

TOWN OF MARS HILL PARKS & RECREATION PLAN



WELCOME
 Mars Hill
Recreation Park
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INTRODUCTION

In June 2018 the Town of Mars Hill Aldermen moved forward with the planning process for the Town of Mars Hill Parks and Recreation Plan. They assembled a steering committee made of local leadership to facilitate the overarching goals of the process and plan.

OVERVIEW

Mars Hill, NC is a picturesque town in the heart of the Appalachian Mountains that prides itself on long held values and support for parks, green space, fitness, and wellness. The Town of Mars Hill is unique and has natural capital built around scenic mountains, abundant water, and rich cultural heritage. With a backdrop of beautiful Appalachian Mountains the Town of Mars Hill also prides itself on cultural assets such as the Southern Appalachian Repertory Theater (SART), Rural Life Museum, Ramsey Center, and Wiezenblatt Gallery on the MHU campus. Mars Hill has a healthy economic climate, excellent schools, and a great quality of life for those who choose to live there. The town has a culture

rooted in heritage and residents have a strong desire to preserve the history and culture of the town as it develops.

An essential part of the quality of life for a community is the opportunity to experience recreation and the outdoors. Mars Hill enjoys an amazing park system that is enhanced by its proximity to so many natural resources. This provides locals with opportunities to connect to the natural environment and experience more physical fitness in their life. Parks, open space, and trails are all amenities that connect people to nature, promote physical fitness, and provide alternatives to transportation besides vehicle.

The Town of Mars Hill wishes to take its next step in moving forward with a master plan to help identify and communicate its recreational assets to the community. This plan will help provide framework for parks, open space, and connecting people to other amenities in the town.

PRINCIPALS FOR PARK PLANNING AND DESIGN

- 1. BUILD COMMUNITY** - The Parks and Recreation Plan needs to reflect the needs and future of a community. Parks and Recreation development in a community has immense potential to connect citizens to each other through creating spaces to live and play together, as well as providing the community with an identity. Many great places are known for a “signature” park and Mars Hill’s natural assets lend itself to this.
- 2. RESPECT THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE AND ENJOY SCENERY** - Respecting the local landscape means respecting the environment and responding to its needs. Town of Mars Hill’s natural beauty is an important resource and the park system should respect the native flora and fauna. Successful parks provide users the opportunity to experience and enjoy nature.
- 3. INTEGRATE BUILT ELEMENTS INTO THE PARK PLAN** - A comprehensive parks system includes facilities for active recreation and human comfort, as well as undeveloped open spaces. Built elements should reflect the desires of the community to enhance quality of life.
- 4. INCREASE PROPERTY VALUES** - Numerous recent studies confirm that properties adjacent to parks have higher values because of their proximity to quality of life.
- 5. MAKE PARKS ACCESSIBLE** - Accessibility refers to travel to parks by varying modes of transportation. By connecting parks to places of business, local housing, schools, etc. via roads and greenways you ensure use by a wide range of demographics.



WELCOME TO THE MANS HILL BAILEY MUNDY STORMWATER DEMONSTRATION PARK

Landscaping & Stormwater Management for City of Mansfield, Mansfield, Ohio

The Mansfield City Council has approved the construction of a stormwater demonstration park in the Mansfield area. The park will be a demonstration of stormwater management techniques and will be a valuable resource for the community. The park will be a demonstration of stormwater management techniques and will be a valuable resource for the community. The park will be a demonstration of stormwater management techniques and will be a valuable resource for the community.



Project Objectives:

- Demonstrate stormwater management techniques
- Provide a resource for the community
- Provide a resource for the community
- Provide a resource for the community

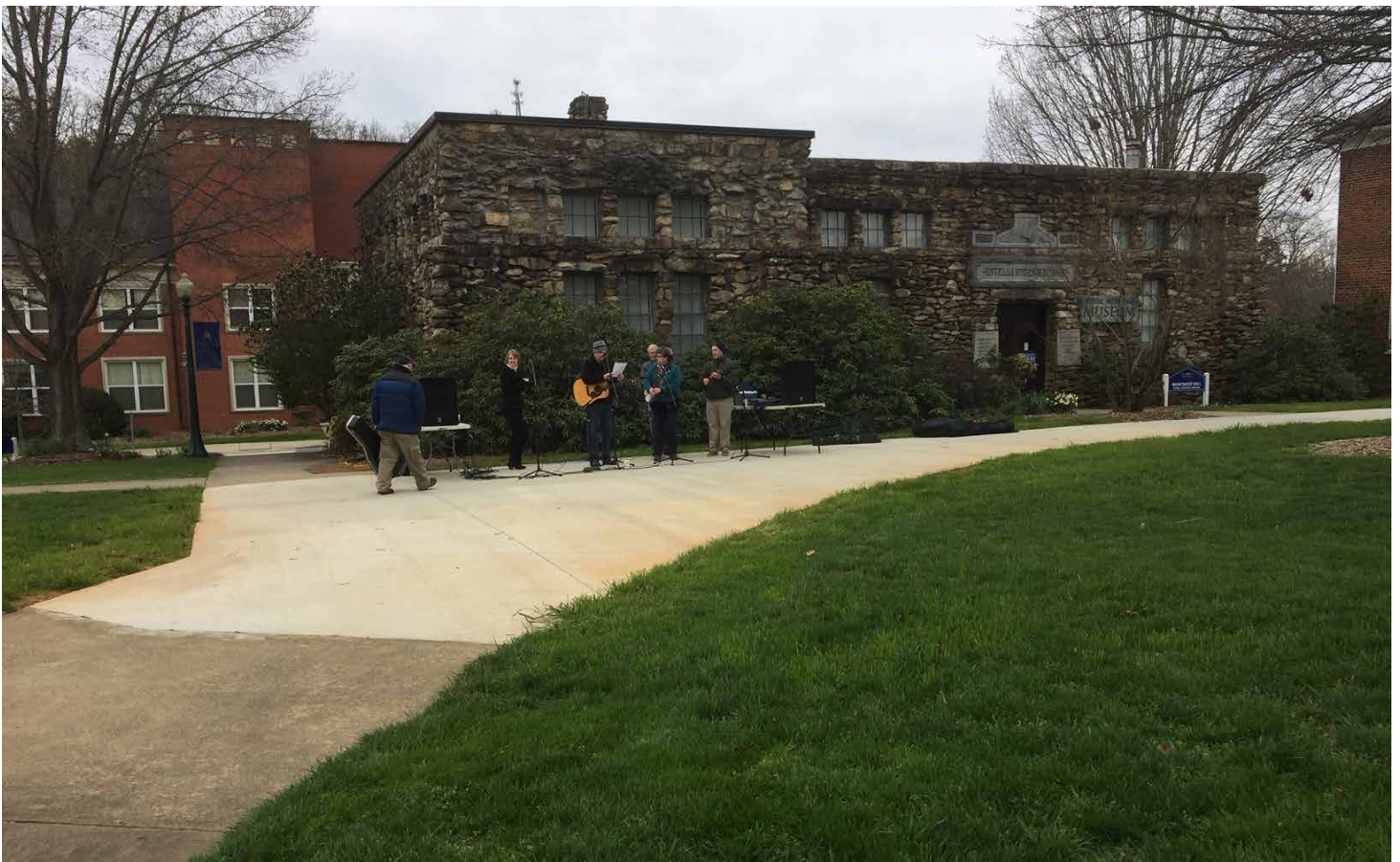
GOALS OF THE PLAN

The purpose of the plan is to provide direction in development of the community's resources. As part of the Town of Mars Hill's Parks and Recreation Master Plan we are proud to present the framework and policy that will assist and guide the Town in their future planning for their parks, recreation facilities, and programs. Ongoing community interest over the years has identified the need for this plan and expansion of recreational assets. The planning process officially started in June 2018 and lasted until March 2019. This Town of Mars Hill leadership and community members have determined that the master plan must take into consideration:

- Community Health and Wellness
- Taking care of natural resources
- Building Community and Relationships
- Youth Engagement and Activity

This plan identifies short-term strategies that will build success over the long-range for the community. The master plan focuses on high level initiatives rather than more specific and detailed actions.

It should be noted that this plan does not function as a static guide, but rather used as a working document that is used to shape the decision making for the town, leverage additional support, identify partnerships, and be revisited to ensure that priorities are still consistent with the needs and desires of the community.





ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Town of Mars Hill's Parks and Recreation Master Plan was a cooperative effort of the Town of Mars Hill Alderman, Town Manager, Land of Sky Regional Council of Government, and local citizens who expressed an interest in providing a high level of park and recreation services to their community.

