

Dare County

Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment



Board of Commissioners Meeting

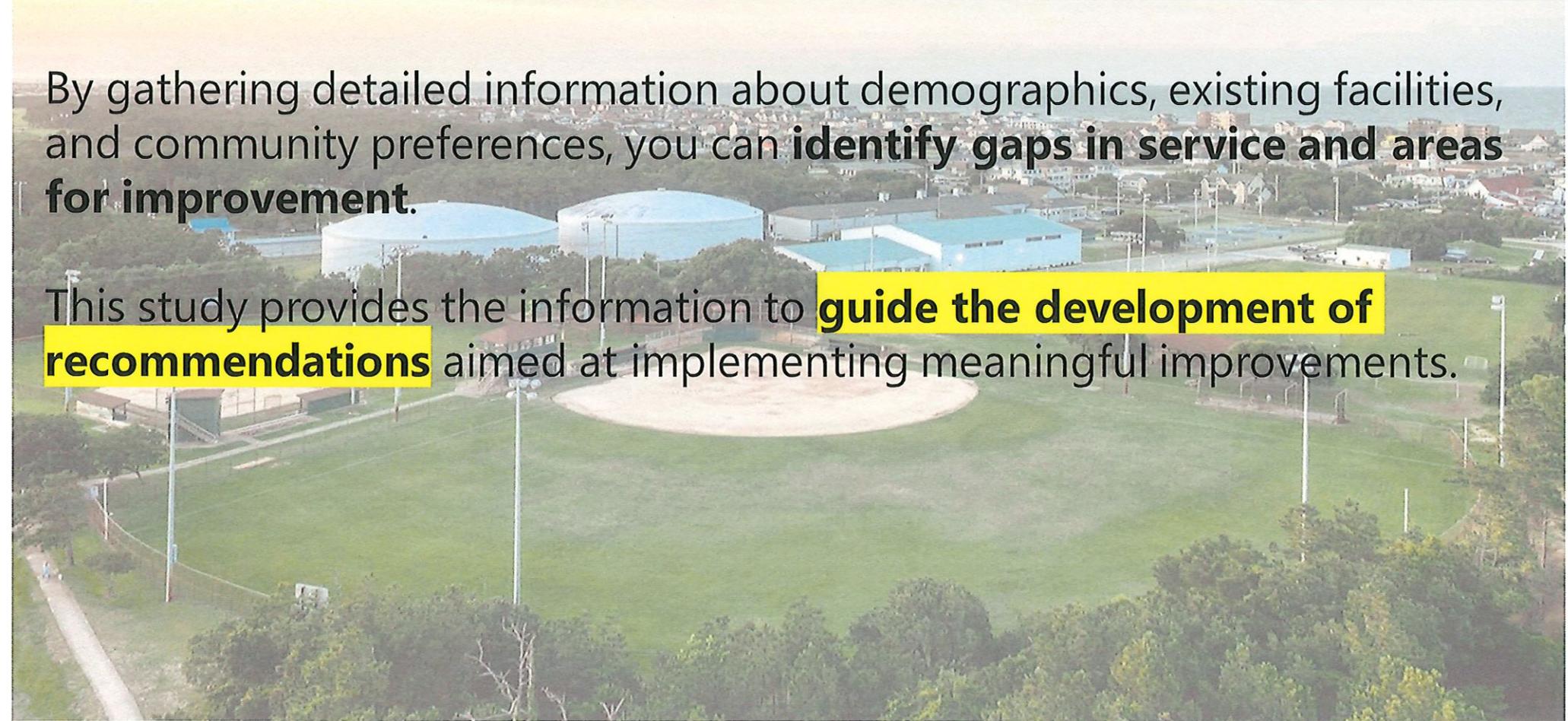
February 3, 2025



Why this Assessment?

By gathering detailed information about demographics, existing facilities, and community preferences, you can **identify gaps in service and areas for improvement.**

This study provides the information to **guide the development of recommendations** aimed at implementing meaningful improvements.



