

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Town Council

FROM: Tyler Steelman, Chair
Parks, Greenways, and Recreation Commission

SUBJECT: Project Priorities

DATE: January 4, 2022

On December 20, 2021, the Parks, Greenways, and Recreation Commission voted unanimously 5-0 to forward to the Council specific project priorities for financing with the Town's Excess Funds, American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Capital Improvements Program, and other available sources. In identifying the priorities, the Commission reviewed the Parks and Recreation Department's Capital Improvement Program needs (84 projects collectively valued at \$12.5 million) and utilized criteria defined in this correspondence. Nine priority projects and four additional recommendations were identified and are shown in alphabetical order.

1. Cedar Falls Park Synthetic Turf Field Replacement Project
2. Cedar Falls Park Inclusive Playground Project
3. Ephesus Park Tennis and Pickleball Court Reconstruction Project
4. Hargraves Park AD Clark Pool Improvements Project
5. Homestead Park Skate Park Reconstruction Project
6. LED Lights for Courts and Athletic Fields Project
7. Morgan Creek Trail Projects (East and West Sections)
8. New System-wide Parks and Recreation and Open Space Master Plan Project
9. Splash Pad Project

Other project needs

1. Oakwood Park Tennis Court Resurfacing Project
2. Meadowmont Park Dam-Repair Project
3. Morgan Creek Trail Project (Bartram Bridge Section)
4. Playground Renovations and Refurbishments Project

The projects were selected based on the following criteria.

- Health and safety-related urgent repairs
- Demand and utilization
- Outreach to reach underserved members of the community, including projects within ARPA-defined Qualified Census Tract (QCT) areas and which are Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)-focused

The Commission requests that all noted projects be given every possible consideration for funding and execution.

Members Present: Tyler Steelman, (Chair), Leah Boucher (Vice Chair), William Kaiser, Lydia Kivihya-Ndugga, and Renuka Soll.

PROJECT DETAILS

1. Cedar Falls Park Synthetic Turf Field Replacement Project: Amount \$1 Million – Criteria “Demand and Utilization; Urgent Repair”

This project addresses health, safety and demand criteria. It would replace the synthetic turf from a crumb rubber infill to a cork infill such as is found at the new Homestead Park synthetic turf fields.

During the Pandemic, the fields have continued to provide physical activity opportunities and health and wellness breaks for Chapel Hill residents. Residents from all areas of Chapel Hill use Cedar Falls Park and its athletic fields. The synthetic turf field is Town’s most popular and essential athletic field.

The synthetic field, installed in 2013, is at the end of its lifespan due to the heavy use experienced at this athletic field. The black material shown in the photograph illustrates the deterioration.



Staff can no longer maintain the area with the infill and turf products. Grass fields require months of rest, usually in the winter and mid-summer. In North Carolina, people play soccer all year. This facility is our only adult-sized synthetic turf field. We have to close our grass fields after rainy periods, but play can continue on this field 365 days per year in any weather conditions.

2. Cedar Falls Park Inclusive Playground Project: Amount \$150,000 - \$1 Million Criteria “Demand and Utilization; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion”

The Town Council initiated a program to develop an inclusive playground. The playground will be located at Cedar Falls Park. An inclusive playground is different in that it is fully accessible by everyone, regardless of ability, and thereby creates a space for more collective engagement, understanding, and awareness by all.



This includes those with physical, intellectual, and emotional disabilities. Inclusive playgrounds require far more space than a traditional playground. Chapel Hill does not currently have a fully inclusive playground; this project addresses unmet demand and DEI criteria. The project could be built in phases. The first phase (\$150,000) would include planning, surveying, design, public engagement, permitting, and construction documents.

3. Ephesus Park Tennis and Pickleball Court Reconstruction Project:

Amount \$1 Million

Criteria “Demand and Utilization; Urgent Repair”

This project addresses health, safety and demand criteria. It would move forward with a recent engineering study’s recommendation to remove the existing pavements and the underlying stone base mixture and complete a reconstruction to include:

- 4 New Tennis courts
- 6 New Pickleball Courts
- Associated Amenities

The Ephesus Park racquet sports complex is the Town’s most popular place to play tennis and pickleball, and visitation has increased during the Pandemic, giving residents from 8 to 80 an outdoor space to recreate, reduce stress, improve physical and mental well-being.

As shown in the photograph, the courts are in poor condition and various distress stages.



A geotechnical engineering firm was hired and completed an investigation that included six core tests in determining the subsurface conditions. The report that accompanied this investigation included the engineer's recommendation regarding probable construction cost.

4. Hargraves Park AD Clark Pool Improvement Project:

Amount \$500,000

Criteria "Demand and Utilization; Qualified Census Tract; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion"

This project addresses all of the criteria and will include the improvements to the A.D. Clark Pool Complex, originally built in 1943 with renovations last completed in 2003.

It would necessitate working with a professional services firm specializing in aquatic facilities to assist the Town in conducting a robust community engagement process to determine enhancements for this complex and could tie into feasibility analysis for constructing a Town splash pad.

