



Southeast County Park Master Plan Executive Summary

Mission

Southeast County Park aims to provide a universally inclusive recreational amenity to the residents of Wake County and all visitors with the following core principles:

PROTECT, RESTORE AND ENHANCE

the ecological diversity of the site from forest to floodplain and the beneficial functions of the underlying natural living systems.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL EXPLORATION

that will strengthen the connection of people to the local community.

PROMOTE HUMAN HEALTH AND WELLNESS

through outdoor recreation and building connections of people to the natural environment.



FORWARD

Within the past decade, Wake County has been challenged with meeting the demand for park and recreational facilities from the growing population at a rate of nearly 69 people per day. For fiscal year 2018 alone, these facilities produced a combined visitation of nearly 1.3 million patrons prompting Wake County to acquire additional land to expand the Park System. In November 2017, Wake County initiated a process for producing a Master Plan for Southeast County Park; anticipated to be the ninth park in the Wake County Park System.

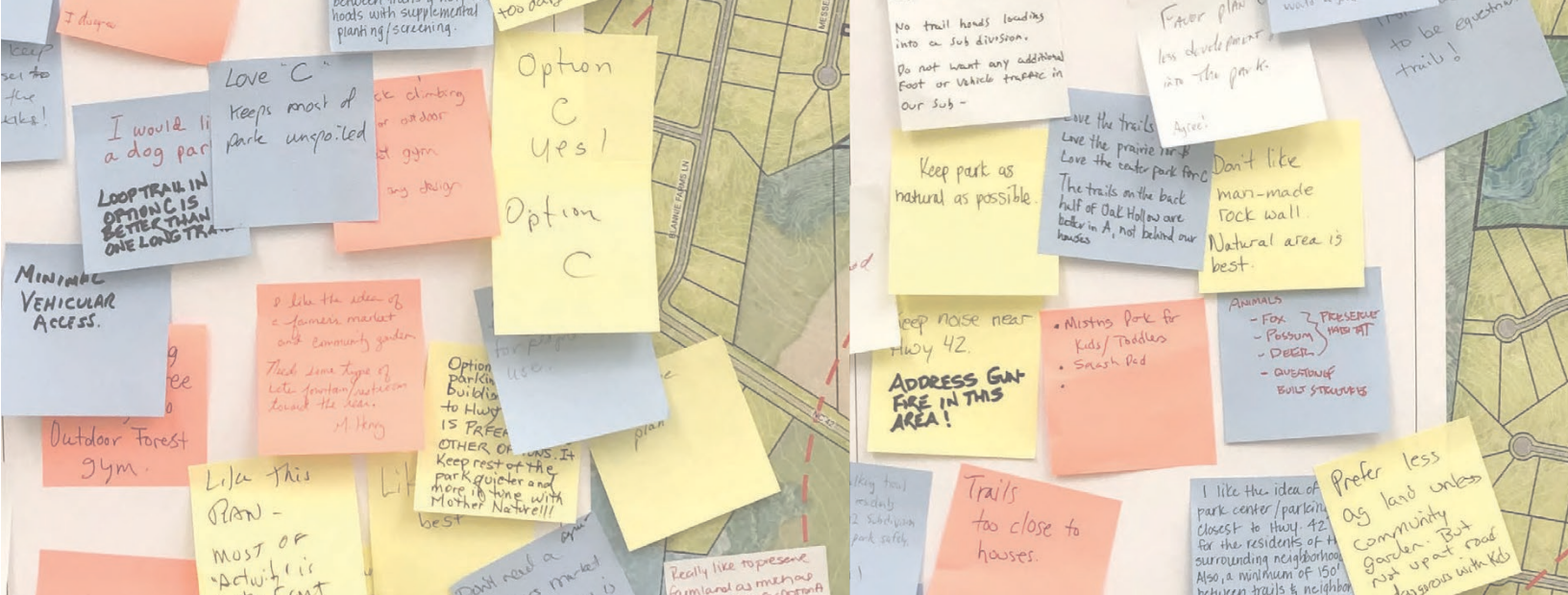
The land acquired for Southeast Park is located in the southeast corner of Wake County adjacent to the towns of Garner and Fuquay-Varina. Several parcels combine to form the main park area of 240 acres while two parcels of 62 acres to the east are currently isolated. A portion of the land adjacent to Highway 42 is currently agricultural land, however, the majority of the park contains undeveloped forests, wetlands, stream channels, floodplains and rock outcrops, all of which support a diverse ecosystem and help protect critical natural resources.