Plan Summary

Dare County Recreation Needs Assessment

Section 1 - Introduction

Section 2 – Influencing Factors

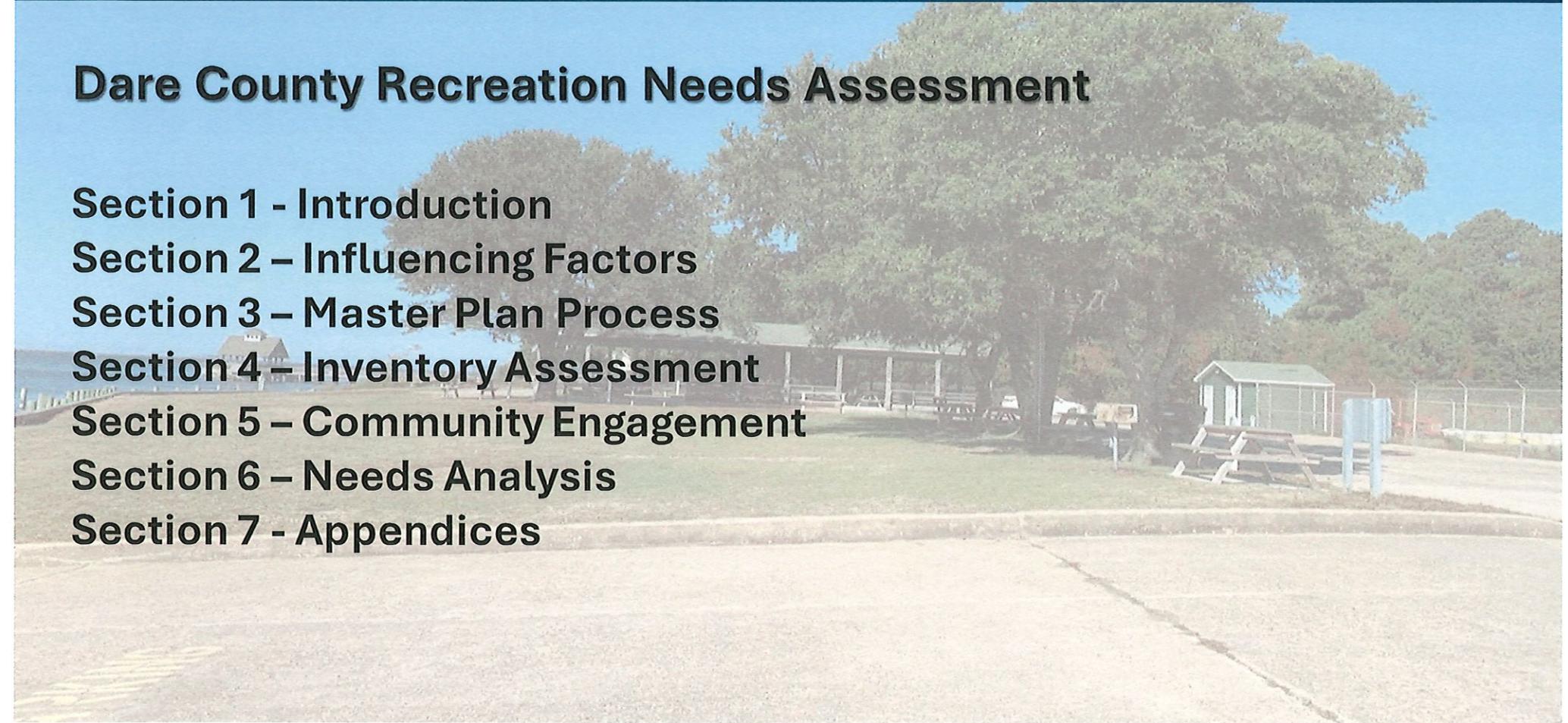
Section 3 – Master Plan Process

Section 4 – Inventory Assessment

Section 5 – Community Engagement

Section 6 – Needs Analysis

Section 7 - Appendices



Who We Are

1,541 square miles of coastal NC

110 miles of stunning Atlantic Ocean shoreline

Median Age: 48.1

2024 Population: 38,110 residents

Seasonal Population can swell by 400%

Anticipated 2035 Population: 40,000

NORTHERN BEACH DIVISION

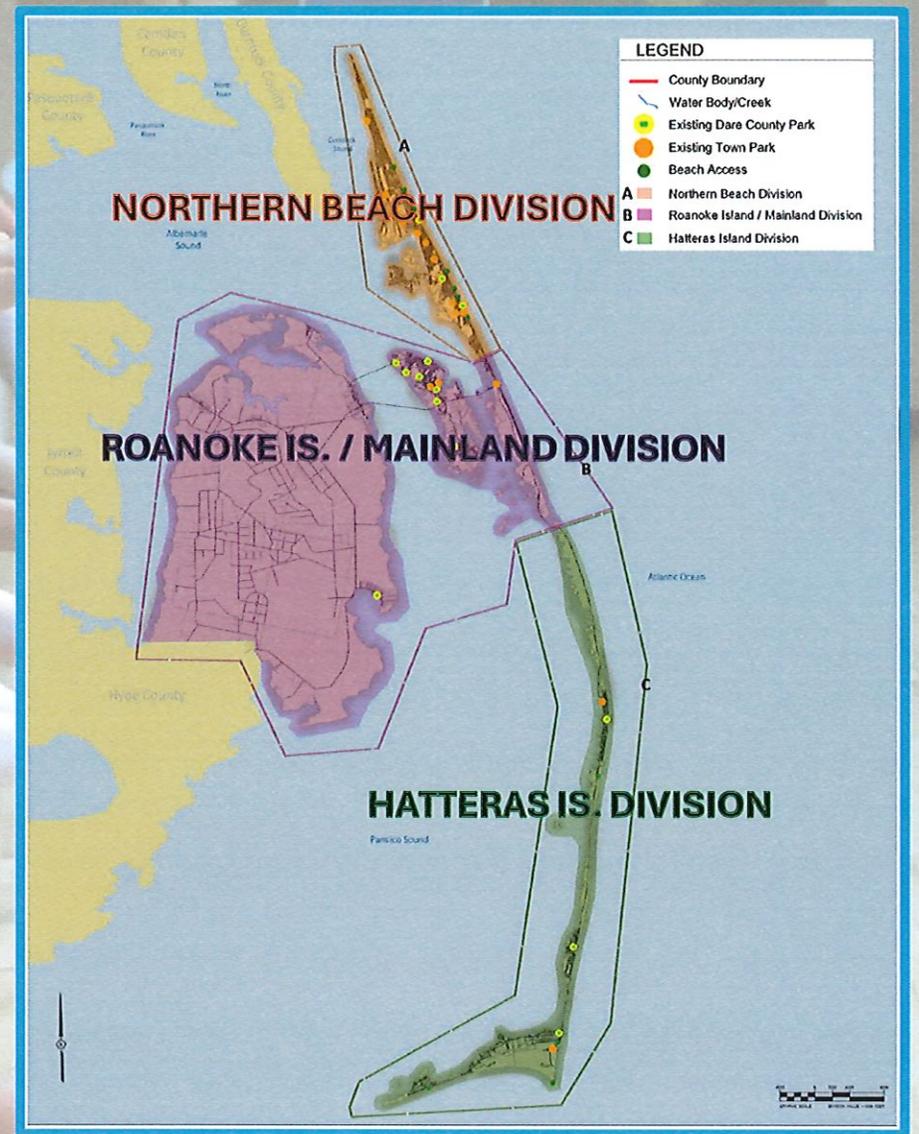
(Duck, Southern Shores, Kitty Hawk, Kill Devil Hills, Nags Head, etc.)

