

Town of Cornelius 2005 - 2015 Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Master Plan

Cornelius, North Carolina



Prepared By Site Solutions
July 18, 2005



To: The Citizens of Cornelius

Gary Knox, Mayor

Jim Bensman, Town Commissioner

Hank Kahn, Town Commissioner

Susan Medlin, Town Commissioner

Thurman Ross, Town Commissioner

Thom Tillis, Town Commissioner

Anthony Roberts, Town Manager

From: Enrico Piraino, Chair, Cornelius Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission

Paul Herbert, Director, Cornelius Parks and Recreation Department

Date: 06/18/05

Re: Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Master Plan

It is with great pleasure that the Cornelius Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission and Parks Department staff submit an updated Comprehensive Master Plan regarding Parks and Recreation services for the years 2005 - 2015. Since the last master plan was approved in May of 2000, much has been accomplished, yet much remains to be accomplished in the years ahead. The Plan is visionary and serves as a general guide to Cornelius for its recreational needs over the next ten years. It is designed to be a dynamic document that establishes specific recommendations for land acquisition and parks development while outlining the operational roadmap for implementation. It sets the stage for strategic goals and objectives to be outlined by Town staff and Board over two five-year periods. It provides the Town with ways in which it may leverage funds against those of the County, school system, and other resources to accomplish this vision. We trust that the Town will utilize the Plan to fulfill its parks and recreational needs for the decade ahead.

Sincerely,

Enrico Piraino, Chair, Cornelius Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission

Paul Herbert, Director, Cornelius Parks and Recreation Department



**Town of Cornelius
2005 - 2015
Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Master Plan
Acknowledgements**

Gary T. Knox, Mayor

Town of Cornelius Board of Commissioners

Ms. Susan Medlin
Mr. Thurman Ross, Jr.
Mr. James R. Bensman
Mr. Hank Kahn
Mr. Thom Tillis

Parks and Recreation Advisory Board

Enrico Piraino, Chairperson
Donald Morris
Mark Hiller
Alwyn Smith
Andrea Visser
Delaina Walker
Jeffrey Tarte
Gary Fankhauser

Cornelius Town Staff

Mr. Anthony Roberts, Town Manager
Paul A. Herbert, Director
Chad Cauble, Park Superintendent



Park Planning Committee Citizen Stakeholders

Dave Alexander
Isaac Applewhite
Nancy Archer
Teresa Bishop
Beth Butler
Jeff Carter
Sharon Davis
Laurie Ekstrom
Jean Elwood
Gary Fankhauser
Jan Feamster
Randy Ford
Blair Foster
Ronda Freese
Phil Geiger
Marilyn Gilmore
Dave Gilroy
Rob Hinman
Cynthia Holevas
Alex Jankowsky
W. Lee Jones
Andrew Karres
Harold Little
Ladianne Mandel
Aidan McCarthy
Kim McCulloch
Bob McIntosh
Chief Ron McKinney

Ed McNeely
Larry Meese
Don Morris
Briana Murphy
Lori Neill
Debbie Newman
Doreen Nieboer
Melissa Ohlman-Roberge
Ruth Oliver
Paul Pettie
Carole Picariello
Enrico Piraino
John Pizetoski
Nannie Potts
Art Rouse
Kenny Russell
Richard Sanderson
Alwyn Smith
Carl Sorensen
Kate Stables
Joan Tate
Ann Todd
Andrew Uglehus
Andrea Visser
Delaina Walker
Jack Wilson
Jim Woods



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Planning Process

In 1999 the Town of Cornelius developed a Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan that defined a vision for parks and recreation. Many things have changed in Cornelius in the past six years. This planning study looked at recent changes within the community, initiated a public discourse about desires for park and recreation facilities, and reviewed what other communities similar to Cornelius are offering as part of their park and recreation programs. The 1999 Master Plan was updated from this analysis.

