

# *Belmont Parks and Recreation Facilities*



Catawba River

## *Comprehensive Master Plan 2003/2013*



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**Belmont Parks and Recreation Facilities  
Comprehensive Master Plan 2003/2013  
Belmont, North Carolina**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY****PROJECT OVERVIEW**

During the fall of 2002, Belmont's City Council made a significant decision that will lead to community improvements which will improve the quality of life for its citizens. By authorizing the funds to establish the City's first Comprehensive Master Plan for Parks and Recreation, this City Council has laid the groundwork for park improvements which provide recreation facilities and public open space for the City's future generations.

The document which has resulted from this decision is a compilation of an inventory of existing park/recreation facilities, a review of national and state standards for park facilities, and a very well attended public participation process that allowed the citizens of Belmont to voice their opinions on local recreation needs. It should be noted that Belmont has a strong core of advocates for the park system who truly wish to build upon and improve the quality of life for the community through park improvements. The resulting plan summarizes the planning process as well as the recommendations derived from that process. This plan will provide a road map for elected officials and staff as they make decisions on park and recreation improvements for the coming decade.

In preparing the Master Plan, standards developed by organizations including the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and the North Carolina Department of Environmental and Natural Resources (NCDENR) were used as a basis to support development of standards for the City of Belmont. Based on national and state standards, the standards for the City of Belmont were developed to meet the areas unique geographical and population characteristics. A complete breakdown of these standards is provided in Section 3 of this study.

**Belmont – Today And Tomorrow**

The City of Belmont is a modest sized community of approximately 8,800 citizens. Nestled in the southeast corner of Gaston County, Belmont is a charming small town with convenient access to Charlotte and Gastonia. The ease of access and other pending means of transportation is making Belmont a highly desirable community to live. With small town appeal and easy access, the population of Belmont is expected to nearly double within the next ten years. It has been estimated that by 2013, the population will approach 15,000. With the proposed development of Reflection Pointe at the tip of the South Point peninsula and subsequent annexation of Reflection Pointe, realization of this growth is already in process.

**Belmont Standards For Facility Development**

Both City staff and the general public felt that Belmont's needs are fairly typical of the national and state standards with a few exceptions. The standards, which have been adopted for this report, are outlined in comparison with national and state standards in Section 3 of this document. The noted variations include:

- Adult baseball was not a priority of the City. It was decided that a minimum standard would be established and adult baseball would not be provided unless a need arose in the future.
- The demand for soccer is higher in Belmont than current national and state standards. This is consistent with many North Carolina communities and reflects a regional trend in soccer demand.
- The demand for football is higher in Belmont than current national and state standards.
- National and state standards do not provide recommendations for youth baseball and youth softball, but Belmont has established a standard to meet the high demand of these sports.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

With these general standards for public facility development as a guideline, this study found that the City needs to add the following facilities to adequately meet the current recreation needs of its citizens:

- |                        |                                 |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 Youth Baseball Field | 6 Playground Activities         |
| 1 Adult Softball Field | 3.1 Miles Walking/Hiking Trails |
| 1 Youth Softball Field | 1 Community Center*             |
| 1 Football Field       | 1 Swimming Pool*                |
| 1 Soccer Field         | 9 Miles Of Urban Bikeways       |
| 2 Volleyball Courts    | 1.6 Stream/Lake Mileage         |
| 2 Shuffleboard Courts  | 1 Stream/Lake Access            |
| 2 Picnic Shelters      | 3.5 Miles Equestrian Trails**   |

\*Belmont citizens expressed a strong desire for these facilities now, suggesting that facilities be built today that will accommodate the 10 year population projection and the Belmont Standard of one facility per 20,000 residents (1/20,000) from the table at the end of Section 3.

\*\*Belmont citizens expressed no interest in this current need. Documentation is shown only to concur with the current and projected needs set out in the table at the end of Section 3.

With the City’s rapidly expanding population, these needs will grow considerably over the next decade. By 2013, the City will have the following additional facility needs:

- |                         |                                 |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 3 Youth Baseball Fields | 1 Shuffleboard Court            |
| 1 Adult Baseball Field  | 1 Horseshoe Pit                 |
| 1 Adult Softball Field  | 2 Picnic Shelters               |
| 1 Youth Softball Field  | 6 Playground Activities         |
| 1 Football Field        | 2.5 Miles Walking/Hiking Trails |
| 1 Soccer Field          | 6 Miles Urban Bikeways          |
| 1 Basketball Court      | 1.4 Miles Stream/Lake           |
| 2 Tennis Courts         | 2.5 Miles Equestrian Trails**   |
| 1 Volleyball Court      |                                 |

\*\*Belmont citizens expressed no interest in this current need. Documentation is shown only to concur with the current and projected need set out in the table at the end of Section 3.

**Plan of Action**

The City of Belmont has already begun making the important decisions, which will ensure that the recreational needs of its citizens are met. Undertaking this planning study is an important first step in the development of a comprehensive parks and recreation program. While there is much work ahead, this study lays out steps to take to meet the City’s existing and future recreation needs. As discussed in Section 4 of this study, the City should begin work on the following initiatives:

- All of the City’s existing park facilities are centrally located within one mile of downtown. Park sites should be acquired and developed in the northern, eastern, and southern parts of the City. This will not only provide facilities for underserved areas, it will also help attain the proper number of park facilities recommended based upon national and state standards.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- A community park should be acquired and developed in south Belmont near Highway 273 and the proposed Highway 321 bypass. This facility should be intensely developed for active recreation with multiple baseball, softball, football, and soccer fields to meet current and future demands.
- The Hall Property should be developed as a neighborhood park. Due to the site's challenging topography, the site can only be developed with passive recreational amenities such as trails, picnic areas, and picnic shelters. This will provide much needed passive park space since the existing park system is developed more for active recreation.
- There is a need for additional mini parks. In order to meet this need, the River Property should be classified as a mini park and developed as a passive use facility, Crescent Park should be acquired to make it a permanently dedicated park, and four additional mini park sites should be acquired and developed in underserved areas of Belmont.
- A recreation center, with a minimum of 25,000 square feet, should be constructed in the downtown area. The center should have a complement of athletic and recreational programming space to meet the diverse needs of Belmont's population. An indoor swimming pool should also be incorporated. The Parks and Recreation Department's administrative office should be relocated to the center.
- A skateboard park should be provided for residents where they can ride their skateboards in a safe and structured environment. It is recommended that the undeveloped portion of Davis Park be utilized for the development of a concrete skate bowl. Since it will take some time to obtain funding for this ambitious project, a temporary, more economical facility can be provided with street course ramps on an underutilized paved area within a park.
- Most of the existing parks are very old. Extensive use and time causes great wear and tear on facilities and they subsequently require renovations to restore them. An improvements program should be undertaken immediately to provide more updated and safe facilities. There is also a strong need to add water borne restroom facilities within existing parks.

The total capital improvement costs, associated with the improvements outlined in the Master Plan, are estimated to be \$9,250,000. It is recommended that a combination of general operation funding and general obligation park bonds fund a major portion of these improvements. Remaining funding needed to complete the Master Plan can be obtained through gifts, mandatory land dedication, grants, and other revenue sources.

**Joint Responsibilities**

Meeting the recreational needs of the citizens of the City of Belmont will require a joint effort between the various government agencies and the private sector. The following is a summary describing the roles of each recreational provider over the next ten years:

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY****State of North Carolina**

The State of North Carolina should be used as a resource for planning and development funds of future City facilities. State funding through agencies such as the Division of Parks and Recreation should be utilized to the fullest extent possible.

**Gaston County Schools**

Every effort should be made to develop long-term agreements with Gaston County Schools on joint uses of school facilities. The joint use of public facilities maximizes efficiency and minimizes duplication of facilities. The result is better use of tax dollars. The joint use of facilities should be governed by written agreements where the responsibility of each of the agencies is understood.

The City should work closely with the schools in the planning of future schools to maximize joint use of facilities. Consideration should be given to purchasing land adjacent to school sites with the intent of developing park/school complexes.

**Gaston County**

The City should work with the County to ensure that the needs of Belmont citizens are being met at the county level. With the exception of Belmont Central Elementary School providing county run youth baseball and soccer, there are no other county facilities within Belmont or the immediate area surrounding the City limits. Belmont has taken on the overwhelming burden of providing parks and programs for its citizens. This demanding responsibility is compounded by the fact that nearly 35% of all program participants are non-residents. It is reasonable to expect the County to provide a level of service appropriate for a county parks system.

In order for the County to provide a suitable level of service, it is recommended that the City strongly encourage the County to complete a proposed lease with Duke Power for a 70-acre tract of land near the Wildlife Life Club in south Belmont. This site, when developed, would provide much needed passive recreation amenities and water frontage along the Catawba River. The City should also cooperate with and encourage the County to undertake a proposed countywide greenway system as recommended in the Gaston County Comprehensive Planning Program. The County's greenway system can serve as the nucleus for a future greenway system developed by Belmont.

**Historical Perspective**

The planning and development of parks has been recognized as an important public undertaking since the mid 1800's, when New York City commissioned Frederick Law Olmstead to create Central Park. Since that beginning, public agencies everywhere have devoted time, energy, and resources to the development of public parks and recreation facilities, which improve the quality of life for the citizens they serve. This document is evidence of that same commitment to parks and recreation as a quality of life issue shared by the leaders of the City of Belmont.

*Section 1*  
*Master Plan Population Trends*  
*and Projections*

**SECTION 1 MASTER PLAN POPULATION TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS****POPULATION TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS**

Located in southeast Gaston County between the Catawba and South Fork Rivers, the City of Belmont is a charming small city in the midst of redefining itself. With its small town charm and convenient access to major cities such as Charlotte and Gastonia, Belmont is becoming a very desirable residential community and is on the cusp of experiencing a sizable population boom in the coming years. It is estimated that over the next decade, Belmont will nearly double in population from approximately 8,800 to 15,000.

The redefinition of Belmont was prompted by the closing of many of the City's textile mills and subsequent loss of manufacturing jobs. Younger workers, along with their families, relocated to other areas where work could be found. U.S. Census data substantiates this migration as the population of Belmont's younger citizens, 44 years old and younger, decreased by 5% from 1990 to 2000, while citizens 45 years old, or older, increased by 23%.

The 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census noted several significant trends of city growth. These changes in city population include:

- ◆ The percentage of children, 0-20 years old, dropped significantly from 1990-2000, decreasing by over 8%.
- ◆ Adults, 45 years of age, and older, increased substantially, by over 23%.
- ◆ The city's Hispanic population increased a dramatic 175% from 1990 to 2000.

I-85 and Highway 74 currently provide convenient access to Charlotte, Gastonia, and other parts of Mecklenburg and Gaston Counties. The ease of access will only increase with the completion of I-485 in Mecklenburg County and the planned Highway 321 extension. Highway 321 will extend through southern Belmont connecting Gastonia to I-485 near Charlotte-Douglas Airport. Other modes of transportation will also be available in the near future with the development of Charlotte's planned multi-modal mass transportation system. This system will utilize dedicated busways, light rail, and commuter rail to provide other means of transportation throughout Mecklenburg connecting people's homes to their jobs and other places of interest. Belmont sits at the terminus of one of the proposed transportation corridors as the West Corridor runs from downtown Charlotte to the Catawba River along Wilkinson Boulevard. While this corridor is not currently planned for light rail, the Wilkinson Boulevard Corridor will still provide a strong transportation connector to Charlotte.

There is no doubt that Belmont's small town character and convenience of access will further enhance its desirability as a residential community. This will also allow for a rapid transformation in the demographic composition of the City. Belmont will gradually become a younger, more diverse, and vibrant community in the coming years.

*Section 2*  
*Analysis of*  
*Existing Park Facilities*

**SECTION 2 ANALYSIS OF EXISTING PARK FACILITIES**

**INTRODUCTION**

City staff and the staff of Site Solutions performed the inventory of recreational facilities in the City of Belmont. Site visits were made to each of the park facilities and general observations recorded. While this method of study provides an adequate inventory of facilities, it is not meant to serve as a detailed analysis of each facility.

The citizens of Belmont have their recreational needs met through a variety of facility offerings. Several public agencies provide parks/recreation facilities within the City’s service area. These facilities include:

- ◆ Belmont Parks & Recreation Facilities
- ◆ Gaston County Parks & Recreation Department Facilities
- ◆ Gaston County School Facilities

Since all of these facilities are part of the recreation opportunities for the City, we have included a brief description of those facilities closest to the City’s sphere of influence.

