



## Chapter 3.



# 3. Public Input

## Public Engagement

The Watkins Regional Park Master Park Development Plan was developed with an open and collaborative public engagement process. An array of outreach methods were used, including: public meetings and focus groups; an appointed stakeholder group; interviews with key staff and agency representatives; an on-line survey; a participatory dot poster survey with displays at the Watkins Nature Center (WNC) and the Largo/Kettering/Perrywood Community Center; and attendance at park events. Much effort was expended to ensure that the recommended plan grew from a clear understanding of the community's desires and with its support.

## Public Meetings

The project intent initially was to host two public meetings. The first public meeting, held on May 24, 2016, introduced the project to interested neighbors and community members. Attendance from nonstaff members was low. Although the discussion was productive, and attendees were able to gain an understanding of the project's issues and intent, a more targeted outreach effort was needed for future meetings. Instead of a second meeting, a stakeholder group was formed.



Image from the first stakeholder group, digital voting on interests



## Focus Groups

Small focus groups met at WNC on August 2 and 3, 2016. The groups invited to participate included:

- Fitness users (yoga, walking)
- WNC users
- Sports league users
- Summer Operations users and Ambassadors
- Class participants

Convened in small groups, each group was presented with information related to the project's intent and scope and was asked to provide any insights they had through their affiliation with Watkins Regional Park. Discussions were oriented around these questions:

- How do you use the park?
- How well does the park serve your needs?
- What recommendations do you have?

Some of the responses to the first question are noted below.

“When their kids were young, the respondents used to come with their young kids for the playground, picnicking, to visit the raptors. Now one is a frequent tennis user; the other still comes to visit the nature center raptors and gardens, and to walk the trails. They usually park by the tennis courts and walk from there. They usually stay 2.5 hours on average.”<sup>1</sup>

“She used to bring kids and now is involved in yoga, Tai Chi, walking. Often she walks the loop with friends – they meet at the lot, walk the loop, and then go home.”

Several responses to the second question follow.

“Trails are in good shape and serve her well. She uses the paved trails mainly.”

“Very well, but feel that most other kids are not getting out into the nature trails – they just use the playground and carousel.”

Responses to the third question were more varied, and varied based upon the speaker's area of interest.

“Tournament play is on the rise and to rebuild the fields to tournament specs would really create a destination that is well-used – that would generate a lot of revenue too.

The main issues to address are:

- Better water management (covers, drainage)
- New concessions and restrooms
- More parking
- Upgrade all fields to at least 300 feet (if a focus on adult play)”

“If it rains, there is no place to move programs (like yoga) indoors.”

“The agricultural land needs some interpretation – people don't know what it is or why it is there.”

“The park's marketing functions are not centralized. Nature Center markets their programs, so does the farm. We need a more coordinated approach, including a

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<sup>1</sup> 082016WRP focus group notes

website, a central phone number, and a brochure with a better map.”

“Casual picnic areas is a definite need, especially around the carousel cluster.”

“If there were a multi-purpose building, you could bring a lot more people to the park who would never otherwise come, like KidsCare after school program, or senior groups. You could also do nature therapy programs, junior ranger programs, a sleep-over program, etc.”

“Jitney tours of the whole park, on weekends, to show people the areas of the park they don’t know about.”

“More wayfinding and signage, including signs that indicate how far a walk it is (in minutes or miles).”

## Stakeholder Group

A stakeholder group was formed mid-way through the planning process when it became clear that a more targeted outreach would be useful. The invited group of stakeholders represented a broad cross-section of interest groups. Invitees included nearby civic association and neighborhood representatives, active park users, special interest group representatives such as the Boys and Girls Club, and nearby church congregations. A list of participants is included in Appendix 5.

The intent of forming the group was to have three meetings with the group. The first was to introduce the project, identify issues, and solicit opinions on the park—what was working, who was not being served, and what were their concerns. The second meeting introduced some initial planning concepts, based on the research and analysis completed to date. The third contact was to share the draft plan with members of the group, requesting their comments following their review.