ROANOKE ISLAND / MAINLAND DIVISION

(Manteo, Wanchese, Manns Harbor, Stumpy Point, East Lake, etc.)

HATTERAS ISLAND DIVISION

(Rodanthe, Waves, Salvo, Avon, Buxton, Frisco, Hatteras Village, etc.)



What We Have

17 County Parks

Quartile	Acres per 1,000 residents	Applied to Dare County Population (38,110)
Dare County	2.6	98.5 total acres
Lower Quartile Level	6.2	235.6 total acres
Median Quartile Level	11.2	425.6 total acres
Upper Quartile Level	18	684 total acres

Table 5.2 | Based on NCOSBM population figures and growth rates | Source: National Recreation and Parks Metric Data

Dare County's total park acreage is well below national benchmark levels, due in part to its unique geographic make up

Public Input

Eight **FOCUS GROUP** meetings were held

Help Improve Recreation in Dare County!

Community Survey

Please visit the link or use the QR code below:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DareRecSurvey>

This effort will help inform Dare County's planning efforts for Parks and Recreation in the community. Thanks for your participation!



Dare County Parks & Recreation Master Plan Community Input

This effort will help inform Dare County's planning efforts for Parks and Recreation in the community. Thanks for your participation!

Monday, October 8th
Lions Club Center @
Westcott Park
1000 Westcott Park Rd
Manteo, NC 27954

Tuesday, October 9th
Dare County Youth Center
692 Mastin St
Kill Devil Hills, NC 27919

Wednesday, October 23rd
Rodanthe Community Center
23616 NC HWY 12
Rodanthe, NC 27968

Thursday, October 24th
Fessenden Center
4950 NC Hwy 12
Buxton, NC 27920

Drop-in and Share Your Vision, Concerns or Ideas for Improving Recreation in Our Community!

ALL DROP-IN MEETINGS ARE FROM 4 PM TO 7 PM

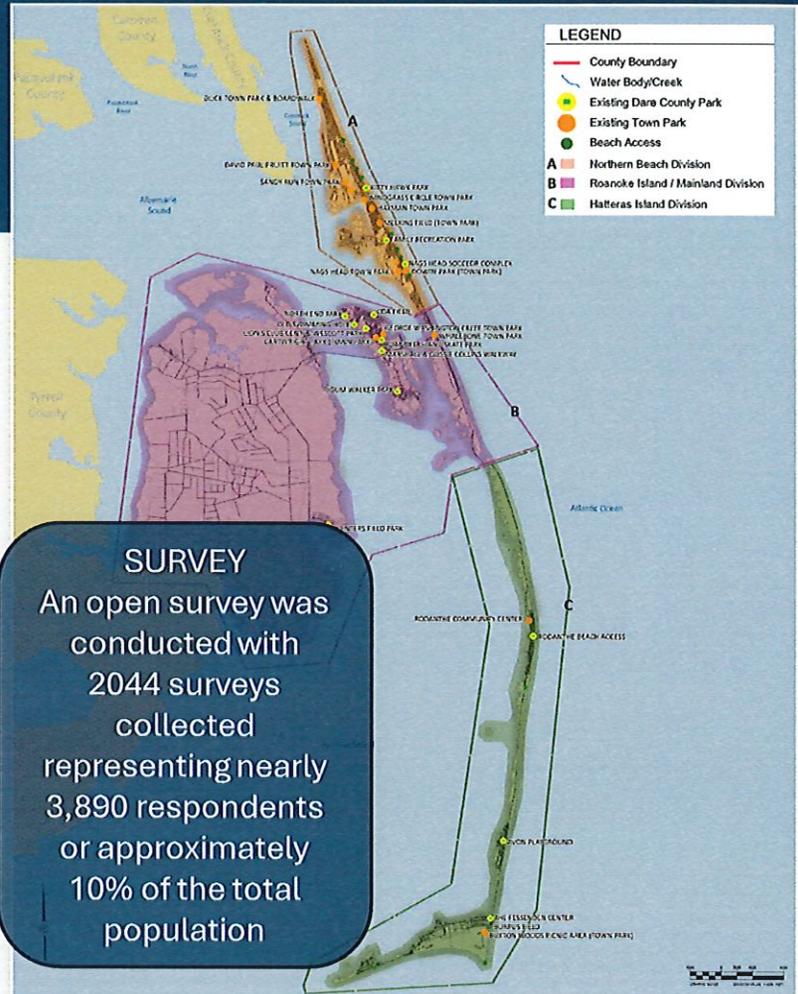
Scan the QR code to fill out the survey.



