



SECTION 4

PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The Town of Cornelius and its Parks and Recreation Department currently have the mission to serve the recreation needs of the town's citizens by offering a variety of recreation programs and facilities through a growing system of attractive and safe public parks. The population of Cornelius has grown significantly in the past ten years and will continue to show significant growth for the next decade. Based on current population projections, the Town's population (16,395) will exceed 30,000 by 2015. There will definitely be increased demand for quality leisure services and the citizens of Cornelius will expect the town to be the main provider.

Currently there is a need for both new facilities and additional park acreage in the town. This need will grow with the population over the next decade. Available land for recreational development in the Cornelius area is very limited and the town will need to act quickly to acquire property for parks and recreation. Large tracts of property are difficult to assemble due to market demand. Thus, land values are extremely high. More recreation programs will be desired and existing programs will be expected to grow in size with the addition of new park facilities. These demands will create a need for additional staff and increased funds for the Recreation and Parks Department to adequately meet its mission.

The inventory of existing public park facilities in the Town of Cornelius indicates that there has been significant park development since the 1999 plan. One community park (Bailey Road Park) has been constructed and land for another (Robbins Park) has been acquired. In addition, two neighborhood parks (Torrence Chapel Park and Jetton Road Neighborhood Park) have been added to the Town's list of neighborhood parks (Legion Park and Smithville Park). One mini park (Walter Henderson Park) has been developed. Approximately 136-acres of undeveloped open space has been acquired, or is in the process of being acquired. Additional recreation facilities are located at Cornelius Elementary School.

Mecklenburg County also maintains recreation sites at Jetton Park, Blythe Landing, and Ramsey Creek Park. An additional district facility, now operated and maintained by the Town of Huntersville, is offered at North Mecklenburg District Park. Land for a second district park (Bradford Park) has been purchased and construction is planned for this year. This second facility will also be maintained and operated by the Town of Huntersville. Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools currently operates one school site (Cornelius Elementary School), but several more school sites are under construction or are in the planning stages.

The private sector maintains diverse recreational facilities such as a championship golf course at the Peninsula, an indoor YMCA sports complex, numerous swimming pools, tennis courts, and boat slips. Unfortunately, most of these outstanding facilities provided by the private sector are not open to the general public without a large user or membership fee/cost.

Cornelius, at sites within the corporate limits, provides active recreation and limited passive recreation opportunities. The County provides passive recreation within the Town's sphere of influence at Jetton Park, Ramsey Creek, and Blythe Landing. Bailey Road Park, Smithville Park, Torrence Chapel Park, and Legion Park appear to be well used and their location provides suitable access for patrons. The development of Robbins Park will significantly improve active recreation facilities in the western section of the town.



With the adoption of the Cornelius Land Development Code in October 1996, public open space can be planned and enhanced by requiring land developers to dedicate a percentage of their total project site to public open space. This will assist with obtaining the park acreage needed to serve the community.

The State of North Carolina also provides three state parks within less than an hour driving distance to Cornelius. These parks offer a diverse range of outdoor recreational opportunities such as fishing, swimming, camping, canoeing, rock climbing, and hiking. Although Cornelius has the good fortune of being close to state parks, it still requires an hour drive to reach them, preventing many residents of the community from using these facilities.

This plan addresses the need of providing both passive and active recreation opportunities at parks as well as greenway corridors. The term "passive recreation" is one that refers to recreation opportunities, such as walking, hiking, and picnicking that typically accommodate the need to preserve open space and allow people to observe nature. Passive facilities typically serve the entire county and are provided at regional or district parks. "Active recreation" includes activities such as softball, baseball, volleyball and other outdoor activities. These types of recreational activities have facilities that are usually provided by towns and municipalities at community parks, recreation/community centers, neighborhood parks and school sites.

To determine specific park and recreation recommendations for the Town of Cornelius, it is essential to clearly define how the town will interface with the other recreational providers in the community. Hopefully, this will eliminate duplication of facilities and services, and begin to establish a cooperative effort from all the providers. Therefore, the proposals and recommendations of this Master Plan are organized based on what each recreational provider should offer through the 10-year planning period (2006-2015).

