A. Purpose and Goals

The Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Master Plan will help to further the mission of Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission (CCPRC) while determining additional service needs that can be provided in harmony with other recreation providers. This 10-year growth plan focuses on immediate, short-term, and longer-term capital development and improvement strategies that correspond to the community’s unmet needs and priority investments for critical parks and recreation services. This plan articulates a clear vision (a “road map”) for CCPRC’s future that:

- Identifies and serves current and future parks and recreational needs through an integrated park system that provides adequate open space, recreational services and facilities, trails, and stewardship of natural and cultural resources.
- Provides an accessible and diverse offering of parks and recreation facilities and programs to all residents of Charleston County.
- Establishes the updated greenways and trails master plan, including trails for recreational use within park facilities, as well as County-wide greenway corridors and linkages.
- Develops an action plan – a strategy for prioritizing, phasing, funding, and accomplishing the identified needs.

B. History and Planning Context

“The Charleston County Park, Recreation and Tourist Commission was created in 1968 as a county special purpose district by an act of the South Carolina legislature. The original act was amended in 1972, authorizing the Commission to promote Charleston’s historical and tourist attractions, to create and operate countywide parks and recreation facilities, and to provide technical assistance to existing park and recreation agencies and community groups.

“In July 1985, the Commission’s tourism function was transferred to the Charleston Trident Chamber of Commerce and the commission was renamed Charleston County Park & Recreation Commission. CCPRC represents one of the most unique park and recreation agencies in the State of South Carolina.

“The agency has specific areas of responsibility that are defined through our legislative act. The Commission is charged with the responsibility to provide park and recreation services, but not to duplicate services provided by the other municipalities and special recreation districts existing in the area.

“One of the prime responsibilities of the Charleston County Park & Recreation Commission is the development of a countywide park system. These parks are generally of a size and scope that would not be developed by other municipalities and public service districts. The park system emphasizes passive activities, outdoor recreation, environmental education, and public beach access. Each park facility offers a variety of programming generally directed toward the natural features and characteristics of the site. The staff and commission[ers] of the Charleston County Park and Recreation [Commission] are committed to maintaining high standards in the delivery of leisure services and facilities to the citizens of Charleston County.”

C. Planning Process

In February 2012, CCPRC engaged the services of a team of consultants with national and local recreation planning experience to assist in developing this master plan guided by a staff Project Team. The consultant team, led by Colorado-based GreenPlay LLC, assessed existing parks, trails, recently acquired undeveloped lands, recreation facilities and services, and new opportunities through research, site visits, and a comprehensive public engagement process. The consultant team reviewed administrative, land, facility, programmatic, and industry trends, as well as demographic trends, and considered best practices. A comprehensive needs assessment, gap analysis, and level of service analysis were also performed as part of their process.

D. Guiding Principles

Based on the public and stakeholder input received throughout the planning process, the following guiding principles were identified to provide a framework for parks and recreation within CCPRC.

- Parks and recreation opportunities are provided to promote healthy active lifestyles and connect people to nature.
- Core services include management and protection of historically or culturally significant resources, land acquisition, and environmental stewardship.
- The community is engaged in planning decisions.
- Environmental, social, and financial sustainability guides planning and operations.
- Provide park facilities within a 15-minute drive time or less to every resident.
- Priorities include providing recreation programs and services for all age groups, connectivity and development of hiking/biking trails and greenways, more water and beach access, improve or expand existing park facilities, and develop new parks on recently acquired lands.
E. Mission, Vision, and Core Values

CCPRC Mission
“The Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission will improve the quality of life in Charleston County by offering a diverse system of park facilities, programs, and services.”

CCPRC Vision
“CCPRC continues their legacy of preservation for the public good through responsible stewardship, management, and improvement of the current public entrusted infrastructure; and through the balance of passive, active, and entrepreneurial planning and development for the undeveloped properties acquired through the 1992 bond program.”

Core Values
“Charleston County Park & Recreation Commission is making a commitment to a new set of Core Values. This effort will ensure that we leave some blue up above and some green on the ground. Adopting these important values ensures a thriving park system for our children and grandchildren.”

Community Enrichment – Enriching lives through education and programs
Leadership – Providing professional staff development
Fun – Delivering fun to customers
Exceptional Customer Service – Always focusing on you
Health and Wellness – Providing and promoting healthy lifestyle opportunities
Quality – Striving for quality throughout the park system
Diversity – Fostering diverse populations of vendors, employees, and customers
Safety – Ensuring safe and secure environments
Accessibility – Providing accessibility through affordable options and a variety of offerings
Stewardship – Preserving and conserving cultural, natural, and historical resources
Building a Legacy – Maintaining a vision for the future while sustaining a healthy park system
“Over the past 5 years, CCPRC has doubled the acreage in its park system, now totaling nearly 10,000 acres. As we dream about future improvements (keeping in mind that quality recreation facilities and programs cost money to provide and maintain), how much additional property tax would you be willing to pay annually to increase recreational opportunities in Charleston County?”