Free public WiFi and mobile phone service provided by Verizon. Dare County Public Safety Network is not responsible for service interruptions.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DareRecSurvey>

4 PUBLIC INPUT MEETINGS were held around the County reached approximately 300 individuals: Meetings were held in: Manteo, Kill Devil Hills, Rodanthe and Buxton



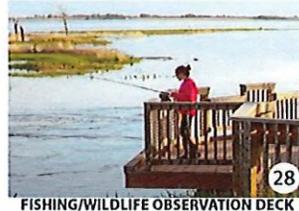
EXISTING CONDITIONS MAP
DARE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA
2024



Public Meetings: Preference Exercise Results

Board 1 – 16 Amenities

1. Fishing / Wildlife Observation Deck
2. Multipurpose Greenway
3. Campground / Tree Houses
4. Gymnasium
5. Free Form Natural Play
6. Music Play Area
7. Indoor Fitness Stations
8. Restrooms / Changing Rooms
9. Baseball / Softball Field
10. Tot Lot
11. Shuffleboard
12. Non-Motorized Boat Launch
13. Adventure Play Area
14. Interpretive / Education Signage
15. Soccer Fields
16. Football Field



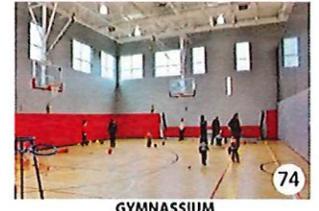
FISHING/WILDLIFE OBSERVATION DECK 28



MULTIPURPOSE GREENWAY 23



CAMPGROUND / TREE HOUSES 17



GYMNASIUM 74



FREE FORM NATURAL PLAY 8



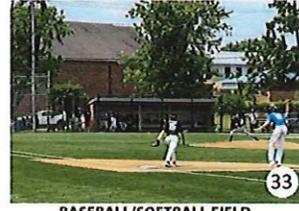
MUSIC PLAY AREA 3



INDOOR FITNESS STATIONS 40



RESTROOMS/CHANGING ROOMS 5



BASEBALL/SOFTBALL FIELD 33



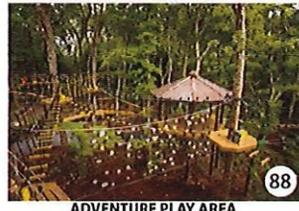
TOT LOT 11



SHUFFLE BOARD 0



NON-MOTORIZED BOAT LAUNCH 14



