

Destination 2028

DESTINATION STRATEGIC PLAN PRIORITY

2. Sports



2. Sports

Priority Focus

Develop the needed inventory to include additional fields and courts, as well as an indoor multipurpose venue to elevate the county as a competitive sports tourism destination. Additionally, create an efficient and well-managed, countywide sports cluster model that utilizes the existing facilities and informs criteria for development and support of new venues

Overarching Goal

Professional, competitive youth/amateur and recreational sports events and tournaments are a major opportunity for Wake County to deliver overnight visitation and significant economic impact into the community. The overarching goal for the Sports priority is to develop needed inventory (including additional fields and courts and an indoor multipurpose venue) to elevate the county as a competitive sports tourism destination. Concurrently the county should assemble an efficient and well-managed, countywide sports “complex” that utilizes the existing facilities as well as informs criteria for development to attract events and tournaments of the scale to drive overnight visitation.

GRSA: Sales and Sports Entity

The Greater Raleigh Sports Alliance (GRSA) is a department of GRCVB created in 1998 that focuses exclusively on selling the county as a sports destination and booking sports tournaments and events. The GRSA was formalized as a stand-alone entity in 2012 and is responsible for marketing Wake County as a sports event destination. This includes working with partners to book all the major sporting events in Wake County.

In addition to its full-time, five-member staff, GRSA has a 22-member Advisory Board, comprised of sports, government, tourism and hospitality officials who play key roles in the sporting events industry in Wake County.

Under the GRSA’s direction, Wake County has made such a name for itself that the National Association of Sports Commissions named it the 2015 Sports Tourism Organization of the Year. For the most part, the GRSA’s role is that of a liaison between an event rights-holder and a local host venue or organization. GRSA identifies and pursues events that are a good fit for Wake County. In parallel, GRSA works to identify a local host venue or sports organization that (a) is available to host the event and (b) wants to host and/or manage the event.

Once an event is booked in Wake County, GRSA typically plays more of a supporting role and often serves on local organizing committees. GRSA focuses on housing, marketing, community involvement and support, transportation, visitor information and visitor services. GRSA does not own, manage or operate sporting events or venues. GRSA works closely with local partners, who are the experts in the "event management" business.

Wake County has played host to many high profile events including: the NHL Stanley Cup Finals (twice), NHL All-Star Weekend, U.S. Youth Soccer Southern Regionals, NCAA Men’s and Women’s Basketball, USA Gymnastics Men’s Region 8, a Champions Tour (PGA) event, ACC Men’s and Women’s Soccer Championships, the visitRaleigh.com Showcase Series with NCFC Youth (formerly known as CASL), ACC Tennis Championships, NCAA Baseball Division II World Series, NCAA Women’s College Cup, U.S. Lacrosse Southeast Regional, the State Games of North Carolina and more. In addition, IRONMAN 70.3 Raleigh, drawing 2,500 participants from over 40 states, was in Raleigh from 2013-2018.

These high-profile events are samples of GRSA’s success, but are only part of the overall success of sports tourism in Wake County. GRSA has also been successful in securing high-impact, lower-profile youth and amateur sports tournaments and competitions throughout the county. GRSA has been involved in some advisory activities related to sports facility development; there are additional opportunities to play a broader role in advising on facility development and coordinating large tournaments within the existing facilities throughout the county. This has also been referenced in the Interlocal section of the plan.

Existing Sports Infrastructure

According to GRSA, the sports where Wake County is most competitive are many of the traditional sports including soccer, baseball/softball, basketball and tennis in terms of venue quality and quantity. As shown in the Situational Analysis map earlier in the report, Wake County has a series of existing facilities geared toward these sports. These facilities include:

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| PNC Arena | Southern Sand Volleyball Complex | Cary Tennis Park | Triangle Aquatic Center | USA Baseball National Training Complex |
| WakeMed Soccer Park & Cross Country Course | Ting Park | Walnut Creek Softball Complex | Millbrook Exchange Tennis Center | Carter-Finley Stadium (North Carolina State University) |
| WRAL Soccer Park | Five County Stadium | Thomas Brooks Park | Triangle Table Tennis | Capital City BMX |
| | Lonnie Poole Golf Course | RCC | Reynolds Coliseum | |

Youth/Amateur Competitive Sports

Small complexes make up the majority of sports fields and courts inventory in Wake County. As detailed in the Situational Analysis section, there are nearly 70 soccer fields across the county with another 44 proposed. For each traditional sport, the DSP has outlined specific initiatives related to inventory, infrastructure or maintenance needs below.