## STAKEHOLDER GROUP MEETING 1

The initial meeting, held on January 24, 2017 from 7:00 to 9:00 PM at the Watkins Nature Center, focused on introducing the project to the attendees. The meeting began with an opportunity for attendees to view the existing

### Stakeholder Group Meeting 1

#### What do you cherish?<sup>1</sup>

- Walking and bike trails
- Green space
- Picnic areas
- Summer concerts and courses
- Tennis
- Farm/historic tobacco barn
- Ball fields
- Playgrounds
- Nature Center (Summer Camp)

#### Who is missing; what attracts them? Tweens/Teens

- Skate park
- Archery
- Splash park
- Bike rentals/BMX bike park
- Music venue/Concert in barns

#### Ages 20-30

- Wifi connectivity
- Competitive obstacle course
- 5k-10k runs

#### Seniors

- Benches for resting
- Exercise station
- Senior fitness playground

#### What is the most pressing need?

- Lighting
- Parking
- Signage
- Park furnishings
- Food vendors, concessions, food trucks, event space
- Passive area for meditation or reading
- Connecting people to agriculture through expansion of farm learning
- Chelsea history and repurposing barns
- Water feature
- Community garden
- Picnic shelters
- Bike facilities
- Make Nature Center larger

<sup>1</sup> Sample, full responses in Appendix 5

### Stakeholder Group 2<sup>1</sup> Meeting Comments

- Consider use of synthetic turf surface for all existing and proposed rectangular multi-purpose fields
- Life Lab at Watkins Discovery Center
- Retain tee-ball near Community Center
- Make trail connection between repurposed campground area and Community Center
- Add sports oriented activities such as bocce and croquet to Coville's Picnic Area
- Consider a boardwalk adjacent to the Western Branch for wildlife viewing (eastern side of valley, southwest of current Nature Center near natural trails)
- Add 3 picnic shelters/tables along path near the proposed boardwalk
- Positive reaction to shared images during discussion
  - Ropes course with wheelchair rider as participant
  - Adult fitness equipment
  - Outdoor pavilion
  - Tobacco barn—shadow light show on snow; re-purpose and uses for the barns
  - Beer garden/café on terrace with trellis
  - Bike skills park
  - Horseback riders

#### Phase 1

- Fields (earns revenue)
- Parking
- New picnic area (earns revenue) at former Campground area
- Food Trucks (earns revenue)

#### Phase 2

- Misters
- Splash Park
- Concessions at fields (earns revenue)

<sup>1</sup> Sample, full responses in Appendix 5

conditions on display boards and to participate in a 'dot' survey, similar to the one completed over the summer and fall of 2016 at Watkins Nature Center and Largo/Kettering/Perrywood Community Center. Approximately 30 members of the stakeholder group and 15 Staff members attended the workshop.

Following an introduction to the project, a slide presentation with the findings from site explorations, online survey results, level of service analysis, and initial vision concepts were presented. As a part of this presentation, five interactive survey slides were completed with questions ranging from identifying the reasons people use the park to which area of the park most needs improvement.

Four breakout groups, of 6-8 members each, brainstormed and discussed three questions. Full responses are included in Appendix 5. A sample of responses is illustrated in the sidebar.

- Question 1: What do you cherish about Watkins Regional Park?
- Question 2: Who is missing from this park as a user and what would draw (cause them to use) them to Watkins Regional Park?
- Question 3: What is the park's most pressing need?

### STAKEHOLDER GROUP MEETING 2

A second stakeholder group meeting was held on February 15, 2017. A short presentation, rich in imagery, summarized the initial planning concepts. The presentation was followed by a question and answer period, then three breakout groups for further discussion.

The entire group was largely in support of the concepts as presented. Through the discussion and the breakout groups, more detailed concerns and issues were raised.

### STAKEHOLDER GROUP MEETING 3

TO COME

### Interviews

In addition to the focus groups and the stakeholder group meetings, more than twenty meetings were held with park staff including operations, police, park rangers, program operators, and other agency representatives, such as those from Prince George's County Public Schools. These interviews were in addition to multiple meetings with the

Department of Parks and Recreation's project staff, Division Chiefs and the Executive Team. Summary notes from these meetings can be found in Appendix 5.

