

2025 - 2028

Strategic Plan II

Bringing Our Vision to Life



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Milestones 2011 - 2024

2011

- Reorganized and Created Athletics & Recreation Programs Divisions
- Started Cherokee Youth Basketball (CYB) program
- Renovated Sequoyah Park, Union Hill Community Center

2012

- Opened Splash Pad in Cline Park
- Opened Badger Creek Park
- Renovated Hobgood Park Softball Complex

2013

- Opened Cherokee County Aquatic Center
- Renovated Blankets Creek Bike Trailhead & Parking Lot

2014

- Renovated Barnett Park, Dwight Terry Park, Hobgood Park Baseball Complex, JJ Biello Park, Woodstock Recreation Center, Waleska Park, Weatherby Park

2015

- Recognized with NAYS Excellence in Youth Sports Award
- Opened Richard “Hunkey” Mauldin Sports Complex @ Kenney Askew Park

2016

- Opened Hobgood Park Artificial Turf Athletic Field
- Awarded GRPA District 5 Agency of the Year

2017

- Hired first Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist
- Reorganized Parks Division into Three (3) Geographic Maintenance Zones
- Implemented Inmate Work Detail Program with Sheriff’s Office
- Opened Patriots Park
- Opened Cherokee Veterans Park Phase I

2018

- Created Outdoor Recreation Program Coordinator position
- Opened Playground Addition @ Cherokee Veterans Park
- Opened Outdoor Fitness Equipment @ Hobgood Park
- Opened Monument @ Cherokee Veterans Park

2019

- Adopted/ Completed 2019-2028 Recreation, Parks, Green Space & Trails Master Plan
- Completed L.B. “Buzz” Ahrens, Jr. Recreation Center Conceptual Plans
- Opened New Pavilion @ Cherokee Veterans Tennis / Pickleball Courts
- Replaced Seven (7) Vehicles in CRPA Maintenance Fleet
- Purchased 23 AC on Etowah River & Ball Ground Road for Future Park
- Launched New Website, www.playcherokee.org
- Awarded GRPA District 5 Agency of the Year

2020

- Launched New Activity Guide Format - *Play Cherokee*
- Completed Renovations to Twin Creeks Softball Complex Field 3
- Completed Office Renovations at South Annex; Adding two (2) New Offices and Renovating the Conference Room
- Held First Staff Retreat Since 2013
- Adopted a New Logo, Branding Guide and Marketing Plan
- Received \$250,000 Grant from Pilgrim’s Hometown Strong Program to Renovate Kenney Askew Park
- Awarded “Better Sports for Kids - Quality Program Provider” by NAYS
- All Leadership Team Members achieved CPRP (Certified Parks & Recreation Professional) Status

2021

- Purchased Cochran Property & Milford Property for Future Park in Free Home, GA
- Adopted Southwest Cherokee Parks & Trails Plan
- Added New Playground at Hunkey Mauldin Sports Complex
- Replaced Playground at Sequoyah Park
- Converted Two Tennis Courts at Kenney Askew Park to Six Pickleball Courts
- Awarded Construction Services Agreement for L.B. “Buzz” Ahrens, Jr. Recreation Center at Cherokee Veterans Park for \$10.5M
- Launched Master Planning Process for Three (3) Future Parks in NE Cherokee- Cochran Park in Free Home, Yellow Creek Road Parcel near Etowah River, and Highway 372 Parcel near Etowah River and Long Swamp Creek Confluence.
- Achieved National Accreditation through CAPRA (Commission for Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies)
- Implemented Supplemental Pay Plan to encourage Staff Development and CEU’s

2022

- Completed Hickory Flat Gym Renovations
- Adopted the Northeast Cherokee Parks Master Plans
- Received \$155K GRPA Summer Boost Grant funds from Department of Education to expand summer camp opportunities
- Purchased 40 acres in Hickory Flat area for a future park
- Completed new pavilions at Mauldin Sports Complex, Cherokee Veterans, & Patriots
- Completed 1/3-mile walking track at Mauldin Sports Complex
- Received \$600K Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Grant for the development of the Long Swamp Creek Recreation Area

