

## COST SUMMARY TABLE

### Improvements/Repairs/Upgrades at Existing Facilities

*(NOT INCLUDING MAJOR REMODELING OF LINEBERGER  
AND RANKIN LAKE PARKS)*

A. Phillips Center	\$ 595,000.00
B. Erwin Center	\$ 368,000.00
C. Roland Bradley Center and Park	\$ 803,000.00
D. T Jeffers Center	\$ 788,000.00
E. Adult Recreation Center	\$ 142,000.00
F. Gastonia Municipal Golf Course	\$ 790,000.00
G. Ferguson Park	\$ 385,000.00
H. Skeet & Trap Range	\$ 100,000.00
I. Sims Legion Park & Men's Softball Complex	\$ 1,245,000.00
J. Martha River's Park (outdoor improvements only)	\$ 322,000.00
K. School Facilities Joint Use (City improvements on school sites)	\$ 311,000.00
L. Schiele Museum Nature Trail Renovation	\$ 125,000.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 5,974,000.00</b>

**NEW FACILITIES AND MAJOR RENNOVATIONS/MAKEOVERS/CONVERSIONS  
OF EXISTING FACILITIES**

<b>FACILITY</b>	<b>EST. COST TODAY</b>
Lineberger Park Renovation (does not include train rolling stock)	\$2,296,000
Rankin Lake Park Renovation (including circumferential trail)	\$1,275,000
Community Center Building at Martha Rivers Park	\$3,900,000
Major (regional) Skate Park, on existing city-owned land	\$ 300,000
SE Community Center with youth sports complex w/ indoor aquatics option	\$13,000,000 (package all at once price) or \$15,020,000 as separate costs- see rows below)
<i>Per Item Costs If Built/Funded Separately:</i>	
Land	\$ 920,000
Community Center Building	\$3,900,000
Sports Complex + picnic, trails and playground	\$4,200,000
Cost Increment to add recommended aquatics facilities	\$6,000,000
Land Acquisition Program for future Development	\$2,000,000
Greenway Development, Phase I (8-10 Miles)	\$3,500,000
Greenway Development, Phase II (7-9 Miles)	\$3,500,000
Men's Sports Complex (See Sims Park under existing facilities)	
Development of Davis Park + Greenway Interconnection w/ Phillips + Linwood	\$ 750,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$30,521,000*</b>

*\*Total includes \$13 million indoor aquatics center, community center and outdoor youth sports complex as a package*

## FUNDING AND PRIORITY PROJECTS

Obviously, funding will be the greatest challenge in implementing this plan. Over the past 28 years the City has relied heavily upon outside resources to fund capital improvements in parks and recreation. The City should expect state and federal resources to continue to diminish as they have for the past 20 years. Some potential sources yet remaining include the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund Program; and, for Greenways there is the federal T-21 Enhancements Program (administered by NCDOT), the North Carolina Trails Program, and the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund. There are also local foundations philanthropists interested in funding parks, recreation, and open space enhancements.

The City of Gastonia has been the recipient of all of these sources at one or more times in the past. In fall of 2004 there was a countywide referendum for a ½ cent sales tax for economic development related projects. The City of Gastonia allocated a portion of its projected share of the proceeds for recreational project development. The referendum failed. Top funding priorities listed below reflect approximately the same direction of funding as proposed for the ½ cent tax. However, some additional projects have been added. These listed projects appear to generate the greatest benefit for economic development, which is the top priority of the City, given its recent economic history.

### *Funding Priorities:*

○ Renovation of Lineberger Park (not incl. Bathhouse)	\$2,133,428
○ Renovation of Rankin Lake Park incl. trails + lake pavilion	\$1,166,000
○ Phase I Greenway Development (8-10 miles)	\$3,500,000
○ Land Banking	\$2,000,000
○ Community Center Building	\$3,900,000
○ Youth Sports Complex	\$4,200,000
○ Development of Davis Park + Phillips interconnecting trails	\$ 750,000
○ One Regional Skate Parks + 2 more modular setups	\$ 350,000
○ Improvements to Adult Recreation Center	<u>\$ 117,000</u>
 TOTAL	 \$18,116,428

Another way to fund capital parks, recreation and open space improvements is through a general obligation bond referendum. Because the full faith and credit of the City as a

taxing authority is pledged, authority for a G.O. bond issuance must be granted by the electorate. The table below illustrates the amount of funds that can be generated through various size bond referendums. Each \$400,000 dollars in debt service (amortization costs) requires the equivalent of one cent per \$100 valuation on the property tax rate.