Roles of Recreational Providers

State of North Carolina

The State of North Carolina should continue to maintain and operate all the state parks within a one-hour service radius of Cornelius. Cornelius, along with other nearby governments, should provide a unified message to the State on their interest to see Duke Power State Park enhanced to its utmost potential. This may include expansion of facilities and recreational opportunities. The State of North Carolina should continue to offer a variety of recreational facilities and programs on a multi-county regional basis. The state should be the provider of regional state parks that include opportunities for camping, fishing, biking, and special facilities such as zoos and preservation of historic sites. In addition, Cornelius should also support the recommendations listed in the Mecklenburg and Cabarrus County Park Master Plans that call for another state park to be developed in North Mecklenburg County along the Rocky River corridor.

Mecklenburg County

Mecklenburg County should continue maintaining, operating, and developing countywide facilities such as Jetton Park, Ramsey Creek Park, Blythe Landing, and North Mecklenburg District Park (now a Huntersville facility) that serve the entire county population. The County should proceed with development of Bradford District Park (to be operated by Huntersville) to provide active and passive recreation opportunities. In addition, the County should work with the Town to facilitate the development of Robbins Park. Likewise, the Town and County should work together to develop a community center facility and park on the undeveloped Jetton Park (Jetton Park II) site to the north of Jetton Road. The County should update its 1989 Master Plan. The northern Mecklenburg towns should have input in that



planning process. Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation Department should continue coordinating their planning efforts with the Towns of Cornelius, Huntersville, and Davidson for the development of any new parks or facilities within the North District. A management agreement between the County and the local municipalities should be developed to identify roles and responsibilities. The towns should assist in the location and acquisition of any park sites.

The County should continue its leadership role in developing and coordinating greenway efforts in Mecklenburg County. Passage of the County's park and recreation bond in November of last year provides funding for greenways in northern Mecklenburg County. Mecklenburg County has long-range plans for a regional greenway along the Rocky River. This regional greenway system will be a joint effort between Mecklenburg and Cabarrus County. A greenway corridor should be extended off the Rocky River along the South Prong Branch leading all the way into the Town of Cornelius and Davidson. The planned high school will link to this greenway. This should be a joint effort between the two towns and Mecklenburg County to develop.

Town of Cornelius

As previously stated, the Town of Cornelius should focus on developing and operating community, neighborhood, and mini parks, along with greenways. Section 3 "Recreation Standards and Community Needs Assessment" identified the existing and future parks needed in the Town. It is recommended by the year 2015 that Cornelius makes provisions for a total of three community parks, eight neighborhood parks, three mini parks, and over thirteen miles of greenways. An overall summary of the park proposals and recommendations are listed below. In addition, the locations of the proposed park sites and greenways are shown on the "Master Plan Proposal Map" through the year 2015.

Community Parks

The Recreation Standards and Community Need's Assessment recommends that three (3) community parks be provided throughout the Cornelius area by the year 2015. Community parks should be at least 40 acres in size and have a service radius of approximately two (2) miles. These parks provide recreational opportunities for the entire family and contain areas suited for intense recreational purposes such as a recreation center building, athletic fields, swimming, tennis, and walking/jogging trails. These parks may also possess areas of natural quality for outdoor recreation such as viewing, sitting and picnicking.

Jetton Park & Jetton II - Mecklenburg County's Jetton Park is a 105-acre specialty park providing access to Lake Norman. The service area for this park encompasses the Cornelius area. Future expansion plans at the park (Jetton-II) call for development of land across from the main park entrance along Jetton Road. Conceptual plans developed by the County indicate a recreation center with some active recreation facilities on this site. The County should develop this site in accordance with its 1989 Master Plan. These improvements, along with the existing facilities in Jetton Park, will constitute a community park. The planned improvements along with a community/recreation center will satisfy the requirement for serving as one of the community parks.

Bailey Road Park - Based on the recommendations from the 1999 Comprehensive Plan, the Town purchased approximately 75 acres at the intersection of Bailey Road and Highway 115. After purchase of the property, the Town proposed a Master Plan that called for the park to be developed as a community park with a variety of active and passive park facilities. In the past five years, Cornelius has developed the majority of facilities proposed by the Master Plan, and Bailey Road Park is now a major provider of park facilities. In 2002, the Town worked with CMS and provided a portion of the Bailey Road Park site to be used for the construction of a middle



school. In return, the school is building a football field/track facility that will be available for joint use and is working with the Town to allow joint use of the school's gymnasium.