Public Input

The most important aspect of this planning study was identifying the public's desire for park and recreation facilities. The public was afforded the opportunity to participate in this planning effort through:

- Park Planning Advisory Committee of 55 citizens
- Telephone survey of 400 households
- Four public meetings
- Interviews with 30 park and recreation stakeholders from throughout the community

Growth & Population

In addition to public input, a key determining factor for projecting park, facility, and manpower needs is the anticipated population growth for the Town. Projected growth seems to be consistent with the growth expressed in the 1999 plan; by 2015 the anticipated population of the Town of Cornelius will be approximately 30,000.

Park and Recreation Facility Needs

Park Needs

Based on the findings from this study, the Town of Cornelius should make the following improvements to its park system by 2015:

Community Parks

- **Bailey Road Park:** This is the Town's newest and largest park. The majority of the park is completed. The Town should continue to make final improvements on this park and work with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools on joint use/development of a gymnasium and athletic fields at both the middle school and the future high school.
- **Robbins Park:** Land for Robbins Park has been acquired through a lease agreement with Mecklenburg County. Robbins Park will be an important community park for the town. The Town should immediately begin the planning and development of this facility.
- **Jetton II:** The County owns 20 acres of undeveloped land on Jetton Road across from Jetton Road Park. The Town should work with the County to develop this 20 acres with a recreation/cultural center (20,000 to 30,000 square foot multipurpose, multigenerational facility) and other park amenities. This development, along with the existing facilities found in Jetton Road Park, will serve as Cornelius' third community park.



Neighborhood Parks

Cornelius has three excellent neighborhood parks (Smithville, Legion, and Torrence Chapel Road Parks). A fourth neighborhood park, Jetton Road Neighborhood Park, offers minimal facilities and should be further developed. In addition to these four existing park sites, the Town should develop neighborhood parks at the following locations:

- Glenridge/Heritage Green/Oakhurst
- McDowell Creek (north of Westmoreland Road)
- Cornelius East
- Transit Oriented Development (TOD) site (Antiquity)

Mini Parks

The Town currently has one mini park at Walter Henderson Road. Two additional mini parks should be constructed at:

- Floral Lane
- Habitat Housing Site

Greenways

The Town of Cornelius commissioned a greenway study in 2004 that recommended the development of 13.57 miles of greenway. The development of these greenways should be a priority over the next ten years.

Cultural Arts Facility

The need for a Cultural Arts Facility was expressed in the public meetings and interviews. The Town should initiate discussions with Davidson, Huntersville, and other potential partners to build a cultural arts facility that will serve citizens in northern Mecklenburg County.

Indoor Recreation Facilities

The Town of Cornelius is currently working with Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools in the joint use/development of indoor recreation facilities at Westmoreland Elementary School (gymnasium) and Bailey Road Middle School (gymnasium and meeting rooms). In addition, as noted in this Master Plan, the Town should pursue joint use opportunities in the development of the Bailey Road High School. The recreation programming that will be afforded by these three gymnasium facilities will meet current demand and much of the future need for indoor recreation facilities.

Renovations to Existing Parks

In addition to developing new parks, there are capital improvements that need to be made to existing parks. These improvements vary in scope, but generally exceed a cost of \$50,000 and are beyond the normal maintenance and renovation of existing facilities. This Master Plan has allocated \$1,000,000 in capital improvements and another \$500,000 in renovations in its Capital Improvements Program (Table 4-1). The following projects are anticipated in this Capital Improvements Program and have been included in the Town's current Capital Improvements Plan.



Executive Summary

- Renovations to ball fields at Smithville Park
- Bailey Road Park Improvements
- Walter Henderson Mini Park Improvements
- Torrence Chapel Road Park Development
- Legion Park Parking Landscaping
- Bailey Road Tennis Court Improvements

Recreation Facility Needs

In addition to establishing park needs for Cornelius, this master plan study reviews facility needs for the coming decade. Based on public input, the Town will need to develop the following recreation facilities by 2015:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 2 Adult/older youth baseball fields | 2 Tennis courts |
| 4 Youth baseball fields | 6 Playground activities |
| 5 Softball fields | 13.57 Miles of pedestrian trails |
| 3 Football fields | 30 Miles of urban bikeway paths |
| 3 Soccer fields | 1 Recreation/community/cultural arts center |
| 3 Outdoor basketball courts* | 1 Swimming pool |

* In addition to the expressed need for outdoor basketball courts, there is a strong demand for indoor basketball courts as well. This demand will be met with the development of joint use gymnasium facilities at Westmoreland Elementary School, Bailey Road Middle School, and Bailey Road High School.

