

10 | RECOMMENDATIONS

IN THIS CHAPTER

Vision

Theme 1- Expand

Theme 2 - Experience

Theme 3- Excel





A strong vision for the Town’s parks and recreation future stands on the guiding principles established through robust community engagement, staff and stakeholder involvement, and the needs assessment findings. Rooted in community values, the guiding principles create the foundation for recommendations and action items. While the recommendations and action items may change or shift priorities to achieve the desired outcomes, the guiding principles protect the vision and core values of the community.

VISION

The review of existing data needs assessments, level of service analysis, and the overall community engagement process revealed an overarching vision for the Apex’s parks system. This vision encompasses three key ideas- **Expand, Experience, and Excel**. Apex residents would like to Expand the Town’s offerings with additional parkland, recreational programming, and a more connected greenway system while developing environmental stewardships programs and opportunities to strengthen the culture of belonging. They want to Experience the unique amenities and programs for all ages, abilities and interest that encourage a healthy lifestyle, explore cultural avenues and provide a strong sense of community. Residents want to see the PRCR Department Excel in operational efficiencies, outstanding customer service and best in class programming and facilities. These key ideas or themes form the foundation for the guiding principles and plan recommendations to achieve the vision for a modern, vibrant, and dynamic 21st century parks and recreation system.



Figure 10.0 - Recommendations Framework

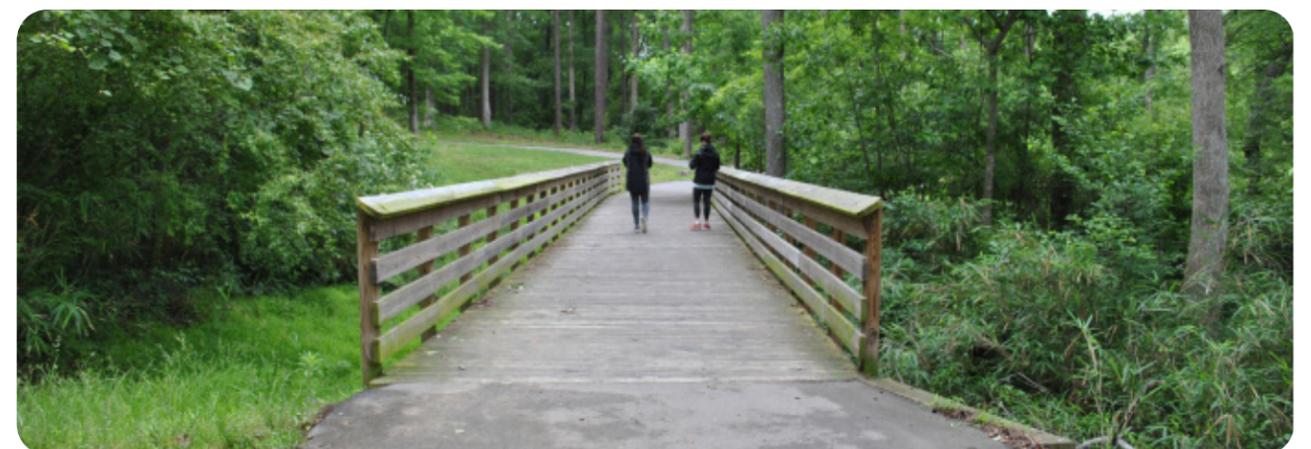


Figure 10.1- Greenway Boardwalk



THEME 1 - EXPAND

The Town of Apex is one of the fastest-growing towns within Wake County and will continue to grow over the period of the next ten years. Like other infrastructure expansions to accommodate this growth, parks and recreation services need to respond proactively and flexibly to these changes and be prepared to fulfill the needs of the newly migrated population. Apex currently has a good balance of large and small parks, well distributed within the town boundary. As the new developments are coming in, it is necessary for the PRCR department to be strategic about acquiring more developed parkland, building new indoor facilities, offering trendy and new recreation programs to attract new residents, and ensuring that these amenities are well connected via multiple modes of transportation and accessible for all. Additionally, the town should continue expanding its efforts to implement effective environmental stewardship practices to raise awareness about the importance of climate-positive design, protection of sensitive ecologies, and achieving operations sustainability.

APEXpand



CONNECTIVITY

Prioritize interconnected public realm through greenways, bikeways, and transportation.



