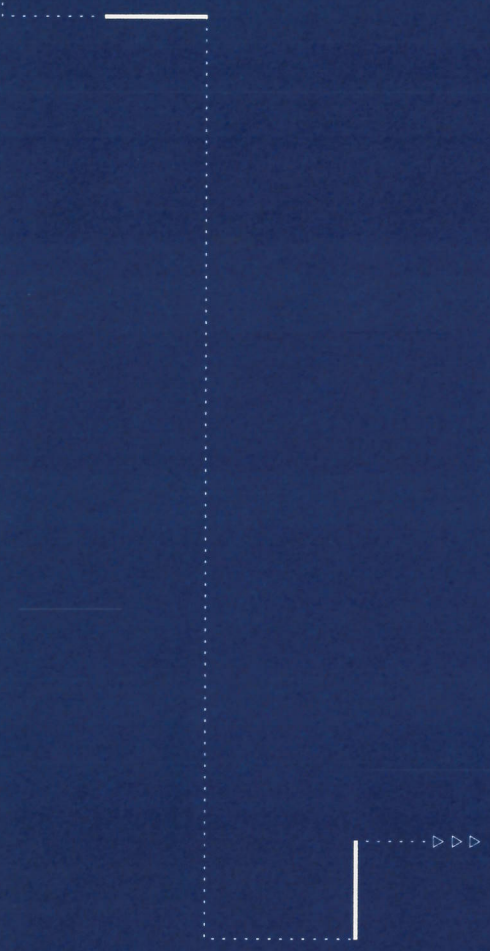


▷▷▷ Effective Solutions



**COMPREHENSIVE RECREATION
MASTER PLAN**

Community Input Special Interest Groups

City of Morganton, North Carolina

January 1997



City Department Heads

- The Morganton community is very recreation oriented and is desiring diverse facilities to meet their needs.
- The City Council is committed to continuing with the development of the Catawba River Greenway. The initial phases have been well received by the community.
- Historically, City Council has been somewhat conservative in financially supporting new recreation facilities.
- Bond referendums have been attempted in the past for a new swimming pool but have been defeated by the community.
- A successful recreation bond will need to be tied to various recreation improvements throughout the City, and not just to one special use facility such as a swimming pool.
- Try to get money for recreation improvements through federal or state grants.
- Current capital improvement needs, seen by the Department include: replacement of Collett Street Center gymnasium floor; widen the Freedom Park track; corporate picnic shelter; replace vehicles; ongoing maintenance of existing park facilities; and athletic field lighting.
- A strong Recreation Department with numerous programs can help keep the youth of the community active in a positive way and will help reduce crime.
- Greenways are fine, but don't forget that the kids who live in the inner city also need easily accessible recreation facilities for entertainment and social purposes.
- Additional facility needs as identified by Department Heads include: a training/or corporate retreat center, greenway extension along Hunting Creek (through state property), renovation of inner city parks; large picnic shelter, jogging track, and more soccer, softball, and youth baseball fields.

Private Recreation Providers

- There are excellent relationships between the private recreation providers and the City Recreation Department. There is opportunity and willingness to work together even more on joint use of facilities or programs.
- The private recreation providers benefit economically from a strong City Recreation Department.
- Try more sponsorships of special events or tournaments with the private sector to offset public cost. They want to participate.
- Allow more opportunity for private advertising at public recreation facilities (signs on outfield fences, ads in programs) to offset public cost.
- When considering new expensive special use facilities (indoor pool), look at what is currently in the City that is provided by others (state government, school, hospital, etc.).
- User fees should be closely evaluated. Consider cost impact on the kids, as well as how competitive the fee is with the private sector.
- City should not provide some special use facilities such as RV camping. Private sector should provide these unique facilities if it can operate them better, and make a profit.
- Some special facilities and events (canoe livery and rafting down Catawba River) are cost prohibitive for the private sector. Too much liability cost involved, and no profit.
- Private sector is in favor of recreation facility growth, but at a controlled rate. Don't over extend yourself financially.
- Recreation Department does an excellent job providing facilities and programs with limited resources.