Soccer

Wake County has a significant inventory of soccer fields, including several premier soccer venues. The primary need within the sport of soccer is additional turf fields. There is a slight concern within the sports community that, with the existing inventory, when combined with the nearly 50 additional fields planned in the pipeline, there could be a surplus for tournament use. The other important dimension for the future is the clustering of fields that are in close proximity. According to the industry experts in the market, including GRSA, synthetic turf inventory with lights and maintenance of the existing fields are needed to continue to be a premier destination for soccer tournaments. The DSP identifies what is required of future fields if Wake County is to continue to remain competitive as a soccer tournament location.

| Sport | Inventory Needs | Infrastructure Needs | Maintenance Needs |
|--------|-----------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Soccer | Turf fields | Parking Increased lighting | Grass field upkeep |

Baseball/Softball

Wake County is also home to USA Baseball’s training facility and has become well-known for baseball tournaments related to the USA Baseball national governing body. This caliber asset in the county has worked to brand the area to baseball events. The primary need within this category is additional softball fields. According to the research done at the time of the Situational Analysis, there are no additional softball-specific fields planned for development, while there are 34 baseball fields planned. Building out the softball inventory (or fields that can be easily transformed for softball dimensions) should be part of future interlocal considerations.

| Sport | Inventory Needs | Infrastructure Needs | Maintenance Needs |
|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Baseball/Softball | Softball-sized fields | Increased lighting on softball fields | Facility upkeep |

Basketball

Wake County has a strong reputation for basketball tournaments with the storied NCAA tournament runs of N.C. State, as well as hosting NCAA Basketball Tournament games at PNC Arena on a regular basis. In addition, GRSA has a strong relationship with the Deep South Classic occurring at the RCC each year. This event delivers 7,000 attendees and over 2,000 hotel rooms on peak night into the county. According to the industry experts in the market, including GRSA, indoor courts and a multipurpose indoor venue would be needed to take Wake County’s basketball inventory to the next level. In addition, there is an additional indoor, multiuse facility contemplated in the county that could provide much needed inventory. This would enable GRSA and Wake County as a whole to continue to compete for high-value tournaments.

| Sport | Inventory Needs | Infrastructure Needs | Maintenance Needs |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Basketball | Wood courts 12-16 courts preferred with six-court minimum Small arena to seat 4,000-5,000 people | | |

Volleyball

Volleyball is one of the most desired sports for youth and amateur tournaments because of the size of tournaments and the impact they can have on a community. Wake County has also hosted significant tournaments including the City of Oaks Challenge. This event delivers roughly 4,000 attendees and nearly 2,000 hotel rooms on peak into the market. In addition, Wake County is also home to the Southern Sand Volleyball Complex, which is used for outdoor tournaments. If additional inventory of wooden, indoor courts is contemplated, these should be utilized for both basketball and volleyball. The same would be true for the desired indoor arena. This would enable GRSA and Wake County to continue to compete for high-value tournaments.

| Sport | Inventory Needs | Infrastructure Needs | Maintenance Needs |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Volleyball | Wood courts - eight-court minimum Small arena | | |

Tennis

With the significant inventory of tennis courts countywide, tennis is a sport where Wake County stands to compete well. As mentioned above, Wake County facilities have hosted successful USTA and ACC tennis tournaments in the past. The recently completed Cary Tennis Park is the premier facility in the state with the only covered courts (seven) in the region. Tennis is a sport growing in demand, and there is need for inventory with an increased focus on hosting tournaments. There is potential for an additional tennis center, which has been proposed. This would increase the number of available courts for tournament use and continue to increase the value to the destination's ability to compete for tennis tournaments. In addition, the courts could be used by tennis championship-level events at a small indoor arena.