RECREATION OFFERINGS

Expand recreation offerings to attract new participants, retain current ones, and meet the needs of diverse demographics of Apex.



CULTURE OF BELONGING

Nurture the culture of belonging by prioritizing inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility.



ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Expand efforts to protect the natural assets and collaborate on town-wide sustainability efforts.



Figure 10.2 - Greenway - Commute to School



Figure 10.3 - Greenway Trail - Commute to Work

1.1 Connectivity

Across the nation, the past ten to fifteen years have seen an increased interest in walking and biking as a form of exercise and an alternative mode to commute. The interconnected system of important community assets provides many benefits including healthy lifestyle choices, social interactions, contact with nature, protection of sensitive natural resources and habitats, and positive economic impact.

The Town of Apex is experiencing the desire and demand from residents for increased town-wide connectivity. Several town-wide initiatives and planning efforts are underway to improve and expand connectivity to local destinations, such as local parks, schools, commercial areas, and regional destinations via American Tobacco Trail and East Coast Greenway.

The Greenway Trails chapter in this master plan report is dedicated to this guiding principle. It provides details regarding current challenges in Apex, the benefits of greenway trails, design standards, additional principles that guide the proposed greenway trails system framework, and implementation strategies.



CONNECTIVITY

Prioritize interconnected public realm through greenways, bikeways, and transportation.

1.1.1 Implement the proposed greenway network plan to improve access to parks, other greenways, and other local and regional destinations.

1.1.2 Prioritize completion of greenway corridors that meet most criteria established in the prioritization matrix.

1.1.3 Encourage and support greenway use through placemaking strategies.



1.2 Recreation Offerings

One of the biggest challenges for parks and recreation departments in growing communities is to keep up with the increasing demand for new parkland and indoor recreation space. Regularly tracking the changing needs and program trends is essential to set up the strategic direction for system-wide growth and community engagement and support for the Department.

The Town of Apex has been experiencing consistent growth, similar to surrounding jurisdictions including the Town of Cary, the Town of Holly Springs, and Wake County in general. The recent growth trends have been responsible for the increased demand and need for recreation programs and park amenities as the demographic trends are shifting. The Town of Apex is proactively investing in providing new parks and acquiring parkland for future development. Pleasant Park is a great example of the Department's commitment to providing a unique destination park that will not only provide diverse recreation programming for the residents but also generate economic impact through sports tourism. The Town has acquired additional parkland in the western part of the Town and has plans to acquire more land in the Southeast portion of the Town where currently a significant geographic gap in providing park access exists. The community engagement process revealed the desire to continue to invest in existing parks and facilities to provide high-quality programs and amenities at these well-loved destinations.

Additionally, the shifting demographics also demonstrate the need for diversifying the recreation offerings to fulfill the needs of new residents moving into the Town.

The recommendations associated with this guiding principle are divided into two categories, parks and facilities recommendations, and programming recommendations. Through the implementation of these recommendations, the PRCR Department should ensure that a balance of sports fields, courts, spaces to celebrate, learn, and connect, and spaces for performances, historic landmarks, and natural areas are provided. Many growing cities are taking the approach of developing flexible, multi-functional spaces that afford different types of uses. Furthermore, it should be noted that the expansion of the parks system should be considered in conjunction with the high-quality care and services for the existing parks, facilities, and programs.



Figure 10.4 - Rogers Family Skate Plaza



RECREATION OFFERINGS

Expand recreation offerings to attract new participants, retain current ones, and meet the needs of diverse demographics of Apex.

Parks and Recreation Recommendations

- 1.2.1** Acquire 193 additional acres to continue to provide 10 ac/ 1000 pop. Level of Service standard.
- 1.2.2** Build 39,084 sq ft of additional indoor facility space by 2031.
- 1.2.3** Develop the existing vacant parkland to continue to provide recreation offerings for growing population.
- 1.2.4** Continue to invest in existing parks and facilities to meet community priorities.

Programming Recommendations

- 1.2.5** Continue to offer diverse recreation programs for growing and changing demographics of Apex.
- 1.2.6** Effectively manage and operate the core program areas.