**CITY OWNED AND OPERATED PARK FACILITIES**

**NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS**

Davis Park  
Reid Park

**MINI PARK**

Stowe Park

**SPECIAL USE FACILITY**

J. Paul Ford Recreation Center

**ATHLETIC PARK**

Rodden Ballfield

**UNDEVELOPED PARK LAND**

Hall Property (Future Neighborhood Park)  
River Property (Future Mini Park)

**CITY LEASED AND OPERATED PARK FACILITIES**

**MINI PARK**

Crescent Park

**GASTON COUNTY SCHOOL FACILITIES**

Belmont Central Elementary School  
Belmont Middle School

**SECTION 2 ANALYSIS OF EXISTING PARK FACILITIES**

**NEIGHBORHOOD PARK**

**Davis Park**

Davis Park is the largest Belmont park facility (located on Park Drive), with approximately 15 acres. There is a good blend of active and passive recreation areas. Active recreation areas include 5 lighted tennis courts, 2 half courts with practice walls, and parking. There is also a lighted multipurpose field used for youth league baseball, soccer, and football. The field area includes a restroom/concession/press box building and parking. The passive recreation area includes a large playground, horseshoe pits, and picnic tables. With the exception of one modular playground component installed two years ago, the remaining playground amenities do not appear to meet current National Playground Safety Institute standards and may pose a safety hazard for children using the equipment. There is additional land associated with this site behind the tennis facility that is used as the City of Belmont’s Public Works stockpile area. Facilities include:

**Active Recreation Facilities**

- ◆ 5 Tennis Courts (lighted)
- ◆ 2 Half Tennis Courts with Practice Walls
- ◆ 1 Multipurpose Field (lighted)
- ◆ 1 Restroom/Concession/Press Box Building

**Passive Recreation Facilities**

- ◆ 1 Playground (3 modular units, 4 swings for 5-12 year olds, 2 swings for 2-5 year olds, 2 sand diggers)
- ◆ 2 Horseshoe Pits
- ◆ 1 Picnic Area
- ◆ Parking



**SECTION 2 ANALYSIS OF EXISTING PARK FACILITIES**

**NEIGHBORHOOD PARK**

**Reid Park**

Reid Park is the second largest Belmont park facility, with approximately 9 acres. It is located in the Reid Neighborhood on Saco Street. The facility is active in nature, serving predominantly as a youth baseball facility with two lighted baseball fields. Other facilities include a playground, ¼ mile gravel track, parking, and a piece of sculpture. The sculpture was created by a neighborhood resident and donated to the City for the park. The playground amenities do not appear to meet current National Playground Safety Institute standards and may pose a safety hazard for children using the equipment. There is no permanent restroom building on site. Facilities include:

**Active Recreation Facilities**

- ◆ 2 Youth Baseball Fields (lighted)
- ◆ 2 Basketball Courts
- ◆ 1 ¼ Mile Gravel Track
- ◆ 1 Playground (1 modular unit, 4 swings for 5-12 year olds)
- ◆ Parking

**Miscellaneous**

- ◆ 1 Sculpture



**SECTION 2 ANALYSIS OF EXISTING PARK FACILITIES**

**MINI PARK**

**Stowe Park**

Stowe Park is the premier park within the City’s park system. The facility is located in downtown Belmont along Main Street. The facility is predominantly passive in nature and provides a wonderful setting for festivals and other events. Large mature trees provide ample shade for park visitors and a decorative fountain provides a soothing atmosphere. The facility also has a large gazebo, playground, gravel track, and a multipurpose field that is used in conjunction with Belmont Middle School. Facilities include:

**Passive Recreation Facilities**

- ◆ 1 Multipurpose Field
- ◆ 1/5 Mile Gravel Track
- ◆ 1 Gazebo/Picnic Shelter
- ◆ 1 Decorative Water Fountain
- ◆ 1 Playground (1 modular unit, 4 swings for 5-12 year olds, 2 swings for 2-5 year olds)



**SECTION 2 ANALYSIS OF EXISTING PARK FACILITIES**

**MINI PARK**

**Crescent Park (leased)**

Located at the intersection of 6<sup>th</sup> and Church Streets, Crescent Park functions as a mini park and adult softball league complex. The park, which covers approximately 4 acres, has predominantly active recreation facilities. A lighted adult softball field, used for league play, anchors the park. Other activities include a playground, lighted half court basketball court, 1/8-mile gravel track and a one-table picnic shelter. Though there are an abundance of recreational facilities, Crescent Park lacks parking and restrooms. There is only street parking and restrooms are provided through the provision of portable toilets. Also, the playground amenities do not appear to meet current National Playground Safety Institute standards and may pose a safety hazard for children using the equipment. Facilities include:

**Active Recreation Facilities**

- ◆ 1 Adult Softball Field (lighted, infield irrigation)
- ◆ 1 Half Court Basketball Court (lighted)
- ◆ 1 1-Table Picnic Shelter
- ◆ 1/8 Mile Gravel Track
- ◆ 1 Playground (2 slides, 4 swings for 5-12 year olds, 2 swings for 2-5 year olds)



**SECTION 2 ANALYSIS OF EXISTING PARK FACILITIES**

**SPECIAL USE FACILITY**

**J. Paul Ford Recreation Center**

The J. Paul Ford Recreation Center is the sole indoor recreation facility owned by the City. The center provides approximately 3,300 square feet of space for recreation programming. There are two meeting/activity rooms; one large and one small. These rooms are used for recreational programs and can be reserved for private functions. There is also a small prep kitchen and restrooms adjacent to the meeting rooms. The building also functions as the Parks and Recreation Department's office facility. Based upon the age of this facility, it appears to be in need of renovations in order to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines. Facilities include:

**Interior Facilities**

- ◆ 1 Large Meeting/Activity Room
- ◆ 1 Small Meeting/Activity Room
- ◆ 1 Restroom
- ◆ 1 Prep kitchen
- ◆ Department Offices
- ◆ Parking



**SECTION 2 ANALYSIS OF EXISTING PARK FACILITIES**

**ATHLETIC PARK**

**Rodden Ballfield**

Rodden Ballfield is located on Vine Street, adjacent to Highway 273. The facility has one lighted adult softball field and parking area. Due to a deep drainage trough within the park, there is no further development possible. The trough creates problems for softball players, as it is just beyond the outfield fence where balls become irretrievable. There is no permanent restroom building on site. Facilities include:

**Athletic Facilities**

- ◆ 1 Adult Softball Field (lighted)
- ◆ Parking



**SECTION 2 ANALYSIS OF EXISTING PARK FACILITIES**

**UNDEVELOPED PARK LAND**

**Hall Property (Future Neighborhood Park)**

Nearly 28 acres of undeveloped, wooded property at the end of West Woodrow Street, known as the Hall Property, can provide an opportunity for additional active and passive recreation space. Since the site has challenging topography, the park will be developed in a primarily passive state. Potential amenities include trails, picnic areas, picnic shelter, playground, and one or two ball fields.

**River Property (Future Mini Park)**

An excellent opportunity exists to develop a river front park along the Catawba River near Wilkinson Boulevard. Potential amenities include picnic areas, playground, trails, and water based activities, such as paddleboat rentals and fishing docks.



**SECTION 2 ANALYSIS OF EXISTING PARK FACILITIES**

**GASTON COUNTY SCHOOL FACILITIES**

**Belmont Central Elementary School**

Belmont Central Elementary School is located at 310 Eagle Road. The Gaston County Parks and Recreation Department has a joint use agreement with the school system to provide athletic programming on school fields. Facilities include a youth baseball field, youth soccer field, and ¼ mile track.

**Belmont Middle School**

Located adjacent to Stowe Park, this county owned and maintained facility is the center of the City's youth and adult basketball program. While this arrangement maximizes the use of the gymnasium, the department still has a strong need for a recreation center to meet the needs of Belmont citizens.

NOTE: Catawba Heights Elementary School, North Belmont Elementary School, South Point High School, and JB Page Elementary School are located within the city limits, but no joint use between these schools and the Park and Recreation Department currently exists.

# City of Belmont

## Current Recreation Facilities

	Neighborhood Parks		Mini Parks		Special Use Facilities	Athletic Parks	Undeveloped Properties		Total
	Davis Park	Reid Park	Stowe Park	Crescent Park (Leased)			Hall Property (Future Neighborhood Park)	River Property (Future Mini Park)	
<b>Acres</b>	15	9	9	4	1	6	28	7	75 <sup>^</sup>
<b>Fields</b>									
Multipurpose	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Adult Softball	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1 <sup>^</sup>
Youth Baseball	1*	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Youth Softball	0	0	0	0	0	1#	0	0	1
Football	1*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Soccer	1*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Outdoor Courts</b>									
Basketball	0	2	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	2 <sup>^</sup>
Tennis	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Horseshoes	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
<b>Outdoor Area</b>									
Picnic shelters	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1 <sup>^</sup>
Playground area	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	3 <sup>^</sup>
Walking trail (mi)	0	.25	.20	.125	0	0	0	0	0.45 <sup>^</sup>
<b>Indoor Facilities/Special Use</b>									
Community Center	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1

\* Youth baseball, football, and soccer are provided on one multipurpose field at Davis Park.

<sup>^</sup> Leased facilities are shown for informational purposes only and are not counted in the inventory.

# Youth softball is provided on the adult softball field at Rodden, but is not a legitimate youth softball field.

*Section 3*  
*Recreation Standards*  
*and Needs Assessment*

**SECTION 3 RECREATION STANDARDS AND NEEDS ASSESSEMENT****INTRODUCTION**

This section contains the documentation on which the Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Master Plan is based. It begins with a description of park types which typically make up a park system. Using these park types as a backdrop, national and state standards are reviewed and used as a basis for establishing standards for park development for the City. Standards quoted in this study are based on standards proposed by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources (NCDENR). These standards are then used to evaluate the City's current system and to establish goals to meet future growth.

This study looks at two types of park standards. First it looks at total acreage of park land within the system. This analysis is broken into park types. From this analysis we can begin to see how the City's existing facilities compare with national and state standards, both with overall park acreage and with park types within this overall acreage.

The second analysis looks at recreation activities and the facilities required to provide those activities. By establishing a population-based standard for various recreation activities, this study establishes the kind and quantity of facilities, as well as the quality, which the City should be developing in the future.

The design standards used in this study were derived from input by City staff and citizen input from three public meetings. The development of these standards is perhaps the most important step in this planning process.

**PUBLIC INPUT**

The purpose for establishing and implementing a parks and recreation plan is to improve the services provided to the citizens. For this reason, it is imperative that the community is given an opportunity to voice their opinion with regard to the current standards and services of parks and recreation offered by the City. If this study is to be successful, it must reflect the needs and desires of the citizens. With this understanding, City staff, working with the consultant, put together a public participation plan for this study.

Public meetings to discuss parks and recreation needs for the City of Belmont were held on March 18, April 22, and June 5, 2003. Overall, the public meetings were very successful. Attendance for the meetings was very good. Approximately 20-30 citizens were present at each meeting, and input was excellent. The meeting format allowed an open exchange between citizens and the consultants.

The first public meeting on March 18, 2003 was held at Belmont City Hall with  $\pm$  20 citizens in attendance. Sallie Stevenson, Parks and Recreation Director, opened the meeting and introduced the staff of Site Solutions. Derek Williams of Site Solutions began with a brief introduction, firm description, and explanation of the components (or park types) that typically make up a comprehensive park system. He then explained the City's Master Plan process. Troy Fitzsimmons of Site Solutions followed with findings from an existing facility inventory to give

**SECTION 3 RECREATION STANDARDS AND NEEDS ASSESSEMENT**

an overview of the park facilities Belmont currently offers. Upon completion of the presentation, input from citizens was invited. The following comments were made:

- ◆ All of the existing parks are centrally located and a short distance from downtown Belmont. The pending plan needs to be sensitive to the growth that is occurring in Belmont and provide facilities for other areas of the City. Most of the growth is occurring in South Belmont and there is a strong need for park facilities there, but North Belmont also needs park facilities to service its residents.
- ◆ A large number of citizens expressed a need for a skateboard park facility. There is currently no such facility in Belmont and skateboarders are forced to use the streets and parking lots. Attendees asked if they could raise private funds to construct a skateboard facility. It was also noted that the undeveloped area of Davis Park could potentially create a good setting for a skate bowl.
- ◆ Parks should be small with convenient walking access provided.
- ◆ The zoning ordinance needs to be reviewed and recommendations made to employ other forms of obtaining park land in lieu of fee simple acquisition.
- ◆ Safety is an issue in parks, as many amenities, particularly playgrounds, are outdated and unsafe.
- ◆ The Catawba River needs to be taken advantage of for park space by providing river trails/greenways, fishing areas, picnic grounds, and potentially campsites for Boy and Girl Scout troops.
- ◆ Boy's football, boy's baseball, and girl's softball fields are not adequate, creating an immediate need for additional fields.
- ◆ Duke Power offered Gaston County an opportunity to lease 70 acres of land adjacent to the wildlife club for a park. The County did not take advantage of this offer so the city should consider this opportunity for additional park land.
- ◆ Restrooms are needed at most parks.
- ◆ It was suggested to add a ballfield at Davis Park, but decided that there would be an excessive amount of fill required to develop a suitable field.
- ◆ There is a need for a community park. Martha Rivers Park in Gastonia was cited as a good example of the type of park Belmont needs.
- ◆ The City contributed funds to the development of the Stowe Family YMCA. In return for these funds, the YMCA will provide access to ball fields, still undeveloped on YMCA property.
- ◆ The existing community center is inadequate. There is a need for indoor basketball as well as other indoor sport activities. There is also a need for classrooms for other types of recreational programs. McAdenville was cited as a good example of the type of facility Belmont needs.
- ◆ The need for a swimming pool was identified.

Following these comments, the group reviewed standards for recreational facilities development for the City. The results of this discussion are included in the tables found in other sections of this document.

**SECTION 3 RECREATION STANDARDS AND NEEDS ASSESSEMENT**

The second community workshop for the planning study was held on April 22, 2003 at Belmont City Hall. The meeting was well attended ( $\pm$  25 people) and participants provided positive input on the proposed recommendations. Sallie Stevenson opened the meeting with introductions and Derek Williams briefly described the planning process for this study. Troy Fitzsimmons presented a preliminary set of standards for parks and recreation facility development that included the following:

- ◆ The City currently has adequate park land in neighborhood parks and mini parks, but much of this land is currently undeveloped. By 2013 the City will need to develop a community park, an additional neighborhood park, and four or five additional mini parks.
- ◆ Currently, the City has adequate athletic field and court facilities. There is, however, an immediate need for one additional football field, one picnic shelter, and several playgrounds. In addition, there is a current need for walking trails, bike paths, a community center (with gymnasium), a swimming pool, and a skateboard facility.