Citizens With Special Needs

- The Recreation Department needs to add a Special Population Staff person to help coordinate and promote activities/programs for citizens with special needs. (High concentration of disabled people in Morganton.)
- In the past, the Recreation Department had a “buddy system” to help kids with disabilities participate in recreation programs. Parents want the “buddy system” to continue in the future and it needs better promotion.
- Overall, the Recreation Department needs to promote more strongly what is available for the disabled community. People are not aware of the easy access to some great recreational opportunities.
- The Special Olympics needs to be led by either the City or the Burke County Recreation Departments and not the schools. This is an extremely important special event for the disabled community that could fall under the responsibility of the Special Populations staff person.
- As Morganton continues to diversify with more Asian and Hispanic residents, it will be increasingly more important to communicate with everyone through various languages. (Staff that is bilingual, program pamphlets printed in English, Spanish, etc.)
- Additional facility needs identified by citizens with special needs, include: more gym space; indoor pool; more soccer/softball, youth baseball, football fields, and tennis courts.
- The new Wellness Center does not satisfy the need for a municipal indoor pool. A third bond campaign needs to occur and be led by strong civic and community leaders. The private sector needs to participate.
- Western Carolina Center receives calls often requesting access to their pool. They can't fulfill the needs of the overall community.
- There are 400 people at Western Carolina Center that are disabled. Accessibility to the park facilities needs to continue to be an important factor.
- Overall, the disabled community currently feels that the existing park system is physically accessible.

Environmentalist

- The environmentalist are extremely supportive of the greenway development because it satisfies the needs of so many users (nature walkers, joggers, bicyclists, etc.) and it helps preserve sensitive/critical open space.
- The two most popular bike routes are the Lake James Loop (Freedom Park High School, to NC 126 and back Watermill Road) and the City Bypass Loop (Kirksey Drive, Sanford Drive, and Fleming Drive).
- Consider the extension of the Catawba River Greenway to include other important tributaries such as: Hunting Creek, Silver Creek, John's River, and Warrior Fork.
- Try to include both rural bike routes along with urban bike commuter routes in the downtown area. With safer routes downtown, more people would ride their bikes to work.
- The Catawba River Water Trail will soon be designated by the state. Access points to the river for canoeist/rafters include: Lake James Power Plant, Watermill Road, Catawba River Greenway Park, Lenoir Road, Lagoon Site, and Huffman Bridge.
- There is a small dam just west of Independence Boulevard which impedes easy canoe travel along the Catawba River. There is also some conflict of uses between the canoeist and fishermen at Catawba River Greenway Park.
- The environmentalist would strongly support the acquisition of the Edward's Nursery Site along the Catawba River for a future park. Consider an environmental center as part of the park development. Clearly separate passive from active recreation uses.
- Consider environmental education opportunities along the greenway. Educate the public on the importance of the Catawba River water quality, plant materials, wildlife habitats, etc.
- Consider footbridge connection from Catawba River Greenway Park to Freedom High School. Would enhance biking, jogging, walking, and environmental education opportunities.

Chamber of Commerce

- The Chamber's current mission statement is to serve its existing membership and to focus on small business enterprises. In the future they will be more involved in also serving large businesses and in attracting retirees to the Burke County/Morganton area.
- The Chamber is forming a Recreation and Retirement Committee which will be responsible in the recruitment effort for retirees.
- Retirees are interested in this area due to the mountains, Lake James, climate, size of community, and livability conditions. Retirees will be interested in passive recreation opportunities and in senior programming.
- Specific recreational interest for retirees will include walking, arts and crafts, and social programs.
- Retirees will be extremely interested in golfing and water based recreation opportunities. There will be a need for additional golf courses and more public access to Lake James and the Catawba River.
- A lot of people moving into the community will probably live outside the Morganton City limits, but will depend upon the recreation facilities and programs that the City offers.
- It can be anticipated that the retirement community will be very interested in keeping Morganton an affordable place to live, and will oppose tax increases and major projects that don't benefit them.
- For major new projects such as an indoor swimming pool, private industry will need to help financially or they won't happen.
- With retirees, park facilities and recreation programming will probably be placed in a lower priority, as compared with public safety, water and sewer, and a good roadway network.

