OVERVIEW

In 2006 New Hanover County commissioned a Master Plan to provide a countywide vision for parks, recreation and open space. The planning document, which was approved by the County Commissioners, provided a Needs Assessment for all types of parks and recreational facilities. Soccer was one of the activities that was addressed in that planning effort.

The 2006 Master Plan for Parks, Recreation and Open Space for the New Hanover County Parks Department identified a significant demand and need for soccer facilities throughout the county. The document stated there was a current (2006) need for 17 additional public soccer fields for the community. The report projected that by 2015 the need would increase to 24 additional fields.

The purpose of this planning study is to review the 2006 plan, identify changes within the County that have occurred, and assess the current and future need for soccer/multi-purpose fields.

This report begins with a review of the 2006 Plan. It then identifies changes in demand and supply that have occurred since 2006. These changes are then used to update the findings from the soccer assessment of the 2006 Plan to provide an update assessment of countywide soccer needs (current and ten year projections).
2006 MASTER PLAN FOR PARKS, RECREATION & OPEN SPACE
NEW HANOVER COUNTY

The 2006 Master Plan developed by New Hanover County provided a comprehensive assessment of parks and recreation needs for the entire county. The Master Plan was developed with considerable public input. A countywide telephone survey was conducted to determine demand for various park and recreation facilities. Several community workshops and focus group interviews were also included in the planning process.

There was very strong support for soccer in all of the public input venues. Based on the telephone survey taken from a random sample of New Hanover households, almost half (47%) of all county households indicated they participated or had an interest in participating in youth or adult soccer. Over one third (36%) of county households indicated similar demand for football; another sport played on multi-purpose fields. Support for soccer was also heard at the public workshops. Likewise, the need for both soccer and lacrosse fields was heard in stakeholder interviews. Mason Hawfield (soccer) and James I. Smith (lacrosse) indicated that as many as 5,000 youth and adults participated in these two sports during 2005. Both stakeholders expressed significant problems with finding adequate field space to practice, play and host tournaments.

The 2006 Plan used a level of service (LOS) for soccer of 1 field for every 6,000 people in the County’s service population in developing a needs assessment for the sport. While this LOS was significantly higher than the older National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources (NCDENR) level of service, the 1/6,000 LOS was relatively low compared to LOS used by other North Carolina communities (see section on Level of Service).

The 2006 Plan applied this LOS to the County’s population (2005 and projected) to determine the number of soccer fields needed to meet demand. This demand for soccer was then compared with the total number of fields available in the county to meet this demand. The number of fields used in the 2006 Needs Assessment was based on fields owned/controlled by the City of Wilmington and New Hanover County. Fields at local schools were not considered in the 2006 Needs Assessment because very few of the schools fields were accessible or in playable condition.

Utilizing this rationale of determining facility needs, the County’s 2006 Master Plan identified an immediate need for 17 additional soccer fields with an anticipated ten year (2015) need to increase to 24 fields.

The purpose of this planning study for soccer is to determine what factors have changed since the County’s 2006 Master Plan that would influence the need for soccer fields, and what will the need for soccer facilities be in ten years (2023).
CURRENT FACTORS AFFECTING COUNTY SOCCER

In the eight years since the 2006 Plan a number of changes have occurred in New Hanover County that influence the demand for soccer and the capacity to meet that demand through programs and facilities.

Public Agency Structure
While almost all of the programming for soccer in New Hanover County is provided by soccer associations, the majority of the fields being programmed are owned and maintained by public agencies. There have been a number of organizational changes in the eight years since the County’s Master Plan was adopted. New Hanover County’s Park Department merged with Airlie Gardens to form the New Hanover Parks and Gardens Department. This change in organizational structure did not have a significant impact on the soccer community. New Hanover County still maintains and operates six parks which contain the largest block of fields used for soccer play.

The City of Wilmington’s Parks and Recreation Department was incorporated under the Department of Community Services in an effort by the City Council to reduce the number of departments within the City. This consolidation has probably reduced some of their athletic programs and outdoor education, but the soccer facilities at Legions Sports Complex and Wallace Park are still available for soccer play. Finally, Wrightsville Beach Recreation Department has been wrapped into the Town’s Planning Department. This merger has minimal impact on soccer programming, since Wrightsville Beach does not provide any soccer programs.