Following the presentation, the meeting was opened for discussion, and the following comments were made:

- ◆ Walking trails would provide a wonderful opportunity for everyone (young and old) to participate in physical exercise. The plan might also include a track and field facility.
- ◆ The proposed standards for soccer fields should be increased to reflect greater demand (1/5000).
- ◆ It was noted that the field on Crescent Park was not owned by the City and could be removed from public use in the future.
- ◆ As plans for the River Property develop, it should be remembered that the water in this area is very shallow and boat access will not be feasible.
- ◆ Someone asked if the YMCA's expansion plans had been considered in the proposed master plan. It was noted that the final schedule and use arrangements for these facilities have not been finalized.
- ◆ Most people favored an indoor pool associated with the gymnasium, instead of an outdoor pool.
- ◆ Generally, it was felt that the gymnasium should be centrally located within the City.
- ◆ A very general discussion of the gymnasium was held. Most people felt this facility should include a full basketball court, changing areas, exercise rooms, and meeting rooms. This type of building will require 20,000-30,000 S.F. and will cost approximately \$2.5 million.

It was noted that this planning study will include a brief overview of greenway development, but will not include a detailed greenway plan.

The third and final community workshop for the Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan was held at City Hall on June 5, 2003. Attendance was light as only seven +/- were present, but those that did attend were very interested in the plan and provided good input.

**SECTION 3 RECREATION STANDARDS AND NEEDS ASSESSEMENT**

Sallie Stevenson opened the meeting with the introduction of Derek Williams and Troy Fitzsimmons. Derek Williams briefly reviewed the inventory, park classifications and facility standards. Mr. Williams then went through, in detail, specific recommendations for Belmont. The recommendations are based upon previous public and staff input, and national and state guidelines for park Master Plan development. The specific recommendations are as follows:

- ◆ The 28-acre Hall Property should be developed as a community park and intensely developed with athletic fields.
- ◆ One new neighborhood park, approximately 20 acres, should be located in the vicinity of Highway 273 and the proposed Highway 321 bypass.
- ◆ Five new mini parks, approximately one acre each, should be acquired and developed by 2013. Since Crescent Park is leased, it was recommended to purchase this facility in order to guarantee its future as permanent dedicated park land. The River Property should be developed as a mini park. Four additional mini parks should be acquired and developed in underserved areas of the City.

Troy Fitzsimmons then presented specific facility needs for the City of Belmont. The plan recommends that there is a need for all types of facilities and that this need will continue to grow through 2013. The specific recommendations are as follows (numbers mentioned are in addition to any facilities that currently exist):

- ◆ One additional youth baseball, adult softball, youth softball, football, and soccer field is needed to meet current demand.
- ◆ By 2013, there will be a need for four additional youth baseball fields, one additional adult softball field, youth softball, football, and soccer field(s).
- ◆ The Hall Property and new neighborhood park was recommended for intense athletic field development to meet these needs.
- ◆ Two volleyball courts are currently needed and one additional court will be needed by 2013.
- ◆ By 2013, one additional basketball court, three additional tennis courts, and one additional horseshoe pit will need to be added to the existing inventory.
- ◆ Two additional picnic shelters are currently needed with an additional two by 2013.
- ◆ Six additional playground activities are currently needed with an additional six by 2013.
- ◆ Approximately three additional miles of hiking/walking trails are currently needed with an additional two and one-half needed by 2013.
- ◆ A bona-fide community center complete with gymnasium, craft rooms, aerobic rooms, meeting rooms, and swimming pool is needed before 2013. Based upon these programming needs it is anticipated that the new center would need to be approximately 25,000 square feet.
- ◆ A 15-mile urban bicycling system should be developed by 2013.
- ◆ A permanent concrete bowl skate park should be constructed as soon as funding is available. Due to the immediate need for such a facility, it was also recommended that a smaller and more economical street course be developed immediately.

Derek Williams concluded the presentation with priorities for development, estimated costs for capital improvements, and a funding strategy. In total, there is estimated to be \$9 million in capital improvement costs. This estimate includes land acquisition, new development, and

**SECTION 3 RECREATION STANDARDS AND NEEDS ASSESSEMENT**

improvements to existing facilities. Funding options were also discussed with the bulk of funding (\$7 million), recommended to come from general obligation bonds. An additional \$1 million would come from annual allotments of \$100,000 through the general operation budget. The remainder would come from a combination of grants, gifts, dedications, and other revenue sources.

Following the presentation, the meeting was opened for discussion, and the following comments were made:

- ◆ The Hall Property has some severe topography and may not be suitable for a large number of athletic fields. An additional community park site may have to be acquired and developed in order to meet the athletic fields need if Hall cannot accommodate them.
- ◆ Consideration should be given to developing a large soccer facility that will be suitable for attracting major tournaments.
- ◆ Stowe Park needs a restroom facility in order to accommodate visitors for the many festivals hosted at the park.
- ◆ It was noted that Davis Park has a restroom facility.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Derek Williams announced that a draft Master Plan will be provided to staff for review within the next ten business days. The plan will then go before the City Council for approval at their August meeting.

**SECTION 3 RECREATION STANDARDS AND NEEDS ASSESSEMENT**

**PARK CLASSIFICATIONS AND LAND REQUIREMENTS**

A comprehensive park system is made up of a variety of park types. These park types range from very large Nature Preserves (often encompassing hundreds of acres) to the very small mini parks (sometimes less than one acre). Not all of these parks are the responsibility of the municipal agency. Instead, a variety of agencies play a role in providing a comprehensive plan (federal, state, county, and municipal). To understand the City’s role in providing recreation services to its citizens, one needs to understand the context that makes up a total park and recreation system.

**Regional Parks/Nature Preserves**

Nature Preserves are typically very large sites, encompassing unique qualities that exemplify the natural features found in the region, the diverse land formations, and the variety of vegetation and wildlife. Examples of the types of facilities provided in a Nature Preserve are environmental centers, camping, nature trails, observation decks, and picnic areas. Open fields for non-structured activities, such as frisbee throwing or kite flying, are also generally found.

Land chosen for future preserves, or the expansion of existing sites, should contain the previously mentioned characteristics accompanied with natural water features such as lakes, rivers, and creeks. The majority of the site should be reserved for passive recreation, with the remaining acreage used for active recreation.

Specific standards/criteria for developing Nature Preserves are as follows:

Service Area:	County Wide
Acreage/Population Ratio:	10 acres per 1,000 persons.
Minimum Size:	150-1,000 acres minimum with sufficient area to encompass the resources to be preserved and managed (10% of the site may be developed with facilities found in Community Parks).
Typical Facilities:	
Environmental Center	Picnic Tables with Grills (not under shelter)
Equestrian Center	Restrooms/Vending
Primitive Camping	Beach
Group Camping	Swimming
Recreational Vehicles Camping	Boating
Nature Trails	Fishing Piers/Boat Docks
Observation Deck	Parking
Picnic Shelters with Grills	Caretaker’s House

**The acquisition and development of Nature Preserves are typically undertaken by federal or state agencies.**



**TYPICAL REGIONAL PARK**

150-1000 ACRES

**SECTION 3 RECREATION STANDARDS AND NEEDS ASSESSEMENT**

**District Parks**

District parks function as the major source of active recreation in the areas they serve. Athletic facilities developed in district parks are typically designed for league and possibly tournament play. Passive recreation opportunities are found in the undisturbed areas, preferably within surrounding buffers.

Sites for district parks should be relatively flat to alleviate excessive grading of active facilities. Where possible, there should be an equal balance of wooded and cleared areas. If a natural water feature is present, the adjoining land should be developed primarily with passive recreation. Accessibility to neighborhoods should also be a consideration when choosing sites.

Listed below are standards for developing District Parks:

Service Area:	1 to 2 1/2 mile radius
Acreage/Population Ratio:	5 acres per 1,000 persons
Desirable Range:	75-200 acres
Desirable Size:	+100 acres

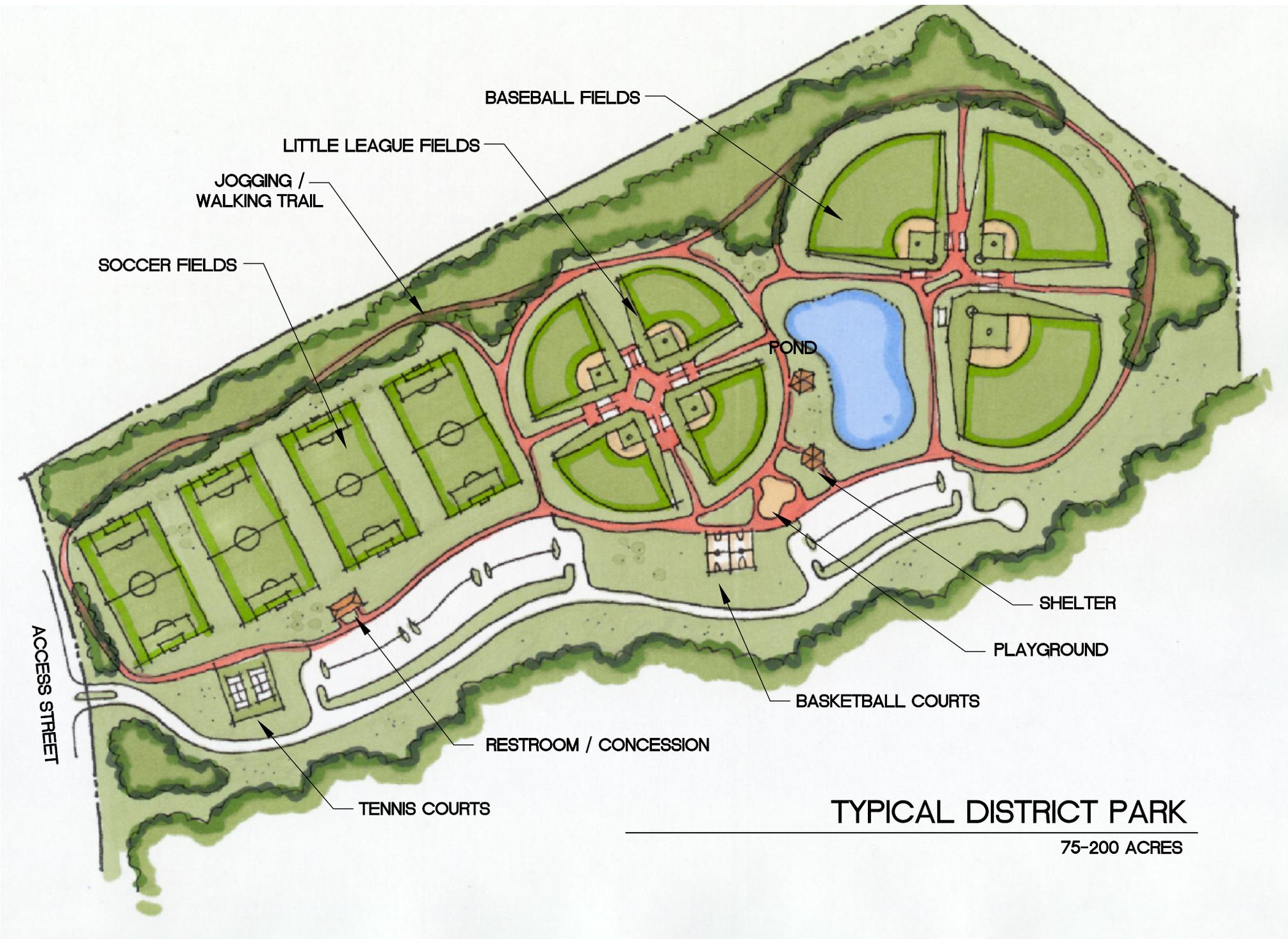
Typical Facilities:

Playgrounds	Picnic Shelter with Grills
Full Size Basketball Courts	Picnic Tables with Grills (not under shelter)
½ Basketball Courts	Nature Trail
Tennis Courts (lighted)	Benches or Bench Swings
Baseball/Softball Fields	Restrooms/Concessions
Multipurpose Fields	Parking
Soccer Practice Field with Moveable Goals	Service Yard
Volleyball Courts	50% of Site to Remain Undeveloped

Alternate Facilities:

Recreation Center	Boating
Tennis Center	Amphitheater
Soccer/Football Fields	Observation Decks
Running Trail	Fishing Piers/Boat Docks

**Development of District Parks typically fall within the responsibility of the county or municipal agency.**



# TYPICAL DISTRICT PARK

75-200 ACRES

**SECTION 3 RECREATION STANDARDS AND NEEDS ASSESSEMENT**

**Community Parks**

Community parks provide for the recreation needs of a few neighborhoods. A smaller range of facilities, compared to district parks, is typically provided and may support athletic and league sports or passive recreation. Fifty percent of the community park site should be developed for only passive recreation; these relatively undisturbed areas may serve as buffers around the park and/or act as buffers between active facilities.

Community park sites should have varying topography and vegetative communities. Forested areas should have a variety of tree species. Cleared areas should be present for siting active recreational facilities. Park land should also be contiguous and strategically located in order to be accessible to all users within the neighborhoods it serves.

Development of these parks should be based upon the following standards:

Service Area:	1-2 mile radius.
Acreage/Population Ratio:	2-5 acres per 1,000 persons.
Desirable Range:	15-50 acres.
Desirable Size:	25 acres.

