

Department Organization and Analysis

Parks and Recreation in the unincorporated areas of Pender County is a function of the Pender County Government. Prior to FY 09-10, Parks and Recreation was a separate department, and included the Director of Parks and Recreation and two full-time maintenance worker positions. In May 2009, the County Manager made personnel and organizational changes impacting the Department of Parks and Recreation. The Director of Parks and Recreation position was reclassified to a Planner II-Recreation Planner position and placed within the Department of Planning and Development, and the two maintenance positions were placed under the County Public Works Department where the overall county maintenance activities are located.

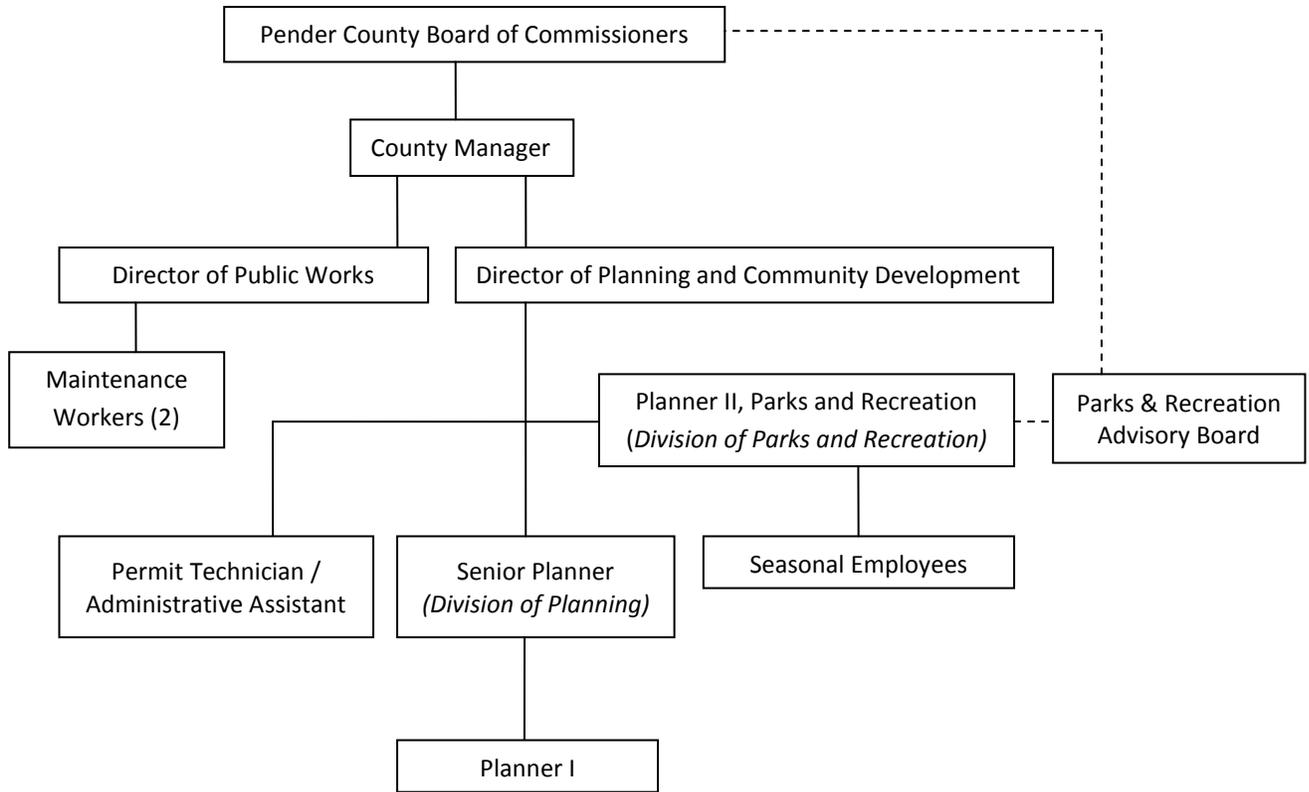
The purpose of the changes was to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the use of limited resources. The larger Department of Planning and Community Development provided staff and technical resources and support for needed long-range planning activities previously not available to the Director, such as the development of this plan. As well, the larger Department of Public Works provided additional resources and coordination to effectively address parks maintenance issues and needs. In making these changes, the County Manager expressed that as the county embarked on developing additional parks and recreational facilities county-wide, the need for a separate Parks and Recreation Department in the future would become necessary.

