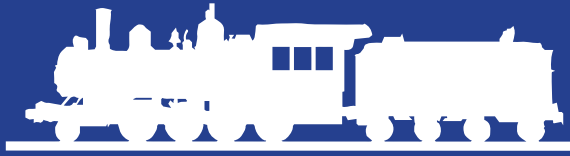


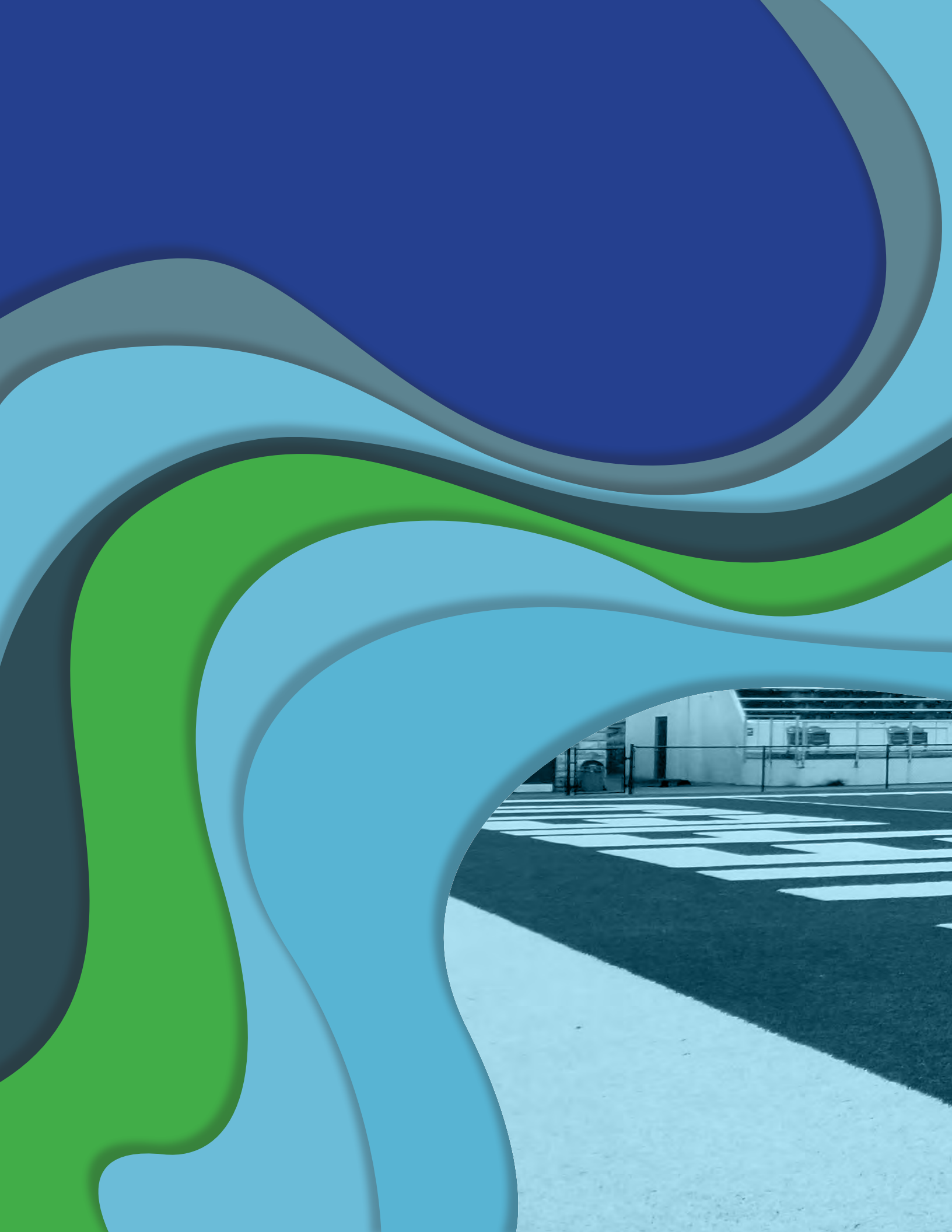
# BLUEFIELD WV

## PARKS, RECREATION, AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN



gai consultants

**COMMUNITY  
SOLUTIONS  
GROUP**





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In addition to the individuals listed here, the planning team would like to thank the citizens of Bluefield, as well as the many other people and groups that provided input throughout the planning process. Developing a quality public parks plan is not possible without the input of passionate and well-informed citizens.

This study would not have been possible without a generous financial contribution from the Shott Foundation.

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July 31, 2019 | Edition 1.0



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# CHAPTER ONE

# 1







# INTRODUCTION



# BLUEFIELD!

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The City of Bluefield, West Virginia encompasses 9.03 square miles and is located in southern Mercer County, about 3 miles off of Interstate 77 along the border of West Virginia and Virginia. With a population around 10,000 people, making Bluefield an ideal community for small town living with a bright future.

Bluefield's history began in the 18th century, after two families settled in the rugged hills of southern West Virginia, the Davidson's and Bailey's. After building a small community, in 1882 the families sold a portion of their land for the development of the Norfolk and Western Railway, thus initiating the development of the City of Bluefield through coal extraction.

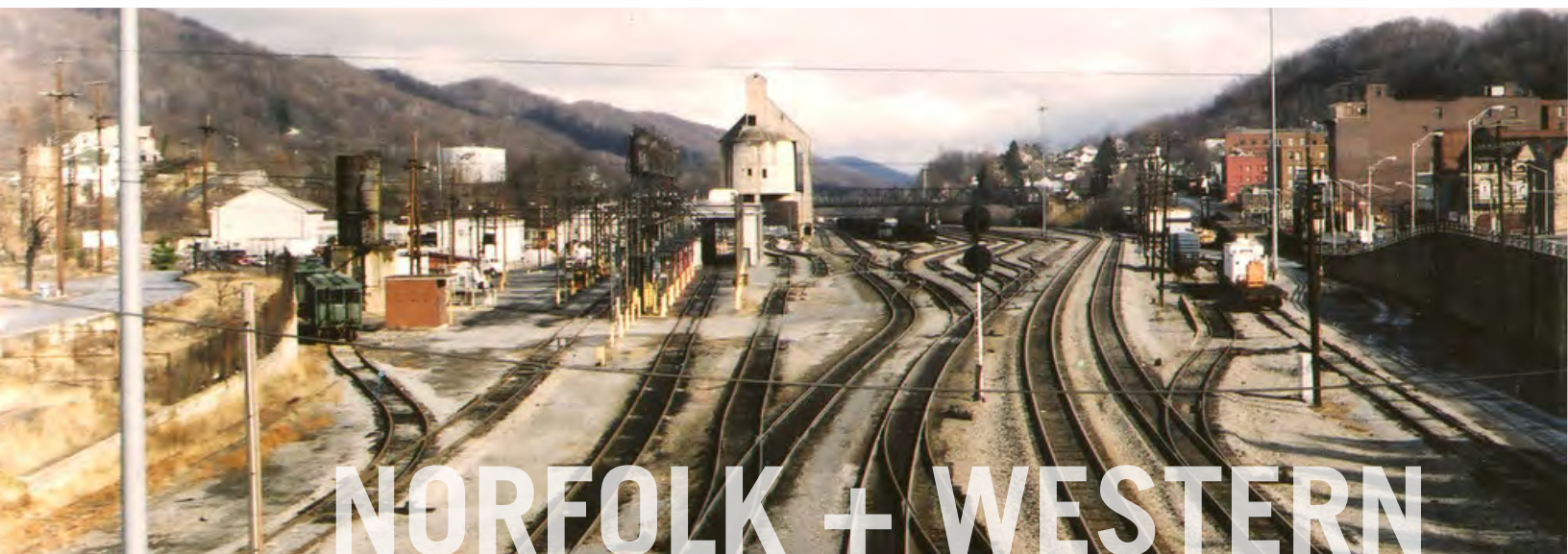
As part of the Pocahontas Coal Fields, growth in Bluefield flourished with the development of the coal industry. In search of industrial work, Bluefield began attracting immigrant European works and migrant African Americans from the farther south to the mountainous region.

In the late 19th century, the Norfolk and Western Company selected Bluefield as the site for its headquarters and repair center,

continuing to stimulate the growth of the local economy and population. Booming overnight, the City of Bluefield was officially incorporated in 1889 and continued to grow faster than the infrastructure around it.

The City of Bluefield continued to thrive until the Great Depression in the early 1900's. It was then that several fires spread throughout the urban area devastating the community. It was not until the outbreak of World War II that coal production revived the City. As time continued, and the development of the countries interstate system, Bluefield's dependency on the railroad system diminished and thus changed the needs of the local industry. Bluefield began to lose jobs and population with the restructuring of industry and the Amtrak station ultimately closed in the 1980's.

Bluefield today has continued to survive off of locally generated jobs and being a short distance off a major interstate. The City has also been successful in attracting jobs in the tech industry to the downtown area, thus creating a new vision for Bluefield, West Virginia.



Norfolk and Western Railroad bisecting Bluefield, West Virginia. Photo: Momodif



# VISION

At the center of any successful community are parks, recreational assets, and open space. As cities look to grow in the 21st century, they are using parks and recreation to help develop four principles within the community:

- Social Justice,
- Health,
- Environment,
- And Economic Development.

As the City of Bluefield plans for the future, city officials understand that parks and recreation will be an important tool in the diversification and growth of the City. This Plan was developed to guide the future of Bluefield Parks and Recreation. Represented in this report are the cumulative efforts of a six-month-long planning and design study that utilized community engagement, inventory and analysis of existing conditions, review of existing programs and facilities, development of planning and design goals, and exploration of future projects and opportunities.

## BLUEFIELD DEVELOPING PARKS OF THE FUTURE

### SOCIAL JUSTICE



- Improves the neighborhood
- Provides places for formal and informal social gathering, art, performances, events
- Facilitates shared experiences among different groups
- Attracts diverse populations

### HEALTH



- Improves social and physical mobility
- Encourages health and fitness
- Provides opportunities for individual, group, passive and active recreation

### ENVIRONMENT



- Serves as an interconnected node within larger scale ecological corridors and natural habitat
- Enhances, preserves, promotes, or contributes to biological diversity
- Hardscape materials selected for longevity of service, social/ cultural/ historical sustainability, regional availability, low carbon footprint

### ECONOMY



- Sustains or increases property values
- Catalyzes infill development and/or the re-use of obsolete or under-used buildings or spaces
- Indirectly creates or sustains good, living wage jobs
- Attracts new residents
- Attracts new businesses
- Generates increased business and tax revenues



# MISSION

The mission of the City of Bluefield Department of Parks and Recreation is to provide access to quality parks, recreation facilities, and services to meet the needs of our community through community resources, and fostering an environment that encourages growth, creativity, and integrity.

# VISION

The vision of the Department of Parks and Recreation is to promote a healthy quality of life to our citizens by providing access to dynamic activities, facilities, and park services.



---

The City of Bluefield Department of Parks and Recreation, through local contributions, has found it necessary to plan a vision for the future of the communities parks system. The department functions as the foundations of operations for 13 different city parks, 15 miles of trails, the FitRec and Herb Sims Youth Center, Mitchell Stadium, and events programming for the community. In order for the department to continue to enhance the quality of life for Bluefield's residents, it must continue

The development and implementation of a Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan presents the City of Bluefield with clear guide for existing and future facilities. This Plan has created a system-wide master plan for parks and recreation opportunities to meet the current and future needs of the community. The Plan assesses current conditions, identifies community needs and interests, and outlines a strategic action plan that balances opportunities, sustainability, and financial



to provide access to dynamic activities, facilities, and park services. To accomplish this goal, a parks, recreation, and open space plan is necessary to help guide for future park and facilities development, operational improvements, and maintenance upgrades.

realities. The Plan provides guidance and policy direction for the Bluefield Parks and Recreation Department's role in the community and will shape future development of city-provided parks, recreation, and open spaces.

The ultimate goal of the Bluefield Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan is to guide the City in policy development, capital programming, and future planning and growth.

# PROCESS

The overall purpose of this report is to service a road map for the future of Parks, Recreation, and Open Space within the City of Bluefield, West Virginia. The project process included four vital steps that have been completed by the Consultant over the last 6 months.

To begin the project, a detailed review of the community and parks system was completed. This process was used by the consultants to fully **understand** the needs of the City. The project team held face-to-face interviews and discussions with various stakeholder groups, visited existing facilities, analyzed demographics and population

trends, and compared Bluefield recreational assets to similarly sized communities to form benchmarks for level of service. The team also used both a public meeting and on-line survey to allow local residents to provide feedback on parks and recreation in Bluefield.

Once the project team concluded the baseline understanding of the community, a series of guiding principles was **organized** for the study area. By using information that had been learned in the first step, the project team formed consensus on guiding principles of the parks system.



## Understand

### PROGRAMMING *Look, Listen, and Learn*

We complete a detailed review of the community and Parks System using a variety of face-to-face interactions, site survey, demographics, technical analysis, and industry benchmarking. We will work together to define the issues and opportunities that the Parks System Plan should address. We also review the operational model of budget, staffing, and organization that is delivering the system.

Our goal is to develop a comprehensive understanding of place before we form recommendations.

## Organize

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES *Agreeing on Strategic Frameworks*

As we conclude our baseline understanding, it is important to define what we have learned, what we think it means, and how it will guide the plan. We have found that if we can develop consensus on the big ideas and approach, then the momentum for the plan builds.

Our plan recommendations are strongly supported because they are clearly linked to shared principles.



Based upon the guiding principles developed in the second step, a **design** vision for the future of the parks system was identified. The plan addressed specific opportunities for projects and initiatives that serve various parts of the community, such as neighborhood and regional parks. Facility needs, programming suggestions, and local connectivity improvements were also suggested. Each component of this section helped to develop the preliminary recommendations for the parks system.

Finally, the team compiled each step of the process into a clearly defined set of priorities and projects for the parks system to explore. This includes projects ranging from short-term to long-term suggestions. The project team was able to make recommendations on funding sources, staffing, capital projects, and maintenance. These elements were combined into an achievable **implementation** plan that can be used by the City of Bluefield Parks and Recreation as a guide for the years to come.



## Design

### DEVELOPING COMPONENTS *An Integrated Whole*

Based upon the Guiding Principles, the Parks System plan will address specific opportunities for projects and initiatives that serve each neighborhood and community district. Facilities, programs, and local connectivity are addressed, along with preliminary recommendations regarding the operational delivery model for the new System.



## Implement

### AN ACTIONABLE PLAN *A Strategy for Success*

The final Parks System Plan links each step along the journey into a clearly defined set of prioritized projects and budgets, while revisiting meeting identified need and Guiding Principles. Because of our robust economics and strategic governance capabilities, we can provide models for funding and finance, partnership and grants leverage that allow projects to happen.

We identify actions that provide multiple benefits and shared success.

# PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

---

Feedback and input from the City of Bluefield and surrounding communities were gathered through stakeholder interviews, a public meeting, and a public online survey. This input was vital to the overall direction of the project and assisted in developing the key themes and goals of the report.

## Stakeholder Meetings

In early April 2019, the consultant team held two days of meetings with local stakeholders who represented various users of Bluefield Parks and Recreation assets. Local sports leagues, colleges, secondary schools, neighboring communities, philanthropic foundations, invested citizens, elected and city officials, and parks staff made up the majority of stakeholder groups. Meeting with these individuals allowed the consultant team to focus in on future opportunities for the overall parks system.

## Public meeting

In late April 2019, a public meeting was held at the Bluefield Arts Center to allow another opportunity for community members to share their thoughts on parks and recreation in Bluefield. To begin the meeting, the consultant team provided a brief overview of the plan process. From there, the meeting attendees were split into breakout groups to cover a variety of topics. First, the breakout groups were asked to share their opinion on the current state of operations/facilities of parks and recreation. Moving on, the groups were then asked to discuss sports and programming. And finally, thoughts on the future direction and “big ideas” for Parks and Recreation to tackle were shared. The meeting was a very informal and collaborative affair. Some of the attendees even brought idea boards.



Stakeholder Meetings. Photo: GAI Consultants



Breakout groups at the public meeting. Photo: GAI Consultants



Public meeting participant. Photo: GAI Consultants

# ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS SUMMARY

## Online Survey

Beginning in late March 2019, a public, online survey was made available. This survey covered a wide array of topics related to Bluefield Parks and Recreation, and gave community members the opportunity to bring forward their ideas about the future of parks and recreation within the City of Bluefield. Participants could share how satisfied they were with current parks amenities and programming, share usage statistics, suggest future improvements, and provide other general feedback. Over 225 individuals responded to the survey, which provided ample feedback for the consultant team.

The following pages show an overview of the survey results. The full results of the survey can be read in the Appendix, which is in Chapter 8.

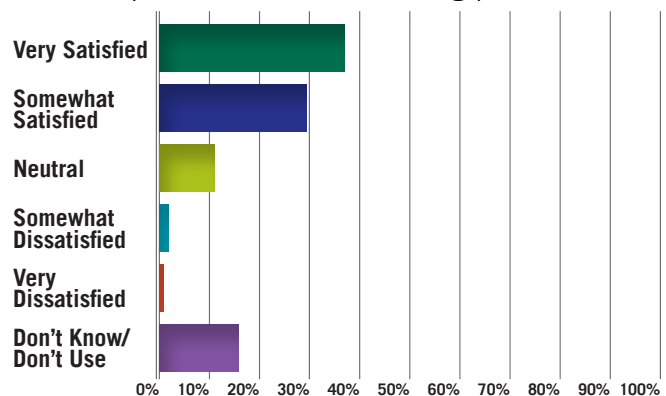
## Respondent Makeup

Several questions were provided to ascertain the general makeup of the survey respondents. Most respondents were female at 69%, while 31% were male. Additionally, the age of the respondents trended toward being more senior, with 37% of stating they were 55+. The households represented in the survey were also generally more senior in makeup, which aligns with the current population of the City. 67% of the respondents reported being from a Bluefield, WV ZIP Code. The next largest respondent group reported being from Bluefield, WV, at about 17%.

## Satisfaction with facilities and amenities at City Park

At City Park, the Ridge Runner Train was regarded as the most satisfactory among current facilities and amenities. The trails,

tennis courts, and playgrounds also received high marks for overall satisfaction among survey respondents. Two facilities, the practice baseball field above Bowen field and the equestrian ring, received a high number of respondents who did not use the facilities. Improved utilization of these facilities, either in their current function or as an entirely new use, could improve satisfaction among park users.



Question 1: Please indicate your overall satisfaction with the [walking and biking trails at Bluefield City Park].

## Satisfaction with Major Facilities

Most of the major facilities showed a fair amount of satisfaction with their current state. Both Mitchell Stadium and the FitRec ranked highest in the number of respondents who stated they were “Very Satisfied” with the facilities. East River Mountain Overlook was the only facility that showed a somewhat high number of responders who said they were “Very Dissatisfied” at 12%. However, about 50% of the respondents said they were either “Somewhat Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied” when asked about the Overlook facility. Overall, these numbers suggest that the major facilities are generally satisfactory, though some could use general improvements.

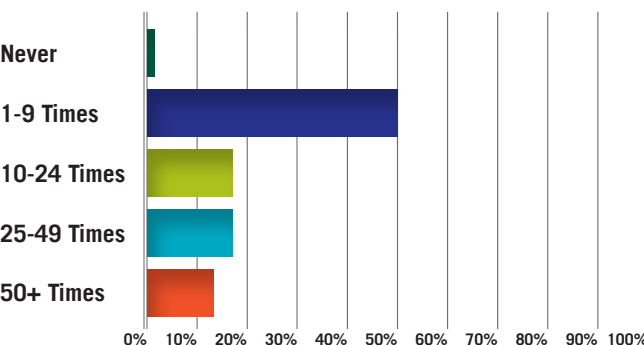
# ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS SUMMARY

## Satisfaction with Secondary Facilities

The majority of survey respondents stated they “Don’t Know/Don’t Use” when asked about their satisfaction with secondary facilities managed by Bluefield Parks and Recreation. This aligns with the amount of usage of the facilities that was shown in the following question. None of the secondary facilities had an overwhelmingly high amount of dissatisfaction with the current state of the parks. Chicory Square and the TailYard Dog Park and Greenspace showed the highest amount of satisfaction among secondary facilities.

## Usage of Major Facilities

Bluefield City Park registered as the most utilized major facility according to survey respondents, with only 2% saying they had not been to the park within the last 12 months. About 50% of respondents said they had not been to the FitRec within the last 12 months, but the remaining 50% had been at least once. About 40% of respondents stated they had not been to the Youth Center and Auditorium in the same time frame, which is likely due to the facility being geared more towards After School Programs.



Question 4: During the past 12 months, please indicate how often you and members of your household have used [City Park].

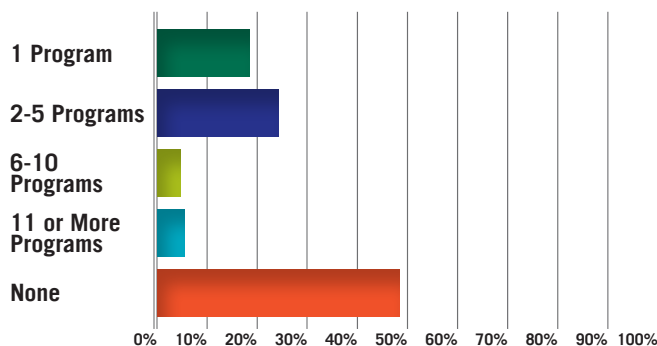
## Usage of Secondary Facilities

Of the secondary facilities managed by Bluefield Parks and Recreation, Chicory Square, East River Park, and The TailYard Dog Park and Greenspace were reported as being used the most. The TailYard and Chicory Square are both located downtown, and Chicory Square hosts a variety of events throughout the year. The remainder of the secondary facilities are largely tucked away within residential areas of Bluefield, which means they are most likely to be used by residents who live within a short distance to the parks. Though the secondary facilities may not show up as being used frequently, they do serve a vital role in improving the level of service provided by Bluefield Parks and Recreation.

## Program Participation and Desires

Of current programs offered by Bluefield Parks and Recreation, group exercise classes are the most participated in, according to survey responses. Other programs which received notable levels of participation in the survey include youth basketball, youth swim lessons, CPR classes, summer camps, and after school programs. A little under half of the respondents stated they had not participated in any programs offered over the last 12 months. About 18% had participated in at least one program, about 24% stated they had participated in two to five programs, and about 10% stated they had participated in greater than six programs in that same time frame. Of the programs suggested by respondents, pickleball, softball, and volleyball were the most requested.

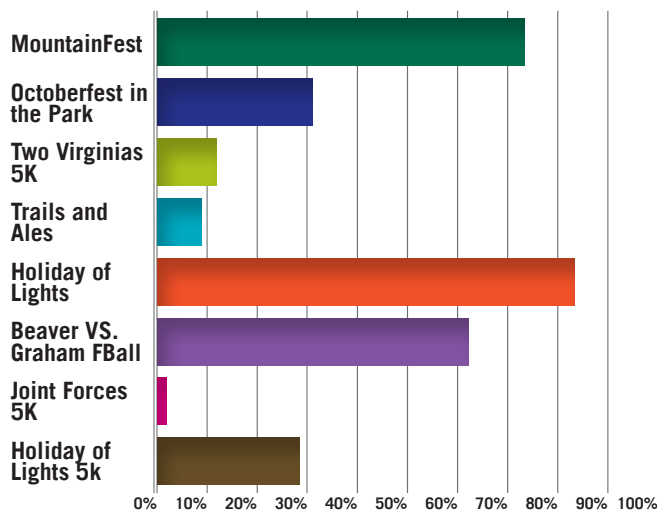




Question 7: Over the past 12 months, approximately how many programs and activities provided by Bluefield Parks and Rec have you and members of your household participated in?

## Special Event Participation

Of the special events offered by Bluefield Parks and Recreation, the Annual Holiday of Lights was the most attended, according to survey respondents. MountainFest was the next special event, though it is a joint operation with other city entities. The Beaver vs. Graham football game was another special event that most of survey respondents attended.



Question 10: Please check ALL the special events you and members of your household have attended over the past 12 months.

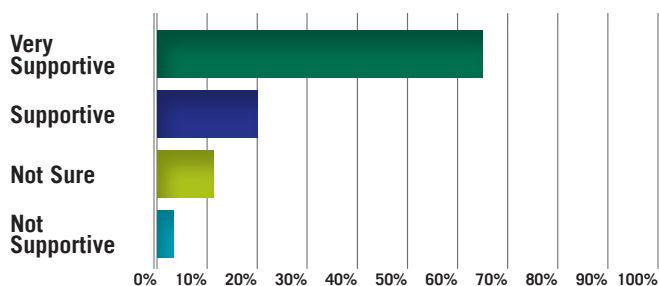
## Usage of Non-Bluefield Parks and Recreation Facilities

Over 60% of respondents stated they used facilities other than what was offered by

Bluefield Parks and Recreation. The most notable facilities that were used included West Virginia State Parks, Glenwood Park near Princeton, WV, and facilities in Tazwell County, Virginia. Out of the responses, it was noted that these facilities were used because of either local proximity or unique offerings the most.

