



# JOHNS CREEK, GA

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## RECREATION AND PARKS DIVISION

### *EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*

## 2011 COMPREHENSIVE PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Introduction

The community that is now the City of Johns Creek, GA has been recognized as a model of rural living while providing the amenities associated with suburban communities in metropolitan Atlanta. It has shared in the tremendous growth stemming from Atlanta and has become a popular suburban home for over 70,000 residents. The Mission Statement of the Recreation and Parks Advisory Committee is as follows: “The Johns Creek Recreation and Parks Division is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life and sense of community by providing safe facilities for active and passive programs that promote health and well-being.” Recreation and Parks Division leaders appointed Lose & Associates, Inc. to develop an efficient strategy for fulfilling the Division’s commitment to the community. An extensive public input process was conducted, including interviews and public meetings as well as a demographic analysis, along with department research and facility reviews. This document is a summary of the full “2009 Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan”.

## Community Profile

As the City of Johns Creek continues to grow, recreation and parks service providers must adjust to meet the needs of an ever-changing population. The City’s quiet location within the Metropolitan Atlanta area lends itself to substantial population growth and development as more people seek the relaxed suburban lifestyle that Johns Creek has to offer. Along with its surrounding areas, Johns Creek offers many opportunities for employment, particularly in technology fields. Over the years, these factors have combined to establish the City as one of the most desirable and fastest growing communities in northeast Georgia.

In anticipation of its historically high rate of growth, the City will be challenged to seek out additional park land to meet service level requirements for its growing population. This is particularly critical during the life of this Master Plan, as growth rates are expected to remain relatively high over the next ten years, after which they should level off to a more moderate rate. When planning this expansion of park land, additional consideration should be given to the eastern portions of the City, which have recorded substantial growth rates.

The racial/ethnic composition of Johns Creek is becoming more diverse with each year. The previously dominant Caucasian contingent has been gradually decreasing over the last two decades, giving way to an increase in both African American and Asian populations. This trend is expected to continue over the life of this Master Plan. Researchers noticed a growing concentration of Asian residents in east/southeast Johns Creek, an area adjacent to similar communities in neighboring Gwinnett County.

Understanding the age of a population is one of the most critical components to providing adequate recreation and parks services. Like many communities, Johns Creek is showing a gradual but steady increase in senior population, particularly in the southwestern areas of the City. Accommodations should be made over the next ten years to ensure sufficient senior programs and facilities to serve this population, especially in this area. The statistics for senior citizens, however, are overshadowed by numbers indicating a vast community of young adults with children in their homes. This highly active sampling represents a substantial component of the City’s population, one which requires

diverse programs and facilities, especially competitive sports for all ages. Johns Creek is fortunate to be ranked as the most affluent community in Georgia, along with a strong economic base that draws from nearby Atlanta. Such prosperity allows the community to support quality recreation opportunities capable of rivaling its neighbors. Additionally, the higher education levels of its residents indicate a City dedicated to education, opening the doors to joint programs between the City Recreation and Education authorities. This form of mutual relationship is particularly beneficial to the residents because it allows for a more efficient development of additional park land.

Coupled with its growing diversity, the City's economic status identifies Johns Creek as a strong, stable community capable of continued success well into the future. It is important for public recreation providers to prepare for the anticipated growth and development spurred by these factors. In doing so, residents can expect the continuation of Johns Creek's proud tradition of quality lifestyle and excellence.

## Public Input

The completion of public input brought about consistent themes throughout the various stages of the process. While some input forums had stronger desires for specific facilities over others, the overall direction for future improvements was relatively parallel among all the groups. The priorities were also consistent with the deficiencies noted during the planning team's analysis of the current recreation and parks system. The most consistent evaluation throughout the entire process was that the City must focus on informing the public of the programs and facilities it has to offer and increase the number and types of park facilities that would offer more diverse programs to meet the demand of its residents.

The surveys were intended to further gauge the community's desire for recreation facilities and programs. As with the public meetings, the top priorities were similar. A few priorities that had been highly desired in the public meetings did, however, receive a lower priority by survey respondents and vice versa. The public meetings and online survey respondents are generally representative of current park users. The mail survey also includes non-users, which is why it is such an important component of the overall response.

