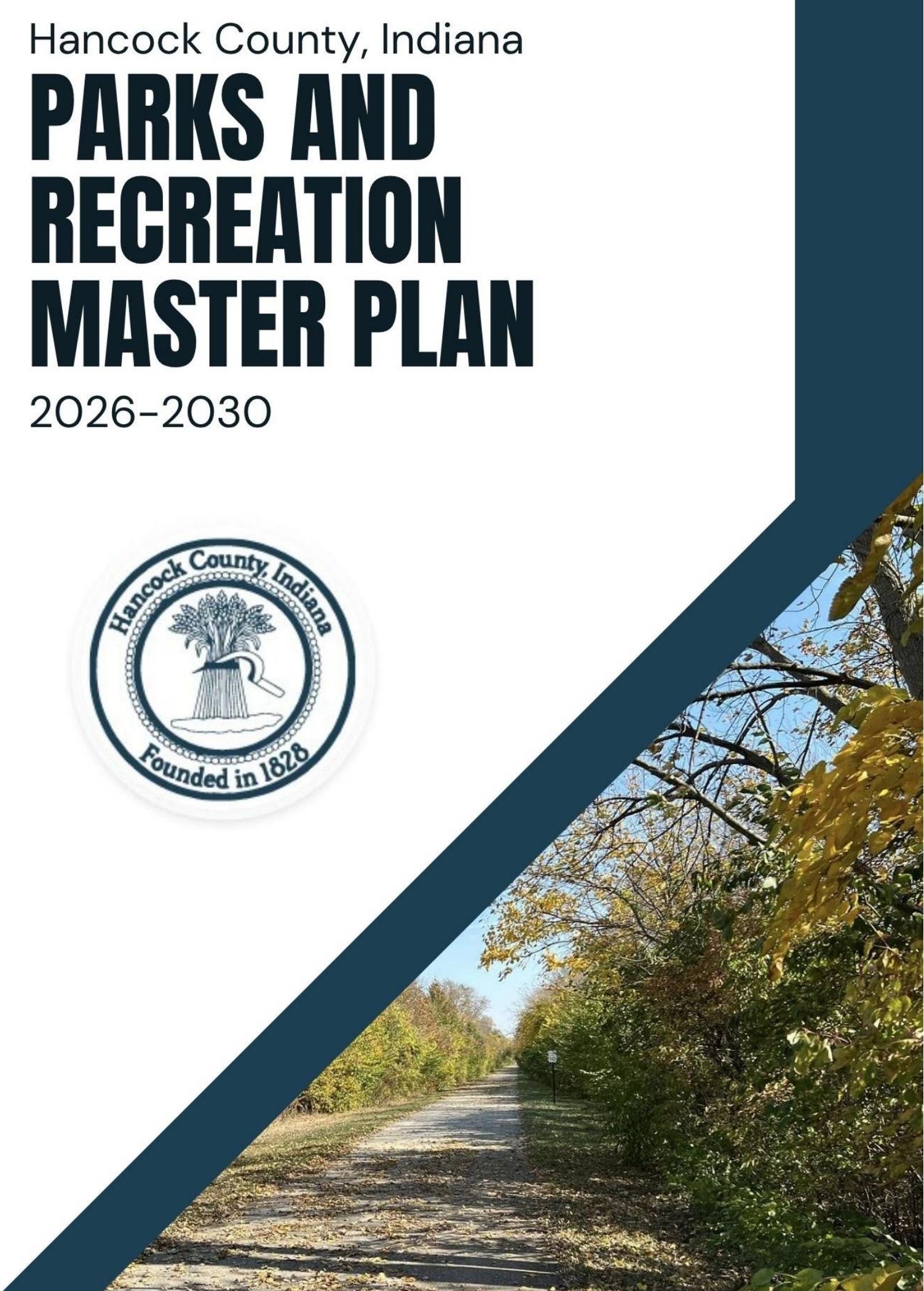


Hancock County, Indiana

PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

2026-2030



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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

The Master Plan comprehensively outlines the current and future needs of the community and recommends level of service standards, funding strategies, and presents a strategic action plan for the next five years. This Master Plan responds to the dynamic shifts within the Hancock County community over the last decade. Factors such as population growth, shifting demographics, evolving recreational trends, and the community expectations for the establishment of new parks, facilities, and programs have collectively influenced and redefined the demand for park and recreation services. Consequently, these changes necessitate strategies to effectively create and manage a park and recreation system over the next five years.

The goals of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan include:

- Create a plan that is grounded in inclusive and accessible community engagement to ensure the broad interests of the diverse community and stakeholders in Hancock County are represented and served.
- Outline a parks and recreation strategy to serve the entire community regardless of socioeconomic, cultural, racial, or geographic differences that provide fair and equitable community benefit to all.
- Utilize a wide variety of data sources and best analytical practices to predict trends and patterns of use, community impact, and how to address unmet needs in Hancock County, while reflecting achievable best practices.
- Identify new and sustainable funding strategies that align with strategic objectives to ensure parks and recreation long-term viability in Hancock County.
- Develop a dynamic and realistic action plan that creates a road map to ensure long-term success and financial sustainability for Hancock County Parks and Recreation. The plan considers the community’s needs and guides staff in handling upcoming financial challenges over the next five years.

1.1 PROJECT PROCESS

The Master Plan followed a process of data collection, public input, on-the-ground study, assessment of existing conditions, market research, and open dialogue with local leadership and key stakeholders. The project process followed a planning path, as illustrated below.



1.2 ENVISIONING EXPANDED PARKS AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES IN HANCOCK COUNTY

1.2.1 VISION

“A county where every resident can thrive through nature, recreation, and community connection.”

1.2.2 MISSION

“To preserve our natural resources, support active living, and create outdoor experiences that unite our growing communities.”

1.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

1.3.1 SHORT-TERM

Short-Term (0-3 Years)

- A. Formalize a Department organizational structure and staffing plan based on park development goals that identifies necessary core competencies. Focus on using existing internal staff and external partners and contractors until full-time staff can be hired.
- B. Establish organizational structure and build capacity in the Department through professional development, park design standards, and defined operational policies and standards for efficient and effective operations.
- C. Formalize a partnership policy to ensure equitable outcomes for park and recreation management with public-public, public-nonprofit, and public-private partners. {e.g., a formalized partnership agreement with the Community Foundation of Hancock County that helps raise funds for future park needs.}
- D. Establish outcome-based agreements with third-party partners or contractors for technical expertise and outsourced functions including routine maintenance, landscaping, and natural resource management.
- E. Develop outcome-based partnerships with external organizations and interlocal agreements with other government agencies to provide core recreation programming that enhances what is currently offered throughout the county. Programs should be focused on the core areas of special events that celebrate the county and outdoor adventure and environmental education.
- F. Develop a multi-year plan to identify key areas for volunteer involvement for park and trail maintenance and recreation programming such as invasive plant removal, leading nature education programming, and community clean-up initiatives.
- G. Acquire a computerized maintenance management system for proactive maintenance scheduling, tracking, and reporting on parks and trails. Establish protocol on implementing within operations.

- H. Develop a capital improvement strategy specific to parks and recreation to enhance future park areas and set costs for a standard of care.
- I. Establish a dedicated parks and recreation operational and capital budget within the County's main budget. {Establish a per capita benchmark - e.g., \$6.00 per capita}
- J. Establish two dedicated funding sources for the long-term Department operations and capital improvements and identify funding for mid-term and long-term projects
- K. Apply for state and federal grants that supplement funding for parkland acquisition and trail development. Establish a matching-funds program within annual capital budget.
- L. Develop a Communication Plan to educate county residents on the mission of the newly established County Parks and Recreation Department.
- M. Continue working to increase connectivity priorities as identified in the Thoroughfare Trails Plan.
- N. Acquire parkland according to land acquisition criteria in underserved areas of the county that follow master plan priorities.
- O. Establish a land dedication ordinance that requires residential and commercial developers to either dedicate land or pay a fee in lieu of dedication to ensure new development provides adequate parkland and recreation space for residents.

1.3.2 MID-TERM

Mid-Term (4-5 Years)
A. Identify funding for mid-term and long-term capital projects
B. Develop site master plans for the undeveloped property once acquired
C. Hire a Superintendent of Parks and Recreation and dedicated park maintenance staff over the next five years according to established staffing plan.
D. Expand recreation programming through trending leisure activities and align with community needs identified in the community needs assessment
E. Initiate a schedule to begin construction documents for all major improvements to the park system as identified in the CIP
F. Protect historic sites through acquisition and preservation purposes.
G. Work with County Commissioners to develop a lifecycle replacement schedule and funding



1.3.3 LONG-TERM

Long-Term (Beyond 5 Years)

- A. Secure funding and develop parks from site master plans (construction documents) identified in the CIP - Set goal to develop a set amount of park acres over five years.**
- B. Maximize access and trail connectivity to parks and destinations citywide**
- C. Conduct an updated parks and recreation needs assessment through a statistically valid survey (gauge progress from previous survey results and identified community needs)**
- D. Expand staffing to help with park maintenance and recreation programming.**



1.3.4 ONGOING

On-going
A. Annually review actual revenue and expenditures making incremental adjustments as needed
B. Embed parks and recreation development within annual budgets and capital improvement plans, ensuring sustainable funding and consistent progress.
C. Submit annual grants for land acquisition, capital development, stormwater management, and preservation.
D. Annually review policies and procedures and update according to needs and changes in operation
E. Continue to consider contracts for services that improve operations, require expertise and contains costs
F. Continue to remove invasive plant species and add native plants and landscapes with new projects and as funding becomes available.
G. Increase shade in parks with a diverse population of next generation trees and shade structures, where appropriate
H. Update Communications Plan annually capturing change in markets and innovative approaches
I. Track Department operations using key performance indicators, such as cost per acre, revenue per capita, miles of trail per 1,000 residents, program cost recovery, user satisfaction surveys, and program participation
J. Incorporate environmental analysis into site master plans increasing long-term sustainability for properties and facilities
K. Incorporate public safety considerations and other public facility needs into the design and development of new parks and recreational spaces.
L. Update a park maintenance plan incorporating standards for new assets replacing aged amenities and for all new assets added to the system
M. Coordinate parks planning and development efforts with public safety, utilities, transportation, and land use planning to optimize resources and service efficiency. Consider acquiring county-owned surplus property.
N. Conduct feasibility studies for all new facilities and parks incorporating revenue generating opportunities for financial sustainability

CHAPTER TWO COMMUNITY PROFILE

2.1 PLANNING AREA

Hancock County is approximately 306 square miles in area. Located in central Indiana, it is the eastern neighbor to Marion County. The county is experiencing tremendous growth and development on the western side, mostly bordering Marion and Hamilton Counties. The eastern half remains mostly rural. Unincorporated communities include Mount Comfort, Gem, Maxwell, Mohawk, Warrington, Eden, Charlottesville, Cleveland, and Willow Branch. There are also several incorporated municipalities as detailed in Chapter 3.

Major roadways throughout the county include Interstate 70, stretching east to west and running parallel to US 40, historically known as the National Road, which runs east to west across the center of the county, providing an important early connector to downtown Indianapolis. State Road 9 runs north to south through the center of the county, making it easy for residents to quickly connect to Interstate 69 to the north and Interstate 74 to the south. Other significant state roads include SR 234, SR 109, and SR 67. The only remaining railway is along SR 67 in the northwestern part of the county.

2.1.1 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The following recent Hancock County strategic plans have helped to inform the parks and recreation master planning efforts.

2023 HANCOCK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Hancock County Comprehensive Plan provides a framework for guiding sustainable growth and development within the county. The comprehensive plan recommends strategies to balancing growth, preserving rural character, enhancing quality of life, and strategically managing resources. The Comprehensive Plan also recommends expanding parks and recreation services as a part of overall future community development.

Key Actions for Parks and Recreation Growth

The Comprehensive Plan addresses the importance of quality of life, recommending the development and enhancement of parks and open spaces. It emphasizes the strategic role parks and recreation facilities play in community engagement, public health, and environmental stewardship. Strategies that help inform the parks and recreation master plan include:

- Developing a county-wide parks and open space system
- Increase walkability, connectivity, and accessible recreational spaces throughout future development
- Protect natural areas and agricultural lands
- Enhance community character and increase public health awareness

2023 HANCOCK COUNTY THOROUGHFARE PLAN

The Hancock County Thoroughfare Plan recommends development strategies for the county's transportation infrastructure, including several trail projects that have been brought forward from the 2018 Trails Plan and will help support a future park system.

Impacts on Parks and Recreation Master Planning

The Thoroughfare Plan prioritizes the Hancock County Trails Plan and developing policies for the addition of bike lanes, sidewalks, and multi-use paths for new development.

PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

The Thoroughfare Plan includes three priority tiers for various trail projects including:

- CR 600 W Multiuse Trail/Protected Bike Lane from US 52 to CR 500 N
- Pennsy Trail Multiuse Trail from CR 600 W to CR 150 W
- CR 700 W Multiuse Trail from US 52 to Pennsy trail
- CR 700 W Multiuse Trail from CR 100 N to CR 600 N
- CR 500 W Multiuse Trail from CR 300 S to CR 100 S
- SR 9 Multiuse Trail from CR 300 N to CR 500 N
- Railroad Street Multiuse Trail from Wilkinson to Shirley
- Pennsy Trail from CR 400 E to the County Line
- Sugar Creek Multiuse Trail from New Palestine to Eden
- Fortville Pike Multiuse Trail from Beckenholdt Park to Fortville
- NineStar Park at Sugar Creek - 100 S. North to Pennsy Trail

Figure 3.02-1: Map 9. Bike/Pedestrian Trails

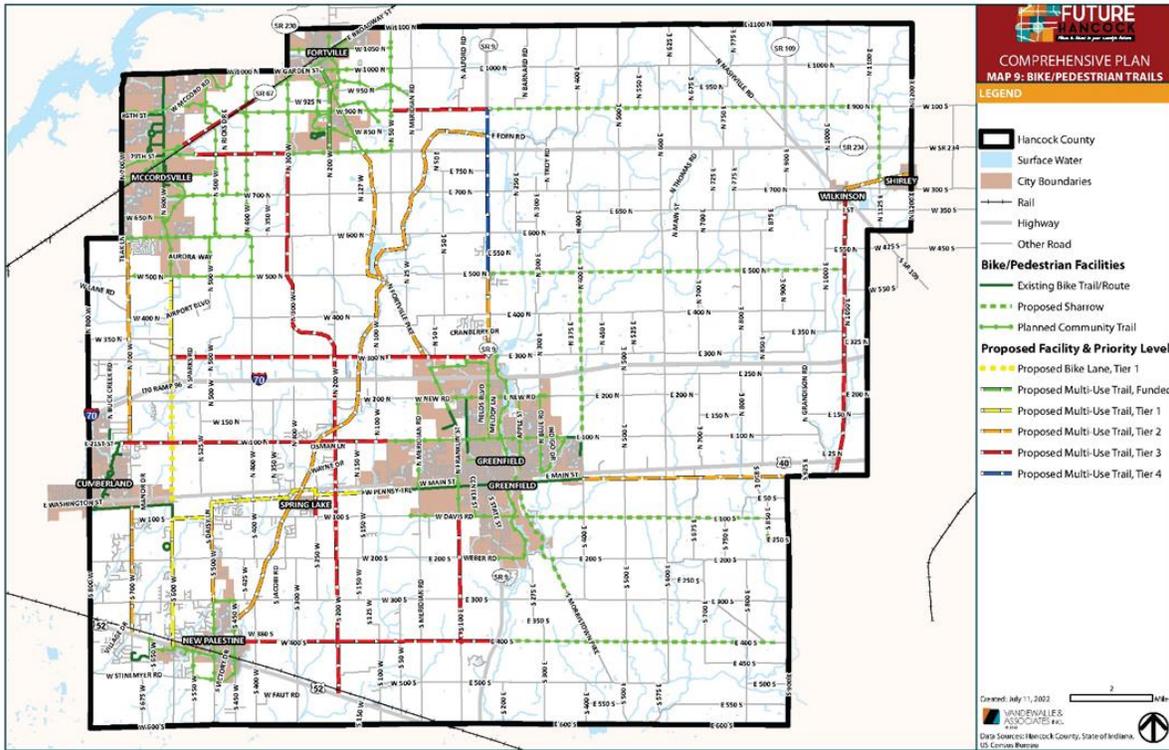


Figure 3.02-1 shows the updated County Trails Plan with the four additions noted above highlighted.

QUALITY OF PLACE PLAN OVERVIEW

The "Quality of Place Plan" for Hancock County was developed by the Community Foundation of Hancock County and the Hancock Economic Development Council, along with the input from many other community leaders. The plan identifies how to balance development pressures with maintaining community character and enhancing quality of life.

Impact on Parks and Recreation Master Planning

The Quality of Place Plan identifies health, wellness, and recreation as important pieces of the county's identity. Its vision for "Homegrown Healthy Living" supports the County's goals for a future parks and recreation system that supports the providers that are already established throughout the county.

Key actions in the plan include:

- The creation of a county parks system to enhance access to recreational amenities.
- A focus on the expansion of the Pennsy Trail and multi-use trails.

2.2 NATURAL CHARACTERISTICS

Hancock County has several opportunities for passive recreation and ecological preservation. Understanding the county's natural features is essential for planning future parkland development, conservation priorities, and recreation programming that aligns with the region's character and ecological systems.

Rivers, Floodplains, and Riparian Areas

Hancock County has several key waterways that serve as natural drainage systems and help to form the county's floodplains and present opportunities for parkland development, conservation areas, and future greenways. The most prominent water feature is Sugar Creek, which flows diagonally through the county and serves as a central ecological corridor. Other notable waterways include Big Blue River to the south and Buck Creek to the north, along with Brandywine Creek near Greenfield, and Six Mile Creek in the southeastern part of the county.

Woodlands and Tree Canopy

Since much of Hancock County is designated for development and agricultural land use, there are few woodlands across the county. Most of these wooded areas are typically found along stream corridors, in floodplains, and within undeveloped land. According to the USDA's 2022 Census of Agriculture Hancock County Profile, there were 184,430 acres of farmland with 8,667 of these acres classified as woodland. In addition, the Sugar Creek corridor and Brandywine Creek have riparian woodlands. The Pennsy Trail, Jacob Schramm Nature Preserve in New Palestine, and Thornwood Nature Preserve in Greenfield all contribute to conservation efforts and preserved woodlands that will help with overall community environmental sustainability.

Wetlands and Hydrologic Features

Hancock County's wetlands are primarily found along the low-lying areas of rivers, streams, and agricultural drainage basins. These wetlands function as natural water filters, provide flood storage, and support diverse plant and animal life, including migratory birds and amphibians.

Many of these wetlands are seasonal or ephemeral, and while they may not always be visible year-round, they play an essential role in the health of the watershed. The county's National Wetlands Inventory

(NWI) maps can help inform where future development should be limited and where conservation investments can have the most environmental benefit.

Developing properties with delineated wetlands could be challenging and expensive due to the cost of mitigation. Therefore, exploring undeveloped properties with wetland areas could be a viable option for creating new parks in underserved parts of the community. Many existing parks have preserved or created wetlands, which provide a refuge for wildlife and a chance for educational interpretation.

Also, Hancock County has at least two artesian wells in Brown Township including the Vandyne Well and the Harlan Cemetery Well.

Stewardship and Opportunity

Future park planning efforts should consider both natural resource preservation with recreation access by:

- Identifying and preserving floodplains and riparian corridors as future greenway and passive recreation zones.
- Working with landowners and conservation organizations to protect key woodlands and wetland areas through easements or public acquisition.
- Prioritizing low-impact development that reduces encroachment on sensitive natural features.
- Leveraging the educational and interpretive opportunities through signage, programming, and partnerships.

Other efforts are underway in Hancock County to preserve natural landscapes through coordinated efforts in natural resource management and invasive species control.

Hancock County Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA)

Established in partnership with the State of Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management (SICIM), the Hancock County CISMA is a volunteer-driven organization dedicated to educating the community and eradicating invasive species. Through activities and working events, they focus on removing invasive plants and restoring native habitats across the county.

- Purdue Extension, Hancock County Master Gardeners, and Hancock County CISMA are all actively involved in community education and action toward combatting invasive species.
- Also, the Hancock County Soil and Water Conservation District provides resources and support for invasive species management.

2.2.1 CLIMATE

Hancock County experiences four distinct seasons. Summers are typically hot and humid, with July being the warmest month, while winters are cold, with January often the coldest. These seasonal weather variations and extreme weather events can directly impact parks and recreation operations, specifically park maintenance demands.

DESIGNING CLIMATE-RESILIENT PARKS

As Hancock County plans for the future of its park system, adopting climate-smart design strategies will be essential to ensure parks remain safe, functional, and welcoming year-round. Parks and open spaces are not only vulnerable to climate change, but they are also a powerful tool for mitigation and adaptation. A climate-resilient park system can reduce environmental impact, protect ecosystems, and improve community health and resilience.

The Trust for Public Land’s Climate-Smart Cities framework provides Hancock County with strategies to ensure that parks help address future climate challenges:

- Cool: Use trees, vegetation, and shade structures to lower temperatures and improve air quality.
- Absorb: Integrate green infrastructure to manage rainwater, reduce runoff, and recharge groundwater.
- Protect: Position parks to act as buffers in flood-prone areas, preserving natural lands that serve as barriers against extreme weather.
- Connect: Build a network of parks, trails, and natural corridors that support biodiversity and offer residents access to nature and recreation.

As the county grows and its park system expands, it will be important to:

- Develop a park maintenance plan that includes contingency protocols for severe weather events and long-term climate impacts.
- Incorporate sustainability goals into park design, operations, and capital planning.
- Establish reserve funds or capital reinvestment strategies to address weather-related damages or climate adaptation needs.



Climate-Resilient Park Design Features		
Feature / Strategy	Function	Benefits
Native Tree Plantings	Provide shade and reduce urban heat	Cooler park environments, carbon sequestration
Green Infrastructure (bioswales, rain gardens)	Absorb and filter stormwater	Reduced flooding, improved water quality
Permeable Pavement	Allows rainwater to infiltrate	Reduces runoff and erosion
Drought-Tolerant Native Plants	Require less watering and maintenance	Resilient landscaping and pollinator support
Expanded Tree Canopy Goals	Shade trails, playgrounds, and gathering areas	Reduces heat exposure, improves comfort
Community Gardens and Edible Landscapes	Encourage local food production	Promotes healthy lifestyles
Floodplain-Compatible Recreational Design	Flexible design in low-lying areas (e.g., trails, disc golf)	Minimizes damage risk from flooding
Shelter and Shade Structures	Offer refuge during extreme heat or rain	Increases usability and comfort
Green Roofs or Solar Canopies (future facilities)	Provide insulation and renewable energy generation	Reduced energy use, educational value
Wildlife Corridors and Habitat Buffers	Preserve biodiversity and migration paths	Protects species and supports ecosystem services

2.3 MAN-MADE, HISTORICAL & CULTURAL FEATURES

Hancock County is experiencing tremendous residential, commercial, and industrial growth but also still maintains its historical and cultural landmarks. The county has historic downtowns, civic architecture, and a strong sense of place and community identity. It will be important for the County to integrate its history and culture into parks and recreation planning to create spaces that celebrate local heritage, foster civic pride, and enhance visitor experiences.

Historic Landmarks and Districts

Hancock County is home to a variety of historic sites and buildings, many of which are preserved through local historic districts or are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Hancock County Courthouse, located in the heart of downtown Greenfield, is an architectural landmark and a focal point of civic life. The adjacent courthouse square hosts community festivals, markets, and performances, making it a natural extension of public gathering and recreation.

Numerous historic homes, churches, and cemeteries throughout the county tell the story of early settlers and notable residents, including James Whitcomb Riley, Indiana's most famous poet. Riley's boyhood home and museum serve as both a tourist destination and cultural learning space, offering opportunities for literary-themed programming, storytelling events, and interpretive walking tours.

Arts and Cultural Programming

The presence of Hancock County Arts enhances the county's cultural offerings. Incorporated municipalities such as Greenfield provide events such as outdoor concerts, art walks, and craft fairs that activate public spaces and draw residents into parks and civic plazas. Also, public art installations, murals, and sculptures such as downtown Greenfield and other communities can provide inspiration for future County parks and spaces. Integrating the arts into park spaces through amphitheaters, pop-up performances, or creative placemaking can broaden recreation programming and appeal to diverse user groups.

Agricultural Heritage and Rural Identity

Agriculture has long been a cornerstone of Hancock County's economy and cultural identity. The county fairgrounds, rural barns, and working farms reflect this legacy and serve as important gathering spaces for 4-H activities, livestock shows, and seasonal festivals. Preserving this rural character through parks that feature agritourism elements, such as community gardens, demonstration farms, or farmers markets, can support local food systems while connecting new generations to the land.

Man-Made Amenities and Community Anchors

In addition to cultural and historic resources, Hancock County's community parks, schools, libraries, and civic centers serve as key man-made assets that can help serve residents with recreation programming. These facilities help to anchor neighborhoods and towns, offering space for events, sports, education, and social connection.

Schools

- Eastern Hancock Community School Corporation
- Greenfield-Central Community School Corporation
- Mt. Vernon Community School Corporation
- New Palestine Community School Corporation

Libraries

- Vernon Township Public Library
 - McCordsville Branch (future)
- Hancock County Public Library
 - Sugar Creek Branch

Finally, the continued development of the Pennsy Trail, a rails-to-trails corridor that runs through Greenfield and connects to neighboring communities, has helped to promote trail growth throughout the county. Expanding and connecting this trail system to cultural destinations and historic districts can further position Hancock County as a well-connected and active community.

CHAPTER THREE GOVERNANCE

3.1.1 GOVERNMENT AND COUNTY DEPARTMENTS

Hancock County's administrative offices are located at 111 American Legion Place, Greenfield, IN 46140. Hancock County has the following government administration and department:

- Assessor
- Auditor
- Clerk of Courts
- Community Corrections
- Coroner's Office
- Courts
- E-911
- Election Office
- Economic Development
- Extension Office
- Homeland Security
- Health
- Highway Department
- Planning and Building
- Probation
- Prosecutor
- Public Defender
- Recorder
- Sheriff
- Soil and Water
- Stormwater and Flood Management
- Surveyor
- Treasurer
- Veterans Services
- Recycle Hancock County - Solid Waste Management District

Current boards, committees, and commissions serving Hancock County include:

- Board of Zoning Appeals
- Cemetery Board
- County Commissioners
- County Council
- Parks and Recreation Board
- Plan Commission
- Public Defender Board

3.1.2 TOWNSHIPS

- Blue River Township
- Brandywine Township
- Brown Township
- Buck Creek Township

- Center Township
- Green Township
- Jackson Township
- Sugar Creek Township
- Vernon Township

3.1.3 INCORPORATED MUNICIPALITIES

- Cumberland
- Fortville
- Greenfield
- McCordsville
- New Palestine
- Shirley
- Spring Lake
- Wilkinson

3.1.4 ESTABLISHING A PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

PARK BOARD

Indiana state law provides guidance for establishing a Park Board and Parks and Recreation Department. Under Indiana Code 36-10-3, counties in Indiana are authorized to create a Park and Recreation Board that oversees and manages parks and recreation operations.

The Hancock County Parks and Recreation Board was established on _____ per Ordinance _____. The Park Board serves as the governing body responsible for developing, administering, maintaining, and improving parks, recreation facilities, and programs within the county.

The Park Board’s responsibilities and authorities include:

- Acquiring, holding, managing, and disposing of real and personal property for park purposes
- Implementing park rules, regulations, and administrative policies
- Entering contracts, leases, and other agreements necessary for park operations and development
- Hiring staff for the day to day responsibilities of a parks and recreation department

Furthermore, the Indiana Code allows counties to levy taxes to support the operations and capital improvements associated with park facilities, providing consistent funding for ongoing maintenance, programming, and land acquisition.

As Hancock County moves forward with establishing its parks and recreation department, the Park Board should ensure a structured governance model, defined roles, clear responsibilities, and consistent funding through strategic discussions with the Board of Commissioners.

In 2024, Hancock County legally established a Park Board that has overseen this master plan process. The Hancock County Parks and Recreation Board has the following purpose:

“The Hancock County Parks and Recreation Board is dedicated to creating inclusive, sustainable outdoor spaces that enrich the lives of our residents. Through collaboration with municipalities, community partners, and stakeholders, we connect trails, preserve green spaces, and protect the natural beauty of our county. We strive to provide safe, accessible, diverse recreational opportunities promoting health, wellness, and a strong sense of community. Our commitment to environmental stewardship includes preserving natural resources and fostering sustainability through initiatives like recycling and green energy awareness. By creating spaces that welcome all ages and abilities, we aim to ensure everyone has the chance to experience the benefits of the outdoors. Together, we are cultivating a healthier, greener, and more connected Hancock County for generations to come.”

OPERATIONAL MODEL

As Hancock County, the Board of Commissioners, and the Park Board establish a parks and recreation department, it is important to consider an operational model that ensure the consistent oversight of master plan priorities and implementation of critical goals and strategies that set the future department and its Park Board up for success.

Given Hancock County’s limited resources that will initially prevent the addition of dedicated parks and recreation staff, a decentralized management model may be the most realistic way to address initial goals and priorities. A decentralized management model simply means that different parts of park operations, such as programs, events, administration, and maintenance, are handled by a small team consisting of internal staff and external partners. This approach would allow Hancock County to be more flexible, responsive to community needs, and help maximize the strengths of internal staff. The initial priorities of land acquisition and establishing alternative funding sources to sustain a parks and recreation system require specific expertise and the Park Board will need to determine if these goals will be handled internally with staffing or externally through partnerships and contracted services.

It is recommended that the Park Board prioritize the hiring of a full-time Superintendent of Parks and Recreation who will oversee the day to day responsibilities and the implementation of the master plan goals. Other key staff that will need to be considered in the mid to long term phases of master plan implementation include full-time maintenance positions to care for the park grounds, facilities, and amenities as well as future recreation programming staff.

In addition, Hancock County and the Park Board would initially heavily rely on contracted services that will provide specialized maintenance and facility upkeep as needed and oversee select administrative functions and recreation services.

CORE OPERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

As the Park Board considers future operational staff, it should keep these core responsibilities of a parks and recreation agency in mind.

Superintendent and Administration Core Responsibilities

The Superintendent of a parks and recreation agency’s role involves comprehensive planning and implementation of projects, programs, facility management, and development initiatives. Overall, the

Superintendent plays a pivotal role in driving the agency's mission forward while ensuring accountability, efficiency, and community satisfaction.

Parks and Recreation Superintendent Key Functions
Overall, planning and implementation of projects, programs, facility management, and development.
Budget management is essential, requiring strategic allocation of resources to support operational needs and future growth.
Coordinating staff and volunteers ensures effective execution of tasks and promotes a collaborative environment.
Managing policies and human resources ensures compliance and fosters a positive workplace culture.
Cultivating partnerships, sponsorships, and contracts strengthens community ties and enhances financial support.
Prioritizing risk management safeguards assets and visitor safety. Utilizing technology efficiently streamlines operations and improves service delivery.
Utilizing technology effectively can streamline operations and improve service delivery.
Community engagement initiatives promote inclusivity and gather feedback to shape future endeavors.
Parkland acquisition and evaluation

Maintenance Core Responsibilities

Maintenance and operations positions within a parks and recreation agency are responsible for a wide range of tasks related to park and facility maintenance, including ecological stewardship, trail management, facility upkeep, sports field maintenance, and custodial care. Through diligent maintenance efforts, these personnel contribute to the overall functionality, safety, and attractiveness of the park system, ensuring that visitors can enjoy quality experiences in well-maintained and accessible natural environments and recreation facilities.

