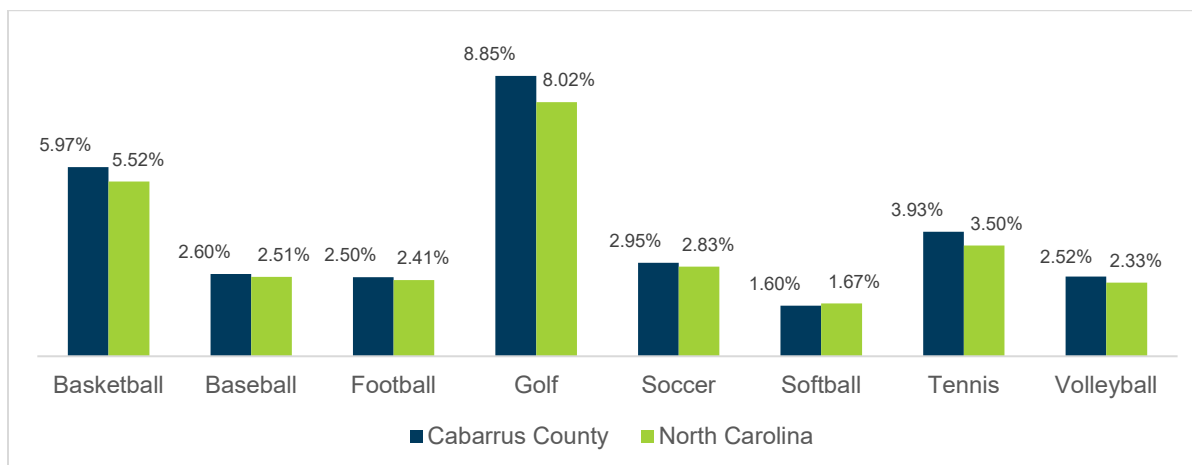
Data from ArcGIS Business Analyst shows comparative participation data for adult residents of Cabarrus County and the state of North Carolina, 25 years and older. For general fitness activities, walking for exercise, swimming, and weightlifting were the activities with the most participation for the County and State.

Figure 75: Local Participation in Fitness Activities



Sport participation for adults 25 and older was highest in Cabarrus County and North Carolina for golf, basketball, and tennis. Some sports, such as futsal and pickleball—which will likely also be high on the list—are not include because ArcGIS Business Analyst does not currently capture those sports.

Figure 76: Local Participation in Sport Activities



Estimated Local Recreation Expenditures

The average annual expenditure on individual membership fees for social, recreation, and/or health clubs is estimated to be \$288.97 and \$239.53 annually for the County and State, totaling over \$26 million and \$1 billion respectively. Additional information regarding amounts spent on fees for participant sports, recreational lessons, tickets to parks and museums are detailed below.

Table 15: Estimated Annual Average Recreational Expenditures in Cabarrus County

	Cabarrus County	North Carolina
Social/Recreation/Health Clubs Membership Fees	\$288.97	\$239.53
Participant Sports (Excluding Travel Fees)	\$125.18	\$103.06
Tickets to Parks or Museums	\$30.88	\$25.85
Fees for Recreational Lessons	\$146.58	\$114.79
Sports/Rec/Exercise Equipment	\$307.23	\$262.79
Admission to Sports Events Excluding Travel	\$62.33	\$50.53
Other Sports Equipment	\$11.05	\$12.02

Table 16: Estimated Total Recreation Expenditures in Cabarrus County

	Cabarrus County	North Carolina
Social/Recreation/Health Clubs Membership	\$25,706,582	\$1,033,212,758
Fees for Participant Sports (Excluding Travel)	\$11,135,456	\$444,523,000
Tickets to Parks or Museums	\$2,747,329	\$111,513,056
Fees for Recreational Lessons	\$5,544,655	\$217,955,199
Sports/Rec/Exercise Equipment	\$13,039,846	\$495,139,269
Admission to Sports Events Excluding Travel	\$27,330,669	\$1,133,526,965
Other Sports Equipment	\$983,283	\$51,852,882

Inactive American's Aspirational Activities by Age

To understand the market potential for Cabarrus County, BerryDunn reviewed the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) Report. This report provides data related to what inactive Americans were most interested in participating in by age. Cabarrus County has a median age of 38.7. According to SFIA's "inactive aspirational activities by age," the top activities for most Cabarrus County's residents (falling in the category of 35 – 44 years) are likely fishing, camping, working out with weights/machines, and running/jogging, as outlined below.