Various funding solutions were discussed throughout the public input process. The response by survey participants was a desire to fund park projects by borrowing money and paying it back over 20-25 years. The survey also points to support for dedicating funding to parks.

In conclusion, the people of Johns Creek want programs that meet their needs and the needs of their families; they want walking and biking trails; they want to feel safe at their parks; they want facilities that will provide a range of recreation opportunities; and they want to be informed along the way. They want parks that are convenient and not overcrowded and they want the parks to be well maintained and safe. They are willing to borrow money today to meet these needs and pay it back over time so that they can enjoy the parks as soon as possible. With the enthusiasm of the citizens, Johns Creek is primed for expanded recreation and parks opportunities and effective program delivery.

## Division Organization and Analysis

**Tier One Recommendations** *Tier One Priorities are the actions that should be taken and the park projects that should be funded in the next 24 months.*

- Establish a goal of becoming an accredited park and recreation agency
- Create a Recreation and Parks Department or establish a Recreation Authority
- Change the Division's Manager title to Director
- Create a staff position for the Director of Recreation and Parks
- Hire two full-time managers under the Director
- Hire part-time park attendants for weekday and weekend peak use periods
- Update rental policies, association use agreements, and develop maintenance standards and other standard operating policies for the Recreation and Parks Division
- Establish a fees and charges policy
- Redevelop the maintenance service contract to be much more specific
- Hire a marketing consultant and develop a marketing plan for the Division
- Develop a Comprehensive School Park Agreement that covers all school properties

**Tier Two Recommendations** *Tier Two Priorities are the actions that should be taken and the park projects that should be funded in the months 25-60.*

- Hire a full-time Athletic Manager
- Hire a full-time Greenway Manager
- Continue development of necessary park operational and employee policies
- Hire a full-time administrative assistant
- Hire additional park attendants for new parks
- Apply for the Division's accreditation
- Develop a Sports Advisory Council, or single sports alliance in which all athletic associations are associated

**Tier Three Recommendations** *Tier Three Priorities are the actions that should be taken and the park projects that should be funded in the months 61-120.*

- Hire recreation center staff
- Hire park attendants for new parks

## Programming

### Trends Overview and Recommendations

American society and the Johns Creek community are changing in many ways that are impacting parks and recreation. For example, the population is growing older, with the baby boomer generation turning 60, and is also becoming more diverse in terms of race and ethnicity. This provides both opportunities and challenges for park and recreation providers, in terms of programming and participation.

Americans' busy lifestyles and competition for leisure choices is changing how public recreation providers are meeting their clients' needs. The long-held practice of offering the same programs year after year in a highly structured environment is falling out of favor, while programs that offer different types of exercise and relaxation, specialized wellness and fitness training, and cultural and enrichment programs are growing for all ages.

Therefore, a "one-size-fits-all" approach to programming, facilities and organization will most likely not be successful. The park and recreation industry must remain flexible, participate in the planning process, and think both creatively and strategically, so that each agency can make a positive influence on the community and its resident's lives.

It is recommended that the Division review the community data generated during the master planning process as a starting point for developing new programs. Targeted programs should be developed and planned to meet specific programs that are currently underdeveloped or absent from the current program roster and not offered by churches or other private providers. It should be noted that a combination of full-time staff, paid/contract instructors and volunteers will be required for each new program, and overall full-time staffing loads may require increases in certain programming positions. See Section 3 staff organization discussion for more on staffing needs for the Division.

### **New Program Development**

The following new and expanded programs are recommended to diversify the Division's current level of service:

#### **High Priority**

- Increase the number and variety of non-athletic/non-traditional programs for all age groups that can be programmed at existing parks, schools or NPS properties. Examples include nature-based programs, geocaching programs and other programs that do not require specialized recreation facilities.
- Provide new programs in nature-based and outdoor recreation such as day trips for kayaking, hiking, environmental education, and wildlife viewing. These programs can be conducted from existing NPS properties or through partnerships with private outfitters who have property on the Chattahoochee River.
- Expand heritage programs at Autrey Mill Nature Preserve and Heritage Center by improving the Division's oversight of existing programs and expanding the focus of the center.
- Expand the potential for individual-based walking and running clubs by developing greenway trails.
- Develop indoor athletic programs for adults such as volleyball, dodge ball and basketball by building a community recreation center.
- Develop revenue producing, outdoor athletic programs for adults through the development of multi-use fields at Ocee, Shakerag and Newtown Parks.
- Expand the offering of adult programs in reply to survey responses which indicate that more instructional and individual based classes are desired by adults.
- Work with community groups to develop Therapeutic Recreation programs.
- Establish a preferred registration policy for Johns Creek residents.