## Support of Future Parks Ventures

The majority of respondents were supportive of the idea of Parks acquiring more land for future use as recreation space. Of the suggested items in the survey, the most supported idea was the development of an aquatic facility, such as a splashpad or sprayground.



Question 18: How supportive would you be of Bluefield Parks and Recreation acquiring land for recreational uses such as parks, trails, sports field, greenspace, etc.?

## Additional Comments

About 35% of survey respondents left additional comments. While these varied quite a bit, some of the commentary did share common themes. Several individuals felt that the restroom availability and condition at City Park needed to be improved. Another common theme was that the parks have improved over the past few years, and respondents took the opportunity to thank the Parks and Recreation staff. Additionally, a fair amount of people stated that security in the parks needed to be enhanced.

# THEMES AND GOALS

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## THEME ONE

### Enhance The Park, Open Space, and Trail Systems

#### Goals:

1. Ensure that the parks within the current Bluefield system are maximizing their potential in terms of use and future trends.
2. Confirm that the parks system can sustain economic downturns through effective programming and the continuation of offering desirable recreational assets.
3. Look at ways to connect and open up trails to other users such as mountain bikers and also offer numerous trail options for hikers.
4. Provide access to recreational assets and programs for a wide variety of users.

## THEME TWO

### Ensure That Existing Recreational Facilities Are Maximizing Economic Development and Tourism Potential

#### Goals:

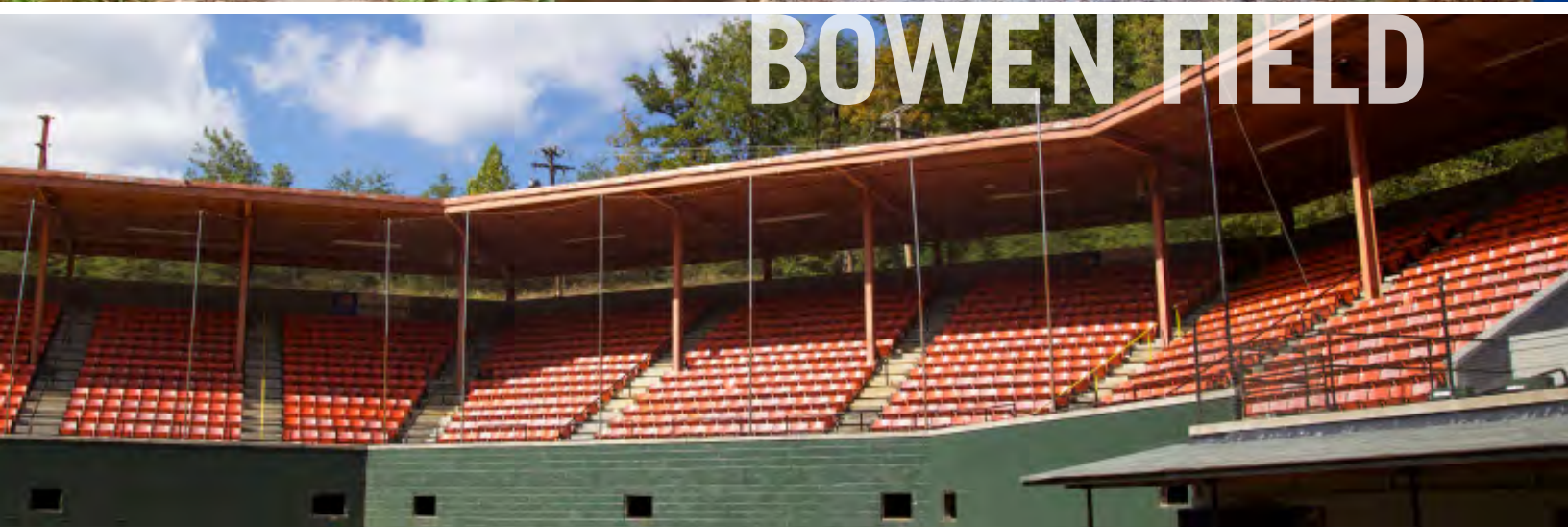
1. Continue to attract both residents and visitors from outside of the region to parks and recreational assets within the City of Bluefield.
2. Ensure that the facilities are in place to support out-of-town users and guests.
3. Continue ongoing efforts to create (and promote) a recreational destination within the City of Bluefield.

## THEME THREE

### Ensure That Existing Recreational Facilities Are Well-Maintained and Safe

#### Goals:

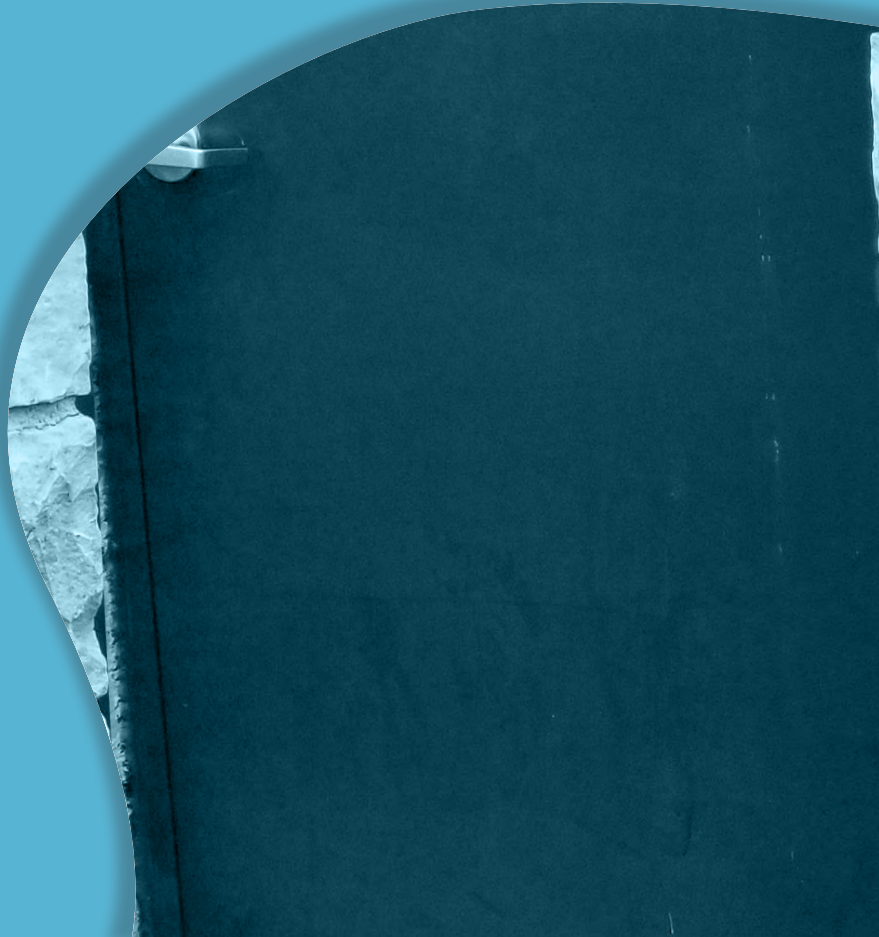
1. Continue ongoing efforts increase security at parks and address any issues.
2. Highlight current maintenance problems and recommend solutions.






# CHAPTER TWO

# 2







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# PLANNING CONTEXT

# MARKET OVERVIEW

The City of Bluefield, West Virginia, is situated at the border of West Virginia and Virginia and is approximately a two-hour drive south of Charleston, West Virginia. The adjacent jurisdiction on the Virginia side is the Town of Bluefield.

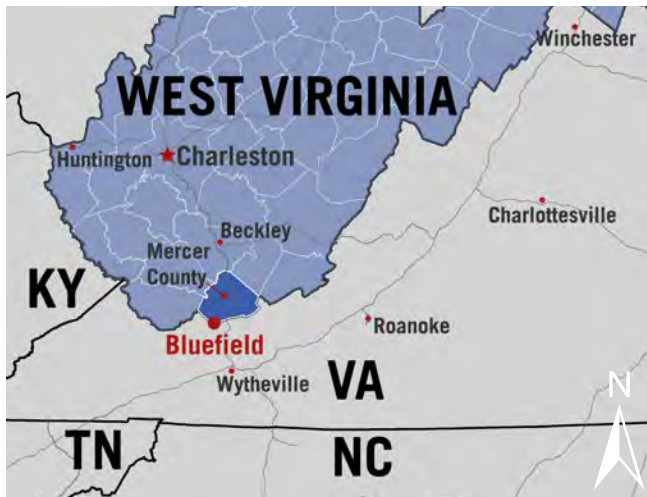


Figure 2.1: Drive times from City Park. Source: Nielsen Marketplace, GAI Consultants

The market area for a recreation venue consists of the geographic region in which regular users of the facility live. Many of these potential users reside within the City of Bluefield and the Town of Bluefield. The City is also close to Interstate 77. Therefore, in addition to the Town of Bluefield and the City of Bluefield, the analysis also includes the local markets within 10-, 20-, and 30-minute drive times of City Park. The following figure identifies these areas and their boundaries within the context of the Bluefield market area.

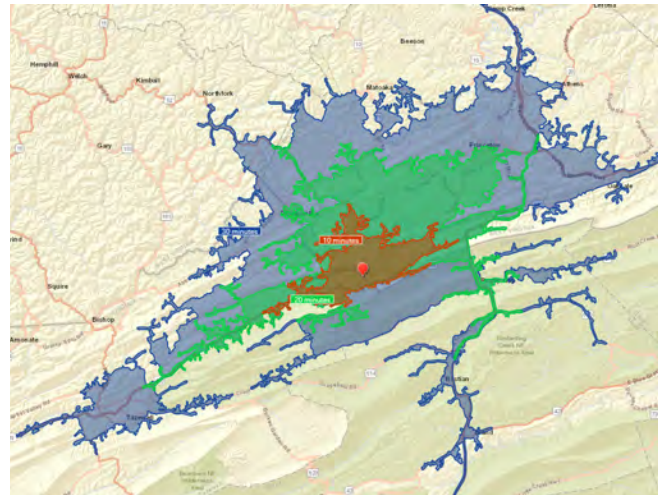


Figure 2.2: Drive times from City Park. Source: Nielsen Marketplace, GAI Consultants

GAI used the Bluefield market area as well as the drive time markets to assess and understand trends in the economic climate of the area and its ability to support various recreational facilities.

The size of the resident population surrounding a recreation facility is an important indicator of demand potential for all types of usage, including tournaments, leagues, camps, clinics, outside rentals, and other recreation activities. Income levels affect the ability of a market to support certain types of recreation facilities. A healthy and diversified economy provides not only employment and disposable income for a market's residents, but also helps to insulate an area from economic downturns that could negatively affect facility demand. Trends in median household income indicate growth or decline in the capacity of area residents to participate in sports. Income levels also provide a benchmark for the quality of public and private services and attractions that are necessary to attract out-of-town visitors to tournaments.



Figure 2.3 presents population and median household income statistics for the market area (as defined by drive times and jurisdiction).

<b>Figure 2.3</b>	<b>Population and Median Income by Drive Time</b>				
	2018				
Market/Drive Time	2010	2018	2023	Growth Rate 2010–2018	Median HH Income 2018
10 Minutes	18,181	17,389	16,634	-4.4%	\$39,187
20 Minutes	38,060	37,004	35,633	-2.8%	\$38,374
30 Minutes	70,420	68,928	66,618	-2.1%	\$38,318
City of Bluefield	10,447	9,831	9,368	-5.9%	\$38,951
Mercer County	62,264	61,477	59,714	-1.3%	\$38,841
Town of Bluefield	5,444	5,322	5,107	-2.2%	\$42,507
Tazewell County	45,078	43,136	43,136	-1.0%	\$37,390
<b>Source: ESRI, GAI Consultants</b>					

As shown (Figure 2.4), the immediate area, as well as the broader region, continues to lose population. However, the rate of loss for both Mercer and Tazewell Counties is lower than that for both the City and Town of Bluefield. The median household income for the 30-minute drive time is \$38,318, versus \$59,055 for the United States and \$43,469 for the state of West Virginia. The relatively low median household income for the area may present challenges when trying to attract certain types of recreational uses.

<b>Figure 2.4</b>	<b>Population by Age by Drive Time</b>			
	2018			
Age Range	10–Minute	20–Minute	30–Minute	U.S.
0–9	10.6%	10.4%	10.5%	12.5%
10–24	17.2%	16.2%	15.9%	20.0%
25–44	22.7%	23.4%	23.9%	26.2%
45–64	27.0%	27.3%	27.4%	26.3%
Over 64	22.5%	22.7%	22.3%	14.9%
Median Age	44.5	45.0	44.8	37.9
<b>Source: ESRI, GAI Consultants</b>				

The success of an events facility lies in its ability to develop event programming that appeals to a broad cross-section of the marketplace. A market's age distribution can be a decisive factor in determining potential event demand and provide insight into the types of events and programs that the market will support.

# MARKET OVERVIEW

Figure 2.5	Sports Participation Rates											
	Drive Time From Site				West Virginia		Virginia		United States			
Demographic Data Points	10 min	% of total	20 min	% of total	30 min	% of total	Mercer County	% of total	Tazewell County	% of Total	Total	% of Total
<b>Consumer Behavior (2018)</b> Household owns ATV or UTV	602	3.5%	1,535	4.1%	2,964	4.3%	2,600	4.2%	2,330	5.2%	7,232,951	2.2%
Participated in Past 12 Months:												
Baseball	620	3.6%	1,277	3.5%	2,352	3.4%	2,108	3.4%	1,474	3.3%	10,653,753	3.2%
Football	604	3.5%	1,188	3.2%	2,197	3.2%	1,943	3.2%	,1322	3.0%	11,266,564	3.4%
Basketball	986	5.7%	1,978	5.3%	3,596	5.2%	3,210	5.2%	2,052	4.6%	21,199,110	6.4%
Soccer	385	2.2%	692	1.9%	1,287	1.9%	1,148	1.9%	780	1.7%	10,592,419	3.2%
Softball	349	2.0%	728	2.0%	1,328	1.9%	1,188	1.9%	843	1.9%	7,073,356	2.1%
Volleyball	407	2.3%	834	2.3%	1,601	2.3%	1,443	2.3%	1,063	2.4%	8,435,204	2.6%
Tennis	355	2.0%	663	1.8%	1,231	1.8%	1,107	1.8%	732	1.6%	8,948,842	2.7%
Swimming	1,983	11.4%	3,771	10.2%	6,876	10.0%	6,109	9.9%	4,365	9.8%	41,608,900	12.6%
Golf	1,122	6.5%	2,159	5.8%	3,816	5.5%	3,244	5.3%	2,668	6.0%	22,196,187	6.7%
Mountain Biking	416	2.4%	758	2.0%	1,383	2.0%	1,226	2.0%	820	1.8%	10,453,571	3.2%
Freshwater Fishing	2,054	11.8%	4,599	12.4%	8,905	12.9%	8,009	13.0%	6,214	13.9%	29,559,537	9.0%
Hiking	1,156	6.6%	2,354	6.4%	4,373	6.3%	3,853	6.3%	3,040	6.8%	31,110,914	9.4%
Attended Sports Event	2,208	12.7%	4,149	11.2%	7,623	11.1%	6,701	10.9%	4,669	10.5%	43,393,710	13.1%
<b>Source: ESRI, GAI Consultants</b>												

A market with strong youth and teen populations suggests a stronger demand for family-oriented programming and higher participation rates in amateur sports programs. In general, a younger population base represents a positive sign for sports and recreation facility demand. Figure 2.4 presents the population distribution by age for the 10-, 20- and 30-minute drive times.

The age range analysis indicates a relatively consistent distribution across drive time markets. Minor variances in age distribution and the median age of these markets would not produce material impacts on sports participation rates. The market area for Bluefield does skew older when compared to

the national average, especially for the 10- to 24- age cohort.

In order to get a better understanding of regional recreational needs, it is helpful to look at sports participation rates. Figure 2.5 compares participation rates for a wide variety of sports for the drive time markets relative to Mercer County, Tazewell County, and the United States. The participation figures represent the number of people who participated in the specified activity within the prior 12-month period within the specific geographic boundary. The participation numbers do not reflect the level of participation (whether they participated in the activity one time in the prior year or 100 times in the prior year).



Figure 2.6	Spending Patterns, Participant Sports, and Sporting Events					
	Drive Time from Site					
Demographic Data Points	10–Minute	Spending per Person	20–Minute	Spending per Person	30–Minute	Spending per Person
Population (2018)	17,389		37,004		68,928	
Consumer Spending (2018)						
Fees for Participant Sports	\$2530,591	\$31	\$1,000,010	\$27	\$1,845,336	\$27
Admission to Sporting Events	\$292,684	\$17	\$536,857	\$15	\$979,500	\$14

**Source: ESRI, GAI Consultants**

When looking at the close-in market relative to national averages, Bluefield-area residents have higher participation rates (over a 1% difference) for households owning ATVs or UTVs and freshwater fishing, and lower participation rates for soccer, swimming, and hiking.

Retail spending patterns indicate a market's ability to support a facility's revenues through facility rentals, program participation fees, and participant sports fees. Figure 2.6 presents the annual spending for the retail segments that might contribute to sports-related facilities.

Average per person spending on fees for participant sports and admission to sporting events was similar for each of the market areas, although the averages for both spending categories were slightly higher for the 10-minute drive market.

A sports complexes ability to attract out-of-town teams for tournaments and other programming depends greatly on the availability of nearby hotel rooms within a reasonable driving distance. The same is also true for sports-related tourism, including, for example, users of the Hatfield-McCoy Trail.

Most out-of-town users of a sports complex would be families and youth groups traveling to the area for a weekend tournament. These lodgers are typically price sensitive and prefer less expensive, limited-service properties in upper midscale, midscale, and economy properties. These hotels typically offer guest amenities such as complimentary breakfast and free internet connections. Because tournaments are weekend events when corporate demand is low, full-service hotel properties can often accommodate these groups as well. Figure 2.7 identifies the location lodging options in relation to Bluefield.



● Bed & Breakfast ● Economy Hotel ● Major Chain Hotel  
Figure 2.7: Lodging Options in relation to Bluefield. Source: GAI Consultants

# PEER AGENCY COMPARISON

In order to better understand the efficiency of operations within Bluefield Parks and Recreation, a comparison was made to peer organizations with similar operating budgets, size (square mileage), and population densities. The National Recreation and Park Association provides up-to-date metrics, which allow various agencies to benchmark their operations against other similar groups. The peer agencies which were included in the analysis are highlighted below. All of the peer agencies analyzed had a population below 40,000.

Figure 2.8	Peer Agency Characteristics		
	Square mileage of incorporated jurisdiction	Population of jurisdiction	State
<b>Bluefield Parks and Recreation</b>	<b>8.86</b>	<b>9,831</b>	<b>WV</b>
Albemarle Parks & Recreation	15.75	16,000	NC
Alvin Parks & Recreation Department	25.6	26,474	TX
Clinton Parks and Recreation Department	42	25,000	MS
Fernandina Beach (City of) P&R Dept.	11.9	12,500	FL
Fort Payne Parks & Recreation	55.49	14,071	AL
Garden City Recreation Commission	8.82	30,000	KS
Hallandale Beach, FL	4.22	39,488	FL
Hopkinsville (City of) Comm. & Dev.	30.8	34,000	KY
Lumberton Parks and Recreation	15.8	21,040	NC
Mexico Parks & Recreation Dept	12.01	11,680	MO
Mount Vernon Parks and Recreation	12.3	35,051	WA
Rolla Parks and Recreation	11.83	20,293	MO
Somerset (City of) Parks & Recreation	11.32	11,196	KY
Starkville Parks and Recreation	25.79	24,775	MS
Stephenville Parks and Recreation	11.89	20,797	TX
Tarpon Springs Recreation Department	16	25,000	FL
Town of Warrenton Parks and Recreation	4	9,800	VA
Waverly Leisure Services	11	10,000	IA
Weston Recreation Dept	17	11,500	MA
White House (City of)	11	11,608	TN
White Settlement (City of) PARD	5.05	16,980	TX
York Parks and Recreation	5.77	7,766	NE
<b>Source: NRPA, GAI Consultants</b>			

As part of the overview, we also looked at the number of parks and acres managed relative to the population of the community. As shown below, the City of Bluefield manages a significant amount of parkland relative to its population. The ratio of total acres managed to population was the highest among all of the peer communities at 0.0423. This indicates that the city is well-served by parkland. It may also indicate that the City should consider the overall viability of all of the parkland currently under its control.

<b>Figure 2.9</b>	<b>Number of Parks and Acreage Managed by Peer Agencies</b>				
	<b>Total Number of Parks</b>	<b>Total Acres Managed</b>	<b>Total Acres Managed / population</b>	<b>No. of Operated Buildings</b>	<b>Sq. Ft. of Buildings</b>
Albemarle Parks & Recreation	8	260	0.016	3	12,000
Alvin Parks & Recreation Department	NA	NA	NA	1	10,000
Clinton P&R Dept.	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Fernandina Beach (City of) P&R	13	450	0.036	17	37,000
Fort Payne Parks & Recreation	5	19	0.001	2	54,000
Garden City Recreation Commission	18	48	0.002	3	80,000
Hallandale Beach, FL	18	94	0.002	5	103,150
Hopkinsville (City of) Comm. & Dev.	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Lumberton Parks and Recreation	22	426	0.020	NA	NA
Mexico Parks & Recreation Dept	14	450	0.039	4	7,000
Mount Vernon Parks and Recreation	26	866	0.025	9	14,554
Rolla Parks and Recreation	34	226	0.011	11	28,860
Somerset (City of) P&R	11	50	0.004	2	38,500
Starkville Parks and Recreation	7	200	0.008	4	65,900
Stephenville Parks and Recreation	5	180	0.009	3	8,500
Tarpon Springs Recreation Dept.	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Town of Warrenton P&R	7	85	0.009	1	54,000
Waverly Leisure Services	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Weston Recreation Dept	10	50	0.004	1	22,000
White House (City of)	5	130	0.011	5	20,000
White Settlement (City of) PARD	18	193	0.011	8	22,500
York Parks and Recreation	9	NA	NA	4	NA
<b>Bluefield</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>0.0423</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>60,000</b>
<b>Source: NRPA, GAI Consultants</b>					



# PEER AGENCY COMPARISON

The following table provides a comparison of staffing among the peer agencies. As might be expected, staffing levels vary widely among peer groups; however, it does appear that full-time staffing for the City of Bluefield is relatively low. As shown, the average number of full-time employees among the peer agencies is 14.5, versus 7 full-time employees at the City of Bluefield. The number of non-full-time employees at the City of Bluefield is similar to that for the average of the peer agencies, or 35 versus 40.

Figure 2.10	Staffing Comparison Among Peer Agencies			
	Number of Full-time Employees	Number of Non Full-time Employees	Number of Volunteers	Hours Worked by Volunteers
Albemarle Parks & Recreation	15	35	150	3,000
Alvin Parks & Recreation Department	11	28	200	3,821
Clinton P&R Dept.	NA	NA	NA	NA
Fernandina Beach (City of) P&R	9	55	75	450
Fort Payne Parks & Recreation	19	45	0	0
Garden City Recreation Commission	19	35	150	3,500
Hallandale Beach, FL	37	56	10	1,000
Hopkinsville (City of) Comm. & Dev.	NA	NA	NA	NA
Lumberton Parks and Recreation	39	7	300	3,000
Mexico Parks & Recreation Dept	11	27	0	0
Mount Vernon Parks and Recreation	14	5	996	3,769
Rolla Parks and Recreation	7	50	40	160
Somerset (City of) P&R	14	50	45	620
Starkville Parks and Recreation	12	13	250	2,500
Stephenville Parks and Recreation	16	80	100	500
Tarpon Springs Recreation Dept.	18	8	50	1,500
Town of Warrenton P&R	7	NA	20	2,500
Waverly Leisure Services	9	NA	200	1,000
Weston Recreation Dept	7	100	5	20
White House (City of)	10	5	NA	NA
White Settlement (City of) PARD	8	3	182	1,140
York Parks and Recreation	7	120	0	0
<b>Average</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>1,499</b>
<b>Bluefield</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>0.0423</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Source: NRPA, GAI Consultants</b>				

Next we looked at total operating expenditures, operating budget per capita, and expenditure allocations. As shown below, the operating budget per capita for Bluefield of \$95.72 is just slightly less than the average for the peer agencies of \$106. The percentage of expenditures allocated to personnel expenses also appears in line with the other peer agencies.

