



05 | Needs Analysis

Recreation Needs Assessment

No two communities are the same, and neither are their recreational needs. Recreation facilities and programs do more than provide a place to play; they help put form and function into the culture that is envisioned by the community. Visioning a community's culture starts with understanding each community's subtle and sometimes dramatic cultural differences. A robust approach to listening to an area's citizens helps planners understand the pillars and principles of the culture envisioned for the place residents call home.

Park access should be geographically equitable to ensure access for all Albemarle residents. An analysis of recreation service areas can be used to make land acquisition recommendations for current and future needs. One way to improve recreation is to provide easily accessible facilities and amenities that residents want and need.

To better understand what recreation resources a community has and how accessible those facilities and programs may be to the general population, this study looked at typical service areas. The existing service areas map illustrates what portions of the community lie within or near the typical recreation service areas for identified City-owned recreation facilities. The outcome of this exercise reveals that most of the community lives near a City-owned facility that they can easily access. Children and seniors who do not drive are typically the groups that encounter accessibility issues. Both user groups generally have greater leisure time and can directly benefit from access to parks and recreation facilities.

Existing recreation service areas indicate that the areas outside the municipalities' core have the least access to parks. Future parks and recreation system plans should consider developing facilities outside the City's core. As new residential and commercial developments are planned, the City should

actively work with developers on what recreation amenities should be provided per the City's planning department requirements.

Assessing and evaluating the level of service standard is another metric used to determine deficits or surpluses of parkland and amenities in a park system based on the jurisdiction's population. The analysis begins with an inventory of existing facilities, looking at national standards and evaluating staff input. A tailored service standard is created to reflect the increase in parks and recreation needs through the ten-year planning scope. The final output of the analysis is a table representing the 2025 and 2035 levels of service, showing the surpluses and deficits in park types and amenities based on population projections for the next 10 years.

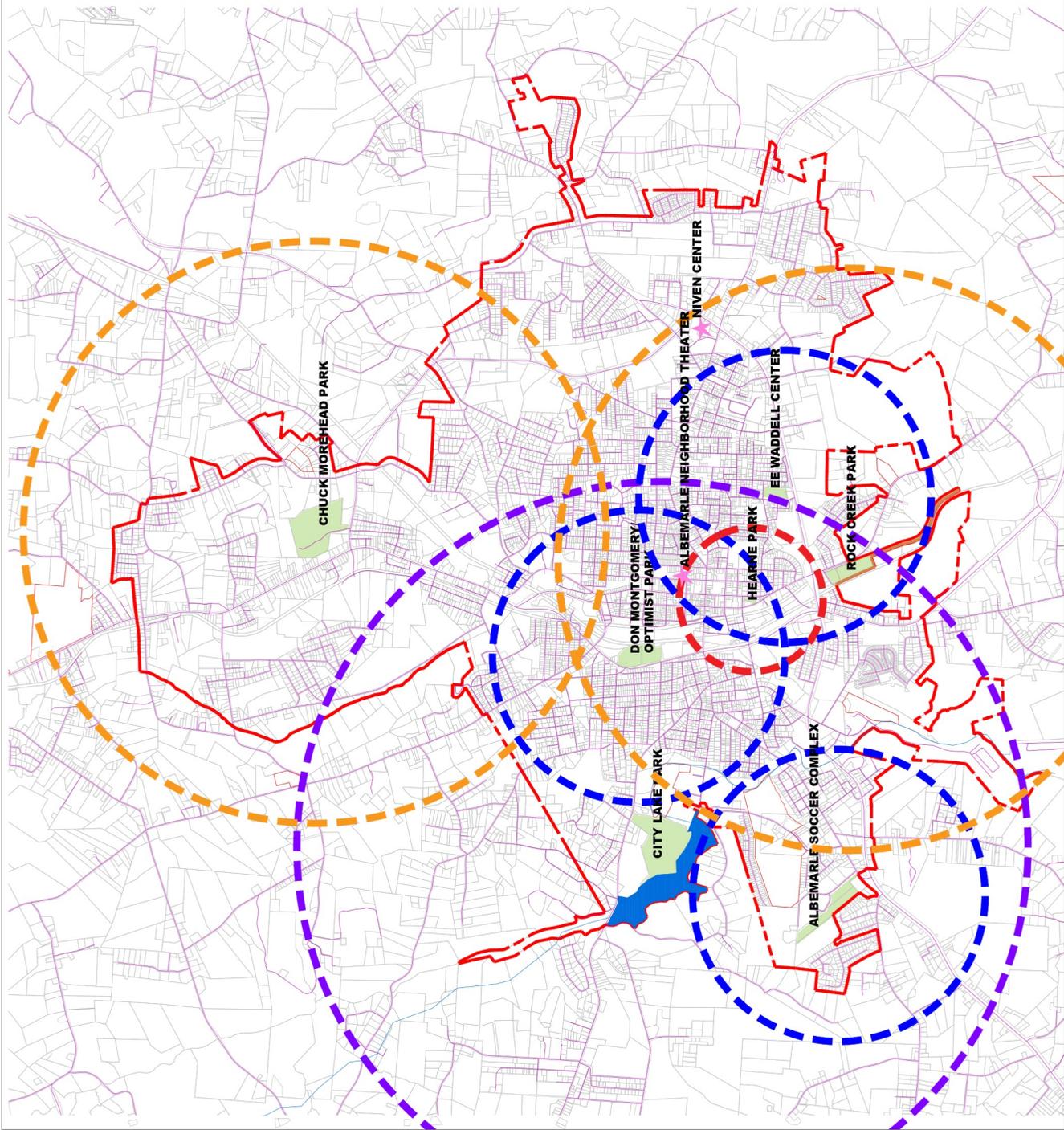
Only City-owned and operated parks and facilities and municipal facilities contribute toward the level of service calculation. It is important to note that recreational needs are also being provided by local municipalities, county facilities, state public lands, and other private or nonprofit recreational facilities. However, level of service only considers City-owned and operated parkland.