**ANNUAL AMORTIZATION COSTS OF GENERAL OBLIGATION BONDS**  
 @ 4.5% Rate in \$1,000's

Year	\$6 Million	\$8 Million	\$10 Million	\$12 Million	\$14 Million
1	563	751	939	1,126	1,313
5	509	679	849	1,018	1,187
10	442	589	736	884	1,032
15	375	499	624	749	874
20	307	409	511	613	715

## TOOLS FOR LAND ACQUISITION AND PRESERVATION

### Introduction

This chapter takes the view that lands for parks, recreational and open space purposes are capital investments to secure a sustainable and economically viable future for our community. Not counting Crowder's Mountain State Park, a state facility, Gastonia lags far behind national standards in parks and open space land. These lands are vital for a well-rounded community attractive to both new residents and businesses. The establishment of parks and open spaces should be considered an ongoing process as the city expands.

During the past 35 years (since 1970) the Gastonia has grown by over 50% in both population and land area, while very little public resources have been spent acquiring parklands. The three major new parks (Bradley, Jeffers, and Martha Rivers totaling 143 acres) established during this period were provided land primarily through outside sources. Bradley and Jeffers lands were acquired with Federal Community Development Block Grant Funds, while Martha Rivers was largely a private donation through Gaston County. The only significant exception was land acquisition for the Mountain Island Watershed. But this tract is over 15 miles from Gastonia and will exist in a virtually natural state for the primary purpose of protecting our water supply.

Some jurisdictions in the region pursued visionary policies and programs during this period to provide parklands and open space. The three most important points to make about a comprehensive open space program are: (1) parks and open spaces exist to make our community not only more livable but also more competitive; (2) they are time sensitive opportunities and for greatest enjoyment they should be distributed over space; and (3) once an area is "built-out" opportunities for open space/parkland preservation are forever lost.

***"Land...they aren't making any more of it."***  
**Will Rogers**

### Land Donations

Private citizens may contribute any land that a municipality is willing to accept. The land donor can claim the value of the land donated to a charitable organization as an income tax deduction equal to the land's current fair market value. Land donation will also remove its value from an estate, reducing future estate taxes. Land donations result in an actual transfer of ownership unlike a conservation easement as discussed below. This will relieve the owner of the management and care of the land. Furthermore, North Carolina provides a 25% of value ***state income tax credit*** (distributable over 5 years), for land and easements donated for public recreational and conservation purposes.

## Conservation Easements

A conservation easement is a legally binding agreement between a property owner and a governmental body or land trust that restricts the type and amount of development that may take place on the property. A conservation easement ensures a landowner that his land will be protected for future generations. Its primary purpose is to protect significant open space, recreational, natural, agricultural, or historic resources. Entering into a conservation easement usually provides a reduced state and federal tax responsibility. The agreed upon use is normally much less intense and therefore less valuable therefore the tax burden it generates is lower. The ownership of the land does not change hands and does not imply free ingress or egress by the general public. For the City, conservation easements are a better financial alternative than land donations because the land remains in private ownership and on the tax rolls, unlike publicly owned land. The municipality is also responsible for the maintenance of donated land and not easements.