| Sport | Inventory Needs | Infrastructure Needs | Maintenance Needs |
|--------|---------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Tennis | Outdoor courts Indoor courts | | |

Sports Enhancements to RCC

The Meetings and Conventions section of the DSP outlines the needs of an RCC renovation and future expansion. As noted in the various optimization scenarios, there is an opportunity for the exhibit hall and proposed flex space to have more built-in and in-house capabilities to host indoor sports tournaments. To do so and to provide the ease of hosting an event demanded by the level of tournaments that would attract overnight visitation, more indoor courts (basketball and volleyball) and retractable seating would need to be purchased. The onsite equipment and furnishings would add to the RCC's overall capacity and aid in securing future indoor sporting events in the facility.

Emerging Sports Markets

Lacrosse

Lacrosse was identified early in the DSP process as a sport that is quickly on the rise in the region, as well as nationally. Many in the industry believe that participation in lacrosse is where soccer was about 10 years ago. Knowing how quickly soccer has taken off and how large the competitive youth tournament market is, Wake County could be poised to win much of the lacrosse tournaments in the region. Utilizing the soccer inventory, lacrosse should be a space where Wake County competes well going forward. The challenge with lacrosse on natural grass soccer fields is that lacrosse can be more destructive to the grass. Lacrosse cleats are similar to baseball cleats with a toe cleat, whereas in soccer a toe cleat is not allowed. With the added front cleat, the grass can be torn up at a quicker rate. This means that natural-grass lacrosse fields require added maintenance. This would also support the case for additional turf fields in the Wake County inventory.

| Sport | Inventory Needs | Infrastructure Needs | Maintenance Needs |
|----------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Lacrosse | Turf fields | Increased lighting | Additional field upkeep |