In particular, we acknowledge the efforts of the following individuals/groups for their leadership:

TOWN ALDERMAN

John L Chandler - Mayor
Nicholas Honeycutt - Vice-Mayor
Robert Zink - Treasurer
Stuart Jolley - Clerk
Larry Davis - Secretary

TOWN MANAGER

Darhyl Boone
Nathan Bennett

PARKS AND REC STEERING COMMITTEE

Bruce Murray
Ryan Bell
Lee Hoffman
Darhyl Boone
Stuart Jolley
Nicholas Honeycutt
Faye Chandler
Will Hoffman

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Mars Hill University
Madison County Government
Madison County Parks and Recreation
Richard L Hoffman Foundation
Land of Sky Regional Council of Government

COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

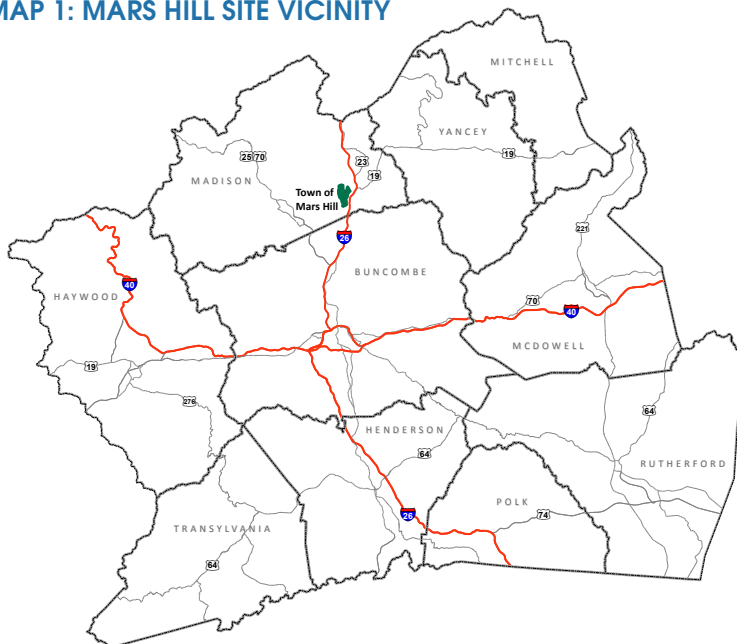
This plan is part of an ongoing effort to provide quality recreational opportunities for those who live, work, play, and want to play in the Town of Mars Hill. This plan is a tool to guide development of the Town's recreational assets while also doing an inventory of existing amenities available to the community.

GEOGRAPHY

Town of Mars Hill is conveniently located between Johnson City, TN and Asheville, NC along Interstate 26 in the Appalachian Mountains. Due to its central location between two growing areas it is also poised for growth. It provides many of the conveniences of a city while maintaining the charm of a small town. It is located in Madison County, NC. The Town of Mars Hill is home to Mars Hill University, a small liberal arts university. The town encompasses approximately 1.9 sq mi and sits at an average elevation of 2,320ft. The backdrop of the town is the iconic Bailey Mountain.

The Town has a historic town center just one mile off of I-26. The region is known for its abundance of opportunities for whitewater rafting, hiking, snow sports, biking, and cultural heritage.

MAP 1: MARS HILL SITE VICINITY



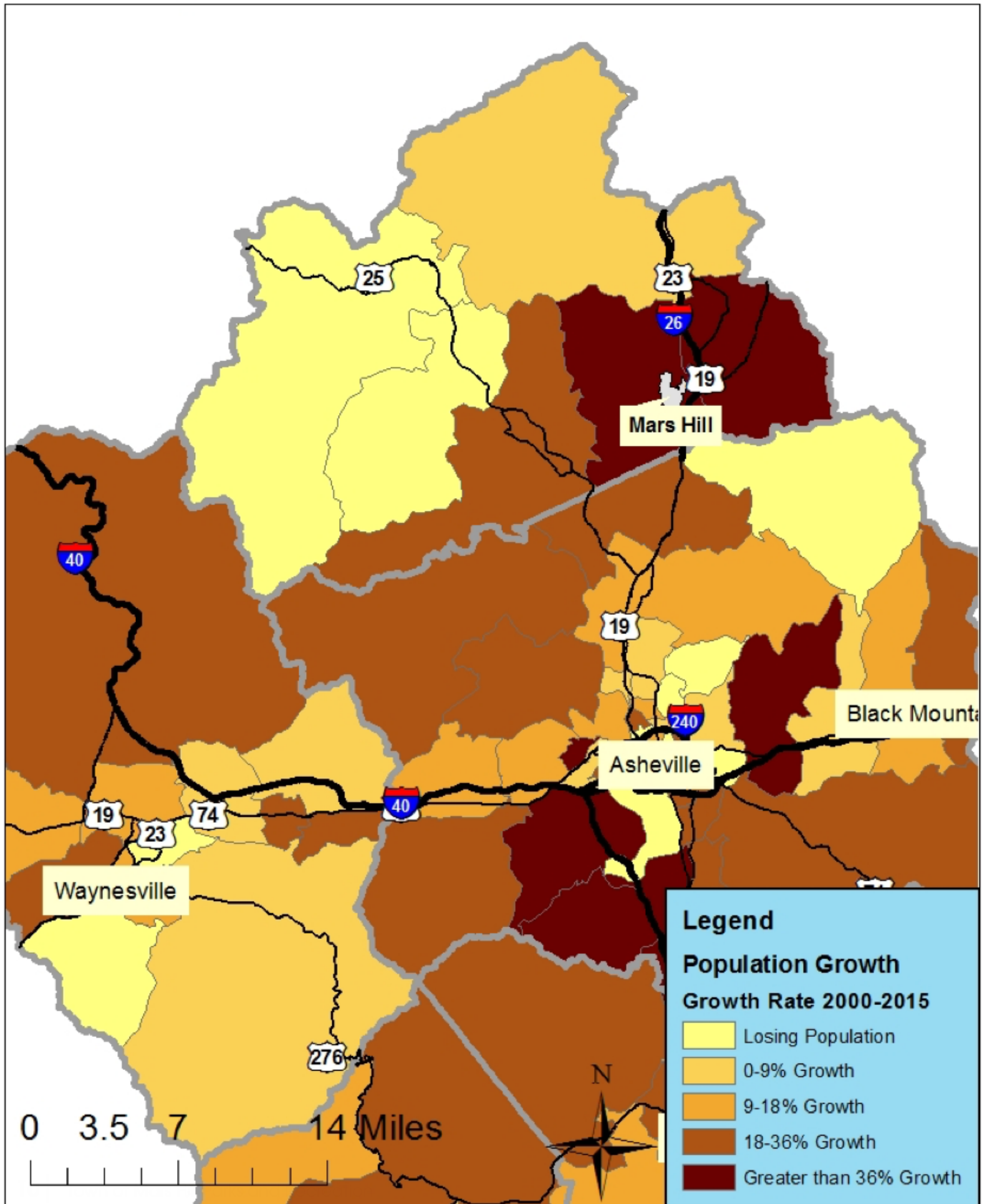
HISTORY

The earliest known residents of what is now known as the Town of Mars Hill were the Cherokee Indians. Settlers from the Scotch-Irish and German descent moved to the area during the late 1800s during what was then called Pleasant Hill. After that the Town of Mars Hill was formed around the same guiding leadership that Mars Hill University was and it is hard to differentiate between the development of the two around 1856 with more major developing occurring in 1913 as the Town and MHU grew together. The school was developed as a the need to have a school became identified by Edward Carter. Before that time no more than 10 families were living in the area.

MARS HILL TODAY

Today Mars Hill is a self-sufficient community that is home to a number of churches, restaurants, businesses, medical services, schools, recreation facilities, and more. Mars Hill is still the home to the oldest running college in North Carolina, Mars Hill University. It's strategic location along I-26 and just 15 min from Asheville makes it a popular place for visitors and convenient place to live. Residents like that the town maintains its small town charm, but has many of the amenities of a larger city.

Population Growth 2000-2015



DEMOGRAPHICS

POPULATION

As of 2017, the US Census estimates the population of Mars Hill at 2,118. Mars Hill is in a quickly growing part of the state, having grown by more than twenty-nine percent between 1990 and 2017- and more growth is projected.

In the past few decades Western North Carolina has become an attractive destination for seniors and retirees. Every county in the region exceeds state and national averages for senior population percentages. However, Mars Hill has largely bucked that trend. In 2017, less than nine percent of the population was over the age of sixty-five despite that number being more than twenty percent in Madison County.

It should be noted that the demographics specific to the Town of Mars Hill are not likely to fully reflect the same groups utilizing the Town's Park and Recreation assets. While Mars Hill has grown and added to its community's recreational assets, many of the surrounding areas in southeastern Madison County and northern Buncombe County have grown and use Mars Hill's recreational assets. So while Mars Hill may have grown by roughly 300 new residents between 2000 and 2015- the census tracts immediately surrounding Mars Hill grew by more than 1,100 new residents over that same time period.

