

**City of Aiken
Department of
Parks, Recreation
and Tourism Need
Assessment and
Strategic Plan**

CLEMSON
PARKS, RECREATION AND
TOURISM MANAGEMENT



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Study Introduction and Overview

Public agencies, like the City of Aiken Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism (PRT), are frequently confronted with an increasing demand for services, while working within an environment characterized by static or decreasing financial resources and understaffing. In particular, park and recreation agencies are heavily dependent on public appropriations, tax levies, philanthropic support, and user fees, while being faced with numerous service delivery challenges, not the least of which is the provision of the adequate distribution of high quality programs, facilities, and parks. A more educated and vocal public expects public entities to be more accountable and measured in their allocation of limited public monies. However, this is also a time when society is beginning to fully understand the importance of providing high quality, well-run parks and recreation facilities and programs in promoting the long-term health and economic development of the region.

At the same time, rapid changes are occurring in the makeup and demographic distribution of the area. As PRT adopts a more proactive, consumer-centric approach to the production and delivery of park and recreation facilities and programs, the practice of actively soliciting input and feedback from the jurisdiction's populace to document the current and projected use of existing and future facilities and programs is critical to success. Public needs assessments are conducted to measure felt or expressed needs, interests, and use among the general public. This process allows the agency to take the pulse of the entire community. The results are then used to help guide decision-makers in the efficient, effective, and equitable delivery of facilities and services across the entire jurisdiction.

This report details the process and results of a needs assessment conducted by Clemson University researchers October-November 2021 in Aiken, South Carolina and provides strategic recommendations to guide the future development and sustainability of park, land, and recreational programs and amenities in the City of Aiken.

Purpose of the Assessment

To solicit public input regarding the parks and recreation facility, program, and service needs of residents living within the municipality in order to develop recommendations that will guide the provision of parks and recreation programs, facilities, and services for the next five to seven (5-7) years.

Methods

A two-stage methodology was employed to assess the park and recreation needs of Aiken residents. First, an online web survey was distributed to residents throughout Aiken, helping to ensure the broadest possible coverage of views were captured to inform city-wide recommendations. The survey was open for a five-week period and yielded 948 total responses. In the second stage, researchers from Clemson University conducted seven (7) focus groups, a public input session with stakeholders, facility tours, meetings with staff, and

a presentation to city council over a three (3) day period. During each session, researchers took notes while engaging the participants through facilitated conversations.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were designed to explore the recreation program and facility needs of selected stakeholders in depth. Focus groups were organized and participants recruited by PRT. Sessions included three to twelve (3-12) individuals representing a particular stakeholder group such as park and recreation staff, local leadership, trail and greenway users, seniors, youth, local businesses leaders, coaches, parents of community youth, etc. In total more than 100 individuals took part in these focus groups.

Each focus group was moderated by Dr. Brookover (see bio on page 28) from Clemson University who began each session with an explanation of the process and by prompting participants with the following question, "If you were to wave a magic wand and have your parks and recreation needs and wants met, what facilities, programs, and services would that include? What is going well, what needs to be improved, and what needs to be built/developed? However, you must be reasonable and responsible with the magic wand." Focus groups were otherwise unstructured. During participant discussion, two individuals took notes and asked follow-up questions to acquire more information about stated recreation program and facility needs and wants. Upon completion of the focus group sessions, researchers compared notes, outlined themes, and outlined recommendations based on participant discussion.

Online Survey

An online survey was designed to allow any and all residents to voice their recreation program and facility needs and wants. The online survey was advertised through a variety of forums including e-mails, social media, and local newspaper articles. The majority of the survey was an importance-satisfaction scale that first measured how important program, service, and facility categories were to each respondent/respondent's family, followed by how satisfied the respondent/respondent's family was with the program, service, and facility categories. A gap analysis of importance-satisfaction was conducted by subtracting the percentage of respondents satisfied with a particular program, service, or facility from the percentage who had ranked it as important in order to identify and prioritize areas of need.

In addition to the importance-satisfaction gap, participants were asked to provide demographic information, the medium used to attain information about park and recreation events/programs, and respond to several questions pertaining to potential policies impacting recreation and park services. The survey also included several qualitative input exercises. These exercises were designed to force participants to rank their individual top-3 priorities for programs and facilities, and provide their individual willingness to pay for current and improved levels of parks and recreation programs, facilities, and services.

The research team analyzed data collected from these sources to formulate a strategic plan focused on recreation and parks program and facility needs.

Deliverables

The outcome of this process is this report that details both large and small-scale projects, priorities, and other recommendations that the City of Aiken should pursue and invest in to meet the needs of residents moving forward.

Specifically, this study addressed the following objectives:

Study Objectives

1. Determine public opinion about parks, recreation, and tourism service needs of the City of Aiken.
2. Determine potential partners and roles partners might play in the provision of parks, recreation, and tourism programs, services, and facilities.
3. Determine how public opinion of needs align with program, service, and facility needs and trends based on current and future demand.
4. Determine the public's willingness to pay fees for programs, services, and facilities.
5. Determine operational needs that may assist the City of Aiken in streamlining processes, improving communications, and conducting business in a more efficient, effective manner.
6. Provide recommendations regarding the provision of parks and recreation programs, facilities, and services for the next five to seven (5-7) years.

City of Aiken Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Mission and Vision

In response to this process and in preparation for the CAPRA accreditation process, the department reviewed and redeveloped their mission and vision statements:

MISSION

To enhance the lives of our residents and guests by providing meaningful parks, recreation and tourism opportunities.

VISION

Experience a community connected through people, parks and programs.

Study Respondents

Explanation of Tables 1-9 (following three [4] pages):

In the following tables (Tables 1-9), provide a description of the respondents to the study, including gender, age, ethnic background, residency, household income, number of children in the household, if they have dependent adults living in the home, and the type of recreation program/facility used and provider, and the *overall* importance/satisfaction of recreation programs and facilities in the City of Aiken. The percentages in Table 9 were calculated by subtracting the very satisfied/satisfied percentage from the very important/important percentage to yield a gap percentage for the City of Aiken. The table also includes the Highly Important/Important and Very Satisfied/Satisfied measures for Aiken.

