



## 07 | Parks and Recreation Recommendations

---

## Parks and Recreation Recommendations

The best way to develop the future of a community's parks and recreation offerings is to listen to the community and understand what has and has not worked in the past. After discovering who the community is and what facilities / programs exist, you can consider the needs of the residents and staff. By analyzing area recreation trends, having open conversations with residents, gathering public input, considering national benchmarks, gleaning input from staff and leaders, and making site observations, a picture of the best way to move forward will form. The recommendations in this section reflect a strategic approach for addressing these needs.

## Understanding the Difference Between Recommendations and Best Practices

### Recommendations

These are specific, actionable goals that will directly or indirectly relate to the community's expressed needs and observations of the parks and recreation department. These items are more specific in nature and, in this plan, they will be prioritized in order of importance.

### Best Practices

These are more general in nature. While many may be related to the City's community desires, these are commonly-held practices that can be found in various parks and recreation departments across the County. These are usually addressed over a long period of time.

At times, a recommendation serves as the catalyst to help a department build a best practice. With that, there is sometimes a gray area between them.

## Recommendations Timeline

Unlike best practices, recommendations are broken down into a general time frame. In this section, we address the recommendations topically. In the next section, we provide a strategic and chronological approach to the recommendations from this section.

The time frame for the recommendations is the following:

- **Immediate Needs (0-12 months):** These items should be started immediately due to their impact and the risk that could present itself. Ideally these items will start within the first calendar year after this plan's adoption.
- **Short-Range Needs (1-3 years):** These needs are highly important, but they may require additional planning, consensus, funding, or other considerations in order to begin.
- **Mid-Range Needs (4-7 years):** These needs might require significantly more resources and may not meet as many of the prioritized community needs.
- **Long-Range Needs (8-10 years):** These are critical needs that require a long-term strategy or funding. These are also probably not a high priority desire of the community.

## Contingent Factors

It is common for items in the mid- or long-range categories to address community needs. However, at time these critical needs cannot be immediately addressed because their actions are contingent on steps that were completed previously.

For example, you might urgently need a new park, but the item is listed as a mid-range need because there currently is not land in the geographic area where the park is needed. This approach will be made more clear in the action plan.

## Recommended Level of Service

Amenity	Metrics-based Needs Range* (estimated pop. of 18,995 in 2035)	Current Owned / Service Level	Community Input Interest Level	Recommended Number to be Developed by 2035
Baseball / softball fields	7-10	4	High	3
Multipurpose Field	6-8	5	High	3
Basketball Courts (dedicated)	3-4	1	High	3
Community Gardens	1-2	1	Medium	0
Pickleball (dedicated)	2-6	10	Low	0
Tennis / pickleball	2-4	6	Low	0
Multi-use Courts	2-4	0	Low	0
Golf Courses	0-1	0	Low	0
Playground	6-10	5	Medium	1
Inclusive Playgrounds	1-2	0	Medium	1
Dog Park	1-2	1	Low	0
Recreation Center (and gym)	1-2	1	Medium	0
Community Center (no gym)	1-2	1	Medium	0
Performance Amphitheater	0-1	2	Low	0
Nature Center	0-1	0	Medium	0
Aquatic Center	1	2	Low	0**
Stadiums	1	1	Low	0
Teen Center	1	0	Medium	1

Table 5.3 | \* Metrics derived from 2024 NRPA agency performance data | \*\* Remove one pool and add one splash pad

in range
  not in range
  above range

## Categories of Impact

The recommendations listed below are typically presented to help local leaders understand themes and their related needs. These areas of impact seek to address the wide range of operations and challenges that modern parks and recreation agencies face.

### Access

Access to parks and recreation facilities can significantly impact the health and well-being of a community. These spaces and programs should aim to serve an entire community. Albemarle’s park system has a lot to offer; however, the system needs to be updated for modern accessibility. Albemarle is not unique in this need, as many recreation departments across the state are grappling with the realization that the facilities in their system are generally developed for able-bodied users and need to be updated to better serve all people.