FIGURE 2: MARS HILL POPULATION

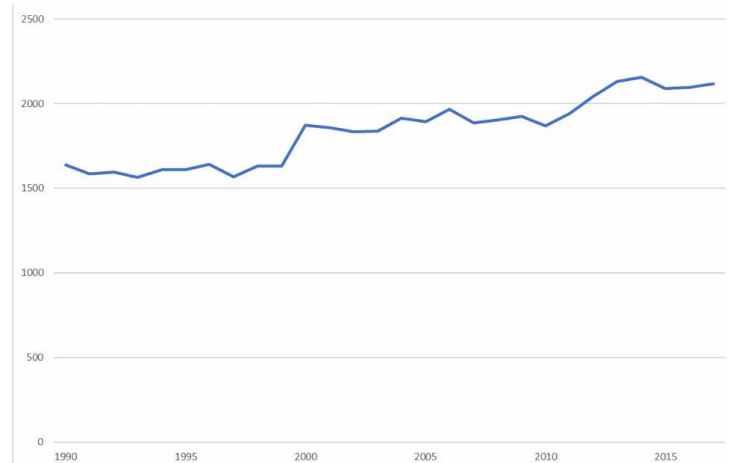


FIGURE 3: POPULATION AGE 65 AND OLDER

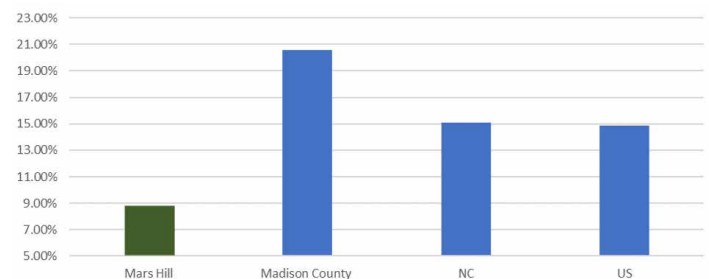
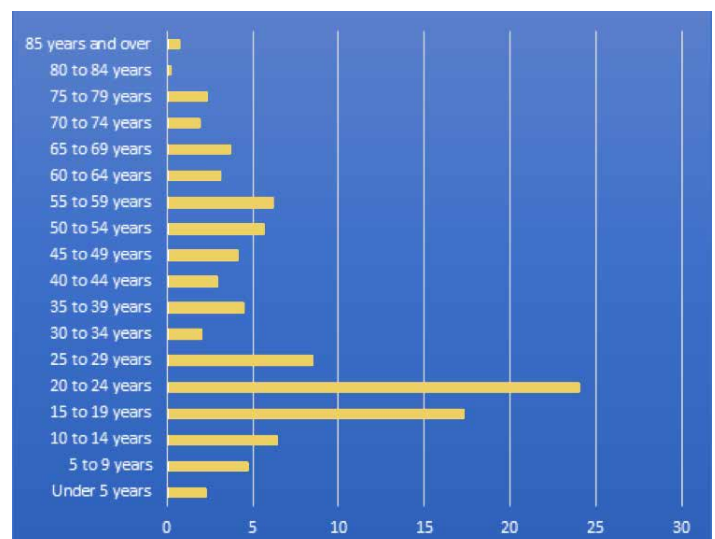


FIGURE 4: MEDIAN AGE AND POPULATION DISTRIBUTION





Hold Us With a Loving Hand
Safety means it's possible that you'll see
a child who is not in the best of health.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

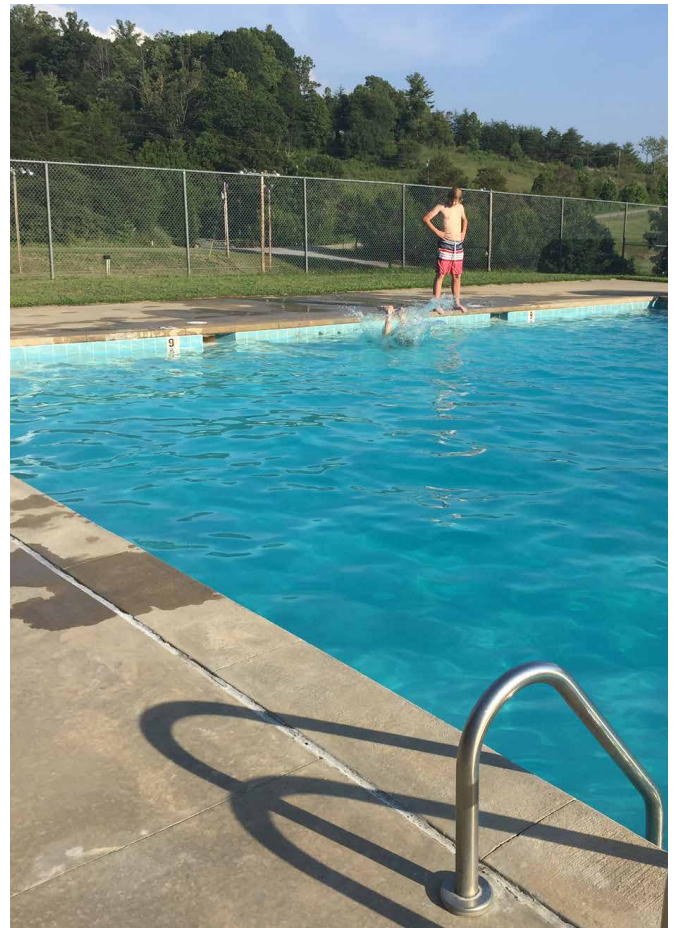
The Town of Mars Hill has a variety of recreational options available to the community. Overall the condition of the assets is considered to be satisfactory, but some improvements can be made to improve the quality of life for the town's residents and visitors. The Town of Mars Hill has been making progress to connectivity between new parks and maintains the current facilities. The Town of Mars Hill will have to make decisions for the future of their amenities with limited resources. The existing recreational assets include a recreation park, open areas, a greenway, swimming pool, and passive recreation. Mars Hill University is located within Town of Mars Hill and has additional active and passive recreational activities that are open to the public.

Our assessment revealed that the Town of Mars Hill's recreation system features meet the needs of many community members, but additional marketing is recommended to inform people of what is already available. Recent acquisition of the Smith Farm Property provides new opportunities to expand Parks and Recreation in the Town of Mars Hill, but due to restrictions from some of the funders that helped with purchase development options will be limited to mostly natural options such as trails, wildlife viewing, etc. only.

Survey data supported the community desire for additional passive recreation amenities such as trails and picnic areas. These types of amenities are some of the planned assets for the Smith Farm and Bailey Mountain Property. An ideal way to accommodate many of the community's desire for passive recreation will be to for the Town of Mars Hill to acquisition the Bailey Mountain Park land and continue to develop trails connecting the site to Downtown Mars Hill. This total project (over several phases) will total 284 acres. In order for the town to have more land that could be developed for other types of opportunities land joining the recreation park would be ideal or a parcel near the Smith Farm Park.

Overall the desires of the community will be met by the trails on the Smith Farm land. Additional desires supported by the Town of Mars Hill community were outdoor music venue, common areas, playground, gardens, heritage farming. Disc golf did not rank high on desired activities for Mars Hill, likely due to the current active course utilized in the town already.

Gathered information from both the community survey and open house indicate a strong local interest in taking environmental concerns and local heritage into consideration for development occurs. Since Town of Mars Hill has some steep slopes and highly erodible soils. Because of this as development occurs it will be valuable to have functional and native landscaping, reduced impervious surfaces, and public education.



Mars Hill, NC

Existing Recreation Assets

Smith Farm Property

Forest St

Bailey St

N Main St

S Main St

213

213

- Legend**
- Smith Farm Property
 - Town Boundary
 - Rec Park Boundary
- Greenways**
- Existing
 - Proposed
- Recreation Facilities**
- 1 Stormwater Demo Park
 - 2 Tennis Courts
 - 3 Bouldering Wall
 - 4 Fitness Center
 - 5 Tree Trail
 - 6 Rural Life Museum
 - 7 Pavillion
 - 8 Disc Golf Course
 - 9 Volleyball Court
 - 10 Private Soccer Field
 - 11 Swimming Pool
 - 12 Tennis Courts
 - 13 Ball Field
 - 14 Basketball Court
 - 15 Playground
 - 16 Pavillion

Mars Hill Rec Park Inset



EXISTING RECREATION FACILITIES

MARS HILL RECREATION PARK

The Mars Hill Recreation Park is currently the town's largest recreational facility. It has a number of amenities co-located for community engagement. The park is located 2 miles off Hwy 213 at 690 Park Drive.

According to survey responses the general population says this park is in good condition, with some room for renovations.

Features of the Town of Mars Hill Recreation Park:

- Tennis Courts
- Swimming Pool (open June - August)
- Playground (for ages 2 - 12)
- Baseball Field
- Outdoor Basketball Courts
- Pavilion



MARS HILL STORMWATER DEMONSTRATION PARK

In the history of the Town of Mars Hill being a place of beautiful learning the Town was a strategic partner on the creation of an innovative stormwater demonstration park. This site is located directly behind Mars Hill Town Hall and provides a scenic short walk through over 15 stormwater best management practices including wetlands, rain gardens, and a green roof.

DR. OTIS T. DUCK GREENWAY

The growing greenway starts at the field house on the MHU campus as goes along the river past Mars Hill Elementary School. The greenway connects Mars Hill University, some residential areas, with downtown businesses and schools. This project was a response from previous strategic planning efforts from the town that indicated the need for more greenways/sidewalks in the town.

Much of the greenway is paved with some areas left unpaved at the request of citizens. The Town of Mars Hill will benefit from extending existing greenway further to enhance quality of life and provide alternate transportation opportunities for more people. Extending the greenway to the newly acquisitioned Smith Farm property would be an ideal way to improve greenway options.

The Otis T. Duck greenway is also home to the a public art project called the "Manufacturing Art Park". Each year a new piece will be added to the greenway that focuses on a manufacturing business in Madison County.