Maintenance and Operations Key Functions
Maintaining developed and undeveloped park spaces including regular inspections, vegetation management, erosion control, and habitat preservation to ensure the ecological health and sustainability of parklands.
Performing routine trail inspections, repairing trail surfaces, clearing vegetation, installing and repairing signage, and other control measures to enhance trail usability and safety.
Conducting regular inspections, performing repairs, cleaning, and addressing safety concerns to ensure optimal functionality and visitor satisfaction of facilities such as playgrounds, picnic areas, restrooms, shelters, and parking lots.
Specialized maintenance for areas such as sports fields including overseeing a turf management program through mowing, fertilization, irrigation, and pest control practices to maintain healthy turf conditions conducive to sports and leisure activities.



Custodial duties including trash collection, restroom cleaning, graffiti removal, and litter control.

Recreation Core Responsibilities

The recreation staff play a multifaceted role in overseeing programming for a parks and recreation agency, encompassing program development, contractual oversight, volunteer management, and specialized services catering to diverse demographics and interests within the community. Through strategic planning, creative innovation, and collaborative partnerships, the recreation staff contribute to the agency's mission through recreational experiences.

Recreation Key Functions
Identifying trends, assessing demand, and designing innovative programming to maximize participation and engagement.
Overseeing the execution of contracted services, monitoring contractor performance and quality assurance, and maintaining effective communication channels with vendors.
Recruiting, training, and coordinating volunteers to support various programs and events.
Organizing and managing a variety of special events.
Ensuring recreational experiences are inclusive and accessible to all participants with a variety of skill levels and abilities.
Establishing and implementing customer service standards for program registration and participation.
Collecting participant feedback on programming to improve and enhance offerings.

Other responsibilities to consider

Hancock County should also consider these additional key responsibilities that can be dispersed to the parks and recreation team or managed by other County departments. Ideally, for consistency purposes, the parks and recreation department should be involved in these operational functions in addition to their daily obligations.

- **Marketing and communications of parks and recreation services:** This entails developing and implementing marketing strategies to promote parks and recreation services to the community. Responsibilities include creating promotional materials, managing social media accounts, coordinating advertising campaigns, and fostering positive relationships with the media to raise awareness and encourage participation in programs and events.
- **Capital Projects:** Overseeing capital improvements is crucial for enhancing the quality and functionality of parks and recreational facilities. This includes planning, prioritizing, and implementing infrastructure projects such as facility upgrades, park renovations, trail expansions, and playground installations to meet evolving community needs and enhance visitor experiences.
- **Park safety:** Ensuring the safety and security of park users is paramount. This function involves implementing safety protocols, conducting risk assessments, maintaining emergency response plans, and providing staff training to mitigate hazards and respond effectively to emergencies.

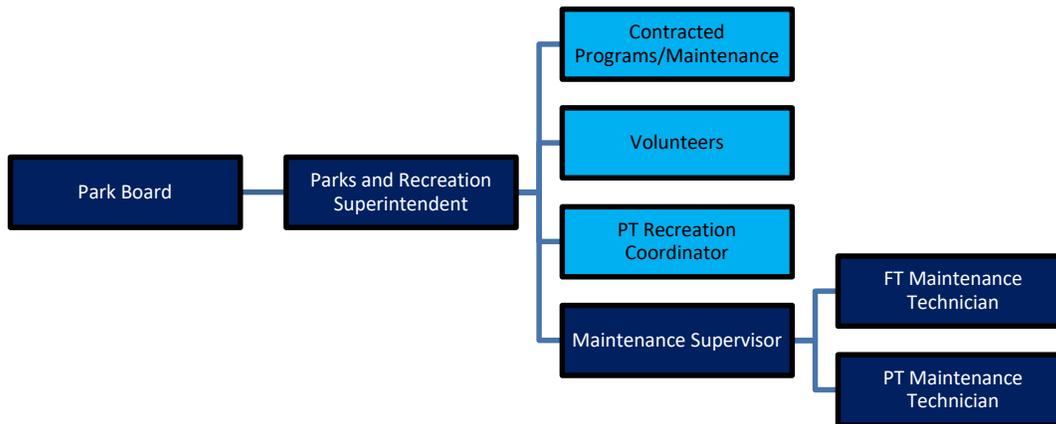


- **Contracted services:** A decision should be made for each maintenance and recreation function whether the County will manage it in-house with its own staff or use contracted labor. Contracted services are typically considered for specialized services that require unique resources and skill sets that may not be available through municipal resources.

Lastly, Hancock County leadership should determine the hours that are associated with each core function within the parks and recreation system. This can help determine whether the function requires a contracted, seasonal, part-time, or full-time position. As self-generated revenue from recreation programs and services grows, so can the justification to add additional employees or Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) to operations.

3.1.5 PROPOSED DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

The proposed organizational structure as depicted below shows how the parks and recreation department should grow over the next five years. The staffing positions that will be a priority for Hancock County in the short term include a Superintendent of Parks and Recreation and Maintenance Supervisor supplemented by contracted labor for more specialized functions.



3.1.6 MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONAL STANDARDS

The vitality and sustainability of parks and green spaces rely heavily on effective operations and maintenance practices. Establishing a consistent maintenance program with clear standards is paramount to ensuring that Hancock County’s parks remain safe, attractive, and functional for generations to come.

Building a maintenance and operational program

Below are some steps on how Hancock County can establish an operations and maintenance program for their parks and facilities.



- Understand what parks, facilities, and amenities are currently within the park system and develop an inventory database. Identify the existing infrastructure, including amenities, trails, and green spaces. Evaluate their condition, usage patterns, and any immediate maintenance needs. Based on the future conceptual designs for its parks, Hancock County will need to be mindful of recreational amenities that will add to the park system’s maintenance needs.
- Hancock County should account for the total number of hours that will be necessary to maintain the park system at a high or mid-level standard. By determining the total number of hours needed to maintain the park system and equating that to the necessary full-time equivalents (FTEs) that will be needed for labor, the County will have a better understanding of the parks system’s personnel and budgetary needs. A general benchmark that leadership could strive for is one maintenance FTE for every 28 acres of maintained parkland.
- Clearly outline the goals and objectives of the operations and maintenance program. Consider factors such as enhancing safety, improving aesthetics, and maximizing resource efficiency. These goals will serve as the foundation for developing strategies and allocating resources.
- Establish comprehensive maintenance standards and procedures tailored to the specific needs of each park and facility. This includes guidelines for routine maintenance tasks such as landscaping, trash removal, restroom cleaning, equipment inspection, and facility repairs. Standardizing these procedures ensures consistency and quality across all sites. Recommended standards can be found in *Appendix A*.
- Develop a detailed maintenance schedule outlining when and how different tasks will be performed. Prioritize tasks based on urgency, seasons, and usage patterns. Consider factors such as weather conditions, special events, and peak visitor times when scheduling maintenance activities.
- Consider computerized maintenance management software (CMMS) to help with collecting and analyzing operational and maintenance data. The system can help with work order management and maintenance schedules, tracking inventory and lifespan of critical infrastructure, amenities, or facilities, and be a tool for park budgeting and financial forecasting.
- Determine the necessary resources to support the operations and maintenance program, including staffing, equipment, materials, and budgetary allocations. Consider outsourcing certain tasks or collaborating with other departments or community organizations to leverage resources more effectively.
- Provide comprehensive training and ongoing professional development opportunities for maintenance staff. Ensure that employees are equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge, and tools to perform their duties effectively and safely. Emphasize the importance of customer service, teamwork, and adherence to established standards. The Indiana Parks and Recreation Association and National Recreation and Parks Association provide online resources that can help to support staff in their professional growth.
- Establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the operations and maintenance program. Conduct regular inspections, audits, and surveys to assess compliance with maintenance standards, identify areas for improvement, and gather feedback from park users. Mitigate risk through risk management assessments or safety checks that are recorded and repairs are prioritized based on the level of risk under the advisement of County insurance representatives.
- Foster strong partnerships with community stakeholders, including residents, neighborhood groups, schools, businesses, and nonprofit organizations. Encourage community involvement in park maintenance through volunteer programs, adopt-a-park initiatives, and public awareness

campaigns. Engaging the community not only enhances stewardship but also creates a sense of ownership and pride in the parks.

- Continuously evaluate and adapt the operations and maintenance program in response to changing needs, emerging trends, and feedback from stakeholders. Stay informed about best practices, industry standards, and technological advancements in park management. Embrace innovation and creativity to enhance efficiency, sustainability, and the overall visitor experience.

PARK ZONES AND LEVELS OF SERVICE

Hancock County should use a zone management approach to operations and maintenance activities. That is, each key area within the park (whether developed or undeveloped) is given at least one “zone” classification. The zones are used to clarify maintenance assignments and roles/responsibilities for staff. Within each zone, there is a different level of service. Levels of service relate to the frequency of which a maintenance standard is applied to that certain park element. Levels of service are most often dictated by usage and are directly related to the ability to fund that frequency.

LEVELS - GENERAL DEFINITION:

- Level One Park Elements - Very high, intense maintenance applications that are usually associated with high use/high participation programs and services. Level One also includes any element that has a very high safety risk exposure (e.g., play equipment, pools). Additionally, certain environmentally sensitive Conservation/Natural Resource Management Areas are considered Level One.
- Level Two Park Elements - High level maintenance applications usually associated with reasonably high visitation or elements that serve ancillary programs and services.
- Level Three Park Elements - Moderate to low maintenance applications usually associated with moderate to low levels of park development and visitation.

MAINTENANCE STANDARDS

- Establish maintenance zones that correlate with regular maintenance attention and activities performed.
- Maintain an active invasive management plan to continually improve the quality of the natural resources in County parks.
- Utilize a maintenance management system to strategically prioritize and allocate staff resources to necessary maintenance tasks, as well as track capital asset lifecycle.
- Regularly inspect built infrastructure to identify maintenance priorities.
- Utilize volunteers where appropriate and possible to improve maintenance staff efficiency.
- Track the asset value of the site and try to budget for 3%-5% of total asset value as an annual reinvestment in capital infrastructure.

Additional maintenance standards can be found in Appendix A.

3.1.7 PROGRAM STANDARDS

Recreation programs and services are the foundation of park and recreation systems. Sound policies and procedures must guide their development, and a consistent planning process that leverages community data, current trends, and resources must identify clear goals and performance measures to ensure excellent service delivery. To address community needs and priorities for programs, this document outlines an analysis of existing and recommended programming, informed by community engagement as well as local, state, and national recreational trends.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Planning Process

Ideally, at the beginning of the planning process, all programs should be aligned with Hancock County's Master Plan which is supported by community priorities for recreation services. From there, a formalized Program Planning Resource Guide can provide recreation staff with consistent standards for developing, implementing, and evaluating programming. *Appendix B* provides additional program standards for leadership to consider.

Program Development Plan

A standardized program development process provides staff with the resources necessary to organize ideas into relevant services for the community. There are many components that must receive the necessary attention before a service is unveiled. Below are some key areas for staff to establish during the development process.

- Program Goals and Objectives
- Program Budget and Pricing
- Supplies and services needed
- Program Action Plan and Timeline
- Staffing and volunteers needed
- Marketing Plan including target marketing
- Emergency Action Plan
- Program Evaluation and Performance Measures

Program Standards

Program standards should be established as a part of the development process to ensure consistency with service delivery. A focused approach should be applied to quality assurance for all services and how they are planned, implemented, and evaluated.

Quality standards include expectations for staff training on service delivery and evaluation, the condition of the program space, as well as supplies and equipment used for activities, and adhering to risk management policies and practices.

Customer service standards ensure that staff are maintaining a safe, quality, and positive experience for participants. Key standards are applied to the customer's journey from the point of deciding to register for a program or activity, through the registration process, participation, and, finally, evaluation of the customer's experience after the program or activity has been completed. Staff should always be mindful of consistent communication with the customer through the completion of the program or activity as well as ways that the customer experience can be enhanced.

Core Program Areas

It is important to identify core program areas based on current and future needs to create a sense of focus around specific program areas of greatest importance to the community. Public recreation is challenged by the premise of being all things to all people. The philosophy of the core program areas is to assist staff, policy makers, and the public to focus on what is most important to the community.

Program areas are considered as core if they meet most of the following criteria:

The program area has been provided for an extended period (over 4-5 years) and/or is expected by the community.
The program area consumes a relatively sizable portion (5% or more) of the parks and recreation department's overall budget.
The program area is offered 3-4 seasons per year.
The program area has wide demographic appeal.
There is a tiered level of skill development available within the program area's offerings.
There are full-time staff responsible for the program area.
There are facilities designed specifically to support the program area.
The program offered by the parks and recreation department controls a significant percentage (20% or more) of the local market.

Based on community input, the core program areas and their outcomes outlined below are recommended for Hancock County.

- **Community and Special Events:** Community events that bring people together outdoors in parks and public spaces that celebrate the County's arts, culture, and heritage.
 - Example Goals and Outcomes: Establish a community event through partnerships with other county agencies to bring awareness of and activate a future piece of park property.
- **Outdoor Adventure and Environmental Education:** Promoting environmental awareness and a love for nature through educational and active programs that bring the community together outdoors.
 - Example Goals and Outcomes: Offer three environmental education programs in 2026 that engage teens ages 12-16 to promote stewardship and volunteer programs.

With no dedicated recreation programming staff, Hancock County should rely on partnerships, volunteers, and self-guided opportunities. Programs should be designed to be implemented with minimal staffing in the short-term stages of the master plan implementation.

Partnerships with Purdue Extension, Indiana Master Naturalists, Hancock County public libraries, and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources can provide technical support for outdoor adventure and nature education programming.

Some ideas for initial county programming include:

- **Junior Naturalist Program:** The county can create a self-guided program that takes families to different sites throughout the county with a guidebook that teaches youth essential ecology or outdoor adventure skills.
- **Citizen Science Projects:** The county can partner with organizations such as Purdue Extension to engage volunteers in monitoring plant and animal life throughout future county park spaces.
- **Wildlife photography classes** can be an opportunity to engage residents with natural spaces and produce future content for Department promotional materials.



- Outdoor Skill Workshops: The county can work with organizations such as Boy Scouts, 4-H, or outdoor gear suppliers to host workshops on outdoor skills such as camping, orienteering, wildlife tracking, and fishing.
- Community Events: The county should consider creating a community event that helps bring awareness to the community of the vision for additional parks in Hancock County. The event could be hosted on future parkland once secured and provide opportunities for additional community engagement on future design priorities and plans.



3.2 ACCESSIBILITY

3.2.1 ADA PUBLIC NOTICE

Hancock County established an ADA Transition Plan in 2023 that is overseen by an ADA Coordinator. The full plan and supporting materials can be found on the County's website: <https://www.hancockin.gov/157/ADA-Title-VI>.

The ADA Transition Plan provides a grievance procedure, disability accommodation request form, self-evaluation data, design standards, training guidance, and public involvement opportunities.

3.2.2 GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, users of Hancock County facilities and services have the right to file a grievance if they believe the County has not provided reasonable accommodation. All complaints should be presented in writing to Hancock County's ADA Coordinator. Please consult the Grievance Procedure found on Hancock County's website at <https://www.hancockin.gov/> for details. A formal complaint must be filed within 180 calendar days of the alleged occurrence. Hancock County Government will not officially act or respond to complaints made verbally.

3.2.3 UNIVERSAL DESIGN

As Hancock County considers accessibility and inclusion for future parks and recreation program design efforts, the parks and recreation department should think beyond the baseline standards and legal requirements provided in the Americans with Disabilities Act and align with the ever-evolving principles of Universal Design that provide guidance on barrier-free access for all ages and abilities.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR PARKS AND RECREATION SPACES AND PROGRAMMING

The American Society of Landscape Architects provides insight that can guide the planning and design of public spaces including parks and recreation amenities and facilities. These expand on The Center for Universal Design's principles.

- **Accessible:** Public spaces should be physically accessible regardless of their physical, cognitive, or mental abilities.
- **Comfortable:** People with any type of ability should feel like they belong in the space.
- **Participatory:** Co-design spaces with people with disabilities to understand their experiences from their perspectives.
- **Ecology:** Public spaces should connect people to nature and green space throughout the built environment.
- **Legible:** People of all ages and abilities should understand how to move through the space.
- **Multi-sensory:** Design should provide options for multiple senses to help guide people through the space.
- **Predictable:** Provide a predictable environment throughout the public space that is clear and understandable for people of all ages and abilities.
- **Walkable/Traversable:** Consider that people with disabilities are limited in the distance they can travel when considering access to all amenities and facilities in the public space.

3.3 DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

3.3.1 DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW
 Understanding demographic shifts and recreation trends is critical as Hancock County, Indiana, moves toward establishing its first formal parks and recreation department. A comprehensive analysis of demographics and recreational preferences reveals key insights that will guide the development of a responsive and sustainable park system. The full demographic and recreation trend analysis can be found in Appendix C.

DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Hancock County is experiencing robust population growth, increasing from 70,002 residents in 2010 to an estimated 85,753 in 2024, with projections indicating a population of approximately 101,821 by 2039. The county is characterized by an aging yet balanced demographic profile, with a median age of 40.8 years. The largest age segment currently is adults aged 35-54, though there is notable growth in both the senior (ages 65-74) and young family segments (ages 0-12). This demographic distribution emphasizes the necessity for multi-generational park amenities and recreation programming.

Racially, Hancock County is predominantly White (88%), with modest but increasing diversity expected over the next 15 years. The median household income (\$93,002) and per capita income (\$45,733) exceed state averages, suggesting higher-than-average disposable income, influencing potential fee structures and participation levels in park activities and programs.

<u>Demographic Overview</u>	
	<p><u>Population</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 2024 Population: 85,753 ➤ Annual growth rate: 2.47% ➤ Total Households: 33,568
<p><u>Age</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Median age: 40.8 ➤ Largest age segment: 35-54 ➤ Continued growth of 65-74 population through 2039 	
	<p><u>Race and Ethnicity</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 88% White Alone ➤ 4% Black/African American ➤ 3% Hispanic/Latino
<p><u>Income</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Median household: \$93,002 ➤ Per capita: \$45,733 ➤ Continued economic growth through 2039 	

Demographic Overview of Hancock County, IN

Implications for the Future Park System

Development of facilities and amenities should cater to both growing young families and the increasing senior population. Accessible parks, playgrounds, nature trails, and age-friendly fitness amenities, such as pickleball courts and walking paths, should be prioritized.

Higher income levels indicate potential for cost recovery through fees and charges. The County should consider a balanced pricing structure that provides inclusive access while leveraging disposable income for revenue generation.

Finally, anticipating the continued diversification of the population, Hancock County's parks and recreation programming and communication strategies must remain adaptive, culturally relevant, and inclusive.

CHAPTER FOUR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

4.1 STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW SUMMARY

PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN - STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

In late fall 2024 and early winter 2025, individual stakeholder interviews were conducted to supplement the community engagement that took place in 2023 as a part of a recreation needs assessment. Key themes emerged from these interviews including the need for trail connectivity, inclusivity, and enhanced collaboration among County entities to expand recreation services. Stakeholders also emphasized preserving natural areas, improving underserved communities, and expanding recreational amenities.

Stakeholders represented municipal staff from the County and various other communities throughout the County, community leaders, and residents. The feedback highlights current strengths, gaps, and future priorities for the park system.

Stakeholder Representation
Hancock County Board of Commissioners
Hancock County Council
Hancock County Park Board
Hancock County Staff
Hancock County Economic Development Commission
Visit Hancock County
Community Foundation of Hancock County
Penny Trails of Hancock County
Purdue Extension
City of Greenfield
Town of Cumberland
Town of McCordsville
Town of Shirley
Sugar Creek Township
Various Hancock County Businesses
Nameless Creek Youth Camp, Inc.
Hancock County Master Gardeners Association

KEY FINDINGS

General Perceptions of Parks and Recreation

Recreational opportunities are concentrated in the individual communities within the county including Cumberland, Fortville, Greenfield, and McCordsville, leaving rural areas underserved. Trails, particularly



the Pennsy Trail, are appreciated but lack connectivity, which limits their effectiveness. Finally, stakeholders identified the need for updated facilities and additional amenities to meet growing demand, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and connectivity with communities in the county.

Key Themes:

- ***Collaboration and connectivity***
- ***Addressing underserved rural areas***

Unique Ideas:

- ***Organize visionary meetings for eastern communities to determine the most appropriate growth of parks and recreation in the rural areas.***
- ***Increase volunteer involvement for invasive species management and trail upkeep.***

Values and Priorities

Stakeholders value safe, accessible parks and trails that promote recreation and nature interaction. Green spaces and family-oriented amenities are seen as essential and trails are particularly valued for connecting communities to recreation opportunities.

Key Themes:

- ***Safety and accessibility***
- ***Conservation and green space preservation***

Unique Ideas:

- ***Incorporate educational play features along trails***
- ***Add more trail amenities and access points to address trail user needs***

Needed Amenities and Facilities

There is a high demand for expanded trail networks to improve cycling safety and connectivity. Opportunities also exist to better utilize waterways for recreation, such as kayaking and canoeing, and to develop shaded, inclusive play spaces. Stakeholders also emphasized the potential to leverage the county's natural features for outdoor activities.

Key Themes:

- ***Expanding recreational options and enhancing accessibility***
- ***Utilizing natural features and waterways for outdoor activities***

Unique Ideas:

- ***Develop mountain biking trails and more water recreation areas***
- ***Collaborate with developers to integrate park amenities in new developments***

Vision for the next ten years

Stakeholders discussed a connected park system integrating municipal parks and trails across the county. There is a clear expectation that the County does not duplicate services but rather support what is already established throughout the county. This includes expanding green spaces, the trail networks, and the preservation of natural areas.

Key Themes:

- *Connectivity and inclusivity*
- *Conservation and smart growth*

Unique Ideas:

- *Create a signature park focusing on conservation and nature programming*
- *Use trails as a gateway to connect residents with nature*

Challenges for the park system

Key challenges include limited funding for land acquisition and maintenance, staffing shortages, and leadership turnover that disrupts long-term planning. There is a clear need for establishing stable, long-term funding sources to ensure the success of future parks and recreation growth.

Key Themes:

- *Funding and staffing limitations*
- *Leadership stability and collaboration*
- *Safety and maintenance of facilities*

Unique Ideas:

- *Partner with developers for land acquisition along trails*
- *Establish dedicated trail maintenance funds*

Funding the master plan priorities

Funding strategies that were discussed by stakeholders include identifying grants, establishing user fees, and partnerships with businesses and non-profits. It will be important for the County to diversify revenue streams and implement sustainable funding policies to support the park system's growth and maintenance.

Key Themes:

- *Leveraging grants and partnerships*
- *Diversifying funding sources*

Unique Ideas:

- *Develop pricing policies for events and facilities*
- *Collaborate with developers to introduce park impact fees*

4.2 PUBLIC FORUM SUMMARY

Emerging themes from the 2023 Recreation Needs Assessment and 2024/2025 stakeholder engagement were presented in a Park Board meeting in February 2025. Attendees were able to hear the results of community engagement efforts, provide further input on park development priorities, and view county maps that highlight priority areas for potential future park development.



Several community members attended a Park Board meeting in February of 2025 to hear findings for the parks and recreation master plan.

CHAPTER FIVE PARKS AND RECREATION NEEDS AND GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

5.1 RECREATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The Recreation Needs Assessment conducted in 2023 for Hancock County, Indiana, provided guidance to the County on establishing its first parks and recreation system. Community engagement through focus groups, stakeholder interviews, and a statistically valid county-wide survey (Appendix D) gathered comprehensive input and identified residents' recreation preferences and facility priorities.

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Survey results revealed clear community priorities and unmet needs. Residents expressed strong support for:

- Acquiring land to preserve open space (65%), developing interconnected multi-use trails (59%), and creating a large regional park (50%) were highly prioritized. Financial willingness to support these initiatives mirrored this enthusiasm.
- The highest unmet needs identified by households were an indoor walking/jogging track, indoor aquatic center, and multi-use paved trails. These amenities also ranked highest in terms of importance, underlining their significance to the community.
- Community members prioritized adult fitness and wellness programs, a farmers market, community special events, and senior wellness programs, reflecting broader national trends emphasizing active lifestyles and community engagement.

RECREATION TRENDS

National and local recreational trends show growth in active recreation and fitness. The Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) reports increasing participation across multiple recreational categories, including activities such as pickleball, golf, walking, yoga, hiking, and outdoor water sports. Specifically, pickleball has emerged as a rapidly growing sport nationwide, which aligns with Hancock County's Market Potential Index (MPI), where golf (MPI: 118) and pickleball (MPI: 108) exceed national participation averages.

Local market potential for fitness activities like swimming, walking, and weightlifting also surpass national averages, aligning with community survey responses emphasizing a demand for adult and senior fitness programs. Outdoor recreation, particularly freshwater fishing, canoeing/kayaking, and archery, stands out with high local interest levels, reinforcing community priorities for environmental programming, trails, and preservation of open spaces.

Given the high local MPI scores and community feedback, recreational programming should emphasize fitness and wellness, outdoor adventure, and environmentally focused activities. This approach will align closely with residents' preferences and national participation trends.



Community members identified priorities for park development in a February 2025 Park Board meeting.

5.1.1 PARK CLASSIFICATIONS

PARK CLASSIFICATIONS

In 1996, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) published the Park, Open Space, and Greenway Guidelines, which have since served as a national standard to help communities define their own level of service based on current and future population needs. These guidelines form the foundation for developing the Hancock County parks system.

A system-wide level of service approach is used to inventory major park facilities and amenities also including indoor recreation square footage, creating measurable performance indicators. This approach supports benchmarking against peer communities and past performance, helping to track progress and identify needs over time.

Hancock County’s level of service may also include amenities not covered by national standards, reflecting local culture, demographics, and community priorities.

These classifications, combined with public input, guide the County and consulting team in aligning services with community needs and shaping recommendations based on existing assets and projected growth.

The following park classifications are based on NRPA standards and incorporate design best practices to ensure optimal use of newly developed properties.

POCKET PARK “MINI PARK”

A pocket park, also sometimes referred to as “mini park,” should be up to a half of an acre; however, some mini parks are determined by need and potential benefits, not just by size. Mini parks are also used to repurpose land, enhance landscaping/charm, and preserve a cultural heritage location. Mini parks typically serve up to a quarter-mile radius and predominantly passive use.

- Size of park: Up to one half of an acre (usable area measured)
- Service radius: 0.25-mile radius
- Site Selection: In densely populated areas, downtown districts, along greenways, and where opportunities exist to beautify or capture local cultural heritage
- Length of stay: One half of an hour experience or less
- Amenities: One amenity (e.g., playground, picnic area, gazebo, public art); no restrooms; play area for ages 2-5 with some shaded elements; no reservable shelters; no non-producing/unused amenities; benches next to small play area or enhanced landscaping. Amenities are ADA compliant
- Landscape Design: Appropriate design to enhance the park theme/use/experience
- Revenue facilities: none
- Land usage: 100 percent passive
- Programming: Typically, none
- Maintenance Standards: Provide the highest-level maintenance with available funding
- Signage: Interpretive; cultural heritage, historical, interpretive
- Parking: Typically, not required
- Lighting: Security or landscape lighting
- Naming: Consistent with the County’s ordinances for naming of parks, or may be named after a prominent or historic person, event, or natural landmark



- Other: Customized to meet the needs of densely populated area; safety design meets established CPTED standards; integrated color scheme throughout

NEIGHBORHOOD PARK

A neighborhood park should be 0.5 to 10 acres; however, some neighborhood parks are determined by use and facilities offered and not by size alone. The service radius for a neighborhood park is one half mile or six blocks. Neighborhood Parks should have safe pedestrian access for surrounding residents; parking may or may not be included but if included it accounts for less than ten cars and provides for ADA access. Neighborhood Parks serve the recreational and social focus of the adjoining neighborhoods and contribute to a distinct neighborhood identity.

- Size of park: one half to 10 acres (usable area measured). The preferred size is at least three acres
- Service radius: 0.5-mile radius
- Site Selection: On a local or collector street. If near an arterial street, provide natural or artificial barrier. Where possible, next to a school. Encourage location to link subdivisions and linked by trails to other parks
- Length of stay: One hour experience or less
- Amenities: One signature amenity (e.g., major playground, spray ground park, sport court, gazebo); no restrooms unless necessary for signature amenity; may include one non-programmed sports field; playgrounds for ages 2-5 and 5-12 with some shaded elements; no reservable shelters; loop trails; one type of sport court; no non-producing/unused amenities; benches, small picnic shelters next to play areas. Amenities are ADA compliant
- Landscape Design: Appropriate design to enhance the park theme/use/experience
- Revenue facilities: none
- Land usage: 85 percent active/15 percent passive
- Programming: Typically, none but a signature amenity may be included which is programmed
- Maintenance Standards: Provide the highest-level maintenance with available funding.
- Signage: Directional signage and facility/amenity regulations to enhance user experience
- Parking: Design should include a widened on-street parking area adjacent to the park. The goal is to maximize usable park space. As necessary, provide 5-10 spaces within the park including handicap spaces. Traffic calming devices encouraged next to park
- Lighting: Security or amenity only. Lighting on dual system with 50 percent of lights off at a set time and 50 percent on all night for security
- Naming: Consistent with the County's ordinances for naming of parks, or may be named after a prominent or historic person, event, or natural landmark
- Other: Customized to demographics of neighborhood; safety design meets established CPTED standards; integrated color scheme throughout

COMMUNITY PARK

Community Parks are intended to be accessible to multiple neighborhoods and should focus on meeting community-based recreational needs, as well as preserving unique landscapes and open spaces. Community Parks are generally larger in scale than neighborhood parks, but smaller than regional parks and are designed typically for residents who live within a three-mile radius. When possible, the park may be developed adjacent to a school. Community Parks provide recreational opportunities for the entire family and often contain facilities for specific recreational purposes: athletic fields, swimming pool, tennis courts, extreme sports amenity, recreation center, loop trails, picnic areas, reservable picnic

shelters, sports courts, permanent restrooms, large turfing and landscaped areas and a playground or spray ground. Passive outdoor recreation activities such as meditation, quiet reflection, and wildlife watching also take place at Community Parks.

Community Parks generally range from 10 to 100 acres depending on the size of a community. Community Parks serve a larger area - radius of one to three miles and contain more recreation amenities than a Neighborhood Park.

- Size of park: 10 to 70 acres normally. Can be up to 100 acres (usable area measured needs to be up to 70 acres).
- Service radius: One to three-mile radius
- Site Selection: On two collector streets minimum and preferably one arterial street. If near arterial street, provide natural or artificial barrier. Minimal number of residences abutting site. Preference is streets on four sides, or three sides with school or municipal use on fourth side. Encourage trail linkage to other parks
- Length of stay: Two to three hours experience
- Amenities: Four signature amenities at a minimum: (e.g., trails, sports fields, large shelters/pavilions, community playground for ages 2-5 and 5-12 with some shaded elements, recreation center, pool or family aquatic center, sports courts, water feature); public restrooms, ample parking, and security lighting. Amenities are compliant with ADA. Sport Fields and Sport Complexes are typical at this park.
- Revenue facilities: One or more (e.g., pool, sports complex, pavilion)
- Land usage: 65 percent active and 35 percent passive
- Programming: Minimum of four essential program services (e.g., sports, day camps, aquatics)
- Maintenance Standards: Provide the highest-level maintenance with available funding
- Parking: Sufficient to support the amenities; occupies no more than 10 percent of the park. Design should include a widened on-street parking area adjacent to the park. The goal is to maximize usable park space. Traffic calming devices encouraged within and next to the park
- Lighting: Amenity lighting includes sport field light standards. Security lighting on dual system with 50 percent of lights off at a set time and 50 percent on all night for security
- Signage: Directional signage and facility/amenity regulations to enhance user experience. May include kiosks in easily identified areas of the facility
- Landscape Design: Appropriate design to enhance the park theme/use/experience. Enhanced landscaping at park entrances and throughout park
- Naming: Consistent with the County's naming right ordinance, may be named after a prominent or historic person, event, or natural landmark
- Other: Strong appeal to surrounding neighborhoods; integrated color scheme throughout the park; partnerships developed with support groups, schools and other organizations; loop trail connectivity; linked to Regional Park, trail or recreation facility; safety design meets established CPTED standards. Telephone/Cable TV/Fiberoptics conduit.