Population Growth
The 2006 County Master Plan identified the county population to be 175,000. It projected the ten year population (2015) for the county to be 216,000. These population figures were provided by a Population Paper Issue developed by Wilmington and New Hanover Planning Departments.

Based on the U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts, the 2012 population was approximately 210,000 and the 2013 population will be almost 214,000. This current population figure indicates the County’s population will exceed the projections made in 2006. The State of North Carolina’s official Office of State Budget and Management projects the 2015 population to exceed 220,000 and projects a 2023 (ten year) population to exceed 250,000.

The Needs Assessment developed for the 2006 Master Plan was population based. The number of facilities identified in the Needs Assessment were derived by dividing the service population by the level of service (LOS) for each recreation activity.

The new ten year projected service population to be used for this Soccer Needs Assessment Update will be 250,000.

**New Hanover Population Growth**

Soccer/Lacrosse/Football Programming
Soccer is one of the most popular sports in New Hanover County, but it is not the only sport vying for play time on multi-purpose fields. The demand for soccer fields is intensified by the number of sports that utilize multi-purpose rectangular fields similar to soccer fields. Historically in the United States, football has been the predominant sport played on rectangular fields. While in the past several decades the demand for football has declined, there is still demand for the sport through the Pop Warner Program. In addition to soccer and
football, competition for field space has increased significantly with the increased popularity of lacrosse. This sport, like soccer, has exploded in popularity over the past decade, placing even greater demand on field space.

This report looks at the numerous organizations and associations operating in New Hanover County that compete for multi-purpose fields.

**Soccer**

There are a number of organizations/associations in New Hanover County focused on playing, promoting, and providing soccer programs. These associations organize a wide variety of recreational and travel soccer teams, as well as conduct soccer camps, travel programs, and tournaments. As with most athletic associations, the majority of the organizational and operational tasks of these associations are carried out by volunteers, although several of the associations in New Hanover County have full time, paid executive directors.

With the organization and operation of the soccer programs being handled by the various athletic associations, the public sector’s (municipal and county agencies) role is predominately providing soccer fields and field maintenance to support league and tournament play. Each of the area soccer associations have worked out field scheduling arrangements with the various public agencies that control the fields.

**Cape Fear Soccer Club**

Cape Fear Soccer Club is New Hanover County’s largest soccer association, approximately 3,000 players participate in the club’s recreational and academy programs. The club’s mission statement is: To promote a positive athletic environment for the development of physical wellness, competitive spirit and pure enjoyment for the young and the young at heart of the lower Cape Fear Region.

The club plays on the following fields:
- Cape Fear Regional Soccer Complex
- Eaton Elementary School Fields
- Ogden Park Fields
- Hugh MacRae Athletic Complex
- Roland-Grise Middle School
- Veterans Park Fields
- Ashely High School Fields
- Murray Middle School Fields

They provide play/instruction in the following areas:
- Recreation Program U4-U18
- Academy Program U8-U10
- Classic
- Rec All-stars
- Top Soccer (special needs)

They host the following tournaments:
- Beach Soccer Classic (November)
- Seaside Soccer Classic (May)

**Port City Soccer**

Port City Soccer programs youth soccer through recreational leagues in the Wilmington and the Hampstead areas. There are approximately 1,000 players in the club. The mission of the Port City Soccer is “…to teach sportsmanship, character, soccer skills, and a passion for playing the game to local youth.”
The club runs recreational league play for the following ages:

- U4 Co-ed
- U5 Co-ed
- U6 Co-ed
- U7 Co-ed
- U8-10 Co-ed
- U11-14 Co-ed

They play their games and practice at the following fields:
- Olsen Farm Soccer Complex
- Ogden Park
- Hampstead Kiwanis Park

In addition to recreational leagues, Port City Soccer promotes the Twilight 3v3 and Olsen Cup tournaments.

Pleasure Island Soccer Association (PISA)
PISA provides soccer programs for approximately 1,000 players. Based on their mission statement they strive to provide a healthy and fun environment for the children of the community by building friendships, self confidence and sportsmanship through soccer. Association operations are carried out by an executive director and board of directors.

