

GAINESVILLE 2030 PARKS, GREENWAYS, AND OPEN SPACES MASTER PLAN

November 2019



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: GAINESVILLE PARKS AND RECREATION SERVICES DEPARTMENT MASTER PLAN

PURPOSE OF A MASTER PLAN

The purpose of the Gainesville 2030 Parks, Greenways, and Open Spaces Master Plan is to provide the city with a road map for present and future recreational programs and facilities development. For this Master Plan, information was gathered from sources that included a community-wide survey, public input meetings, citizen emails, and interviews with stakeholders, GPRA staff and administrators, and elected officials.

GAINESVILLE PARKS AND RECREATION AGENCY (GPRA)

GPRA is comprised of the Parks and Recreation Director, appointed Parks and Recreation Board, a Deputy Director, and four divisions. The Recreation Board is a 9-member board with officers that include a chair, vice-chair, and secretary-treasurer. The Director serves as a technical advisor to the Board and is responsible for daily operations of the Agency, including policy recommendations, hiring and training staff, assigning duties, establishing and supervising programs and services, and related activities of the Agency. In recognition of GPRA's commitment to excellence, the Agency was awarded CAPRA accreditation in 2000 and was re-accredited in 2005, 2010, and 2015. As of FY2019, there are 38 Full-Time (FT), 129 Part-Time (PT), and 82 seasonal positions.

NATIONAL STANDARDS, BENCHMARKS AND THE CITY OF GAINESVILLE

The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) provides National Benchmarks, based on a community's population related to jurisdictional responsibilities. The NRPA benchmarks in this Master Plan are from the 2018 agency performance report. As an accredited agency, GPRA is assumed to be operating in the area normally associated with NRPA's upper quartile for a city the size of Gainesville.

COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS, CHANGES AND INPUT

As of 2018, the City of Gainesville comprised 21% of the population of Hall County. By 2030, the City of Gainesville's population is projected to increase by approximately 32%, from 42,716 to 56,180, comprising approximately 23% of the total population of Hall County based upon estimates by the City of Gainesville Community Development. According to the 2018 Georgia Office of Planning and Budget and the 2011 US Census Bureau Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, The City of Gainesville has a higher poverty rate and a lower median income than Georgia as a whole. Additional research conducted as part of The United Way Game Plan suggests that over 40% of Hall County, as a whole, lives in poverty while 54% are considered "financially burdened."

Different age and ethnic groups utilize parks and recreation facilities and programs in different ways. Some examples of these differences include:

- Millennials choose where they live before they choose their job, drive fewer miles, prefer "walkable" communities, and place a premium on locations that accommodate all aspects of "live, work, play" within walking/biking distance.
- Seniors are living longer, staying active longer, seek activities that involve people of the same age group, enjoy sharing/mentoring younger generations, and have the greatest percentage of disposable income and available time to volunteer.
- The Hispanic community frequently places a high priority on open space for unstructured play, gathering places for family and friends, and trails and walking paths.

Over the years leading to 2030, the number of young children (0 – 4-year olds) is anticipated to increase while 10 -19-year olds are projected to decline. The population of young people 20 – 30 is expected to rise but there is a much lower anticipation that 30 – 54 years old will move to or stay in City of Gainesville. The largest gain in population is people in the 55+ years and older group. This age group is anticipated to grow by almost 59% and represent almost 33% of the overall population in 2030. As of 2017, minority communities represented approximately 61.8% of the City of Gainesville population, with 41.7% identifying as Hispanic or Latino. Minority populations are projected to continue to grow as a percentage through 2030.



ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET, CAPITAL BUDGET, COST RECOVERY

GPRA funds 100% of its annual operations from revenue generated through annual property taxes, and fees for programs and services. A 5-year review of GPRA revenues revealed that departmental revenues were roughly 1/3 of total revenues. Based on NRPA benchmarks, GPRA is projected to need an additional \$3.36M added to the current budget, suggesting a total budget of approximately \$8.10M, by 2030.