Future plans for the school site include the construction of a high school. As these plans are developed, Cornelius should work closely with CMS to establish joint use of some of the facilities. The Town should consider providing additional funding to allow the construction of an expanded gymnasium facility and possible meeting rooms. Through this joint use of gymnasium facilities, the Town could meet many of its indoor athletic facility needs and avoid the cost of constructing a stand alone gymnasium. In addition, the proposed high school site could provide an excellent location for a performance arts facility that can serve as a cultural arts facility for northern Mecklenburg County (as recommended by the North Mecklenburg Cultural Action Plan study). This facility could be a collaborative development between Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools and the towns of Huntersville, Davidson, and Cornelius.

Robbins Park - In 2003, the County purchased 100 acres of beautiful land in the western section of town adjacent to Catawba Avenue. Final acquisition of property may result in this acreage becoming 116 acres. The County will maintain approximately half of this property as a nature preserve, and will lease the remainder of the property to Cornelius for the development of a community park.

The Town of Cornelius has developed preliminary designs for the park site, and will begin a Master Plan for the park within the next year. The planning and development for this site is an important step in meeting the many facility needs of the Town.

Neighborhood Parks

The Town of Cornelius should be responsible for providing eight (8) neighborhood parks by the end of the planning period. This will require the development of four (4) new park sites. These new parks should be 7-15 acres in size and be easily accessible by pedestrians and bicyclists within a 1-mile service radius. These parks will be intensely developed with active recreation facilities such as: soccer fields, basketball courts, softball or baseball fields, a multipurpose field, and tennis courts. There should be limited passive facilities associated with these parks. They are intended to be used solely by the residents of the Town and not reserved by private recreation associations. Each new park site should have a site-specific master plan prepared for its development and local neighborhood users should be made part of the development process. Where feasible, the parks should be linked to other parks and recreation areas by greenways/trails and bikeways/routes.

Existing Parks

Torrence Chapel Park, Smithville Park, Jetton Road Neighborhood Park, and Legion Park - These existing parks will remain the same size and have a maximum service radius of one mile. A master plan has been developed for Jetton Road Neighborhood Park. The Town should implement the proposed improvements to this park.

Proposed Parks

Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Site - This neighborhood site is located to provide service to the eastern part of town in the proposed residential development associated with the future transit stop. This park should include facilities similar to those at Torrence Chapel Park such as field games, court games, crafts, playground apparatus, picnicking, and space for quiet/passive activities. *(See typical park description in Section 3)*



McDowell Creek - An additional park is needed in west Cornelius north of Robbins Park along the proposed McDowell Creek Greenway. This park, located between West Catawba and I-77 in an area of intense residential development is recommended in lieu of the mini parks listed in the 1999 study. *(See typical park description in Section 3)*

Glenridge/Heritage/Oakhurst - This neighborhood park site is located to provide service to the southern area of Town and to accommodate new residential development. This park should include facilities similar to those proposed above such as field games, court games, crafts, playground apparatus, picnicking, and space for quiet/passive activities. *(See typical park description in Section 3)*

Cornelius East - This neighborhood park is situated southeast of the town's center in the vicinity of Bailey Road, east of NC 115. The park is to serve new residential development in the area. This park should include facilities similar to those shown above such as field games, court games, crafts, playground apparatus, picnicking, and space for quiet/passive activities. *(See typical park description in Section 3)*

Mini Parks

Currently, the Town has only one mini park, Walter Henderson Road Mini Park. The Master Plan recommends a total of three (3) mini-park sites by the end of the planning period. Two additional mini parks will be needed by 2015. These mini parks should be developed at Floral Lane where the town already has land and in the habitat housing site. This represents a change in planning philosophy from the 1999 plan. While this report uses the same land planning standards as the 1999 plan, it recommends mini parks be developed at a size of one to two acres. Using this size increases the play value of the parks and minimizes the number of parks required. These sites should include an open multipurpose field, playground equipment, and a basketball court. The Town should be responsible for the development and maintenance of these sites. Mini parks are typically located close to higher density neighborhoods. Future mini-parks sites may be acquired from developers as new developments continue, and as required by the Town's Land Development Code.

