



May 22, 2025

TO: Christopher Shorter, County Executive

FROM: Seth Hendler-Voss, Director of Parks and Recreation 

THRU: Elijah Johnson, Deputy County Executive

RE: 2024 Needs Assessment Survey Report Summary

INTRODUCTION

In accordance with accreditation requirements, the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) conducts a Needs Assessment Survey (NAS) every five (5) years to assess resident usage and demand for park facilities, amenities, and programs. The survey results are used to guide future funding and prioritization decisions in the county's park system to meet both current and future community needs. The DPR conducted a NAS in 2019, and the latest NAS was conducted at the end of 2024 and finalized in February 2025. Polco/National Research Center (NRC) implemented the survey on the Department's behalf and prepared the findings report. NRC is the same firm that conducted the county's 2024 Community Survey.

Two survey methods were used to solicit community input. The first is the statistically valid random sample survey, which resulted in 194 completed responses from 7,000 mailed surveys to county households. The second was an open participation survey made available to all residents in Prince William County and resulted in an additional 564 completed surveys.

The 95% confidence level for this survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 7%, which is within the standard range for surveys of this kind.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Prince William County's parks and parks facilities are heavily used by residents.

- Around 50% of respondents reported using Prince William County parks or parks facilities at least once per month, and more than 1 in 5 indicated they visited at least once per week.
- Newer county residents, homes without children, and older residents indicated significantly lower levels of use.

Of the 77% of residents who have visited a park, trail, or facility in the past 12 months, 93% report having a “good” or “excellent” experience.

Walking, hiking, and biking trails remain the MOST IMPORTANT facility to provide. Respondents indicate that several of these amenities are meeting respondents’ needs at least at a 50% level.

<u>Facility</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2024</u>
Walking, hiking, and biking trails	1 (43%)	1 (41% of respondents)
Park Restrooms*		2 (26%)
Natural wildlife habitats	2 (22%)	3 (18%)
Indoor fitness and exercise facilities	3 (20%)	4 (18%)

* Park restrooms were not included as an amenity to rate in the 2019 survey.

Adult fitness and wellness programs remain the MOST IMPORTANT programs to provide. Community special events rose in importance from 2019 results. Respondents indicate that several of these programs are meeting respondents’ needs at least at a 50% level.

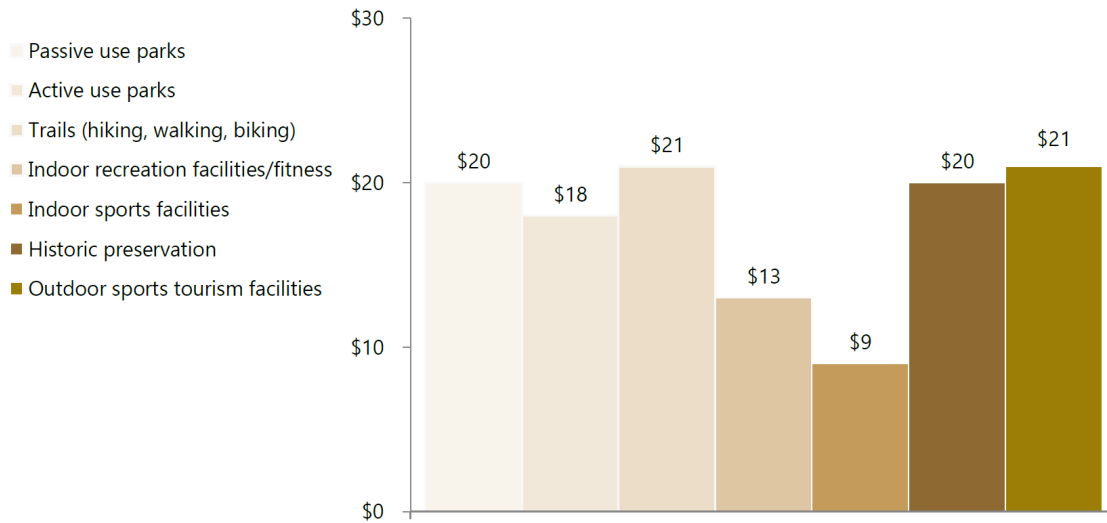
<u>Program</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2024</u>
Adult fitness and wellness programs	1 (40%)	1 (37% of respondents)
Community special events	5 (17%)	2 (31%)
History programs*		3 (25%)
Active older adult programs	4 (20%)	4 (25%)
Nature programs	2 (22%)	5 (18%)