REGIONAL PARK

A regional park serves a large area of several communities, residents within a city or county, or across multiple counties. Depending on activities within a regional park, users may travel as many as 60 miles for a visit. Regional parks include recreational opportunities such as soccer, softball, golf, boating, camping, conservation-wildlife viewing and fishing. Although regional parks usually have a combination of passive areas and active facilities, they are likely to be predominantly natural resource-based parks.

A common size for a regional park is 100 to 1,000 acres but some parks can be up to 5,000 acres in size. This depends upon the size of the community and land availability. A regional park focuses on activities and natural features not included in most types of parks and often based on a specific scenic or recreational opportunity. Facilities could include those found in a Community Park and have specialized amenities such as an art center, amphitheater, boating facility, golf course, or natural area with interpretive trails. Regional parks can and should promote tourism and economic development. Regional parks can enhance the economic vitality and identity of the entire region. Eagle Creek Park is a regional park.

- Size of park: 70 to 1,000+ acres
- Service radius: Three mile and greater radius, depending upon experiences
- Site Selection: Prefer location which can preserve natural resources on-site such as wetlands, streams, and other geographic features or sites with significant cultural or historic features. A significantly large parcel of land. Access from public roads capable of handling anticipated traffic.
- Length of stay: All day experience
- Amenities: 10 to 12 amenities to create a signature facility (e.g., golf course, tennis complex, sports complex, lake, regional playground, 3+ reservable picnic shelters, camping, outdoor recreation/extreme sports, recreation center, pool, gardens, trails, zoo, specialty facilities); public restrooms, concessions, restaurant, ample parking, special event site. Sport Fields and Sport Complexes are typical at this park.
- Revenue facilities: More than two; park designed to produce revenue to offset operational costs
- Land usage: Up to 50 percent active/50 percent passive
- Programming: More than four recreation experiences per age segment with at least four core programs provided
- Maintenance Standards: Provide the highest-level maintenance with available funding
- Parking: Sufficient for all amenities. Traffic calming devices encouraged within and next to park
- Lighting: Amenity lighting includes sport field light standards. Security lighting on dual system with 50 percent of lights off at a set time and 50 percent on all night for security
- Signage: Directional signage and facility/amenity regulations to enhance user experience, can include kiosks in easily identified areas of the facility
- Landscape Design: Appropriate design to enhance the park theme/use/experience. Enhanced landscaping at park entrances and throughout park
- Naming: Consistent with the County's naming ordinance, may be named after a prominent or historic person, event, or natural landmark
- Other: Safety design may meet CPTED safety standards; integrated color scheme throughout the park; linked to major trails systems, public transportation available, concessions, food and retail sales available, dedicated site managers on duty. Telephone/Cable TV/Fiberoptics conduit.

SPECIAL RECREATION AREAS/PARKS/FACILITIES

Special Use facilities are those spaces that do not fall within a typical park classification. A major difference between a Special Use facility and other parks is that they usually serve a single purpose whereas other park classifications are designed to offer multiple recreation opportunities. It is possible for a Special Use facility to be located inside another park. Special Use facilities generally fall into three categories:

Historic/Cultural/Social Sites - unique local resources offering historical, educational, and cultural opportunities. Examples include historic downtown areas, commercial zones, plaza parks, performing arts parks, arboretums, display gardens, performing arts facilities, indoor theaters, churches, and amphitheaters. These sites are frequently located in Community or Regional Parks.

Golf Courses - Nine and 18-hole complexes with ancillary facilities such as club houses, driving ranges, program space and learning centers. These facilities are highly maintained and support a wide age level of males and females. Programs are targeted for daily use play, tournaments, leagues, clinics and special events. Operational costs come from daily play, season pass holders, concessions, driving range fees, earned income opportunities and sale of pro shop items

Indoor Recreation Facilities - specialized or single purpose facilities. Examples include community centers, senior centers and community theaters. These are frequently located in Community or Regional Parks.

Outdoor Recreation facilities - Examples include aquatic parks, disc golf, skateboard, BMX, and dog parks, which may be in a park.

- Size of park: Depends upon facilities and activities included. Their diverse character makes it impossible to apply acreage standards
- Service radius: Depends upon facilities and activities included. Typically serves special user groups while a few serve the entire population
- Site Selection: Given the variety of potential uses, no specific standards are defined for site selection. As with all park types, the site itself should be located where it is appropriate for its use.
- Length of stay varies by facility
- Amenities: varies by facility
- Revenue facilities: Due to nature of certain facilities, revenue may be required for construction and/or annual maintenance. This should be determined at a policy level before the facility is planned and constructed
- Land usage varies by facility
- Programming: varies by facility
- Maintenance Standards: Provide the highest-level maintenance with available funding
- Parking: On-street or off-street parking is provided as appropriate. Design should include a widened on-street parking area adjacent to the park. The goal is to maximize usable park space. As necessary, provide five to 10 spaces within the park including handicap spaces. Traffic calming devices encouraged next to park
- Lighting: Security or amenity only. Lighting on dual system with 50 percent of lights off at a set time and 50 percent on all night for security
- Signage: Directional signage and facility/amenity regulations to enhance user experience
- Landscape Design: Appropriate design to enhance the park theme/use/experience
- Naming: Follows County ordinance for naming or may be named after a prominent or historic person, event, or natural landmark
- Other: Integrated color scheme throughout the park; safety design meets established CPTED standards. Telephone/Cable TV/Fiberoptics conduit as appropriate.

GREENWAYS/TRAILS

Greenbelts/Trails/Paseos are recognized for their ability to connect people and place and often include either paved or natural trails. Trails can also be loop trails in parks. Linking neighborhoods, parks, recreation facilities, attractions, and natural areas with a multi-use trail fulfills two guiding principles simultaneously: protecting natural areas along river and open space areas and providing people with a way to access and enjoy them. Multi-use trails also offer a safe, alternative form of transportation; provide substantial health benefits, habitat enhancements for plants and wildlife, and unique opportunities for outdoor education and cultural interpretation.

- **Size:** Typically, at least 30-foot width of unencumbered land for a Greenbelt or Paseo. May include a trail to support walk, bike, run, equestrian type activities. Typically, an urban trail is 10-foot wide to support pedestrian and bicycle uses. In open space areas, trails include 2 feet of decomposed granite on both sides of the trail for walkers and cyclists. Trails incorporate signage to designate where a user is located and where the trails connect in the county.

Equestrian uses can occur in both urban and open space settings by adding 10 more feet of space to separate equestrian usage from pedestrian/bike usage. In urban settings, equestrian use includes five foot of decomposed granite plus a five-foot landscaped separation from the pedestrian/bike trail. In open space settings, equestrian use includes five foot of harrowed soil plus a five-foot natural separation from the pedestrian/bike trail

- **Site Selection:** Located consistent with approved Trails Master Plan
- **Amenities:** Parking and restrooms at major trailheads. May include small parks along the trail
- **Maintenance standards:** Demand based maintenance with available funding
- **Lighting:** Security lighting at trailheads and high use areas. Lighting on dual system with 50 percent of lights off at a set time and 50 percent on all night for security
- **Signage:** Mileage markers at half mile intervals. Interpretive kiosks as deemed appropriate
- **Landscape Design:** Coordinated planting scheme in urban areas. Limited or no planting in open space areas
- **Other:** Connectivity to parks or other County attractions and facilities is desirable

WATERWAY CORRIDORS

Waterway Corridors are land adjacent to and including the course of a river or creek. Waterway corridors typically include the width in which the river meanders at a minimum. These corridors are mostly undeveloped due to being within a floodplain but may include natural or paved trails. In some instances, the corridor may have access points for public and/or private outfitters and individuals interested in traveling on the water. Corridors are also known within cities to include parks and open space that have been developed as a destination with amenities and viewing areas. Grasslands under power line corridors are one example; creek areas are another. Open Space contain natural resources that can be managed for recreation and natural resource conservation values such as a desire to protect wildlife habitat, water quality and endangered species. Open Space also can provide opportunities for nature based, unstructured, low-impact recreational opportunities such as walking and nature viewing.

CONSERVATION AREAS

Conservation areas are land that is protected with defined purposes and/or limitations on development. Conservation areas can include land with architectural, historical or environmental interests that have been identified as important to preserve. Architectural conservation describes the material, historical, and/or design integrity of structures and the process by which the heritage is prolonged through carefully

planned restoration and use. Historical conservation seeks to preserve buildings, landscapes, artifacts that are of historical significance. Environmental conservation is the protection of land, resources, natural flora and fauna. Environmental conservation can also be the preservation of land for natural beauty, wildlife habitats and wildlife migration.

5.2 LAND ACQUISITION CRITERIA

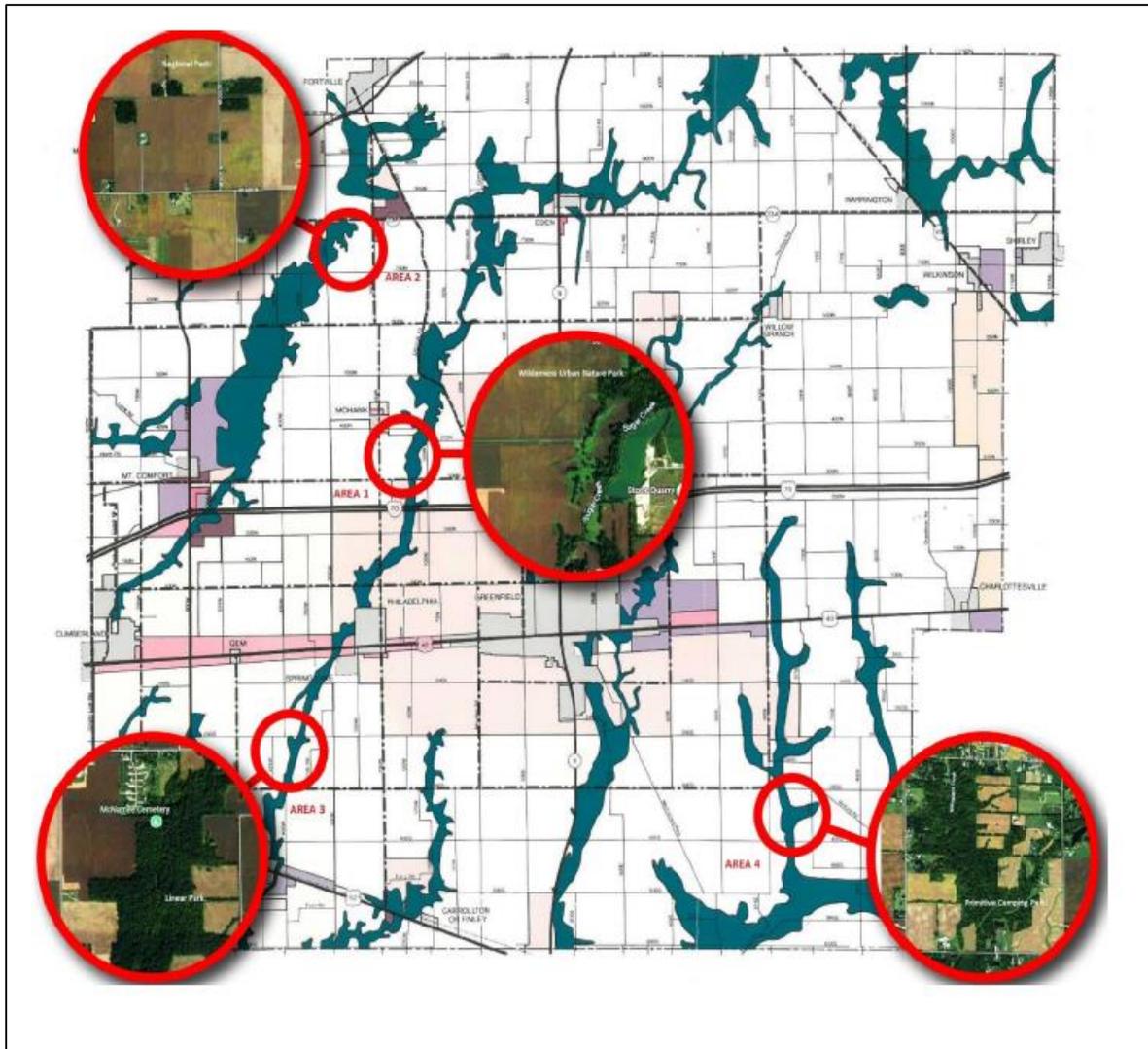
The following criteria for land acquisition should be considered by the County to acquire needed park land for the future. This allows the County to buy land based on a set criterion that aligns with the parks and recreation master plan and overall County comprehensive plan versus because an opportunity came along:

- The proposed land supports an unmet need in the community and is in an underserved area of the community for that classification of park.
- The land is adjacent to an existing park or trail and will provide greater access for the community to enjoy the resource.
- The land supports a recreation facility need in the community such as a recreation center, aquatic center, sports complex which are important to the residents or an unmet need.
- The land supports a connectivity route for an existing or future trail extension.
- The land is adjacent to a school where the value can be maximized by the school and the Department for needed programs.
- The land supports and environmentally endangered area in the Town or Township and needs to be protected.
- The land is identified as a heritage site or building of the Town or Township and should be preserved.
- The land is a natural and unique piece of property with high conservation value and should be preserved.
- The land is donated and it meets one of the top eight criteria listed.

5.2.1 PARKLAND ACQUISITION OPPORTUNITIES

The 2023 Hancock County Comprehensive Plan provides direction on a parkland acquisition strategy including:

- Establishing criteria for evaluating potential parkland
- Design parks to be provide more passive opportunities such as hiking, walking, biking, nature interaction and to have less maintenance requirements or lower levels of care.
- Identify where parks can be accessible and are needed by planning for parkland in potential growth areas.
- County and municipal park systems should complement each other and the various systems should not duplicate services.



An initial vision for targeted areas for future parkland presented by Hancock County in 2024.

5.2.2 SPRING LAKE PROPERTY

In late summer 2025, The Board of Commissioners accepted a donation from NineStar Connect of 54.84 acres of which approximately 43 acres will be dedicated to future parkland and provide a connection to the Penny Trail with the potential for needed trailhead facilities and amenities. The remaining acreage will be for future utility services.

CHAPTER SIX FINANCIAL STRATEGIES

6.1 PER CAPITA SPENDING ON PARKS AND RECREATION

As a Hancock County looks to establish its first parks and recreation department, referencing benchmarks for the per capita operating budgets of surrounding counties and peer communities can provide important data for decision making and realistic planning. This benchmarking provides an understanding of how much neighboring county park systems invest in parks and recreation services.

Per capita operating budget amounts represent the level of ongoing investment per resident and are one of the clearest indicators of how a community values access to quality parks, facilities, and programs. By comparing the figures of counties with similar population sizes, geographic characteristics, and service models, Hancock County can identify a range to allocate for staffing, programming, maintenance, and operations.

Benchmarking also supports informed decision-making and goal setting. It enables county leaders to set service levels that align with regional trends, avoid underfunding the department in its early stages, and communicate clearly with elected officials and the public about the cost of delivering parks and recreation services.

Furthermore, benchmarking is critical for long-term financial sustainability. It allows the county to anticipate the ongoing costs associated with park and facility development, program expansion, and staff growth. By anchoring budget decisions in regional data, the county strengthens its ability to build a credible, phased approach to parks and recreation services that can grow with community needs and expectations over time.

The table below shows other counties in the Central Indiana region and their per capita spending on parks and recreation operations. Additionally, National Recreation and Park Association (“NRPA”) Park Metrics ¹provide an average national perspective on per capita spending.

Per Capita Spending on Parks and Recreation Operating Budgets ²	
Hamilton County, IN	\$32.96
Hendricks County, IN	\$8.50
Johnson County, IN	\$8.73
NRPA Park Metrics (lower quartile for all agencies)	\$58.50

It is recommended that Hancock County look into a phased approach to creating a dedicated parks and recreation operating and capital budget over the next five years. Based on regional data, a recommended goal of \$6 per capita on parks and recreation operations should be achieved within the next one to two years. Based on the population projection of 90,837 for 2029, this equates to approximately \$545,022 dedicated to parks and recreation personnel, supplies, and other services.

¹ NRPA Park Metrics: <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/research-papers/agency-performance-review/>

² Budget amounts were pulled from Indiana Gateway: <https://gateway.ifionline.org/>



6.2 FUNDING AND REVENUE STRATEGIES

Parks and Recreation systems across the United States today have learned to develop a clear understanding of how to optimize revenue generation options to support parks and recreation services with limited tax dollars available. They no longer rely on taxes as their sole revenue option but have developed new sources of revenue options to help support capital and operational needs.

A growing number of municipalities have developed policies on pricing services, cost recovery rates and partnership agreements for programs and facilities provided to the community. They have also developed strong partnerships that are fair and equitable in the delivery of services. In addition, the County is aware of the trend using parks and recreation facilities, amenities, programs and events to create economic development as it applies to keeping property values high around parks and along trails.

Funding strategies have been identified as an option to support the capital and operational needs of the County's service area. Many of these funding sources may not be approved by the County or currently do not meet the requirements to implement. This list is also valuable as a reference should circumstances change and the needs align with a potential funding source.

6.2.1 EXTERNAL FUNDING SOURCES

CORPORATE SPONSORSHIPS

This revenue-funding source allows corporations to invest in the development or enhancement of new or existing facilities in park systems. Sponsorships are also highly used for programs and events.

Implication for Hancock County: It is important to have a corporate sponsorship agreement that protects both parties and identifies the terms, including for breach and termination. It would be ideally complemented with a Parks Foundation that can support the County's needs in delivering on the mission. This funding source can be used for operations or capital.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are joint development funding sources or operational funding sources between two separate agencies, such as two government entities, a non-profit and a governmental entity, or a private business and a governmental entity. Two partners jointly develop revenue producing park and recreation facilities and share risk, operational costs, responsibilities and asset management, based on the strengths and weaknesses of each partner.

Implication for Hancock County: Develop partnerships and specific policies to manage public, private and non-profit partnerships differently. This funding source can be used for operations or capital.

CONSERVANCIES

These are organized fundraising and operational groups who raise money for individual signature parks and or attractions.

Implication for Hancock County: Should the County begin conversations about a regional or destination park, this could be a viable option. Organizations such as the Central Indiana Land Trust are already present in Hancock County creating a potential partnership opportunity. This funding source can be used for operations or capital.

FOUNDATIONS/GIFTS

These dollars are raised from tax-exempt, non-profit organizations established with private donations in promotion of specific causes, activities, or issues. They offer a variety of means to fund capital projects,

including capital campaigns, gifts catalogs, fundraisers, endowments, sales of items, etc. This funding source can be used for capital costs.

Implication for Hancock County: The County can partner with the already established Community Foundation of Hancock County to help the Parks and Recreation Department accomplish its mission through fundraising and financing capital projects and services.

PRIVATE DONATIONS

Private Donations may also be received in the form of funds, land, facilities, recreation equipment, art or in-kind services. Donations from local and regional businesses as sponsors for events or facilities should be pursued.

Implication for Hancock County: Actively seeking donations can become time consuming and would eventually require an employee to oversee. This funding source can be used for capital.

FRIENDS GROUPS

These groups are formed to raise money typically for a single focus purpose that could include a park facility or program that will better the community as a whole and their special interest. The value is in the form of time, labor, funding and/or capital. These groups are formed to raise money typically for a single focus purpose that could include a park facility or program that will better the community as a whole and their special interest.

Implication for Hancock County: These groups require a person with availability in time for the commitment. In many instances these are initiated by the public and a desire to preserve a park, specific amenity or the cultural heritage of place. For example, a formalized partnership could be established with Pennsy Trails of Hancock County to continue development and ongoing maintenance of the Pennsy Trail throughout the County. The County should remain open to evaluating these opportunities on a case-by-case basis. This funding source can be used for operations or capital.

VOLUNTEERISM

The revenue source is an indirect revenue source in that persons donate time to assist the organization in providing a product or service on an hourly basis. This reduces the organization's cost in providing the service plus it builds advocacy into the system.

Implication for Hancock County: The goal should be to increase volunteer hours to reach 3-5% of the total staff hours needed to operate the system. The value of volunteer hours is currently at \$30.16 in Indiana according to independentsector.org. This is a form of cost containment, to stretch budget dollars farther. This funding source can be used for operations.

6.2.2 CAPITAL FUNDING SOURCES

DEVELOPMENT FEES/IMPACT FEES

These fees are assessed for the development of residential properties with the proceeds to be used for parks and recreation purposes, such as land acquisitions and park site development.

Implication for Hancock County: The County is in the final stages of establishing a Zone Improvement Plan and Recreation Impact Fee.

6.2.3 USER FEES

PERMITS (SPECIAL USE PERMITS)

These special permits allow individuals to use specific park property for financial gain. The County receives either a set amount of money or a percentage of the gross revenue that is being provided.

Implication for Hancock County: The County should monitor the use of the future parks and where challenges arise, this could be a component to the solution. The County will also need to develop the system for the application and review of special permits.

6.2.4 GRANTS

Hancock County plans to actively seek out grants to build capacity with capital funding for park development and improvements. When used appropriately, this strategy can alleviate financial pressures to meet community demand. Grants can also enhance the public’s perception of the agency’s fiscal performance and effectiveness as well as push some projects that could be delayed through to completion. However, there are several other limitations, impacts, and actions to consider when seeking grant funding.

- Grant funding is highly competitive, requiring strong proposals and alignment with funder priorities. This requires specific staff qualifications or outside technical expertise.
- Many grants will require matching funds from the County, which could strain the existing budget if not properly planned for in advance.
- If awarded a grant, there are often various reporting requirements and limitations on grant use, which could divert staff time and resources away from daily operational needs.
- Hancock County should align project priorities and needs strategically with relevant grant opportunities.
- When possible, Hancock County should partner with non-profits such as the Community Foundation and other organizations on grant applications for grant-related expertise and fundraising support. Partnerships can foster community engagement and advocacy.
- Hancock County should track grant-funded project impacts and document outcomes for future applications.
- Grant management software can help streamline the application and reporting procedures.

NEXT LEVEL TRAILS

Next Level Trails (NLT) is designed to incentivize collaborative efforts to accelerate trail connections. The DNR Division of Outdoor Recreation will administer the program in conjunction with the Indiana Department of Transportation.

COMMUNITY AND URBAN FORESTRY ASSISTANCE (CUF-A) GRANT

The objective of this funding opportunity is to inventory, plan, evaluate, educate, and plant trees. The only allowable costs for this grant program include the cost of (1) tree inventories, (2) management plans and ordinance updates, (3) purchase of trees, (4) planting trees, and (5) urban forestry educational programming, publications, signage, etc. to encourage comprehensive urban forest management and better public understanding of urban forestry topics.

NRPA GRANT & FUNDING RESOURCES

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) periodically posts information about grant and fundraising opportunities that are available for park and recreation agencies. Grant opportunities are



posted in areas of conservation, environmental/habitat, programming, social issue initiatives, Art and facility/amenity development.

CDBG FUNDING

Funding is received in accordance with the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Programs national objectives as established by the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development. Funding may be applied to such programs as Infrastructure Improvements, Public Facility and Park Improvements, Human Service Enhancements, Lead-Based Paint Education and Reduction, Housing Education Assistance, and Economic Development and Anti-poverty strategies.

LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

Up to 50 percent reimbursement for outdoor recreation projects. Indiana reviews LWCF grant applications and submits recommended projects to the National Park Service for final approval.

INDIANA TRAILS PROGRAM

For development of urban trail linkages, trail head and trailside facilities; maintenance of existing trails; restoration of trail areas damaged by usage; improving access for people with disabilities; acquisition of easements and property; development and construction of new trails; purchase and lease of recreational trail construction and maintenance equipment; environment and safety education programs related to trails.

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION - TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES (TA)

The TA program is funded through the Transportation Improvement Program and supports active modes of transportation such as trails, sidewalks, and safe routes to school. This program can also assist with historic preservation or tourism projects. The call for projects is typically for project letting four years in advance. The projects must align with the MPO's short and long range plans including the Metropolitan Transportation Plan.

LAKE AND RIVER ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

Grant funds are directed toward ensuring public-access lakes and streams remain in good condition. This program provides technical and financial assistance for projects that improve water quality and restore waterways.

INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES - IN-LIEU FEE PROGRAM

A program that helps with the restoration, establishment, enhancement, and preservation of natural aquatic resources. The funds come from fees paid to the DNR to satisfy compensatory mitigation requirements for building permits. The DNR assists with the costs associated with design and construction of the projects.

6.2.5 TAX FUNDING SOURCES

PROPERTY TAXES

Ad valorem taxes on real property are currently implemented by the County.

LEASE OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS BELOW THE GROUND ALONG TRAILS

Lease land for fiber optics, utilities alongside trails to support operations trails

Implication for Hancock County: As the County adds trails to the system including connectivity trails, opportunities may develop. The County should look at these on a case-by-case basis. Should this funding source materialize, the County should develop a policy to direct city officials and staff.

HOTEL/MOTEL (TRANSIENT) TAX

Tax based on gross receipts from charges and meal services, which may be used to build and operate sports fields, regional parks, golf courses, tennis complexes, and other special park and recreation facilities.

Implication for Hancock County: The County should evaluate any mutually beneficial projects to partner with other entities such as County Tourism.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE TAX

The tax is usually associated with convention and tourism bureaus. However, since parks and recreation agencies manage many of the tourism attractions, they receive a portion of this funding source for operational or capital expenses.

Implication for Hancock County: The County should continue to monitor State legislation to determine if this is a feasible option for the Parks and Recreation Department.

LOCAL INCOME TAXES

Allocate at least a portion of the additional revenues received resulting from countywide income growth to park capital projects.

Implication for Hancock County: This would include a reprioritization of an existing funding source. The County currently has six different LIT funds: Certified Shares, Property Tax Relief, Library, Economic Development, Public Safety & Correctional Facility.

6.2.6 FRANCHISES AND LICENSES

GREENWAY UTILITY

Greenway utilities are used to finance the acquisition of greenways and development of the greenways by selling the development rights underground for the fiber optic types of businesses.

Implication for Hancock County: As the County develops trails, this may be an opportunity to create revenue.

LAND LEASES

This includes options where developers / agencies lease space from City-owned land through a subordinate lease that pays out a set dollar amount plus a percentage of gross dollars for recreation enhancements. These could include a golf course, marina, restaurants, driving ranges, sports complexes, equestrian facilities, recreation centers and ice arenas.

Implication for Hancock County: The County should continue to monitor changing circumstances that could make this funding source and option.

EASEMENTS

This revenue source is available when the County allows utility companies, businesses or individuals to develop some type of an improvement above ground or below ground on their property for a set period and a set dollar amount to be received by the County on an annual basis.

Implication for Hancock County: The County has historical easements that have been provided for utilities. The County can be open to these as any new requests for easements are made with the County.

INTERLOCAL AGREEMENTS

Contractual relationships entered between two or more local units of government and/or between a local unit of government and a non-profit organization for the joint usage/development of sports fields, regional parks, or other facilities.

Implication for Hancock County: The County currently has interlocal agreements. There should be best practices identified in Appendix E in place for all interlocal agreements.

6.2.7 CONCLUSIONS

FUNDING SOURCES

Additional consideration should be given to the following strategies to diversify operational and capital funding sources for parks and recreation development:

- Conduct a cost benefit analysis of grants before applications are submitted to determine the amount of reporting compared to the overall value.
- Develop a capital improvement strategy to enhance future park areas and set a standard of care
- Secure funding and develop parks from site master plans (construction documents) identified in the future Capital Improvement Plan.
- Develop policies to support earned income through the Department's ability to establish additional fees and charges where the individual benefit is significant.

REVENUE POLICIES

The County should perform an annual budget review of programs and operations. The annual review will provide an assessment of the revenue recovery and operating costs for each service area. This should be part of an overall pricing policy and cost recovery goals.

A pricing policy is designed to provide the park systems consistent guidelines in pricing admissions, facilities, and program services. This allows the users to better understand the philosophy behind pricing a service. Furthermore, the level of service and benefits users receive is translated into a price that is based on a set subsidy level, or on the level of individual consumption or exclusivity that is involved outside of what a general taxpayer receives. The subsidy levels should be in line with the County's annual program offerings.

Pricing policies provide a basis for clear understanding of the level of benefit and exclusivity the user receives above what a general taxpayer receives and the costs to provide services, programs, or facilities. The pricing policy is expressed in terms of the percentage of cost recovery the agency is trying to recover against the agency's overall budget and the activity goal within a specific core business.

DONATION POLICIES

The County may be able to receive donation revenues through the implementation of a Donation Policy. A Donation Policy provides the County with a framework for accepting donations to the Parks and Recreation Department. The policy should provide guidelines for the acquisition and management of parkland, facilities, and amenities. General guidelines include a framework for gifts and bequests, passes and certificates, and an exchange for services or goods to the Parks and Recreation Department. This would be a short-term goal, with the establishment of a park foundation to be the long-term goal for receiving donations.

SPONSORSHIP POLICIES

The County can use sponsorships which allow corporations and individuals to invest in the development or enhancement of new or existing programs and facilities. Sponsorships are often used for events.

A Sponsorship is the financial or in-kind support from a for-profit (or non-profit) entity for a specific program, event, project, display, exhibit, or site in exchange for tangible and intangible benefits. For most sponsors, those benefits are primarily marketing opportunities, such as visibility for a brand, product, sampling, and name association with a cause. The Parks and Recreation Department could display a specific corporation through its company logo or other form of corporate recognition on County property in the exchange for financial support and or goods or services.

Corporate Sponsorships generally include Title Sponsors, Presenting Sponsors, Associate Sponsors, and Product Sponsors. Non-monetary sponsorships may involve trade-outs of time, materials, space, volunteers, in-kind goods or services, food, sports type drinks, and marketing exposure.

PARTNERSHIP POLICIES / INTER-LOCAL AGREEMENTS

The County should maximize community partnerships to grow the parks and recreation system. These relationships, entered between two or more local units of government and/or between a local unit of government and a non-profit organization jointly develop revenue producing park and recreation facilities and share risk, operational costs, management responsibilities and asset management, based on the strengths and weaknesses of each partner.

It is best practice to review partnerships and terms annually. Revisiting the terms of partnerships is important to ensure the agreement's terms are still valid and the need for partnering has not changed. Updating existing partnership terms to accurately reflect what is being provided and the purpose of the partnership.

New partnerships should be forged as the County continues to evolve the parks and recreation system to align with community needs. Ensure that partnerships are fair and equitable to the County and Parks and Recreation Department with the best interests of the community identified.

6.3 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

6.3.1 APPROACH TO THE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS (CIP)

As Hancock County establishes its parks and recreation system, the Park Board and Department should create a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) specific to parks and recreation development priorities. Since there is no current, dedicated parkland overseen by the County there is an opportunity to establish a realistic, strategic approach to park development that aligns with available resources and community expectations. A tiered approach can be used to prioritize limited capital funding toward critical, essential needs.

