

Policy Area 7: Park and Recreation Improvements



Key Words and Phrases:

Citizen Comments from Town Meeting (literal, unedited):

DESIRED FUTURE

Parks and Recreation, Summerfield Community Park

- Complete park w/lots of walking trails, fishing piers/access, special event area
- Completion of amphitheater
- Park facilities with handicap access. Fishing pier, amphitheater
- Continue growth of SFD park & more community parks
- Further dev on SFD park

Parks and Recreation, Ballfields

- Finish ball park

Parks and Recreation, Generally

- Natural passive parks
- Swimming pool (indoor or outdoor) sponsor it with memberships if not done as a community pool

UNWANTED FUTURE

Failure to Complete Phase 2 of Summerfield Community Park

- Fail to complete Phase 2 of the park as planned
- Changes to park plan

Miscellaneous Parks Facilities Unwanted

- No “overflow” park & parking in neighborhoods
- Amphitheater

Town Council/Zoning Board Comments From Joint Kick Off Meeting:

Plan for Parks and Recreation

- Lack of parks & recreation



The preceding *key words and phrases* were gleaned from (1) the Town Meeting for the Comprehensive Plan and (2) the Joint Kick-Off Meeting of the Town Council and Zoning Board. These key words and phrases were employed to generate the following **Common Objective** and related **Policies for Parks and Recreation**.

Common Objective for Park and Recreation Improvements

Summerfield values its open space and park and recreation facilities, which help define the community's image and quality of life. To serve the increasing numbers of children, families, senior citizens, and others calling Summerfield home, the Town shall provide quality parks and recreation facilities and services commensurate with community needs. Smaller parks should continue to be provided by private developments at the neighborhood level. Larger parks should be provided as a result of advanced planning and development by the Town. An extensive system of open space and greenway trails should be developed to connect large and small park areas and to serve as natural corridors for the movement of wildlife.



Policies for Park and Recreation Improvements⁹

Policy 7.1: In determining **SITES FOR PARK, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE AREAS**, multiple objectives for natural area conservation, open space connectivity, visual impacts, preservation of cultural and historic assets, watershed enhancement and flood prone area protection shall be considered.

Policy 7.2: **LAND FOR PARK, RECREATION, AND OPEN SPACE FACILITIES** should be acquired in advance of development pressures, if possible, to achieve desirable locations at cost effective levels, park development should be commensurate with identified community needs.

Policy 7.3: **NEW DEVELOPMENTS SHALL PROVIDE FOR ADEQUATE OPEN SPACE** or, alternatively, fees placed in an open space trust fund, in proportion to the demand created by the development. This may be determined, for example, by the number of dwelling units in the development and/or by a percentage of the total acreage or square footage in the development. (Also see Policy 6.5)

Policy 7.4: The Town supports the **CO-LOCATION, JOINT DEVELOPMENT, and SHARED USE** of park, open space, and recreation facilities in cooperation with institutions and organizations such as public schools, utility companies, and federal, state, and local government agencies.

Policy 7.5: The Town supports the planning and development of a system of open space **GREENWAYS AND HIKING TRAILS** that connect parks and recreation facilities throughout the community and connecting to other trail systems and parks beyond the Town limits.

Policy 7.6: The Town shall work proactively with other local and state governments, utility companies, and other major landowners in the development of **WALKING AND BICYCLING TRAILS** for the public.

Policy 7.7: The Town shall proactively work with organizations that provide **RECREATIONAL PROGRAMMING** to Summerfield residents to meet the recreational needs of the community.

⁹ Given the close relationship between (1) parks and recreation and (2) trails and greenways, the reader is also referred to the policies previously set forth in **Policy Area 2: Sidewalks, Bikeways, and Trails**.

Notes and Commentary:

PARKS AND RECREATION AS A QUALITY OF LIFE PRIORITY

Parks and recreation facilities are one of the key features that separate communities with a high quality of life from those that claim to have such but do not. In some communities, parks, open space, and recreation are viewed as features that are nice to have, but are clearly of secondary importance when compared to other services seen as *essential*, such as law enforcement, fire protection, public works, etc. This is not the case for the Town of Summerfield, where families with children have moved to the area in large numbers in search of organized outdoor activities like little league baseball, soccer, horseback riding, and cycling.¹⁰



In keeping with the heavy family orientation of the community, the Town places a high priority on parks and recreation services. The most tangible evidence of this commitment can be seen in the Town's budget, where parks and recreation is the largest line item (about \$2.0 million), amounting to about 50% of the total operating budget of the Town. Many other traditional services, on the other hand, such as public safety, utilities, street maintenance, etc. are handled by Guilford County or the State of North Carolina.

