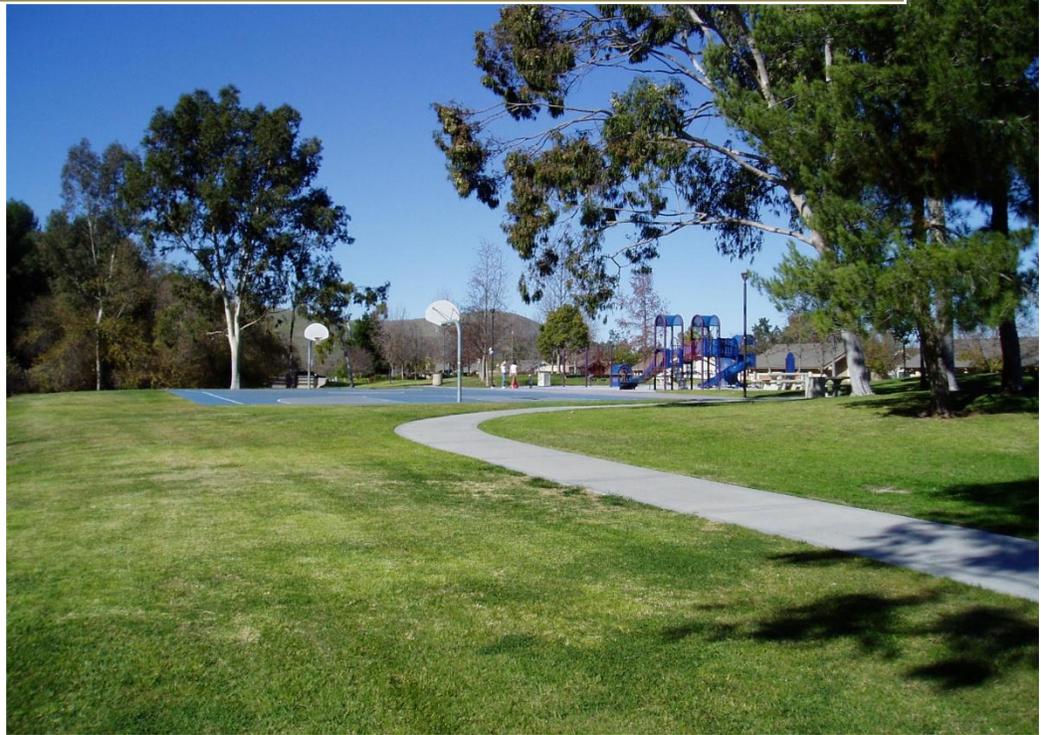




City of  
**Laguna Hills**  
California

April 2009

# Recreation Facilities Needs Assessment Executive Summary





## Executive Summary

### Purpose of this Plan

The Recreation Facilities Needs Assessment is intended to help the City of Laguna Hills meet the needs of current and future residents by positioning Laguna Hills to build on the community's unique parks and recreation assets and identify new opportunities. The citizen-driven process identifies the recreation facilities needs to guide city staff, advisory commission, and elected officials in their efforts to enhance the community's parks and recreation facilities. The objectives of the Recreation Facilities Needs Assessment that were stated in the Request for Proposal are:

- 1) Produce a Needs Assessment document that clearly articulates the recreation facility needs of the community and identifies surpluses and deficiencies with existing facilities
- 2) Compare the Laguna Hills' recreation facilities with other south county municipality facilities and to industry benchmark standards
- 3) Complete the needs assessment project in time for the start of the City's 2009-2011 Biennial Budget process. Specifically, for the prioritization of capital projects.

### Laguna Hills Community Services Mission Statement

Provide quality recreation programming that promotes a healthy lifestyle, self-esteem, family life, and community spirit.

### Community Services and Public Services Department Overview

A total of approximately 65 acres of public parkland is located in the City of Laguna Hills. This includes an 18-acre Community Center and Sports Complex, a nine-acre sports park, and 12 neighborhood public parks. The City of Laguna Hills also has 15 private parks, three elementary public schools, and one high school located within the City. There is also a nonprofit senior citizen center located within the City that is operated by South County Senior Services.

