



## SECTION 2

### THE PEOPLE OF CORNELIUS

#### Introduction

The first step in understanding the park and recreational needs of Cornelius is to develop an understanding of the people that make up the community. This understanding includes a review of the population and demographics of the town and a review of changes that are occurring. Change is occurring rapidly in Cornelius. The population increased over 360% from 1990 to 2000. A smaller rate of increase is expected over the next decade, but the town's population will grow significantly in the next twenty years.

As the population increases, there will be shifts in the demographic make up of the population. Significant shifts were evident from 1990 to 2000. It is anticipated that there will be other changes in the demographic make up of Cornelius during this planning period.

It is not enough to simply understand the population growth and demographic shifts of the Town. In order to develop a plan that meets the Town's specific needs, this planning effort attempted to define the citizens' park and recreation preference through a series of public input initiatives including:

- Establishing a 55 member Park Planning Committee
- Conducting over 400 telephone interviews with local residents
- Conducting four public meetings
- Conducting 30 interviews with stakeholders throughout the community

Through these various efforts, considerable insight was gained regarding the public desires for public parks and recreation programs and methods of funding those facilities.

#### Population Trends and Projections

To use recreation standards to project the town's future needs, population trends and projections must be identified for the town through the planning period (2006-2015). The 2000 census provided valuable information on changes that occurred in Cornelius; particularly when comparing the 1990 data with the 2000 data. The population for the Town of Cornelius in 1990 was 2,581. The 2000 Census listed the town's population at 11,969; a 360% increase. Much of this growth was due to the development along Lake Norman and through annexation. Population growth is expected to continue into the 21st century until "Total Build Out" in 2035 where the total population of the town will be somewhere between 42,700 and 56,400. The estimate is variable depending on how development trends for housing are addressed concerning issues such as urban sprawl, neo/new urbanism, and sustainable development. It is estimated that over 30,000 people will live in the town by the year 2015, the last year of this study's planning period.



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Population projections for the Town of Cornelius are as follows:

Town Population Projections			
2000	2005	2010	2015
11,969	16,395*	22,645*	30,937*

\*From Town of Cornelius Planning Department "Town of Cornelius Build Out Estimate", June 1999.

Mecklenburg County is one of the southeast's fastest growing areas. During the 1990's (1990-2000), the county experienced an overall growth of 36%. As rapid as this overall growth seems, it pales in comparison with the growth that has been experienced in the northern part of the county. Cornelius's population increased from 2,581 to 11,969 representing a 364% increase in population during the ten-year period. In that same period, the number of housing units increased by 420% (1,079-4,533) while Mecklenburg County's housing units increased by 35%. In addition, there were shifts in the demographics of the community. In 1990, Cornelius closely mirrored Mecklenburg County's age distribution; but by 2000, Cornelius's population between the ages of 25-64 grew significantly. In 1990, this age group comprised 55% of the town's population (almost identical to Mecklenburg County). By 2000, this segment represented roughly 65% of the town's population. Race represents another shift of Cornelius's demographics. In 1990, 78% of the town's population was white (considerably higher than the county's overall population). By 2000, the white population grew to represent almost 92% of the entire population.

Not all areas of the town have grown equally. Census tracts 62.04 and 64.02 grew roughly 150% from the 1990 census to the 2000 census. During that same period census tract 62.05 grew by 1405%. The slowest growth census tract in the town was 62.03, which experienced a 91% growth rate for that period.

There was a significant increase in wealth in Cornelius in the 1990s. From 1990 to 2000, the median family income increased from \$36,786 to \$89,945. This represents a 145% increase in family income. During that same period, the median income for Mecklenburg County increased from \$40,904 to \$60,608 (48% increase).

