



# Whitmire Property Master Plan

June 2023



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# BACKGROUND



## INTRODUCTION



**WHITMIRE PROPERTY**  
TOWN OF FRANKLIN, NORTH CAROLINA  
FEBRUARY 2023



Parks are an integral piece of any community. They provide people with high quality of life standards that include health and wellness benefits, the opportunity for leisure, and the ability to connect with other people and the surrounding natural environment.

The Town of Franklin provides public parks for its citizens and visitors as a means of supporting a high quality of life. Studies have shown that quality of life is very important to residents and visitors. Extensive research also demonstrates the positive economic impact of recreation, parks, and tourism on local economies. Lively programs and events also have a major impact on community economic development and a sense of unity within a community.

The Town recognizes the importance of planning as a means of improving recreation opportunities for all its residents and visitors. As a result, the Town hired McGill Associates, PA (McGill) to assist with the creation of a master plan for the Whitmire Property located at the corner of Highlands Rd. and 1st Street near downtown Franklin.

The Whitmire Property Master Plan provides the framework for guiding Franklin’s efforts to develop this historic location into a great park for the residents and visitors of Franklin. The proximity to downtown Franklin, the Little Tennessee River Greenway, and Wesley’s Park will provide park users access to all that the Town has to offer. The master plan included a careful study of the site, the surrounding area, and its history.

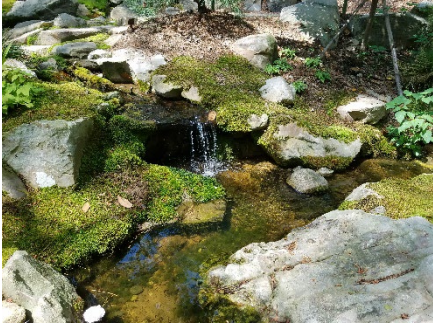
The planning phase also included a robust public input process. Public input was an important factor in developing plan recommendations. Community input was solicited throughout the entire planning process as was information from local leaders and Town staff. Public meetings and a recreation survey were used to gather essential information that aided in the planning process. The contributions and materials received from community participants were essential for producing a master plan that will benefit the community for generations to come.

The master plan analyzed the information gathered for the conceptual development of the Whitmire Property. Final recommendations and conceptual designs, which were drawn from these collaborative efforts, will be discussed further in this document in detail. It is intended to develop the type of location that fosters community spirit and bonding between local citizens.

## **LOCATION AND REGIONAL CONTEXT**

The Town of Franklin is idyllically located along the Little Tennessee River in the Appalachian Mountain Range. Franklin, which was initially established in the 1820s and has been incorporated since 1855, is the county seat for Macon County North Carolina. The area was originally a large territory of the Cherokee Indians and later became a key trading point. Franklin also has a rich Scottish heritage as well as a mining center.

Franklin is nestled within the naturally rich “Smoky Mountains” of western North Carolina. The mountain range extends 550 miles from southern Pennsylvania to Georgia and provides a wide variety of recreational opportunities for people throughout the southeastern United States. The world-renowned Appalachian Trail (AT) follows this mountain range, and the Town of Franklin is one of the trail towns along the AT where hikers can stop for resupply and rest. The mountain range is also a natural sanctuary for flora and fauna that are indigenous to the Mountain region.



Directly adjacent to the park are the Shops at Riverwalk, residential properties, and several businesses. East Franklin Elementary School is within walking distance of the park as are several restaurants, coffee shops, and breweries. Downtown Franklin is approximately a half mile from the park property and is visible from the park property with the Smoky Mountains as a backdrop. Sidewalks and safe crossings are available from the park to downtown providing the opportunity for a pedestrian connection between these two destinations.



## DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The demographic make- up of a community plays an integral role in how to plan and prepare for future park development. A well-formed plan draws from the uniqueness of the population and uses that information to develop a park that is a perfect fit for the community. According to the North Carolina Office of State Budget Management (NC OSBM) demographer, the estimated population for the Town of Franklin in 2021 was 4,216 people.



Figures 1.1 – 1.3 below portray demographic information for the Town. Franklin, on average, is older than the State of North Carolina’s average age by comparison and there are slightly more men than women in comparison to the rest of the state as well. The Town has a significant and growing foreign-born population with nearly 13% percent of its population coming from Latin America.