Table 17: SFIA Inactive Aspirational Activities by Age

6 ĩ 12 Years of Age		13 ĩ 17 Years of Age		18 ĩ 24 Years of Age	
1	Fishing	1	Fishing	1	Working Out With Weights
2	Camping	2	Bicycling	2	Running/Jogging
3	Running/Jogging	3	Tennis	3	Cardio Fitness
4	Soccer	4	Swimming for Fitness	4	Camping
5	Basketball	5	Shooting	5	Hiking
6	Swimming for Fitness	6	Working Out Using Machines	6	Working Out Using Machines
7	Hiking	7	Hunting	7	Yoga
8	Tackle Football	8	Camping	8	Basketball
9	Hunting	9	Hiking	9	Fishing
10	Boxing	10	Running/Jogging	10	Hunting
25 – 34 Years of Age		35 ĩ 44 Years of Age		45 ĩ 54 Years of Age	
1	Fishing	1	Fishing	1	Fishing
2	Running/Jogging	2	Camping	2	Camping
3	Camping	3	Cardio Fitness	3	Cardio Fitness
4	Working Out Using Machines	4	Working Out With Weights	4	Working Out Using Machines
5	Cardio Fitness	5	Working Out Using Machines	5	Working Out With Weights
6	Hiking	6	Running/Jogging	6	Shooting
7	Working Out With Weights	7	Hiking	7	Hiking
8	Shooting	8	Yoga	8	Yoga
9	Yoga	9	Swimming for Fitness	9	Hunting
10	Soccer	10	Hunting	10	Running/Jogging
55 – 64 Years of Age		65+ Years of Age			
1	Fishing	1	Fishing		
2	Camping	2	Camping		
3	Swimming for Fitness	3	Swimming for Fitness		
4	Working Out With Weights	4	Working Out Using Machines		
5	Working Out Using Machines	5	Working Out With Weights		
6	Cardio Fitness	6	Shooting		
7	Yoga	7	Cardio Fitness		
8	Hiking	8	Hiking		
9	Shooting	9	Yoga		
10	Hunting	10	Hunting		

Recreational Trends Highlights

This section details the trends recognized on a regional or national level. The information contained in this report can be used by staff when planning new programs, considering additions to parks and new park amenities, and creating the annual budget and capital improvement plan. Understanding trends can also help an organization reach new audiences and determine where to direct additional data collection efforts within an organization.

Pickleball

A significant trend in park planning is the incorporation of pickleball facilities in response to the sport's rapid rise in popularity. To meet the need, some agencies are addressing the trend by repurposing existing spaces such as tennis courts or incorporating pickleball into their capital improvement plans for their own recreational or competitive sports.⁸ One challenge communities are dealing with is the sound associated with playing. In some areas, agencies are conducting sound studies while planning for new courts and others are looking for ways to reduce noise.

Tennis

Repurposing traditional tennis facilities presents a myriad of opportunities for innovative uses, offering new avenues for engagement, revenue generation, and community interaction. While certain adaptations may necessitate additional resources or investments, many transformations can be implemented with minimal costs. Here are some primary strategies being employed to reinvigorate tennis spaces and attract a broader audience:

Cardio Tennis: Integrating fitness elements into traditional tennis gameplay, Cardio Tennis offers a dynamic workout experience that combines aerobic exercise with skill development. By catering to health-conscious individuals seeking a fun and engaging fitness alternative, Cardio Tennis revitalizes tennis facilities and attracts a diverse range of participants.

Tennis Events and Social Gatherings: Tennis facilities can serve as versatile venues for hosting various events, including tournaments, exhibitions, and social gatherings. Capitalizing on the picturesque surroundings and well-maintained amenities of tennis clubs, these events provide opportunities for community engagement and revenue generation.

Adaptive Tennis Programs: Embracing inclusivity, adaptive tennis programs cater to individuals with disabilities, offering modified gameplay and specialized equipment to accommodate diverse needs. By fostering a welcoming and supportive environment, tennis facilities can expand their reach and promote tennis as an accessible and inclusive sport.

⁸ Galvin, Gabby. February 2023. "Pickleball Is Booming. Here's How Cities Are Adapting to the Craze." *Smart Cities Dive*. Accessed December 14, 2023. <https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/news/how-cities-adapting-us-pickleball-craze/642125/>

Tennis Academies and Youth Development Programs: Investing in youth development initiatives and tennis academies nurtures the next generation of tennis talent while fostering a sense of community and camaraderie. By providing structured coaching, training, and competitive opportunities, tennis facilities can cultivate a vibrant tennis culture and secure their long-term viability.