ORGANIZATION FOR PARKS AND RECREATION SERVICES

Town Parks and Recreation Committee

*"The Parks and Recreation Committee is responsible for supporting Town Council's efforts in enlightening and enriching the lives of citizens and working towards the preservation of the environment by providing quality parks, facilities, and services designed for people of all ages and abilities."*¹¹ Until recently, the Town also had a Conservation Council whose charge was to promote the conservation of open space, greenways (and associated trails) and other desirable features that make Summerfield unique. Due to common goals and interests, the Conservation Council was re-organized as a sub-committee of the Parks and Recreation Committee. The P and R Committee recently provided oversight for phase II of the Summerfield Community Park. They will also play an important role as other park plans are developed and implemented. In addition, the SPARC Committee is heavily involved in the planning for special events such as "Movies in the Park", outdoor theater productions, and musical events.

Town Athletic Advisory Committee

Town Council established the Summerfield Athletic Advisory Committee in 2008, shortly after plans were set in motion for the development of a master plan for the 28+ acre site for the Summerfield Athletic Park. Since that time, the Athletic Advisory Committee has provided guidance and oversight to the preparation of the master plan. At the time of this writing, the master plan is complete and has

¹⁰ Population figures presented in the *Growth Factors Analysis* for this plan indicate that, for the 2000 U.S. Census, the population age groups most apt to be in families (adults aged 30 to 49 years and children from birth to 19 years of age) make up about two-thirds of the total population of Summerfield. This percentage is significantly higher than the average community in the State.

¹¹ Parks and Recreation Committee Mission Statement as repeated on the Town website: www.summerfieldgov.com/content/view/38/111

been put out to bid. Construction is underway with a planned completion for the Fall of 2010.

Town Parks and Recreation Supervisor

The Town employs one full time parks and recreation supervisor whose duties focus primarily on operation, maintenance, and replacement of park equipment and facilities. In addition, the supervisor is responsible for managing various parks and recreation construction projects and serves as staff liaison to the Parks and Recreation Committee.

Summerfield Recreation Association

The Town of Summerfield has no formal in-house recreation programming staff or function. This is not unusual for a small town or rural county. Instead, the community relies upon the Summerfield Recreation Association (SRA), “a volunteer based organization whose success comes from dedicated parents and local businesses that recognize the value of our community’s youth participating in sports.”¹² According to the SRA website, the organization currently offers cheerleading, softball, basketball, and baseball programs (using whatever fields and facilities may be available in the community).

Other Recreational Organizations Serving Summerfield residents

While the SRA is the most active recreation organization serving Summerfield residents, several other organizations provide recreational services to residents in the area. Examples are Greensboro Parks and Recreation, several youth sports leagues, equestrian clubs, local churches, and the YMCA.

EXISTING PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES

Summerfield Community Park

Summerfield Community Park opened in September 2006. This 50 acre park is located off Centerfield Road, generally behind Summerfield Elementary School. The park design includes a playground, restroom facilities, picnic areas and shelters, an amphitheater, and over a mile of paved and unpaved trails leading around School House Lake. In addition to the public facilities, the Summerfield Community Center Inc. maintains a special events building that may be rented for a fee.

Atlantic and Yadkin Greenway Trail

The Atlantic and Yadkin Greenway Trail connects Summerfield to Greensboro’s Lake Brandt Greenway. It begins at a trailhead located on Strawberry Road approximately 1000 feet north of US 220. The trail follows the course of the old Southern Railroad bed north for ¼ mile before becoming an unpaved trail to Toscana Drive in the Vineyard Neighborhood. Trail users can also go south from the trailhead along the Lake Brandt Greenway to Bur-Mil Park and points beyond.

Conventionally, neighborhood parks or park-like open spaces are considered boons conferred on the deprived population of cities. Let us turn this thought around, and consider parks deprived places that need the boon of life and appreciation conferred on them. This is more nearly in accord with reality, for people do confer use on parks and make them successes—or else withhold use and doom parks to rejection and failure.

Jane Jacobs
1961



¹² Excerpted from the SRA website: www.summerfieldrec.org

Ballfields at Summerfield Elementary School

The ballfields at Summerfield Elementary School, owned by Guilford County Schools, have served the Summerfield community for many years. As the population of Summerfield has grown, however, demand for playing time on the elementary school fields has outstripped the available hours for use. Further, heavy use of these fields has often presented other issues, including parking problems as teams, coaches, and fans have parked their vehicles along the shoulders of nearby residential streets.



