

**GREAT PARKS, GREAT COMMUNITIES  
2010 – 2020 Park System Plan**

**Fairfax County Park Authority**

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## Introduction

*Great Communities have Great Parks.* With over 22,500 acres in 416 parks, the Fairfax County park system is well used and highly regarded. Parks are an essential element of life to residents of Fairfax County, about 80% of whom visit our parks each year to enjoy nature, historic sites, trails, sports, fitness, aquatics, programs, classes, events and so much more. Accredited and nationally recognized for excellence by the award of the prestigious Gold Medal for Parks and Recreation, Fairfax County's parks are ranked among the best in the nation.

As wonderful as our parks are, we must constantly strive to make sure they meet the changing needs of our diversifying and rapidly urbanizing community. As we look to the future, Fairfax County will continue to grow and change:

*Growing employment centers will attract a varied workforce*

*More people with diverse backgrounds will reside here*

*Many parts of the County will evolve into more urban places*

*Lifestyles and leisure preferences will continue to change*

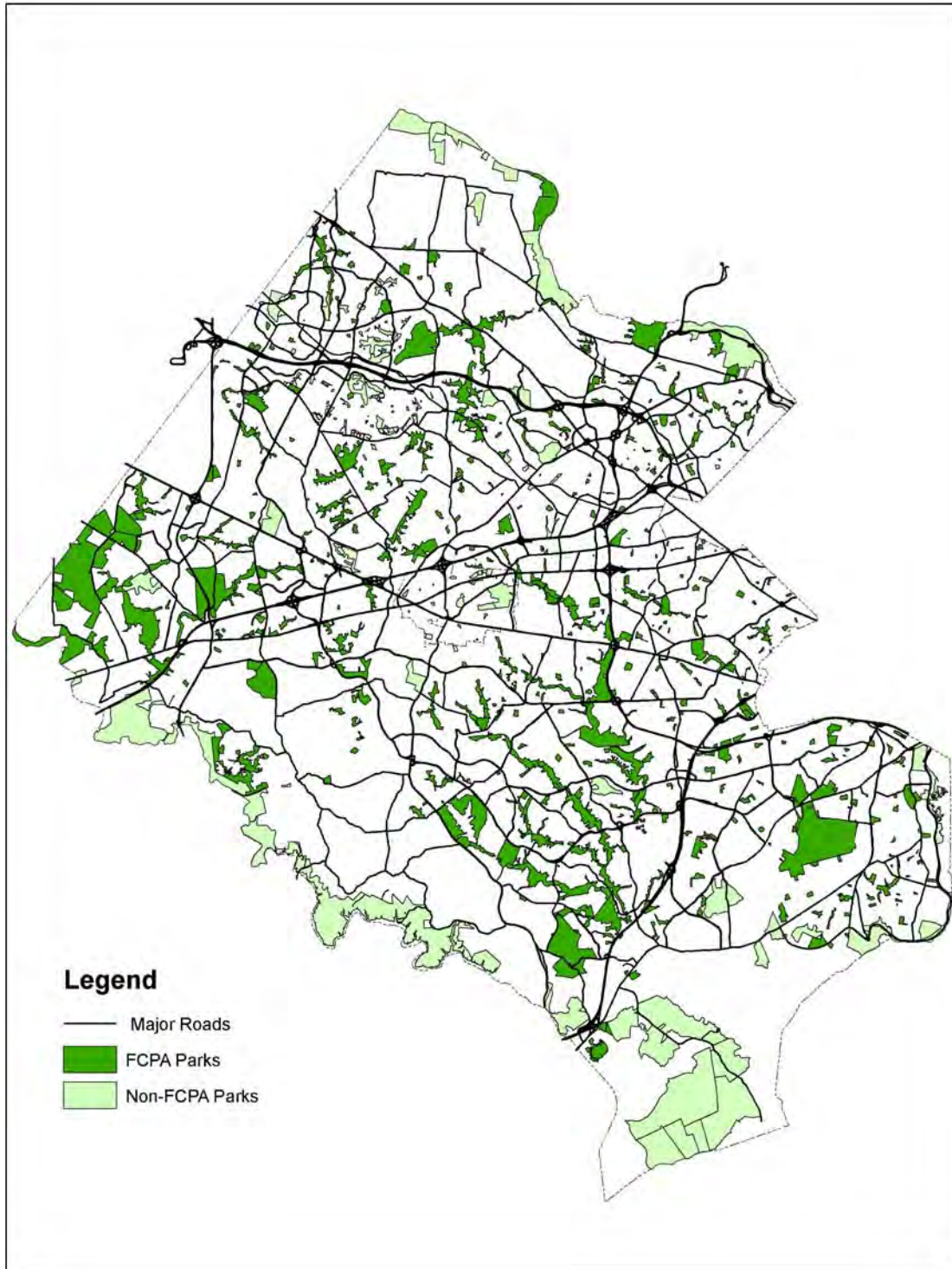
The Park Authority works to balance the park system in accordance with our mission to help make Fairfax County a healthy and unique place. The Park Authority's multi-faceted mission is to protect environmental and cultural resources within Fairfax County, as well as to create and sustain quality recreational facilities. The Great Parks, Great Communities planning process was created to incorporate public views on how the park system should be balanced in the future as communities across the County evolve. This multi-year planning process has resulted in a long range plan to guide future park development and stewardship.

The Fairfax County Park Authority initiated the Great Parks, Great Communities planning project in February 2007 to develop a comprehensive park system plan to guide park planning in Fairfax County through the year 2020. This effort addresses the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to planning for park land acquisition, resource protection and development activities over a ten year period. The Great Parks, Great Communities project objectives include the following:

- Collect and analyze data relevant to park and recreation resources in Fairfax County to better understand the park system within a local context;
- Work with the community to ascertain public attitudes and preferences with regard to the existing park system; identify issues and develop strategies for sustaining the resources of the park system; and identify changes needed to meet future needs, preferences and demographic shifts;
- Tie together previously established Park Authority objectives, policies, standards, and priorities for the protection and stewardship of natural and cultural resources and the development and management of recreation resources; and

- Create a comprehensive long range park system plan that provides recommendations and priorities for balancing the park system to meet existing and future park needs and serves as an overarching plan to guide park planning efforts at the individual park master plan level.

Map 1: Public Parkland in Fairfax County



## **Our Park System**

### ***History***

The Park Authority was created by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors in 1950 when the Virginia General Assembly passed the Park Authorities Act (Sec. 15.1-1228 to 15.1-1238.1, Ch. 27, Code of Virginia) which permitted counties to establish individual authorities to preserve open space and acquire and develop park facilities throughout the state. The Park Authority has been an important part of the County's landscape since then.

Over the course of our sixty year history, the Park Authority has grown and evolved to meet the changing needs of the growing County. The Park Authority's first land purchase was a 16-acre tract in Great Falls, which later became the core of Great Falls National Park. In 1959 a 38-acre tract in Annandale was acquired and became the site of the Park Authority's first headquarters and Hidden Oaks Nature Center. The first park bond referendum was approved by County voters in 1959 and provided for the acquisition of 75 neighborhood and community parks and approximately 20 acres of stream valley lands. Around this time, the Park Authority acquired Sully Historic Site, an 18th century plantation now listed on the National Register of Historic Places that was built in 1794 by Richard Bland Lee, Northern Virginia's first Congressman.

During the second decade of operation, the Park Authority experienced substantial growth in land acquisition and park development. Between 1960 and 1970, parkland in Fairfax County increased from 414 acres to 4,615 acres. The 1960s saw the acquisition and development of Burke Lake Park, which at the time was the largest outdoor recreational park in the greater Washington D.C. area; the opening of Twin Lakes Golf Course and Lake Fairfax, developed with revenue bonds to be the Park Authority's first revenue generating facilities; and the acquisition of Colvin Run Mill, Lake Accotink, and land for development of Wakefield and Mount Vernon District Parks.

Wakefield Recreation Center (RECenter), opened in 1977 and later renamed Audrey Moore RECenter, became a model for other park and recreation organizations throughout the nation and set the stage for the subsequent construction of the Mount Vernon, Robert E. Lee, Providence, Oak Marr, Spring Hill, South Run, George Washington, and Cub Run RECenters.

During the 1970s and 1980s, years of rapid growth for the Park Authority, recreation opportunities were diversified with the development of Green Spring Gardens horticultural center and park, Kidwell Farm and the equestrian center at Frying Pan Park, golf courses, and athletic fields. The number of nature/visitor centers in operation to serve the community expanded to five and the Park Authority undertook the restoration of Dranesville Tavern, Cabell's Mill and Walney at Ellanor C. Lawrence Park, the Manor House at Green Spring Gardens, and the Wakefield Chapel.

The Park Authority vigorously continued to pursue its mission during the fifteen year span addressed by the 1995-2010 Park Comprehensive Plan. More than fifty new

parks were added to the system through the acquisition of more than 6,500 acres of parkland. Although each new park contributes unique value, several of the more notable additions over this time span include Laurel Hill Park in Lorton, encompassing nearly 1,200 acres that includes a premiere 18-hole golf course, planned equestrian center, expansive trails, sports facilities, and various cultural and natural resources. Significant holdings were also acquired in the rural western reaches of the County to create the Sully Woodlands area, with over 2,000 acres including Ellick Preserve and its globally rare oak-hickory forests and natural communities. Old Colchester Park and Preserve in Lorton adds 139 acres on Mason Neck and fronts on the Occoquan River.

As of 2010, the County operates seven separate golf facilities and manages over 750 athletic fields including rectangle and diamond fields. Increasingly these fields are updated with synthetic turf and supplemental lighting to address increased demand for their usage. May 2006 saw the completion of the forty-mile long section of the Cross County Trail, linking many of these elements across the County.

Beyond the more traditional role of open space management, changing demographics in the region have led the Park Authority to expand and change as well. The Water Mine Family Swimmin' Hole was opened in 1996 at Lake Fairfax and offers more than an acre of slide, flumes, sprays, showers, floatables and interactive play features, all encircled by a tubing river. Starting with Blake Lane Park in 2000, the Park Authority now operates seven off-leash dog parks across the County. April 2004 saw the opening of the Wakefield Skate Park for skateboarders and BMX riders. Farmers Markets, operating from May to November in twelve locations, continue to increase in popularity.

*Table 1: Park Authority Growth*

	<b>FY2001</b>	<b>FY2009</b>	<b>% Growth</b>
Park Acreage	20,063 acres	22,533 acres	12.3%
Parks	363	416	14.6%
Picnic Shelters	17	33	94.1%
Dog Park	1	7	600%
Irrigated Athletic Fields	82	136	65.8%
Lighted Athletic Fields	57	100	75.4%
Synthetic Athletic Fields	0	22	New
Athletic Fields Maintained <sup>1</sup>	296	795	168.5%
Historic Sites	60	87	45%
Hiking & Fitness Trails	204 miles	306 miles	50%
Structures (square feet)	863,302	1,183,127	37%
Number (count) of Capital Equipment	397	589	48.3%

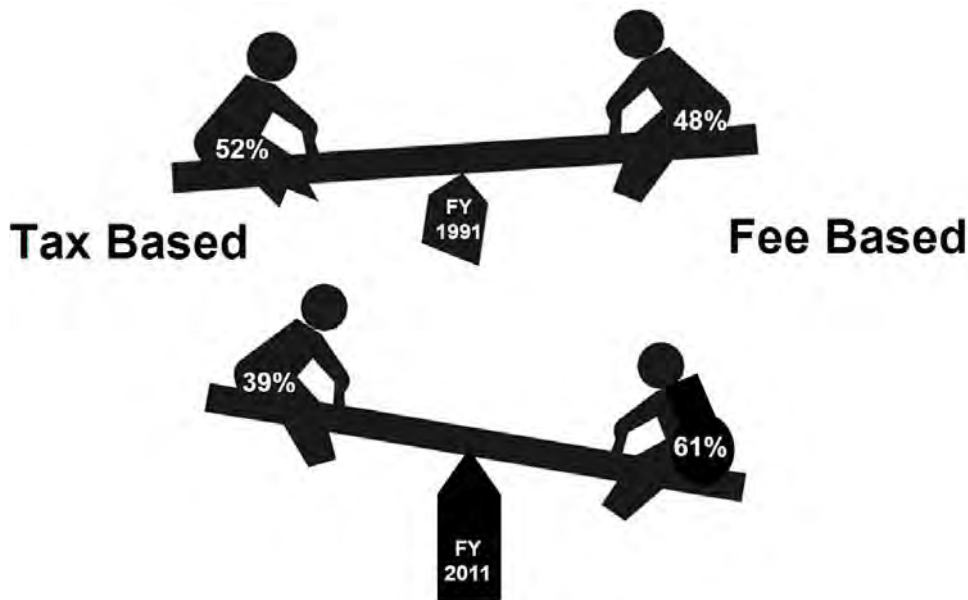
	FY2001	FY2009	% Growth
Items Maintained			
Classes, Camps and Programs	81,337	156,306	92%
Full and Partial Field Adoptions	129	135	4.6%
Volunteer Hours	155,684	193,916	24.5%

<sup>†</sup> Includes athletic fields owned by both Fairfax County Public Schools and the Park Authority.

### Funding

Park funding is provided in three traditional fund types. County General Fund contributions from taxes fund general park administration and operation of non-revenue parks. The Park Revenue Fund consists of park revenues generated from fees and rentals produced by operations of revenue-generating sites. Land acquisition and facility development and renovation are generally funded through voter-approved General Obligations Bonds.

Figure 1: General Fund versus Revenue Fund Appropriation



Source: Fairfax County Department of Management and Budget

Since the 1990s, a greater reliance on the Revenue Fund and revenue sources has been necessary as the percentage of the overall County budget allocated to parks has decreased from 1.2% to 0.7%. The absorption of operational costs by the Revenue Fund has added pressures to revenue facilities such as RECenters and golf courses, especially as these facilities age and competition from private-sector providers increases. Shifts in pricing, cost centers and fee generation have been necessary to

sustain the Revenue Fund as it absorbs more General Fund costs. In the extreme budget cut years from FY 2008-10, the Revenue Fund viability has been extremely fragile. Continued revenue growth depends on facility development and reinvestment, which requires capital funding.

