



Dorchester COUNTY



2020 PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Letter From the Chairman | 3 |
| Executive Summary | 5 |
| Introduction | 7 |
| Recreation Facility Inventory | 8 |
| Action Plan and Next Steps | 15 |
| Parks and Recreation Policy | 15 |
| Parks and Recreation Projects | 17 |
| Parks and Recreation Staffing and Operations | 43 |
| Budgetary Impact of Recommendations | 49 |
| Conclusion | 54 |



LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

“Si hortum cum bibliotheca habes, nil deerit.”

- Marcus Tullius Cicero

As one of the great orators of history, Cicero is renowned for his keen intellect and timeless pearls of wisdom. “If you have a library and a garden, you have everything.” Indeed. Even two thousand years ago wise men of the day knew education and outdoor activity were vital to a healthy and long life. Fast forward to Dorchester County, 2020, and if you’ll indulge me, a very brief history of how we got here:

- **2009:** Dorchester County created its first Parks and Recreation Master Plan and had the Trust for Public Land begin polling support for a referendum.
- **2010:** A \$5,000,000 capital bond referendum for parks and conservation passed with 78% of the vote, during the Great Recession.
- **2011:** Rosebrock Park is dedicated and opened to the public.
- **2011:** We pack County Council and community leaders onto my church bus from Old Fort Baptist and drive to Rock Hill where city staff and my uncle Carey Smith, recently retired City Manager, leads us on a tour of Rock Hill’s parks. This creates a solid vision of what could be here at home if we just have the commitment and community support to make it happen. The Rock Hill Mayor tells us how he had voted for Cherry Park in the 80s, lost his next election because of it, and is now part of a group and a community that has arguably the best park system in the Southeast – all because they didn’t waver from their vision and commitment. After that field trip, the gauntlet is thrown down. Council is all-in. All of us. It is incredible to see the passion to get this going!
- **2011:** Dorchester County buys 300+ acres of land in Summerville called Pine Trace. What was going to be 790 residential units will now become a 300-acre urban forest park.
- **2012:** Property on the Ashley River is presented to a few councilmen, including David Chinnis, who advocates we buy the 83 acres. We get started. It’s in foreclosure with a large bank from a busted development. George Bailey flies to Baltimore to sit with the bank and gets us a deal. We pay only \$1,600,000 for a \$3,000,000 piece of property. What was once going to be over 140 homes on the Ashley River will now be our flagship County park. Forever.
- **2013:** Designs and concepts for the “Courthouse Park”, Ashley River Park, and Pine Trace all begin to take shape.
- **2014:** The County hires a Parks and Recreation Director, Eric Davis. (Thankfully. It was time for professional staff to guide our work!)
- **2016:** We pass a referendum to fund parks and libraries for \$43,000,000 with 60.5% of the vote. It is a great second step but is struck down by the SC State Supreme Court in 2019 because the libraries and parks were combined on one question.
- **2019:** Off year election. Time is ticking. Council places a referendum on the ballot for \$38,000,000 for parks and land acquisition and \$30,000,000 for libraries, again with the help of the Trust for Public Land. From the prior setback, we make lemons out of lemonade. Both pass, with 64.8% for libraries and 66.6% for parks and conservation.
- **2020:** Construction is well underway at Davis-Bailey Park in St. George (formerly Courthouse Park; renamed for legendary County Councilman Willie Davis and our current County Council Chairman George Bailey), and Ashley River Park in Summerville.

If you follow local politics at all, you would have to be on Mars to not know how passionate I am personally for this vision to come to pass as a reality for us all. We have learned so much over the years, both with our successes and our failures. Yes, we have had plenty of both! But we never wavered in our vision and our passion to fundamentally change our community for the better forever. And that is because of all of you. These are your parks. And your vision, support, encouragement, ideas, and votes helped to make all of this happen. Within a year you will be happy and proud to take your family and friends to new parks that will stand second to none in the South. But we're not stopping here. We are already planning for future facilities so that we will have a first-class park system for our County that others will envy and our residents will enjoy. Here. In our own back yard. And we won't have to drive far to experience them.

I would be remiss not to thank staff for their help. I would also like to specifically thank the members of Council as well as the Parks and Recreation Commission members who have worked tirelessly to see the vision through. These men and women have all been a part of this since 2010: County Council – Richard Rosebrock, Carroll Duncan, Con Chellis, Willie Davis, Larry Hargett, Harriett Holman, Eddie Crosby, George Bailey, David Chinnis, and Bill Hearn; Parks and Recreation Commission members: Rita May Ranck, Edward Tupper, Joe Debney, Ken Minus, Charles Brown, John Welch, Freddie Skipper, Wesley Donehue, Danny Garnette, and Mike Monte. Without the passion of these folks, the following document would just be another government master plan on paper. These folks, alongside all of you, made this vision into reality. I could not be prouder of what we have accomplished together. Stay tuned everyone. The best is yet to come. I am

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jay Byars". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jay Byars
Dorchester County Council
Chairman, Dorchester County Parks & Recreation Commission

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Originally published in April of 2009, the *Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Master Plan* is the result of a deliberate process designed to “evaluate recreational facilities, activities and programs currently offered in Dorchester County, gather input from county residents on various recreational issues and guide the county in the establishment and provision of complementary recreation services.” After establishment of Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Department in 2014, the *2016 Parks and Recreation Master Plan* was completed as an update to document progress, and to incorporate additional public feedback, opportunities and constraints into the plan. Several years have passed and new information must be incorporated into this *2020 Parks and Recreation Master Plan* to ensure this evolving strategic document continues to be a relevant guide for how the Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Department (DCPRD) will strive to meet the current and future recreational needs for the people of Dorchester County. The *2020 Master Plan* incorporates feedback from elected officials, targeted stakeholder/partner organizations, and the general public through the 2020 Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Survey.

Significant strides to implementing the *2016 Plan* were completed. The top two priority park projects, Davis-Bailey Park (DBP) (formerly Courthouse Park) and Ashley River Park (ARP) were designed, permitted and construction-ready in October 2017 and March 2019 respectively. However, capital funding continued to be the major hurdle to establishing the envisioned park system.

Progress was made on funding in January of 2019 when a new and important revenue source was implemented for tourism related capital projects and operations – the County Hospitality Tax, which is a 2% sales tax on prepared foods. Approximately \$1,000,000 in revenue is estimated for FY 21. Additionally, the County, Town of Summerville and School District Two have cooperated to implement a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District for the Oakbrook area. Revenues generated within the TIF district are eligible and anticipated to be used (in part) for park, athletic, trail, bike and pedestrian improvements in the district.

While these are important and diverse funding sources to include in the toolkit, a more significant infusion of capital was required to expedite completion of priority park projects as well as to prepare to meet anticipated future demand. Toward this end, County Council voted in August of 2019 to place a new \$38M capital bond voter referendum on the November 2019 ballot for park and recreation projects. Voters approved the referendum 67% to 33%. Council’s prompt issuance of the first \$20M in general obligation bonds provided a greenlight to move forward with long-awaited County park projects.

Immediately following this milestone, procurement of construction services for Ashley River Park and Davis-Bailey Park began. In April 2020, Ashley River Park construction was awarded to Edcon, Inc. and is expected to be completed in Summer 2021. The total budget for Ashley River Park is \$13M. Also, in April 2020, Davis-Bailey Park construction was awarded to Hill Construction and anticipated completion is Spring 2021. The total budget for this facility is \$6M. Master planning and surveying for Pine Trace Natural Area commenced in September 2020. Other upcoming recreation projects of note include a bicycle and pedestrian connection between Ashley River and Rosebrock Parks, multiuse paths in the Oakbrook area, a new Ashley River boater access, and acquisition of land for future parks.

Staff continues to prepare for the safe and efficient operation of the growing park system. Refinement of operating and personnel plans and associated costs are ongoing. In preparation for funding the new staff positions and operations, agreements were executed with all municipalities that will allow the County to levy parks and recreation millage countywide. Additionally, the Recreation Fund was eliminated and Parks and Recreation Department was brought under the General Fund in FY 21 for streamlining purposes.

In addition to ongoing planning and construction efforts, on-the-ground facility improvements were accomplished since 2016 through utilizing limited funding to leverage grants and in-kind donations. In December 2017, the Ashley River Blue Trail reached a milestone with the opening of the Howard Bridgman River Access at Bacon's Bridge, the first new public access on the Ashley in three decades. More recently, Rosebrock Park was enhanced by the addition of a restroom facility, trail expansion, and installation of a new playground. Additionally, the County and private sector partners invested heavily in upgrades to Texas Community Park that included playground replacement, construction of a new walking track, safety improvements, and renovation of the community center and restroom building. Lastly, County Council awarded over \$900,000 in outreach grants to County municipalities for projects including the Rosenwald School, Extraordinary Playground, and various town park improvements.

A variety of brand-new community events was also established since 2016 with assistance from partner Friends of Dorchester County Parks (FDCP). These events include the Ashley River Adventure Race, Edisto Blackwater Boogie, Deck the Hulls Ashley River Holiday Paddle, Evening at Brosnan and Fish Brosnan Forest. To date, FDCP has raised over \$30,000 for park and recreation initiatives in Dorchester County.

In summary, much progress has been made in implementing the *2016 Plan* and is documented herein. Incremental park enhancements were completed and priority projects identified in 2016 are moving full steam ahead thanks to the injection of funding authorized by voter approval of the 2019 Parks Capital Bond Referendum. Planning for park operations, which will ramp up in Summer 2021, is well underway and will be continuously refined and ultimately approved by Council as part of the annual budgeting process.

INTRODUCTION

The *2020 Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Master Plan* is intended to be a guide for meeting the park, recreation and leisure demands of a rapidly growing population. The *2009 Parks and Recreation Master Plan* and the *2016 Parks and Recreation Master Plan* have served this purpose in years past. The *2009 Plan* called for the goals and objectives found therein to “be revisited, and if necessary, modified each year in order to meet the needs of Dorchester County residents.” With some goals accomplished, some moving forward and new opportunities on the horizon, 2020 is a pivotal year for parks and recreation in Dorchester County and the Master Plan is updated accordingly.



Section one of the *2020 Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Master Plan* is a Facilities Inventory and Analysis of existing County and non-County recreational facilities available to the general public. A combination of government, nonprofit and private facilities represent the overall recreation system available to County residents. Understanding current recreational opportunities is essential to addressing gaps in services/facilities and avoiding duplication of efforts in *2020 Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Master Plan* recommendations.

Next, the Action Plan Review and Next Steps reviews, provides updates, and makes recommendations on major policy issues, projects, and staffing. The ‘Projects’ portion of this section is once again broken down into two categories – “Infrastructure” and “Other” projects. The “Infrastructure” section groups projects into short-term and long-term projects. Short term projects are anticipated to be completed within the next five years.

The third section projects the budgetary implications of the recommendations presented in the Action Plan section. Information from the FY21 Dorchester County Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) pertaining to park projects is included. Recurring personnel and operating costs are explored. Revenue projections are also included.

Lastly, the final section offers concluding thoughts on the information presented in the *2020 Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update*.

RECREATION FACILITY INVENTORY

A combination of government, nonprofit and private facilities represent the overall recreation system available to County residents. Understanding current recreational opportunities is essential to addressing gaps in services/facilities and avoiding duplication of efforts by Dorchester County Parks and Recreation.

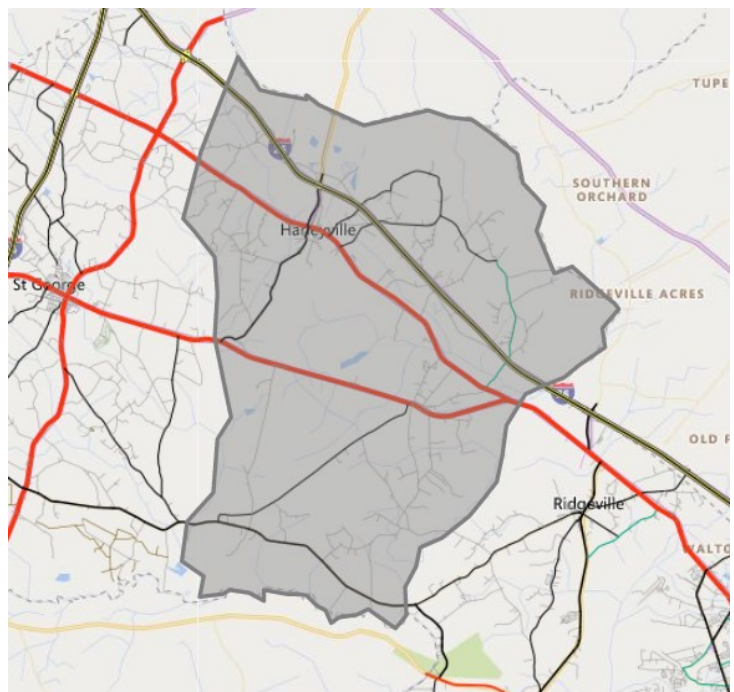
While multiple parks are currently planned and funded, Dorchester County currently owns or operates only five facilities (this figure includes two Senior Centers). However, many municipalities, community organizations and private sector providers offer programming and maintain facilities for recreation, athletics and leisure pursuits. The following list summarizes the existing park and recreational facilities available to the people of Dorchester County. The inventory is categorized by geographic region. Within each geographic area, facilities are listed in alphabetical order of the owner/provider. Private sector recreation facilities that are open to the general public are included even where fees apply.