**Medium Priority**

- Develop community gardening programs at Newtown and Shakerag Parks. Consult with Fulton County Agriculture Extension Service to see if they will conduct master gardener classes at these parks.
- Expand Special Olympics and Paralympics programs as new parks and facilities are developed.
- Provide new indoor fitness programs. Future indoor facilities will provide opportunities for more indoor programming.
- Develop adult master swimming programs and expanded therapeutic and aerobic swimming programs at the proposed community recreation center.

**Budget**

During the 10-year period covered by this master plan, spending will need to increase if the Division is to meet community needs and be an upper tier agency in the state. The current national economic conditions and impacts on local tax collection will hinder an increase in spending in the near-term, but should not prevent the Division from increasing funding over the long-term.

The key to increasing funding for the Division will be an increased awareness of the need to grow revenue generation at the same time operating costs are increased. Another important factor, which was strongly supported throughout the public input process, will be to construct more facilities so the Division can offer more program opportunities. The new facilities should be programmed to the maximum extent possible.

Another important element to budgeting is developing a fees and charges plan that establishes policies for developing program fees. Most parks agencies use a three or four tier system for program fees. Tier one programs are provided to the public at no cost or low cost and are not required to produce revenue. These are the basic programs that the community feels should be provided such as community events, recreational swimming and drop-in programs. These programs normally cover 0 to 25% of their cost. Tier two programs are expected to cover 25 to 50% of their cost. These programs are also part of the core programs and facilities that provide basic core services to the community. Tier three programs cover 50 to 75% of their cost and are for expanded programs beyond the core services. These include some adult programs and other special programs that serve specific user groups and demographic groups in the community. The final tier is for revenue centers and these are facilities and programs that should cover 100% of their cost.

Developing a fees and charges policy and reviewing how current programs are being operated should be priorities for the Division. As facility development is considered in the future, the County should look at the balance of facilities that are or would be revenue generators versus open space and passive parks. Common revenue generating facilities include large recreation centers, aquatic facilities, festival venues and rental facilities. Expanding program offerings, especially in the area of adult programs, will also increase the potential for more revenue generation.

## Recommendations Summary

- Increase per capita spending over the 10-year period of the master plan to stay on pace with comparable Divisions in Georgia.
- Balance capital development between revenue generating facilities and non-revenue generating facilities.
- Increase revenue generation within the Division. Set a revenue generation goal to reach the state average of 30% cost recovery within five years.
- Establish comprehensive fees and charges policies, including fees for park programs, rentals, admission/facility use fees, etc.
- Develop an athletic association facility use policy and a separate tournament lease agreement.
- Update facility rental agreement forms to match new fee and charges policies.
- Implement the new rental fees provided in this section.
- Implement a non-resident fee that is an additional 75% of the resident fee across the board (e.g. facility rentals, program fees for youth and adult athletics and other program fees).
- Implement instructor fees at tennis courts and other facilities where private groups and citizens are using Johns Creek facilities to profit from teaching private lessons.

## Park Assessment and Recommendations

The planning team has prioritized the projects recommended throughout this master plan. For a detailed phasing of these projects, including opinions of cost and the year in which they should be implemented, refer to Section 8, *Opinions of Probable Cost and Phasing Plan*.

