2C: Summary of Past Parks Planning Documents

Over the past fifteen years, a number of parks and recreation studies and recommendations have been produced. A comprehensive review of the studies indicates two common themes: a need to expand the availability of public parks for both active and passive recommendation as well as disconnects between desired park facilities/programs and available funding. A summary of these studies and recommendations is presented to provide the reader background on why the Spartanburg County Parks Department is pursuing the mission, strategies, goals and objectives and measurement standards described in Appendix 1.

SPARTANBURG COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, 1998-2015

The plan noted that Spartanburg County had a shortage of parks, with 2.44 developed park acres for every 1,000 resident. The national average according to the National Recreation and Park Association is 6.5 acres for every 1,000 residents. Goals from the 1998 Comprehensive Plan included:

1. Need for more parks, and more equitable distribution of park and recreation sites based on population distribution.
2. Need for increased funding, to include public/private partnerships, to meet existing and projected park deficit.
3. Need to “Master Plan” park development in the county, to include maintenance schedule and improvement program for existing park facilities.
4. Need to establish land bank budget for new park site acquisition and development, prioritized by Planning Area to ensure greater geographic equitability and access.
5. Need to negotiate pragmatically workable schedule for co-use of school recreation facilities in the interest of maximizing use of such facilities and optimizing return on investments (taxes) in recreation facilities, with clear division of maintenance and financial responsibility, and an “understanding of availability” for county use.
6. The Comprehensive Plan cited a 1994 study by the S.C. Department of Parks indicated that “playing ball” was the number one preferred recreational activity, followed by walking and fishing.


The study divided the County into four planning areas and recommended park facility investments based on national standards. The plan recommended mini-parks (1 acre), neighborhood parks (4 acres), community parks (20 acres), multi-purpose recreation complexes (35-140 acres) and special-purpose facilities (nature preserves, kayaking trails, etc.)
The plan recommended investments of $118 million (in 1999 dollars) over ten years, to bring Spartanburg County’s park measurement to 5.06 acres for every 1,000 residents.

Nine goals were recommended:

1. Acquire park land for future recreation use.
2. Upgrade existing parks and facilities.
3. Establish a level of maintenance and safety which affords optimum use of County parks and facilities.
4. Develop parks and facilities.
5. Promote cooperative efforts for shared recreation facilities.
6. Provide cost-effective parks and facilities.
7. Provide diverse recreation opportunities based on the unique characteristics of Spartanburg County.
8. Consider a potential greenbelt system to link recreation resources.
9. Develop a marketing strategy to inform residents of available recreation opportunities.

IS THE PLAN STILL VALID?

In comparing Census records from 2000 to 2010, it appears that while Spartanburg County’s population has grown some 12% in ten years, the population makeup has changed little, with one exception: the significant increase in Hispanic or Latino persons. Thus, one could make the argument that the goals from the 1999 study are still valid today.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>2000 Census</th>
<th>2010 Census</th>
<th>Percentage Change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>253,791</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>130,453</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median age (years)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>All Other Races</td>
<td>3,366</td>
<td>3,404</td>
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</table>
SPARTANBURG COUNTY ACTIVE AREA LIVING ASSESSMENT, 2005.

Upstate Forever retained The Lawrence Group to conduct an “active living assessment” of the land development regulations and plans for Spartanburg County and the City of Spartanburg and to identify “provisions that impede the development of active living neighborhoods and communities” -- neighborhoods that allow and encourage people to engage in regular physical activity, such as bicycling and walking, as part of their daily routine. This report provided a framework for revising City and County regulations and policies to support active living and recommended an action agenda for implementation. Key recommendations included:

1. Support Active Living Land Use Planning and Development
2. Support Pedestrian-oriented Transportation Facilities and Services
3. Support Programming that Promotes Active Living
4. Support Recreation Facilities, Parks and Trails
5. Encourage Healthy School Sites, Facilities and Policies
6. Identify and Create Active Living Funding Sources
7. Enable Safety, Security and Crime Prevention
8. Foster Collaboration and Information Sharing

SPARTANBURG COUNTY RAPID PARK ASSESSMENT, 2006.

