



**2018 Summerville Parks
and Recreation
Department Need
Assessment and Strategic
Plan Prepared By:**

CLEMSON®
PARKS, RECREATION AND
TOURISM MANAGEMENT



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Study Introduction and Overview

Public agencies, like Summerville Parks and Recreation Department, are frequently confronted with an increasing demand for services, while working within an environment characterized by static or decreasing financial resources and understaffing. In particular, park and recreation agencies are heavily dependent on public appropriations, tax levies, philanthropic support, and user fees, while being faced with numerous service delivery challenges, not the least of which is the provision of the adequate distribution of high quality programs, facilities, and parks. A more educated and vocal public expects public entities to be more accountable and measured in their allocation of limited public monies. However, this is also a time when society is beginning to fully understand the importance of providing high quality, well-run parks and recreation facilities and programs in promoting the long-term health and economic development of the region.

At the same time, rapid changes are occurring in the makeup and demographic distribution of the area. As the Summerville Parks and Recreation Department adopts a more proactive, consumer-centric approach to the production and delivery of park and recreation facilities and programs, the practice of actively soliciting input and feedback from the jurisdiction's populace to document the current and projected use of existing and future facilities and programs is critical to success. Public needs assessments are conducted to measure felt or expressed needs, interests, and use among the general public. This process allows the agency to "take the pulse of the entire community, being responsive and accountable to more than just the vocal and visible interest groups of the agency" (Crompton, 2000). The results are then used to help guide decision-makers in the efficient, effective, and equitable delivery of facilities and services across the entire jurisdiction.

This report details the process and results of a needs assessment conducted by Clemson University researchers in March 2018 in Summerville, South Carolina, and provides strategic recommendations to inform recreation facilities and programs planning to meet existing and projected future needs.

Purpose of the Assessment

To solicit public input regarding the parks and recreation facility, program, and service needs of residents living within the municipality in order to develop recommendations that will guide the provision of parks and recreation programs, facilities, and services for the next five to seven (5-7) years.

Methods

A two-stage methodology was employed to assess the park and recreation needs of Summerville residents. First, an online web survey was distributed to residents throughout Summerville, helping to ensure the broadest possible coverage of views were captured to inform town-wide recommendations. The survey was open for a 4-week period and yielded 670 total responses. In the second stage, researchers from Clemson University conducted

seven (7) focus groups and a public input session with stakeholders over a two (2) day period. The focus groups generally consisted of five to fifteen (5-15) individuals per group. The composition of each focus group varied according to session, but all consisted of community leaders, residents, and/or stakeholder groups with a vested interest in the future trajectory of the parks and recreation facilities and programs in Summerville. During each session, researchers took notes while engaging the participants through facilitated conversations.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were designed to explore the recreation program and facility needs of selected stakeholders in depth. Focus groups were organized and participants recruited by the recreation department in Summerville. Sessions included five to fifteen (5-15) individuals representing a particular stakeholder group such as park and recreation staff, local leadership, trail and greenway users, seniors, the Miracle League organization, coaches, parents of community youth, etc.

Each focus group was moderated by two (2) researchers from Clemson University who began each session by prompting participants with the following question, "If you were to wave a magic wand and have your parks and recreation needs and wants met, what facilities, programs, and services would that include? What is going well, what needs to be improved, and what needs to be built/developed? However, you must be reasonable and responsible with the magic wand." Focus groups were otherwise unstructured. During participant discussion, two (2) researchers took notes and asked follow up questions to acquire more information about stated recreation program and facility needs and wants. Upon completion of the focus group sessions, researchers compared notes, outlined themes, and outlined recommendations based on participant discussion.

Online Survey

An online survey was designed to allow any and all residents to voice their recreation program and facility needs and wants. The online survey was advertised through a variety of forums including e-mails, social media, and local newspaper articles. The majority of the survey was an importance-satisfaction scale that first measured how important program, service, and facility categories were to each respondent/respondent's family, followed by how satisfied the respondent/respondent's family was with the program, service, and facility categories. A gap analysis of importance-satisfaction was conducted by subtracting the percentage of respondents satisfied with a particular program, service, or facility from the percentage who had ranked it as important in order to identify and prioritize areas of need.