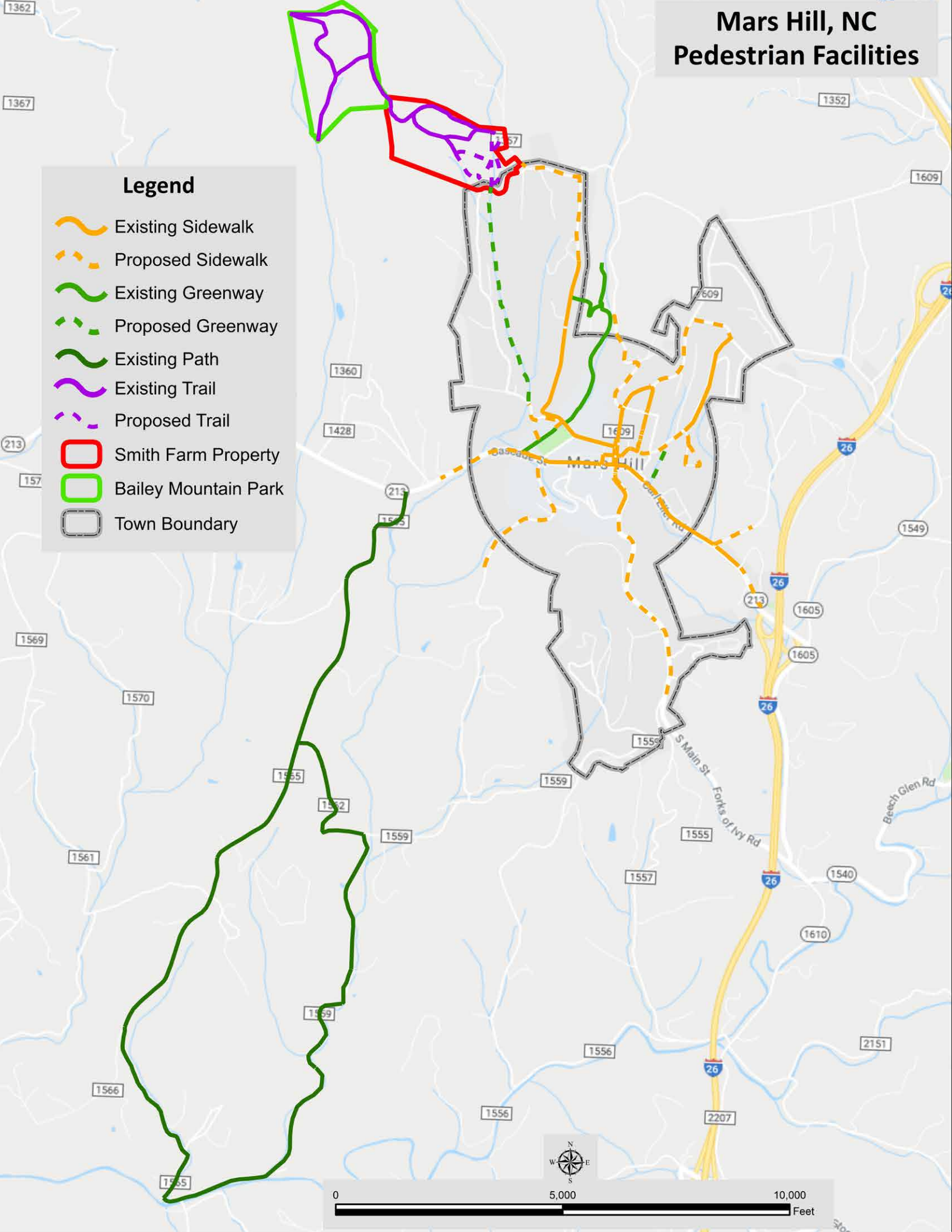
See Map on page 16.



Mars Hill, NC Pedestrian Facilities

Legend

- Existing Sidewalk
- Proposed Sidewalk
- Existing Greenway
- Proposed Greenway
- Existing Path
- Existing Trail
- Proposed Trail
- Smith Farm Property
- Bailey Mountain Park
- Town Boundary



SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR

Take a self-guided walking tour of the historical buildings in Mars Hill. The walking tour has 13 historic properties within one mile of the Mars Hill University campus.

MAP 2: MARS HILL SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOURS

Madison County, NC Self-Guided Walking Tours

Mars Hill, NC

Mars Hill is a town that is rich in history, character, and people. It is known for its beautiful mountain views and picturesque setting. The town's history is inextricably linked with that of Mars Hill College, the oldest educational institution still in its original location in western NC. Many of the historic homes and buildings on Main Street showcase this connection between the town and the college.



The history of Mars Hill began before 1856 when there were no more than ten families living on what was known as Pleasant Hill. Several of these families founded an academy to educate their children—the French Broad Academy which eventually became Mars Hill College. When the village of Mars Hill was incorporated in 1893, the corporate limits were set at nine hundred yards in all directions from the northwest corner of the first college building. As the college grew, the town grew also. A general store was built, a doctor's office established, and boarding houses opened for college students. The year 1913 was a boom year for the growing community. Several new buildings were erected, including two stores, a bank building, general store, drug store. Many of the homes and the businesses built during this time remain as a reminder of the town's history.

SMITH FARM PROPERTY

In Jan. 2019 the Town of Mars Hill fully acquisitioned the 86 acre site on Forest Street. The site is currently a former farm with open space, but has access to the adjoining Bailey Mountain Park. This site can currently be used for hiking and is in the development phase for additional trails, picnic areas, a barn gathering facility, an outdoor venue, an educational center, restrooms, stream restoration, and education stations.





MARS HILL UNIVERSITY RECREATION

Mars Hill University is strategically placed in the center of the town and has a long standing relationship with the community. Many of the amenities identified in this plan are located on university campus, but are available for public use when not needed by the university. This relationship greatly improves the quality of life opportunities for the people who live, work, and play in Mars Hill.

DISC GOLF COURSE

The MHU disc golf course offers a course of 43 different tee pads and 34 different basket placements over approximately 30 acres of land. The course has many steep slopes and stretches about one and a half miles of distance.

FITNESS CENTER

Taylor Fitness Center is located on the campus of MHU and offers community membership. The fitness center offers free weights, workout machines, and stationary bikes. Contact the office of student development for more information at 828-689-1253.

BOULDERING WALL

A small bouldering wall is located on the outside of Wren Student Center.

TREE TRAIL

The tree trail is a walking tour of 50 specific specimen trees on the main portion of the university campus. The trail follows sidewalks and paved paths for approximately .75 miles. Tree labels are attached to the tree trunk. Printed copies of the trail map can be found at the Rural Heritage Museum, Mars Hill Visitor Center, Blackwell Hall, and Renfro Library.

HART TENNIS COURTS

MHU has 6 tennis courts along Hwy 213. These courts are available for usage when MHU tennis team is not using them.

OPEN FIELD AND VOLLEYBALL

An open field is located behind Broyhill Chapel. Field and other nearby amenities such as the volleyball field are available when MHU students are not using them.

RURAL LIFE MUSEUM

The museum is housed in the Montague Building on the MHU campus. It features exhibits that showcase early life and culture of the regions earliest settlers.

PAVILION

A Pavilion is located behind Broyhill Chapel. The Pavilion has several picnic tables that are open for the public to use.





REGIONAL RECREATION ASSETS

OVERVIEW

Residents and visitors to the Town of Mars Hill have a lot of options when it comes to outdoor recreation options in the region. The area is known for its year round opportunities related to hiking, biking, river sports, bird watching, and winter sports.

See Page 22 - 23 for Madison County Recreation and Adventure Map.

SLOPES

Due to the regions elevation and snowfall Western North Carolina is lucky to have several facilities that are available for winter sports activities such as skiing, snowboarding, and tubing. These opportunities are all in the private sector, but during winter months plenty of fun can be had by all getting outside in the snow to build snowman, have a snowball fight, or walk in a winter wonderland.

RIVER ACTIVITIES

The French Broad River and its tributaries are home to some of the regions most popular outdoor recreation activities. The French Broad flows 218 miles from Transylvania County to Tennessee and runs right through the western side of Madison County. The French Broad is believed to be one of the oldest rivers in the world due to the dating on the rocks.

Here are some of the activities the region offers on the water:

- White Water Rafting
- Canoeing
- Kayaking
- Fly-Fishing
- Tubing
- French Broad River Trail (67 miles of blue way along the river for paddlers)
- Swimming
- Stand Up Paddle boarding
- Boating

HIKING

Due to the regions location in the mountains there are plenty of places to access great hiking spots that range from casual stroll to very strenuous. Trips can be very short or months long. Here are some of the places to check out in the region for hiking opportunities. When hiking in the region it is not uncommon to encounter wildlife, experience waterfalls, and explore rocky outcliffs. Many of the hiking trails are available for biking and/or horseback riding, but one should research in advance details and restrictions for any specific trail they wish to explore.

- **Appalachian Trail (AT)** - The AT is approximately 2,200 miles and is the world's longest hiking only trail. Small sections of the trail that are popular in this region include Roan Mountain, Max Patch, and Lovers Leap.
- **Mount Mitchell** - The tallest peak east of the Mississippi River is located in nearby Yancey County. This site offers several small day hikes as well as access to the Mountains to Sea trail.
- **Blue Ridge Parkway (BRP)** - The Blue Ridge Parkway home to over 450 miles of hiking trails in the Appalachian region. The closest area to Mars Hill to get on the parkway is in Asheville. Some of the most popular trails for locals are Linville Falls, Craggy Gardens Trail, and Graveyard Fields. There is also access to the Mountains to Sea trail from the BRP.
- **Mountains to Sea Trail** - The Mountains to Sea Trail is the state hiking trail of North Carolina. This trail stretches 1,175 miles from the Great Smoky Mountains to the Outer Banks.

WATERFALLS

Locals and visitors love the quantity and quality of the regions many waterfalls. The mountains provide elevation changes and abundance of water makes WNC home to many waterfalls that can be hiked or driven to.

Some of the most popular waterfalls in the region are:

- **High Falls** - Dupont State Forest
- **Looking Glass Falls** - Pisgah National Forest
- **Rainbow Falls** - Gorges State Park
- **Sliding Rock** - Pisgah National Forest (a waterfall you can slide down)
- **Skinny Dip Falls** - Blue Ridge Parkway

BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY (BRP)

The Blue Ridge Parkway is known as the nation's favorite drive. BRP is 469 miles that runs through North Carolina and Virginia. It offers people an experience in Southern Appalachian arts, culture, natural resources, and recreation.