This approach is taken for three reasons. First, the level of service is the foundation for recommendations and improvements the City can implement. Any improvements considered must be under the City's jurisdiction. Second, other performance metrics, such as staffing, budgets, and maintenance, are related to the level of service acreage. For this reason, it is essential only to include acreage for which the City is responsible. Finally, when utilizing best practices or national benchmarks, reported data is limited to what an agency owns and operates. Thus, the level of service figure maintains this same parameter to make a direct comparison.

Standards based on the level of service are guidelines, not requirements, for communities to understand and systematically address the demand for recreation in their given geographic areas. To ensure that the City's comprehensive parks and recreation master plan is distinctive yet versatile, we sought input from integral components: City staff, City council, and citizen representatives.



Wooded area in Albemarle



LEGEND

- Municipal Boundary
- ~ Water Body/Creek
- Existing Parks
- ★ Special Use Site

TYPICAL SERVICE AREAS

- ⊖ 2.5 Mile (Existing District Park)
- ⊖ 2.0 Mile (Existing Community Park)
- ⊖ 1 Mile (Existing Neighborhood Park)
- ⊖ 0.5 Mile (Existing Mini Park)



EXISTING CONDITIONS

ALBEMARLE, NORTH CAROLINA

OCTOBER 2024



Level of Service for Parkland

The level of service guidelines for parkland that the City owns and operates are provided in Tables 5.1 and 5.2. Population figures in this analysis are based on the demographics obtained from the United States Census Bureau data. The acreage standard is based on the population ratio method pre-established for each classification of park.

Linear parks, special-use facilities, and open space areas are not designated under the parkland level of service evaluation. Due to the variability and nature of each of these facilities, determining a pre-established population ratio is very difficult.

Albemarle Existing Parks	Acreage
Albemarle Soccer Complex	2 acres
City Lake Park	140 acres
Hearne Park	.5 acres
Don Montgomery / Optimist Park	21 acres
Chuck Morehead Park	65 acres
Rock Creek Park	33 acres
Niven Center	2 acres
EE Waddell Center	8 acres
Albemarle Neighborhood Theater	0 acres
City of Albemarle Total Acreage	271.5 acres

Table 5.1 | Existing Park Acreage

Acres of Parkland per 1,000 Residents		
Quartile	Acres Per 1,000 Residents	Applied to Albemarle's Population
Lower Quartile	6.0 acres	102 acres
Median Quartile	10.6 acres	180.2 acres
City of Albemarle	15.9 acres	271.5 acres
Upper Quartile	20.9 acres	355.3 acres

Table 5.2 | Populations and projections based on NCOSBM population figures and growth rates

Source of Comparison | National Recreation and Parks Metrics data fro communities under 20,000 in population

Benchmark Analysis

Level of service standards were established based upon information gathered from the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) and historical evidence from past projects. A benchmarking assessment of the existing amenities is shown in Table 5.3. Based on the information contained in Table 5.3, the City has strong and weak areas within its system. The recommendations are intended to meet the anticipated level of service needs over a ten-year period, but implementation of specific projects may depend on available funding, land acquisition, and periodic re-evaluation of recreation needs.

Current Contribution to Service Offerings

Amenity	2025 NRPA Metrics Jurisdictions less than 20,000 in population	2025 NRPA Metrics (typical City offerings)	Metrics Based Need Range Estimated Population of 17,105	Current City-Owned Contribution to Service Level
Baseball / softball fields	1/1,833	1/2,432	7-9	4
Multipurpose Field	1/2,493	1/3,017	5-6	5
Basketball Courts (dedicated)	1/4,366	1/5,546	3-4	1
Community Gardens	1/8,880	1/17,000	1-2	1
Pickleball (dedicated)	1/3,390	1/7,250	2-5	10
Tennis / pickleball	1/4,634	1/7,250	2-4	6
Multi-use Courts	1/5,248	1/9,425	1-3	0
Golf Courses	1/9,644	1/30,597	0-1	0
Playground	1/1,990	1/2,900	5-8	5
Inclusive Playgrounds	1/9,644	1/30,597	0-1	0
Dog Park	1/10,327	1/17,000	1-2	1
Recreation Center (and gym)	1/9,685	1/16,835	1-2	1
Community Center (no gym)	1/8,908	1/19,211	0-2	1
Performance Amphitheater	1/12,618	1/27,790	0-1	2
Nature Center	1/9,430	1/33,669	0-1	0
Aquatic Center	1/12,618	1/16,430	1	2
Stadiums	1/10,633	1/14,500	1	1
Teen Center	1/14,797	1/17,563	0-1	0

Table 5.3 | Metrics derived from 2024 NRPA agency performance data

in range
 not in range
 above range

Comparative Analysis

An important part of the planning process is comparing Albemarle to municipalities with similar population sizes. Other established standards can create a benchmark for the recreation opportunities that the City offers. The number of parks, amenities offered per capita, per capita spending, and staffing levels should be considered when comparing Albemarle to other municipalities.