Table 1. Aiken Respondents by Gender

<i>Aiken Respondents by Gender (by %)</i>	
Gender	Percentage
Male	32%
Female	64%
Prefer not to Answer	4%

Table 2. Aiken Respondents by Age

<i>Aiken Respondents by Age (by %)</i>	
Age	Percentage
18-25	3%
25-34	9%
35-45	26%
46-55	19%
56-65	18%
66+	25%

Table 3. Aiken Respondents by Race

<i>Aiken Respondents by Race (by %)</i>	
Race	Percentage
Black/African American	8%
Hispanic/Latino	3%
Asian/Pacific Islander/Native American	1%
White	84%
Other	4%

Table 4: Respondents Living in City Limits

<i>Aiken Respondent's Living in City Limits (by %)</i>	
In City Limits	Percentage
Yes	60%
No	38%
Unsure	2%

Table 5: Aiken Respondents by Household Income

<i>Aiken Respondents by Household Income (by %)</i>	
Household Income	Percentage
Under \$25,000	5%
\$25,000-\$49,999	13%
\$50,000-\$74,999	20%
\$75,000-\$99,999	17%
\$100,000+	45%

Table 6. Aiken Respondents by Number of Dependent Children

<i>Number of Children Living in the Home (by %)</i>				
Age of Children	0	1	2	3+
5 & Younger	75%	15%	7%	3%
6-12	67%	21%	9%	3%
13-18	68%	21%	7%	4%

Table 7. Dependent Adults Living in Home

<i>Dependent Adults Living in Home (by %)</i>	
Dependent Adults	Percentage
Yes	11%
No	89%

Table 8. Aiken Program/Facility Usage Per Week

<i>Program/Facility Usage Per Week (%)</i>				
	Type of Organization			
Weekly Attendance	City of Aiken PRT	Other Public Recreation Agencies	Private Recreation Businesses	Non-Profit Recreation Organizations
0	11%	50%	43%	68%
1-2	43%	39%	28%	22%
3-4	31%	7%	16%	6%
5-6	11%	3%	9%	2%
7+	4%	1%	4%	2%

Table 9: Overall Importance/Satisfaction of City of Aiken PRT Programs and Facilities

<i>Overall Importance/Satisfaction of Aiken</i>			
	High Importance /Important	Very Satisfied/Satisfied	Very Important/Important-Very Satisfied/Satisfied (Gap)
Aiken	97%	58%	39%

Overall Data

Facility and Program Needs and Facility and Program Priorities

This report presents the findings from the combined focus groups and online survey data for the City of Aiken.

Explanation of Tables 10-14 (following five (5) pages):

Table 10 presents the importance-satisfaction gap analysis for facilities. These percentages were calculated by subtracting the very satisfied/satisfied percentage from the Very Important/Important percentage to yield a gap percentage for each type of facility. The table also includes the Highly Important/Important and Very Unsatisfied/Unsatisfied measures for each facility.

Table 11 presents the importance-satisfaction gap analysis for recreational program offering. These percentages were calculated by subtracting the very satisfied/satisfied percentage from the Very Important/Important percentage to yield a gap percentage for each type of program. The table also includes the Highly Important/Important and Very Unsatisfied/Unsatisfied measures for each program.

Table 12 presents data collected during the online survey. Each individual was asked to list their top three (3) facility priorities and percentages are based on the aggregate of people who listed the facility in their top three (3).

Table 13 presents data collected during the online survey. Each individual was asked to list their top three (3) recreational program priorities and percentages are based on the aggregate of people who listed the program in their top three (3).

Table 14 presents data collected during the community forum and online survey. Here, survey respondents were asked to state events and programs in which they traveled outside of Aiken to attend.

Table 10. Aiken Facility Importance/Satisfaction Gap Analysis

<i>Facility Importance/Satisfaction (by %)</i>			
	Very Important/ Important	Very Satisfied/ Satisfied	Very Important/Important-Very Satisfied/Satisfied (Gap)
Availability of an Entertainment Venues (skating, bowling, trampoline)	60%	12%	48%
Availability of Trails and Greenways	87%	40%	47%
Availability of Indoor Aquatic Facilities	58%	14%	44%
Availability of Outdoor Adventure Facilities	56%	17%	39%
Availability of Special Event/Festival Space	75%	37%	38%
Availability of Outdoor Aquatic Facility	56%	19%	37%
Availability of Indoor Recreation Facilities	78%	46%	33%
Availability of Cultural/Arts Facilities	70%	39%	31%
Availability of Rec Center for Active (Senior) Adults	61%	30%	31%
Availability of Neighborhood Parks	62%	32%	30%
Availability of Passive Parks/Open Space	83%	55%	28%
Availability of Water Access	39%	12%	27%
Availability of Picnic Shelters	66%	39%	27%
Availability of Dog Parks	45%	19%	26%
Availability of Outdoor Sports Courts (basketball, bocce ball, etc.)	50%	24%	26%
Availability of a Library	82%	57%	25%
Availability of Destination Playground	72%	48%	24%
Availability of Meeting/Gathering Spaces	41%	25%	16%
Availability of Multi-Purpose/Rectangle Fields	63%	50%	13%
Availability of Equestrian Facility	39%	27%	12%
Availability of Golf Facilities	39%	30%	9%
Availability of Disc Golf Facilities	24%	19%	6%
Availability of Pickleball Courts	43%	37%	6%
Availability of Tennis Courts	50%	45%	5%
Availability of Diamond Fields	48%	48%	0%