HARLEYVILLE/DORCHESTER

TOWN OF HARLEYVILLE

Harleyville Town Park

- Baseball Fields (2)
 - 1 – Youth
 - 1 – Adult
- Picnic Shelters
- Playground
- Indoor Meeting Hall
- Event Lawn
- Stage/Large Pavilion
- Paved Walking Trail



ST. PAUL COMMUNITY PARK TRUSTEES

St. Paul Community Park

- Baseball Field
- Basketball Court
- Playground
- Picnic Shelter

NORTH CHARLESTON

CITY OF NORTH CHARLESTON

North Charleston Aquatic Center

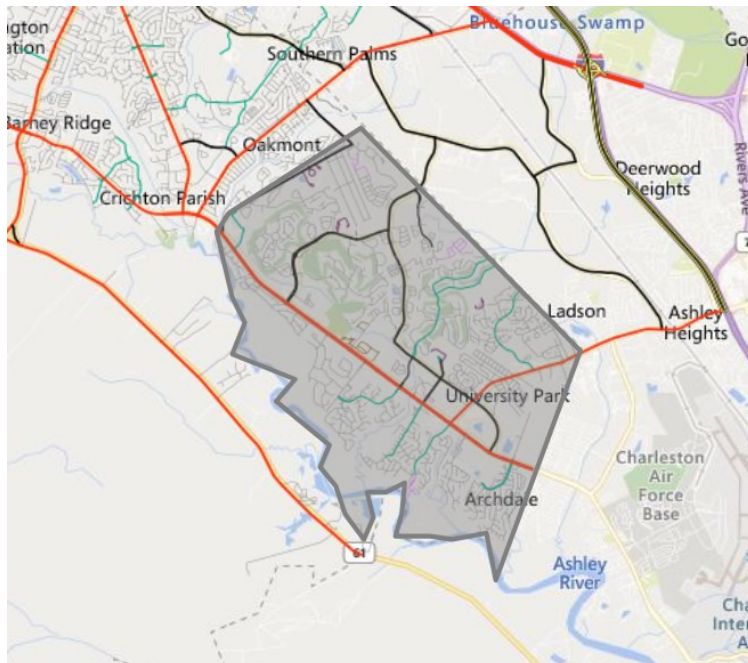
- Fifty Meter Pool
- Therapeutic Pool
- Lessons, Laps and Classes

Wescott Golf Club

- Twenty-Seven Hole Golf Course
- Driving Range
- Practice Area

Wescott Park

- Youth Baseball/Softball Fields (3)
- Batting Cages
- Sand Volleyball Court
- Dog Park
- Outdoor Fitness Equipment
- Indoor Event Space
- Playground
- Picnic Shelters (3)
- Walking Path



RIDGEVILLE/GIVHANS

GIVHANS COMMUNITY

Givhans Community Park

- Baseball Field
- Basketball Court
- Community Building

SAND HILL COMMUNITY

Sand Hill Community Park

- Baseball Field
- Concession Building

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

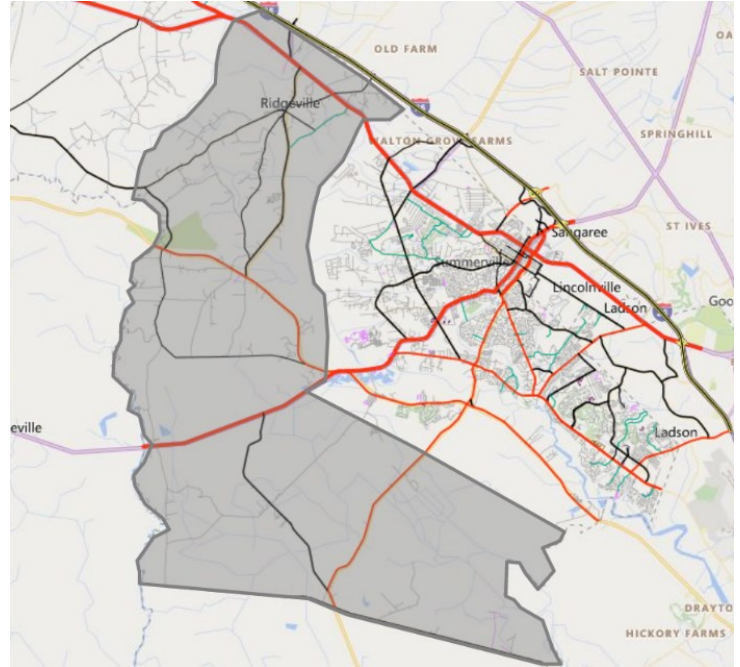
T.W. Messervy Boat Landing

- Edisto River Access
- Concrete Boat Ramp
- Floating Dock

SC STATE PARKS

Givhans Ferry State Park

- Cabins
- Campground (RV and Tent)
- Picnic Shelters (2)
- Playground
- Edisto River Access
 - Beach
 - Canoe/Kayak Launch
- Hiking Trails
- Green Space/Event Lawn
- Riverside Hall



TOWN OF RIDGEVILLE

RIDGEVILLE TOWN PARK

- Playground
- Tennis Court
- Basketball Court
- Picnic Shelters (2)

SUMMERVILLE

DORCHESTER COUNTY

Ashley River Park (Coming 2021)

- Ashley River Access
- Riverside Hiking Trails
- Fishing Pond
- Event Lawn/Green Space
- Outdoor Pavilion
- Picnic Shelters (2)
- Splash Fountain
- Playground
- Large Dog Park
- Small Dog Park
- Climbing Wall
- Aerial Adventure Course

Bridgman River Access

- Ashley River Access
- Carry-Down Boat Launch

Faith Sellers Senior Center

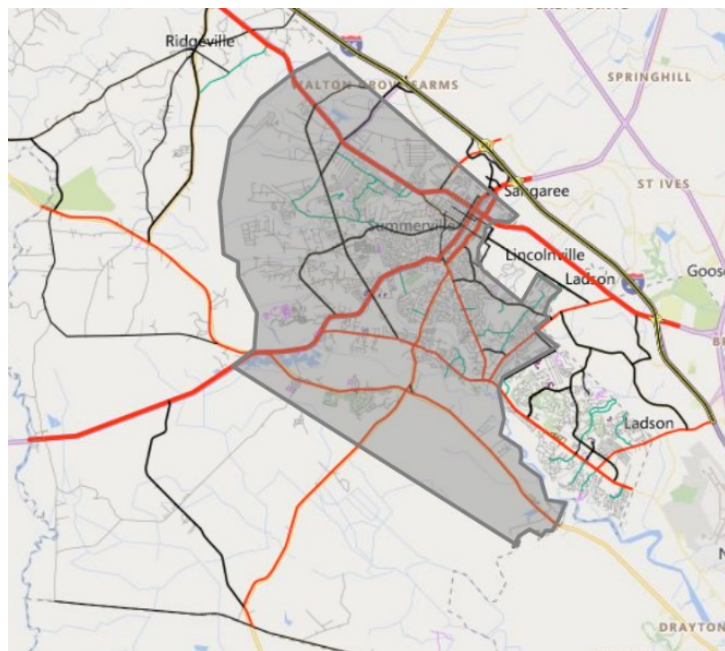
- Fitness Equipment
- Billiards
- Classrooms for Senior Programs

KINGS GRANT ON THE ASHLEY

- Outdoor Seasonal Pool
- Tennis Courts (2)

LEGEND OAKS GOLF CLUB

- Eighteen Hole Golf Course
- Junior Olympic Pool
- Tennis Courts (4)



PARKS FIELD DIXIE YOUTH BASEBALL

Parks Field

- Youth Baseball Fields (5)

SC STATE PARKS

Colonial Dorchester State Historic Site

- Walking Paths
- Historical Interpretation
- Ashley River Frontage

SUMMERVILLE COUNTRY CLUB

- Eighteen Hole Golf Course
- Clay Tennis Court
- Clay Pickleball Courts (3)
- Outdoor Seasonal Pool
- Outdoor Pavilion

SUMMERVILLE FAMILY YMCA

Downtown Family Center

- Fitness Center
- Fitness Classrooms
- Indoor Pool
- Sauna
- Gymnastics Center

Oakbrook Family Center

- Outdoor Seasonal Pool
- ~10 Acres Multiuse Field Space
- Indoor Programming Building

The Ponds Center

- Gymnasium
- Fitness Studios
- Soccer Field
- Walking Paths
- Playground
- Outdoor Pavilion
- ~3 Acres Multiuse Field Space

SUMMERVILLE LITTLE LEAGUE

Summerville Little League Fields

- Full Size Baseball Field
- Youth Baseball Fields (4)
- Tee Ball Fields (3)
- Batting Cages (2)

SUMMERVILLE SERTOMA CLUB

(Games at Gahagan Park)

- Youth Football and Cheerleading

THE CLUB AT PINE FOREST

- Eighteen Hole Golf Course
- Junior Olympic Size Seasonal Outdoor Swimming Pool
- Clay Tennis Courts (10)

TOWN OF SUMMERVILLE

Azalea Park

- Ornamental Gardens
- Tennis Courts (2)
- Walking Paths
- Sculptures
- Reflection Pond
- Enclosed Event Space
- Walking Path
- Gazebos (2)
- Indoor Event Space

Doty Park

- Tennis Courts (6)
- Indoor Event Space
- Playground
- Picnic Shelter
- Pickleball Courts (2)

Gahagan Park

- Adult Baseball Fields (4)
- Youth Softball Fields (2)
- Football/Soccer Fields (2)
- Picnic Shelters (3)
- Playground
- Batting Cage
- Running Track

**Oakbrook Ashley River Preserve
(Coming Soon)**

- 36 Acre Riverfront Park
- Bank Fishing
- Trails

Oakbrook Nature Trail

- Hiking Trail
- Boardwalks
- 0.66 Mile Loop

Rollins Edwards Community Center

- Gymnasium
- Meeting Rooms (3)
- Fitness Center
- Activity Rooms (2)

Rotary Centennial Park

- Hiking Trails
- Boardwalk
- Accessed from Jessen Landing

Sawmill Branch Trail

- Paved Multiuse Path
- Seven Miles
- Fitness Stations
- Multiple Access Points

Sawmill Ridges Trail

- Unpaved Multiuse Trail
- Five Miles
- Very Popular with Mountain Bikers
- Accessed Via Sawmill Branch Trail

Shepard Park

- Reflection Pond
- Walking Path
- Playground
- Gazebo
- Sculptures

Summerville Skate Park

- 50'x100' Skate Pad
- Street Plaza Style Features

Wassamassaw Community Park

- Adult Baseball/Softball Field
- Dog Park
- Basketball Courts (2)
- Playground
- Walking Trail
- Picnic Shelter

Woodlands Nature Reserve

- Horseback Riding
- Hiking/Biking Trails
- Ponds
- Paddling
- Fishing
- Camping
- Event Lawn

ST. GEORGE/REEVESVILLE

DORCHESTER COUNTY

Davis-Bailey Park (Coming 2021)

- Youth Baseball Fields (2)
- Multipurpose Field/Event Lawn
- Outdoor Basketball Courts (2)
- Walking Path
- Outdoor Pavilion
- Playground
- Splash Fountain
- Fishing Pond

David Sojourner Senior Center

- Fitness Equipment
- Billiards
- Classrooms for Senior Programs

Texas Community Park

- Indoor Meeting/Event Space
- Outdoor Basketball Court
- Adult Baseball Field
- Playground
- Walking Path
- Picnic Shelters (4)