In addition to the importance-satisfaction gap, participants were asked to provide demographic information and respond to several questions pertaining to potential policies impacting recreation, parks, historic, and cultural affairs. The survey also included several qualitative input exercises. These exercises were designed to force participants to rank their individual top-3 priorities for programs and facilities, and provide their individual

willingness to pay for current and improved levels of parks and recreation programs, facilities, and services.

The research team analyzed data collected from these sources to formulate a strategic plan focused on recreation and parks program and facility needs.

Deliverables

The outcome of this process is this report that details both large and small-scale projects, priorities, and other recommendations that the Town should pursue and invest in to meet the needs of Summerville residents moving forward. In addition to this formal report, a PowerPoint version is also included.

Specifically, this study addressed the following objectives:

Study Objectives

1. Determine public opinion about recreation and leisure service needs of the Town of Summerville.
2. Determine potential partners and roles partners might play in the provision of recreation and parks programs, services, and facilities.
3. Determine how public opinion of needs align with program, service, and facility needs and trends based on current and future demand.
4. Determine the public's willingness to pay fees for programs, services, and facilities.
5. Provide recommendations regarding the provision of parks and recreation programs, facilities, and services for the next five to seven (5-7) years.

Study Respondents

Explanation of Tables 1-8 (following three [3] pages):

In the following tables (Tables 1-8), provide a description of the respondents to the study, including gender, age, ethnic background, residency, number of children in the household, if they have dependent adults living in the home, and the type of recreation program/facility used and provider, and the *overall* importance/satisfaction of recreation programs and facilities in the Town of Summerville. The percentages in Table 8 were calculated by subtracting the very satisfied/satisfied percentage from the very important/important percentage to yield a gap percentage for the Town of Summerville. The table also includes the Highly Important/Important and Very Satisfied/Satisfied measures for Summerville.

Table 1. Summerville Respondents by Gender

<i>Summerville Respondents by Gender (by %)</i>	
Gender	Percentage
Male	29%
Female	71%

Table 2. Summerville Respondents by Age

<i>Summerville Respondents by Age (by %)</i>	
Age	Percentage
18-25	3%
25-34	25%
35-45	33%
46-55	16%
56-65	14%
66+	9%

Table 3. Summerville Respondents by Race

<i>Summerville Respondents by Race (by %)</i>	
Race	Percentage
Black/African American	2%
Hispanic/Latino	2%
Asian/Pacific Islander/Native American	.5%
White	94%
Other	1.5%

Table 4: Respondents Living in Town Limits

<i>Summerville Respondent's Living in Town Limits (by %)</i>	
In Town Limits	Percentage
Yes	65%
No	35%

Table 5. Summerville Respondents by Number of Dependent Children

<i>Number of Children Living in the Home (by %)</i>				
Age of Children	0	1	2	3+
5 & Younger	63%	21%	13%	3%
6-12	64%	22%	12%	2%
13-18	77%	16%	6%	1%

Table 6. Dependent Adults Living in Home

<i>Dependent Adults Living in Home (by %)</i>	
Dependent Adults	Percentage
Yes	12%
No	88%

Table 7. Summerville Program/Facility Usage Per Week

<i>Program/Facility Usage Per Week %)</i>				
Type of Organization				
Weekly Attendance	Summerville Parks	Other Public Recreation Agencies	Private Recreation Businesses	Non-Profit Recreation Organizations
0	31%	35%	44%	33%
1-2	44%	42%	24%	36%
3-4	16%	16%	18%	19%
5-6	7%	5%	10%	8%
7+	2%	2%	4%	4%

Table 8: Overall Importance/Satisfaction of Summerville Recreation Programs and Facilities

<i>Overall Importance/Satisfaction of Summerville</i>			
	High Importance /Important	Very Satisfied/Satisfied	Very Important/Important-Very Satisfied/Satisfied (Gap)
Summerville	96%	28%	68%

Overall Data

Facility and Program Needs and Facility and Program Priorities

This report presents the findings from the combined focus groups, public input sessions, and online survey data for the Town of Summerville.

Explanation of Tables 9-12 (following four (4) pages):

Table 9 presents the importance-satisfaction gap analysis for facilities. These percentages were calculated by subtracting the very satisfied/satisfied percentage from the very important/important percentage to yield a gap percentage for each type of facility. The table also includes the Highly Important/Important and Very Unsatisfied/Unsatisfied measures for each facility.

