



# CONOVER PARKS MASTER PLAN 2008





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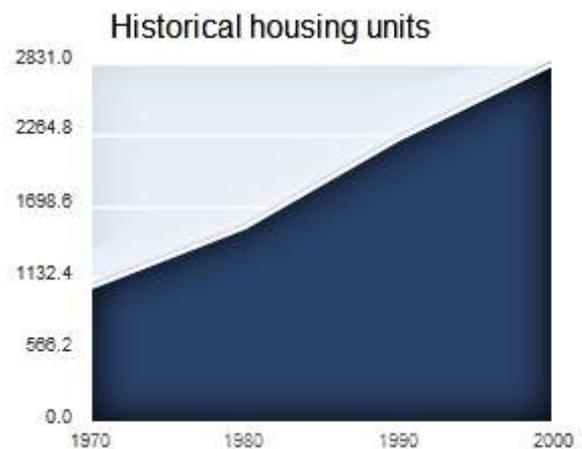
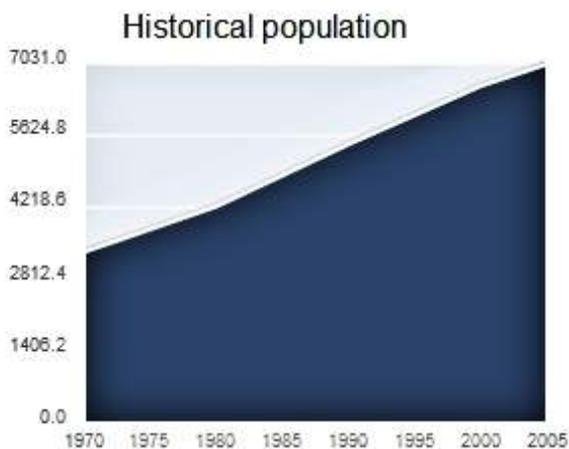


## Chapter 1. Introduction and Background

### 1.1 Background

Conover is located in the western piedmont area of the State and is part of the Hickory Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), the fourth largest MSA in the State. Conover is located approximately 50 miles northwest of Charlotte; 60 miles west of Winston-Salem; and 80 miles east of Asheville, and is the geographic center of Catawba County. Interstate 40 traverses the City along with other major roads including US Highway 70, US Highway 321, US Highway 70A, and NC Highway 16. As of 2008, the land area of the City is 10.7 square miles.

The City of Conover is the third most populous municipality within Catawba County. The 2000 Census estimated the population of Conover at 6667 residents; the 2006 State Certified Estimate is 7,792 reflecting 16% growth in that time. Conover has approximately 3,033 housing units, based on the 2004 Special Census Count. The median resident age of Conover citizens' is 38.0 years old, which is 2.7 years older than the NC average.



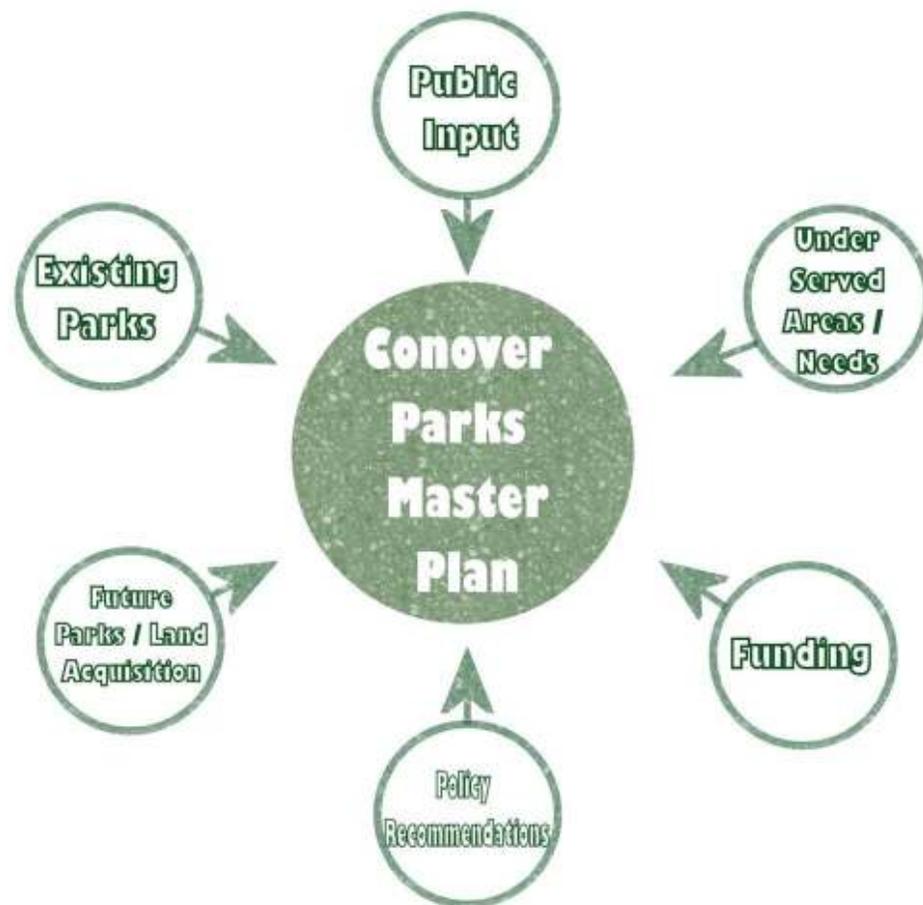
Courtesy City-Data



## 1.2 Goal of the Parks Master Plan

The goal of the Parks Master Plan is to improve Conover Citizens' quality of life by adequately meeting the park and recreational needs of the community. The first step in planning for the future is the development of a document that:

- Analyzes existing park amenities provided in Conover
- Utilizes public input and desire for parks
- Takes the best information available to develop a strategic plan that will identify the key locations and park amenities that will be provided in the future.





## Chapter 2. Public Input

### 2.1 Seeking Community Input

Public input is vital in the development of the Parks Master Plan. It is critical to develop and illustrate an overall vision for the future development of parks as Conover moves into the future. Several methods have been utilized to solicit community input in the planning process and to engage interest in parks and recreation planning:

#### A. Public Workshops

Two advertised public workshops were held at the Shuford YMCA in an effort to obtain citizen input and opinions regarding recreational greenways and trail systems in Conover (see fig 1.1). Maps and illustrations were used to generate interest. Participants were encouraged to identify locations of desired trail and greenway connections throughout the city. City Staff spoke with numerous participants, answered many questions and engaged in a beneficial dialogue regarding the overall benefits of the development of recreation master plans.



Figure 1.1: Public input is gathered at the Shuford YMCA.



Two public workshops were held at the Conover City Hall. The first workshop was held to seek citizen input on needs in specific neighborhood parks (see fig 1.2). Conover youth participation was high at this workshop, showing that we have been able to reach a good cross section of citizens. The second workshop (Figure 1.3) was held to review the entire park system and the gain input on the Parks Master Plan.



Figure 1.2:  
Public Input  
Workshop on  
Trinity Park

Figure 1.3:  
Public Input on  
Parks Master  
Plan

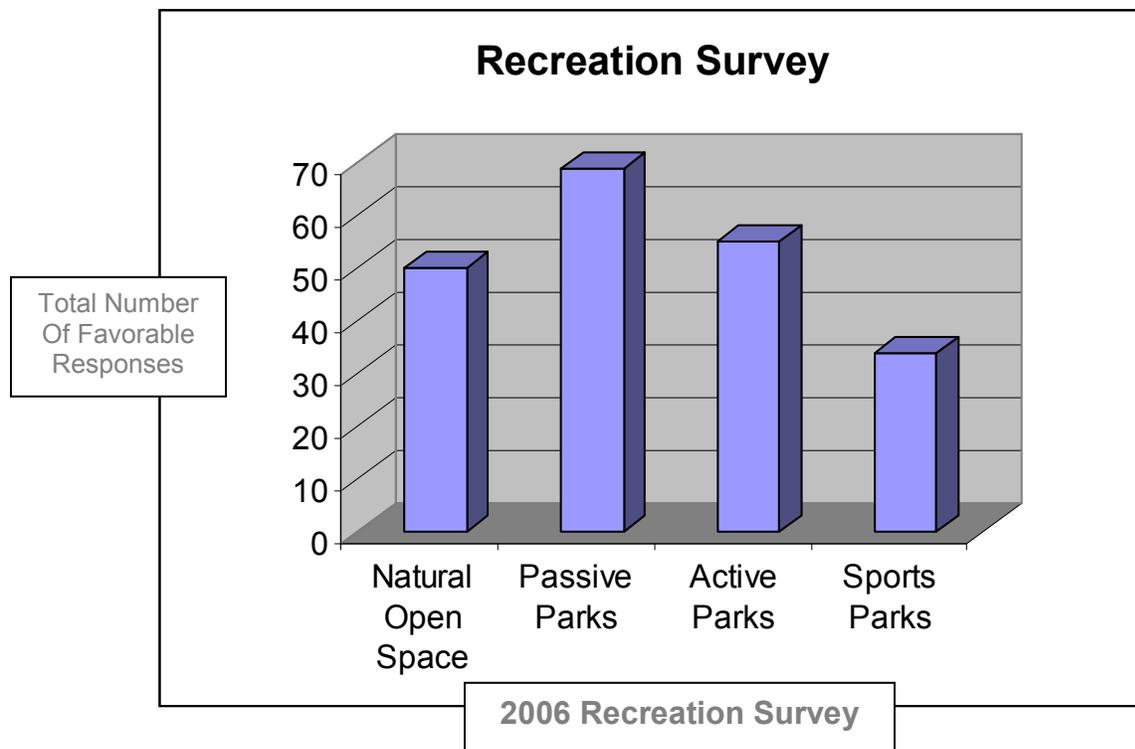




## B. Citizen Surveys

Two surveys were utilized to gain public input:

B.1 The first survey was designed to gain public input on the Broyhill Property Redevelopment. A portion of that survey requested citizen input on recreational needs in Conover was mailed to 5,217 citizens (all utility customers). A total of 137 responses were received. The results of the survey question pertaining to overall community desires for recreation were as follows.