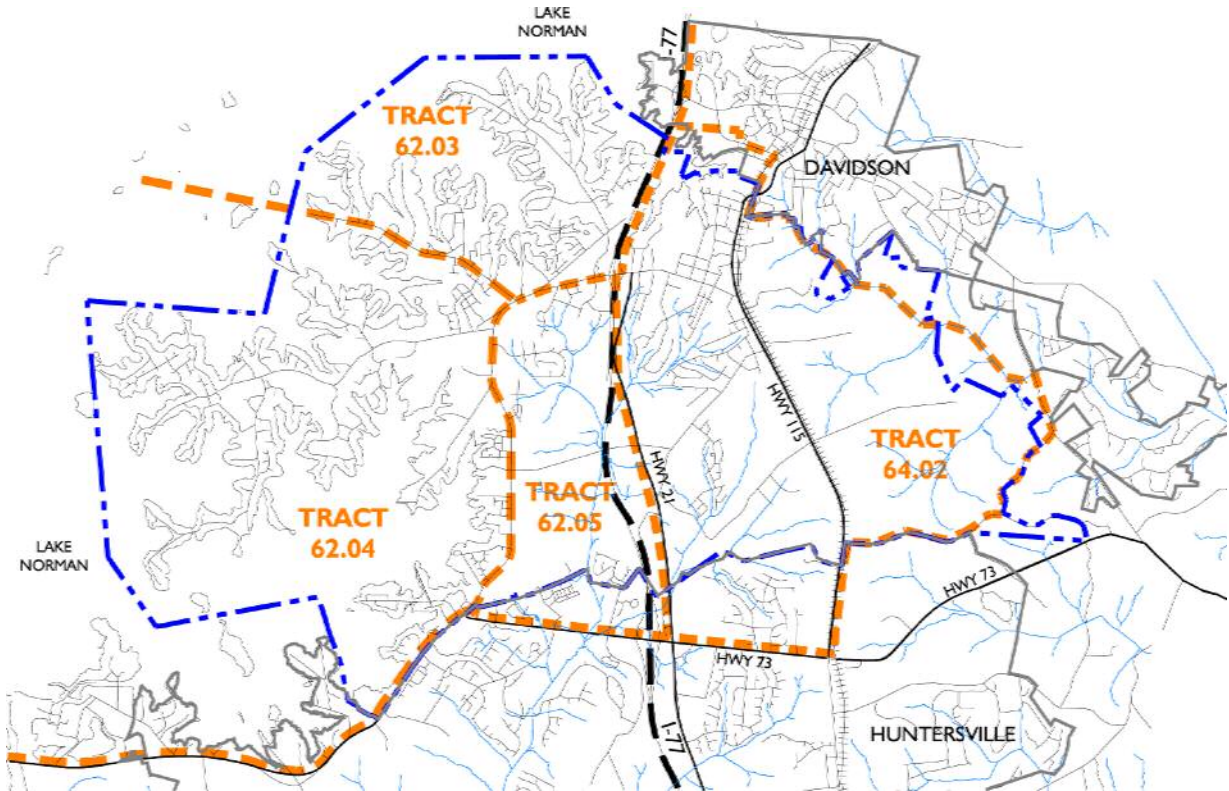
From 1990 to 2000 the median value of owner occupied housing units in Cornelius increased from \$71,000 to \$236,500. This is significantly different than the county's median value, which increased from \$86,900 in 1990 to \$141,800 in 2000. On the other side of the socio-economic spectrum, the number of personal households below the poverty level is very low in the town.

The 2000 Census provides a snapshot of a community that is rapidly growing with a population largely comprised of white upper-middle class households with a majority of the population in the 25-64 age group.



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### Town of Cornelius Census Tract Map





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## Public Input

As part of the planning process, the Town of Cornelius and the planning consultant (Site Solutions) developed a methodology for obtaining public input through several means. This public input process included:

### Park Planning Committee (Stakeholders)

To gain insight into the public’s desires, a Park Planning Committee of 55 citizen stakeholders was established to oversee and provide input into the planning process. This committee was comprised of local citizens with expressed interest in various park and recreation activities. The group included members of the Park and Recreation Advisory Board, arts community, youth athletic programs, YMCA, private recreation providers, and the business development community. Committee makeup began as a list of interested citizens/stakeholders established by the town staff. The public was invited to join the committee through articles carried by the local media. Ultimately, the Park Planning Committee included:

- |                  |                        |                |
|------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Dave Alexander   | Andrew Karres          | Art Rouse      |
| Isaac Applewhite | Harold Little          | Kenny Russell  |
| Nancy Archer     | Ladianne Mandel        | Richard        |
| Teresa Bishop    | Aidan McCarthy         | Sanderson      |
| Beth Butler      | Kim McCulloch          | Alwyn Smith    |
| Jeff Carter      | Bob McIntosh           | Carl Sorensen  |
| Sharon Davis     | Chief Ron McKinney     | Kate Stables   |
| Laurie Ekstrom   | Ed McNeely             | Joan Tate      |
| Jean Elwood      | Larry Meese            | Ann Todd       |
| Gary Fankhauser  | Don Morris             | Andrew Uglehus |
| Jan Feamster     | Briana Murphy          | Andrea Visser  |
| Randy Ford       | Lori Neill             | Delaina Walker |
| Blair Foster     | Debbie Newman          | Jack Wilson    |
| Ronda Freese     | Doreen Nieboer         | Jim Woods      |
| Phil Geiger      | Melissa Ohlman-Roberge |                |
| Marilyn Gilmore  | Ruth Oliver            |                |
| Dave Gilroy      | Paul Pettie            |                |
| Rob Hinman       | Carole Picariello      |                |
| Cynthia Holevas  | Enrico Piraino         |                |
| Alex Jankowsky   | John Pizetoski         |                |
| W. Lee Jones     | Nannie Potts           |                |

Prior to the first public meeting, the Park Planning Committee met to be briefed on the planning process. The committee was asked for suggestions that would encourage public input and ensure the plan is reflective of community needs. They were informed of their role as a “sounding board” for the various boards and interest groups and were encouraged to attend the public meetings and bring other citizens with them. As the plan evolved, the committee was asked to review and comment on draft copies. Their input provided valuable insight into the needs of the community.



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**Public Survey**

As a means of determining the public's desires for park and recreation facilities and programs, this planning study conducted a public survey. The survey was conducted by KPC Research, a Charlotte based firm specializing in market research, through telephone interviews using a standard questionnaire (see Appendix B). Household selection was accomplished through a random sample of published telephone numbers of Cornelius residents. Interviews were only completed with those respondents who indicated that the household called was located within the town.

A total of 408 interviews were conducted and the adult in the household was randomly selected to ensure that both men and women, young and old were represented in the sample. Data was balanced by geographic area (census tract), number of adults in household, race, age, and gender according to CLARITAS 2004 (CLARITAS is a nationally recognized firm that provides demographic and life style data). The maximum sampling error was  $\pm 4.9\%$  points at a 95% confidence level for the total study. A summary of the survey findings is included as Appendix A.

The following findings came from the survey:

**Current Park Use**

- Two thirds of those surveyed currently use a public park in Cornelius.
- More than half of those using parks visit regularly (6-25 visits annually)
- Jetton Park is the most often used park in Cornelius

**Citizen Perception of Existing Facilities and Programs**

- 71% of adults currently using Cornelius parks are satisfied with the parks and facilities
- 51% of those that have visited a public park said they had participated in an activity sponsored by the department
- 95% of those participating in an activity put on by the department said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the activity

**Need for Public Park and Recreation Areas**

- 92% of those surveyed believe that parks and recreation facilities enhance the economic health of the community
- 73% believe parks and recreation programs and facilities help reduce crime in the city
- 79% felt parks should be a priority
- Three quarters of those surveyed felt there is a need for parks in Cornelius
- 78% of those interviewed felt it is important to preserve open space

**Park Use**

- Demand for greenways is very strong in Cornelius. 88% of those using parks said they would like to see greenways developed
- 76% of those currently using parks expressed a desire for a recreation center
- 68% of those currently using parks expressed a desire for additional athletic fields



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**Preferred Activities**

Participants were given a list of recreation activities and asked if they currently participate in those activities or if they would like to participate in those activities. The following is a ranking of those activities:

- Musical Concerts/Events 94%
- Walking/Jogging 94%
- Special Events 94%
- Picnic Areas 91%
- Biking 80%
- Fitness Programs 79%
- Nature/Environmental Programs 77%
- Playgrounds 77%
- Swimming 75%
- Camping/Hiking 75%
- Instructional Camps 68%
- Volleyball 51%
- Football 51%
- Programs for People with Disabilities 50%
- Track and Field 48%
- Gardening 46%
- Horseshoes/ Shuffleboard Courts 44%
- Drama 43%
- Poetry/Literature Classes 38%
- Disc Golf 34%
- Lacrosse 26%