Table 10 presents the importance-satisfaction gap analysis for recreational program offering. These percentages were calculated by subtracting the very satisfied/satisfied percentage from the very important/important percentage to yield a gap percentage for each type of program. The table also includes the Highly Important/Important and Very Unsatisfied/Unsatisfied measures for each program.

Table 11 presents data collected during the open community forum. Each individual was asked to list their top three (3) facility priorities and percentages are based on the aggregate of people who listed the facility in their top three (3).

Table 12 presents data collected during the open community forum. Each individual was asked to list their top three (3) recreational program priorities and percentages are based on the aggregate of people who listed the program in their top three (3).

Table 9. Summerville Facility Importance/Satisfaction Gap Analysis

<i>Facility Importance/Satisfaction</i>			
	Very Importance/ Important	Very Satisfied/Satisfied	Very Important/Important- Very Satisfied/Satisfied (Gap)
Availability of Trails and Greenways	91%	24%	67%
Availability of Indoor Swimming Pools/Aquatic Facility	75%	8%	67%
Availability of Passive Parks/Open Space	89%	26%	63%
Availability of Outdoor Swimming Pools/Aquatics Facilities/Waterparks	71%	9%	62%
Availability of Neighborhood Parks/Playgrounds	82%	23%	59%
Availability of Cultural/Arts Facilities	66%	9%	57%
Availability of Indoor Recreation Facilities	74%	22%	52%
Availability of Dog Parks	58%	9%	49%
Availability of Water Access	60%	17%	43%
Availability of Center for Older Adults (Senior Center)	55%	13%	42%
Availability of Rectangle Athletic Fields	63%	32%	31%
Availability of Diamond Athletic Fields	54%	38%	16%
Availability of Tennis Courts	45%	30%	15%

Table 10. Summerville Program Importance/Satisfaction Gap Analysis

<i>Program Importance/Satisfaction</i>			
	Very Importance/ Important	Very Satisfied/Satisfied	Very Important/Important- Very Satisfied/Satisfied (Gap)
Outdoor Recreation/Adventure Programs	80%	6%	74%
Programs for Teens	76%	7%	69%
Aquatic Programs	76%	9%	67%
Dance, Music, and Art Programs	74%	9%	65%
Fitness and Wellness Programs	84%	23%	61%
Cultural/Art Programs	73%	15%	58%
Camps (Holiday/Spring Break)	67%	9%	58%
Non-recreational Adult Programs (Arts/Environmental)	63%	8%	55%
Programs for Youth/Adults with Disabilities	61%	7%	54%
Non-sport Youth Recreation Programs (Afterschool, Environmental)	64%	13%	51%
Recreational/Instructional Youth Athletics	80%	29%	51%
Programs for Seniors	59%	9%	50%
Social Events/One-Time Events	76%	26%	50%
Adult athletics programs	57%	13%	44%
Competitive/Travel Youth Athletics	32%	18%	14%

Table 11. Summerville Residents' Facility Priorities

<i>Facility Priorities</i>	
Facility Type	Facility Priority Percentage
Trails and Greenways	19.38%
Neighborhood Parks and Playgrounds	13.03%
Passive Areas and Open Space	11.65%
Indoor Aquatic Center	9.23%
Indoor Recreation Facility	8.07%
Outdoor Aquatic Facility	7.50%
Cultural/Arts Facility	6.69%
Water Access	6.34%
Rectangle Fields	5.07%
Dog Park	4.04%
Diamond Fields	3.34%
Recreation Center for Seniors	1.97%
Tennis Courts	1.96%
Other	1.73%