1.3 Culture of Belonging

Belonging is the feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity for a member of a certain group¹. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access (DEIA) have become buzzwords globally and when achieved through a strategic planning process, they result in developing a sense of belonging for a person or group of people who otherwise feel excluded. According to NRPA's Parks for Inclusion initiative², parks and recreation agencies are uniquely positioned to offer safe and welcoming spaces for all people regardless of their gender identity, physical abilities, and racial or cultural background. A firm understanding of community demographics, market research data, as well as recreation needs and priorities is essential to expand efforts in creating spaces and places where people come together, get inspired, and develop confidence about their value and place in the community.

Through parks and recreation, the Town of Apex desires to cultivate a sense of belonging within the community by intentionally developing opportunities to acknowledge diversity, promote inclusion, support equity, and provide fair and just access to all members of the community. The Town of Apex is a diverse community represented by many cultures and ethnic backgrounds. There is a strong representation of the LGBTQ community in Apex and residents are vocal about the recreational needs of the neurodiverse population and people with physical disabilities. The Town of Apex already provides several special programs such as PRIDE Festival, Juneteenth, and Latino Arts Festival to celebrate the cultural diversity within the community. In addition, specialized recreation programs are offered for the special needs population. By incorporating the recommendations suggested in this plan, the Town can enhance the current offering, provide new opportunities for people to make connections and educate themselves about the concept, and truly develop an environment where residents feel safe and welcome.

¹ <https://diversity.cornell.edu/belonging/sense-belonging>
² Parks and Recreation Inclusion Report | Research | National Recreation and Park Association (nrpa.org)



CULTURE OF BELONGING

Nurture the culture of belonging by prioritizing inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility.

- 1.3.1** Achieve equitable access to parks, facilities, and programs for all Apex residents.
- 1.3.2** Support special events and programs that represent diverse cultures in Apex.
- 1.3.3** Continue to provide age targeted recreation programs that appeal to diverse interest groups.
- 1.3.4** Prioritize PLAY opportunities for all ages and abilities.
- 1.3.5** Prioritize placemaking strategies to create welcoming spaces that attract wide range of participants.



Figure 10.5 - Spirit League Special Programs



1.4 Environmental Stewardship

Parks and Recreation Departments across the country are acknowledging their role and responsibility in creating resilient and climate-positive solutions. NRPA supports this goal by identifying conservation as one of the three pillars of its mission³. Parks not only provide critical access and connection to nature, but they also help protect local flora and fauna and provide opportunities to address climate change impacts through green infrastructure strategies.

The Town of Apex has been working proactively to balance the impact of growth and development with strategic planning efforts to conserve and protect existing natural resources. Several town-wide efforts are in place such as outreach efforts to educate the community about solar installation, composting, recycling, and air quality, zero-waste events, and the exclusive Earthfest festival to bring like-minded groups and businesses together. Community engagement feedback revealed that the residents are interested to participate in environmental education programs. While the Town currently provides programs, there is also a need for a dedicated indoor and outdoor space to host these programs. Apex Nature Park, recognized for its park amenities set within an expansive hardwood forest, presents an opportunity to expand the nature-based recreation programs. There are several third-party certification programs such as LEED, Green Globes, Energy Star, etc. which can show Town's commitment to environmental sustainability. These certifications target various areas of the built environment including site development, architecture, operations, and human health. While it is not necessary to opt for certifications, the Town can use the rating criteria mentioned in these programs to develop sustainability initiatives. There is also an opportunity to leverage efforts by the Environmental Advisor Board, Bee City Committee, Tree Citizens Advisory Panel, and Apex Community Coalition. Through interdepartmental collaboration, partnerships, and establishing synergy in various planning efforts, the Town can leverage Parks and Recreation Department to achieve community resilience and address climate change as a public health concern⁴.

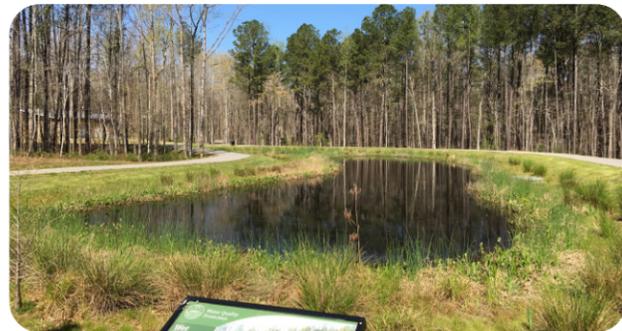


Figure 10.6 - Nature Park



ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Expand efforts to protect the natural assets and collaborate on town-wide sustainability efforts.