Capital funding through voter-approved bonds has been successfully used since 1959 to purchase parkland and build the park system. From its first land purchase of a 16-acre tract in Great Falls, the Park Authority has expanded its holdings to include more than 22,500 acres, about 9.5% of the entire County acreage. Acquired through the consistent support of Fairfax County citizens and the Board of Supervisors, eleven park referenda have been approved since the inception of the Park Authority, providing more than \$463 million for land acquisition and park development. Additional land donated through public-spirited citizens and the land development process has greatly contributed to the County's open space network.

As the County population increased and recreation became an essential part of the County's community life, the emphasis of the Park Authority gradually expanded from land acquisition to facility development. Park bond referenda earmarked 52% of total bond funds for development in 1971; 67% in 1977; and 92% in 1982. In 1988, 68% of the \$77 million bond referendum was allocated for construction projects with a significant portion of this funding allocated to major renovation projects for the first time. In a County with diminishing open space, the Park Authority remains committed to seeking land acquisition opportunities and constructing an ever broadening range of recreation facilities. This commitment has, over time, led to an increasing focus on renovation of existing facilities and an emphasis on resource protection projects, termed as stewardship. With this focus, the allocation of capital funds has also shifted. This is demonstrated in the division of funds approved through the 2008 referendum allocating \$11.64 million to stewardship projects, \$19.74 million to renovations, \$14.38 million to land acquisition and \$19.23 million to park development.

In addition to these three funding means, public parks and recreational facilities may be provided by private entities through the development process. Developers of residential and mixed use communities frequently proffer, or offer to provide, facilities as a condition of a rezoning or similar action. These proffers have provided, and will continue to contribute, many key recreational facilities to County residents.

### ***Sustainability***

As the Park Authority continues to acquire land, build facilities and manage various natural and cultural resources, the ability to care for and sustain them is essential and must remain in balance with shifting needs, use patterns, and financial resources. The next Agency Strategic Plan should focus on strategies to balance the sustainability of growing land resources, service demands and stewardship responsibility within the context of aging infrastructure and facilities, extensive community input, changing development patterns, shifting resources and political environments. Strategies must acknowledge the ongoing financial and staff resources required to sustain facilities and



that some facilities desired by the public may be required/expected to be funded entirely through user fees.

### **Guiding Principles, Policies and Countywide Plans**

In 2010, the Park Authority owns over 22,500 acres of parkland in 416 parks that provide stewardship, interpretation, leisure and recreational opportunities through a rich variety of natural resources, facilities and services that enhance the quality of life for all Fairfax County residents, in accordance with its mission:

*“To set aside public spaces for and assist citizens in the protection and enhancement of environmental values, diversity of natural habitats and cultural heritage to guarantee that these resources will be available to both present and future generations. To create and sustain quality facilities and services which offer citizens opportunities for recreation, improvement of their physical and mental well-being, and enhancement of their quality of life.”*

The Park Authority has adopted a number of over-arching, Countywide plans to guide the agency’s efforts in different thematic areas. These documents are available on the Park Authority’s web page (links are provided below). Hard copies may be obtained by calling the Planning and Development Division at 703-324-8741. The guiding documents include the following:

- 2006-2011 [Strategic Plan](#) addresses several areas and initiatives which support the agency mission and represent major agency undertakings. A balanced scorecard approach is used to measure the Park Authority’s strategic performance. A new Strategic Plan will be adopted for 2012-2016 along with annual implementation plans that set forth specific strategic projects.
- The [Business Plan](#) creates a ‘road map’ to enable the Park Authority to stabilize its operations and position itself to better serve and meet the needs of the citizens of Fairfax County through a business model that enables the Authority to be more financially sustainable. Key steps in the development of the Business Plan were the identification, review and analysis of all core services and programs, determining full costs for each of the core program areas and constructing a sustainability model that accounts for all costs (direct, indirect and overhead) as well as annualized capitalized expenses for ongoing system repair and replacement. This funding model will be applied to all programs and services for the ongoing close management of the organizations operations. The Business Plan contains a clear strategy for ongoing investment in new and renewed revenue generating facilities and programs through the CIP with regularly scheduled bond referenda. Finally, a cost-recovery target has been developed for each of the core programs and service areas. The Business Plan will be adopted late 2011.

- [Park Authority Policy Manual](#) reflects adopted Park Authority Board policies and guides decision making and park operations.
- Parks and Recreation [Needs Assessment](#), completed in 2004, identifies recreation needs, establishes parkland and facility service level standards and proposes a \$377 million 10-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to meet park and recreation needs.
- Countywide [Parks and Recreation Policy Plan](#) element of the County Comprehensive Plan, updated in 2005, incorporates new service level standards, land acquisition criteria, revised Park Classifications and Countywide policies to protect park resources. The County Comprehensive Plan, Policy Plan also includes other guidance that supports Park Authority work, including the [Environmental Quality Corridor](#) policy.
- [Natural Resource Management Plan](#), adopted by the Park Authority Board in 2004, addresses natural resource issues and strategies. The plan contains seven elements: (1) Natural Resource Management Planning, (2) Vegetation, (3) Wildlife, (4) Water Resources, (5) Air Quality, (6) Human Impact on Parklands, and (7) Education. Each of these elements is explored in the plan and strategies and issues are detailed. A separate implementation plan sets out specific projects relative to this plan.
- [Cultural Resource Management Plan](#) (CRMP), adopted by the Park Authority Board in 2006 addresses cultural resource issues and strategies. The plan identifies 48 issues in 11 topic areas concerning management and protection of cultural resources. The areas include (1) planning, (2) archaeology, (3) Civil War sites, (4) artifacts and collections, (5) historic buildings, structures, objects and traditional cultural properties, (6) Fairfax County Historic Overlay Districts, (7) listings, (8) cemeteries, (9) cultural landscapes, (10) the human impact on cultural resources and (11) stewardship education. The CRMP proposes strategies to address each of the issues. A separate implementation plan sets out specific projects relative to this plan.
- [Urban Parks Framework](#) endorsed by the Park Authority Board in 2009, establishes an urban parks typology, urban park service level standards and framework for the development of urban parks in the County's growth and transit centers. The Framework details the several urban park design elements, which include (1) context/location, (2) function/purpose, (3) access, (4) ownership, management, and operation, (5) amenities, (6) form/visuals, (7) general length of stay, and (8) size and service area. It also describes the urban park typology: (1) pocket park, (2) common green, (3) civic plaza, and (4) recreational urban park.
- [Trail Strategy Plan](#) examines the issues surrounding trail development, collects and analyzes the relevant data concerning trail projects, and devises

the best process for objectively evaluating and prioritizing trail projects.

- Countywide Facility Lifecycle Replacement Schedules use facility installation dates and facility life expectancy standards based on historic operations and maintenance records and apply the best knowledge of the parks and recreation industry. Facilities should be replaced according to this schedule to ensure they provide service or capacity at the level for which they were designed while receiving routine maintenance.
- Comprehensive Financial Management Plan provides revenue and expenditure projections and principles for the management of the Park Authority's Revenue Fund (Fund 170) and other related issues.

A Park Authority Marketing and Communication Plan is being developed to provide strategic guidance for the agency's marketing and communication activities. A draft of the plan is anticipated in the fall of 2011.

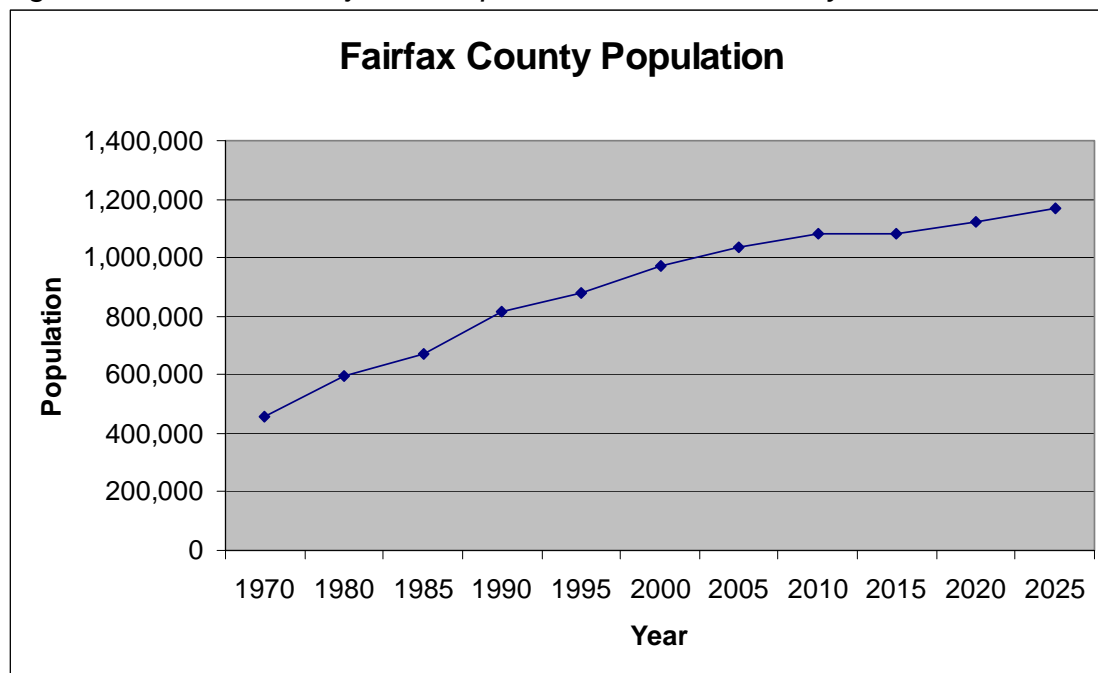
## **Countywide Demographics and Trends**

### ***Demographics***

The face of Fairfax County has transformed dramatically from its rural, agricultural beginnings. Although the County was not officially created until 1742, the area had been home to Native Americans for centuries and to English settlers since the 1600s. The climate and character of the land was well suited to subsistence living and agricultural pursuits which for many years would shape the growth of the County. Many were attracted to the benefits of the region and the population slowly began to grow. In 1790, the County's population was estimated at 12,000. From 1790 until 1930, the population continued to gradually grow, taking 140 years to double the population to an estimated 25,000.

That "sleepy" rate of growth, however, was soon to change. The 1930s ushered in the tenure of President Franklin D. Roosevelt along with dramatic increases in federal programs and agencies. The resultant demand for additional employees combined with the increasing availability of affordable automobiles began to dramatically change the character of Fairfax County. From 1930 to 1950, a period of only twenty years, the County's population had nearly quadrupled from 25,000 residents to almost 99,000. Further expansion of the federal government spurred continued growth through the 1950s while a diversified economy exceeded the agricultural base for the first time.

Figure 2: Actual and Projected Population in Fairfax County



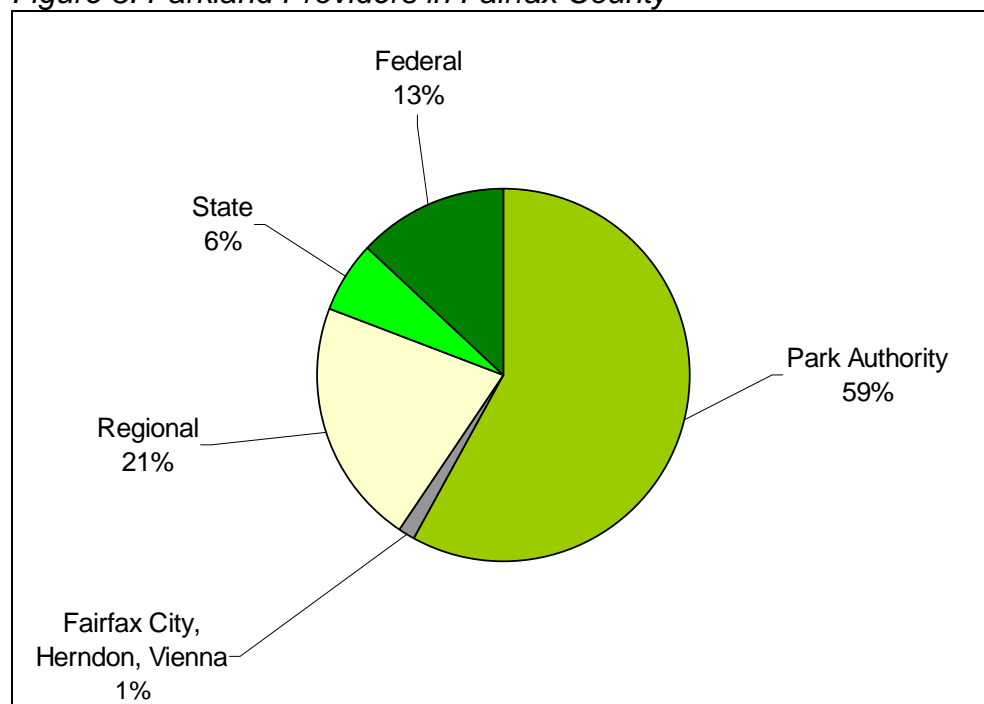
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010 Decennial Censuses, 2015 to 2025 estimates and forecasts, Fairfax County Department of Systems Management for Human Services.

Population growth leveled in the 1960s in a decade characterized by migration of residents from cities to suburbs. The 1970s and 1980s reflected a dramatic influx of private corporations and industries, bringing many new residents to the County. By 1990, the County's population had grown to over 818,000 people, doubling the total in 1970. Growth of high-tech and international companies continued to drive the economy and population growth through the 1990s and the first decade of 21st century. The 2010 Decennial Census reports the population count of Fairfax County at over 1,081,000 residents.