SC DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

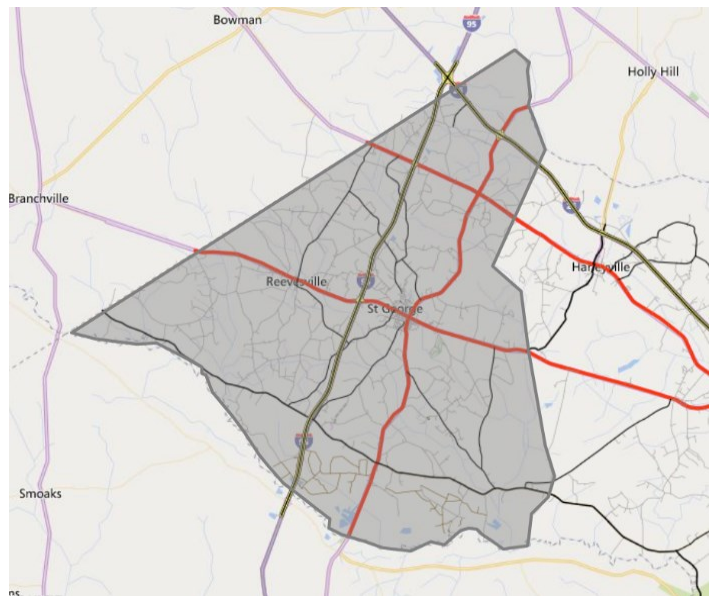
T. Coke Weeks Landing

- Edisto River Access
- Concrete Ramp
- Floating Dock

ST. GEORGE DIXIE YOUTH BASEBALL

Will Rickborn Field

- Youth Baseball/Softball Field



DD4 Baseball Field

- Youth Baseball/Softball Field

ST. GEORGE SOCCER CLUB

Sears St. Soccer Field (DD4)

- Youth Soccer Field

TOWN OF REEVESVILLE

Mims Magnolia Park

- Walking Path
- Playground
- Picnic Shelter

TOWN OF ST. GEORGE

St. George Tennis Center

- Adult Tennis Courts (3)
- Youth Tennis Courts (4)

St. George Town Park

- Playground
- Walking Path
- Picnic Shelters (2)
- Fitness Equipment

Action Plan Review and Next Steps

The original master plan provided a detailed action plan for the establishment and provision of recreational services by Dorchester County. The *2020 Plan* follows this template. Action plan items are presented in four main categories:

- Parks and Recreation Policy
- Parks and Recreation Projects
- Parks and Recreation Staffing and Operations

A primary focus of this section is to provide status updates on each action item category – highlighting progress, challenges, opportunities, anticipated short-term actions, and general situational changes on various items. Each item update is followed by a recommendation of next steps.

Parks and Recreation Policy

Policy is set by County Council in Dorchester County. This section focuses on Council actions that impact the structure and governance of county-led parks and recreation initiatives.

Establish a permanent Parks and Recreation Department for Dorchester County.

The Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Department (DCPRD) was established with the hiring of a Director in September of 2014. As responsibilities expanded with the implementation of new programming, special events and capital projects, Council approved the addition of an Administrative Support Specialist in FY 19. For FY 20, this position was upgraded to a Park Operations Manager position to better reflect current job responsibilities. Two part-time park maintenance workers are tasked with opening, closing, custodial and basic maintenance duties at Rosebrock Park and Bridgman River Access.

DCPRD's initiatives continue to be guided by the mission statement adopted by the Parks and Recreation Commission in December of 2014:

Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Department strives to provide sustainable recreational, cultural, and leisure opportunities that complement the diverse and progressive nature of our community and enhance quality of life for residents and visitors.

This mission statement is in line with Dorchester County's broader mission and vision statements and incorporates many guiding principles of the master plan.

County Council has worked diligently to address much-needed capital funding to jumpstart infrastructure development by placing two voter capital bond referenda on the ballot in 2016 and 2019.

Council began to prepare for expanded grounds maintenance operations associated with park facility expansion by approving additional maintenance positions and equipment in the FY 21 budget.

Recommendation: 1) Allocate the recurring funding necessary to support expansion of park operations that will take place with the opening of Davis-Bailey Park FY 22. Hire Park Aides and Park Attendants in 4Q FY 21.

2) Increase funding allocation for personnel and operations prior to Ashley River Park and additional facilities opening in FY 22.

(More on staffing levels in subsequent sections)

Park and Recreation Projects

This section focuses on master plan recommendations for the purpose of increasing the amount and variety of recreational facilities and activities available to county residents and visitors. Projects in this section are divided between infrastructure and non-infrastructure categories. “Infrastructure Projects” are limited only to those projects directly resulting in a new or expanded, on-the-ground recreational facility. Action items such as planning endeavors, partnership opportunities, and dissemination of information are included under “Other Projects”.

Infrastructure Projects – Near Term

DCPRD staff is constantly working on both short-term and long-term projects to expand recreation opportunities in the County. This section considers those projects that are either currently under construction, under active planning/design, or likely to be completed within the next five years.

Trails/Bike/Pedestrian Connectivity

Trails, paths, and associated bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure have consistently risen to the top of public demand. Hiking Trails and Paved Walking and Biking Trails ranked first and second out of thirty-three amenities that *2020 Parks and Recreation Survey* respondents felt should be expanded. The Parks and Recreation Commission recognizes the immense economic, health, and social value in connecting parks, residential areas, schools, community destinations and commercial districts with trails. The Sawmill Branch Trail is a popular arterial trail and serves as the backbone of the future trail system for the Eastern County. Nevertheless, opportunities to build on this trail asset and to begin creating a new system in Western Dorchester County have once again been identified as a crucial component in the *2020 Update*. A summary of each project and list of associated recommendations are found below.

- ***Rosebrock Park – Ashley River Park Connector*** – Rosebrock Park currently boasts one and a half miles of moderately used natural surface trails and boardwalks. As the crow flies, Ashley River Park is located about fifty yards from Rosebrock Park and will feature a similarly sized trail system. Unfortunately, the two parks are separated by a four-lane highway and the Ashley Scenic River. Furthermore, the multiuse path that was part of Highway 165 widening does not continue along the shoulder of this highway adjacent to Rosebrock Park, providing a major obstacle to traveling on foot or bike between residential areas, parks, and local schools. Connecting the two parks will require both crossing the highway underneath the vehicular bridge and crossing the Ashley River with a standalone bike and pedestrian bridge.

The Ashley River Pedestrian River Crossing Feasibility and Alternatives Analysis was completed in 2019 to provide an understanding of the options and associated costs to implement this vital connection. The most functional design, which was also estimated to be the costliest, is estimated to cost \$2,000,000. A Request for Qualifications (RFQ) was issued in September of 2020 to select a consulting firm to lead design, permitting, and construction administration services for the project. Design and permitting are anticipated to take approximately one year.

Recommendation: 1) Utilize 2020 Bond proceeds to connect Rosebrock Park to Ashley River Park via a sub-grade pedestrian crossing underneath Bacon’s Bridge and a dedicated bridge for bikes and pedestrians to cross the Ashley River. A seamless link between Ashley River Park and Rosebrock Park is essential to maximizing the utility of each individual park.

2) Complete the connection as soon as possible after the opening of Ashley River Park.

- **Eagle-Chandler Bridge Creeks Trail System** – The idea for the Eagle-Chandler trail system was conceived more than two decades ago and involves paving and signing the maintenance shelves of these creeks. These streams are similar in nature to the Sawmill Branch Trail in that most of the stretch has been channelized by the USACE for flood control. Phase I consists of paving a one-mile section extending from Ladson Road downstream to Hummingbird Lane, where the county currently owns ROW to access the maintenance shelf. Design, permitting and ROW acquisition for this project is funded



through the Transportation Alternatives Program and matching funds from Dorchester County. Dorchester County Public Works is managing Phase I of the project. Design, permitting and ROW acquisition are expected to be completed in 2020 with construction to follow in 2021. Construction is anticipated to be funded through proceeds from the new Oakbrook Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District.

Phase II consists of paving the trail upstream to Miles Jamison Road, where Pine Trace Natural Area will be located and serve as the northern terminus offering an extensive internal trail system. This route will largely follow the Chandler Bridge Creek corridor in a northwestward direction. Phase II also includes a connection to the Sawmill Branch Trail at their closest point – along Beverly Drive and crossing Trolley Road at the stoplight. Upon completion of Phase II, the Sawmill/Eagle/Chandler trail system alone will offer over ten miles of interconnected, off-road multiuse paths in one of the most densely populated regions of the County.

Development of Phase III of the trail project will follow Eagle Creek, as it splits from Chandler Bridge Creek, in a northeastward direction to its intersection with the multiuse path on Wallace Ackerman Drive. The Eagle Run Natural Area will accommodate most of this trail route and provide opportunities for additional looping trails and neighborhood connections in the future.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) Utilize a combination of 2020 Bond proceeds and Oakbrook TIF district funds to complete Phases I and II.
 - 2) Incorporate recommendations from the Sawmill Branch Trail Design Guidelines Master Plan (more on this below).
 - 3) Begin design, permitting and ROW acquisition for Phases II and III.

- **Sawmill Branch Trail System** – The original master plan recommended a one-mile extension of the Sawmill Branch Trail from its current terminus at the Oakbrook YMCA, to Dorchester Road, and connecting across Dorchester Road into Colonial Dorchester State Historic Site, Herbert H. Jessen Boat Landing and the future Oakbrook Ashley River Preserve. A South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grant was secured for this project with matching funds from both Dorchester County and the Town of Summerville. However, the project has been on hold at the direction of SCDOT due to complicated permitting on the Berlin G. Myers Parkway extension. Because of the delay, the TAP funding was moved to other projects and the extension is currently unfunded.

As noted in the *2016 Master Plan*, the standard at-grade crossings of heavily traveled Dorchester Road present a safety issue that will deter users from fully utilizing the new extensions. There has been some support voiced on County Council and the Parks and Recreation Commission for an elevated bike and pedestrian crossing. While ideal from a safety standpoint, these facilities are very costly and average



\$1,700,000, which does not include land or right-of-way acquisition costs (if required). At a minimum, enhancements of at-grade crossings for Dorchester Road in Oakbrook should be explored and coordinated with planned traffic improvements for the area.

A new grassroots organization, Bike-Walk Summerville, has advocated for increasing safety and minimizing user conflicts on the Sawmill Branch Trail. Town of Summerville, Dorchester County and The Greater Summerville – Dorchester County Chamber of Commerce have partnered to commission the Sawmill Branch Trail Design Guidelines Master Plan to identify issues and develop a set of guidelines to improve safety on the trail. Recommended initiatives are expected to include signage, infrastructure improvements, lane striping, fencing and public education.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) Utilize a combination of 2020 Bond proceeds Oakbrook TIF funds to extend the Sawmill Branch Trail to Dorchester Road as soon as SCDOT grants permission to proceed.
 - 2) Utilize Oakbrook TIF funds to improve bike and pedestrian crossing(s) at Dorchester Road. Explore option of an elevated crossing.
 - 3) Implement recommendations from the Sawmill Branch Trail Design Guidelines Master Plan when completed; extend to future trail projects..
- **Western County Trail Development** – Considerable feedback provided from the 2015 public forums and survey conducted in Western Dorchester County, which is comprised of Ridgeville, St. George, Givhans, Harleyville, Reevesville, and the more rural areas in between, indicated a desire for trail development among residents in this region. Utilizing existing canal maintenance shelves and utility ROW to link communities is a major focus. While easements do exist for maintaining the drainages, these easements do not provide for public trail access. Use for public trails would need to be negotiated with each individual property owner along the desired route. Primary attention should be placed on better connecting the Davis-Bailey Park to surrounding communities, particularly between the park and downtown St. George along Hwy. 78.
 - 1) Explore Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments rural communities funding to develop the connection between DBP and downtown St. George. Work with Town of St. George to fund and implement this project.

Ashley River Park

The Ashley River Park Site comprises 85 acres of future parkland owned by Dorchester County. This property was purchased in 2012 at a cost of \$1,450,000 with proceeds from the 2010 voter-approved \$5,000,000 bond referendum for parks and conservation. The property has nearly one-mile of frontage abutting the Ashley Scenic River.

Much progress has been made on this project since the *2016 Master Plan*. The boardwalks that were destroyed in the historic 2015 Flood have been replaced, funded primarily through a Federal Emergency Management Agency grant. Park design and permitting were substantially completed in early 2019. Obtaining wetland credits to offset impacts at Ashley River Park was a major part of the permitting process. Notably, staff worked with a consultant to develop a creative solution to securing these credits by perpetually protecting 81.5 acres of high-quality wetlands and upland buffer at the Pine Trace Natural Area property. This strategy saved the County \$600,000 in mitigation fees when compared with purchasing credits from an open market wetland mitigation bank.

Following voter approval of the 2019 Parks Bond Referendum, Edcon Inc. was awarded the contract for park construction, which began in April 2020. The park has a \$13M budget and is projected to open in Summer 2021. Primary park features will include a playground, interactive fountain, dog parks, climbing wall, ropes course, outfitter building/park office, event pavilion, picnic shelters, fishing pond



with piers and boardwalks, event lawn, and riverfront trail system. Live music and concerts topped the list of desired activity enhancements in the 2020 public feedback survey.