Special Use Facilities

Jetton Park Community/Recreation Center

The County should develop a community/recreation center on the undeveloped land at Jetton Park on Jetton Road as recommended in their capital needs assessment. This facility should be focused on a community meeting center and on a facility that can be used to house Cornelius's recreation programs.

A community/recreation center is an important multipurpose, multigenerational facility serving a variety of town needs. Cornelius currently does not have a community/recreation center and is heavily dependent on school facilities as a substitute. Without a community center, the Parks and Recreation Department is hindered with its general programming. The need for a community/recreation center in the Town was identified as a top priority by the department. The center needs to be 20,000 to 30,000 square feet in order for it to operate effectively as a multipurpose recreation space.



Cultural Arts Center

In addition to a traditional community center, the Town should facilitate the development of a center for cultural arts as recommended in the North Mecklenburg Cultural Action Plan. A possible location for this facility would be the campus of the proposed high school at Bailey Road.

This facility could be developed in conjunction with the high school and could be co-developed with Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools and the other towns in northern Mecklenburg County (Davidson and Huntersville). This location would provide a central location for this facility between the three towns.

Lake Access

As presented previously in this report, Mecklenburg County offers special facilities at Ramsey Creek and Blythe Landing. These sites provide additional benefits to the Cornelius community as public parklands. The facilities at these sites serve the northern region of the county as well as the entire county in providing passive recreation opportunities and water access to Lake Norman. However, they do not provide the active recreation facilities that are needed in the northern region of the county.

The lack of public swimming access to the lake was mentioned by several people in both the public meetings and the stakeholder interviews. Mecklenburg County, which has several park facilities on the lake, does not allow public swimming at these facilities due to the cost of operations and the liability that is associated with swimming. The Town of Cornelius should discuss this issue with the County to determine if it is feasible to propose swimming access at Jetton Park.

Bikeways

The Town should extend sidewalks/bike lanes along Catawba Avenue, Old Statesville Road, NC 73, Torrence Chapel Road, Bethel Church Road, Jetton Road, Nantz Road, and Westmoreland Road for safe pedestrian access throughout town.

Greenways

Greenway trails are typically off-road facilities that traverse through natural areas and are enjoyed by walkers/joggers and bicyclists. The trail surface can be either natural or paved and normally is 10' in width. Greenways are also green infrastructures that provide environmental protection and recreation as well as economic development. They offer a way to get from here to there besides using a car. The most popular form of outdoor recreation in this state is walking. A greenway trail provides a linkage between communities, schools, churches, business, and parks.

Recognizing the importance of these facilities, Cornelius commissioned a greenway study in 2004. The Greenway Master Plan recommends the development of a series of greenways and sidewalk improvements to improve pedestrian circulation throughout the community. This plan recommends the construction of 13.5 miles of greenways with an anticipated cost of \$5,000,000. Mecklenburg County has reaffirmed the importance of greenways by including funds for their construction in the 2004 bond package. With the passing of this bond referendum, Mecklenburg County will be constructing greenways along the South Prong and McDowell Creeks.

Cornelius, in conjunction with Mecklenburg County, should develop a greenway system into town using the South Prong Branch, the unnamed tributary leading into Davidson, McDowell Creek, and Caldwell Station Creek. Utility right-of-ways and joint participation of privately owned properties along the stream and creek channels should be utilized. The Town should coordinate and establish a joint agreement for a greenway trail easement in the right-of-ways (R.O.W.) for existing and future sanitary sewer lines. Sanitary sewer right-of-ways provide an excellent location for greenway trails



because they typically follow drainage ways such as streams/creeks. Where this option is unavailable the Town will need to purchase greenway land or easements for development. The Town should also provide trailhead connections or access points to the greenways from adjoining streets and neighborhoods.