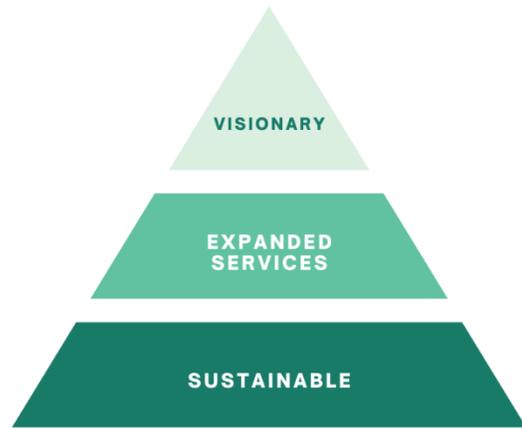
Three separate tiers are recommended including, Sustainable Projects, Expanded Services Projects, and Visionary Projects and are detailed below:

Sustainable Projects will prioritize projects related to safety, functionality, and accessibility needs of the parks system. These types of projects include basic amenities and infrastructure. Sustainable projects ensure efficient and effective use of existing resources and address planned maintenance requirements and routine upkeep through an annual capital budget.

Expanded Services Projects can be addressed when additional financial resources become available. These projects improve services, including the upgrade of existing facilities. The Parks and Recreation Department, in collaboration with the County Commissioners and the Park Board, should actively explore additional revenue streams, such as strategic partnerships, naming rights, increased program revenues, grants, and, potentially, capital bond funding once existing financial obligations are met.

Visionary Projects are typically extensive and have a far reaching impact in the community. These projects are typically planned years in advance and can expand the County's recreation service levels. Funding for these types of projects will largely rely on developing strong partnerships, often involving private funding and capital bond funding as debt capacity becomes available in the future.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING



CHAPTER SEVEN STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 VISION

“A county where every resident can thrive through nature, recreation, and community connection.”

7.2 MISSION

“To preserve our natural resources, support active living, and create outdoor experiences that unite our growing communities.”

7.3 GUIDING PILLARS TO BUILD ON

- **Sustainability** of the park system and services through standards of care and well-managed resources to ensure consistency in delivery now and into the future.
- **Placemaking** of public spaces through planning, design, and management that promotes community health, happiness and well-being.
- **Community Health and Wellness** achieved through design, operation, asset preservation, and use of public spaces for residents.
- **Conservation of Natural Areas** within the County through policies that drive design and development emphasizing preservation and use.

7.4 ACTION STRATEGIES

In addition, the action strategies outlined below will be updated and utilized by staff to implement and track progress on this plan’s recommendations. These strategies are organized based on Short-term (0 - 3 years), Mid-term (3-5 years), Long-term (Beyond 5 years) and On-going timeframes.

7.4.1 SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES
 Short-term goals are established to help position an emerging Department to align with community needs. Some will have visible outcomes in the short term, where others will contribute to mid-term strategies, long-term strategies and ongoing strategies where greater outcomes will be achieved.

Short-Term (0-3 Years)
A. Formalize a Department organizational structure and staffing plan based on park development goals that identifies necessary core competencies. Focus on using existing internal staff and external partners and contractors until full-time staff can be hired.
B. Establish organizational structure and build capacity in the Department through professional development, park design standards, and defined operational policies and standards for efficient and effective operations.
C. Formalize a partnership policy to ensure equitable outcomes for park and recreation management with public-public, public-nonprofit, and public-private partners. {e.g., a formalized partnership agreement with the Community Foundation of Hancock County that helps raise funds for future park needs.}
D. Establish outcome-based agreements with third-party partners or contractors for technical expertise and outsourced functions including routine maintenance, landscaping, and natural resource management.



- E. Develop outcome-based partnerships with external organizations and interlocal agreements with other government agencies to provide core recreation programming that enhances what is currently offered throughout the county. Programs should be focused on the core areas of special events that celebrate the county and outdoor adventure and environmental education.
- F. Develop a multi-year plan to identify key areas for volunteer involvement for park and trail maintenance and recreation programming such as invasive plant removal, leading nature education programming, and community clean-up initiatives.
- G. Acquire a computerized maintenance management system for proactive maintenance scheduling, tracking, and reporting on parks and trails. Establish protocol on implementing within operations.
- H. Develop a capital improvement strategy specific to parks and recreation to enhance future park areas and set costs for a standard of care.
- I. Establish a dedicated parks and recreation operational and capital budget within the County's main budget. {Establish a per capita benchmark - e.g., \$6.00 per capita}
- J. Establish two dedicated funding sources for the long-term Department operations and capital improvements and identify funding for mid-term and long-term projects
- K. Apply for state and federal grants that supplement funding for parkland acquisition and trail development. Establish a matching-funds program within annual capital budget.
- L. Develop a Communication Plan to educate county residents on the mission of the newly established County Parks and Recreation Department.
- M. Continue working to increase connectivity priorities as identified in the Thoroughfare Trails Plan.
- N. Acquire parkland according to land acquisition criteria in underserved areas of the county that follow master plan priorities.
- O. Establish a land dedication ordinance that requires residential and commercial developers to either dedicate land or pay a fee in lieu of dedication to ensure new development provides adequate parkland and recreation space for residents.

7.4.2 MID-TERM STRATEGIES

Mid-term strategies are continuing actions taken in the short-term strategies and preparing for long-term strategies.

Mid-Term (4-5 Years)
A. Identify funding for mid-term and long-term capital projects
B. Develop site master plans for the undeveloped property once acquired
C. Hire a Superintendent of Parks and Recreation and dedicated park maintenance staff over the next five years according to established staffing plan.
D. Expand recreation programming through trending leisure activities and align with community needs identified in the community needs assessment
E. Initiate a schedule to begin construction documents for all major improvements to the park system as identified in the CIP
F. Protect historic sites through acquisition and preservation purposes.
G. Work with County Commissioners to develop a lifecycle replacement schedule and funding

7.4.3 LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

Long-term strategies are specifically focusing on the long-term CIP and park improvements that will take time to prepare for development.

Long-Term (Beyond 5 Years)
A. Secure funding and develop parks from site master plans (construction documents) identified in the CIP - Set goal to develop a set amount of park acres over five years.
B. Maximize access and trail connectivity to parks and destinations citywide
C. Expand staffing to help with park maintenance and recreation programming.
D. Conduct an updated parks and recreation needs assessment through a statistically valid survey (gauge progress from previous survey results and identified community needs)

7.4.4 ONGOING STRATEGIES

Ongoing strategies are designed to sustain the efforts from the short-term, mid-term and eventually the long-term strategies.

On-going
A. Annually review actual revenue and expenditures making incremental adjustments as needed
B. Embed parks and recreation development within annual budgets and capital improvement plans, ensuring sustainable funding and consistent progress.
C. Submit annual grants for land acquisition, capital development, stormwater management, and preservation.
D. Annually review policies and procedures and update according to needs and changes in operation
E. Continue to consider contracts for services that improve operations, require expertise and contains costs
F. Continue to remove invasive plant species and add native plants and landscapes with new projects and as funding becomes available.
G. Continue to replace, convert, or add native and drought-tolerant plants and landscapes with new projects and as funding becomes available.
H. Increase shade in parks with a diverse population of next generation trees and shade structures, where appropriate
I. Update Communications Plan annually capturing change in markets and innovative approaches
J. Track Department operations using key performance indicators, such as cost per acre, revenue per capita, miles of trail per 1,000 residents, program cost recovery, user satisfaction surveys, and program participation
K. Incorporate environmental analysis into site master plans increasing long-term sustainability for properties and facilities
L. Incorporate public safety considerations and other public facility needs into the design and development of new parks and recreational spaces.
M. Update a park maintenance plan incorporating standards for new assets replacing aged amenities and for all new assets added to the system

- N. Coordinate parks planning and development efforts with public safety, utilities, transportation, and land use planning to optimize resources and service efficiency. Consider acquiring county-owned surplus property.**
- O. Conduct feasibility studies for all new facilities and parks incorporating revenue generating opportunities for financial sustainability**

7.4.5 CONCLUSION

This Plan is meant to be a strategic roadmap that can adapt as times and circumstances change. How the County delivers future parks and recreation services will evolve over the implementation of this plan to align with the community's needs.

In addition, the financial realities of governments and public agencies nationwide have changed with increased costs and the future Department will need to have an even greater emphasis on revenue opportunities to ensure long-term financial sustainability.

Hancock County and its Park Board is in a unique position to establish the foundation for a parks and recreation system the right way from the beginning by creating sound practices through policies and procedures and creating sustainable funding sources that allow for the system to grow over time with community demand in a smart manner.

APPENDIX A: MAINTENANCE STANDARDS

The following includes standards to be considered for future facilities and park or exterior spaces. While there are some maintenance standards that decrease the level of maintenance in low-traffic areas, it is assumed that Hancock County will have a high expectation in appearance. For this reason, all maintenance is of the highest level applied.

PARK AND PUBLIC SPACE MAINTENANCE

The area surrounding facilities and amenities will be maintained, which includes the landscaping around buildings, walkways, parking areas, gathering spaces, grass, signage, lighting, and trash pick-up. Maintenance standards can change by season and month depending on the type of park area and level of use. Standards will be calculated by time and equipment needed to develop the required operation budgets.

TURF MAINTENANCE - HIGH PROFILE AREAS (SMALL AREAS, ENTIRE AREA VISIBLE TO FOOT TRAFFIC)

- Mowing will occur 2 times/week.
- Mowing heights
- 2 ½ “during warm season (daytime highs consistently above 75 degrees)
- Edging of all turf perimeters will occur 1 time/week.
- 95% turf coverage
- 3% weed infestation for existing areas (all efforts should be made to keep new areas 100% weed free)
- 2% bare area
- Remove grass clippings if visible.
- Aerate 1 time/year (additionally if needed)
- Inspect thatch layer regularly and remove as needed.
- Assess soil and water annually
- Additional testing will occur if deemed necessary.
- Inspect daily for insects, disease, and stress and respond to outbreaks within 24 hours.
- Fertilize (3) times per year.
- Top dress/over seed once a year

TREE AND SHRUB MAINTENANCE

- Conduct routine inspections to identify dead, diseased, or hazardous trees.
- Prune/trim trees and shrubs as dictated by species twice annually during spring and fall.

- Remove sucker growth annually.
- Assess soil annually to ensure application of appropriate nutrients as needed.
- Apply fertilizer to plant species according to their optimum requirements as needed or yearly.
- Inspect regularly for insects and diseases. Respond to outbreaks within 48 hours.
- Place 2” of organic mulch around each tree within a minimum 18” ring
- Place 2” of organic mulch around shrub beds to minimize weed growth.
- Remove hazardous limbs and plants immediately upon discovery.
- Remove dead trees and plant material immediately unless located within an environmental area.
- Flower bed maintenance is done yearly.
- Fertilize once a year.
- Clear underbrush from around trees and maintain a buffer zone around the woodland to help prevent wildfires.

STORM CLEANUP

- Inspect drain covers at least twice monthly, before rain and immediately after flooding
- Remove debris and organic materials from drain covers immediately.
- Maintain water inlet height at 100% of design standard.

IRRIGATION SYSTEMS

- Inspect irrigation systems at least once per month or computer monitors, as necessary.
- Initiate repairs to non-functioning systems within 24 hours of discovery
- Back flow testing is done annually.

LITTER CONTROL

- Pick up litter and empty containers at least once daily or as needed this includes dog litter boxes along the trail in the park.
- Remove leaves and organic debris once a week or as necessary.

HARD SURFACE MAINTENANCE AND THE PARKING LOTS

- Remove debris and glass immediately upon discovery.
- Remove sand, dirt, and organic debris from walks and hard surfaces weekly including washing down front entrance of buildings every two weeks.

- Remove trip hazards from pedestrian areas immediately upon discovery.
- Paint fading or indistinct instructional / directional signs annually.
- Blow grass clippings after mowing around hard surfaces.
- Remove grass growing in cracks as needed.
- Re-coat parking lines every two years
- Pick up trash daily.
- Re-mulch in the spring
- Over seed turf areas in the fall and fertilize
- Edge median weekly
- Parking curbs are painted every two years.

HARD SURFACE GATHERING SPACES & SIDEWALK MAINTENANCE

- Inspect hard surface sidewalks at least once monthly.
- Remove dirt, sand, and organic debris from the hard trail surface at least once weekly.
- Graffiti removed immediately upon discovery.
- Mechanically or chemically control growth 24” on either side of sidewalks or trails on site.
- Inspect signs, benches, and other site amenities at least once a week. Complete repairs within 3 days of discovery
- Inspect and make necessary repairs to lighting systems at least once monthly.
- Repair / replace bulbs to maintain lighting levels to design specifications.

SITE AMENITY MAINTENANCE

- Inspect benches, trash containers, bicycle racks, flag poles, and other site amenities at least weekly. Complete repairs within 24 hours of discovery
- Cleaning/power wash of amenities twice yearly

SIGN MAINTENANCE

- Inspect sign lettering, surfaces, and posts at least once monthly.
- Repair / replace signs to maintain design and safety standards within 24 hours of discovery.
- Clean signs twice a year
- Cut back plant material monthly.

VANDALISM AND GRAFFITI REMOVAL

- Initiate repairs immediately upon discovery. Document and photograph damage as necessary

LIGHTING SECURITY/AREA

- Foot-candle levels will be maintained to preserve original design at 3 foot-candles.
- Inspect once monthly.
- Repairs/bulb replacement will be completed within 24 hours of discovery.

OPEN SPACE

- Maintain natural appearance to open space areas
- Remove trees and branches that pose a hazard to the users of the area
- Respond to disease and insect outbreaks within 24 hours of identification
- Inspect areas monthly
- Remove and clean dump sites within 48 hours of identification
- Post and maintain appropriate signage for each individual area
- No large branches or debris will be allowed in parks and along perimeters

TRAIL MAINTENANCE

- Inspect hard and soft surface trails at least once monthly
- Remove dirt, sand, and organic debris from hard surfaces at least once monthly
- Remove organic debris from soft surfaces at least once monthly
- Maintain a uniform 2-4” depth of compacted material on soft surface trails
- Mechanically or chemically control growth 24” on either side of the trails
- Remove overhanging branches within 84” of the trail surface at least once annually
- Inspect signs, benches, and other site amenities at least once monthly. Complete repairs within 10 days of discovery

INVASIVE SPECIES CONTROL

- Create an invasive species management plan that identifies each plant type, its current cover or range percentage, density, and strategies for removal.
- Implement integrated pest management (“IPM”) strategies to assist in reducing non-native invasive plants by at least 5% annually. IPM combines multiple control methods to achieve the best results while minimizing environmental impact.

- **Mechanical Control:** This involves techniques with tools or machines such as cutting, mowing, and chopping plants and is most useful in areas with large infestations with terrain that does not create access issues for equipment or pose a threat to the safety of employees and volunteers.
 - Cut or mow several times during the growing season and prioritize this work during the period just before plants flower.
 - Avoid mowing if seeds have already developed to prevent the spread.
 - Apply herbicide to the cut stems or resprouts.
- **Chemical Control:** This method involves the use of pesticides depending on the type of plant species.
 - Prevent applying pesticides in areas where rare plant species are present.
 - Ensure proper equipment and personal protective gear as well as training for employees and volunteers are in place before allowing applications. Hancock County should ensure a licensed applicator is overseeing the treatment program.
- **Biological Control:** This method refers to the use of control organisms, such as animals or insects, who are native to the area and can target invasive plants. Hancock County must carefully evaluate this method to ensure that it does not have unintended consequences and harms native species.
 - Monitor natural sites and treatment areas regularly and remove or treat invasive plants within 5 days of discovery.
 - Revegetate with native species when appropriate.

Bathhouse/Restroom

Daily Maintenance

- **Clean and Sanitize Fixtures:** Clean and disinfect toilets, urinals, sinks, and countertops multiple times daily to prevent odor and germs.
- **Refill Supplies:** Restock toilet paper, soap, paper towels, and hand sanitizer as needed.
- **Empty Trash:** Empty all trash bins and replace liners, ensuring no overflow.
- **Sweep and Mop Floors:** Sweep floors to remove debris and mop with a disinfectant cleaner to prevent slippery surfaces and odors.
- **Mirror Cleaning:** Wipe down mirrors to remove smudges and water spots.
- **Inspect for Damage:** Check for broken fixtures, clogged drains, or any signs of vandalism.
- **Sanitize Surfaces:** Wipe down tables, chairs, and countertops with a disinfectant cleaner.
- **Spot Cleaning:** Address any spills, stains, or messes immediately.

- Check Lighting: Verify that all light fixtures are working properly and replace burned-out bulbs.
- Monitor Air Circulation: Ensure proper ventilation to keep air fresh and odors minimized.

Weekly Maintenance

- Deep Clean Floors: Scrub and sanitize grout and tile flooring to remove buildup of dirt and stains.
- Clean Walls and Partitions: Wipe down walls and restroom partitions with a disinfectant.
- Inspect Plumbing: Check for leaks in sinks, toilets, or urinals. Test all faucets and flush mechanisms for proper function.
- Organize Storage Areas: Ensure party supplies and equipment are organized and accessible.
- Pest Control Check: Inspect the facility for any signs of pests and address issues proactively.
- Inspect HVAC Systems: Check that air conditioning/heating units are working efficiently.

Monthly Maintenance

- Fixtures: Perform a detailed cleaning of all fixtures, including pipes and plumbing beneath sinks.
- Ventilation: Clean exhaust fans to ensure proper airflow and odor control.
- Test Drains: Ensure all drains are clear and free of obstructions.
- Walls and Windows: Wash walls, windows, and window sills to remove dust and smudges.
- Safety Equipment: Check fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, and emergency exits.
- Deep Clean Entryways: Scrub door frames, handles, and entry flooring to remove dirt and wear.
- Inspect and Replace Damaged Fixtures: Replace any worn-out furniture, hardware, or equipment.

Seasonal Maintenance (opening and closing)

- Inspect Plumbing for Issues: When opening, check for pipes at risk of freezing in winter or leaks due to high usage in summer.
- Winterizing Service: Inspect the plumbing system for wear, corrosion, or blockages.
- Repaint or Touch Up Walls: Refresh paint as needed to maintain a clean appearance.
- Check Heating and Cooling Systems: Service HVAC systems at the start of each season to ensure proper function.
- Inspect Roof and Gutters: Ensure the roof and gutters are clear of debris and not leaking.
- Power Wash Exterior: Clean the building's exterior to maintain a professional look.

Annual Maintenance

- **Replace Old Fixtures:** Upgrade or replace any outdated or heavily worn fixtures such as faucets, toilets, or hand dryers.
- **Seal Grout:** Re-seal tile grout to maintain cleanliness and prevent water damage.
- **Furniture Maintenance:** Repair or replace worn-out chairs and tables.
- **Inspect Flooring:** Repair or replace damaged flooring (e.g., scratched hardwood, chipped tile).
- **Fire Safety Inspection:** Conduct a professional inspection of fire extinguishers, alarms, and emergency lighting systems.
- **Energy Audit:** Evaluate energy efficiency of lighting, HVAC, and appliances. Upgrade to energy-saving options if needed.

APPENDIX B: RECREATION PROGRAM STANDARDS

These standards ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for all park visitors and participants in Hancock County's future programs, activities, and events.

FACILITIES AND SAFETY

- Programs will be held in designated spaces that are safe, clean, and appropriate for the program.
- Maintain a maximum and minimum number of participants per program to ensure quality and adhere to space limitations.

STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

- All Program Instructors will have verified qualifications relevant to their program area.
- New staff, volunteers, and contractors working with children will undergo mandatory background checks.
- All staff will be trained in first aid and CPR. Volunteers will be trained when appropriate. Readily accessible first aid kits and AEDs will be available.
- Staff will wear easily identifiable uniforms.
- Staff and volunteers will receive annual customer service training.
- Appropriate support staff or volunteers will be readily available to assist instructors.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

- Program policies will be readily available to all instructors.
- Program Instructors will collaborate with supervisors to develop program curricula and work plans before each program begins. These plans will require approval by designated program staff.
- Staff will utilize established performance measures to evaluate each program. Results will be reported quarterly.
- All disciplinary actions will be documented in writing.

MATERIALS AND ENVIRONMENT

- All equipment and supplies will be high-quality, safe, and suitable for participants.
- Program spaces will be inspected for safety and cleanliness before each program.

PROGRAM EVALUATION AND COMPLIANCE

- Utilize a combination of pre/post-program evaluations, focus groups, or exit surveys to gather customer feedback.

- All required licenses and certifications will be reviewed and filed before program commencement.
- Regulatory requirements will be completed on time according to established guidelines for each program area.



APPENDIX C DEMOGRAPHICS AND TRENDS ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

A key component of Parks and Recreation Master Plan is a Demographics and Recreation Trends Analysis. The purpose of this analysis is to provide Hancock County with insight into the makeup of the population they serve and identify market trends in recreation. The report also helps to quantify the market in and around the County of Hancock, Indiana (“County”) and assists in providing a better understanding of the types of parks, facilities, and services used to satisfy the needs of residents.



Figure 1: Demographic Overview of Hancock County, IN

METHODOLOGY

Demographic data used for the analysis was obtained from U.S. Census Bureau and from Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. (ESRI), the largest research and development organization dedicated to Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and specializing in population projections and market trends. All data was acquired in August 2024 and reflects actual numbers as reported in the 2020 Census. ESRI then estimates the current population (2024) as well as a 5-year projection (2029). PROS then utilized straight line linear regression to forecast demographic characteristics for 10 and 15-year projections (2034 and 2039).

RACE AND ETHNICITY DEFINITIONS

The minimum categories for data on race and ethnicity for Federal statistics, program administrative reporting, and civil rights compliance reporting are defined below. The Census 2020 data on race are not directly comparable with data from the 2010 Census and earlier censuses; therefore, caution must be used when interpreting changes in the racial composition of the US population over time. The latest (Census 2020) definitions and nomenclature are used within this analysis.

- **American Indian or Alaska Native:** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America), and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.
- **Asian:** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of East Asia, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- **Black or African American:** A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa.
- **Hispanic or Latino:** A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.
- **Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander:** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.
- **White:** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.

Please note: The Census Bureau defines Race as a person's self-identification with one or more of the following social groups: White, Black, or African American, Asian, American Indian, and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, some other race, or a combination of these. Ethnicity is defined as whether a person is of Hispanic / Latino origin or not. For this reason, the Hispanic/Latino ethnicity is viewed separate from race throughout this demographic analysis.

DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS BOUNDARY

The Hancock County boundaries shown below were utilized for the demographic analysis (Figure 2).

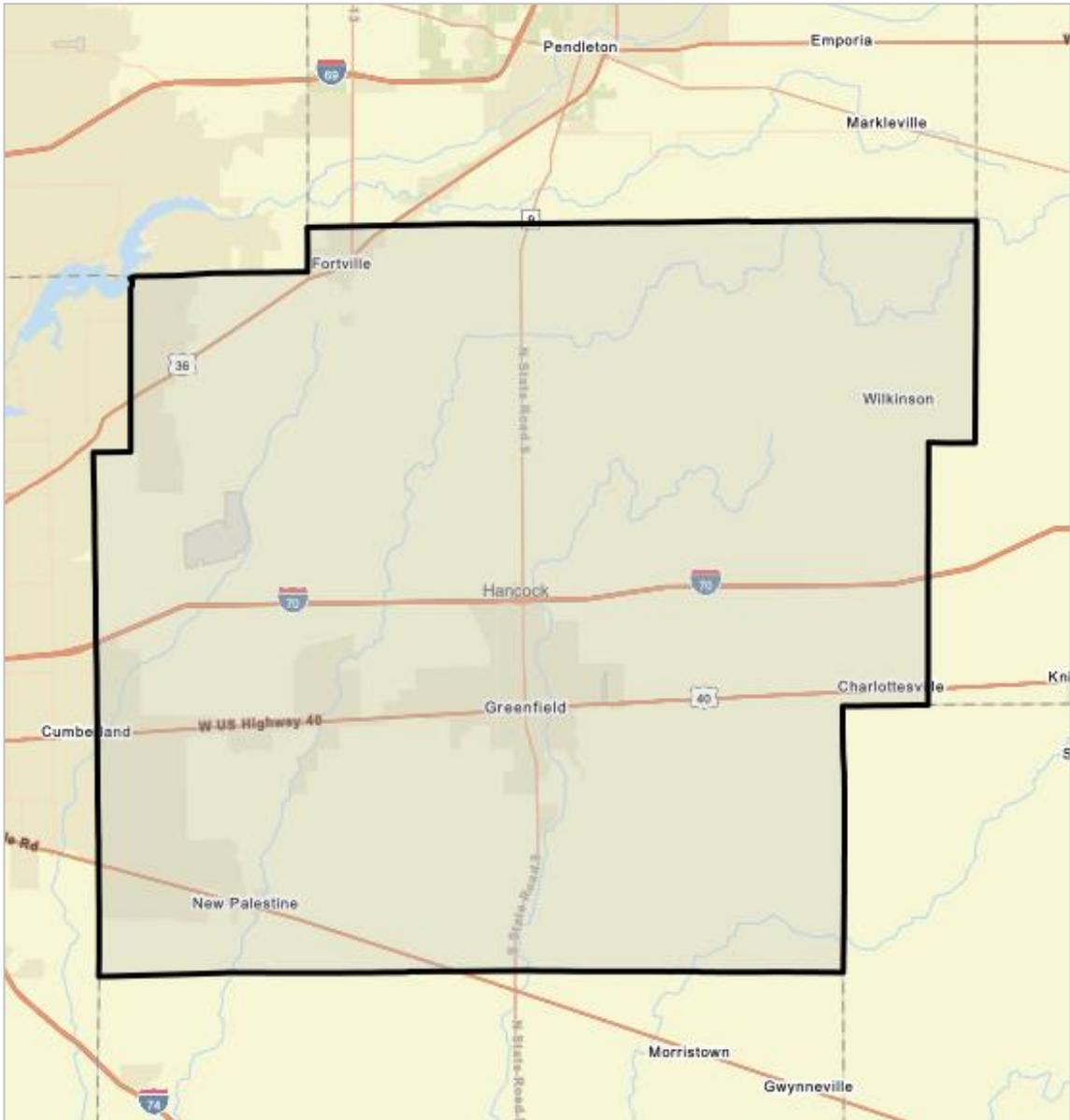


Figure 2: Service Area Boundaries

COUNTY POPULACE

POPULATION

Hancock County has a quickly growing population that ranges from moderate to major yearly increases; in fact, the population has increased from 70,002 in 2010 to an estimated **85,753 in 2024**. Hancock County’s population is expected to continue to grow significantly in the following 15 years, where it is projected to reach **101,821 residents by 2039 (Figure 3)**. The total number of households has grown at a consistent rate proportional to the population growth, increasing from 26,304 in 2010 to an estimated **33,568 in 2024**. By 2039, it is estimated that there will be **41,362 total households** within Hancock County, which is likely to continue growing. (Figure 4)

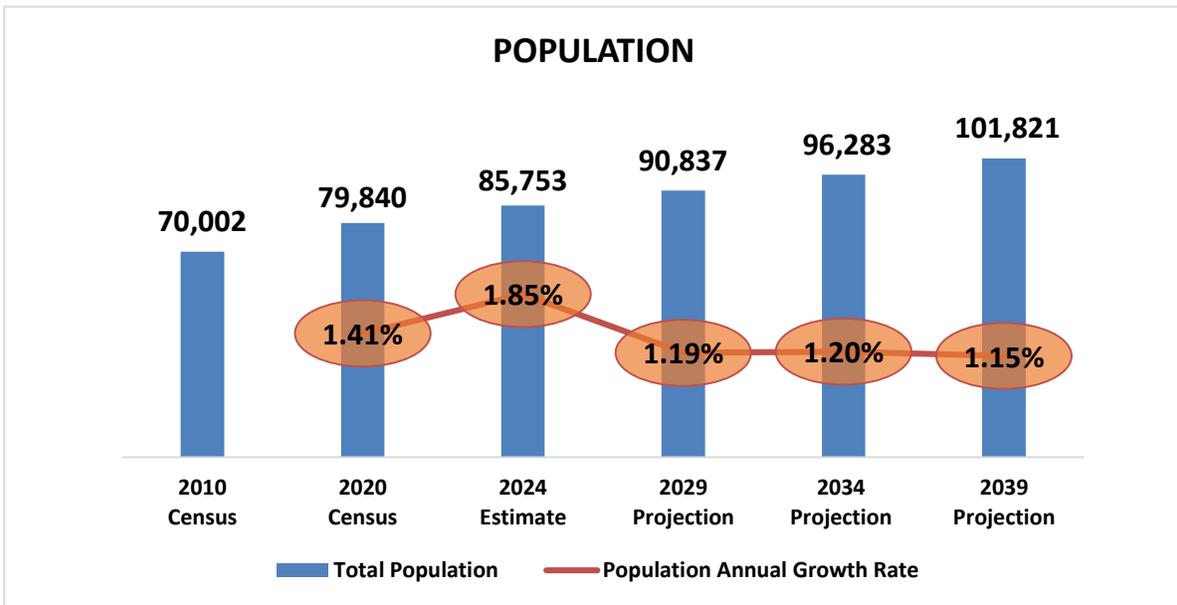


Figure 3: Hancock County’s Total Population and Annual Growth

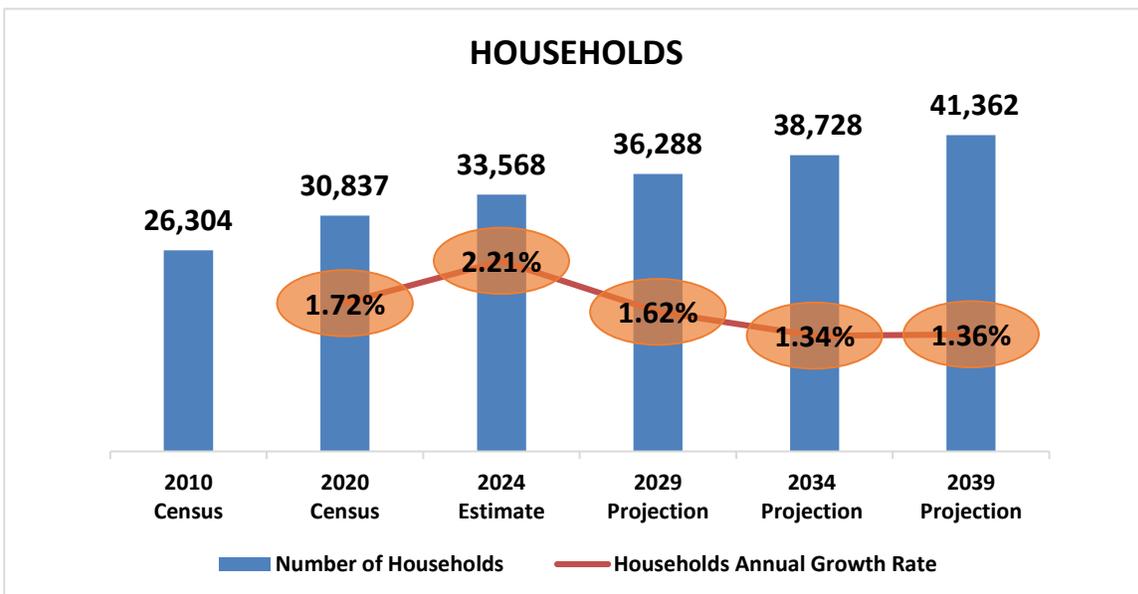


Figure 4: Hancock County’s Total Households and Annual Growth



AGE SEGMENTATION

The largest age segments of Hancock County’s current population are **35-54 (26%)**, **18-34 (19%)**, and **0-12 (16%)**, comprising a relatively well-distributed county population. Within the community, there is an aging trend with people between the ages of 35-54, decreasing from making up 30% of the population in 2010 to making up **24% of the population by 2039**; meanwhile, the three oldest age ranges have an estimated increase of **12% from 2010 to 2039**, suggesting a greater need for accessibility to all facilities. There is a slight projected increase in the population percentage of ages **0-12** suggesting that Hancock County is being chosen to start families in, meaning that more youth programs may need to be considered.