## Online Survey

The online survey incorporated an interactive mapping exercise that provided an opportunity for all park users (residents, visitors, employees, etc.) to share their on-the-ground knowledge about what works and what does not work in the park.

The interactive map is a web-based application developed by Mapita<sup>2</sup>. The tool allows participants to identify and reference specific geographic locations when answering a wide range of questions. Answers to questions are marked with "pins" directly onto an online map. More traditional survey questions and open-ended questions followed, collecting more specific data about the pinned locations on the map. This approach allows for respondents to answer questions about places they know or care about the most.

## RESPONDENTS

A total of 319 respondents participated in the survey between May 24 and August 31, 2016. Respondents placed a total of 1,020 pins on the map to indicate opportunities or concerns in places they know or care about the most within the regional park. Not all of these 319 respondents answered all the questions. However, for consistency, all the percentages are calculated based on the total number of respondents who have provided answers to at least some of the questions. Where multiple responses were allowed, the percentage is not based on the sum of the answers indicated but rather the number of respondents (319).

Each respondent was asked to self-identify where they lived by placing a pin. Map 1 illustrates the distribution of these points or pins. Overall, most of the pins were placed within the Prince George's County area and within a 2-mile radius. Many pins were placed in the surrounding suburbs and in

<sup>2</sup> The interactive map is a web-based application developed by Mapita, a spinoff of a research group at Aalto University in Helsinki, Finland, for use in social science research regarding the quality of environments and specific ideas for improvements. Following extensive testing of the technology and methodology, Mapita partnered with MIG to make this tool available to enrich community input methods in North America.

### Online Survey Findings

*Features noted received highest response under each category noted.*

#### Most Time Spent Sites<sup>1</sup> (59%)

- Wizard of Oz playground
- Nature Center
- Old Maryland Farm
- Miniature Golf
- Chesapeake Carousel
- The Green

#### Most Desired Improvements

- Trails (26%)
- Nature Center (21%)
- Picnic Grounds (17%)
- Old Maryland Farm (17%)
- Play Areas (16%)

#### Least Desired Improvements

- Carousel (11%)
- Sports Fields and Courts (11%)
- Campgrounds (6%)

#### Active Recreation

- More walking and running trails (28%)
- More health and fitness programs (24%)
- Indoor or outdoor pool (21%)
- Mountain biking course (12%)
- Archery range (12%)
- More playground equipment (12%)
- Multi-purpose fields (5%)
- Disc golf (5%)

#### Community-building/Social Features

- Food and drink vendors (21%)
- More community small events (20%)
- Outdoor café with plaza seating (20%)
- Rentable wedding or event venues (10%)
- Beer garden (10%)

<sup>1</sup> Survey conducted online between May 24 and August 31, 2016; 319 Respondents

**On-line Survey Findings**

*Features received highest response under each category noted.*

**Picnic Facilities<sup>1</sup>**

- Improve shelters (20%)
- Casual family picnic facilities (23%)

**Arts and Cultural Programming**

- Concerts, plays, performances (40%)
- Food and wine festivals (32%)
- Outdoor movies (30%)

**Educational and Recreational Programming**

- Fitness and wellness classes (33%)
- Programs for kids (29%)
- Kids day camps (19%)

**Service Facilities**

- Restrooms (30%)
- Expanded parking (23%)
- More directional signage (21%)

**Cultural and Natural Facilities**

- Gardens and botanical features (31%)
- Natural and environmental programs (22%)

<sup>1</sup> Survey conducted online between May 24 and August 31, 2016; 319 Respondents

unincorporated communities located east of Washington DC. A few were placed in Montgomery County, Calvert County, and in the City of Annapolis. Thirty percent (30%) of respondents identified themselves as African-American, with just under twenty percent identifying as Caucasian/White (19.4%). The largest group by age is between 35 and 54 years (31%), and 26% of the respondents earn more than \$100,000 but less than \$250,000 annually. Around 27% of the respondents have children under 18 living with them.

**Sample Responses from Online Survey**

“Would love to see the inside of this historic building [likely in reference to Chelsea Historic Site] and see it being utilized.”