The NRPA benchmark for a city 20,000-49,999 is \$7,635,274 dedicated to capital expenses over 5 years, or \$1,527,055 per year. Over the period from FY15 – FY19, GPRA dedicated \$4,263,286 to annual capital expenses, or an average of \$852,657. This is an annual average of \$674,398 below NRPA benchmarks for capital budget expenditures. Both actual and projected GPRA capital funding from 2015 – 2023 was compared to the NRPA benchmark and the results in section 5.2 of the report show that substantial capital funding, totaling over \$30M will be needed through 2030.

For GPRA, cost recovery findings show that revenue as a percent of expenditures increased from 39% in FY15 to 43% in FY17 before dropping to near 38% for FY18 (adjusted) and FY19 (budget). In the absence of revenue generating facilities, the rise and decline of overall cost recovery could be an indication that fees and charges have reached the top end of what the market will accommodate, that programming demand has exceeded available space or that the age and condition of some facilities mean less rentals as people turn to newer options.

Consider:

- Meeting or exceeding the NRPA benchmark by increasing the existing operating budget by an additional \$3.3M to a total of \$8.1M by 2030.
- Investing a total of \$30M in capital funds to offset deferred maintenance, provide for new facilities, and support land acquisition needs.
- Through 2025, allocating a minimum of \$2.98M annually with a goal of renovating facilities what were identified as in fair to poor condition (Note: this recommendation is intended to provide critical funding to help address deferred maintenance needs).
- From 2019 – 2030, consider allocating a minimum of approximately \$1.1M annually for land acquisition.
- Dedicating funding above to address facilities and capital equipment currently identified as in need of renovation/replacement (ex; Civic Center) as well planning for as those identified as being in good condition, renovating them before they deteriorate.
- Including a dedicated fund to be used to acquire properties/expand parks with a target allocation of a minimum of \$200,000 annually.
- Maintaining and establishing multiple revenue streams to provide capital funding stability.
- Adopting an asset and work force allocation tool such a “Cityworks” or similar program; include staff training, mobile devices, etc.



ANNUAL OPERATING FUNDING, CAPITAL FUNDING, SPLOST, AND OPPORTUNITY FUNDS

Operating and Capital Funding for GPRA programs, services, and facilities is a significant need and options are limited. Examples of funding vehicles include: Property Tax, User and Activity Fees, Enterprise Activities (i.e. tournament complexes, events, public/private partnerships, etc.), Development or Impact Fees, SPLOST/TSPLOST, Grants, Donations, Bequeaths, and Gifts, Bonds and Other Special Levies and Funding Opportunities.

Sustainable funding for annual park maintenance is a high-priority. Overall, support for an increase in the millage rate was limited. However, of the available funding options, a millage rate increase is a major tool for long-term, sustainable operational funds. Currently, GPRA is collecting a 0.75 mil, less than the legally allowed 1 mil. Research has proven that establishing accessible natural resource parks and greenspace increases home values for tax payers and increases tax revenue for local government.

The GPRMP Survey suggests significant support for continued SPLOST/TSPLOST funding. While this option can provide substantial funding for Capital Budget needs, it cannot, by law, be used for operational expenses.

Bonds can provide focused capital funding that significantly enhances GPRA's ability to renovate existing facilities, acquire property, construct new facilities, and meet community needs. Other options available to GPRA include increasing impact fees, grants, donation, sponsorships, and gifts. GPRA has, historically, created a mix of these capital funding sources.

Consider:

- Over the next years, implement a two-step process to increase the millage rate to the legal cap of 1.0 mil.
- Raising the hotel/motel tax; Review both hotel/motel tax and impact fees at least every 3 years for potential adjustment.
- Developing a General Obligation Bond to address park/facility restoration, facility development, and land acquisition need.
- Investigating and developing a strategic plan to partner with a carefully selected, socially-oriented Opportunity Funds to include the creation of greenspace, greenways, parkland, and related facilities.
- Hiring or dedicating a position to fundraising; obtaining government and foundation grants; sponsorship promotions and benefits; and other related activities.
- Utilizing existing facilities and/or building tournament facilities for the purpose of generating revenue for GPRA.
- When using existing facilities, establishing a maximum number of times per year facilities will be dedicated to fundraising to minimize potential customer dissatisfaction when facilities are not available to the public; publicize the purpose of the event (i.e. reducing GPRA annual expenses) to promote community support.
- Expanding and enhance opportunities for citizens and businesses to sponsor events, activities, and even facilities.
- Expanding donation opportunities.