This reconstruction could include addressing infrastructure needs, adding a climbing wall, renovation of the wading pool to incorporate splash features, landscaping, furniture, art, and other amenities.





This project will also help reduce operations and maintenance costs associated with a 78-year-old pool and increase usage at a park within a Qualified Census Tract (QCT), where 50 percent or more of households are at any income level less than 60 percent of the area's gross median income.

5. Homestead Park Skate Park Reconstruction Project:

Amount \$400,000

Criteria “Demand and Utilization; Urgent Repair; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion”

This project addresses health, safety and demand criteria. The Homestead skatepark was built in the 1970s. Children*, teenagers, and young adults from all areas of Chapel Hill use this facility, and its popularity increased during the Pandemic, as it offered an outdoor space to recreate, reduce stress, improve physical and mental well-being.

This project would include working with a design-build firm specializing in skate parks to assist with planning, design, and community engagement to determine the best solution for renovating the existing complex from wood (as shown in the image) to a more durable concrete surface.



The current structure requires ongoing maintenance. The project would include some enhancements to the current skateboarding features. This same company would also oversee the renovation.

*40% of skateboarders are between 6 to 12 years old. (source: BoardTrac)

6. LED Lights for Courts and Athletic Fields Project:

Amount \$1 Million

This project aligns with the Town's environmental stewardship initiatives and Climate Action Plan. It entails replacing existing high-pressure sodium, mercury vapor, and metal halide lights on athletic fields and sports courts with new LED fixtures.



Residents from all areas of Chapel Hill use these facilities. During the Pandemic, demand for amenities that provide opportunities for physical activity and health and wellness breaks has increased. This included players wanting to use athletic fields and sport courts after dark.

LED lights improve illumination, enhance safety, and require far less maintenance. LED lamps tend to last longer than conventional lighting and do not require regular replacements like the existing bulbs.

This conversion also helps to meet:

- Towns 2019 Climate Action and Response Plan to lower carbon emissions and address the effects of climate change by implementing energy efficient projects in Chapel Hill.
- Town's 2022 Strategic Goal "Environmental Stewardship:" To mitigate effects of climate changes through management of Town resources, partnerships, and natural environment

7. Morgan Creek Trail Projects (East and West Sections):

Total Amount \$3,557,660

Criteria "Demand and Utilization; and Qualified Census Tract"

This recommended project addresses all of the criteria and would extend the popular Morgan Creek Trail. The current greenway section has seen an approximate 30% increase in pedestrian and bicycle usage over pre-pandemic usage. The utilization of the remaining 2015 Greenway Bond funds (\$1.2 Million) is factored into the requested amounts.

On March 16, 2021, the Parks, Greenways, and Recreation Commission held a joint meeting with the Transportation and Connectivity Advisory Board. At this meeting, the two boards collectively initiated and agreed on a request that the Town fund six Greenways and Transportation Planning connectivity projects and include the Morgan Creek projects in both boards' 5-year priorities sent to the Mayor and Town Council.



➤ **East Section Project**

Amount: \$2,235,350

This phase would extend the Morgan Creek Trail eastward 3,800 feet to Oteys Road, although a more limited first phase project could end after 2,400 feet at Morgan Creek Road. This project would connect the trail system to extensive neighborhoods south of Fordham Boulevard. This project would be within the Fordham right-of-way and require safety measures and a retaining wall that meets North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) specifications.

➤ **West Section Project**

Amount: \$1,322,130

The existing trail would be extended 3,700 feet west to the Carrboro Town line at Smith Level Road. This section would connect directly to the large Carrboro neighborhoods south of NC 54 and the Kingswood Apartments and Frank Porter Graham School. This project will require a large bridge, a small bridge, a substantial retaining wall, new parking for UNC, and flood-resistant construction. This extension to Carrboro can connect an additional 21,230 people to the Morgan Creek Greenway and areas of Chapel Hill and Carrboro within a Qualified Census Tract, where 50% or more of households earn less than 60 percent of the area's gross median income.

8. New System-wide Parks and Recreation and Open Space Master Plan Project:

***Amount \$300,000**

Criteria “Demand and Utilization; Qualified Census Tract; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion”

**Project amount assumes that Town staff will be contributing time in developing aspects of the plan.*

A system-wide parks master plan is a comprehensive document and process that includes an internal assessment, community engagement, trends and benchmarking analysis, resources and data collection, and an implementation plan. It is a tool that can help us understand the history and current barriers to park access, set a vision and plan to remove these inequities and ensure parks and open spaces provide the most benefit to communities. This recommended project will help us to determine the demand for new and existing facilities and will include an assessment of current conditions related to health, safety, and regulatory issues.

The current Parks Comprehensive Master Plan was adopted in 2013. Such plans typically have a shelf life of up to 10 years. There are areas not addressed in the current scenario that would be very important to cover in a new plan – for example, open space preservation, a recreation needs analysis, and growing trends such as pickleball. The information included in a new plan would be highly beneficial for future park planning efforts. This new plan would link existing Town plans including the previous parks plan, greenways plan, and mobility and connectivity plan related to parks and recreation and would also allow the Town to further promote connectivity to schools, parks, shopping areas, and adjacent areas such as Carrboro unincorporated Orange County.