Surface 678, P.A. was selected as the landscape architectural firm and lead design consultant to prepare a comprehensive Master Plan for the future development of Southeast Park. Throughout a 14 month process, a strong emphasis was placed on gathering input from a broad range of perspectives including those identified in the “Project Core Team”, potential research partners, stakeholders, non-profit organizations, local businesses, municipalities and surrounding residents. The end vision for the Southeast Park Master Plan was to offer a unique experience that supports the recreational needs of the growing adjacent communities while strengthening the natural, cultural and historical resources of the land.

PROCESS

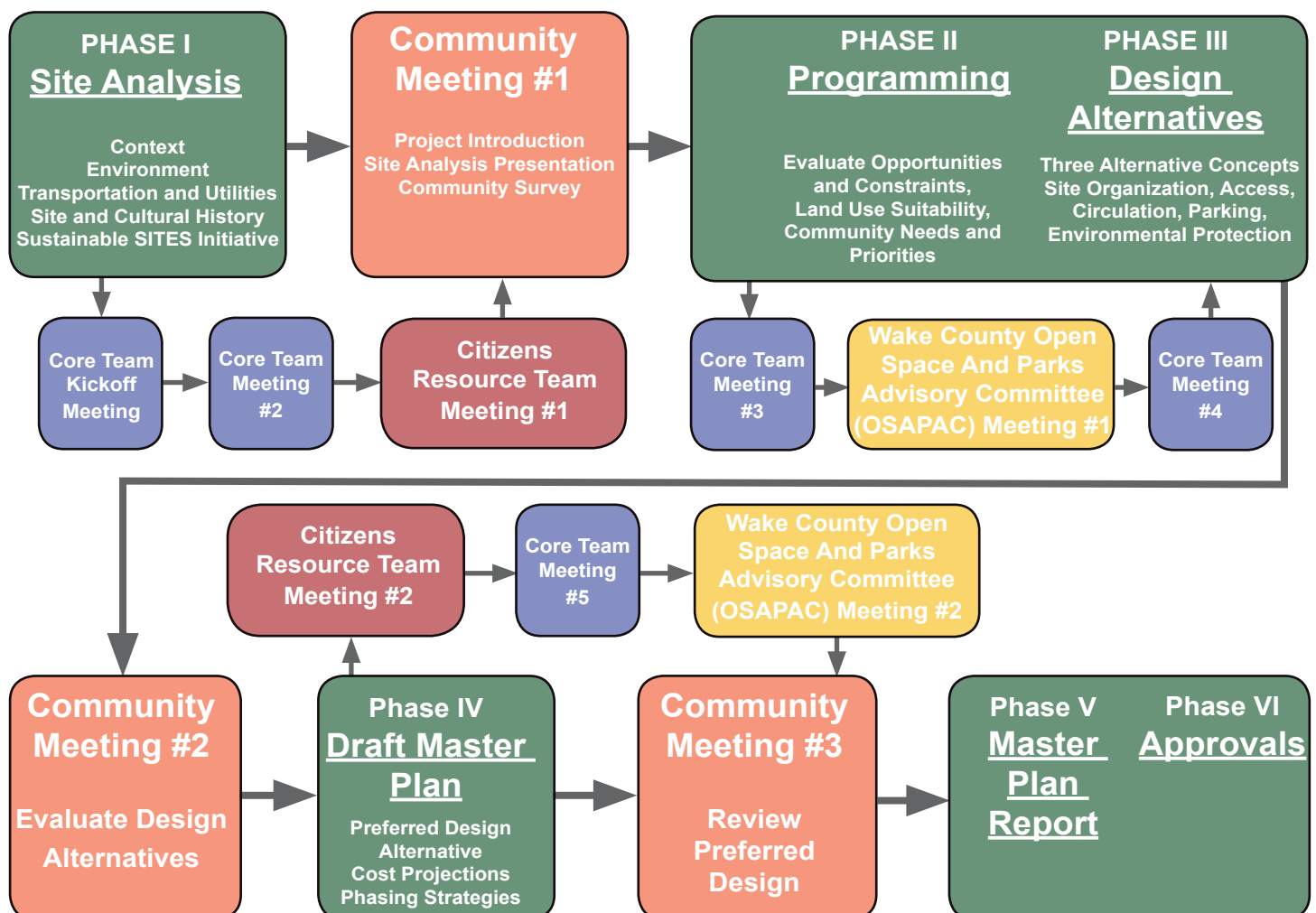
Prior to the start of the Southeast Park Master Plan phase, the Project Core Team developed an integrative process that would produce a detailed site analysis, explore opportunities and constraints, engage stakeholders and end users, collect input from the public and draw excitement from the local communities.