PISA provides recreational play for boys and girls ages 3-18. They also provide academy and academy elite programs, travel teams and adult all-stars.

PISA uses fields at the following locations:
- Veterans Park

- Mike Chappell Park
- Murray Middle School
- Carolina Beach

Wilmington Adult Soccer Club
Wilmington Adult Soccer Club provides soccer programs for approximately 500 adult players. League play is offered in both 7 and 11 player teams. There are open leagues and leagues for over 30. Co-ed leagues are also available.

Games are played at Veterans Park.

Wilmington Christian Academy (WCA)
As stated on their website, WCA “provides a league where our students can receive quality soccer instruction, enjoy mornings of fun with friends and family, and have it take place in a Godly environment.”

Through its WCA intramural soccer league the academy host a fall soccer league for youth (K4 through 8th grade). Over 20 teams participate in the league (±200 youth).

Wilmington Family YMCA
As with most youth sports, the Wilmington Family YMCA offers soccer programming through a winter Futsal indoor soccer program (youth and adult) and a spring soccer league for youth (U5-U18).

The indoor programming is played in the YMCA gymnasium, and the spring league is played on fields behind the YMCA.

Wilmington Women’s Soccer Association
The Wilmington Women’s Soccer Association offers fall and spring league play (7 v 7). Over 100 players participate in these programs. Games are played Thursday evenings at Veterans Park and Ashley High School practice fields.

Sea Hawks Boys Soccer Camp
UNC Wilmington offers both day and residential camps for boys and girls. Camp offerings include:
- Winter Camp 15-18 (boys)
- Lil Hawks Half Day Camps 5-8
• Full Day Camps 5-12
• Boys Residential Camp 10-18
• Goal Keeper Camp 10-18 (boys)
• Speed, Power & Agility Camp 8-18 (boys/girls)

**Wilmington Hispanic Soccer League**
The Wilmington Hispanic League is an active soccer league serving the hispanic community in New Hanover County. They play games and practice at Ogden Park and Trask Middle School.

**Upward Sports**
Upward Sports is a Christian sports league for children. They organize and promote a wide range of youth athletic programs; including soccer. Currently they are operating several soccer programs in the New Hanover area:
• First Baptist Church, Leland
• College Acres Baptist Church, Wilmington Soccer camp and leagues K4 through 6th grade.
• Hampstead United Methodist Church Soccer league K4 through 7th grade.

**Cape Fear Lacrosse Association**
The Cape Fear Lacrosse Association provides a wide variety of programs to promote play and instruction of lacrosse. Programs offered by the association include:
• Winter Warm-up Clinic
• Lady Shamrocks - Travel Team
• Cape Fear Shamrocks - Travel Team
• Girls Fall League (elementary and middle divisions)
• Boys Fall League (U-7, 9, 11, 13 and 17)

The Lacrosse Association uses fields at several locations:
• Kiwanis Park in Hampstead
• Hugh McCrae Park
• Alderman Elementary School
• Murray Middle School
• Noble Middle School
• Roland-Grise Middle School
• Temple Baptist Church
• Trask Middle School

Lacrosse is played on Sundays to minimize conflicts with soccer. It is also played in summer when there is less competition for fields. Cape Fear lacrosse engages over 500 players. Demand for their programs is growing rapidly, but they do not have access to fields to accept more players.

**Coastal Pop Warner**
**Youth Football and Cheerleading**
Established over 40 years ago, the Coastal Pop Warner program provides programming and instruction to children from 5 to 15 years of age in New Hanover, Pender and Brunswick Counties. Over 1,000 youth participated in this program in 2012.

Their mission is to teach the fundamentals of football and cheerleading in a fun, safe environment, while emphasizing the importance of sportsmanship and academics in athletics.

The Pop Warner regular season begins in August and runs through October. Playoffs are held in November. Pop Warner teams practice on baseball field outfields at Optimist and Veterans Parks. Games are played at Eaton Elementary School and Ogden Park.