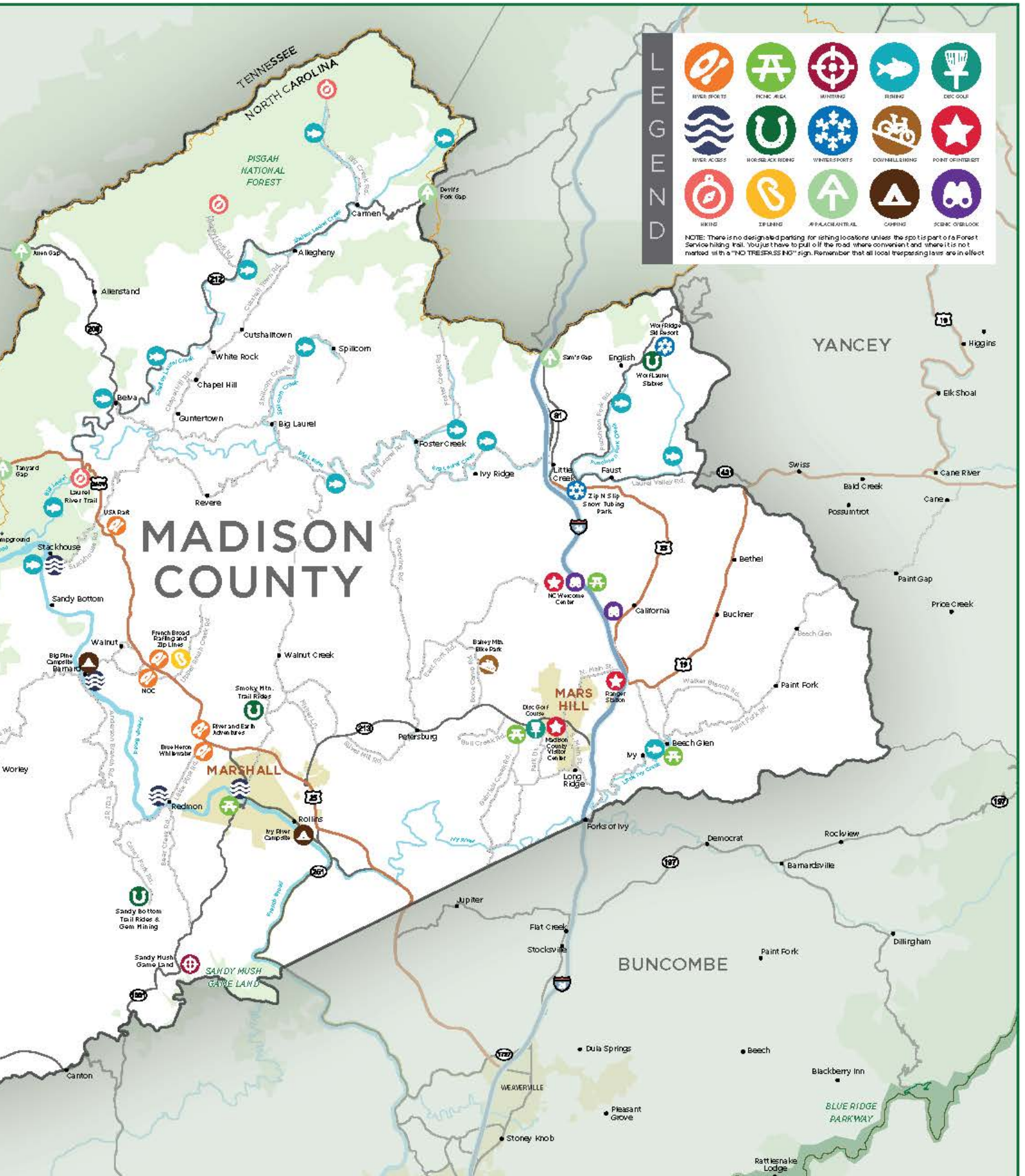
GREAT SMOKY NATIONAL PARK (GSNP)

Located in North Carolina and Tennessee, GSNP is home to a variety of recreation and scientific study. GSNP has educational interpretation programs, access to wildlife such as elk and bears, synchronous fireflies, camping, hiking, and cultural access.

BEECH GLEN COMMUNITY CENTER

The Beech Glen Community Center is located in Mars Hill, NC outside of town limits and is owned/operated by the Madison County Parks and Recreation Department. The site has a walking trail, playground, ball fields, basketball court, and open room for gathering.







RECREATIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

During the months of October and November 2018 the Town of Mars Hill conducted surveys to identify community wide needs. The survey was dispersed online through Survey Monkey and paper copies were left at the Mars Hill library, Mars Hill University campus, and Mars Hill Town Hall. 232 people responded to the survey. About half of the survey participants responded as being town residents. 100% of citizens who started the online survey completed it. Over 70% of survey participants responded as having lived in the area for over 10 years. The responses of this survey indicate a diverse response from residents and visitors with varied interests.

From the survey the largest group of respondents were between the ages of 35 and 49 (40.53%) with approximately equal participation from ages groups in the 18-34, 50-65, and 65-80 (each around 20%) categories.

According to survey respondents a high percentage said that they used the Otis T. Duck greenway, the Mars Hill Recreation Park, and other facilities. A smaller group said that they used the disc golf course located on the MHU campus or don't use any of the Town's Parks and Recreation facilities.

The survey showed that a large part of the population participated in recreation opportunities provided by a private provider such as the YMCA, Gold's Gym, or MHU. Most survey respondents said they participated in other recreational programming because they felt other options had better programming or facilities.

When asked what kinds of developments or programming they would like the largest group of people (71.56%) were interested in more greenways and trails with the second highest responses being more park facilities (49.29%). This supports the need for more greenways, trails, and open space passive recreation and the greatest parks and recreation needs for the Town of Mars Hill.

See Appendix A for additional information from survey results.

FIGURE 5: WHAT AGE GROUP ARE YOU A PART OF?

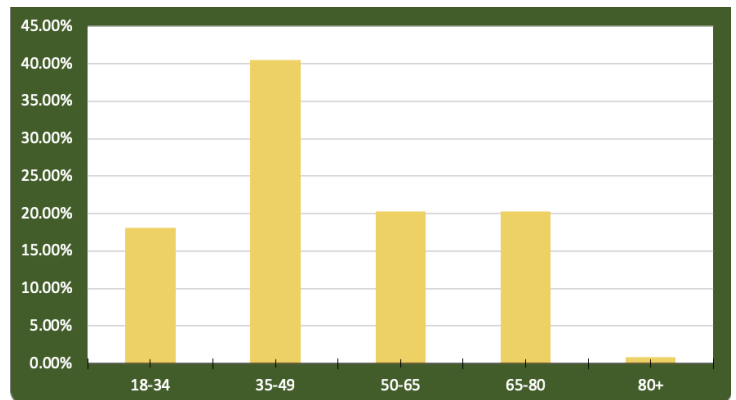


FIGURE 6: WHAT PARKS AND REC FACILITIES IN THE TOWN DO YOU CURRENTLY USE?

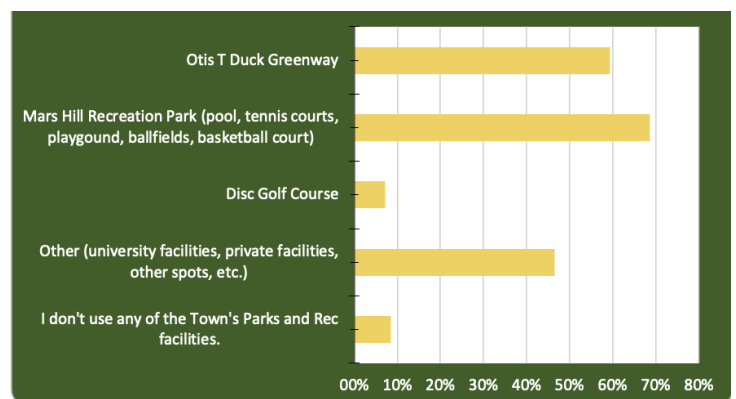
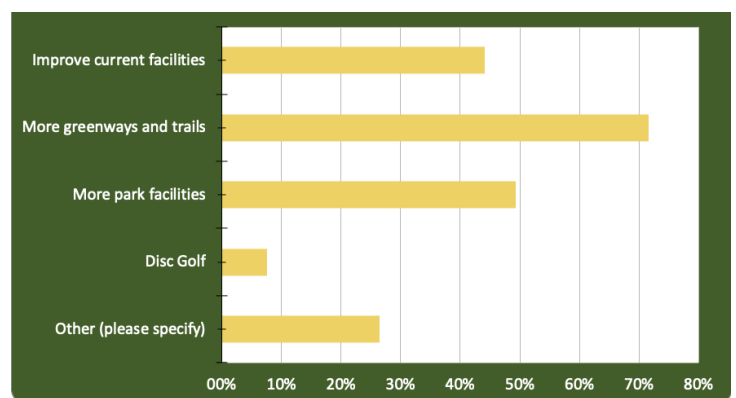


FIGURE 7: WHAT OTHER PARKS AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE IN MARS HILL?





PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A critical part of the master plan is the community engagement. A balanced, open, and collaborative engagement process builds community-wide trust in the plan and the process. It is imperative that this process include the input and guidance of key stakeholders from the community. In the Town of Mars Hill these included community members, committee members, Town Council, and others. Community engagement is carefully planned in order to create an outcome that will secure support from leadership, partners, and wide demographic of people who will utilize the Town of Mars Hill’s recreational opportunities.

Below are responses from public meeting comments to “What kind of improvements to the Town’s Park and Recreation plan would you want? The greatest percentage of the population suggested trails, sidewalks, and biking as the recreational opportunities they want most in Mars Hill.

TABLE 1: WHAT DO YOU WANT IN MARS HILL PARKS AND REC?