This integrative process was centered around three separate community meetings that allowed for public comments and feedback to be incorporated into all aspects of the Master Plan analysis and recommendations. Two Citizens Resource Team Meetings consisting of a smaller group representing the surrounding residential subdivisions as well as representatives from the Towns of Garner and Fuquay-Varina were held to generate feedback specific to the adjacent neighborhoods. The Wake County Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee (OSAPAC), an 11-member citizen group appointed by the Board of Commissioners to advise on park operations, greenway planning and open space preservation, was involved to comment on the Master Plan progress prior to the second and third community meetings. Lastly, meetings amongst the Project Core Team were conducted for the purpose of decision making at key milestones throughout the Master Plan Process.



PUBLIC INPUT

The format of each of the three community meetings allowed participants to walk throughout a series of seven to ten stations, each presenting a different component of the analysis, programming and concept designs for Southeast Park. Each station was designed to engage participants, allowing them to post comments and feedback for the Project Core Team and other participants to observe. Community members were also given the opportunity to provide input on the future park program and development through a questionnaire available both online and at each community meeting.



ANALYSIS

An integrative team that sought input from a wide range of disciplines was assembled to analyze the Southeast Park project site at both a regional and site scale. The goals of the site analysis were to ensure that the resulting recommendations for the Park would take advantage of all opportunities of the site and maximize the benefits to both the community and the environment. As part of the site analysis, the Project Core Team explored the following characteristics influencing the site:

Regional Scale

- Surrounding Amenities
- Transportation
- Future Growth and Land Use
- Watershed
- Landscape Ecology

Site Scale

- Utilities
- History and Culture
- Hydrology
- Vegetation
- Topography
- Wildlife Habitat
- Natural Resources
- Physical Character and Constraints

PROGRAMMING

Based on results of the site analysis, input from Community Meeting #1, Citizens Resource Team Meeting #1 and goals from the Mission Statement, the Project Core Team began to develop and test a list of desired programmatic elements that would define the identity of the Park. Each element in the program list would center around an overall theme of providing environmental education, historical and cultural exploration and resource based recreation. In following with the goals of the Wake County Parks System, the program within Southeast Park would have to reveal a “cultural identity and a natural legacy.” Of equal importance to the proposed improvements within the Park were areas of the Park to remain undeveloped. These natural areas would be designated to help strengthen the ecological resilience and wildlife diversity of the site. The major programmatic elements have been identified in each design alternatives and Preferred Design Alternate.

DESIGN ALTERNATIVES

Using the development limits recommended in a Land Use Suitability Map and the amenities contained within the Program List both created by the Project Core Team, three design alternatives were developed. Each design was analyzed from a wide range of perspectives, including environmental protection, productivity, accessibility, safety and character to generate a list of advantages and disadvantages for each.

The central focus for each design alternative was the location of the Park Center and the extents of vehicular access in contrast to pedestrian only access. Blue Jay Point County Park was studied as an example typical of many Wake County Parks where the Park Center is located between one quarter and one half mile into the Park. The drive into the Park becomes a journey and most primary amenities and parking areas are centered deep within the Park, sheltered from surrounding adjacent land uses.

The design alternatives challenged this concept for the Southeast Park site with the thought that limiting vehicular access and utilities would best preserve the ecological diversity, minimize impacts to water quality, and reduce overall construction costs. Whether or not the Park Center would be visible or hidden from NC 42 was also a question explored with each design alternative.

IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

A rough order of magnitude cost estimate was completed based on the scope shown in the Preferred Design Alternate and using construction cost data from projects of similar size, scale and location. Due to the challenges with providing access to the portion of the Park north of Middle Creek as well as environmental constraints including existing floodways, wetlands and stream buffers, the Project Core Team recommended including the proposed bridge across Middle Creek and trails in this area as part of future development. The estimated overall construction cost for the development of Southeast County Park included in the Master Plan is between \$17,000,000 and \$20,000,000.

PREFERRED DESIGN ALTERNATE

The three design alternatives were narrowed down to one Preferred Design Alternate that was created based on the feedback compiled from the Community Meeting and discussion amongst the Project Core Team. The Project Core Team chose a site layout that concentrated the Park Center and high activity areas over the existing farm fields adjacent to NC 42 in order to protect as much of the existing forested areas as possible. At the same time, the Park Center was placed along the edge of the forest to provide separation from NC 42 and allow for expansive views into the wooded areas. The walking distance from the Park Center to the Wildlife Viewing Platform is around 2/3 of a mile, a distance the Project Core Team felt would provide significantly quieter trails within the forests conducive to wildlife viewing, while still allowing for methods to accommodate universal access for all Park visitors.