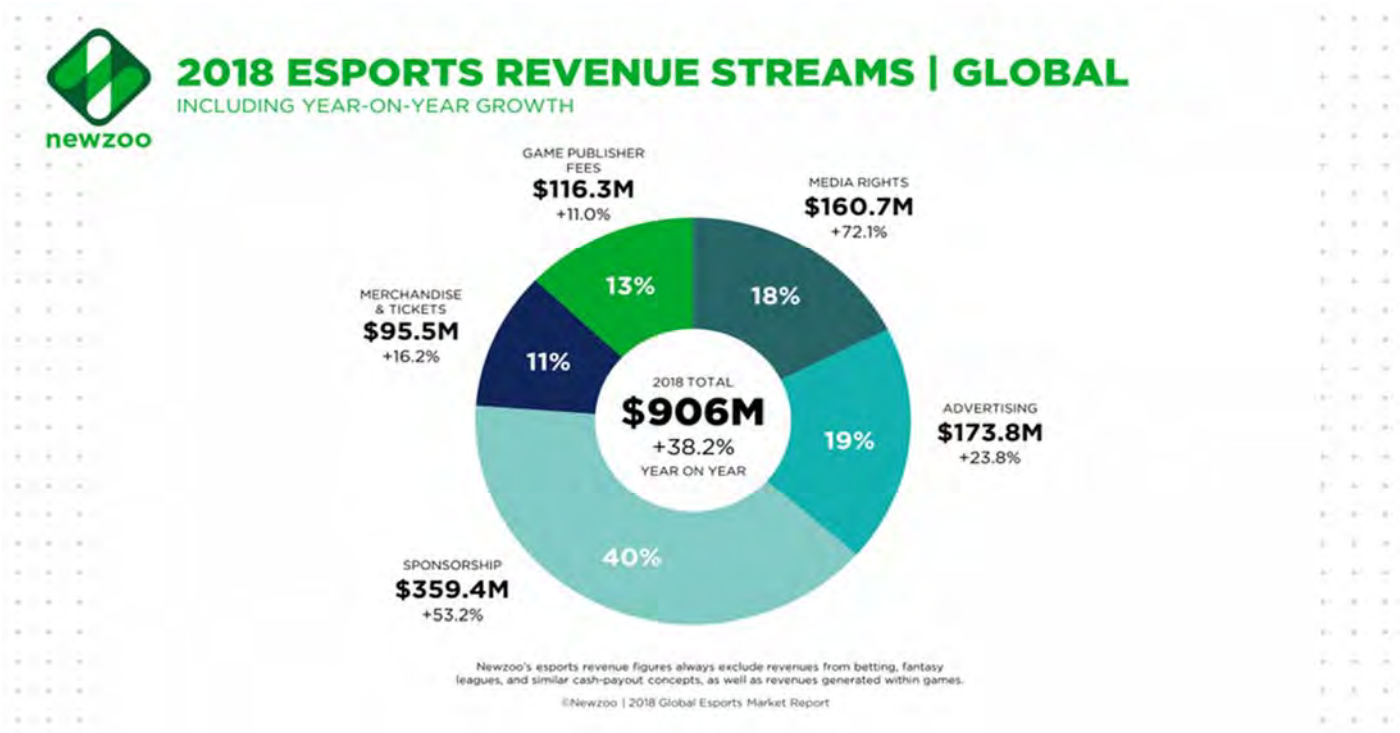
Esports

Competitive online gaming is one of the quickest growing sports in the country. In early 2018, Forbes stated the esports industry would soon be a billion-dollar market with revenues projected to reach \$906 million by year-end. In addition to the staggering growth in participation, brands are buying in at an increased rate, nearly 50% over their investment from the prior year, according to Newzoo, a market research firm with expertise on esports. The below breaks down where the revenue related to esports comes from, with the majority coming from sponsorships, but a significant increase is also seen in advertising. As brands and major advertisers begin to see increased value, esports will continue to grow.

Wake County has a highly valuable asset within the community when it comes to esports, with Epic Games headquartered in Cary and several other gaming companies in the region. Epic Games employs 700 people and operates seven subsidiaries across the globe. Epic Games is behind several gaming products, including Gears of War and the recent sensation, Fortnite.

JLL recently visited a sports training and competition center in Florida which includes mental training and dietary planning. This facility has also seen an increase in interest in esports and has had teams stay onsite to train for mental toughness, as well nutrition training to keep the gamers focused for long periods of time, increasing their performance.

Epic Games and other esports producers believe the next frontier for online gaming is now. Many are considering building production and competition facilities. With Epic Games headquartered within the county, this could be a viable opportunity to bring the next wave of sports tourism to Wake County.



| Sport | Inventory Needs | Infrastructure Needs | Maintenance Needs |
|---------|----------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Esports | Production studio Competition arena | Secure server capacity | |

Future of Professional Sports in Wake County

As mentioned above, Wake County is home to several professional teams and venues including the PNC Arena (Arena), where the Carolina Hurricanes play, and Wake Med Soccer Park, where the North Carolina Courage and North Carolina Football Club (NCFC) play. There are also several minor league or development leagues within the county. The professional leagues and their venues are important to the community as fans have come to love them.

Carolina Hurricanes and PNC Arena

PNC Arena opened in 1999 with the first hockey match of Carolina Hurricanes vs. the New Jersey Devils. The Carolina Hurricanes won the Stanley Cup in 2006, have been conference champions twice and won their division three times. The Hurricanes were recently purchased in December 2017 by Tom Dundon, at a 61% share of the team. This ensured the team would not be relocated and is a good sign for professional hockey in Wake County.

With the team's near future now secured, there have been discussions on the future of PNC Arena, given that it is approaching the 20-year mark. PNC Arena is owned by the Centennial Authority, which was created to manage the public-private partnership by the N.C. General Assembly. PNC Arena is also home to N.C. State's men's basketball team and has been host to a variety of other events including concerts and special events.