After identifying comparable municipalities, we compared those tax rates to Albemarle. We derived a per capita expenditure level from the budget data we collected. We also included NRPA benchmark per capita spending levels in this analysis. Doing so allows for Albemarle’s budgetary spending to be compared to peer communities in North Carolina and across the country. The City has a per capita spending level that is very close to the national median. Two of the North Carolina communities listed below have lower spending than Albemarle and two have more.

Projected Investment

The chart below shows a five-year projection of parks and recreation spending, if the spending levels remain consistent. These trajectories are a good indicator for the quality of life in a community.

Per Capita Spending Comparison



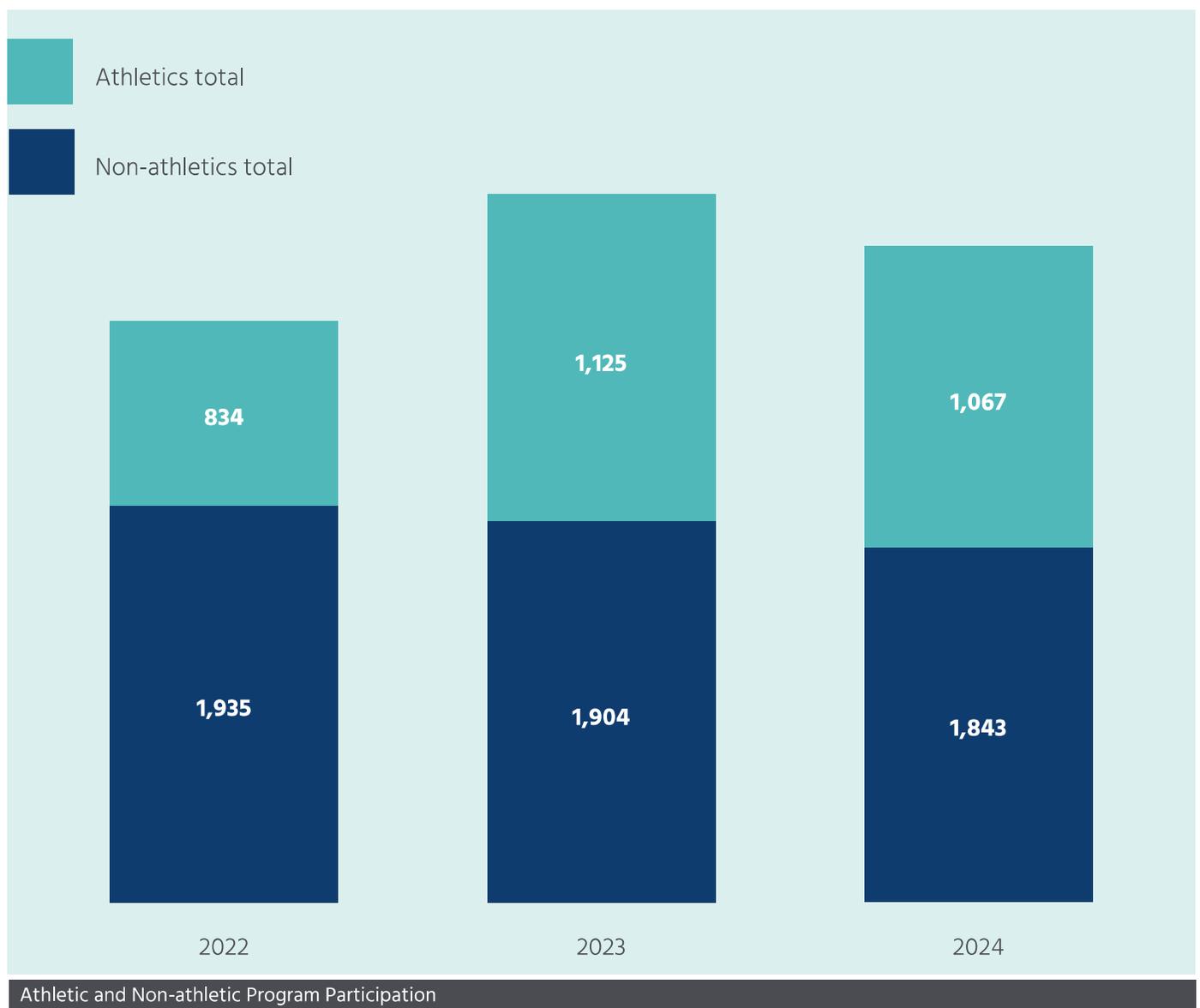
Information was obtained from Census Reporter, who uses sources; it is data from the US Census.

Program Analysis

Park usage analysis is a helpful way to understand what general area park users are coming from. We analyzed the last three years of recreation registration numbers to understand the trends in Albemarle’s programming.