Table 11. Aiken Program Importance/Satisfaction Gap Analysis

<i>Program Importance/Satisfaction (by %)</i>			
	Very Important/ Important	Very Satisfied/ Satisfied	Very Important/Important- Very Satisfied/Satisfied (Gap)
Outdoor Recreation/Adventure Programs	64%	16%	48%
Programs for Teens	60%	14%	46%
Adult Recreation Programs (Arts/Environmental)	64%	22%	42%
Enrichment Classes/Programs (dance, art, music programs)	63%	22%	41%
Volunteer Opportunities	53%	14%	39%
Programs for Youth/Adults with Disabilities	65%	26%	39%
Fitness and Wellness Programs	50%	14%	36%
Cultural/Arts/Performing Arts Programs	72%	37%	35%
Special Events/One-Time Events	74%	40%	34%
Active Adult (Senior) Programs	73%	41%	32%
Special Events/One-Time Events	61%	30%	31%
Recreational/Instructional Youth Athletics	63%	35%	28%
Adult Athletic Programs	58%	30%	28%
Camps (Holiday, Spring Break)	48%	21%	27%
Non-sport Youth Recreation Programs (afterschool/summers)	44%	19%	25%
Competitive/Travel Youth Athletics	39%	26%	13%

Table 12. Aiken Residents' Facility Priorities

<i>Facility Priorities (by %)</i>	
Facility Type	Facility Priority Percentage
Library	10.20%
Trails/Greenways	9.92%
Multi-Purpose/Rectangle Fields	8.05%
Passive Park/Open	6.59%
Indoor Aquatic Center	5.90%
Recreation Center	5.55%
Cultural/Arts Facility	5.55%
Destination Playground	5.07%
Diamond Fields	4.37%
Entertainment Venues (skating, bowling, trampoline)	4.37%
Pickleball Courts	4.23%
Rec Center for Active (Senior) Adults	4.16%
Tennis Courts	3.47%
Festival and Special Event Venues	3.33%
Outdoor Adventure Facilities	3.19%
Neighborhood Playgrounds	2.78%
Dog Parks	2.36%
Outdoor Aquatic Center	1.87%
Picnic Shelter	1.53%
Equestrian Venue/Facilities	1.46%
Golf Courses	1.32%
Water Access	1.18%
Other	1.18%
Outdoor Sport Courts (basketball, bocce ball)	0.83%
Meeting/Gathering Spaces	0.83%
Disc Golf Facility	0.69%

Table 13. Aiken Residents' Program Priorities

<i>Program Priorities (by %)</i>	
Program Type	Program Priority Percentage
Non-competitive, Instructional Youth Sports Programs	11.56%
Cultural/Art Programs	10.54%
Fitness/Wellness Programs	10.17%
Outdoor Recreation/Adventure Programs	8.31%
Special/One-Time Events	8.25%
Adult Athletic Programs	7.71%
Active Adult (Senior) Programs	7.59%
Competitive Youth Sports	6.44%
Enrichment Classes/Programs (dance, art, music programs)	5.42%
Programs for Teens	4.21%
Non-Sport Adult Recreation Programs	3.73%
Other	3.31%
Non-sport Youth Recreation Programs (Art/Environmental)	2.83%
Aquatic Programs	2.71%
Community Service/Volunteer Opportunities	2.65%
Programs for Youth/Adults with Disabilities	2.35%
Camps (Holiday, Spring Break)	2.23%

Table 14. Event/Programs Traveled to Outside of Aiken

<i>Event/Programs Traveled to outside of Aiken (by %)</i>	
Event Type	Percentage
Hiking Trails/Greenways/Bike Paths	29.03%
Music and Cultural Events (live music, concerts in the park(s), movies)	19.35%
Special/Seasonal Events (e.g., Jack-O-Lantern Jubilee, Brewfest, Summerfest)	12.90%
Swimming/Aquatic Facility	8.06%
Competitive Youth Sport Programs (e.g., football, volleyball, wrestling, soccer)	8.06%
Farmers Market	4.84%
Bowling/Skating Venue	4.84%
Pickleball Tournaments	3.23%
Destination Park	3.23%
Adult Athletic Events (e.g., Sprint Triathlon, Tough Mudder)	3.23%
Lacrosse Leagues	1.61%
Folk Dancing	1.61%

Aiken Residents’ Medium Used to Obtain Information Related to Events offered by City of Aiken Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism

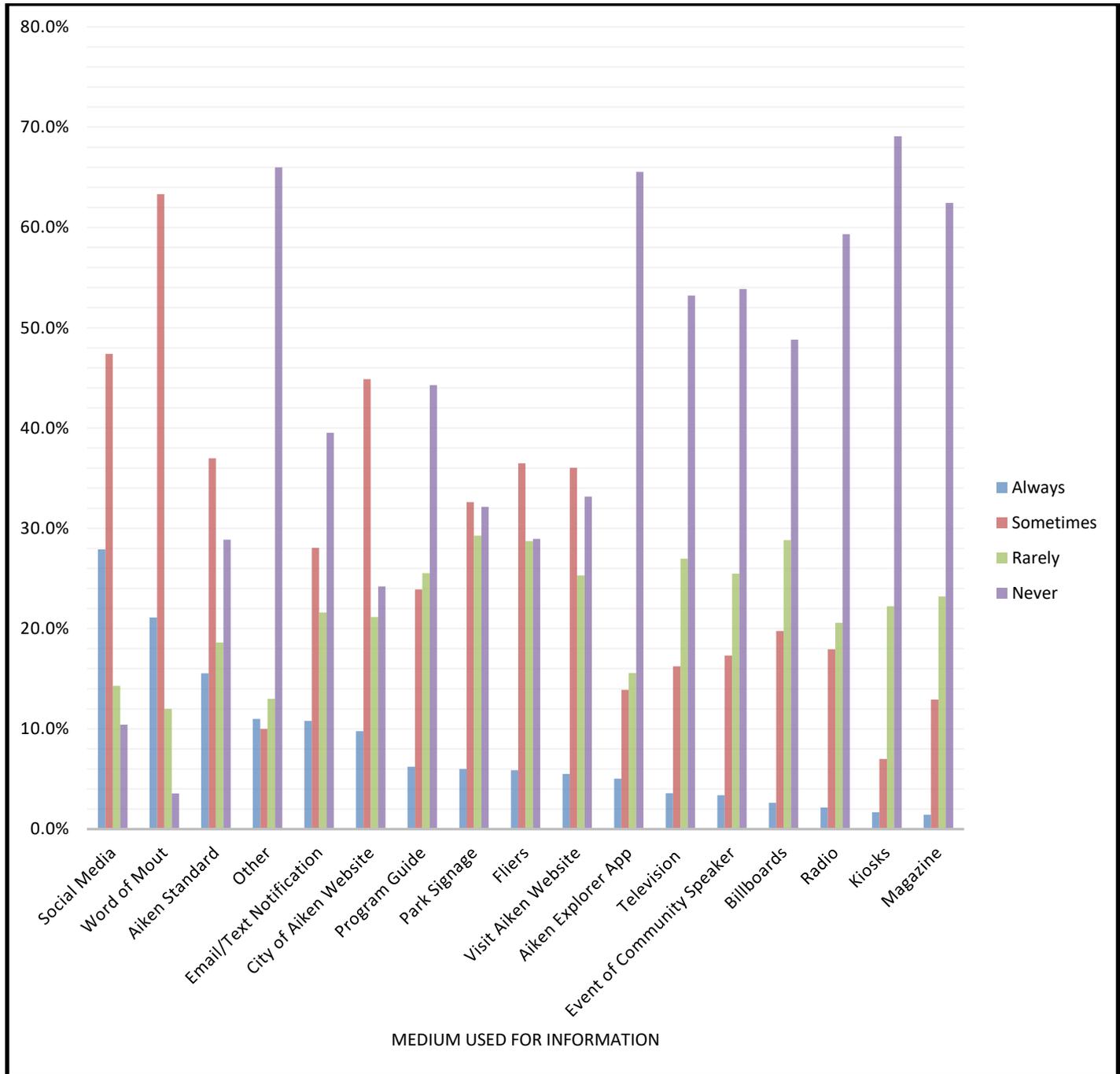
Explanation of Table 15:

The information in Table 15 (and corresponding chart) details the sources Aiken residents typically use to obtain information related to park, recreation, and sports events offered through the City of Aiken Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism as well as frequency of use. To attain this information survey respondents were asked, “How do you keep up with programs, facilities, and services offered by City of Aiken Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism”, and given a variety of mediums in which to select from. Survey respondents had the option of including a source not listed in the survey by selecting “other” and writing in their response. Information is sorted by “Always” response, greatest-to-least.

Table 15. Aiken Residents’ Medium Used to Obtain Information Related to Events/Programs

<i>Medium Used to Obtain Information Related to Events (by %)</i>				
	Frequency			
Medium Used to Obtain Information	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Social Media	27.9%	47.4%	14.3%	10.4%
Word of Mouth	21.1%	63.3%	12.0%	3.6%
Aiken Standard	15.5%	37.0%	18.6%	28.9%
Other	11.0%	10.0%	13.0%	66.0%
Email/Text Notifications	10.8%	28.1%	21.6%	39.5%
City of Aiken Website	9.8%	44.9%	21.2%	24.2%
Program Guide (Parkbench publication)	6.2%	23.9%	25.5%	44.3%
Signage in Parks	6.0%	32.6%	29.3%	32.1%
Fliers	5.9%	36.5%	28.7%	28.9%
Visit Aiken Website	5.5%	36.0%	25.3%	33.2%
Aiken Explorer App	5.0%	13.9%	15.6%	65.6%
Television	3.6%	16.2%	27.0%	53.2%
Event or Community Speaker	3.4%	17.3%	25.5%	53.9%
Billboards	2.6%	19.8%	28.8%	48.8%
Radio	2.2%	17.9%	20.6%	59.3%
Kiosks	1.7%	7.0%	22.2%	69.1%
Newspaper/Magazine	1.4%	12.9%	23.2%	62.4%

Graph 1: Aiken Residents' Medium Used to Obtain Information Related to Events/Programs



Aiken Residents' Average Willingness to Pay per Year for Current and Improved Programs, Services, and Facilities

Explanation of Graph 2.

The information in Graph 2 represents the results of the Willingness to Pay exercise. Survey respondents were asked to provide the amount they are willing to pay per person, per year for the current programs, services, and facilities and what they would be willing to pay in addition each year if programs, services, and facilities were developed. This question was presented to each respondent in the form of a fictitious scenario. In the scenario, the researchers informed respondents that they had seized all of the recreational and park facilities and programs in Aiken. The researchers then asked how much each respondent would be willing to pay to obtain use of/or get these park and recreation facilities and programs back (highlighted by orange column). In the second part of the scenario, the researchers informed respondents that they would be willing to build and institute new parks and recreation facilities and programs for the municipality and asked how much each respondent would be willing to pay in addition to the previous amount (light green column). The table below is an average from all of the combined respondents.

Graph 2: Willingness to Pay



Policy Information

Explanation of Table 16:

Policy questions asked respondents about their preferences regarding recreational policy, intergovernmental agreements, and tax allocation to assist in meeting recreational program and facility needs. The following table shows the questions presented to the respondents and their answers based on an aggregate percentage.

Table 16. Aiken Policy Questions

<i>Policy Questions</i>			
	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Neutral	Disagree/Strongly Disagree
Appropriate to develop intergovernmental agreements between the school district and public recreation agencies to share facilities	88%	9%	3%
Appropriate to allocate tax resources to support the development and operation of recreation programs, facilities, and services	91%	6%	3%
The City of Aiken Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism should play a vital role in protecting green and open spaces for public use	94%	5%	1%

Recommendations

*Disclaimer: Each of the following recommendations is based on data gathered by researchers from Clemson University during October and November of 2021. The intent of these recommendations is **only** to serve as a guide for the City of Aiken Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism and each is subject to change based upon existing or projected economic, social, and environmental conditions in Aiken, SC. All final decisions regarding recreation and park programs, facilities, and operations are at the discretion of the City of Aiken Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism and The City of Aiken.*

Program Recommendations

Outdoor Recreation/Adventure Programs

Explore opportunities to provide outdoor recreation, adventure, and environmental education programs. There are existing organizations and groups in the community that are potential partners. Hitchcock Woods, Aiken State Park, Langley Pond, Boyd Pond, Camp Long and Camp Gravatt are a few examples. Camping, hiking, fishing, ziplines, and ropes courses rank high on areas of interest in national level studies. Consider expanding into trip options like white water rafting or trips to zipline/ropes courses in the future.