Adult Athletics

- Existing adult softball fields in the City are not adequate, fields are undersized.
- There is a strong need for a new five-field adult softball complex, where tournaments can be played.
- One large adult softball complex is preferred, over separate fields at various park sites throughout the City.
- City softball teams currently must go to Lenoir, Statesville, and Charlotte for tournament play.
- Keeping tournaments in Morganton will keep dollars in the community (gas, restaurants, hotels, etc.).
- The Collett Center gymnasium floor must be replaced now.
- There is a strong need for another gymnasium for adult basketball play. Currently all existing facilities are overloaded and there is no place to practice.
- Consider opening middle school gymnasiums at night for adult leagues.
- Adult soccer is becoming more popular and fields will need to be provided and reserved for league play.
- Consider the Edwards Nursery site as a potential new multi-use park, where new adult athletic fields could be located.

Senior Adults

- Seniors want to be active with opportunities to participate in a variety of forms of recreation (square dancing, bingo, arts and craft, bridge, and exercise).
- Seniors desire an indoor pool with time reserved during the day for senior water exercise programs.
- The new Wellness Center pool is too expensive for seniors to use.
- Bring in an outside consultant to help further research the need for an indoor pool, and help with a bond promotion.
- Next time consider a stand-alone recreation bond to include an indoor pool, greenway extensions, and renovations to existing parks. Don't tie it together with utility or school projects.
- An indoor walking track would be used extensively by the seniors for exercise.
- Seniors enjoy the greenway system and are supportive of further development.
- Provide more promotion of senior recreation programs. More people would participate if they knew what was available.
- It would be nice if the City would provide a full-time Seniors Activities Coordinator.
- Overall, the City, County, and College do a nice job providing recreation opportunities for seniors.

Arts and Humanities

- There is enormous competition in the arts and humanities entertainment industry. CoMMA competes regionally with Hickory, Asheville, and Charlotte for stage act and entertainment events.
- Even though CoMMA events are extremely cost competitive, people from Morganton will still go to Charlotte to watch the same show, and tie the trip into shopping and eating out.
- City currently sponsors 12-15 quality shows per year, and there are 125-140 events per year at the Municipal Auditorium.
- The Municipal Auditorium is a good facility with the ability to seat 1,058. Most shows average 600-700 people.
- CoMMA has a positive working relationship with the Recreation Department, sharing staff and equipment when needed.
- City has tried outdoor concert events, but it's difficult to organize and assemble. There is also high risk with unpredictable weather. Old high school site has been used in the past.
- The City does have a small outdoor amphitheater with a seating capacity of 200 for small events.
- Funding is hurting for the arts and humanities community. Everyone relies on the private sector to support arts and humanities.
- With the few City staff members working at CoMMA, it will be difficult to do any more programming than what is currently available.
- American culture is changing rapidly. Americans are becoming less patient to sit through a 2-3 hour show. They want to hit the remote control and fast forward.