### Tier One Priorities

*Tier One Priorities are the actions that should be taken and the park projects that should be funded in the next 24 months.*

- Acquire options for 38 acres at Shakerag Park and work with Fulton County School System to develop or revise the memorandum of understanding on joint use.
- Complete Shakerag Park Phase 1
- Complete Ocee Park Phase 1
- Acquire 5 acres for the Newtown Park expansion
- Complete Newtown Park Phase 1: Including historic school renovation and expansion
- Acquire land for Rogers Bridge Trailhead Park and build parking lot
- Begin upgrading school park facilities
- Acquire easements and construct greenways from Rogers Bridge Trailhead Park
- Develop design standards
- Develop signage standards
- Buy land to expand Shakerag and Newtown parks
- Acquire land and develop the greenway to connect Abbotts Bridge CRNRA and McGinnis Ferry CRNRA

**Tier Two Priorities**

*Tier Two Priorities are projects to be completed in months 25-60 following adoption of this master plan.*

- Complete Newtown Park Phases 2 and 3
- Complete Shakerag Park Phases 2 and Phase 3
- Acquire land for a large urban park (or optional community park north of Abbott's Bridge Road)
- Upgrade school park facilities
- Complete Autrey Mill Nature Preserve and Heritage Center renovations

**Tier Three Priorities**

*Tier Three Priorities are projects to be completed in months 61-120 following adoption of this master plan.*

- Acquire land and develop Phase 1 for a new community park
- Begin development of the aquatics/community center at the new community park
- Complete development of the aquatics/community center at the new community park
- Upgrade school park facilities
- Begin development of passive facilities at the large urban park (trails and parking)

**Future Priorities**

*Tier Four Priorities are projects to be completed in the future, beyond the 10 year master plan time frame.*

- Acquire land for Ocee Park expansion
- Complete Phases 3 and 4 of Ocee Park expansion
- Complete the large urban park Phases 2 and 3
- Complete the new community park Phases 2 and 3

Refer to Section 8 for parkland acquisition strategies and key properties for new park development. Section 10 contains a year-by-year spending plan and cost estimates for park renovation and redevelopment.

**Land Acquisition****Potential Park Properties****1) Community Park (Large Urban Park Alternative Site)**

A community park is proposed on two parcels (approximately 39 acres and 18 acres), which are centrally located in the city along State Highway 120. One property is currently used as pasture for horses and contains two streams, pastureland, a training ring, two barns and a home between The Standard Club and an elementary school. The north and northwest regions of Johns Creek are densely populated and a subdivision lies to the north of the property. Because most of the property is cleared for pasture, the site is ideally suited to development as a community park. On the other hand, the site has characteristics of a scenic quality that are unique to the area. If passive activities

were chosen for this site, parking, trails, a restroom, pavilions, benches and similar amenities would be suitable and low impact to the visual qualities of the site. In addition, the property to the south is especially suited to low impact park activities such as natural surface trails, and small picnic pavilions. Although separated by a major road, a tunnel or bridge over the roadways could be used to connect both properties so that parking could be consolidated to one area to preserve woodland.

## **2) Large Urban Park**

A large urban park is proposed east of Medlock Bridge Road and Bell Road in the eastern half of the city. Three tracts of land contain approximately 115 total acres woodland. A smaller 18 acre, cleared parcel contains a home and barn. Two properties have frontage along Bell Road and all have streams and a mixture of hardwood and softwood vegetation.

This property was selected based on its natural features, size, location near the service gap and its potential to provide diverse recreation facilities. The large amount of woodland would allow athletic facilities to be developed in a natural setting, preserving mature vegetation for shade and nature trails. Disc golf, mountain biking and hiking could be enjoyed here. A cluster of athletic fields could be provided here as well, to reduce the deficit of facilities established in the community-based facility standards.

This property provides ample room to develop a community center. A large property is needed to provide for parking requirements. Located among diverse outdoor recreation opportunities, this property could become the town center.

## **3) Rogers Bridge Trailhead Park**

A trailhead is needed southwest of Shakerag Park to facilitate the future pedestrian connection across the historic Rogers Bridge and the proposed off-road greenway trail that will connect Abbotts Bridge and McGinnis Ferry CRNRAs. This 27.5 acre property was identified for its location at the intersection of Bell Road and Rogers Bridge Road, its location along a greenway and its mixture of cleared land and woodland.

At minimum, parking will need to be provided, which can be accomplished with minimal impact to existing vegetation if located on the northern half of this parcel. Signage, restrooms, bike racks, benches and a small pavilion would increase the appeal of the park. In addition, the southern half of this parcel offers 16 acres of woodland that would be suited to activities such as hiking and mountain biking.