PUBLIC/STAKEHOLDER INPUT AND SURVEY

The GPRMP survey indicated that inside the COG zip codes, 36% of respondents are satisfied or very satisfied, 26% were neutral, 38% were unsatisfied with GPRA facilities. Of respondents living outside the COG 46% indicated they are satisfied or very satisfied, 35% are neutral, and 11% are unsatisfied with GPRA facilities. The Survey shows that over half of the respondents (59%) leave the city and travel to Gwinnett County because: Programs are not offered (40.0%), Facilities are not offered (20.8%), GPRA facilities too far away (11.1%), etc. Respondents indicated the following needs, in priority order: Trails and Greenways (74%), Recreation Program/Events (62%), Parks (61%), Athletic Fields (45%), Basketball (44%), and Tennis Courts (37%).

The highest frequency of visits to GPRA facilities was reported as 19.1% who stated they visit Parks and Greenways a few times per month while 10% of respondents noted they visited Frances Meadows Aquatic Center a few times per month. Notable factors preventing the respondents from using the GPRA facilities were that facilities were too far (37%), preferred facilities or programs not available (17%) and poor condition and maintenance of facilities (14%). The top five community preferences for facilities recorded were: hiking and walking trails (64%), biking multi-use trails (52%), community events (44%), Greenways (43%) and park restrooms (39%).

The top five projects that COG respondents indicated needed funding were: Continue development of Greenways (87%), Add/Renovate park restrooms (83%), Add a fitness trail at France Meadows Aquatic Center (73%), Playground Additions/Improvements (69%), and tied for fifth were Renovate Green Street Park and Develop Community Gardens (64%). The top five project priorities that very nearly matched the funding question responses above, with the exception of the fifth highest response being Develop a Dog Park. A review of the demographics of respondents suggests that a significant segment of the COG, Hispanics, were under represented in the Survey.



TOP RECOMMENDATIONS

After a review of all data and input, findings suggest that overarching priorities and guiding principles are:

- Expand Greenways, enhance connectivity, and build fitness trails
- Take care of what the community has – focus on renovating existing facilities.
- Enhance/build additions to existing facilities.
- Build a Sports Complex
- Plan for and build a new Recreation Center
- Build a Racquet Sports/Tennis Center



PARK LAND, GREENSPACE, MAINTENANCE AND CONDITION OF FACILITIES

NRPA benchmarks for the number of parks per resident (median) is 22. Currently GPRA has 21 parks totaling 458 acres. Based on NRPA benchmarks, Gainesville should have 500 acres of parkland/greenspace; currently a 42-acre gap. By 2030, due to the projected increase in population, COG should have 657 acres of parkland; a projected gap of 199 acres. There are portions of the COG, especially in the southern part of the city, that lack access to parks and related facilities. Overall, the majority (78%) of GPRA facilities are in good to excellent condition. However, without a sustained increase in capital funding, a significant number of facilities currently categorized as good or fair are in danger of moving into the “fair” range with others moving into the “poor” category by 2030.

Consider:

- Establishing a priority to renovate and expand the GPRA maintenance facilities, including satellite storage/operation hubs.
- Within the next 3 years enhancing GPRA’s comprehensive capital asset and facility inventory to include all equipment, facilities, paths, trails, and amenities.
- Acquiring trail and land management equipment.
- Reviewing and establishing mowing standards/zones.
- Acquiring at least another 188 acres of park land and greenway by 2030, targeting 9 new parks.
- Consider removing the tennis courts at Longwood Park and converting the use to a special event and multi-use field; renovating natural surface paths and provide infrastructure as needed (restrooms, benches, lighting, etc.).
- Securing as many United States Army Corps of Engineer properties (USACOE) as possible to provide for future growth and needs.
- Establishing park-use levels by developing a plan and utilizing electronic counters, trail cameras, and other tools to note the level and timing of use at parks, greenspace, trails, and other GPRA facilities.
- Obtaining ESRI’s ArcGIS software and providing training to key staff to help with the development of planning documents, maps, work plans, land management plans, etc.
- Consider using SPLOST and capital funds and establishing an acquisition priority process and create a permanent, dedicated Park and Greenspace Acquisition Fund.