PNC Arena Utilization

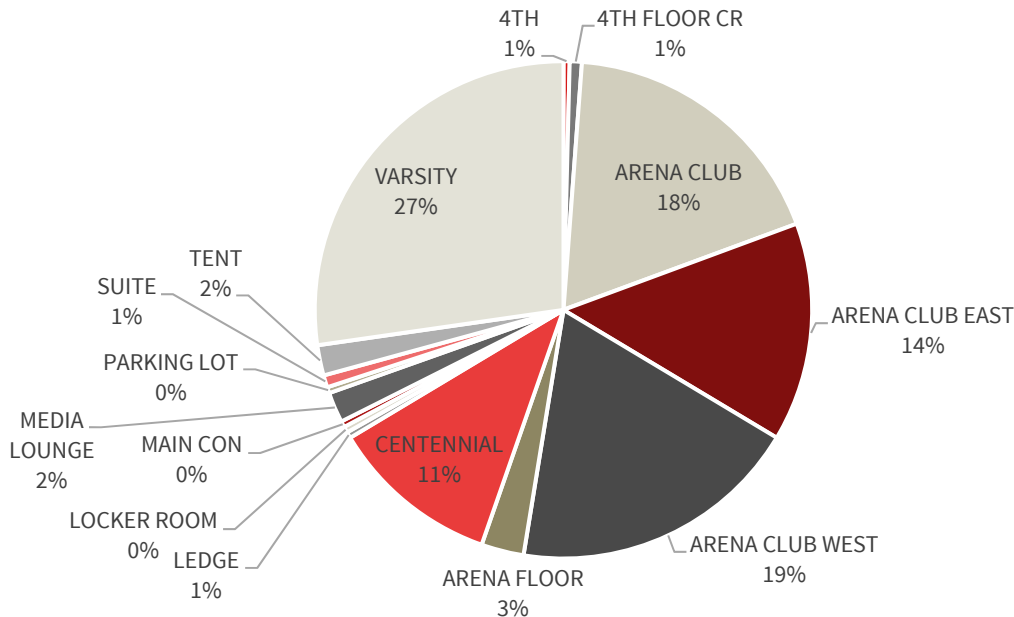
Like the RCC optimization process, JLL reviewed three fiscal years of calendar data to understand how PNC Arena is being utilized. The PNC Arena averages 135 full-building usages per year. These events include Carolina Hurricanes games, N.C. State basketball games and other concerts, comedy acts and special events. The full-building users represent 40% of PNC Arena's availability on average. The remaining inventory is used for smaller conferences, meetings or shows that do not occupy the entire building's leasable space. On average there are 266 additional smaller event days in PNC Arena each year for 120 groups. The below is a breakdown of how the building spaces are used by room when a full-building user is not in PNC Arena.

In total, PNC Arena had 269 total active calendar days in 2017, leaving just over 25% of the available days open. In discussions with the Centennial Authority, JLL believes there is room for opportunity to create further synergies with the RCC downtown and with GRCVB to pursue conventions with 5,000+ attendees that have a need for an arena. The most available time within PNC Arena is the summer months when the two primary tenants, N.C. State and the Hurricanes, are off season. In addition, there is opportunity to activate a portion of the parking areas for large outdoor events during this time.

With PNC Arena being as active as it is and a new owner of the Hurricanes in place, there have been discussions on the state of the building, its future and the future of the areas around it. As shown in the Situational Analysis map, there are areas around the PNC Arena that are under-utilized. State land at the State Fairgrounds as well as the NC DOT and Department of Administration facilities could be redeveloped to create additional density in this area.

There is more detail on this in the Destination Development section, but to keep PNC Arena a viable space for large events, the area around it needs to be developed to create a critical mass of experiences for both residents and visitors.

PNC Arena Usage (Non-full Building Users), 2017



In addition, there is currently a vision for the building itself to include enhancements for users and more activated spaces. The enhancements should consider opportunities to increase flexibility and potentially attract additional uses in the future.

| Venue | Capital Needs | Infrastructure Needs | Maintenance Needs |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| PNC Arena | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open up main façade Create space for outdoor dining Increase flexibility to host multiple uses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Network of development around the Arena to include restaurants and retail | |

Carolina Mudcats

The Carolina Mudcats are a minor-league class A Advanced Affiliate of the Milwaukee Brewers in the Carolina League. The Carolina Mudcats play at Five County Stadium in Zebulon. The Mudcats have previously been affiliated with the Atlanta Braves, Cleveland Indians and Toronto Blue Jays. The Carolina Mudcats have won five league titles and 10 division titles since 1988. Over 300 future major league players have played at Five County Stadium, welcoming over six million fans over the years.

