

**Historic Yates Mill County Park**  
**ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES**  
Friday, April 26, 2024, 2-4 pm

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**MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

*N.C. State University:* Bridget Lassiter (Chair), Greg Cope, Tom Wentworth, Clyde Sorenson

*Wake County:* Sam Ray, Jan Weems, Gene Brothers

*Yates Mill Associates (YMA):* Ed Barrows, Bob Harkness, Herb Elton

*Wake County Park Staff in Attendance:* Sam Trogdon-Assistant Director, Tim Lisk-Park Manager, Laura Ketcham-Assistant Manager

THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 2:00 PM BY THE BOARD CHAIR.

**ITEMS OF BUSINESS:**

1. **Introductions:** Gene Brothers introduced himself as a new County representative.
2. **Approval of agenda:** The agenda was approved.
3. **Approval of the January 2024 Meeting Minutes:** The January minutes were approved.

**REGULAR AGENDA:**

4. **Partnership Update—YMA and Wake County:** Tim said the latest draft of the Joint Use Agreement is being reviewed by YMA's Executive Committee; once it is approved, it will go to the Board of Commissioners for approval. Ed asked when it might go before the board; Sam noted that it depended on when YMA approved it and then it has to be put on the Board of Commissioners' agenda—this all could be accomplished in perhaps two months, optimistically. Bridget asked for highlights of the agreement to share with the group.

Tim said that in the new agreement the County will become a funding partner. The mill needs major repairs/capital improvements that are expensive--the waterwheel and forebay need to be replaced—and the County has offered to help pay for this. Going forward, the County is also offering to help with future major expenses. For instance, the mill's siding will need to be replaced sometime after the waterwheel and forebay are replaced.

Another change in the agreement is that the mill tours will be free, like all other programs in the Division currently are. The goal in going free is to reduce barriers to participation. In the past, the fees have kept some people from taking tours. However, the County recognizes that the mill tour fees were a funding source for YMA, and the County is planning to compensate YMA with some additional revenue for the anticipated loss of revenue. With tours becoming free, the park is asking the County for additional part-time and full-time positions to help the park meet an anticipated increased demand for mill programming. This will help make the mill more available to visitors. Right now the mill is open for so few hours compared to how many hours the park

operates, and just a small fraction of park visitors get to go inside the mill. The County would like to make the mill more available to more visitors, while also recognizing that the most important job is taking care of the mill.

Because public money will be used to care for the mill, the park has to go through a fair bidding process, as required by law for all large-scale projects. Since working on a mill takes specialized skill, a pre-qualification process—a kind of scoring system—is being developed to help hone down the people who can do period construction and are qualified to work on the mill.

The County hired a consultant engineer to give an assessment of the condition of the mill. Tim noted that William has kept the mill in very good shape, but since County funding is going into this project, the County wanted another set of eyes to look at the mill structurally. Staff are waiting for the results of that assessment. The pre-qualification process and the mill assessment report will be shared with YMA.

Tim said the new Joint Use Agreement will be a 5-year agreement, not a 10-year agreement, and will roll over on an annual basis for the next five years if there are no big changes.

YMA has not officially started the fundraising campaign for the waterwheel and forebay, but they are raising money.

Jan asked whether the engineers looking at the mill considered the impact of possible wear and tear of increased visitation to the mill and whether they considered the need for possible safety modifications if there is more free flow of visitors in the mill and fewer small, guided groups. Tim said the engineers did look at the mill structurally where people would be standing; they could see additional structures had been added to support that weight. Tim said that just because more people will be going through the mill overall doesn't mean there will be more people inside the mill at any given time; they are still limitations on how many people can be inside. Tim noted that William added jute matting on the floor, which protects the floorboards from direct contact with shoes. Sam added that the draft Joint Use Agreement talks about future assessments; this current assessment gives us a base level of where we are now and points out watch areas where funding may be needed in the future for repairs. Theoretically we can compare this report to future assessments to see how the mill is doing over time. The desire of everyone is to maintain and preserve the mill and provide access; we can adapt based on how the mill is used.