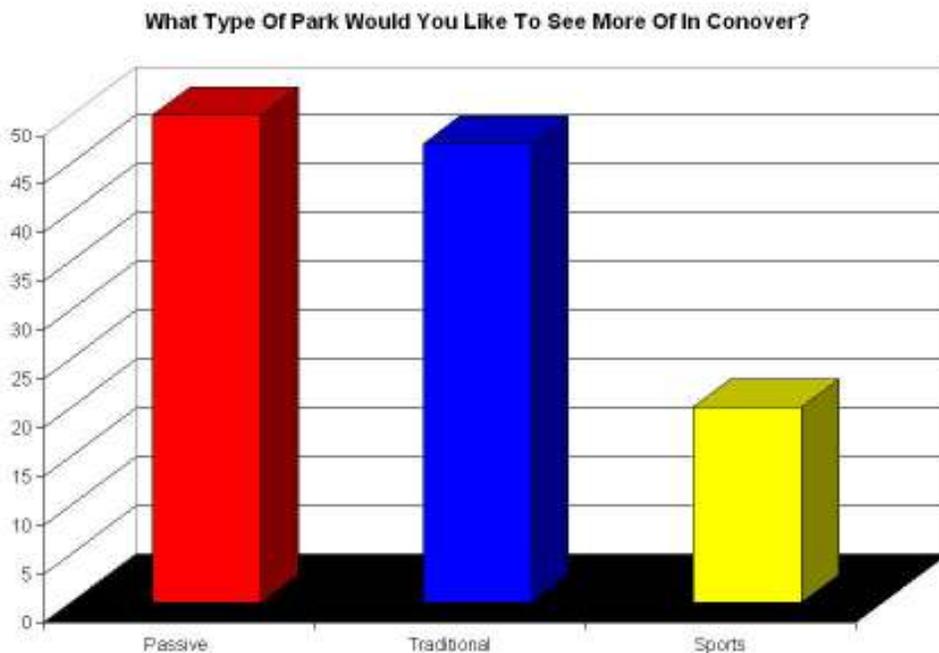
For the purpose of this survey the categories had the following definitions:

- Natural green space: Natural vegetation & water features
- Passive park: Walking trails, bike trails, picnic tables
- Active park: Trails, playground equipment, BBQ pits, picnic shelter
- Sports park: Baseball, football, soccer fields, tennis or basketball courts



- B.2 The second survey was designed to gain further insight and more detailed information on what recreational needs the community feels are most important and critical. Staff sought to reach the greatest number of citizens to gain valuable input. It is often difficult to obtain a great quantity of public input, therefore several tactics were used. The survey, a copy of which can be found in the appendix to this plan, was provided to citizens by:
- Hardcopies available at the City Hall utility payment center, Conover Library and the Planning Department.
  - Online link to the survey on the City of Conover website.
  - Direct mailing of the survey to targeted areas to insure we received input from different neighborhoods throughout the city. To encourage a higher level of responses the direct mailing offered a chance to be entered into a drawing for a prize.

When asked the same question on the Parks Master Plan Survey in 2008 the response was similar.



- Passive = Walking Trails, Bike Trails, Open Space
- Traditional = Playground Equipment, Shelters, BBQ Pits
- Active = Baseball Fields, Soccer Fields

The complete details of the survey are illustrated in Chapter 4, Section C



## Chapter 3: Existing Park System

### 3.1 Background

#### A. Shuford YMCA

Through the years Conover has been fortunate to have within the City, the Adrian Shuford YMCA. The “Y”, which is located at 1104 Conover Boulevard East, has been in operation for over 35 years. The Shuford YMCA has been an asset to the community by offering our citizens a great facility with numerous amenities. This being said the “Y” is not affiliated with the City of Conover either administratively or financially. The facility is a branch of the YMCA of Catawba Valley system, which serves the entire county.

The Shuford YMCA’s current facility consists of the following spaces:

- Two regulation sized racquetball courts
- Children’s’ play area
- Gymnasium 84’ x 45’
- Full day childcare rooms – 7
- Health & Wellness center – 5,600 sq. ft.
- Group exercise room – 2,500 sq. ft.
- Nurse’s station/office
- Program and management staff offices – 7
- Welcome Center/Reception area
- Outdoor recreation space including:
  - Softball/baseball field
  - Multiple soccer fields
  - Walking track
  - Two playgrounds for children
  
- Classroom/office building – free standing – 6,000 sq. ft.



The explanation of the Shuford YMCA and its role in Conover is relevant to this document, in that, its presence has strongly shaped the perception and development of parks and recreation in Conover through the years. The City has not sought to duplicate services offered by the YMCA. Therefore as a city Conover has not entered into the development or management of an “active”



#### A. Other Non-City Affiliated Recreation Amenities

Several other recreational amenities exist within Conover that are not affiliated with the City which should be noted.

##### Conover Pool

The Conover Pool is located in the northeast quadrant of the city at the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue Northeast. This private swimming pool has been in operation for over 25 years. Annual memberships are required to patronize the facility

##### Major Subdivision Common Open Space

Several subdivisions within the City (typically newer subdivisions) have land within them that has been required by the Conover Subdivision Ordinance to be dedicated as "Common Open Space". This land is typically deeded to the homeowners association for the subject subdivision. Should there be improvements, by way of recreational amenities, it is the responsibility of, either the developer or the association to install and operate. This land is open for the residents of the subdivision to utilize.



## 3.2 Conover Public Park System

To adequately plan for future parks, one must first have a clear and concise picture of the current park system as it stands today. Conover has a total of eight (8) public parks. These parks are generally passive in nature and vary in size and amenities. The parks in Conover include:

- Downtown Park
- Rowe Park
- Hines Park
- Travis Park
- Majestic Park
- Southwest / Washington Park
- Hunsucker Park
- Gateway Park
- L'Echo Link (unofficial park)

The City of Conover does not have a Parks and Recreation Department or a department with the sole responsibility of maintaining, operating and planning for the overall park system. Parks are maintained by the “Cemeteries, Parks and Grounds” department within the Conover Public Works. This department is responsible for the mowing and maintenance of not only parks, but cemeteries and street rights of way.

The majority of parks within Conover originated from privately held land which was donated by citizens to the City of Conover. Typically this donated land has some constraint that renders it unfavorable for construction. It could be the size of the parcel, location or in most cases topographic issues, such as drainage, floodplain or slope. As this land is not suited for construction, it can be an ideal candidate for recreational uses.

A comprehensive analysis of Conover’s parks was conducted and the results of that inventory are as provided in this chapter. Planning Department staff has thoroughly inspected and documented each City park. A matrix of all parks within the Conover system has been developed and all amenities in each park have been identified (see Figure 3.3).



PARK	LOCATION	ACRES	OTHER PLAY EQUIPMENT					UNIQUE									
			PARKING	WALKING PATH (in feet)	GAZEBO/SHELTER	TRASH BINS	DECORATIVE LIGHTING	SWINGS	Jungle Gym	Amphitheatre	Jungle gym, merry-go-round, slide	Good location, good amount of play equipment	Rip rap drainage ditch along the side	Hidden at the end of a dead end street	Long uninterrupted sidewalk with benches		
<b>Downtown</b>	2nd Av NE	1.97		2300	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Jungle Gym	Amphitheatre	Jungle gym, merry-go-round, slide	Good location, good amount of play equipment	Rip rap drainage ditch along the side	Hidden at the end of a dead end street	Long uninterrupted sidewalk with benches
<b>Hunsucker</b>	8th St NE	1.31		0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Jungle gym, merry-go-round, slide	Amphitheatre	Good location, good amount of play equipment	Rip rap drainage ditch along the side	Hidden at the end of a dead end street	Long uninterrupted sidewalk with benches	
<b>Rowe</b>	9th St SW	0.34	✓	144	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	None	Amphitheatre	Good location, good amount of play equipment	Rip rap drainage ditch along the side	Hidden at the end of a dead end street	Long uninterrupted sidewalk with benches	
<b>Travis</b>	6th St Ct NW	0.78	✓	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Spring Riders	Amphitheatre	Good location, good amount of play equipment	Rip rap drainage ditch along the side	Hidden at the end of a dead end street	Long uninterrupted sidewalk with benches	
<b>Gateway</b>	1st St W	n/a		3,700	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	None	Amphitheatre	Good location, good amount of play equipment	Rip rap drainage ditch along the side	Hidden at the end of a dead end street	Long uninterrupted sidewalk with benches	
<b>Southwest</b>	4th St Pl SW	2.21		0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Slides, jungle gym, merry-go-round, teeter totter	Amphitheatre	Good location, good amount of play equipment	Rip rap drainage ditch along the side	Hidden at the end of a dead end street	Long uninterrupted sidewalk with benches	Basketball court, baseball field
<b>Majestic</b>	2nd St Dr SW	3.92		1185	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	None	Amphitheatre	Good location, good amount of play equipment	Rip rap drainage ditch along the side	Hidden at the end of a dead end street	Long uninterrupted sidewalk with benches	Two horse shoe pits, two grills
<b>Hines</b>	4th St SW	1.43	✓	1200	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	None	Amphitheatre	Good location, good amount of play equipment	Rip rap drainage ditch along the side	Hidden at the end of a dead end street	Long uninterrupted sidewalk with benches	Plenty of parking, good location for lunch breaks for workers



## Downtown Park

The Downtown Park is located at 112 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Northeast, which is in the geographic and cultural heart of the City. Downtown Park contains 1.97 acres and is home to the large gazebo that has become the unofficial symbol of Conover (A gazebo is prominently positioned on the center of the City Seal). The park is just across the street from both the Conover City Hall and Conover Police Station. Downtown Park is easily accessible by both pedestrian and vehicular traffic from the central business district of Conover. The park is also adjacent and easily accessible to the largest contiguous residential neighborhood within the city.



Downtown Park is commonly considered to be the flagship of Conover's park system as well as one of the most popular. The park's location and relaxing atmosphere make it a favorite for citizens to drop by and have lunch or bring the kids to play on the playground. The park has become a popular location for weekend birthday parties, family reunions. Several weddings have also been held at the park through the years. The Downtown Park is also the location of the annual "Christmas in the Park" hosted by the City of Conover.



Downtown Park is considered a “Passive Park”. A Passive Park is commonly understood to be a park in which no sporting facilities are located. Generally, parks fitting this category could range from having no amenities other than simple open space, forested land, lakes, ponds, creeks to having walking trails, benches or picnic areas. These parks offer the public more “laid back” and serene setting to enjoy nature. These type of parks constitute the bulk of the City of Conover park system.



Downtown Park Walking Path

A complete assessment of Downtown Park was conducted to document all amenities provided. Below are the findings:

- 2300 feet of concrete / asphalt walking paths
- Large gazebo / amphitheatre with electric service
- Six (6) picnic tables
- Eight (8) park benches
- One (1) swing set with two (2) swings
- One (1) jungle gym w/ assorted playground activities
- Three (3) trash receptacles
- Decorative lighting
- Attractive landscaping
- Brick monument sign (consistent with City Hall building colors)





## Rowe Park

Rowe Park is located at 217 9<sup>th</sup> Street Southwest and is .34 acre. The park is situated in the center of an established residential neighborhood in the southern area of Conover just east of the Marketplace Shopping Center (formerly Villa Park). Rowe Park was completed in 2007 and is the newest park in the Conover park system.