<b>Figure 2.11</b>	<b>Operating Expenditures Comparison Among Peer Agencies</b>					
	<b>Total Operating Expenditures</b>	<b>Operating Bdgt. Per Capita</b>	<b>Personnel</b>	<b>Operating</b>	<b>Capital</b>	<b>Other</b>
Albemarle Parks & Recreation	\$1,868,658	116.79	55.2%	44.2%	0.0%	0.6%
Alvin Parks & Recreation Department	\$1,823,610	68.88	41.2%	58.8%		
Clinton P&R Dept.	\$1,700,000	68.00	40.0%	31.0%	29.0%	
Fernandina Beach (City of) P&R	\$2,000,000	160.00	60.0%	30.0%	10.0%	
Fort Payne Parks & Recreation	\$1,934,819	137.50	57.0%	36.0%	7.0%	
Garden City Recreation Commission	\$1,787,623	59.59	20.0%	60.0%	20.0%	
Hallandale Beach, FL	\$1,556,143	39.41	69.8%	30.1%	0.1%	
Hopkinsville (City of) Comm. & Dev.	\$1,500,000	44.12	56.0%	20.0%	10.0%	14.0%
Lumberton Parks and Recreation	\$1,551,140	73.72	60.0%	30.0%	0.0%	10.0%
Mexico Parks & Recreation Dept	\$1,489,330	127.51	41.0%	20.0%	39.0%	
Mount Vernon Parks and Recreation	\$1,905,029	54.35	69.4%	28.2%	2.3%	
Rolla Parks and Recreation	\$1,522,792	75.04	48.0%	22.0%	30.0%	0.0%
Somerset (City of) P&R	\$1,523,100	136.04	61.0%	28.2%	2.7%	8.2%
Starkville Parks and Recreation	\$1,438,104	58.05	47.0%	53.0%		
Stephenville Parks and Recreation	\$1,806,764	86.88	58.0%	42.0%		
Tarpon Springs Recreation Dept.	\$1,748,190	69.93	59.0%	33.0%	8.0%	
Town of Warrenton P&R	\$1,990,097	203.07	55.0%	45.0%		
Waverly Leisure Services	\$1,500,000	150.00	70.0%	27.0%	3.0%	
Weston Recreation Dept	\$1,698,061	147.66	67.0%	33.0%		
White House (City of)	\$1,579,284	136.05	36.8%	34.8%	28.4%	
White Settlement (City of) PARD	\$1,626,055	95.76	58.0%	42.0%	0.0%	0.0%
York Parks and Recreation	\$1,797,919	231.51	40.0%	30.0%	30.0%	
<b>Average</b>	<b>\$1,697,578</b>	<b>\$106</b>	<b>53.2%</b>	<b>35.4%</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>--</b>
<b>Bluefield</b>	<b>\$940,985</b>	<b>95.72</b>	<b>57.0%</b>	<b>43.0%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>
<b>Source: NRPA, GAI Consultants</b>						

# PEER AGENCY COMPARISON

The following table reflects a relative comparison of various operating metrics. On a revenue per capita basis, the City of Bluefield performs well at \$70 per capita, versus an average of \$29 for the peer agencies. The largest source of revenue for the Parks and Recreation Department is fitness center membership and stadium rents, accounting for about 80% of total revenues. The largest source of programming revenues is attributable to camp and after school programming. However, operating expenditures are relatively high on the basis of operating expenditures per acre of parkland.

Figure 2.12	Percentage of Operating Expenditures Among Peer Agencies						
	General Fund	Dedicated Levies	Earned Revenue	Other Dedicated Taxes	Sponsorships	Grants	Other
Albemarle Parks & Recreation	75.0%	0.0%	15.0%	0.0%	5.0%	5.0%	
Alvin Parks & Recreation Department	90.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	10.0%
Clinton P&R Dept.	100.0%						
Fernandina Beach (City of) P&R	55.0%		45.0%				
Fort Payne Parks & Recreation	100.0%						
Garden City Recreation Commission	0.0%	50.0%	40.0%		10.0%		
Hallandale Beach, FL	100.0%						
Hopkinsville (City of) Comm. & Dev.							
Lumberton Parks and Recreation	90.0%					10.0%	
Mexico Parks & Recreation Dept	91.0%		9.0%				
Mount Vernon Parks and Recreation	76.8%		17.3%		0.3%		5.7%
Rolla Parks and Recreation	16.0%	0.0%	14.0%	70.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Somerset (City of) P&R	87.6%		11.4%		0.7%		0.4%
Starkville Parks and Recreation	75.0%			25.0%			
Stephenville Parks and Recreation	70.0%		20.0%		10.0%		
Tarpon Springs Recreation Dept.	73.0%		17.0%		5.0%	5.0%	
Town of Warrenton P&R	35.0%		65.0%				
Waverly Leisure Services	65.0%		33.0%	1.0%		1.0%	
Weston Recreation Dept	30.0%	0.0%	62.0%	8.0%			
White House (City of)	100.0%						
White Settlement (City of) PARD	52.0%			48.0%		0.0%	0.0%
York Parks and Recreation	90.0%		10.0%				
<b>Bluefield</b>	<b>\$940,985</b>	<b>95.72</b>	<b>57.0%</b>	<b>43.0%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	
<b>Source: NRPA, GAI Consultants</b>							

<b>Figure 2.13</b>	<b>Staffing Comparison Among Peer Agencies</b>		
	<b>Operating expenditures per capita</b>	<b>Revenue per capita</b>	<b>Park operating expenditures per acre of parkland</b>
Albemarle Parks & Recreation	\$117	\$31	\$3,845
Alvin Parks & Recreation Department	\$69	\$7	NA
Clinton P&R Dept.	\$68	\$1	NA
Fernandina Beach (City of) P&R	\$160	\$69	\$444
Fort Payne Parks & Recreation	\$138	\$40	\$25,458
Garden City Recreation Commission	\$60	\$24	\$11,173
Hallandale Beach, FL	\$39	\$13	\$9,097
Hopkinsville (City of) Comm. & Dev.	\$44	NA	NA
Lumberton Parks and Recreation	\$74	\$6	\$1,092
Mexico Parks & Recreation Dept	\$128	\$3	NA
Mount Vernon Parks and Recreation	\$54	\$16	NA
Rolla Parks and Recreation	\$75	\$12	\$5,188
Somerset (City of) P&R	\$136	\$0	\$28,503
Starkville Parks and Recreation	\$58	\$8	\$3,595
Stephenville Parks and Recreation	\$87	\$14	\$4,299
Tarpon Springs Recreation Dept.	\$70	\$12	NA
Town of Warrenton P&R	\$203	\$126	\$5,853
Waverly Leisure Services	\$150	\$58	NA
Weston Recreation Dept	\$148	\$92	\$3,396
White House (City of)	\$136	NA	\$7,568
White Settlement (City of) PARD	\$96	\$11	\$3,100
York Parks and Recreation	\$232	\$42	NA
<b>Average</b>	<b>\$106</b>	<b>\$29</b>	<b>\$8,044</b>
<b>Bluefield</b>	<b>\$96</b>	<b>\$70</b>	<b>\$2,262</b>
<b>Source: NRPA, GAI Consultants</b>			



# PEER AGENCY COMPARISON

## Budget Analysis

We also looked at trends over the past three fiscal years in order to better understand if there are aberrations in the current budget. The FY 2019 figures are current as of mid-June 2019, therefore, the actual numbers may change slightly. As reflected below, expenditures for the Parks and Recreation Department appear to average about \$725,000 over the past two years. FY2017 was an exception (\$1.3 million), with major expenditures for capital improvements and turf at Mitchell Stadium. Revenues have been steadily increasing over the past three years, with the new FitRec contributing substantially to total revenues. The camp and after school programs are also an important revenue source for the department.

Figure 2.14	Budget Analysis – Expenditures				
	FY 2017	FY 2018	% Change FY 2017–2018	FY 2019*	% Change FY 2017–2019
<b>Major Expenditures</b>					
Staffing	\$279,087	\$416,499	49%	\$492,969	18%
Utilities	\$64,291	\$64,754	1%	\$55,186	-15%
Mitchell Stadium Turf	\$392,462	\$11,401	-97%	\$0	-100%
Mitchell Stadium Expenses	\$25,245	\$41,833	66%	\$11,556	-72%
Capitol Outlay Other	\$240,123	\$18,781	-92%	\$0	-100%
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$1,273,514</b>	<b>\$723,053</b>	<b>-43%</b>	<b>\$732,508</b>	<b>1%</b>
*As of June 17, 2019					
Source: City of Bluefield, GAI Consultants					

Figure 2.15	Budget Analysis – Revenue				
	FY 2017	FY 2018	% Change FY 2017–2018	FY 2019*	% Change FY 2017–2019
<b>Major Revenues</b>					
Stadium Rents	\$121,000	\$151,270	25%	\$207,510	37%
Fitness Center Membership	-	\$122,572	-	\$228,447	86%
Camp and After School Program	\$13,932	\$63,867	358%	\$66,029	3%
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$237,546</b>	<b>\$424,106</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>\$577,285</b>	<b>36%</b>
*As of June 17, 2019					
Source: City of Bluefield, GAI Consultants					



# CONCLUSION

Based on a comparison with similar peer agencies, it appears that the City of Bluefield Parks and Recreation Department is understaffed in terms of full-time employees. The addition of staff will also likely be necessary as new capital improvements are made at various parks and new facilities are added. Annual revenues for the parks department appear to be strong relative to other peer agencies, due in large part to stadium rents and fitness center memberships.

# CHAPTER THREE

# 3





# EXISTING RESOURCES



N

Mercer  
County  
Airport

Not To Scale

52

Wayne

Bedford Park

Pulaski Street Park

TailYar

Chicory

Genoa Park

Rotary C

Midway Park

19

East River Park

Youth Center

FitRec

Fairview P

Mitchell Stadium

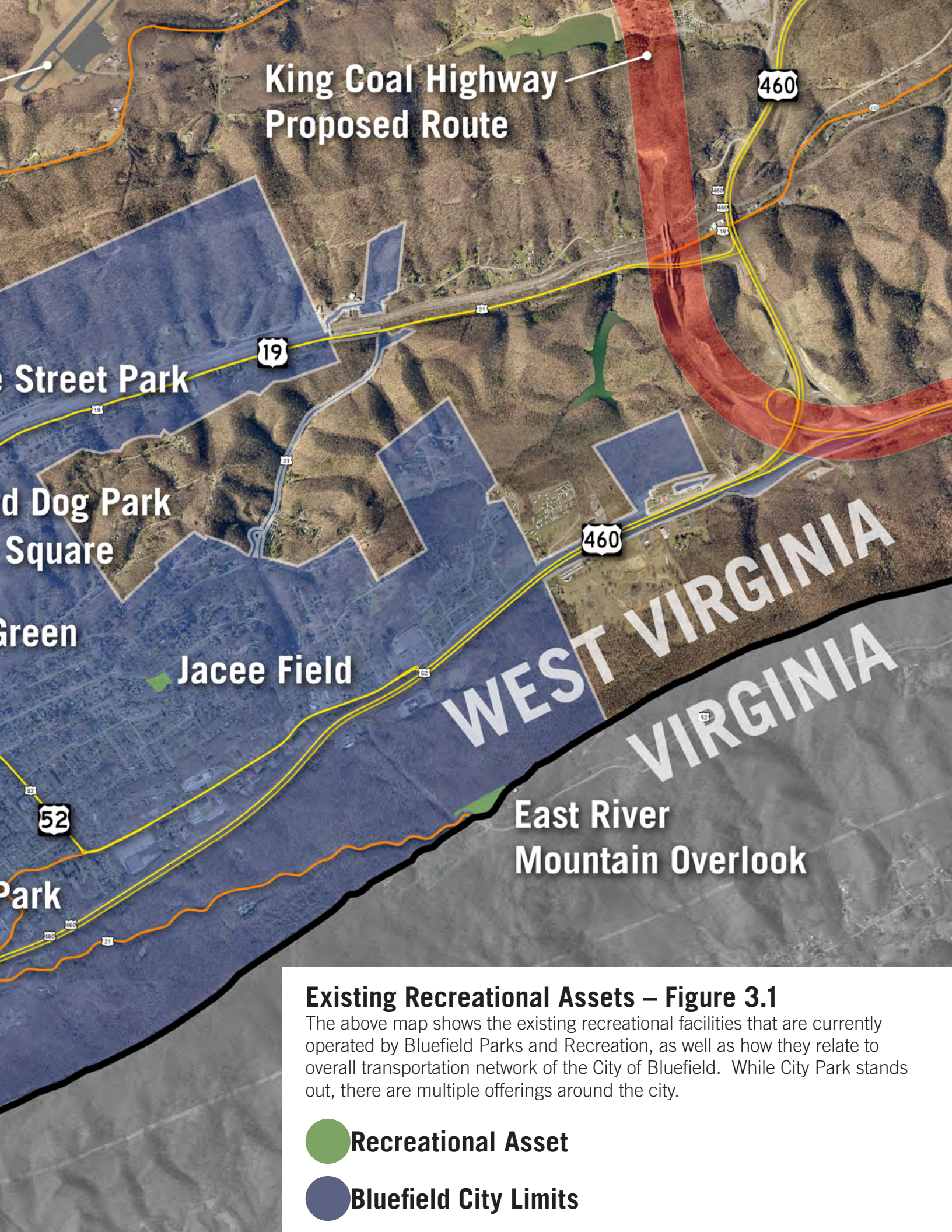
City  
Park

460

Bluefield, VA

Bluefield





**King Coal Highway  
Proposed Route**

**Street Park**

**Dog Park  
Square**

**Green**

**Jacee Field**


**WEST VIRGINIA  
VIRGINIA**

**East River  
Mountain Overlook**

**Park**

### **Existing Recreational Assets – Figure 3.1**

The above map shows the existing recreational facilities that are currently operated by Bluefield Parks and Recreation, as well as how they relate to overall transportation network of the City of Bluefield. While City Park stands out, there are multiple offerings around the city.

-  **Recreational Asset**
-  **Bluefield City Limits**



# REGIONAL PARKS

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## Overview

Typically comprised of larger areas of land and unique recreational opportunities, regional parks are able to draw visitors in from the local community as well as from the surrounding region. The size of these facilities allow for large groups of users to be accommodated through both passive and active recreational activities. However, because of the size (or unique features), regional parks often require more maintenance and support facilities.

## City Park

Lotito City Park, located on the western edge of the City of Bluefield (and extending into neighboring Bluefield, VA), is an expansive regional hub of recreation and activity. With nearly 400 acres of land across multiple parcels, the park has ample room for a variety of uses.

A large majority of the park is made up of the hills and mountains, with a valley of relatively level land resting between them. Though the natural topography does present some challenges, overtime the City has been able to develop a fair portion of the park into usable recreation spaces. The park is different from many other similar parks because it is split across two states, West Virginia and Virginia. About half of the park resides in each state. Though this is somewhat of a logistical challenge for the City of Bluefield, as they maintain both sides but are only able to police the WV portion of the park, it does present opportunity to serve as an attraction.

With greenspace, playgrounds, picnic shelters, trails, active sports, and more, City Park has a lot to offer. Some of the features are highlighted in the following pages.



Mitchell Stadium. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec



Bowen Field. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec



City Park Trails. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec

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## Mitchell Stadium

One of the more atypical facilities owned and maintained by Bluefield Parks and Recreation is Mitchell Stadium. Mitchell Stadium was constructed in 1935 as a Work Progress Administration (WPA) project. The WPA was one of the many New Deal programs established under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and was used to get unemployed Americans back to work. Though the WPA mainly focused on public facilities such as schools or roadway and infrastructure projects, stadiums such as Mitchell Stadium were also constructed. The stadium seats about 10,000 and has recently had a new synthetic turf surface installed.

Mitchell Stadium has long been host to an annual rivalry football game between Bluefield High School (WV) and Graham High School (VA). This event, and its associated tailgate party, is known to be somewhat of a homecoming event for regional residents. In addition to the rivalry game, Mitchell Stadium currently hosts home football games for Bluefield High School and for Bluefield College (VA). Historically, the stadium was also used for home games for Graham High School, concerts, festivals, and various other events.

## Bowen Field

Baseball has been played at the location of Bowen Field since 1939 when the original Bowen Field was built as a WPA project similar to Mitchell Stadium. The main grandstand burned down in 1973 but was reconstructed in the same location. Bowen Field sits entirely in the Virginia side of City Park.

Bowen Field is home to the Bluefield Blue Jays minor league baseball team (affiliated with the Toronto Blue Jays), the Bluefield College

baseball team and the Bluefield High School team. The Bluefield State College baseball team also periodically uses Bowen Field while their on-campus facility is being renovated. The facility also includes two batting cages and a weight room. The Blue Jays will have 34 home games this year.

The Bluefield Blue Jays have a recurring two-year contract. Reportedly, attendance has been down over the past few years, due in part to poor weather and rain outs.

## Trails at City Park

Considered by many to be one of the best features of City Park, the trails allow users to hike or bike across the wooded areas of the park. Almost 15 miles of trails have been developed and future improvements are planning to be made to better accommodate mountain bikers. No motorized vehicles (such as motorcycles or ATVs) or horses are permitted on trails.

Of the available trails, the Family Friendly Trail is one of the more popular destinations. The Family Friendly Trail is a primarily flat 1.3 mile loop with a hard packed gravel surface. Along the trail, various educational nature signs are placed to help teach children. The trail also features multiple activity stations for children to enjoy.



# REGIONAL PARKS

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## Tennis Courts

City Park currently holds a total of 9 tennis courts. The Lower Courts include 6 tournament quality courts. These courts are regularly used by Bluefield State College as well as local high schools and rec play. They also have hosted NCAA Division II Regional Tournaments over the past few years. The Lower Courts are in good condition but currently do not have lighting, which sometimes results in games being suspended. The City of Bluefield is planning on installing bleachers at the Lower Courts to further improve their tournament hosting ability.

The Upper Courts consist of 3 courts which are less seldom used and are not in good condition. One of the Upper Courts has been temporarily marked for pickleball play by a local group.

## Yakkity Yak Playground

Yakkity Yak Playground is one of the staple features of City Park and a popular local attraction for families with children. The playground was designed by Leathers & Associates and built as a community project about 25 years ago. This playground is primarily wood in construction with a mulch safety zone around the playground. Like many playgrounds of the same vintage and construction, it is begging to show age and use related wear and will likely need replaced in the near future.



Yakkity Yak Playground at City Park. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec

## Ridge Runner Train

The Ridge Runner train is a unique attraction in City Park, offering visitors scenic views of the surrounding park space. The train originally operated as a tourist attraction atop East River Mountain from 1964 until closing in the 1980s. This was due to the primary traffic flow being rerouted from US 21/52 to I-77 once the interstate was complete. In 1984, the City acquired the train and it was placed inside of City Park. However, revenue was not able to cover the operating cost and the train was eventually placed in storage. In 2009, a restoration effort was put underway and the train eventually reopened in 2011 thanks to the efforts of countless volunteers, individuals, and corporate sponsors. In 2014, the Ridge Runner celebrated its 50th year of operation.

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## East River Mountain Overlook

High above the City of Bluefield, along the ridgeline of East River Mountain, sits East River Mountain Overlook, a small park with a regional draw. This park features scenic views into Bluefield and the surrounding area. The park also has picnic areas and a seasonal restroom facility. With the elevation of the facility (just under 3500'), it provides an optimal vantage point for both solar and astronomical events. With about 5 acres of land available, it is not a large facility. However, the unique views help the facility to attract from a more regional crowd as well as detoured motorists when traffic is backed up on I-77. Currently, the most practical way to access the park is by vehicle, as it sits on a roadway without a safe option for cyclist or pedestrians.



East River Mountain Overlook. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec



East River Mountain Overlook. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec



East River Mountain Overlook. Photo: GAI Consultants



# NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

Representing about 11 acres of recreation space within the City of Bluefield, neighborhood parks are vital part of the community. These park assets typically serve residents who are within a ten to fifteen minute walk of the facility. Though these facilities are on the smaller side, they are important because they provide a “close-to-home” recreational opportunity for nearby residents who may not have the ability to travel to a larger facility, such as City Park.

Non-organized recreational activities make up the majority of uses for neighborhood parks. Typically these parks include passive recreational elements like greenspace, picnic areas, trees, and small playgrounds. Some of the neighborhood parks in Bluefield also include active uses such as basketball courts. Ease of access for local pedestrians and cyclists is an important part of neighborhood parks.

## Bedford Park

Bedford park is a small neighborhood park located just north of Downtown Bluefield. It has about 0.40 acres of land in the park property and includes greenspace and a full basketball court.



Bedford. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec

## Chicory Square

Chicory Square, a small urban plaza, sits in the heart of downtown Bluefield. Though it only takes up about a quarter of the block it sits on, the park is a vital part of the downtown environment. Chicory Square features an amphitheater, greenspace, and bench seating throughout the park. As the Downtown area of Bluefield continues to be revitalized, improvements and expansion of Chicory Square should be at the forefront of planning discussions.



Chicory Square. Photos: Bluefield Parks and Rec



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## East River Park

Located near the FitRec, East River Park is about 1 acre in size and contains a small playground, greenspace, and a basketball court sized asphalt pad, though there are currently no basketball hoops at the park. With its proximity to the FitRec and neighboring houses, this park provides a great opportunity for passive recreation.



East River Park. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec

## Fairview Park

At over 2 acres, Fairview Park is one of the larger neighborhood scale parks in the City of Bluefield. It is located a couple of blocks southeast of the FitRec and consists of a large open greenspace with several mature trees on the perimeter of the park. The proximity to the FitRec serves as an asset, as people could easily walk between the two locations to enhance their recreational experience.

## Genoa Park

Genoa Park is a small neighborhood scale park located just south of downtown Bluefield. This park features a small playground, half-court basketball, and swings.



Genoa Park. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec

## Jacee Field

Jacee Field is an expansive greenspace located in the southeast area of Bluefield. Jacee Field has about 2 acres of land available for recreation, and also has several mature trees around the park.



Jacee Field. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec

# NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

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## Midway Park

Midway Park features about 3 acres of greenspace situated to the northwest of Downtown Bluefield. The majority of the park is open greenspace, but it also has a full-sized basketball court, a playground, and swings. Surrounded by forest on three sides, Midway Park is very picturesque in its current form and presents opportunity for future improvements.



Pulaski Street Park. Photos: Bluefield Parks and Rec

## Rotary Green

The Rotary Green is a greenspace just south of Downtown Bluefield. The park is only about a tenth of an acre, but has several large evergreen trees on the outskirts of the site which make it very inviting. Though not a candidate for much future development, the park offers a quaint space for citizens to utilize and should be maintained.



Rotary Green. Photos: Bluefield Parks and Rec

## Pulaski Street Park

At one third of an acre, Pulaski Street Park is a small neighborhood park located west of downtown, near Bluefield State College. The park has swings, greenspace, and seating.



Pulaski Street Park. Photos: Bluefield Parks and Rec



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## The Tailyard Dog Park and Greenspace

Situated between downtown Bluefield and the rail yard area, the Tailyard Dog Park and Greenspace is an expansive area which is utilized by many visitors and residents alike. The park has a large fenced in area for four-legged users and some additional greenspace surrounding it. With several developments underway downtown, it is likely that the current greenspace and dog park may be utilized for additional parking in the future. However, ample opportunity is available for relocation of the existing facilities as the needs of downtown Bluefield grow.



The Tailyard Dog Park. Photos: Bluefield Parks and Rec

## Wayne Street Park

Northeast of downtown, Wayne Street Park features a full-sized basketball court, playground, and greenspace. This park is the most northerly of the neighborhood parks in Bluefield and serves a vital role as recreational space for residents in that area of the City.



Wayne Street Park. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec



# INDOOR RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

## Bluefield Fitness and Recreation Center (FitRec)

Originally constructed as a YMCA, the FitRec has been a staple of fitness and recreation in Bluefield for many years. In 2018, the City of Bluefield completed an extensive renovation project in the building to bring it up to modern standards and improve the level of service available to users. The renovation has resulted in the FitRec becoming one of the crown jewels of recreation in Bluefield and offers amenities that are not common in similarly sized cities. With over 40,000 square feet under-roof, the FitRec features multiple recreation assets.

A four-lane lap pool is situated at the middle of the building near the entrance. This pool is used for a variety of activities including swimming lessons, aquatic fitness classes, pool party rentals, lifeguard classes, and general open swim times.

During renovations, the fitness and workout areas were greatly improved. The FitRec now has a free weight area, cardio area, basketball gymnasium, and group fitness classroom. Multiple exercise programs are available, including group classes and personal training. Additionally, the gymnasium is used for classes, league play, and open gym time. There are also some other currently underutilized spaces which could be considered for use by after-school program in the future. Overall, the improvements made to the FitRec have allowed Bluefield Parks and Recreation to set the regional standard in fitness and recreation.