“Open restrooms by 6 AM”

“Better integration of farm into the park and park info”

“...alternate location for Old Maryland Farm. Beautiful setting, larger area for meadows, better views during the tractor ride, more space for gardens.”

“increase length of trails or connect them together”

“Add parking”

“....add disc golf, ropes course, dog park, lighted soccer fields, event hall, multi-purpose field, indoor soccer facility, amphitheater, playground near sports complex, large pool, spray ground...”



## KEY FINDINGS

Mapita was used to obtain place-based feedback from the community about how they use the park and also their recommendations for future improvements. More detailed information regarding the findings can be found in the Appendix 5.

### *People Are Drawn To Watkins Park To Improve Personal Fitness And To Be Outdoors*

Most respondents reported visiting the park a few times a year (31%). Many respondents reported visiting the park once or twice a month (23%) or at least once a week (14%). A nearly equal percentage of respondents reported visiting the park everyday (9%) and once a year or less (7%). When asked what are the main reasons they visit the park, most respondents specified personal fitness and exercise (33%). Other popular fitness and outdoors-related uses were taking children to the playground (30%) and enjoying activities or features at a particular site, such as the carousel, The Green, and Watkins Nature Center (29%). Playing organized or group sports, dog walking, picnicking, and developing skills or abilities were the least popular reasons for visiting the park.

### *The Most Frequent Destinations Are The Playground, The Nature Center, And The Old Maryland Farm*

Each respondent was asked to place a pin at the location where they spend time in Watkins Regional Park. Of the many amenities and destinations within the park, overall most of the pins were placed on the *Wizard of Oz* playground, Watkins Nature Center, Old Maryland Farm, miniature golf, and Chesapeake carousel area. If one combines the use of playgrounds, carousel, The Green, and Watkins Nature Center (arguably all destinations geared to families with children), 59% of the responses indicate these destinations are the main reasons respondents visit the park. The sheltered picnic areas in the west and the ball fields and tennis bubble in the east of the park were also places that received many pins.

### *People Want To See Most Improvements Made In The Trails, Nature Center, Picnic Grounds, And The Old Maryland Farm*

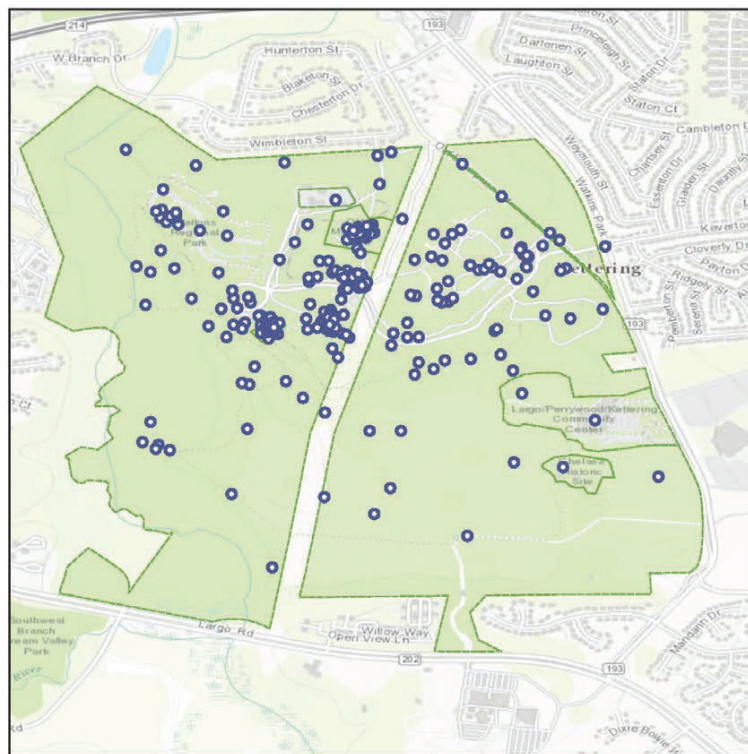
When asked where to focus capital improvements, trails were the most frequent answer (26%), followed by improvements to the nature center (21%), the picnic grounds, Old Maryland Farm (17% each), and play areas (16%). Respondents indicated that the carousel (11%), sports fields and courts (11%), and campground (6%) need the least improvements made. These findings support the results on popular park activities presented below.