## **4) Small parks along greenways**

State Highway corridors offer a unique opportunity for the City to acquire parkland through methods such as memorandums of understanding (MOUs) or through purchase agreements with GDOT. Because many greenways and/or sidewalks are located along these corridors, there is potential to enhance the routes by developing small parks along the way. Constant road expansions and improvements to state highways may have left small parcels of land available that are suitable for small pavilions, picnic tables or benches. Although these properties are not identified on the map, it is recommended that the City approach GDOT about the potential for such agreements. Other small properties along roadways that are undeveloped or have older homes would also make suitable sites for green space along the greenway system with minimal development cost.

In addition to small parcels of land, this area is ideally suited for the proposed community park and aquatics/community center, which would require a minimum of 20 acres for development.

### **Park Expansion Properties**

#### **5) Shakerag Park Expansion**

Expanding Shakerag Park will greatly increase recreation opportunities in the eastern region of the city. Although a restroom building, pavilion and playground area offer young families an area for passive recreation, the remaining facilities are not readily available for public use. River Trail Middle School utilizes most of the athletic facilities. The school's track is located on park property and the remaining athletic fields are located on school property, making it hard to distinguish which facilities are available for public use.

A 38 acre parcel to the south of River Trail Middle School will create an area for trails, open space, a dog park, a community garden and an amphitheater near an existing lake and small wooded area. This parcel will also facilitate the separation of school facilities from day-use park facilities and open up the southern portion of Shakerag Park for use by providing a road corridor to access it.

#### **6) Newtown Park Expansion**

Two small parcels of 2.2 and 2.5 acres are located in the northeast corner of Newtown Park. It is proposed that the City purchase these parcels in order to expand and improve its existing facilities. This extra land will allow for better pedestrian circulation, clusters of similar athletic fields and increased green space.

#### **7) Ocee Park Expansion**

The expansion of Ocee Park is recommended in two phases. The first land acquisition will increase the park's area by 22 acres. The second proposed acquisition will increase its size by an additional 9 acres. Both parcels are located within Alpharetta's city limits. Because the land is currently undeveloped, there is an opportunity to provide many new athletic fields, improve circulation and parking, provide new and unique facilities such as a skate park and increase green space.

### **Off-Road Greenway Properties**

#### **8) Abbotts Bridge CRNRA to McGinnis Ferry CRNRA**

Several properties are crossed along the corridor of the proposed off-road greenway connecting Abbotts Bridge CRNRA to McGinnis Ferry CRNRA. Despite the number of properties, only four property owners separate the two natural areas. It is recommended that the City acquire easements through these properties in order to build this section of greenway. The large size of the parcels that are crossed will be cost prohibitive if the City were to acquire them outright. If easements are acquired, the property owners would not lose their rights to count the land as green space to fulfill zoning requirements should they ever consider developing the property.

#### **9) Shakerag Greenway Corridor**

Providing a multi-use trail that connects Shakerag Park to the proposed CRNRA connector will create a network of trails connecting three parks in the eastern region of Johns Creek. It is proposed that the City acquire an easement for a trail that follows the western edge of the McGinnis Ferry CRNRA. If easements are acquired, the property owners would not lose their rights to count the land as green space to fulfill zoning requirements should they ever consider developing the property.

## Summary

These recommended properties represent the type of land that exhibits the characteristics that meet the recommended property acquisition goals and objectives. Should these property owners not wish to sell their properties, other properties located in the same general areas and exhibiting similar characteristics should be considered in order to maintain a proper balance of service across the city.

## Funding Recommendations

We believe that the most viable funding sources for large capital projects and parkland acquisition will be through a general obligation bond program. Survey responses indicated that there is overwhelming support to borrow money to develop parks and pay it back over a long period of time. Seventy seven percent of the survey respondents indicated their support for this method of funding. Survey respondents also showed support for combining a dedicated funding source with a bond program to complete new park projects. The most likely funding source for bond repayment will be a combination of fees and taxes that are imposed by the city in order to pay the bond off over a 20 to 25 year period. City staff should explore the funding options presented and then work with City Council to implement the necessary steps to fund the bond program.