**Improvements/Expansion of Fields**
The Needs Assessment for soccer developed in the 2006 Plan identified 12 county fields under public domain dedicated to soccer play. This inventory included fields at the following locations:
• Castle Hayne Park 2
• Ogden Park 2
• Hugh MacRae Park 4
• Veterans Park 4
The fields at Cape Fear Regional Soccer Complex were not included in the inventory of facilities because the fields were under construction. The 2006 Plan noted 10 fields located on school properties, but did not include those fields in the Needs Assessment for soccer because field conditions limited play on most school fields and joint use agreements were not in place to guarantee public play on those facilities.

There have been improvements made to the inventory of soccer facilities available in the county since the 2006 Plan. The completion of the Cape Fear Regional Soccer Complex has increased the number of fields significantly (7 fields). Likewise, there have been expansion of soccer fields at Ogden Park, Arrowhead Park and Monterey Heights Parks. Plans are currently underway to add fields at Castle Hayne Park. The City of Wilmington has also made improvements to Legion Sport Complex. Today the number of public fields under the public domain (City and County) has increased to 28 fields; although three of these fields (Arrowhead, Monterey Heights, and Wallace) are limited in support facilities (restrooms) and are used primarily for unprogrammed free play.

In addition to the fields provided by the City and County, several of the athletic associations are currently using school facilities at the following schools:
- Alderman Elementary School
- Bradley Creek Elementary School
- Hoggard High School
- Roland Grise Middle School
- Trask Middle School
- Eaton Elementary School
- Myrtle Grove Middle School
- Murrayville Elementary School

These schools provide 17 additional fields and are currently being used for soccer/lacrosse programming. Most of these school fields are maintained by New Hanover County.

Based on field expansion/improvements and stronger dependence on school facilities, the current number of public fields available for soccer programming in New Hanover County is approximately 45.

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<tr>
<th>Existing Fields</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Public Fields</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>New Hanover County Fields</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arrowhead Park</td>
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<td>Castle Hayne Park</td>
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<td>Cape Fear Regional Soccer Complex</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monterey Heights Park</td>
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<td>Ogden Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>Veterans Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>City of Wilmington</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legion Sports Complex</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wallace Park</td>
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<td>Martin Luther King, Jr. Field</td>
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<td>Wrightsville Beach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carolina Beach (Mike Chappell)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School Fields Currently Used</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alderman Elementary School</td>
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<td>Bradley Creek Elementary School</td>
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<td>Eaton Elementary School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hoggard High School/Hugh MacRae Complex</td>
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<tr>
<td>Myrtle Grove Middle School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roland-Grise Middle School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trask Middle School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Murrayville Elementary School</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School Fields Not Utilized</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ashley High School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hoggard High School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Holly Tree Elementary School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parsley Elementary School</td>
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<td>Pine Valley Elementary School</td>
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<td>Williams Elementary School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Williston Middle School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noble Middle School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Castle Hayne Elementary School</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Private/Institutional Facilities with Limited Access</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cape Fear Community College</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNCW - Soccer Stadium</td>
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<tr>
<td>YMCA</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Private Schools</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cape Fear Academy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Myrtle Grove Christian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coastal Christian</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Private Fields</strong></td>
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<td>Olsen Farms</td>
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New Hanover County
Existing Soccer Fields

Soccer Needs Assessment
January, 2014
LEVEL OF SERVICE

The 2006 Master Plan used a level of service (LOS) for soccer of one field for every 6,000 people in the service population. In the eight years since this plan was developed, soccer in New Hanover County and throughout North Carolina has grown in popularity.

As part of the 2006 Plan representatives from Cape Fear Soccer Association (Mason Hawfield and Bill Furjanic) were interviewed. During that interview they indicated that over 4,000 people in the county were participating in soccer. That estimate of participation included 2,700 recreation league players, 700 classic or challenge players, and over 500 adults.

Today participation numbers are significantly higher. As noted in the section on Soccer Programming, over a half dozen soccer associations, youth organizations, or local churches are providing some form of soccer play. The current level of participation is well over 5,000 players. In addition to soccer, as noted in previous sections, there has been an explosion in interest in lacrosse. Adding the participants in lacrosse and Pop Warner football, there are 6,000 to 7,000 players looking for multi-purpose fields throughout the county.