## *Park Activities*

Respondents were asked to choose which top park activity they were interested in seeing more of within the park. These activities were grouped into seven comprehensive categories, which are listed with the number of times people clicked on choices under them: active recreation; community building and social features; arts and cultural programming; educational and recreational programming; service facilities; expanded cultural and natural features; and picnic facilities.

### Active Recreation

Under the active recreation category, the top two choices that respondents were interested in seeing more of in the park were adding walking and running trails (28%) and adding health and fitness programs (24%). These results are consistent with the finding that the majority of respondents were interested in seeing improvements made to trails. Adding an indoor or outdoor pool was also a popular choice (21% of the respondents checked this option). Adding more outdoor multi-purpose fields or adding disc golf facilities were the least popular choices (5% each).



**Spend Time**  
 ● Where do you spend time in Watkins Region  
 ■ Watkins Regional Park

Where do you spend time in Watkins Regional Park?

Map excerpted from Memorandum in Appendix 5, summarizing online survey findings

picked were fitness and wellness programs or classes (33%), programs for kids (29%), and kids day camps (19%). Programs for seniors (16%) and general education programs (12% of the respondents) were the least popular choices.

### Service Facilities

The most commonly selected facilities to be added were restrooms (30% of the respondents checked this option), expanding parking (23%), and adding more directional signage (21%).

### Cultural and Natural Resources

The largest group of respondents were interested in adding more gardens and botanical features (31%) and adding more natural and environmental programs (22%) under this category. Expanding archeological research and expanding interpretive features were the least popular choices (11% each).

### Picnic Facilities

Respondents would like to add or improve picnic shelters (20%) and add casual picnic spaces that become available on a first-come-first-served basis (23%). Not many were interested in adding catering services (4%).

### Community-building/Social Features

The largest group of respondents would like to see more food and drink vendors (21%), more small community events (20%), and an outdoor café with plaza seating (20%) in the park. Community-building events received 115 votes, with a slight preference for small events over large festivals. Not many were interested in adding more rentable wedding and event venues or a beer garden (10% each).

### Arts and Cultural Programming

The top choice in this category was bringing more concerts, plays, and performances (40%). Food and wine festivals (32%) and outdoor movies (30%) were the second and third most popular choice. Art classes or photography classes was the least popular choice (16% of respondents checked this option).

### Educational and Recreational Programming

Under the educational and recreational programming category, the most popular activities that respondents





### Activities that received 50 or more dots on-site<sup>1</sup>

- Concerts, plays, performances
- Outdoor movies
- Food and Wine Festival
- Kids programs, daycamps
- Improved trail network
- Archery range
- Indoor or outdoor pool
- Nature and environmental programs
- Gardens and botanical features
- Outdoor café
- Beer garden
- Food and drink vendors
- Off-leash dog area
- Casual picnicking
- Expand parking
- Add restrooms

### On-site 'Dot Survey' Results

#### Top Green Dot Getters (Keep)

- Watkins Nature Center
- Old Maryland Farm
- Miniature train
- Antique carousel
- *Wizard of Oz* playground

#### Top Yellow Dot Getters (Improve)

- Watkins Nature Center
- Old Maryland Farm
- 18-hole mini-golf course
- Snack bar/depot
- Family/unreserved picnic areas