Teen Programs

Teen programming has always been a challenge. Recent research by the Aspen Institute indicates that teens are attracted to informal programs that allow for autonomy. PRT already has a teen Influencers group that has formed under the Recreation Commission as of September of 2021. Communities that have had success in the teen programming space have formed teen programming councils and provided them with the resources to plan, market, and implement programming options.

It is recommended that the city continue to develop, empower, and support the teen Influencers to lead these efforts.

Arts, Cultural, and Enrichment Programs (dance, art, music programs)

The department currently offers a variety of programs related to arts, culture, and enrichment (line dancing, guitar lessons, arts/crafts, thoroughbred racing Latino Heritage and African American exhibits, Story Time series, Let's Chat series, Music at the Depot, Aiken Art Walk, Black History programs, etc.) and partners with non-profits such as Aiken Community Theatre, Aiken Performing Arts, Joye in Aiken and the Aiken Symphony Orchestra. There are a number of private sector opportunities within the community as well, such as the Center for African American History, Arts and Culture, the Aiken Center for the Arts, and the USCA Etherredge Center.

Continue to identify instructors and promote opportunities provided by partner organizations in the private and non-profit sectors. With the variety of opportunities that are available, promotional efforts to let the public know about these programs may need to

be enhanced. Utilize the Arts Commission to strengthen communication and coordination among area cultural organizations.

Athletic Programs

Competitive program offerings by other agencies attract youth sport participation away from city recreation leagues. This is seen through school athletic programs in the public, private and newly formed charter schools, sports groups such as Midland Valley Recreation Association and Aiken County Youth Football League; local travel teams and clubs in basketball, soccer, volleyball, softball and baseball; private tennis facilities; boxing clubs, karate programs, gymnastics facilities, baseball training facilities, golf programs, swim programs, bicycle clubs, and running clubs. Additionally there are church programs and facilities such as YMCA and Greg Park that offer athletic leagues.

The department provides a high quality and very solid menu of athletic programs and does an excellent job of understanding trends, soliciting public input, and providing new opportunities as appropriate. Keep up the excellent work in this program area.

eSports

The department has started to provide eSports programming. USC-Aiken has also started a program. If this trend and interest continues to develop and grow, consider options to provide space and technology to expand programming. However, do so carefully as the technology changes and requires new investments every few years.

Senior Programs

Because of requirements related to the grant funding secured for the development of the Lessie B. Price Aiken Senior & Youth Center six hours a day of senior programming must be provided at this location. In response to these requirements, some programs that were traditionally available at other facilities (both Odell Weeks and Smith-Hazel) had to be shifted to the new facility. This situation has caused some level of confusion and dissatisfaction among users.

Continue to evaluate and enhance messaging to your senior populations to ensure that they understand the opportunities available, why decisions have been made, and future plans to expand programming throughout the community beginning with new program options at Smith-Hazel when renovations are complete.

Transportation was identified as a major barrier to participation. Work with the county, Aiken Senior Life Services, the Lower Savannah Council of Governments Department on Aging, and other partners to expand transportation and services available to seniors (and youth) in the area. Utilize the Senior Commission to facilitate implementation of improvements to advance the well-being of seniors in Aiken.

Facility Recommendations

The City of Aiken has developed quality recreation facilities since the 1950's. Odell Weeks, Smith Hazel and Citizens Park are enviable assets. However, those facilities, while well kept, are showing their age and are outdated. Therefore, a focus of these recommendations is to take care of what you have and undertake major renovations, rebuilds, retrofits, and additions at existing facilities that meet the needs expressed during the public input process.

Odell Weeks

Odell Weeks was built in 1975 and an addition was constructed in 1997. Overall, the facility is nearly 50 years old and while well kept, is outdated. The typical lifespan of a recreation facility is 25-30 years before replacement or major renovation/remodel. Capital Projects Sales Tax IV funds have been appropriated for this facility.

Therefore, it is recommended that the city begin plans to demolish and rebuild a new recreation center on the site. This center should include 4 gyms, a multi-use room to accommodate 500 people that can be divided into smaller spaces, fitness and wellness space (aerobics, spin, cardio, strength, functional fitness space), indoor climbing wall, walking track, areas and rooms suitable to conduct day camp programs, locker rooms/restrooms, concessions/vending, retail space, and consolidated offices for most management and program staff. This new facility can act as a one-stop shop for participants.

Within Virginia Acres Park, tear down outdoor handball courts and add two additional outdoor basketball courts adjacent to current courts. Add six additional pickleball courts where two existing tennis courts are located with existing pickleball courts.

At the Weeks Tennis Center, there are 6 existing hard surfaced tennis courts recommended be converted to clay. The asphalt on the hard courts is deteriorating and funds would be better served to convert to clay in lieu of patching or a total rebuild.

Smith-Hazel

Smith-Hazel was built in 1953. Like Odell Weeks, it is well kept but extremely outdated and in need of a major renovation to include new interior and exterior windows, doors, HVAC, adding a fitness area and senior rooms within the existing space, new lobby and reception areas, new restrooms, and table/chair storage. Capital Projects Sales Tax IV funds have been appropriated for this facility.

Other considerations not included in the existing plans that should be addressed are replacement of the gym floor and updating the exterior of the building.

Citizens Park

The need for lighted multi-use rectangle fields is high, and though identified in the 2016 Northside Park Master Plan, this study focused on opportunity for expansion within existing open space at Citizens Park. Recommendation is to add 4-6 lighted multi-use rectangle fields with 2 artificial turf fields with stadium seating and fencing (up to 4 in CP3 and up to 2 in Championship Field area) with a building to accommodate restrooms, meeting area/office space for officials.

Expansion would include new parking in CP3, Banks Mill area, and Stewart field area, a rebuild of the walking track around soccer area, and addition of a maintenance, equipment, and storage shop near the Stewart field area.

Additional recommendations for the park include new lighting and higher poles on CP1, renovations to CP1 score tower, and replacement/upgrade of all scoreboards.