As mentioned in the trails section above, connecting Ashley River Park to nearby Rosebrock Park is a top priority that will enhance the functionality and quality of both facilities. Since 2016, opportunities to expand

the footprint of the parks system in this immediate area have arisen. In 2019, 6.9 acres of property were purchased directly across the river from Ashley River Park. Work is currently underway to acquire additional nearby properties to plan for future expansion. Due to the popularity of waterfront facilities and the proximity of these sites to major population centers, expanding park acreage in this immediate area is a top priority.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) Complete ARP construction and continue to prepare to open Summer 2021.
 - 2) Finalize details related to admission fees, park passes, rental fees, etc. and obtain Council approval.
 - 3) Connect to Rosebrock Park via a sub-grade pedestrian crossing underneath Bacon's Bridge and a dedicated bike/pedestrian bridge over the Ashley River. See *Trails* section above for more detailed information.
 - 4) Continue to work with private sector partner to finalize climbing wall and ropes course design and implement construction of these features.

Davis-Bailey Park

Much progress has been made on the 15-acre Davis-Bailey Park project. Timbering was completed at the site in 2017. In 2019, County Council voted to rename the park Davis-Bailey Park for the late Dorchester County Councilman Willie Davis and current County Council Chairman George Bailey. Design and permitting were completed in late 2017, but construction was delayed due to the lengthy legal challenge related to the anticipated funding source, the 2016 Parks Bond Referendum.

Due to availability of 2020 Bond proceeds, park development is now moving quickly. The construction contract was awarded to Hill Construction and kicked off in May 2020. The park budget is \$6M and the



facility is anticipated to be completed in Spring 2021. It will feature two illuminated youth baseball fields, an illuminated multiuse field, illuminated basketball courts, paved walking trail, veterans’ memorial, event pavilion and fishing pond. A custom playground and splash pad, both features ranking in the top seven of the survey, will provide an experience like no other in this part of the County.

Programming at Davis Bailey Park is anticipated to primarily consist of youth league play organized by existing outside organizations. Initial meetings were held with youth baseball, softball, football and soccer organizations that plan to utilize the facility and communication is ongoing. Small tournaments would also be appropriate for the facility in conjunction with other nearby facilities. DCPRD programming will complement that provided by existing outside organizations and aim to fill in gaps in service. At a minimum, this will include special events and basketball programming. DCPRD will manage allocation of field time, scheduling and adherence to DCPRD policies by other organizations.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) Complete DBP construction and prepare to open Summer 2021.
 - 2) Engage existing local leagues that would like to utilize facilities and develop policies to guide facility use.
 - 3) Engage area corporations to explore sponsorship opportunities to supplement funding of operations.

Pine Trace Natural Area

The Pine Trace site was purchased by Dorchester County in Summer 2011 with a combination of park and conservation bond proceeds, a new general obligation bond repaid with cable franchise fees (via the Recreation Fund), and Recreation Fund reserves. The original tract totaled 331 acres and is located off Miles Jamison Road within the jurisdictional boundary of the Town of Summerville. The County sold 25 acres of the tract to Dorchester School District Two for construction of Dr. Eugene Sires Elementary School, which opened in 2016.

As noted in the *2016 Update*, the vision for this park facility has changed considerably over the years from an active park with athletic fields to a more passive natural area or urban forest. This change was spurred by an updated wetlands delineation in which wetlands “grew” to cover over half of the property. Nevertheless, this large natural area will begin to fill a documented need as nature parks were ranked third overall for facility enhancements by survey respondents.

Significant progress has been made at Pine Trace. As noted above, 81.5 acres of were set aside to mitigate for wetland impacts at Ashley River Park. Looking to the future, staff also projected wetland impacts related to providing public access to Pine Trace Natural Area and mitigated for those impacts on the 81.5-acre section of preserved natural area as well. The 404 Permit (wetland fill permit) was also obtained for Pine Trace. This represents a significant permitting step as the 404 Permit almost always involves the lengthiest permitting process. A change in zoning was sought and obtained from Town of Summerville. The property switched from Planned Unit Development (PUD), which allowed for development of hundreds of residential units, to Public Lands (PL).

To determine wetland impacts for the 404 Permit, a conceptual master plan was created. This plan includes maintaining most of the tree canopy while providing parking and access to the following amenities: fishing pond, picnic shelter, outdoor classroom, trail system, disc golf course, and dog parks. While the wetland impacts necessary to providing access will not be altered, exact type and location of amenities may be. Surveying and master planning kicked off in September 2020. This process will finalize park features and locations. A playground will likely be added due to the playgrounds ranking fourth in the survey for facility enhancement needs. Construction is estimated to begin in Spring 2021 and be completed in early 2022. The current project budget for Pine Trace Natural Area is \$4M.

The County has agreed to partner with Town of Summerville Fire and Rescue Department to provide two acres for construction of a new combination Fire/EMS station fronting Miles Jamison Road to the east of Chandler Creek Boulevard. The County plans to eventually develop an indoor recreational facility adjacent to the Fire/EMS station.

- Recommendation:***
- 1) Utilize 2020 bond funding to complete master planning, design, permitting and construction of the park in early 2022.
 - 2) Work with the school district to explore partnership opportunities to meet student and public needs at Pine Trace.
 - 3) In coordination with Town of Summerville, set aside two acres for the Fire/EMS station and designate the adjacent area for a future indoor recreation facility.

Oakbrook Athletic Complex

The Oakbrook Athletic Complex is a new facility under development on land that has been owned by the County since 1981. A volunteer organization, Summerville Soccer Club, maintained the site for club soccer activities through a land use agreement with Dorchester County for many years. Recently, the organization was absorbed by Charleston Soccer Club. Coinciding with this was Dorchester County's initiative to improve the property through proceeds from bonds issued as a result of the creation of the Oakbrook Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District. The use of these public funds to improve the property trigger certain public use requirements. To ensure compliance, Dorchester County will maintain and schedule the facility. To support this arrangement, County Council has approved a memorandum of understanding with Charleston Soccer Club granting them priority access to a portion of soccer field time for a fee based on standard daily use fees. Other clubs, teams, and the general public will also be afforded the opportunity to rent field time for the daily rate. The complex will be operated by the County as a public athletic facility and there is consideration for future recreation league soccer activities administered either by the Town of Summerville or County at the site.

Improving drainage is one of the major project goals as wet soils associated with the low-lying topography of the site regularly prevent play even when nearby soccer facilities are open. Five new illuminated soccer fields will be constructed complete with drainage and elevated grades. Other improvements will include two illuminated outdoor basketball courts, building upgrades and expansion, paved parking and site lighting. Surveying and master planning kicked off in August 2020 and construction is anticipated to start June 2021.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) Complete design, permitting and construction bidding prior to Summer 2021 so that sitework may take place during this down time in the soccer schedule as well as when site conditions will be most suitable.
 - 2) Prepare for expanded grounds maintenance operations and allocate appropriate resources prior to assuming these responsibilities.

Blueway/Water Access Development

Providing access to and encouraging recreation on waterways in Dorchester County is a recurring theme throughout every iteration of the *Parks and Recreation Master Plan*. Water recreation activities such as fishing, paddling and nature viewing are ever increasing in popularity. Expanded access to waterways and bank fishing ranked fifth and sixth among facility needs in the public survey. Dorchester County is blessed to host portions of two major watersheds – the Ashley and Edisto Rivers. In 2019, Dorchester County Council established the County Rivers and Waterways Commission to enhance opportunities for water recreation. This Commission provides guidance and recommendations for the effective development and management of recreation on County waterways.

Ashley River

The Ashley River was designated a state scenic river in 1999 for its outstanding ecological and cultural treasures. The Ashley Scenic River flows out of Cypress Swamp at Schultz Lake and follows a 30-mile course to Charleston Harbor, slowly transitioning from a narrow freshwater stream to a marsh-bounded estuary along the way. It's diversity of scenery and proximity to the Charleston Metro area present a range of convenient water recreation activities for residents and visitors alike.



Recreation activity on the river has become increasingly popular in recent years due to progress in marketing efforts and installation of a new public access point. In 2015, the river was designated the Ashley River Blue Trail (ARBT) by national nonprofit organization American Rivers. As part of this marketing and awareness campaign, ARBT waterproof maps were printed and are still distributed by DCPRD on a regular basis. The map is

now out of date and will need to be updated in conjunction with the opening of new recreational facilities on the river. 128 acres were acquired on the southern bank of the river between Bacon's Bridge and US Hwy 17A. While currently landlocked, the property offers future opportunity for primitive paddle-in, paddle out camping and hiking trails.

Perhaps the most pivotal accomplishment related to the Ashley River in recent years was the opening of Howard Bridgman River Access at Bacon's Bridge. Named for a longtime advocate for expanded public access on this river segment, the carry-down watercraft launch opened in December 2017 to much fanfare. The launch site represents the first new public access on the Ashley River in Dorchester County in three decades and is one of two access sites currently open to the public. The other access, Jessen Boat Landing, is located just over three miles downstream. Public usage has exceeded expectations and has altered plans for other sites as discussed below. In 2019, the County acquired seven acres on the southern bank of the Ashley River directly across from Ashley River Park. While the site has not been master planned, at a minimum it will provide a direct connection to a small riverfront park from the anticipated Cook's Crossroads residential/commercial center.



Two new Ashley Scenic River-based events were established in conjunction with Friends of Dorchester County Parks to promote the waterway. The popularity of these events appears to provide further evidence of the public demand for water recreation. The inaugural Deck the Hulls Ashley River Holiday Paddle was held immediately after the ribbon cutting for the Bridgman River Access in December 2017.



The late-season festive group paddle and oyster roast is already becoming a unique Lowcountry tradition. The Ashley River Adventure Race held its first competition in March 2019 featuring a 5k trail run at the Ashley River Park site followed by an 8-mile paddle to the Inn at Middleton Place where the awards party took place. Its inaugural year attracted nearly 200 racers and raised over \$8,000 for Friends of Dorchester County Parks. The 2020 iteration was cancelled due to COVID-19 considerations and logistical/safety challenges associated with park construction.

The Dorchester County Rivers and Waterways Commission is currently steering development of the *Ashley River Recreation Master Plan*. This plan, enabled in part by a National Park Service Rivers, Trails, Conservation Assistance Program grant, is intended to inventory recreation projects and plans by all public agencies (including Colonial Dorchester State Historic Site, Town of Summerville, City of North Charleston and SCDNR) operating on the upper stretch of the river, gather stakeholder input, and make recommendations for strategies to maximize the recreational experience in the river corridor. The plan is anticipated to be completed in early 2021. Survey results support anticipated plan recommendations for expanded public access to the river and riverside, bike and pedestrian connectivity to riverside

parks, a connected riverside trail system, a dedicated interactive website or application to serve as a clearinghouse for comprehensive public information on the river, protection of the natural viewshed along the corridor, and expanded educational and interpretive opportunities.

A primary recreational need on the Ashley River is to develop greater public access to the uppermost reaches of the waterway near Highway 17A and Schultz Lake. New public access here would effectively open the entirety of the waterway to users including the uppermost seven miles of the river, ideally suited to paddling and solitude. Dorchester County currently owns six acres of property located at 137 Swan Drive in Summerville. Plans for a very small access site were completed in 2017, but construction was not pursued for two reasons. The Bacon's Bridge access project depleted available funding, and the popularity of the Bridgman River Access has cast doubt that the design of the original site is large enough to accommodate demand during peak times. Nonetheless, a river access point upstream of Ashley River Park is essential to maximizing on-water recreation opportunities based around Ashley River Park. Toward this end, staff began work with on-call consultant Stantec in October of 2020 to revise the site plan and permitting.

Prior to the upstream river access opening, substantial river clearing by a professional contractor must take place. While the narrow channel creates an intimate paddling experience, it also is more susceptible to becoming blocked by downed trees. This stretch of river has not been maintained in some time and will need several large blowdowns removed for navigable, safe paddling. Staff is currently exploring funding through the US Army Corps of Engineers' Continuing Authorities Program (CAP) funding to support this effort.

Lastly, staffs at DCPRD and Town of Summerville Parks and Recreation continue to coordinate plans for river recreation as they prepare to open their parks, Ashley River Park and Oakbrook Ashley River Preserve. One unique opportunity, due to proximity to population, is a kayak-share program similar to bike share initiatives. Logical locations would be at the future Ashley River Park and the future Oakbrook Ashley River Preserve.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) Implement recommendations of the Ashley River Recreation Management plan once completed.
 - 2) Develop and open a river access site in the vicinity of Hwy. 17A to enable access along the full length of the Ashley River Blue Trail. Plan river channel clearing in accordance with new access timelines.
 - 3) Coordinate programming opportunities with Town of Summerville in preparation for the opening of Ashley River Park and Oakbrook Ashley River Preserve.
 - 4) Develop historical, cultural and environmental interpretive programming and experiences.
 - 5) Plan additional river-based special events to encourage ecotourism and river recreation as additional staffing allows.

