

BLACK MOUNTAIN RECREATION AND PARKS DEPARTMENT

Black Mountain Veterans Park

Master Plan

Presented to:

THE TOWN OF BLACK MOUNTAIN, NORTH CAROLINA

By:

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Black Mountain Veterans Park

1.0 Introduction

Parks are defined as areas of land set aside for public use, often preserving the natural characteristics of that land, meant for recreation and enjoyment. Recreation is defined as the refreshment of one's mind and body through activity that amuses or stimulates (play, if you will). Though few parks are able to truly serve a wide cross-section of the local public and provide the setting and facilities necessary to rejuvenate their users. It takes a unique mix of elements to create such a rare and special place. If you ask anyone in Black Mountain, North Carolina, they will tell you, Black Mountain Veterans Park is one such special place.

Black Mountain Veterans Park provides its users a place to play, walk, fish, gather, exercise and relax within a 27.2-acre parcel situated on the southwest side of the Town of Black Mountain. The development of such a park didn't happen overnight. The Park was created in 1991, was flooded and rebuilt in 1996. However, time is catching up with Black Mountain Veterans Park. Facilities that have been maintained for many years are beginning to show their age. Major renovations have been difficult to fund. The maintenance and upkeep that has sustained the park for so many years is beginning to affect the level of service that Black Mountain Veterans Park can provide the Town of Black Mountain.

The Town of Black Mountain is committed to preserving, restoring and enhancing Black Mountain Veterans Park for many years to come. The Black Mountain Veterans Park Master Plan establishes a thorough vision of improvement and development for the next 10 years.

Black Mountain Recreation and Parks:

1.1 Vision Statement

Building a strong and healthy community for all through programs and places.

1.2 Mission Statement

The Black Mountain Recreation & Parks Department, in partnership with our citizens and with respect to our environment, will provide community based recreation programs, wellness opportunities, facilities, and services to enrich the quality of life in Black Mountain.

2.0 Community Outreach

2.1 Public Input - Public input meetings for Black Mountain Veterans Park were held on March 14, 2016 11:00am at the Lakeview Center; March 19, 2016 at 11:30 am @ Veterans Park; March 24, 2016 6:30 pm at the Carver Community Center; March 28, 2016 5:00 pm at Town Hall. The goal of these meetings was to get input from local residents on what they would like to see done regarding improvements to the park. Because of the size of the park and the numerous user groups that use the park we felt that having several meetings over a series of weeks was the best way to get a broader cross section of users for input. We sent notices to Facebook followers, predetermined user groups, posting flyers and notification in the Black Mountain News. Some of the ideas that had come forward for consideration were: a playground, a picnic area, an outdoor kitchen, land acquisition, and other ideas brought forward by the community.

We received 99 responses through the public meeting. In the meeting we asked each respondent to rank the proposed ideas 1-4 with 1 being the project that they would most like to see. The rankings are in the table below.

| | 1's | 2's | 3's | 4's | Points |
|--------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|--------|
| Playground | 51 | 18 | 19 | 11 | 307 |
| Ballfield Pavilion | 11 | 35 | 27 | 21 | 224 |
| Outdoor Kitchen | 20 | 20 | 24 | 25 | 213 |
| Land Acquisition | 17 | 19 | 17 | 26 | 185 |
| | | | | | |
| Year Round Bathrooms | 25 | 14 | 18 | 14 | 192 |
| Stream Restoration | 23 | 16 | 15 | 9 | 179 |
| Trail Improvements | 16 | 13 | 17 | 17 | 154 |
| Shade for the Ballfields | 13 | 10 | 7 | 8 | 104 |
| Fishing Pier | 6 | 16 | 8 | 10 | 98 |
| Educational Wetlands | 7 | 10 | 8 | 9 | 83 |
| Outdoor Exercise Area | 5 | 6 | 9 | 11 | 67 |
| Basketball Court | 7 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 62 |
| Disc Golf Improvements | 1 | 4 | 2 | 10 | 30 |
| Bike Station | 1 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 29 |
| Dog Park | 1 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 23 |
| Pickleball | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 6 |

Each item that received a first place vote was translated to four (4) points, second place received three (3) points, third place received two (2) points, and fourth place received one (1) point.