Existing Organizational Structure

Figure 4.1 depicts the current organizational structure among all Pender County staff that contribute to parks and recreation duties. The delegation of parks and recreation duties and responsibilities across two departments requires positive collaboration and coordination. The Recreation Planner position reports directly to the Director of Planning and Community Development. Technical assistance and support is provided by other professional planners and support staff. As a result, planning assistance has been provided on projects like Millers Pond Park, in forging relationships with community members and staff of local, state and federal parks and facilities, and in the development of this parks and recreation master plan.

The two maintenance positions report to the Director of Public Works, who is responsible for the maintenance of all county facilities including parks. This arrangement allows the Director to allocate additional resources and equipment to parks projects or maintenance as required.

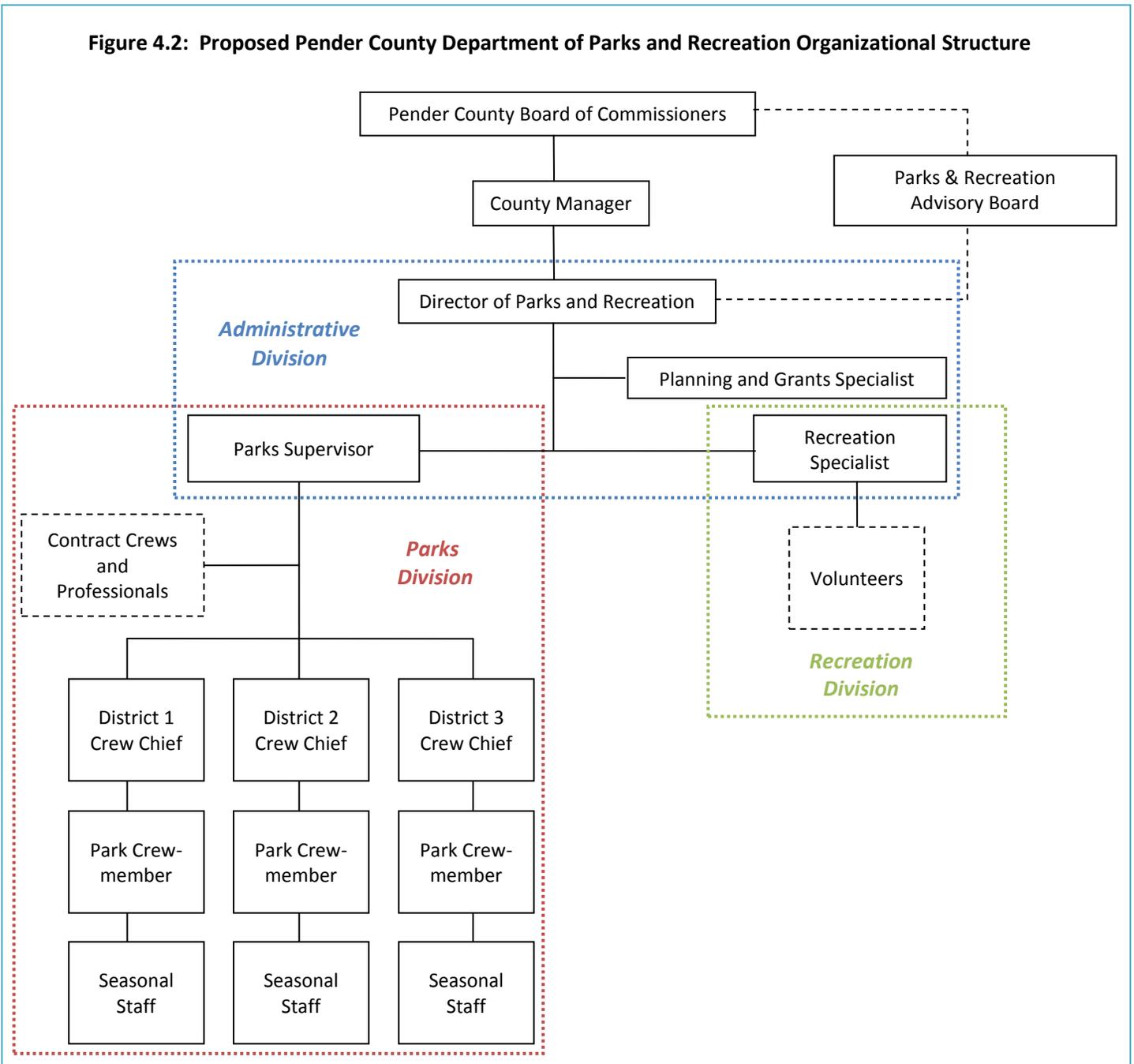
Figure 4.1: Existing Organizational Structure of Pender County Staff that Contribute to Parks and Recreation