Incorporating these innovative strategies enables tennis facilities to adapt to evolving trends, maximize their potential, and ensure their continued relevance in today's dynamic recreational landscape.

Cricket

In recent years, cricket has experienced a notable resurgence in the United States, fueled by a combination of factors. The nation's increasing diversity, with a significant influx of immigrants from cricket-playing countries, has infused the sport with enthusiasm and support in various communities. Moreover, the globalization of sports and advancements in media coverage have made cricket more accessible to American audiences, facilitating its growth in popularity.⁹ Cabarrus County residents have also started to express interest in Cricket, as one commissioner noted during the project kick-off.

The establishment of professional leagues like Major League Cricket (MLC) and Minor League Cricket (MiLC), alongside the proactive efforts of the United States of America Cricket Association (USACA), has further bolstered the sport's presence by organizing tournaments and enhancing infrastructure.

Additionally, grassroots development initiatives and the proliferation of cricket facilities across the country have provided more avenues for active participation, fostering a new generation of players and enthusiasts. Despite challenges posed by entrenched American sports and cricket's complex rules, ongoing efforts from cricket organizations, coupled with growing youth involvement and increased accessibility, suggest a promising trajectory for cricket in the United States. As cricket continues to carve out its place among the nation's sports scene, it holds the potential to become a widely recognized and celebrated sport across diverse communities in the years ahead.

Disc Golf

Disc golf is exhibiting notable trends in 2024¹⁰ that are reshaping the sport's landscape. These trends include explosive growth in participation, with more individuals embracing the sport due to its accessible courses and low-cost equipment. Manufacturers are continually evolving disc technology, introducing new materials and designs to enhance disc performance.

⁹ Alano, J. (2023) Is cricket gaining popularity as a sport in the United States?, Fan Arch. Available at: <https://fanarch.com/blogs/fan-arch/is-cricket-gaining-popularity-as-a-sport-in-the-united-states>

¹⁰ Reports, V.M. (2024) Top 7 trends in the Disc Golf Market, Verified Market Reports® | Get Market Analysis And Research Reports. Available at: <https://www.verifiedmarketreports.com/blog/top-7-trends-in-the-disc-golf-market/>

The professionalization of disc golf is also on the rise, with competitive circuits attracting top-tier players and sponsors, leading to increased visibility and prize money. Cabarrus County is embracing the increased interest and has disc golf courses at several of its parks.

Course design is evolving to offer diverse challenges, incorporating elevation changes and natural features to enhance player experience. Sustainability and eco-friendly practices are becoming integral, with a focus on environmental conservation in course design and tournament operations. Community-building efforts aim to foster inclusivity, organizing events for players of all ages and backgrounds. Technological integration is enhancing player experience through mobile apps and GPS technology, providing real-time statistics and connecting players globally.

Fishing

In 2022, the Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation (RBFF) Special Report on Fishing¹¹ revealed that 54.5 million Americans, aged six and above, participated in recreational fishing, indicating a 4% increase from the previous year. Notably, fishing engagement among Hispanic individuals in the same age group experienced a significant rise of approximately 45% over the past decade, specifically within freshwater environments. Furthermore, the report highlighted growth in female participation in freshwater fishing, with nearly 4 million more females engaging in these activities from 2012 – 2022. Females constituted 36% of total anglers and represented 42% of first-time participants, emphasizing their increasing presence in freshwater fishing pursuits. The report also underscored the communal nature of freshwater fishing, with only 18% of anglers typically fishing alone, indicating a preference for shared experiences in freshwater environments. Additionally, the data reiterated the importance of introducing fishing at a young age, with 86% of current participants having their first fishing experience in freshwater settings before the age of 12. These insights highlight the evolving landscape of recreational angling within inland waterways.

In addition to fishing available at Camp TN Spencer Park, Frank Liske Park, and Rob Wallace's pond.

¹¹ 2022 special report on Fishing. Available at: <https://www.takemefishing.org/getmedia/155fcbd1-716a-41e5-ad5b-1450b76b9162/2022-Special-Report-on-Fishing.pdf>

Camping

A 2023 Camping Report¹² reveals five significant trends shaping the camping landscape. Firstly, there is a notable increase in the difficulty of securing available campsites, largely attributed to a surge in new campers during the pandemic and the growing practice of advanced booking. Secondly, the allure of "glamping" is on the rise, with more campers, particularly those with higher household incomes, opting for luxurious camping experiences. Thirdly, there is a growing trend of remote work campers, indicating a shift toward blending work with outdoor experiences. Additionally, solo camping is becoming increasingly popular, with a notable rise in the number of individuals embarking on camping trips alone, often accompanied by pets. Finally, camping costs are on the rise, as indicated by a significant percentage of property managers raising rates, particularly affecting avid campers despite their relatively lower household incomes. These trends collectively reflect the evolving landscape of camping in the United States.