PERSONNEL

GPRA personnel levels were reviewed and compared to NRPA benchmarks. The NRPA benchmark for a city the size of Gainesville is 12.55 FTEs* per 10,000 residents. Based on this benchmark: GPRA’s current staffing level is 44 FTEs (10.30 FTEs per 10,000 residents), NRPA benchmarks suggest GPRA should have 53 FTEs (12.55 FTEs per 10,000 residents), and by 2030 NRPA benchmarks suggest that GPRA should have 74 FTEs.

Consider:

- Hiring at least 9 Full-time Equivalent positions within the next 3 years, adding a total of 30 new FTE positions to GPRA by 2030.



SAFETY IN PARKS

Public/stakeholder input and comments on the GPRMP Survey identified safety concerns including lack of strategically placed lighting in parks and along greenways, police or security staff not being seen in or around the parks, concern with inappropriate behavior by park users, and homeless in some areas of the parks.

Consider:

- Assigning 2 – 3 sworn officers directly to the GPRA or establish a regular patrol of all parks throughout the day and night, and potentially include bike or motorcycle patrols, especially for greenways and trails.
- Having key staff receive CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) training;
- Installing cameras in park buildings and parking lots, maintenance yards and buildings;
- Adding lighting to strategic locations in parks to deter criminal behavior;
- Changing requisite lighting ordinances to allow for lights in GPRA parks and greenspaces
- Installing “property subject to video surveillance” signs in high conflict areas.

- Working with law enforcement to conduct “safety reviews/audits” of facilities and grounds.
- Installing “panic buttons” in key locations in all park buildings to allow staff to silently alert public safety should an emergency arise.
- Establishing a “Trail Ambassador” Program, utilizing specially trained volunteers to enhance user experiences and monitor trails.
- Working with local law enforcement as well as Georgia Department of Natural Resources law enforcement and first responder officials to provide on-going programs designed to teach situational awareness, safety and personal defense.
- Building capacity and consider dedicating resources to the removal of invasive plants in all GPRA facilities.



AQUATICS

NRPA benchmarks suggest that for a community the size of Gainesville, GPRA would have 2 outdoor pools. Based on public inputs and the GPRMP Survey, there is strong support for an outdoor competition pool that can be used year-round. Public and stakeholder feedback and numerous comments in the GPRMP Survey suggest there is very strong support in favor of public access to Lake Lanier.

Consider:

- Building one outdoor pool at the Frances Meadows Aquatic Center .
- Building at least 4 more splash pads, 1 to be at the proposed Recreation center; 1 at Midtown Park, and 1 located at the proposed town green (involving the Roosevelt square/city hall,); 1 splash pad location to be determined (TBD).
- Adding at least 1 swim beach to a lakeside park



BOATING AND FISHING

Based on public/stakeholder feedback and the GPRMP Survey (29% of respondents), there is a need for additional canoe/kayak resources in the COG. Lake Lanier Olympic Park and Longwood Park are well located for this activity.

Consider:

- Adding docks to Holly Park, and an additional dock at Longwood Park; include space and accommodations for canoes and kayaks.
- At Lake Lanier Olympic Park, consider renovating existing docks and including a canoe/kayak, paddle boards, and small sail boat focused dock system to facilitate and expand rental operations.
- Upgrading/renovating existing piers to include lighting, cleaning stations and wheelchair accommodations.
- Adding additional fishing piers to each of the 4 lakeside parks.
- Working with GDNR and USACOE fisheries specialist to enhance and maintain fish habitat around piers.