An assessment of Rowe Park was conducted to document all amenities provided. Below are the findings:

- 144 feet of gravel walking paths
- Small gazebo w / swing
- One (1) picnic table
- One (1) trash receptacle
- One (1) swing set with two (2) swings
- Gravel parking lot with 2-3? Spaces
- Block monument with dedication plaque

\*A drainage ditch runs along the entire western edge of this property. This park was intended not only to meet neighborhood park needs, but was an opportunity for the city to make improvements to a neighborhood drainage ditch that was functioning poorly.





## Hines Park

Hines Park is located at 1130 4<sup>th</sup> Street Southwest and contains 1.3 acres. This park is centrally located within the Conwest Business Park. Its location within an area where the predominant land uses are commercial activities makes this park different from others in the Conover system. Unlike the Downtown Park and several other parks, there are few residences within walking distance. Despite this fact Hines Park is a relatively popular park. The primary patrons of the park are employees from the nearby Boyles Furniture and other businesses in the area.



An assessment of Hines Park was conducted to document all amenities provided. Below are the findings:

- 1200 feet of concrete walking paths
- Small gazebo
- Two (1) picnic tables
- One (1) trash receptacle
- Asphalt, curb and gutter parking lot with 8 parking spaces.
- Decorative lighting
- Brick monument sign (consistent with other Conwest directional signage)
- Attractive landscaping





Hines landscaping

## Travis Park

Travis Park is located at 612 6<sup>th</sup> Street Court Northwest. This .78 acre park is the only park located in the Northwest quadrant of the City. The park's location is not central or easily accessible to many residents. Situated at the terminus of a dead end street, bound by Interstate 40 to the north, bordered by challenging topography and a stream, makes the park is somewhat isolated.



A complete assessment of the Travis Park was conducted to document all amenities provided. Below are the findings:

- One (1) swing set w/ 2 swings
- One (1) playground tube
- Three (3) spring riders
- Two (2) benches
- Two (2) picnic tables
- Three (3) trash receptacles
- Asphalt parking lot with 2 parking spaces.
- Block monument sign



Directional Sign on  
County Home Road





## Majestic Park

Majestic Park is located 624 2<sup>nd</sup> Street Drive Southwest. Majestic Park is one of the three parks located in the southwest quadrant of the City, and at 3.92 acres this is the largest park in the Conover system. The park is centrally located in what is commonly referred to Southwest Community and is accessible to the majority of that neighborhood. The shelter and other amenities make this park popular for family reunions and community events.



Park Shelter



Walking Trail



Open Space



A complete assessment of Majestic Park was conducted to document all amenities provided. Below are the findings:

- 1150 Feet of walking path – gravel
- One (1) Shelter 45' x 30' w / electricity
- Two (2) horseshoe pits
- One (1) sandbox
- Two (2) grills
- Seven (7) picnic tables
- Two (2) trash receptacles
- Four (4) benches
- Brick post sign



Horseshoe Pits



Park Signage



## Southwest / Washington Park

Washington Park is located at 555 4<sup>th</sup> Street Place Southwest in the Southwest Community. The park contains a approximately 2.21 acres. The parks location makes it accessible by foot or bicycle to the majority of the neighborhood.

Whereas the majority of our parks are predominately passive in nature, this would be considered the park within the Conover system with the most active amenities.



Basketball Court



Baseball / Softball Field



Park / Cemetery Signage



A complete assessment of Washington / Southwest Park was conducted to document all amenities provided. Below are the findings:

- One (1) basketball court – asphalt
- One (1) baseball / softball field
- One (1) gazebo
- Three (3) picnic tables
- Two (2) trash receptacles
- Brick monument sign (shared with cemetery)
- Assorted Playground Equipment including:  
Two (2) slides, two (2) teeter totters, one (1) swing set w/ 3 swings, one (1) merry go round, one (1) jungle gym, two (2) spring riders, one (1) play tube



Playground Equipment



Washington Park Gazebo



## Hunsucker Park

Hunsucker Park is located at the corner of 8<sup>th</sup> Street Northeast and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue Place Northeast. The park is sited in the northwestern portion of the neighborhood that is commonly referred to as L'echo Park. The park contains approximately 1.13 acres and is surrounded by residential uses, and is easily accessible to nearby residents. The park's numerous types of playground equipment make it a popular stop for parents and young children.



View of Park from 8<sup>th</sup> St NE



Hunsucker Park Gazebo



A complete assessment of Hunsucker Park was conducted to document all amenities provided. Below are the findings:

- One (1) gazebo
- Two (2) picnic tables
- One (1) trash receptacle
- Rock monument sign
- Wood split-rail fencing around the park
- Assorted Playground Equipment including:
  - One (1) slide
  - two (2) swing sets w/ a total of 7 swings
  - one (1) merry go round
  - one (1) large jungle gym w / numerous features
  - two (2) spring riders





## Gateway Park

Gateway Park is a linear park located along 1<sup>st</sup> Street West, which was dedicated in May of 2003. The park extends from the intersection of 1<sup>st</sup> Street West and 10<sup>th</sup> Street Northwest, near the Canova Shopping Center, into downtown Conover. This linear park provides a valuable pedestrian / bicycle link from the existing downtown to the Canova Shopping Center. The park is located entirely within the rights-of-way of both the North Carolina Department of Transportation and Norfolk Southern Railroad. The development of this park provided the city with an opportunity to improve a major entrance into the downtown.



A complete assessment of the Gateway Park was conducted to document all amenities provided. Below are the findings:

- 3,700 feet of walking path (.7 mile) – asphalt
- One (1) park bench
- One (1) dedication monument
- 2,600 feet of white vinyl fencing
- Decorative lighting
- Attractive landscaping





## L'Echo Link

In 2003 Thornburg Drive, or the new Highway 16 Bypass, was completed. The City made a significant investment in pedestrian and bicycle mobility by partnering with NCDOT to provide an increased width of the new sidewalks installed on both sides of this thoroughfare. The sidewalks are widely used by Conover residents for recreational purposes such as walking, running and cycling. The L'Echo Park area is the largest contiguous residential neighborhood in Conover and despite being adjacent to Thornburg Drive, the neighborhood had no access for pedestrians or bicycles.

The L'Echo Link is located at the intersection of 7<sup>th</sup> Street Place Northeast and 7<sup>th</sup> Street Drive Northeast near the roundabout in L'Echo Park. Though not a formally dedicated park within the City of Conover network, it deserves to be mentioned due to the benefits it offers to the neighborhood which it serves. It provides a convenient connection from the L'Echo Park Neighborhood to the Thornburg Drive sidewalks via a 240 foot long gravel path through a wooded area. It should also be noted that the L'Echo Link is the first "greenway" within the City.



Entrance at roundabout on 7<sup>th</sup> St. Pl. NE



Entrance on Thornburg Drive





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## Chapter 4: Analysis

### 4.1 Public Park Needs Assessment

#### Determining Demand and Need

Parks, recreation, and open space demands and needs can be defined in a number of ways. Designing a parks master plan that adequately meets the current and future needs of the citizenry is a formidable task. Communities constantly change. Families move in, and families move out. Occupancy rates change. A neighborhood that was previously populated by elderly citizens begins to shift to younger families with children. Commercial development occurs in an area that was previously farm land. A new home gets built on a vacant lot in a subdivision on which neighborhood kids used to play. Many variables are at play when trying to determine how to meet so many different community needs.

Developing a clear vision for the future requires looking at the demographics of the community, what level of service is desired for both land and facilities, parks and recreation trends in our region, and, most importantly, community input. These considerations, among many, help to define what the community wants and needs, and shape the plan for the future.

In an effort to evaluate our future needs it is important to establish quantitative figures to determine the level of service a city the size of Conover requires. Planning Staff has attempted to identify park needs through three methods.

- A. Analysis of how Conover's park system compares to other cities in our region and beyond
- B. Look at what we currently require, by way of open / park space for new residential developments
- C. The results of the Citizen Parks Survey

Each of these methods are explained in detail in the following pages.



A. City by City Park Comparisons

One classic approach used when researching any number of issues is to see how your community stacks up with other cities. Municipalities in our region were chosen, along with cities that have comparable populations in North Carolina. Each city was researched to determine the amount of park land they have in their park system. The chart below (Figure 4.2) helps to illustrate how Conover compares with these other cities based on the acreage of public park land provided.

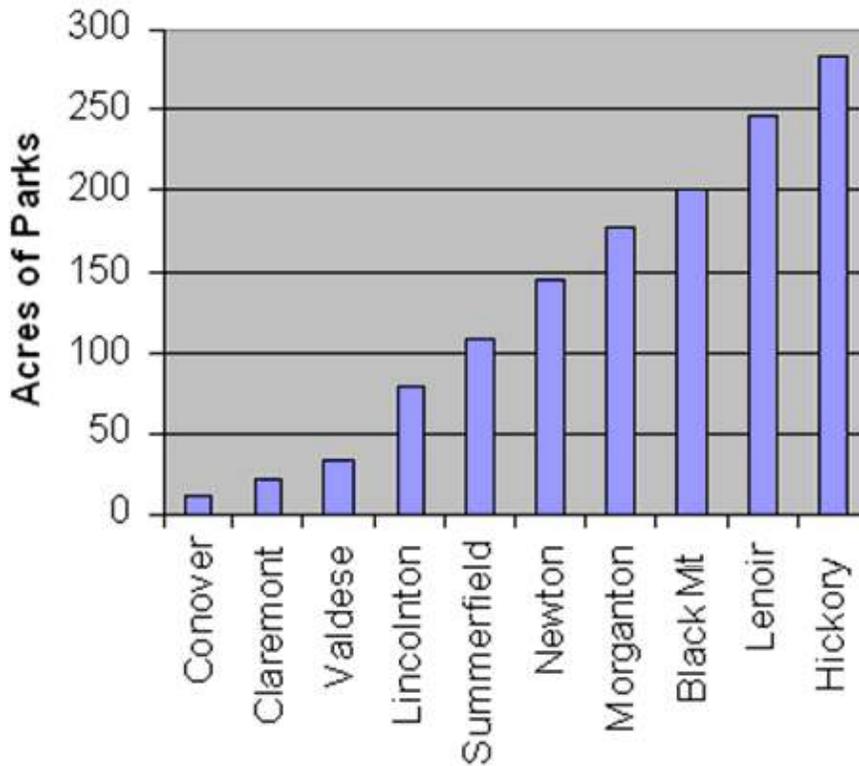


Figure 4.2 Total Park Acreage Comparisons



A. City by City Park Comparisons (Cont.)

Since cities used for this comparison vary widely in both area and population the following chart (Figure 4.3) illustrates the total amount of park space provided per citizen in each subject city.