Future Organizational Recommendations

As Pender County embarks successfully on developing and opening new parks and recreation facilities and broadens programming, re-establishment of a separate Pender County Parks and Recreation Department will be necessary for more effective and efficient operations and management. The timing of such is dependent upon facility and program growth, and should be based upon specific criteria that provide clear justification for increasing personnel and resources. A standard future organizational structure is depicted in Figure 4.2, which reflects a Director of Parks and Recreation managing three separate functions: parks, programming, and administrative. Parks functions includes park supervision and maintenance duties and responsibilities. Programming functions includes working with volunteers and recreation partners to program a variety of recreation programs across the county. Administrative functions include overall parks and recreation program administration including planning, budget management, and resource development.

Figure 4.2: Proposed Pender County Department of Parks and Recreation Organizational Structure



General Department Issues

Facility Needs

As the Department of Parks and Recreation grows, it will be necessary to provide a facility with adequate office space and room for storage, and a maintenance/equipment facility. The draft Pender County Government Campus plan prepared by Warren Wilson, Architect P.C. proposes that in the future administrative functions of Parks and Recreation be located within the administrative offices on the campus. The plan also provides for a new public works/maintenance facility to be constructed in the adjacent industrial park, which will be designed to facilitate parks and recreation maintenance and equipment operations as well.

Staff Mentoring and Education Recommendations

Internship Program

Internships are generally the first step of successful careers for students. It is recommended that the department create and manage an internship program with positions that can be either paid or non-paid positions, and would be mutually beneficial for the department as well as the intern. The University of North Carolina at Wilmington has a Parks and Recreation Management program (<http://uncw.edu/stuaff/career/Majors/parksrec.htm>) that provides a source for talented, motivated, interested, and educated internship candidates. Students are often given academic credit for internships and these internships would provide students with hands-on real world experience that prepares them for careers in the field of parks and recreation. These interns would also provide extra staff with minimal resource dedication from the department.

Training, Certification, and Education

Many training, certification, and education opportunities exist for professionals in the field of parks and recreation, particularly through the North Carolina Recreation and Parks Association (NCRPA) annual conferences and National Recreation and Park Association individual workshops. Training and education of staff members should be encouraged because it is very important to staff and allows the department to function in a professional capacity. Proper training for equipment, chemicals, and supplies used within the department is crucial to ensure safety of staff and parks and recreation users. It is recommended that staff should hold certifications including *Certified Parks and Recreation Professional*, *Certified Playground Safety Instructor*, *Public Operator Pesticide Applicator's License*, *First-Aid/CPR Certification*, and others depending on the staff position.