- 1.4.1 Acquire 65 ac. as conservation lands by 2031.
- 1.4.2 Promote environmental stewardship through park and facilities design and focus on environmentally sustainable operating practices.
- 1.4.3 Continue to support town-wide initiatives for energy conservation through parks and recreation
- 1.4.4 Focus on nature-based programming to generate environmental awareness.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- › Start Design Development on the three recommended prioritized greenway corridors
- › Complete Beaver Creek Corridor
- › Continue the partnership with Wake County and Town of Holly Springs to complete Middle Creek Greenway Corridor

³ <https://www.nrpa.org/our-work/Three-Pillars/conservation/>

⁴ <https://climateforhealth.org/>



Figure 10.7 - Apex Community Park Shelter

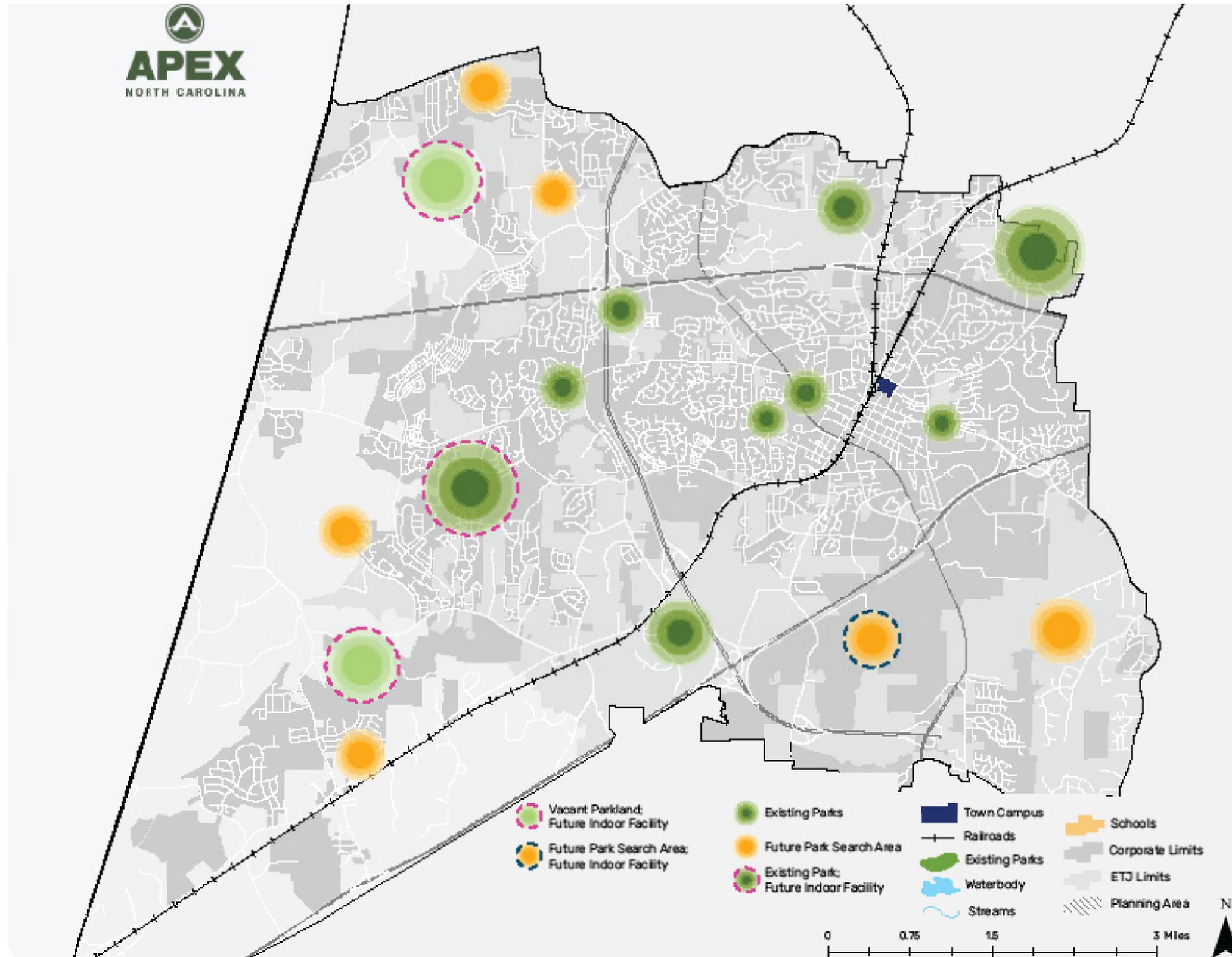


Figure 10.8 - Park Search Areas + Future Indoor Facilities



THEME 2 - EXPERIENCE

Experience is an instance of direct encounter, observation, or sensorial feeling that is deeply personal for an individual as well as collectively for a group of people. Parks and recreation are all about delivering positive, playful, and engaging experiences to residents through at-will activities and organized programs and events. It is important that the culture, traditions, and demographics of a community are built into delivering these experiences to the community. This helps to create a sense of ownership and connectedness amongst residents. The uniqueness or exclusiveness attracts non-residents who are not able to find similar experiences elsewhere or within proximity of where they live. Parks and recreation are also critical components of health and wellness service delivery. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the need for parks as essential infrastructure for providing communities with places to be social, active, and connected.

Apex residents, staff, advisory board members, and elected officials unanimously agreed on creating a diversity of experiences for residents and visitors alike through unique programming and events and celebrating the cultural diversity within the community. Developing a sense of community was expressed as a strong desire as the Town continues to grow. Additionally, residents expressed the desire to use parks and recreation services to promote the importance of healthy lifestyles and physical and mental well-being.

APEXperience



UNIQUE TO APEX

Reflect on Apex's culture and history through the design of spaces that are unique, innovative, and imaginable.



SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Provide a chance for people to socialize, form friendships and discover common grounds.



HEALTH + WELLBEING

Support health and wellbeing of Apex residents through parks and recreation.



Figure 10.9 - Greenway Trail

2.1 Unique to Apex