First, we found that on the surface, recreation program trends have been steady over the past couple years. There have been annual fluctuations that are normal. The department also has a healthy blend of athletic and non-athletic programs. These programs do not account for the entire programmatic catalogue of the department. A snapshot of 2024 special events depict a recreation department with a very robust outreach into the community at large. As recreation data is further explored, trends emerge. See the charts below and on the next few pages to see glimpses of athletic events, non-athletic events, and annual program participation.

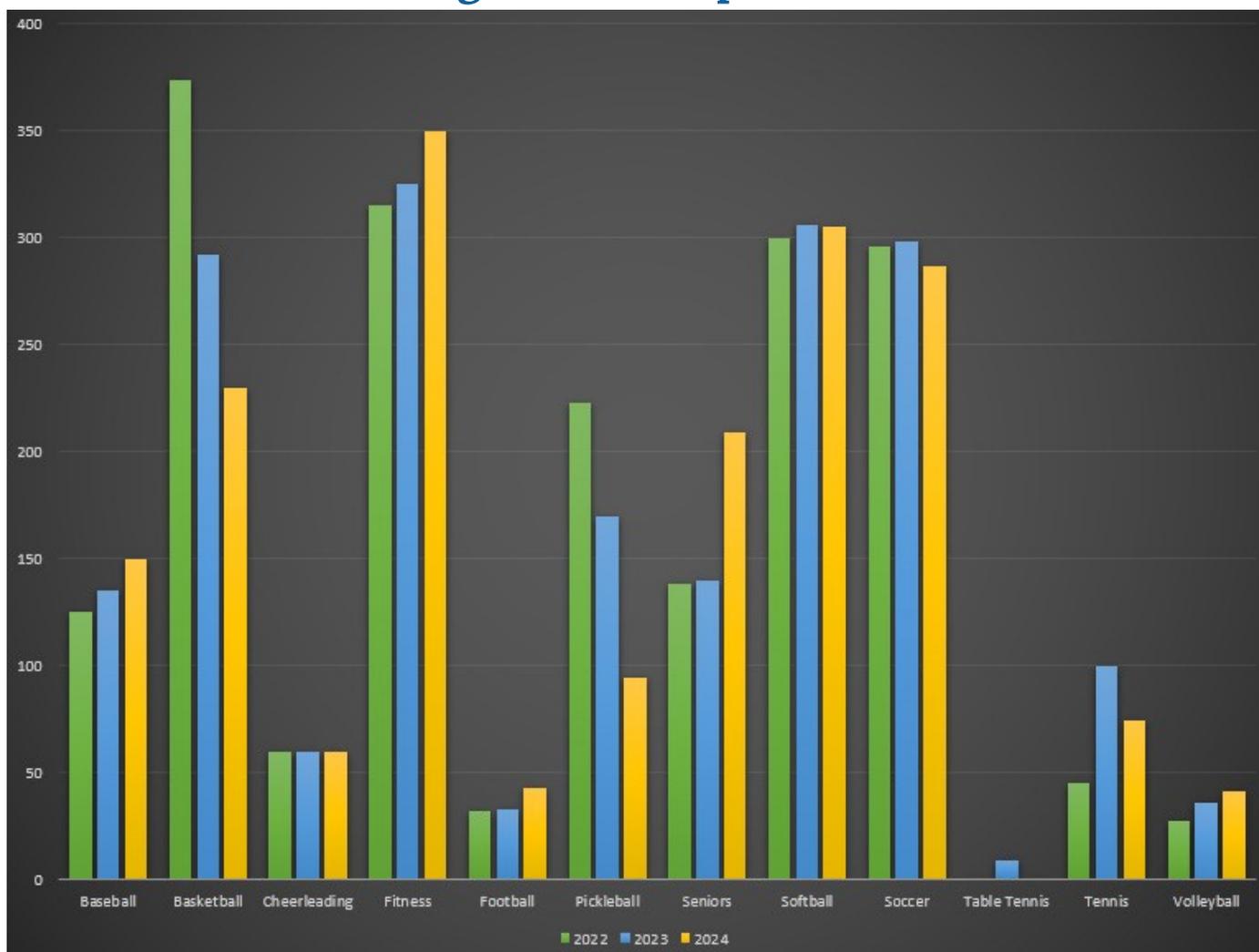
Overview of Annual Program Participation



