

CHAPTER 7: RECREATION PROGRAMS

A. Introduction

The Town of Cary offers a wide array of parks, recreation, and cultural arts programming. This chapter of the 2012 *Parks, Recreation & Cultural Resources (PRCR) Master Plan* update reviews recreation programs offered by the Cary Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department (PRCR).

- Overview of the recreation program and service framework
- Summary of needs assessment findings
- **Master Plan** Recommendations for programs

Recreation Program Framework

In 2010, the Cary PRCR Department completed the update of the *Long Range Program Plan* (LRPP). The LRPP provides a focused review and analysis of PRCR programs and services. It is closely aligned with the *PRCR Business Plan* which focuses on organizational issues. The *PRCR Master Plan* guides future facility development and identifies departmental management strategies. These three documents complement each other and provide the framework for the work of the PRCR Department.

The LRPP has been developed through a staff effort led by the Program Plan Work Team. The PRCR Department purposely strives for excellence in leisure services by undertaking many best practices as outlined by the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA). First developed in October 2007, the plan has been updated in September 2008 and September 2010. As part of the *PRCR Master Plan*, current public input, inventory and Level of Service analysis, and relative information and recommendations have been included in the 2011 update to the LRPP.

Program Service Categories

Three categories of service are provided to Cary residents:

Basic Services preserve and promote physical and mental well-being of the community, provide patron safety, and offer an opportunity for parks, recreation, and cultural resources services, facilities, greenways, and open space to be used by the general public. Basic services and facilities are offered to Town residents at minimal or no charge.

- Basic Services provide general use of parks and outdoor areas such as basketball slabs, open play areas, ballfields, picnic areas, playgrounds, greenways, comfort stations, and satellite tennis courts.
- Basic services provide for indoor facilities and amenities to include, but are not limited to, community centers, senior, nature, arts, and history facilities.
- Basic services include, but are not limited, to Town-wide special events and celebrations, program and facility information, community assistance, program planning, public art access, and administrative support.
- Cost of basic services and facilities shall be primarily borne by the general tax base.

Supplemental Services provide traditional parks, recreation, and cultural activities that benefit the individual and the community as a whole. Supplemental services are available to Cary citizens on an equitable basis; however, participation is limited based on program and space availability. Supplemental services provide an extended level of benefit for users.

- Supplemental Services require facilities, supplies, equipment, and/or considerable staff planning and supervision specific to the service. These types of services benefit both the participant and the community due to their educational, cultural, or physical value.
- Some examples of Supplemental Services include but are not limited to instructional programs, summer day camp, senior programs, teen programs, concerts, open gym, performances, and youth/adult athletics programs.
- The user shall share in the cost of providing supplemental services to offset tax dollar support.

Special Services and Facilities are beyond the scope of traditional leisure services. They primarily provide exclusive benefit to individuals based on public demand and population served.

- Special services include but are not limited to organized tournaments, trips, private group programs, and retail operations.
- Special facilities include, but are not limited to, reserved areas, lighted ballfields, Cary Tennis Park, picnic shelters, Sk8 Cary (skatepark), ropes course, soccer/ballfield complexes, amphitheater, and specialized reserved equipment.
- Fees and charges are often established based on local market demand.
- Special services and facilities shall recover costs through policies that minimize public tax dollar support.

B. Key Findings

Following is a summary of key recreation program findings from the needs assessment. The 2011 community-wide survey results ranked the most important programs to the respondents. The results were slightly different when compared to the public meetings and focus group responses, although positive activities for youth were important to everyone.