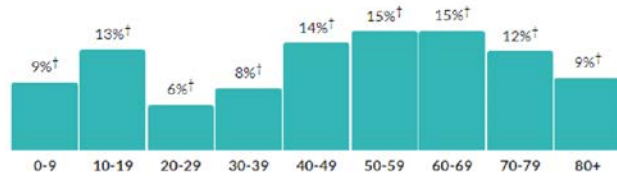
Age

**51.4**

Median age

a little higher than the figure in Macon County: 50.1  
 about 1.3 times the figure in North Carolina: 39

Population by age range



Population by age category

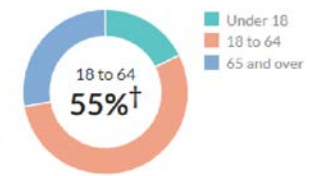
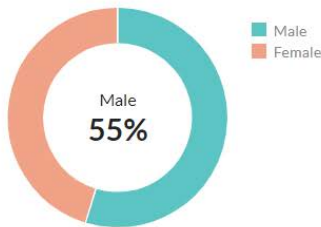


FIGURE 1.1: DEMOGRAPHICS AS ASCERTAINED FROM NC OSBM

Sex



Race & Ethnicity

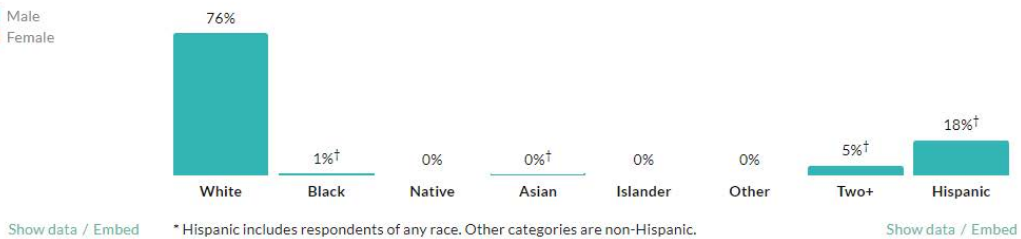


FIGURE 1.2: DEMOGRAPHICS AS ASCERTAINED FROM NC OSBM

Place of birth

**13.2%**

Foreign-born population

more than double the rate in Macon County: 5% †  
 more than 1.5 times the rate in North Carolina: 8.2%

Place of birth for foreign-born population

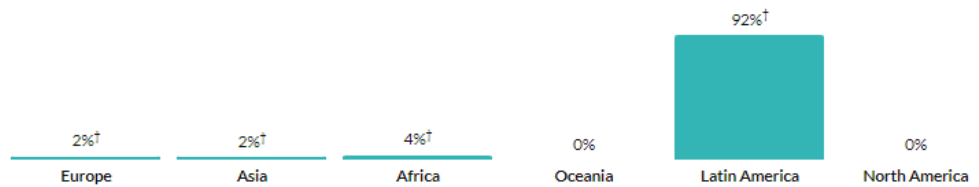


FIGURE 1.3: DEMOGRAPHICS AS ASCERTAINED FROM NC OSBM

**WHITMIRE PROPERTY HISTORY**

The Whitmire Property was historically the estate of E.J. and Burda Whitmire. Mr. Whitmire was a prominent educator, contractor, agriculturalist, and public servant in the Town of Franklin. The Town acquired the 12.7 +/- acre parcel in December of 2004. At the time of purchase, the existing home and outbuildings were still onsite. Over the years the buildings fell into disrepair and were eventually removed. The location where the old home once stood creates a wonderful experience

with old-growth landscape trees, stone walls, and a stunning view of downtown Franklin and the Smoky Mountains in the background.

In the years 2017 and 2018, the Town conducted an assessment of the property to determine the best use for the vacant parcel of land. In the study, the Project Objective states, “It is the objective of this assessment to identify potential future uses of the Whitmire Property, design a process for examining those potential uses, and recommend the alternative uses that appear to yield the greatest economic and quality-of-life returns to the Franklin community.” Through this in-depth study, a variety of information was evaluated including, but not limited to, the Town of Franklin Unified Development Ordinance, the Macon County Recreation Plan, Macon Public Transportation Map, NCDOT Comprehensive Transportation Plan for Macon County, audits, surrounding property uses, and utility infrastructure.



REMNANTS OF THE EXISTING HOMESITE DENOTE THE PAST HISTORY AND USES OF THE SITE

Seven different options were determined as possible uses of the property. Throughout the study, the option to develop the parcel into a passive recreational/cultural area was found to be the best use of the property. This option would benefit the Town by adding value to the quality of life in Franklin, providing the opportunity for site and historic preservation, and supporting other public assets.

# GETTING TO KNOW THE SITE



## SITE OBSERVATIONS

Using the National Recreation and Park Association park classifications, the Whitmire Property, with its 12 +/- acres would be considered a large neighborhood park. Neighborhood parks offer the public a convenient source of recreation while serving as the social focal point of neighborhoods. Usually located within walking distance of the area serviced, neighborhood parks provide

both active and passive recreation opportunities that are of interest to all age groups. This is significant as a substantial portion of the Town’s residents that live east of the Little Tennessee River would be within the service radius and within walking distance of the park. East Franklin Elementary is within walking distance of the park. Finally, a significant number of businesses are also within walking distance of the park site and stand to benefit from increased residential and tourism visitation to the park area.



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### MAN-MADE FEATURES

The site is currently undeveloped with minimal infrastructure. There is an informal, gravel parking lot available on-site along Van Raalte St. This lot provides users access to the open fields of the site. An 18-hole disc golf course is located on-site. Two existing stone walls are attractive features that may would retain some historical charm to the park if retained.