**Funding for Public Parks and Recreation Areas**

- Three quarters (75%) of those interviewed felt funding for parks should come from current taxes and/or government bonds
- 68% of those interviewed indicated they would support the authorization of bonds being sold to support new parks
- One third of those interviewed felt new taxes should be considered as a funding source for park development
- 77% of those interviewed said they would be willing to pay \$25 more annually for park improvements
- Over half those interviewed (55%) indicated they would be willing to pay \$50 more annually for park improvements
- 16% of those interviewed said they would be willing to pay more than \$200 annually to improve parks



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**Stakeholder Interviews**

One-on-one interviews were conducted with the following local citizens as a means of allowing the public to provide additional input into the planning process:

Jim Bensman	W. Lee Jones	Nannie Potts
Parker Black	Gary Knox	Bill Russell
Jean Elwood	George Krueger	Franklin Russell
Betty Fentress	Ladianne Mandel	Dick Sanderson
Karen Floyd	Kim McCullough	Alwyn Smith
Steve Fraher	Ed McNeely	Jeff Tarte
Tom Francomano	Don Morris	Thom Tillis
Gary Frankhauser	Debbie Newman	Ann Todd
Ronda Freese	Melissa Ohlman-Roberge	Andrea Visser
Mark Hiller	Enrico Piriano	Delaina Walker

Derek Williams of Site Solutions conducted the interviews with these stakeholders. Questions varied slightly with different stakeholders, but generally included a series of open-ended questions about the community and the role of parks and recreation to the citizens of Cornelius (see Appendix C for interview questions). For those who were citizens of Cornelius, the interview ended with an abbreviated questionnaire similar to the questions asked in the town-wide survey.

When asked what they liked most about living in Cornelius, most expressed a love for the small town feel; and, as expected, many expressed the opportunity to live near the lake. Several mentioned that it is especially nice to experience these things while living so close to Charlotte, where you have access to cultural, sport, and shopping opportunities.

When asked what they liked least about living in Cornelius, the predominant answer was the increased traffic and congestion. Several mentioned the lack of cultural opportunities, and several mentioned the separation of the town (geographically and demographically) between east and west of I-77.

When asked what role the parks and recreation offerings (facilities and programs) have on the quality of life of the community, most everyone interviewed felt that the parks and recreation programs are and should continue to be an important part of community life. Most all felt the Parks and Recreation Department is doing an excellent job with the staff and facilities that are available. When asked what role the department should be playing, several expressed a desire for the expansion of programs/facilities to include more cultural activities and to ensure that park and recreation offerings include facilities/programs for special populations and seniors.

When asked to project a vision for the department in the next decade, people offered the following points:

- Expand parklands; need to purchase now
- Expand green/open space
- Expand neighborhood parks; put parks next to people
- Expand cultural opportunities
- Add programs for senior citizens
- Develop a recreation center with both athletics and cultural offerings



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Those interviewed were quizzed on their view of joint use opportunities with Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation Department, Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), and North Mecklenburg County's sister Towns (Davidson and Huntersville). Most everyone thought that the County should take a stronger role in providing facilities and programs to the towns in northern Mecklenburg County. While everyone acknowledged the importance of Mecklenburg County's land holdings (Jetton Park, Ramsey Creek by the Landing, and Robbins Park), most felt they should be taking a stronger role in providing more traditional park facilities and programs through the development of district parks and recreation centers. Many people expressed feeling that they were being taxed by the County for services they were not receiving. Several mentioned a disappointment in the priority that the Town of Huntersville will receive at Bradford Park. Likewise, several of those interviewed suggested this Master Plan demonstrated the role Mecklenburg County should be playing in the development of the Town's major parks.