The Community Services Department is responsible for providing recreation classes, special events, excursions, camps, athletic programs, and disability services for the community. The Public Services Department is responsible for the design, construction, and maintenance of public facilities including the City's parks.

The City Council adopted the City's first Master Plan of Parks and Recreation in May of 1993. On November 14, 1995, the City Council approved annexation of the North Laguna Hills area, which became part of the incorporated City on July 1, 1996. The Master Plan was updated in 1996 with a new Field Use Survey to account for the 1996 annexation, completed capital improvement projects, and the fact the City was in the process of planning the Community Center and Sports Complex.

The City successfully annexed the "Westside" of the City on September 18, 2000, which subsequently added 149 acres of residential land including the Aliso Viejo Community Association's Sheep Hills Park. Thereafter, the 18-acre Community Center and Sports Complex opened its doors in July 2002 and numerous capital projects as outlined in the Master Plan of Parks and Recreation were completed. The last update to the City's Master Plan for Parks and Recreation occurred in 1997.

The City is in the process of updating its General Plan which was first adopted by the City Council on June 28, 1994. It is planned that the City Council will adopt the updated version of the City's General Plan by December 2009.

### **Methodology of this Needs Assessment Study**

This project has been guided by a project team made up of city staff as well as the Community Services, Historical and Arts Commission. This team provided input to the GreenPlay consulting team throughout the planning process. This collaborative effort creates a needs assessment that fully utilizes the consultant's expertise and incorporates the local knowledge and institutional history that only community members can provide. The project consisted of the following tasks:

#### **Needs Assessment and Public Input**

- Review of previous planning efforts, city historical information, and recent statistically valid community interest and opinion surveys.
- Consideration of the profile of the community and demographics, including population growth.
- Extensive community involvement effort including focus groups, meetings with key stakeholders, and community-wide public meetings.
- Identification of additional providers of recreation facilities such as HOA private parks and schools to provide insight regarding all recreational facilities utilized by the community.
- Research of trends and statistics related to American lifestyles to help guide the efforts of programming staff.

#### **Benchmarking Neighboring Communities**

- Complete a matrix of participating neighboring communities' number of park and recreation facilities and amenities.
- Analysis of neighboring communities' number of park and recreation facilities, amenities, and population.

#### **Inventory**

Inventory of parks and facilities consists of using existing mapping, staff interviews, and on-site visits to verify amenities and assess the condition of the facilities and surrounding areas.

#### **Recreation Facilities Demand Analysis**

- Review and assessment of relevant recreation facilities information including current participation, community input, special interest group input, other service provider input, etc.
- Measurement of the current usage recreation facilities and a determined target level of usage that is both feasible and aligned with the desires of citizens as expressed through the citizen input, survey results, special interest group input, and other service provider input. This analysis is also represented graphically in charts and tables.

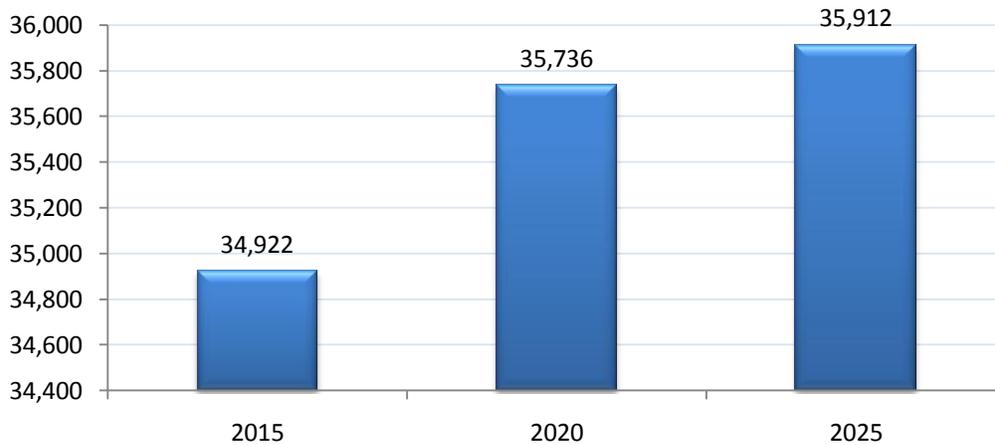
#### **Priorities of Recreation Facilities Needs**

Identification of needs of recreation facilities and categorize into High, Medium, and Low priorities based on all the information available for this study.