Conversion of field 5 to grass infield with new irrigation to make a premier full size baseball field would allow for expansion on partnership with American Legion Post 26 and provide additional baseball opportunities at the facility.

Beverly D. Clyburn Generations Park

Beverly D. Clyburn Generations Park should largely remain open space for the short to mid-term as the city renovates and upgrades existing parks and facilities. However, completing the amphitheater and adding play equipment suitable for younger children should occur as soon as practical.

As Aiken will continue to grow, demand will increase, and needs will evolve, the city should evaluate opportunities to acquire adjacent land to allow ease of expansion at Beverly D. Clyburn Generations Park for outdoor recreation and adventure programming.

Formalizing a partnership with school district to meet athletic needs that also serve the community should be a high priority to create efficiency in the use of taxpayer dollars. The development of a shared football facility and track that is open to the public when not in use by schools should be explored.

Refer to 2016 Northside Park Master Plan for future development particularly if the development of rectangle fields at Citizens Park is not possible.

Trails and Greenways

Trails, greenways, and safe walking and biking were [identified as the highest priority](#) in the needs assessment survey and were a key item discussed in the focus groups.

Priorities should include connecting Beverly D. Clyburn Generations Park, Citizens Park, Odell Weeks, Smith-Hazel, and Lessie B. Price Center to downtown and neighborhoods through a network of trails and on-street bike lanes. Many of the roads in Aiken can accommodate bike lanes with restriping and will not require rebuilds or the addition of pavement.

It is recommended that the city review the bike/pedestrian plan that was completed in 2012, the ARTS MPO 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan adopted in 2015, and reference the City Comprehensive Plan completed in 2017. As a longer term goal and strategy, the city should continue work with the county to identify funding and carry out a plan for a trail/greenway to connect Aiken and North Augusta.

Library

While the library did rise to the top 5 priorities, the gap between the importance and satisfaction level was relatively low which demonstrates that residents and users are relatively happy with what is currently available. Also, the library is operated by Aiken

County. Facility related library initiatives are the responsibility of the county, and total renovation is currently underway to provide a state-of-the-art public library.

Partnerships for mobile library sites in City parks and facilities currently exist and should continue as well as literacy program partnerships. Expand these programming partnerships as appropriate.

Indoor Aquatic Facility

Due to the cost of development and operation of aquatic facilities, options for development should be carefully studied and the City of Aiken should only proceed with development in partnership with public (e.g. county/other municipalities, schools) and/or non-profits (e.g. hospital system or YMCA) organizations. Additionally, it is important for the City of Aiken to understand that the annual operating cost will need to be heavily subsidized through tax resources. Aquatics facilities almost never generate sufficient revenue to break even and certainly will not do so in the Aiken market. Indoor aquatic facilities identified within the community relieves any immediate need for PRT to pursue the development of an aquatic center.

Special Event, Festival Space, and Entertainment Venues

In addition to several event spaces provided by PRT, there are a variety of other spaces available across the private and non-profit sectors in Aiken. The Aiken Steeplechase site will provide a great deal of event space if made available to PRT and other organizations, businesses, and event organizers. Additionally, there are other existing sites like Highfields, Aiken Horse Park, polo grounds, fairgrounds, and similar venues that are available or might be available through partnership agreements. In other words, there is not a shortage of venues or event space in the City of Aiken.

Complete the amphitheater at Beverly D. Clyburn Generations Park to further support PRT programming and community events.

Local performing arts organizations and schools (East Aiken School of the Arts, etc.) with performing arts programs like music and drama clubs should consider the development of a multi-use performing arts venue that better meets the capacity needs of these organizations and productions. However, the development of this facility should be fully supported by private fundraising efforts. See Chapman Cultural Arts Center in Spartanburg, SC (<https://www.chapmanculturalcenter.org/home/>) as a possible example of size, scale, and design.

A new 720-seat auditorium at Aiken High School along with the announcement of the development of a downtown conference center will increase available indoor event space in the community once completed.

Other Facility Recommendations

Evaluate all neighborhood and other parks to determine if there are parks and facilities that you should divest of. Some parks are placed in DOT right of way and/or property that

is not owned by City of Aiken. Consideration should be given as to future of these facilities: Sumter Street Park, Gyles Park, Charleston Street Park, Perry Park, Aiken County Farmers Market.

Hammond-Williams Park is an underutilized park that should be converted to a passive park or sold. Investment in neighborhood park amenities should be focused at Smith-Hazel, located just 0.8 miles apart from Hammond-Williams. Additionally, PRT maintains Centennial Park, another underutilized property consisting of 3.3 acres of greenspace that requires weekly mowing and litter control. Consider selling to adjacent apartment complex or developer.

Operations Recommendations

Across all focus groups, the need for improved marketing, promotions, and communications across city operations (not just parks and recreation) was the most often mentioned area for enhancement.

Marketing, Promotions, and Communications

Marketing, promotion, and communication efforts by PRT appear to be effective. Programs and events are well attended and often fill to capacity and have waitlists. However, there is always room for improvement. Several suggestions were made to provide some direct marketing targeted to specific segments of the population like seniors, minority communities, and neighborhood associations. Everyday Direct through the USPS is an easy and effective way to accomplish this endeavor.

To ensure that PRT's programs and services are responsive to the needs of all citizens, be intentional in efforts to strengthen engagement and communication with diverse groups throughout the community. Council should make a concerted effort to ensure that the recreation commission and other related commissions (arts, seniors, etc.) are representative and proportional to the demographics of the population (race, age, gender, socio-economic status).

Along similar lines, the department's ongoing CAPRA Accreditation process revealed a lack of a consolidated marketing plan. A marketing plan complete with objectives, situation assessment, market coverage by alternatives, mix, methods, and evaluation criteria and methods would address the feedback of inconsistencies in communication of programs to participants. It is recommended that the department develop an overall marketing and communications plan for core offerings, facilities and services that meets the CAPRA Standard as well as department needs. The marketing plan should include strategic direction for the department, such as style guidelines and templates for marketing materials.