Survey Highlights

Programs

- Top programs in “importance” per the survey:
 1. Special events and festivals
 2. Fitness and wellness programs
 3. Children/youth activities
 4. Co-ed recreation adult sports
 5. Teen activities
 6. Senior activities
 7. Athletic leagues – youth
 8. Performing arts programs
 9. Athletic leagues – adults
 10. Swimming programs (learn-to-swim)

- Cultural arts programs ranked in the mid-range in terms of importance and needs being met
- Programs with “lower needs being met” per the survey:
 - Therapeutic recreation/specialized programs for people with disabilities
 - Inclusion services
 - Swimming programs (learn-to-swim)
 - Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (S.T.E.M.) programs
 - Co-ed recreational adult sports
 - Fitness and wellness programs

Cary Senior Center Program Interest Survey - Fall 2010

- Ages 66-70 were most likely to return the survey
- 83% of survey responders are Cary Residents
- Direct mail is highest response for marketing however Internet (email, web site, etc.) is growing as marketing outlet
- Most participants come to the facility 1-4 times per month with ages 66-70 visiting 1-4 times per week
- Overall Saturday programs are preferred over evening activities
- “To Learn Something New” is the key reason for participation
- Art Exhibitions and creative expression classes (painting and jewelry making) were highest demand in Arts category
- Outdoor walking, Yoga and Weight training were highest demand in Fitness category
- Gardening was the highest demand in Outdoor Recreation category
- Trips, Volunteering and Meals ranked highest for Social Activities category
- Healthy Aging, Nutrition and Photography ranked highest for Educational programming
- Health Screens, Social Security and Medicare information ranked highest for Resources for Seniors, Inc. programming
- Weekend and Evening as well as College Level Courses were ranked highest among miscellaneous questions

Public Meetings & Focus Groups

- Individuals expressed program needs including activities for kids with special needs and swimming lessons.
- Interest was also expressed in a variety of non-sports programs such as cultural arts and S.T.E.M. programs.

Trends

According to the National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA), swimming ranked fourth in terms of participation in 2009 and 2010. There is an increasing trend toward indoor leisure and therapeutic pools. Additional amenities like spray pads are becoming increasingly popular as well. In some cities, spray pads are popular in the summer months and turn into ice rinks in the winter months.

The Town of Cary does not operate an indoor or outdoor aquatic facility. The Master Plan Survey indicates a high interest in aquatics. Indoor lap and leisure pools rated as the next highest priorities for indoor facilities to be added, after an indoor track. Adding an outdoor aquatic center ranked as the 3rd top priority (along with new parks) for future funding improvements.

The *Ten-year History of Sports Participation Report* published by NSGA shows national trends in team sports and individual sports. Overall participation trends indicate a decrease in general. Team sports such as basketball, soccer, tackle football, softball, and volleyball had an increase in participation from 2006 through 2008; however, by 2010, they showed a decline. Since the report lacrosse has become one of the country's fastest growing team sports. Participation in high school lacrosse has almost doubled this decade.

The Town of Cary's team sport participation is not following this trend. As a matter of fact, one of the things that Cary is known for is their state-of-the art special use facilities:

- Cary Tennis Park
- USA Baseball National Training Complex
- WakeMed Soccer Park

Inactivity and obesity in the United States cost the country hundreds of billions of dollars annually. Some local governments are now accepting the role of providing preventative health care through park and recreation services.

The aging population, along with the growing senior demographic as a result of the Baby Boomers beginning to retire, will have a dramatic impact on the Town of Cary and the services they provide in the future.

The Town of Cary's demographic profile indicates that 26.3% of the current population is between 45 and 64 years of age.

Boomer Basics:

- Boomers are known to work hard, play hard, and spend hard.
- They have always been fixated with all things youthful. Boomers typically respond that they feel 10 years younger than their chronological age.
- Swimming pools have become less of a social setting and much more of an extension of boomers' health and wellness program.
- Because boomers in general have a high education level, they will likely continue to pursue education as adults and into retirement.

The Town of Cary ranked festivals and special events as the top program to expand in the 2011 Community Survey.

In the context of urban development, from the early 1980s, there has been a process that can be characterized as "festivalization," which has been linked to the economic restructuring of towns and cities, and the drive to develop communities as large-scale platforms for the creation and consumption of "cultural experience." The Town of Cary, however, finds itself with additional options by means of its regional athletic complexes for sporting event opportunities as well as events based out of the amphitheaters in Town. All of these can benefit the community through tourism.