ADVENTURE PLAY AREA 88



INTERPRETIVE/EDUCATIONAL SIGNAGE 2



SOCCER FIELDS 35

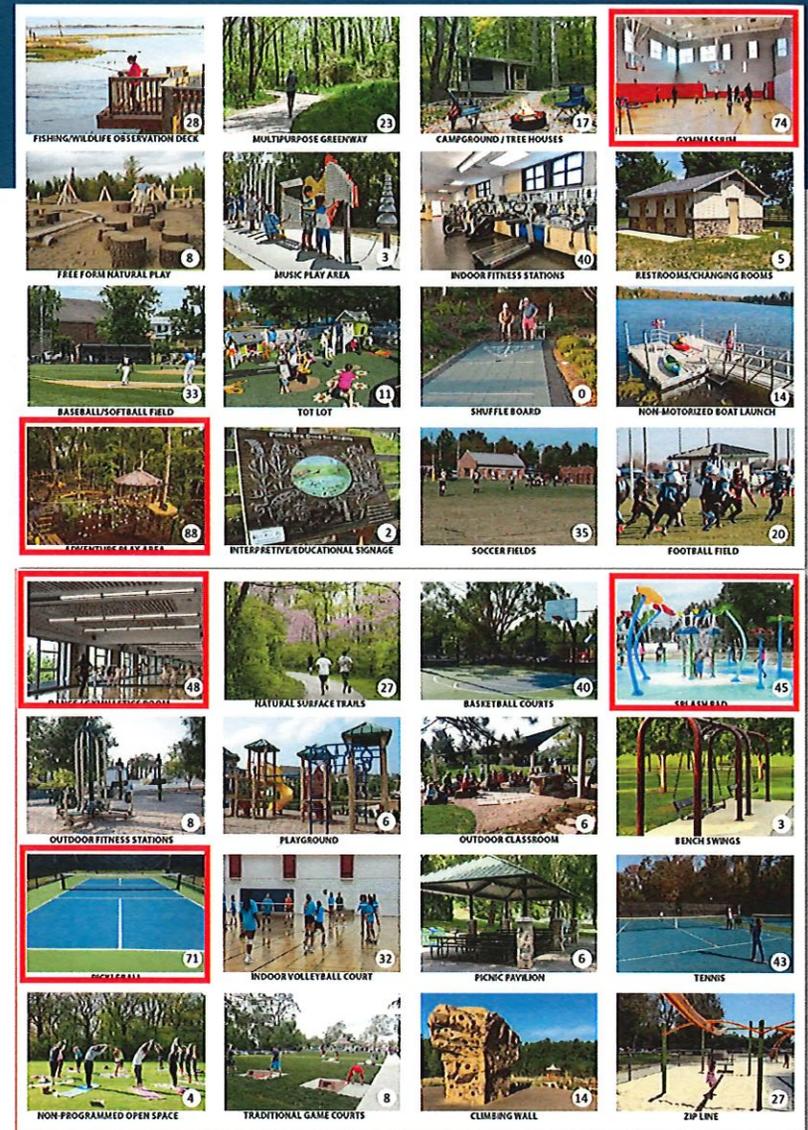


FOOTBALL FIELD 20

Visual Preference Exercise

The Top 10 of 32 Amenities:

1. Adventure Play Area (88)
2. Gymnasium (74)
3. Pickleball (71)
4. Dance / Gymnastics Room (48)
5. Splash Pad (45)
6. Tennis (43)
7. Basketball Courts (40 – Tie)
8. Indoor Fitness Stations (40 – Tie)
9. Soccer Fields (35)
10. Baseball / Softball Fields (33)

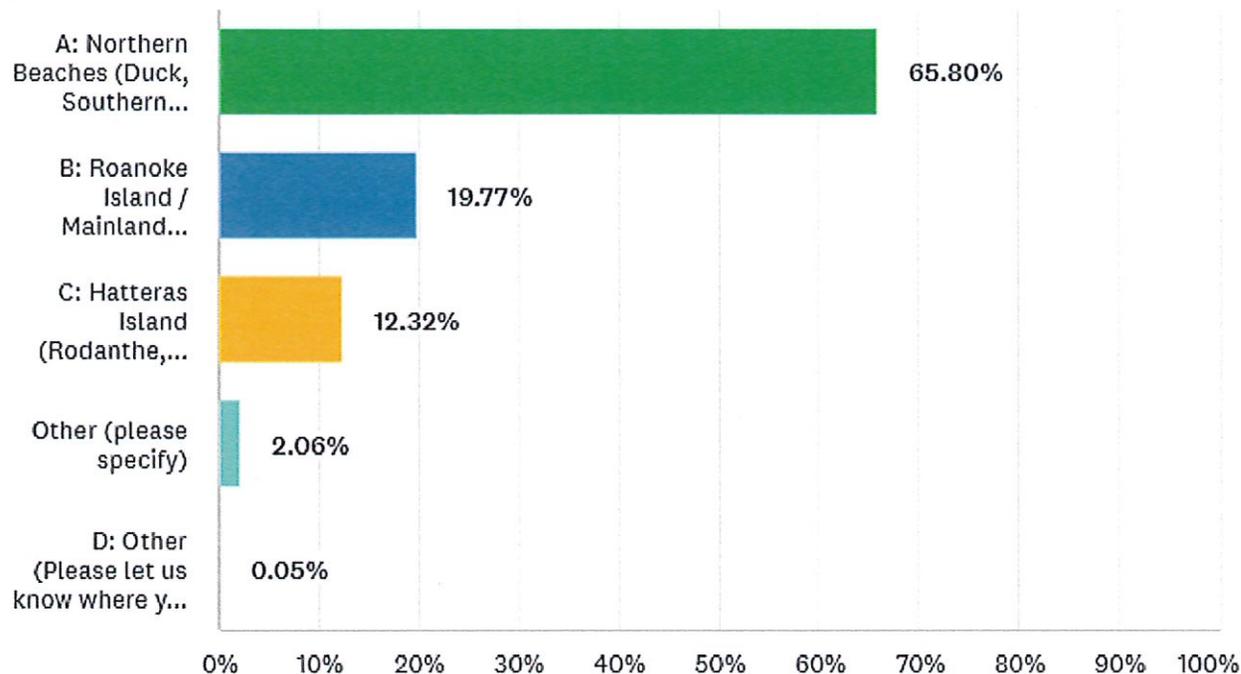


Survey Results – 2,044 Participants

Household Survey Represented
3,890 Individuals

Referring to the image above, in which division of the county do you live?

Answered: 2,038 Skipped: 6



Survey Results

- Nearly 90% of survey takers indicated they had used a recreation facility or participated in a recreation program
- Most facilities were rated as being in **good or excellent condition**
- The *Old Swimming Hole* in Manteo received the lowest marks with most respondents noting the park was in “okay” or “poor” condition
- The *Youth Center and Lions Club Centers* received the next lowest marks for perceived condition

Survey Results

The following is a list of recreation activities/facilities that could be offered at a public park or recreation facility. Rate the importance of each activity from most to least desired. Please consider other members of your household.