Number	Action Item	Description	Need Type
1	Access		
1.1	Accessible routes	ADA transition plan that includes, but is not limited to, routes, parking, and facility improvements.	Immediate

### Best Practice

Every park and recreation facility should respect and provide for the needs of those with disabilities. All new facilities should be designed to meet ADA requirements. The department should continually take steps to meet or exceed compliance with all ADA regulations. As new facilities are developed or acquired, the priority should be placed on upgrading facilities that have become non-compliant.

## Budgetary

Recreation budgets are the funding engine for serving resident and visitor needs. No budgets are exactly the same, and adjustments should be made, as needed, to better align with the community's requested investments. Albemarle's budget generally aligns with the national average, but it has an above average amount of parkland. Additionally, Stanly County does not offer recreation services, and data shows that Albemarle's parks and recreation offerings are a major provider to non-City residents. Combined, these items place long-range strain on Albemarle's parks and recreation programs, staff, and facilities. How the County chooses to help its municipalities, if it chooses to do so, will shape the quality of life for the foreseeable future. Similarly, how the City serves and takes advantage of the opportunities that arise from visitors can benefit the City as a whole.

Number	Action Item	Description	Need Type
2	Budgetary		
2.1	Increase the budget to account for visitors	Albemarle's park system serves a lot of visitors. The budget should be increased so that the parks system can positively and effectively serve residents and tourists.	Short-range
2.2	Non-resident fees	Consider raising non-resident fees to cover their impact on usage and participation. In-lieu of increasing non-resident fees, Stanly County could provide funding assistance to the City. A fee study should be conducted on a regular basis.	Immediate
2.3	Seek County funding for facility support	Non-resident program fees are not enough to cover staffing and facility maintenance. Without some financial support from the County, the City will continue shouldering the impacts from non-resident use.	Immediate

## Environmental

Within a local government setting, few departments can inform the local community about natural resources as well as the parks and recreation department. A department can utilize environmental resources and develop facilities to educate the community. For Albemarle, how the City chooses to develop the Wiscassett Property will impact the quality of life for residents; however, understanding environmental challenges at this property are key to understanding the next steps for strategic growth.

Number	Action Item	Description	Need Type
3	Environmental		
3.1	Environmental assessment of Wiscassett Property	A phase 1 environmental assessment of the Wiscassett Property will determine what kind of park the site is suitable for.	Immediate
3.2	Environmental education signage	There should be more environmental education signage around the park.	Long-range

## Best Practice

The department should implement green building components into the existing and future park facilities when cost-effective and economically feasible. Green building techniques consist of using materials and construction practices that reduce environmental impacts (greenhouse gases, water pollution, and air pollution). These efforts will improve environmental stewardship for park facilities and educate park users.

## Facilities

The type and function of the facilities in a park system set the foundation for how well an agency will serve residents and visitors. For example, a community might have a need for pickleball because it does not have the adequate facilities. It is worth noting that community needs are constantly changing, so it is important for parks and recreation agencies to shift the offerings over time as well. Finally, facilities have a useful life expectancy, and while renovation and retrofitting can extend the life of facilities, failing to take action can cause a myriad of other issues, which can portray the community in a negative light.

Like many parks and recreation systems, Albemarle has grown organically over time. Park development and expansion has been more opportunistic than strategically planned. Over the next decade, the City should focus on aligning the recreation offerings with the community needs instead of focusing only on a more traditional mindset. While there will likely be apprehension from long-term residents who might not like the way the community is changing, the alternative is a misaligned system with many residents who do not feel that their needs are being met.

Number	Action Item	Description	Need Type
4	Facilities		
4.1	Arts and design facility	The parks system should have an arts and design studio.	Long-range
4.2	Centralize athletic facilities	The athletic facilities should be more concentrated to improve maintenance efficiency and to serve the community in a more practical way.	Short-range
4.3	Reduce duplicate offerings	By having two pools, the City is duplicating an offering. The City should phase out of using the pool at Rock Creek Park and concentrate its efforts to improve the offering at Chuck Morehead Park.	Mid-range

## Existing Facilities Recommendations

Noted below is each park in the system and the general recommendations for each site. More specific recommendations and the opinion of probable cost are noted in the next section.