Additionally, having a comprehensive plan is a requirement for national accreditation and many grant applications. The master plan would further advance Council priorities related to Environmental Stewardship, Vibrant and Inclusive Community, and Connected Community.

We recommend that the Town begin establishing a new Comprehensive Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan and includes the following multi-benefit focused approach.

- Health:
Parks and recreation services are a fundamental component of overall health and wellness. A [report](#) issued by National Recreation and Parks Association quantifies the contribution of public parks to the physical activity and health of community residents. It affirms that physical activity is critical to good health, and parks provide a venue in which physical activity can occur. In addition, a report on The Health Benefits of Parks by the Trust for Public Land provides strong evidence that people exercise more when they have access to parks.
- Equity:
A new comprehensive plan will be developed with a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion lens at the forefront, meaning that input from all residents of the town will be actively sought and considered with a particular emphasis on gaining feedback from those in historically underserved areas. Additionally, the impacts of facility and programming decisions on different areas of the community will be identified and plans will be developed in order

to ensure that the diverse interests and needs of those living in all areas of the town are considered fully.

- Economic Impact:
Parks are a cornerstone to improving a region's quality of life — setting a bold but realistic plan can help entice employers and workers to an area, visitor spending, and increase property values. It is also essential for the project to consider negative economic impacts that can result in the displacement of people from the community.
- Active and Alternative Transportation
A system-wide park plan can organize the connectivity of trails and open space to ensure options for active transportation and build from or be the foundation for an operational transportation plan. This component would complement the existing Greenway and Mobility and Connectivity Plans.
- Climate Resiliency:
Parks are a critical part of our infrastructure when addressing the effects of climate change. A system-wide park plan can prioritize where sustainability practices, such as green stormwater infrastructure, may have the most benefit based on health and environmental outcomes.

9. **Splash Pad Project:**

Amount \$400,000 - \$1 Million

Criteria “Demand and Utilization; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion”

This project would include preparing design and construction documents for constructing a new destination splash pad facility at one of the Town's parks, using the results of the Town's splash pad feasibility report (to be developed in 2022).

A splash pad will enrich the Town, providing socialization for all demographics. Children and families of all backgrounds and income levels will have the opportunity to get physical exercise while keeping cool and socializing together during the hot summer months. Another advantage of splash pads is that they can be universally enjoyed by children of all abilities and equally enjoyed by children in wheelchairs or who have other disabilities that make a swimming pool inaccessible or impractical.



It is a cheaper and safer alternative to a traditional community swimming pool. Splash pad decks are also generally textured or surfaced with non-slip materials to reduce slipping and prevent injuries. There is essentially zero chance of drowning with little or no standing water.

OTHER PROJECT NEEDS

1. Oakwood Park Tennis Court Resurfacing Project:

Amount \$100,000

Criteria “Demand and Utilization; Urgent Repair”

Resurface existing tennis court which is in poor condition, replace fencing, and complete LED lighting installation.

2. Meadowmont Park Dam-Repair Project:

Amount \$800,000

Criteria “Urgent Repair”

The age of the current earthen dam is unknown. It has large trees growing out of the dam structure. The dam could fail in a number of scenarios, but especially in the event of high winds.

If any of the large trees growing in the dam were to fall the root balls would likely cause a breach. In addition, the dam has had a history of leaks. The pond is bordered on one side by a row of homes, on another side by an elementary school, and on a third side by Meadowmont Park. Just downstream from the dam is an OWASA sewage pump station and several trails. This request would include hiring an engineering firm to prepare planning, design and construction documents and the completion of construction in consultation with Public Works.

3. Morgan Creek Trail Project (Bartram Bridge Section):

Amount \$800,000

Criteria “Demand and Utilization”

This segment of the trail would include a bridge to cross Morgan Creek. It would be located entirely on property owned by the University of North Carolina (UNC) and managed by the North Carolina Botanical Garden. A new simple unpaved bridge connector trail would also be extended for approximately 200 feet on the south side of the creek on UNC property, administered by the Botanical Garden, to a current path in the nearby Orange Water Sewer Authority (OWASA) easement that leads to Arboretum Drive. An existing trail already provides access from the north side of the proposed bridge site to the NC Botanical Garden and Bartram Drive.

This project is important in that it would provide crucial pedestrian access to neighborhoods on the north and south of Morgan Creek, enabling residents to have easier access to town. It would also enhance the trail system maintained by the Botanical Garden. Public input sessions have been initiated and would be completed to prepare the project for execution.

4. Playground Renovations and Refurbishments Project:

***Amount \$1 Million**

Criteria “Demand and Utilization; Qualified Census Tract; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion”

This project would include repairs and refurbishment of playground equipment at up to 10 parks and public housing facilities to include.

- New equipment including accessible amenities
- New poured-in-place surface (the safest, low maintenance option available)
- Painting and refurbishment of existing amenities
- Landscaping and other amenities

*This budget is based on Winter 2021 quotes received by staff for renovation of the Community Center Playground and equals \$100,000 per playground