Trail Inclusivity and Accessibility

Many organizations, such as the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA), are working to promote trail and hiking accessibility for all individuals. The IWA, along with other associations, emphasizes the importance of designing and managing outdoor spaces with inclusivity in mind. One recommendation to achieve inclusivity in trails is to design and clearly designate Multi-Access and Challenging Access trails. Multi-Access trails are wide and flat Level 1 trails with no obstacles, such as steps or gates, and allow access with regular footwear, wheelchairs, or bicycles. In areas not physically possible to modify yet still accessible by all, Challenging Access signs should mark Level 2 trails. These trails may feature narrower paths, slightly rougher terrain, and steeper gradients. Level 2 trails will be better suited for fitter individuals.¹³

¹² Mckee, S. and (Tns), T.G. (2023) 5 camping trends of 2023: More campers, more money, more problems, Arizona Daily Star. Available at: https://tucson.com/travel/5-camping-trends-of-2023-more-campers-more-money-more-problems/article_e37b7907-110e-5e02-813c-1d5872aed08c.html

¹³ Trails, Greenways & Public Parks. (n.d.). Irish Wheelchair Association. Retrieved February 24, 2024, from <https://www.iwa.ie/access-guidelines/great-outdoors-access-guidelines/4-trails-greenways-public-parks/#4point1>

Community Gardens

Communities around the country are building community gardens for a number of far-reaching environmental and social impacts. According to GreenLeaf Communities, which supports scientific research in environmental and human health, community gardens offer benefits including:

Environmental	Social
• Reducing waste through composting • Improving water infiltration • Increasing biodiversity of animals and plants • Improve air and soil quality	• Increase intake of vegetables and fruits • Promotes relaxation and improves mental health • Increases physical activity • Reduces risk of obesity and obesity-related diseases

Many studies show that community gardens can improve the well-being of the entire community by bringing residents together and creating social ties. This activity can reduce crime, particularly if gardens are utilized in vacant lots. In fact, vacant land has the opposite effect of community gardens, including increased litter, chemical and tire dumping, drug use, and decreased property values. By creating community gardens, neighborhoods can teach useful skills in gardening, food production, selling, and business. The NRPA published an in-depth guide to building a community garden in parks through the [Grow Your Park Initiative](#).

Equestrian Trails

Upcoming trends in equestrian trail development emphasize sustainability, inclusivity, safety, and technological innovation. Stakeholders are increasingly focused on integrating eco-friendly materials and practices to minimize environmental impact while ensuring the safety and accessibility of trails for riders of all skill levels. Inclusive community engagement is paramount, with efforts aimed at accommodating diverse user needs and fostering a sense of belonging among trail enthusiasts. Additionally, the integration of new technologies, such as trail monitoring systems and mobile applications, offers opportunities to enhance trail management and user experiences. These trends reflect a broader commitment to environmental conservation, equitable access, and the promotion of enjoyable, inclusive trail networks for equestrian enthusiasts and the community at large.¹⁴

¹⁴ Current and future trends in equestrian trails Current and Future Trends in Equestrian Trails - American Trails. Available at: <https://www.americantrails.org/training/current-and-future-trends-in-equestrian-trails>

Trends for Adults Ages 55 and Over

Lifelong Learning

A Pew Research Center survey¹⁵ found that 73% of adults consider themselves lifelong learners. Do-it-yourself project classes and programs that focus on becoming a more “well-rounded” person are popular. Phrases such as “how-to” can be added to the agency website’s search engine optimization, as consumers now turn to the internet as their first source of information regarding how-to projects. Safeguarding online privacy is also a trending course.

Fitness and Wellness

Programs such as yoga, Pilates, tai chi, balance training, chair exercises, and others continue to be popular with the older generation.

Encore Programming

This is a program area for baby boomers who are soon to be retired and focuses on a broad range of programs to prepare people for transitions into retirement activities. Popular programs for the 55+ market include fitness and wellness (specifically yoga, mindfulness, tai chi, relaxation, personal training, etc.), drawing and painting, photography, languages, writing, computers and technology, social media, cooking, mahjong, card games, volunteering, and what to do during retirement.

Specialized Tours

Participants are looking for more day trips that highlight unique local experiences or historical themes. For example, a focus on authentic food, guided night walks, bike tours, concentration on a specific artist’s work, and ghost walks are among the themes being sought out.