North Carolina Football Club

The North Carolina Football Club (NCFC) is a professional soccer team located in Cary and is part of the United Soccer League. NCFC's home turf is Sahlen's Stadium at WakeMed Soccer Park. NCFC hosted its inaugural season in 2007, originally named the Carolina RailHawks. In 2016, the name was changed to NCFC. NCFC has become a strong brand for soccer in the area, as well as in the professional league, winning their division in 2010 and 2011 and finishing third in 2017.

Proposed Major League Soccer (MLS) Stadium

There is also an MLS stadium proposed in downtown Raleigh to become home of a new professional soccer team. This effort is being led by NCFC President Steve Malik. The MLS plans to get the total number of teams in the league to 28, currently at 25, with Cincinnati and Nashville being the most recent cities awarded teams. As noted above, youth soccer is in such high demand with the number of youth tournaments growing every year. The participation is reflective of the same momentum at the professional level, with soccer becoming America's third-favorite sport to watch, according to a Forbes article published in January 2018. While being third-favorite does not sound significant, the primary American sports (football, basketball and baseball) all had declining attendance figures.

With this in mind, the race to secure the last two team spots in the MLS is in full swing. The proposed stadium would be home to such a franchise if it were awarded to Raleigh and Wake County. The stadium could be a catalytic development for downtown, but the public-private deal could be challenging to accomplish, requiring certain buildings owned by the State of North Carolina to be all or partially relocated. If the stadium is built, the positive impact on the community could be significant, with roughly \$10 million in taxes collected by the City and County combined with an additional \$1.3 million in hotel occupancy taxes, according to the MLS stadium backers.

Importance of Utilization

While the proposed stadium's primary use is to house an MLS team, it is important for the facility to have other uses and continue to generate spending and return for the county. The MLS stadium backers have stated the importance of additional uses and believe they are critical to the success of the venue, anticipating 75 or more events annually. The DSP can support this initiative, especially the emphasis on flexibility and multiple uses. These uses could include:

- Championship-level sporting events outside of soccer
- Entertainment
- Small conferences or offsite meetings, general sessions and catered events
- Consumer or public shows (could move public shows out of RCC to this venue, which would free up space meant for conventions)
- Large-scale religious events

The plan includes a larger mixed-use complex including a conference center, 750,000 square feet of office space, 100,000 square feet of retail space, 1,200 residential units and at least 300 hotel rooms. While all of those uses have not been analyzed for feasibility by JLL, the most important component is the synergy between the existing assets and the ability for the proposed stadium complex to grow activity and not cannibalize activity already coming to the county.

Governance - Authority

As mentioned above in the discussion regarding PNC Arena, it is important to have a governance model that reflects the priorities and interests of the asset, City, County and State. To this end, JLL has spoken with the MLS stadium backers about the idea of an Authority similar to the Centennial Authority that owns PNC Arena. It is recommended that this option is further explored. Finding synergies and ways to position the assets both in the city and the county will be critical for success of a countywide model; more detail on this in the following pages. Regardless of the model chosen, GRCVB and GRSA will be critical components in this effort.

Countywide Sports Cluster Model

As noted throughout this priority, there are a significant number of fields and courts in the countywide inventory. In conversations with stakeholders, County officials and many city and town leaders, there were considerable discussions around the future model for sports sales, bookings and services. With sports being an important market for hotel room-night generation (representing just under 50% of all room-nights booked by GRCVB), the consideration for what to do next and how to do it are big questions for the DSP.

County leaders and stakeholders recognize that sports venues throughout the county's geography have been funded by the Interlocal Fund in the past and do not want to see those investments go to waste. Moreover, to remain competitive in the sports tourism and tournament world as other communities are building mega-complexes, fields and facilities must be maintained and improved over time. As an example, the competitor complexes being built sit on 100+ acres and can include as much as a third of Wake County's soccer inventory in one complex. Tournament organizers find those complexes appealing because of the ability to consolidate their usage to a singular location.