Typical Facilities:

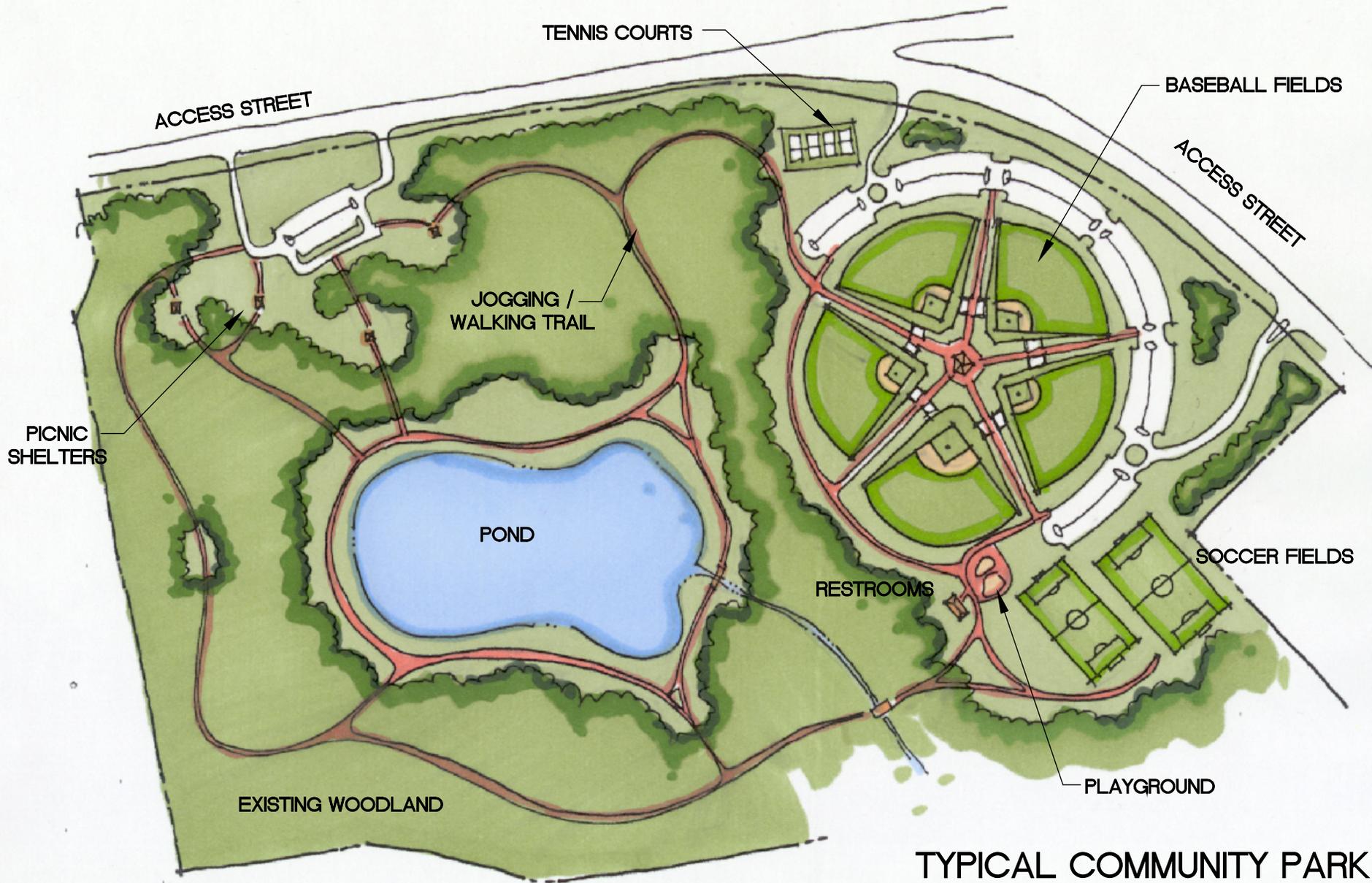
Picnic Shelters	Full Size Basketball Courts
Picnic Shelters with Grills	½ Basketball Courts
Picnic Tables with Grills	Tennis Courts
Benches or Bench Swings	Nature Trails
Restroom/Concessions	Multi-purpose Fields
Parking	Soccer Fields
Playgrounds	Swimming Pool
Volleyball Courts	
50% of Site to Remain Undeveloped	

Alternate Facilities:

- Recreation Center
- Natural Water Feature
- Disc Golf
- Amphitheater
- Observation Decks

Specialty facilities may be added to (or substituted) for other facilities, depending on community need or special site characteristics.

**Development of Community Parks typically fall within the responsibility of the municipality.**



## TYPICAL COMMUNITY PARK

15-50 ACRES

**SECTION 3 RECREATION STANDARDS AND NEEDS ASSESSEMENT**

**Neighborhood Parks**

Neighborhood parks offer the public a convenient source of recreation. These parks are usually located within walking distance of the area serviced, and they provide a variety of activities to interest all age groups. While their small size requires intense development, fifty percent of each site should remain undisturbed to serve as a buffer between the park and adjacent land users.

The standards for Neighborhood Park development are as follows:

Service Area:	¾ to 1 mile radius to serve walk-in recreation needs of surrounding populations.
Acreage/Population Ratio:	2.5 acres per 1,000 persons
Desirable Size:	7 to 15 acres
Typical Facilities:	
Playground	Picnic Shelters with Grills
½ Basketball Court	Picnic Tables with Grills (not under shelter)
Softball or Baseball Fields	Benches or Bench Swings
Multipurpose Field	50% of Site to Remain Undeveloped
Alternate Facilities:	
Tennis Courts	
Nature Trail	

**Where Municipal jurisdiction is available, neighborhood parks are typically developed by the municipality.**



## TYPICAL NEIGHBORHOOD PARK

7-15 ACRES

**SECTION 3 RECREATION STANDARDS AND NEEDS ASSESSEMENT**

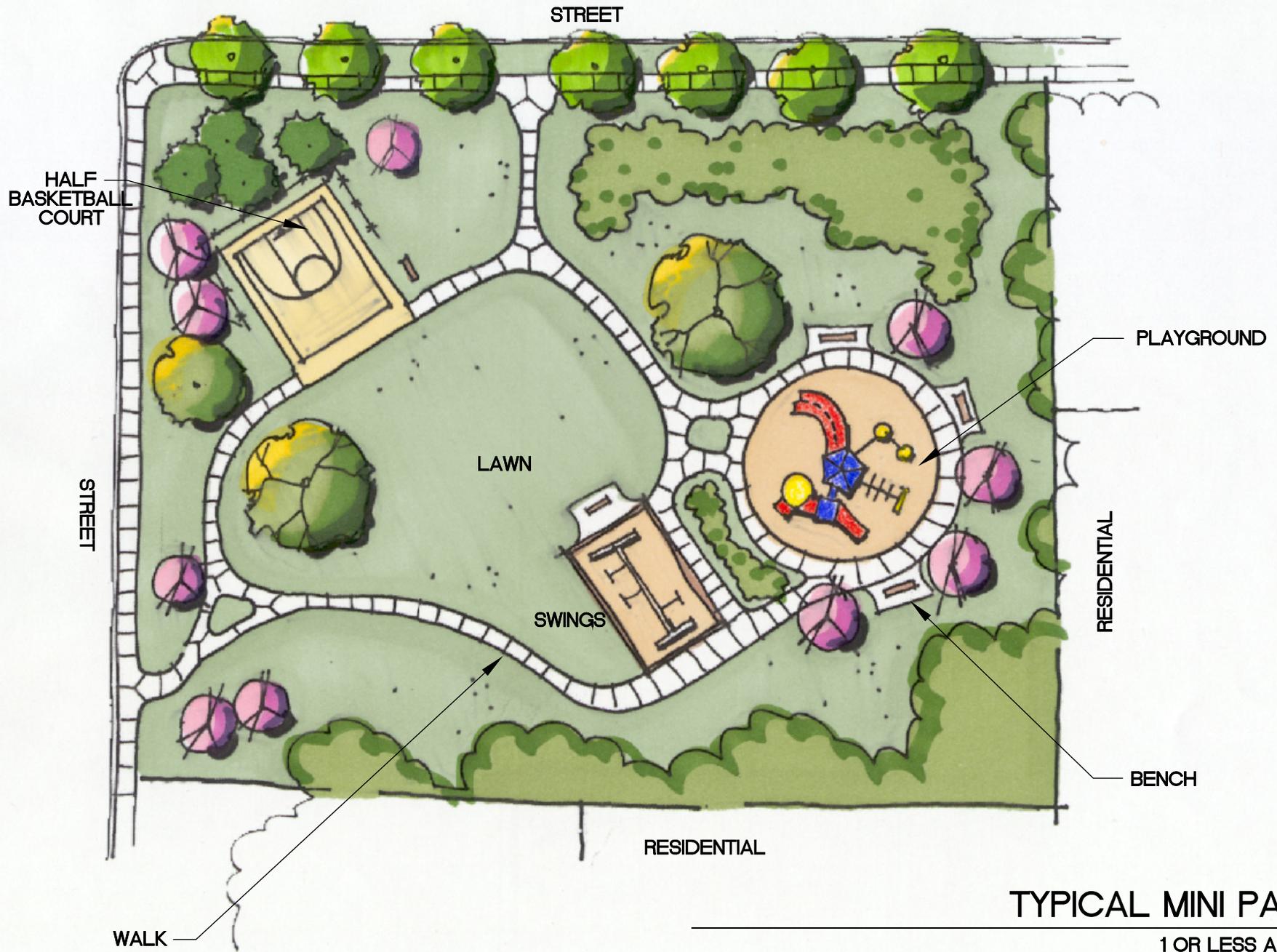
**Mini Parks**

Mini parks are the smallest park classification. These parks are located within walking distance of the area serviced, and they provide limited recreational needs. Their small size requires intense development, and little to no buffer between the park and adjacent land users is provided.

The standards for Mini Park development are as follows:

Service Area:	¼ to ½ mile radius to serve walk-in recreation needs of surrounding populations.
Acreage/Population Ratio:	0.5 acres per 1,000 persons
Desirable Size:	+/-1 acres
Typical Facilities:	
Playground	Picnic Tables with Grills (not under shelter)
½ Basketball Courts	Benches or Bench Swings
Open Play Area	
Alternate Facilities:	
Tennis Courts	
Walking Trail	

**Where Municipal jurisdiction is available, mini parks are typically developed by the municipality.**



## TYPICAL MINI PARK

1 OR LESS ACRES

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**SECTION 3 RECREATION STANDARDS AND NEEDS ASSESSEMENT**

**Linear Parks**

A linear park is an area developed for one or more varying modes of recreational travel such as hiking and biking. Often the linear park will be developed to connect recreational facilities, as well as schools and residential neighborhoods.

The acreage and service area of a linear park is variable and subject to existing natural and man-made features, the existence of public right-of-way, and the public demand for this type of park. In some cases, a linear park is developed within a large land area designated for protection and management of the natural environment, with the recreation use a secondary objective.

**Unique or Special Use Facilities**

The unique or special use facilities are park types that exist to enhance or utilize a special man-made or natural feature. They can include beaches, parkways, historical sites, sites of archeological significance, arboretums, conservation easements, flood plains, etc. Minimum standards relating to acreage or population have not been established by the park and recreation industry for this category. A size that is sufficient to protect and interpret the resource, while providing optimum use is considered desirable.

## SECTION 3 RECREATION STANDARDS AND NEEDS ASSESSEMENT

**EVALUATION OF PARK LAND NEEDS**

The minimum park land requirement (in acres) for the total population of Belmont is provided in the table below. The population outside of Belmont, including unincorporated areas of southeast Gaston County, has not been included in the standards analysis. The acreage requirement is based upon the population ratio method (acres of park land per 1,000 population) established for each park classification. It is recommended that in order to meet the projected park land requirements co-operative effort among the schools and other public or private entities should be employed.

The types of parks, which will be needed by the end of the planning period (year 2013), based upon the acreage standards provided in the table below include community parks, neighborhood parks and mini parks. The acreage standards established as part of this planning process indicates that the City of Belmont will be responsible for the development of one community park, one neighborhood park (land has already been acquired), and five mini parks (land has already been acquired for one park).

**Parks by Classification  
City of Belmont**

<b>Type</b>	<b>2003 (8,769)</b>	<b>2013 (15,000)</b>	<b>Existing</b>
<b>Regional Parks*</b> 1000 acre park (10 acre/1000)	88 acres	150 acres	N/A
<b>District Parks*</b> 200 acre park (5 acre/1000)	44 acres	75 acres	N/A
<b>Community Parks</b> 20-30 acre park (2.5 acre/1000)	22 acres <i>1 site</i>	38 acres <i>1 site</i>	0 acres <i>0 site</i>
<b>Neighborhood Parks</b> 10-15 acre park (2 acres/1000)	18 acres <i>2 sites</i>	30 acres <i>3 sites</i>	52 acres** <i>3 sites</i>
<b>Mini Parks</b> 1-2 acre park (0.5 acres/1000)	4 acres <i>4 sites</i>	8 acres <i>7 sites</i>	16 acres**^ <i>2 sites</i>
<b>Total Acres Needed for Mini, Neighborhood, and Community Parks</b> (5 acres/1000)	44 acres <i>24 acre surplus</i>	75 acres <i>7 acre deficiency</i>	68 acres**^

\* Regional and district parks are typically provided by state or county agencies.

\*\* Existing acreage and sites include undeveloped park property.

^ Crescent Park is leased and not counted in this table.