### ***Fairfax County of 2010***

The Fairfax County of 2010, which includes the Towns of Clifton, Herndon and Vienna, covers a land area in excess of 252,800 acres. Of that portion of the County designated for park and recreation uses, the Fairfax County Park Authority protects and maintains over 22,500 acres, or approximately 9.5% of the County's total land area. Over half of the public parkland in Fairfax County (58%) is owned and managed by the Park Authority. Other providers include the Federal government (including the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management), the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, and local municipalities. Additional open space (not shown on the chart) is held privately by non-profit organizations, private clubs, and homeowners' associations.

Figure 3: Parkland Providers in Fairfax County



Source: Fairfax County Geographic Information System

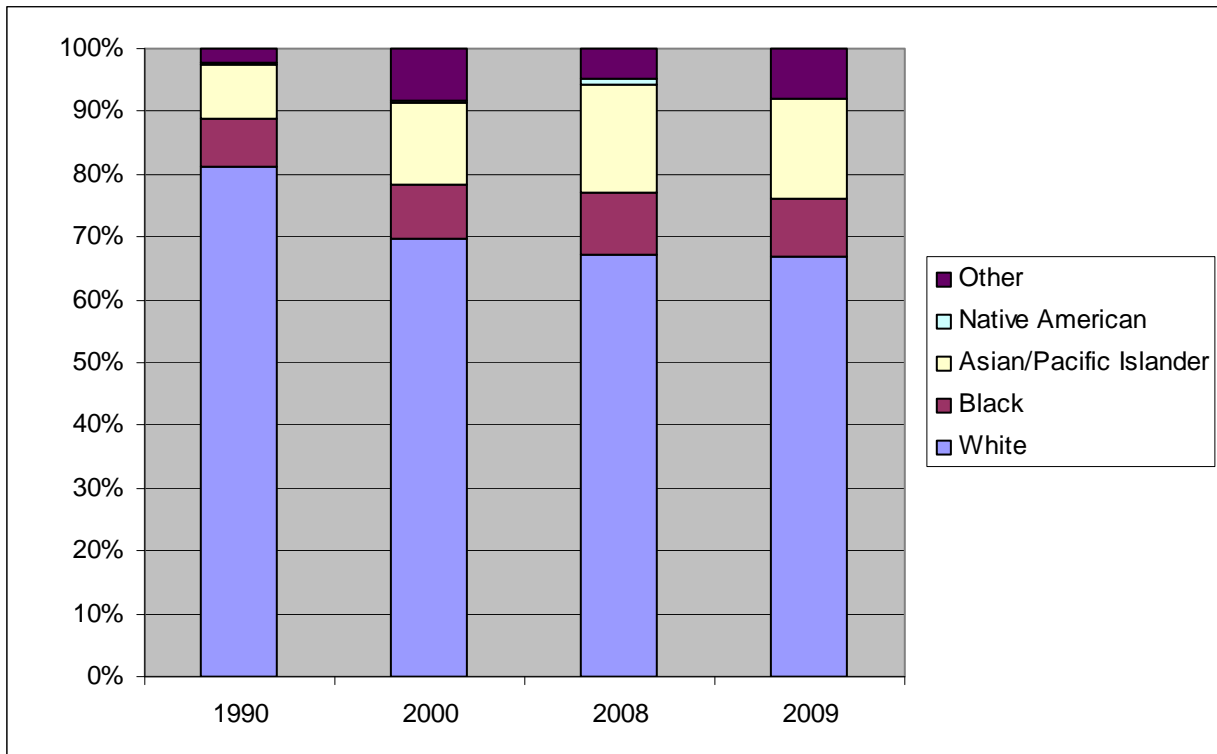
### ***Fairfax of the Future***

As easily witnessed throughout the County's history, the only constant element is change. The Park Authority must keep an eye to future trends if it is to continue to effectively meet the needs of Fairfax County's residents. Indeed, this is the driving force behind the **Great Parks, Great Communities Plan** – to establish a clear path to evaluate changing demographics and demands and to assimilate these into the Park Authority's planning efforts.

Forecasts for the future of Fairfax County indicate a continued expansion of the population, but at a decelerated rate. Whereas the County's population increased by 64,000 residents over the five-year span between 2000 to 2005, it is expected to increase by approximately 37,000 residents between 2010 and 2015. From 1980 to the present time, the number of housing units has increased at a faster rate than the population with an associated trend towards smaller household sizes. This trend is predicted to continue through 2015.

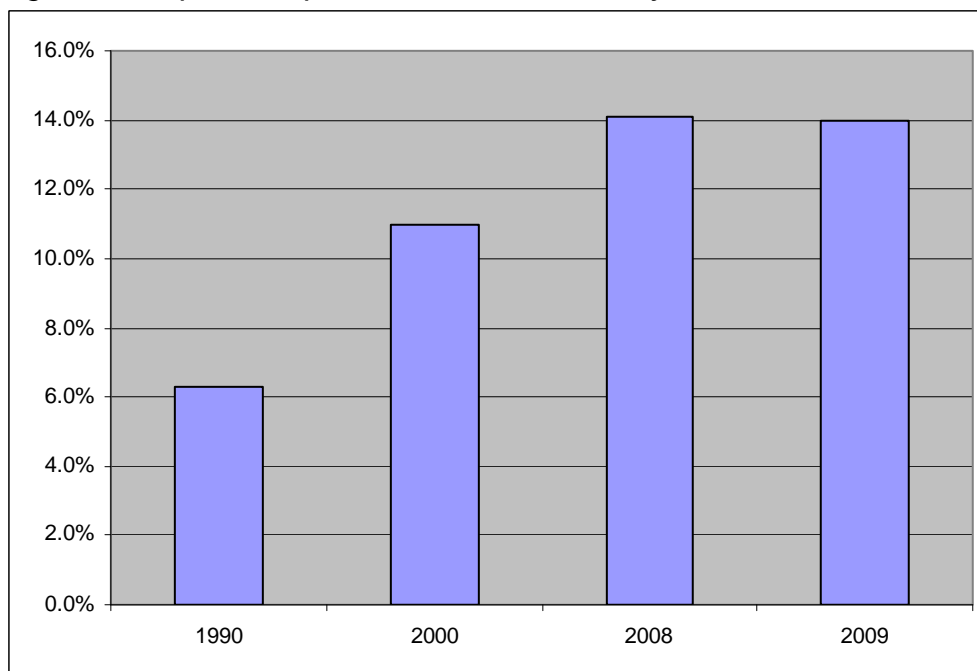
In addition to the increase of total residents, the composition of Fairfax County residents will continue to change over the coming years. Fairfax County's richness in cultural diversity will continue to increase. The 1990 U.S. Decennial Census indicated that less than one quarter of the County's population was comprised of racial and ethnic minorities; 2010 Decennial Census data reports an increase to almost 40%.

Figure 4: Race Composition of Fairfax County Population



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 and 2000 Decennial Censuses and 2008 and 2005-09 Consolidated American Community Survey (ACS). Note that 2009 ACS Other category includes Native American.

Figure 5: Hispanic Population in Fairfax County

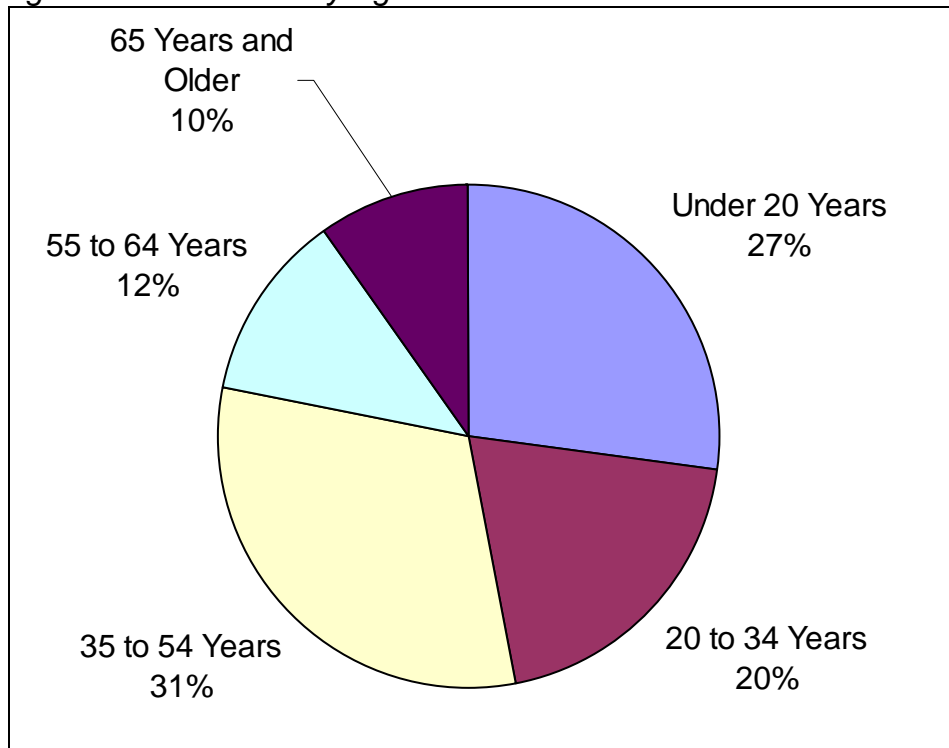


Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 and 2000 Decennial Censuses, 2008 and 2005-09 Consolidated American Community Survey.

As shown on the two previous charts, Hispanics and Asian/Pacific Islanders represent the two fastest growing groups. Indicators reflect that this trend will continue in the years ahead. Associated with the increase in minority populations is the increase in the number of households with persons speaking a language other than English.

The County population's age is another demographic that continues to evolve and has implications for the park system. The Fairfax County of the 1980s reflected a largely younger population with nearly 33% of the population under 20 years of age and nearly 60% of the total population under the age of 35. By 2007, the under-20 population had decreased and the 20 to 54 age brackets accounted for nearly half of the population, with the over-65 age group increasing to nearly 10% of the population. This aging pattern, reflecting national demographic trends, can be primarily attributed to: (1) aging of the Baby Boom generation; (2) drop in the birth rate during the 1970s; and, (3) growth in the elderly population due to increased life expectancies. Similar trends are predicted to continue through 2015 with a further decrease in the under-20 population and increase in the over-65 age bracket.

*Figure 6: Fairfax County Age Distribution in 2008*



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009 American Community Survey.

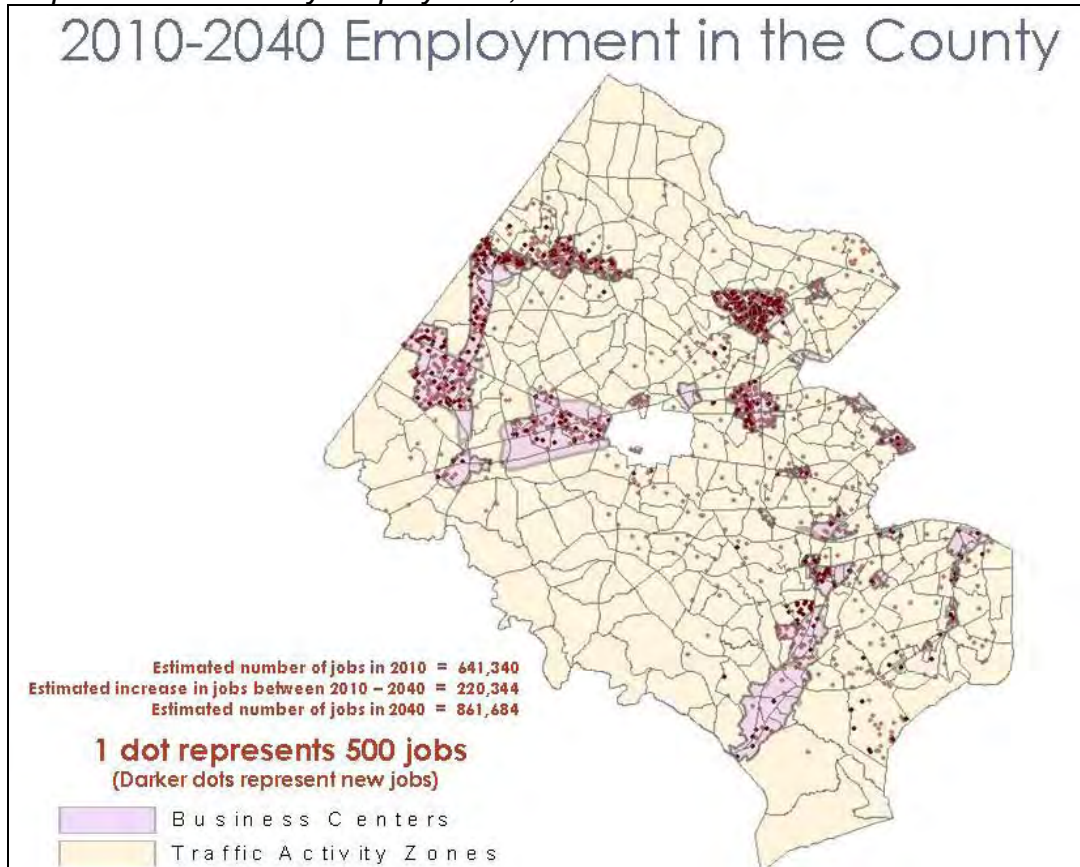
### **Employment Growth**

Fairfax County has evolved into a major employment center within the Washington, DC metropolitan region. While the population doubled in size from 1970 to 2005, the number of jobs located in Fairfax County increased almost six-fold. Map 2 shows the geographical concentration of jobs in the County, both current estimated employment



(2010) and employment projected through 2040. Of the 220,000 new jobs anticipated by 2040, roughly 40% (about 90,000) of those new jobs are projected to be added from 2010 – 2020, the horizon year for this plan. Most of the new jobs will be concentrated in employment centers, such as Tysons Corner, Springfield, Reston and along the Dulles Corridor. Map 3 shows the location of the County's planned growth centers.

