



SUWANEES APPROACH TO PARKS & RECREATION



DID YOU KNOW:

Our citizens have spoken and tell us they like passive parks. Based on this direction, the City has focused efforts on acquiring and building passive parks, which has resulted in the following improvements to Suwanee's park system:

- 2225% increase in open space acreage, from 16 acres in 2001 to a current total of 372 acres.
- Construction of six new parks: Town Center Park; Suwanee Creek Greenway; PlayTown Suwanee; Sims Lake Park; Suwanee Creek Park; and White Street Park.
- Acquisition of land for future park sites.

The City of Suwanee's parks and recreation approach centers on improving quality of life and creating an identity for the community through the provision of passive parks and protected natural habitats. Through its eight parks and 8.71 miles of greenway/trails, Suwanee's focus has been on providing passive recreation, leaving active recreation to Gwinnett County.

PASSIVE VS. ACTIVE RECREATION: Passive recreation generally enhances the open-space aspect of a park by providing a minimal intensity of development for "unstructured" recreation opportunities, such as walking, picnics, kite-flying, interactive fountain, disc golf course, and exercise. Active recreation involves more intensive development for ball fields, skate parks, aquatic centers, etc. and typically includes programmed activities, such as athletic leagues and classes. Gwinnett County offers active recreation opportunities in the area, available at George Pierce Park* and other nearby parks.

The decision to focus on passive recreation impacts the City's organizational structure, costs and budgeting with respect to parks and recreation. Unlike many similar communities the City does not operate a traditional Parks and Recreation Department. In 2001 it was estimated to cost \$1.2 million annually to operate a full department. To reduce redundancies and take advantage of existing strengths, Suwanee has spread the operations among existing departments with complimentary functions. Public Works handles maintenance and special events support. Economic & Community Development plans events and activities that take place in the parks.

PAST AND RECENT EFFORTS: In 2001, the City had just 16 acres of open space/parkland. Residents relied on non-City facilities for their recreation needs - Gwinnett County's George Pierce Park, neighborhood recreation areas, and private facilities, such as Suwanee Sports Academy or fitness centers. This overall lack of City facilities led to development of the Recreation and Open Spaces Needs Assessment in 2001, a community-involved master planning effort aimed at identifying critical land for preservation and recreation and assessing the recreation programs and activities available to residents. The Assessment resulted in the November 2001 bond referendum, with Suwanee voters approving a \$17.7 million program to acquire land, preserve open spaces, and develop parks. The Assessment found, "review of public opinion regarding [active recreation] programs reveals most citizens feel their needs are being met."^ With that in mind, the City has used the bond proceeds to focus on acquiring and building and enhancing passive parks, which has resulted in the following improvements to Suwanee's parks system

- 2225% increase in open space acreage, from 16 acres in 2001 to a current total of 372 acres.
- Construction of six new parks: Town Center Park; Suwanee Creek Greenway; PlayTown Suwanee; Sims Lake Park; Suwanee Creek Park; and White Street Park.
- Acquisition of land for future park sites, such as Town Center on Main.

The City completed the final project with bond proceeds - rehabilitation and enhancement of the Suwanee Creek Greenway - in 2011. Recognizing the operating costs needed to maintain new parks, the City's short-term efforts are centered on maintaining and enhancing existing parks to ensure a quality standard, rather than construction. Examples of past enhancement projects include: Big Splash fountain in Town Center Park; amphitheater/outdoor classroom and orchard in White Street Park; shade structures in Town Center and Sims Lake Parks; Brushy Creek Greenway; disc golf course in Suwanee Creek Park; and dock at Sims Lake Park.

PRESENT AND FUTURE PROJECTS: As of 2017, an orchard at White Street Park is under construction and planning is underway for the proposed future Town Center on Main.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Suwanee Recreation and Open Space Needs Assessment. 2001
- Suwanee 2030 Comprehensive Plan: A Community Agenda. 2008
- Capital Improvement Program, City of Suwanee Annual Budget.
- suwanee.com

^ 2001 Recreation and Open Space Needs Assessment
*While George Pierce Park is located within the City limits of Suwanee, the park is owned, maintained, and controlled by Gwinnett County.