The top four selections were on a boards separate from the other board with the remaining items. These selections were given a board because they had been identified in previous forums as priority improvements.

We also gave each respondent the opportunity to further elaborate on their ranking by giving comments in both the online survey and the public meeting. Some of the comments that were worth noting from the responses are as follows:

| Other Ideas | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Better Lighting in Underpass | Ballfield sprinklers | more indoor soccer |
| Pave Parking Lot | bigger skate park | |
| Signs for visually impaired | golf area | |
| Plaque for veterans | alcohol permits in public places | |
| Better signage from us 70 | soccer fields | |

The original public meeting to gather input for the Black Mountain Veterans Park (Black Mountain Recreation Park at the time) was held on December 4th 2014. From this meeting and from previous discussions with the Recreation Commission it was determined that land acquisition, playground, pavilion, and outdoor kitchen were the priorities. With year round restrooms and ADA improvements to be done if funding allowed.

In summary, the turnout for these events and the amount of feedback was more than we had anticipated. I believe that the high number input shows the value that people place on the park and its future. Several of these items that scored high could be cost prohibitive and may take longer to achieve than some items that possibly scored lower but have other sources of funding.

2.2 Black Mountain Needs Assessment

The Black Mountain Needs Assessment state two purposes for the study:

- To assess awareness regarding healthy living through recreation
- To gauge the attitudes, needs, interests and behavior of the people of Black Mountain with respect to leisure, health and recreation

During the spring of 2015 the data collection process took place, which was conducted by US Mail, the response rate was just over 10% elicited from the mailing of 3,000 questionnaires to a random sample of addresses in Black Mountain. The data was analyzed using standard statistical software to develop the recommendations presented here. Furthermore, it should be noted that the data presented in this report are based only on the responses obtained in the community-wide study and the descriptive and narrative information collected in the focus group meetings. There are no presumptions about the actual performance of the BMRP; only the perceptions of the community are reported. It is quite possible that many of the perceptions do not match the actual activities of the BMRP. However, the purpose of this report is to present the perception, accurate or inaccurate, to demonstrate how the community feels about the BMRP.

2.3 RESULTS OF THE STUDY: DEMOGRAPHICS

Description of the Population

A set of questions was designed to elicit demographic information such as age, marital status, gender, etc. These questions can provide information about a community's makeup and therefore its possible recreation needs. It is useful to note that the percentages reported and tabulated sometimes add up to 101% or 99% due to the effects of rounding off decimals.

Gender

The sample was made up of 32% male and 68% female respondents. While this is different from the Census information, at this point, the data will be accepted with a certain amount of bias towards female respondents.

Age

The questionnaire provided different age categories and the age category percentages of the respondents are reported below. This places the median age in the 55-64 age groups which is higher than the Census median age reported as 48 years.

| Age Category | Percent |
|---------------------|----------------|
| 18-24 | 0% |
| 25-34 | 3% |
| 35-44 | 11% |
| 45-54 | 16% |
| 55-64 | 30% |
| 65-69 | 11% |
| 70-74 | 12% |
| Over 75 | 14% |

Income

The household income distribution varied from under \$50,000 to over \$150,000 per year, with the median income being in the \$50,000 to \$75,000 range which is higher than the median income of \$37,000 described in the 2012 Census. The specific income categories reported by the respondents were as follows:

| Income Category | Percent |
|------------------------|----------------|
| Under \$50,000 | 40% |
| \$50-75,000 | 17% |
| \$75-100,000 | 13% |
| \$100-125,000 | 5% |
| \$125-150,000 | 3% |
| Over \$150,000 | 8% |

Household composition

The respondents indicated that 57% were married. Nearly 97% of the respondents claimed to be white, with the rest being African-Americans and Hispanics. Nearly 90% of the respondents claimed to have a high-school diploma or a higher educational degree. The people who responded to the questionnaire approximate the population of Black Mountain with some over- and under- representations. Additionally, the majority of the respondents claimed to pay property taxes in Black Mountain and the average length of residence in Black Mountain was 21 years. These limitations can be corrected by applying appropriate statistical weights to the data, however, this report is based on the analysis of the un-weighted data.