Table 12. Summerville Residents' Program Priorities

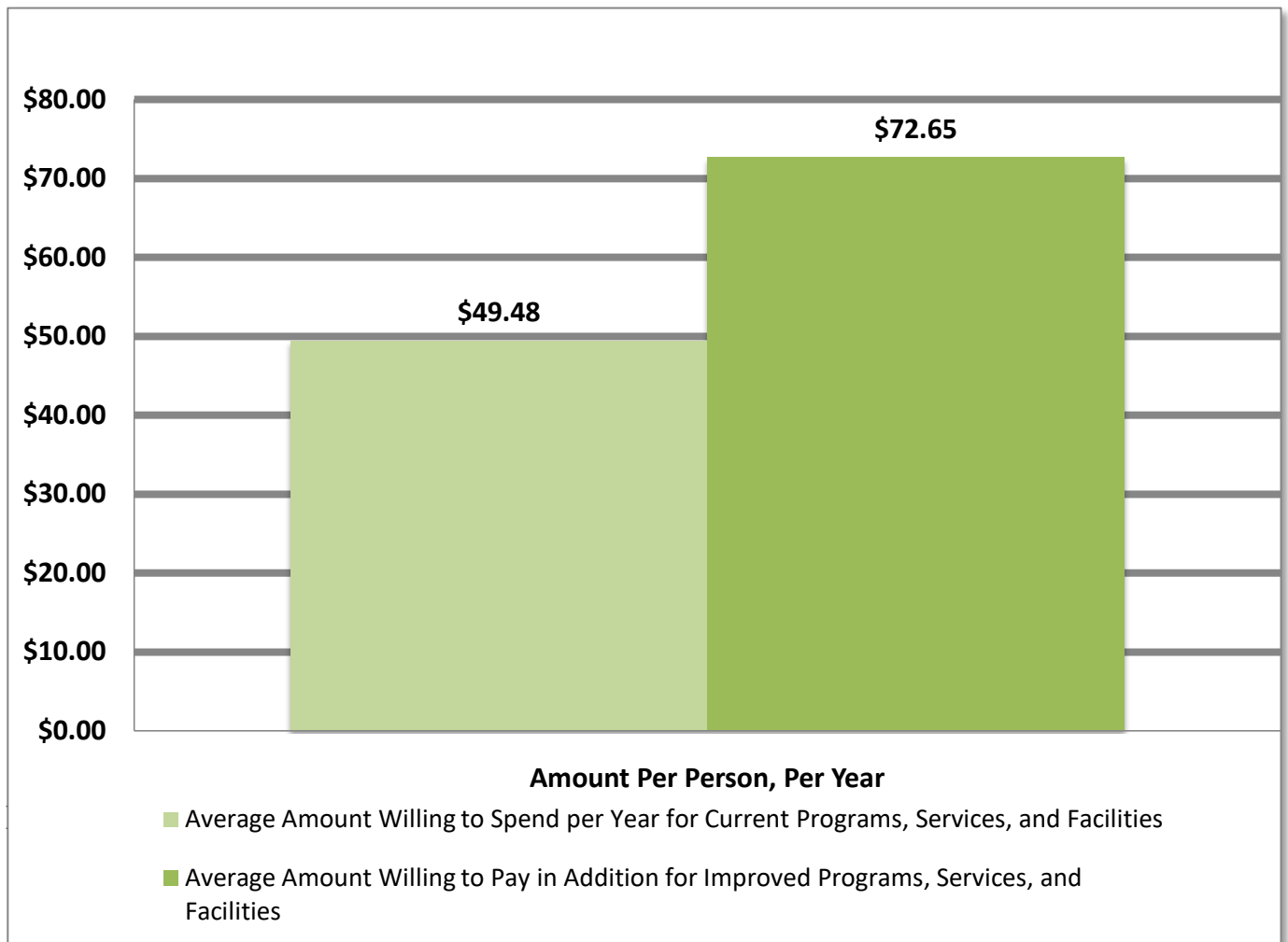
<i>Program Priorities</i>	
Program Type	Program Priority Percentage
Recreational/Instructional Youth Athletics	14.21%
Fitness/Wellness Programs	11.73%
Outdoor Recreation/Adventure Programs	10.74%
Special Events	9.05%
Cultural/Art Programs	8.55%
Non-Sport Youth Programs	6.26%
Aquatic Programs	5.27%
Senior Programs	5.17%
Adult Athletic Programs	4.97%
Non-Sport Adult Recreation Programs	4.57%
Competitive Youth Sports	4.08%
Programs for Teens	3.48%
Camps (Holiday, Spring Break)	3.38%
Dance, Art, Music Programs	3.28%
Other	3.08%
Programs for Youth/Adults with Disabilities	2.19%

Summerville Residents' Average Willingness to Pay per Year for Current and Improved Programs, Services, and Facilities

Explanation of Table 13:

The information in Table 13 represents the results of the willingness to pay exercise. Survey respondents were asked to provide the amount they are willing to pay per person, per year for the current programs, services, and facilities and what they would be willing to pay in addition each year if programs, services, and facilities were developed. This question was presented to each respondent in the form of a fictitious scenario. In the scenario, the researchers informed respondents that they had seized all of the recreational and park facilities and programs in Summerville. The researchers then asked how much each respondent would be willing to pay to obtain use of/or get these park and recreation facilities and programs back (highlighted by light green column). In the second part of the scenario, the researchers informed respondents that they would be willing to build and institute new parks and recreation facilities and programs for the municipality and asked how much each respondent would be willing to pay in addition to the previous amount (dark green column). The table below is an average from all of the combined respondents. Each one is broken down later in the report.