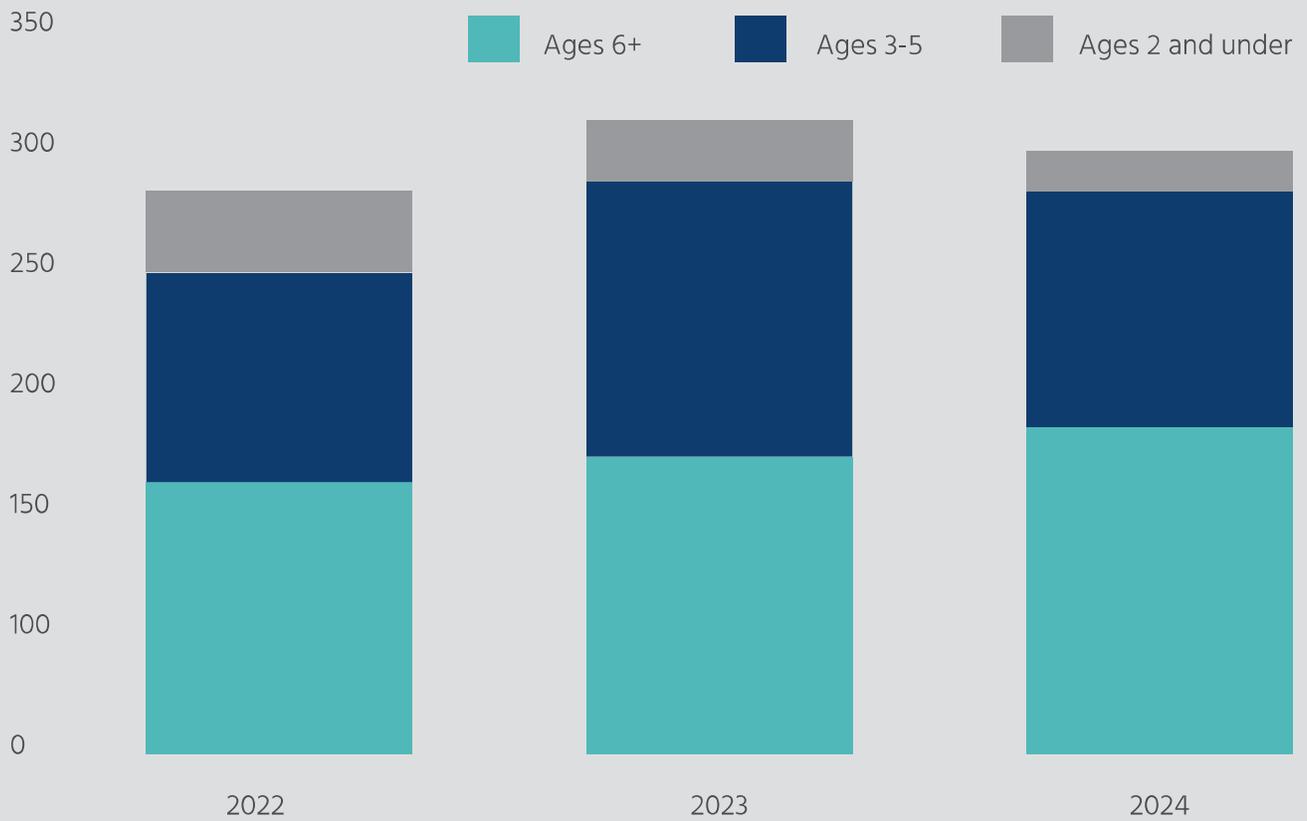
Athletic Program Trends

- Basketball program participation is trending downward, which is largely attributed to a decline in participation in the men’s basketball league. The winter and spring leagues have declined the past three years
- Pickleball leagues and lessons are seeing a multi-year decline
- Baseball, volleyball, and fitness-related programs are seeing steady increases in participation
- Softball and soccer leagues have plateaued at very high levels, which suggests a plateau of interest
- Swim lessons have generally plateaued, which might be related to facilities, since Albemarle have two swimming pools but probably only needs one
- Adventure programming is slowly declining, and programs that involve off-site trips are seeing steady or slightly increased participation. Programs related to the challenge course are seeing declined use

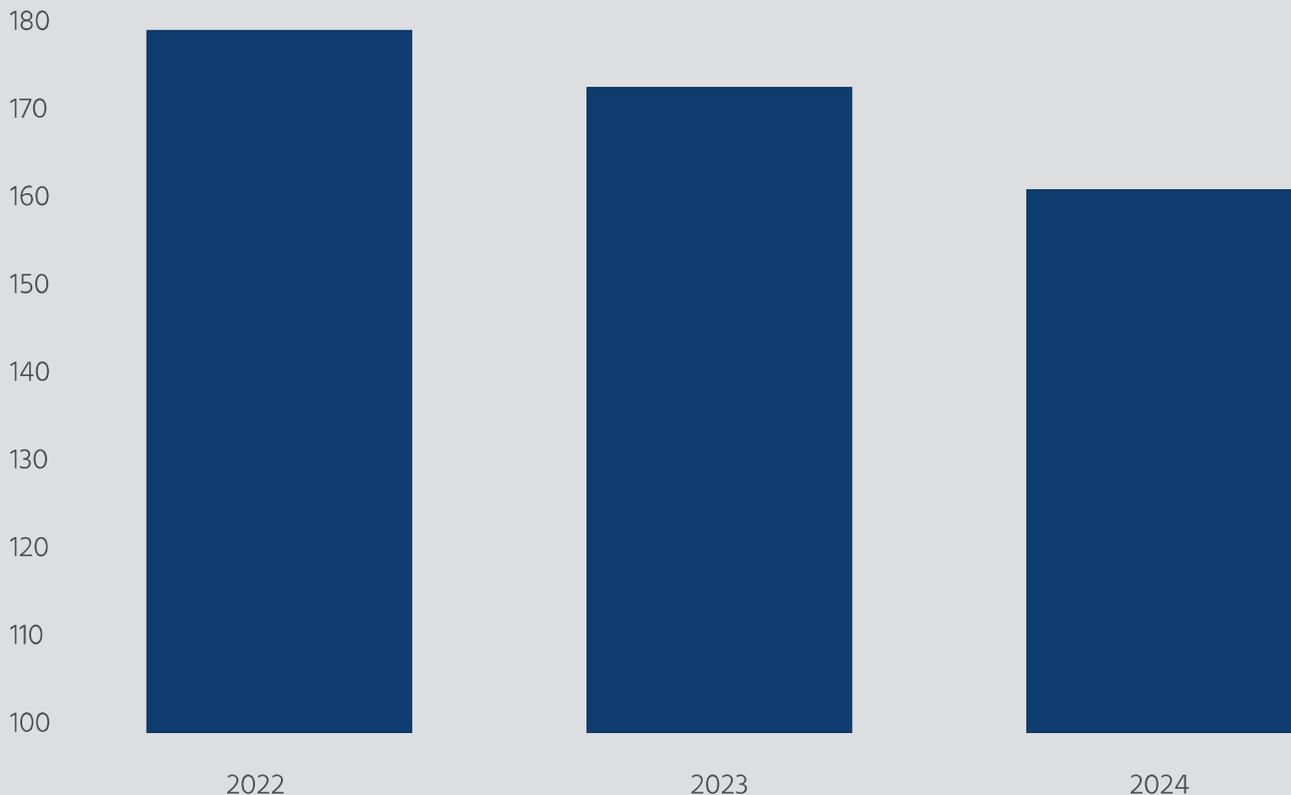
3 Year Recreation Program Participation Trends



