CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTION & PLANNING CONTEXT

A. Introduction

The ***Town of Cary Parks, Recreation & Cultural Resources (PRCR) Master Plan*** provides a vision for the shaping of parks and recreational opportunities in Cary in the next two decades, with a focus on recommendations for the first 10 years. This plan is the culmination of public input, a needs assessment, and sound planning practices. The intent of this plan is to serve as a guide for parks, recreation, and cultural resource service delivery for the future.

The Town's nationally accredited Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department oversees an expansive parks and recreation system that is recognized within the region as setting the benchmark for providing leisure services. This plan outlines a proactive set of recommendations to guide the Town of Cary to ensure a high quality parks, recreation, and cultural resources system now and into the future.

B. Accomplishments

The Town's strong commitment to parks and recreation is demonstrated in the many accomplishments since the 2003 *Cary Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Facilities Master Plan*.

- Parks and Renovations – Mills Creek Park (2010); Walnut Street Park (2009); Middle Creek, Phase II (2008); Ritter Park (2007); Sears Farm Road Park (2005)
- Land Acquisition – 600 acres at 10 sites
- Greenways – 50 miles, eight grade-separated crossings
- Cultural Resources – Cary Arts Center (2011), Public Art at various sites
- Sports Venues – USA Baseball National Training Complex at Thomas Brooks Park (2007) and WakeMed Soccer Park (Town began management in 2004)
- Special Use Facilities – Middle Creek Disc Golf Course (2008), Bond Park Boathouse (2006), and Dog Park (2006)

This is an impressive list of accomplishments and is testament to the dedication of Town leaders, residents, and staff to advancing a comprehensive, high quality parks and recreation system. This ***Master Plan*** update will build on the successes and identify additional opportunities and challenges to help guide the Town planning efforts for parks, recreation, and cultural resources in the coming years.

C. Agency Mission & Values Statements

The Town of Cary and the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department is guided by the following mission and values statements. These provide an important framework for this ***Master Plan***.

Mission Statements

Town of Cary
At the Town of Cary we focus every day on enriching the lives of our citizens by creating an exceptional environment and providing exemplary services that enable our community to thrive and prosper.

Department
It is the mission of the Cary Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department to serve, educate, and enhance life for the citizens of Cary. Our professional staff plans and provides a variety of enjoyable and cost effective recreation, sports, environmental, historical, and cultural arts programs and services. We acquire, develop, beautify, conserve, and maintain a system of parks, greenways, and recreation facilities which will assure quality leisure opportunities for all Cary residents

Values

To achieve the Town of Cary mission, the agency upholds the following values:

1. *Our organization exists to serve our **citizens**. We will be open, ensure access, encourage involvement and be accountable to our citizens.*
2. ***Employees** are our most important resource. We will attract and retain the best employees and invest in their personal and professional growth.*
3. *We will be **honest**, ethical and diligent. Our actions will comply with local, state and federal laws.*
4. *We will treat everyone with **dignity**, respect and fairness.*
5. *We will achieve the best results through effective **teamwork**, strategic partnerships and community participation.*
6. *We will provide outstanding customer **service** that is polite, friendly and responsive.*
7. *We value **creative** thinking and innovation. We will continue to be nationally recognized for excellence in local government.*
8. *We value **growth** that balances desired service levels, economic benefits and continued stability for our community.*
9. *We are **cost conscious**. We spend public funds responsibly and effectively to ensure the Town's short and long-term financial strength.*
10. *We are committed to proactive, comprehensive **planning** to guide the future of our community.*
11. *We will preserve and protect our environment. We will be good **stewards** of our finite natural resources.*

D. Relationship to Other Plans

The planning process for this Master Plan responds to and builds on the Town of Cary planning documents related to parks, recreation, cultural resources, and trails.

PRCR Master Plans

- *Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Facilities Master Plan* (2003)
- *Public Arts Master Plan* (2001)

Downtown Plans

- *Town Center Civic & Cultural Arts District Plan* (2006)
- *Downtown Streetscapes Plan* (2006)
- *Town Center Park Concept Plan* (2002)
- *Town Center Area Plan* (2001)

Historic and Open Space Plans

- *Historic Preservation Master Plan* (2010)
- *Open Space and Historical Resources Plan* (2000)

Pedestrian/Bike Plans

- *The Comprehensive Pedestrian Plan* (2006)
- *The Bicycle Plan* (2006)

Land Use Plans

- Special Area Plans (including *Carpenter Community Plan, Northwest Area Plan, Southeast Area Plan*, and *Southwest Area Plan*)
- *Chatham-Cary Joint Land Use Plan* (unapproved)

In addition, many Department documents and studies were reviewed including the Capital Improvement Plan, program reports, and past community surveys. References to these plans and documents are made in relevant sections of this plan.

E. Planning Process & Timeline

This project has been guided by a project team made up of key staff along with input from an extensive public process, including the strong involvement of the Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources Advisory Board. The project team met with consultants from the GreenPlay team and provided input throughout the planning process. This collaborative effort fully utilizes the consultant's expertise and incorporates local knowledge and institutional history. The planning process and timeline follows.

PHASE I: INFORMATION GATHERING **May-July 2011**

Community & Stakeholder Input Process

1. Conducted public meetings and focus groups
2. Held staff focus groups and interviews
3. Received guidance from staff project team

Inventory and Assessment of Existing Facilities

1. Conducted inventory and analysis of Town parks, open space, trails, and facilities

Statistically-Valid Survey

1. Mailed survey to random sample of Town residents
2. Provided additional open web-based survey

Demographic, Benchmarking, and Trends Analysis

1. Analyzed Town demographics and population projections
2. Conducted benchmark study of select parks and recreation agencies
3. Identified parks and recreation-related trends

PHASE II: FINDINGS & VISIONING **August-October 2011**

1. Presented key findings to staff, public, and Town Council
2. Validated findings
3. Identified focus areas for recommendations

PHASE III: PLAN DEVELOPMENT & REVIEW **November 2011-May 2012**

1. Worked with staff to refine plan elements.
2. Draft Plan presentations and review by:
    - Staff
    - Town Council
    - Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Advisory Board
    - Public

PHASE IV: FORMAL PLAN REVIEW AND APPROVAL **June-November 2012**

1. Public hearing process with Town Council and Planning and Zoning Board
2. Town Council action