Most everyone interviewed believed that Cornelius should communicate with and search for joint use opportunities with Huntersville and Davidson. Recommendations included developing a framework where directors and boards of each town could meet regularly to discuss issues of importance. It was also suggested that each of the Comprehensive Park and Recreation Master Plans (all three towns have Master Plans) be coordinated to minimize overlap of service. Of particular interest was coordination of any planning of local and county greenways. It was also suggested that there may be facilities that should be developed as joint use facilities between the towns. Several people discussed a regional recreation center and/or regional cultural arts center.

Finally, most everyone expressed a desire for Cornelius to work with CMS in the planning/development of joint use facilities. These efforts have already begun with the joint use development of Bailey Road Middle School where CMS and Cornelius will joint use the school's football field, track, gymnasium, and several arts/crafts classrooms. In addition to these joint use efforts, CMS and Cornelius will be jointly developing a gymnasium facility at Westmoreland Elementary School. Each of these joint use efforts is an excellent example of how the towns can work together for the community benefit.

In addition to these open-ended questions, a majority of those interviewed were given a summarized version of the telephone survey. The purpose of this portion of the interview was to determine if the opinions of those interviewed would reflect the overall population on issues of park needs, recreation facility preferences, and funding sources.

With regard to the need for public park and recreation areas, it was almost unanimously agreed that parks enhance the economic health of a community, benefit the community, should be funded with public taxes, should be a government priority, and reduce crime. While the public also agreed with these statements, those interviewed expressed a much stronger belief (10% - 15% higher) in the positive benefits of parks. Likewise, while approximately 40% of the general population expressed a need for additional public parks, more than half of those interviewed expressed a need for additional facilities.

When asked, "What types of recreational facilities would you like to see in the Town of Cornelius?" those interviewed expressed a much stronger desire than the general population for all facilities listed. The exception to this was the aquatic facility. The demand for



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greenways and open space was ± 6% greater than the general population, while the demand for additional athletic fields and cultural arts facilities was ± 20% greater.

	Community Wide <u>Survey</u>	Stakeholders <u>Interviewed</u>
Greenways	88%	94%
Open Space	82%	89%
Recreation/Community Center	76%	83%
Additional Athletic Fields	68%	83%
Aquatic Facilities	63%	44%
Cultural Arts Facility	62%	83%

With regard to how the park and recreation facilities should be funded, those interviewed showed stronger support for tax funding (current and new) of park facilities and for using government bonds to fund park improvements.

	Community Wide <u>Survey</u>	Stakeholders <u>Interviewed</u>
Private Donations	95%	100%
Matching Grants	86%	100%
Current Taxes	79%	100%
Government Bonds	75%	95%
New Taxes	34%	84%

When asked how much they were willing to pay to improve park facilities, over half stated they would pay as much as \$200 annually to fund these improvements.

	Community Wide <u>Survey</u>	Stakeholders <u>Interviewed</u>
More than \$200	16%	47%
\$101 - \$200	9%	6%
\$51 - \$100	17%	23%
\$26 - \$50	13%	18%
\$1 - \$25	22%	-
Nothing	23%	6%

**North Mecklenburg Cultural Action Plan**

In addition to the public input process undertaken as part of this planning process, the Arts and Science Council of Charlotte Mecklenburg (ASC) developed a study in 2004 that provides pertinent information to this Master Plan. The ASC teamed with Cornelius, Davidson, and Huntersville to develop a North Mecklenburg Cultural Action Plan. The Town of Cornelius was well represented in this planning effort, with Mayor Knox playing a key role in plan development.



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The study found that the majority of north Mecklenburg residents favor local public funding for arts (63.1%), science (67.7%), and history (63%). Unfortunately, little infrastructure exists to meet this interest. Recommendations from the plan include:

- 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
  - Consider creating a municipal department of parks, recreation and culture; including ensuring a wide representation of people with cultural experience
  - Developing an inter-town cultural team
  - Articulating programs, services, enrollment, and scholarship functions
  - Strengthening program quality
  - Defining partnerships with local cultural organizations
  - Cosponsoring summer 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
- 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

The findings from this study suggest that the Town of Cornelius should endeavor to include cultural activities in its recreation programs. The Town should include the development of facilities to support these programs as it plans future park and recreation facilities.

These findings were supported in the interviews that were held with key community stakeholders and, to some extent, in the responses from the telephone surveys.