Answered: 2,011 Skipped: 33

Rank	County-wide	Northern Beach Division	Roanoke Island / Mainland Division	Hatteras Island Division
1	Pool	Pool	Pool	Pool
2	Indoor programs (arts, fitness)	Indoor program (arts, fitness)	Baseball / softball fields	Pickleball
3	Greenways / trails	Greenways / trails	Indoor programs (arts, fitness)	Bike trails
4	Bike trails	Soccer fields	Greenways / trails	Indoor fitness equipment
5	Soccer fields	Bike trails	Gymnasium (multi-purpose indoor space)	Indoor program (arts, fitness)
6	Indoor fitness equipment	Pickleball	Soccer fields	Public motored boat ramp
7	Pickleball	Gymnasium (multi-purpose indoor space)	Bike trails	Canoe / kayak launch
8	Gymnasium (multi-purpose indoor space)	Basketball court (indoor)	Basketball court (outdoor)	Playground / tot lot
9	Basketball court (indoor)	Indoor fitness equipment	Indoor fitness equipment	Picnic areas
10	Baseball / softball field	Tennis courts	Playground / tot lot	Soccer fields

Top ten activities facilities



Pickleball was #28 in Roanoke/Mainland

Notice how there are variations in facility types by the different divisions



The Public's Perceptions Of Parks Investment Levels

- \$ Not Enough
- \$\$ A little Low**
- \$\$\$ Just Right
- \$\$\$\$ Aggressive
- \$\$\$\$\$ Very Aggressive

I feel Dare County's parks investment level CURRENTLY IS:

Answered: 1,894 Skipped: 150

1.94★
average rating



A desire for more investments into parks

I feel Dare County's parks investment level SHOULD BE:

Answered: 1,888 Skipped: 156

3.58★
average rating



- \$ Reduced
- \$\$ Maintain
- \$\$\$ Maintain and Grow Slowly**
- \$\$\$\$ Improve and Grow Quickly**
- \$\$\$\$\$ Trend Setter

Focus Group Interviews

- 8 focus / stakeholder group interviews
- 32 participants
- (November 18 & 20th)

Key Takeaways From Focus Group Meetings

1. Accessibility and Inclusivity
2. Diverse Programming
3. Facility Maintenance and Development
4. Community Involvement
5. Strategic Planning and Partnerships
6. Balancing Resident and Visitor Needs

Benchmarking Your Facilities



We factored in how each division was contributing to the total County-wide benchmark

Key Findings:

Pickleball is well above benchmark

The County has nearly three times above the national benchmark

Baseball/Softball fields and your recreation centers are also above benchmark

Aquatics, indoor recreation, playgrounds, accessible playground and others are below benchmark ranges

Amenity	2025 NRPA Metrics Jurisdictions between 20,000-49,000	OSBM-Based Estimated Population (38,110)	System Total	Northern Division	Roanoke Island Mainland Division	Hatteras Island Division
Baseball / Softball Fields	1/3,105	12-13	17	6	9	2
Multipurpose Fields	1/3,333	11-12	10	7	3	0
Basketball Courts (dedicated)	1/7,501	5-6	8	2	5	1
Community Gardens	1/27,262	1-2	1	1	0	0
Disc Golf	1/29,262	1-2	1	0	1	0
Tennis / Pickleball	1/13,000	2-3	7	4	1	2
Pickleball (dedicated)	1/7,737	4-5	14*	10	4	0
Multi-use Basketball / Volleyball Courts	1/15,531	2-3	0	0	0	0
Playground	1/3,105	12-13	10	3	5	2
Inclusive Playgrounds	1/19,729	1-2	0	0	0	0
Dog Park	1/27,508	1-2	2	1	1	0
Recreation Centers (with gym)	1/24,486	1-2	3	1	1	1
Community Center (no gym)	1/27,858	1-2	1	0	1	0
Performance Amphitheater	1/32,255	1-2	0	0	0	0
Nature Center	1/33,669	1-2	0	0	0	0
Aquatic Center	1/31,000	1-2	0	0	0	0
Teen Center	1/31,785	1-2	0	0	0	0

Table 53 | Metrics derived from 2025 NRPA agency performance data

 in range

 below range

 above range

* currently in development

Dare County

Parks and Recreation Recommendations



Board of Commissioners Meeting

September 3, 2025



Research Supports That Parks And Recreation Acts More Like An INVESTMENT

Property Values Increase:

Economic research has demonstrated consistently that homes and properties located near parklands have higher values than those located farther away. Higher home values not only benefit the owners of these properties but also add to the tax base of local governments. ¹

8%-20%

Average property value increase

Economic Development:

Parks and recreation improves the quality of life in communities and benefits the local economic development of a region. Eighty-seven percent of corporate executives responding to a 2023 Area Development survey rated-quality-of-life features as an important factor for a headquarters, factor or other company facility.¹

75%

of Executives want quality of life as important when locating facilities

Visitor Spending:

Many local park and recreation agency amenities spur tourism to their respective locales, generating significant economic activity, including but not limited to increased sales, local restaurants/bars and hotels.¹

$$\left(\begin{array}{l} \text{Economic impact} \\ \text{of patron spending} \end{array} \right) = \left(\begin{array}{l} \text{Number} \\ \text{of Visits} \end{array} \right) \times \left(\begin{array}{l} \text{Average spending} \\ \text{per Visit} \end{array} \right) \times (\text{Multiplier})$$

Events are not a matter of IF you will have an impact, but how much of an impact it will have ³.