*Map 2: Fairfax County Employment, 2010-2040*



Source: Department of Planning and Zoning, COG

### ***Major Anticipated Land Use Changes***

The County's agricultural economy has virtually disappeared. Today it is difficult to preserve any remaining farm land, conserve areas of high environmental and scenic value, or protect open space for passive and active recreation purposes because of land values and the pressure of development. However, continued development and population growth pressures will create additional need for protected open space as well as recreational facilities that will serve the population.

Most of the southern, eastern and central parts of the County are now built out and new development opportunities will primarily be infill or redevelopment in these established areas. There are a few large undeveloped tracts of privately-owned land that remain in the western part of the County, and market forces may easily lead to development of



those few instead of open space preservation or development of recreation facilities. Few large tracts of land remain available for parkland acquisition.

The greatest concentration of new development and associated growth is anticipated to occur in designated, mixed use centers, identified in the Concept for Future Development in the Comprehensive Area Plans. Designated areas include the Tysons Corner Urban Center, major suburban centers (such as the Fairfax Center Area), Transit Station Areas, Community Business Centers and Commercial Revitalization Districts. These areas will absorb the greatest numbers of new residents to Fairfax County and, consequently, will generate the greatest new demand for park and recreation facilities. Map 3 shows the location of these major development centers and their relationship to the park system in Fairfax County. The nature of these mixed use areas will be different than other traditionally suburban areas of the County. As such, the way that park and recreational needs are met in these mixed use urbanizing areas must also be different. The Urban Parks Framework will help guide the integration of parks in many of these urbanizing areas. As described above, the Urban Parks Framework establishes an urban parks typology, urban park service level standards and framework for the development of urban parks in the County's growth and transit centers.

A few recent and anticipated major changes will have a significant impact upon the population and employment of Fairfax County and, therefore, on the demand for parkland and recreational facilities. These major changes include those listed below.

Fort Belvoir BRAC – The Department of Defense's 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) action will result in the relocation of 14,000 – 19,000 employees to Fort Belvoir and the Fort Belvoir North Area (FBNA) by 2011. Additional jobs will be created and new development will occur in the South County region as private sector contractors will be drawn to opportunities created by the BRAC action. The resulting residential and commercial development will create further demand for parkland and facilities in the southern part of the County.

Extension of Metro Rail to Dulles Airport – The extension of Metro along the Dulles Toll Road corridor will provide the basis of planned growth in Tysons Corner and the Reston-Herndon and Dulles Suburban Centers. Eight additional Metro stations are proposed along this route. These stations are planned as focal points for high density development, which will consist of pedestrian-oriented mixed-use development. These areas will add future residential development and increase commercial development adding to the public need for parks and park facilities.

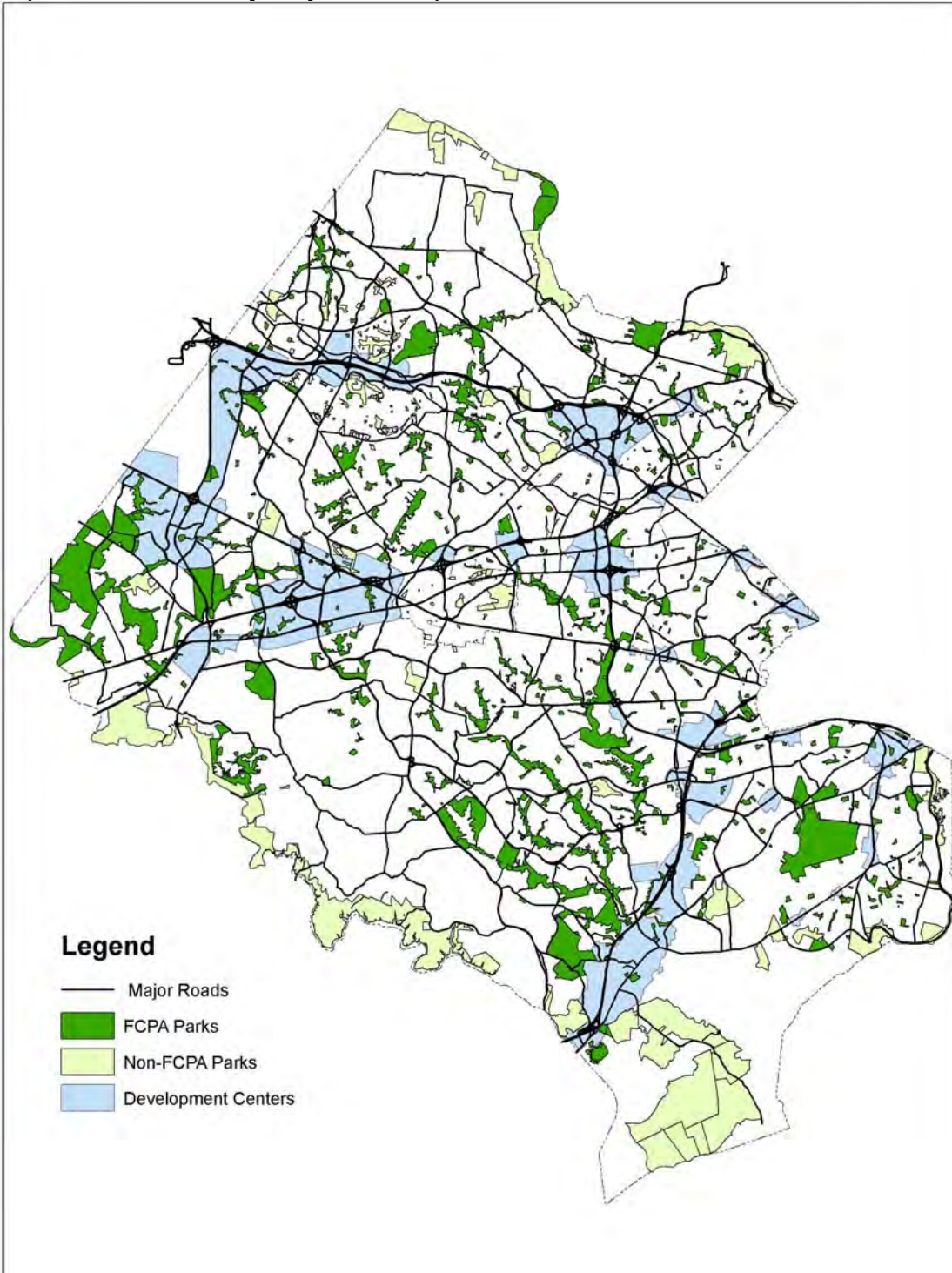
Tysons Corner – The Tysons Corner Land Use and Transportation Study that was initiated in 2005 and adopted in 2010 will allow for significantly higher residential and commercial development in Tysons Corner than previously planned. Plan changes as a result of this study support a major shift in the provision of parks and active recreation through the development process. This plan change will further increase the parkland and recreational facilities needs for Tysons. Continued urbanization of Tysons Corner

will create a need for different types of park and recreation facilities in addition to the typical park and recreation facilities traditionally provided by the Park Authority. A range of urban parks and creative ways to address active recreation needs are addressed in the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance to be implemented as Tysons grows into a world-class urban center.

Reston – The extension of transit to Dulles Airport via Reston will change the Dulles Toll Road Corridor. A planning study is underway in 2010 that will guide future transit oriented development and support the addition of urban parks and active recreation in these areas. Transit Oriented Development around transit stations will incorporate pedestrian oriented mixed use developments that are more urban than the current suburban office campuses located along the Dulles Corridor. As this redevelopment occurs, the inclusion of urban parks and active recreation facilities is essential. The Urban Parks Framework as well as Comprehensive Plan amendments for Reston will help inform how parks will be integrated into future redevelopment in and around Reston.

Commercial Revitalization Areas (Annandale, Baileys Crossroads, Richmond Highway Corridor) – Commercial Revitalization Areas (CRA) in Fairfax County represent an opportunity for converting commercial or public uses to urban parks. As smaller scale mixed use redevelopments are spurred through the efforts of the Office of Community Revitalization and Reinvestment (OCRR), the integration of urban parks and open space will support these efforts and make these transitional areas more vibrant and livable. Again, the Urban Parks Framework and Comprehensive Plan amendments will help inform how parks will be integrated into future redevelopment in these areas.

Map 3: Fairfax County Major Development Centers

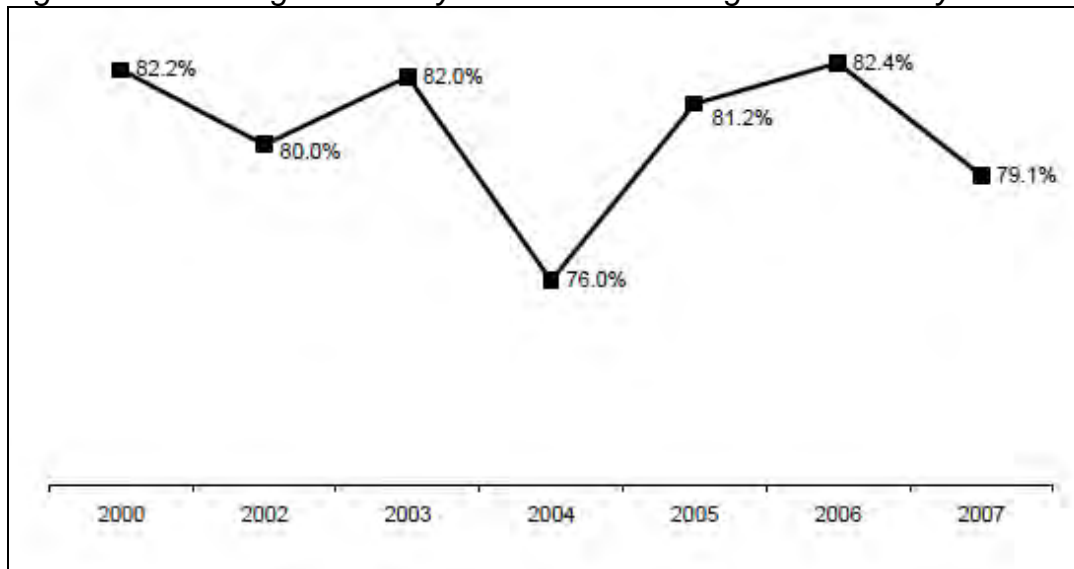


## Park Trends

### ***Park Participation***

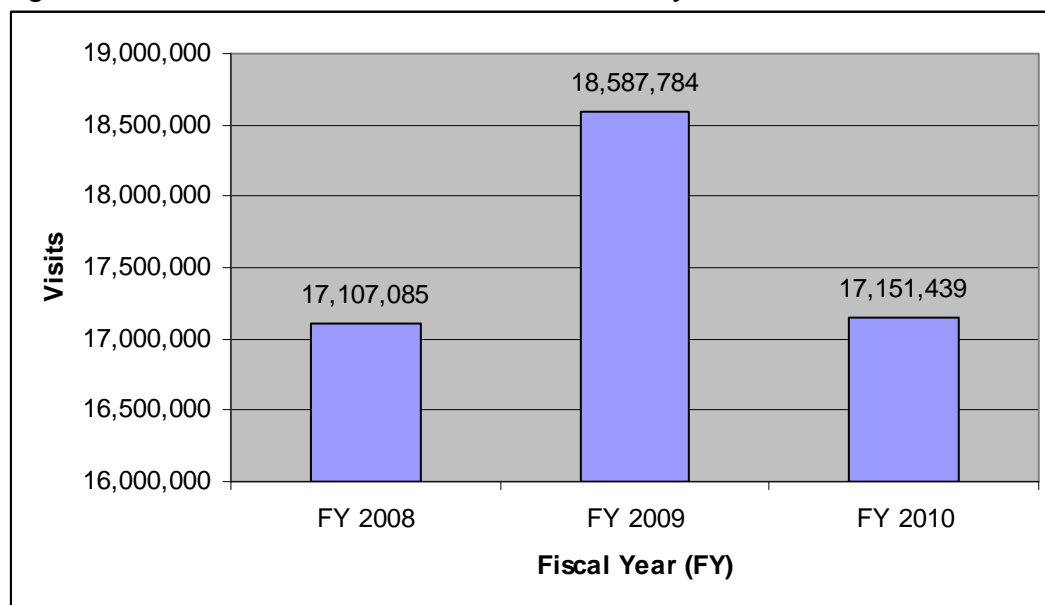
In 2007, the Park Authority conducted a household survey of park use and satisfaction in partnership with the Center for Social Science Research at George Mason University. The survey found that an estimated 79% of Fairfax County households use parks operated by the Park Authority. Figure 7 shows that the percentage of households visiting parks has been relatively steady. Not all demographic groups in Fairfax County use Park Authority parks equally, however. Those households with children under the age of 18 were much more likely to use the park system than childless households. About 90% of households with children were park users versus about 75% of childless households. A higher proportion of White residents used parks compared to other races or those of Hispanic ethnicity. 82% of White Fairfax households used the park system, compared to participation rates of between 71% and 76% for Black, Asian, and Hispanic households. Park use also varied by household income level, with those households having incomes below \$50,000 per year having a substantially lower incidence (65%) of park use. Figure 8 shows total visits to Park Authority Parks by fiscal year since the 2007 study.

*Figure 7: Percentage of County Households Visiting Park Authority Parks*



Source: Fairfax County Park Authority

Figure 8: Total Estimated Visits to Park Authority Parks, FY 2008 to FY 2010



Source: Fairfax County Park Authority

In 2008, the Park Authority published a report on nationwide activity participation trends for more than 60 sports and recreation activities from 2001-2006 to develop an understanding of which trends are most important to Fairfax County. The research looked at field and court team sports, racquet sports, skating sports, golf, outdoor recreation activities, and fitness activities. The report noted a continuing trend of decline in the total number of participants involved in most team sports, including basketball, soccer, football, both slow-pitch and fast-pitch softball, court volleyball and baseball. Lacrosse was the only one of the nine field and court team sports tracked to gain participants during the study time period. Overall numbers of participants in most team sports declined as a result of fewer occasional players. Organized play continued to grow through increased participation among the most accomplished players coincident with a growing number of elite league teams.