PLANNED PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES

Future Summerfield Athletic Park

In 2007, in response to the growing pressure on the ballfields at Summerfield Elementary School, as well as other identified needs, Town Council authorized an initiative to locate and purchase a site for a major new park in Summerfield. Late that same year, a 28+ acre site was purchased off US 220 about one half mile north of the NC 150

intersection. A master plan for the park,

completed in 2009, calls for development in phases. Phase 1 will include a large multipurpose field with perimeter walking track, two baseball/softball fields, a restroom and concessions facility, parking for 140+ vehicles, and appropriate lighting, irrigation, landscaping, and signage. Future phases will include additional lighted baseball or multi-purpose fields, as well as necessary parking, restrooms, and support facilities. Costs for Phase 1 improvements have been estimated at \$1.3 to \$1.5 million. Construction of future phases would be on the order of \$1.5 to \$1.8 million in 2009 dollars. Park designers have recommended a 20% contingency for all phases of development.

Future Town Park at Armfield

Summerfield Properties LLC, the developers of the 500 acre Armfield neighborhood, dedicated over 30 acres of property along both sides of Brookbank Road near Banning Road for a Town park. Plans for this parkland have not yet been developed, and the site is not currently open to the public. Under provisions for land dedication set forth in the Summerfield Development Ordinance, the Town must begin the preparation of a master plan within two years of acceptance of the property. The Town has therefore scheduled the development of such a plan during the 2009-10 fiscal year.

Future Trail Development

As noted in the Policy Area 2 on **Sidewalks, Bikeways, and Trails**, Summerfield residents have voiced considerable support for the development of an extensive walking and trail system throughout the community. Consistent with this desire, there are ample possibilities in the town to pursue the development of such a system. Major opportunities include the existing railroad bed that runs through the heart of the community, the Mountains to the Sea Trail, the Haw River Trail, and the Piedmont Regional Greenway. In addition, the Town's development ordinance, emphasizing open space preservation and land dedication, is a significant tool for setting aside substantial greenway and trail corridors.

FEE IN LIEU OF LAND DEDICATION FOR PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

A century ago, it was quite common for developers to include parks and open space as a routine part of any new neighborhood. Real estate advertisements of the period often made note of recreation amenities planned and built into these relatively compact neighborhoods with modest sized lots. This form of enlightened self interest helped sell lots to a buying public which sought the "fresh air and open spaces" of the suburbs, while still being part of a walkable community. Unfortunately, this balanced approach to community building was not to last. After the Second World War, many "subdividers" discontinued the practice of setting aside common open space in compact, walkable neighborhoods, preferring to create larger individual lots.

Since at least the 1970's, North Carolina state law has allowed cities and counties to require new subdivisions to set aside or "dedicate" a certain proportion of a subdivision for open space and recreation.

To help deal with the loss of common open space and recreation opportunities in these new neighborhoods, many states, including North Carolina, passed enabling legislation to restore the practice of preserving open space as part of the development process. Since at least the 1970's, North Carolina state law has allowed cities and counties to require new subdivisions to set aside or "dedicate" a certain proportion of a subdivision for open space and recreation.

The Town of Summerfield has embraced this state enabling legislation in a significant way, requiring that new developments set aside substantial amounts of open space under provisions of the Town's development ordinance. The Town uses a sliding scale to determine how much land should be set aside. Under this system, the Town actually exempts subdivisions of 5 lots or less from any open space dedications. The theory behind this exemption is that small subdivisions will not yield sufficient open space (as a percentage of total land area) to be useful for meaningful recreation. Numerous small acreages would also create maintenance difficulties. Either the open space would have to be maintained by just a few homeowners, or the Town would have to spend an inordinate amount



The movement to create greenways is one excellent way to bring nature to the city. Greenways bring a wealth of space and a mix of natural resources into the city all at one time. The strings that hold the web of life together in a natural area are left intact when long corridors are allowed to survive. The threads give strength and depth to the urban forest. There are opportunities for trails and waterways, room for wildlife, space for trees and shrubs to thrive.

Gary Moll
1989

Small parks, if they are popular, knit together their neighborhoods from different sides, and mingle the people from them.

Jane Jacobs
1961

of time traveling to and maintaining a large number of very small parks. Even so, this arrangement has the effect of requiring larger developments set aside land while smaller developments have no similar “burden” imposed on them.

One way to correct for this apparent unequal burden is to establish a “*fee in lieu of land dedication*”. Under this method, also authorized by State enabling legislation, fees paid by the developer are deposited into a special trust fund set up by the Town specifically for parks, open space, and recreation. Further, larger towns may set up more than one trust fund corresponding to the specific geographic area of the community within which the funds are collected. In this way, monies available for park development and open space acquisition are commensurate with the level of demand created by new development in each part of the town. Thus, the *fee in lieu of dedication* option also ensures that the small subdivision, not just the larger ones, will provide for a proportionate (even if small) share of the open space needs of area residents.



Summerfield currently has no provision in its subdivision regulations regarding *fees in lieu of land dedication*. After the economy has recovered from the current recession, Summerfield will likely see a renewed resurgence of interest in the community, along with significant population growth and subdivision activity. Now may therefore be the best time to consider establishing such a provision in the Summerfield Development Ordinance.