2023

- Opened the L.B. “Buzz” Ahrens, Jr. Recreation Center on February 3, 2023
- Launched the Master Planning Process for the newly purchased Hickory Flat parcel
- Opened the Mica Fire Station Community Room
- Received \$90K GRPA Summer Boost Grant funds from Department of Education to expand summer camp opportunities

2024

- Groundbreaking for Long Swamp Creek Recreation Area on August 20, 2024
- Opened the Suttalee Fire Station Community Room
- Adopted the Hickory Flat Area Park Master Plan
- Completed over 30 small capital projects for \$1.1M
- Received \$75K GRPA Summer Boost Grant funds from Department of Education to expand summer camp opportunities
- Added Natural Resources Division

Introduction

The Charge

The strategic plan was first adopted in 2020 to identify key priorities and develop action plans to accomplish the goals and objectives set forth. The key priorities are based on recommendations set forth in the 2019-2028 Cherokee County Recreation, Parks, Green Space and Trails Master Plan as well as input from community partners and county staff. The strategic plan will measure different metrics and track progress toward our goals. This edition of the strategic plan covers 2025-2028.

County Overview

Cherokee County is committed to providing a superior quality of life for our residents and to preserving the beauty, unique character, and desirability of the community where we live, work, and play. Recreation, parks, green space and trails play a vital role in maintaining a vibrant, livable community.

Located approximately forty-five minutes north of metropolitan Atlanta near the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, Cherokee County encompasses approximately 434 square miles. It includes six municipalities as well as most of Allatoona Lake, a 12,000-acre man-made lake managed by the US Army Corps of Engineers. Both the Etowah and Little Rivers flow south and west through the County and into the lake. As of July 2024, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) estimated the County population at 292,360. The County is a unique mix of suburban living concentrated mostly in the south transitioning to rural communities in the north.

As a function of the Cherokee County Board of Commissioners, Cherokee Recreation & Parks is the principal provider of recreation and park facilities and programs in Cherokee County. Our mission is making life better by cultivating active communities through recreation while preserving our parks and facilities. We operate 31 parks and recreation facilities throughout the county that encompass more than 2,443 acres including 40 baseball/softball diamonds, 29 athletic fields, 20 tennis courts, 8 pickleball courts, 17 playgrounds and more than 45 miles of trails. This includes the Cherokee County Aquatic Center, Woodstock Recreation Center, L.B. “Buzz” Ahrens, Jr. Recreation Center, the Hickory Flat Gym, and the Union Hill Community Center. Cherokee Recreation & Parks provides a variety of recreation opportunities for youth and adults in the areas of athletics, aquatics, instructional programs, special events, older adult activities and therapeutic recreation as well as the upkeep and maintenance of our parks. We partner with a variety of other organizations throughout the county to maximize our resources and further expand recreation opportunities throughout the county.

In November 2008, Cherokee County voters were asked if the County should issue general obligation bonds up to \$90 million for the purpose of improving and expanding recreation and parks opportunities within the County. Voters overwhelmingly approved the measure and, in 2009, the Cherokee County Board of Commissioners began issuing those bonds for the purpose of fulfilling the commitment to the citizens of Cherokee County. In November 2023, the voters approved SPLOST24 for county wide improvements which includes \$36.5M dedicated to parks.

From 2009 through 2018, the multiple projects were completed that increased and improved recreation and parks facilities in Cherokee County. These projects are listed in the Milestones

section. For detailed descriptions, see the *Capital Improvement Program 2008-2018 Report*, available online at www.cherokeecountyga.gov under Recreation & Parks > Planning.

The most recent *Cherokee County Recreation, Parks, Green Space & Trails Master Plan* was adopted by the Board of Commissioners in May 2019. This plan identified gaps in services and made recommendations for future park development and recreation services.

Based upon the level of service at the time, the community standards and the projected growth in the county over the next ten years, the findings from this assessment include the following recommendations.