Staff Needs

The Cornelius Park and Recreation Department's structure and number of personnel is below that of comparably sized communities in the state; especially given recent growth and program participation. The current program load, facility growth, and expansion has justified the hiring of an Athletic Programs Supervisor, a Special Events Coordinator, two Grounds Maintenance Technicians, an Administrative Assistant, and a Parks Superintendent.

In consideration of continued growth, participation, demand for services, and existing departmental structure, there is a need for additional staff. Future staff needs include recreation center staff, program support staff, and maintenance personnel. These staff positions will be added as future program needs demand and as new facilities come on line. There are a total of 14 new positions and one consolidated position identified in the "Proposed Organizational Chart" as follows:

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| • Deputy Director | • Programs Assistant |
| • Recreation Programs Superintendent | • Maintenance Supervisor |
| • Marketing/Fund Development Director | • General Maintenance Technicians |
| • Special Events/Volunteers Supervisor | • Greenways Ranger |
| • Special Events/Volunteers Coordinator | • Registrar |
| • Recreation Center Director | |



Operational Budget

The per capita expenditures by Cornelius for operations has increased significantly since the 1999 report. The 98/99 operational per capita expenditure was \$13.18. The per capita expenditure for 03/04 was \$57.73. While this increase in per capita spending is admirable, Cornelius' spending for parks and recreation is still below the state mean per capita spending of \$60.87.

Park and recreation offerings play an important role in the quality of life in a community. If Cornelius is to be one of North Carolina's outstanding communities, funding for parks and recreation should be a priority. As a priority it should be funded at or above the state average. While the proposals presented in this Master Plan will significantly increase the facilities and programs offered by the Town, these additional programs and facilities can be operated with revenues provided by the increase in population and a slight increase ($\pm 10\%$) in per capita spending.

Capital Improvement Program

The Capital Improvement Program for park acquisition, renovation, and development during the planning period was prepared with input from town staff and the planning team. Table 4-1 "Capital Improvements Budget" shows the capital improvement cost divided into 5-year intervals starting in 2006 and ending 2015 (10-year planning period). This budget includes facility development as described in the park and recreational facility needs of the Town. It does not include monies for district parks, recreation centers, or special use facilities defined as the responsibility of Mecklenburg County. All of the proposed costs are shown in 2005 dollar values. The Capital Improvement Program can be summarized into the following components:

| | |
|--|---------------------|
| Renovation/Improvement Program | \$ 1,650,000 |
| Land Acquisition Program | 1,500,000 |
| Park Development Program | 9,735,000 |
| Special Use Facilities & Grant Program | 7,260,000 |
| Total Capital Improvement (2006-2015) | \$20,145,000 |

A capital needs budget of over \$20 million will require spending approximately \$2 million annually over the next ten years. This level of expenditure will require a variety of funding options.

Master Plan Funding Strategy

The increased funding that will be generated by the population expansion and by increasing the current level of appropriations for parks and recreation by 10% (\$63 per capita) will support the majority of future operational cost. In addition to this increased operational spending, the Town should begin budgeting capital improvement projects on an annual basis. For purposes of this planning effort, the recommended annual capital improvements budget should be \$300,000. This level of funding will provide \$3,000,000 for capital needs (approximately 15% of the proposed capital improvements) over the next 10 years. Unfortunately, even this higher level of operational funding will not support the proposed capital improvements budget (\$20,145,000). The Department will be required to use a combination of revenue sources to accomplish the capital improvement recommendations of the Master Plan. There are numerous combinations of funding strategies that can be explored and implemented by Cornelius. Upon careful analysis of past budget documents, current practices, available resources, national trends, and standards, the following funding strategies are presented for consideration:



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General Obligation Bonds

General Obligation Bonds should be used in acquiring and developing new parks and recreation facilities. The funding strategy proposes that bond issues be targeted to raise approximately \$14 million. These monies can be dedicated to acquiring land for the proposed park sites and the development of parks, greenways, and indoor facilities. These funds are needed early in the process and a bond campaign will need to be started as soon as possible for at least \$8 to 9 million of the total amount, with another campaign needed within five to six years.

Hotel Tax Revenues

The Town receives approximately \$160,000 from the local hotel tax and an additional \$200,000 from prepared food taxes. These taxes are annually collected under the Room Occupancy/Prepared Food Tax ("Hotel Tax") administered by Mecklenburg County for use in promoting tourism. This Master Plan proposes that \$100,000 from this revenue source be dedicated for park and recreation development. Over the 10-year planning period this would provide \$1,000,000 to be invested in park development.

Partnerships and Gifts

The Town of Cornelius is already working to generate revenues through sponsorships of its summer programs, special events, and other activities. This initiative of raising money from the private sector through gifts, sponsorships, and partnerships should be encouraged and expanded. One avenue for expanding this effort will be establishing a Cornelius Partners For Parks program. This non-profit organization should be established independent of the department and operate as a stand alone charitable organization, much like Mecklenburg County's Partners For Parks. This non-profit organization allows private citizens and corporations to donate money, land, and in-kind services for use by the parks department. Once established, Cornelius Partners For Parks should be able to raise \$100,000 to \$125,000 in funds annually. Over the next ten years, this organization would generate \$1,000,000 to \$1,250,000 for capital improvements.

Grants

The Town staff has been very successful in finding and procuring funds from state and local grants. In the past four years, the Town has received \$600,000 in grants for park improvements. The Town should continue to explore grants such as LWCF, PARTF, ISTE, etc. Active pursuit of this funding could provide \$1,000,000 in funds for capital improvements over the next ten years.



Capital Improvements Funding Strategy

| | | |
|---|-------------|---------------------|
| General Obligation Bonds | | |
| 2006 - 2010 Package | | \$8,200,000 |
| Robbins Park | \$4,200,000 | |
| Neighborhood Park Acquisition and Development | \$2,000,000 | |
| Greenway Development | \$2,000,000 | |
| 2011 - 2015 Package | | \$5,750,000 |
| Greenway Development | \$2,500,000 | |
| Neighborhood Park Development | \$1,500,000 | |
| Jetton II Park (Phase One) | \$1,000,000 | |
| Bailey Road High School Gymnasium | \$750,000 | |
| Hotel Tax Revenue | | \$1,000,000 |
| Partnerships/Gifts | | \$1,195,000 |
| Grants | | \$1,000,000 |
| Capital Improvements Funding (\$300,000 annually) | | <u>\$3,000,000</u> |
| | | \$20,145,000 |

Roles of Other Providers

State of North Carolina

The State of North Carolina plays an important role in providing passive recreational facilities and programs through its state parks. In addition to providing state parks, North Carolina assists the community with funding park development through great programs such as PARTF, ISTE (TEA21), CDBG, Clean Water Act, and NCDOT programs.

Mecklenburg County

Growth in northern Mecklenburg County will continue to create a strong need for additional recreation services and park facilities. County governments typically provide these facilities as district parks that are approximately 200 acres in size and serve multiple townships and/or towns. As identified in their 1989 county-wide Master Plan, Mecklenburg County should provide, develop, and maintain district parks, recreation centers (20,000 to 30,000 square foot multipurpose, multigenerational facilities), and special use facilities (through partnership or management agreements where necessary). The Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation Department should continue coordinating their planning efforts for the development of district parks, water/lake access, and greenways with the towns of Cornelius, Huntersville, and Davidson.

