

Executive Summary

This plan is intended to provide guidance in directing the future of parks and recreation in Winchester-Clark County.

The plan analyzes parks and recreation benefits and national trends, local demographics, community input and national standards. An inventory of public and private facilities was conducted. Recommendations for improvements are provided based on the analysis along with funding opportunities for these activities.

Analysis

Data from the National Recreation and Parks Association defines the various benefits of parks and recreation which are categorized by community, environment and economy. National issues and trends in local government parks and recreation are provided. Trends are categorized by community, people, natural resources, and management. The main new trends include increased community involvement in recreation facility design, more initiatives for older adults, protection of natural resources and open space and new strategies to generate revenue and expand service levels to broader segments of the society.

Clark County's population change between 1990 to 2020 is 21.8 percent. Fayette, Montgomery and Estill counties have similar increases while Bourbon County is losing population. The county has seen a greater population increase, 10 percent, than Winchester's growth of 2.3 percent during the 1990-1999 period. Projections through 2020 show a slowed increase in population. The fastest growing age group within the 1990-1999 period was the 45 to 64 group with a 31.5 percent increase; whereas, by the year 2020, the largest age sectors will be in the 20-39 and 60 and over age groups. Based on the *Comprehensive Plan* approximately 50 to 60 percent of the projected growth is expected to occur primarily within the Winchester urban growth boundary.

Community input was obtained through public surveys, school visits/teen surveys, and personal interviews. A total 576 individuals responded to the survey with the highest age group responding being 36-50. The average park user is within a household of 2 to 4 and drives to the facility once or twice a week. Most individuals, 55 percent, stated that there are adequate facilities with 67 percent pleased with the condition of the facilities and the same number being satisfied or very satisfied with the condition of the existing facilities. The need for an indoor pool was rated the highest active facility (87%) with gymnasium, fitness center, athletic fields, skateboard ramps and tennis courts following, in order. The need for nature walks was rated the highest passive facility with hiking trails, fishing areas, camping areas and boat docks following, in order. The demand for passive recreation is slightly higher than that for active. The need for a multi-purpose recreational complex was recognized by 94 percent of the respondents. The greatest need in the multi-purpose complex was shown as a social center with fitness, aquatic, cultural, and meeting following, in order. A vast amount of comments from respondents indicated the need to provide more parks with improved activities for all ages.

A total 100 students were interviewed in a classroom setting along with completing a survey form. Students had good, well thought out ideas. Most teens feel that there are not adequate parks and recreation facilities. An indoor pool is seen as the overall highest priority with the second highest need being hiking trails. Camping areas and skateboard park follow closely. Teens exhibit a need for socialization, a place to "hang-out". They like the idea of a teen center and understand the need to have controls and supervision. They appreciated the opportunity to comment and expressed interest in additional meetings.

Personal interviews mirrored the needs shown by the surveys. Most individuals felt that there is a need for improvement specifically for walking trails, gymnasium, and indoor pool/multi-purpose facility, along with more parks. The overall opinion relating to the condition of the parks is good considering the limited staff available.

A review of the *Comprehensive Plan* was conducted as it relates to parks and recreation. A total 140 acres of future public/semi-public land is shown on the Land Use map. However, this does not reflect all the acreage that will be needed for this use during the 20-year planning period of the *Comprehensive Plan*. The Plan notes the need for park facilities must be considered during development plan review for proposed projects. The need for a park in the southwestern side of the county is identified. A recommendation in the Plan stated that a committee be appointed to formulate a recommendation for the Winchester-Clark County Planning and Zoning Commission regarding how the community might best meet the needs of the residents of those portions of the county that might not be adequately served by available parks. The Plan also recommends that a committee be established to research and consider the use of impact fees to fund off-site improvements.

An analysis of the Kentucky Department for Local Government's *Outdoor Recreation in Kentucky, A Five-Year Assessment and Policy Plan*, addresses public attitudes, priorities and behavior. Public survey results within the Plan identify the benefits of parks and recreation, facility needs and activity needs. Public outdoor recreation areas and facilities are considered to be very important with most individuals somewhat satisfied with existing recreation opportunities. A majority of individuals felt that facility rehabilitation deserves greater expenditures followed by programming and resource protection. The most common and definable outdoor recreation activity is hiking/walking. This survey closely mirrors the responses of the Winchester-Clark County community in terms of needs.

An inventory of the existing public facilities shows that there are 93 acres in nine separate parks located within the jurisdiction of the Winchester-Clark County Parks and Recreation Department staffed by three full-time, seven part-time (including in-mate labor) and 14 seasonal employees. Each of the nine facilities were examined with a site analysis and general assessment of the facility provided including positive and negative site features with recognized needs. School recreational facilities are listed noting that they complement the public parks system. The various private recreational facilities are listed including golf, history/cultural arts, YMCA, churches and others. Programming conducted by the parks department is identified and compared to a nationwide survey prepared for the National Recreation and Park Association.

