



## Section 5: Maintenance & Operational Cost Assessment

### Maintenance Staff Costs

The International City County Managers Association's (ICMA) data indicates a ratio of 1 FTE (full time employee) per 18-20 acres of maintained parkland as a general standard for parks maintenance, with the best practice as a 12 to 1 ratio. PRORAGIS data reveals a wide range of park acres maintained per FTE, with an overall median ratio of 9 to 1. Applying an 18 acre per FTE standard for Warner Robins' 315 acres of parks indicates a need for 17 full time parks maintenance workers. When compared to the goals to achieve 450 acres of parkland, this increases to 25 FTEs. Currently, the Department utilizes 4 FTEs for building maintenance, and shares another 4-8 FTEs with Public Works, depending on the season. For comparison, at its seasonal peak, the Department utilizes 12 FTEs for its purposes. At an average annual compensation (salary and benefits) of \$38,000 for a FTE, this would require an increase in salaries to the City's operational budget of \$190,000 now (to arrive at 17 FTEs), and \$494,000 (to arrive at 25 FTEs) to cover future acreage goals. Those figures rely on the ICMA standards. If a median of other parks departments is applied using standards from NRPA's PRORAGIS system, those figures would double.

A focus on improving the safety, access and aesthetics of the parks system should be the highest priority for the Parks and Recreation Department. The planning team recommends that the City develop parks maintenance standards to serve as the basis of the parks maintenance staff assignments. At least one employee should hold a Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) Certification. In addition to routine maintenance, the Maintenance Supervisor should implement a preventive maintenance plan and a regular inspections program. A digital inspections and work order system would assist in scheduling work, tracking costs and prioritizing the repair of unsafe conditions. Performance measures should be developed to track workload indicators and performance.

### Operational Budgeting

In its most recent publication, NRPA's PRORAGIS reported a median operation expense per capita of \$77 for the 500 agencies profiled. A 2006 study conducted by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) of 125 cities indicated a per capita operations expense of \$45.96 for cities with populations under 100,000. In Alpharetta, Roswell, and Decatur, we see figures of \$113, \$109, and \$75 respectively. These figures include capital and operational expenses. Warner Robins's figure of \$28 per capita (which includes the \$100,000 budgeted for capital derived from the lodging tax) means that upkeep and operation of the



existing park acreage is well below national and state standards. If the Department is to grow its acreage by approximately 43% (315 acres existing to 450 acres by 2020), the Department's budget will need to be increased significantly.

### **Contract Management**

Parks and Recreation Departments often extend their ability to offer programs or enhance services through private sector contracts. Major reasons that cities contract with private providers include:

- The job, or service, requires a specialized skill that staff does not have, but is readily available in the private sector
- The City would have to purchase specialty and costly equipment to perform a task, but private contractors have the equipment in inventory
- The function is intended to be operated with a business model, as opposed to a public sector model
- The City wants to offer a service but wants to share or reduce its level of risk
- A cost savings is realized.

Contract management is most effective when it is seamless, operating as an extension of staff. Its success is dependent on 1) the detail and clarity of the contract document and 2) regular staff oversight and evaluation of the contractor's performance. It is a common misconception that contract management eliminates the need for staff.

### **Community Partnerships**

City officials have expressed an interest in developing community partnerships as a strategy to improve services while containing City costs. The City's nonprofit partnership goals can best be progressed by creating a framework and process that facilitate non-profit volunteerism and cost sharing for park improvements. A policy needs to be developed that establishes the rules, conditions, and priorities for matching contributions for park improvements. The Parks and Recreation Department should initiate and establish "Friends Groups" with formalized policies, procedures, and written agreements to assist with offsetting maintenance costs.