Parks have the power to transform a derelict space into a delightful, welcoming amenity that tells the story and legacy of the place. Public parks play an important role in connecting the community to its culture and history. In addition, participation in recreation programming connects and inspires people from different cultures, backgrounds, and interests. "Placemaking" is an important design strategy that can be applied to public spaces to identify and reflect the community's unique character through public art, cultural programs, and park amenities. There are multiple ways to achieve uniqueness through collaborations with community and neighborhood groups, local and culturally specific art organizations, and local artists.

The Town of Apex's more than 150 years of unique and rich history and its transformation from a small railroad town to a vibrant regionally competent⁵ community needs to be acknowledged and celebrated through parks design and recreation programming. There are several unique amenities in Apex such as the downtown trackside skate park, Elevate Fitness course, and downtown public art walk, which are great examples of the Parks and Recreation Department providing on-trend amenities and programs for residents. Apex residents, staff, and elected officials unanimously agreed to develop parks, facilities, and recreation programming that tells the story of Apex to attract new users and out-of-town visitors to Apex to experience the Peak of Good Living. Additionally, the influx of new residents moving to Apex is coming from larger cities across the country and have certain expectations regarding modern and on-trend park programs and amenities. The Department needs to continue to investigate these new trends and continue to offer something new to retain the current users of the system and attract non-residents as well.



UNIQUE TO APEX

Reflect on Apex's culture and history through the design of spaces that are unique, innovative, and imageable.

2.1.1 Continue to offer arts and cultural programming to appeal to diverse interest groups and cultural backgrounds.

2.1.2 Promote "unique to Apex" theme while designing new parks and amenities.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- > Depot Plaza as public space (Downtown Plan)
- > Town Complex for special events



10.10 - Pleasant Park Play Structure



2.2 Sense of Community

Parks and recreation amenities are a valuable resource for the community to provide social, economic, and environmental health benefits to its residents. Sense of community is a complex concept based on four dimensions: 1. Membership; 2. Influence; 3. Integration; and 4. Shared emotional connection⁶. Membership is the feeling of being part of a group. Influence is the level of importance an individual reciprocates towards the group. Integration is the level of expectation that a person's needs are met by the group and lastly the shared emotional connection is the shared history or commonality within the group. These four dimensions connect an individual to their community, develop relationships, trust, and a sense of empowerment. Parks and recreation programs promote social interaction among residents, find common interests and build trust and respect while acknowledging differences. Special events and festivals contribute to enhancing social capital and higher social capital relates to a higher sense of community.

