

SECTION 5 – Needs Assessment Summary

5.1 Introduction

This section of the report discusses the park and facility needs for the City of Albany. For a more detailed analysis of the needs, please refer to Appendix E.

Quantifying park and recreation facility needs is difficult to identify because many different variables influence recreation needs. Community values, participation patterns, and willingness to pay for services vary widely from one community to another. Consequently, what seems appropriate for one community may not be suitable for another. One of the problems associated with determining needs is that overstating the demand can result in the development of underutilized facilities. Conversely, underestimating the needs can result in overused facilities and a lack of usable park land and open space. The process used to identify the needs in Albany were:

1. Inventorying and analyzing the existing supply of park and recreation facilities (See Section #3 and Appendix B).
2. Public input on park and recreation needs
 - a. A city-wide opinion survey of Albany residents conducted by MIG, Inc. (See Section #4 and Appendix D, Part A).
 - b. Public Meeting (See Section #4 and Appendix D, Part B)
 - c. User Group Contacts (See Section #4 and Appendix D, Part C)
3. Forecasting park and facility needs utilizing various approaches.

5.2 Alternative Approaches to Identifying Needs

There are several approaches to estimating needs. They include the use of national standards, measurement of participation levels, user trend analysis, input from surveys and public meetings, goal setting and participation models. Since the analysis on the following pages encompasses some of these methods, a brief description of each is listed below.

National Standards

Standards were first created by a group of professionals who established an easily understood format of what "seemed to be right" based on their practical experience in the field. These standards were felt to be most useful if stated in quantifiable terms of acres or facilities per given population level, e.g., 10 acres of park land per 1,000 people.

The most recognized standards were those published by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). In 1983, they published the first edition titled "Recreation, Park and Open Space Standards".

The problem with this approach was that communities were adopting the national standards without taking into account local conditions. The result was often standards the agency could not possibly achieve. In 1996, NRPA developed a new approach to assessing need based on a desired level of service or "LOS".

This LOS is a way of accurately calculating the minimum amount of land to provide all of the recreation activities and facilities desired in the communities. LOS is still expressed in terms of acres per population, but is driven by facility-based needs and land measured formulas.

Participation Levels Analysis

Recognizing the need to reflect local conditions, MIG, Inc., began measuring per capita participation levels in every community it studied. Participation level is measured in terms of the number of occasions in a given 30-day period when that activity is in season. The activity level is then compared to other similar communities or with the MIG AVERAGE, which is the weighted average of the last 15 communities surveyed.

By comparing the subject community with the MIG AVERAGE, a determination can be made if participation is above or below average. This then gives an indication as to whether the standard should be above or below average.

Trend Analysis

With this approach, extrapolating historical use statistics for each type of facility develops facility demand estimates. If local statistical information is used, the results can be reasonably accurate because they reflect use in the specific community. However, local conditions or current trends in recreation interests can influence the trend analysis approach. As an example, if one charts tennis playing over the last 20 years, a cycle of interest and level of play emerges. Also, operating conditions such as quality of the facility, its location, user fees and hours of operation can all play an important role in the level of use. This method is sometimes used to forecast team registration if the number of facilities remains constant.

Recreation Surveys

Recreation surveys can be conducted utilizing several different methods and approaches. These include mail-in, telephone and door-to-door surveys. Each type of survey process has both positive and negative attributes that include cost efficiency, return ratio, desired information and time frame. Using the survey approach, future facility needs are sometimes developed from survey information on user characteristics, participation patterns, opinions and perceived needs. If the questionnaires are drawn from a statistically valid sample, a good reliable sampling of information can be derived.

The difficulty with surveys is converting the information to quantifiable terms. As an example, if 1,000 people expressed an interest in playing tennis, how many tennis courts will it take to satisfy that expressed need? It is also difficult, in the survey approach, to measure future recreation participation because it is impossible to accurately forecast how much use an individual would make use of a facility if it were available.

Public Meetings

Some communities rely quite heavily on input from the general public to assess the needs. However, this approach by itself may not reflect the true community need because special interest groups often do not necessarily represent the true community's interest.

Goals

In some instances, community goals are expressed as the need without quantifiable or statistical analysis to support the goal. An example might be, "It is our goal to acquire as much natural open space as possible". Goals reflect a community's desire. While this approach is not the most ideal, in some instances it is the only option possible. In the above example, it would be very difficult to come up with a statistically valid standard such as "xx" acres per 1,000 people. It is a valid approach if the goal can be supported by a true evaluation of community values and desires.

Participation Models

Participation models are refined statistical formulas for establishing a quantifiable standard. They are based on actual participation characteristics taken from individual uses. When a large sample is taken, a fairly accurate statistical profile can be made.

