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Re: Jasper County Comprehensive Plan: Sub-Task #5: Parks and Recreation Strategy

Gentlemen:

Included below is a rough draft of the parks and recreation section and strategy, as I would like to receive feedback as soon as possible to make the Planning Commission deadline. Please let me know if you have any questions or comments concerning the draft language. Each of the five strategies at the end will be reflected in the table at the end of the chapter.

7.7 PARKS AND RECREATION

Parks and recreation areas are important community assets as they provide: needed open space for residents to enjoy; recreational activities to promote and active lifestyle; and green space to maintain the County's appearance. Nationally and locally, outdoor recreation is receiving increased attention across growing communities similar to Jasper County. The main challenge is to keep pace with demand and to allocate resources to continually maintain facilities for County residents and visitors. Substantial population growth, combined with the changing demographic composition of Jasper County's residents, can be considered primary factors impacting recreation trends and needs.

The purpose of this section is to consider outdoor recreation issues relating to the needs of both residents and visitors to Jasper County, examine recreational resources, analyze demand for future recreational opportunities and develop a general strategy moving forward.

GENERAL FACILITY TYPES

There are a variety of park types that are considered in future planning efforts. For the purposes of a higher-level Comprehensive Plan, the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) has developed a park classification system which is presented below:

Mini: Small, specialized parks that serve the needs of residents in the surrounding neighborhood. Provides daily places for those who cannot travel. Service area- ¼ mile, setting- residential, typical size- 2,500 s.f. to 1 acre.

Neighborhood: Multi-purpose facilities that serve as a local recreational and social focus. Provides both active and passive recreation. Service area- ¼ to ½ mile, setting- away from main roads, typical size- 5-10 acres.

Community: Meets larger, community-wide needs. Preserves unique landscapes and open spaces. Service area- ½ to 3 miles, setting- varies, typical size- 30-50 acres.

School: Facilities located on public school property. Generally used for school athletic programs but are also open to the public.

Natural Resource Areas: Lands set aside for preservation due to significant natural resources, landscapes or aesthetics. May be used for passive recreation.

Greenways: Linear parks generally measured in feet/miles rather than acres. Can link parks together to create a continuous park.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

There are a number of recreational facilities available in Jasper County, among which are the County-owned boat landings, community centers, and playgrounds. In terms of facility types, County owned sites can be considered mini or neighborhoods parks, depending on size and amenities. Larger properties, such as Sergeant Jasper Park, can be considered community parks, serving a larger need. Considering the size of Sergeant Jasper Park, portions of its natural land can also be considered natural resources areas, for passive recreation, such as hiking. This park has 321 acres of beautiful nature scenery with walking trails, kayak and canoe rentals, a playground, ample fishing opportunities and an 18-hole championship disc golf course. There is a picnic shelter and an attractive banquet room that can be rented.

Recreational programs are run by the County's Parks and Recreation Department, the local schools, civic organizations, and some community centers. Programs include youth soccer, football, basketball and occasional cross country running races.

In recent years, the Parks and Recreation Department has completed a number of improvement projects, including:

Sergeant Jasper Trail: A State of South Carolina Parks and Recreation Grant was awarded for a trail expansion and boardwalk project.

The Sarge Disc Golf Course Improvements: The disc golf course has been expanded to include new tees and equipment.

Community Centers: ??

Other: ?? Additional County input needed.

A partial listing of the facilities and programs available is as follows:

Boat Landings:

- B&C Boat Landing – ramp
- Beck’s Ferry Landing - ramp, dock
- Bolen Hall Landing - ramp, dock
- Cook’s Landing – ramp
- Corner Lake Landing - ramp, shed, dumpster
- Millstone Landing - community center, ramp, shed, bathrooms
- Dawson Landing - ramp, dock, dumpster, shed, bathrooms
- Myers Lake Landing – ramp
- New River Landing - ramp, shelter
- Salzburg Landing – ramp
- Slaters Bridge Landing – ramp
- Turnbridge Landing – ramp
- Tuten’s Boat Landing - ramp, shed, picnic table, and bathroom

Community Centers:

- Coosawhatchie Community Center (County) - building, fields, court
- Grays Community Center - community-owned building, County-owned basketball court, planned picnic shelter
- Hardeeville Recreation Complex (community lease) - school building, fields, tennis court, concession stand
- Levy-Limehouse Community Center - community-owned building, County-owned basketball court, planned ball field
- Millstone Landing (County) - building, ramp, shed, bathrooms
- Old House/Cherryville Community Center - planned for a building, picnic shelter, playground, basketball court
- Purrysburg Recreation Center (County lease) - building, playground, basketball court
- Rivers Hill Community Center (private, public access) - building, field, picnic area
- Robertville Community Center (County) - building, playground, court, gym
- Tarboro Community Center (County lease) - building, playground
- Turpin Park (community) - gym, playground, tennis court
- Wagonbranch Community Center (County) - structure, fields, playground, court, picnic tables

Additional outdoor playgrounds and open space includes Garvins Corner Picnic Area, Gillisonville Picnic Area, Gillisonville Recreation Park, Glasgow Landing, and the Mitchellville Basketball Court and Playground. The general locations of recreational facilities in Jasper County are shown on Map 13.