The median age has risen from 39 in 2010 to **40.8 in 2024** and is projected to continue increasing in the coming years. Therefore, the amenities updated and developed for Hancock County should likely be designed to appeal to a family-oriented demographic. Including more programs fitting to this demographic, like parks with playgrounds and nature trails, could be beneficial, though additions should also remain accessible for adults of all ages and young children. **(Figure 5)**

In a statistically valid recreation needs assessment survey conducted in 2023, respondents were asked how well needs were being met for specific core program areas and what programs are most important to them for a future parks and recreation department to offer. Three of the top priorities were adult fitness & wellness, community special events, and senior fitness & wellness. When pairing the community feedback on programming priorities with the aging population trend data of the County over the next fifteen years, an assumption can be made that older residents will expect active recreation facilities and programming from the future parks and recreation department.

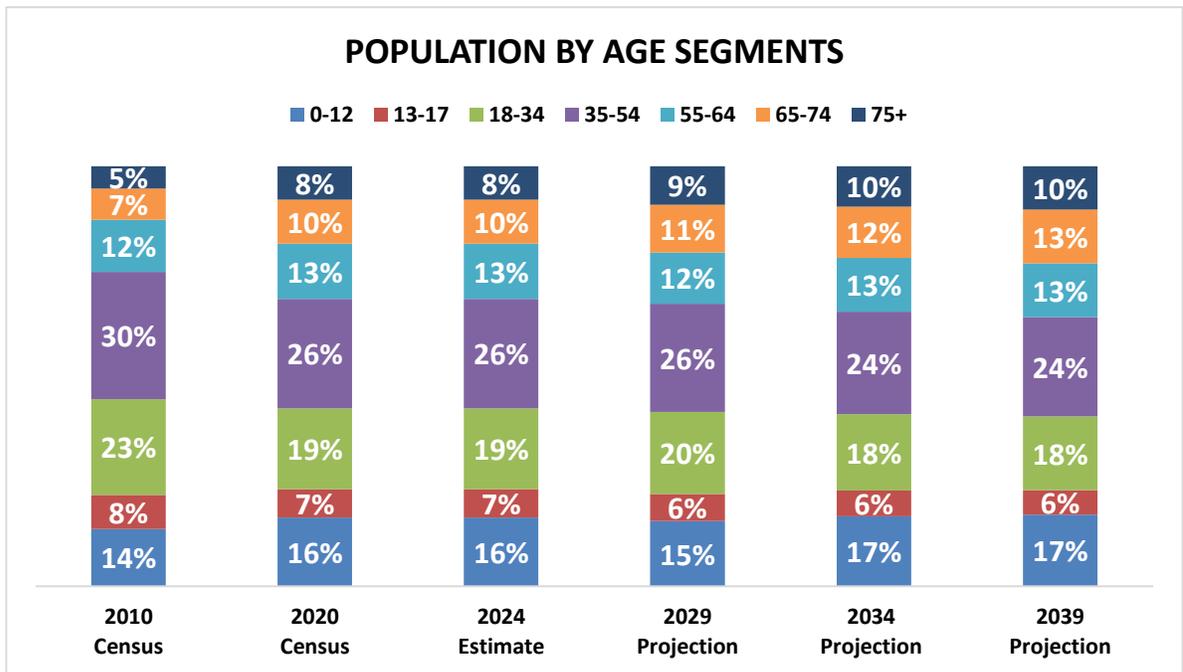


Figure 5: Hancock County’s Population by Age Segments



RACE

Analyzing race, Hancock County’s current population makeup is **majority White**, with the 2024 estimate showing 88% of the population being White Alone, along with ‘**Two or More Races**’ (5%) and ‘**Black or African American Alone**’ (4%) representing the second and third largest categories. Predictions for 2029 and beyond expect the population to slowly diversify, with a 4% decrease in the White Alone population, and minor increases in most other race categories. Within this change, the ‘**Two or More Races**’ category will increase the most from 5% to 8% by 2039. (Figure 6)

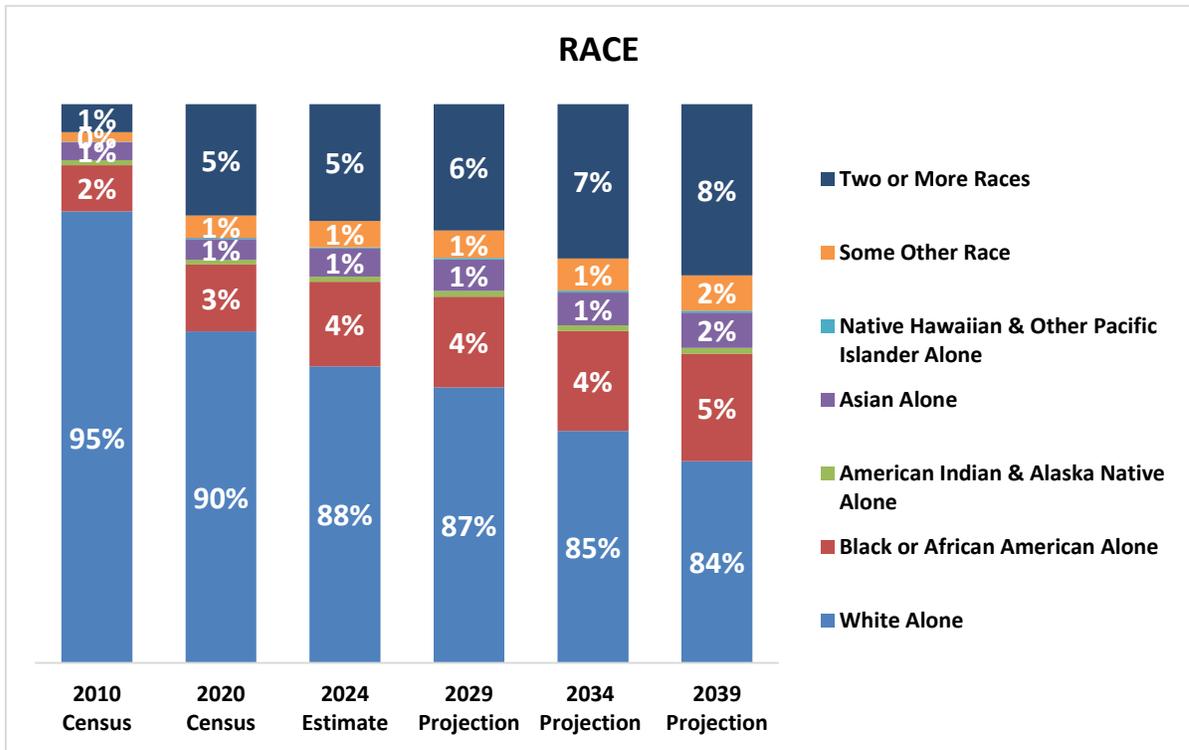


Figure 6: Hancock County’s Population by Race

ETHNICITY

Hancock County’s population was also assessed based on Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, which by the Census Bureau definition is viewed independently from race. **It is important to note that individuals who are Hispanic/Latino in ethnicity can also identify with any racial categories identified above.**

Based on the 2024 estimate, people of Hispanic/Latino origin represent **3% of Hancock County’s population**, which is well below the national average (19% Hispanic/Latino) and the state of Indiana average (8.8% Hispanic/Latino). However, the County’s Hispanic/Latino population has experienced a minor increase over time and is expected to continue growing slightly to **4% of Hancock County’s total population by 2039. (Figure 7)**

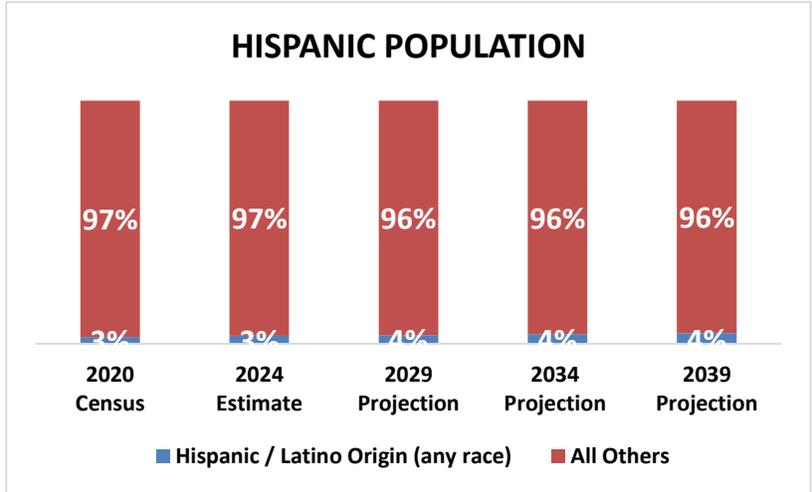


Figure 7: Hancock County’s Hispanic Population

INCOME CHARACTERISTICS

When analyzing income, the per capita income is that earned by an individual while the median household income is based on the total income of everyone over the age of sixteen living within the same household. Hancock County’s **per capita income (\$45,733)** is slightly above the Indiana average (\$37,705) while Hancock County’s **median household income (\$93,002)** is significantly above the Indiana median (\$70,604). Hancock County projects to increase in both median household and per capita income, where the averages are expected to increase to **\$66,949 and \$129,557 respectively by 2039**. These income projections should be taken into consideration when determining pricing for recreation programs, calculating future cost recovery goals, or planning for alternative funding for facilities and amenities including parks and trails. (Figures 8 and 9).

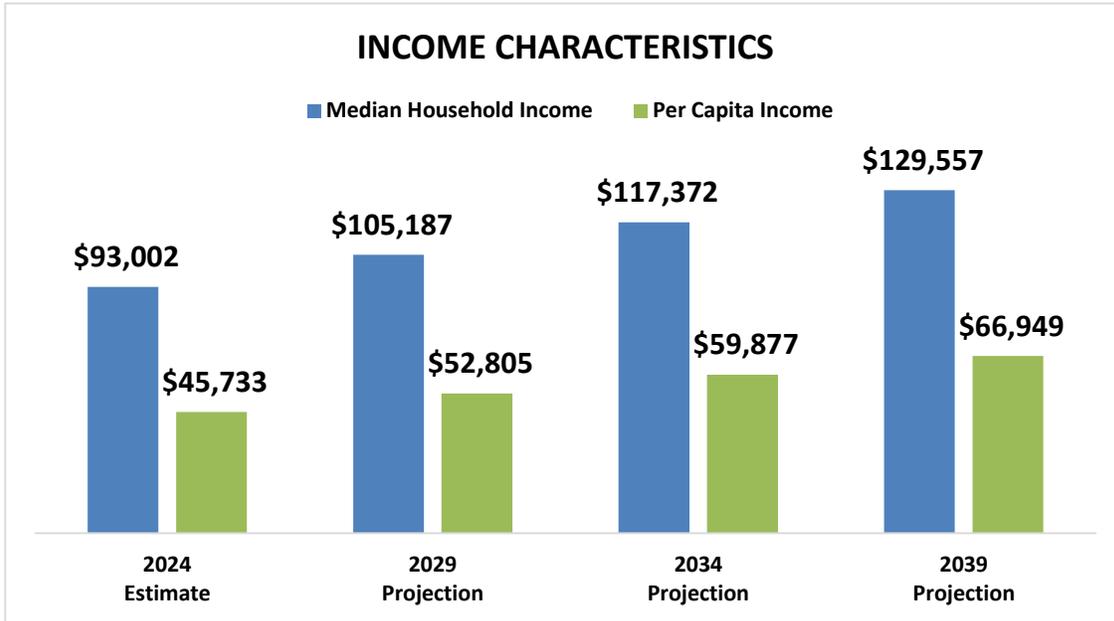


Figure 8: Income Characteristics of Hancock County

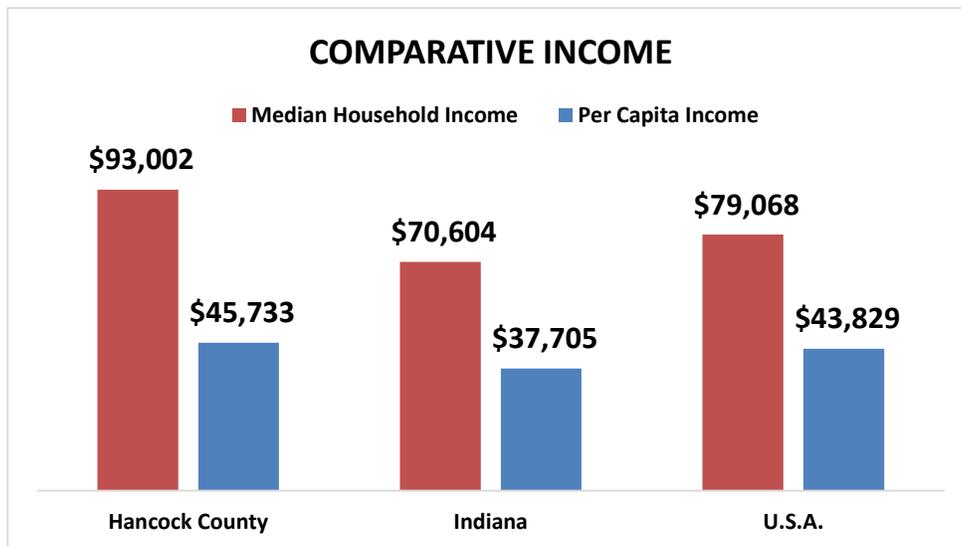


Figure 9: Comparative Income Characteristics of Hancock County

DEMOGRAPHIC IMPLICATIONS

While it is important not to generalize recreation needs and priorities based solely on demographics, the analysis suggests some potential implications for Hancock County, Indiana:

- Hancock County's aging trends indicate a need to identify and understand the future quality of life needs of its residents to address future demand for recreation services appropriately. The 55 and over age groups will be more than a third of the county population by 2039. These age groups will require special attention when planning future recreational programming and facilities for the county parks system. Adding more recreational and wellness activities for healthy aging for the older, active adult population, such as exercise classes or recreational sports like pickleball, may prove to be beneficial in addressing demands. These age groups may require more recreation services geared toward social interaction, as well.
- Hancock County's above average household income characteristics suggest **potential disposable income at the individual and family levels**. The County should be mindful of this when determining price points for future services.
- In comparison to the United States average (0.70%), Hancock County had a **high annual growth rate from 2020 to 2024** (1.85%). However, the annual growth rate is projected to dip to 1.15% from 2024 to 2039, slowing a little, but still showing a continuation of the steady growth the community has seen in the past decade. This population growth should be considered and accounted for when conducting short-term and long-term planning of new amenities and offerings for the community, as well as the maintenance and upkeep of current offerings.
- Finally, Hancock County should ensure its **diversifying population is reflected in its offerings, marketing/communications, and public outreach**. With increasing diversity in both race and age, as well as uncommonly high population growth, Hancock County should remain prepared to adapt its offerings over time to remain culturally relevant for its diversifying user base.

RECREATION TRENDS ANALYSIS

The Recreation Trends Analysis provides an understanding of national, regional, and local recreational trends as well recreational interest by age segments. Trends data used for this analysis was obtained from the Sports & Fitness Industry Association’s (SFIA), National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), and Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. (ESRI). All trend data is based on current and/or historical participation rates, statistically valid survey results, or NRPA Park Metrics.

NATIONAL TRENDS IN RECREATION

7.4.6 METHODOLOGY
 The Sports & Fitness Industry Association’s (SFIA) *Sports, Fitness & Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report 2024* was utilized in evaluating the following trends:

- National Recreation Participatory Trends
- Core vs. Casual Participation Trends

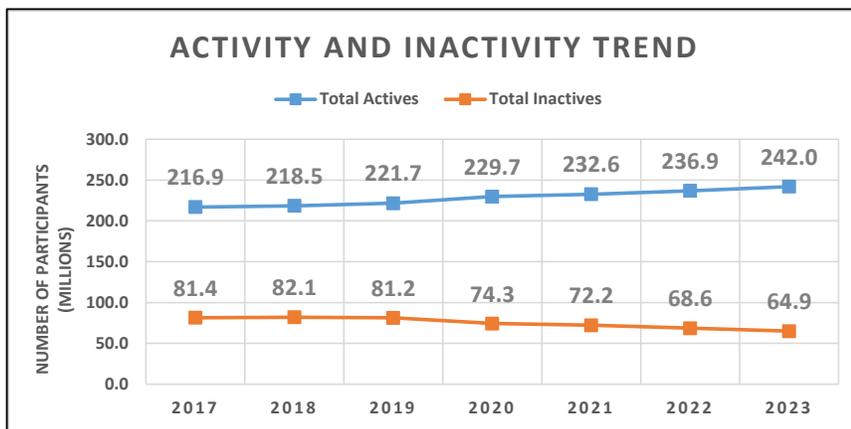


The study is based on findings from surveys conducted in 2023 by the Sports Marketing Surveys USA (SMS), resulting in a total of 18,000 online interviews. Surveys were administered to all genders, ages, income levels, regions, and ethnicities to allow for statistical accuracy of the national population. A sample size of 18,000 completed interviews is considered by SFIA to result in a high degree of statistical accuracy. A sport with a participation rate of five percent has a confidence interval of plus or minus 0.32 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level. Using a weighting technique, survey results are applied to the total U.S. population figure of 306,931,382 people (ages six and older).

The purpose of the report is to establish levels of activity and identify key participatory trends in recreation across the U.S. This study looked at 124 different sports/activities and subdivided them into various categories including: sports, fitness, outdoor activities, aquatics, etc.

1.2.2 OVERALL PARTICIPATION

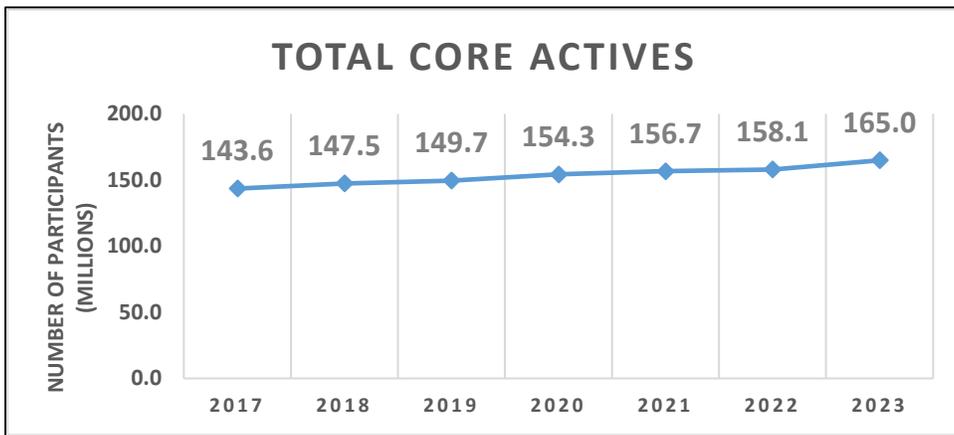
Approximately 242 million people ages six and over reported being active in 2023, which is a 2.2% increase from 2022 and the greatest number of active Americans in the last 6 years. This is an indicator that Americans are continuing to make physical activity more of a priority in their lives. The chart below depicts participation levels for active and inactive (those who engage in no physical activity) Americans over the past 6 years.



CORE VS. CASUAL PARTICIPATION

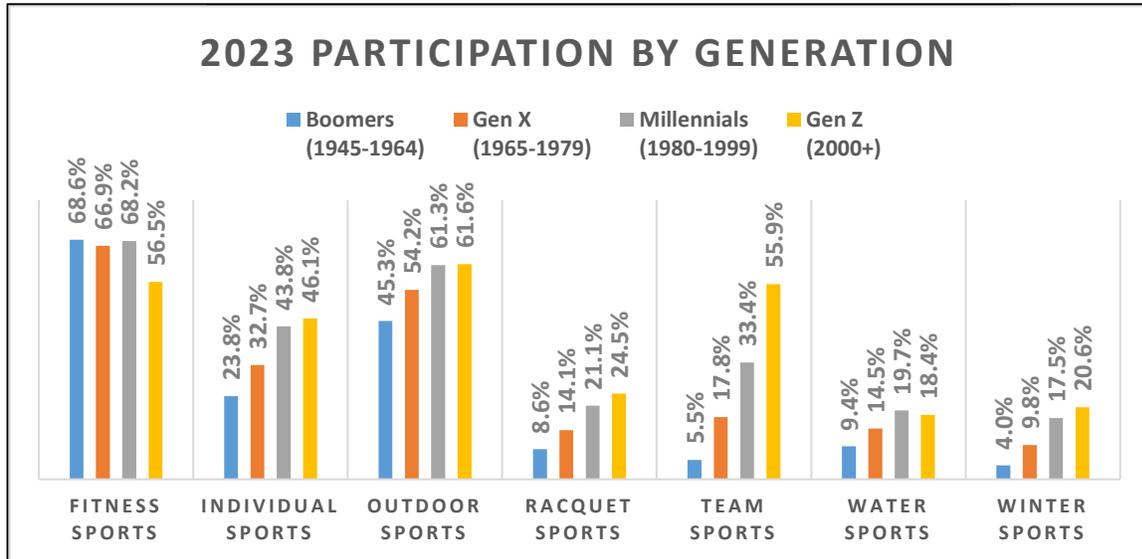
In addition to overall participation rates, SFIA further categorizes active participants as either core or casual participants based on frequency of participation. Core participants have higher participatory frequency than casual participants. The thresholds that define casual versus core participation may vary based on the nature of each individual activity. For instance, core participants engage in most fitness activities more than fifty times per year, while for sports, the threshold for core participation is typically 13 times per year.

In each activity, core participants are more committed and tend to be less likely to switch to other activities or become inactive (engage in no physical activity) than casual participants. This may also explain why activities with more core participants tend to experience less pattern shifts in participation rates than those with larger groups of casual participants. Increasing for the sixth straight year, 165 million people were considered CORE participants in 2023.



PARTICIPATION BY GENERATION

The following chart shows 2023 participation rates by generation. Fitness sports continue to be the go-to means of exercise for Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials. Over half of the Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z generation participated in one type of outdoor activity. Team sports were heavily dominated by generation Gen Z and nearly a third of Gen X also participated in individual sports such as golf, trail running, triathlons, and bowling.



HIGHLIGHTS

Pickleball continues to be the fastest growing sport in America by reaching 13.6 million participants in 2023 which is a 223.5% growth since 2020. The growth of pickleball participants (13.6 million) has nearly reached the size of outdoor soccer participants (14.1 million). Following the popularity of pickleball, every racquet sport except table tennis has also increased in total participation in 2023.

Group, full-body workout activities such as tai chi, barre and Pilates saw the biggest increase in participation this past year. Americans continued to practice yoga, workout with kettlebells, started indoor climbing, and while others took to the hiking trail. The waterways traffic had increases in participation in all activities in the past year.

Over two-thirds (67.8%) of American’s participated in fitness sports followed by over half (57.3%) of Americans participated in outdoor sports. Total participation for fitness, team, outdoor, racquet, water and winter sports are higher than their pre-pandemic participation rates. Individual sports are the only category still not at their pre-pandemic participation levels (45% in 2019 currently at 42.1% in 2023).

NATIONAL TRENDS IN GENERAL SPORTS

PARTICIPATION LEVELS

The top sports most heavily participated in the United States were basketball (29.7 million), golf (26.6 million), and tennis (23.8 million) which have participation figures well more than the other activities within the general sports category. Playing golf at an entertainment venue (18.5 million) and baseball (16.7 million) round out the top five.

The popularity of basketball, golf, and tennis can be attributed to the ability to compete with a small number of participants, this coupled with an ability to be played outdoors and/or properly distanced helps explain their popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Basketball’s overall success can also be attributed to the limited amount of equipment needed to participate and the limited space requirements necessary, which make basketball the only traditional sport that can be played at most American dwellings as a drive-way pickup game. Golf continues to benefit from its wide age segment appeal and

is considered a life-long sport. In addition, target type game venues or golf entertainment venues have increased drastically (99%) as a 5-year trend, using golf entertainment (e.g., Top Golf) as a new alternative to breathe life back into the game of golf.



BASKETBALL
29.7 MILLION



GOLF
26.6 MILLION



TENNIS
23.8 MILLION



GOLF VENUE
18.5 MILLION



BASEBALL
16.7 MILLION

FIVE-YEAR TREND

Since 2018, pickleball (311.5%), golf - entertainment venues (99.0%), and tennis (33.6%) have shown the largest increase in participation. Similarly, outdoor soccer (23.4%) and basketball (22.7%) have also experienced significant growth. Based on the five-year trend from 2018-2023, the sports that are most rapidly declining in participation include roller hockey (-28.7%), rugby (-28.7%), and ultimate frisbee (-23.0%).

ONE-YEAR TREND

The most recent year shares some similarities with the five-year trends; with pickleball (51.8%) and golf - entertainment venues (18.8%) experiencing some of the greatest increases in participation this past year. Other top one-year increases include court volleyball (13.3%), ice hockey (9.6%), and cheerleading (8.3%).

Sports that have seen moderate 1-year increases, but 5-year decreases are cheerleading (8.3%), track and field (5.8%), lacrosse (5.5%) and slow-pitch softball (5.3%). This could be a result of coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic and team program participation on the rise. Like their 5-year trend, roller hockey (-9.6%), sand/beach volleyball (-5.1%), and rugby (-4.6%) have seen decreases in participation over the last year.

CORE VS. CASUAL TRENDS IN GENERAL SPORTS

General sport activities, basketball, court volleyball, and slow pitch softball have a larger core participant base (participate 13+ times per year) than casual participant base (participate 1-12 times per year). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most activities showed a decrease in their percentage of core participants, but these percentages for core users are slowly reaching their pre-pandemic levels. *Please see Appendix A2 for the full Core vs. Casual Participation breakdown.*

National Participatory Trends - General Sports					
Activity	Participation Levels			% Change	
	2018	2022	2023	5-Year Trend	1-Year Trend
Basketball	24,225	28,149	29,725	22.7%	5.6%
Golf (9 or 18-Hole Course)	24,240	25,566	26,565	9.6%	3.9%
Tennis	17,841	23,595	23,835	33.6%	1.0%
Golf (Entertainment Venue)	9,279	15,540	18,464	99.0%	18.8%
Baseball	15,877	15,478	16,655	4.9%	7.6%
Soccer (Outdoor)	11,405	13,018	14,074	23.4%	8.1%
Pickleball	3,301	8,949	13,582	311.5%	51.8%
Football (Flag)	6,572	7,104	7,266	10.6%	2.3%
Volleyball (Court)	6,317	6,092	6,905	9.3%	13.3%
Badminton	6,337	6,490	6,513	2.8%	0.4%
Softball (Slow Pitch)	7,386	6,036	6,356	-13.9%	5.3%
Soccer (Indoor)	5,233	5,495	5,909	12.9%	7.5%
Football (Tackle)	5,157	5,436	5,618	8.9%	3.3%
Football (Touch)	5,517	4,843	4,949	-10.3%	2.2%
Gymnastics	4,770	4,569	4,758	-0.3%	4.1%
Volleyball (Sand/Beach)	4,770	4,128	3,917	-17.9%	-5.1%
Track and Field	4,143	3,690	3,905	-5.7%	5.8%
Cheerleading	3,841	3,507	3,797	-1.1%	8.3%
Racquetball	3,480	3,521	3,550	2.0%	0.8%
Ice Hockey	2,447	2,278	2,496	2.0%	9.6%
Softball (Fast Pitch)	2,303	2,146	2,323	0.9%	8.2%
Wrestling	1,908	2,036	2,121	11.2%	4.2%
Ultimate Frisbee	2,710	2,142	2,086	-23.0%	-2.6%
Lacrosse	2,098	1,875	1,979	-5.7%	5.5%
Squash	1,285	1,228	1,315	2.3%	7.1%
Roller Hockey	1,734	1,368	1,237	-28.7%	-9.6%
Rugby	1,560	1,166	1,112	-28.7%	-4.6%

NOTE: Participation figures are in 000's for the US population ages 6 and over

Participation Growth/Decline:	Large Increase (greater than 25%)	Moderate Increase (0% to 25%)	Moderate Decrease (0% to -25%)	Large Decrease (less than -25%)	
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NATIONAL TRENDS IN GENERAL FITNESS

PARTICIPATION LEVELS

Overall, national participatory trends in fitness have experienced growth in recent years. Many of these activities have become popular due to an increased interest among Americans to improve their health and enhance quality of life by engaging in an active lifestyle. The most popular general fitness activities in 2023 were those that could be done in multiple environments such as at home, gym or in a virtual class setting. The activities with the most participation was walking for fitness (114.0 million), treadmill (54.8 million), free weights (53.9 million), running/jogging (48.3 million), and yoga (34.2 million).



FIVE-YEAR TREND

Over the last five years (2018-2023), the activities growing at the highest rate were trail running (48.7%), Pilates training (30.6%), barre (21.6%) and yoga (19.1%). Over the same period, the activities that have undergone the biggest decline in participation include group stationary cycling (-34%), cross-training style workout (-29.5%) and traditional/road triathlons (-19.8%).

ONE-YEAR TREND

In the last year, fitness activities with the largest gains in participation were group-related, slow, intentional movements activities, tai chi (16.3%), Pilates training (15.0%), and barre (12.9%). This 1-year trend is another indicator that participants feel safe returning to group-related activities. Trail running (12.3%) also saw a moderate increase indicating trail connectivity continues to be important for communities to provide. In the same span, fitness activities that had the largest decline in participation were boxing/MMA for fitness (-14.4%), traditional/road triathlons (-2.4%) and weight/resistant machines (-1.9%).

CORE VS. CASUAL TRENDS IN GENERAL FITNESS

Participants of walking for fitness are mostly core users (participating 50+ times) and have seen a 1.3% growth in the last five years. *Please see Appendix A2 for the full core vs. casual participation breakdown.*

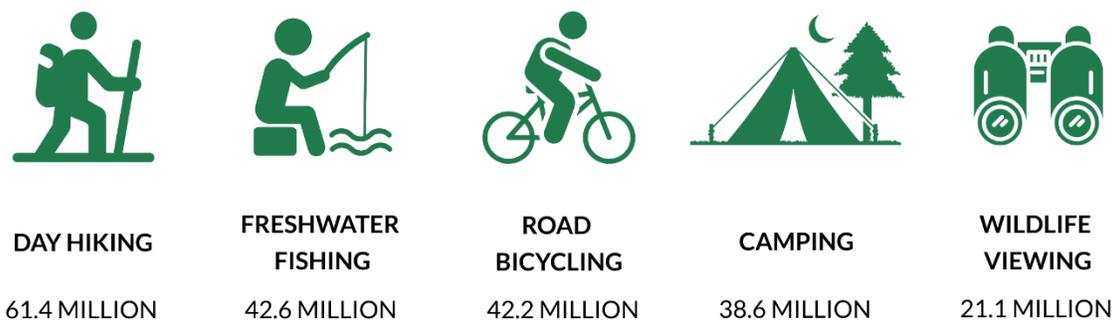
PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

National Participatory Trends - General Fitness					
Activity	Participation Levels			% Change	
	2018	2022	2023	5-Year Trend	1-Year Trend
Walking for Fitness	111,001	114,759	114,039	2.7%	-0.6%
Treadmill	53,737	53,589	54,829	2.0%	2.3%
Free Weights (Dumbbells/Hand Weights)	51,291	53,140	53,858	5.0%	1.4%
Running/Jogging	49,459	47,816	48,305	-2.3%	1.0%
Yoga	28,745	33,636	34,249	19.1%	1.8%
Stationary Cycling (Recumbent/Upright)	36,668	32,102	32,628	-11.0%	1.6%
Weight/Resistant Machines	36,372	30,010	29,426	-19.1%	-1.9%
Free Weights (Barbells)	27,834	28,678	29,333	5.4%	2.3%
Elliptical Motion/Cross-Trainer	33,238	27,051	27,062	-18.6%	0.0%
Dance, Step, & Choreographed Exercise	22,391	25,163	26,241	17.2%	4.3%
Bodyweight Exercise	24,183	22,034	22,578	-6.6%	2.5%
High Impact/Intensity Training	21,611	21,821	21,801	0.9%	-0.1%
Trail Running	10,010	13,253	14,885	48.7%	12.3%
Rowing Machine	12,096	11,893	12,775	5.6%	7.4%
Stair Climbing Machine	15,025	11,677	12,605	-16.1%	7.9%
Pilates Training	9,084	10,311	11,862	30.6%	15.0%
Cross-Training Style Workout	13,338	9,248	9,404	-29.5%	1.7%
Boxing/MMA for Fitness	7,650	9,787	8,378	9.5%	-14.4%
Martial Arts	5,821	6,355	6,610	13.6%	4.0%
Stationary Cycling (Group)	9,434	6,268	6,227	-34.0%	-0.7%
Cardio Kickboxing	6,838	5,531	5,524	-19.2%	-0.1%
Boot Camp Style Cross-Training	6,695	5,192	5,434	-18.8%	4.7%
Barre	3,532	3,803	4,294	21.6%	12.9%
Tai Chi	3,761	3,394	3,948	5.0%	16.3%
Triathlon (Traditional/Road)	2,168	1,780	1,738	-19.8%	-2.4%
Triathlon (Non-Traditional/Off Road)	1,589	1,350	1,363	-14.2%	1.0%
NOTE: Participation figures are in 000's for the US population ages 6 and over					
Participation Growth/Decline:	Large Increase (greater than 25%)	Moderate Increase (0% to 25%)	Moderate Decrease (0% to -25%)	Large Decrease (less than -25%)	

NATIONAL TRENDS IN OUTDOOR/ADVENTURE RECREATION

PARTICIPATION LEVELS

Results from the SFIA report demonstrate rapid growth in participation regarding outdoor/adventure recreation activities. Much like general fitness activities, these activities encourage an active lifestyle, can be performed individually, and are not as limited by time constraints. In 2023, the most popular activities, in terms of total participants include day hiking (61.4 million), freshwater fishing (42.6 million), road bicycling (42.2 million), camping (38.6 million), and wildlife viewing (21.1 million).