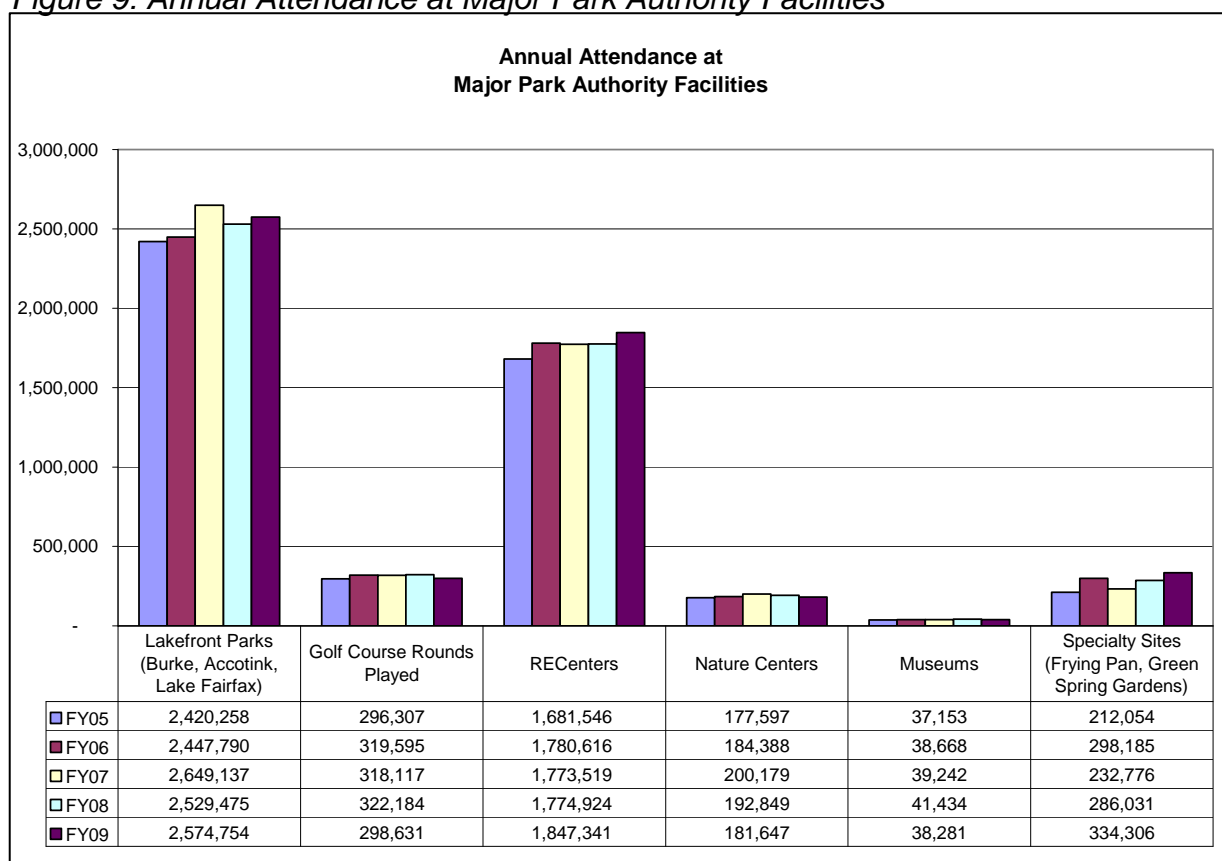
Growth in the number of tennis participants continued, while racquetball participation remained stable (after a precipitous decline in the 1990s). Inline skating, ice skating, skateboarding and in-line hockey all saw significant declines in the number of activity participants over the five-year study period. Ice hockey was the only skating sport to have experienced growth in its participant base. The total number of golfers nationwide (age 6 and above) increased marginally between 2000 and 2006. The number of core golfers declined due to less frequent play. The number of health club memberships continued to grow, but at a slow pace.

In the outdoor recreation category, there were fewer participants engaged in recreational bicycling, tent camping, freshwater fishing, RV camping, mountain biking and BMX bicycling in 2006 than in 2001. Activities experiencing participant increases over the same time period included kayaking, wall climbing, canoeing, day hiking and recreational swimming. Reporting on shifts in these trends since 2006 as well as

considering how our local trends compare to the national trends cited above will be part of the Needs Assessment update process (2012/2013).

In addition to conducting surveys and trends research, the Park Authority measures actual participation at staffed facilities by tracking attendance on an annual basis. The facility types tracked include lakefront parks, golf courses, RECenters, nature centers, museums and specialty sites. Figure 9 shows levels of attendance at major Park Authority Facilities for the fiscal years 2005 – 2009 (the fiscal year runs from July 1 – June 30). The chart shows that attendance at lakefront parks, RECenters and specialty sites has increased over the past five years, whereas the rate of attendance at golf courses, nature centers and museums has essentially remained flat during this time period.

*Figure 9: Annual Attendance at Major Park Authority Facilities*



Source: Fairfax County Park Authority

### **Service Levels**

The goal of park and recreation providers is to meet the needs and desires of the public to the extent possible under constraints of land and funding availability and sustainable development. Both the private and public sector will benefit from coordinated planning to achieve this end. The standards employed by the Park Authority are the result of extensive research and analysis of public needs conducted as part of the Fairfax County Park Authority's Needs Assessment completed in 2004.



The Needs Assessment defined the Park Authority's role in future land acquisition, facility renovation and new capital improvements. The [Needs Assessment Final Report](#) documents the research, analysis, and findings; identifies community needs; and recommends a ten year phased Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) with implementation strategies. The CIP provides the overall long-range framework with recommended allocation of capital resources by facility type to meet the projected park and recreation needs. The plan is a guide used by the Park Authority to create future bond programs. The total projected need for the ten year period reflected in the CIP is \$377 million. Since the Needs Assessment recommendations were adopted, County citizens have voted to support \$155 million in bond funding for land acquisition and park capital improvements.

The Needs Assessment Final Report was based on an extensive public input process that included stakeholder interviews, focus group discussions, and public forums. The process culminated in a community survey conducted with a statistically valid, random sample of Fairfax County households. Important themes that emerged from the analysis of the survey data included the following:

- Eight out of ten households visited a County park in the year prior to the survey;
- County parks enjoy widespread popularity, having been visited by at least 70 percent of the households in every major racial/ethnic group in the County;
- On average, residents participate in 5 of the 35 sports and recreation activities included in the survey;
- Much of the current need for parks and recreation facilities expressed by county residents is not being met;
- Unmet need is greatest for paved walking/biking trails, indoor exercise/fitness facilities, unpaved hiking/walking/biking trails, and small local parks; and
- At least 50,000 households expressed unmet needs for another dozen types of parks and recreation facilities, including a number of emerging and niche activities.

The survey also addressed citizen support for applying capital funding resources in various areas. Residents were most supportive of allocating resources to the dual task of maintaining the Park Authority's facilities and purchasing land to preserve additional open space. Beyond that, community priorities for future development of the park system were varied and indicate the collective desire to have a balanced park system that meets the diverse recreational needs of those who live in Fairfax County.

Service level standards for 23 park facility types were established through the 2004 Needs Assessment process and incorporated into the County Comprehensive Plan [Parks and Recreation Policy Plan](#) in 2005. Facility standards are countywide goals for providing park and recreation facilities that reasonably satisfy community needs. Standards are expressed in units per population, such as one rectangle athletic field per 2,700 residents. The establishment of countywide standards was based on extensive analysis of citizen demand and preferences compared with the existing public facility inventories, including Park Authority facilities and other public providers, such as

schools and municipalities. Table 2 summarizes how service level standards are met in 2010 by public providers. This includes facilities at regional parks and in the towns of Herndon and Vienna and Fairfax City. While private facilities are not included in the quantification below, additional known facilities such as those provided by homeowners associations and commercial providers are considered in making capital investment decisions about specific facility types and the level of contribution to be made by the Park Authority to these facility types.

*Table 2: Countywide 2010 Needs Analysis*

Park Facility Type	Existing Public Inventory (2010)	Adopted Service Level Standard	Needed in 2010 to Meet Standard	(Deficit)/ Surplus	2010 Service Level
Rectangle Fields	350	1 field / 2,700 people	401	(51)	87%
Adult Baseball Fields	54	1 field / 24,000 people	45	9	120%
Adult Softball Fields	36	1 field / 22,000 people	49	(14)	72%
Youth Baseball Fields	161	1 field / 7,200 people	150	11	107%
Youth Softball Fields	146	1 field / 8,800 people	123	22	118%
Multi-use Courts	278	1 court / 2,100 people	516	(238)	54%
Playgrounds	392	1 playground / 2,800 people	387	5	101%
Nature Centers (sq. feet)	20,964	0.04 sq. feet per person	43,320	(22,356)	48%
Reservable Picnic Areas	76	1 picnic area / 12,000 people	90	(14)	84%
RECenters (sq. feet)	956,044	1.1 sq. feet per person	1,191,300	(235,256)	80%
Neighborhood Dog Parks	8	1 facility / 86,000 people	13	(5)	64%
Countywide Dog Parks	0	1 facility / 400,000 people	3	(3)	0%
Neighborhood Skate Parks	2	1 facility / 106,000 people	10	(8)	20%
Countywide Skate Parks	2	1 facility / 210,000 people	5	(3)	39%
Golf (number of holes)	486	1 hole / 3,200 people	338	148	144%
Indoor Gyms (sq. feet)	1,318,941	2.8 sq. feet per person	3,032,400	(1,713,459)	43%
Outdoor Family Aquatics	2	1 facility / 570,000 people	2	0	105%
Horticulture/Garden Parks	5	1 facility / 350,000 people	3	2	162%
Equestrian Facilities <sup>1</sup>	2	1 facility / 595,000 people	2	0	100%
Waterfront Parks	14	1 facility / 90,000 people	12	2	116%

Source: Fairfax County Park Authority

<sup>1</sup> Count includes facilities intended for full service (events, programs, classes). Does not include equestrian-accessible trails and programs.

The population of Fairfax County (including Fairfax City) is projected to increase by almost 12% over the next ten years, from 1,056,422 to 1,179,547. If no additional park and recreation facilities are developed, this will result in further service delivery deficits in 2020 as shown in Table 3 below.



*Table 3: Countywide 2020 Needs Analysis*

Park Facility Type	Existing Public Inventory (2010)	Adopted Service Level Standard	Needed in 2020 to Meet Standard	(Deficit)/ Surplus	2020 Service Level
Rectangle Fields	350	1 field / 2,700 people	416	(66)	84%
Adult Baseball Fields	54	1 field / 24,000 people	47	7	115%
Adult Softball Fields	36	1 field / 22,000 people	51	(16)	70%
Youth Baseball Fields	161	1 field / 7,200 people	156	5	103%
Youth Softball Fields	146	1 field / 8,800 people	128	18	114%
Multi-use Courts	278	1 court / 2,100 people	534	(256)	52%
Playgrounds	392	1 playground / 2,800 people	401	(9)	98%
Nature Centers (sq. feet)	20,964	0.04 sq. feet per person	44,896	(23,932)	47%
Reservable Picnic Areas	76	1 picnic area / 12,000 people	94	(18)	81%
RECenters (sq. feet)	956,044	1.1 sq. feet per person	1,234,640	(278,596)	77%
Neighborhood Dog Parks	8	1 facility / 86,000 people	13	(5)	61%
Countywide Dog Parks	0	1 facility / 400,000 people	3	(3)	0%
Neighborhood Skate Parks	2	1 facility / 106,000 people	11	(9)	19%
Countywide Skate Parks	2	1 facility / 210,000 people	5	(3)	37%
Golf (number of holes)	486	1 hole / 3,200 people	351	135	139%
Indoor Gyms (sq. feet)	1,318,941	2.8 sq. feet per person	3,142,720	(1,823,779)	42%
Outdoor Family Aquatics	2	1 facility / 570,000 people	2	0	102%
Horticulture/Garden Parks	5	1 facility / 350,000 people	3	2	156%
Equestrian Facilities	2	1 facility / 595,000 people	2	0	100%
Waterfront Parks	14	1 facility / 90,000 people	12	2	112%

Source: Fairfax County Park Authority

### **Land Ownership**

With nearly 23,000 acres in our care, the Park Authority is the premiere land owner in the County. One-third of parkland consists of stream valleys and more than three-quarters, or 75% of County-owned parkland remains undeveloped, as open space. Meanwhile, open space in Fairfax County is rapidly dwindling—it is estimated that there are less than 25,000 acres of vacant land remaining in the County—and most of this land is located in the western part of the County. Most large tracts of land in the eastern half of the County have been developed.

Figure 10 illustrates the Park Authority’s growth in land holdings since its inception in 1950. Land holdings were minimal for the first decade, but increased at ever greater rates over the next two decades. Land holdings grew slowly from the mid-80s through the 1990s, but the acquisition of both Laurel Hill and the Sully Woodlands properties in the early 2000s brought the Park Authority’s holdings up to about 9% of the County’s land mass. This number is impressive with a large portion of the property acquired for resource protection; in fact, our largest parks are resource-based parks. Lands that support active recreation needs are critical to acquire, but are not as readily available. It is essential that new land acquisitions focus on land that will support the building of needed facilities.

Figure 10: Park Authority Land Holdings as a Percentage of County Land Area



Source: Fairfax County Park Authority

The Park Authority utilizes a variety of acquisition means to preserve open space and provide park facilities. Fee simple acquisition is the most straightforward means; we may purchase the property at full market value, negotiate a bargain sale where the property owner sells their property at less than market value, or offer a retained or life estate to those property owners who wish to remain on their property beyond the date of sale. This allows the Park Authority to purchase critical acquisitions at today's dollars.