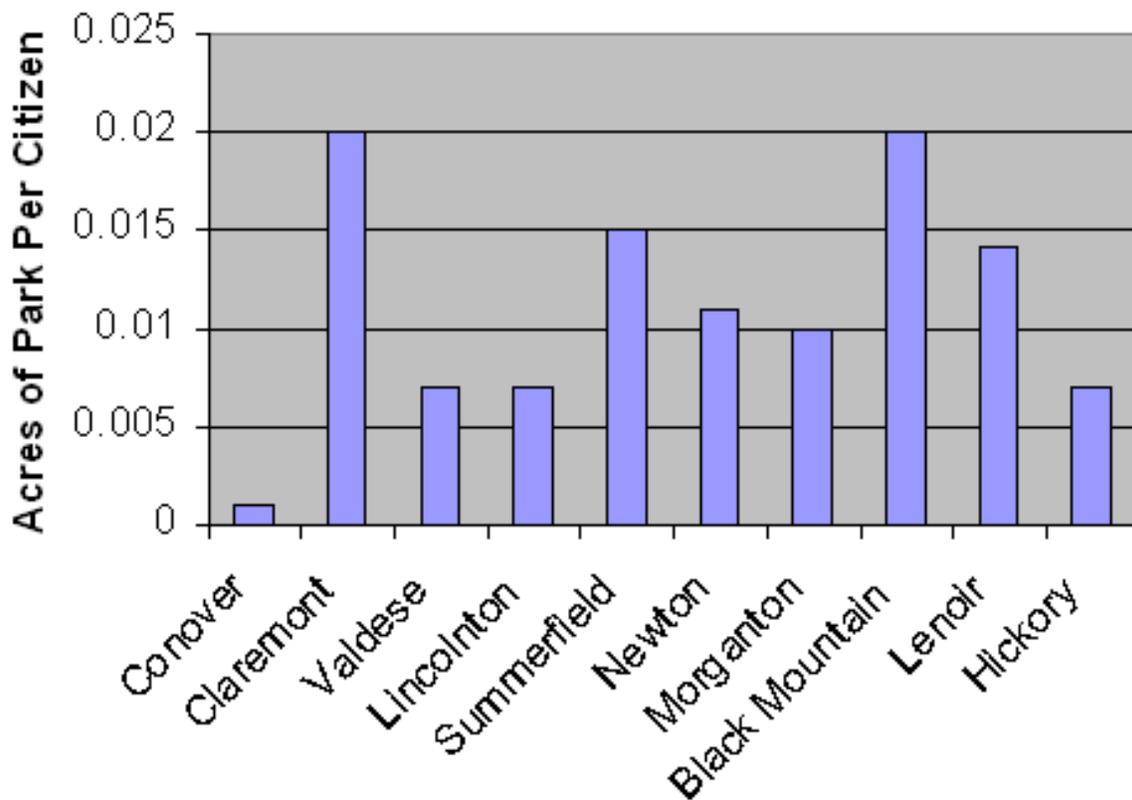


Figure 4.3 Park Acreage Per Citizen



B. Current Residential Subdivision Standards for Open Space

The Conover Subdivision Ordinance requires open space and park needs to be addressed when a new subdivision is constructed. This is accomplished by setting aside land that is accessible to the community which is considered open space. This land is typically owned and maintained by the homeowners association for that subdivision. The amount of land required to be set aside is .02 acres per residential unit / building lot. This gives us a quantitative reference point of the ratio of residential dwellings to acreage of open space that has been deemed to meet community needs. This is a part of the Subdivision Ordinance which has been recommended by the Planning Board and adopted by the City Council. This quantitative figure within the Conover Code of Ordinances can give us insight into how much open space or park space is ideal for our citizens. By applying this number to the entire population of the City of Conover the following calculation would recommend an amount of land that would meet the open space and park needs for the entire city.

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<b>Total Number of Housing Units in Conover</b> Based on 2004 Special Census Count		<b>Conover Subdivision Ordinance Park / Open Space Requirement Per Residential Unit</b> Appendix B, Sec. 87.D		<b>Total Recommended Acres of Parks / Open Space for Conover</b> Based on Subdivision Standards
<b>3,033</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>.02</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>60.7</b> Acres

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### C. Public Input on Parks Survey

A public input survey, previously mentioned in Chapter 2, was conducted in September / October 2008. This survey (Figure 4.4) was designed to assist in gauging the public perception of the current park system, as well as help to identify public desires for future.

Planning Staff sought to reach the greatest number of citizens to gain valuable input. It is often difficult to obtain a great quantity of public input, therefore several tactics were used. The survey, a copy of which can be found in the appendix to this plan, was provided to citizens by:

- Hardcopies available at the City Hall utility payment center, Conover Library and the Planning Department.
- Online link to the survey on the City of Conover website.
- Direct mailing of the survey to targeted areas to insure we received input from different neighborhoods throughout the city. To encourage a higher level of responses the direct mailing offered a chance to be entered into a drawing for a prize.



**Conover Parks Survey**

**1. What quadrant do you live in?**  
 NE       SE       NW       SW       I don't live in the City Limits

**2. How old are you?**  
 14-18       19-35       36-50       over 50

**3. How many children live in your house?**  
 0       1       2       3       4       over 4

**4. How would rate your satisfaction with the number of parks in Conover?**  
 Very Satisfied       Satisfied       Neutral       Unsatisfied       Very Unsatisfied

**5. How would you rate the amenities at the parks?**  
 Very Satisfied       Satisfied       Neutral       Unsatisfied       Very Unsatisfied

**6. What Conover park do you visit the most?**  
 Downtown       Hunsucker       Travis       Hines       Southwest       Gateway  
 Majestic       Rowe

**7. Would you be willing to pay more in taxes to pay for additional parks?**  
 YES       NO       I don't live within City Limits

**8. What type of park would you like to see in Conover?**  
 Passive (walking, bike trails)       Active (playground, BBQ pits, pavilions)       Sports (soccer, b-ball)

**9. If new parkland was purchased, what type of amenities would you like?**  
 Skatepark       Playground       Dog park       Athletic Field       Trails       Disk Golf  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

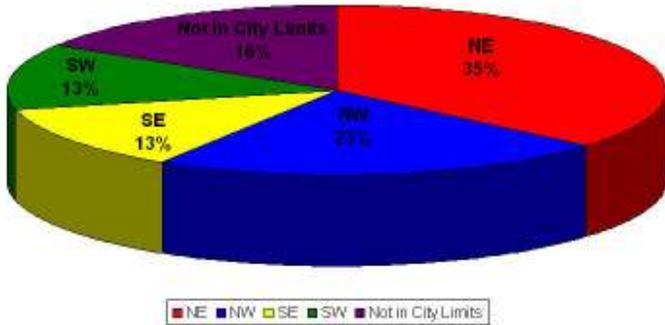
**10. On the back of this page please provide your name and any additional comments that could help us plan for future parks. i.e. what is your favorite park in Catawba County, what do you like about other parks in the area?**

Figure 4.4  
Parks  
Survey

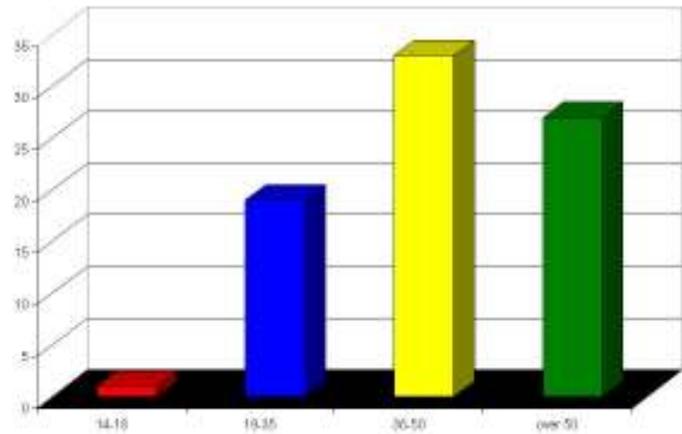


A total of eighty (80) surveys were received and the results are as follows:

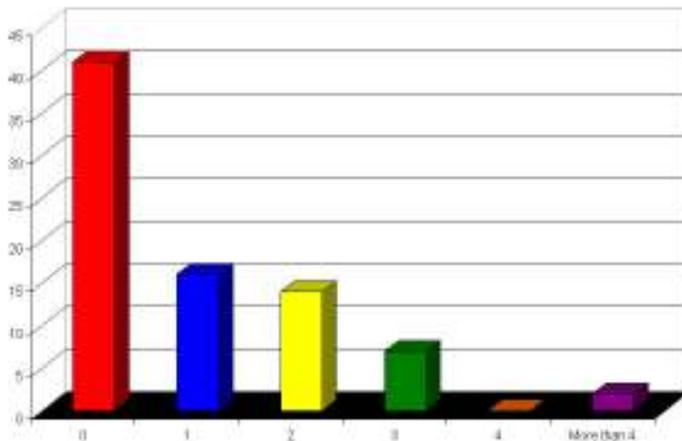
What Quadrant Of The City Do You Live In?



How Old Are You?

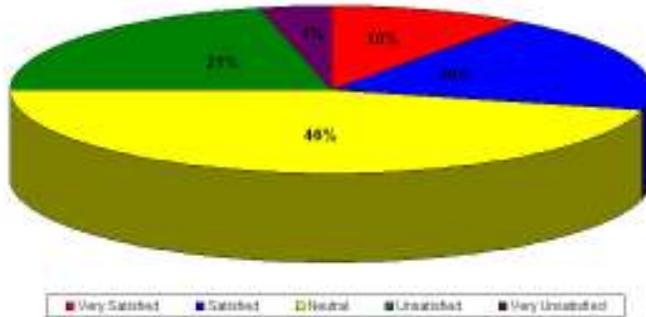


How Many Children Live Inside Your Home?