The Town of Apex PRCR Department holds many special events, festivals, and diverse recreation programs throughout the year that brings community together. There are also several private events that PRCR Department supports and provides resources for. There is an opportunity for the Department to strengthen the role of parks in offering social connections through design. The COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the need of flexible open spaces where friends and families could safely meet. People also used public open spaces to exercise, work, and play when indoor facilities were closed. Recognizing the historical power of parks to heal the community from the effects of the pandemic is critical in designing and developing future park facilities.



SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Provide a chance for people to socialize, form friendships and discover common grounds.

2.2.1 Provide opportunities for residents to connect with each other and encourage social interaction.

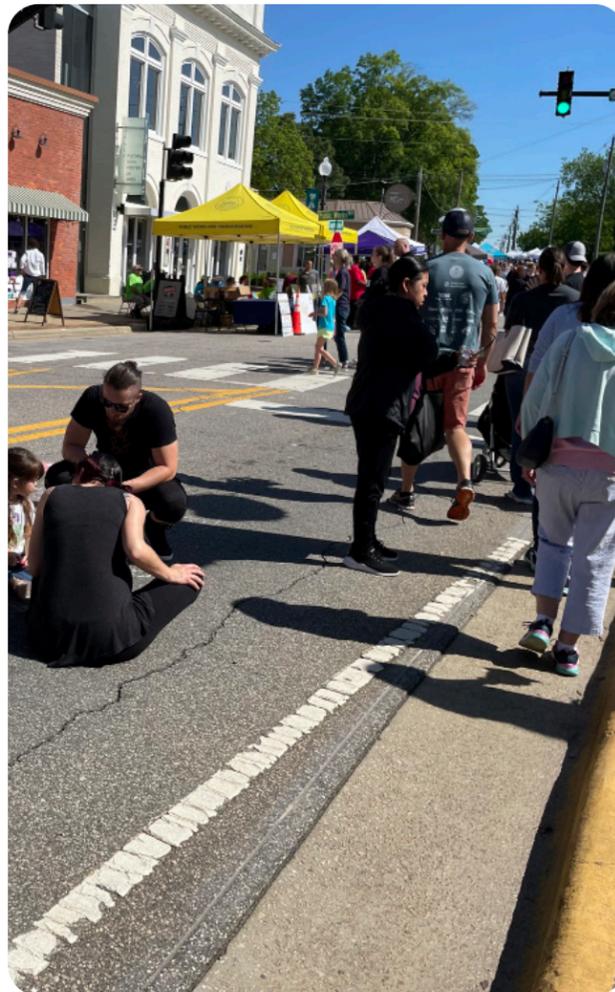


Figure 10.11 - Peakfest 2022

2.3 Health and Well-Being

Apex residents ranked fitness and wellness programs as one of the top priorities for investment and there is a town-wide consensus that parks and recreation has a positive effect on the community's health and quality of life. Parks and recreation services are increasingly being recognized as an essential infrastructure for the public health system. In addition to the traditional recreation provisions, parks and recreation departments across the country are helping address social challenges such as healthy food access, mental health, substance abuse, and social isolation⁷.

NRPA has been promoting the parks and recreation services in partnerships with other community organizations as community wellness hubs are a critical need for residents to seek help in a safe environment and improve the collective social, physical, and mental health outcomes within the community.

Apex PRCR Department currently offers core programs including athletics, specialized recreation, senior programs, and an array of non-athletic programs focused on health and well-being such as Zumba, Pilates, and Yoga classes. There has been an increased desire to include more community gardens and incorporate nature-based programs. The Town should continue to take intentional actions to promote the health and well-being of the community through PRCR services.



HEALTH + WELLBEING

Support health and wellbeing of Apex residents through parks and recreation.

2.3.1 Encourage development of amenities and programs that provide physical, social, and mental health benefits.

2.3.2 Promote access to healthy lifestyle choices

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- > 2- new parks in the Western part of Apex
- > 1- new park per Veridea Master Plan
- > 2- new recreation centers in the Western part of Apex
- > 1- recreation center per Veridea Master Plan
- > 1- Nature Center
- > Trend-setter programming