Table 13: Willingness to Pay



Explanation of Table 14:

Policy questions asked respondents about their preferences regarding recreational policy, intergovernmental agreements, and tax allocation to assist in meeting recreational program and facility needs. The following table shows the questions presented to the respondents and their answers based on an aggregate percentage.

Table 14. Summerville Policy Questions

<i>Policy Questions</i>			
	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Neutral	Disagree/Strongly Disagree
Appropriate to develop intergovernmental agreements between the school district and public recreation agencies to share facilities	84%	12%	4%
Appropriate to allocate tax resources to support the development and operation of recreation programs, facilities, and services	89%	6%	5%
My community should implement reasonable policies that protect public recreation amenities from development	87%	8%	5%

Observations

- Summerville Parks and Recreation does an excellent job of providing high-quality park and recreation opportunities. Summerville is also uniquely positioned to expand due to its access to multiple bodies of water and land that remains undeveloped throughout the town.
- Even though Summerville is a town of nearly 50,000 residents, it maintains a small town feel with a great amount of community pride and resident involvement. The park and recreation resources play an important role in connecting these residents and in forming the town's identity.
- Summerville residents gave the staff and agency high praise. The team heard on multiple occasions that the staff was accommodating to the needs of residents, approachable, and invested to improving existing opportunities.
- However, the current resources are not sufficient in their ability to meet the demand of the rapidly growing population. While a reactionary approach to population growth may have sufficed in the past, the Town of Summerville must now be proactive in how they assess/approach the long-term park and recreation needs of the expanding population.
- The level of economic and staffing resources, that are currently well below the national average, hinder the park and recreational offerings and abilities of the Summerville Parks and Recreation Department.
- There is a major concern among residents that they will eventually lose access to existing natural resource areas that define Summerville and make it "special".

Recommendations

- ***Trails, Greenways, Connectivity, Sustainable Walkability, River Access***

This recommendation was the clear top-level priority based on survey and focus group input.

- Summerville is uniquely positioned with existing and planned trail/greenway corridors (primarily Sawmill Branch Trail and planned Eagle Creek Trail corridor). Connecting those trail systems and providing safe access across Dorchester Road to Jessen Boat Landing/Ashley River Blue Trail will enable the Town of Summerville to have a complete and distinctive connectivity system.
- When fully developed the main portion of the trail system will be 12-15 miles with interconnectivity and extension possibilities. Current and planned assets along the corridor like commercial and retail districts, residential neighborhoods, existing parks (e.g. Gahagan, YMCA, and soccer complex), and planned development of adjacent features such as mountain bike trails, disc golf, outdoor education, and expanded and improved river access, provide assets that will make this system unparalleled.
- *Key Considerations:*
 - Create a safe connection to downtown Summerville across East Richardson and across Dorchester Road to the Jessen Boat Landing.
 - Create partnership with Dorchester County to connect the Sawmill Branch Trail to the Eagle Creek Trail to include future development of the Pine Trace Property (owned by county) where amenities, such as a disc golf course, may be developed.
 - The 100 acres of Town-owned property adjacent to Sawmill Trail that will be occupied by the mountain bike trail system is a value-adding amenity and creates options for trail runners and hikers. Ideally 5k and 10k trail running loops will be developed that can accommodate a variety of endurance-related events.
 - Amenities should be added to all parks and greenways where appropriate, including additional parking, new trail access, directional markers/signage, restrooms, bike repair stands, and water stations.
 - Study ability to add lighting to the trail system as many participants

feared using the trail in certain areas during the evening.