#### Top Red Dot Getters (Remove)

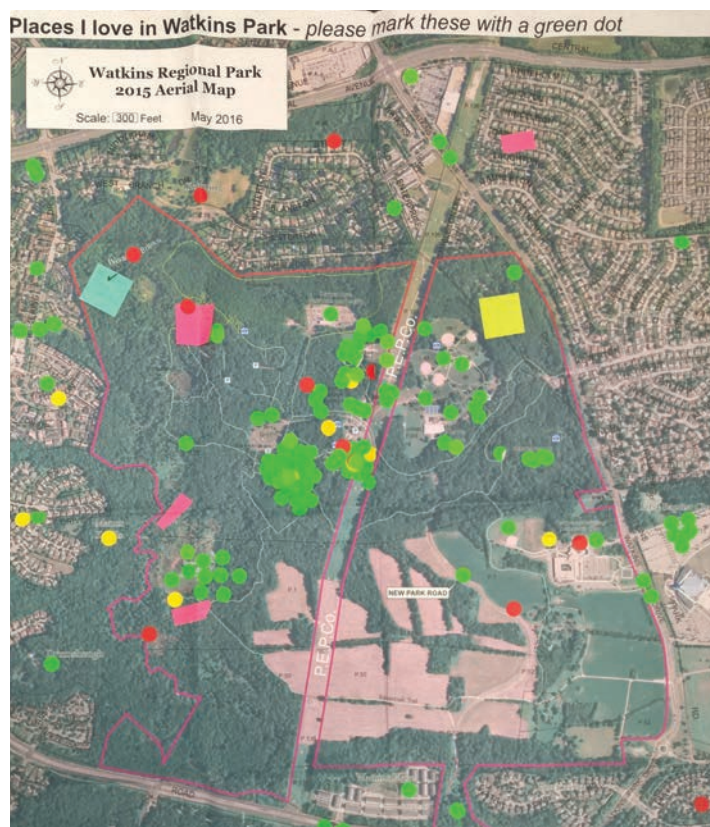
- Basketball half-court
- Campground
- *Wizard of Oz* playground

<sup>1</sup> Survey conducted in the park with 'stickers' from May 2016- November 2016; Nature Center, L/K/P Community Center, Park Events

Regarding personal safety, respondents indicated locations along the various trails that were either overgrown or needed some maintenance to improve visibility. Some respondents placed pins to indicate off leash dog areas as safety concerns. Many respondents also emphasized the need for better signage and wayfinding throughout the site to orient users to the different amenities and trail routes. Respondents suggested adding traffic lights at the park entrance along Keverton Drive to improve traffic safety.

### Interactive Surveys - Dot Posters

Additional outreach in the form of interactive photos and lists were modeled using the same queries contained in the on-line survey. Placed in Watkins Nature Center and at Largo/Kettering/Perrywood Community Center, viewers were invited to indicate their responses with a variety of colored dots. Colored stickers were also available to place on existing and proposed park features and on aerial photographs to indicate favorite or disliked locations. The posters were up May 2016 through November 2016, with intermittent replacements when the page was filled with dots.