FIVE-YEAR TREND

From 2018-2023, camping (40.7%), birdwatching (33.0%), skateboarding (37.3%), BMX bicycling (29.7%), and day hiking (28.4%) has undergone large increases in participation. The five-year trend also shows that only two activities declined in participation, adventure racing (-18.4) and backpacking overnight (-5.2%).

ONE-YEAR TREND

The one-year trend shows most activities have grown in participation from the previous year. The most rapid growth being indoor climbing (10.0%), BMX bicycling (6.7%), fly fishing (5.8%), and adventure racing (5.5%). Over the last year, the only activities that underwent decreases in participation were road bicycling (-3.0), overnight backpacking (-2.2%), RV camping (-2.0%), and skateboarding (-1.1%).

CORE VS. CASUAL TRENDS IN OUTDOOR / ADVENTURE RECREATION

Although most outdoor activities have experienced participation growth in the last five years, it should be noted that all outdoor activities participation, besides adventure racing, consist primarily of casual users. *Please see Appendix A for the full core vs. casual participation breakdown.*

PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

National Participatory Trends - Outdoor / Adventure Recreation					
Activity	Participation Levels			% Change	
	2018	2022	2023	5-Year Trend	1-Year Trend
Hiking (Day)	47,860	59,578	61,444	28.4%	3.1%
Fishing (Freshwater)	38,998	41,821	42,605	9.2%	1.9%
Bicycling (Road)	39,041	43,554	42,243	8.2%	-3.0%
Camping	27,416	37,431	38,572	40.7%	3.0%
Wildlife Viewing (>1/4 mile of Vehicle/Home)	20,556	20,615	21,118	2.7%	2.4%
Camping (Recreational Vehicle)	15,980	16,840	16,497	3.2%	-2.0%
Birdwatching (>1/4 mile of Vehicle/Home)	12,344	15,818	16,423	33.0%	3.8%
Fishing (Saltwater)	12,830	14,344	15,039	17.2%	4.8%
Backpacking Overnight	10,540	10,217	9,994	-5.2%	-2.2%
Bicycling (Mountain)	8,690	8,916	9,289	6.9%	4.2%
Skateboarding	6,500	9,019	8,923	37.3%	-1.1%
Fishing (Fly)	6,939	7,631	8,077	16.4%	5.8%
Archery	7,654	7,428	7,662	0.1%	3.2%
Climbing (Indoor)	5,112	5,778	6,356	24.3%	10.0%
Roller Skating, In-Line	5,040	5,173	5,201	3.2%	0.5%
Bicycling (BMX)	3,439	4,181	4,462	29.7%	6.7%
Climbing (Traditional/Ice/Mountaineering)	2,541	2,452	2,569	1.1%	4.8%
Climbing (Sport/Boulder)	2,184	2,452	2,544	16.5%	3.8%
Adventure Racing	2,215	1,714	1,808	-18.4%	5.5%
NOTE: Participation figures are in 000's for the US population ages 6 and over					
Participation Growth/Decline:	Large Increase (greater than 25%)	Moderate Increase (0% to 25%)	Moderate Decrease (0% to -25%)	Large Decrease (less than -25%)	



NATIONAL TRENDS IN AQUATICS

7.4.7 Participation LEVELS

Swimming is deemed a lifetime activity, which is why it continues to have such strong participation. In 2023, fitness swimming remained the overall leader in participation (28.2 million) amongst aquatic activities.



**FITNESS
SWIMMING**

28.2 MILLION



**AQUATIC
EXERCISE**

11.3 MILLION



**SWIMMING
ON A TEAM**

3.3 MILLION

FIVE-YEAR TREND

Assessing the five-year trend, all three aquatic activities saw moderate increases in participation.

ONE-YEAR TREND

In 2023, all aquatic activities saw moderate increases in participation which can be asserted to facilities and programs returning to pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels. Swimming on a team (14.6%) saw the highest percentage increase in participation.

CORE VS. CASUAL TRENDS IN AQUATICS

All activities in aquatic trends have undergone an increase in casual participation (1-49 times per year) over the last five years. *Please see Appendix A2 for full the core vs. casual participation breakdown.*

National Participatory Trends - Aquatics					
Activity	Participation Levels			% Change	
	2018	2022	2023	5-Year Trend	1-Year Trend
Swimming (Fitness)	27,575	26,272	28,173	2.2%	7.2%
Aquatic Exercise	10,518	10,676	11,307	7.5%	5.9%
Swimming on a Team	3,045	2,904	3,327	9.3%	14.6%
NOTE: Participation figures are in 000's for the US population ages 6 and over					
Participation Growth/Decline:	Large Increase (greater than 25%)	Moderate Increase (0% to 25%)	Moderate Decrease (0% to -25%)	Large Decrease (less than -25%)	

NATIONAL TRENDS IN WATER SPORTS / ACTIVITIES

PARTICIPATION LEVELS

The most popular water sports / activities based on total participants in 2023 were recreational kayaking (14.7 million), canoeing (10.0 million), and snorkeling (7.5 million). It should be noted that water activity participation tends to vary based on regional, seasonal, and environmental factors. A region with more water access and a warmer climate is more likely to have a higher participation rate in water activities than a region that has a long winter season or limited water access. Therefore, when assessing trends in water sports and activities, it is important to understand that fluctuations may be the result of environmental barriers which can influence water activity participation.



RECREATIONAL KAYAKING

14.7 MILLION



CANOEING

10.0 MILLION



SNORKELING

7.5 MILLION



JET SKIING

5.8 MILLION



STAND-UP PADDLING

4.1 MILLION

FIVE-YEAR TREND

Over the last five years, surfing (38.9%), recreational kayaking (33.7%), stand-up paddling (19.6%) and rafting (19.0%) were the fastest growing water activities. From 2018-2023, activities declining in participation were water boardsailing/windsurfing (-7.8%), water skiing (-6.8%), snorkeling (-4.2%) and sea/touring kayaking (-0.2%).

ONE-YEAR TREND

In 2023, zero activities saw a decrease in participation. Activities which experienced the largest increases in participation include scuba diving (15.2%), sailing (12.9%), and rafting (12.7%).

CORE VS. CASUAL TRENDS IN WATER SPORTS/ACTIVITIES

As mentioned previously, regional, seasonal, and environmental limiting factors may influence the participation rate of water sport and activities. These factors may also explain why all water-based activities have drastically more casual participants than core participants, since frequencies of activities may be constrained by uncontrollable factors. *Please see Appendix A2 for the full core vs. casual participation breakdown.*

National Participatory Trends - Water Sports / Activities					
Activity	Participation Levels			% Change	
	2018	2022	2023	5-Year Trend	1-Year Trend
Kayaking (Recreational)	11,017	13,561	14,726	33.7%	8.6%
Canoeing	9,129	9,521	9,999	9.5%	5.0%
Snorkeling	7,815	7,376	7,489	-4.2%	1.5%
Jet Skiing	5,324	5,445	5,759	8.2%	5.8%
Stand-Up Paddling	3,453	3,777	4,129	19.6%	9.3%
Sailing	3,754	3,632	4,100	9.2%	12.9%
Rafting	3,404	3,595	4,050	19.0%	12.7%
Surfing	2,874	3,692	3,993	38.9%	8.2%
Water Skiing	3,363	3,040	3,133	-6.8%	3.1%
Scuba Diving	2,849	2,658	3,063	7.5%	15.2%
Kayaking (White Water)	2,562	2,726	2,995	16.9%	9.9%
Wakeboarding	2,796	2,754	2,844	1.7%	3.3%
Kayaking (Sea/Touring)	2,805	2,642	2,800	-0.2%	6.0%
Boardsailing/Windsurfing	1,556	1,391	1,434	-7.8%	3.1%
NOTE: Participation figures are in 000's for the US population ages 6 and over					
Participation Growth/Decline:	Large Increase (greater than 25%)	Moderate Increase (0% to 25%)	Moderate Decrease (0% to -25%)	Large Decrease (less than -25%)	

LOCAL SPORT AND LEISURE MARKET POTENTIAL

LOCAL SPORT AND LEISURE MARKET POTENTIAL

The following charts show sport and leisure market potential data for Hancock County residents, as provided by ESRI. Market Potential Index (MPI) measures the probable demand for a product or service within the defined service areas. The MPI shows the likelihood that an adult resident will participate in certain activities when compared to the U.S. national average. The national average is 100; therefore, numbers below 100 would represent lower-than-average participation rates, and numbers above 100 would represent higher-than-average participation rates. The service area is compared to the national average in four (4) categories – general sports, fitness, outdoor activity, and commercial recreation.

It should be noted that MPI metrics are only one data point used to help determine community trends; thus, programmatic decisions should not be based solely on MPI metrics.

Overall, when analyzing Hancock County’s MPIs, the data demonstrates high potential in several specific activities. For example, Golf and Pickleball both scored above the national average, while also outperforming most of their other General Sports counterparts according to the analysis. Something to note about Hancock County’s MPI scores is that there are few activities below the national average, with 18 of the measured 47 activities scoring less than 100. This becomes significant when the County considers planning new programs or building new facilities, giving them a strong tool to estimate resident attendance and participation.

The following charts compare MPI scores for 47 sport and leisure activities that are prevalent for residents within Hancock County. The activities are categorized by activity type and listed in descending order, from highest to lowest MPI score. High index numbers (100+) are significant because they demonstrate that there is a greater likelihood that residents within the service area will actively participate in those offerings provided by the Department.

GENERAL SPORTS MARKET POTENTIAL

The following chart shows that only two of Hancock County’s recorded General Sports are at or above the national average regarding MPI: Golf (118) and Pickleball (108). Football, Softball, Tennis, Basketball, and Baseball all scored below the national average but still showed promise, scoring in the high 90s. Hancock County scored above the state average in three activities: Golf, Pickleball, and Tennis (Figure 10).

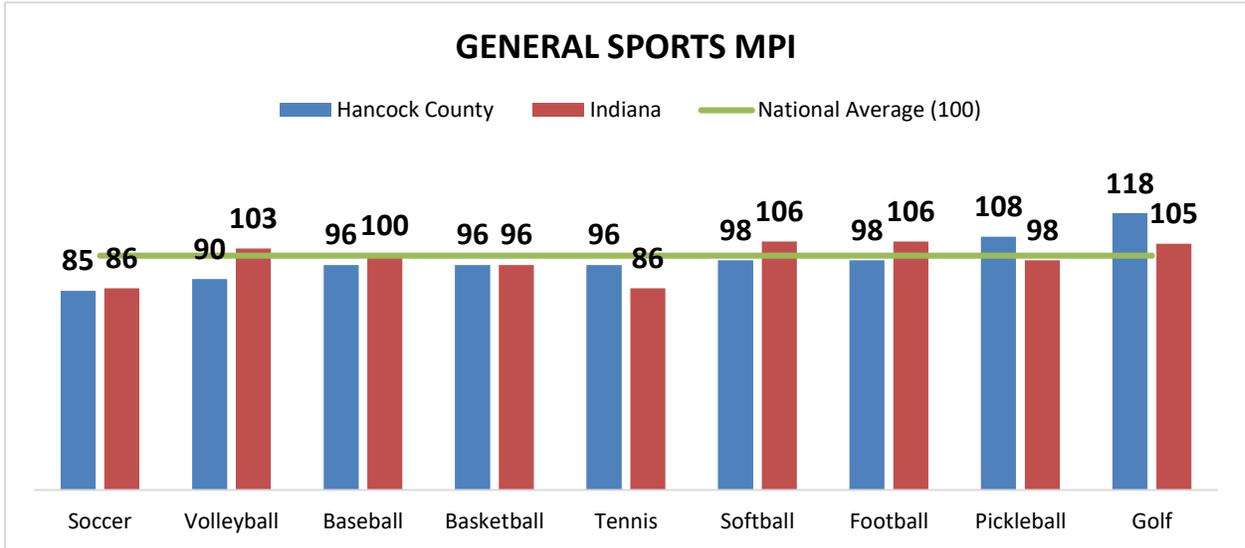


Figure 10: General Sports MPI for Hancock County

FITNESS MARKET POTENTIAL

Assessing MPI scores for the Fitness Activity category reveals that three of Hancock County’s fitness activities are **above the national average**. These activities are Swimming (113), Walking for Exercise (106), and Weight Lifting (103). Alternatively, the lowest-scored activities were Zumba (76), Pilates (87), and Aerobics (90). While five of the eight activities scored below the national average, seven of the eight scored above the state average (**Figure 11**). The 2023 statistically valid community survey revealed that residents have a need for more fitness and wellness programs with programming for both adults and seniors included within the top four priorities for investment.

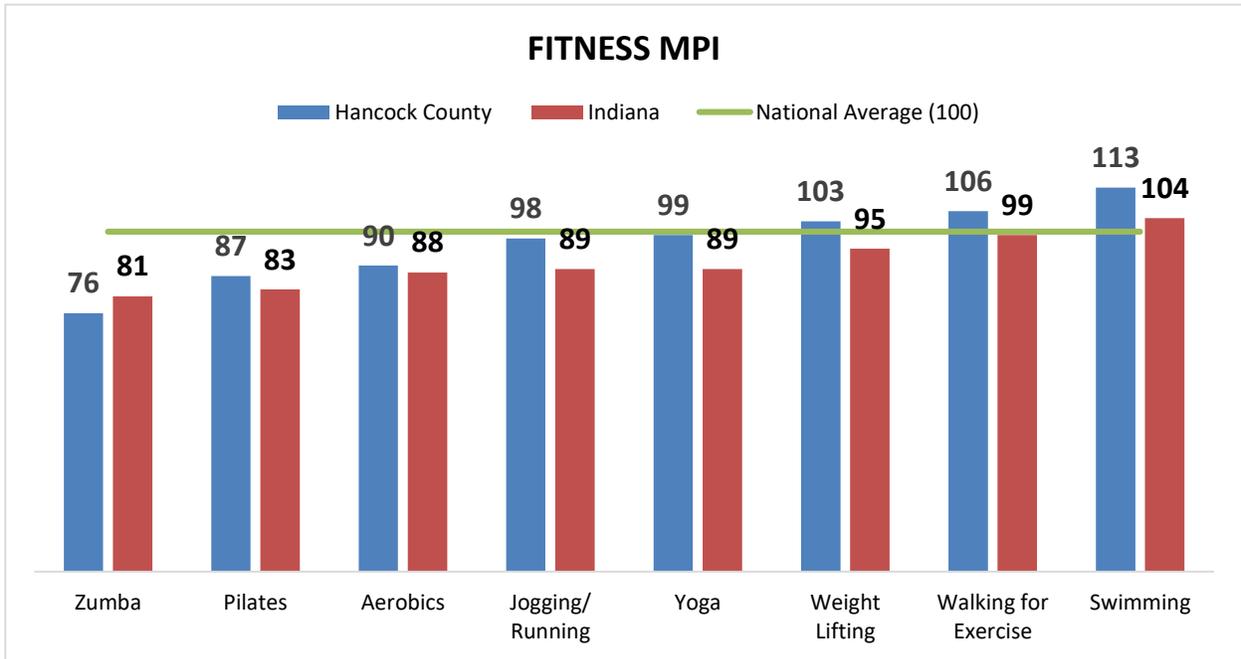


Figure 11: Fitness MPI for Hancock County

OUTDOOR ACTIVITY MARKET POTENTIAL

Hancock County’s Outdoor Activity MPI chart reflected relatively strong scores in most of the recorded activities; the County scored **higher than the US average** on 8 of the 10 activities, with the most popular activities being Fresh Water Fishing (127), Canoeing/Kayaking (121), and Archery (115). Alternatively, the lowest score in the County’s Outdoor Activity MPI belonged to Rock Climbing (95). While outscoring the US average in most activities, Hancock County trumps the Indiana state averages in six of the assessed activities, and ties in two of them (**Figure 12**). Hancock County’s high MPI scores for outdoor activities correlate with the 2023 statistically valid recreation needs assessment survey that stated residents were most supportive of acquiring land to preserve open space (65%), develop trails that provide connectivity throughout the County (59%), and developing a large regional park (50%). The survey also suggested that the residents prioritize environmental programming. Pairing the Outdoor Activity MPI with the 2023 community survey can give the County a good idea of what projects or parks it can pursue with the support of County residents.

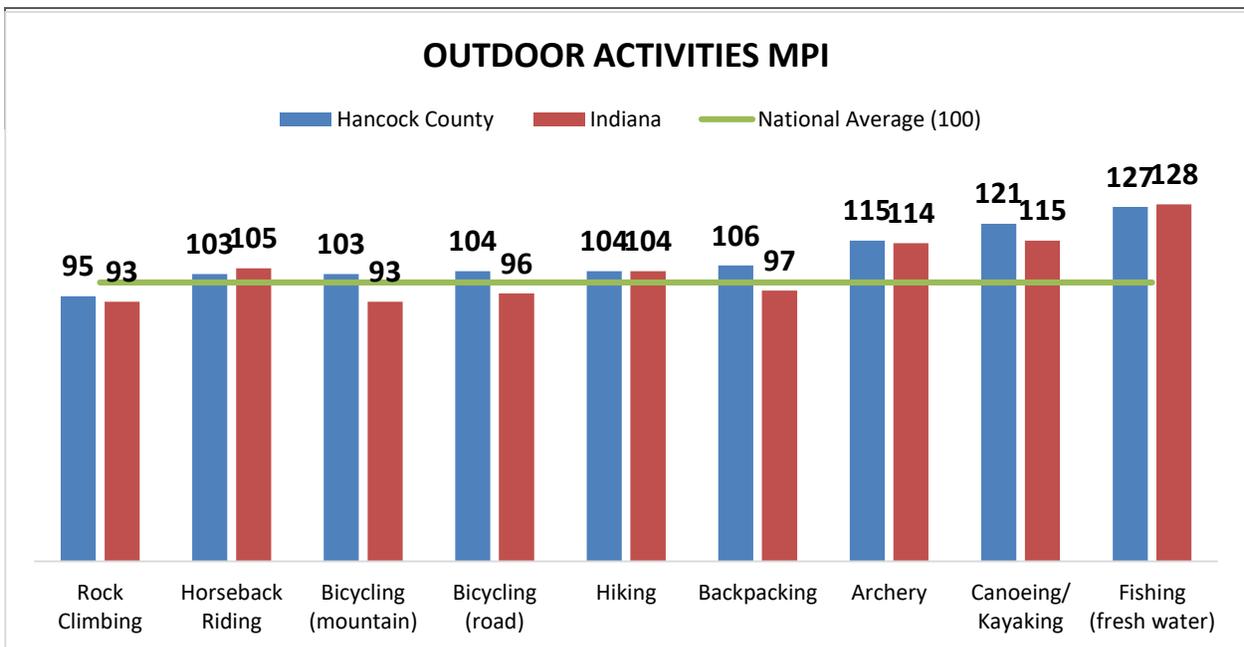


Figure 12: Outdoor Activity MPI for Hancock County

COMMERCIAL RECREATION MARKET POTENTIAL

The Commercial Recreation MPI category reveals that most of the County’s recorded Commercial Recreation activities are **above the national average**. The most popular activities in the service area were ‘Visited an Indoor Water Park’ (118) and ‘Spent \$250 on Sports/Rec Equipment’ (116). The lowest scoring activities were ‘Attended adult education course’ (93) and ‘Went to art gallery’ (94). The types of activities that are most popular in Hancock County are sports spending, whether that is participating or attending sporting events. This is most likely due to the above-average household income in the county. Other popular commercial activities are an assortment of leisure, outdoor, and attractions. Paired with the other MPI ratings (General Sports and Fitness, and Outdoor Activities), these activities could signal potential target areas for projects when developing the recreation programming. (Figure 13).

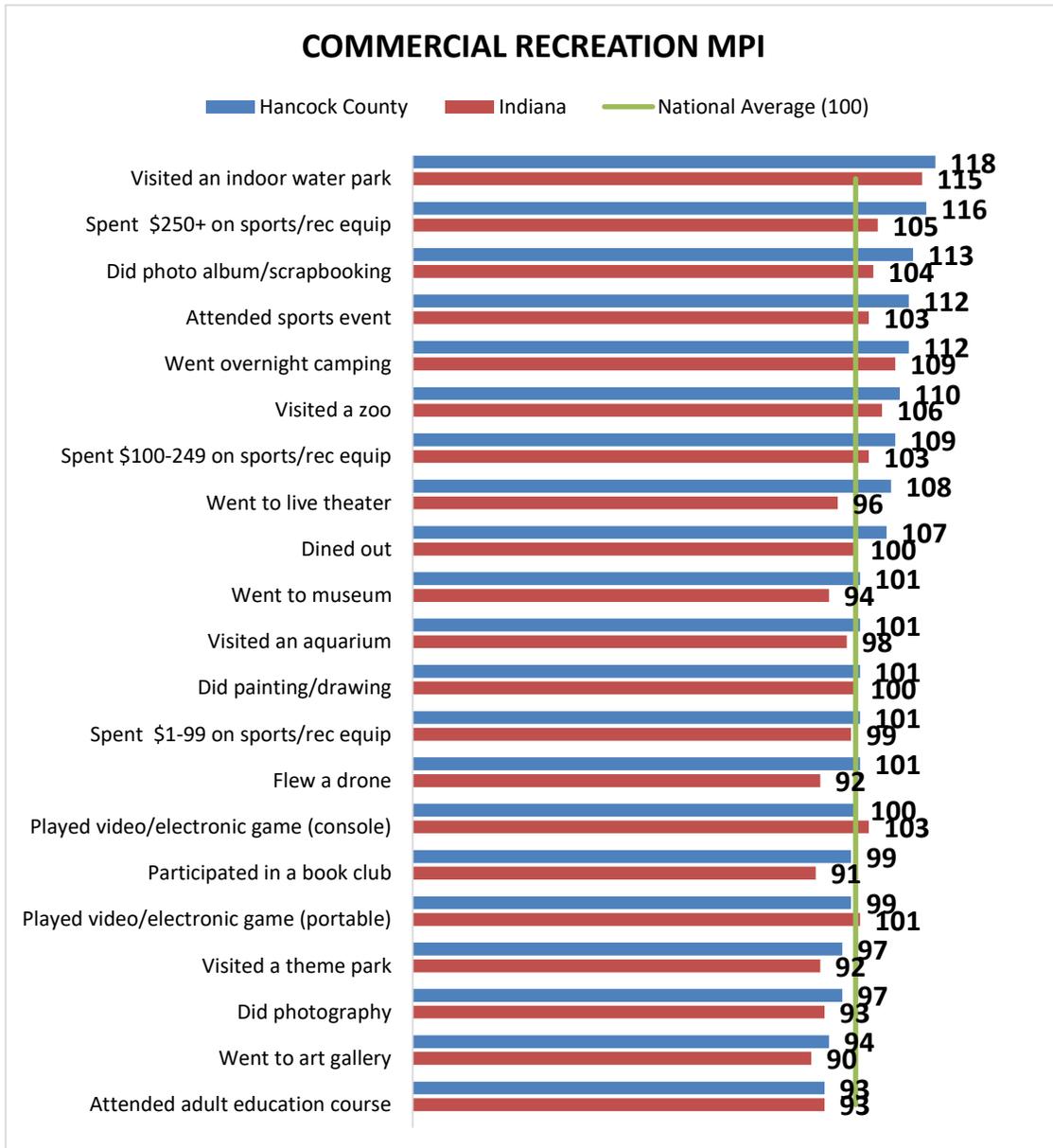


Figure 13: Commercial Recreation MPI for Hancock County

APPENDIX A₂ – CORE VS. CASUAL PARTICIPATION TRENDS
GENERAL SPORTS

National Core vs Casual Participatory Trends - General Sports								
Activity	Participation Levels						% Change	
	2018		2022		2023		5-Year Trend	1-Year Trend
	#	%	#	%	#	%		
Basketball	24,225	100%	28,149	100%	29,725	100%	22.7%	5.6%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	9,335	39%	13,000	46%	14,405	48%	54.3%	10.8%
<i>Core(13+ times)</i>	14,890	61%	15,149	54%	15,320	52%	2.9%	1.1%
Golf (9 or 18-Hole Course)	24,240	100%	25,566	100%	26,565	100%	9.6%	3.9%
Tennis	17,841	100%	23,595	100%	23,835	100%	33.6%	1.0%
Golf (Entertainment Venue)	9,279	100%	15,540	100%	18,464	100%	99.0%	18.8%
Baseball	15,877	100%	15,478	100%	16,655	100%	4.9%	7.6%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	6,563	41%	7,908	51%	8,934	54%	36.1%	13.0%
<i>Core (13+ times)</i>	9,314	59%	7,570	49%	7,722	46%	-17.1%	2.0%
Soccer (Outdoor)	11,405	100%	13,018	100%	14,074	100%	23.4%	8.1%
<i>Casual (1-25 times)</i>	6,430	56%	7,666	59%	8,706	59%	35.4%	13.6%
<i>Core (26+ times)</i>	4,975	44%	5,352	41%	5,368	41%	7.9%	0.3%
Pickleball	3,301	100%	8,949	100%	13,582	100%	311.5%	51.8%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	2,011	61%	6,647	74%	8,736	74%	334.4%	31.4%
<i>Core(13+ times)</i>	1,290	39%	2,302	26%	4,846	26%	275.7%	110.5%
Football (Flag)	6,572	100%	7,104	100%	7,266	100%	10.6%	2.3%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	3,573	54%	4,573	64%	4,624	64%	29.4%	1.1%
<i>Core(13+ times)</i>	2,999	46%	2,531	36%	2,642	36%	-11.9%	4.4%
<i>Core Age 6 to 17 (13+ times)</i>	1,578	24%	1,552	22%	1,661	22%	5.3%	7.0%
Volleyball (Court)	6,317	100%	6,092	100%	6,905	100%	9.3%	13.3%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	2,867	45%	2,798	46%	3,481	50%	21.4%	24.4%
<i>Core(13+ times)</i>	3,450	55%	3,293	54%	3,425	50%	-0.7%	4.0%
Badminton	6,337	100%	6,490	100%	6,513	100%	2.8%	0.4%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	4,555	72%	4,636	71%	4,743	73%	4.1%	2.3%
<i>Core(13+ times)</i>	1,782	28%	1,855	29%	1,771	27%	-0.6%	-4.5%
Softball (Slow Pitch)	7,386	100%	6,036	100%	6,356	100%	-13.9%	5.3%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	3,281	44%	2,666	44%	2,939	46%	-10.4%	10.2%
<i>Core(13+ times)</i>	4,105	56%	3,370	56%	3,417	54%	-16.8%	1.4%
Soccer (Indoor)	5,233	100%	5,495	100%	5,909	100%	12.9%	7.5%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	2,452	47%	3,144	57%	3,411	57%	39.1%	8.5%
<i>Core(13+ times)</i>	2,782	53%	2,351	43%	2,498	43%	-10.2%	6.3%
Football (Tackle)	5,157	100%	5,436	100%	5,618	100%	8.9%	3.3%
<i>Casual (1-25 times)</i>	2,258	44%	3,120	57%	3,278	58%	45.2%	5.1%
<i>Core(26+ times)</i>	2,898	56%	2,316	43%	2,340	42%	-19.3%	1.0%
<i>Core Age 6 to 17 (26+ times)</i>	2,353	46%	2,088	38%	2,130	38%	-9.5%	2.0%
Football (Touch)	5,517	100%	4,843	100%	4,949	100%	-10.3%	2.2%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	3,313	60%	3,201	66%	3,301	67%	-0.4%	3.1%
<i>Core(13+ times)</i>	2,204	40%	1,642	34%	1,648	33%	-25.2%	0.4%
Gymnastics	4,770	100%	4,569	100%	4,758	100%	-0.3%	4.1%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	3,047	64%	3,095	68%	3,315	70%	8.8%	7.1%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	1,723	36%	1,473	32%	1,443	30%	-16.3%	-2.0%
Volleyball (Sand/Beach)	4,770	100%	4,128	100%	3,917	100%	-17.9%	-5.1%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	3,261	68%	2,977	72%	2,769	71%	-15.1%	-7.0%
<i>Core(13+ times)</i>	1,509	32%	1,152	28%	1,148	29%	-23.9%	-0.3%
Track and Field	4,143	100%	3,690	100%	3,905	100%	-5.7%	5.8%
<i>Casual (1-25 times)</i>	2,071	50%	1,896	51%	2,093	54%	1.1%	10.4%
<i>Core(26+ times)</i>	2,072	50%	1,794	49%	1,811	46%	-12.6%	0.9%

NOTE: Participation figures are in 000's for the US population ages 6 and over

Participation Growth/Decline:	Large Increase (greater than 25%)	Moderate Increase (0% to 25%)	Moderate Decrease (0% to -25%)	Large Decrease (less than -25%)
Core vs Casual Distribution:	Evenly Divided between Core and Casual Participants (45-55%)	Moderate Amount of Participants (56-74%)	Majority Amount of Participants (75% or greater)	

PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

GENERAL SPORTS (CONTINUED)