Swim Lessons



Adventure Programs



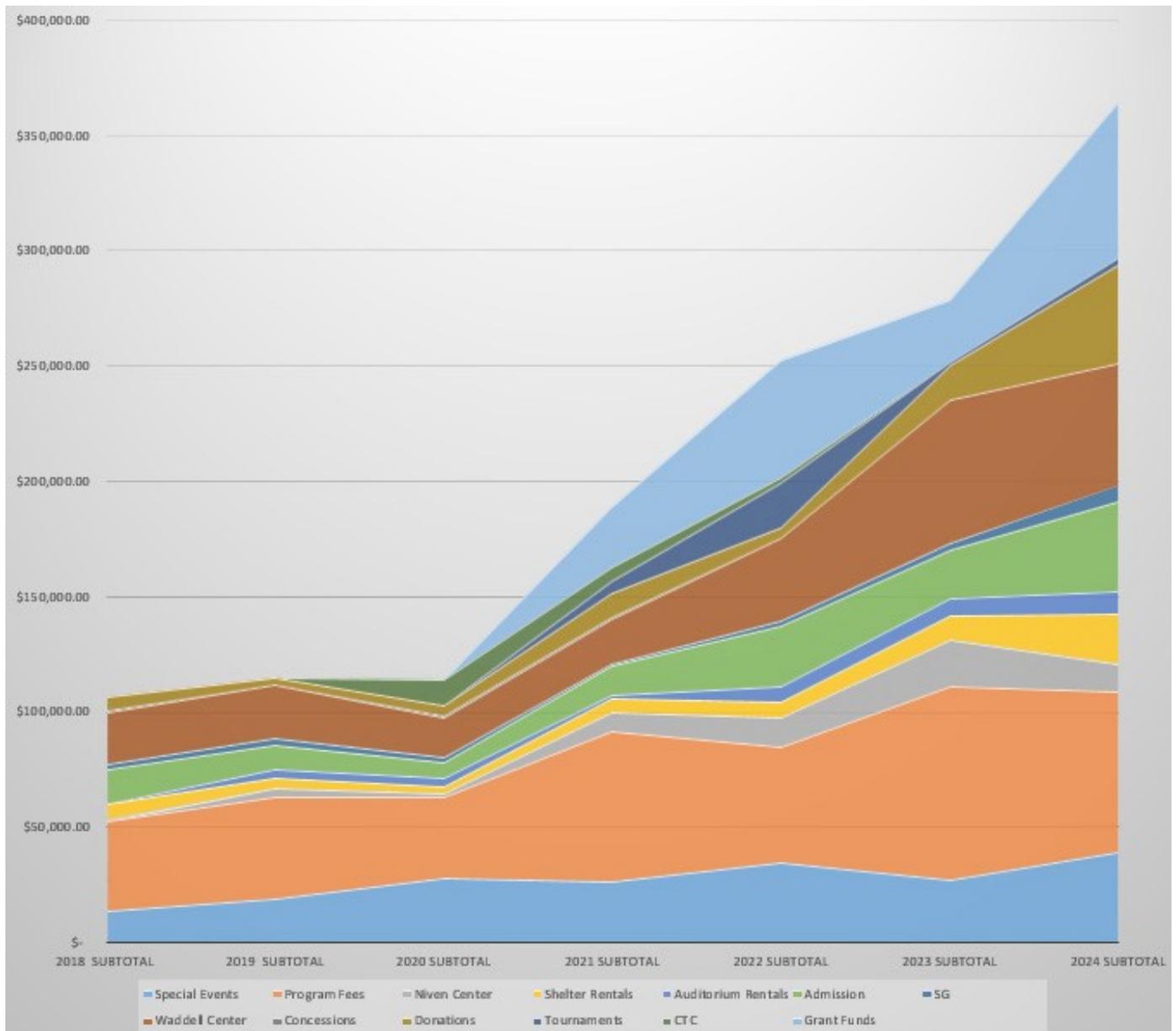
Revenue Analysis

We conducted a revenue analysis for Albemarle’s system offerings, which resulted in useful information. First, we did an analysis that examined the different channels and trends of parks and recreation revenue. With the revenue histogram, we found the department has been making dramatic improvements to its revenue levels since 2020. We cross examined the data with 2024 to better understand which revenue channels were performing the best.