Based on this information, most survey respondents (36%) stated that they would be willing to increase property taxes by $1 to $10 annually, 28 percent were willing to pay an annual increase of $11 to $20, and 17 percent indicated that they were willing to pay more than $20 in increased property taxes. Less than 20 percent of respondents indicated that they would not be willing to increase property taxes.

If a bond referendum was identified as a viable funding source for parkland expansion, 73 percent of respondents said that they would support passing a vote for this option (31 percent “definitely support”; 42 percent “probably support”). Whereas nine percent said that they would not support passing a vote. Eighteen percent were neutral.

Public Engagement

A series of six public meetings and several small focus group meetings with staff, potential partners, and key stakeholders were conducted in June and July 2012, resulting in these key findings.

- Provide a variety of affordable services
- Maintain quality infrastructure
- Pursue partnerships for sustainable services
- Get the word out and expand marketing efforts
- Grow what we have – trails, water access, camping, environmental opportunities, etc.
- Increase rural recreation areas that are underserved
- Develop parks on newly acquired lands

Survey

A random, statistically-valid survey, as well as an open on-line survey, yielded input from over 3,000 residents. The following survey conclusions provide understanding of usage patterns and recreation preferences, and help to establish priorities.

- CCPRC parks, programs, and services are well loved and used.
- Water access, maintaining what the community already has, development of recently acquired properties, and trails are priorities for the Charleston community.
- There appears to be support for a future taxation measure to develop the newly acquired properties, improve the system, and address prioritized unmet needs.
Analysis of Inventory & Services

Key Issues for Existing Developed Lands
Through public and stakeholder input, consultant team observation and expertise, GRASP® level of service analysis, and the needs assessment, the following key issues were identified for consideration.

For Regional Parks and Special Use Facilities
- Wayfinding signage is needed for waterparks on adjacent highways.
- Complete the Folly Beach County Park re-nourishment project.
- Additional parking is needed at all three CCPRC beach properties.
- Wannamaker County Park may be at capacity, and phase 2 is warranted.
- Maintain and sustain amenities at James Island County Park with a focus on upgrades and repurposing of existing amenities to enhance visitor experience.
- Enhance amenities at Palmetto Islands Park to increase annual visitors.

For Rural Recreation Areas
- Rural areas have gaps in level of service.
- There are opportunities to partner with the School District to utilize school sites for recreation facilities.
- Level of quality in amenities is not consistent across rural recreation sites.
- Rural recreation sites at school facilities should feel welcoming to users.
- Opportunities exist to strengthen educational experience and public involvement at school sites.

For Water Access
As the population continues to grow, access to the water both for boating opportunities and other water-based recreational activities becomes more limited. Parking at popular boat launches is already a major issue, along with conflicts between boaters, fishing and crabbing, and non-motorized users. More boat landings are needed.

Key Issues For Planning of Undeveloped Lands
There are a number of significant criteria that will drive the planning and development of undeveloped lands in the coming years. Each of the following items should be considered not only within the context of the individual property, but also within the framework of the overall park system. The criteria are shown in no particular order of importance, as they should all be evaluated equally in the determination of parkland development, prioritization, and planning.
- GRASP® level of service (LOS)/accessibility to user population
- Programming based on community identified needs/survey results/public input meetings
- Connectivity/trails
- Management and protection of natural and cultural resources
- Access to water
- Impacts/development considerations:
  - Environmental sensitivity
  - Physical conditions of site
  - Deed restrictions/conservation easements
  - Adjacent existing development/surrounding context
  - Population context
  - Political considerations
• Revenue potential/funding – Significant financial resources will be required to implement the planning and construction necessary to realize the recommendations of this plan. CCPRC will need to consider a number of possible revenue streams as well as establishing priorities for respective projects that are based on balancing expenses with known revenue streams. Possible funding mechanisms could include:
  - Revenue bonds
  - Increasing user fees
  - Create sponsorship opportunities for capital improvements
  - Grants
  - Expand existing or create new revenue generating features/activities
  - Improve attendance by marketing to new and different user groups
  - Financial partnerships/joint ventures

Key Issues For Trails
As a whole, Charleston County has qualities naturally suited for bicycling, walking, and trail activity and for trail and greenway development. The County benefits from:
• Scenic, protected natural areas and undevelopable wetlands
• Flat terrain
• Climate for year-round bicycling and walking
• Relatively dense, mixed-use areas (such as North Charleston)
• Master-planned bike and walk friendly developments (such as I’On Village)
• Bike and walk friendly beach communities (such as Isle of Palms)
• Popular recreation amenities and outdoor attractions
• Segments of two long-distance trails, (the Palmetto Trail and the East Coast Greenway)