- Mecklenburg County recently passed a bond referendum for park development that includes significant expansion of its greenway system. Portions of this funding will be spent in northern Mecklenburg County to develop greenways along the McDowell Creek and the southern branch of the Rocky River. Mecklenburg County should proceed with acquisition and development of this greenway corridor as soon as possible. Cornelius should coordinate its greenway development efforts with the County and with the neighboring towns of Huntersville and Davidson.
- As the County executes its mission of building district parks, recreation centers, and special facilities in the north Mecklenburg area, the Town should continue to partner with Mecklenburg County in the development of recreation facilities and parks in Cornelius.



Charlotte-Mecklenburg County Schools (CMS)

- CMS should coordinate their planning efforts with the Town of Cornelius for any new schools proposed within town limits or sphere of influence. Cornelius should assist in the location and acquisition of any school site that could possibly be used jointly by the school system and the Town. This effort has already begun with the development of Bailey Road Middle School where Cornelius will jointly use the school's football field and track as well as the school's gymnasium. In addition, the Town is funding the construction of a gymnasium at Westmoreland Elementary School to be used jointly with CMS. This same joint use approach should be used on other school facilities.
- The Town should consider working with CMS to expand the typical high school gymnasium at the proposed Bailey Road High School site to increase joint use programming. This would provide an excellent opportunity to develop another facility that would meet the Town's needs for indoor recreation and potential cultural resource center.

Private Sector

- The private sector should provide recreation facilities and programs that the Town and public sector are unable to offer or present significant cost avoidance opportunities (capital development and operational). These facilities may include golf courses, private swim clubs, tennis clubs, and private athletic associations and complexes.
- Land developers should be responsible for the dedication of open space as required by the "Cornelius Land Development Code." The land development process provides an excellent opportunity to gain additional land for open space conservation/preservation and greenway development. Developers can enhance their projects and realize economic benefits when they carefully plan sites to include recreational amenities.
- The Town should seek out opportunities to work with private vendors to provide special use activities and avoid the cost of constructing and operating these facilities. An example of this collaborative effort would be working with Mecklenburg Aquatic Club (MAC) in the development of an aquatic center at Bailey Road Park. The development of this swimming facility in Bailey Road Park eliminates the need for Cornelius to construct an aquatic center/swimming pool with town funds. A second example of cost avoidance through the private sector is the development of the Westmoreland Athletic Complex.

Arts and Science Council

The Arts and Science Council of Charlotte Mecklenburg (ASC) developed a study in 2004 that established a cultural action plan for northern Mecklenburg County. This planning study made the following recommendations:

- Creating a regional office of cultural development
- Forming a regional public/private partnership to develop cultural facilities in north Mecklenburg
- Undertaking joint marketing and public communications
- Nurturing artists, cultural workers, and cultural organizations
- Advancing philanthropic development by creating a mechanism for donors to come together
- Advancing the coordination of cultural parks and recreation programs



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- Consider creating a municipal department of parks, recreation and culture; ensuring a wide representation of people with cultural experience
- Developing an inter-town cultural team
- Articulating cultural arts programs, services, enrollment, and scholarship functions
- Strengthening cultural arts program quality
- Defining partnerships with local cultural organizations
- Co-sponsoring summer arts camps
- Increasing cultural program offerings, strengthening the quality of those offerings, and ensuring access for residents.
- Strengthening targeted partnerships to fill gaps in cultural programming
- Advancing regional identity (in the arts)
- Advancing intercultural unity
- Building a coordinated approach to historical preservation and programming
- Enhancing lake access; thereby creating opportunities to use the lakes as a cultural venue
- Enhancing faith, civic, neighborhood, and social organizations involvement in cultural activities
- Utilizing cultural activities to enhance downtown development

Department Name Change

The Cornelius Parks and Recreation Department should consider changing its name to the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Culture. The expanded name would signify the importance that cultural activities have in the life of the community. This value of cultural facilities and programs was expressed by the public during this planning process and was evidenced in the Arts and Science Council's North Mecklenburg Cultural Arts Study.