Edisto River

The Dorchester County portion of the Edisto River is a more established and well-known blue trail than the Ashley River. For several decades, this stretch of blackwater river has been marketed as the Edisto River Canoe and Kayak Trail by Colleton County's Edisto River Canoe and Kayak Commission. Many public and private access sites of varying quality and utility exist. Paddlers, tubers, fishermen, hunters, and even wake boarders recreate in this river corridor. Two thriving SC State Parks, Givhans Ferry and Colleton are located on this strategic segment of the Edisto.



While the Edisto is the shared border of Colleton and Dorchester Counties, Dorchester County was largely uninvolved with the management and promotion of this outstanding recreational resource until 2016. During this time, DCPRD secured grants from the National Park Service's Recreation, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor's Marketing Grant program, and Dorchester County Accommodations Tax proceeds that jumpstarted Dorchester County's involvement in Edisto River recreation and marketing.

Kimberley Noonan, a USC Graduate Student at the time, completed the Edisto River Recreation Management Plan in late 2017. The project involved inventorying the river and its assets, gathering feedback on issues and concerns from the general public and select stakeholders, and providing a set of recommendations for recreational enhancement. Many of these recommendations were implemented.



The ERCK Trail was rebranded with a more modern logo. A branding package was created with graphics for use in various modern applications such as the internet and social media. A new, more functional website was launched that provides a one-stop source for information needed to plan adventures of a few hours up to several days in the river corridor. Lastly, a detailed ERCK Trail map was created, made available on the website, and printed on waterproof paper for distribution to the public.

In 2019, DCPRD partnered with Givhans Ferry State Park, Friends of Dorchester County Parks, Friends of the Edisto, Dan Riley Music, and others to present the inaugural Edisto Blackwater Boogie festival. The event featured live music (the most desired activity among survey respondents) and river-based recreation opportunities, bringing considerable new attention to this outstanding natural resource. The event was a qualified success attracting over 600 attendees over two days and raising over \$5,000 for Givhans Ferry State Park improvements. Planning for future Edisto Blackwater Boogies continues and stakeholders appear to have found a much-needed signature event for the ERCK Trail.

Increased marketing and promotion quickly highlighted issues that must be addressed to ensure the recreational experience in the river corridor remains special. Expanded paddle craft on the river in the vicinity of Givhans Ferry State Park has resulted in a higher frequency of user conflicts. This wide, relatively straight stretch has long been popular with motorized watercraft. Speeding, propeller-driven boats do not mix well with slow moving canoes, kayaks, and tubers. Many of the motor boaters have not adjusted to the increase in river usage, and there have been dangerous instances of outright hostility from motorboaters toward paddlers. Alcohol-fueled partying on warm summer weekends on the various river sandbars along this busy stretch only exacerbates the problem. Increases in usage also has resulted in increased emergency and rescue calls.

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources only has six officers assigned to cover the entirety of Colleton and Dorchester Counties and is unlikely to increase manpower anytime soon. To address these issues related to safety and protection of the recreational resource, Dorchester County allocated newly instituted Hospitality Tax proceeds to stand up a Marine Patrol program staffed by Dorchester County Fire-Rescue and Dorchester County Sheriff's Office in 2019. Appropriate equipment was acquired for DCFR to respond more efficiently and effectively to calls for assistance. Furthermore, the visibility enabled by regular patrols by both DCFR and DCSO is beginning to create a safer recreational environment and curb the upward trend in user conflicts. In addition to the patrols, Dorchester County has partnered with Colleton County to remove major blowdowns and blockages from the river to allow for safer passage.

The boost in users is currently creating a demand for greater infrastructure development. Givhans Ferry State Park has become Dorchester County's busiest tourist attraction welcoming over 100,000 visitors through its gate each year, with steady growth from year to year. The park campground and cabins are full every weekend and many weekdays during prime seasons. To meet the demonstrated demand for camping and rustic accommodations in this area, DCPRD is working to acquire property for the development of a major park facility on the river southwest of Ridgeville. This location is centrally located to County population centers and offers the chance to exponentially increase public access to freshwater pond fishing – a major deficiency in outdoor recreation offerings in our region and a priority among survey respondents with bank fishing ranking sixth-most (of 27) desired activity for expansion. In September of 2020 County Council approved the County Administrator to acquire 124 acres at this site and negotiations with the owner are ongoing.

The other key infrastructure gap as noted in the Edisto River Recreation Management Plan is a lack of adequate public access to the uppermost reaches of the ERCK Trail. Green Pond Church Landing, located on the Colleton County side nine miles upriver of Weeks Landing at Hwy. 15, has been closed. It is not located on the main river channel and has become increasingly silted, rendering it unusable at lower river levels. Furthermore, it is located on private property and the owner is no longer willing to allow public access. This leaves over twenty miles of the uppermost portion of the ERCK Trail without adequate public access. There is opportunity for Dorchester and Colleton Counties to work together, pool their SCDNR Water Recreation monies, and create additional public access sites for both paddle and motor craft. Adequate access here is a necessity for the Western County to reap the benefits of the growing tourism boon of the Edisto River. Again, citizens desire expanded waterway access based on the 2020 Survey results ranking this infrastructure fifth out of thirty-three overall options.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) Acquire land on the Edisto River for a major park facility with camping, fishing, hiking and related amenities.
 - 2) Work with Colleton County to add a public access facility upstream of Weeks Landing.
 - 3) Expand programs and events on the Edisto as staffing allows.

Rosebrock Park

In 2011 Dorchester County opened and assumed operation of its first public park, Richard H. Rosebrock Park, which is located at 507 Beech Hill Rd. near the intersection of Bacon's Bridge Road. While the County does not own the park land, it does hold long term leases on two adjacent parcels totaling 70 acres for the provision of passive recreation to the public. The smaller of the two parcels is ten acres and leased from the Commission of Public Works of the City of Charleston through May of 2037. The larger parcel of sixty acres is owned by Dorchester Trust Foundation (DTF) and is use-restricted for passive recreation. The county entered into a lease agreement with DTF through 2110. The agreement also places restrictions on tree removal and limits the number of fishing docks installed on the property to one (currently no fishing docks exist).

Rosebrock Park is best classified as a natural area. Fittingly, nature parks rank third in facilities that survey respondents desire to see expanded. Vast wetland areas, mature floodplain forest, and the Ashley Scenic River are the primary features of this property. The original park design offered a parking area, outdoor classroom, picnic shelters, and 1.5 miles of hiking trails and boardwalks.



Staff is proud to report major improvements have been implemented at Rosebrock Park, completing many of the recommendations from the 2016 *Master Plan*. Volunteers played a major role in the improvements. A single workday in 2018 yielded the new “Bluff Loop” trail that provides a birds-eye view of the river with rare elevation change. Eagle Scout projects yielded several new boardwalks traversing wet areas of the trail, a

little library and a new park sign complete with landscaped beds.

Creature comforts were greatly expanded in 2019 when the previously unused outdoor classroom was converted into a public restroom facility complete with water fountain and bottle filler. An equipment and supply storage room on the back side of the restrooms greatly increased operations and

maintenance efficiency. Most of the restroom project was funded through a Recreational Trails Program grant. Volunteers from the Ashley Ridge High School Fine Arts Program even painted an Ashley River scene mural on the building to bring unique local flare to the park. The mural has received rave reviews.

Most recently, in 2020 a playground was added to the park. The natural-themed equipment made of Robinia wood has been a hit that has resulted in an exponential increase in park visitors. Around the same time, the trailhead was rerouted to enter the forest on higher ground to mitigate worsening erosion issues at the trail entrance. An ongoing project with Dorchester Trust Foundation and nearby Beech Hill Elementary to infuse a



conservation message into the park and offer self-guided nature trail activities was interrupted by COVID-19 but is a promising enhancement that will be revisited as conditions allow. Since the new playground is attracting many more families to the park, this coalition has seized the opportunity to introduce playground users to the natural environment the rest of the park offers with this project.

One main desired improvement has not been accomplished. Rosebrock Park is still separated from the future Ashley River Park by a river and a highway. Connecting the two parks with pedestrian infrastructure would create nearly three miles of interconnected hiking trails (the most desired amenity among survey respondents) and be a catalyst for continuing the park and trail footprint upriver. The safest way to do this is to segregate pedestrian traffic from road traffic by crossing the road underneath the vehicular bridge and crossing the river with a standalone pedestrian bridge. A feasibility study, which was mostly grant-funded, was completed in 2019 and provides several potential options with associated costs to install this infrastructure. A solicitation for engineering and design services for this project is currently posted.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) Connect Rosebrock Park to future Ashley River Park via a sub-grade pedestrian crossing underneath Bacon's Bridge. Using a non-signalized crosswalk to negotiate four lanes of traffic on a heavily utilized highway would be undesirable for most park users and viewed by most motorists as a major inconvenience. A seamless link between Ashley River Park and Rosebrock Park is essential to maximizing the utility of each individual park.
 - 2) Complete the conservation message project with Beech Hill Elementary and Dorchester Trust Foundation.
 - 3) Explore opportunities to add to the interior trail system as well as to connect to upriver properties.
 - 4) Continue to utilize volunteer labor to improve the quality of the trails through rerouting, maintaining existing drainages and constructing boardwalks.

Texas Community Park

Texas Community Park jumped in priority since the *2016 Master Plan* due to the recognition that the property was deeded to the County in 1989 and is therefore a County park facility. Immediately upon receiving this information, DCPRD staff audited the facility and implemented several safety-related actions. First, non-commercial, wooden playground equipment was removed. Second, the community center building was closed to the public until it could be brought up to code. Third, a gate was added to enable controlled access to the property. Lastly, in partnership with the County Leadership Program picnic tables were repaired, fencing was added to the basketball court, and poly cap protection was added to the baseball field fencing.



Following this “stabilization” period, DCPRD pursued improvements to the facility. Through a variety of local

pro-bono donations from Infrastructure Consulting and Engineering, Knight’s Redi-Mix, Swamp Fox Utilities, Paragon Sitework Constructors, HDR Inc., and Dorchester County Public Works, the walking track was redesigned, regraded, and repaved to create a 1/5-mile loop in 2019. In the same year, a new commercial grade playground was also installed inside the walking track loop, which encourages family active living.

pro-bono donations from Infrastructure Consulting and Engineering, Knight’s Redi-Mix, Swamp Fox Utilities, Paragon Sitework Constructors, HDR Inc., and Dorchester County Public Works, the walking track was redesigned, regraded, and repaved to create a 1/5-mile loop in 2019. In the same year, a new commercial grade playground was also installed inside the walking track loop, which encourages family active living.



The County’s most significant investment in Texas Community Park was the renovation of the community building, site of the area DHEC Summer Feeding program and the primary revenue generator for park operating expenses. In 2020, renovations addressed ADA access, electrical wiring, termite damage, central heating/air, access control, and wastewater systems in order to reopen the building to public use. While the bulk of the improvements were County funded, SC Park and Recreation Development (PARD) funding assisted with the building work. All of the recent investments in Texas Community Park total \$200,000.



Currently, the County has an existing land use agreement with the Texas Community Recreation Organization to provide regular maintenance and operating functions such as grass mowing, opening and closing, and rental management. However, the organization has had significant difficulty in mowing the grass and opening and closing the park on a regular basis. To protect the County's recent investments and maintain this park to the level of other County facilities, DCPRD has recently taken over mowing of the park, rented a refuse dumpster, and provided a portable toilet for times when the building is not open.

DCPRD will be in a position to take on additional responsibilities at Texas Community Park once the nearby Davis-Bailey Park opens and staff is hired to support operations and maintenance in the western County.

- Recommendation:***
- 1) Transition full responsibility for operations and maintenance to DCPRD as staffing allows.

 - 2) Develop a master plan for improvements at the site which may include baseball field rehabilitation, planting of shade trees, and additional creature comforts.

Infrastructure Projects – Long Term

Bridlewood Farms Park Site

The Bridlewood Farms Park Site is one that was on the radar when the master plan was published in 2009, and not much has changed since then. The developer of the Bridlewood Farms subdivision donated thirty-six acres to Dorchester County and Dorchester School District Two for development of a public park and school site. This property is in a rural yet growing area of the county off Carter Road between Ridgeville and the Givhans community. The master plan noted in 2009 that due to a relative lack of wetlands and flat topography, Bridlewood Farms “is an ideal site for the development of an active recreation park.” Since that time, plans for the school have been moved to the backburner, and no effort has been made to install a public park facility on the site. Boundaries have been drawn between county and school properties. Working together to best locate park features and school facilities will benefit all. It should also be noted that Dorchester County Water and Sewer purchased one acre of this future parkland for an elevated water storage tank.