Park Authority Board-approved criteria for parkland acquisition include the following:

- Availability
- Contiguity to existing parkland or stream valley areas
- Demonstrated need for parkland in service area
- Development potential identified in Green Infrastructure mapping
- Park use supported in County Comprehensive Plan
- Park Development supported by demonstrated community response
- Existing zoning and development conditions permit desired use
- Site conditions support proposed development
- Development costs are reasonable
- In less densely developed areas of the County, parcels or assemblages larger than 10 acres
- In more densely developed areas of the County, parcels or assemblages that support development of urban park types

The Park Authority has received donations of land as well as easements, such as trail easements for the County's trail system. Easements can take the form of a conservation easement, open space easement, scenic easement, or trail easement, to name a few. These easements give the Park Authority certain property rights without

the expense of acquiring the property in its entirety. Proffered dedications also provide parkland to offset development. While often these dedications are stream valleys, several critical acquisitions have also been achieved via proffers. Lease, license, or interim use agreements can also be negotiated to allow the Park Authority to use someone else's property for park development. One example of this is the interim use agreement that the Park Authority has with Fairfax County Public Schools, which has allowed us to build recreational facilities on sites that the School Board does not currently need for a school.

### **Stewardship**

Stewardship is a key component of the Park Authority's mission. The Park Authority defines stewardship as the careful, responsible and sustainable management of the natural and cultural resources entrusted to the Park Authority by Fairfax County for present and future generations. In recent years, the agency has taken a more focused and active approach to resource management. This is demonstrated by the adoption of the agency-wide [Natural Resource Management Plan](#) and [Cultural Resource Management Plan](#). These plans focus on building and expanding partnerships with other agencies, groups, and volunteers while also highlighting the important role that education and public involvement play in stewardship. Since these plans were adopted, new trends in resource management have emerged.

### Cultural Resource Trends

Computer and internet technology makes it possible to provide access to museum and archaeological collections and associated documentation on the web, as well as in exhibits and displays, therefore making a wider array of collections accessible to the public. Best practices for historic buildings now recommend the rehabilitation and/or restoration of a building rather than closing it up. The Federal government (per Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act) has begun conducting active resource management for cultural resources through assessment, survey and National Register evaluation of properties upfront, before they are threatened by impacts. Technological advances, such as the use of GPS, digital imaging, infrared and aerial photography, remote sensing and special analyses of findings are being incorporated into the documentation of sites.

### Natural Resource Trends

Non-native invasive plants are threatening natural resources by reducing the diversity of native species and impacting wildlife habitat. Deer populations continue to exceed carrying capacities and threaten the sustainability of forests through overbrowsing, or overgrazing, regenerating trees. Because of these threats, the need to actively manage natural areas (rather than just setting them aside) has become widely recognized. In addition, new policies and regulations have an impact on stewardship activities. More comprehensive and stricter stormwater regulations will change how we develop parks and require innovative stormwater treatment, retrofit and stream restoration projects on parkland. The County's tree canopy policy and tree preservation ordinance have stewardship implications as a great portion of the County's forested lands are in public park ownership.

## The Great Parks, Great Communities Project

### Planning Process

The comprehensive **Great Parks, Great Communities** planning process consists of four phases completed over four years. That process is detailed below.

PHASE I 2007	PHASE II 2008	PHASE III 2009	PHASE IV 2010
Existing Conditions	Input & Analysis	Plan Development	Review & Approval
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct background research</li> <li>• Gather data</li> <li>• Create maps</li> <li>• Assess existing conditions</li> <li>• Write Existing Conditions Reports</li> <li>• Publish Existing Conditions Reports to web</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct 10 public workshops</li> <li>• Meet with public at events in the parks</li> <li>• Collect email and web input</li> <li>• Compile input</li> <li>• Identify themes</li> <li>• Analyze issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify strategies to address issues</li> <li>• Develop draft plans for 14 Planning Districts</li> <li>• Conduct multiple levels of internal review</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present draft plan to Park Authority Board</li> <li>• Conduct four public information meetings</li> <li>• Seek public input through various means</li> <li>• Revise plan as needed</li> <li>• Park Authority Board adopts plan</li> </ul>

### Public Input

In 2008, the **Great Parks, Great Communities** interdisciplinary project teams interacted with citizens at ten public workshops in all Supervisory Districts. Outreach activities continued through the Spring and Summer at community festivals at parks and other locations. In addition, the Park Authority received feedback by email and the project web site. Many of these comments were from individuals representing larger groups with widespread memberships.

#### Who We Heard From:

Individual Citizens  
 Reston Association  
 Reston Pathways Committee

United States Trail Ride  
 Mid-Atlantic Off-Road Enthusiasts  
 (MORE)

Audubon Society of Northern Virginia  
Friends of Accotink Creek  
Friends of Huntley Meadows  
Friends of Green Spring Gardens  
(FROGS)  
Fairfax ReLeaf  
Fairfax County Tree Commission  
Fairfax 4 Horses (and other  
Equestrian groups)  
Analemma Society  
Society for Creative Anachronism

Fairfax Adult Softball  
South County Little League  
Mason District Little League  
Fairfax County Athletic Council  
Fairfax History Commission  
District Supervisors  
Planning Commission  
Park Board Members  
District Land Use Committees  
Park Staff

### **What We Heard:**

(Public input is grouped according to several major categories that emerged out of the process and eventually became the guiding themes of this Plan.)

#### Connectivity

- Provide more trail connections between parks
- Improve access to parks from neighborhoods
- Add accessible trails for all ages and abilities
- Provide historic interpretive trails and thematic links
- Improve public transportation access to parks

#### Community Building

- Provide flexible open spaces for social interaction
- Better integrate parks into local communities
- Provide sites for public performances
- Include public art in the parks
- Add more off-leash dog parks throughout the County
- Add more community garden plots

#### Service Delivery

- Provide more playgrounds in local parks
- Build playgrounds for older kids that promote fitness
- Add more skate parks across the County
- Address demand for more indoor fitness/gym space
- Provide more mountain biking trails and skills courses
- Designate spaces for archery activities
- Provide equestrian facilities and riding lessons
- Designate open areas for unscheduled activities
- Build more athletic fields and group them in a complex

#### Facility Reinvestment

- Upgrade or replace older equipment and facilities
- Evaluate usage level of existing facilities
- Find new uses for underused facilities

- Determine need for different types of facilities
- Provide new facilities through infill development
- Revise parking standards and facilities to reflect use patterns

#### Land Acquisition

- Add developable land for new recreational facilities
- Protect all types of natural habitats
- Acquire threatened cultural resource sites
- Add to land holdings around historic sites as a buffer
- Provide pocket parks in urbanizing areas
- Add more local-serving parks

#### Resource Interpretation

- Upgrade or replace older nature center exhibits
- Interpret a broader range of history at park sites
- Provide more outdoor exhibits and kiosks

#### Cultural Resource Stewardship

- Take care of and restore the historic sites in Park Authority ownership
- Improve storage and protection of artifact collections

#### Natural Resource Stewardship

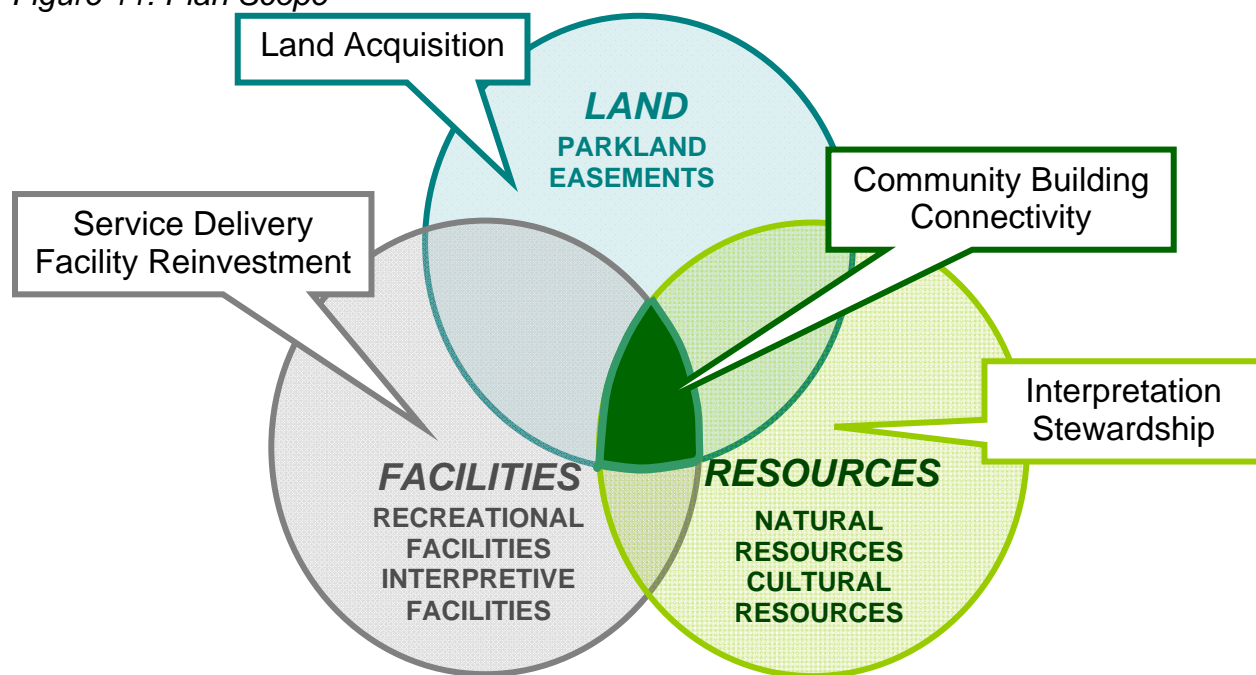
- Protect fragmented natural habitats, especially upland forests and meadows
- Protect and restore degraded streams and wetlands
- Inventory natural resources for better management
- Remove non-native invasive plants that threaten natural plants and habitats
- Contribute to the County's tree canopy goals
- Use green building techniques to minimize impacts on global warming

In early September 2010, the Park Authority published the draft Great Parks, Great Communities Plan to the project web site for public comment and review. In addition, four public meetings were held across the County. Comments were received from the public by means of the online web comment form, by email, mail, phone calls, and at the four public meetings. Close to 300 comments were received, acknowledged, and considered in the revisions to the draft plans.

#### ***Plan Scope and Horizon***

The **Great Parks, Great Communities** Plan is intended to guide parkland acquisition, facility and site development activities, and natural and cultural resource protection for the 2010 – 2020 timeframe. The plan does not address areas that do not fit within the Land, Facilities and Resources scope, such as routine operations, programs, marketing, communications, revenue, and project funding.

Figure 11: Plan Scope



### ***Planning Themes***

Based on the public feedback and staff expertise, staff identified 26 key issues that fit within eight themes relating to the land, resources and facilities of the Park Authority. The themes are **Connectivity, Community Building, Service Delivery, Facility Reinvestment, Land Acquisition, Resource Interpretation, Cultural Resource Stewardship and Natural Resource Stewardship**. These themes serve as the conceptual framework for the Great Parks Plan.

- ***Connectivity***  
Better integrating parks with surrounding land uses (neighborhoods and employment centers) and increasing park-to-park connections within the system will allow for greater public access and enjoyment.
- ***Community Building***  
Local parks are places where people can interact and build community. Well-designed and located parks, park facilities and programs support greater social interaction. Community-building park facilities and activities include reservable picnic areas; amphitheaters; dog parks; garden plots; and farmers market, performance and special event venues. Colocation of park facilities with other community uses can also strengthen community connections.
- ***Service Delivery***  
Residents desire recreational facilities and opportunities at parks near where they live and for all age groups and socio-economic populations. The Park Authority provides quality facilities that are well used, but may not be equitably distributed across all parts of the County or accessible to all groups. Countywide

and specialty facilities, in particular, may not serve a true county-wide service area.

- *Facility Reinvestment*  
The Park Authority has a great diversity of facilities and resources in various lifecycle stages. Funding and schedules for replacement or reinvestment are inconsistent and capital funding for new facilities has sometimes taken precedence over renewal of existing facilities. Long term sustainability of park facilities can be addressed through initial design and development and facility renewal and replacement efforts.
- *Land Acquisition*  
Additional parkland is needed to protect and buffer natural areas and historic sites and to provide room to develop new recreational facilities. Diminishing land availability and affordability challenge efforts to acquire appropriate lands for parks.
- *Resource Interpretation*  
Residents may not be aware of or understand the importance of the vast number of natural and cultural resources the Park Authority holds in public trust. Park Authority interpretive facilities include historic sites, nature centers, horticultural centers, a working farm, a wetlands park, exhibits, interpretive signage, visitors' centers and classrooms.
- *Cultural Resource Stewardship*  
Stewardship of cultural resources is a broad Park Authority responsibility. In addition to the many historic sites owned and managed by the Park Authority, responsibility for assessment and protection of archaeological resources on parkland and Countywide lies with the Park Authority's Cultural Resource Management and Protection team. Human activity and lack of adequate financial resources are major threats to the condition and preservation of cultural resources in Fairfax County.
- *Natural Resource Stewardship*  
Many factors threaten the health, protection and viability of natural resources on county parkland. Natural habitats and the wildlife they support are disappearing due to development and are fragmented from development, trails, easements and utilities. Meadow and upland habitats are especially scarce. Water resources and stream valleys are degraded due to development and associated stormwater runoff. The Park Authority does not have an adequate inventory of natural resources on parkland, nor the capacity to actively manage and protect natural resources.