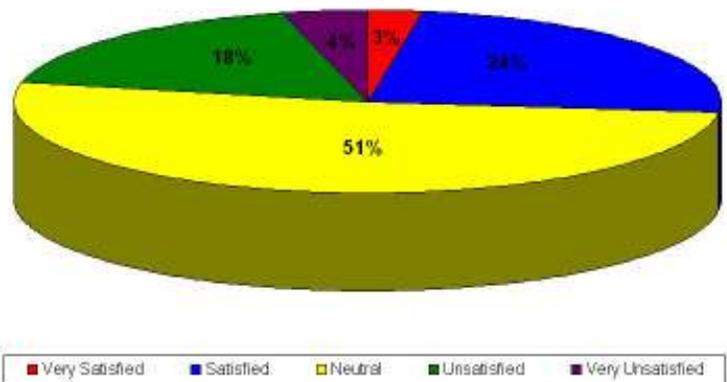




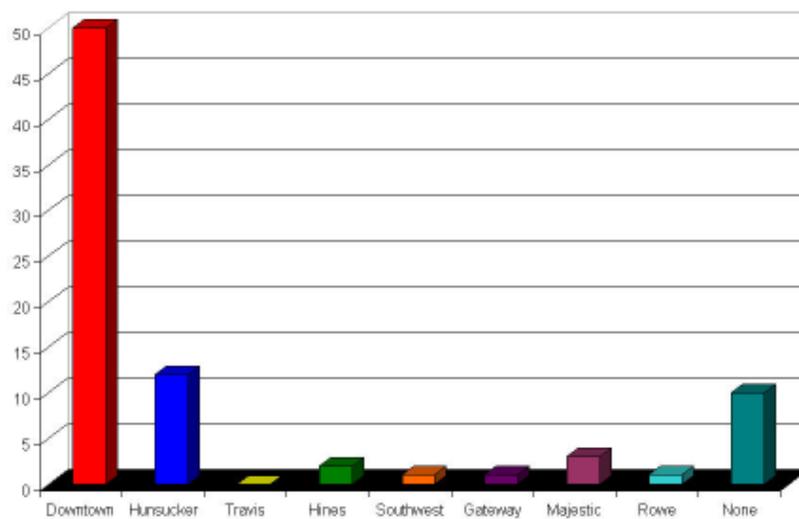
Rank Your Satisfaction With The Number Of City Parks



Rank Your Satisfaction With The Amenities At The City Parks

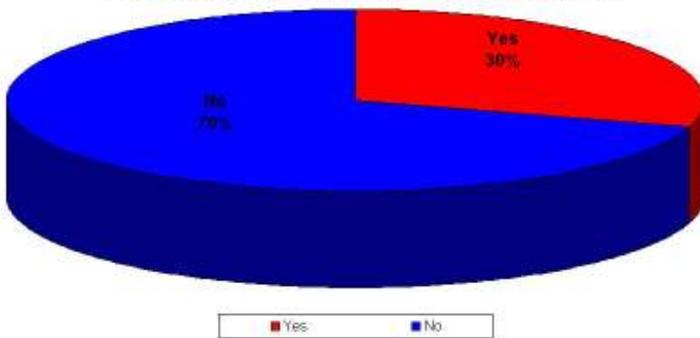


Which Park Do You Visit Most?

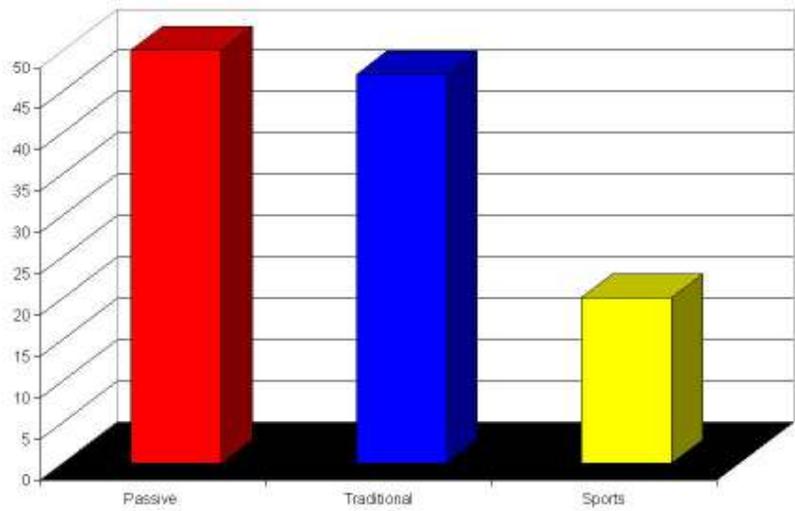




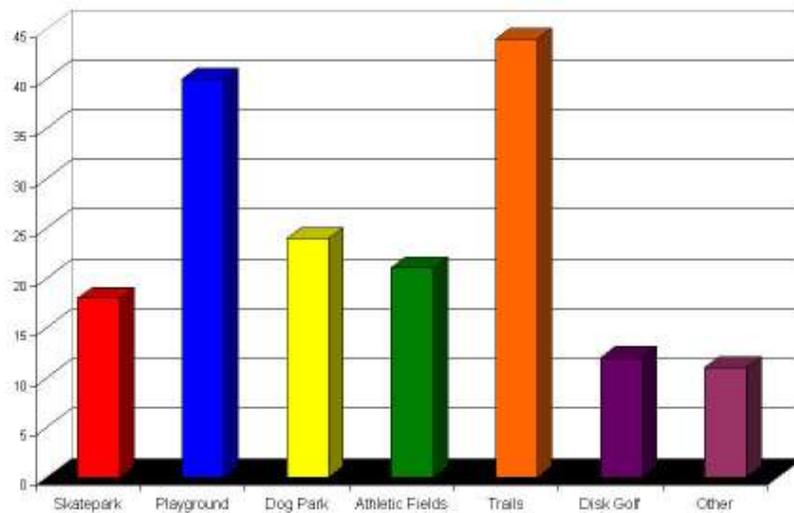
Would You Be Willing To Pay More In Taxes For More Parks?



Park Would You Like To See More Of In Conover?



What Type of Amenities Would You Like More Of In Conover?





## Chapter 5 Recommendations

### 5.1 Parks and Land Use

Through the development of this plan, research on land use, accessibility, connectivity, demographic trends as well as public input were used to create an overall vision of park needs for the City. Conover has a variety of land uses and different areas of the city have different characteristics. With such a great deal of land in Conover's jurisdiction that contains manufacturing and commercial uses, much consideration must take place to plan for future park locations that will serve the citizens.

As previously mentioned, parks in Conover have historically originated as privately held land which has been donated from citizens to the City of Conover. Typically this donated land has some constraint that renders it unfavorable for construction, such as size of the parcel, the location or in most cases topographic, floodplain or drainage issues. These constraints make it ideal for recreational uses (so long that it is situated in a location that is accessible to the public). Developing recreational and park amenities in such areas serves several positive purposes.

#### Constrained Land for Public Parks

- Most importantly it provides recreational opportunities for our citizens thereby taking an underutilized piece of land and creating a positive amenity.
- In the case of land that has known drainage issues, it removes the possibility of the construction of a building on the site, which would likely encounter flooding or property damage over the course of its occupancy.
- Based on the observances of Planning Department Staff, often times privately held vacant land within residential areas is not maintained to the same standards as land on which homes are sited. The properties many times become overgrown with vegetation and can harbor for rats, mice, snakes, insects and other pests. This often results in the complaints to the Planning Department, thus costing the City time and resources on code enforcement.
- Should the city be required to purchase property for parks, the price of land with such constraints are often significantly lower than buildable land.
- All land need not have park amenities to be valuable to the community. Natural open space and undeveloped forest land also benefits the community and the environment by providing habitat for wildlife, aesthetics, and natural riparian buffers.



## 5.2 General Recommendations

The following recommendations are general in nature and should serve as overall guidelines for park planning and decision making for all parks throughout the city.

- Simply because land has been offered for donation to the city or land can be acquired cheaply it is not recommended that public park improvements be installed, unless the park is sited in a favorable location to serve the community.
- Neighborhood parks should be sited in such a manner such that they are easily accessible to citizens, ideally by foot or by bike.
- Should prospective park land be in an area prone to experiencing drainage issues, stormwater management / education structures should be installed.
- The unique environmental features of the land such as wetlands, streams, riparian corridors, and significant archaeological and historic properties and hillsides should be recognized when designing any park.
- Equipment, landscaping, and design should be adequately planned to reduce long-term maintenance costs and increase safety for park users.
- Signage and other means shall be utilized to notify people of general park rules.
- A monument or other style sign with the park name should be installed at the entrance of any park.
- It should be insured that appropriate park facilities within the system, include trails, picnic areas, and play equipment that are accessible to the disabled.
- On site parking at city parks is strongly discouraged. Neighborhood Parks should be primarily resources to the neighborhood and promote people walking and biking to them. Limited parking for the disabled and loading could be provided.
- At least one public meeting should be conducted to obtain citizen input on a proposed park.
- Volunteer programs to plan, develop, maintain and improve public parks should be established.
- Information should be made available to the general public about options for donating money and services for park improvements. It is recommended that a brochure and online resources be made available to citizens whom may wish to donate money or land.
- Educate the general public about the values of open space and the role it plays in the community. Aside from publicly held land dedicated to parks or open space, or placed on a land conservancy, know that every property could some day be developed.



- A funding strategy should be developed that takes advantage of all available resources of park development and improvement, i.e. North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund Grants. It is recommended that Conover routinely apply for PARTF grants for city parks.
- New development which impacts the park system should pay its fair share of the costs of providing new park facilities.
- Beautification on public and private property throughout the city should be encouraged.
- The Parks Master Plan should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.
- The implementation of the Parks Master Plan with the current Land Development Plan should be coordinated. The siting and design of parks should further the goals of the Land Development Plan.
- An urban forestry program should be developed to encourage the preservation and planting of trees on public and private property.
- Street design standards with specific recommended street tree species should be developed.
- Design standards for greenway paths and bridges should be developed.
- The special needs of an ever growing senior citizen population should be met by providing parks which meets their needs.
- Retain City owned lands, including unopened or excess rights-of-way for open space purposes.
- Existing parks and land currently owned by the City should be strongly considered for improvements for meeting increasing park needs and demands.
- A trail system or pedestrian / bike connection between parks should be developed where available.
- Greenways and pedestrian paths are recommended in appropriate areas throughout the city in accordance with the Pedestrian Plan.
- Participate in the Carolina Thread Trail Initiative. Details on the Carolina Thread Trail are provided in the following pages.
- When the development of any portion of land along the greenway plan occurs, the developer of that project is responsible for dedicating a public access easement and construction of that portion.
- Develop working partnership with the administrators of the Shuford **YMCA** to coordinate and assist in recreational improvements in the city.



## Carolina Thread Trail

Conover has an opportunity to look beyond its own city limits and link pedestrian facilities to neighboring and regional destinations. One of the most significant and valuable regional opportunities for pedestrian connections is the Carolina Thread Trail ([www.carolinathreadtrail.org](http://www.carolinathreadtrail.org)). The Carolina Thread Trail is a regional trail effort that encompasses a 15 county area in the Greater Charlotte area and includes spurs to Catawba County and Conover. The Carolina Thread Trail aims to link individuals to local and regional destinations through a 500+ mile network of greenways, blueways, and trails.