The envisioned community park was a major point of contention during the public feedback process preceding the *2016 Master Plan*. The Ridgeville meeting, which was the best attended of all the public forums, was highlighted by negative comments from nearly all that chose to speak. Comments from the survey instrument echoed this trend. Two major perceived problems with the park were voiced – both related to location. Many felt the location, four miles removed from downtown Ridgeville, would prove to be too far from this population center. Residents of the adjacent Bridlewood Farms subdivision espoused a different message – “not in my back yard.” These residents argued that most of the public outside of Bridlewood Farms would utilize their neighborhood as a “shortcut” to access the park from Highway 27 instead of utilizing Carter Road. This additional neighborhood traffic was viewed as a serious issue among residents.

Some survey comments were positive regarding the park, but even those respondents felt the focus on athletic fields and courts was too strong. More multiuse features such as a spray fountain, playground, and multiple picnic shelters were desired.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) When School District Two is ready to move forward with planning, coordinate with them to determine location of school and park infrastructure.
 - 2) Work with School District 2 and Bridlewood Farms representatives to address access concerns.

Eagle Run Park Site

Located less than a mile from the Pine Trace Park Site, the Eagle Run Site is a 54 acre county-owned property that the *2009 Master Plan* describes as having “little opportunity to be developed as an efficient active recreation park” due to limiting factors such as a high proportion of wetlands, protected natural area and limited vehicular access. The *2009 Master Plan* estimated over half of the site contains delineated wetlands leaving around twenty-two acres of developable land. It is important to note here that wetlands have been interpreted much more broadly by USACE since 2009 as evidenced by delineation work at Pine Trace, Davis-Bailey Park, and Ashley River Park.

DCPRD contracted with a wetland consultant for a basic wetland assessment of the property. Their findings do not bode well for accommodating vehicular access. The consultant estimates well under 10 acres of uplands exist at the site. Unfortunately, this high ground is situated in the middle of the property and is a de facto island surrounded by wetlands. Constructing a road through the wetlands between Wallace Ackerman Drive and the dry ground would result in major wetland impacts, significant bridging and/or costly mitigation.

Though Eagle Run may not be suitable as a “park and enjoy” facility, its location is important for Eagle-Chandler Trail Phase III development. It comprises over half of this proposed section. Additionally, Wallace Ackerman Drive features a heavily used multiuse path. Eagle-Chandler Trail Phase III will connect to this path through the property. The high ground in the middle of the site could offer an opportunity for side trails and a bike skills course, providing a more challenging experience for advanced biking and running enthusiasts.

Recommendation: 1) Focus future planning and design efforts on connecting adjacent communities to the Eagle-Chandler Trail system.

2) Explore ideas for utilizing this space as a low-impact biking facility.

Western County Community Center and Pool

Provision of some sort of aquatic and indoor recreation facility to serve western county residents was not a concept included in the original *2009 Master Plan*. During the public feedback process in 2015, the need for a basic outdoor pool facility in this region was voiced during the public forums, in the survey, and with follow up inquiries by Park and Recreation Commissioners residing in this area. Since that time, staff has continued to hear community feedback regarding the desire for a pool as well as an indoor recreation center.

The primary demand for a pool is related to the need to teach basic swimming and life saving skills to area youth. No such public pool facility currently exists in western Dorchester County. Additionally, no public indoor recreation facilities currently operate in this area. A recreation center would provide capacity for indoor programming, meeting spaces, and fitness opportunities that are currently not offered in the region.

An appropriate aquatic facility would consist of a standard outdoor pool with six, twenty-five-meter lanes and an adjacent, shallow, zero entry pool for non-swimmers. Designing and constructing such a facility is not an overly costly endeavor. However, operation and maintenance of pools present significant challenges related to risk management and staffing. Certified pool operators are required to ensure safe water conditions monitoring and maintenance. Understandably, pool facilities are also required to have many trained lifeguard eyes on the water at all times. Furthermore, during hot summer days it is important to rotate staff on and off shifts to maintain alertness and stamina. The ability to identify and train enough qualified lifeguards in this part of the county could be a challenge. These

personnel costs, not to mention those associated with chemicals and other supplies, make it very challenging to avoid significant operating deficits at such facilities. Considering the general need to keep recurring annual costs of the young Parks and Recreation Department to a minimum, the pool and recreation center projects have not gained much traction in recent years. A strong partner will be needed to address logistical and financial challenges related to operations and maintenance of pool and recreation center facilities.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) Undertake discussions with potential partners such as Dorchester School District 4, the YMCA, and municipalities to determine interest in a facility partnership.
 - 2) Further research mobile pool operations, such as the one in Charleston County and now Colleton County, for meeting interim basic swimming lesson needs.
 - 3) Locate and construct pool and recreation center facilities together as the recreation center could include indoor facilities such as changing rooms and restrooms that a pool requires.

Rural Community Parks

Rural community parks have played a vital role in providing recreation opportunities for isolated communities throughout Dorchester County. These parks include: Givhans Community Park, Sand Hill Community Park, Shady Grove Community Park, St. Mark's Community Park, and St. Paul Community Park. As mentioned in the "Recreation Outreach Grants" update below, these facilities appear to have been most impacted by the shift in policy that saw a postponement of the grant program in favor of utilizing the limited funding toward county-led recreation endeavors. Collecting usage information for some of the community parks has proven challenging, and staff has relied somewhat on visual inspection as well as word of mouth to determine the condition and use characteristics of some facilities. Some community parks that have received outreach grants in the past include:

Givhans Community Park – Located off Givhans Road between Ridgeville and Givhans, this park features an unlit baseball field with backstop and foul line fencing, a community gathering building with restrooms, picnic shelter, basketball court, and aging playground equipment. The degree of ball field use for practices and local games is unknown, and a visual inspection suggests the existence of multiple maintenance issues.

Sand Hill Community Park – Located at the intersection of Clubhouse Road and Summers Drive in southwestern Dorchester County, this park features an unlit baseball field with backstop and foul line fencing as well as a restroom/concession building. The ball field is utilized primarily by a travel baseball team for practice during the week and by adult men's and women's softball teams on the weekends. The Sand Hill Community Association provides mowing services, and the travel baseball team maintains the skinned (dirt) portions of the infield. Sand Hill Community Park is one of the better maintained community parks in Dorchester County. An involved volunteer group undertakes community festivals generating some funds that are used to pay utility bills. This group has expressed a desire to install

modern playground equipment and picnic shelters in order to serve other community recreation needs but has not been able to assemble the significant funding required.

Shady Grove Community Park – Located less than a half mile from the Orangeburg County line near Highway 178, this park features an unlit baseball field with backstop and foul line fencing along the infield, a restroom building, and several picnic shelters. It appears at one time this site was used for practices, informal games, and community cookouts. An inspection in September 2020 showed the grounds to be unkept and facilities in major disrepair.

St. Mark's Community Park – Located adjacent to the vacant St. Mark's Church building off St. Mark Bowman Road west of Interstate I-95, this park features a very basic baseball backstop and a shelter. Visual inspection suggests this facility is rarely used and has not been maintained regularly in recent years. Pine tree saplings are growing in the infield and a dilapidated, unoccupied church structure also sits on the property.

St. Paul Community Park – Located just over a mile southwest of Harleyville, this park features an unlit baseball field with backstop and foul line fencing, an updated playground, basketball court, restrooms, concession building with attached shelter, and other park amenities such as picnic tables and swings. Park volunteers work to host weekend softball games, practices, and fundraising events, and offer rentals for group events that help to cover operating costs. St. Paul Community Park is one of the better maintained community parks in the county. In recent years, St. Paul Community Park secured funding from the Upper Dorchester County Economic Development Fund to implement improvements to the building, ballfield and playground. These funds also were utilized to purchase a commercial ZTR mower and an ice machine that have helped with park maintenance and operations.

Recommendation: 1) Reintegrate these parks into the Recreation Outreach Grant program once it is reinstated. Develop selection process criteria that reward those parks/groups that demonstrate maintenance capacity and higher levels of use.

Regional Multiuse Park

The county currently does not own a suitable site for a traditional regional park, which requires a site with a bare minimum of 200 usable acres with opportunities for both active and passive uses. No such park exists in Dorchester County. Partnerships for land acquisition, facility development and operations are essential to establishing a regional park. Where possible, adding park landholdings adjacent to existing and/or planned park areas would be a more cost-effective approach to establishing a true regional park facility. For instance, connecting various Ashley River corridor County parklands (Ashley River Park, Rosebrock Park, Walnut Hill Natural Area) through acquisition of adjacent parcels could be a strategy for more quickly creating a regional park in a densely populated area.

Recommendation: 1) Pursue other park facility development efforts as recommended above while staying abreast of land acquisition opportunities for a park of this size, as well as partnership opportunities for development and operations.

2) Continue to explore opportunities to expand the footprint of existing park holdings to accommodate more users and more diverse uses.

Facility Partnerships

Partnerships between public agencies (and to a lesser degree public-private arrangements) have proven to be an effective cost sharing method for the provision of recreation facilities in some communities. A typical arrangement is for one agency to fund construction of a facility and contribute to ongoing maintenance costs while a partner agency operates and programs the facility. Another common partnership is for a public recreation agency to contribute to construction, maintenance, and/or operating costs of school district facilities such as gyms, tracks, playgrounds, and athletic fields in exchange for general public access to these resources.

Specific facility partnerships are covered above in the Western County Pool/Community Center and Regional Park items. However, other opportunities exist to pool public resources to better meet the general recreation needs of our residents. Recent conversations with Dorchester School District Four have indicated the district is open providing public use of gyms and fields with County support. Dorchester District Two has traditionally been more opposed to such partnerships, but meetings to revisit the topic have been delayed due to the pandemic.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) Continue to communicate and to work with SD2 and SD4 officials to develop short, medium and long-range plans to incorporate public recreation opportunities into existing and future school facilities.
 - 2) While operating and maintaining community recreation centers is traditionally a costly parks and recreation endeavor, Dorchester County is severely lacking in these facilities outside of the Town of Summerville's recently opened Rollins Edwards Community Center and membership-based Summerville YMCA facilities. DCPRD should continue to explore indoor recreation facility partnership opportunities with SD2, SD4, Town of Summerville, and City of North Charleston. A potential arrangement might see shared use of a school district gym with an on-site community center that is able to be isolated from campus during school hours. Operating and maintenance costs could be shared by multiple partners.
 - 3) Like DCPRD, the Town of Summerville recognizes that the high demand for athletic fields and related facilities is not currently being met and that the gap will continue to widen due to ongoing population growth. A large, athletic complex featuring numerous and varied sports fields would go far in meeting the demand. Sharing the costs of constructing and operating such a facility could be a way to move an ambitious project like this forward. Staff from both agencies should continue current discussions regarding the feasibility of this idea. Discussions should focus on what a partnership arrangement might consist of, as well as identification of a suitable location for what would be a large, high use complex. Once identified, gaining control of the property for future development should be a top priority.

Other Projects

Recreation Outreach Grants

Until the last 6-7 years, the main thrust of Dorchester County's parks and recreation endeavors came in the form of financial assistance to municipalities, community groups, and other organizations for the provision of a variety of recreational offerings to county residents. These grants were funded through a combination of Parks and Recreation Development (PARAD) Grants, general fund allocations, and designated Recreation Fund revenues. The *2009 Master Plan* labeled this assistance Recreation Outreach Grants and recommended the continuation of this program. Assistance levels increased steadily from 2006, peaking in 2009 with a total of \$302,589 transferred that year. However, transfers to outside organizations declined significantly each year after 2009 to a low of \$0 in 2013. The downward trend is explained by a shift in policy in which Dorchester County focused on building an independent parks and recreation capacity – primarily through park land acquisition, development of Rosebrock Park, and the establishment of a County-run Parks and Recreation Department

Many of the outreach grant recipient organizations were reliant on this stream of assistance not only for development of new amenities but also for maintaining the quality of those amenities already in place. As a result, it appears that levels of maintenance and level of activity have decreased in correlation with the decrease in funding. Some of the county's smaller municipalities that provide recreation services to county residents residing both within and outside the town limits have reiterated the need to reinstitute the Recreation Outreach Grant Program. Toward that end, Dorchester County provided grants to the following entities: Town of Saint George - \$400,000 for Rosenwald School renovations; Town of Summerville - \$100,000 for a fully accessible playground; Town of Reevesville - \$90,000 for park and playground improvements; Town of Harleyville - \$80,000 for playground and park improvements; and, Town of Ridgeville - \$80,000 for playground and park improvements.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) Reinstitute the Recreation Outreach Grant Program as part of the first significant increase in recurring annual funding for parks and recreation operations.

 - 2) Develop a standard application, review, and reporting process to ensure efficient use of funds. The selection process should be competitive with scoring criteria developed with input from the Parks and Recreation Commission. Scoring should favor those organizations that demonstrate ability to commit matching funds or in-kind labor.