Park	Park Specific Recommendations
Albemarle Neighborhood Theater	This facility was renovated in 2018 and is in good condition. We recommend the greenroom area be expanded in the future, but not within the next ten years.
Albemarle Soccer Complex	We do not recommend that the City invest in this site because it is owned by the community college. This site is designed like an overflow facility for an athletic complex / stop-gap measure for multi-purpose fields rather than a park.
City Lake Park	This park should have a site specific master plan that focuses on updating the park and creating an opportunity for full, hook-up campground with RV's, cabins, and yurts and related amenities.
Chuck Morehead Park	This site needs to have its tennis courts resurfaced soon. As a mid-range need, this park would benefit from a site redevelopment plan. This site could move toward becoming the sole location with a swimming pool, which would require the bathhouse to be renovated. The swimming pool could have cabanas to provide shade and could be rented for parties and small gatherings. Should the Wiscassett Property be developed into a multi-sports complex, the front of the park could take on a different purpose.
Don Montgomery / Optimist Park	These ballfields are tied to the interest in the Wiscassett site. If the Wiscassett Property can be developed into a multi-faceted community park with athletic fields and community spaces, then these fields should be incorporated into the planning of a larger site. Regardless of the Wiscassett Property, this park needs to have more formalized parking and updates to the landscaping. The landscaping should include a visual, vegetative buffer between the park and the electrical substation.
EE Waddell Center	There are structural cracks in the gym walls, which need to be assessed. The events hosting area should also be updated, as should the kitchen area so that the site can host educational / life skills cooking classes. This site should also have a landscaping / planting plan since there are so many rentals. This site has the ability to portray Albemarle in a positive light if used correctly due to its heavy usage.
Hearne Park	This small park could be maintained through partnership with a volunteer group, like scouts or a garden club. Limited financial assistance, likely through landscaping or hardscaping, would help make this transition smoother and could promote volunteerism and community bonding.
Niven Center	A site-specific master plan is recommended for this site. Currently, the space is being used in an insufficient way. Realigning the maintenance facilities and redesigning the paved area behind the center might provide more space for a broader, recreational use of the site.
Rock Creek Park	This site needs a park specific master plan. If by the time this site is being planned, the Wiscassett Property has a splash pad and the pool at Chuck Morehead has been improved, then we recommend the pool shift to not being used for aquatics. If Wiscassett does not have a splash pad, the pool should be converted to a splash pad.
Wiscassett Property	We recommend a phase 1 environmental assessment for this site to determine what type of park is suitable for the site. These findings will indicate if the site can offer active recreation, passive recreation, or a combination of both. The site would be best used for active recreation that has baseball and softball fields. The site should also offer communal spaces that can host special events and festivals. The site's central location is ideal for developing a splash pad. The planning of this site should incorporate what is happening at Don Montgomery / Optimist Park so that all three can form one big "central park." The City should consider connecting this site to greenways that provide access to downtown so that park users can easily support businesses and economic development.

## Maintenance

Maintaining recreation facilities is a major pillar of operations. While people are often drawn to recreation facilities because of events, programs, or marketing, the upkeep of maintenance items is what gives users an impression of the park and determines, in some cases, if they will return. Proper maintenance directly impacts the lifecycle of a park system. As previously stated, Albemarle parks and recreation is serving more than just the City residents, and because of this, the park system is essentially being loved to death. The department needs to move beyond day-to-day maintenance tasks to form an operational system that steadily improves the assets.