### ***Plan Organization***

The Great Parks Plan consists of 15 chapters: this Countywide Chapter and 14 District Chapters that follow. All chapters contain introductory information followed by recommendations organized by planning theme, as detailed above

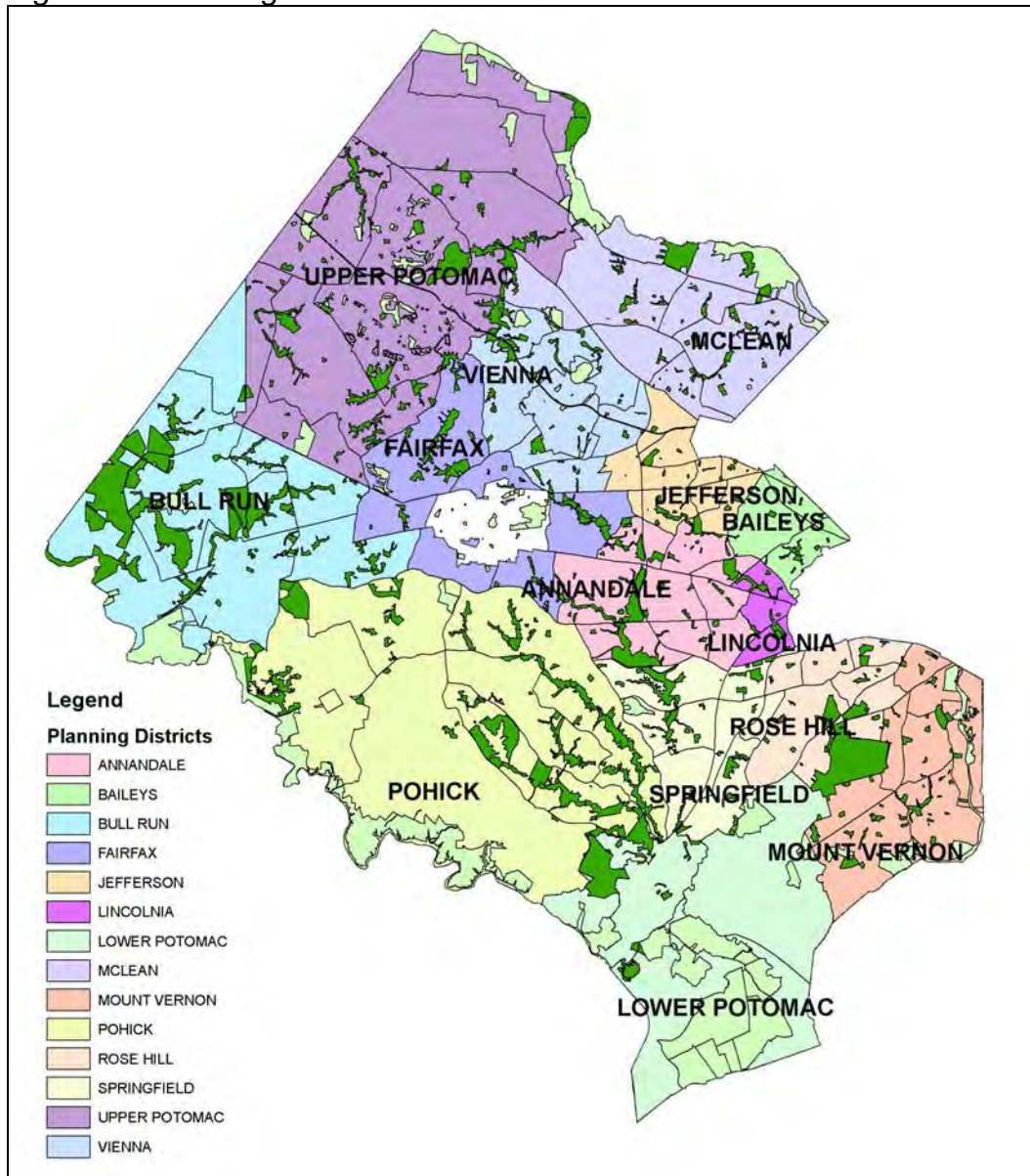


The District Chapters use the same planning district geography used in the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan. District-level plans provide existing district conditions information, a discussion of issues, and recommendations specific to each local park system. These plans will be used to update the Comprehensive Plan Area Plan Park and Recreation Recommendations (see *Implementation* section below) and will guide systematic park planning efforts at the local and individual park level.

The 14 Planning Districts are shown in Figure 12 and are listed below.

- Annandale
- Baileys
- Bull Run
- Fairfax
- Jefferson
- Lincolnia
- Lower Potomac
- McLean
- Mount Vernon
- Pohick
- Rose Hill
- Springfield
- Upper Potomac
- Vienna

Figure 12: Planning Districts



### Implementation

Once adopted, the Great Parks, Great Communities Plan will be implemented through several different actions. First and foremost among these are two Park Authority initiated actions: (a) amending the County Comprehensive Plan Area Plan recommendations for parks; and, (b) creating an implementation plan for the Great Parks Plan. These two implementation steps will ensure the structure is in place to allow the Plan's strategies, and all of the public and agency work behind them, to be put into action. A third implementation step occurring at the same time is the updating of the Needs Assessment and incorporation of its findings into the Capital Improvements Plan. All three implementation steps are described in more detail below.

- (a) Amend the County Comprehensive Plan Area Plan recommendations relating to parks and recreation – Revised park classifications and recommendations for individual parks in all fourteen planning districts will be considered by Park Authority and County staff, general public and Park Authority Board. Public hearings will be held before the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors who will ultimately adopt these Comprehensive Plan changes. (2011/12)
- (b) Create a five-year implementation plan of agency implementation activities with priorities assigned and approved by the Park Authority Board. (2011/12)
- (c) Updating the Needs Assessment survey and data analysis– This will include an updated Countywide survey and other data analysis to update information on residents’ park and recreation needs. An evaluation of the 23 Countywide service level standards and considerations of how to quantify trails service levels, will be included in this update. (2012/13)
- (d) Using the updated Needs Assessment findings to identify park capital funding priorities and develop an updated Capital Improvements Plan that will guide future park bond programs. (2012/13)

The Great Parks Plan will also be implemented as the Park Authority and County residents begin to refer to and cite Great Parks, Great Communities Plan data, issues, and strategies to guide actions and decision-making. The Plan will help the Park Authority to perform land use and service level analysis, inform decisions, identify opportunities, prioritize resources, support park related County Comprehensive Plan amendments, rezoning proposals and special land use studies. Site-specific park master plans will use data and recommendations from this Plan to inform the planning process, specific park uses, and facilities. Other County agencies will also begin to use the Plan as a reference for their own studies and assessments.

Many more actions will be needed to achieve the goals highlighted in the Plan. Reaching the Plan’s goals will require the efforts and support of other local agencies, residents, elected officials, private and non-profit partners, state and federal agencies, and others. Other key elements to achieving the Plan’s goals include:

- Funding, from both public and private sources, will be critical, as it is in any effort with capital and/or operating cost considerations;
- Emphasis on partnerships with other County agencies such as Fairfax County Public Schools, Department of Public Works and Environmental Services, and Department of Planning and Zoning;
- The continued time and support of the Park Authority’s dedicated volunteers, whose work is at the very core of our successful park system;
- Increased public awareness, not only of the Great Parks Plan, but of the parks and recreational facilities the County already provides -- using signage, branding, and marketing techniques; and
- Coordination with other local, regional, and state park providers – both in relation to broad goals and specific sites

It will be the combined efforts of the Park Authority, residents, park advocates, volunteers, public and private partners, and others that will ensure the implementation of the Great Parks Plan as well as its continued utility and relevance to all of the County's park users.

## CONNECTIVITY



Trends related to this theme: Trails are a key connectivity component and are the most widely-used recreational facility type in the County. While the 2004 Needs Assessment recommended building 75 miles of new trails in Fairfax County, emphasis on improving connectivity and major trails has produced better results than focusing on added miles. The use of Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology has enabled the Park Authority to develop an accurate inventory of park trails and pathways and to identify gaps in connectivity. Constructing shorter trail segments in more densely populated communities that provide connectivity to the existing trail network provides more access to existing trail systems than building many miles of new trails.

### Countywide Connectivity Strategies

- CW-C-1. Improve non-motorized access to parks from commercial and residential areas and increase connectivity between park sites.
- CW-C-2. Link multiple, separate park sites located across Fairfax County through thematic interpretive connections.
- CW-C-3. Work with transportation officials to ensure that District and Countywide parks and the Cross County Trail are served by the public transportation system to provide broader and equitable access to recreational facilities.
- CW-C-4. Work to improve access to waterways and promote the use of “water trails” throughout the County where environmentally feasible.
- CW-C-5. Protect and improve connectivity for wildlife through corridors, linkages and watersheds.
- CW-C-6. Continue to partner with MORE and other trail user groups.
- CW-C-7. Support connectivity and trail access for various user groups through the provision of facilities such as bike racks or parking areas, as appropriate.

District-level Connectivity strategy suggestions include: adding specific trails, trail connections, bridges and other forms of improved access to and between parks; making thematic connections between parks with related natural and cultural resource features; working with the Department of Transportation to improve transit access to specific parks; working with the Department of Planning and Zoning to encourage creation of new parks in transit oriented growth areas of the county; and working with the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority and others to improve water access along the Occoquan and Potomac Rivers.

To address Connectivity needs, district-level strategies in the Great Parks, Great Communities Plan incorporate the recommendations of the Park Authority’s Trail Strategy Plan.

## COMMUNITY BUILDING

Trends related to this theme: Fairfax County is in a post-suburbanization phase. The focus of future development is shifting from accommodating new growth to that of redevelopment and providing more lifestyle choices for an increasingly diverse population. With about 40% of the total population comprised of racial and ethnic minorities, Fairfax County has a diverse variety of language and cultural representation. Increasingly, ethnic groups are making use of parks in ways that were not anticipated when the parks were first built, such as regular large all-day gatherings and family celebrations. Also, as the County has grown and more townhouses, condos and apartments have been built, fewer residents have their own private yards. As a result, there is a waiting list for public garden plots and more people are making use of trails and dog parks to socialize outdoors with their dogs.



### Countywide Community Building Strategies

- CW-CB-1. Plan local and urban parks to include a combination of facilities, amenities and gathering spaces to support, attract and promote social interaction among community members.
- CW-CB-2. Collocate parks with other civic uses, where feasible, to promote social interaction among community members.
- CW-CB-3. Incorporate public art exhibit and performance space in parks where feasible.
- CW-CB-4. Continue to partner with Fairfax County Schools to provide educational opportunities related to fitness, parks, natural, and cultural resources.

District-level Community Building strategy suggestions include: ways to increase the role of local parks in neighborhoods by providing new picnic facilities, garden plot areas and off-leash dog areas; including community gathering, open air market and performance spaces in new urban parks in the County's growth centers; and developing parks and recreation facilities near other civic uses such as libraries, schools and community centers.

To address Community Building needs, district-level strategies in the Great Parks, Great Communities Plan build on the Park Authority's long established experience in providing community building programs and facilities and incorporate the recommendations of the 2004 [Needs Assessment](#) as well as the adopted [Urban Parks Framework](#).



## SERVICE DELIVERY

Trends related to this theme: Fairfax County is now one of the most populous and densely settled counties in the nation, with over one million residents. The increase over the past decades in population and employment coupled with shifts in sports participation rates and lifestyle changes such as the shift from unstructured play to organized sports; the shift from individual sport seasons to year-round play; the growth of travel teams and competitive play; and increased expectations from citizens has resulted in increased demand for rectangular fields for sports such as soccer, football, field hockey, lacrosse and cricket. Growing national attention to the link between physical activity and all-around health increases the need for adequate services.



### Countywide Service Delivery Strategies

- CW-SD-1. Provide and equitably distribute facilities geographically to meet established facility service level standards and seek to minimize impacts of development on park service levels with proffered facilities and turnkey parks, land dedications and cash contributions through the County land use planning and development processes.
- CW-SD-2. Provide new kinds of parks and facilities in order to meet the County's changing needs. (Examples include urban parks and facilities to support emerging sports.)
- CW-SD-3. Use newer technologies and creative approaches to add capacity to existing facilities in order to meet the County's changing needs. (Examples include synthetic turf, full cut off and directed lighting, multiple use facilities, facility conversion, and scheduling improvements.)
- CW-SD-4. Re-examine park master plans to determine if parks are planned to best serve the needs of Fairfax County residents. Consider reconfiguring as well as repurposing parks, as appropriate.
- CW-SD-5. Continue to plan for and provide urban parks in the County's designated, increasingly urban growth and revitalization areas.
- CW-SD-6. Continue to increase the number of park facilities that are accessible to all populations through new construction and retrofitting, as appropriate.
- CW-SD-7. Explore opportunities to provide and/or partner to provide an indoor facility for dog training and other pet activities.
- CW-SD-8. To the extent each site allows, maximize rectangle field sizes to support a maximum number of youth and adult sports.

District-level Service Delivery strategy suggestions include: building new facilities, better distributing facilities across the County, planning for new urban parks in the County's growth centers, reviewing park master plans, and improving access to existing facilities outside Park Authority ownership (such as regional parks and school sites).

To address Service Delivery needs, district-level strategies in the **Great Parks, Great Communities** Plan apply the service level standards established in the 2004 [Needs Assessment](#) and adopted by the Board of Supervisors in the Countywide [Parks and Recreation Policy Plan](#).

## FACILITY REINVESTMENT

Trends related to this theme: Changing sports participation patterns create a need to replace existing facilities with new types of facilities (for example, shuffleboard court to skate spot and racquetball court to fitness center). Capital spending on facility reinvestment has increased over the years as more facilities (such as playgrounds and sport courts) age and reach or exceed their lifecycles. On the resource management side, historic structures and nature centers are falling into disrepair and need improvements to facilitate better stewardship and interpretation.



### Countywide Facility Reinvestment Strategies

- CW-FR-1. Repair, replace and upgrade existing park facilities through a system-wide lifecycle replacement program that takes into account changing facility needs, funding and priorities. Facilities include all Park Authority and recreational facilities, including trails, RECenters, and athletic fields.
- CW-FR-2. Adjust parking standards and levels of service to reflect user patterns and minimize impacts on surrounding neighborhoods.
- CW-FR-3. Consider sustainability over the longest life span feasible when designing and developing new park facilities and include a projection of funding needs for operation and replacement.

District-level Facility Reinvestment strategy suggestions include: repairing, replacing, and upgrading existing facilities and equipment as they reach their predicted lifecycle; removing outmoded facilities and replacing them with needed facilities; and expanding and improving vehicle entrances and parking areas where usage patterns indicate the need.