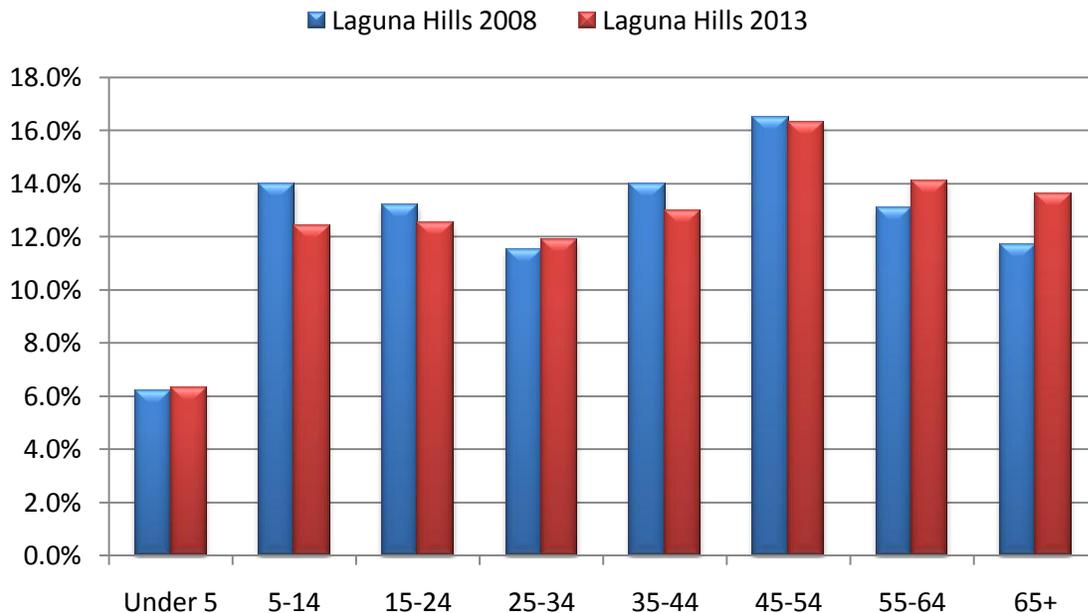
## Demographic Overview

The population in Laguna Hills will remain fairly constant with very little growth over the next several years. The largest growth is predicted to be in the 55+ age bracket. The tables below demonstrate both these demographic changes. For a more detailed demographic analysis is located in Section III A. of the Recreation Facilities Needs Assessment report.

### Population Projections 2015, 2020, 2025- Laguna Hills



### Population Breakdown by Age 2008 and 2013 Projections- Laguna Hills



Source: ESRI Business Information Solutions

## Trends

The different trends in the park and recreation industry that could affect Laguna Hills over the next several years are outlined below. For a detailed description of all types of trends Laguna Hills should take into consideration in the future are found in Section III B. of the Recreation Facilities Needs Assessment report.

### *Facility Trends*

- Multipurpose, multigenerational facilities
- Artificial Turf
- Leisure and therapeutic pools
- Interactive game rooms
- Nature centers, outdoor education centers
- Indoor walking tracks
- Partnerships

### *Young Adults*

- Interest in festivals, special events, farmer's markets, biking, rock climbing, and running

### *Baby Boomers*

- Often still work full or part-time
- Do not like the term "seniors"
- Interest in health and physical activities

### *Seniors*

- The top three activities for persons 65 and older are: exercise walking, exercising with equipment, and swimming
- Activities include:
  - Virtual birding, electronic games (Wii), incentive-based walking programs, wellness seminars