Other steps that will increase the rate of park and greenway development but on a much smaller scale include the following:

***Implement regulatory tools for mandatory parkland and greenway rights-of-way or easements in the zoning code.*** This is one of the few no cost options for the City and is a standard requirement in many communities across the country.

***Develop a fees and charges policy.*** The Division should develop a fees and charges policy, as discussed in Section 6, which can be applied to all programs they offer. The fees and charges policy shall clearly define the various levels of general funds that will be used to fund each type of program so that revenue generating goals for the Division can be set for individual programs, as well as the Division as a whole. This should be a high priority for the Division and should be completed in the first six months of fiscal year 2009-10. Increasing self-generated revenues will be a vital part of the increased funding for the Division, but is dependent on providing adequate park facilities, as discussed in Section 7.

***Explore existing and potential partnerships.*** Building stronger relationships with local agencies including schools, churches, non-profit groups and others could allow the Division to provide services through allied providers and save costs in the future. Any agreements with these partners should be in writing in the form of intergovernmental agreements (IGA), memorandums of understanding (MOU), memorandums of agreement (MOA) or other similar written agreement formats to ensure that all parties understand their roles and responsibilities.

***Seek grants and leverage existing funds as potential matches.*** Expand the level of grant writing that is done by the Division. Grants have been and will continue to be a credible funding source for special projects and plans. Grants should not be sought as a primary revenue source, but as a

supplement to the Division and capital funding. The Recreation and Parks Division should work closely with the City's Transportation Division to pursue GDOT grant funds for sidewalks, trails and bike lanes.

## Opinion of Probable Cost and Phasing Plan

We have outlined over \$101 million in capital improvement needs for the next ten years. While the total cost may seem high, the planning team believes that this level of development is obtainable by the City of Johns Creek. Detailed opinions of probable cost are provided. A ten-year phasing plan has been developed from these combined costs. The phasing plan provides a year-by-year spending summary and reflects project funding over a two year period for some construction projects that are expected to exceed 12 months in duration. Project funding is broken into three tiers: Tier One projects are to be completed in the next 24 months, Tier Two projects are to be completed in the next 60 months and Tier Three projects are to be completed within 120 months.

The totals shown for each facility in the phasing plan include a 15% contingency to cover costs that will only be determined when more detailed plans are developed for each facility, and architectural and engineering fees at 7% to cover plan development, testing and construction related services. The planning team has identified land acquisition requirements and, based on the current economic and real estate markets, estimate \$250,000.00 per acre for land acquisition.

## Cultural Arts

### Summary Recommendations

The following twelve (12) recommendations for the City of Johns Creek are a result of primary and secondary data and subsequent analysis.

#### Recommendation #1

Work with the Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Chamber of Commerce to integrate the City's cultural positioning into its brand platform

#### Recommendation #2

Create an Intellectual Think Tank to brainstorm on unique ways to maximize the arts given the City's current restraints

#### Recommendation #3

Provide space on the City website to promote and market Arts Alliance events

#### Recommendation #4

Develop or partner with an existing quarterly marketing publication to generate awareness of the arts

#### Recommendation #5

Take advantage of Twitter (and similar social networking mechanisms) as a marketing vehicle

#### Recommendation #6

Serve as a catalyst to further formalize the relationship between local arts organizations and public schools

#### Recommendation #7

Consider planning and executing (and/or contracting out) a signature Festival

**Recommendation #8**

Partner with existing Johns Creek organizations to create/strengthen community-unifying events

**Recommendation #9**

Develop a marketing partnership with a larger regional institution (e.g. the Woodruff Arts Center)

**Recommendation #10**

Encourage local businesses to commission public art and congruent design as part of the overall brand campaign to create a sense of place

**Recommendation #11**

Appoint a City liaison to assist with and expedite government grants

**Recommendation #12**

Communicate the City's arts action plan, its progress and rationale to constituents regularly

**Summary - Arts Leadership Perspectives**

The local arts nonprofits understand that the City is not in a financial position to make grants. However, their responses indicate that they need the City's help to assist in maximizing their individual and collective fundraising efforts. This can be accomplished through advocacy and by providing a designated City staffer to expedite support material (e.g. official letters) that they need to complete their application packages.