School Personnel

- The schools and Recreation Department now operate on an informal basis to schedule after-school and school daycare activities at City facilities. There is a need for a formal joint-use agreement.
- School daycare and after school programs are willing to assist, (by fees), in providing programs for their groups. Either participate in at the recreation centers or at school sites if instructors are made available.
- Existing park sites do not offer much for large groups such as theirs. The facilities need updated and improved.
- Sport fields and gyms are needed badly in the community. The schools already experience conflicts with joint use of facilities.
- Would like to see the Recreation Department more involved with Project Graduation.
- Pools are something schools would support, but pools at schools sites are not likely.
- Schools are interested in helping the Recreation Department with in-kind service such as cleaning up parks, or any project that would benefit both parties.
- Facilities at some parks are too spread out, this makes it difficult to monitor a large group of children. Redesign park facilities is needed to eliminate problems like these.
- User fees must be carefully considered and not prohibit participation due to economic standing. Fees for large groups should be fair and economical.
- A bond issue/referendum to fund parks and recreation facilities will need to include a variety of activities in order to be successful.

WPCC

- Recreation facilities need to be affordable and accessible to all segments of the community, especially those who cannot afford “private memberships.”
- WPCC is supportive of the Recreation Department’s programs and assists with some activities and programs. Due to lack of facilities WPCC must rely more on the City to host programs they offer.
- The existing facilities are well maintained and they provide adequate service for specific activities.
- There is a need for more gyms and sports fields in the community due to the excessive use at existing facilities.
- Funding for park and recreation facilities will need to come from many sources such as the general fund, bonds, fees, gifts, etc. A key component of funding will be to tap into the private sector for support.
- It’s getting very difficult for the Recreation Department to provide for the needs of all the organizations that use their facilities and programs.
- The Recreation Department must promote the benefits that recreational activities provide physically, psychologically, socially, emotionally, and economically. (“wellness issues”)
- The residents in Morganton have proven their willingness to pay for recreational opportunities in the City. They believe recreation is an important public service like schools, public safety, and utilities.
- The changing demographics of the City’s population presents a challenge for the City to provide programs that promote the benefits of a culturally diverse society and are “all inclusive.”

Tennis Club

- The Tennis Club and City Recreation Department have a good working relationship and the City is very cooperative and supportive with use of facilities.
- Existing courts need repair and better lighting. With some courts needing repair, court time is difficult to schedule and additional courts are needed.
- A tennis facility/complex of 6-8 courts located separate from other recreation activities would benefit the City economically and promote tennis in the area. It would also take the pressure off existing facilities.
- A stronger link between the summer instructional program and the Tennis Club would help promote tennis and benefit younger players. The youngsters could be matched with adults and teens who would mentor them during play.
- Look at using alternate court surfaces that are easier on players' legs and not difficult to maintain.
- A tennis facility could attract tournaments that would have a positive economic impact on the community.
- Existing indoor gym facilities are overtaxed with scheduled play and there is a need for additional indoor facilities such as gyms/recreation centers.
- An indoor pool is needed in the area.
- The greenway and the park at the Nursery site are needed projects in the community. The Nursery site park is a possible location for a tennis complex.

Churches

- Promote the benefits of recreation in shaping well rounded individuals that develop “healthy habits.”
- Approach churches for financial support, “scholarship,” to assist people who cannot afford to participate in programs or activities. This promotes social interaction of a diverse population.
- Provide programs or activities that promote “creative play.”
- The area needs an indoor pool for competition and recreational swimming.
- Use trips to the mountains and state parks to provide “outdoor” experience programs such as camping, hiking, and outdoor education.
- Sport fields and gym/recreation centers are programmed to their limits. Develop new facilities to provide practice space and help keep fields in good condition.
- Get schools more involved with the Recreation Department.
- Improve communication between the Recreation Department and churches by surveying church’s needs on a regular basis. This provides an opportunity for the Recreation Department to create partnerships with the churches in providing facilities and programs.
- Use the press to promote the overall positive aspects of recreation rather than the occasional negative incidents that occur at recreational sites, events, or programs.