## Community and Stakeholder Input

### **Public Input Process**

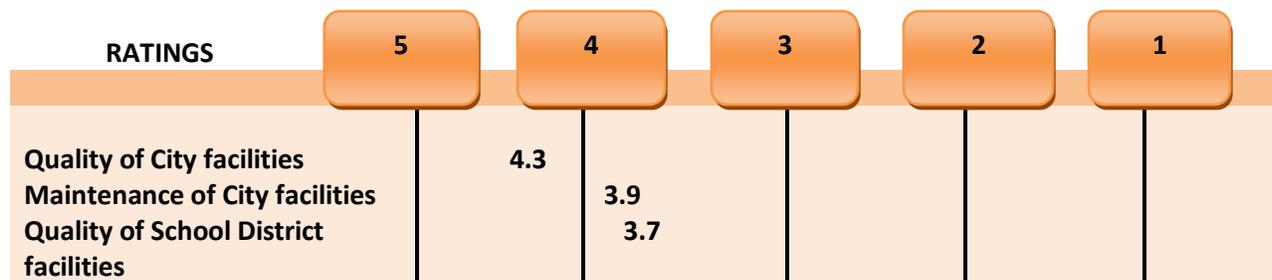
Gathering information and input from the public for the Recreation Facilities Needs Assessment project included four stakeholder focus groups; three staff department focus groups; two Community Services, Historical, and Arts Commission Public Workshops with a total of approximately 50 participants. Additionally, six individual interviews with sports organizations and the Laguna Hills High School were conducted.

Focus group participants were asked a variety of questions including:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of recreational facilities in Laguna Hills?
- Rate the quality of City and School District recreational facilities.
- Are there any portions of the community that are underserved?
- What additional park and recreation facilities would you like to see the community provide?
- How do you believe the Department should be financially supported (ie. through user fees, completely through taxes, alternative funding, etc.)?

- Whom do you perceive as key partners and stakeholders in the community with regards to assisting with the implementation of the priorities of this study?
- Identify top priorities and key issues for the Department to focus on during the next five to 10 years.

The overall response of the quality of facilities and maintenance in the focus groups and interviews is shown in the following graphic. The existing recreation facilities in Laguna Hills are in very good condition.



5= Excellent, 4= Very Good, 3= Good, 2= Fair, 1=Poor

A synopsis of key issues that were identified during the focus group meetings is located in **Section III C.** of the Recreation Facilities Needs Assessment report. A very detailed summary of comments made during the public process can be found in Appendix I of the report.

### Citizen Survey Highlights

Below is a brief outline of the survey highlights of the Parks and Recreation portion of the citizen survey the University of North Texas Survey Research Center conducted in February of 2009 for the City of Laguna Hills. A detailed summary of the survey results can be found in **Section III C.** of the Recreation Facilities Needs Assessment report. The actual survey instrument and results are in **Appendix V** of the report.

#### Facilities

- Recreation facilities are adequate or more than adequate (92%)
- Facilities are easily accessible

#### Department Issues

- Customer service of community services staff is good or excellent (81.7%)
- Communication to public is good or excellent (71.6%)
- Responsiveness to public concerns is good or excellent (65.3%)

#### Funding

- Money is spent on parks and facilities “about right” (82%)

#### Most Important New Facilities

- Paved walking/biking trails
- Unpaved/natural trails
- Multiuse sports fields
- Aquatic center
- Dog Park
- Baseball fields

## Laguna Hills Inventory

### ***City of Laguna Hills Parks and Facilities***

Laguna Hills has 14 developed park properties to serve the community. All of Laguna Hills' parks are well designed and well maintained. Without exception, the parks receive a high level of care and thought. Equipment is replaced in a timely manner and vegetation is well cared for and enhances the overall experience of the park. Throughout most of the community, parks are located at a walkable distance to residences, and other than some small areas in north Laguna Hills, residents have easy walking access to parks. The system contains a total of 51.5 acres of developed parkland, and within the parks, there are about 23 kinds of recreational components within the parks.

The majority of these parks are between two and four acres in size and typically offer a playground, picnic area, and open turf. Other components found within the park include: basketball, tennis, practice backstops, ballfields, and multipurpose fields.

Three notable exceptions to these smaller parks include the Community Center Park and Sports Complex, Cabot Park, and Veeh Ranch Park.