Areas of Importance From Needs Assessment

| NEED | Yes | No | Will use |
|----------------------------------|-----|----|----------|
| Sidewalks | 90 | 10 | 93 |
| Walking trails | 87 | 13 | 94 |
| Year-round restroom facilities | 87 | 13 | 90 |
| Special events | 85 | 15 | 86 |
| Neighborhood parks | 83 | 18 | 83 |
| Connected greenways | 80 | 20 | 84 |
| Picnic pavilions | 80 | 20 | 75 |
| Parking | 79 | 21 | 85 |
| Greenways | 77 | 23 | 82 |
| Upgrading of existing facilities | 76 | 24 | 64 |
| Designated bike lanes | 74 | 26 | 65 |
| Community garden | 73 | 27 | 43 |
| Swim time for adults | 71 | 29 | 56 |
| Bicycle trails | 70 | 30 | 66 |
| Disabled access | 68 | 32 | 37 |
| Bicycle lanes | 68 | 32 | 69 |
| Accessible facilities | 67 | 33 | 54 |
| Deal with water runoff | 66 | 34 | 65 |
| Water exercise classes | 65 | 35 | 58 |
| Dog park | 58 | 42 | 46 |
| Fishing facilities | 56 | 44 | 41 |
| Restrooms at tennis complex | 53 | 47 | 40 |
| Greenhouse | 53 | 47 | 48 |
| Bike borrowing programs | 51 | 49 | 39 |
| Outdoor basketball courts | 51 | 49 | 34 |
| Aerobics | 48 | 52 | 34 |
| Community kitchen | 48 | 52 | 29 |
| Summer camp | 45 | 55 | 22 |
| Campgrounds | 44 | 56 | 39 |
| Rental spaces | 39 | 61 | 23 |
| Tennis courts | 37 | 63 | 22 |
| Indoor basketball courts | 36 | 64 | 15 |
| Tennis facilities | 33 | 67 | 24 |
| Tennis clinics support | 30 | 70 | 9 |
| Baseball fields | 29 | 71 | 13 |

3.0 Research and Analysis

The first step in improving a park is to determine what issues exist. Proper site analysis is crucial in determining each issue that exists on a project site. The following sections describe the current setting of Black Mountain Veterans Park.

3.1 Black Mountain Veterans Park History

- July 1991 the Town purchased 17 acres
- 1992 ball field construction, soccer field and concession stand.
- June 1993 Fencing installed
- November 1993 park is named Black Mountain Recreation Park
- Summer 1994- Winter 1995 flooding damage at park was repaired March 1995 fields, trails, and concession stand area
- Lighting for fields added, completed February 1997
- 1997 field house was completed
- River Trail was added in 1998
- The Oaks trail that connects the park to Vance Avenue was completed in 1999
- The Bridge at the Oaks trail was also added in 1999
- First 9 holes of disc golf added in 2000
- The Clevenger Sock Mill Property (10 acres) was purchased in 2003
- Underpass to connect the north and south sides of the park were completed in 2006
- Back 9 of disc golf added 2008
- The Garden loop trail was added in March 2011
- The park was renamed from Black Mountain Recreation Park to Black Mountain Veterans Park in March 2016.

3.2 Site Features

Black Mountain Veterans Park is located in a wide, flat valley that borders the Swannanoa River. Approximately 1/3 of the park lies within the FEMA 100-year Floodplain. A protective berm was constructed within the park to protect from repetitive flooding while maintaining the integrity of the river and the surrounding properties. The only major utility of note found in the park is a supply power line for Duke Progress Power Company. There is only one small area on the north-west corner of the park that contains wetlands.