COMMUNITY GARDENS

NRPA benchmarks suggest a community the size of Gainesville would have 2 community gardens. There is support for this amenity, with 30% of GPRMP Survey respondents indicating they would like to see GPRA build community garden, 64% supporting funding for Community Gardens, and 20% indicating it was the first priority for funding.

Consider:

- Creating at least 2 community gardens, with at least 1 located at the proposed recreation center.
- Partnering with Master Gardeners to install, operate, and maintain the community gardens.



RESTROOMS, PAVILIONS, AND PICNIC AREAS

Restrooms were in the top 5 items GPRMP Survey respondents indicated they wanted added or increased. They were the number 2 item respondents’ thought was needed and the number 2 item respondents though was the most important item to fund. One fifth of GPRMP Survey respondents indicated that they wanted more/expanded picnic pavilions and shelters.

Consider:

- Locating restrooms strategically throughout park and greenway system.
- Locating additional pavilions and picnic areas in areas of the park system where there is additional need.



FACILITY NEEDS

In the GPRMP Survey, respondents indicated that recreation and community centers were: Wanted and should be added (27%), and the #5 project priority that GPRA should pursue. Data suggests that GPRA needs 2 community centers, 2 recreation centers, and 1 fitness center.

Consider:

- Building a recreation center and a sports complex to meet the need.
- Developing in-house or adopting National Green Building standards for renovation and new construction.
- Researching and adopt or expand basic energy and water saving activities.
- Including a climbing wall in the proposed recreation center.
- Including a gymnasium as part of the Recreation Center and, potentially, the Sports Complex.

Sports and athletic facilities that are most important to COG residents are: Recreation Facility/Gym (43%), Multi-purpose Field/Turf Field (26%), Fitness Trail at FMACC (15%), and Multi-use/Open Space (9%). Data indicated that the following sports and athletic facilities are needed: basketball courts, outdoor and multi-use indoor courts, softball fields, baseball fields, a turf field, fitness center, football field, gymnasium, multi-purpose fields, both outdoor and indoor and a track.



RACQUET SPORTS

NRPA Benchmarks suggest that a community the size of Gainesville would have 12 tennis courts, GPRA has 15. There was, however, support for a tennis complex; 9% of GPRMP Survey respondents indicating they would like to see GPRA add or expand tennis, 60% indicating that it was a Much Needed or Somewhat Needed, and 17% indicating that they felt it was the #1 project to be funded.

Consider adding:

- At the proposed Recreation Center, 2 additional tennis courts
- 2 pickleball/tennis overlay courts
- 4 pickleball courts
- 1 mini-tennis red court, 1 mini-tennis orange court
- 2 handball courts, expandable to 4.



DOG PARKS

The need for dog parks was indicated in stakeholder and public meetings. In the GPRMP Survey, respondents indicated a desire to see dog parks built (37%), felt dog parks were much needed or somewhat needed (56%), and when asked what was the #1 project priority for GPRA to pursue, dog parks were 5th out of 17.

Consider:

- Adding 2 dog parks, with a minimum size of 3 acres, preferably 6+, with 1 dog park being located at the proposed recreation center.



GREENWAYS, BLUEWAYS, TRAILS, AND CONNECTIVITY

GPRMP Survey respondents ranked these amenities as the #1, #2 and #4 Most Important facilities. Outside of the GPRA properties, greenways are currently planned by the Gainesville-Hall County Metropolitan Planning Organization (GHMPO). In addition, GPRA has partnered with other agencies to develop the Upper Lanier Water Trail.

Consider establishing a goal of building the following by 2030:

- 20 miles of new natural surface trails
- 20 miles of multi-use greenway paths
- 8 miles of mountain bike trails with a goal of linking with Hall County mountain bike trails

Work with GHMPO and the Gainesville Public Works Department to develop a comprehensive system of sidewalks, protected bike lanes, and greenways that interconnect all GPRA parks; where possible, expand the greenway corridor to include adjacent natural areas. Target greenway path and adjacent natural area connections to include:

- A connection between the Midtown and Rock Creek Greenways through the town square/Roosevelt Square; expand to include the Elachee Trail system as well as Newtown and New Holland areas.
- A greenway in the Pearl Nix Parkway, Longwood Creek/John Morrow Parkway areas
- Provide support to the Gainesville/Midland Rail to Trails and the Central Hall Multi-use trail plans; connect and/or establish adjacent natural areas and parks to enhance these efforts.
- Consider a sidewalk/greenway combination located along Atlanta Highway, especially in areas where roadside “trails” suggest high usage and where such sidewalks can connect neighborhoods to greenways.