To remain competitive and maximize the investment made into the county's existing inventory, a Countywide Sports Cluster Model is recommended. The model would certify that entirety of the county's inventory that can be considered "tournament-ready."

To remain competitive and maximize the investment made in the county's existing inventory, JLL recommends creating a Countywide Sports Cluster model. In this model, the entirety of the county's inventory of fields and facilities that can be considered "tournament-ready" would be sold cohesively by GRSA. GRSA does much of this today; however, this model contemplates taking the GRSA's efforts and ramping them up further. This would be an important function, given the spread-out inventory (not every field in the county would be in the inventory since there is a threshold to be considered "tournament-ready"). JLL recommends this model be explored and developed in conjunction with the existing fields and courts owned by municipalities. The internal considerations and development for GRSA could be significant, including the need to add staff and additional resources. However, for the inventory that exists in the county to remain competitive, the experience provided by GRSA in this model could enhance Wake County's ability to compete.

This increased and focused effort by GRSA would include selling, booking and servicing tournaments within the county for fields and courts that fit the following criteria:

| Sport | Minimum requirements | Notes |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Soccer | Four (4) tournament sized fields | One lighted field for every four fields. Given the inventory of grass fields, turf is preferred to balance the inventory. Maintenance of existing and new fields to tournament-quality is required. |
| Tennis | Minimum eight (8) courts | |
| Lacrosse | Four (4) tournament sized fields | One lighted field for every four fields. Given the inventory of grass fields, turf is preferred to balance the inventory. Maintenance of existing and new fields to tournament-quality is required. |
| Volleyball | Eight (8) indoor courts | |
| Baseball/Softball | Four (4) fields | One lighted field for every four fields |
| Basketball | Six (6) indoor courts | |

Criteria for unique specialty sports need to be built. Sports should be chosen given their ability to attract overnight visitors due to tournaments, e.g., cricket, pickleball.

In addition, GRSA’s efforts would need to be integrated with those of the facility ownership, whether that is a municipality or private owner. The GRSA and individual facility owners should enter into a memorandum of understanding (MOU), as noted in the Interlocal section, for tournament bookings and availability. GRSA should have the ability to also comment on maintenance and infrastructure needs to the ownership and to the County, especially if a facility was funded through the interlocal fund. As the entity responsible for generating sports tourism for the county, the GRSA should also be involved in calendar management and overall utilization, as many of these projects were funded with the idea of sports tourism at their core. There is additional detail on the role of the GRSA in the “Impact on GRCVB” section of this report.

Why a Countywide Sports Cluster Model?

As mentioned above, feedback from County leadership, elected officials and other stakeholders was clear that interest in hosting sporting events that attract overnight visitors is strong, but equally strong was to continue to drive the impact throughout the county, including the sports fields and courts that had already been invested in and developed. To have the desired impact, the model for sports tourism needs to be driven through a countywide mentality.

For the desired impact, the model for sports tourism needs to be driven through a countywide mentality.

This model would be unique to Wake County, as many municipalities are developing large-scale, singular facilities that have multiple sport fields and courts in one complex. As previously mentioned, those sportsplexes can be 100+ acres and consolidate all the sports inventory into one area.

In this process, JLL reviewed both main options: a countywide sports cluster and a singular sportsplex model. It was determined, in conjunction with GRCVB and County leadership, the model that would further the mission of the interlocal fund's past and future investments to deliver the highest impact is the countywide sports cluster model. County leadership supports this effort and wants to integrate this model into the way interlocal funds are committed in the future. Arguably, this model is more challenging than a single sportsplex model, but the goal of increasing overnight visitation countywide and ensuring the existing and future investments from the interlocal fund are realized can only be achieved through a countywide focus, hence the sports cluster model.

Proposed New Venues

Throughout this process, JLL has learned of several projects that could impact the total inventory of fields and courts across the county. Several of these projects have been well-thought-out and would be valuable to the community in terms of enhancing sporting events tourism in the market.