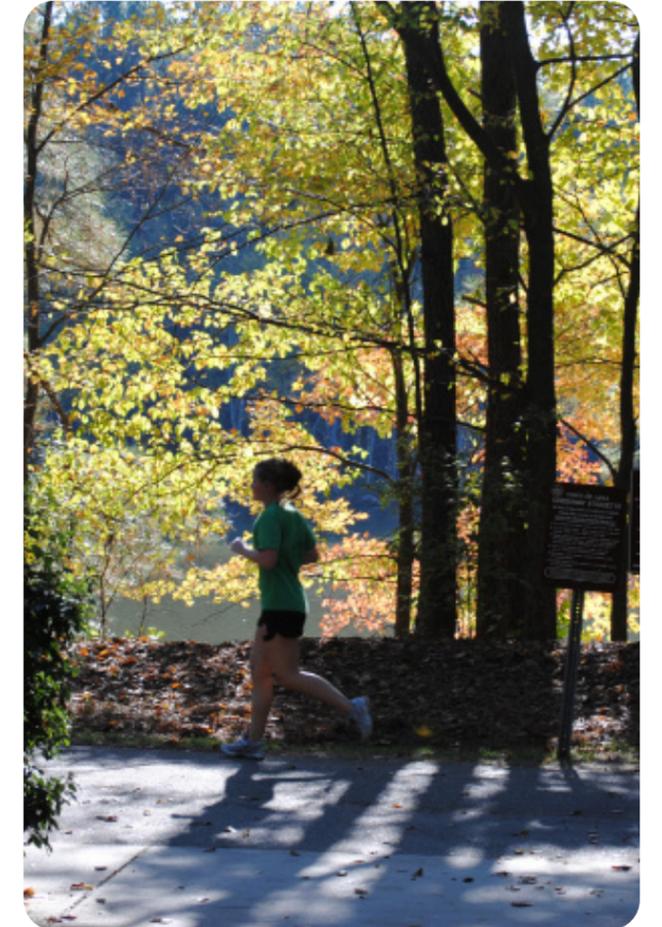


Figure 10.12 - Apex Community Park

⁶ Gomez, Edwin. "Urban Parks and Psychological Sense of Community." Journal of Leisure Research 47 (3), 2015: 388-98. <https://www.nrpa.org/globalassets/journals/jlr/2015/volume-47/jlr-volume-47-number-3-pp-388-398.pdf>.

⁷ <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/df807077b2ee43f084810f5bb4a7bde1/2021healthwellness.pdf>



THEME 3 - EXCEL

To excel is to be superior in quality and performance when compared to previous data or another similar entity. Achieving excellence should be the common direction for the PRCR Department. This sentiment should be cultivated by Department leadership while training, motivating, and empowering employees to deliver outstanding services. This theme serves as framework for how the Department can operationalize excellence to deliver products, services, and experiences that users perceive to be outstanding. Particularly for the PRCR Department, excellence can be achieved in every aspect of parks and recreation through attention to:

APEXcel



OPERATIONS EFFICIENCY

Achieve organizational excellence by implementing business practices that enhance efficiency, staff satisfaction, and economic vitality.

- › High quality parks and facilities
- › On-going maintenance
- › Recreation programs
- › Technology
- › Staff and operations
- › Marketing and communications
- › Partnerships



CUSTOMER SERVICE

Provide outstanding customer service through streamlined communication and marketing efforts.



Figure 10.13 - Town Hall Campus

3.1 Operations Efficiency

The high-quality of parks and recreation system directly relates to how the department operates. Sufficient staffing and standardized policies and procedures coupled with strategic funding support are critical to achieving operational efficiencies and system-wide excellence. A growing system puts additional demand on existing staff to take on more responsibilities and work outside of their expertise resulting in staff burnout and turnovers. By investing in staff resources and empowering them to effectively manage their responsibilities, the Department can ensure staff satisfaction and high-quality service delivery. Written and adopted policies and procedures that provide qualitative and quantitative data points are essential to evaluate the successes and identify gaps. Resources and funding requests backed by data are critical for the annual operating budget and Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget allocations.

The PRCR Department has acknowledged the challenges of the growing community and the additional demands it places on the parks and recreation provision. The Department is working on additional staffing, pay scale restructuring, and staff investment. Additionally, the Department is working on streamlining the interdepartmental communications, and policies and procedures associated with program registration, maintenance and management, and pursuing partnerships to find alternative sources of funding. The Department desires to pursue accreditation by the Commission for Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) in the future. CAPRA accreditation offers many benefits to the Department and the public by validating the evidence of operations efficiency, documentation of policies and procedures, staff satisfaction and engagement, and national-level recognition for high-quality services. The national accreditation standards are available online for reference as the Department continues to implement the best practices for CAPRA compliance.