Number	Action Item	Description	Need Type
5	Maintenance		
5.1	Improving curb appeal	The City should recognize that the first impression people have of its parks will impact how the parks are visited and returned to. Parks should be as inviting and as attractive as possible.	Short-range
5.2	Increase major maintenance	All assets over \$5,000 should be inventoried. This includes items like HVAC units, park vehicles, maintenance equipment, repaving park areas, facility painting, fencing, lighting, and other similar items.	Short-range
5.3	Reconfigure / update the maintenance facilities	The maintenance area at the Niven Center is diffused across a large area. Finding a better way to organize the maintenance buildings, amenities, and facilities could open up the area behind the Niven Center for more programmatic use. Fencing, visual buffering, and safety precautions must be considered for this opportunities.	Long-range

## Best Practice

Parks and recreation departments should develop a maintenance plan that supports departmental facilities and operations. Staffing, policies, and schedules should support these efforts, and developing larger parks at fewer locations is one way to show support. This allows the department to concentrate its maintenance efforts in fewer places, which is more effective in the long run.

Establishing an optimal time that it takes to complete regular maintenance items can help with benchmarking operational efficiency as well as setting goals and targets for new staff. While not all maintenance practices are well-suited for time, the following are: mowing time per park, restroom cleaning time, trash pick-up route time, and athletic field preparation time. Planning out the projected time can help staff set realistic expectations.

GIS informed maintenance routing is a process where GIS can help map out the most efficient travel route between parks. This analysis, if done periodically, can minimize the window of time it takes for maintenance staff to travel, which puts more time toward improving the park system. Many local governments have GIS staff to conduct this routing internally, and the process is relatively simple.

## Marketing

The hallmark of successful parks and recreation marketing is that community members can find out about programs, events, and new facilities in a variety of ways. Strong marketing efforts can also help build a sense of community within the municipality as well as broadcast events and activities to non-residents. Marketing practices frequently change as new technologies and creative trends emerge.

Albemarle’s marketing is adequate, but it does not take advantage of the department’s opportunity to project the message that the City is inviting and open to new residents and visitors. The current marketing lacks a unified brand that is consistent across all parks and offerings. The City should also consider expanding its events offerings because they have been well-received by the community.

Number	Action Item	Description	Need Type
6	Marketing		
6.1	Park renaming considerations	The Don Montgomery and Optimist Park fields should keep their respective names but also be contained within a park that has one name. We recommend timing this around the development of the Wiscasset Property.	Mid-range
6.2	Program banners	Uniform marketing banners should be placed in high traffic locations.	Short-range
6.3	Rebranding efforts	A rebranding effort can ensure the City’s parks are refined and uniform, which can convey a positive message to park and City visitors. The department should pursue uniform branding and standards.	Immediate
6.4	Park signage	Currently, there is not uniform signage within the park system. Moving forward, all parks should have signs that are uniform and aligned with the departmental brand standards.	Immediate

## Best Practice

Parks and recreation facilities are an invaluable asset to any community. The need to provide public awareness for recreation opportunities is just as important as provided the necessary facilities. Departments should regularly assess their marketing campaigns to improve their understanding of park facilities and programs. Departments should also strive to pursue more options for raising awareness through social media, special events at lesser known facilities, and signage that directs visitors to the parks as growth continues. Additionally, departments should seek partnerships with local chambers of commerce, tourism development authorities, and real estate groups to help these partners communicate the quality of life enhancements and attractive parks.

## Organizational

Albemarle’s parks and recreation department is organizationally sound, but it would benefit from the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Agency Accreditation. However, Albemarle’s low staffing levels currently prohibit the key department leadership from realistically being able to pursue this accreditation.

Number	Action Item	Description	Need Type
7	Organizational		
7.1	Outdoor recreation economy	The department should develop RV camping and cabins within the park system. The revenue from these efforts should be used as an enterprise fund that can continually improve the park system.	Mid-range

## Best Practice

NRPA helps departments evaluate their operational practices and compare them to other departments around the Country. This information sharing process provides an objective perspective and can be a catalyst for modernization and improved efficiency.

NRPA notes that the “Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) delivers quality assurance and improvement to accredited park and recreation departments throughout the United States. This operational management system improves their infrastructure, increases efficiency in all activities, and demonstrates accountability within their communities. Implementation of this system strengthens teamwork among department staff, embeds all aspects of CAPRA into their department’s internal culture, and establishes a continuous improvement mindset for all department activities.”