Critical Finding

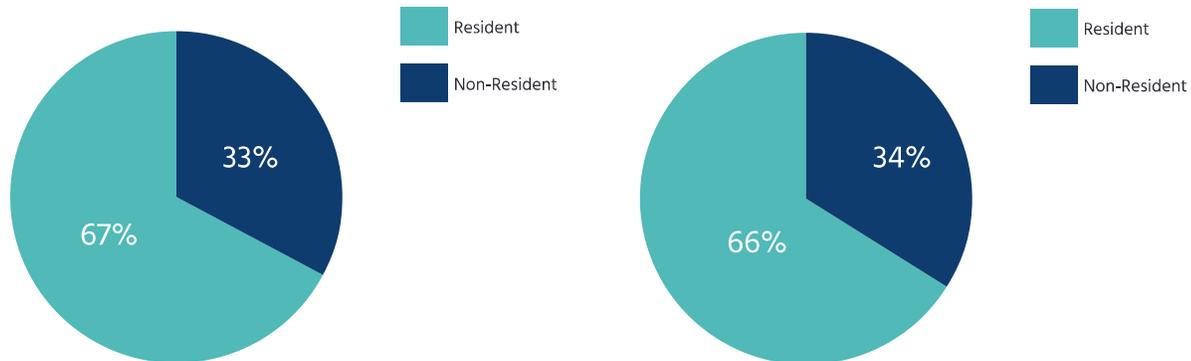
Approximately 1/3 of Albemarle’s program revenue comes from non-resident users. This revenue is generally not enough to fully cover staff time and the wear and tear on the facilities.