OPERATIONS EFFICIENCY

Achieve organizational excellence by implementing business practices that enhance efficiency, staff satisfaction, and economic vitality.

- 3.1.1** Streamline recreation program management through best practices, tracking, and fees policy updates.
- 3.1.2** Achieve operations efficiency through sound maintenance and management practices
- 3.1.3** Invest in staffing resources and staff satisfaction to achieve departmental operations efficiency.
- 3.1.4** Seek strategic partnerships with third party providers to expand Department's capacity to provide competitive services to residents.
- 3.1.5** Implement capital improvements and operations through responsible funding sources.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- › Develop partnerships
- › Additional staffing



3.2 Customer Service

The parks and recreation system is a customer-focused service. Parks and recreation departments across the country are facing challenges with budget restrictions, resource scarcity, and competition from private providers. To build a better customer experience, the agencies have to focus on customer service delivered through highly trained staff. Through effective and streamlined communication and marketing, the staff can connect with the community members with ease and provide them high quality service, so they continue to participate in and inspire others to participate as well. Additionally, leveraging technology, assessment metrics, and data to receive feedback from community members to constantly improve customer service and experience.

Apex PRCR Department needs to continue to invest in staff resources, provide ongoing training and professional development opportunities, and encourage staff engagement in various Department-wide initiatives to empower them to perform their roles and responsibilities with the highest standards. Incorporating system-wide marketing plan to reach out to new residents is critical to attracting them to recreation program participation. While residents focus on referring to social media, the town's website, and other online platforms to gain information, the Town should continue to provide flyers, brochures, and program guides at strategic community destinations such as local grocery stores, schools, libraries, etc. to reach nonusers. Finally, as the Apex community is growing increasingly diverse, it is critical for the PRCR Department to promote inclusion and acknowledge cultural diversity. To maximize participation and build trust and loyalty⁸, the Department should continue to ensure that the staff projects cultural awareness and it is reflected through marketing and communication.



CUSTOMER SERVICE

Provide outstanding customer service through streamlined communication and marketing efforts.

3.2.1 Provide high quality customer service through enhanced communication and outreach.

3.1.2 Establish volunteer program to engage residents in parks and recreation services and develop a sense of ownership within the community.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- › Develop fees and charges policy and include need-based component.
- › Update Kelly Road Park playground as inclusive play area.
- › Strategic marketing plan
- › Continue website updates for program offerings
- › Include resources from third party providers on the website
- › Strategic recruitment to fulfill staffing needs



Figure 10.14 - Staff Work Session

TRANSFORMATIVE PROJECTS

While the detail action plan is included in the action and implementation plan chapter, the project highlights included with the recommendations are highlighted below that will transform the scene of recreation in the Town of Apex.

	GUIDING PRINCIPLE	TRANSFORMATIVE PROJECTS
EXPAND	CONNECTIVITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Start Design Development on the three recommended prioritized corridors. › Complete Beaver Creek Corridor. › Continue partnership with Wake County and Town of Holly Springs to complete Middle Creek Greenway Corridor.
	RECREATION OFFERINGS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Complete master plans for two new parks in western Apex and start construction. › Complete plans for 2- recreation centers and the nature center and start construction on at least one. › Acquire parkland per Veridea Park Master Plan for a new park and a recreation center in SE Apex.
	CULTURE OF BELONGING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Update fees and charges policy for programs and include need-based component. › Update Kelly Road Park playground as inclusive play area.
	ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Establish Department goals for sustainability within the framework of Town-wide initiatives.
EXPERIENCE	HEALTH + WELL-BEING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Develop options for in-person and online health and fitness programs. › Promote park amenities that encourage active lifestyles.
	SENSE OF COMMUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Complete renovations of Depot Plaza as downtown social hub destination.
	UNIQUE TO APEX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Complete renovations of historic Tunstall House. › Develop town-wide Public Art Plan.
EXCEL	OPERATIONS EFFICIENCY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Develop formal volunteer program for PRCR Department.
	CUSTOMER SERVICE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Develop Marketing Plan.

Figure 10.8 - Transformative Projects

8 <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2017/december/how-to-build-a-culture-of-guest-service-excellence/>