C. Recommendations – Recreation Programs

The following recommendations should guide and tie into the three-five year *Long Range Program Plan*'s outstanding goals and feed into annual departmental and site specific business plans or strategic plans.

GOAL 3: Provide a mix of recreation and cultural arts programs responsive to a growing and diverse population.

Objectives:

3.1. Base future programming on research and assessments to reflect the true needs and demands of Cary citizens.

Actions:

- a. *Incorporate survey findings into the update of Long Range Program Plan.*
- b. *Utilize 2011 Master Plan survey results to tailor programming efforts.*
- c. *Conduct a community-wide needs assessment survey every five years as part of the Master Plan process and use the results to identify gaps in service and to guide program development and/or elimination.*
- d. *Periodically conduct program/topic-specific focus group meetings and public forums to guide program planning efforts.*

2011 Survey Program Highlights:

- According to the survey, programs that represent opportunities for improvements that are considered of relatively high importance and relatively lower degrees of needs being met include: Cultural Arts Programs/Classes – all ages; Town Sports Leagues, Camps, Clinics – all ages; Town Recreation Programs/Classes – Adult.
- Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Programs and Learn-to-swim and other aquatics programs have high degrees of unmet needs and appear to be important to many people.
- The programs not meeting needs as well, relative to other areas include: Environmental Education Programs, and Recreation Programs/Classes – youth/teen, Town Recreational programs/classes – seniors. However, it is important to note that these program areas are important to fewer members of the community.
- Therapeutic recreation/specialized programs for people with disabilities, inclusion services have a lower degree of needs being met even though fewer respondents indicated a need for these services.

3.2. Consider the implementation of the approved Specialized Recreation Plan to establish a formal program for people with disabilities.

Actions:

- a. *Pursue hiring a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist per 2008 Specialized Recreation Study recommendations to implement new program area.*
- b. *Consider hiring qualified temporary staff to support this program area.*

3.3 Implement innovative and diverse programming for senior programs.

Actions:

- a. *Provide more evening and Saturday programming targeting 55+.*
- b. *Focus on “Healthy Aging” issues as well as the “growing older experience.”*
- c. *Expand exercise programs for 55+ at Senior Center as well as at other PRCR facilities based on space and schedule. Emphasis should be on providing Aerobics, Yoga and Dance classes.*
- d. *Explore option to change name of Senior Center to attract “younger older” adults.*
- e. *Reinstate the outdoor walking group by contracting with exercise instructors to offer outdoor walking experiences or secure volunteers to lead walking program.*
- f. *Enhance programs to respond to comments from the Senior Survey including: tai chi (currently being offered in the afternoons; having exercise equipment such as tread mills, stationary bikes, etc.; and offering exercise for “problem areas” such as exercise for those with joint problems, stress relief, or lower back pains.*
- g. *Continue to provide Art Shows at the Senior Center.*
- h. *Increase the number of painting classes.*
- i. *Coordinate with Cary Community Arts Center by offering more jewelry-making classes.*
- j. *Provide opportunities for gardening. Add Garden lectures to the ongoing educational activities.*
- k. *Coordinate with Bond Park staff to offer fishing programs.*
- l. *Based on comments from the Senior Survey, advertise the pickle ball opportunity being offered at Bond Park Community Center and consider offering demonstrations at the Cary Senior Center for marketing this game.*
- m. *Increase the number of monthly meal programs at the Cary Senior Center.*

3.4 Emphasize programming for fitness and wellness.

Actions:

- a. *Consider expanding the variety of programming at each indoor recreation site to include fitness and exercise, senior programs, and cultural arts activities. (Also see Objective 6.6 in Community and Special Use Facilities Chapter 8.)*
- b. *Continue to enhance the healthy living month using existing programs and special events to promote the value of healthy lifestyle choices.*

3.5 Expand heritage programming and interpretation.

Actions:

- a. *Implement actions identified in the Cary Historic Preservation Master Plan. (Several actions are identified including the expansion of the Cary Heritage Museum and the development of preservation and stewardship plans for each historic resource, structural and non-structural, owned by the Town. These should continue as resources are acquired.)*
- b. *Develop and maintain a historic preservation web page; periodically explore new internet technologies to promote preservation.*
- c. *Increase the number of trained facilitators for the existing oral history program.*
- d. *Develop a formal internship program to support historical research documentation.*
- e. *Periodically post a feature article on a local historic property and its owner on a Town Historic Preservation web page.*
- f. *Create and maintain a database of completed, current, and future research on historical topics.*
- g. *Create a speaker's bureau for presenting historic preservation information to local community groups and organizations.*
- h. *Develop a public education program to educate citizens and hobbyists about site preservation and the importance of archaeological context.*
- i. *Develop an annual awards program to recognize those who have rehabilitated historic buildings in the past year.*
- j. *Establish and maintain a program to distribute materials about Cary's preservation program and historic areas to local hotels, restaurants, antique shops, and other merchants.*
- k. *Begin sponsoring periodic public workshops on historic building repair and maintenance.*
- l. *Develop an interpretive plan that incorporates educational goals and addresses public access for each Town-owned historic site/property.*
- m. *Develop, with citizen input, additional walking or driving tours of historic neighborhoods throughout Cary.*
- n. *Develop educational tours of other Town-owned historic properties as they become accessible.*
- o. *Expand house marker programs throughout historic areas such as downtown, Carpenter, and Green Level, as well as individual resources.*
- p. *Initiate a periodic Cary Heritage Festival with a variety of programs, performances, and living history demonstrations highlighting Cary's diverse heritage.*
- q. *Develop and maintain Historic Preservation Resource Library that is accessible to the public.*
- r. *Continue to celebrate National Historic Preservation Month with special events.*
- s. *Continue to update history-based curriculum materials and distribute to area schools to further student appreciation of local history.*
- t. *Continue to offer hands-on educational tours of the Page-Walker Arts and History Center and the Cary Heritage Museum to area schools.*
- u. *Continue to offer periodic historic preservation-themed public education programming in collaboration with the Friends of the Page-Walker Hotel.*
- v. *Continue to offer a downtown walking tour which emphasizes historical and architectural significance of historic downtown structures.*
- w. *Continue to provide guidance to owners of historic homes in obtaining chain-of-title research, ownership history, biographical data, etc.*
- x. *Continue to incorporate elements of local history and the importance of historic preservation into Lazy Daze and other town celebrations.*

- y. *Develop a heritage interpretation plan (based on the model of the Hemlock Bluffs Plan). The plan should incorporate educational goals and address access for each Town-owned historic site/property. (This recommendation supports the Cary Historic Preservation Master Plan, Action 2.4.3, identified for implementation by the PRCR Department in 5-6 years.)*
- z. *Increase the number of trained facilitators for the existing oral history program. (This recommendation supports more detailed actions identified in the Cary Historic Preservation Master Plan including Action 5.1.1.)*

3.6 Expand festivals and special events with an emphasis on downtown.

Actions:

- a. *Identify resources needed including staff, volunteers, funding, sponsorships, etc.*
- b. *Identify partnerships and sponsorship opportunities with business community and community organizations.*

GOAL 4: Enhance program planning and market analysis efforts to more strategically deliver services.

Objective:

4.1. Review existing programs to determine most effective use of program resources.

Actions:

- a. *Expand market analysis for each service to avoid duplicative services.*
- b. *Consider using the Public Sector Service Assessment tool to analyze the strength or weakness of the market position for each specific service relative to like or similar providers in the target market service area. Identify duplicative services or a saturation of services and alternative provision strategies. (See **Appendix L**, which has been provided as part of a separate document, for information on the Public Sector Service Assessment tool.)*
- c. *Consider offering peak and non-peak pricing strategies and package bundling for low usage times/days/seasons.*