**SECTION 3 RECREATION STANDARDS AND NEEDS ASSESSEMENT**

Regional and district parks typically fall under the responsibility of federal, state or county agencies. Crowders Mountain State Park provides Belmont with a convenient regional park facility. Stowe Botanical Gardens offers another passive recreation facility in southeast Gaston County near the South Carolina line. The County has completed phase I development of the 350 acre George Poston District Park located on Lowell-Spencer Mountain Road. Phase I construction included the development of soccer fields, softball fields, baseball fields, playground, tournament horseshoe facility, and 1/3 mile walking track. The County also has a joint use agreement with the Gaston County School System to provide athletic programming at Belmont Central Elementary School. Belmont Central does not fit the criteria as a district park, but it does meet a need in providing organized athletic field space for youth baseball, youth soccer, and a ¼ mile track.

- ◆ **Community Parks:** There are no existing community parks within the Belmont Park system.
- ◆ **Neighborhood Parks:** Davis Park; Reid Park; Hall Property (undeveloped)
- ◆ **Mini Parks:** Crescent Park (leased); Stowe Park; River Property (undeveloped)
- ◆ **Athletic Parks:** Rodden Ballfield
- ◆ **Special Use Facilities:** J. Paul Ford Community Center

**SECTION 3 RECREATION STANDARDS AND NEEDS ASSESSEMENT****OPEN SPACE**

While it is feasible and appropriate to adopt population-based standards for park land and facilities, it is not quite as clear to calculate open space standards. Perhaps the most appropriate standard is a determination by the community that certain open space areas are necessary to protect perceived significant natural areas.

Public open space is considered any land acquired for the purpose of keeping it in a permanent undeveloped state. The functions of such land include: a] protection of drainage areas for water supplies (watersheds); b] protection of areas which are particularly well suited for growing crops (farmland preservation); c] protection of attractive waterways (wild and scenic rivers); d] preservation of spaces between communities to prevent urban sprawl (greenbelts); e] protection of wildlife habitat (sanctuaries); f] protection of approach and take-off areas near airports (clear zones); and g] protection of undevelopable land (landfills). While these are some of the more common open space functions, many others exist. The majority of open space in Belmont is comprised of privately held mixed hardwood forests, which is likely being held for future residential/commercial development.

**SECTION 3 RECREATION STANDARDS AND NEEDS ASSESSEMENT**

**FACILITY STANDARDS**

Minimum standards for recreational facilities (i.e. ball fields, courts, outdoor areas, etc.) have been developed for Belmont in accordance with industry guidelines established by the NRPA (National Recreation and Park Association) and the NCDENR (North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources). Identified in the table “Standards for Public Facilities” are the minimum national and state recreation facility standards as well as the standards that have been adopted through the public input process for the City of Belmont.

**EVALUATION OF FACILITY NEEDS**

The number of public facilities needed in Belmont through the planning period (2013) is identified in the table “Public Facilities Needs”. The table illustrates that there are several deficiencies in the recreation facility categories. According to the “Standards for Public Facilities,” which were developed as part of the planning study, the City currently meets the required standards for only basketball, tennis, and horseshoes. The largest deficiency is playgrounds. There are currently only three playground areas in the City and the standard recommends a need for an additional twelve playgrounds by 2013. Other major facility categories with deficiencies include youth baseball, adult softball, adult baseball, football, soccer, volleyball, shuffleboard, picnic shelters, walking/hiking trails, equestrian trails, bicycling/urban trails, and stream/lake access and mileage. It should also be noted that while the City operates the J. Paul Ford Community Center, it is not a true community center by definition and the need still exists for a functional community center.

Based upon the standards, immediate needs for additional facilities include:

- |                        |                                 |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 Youth Baseball Field | 6 Playground Activities         |
| 1 Adult Softball Field | 3.1 Miles Walking/Hiking Trails |
| 1 Youth Softball Field | 1 Community Center*             |
| 1 Football Field       | 1 Swimming Pool*                |
| 1 Soccer Field         | 9 Miles Of Urban Bikeways       |
| 2 Volleyball Courts    | 1.6 Stream/Lake Mileage         |
| 2 Shuffleboard Courts  | 1 Stream/Lake Access            |
| 2 Picnic Shelters      | 3.5 Miles Equestrian Trails**   |

\*Belmont citizens expressed a strong desire for these facilities now, suggesting that facilities be built today that will accommodate the 10 year population projection and the Belmont Standard of one facility per 20,000 residents (1/20,000) from the table labeled Public Facility Needs at the end of Section 3.

\*\*Belmont citizens expressed no interest in this current need. Documentation is shown only to concur with the current and projected needs set out in the table labeled Public Facility Needs at the end of Section 3.

**SECTION 3 RECREATION STANDARDS AND NEEDS ASSESSEMENT**

The following additional facilities will need to be added to this list of needs in order to meet the need through 2013:

- |                         |                                 |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 3 Youth Baseball Fields | 1 Shuffleboard Court            |
| 1 Adult Baseball Field  | 1 Horseshoe Pit                 |
| 1 Adult Softball Field  | 2 Picnic Shelters               |
| 1 Youth Softball Field  | 6 Playground Activities         |
| 1 Football Field        | 2.5 Miles Walking/Hiking Trails |
| 1 Soccer Field          | 6 Miles Urban Bikeways          |
| 1 Basketball Court      | 1.4 Miles Stream/Lake           |
| 2 Tennis Courts         | 2.5 Miles Equestrian Trail**    |
| 1 Volleyball Court      |                                 |

\*\*Belmont citizens expressed no interest in this current need. Documentation is shown only to concur with the current and projected needs set out in the table labeled Public Facility Needs at the end of Section 3.

## Standards for Public Facilities City of Belmont

Facilities	NRPA	NCDENR	Belmont
<b>Fields</b>			
Adult Baseball	1/12,000	1/5,000	1/10,000
Youth Baseball	N/A	N/A	1/2,000
Adult Softball	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/5,000
Youth Softball	N/A	N/A	1/5,000
Football	1/10,000	1/20,000	1/5,000
Soccer	1/10,000	1/20,000	1/5,000
<b>Courts</b>			
Basketball	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/5,000
Tennis	1/2,000	1/2,000	1/2,000
Volleyball	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/5,000
Shuffleboard	N/A	N/A	1/5,000
Horseshoe	N/A	N/A	1/5,000
<b>Outdoor Areas</b>			
Picnic Shelter	N/A	1/3,000	1/3,000
Playground Activities	N/A	1/1,000	1/1,000
<b>Trails</b>			
Hiking	1/region	.4 mile/1,000	.4 mile/1,000
Equestrian	N/A	.4 mile/1,000	.4 mile/1,000
Camping	N/A	2.5 sites/1,000	2.5 sites/1,000
Archery Area	1/50,000	1/50,000	1/50,000
<b>Specialized</b>			
Community Center	1/20,000	1/20,000	1/20,000
Swimming Pool	1/20,000	1/20,000	1/20,000
Golf Course	1/25,000	1/25,000	1/25,000
Bicycling/Urban	N/A	1 mile/1,000	1 mile/1,000
<b>Canoeing/Boating</b>			
Stream/Lake Mileage	N/A	.2 mile/1,000	.2 mile/1,000
Stream/Lake Access	N/A	1/10 miles	1/10 miles

# Public Facility Needs

## City of Belmont

Facilities	Belmont Standard	Existing Facilities	Current Demand (8,769)	10 Year Demand (15,000)
<b>Fields</b>				
Adult Baseball	1/10,000	0	0	1
Youth Baseball	1/2,000	3	4	7
Adult Softball	1/5,000	1	2	3
Youth Softball	1/5,000	1	2	3
Football	1/5,000	1	2	3
Soccer	1/5,000	1	2	3
<b>Courts</b>				
Basketball	1/5,000	2	2	3
Tennis	1/2,000	5	4	7
Volleyball	1/5,000	0	2	3
Shuffleboard	1/5,000	0	2	3
Horseshoe	1/5,000	2	2	3
<b>Outdoor Areas</b>				
Picnic Shelters	1/3,000	1	3	5
Playground Activities	1/1,000	3	9	15
<b>Trails</b>				
Hiking	.4 mile/1,000	0.45 mile	3.1 miles	6.0 miles
Equestrian	.4 mile/1,000	0	3.5 miles	6.0 miles
Archery Area	1/50,000	0	0	0
<b>Specialized</b>				
Community Center	1/20,000	1*	1**	1
Swimming Pool	1/20,000	0	1**	1
Golf Course	1/25,000	0	0	0
Bicycling-Urban	1 mile/1,000	0	9.0 miles	15.0 miles
<b>Canoeing/ Boating</b>				
Stream/Lake Mileage	.2 mile/1,000	0	1.6 miles	3.0 miles
Stream/ Lake Access	1/10 miles	0	1	1

Note: Crescent Park facilities are not counted since it is a leased property.

\* J. Paul Ford Recreation Center is not a true Community Center

\*\* Belmont citizens expressed a strong desire for these facilities now, irrespective of the standard – suggesting facilities be built large enough to accommodate the 10 year projection for population

***Section 4***  
***Master Plan Proposal***  
***and Recommendations***

**SECTION 4 MASTER PLAN PROPOSAL AND RECOMMENDATIONS****INTRODUCTION**

The inventory of existing park facilities within the City of Belmont indicates there are five separate recreation sites and one leased site within the corporation limits. Each of these recreation facilities is unique in its own respect and combined they form a basis of recreation for the residents of Belmont. The City also has two undeveloped park sites known as the Hall and River Properties. These undeveloped sites will help meet a need for additional park facilities in the near future for Belmont. Master Plans are fluid documents and must be changed as changes occur within the community. This Comprehensive Master Plan will provide direction for the future of recreation in the City of Belmont. This planning process is an excellent opportunity to assess where the park system currently is and where it needs to be in the future.

The City, within its corporate limits, provides active recreation and limited passive recreation. Most of the parks are well used and their locations provide suitable access for those patrons within each service area for that particular park. The City's parks have been primarily concentrated around the downtown area. All parks are within one mile of each other and there is a need to provide parks in other areas of the City. To provide a more equitable distribution of parks throughout the City, it is recommended that additional acquisition of park properties be acquired outside the downtown area. To achieve this distribution, park land should be acquired for a community park in the vicinity of Highway 273 and the proposed Highway 321 bypass and four additional mini park sites in the vicinity of North Belmont, Browntown/Catos, Amity Acres/Belwood, and Shanon Point/Southridge. It is also recommended that the undeveloped Hall and River Park properties be developed as a neighborhood and mini park respectively. Finally, the City needs to acquire the existing Crescent Park site. Crescent Park is currently leased and is not officially counted in the Parks Classification Table as the owners can terminate the lease at any time. Efforts should be made to permanently secure this site for park use.

Private recreation is provided by Stowe YMCA and other local private clubs located throughout the area. The YMCA provides programs at their indoor gymnasium/health club facility. Water sports are available on Lake Wylie and the South Fork River through private clubs and marinas. Historic attractions are also present throughout the historic downtown area.

This plan will address the needs of providing both passive and active recreation. Passive recreation fulfills the need for preserving open space and providing predominately passive forms of recreation such as hiking, picnicking, quiet/passive recreation, along with the opportunity to observe nature. These facilities typically serve the entire County and are provided in regional or district parks. The other type of recreation is active, such as softball, baseball, volleyball, and other outdoor active activities. Cities and municipalities (usually provide this type of recreation facility) on a limited basis at community centers, community parks, neighborhood parks, mini parks, special use facilities, and school sites.

The following information will provide insight into the different aspects of recreation currently provided in the City of Belmont. The information is organized into the following categories for ease of coverage:

**SECTION 4 MASTER PLAN PROPOSAL AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- ◆ Role of the City of Belmont
- ◆ Role of Other Recreation Providers
- ◆ Park Proposals and Recommendations
- ◆ Facility Proposals and Recommendations

**ROLE OF THE CITY OF BELMONT**

The City of Belmont presently provides a wide array of recreation opportunities through active recreation facilities, passive recreation facilities, and special use facilities. Each park seems to have its own niche in providing recreation amenities to City residents. The City's primary role is to offer park and recreation facilities on a citywide level for the residents of Belmont. The City of Belmont should strive to insure that recreation facilities and programs are available and equitably distributed to satisfy the needs for its own citizens. A secondary concern is the recreation needs of users outside of the City that make up a portion of the overall user total. Belmont must be responsible for providing community, neighborhood, and mini parks within their own municipality based on the population of their City. Gaston County should be responsible for district parks and the state or federal government for regional parks.

It is also suggested that Belmont maintain their relationship with both public and private user/provider groups, within Belmont and Gaston County, in order to be aware of facility needs (current and future). Through this communication, agencies will avoid duplication and improve recreation planning activities. This includes coordination with the Gaston County Parks and Recreation Department and Gaston County Schools for joint participation of their facilities to meet area needs. Through cooperation and coordination, the City and County may offer some of these facilities and programs jointly. The City of Belmont and Gaston County should explore the opportunities of “partnering” in the delivery of recreation services for the area. Belmont and Gaston County should also search for additional agencies (public and private) that have interest in sharing programs and facility development.

The City should support the greenway initiative proposed in the Gaston County Comprehensive Planning Program. This greenway initiative, when complete, will provide a greenway corridor connecting the Educational Forest in Northeast Gaston, Stowe Botanical Garden, Crowders Mountain State Park, and other areas in Gaston County. The City should also provide greenways or pedestrian friendly streets between existing city parks, schools, residential neighborhoods, and businesses. Greenways are considered important to the success of the City’s recreation program and the quality of life for Belmont residents.

Most of the existing parks in the Belmont area are over 40 years old. Over the past several years, the City has invested in updating these parks to improve park amenities and playground safety. However, there is still a critical need to provide additional improvements to existing facilities.