The most accurate participation models are developed for a specific type of area or facility. Unfortunately, these models are very costly to develop because of the data needed and they usually only deal with one type of facility. However, based on studies of specific types of facilities over the years, MIG has developed participation models for many special-use facilities such as trails and swimming pools.

5.3 Methodology of Assessing Park and Open Space Needs

Developing a statement of land needs for park areas and open space is the most difficult of all types of needs analysis because it depends on localized values, availability of land, financial resources and desired service levels.

To determine specific land needs for the City of Albany, several analytical methods were used. These included a comparison to other similar communities, results of the household survey, national and local trends, land availability and geographical deficiencies for parks and open space areas. It should be noted that even with all the statistical information available, a certain amount of subjective analysis and professional experience must be used to quantify the standards.

In the following discussion, suggested standards for specific types of park areas are given. In many cases, comparisons to other communities are given. These comparisons are given as the "existing ratio". The existing ratio is the existing amount of park land divided by the existing population. It is expressed in terms of acres per 1,000 people. The suggested standard is the desired amount of park land and is also expressed in terms of acres per 1,000 people.

The ratio of park land is based on a comparison with the existing population base. By developing a desired level of service (suggested standard) and applying it to a future population forecast, one can determine future needs. To determine the existing ratio, the population within the existing city limits was used. (Refer to Section 2 of this report for existing population information).

5.4 Land Needs

On the following pages, specific needs for each type of park land are discussed. The categories of park land include:

1. Mini-Parks
2. Neighborhood Parks
3. Community Parks
4. Regional Parks
5. Special Use Parks
6. Linear Parks
7. Open Space Areas/Greenways

It should be mentioned that no assessment of needs has been made for school recreation areas due to the difficulty of ascertaining the amount of dedicated land for recreation use. In addition, only a portion of the site is accessible to the general public, which generally occurs in the late afternoon and evenings.

No needs were developed for private recreation lands, such as private open space areas and miscellaneous recreation areas because these are limited or restricted by use or fees.

Table 5.1
Comparison of Current Ratio and Suggested Demand Standards for Park and Recreation Areas
City of Albany

Recreation Area	Current Ratio	Suggested Standard
Mini-Parks	0.05 Acres/1,000 People	0.03 Acres / 1,000 People
Neighborhood Parks	0.39 Acres/1,000 People	0.57 Acres / 1,000 People
Community Parks	0.40 Acres/1,000 People	0.40 Acres / 1,000 People
Regional Parks	9.52 Acres/1,000 People	9.85 Acres / 1,000 People
Special Use Areas	1.26 Acres/1,000 People	1.69 Acres / 1,000 People
Linear Parks	0.55 Acres/1,000 People	0.77 Acres / 1,000 People
Open Space Areas/Greenways	1.66 Acres/1,000 People	4.11 Acres / 1,000 People

Summary of Land Needs

Listed below is a summary of the demand analysis for park and recreation services.

- One additional neighborhood park is needed to serve the entire area within the planning area. Depending on the eventual size and type of facilities developed at this site, the planned Pierce Street Park could potentially fulfill this need.
- While there is no need for an additional regional park in the City, there is some opportunity to expand the existing Eastshore State Park. With the eventual redevelopment of the “Albany Bulb” (owned by the City) and the Golden Gate Fields property, there may be opportunities to add additional land in this category.
- Additional land is needed to preserve open space on Albany Hill and along the creeks. Preserving land along the Codornices and Cerrito Creeks in accordance with the City’s conservation policy will help fulfill the need in these areas. This policy establishes a 100’ conservation corridor along three creeks within the City.

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Table 5.2
Summary of Current Park Needs (Year 2003)¹
Park and Recreation Areas (in Acres)
Albany Planning Area

Area or Facility	Existing Inventory	Year 2003 Demand	Additional Need ¹
Mini-Parks	0.78	0.50	(0.28)
Neighborhood Parks	6.63	9.58	2.95
Community Park	6.75	6.72	(0.03)
Regional Parks	160.00	159.94	(0.06)
Special Use Parks	21.20	28.39	7.19
Linear Parks	9.32	12.94	3.62
Open Space	27.87	69.05	41.18
Areas/Greenways **			

¹ Based on a suggested demand standard and a 2003 population of 16,800

** Excludes Albany Mudflat Ecological Preserve (Eastshore State Park) (367.0 Acres)

Table 5.3
Summary of Park Needs (Build-out)⁽²⁾
Park and Recreation Areas (in Acres)
Albany Planning Area

Area or Facility	Existing Inventory	Build-out Demand	Additional Need ²
Mini-Parks	0.78	0.51	(0.27)
Neighborhood Parks	6.63	9.70	3.07
Community Park	6.75	6.81	0.06
Regional Parks	160.00	162.03	2.03
Special Use Parks	21.20	28.76	7.56
Linear Parks	9.32	13.11	3.79
Open Space	27.87	69.95	42.08
Areas/Greenways **			

² Based on a suggested demand standard and build-out population of 17,020

** Excludes Albany Mudflat Ecological Preserve (367.0 Acres)

5.5 Methodology of Assessing Recreation Facility Needs

Establishing needs for recreation facilities, such as sport fields and trails was derived from several analytical approaches. This included an analysis of present recreation participation levels, needs expressed in the survey, from play and practice time requirements of sport teams and from mathematical models developed over the years from other studies.