FitRec Pool. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec



FitRec Exercise Area. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec



FitRec Classroom. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec

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## Herb Sims Youth Center and Auditorium

The Herb Sims Auditorium has been another staple of recreation in Bluefield for many years. Recently, the City has put effort into refurbishing the building, opening it up for a multitude of uses. The building currently houses the after school and day camp programs administered by Bluefield Parks and Recreation. Additionally, the center is used for youth and adult basketball leagues, senior citizen programming, and a variety of special events throughout the year. Inside the building, there is a full basketball court/auditorium, a teen area, and a large multi-use space.

When planning for the future of the facility, several factors should be considered. Currently, the facility has to be subsidized to remain operational. Additionally, many of the features at the facility are duplicative of those available at the FitRec. If Parks and Recreation were anticipating falling short on typical annual funding and revenue, the Herb Sims Youth Center and Auditorium should be the first facility considered to be leased out as a means to cover financial shortfalls.



Auditorium. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec



After School Program Area. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec



Auditorium. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec



# REGIONAL ASSETS

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Mercer County and the surrounding area is home to many great regional parks/outdoor recreational sites. This includes three state parks, access to a regional all-terrain vehicle trail system, a soccer complex, and National Guard facility. Though these facilities are not part of the City of Bluefield, they do provide a valuable asset to local individuals and help draw visitors to the region.

## Pinnacle Rock State Park

The closest state park to Bluefield, Pinnacle Rock State Park is known for a large sandstone formation from which the park's name is drawn. Across the more than 400 acres that fall within the park are a wide array of amenities. Hiking trails, picnic shelters, camping spots, and a fishing lake are all available in the park. By car, Pinnacle Rock State Park is about a 15-minute drive from Downtown Bluefield.



Pinnacle Rock State Park. Photo: West Virginia State Parks

## Camp Creek State Park and State Forest

With over 6000 acres of lush, forested land, Camp Creek State Park and State Forest are another vital recreation amenity about 25 miles Bluefield in Mercer County. The ample space allows recreational activities like camping, hiking, fishing, horseback riding, mountain biking, and hunting. Additionally, Camp Creek features several scenic waterfalls along the Marsh Fork, which flows through the park and forest.



Camp Creek State Park. Photo: West Virginia State Parks



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## Pipestem Resort State Park

Spanning two counties, Pipestem Resort State Park is predominately in Summers County, but a small portion of the park is in Mercer County. The park, which is about 30 miles from Bluefield, includes over 4000 acres of land. Adventure-based tourism is the biggest draw of the facility and offers amenities like ziplines, fishing, mountain biking, rock climbing, and more. For lodging options, the park has camping sites, cabins, and two lodges. One of the lodges open seasonally (May through October), and is only accessible by the aerial tramway in the park.



Pipestem Resort State Park. Photo: West Virginia State Parks

## Pocahontas Trails – Hatfield-McCoy ATV Trails

Currently regarded as one of the more popular recreation destinations in Southern West Virginia, the Hatfield-McCoy Trails are comprised of over 600 miles of all-terrain vehicle trails in 7 different trail systems. Within Mercer County is the Pocahontas Trail System. The trailhead for this system is located in the Town of Bramwell, which is about 10 miles from Bluefield. This trail system also connects (via ATV friendly roadway) to two other systems within the Hatfield-McCoy network – Indian Ridge and Pinnacle Creek – making it the most continuous miles of ATV trails east of the Mississippi River.



ATV Riders. Photo: GAI Consultants

# REGIONAL ASSETS

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## East River Soccer Complex

The East River Soccer Complex includes six soccer fields, five of which are full-size, or able to accommodate college and high school soccer games. The East River Soccer Association (ERSA) is a member of the West Virginia Soccer Association and Virginia Youth Soccer Association. The fields are currently used by Bluefield College's men's and women's soccer teams for training and competitive games. Other users include middle schools, high schools, and adult recreational soccer leagues.



East River Soccer Complex. Photo: Bluefield College

## Brushfork Armory

The Brushfork Armory in Bluefield is a West Virginia National Guard Facility that includes an older football field, which is currently used by the local youth football league for practice. The armory also has an indoor meeting area and basketball court that is used by Bluefield High School for basketball games. For basketball games, the facility can seat around 3500 people. Brushfork Armory is about 10 minutes away from Downtown Bluefield via vehicle.



Brushfork Armory Football Field being utilized for parking during a trade show. Photo: Bluefield Chamber of Commerce



Brushfork Armory Arena. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec

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Northeast of Bluefield, the City of Princeton is the second largest city in Mercer County. Within the city and surrounding area are several parks which are often utilized by residents of the City of Bluefield.

## **Glenwood Park**

Glenwood Park is a facility managed by Mercer County located just outside of Princeton. It features a 55-acre lake, picnic areas, trails, tennis courts, and miniature golf. In the rear of the facility, there is also a 4-H Camp which is available to be rented for groups. The natural scenery is one of the bigger draws to the facility.



Glenwood Park. Photos: WV Tourism

## **Princeton City Park**

One of the larger facilities that belongs to the City of Princeton, City Park boast several amenities which aren't immediately available in Bluefield. The park has a large outdoor swimming pool, slides, and a toddler pool. In addition to typical park offerings like trails and picnic areas, the park also features a skatepark and a disc golf course. City Park is about 25 minutes driving time from Bluefield.

Across the state line in Tazewell County Virginia are other facilities which are relatively accessible to Bluefield residents.

## **Graham Recreational Park**

Graham Recreation Park is a 57-acre park located in the Town of Bluefield, Virginia. The park includes four baseball/softball diamonds, a tennis court, an amphitheater, and a walking trail. The park also includes parking and a paved road which runs through the park. Graham Recreation Park is the largest park located in Bluefield, Virginia. The park is home to the Town of Bluefield Little League team, the Bluefield College Softball team, middle school softball, and recreation leagues.

## **Lincolnshire Park**

Lincolnshire Park, located in Tazewell, Virginia, include two softball fields, including one field with lights. The rental rates for the fields are \$50 to \$75. There are several other amenities located at the park, including a 21-acre lake, tennis courts, a basketball court, sand volleyball, and a junior Olympic sized pool.

## **Harmony Acres Pool**

Managed by the Town of Bluefield Parks and Recreation (Virginia), Harmony Acres pool has been a part of the community for over 60 years. The pool features depths ranging from 3' to 11', diving boards, slides and a toddler pool. It is open to the public seasonally and is often utilized by residents of the City of Bluefield. Admission for individuals ages 5+ is \$4.00 daily.



# CHAPTER FOUR

# 4







# NEEDS ASSESSMENT

# NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Figure 4.1			Existing City Recreational Facilities						
	Median Acres/1000 Residents	Need	City Park	East River Mtn. Overlook	East River Park	Chicory Square	Fairview Park	Rotary Green	Genoa Park
Parkland (Acres)	13.6	134	400	5.25	1.00	0.30	2.15	0.10	0.20
	Median Population Per Facility								
Playground	2272	4	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Tot Lot	10232	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Community Gardens	7506	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Basketball	3484	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	1
Multi-Use Court (Volleyball, basketball, etc.)	9850	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tennis Court (Outdoor)	1787	6	9	0	0	0	0	0	0
Diamond Field (90ft Baselines)	10118	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Diamond Field (50-65ft Baselines)	4272	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Diamond Field (Softball, youth)	4416	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rectangular Field (Regulation - Soccer, Lacrosse)	11000	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rectangular Field (Small Sided - Soccer, Lacrosse)	2400	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Rectangular Field (Multi-use)	3667	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dog Park	10000	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Recreation Center	9701	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Football Stadium	7636	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Equestrian Riding Ring	-	-	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Miniature Train	-	-	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Miles of Trails	-	-	+/- 15	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>2018 Population Estimate</b>	<b>9831</b>								

Source: National Recreation and Parks Association, GAI Consultants. Median population figure based on cities with a population ranging from 8000–12000 residents, 2018.



								Existing	2019	
Midway Park	Pulaski Street Park	Bedford Park	Wayne Street Park	TailYard Dog Park	Jacee Field	FitRec	Youth Center Auditorium	Total	Shortfall/ Surplus	Additional Facilities Needed
3.00	0.30	0.40	0.40	1.00	2.00	0	0	416.10	282.00	0
1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	7	3	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1	1
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1	1
1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	9	6	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1	1
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	3	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-2	2
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1	1
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	-3	3
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-3	3
0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+/- 15	0	0

# NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## Importance of Recreation

Access to parks and recreation is an essential part of the overall health of a community. Nationally, the most healthy communities are typically in areas with easy access to multiple recreational assets.

Figure 4.2 highlights some of the community health factors in Mercer County as they relate to recreation. Though the State of West Virginia as a whole performs poorly in numerous health rankings, it is worth noting that Mercer County is among one of the most unhealthy counties in the state, coming in at 51 out of 55 in overall rankings. While the City of Bluefield likely trends more healthy than the entire county, it is still worth noting that the overall health picture is likely not positive for the community.

<b>Figure 4.2</b>		<b>Community Health Indicators</b> Source: <a href="http://www.countyhealthrankings.org">www.countyhealthrankings.org</a>	
Topic	Mercer County	State of WV	Top U.S. Counties
Overall Ranking	51/55	-	-
Health Behaviors	48/55	-	-
Adult Obesity	38%	36%	26%
Physical Inactivity	32%	28%	19%
Access to Exercise Opportunities	60%	60%	91%

## Existing Facilities

As highlighted in Chapter 3, the City of Bluefield has three types of facilities under its current care which were analyzed as part of this study. This includes regional parks, neighborhood parks, and recreation centers. Regional parks, which in this study included City Park and the East River Mountain Overlook, make up the overwhelming majority of land in the city parks system. They account for 97% of the acreage

of recreational assets, which is largely due to the size of City Park. Neighborhood parks account for the remaining 3% of parks acreage available in the city.

Figure 4.3 displays how the existing park assets of the City of Bluefield are distributed. The National Recreation and Parks Association is participating in a campaign called the “A 10-Minute Walk Campaign Commitment.” The ultimate goal of this effort is for everyone in a city to reside within a 10-minute or half-mile walk of a park. Overall, the City of Bluefield has a relatively even distribution of parks, and many residential areas of the city fall within or close to this recommendation. Should the City explore divesting in recreational assets in the future, this map will help guide discussion as to where or where not may be a viable option.

## Needs Assessment

GAI Consultants utilized the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) program called PRORAGIS (Parks and Recreation Operation Ratio and Geographic Information Systems) to determine what assets the City of Bluefield Parks and Recreation system may need to look to add in the future. The tool allows for a comparison of the City to similar cities based on factors such as population, budget size, jurisdiction size, and number of parks maintained. For the comparison, cities with a population of 8,000 to 12,000 with a parks budget similar to that of Bluefield, around \$1,000,000 annually, were chosen.

## Level of Service Standards

Park and facility level of service (LOS) is a policy that outlines the type, location, and number of parks and facilities that will be provided within a delineated area. It measures

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the minimum amount of land or facilities needed in order to provide the desired amount of recreational opportunities in an area.

Numerical park standards are typically expressed in acres per 1,000 residents. For example, a park agency may target 4 acres per 1,000 residents. The LOS standards will change as demographics and recreational trends change over time. Proposed facility guidelines indicates a ratio of one facility per number of residents served. For example, standard may be expressed as one softball field for every 3,000 people. Numerical guidelines are sometimes less useful for developing facilities that require multiple agencies (such as trails) or for facilities that are opportunistic, or based on location, such as fishing piers and beaches.

## Facility Shortfalls

As seen in Figure 4.1, when compared to national recreational trends and similar cities, there are some shortfalls within Bluefield's recreational asset portfolio. Bluefield currently exhibits a need for the following facilities:

- TotLot (dedicated playground area for smaller children) - 1
- Community Garden - 1
- Multi-use Court (Basketball, Volleyball) - 1
- Diamond Field (Softball, youth) - 2
- Rectangular Field (Regulation size, soccer, lacrosse, etc.) - 1
- Rectangular Field (Small-sided, soccer, lacrosse, etc.) - 3
- Rectangular Field (Multi-use) - 3

Of the facilities listed, multi-use rectangular fields and small-sided rectangular fields are at the largest deficit with three each needed. Additionally, one regulation size rectangular field is needed. These facilities are available at

the East River Soccer Complex and generally meet the needs of the community. However, since Bluefield Parks and Recreation does not have control over this facility, access can be an issue. Bluefield should work to developing additional facilities under their own control to help meet the needs of the community.

Diamond fields of a softball and youth play size are another facility needed with a deficit of two fields. Formerly, there were two softball fields at City Park, but they have fallen into disrepair. Rehabbing these fields is possible, but as they are within a floodplain, it may make more sense to build new fields in a different location.

Per the results of the comparison, one multi-use court is needed. This would be an outdoor court that could accommodate basketball and volleyball, as well as other court-based sports. Striping and existing basketball court could help the city meet this need in a short time frame.

A community garden is not found in any existing Bluefield recreational facility. Adding one would meet the need of the community and help diversify park offerings.

A tot lot, which is a dedicated playground area for smaller children, is also currently not available within a Bluefield park. Though modern recreation trends do attempt to make playgrounds inclusive and multi-generational, having an area where smaller children, typically under five years old, can safely play and get acclimated to a larger playground is important. As the City looks to redevelop its existing playgrounds, a tot lot should be considered.



N

Mercer  
County  
Airport

Not To Scale

52

Wayne

Bedford Park

Pulaski Street Park

TailYar

Chicory

Midway Park

Genoa Park

Rotary C

19

East River Park

Youth Center

FitRec

Fairview P

City  
Park

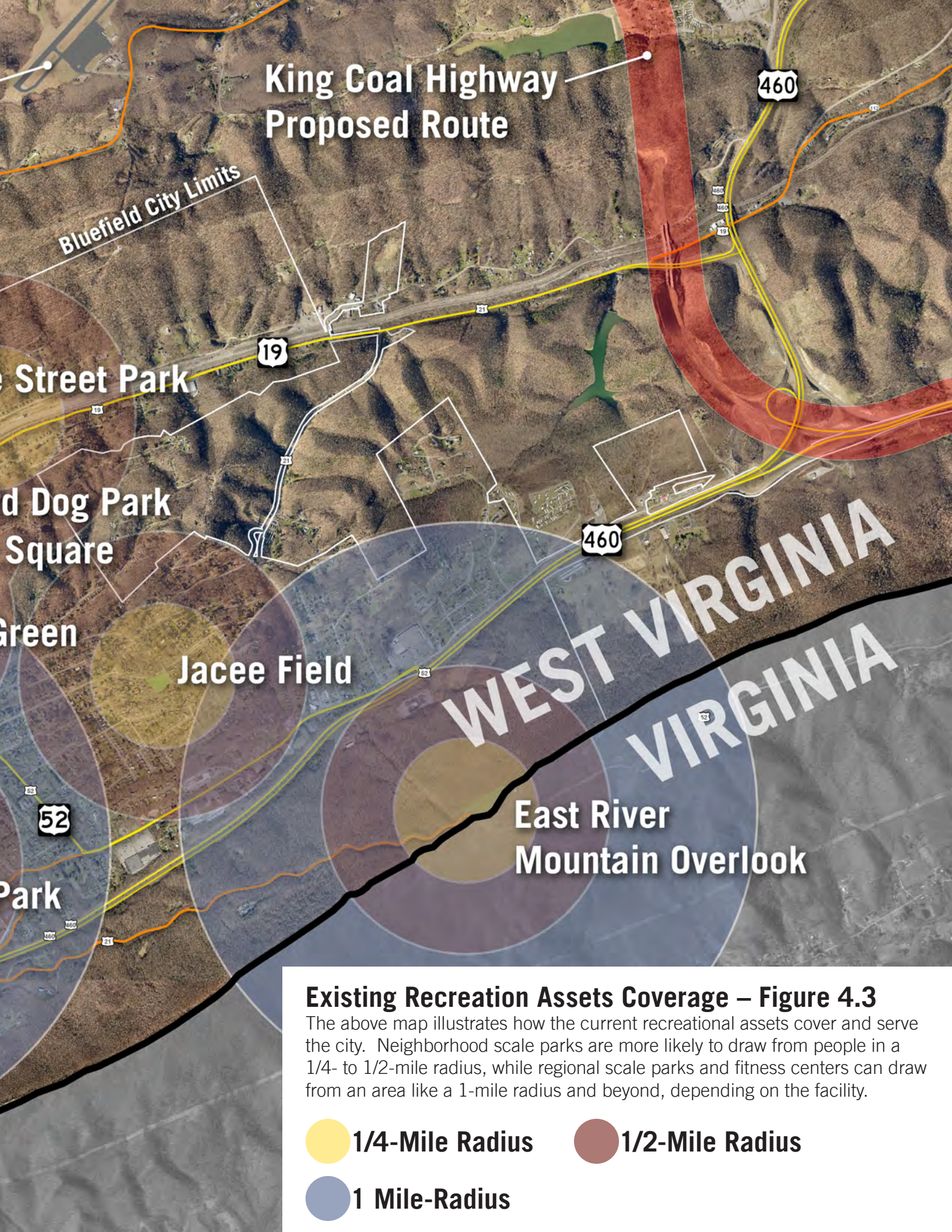
Mitchell Stadium

460

Bluefield, VA

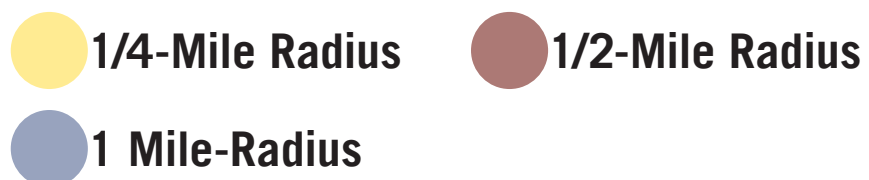
Bluefield





### Existing Recreation Assets Coverage – Figure 4.3

The above map illustrates how the current recreational assets cover and serve the city. Neighborhood scale parks are more likely to draw from people in a 1/4- to 1/2-mile radius, while regional scale parks and fitness centers can draw from an area like a 1-mile radius and beyond, depending on the facility.





# CHAPTER FIVE

# 5







**LOOKING  
FORWARD**



# IMPACT

As part of the planning process, various types of possible facilities and improvements were explored to determine what may be beneficial to the parks system. Figure 5.1 highlights the types of facility additions and improvements explored, as well as their potential for economic impact in the City of Bluefield.



<b>Figure 5.1</b>	<b>Recreation Facility Additions and Improvements</b>				
	Market Demand	Potential Location	Cost	Stakeholder/ Public Support	Potential Economic Impact
<b>Splash Pad</b>		City Park, Kee Dam Site	Low to Moderate estimate \$0.25 to \$0.5 million	Stakeholder interest	Low
<b>Motorcross Track</b>	Pro Sport Motorcross Track – Wytheville, VA	Kee Dam Site	High	Stakeholder interest	Medium to High
<b>ATV Training Course</b>		Kee Dam	Moderate	Stakeholder interest	Medium
<b>Indoor Practice Facility</b>	Limited competition	City Park, Kee Dam Site	Moderate	Look at survey	Medium
<b>Baseball Complex</b>	Limited competition	City Park	Moderate (also need to address flooding issues)	Stakeholder interest	High
<b>Expand Mountain Bike Trails</b>	Competitive – New River Gorge	East River Mountain Overlook, Kee Dam Site, City Park	Moderate	Yes	Medium
<b>Campsites</b>		Kee Dam Site	Moderate	Look at survey	High
<b>ATV-Focused Lodging</b>	Competitive – lodging associated with Hatfield McCoy Trails	Kee Dam Site	High	Unknown	High
<b>Outdoor Pool</b>	Competitive – City of Princeton outdoor pool, Graham Park outdoor pool, Lincolnshire Park outdoor pool (Tazewell, VA)	Rehabilitation of existing pool at Elks property	Moderate estimate \$0.5 million	Yes	Low
<b>Water Park</b>		Kee Dam Site or Purchased Property	High	Look at survey	Medium to High
<b>Ropes/Zip Line/ Adventure Course</b>	Nearest courses at Pipestem Park, New River Gorge	East River Mountain Overlook, Kee Dam Site	High Pipestem Zipline – \$1M, includes 9 zips	Yes	Medium to High

# MULTI-USE FIELDS

## East River Soccer Complex

The East River Soccer Complex includes six soccer fields, five of which are full-size, or able to accommodate college and high school soccer games. The East River Soccer Association (ERSA) is a member of the West Virginia Soccer Association and Virginia Youth Soccer Association. The fields are currently used by Bluefield College's men's and women's soccer teams for training and competitive games. Other users include middle schools, high schools, and adult recreational soccer leagues.

Field 1 at the facility offers bleachers, a concession stand, press box, locker rooms, and a hospitality area for officials. Tournaments held at the complex have included the USCAA National Soccer Championship, which was hosted by Bluefield College. The complex has also held various other tournaments at lower levels of play.



East River Soccer Complex. Photo: Bluefield College

## Other Competitive Soccer Complexes

Given relatively low population densities in the area, there are a limited number of soccer complexes located within 50 miles of Bluefield. The premier soccer complex located within 50 miles is the YMCA Paul Cline Memorial Sports Complex. The complex includes a total of 18 multi-use fields, including eight full-size soccer fields (two with stadium seating, lights, and scoreboards), conference rooms, a concession stand, and a walking trail. The complex hosts several tournaments, including the WVSA State Cup, and is home to the YMCA Youth Soccer Program, local middle school and high school soccer teams, Legacy FC, and the WVU Tech Men's and Women's Soccer teams.



Paul Cline Memorial Sports Complex. Photo: YMCA of Southern West Virginia

Other facilities include the Max Meadows Recreation Park in Max Meadows, Virginia and a facility at Virginia Tech for collegiate soccer and lacrosse. The Max Meadows Recreation Park has four multi-purpose fields located adjacent to the Max Meadows Elementary School, as well as a baseball/softball diamond, walking track, and concessions.

The 2019 US Youth Soccer Eastern Regional



<b>Figure 5.2</b>		<b>Area Facilities with Four or More Soccer Fields within 50 Miles of Bluefield</b>					
		Source: GAI Consultants, ESRI					
Facility	Soccer Fields	Fitness Center	Multi-Purpose	Baseball Diamonds	Other	20 Min Drive Time from Population	Distance from Bluefield
East River Soccer Complex	6	-	-	-	Includes concessions, press box, locker rooms, hospitality area, five full-sized fields	-	-
YMCA Paul Cline Memorial Complex	18	-	Yes	-	Includes eight full-sized fields, stadium seating, lighting, scoreboards, concessions, playground, walking trails	-	1 hour
Tech Softball Park	9	Yes	Yes	3	Sports complex for Virginia Tech	-	1 hour
Max Meadows Recreation Park	4	-	Yes	1		-	1 hour

Championships and the Eastern Presidents Cup are being played at the Barboursville Soccer Complex and the Shawnee Park Sports Complex in Dunbar. The Barboursville Complex has been improved recently and has hosted the events in the past. The Shawnee Sports Complex is new and was built, in part, to attract tournaments to the Charleston area. The complex includes six multi-purpose/collegiate-sized turf fields and four collegiate-sized baseball fields. The Eastern Regional Championships will feature approximately 225 Boys and Girls teams in the 12U through 19U age groups. Regional winners in the 13U through 19U age groups will earn a berth to the US Youth Soccer National Championships. The

Eastern Presidents Cup will feature approximately 112 Boys and Girls teams in the 12U through 18U age groups. Regional winners in the 13U through 18U age groups will earn a berth to the US Youth Soccer National Presidents Cup.

## Mitchell Stadium

Mitchell Stadium is a 10,000 stadium that is home to both local high school football teams – Bluefield High School in West Virginia and Graham High School in Virginia. The Bluefield College Rams football team also plays at the stadium. The Bluefield youth football league also plays at Mitchell Stadium. Current improvements planned for Mitchell Stadium



Figure 5.3: Competitive Soccer Facilities. Source: ESRI, GAI Consultants



Mitchell Stadium at capacity during the annual rivalry game. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Recreation

# MULTI-USE FIELDS

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include replacing the current lights with LED lighting. The Beaver/Graham high school football game is one of the top rivalries in the state and attracts about 13,000 tailgaters to the area. The number of fans, as well as the state line boundary running through the park, has led to some issues with policing in the past.

## Other Football Fields

The Brushfork Armory in Bluefield is a West Virginia National Guard Facility that includes an older football field, which is currently used by



Brushfork Armory Football Field being utilized for parking during a trade show. Photo: Bluefield Chamber of Commerce

the local youth football league for practice. The armory also has an indoor meeting area and basketball court that is used by Bluefield High School for basketball games. For basketball games, the facility can seat around 3500 people. Brushfork Armory is about 10 minutes away from Downtown Bluefield via vehicle.