Recreational Needs	Percentage
Trails	22.6%
Sidewalks	18.9%
Bike	7.5%
Skating Rink	7.5%
Gym	5.7%
Improved River Access	5.7%
Dog Park	3.8%
Softball Complex	3.8%
Marketing	3.8%
ADA	1.9%
Boat Launches	1.9%
Dance Places	1.9%

When asked what specifically they did not want to see happen in Mars Hill open house participants said paved trails (with reasons include water quality and softer surfaces for elderly usage), additional sports fields, and horse trails.

TABLE 1: MARS HILL DOES NOT WANT

Recreation	Percentage
Paved Trails	50%
Sports Fields	33.3%
Horse Trails	16.7%

STAKEHOLDER MEETING

June 20th, 2018 Land of Sky Regional Council of Government and Town of Mars Hill gathered with the Mars Hill Parks and Recreation Steering Committee. The committee was made up of town leadership, MHU, planning and zoning, and community members. The goal of this meeting was to set a timeline to create the plan for the community.

PUBLIC SURVEY

October 5th, 2018 Land of Sky Regional Council of Governments and Town of Mars Hill launched a survey to the community to receive community input regarding the future of Parks and Recreation in Mars Hill. Paper copies of the survey were distributed at several public areas around town. An online survey was distributed to the community. The survey was closed in November 2018 and had 232 responses. Additionally a very basic survey regarding the Bailey Mountain Project was completed in March 2017.

PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE

October 10th, 2018 Land of Sky Regional Council of Government and Town of Mars Hill hosted a public meeting to the community. Over 30 people participated in the activities to provide input regarding what kinds of Parks and Recreation activities they were interested in and not interested in.

TARGETED OUTREACH

October 19th, 2018 Land of Sky Regional Council of Government discussed the project and involvement of Mars Hill University with MHU staff. Staff worked collaboratively to make decisions about what MHU amenities would be available for community-wide usage and are a part of the asset inventory in this plan.

October 19th, 2018 Land of Sky Regional Council of Government presented the planning process with a MHU Political Science class and received feedback on what kinds of ideas should be included in the plan.





RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

OVERVIEW

The effectiveness of a plan is directly related to its ease of implementation. In order to effectively support the goals and policies in this document, it is important to identify methods in which to achieve the desired objectives. An implementation plan officials a tool to help guide staffing needs, programming, and capital improvements. Both annual and long-range departmental budgeting efforts should consider the implementation items identified in this plan.

- 1 Renovate and improve existing facilities for a variety of ages and abilities
- 2 Develop a maintenance plan for existing facilities
- 3 Develop programming based on the needs of the community
- 4 Identify financing options for facility improvements
- 5 Develop a marketing plan for parks and programs
- 6 Implementation of site plan for site Smith Farm property
- 7 Identify additional sites for other needed amenities such as ball fields, gymnasiums, trails, playgrounds, and fitness centers as the community desires
- 8 Improve connectivity options between parks and recreation opportunities and downtown Mars Hill



1: RENOVATE AND IMPROVE EXISTING FACILITIES FOR A VARIETY OF AGES AND ABILITIES

Parks and recreation facilities should aim to be accessible for all ages and abilities in design and programming. New public facilities should be designed to meet current ADA regulations, and existing facilities should be upgraded to become compliant. The demographic of Mars Hill is diverse because the town has an aging population, but also Mars Hill University is located in town limits with a much lower age bracket it serves. Developing through partnership between these two entities could help reach a broad range of ages and abilities.

2: DEVELOP A MAINTENANCE PLAN FOR EXISTING FACILITIES

The Town of Mars Hill and Mars Hill University both do an excellent job of maintaining its facilities. As the parks and recreation opportunities grow in Mars Hill it will be key to create a maintenance plan to help maintain the assets. The Maintenance Plan is intended to enable the Town of Mars Hill to improve the identification, justification, and prioritization of maintenance requirements for park and recreation sites.

Key Elements in a maintenance plan:

- Maintenance objectives
- Best Practices
- Site and Design Issues
- Project costs and estimates
- Regular maintenance requirements
- Park maintenance, trail maintenance, open space maintenance, facility maintenance

3: DEVELOP PROGRAMMING BASED ON NEEDS FOR THE COMMUNITY

Based on the survey results the participants seemed to know about and participate in many of the activities offered by the Town of Mars Hill. Community wide there is interest in programming, classes, and after school options. This does not have to be offered by the town, but the town could partner/facilitate these programs to begin. The Town's role could be to provide the space, coordinating the events, and co-marketing the options to the community. An excellent partnership with Madison County Parks and Recreation could help facilitate coordination of these events.

Generally, park programming falls within the following categories:

- Mind Body/Balance programs
- Fitness Programs
- Educational Programs
- Day camps and summer programs
- Environmental Education
- Teen Programming
- Adult sports teams
- Active older adult programming
- Holidays and other special events
- Nutrition and diet counseling
- Outdoor movies
- Events and festivals

4: IDENTIFY FINANCING OPTIONS FOR FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS

Financing of costs associated with parks and recreation can be difficult for a small community to prioritize, but building a parks and recreation program doesn't have to rely solely on the Town of Mars Hill's limited resources. The town has many supporters and allies that can be leveraged to help the parks and recreation growth for the community.

Development costs can be leveraged through a variety sources such as:

- Grants such as PARTF
- Public Private Partnerships
- Fundraising
- Program/space rental fees
- Bonds

5: DEVELOP MARKETING PLAN FOR PARKS AND PROGRAMS

By building on the town's existing resources more Parks and Recreation materials could be distributed to the community. The Town's website could host current activities and amenities in the town. Social media, flyers, and direct communication about what the Town is offering could benefit the communication to the community.

6: IMPLEMENTATION OF SITE PLAN FOR SMITH FARM PROPERTY

A survey process and site plan was completed in 2018/2019 indicate that the restrictions of the property and the community desire a peaceful place for recreation. The desired amenities for development include trails, outdoor venue, environmental education, discovery center and gathering places such as picnic areas. The information gathered from this process aligned with Madison County's parks and recreation desires. The Town may be interested in pursuing funding through PARTF, Pigeon River Fund, and Division of Water Resources to help implement development on the Smith Farm Site.

7: COLLABORATE AND IDENTIFY MORE PLACES FOR THE TOWN OF MARS HILL TO EXPAND PARKS AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

The town, university, and county can work together to see where future site development should be located to maximize resources. Based on survey results the community feels that between the opportunities at the Mars Hill Recreation Park, Beech Glenn Community Center, Mars Hill University, and Madison Schools there are lots of available resources. However, growth predictions for the town may necessitate additional opportunities in recreation needs.

8: IMPROVE CONNECTIVITY OPTIONS BETWEEN PARKS AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES AND DOWNTOWN MARS HILL

Continuing to work on expansion of the Otis. T. Duck greenway will greatly increase community participation in other activities the Town of Mars Hill offers. Greenways and sidewalks connecting Main Street in Mars Hill to the Mars Hill Recreation Park and the Smith Park would be an ideal way to connect community with local economic assets. Consider forming a Greenway Committee or active group to assist the town plan for implementation of the Pedestrian plan. Connect with the French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization about funding opportunities and planning assistance.

APPENDIX A

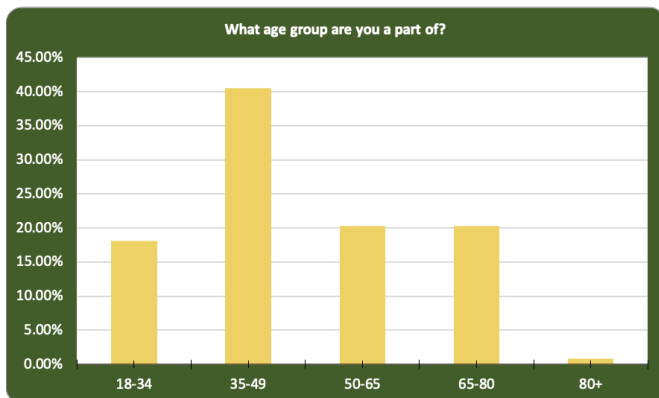
RECREATION SURVEY RESPONSES

The Town of Mars Hill maintains several recreational amenities enjoyed by those who live, work, and play in the region. The Mars Hill Recreation Park that has ball fields, swimming pool, basketball, tennis courts, and an outdoor pavillion. The town also maintains the Otis T. Duck greenway and Smith Farm property. The town does not currently fund recreational program staffing except for summer employment at the pool. All of these facilities offer passive recreation for the community to enjoy. The survey process identified what the community has to say about recreation in Mars Hill.

THE FIRST SECTION OF THE SURVEY FOCUSED ON DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FROM THE POPULATION WHO RESPONDED

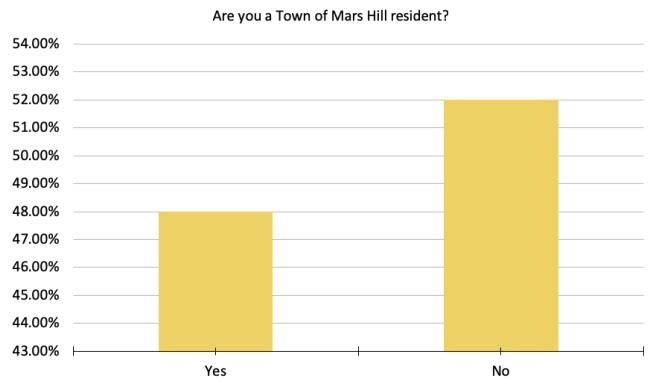
What age group are you a part of?

The highest percentage of survey respondents (40.52%) categorized themselves between the ages of 35-49. Other categories of 18-34, 50-65, and 65-80 all responded around 20% of the population. The least participation was in a demographic of 80+ (.86%).