**ROLE OF OTHER RECREATION PROVIDERS**

Recreation is available through many different providers within the City of Belmont and southeast Gaston County. Each supplier provides a different type of recreation that adds to the unique mix of leisure activities within the City.

**SECTION 4 MASTER PLAN PROPOSAL AND RECOMMENDATIONS****Membership Recreation Carriers**

The Stowe YMCA currently offers a swimming pool, gymnasium, weight room, aerobics room, and other activity rooms at its facility. The YMCA also offers day camps, after school programs, and athletic programming both indoor and outdoor. Future plans call for athletic field development at the site and an expansion of the center.

**Private Sector**

The private sector should provide recreation facilities and programs that the City and County are unable to offer. These facilities may include golf courses, private swim clubs, tennis clubs, and private athletic associations and complexes. Stowe Botanical Gardens offers an array of interpretive programming that the public can enjoy. The City should also look for ways to encourage assistance from private industry that may provide their own recreation facilities on their private property, or financially contribute to the development of special facilities within the City's parks.

Land developers should be responsible for the dedication of open space when it is associated with the development of residential, commercial, or industrial properties. The land development process provides an excellent opportunity to gain additional land for natural area preservation and greenway development. The City should look at open space as a requirement for developers in their development codes and ordinances.

**State and Federal Parks**

Crowders Mountain State Park is located within twenty miles of the City. Crowders provides a plethora of passive recreation facilities such as hiking trails, interpretive trails, rock climbing, camping, fishing, and picnic areas for visitors. The park also houses a newly constructed nature center that is very popular. This park provides much needed passive and special use recreation filling a need that Belmont parks cannot provide.

**Gaston County Schools**

Gaston County Schools already serves as a significant component of the County Parks and Recreation System by supplying existing school sites for active recreation. The County Parks and Recreation Department is currently working with schools within the city limits. The joint use agreements between Gaston County Schools and the Gaston County Parks and Recreation Department are important and will require a cooperative effort in the sharing of community resources. Joint use agreements help to better coordinate and insure program schedules, the responsibilities for supervision and cleanup, maintenance costs, and facility improvement costs. This will continue to result in the least possible expenditure of public funds for the area.

**Gaston County Parks and Recreation Department**

The citizens of Belmont are limited in their use of County facilities as only one County facility exists within the city limits at Belmont Central Elementary School. However, many County residents use City programs in youth athletics, ceramics, and other recreation program opportunities. It has been estimated that as much as 35% of the participants in City programs are not Belmont residents.

**SECTION 4 MASTER PLAN PROPOSAL AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This unilateral use of programs and facilities points to the need for the County to work more with the City in providing facilities and programs. Each agency can, and should, play a role in the comprehensive network of facilities and services that make up a park system. The most important step in this collaboration is open and honest communication between City and County staff, advisory boards and elected officials.

**Adjacent County Park Systems**

Belmont is located in the southeast quadrant of Gaston County. York and Mecklenburg are the only two counties that adjoin this section of Gaston County. While these counties are close, there are no existing park facilities nearby for Belmont residents to utilize. The closest facility is on Lake Wylie off York Road in Mecklenburg County at McDowell Nature Preserve. Mecklenburg County owns two significant tracts of land along Lake Wylie near Wilkinson Boulevard and I-85. When these facilities are finally developed Belmont residents will have recreation facilities within a short commute. The site just north of I-85 is the location for a proposed whitewater river park. This manmade facility will provide whitewater rapids for boating and kayaking.

All adjoining counties should start or continue efforts in the development of a regional greenway system. These systems should follow existing drainage basins and utility corridors.

**PARK PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

As previously stated, the City of Belmont should focus on developing and operating community, neighborhood, mini parks, and special use facilities along with greenways. Chapter 3 of the Recreation Standards and Needs Assessment identified the existing and future parks needed in the City. It is recommended, by the year 2013, that Belmont makes provisions for one community park, three neighborhood parks, and seven mini parks. The park proposals described below have been formulated to address the existing and future park needs for the City of Belmont through the year 2013. In addition, the proposals and recommendations are presented graphically on the Master Plan.

**Regional Parks**

Crowders Mountain State Park is within twenty miles of Belmont city limits. This facility provides the necessary regional recreation needs of the City without the establishment of any new facilities.

**District Parks**

Based on state standards, it is recommended that Belmont be served by one district park based upon their population and current facility needs within the study area by the year 2013. Currently, the County provides such a facility at the 350-acre George Poston Park on Lowell-Spencer Mountain Road. There is also an additional athletic field programmed by the County at Belmont Central Elementary School. Poston is several miles outside the Belmont city limits and inconvenient for Belmont residents. A closer facility is needed to legitimately serve Belmont.

The County has been negotiating with Duke Power to lease a 70-acre tract near the Wildlife Club in south Belmont. The City should encourage the County to complete the lease and develop the facility in the near future. This site is only conducive to passive development and has already

**SECTION 4 MASTER PLAN PROPOSAL AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

been master planned for nearly two miles of trails, camping, picnicking, fishing piers, and restrooms. There is also a proposed youth baseball field for the site, but will likely be deemed infeasible due to topographic constraints.

**Community Parks**

The Recreation Standards and Needs Assessment (Chapter 3) recommends that one community park be provided no later than 2013. The City should begin immediately looking for approximately 30 acres of land for one community park. This park should be located in south Belmont near the future intersection of Highway 273 and the proposed Highway 321 bypass. This area has no park facilities and is experiencing significant residential development. The eventual opening of the Highway 321 bypass will only perpetuate further development and the need for a park.

Due to the current and future demand for athletic fields, this site should be intensely developed to provide multiple fields such as youth baseball, adult softball, youth softball, football, and soccer. It may not be feasible to meet all of these needs at one site, but an effort should be made to meet as many needs as possible. Those needs, which cannot be met, can be developed at the proposed neighborhood parks. Land acquisition (Chapter 3) and development of this park should be a high priority in order to meet the current athletic field demands.

**Neighborhood Parks**

The Recreation Standards and Needs Assessment recommends that three neighborhood parks be provided throughout the Belmont area by the year 2013 with 30 acres required. The City already has two parks that fall under the classification criteria for a neighborhood park with regards to the acreage of 7 to 15 acres. These facilities are Davis Park (15 acres) and Reid Park (9 acres).

In addition to the two existing neighborhood parks, the City owns 28 acres of undeveloped land on West Woodrow Street. This site is known as the Hall Property. While the Hall Property is large enough to serve as a community park, the site's physical characteristics (topography, drainage, etc.) would significantly limit development of active recreation (ball fields). Based on this limitation, it is recommended that the Hall Property be developed as a neighborhood park; where active recreation is not the primary use.

**Mini Parks**

In accordance with the recreation standards established by the State of North Carolina it is recommended that Belmont provide seven mini parks based upon their population and current facility needs within the study area by the year 2013. Currently, the City has two mini parks, which meet the classification criteria for a mini park. They are Stowe Park (9 acres) and the River Property (7 acres). Crescent Park is another suitable existing mini park, however, because it is leased to the City it is not counted since it cannot be considered a permanently dedicated park.

The City's first priority should be to utilize existing property which is currently available. Crescent Park should be acquired and made a permanent dedicated park. Crescent provides needed athletic field space along with other recreation facilities for the surrounding neighborhood. The City should also develop the River Property as a passive use mini park.

**SECTION 4 MASTER PLAN PROPOSAL AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Facilities could include fishing piers, picnic areas, and nature trails.

Next, the City should acquire four additional mini park sites in areas of the City that are not currently served. Sites should be acquired in the vicinity of North Belmont, Browntown/Catos, Amity Acres/Belwood, and Shanon Point/Southridge for future development. These acquisitions will provide a more equitable distribution of park facilities throughout the City and provide residents with nearby walk-to parks.

Future mini park sites should be acquired from developers as new developments continue. It is recommended that 5 to 10 percent of gross project size should be dedicated to open space, or the City should require developers to donate land for future parks. The City should be responsible for development and maintenance of these sites. These parks could contain an open multi-purpose field, playground equipment and sitting areas. Any new school sites in the near future should also develop mini parks along with the school.

**Greenways**

The Gaston County Comprehensive Planning Program recommends the acquisition and development of a greenway along the Catawba River from the Educational Forest in Northeast Gaston to Stowe Botanical Garden and onto Crowders Mountain State Park. This bold initiative will provide access to Belmont residents near the Catawba River. Belmont should support this initiative to provide the nucleus of a bonafide City greenway system.

While the Gaston greenway plan is a good starting point for a greenway system in Belmont, the City should provide better connectivity of its residential neighborhoods, business areas, parks, and schools. Safe pedestrian/bicycle paths provide convenient alternative means of transportation to various points of interest. Greenways can be developed along creeks in floodplain areas where development is limited and land usually available. Greenways can also be provided along road corridors as extra wide sidewalks and marked bicycle lanes on the roadside. Due to Belmont's existing development, a combination of creek side greenways and road connectors will be needed to provide a suitable interconnecting greenway system. While a comprehensive greenway master plan is beyond the scope of this plan, it is recommended that a comprehensive greenway master plan be developed in the near future. Belmont is undergoing significant growth and a greenway plan should be in place before vacant land becomes scarce.

Belmont does not currently have subdivision regulations that allow for park land dedications. Zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, and mandatory dedications may be utilized to create new park land at no cost to the community. Subdivision regulations can be revised to contain written provisions making allowance for both "cluster and planned unit development". Design standards relating to tree cover, drainage-ways and other natural features can be instrumental in the preservation of the natural setting and provide the linkages necessary for a greenway system. Regulations can require that land be dedicated, and/or compensation, in lieu of, be made available to the City for the development of park land.

**FACILITY PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

As previously stated, by the year 2013 the City of Belmont should contain one community park, three neighborhood parks, and seven mini parks. These park sites will allow for expansion of

**SECTION 4 MASTER PLAN PROPOSAL AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

needed recreation facilities. All new facilities will need to comply with federal, state and local building codes. This includes the requirements of the American Disabilities Act, which requires access to all public services. In Chapter 3 of The Recreation Standards and Needs Assessment, specific facility needs were identified in the community involvement process and by using recreation standards. This section summarizes facility improvements that need to be considered in future park development.

**Adult Baseball**

There are currently no adult baseball fields serving the City. Staff and the public did not identify adult baseball as a priority sport and chose to set a lesser standard of one field per 10,000 residents (1/10,000). Should a need arise for adult baseball, negotiating a joint use agreement with Gaston County Schools could provide this facility at South Point High School.

**Youth Baseball**

Youth baseball is one of the most popular athletic programs that the City offers. The program includes participants from Belmont, and from the surrounding Gaston County rural areas. There are only two existing youth baseball fields and one multipurpose field at Davis Park used for youth baseball as well as football and soccer. These existing fields cannot adequately accommodate all the youth that wish to participate in the program. This study recommends a standard of one field per 2,000 residents (1/2,000), which generates a current need for four fields total. This will require an immediate need of one additional field. Four additional fields will need to be constructed by 2013 as the population nearly doubles.

With the current need of one additional field and a future need of four additional fields it is recommended that the proposed community park be developed as a five-field youth baseball complex in order to meet the high demand for youth baseball. These fields should be designated for baseball and not developed as multipurpose fields where programming conflicts will arise. By consolidating a five-field complex at one site, economy of scale for operation and programming will be realized by the Parks and Recreation Department.

**Adult Softball**

The City of Belmont currently has one dedicated field within their park system. There is one additional field at Crescent Park, but this facility is leased and cannot be guaranteed for use in the future. The City should obtain ownership of Crescent Park in order to secure its future use. Two dedicated adult softball fields will meet the current demand while one additional field can be constructed to meet the demand in ten years. This additional softball field should be located at the proposed community park near Highway 273 and 321 or Hall Neighborhood Park. This will provide an adequate buffer for surrounding neighbors as opposed to a mini park, which would have no buffer to dampen sound and reduce field lighting spill.

**Football**

The City of Belmont currently offers a youth football program at Davis Park on a multipurpose field that is used for youth baseball and soccer as well. While this multipurpose field appears to meet the current demand, both City Staff and the public have expressed a need for a dedicated football field. A dedicated football field could be located at the proposed community park, the proposed neighborhood park site, or one of the mini park sites.

**SECTION 4 MASTER PLAN PROPOSAL AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

By 2013, there will be a demand for a second dedicated football field. This additional field can be placed at any one of previously recommended sites. Finally, it is recommended that this program be strongly coordinated with the Gaston County Schools. Public input has suggested that efforts to coordinate this program in the past with Gaston Schools have been difficult.

**Soccer**

Soccer is one of the fastest growing sports in America and the City of Belmont is no exception. The City currently has only one soccer field at Davis Park, on the multipurpose field. Existing demand indicates a current need for at least one additional field. By 2013 a third field will be required. Dedicated soccer fields could be located at the proposed community park, the proposed neighborhood park site, or one of the mini park sites. Development and operation of the soccer program should be strongly coordinated with the Gaston County Schools to fill current demands.

**Basketball Courts**

There are two full outdoor basketball courts within the park system, with an additional half court at Crescent Park. This meets the current need for outdoor courts, but future growth will generate a demand for an additional outdoor court by 2013. This future need can be easily met at one of the proposed mini park sites or any other proposed park site.

Indoor league basketball is an extremely popular activity in the community with high participation in both the youth and adult basketball programs. Belmont Middle School is currently utilized to meet this need, but scheduling difficulties have led to problems in coordinating this program. A new indoor basketball court/gymnasium should be constructed to meet this need as a component of a proposed recreation center that will be described further in this section.