### ***Homeowner's Association Facilities***

Within the city limits of Laguna Hills there are 15 private parks and facilities that are maintained by HOAs. A majority of these parks are not very different from the facilities that are provided by the City, however, they often are available only to members of the HOA and their guests. Several of the private parks lack recreation amenities such as ball fields, recreation centers, basketball courts, etc.

### ***School Facilities***

Schools in Laguna Hills also provide opportunities for recreation at a neighborhood and community level. Within Laguna Hills are four public schools, all of which are a part of the Saddleback Unified School District. Three of the schools are elementary schools which offer sports fields, multiuse courts (including basketball courts), and playgrounds. Although these facilities are typically available only outside of school hours, they do provide additional recreational opportunities to the community for drop-in and scheduled use. The school properties are often the best opportunity for sports activities as the sites are large and flat – a rarity within Laguna Hills.

Laguna Hills High School doesn't provide much opportunity for drop-in use but does offer options for organized sports. The grounds and gyms of the high school provide many opportunities for community organized sports when not in use by the high school. These activities are scheduled both through the school and through the City Community Services department.

See **Appendix II** for a complete listing of all parks and amenities and a detailed inventory assessment can be found in **Section IV A**. of the Recreation Needs Assessment report.

## Recreation Facilities Demand Analysis

### ***Laguna Hills Outdoor Facility Deficit / Surplus Analysis***

Typically this analysis looks at residents' desires to participate in recreational activities compared to the population and quantity of available parks and recreation facilities. Several different approaches are used in this study. As described below, the following have all been considered in this analysis:

- Commonly referenced ratios

- Available facilities/population growth
- Recreational desires of residents
- Demographic changes

Based on all this information, the number of Laguna Hills recreational facilities are very adequate and should be maintained at the current level with the exception of trails which should be increased. However, over the next several years, minimal increases to a few types of recreational facilities would increase capacity for usage. These include: one open turf area, one play equipment/tot lot, three picnic sites, one softball/baseball field, one soccer/multiuse field, one outdoor basketball court. It should be noted that these capacity increases may also be achieved by adding amenities to existing facilities such as lights and/or artificial turf. The details of the facility demand analysis can be found in **Section IV B.** of the Recreation Facilities Needs Assessment report.

### Laguna Hills Sports Facilities Analysis

#### *Sports venues*

Although not identified in the overall facility demand analysis as a high need item, sports venues have long been an issue within the Laguna Hills Community. Residents of Laguna Hills are active participants in baseball, softball, basketball, soccer, and in-line hockey. There are seven sports organizations listed below with a total of 3,300 participants that utilize Laguna Hills sports venues for games and practices

#### *Sports Organizations*

- Mission Viejo Girls Softball
- National Junior Basketball
- City of Laguna Hills
  - Adult softball
  - Adult basketball
  - Adult volleyball
- American Youth Soccer Organizations (AYSO)
- Laguna Hills Little League
- California Hockey Assoc.
- Nellie Gail Gators Swim Club

Each of these groups was interviewed as a part of this process to determine their needs and the amount of service that they provide to the City. In addition the available facilities were also analyzed to create a comparison of community need versus facility availability. For a detailed analysis of the There are several different kinds of facilities that are required to allow for practice and games of the groups mentioned above: multi-purpose fields, ballfields, basketball courts, and in-line skating rinks.

Although the city does provide all of these facilities, not all of them are at the frequency or specifications as needed by the sports organizations. The sports facilities analysis studied the available sports facilities within the community as well as the organizations that are providing programming and their needs.

The sports facility analysis looked at the game facility capacity versus the actual use. The study found that the softball field and two soccer fields at the Sports Complex are well utilized with only 450 unutilized hours per year. The two ball fields at Cabot Park and the Little League baseball field at the

Sports Complex are underutilized by 2100 hours per year including the fact that there are no lights at Cabot Park. The details of the sports facilities analysis can be found in **Section IV C.** of the Recreation Facilities Needs Assessment report.

Overall, Laguna Hills has high demand for the facilities within the City. The combination of active sports organizations, difficult terrain, and being a built-out community, make the provision of facilities a complicated puzzle. Of the organizations that are providing services to the community, the AYSO serves the most participants and uses the widest variety of fields – all of which are shared with other organizations and uses. Laguna Hills Little League is also an active organization, and although serves a smaller segment of the population and has slightly declining numbers, has majority use of three of the City’s fields. The other organizations mentioned, while providing needed services to the community do not require the space in Laguna Hills that is needed by soccer and baseball.