Funding and Fee Structure

Conduct a comprehensive review of pricing structures to include making a determination about the future of fee differentials for in city and out of city participants. The biggest questions to answer in this review are what you are charging, who you are charging, and most importantly, why you are charging the fees you collect while ensuring that new fee structures do not become a barrier to participation.

Groups (profit, non-profit, public, private, religious, families, etc.) are allowed to use facilities, amenities, and equipment as well as requiring staff to service those events at no charge, are a contributing factor to the personnel issues discussed in those recommendations, are a missed opportunity to increase revenues, impact the department's ability to conduct regular day to day programming, and cause a variety of other issues. The researchers are unaware of any other municipal recreation agencies that accommodate these requests at no charge. This situation must be addressed.

The city should increase the hospitality tax from 1% to 2%. Not doing so is and continues to be an unfortunate missed opportunity. The additional 1% will generate approximately \$1.6 million per year that can be dedicated to enhancing operations and leveraged for capital projects. Hospitality tax does not create a financial burden on individuals and families as every \$100 spent on prepared food and beverage (which is a choice to purchase, not a necessity) results in a \$1 addition to that bill. In other words, this tax represents a low burden on the payer while providing a high impact on your community. Surrounding communities like North Augusta and the Town of Lexington (and most other places that have implemented the tax) charge the full two percent. Finally, if the county were to decide to pass a county wide hospitality tax before the city increases to 2%, the county would collect the additional 1% inside the city limits and retain those funds within the county budget with no benefit to the city.

Software System Recommendations

The department currently uses and is adequately satisfied with the eTrak system. If the city ever adopts a packaged comprehensive software system that includes a recreation management component, the department should transition to the new system.

Personnel and Staffing

The current staffing structure is stretched to their maximum capacity. As programs, facilities, and other amenities are added, appropriate personnel will need to be added to meet future demand, maintain facilities, and continue to provide quality service to residents and participants.

A premium pay differential in PRT for staff that are expected to work nights and weekends should be considered as an incentive. Pressures on staff who are working a tremendous number of nights and weekends (24-26 weekends per individual per year) is causing some low morale, turnover, and other job satisfaction related issues. Additionally, these working conditions put PRT in a position where they compete against other available positions in city departments where not only pay rates are higher, but work-life balance is also a deciding factor in their decision to change positions. Demand and pressures currently exist in PRT and will increase with the development of new programs and facilities.

Increasing part-time wages along with decreasing minimum age requirements would allow PRT to be more competitive in hiring. New hires with experience should be offered starting rate dependent on qualifications.

Through a 2-year fellowship agreement with Lead for America, the department has funded an individual to lead staff in the process to reach agency accreditation. If successful in pursuing accreditation PRT will need to consider how to allocate that responsibility to an existing staff member or evaluate the need to create a new position that will oversee accreditation in addition to other job responsibilities.

As this strategic plan is implemented and new development occurs, conduct a review of organizational and personnel structure. The tourism recommendations outline personnel issues related to that area.

Other

PRT has become an event management and rental agency due to providing equipment, set up and tear down, shuttle drivers, and venues outside of the core programs and facilities that have traditionally fallen under the department's areas of responsibility. The mobile stage is used for 1 City event (Downtown Tree Lighting) and could better serve the community if sold to a local rental company such as Allstar Rentals. Purchased in 2011 through Capital Projects Sales Tax II, there are no depreciation funds to replace the stage once it exceed its useful lifespan, valued at 25 years.

There needs to be a pressure release valve in the form of additional personnel and budget resources, giving the department the authority to say no to unreasonable/unmanageable requests.

The City Employee Health Center is maintained by PRT. Consider assigning staff at the adjacent City Public Safety Station 2 to assist in order to relieve pressures from PRT maintenance.

Tourism Recommendations

With a county visitor center, a city visitor center, and a Chamber of Commerce, Aiken/Aiken County has the most disjointed tourism/destination/visitor management structures the researchers have observed. It is incredibly inefficient, ineffective and extremely confusing to both visitors, locals, and hospitality sector business owners. The development of these partnerships and the creation of a new structure to manage tourism are critical to address this situation and position Aiken to better serve visitors and leverage the economic benefits of tourism.

- 1) Create a partnership between the city, county, and Chamber to consolidate resources, fund, and create “Visit Aiken” as the single tourism marketing organization for the area. Take a zero-based approach to staffing by creating a new organization structure and position descriptions and qualifications. An initial recommendation for staffing might include:
 - Executive director to set direction and oversee all marketing and promotion of the Aiken area
 - Tourism events and marketing coordinator to work with partners to attract and manage events
 - Visitor management coordinator to collect, organize, and disseminate information to both visitors, local hospitality businesses, event organizers, and other partners, create sample itineraries for visitors based on length of stay, time of year, and interests/themes, and oversee employees who staff the visitor center.
 - Tourism promotions and social media coordinator to manage the tourism and event “calendar” and assist with local and regional advertising as well as plugging into opportunities for destination marketing provided through SCPRT.
- 2) Find an appropriate location (downtown) to create a single visitors center. Consider utilizing available space in the Chamber of Commerce. With the announcement of the new potential conference center development, determine if a move to that site makes sense as that project unfolds. The current Aiken Visitors Center and Train Museum can stand alone as a Train Museum, allow for expansion of exhibits and programs, and continue to provide a small-scale event space.
- 3) However, this recommendation should be aligned with the upcoming tourism strategic planning efforts being facilitated by Bandwagon in December.

Dr. Bob Brookover Bio and Project Resume

Dr. Bob Brookover is a recreation and tourism researcher/consultant specializing in community and economic development, strategic/master planning, tourism product development, public input and needs assessment processes, and economic impact/return on investment studies. He is on the faculty in the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management at Clemson University where he serves as the Coordinator of Online and Enterprise Programs and was the Undergraduate Coordinator for approximately 15 years. With over 25 years of experience in the field, Dr. Brookover has completed projects including needs assessments, program evaluations, master and strategic plans, feasibility studies, tourism product development plans, cost recovery/financial analysis studies, and economic impact/return on investment analysis projects for over 20 communities, counties, and non-profit organizations in the past five years. He currently teaches courses in the core curriculum including recreation programming, facility planning and operations, finance, risk management, marketing/promotions, and evaluation and upper division and graduate level courses on recreation and tourism finance, grant writing, strategic/master planning, and operations. As Undergraduate Coordinator, Dr. Brookover developed a number of innovative curricula including the award winning, PRTM EDGE Integrated Core Curriculum.