**Tennis Courts**

Five-lighted tennis courts provide an excellent tennis facility at Davis Park. The recreation standards indicate that a total of eight tennis courts will be needed by 2013 based upon a 1/2,000 standard. It is recommended that three additional courts be provided by 2013. These courts can be provided at either the proposed new neighborhood park or mini parks.

**Volleyball Courts**

There are no outdoor volleyball courts within the park system. By the year 2013, three volleyball courts will be needed in the park system. Volleyball courts can easily be added to existing facilities or developed in new parks. Volleyball courts offer a convenient recreation amenity for picnic groups and should be considered in parks with picnic shelters or picnic areas.

**Horseshoe Pits and Shuffleboard Courts**

There are two horseshoe pits located at Davis Park. These courts provide a convenient recreational amenity for picnickers at the park. Throwing horseshoes tends to be an activity that everyone can participate in and is associated with group gatherings such as family reunions and company picnics. The City should provide additional horseshoe pits where desirable at picnic shelters or picnic areas.

**SECTION 4 MASTER PLAN PROPOSAL AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Shuffleboard was traditionally a very popular activity for senior citizens throughout the country. Due to lack of demand it is not recommended that outdoor courts be added to parks, but be incorporated as part of the proposed recreation center project. They will not only provide another indoor program, but are easy to place in the out of bounds areas of the gymnasium basketball courts.

**Picnic Shelters and Tables**

The City of Belmont does not have a group picnic shelter. There is one small shelter at Crescent Park and a gazebo at Stowe Park, but neither of these shelters provides group picnic opportunities. National and state users surveys have determined that picnicking is consistently one of the most popular outdoor recreation activities. Belmont should construct at least two additional shelters to meet current demand and at least two more by 2013. Shelters should vary in size to accommodate different types of gatherings and functions. The River Property is an ideal location for one or more shelters as this facility is proposed to be passive in nature and offers a scenic backdrop with the Catawba River flowing along its shore. A shelter should also be considered for the proposed Hall Neighborhood Park

**Playground Activities**

There are three playground activities within the parks system, one additional playground at Crescent Park, and several provided by the school system. Currently, Belmont has enough demand for nine playgrounds, based upon the established standard of 1/1,000. By the year 2013, a minimum of fifteen playground activities will be needed in Belmont. New playground activities should be located at all new neighborhood and mini park sites. Additional playgrounds should be provided at existing park facilities without playground equipment.

All but one playground unit at Davis Park are over 10 years old and may have potential safety hazard. A playground safety audit, in accordance with the National Playground Safety Institute, should be conducted to ensure that existing playgrounds are safe for children.

**Hiking/Interpretive Trails**

Currently, there are three short walking tracks at Reid, Crescent, and Stowe Parks. While these tracks provide walking and jogging opportunities, they really do not provide an opportunity to get out into nature, as they are located around ballfields. Recreation standards indicate that by 2013, over six miles of hiking trails will be needed to serve the community based upon a 0.4 miles per 1,000 population (04.mi/1,000). It is recommended that the majority of these trails be incorporated as part of a comprehensive greenway system. Trails should also be provided along the River Property at the river's edge and along the perimeter of the proposed Hall Neighborhood Park. Short walking tracks could also be provided in mini parks as community demand warrants. Interpretive trails should be located along select routes of the greenways and River Property where there are opportunities for environmental interpretation.

The hiking trails should be designed to serve primarily walkers and joggers and in certain cases bicyclist. The trail surface can be either natural or paved and normally is 10' in width. Greenways need to be planned in conjunction with the overall Belmont open space network. These greenways should be interconnected with Gaston County's regional greenway plan,

**SECTION 4 MASTER PLAN PROPOSAL AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

allowing access to the Educational Forest to the north, Stowe Botanical Gardens to the south, and Crowders Mountain State Park to the west.

**Recreation Center**

A recreation center is an important multi-purpose facility serving a city's indoor recreational needs. Both athletic and general recreation programming can occur at the center in addition to various other city activities. Belmont currently has one community center, the J. Paul Ford Community Center. This facility provides space for basic recreational programming such as community meetings, but cannot support any athletic programming. Strong staff and public support indicates a need for one large complex that can meet the needs for indoor basketball and volleyball leagues, and also meet the needs for senior and other recreation programming needs.

The recreation center should include at least one full size basketball court, swimming pool, weight room, aerobic rooms, locker rooms, senior center room, space for arts and crafts, and multi-purpose rooms for general activities and community meetings. This facility will require a minimum of 25,000 square feet, perhaps much more depending on the outcome of design development. It is recommended that the center be centrally located in downtown Belmont.

The new recreation center will replace all of the recreational programming currently offered at the J. Paul Ford Community Center. Given its age, limitations, and code issues related to the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), it is recommended that the existing center be utilized for another purpose once the new recreation center is complete or surplus.

**Swimming Pools**

There was very strong support at the public meetings for the development of a public swimming pool. Based upon staff and public input, it is recommended that a swimming pool be developed in conjunction with the proposed recreation center.

**Urban Bikeways**

Belmont currently has no designated urban bikeway routes. By the year 2013, the standards suggest that fifteen miles will be needed. It is important that a bikeway master plan be developed by the City of Belmont. This planning needs to occur on a regional level incorporating the bikeway plans from Gaston and surrounding counties. In addition to providing bikeways along existing roadways, they can also be provided as part of a planned greenway system as previously discussed in this section.

**SECTION 4 MASTER PLAN PROPOSAL AND RECOMMENDATIONS****Skateboard Park**

There was strong community support to develop a skateboard facility where residents can ride their skateboards in a safe and structured skateboard park. The City does not allow skateboard use on public streets and sidewalks due to the inherent danger of the interaction between skateboarders, motorists, and pedestrians. With no place to safely pursue this sport there becomes a high demand to provide such a facility.

A skateboard park can be as simple as a few movable ramps placed on an asphalt or concrete surface to a more elaborate concrete bowl with varying slopes, depths, and banks. Through discussion at the various community workshops, it has been suggested that the undeveloped property behind the multi-purpose field and tennis courts at Davis Park would lend itself to the development of a concrete bowl type skateboard park. This could provide a suitable permanent skateboard park facility. However, since there is a lack of immediate funding for a bowl and there is an immediate need to provide at least some type of facility now, another option is necessary. An underutilized hard surfaced area needs to be identified within one of the parks where some custom or prefabricated ramps can be placed to meet this current demand.

**Restrooms**

Only one of the City's parks has a permanent restroom facility (Davis Park). Restroom facilities at other parks are provided by means of portable toilet units. While this approach fills the immediate need, there is a desire to have more sanitary water borne facilities located in the parks. All existing or future parks hosting organized athletic or recreational programs, where visitors stay for an extended length of time, should be developed with water borne restrooms. Crescent, Stowe, Reid, and Rodden Parks should be up-fitted with restroom facilities. Likewise, new parks at the River Property, Hall Neighborhood Park, and the proposed community park should be developed with restrooms.

**PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT**

The park and facility proposals have been prioritized into three separate time frames for implementation. The prioritization was influenced by the evaluation of existing facilities, the community needs assessment, and the financial ability of the City to implement the overall capital improvement plan.

**Fiscal Years 2004-2006**

◆ Acquire property for Highway 273/321 community park (30 acres)*	\$1,050,000
◆ Acquire property for four new mini parks and Crescent Park*	\$ 350,000
◆ Community Park development	\$1,800,000
◆ Improvements to existing facilities at all parks	\$ 300,000
◆ Skateboard Park street course development	<u>\$ 50,000</u>
	\$3,550,000

**Fiscal Years 2007-2009**

◆ Acquire property for recreation center (+ 11.5 acres)*	\$ 400,000
◆ Mini Park (1 site) and the River Property Site Development	\$ 200,000
◆ Recreation Center Development Phase I (gym and activity rooms)	\$2,500,000
◆ Skateboard Park Concrete Bowl Development at Davis Park	\$ 200,000

**SECTION 4 MASTER PLAN PROPOSAL AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

◆ Continue improvements to existing facilities at all parks	<u>\$ 300,000</u>
	\$3,600,000

**Fiscal Years 2010-2013**

◆ Recreation Center Development Phase II (indoor pool)	\$1,000,000
◆ Develop Hall Neighborhood Park site	\$ 500,000
◆ Continue improvements to existing facilities at all parks	\$ 300,000
◆ Mini Park Development (3 sites)	<u>\$ 300,000</u>
	\$2,100,000

Grand Total: \$9,250,000

\*Cost estimates assume \$35,000/acre land cost

***Section 5***  
***Action Plan Implementation***

**SECTION 5 ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Belmont Parks and Recreation Facilities Comprehensive Master Plan 2003/2013 is based upon an analysis of the City’s demographics, anticipated population projections, an inventory and assessment of the existing park system, the identification of user needs, the development of recreation standards, and recommendations to implement the Master Plan. The plan is designed to be fluid in nature in order to provide the framework from which the City can enhance and expand its park and recreation system. This plan identifies both the current and projected needs of existing and future Belmont residents.

The identification of adequate funding is critical for implementation of the Master Plan. Given the current fiscal conditions of balancing municipal budgets, it will be increasingly difficult to adequately fund capital improvement projects in this current state of declining tax revenues. A U.S. Census Bureau report found per capita funding for parks and recreation services throughout the State of North Carolina, including local government, is 33% below the national average. The North Carolina Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan also identified inadequate funding for park facilities and recreation programs as a key issue needing to be addressed in the next five years if government is to maintain basic minimum services. Even though funding is currently low and the economic environment is less than ideal, it does not appear to reflect the high value Belmont citizens place on parks and recreation.

Master Plan implementation will result in meeting the current and future needs for parks and recreation services, as well as preserving some additional open space in Belmont. The City will need to continue to establish adequate annual budgets for the Parks and Recreation Department. The Department’s budget not only needs to be based on staffing needs, operations, and maintenance costs, but there should also be a suitable level of funding for capital improvements to the parks system. The proposed action plan is formatted in two 3-year and one 4-year increments. This funding plan is designed to give Belmont a realistic approach to finance the capital improvements program of the Master Plan.

**CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM**

The capital improvement program for the acquisition, development, and renovation of parks has been designed for a 10-year period. All of the proposed costs are shown in 2003-dollar values. The capital improvement program includes costs for land acquisition, site preparation, site utilities, access and parking, along with specific recreation improvements. The capital improvement plan also includes estimated planning, design fees, and furniture, fixtures, and equipment.

The capital improvement program is summarized into the following major components:

Improvements Program	\$ 900,000
Land Acquisition Program	\$1,800,000
Park Development Program	\$2,800,000
Special Use Facilities Development Program	<u>\$3,750,000</u>
Total Capital Improvement Cost	\$9,250,000

**SECTION 5 ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION**

This total figure equates to spending approximately \$925,000 annually through the year 2013. The capital improvements reflect the proposals and recommendations outlined in Section 4 of this Master Plan.

**PROPOSED FUNDING STRATEGY: \$9,250,000 TOTAL**

Over the next ten years, it will be impractical for the City of Belmont to support an overall capital improvements budget of \$9,250,000 solely through the general fund. A combination of funding strategies will need to be applied for successful implementation of the Master Plan. There are numerous combinations of funding strategies that can be explored and implemented by the City Council. One funding strategy the City might consider is as follows:

**General Tax Revenues: \$1,000,000**

General tax revenues traditionally provide the principal sources of funds for general operation and maintenance of a municipal parks and recreation system. Recreation, as a public service, is funded along with roadways, health, public safety, schools, etc., in regular budgets established by the municipality. The assessed value of real and personal property provides the framework for a major portion of the City's tax base.

This plan proposes budgeting \$100,000 per year for capital improvements of parks in addition to its regular general operation funding for parks and recreation. If this funding level is maintained for the next ten years, \$1,000,000 will be generated for park improvements and new development. This annual allocation of capital improvements funding will allow renovation of existing facilities and construction on smaller facilities, like mini parks.

**General Obligation Bond: \$7,000,000**

In view of the recommended capital improvements suggested in this plan, borrowing funds will be necessary for major acquisition and construction projects. The State of North Carolina gives municipal governments the authority to borrow funds for parks and recreation through the issuance of bonds. These funds can be used for land acquisition, planning, design, and development costs. For the purpose of paying the debt on these bonds the municipality is empowered to levy a special tax. The total bonding capacity for local government is limited to a maximum percentage of assessed property value.

The real value of a municipality's bonding authority and capacity is not limited to the funds made available for the capital improvement program. Bonding also allows the City to utilize local funds to match federal grant-in-aid monies. General obligation bonds are the most common funding source utilized for park projects in North Carolina. The City of Belmont has never proposed a bond referendum for park development, but may need to consider this source of funding to implement the recommendations found in this plan.

The City should consider the sale of general obligation bonds for the construction of larger park development and land acquisition projects. A minimum goal of \$7,000,000 should come from bonds. This represents roughly 75% of the proposed capital improvement program and would fund such projects as the proposed community park, neighborhood park, recreation center and pool complex. Bonds could be formatted in three separate campaigns of \$2-3 million each, spaced 3-4 years apart to provide funding when needed for each phase of a particular project.

**SECTION 5 ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION****Other Funding Sources: \$1,250,000**

A combination of grants, partnerships, mandatory land dedication, and others revenue sources can be utilized to offset the implementation of the Master Plan. The federal, state and private sector should be aggressively approached in helping with this undertaking as they provide some of the more reliable sources for funding. By aggressively pursuing other funding sources it is reasonable to obtain the remaining \$1,250,000 through this approach. A description of these suggested funding sources follows:

**Federal Grant Assistance**

Federal funding sources necessary to help finance the park improvements have been historically available from the U.S. National Park Service's Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery (UPARR) fund. Potential funding, through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant Program, is also available given certain conditions. Other potential sources for recreation funding are available through the National Foundation of Arts and Humanities.