The following key needs were identified with regard to trails.
• Improved access to trails in urban areas
• Provide trails in undeveloped parks for multiple users: hiking, mountain biking, equestrian, and ATV
• Improve and increase ADA accessible trails within parks
• Connect trails to municipal and county parks
• Improve and repair existing trails
• Expand trail network
  - Trails in new properties
  - Connector trails between parks and mountain bike trails

The trail recommendations of this Plan address the community-identified goals of expanding Charleston County’s existing trail system and creating bicycle and pedestrian access to park and recreation facilities. Recommendations build on the strengths of the existing CCPRC parks and recreation system and previous bicycle, pedestrian, and trail planning efforts. Proposed improvements are organized as follows:
• Recommended Trail Facility Types
• Regional Trails
• Interior Park Trails
• Water-based Trails
• Trail Network Recommendations by Sub-Area
• Implementation Strategies
Key Issues for Programs
Through public and stakeholder input, survey results, consultant team observation and expertise, and the needs assessment, the following key issues were identified for consideration:

- Because of weather and environmental issues related to Lowcountry living and the proximity to many bodies of open water, all Charleston County youth should know how to swim and feel comfortable in the water.
- Wedding venues and event destinations are an opportunity for service expansion in Charleston County.
- Ecotourism is a program area ripe for expansion.
- Nature programs and environmental education are highly valued.
- Festivals are well attended and desired services.
- Providing recreation opportunities to rural recreation sites will require partnerships and creative, leveraged uses of existing resources. Both CCPRC owned and managed sites and school sites should be invested in as growth and demand necessitate.

Key Issues for Operations and Management
CCPRC is one of the premiere park and recreation agencies in the nation and provides a sustainable operation with their many entrepreneurial endeavors. Identifying and anticipating industry trends have helped them refine their service portfolio and be responsive to opportunistic endeavors as they present themselves. Continual self-analysis and feedback identified these areas for attention:

- CCPRC should continue to seek the sustainable balance between available resources and needs, revenues and expenses, passive and active recreation opportunities, development and preservation, etc. as they provide services into the future.
- There was a consistent message throughout the internal and external input process that CCPRC needed to upgrade their registration and rental software, along with the possibility of linking it to an upgraded point-of-sale software. Both could be linked to the financial tracking software system.
- There was a consistent message throughout the public input process that improved marketing efforts to inform the public of facilities, activities, services, and update was desirable.
- Internal staff focus groups pointed out the need to streamline the process to get marketing materials approved and created.
- CCPRC should continue to let the public know how they leveraged the half-cent sales tax bond money to get approximately twice the amount of public land for parks.
- CCPRC should package the costs of the priority items identified in the Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Master Plan and develop a strategy to educate the public to vote for another bond referendum that will finance the development of the recommended improvements.

H. Summary of Plan Recommendations

The recommendations are provided for 1-3, 4-7, and 8-10 years out and are not in priority order. In addition, flexibility with this plan is warranted, because unique, opportunistic enterprises for entrepreneurial ventures or other partnerships may arise as CCPRC moves forward. It is realistic to assume that unique circumstances will arise, providing opportunities for CCPRC to participate in recreation options that are not currently quantifiable. Whether through property acquisition or by partnering with other entities in the design, construction, and/or management of recreation facilities or programs, CCPRC should remain open to opportunities that would further its mission.
Recommendations are provided for:

- Existing Developed Lands
- Undeveloped Lands
- Trails
- Opportunity Enterprises including acquisition

Additional operational and programmatic suggestions and recommendations can be found in other chapters in this document and are not included here, because most of them do not have financial implications.

Capital recommendations for exiting developed lands, undeveloped lands, and trails by Sub-Area:

- West Sub-Area $29,635,000
- Charleston Central Sub-Area $28,442,000
- North Sub-Area $45,596,000
- East Sub-Area $20,256,500
- All $16,213,600
- Location TBD $19,935,000

The entire capital campaign totals $160,078,100 not including acquisition and other costs to be determined.

- Years 1-3 $61,795,700
- Years 4-7 $49,167,200
- Years 8-10 $49,115,200

Funding from General Obligation Bonds will help provide short- and mid-term priority projects, feasibility studies and conceptual planning efforts identified in this Master Plan. Additional longer-term facilities are proposed and funds will need to be identified to support additional improvements. There is a potential to use revenue bonds for revenue producing facilities. Leveraging resources through partnerships and grants will be important to successful implementation of many of the plan’s recommendations. CCPRC may also need to consider operational funding increases as well.

J. Summary

Charleston County is home to over 350,000 diverse residents, some of whom are avid users of CCPRC’s parks, facilities and services, and others who are not aware of what the CCPRC system has to offer. This Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Master Plan provides a vision and strategies to enhance popular indoor and outdoor recreational activities and add new ones to engage diverse communities. An “all hands on deck” approach is needed (among staff, stakeholders, and partners) to embrace the Plan’s vision and guiding principles. This master plan helps position the Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission to proactively plan for the future and ensure its legacy as a valued treasure for the next century and beyond.