

06-01-2022 Town Council Meeting

Responses to Council Questions

ITEM #2: Parks and Recreation Update

Council Question:

Could staff provide data on how the fees we charge compare with similar and/or nearby communities?

Staff Response:

Parks and Recreation does not have current data on this. Should the Council recommend exploring fee changes, staff would complete a market analysis within the next fiscal year so that any changes to fees and charges could be considered within the FY24 budget process. Such changes would be reviewed by the Parks, Greenways, and Recreation Commission prior to consideration by the Council.

Recreation program fees are determined internally by Parks and Recreation. The department follows cost recovery guidelines for programming which is included in its [User Fees Policies and Procedures](#)¹ and is reflected below.

TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL PARKS & RECREATION - ESTABLISHMENT OF FEES FOR PROGRAMS

1. Program Costs and Fees: The costs of programs, excluding aquatic programs, will be determined by totaling direct costs, such as the costs of specialized employees and equipment, and consumable materials and supplies, and dividing the total cost by the minimum number of participants in the program.

a. Residents will pay a fee that will cover at least 100% of those costs. Youth program fees (for those 18 and under) will be set to only cover 100% of the direct costs. Adult program fees (for those over 18) will pay 100% of the direct costs plus an assessed 10% administrative charge.

b. Non-residents will pay the fee of a resident, based on the program, plus a 20% non-resident surcharge.

c. Non-resident Fees for Athletic Teams: Teams that register for athletic leagues will be charged an additional \$10 per person fee for each team member that does not reside within Orange County or the Chapel Hill town limits.

d. Contract Instructors set their own fees based on market rate, agreeable to the Parks and Recreation Director or his designee.

¹ <https://www.townofchapelhill.org/home/showpublisheddocument/35130/637478850410170000>

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e. The Town reserves the right to set fees that include indirect costs and/or that are based on market rate.

2. Aquatic program fees: will be set utilizing the program cost and fee model described above and/or market rates.

3. Street Fair Fee: Booth fees will be based on market rate.

4. Program Improvement Cost Recovery Fee: If for a specific program, costs of special equipment or facility improvement can be identified, surcharges may be added to the program's user fee to recover these costs over the life of the equipment or improvement.

Council Question:

What state and federal sources of funding are available to the Town to help support our parks plan?

Staff Response:

The State's Parks and Recreation Trust Fund and the federal / state Land and Water Conservation Fund are two large matching grants that are available to agencies to support park development. Both programs prioritize applicants with current comprehensive plans and site master plans. The State funds or administers several [additional grant programs](#)². Listings of additional grant sources are maintained by the [Recreation Resources Service](#)³ and [National Recreation and Park Association](#)⁴.

Council Question:

If I remember correctly, haven't we already allocated funds for the Cedar Falls tennis courts? Are additional improvements needed or has the work not started yet?

Staff Response:

Construction has not started yet. The project has been working its way through the design, permitting, and public input processes. The landscape architecture and engineering firm contracted to complete the design plans recently provided 90% drawings which included an updated opinion of probable construction cost and a 20% contingency. This amount is \$1,784,106, which is \$981,203 above the previously allocated 2019 project budget of \$802,903 that was derived from the design professionals' estimate and athletic court lighting contractor. The project could be formally bid out in order to get the actual pricing; however, it will not be able to move forward to construction until sufficient funds are identified.

² <https://www.ncparks.gov/more-about-us/grants/>

³ <https://rrs.cnr.ncsu.edu/grant-resources/>

⁴ <https://www.nrpa.org/our-work/Grant-Fundraising-Resources/>

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Council Question:

What are the staff's recommendations for prioritization of funds for repairs of existing facilities v. creating new facilities?

Staff Response:

Staff believes that it is crucially important to maintain the facilities that the Town already has within its inventory, as failing to do so can result in significant safety and liability issues in addition to negative experiences and reduced public trust. Staff also acknowledges that Chapel Hill Parks and Recreation lacks several amenities added by other locales in recent years – for example, a splash pad and an inclusive playground – and has fallen behind its ability to meet growth and demand in several areas – for example, pickleball and tennis court inventories and meeting the needs and expectations of teens and their families with a modern teen-focused facility.