In 1998, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21) was passed by Congress to enhance the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991. TEA-21 provides federal highway funds for transportation related projects. The fund is administered through state transportation departments. Greenway trails are considered transit related projects. In North Carolina, the Department of Transportation received \$22.5 million in 2002 of which 35% was applied toward bicycle/pedestrian initiatives.

**State Grant Assistance**

The North Carolina State Legislature created a consistent source of funds for parks and recreation in the state. The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) provide money for capital improvements, repairs, renovations and land acquisition for state and local parks. Revenues from the state's portion of the Real Estate Deed Transfer Tax supports the fund and is estimated to be \$13 million annually. 20% is applied to matching grants for local governments with the remainder applied towards the state's parks system, and the Coastal and Estuarine Water Beach Access Program.

**Partnership Structures**

All types of partnerships can be formed with local public, private, or quasi-public entities. To get started, a direct request should be made of an organization to meet and evaluate the mutual benefits possible through a partnership. Eventually, a concrete description of responsibilities will be needed, but the important step is to make initial contact and promote interest that can solidify an agreement to provide recreational services for the community. The following are just a few examples of the types of partnerships that can be formed:

Partnerships with other public agencies can include joint acquisition and development of a park facility. As noted in this Master Plan, Gaston County is currently negotiating with Duke Power on the lease of 70 acres of land in Belmont. The County does not have funding identified for development, but the formation of a partnership between the City and County for development funds could be a mutually beneficial solution to developing the park. If the City and County

**SECTION 5 ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION**

could work together on providing park facilities, the cost to each agency would be significantly reduced to fund.

Partnerships with the quasi-public sector can provide a direct benefit to the parks and recreation needs of Belmont. An example of such a partnership could be the City of Belmont and the Boy Scouts working together to develop portions of the River Property. The City owns the land, but has no development funding while the Boy Scouts have the resources to develop a portion of the property. The specific proposal involved creating trails and primitive campsites so the Scouts could conduct periodic retreats. This is a mutually beneficial partnership because the City gets a partially developed park while the Scouts get a convenient location to host events. These types of partnerships can provide a significant impact on the development and provision of park facilities within a community.

Partnerships with the private sector can be beneficial to all participants as well. Typically, a private developer can use private funds to develop a facility on city property with the City leasing it to the developer on a long-term basis. During the period of the lease the developer returns a portion of the revenues to the City and at the end of the lease the facility reverts to City ownership. This type of arrangement would be appropriate for improvements to a special use facility requiring a large capital investment.

#### Fees And Charges

Fees and charges for recreation services are recognized as an acceptable source of revenue. In 1988 the North Carolina Recreation Resources Service conducted a survey on user fees and charges. This study found that 94% of those surveyed charge fees for programs and/or facilities.

As indicated by the survey, a number of approaches are used today in terms of fees and charges. Some advocate that fees should only cover day-to-day operation and maintenance costs. Others look upon fees and charges to cover only a portion of operation and maintenance, with the balance coming from general tax revenues. Some advocate no fees and charges, viewing parks and recreation as a “free” public service, but the final decision as to fees and charges rests with elected officials. However, a word of caution may be appropriate. Fees should not be so high that persons of modest income will be effectively denied the use of a park facility. This is particularly appropriate during periods of high unemployment.

#### Contributions

Increasing numbers of parks and recreation agencies are exploring non-public (non-governmental) sources of revenue for their park systems. A public outdoor recreation estate may be used to accept gifts of property, easements, and direct monies. The National Recreation and Park Association recommends the use of private, non-profit, tax-exempt foundations as a means of accepting and administering private gifts to a public park system.

#### General Foundations

Another source of revenue is the direct contribution of money from general foundations within the state or nation. A listing of appropriate foundations can be found in the text entitled Grant Seeking in North Carolina, made available through the North Carolina Center of Public Policy Research, P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, North Carolina 27602.

**SECTION 5 ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION**

Foundation funds should be sought for both development and construction of facilities as well as providing programs. They should include general-purpose foundations, which have relatively few restrictions, special program foundations for specific activities, and corporate foundations with few limitations typically from local sources.

**LAND ACQUISITION OPTIONS**

There are several options available to acquire park land outside of the traditional outright purchase of land. Options available to Belmont for acquiring parks as recommended in the Master Plan include the following:

**Fee Simple Purchase**

The outright purchase is perhaps the most widely used method of obtaining park land. The fee simple purchase has the advantage of being relatively simple to administer, but does require the greatest direct use of public funds.

**Fee Simple With Lease-Back or Resale**

This technique of land acquisition allows the City to purchase land to either lease or sell to a prospective user with deed restrictions that will protect the land from abuse or development. The land can then be protected, and possibly used for public good, without the ultimate cost of fee simple purchase.

**Long-Term Option**

A long-term option is frequently used when a piece of land is seen as having potential future value though it is not desired, or affordable, to the City at the time. Under the terms of a long-term option, the City agrees with the landowner on a selling price for the property and a time period over which the City has the right to exercise its option. The first benefit of this protective method is that the land use of the property is stabilized and protected. Secondly, the City does not have to expend large sums of money until the land is purchased. Thirdly, the purchase price of the land is established.

The disadvantage of this method lies in that for every right given by the property owner, a price must be paid. In this case, the cost of land use stabilization and price commitment comes at the cost of securing the option.

**First Right of Purchase**

This approach to acquiring park land does not fix the selling price of a parcel of land, but alerts the City of any impending purchase that might disrupt the park land acquisition. The City would be notified that a purchase is pending and would then have the right to purchase the property before it is sold to another party.

**Local Gifts**

A significant, and often untapped source of funding for acquisition and development of local park projects is through a well-organized local gifts program. The pursuit of land, money, construction funds, or donated labor can have a meaningful impact on the development of a park system.

**SECTION 5 ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION**

The most frequently used type of gift involves the giving of land (through a full gift of agreed upon below market value sale) to be used for a park. The timing of such a donation can correspond with a Land and Water Conservation Fund project or PARTF Grant application, thereby providing all or a significant portion of the local matching requirement associated with this program. A still familiar use of gifts involves donated labor or materials, which become part of an improvement project and help to reduce project costs. The value of the services or materials can also be used to match non-local grant funds. When not tied into a grant, such donations (land, labor or materials) still play an important role in reducing the demand for local capital expenditures.

Some cities have developed a gifts catalog as a tool for emphasizing an organized gifts program. Such a publication should explain the role and importance of the gifts program, describe its advantages, define the tax advantages to the donor, and identify various gifts (land, labor, play equipment, materials, trees, etc.) that are needed. The gifts catalog should be prepared in a format that can be distributed effectively and inexpensively. It should employ a clear statement of needs and the costs associated with various gifts.

To aid this type of gift program, a strategy for contacting potential donors (individuals, businesses, foundations, service clubs, etc.) should be developed. An important part of this strategy should include contacting the local Bar Association, trust departments of lending institutions, and the Probate Court to make sure these groups are aware of the potential for an individual to include a gift to a recreation department.

**Life Estate**

A life estate is a deferred gift. Under this plan, a donor retains use of his land during his lifetime and relinquishes title to the land upon his death. In return for this gift, the owner is usually relieved of the property tax burden on the donated land.

**Easement**

The most common type of less-than-fee interest in land is an easement. Since property ownership may be envisioned as a bundle of rights, it is possible for the City to purchase any of these rights. An easement seeks either to compensate the landholder for the right to use his land in some way, or to compensate him for the loss of one of his privileges to use the land.

One advantage of this less-than-fee interest in the land is the private citizen continues to use the land while the land remains on the tax records continuing as a source of revenue for a city. Perhaps the greatest benefit lies in the fact that the community purchases only those rights which it specifically needs to execute its park land objectives. By purchasing only rights necessary to the system and not the land itself, the City is making more selective and efficient use of its limited financial resources.

**SECTION 5 ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION**

**Zoning/Subdivision Regulations/Mandatory Dedication**

Zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, and mandatory dedications may be utilized in acquiring new park land at no cost to the community. This process must be approved through special state legislation in Raleigh.

Subdivision regulations can be revised to contain written provisions making allowance for both Cluster and Planned Unit Development. Design standards relating to tree cover, drainage-ways, and other natural features can be instrumental in the preservation of the natural setting. Regulations can require that land be dedicated and/or compensation in lieu be made to the City for the development of park land. Belmont does not have subdivision regulations that allow for park land dedications.

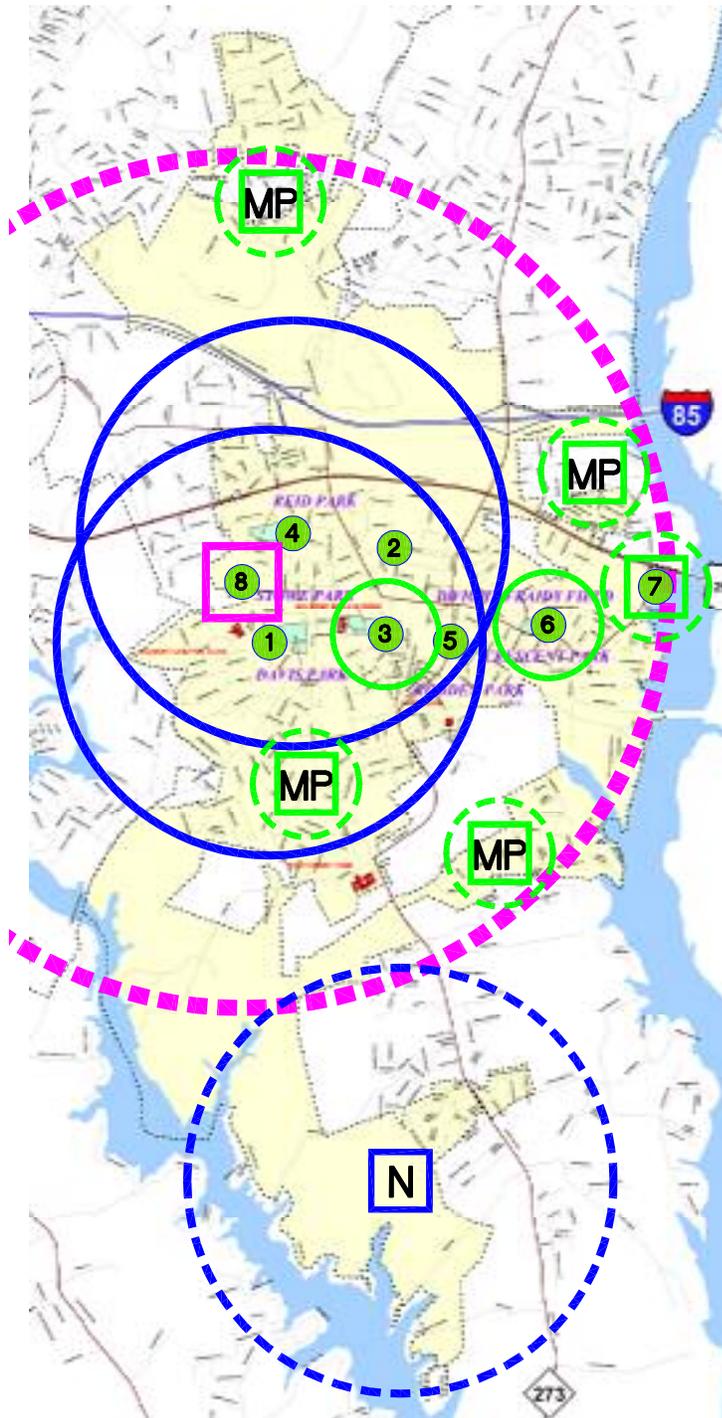
Should the City move to this method of park acquisition, care should be taken to ensure quality land is dedicated to the public. The City should reserve the right to review all preliminary development plans to verify acceptance of required dedicated park land. All too often, developers attempt to dedicate unusable land to local governments. Scattered and unplanned pockets of open space are of no use to the overall parks and recreation system.

A variation of the mandatory land dedication is payment of a fee in-lieu-of land dedication. Under this alternative, a payment of a fee for construction of each dwelling unit goes directly into a special fund earmarked for parks acquisition and development. The benefits of this method for park development in newly evolving neighborhoods are as follows:

- The City is financially able to purchase parks in accordance with a predetermined set of plans.
- The money is available when needed.
- The residents directly feel the benefit of the park fee involved.

Belmont will experience tremendous growth in the coming decade. Mandatory dedication could add significantly to the City's park land holdings and development.

# City of Belmont Parks and Recreation 10 Year Master Plan



1 Davis Park



2 J Paul Ford Recreation Center



3 Stowe Park



4 Reid Park



5 Rodden Ballfield



6 Crescent Park



7 River Property



8 Hall Property

## Existing Park Facilities

Mini Parks 1/4 Mile Radius

- 3 Stowe Park
- 6 Crescent Park
- 7 River Property (future)

Neighborhood Parks 1 Mile Radius

- 1 Davis Park
- 4 Reid Park

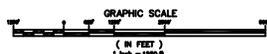
Community Parks 2 Mile Radius

- 8 Hall Property (future)

CITY OF BELMONT  
SOUTH FORT THOMPSON LADEN COUNTY  
NORTH CAROLINA



PARKS AND RECREATION AREAS  
BELMONT, NC





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