The rapid assessment attempted to facilitate identification and prioritization of parkland, greenway, and greenbelt protection opportunities that would advance the goals of local park and active living advocates as well as published recreation needs assessments, greenway plans, and active living assessments developed for the City and County of Spartanburg. Recommendations included:

1. Establish an Active Living Overlay Zone to promote higher density development within appropriate areas of the City of Spartanburg.
2. Support density bonuses for residential development within the Active Living Overlay Zone.
3. Establish a Spartanburg Parks and Greenways Board that will encourage voluntary parkland donations and facilitate private financial contributions for park and greenway development.
4. Evaluate the feasibility of a successful City and County ballot initiative for conservation.
5. Consider commissioning a poll to gauge voter interest in the expansion of the City and County parks and greenway system.

6. Utilize the Spartanburg Parks and Greenways Board to help maximize the use of funds available from the South Carolina State Conservation Bank.

7. Establish a revolving loan fund for land purchases that allows private acquisition agents to move quickly to secure acquisition opportunities.

COMMUNITY INDICATORS PROJECT, 2008.

The Spartanburg Community Indicators Project, a strategic planning initiative of Spartanburg County, Spartanburg County Foundation, United Way and USC-Upstate, attempted to identify “community indicators” that would point the way towards community investment priorities and provide for a baseline against which progress could be measured. The document noted:

1. The park land deficit in Spartanburg (2.44 acres of park land per 1,000 residents versus the national average of 6.25 acres per 1,000 residents.

2. Existing community facilities and the Spartanburg Parks Commission plans for locating a regional park within 15 minutes of every resident and for investing in trails and access to waterways.

3. The efforts of private-sector conservation groups to protect land for parks, greenways and blueways.

THE ENCORE PROJECT, 2009

Conducted by Sage Wave Consulting and funded by the Spartanburg County Foundation, the project brought together 14 agencies providing services to senior citizens to map out a strategy for “Keeping Seniors and Baby Boomers Independent, Healthy, Active, Learning and Engaged in the Community.”

When the project leader relocated, the initiative foundered, though the issues it dealt with are still relevant.

TOURISM ACTION PLAN, 2011

A committee chaired by County Councilmember Jane Hall and Town of Pacolet Mayor Jane Hall chaired a months-long effort to develop a tourism action plan for the County, as an economic development and quality of life initiative.

The study noted that “recreation and sport tourism should be a top priority as there is already a good product mix in place and under construction. In addition, attracting this type of tourism activity (particularly youth sport tournaments) has a very good return on investment. Typically, youth sport tournaments attract large numbers of participants and spectators. Hospitality taxes are funding a number of new recreation facilities within the county. This model is appropriate
and has become very common in South Carolina. Because sport and recreation tourism has a very good return on investment and puts “heads in beds,” the Funding Strategy Committee should insure that the level of funding currently being directed to the Parks Commission from hospitality and accommodations taxes remains stable. Ideally, funding mechanisms for sport and recreation facilities that can be leveraged to attract tourists should be created that not only allow for additional facility projects to be completed but also to maintain, upgrade, and renovate existing facilities as necessary and appropriate.

The study also noted: “Outdoor recreation is also a key component of the growing tourism industry in Spartanburg. The Glendale Outdoor Leadership School is in the process of developing infrastructure for paddling the Pacolet River and the Lawson’s Fork. Glendale Shoals is becoming an increasingly popular place to hike, kayak, or just enjoy the river. The Tyger River Foundation is also developing paddling infrastructure on the Tyger River. Hiking, fishing, cycling, equestrian, and walking activities are prominent throughout the county. Public investment in outdoor recreation will almost certainly prove to have health benefits, as well as economic ones, for Spartanburg County residents. The County has serious health care needs, ranking near the top in most indicators of poor health. Thomas Jefferson once said, “Without health there is no happiness. An attention to health, then, should take the place of every other object.” Outdoor recreation holds the key to a healthier local population who will no doubt take advantage of available recreational activities. According to the National Park Service, people who exercise regularly file 14 percent fewer health claims, spend 30 percent fewer days in the hospital and have 41 percent fewer insurance claims greater than $5,000.