From this perspective the demand for soccer fields has increased by 75% since the 2006 report from 4,000 to 7,000. That increased demand, along with the increase in population has resulted in considerable unmet need.

Based on this increase in population and demand for multi-use fields it appears the level of service for soccer used in the 2006 Master Plan may not represent current demand. A review of other North Carolina communities reveals most communities utilize a higher level of service for soccer and lacrosse than the 2006 LOS.

Comparison of Standards

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<tr>
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<th>2006 Plan</th>
<th>New Hanover County Standards</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brunswick County</td>
<td>1/2,500</td>
<td>1/6,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapel Hill</td>
<td>1/3,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rocky Mount</td>
<td>1/4,000</td>
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<td>Greenville</td>
<td>1/5,000</td>
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<td>Burke County</td>
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<td>Pasquotank County</td>
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<td>Carteret County</td>
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<td>Currituck County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fayetteville-Cumberland County</td>
<td>1/7,500</td>
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While a 75% increase in the LOS may not be warranted, the LOS should be increased to 1 field per 4,000. This updated LOS will more closely reflect the demand for the sport(s) that currently exists throughout the county.
CURRENT/PROJECTED NEEDS ASSESSMENT

It is evident that several changes have occurred in the County since the 2006 County Master Plan was adopted. The County’s population has increased faster than the 2006 Plan projected. This greater increase in population is significant in light of the historical economic downturn that occurred in 2008. As we move from the hard economic times of the past five years, population growth in New Hanover County will increase rapidly. In addition to the increase in population, the demand for soccer in the county has risen. This increase in demand is reflected in the participation numbers that are discussed in the section on Soccer Programming.

This increase in participation/demand has been somewhat offset by improvements to public fields in the county over the past eight years. Ten new fields (7 of these fields are at the Cape Fear Regional Soccer Complex) have been developed since the 2006 Plan. In addition, school facilities have been utilized to a much greater extent.

Even with the expansion of fields and the reliance on additional school fields, there is a significant need for additional fields in New Hanover County.

Utilizing the updated LOS for soccer (1 field for every 4,000 people in the service population) we see there is a current demand for 53 soccer fields. Currently there are only 45 fields available to meet this demand; leaving a current need for 8 additional fields.

In ten years (2023) with the County’s population reaching ±250,000, the demand for soccer will increase to 62 fields (250,000 ÷ 4,000). Unless improvements are made to current fields and/or new fields constructed there will be a need for 17 additional fields.

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<th>2013 NEEDS ASSESSMENT</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Current Need</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2013 LOS</td>
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<td>1 Field/4,000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2023 Projected Need</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2013 LOS</td>
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<td>1 Field/4,000</td>
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The County currently has plans to build two new fields at Castle Hayne Park. The development of the fields at Castle Hayne Park will help off-set the demand for fields, but will not meet all of the immediate need.
ACTION PLAN TO MEET MULTI-PURPOSE FIELD NEEDS

There are a number of actions that can be taken to meet current and future needs for multi-purpose fields. Some of the steps are significant (constructing a new sports complex dedicated to multi-purpose field play), but there are smaller, more incremental steps that can be taken to relieve the need. Meeting the need for soccer, and other sports played on multi-purpose fields, will require elected officials to explore all options. Specific recommendations to consider include:

**Short Term Actions**
- Eaton Elementary School field improvements (4 fields)
  - Drainage/field improvements, cost $300,000 ($75,000/field)
  - Field lighting, cost $650,000
- Veterans Park improvements
  - Convert 2 fields to synthetic turf, cost $1,600,000 ($800,000/field)
  - Light Murray Middle School field, cost $325,000
- Castle Hayne Park
  - Construct 2 new fields with synthetic turf, cost $1,600,000 ($800,000/field)

**Long Term Actions**
- Develop long term joint use agreements with New Hanover County Schools for public use of existing school fields. With long term joint use agreements in place invest in field improvements, lighting, etc. to expand use of existing school fields, cost $200,000/field.
- Identify property (30-50 acres) in southern area of county to develop a multi-purpose field complex with 8-10 fields, cost: Land Acquisition $2-3 million, Facility Development $8-9 million.

A sports complex with 8-10 multi-purpose fields will be needed to meet future demand; similar to the one shown above.