Work with Georgia Department of Transportation to establish criteria and develop opportunities to:

- Set standards and establish the ability to construct road underpasses to accommodate greenways and multi-use paths when GDOT is building or replacing a bridge or culvert;
- Add protected multi-use and/or pedestrian access as part of all bridge replacement projects or, at a minimum, to build necessary abutments and infrastructure to support a future pedestrian bridge.
- Be able to utilize GDOT right-of-way properties as needed to create greenways. (example: using entrance and exit ramp areas and property along the edge of the right of way to create path access into GPRA owned or acquired tracts.)
- Consider working with GHMPO to utilize STRAVA data to help guide path and trail development to and around parks and greenways.

Consider adding restrooms, drinking fountains, and small docks (can be co-located with proposed fishing piers, where applicable) in an accessible location to blueway landings at Holly Park, Lanier Point Park and include wayfinding park signage (park maps and information, location of drinking fountains/restrooms) at blueway landing areas.



GREENSPACE INITIATIVE

A greenspace initiative began approximately 15 years ago in Hall County and included the COG with a goal of 20% permanently protected greenspace. Public meetings, stakeholder and staff interviews, and the GPRMP Survey highlighted a high level of community interest in the establishment of permanently protected greenspace.

Consider locating new parks in the:

- I985/129 corridor area
- Gaines Mill Road area
- Morningside Heights area

Consider locating the proposed recreation center in an economically depressed area of the COG in conjunction with redevelopment of area shopping/business development and establishing an associated special tax district to generate economic activity and spur development.



OTHER ACTIVITIES

Consider:

- Additional playgrounds: 4 tot lots, 4 playgrounds, and 2 destination playgrounds with exercise stations for adults
- Adding 1 Disc Golf Course
- Adding a Teen Area within proposed recreation center
- Nontraditional activities (as demand increases) including sand volleyball, horseshoes, Ultimate Frisbee, badminton, lacrosse, field hockey



SENIORS

By 2030, seniors are projected to be 33% of the population of the City of Gainesville. NRPA benchmarks suggest that a community the size of Gainesville would have 1 senior center which, by 2030, would increase to 2 centers. Currently, GPRA supports the Gainesville Senior Life Center.

Consider:

- Expanding facility opportunities for seniors by adding a “wing” on the proposed recreation center.
- Adding activities and accessibility to nearby parks with open space and walking trails.
- Providing a community garden area and nature/natural trails and dedicated transportation for seniors.



VOLUNTEERS

Consider establishing volunteer maintenance and land restoration days for:

- Trail and path clean-ups.
- Land restoration activities, including invasive plant removal, restoration plantings, etc.
- Seasonal/annual cleanup, painting, or repair events.
- Outdoor amenity repairs and painting.
- Promoting volunteerism and expressing appreciation for volunteer efforts.



SPECIAL EVENTS

Public and stakeholder feedback indicated a high interest in special events and activities; 44% (3rd highest) indicated that they wanted more community events, which require open space play areas/festival fields. There are no NRPA benchmarks for this, however, GPRM currently has 7 open areas that could serve as festival fields for both small and large events. These are: Holly Park, Lake Lanier Olympic Park, Lanier Point Park, Longwood Park, Midtown Greenway, Rock Creek Veterans Park, and the Civic Center (front lawn area – small “lawn events” only).