A new multi-use sports facility has been proposed by Bluefield, Virginia next to Graham Middle School. The \$6 million facility is slated to include a venue for football, soccer, and lacrosse, funded in part by the town's meal tax. The multi-use facility is also proposed to include stands for 4,500 people and artificial

turf. According to the town, the facility would accommodate 20 community and regional sports events and 24 collegiate events. If built, the new sports facility would compete with the existing Mitchell Stadium, East River Soccer Complex, and YMCA Paul Cline Memorial Sports Complex.

## Implications for Adding Multi-Use Fields

GAI considered the potential demand and feasibility for a new multi-use field complex to attract local and regional tournaments as well as the demand for one or two new multi-use fields. Multi-use fields are typically used by soccer, football, and lacrosse teams.

The East River Soccer Complex appears to effectively address field needs for both youth soccer and area collegiate soccer, as well as demand by local middle schools and high schools. With the YMCA Paul Cline Memorial Sports Complex located only 50 miles away, and a new multi-purpose field recently opened in the Charleston area, it does not appear that there is sufficient demand for another regional soccer complex in the near future. However, there may be an opportunity to add additional multi-purpose fields to accommodate practice for teams such as the youth football league. It was also noted that area football teams sometimes share Mitchell Field for practice. Other potential users of multi-use fields include lacrosse teams. While the sport is not currently played locally, Bluefield College has considered adding a lacrosse team.



# MOTOCROSS TRACK

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## Market Demand

The competition for a motocross track venue in Bluefield appears relatively limited. There is a motocross track currently located in Wytheville, Virginia (Pro Sport MX Wytheville), about 25 miles south of Bluefield. Event races are typically held on Sundays. The track holds races held by Victory-Sports, the organization which arranges motocross events and training for the Southeast.



ProSport MX in Wytheville, VA. Photo: ProSport MX

Track Builders and MX Track Builders offer design and development services for motocross facilities and could help provide guidance and a feasibility study for a proposed track. They can help with issues such as associated access planning, start and finish lines, signage, and financing. Smaller, less complex tracks can be relatively inexpensive to construct (Motocross Track Builders quotes \$6,000 to \$15,000 for many of their simple tracks).



ProSport MX in Wythville, VA. Photo: ProSport MX

## Location

The Kee Dam site is the most logical location for a motocross track. According to stakeholders, a motocross track had been proposed for Bluefield in the past, but was never constructed. A feasibility study by a motocross track developer (referenced below) will help determine the anticipated market, design and construction costs, and operating costs.

## Cost

The cost of building and maintaining a motocross track will vary widely depending upon the site constraints, type of course desired, etc. Companies such as Motocross

# BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL FACILITIES

## Bowen Field

Bowen Field is home to the Bluefield Blue Jays minor league baseball team (affiliated with the Toronto Blue Jays), the Bluefield College baseball team and the Bluefield High School team. The Bluefield State College baseball team also uses Bowen Field while their on-campus facility is renovated. The stadium holds 3,000 people and is located at Bluefield City Park. The facility also includes two batting cages and a weight room. The Blue Jays will have 34 home games this year.

The Bluefield Blue Jays have a recurring two-year contract. Reportedly, attendance has been down over the past few years, due in part to poor weather and rain outs.



The Outfield Area of Bowen Field at City Park. Photo: GAI Consultants

## City Park Baseball Fields

The Bluefield, West Virginia Little League plays at the two fields located at City Park. The fields need some minor repair and there is a concession stand available at the facility. Two former softball fields are located in the lower portion of the park, but have not been used in several seasons and are currently not playable. Additionally, there is a baseball field located on

the hill above Bowen Field which has 90' baselines and outfield dimensions suitable for high school play. It is currently being leased out to Mercer County Schools.



Little League Baseball Fields at City Park. Photo: GAI Consultants

## Bluefield State College Baseball Field

The Bluefield State College baseball field is currently being rehabilitated and is slated to be re-opened for use next year. As a result, the college team does not currently have a home field on the campus and currently uses facilities in Princeton for practice and Bowen Field for games.



Baseball Field under rehabilitation at Bluefield State College. Photo: GAI Consultants



<b>Figure 5.4</b>		<b>Baseball Fields and Complexes Close to Bluefield</b> Source: GAI Consultants, ESRI			
Facility	Soccer Fields	Baseball Diamonds	Other	20 Min Drive Time from Population	Distance from Bluefield
Graham Recreation Park	1	4	Tennis	26370	3 miles
Lincolnshire Park	-	2	Pool, tennis, basketball, sand volleyball, three picnic shelters	11,072	17 miles
Harkrader Sports Complex	-	3	Sports complex for Virginia Tech	-	1 hour
City Park Bowen Field	-	1	Home of the Bluefield Bluejays and Bluefield College baseball	37,004	-
City Park Other Fields	-	3	Practice field above Bowen Field is used by Mercer County Schools, other two fields for little league.	37,004	-

## Graham Recreation Park

Graham Recreation Park is a 57-acre park located in the Town of Bluefield, Virginia. The park includes four baseball/softball diamonds, a tennis court, an amphitheater, and a walking trail. The park also includes parking and a paved road which runs through the park. Graham Recreation Park is the largest park located in Bluefield, Virginia. The park is home to the Town of Bluefield Little League team, the Bluefield College Softball team, middle school softball, and recreation leagues.

## Lincolnshire Park

Lincolnshire Park, located in Tazewell, Virginia, include two softball fields, including one field with lights. The rental rates for the fields are \$50 to \$75. There are several other amenities located at the park, including a 21-acre lake, tennis courts, a basketball court, sand volleyball, and a junior Olympic sized pool.

## Harkrader Sports Complex

The Harkrader Sports Complex, which is located in Christiansburg, Virginia, is one of the newer and more comprehensive softball/baseball complexes located in the area – approximately 75 miles from City Park in

Bluefield. The park includes one softball field and two baseball fields in a radial configuration. A central building includes a press box and a concession stand. The fields are lit and the baseball outfields can be converted to soccer fields. The stadium was completed in 2006 and encompasses 11 acres. The cost for the facility was \$1.4 million. The fields are used for local tournament play, including the 2013 USSSA Baseball World Series, the 2014 Nations Baseball World Series, and the 2015 Nations Ultimate Baseball World Series

## Implications

There may be an opportunity to add ballfields at City Park in order to potentially attract regional tournaments to the area. The addition of baseball/softball fields could also alleviate some of the pressure to accommodate practice among multiple groups at Bowen Field. There may also be an opportunity to add adult leagues with new Intuit employees moving into the area. If additional fields were added at City Park near the equestrian oval, stormwater issues would need to be addressed. City Park would also have a competitive advantage in attracting and hosting tournaments since it has several amenities available for families and friends attending the tournaments.

# MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS

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## Market Demand

Based on conversations with stakeholders, there appears to be an increasing demand for mountain bike trails. The Bluefield Trails and Ales Mountain Bike Race, which is sponsored by the City of Bluefield, typically occurs in September. Competitively, there is an existing network of mountain bike trails at Pinnacle Rock State Park, which includes over seven miles of hiking and biking trails. Other nearby trails include Camp Creek State Park (three miles of intermediate trails) and County Line/ River View Trail (seven miles at Pipestem).



Obstacles like jumps are common features on mountain biking trails. Photo: GAI Consultants

## Case Study: Roanoke, Virginia

The International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) promotes mountain biking by designating areas as bronze, silver, or gold Ride Centers. Virginia's Blue Ridge is the only silver-level Ride Center located on the east coast. The evaluation considers factors such as bike infrastructure and amenities and general bike culture and support. The area has mountain bike rentals, with Carvins Cove offering cross country single track, downhill trails, and fire roads. The Blue Ridge Off-Road Cyclists offer group rides for those not familiar with the trail system in the area.

## Case Study: Fayetteville, Arkansas

Northwest Arkansas has become a mountain biking destination, in part due to the topography of the region. The inclusion on IMBA's ride center list was an important part of becoming a destination for mountain biking. IMBA also held their world summit in Arkansas, further marketing the area as a mountain biking destination. Securing the world summit is a highly competitive process. The Walton Foundation's Home Region Program has also invested substantial dollars into the mountain biking system, including \$13 million to build new singletracks in the region. The Walton Foundation funding was also matched by local jurisdictions and stakeholders. The Walton Foundation investment is part of a greater effort to attract and retain talent to the area. The bike trails are also used to preserve greenspace throughout the area.



Mountain bike rider on a wooden turn structure. Photo: GAI Consultants





Rock outcroppings make for enjoyable scenery along a trail.  
Photo: GAI Consultants

## Location

There is an existing mountain bike network located in City Park. The City of Bluefield should also look at establishing a mountain bike network at East River Mountain Overlook or at the Kee Dam site. At either site, the City should work with an experienced trail designer (Velosolutions is a good example of a well-respected and experienced bike trail design firm) in order to establish a course that is challenging and appropriate for all ages. There are several categories of trails, including traditional singletrack, bike specific singletrack

(which may include technical features and drops), bike specific gravity-oriented singletrack, singletrack descent, technical singletrack descent, long climb, and technical climb. (as defined by the IMBA). In designating ride centers, the IMBA also looks at nearby bike shop goods and services, outfitters, bike rental, and lodging (including bike-friendly lodging which offers bike wash stations and secure bike storage). The proximity of restaurants, including brewpubs, is also important, as is trailhead access, including shuttle options. A more extensive bike trail system would likely attract more visitors from outside of the region and build upon the area's legacy as an outdoor and adventure tourism destination.



Ski resorts are often utilized for mountain biking in the summer season. Photo: GAI Consultants

# OUTDOOR POOL

## Market Demand

There are currently three outdoor pools located within the vicinity of the City of Bluefield: Harmony Acres Pool in Bluefield, Virginia; City of Princeton outdoor pool; and, the Lincolnshire Park outdoor pool in Tazewell, Virginia. During the planning process, stakeholders expressed an interest in having access to an outdoor pool in Bluefield, West Virginia.



Harmony Acres Pool in neighboring Bluefield, VA. Photo: Harmony Acres Pool

## Location

The most logical location for a public pool in Bluefield, West Virginia is at the Bluefield Elks Lodge property, which also includes an existing pool and golf course. There would be a substantial cost associated with upgrading the pool – estimated at about \$0.5 million. However, this would likely be significantly less than constructing a new pool at another location.

## Cost

As mentioned, the cost for retrofitting the existing swimming pool at the Elks Lodge site is substantial. An experienced pool contractor would be able to itemize the actual cost needed to rehabilitate the existing pool. Features such

as water slides, zero depth access, and water playground equipment may also be considered as part of any rehabilitation project. The addition of some of these features may increase pool attendance and revenues.



The Bluefield Elks Lodge pool in 2016. Photo: Bluefield Elks Lodge 269

Since outdoor pools are limited to the summer season, and subject to unfavorable weather conditions, financial feasibility can be an issue. Pools can be expensive to operate and maintain, and typically have to be subsidized by municipal funding to remain open. It will be important to consider potential revenue sources such as season pass cost, swimming lessons, special events, concessions, etc. when considering the desirability of upgrading the Elks Lodge pool. The capital and operating costs of an outdoor public pool will have to be considered relative to other priority projects.

The climate of Bluefield is not favorable for the operation of a public outdoor pool. Cooler weather patterns would likely result in a short season. Additionally, due to financial and maintenance issues, other local pools have closed. Considering these factors, the opening of an outdoor pool by Bluefield Parks and Recreation is not recommended.



# ROPES / ZIP LINE / ADVENTURE COURSE

## Market Demand

The nearest zip line and ropes courses are located at Pipestem and the New River Gorge area. Pipestem is investing about \$11 million in new features at the park, including the addition of an extensive zip line system. The zip line was developed by Bonsai Design and includes nine zips. Other renovations include an adventure lake, splash park, cabin modernizations, campground upgrades, and tram renovations. The zip line system travels more than 300 feet above the river valley and reaches speeds of up to 50 miles per hour. At the end of the zip line excursion, visitors return via the Pipestem tram. The upgrades are a partnership between the Department of Natural Resources and ACE Adventure Resort. ACE provides guided adventure tours for visitors staying at the Pipestem Resort. ACE also has its own zip line system in the New River Gorge.

TimberTrek Adventure Park includes four acres of woods with a variety of adventure features, including ropes platforms and zip lines. The park also offers night tours. Visitors can choose from five different defined courses with different degrees of difficulty. The park also had a tree tops zip line canopy tour, which includes 10 zips and five sky bridges, and gravity zip lines, which extends for 1.5 miles and winds across the ridgeline of a mountain. The final zip line can reach speeds of up to 65 miles per hour.

## Location

The most likely location for a zip line or ropes course would be at the East River Mountain Overlook or the Kee Dam site. As with a mountain bike course, a professional adventure course designer would be needed to plan a course at either location. One of the major considerations is speed, and determining where to construct the departure and arrival locations.

The designers also have to consider clearance for riders, the appropriate height of the towers, and optimal slope for the lines.

## Cost

The cost will obviously vary greatly based on the size and scope of the zip line or ropes course. Based on a cost estimate from Adventure Ziplines, a double zip line on a 60-foot tower and about 1,000 feet long costs between \$70,000 and \$150,000 (including drawings, staffing, and insurance).



Example of a zip line system nestled within a tree canopy. Photo: GAI Consultants



Example of a landing area along a ropes course, which is built around an existing tree. Photo: GAI Consultants

# WATER PARK

## Market Demand

This section presents an overview of water parks, including a general discussion of the water park industry and a description of selected existing parks located in the region. During the planning process, stakeholders and survey respondents expressed an interest in having access to a water park in the Bluefield area.

## Competition

The nearby competition for water parks is relatively limited. This is likely due in part to the fact that water parks can be costly to develop and operate and the population densities in the area limit potential attendance (water park operations are outlined in the following section).

## Wild Water Express – Hinton, WV

Wild Water Express is located about 35 miles away from Bluefield in Hinton, WV and includes a new waterslide, pool, kid's pool, volleyball, basketball courts, and picnic tables.



New Slides at Hinton's Wild Water Express. Photo: Wild Water Express

## Splash Valley Water Park – Roanoke, VA

Splash Valley Water Park is operated by the Roanoke County Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism and includes two 34-foot high slides (a flume slide and a bowl slide), a float river, an outdoor sprayground, a starter slide for younger children, a leisure pool, concessions, and shaded areas for special events and parties. Daily admission rates range from \$11 for adults ages 18 to 54, \$10 for children ages 3 to 17, and \$9 for ages 55 and up.



A Large Flume Slide and a Lazy River. Photo: Splash Valley Water Park

## Evelyn Alexander Water Park – Dublin, VA

The Evelyn Alexander Water Park is located in Pulaski County and is part of the larger 87-acre Randolph Park. The water park includes an eight-lane lap pool, a 38-foot water slide, a smaller slide for young children, a spray area with water drops, concessions, a shaded seating area, and a bath house. The park is open from Memorial Day to Labor Day and there is a nominal entrance fee (\$2.00 for visitors under age 2, \$4.00 for visitors ages 2 to 54, and \$2.00 for visitors ages 55+).





A water park area for small children. Photo: Evelyn Alexander Water Park

## Water Ways – Julian, WV

Water Ways is located about 75 miles north of Bluefield in Julian, West Virginia. The water park includes five water slides, a lazy river, a leisure pool, a smaller pool for kids, volleyball and basketball courts, a walking trail, a gift shop, food concessions, and sheltered picnic areas. There is a \$12 entry fee for anyone 44 inches and taller, and a \$5 entry fee for those children under 44 inches tall.



Slide landing area and lazy river are combined into one feature. Photo: Water Ways

## Concept

Innovative recreation developers, recognizing the broad-based popularity of water recreation, developed a number of water attractions that have proven to be profitable and popular over a sustained period of time. Attractions such as water slides and wave pools have been developed, marketed, and operated successfully. Water play attractions have demonstrated a broad market appeal and

Figure 5.5	Selected Characteristics of Water Park Size Categories. Source: GAI Consultants, Water Park Interviews		
	Large	Medium	Small
Ticket Price	\$40+	\$15–\$20	\$5
Annual Attendance	Over 1,000,000	120,000–250,000	100,000 or less
Park Size	30–60 acres	Around 5 acres	5 acres or less
Number of Rides/Attractions	10 or more	5–8	3–4
Revenues	Large profit	Small profit	Probably needs a subsidy to operate
Age Group	All ages	Ages 0–12	Geared toward young child
Food Service	Concessions and Dining Options	Concessions	Outside food allowed
Parking Fee	\$10 and up	\$5 or less	Generally free
Park Schedule	Open year round	Open year round	Follows school schedule/seasons
Ownership	Private	Varied	Public
Length of Stay	All day (7 hours)	3–5 hours	1–3 hours

# WATER PARK

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staying power, largely due to the popularity of water-oriented recreation. Over time, water parks have shown that they are capable of generating average lengths of stay of more than three hours.

## Typical Components

Components found at a typical water park include a wave pool, water slides, inner tube rides, and activity pools. Water slides and rides are manufactured in a variety of types. Serpentine slides or body flumes enable the user to glide down a winding serpentine-shaped tube in a sitting position or lying on their backs for extra speed. Riders end the experience in a deceleration run-out or catch pool at the bottom. Water slides may be open or covered; open configurations are engineered to ensure that users cannot gain enough momentum to slip over the sides.

Speed slides are more thrilling than serpentine slides and involve a freefall descent or a more gradual drop with a hump or two, and a deceleration run-out or catch pool landing. Speed slides are typically straight and open. Inner tube rides allow more than one person to descend down a wide slide while sitting in circular inner tubes. This gives users the experience of riding a raft through simulated whitewater rapids.

A key element of typical water parks is the wave pool. A wave pool consists of a large (10,000 or more square feet) fan-shaped pool outfitted with a wave generator. The equipment can simulate waves in a range of sizes, enabling visitors (with or without inner tubes) to float gently or body surf. A large sun deck typically surrounds the wave pool with convenient concessions nearby; a group of deck chairs, lounge chairs, and cabanas here often becomes the main family meeting point during their visit.

Another relatively passive experience is called the “lazy river” or “endless river”, which allows users to slowly float around a long oval-shaped trough.

Activity pools provide participatory play activities. The children’s play pool or “kiddie pool” appeals to small children, while a teen/adult activity pools provide more vigorous activities.



An example of a splash pad area and water slides at a regional water park. Photo: GAI Consultants

Water parks can generally be divided into three categories: small, medium, and large. The small tier parks are generally owned by public entities, such as cities or counties, and operated much like any local recreation venue. These usually charge up to a \$5 entrance fee and often require a subsidy to operate. Annual attendance is less than 100,000 people, partially due to the limited operating schedule that closely follows the school schedule. These parks tend to have seasonal closures generally from after Labor Day to March.

## Location

A minimum of 3–5 relatively flat acres would be necessary to accommodate a water park facility and related functions, such as a parking lot. The facility would be best located in an area with a fair amount of regular traffic and not close to residential structures. Another consideration is that the property would benefit from regular direct sunlight, as Bluefield has a relatively cool climate. Within the Bluefield Parks system, there is currently not a location with fits these recommendations. Purchasing a property to construct a water park would likely be necessary.







# CHAPTER SIX

# 6







**IMPLEMENTATION**

# IMPLEMENTATION

Three key themes are identified as improvement goals that outline specific issues and recommendations for the City of Bluefield Parks and Recreation Department to examine and implement throughout the parks system. Data, site surveys, and community input helped determine these goals and guide future investments toward projects that will create the most impact:

- Enhance the park, open space, and trail system
- Ensure that existing recreational facilities are maximizing economic development and tourism
- Ensure that existing recreational facilities are well-maintained and safe

Implementation strategies are outlined within this chapter and include recommendations that may require additional due diligence, local refinement, and funding to complete their implementation. However, investment in the Bluefield Parks system is needed to ensure a positive quality of life for existing and future residents.

The consulting team has used the data collected to target nine key areas throughout the parks system, with each area containing a list of recommendations. A detailed chart has been developed to highlight the time frame needed for implementation of each recommended improvement. This categorizes each recommendation into short, medium, and long range goals based on the needs within the parks system and their potential financial and developmental impacts. Each improvement is recommended to fit within the time frame listed below:

- Short Term 0–2 years
- Medium Term, 3–5 years
- Long Term, 6–10 years



# IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

## CITY PARK

### SHORT

- Existing Trail Improvements
- Wetland Trail
- Tennis Court Improvements
- Pickleball
- Mitchell Stadium Scoreboard
- Softball Fields
- Dog Park Relocation
- Restrooms
- Disc Golf
- State Boundary Recognition
- Security Improvements

### MEDIUM

- Playground Replacement
- Mitchell Stadium Lighting
- Mitchell Stadium Press Box
- Mitchell Stadium Restrooms
- Equestrian Ring
- Parking Lot Improvements
- Relocate Police Practice Range
- Secondary Emergency Entrance

### LONG

- Splash Pad
- Mitchell Stadium Fieldhouse
- Multi-Use Field

## EAST RIVER MOUNTAIN OVERLOOK

### SHORT

- Security Improvements

### MEDIUM

- Family-Friendly Loop Trail
- Restroom Operations

### LONG

- Connector Trail

## DOWNTOWN BLOCK

### SHORT

- Master Plan Block

### MEDIUM

- Develop Block

### LONG

- Develop Block

# IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

## KEE DAM SITE

### SHORT

- Master Plan Site

### MEDIUM

- Develop Trails
- Develop Tent Camping

### LONG

- Develop Other Aspects of Adventure Tourism
- Motocross Course
- ATV Training Course
- ATV-Focused Lodging
- Fly-In Tourism

## GENERAL CITY-WIDE PARK IMPROVEMENTS

### SHORT

- Safety and Security
- Maintenance
- Community Involvement
- Site Furnishings Unification
- Landscape

### MEDIUM

- Site Furnishings Unification
- Safety and Security
- Maintenance

### LONG

- Site Furnishings Unification
- Safety and Security
- Maintenance

## TRANSPORTATION

### SHORT

- Reconfigure Bus Schedule
- Sidewalk Enhancements

### MEDIUM

- Multimodal Transit Facility
- Bicycle Routes

### LONG

- Bicycle Routes



## POLICY

### SHORT

- Capital Improvement Programming
- City of Bluefield Department Coordination
- Address Changing Demographics
- Cost Recovery

### MEDIUM

- Develop Interlocal Agreement
- Address Changing Demographics

### LONG

- Address Changing Demographics

## FUNDING

### SHORT

- Strengthen Partnerships
- Contract Services
- Coordinate Volunteers
- Explore Grant Opportunities

### MEDIUM

- Apply for Grants for Newly Master Planned Facilities

### LONG

## REVENUE AND STAFFING

### SHORT

- Earned Revenues
- Increased Programming
- Staffing

### MEDIUM

- Address Staffing as Parks Needs Change

### LONG

- Address Staffing as Parks Needs Change

# CITY PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

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## Existing Trail Improvements

The trails at City Park are among the most popular amenities the facility has to offer. With close to 15 miles of existing trails, there are a variety of uses that take place on the trails. Hikers, runners, and mountain bikers all share some of the more intensive trails built into the hillside. Alternatively, many families take advantage of the “Family Friendly Trail”, which has various children’s activity stations along its over 1-mile, mostly flat loop.

As many of the trails were developed at different times, variations exist between them. Bringing the trails up to a consistent standard and design would serve as one method of improving them. A uniform wayfinding system should be developed throughout the trails with markers indicating location along the trail. These can be of assistance when an individual experiences an injury while hiking or biking. If the user has a cell phone, they can contact emergency personnel to provide a more exact idea of where they are located.

Most of the existing trails were developed initially for hiking and have been adopted by mountain bikers. Mileage was gradually added to the system, but the current state of the turns are not particularly accommodating for mountain biking. Improving the turns would create a more enjoyable experience for mountain bikers and help attract additional and more serious riders to the park. Furthermore, improvements to the turns will make the trails much safer for riders. When improving the turns, International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) standards should adhered to.

The City of Bluefield Parks and Recreation has recently engaged with Outdoor Adventures Centers (OAC) of Tazwell County, Virginia, to develop a list of improvements to the trails that will better accommodate mountain bikers. Once the list is completed, it is recommended that Parks and Recreation begins work on implementing the proposed improvements.



Example of a mountain bike turn structure that could be placed at City Park. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec



Example of wayfinding markers that could be placed at City Park. Photo: Bluefield Parks and Rec



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## Wetland Trail

To the west of the former softball fields at City Park lies a wetland which Beaverpond Creek flows into. Because of the unique environmental features, it would make a great location to construct an elevated wooden walkway for use as a small extension to the existing trail network. As the wetland is not on City-owned property, development of the trail could be difficult. Access to the property would need to be secured, likely through an easement. It is the understanding of the consultant team that an attempt at doing so has been made in the past, but was unsuccessful. But, the educational and environmental value the wetland holds makes it worth attempting to secure rights to it again. If access can be negotiated, construction of the trail would need to be completed in an environmentally sensitive manner. Once built, the walkway would likely attract school groups.