National Core vs Casual Participatory Trends - General Sports								
Activity	Participation Levels						% Change	
	2018		2022		2023		5-Year Trend	1-Year Trend
	#	%	#	%	#	%		
Cheerleading	3,841	100%	3,507	100%	3,797	100%	-1.1%	8.3%
<i>Casual (1-25 times)</i>	2,039	53%	2,092	60%	2,360	62%	15.7%	12.8%
<i>Core(26+ times)</i>	1,802	47%	1,415	40%	1,438	38%	-20.2%	1.6%
Racquetball	3,480	100%	3,521	100%	3,550	100%	2.0%	0.8%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	2,407	69%	2,583	73%	2,694	76%	11.9%	4.3%
<i>Core(13+ times)</i>	1,073	31%	938	27%	855	24%	-20.3%	-8.8%
Ice Hockey	2,447	100%	2,278	100%	2,496	100%	2.0%	9.6%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	1,105	45%	1,209	53%	1,458	58%	31.9%	20.6%
<i>Core(13+ times)</i>	1,342	55%	1,068	47%	1,038	42%	-22.7%	-2.8%
Softball (Fast Pitch)	2,303	100%	2,146	100%	2,323	100%	0.9%	8.2%
<i>Casual (1-25 times)</i>	1,084	47%	1,002	47%	1,123	48%	3.6%	12.1%
<i>Core(26+ times)</i>	1,219	53%	1,144	53%	1,201	52%	-1.5%	5.0%
Wrestling	1,908	100%	2,036	100%	2,121	100%	11.2%	4.2%
<i>Casual (1-25 times)</i>	1,160	61%	1,452	71%	1,589	75%	37.0%	9.4%
<i>Core(26+ times)</i>	748	39%	585	29%	532	25%	-28.9%	-9.1%
Ultimate Frisbee	2,710	100%	2,142	100%	2,086	100%	-23.0%	-2.6%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	1,852	68%	1,438	67%	1,523	67%	-17.8%	5.9%
<i>Core(13+ times)</i>	858	32%	703	33%	563	33%	-34.4%	-19.9%
Lacrosse	2,098	100%	1,875	100%	1,979	100%	-5.7%	5.5%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	1,036	49%	999	53%	1,129	53%	9.0%	13.0%
<i>Core(13+ times)</i>	1,061	51%	876	47%	850	47%	-19.9%	-3.0%
Squash	1,285	100%	1,228	100%	1,315	100%	2.3%	7.1%
<i>Casual (1-7 times)</i>	796	62%	816	66%	927	70%	16.5%	13.6%
<i>Core(8+ times)</i>	489	38%	413	34%	387	29%	-20.9%	-6.3%
Roller Hockey	1,734	100%	1,368	100%	1,237	100%	-28.7%	-9.6%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	1,296	75%	1,065	78%	938	76%	-27.6%	-11.9%
<i>Core(13+ times)</i>	437	25%	303	22%	298	24%	-31.8%	-1.7%
Rugby	1,560	100%	1,166	100%	1,112	100%	-28.7%	-4.6%
<i>Casual (1-7 times)</i>	998	64%	758	65%	729	66%	-27.0%	-3.8%
<i>Core(8+ times)</i>	562	36%	408	35%	384	35%	-31.7%	-5.9%

NOTE: Participation figures are in 000's for the US population ages 6 and over

Participation Growth/Decline:	Large Increase (greater than 25%)	Moderate Increase (0% to 25%)	Moderate Decrease (0% to -25%)	Large Decrease (less than -25%)
Core vs Casual Distribution:	Evenly Divided between Core and Casual Participants (45-55%)	Moderate Amount of Participants (56-74%)	Majority Amount of Participants (75% or greater)	



PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

GENERAL FITNESS

National Participatory Trends - General Fitness								
Activity	Participation Levels						% Change	
	2018		2022		2023		5-Year Trend	1-Year Trend
	#	%	#	%	#	%		
Walking for Fitness	111,001	100%	114,759	100%	114,039	100%	2.7%	-0.6%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	36,139	33%	38,115	33%	38,169	33%	5.6%	0.1%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	74,862	67%	76,644	67%	75,871	67%	1.3%	-1.0%
Treadmill	53,737	100%	53,589	100%	54,829	100%	2.0%	2.3%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	25,826	48%	26,401	49%	27,991	51%	8.4%	6.0%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	27,911	52%	27,189	51%	26,837	49%	-3.8%	-1.3%
Free Weights (Dumbbells/Hand Weights)	51,291	100%	53,140	100%	53,858	100%	5.0%	1.4%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	18,702	36%	22,428	42%	23,238	43%	24.3%	3.6%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	32,589	64%	30,712	58%	30,619	57%	-6.0%	-0.3%
Running/Jogging	49,459	100%	47,816	100%	48,305	100%	-2.3%	1.0%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	24,399	49%	23,776	50%	24,175	50%	-0.9%	1.7%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	25,061	51%	24,040	50%	24,129	50%	-3.7%	0.4%
Yoga	28,745	100%	33,636	100%	34,249	100%	19.1%	1.8%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	17,553	61%	20,409	61%	20,654	60%	17.7%	1.2%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	11,193	39%	13,228	39%	13,595	40%	21.5%	2.8%
Stationary Cycling (Recumbent/Upright)	36,668	100%	32,102	100%	32,628	100%	-11.0%	1.6%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	19,282	53%	15,424	48%	15,901	49%	-17.5%	3.1%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	17,387	47%	16,678	52%	16,728	51%	-3.8%	0.3%
Weight/Resistant Machines	36,372	100%	30,010	100%	29,426	100%	-19.1%	-1.9%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	14,893	41%	12,387	41%	11,361	39%	-23.7%	-8.3%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	21,479	59%	17,623	59%	18,065	61%	-15.9%	2.5%
Free Weights (Barbells)	27,834	100%	28,678	100%	29,333	100%	5.4%	2.3%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	11,355	41%	13,576	47%	14,174	48%	24.8%	4.4%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	16,479	59%	15,103	53%	15,159	52%	-8.0%	0.4%
Elliptical Motion/Cross-Trainer	33,238	100%	27,051	100%	27,062	100%	-18.6%	0.0%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	16,889	51%	14,968	55%	13,898	51%	-17.7%	-7.1%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	16,349	49%	12,083	45%	13,164	49%	-19.5%	8.9%
Dance, Step, & Choreographed Exercise	22,391	100%	25,163	100%	26,241	100%	17.2%	4.3%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	14,503	65%	17,096	68%	18,179	69%	25.3%	6.3%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	7,888	35%	8,067	32%	8,063	31%	2.2%	0.0%
Bodyweight Exercise	24,183	100%	22,034	100%	22,578	100%	-6.6%	2.5%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	9,674	40%	9,514	43%	10,486	46%	8.4%	10.2%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	14,509	60%	12,520	57%	12,092	54%	-16.7%	-3.4%
High Impact/Intensity Training	21,611	100%	21,821	100%	21,801	100%	0.9%	-0.1%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	11,828	55%	12,593	58%	12,559	58%	6.2%	-0.3%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	9,783	45%	9,228	42%	9,242	42%	-5.5%	0.2%
Trail Running	10,010	100%	13,253	100%	14,885	100%	48.7%	12.3%
<i>Casual (1-25 times)</i>	8,000	80%	10,792	81%	12,260	82%	53.3%	13.6%
<i>Core(26+ times)</i>	2,009	20%	2,461	19%	2,625	18%	30.7%	6.7%
Rowing Machine	12,096	100%	11,893	100%	12,775	100%	5.6%	7.4%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	7,744	64%	7,875	66%	8,473	66%	9.4%	7.6%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	4,352	36%	4,017	34%	4,302	34%	-1.1%	7.1%
Stair Climbing Machine	15,025	100%	11,677	100%	12,605	100%	-16.1%	7.9%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	9,643	64%	7,569	65%	8,075	64%	-16.3%	6.7%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	5,382	36%	4,108	35%	4,530	36%	-15.8%	10.3%
Pilates Training	9,084	100%	10,311	100%	11,862	100%	30.6%	15.0%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	5,845	64%	7,377	72%	8,805	74%	50.6%	19.4%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	3,238	36%	2,935	28%	3,057	26%	-5.6%	4.2%

NOTE: Participation figures are in 000's for the US population ages 6 and over

Participation Growth/Decline:	Large Increase (greater than 25%)	Moderate Increase (0% to 25%)	Moderate Decrease (0% to -25%)	Large Decrease (less than -25%)
Core vs Casual Distribution:	Evenly Divided between Core and Casual Participants (45-55%)	Moderate Amount of Participants (56-74%)	Majority Amount of Participants (75% or greater)	



PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

GENERAL FITNESS (CONTINUED)

National Participatory Trends - General Fitness								
Activity	Participation Levels						% Change	
	2018		2022		2023		5-Year Trend	1-Year Trend
	#	%	#	%	#	%		
Cross-Training Style Workout	13,338	100%	9,248	100%	9,404	100%	-29.5%	1.7%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	6,594	49%	4,281	46%	4,391	47%	-33.4%	2.6%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	6,744	51%	4,968	54%	5,013	53%	-25.7%	0.9%
Boxing/MMA for Fitness	7,650	100%	9,787	100%	8,378	100%	9.5%	-14.4%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	4,176	55%	6,191	63%	5,003	60%	19.8%	-19.2%
<i>Core(13+ times)</i>	3,473	45%	3,596	37%	3,375	40%	-2.8%	-6.1%
Martial Arts	5,821	100%	6,355	100%	6,610	100%	13.6%	4.0%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	1,991	34%	3,114	49%	3,481	53%	74.8%	11.8%
<i>Core(13+ times)</i>	3,830	66%	3,241	51%	3,130	47%	-18.3%	-3.4%
Stationary Cycling (Group)	9,434	100%	6,268	100%	6,227	100%	-34.0%	-0.7%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	6,097	65%	3,925	63%	3,783	61%	-38.0%	-3.6%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	3,337	35%	2,344	37%	2,444	39%	-26.8%	4.3%
Cardio Kickboxing	6,838	100%	5,531	100%	5,524	100%	-19.2%	-0.1%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	4,712	69%	3,958	72%	3,929	71%	-16.6%	-0.7%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	2,126	31%	1,573	28%	1,596	29%	-24.9%	1.5%
Boot Camp Style Cross-Training	6,695	100%	5,192	100%	5,434	100%	-18.8%	4.7%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	4,780	71%	3,691	71%	4,003	74%	-16.3%	8.5%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	1,915	29%	1,500	29%	1,432	26%	-25.2%	-4.5%
Barre	3,532	100%	3,803	100%	4,294	100%	21.6%	12.9%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	2,750	78%	3,022	79%	3,473	81%	26.3%	14.9%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	782	22%	781	21%	821	19%	5.0%	5.1%
Tai Chi	3,761	100%	3,394	100%	3,948	100%	5.0%	16.3%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	2,360	63%	2,139	63%	2,748	70%	16.4%	28.5%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	1,400	37%	1,255	37%	1,200	30%	-14.3%	-4.4%
Triathlon (Traditional/Road)	2,168	100%	1,780	100%	1,738	100%	-19.8%	-2.4%
Triathlon (Non-Traditional/Off Road)	1,589	100%	1,350	100%	1,363	100%	-14.2%	1.0%

NOTE: Participation figures are in 000's for the US population ages 6 and over

Participation Growth/Decline:	Large Increase (greater than 25%)	Moderate Increase (0% to 25%)	Moderate Decrease (0% to -25%)	Large Decrease (less than -25%)
Core vs Casual Distribution:	Evenly Divided between Core and Casual Participants (45-55%)	Moderate Amount of Participants (56-74%)	Majority Amount of Participants (75% or greater)	

PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

OUTDOOR/ADVENTURE RECREATION

National Participatory Trends - Outdoor / Adventure Recreation								
Activity	Participation Levels						% Change	
	2018		2022		2023		5-Year Trend	1-Year Trend
	#	%	#	%	#	%		
Hiking (Day)	47,860	100%	59,578	100%	61,444	100%	28.4%	3.1%
<i>Casual (1-7 times)</i>	37,238	78%	44,154	74%	45,336	74%	21.7%	2.7%
<i>Core(8+ times)</i>	10,622	22%	15,424	26%	16,108	26%	51.6%	4.4%
Fishing (Freshwater)	38,998	100%	41,821	100%	42,605	100%	9.2%	1.9%
<i>Casual (1-7 times)</i>	21,099	54%	23,430	56%	23,964	56%	13.6%	2.3%
<i>Core(8+ times)</i>	17,899	46%	18,391	44%	18,641	44%	4.1%	1.4%
Bicycling (Road)	39,041	100%	43,554	100%	42,243	100%	8.2%	-3.0%
<i>Casual (1-25 times)</i>	20,777	53%	23,278	53%	22,520	53%	8.4%	-3.3%
<i>Core(26+ times)</i>	18,264	47%	20,276	47%	19,723	47%	8.0%	-2.7%
Camping	27,416	100%	37,431	100%	38,572	100%	40.7%	3.0%
<i>Casual (1-7 times)</i>	20,611	75%	28,459	76%	29,060	75%	41.0%	2.1%
<i>Core(8+ times)</i>	6,805	25%	8,972	24%	9,513	25%	39.8%	6.0%
Wildlife Viewing (>1/4 mile of Vehicle/Home)	20,556	100%	20,615	100%	21,118	100%	2.7%	2.4%
Camping (Recreational Vehicle)	15,980	100%	16,840	100%	16,497	100%	3.2%	-2.0%
<i>Casual (1-7 times)</i>	9,103	57%	10,286	61%	9,801	59%	7.7%	-4.7%
<i>Core(8+ times)</i>	6,877	43%	6,553	39%	6,695	41%	-2.6%	2.2%
Birdwatching (>1/4 mile of Vehicle/Home)	12,344	100%	15,818	100%	16,423	100%	33.0%	3.8%
Fishing (Saltwater)	12,830	100%	14,344	100%	15,039	100%	17.2%	4.8%
<i>Casual (1-7 times)</i>	7,636	60%	9,151	64%	9,904	66%	29.7%	8.2%
<i>Core(8+ times)</i>	5,194	40%	5,192	36%	5,135	34%	-1.1%	-1.1%
Backpacking Overnight	10,540	100%	10,217	100%	9,994	100%	-5.2%	-2.2%
Bicycling (Mountain)	8,690	100%	8,916	100%	9,289	100%	6.9%	4.2%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	4,294	49%	4,896	55%	5,434	58%	26.5%	11.0%
<i>Core(13+ times)</i>	4,396	51%	4,020	45%	3,854	41%	-12.3%	-4.1%
Skateboarding	6,500	100%	9,019	100%	8,923	100%	37.3%	-1.1%
<i>Casual (1-25 times)</i>	3,989	61%	6,469	72%	6,504	73%	63.0%	0.5%
<i>Core(26+ times)</i>	2,511	39%	2,559	28%	2,418	27%	-3.7%	-5.5%
Fishing (Fly)	6,939	100%	7,631	100%	8,077	100%	16.4%	5.8%
<i>Casual (1-7 times)</i>	4,460	64%	4,993	65%	5,417	67%	21.5%	8.5%
<i>Core(8+ times)</i>	2,479	36%	2,638	35%	2,659	33%	7.3%	0.8%
Archery	7,654	100%	7,428	100%	7,662	100%	0.1%	3.2%
<i>Casual (1-25 times)</i>	6,514	85%	6,202	83%	6,483	85%	-0.5%	4.5%
<i>Core(26+ times)</i>	1,140	15%	1,227	17%	1,179	15%	3.4%	-3.9%
Climbing (Indoor)	5,112	100%	5,778	100%	6,356	100%	24.3%	10.0%
Roller Skating, In-Line	5,040	100%	5,173	100%	5,201	100%	3.2%	0.5%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	3,680	73%	3,763	73%	3,840	74%	4.3%	2.0%
<i>Core(13+ times)</i>	1,359	27%	1,410	27%	1,361	26%	0.1%	-3.5%
Bicycling (BMX)	3,439	100%	4,181	100%	4,462	100%	29.7%	6.7%
<i>Casual (1-12 times)</i>	2,052	60%	2,792	67%	3,130	70%	52.5%	12.1%
<i>Core(13+ times)</i>	1,387	40%	1,389	33%	1,332	30%	-4.0%	-4.1%
Climbing (Traditional/Ice/Mountaineering)	2,541	100%	2,452	100%	2,568	100%	1.1%	4.7%
Climbing (Sport/Boulder)	2,184	100%	2,452	100%	2,544	100%	16.5%	3.8%
Adventure Racing	2,215	100%	1,714	100%	1,808	100%	-18.4%	5.5%
<i>Casual (1 time)</i>	581	26%	236	14%	405	22%	-30.3%	71.6%
<i>Core(2+ times)</i>	1,634	74%	1,478	86%	1,403	78%	-14.1%	-5.1%

NOTE: Participation figures are in 000's for the US population ages 6 and over

Participation Growth/Decline:	Large Increase (greater than 25%)	Moderate Increase (0% to 25%)	Moderate Decrease (0% to -25%)	Large Decrease (less than -25%)
Core vs Casual Distribution:	Evenly Divided between Core and Casual Participants (45-55%)	Moderate Amount of Participants (56-74%)	Majority Amount of Participants (75% or greater)	



PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

AQUATICS

National Participatory Trends - Aquatics								
Activity	Participation Levels						% Change	
	2018		2022		2023		5-Year Trend	1-Year Trend
#	%	#	%	#	%			
Swimming (Fitness)	27,575	100%	26,272	100%	28,173	100%	2.2%	7.2%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	18,728	68%	18,827	72%	20,620	73%	10.1%	9.5%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	8,847	32%	7,445	28%	7,553	27%	-14.6%	1.5%
Aquatic Exercise	10,518	100%	10,676	100%	11,307	100%	7.5%	5.9%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	7,391	70%	8,626	81%	9,298	82%	25.8%	7.8%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	3,127	30%	2,050	19%	2,009	18%	-35.8%	-2.0%
Swimming on a Team	3,045	100%	2,904	100%	3,327	100%	9.3%	14.6%
<i>Casual (1-49 times)</i>	1,678	55%	1,916	66%	2,280	69%	35.9%	19.0%
<i>Core(50+ times)</i>	1,367	45%	988	34%	1,047	31%	-23.4%	6.0%
NOTE: Participation figures are in 000's for the US population ages 6 and over								
Participation Growth/Decline:	Large Increase (greater than 25%)		Moderate Increase (0% to 25%)		Moderate Decrease (0% to -25%)		Large Decrease (less than -25%)	
Core vs Casual Distribution:	Evenly Divided between Core and Casual Participants (45-55%)		Moderate Amount of Participants (56-74%)		Majority Amount of Participants (75% or greater)			



PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

WATER SPORTS/ACTIVITIES

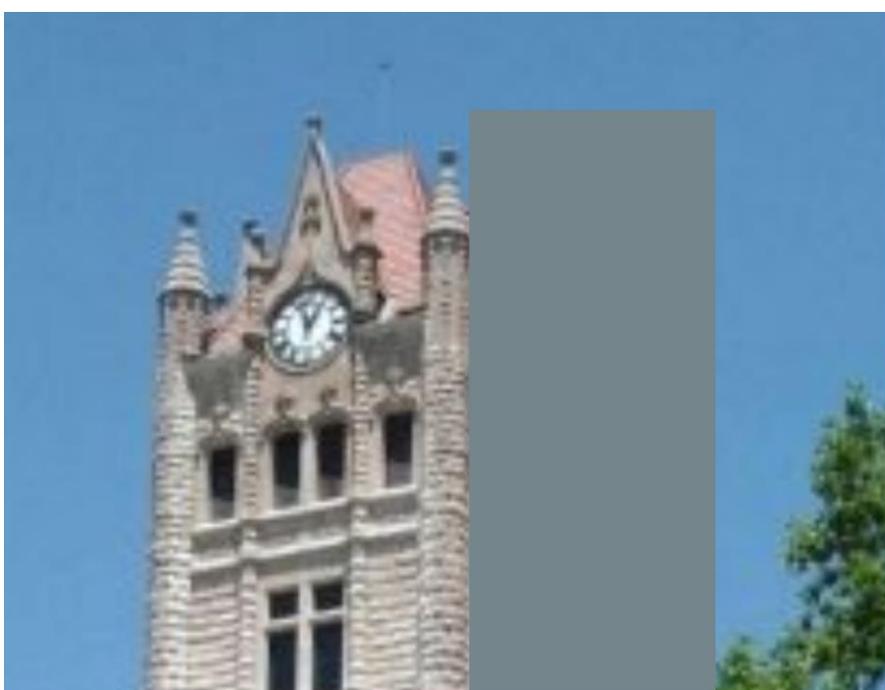
National Participatory Trends - Water Sports / Activities								
Activity	Participation Levels						% Change	
	2018		2022		2023		5-Year Trend	1-Year Trend
	#	%	#	%	#	%		
Kayaking (Recreational)	11,017	100%	13,561	100%	14,726	100%	33.7%	8.6%
Canoeing	9,129	100%	9,521	100%	9,999	100%	9.5%	5.0%
Snorkeling	7,815	100%	7,376	100%	7,489	100%	-4.2%	1.5%
<i>Casual (1-7 times)</i>	6,321	81%	6,005	81%	6,086	81%	-3.7%	1.3%
<i>Core(8+ times)</i>	1,493	19%	1,371	19%	1,403	19%	-6.0%	2.3%
Jet Skiing	5,324	100%	5,445	100%	5,759	100%	8.2%	5.8%
<i>Casual (1-7 times)</i>	3,900	73%	4,151	76%	4,490	78%	15.1%	8.2%
<i>Core(8+ times)</i>	1,425	27%	1,294	24%	1,269	22%	-10.9%	-1.9%
Stand-Up Paddling	3,453	100%	3,777	100%	4,129	100%	19.6%	9.3%
Sailing	3,754	100%	3,632	100%	4,100	100%	9.2%	12.9%
<i>Casual (1-7 times)</i>	2,596	69%	2,633	72%	3,117	76%	20.1%	18.4%
<i>Core(8+ times)</i>	1,159	31%	999	28%	984	24%	-15.1%	-1.5%
Rafting	3,404	100%	3,595	100%	4,050	100%	19.0%	12.7%
Surfing	2,874	100%	3,692	100%	3,993	100%	38.9%	8.2%
<i>Casual (1-7 times)</i>	1,971	69%	2,444	66%	2,655	66%	34.7%	8.6%
<i>Core(8+ times)</i>	904	31%	1,248	34%	1,338	34%	48.0%	7.2%
Water Skiing	3,363	100%	3,040	100%	3,133	100%	-6.8%	3.1%
<i>Casual (1-7 times)</i>	2,499	74%	2,185	72%	2,302	73%	-7.9%	5.4%
<i>Core(8+ times)</i>	863	26%	855	28%	832	27%	-3.6%	-2.7%
Scuba Diving	2,849	100%	2,658	100%	3,063	100%	7.5%	15.2%
<i>Casual (1-7 times)</i>	2,133	75%	2,012	76%	2,374	78%	11.3%	18.0%
<i>Core(8+ times)</i>	716	25%	646	24%	689	22%	-3.8%	6.7%
Kayaking (White Water)	2,562	100%	2,726	100%	2,995	100%	16.9%	9.9%
Wakeboarding	2,796	100%	2,754	100%	2,844	100%	1.7%	3.3%
<i>Casual (1-7 times)</i>	1,900	68%	2,075	75%	2,119	75%	11.5%	2.1%
<i>Core(8+ times)</i>	896	32%	679	25%	725	25%	-19.1%	6.8%
Kayaking (Sea/Touring)	2,805	100%	2,642	100%	2,800	100%	-0.2%	6.0%
Boardsailing/Windsurfing	1,556	100%	1,391	100%	1,434	100%	-7.8%	3.1%
<i>Casual (1-7 times)</i>	1,245	80%	1,103	79%	1,162	81%	-6.7%	5.3%
<i>Core(8+ times)</i>	310	20%	288	21%	272	19%	-12.3%	-5.6%

NOTE: Participation figures are in 000's for the US population ages 6 and over

Participation Growth/Decline:	Large Increase (greater than 25%)	Moderate Increase (0% to 25%)	Moderate Decrease (0% to -25%)	Large Decrease (less than -25%)
Core vs Casual Distribution:	Evenly Divided between Core and Casual Participants (45-55%)	Moderate Amount of Participants (56-74%)	Majority Amount of Participants (75% or greater)	

APPENDIX D – 2023 NEEDS ASSESSMENT





NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Hancock County, Indiana



Spring 2023

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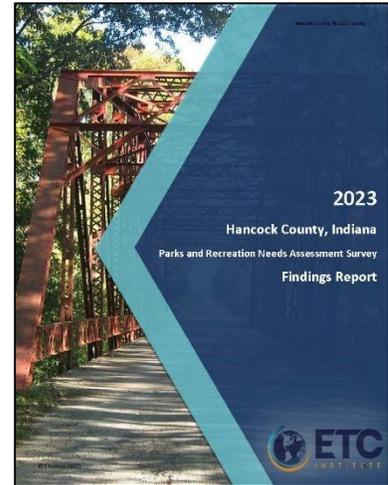
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Needs Assessment developed for Hancock County focuses on community engagement through community focus groups, stakeholder interviews and a county-wide survey to guide the County in future needs of the community as it applies to recreation facilities, programs, and park development issues.

There are many positive results that came out of the focus groups, stakeholder interviews and the county-wide survey as it applies to future needs for park improvements, facility needs and improvements and programs needs of the Hancock County community.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

ETC Institute administered a survey to residents of Hancock County during the winter months of 2023. The purpose of the survey was to collect input and feedback from residents to help shape the future of the county parks system.



METHODOLOGY

ETC Institute mailed a survey packet to a random sample of households in Hancock County. Each survey packet contained a cover letter, a copy of the survey, and a postage-paid return envelope. Residents who received the survey were given the option of returning the survey by mail or completing it online at HancockCountySurvey.org.

After the surveys were mailed, ETC Institute followed up with residents to encourage participation. To prevent people who were not residents of Hancock County from participating, everyone who completed the survey online was required to enter their home address prior to submitting the survey. ETC Institute then matched the addresses that were entered online with the addresses that were originally selected for the random sample. If the address from a survey completed online did not match one of the addresses selected for the sample, the online survey was not included in the final database for this report.

The goal was to collect a minimum of 400 completed surveys from residents. The goal was met with 509 completed surveys collected. The overall results for the sample of 509 households have a precision of at least +/-4.3 at the 95% level of confidence.

FINDINGS

OUTSIDE ORGANIZATIONS

Respondents were asked to select all the organizations their household has used for parks, recreation, and sports activities during the last two years. Neighboring cities/towns (69%), neighboring counties (63%), and private workout facilities (42%) were the organizations used most often by respondents.

SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENTS

Respondents were asked to rate their level of support for eleven potential actions Hancock county could take to develop a parks and recreation systems. Respondents were most supportive (rating "very supportive") of acquiring land to preserve open space (65%), developing trails that provide connectivity throughout the County (59%), and developing a large regional park (50%). Respondents are most willing to financially support developing trails with connectivity throughout the community (45%), acquiring land to preserve open space (44%), and developing a large regional park (40%).

PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

FUNDING METHODS

Respondents were asked to rate their level of support for six types of potential funding mechanisms to pay for the developments they most supported. Respondents most preferred using enterprise operations (53%) and hotel taxes (48%).

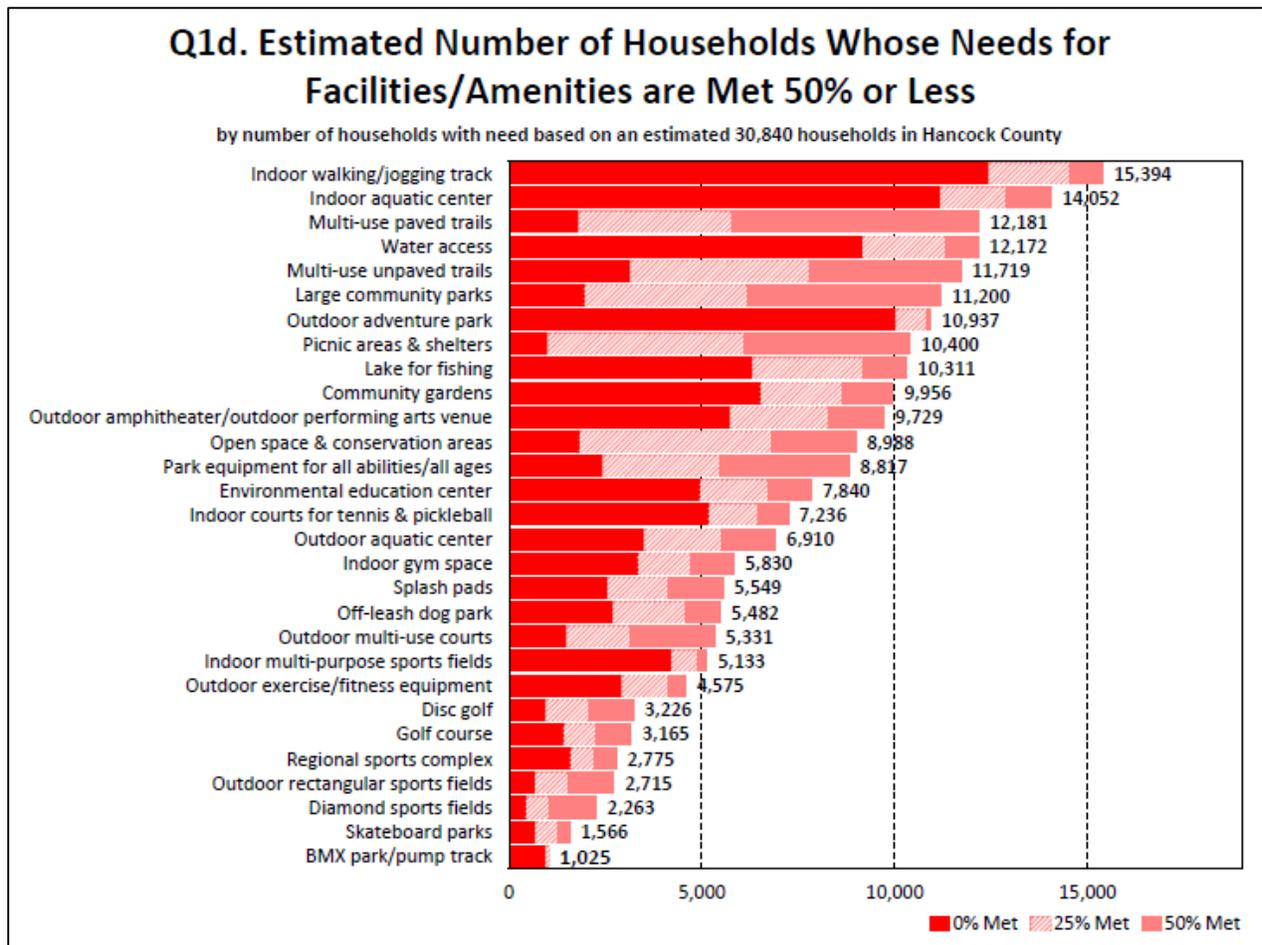
PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES AND AMENITIES NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

Facility/Amenity Needs: Respondents were asked to identify if their household had a need for 29 parks and recreation facilities/amenities and to rate how well their needs for each were currently being met. Based on this analysis, ETC Institute was able to estimate the number of households in the community that had the greatest “unmet” need for various facilities/amenities.

The three parks and recreation facilities/amenities with the highest percentage of households that have an unmet need:

1. Indoor walking/jogging track – 15,394 households
2. Indoor aquatic center – 14,052 households
3. Multi-use paved trails – 12,181 households

The estimated number of households that have unmet needs for each of the 29 parks and recreation center amenities assessed is shown in the chart below.