## Land donations through development process

- In many instances, the development process has led to the donation of land for greenways or other open spaces. For instance, when reviewing a rezoning application for a new shopping village, city staff noticed the project area included land identified as a potential extension of the Catawba Creek Greenway. The developers agreed to donate the land and actually build that portion of the greenway! In a residential development further north, the developer was able to locate the walking trail so that it could provide residents a connection to the greenway.
- ***In some cases policies may be in place, but are not being applied. The City should proceed to implement section 18-37 of the City of Gastonia subdivision code pursuant to G.S. 160A-372.***

### **Sec.8-37. Areas for schools, parks, playgrounds (Gastonia Code)**

Planning Commission may consider the allocation of suitable areas for schools, parks, and playgrounds. In the interest of the public welfare, a minimum amount of land in the ratio of three acres per 100 families, exclusive of streets, should be set aside for recreational or park purposes. Where a tract contains less than 40 acres, such reservation for open space should be combined, whenever possible, with similar reservations in adjoining tracts. Such parks or playgrounds may be dedicated for public use or reserved for the common use of all property owners within the proposed subdivision by covenant in instruments conveying lands in such subdivision.

*Note: G.S. 160A-372 also provides that developers may provide money in lieu of land for the purpose of purchase for parks and recreation, or combination of land dedication and money payment.*

### Transfer of Development Rights

This program enables landowners to transfer the development rights on one parcel of land to another parcel of land, such as from an agricultural zone to designated higher-density development areas. TDR programs may be designed for multiple purposes, such as to conserve environmentally sensitive areas or preserve historic landmarks. As of 2000, Montgomery County in Maryland had more than 40,000 acres, which accounted for 60 percent of the national total, enrolled in TDR program.

### Excess purchase by municipality

Utilizing the proximate principle, the municipality can purchase an excess amount of land for a park project. After developing the park, which increases the value of the surrounding land, the municipality can sell the remaining land at a higher market value. The increased property tax revenue pays for the original investment.

### Grants

Grants are available at both the state and local level to purchase land for protection purposes. The city received significant financial resources from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund to purchase land for the Avon and Catawba Creek Greenway. Together with the Trust for Public Land, the City used Clean Water Management Trust Fund dollars to purchase land for conservation along the shore of Mountain Island Lake where the City draws raw water for potable treatment.



**CROWDERS MOUNTAIN STATE PARK IS PROBABLY THE SINGLE BEST AND MOST BENEFICIAL LAND CONSERVATION IN GASTONIA**

### General Revenue

Local general tax revenues and voter approved tax levies to support the purchase of property for open space protection. On page \_\_\_\_ this plan proposes spending \$2,000,000 over the next 15 years to buy land for parks, recreation, and open space purposes. This amount could be significantly enhanced through the implementation of existing city code on recreational lands or payment in lieu of pursuant to GS160A-372.

### Development Code Mandates

Some jurisdictions require a certain amount of land in residential developments to be set aside as open space. The Town of Davidson adopted an aggressive policy of a 50% set aside. Gastonia requires a 20% set aside in “planned residential developments (PRD).” For this, the developer may develop in greater density/intensity on the remaining 80% and he is freed of lot dimensional and setback most requirements. But, this provision only applies to those who elect to take their application through the PRD process. Furthermore, installing sidewalks to a superior standard can satisfy part of the 20%.

One important principal in land conservation through the development process is that the land preserved be more than just the land that is not developable. Sometimes, such land is inaccessible and may have little use for recreational purposes.

**Crowders Mountain State Park, Gastonia, NC**



## STAFFING AND OPERATIONAL ISSUES

This section of the report deals with improvements needed in the operations of the Parks and Recreation Department, particularly staffing. The existing situation is examined as well as staffing needs to program, operate, and maintain expanded recreation facilities as recommended in this plan. New personnel for projected new facilities will not be needed until such facilities are built and operational.

**Existing Situation** : Like other city departments, the parks and recreation department is not abundantly staffed, particularly so in the current time of severe budget constraints and frozen positions. But also like other city departments it too has met these financial challenges gracefully by keeping facilities open, acceptably programmed, and adequately maintained. The department, in staff's view, has been short of maintenance staff for a number of years. When Martha Rivers Park was added, there was no ability to maintain this fine facility with the existing staff. Therefore, a separate new maintenance staff was added, which is devoted exclusively to the new park. This leaves one other crew to maintain all other facilities, with the exception that each community center has a custodian who does some outdoor work. The Avon/Catawba Creek Greenway is maintained (grass cutting, leaf blowing, and trash pickup) by a private contractor who is supervised by the code enforcement office. Outdoor facilities other than Martha Rivers Park are maintained in an "average to below average" condition according to staff. The maintenance people stay busy and work hard—it's just that they have so much to keep up with. In order to maintain other facilities at the same level as Martha Rivers Park, the following additional outdoor crew people will be needed:

- 1 General Supervisor
- 2 to 3 Crew Chiefs\*
- 6 to 8 Landscape Technicians\*
- One Turf Specialist
- One Horticulturalist
- \*Depends on whether staffing for added youth sports complex and new men's softball complex is counted

The estimated cost of these additions is **\$485,000 per year** including staff, fringe benefits, and other operational costs; however, if the athletic facilities recommended by this plan the figure goes up to **\$609,000 per year**.

**Lineberger Park Renovation**. In order operate the additional facilities at the renovated Lineberger Park. The following additional staff will be needed:

- Ticket and Concession Salesperson-SPT (Seasonal/Part-Time)
- Train Operator- SPT, 6 mos.
- Carousel Operator- SPT- 6 mos.
- Splash Park Operator-SPT- 3-4 mos.
- Full Time Park Manager
- One Park Ranger or added enforcement by GPD

The estimated cost of these added staff is **\$111,000 per year** including fringe, plus an **additional \$30,000 in annual operational costs** for the facility enhancements.

**Rankin Lake Park.** In order to operate the renovated Rankin Lake Park the addition of a uniformed Park Ranger/Lake Warden staff would be needed. Public access to the lake will not be allowed by the State of North Carolina without such on-site enforcement capability. Such personnel would also handle park concessions and facility rentals. This staffing can be directed by either the Recreation Department or the Police Department. In order to keep the park open from 10:00 AM until 7:00 PM weekdays and 9:00 AM to 7:00 PM on weekends, seven days per week, three full-time personnel will be needed. Additional help may be needed to oversee late night rentals of social facilities. The added cost for three full-time officers is **\$114,000, including fringe**. Add another **\$20,000 per year** other in operational costs for facility enhancements. About one-half full time equivalent in part-time patrol help can be obtained for about **\$19,000 per year**. There will also be an initial capital outlay for equipment such as vehicles and radios.

**Community Centers.** The report recommends the addition of a community center at Martha Rivers Park and another one in the growing southeast sector of the city. *Each* community center added will require a full-time Center Director, full-time Assistant Director, part-time program specialist, and full-time custodian. Each community center added will require about **\$130,000 in staffing costs, including fringe, plus another \$63,000 in non-personnel operational costs**. **If two additional centers are added we should expect a total annual operational cost of \$386,000 for the two.**

**Greenways.** This plan recommends a program of greenway development. While greenway trails are relatively low maintenance (as compared to most other recreational facilities), they are not maintenance free. Most maintenance includes seasonal grass cutting, leaf and tree debris blowing, trash can emptying, repairs to furnishings, maintenance of drainage facilities, and maintenance of culverts that are used for pedestrian tunnels. The City should count on an **annual routine maintenance cost of \$10,000 to \$15,000 per mile of trail** during the first ten years of trail life, more in later years as major replacements become due.

**Aquatics Center.** The Aquatics Center study performed by Water Technology, Inc + Ballard\*King and Associates recommended staffing levels for the proposed facility. Since this facility would also have facilities of, and serve as, a community center, the staffing of a second community center as noted above would not be needed in addition to all the programmed staff of the aquatics center. The staffing cost of the Aquatics Center was taken into consideration in the facility's financial pro forma. The staffing projected by Ballard\*King Associates with Water Technology will cost about \$1,325,000 per year. If the aquatics center provides one of the two needed recreation centers, then the staffing cost of the second recreation center can be deducted from that total, bringing the figure for the aquatics center down to \$1,132,000, assuming the staffing cost of the second new recreation center is devoted to the aquatics center. It should also be considered that the aquatics center would have its own significant revenue stream, unlike other recreational facilities—nearly \$2 million per year. On the other hand, non-staff related operational

costs total to about \$780,000 per year. This will result in average operational deficits in the neighborhood of \$200,000 per year, not including debt service, if any.