An elevated wooden walkway meandering through a wetland.  
Photo: National Wetland Trust

## Tennis Court Improvements

Tennis is another popular activity within City Park. The six lower tennis courts are currently in very good condition and have regularly hosted NCAA regional tournaments. To improve the ability to host such events, adding bleachers in accordance with NCAA placement

standards is recommended. Lighting, again in accordance with NCAA rules, should also be added to the lower courts. NCAA standard intercollegiate play requires a horizontal lighting level of 75 foot candles (fc). Lighting systems could be controlled centrally either by parks staff or by timers that could be controlled by park users on an as-needed basis.

The upper tennis courts are in poor condition. As funds are made available, the courts should be reconstructed to recreational level play standards. These courts do not need lighting, although perimeter lighting could be useful for security and safety. Once the courts are updated, they can be striped for additional court-based sports. The upper courts would also make a good location for a wall to allow players to hit a ball back to themselves.



Tennis courts with lighting for evening and night play. Photo: GAI Consultants

## Pickleball

When rehabilitating the upper tennis courts, striping them with lines for pickleball would be advantageous for the Parks system. Multiple markings will enable the courts to receive more use. Additionally, because the upper courts are not necessary for tennis tournament play, they make an ideal location for improvements such as these.

# CITY PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

In recent years, the sport has gained popularity in the region. There is currently a group of about 30–40 individuals who regularly meet to play pickleball at City Park as well as at another location in Bluefield. According to the USA Pickleball Association (USAPA), the sport has had a 650% increase in participation over the last 6-years. Although the sport initially took off in Florida retirement communities during the mid to late 2000s, it now sees most growth in age groups under 55 years old. It is anticipated by the USAPA that the sport will continue to see strong gains in participation. The City of Bluefield may be able to capitalize on this and become a regional hub for pickleball.



Pickleball players utilizing a remarked tennis court. Photo: GAI Consultants

## Splash Pad

Splash pads, sometimes referred to as “spraygrounds”, are increasingly popular amenities in recreational facilities. Splash pads typically consist of a flat surface, usually constructed of concrete, with various spray elements that are incorporated into the ground or are situated above grade. Many splash pads will have elements that serve a broad range of age groups and abilities, and are zoned by intended usage groups. Additional features typically included are seating and shaded

areas, user-activated water systems, and accessible restroom facilities if there are not any already close to the site.



Children playing around fountains in a simple splash pad. Photo: GAI Consultants

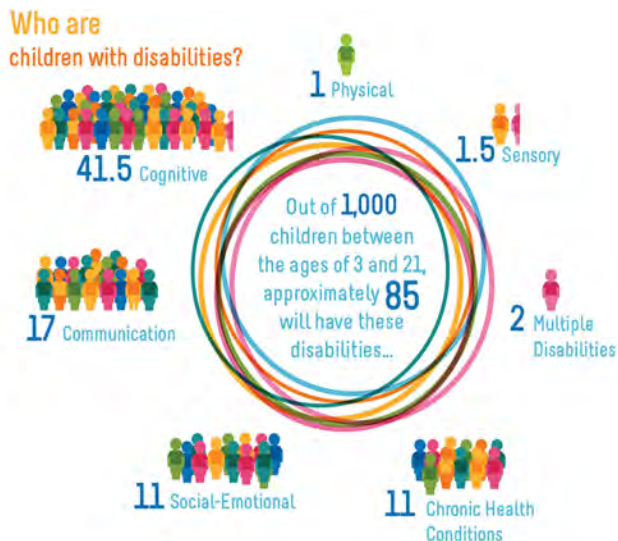
Splash pads function similarly to playgrounds. Beyond providing a place to cool off, they provide an active recreation and socialization for children and their families. There are also multiple benefits for parks and recreation systems that install splash pads, particularly when compared to traditional pools. For example, splash pads are less maintenance intensive than pools. They typically can operate without a lifeguard, though it is still a good idea to have a trained lifeguard on hand during operational hours. There is less liability associated with splash pads when compared to traditional pools. Splash pads are also more adaptable to change, with many manufactures offering equipment that can be switched out without the need for expensive infrastructure improvements.



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## Playground Replacement

The existing playground at City Park, Yakkity Yak Playground, is a mainly wooden structure that was originally built about 30 years ago. These types of structures, designed by Leathers and Associates, were very popular during that time. Community fundraising and construction efforts were often used to develop the playgrounds. While proper maintenance can prolong the life of a playground, wooden structures do have a shelf life. With the current age of the playground, replacement will likely be necessary within the next few years. The public involvement in the creation of the playground often makes it an unpopular decision to completely remove, but with recent advancements in playground design and technology, keeping such a structure is impractical.



Disabilities among children between the ages of 3 and 21.  
Information: US Dept. of Education, Graphic: PlayCore

Replacement of the playground will mean starting from scratch with a new design. This provides a great opportunity for Parks and Recreation to create a unique and inclusive play experience for all children. When designing a new playground, it is important

to consider several factors, such as inclusion, accessibility, multi-generational play, fitness, and educational value. Modern materials, such as steel and composites, make for a much safer play experience versus wood. And surfacing should be a material that is easy for an individual in a mobility device to traverse. Multiple manufactures produce playgrounds with such elements in mind.

The playground could be replaced in the same location as the existing playground, but it should be noted that a portion of the Yakkity Yak Playground does sit within a floodplain and floodway. Cost for replacement for a playground the size of the existing playground would like be around \$1,000,000+. Beginning a capital campaign to plan for replacement within the coming years will be an important step to start the project.

## Mitchell Stadium Improvements

Mitchell Stadium is in important part of history and culture within the City of Bluefield. With the age of the stadium and the desire to attract additional uses and events, several items are in need of updates. These include a new scoreboard and fieldhouse, along with updated field lighting, restrooms, and an updated or new pressbox.

A new scoreboard, along with associated public address system upgrades, is necessary to continue to attract events to the stadium. Cost reductions in video display boards make it more feasible to implement these upgrades for play review, information, and advertising display. At the least, a new scoreboard should be LED based, and be able to display game time, scores, timeouts left, down, yardage, and the play clock. Additionally, separate play clocks in each end zone should be incorporated. An

# CITY PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

upgraded scoreboard could cost between \$300,000 and \$400,000.

Field lighting should be updated to accommodate the highest level of use for the field. For Mitchell Stadium, collegiate regulations dictate the amount of lighting required. In this case, 75 fc is the minimum horizontal and vertical light levels required for regional broadcast. It is possible that the existing lighting structures could be repurposed and used to hold new fixtures, possibly reducing costs, although a structural analysis would be necessary to determine the feasibility. A completely new LED lighting system could cost between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000. The existing press box at Mitchell Stadium is in



Example of a new LED scoreboard that could be placed at Mitchell Stadium. Photo: Daktronics

need of various improvements and currently lacks accessible entrances. Bringing it in line with ADA standards could be an expensive proposition, making a complete replacement a more viable long-term goal. At minimum, the existing windows should be replaced, and the restrooms on the press box side of the stadium should be renovated. Cost for these improvements would vary greatly, depending on what was taken on.

Another long-term goal for the stadium would be the construction of a fieldhouse for use by tenants beyond the northern endzone of the stadium. It could be designed to incorporate lockerrooms, restrooms, concessions, a weight room, and other amenities. This would be of the most benefit to collegiate tenants, and as a result, the financial responsibility of construction costs would likely need to be shared to make it viable.

With any renovation or improvement, the end goal should be to attract additional events to the stadium. For Mitchell Stadium, hosting the West Virginia Secondary School Activities Commission (WVSSAC) Super Six football games would be an attainable goal, which could provide a positive economic impact in the region. However, to be able to host such events, hotel rooms within the city will need to be developed. The City has already completed a market analysis, which has determined that more hotel rooms could be supported.

## Dog Park Relocation

The current location of the TailYard Dog Park and Greenspace is being considered to be used as parking area to accommodate anticipated downtown growth. This will first require a new location for the dog park to be constructed. When selecting a location for a dog park, it is important to consider several factors, such as accessibility, parking, existing infrastructure, buffer from residential areas, shade, and size. Of the available space the City of Bluefield has, City Park would likely be the best location for the dog park to be relocated to. Existing infrastructure and ample space make it a viable option. One location that could work is the most westerly of the former softball fields. This field is close to existing parking and infrastructure without being too close to existing



trails or other items that could be in conflict with a leash-off dog park. The existing dog park has about one-third of an acre of fenced space. This would be easy to replicate on the site of the former softball field, and the space allows for more expansion.



Example of an improved dog park. Photo: Wheeling Parks and Rec

This proposed location is within the floodplain and floodway, so consideration will need to be made when developing the land. An area with a dry material base, such as decomposed granite, could allow for a portion of the space to be used when the rest of the area dries out after a heavy rain event. A wide buffer, at least 50 feet in width between the adjacent wetlands and the dog park area should also be considered to prevent a negative reaction between dogs and native inhabitants of the area. It should also be emphasized on signs that pet owners are responsible for the cleanup of animal waste to prevent any runoff from entering the adjacent creek and wetland.

## Multi-Use Field

Currently, the City of Bluefield is engaged in a long-term lease agreement with Mercer County Schools for the upper baseball practice field at City Park. According to City officials,

there is some flexibility over the terms of this agreement. In the future, this field could be utilized as a multi-use field, capable of hosting baseball, softball, football, lacrosse, and soccer. Developing a multi-purpose field would help Parks meet facilities recommendations outlined in the Needs Assessment (Figure 4.1).

To make this feasible, replacing the natural turf and clay surface with synthetic turf should be implemented. The synthetic turf surface could be marked permanently for multiple sports, and quick drainage after storm events would make it more usable. Depending on the sport, movable fences could be used to manage field dimensions. This would be a long-term project, and anticipate costs could range from \$500,000 to \$750,000.



Example of a multi-purpose synthetic turf field that could be placed at City Park. Photo: GAI Consultants

## Softball Fields

Taking in to consideration the amount of interest expressed in adult softball during both the stakeholder meetings and public survey, as well as the needs assessment, at least one of the former softball fields at City Park should be returned to playing condition. Starting with one field (the easternmost field) will enable Parks to gauge interest in the program and facility while leaving the second field as an option for the

# CITY PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

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relocated dog park. If there is then demand for more fields, the second field could be rehabbed once a suitable site for the dog park is found.

When rehabbing the field, underdrains should be placed throughout the playing area to expedite drainage after a heavy rain event. Updating the lighting should also be considered to increase the amount of usable time each day for the field, as adult leagues often play after typical working hours. Additionally, if the second field were to be developed into a dog park, a net to protect dogs and dog owners from stray foul balls would need to be placed down the right field line.



Underdrains being installed in the outfield of a softball field.  
Photo: Hydraway

## Equestrian Ring

The existing equestrian riding ring is an underutilized facility within the park. It currently hosts only one event per year (a horse show), which does not generate a lot of revenue for the parks system, but requires a lot of resources to be set up (though volunteer labor is utilized). Increasing fees associated with the event or hosting more than one event per year could make the facility more viable in its current form.

Alternatively, if the decision to divest in the facility is made, it may be a suitable location for the dog park, which will be relocated from downtown. It may also function as a starting point for a disc golf course, though the course would need to be spread out considerably to accommodate a full 18 holes.

## Restrooms

A large number of survey respondents, as well as individuals at the public and stakeholder meetings, felt that the restrooms at City Park could be improved. This includes access to restrooms as well as maintenance and cleanliness. We recommend that the restrooms be kept open during regular park operational hours. The exception to this may be closing the restrooms for the winter season if they need to be winterized each fall. Additionally, attendants should check the restrooms for cleanliness at least twice daily, and possibly more during peak use times. Because the restrooms have been prone to vandalism, replacing existing fixtures such as toilets and sinks with vandal-resistant varieties would be beneficial.

## Parking Lot Improvements

As the facility has aged, many areas of the main parking lot at City Park have deteriorated and are in need of repair. The parking area currently includes about 12 acres of asphalt pavement, meaning that resurfacing it entirely could be a costly venture. Condition varies throughout the parking lot; therefore, some areas may be able to be rehabilitated simply by patching. Other areas could require either milling and overlaying (removing the wearing course and overlaying the base with a new wearing course) or completely rebuilding (replacing both the wearing and base courses) if the subgrade is in poor condition.





An example of a rain garden, a green infrastructure element, being utilized in a parking lot. Photo: GAI Consultants

If more intensive rebuilding is required, it would present a good opportunity for the City to incorporate better stormwater management and green infrastructure throughout the parking lot. Reducing peak flow rates into the neighboring Beaverpond Creek could help reduce the likelihood of flooding in City Park. Additionally, utilizing green infrastructure make the space more inviting. An increased number of islands, street trees, raingardens, and pedestrian access points all could make the space seem less like a typical parking lot, and more like an extension of the park itself. While rebuilding, it would also be worthwhile to consider if the parking lot needs to be kept the same size, or if the pavement area could be reduced. Reducing the pavement area would assist with stormwater management and also help with costs savings when rebuilding.

The parking area by the existing Little League baseball fields could also benefit from improvements and expansion. Expanding the lot into the existing organics landfill area would allow the facility to hold larger tournament events. Because the lot is gravel, it would also be beneficial to put in sidewalks along the perimeter of the lot to give pedestrians

an accessible and safe route to the baseball fields. If night games are anticipated, lighting for the parking lot would also be a necessary improvement.

## Disc Golf Course

Disc golf is a sport that, as the name suggests, is similar to playing golf. Instead of using a ball and clubs, players throw discs (like a Frisbee®) toward a target, which is typically an elevated metal basket. Though the sport was officially established in the 1970s, it has seen a recent rise in popularity. As such, many parks systems have been incorporating disc golf courses into their facilities over the past decade.



Many disc golf courses utilize obstacles to increase the level of play difficulty. Photo: Putnam County Parks and Recreation

Developing a disc golf course can be a relatively low cost venture for a parks system. Many of the elements of a course could be constructed by either volunteers or parks employees, though utilizing professional course design consulting would likely be necessary to develop a tournament-quality course.

Locally, there is some competition for courses. Princeton City Park has a free to play course.

# CITY PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

Pipestem State Park and Glenwood Park have pay to play courses. Additionally, neighboring Bluefield College has a 9-hole course for student use. Most recreational-level disc golfers prefer to play on free, local courses. However, once a course is established, revenue could be generated by hosting tournaments, with each participant paying a fee to play. Despite the competition, the rising popularity of the sport and low impact development needs makes adding a disc golf course an enticing opportunity for Parks to explore.

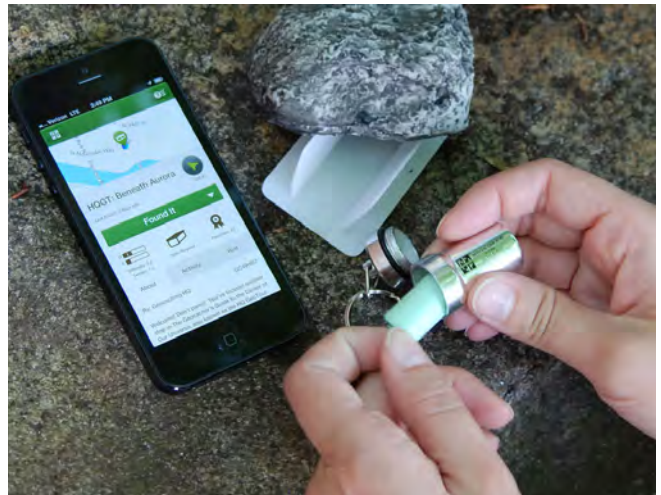
## State Boundary Recognition

While the boundary separating West Virginia and Virginia crosses through the park and creates some logistical issues, visually emphasizing the line would provide a unique feature for visitors. The line cuts through the main parking area as well as one of the lower tennis courts. Although NCAA competition regulations would not allow the line to be marked on the court, a painted line in the parking lot could mark the boundary. Where the boundary crosses pedestrian walkways, emphasis should be made with a monument or marker of some sort. The monument could be used as an “Instagram Trap” to encourage people to share on social media when they are in the park.

Another way to emphasize the boundary would be to place geocache markers in places where the boundary crosses the existing trails. Geocaching is an outdoor activity where participants use a GPS-enabled device to navigate to a specific set of coordinates. At the coordinates, they attempt to find a geocache, which is a container, hidden at the location they were directed to. Geocaching is essentially a treasure hunt and can be used to promote exploration and tourism.



A line along the California and Nevada boundary creates a unique photo opportunity. Photo: TripAdvisor



Geocaches can come in many shapes and sizes, which can make finding one more exciting. Photo: Geocaching.com



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## Security

Numerous respondents to the public survey indicated that they felt park security could be improved. While this is a difficult task to tackle (largely due to the state boundary bisecting the park), it should be at the forefront of discussions. Parks and Recreation should work with both the City of Bluefield Police and the Town of Bluefield Police to increase the number of patrols in the park on a daily basis. Additionally, where practical, security cameras and improved lighting should be placed throughout the park, in particular at main entrances.

## Relocate Police Practice Range

A small area near Mitchell Stadium is currently used as a police practice firing range. The City of Bluefield intends to relocate this facility off of the park property in the near future. Once relocated, a small greenspace (about 1 acre) will be available for use. It could be used as a practice area for sports teams who play in Mitchell Stadium, though the area cannot accommodate a full-size rectangular athletic field.

The best use of the space in the future may be as a general greenspace. There appears to be a building of unknown use currently on the site. Depending on the layout of that building, it may make sense to convert it to a picnic shelter. Additional shelters could later be added to create a picnic grove. Although there is currently a road that leads to the area, adding trail connections would also be a smart enhancement. Another possible use for the space could be a public archery range, though it would likely need to be monitored if left open on a regular basis.

## Secondary Emergency Entrance

On the western edge of the park, there appears to be some form of utility access connecting the park to a shopping plaza on the Virginia side of the line. This access point could be opened up utilized by emergency services vehicles accessing the park from Virginia. An easement agreement with the property and utility owners would need to be reached before opening up the access point, but it could provide valuable time savings when emergency services are needed on that side of the park property.



A lockable pipe gate could be used to secure the additional emergency access point. Photo: US Forest Service

# City Park Recommendations – Figure 6.2

On this map, possible improvement projects for City Park are highlighted. It should be noted that this plan is conceptual and does not mean that an amenity will be added or removed. Possible locations for new amenities, such as a splash pad, have been included.

- |                                      |  |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>A</b> Existing Trail Improvements | <b>G</b> Mitchell Stadium Improvements | <b>M</b> Parking Lot Improvements                |
| <b>B</b> Wetland Trail               | <b>H</b> Dog Park Relocation           | <b>N</b> Disc Golf Course                        |
| <b>C</b> Tennis Court Improvements   | <b>I</b> Multi-Purpose Field           | <b>O</b> State Boundary Recognition              |
| <b>D</b> Pickleball Courts           | <b>J</b> Softball Field Improvements   | <b>P</b> Security                                |
| <b>E</b> Splash Pad                  | <b>K</b> Equestrian Ring               | <b>Q</b> Police Practice Range (to Be Relocated) |
| <b>F</b> Playground Replacement      | <b>L</b> Restrooms                     | <b>R</b> Secondary Emergency Entrance            |
- Wetland Trail Concept Route    Secondary Emergency Access Route    --- Existing Trail    City Park Property







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WEST VIRGINIA

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Not To Scale



# EAST RIVER MOUNTAIN OVERLOOK

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Though not large in acreage, the East River Mountain Overlook is a more regional-scale facility within the Bluefield Parks and Recreation system. The scenic views from the overlook are a unique feature, which allows it to draw from a broader base of visitors as compared to other similarly sized facilities within the city. However, the size and relatively isolated location of the park slightly detract from its function. Improvements to the park should focus around offering more than scenic views.

## Family-Friendly Loop Trail

Within the City-owned parcel that makes up the park, additional recreational uses should be explored. One possible use could be the construction of a family-friendly loop trail that would take visitors from the existing parking lot and around the perimeter of the park property. This potential trail, shown in Figure 6.3, would be about one-third of a mile in length. To be family-friendly, the trail would need to be constructed with a well compacted base and have no areas of excessive grade (beyond 5%). To add interest, activity stations for children could be placed along the trail, similar to the existing family-friendly trail at City Park. Portions of the trail could come close to the boundary between Virginia and West Virginia. Where this occurs, markers should be placed to further highlight the uniqueness of the park. While this trail would likely not be a major draw, it would provide more recreational opportunities for visitors.

## Connector Trail to the Top of East River Mountain

Another trail that could attract more visitors is one that connects the hotel and conference center at the base of the mountain to the top of the mountain near the overlook. This

would likely encounter challenges during development, as the trail would need access to adjacent parcels, one of which is owned by the hotel operator. However, the trail could be marketed as an amenity for the hotel, which could make access negotiations easier. The trail would likely be over 1 mile in length and would have about 750 feet in elevation change. With the elevation change, the trail will be steep and unsuitable for beginner hikers. Mountain biking use on the trail could be considered, though getting back up to the top without the use of a vehicle may make it unattractive to riders. To remedy this problem, a shuttle service could be offered from the bottom of the trail that would drive mountain bikers and their equipment to the top of the trail, allowing them to ride downhill several times over the course of a day.

## Restroom Operations

The current restrooms at the park are limited in annual operational days by state regulations because the facility utilizes a well for its water source. After 60 operational days, regular water testing is required to continue to operate. A possible solution would be to work with the developer of the neighboring residential sites (across the state line) to see if they have a non-well water source that could be tapped in to. If such an agreement is able to be reached, the restroom and related facilities could be open more.

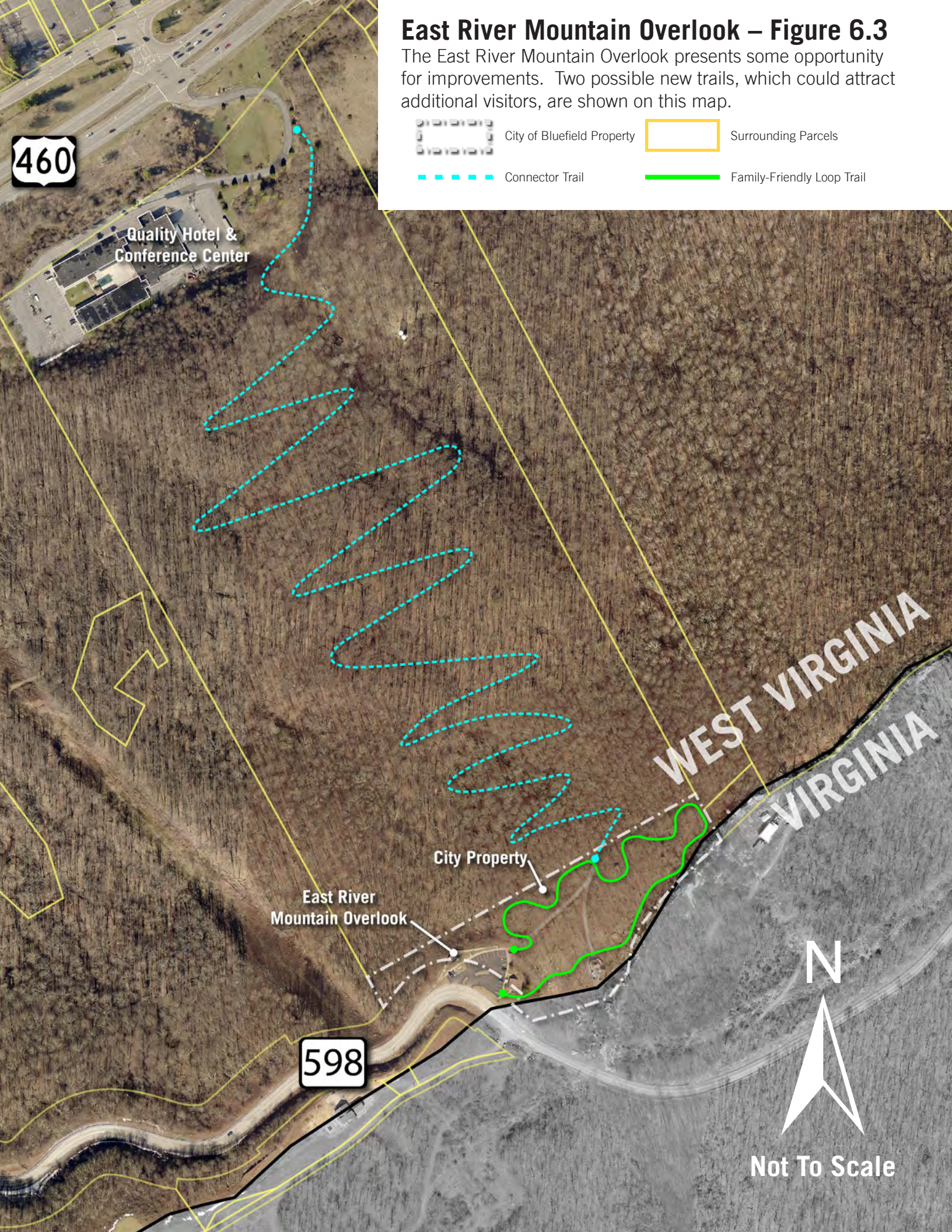
## Security

Not uncommon in isolated recreational facilities, the overlook property has been prone to vandalism. The installation of security cameras may help deter criminal activity at the park. Additionally, more regular visits by staff and police could offer further deterrents.