Recreation Information Center

Surveys conducted as part of the *2009 Master Plan* information gathering effort revealed that nearly a third of respondents did not know whether their city or town offered recreational services. Furthermore, open house attendees were surprised to learn about many existing recreational facilities located throughout the county. Due to Dorchester County's relatively large jurisdictional boundary, it is logical that the county should take the lead in organizing and disseminating recreational information to residents in order to help ensure existing opportunities are fully utilized.

Some progress has been made on this recommendation. The Parks and Recreation Department portion of the Dorchester County website hosts a page dedicated to providing information on some facilities and activities offered by partner recreation providers in the county. However, the listings found here are far from comprehensive. Gathering, organizing, and including this information on the website is tedious and time consuming. Incremental improvements have been made by staff to keep the webpage current and useful, but the larger Recreation Information Center effort has not started in earnest. Additional staff assistance is needed to complete this effort. In addition to the webpage, Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Department utilizes the social media platform Facebook in order to update interested individuals on DCPRD progress and partner recreation opportunities. A quarterly newsletter, another recommendation of the master plan, has not been developed as there is not enough content available to fill a newsletter at this time.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) Continue collection of data and reorganization of existing DCPRD webpage to better serve as a complete recreation directory for users. Update the page at least twice annually. Develop and post on the website a standard form that interested parties may complete to transmit pertinent information on outside agency recreation opportunities.
 - 2) Produce and distribute an semi-annual electronic newsletter for recreation facilities and services when Ashley River Park and Davis-Bailey Park are open. Eventually, this should transform into a seasonal newsletter.

Friends of Dorchester County Parks

Park friends groups support governmental park and recreation efforts through contributing valuable time, expertise, and privately raised funds. As champions of parks, friends groups frequently engage area communities in the park system and solicit financial support and volunteer time in support of County park priorities. Fostering the development of a park friends group was a noted recommendation in the *2009 Master Plan* and was quickly recognized by both staff and the Dorchester County PRC as a top priority. Friends of Dorchester County Parks (FDCP) was incorporated and designated as a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization in 2015.



Since that time, FDCP has grown to include over a dozen board members and a large database of interested “park friends” and volunteers. Furthermore, FDCP has raised over \$30,000 in net revenue for park projects in Dorchester County, primarily through event fundraisers like the Evening at Brosnan and Ashley River Adventure Race. General donations have also been solicited and accepted by the group. Now that the organization has developed a reliable revenue stream and major county park projects are moving forward, the focus has shifted to generating support of trail/bike/ped infrastructure improvements. This initiative will be launched upon completion of the Sawmill Branch Trail Design Guidelines Master Plan.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) Launch trail/bike/ped fundraising campaign.
 - 2) Plan and hold donor-focused informational events.
 - 3) Assist DCPRD with securing and managing helpers for special events and volunteer opportunities.

Programming Partnerships

The *2009 Master Plan* recommends the newly formed DCPRD “delay directly offering recreation programs until further into the department’s existence,” recognizing that facility development efforts will “require much of the department’s attention, efforts, and budget” during its first five years. Rather than directly offering new programming, the plan calls for a focus on notifying residents of existing programming through the Recreation Information Center (discussed above) and partnering with existing public and private recreation providers to provide a basic level of fee-based programming. Instead of hiring and training staff for highly specialized programming, DCPRD has so far elected to partner with private sector organizations for such services as is the case with the climbing wall and ropes course for Ashley River Park. Discussions are also underway for experienced local government entities to expand athletic program offerings to future county-owned facilities.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) Continue to develop opportunities to support existing programs in the county through Recreation Outreach Grants and development of the Recreation Information Center. These efforts will help to both increase the quality and capacity of existing programs as well as ensure that residents are aware of program opportunities. This approach will help DCPRD to avoid an overwhelming increase in personnel costs.
 - 2) Work with other public agencies (SCDNR, Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service, etc.) and volunteer organizations (scouting groups, SC Master Naturalists, Audubon Society, etc.) to provide near term, basic environmental and nature-based programming for Rosebrock Park and other parks as they open to the public.

3) Because of specific opportunities afforded by the locations and features of coming park facilities, consider providing outdoor recreation programming such as paddling, fishing, guided tours, special events and environmental education in-house through a Recreation Coordinator.

4) A strong network of volunteer youth sports and athletic organizations exists in Dorchester County. Rather than attempt to duplicate these successful programs, DCPRD should work with these organizations to provide and maintain adequate practice and game facilities for use by these leagues, as well as to promote these opportunities through the Recreation Information Center. There are some instances and locations in which residents have limited access to varied local youth sports opportunities. In these situations, DCPRD operations and athletics staff should work with these communities to develop such opportunities as staff capacity allows on a case by case basis.

5) Special events such as races, competitions, and festivals hold additional opportunity to program DCPRD facilities and generate revenue for the department. The Ashley River Adventure Race, started in 2019, is evidence of this. While DCPRD will offer regular special events, under certain circumstances, it may be more advantageous to offer facility “rentals” to outside organizations seeking to hold special events on DCPRD property. Specific policies and procedures must be drafted and adopted prior to entering into such arrangements.

Conservation Projects

Many park and recreation agencies are actively involved in local efforts to conserve land for the benefit of the public. Oftentimes, land conservation goals and public recreation goals can be reached on the same property. Typically, in these instances, limited public access is provided on conserved lands in the form of trailheads, trails, and other low impact recreation features. Rosebrock Park is a prime local example of conserved land that provides public recreation in a protected natural resource area. Upon opening, both Ashley River Park and Pine Trace Natural Area will provide a case study of how conservation and parkland can coexist side by side. Over 125 acres (or 32% of the total acreage) of wetlands and upland buffers have been set aside as perpetually protected natural areas between the two sites.

Dorchester County's conservation efforts to this point have been led by the Conservation Commission, which was established in 2003. In September of 2015, the Director of Parks and Recreation was instructed to serve as primary staff support to the Conservation Commission. This change improved communication and partnership efforts between the Parks and Recreation and Conservation Commissions. Conservation Commission initiatives were primarily funded through the now-expended 2010 Bond proceeds. No funding is currently identified for conservation projects. A Dorchester County Conservation Plan was recently developed and approved by the Conservation Commission and with County Council's approval, will guide conservation strategies and efforts in the coming years.

Since the *2016 Master Plan*, Conservation Commission recommended projects have resulted in the acquisition of the 128-acre Walnut Hill tract on the Ashley River, ongoing preservation and restoration of the historic Rosenwald School and development of a Dorchester County Historic Battlegrounds Survey and Report.

Recommendation: 1) Continue to provide staff support to the Conservation Commission as requested and as capacity allows.

2) Work to identify projects that meet both conservation and recreation goals.

3) Work with County Administration and County Council to identify and allocate recurring funding for the yet-to-be established Conservation Fund. Being able to depend on a minimum recurring funding allocation will allow the Conservation Commission to undertake its work more strategically and to be able to respond to conservation opportunities that sometimes require quick action. A dedicated annual allocation also demonstrates Dorchester County's long-term commitment to conserve lands for public benefit. Unspent funds should be carried over in the conservation fund balance that could be utilized during future years of high conservation activity or for protection of large tracts.

- **Trails/Greenways Master Plan** – Community input in the *2009* and *2016 Master Plans* demonstrated a high demand among residents for improved and expanded walking and biking infrastructure for both connectivity and recreational purposes. The master plan recommends creating a countywide greenway master plan to prioritize and guide related development. With input from DCPRD staff, Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments staff completed the Bike-Walk BCD plan for the entire Tri-County region. This plan identifies opportunities for expanded connectivity throughout all of Dorchester County and more importantly, provides an independent analysis and prioritization of these routes and connections. Furthermore, master planning for trails in the Oakbrook/Summerville area is underway. Detailed planning for trails and connectivity in the rural areas and smaller municipalities of Dorchester County has so far not been undertaken.

Recommendation: 1) Implement projects in the Bike-Walk BCD plan.

2) Complete the Sawmill Branch Trail Design Guidelines Master Plan and extend to all multiuse path projects.

3) Consider a study to identify trail corridors for connections linking together population centers and popular destinations for the rural areas of the County.

Parks and Recreation Staffing

2016 Master Plan

This update stressed that the staffing plan described in the master plan is based on a far less aggressive approach to park development than the *2009 Plan* envisioned. Therefore, a larger and more rapid staffing buildup was planned. Some position titles were changed to better reflect the personnel needs. Key positions (in order of onboarding) included a Director, Administrative Assistant, Marketing and Development Manager, Park Maintenance Crew (5 positions), Part Time Park Attendants, Park Manager, Assistant Park Manager, and Recreation Coordinator. It was noted at the time that final park design and changes in development schedules could impact staffing levels and timing of adding positions.

2016 - Present

Since the *2016 Plan* was released, much progress has been made regarding DCPRD's personnel and operations planning. Design has been completed for Ashley River Park and Davis-Bailey Park. As recommended, an Administrative Support Specialist was hired in 2018 representing the department's second full-time employee. At the start of FY20, this position was upgraded to Park Operations Manager to better reflect the regular responsibilities and duties being performed. This additional position was crucial to the department's capacity to manage daily operations, programs and special events while the Director focused on facility development and operations planning. The FY21 budget adopted by County Council includes reinstatement of the Administrative Support Specialist position in January 2021 in order to better prepare for additional employee onboarding, closeout of capital projects and standing up of operations in Spring 2021.

Additionally, discussions with the County CFO and Facilities Management Director have led to a new approach to maintenance since the *2016 Master Plan*. The Facilities and Grounds Department will assume primary responsibility for grounds maintenance of new park facilities as they are completed. Additional positions were funded and equipment purchased in FY 21 to meet this expanded scope of grounds maintenance.

Staff Positions

With more clarity regarding park facility characteristics, operations and anticipated service levels, it is evident that additional positions will be required for the efficient and effective operation of the park system. Details for currently funded positions and those recommended to be funded as Davis-Bailey Park, Ashley River Park, Oakbrook Sports Complex, and Pine Trace Natural Area open are described below.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) **Director** – This position was created and filled in 2014 and is responsible for the comprehensive management of department operations, capital projects, budgeting, public information, personnel and related tasks.
 - 2) **Park Operations Manager** – This position was upgraded in FY 20 from the Administrative Support Specialist position to reflect actual duties. The Park Operations Manager currently manages park maintenance activities, part-time maintenance staff, programming, special events and special

projects as assigned. Once the first round of parks open, Park Operations Manager duties will shift and expand somewhat to include managing operations at Pine Trace Natural Area, Davis-Bailey Park, Oakbrook Sports Complex, and associated staff. This position will also oversee smaller facilities such as Texas Park and River Access Sites.

3) Administrative Support Specialist IV, Assistant to Director – Originally hired in 2019, this position served as an assistant to the Director focusing on daily administrative, timekeeping, research, procurement, reporting, and customer service tasks. The position was upgraded in 2020 to Park Operations Manager to more accurately reflect duties and tasks being performed. The FY21 budget includes funding to reinstate this position in January 2021, providing direct support to the Director for procurement, timekeeping, personnel management and other administrative tasks.

4) Park Manager, Ashley River Park – Ashley River Park is anticipated to serve a very high volume of users from the time it opens. User demand combined with multiple rental opportunities, special events, programs and coordination requirements with outside vendors/contractors will require a significant amount of daily management and supervision of processes and staff. The Park Manager will coordinate with the Assistant Park Manager to provide this supervision and will stagger schedules to ensure manager-on-duty coverage during peak times, especially weekends. Due to proximity and the future park connector, this position will oversee Rosebrock as well. This position should be filled at least 60 days prior to park opening.

5) Assistant Park Manager, Ashley River Park - Ashley River Park is anticipated to serve a very high volume of users from the time it opens. User demand combined with multiple rental opportunities, special events, and coordination requirements with outside vendors/contractors will require a significant amount of daily management and supervision of processes and staff. The Assistant Park Manager will coordinate with the Park Manager to provide this supervision and will stagger schedules to ensure manager-on-duty coverage during peak times, especially weekends. Due to proximity and the future park connector, this position will oversee Rosebrock as well. This position should be filled at least 30 days prior to park opening.

6) Administrative Support Specialist III – Ashley River Park – The park office will serve as the primary in-person customer service point for the park system. This position will serve as the main customer service agent during normal business hours for both in-person and phone tasks related to rentals, requests for information, sales, vendor check-in, deliveries, etc. Position will provide procurement support to Park Manager and Assistant Park Manager.

7) **Marketing and Events Manager** – Marketing endeavors will be important to establishing the department early on, especially as new facilities open to the public. The Marketing and Events Manager will develop and manage extensive social media and digital marketing plans to drive park usage, attendance and revenues. Special events will also be a useful tool for both revenue development and marketing of facilities. The ideal candidate will have experience with a range of marketing functions as well as special event planning and management. This position should be filled at least 60 days prior to Ashley River Park opening.