Before joining the faculty, he was the Director of Facilities and Outdoor Programs in Campus Recreation at Clemson. His primary area of responsibility included the day-to-day operations of a 190,000+ square foot comprehensive indoor wellness, recreation, and aquatics facility, indoor and outdoor tennis centers, 2 lakefront beach/recreation areas, several multi-use sport field complexes, intramurals, and club sport, and coordinating a variety of sporting events and tournaments. He was also responsible for the renovation and expansion of Fike Recreation Center and created and launched the Clemson Outdoor Recreation and Education (CORE) Program.

In 2020, Dr. Brookover was elected to Clemson City Council and is serving his first term. Prior to his election, he Chaired the ClemsonNext Strategic Planning effort which was a year-long effort to address growth and development in the Clemson area.

Education

Clemson University Education Leadership, PhD, 2002.

Clemson University Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management, MPRTM, 1995.

Clemson University Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management, BS, 1993.

Experience

Clemson University Senior Lecturer: 8/01-present

Director of Facilities and Outdoor Programs, Campus Recreation: 12/96-8/01

Relevant Projects

- 2021 Newberry Recreation Complex Phase II Conceptual Master Plan

- 2020 Climbing Wall Association Industry Benchmark Study
- 2020 Pelham, AL Parks and Recreation Master Plan
- 2020 Myrtle Beach Parks, Recreation, and Sports Tourism Master Plan
- 2018-2020 Economic contribution of coastal nature-based tourism for the state of South Carolina
- 2019 Irmo-Chapin Recreation Commission Strategic Plan
- 2019 Travelers Rest, SC Downtown Master Plan
- 2019 City of Greenville, SC Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan
- 2019 Seneca, SC Parks and Recreation Master Plan
- Summerville, SC Parks and Recreation Master Plan
- City of Spartanburg, SC Recreation Needs Assessment
- Spartanburg County, SC Recreation Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan
- Mt. Pleasant, SC Recreation Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan
- Roswell, GA Strategic Plan for Recreation, Parks, Historic, and Cultural Affairs
- Lancaster County (SC) Recreation District Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan
- Greenville Area Recreation Agencies Public Input Process and Strategic Plan w/ Anderson
- Hilton Head National Redevelopment Study w/ Salazar
- Examining capacity for a cooperative seafood tourism trail as a value-added marine resource-based recreation and tourism product on the South Carolina coast w/ Jodice, Ramshaw, and Lanford
- Understanding demand for value-added products and services associated with for-hire boat trips on the South Carolina coast w/ Jodice, Hammitt, and Oh
- City of Aiken Northside and Eustis Park Project Public Input and Master Plan
- Fort Mill, SC Recreation Strategic Plan
- Town of Moultonborough, NH Needs Assessment and Indoor Recreation Center Feasibility Study w/ Barcelona
- Town of Mt. Pleasant, SC Cost Recovery Feasibility Study w/ Barcelona
- Camden, SC Tourism Action Plan and Branding Strategy
- St. Andrews Parks and Playgrounds (SC) Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan for Family Fitness Plus w/ Barcelona
- Rockingham, NC Strategic Tourism Plan and Branding Strategy
- Pee Dee (SC) Regional Agri-Tourism Strategic Plan w/ Jodice
- Greenville County, SC Area Recreation Provider Needs Assessment w/ Barcelona
- City of Rock Hill, SC Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Public Input Process and Strategic Recommendations w/ Anderson and Barcelona
- Oconee County, SC Tourism Action Plan
- Pickens County, SC Tourism Action Plan w/ Norman
- Spartanburg County, SC Tourism Action Plan and Branding Strategy
- Irmo-Chapin (SC) Recreation Needs Assessment and Strategic Recommendations
- Newberry, SC Recreation Master Plan
- Aiken County, SC Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Strategic Plan w/ Barcelona
- City of Greer, SC Parks and Recreation Master Plan w/ Anderson
- Town of Fountain Inn, SC Strategic/Product Development Plan for Tourism and Recreation
- Town of Central, SC Tourism Action Plan
- Town Dillon, SC Tourism Plan
- Town of Barnwell, SC Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Strategic Plan

- Jasper County, SC Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Master Plan w/ Wright
- Williamsburg County, SC Strategic Plan for Tourism w/ Dixon
- Williamsburg County, SC Equestrian Facility Feasibility Study w/ Dixon
- An Action Plan to Increase the Sustainable and Regionally Appropriate Use of Natural and Historic Resources in Union County w/ Halo, Norman, and Beeco

Recent Economic Impact Studies

- 2019 Euphoria Food Festival Economic Impact Study, Greenville, SC
- 2018 Economic Contribution of Tourism Industry on Spartanburg County
- 2015-2018 Panther's Training Camp Economic Impact Study
- 2016 Town of Lake Lure and Chimney Rock Village Trail Development Economic Impact Study
- 2015 & 2019 Artisphere Economic Impact and Marketing Study
- City of Greer 2015 Festivals Economic Impact Study
- 2014 Upper Palmetto YMCA (York County, SC) Aquatic Center
- 2005, 2010, 2014, and 2019 Economic Impact and Marketing Study of the RBC Heritage presented by Boeing (PGA Tour Event)
- Multiple Projects/Multiple Years - Greenville County, SC – Soccer, Westside Aquatics, Estimated Economic Impact of County Recreation Expenditures on Greenville County, SC
- Multiple Projects/Multiple Years - Spartanburg County, SC – Tyger River Park, Tourism Industry
- 2013 Easley Big League World Series
- 2010 Proposed Reedy Square Project – Greenville, SC (updated in 2013 and 2015)
- 2013 Rock Hill Multi-use Recreation Facility
- 2012 Economic Impact of the BMW Charity Classic