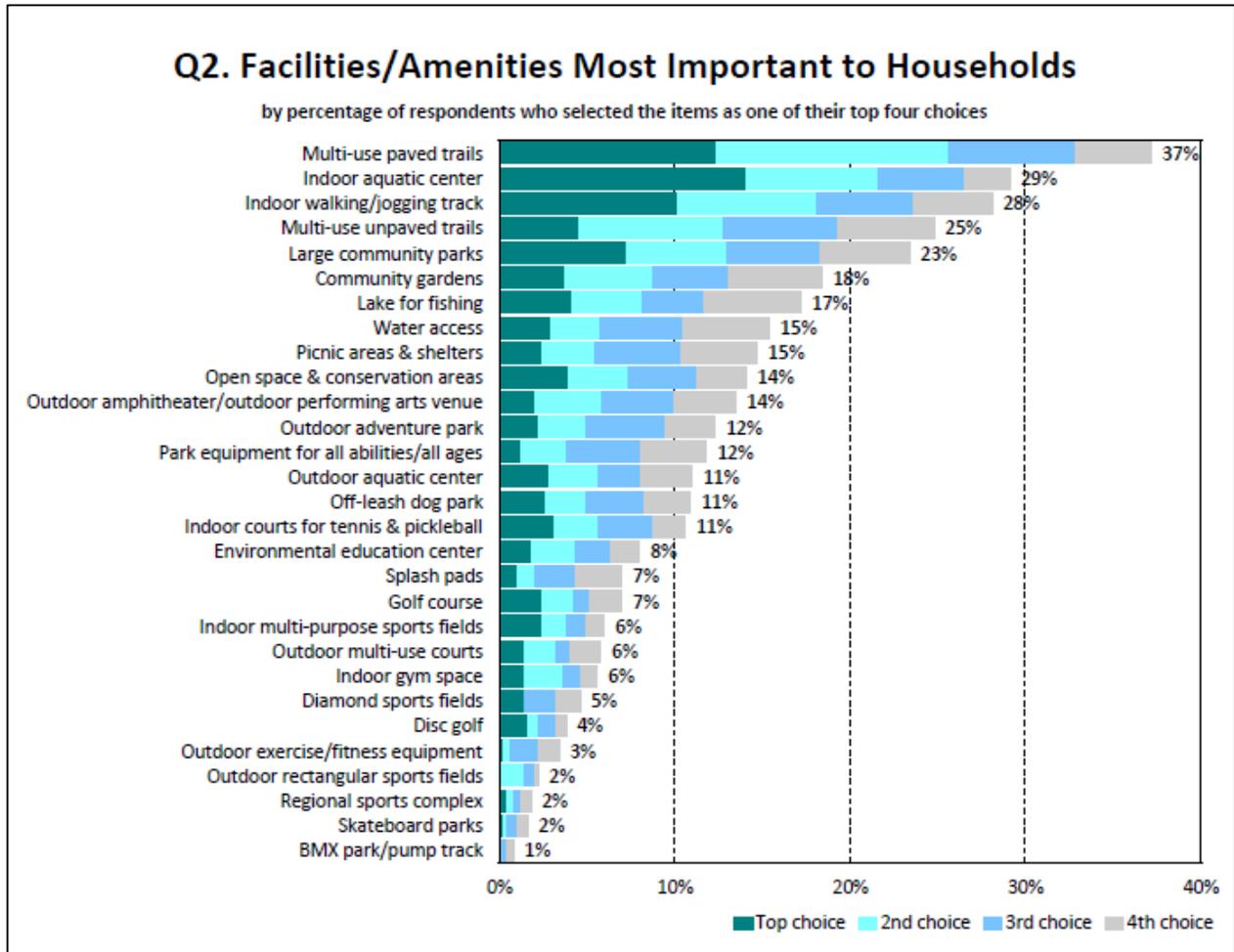


PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

Facilities and Amenities Importance: In addition to assessing the needs for each park and recreation facility and amenity, ETC Institute also assessed the importance that residents placed on each item. Based on the sum of respondents’ top four choices, these were the four facilities/amenities ranked most important to residents:

1. Multi-use paved trails (37%),
2. Indoor aquatic center (29%)
3. Indoor walking/jogging track (28%)
4. Multi-use unpaved trails (25%)

The percentage of residents who selected each facility/amenity as one of their top four choices is shown in the chart below.



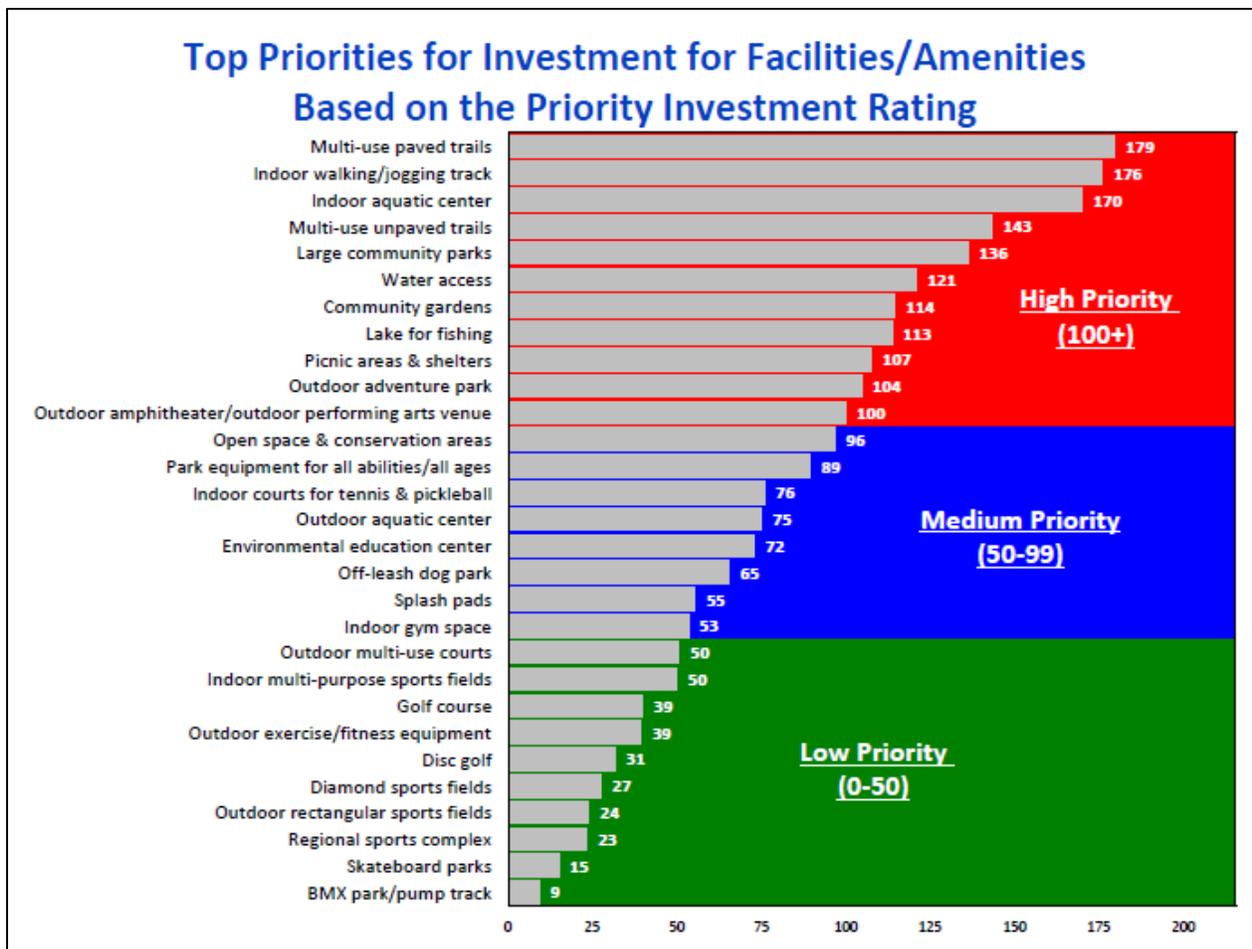
PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

Priorities for Facility Investments: The Priority Investment Rating (PIR) was developed by ETC Institute to provide organizations with an objective tool for evaluating the priority that should be placed on recreation and parks investments. The Priority Investment Rating (PIR) equally weighs (1) the importance that residents place on amenities and (2) how many residents have unmet needs for the amenity.

Based the Priority Investment Rating (PIR), the following parks and recreation facilities/amenities were rated as high priorities for investment:

- Multi-use paved trails (PIR=179)
- Indoor walking/jogging track (PIR=176)
- Indoor aquatic center (PIR=170)
- Multi-use unpaved trails (PIR=143)
- Large community parks (PIR=136)
- Water access (PIR=114)
- Community Gardens (PIR=113)
- Lake for fishing (PIR=107)
- Picnic areas & shelters (PIR=104)
- Outdoor adventure park (PIR=100)

The chart below shows the Priority Investment Rating for each of the 29 recreation facilities assessed on the survey.



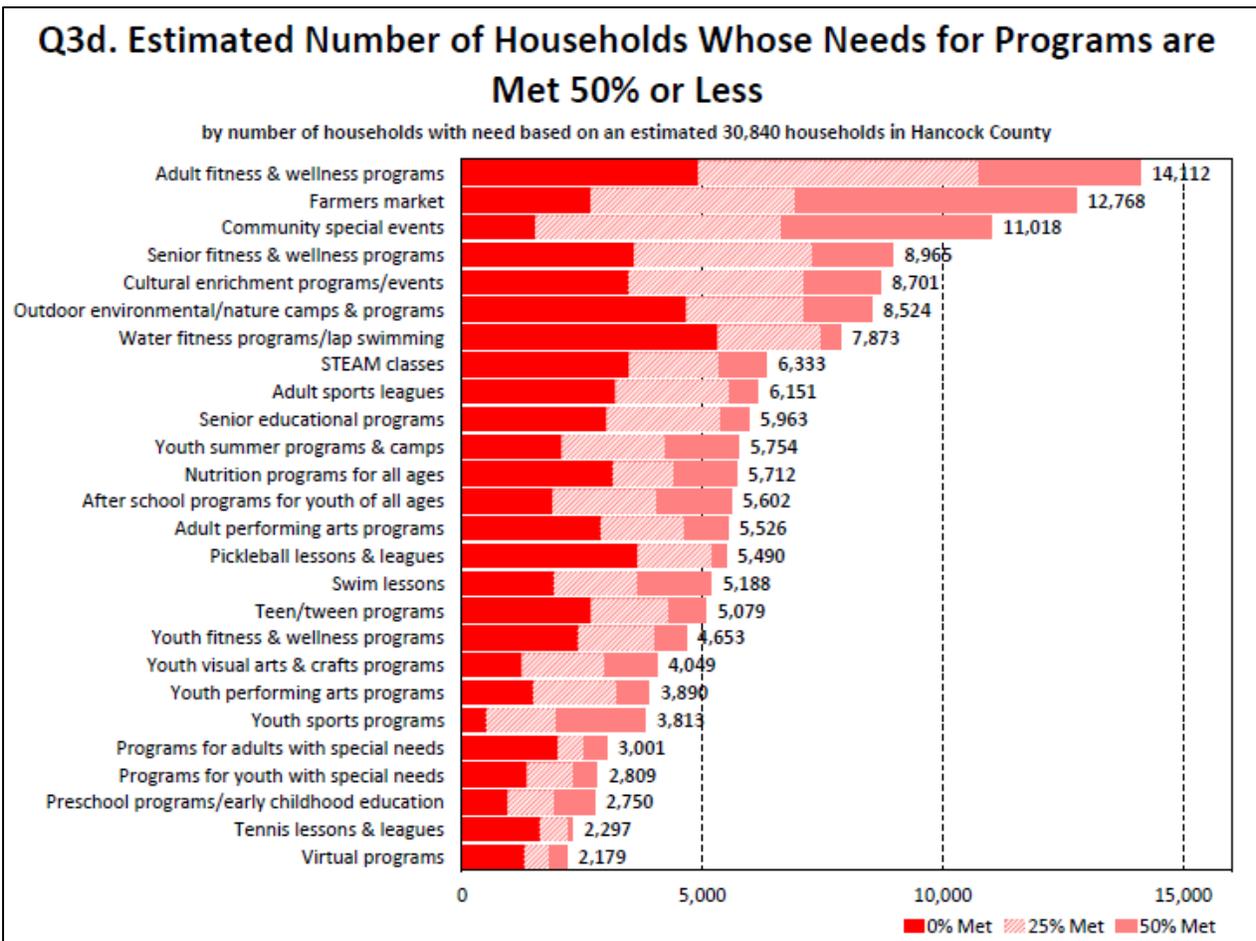
HANCOCK COUNTY PROGRAM NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

Program Needs: Respondents were asked to identify if their household had a need for 26 programs and to rate how well their needs for each were currently being met. Based on this analysis, ETC Institute was able to estimate the number of households in the community that had the greatest “unmet” need for various programs.

These are the three programs with the highest percentage of households with unmet needs:

1. Adult fitness & wellness programs– 14,112 households
2. Farmers market – 12,768 households
3. Community special events – 11,018 households

The estimated number of households that have unmet needs for each of the 26 parks and recreation programs assessed is shown in the chart below.

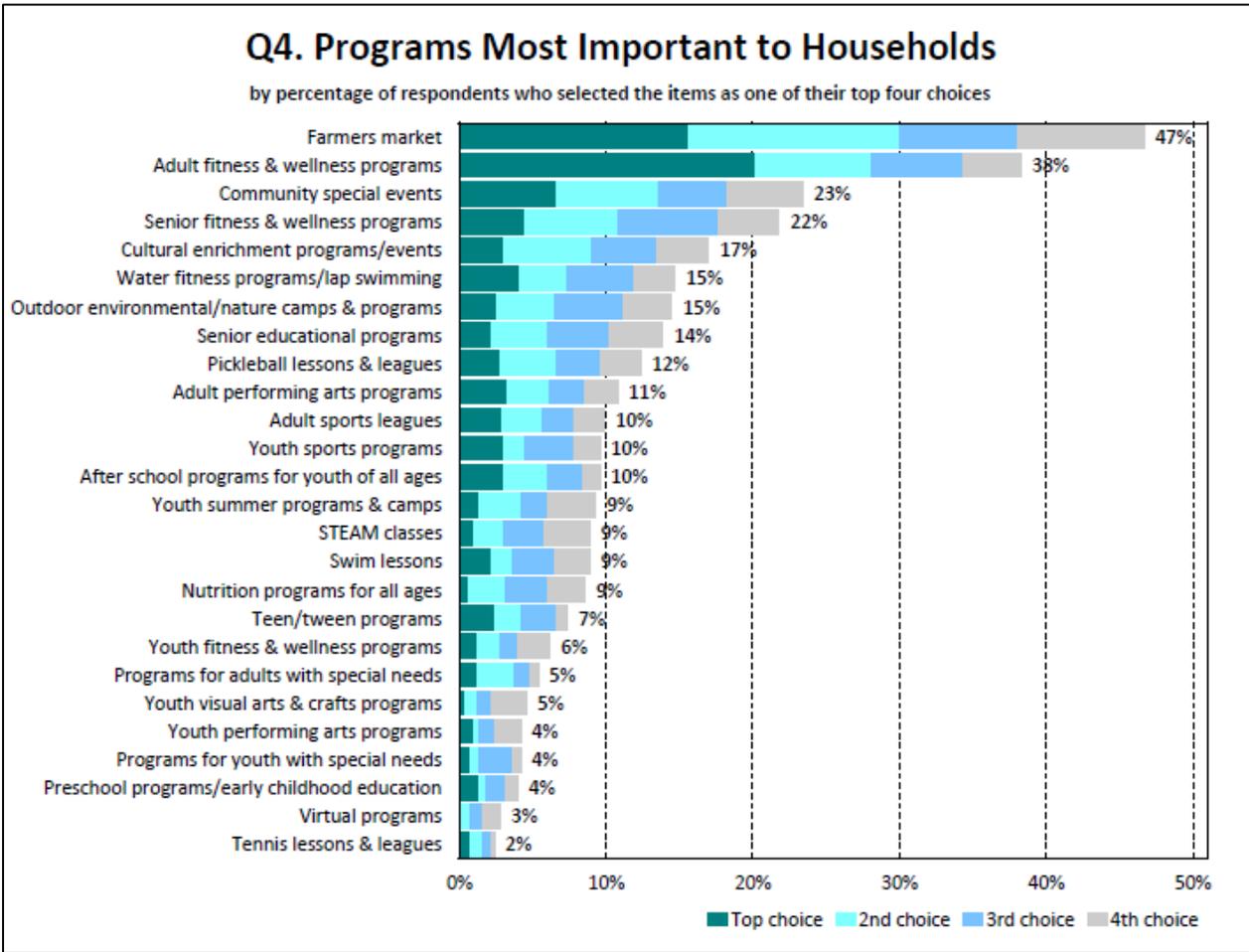


PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

Programs Importance: In addition to assessing the needs for each program, ETC Institute also assessed the importance that residents placed on each item. Based on the sum of respondents’ top four choices, these are the four most important programs to residents:

1. Farmers market (47%)
2. Adult fitness and wellness programs (38%)
3. Community special events (23%)
4. Senior fitness & wellness programs (22%)

The percentage of residents who selected each program as one of their top four choices is shown in the chart below.



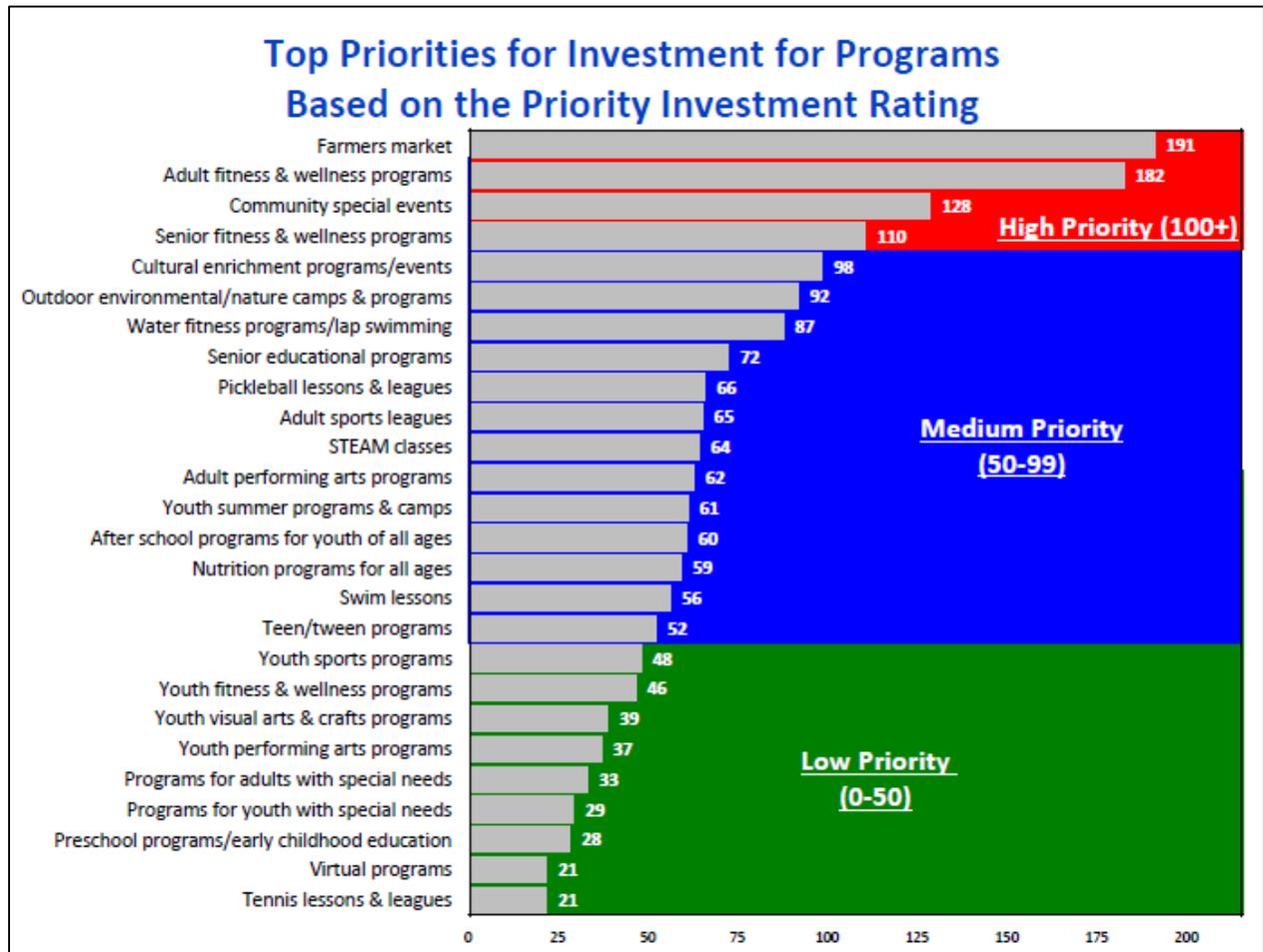
PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

Priorities for Program Investments: The Priority Investment Rating (PIR) was developed by ETC Institute to provide organizations with an objective tool for evaluating the priority that should be placed on recreation and parks investments. The Priority Investment Rating (PIR) equally weighs (1) the importance that residents place on each program and (2) how many residents have unmet needs for the program.

Based the Priority Investment Rating (PIR), the following Hancock County programs were rated as high priorities for investment:

- Farmers market (PIR=191)
- Adult fitness & wellness programs (PIR=182)
- Community special events (PIR=128)
- Senior fitness and wellness programs (PIR=110)

The chart below shows the Priority Investment Rating for Hancock County.



ACTION PLAN

Hancock County Commissioners met with PROS Consulting to discuss the third phase of the Needs Assessment Study which includes the development of a Park and Recreation Needs Assessment Action Plan based on the results of the community focus groups and the statistically valid survey results. The Park and Recreation Needs Assessment Action Plan puts into motion what the Commissioners need to address in moving forward in development of a county park system for the residents of the county based on the survey results and focus group results for establishing a Hancock County Park and Recreation system.

In the development of a county park system there are several elements that need to be put into place to be able to move forward. The following are critical to this effort.

RECOMMENDATIONS

STRATEGIES, AND TACTICS

1. Establish a steering committee compiled of key leaders in the County to help guide the Commissioners in their pursuit of creating a County Park and Recreation system.
 - a. Seek leaders that are conservationists, financial experts, park and recreation professionals, land planners, business executives and park design professionals to be a part of the steering committee.
 - b. Share the results of the needs assessment completed in 2023 and the support of residents having a county park system.
 - c. Seek local support from farm related organizations in developing a county park and recreation system.
2. Seek state and local legislation to create park and recreation system in Hancock County.
 - a. Hire or use legal counsel from the County Commissioners office to draw up the legislation to start a county park system, establish the park and recreation bylaws, funding mechanisms and charter of focus.
3. Determine funding opportunities that are available to acquire park land and developing the infrastructure for the county parks and recreation system.
 - a. Seek to assess all funding options that support the funding values of the County residents.
 - b. Using the existing County budget, determine what level of funding is currently available to initiate the parks and recreation system.
 - c. Execute the appropriate process to establish a long-term dedicated funding source to acquire land for open space preservation, development of park features, and incorporate amenities desired by the Hancock County residents based on the results of the Needs Assessment study.
4. Develop an organizational structure of how the County Park and Recreation System would operate (can be patterned after other local county park systems in the Indianapolis region).
 - a. When developing the organization charter and by-laws, determine if the County Commissioners will be the governing body or a separate park and recreation board to guide the organization and make recommendations to the Commissioners.
5. Evaluate land acquisition options and actions:
 - a. Evaluation of land acquisition opportunities that support protection of natural resources.
 - b. Review of land acquisition opportunities that can be developed with public access to local communities located in the county via roads, visibility, and eventually trails.
 - c. Meet with local landowners to seek interest in selling or donating a portion of their land to the county park and recreation system for naming rights and land acquisition.
 - d. Hire a communication strategist to help guide consistent communication across the County so landowners do not perceive the County is in a land grab mode.
 - e. Meet with local cities and townships to share the land acquisition strategy seeking their input and support for a future park system.

PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

6. To help maintain a consistent level of service across the County, hire a park planner to break out the County into regions and identify the number of acres that is needed to serve the future population in each region. This could include the development of a county trails system, protected natural areas, and key amenities desired by the community.
 - a. Seek support from a land trust or the Trust for Public Lands in acquiring park land in the county.
 - b. Once land is acquired, begin the design component of what the park site could look like. Encourage the community to vote on a tax of some type that would allow for the development, preservation, and operations of future park properties.
 - c. Develop a capital cost strategy for land acquisition and park improvements to develop the park system over a 30-year period to inform the community of the value of having a county park and recreation system in place.
7. Once the Commissioners approve the legislation and funding methods for a county park and recreation system, seek voter approval for implementation of the Hancock County Park and Recreation System.
 - a. Work to gain support from other city and township park systems in the County for developing a county parks and recreation system.
 - b. Develop a committee of key leaders and volunteers to help raise awareness of the value of a bond issue (or park tax levy) as well as how it will be used throughout the County.
 - c. Raise money to promote and educate County residents on the value of having a county park and recreation system and to gain their support for funding the system.
 - d. Develop a county park site and trails master plan for the first county park so voters know what the potential park site could offer as well as planned trail connectivity throughout the County.
8. If approved by the voters, establish a governing body to hire a director and three employees that would include a park land planner, recreation planner and capital improvement manager to collaborate with the director to acquire land and develop properties for public use.
 - a. Develop a functional organizational plan, organizational chart and job descriptions for the key positions that are needed to support the development of a county park and recreation system.
 - b. Hire the positions that are needed to get the system started.
 - c. Develop an operational budget and policy document on how the organization will be developed, operated, and maintained for the first five years of the park and recreation system's existence.
 - d. Develop a long-term acquisition strategy to acquire the desired amount of land for a county park system to enhance the quality of life for County residents.
 - e. Contract with a public engagement/information specialist to accurately inform residents of what is occurring in the process of developing the Hancock County Park and Recreation System.

APPENDIX E - VOLUNTEER/PARTNERSHIP BEST PRACTICES & RECOMMENDATIONS

BEST PRACTICES IN VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

In developing a volunteer policy, some best practices that the Department should be aware of include:

- Involve volunteers in cross-training to expose them to various organizational functions and increase their skill. This can also increase their utility, allowing for more flexibility in making work assignments, and can increase their appreciation and understanding of the Department.
- Identify a Volunteer Coordinator (a designated program staff member with volunteer management responsibility) and ensure they and associated staff stay fully informed about the strategic direction of the agency overall, including strategic initiatives for all divisions. Periodically identify, evaluate, or revise specific tactics the volunteer services program should undertake to support the larger organizational mission.
- A key part of maintaining the desirability of volunteerism in the agency is developing a good reward and recognition system. The consultant team recommends using tactics like those found in frequent flyer programs, wherein volunteers can use their volunteer hours to obtain early registration at programs, or discounted pricing at certain programs, rentals or events, or any other City function. Identify and summarize volunteer recognition policies in a Volunteer Policy document.
- Regularly update volunteer position descriptions. Include an overview of the volunteer position lifecycle in the Volunteer Manual, including the procedure for creating a new position.
- Add end-of-lifecycle process steps to the Volunteer Manual to ensure that there is formal documentation of resignation or termination of volunteers. Also include ways to monitor and track reasons for resignation/termination and perform exit interviews with outgoing volunteers when able.

In addition to the number of volunteers and volunteer hours, categorization and tracking volunteerism by type and extent of work, is important. Below are some examples of how the categorize volunteers:

- **Regular volunteers:** Those volunteers whose work is continuous, provided their work performance is satisfactory and there is a continuing need for their services.
- **Special event volunteers:** Volunteers who help with a particular event with no expectation that they will return after the event is complete.
- **Episodic volunteers:** Volunteers who help with a particular project type on a recurring or irregular basis with no expectation that they will return for other duties.
- **Volunteer interns:** Volunteers who have committed to work for the agency to fulfill a specific higher-level educational learning requirement.
- **Community service volunteers:** Volunteers who are volunteering over a specified period to fulfill a community service requirement.

The Department should continue to encourage employees to volunteer themselves in the community. Exposure of staff to the community in different roles (including those not related to parks and recreation) will raise awareness of the agency and its volunteer program. It also helps staff understand the role and expectations of a volunteer if they can experience it for themselves.

BEST PRACTICE FOR ALL PARTNERSHIPS

All partnerships developed and maintained by the Department should adhere to common policy requirements. These include:

- Each partner will meet with or report to the Department staff on a regular basis to plan and share activity-based costs and equity invested.
- Partners will establish measurable outcomes and work through key issues to focus on for the coming year to meet the desired outcomes.
- Each partner will focus on meeting a balance of equity agreed to and track investment costs accordingly.
- Measurable outcomes will be reviewed quarterly and shared with each partner, with adjustments made as needed.
- A working partnership agreement will be developed and monitored together on a quarterly or as-needed basis.
- Each partner will assign a liaison to serve each partnership agency for communication and planning purposes.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

The recommended policies and practices for public/private partnerships that may include businesses, private groups, private associations, or individuals who desire to make a profit from use of the Department's facilities or programs are detailed below. These can also apply to partnerships where a private party wishes to develop a facility on park property, to provide a service on publicly owned property, or who has a contract with the agency to provide a task or service on the agency's behalf at public facilities. These unique partnership principles are as follows:

- Upon entering into an agreement with a private business, group, association or individual, the Department staff and political leadership must recognize that they must allow the private entity to meet their financial objectives within reasonable parameters that protect the mission, goals and integrity of the Department.
- As an outcome of the partnership, the Department must receive a designated fee that may include a percentage of gross revenue dollars less sales tax on a regular basis, as outlined in the contract agreement.
- The working agreement of the partnership must establish a set of measurable outcomes to be achieved, as well as the tracking method of how those outcomes will be monitored by the agency. The outcomes will include standards of quality, financial reports, customer satisfaction, payments to the agency, and overall coordination with the Department for the services rendered.
- Depending on the level of investment made by the private contractor, the partnership agreement can be limited to months, a year or multiple years.
- If applicable, the private contractor will provide a working management plan annually that they will follow to ensure the outcomes desired by the Department. The management plan can and will be negotiated, if necessary. Monitoring the management plan will be the responsibility of both partners. The agency must allow the contractor to operate freely in their best interest, if the outcomes are achieved and the terms of the partnership agreement are adhered to.
- The private contractor cannot lobby agency advisory or governing boards for renewal of a contract. Any such action will be cause for termination. All negotiations must be with the Department Superintendent or their designee.

- The agency has the right to advertise for private contracted partnership services or negotiate on an individual basis with a bid process based on the professional level of the service to be provided.
- If conflicts arise between both partners, the highest-ranking officers from both sides will try to resolve the issue before going to each partner's legal counsels. If none can be achieved, the partnership shall be dissolved.

PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

The Department currently has a strong network of recreation program partners. Therefore, the following recommendations are both an overview of existing partnership opportunities available to the Department, as well as a suggested approach to organizing partnership pursuits. This is not an exhaustive list of all potential partnerships that can be developed, but this list can be used as a reference tool for the agency to develop its own priorities in partnership development. The following five areas of focus are recommended:

1. **Operational Partners:** Other entities and organizations that can support the efforts of the Department to maintain facilities and assets, promote amenities and park usage, support site needs, provide programs and events, and/or maintain the integrity of natural/cultural resources through in-kind labor, equipment, or materials.
2. **Vendor Partners:** Service providers and/or contractors that can gain brand association and notoriety as a preferred vendor or supporter of the City or Department in exchange for reduced rates, services, or some other agreed upon benefit.
3. **Service Partners:** Nonprofit organizations and/or friends' groups that support the efforts of the agency to provide programs and events, and/or serve specific constituents in the community collaboratively.
4. **Co-Branding Partners:** Private, for-profit organizations that can gain brand association and notoriety as a supporter of the Department in exchange for sponsorship or co-branded programs, events, marketing and promotional campaigns, and/or advertising opportunities.
5. **Resource Development Partners:** A private, nonprofit organization with the primary purpose to leverage private sector resources, grants, other public funding opportunities, and resources from individuals and groups within the community to support the goals and objectives of the agency on mutually agreed strategic initiatives.