* History programs were not included as an amenity to rate in the 2019 survey.

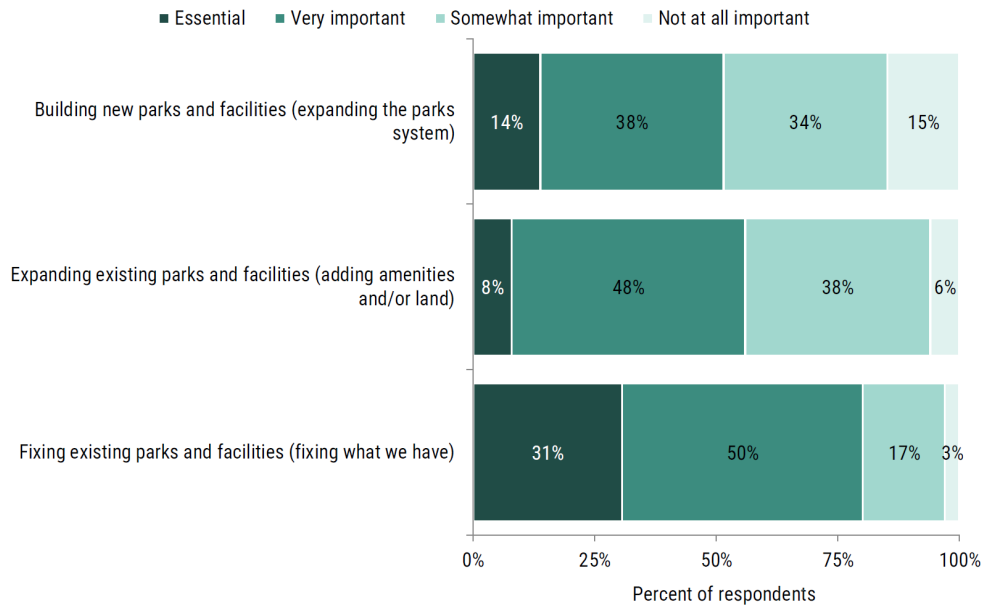
When asked to prioritize amongst possible investment categories, “outdoor sports tourism facilities (e.g. large baseball complex)”, “trails,” “historic preservation,” and “passive use parks” were ranked as the top four.

FIGURE 7: FUNDING AND SPENDING PREFERENCES, 2024

If you were given \$100 to spend on the Parks and Recreation System, how would you split the amount?
You may split the funding any way you wish; however, the sum **MUST** equal \$100.
(Note: The average investment for each is shown below)