ATTRACTIVE EXISTING STONE WALLS ON SITE PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DESIGN ELEMENTS

## NATURAL RESOURCES

The native soils, as ascertained by the USDA’s web soil survey, denote that the predominant soil type is Braddock clay loam, Braddock-Urban land complex, Hayesville clay loam, and Saunook loam (see Figure 2.1). This type of soil indicates that there are no major drainage and erosion problems as long as they are graded properly.

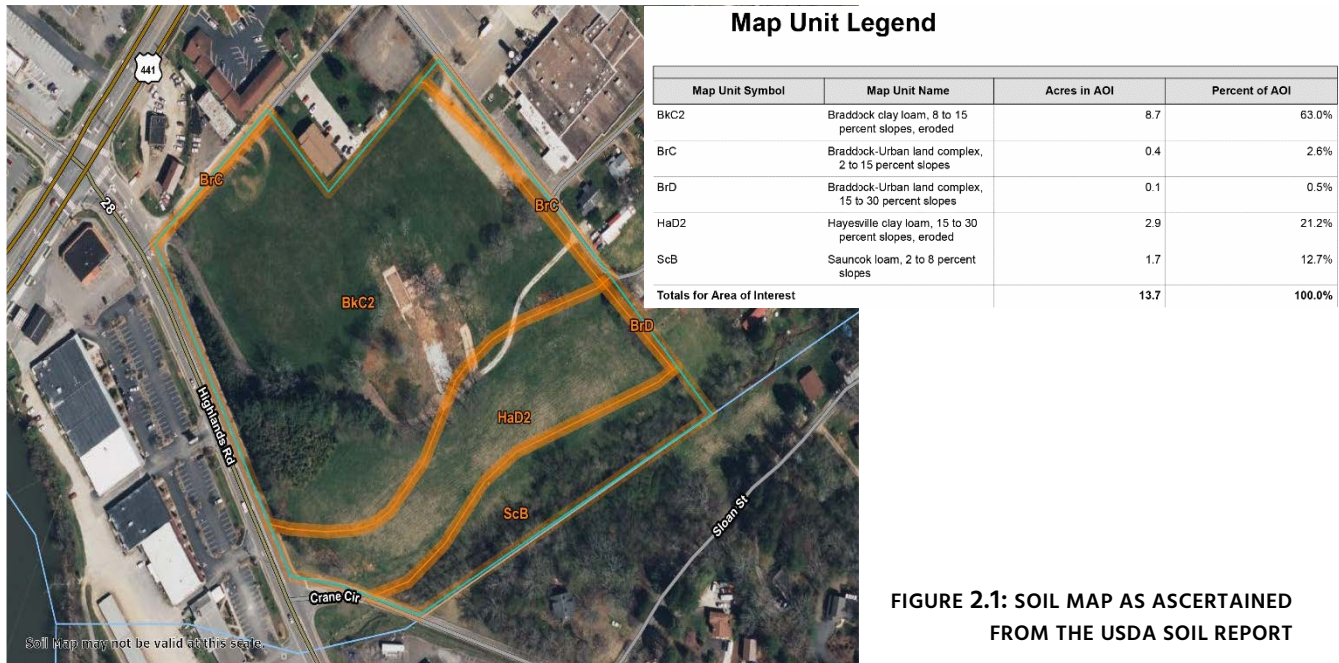


FIGURE 2.1: SOIL MAP AS ASCERTAINED FROM THE USDA SOIL REPORT

The park site generally has a flat knoll at the top of the property where the old homesite was located. The property gently slopes toward Highlands Road and 1<sup>st</sup> Street from the center of the site. There is a large grade change to the south of the existing access road that separates the majority of the property from the southern portion of the site. The lower section provides access to an unnamed creek. The topographical variation and the natural state of the land provides a beneficial environment for recreational amenities or the location for support facilities.



FIGURE 2.2: TOPOGRAPHY AS ASCERTAINED FROM MACON COUNTY GIS

According to the NC Department of Environmental Quality, the Little Tennessee River is a classified hydrologic feature present near the park site across Highlands Road (see Figure 2.3). The unnamed stream runs along the southeastern border of the park. The stream is generally in a natural state with vegetation growing along the length of the stream. Flood mapping indicates that the presence of flood-prone areas runs along the southern boundaries of the property (see Figure 2.4). However, due to the site’s topography, neither of these flood zones should impact the development potential of the site.