3.3 Facility Inventory

Black Mountain Veterans Park is located within an industrial area of Black Mountain, North Carolina. Existing park facilities include:

- Four Baseball/Softball Fields
- Concession Stand
- Score booth
- Multi-Sport Fields
- Walking/Jogging Path (1.6 miles)
- 18 Hole Disc Golf Course
- Picnic Areas
- Dr. John Wilson Community Garden
- 1 Covered Picnic Table
- Grey Eagle Arena Indoor Soccer Facility
- 1 Fishing Platform
- Outdoor Restroom Building
- Maintenance Building

Program Inventory

- Fishing
- Walking
- Cross Country Running
- Track Trail
- Geo Caching
- Youth Indoor Soccer
- Community Gardening
- Owen District Youth Football
- Owen Babe Ruth and Softball
- Disc Golf Tournaments hosted by WNC Disc Golf Assoc.
- Adult Softball League
- Facility Rentals

3.4 Site Description & Observations

Black Mountain Veterans Park Drive Parking Area

- Most visitors to Black Mountain Veterans Park see the Veterans Park Drive Parking Area before they experience any other feature of the park. This parking area is the larger of the two parking areas at the park (approx. 200 spaces). There is no clear main entrance to this parking area. The existing parking area entrances are difficult to navigate for first time visitors when the park is busy.

Grey Eagle and Community Garden Parking Area

- This building was constructed circa 1963 and currently has 10,000 square feet of heated space. The building was used as a sock factory until the early 2000's. The building was used for storage for several years and finally remodeled into an indoor soccer facility in 2005 and opened in March 2006. The arena has parking for approximately 40 cars in the front of the building and shares parking in the back with the community garden for another 40 spots.

3.5 Opportunities & Constraints

Black Mountain Recreation Park is highly used and visited by a variety of Black Mountain's residents, which is testament to the park's service to the community. Existing vegetation, primarily hardwoods, creates a green belt around Black Mountain Recreation Park. The Ballfield complex holds functions March-November.

A park that serves such a large number of residents and visitors is bound to have a number of issues and constraints. Drainage issues throughout the park contribute to the granite screenings on the River Trail washing away and into the river. Stream banks continue to change and erode in sections. Relationships between the two main parking lots and the uses that surround them are not compatible. The past absence of a park master plan is evident as well. Recent additions to the park facilities have been placed in the closest open area, without regard to future uses. Furnishings within the park, which are used daily, have been added haphazardly and without forethought. The site inventory counted 3 different styles of benches within the park.

Though Black Mountain Veterans Park is a thriving space, it is not without its flaws and imperfections. It is key to plan for the future of the park, so that it may serve future citizens and visitors as it serves those today.

4.0 Recreational Needs

The stated goal of the Black Mountain Recreation & Parks Department 2025 Master Plan is to provide the Town of Black Mountain with an accurate, usable plan to guide its action for improvements and development of parks facilities and programs for the future. The following excerpts from the study pertain directly to Black Mountain Veterans Park and the role it plays within the overall park system. A complete report is available upon request from the Black Mountain Recreation and Parks Department.

Black Mountain Recreation and Parks Department 2025 Master Plan

- Evaluation of Facility Needs-Overall
 - Picnic Shelters
 - Picnic Sites
 - Jogging/Fitness Trail
 - Playgrounds

Park Proposals & Recommendations

- Black Mountain Recreation Park
 - Needs Year Round Restrooms
 - ADA Improvements
 - Additional Parking
 - Playground
 - Improved Drainage
 - Picnic Pavilion
 - Outdoor Kitchen
- Playgrounds
 - Each park, both current and future, should have a playground

Priorities for Development

1. ADA Improvements
2. Playground
3. Picnic Pavilion
4. Year Round Restrooms
5. Land Acquisition
6. Stream Restoration
7. Trail Improvements
8. Shade
9. Fishing Pier

5.0 Master Plan Recommendations

The following recommendations represent a culmination of an extensive information gathering, public participation and professional assessment process. This process involved hours of on-site investigation, the assessment of site features, the analysis of those features, input from the public in various forums, the recommendations of previous studies and conversations with town staff and the Board of Aldermen. The process leaves the project team with a clear understanding of the needs within Black Mountain Veterans Park.