In response to a question whether anything had been said about ADA modifications in the review of the mill, Tim said that this was not specifically considered and that modifications would perhaps be part of the re-master planning of Yates Mill. During the last master plan, different options for ADA were considered, and they are still on the table in the timeframe of future master planning. Tim noted that the Lake Wheeler bridge and road will be moved, which will allow for a different pedestrian flow around the mill and may involve redoing the mill yard, within limits of what we're allowed to do; this change could affect accessibility. Accessibility is an ongoing issue. Tim noted that he got an email from a couple in which the wife asked about what is accessible at the park, asking specifically about the mill. Tim replied that the park center is accessible, but the mill is not; you can get to the mill and to the pond boardwalk and you can learn about mill history at the center. We hope to address this issue through the master plan process.

Bridget asked that a copy of the agreement be sent to committee members when it is signed.

**5. Programming/Mill Tour Updates:** Laura brought in the May program flyer to share with the committee. She noted that the park is now offering canoe programs again, and Adam is doing more outreach for the park; he went to a school earlier in May and spoke with hundreds of students about science careers. Lindsey is doing good work with hands-on history programs and exploration stations.

The park has had a good number of weekday group mill tours, with 12 group tours in March and 10 different groups taking tours in April. The park has also had good visitation on weekends. In March, 175 people attended the public Mill Heritage Tours and 150 people attended the corn grinding tours.

Staff led almost all of the weekday group tours, except for one Mill Heritage Tour led by Ed, who brought a group here. Ed will bring back another group in June. On weekends we have some volunteer help with tours but staff are also leading weekend tours. Park staff would welcome additional volunteers.

**6. Park Construction Projects:** Tim noted that the flat roof of the building is being replaced on the public side and over the research facility. The roof of the public side is being replaced first. New gutters will also be installed. Work will continue through end of May, possibly into June. The construction company has to provide special protection to the live animals in the research facility to make sure no debris falls into the tanks.

Once the roof is done, later this summer the park center will have solar panels installed. The park will not be taken off the electrical grid.

The mill overlook deck on the other side of the mill will be renovated, similar to the way the boardwalk was renovated. Composite material will be used for the decking and rail. That work may happen in the May and June, but it is tied up with work happening at Crowder County Park, which is getting new boardwalk and new overlook.

Tim gave an update on the Lake Wheeler bridge. He noted there was a public comment period; people living nearby got a postcard about the proposed realignment. County staff had a couple of meetings with DOT's consultant, Dewberry. The County is interested in moving the bridge as far downstream as is realistically possible; the County would also like to keep access to the current road, so as to be able to access the mill yard and the pole barn up the hill. The park may turn the current road into an internal park road or a road for maintenance access. There is also interest in future tie-in's to greenways and in possibly connecting the park to the NC State dairy farm with a greenway; this option may be considered in the future. The City of Raleigh has spoken with the consultants about providing bike access on Lake Wheeler Road and the new bridge.

DOT is still doing environmental work/assessments, which should be completed this spring or summer. They shifted the road's path slightly due to the remnant dam located across Penny Road from the park. DOT will begin accessing right of way in the fall, and construction is scheduled to begin in the winter of 2029, according to their website.

**7. Potential development on Mid-Pines Road:** Bridget noted that NC State hosted a well-attended public meeting about this development at the Beef Unit in January. As a result of that meeting, the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) has become involved; the SELC and the developers have separately visited the aquatic propagation research facility. Greg said he had invited the developer and engineer to visit the facility; they visited and were understanding of the

need for clean water and improved water quality. Greg got the impression that they would consider this need in future development. Greg said he and Chris had conversations with SELC lawyers about the meeting and their concerns, and SELC wrote a letter to the City of Raleigh city manager and the county manager to put it on their radar.

Greg learned from an April 2 email from SELC that their lawyers met with city council member Jane Harrison and her staff, who gave helpful updates. The plot is being reviewed by the Council only for approval to subdivide and sell the land; no request for annexation has been made, but that will probably come later. The land is subject to the Swift Creek land management plan, which means it can be developed with only 1 dwelling per acre, or 6 dwellings per acre if sewer is in place; installing sewer would require annexation by Raleigh. Without annexation, 12% of the land could have impervious surfaces; with annexation, 30% of the land could have impervious surfaces. The developer will be required to develop green storm water infrastructure. The SELC said it will continue to monitor the project as it works its way through the process.

Bridget said nothing has been heard from the developer since the January meeting; work would start this winter. Bridget also looked into whether NC State would be interested in purchasing the property and was told that State would not purchase it.