Planning and Maintenance Districts

Pender County is very geographically unique in that it contains many natural features in its nearly 900 square miles. As such, the populated areas of the county that are served by the Department are vastly spread and require significant driving time to transit from one area to another. As more parks and recreation facilities are developed in the county, it will be increasingly difficult and inefficient to have one parks crew maintaining all facilities in the entire county. Establishing several parks districts may be considered as an option to allow for more efficient maintenance and planning. By utilizing a district approach, the Department may better plan, evaluate, and maintain parks facilities and recreational programming to ensure that equal opportunity is being granted in each district. Implementation of the district planning and management approach will become more appropriate as new programs and facilities are created in the county.

Marketing and Public Outreach

There is ample room for improvement in marketing and public outreach for the Department, including creating a website, a unique logo for department branding, and performing more outreach and advertising for programming and special events.

Pender County Parks and Recreation would strongly benefit from a unique website that allows for residents to stay updated on parks facilities, recreational programming, other news, and the ability to register for programs and reserve facilities online. Survey respondents overwhelmingly indicated that they would prefer to register for parks and recreation programs online, and creating such an online registration system would allow for better data management and staff efficiency. The current website does allow for residents to find contact information on recreation partners, county parks facilities, park ordinances, and staff contacts, but has great room for improvements. The Pender County Tourism Department recently launched a new website (www.visitpender.com) that has an attractive look and welcoming user interface, and a similar website for Parks and Recreation should be pursued within 6 months of this plan adoption.

The Department would also benefit from a unique branding. The logo previously used by the department was "retired" several years ago, and creating and utilizing an updated, refreshed logo would help to brand the department. Both the Pender County Department of Public Utilities and Tourism Department have recently created and begun using updated logos that immediately have become the branding for both departments.

Finally, more attention to outreach and advertising for programming and special events should be pursued, especially as more programs and events are undertaken by the Department. Regular publications and website updates should be performed to ensure that residents are aware of the programs and facilities offered by the Department. All flyers, brochures, special announcements, and other publications should retain a unified look to strengthen departmental branding.

Partnerships

Partnerships are an efficient method to provide parks facilities and recreational programming. As Pender County continues to strive to become more progressive, innovative, and efficient, partnerships should be pursued to allow for a more effective provision of parks facilities and recreational programming. Potential partnerships may include, but are not limited to, civic clubs, schools, the YMCA, the Boys and Girls Club, and other private organizations, state and federal agencies, community organizations, non-profit organizations, and others. As discussed further later in this plan, the existing partnerships for parks and recreation providers in Pender County should be evaluated, and additional partnerships should be pursued as parks and recreational facilities and programs are developed in Pender County.

Natural Areas

Pender County is host to a tremendous amount of natural areas that are extremely biodiverse and unique. Many areas of the county are held in perpetual conservation easements by public and private entities including the Nature Conservancy, the Coastal Land Trust, the Audubon Society, various departments of the State of North Carolina, and others.

The North Carolina Natural Heritage Program has published the *Natural Area Inventory of Pender County, North Carolina* which identifies many natural areas, biological communities, and rare species throughout the county. Strong consideration should be given to conserving and preserving the areas indicated in the document, as these areas will serve as destinations for ecotourism and educational tours. Efforts to retain these natural areas may include partnerships with conservation and environmental organizations as well as state and federal departments. Additionally, nature-based programs utilizing these unique natural areas are a tremendous opportunity for new programming by the Department; these programs generally would be revenue generating and would help the economic stability of the Department. Survey respondents indicated very strong interest in these types of activities and programs within the county.

Organization Recommendations Summary

- Review the need for the creation of a larger organization and district planning and management approaches on an annual basis, and implement changes as necessary to deliver efficient and effective services.
- Work with UNCW and other schools and universities to create and manage an internship program.
- Create a new logo for Pender County Parks and Recreation to increase departmental branding, and utilize similar styles of signs, publications, and materials to create a sense of branding for the department.
- Work with the Information Technology Services to create a website with a unique domain name that provides an easy to use interface for county residents to stay up to date and involved with parks and recreation in the county. Also create an online registration system for parks facilities and recreational programs.
- Increase outreach and advertising efforts to ensure residents are aware of facilities, programs, and special events in the county.
- Evaluate existing partnerships for reciprocity and pursue additional partnerships for facilities and programs.