Sources:

1. "The Economic Impacts of Parks: An Examination of the Fiscal Effects of Operations and Capital Spending by Local Park and Recreation Agencies on the US Economy.
2. Crompton, J.L. 2001. Parks and Economic Development. PAS Report No. 502. American Planning Association, Chicago, Illinois.
3. Center for Economic Studies: Michigan State University: 2007 Quantifying the Economic Impacts of Community Events

Grants Leverage Local Investments

1. Eligibility: The County Is eligible for all these funds
2. Partnering: Partnering with the local governments is possible. Non-profits are not typically eligible
3. Leveraging local funds: These grants are great ways to leverage local investments of funds.
4. Key considerations: Planning is critical in receiving all these funds
5. Public Input: Public needs and wants are the backbone of justifying these funds to the funding body.

Completing the second part of this study opens this plan up to assist with grant funding.

State Funds \$500k Max	Federal Funds \$500k Max	Federal Trails Funding	State Land Protection and Waterways	<div style="border: 2px solid green; border-radius: 20px; padding: 10px;"> <p>New North Carolina Park funds added this year.</p> <p>Accessible Parks Grant</p> <p>Great Trails State Funding</p> </div>
				

Public input and benchmarks factored into the recommendations

	Low Community Interest (low demand)	Medium Community Interest (medium demand)	High Community Interest (high demand)
Below Benchmark (low supply)	Multiuse courts (M & H), Performance amphitheater (M & H), Nature center (CW), Teen Center (CW)	Multiuse courts (B), Play- grounds (B), Inclusive Play- grounds (B), Performance amphitheater (B)	Playgrounds (M & H), Inclusive Playgrounds (M & H), Aquatics center (CW)
At Benchmark (medium supply)	Basketball (H), Community gardens (CW), Disc Golf (CW), Dedicated Pickleball (M)	Rec center with gym (H), Basketball Courts (B)	Multipurpose fields (CW), Dedicated Pickleball (B & H), and a rec center with a gym (B &M), Community center with no gym (CW)
Above Benchmark (high supply)	Baseball (H), Tennis / Pickleball (M), Dog parks (CW)	Baseball / softball (B), Tennis / Pickleball (B)	Baseball (M), Tennis / Pickle- ball (H), Basketball Courts (M)

Key: Northern Beach Division (B); Roanoke Island Division (M); Hatteras Island Division (H); County-wide (C)
Critical benchmarks are evaluated on a County-wide basis; divisional contribution to the benchmark level has been considered.

Other key factors for recommendations



Top 10 Considerations

1. The County is well below national benchmark levels for park land
2. The County's indoor recreation facilities are dated and struggling to meet current public demand
3. Population growth is placing pressure on available land, contributing to the surge in property values
4. The County is a national tourism destination, which creates opportunities and challenges
5. The 2022 Oakley Collier Report provided insight into staff observed needs and detailed priorities
6. The County is geographically over 100 miles from north to south, and travel is a significant barrier of access
7. Partnerships with schools, municipalities, state, and federal partners is exceptionally critical due to limited amount of land
8. A significant portion of the land in the County is undeveloped due to environmental limitations
9. The mainland landfill area presents opportunities for development, but its distance from population bases is a major barrier
10. Recreation development presents the opportunity to attract visitors and help with economic development

System investment has not kept up with public demand

You need to start to “chip away” at updating your system

Immediate needs

Update your current system

Immediate Needs	#	Project	Cost	Location	Comments
	1	Synthetic turf on athletic fields	\$4,000,000	Update existing fields based on the highest current usage. Focus on rectangular multi-purpose fields	The County does not have the land to build more multi-purpose and baseball fields to meet CURRENT demand. Installing synthetic turf on existing fields that receive the most usage serves as a stopgap measure until the County can acquire more land and construct additional athletic fields.
	2	Stop gap indoor expansions and updates **	See below	Wescott Park, Northern Beach Division, and Fessenden Center	There is a need for indoor expansions / facility updates in each of the three divisions; however, based on which division has land that is readily available for expansions, Westcott Park is the recommended first location, followed by the Northern Beach Division, and then the Fessenden Center.
	3	Splashpads / spray grounds	\$2,000,000	Three splash pads, one in each division	The size of the splashpads should be developed to serve residents and tourists. Rentable shelters and cabanas should accompany the splashpads. Site-specific master plans should be conducted for each of the three sites so that the County is more competitive when pursuing grant funding.
	4	Playground accessibility improvements	\$1,000,000	Across the County	Funding should be directed toward updating playgrounds across the County. Due to spacing constraints, it is recommended that existing playgrounds be upgraded / updated to offer more accessible features, improved surfacing, and other items that make the existing playgrounds usable by a wide range of user abilities.