While important projects have occurred with limited resources, additional planning and construction is anticipated in the years to come. Current specific issues and needs surrounding parks and recreation are the following:

- Maintenance?
- Programs?
- Worn or obsolete facilities?
- Other? Additional County input needed.

NEEDS

It is important to consider the park types, location, and disbursement throughout the County. When evaluating parks and recreation service areas, it is important to specifically consider current and future residential clusters. As shown earlier, the NRPA established a recommended service area for each park classification. Mapping these service areas would help to determine the areas in Jasper County that are lacking easy access to parks and recreation facilities. By mapping service areas, the underserved areas are apparent and can receive attention.

Forecasting park acreages for future populations is important as a continued

increase of population over the next 10 years is anticipated. While current facilities are generally meeting acreage requirements for the 2010 population (24,777), the County must plan for an increase of close to 3,000 additional residents by 2025 (see Chapter 1, Table 1.4). Based on the NRPA recommendations, almost 45 acres of additional parks and recreation facilities will be needed to sufficiently serve almost 3,000 new residents. However, Jasper County and its municipalities have negotiated a number of development agreements that require open space and parks to serve residents. Not all of this acreage is required to be acquired, developed or provided by the local government. However, need and demand for parks and recreation facilities should be tracked and monitored by the County.

An evaluation of the parks and facilities in Jasper County should also include an assessment of barrier-free access, specifically, if persons with limited sight, hearing, mobility and comprehension can safely and independently access and use the park or facility. Moreover, as seen in Chapter 1, more than 21.5% of Jasper County residents live below the poverty line. Economically disadvantaged individuals face many obstacles in meeting their recreational needs. These obstacles include the lack of transportation to existing recreational facilities and programs, the inability to pay fees and purchase specialized equipment or uniforms. Therefore the County must strike a careful balance between generating the revenue necessary to offer programs and facilities with setting reasonable fees for all users, including disadvantaged residents.

It is essential that Jasper County stays abreast of trends to serve the constituency. The analysis of trends over time may include the impact of demographic changes, lifestyle and employment practices, complimentary or private recreation providers and other factors that may influence the strategic park planning process.

PLANNING

A long term strategy is recommended to provide the population with adequate facilities. The goal of this Chapter is to ensure that adequate community facilities are provided in a manner which is responsive to community needs, consistent with future development goals, environmentally sound, financially feasible, and which promotes economic opportunity for County residents. General strategies to ensure adequate parks and recreation facilities include:

Mapping: Park type service areas should be mapped to identify underserved areas.

Public Parkland Acreage based on 2025 Population Projections		
Park Classification	NRPA Guideline (per 1,000 residents)	10- Year Recommendation for Jasper County
Mini Parks	0.375	1.09
Neighborhood Parks	1.75	5.08
Community Parks	6.50	16.90
Regional Parks	7.50	21.75
Total		44.82

Future Development: Providing a variety of park types to cover a wide spectrum of uses is important. Considering future development projections, ongoing monitoring of need based on growth is important, as facilities will be provided by the private sector as well as local government. Future development should be based on population and needed park types and service areas.

Special Needs: Meeting the recreational needs of all individuals is a particular challenge. Consideration must be given to those who may experience barriers to accessing recreational facilities or programs for a variety of reasons such as financial, cultural, geographic, and physical. The passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) required all areas of public service to have barrier-free accessibility, including parks and recreation facilities, close attention must be paid to providing facilities that are accessible to the disabled. Facilities should benefit residents across the spectrum of age, economic status, physical ability, neighborhood location, and daily activity.

Funding and Grants: There are a number of state grants available for the development and expansion of parks and recreational facilities; including but not limited to the Land and Water Conservation Fund (development), Recreation Land Trust Fund (acquisition), Recreational Trails Program (trail building), Parks and Recreation Development Fund (development), and the Tourism Partnership Program (tourism development).

Planning: Jasper County should conduct a formal long term parks and recreation planning process. To further these efforts begun by the County, it is recommended that a long-range Parks and Recreation Master Plan be developed which identifies all current deficiencies and addresses future demands. This should be undertaken in coordination with federal, state, and local agencies that provide recreation services throughout the County. This planning effort should also identify opportunities for public-private partnerships in creating and operating recreational facilities and programs.

The overriding objectives for this plan will be to determine the parks, recreation and fitness needs of present and projected residents and to determine how best to serve them in ways that are also economically and financially feasible. It should incorporate direct involvement by citizens in the preparation, and later the realization, of the plan. Plan components would include:

- Inventory of existing public (county, municipal, federal and state) and private facilities, including capacity, usage (numbers of people and programs, and comparison over past 2-3 years), age, condition, features, etc. The public properties survey currently underway will provide part of the input for this project component.
- Assessment of existing recreational programming. This will be quantitative (numbers provided by Jasper County Parks and Recreation Department) and qualitative (by means of focus groups and interviews with users and user groups).
- Determination of present and future needs

In addition to recreational facilities, Jasper County should investigate the cultural facility and programming needs of residents, including libraries, community centers and fine arts programs. For the County to attract quality growth and appeal to a full range of potential businesses and new residents, it must improve its current level of these services. As the County grows, these demands will increase significantly.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions by phone (616-336-8176) or by email at jirousek@slplanning.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David M. Jirousek".

David M. Jirousek, AICP
Senior Planner