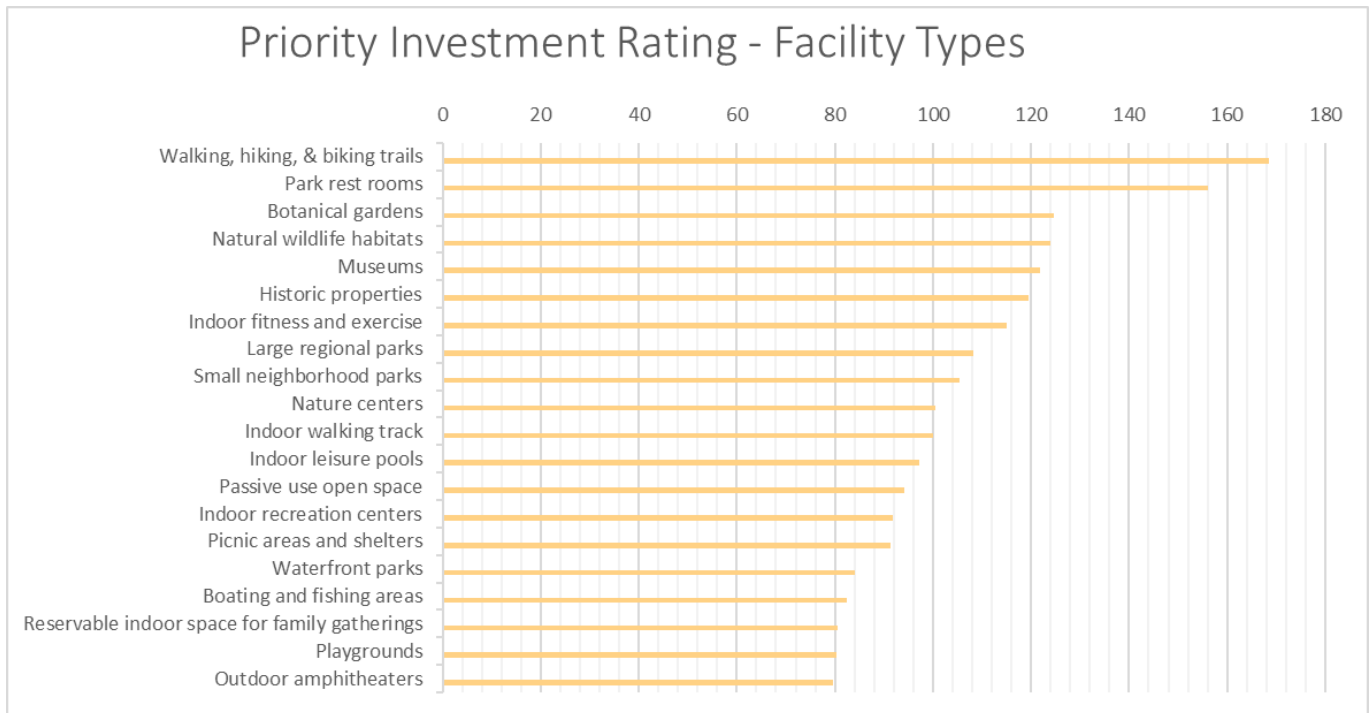
81% of respondents stated that fixing existing parks and facilities was “very important” to “essential,” versus 56% who selected expanding existing parks and facilities and 52% who stated building new parks and facilities were “very important” to “essential.”



30% of residents report traveling outside of Prince William County to have their recreation needs met, primarily for hiking, pools, and better playgrounds (based on those who reported the reason).