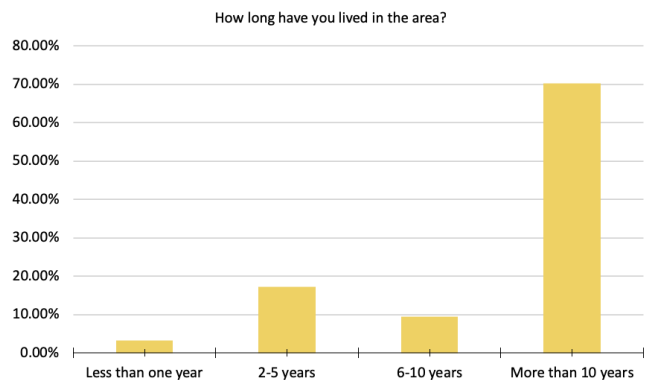
Are you a Town of Mars Hill resident?

The Town of Mars Hill decided to include the population of people who both live in town limits, but understands that they provide recreational services to more than those who live in the town. Of survey respondents 48% claim to live in town limits and 52% do not live in town limits.



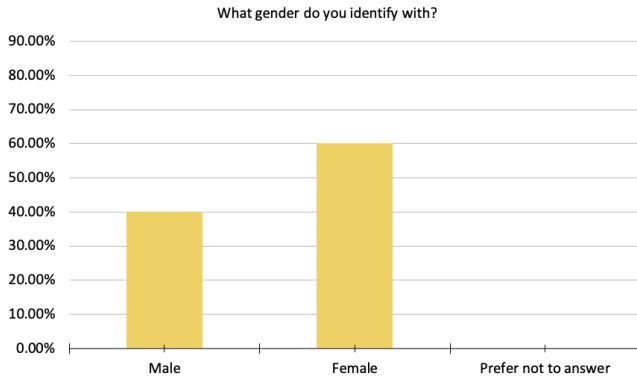
How long have you lived in the area?

People who responded to the survey have a long investment in Mars Hill as a large majority of the survey population claim to have lived in Mars Hill over 10 years (69%). This reflects that most of the results did not come from Mars Hill University students, but rather less transient communities. Some newer residents responded at the 2-5 range (17.26%), people who have lived in the town for 6-10 years represented 9.29% of the population, and less than 4% have lived in the town for less than 1 year.



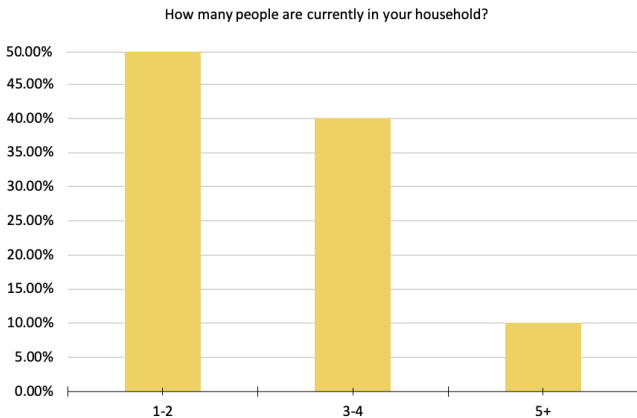
What gender do you identify with?

60% of the population surveyed claimed to be female and 40% male. This data corresponds equally with recent American Community Survey Data showing that the Town's population is 60% female.



How many people are currently in your household?

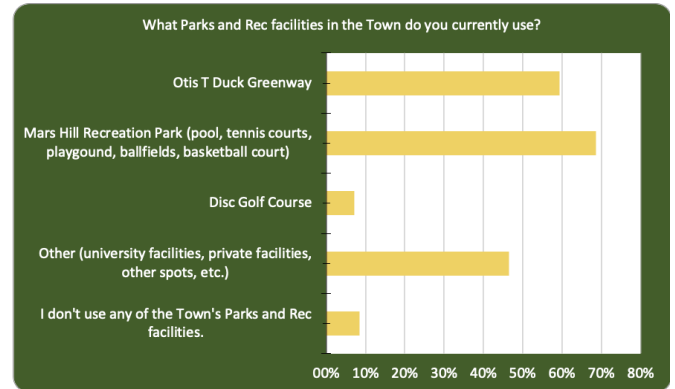
Half of the surveyed population have small household sizes (1-2 people), 40% claimed to have 3-4 people in their household, while only 10% of the population had 5 or more people in their household.



THE SECOND SECTION OF THE SURVEY FOCUSED ON WHAT THE COMMUNITY USES AND WANTS FOR THE TOWN TO DO IN REGARDS TO PARKS AND RECREATION

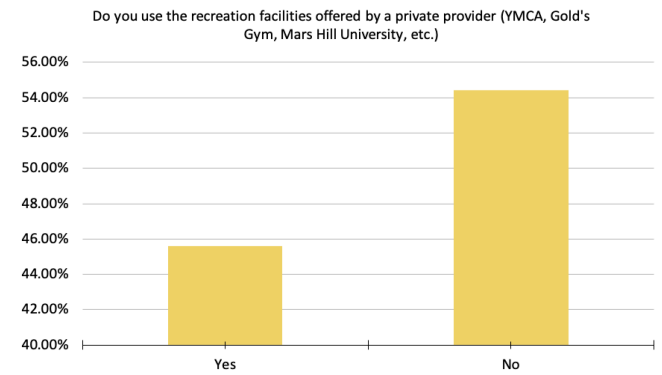
What Parks and Rec facilities in the Town do you currently use? Check all that apply.

Survey respondents claim to use many of the offerings the community has. About 68% claim to use the Mars Hill Recreation Park, 53% use the Otis T. Duck Greenway, 47% use other facilities such as the university, and 7% use the disc golf course.



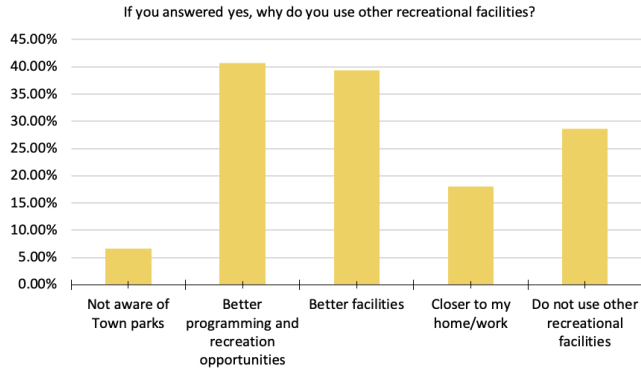
Do you use the recreation facilities offered by a private provider (YMCA, Gold's Gym, Mars Hill University, etc.)?

The population was divided fairly evenly about additional services they seek for recreation facilities. Over 54% of the population did not use additional private services, over 45% did use other services.



If you answered yes, why do you use other recreational facilities?

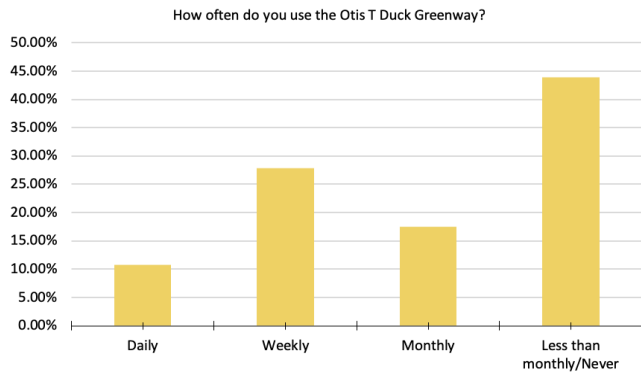
For the 48% of survey respondents who said they did use other facilities most claimed that they did so because of better programming and better facilities. Nearly 20% claimed other facilities were close to their home or work.



THE THIRD SET OF QUESTIONS REFERRED TO THE OTIS T. DUCK GREENWAY

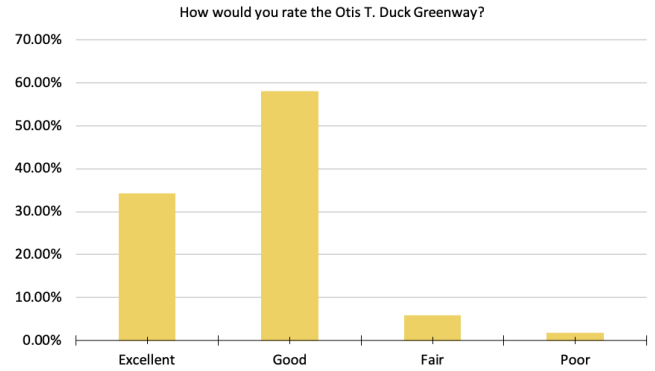
How often do you use the Otis T. Duck Greenway?

Even though trails and greenways consistently rank highly on amenities that people want in the community almost 44% of the population says that they use this greenway less than once a month (or never). A follow up participation study with population counts of usage may be of interest to the town when considering expansion of greenway options. It is predicted that a higher percentage than reflected on this survey use the greenway regularly. Over 28% of the population claim to use the greenway weekly.



How would you rate the Otis T. Duck Greenway?