Creative Endeavors

Improv classes promote creative endeavors. Workshops and groups help seniors play, laugh, and let loose while practicing mental stimulation, memory development, and flexibility.

¹⁵ Horrigan, John B. Pew Research Center. March 22, 2016. “Lifelong Learning and Technology: A large majority of Americans seek extra knowledge for personal and work-related reasons. Digital technology plays a notable role in these knowledge pursuits, but place-based learning remains vital to many and differences in education and income are a hallmark of people’s learning activities”. Pew Research Center.org. Accessed September 14, 2023.
<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2016/03/22/lifelong-learning-and-technology/>

Trends for Adults Ages 25 – 54

Aerobic Activities

For most age groups, swimming for fitness and weight training are the two most frequently mentioned activities in which people indicate interest. Running, walking, and biking for fitness continue to show strong and consistent growth. A good balance of equipment and classes is necessary to keep consistent with trends.

Fun Fitness

“Fun” fitness is a current trend. Exercises such as “P90x,” “Insanity,” and “CrossFit” have proven that a lot of equipment is not required to get fit. Since these programs have become popular, newer versions have become available, some cutting the time it takes to look and feel fit in half. These types of classes have been growing and will continue to grow in popularity at recreation departments and fitness centers.

Group Cycling

Group cycling continues in popularity as the younger fitness enthusiasts embrace this high-performance group exercise activity as well as program variations that are developed to attract the beginner participant.

Yoga

While Pilates has shown an incredible 10-year growth trend, the past 3 years have seen a decline in participation. Perhaps participation migrated to yoga, as participation is up across all levels for the year. Yoga is more class based, while Pilates is more of an individual activity. Millennial fitness participants (ages 25 – 39) are showing a higher propensity to choose group-oriented programs.

Cornhole (or Bags)

Cornhole is a low-impact, low-cost activity that can be played by people of all ages. Young adults are signing up for leagues (that can be held indoors or outdoors and are offered all year long). It does not take any skill, and it is a social activity. Although it can be offered recreationally, some competitive leagues are offered as well.

Community and Special Events

Community-wide events and festivals often act as essential place-making activities for residents, economic drivers, and urban brand builders. According to the 2023 Eventbrite Trends Report, the following trends are expected to impact event planners and community builders in the coming years:¹⁶

Economic Considerations but Continued Interest: Inflation and the economy are concerns for many, yet most people do not plan to cut their event spending. Event organizers are largely maintaining ticket prices.

Music's Essential Role: Music events, especially at local and independent venues, will continue to be a favorite. There is a willingness to pay higher prices for favorite performers.

Value of Connection and Immersion: Events counter social isolation and bring joy and feelings of connection. Immersive experiences, which blend music, video, live performers, and augmented reality, are trending.

Preference for Familiarity: People prefer familiar events close to home, attending with friends, and seeing familiar performers. This could be due to post-pandemic cautiousness or cost considerations.

Experiences Over Material Gifts: People are preferring experiences over physical gifts, emphasizing intimate personal connections that events offer.

Catering to Sensitivities: Many people have sensitivities to loud noises and crowds. Event organizers should consider sensory rooms and quiet spaces to allow places to recharge without the noise.

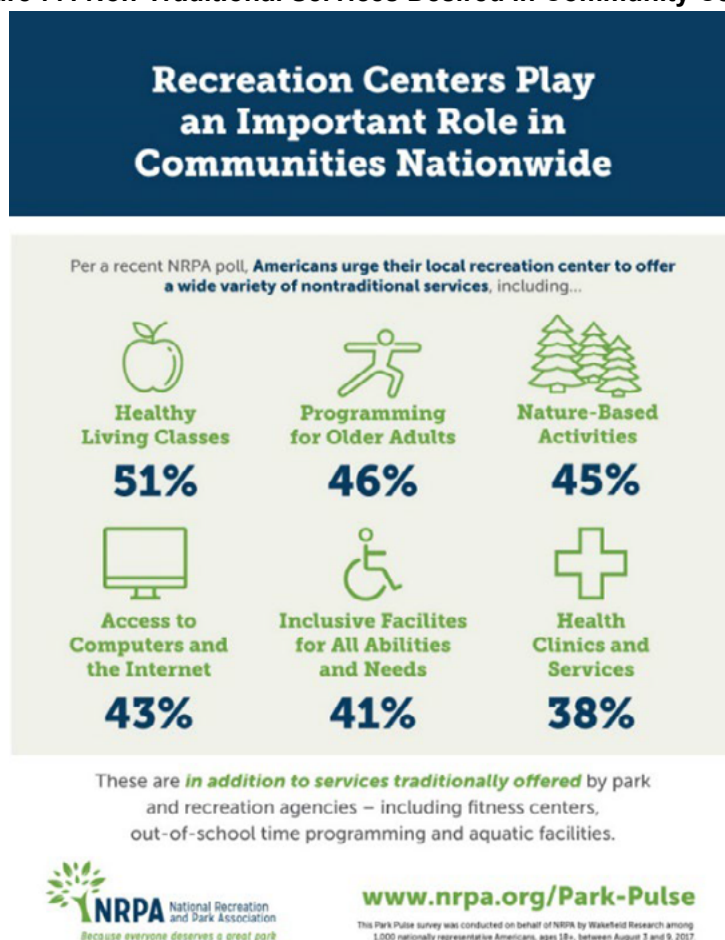
Virtual Events Remain Relevant: While live events are making a comeback, virtual events are not disappearing. The convenience, cost-effectiveness, and comfort that online events offer still appeal to a large segment.