Source and for more information, visit: <https://www.nrpa.org/certification/accreditation/CAPRA/>

## Parkland

Albemarle’s parkland is generally adequate with very few areas of the City that do not offer overlapping service areas; however, further developing the downtown would significantly strengthen the City’s recreation offerings. For example, most of the special events near downtown are located on streets, which is suitable for some events but not concerts, outdoor movies, or larger events that need more space. Adding park amenities should be seen as a way to expand the City’s capacity, serve residents, and draw a larger crowd to area businesses.

We do not recommend any new park units as the residential areas are generally well-served by what currently exists. The existing conditions map demonstrates what parks we recommend for the next ten years. Developing the Wiscassett Property should be seen as an expansion of an existing parkland, which is a strategic land banking investment action.

Number	Action Item	Description	Need Type
8	Parkland		
8.1	Downtown connectivity	An attractive and intentional corridor should connect the Wiscassett Property, Don Montgomery Park, and Optimist Park. The current Long Creek Greenway is generally hidden from view and is need of signage.	Short-range
8.2	Focus on eastern Albemarle	Eastern Albemarle is a geographic area in need of park opportunities. The Niven Center is currently being underutilized. A shift in the use of this property could better serve Eastern Albemarle.	Long-range

## Best Practice

Many departments develop an inventory of the significant natural and cultural heritage at park sites. This information can help the department incorporate the information into park planning, direct visitors toward areas of interest, and protect significant areas from exposure that could be detrimental.

## Partnerships

Parks and recreation departments should not operate in a vacuum. The department should intentionally coordinate with local schools, other municipalities, and planning departments. All recreation stakeholders should participate and provide input on plans and system expansions. Representatives from the local governments and other parks and recreation agencies should periodically meet up to discuss the projects that are planned or underway. When state and federal entities are serving the local population, those agencies should be included in conversations as well.

Albemarle’s recreation department has the opportunity to enhance its notability and offerings through strategic partnerships. Private-public partnership discussions are commonplace in parks and recreation development; however, Albemarle will need to avoid the pitfall of seeing private-public partnerships as a way to supplant true community investment. Partnerships are important but they are hard to secure and happen infrequently.

Number	Action Item	Description	Need Type
9	Partnerships		
9.1	Arts and culture partnerships	The department should offer more arts and cultural programs. This should be done in coordination with the Arts Council.	Mid-range
9.2	Private-public partnerships	Partnerships should be used to expand, maintain, or terminate private-public ventures, as needed. The City should regularly evaluate all ventures to ensure they are a good use of park property.	Short-range
9.3	Visitor impact meetings	The parks and recreation department should regularly meet with the Economic Development Commission, Visit Stanly County, and the Downtown Development board	Immediate

### Best Practice

Most departments have a community college or university in the area. Hosting interns from local colleges and universities is a great way to develop a partnership. Interns from the following fields are most beneficial to a parks and recreation department: parks and recreation programming, marketing, horticulture, turf grass management, public health, public policy, physical therapy, art, design, businesses, planning, sustainable tourism, and photography / videography.

Developing a robust intern pool provides valuable education experiences for students and continually brings new and innovative ideas to parks and recreation agencies.

## Policy

Albemarle has many great parks, some of which are well-suited to attract visitors and revenue, and the City is close to several major outdoor recreation areas in the state. We recommend that the City create departmental policies to differentiate the strategic purpose of the different parks. Departmental policy can also help the City grow the tourism industry as the role of the parks is defined.

Number	Action Item	Description	Need Type
10	Policy		
10.1	Enterprise parks	Parks that are able to generate income, like City Lake Park, should be developed to promote this, as it can help attract visitors and boost the economy through revenue stream.	Mid-range
10.2	Visitor growth policy development	All facilities should be developed with residents in mind, but the tourist / visitor population should also be considered. The department should set annual goals to increase visitorship.	Short-range

## Programs

Parks and recreation programs play a significant role in establishing the quality of life in a community. Just like the facilities and amenities need to evolve over time to meet community needs, the parks and recreation department needs to evolve as well.

There are significant demands for Albemarle's parks and recreation department to offer more programs, expand the current programs, and attract more volunteers. These items should be the main focus area; however, these items are contingent on having additional staff for support.