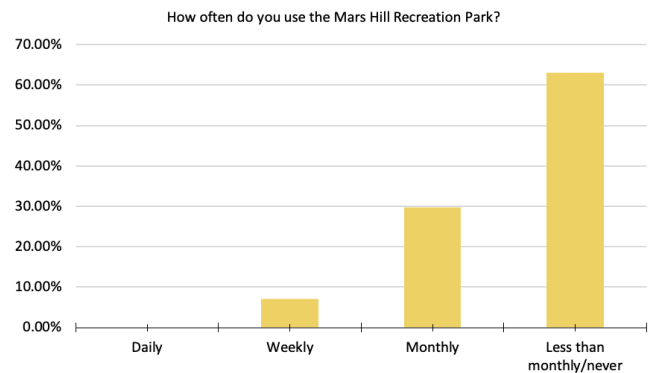
The population that use the greenway over 92% of the survey respondents claimed the greenway was either good or excellent. The Town of Mars Hill should be proud of the public's response to this amenity.



THE FOURTH SET OF QUESTIONS REFLECTS THE PUBLIC'S FEELINGS ON THE MARS HILL RECREATION PARK

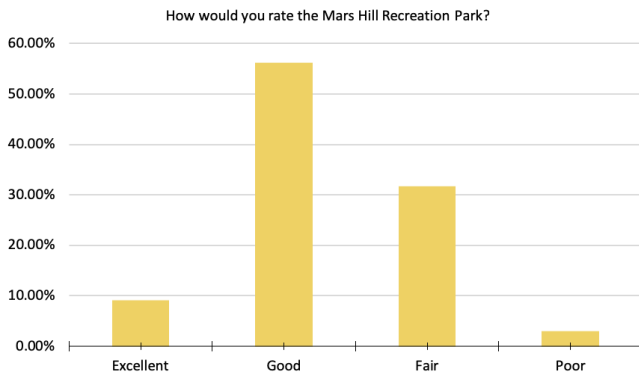
How often do you use the Mars Hill Recreation Park?

Despite an earlier question reflecting that over 67% of the population uses this park 64% of the survey respondents claim that they use this park less than monthly or never. It is suspected that if this survey had been conducted during the summer months this number would have been much higher. Over 29% of the population claims to use the park monthly.



How would you rate the Mars Hill Recreation Park?

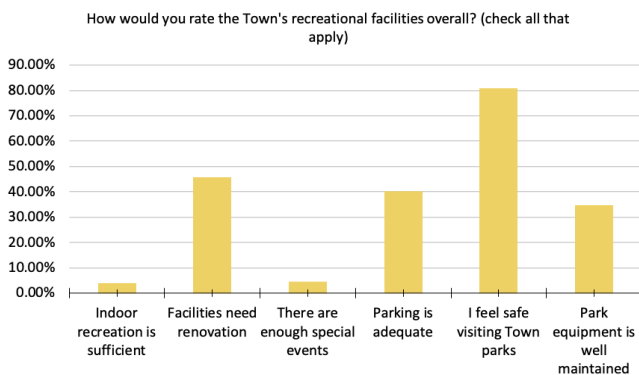
In a follow up question about how one would rate the Mars Hill Recreation Park over 65% of the population says they feel the park is either good or excellent. This information is consistent that the population thinks the town is good stewards of the recreational amenities.



THE FIFTH SET OF QUESTIONS REFERRED TO PEOPLE'S FEELINGS ABOUT THE AMENITIES AND WHAT THEY MIGHT WANT TO SEE IN THE FUTURE

How would you rate the Town's recreational facilities overall? (check all that apply)

Most people in the community leaned towards answering this question with feelings that the park is in good shape such as they feel safe in the parks (81%), parking is adequate (40%), and park equipment is well maintained (34%). There seems to be some gaps in indoor recreation as only 4% seemed to think that there was enough indoor recreation. Less than 5% thought there was enough special events in the town. The town may benefit from marketing the opportunities it does offer in these areas or expand on programming in those areas.



What other parks and recreation opportunities would you like to see in Mars Hill?

The Town of Mars Hill seems very supportive of adding more greenways and trails to the community (72%). Over 43% would like to see the town improve current facilities and 49% want to see more park facilities. This may indicate that the people in town would be interested in helping to fund increased parks and recreation options in the community.

This question allowed people to enter ideas about what they would like to see and some of the ideas are (only answers that appeared more than one time are indicated here):

- A pool that allows laps/Indoor Pool
- Bike Trails
- Parks close to downtown
- Greenway to Smith Farm
- Soccer/Softball fields
- Dog Park/dog walking
- YMCA/Gold's Gym
- Indoor recreation
- Hiking
- Shooting range
- Improved sidewalks to accessed place in town

Many of the items listed here are available in town, thus collective marketing should be used to inform the public about available options.



Town of Mars Hill

PARKS AND RECREATION Capital Improvement Plan 2019-2024

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The Town of Mars Hill is a small town in the mountains of western North Carolina with a population of approximately 2,400 citizens. The Town is home to Mars Hill University, a private liberal arts university. Mars Hill is located approximately 20 miles from downtown Asheville, the largest metropolitan area in the region, popular for outdoor recreation and a vast array of cultural art activities.

The Town of Mars Hill abounds with all types of recreation opportunities. The Town operates a variety of recreation experiences at the Recreation Park located at 690 Park Drive. Tennis courts, baseball field, outdoor basketball courts, a playground and a large swimming pool are among the recreation elements found at this facility. In addition to this park, the Town and other partners have developed a one-mile paved greenway that traverses properties owned by the Town, Mars Hill University and Madison County Schools. The Town also manages a small “pocket park” in the historic downtown district.

The Town of Mars Hill has developed a Parks and Recreation Capital Improvement Plan as a planning tool to provide guidance to the Board of Alderman and town staff in the area of parks and recreation services. This document is developed to cover a five-year period to determine how to invest in new construction projects, renovation and maintenance of infrastructure, and other facility and program initiatives in the Parks and Recreation Department. Each project listing in the CIP typically has further review by the Board of Aldermen as part of the annual budgeting process as well as during any project design and bid award process. In addition, priorities and needs can change over the five-year period as funding scenarios change, new information becomes available and other priorities established. The CIP is a working planning document and project scope and timelines proposed may change subject to those considerations.

PROJECTS

Project Name: Mars Hill Smith Farm Park	Project Costs: \$750,000
Project Description: Plan, design and construct Mars Hill Smith Farm Park, a 86-acre site associated with the conservation of Bailey Mountain. The park will feature active and passive areas, trails, picnicking, parking, outdoor fitness equipment, restroom facilities and entertainment venue. Perform stream restoration and vegetation plantings.	
Funding Sources: Town of Mars Hill Parks and Recreation Trust Fund NC Division of Water Resources Pigeon River Fund Private Foundations Private Fundraising	

Project Name: Greenway –Park Drive Connector	Project Costs: \$250,000
Project Description: Plan, design and construct an extension of the current terminus of the Otis Duck Greenway to the existing Mars Hill Recreation Park. This connector will provide an additional one-half mile paved walkway to connect these two popular recreation facilities.	
Funding Sources: Town of Mars Hill NC Department of Transportation French Broad River MPO Mars Hill University	

Project Name: Greenway – Forest Street/Mars Hill Smith Farm Park Connector	Project Costs: \$1,500,000
Project Description: Plan, design and construct an extension of the current terminus of the Otis Duck Greenway to the Mars Hill Smith Farm Park. This connector will provide an additional one mile paved walkway to connect these two popular recreation facilities.	
Funding Sources: Town of Mars Hill NC Department of Transportation French Broad River MPO Mars Hill University	

Project Name: Greenway – Enhancement	Project Costs: \$50,000
Project Description: Plan, design and construct enhancements along the Otis Duck Greenway to include shelters, lighting, interpretative signage and outdoor fitness equipment.	
Funding Sources: Town of Mars Hill Mars Hill University Madison County Schools	

Project Name: Greenway – Maintenance	Project Costs: \$5,000
Project Description: Maintain and enhance the Duck Greenway to encourage the safe use of the facility by keeping it clear of obstructions.	
Funding Sources: Town of Mars Hill Madison County Schools Mars Hill University	

Project Name: Gazebo Park - Enhancement	Project Costs: \$20,000
Project Description: Plan, design and construct enhancements to the Gazebo Park to encourage use of the community gathering space. Enhancements to include brick paved pedestrian use areas, landscaping, and other enhancements for this “pocket” park.	
Funding Sources: Town of Mars Hill Madison County Tourism Development Authority	

Project Name: Recreation Park - Enhancement	Project Costs: \$100,000
Project Description: Plan, design and construct general enhancements to the Recreation Park to encourage continued community use of the space. Enhancements to include additional picnic shelters, walking/nature trail, landscaping, safety and ADA improvements and other enhancements for this facility.	
Funding Sources: Town of Mars Hill	

Project Name: Recreation Park – Tennis Courts	Project Costs: \$70,000
Project Description: Plan, design and construct enhancements to the existing tennis courts. Existing facility to be resurfaced and striped. Explore feasibility to include additional sport use of the facility such as pickleball and others as deemed appropriate.	
Funding Sources: Town of Mars Hill	

Project Name: Recreation Park – Baseball Field	Project Costs: \$30,000
Project Description: Plan, design and construct improvements to the baseball field area to include outfield fence repair and installation where needed, concession stand area, dugout safety improvements, spectator viewing area improvements, infield material improvements, outfield grass improvements.	
Funding Sources: Town of Mars Hill	

Project Name: Recreation Park – Swimming Pool	Project Costs: \$50,000
Project Description: Plan, design and construct enhancements to the swimming pool and associated deck area to provide additional water play amenities and safety and ADA compliant access to the facility.	
Funding Sources: Town of Mars Hill	

Project Name: Recreation Park – Playground	Project Costs: \$25,000
Project Description: Plan, design and construct enhancements to the playground to encourage use of the space. Enhancements to include additional play equipment, the addition of a natural play area, and safety equipment.	
Funding Sources: Town of Mars Hill	



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