Tim said that he spoke with Chris Snow about the County possibly purchasing this land through the Open Space program; he noted that there are more projects than the County has funding for. If the County had a funding partner, the County would consider purchasing the property, in the same way that it considers other projects. Open Space's focus is protecting water quality and wildlife habitat; Steep Hill Creek flows into the millpond and the County wants to protect that.

Jan said this potential development would open access to two adjacent pieces of property. She wondered if this board as a group or as private individuals could ask Raleigh City Council members not to annex this land, once the process reaches the permitting stage for sewer. If the land is not annexed, it cannot be developed to this level. There may be an opportunity for public comment about annexation.

Bridget said the developer intends to buy the adjacent property but has not been able to reach the land owner.

Greg said his group submitted a grant proposal to the NC Department of Justice's Environmental Enhancement Grant Program, a program which came into existence because of a settlement with Smithfield Foods over hog issues in eastern North Carolina. There are millions of dollars in that fund to support environmental enhancement projects around the state; much of that money has supported stream restoration work. Greg and his team proposed doing monitoring and scoping designs for stream restoration on Miery Branch, which comes through NC State property. This proposal was submitted earlier in April, and Greg said he should know in a couple of months whether it will be funded. If the proposal is funded, it will allow active water quality and stream bank measurements to begin, with some money going to James Environmental to work on a design for stream restoration to improve water quality.

An advisory board member said DOT funded the aquatic research center, and he thought they would be interested if something [like the potential land development] could jeopardize that research. Greg said that DOT employees have to walk a fine line, and that although he can make them aware of the project, he doesn't think they can actively get involved. Bridget said they're

state employees. As a state employee herself, Bridget was told she could not voice any concerns but could navigate and bring groups of people together. She suggested board members keep each other apprised.

Jan asked whether it is in the scope of Park Advisory Board to write a letter to the city council opposing the annexation of the property due to water quality issues.

Bridget said she thought the board could do this, but she did not know if it would resonate with the City of Raleigh, and she said she does not think she could write a letter like this or may not even be able to sign it. Jan noted that one of the topics for today's meeting was the viability of the Park Advisory Board, and writing a letter could be an actionable item that the board could do. She asked whether this has been done in past. Bridget said that as a state employee she probably could not write or sign a letter like this.

Tom said the closest thing he could think of in the past was that the board wrote to NC DOT with concerns about the Lake Wheeler Road location and bridge construction and made it very clear that construction should not be detrimental to the mill and that the bridge should be moved downstream. The letter was sent with Tom's signature, but it was from the board.

Tim said YMA and the County wrote letters regarding that project. The current land development project is a little unclear; the Park Advisory Board is an extension of the County Board of Commissioners. The board sending a letter to the city council would be like saying the Board of Commissioners does not approve of this project. The Park Advisory Board can't tell the commissioners what they should approve.

Jan wondered if the board could say it has concerns that this level of building would have an impact on all citizens of Wake County.

One board member asked if there could be a letter to the commissioners that advises them that something has come up in the neighborhood that it could be detrimental to the park and the pond. Greg noted that the commissioners have received a letter from SELC, and the SELC is probably a stronger advocate than this board.

Jan talked about the synergistic effect of multiple groups writing the council. If several groups were involved, it would be stronger. Jan said an alternative would be for the neighborhood to act. But as an advisory group, maybe the Park Advisory Board could go to the commissioners to express concerns and ask them to talk with the City of Raleigh.

In response to a question whether park staff had regular contact with anyone on the Board of Commissioners, Sam said that OSAPAC (Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee) often provides recommendations to the Board of Commissioners about whether to approve open space acquisition. This situation is a little different, with so many government agencies and organizations involved.

Tim asked if county manager received the letter [from the SELC]; Greg said yes and offered to pass it around. Bridget said she had a digital copy of the letter she can share.

**8. Future of Park Advisory Board**—Bridget said that as discussed in the last meeting, the Park Advisory Board is an extension of the County Board of Commissioners, and the new Joint Use Agreement is just between YMA and the County, making this board redundant and probably not needed. This topic was discussed at the last Park Advisory Board meeting but no action was

taken. Everyone was asked to go home and think about it and come back ready to discuss the issue. Since then, Tim and Bridget have talked and agreed that the board will probably not continue because it is a County-dependent group. Bridget said she does not want State to lose a place at table. Because the mill is owned by NC State and State's research lab is now taking up a third of the building, State has significant interest in the health of the community and the park.