It is recommended that Conover coordinate efforts with Hickory, Newton, Claremont and Catawba County to create long distance connections for alternative transportation and recreation. Regional greenway trail connections will encourage economic development and draw individuals to Conover from surrounding areas.





### 5.3 Area Specific Park Recommendations

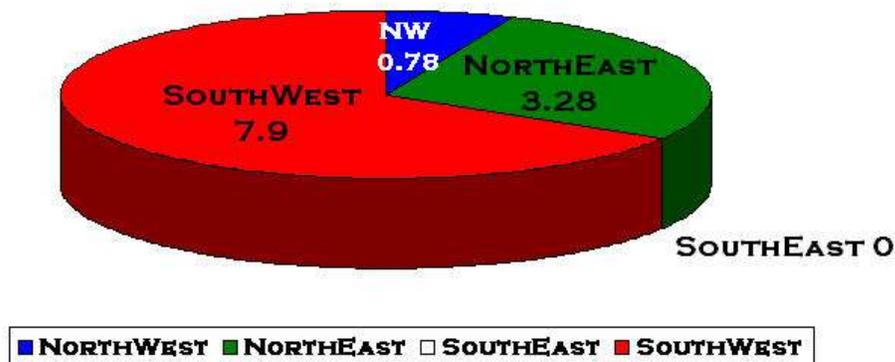
The following recommendations are for specific areas and contain preliminary plans for some parks within the city.

The City of Conover, is divided into four quadrants, the Northwest, Northeast, Southwest and Southeast. All street addresses within the city (other than downtown) have one of these quadrant suffixes. These established quadrants give us logical areas in which to divide the city for park planning purposes. This allows us to look at specific areas of the city each with their own characteristics. Within each of these quadrants there are different land uses. Residential housing units are not divided equally among the quadrants, for example the predominant land use in the southwest quadrant is manufacturing, while the predominant land use in the northeast is residential. Each quadrant also has different existing amounts of park land. Each quadrant will also need different amounts of park land in the future.

To help determine park needs one must take a deeper look at the current park space provided in each quadrant.

The chart below shows the total acreage of park land in the Conover park system by quadrant.

**PARK ACREAGE BY QUADRANT**





The amount of park space provided within a city quadrant is a very important measure to take into consideration when planning for the future. Accessibility is also a very important factor to consider. The majority of parks in the Conover system are passive in nature and therefore are not generally considered “destination” parks in which someone would drive by automobile a great distance to visit. Passive parks of this nature tend to be neighborhood oriented parks which are accessible by foot or bicycle. It is important to provide neighborhood parks of this type. An analysis of existing parks in the system was calculated using a distance of one half mile. This is a commonly used distance that helps to measure walkability. A walk of this distance can also be considered a ten minute walk, which is commonly considered the breaking point at which most people will drive an automobile to reach a destination. It is important, and a recommendation of this plan to develop park facilities that are accessible by pedestrians for numerous reasons:

- Children frequently patronize parks and having a safe neighborhood park allows them to visit on their own.
- Obesity is an ever increasing health concern for the general public. The siting of public parks should encourage healthy activities such as walking and biking.
- Fuel costs continue to rise and neighborhood parks allow recreation and leisure without the need of an automobile.
- Walkable neighborhood parks will be more accessible to our ever growing elderly population.

The following chart (Figure 5.3.2) provides an illustration of the current accessibility to city parks. The chart provides a breakdown, by quadrant of the distance from any given residential dwelling to the nearest city park.

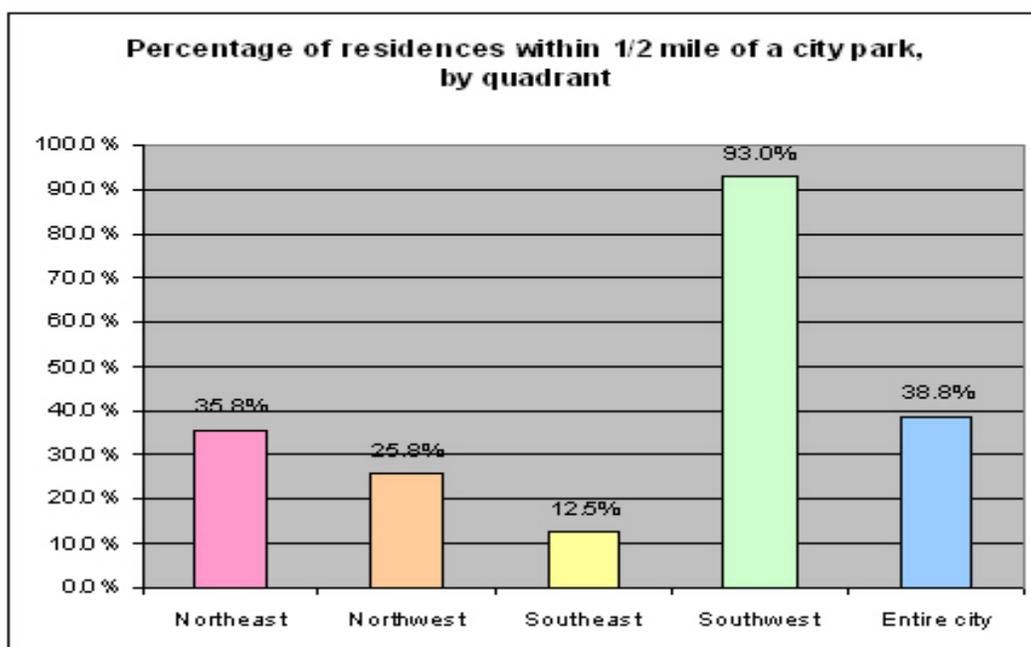


Figure 5.3.2



## Southeast



The southeast quadrant of the City falls to the east of NC Highway 16 and to the south of US Highway 70. The predominant land uses in this quadrant are manufacturing and commercial with some residential. Notable landmarks in the southeast include Concordia Lutheran Church, Food Lion Shopping Center, Carpenter Manufacturing, Hanes Industries, Rock Tenn (formerly Gulf States) and the Adrian Shuford YMCA. This quadrant of the city has the least amount of residential dwellings of all the quadrants containing approximately 11.8% of households in the City. The majority of homes are located in the subdivision immediately to the south of the YMCA and eastward centered along Emmanuel Church Road.

As indicated on the quadrant graph (fig 5.3.1) the southeast is the only quadrant within the city that has no City Park. However, the Shuford YMCA is located in the Southeast and within walking distance to the established residential subdivision to the immediate south. Though full access to the YMCA's facility requires membership, there are open fields on the YMCA property with a walking track. The fields, when not in use by soccer or baseball leagues, are accessible to the public. The track is open to the public and heavily used by citizens. Therefore the southeast is not completely without accessible passive park amenities.



## Southeast (Cont.)

### Conover Station Park

A new city park is currently being planned in the Southeast quadrant of the city. This new city park is proposed at the site of the former Broyhill Factory, which is now owned by the City. The Broyhill furniture factory that once had over 450 employees closed its doors in 2004. In 2005, the City of Conover took a proactive approach in helping to insure the future vitality of our downtown by purchasing the 27 acre property in the heart of downtown Conover. Conover is currently planning for the redevelopment of the site into a vibrant mixed-use center. Bisecting the southern portion of the Broyhill property is a stream, which serves as the headwaters of the nearby McLin Creek. The City envisions this area as being a future passive city park centered on the stream. This area would not only serve as a public park containing amenities such as walking trails, shelters, benches and children's play equipment. Engineered improvements could help create a stormwater best management practice (BMP) that will work to treat the stormwater runoff from adjacent development. This BMP would not only meet and exceed the state Phase II Stormwater standards; it could serve as an educational showpiece for water quality and a demonstration example on how to do integrated, aesthetically pleasing stormwater management for new projects.





## Southeast (Cont.)

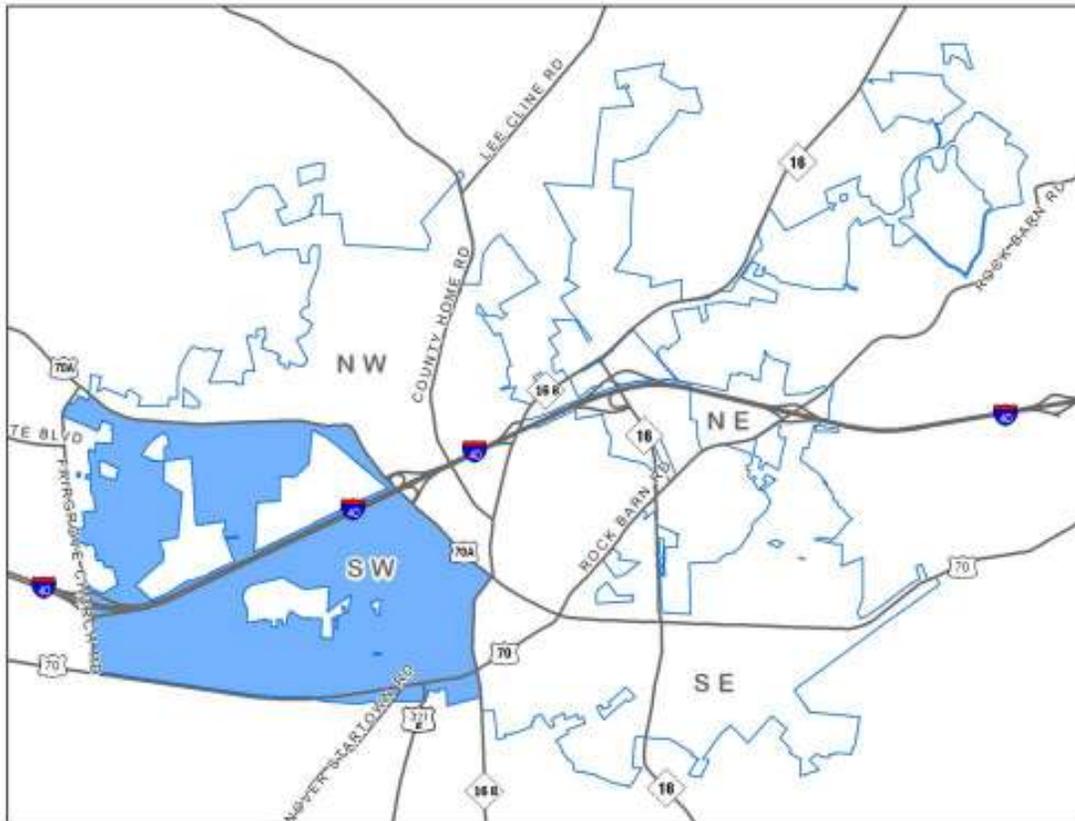
### Neighborhood Park Recommendations.