Swim Club

- The existing pool does not adequately meet the needs of competitive swimming (pool depth, touch pads, starting blocks, etc.).
- An indoor pool is needed to meet the demands of recreational, instructional, and competitive swimming in the area. The pool should have 6-8 lanes, a spectator area and adequate deck space for instruction and teams.
- The indoor pool facility can attract tournaments/meets on a regional basis that could benefit the local economy.
- The staffing of pool facilities could be assisted by club members who are certified as instructors and lifeguards.
- User fees must be reasonable and must not limit people from using programs or facilities due to economic standing.
- Existing support and assistance from the Recreation Department staff is excellent. They do the best they can to make the outdoor pool work for the club's needs.
- Operating costs and policies at a new indoor facility will need to address joint use by schools, teams, instructional programs, and the general public.
- Additional gym/recreation center space is needed due to heavy use of existing facilities.
- A successful recreation bond issue should include a variety of recreational opportunities throughout the City and should include an indoor pool.
- Additional sports fields, especially soccer fields, are needed to provide space for practice and open play.

Exercise Groups

- The City needs additional gym and recreation center space due to the high use of existing facilities for programmed activities.
- Any new facility should provide for improved exercise rooms, a walking track, and improved training equipment.
- An indoor pool is needed in the community, not only for recreational and competitive swimmers, but for exercise and instruction. The pool needs to accommodate for all possible users because existing facilities can't.
- The Recreation Department needs to improve advertisement of its exercise facilities and programs by promoting the benefits of recreation and exercise as a "wellness issue."
- The existing exercise rooms and weight rooms at Collett Street Center can be expanded, reorganized, and improved through building renovations that enhance the appearance and functional use of the facility.
- Fees need to be affordable to the "common man" and not limit use of facilities due to economic standing.
- All new recreation facilities should accommodate for growth and "be bold" in providing first class accommodations.
- The greenway expansion is needed and it will provide a great activity space for outdoor exercise.

Youth/Teens

- Improve play space and equipment at all the parks. Offer a variety of play opportunities for various age groups.
- Expand the greenway and add more spots for picnicking, sitting, and playing.
- Provide more sports fields and gym space.
- An indoor pool is needed because pool time is difficult to get at existing sites in the area.
- Provide for bikeways that provide safe access to facilities like the greenway.
- Improve the game rooms now offered at the recreation centers by providing video games, more pool tables, and computer games.
- Expand programs for girls, especially sports.
- Provide spaces/places for kids to meet and hangout. Include facilities similar to those offered to adults and make them accessible to various age groups.
- Expand “outdoor” activities such as camping, hiking, and rock climbing. Use them to educate young people on the benefits of recreation and the environment.
- Provide space for skateboards, inline skating and bike jumping.
- Indoor soccer facilities are needed due to the high participation in winter leagues and the lack of gym facilities.
- Construct a “challenge course” with a climbing wall.
- Repair the gym floor at Collet Street Center.
- Provide a space for sledding in the winter.
- Keep parks open later.
- Provide canoeing/boating along the river or at a lake.
- Expand programs that “keep kids off the streets.”

Youth Athletics

- Additional gym and recreation center space is needed. Existing facilities are overtaxed with organized play leaving no time for practice and open play.
- The community needs additional sports fields due to the high use of existing fields for “organized play” (baseball, soccer, softball).
- Existing fields are so heavily programmed, they do not get a chance to recover. The planned park at Ralph Edwards Nursery property is needed to alleviate over use of existing facilities.
- The City soccer program needs to be expanded and the City/County relationship needs to address joint facility use and league structure.
- A successful bond issue to fund the acquisition and development of recreational facilities will need to be broad based. It should include a variety of recreational opportunities and sites such as greenway expansion, indoor pools, sports fields, and park improvements.
- Programs for girls need to be expanded.
- Indoor soccer facilities are needed due to over programming at existing sites(±450 participants this winter).
- Expand programs for “Kids at Risk” such as late night basketball, skating, etc.
- An indoor pool is needed due to the competition for pool time at existing facilities in the area.
- Recreation facilities that attract tournaments and provide adequate time for public play are forms of economic development. Tournament participants spend money in the community and businesses often look at available recreational opportunities as a deciding factor when locating in a community.