'Dot Map' display



## CURRENT USES—DOT MAPPING OUTCOMES

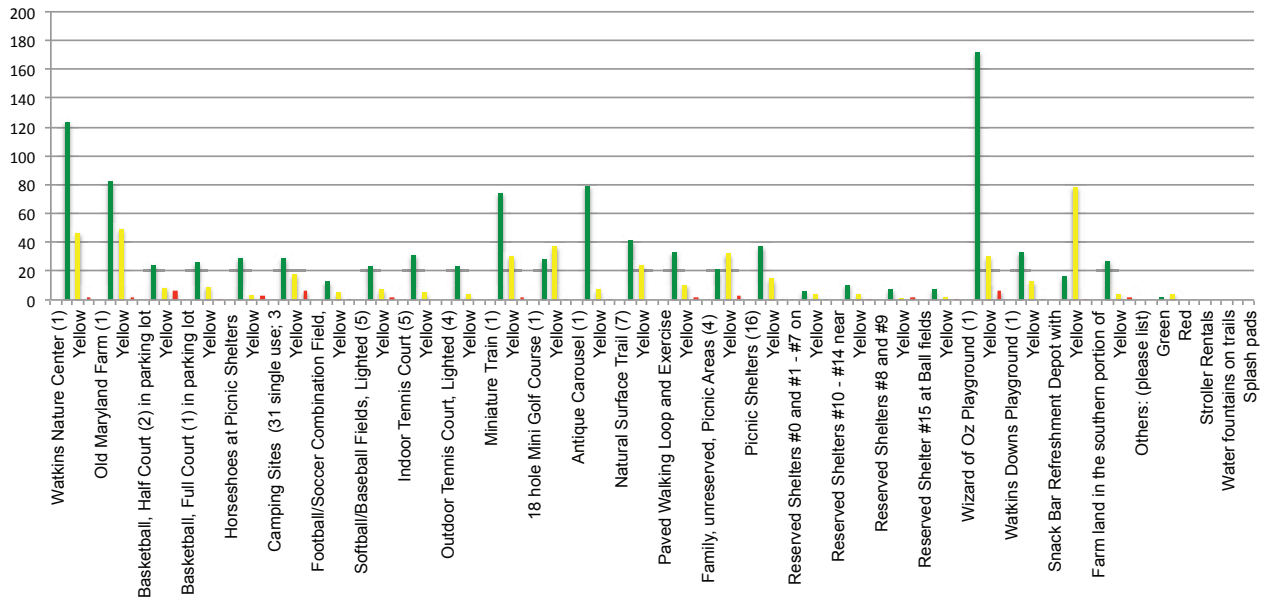


Table 3-1 Summary of Current Use Dot Surveys, measured in numbers of dots applied to each entry

## PROPOSED USES—DOT MAPPING OUTCOMES

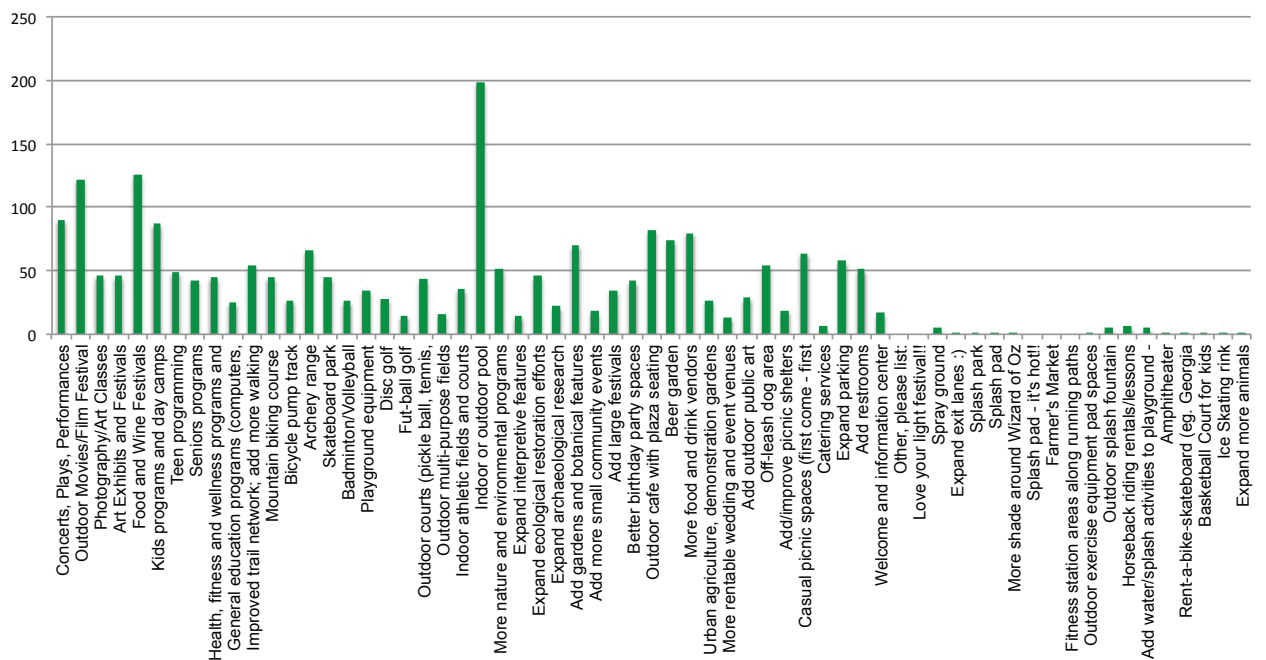


Table 3-2 Dot responses to the question: What uses would you like to ADD to Watkins Regional Park?

## Park Events

The dot posters were displayed at special events such as the Prince George's County Police Family Day that occurred within the park.

Flyers announcing the planning process and meeting dates were made available at many park events and on information tables at sites throughout the park.

## Website and Facebook Page

Information was updated throughout the project on the status of the effort, with presentation materials made available following each public presentation on the website.