The telephone survey confirms that multiuse fields is seen by residents as the most important new facility outside of trails. It is the only amenity located within parks that was valued as very important or somewhat important by more than two-thirds of survey participants (68.2 percent). However, a large majority (92.1 percent) of respondents rated existing facilities as adequate or more than adequate for their recreational needs. When asked what one thing a survey participant would do to improve recreational facilities in Laguna Hills, 18.7 percent responded that no improvements are needed, more than double the next highest response of a higher quantity of trails (9.0 percent).

The four focus groups also mentioned multiuse fields as important new facilities along with a dog park, city acquisition of Sheep Hills Park, a soccer field at Veeh Ranch Park, as well as lights and parking at both Veeh Ranch and Sheep Hills. When these focus groups were asked about the top priorities for the next 5-10 years, multiuse fields was mentioned by two of the focus groups in the context of the City of Laguna Hills acquiring Sheep Hills Park. All four focus groups agreed that capacity usage of recreation facilities to best utilize what the city has already was a priority.

## **Benchmarking Analysis**

Benchmarking is an important tool that allows the comparison of certain attributes of the city’s management of public spaces (parks, recreation, aquatics, and related services) with other similar communities. For this plan, benchmarking data was collected from comparable agencies in California including: Lake Forrest, Mission Viejo, Laguna Niguel, and Rancho Santa Margarita.

It is very difficult to find exact comparable communities because each has its own unique identity, its own way of conducting business, and differences in what populations it serves. It is important to keep in mind that while many park and recreation departments serve primarily its residents, others serve a large portion of non-residents.

Additionally, organizations typically don’t break down the expenditures of parks, trails, facilities, and maintenance the same way. Agencies also vary in terms of how they organize their departments and budgets. Additionally, field and facility usage varies by agency. It should also be noted that some of the information sent is incomplete. This being said, the benchmarking information should be used as a catalyst for the City of Laguna Hills to continue to research best practices for more specific areas when they are needed. Analysis on certain portions of the collected data is found in Section V of the Recreation Facilities Needs Assessment report. For the complete compiled benchmarking matrix see **Appendix IV.**

The communities were chosen primarily due to the perceived similarities and geographic proximity to Laguna Hills. Requested benchmarking data includes:

- Population
- Annual operating and CIP budgets
- Total full time equivalencies (FTE)
- Developed park acreage and number of parks
- Youth and adult baseball and softball game fields
- Youth and adult football and soccer game fields
- Indoor and outdoor volleyball, basketball, and tennis courts
- Number of aquatic centers and recreation/community centers
- Miles of trails and paths

Benchmarking data was analyzed on a per 1,000 person basis in order to compare the information with all factors equal. The calculated data for Laguna Hills was deemed low, consistent, or high when compared to the other communities. Figures are deemed consistent if they are similar to data from the respondent communities or within the range of the data from the other communities. Figures that are low compared to the other communities may be areas for focus and improvement.

#### *Highest*

- Soccer game fields per 1,000 (0.42)
- Outdoor basketball courts per 1,000 (0.30)
- Outdoor volleyball courts per 1,000 (0.18)
- Playgrounds/tot lots per 1,000 (0.42)
- Outdoor tennis courts per 1,000 (0.24) was comparable to the highest (0.28)

#### *Consistent*

- Parks per 1,000 (0.42)
- Parks and recreation budget per 1,000 (\$119,685)
- Staff per 1,000 (0.40)\*
- Number of skateparks (1).
- Number of roller hockey rinks
- Number of recreation/community centers
- Number of multipurpose classrooms

*\*This number only reflects Community Services Department staff*

#### *Low*

- Acres of developed parkland per 1,000 (2.0)
- Softball game fields per 1,000 (0.06)
- Baseball game fields per 1,000 (0.09)\*
- Outdoor leisure aquatic centers per 1,000 (0)
- Picnic shelters per 1,000 (0.03)
- Number of senior centers (0)\*