A change in the park classification system is recommended based on the document *Recreation, Park and Open Space Standards and Guidelines* which identifies recommended acres per 1,000 population for specific park types—mini-park, neighborhood, community, linear and special use. Currently, there is a deficit in mini-parks, neighborhood and community parks with an increase of only 1 percent identified for 2010 due to the projected declining growth rate between 2000-2010. The total current deficit for park land is 266 acres while in 2010 the acreage will increase to 289 acres. The largest deficit is for community parks in 2000 of 192 acres while the deficit in that type for 2010 is 209 acres. The greatest existing and future needs are in the south/southwest area along with the mid-east segment of the community. School parks and recreation facilities help relieve the shortage to some extent but only have a small impact since most of the school grounds have limited availability for general parks and recreation purposes. Based on national facility goals, the greatest existing deficiency is playgrounds at 14; however this need is alleviated by 11 school playgrounds open to the public. The second greatest deficiency is soccer/football fields showing a need of 9 and picnic shelters at 8. Closely following in deficiency is basketball courts, tennis courts and trails.

The *Municipal and County Recreation Services Study for Fiscal Year 1998-1999* provides data for 37 cities and counties throughout the state that have year-round recreation and parks department. Average per capita expenditures of these departments is \$34.22 with Winchester-Clark County's expenditure of \$8.99 well below the average. The average full-time employees at selected similar departments is 8, with an average 14 part-time employees. The Winchester-Clark County Parks and Recreation Department employs 3 full-time staff and 7 part-time employees (including in-mate labor).

Recommendations

The demand analysis indicates that Winchester-Clark County is currently short of meeting accepted national standards by 266 acres. This deficit grows to 289 acres by 2010. The largest deficit is in the area of community wide parks with the recommendation that such a park be located in the southern quadrant to serve the growing population in that area. Land adjoining Lykins Park should be leased or purchased to provide for more opportunities. Two neighborhood parks are recommended, both on the south end. There is a need for two or more mini parks in the unserved areas. Although the community does not currently have a linear park, the city is proposing the utilization of an abandoned rail bed for a trail along with a park within the downtown district. These types of parks provide for linkages and these efforts should be expanded.

Based on all public participation components, the top ranked active facility is for an indoor pool. It is recommended that individuals attend national institutes and visit communities with a new aquatic complex. The second strongest need is for a multi-purpose center with areas for a gymnasium, socialization, fitness, cultural activities, and meetings. The multi-purpose center could also include an aquatic complex. A visit to local communities with this type complex is recommended.

The need for a teen center was exhibited through the teen interviews/survey and public survey. The center could be included within the multi-purpose facility. Immediate needs could be served by leasing a vacant downtown building.

The highest ranked passive facility based on all public participation components is nature and hiking trails. National standards call for 6 miles of trails within the community. Additional needs are seen in the form of linking the parks and downtown with a system of walkways/bikeways.

Although a need for athletic fields was exhibited, the need is for practice fields not regulated play fields. The need for a skate park has been recognized and an application for federal matching funds recently filed for the development.

Although the need for fishing/boating is not high, consideration should be given to continuing the lease agreement between the City of Winchester and the Fish & Game Club which was expressed as a need in the surveys.

In addition to new facilities and development, consideration should be given to improving the existing facilities which have various degrees of need. A coordinated park signage system should be developed to provide effective information and direction to and within the parks.

An exhibited need in the public participation component is for programming. The types of programs identified are: arts/crafts, fitness, environmental, socialization, enrichment, among others. Initially, an intern could be secured from a university to conduct seasonal programs.

It is evident that additional resources are required to maintain existing facilities and provide for future needs. It is recommended that local government consider increased funding levels at a rate comparable to other communities.

In order to maintain and enhance the public parks, department staff should be increased at a level so that recommended improvements can be implemented. Increased visibility for the parks department should be provided through brochures and other media. Continued input, especially from the teens, should be sought. A teen advisory board is recommended.

Funding Opportunities

The *Municipal and County Recreation Services Study* identifies department operating budgets with sources. The study notes that the primary source of local governments' recreation budgets is through the general fund. The next source of revenue is from user charges and fees. Compared to eight communities of similar size, Winchester's budget is the lowest in revenue from general fund and charges and fees.

Six federal programs were identified as potential sources for project development along with nine state programs. Other funding mechanisms include local fundraising and foundations.

Special state incentives include the Department for Local Government's Rails to Trails Program which initially is to develop a statewide data base and assistance. The Bicycle and Bikeways Program provides for planning and promotion of bikeways and bicycling to maximize the use of roads, streets, parks and other publicly owned lands, abandoned road beds, and other resources. The Department for Travel Development provides funds for publications and promotion. Special events and facilities can be listed in statewide publications.