Recommendations for improvements within Black Mountain Veterans Park are broken into two categories:

- **Immediate Needs**
 - These recommendations include those mentioned time after time through the public input process, as well as those which are referred to in previous studies. These recommendations will have a definite impact on the recreational opportunities available to the citizens of Black Mountain.
- **Future Needs**
 - These recommendations represent more broad improvements to Black Mountain Veterans Park aimed at enhancing the existing uses within the park while maximizing the arrangement of those uses.

5.1 Black Mountain Veterans Park Phase I:

Outdoor Kitchen

- The outdoor kitchen/pavilion will be a partly covered slab for gatherings and an outdoor uncovered area that will be used for cooking and demonstrations. The outdoor kitchen would be a space that could be used as an outdoor classroom for environmental education, food preservation classes, garden gatherings or home to one of the many other classes that are currently held in relation to the garden.

Playground

- A new playground would be constructed in the current cul-de-sac and parking area adjacent to the ballfield pavilion. This playground would be constructed to meet all playground safety standards and approved by the playground committee.

Ballfield Pavilion

- The ballfield pavilion will also be constructed in the current cul-de-sac and parking area. This facility will be available for rental by groups of up to 25 to 30 people.

Trail

- Rehabilitation of the old trail in the northwest corner of the park will be done and creating a permanent trail loop around the park will be completed. This will make the trail ADA compliant.

Landscape Beautification

- Volunteers are willing to work with the Black Mountain Recreation and Parks Department to enhance the beauty of Black Mountain Veterans Park. These groups, along with other members of the community, will assist the department in small maintenance projects and park beautification projects throughout the year. These projects are aimed at using landscape materials to increase the park's natural beauty and soften the impact of elements both inside and around the park. 'Park Sweep' events can be held once or twice a year. These events will allow citizens and groups in Black Mountain to actively give back to a place that many of them use on a regular basis.

Streambank Restoration

- Streambank Restoration has been identified as a need from the community. Due to the increased number of high water events in the recent past there has been substantial degradation of several of the streambanks in the park. We will explore opportunities for grant funding for this project as well as partnering with other local organizations such as RiverLink.

5.2 Black Mountain Recreation Park Future Phases:

Parking

- Addition of parking opportunities. This could be done by purchasing adjacent properties and using these for additional parking. This new area will provide at least 80 new parking spaces.

Fishing Pier

- A new large fishing pier will be built on the garden side of Recreation Park. The exact location of this is yet to be determined.

Grey Eagle Arena

- Glass paneling similar to the glass paneling on the west end of the arena would be built along the north side of the arena where spectators generally watch from. This would allow spectators a better view of what is happening on the field.
- Turf repair/replacement. The current turf was installed in 2006 and probably will not need to be upgraded until 2026.

Dr. John Wilson Community Garden

- Greenhouse. A greenhouse built somewhere near the current community garden would be a beneficial facility. This could be used to grow and sell starts which could help fund the garden in the future. Space could also be rented to gardeners.

Year Round Restrooms

- The current restrooms would be upgraded to year round restrooms in the future. Currently we only provide restrooms nine months of the year while the park is used year round.

Drainage

- An upgrade to the park drainage will allow for better usage through the lack of less down time due to flooding and water damage.

Rebuilding of ballfields

- At some point in the future the actual ballfields will need to be redone. The fields suffer from wear and tear each year and slow degradation of underlying structure. This may require some down time for baseball and softball but it is an upgrade that is necessary

Fencing

- The backstops and fencing will need to be replaced. The backstops and fencing also suffer from wear and tear each year and must be upgraded at some point in the future. We would also like to create a safer facility for the spectators which would include netting to prevent errant balls from entering the spectator area.