COUNCIL AND COMMUNITY LEADER INTERVIEWS, 2011

The studies quoted above all indicate the need to expand park acreage in Spartanburg County. However, this didn’t become financially realistic until County Council adopted – in 2005 – a Hospitality Tax that could be used for the construction and maintenance of tourism infrastructure. In 2006, another piece of the puzzle fell into place with the creation of the Spartanburg County Parks and Recreation District, which set aside a specific tax millage for Parks and Recreation.

A volunteer citizen commission was created and appointed by the County Council to oversee the District. The commission had limited powers, the most important of which was supervision of the Parks and Recreation Director. According to the Ordinance that created the commission, the Parks and Recreation Director did not report to the County Administrator.

The construction of the first regional park – using land purchased in the 1998-2001 timeframe – began in 2010. However, as noted above, perceived issues with park planning, funding and construction caused complaints to and discomfort for Spartanburg County Council. In particular, the park was under-funded. A portion of the park budget was to have been raised through substantial private contributions. (Unfortunately, the private fund-raising effort was not successful to the extent needed and Spartanburg County had to appropriate additional funds and reduce the Park’s scope to bring the facility “online” in a timely fashion.)
Ultimately, questions about Tyger River Park and the Parks and Recreation Director’s expressed desire to become “independent” from Spartanburg County led the County Council to dissolve the Spartanburg Parks Commission, placing the Parks and Recreation Director under the supervision of the County Administrator. The Parks and Recreation Director was later terminated and an Interim Director was appointed.

The Interim Director was charged by the County Administrator with providing recommendations to re-imagine, re-organize and re-focus what became known as the Spartanburg County Parks Department. As part of this process, the Interim Director interviewed community leaders and parks department stakeholders to identify improvement strategies. County Council members, County elected department heads, municipal mayors and administrators, school district superintendents, business association leaders and staff members were interviewed. Lessons learned from the interviews included:

The design and construction of Tyger River Park and the funds that had been committed to it had focused resources in only one section of the County, while other areas needed attention, as well.

There was a significant interest in facilities for walking, biking and boating as well as agencies and organizations that were ready to partner with the Parks Department on projects.

Schools were open to the use of school facilities for public recreation.

Most existing parks had received minimal reinvestment over the years and had many operations and maintenance issues.

**PARK CONDITION ASSESSMENT, 2011; PARKS ENHANCEMENT PLAN, 2012**

To identify the operations and maintenance issues, in preparation for the development of Capital Improvement Plan recommendations, in 2011, a Parks Condition Assessment was commissioned from a local engineering and landscape architecture firm. The firm identified the issues and provided “order of magnitude cost estimates” for development of a capital budget. The condition assessment also reviewed local demographic changes that might impact the recommendations.

The condition assessment was later married to an Outdoor Infrastructure Component that was developed in-house, with the assistance of local conservation and active living promotion groups.

The result was the Parks Enhancement Plan that was adopted in October 2012 and is shown as an Attachment. The Parks Enhancement Plan essentially became half of the Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan (with the other half being the Recreation Programming Plan, detailed in Chapter 6. The Parks Enhancement Plan’s implementation vehicle was the Capital Improvement Plan.

**TRAILS AND GREENWAYS MASTER PLAN, 2012**
As noted above, an Outdoor Infrastructure Component was part of the Parks Enhancement Plan. One recommendation was the development of a multi-year Trails Master Plan for the urbanized area of Spartanburg County.

The need for development of trails was recognized as far back as Spartanburg County’s 1979 Comprehensive Plan. In January 2009, SPATS, Spartanburg County, and the City of Spartanburg began developing a countywide comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian plan. The planning effort was funded by the Mary Black Foundation, SPATS, Spartanburg County, and the City of Spartanburg.

In 2012, a project to build upon this foundation was completed as the Trails Master Plan was released. Funded by Partners for Active Living, the City of Spartanburg and Spartanburg County, the Trails Master Plan was significantly different than previous trails plans because it resulted in the adoption of an implementation methodology, including a dedicated funding source for trails development from Spartanburg County.