Number	Action Item	Description	Need Type
11	Programs		
11.1	Offer more non-athletic programs	The City should expand its non-athletic offerings to include arts, culinary arts, environmental education, and programs for ages 15-35. Current staffing levels limit the department's ability to meet this need.	Mid-range
11.2	Offer more special events	The City should offer more special events like outdoor movies and concerts. Current staffing levels limit the ability to meet this need.	Mid-range
11.3	Volunteer projects	The City should create structured volunteer projects to engage the community and teach people new skills. Current staffing levels limit the department's ability to coordinate these now.	Long-range

## Safety

Albemarle’s park system has the opportunity to make small modifications that can improve the sense of safety for park users. Our recommended additions are listed in the chart below. Additionally, the department should continue fostering its relationship with local law enforcement, as this relationship can help the department be proactive and vocalize its efforts. Working to keep this partnership strong can help visitors feel safe and welcome at the City’s parks.

Number	Action Item	Description	Need Type
12	Safety		
12.1	Lighting and cameras	The department should update the lighting, cameras, and park user observation.	Short-range
12.2	Police and park dual messaging	The efforts and success of the parks and police department collaboration should be more widely publicized. This effort should be proactive and externally communicated.	Short-range

## Staffing

The role of parks and recreation staff varies significantly from community to community. The mission, vision, and focus of the agency can impact the type of staff that is needed to accomplish the departmental goals. The recommendations listed below account for the current departmental operations as well as the future changes that we recommended in this section.

For Albemarle, staffing levels are one of the most critical barriers to growth and service offerings. The City is serving a high number of residents and visitors; the amount of non-resident visitors bring foot traffic to local businesses and amenities, but the City does not have additional staffing to accommodate the amount of visitors. It would not benefit Albemarle to deter visitors from the City, but the department should try to add more staff members so that there is adequate support to keep up with the use.

Number	Action Item	Description	Need Type
13	Staffing		
13.1	Events and arts programs	There is significant interest in special events like outdoor movies, cultural events, and art programs. Many of these offerings are currently coordinated by the director, which takes away from the time that departmental leadership can spend planning and overseeing the department’s future. A special events coordinator is critically needed.	Short-range
13.2	System improvement maintenance and staff	An additional, smaller, full-time maintenance crew should be added to address minor facility additions, manage renovations, update maintenance items, and complete beautification efforts.	Short-range

## Walkability

Walkability is a universal desire for communities across the country. Communities should encourage the inclusion of public greenways or trails that connect current and future schools, parks, and other public destinations. Departments should also continue to encourage the coordination and planning for future utility easements and road right-of-ways.

Albemarle has a fair level of walkability, and it would be stronger as a result of strategic planning that connected key attractions like the downtown, parks, schools, and other popular destinations. Improving walkability is an opportunity to promote the health and well-being of Albemarle, as it encourages walking or biking over driving.

Number	Action Item	Description	Need Type
14	Walkability		
14.1	Greenway beautification	There should be an effort to beautify the Little Creek Greenway from the Don Montgomery / Optimist Park to the downtown businesses.	Mid-range
14.2	Trails and greenways master plan	The City should spearhead efforts to create a trail and greenways master plan, which should include connecting the City to the Carolina Thread Trail and other area destinations.	Long-range

## Best Practice

The NRPA, the Trust for Public Land (TPL), and the Urban Land Institute (ULI) have partnered to promote safe, equitable park access for United States citizens. The goal is to provide all people with access to quality park and green space within a 10-minute walk of their home by 2050.

A planned network of bike trails, bike lanes, and shared roadways would support active transportation between various destinations in the community. To foster trails and greenways, local governments should require bike racks at publicly-owned facilities as an incentive for people to bike.

## Staffing Analysis Report

Below, we highlight the current staffing situation for the City's parks and recreation department, including deficiencies, areas of concern, and strategic recommendations for improving staff operations, seasonal workloads, enhancing staff motivation, and planning for future facility expansions.