Concession Stand

- Upgrading the scoreboards and concession stand area will need to be done in the future. The scoreboards are old and should be replaced. The concession stand could use some modern day upgrades including countertops, hot water tank, appliances, etc.

Lighting

- The lighting for the ballfields will need to be upgraded to a more modern system. Many of the new systems today provide lights that use less energy and are much more efficient and inexpensive to upkeep. A lighting system where the lights could be turned on and off remotely using the internet could save time and money used for staffing facility.

Site Furnishings

- As existing site furnishings (benches, trash receptacles, grills, and picnic tables) deteriorate, new site furnishings will be added. The design of the new site furnishings will relate to one another and reflect the natural character of the park and the architectural elements of the structures in the park.

Pedestrian Park Entrances

- Pedestrian entrances into Black Mountain Veterans Park will be treated as gateways into the park. Entrance features, such as low walls, fences, signs and/or bollards, will create a formal focused entrance for pedestrians and cyclists. These features will be designed to allow maintenance vehicles to access the park where necessary.

5.3 Funding Opportunities

Alternative Funding Sources

In addition to general revenues and funding from the Town budget, the Town of Black Mountain should pursue a variety of funding sources for future planning and development at Black Mountain Veterans Park or other facilities. The funding sources listed below represent several funding opportunities that may be useful.

Bond Referendums

A bond referendum can be placed on a ballot to finance land acquisition and site development costs for parks and/or greenways. Voters must approve a bond. Because of this fact, it is critical to educate the public on the mission and intent of the bond in order to gain support.

Impact Fees

Impact fees are one-time monetary charges levied by a state or local government on new development. A local government can go through the process to change state statues if impact fees are needed in the community. Unlike dedication fees required through development, one-time impact fees can be applied to finance nearby recreation facilities.

Taxation

Communities can vote to raise tax money in support of Town-wide recreation efforts. These small taxes can be made temporary, lasting only for a predetermined period of time, or permanent.

Private Funding Sources

Town of Black Mountain has many local businesses, regional offices, and industries located within the county. The Town should establish a list of business owners through the Chamber of Commerce to seek financial and volunteer support for local events and park improvements.

User Fees

Municipalities typically charge a variety of user fees for recreational services and facilities within a park system. These fees are usually associated with special program participation and facility use. Town of Black Mountain could review, update and impose small user fees for the use, and upkeep of these specialty facilities and programs.

The membership and user fees generated at an indoor recreation center should be allowed to remain at the recreation center for upkeep and maintenance.

Volunteer Work

Local and regional volunteers can help with park and greenway development, maintenance, and monetary donations. Local organizations looking for a public service project, like Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts or conservation groups, would be

ideal for this type of participation. All groups and organizations would require prior approval and would be supervised by a representative from the Town.

AmeriCorp's National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC)

One type of project these teams of volunteers can participate in is trail construction. They have been involved in trail projects in 50 states and have worked in some of North Carolina's state parks. These groups have experience in trail clearing, construction to comply with federal standards, and the implementation of erosion control measures.

Grants:

Town of Black Mountain should continue to apply for county, state and federal grant programs as another method of financing recreation facility acquisition and development.

Other Grant Programs

There is a new website that contains information about finding and applying for all federal grant programs. For more information go to: www.grants.gov

Sponsorships:

"Adopt-A" Series:

Town of Black Mountain can promote parks and greenways and generate interest by developing a local Adopt-A-Park, Adopt-A-Trail, Adopt-A-Greenway or Adopt-A-Playground program that identifies the organization for providing a walk-through cleanup four times a year. Some local communities have constructed community playgrounds with its primary funds coming from private donations and volunteer labor. Donators are identified with plaques and recognition markers.

Athletic Programs:

Successful programs are made by donations of time, in-kind gifts, and cash donations.

Annual Programs and Special Events:

Underwriting, in-kind gifts, and financial support help keep these popular traditions going. Local, private companies partner with the Recreation and Parks Department to bring free or low-cost events to the public. This allows the Department to offer more activities and save tax dollars.