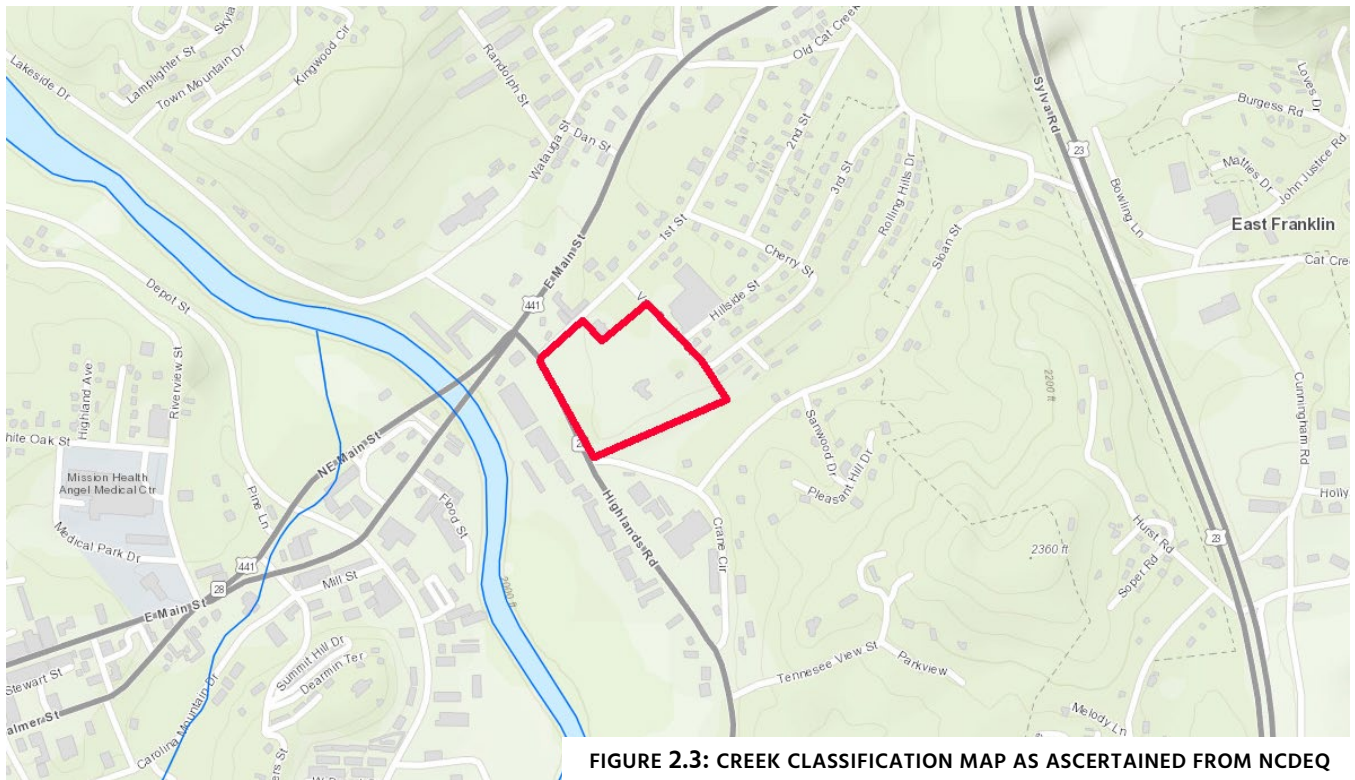


FIGURE 2.3: CREEK CLASSIFICATION MAP AS ASCERTAINED FROM NCDEQ

# Whitmire Property

Mar 16, 2023



North Carolina Floodplain Mapping Program

### Legend

- Panels
- Political Areas
- Stream Centerline
- Cross Sections
- Levee
- Flood Hazard Areas
- AE
- Floodway (AE)
- 0.2 % Chance Annual Flood Hazard
- Future Conditions 1% Annual Chance Flood Hazard



FIGURE 2.4: FLOOD MAP AS ASCERTAINED FROM FRIS

The site is a mix of seasonal grasses with no clear stands of turf. Throughout the site, there are old-growth landscape trees that were planted for the homestead such as chestnuts, oaks, and white pines. Along the western boundary of the site adjacent to Highlands Road is a large stand of bamboo. The wooded areas of the park along the southern border are predominantly mature



A THICK BAMBOO STAND BORDERS HIGHLANDS ROAD

hardwood and evergreen species typical of the mountain region of North Carolina including, but not limited to, oak, hickory, red maple, sweet gum, and pine interspersed on the site.

Other than common squirrels, no wildlife was observed on the site. It's expected this site would play host to native fauna that would be typically found in an urban setting. The future landscape of the park should benefit the local wildlife while providing beauty and enjoyment to residents and visitors.



## ACCESS TO THE PARK

### VEHICULAR ACCESS

There is no currently established roadway access to the property. The park is bordered on three sides by roadways that may be able to serve as a park entrance. The existing driveway for the old homesite runs along the eastern boundary from 1<sup>st</sup> Street. Due to traffic constraints and safety, this access will not be utilized for vehicular use. A park entrance via Van Raalte may be the most amenable due to the site's topography and lower traffic levels. An access gate off Crane Circle may provide the opportunity for minimal parking for users to access the lower section of the property. The site's topography makes it impractical to place the main parking area near Crane Circle.