Limited land near population centers forces recreational development into less accessible areas, reducing convenience for many residents.

You've outgrown your indoor spaces

The public wants aquatics; this is a stop gap until your current system is updated

Your dated system needs to be more accessible, this is a good start

** some of the items within these projects have been addressed, like the roofing and siding repairs. Even with some items completed, the majority of the funding needs for recreation amenity expansions have not been addressed. The construction cost estimates in the Oakley Collier report were considered when determining costs for the legacy projects.

Mid-range and Long-range needs

Continue to update your current system

Mid Range Needs	#	Project	Cost	Location	Comments
	5	Pickleball (outdoor)	\$1,000,000	Northern beaches and Hatteras	Pickleball is within benchmark levels, and the community has expressed a very high desire for the sport in the Northern Beach area and Hatteras Island area. The Oakley Collier report's estimate of need has been used as a guiding figure.
	6	Lighting, security cameras, and accessible routes	\$2,500,000	Systemwide budget allotment toward LED field lighting, safety lighting, and security cameras	Field LED and security lighting, network security, and accessibility routes.
Long Range Needs	7	Landbank for future growth	\$5,000,000	Landbank for park expansion County-wide	Monitor land values and seek land that is suitable for park additions, indoor facilities, and expanded trail system. The County should always be evaluating the additional property that is adjacent to County facilities when it becomes available, as this can make park expansions and building new facilities more feasible and accessible.
	8	Old swimming hole planning and updating	\$1,500,000	Rename the site, site specific master plan, and updates to park site	Master planning and initial development.
	9	Multiuse trail and greenway development	\$2,000,000	Multiuse trails, greenways, and related planning	Develop more trails and greenways and expand the trails within existing parks and related planning. The location and scope of the trail will heavily influence the costs.

Despite meeting benchmarks, high demand exists.

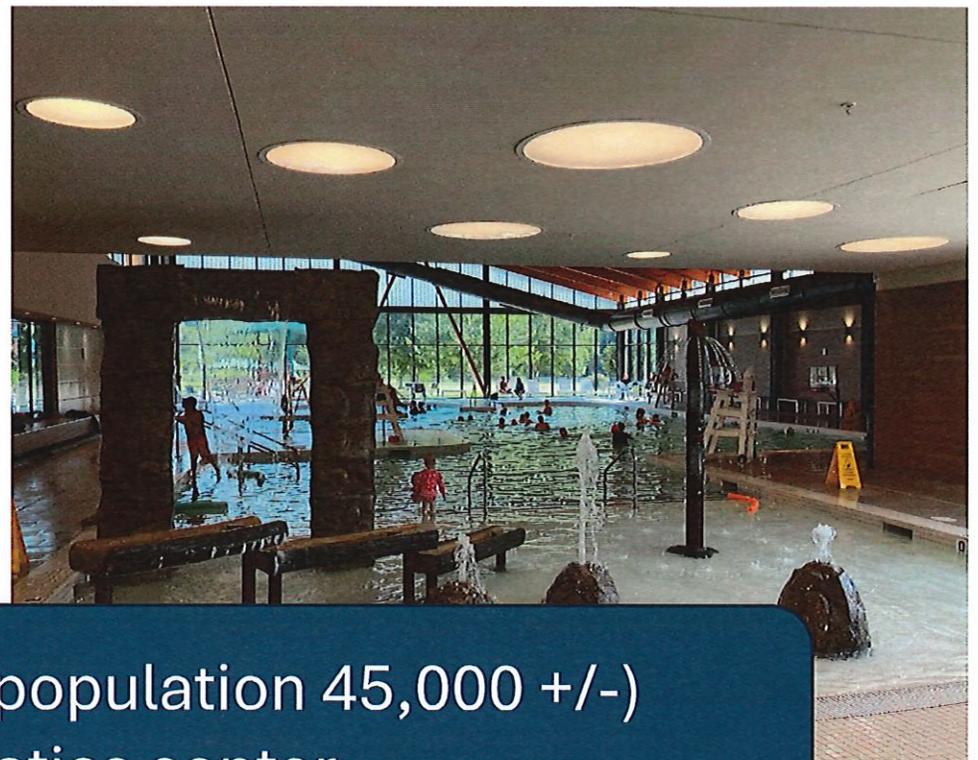
Modernize the lighting system.

Plan for adjacent property acquisition when available.

The swimming hole is an asset worth investing in to return the site to functionality

Pursue improved opportunities for walkability

There is great demand for an aquatics center but it's recommended you wait to develop it



Jackson County, NC (population 45,000 +/-)
Indoor aquatics center

Your current indoor recreation facilities should be updated/expanded to meet current demand

Legacy Projects

There are significant needs that exceed what the County can address within its normal budgeting process.

Funding should come through a combination of .25 cent sales tax (recommended), partnerships, bond considerations, or a combination of these efforts.

Wescott Park Indoor Expansion: \$10.5-\$12 M

Northern Beach Division Indoor Expansion: \$15 M

Fessenden Center Expansion: \$5-\$6.5 M

Total: \$30.5-\$33.5 M

Update what you have before you look at adding to the system

The longer these costs are delayed, the higher the costs will be



Questions?