- Connections to the Nexton area should be explored for future development.
- *Key Concerns:*
 - There are concerns that the Berlin Myers Extension Project may cause significant and long-term disruption to the Sawmill Branch Trail. This disruption could result in a significant decrease in user activity even after the project has been completed.
 - The underpass at East Carolina Avenue should remain intact during/after the construction period—having trail users use East Carolina at grade through traffic will significantly diminish trail user experience and compromise user safety.
 - Summerville should aggressively explore options to keep trail access open in existing corridor on the opposite side of the canal.
 - If it is determined that it is not possible to maintain trail access during construction, a safe alternative route must be determined to ensure trail viability.

- ***Acquire Future Property for Development***

With population growth in the area it is extremely important that the Town of Summerville acquire land for future development of recreational facilities/amenities and the protection of open/green space. By not acquiring property now, the Town of Summerville is exposing itself to the possibility that property will not be available and/or affordable in the near future.

- *Considerations*
 - Purchase of 34 acre site next to Jessen Boat Landing in order to protect riverfront property as a public, open-access green space, enhance river access, and allow for the development of adventure and environmental education programs at the expanded site ***should be a priority.***
 - Identify property(ies) that can accommodate future athletic field complexes that include a minimum of six (6) multi-use rectangle fields, a minimum four (4) additional diamond fields, and an indoor facility with at least four (4) multi-use courts and an indoor walking track.

- ***Aquatic Facility***

Quantitative (i.e. survey) and qualitative data (i.e. focus groups) each indicated a desire for indoor and outdoor aquatic facilities.

- Due the cost of development and operation of aquatic facilities, options for development should be carefully studied and the Town of Summerville should only proceed with development in partnership with public (e.g. counties), private (e.g. Del Webb or Nexton), and/or non-profits (e.g. hospital system or YMCA).
- Additionally, it is important for the Town of Summerville to understand that the annual operating cost will need to be heavily subsidized through tax resources.

- ***Tennis Courts***

The Town of Summerville has an excellent tennis program that should continue to be a focus for the park and recreation department. Options to develop new courts as the market and growth dictate should be considered.

- *Considerations*
 - Received information that clay courts would be a welcomed amenity for injury prevention/recovery and for aging players.
 - With the development of additional courts, consider designing courts to accommodate both pickleball and/or junior tennis.
 - It was noted on numerous occasions that the horseshoe area at Doty Park could be used for additional court space.

- ***Programs and Facilities for Persons with Disabilities***

Summerville Miracle League has done an outstanding job in providing individuals with disabilities the opportunity to participate in a high quality program.

- *Considerations*
 - Consider lighting the existing Miracle League field to expand the capacity for league play and increase the time available for alternative uses, such as practice spaces for youth T-ball, adult kickball, and wiffleball.
 - Explore options for fully-accessible playground structures/play elements. Fully-accessible play structures allow individuals with any

disability to access and utilize all elements of the play structure.

- Consider conducting a needs assessment with individuals with disability(ies) to consider access issue, barriers to participation, etc.

- ***Funding/Staffing/Program Considerations.***

- Based on NRPA field report data, the national average for recreational municipalities is \$77.44 per capita and staffing level is 1.1 full-time employees (FTE) staff per 1,000 residents.
- Based on a current estimated population of 50,000 residents the Town of Summerville would need to increase operating budget from \$2.55 million (\$51 per capita) to \$3.82 million dollars and add 20 FTE positions to meet the national average. Survey respondents indicated a willingness to pay for improved parks and recreation facilities of \$122.13 per person/per year.
- This operating budget and FTE standard should serve as a guideline as the population continues to increase over the next 5-7 years.
- Dedication of a percentage of incoming revenue (e.g. H-Tax) to capital growth projects/fund.
- Reassess impact fee structure/levels/allocations.
- Focus group participants mentioned that a capital project sales tax may be appropriate to meet capital project needs (if local options sales tax cap has not been reached).
- Encourage/work with Dorchester County to pass a hospitality tax and dedicate a portion of that revenue to additional recreational projects with a particular focus on trails, greenways, and connectivity.

- ***Other Recommendations***

- Develop a priority list of current facilities that need to be updated/renovated/modernized (e.g. upgrades to Gahagan Park Athletic Complex, addition/expansion of Summerville Skate Park).
- Study options for a future cultural/arts facility that would increase availability for music, art, and performance programs and events.
- Identify sites for the potential development of half/full outdoor basketball courts.