THE EXISTING ACCESS DRIVE FROM 1<sup>ST</sup> STREET MAY BE USED FOR PEDESTRIAN USAGE INSTEAD OF VEHICLE USAGE DUE TO SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS AT THE ROAD INTERSECTION

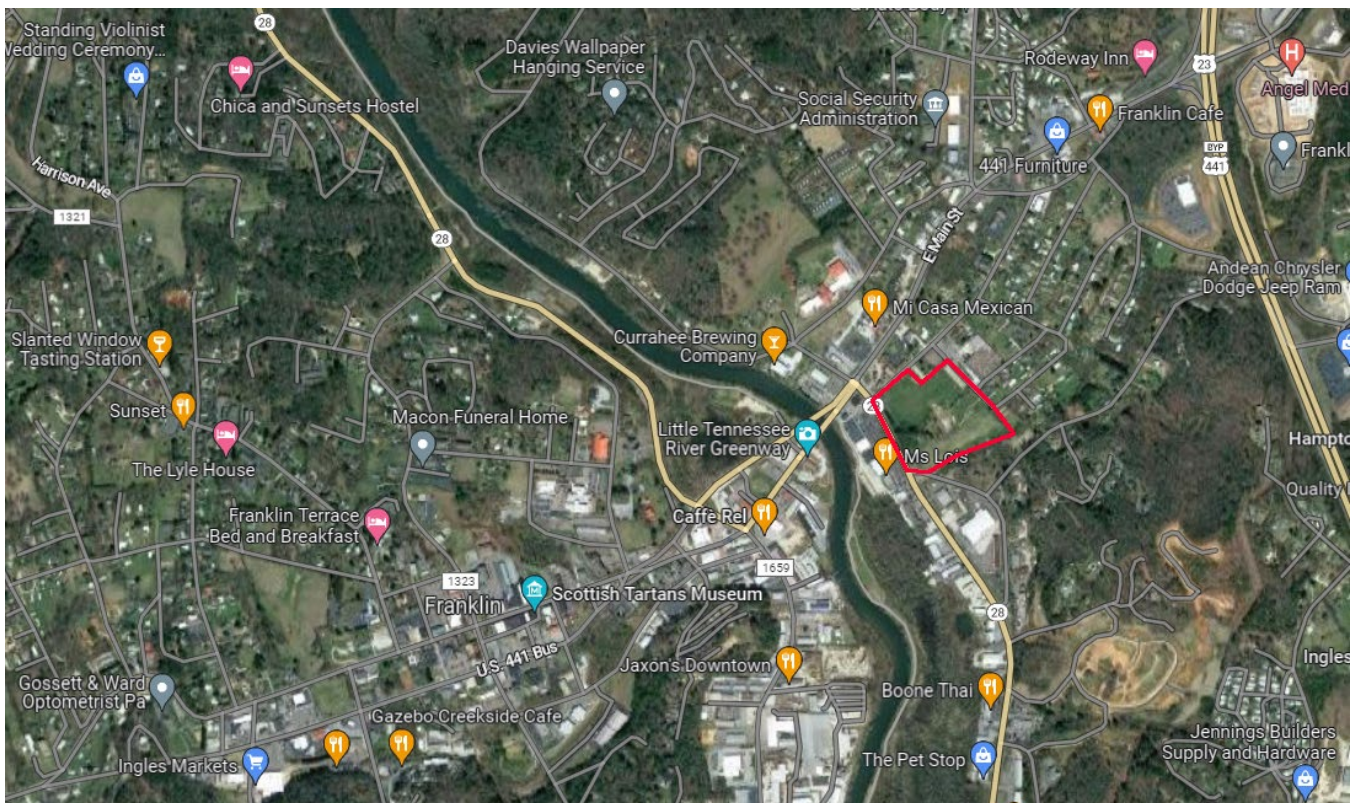


## PARK WALKABILITY ACCESS

Walkability is a recreational and transportation method that improves the quality of life for community members. The Town has a good sidewalk system linking the park site to the downtown district, other local businesses and shops, Wesley's Park, East Franklin Elementary School, and residential neighborhoods. While the park is not directly adjacent to the Little Tennessee River Greenway, a well-developed system of sidewalks and crosswalks also connects the planned park with the greenway.

## A SHORT DRIVE

The Whitmire Property is located along the eastern edge of the Town's limits. The entirety of the Town is approximately 3 miles across. As such, the park site is within a short driving distance of everything within the Town's limits. Other locations of note within a short driving range of the park site include the Appalachian Trail, Nantahala National Forest, and other small towns and communities.



**THE WHITMIRE PROPERTY IS WITHIN A SHORT DRIVE OF A VARIETY OF LOCAL BUSINESSES, EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES, AND RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES**

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# Public Input



## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Community input is one of the most important aspects of the planning process for the development of future facilities. Planning that doesn't seek the help of the community struggles to gain any support and often fails. When community members can voice their opinions, ask questions, and share their wishes for the park they feel a sense of ownership. They see that local government and planners seek to know their needs and desires. As the planning process moves forward and community members see elements that they requested come to fruition they are more apt to support the expansion through participation, funding, and care for the facilities.