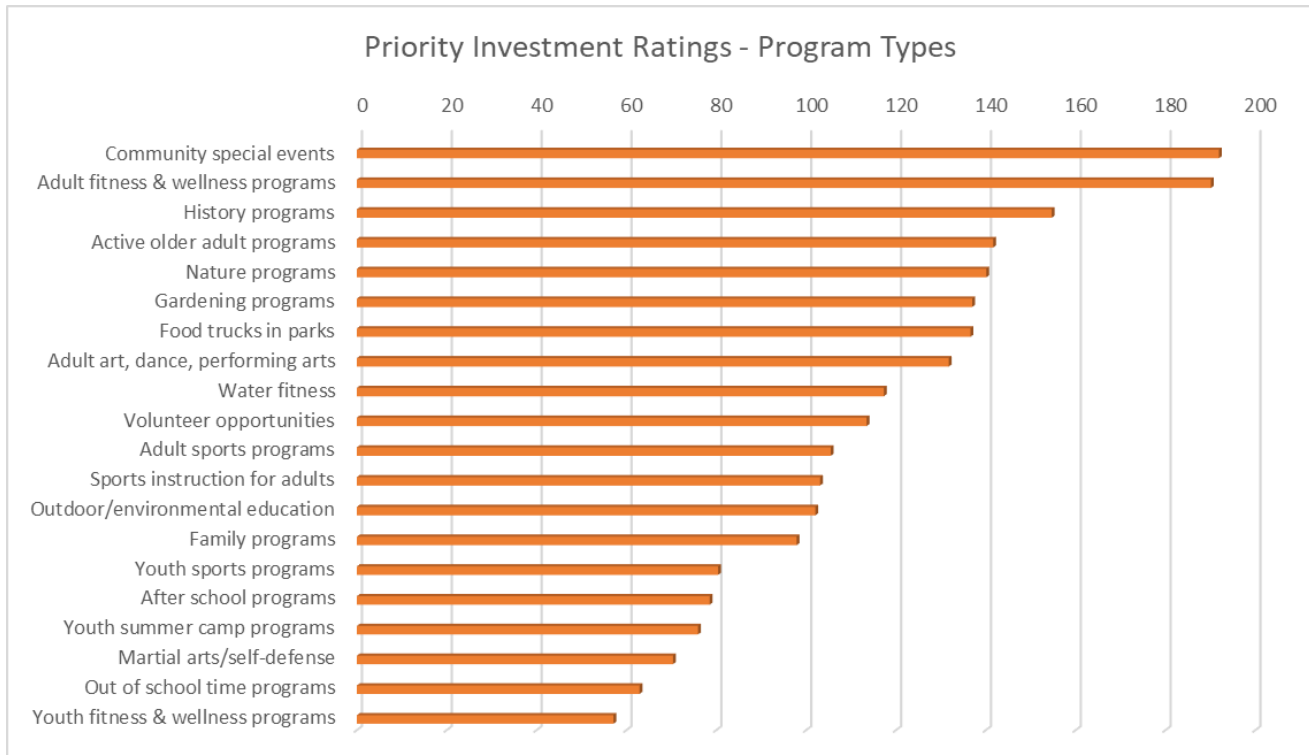
When factoring in overall resident need for a particular park type, park amenity, or facility with the importance they place on said things, the expressed level of importance, the top five community priorities are:

- ***Walking, hiking, and biking trails***
- ***Park restrooms***
- ***Botanical gardens***
- ***Natural wildlife habitats***
- ***Museums***



When factoring in overall resident need for a program with the importance they place on said programs, the top five community priorities are:

- **Community special events**
- **Adult fitness and wellness programs**
- **History programs**
- **Active older adult programs**
- **Nature programs**



ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Regarding the most important park amenities, “walking, hiking, and biking trails,” “natural wildlife habitats,” and “indoor fitness and exercise facilities” continue to rank in the top four compared to the 2019 survey.

Regarding the most important programs, “adult fitness and wellness programs,” “nature programs,” “active older adult programs,” and “community special events” continue to rank in the top five compared to the 2019 survey.

Thanks to the actions of the Board of County Supervisors, the county’s current level of investment aligns with the following community priorities:

- “Fixing what we have.”
- Trail maintenance for “walking, hiking, and biking trails.”
- Dedicated annual appropriation for “community special events.”
- New historic properties to provide additional “history programs.”

Areas of opportunities where the county could strengthen alignment with the community priorities in the future include:

- Adding park restrooms (replacing port-a-johns)
- Building museums, indoor fitness centers and botanical gardens
- Building outdoor sports tourism facilities
- Addressing the 30% leakage from residents who report leaving the county to meet their recreation needs for hiking trails, pools, and larger, and modern playgrounds

NEXT STEPS

DPR will share the NAS results with the Parks and Recreation Commission, Trails and Blueways Council, and the Arts Council.

The official NAS summary will be published on the county website and DPR social media.

DPR will consider the NAS data when planning new program offerings and making capital project recommendations.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

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Attachment: 2024 Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment Report of Results, February 2025