The importance of neighborhood parks, or parks within walking or biking distance from a concentration of residential dwellings has been stressed throughout this plan. Therefore neighborhoods and housing densities within the southeast quadrant of the city were analyzed.

Appendix Map 5.5 illustrates the distribution of housing units within the southeast quadrant. Based on number and density of households, convenience, connectivity and accessibility, recommendations on park locations were determined. These recommendations are illustrated on map 5.5 of this plan. The locations of neighborhood parks are recommended to fall within the identified geographic areas. It has been determined that a neighborhood park constructed within these general locations would help to meet the parks and open space needs of the area.



## Southwest



The southwest quadrant of the City falls generally to the west of NC Highway 16, east of Fairgrove Church Road and in between Old US Highway 70 and new US Highway 70 (Conover Boulevard West). The predominant land uses in this quadrant are manufacturing and commercial with some residential. Notable landmarks in the southwest include the Conwest Business Park, which accounts for roughly one third of the entire quadrant (south of interstate 40). The St. Timothy Industrial Park accounts for roughly one third of the southwest quadrant as well and is located north of Interstate 40. This quadrant also includes Conover Boulevard West, of which the majority is auto-dependent commercial development consisting of restaurants, strip malls, retail and service businesses. This quadrant of the city has the second least amount of residential dwellings of all the quadrants and contains approximately 16.4% of the households in Conover. Nearly all residential dwellings within the southwest are located in the easternmost portion of the quadrant, nearest to the downtown (as illustrated on appendix map 5.5).



## Southwest (cont.)

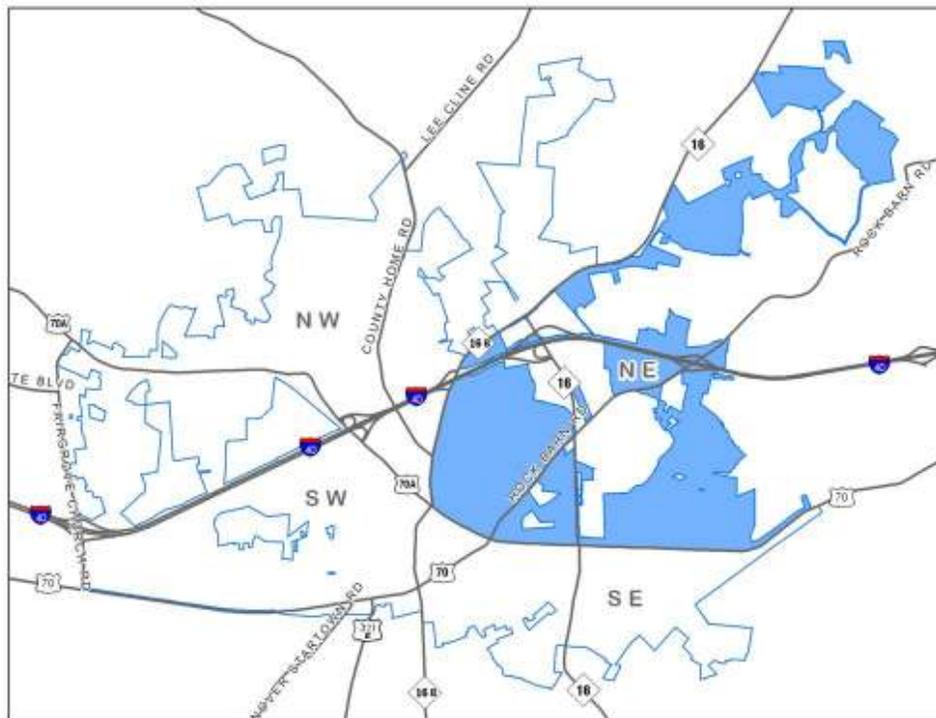
As indicated on the quadrant graph (fig 5.3.1) the southwest has a total of 7.9 acres of city park space. This accounts for over half of the total park space for the city.

The chart listed as figure 5.3.2 illustrates the proximity of city parks to residential dwellings within the city. Again the Southwest fares well in this category. Approximately 93% of all households within the Southwest quadrant of the city are within  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile of a city park, or what is commonly considered a 10 minute walk. This number tells us that citizens in the southwest have more park options within a closer proximity to their homes. Based on these numbers the southwest quadrant is better served by city parks than other quadrants of the city.

Even so, there are neighborhoods within the southwest quadrant of the city that do not have easy access to city parks. The majority of public streets in the City do not have sidewalks. Therefore, many citizens, specifically in the neighborhood south of 4<sup>th</sup> Street Southwest and north of Conover Boulevard West are “cut-off” from parks. It is recommended that a neighborhood pocket park be planned to serve this area as shown on map 5.5.



## Northeast



The northeast quadrant of the City falls generally to the east of NC Highway 16 and to the north US Highway 70 (Conover Boulevard East). The northeast is a sprawling, non-contiguous quadrant that stretches from the downtown to the Rock Barn Golf Course. The predominant land uses in this quadrant are residential with some manufacturing and commercial. Notable landmarks in the Northeast include several residential single family subdivisions such as the largest contiguous residential neighborhood that is commonly referred to as “L’echo Park”. The northeast also contains several multifamily residential developments such as the Brandywine Townhomes, Cambridge Place, and L’echo Park Townhomes. The easternmost area of the northeast contains an several industrial facilities such as Hanes Industries, and Jackson Lea.

This quadrant of the city has the second highest number of residential dwellings of all the quadrants and contains approximately 35.6% of the households in Conover. Residential dwellings within the northeast are relatively evenly distributed throughout the quadrant, the majority of which are located south of Interstate 40 (as illustrated on map 5.5).



## Northeast (Cont.)

As indicated on the quadrant graph (fig 5.3.1) the northeast has a total of 3.28 acres of City park space. The chart listed as figure 5.3.2 illustrates the proximity of city parks to residential dwellings within the city. Approximately 35.8% of all households within the Northeast quadrant of the city are within ½ mile of a city park, or what is commonly considered a 10 minute walk.

The northeast would be considered underserved based on the total number of parks, the amount of parkland available and the accessibility to parks. Being one of the largest quadrants in both land area and residential population it is recommended that additional parks be considered for this area of the city as shown on map 5.5. Clustered areas with higher densities of residential dwellings, such as along Thornburg drive, have several townhome developments and single family subdivisions. These areas are currently without any type of public park within walking distance.

## Trinity Park

Recently a park has been planned for the northeast quadrant. The Trinity Reformed United Church of Christ currently owns property on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Northeast on which there are two existing tennis courts. These courts are in currently in need of repair and are underutilized. Planning Staff approached Trinity Church to discuss options for improving the courts and subsequently obtained a lease agreement for the city to attempt to develop a new city park at the site.

The courts are centrally located near the Conover Downtown Park and existing residential neighborhoods. These tennis courts provide a solid foundation to build upon and provide additional park space for the citizens of Conover. Planning Staff developed a plan for improvements to the existing courts.

Planning Staff recommends improvements to the existing courts including, but not limited to: Resurfacing the existing courts, installing a small skate park on half of the courts and on the other half a basketball court, installing a seating / picnic area in the grassed area between the courts and the Adult Life Programs Facility, installing a pedestrian entrance off 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Northeast, installing a handicapped access off the existing parking lot at the Adult Life Programs Facility located on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Place Northeast

A grant to complete improvements to Trinity Park was submitted for funding to the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund. The grant was not approved and did not receive a 2008 PARTF Grant. The park improvements are now pending.



## Trinity Park (cont.)

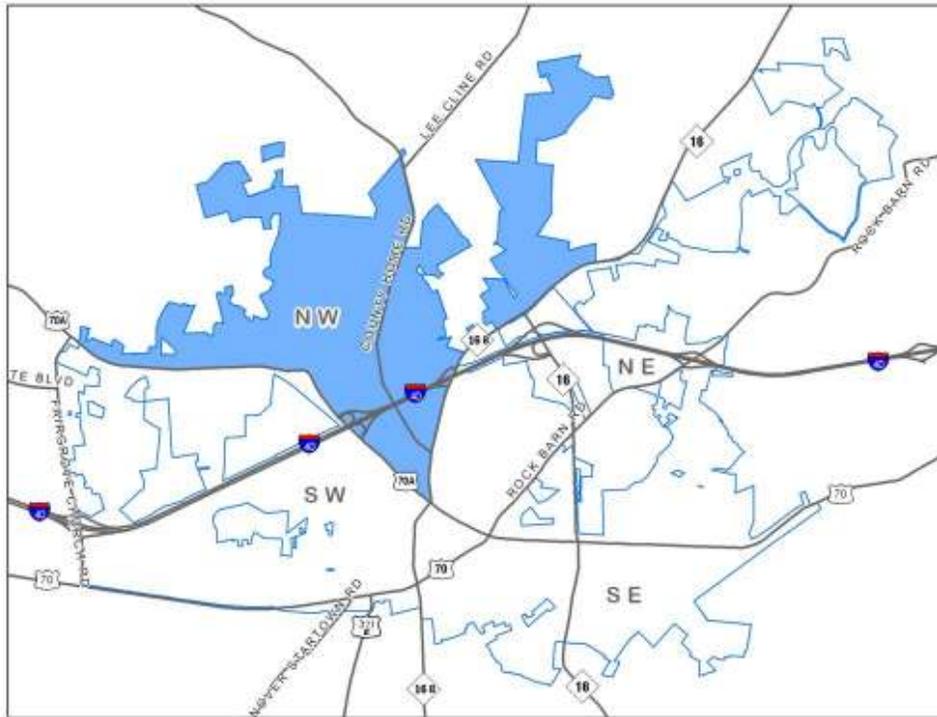
The following plan illustrates the proposed improvements to the proposed unfunded Trinity Park.



Overwhelming public support was offered for the proposal of this park and staff continues to feel it would be a great asset to the community and provide a positive example of how the city can work with the community to meet park needs. It is recommended that the proposed improvements of this park be completed.



## Northwest



The northwest quadrant of the City falls generally to the west and north of NC Highway 16 and to the north of old US Highway 70 (1<sup>st</sup> Street West). Much like the northeast, the northwest is a sprawling, non-contiguous quadrant that stretches from the downtown to the north and northwest. This quadrant reaches its northernmost point at C&B Farm Road and westward at Fairgrove Church Road. The predominant land uses in this quadrant are commercial and residential with some industrial.