- Develop a countywide plan for a system of linear parks & greenways that connects high priority locations throughout the county and coordinates with plans for greenways within the cities.
- Develop a multi-generational recreation center at Cherokee Veterans Park.
- Develop a community park in the southwest portion of Cherokee County on property already available for this purpose.
- Develop additional synthetic multipurpose athletic fields by converting natural grass fields in existing parks.
- As part of any new active park, the county should consider adding the following facilities that show a deficit over the next ten years; rectangular athletic fields (football, soccer, lacrosse) including synthetic and natural turf; running track; tennis & pickleball courts and a skate park.
- Develop canoe/kayak launches at strategic points along the Etowah and Little Rivers.
- Develop more parks that are passive and/or expand existing passive parks. The county should continue to develop the following amenities that show a deficit over the next ten years; dog parks; trails; canoe/kayak launches and disc golf courses.
- Develop pickleball courts to meet the growing demand.
- Renovate those parks that were not improved under the most recent capital improvement program.
- Develop a multi-generational recreation center in the southwest portion of the county to serve this growing and underserved population with indoor recreation space.
- Develop a community or regional park at the Thacker Property.
- Develop a community or regional park at the Yellow Creek Road property along with a canoe/kayak launch and other passive amenities.
- seek to acquire land for neighborhood and community parks in areas where service gaps exist, and growth is expected to continue.

Additionally, the plan identifies and recommends several operational improvements.

- Develop a cost recovery, resource allocation plan and revenue policy.
- Update maintenance standards for parks.
- Expand programming in areas identified through the community survey.
- Pursue CAPRA accreditation.
- Hire additional staff and increase operations budget as new facilities come online.

For detailed recommendations on both capital and operations, see the full master plan available online at www.cherokeecountyga.gov under Recreation & Parks > Planning.

Scope & Scale

The *2025 - 2028 Strategic Plan* continues to provide a comprehensive set of objectives and action plans enabling Cherokee Recreation and Parks to accomplish our mission and bring our vision to life. Phase two of this strategic plan covers a four-year period (2025 - 2028). However, given the complex and fast-changing nature of our county, Cherokee Recreation & Parks staff along with the Cherokee County Recreation and Parks (CCRP) Advisory Board will review this document annually and update it as needed to adapt agency resources in response to or in anticipation of changing conditions. A new 10-year Comprehensive Master Plan and a 5-year Strategic Plan should be adopted by 2029.

This version of the plan was reviewed and adopted by CCRP Advisory Board at their February 12, 2025 meeting, and by the Board of Commissioners at their March 18, 2025 meeting.

Community Partners

The audience for this strategic Plan document remains Cherokee County community partners. They include, but are not limited to:

- Cherokee County Board of Commissioners
- County Staff
- Cherokee County Recreation & Parks Advisory Board
- Cherokee County Residents
- Other Park User Groups



Mission, Vision & Values

Our Mission: MAKING LIFE BETTER by cultivating active communities through recreation while preserving our parks and facilities.

Our Vision: Cherokee Recreation & Parks, acknowledged as a trend-setting and innovative leader in the field, offers a diverse array of exceptional public parks, recreation facilities, and programs, making our county the premier destination to live, work, and play.

Our Values (INTREPID):

- Inspiring the Community
- Noble Stewardship & Sustainability
- Improvement through Teamwork
- Health & Reliable Safety
- Exceptional Fun & Play
- Integrity & Professional Service
- Innovative Accessibility & Inclusion
- Diligent Conservation Efforts