Perhaps, the biggest area of opportunity is awareness. A small, consistent, strategic campaign to generate awareness about specific arts offerings and to reiterate the City's cultural position (e.g., the arts strengths, the City's lack of financial support to the arts, strategic partnerships) would be of tremendous value.

Finally, in lieu of having an actual physical space it would help if the City, the arts groups and perhaps some very unique members of the Johns Creek population who are highly adept at bringing creative solutions to difficult challenges (e.g. one of the designers of Spivey Hall) came together to maximize how they create "virtual" venues for people to experience art. It would also help if all future city planning involved select members of the Arts Alliance (to ensure that opportunities to forward the arts are maximized) and select creative professionals (to capitalize on opportunities to do things in an unprecedented way...which will continue to help Johns Creek distinguish itself from similar cities).

**Summary - Citizen Views and Suggestions**

The public hearings underscored the need to think creatively about how to showcase the arts in lieu of a formal, dedicated venue; make sure that the complex issues that arise within the arts field are acknowledged (and where feasible, proactively addressed), despite the fact that it falls under another division; and that the City use print and social networking to inform residents about the arts.

Additionally, arts leaders who attended the hearings underscored during and after the sessions that the arts were important to the overall economic stability of Johns Creek and the region. National statistics support this. The 2007 economic impact study (the third undertaking of its kind) conducted by Americans for the Arts found that the nonprofit arts and culture industry generates \$166.2 billion in economic activity annually – a twenty-four percent increase in just the past five years. This spending supports 5.7 million full-time jobs in the U. S. – an increase of 850,000 jobs since the last study was conducted in 2002.

This study can definitely serve as a benchmark for emerging cities, such as Johns Creek and for the cultural sector. The arts industry provides skill development and job opportunities, builds tourism and generates revenue that is, in turn, invested back into the community.

### **Summary of Consumer Preferences**

The survey responses collectively centered around one major theme: lack of awareness. Respondents simply did not know what was in their own backyard. Those who take the time to fill out surveys, usually have an interest in the topic. Of those that have an interest in the arts (as indicated by their participation) only 11% stated that they participated in Johns Creek cultural offerings, though an overwhelming 85% stating that they participate in the arts. Moreover, those that do not participate in their local arts scene seem to be doing so, because they do not know what is being offered (not because they find other programs to be superior in quality).

It is in the City's best interest to close this awareness gap. Citizens are often a city's best ambassadors, and what they don't know can hurt the city. In terms of recruiting new residents, recruiting new companies or recruiting visitors – all of which means more money for Johns Creek's bottom line – the City's number one word-of-mouth source should be fully aware of all of its amenities.

### **Recommended Action Plan**

Recommendations revolve less around addressing arts challenges and more around capitalizing on the opportunities that can be seized immediately.

#### **Recommendation #1**

**Work with the Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Chamber of Commerce to integrate the City's cultural positioning into its brand platform**

#### **Recommendation #2**

**Organize an Intellectual Think Tank to brainstorm on unique ways to maximize the arts given the City's current restraints**

#### **Recommendation #3**

**Provide space on the City website to promote and market Arts Alliance events**

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**Develop or partner with an existing quarterly marketing publication to generate awareness of the arts**

#### **Recommendation #5**

**Take advantage of Twitter (and similar social networking mechanisms) as a marketing vehicle**

#### **Recommendation #6**

**Serve as a catalyst to further formalize the relationship between local arts organizations and public schools**

**Recommendation #7**

**Consider planning and executing (and/or contracting out) a signature Festival**

**Recommendation #8**

**Partner with existing Johns Creek organizations to create/strengthen community-unifying events**

**Recommendation #9**

**Develop a marketing partnership with a larger regional institution (e.g. the Woodruff Arts Center)**

**Recommendation #10**

**Encourage local businesses to commission public art and congruent design as part of the overall brand campaign to create a sense of place**

**Recommendation #11**

**Appoint a City liaison to assist with and expedite government grants**

**Recommendation #12**

**Communicate the City's arts action plan, its progress and rationale to constituents**