¹⁶ Eventbrite. *2023 Event Trends Report*. Eventbrite. [2023 Event Trends Report - Eventbrite Blog](#)

Community Center Design & Creating Opportunities for All

Parks and recreation agencies serve their communities in many ways; one of the primary facilities that many agencies operate are community centers. These facilities may host a variety of amenities, such as sport courts, multipurpose rooms, fitness gyms, aquatic facilities, and much more. There has been a shift from traditional fitness and general activities in community centers to a more modern approach, which includes healthy living classes, computer classes/internet access, and older adult transportation. Data from NRPA indicates that recreation centers play an important role in communities across the country. The infographic in Figure 77 demonstrates the potential for non-traditional community services.¹⁷

Figure 77: Non-Traditional Services Desired in Community Centers



Library Integration into Community Centers

¹⁷ NRPA. *Recreation Centers Play an Important Role in Communities*. National Recreation and Park Association. Accessed September 2019. [Recreation Centers Play an Important Role in Communities | Park Pulse | National Recreation and Park Association \(nrpa.org\)](https://www.nrpa.org/Park-Pulse)

In response to the evolving needs of modern communities, libraries are undergoing significant transformations, positioning themselves as dynamic hubs of education, connection, and engagement. To remain relevant amidst the proliferation of digital platforms and instant access to information, libraries are adopting innovative strategies to reach new users and enhance community involvement. These include:

- Expanding digital offerings to encompass diverse formats and languages.
- Facilitating convenience and accessibility through “hold pickup lockers” in community spaces.
- Adding concessions and coffee shops.
- Fostering community connections via shared reading experiences and watch parties enabled by digital services.
- Developing maker spaces.
- Adding equipment lending libraries.
- “Community swaps” for items like greeting Cards and other unused materials.

Furthermore, libraries are leveraging technology to extend their hours and streamline operations, ensuring equitable access and efficient service delivery. By prioritizing high-value programming and embracing technological advancements, libraries are redefining their roles as essential pillars of community connectivity and enrichment in the digital age¹⁸.

Cultural and Bilingual Events

Parks and recreational spaces are evolving into vibrant hubs of cultural exchange, where diversity is celebrated through a tapestry of cultural and bilingual events. These initiatives go beyond traditional programming, embracing the rich culture of the community. Cultural events showcase a variety of traditions, art forms, and cuisines, creating an inclusive space where residents can connect with and appreciate the cultural diversity within their community. By incorporating bilingual elements into events, Parks become an accessible platform for all.

¹⁸ Five ways your library can increase community engagement. (2023). Retrieved from <https://www.bibliotheca.com/library-trends-five-ways-your-library-can-increase-community-engagement/#:~:text=The%20trend%20is%20clear%3A%20libraries,in%20new%20and%20enriching%20activities.>

Opportunities for All

There is growing recognition that access to parks and recreational spaces is not equitable. According to the Urban Institute¹⁹, in many cities across the United States, there are fewer quality parks in proximity to low-income residents and communities of color. As a result, many large cities have started to establish data-driven criteria to guide investment in public recreation to improve equity. The County Parks Alliance²⁰ identified five common elements that are critical to developing, implementing, and evaluating a data-driven equitable investment strategy:

1. Leverage leadership from one or more sectors. Strong leadership is critical for making the case for creating and implementing an equitable approach. In addition to various governmental bodies, involving local foundations and those from the nonprofit sector can help to bring the need for equity into focus.
2. Define equity goals and collect data to support the goals. Data collection and analysis must be reliable, consistent, transparent, and guided by agreed-upon equity goals. The data collected in each County may vary but often includes statistics on poverty, crime, health, youth population, park access, unemployment, past capital and maintenance investment, and access to parks.
3. Educate and engage the community on equity data. Educating all levels of government, residents, nonprofits, foundations, and the private sector on data findings is important for building awareness and buy-in, as well as a commitment to implementation. Extensive outreach and engagement are critical to help ensure the data aligns with reality and that the process builds ownership of the results.
4. Establish and sustain equitable funding practices. A variety of strategies can be implemented to help ensure that equity becomes a reality, including new ordinances, voter-approved measures, strategic plans, and internal reorganization.
5. Institute consistent tracking and evaluation procedures. Tracking new funding initiatives with an oversight committee that is required to produce an audit, reports, or study results helps to ensure consistent implementation over time.

¹⁹ NRPA. Recreation Centers Play an Important Role in Communities. National Recreation and Park Association. Accessed September 2019. [Is COVID-19 Uncovering Park Inequities?](https://www.nrpa.org/COVID-19/Uncovering-Park-Inequities/) (nrpa.org)

²⁰ City Parks Alliance. July 1, 2019. *Investing in Equitable Urban Park Systems: Case Studies & Recommendations*. City Parks Alliance. [Investing in Equitable Urban Park Systems: Case Studies & Recommendations - City Parks Alliance](#)

As the recreation field continues to function within a more diverse society, race and ethnicity will become increasingly important in every aspect of the profession. More than ever, recreation professionals will be expected to work with, and have significant knowledge and understanding of, individuals from many cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. According to the 2020 Outdoor Participation Report²¹, participation rates among diverse groups are evolving quickly but still do not reflect the diverse populations throughout the country. Black Americans represent approximately 12.4% of the population but only 9.4% of outdoor participants. Hispanics, who make up almost 18% of the population, only make up 11.6% of outdoor participants. These two groups are those that are particularly underrepresented, although they are rising over time.

Fitness Trends

Each year, the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) conducts a survey of worldwide fitness trends. Now in its 18th year, the ACSM circulates an electronic survey to thousands of fitness professionals around the world to determine health and fitness trends. The list below includes the top 10 fitness trends for 2024.²²

Wearable Technology

Wearable technology, which includes activity trackers, smartwatches, heart rate monitors, GPS tracking devices, and smart eyeglasses (designed to show maps and track activity), has been one of the top three trends since 2016. These devices can track heart rate, calories, sitting time, and much more. Wearable technology is estimated to be a \$95 billion industry.

Worksite Health Promotion

Worksite health promotion, ranked #2 in current trends, reflects a growing focus on health and well-being, crucial for workplace productivity given that Americans spend about a third of their lives at work. Employers can capitalize on this by fostering health-promoting behaviors such as physical activity and preventive screenings, leading to reduced insurance expenses, heightened productivity, and better mental health. Strategies like providing fitness facilities, organizing athletic leagues, and offering health education courses exemplify worksite health promotion initiatives.

²¹Outdoor Foundation. 2021 Outdoor Participation Trends Report. 2021. "Participation rates by ethnicity." Outdoor Industry. Access 9/14/2023. <https://outdoorindustry.org/>

²² Newsome, A. M. (n.d.). 2024 ACSM Worldwide Fitness Trends: Future Directions of ACSM. *Health & Fitness Journal*. Retrieved from <https://journals.lww.com/acsm-healthfitness/pages/articleviewer.aspx?year=2024&issue=01000&article=00007&type=Fulltext>

Fitness Programs for Older Adults

The rise of fitness program options for older adults to #3 underscores the importance of catering to the needs of a rapidly growing aging population, with a 38% increase in Americans aged 65 and older since 2010, and a projection of continued growth through 2040. Aging heightens susceptibility to chronic illness, cognitive decline, and falls, making regular aerobic and muscle-strengthening exercises critical for mitigating these risks and preserving independence and quality of life as people age. Providing diverse fitness programs tailored to older adults can significantly contribute to their overall well-being and longevity.

Exercise for Weight Loss

Exercise for weight loss rising to #4 acknowledges the crucial role of regular physical activity in enhancing metabolic function and decreasing body fat, emphasizing a holistic approach that combines aerobic exercises, strength training, and dietary adjustments to establish a caloric deficit. By preserving lean body mass during weight loss endeavors, exercise facilitates sustained and lasting reductions in weight, underlining its significance in long-term weight management strategies. Recognizing exercise as an integral component in weight loss endeavors underscores its importance beyond mere calorie expenditure, positioning it as a cornerstone of sustainable and effective weight management approaches.