Priorities

Summary

Priority	Actions
Develop high priority parks and recreation facilities as recommended in the current master plan.	1.1 Open NE Cherokee Parks (Long Swamp, Yellow Creek, & Cochran Parks). 1.2 Develop SW Cherokee Parks Plans (Woodworth Park). 1.3 Identify and develop a comprehensive trails plan for the county. 1.4 Complete development of Cherokee Veterans BB/SB Complex. 1.5 Complete field renovations at Sequoyah Park and Badger Creek. 1.6 Add more inclusive playground components.
Improve the maintenance and overall appearance of parks & facilities.	2.1 Develop and expand on turf management program to include common areas in the parks and facilities. 2.2 Improve overall curb appeal in parks & facilities by implementing a workflow efficiency procedure that improves maintenance standards. 2.3 Increase covered and indoor storage for park maintenance materials and equipment. 2.4 Create a 20-year revolving plan to replace or renovate aging playgrounds. 2.5 Evaluate Riverchase Park for conversion to unprogrammed green space. 2.6 Maintain a high level of parks staff per acre (12-15) of maintained park space.
Increase available operating and capital funds.	3.1 Complete an evaluation of athletic field use fees with recommended changes to be approved by the Recreation & Parks Advisory Board. 3.2 Add additional shade structures (pavilions) for rentals. 3.3 Solicit new partnership opportunities. 3.4 Pursue grant opportunities.
Expand programming and recreation opportunities.	4.1 Add outdoor and therapeutic programming opportunities. 4.2 Increase athletic and summer camp opportunities. 4.3 Add/convert pickleball courts to our park inventory. 4.4 Renovate the The WREC kitchen/concession area into kitchen/programming space. 4.5 Develop soft-surface nature trails throughout the county parks. 4.6 Add an arts programming component to our Recreation Division. 4.7 Add programming geared toward improving adult job skills.
Ensure continued viability of the organization through organizational improvements, staff development, fiscal responsibility and public awareness.	5.1 Maintain national accreditation through the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA). 5.2 Create Comprehensive Master Plan for 2029-2038. 5.3 Research and develop new marketing strategies for improved branding 5.4 Complete monument parks signs to new standards. 5.5 Increase the number of staff members that hold professional certifications. 5.6 Develop and expand on staff on-boarding and training process for staff. 5.7 Complete a Cost Recovery Plan for the entire agency. 5.8 Prioritize parks & facilities for increased security based on vulnerabilities including facilities, and parks. 5.9 Work with stakeholders in the community to form a non-profit parks foundation that will support the efforts of the agency. 5.10 Increase the availability of PPE and safety training for all staff.

Priority Area 1

Goal -

Develop high priority parks and recreation facilities as recommended in the current master plan.

Actions -

- 1.1 Open NE Cherokee Parks (Long Swamp, Yellow Creek, & Cochran Parks).
- 1.2 Develop SW Cherokee Parks Plans (Woodworth Park).
- 1.3 Identify and develop a comprehensive trails plan for the county.
- 1.4 Complete development of Cherokee Veterans BB/SB Complex.
- 1.5 Complete field renovations at Sequoyah Park and Badger Creek.
- 1.6 Add more inclusive playground components.

Key Performance Measures

- Complete design, permitting, bidding, and construction of the Long Swamp Creek Recreation Area, Yellow Creek Conservation Area & Trails, and E.W. and Edith Cochran Park.
- Complete design, permitting, bidding, and construction of Woodworth Park.
- Complete comprehensive master plan for overall county transportation & trails plan.
- Complete ownership transfer, schematic design, and maintenance & operations plan for The Spring Valley Nature Preserve.
- Complete design, permitting, bidding, and construction of the Cherokee Veterans Park Baseball/Softball Complex.
- Complete design, permitting, bidding, and construction for new synthetic turf at the Sequoyah Park multi-purpose field and Badger Creek soccer field(s).
- Evaluate and add fully accessible ADA compliant playground components to existing playgrounds and future playgrounds starting with Cherokee Veterans Park.

Priority Area 2

Goal -

Improve the maintenance and overall appearance of parks & facilities.

Actions -

- 2.1 Develop and expand on turf management program to include curb appeal/ common areas in the parks and facilities.
- 2.2 Improve overall curb appeal in parks & facilities by implementing a workflow efficiency procedure that improves maintenance standards.
- 2.3 Increase covered and indoor storage for park maintenance materials and equipment.
- 2.4 Create a 20-year revolving plan to replace or renovate aging playgrounds.
- 2.5 Evaluate Riverchase Park for conversion to unprogrammed green space.
- 2.6 Maintain a staff maintenance to acreage of 1 worker > or = 12 acres.

Key Performance Measures

- Develop and implement a new turf management plan that expands into sodded grass and landscaped common areas in the parks and surrounding the facilities.
- Develop and implement a standard 12-month workflow chart that emphasizes efficiency and timing of seasonal maintenance and project prioritization.
- Identify locations and funding source for increasing covered and indoor storage space for the Parks Maintenance and Natural Resources Divisions.
- Evaluate, research, and create a 20-year revolving plan to replace or renovate all playgrounds within our inventory. That is the recommended life span for equipment.
- Completed a traffic study for Riverchase Park. Based on this study, provide a recommendation for conversion to unprogrammed green space or sale to the private sector.
- Based on national park standards, maintain one park maintenance worker per 12-15 acres of maintained park space.