## East River Mountain Overlook – Figure 6.3

The East River Mountain Overlook presents some opportunity for improvements. Two possible new trails, which could attract additional visitors, are shown on this map.





# DOWNTOWN BLOCK

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## Big News for the City of Bluefield

During the production of this report, an announcement was made that Intuit had chosen the City of Bluefield from a list of over 900 community applicants as home to its next prosperity hub. The prosperity hub is part of Intuit's Mission Hope Project, whose goal is to help stimulate the economy of distressed communities by creating jobs in their downtown cores. The prosperity hub will include a customer success center for the Intuit QuickBooks software and an innovation lab to help small businesses. The project is expected to create between 200 and 500 jobs, nearly tripling the current downtown workforce, and will be located in the former First National Bank Building on Federal Street.

While this is certainly “game changing” news for the City of Bluefield, certain challenges will arise as city leaders begin to assess whether or not the town has the social and physical infrastructure capacity in place to absorb a sudden 200 percent influx of people into its downtown core. While things like housing, safety, healthcare, cost of living and education will certainly need to be evaluated, current physical infrastructure capacities such as data, utilities, stormwater facilities and cultural & social properties (parks and recreation, restaurants shopping) should be evaluated as well.

## The Importance of a Robust Urban Parks System

One of the most important, yet under-appreciated elements to a city's well-being is the quality and health of its public realm—in particular its system of parks and open spaces. Over time, these spaces have the potential

to become an integral part of the fabric of a town's identity. A great example of this is when somebody mentions Central Park, one's mind immediately goes to New York City. Although we're not advocating that the City of Bluefield undertake a project of that magnitude and scale, an opportunity does exist to create a vibrant, active, and interesting social space in the heart of their downtown, while enhancing the city's image and local economy.



An example of an active urban park in Wauwatosa, WI. Photo: GAI Consultants

Dynamic, well-designed urban spaces make our cities more sustainable, livable, and vibrant and contribute directly to a city's public health, economy, environment, education, and social scene. High-quality open spaces help drive economic development by attracting homebuyers and boosting residential property values by as much as 15% for people living adjacent to these assets—resulting in greater wealth for residents and increased tax revenues for cities' tax rolls. Parks also have the ability to contribute to workforce development, which is particularly pertinent in light of the recent Intuit announcement.



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A correlation can also be drawn between the quality of our parks and open spaces to the overall physical health of our citizens. It's no secret that people living near parks have greater opportunities to be physically active by running and walking, and that adopting an active lifestyle reduces stress and obesity and may even lower the risks of heart disease and diabetes.

Urban parks and open spaces are also critical to a city's environmental well-being. They support public health by purifying the air of pollutants such as carbon monoxide, and can offset the warming effects on a city's microclimate by making it cooler through the reduction of pavements and impervious surfaces. Urban greenspaces should also be used to capture and filter stormwater, reducing the amount of pollutants flowing from roads and lawns before they have the opportunity to contaminate nearby streams and rivers. In addition to cleaning stormwater runoff, urban green spaces can transport and store stormwater runoff that might otherwise overpower city storm sewer systems and cause costly flood damage and environmental pollution. This also benefits the city's economy by minimizing the need to build concrete pipes and additional stormwater infrastructure.

## The Creation of a New Town Square

So how do we create open space in our cities when there seems to be none available? An extraordinary opportunity exists to create a vital and activated public space in the heart of downtown Bluefield that will not only connect the downtown business district to major retail and entertainment amenities, but also function as a social hub for gatherings, recreation, concerts, plays, food trucks, and outdoor

activities.

The proposed +/- 1 acre property is bounded by Raleigh Street and Scott Street to the north and south, respectively, and Bland Street and Federal Street to the west and east, respectively. The northern third of the parcel is occupied by a small city park called Chicory Square, with the remainder of the property occupied by several vacant buildings that are currently slated for demolition. Most importantly, the former First National Bank Building that Intuit will be soon be occupying is adjacent to the property on the corner of Scott and Federal Street, and will provide instant activation to this newly proposed space. While Chicory Square appears to be well-maintained, it lacks the size and amenities necessary to serve as a major social hub in downtown. Also, in its current configuration, it is unable to accommodate the additional 200–500 Intuit employees who will be converging into downtown on a daily basis.



A busy Friday evening concert at Charleston's Haddad Riverfront Park. Photo: GAI Consultants

The design of any successful urban public realm project should involve considerations of both functionality and aesthetics. Functionality refers to how well the space accommodates the needs of its users and its programming. Aesthetics is quite simply about form

# DOWNTOWN BLOCK

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and image. To transform the space into a community asset and a vibrant urban core projecting the City of Bluefield as a positive and progressive community, functionality and aesthetics need to be considered simultaneously. While various aesthetic improvements, such as signage, lighting, gateways, and wayfinding will give Bluefield's new town square a sense of place, if the design doesn't respond to its programming on a functional level, it will fail. The following lists some basic universal considerations that should be followed when working within the public realm:

- The design should create and reinforce Bluefield's identity and sense of place and contribute to the overall city image;
- The design should be flexible and adaptable to multiple functions;
- The design should be well – maintained;
- The design should serve as a central connection node for the entire downtown core;
- The design should cater to all four seasons;
- The design should have easy access and promote public use and participation;
- The design should encourage social activities, communication, and social integration;
- The design should create both physically and socially accessible environments;
- The design should promote environmental sustainability and low-cost maintenance;
- The design should promote public art, cultural activities, and entertainment.
- The space could incorporate parking by building an underground garage and placing greenspace on the top of the deck.
- Portions of the block could be considered for retail development as long as adequate greenspace is held back from development.



Pittsburgh's United Steelworkers Plaza is a greenspace constructed on top of a parking garage. Photo: GAI Consultants

In light of the recent Intuit announcement, it is critical that the City of Bluefield rethink the role of its downtown public realm. It has been shown that in areas where urban parks have been used as redevelopment tool, surrounding vacancy rates have dramatically dropped by as much as 40%. If done properly, Bluefield's new town square has the ability to create construction and maintenance jobs, stimulate workforce development, and encourage and promote commerce and housing. Additionally, Bluefield's new urban square has the potential to promote community engagement and civic pride, and will attract and connect individuals of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds for years to come.



## Downtown Block Area – Figure 6.4

The location of the downtown block being considered for redevelopment is highlighted here, as well as the proposed location for Intuit.



**intuit**  
future location

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Not To Scale



# KEE DAM SITE

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## Overview

At around 550 acres, the Kee Dam Reservoir property represents one of the best opportunities for recreational growth in the City of Bluefield. The site consists of a large reservoir and dam surrounded by acres of mountainous wooded terrain. The Kee Dam Reservoir is currently a drinking water source for the surrounding communities. However, in 2021, water will no longer be drawn from this source, allowing the site to be opened up for further recreational use and development. The current use as a drinking water source has likely been beneficial to the site, as water sources are often protected from over-development and pollution.



The Kee Dam Reservoir as seen from the West side of the reservoir. Photo: West Virginia Tourism

The property is bisected by Airport Road, which connects the City of Bluefield to the Mercer County Airport. Additionally, the site adjoins parcels which are owned by the City of Princeton, Mercer County, and the Mercer County Airport Authority. All together, there are over 2000 acres of mostly wooded land in these parcels. Interest in a collaborative development effort between the county and both cities has been expressed.

The proposed route of the King Coal Highway will eventually make its way through the Kee Dam property, where the roadway will be connected to Airport Road. A construction project for the continuation of the current roadway, which will traverse up to this point, broke ground in the spring of 2019, and is anticipated to be completed by late 2021. Once complete, the majority of travelers heading north to the Hatfield-McCoy Trails will be routed along Airport Road and through the site. Additionally, with the construction of the road, some areas will be graded out and left more level than their current state, which could provide space for development. It is the understanding of the consultant team that some land around a proposed interchange with Airport Road will be leveled. If this is indeed the case, this would provide a good opportunity for development of services catering to travelers, such as a service station.

## Adventure Tourism

Steep topography and heavily forested terrain mean that a fair amount of the property does not lend itself to traditional park development such as open greenspaces or athletic fields. However, these areas of the property are well-suited for development of adventure tourism offerings, such as mounting biking, hiking trails, ropes courses, zip lines, campgrounds, and primitive campsites.

Trail development would likely be the easiest aspect of adventure tourism to undertake when considering cost and environmental impact. The variety of land available will likely make it possible to develop trails with a broad range of difficulties and uses. Biking and hiking trails could be shared or developed as separate systems to reduce use conflicts. For example, it may make more sense to develop the steeper



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areas as downhill mountain bike trails, while less steep areas could be better suited for hiking. With the trail system being developed mostly from scratch, it would be advantageous for Parks and Recreation to consult a professional trail builder with regional familiarity to assist in the design and construction of trails.



Primitive tent camping in a heavily wooded area. Photo: National Parks Service

Tent campsites are another amenity that could be developed on the property early on. To begin, primitive campsites consisting of tent pads and small cooking or fire areas could be placed individually along the newly formed trails, or in small clusters. This would provide an alternative lodging option for visitors in the region and help establish the site as a destination. Over time, Parks and Recreation could then explore developing a full campground suitable for tent campers and RV users. It may also be sensible for Parks and Recreation to form a public-private partnership with an established campground operator to develop such facilities. While the terms of these agreements vary, it is possible that the City could lease property to an operator, who would then develop the campground and operate it for a set period of time. Once that time period is over, the property and

improvements could then either revert to the City, or an extension of the agreement could be negotiated. While it does not work for every situation, a public-private partnership could help the property be developed more quickly and at less upfront expense to the City of Bluefield versus developing it by themselves.

As mentioned previously in Chapter 5, zip lines and ropes courses are another adventure tourism element that would compliment the existing conditions of the Kee Dam site. The City could take advantage of some of the existing unique features of the site to make attractive zip line runs or ropes courses. Given that the City owns hills on either side of the reservoir, it may be possible to have a single long length of zip line that takes passengers across the water from a high point, such as a ridge line, down to a lower landing point.

Like campgrounds, zip lines and ropes courses are items which may be best developed through a public-private partnership, as construction and operation costs can be high. Furthermore, with the existing regional competition, having an experienced operator would likely be the best way to establish and promote the facility. However, having such a facility could help attract visitors into the City of Bluefield proper.

## Motocross Course

The popularity of power sports in the region, as well as the proximity to existing trail networks, should be a driving factor when considering development of the Kee Dam site. There is relatively limited competition for motocross courses in the surrounding community. These factors suggest that the Kee Dam property may be a viable location for a motocross course. It would be practical to cross-promote the facility with the Hatfield-McCoy trail network as a way

# KEE DAM SITE

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to attract a broad range of riders. For example, a motocross competition could be held on a weekend. Riders who may come for the competition could then extend their stay into the following week to take advantage of the extensive trail network. Or, regular trail riders may decide to stay for an extended period to observe the aforementioned races and competitions.



A regional motocross qualifying race event . Photo: MX Motorsports

## ATV Training Course

Although there is ample of property available at the Kee Dam site, development of a full ATV-focused trail network could detract from other possible uses of the site, as ATV riding typically conflicts with hiking and mountain biking. However, developing a small, dedicated trail network and area for ATV and off-road riding training is a more feasible amenity for the Kee Dam site.

An ATV and off-road training facility could be focused at multiple rider groups. One potentially lucrative group would be training for employees of companies doing work in the energy field, for which ATVs may be used to access remote job sites. Companies typically require their employees to undergo safety

training prior to operating ATVs. This is done to ensure that operators understand how to safely use the machinery. Furthermore, if a company is found to have not properly trained their employees, the company could be liable to lawsuits should an ATV accident occur.

There are various outlets that offer ATV safety training, but many are promoting Internet-based learning. While this may satisfy safety requirements for some companies, most would likely prefer practical, in-person training. One such organization that offers in-person training is the California-based ATV Safety Institute. Their courses range from basic riding to on-the-job training, as well training to become a certified ATV safety instructor. This organization is currently seeking locations to host in-person training courses.



Riders practicing off-roading maneuvers. Photo: High Desert SAR Training

Beyond safety training for job-related ATV use, more opportunities to cater to corporate customers are likely available. The Hatfield-McCoy trail system typically attracts people with an interest in the outdoors who have previous ATV riding experience. One potentially untapped market is promoting the trails for use by corporate groups looking for employee



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retreats and team building activities. A training facility could function as a starting point for groups and provide inexperienced riders with a proper location to learn trail etiquette and safe operating procedures. Once riders have undergone safety training, they could then be transported to the nearby Hatfield-McCoy Trails. After a day of trail riding on equipment rented from a local supplier, the groups could be brought back to the Kee Dam site, or be shuttled to downtown Bluefield to take advantage of local restaurants, bars, and shopping.



ATV safety training. Photo: West Virginia University Extension Service

Another factor that supports the idea of creating and ATV training course is that the State of West Virginia requires operators under the age of 18 to attend an ATV Safety Awareness Course conducted by the West Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles. The class has been offered in several locations throughout the state since its inception. Having a training area within proximity to an existing trail network such as Hatfield-McCoy that could regularly host safety classes would be advantageous for riders. Additionally, as West Virginia has some of the highest numbers of ATV-related deaths per capita, having safety training readily available

for riders would be a great benefit to the surrounding community.

Knott County, Kentucky, which is about 3.5 hours away from Bluefield, operates an ATV and Motorcycle Rider Training Center that opened in 2007. The facility is adjacent to a 200+ mile network of off-road trails frequently used by ATVs. The center was established to address the high number of ATV and motorcycle related injuries and deaths in their region. A facility like this provides a good model to be followed at the Kee Dam site.

The West Virginia University Extension Service has recently entered into a partnership with ATV manufacturer Polaris' community outreach organization, the Polaris Foundation, in an effort to improve rider safety. The partnership will establish a safety training program with the intent of it traveling to various locations throughout the state to offer education for riders. The Kee Dam site could be used as a host for the program, or the City of Bluefield could even consider partnering with both organizations to establish a permanent home to the program.



Riders of all ages can benefit from safety training. Photo: Knott County ATV and Motorcycle Training Center

# KEE DAM SITE

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## ATV-Focused Lodging

With the popularity of ATV-riding in the region, multiple locations offering ATV-focused lodging have opened up in the surrounding communities. These facilities are geared towards out-of-town guests who typically spend several days riding trails in the area. Sites range from houses that have been converted to group lodging, to fully developed resorts with small cabins and RV camping sites. Many sites also feature amenities such as WiFi, laundry, restaurants, and general stores.

Although there is competition in the area (highlighted in Figure 6.5), the Kee Dam site presents a strong opportunity to develop ATV-focused lodging with amenities that will set it apart from other locations. As the property is positioned along the proposed route of the King Coal Highway, many ATV riders will be routed past the Kee Dam site on their way to existing trails. Ease of access is important, particularly when hauling a trailer, as many ATV riders do. Allowing for easy access and trailer parking makes a site very inviting to ATV users. A lodging facility could leverage this by operating a service to transport individuals and their equipment to trailheads, while giving them a location to safely park their trucks and trailers.

Individual cabins and campsites are the most popular lodging type available at competitive facilities. Most offer RV hookups at the campsites, and a few primitive tent pads are also available. Lodge-style cabins that can accommodate larger groups such as corporate retreats or families are another form of lodging that should be considered. Regardless, a variety of lodging options would allow the site to attract a broad range of users.



An example of an existing ATV-focused lodging facility in Bluefield, VA. Photo: Trailhead ATV Resort

The potential diversity of recreational options at the Kee Dam site is what could make it stand out from competitive lodging facilities. Access to hiking and biking trails, as well as fishing and kayaking in the reservoir, are great opportunities not readily available elsewhere. Although the facility is farther from the trails, it is closer to downtown Bluefield. All of these factors could be leveraged to attract groups or families by offering a varied experience. For example, groups may have individuals who do not necessarily want to spend their entire weekend on ATV trails. As such, a lodging facility with other recreational assets and downtown access is a more enticing option.

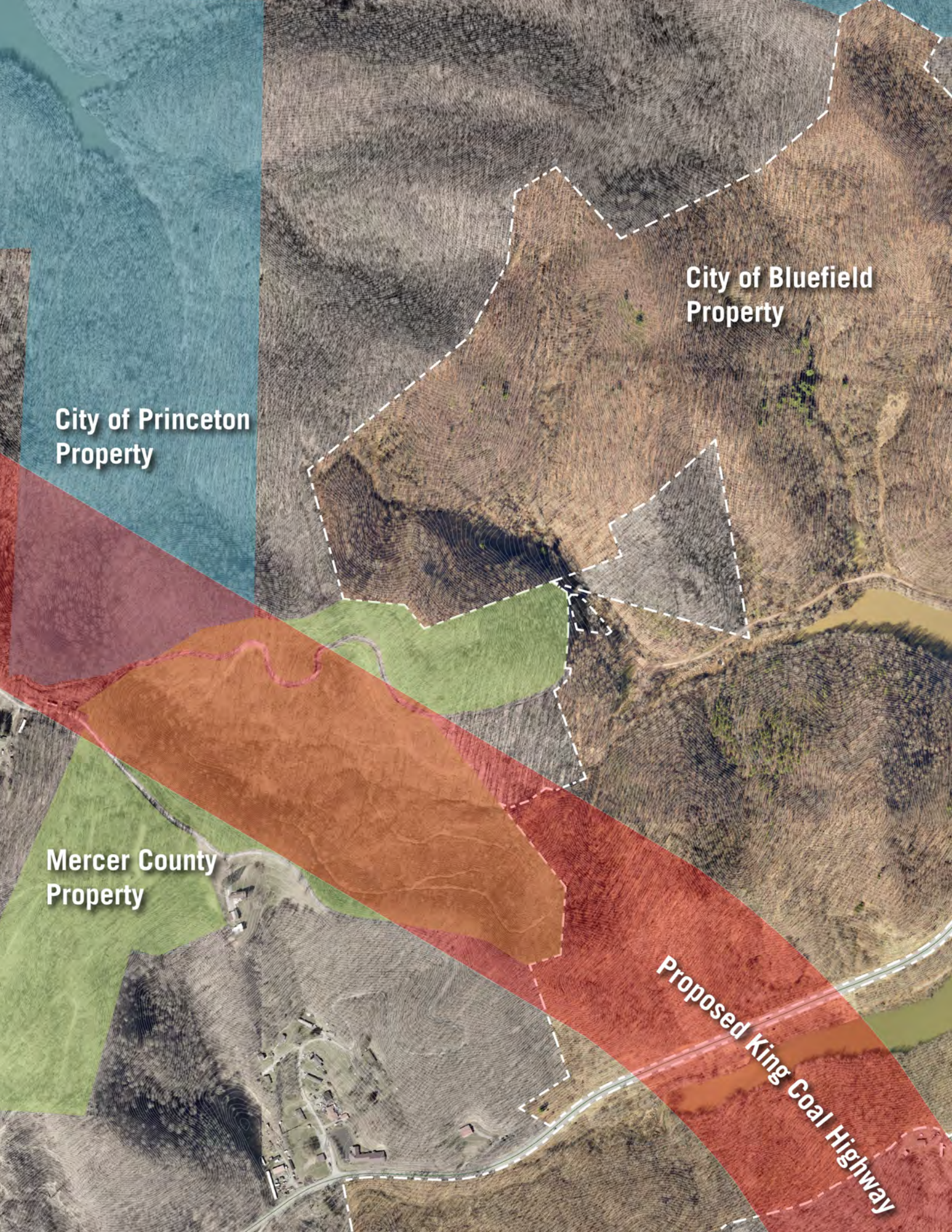
## Fly-In Tourism

The Kee Dam site is a short drive from the Mercer County Airport. Once recreational amenities are established, the site could be marketed toward private plane owners looking for weekend adventures. The Kee Dam could be both a lodging location and activity hub for pilots and their guests, and be tied in with downtown events to promote tourism throughout the City and region.



Figure 6.5		Competitive ATV-Focused Lodging							
		Source: GAI Consultants, ESRI							
Name	State	City	Distance from Downtown Bluefield, WV	Distance from Pocahontas Trailhead (Bramwell, WV)	Distance from Spearhead Trail System (Pocahontas, VA)	Cabin Units	RV Sites	Other Amenities	ATV Rentals
Trailhead ATV Resort	VA	Bluefield	13 miles	6 miles	3 miles	14	7	Pet friendly, WiFi, Food	Yes
Pocahontas ATV Resort	WV	Bramwell	11 miles	3.2 miles	1 mile	11	2	Lodge, Store	No
Real McCoy Cabins	VA	Pocahontas	11 miles	4 miles	1 mile	6	2	Store, Restaurant, Laundry	No
Bramwell ATV Resort	WV	Bramwell	9 miles	0.4 miles	7 miles	2	2	Apartment & House also Available	No
Busted ATV Resort	WV	Bramwell	8 miles	1 mile	4 miles	2	-		No
The Mud Pit ATV Resort	WV	Montcalm	9 miles	5 miles	9 miles	10	5	Garage, Repairs, Store, Fuel	No
Buffalo Trail Cabins	WV	Bluefield	6 miles	4 miles	7 miles	40	5	Restaurant, Bar, Unique Cabins	No
Coal Heritage Camping	WV	Bluefield	5 miles	5 miles	8 miles	-	20		No
Hillbilly Hideaway ATV Resort	WV	Bramwell	10 miles	1.5 miles	5 miles	5	-		No
Crane Creek Cabins	WV	Montcalm	9 miles	6 miles	11 miles	3	-	Pet Friendly	No
Four-Wheeler Heaven	WV	Coaldale	11 miles	0 miles	7 miles	2	2	Pool At One Cabin	No
Maybeury ATV Resort	WV	Maybeury	14 miles	1.7 miles	7 miles	1	-		No
Ashland Resort	WV	Northfork	17 miles	11 miles	15 miles	43	30	Store, WiFi, Playground, Laundry	Yes





**City of Princeton  
Property**

**City of Bluefield  
Property**

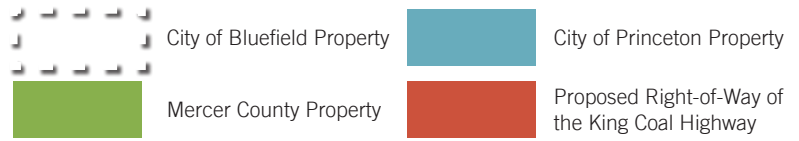
**Mercer County  
Property**

**Proposed King Coal Highway**



## Kee Dam Site – Figure 6.6

With around 550 acres of land owned by the City of Bluefield, the Kee Dam site presents ample opportunity for recreational growth. Future extensions of the King Coal Highway will assist in making the site a destination point for travelers.





# GENERAL CITY-WIDE IMPROVEMENTS

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Although the City of Bluefield does have quality parks and recreation assets, general improvements can be made at each facility to further strengthen the overall system.

## Safety and Security

Multiple steps to increase public safety and park security should be taken as the parks system strives to improve. When possible, more regular patrols by police should be completed. A regular law enforcement presence will typically be a strong deterrent for crime in a public facility. Furthermore, having staff present during regular operational hours of each facility will act as an additional deterrent for undesirable activities. Several members of the Bluefield Parks and Recreation leadership team are already well versed in Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles. When practical, these principles should be enacted at recreational facilities.

Recently, several Parks and Recreation locations have been prong to vandalism and other crimes. Security cameras can help to deter crime and increase safety at Parks and Recreation properties. Wireless technology makes it possible to provide a live feed of a facility to police and security when power and a cellular phone signal is available. It is then easier to catch vandals in the act or to identify a perpetrator after vandalism has taken place. As such, security cameras should be installed at Parks properties, in particular at facility entrances and major activity areas.

Of the aforementioned properties that have been vandalized, the restroom facilities at City Park and East River Mountain Overlook have been hit the most. As improvements are made to each facility, vandal-resistant fixtures such

as toilets and sinks should be installed. While it is not possible to completely vandal-proof a fixture, having a fixture that is difficult to damage can deter a lot of criminal activity.

## Maintenance

While great strides have been made in the parks system over the last few years, the opportunity for improved maintenance practices still exists. One thing that hampers parks currently is that the maintenance of the facilities typically falls under City Works. Dedicated maintenance staff for Parks and Recreation should be hired, though supplemental labor from City Works may still be necessary due to the number of properties maintained. If the parks system expands in the future, maintenance staff may need to be increased.