Similar to the discussion of park land needs, the "existing ratio" and "suggested demand standard" are expressed. The existing ratio is the existing people divided by the number of facilities (e.g., fields, square feet, and miles). Likewise, the suggested demand standard is the desired ratio of people to facilities. This is based on the desired level of service. By establishing a desired level of service and applying it to the existing and future people forecast, one can determine appropriate suggested demand standard and ultimately the future needs. To determine the existing ratio for facilities, the population within the city was used.

To determine the need for sport fields, a demand model was created that compared the supply of fields against the demand created by the number of teams. Within this demand model there are many variables (or service levels) that will affect the eventual need statement. These variables include:

- Demand Variables
 - * Number of teams
 - * Number of games and practices permitted per team per week

- Supply Variables
 - * Number of fields
 - * Number of games/practices permitted per field per week
 - * Existence of lighted or unlighted fields

5.6 Facility Needs

Below specific needs, for each facility type, are discussed. The categories of facilities include:

1. Ball Fields (baseball and softball)
2. Soccer Fields
3. Indoor Gymnasium Space
4. Pathways and Trails

It should be mentioned that no assessment of needs has been made for other field sports due to the limited participation or the lack of statistical data.

Table 5.4
Comparison of Current Ratio and Suggested Demand Standards for Recreation Facilities
City of Albany

Recreation Area	Current Ratio	Suggested Standard
Ball Fields (Baseball and Softball)	1 field per 2,800 people	1 field per 2,400 people
Soccer Fields	1 field per 4,200 people	1 field per 2,800 people
Indoor Gym Space (Courts)	1 court per 2,800 people	1 court per 2,600 people
Pathways and Trails	0.15 miles per 1,000 people	0.55 miles per 1,000 people

Summary of Facility Needs

- There is a slight need for additional ball fields and soccer fields.
- There is a need for additional trails. Current projects along Codornices and Cerrito Creeks will help fulfill the need in these areas.

Table 5.5
Summary of Recreation Facility Needs (Year 2003)¹
Albany Planning Area

Area or Facility	Existing Inventory	Year 2003 Demand	Additional Need
Ball Fields (Baseball and Softball) ²	6	7	1
Soccer Fields	4	6	2
Indoor Gym Space	6	7	1
Pathways and Trails	2.5	9.2	6.7

¹ Based on a suggested demand standard and a 2003 population of 16,800

² This excludes multi-use backstops that, if upgraded, could satisfy a portion of the need

Table 5.6
Summary of Recreation Facility Needs (Build-out)¹
Albany Planning Area

Area or Facility	Existing Inventory	Build-out Demand	Additional Need
Ball Fields (Baseball and Softball) ²	6	7	1
Soccer Fields	4	6	2
Indoor Gym Space (Courts)	6	7	1
Pathways and Trails	2.5	9.4	6.9

¹ Based on a suggested demand standard and a build-out population of 17,020

² This excludes multi-use backstops that, if upgraded, could satisfy a portion of the need

5.7 Indoor Recreation Space Needs

In addition to the more traditional types of park land and recreation facilities discussed earlier in this report, there were other needs identified during the study. Indoor space was one of these needs. This is discussed below.

Indoor Recreation Space:

Many communities have built indoor recreation centers that contain a variety of indoor spaces, such as gymnasiums, exercise/aerobics areas, weight training rooms and other specialized activity areas. In some instances, childcare facilities and places for youth or seniors have been incorporated into these types of spaces. These facilities are extremely popular where the climate is not conducive to year round outdoor recreation activities or where nighttime recreation activities are required.

In Albany, an indoor recreation center would considerably expand the number of recreation activities that could be offered as well as meet gymnasium space for basketball and volleyball.

5.8 Recreation Program Needs

In general, the City of Albany offers a fairly extensive recreation and sports program considering the current facilities.

Other providers such as the Lions Baseball, Albany Little League, Albany Girls Softball, Albany Adult Coed Soccer, Albany Berkeley Soccer Club, Bobcat Football, Lions Flag Football and Albany Sports Camps offer an extensive sports program (both league and instruction).

Based on our analysis, some of the unmet needs in recreation programs include the following:

- Arts (painting/sketching, etc.)
- Crafts (pottery/ceramics, etc.)
- Lifetime sport programs (tennis, golf, hiking, etc.)
- Job training/career placement programs
- Drop in sport activities
- Concerts/Performances in the parks program
- After school programs