Priority Area 3

Goal -

Increase available operating and capital funds.

Actions -

- 3.1 Complete an evaluation of athletic field use fees with recommended changes to be approved by the Recreation & Parks Advisory Board.
- 3.2 Add additional shade structures (pavilions) for rentals
- 3.3 Solicit new partnership opportunities
- 3.4 Pursue grant opportunities.

Key Performance Measures

- Present advisory board with recommendations on athletic use fees on a bi-annual basis.
- Add more pavilions to identified parks (Cherokee Veterans, Long Swamp, etc.).
- Identify new partnership opportunities beyond Coca Cola and Northside Hospital.
- Submit 3 to 6 grant applications as available annually.

Priority Area 4

Goal -

Expand programming and recreation opportunities.

Actions -

- 4.1 Add outdoor and therapeutic programming opportunities.
- 4.2 Increase athletic and summer camp opportunities.
- 4.3 Add/convert pickleball courts to our park inventory.
- 4.4 Renovate “The WREC” concession area into kitchen/ programming space.
- 4.5 Develop soft-surface nature trails throughout the county parks.
- 4.6 Add an Arts programming component to our Recreation Division
- 4.7 Add programming geared toward improving adult job skills

Key Performance Measures

- Increase more sustainable outdoor and therapeutic programs by one or more programs each from 2025 to 2028.
- Increase athletic and summer camp opportunities by expanding into new facilities and parks throughout the county.
- Evaluate the current use of tennis courts in county inventory to determine an equitable share of the courts for tennis and pickleball usage including construction of new courts.
- Develop a plan, budget, and complete the renovation of the “The WREC” kitchen/ concession area to be converted by 2027.
- Add an average of 5 miles of trails annually over the next five years to existing and new parks.
- Develop a business plan to add an arts programming element to the Recreation Division that includes, but not limited to cultural arts, visual arts, musical, and performing arts.
- Research and develop a plan to include instructional programming geared toward improving adult job skills such as small equipment operator and repair, ESOL, carpentry, wood working, public speaking, etc.

Priority Area 5

Goal -

Ensure continued viability of the organization through organizational improvements, staff development, fiscal responsibility and public awareness.

Actions -

- 5.1 Maintain national accreditation through the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA).
- 5.2 Create and Adopt a Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Master Plan for 2029-2038.
- 5.3 Research and Develop new marketing strategies for improved branding.
- 5.4 Complete monument parks signs to new standards.
- 5.5 Increase the number of staff members that hold professional certifications.
- 5.6 Develop and Expand on staff on-boarding and training process for staff.
- 5.7 Complete a Cost Recovery Plan for the entire agency.
- 5.8 Prioritize parks & facilities for increased security based on vulnerabilities including facilities, and parks.
- 5.9 Work with stakeholders in the community to form a non-profit parks foundation that will support the efforts of the agency.
- 5.10 Increase the availability of PPE and safety training for all staff.

Key Performance Measures

- Complete and submit self-assessment report to CAPRA by the 2025 deadlines for re-accreditation.
- Bid, select, and work with a planning firm to develop a Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Master Plan for 2029-2038.
- Continue to expand branding and marketing capabilities as social media trends change due to consumer demands. Develop and implement a plan that shows connectivity of county parks, facilities, and programs.
- Design and adopt new monument sign standards. Develop a plan to have all monument signs added or replaced by the end of 2026.
- Standardize the criteria that ensures that all full-time staff are certified, licensed, or trained specific to their job responsibilities annually.

- Formalize a monthly on-boarding and training process for new and existing employees that goes beyond basic introductions.
- Complete a Cost Recovery Plan for the agency by December 2025.
- Complete a prioritized list of park and facilities where enhanced security is needed. Implement the plan within capital project funding and maintain with operating funds.
- Work with the County Attorney to create Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, with IT department to create a domain name and website tools and recruit key public figures to serve on the board of directors of a non-profit parks foundation.
- Designate additional operational funding to provide training and supplies need for improved availability of PPE for all employees.

Adopted this 18th day of March 2025


Harry Johnston, Chairman

ATTEST:


Christy Black, County Clerk