COMMUNITY MEETINGS PROVIDED MUCH NEEDED INFORMATION FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Public workshops and a community survey were used to gather ideas, share thoughts, stimulate conversations, and answer questions. The contributions and materials received from community participants was essential for producing a park master plan that will benefit the community for generations to come.

## PUBLIC OUTREACH

### COMMUNITY SURVEY

The active participation of residents in Franklin was a crucial part of developing the Whitmire Property so that Master Plan truly reflects the needs of the Town. Community input was solicited throughout the entire planning process. A survey was created as a tool to gather information from the general public concerning the existing and future needs of the

Help Improve Recreation in the Town of Franklin!

### Community Survey

Please visit the link or use the QR code below:

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Whitmire\\_Survey](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Whitmire_Survey)

This effort will help inform the Town of Franklin's planning efforts for Parks and Recreation in the community. Thanks for your participation!



Town's park system. A project marketing card was developed to encourage awareness of the project and provide both a web address to the community survey as well as a QR code that interested individuals could use with mobile devices to reach the online survey and provide their input. To gather further public input and reach the broadest cross-section of residents, a printed version of the survey was also made available at Town offices and at all community outreach events.

The Town had 538 household surveys accessed and received a total of 538 completed household surveys representing about 1,026 individuals for the recreation master planning data collection effort. These results included both the paper survey handouts and the online survey results. The survey data collected represented approximately 24% of Franklin's approximate 2021 population of 4,216 and was a demonstrative cross-section of Franklin in terms of race, age, and household size.

The survey was designed to elicit answers on residents' needs and desires for recreation opportunities. It included a section where respondents rated their use of existing facilities both within the Town limits and outside the Town limits. The survey instructed respondents to rank the programs and facilities in order of importance to their household and to list the facilities they would like to see added to the park and recreation system.

Public surveying efforts, regarding recreation, provide participants with the opportunity to express their desires and concerns related to recreation. As important as knowing what participants would like to see as part of their community's recreation system, understanding the barriers to access of those recreation resources is important for planning how to mitigate barriers to those services. Survey participants felt that the barriers to their household's regular use of public parks or recreational facilities were a lack of facilities or programs they wanted, not having time to use the existing facilities, and current facilities being too far away.

The top three facilities that participants reported visiting the most over the past year include the Little Tennessee River Greenway, Wesley Park, and the Sunnyside Disc Golf Course currently located at the Whitmire Property. This is important to note as the greenway and Wesley Park are within walking distance of the park site.

Those who participated in the community survey expressed a desire to improve active recreation for a range of age groups. The top ten requested amenities included:

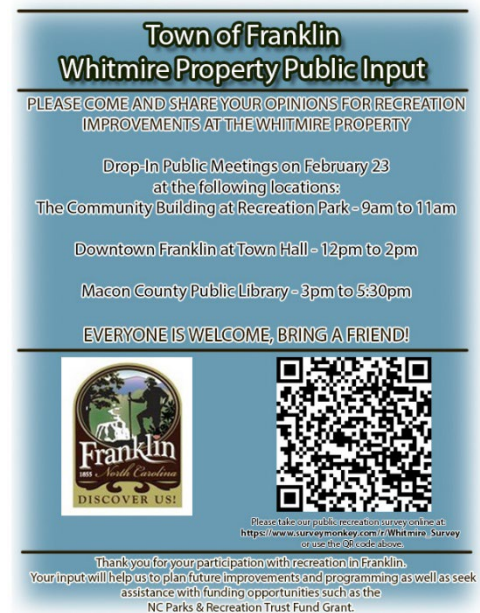
- |                                   |                             |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Paved Walking/Jogging Trails   | 6. Bicycle Trails           |
| 2. Natural Surface Walking Trails | 7. Picnic Areas             |
| 3. All-Inclusive Playground       | 8. Outdoor Performance Area |
| 4. Open Space/Natural Areas       | 9. Pickleball               |
| 5. Outdoor Playground             | 10. Multiuse Pavilion       |

Overall participants are pleased with recreation throughout the Town of Franklin. They reported that the existing recreational opportunities and events offered by the Town are fair to good. Over 96% of participants were in favor of expanding recreational opportunities in Franklin and over 82% would be willing to pay a nominal fee to attend an event or use a special facility.

### COMMUNITY MEETINGS

To facilitate community input, six public meetings were conducted during the initial phase of the Whitmire Property Master Plan process. The community meetings were held at the Community Building at Recreation Park, downtown Franklin, and the Macon County Public Library on February 23 and May 9, 2023. Through the use of open group dialog participants were given the opportunity to share their ideas and concerns about how the future development at the Whitmire Property should occur.