One of those proposed projects is the Knightdale Soccerplex. It is contemplated to have 10 soccer fields with additional family amenities surrounding the park, including food and beverage activation via food trucks and other events. The land was donated to the Town of Knightdale to make this project happen. In conjunction with this plan, land has also been allocated on an adjacent parcel for a future hotel plot. This is the kind of project that enhances the competitiveness of a countywide sports cluster model by adding the level and quality of fields, as well as planning for additional activation and future development around the site. At the time of publication of this report, Phase One of the Knightdale Soccerplex has been approved, which is five of the 10 planned soccer fields.

Another example of this kind of project is a 50-court complex proposed by Triangle Racquet Sports. The potential complex would be a host site for junior and adult USTA tournaments, as well as events on the American Tennis Professionals circuit. This would be the largest tennis facility in the region.

Similarly, early discussions are underway in other communities. Rolesville recently acquired 100+ acres and is interested in seeing that acreage utilized for sporting events tourism. Another large site in the county is available and could house a multipurpose indoor facility. Examples like these are projects that should be studied and vetted to align with the DSP's countywide sports cluster model.

Impact on Interlocal Fund

When it comes to sports fields, complexes, courts and other related sports assets applying for major project funding from the County, JLL recommends the following guidelines for new sports facilities:

- Funding request between \$5-10 million – a business plan be required with projections and measurement strategies for ROI.
- Funding requests between \$10-20 million – a business plan be required with projections and measurement strategies for ROI.
- Funding requests more than \$20 million - full feasibility from a nationally recognized firm should be a minimum qualification. In addition, the applicant should demonstrate the ability for the project to be activated for multiple uses.

In addition, tourism and the overnight visitor impact should be the primary focus of the project to receive such funds. For To be eligible for applying for funds, facilities should meet the minimum requirements described in the table on page 61. If a project is unique, in that there are no other facilities like it in the area, it should be considered because of the ability to attract those unique specialty sports, e.g., cricket, pickleball. The proposed project should show critical mass to generate the demand. The location of the proposed project is an important consideration, as larger tournaments will require multiple clusters of courts/fields. An example of a key opportunity is an indoor, multipurpose venue, which would include seating for 4,000-5,000 spectators and the ability to host indoor sports tournaments including wrestling, basketball, volleyball etc. A proposed indoor multipurpose arena of roughly 100,000-150,000 net square feet would satisfy part of the need for indoor sports facilities in the county.

Lastly, booking and calendar management are critical components of any new projects funded by the interlocal fund. The entity proposing field/court development should have a business plan (to include a minimum number of outside tournaments being brought to the area on a seasonal and annual basis) that has been vetted by GRSA. Any new fields/courts should be made available in conjunction with bidding on larger tournaments to create the largest inventory possible to attract and host tournaments generating the most hotel room-nights.

As noted, the ongoing quality of the fields/courts can be a critical factor in attracting tournaments. The proposer should submit and commit to a capital plan that ensures the level of quality required is maintained. The applicant should include ongoing preventive maintenance and capital planning in its submission.

If an applicant desires interlocal funds from tourism dollars to develop a sports-related project, such a project needs to be planned and built to scale to host outside tournaments and larger sporting events. Without a plan to develop such projects to-scale, Wake County will not receive the desired ROI, and these projects will ultimately be more valuable to the communities they are in for recreational use. If a sports project is funded and is not measuring up to the standards that allowed it to receive funding, the County should reserve the right to include and activate “claw-back” statements in the agreements. This will enable the County to recoup funds invested into an applicant’s facility.

Sports Takeaways

The outlook for sports in Wake County is bright. It is important to stay focused on the overall facility development approach that will best position Wake County in the future. A countywide approach to developing the countywide sports cluster model will drive benefit throughout Wake County. To remain competitive as mega-sportsplexes are being developed will take coordination and leadership from GRSA. To balance the countywide clusters that are primarily outdoor fields, an indoor multipurpose sports venue as noted above would strengthen the county’s ability to compete for sports tourism. Sports for Wake County is a strong market with exciting long-term implications.