Revenue Histogram

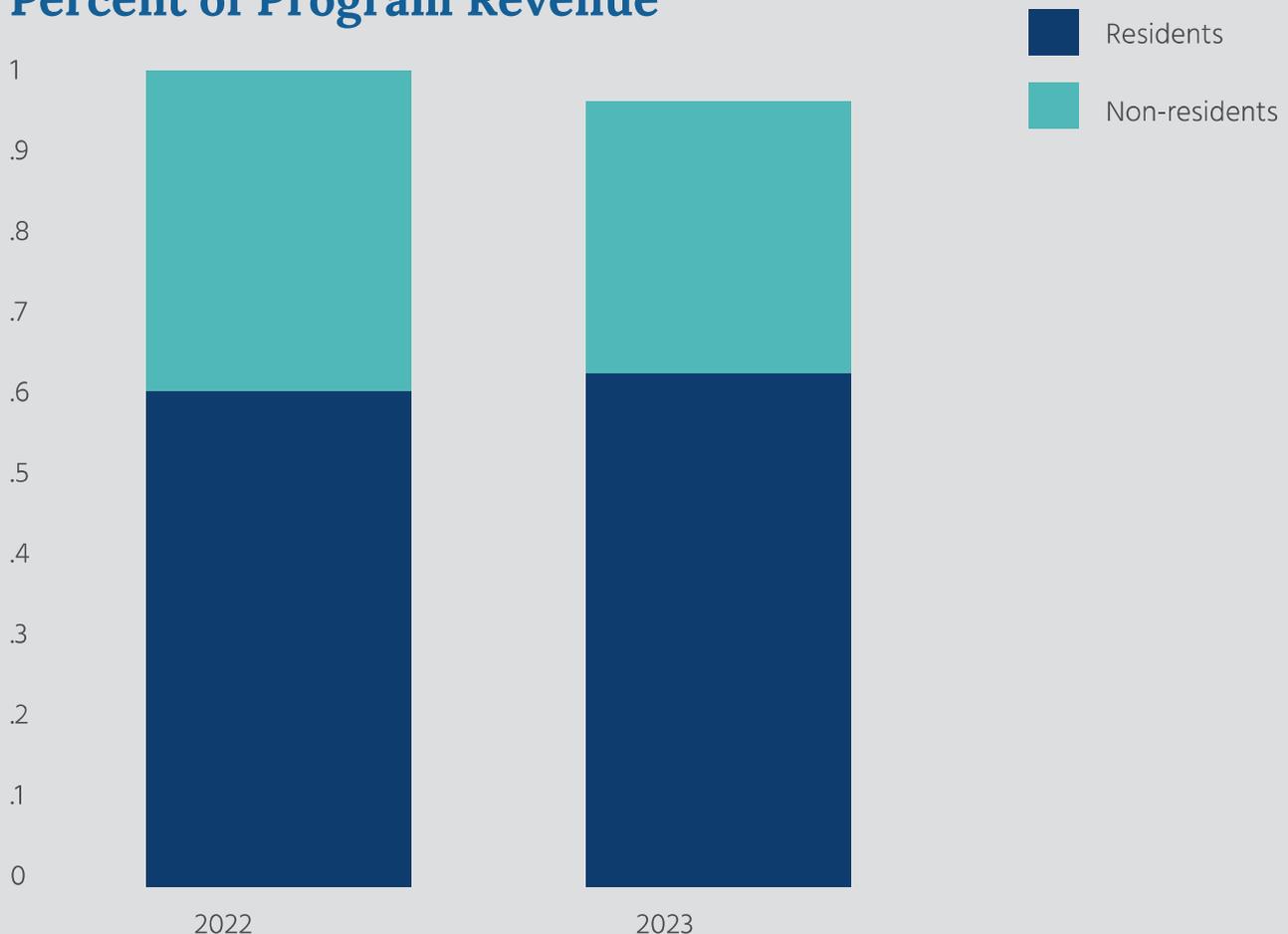


The breakdown below is helpful for understanding that the largest revenue driver is recreation program fees. The three largest areas for revenue are, in this order, program fees, grant funds, and the EE Waddell Center. It is important to notice that tournaments are ranked last with no revenue and concessions, which is not surprising. The City has no facilities that are designed to host tournaments with concessions. Finally, the data shows that the City sees a lot of non-residents use its programs. When comparing how much of the program revenue is coming from residents versus non-residents, we found a consistent trend that one-third of program participants are not Albemarle residents.

Revenue Trends



Percent of Program Revenue



Evaluation of Staffing Needs

A successful parks and recreation department is determined by its people. From the parks and recreation director to athletic specialists to maintenance staff, the department needs to work together to provide quality offerings to the community and visitors. The key maintenance responsibilities of a parks and recreation department include, but are not limited to, operating and maintaining parks and recreation facilities; providing recreational programs and services; maintaining budgetary responsibilities that match the needs of the City; and planning, managing, and hosting special events.

Parks and recreation departments continue to face a multitude of growing market demands, ranging from providing a superior participant experience, addressing the needs of residents, capital development project management, keeping up with changing industry regulatory requirements, and attracting and retaining the best possible employees. Challenges, such as cost recovery, participant retention, expenditure reduction, brand awareness, consistency, and technology applications, can present an opportunity to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery. As the only municipal department where patrons can choose to spend their disposable income, parks and recreation departments must develop a service industry business approach to delivering services for maximum efficiency.

Currently, the parks and recreation department is led by the director with support from an assistant director and parks superintendent. The assistant director manages the department's programmatic operations, and the parks superintendent manages parks and facilities.

NRPA metrics based on Albemarle's estimated population shows what municipal systems of similar size have similar staffing systems.

Albemarle's staffing needs will be influenced by population growth, demographics, available tax monies, and tourism growth. Staff compensation should be based on market precedents and should match maintenance requirements. The maintenance standard should be continued or increased. Leadership should consider the budgetary impacts of adding recreation staff should before committing to constructing new parks.

Unique Staffing Impacts

Based on NRPA metrics-based data

1. 48% of comparable departments have a pool. Albemarle has two pools.
2. 7% of comparable departments have an indoor performing arts center.
3. 39% of similar-sized departments have tournament / sport venues. Albemarle does not.

Current Staffing

Maintenance Staff: Currently, the maintenance team is understaffed for the workload, particularly during the peak months of April through November. It seems that adding one crew with two workers and one supervisor would help manage the workload the City currently has.

Recreation Staff: The current gap of mid-level managers creates an operational gap, which results in no buffer between the director and front line staff; this requires the director to coordinate special events, which is atypical for a department of Albemarle’s size.

Seasonal Workload Management: The workload increases significantly during peak months, but the staffing level does not increase with that workload. This uneven dynamic complicates the efforts to fully keep a system functioning.

A Staff Always Striving to Keep Up

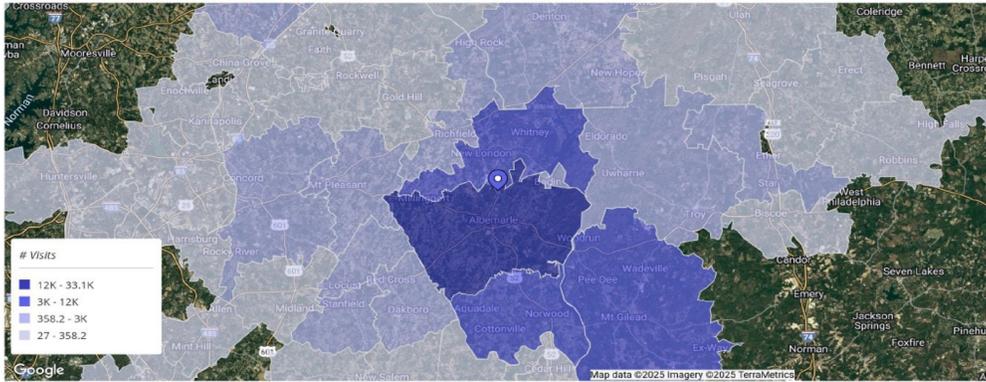
Albemarle’s parks and recreation department is operating without a staff buffer, which means that if there is a staff absence due to sickness, vacation, weather, or having to train new members, there are generally delays. This ongoing challenge leaves little time for meaningful improvements to the park system, which can negatively impact operations and staff morale over time. Additionally, aging facilities require more maintenance, which adds to the issue. According to Placer AI data analysis, Albemarle also serves as the de facto County recreation department, which caters to a significant number of non-city residents. This means the programming staff is responsible for coordinating with coaches, parents, fields, and events.

Staff Responsibilities





Data based on City of Albemarle's Placer AI data



- **Chuck Morehead Park**
1910 Northwoods Lane, Albemarle, NC 28001
- **Rock Creek Park**
100 Rock Creek Dr, Albemarle, NC 28001

Examples park visitor base