On February 23 approximately 122 participants engaged in open conversation relating to their opinions on the development of the Whitmire Property. A site map and images of the existing site were presented to participants to provide context and promote understanding of the scope of the project. Participants were also presented with visual preference boards that showcased examples of possible park amenities. Participants were each given three sticker dots and were asked to place them next to an image that best correlated with amenities they would like to see included in the park design.



Participants at the initial public meetings expressed a desire to improve active recreation for a range of age groups, provide an outdoor entertainment space, offer adventure elements and an inclusive playground, and develop walking trails for the public throughout the park. The top ten requested amenities included:

1. Amphitheater
2. Inclusive Playground
3. Restroom Facilities
4. Pickleball
5. Farmer's Market
6. Picnic Pavilion
7. Bike Pump Track
8. Natural Surface Trails
9. Climbing Wall
10. Free Form Playground

On May 9 approximately 79 participants were presented with two different concept design alternatives for the future development of the Whitmire Property that showcased examples of possible park amenities. Participants were each given a sticker dot and were asked to place it on the concept alternative that best correlated with amenities they would like to have. A comment board was also offered to all participants to share other thoughts and ideas.

The valuable input from members of the community who participated validated the strong desire for the development of a park. Conversation circulated around the addition of play amenities, an outdoor performance area, walking paths, and a large multi-use pavilion. These amenities will provide the opportunity for social gatherings, health and wellness benefits, and places to build community.



## COMMUNITY INPUT SUMMARY

The community input received from public meetings and the community survey served to provide a well-rounded understanding of the needs, concerns, and desires for recreational opportunities and amenities for the future of Whitmire Property.

An overwhelming desire from participants voiced their opinion to develop the park into a mixed-use recreational space. Popular amenities presented included an outdoor performance area, inclusive and adventure-style play amenities, walking trails, and pickleball courts. The mixed-use park would serve also serve as an attractive place for both small and large gatherings and events for a diverse group of visitors that reflects the population of the Town of Franklin. The inclusion of lawn games, shelters, and open space was also strongly desired.

This vital and important process of gathering public input aided in the design and development of a park design that meets the needs of the community. The process was intended to be equitable and inclusive, presenting opportunities and methods for all community members and visitors to have a comfortable space for expressing their needs and desires. The contributions and materials received from community participants were essential for producing a master plan that will benefit the community for generations to come.



COMMUNITY MEETINGS IN MULTIPLE LOCATIONS PROVIDED INPUT FROM A VARIETY OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS



# CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT



## **RECREATIONAL NEEDS**

The Town of Franklin provides both residents and visitors with multiple recreational and cultural opportunities throughout the Town. These spaces provide much-needed active and passive recreational and outdoor spaces. These critical places promote health and wellness, protect the natural environment, and provide spaces for gathering, respite, and play and with an increase in trails and greenways, they provide alternative modes of transportation.

The Whitmire Property has been a fixture within the Town for years. Residential dwellings surrounding the park are generally limited in their outdoor space. Developing a park at the Whitmire Property will provide greater access to outdoor space to meet the active and passive recreational needs of downtown residents. The Whitmire Property has the potential to become a central hub for nearby residents and the Town.

## **PHYSICAL NEEDS**

The Town has a need for a recreational space that can serve several recreational and cultural needs as well as an event space. The Whitmire Property currently is a blank slate with an open field and an 18-hole disc golf course as the only amenities on site. Providing dedicated walking trails, shelters, restroom facilities, and an outdoor performance area would enhance the use of the park. Other amenities such as pickleball, a multi-use pavilion, and a variety of play features would help ensure that the park is able to serve multiple generations.

A formal and dedicated parking area is needed in the park for the safety of visitors and the nearby residences and to accommodate visitors to the park during peak usage times. The park needs to include improvements to ensure that Federal ADA accessibility compliance is met. Such things as handicap parking, accessible routes, and accessibility consideration for amenities that are built are critical needs of the park.

Finally, it's recommended that pedestrian connections are considered to meet the needs of the surrounding residential neighborhoods, the business districts within proximity to the park, and the adjacent Little Tennessee River Greenway.

## UNIVERSAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Universal design principles were developed in the late 1990s at North Carolina State University. These principles are meant to guide and evaluate the design and development of a site and the resulting amenities so that barriers to access are reduced or eliminated for site visitors. The seven principles of universal design are:

1. Equitable use
2. Flexibility in use
3. Simple and intuitive use
4. Perceptible information
5. Tolerance for error
6. Low physical effort
7. Size and space for the approach of use



UNIVERSAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES HELP PROVIDE QUALITY EXPERIENCES FOR PEOPLE OF ALL ABILITIES

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 is a piece of civil rights legislation that protects individuals living with disability rights to freely access buildings and participate in activities, including recreation programs. ADA and universal design in parks are at times used synonymously, but they are not the same thing. ADA compliance is the minimum legal requirement that a park site must uphold to remain in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Universal design principles incorporate best practices that provide the design and site consideration efforts beyond the minimum compliance threshold that is outlined in the ADA Act. Universal design looks to utilize the seven design principles to make the site as open and user-friendly as reasonably possible.