## Current Staffing Levels

### Maintenance Staff

#### Issues

- The maintenance crew is understaffed for the workload, particularly during peak time (April through November)
- The City needs one additional crew that has two workers and one supervisor who can manage the existing and future workloads

#### Recommendations

- Allocate funding for additional crew members (2 workers and 1 supervisor)
- Increase funding for temporary seasonal staff during peak months to match demands
- Conduct a task analysis to see how many staff hours various assignments take
- Rebrand the maintenance division to highlight its critical role and impact on the community

### Recreation Staff

#### Issues

- There is not a special event programmer to coordinate and oversee programming, which places a burden on the director and limits high-level strategic focus
- The lack of a mid-level manager creates an operational gap, which means there is not a buffer between the director and frontline staff

### Recommendations

- Hire a special event programmer so that the director has more time for strategic planning and leadership tasks
- Establish mid-level manager positions as a buffer between the director and supervisors to ensure continuity during staff absence and allow for better delegation
- Develop a succession plan to address the potential staffing gaps and ensure operational consistency

## Seasonal Workload Management

#### Issues

- The workload increases during peak months, but there is not an increase in staff

#### Recommendations

- Increase the budget for hiring temporary, seasonal employees
- Implement partnerships with local agencies or community programs to efficiently source the temporary staff
- Prioritize critical maintenance tasks and outsource non-essential or specialized tasks during the peak months
- Invest in technology and equipment upgrades to reduce the time required to complete routine tasks, which will allow staff to focus on activities with a higher value

## Staff Motivation and Development

#### Issues

- To stay motivated, the staff need to be encouraged, to engage in training, and to experience innovation within their roles

## Recommendations

- Regularly offer training programs to improve staff skills and prepare them for more responsibilities
- Create a mentorship program where senior staff mentor newer staff members
- Launch an internal recognition program to celebrate staff contributions and accomplishments
- Rebrand the maintenance division and highlight their role in enhancing the community's park sustainability and well-being
- Implement performance-based bonuses and incentives to reward staff for exceptional work
- Encourage innovation by creating a platform for staff to propose and implement new ideas

## Planning for Future Facility Expansion

### Issues

- There currently is not a plan that addresses the staffing needs for future facilities

### Recommendations

- Create a staffing projection model that is based on planned facilities and anticipated usage
- Develop funding proposals to secure resources for future staffing needs before the facilities open
- Cross-train existing staff to handle diverse tasks so that there is staffing flexibility as facilities expand
- Partner with local organizations or volunteer groups to supplement staffing needs during the initial phases of facility operations

## Conclusion

The City of Albemarle's parks and recreation department is adequately managing its current operations, but there are significant challenges related to staffing, seasonal workload surges, and a lack of mid-level management. By implementing the recommendations we outlined in this report, which include hiring more staff, rebranding the maintenance division, and establishing proactive plans for future expansions, the department can improve its efficiency, ensure operational continuity, and maintain high levels of service for the community at large.

## Trends to Watch

There are a few major trends that could reshape the landscape of public parks and recreation. Unlike a best practice, which are ideas that have stood the test of time, the success of trends depends on the community and their reception. Departments should consider the way local leaders respond before starting to implement new trends.

### Cell Phone User Data

Cell phone data is proving to be a groundbreaking way of understanding user trends at parks and recreation facilities. This data also shows how users are frequenting local businesses and where the users are coming from, all of which fills in the story of how a community's parks and recreation facilities are being used. Acquiring this data is currently a little expensive, but as more departments adopt this practice, we anticipate the cost will go down. The data is gathered anonymously to protect the privacy of users; however, some people consider this method as intrusive, so the department should make sure they fully understand the process, as well as the pros and cons, before making a commitment.

### Artificial Intelligence

These days, there is an increase in people who are using artificial intelligence (AI). AI can help departments improve their processes in a variety of ways, including programming, operations, and marketing efforts. While we cannot offer best practices yet, this new technology signals that parks and recreation departments should change with the times and strategically incorporate AI.



Albemarle community enjoying live music

**Page Intentionally Left Blank**