*\*This number only reflects city-owned facilities*

## Summary of Priorities

A list of priorities has been developed based on all the information from the demand analysis, deficit/surplus analysis, organization input, benchmarking analysis, and survey results. A key summary finding is that overall the community is very satisfied with the number of recreational facilities as well as the current maintenance of the City of Laguna Hills parks and facilities. However, the Laguna High School ball fields had significant maintenance issues relative to expectations of current participants. Based on all the information gathered, it is the opinion of the consultant team that the City of Laguna Hills currently has an adequate number of recreational facilities and the quality as well as the maintenance levels is more than adequate. Additional capacity of these facilities can potentially be realized with the implementation of following priorities.

The future demographic predictions will not have much effect on the number of recreational facilities maybe with the exception of some additional “active senior” amenities that can easily be added to existing parks. In the current survey, these “active senior” amenities (such as bocce ball courts) did not rank high which may be because the predicted increase of the senior population is currently not present in Laguna Hills to be included in the current survey.

### ***Highest Priorities***

- 1) **Trails** – New and improved trails appear to be a high priority from all available analysis factors, from the survey to the demand analysis to the deficit/surplus analysis.
- 2) **Picnicking in developed sites**– There is a priority indicating a need for three additional tables to existing parks and facilities.
- 3) **Re-establishing a New Partnership Agreement with Laguna Hills High School** – Increased quality and community usage through a revitalized inter-local agreement would increase capacity for community baseball, softball, soccer, basketball, and swimming. Due to the lack of sufficient capital funds the school has, the City could assist with improvements such as lighting and artificial turf of athletic fields as well as resurfacing, lighting, and new goals at the outdoor basketball courts for a vastly increase of the opportunity for community use of these facilities. The renegotiation of a partnership agreement with the City and school could also include additional access to the swimming pool to address these needs within the community.

### ***Medium Priorities***

- 1) **Lighting at appropriate outdoor sports fields and courts** would add capacity usage.
- 2) **Inline skating rink (1 covered)** – improvements to surfacing and a cover for shade and protection from rain.
- 3) **Softball/baseball fields (1 additional)** – the need is being served and current facilities are underutilized, although that could change as the 5-14 demographic is large. Scheduling is tight for the size of fields needed for little league baseball and girls’ softball fields.
- 4) **Outdoor Basketball court (1 additional)** – improvement of existing outdoor courts at schools along with scheduling for drop-in and organized group access. An indoor facility would be a low priority.
- 5) **Play equipment/tot lot (1 additional)** – popularity and demographic changes enforce the addition to or improvement of an existing playground.

### **Lower Priorities**

- 1) **Soccer/Multiuse fields (1 additional)** – current facilities are well utilized and need is being served. As the 5-14 demographic is large, popularity for soccer fields could increase. Space for an additional field may be available at Sheep Hills Park or Veeh Ranch.
- 2) **Aquatic center/Splashpad (1 additional)** – although popularity nationwide is increasing for leisure aquatics, the community is well above the commonly referenced ratio. The addition of a community-sized family-oriented splashpad (which is considered a low capital cost and minimal operational cost) would be a great addition to the community particularly with the water park nearby closing. The need for competitive swimming may be better met through scheduling of existing facilities and the ability to hold meets in the lone 25-meter pool.

Overall, the community feels that the number of recreational facilities is very adequate. It seems that general maintenance and upkeep is well done according to the inventory and the survey results. Amenities within the parks have very nice comfort and convenience components. The requests for restrooms, lights, shelters, etc. within existing parks should be proactively discussed with adjacent neighborhoods as the need is there but new installations may encounter some resistance. The vast majority of Laguna Hills parks are considered neighborhood parks that are small in size and additional amenities that will reduce the greenspace and “neighborhood feel” may not be welcomed by the some users and neighbors.

An improvement to scheduling of existing recreational facilities, particularly the high school facilities, is the easiest method of increasing the capacity of recreational facilities. Revisiting the high school partnership agreement can accomplish this and potentially increase the quality of the facilities.

Through continually surveying the community and ongoing assessment, additional amenities and improvements could become more evident as the demographic changes occur in Laguna Hills.