Bridget welcomed feedback.

Tom asked if the Park Advisory Board is dissolving itself or is the County dissolving the board. He added that the board has always represented the partnership to give voice to YMA, the County, and NC State. Though the board has a unique relationship with the County, he has never viewed the board as a County board.

Greg remembered that the bylaws talk about dissolution. Tim read aloud from the bylaws, "In the event of dissolution the residual assets of the board would be turned over to the County of Wake, North Carolina." That's the only statement about dissolution. Tim said he thought there could be a motion made today to dissolve, and that recommendation could be sent to the County's Board of Commissioners; ultimately the Board of Commissioners has to approve the dissolution.

Tim said that a lot of good has come from the Park Advisory Board; the original Joint Use Agreement with YMA mentioned that there would be an advisory board. That language has been taken out of the new agreement. The removal of the Advisory Board from the agreement was based on the recommendation of NC State, YMA, and the County that the board may have outlived its usefulness.

In the beginning, the Park Advisory Board was very involved at start of the park, helping to establish a lot of policy and how the park would operate. The park and the partnership have evolved, and moving forward, the question is whether this is the best way to have a partnership. The language about having an advisory board for the park was intentionally left out of the new Joint Use Agreement, and that was in agreement with YMA. The board has been a huge help over the years. But Tim thinks there have been redundancies with the YMA board, YMA executive committee, the Park Advisory Board, and subcommittees from all the boards. Park staff are talking with the same group of people about the same thing.

Tim said that YMA is a huge part of the partnership and is the public component that the park needs; in effect, YMA has been the advisory board, particularly in all things related to mill.

Tim said he thinks the park can maintain community support environmentally and historically speaking, with YMA providing that advisory support. The Park Advisory Board is not tackling a lot of issues that the park faced 10 to 15 years ago, and staff want to be conscious of board member time and staff time. There are other ways to be involved and to stay in touch with the park.

Tim read aloud an email from Bob W., who couldn't attend the Park Advisory Board meeting: "Having attended the meetings, I've learned about the history of the board and considered the relevance of the board today. I would recommend the dissolution of the board. I agree with others that the board has outlived its purpose and intent. That's not a bad thing, just a recognition that things have evolved and it's time to move forward on a different path."

One board member said the Park Advisory Board has provided an education over the years, but that he did wonder what is the purpose and ongoing value of the board and what the board is accomplishing. He noted that he missed two meetings in a row last year and the park and mill didn't skip a beat.

Tom asked if there would be any forum where all three entities would get together if there were issues of common concern. Tom agreed that a lot of what board members have heard at the meeting has been informational—a discussion of activities in the park—which board members hear about but don't comment on. The board did create a lot of policy in the past, such as establishing the policy on fishing, pets, and photography, and writing a letter to DOT about the bridge. Tom wondered who would miss the board—would the dean [of State's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences] feel his voice was not actively represented by NC State representatives without this board? Tom said that YMA and the County are having their voices heard but State is not a party to the Joint Use Agreement.

Tim agreed that NC State is not a party to the Joint Use Agreement between YMA and the County, but the County has a lease agreement with State. The County owns the visitor center, while NC State owns the land and the mill; through a lease with NC State, the County is the lease owner of mill and contracts with YMA for the care and upkeep of the mill.

As to whether there is a forum for NC State, Tim said that State's use of the research wing automatically gives staff much more interaction with State, and he and Bridget talk regularly. He said the Park Advisory Board did help with everyone [all 3 partners] sitting down as one unit, but he questions if it is needed going forward. Just because the board may never meet again does not mean that relationships are gone. The County still has an agreement with YMA, and park staff see NC State staff on a daily basis, especially with Chris Eads and his team here. Tim said he doesn't think anyone would miss the board, and that the public at large would not know this board stopped meeting.

Tim said the mill is still the heart of YMA; the mill is why the park is here. The relationships are still there, and we still have agreements with all the entities. The County's lease is for 40 years, due in 2040.

Sam added that the County has several other parks that have lease agreements with other entities, such as Duke Energy and RDU. The expectation for Park Managers is that they provide a good relationship with these agencies. Whether Tim or another Park Manager is at the park, the County expects park managers to have a good relationship with the neighbors.

