

Information Item

Date: September 14, 2021

To: Mayor, Mayor Pro Tempore, and Members of the City Council

From: Johnnie Taylor, Assistant City Manager
Aaron King, Interim Assistant City Manager
William L. Royston, Recreation Director

Subject:
City of Winston-Salem Park Needs

Strategic Focus Area: Livable Neighborhoods

Strategic Objective: No

Strategic Plan Action Item: No

Key Work Item: No



As part of the development of the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Parks and Open Space Plan Update, an analysis of the current park system was conducted utilizing two methods: an acres per 1,000 population metric and one-mile service radius analysis. As of 2019, Winston-Salem had 15.29 acres of parkland per 1,000 population, above the national average of 9.9 acres per 1,000 population listed in the 2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review. This metric shows that the overall system is not lacking in acres of parkland but does not address if there are location-specific deficiencies. The one-mile service radius analysis was utilized to determine if deficiencies exist in specific locations throughout the City. The analysis determined that deficiencies existed in three geographic areas of the City:

- West Winston-Salem
- South Winston-Salem/Forsyth County
- Southeast Winston-Salem/Forsyth County

Deficiencies were also noted along the outer edge of the Winston-Salem city limits adjacent to smaller municipalities such as Clemmons, Walkertown, and Rural Hall.

This information was further analyzed based on public input gathered at public input meetings and through an online survey. When asked where a new park should be located, the top five responses were:

1. Downtown Winston-Salem (18%)
2. No new parks are needed (17%)
3. Northwest Winston-Salem (13%)
4. West Winston-Salem (11%)
5. South Winston-Salem (9%)

East and Southeast Winston-Salem received 7% and 6% of the responses respectively ranking them 7th and 8th out of 10 possible selection choices. Since these responses were received, the City has opened 2nd Street Park and is developing Merschel Park in Downtown and opened Malloy Park and is developing Long Creek Park in the Northwest area of the City. Both west and south Winston-Salem have experienced a significant amount of residential development over the past decade. Finding available land for a new park within the western portion of the City will be difficult; however, there is potential to develop joint-use partnerships with other organizations such as the School System to provide recreational amenities to residents. An excellent opportunity for providing park and recreational facilities in south Winston-Salem/Forsyth County is the retirement of the Old Salisbury Construction and Demolition Landfill. In discussions with City/County Utilities, the current projected closure date for the landfill is 2028. Though this date could change, it does represent an opportunity for the reuse of City-owned land. Furthermore, due to its location, there is potential to develop a partnership with the County Parks and Recreation Department in managing such a park. This partnership would be similar to the partnership in place between Forsyth and Guilford Counties for Triad Park. Given the nature of the site, the amenities that could be developed would be limited to more passive and at will recreation options such as walking trails.

As part of the public input gathered in the process, citizens were asked their opinion on the greatest concern facing the City parks system. Maintenance was the number one response at 48%. Given this response, the plan directly addresses maintenance concerns in a standalone section in the plan. A Deferred Maintenance Assessment of the Recreation and Parks system was completed concurrently with the Parks and Open Space Plan Update. Results of the Assessment are included in the Deferred Maintenance Chapter of the Update. The Assessment identified \$43,830,000 in deferred maintenance needs across the City's parks, recreation centers, pools, and golf courses. While establishing new facilities is important to addressing deficiencies in select areas, staff determined the more critical need for the near future is addressing deferred maintenance based on public input and the findings of the Deferred Maintenance Assessment. Though maintenance should be the focus, the City should not dismiss unique opportunities to expand the system if they become available.

Map 4 of the Plan, Proposed Facilities, does identify potential park sites in the South and East Wards. These sites were proposed as part of the original Parks and Open Space Plan or subsequent adopted area plans. No new park sites were proposed as part of the update process given the focus on deferred maintenance. Below are listed specific park and amenity recommendations for the South and East Wards:

- Old Salisbury Landfill: Complete a feasibility study to determine the possibility of developing the site for passive recreational use upon its closure.
- South Forsyth County: Develop a new park in south Forsyth County to serve both City and County residents.
- Kernersville Road/Northern Beltway (I-74) Activity Center: Consider the establishment of a new community park near the Kernersville Road/I-74 Beltway Activity Center.
- Southeast Winston-Salem/Forsyth County: Develop a new neighborhood park in the Southeast Winston-Salem/Forsyth County area. A master plan should be developed with extensive public participation to ensure that the park meet the needs of area residents.

- South Winston-Salem/Forsyth County: Establish a new recreation or community center in south Winston-Salem/Forsyth County to serve population growth in the area.
- South Winston-Salem/Forsyth: Consider including soccer, multipurpose, and/or ball fields as part of a new district or community park in south Winston-Salem/Forsyth County. Survey residents within the area to assess demand for different field types.

Due to a request to specifically identify, additional locations for additional park land in the East Ward are identified in Map 1.

Deferred/Routine Maintenance

The Recreation and Parks Department presented a Deferred Maintenance update in March to the Public Works Committee that quantified recent capital improvements from the 2018 GO and 2/3 Bond funds. Once current funding resources have been depleted, the City will have a remaining \$24.1M in additional needed improvements to address deferred maintenance needs that were identified in the assessment. Although staff works daily to address deferred and routine maintenance, the City will need to be strategic in addressing any maintenance needs while investing future funding into park infrastructure to mitigate further decline.