Notable landmarks in the northwest include several residential single family subdivisions such as Indian Springs, Wagner Pointe, Pipers Ridge and Lyle Creek. The northwest also contains higher density housing such as Ridgepoint Apartments, Lyle Haven Apartments, Lyle Haven Mobile Home Park and Oak Grove Mobile Home Park. In addition, there are commercial developments such as the Wal-Mart Supercenter, Canova Shopping Center, I-40 Business Park and industrial uses such as GDS and J.T. Russell & Sons Paving (formerly Sigmon Paving). Finally the largest institutional facility in the City, Tri-City Baptist Church, is also located in the northwest quadrant.



This quadrant of the city has the most residential dwellings of all the quadrants containing approximately 36.2% of the households in Conover. Residential dwellings within the northwest are spread throughout the quadrant with few contiguous concentrations.

As indicated on the quadrant graph (fig 5.3.1) the northeast has a total of .78 acres of city park space. Regarding both available park land and accessibility, the citizens within the northwest quadrant are the most underserved of any area of Conover. Being the largest quadrant in both land area and residential population it should be no surprise that this plan recommends several parks for this quadrant as identified on Map 5.5.

As previously mentioned, the northwest contains several residential neighborhoods that provide very little connectivity for pedestrians or cyclists. Many subdivisions and housing developments are located along busy state roads such as County Home Road and Herman Sipe Road. The lack of sidewalks on these busy roads, combined with sprawling subdivisions results in reduced accessibility and connectivity to other city parks. The location of these proposed parks have been determined to optimize accessibility.

Greenway improvements to this area could provide the much needed connectivity to link some of the disconnected residential developments to one another and to city parks.

#### Lyle Creek Greenway

A major park has been in long range city plans for the northwest quadrant. The Lyle Creek Greenway has been conceptualized for over a decade. A greenway is defined as a linear open space established along either a natural corridor, such as a riverfront, stream valley or ridgeline, or over land along a railroad right-of-way converted to recreational use, or over land along a utility easement / right of way also used as utilized for recreational use, a scenic road or other route; or any natural or landscaped course for pedestrian or bicycle passage; or an open space connector linking parks, natural reserves, cultural features or historic sites with each other and with populated areas.



### Lyle Creek Greenway (cont.)

The 1998 Highway 16 Master Plan, as well as the 2003 Land Development Plan began to lay the groundwork for the Lyle Creek Greenway by identifying an approximate 3.7 mile stretch of land along Lyle Creek from County Home Road to Highway 16 North (see Figure 5.3.3). The land is within the Lyle Creek Floodway and would be proposed along an existing City of Conover sewer outfall line.

The 2008 Pedestrian Plan also delineates the Lyle Creek Greenway. The Pedestrian Plan also provides recommended greenway corridors throughout the city and the system map has been included as an appendix to this plan.

This greenway would provide an excellent parks and recreation amenity to not only the underserved residents of the northwest quadrant of the city, but to all citizens.



Figure 5.3.3  
Excerpt from 2003  
Land Development  
Plan



## Greenways in General

Currently Conover has miles of utility easements for water and sewer lines throughout the city. These utility easements are generally 25 feet in width and run the length of any underground infrastructure lines. These are easements across private property for the purpose of operating and maintaining our water and sewer infrastructure. These easements are obtained through written agreements between the city and the property owner. Because sewer infrastructure functions based on gravity, these easements are generally located on the lowest lying areas of the city along creeks, streams and other water features, i.e. within floodplains and other undevelopable, unbuildable pieces of land (similar to land that is often utilized for recreational purposes).

The language on these utility easement agreements provides for city staff or their approved agents to access the easement only for purposes of installation, maintenance or monitoring of the subject lines. The language and easement agreements as they are currently drafted do not allow for public recreational use on the easement area. These easements are mowed and maintained by the City of Conover (see figure 5.3.4 for an example). Therefore, the city currently maintain miles of sewer easement “trails” throughout scenic and wooded areas that cannot be used for public purposes.

Many cities throughout the state are now seeking to modify easement language to install greenways along their utility lines. A recommendation of this plan is for Conover to revise utility easement language to allow for the public use of any future easements obtained. It is also a recommendation of this plan to explore seeking to obtain new easement agreements with property owners along existing utility easements to allow for the public use so the city can install greenways. The construction of the Lyle Creek Greenway would be initiated in this manner.

Figure 5.3.4



Utility Easement



Utility Easement  
With Greenway  
Improvements



## Chapter 6. Implementation

When considering the future of parks in City of Conover one must consider the core questions:

- What type of Parks Program does Conover need?

Generally speaking, the City's current stance is the maintenance of our existing system. Today Conover provides passive parks, or parks without active recreation such as soccer, baseball, basketball. Conover does not own or operate a recreational center that offers indoor activities. The majority of parks within the Conover system contain land that has been donated. There is not a department in the city whose sole purpose is the management, operation or planning for parks and recreation.

- How will a Parks Program be funded?

The funding of a Parks Program is one of the most critical issues to consider. The current budget for parks includes maintaining the grounds, purchasing and repairing play ground type equipment and contracted services related to contracted maintenance. The following table (Figure 6.1) identifies three (3) preliminary estimates for potential program enhancements and corresponding broad funding levels by Parks and Recreation functions. This table summarizes three potential future options and broad estimates for the City's Parks Program.



Parks Program	Existing City of Conover Parks Program	Level 1 Enhanced Program	Level 2 Enhanced Program	Level 3 Enhanced Program
Function	Mowing and Maintaining Park Grounds, Purchasing Park Equipment, Contracting Service	Part-time to Full-time Employee Dedicated to Actively Planning and Exploring Park Improvements and Applying for Grants. Setting Aside Funds for Improvements / Expansions / Matching Grants. Continue Passive Park Style Program.	Parks Department Established with Department Director that Coordinates Administrative Activities of Planning and Funding as Well as Grounds and Maintenance. Funding Set Aside for Improvements / Expansions / Matching Grants. Passive Parks and Active Parks Added to the System.	Full Service Parks and Recreation Department Established that Manages Active Recreation Parks and Facilities and Passive Parks. Recreational Facility Buildings and Community Buildings Constructed with a Variety of Community Programs Offered. Programs Established for Active Sport Leagues.
Total Budget	\$38,000	\$145,000	\$310,000	\$625,000

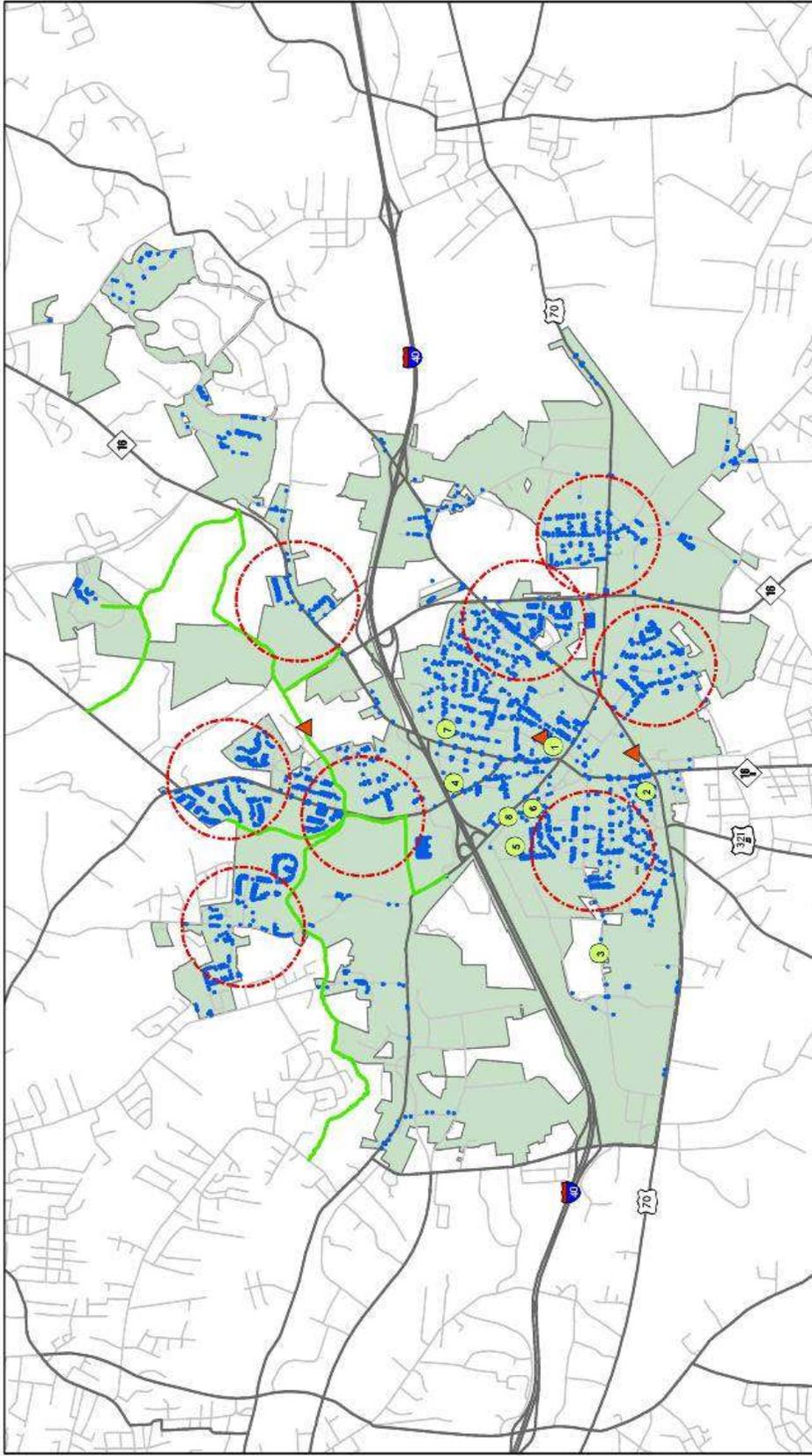
Figure 6.1  
Enhanced Parks  
Program Funding  
Estimates



This Plan was produced by the City of Conover Planning Department Staff.

City of Conover  
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**Map 5.5: Conover Planned & Recommended City Parks**



- 1) Downtown Park
- 2) Howe Park
- 3) Hines Park
- 4) Travis Park
- 5) Majestic Park
- 6) Washington Park
- 7) Hunsicker Park
- 8) Gateway Park

- Legend**
- Recommended park areas
  - Planned park
  - Proposed greenways
  - Residential units
  - City owned parks
  - City limits
  - Major roads
  - Streets