Council Question:

Would the inclusive playground replace the existing Cedar Falls playground? If not, where is the thinking on where it could be located?

Staff Response:

Staff recommends adding the inclusive playground to the splash pad feasibility study. This will help to determine the most suitable location(s) for these amenities and address a potential interest of having water or misting features included within the playground design. If the inclusive playground were to be placed at Cedar Falls as a plan indicated, then it would replace the existing playground. It may or may not be located on the same footprint as the existing playground.

Council Question:

Could you please share more details about the situation with Hope Gardens?

Staff Response:

Hope Gardens, a community garden formerly coordinated by UNC students together with a non-profit board and housed on Town-owned open space located at 2200 Homestead Road, will need to relocate in order for the new Homestead Gardens housing development to be constructed. After a Hope Gardens board meeting on March 28, 2022, the Town was advised that a majority of board members present voted to dissolve Hope Gardens, the 501(c)(3) organization which had worked closely with student leaders. The gardeners will be able to continue to use the current garden site through the summer.

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Individuals involved with the former Hope Gardens board have been actively working with the Town for more than two years to ascertain the next phase of the community garden as current gardeners and the Town's Departments of Affordable Housing and Community Connections and Parks and Recreation are very interested in seeing the community garden project continue. A community garden is seen as an important amenity within the Homestead Gardens development and a key strategy to addressing food insecurity within the town. The approved site plan for the Homestead Gardens project includes a new proposed location for a community garden on the northern end of the 2200 Homestead Rd. property, which is accessible off of Weaver Dairy Rd. Extension and adjacent to the Vineyard Square community.

The development team hopes to finalize a development and funding plan for the reconstruction of the community garden by this fall. Parks and Recreation would then collaborate with current gardeners, partners, and nearby residents to develop a suitable operational model for the site.

Council Question:

What criteria were used to establish the priorities in the 2013 Parks master plan?

Staff Response:

The priorities in the 2013 Comprehensive Parks Plan were determined through a collective analysis of previous planning efforts, community surveys and public input, national and state studies on outdoor recreation demand, benchmarking against other communities, and facility conditions. Standards included in the 1995 National Recreation and Park Association's publication "Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Guidelines" were also considered as the Chapel Hill community's specific needs were determined.

Council Question:

Are there accepted standards that can be used to assess the adequacy of a town's recreational facilities?

Staff Response:

The National Recreation and Park Association prepares the most comprehensive source of data benchmarks and insights for park and recreation providers and publishes the [NRPA Agency Performance Review](#)⁵, an annual report summarizing the benchmarking data contributed by nearly 1,100 park and recreation agencies. Previously, the agency provided the [sets of standards](#)⁶ used by many agencies.

⁵ <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/research-papers/agency-performance-review/>

⁶ <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2019/november/nrpa-park-metrics-replaces-outdated-nrpa-areas-and-facilities-standards/>

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Additionally, the Recreation Resources Service operated out of NC State University regularly compiles a [Municipal and County Parks and Recreation Services Study](#)⁷. These reports provide benchmarking data related to different areas including facility inventories and trends.

⁷ <https://rrs.cnr.ncsu.edu/resource-library/>

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Responses to Council Questions #2

ITEM #2: Parks and Recreation Update

Council Question:

The Parks and Rec Department would like to redo the comprehensive parks plan; some on the Parks and Rec advisory board are advocating for an incremental update process instead. Can you let me know what the rough difference in cost and scope of the two approaches would be? I know that one of the department's concerns is that they won't be as competitive for grants without a completely updated plan; do we know whether a system of regular incremental updates would meet granting agency requirements also?

Staff Response:

It generally takes 12-24 months to complete a comprehensive plan without utilizing an incremental update process. The difference in costs of the two approaches is unknown as a request for proposals for the project has not been issued; the pricing will vary depending on the final scope of work and on the level of involvement of consultants. Staff recommends that the components of the plan remain the same whether the plan is completed in whole or incrementally. The Town's plan would not meet the criteria for certain grants, such as the State Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, until it is fully updated.