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.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System

The joint use agreement between CMS and the Town of Cornelius will continue to require a cooperative effort in the sharing of the community resources by supplying existing school sites for active recreation. Athletic facilities should be considered for joint use to help reduce duplication of these expensive improvements by both the school system and the Town. This will continue to result in the least possible expenditure of public funds for the area. The school system should make their recreational facilities accessible to the Town's Parks and Recreation Department when schedule permits. These facilities include the existing elementary school, the planned West Moreland Elementary School, and Bailey Road Middle and High Schools. Development of an expanded gymnasium facility at the future high school would greatly relieve the Town's need for indoor athletic space and would allow the Town to avoid the larger cost of building a stand alone gymnasium. A mutually beneficial agreement should be negotiated between the school system and the Town. CMS should coordinate their planning efforts with the Town of Cornelius for any new development of schools proposed within the Town limits, or sphere of influence. The Town should assist in the location and acquisition of any school site.

Private Sector

The private sector should provide recreation facilities and programs that the Town and public sector are unable to offer. These facilities may include golf courses, private swim clubs, tennis clubs, and private athletic associations and complexes. A perfect example of this collaboration is the development of the aquatic facility that is currently being planned by Mecklenburg Aquatic Club(MAC) at Bailey Road Community Park. Another excellent example of cost avoidance through public/private ventures is the County/Town's involvement in the Westmoreland Athletic Complex.

Large employers and industrial companies should continue to provide their own recreation facilities on their private property, or financially contribute to the development of special facilities within the Town's park.



Land developers should be responsible for the dedication of open space as required by the Town's Land Development Code. The land development process provides an excellent opportunity to gain additional land for natural area preservation and greenway development. Developers can enhance their projects and realize economic benefits when they carefully plan sites to include recreational amenities.

Whether it is personal, environmental, social, activity-oriented, or economic, the benefits of recreation and park services can be summarized as simply providing a better way of life for the community and its citizens.

TABLE 4-1
TOWN OF CORNELIUS PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT
CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Capital Improvement and Land Acquisition	Total ¹ Cost Projection	Time Frame of Improvement	
		2006 - 2010	2011-2016
Renovation Program			
Existing Parks	\$1,500,000	\$750,000	\$750,000
Planning & Design	\$150,000	\$75,000	\$75,000
Renovation/Maintenance Program Total	\$1,650,000	\$825,000	\$825,000
Land Acquisition Program			
Community Parks (No Land Acquisition req.)			
Jetton II	\$0		
Robbins Park	\$0	\$0	\$0
Neighborhood Parks (4 new sites)			
Site #1 TOD Neighborhood	Dedicated	Dedicated	
Site #2 McDowell Creek (10 acres)	\$500,000	\$500,000	
Site #3 Glenridge/Heritage/Oakhurst	Dedicated	Dedicated	
Site #4 Cornelius East Vision (10 acres)	\$500,000	\$500,000	
Mini Parks (no land acquisition required)	Dedicated		
Greenway	\$500,000	\$200,000	\$300,000
Land Acquisition Program Total	\$1,500,000	\$1,200,000	\$300,000
Park Development Program			
Community Parks (2 sites)			
Jetton II	\$1,000,000		\$1,000,000
Robbins Park	\$4,200,000	\$4,200,000	
Neighborhood Parks			
Jetton Neighborhood Park	\$250,000	\$250,000	
Site #1 TOD Neighborhood	\$750,000	\$750,000	
Site #2 McDowell Creek	\$750,000		\$750,000
Site #3 Glenridge/Heritage/Oakhurst	\$750,000	\$750,000	
Site #4 Cornelius East Vision	\$750,000		\$750,000
Mini Parks			
Site #1 Floral Lane Mini Park	\$200,000	\$200,000	
Site #2 Habitat Mini Park	\$200,000		\$200,000
Planning and Design	\$885,000	\$615,000	\$270,000
Park Development Program Total	\$9,735,000	\$6,765,000	\$2,970,000
Special Use Facilities Program			
Bailey Road High School Athletic Facilities	\$750,000		\$750,000
Westmoreland School Improvements	\$500,000	\$500,000	
Westmoreland Private Partnership	\$350,000	\$350,000	
Greenway	\$5,000,000	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000
Planning & Design	\$660,000	\$335,000	\$325,000
Special Use Facilities Program Total	\$7,260,000	\$3,685,000	\$3,575,000
Total Capital Improvement Budget Cost	\$20,145,000	\$12,475,000	\$7,670,000

¹Proposed cost is presented in 2005 dollar values and makes no allowance for inflation, increased construction cost, or land price increases.