Sam said that as part of the lease with NC State, the park will notify NC State when making improvements, such as the waterwheel and forebay; the park will notify NC State through proper channels and through informal channels, such as communication with Bridget. Those avenues of communication will continue. The relationship between the County and NC State is not dependent on the board.

Ed said that the board has resolved issues in the past; if similar issues arise in the future, there are mechanisms to deal with it. If this board did not exist, a committee or board could be called together to resolve any policy issues.

Sam and Greg agreed the board could make a motion for the board to be dissolved and this could be sent to the Board of Commissioners.

Bridget said she could plan on having a standing meeting with Tim and Greg and that she will look into being part of YMA. She noted that part of her job description is maintaining a relationship with the park. When there's an issue, park staff and State staff get together and work it out.

Tom said that this was an answer to his question about whether there would be a forum to handle issues of mutual concern.

Tim said that in the new Joint Use Agreement with YMA, park staff and YMA will meet on an annual basis at the end of mill tour season to review the year. This meeting will help the park and YMA to reconnect on a partnership basis, and maybe NC State could come to that meeting as we review the year, the tours, the condition of the mill, and anything that's impacting the park. Tim agreed with Jan that environmental concerns are important and that the park can be a steward and can help be a champion in whatever capacity the park is allowed to have.

Jan wondered—with NC State talking to the park and YMA talking to the park—how she could fit in as someone wanting park to be a high-quality environmental site. As a private citizen and neighbor, she would like to be involved. She knows she could perhaps be a volunteer at the park, keeping her eyes and ears open, or be an Open Space volunteer, but she asked where do private citizens have a chance to have this type of input, communication, and information exchange. She appreciates the board's meetings but agrees it is a lot of information and not a lot of action.

Tim agreed that park visitors are the best eyes and ears. They're out there when staff can't be and provide important communication.

Bridget made a motion for the Park Advisory Board to dissolve; Ed seconded. The motion passed, with no votes in opposition and Tom abstaining.

Greg asked how this recommendation would be communicated with the Board of Commissioners. Sam said we'll work through this dissolution process with the Board of Commissioners. Until then, the Park Advisory Board is still a board.

Bridget asked Park Advisory Board members to keep the July 26 meeting on calendar; this meeting might be an appreciation event, more than a meeting.

**9. Partnership roundtable:** Greg gave an update on the grand opening ceremony of Yates Mill Aquatic Conservation Center, which will take place on May 17, from 2 to 4:30 p.m. Invitations were sent to all the partners; invitees include representatives of YMA, Wake County, NC DOT, Water Resource Commission, NC State, and US Fish and Wildlife Services. There will be a program on the back porch at 2 p.m. Speakers include Gary Fox, the new dean of College of Agriculture and Life Sciences; Susan Evans, the vice-chair of the Wake County Board of Commissioners; and representatives from the US Fish and Wildlife Services and the NC Water Resources Commission. After the program on the back porch, invitees will be able to tour the aquatic center. Greg said he is working with Tim on parking and overflow.

Tim said the park will be open and staff may have to open overflow parking. Bridget said State has shuttles that are available if needed to transport people from overflow parking.

Gene asked if this group could have an informational email each month or each quarter; as a community citizen, he would like to keep up with park news.



Tim suggested the park e-newsletter would be a way to stay informed. Gene and Jan would like to be added to the mailing list [Laura will add them]. He noted we also use social media. Tim said that the e-newsletter is not article heavy and is more program focused.

Tom thanked everyone who's been involved in the Park Advisory Board, noting that he's been involved since day one when the original planning group met at Historic Oak View. It has been a meaningful activity and he has learned a lot. The group's dissolution is bittersweet. He explained that he had abstained from the vote to dissolve because it was still not clear to him that there will be a forum that satisfies all three partners. But he added that he thinks if there's a need, people with a vested interest will speak up. He extended thanks to everyone over the years who put in so many hours and worked so hard and for all that the board accomplished.

Greg thanked Tom for his service.

Tim said hopes the group can meet in July at least from a social perspective to say thank you to everyone. Dissolving the board is not easy; board members have given their time because they care.

Tim added that YMA's annual meeting will be held on May 9 at the center.

THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 3:36 PM BY THE BOARD CHAIR.

NEXT MEETING: The next meeting is scheduled for July 26, 2024.