9) **Recreation Coordinator** – While using contractors and partners to provide programming opportunities will be a priority, there is significant opportunity to directly provide recreation programming to the public. Given the natural characteristics of the planned park system, environmental education and outdoor recreation-focused program themes should be prevalent. However, the successful candidate for this position will be capable of implementing a wide variety of programming. In addition to leading activities directly, the Recreation Coordinator will also be responsible for coordinating contractor-provided programs, working with partners and volunteers to enhance program opportunities, and assisting with the marketing of all programming.

10) **Part-time Park Aides** – In addition to performing duties of Park Attendants, Park Aides perform more responsible and complex work such as opening/closing, managing cash startup/close out, liaising with rental customers, providing front-desk customer service in the absence of Administrative Support Specialist, serving as MOD in the absence of Park/Asst. Park Managers, enforcing park policies and procedures, and directing the work of park attendants. In Addition to this, Park Aides working at Davis-Bailey Park will also prepare fields/courts for practices and games, manage concessions, and liaison with park users on field/court reservations and issues. All Park Aides will assist with special events as needed. Number of hours required from Park Aides will be seasonal.

11) **Part-time Park Attendants** – Park Attendants will perform routine tasks related to cleaning, custodial services, light maintenance, collection of admission fees, rental support, special event support and other duties as assigned. It is anticipated that custodial-focused park attendants will bear primary responsibility for routine daily tasks related to restrooms cleaning/stocking, refuse collection, litter abatement, and cleaning of indoor facilities. General Park Attendants will be more seasonal and correlate with demand for attendance, rental and special events. Park Attendants at Davis-Bailey Park will also work in concessions and may assist with field preparation. Number of hours required from Park Aides will be seasonal.

12) **Part-time Park Rangers** – Park Rangers will be utilized to monitor and enforce policies at dispersed facilities that will not regularly host on-site staff such as Rosebrock Park, river access sites, Pine Trace Natural Area, Davis-Bailey Park, and undeveloped, future park properties. They will provide opener/closer duties at some of these facilities. They will serve as a visual security/enforcement presence and goodwill ambassadors.

13) **Athletics Coordinator** – The Athletics Coordinator position will be required prior to the Department assuming operations of Oakbrook Sports Complex. It is anticipated that Davis-Bailey park will be heavily used by existing, volunteer-led leagues in the Western County. In addition to managing field/court time at both of these facilities, the Athletic Coordinator will be responsible for the development and execution of DCPRD-led athletic programming.

14) **Grounds Maintenance Staff** – One major change from the *2016 Update* pertains to plans for maintaining park facilities. To maximize efficiency and avoid creating silos/duplication of services across County departments, grounds maintenance work at DCPRD facilities will be led by the County Facilities Maintenance Department. The anticipated structure is that a Landscape Manager will oversee a western district three position crew and an eastern district four position crew. New groundskeeping positions and equipment were added in FY 20 in preparation for the increased workload. It is likely that groundskeeping activities at some smaller park facilities will be performed by a contractor where logical due to geography and cost.

Staffing Requirements by Facility

Each new facility will require a unique mix of salaried and part-time staff to operate in a safe and functional manner. Most facilities will experience seasonal changes in staffing levels based on demand. Estimates of part-time staffing hours for each facility have been developed based on comparison with similar parks in the region as well as discussions with major park stakeholders, especially those leagues planning to utilize Davis-Bailey Park. Surely, staffing plans will be refined based on experiences from the first year of operations. Some positions are not assigned to specific facilities but are included in the recommendations below.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) **Administration** – The administration division is comprised of positions that will not be assigned to a specific facility or have daily oversight responsibilities for a specific facility or facilities. These include: Administrative Support Specialist IV, Marketing and Special Events Manager, Recreation Coordinator and Park Rangers will be supervised by the Director.
 - 2) **Davis-Bailey Park and Oakbrook Sports Complex** – The Athletics Coordinator, under direct supervision from and in conjunction with the Park Operations Manager, will provide primary oversight for Davis-Bailey Park, Oakbrook Sports Complex and assigned staff. Park Aides and Park Attendants will support tasks related to field preparation, coordination with facility users, rentals, concessions and custodial services.
 - 3) **Ashley River Park** – The Park Manager and Assistant Park Manager will provide primary supervision for Ashley River Park and assigned staff. Park Aides will play a significant role as managers-on-duty in the absence of a Manager as well as opening and closing duties. Park Aides and Attendants will also be utilized heavily for custodial services, fee collection, rental support, special events and light maintenance activities. Ashley River Park will be the busiest facility due to its location and features and therefore will require the greatest amount of staffing of park facilities.
 - 4) **Pine Trace Natural Area** – The Park Operations Manager will provide primary supervision for Pine Trace Natural Area and assigned staff. While Park Attendants, and to a lesser degree, Park Aides will provide support for custodial and light maintenance tasks, the passive nature of Pine Trace will require a fraction of part-time support than that of the other two major parks.

5) **All Other Facilities** – The Park Operations Manager will provide primary supervision over operations and assigned staff for the smaller park facilities including Texas Community Park, and River Access Sites. Park Attendants, and to a lesser degree, Park Aides will provide support for custodial and light maintenance tasks at these facilities.

6) **Park Rangers** – Park Rangers are not assigned to any one facility as their duties will require them to monitor all park facilities. Park Rangers will open and close park facilities except for Ashley River Park.

Budgetary Impact of Recommendations

This section details the anticipated costs of both park facility development as well as annual recurring personnel and operating costs to safely and effectively operate

Capital Projects

In November 2019, Dorchester County voters overwhelmingly approved a Capital Bond Referendum to fund park projects in the amount of \$38M. The first tranche of these bonds was issued in early 2020 resulting in this funding source being commonly referred to as “2020 Bond Proceeds”. 2020 Bond Proceeds will constitute nearly all available capital project funding for the next several years. The *Dorchester County Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)* is a five-year guide for capital expenditures that are significant, non-routine and cost over \$50,000. The FY 2021-2025 CIP recommends allocations of 2020 Bond Proceeds for the projects and amounts below. It should be noted that the plan is updated annually, and specific project allocations are likely to change as plans/budgets are refined or other funding sources are identified.

FY 2021-2025 Capital Improvement Plan 2020 Parks Bond Project Allocations

| | |
|--|---------------|
| Davis-Bailey Park | \$ 6,000,000 |
| Ashley River Park | \$ 13,000,000 |
| Pine Trace Natural Area | \$ 4,500,000 |
| Ashley River Access Site | \$ 500,000 |
| Land Acquisition | \$ 8,000,000 |
| Eagle/Chandler Multiuse Path Phase I | \$ 2,000,000 |
| Sawmill Branch Multiuse Path Extension | \$ 1,250,000 |
| Ashley River Park - Rosebrock Park Connector | \$ 2,000,000 |
| Edisto River Park | \$ 750,000 |
| Total | \$ 38,000,000 |

Annual Recurring Personnel and Operations Projections by Category

The bulk of recurring annual costs to operate the recommended park system is personnel expenses. Utilities will make up a large portion of operating costs at Ashley River and Davis-Bailey parks due to park features (sports lighting, splash pads). Other significant costs are related to office supplies, custodial supplies, fuel, insurance, and contract services. It should be noted that grounds maintenance recurring costs are not included herein as they will be funded through the Facilities Maintenance Department.

The tables below show recurring cost estimates for each facility and category.

| Administration | |
|--|-------------------|
| Salaried Personnel (Director, Admin IV, Marketing Manager, Recreation Coordinator) | \$ 271,193 |
| Operating (includes regular supplies, printing and Department-wide uniforms, training, fuel, signage, memberships, etc.) | \$ 74,200 |
| Total | \$ 345,393 |

| Ashley River Park and Rosebrock Park | |
|--|-------------------|
| Salaried Personnel (Park Manager, Asst. Park Manager, Admin. III) | \$ 164,593 |
| Part-Time Staff (Park Aides, Park Attendants regular duties) | \$ 134,020 |
| Operating (includes regular supplies, printing and Department-wide uniforms, training, fuel, signage, memberships, etc.) | \$ 146,472 |
| Total | \$ 445,085 |

| Davis-Bailey Park | |
|--|-------------------|
| Salaried Personnel (1/2 Park Operations Manager) | \$ 32,500 |
| Part-Time Staff (Park Aides, Park Attendants regular duties) | \$ 41,448 |
| Operating (Utilities, Custodial Supplies, Playground Maintenance, Concessions, etc.) | \$ 129,432 |
| Total | \$ 203,380 |

Oakbrook Sports Complex

| | | |
|---|----|---------|
| Salaried Personnel (1/2 Park Operations Manager; 1/2 Athletics Coordinator) | \$ | 27,375 |
| Part-Time Staff (Park Aides, Park Attendants regular duties) | \$ | 41,448 |
| Operating (Utilities, Custodial Supplies, Insurance, etc.). | \$ | 150,000 |
| Total | \$ | 218,823 |

Pine Trace, Texas Park, and River Access Sites

| | | |
|--|----|--------|
| Salaried Personnel (1/2 Park Operations Manager) | \$ | 32,500 |
| Part-Time Staff (Park Aides, Park Attendants regular duties) | \$ | 17,910 |
| Operating (Utilities, Custodial Supplies, Playground Maintenance, etc.). | \$ | 34,600 |
| Total | \$ | 85,010 |

Part-Time Park Ranger Corps

| | | |
|---|----|--------|
| Part-Time Rangers (8 hours/day M-F; 12 hours/day Sat-Sun) | \$ | 43,160 |
| Total | \$ | 43,160 |

Total Recurring Cost Estimate

The table below shows the combined estimated cost of annually recurring expenses.

| Combined Total Anticipated Annual Recurring Cost Estimate | |
|--|--------------|
| Administration | \$ 345,393 |
| Ashley River Park, Rosebrock Park | \$ 445,085 |
| Davis-Bailey Park | \$ 198,255 |
| Oakbrook Sports Complex | \$ 218,823 |
| Pine Trace, Texas Park, River Access | \$ 85,010 |
| Part-Time Ranger Corps | \$ 43,160 |
| Total | \$ 1,335,726 |

Starting in FY 21, the Recreation Fund was eliminated and DCPRD personnel and operations expenditures are now budgeted under the General Fund. Each of the municipalities in Dorchester County executed agreements that allow for General Fund recurring millage to be levied County-wide to support DCPRD activities. \$322,502 was allocated for the FY 21 budget year.

Recurring Revenue Estimate

DCPRD will work diligently to develop diverse streams of revenue to subsidize park operations and reduce pressure on property tax millage, while striving to offer recreational opportunities at affordable prices for all demographics. Primary sources of park-generated revenue include facility rentals, revenue share with private sector partners, vendor fees, special events, park admissions (Ashley River Park only), and programming/athletics fees.

| Recurring Revenue Estimates by Source | | |
|---|----|---------|
| Facility Rentals (Pavilions, Shelters, Tents, Fields, etc.) | \$ | 150,000 |
| Revenue Share (Ropes Course, Climbing Wall, Contracted Programming) | \$ | 30,000 |
| Vendor Fees (Food Trucks, Special Event Space Rentals) | \$ | 15,000 |
| Special Events (Large Events at ARP and DBP; 6/year) | \$ | 40,000 |
| Admission Fees (Ashley River Park Fees and Annual Passes) | \$ | 50,000 |
| Program Fees and Athletic Surcharges | \$ | 15,000 |
| Total | \$ | 300,000 |

Recurring Future Cost Estimate Vs. Current Funding Level and Future Recurring Revenue Estimate

Total estimated recurring costs are \$1,335,726 while total estimated recurring revenues are \$300,000. Furthermore, DCPRD is currently funded for FY 21 at \$322,502. This leaves a balance of \$713,224 in estimated annual expenses that must be covered from elsewhere.

Recommendation: 1) Work with the Budget Office, County Administrators Office, and County Council to utilize General Fund recurring millage to support the safe and functional operation of the expanded park system.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the slow start to developing a true countywide park system has accelerated tremendously since the last *Dorchester County Park and Recreation Master Plan Update* in 2016. New park facilities have opened, and existing facilities have seen major upgrades and enhancements. New events have energized supporters of the park system effort. Expanded staffing has enabled program expansion and park improvements. Perhaps the most significant turning point came with the voter approved Parks Bond Referendum for \$38M, which has enabled the department to move two major parks into the construction phase, planning and design for another, and start negotiations for future park property to meet the ever-growing public demand.

Nevertheless, there is much work to do before Davis-Bailey Park and Ashley River Park open in 2021. Staff must be hired. Budgets projections must be finalized. Policies and procedures must be implemented. Training must take place. Most importantly, recurring funding for personnel and operations must be secured. This document is a guide for accomplishing these tasks and more, including planning to accommodate the future recreation needs of a growing population.

Please contact Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Department with questions regarding the *2020 Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Master Plan*:

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Or

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