To meet diverse special event needs, consider:

- Developing a permanent amphitheater/stage as part of the Midtown Greenway potentially funded as a joint venture with the COG.
- Purchasing a portable Showmobile stage and sound system for use for community and special events.
- Utilizing multi-purpose fields, create 500-person flexible outdoor event space, expandable to 1,000, to be used for outdoor festivals and events.
- Locating restrooms convenient to performers.
- Including shade and drinking fountains nearby.
- Incorporating City Hall, Roosevelt Square, Mid-Town Greenway, and Rock Creek Veterans Park into a special event and open field/activity areas.



TEAM SPORTS AND INFORMAL ATHLETICS

GPRM does not have enough sports and athletic facilities to meet community demand. Currently, GPRM has priority use of Gainesville City School System facilities through a shared use agreement. This enables GPRM to maximize school gym resources. While agencies have done commendable job working out logistics, “surplus” gym capacity has generally been relegated to times staff logistics and/or the lack of public demand preclude use (ex: Sunday mornings, late evenings).

Consider:

- Adding gym capacity within the Agency



THERAPEUTIC RECREATION AND SPECIAL NEEDS

Currently GPRM does not have a therapeutic recreation program. Public and stakeholder input as well as GPRMP Survey data suggest that there is a need for therapeutic recreation services. It is important to note that most programs and activities should be developed with a goal of inclusion, where those with and without disabilities participate in the same activity.

In all spaces that are used for therapeutic recreation, consider:

- Enhancing/ensuring facilities comply with accessibility standards and needs.
- Including space for therapeutic recreation activities with a ramp/railing and zero depth entry area.
- Adding space for the therapeutic recreation program at the proposed recreation center.
- Partnering with nearby jurisdictions to meet this need.



GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE, STEWARDSHIP, AND LAND MANAGEMENT

As an NRPA accredited agency, GPRM has done an excellent job of establishing maintenance standards and procedures for landscaped and activity areas associated with parks and greenspace.



Consider:

- Developing ecological land management plans to address invasive plant expansion.
- Adopting a policy of planting native plants only in all GPRA landscape areas
- Developing a park management plan that include the establishment and maintenance of native habitats.
- Establish dedicated GPRA staff to create a formal Greenspace Program.



WALKABILITY AND BIKEABILITY

The bikeability and walkability maps in the report appendix highlight areas where there are gaps. Approximately 33% of GPRA residents live within 0.5 miles of a park or greenspace and with walking/hiking/jogging representing the top recreational activity/facility which COG residents want, there is a significant need to enhance walkability, interconnecting neighborhoods and businesses with parks and greenspace. Taking a more in-depth look at bikeability, the master planning team used a 1.5-mile benchmark – a distance more reflective of families with younger children. Approximately 93% of the COG is bikeable for young families. There is a need to connect parks and greenspace to the community through a comprehensive system of sidewalks, dedicated bike lanes, bike paths, greenways, and natural trails.



NATURE AND SCIENCE FACILITIES

Consider:

- Expanding the Linwood Nature Preserve, acquiring additional adjacent property as it becomes available.
- Constructing an outdoor teaching area/gathering area and working with volunteers, or other groups to build these facilities.



TECHNOLOGY

Consider:

- Obtaining ESRI's ArcGIS software and providing training to key staff to help with the development of enhanced customer response.
- Establishing a "technology" committee to research available software to enhance existing program registration.
- Fully utilizing savings and efficiencies associated with technology, consider investing in mobile devices and cell-enabled tablets.
- Developing capacity for, providing staff training for, and acquiring a drone to assist with resource monitoring, asset management, mapping/story board development.



SUMMARY

In summary, as part of the master planning process, data was gathered from national, state, and industry organizations. Community input through stakeholder interviews, a public meeting, and a community survey was obtained. Demographics and projected changes in population were reviewed and potential facility and program needs evaluated accordingly. City of Gainesville community-wide studies, plans, and assessment reports were also reviewed. Included in the master planning process was the evaluation of potential funding sources and revenue enhancement activities. These recommendations included the number, costs, type, and potential location of parks, greenspace, greenways, and facilities, along with projected cost estimates. Utilizing the information provided through the master planning process, elected officials and the community have the planning tools that will help inform and guide what should be built, when, and how to best fund, phase over time, and pay for the facilities needed to meet the community's need through 2030.