To address Facility Reinvestment needs, district-level strategies in the Great Parks, Great Communities Plan apply the capital renovation needs identified in division capital renovation plans, the recommendations of the 2004 [Needs Assessment](#) Capital Improvement Plan, and are guided by lifecycle replacement needs.



## LAND ACQUISITION

Trends related to this theme: One result of the rapid population growth experienced by Fairfax County is that vacant land in the county has diminished rapidly. As vacant land becomes scarcer, there is increasing pressure to redevelop existing neighborhoods and commercial areas. Redevelopment provides opportunities to make communities more livable by providing new parks and new pedestrian and bicycle connections.



### Countywide Land Acquisition Strategies

- CW-LA-1. Use adopted service level standards and land acquisition criteria to guide parkland acquisition for recreation usage.
- CW-LA-2. Continue to work towards equitably balancing the distribution of parkland in relation to users throughout the County.
- CW-LA-3. Establish and/or promote the creation of urban parks in higher density/mixed use areas of the County (i.e. Tysons Corner, Transit Station Areas and Commercial Revitalization Districts).
- CW-LA-4. Protect and preserve lands with significant cultural resources in Fairfax County through the land acquisition process.
- CW-LA-5. Protect and preserve lands with significant natural resources in Fairfax County through the land acquisition process.
- CW-LA-6. Consider land management and budgetary impacts of all potential land acquisitions.
- CW-LA-7. Use alternative means to fee simple purchase, such as conservation easements, to encourage the protection of natural resources on privately-owned land.
- CW-LA-8. Continue to acquire parkland and provide recreational facilities through the development process.
- CW-LA-9. Support the transfer of specific, requested Board of Supervisors owned properties to Park Authority ownership.

District-level Land Acquisition strategy suggestions include: continuing to add appropriate land and easements to the Park Authority's land holdings to expand the park system; promoting the development of new urban parks in the County's growth centers; and expanding protective buffers around natural and cultural resource sites.

To address Land Acquisition needs, district-level strategies in the **Great Parks, Great Communities** Plan apply the park land service level standards set forth in the Countywide [Parks and Recreation Policy Plan](#) and incorporate the recommendations of the 2004 [Needs Assessment](#) and are guided by land acquisition policies in the [Park Authority Policy Manual](#).

## RESOURCE INTERPRETATION

Trends related to this theme: Computer and internet technology makes it possible to provide virtual access to museum and archaeological collections and associated documentation on the web, as well as in exhibits and displays, therefore making a wider array of collections accessible to the public.

### Countywide Resource Interpretation Strategies

CW-RI-1. Interpret natural and cultural resources within appropriate and modern facilities to educate Fairfax County residents about the local history and natural surroundings.

CW-RI-2. Use evolving and innovative technology to enhance interpretive facilities.

District-level Resource Interpretation strategy suggestions include: adding to existing interpretive facilities by providing visitor amenities, developing new and improving existing interpretive exhibits, completing furnishing plans for historic buildings, installing interpretive signs and waysides, and implementing cultural landscape treatment plans.

To address Resource Interpretation needs, district-level strategies in the **Great Parks, Great Communities** Plan build on recommendations from both the [Cultural Resource Management Plan](#) and the [Natural Resource Management Plan](#).



## CULTURAL RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

Trends related to this theme: Best practices for historic buildings now recommend the rehabilitation and/or restoration of buildings rather than mothballing, or closing up, buildings. The Federal government (per Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act) has begun conducting active resource management for cultural resources through assessment, survey and National Register evaluation of properties upfront, before they are threatened by impacts. Technological advances, such as the use of GPS, digital imaging, infrared and aerial photography, remote sensing and special analyses of findings are being incorporated into the documentation of sites.



### Countywide Cultural Resource Stewardship Strategies

- CW-CR-1. Stabilize, restore, repair, and renovate significant historic structures in the Park Authority's ownership to ensure their preservation and availability for public viewing and interpretation.
- CW-CR-2. Identify, assess and evaluate threatened cultural resources prior to any proposed construction activity.
- CW-CR-3. Avoid impacts to National Register eligible cultural resources where feasible. If impacts cannot be avoided mitigation level documentation or data recovery should occur.
- CW-CR-4. Provide new, expanded and upgraded facilities to preserve, restore and house museum and artifact collections to ensure their preservation for future generations.

District-level Cultural Resource Stewardship strategy suggestions include: restoring and preserving specific historic buildings, reconstructing historic outbuildings, and conducting archaeological surveys.

To address Cultural Resource Stewardship needs, district-level strategies in the **Great Parks, Great Communities** Plan incorporate recommendations from the [Cultural Resource Management Plan](#).

## NATURAL RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

Trends related to this theme: Non-native invasive plants are threatening natural resources by reducing the diversity of native species and impacting wildlife habitat. Deer populations continue to exceed carrying capacities and threaten the sustainability of forests through overbrowsing, or overgrazing, regenerating trees. Because of these threats, the need to actively manage natural areas (rather than just setting them aside) in order to preserve and restore biodiversity has become widely recognized. In addition, new policies and regulations, and the Park Authority's own Natural Resource Management Plan have an impact on stewardship activities. More comprehensive and stricter stormwater regulations will change how we develop parks and require innovative stormwater treatment, retrofit and stream restoration projects on parkland. The County's tree canopy policy and tree preservation ordinance have stewardship implications as a great portion of the County's forested lands are in public park ownership.



### Countywide Natural Resource Stewardship Strategies

- CW-NR-1. Protect and improve existing natural and wildlife corridors, linkages and watersheds; provide new linkages between remaining public and private natural areas; and designate permanent resource protection zones on parkland that define appropriate uses and development.
- CW-NR-2. Protect water resources through the development and implementation of watershed plans and stream restoration efforts.
- CW-NR-3. Conduct natural resource inventories and assessments and develop site natural resource management plans where appropriate and feasible. Consider funding needs for these efforts as part of the capital planning process.
- CW-NR-4. Ensure existing forested areas are sustainable (to include managing deer populations) and expand tree canopy where appropriate on parkland.
- CW-NR-5. Define and implement non-native invasive plant best management practices and expand invasive management efforts.
- CW-NR-6. Minimize impacts to the environment and demonstrate stewardship by utilizing innovative practices in construction of recreational facilities and buildings, exploring alternative energy use, and practicing low impact development techniques. Use the County's Sustainable Development Policy for Capital Projects and similar policies for guidance.
- CW-NR-7. Continue to use public-private partnerships to achieve the natural resource goals.
- CW-NR-8. Continue to partner with other agencies including DPZ and DPWES to protect natural assets and resources both on and near parks.
- CW-NR-9. Maintain and increase partnerships with individual athletic leagues and other groups that provide management of recycling programs at specific sites.

CW-NR-10. Continue to work with owners of properties adjacent to County-owned parkland to support uses that are compatible with preservation of natural resources and to mitigate impacts.

CW-NR-11. Restore degraded natural areas by supporting recommendations of the County's Natural Landscaping Committee, the Tree Commission and others to restore degraded urban lands and improve natural resource services (air, water, soils, carbon sequestration, etc.), improving buffers around remaining high quality natural areas, and promoting restoration on private lands in a similar fashion.

District-level Natural Resource Stewardship strategy suggestions include: focusing on managing threats and actively managing existing natural resources as appropriate to each district.

To address Natural Resource Stewardship needs, district-level strategies in the **Great Parks, Great Communities** Plan incorporate recommendations from the [Natural Resource Management Plan](#).

## GLOSSARY

**ARCHAEOLOGY** – the scientific study of material remains of human culture from the past recovered through excavation.

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE** – a location where evidence of past human occupation remains below the ground.

**ARTIFACT** – object made or used by people.

**COMMERCIAL REVITALIZATION DISTRICT (CRD)** – one of five special zoning districts established to encourage economic development activities in the older commercial areas of the County in order to provide desirable employment and enlarge the tax base. The five CRDs are located in Annandale, Baileys Crossroads/Seven Corners, McLean, Springfield, and along the Richmond Highway Corridor.

**COMMUNITY BUSINESS CENTER (CBC)** – the Land Classification System category for centers that contain retail, office, residential uses, and parks (including urban parks and active recreational/cultural facilities) in a community scale, pedestrian oriented setting.

**CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (CDP)** – a graphic plan that describes the planned park elements, identifies design concerns, and illustrates the general location of the recommended facilities based on the guidance of the general management plan.

**CONSERVATION EASEMENT** – a widely used land protection tool that limits certain activities such as development and industrial and commercial uses on a piece of property. Easements are used by land owners to permanently protect identified aspects of their land and while still retaining ownership.

**CROSS COUNTY TRAIL (CCT)** – a over 40 mile long trail that runs roughly north-south through the entire County, connecting one end to the other. The Cross County Trail runs through some of the County's most scenic areas, beginning at Great Falls National Park on the Potomac River and extending south to the Occoquan River and Laurel Hill, formerly known as Lorton Prison.

**CULTURAL LANDSCAPE** – a geographic area (including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein), associated with a historic event, activity, or person or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values.

**CULTURAL RESOURCES** – Cultural resources are those sites or structures, including their landscape settings that exemplify the cultural, architectural, economic, social, political, or historic heritage of the County or its communities.

**ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY CORRIDOR (EQC)** – an open space system designed to link and preserve natural resource areas and provide passive recreation. The system includes stream valleys, wildlife habitats, and wetlands.

**FLOODPLAIN** – that land area in and adjacent to streams and watercourses subject to periodic inundation from flood events.

**GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN (GMP)** – establishes park purpose and classification, describes existing conditions and constraints, details the desired visitor experience and identifies "management zones." General Management Plans are meant to be flexible to accommodate the changing needs of park visitors. Uses are described in general terms, so that as visitor needs change, the uses provided can shift accordingly.

**GREEN BUILDING** – structures and their associated landscapes that are located, designed, constructed, operated and dismantled in an environmentally responsible manner to minimize short- and long-term negative impacts on the environment and building occupants.

**HOA PROPERTY** – privately owned and managed by Homeowners' Associations (HOAs), this land often includes stream valleys, passive open space and private recreational facilities (such as playgrounds, swimming pools, and sport courts) that supplement the County's public park system.

**LIFECYCLE** – facility life expectancy based on historic operations and maintenance records and applying best knowledge of the parks and recreation industry.

**LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT (LID)** – the use of site and subdivision design techniques in coordination with stormwater management engineering to mimic the hydrologic conditions associated with an undeveloped site to the greatest extent practicable.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES** – established in 1966 and managed by the National Park Service, is the official list of structures, sites, objects, and districts that embody the historical and cultural foundations of the nation.

**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE (NPS)** – established in 1916 to manage Federal parkland, the National Park Service is a bureau of the U.S. Department of the Interior. NPS manages the George Washington Memorial Parkway along the Potomac River and some adjacent lands in the County.

**NORTHERN VIRGINIA REGIONAL PARK AUTHORITY (NVRPA)** – the agency that administers a regional park system across multiple jurisdictions in Northern Virginia. Regional parks are distinguished from, yet supplement and enhance County and municipal park systems, and seek to preserve and protect regionally-significant areas of particular ecological, scenic or historic value and provide recreational facilities to serve users throughout the Northern Virginia area.



**PARK MASTER PLAN** – a general guide for appropriate park uses and their approximate location within a specific park site. The plan serves as a long-range vision (10-20 year timeframe) for future development and programming. Issues typically addressed include planned park elements, natural and cultural resource management, and general design concerns. The plan is conceptual in nature and not intended to address detailed issues related to engineered site design or park operations.

**PLANNING DISTRICT** – one of fourteen subdivisions of the County in the Comprehensive Area Plans. Planning Districts are subdivided into Community Planning Sectors, the smallest geographical components of the Comprehensive Plan. The Community Planning Sector text provides details on existing development and planned land use. The Great Parks, Great Communities Plan is subdivided into Planning District chapters.

**PROFFERS** – a development plan and/or written condition, which, when offered voluntarily by an owner and accepted by the Board of Supervisors, becomes a legally binding part of the regulations of the zoning district pertaining to the property in question. Proffers may be modified only by an application and hearing process similar to that required of a rezoning application.

**RECenters** – the Park Authority's nine recreation and fitness centers that serve over one million customers annually, offering the latest exercise equipment, top aquatics facilities and a wide range of fitness, sports and leisure classes.

**REDEVELOPMENT** – development activity generally characterized by clearance of existing structures and new construction. The new development may be the same or different type of land use, but is usually at a higher level of intensity or density than that it replaces.

**RESOURCE PROTECTION AREA (RPA)** – an area designated pursuant to the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance (Chapter 118 of the Fairfax County Code) comprised of lands at or near the shoreline or water's edge that have an intrinsic water quality value due to the ecological and biological processes they perform or are sensitive to impacts which may result in significant degradation of the quality of state waters. In their natural condition, these lands provide for the removal, reduction, or assimilation of sediments, nutrients, and potentially harmful or toxic substances from runoff entering the Bay and its tributaries, and minimize the adverse effects of human activities on state waters and aquatic resources.

**STEWARDSHIP** – the careful, responsible and sustainable management of the natural and cultural resources entrusted to the Park Authority by the residents of Fairfax County for present and future generations.

**STREAM VALLEY** – an aggregation of features, produced by the physical action of flowing water, which includes intermittent or perennial streams, 100 year frequency flood plains, and adjacent slopes.

**TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT (TOD)** – compact, pedestrian- and biking-friendly, mixed-use development containing medium to high density residential, office and retail uses within walking distance of certain rail transit stations identified in the County Comprehensive Plan.

**URBAN PARKS** – public spaces in densely developed areas that offer the opportunity for passive and active recreation, community gathering and civic events.

**WETLANDS** – any land characterized by wetness for a portion of the growing season. Wetlands are generally delineated on the basis of physical characteristics such as soil properties indicative of wetness, the presence of vegetation with an unusually strong affinity for water, and the presence or evidence of surface wetness. Wetland environments provide water quality improvement benefits and, in most cases, are ecologically valuable.