A seasonal maintenance checklist for each facility should be developed. This will assist in managing staff allocation and help Parks and Recreation leadership see where supplemental or volunteer labor may be necessary.



Regular inspection and repair of playground equipment is an important park maintenance aspect. Photo: PlayCore



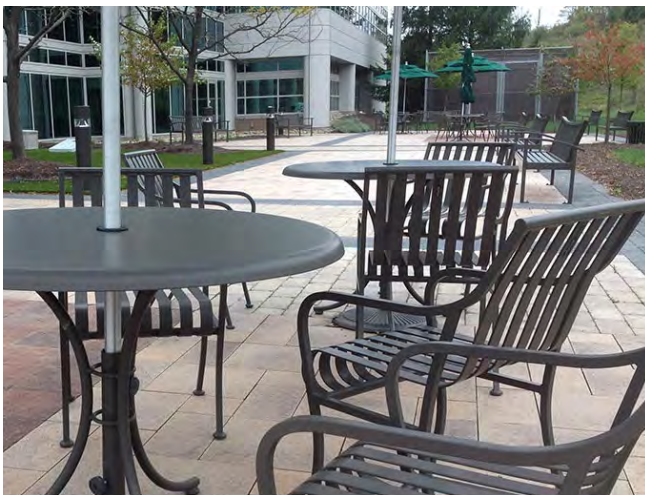
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## Community Involvement

Currently, there is strong community involvement in both the upkeep and improvements of Parks and Recreation properties. For instance, a regular group of volunteers are used for trails maintenance at City Park. These types of groups will continue to be essential for the future maintenance, advocacy, and fundraising efforts for Bluefield Parks and Recreation. Establishing more groups or growing current groups is something that needs to be continued moving forward.

## Site Furnishings

Throughout existing parks, various brands and styles of furnishings are have been used. This is not uncommon among parks systems, but should be corrected when possible. As Parks and Recreation continues to update facilities, all site furnishings should be standardized across the system. Although doing so does have some cost, having a common design language at each facility helps to create a sense of identity. Additionally, it is then easier to obtain replacement parts when necessary.



Site furnishings with consistent design elements help create a uniform sense of space. Photo: Keystone Ridge Designs

## Landscape

Parks typically are among the most environmentally friendly part of any city. To further strengthen this relationship, steps should be taken to ensure that parks are not detracting from the natural environments which they occupy. For example, Parks and Recreation should consider the following items:

- New plantings should all consist of native vegetation.
- Trees should be planted in clusters to increase the efficiency of mowing and maintenance around each tree group.
- In heavily paved areas, tree islands should be utilized to reduce the increase in heat caused from the sun reflecting off of pavement.
- When practical, green infrastructure elements such as rain gardens or bioretention areas should be favored over traditional infrastructure such as buried drainage systems.
- If landscape areas are disturbed, temporary seeding and mulching should be used to reduce the potential for runoff or erosion until land can be repaired.



An example of erosion and sediment controls for a disturbed area. Photo: WVDEP

# TRANSPORTATION

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Transportation is not a direct part of the mission of Bluefield Parks and Recreation, however, ensuring access to recreational facilities can benefit the overall system by making the parks more accessible. By bringing people into parks and events, the City can further improve the quality of life for citizens and increase revenue-generation opportunities for the Parks system.

## Bus Route Recommendations

The current bus routes service a large area of the City and reach into surrounding communities, however, operational hours are limited. The current bus schedule operates from 7 am with the last pickup of passengers occurring around 5 pm. This limits people who work traditional work hours from being able to access parks and recreation in the evening via bus. Furthermore, passengers who work nontraditional hours may only be able to utilize the bus for one way, either to or returning home from work. The City should work with Bluefield Area Transit to expand the operational hours to better accommodate bus passengers.

## Sidewalk Enhancements

An accessible and safe sidewalk system is key to any successful city. Walking is the most basic form of travel, and needs to be accommodated throughout the city. However, challenging topography and the favoring of vehicular travel has left some areas inaccessible for pedestrians. Additionally, in the City of Bluefield, sidewalk maintenance and repair are the responsibility of individual property owners. These factors have resulted in a disconnected system of sidewalks that are in disrepair in many areas.

The city has recently undertaken several sidewalk repair projects. In addition, the State

of West Virginia is working to bring sidewalks within their right-of-way into compliance with ADA design standards. The City should continue these efforts moving forward. They should also work to educate property owners on City policies regarding sidewalk maintenance and repair. A City-funded grant program could be used to assist property owners with limited financial resources. Furthermore, the City could look at state-funded grants, such as the Transportation Alternative grant program, to make additional sidewalk improvements.

For existing City parks and recreational assets, the city should ensure that sidewalks (or trails) allow pedestrians to access each facility. If there is not currently access, creating sidewalks should become a priority project, unless the site is impractical for sidewalks access (such as the East River Mountain Overlook).

## Multimodal Transit Facility

As part of preparations for the arrival of Intuit, the City of Bluefield is considering converting the current location of the TailYard Dog Park and Greenspace into a parking area for employees of new downtown tenants and visitors. The TailYard will then be relocated and a new downtown greenspace is proposed to offset the loss of the current park. When developing the parking area, the City should take the opportunity to create a multimodal transit facility. As the proposed site is just a block away from the heart of downtown, it would make a great hub for various modes of transportation. Vehicles, buses, bicycles, and pedestrians should all be accounted for when planning the facility. Additionally, it will be important to develop a proper method of stormwater management, as the facility will likely need a large area of impervious surfaces.



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## Bicycle Routes

As the City of Bluefield moves forward, creating complete streets should be at the forefront of planning discussions. Complete streets are streets designed to serve not just automobiles, but also pedestrians, cyclists, and transit passengers. One aspect of complete street planning is the creation of bike lanes and designated bike routes. The existing infrastructure of the City presents the opportunity to add both features in multiple locations. While this is not part of the function of Parks and Recreation, bike routes could be leveraged to make the parks more accessible for users. Additionally, a fully developed system of bicycle routes could make the city more attractive for prospective residents and visitors. When planning for future bike routes, the City should attempt to connect the routes to places such as schools, retail centers, civic landmarks, and recreational assets.

## Types of Bike Routes

### Shared Route

Shared routes should occur in areas where vehicular and bicycle traffic can safely coexist. These areas include low traffic and low speed limit areas (under 30 mph), as well as some more dense areas such as a downtown setting where congestion causes vehicles to travel more cautiously. These lanes are typically delineated with a traffic marking called a “sharrow”, which suggests the route cyclists should travel and notifies motorists of the presence of cyclists. If the roadway is to be used in full by cyclists, the marking should be placed in the center of the roadway. In Bluefield, these lanes could possibly work downtown or on residential and other low speed roadways.



Example of a shared route. Graphic: GAI Consultants

### Bicycle Lane

A Bicycle lane is a portion of roadway dedicated for use by cyclists and delineated with signs and pavement markings. Unless on one-way streets, these lanes should be placed on the outside of the vehicular lane. Minimum width of the lanes should be 4 feet, but 5 to 6 feet is preferred where possible. A large portion of College Avenue could be suitable for the marking of bike lanes, which would increase accessibility to the FitRec.

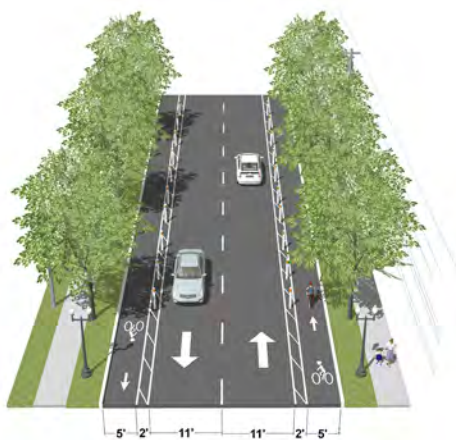


Example of dedicated bicycle lanes. Graphic: GAI Consultants

# TRANSPORTATION

## Buffered Bicycle Lane

Buffered bike lanes are similar to a standard bike lane in design and use, with the exception of some form of buffer occurring between the vehicular and bicycle use of the roadway. The buffer can be as simple as an area with a hatched pavement marking or include an actual physical barrier such as bollards. The buffer should be at least 2 feet in width. Existing streets with wide paved lanes could be utilized to develop buffered bike lanes. Portions of Bland Road are wide enough to be marked for buffered bike lanes, though the number of intersections and driveways connected to the road dictates that the buffer be a pavement marking.



Example of buffered bicycle lanes. Graphic: GAI Consultants

## Shared Route with Uphill Bicycle Lane

In a city such as Bluefield, topography could pose a challenge for cyclists. On streets with enough width for only one dedicated bike lane, the lane should be on the side of the roadway that travels uphill. This allows a safe place for cyclists to traverse uphill without slowing vehicular traffic behind them. The downhill side of the roadway could then be a shared route as cyclists will be able to use gravity or pedaling to maintain speed. As with regular

shared routes, these should be utilized in areas with lower vehicular speed limits (under 30 mph) and traffic counts. The width of the uphill lane should be 6 to 7 feet to allow for additional maneuvering by cyclists.



Example of a shared route with uphill bicycle lanes. Graphic: GAI Consultants

## Design Constraints

Multiple factors could affect the development of bicycle routes in the City of Bluefield and into surrounding communities. Any routes occurring on state or federally maintained roads would be subject to the approval of the governing agencies of those roadways. However, funding for the development of bicycle routes on those roadways may be available from said agencies. Connecting bicycle routes across state lines could prove to be challenging. However, as it is likely that Bluefield College students are users of Bluefield Parks and Recreation assets, it is important to make this connection.

In areas where drivers are not used to cyclists, drivers may not know what laws are needed to be followed. Once bike lanes are developed, an educational campaign for vehicle drivers on how to treat bicycle routes and cyclists should be completed. The implementation of such an educational campaign will increase the safety for both cyclists and drivers.





Rendering showing dedicated bike lanes on College Avenue near the FitRec. Graphic: GAI Consultants



Rendering showing buffered bike lanes along Bland Road. Graphic: GAI Consultants



#### Shared-Use Route connecting to BSC

Although traffic volume and vehicular speed are a concern, the existing pavement may not allow for dedicated bike lanes. A shared-use route connected to Bluefield State College would make it easier for students to travel to and from class.

#### Bike Lanes along Princeton and Bluefield Avenue

As Princeton and Bluefield Avenues are major vehicular thoroughfares, bike route development could be a challenge. Having bike lanes, and possibly buffered bike lanes, would be necessary for cyclist safety next to fast-moving vehicles.

#### Shared-Use w/ Uphill Bike Lanes

Although Thorn Street and Bryant Street present major topographical challenges, they do connect into the back of City Park. Shared-use w/ uphill bike lanes could make this portion of the route a feasible idea.

#### Bike Lanes along College Avenue

The existing roadway along College Avenue is oversized for two lanes of travel. The excess pavement could be striped for bike lanes, which would provide a safe bicycle route connection to the FitRec.

#### Shared-Use Route crossing into Virginia

Connecting local colleges to the City of Bluefield via bike routes is a major goal, but there could be some logistical and design issues when crossing state lines. Further consideration for this shared-use route would be necessary.

#### Shared-Use Route






Connecting Bluefield State College to the City of Bluefield via bike routes is important. Although traffic volume and vehicular speed are a concern, the existing pavement may not allow for dedicated bike lanes. A shared-use route connected to Bluefield State College would make it easier for students to travel to and from class.





## Concept Bicycle Route Plan – Figure 6.7

On this page is a conceptual plan for bike routes in the City of Bluefield. This plan is conceptual only and is not to be used for construction. Should the City decide to move forward with the development of bicycle routes, analysis of existing conditions and safety factors would need to be completed.

-  Dedicated or Buffered Bike Lanes
-  Alternative Shared-Use Route
-  Shared-Use w/ Uphill Lanes
-  Shared-Use Route w/ Design Concern
-  Shared-Use Route

### Multi-Modal Transit Facility

If the existing greenspace is converted into a parking area, a multi-modal transit facility should be developed. Features such as a bus stop, varieties of bike parking, and pedestrian connections into downtown should be considered.

### Shared-Use w/ Uphill Bike Lanes along Bland St.

The existing roadway along Bland Street alternates between two travel lanes with and without parking. Creating dedicated bike lanes could be a challenge, so the best solution may be to have a shared-use route with uphill bike lanes.

### Buffered Bike Lanes along Bland Road

Bland Road currently has two lanes of travel, with an ample shoulder on either side (likely wide enough to fit additional travel lanes or parking). This should space could be utilized to develop comfortable buffered bike lanes.

### Shared-Use Route along Cumberland Road

Lack of existing pavement and the topography on either side of the right-of-way make a shared-use route the most plausible solution. However, existing traffic volume and vehicular speed are a concern for bike route development.



### Route along Cumberland Road

Bluefield High School to a bicycle route. However, existing traffic volume and vehicular speed are a concern for bike route development. Traffic calming may be needed to create this connection.

Not To Scale





Bluefield/Welch

Mercer  
County  
Airport

52

Wayne

Bedford Park

Pulaski Street Park

Tailor Yard

Chicory

Midway Park

Genoa Park

Rotary C

19

East River Park

Youth Center

FitRec

Fairview Park

City  
Park

Mitchell Stadium

South Bluefield

460

Bluefield, VA

Bluefield





## Existing Public Transportation – Figure 6.8

Public Transportation in Bluefield is provided by Bluefield Area Transit (BAT). BAT is a division of the City of Bluefield and is funded by passenger fares as well as Federal and State administered grants. BAT services Mercer and McDowell Counties with routes into Bluefield, Princeton, Athens, and Welch. The system also connects with Graham Transit in Bluefield, VA to help provide extended service into the neighboring state. Several City recreational assets sit along exiting BAT routes. This relationship could be leveraged to bring more people into the parks and to special recreation related events.





# STRATEGIC ACTIONS

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## Policy and Planning Actions

### Interlocal Agreement

Currently, City Park is divided by the state boundary between Virginia and West Virginia. Mitchell Stadium, some of the trail network and parking, and a portion of the tennis courts are located in West Virginia, while the rest of the park facilities are located on the Virginia side of the boundary.

The state of West Virginia currently maintains the park, however, policing that occurs on the Virginia side of the border must be administered by the Town of Bluefield, Virginia. According to the 1939 deed description for the property, the City of Bluefield owns the property through a land conveyance from Bluefield College to five Trustees (three from West Virginia and two from Virginia). Based on a letter from the City Solicitor for the City of Bluefield, “It is clear from these conveyances, copies of which are in City files, that this property was purchased by, and on behalf of, the City of Bluefield, West Virginia, and that the Trustees were appointed to hold the legal title for the equitable owner, the City of Bluefield, West Virginia. It is not known, with certainty, why the Board of Directors of Bluefield, West Virginia, chose this method of title holding, and conversations with the surviving Trustees and a check of City files throws no light on the situation. I believe that the reason this was done rather than granting title in fee simple to the City itself was that it was extremely questionable in 1939 whether a West Virginia municipal corporation could own real property outside the State.” Subsequently, in 1962, the Virginia section of the park was conveyed to the City of Bluefield with the stipulation that the land be used for recreational purposes or other similar benign uses.

Bowen Field is operated by the Bluefield Baseball Club, with the City of Bluefield contributing \$50,000 a year to operations at the field, in part allowing the City access to field use when the Minor League season is completed. The Town of Bluefield contributes a much smaller amount toward operations at Bowen Field. While the Town of Bluefield’s contribution toward operations is notably smaller, they receive tax revenues generated by the baseball games.

Since operations at the various facilities at City Park are relatively disjointed, it is recommended that the City and Town enter into a form of interlocal agreement relative to operations and maintenance at the park (potentially also including oversight at all of the park properties under the umbrella of both jurisdictions). Any type of interlocal agreement will require consultation with an attorney, given the fact that the park straddles two separate states with unique state legislation. However, since the existing deed grants control to the City, the legal ramifications are not clear. While it may also be possible to annex the Virginia portion of the property, again this action would require legal counsel.

The consolidation of parks and recreation services would allow for cost efficiencies by reducing duplication of overhead as well as allow for a more efficient determination of park needs across jurisdictional boundaries. Some form of interlocal agreement would also ensure that benefits are shared fairly. A joint Capital Improvement Program, especially as it applies to City Park, could be determined based on the needs of the entire region instead of the needs of one specific jurisdiction. Joint operations might also allow for a more effective strategy for pursuing alternative funding, including



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joint lobbying for legislation that might enable alternative funding for park operations. A few examples of park interlocal agreements are included within the appendix of this report.

## **Capital Improvement Programming**

It is our understanding that the Parks and Recreation Department does not currently have a Capital Improvement Program in place. The parks department should use this document as a starting point for itemizing and prioritizing desired capital improvements. Such plans can reflect a five to ten-year planning period and reevaluated on an annual basis.

Similarly, an asset management plan, which itemizes repairs and replacement, can help the department adequately set aside funding for upkeep.

## **City of Bluefield Department Coordination**

Ensure departmental coordination and collaboration between the Parks and Recreation Department and other relevant City of Bluefield departments such as Public Works and Economic Development. This will continue to guarantee that the parks department coordinates with other departments with respect to issues that cross department lines, such as needed transportation improvements and the development of amenities which might serve recreational users and visitors.

## **Address Changing Demographics**

Plan for the changing needs of an aging community and consider the inclusion of facilities and programming that will appeal to older adults (e.g., designs that address accessibility and a feeling of security).

## **Cost Recovery**

Examine cost recovery practices and how they might effectively address park and recreation budgeting.

# STRATEGIC ACTIONS

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## Look to Additional Traditional and/or Non-traditional Funding Sources

### Strengthen Partnerships

It will be important to investigate potential partnerships to provide for the increasing demands for recreational facilities and programming. New capital improvements will likely require a creative approach for financing, with a strategic partnership as a potential way to fund new facilities.

During the public input process, GAI spoke with numerous current and potential partnering organizations that are active in the region and offer potential partnership opportunities as well as resources. Some of these organizations include local colleges, the Mercer County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), the local school district, area foundations, and local charities.

There are a number of potential opportunities to partner with these organizations to provide outdoor (and potentially indoor) recreation facilities, youth programs, and health and wellness activities. The parks department should continue conversations with each of these organizations in order to better understand how a partnership might be most impactful. This would include looking at the potential alignment of each group's missions, goals, and objectives. After these guiding principles have been discussed, more detailed discussions that deal with the management and implementation of each partnership opportunity can begin.

The Parks and Recreation Department should also work with existing recreational groups and other ad hoc groups to ensure implementation of new capital improvements, as well as ongoing operations and maintenance. For example, there are existing groups involved in cycling, and these groups could help identify the potential new locations for bike trails as it relates to existing trails and connectivity.

Major employers and healthcare institutions also provide another important partnership opportunity. The City of Bluefield should continue (or initiate) conversations with potential partners such as Intuit and Bluefield Regional Medical Center.

Local colleges, such as Bluefield State College (BSC) and Bluefield College (BC) represent another partnership opportunity. It is our understanding that interest has been expressed by BC to utilize facilities such as the Youth Center and Auditorium as an indoor athletics practice space. It would be advantageous for Parks and Recreation to permit BC to lease the entire facility. BC and the City could enter into a long-term lease where BC would assume the operational expenses of the facility. Additionally, BC could then use their staff to operate traditional programming of the facility, like basketball tournaments.

With Bluefield State College, there are additional opportunities worth exploring. Parks and Recreation offers various camps throughout the summer. They should explore partnering with BSC to formulate unique camp offerings, such as academic camps, as that is something that would be difficult for Parks to offer on their own. The unique camps could attract participants who may not have had interest in more traditional offerings by Parks.



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## **Earned Revenues, Contract Services, and Volunteers**

- Consider the opportunity for other revenue generating activities within the existing parks system, such as public campsites, running clubs, etc.
- Consider the potential use of contract services for certain elements of the parks system.

The City of Bluefield Parks and Recreation Department should continue to actively pursue other state and federal grant funds for identified capital improvements within the city. In order to leverage partnerships and other staff, the County should consider pursuing grant funding with other local partners or City departments.

## **Federal Grant Programs: Recreational Trails Program (RTP)**

In 1991, Congress initiated a number of reimbursable grant programs, including the RTP, designed to enhance America's "Livable Communities" through the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). The West Virginia Department of Transportation administers the program. Recommendations are made by the Recreational Trails Advisory Board (appointed by the Governor). The program is used to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities. Another potential fund to pursue is the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement grant (CMAQ) offered through the Federal Highway Administration.

## **Surface Transportation Program (STP)**

STP provides funding to states that may be used for "projects to preserve and improve conditions and performance on any Federal-aid highway, bridge and tunnel projects on any public road, pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and transit capital projects, including intercity bus terminals."

## **Five Star Restoration Grant**

The Five Star Restoration program is administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is intended to bring together various organizations (e.g., youth groups, conservation corps, government agencies) to provide environmental education and training through projects that restore wetlands. The program achieves its goals through technical support and by offering opportunities to exchange information and knowledge.

## **Conservation Alliance**

The Conservation Alliance engages businesses to help fund projects that protect wildlife habitats and sensitive environmental areas.

## **People for Bikes**

The People for Bikes Community Grant Program provides funding for projects that leverage federal funding for biking. Projects can include bike paths and trails, mountain bike trails, bike parks, and BMX facilities. The program is funded by bike industry partners such as Fuji, Shimano, and Trek.

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## National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF)

The NFWF provides funding to projects that “sustain, restore and enhance the nation’s fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats.”

## International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA)

The International Mountain Bike Association provides a Small Grants Program that provides help for mountain biking associations.

While foundations can provide an important conduit for pursuing funding, there are some disadvantages. For example, since the funding is reliant on donations, year-to-year funding can be unreliable. Also, the costs associated with raising money for the foundation can be relatively high. As an alternative, the city could look to direct-giving mechanisms to help fund parks. This could include the establishment of an endowment or trust fund. Other fundraising activities might include:

- An annual fund program that identifies donors that give to the organization on an annual basis.
- A direct mail campaign and annual donor event to thank all donors from the previous year.
- Tax Increment Financing (TIF) has been used to pay for park improvements in other parts of the state of West Virginia. Use of TIF funds must be approved by the State Development Office.
- In some cases, local jurisdictions have been able to sell the naming rights to help fund the construction of new park facilities. Naming rights can be a one-time payment or they can be allocated over a set period.

- Some park agencies are considering outsourcing certain functions that can be done more cost effectively by the private sector. In Kentucky, seasonal workers are being provided through a temp agency. Elsewhere, functions such as security and maintenance are being undertaken through outside contracts.

Long-term, consider the possibility of establishing a parks foundation for donations and for pursuing private foundation grants. Setting up a foundation would require legal and accounting expertise, but would allow for contributions of cash and property without paying taxes on those contributions and would also allow contributors to claim their donations as tax deductions. Private foundations are granted 501 (c) (3) status.

Running a foundation requires many of the same responsibilities of running a business, including maintaining records, filing taxes, and ongoing compliance issues. Park foundations are typically led by a volunteer board of directors, an executive director, and a small staff. In many cases, their primary function is to raise private funds, secure grants, and create partnerships to supplement a community’s needs for park facilities.

There are a number of examples of park foundations across the country. As an example, the Fairfax County Parks Foundation in Virginia supplements the Park Authority programs through individual, corporate, and foundation donors (totaling \$819,322 in 2014). Some of the programs funded through the foundation include summer camp scholarships for children in-need and construction of a fully accessible playground.



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## Earned Revenues & Increased Programming, Staffing

### Earned Revenues & Increased Programming

The City of Bluefield Parks and Recreation Department should consider establishing fees for certain activities and increase their programming opportunities as a way of generating new revenues for the department. The following activities could be implemented to increase revenue:

- Track all expenses and revenues for all programs, facilities, and services to understand their contribution to overall department costs recovery. Cost recovery levels for adults should be greater than for youth and senior programs.
- Analyze who is benefiting from programs, facilities, and services and to what degree they should be subsidized.
- Fees for certain programs should acknowledge the full cost of each program (those direct and indirect costs associated with program delivery) and where the program fits on the scale of who benefits from the program of service to determine appropriate cost recovery target.
- Review and optimize internally operated and contracted concessions operations.
- Review and increase pricing structure to include the annual rate of inflation and rising prices. The City should also continue to pursue differential fee pricing for residents and non-residents, and corporations versus nonprofits.
- The City Parks and Recreation Department should also increase programming options and continue to monitor desired programs and events every few years.

### Staffing

Look at existing staffing relative to proposed recommendations and ensure that the staffing capability exists to support new capital improvements and functions. In some cases, it is helpful to devote a position (either internal staff position or contract position) to fundraising for the parks system.



# BLUEFIELD WV

PARKS, RECREATION, AND OPEN  
SPACE MASTER PLAN