Reimbursement for Qualified Exercise Professionals (QEPs)

This trend represents a shift from previous years' advocacy for licensure for QEPs, which faced significant policy-level obstacles, making it less feasible for the fitness industry globally. Instead, emphasis is now on reimbursement for services provided by QEPs, such as personal trainers and exercise physiologists, acknowledging their role within the healthcare continuum. Initiatives like the ACSM Task Force formed in 2021 aim to advocate for policy changes enabling insurance billing for patient services by QEPs, aligning with efforts to enhance physical activity outcomes and overall quality of life.

Employing Certified Exercise Professionals

Employing certified professionals remains a top trend in the health and fitness industry, with companies recognizing the significance of hiring trained individuals to lead fitness programs. Accredited certifications signal to consumers that professionals possess proficient knowledge to assist them in achieving their fitness goals safely. These certified professionals adhere to minimum skill levels within their scope of practice, reducing injury risks for consumers and minimizing liability for employers. Continuously maintaining accredited certifications through ongoing education is crucial, ensuring professionals stay updated with industry advancements.

Mobile Exercise Apps

Mobile exercise apps represent a significant facet of the digital technology trend category, having first appeared in the top 20 at number 17 in 2016 as "Smartphone exercise apps." These apps offer flexibility in program delivery, impacting the market with diverse options and proving effective in boosting users' physical activity levels. They enable users to track exercises, receive performance feedback, and often integrate social support mechanisms and behavioral skill acquisition tips, aligning with health behavior change theory principles. Mobile exercise apps cater to the modern lifestyle, providing convenient and personalized solutions for enhancing fitness and well-being.

Exercise for Mental Health

Programming exercise for improved mental health is gaining recognition as individuals increasingly realize the profound impact of movement on cognition and mood. Mental health, encompassing emotional, psychological, and social well-being, affects approximately one in every eight individuals globally according to the World Health Organization (WHO), highlighting the widespread significance of this trend. Regular exercise emerges as a protective factor against mental illness, with physical activity shown to enhance mood and overall mental well-being. Resources provided by ACSM empower exercise professionals to integrate physical activity effectively to support mental health, underscoring the importance of exercise as a holistic approach to wellness.

Youth Athletic Development

This trend emphasizes a youth training approach centered on enhancing motor skills, strength, and coordination, reflecting the growing popularity of facilities and programs like KidStrong[®] aimed at fostering confidence, social skills, and sports performance in children. These initiatives focus on teaching fundamental movement patterns and preparing young individuals for skill acquisition, underscoring the importance of specialized training for exercise professionals working with this demographic. Continued education or specialty training is essential for professionals to effectively cater to the unique needs of children and adolescents, ensuring safe and developmentally appropriate training practices.

Personal Training

Personal training continues to hold its position as a staple in the top 10 fitness trends list since its introduction in 2007, offering individuals one-on-one guidance encompassing fitness testing, goal establishment, and program execution. Consumers seeking effective exercise selection, safety protocols, and recovery techniques often find value in this personalized service. Exercise professionals equipped with nationally accredited credentials, such as those offered by ACSM, are well-prepared to cater to diverse client needs, underscoring the importance of professional certification for ensuring quality service delivery and client satisfaction.

Overall Nationwide Sports Participation Trends

This section aims to identify and analyze current trends in sports and recreation, with a particular focus on participation trends derived from the SFIA 2024 Report.²³ Understanding the latest trends in sports is crucial for ALP to effectively plan and develop programs and utilize space in a way that reflects participation data.



- Basketball is the most popular team sport with 29.7 million participants.
- Tennis is the most popular racquet sport with 23.8 million participants.
- Pickleball participation grew by 51.8% in 2023.
- Walking for fitness is the most prevalent form of aerobic exercise.
- Tai chi saw a 16.3% increase in participation in one year; however, yoga continues to lead in popularity for conditioning activities.
- Dance, step, and other choreographed exercises have grown by 3.3% since 2018, attracting 26.2 million participants each year.
- Ultimate Frisbee has experienced a significant decline in participation (-4.9% since 2018).
- Stationary cycling (group exercise) has been heavily impacted by at-home fitness equipment, declining by 6.2% in five years, with 6.2 million participants.

²³ SFIA. February 27, 2024. "SFIA's Topline Participation Report Shows Strong Positive Trends Across All Sports and Fitness Categories." *Sports & Fitness Industry Association*. [SFIA's Topline Participation Report Shows Strong Positive Trends Across All Sports and Fitness Categories](#)



CABARRUS COUNTY
Active Living & Parks