The Whitmire Property Master Plan strives to utilize universal design principles whenever reasonably possible to enhance the user experience. Universal design does not remove all impediments of use, site considerations, financial limitations, and other factors that can play into the final design of a park.

## STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN

For states to be eligible to receive federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) dollars, each state must maintain a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). For local communities to have a project that is eligible for a LWCF project in their state, the project must focus on at least one of the goals outlined in the current SCORP that addresses the needs for outdoor recreation land and amenities on a statewide level. The plan then goes on to make recommendations about the big-picture needs across the state. The current 2020-2025 North Carolina SCORP has enumerated the following objectives:



1. Meet the needs of North Carolina’s rapidly growing population by providing more recreation opportunities in areas of the state where growth is taking place.
2. Protect and conserve North Carolina’s high-quality natural resources and landscapes.
3. Renovate, replace, and revitalize existing park amenities across the State.
4. Promote the economic benefits of the state’s recreation opportunities for communities across North Carolina.
5. Increase opportunities and public awareness of the state’s natural resources and recreation opportunities for underserved populations.
6. Support improvements in public health and fitness by increasing opportunities for physical activity.



**NATIONAL PARK**



**STATE PARK**



**LOCAL PARK**

The SCORP goals that the Whitmire Property Master Plan addresses are:

Objective #1 Meet the needs of North Carolina’s rapidly growing population by providing more recreation opportunities in areas of the state where growth is taking place.

1. Provide funding to local parks and recreation departments for new recreation amenities in areas with growing populations.
2. Develop new recreational facilities in an eco-friendly manner.

Objective #4: Promote the economic benefits of the state’s recreation opportunities for communities across North Carolina.

1. Develop targeted recreation opportunities that help citizens in economically depressed areas and serve to improve local and regional economic vitality.
2. Develop and promote recreation programs, events, and facilities that attract regional travelers, to encourage overnight stays in economically depressed areas.
3. Develop targeted recreation opportunities that both help citizens in economically depressed areas and serve to improve local and regional economic vitality.

Objective #5: Increase opportunities and public awareness of the state’s natural resources and recreation opportunities for underserved populations.

1. Continue to design recreational facilities to ensure universal access with recognition of the needs of underserved and aging populations.
2. Identify recreational needs in underserved populations and expedite funding and development opportunities in these areas.

Objective #6: Support improvements in public health and fitness by increasing opportunities for physical activity.

1. Provide adequate parkland and recreational facilities to encourage children and their families to be more physically active.
2. Promote public and private partnerships, especially recreation providers, healthcare organizations, and insurance companies, to encourage physical activity through outdoor recreation.
3. Continue to seek efficiencies in providing more opportunities for outdoor recreation by leveraging projects with PARTF and LWCF assistance.
4. Provide communities with up-to-date information about the role of accessible parks, open

space, and non-motorized transportation routes in facilitating healthy residents.

5. Encourage the development of community policies, recreational facilities, schools, trails, and bicycle-friendly routes to help people be more physically active.

## **PARK GOALS**

Utilizing information from the site analysis, input from the community engagement process, and conversations with Town staff, McGill began developing alternate concept plans for park development. Based on this input, the design team was able to develop the purpose and programming for the development of the Whitmire Property.

The goals and objectives of this park should be to serve the neighborhood and the people of the Town of Franklin with multiple outdoor amenities. The strategic planning elements of the park should be to offer a variety of activities compatible with passive recreation while also providing an aesthetically attractive feature to the Town.

## **CONCEPTUAL DESIGNS**

Two concept plans were developed that proposed several park development opportunities composed of providing passive recreation opportunities, open lawn space, play spaces for multi-generational groups, a multi-use pavilion, and providing a paved trail network. Critical support facilities such as shelters and restrooms were also included in the design. These amenities were derived from community involvement at the public meetings and Town staff input.



Each of these elements will provide a space where residents and visitors can enjoy the park at any time.

Each of these concepts looks at various ways to incorporate the amenities that the community members were interested in adding to the Whitmire Property. Through discussions with Town staff, McGill further developed the concept plans into a final site master plan discussed in Section 5.

**CONCEPT 1**

This park concept alternative looks at providing three different nodes of activity. As visitors enter the park from Van Raalte Street, they are welcomed to the first node by a large open lawn. A multi-use pavilion with restrooms provides a variety of uses from large gatherings to a farmer’s market, sheltered court games, and events. An outdoor performance stage anchors the lawn space providing an area for cultural events. The second node provides pickleball courts, lawn games, an inclusive playground, an adventure playground, and a climbing wall to meet the needs of a variety of users. A large picnic pavilion, seat walls, and small picnic shelters deliver resting areas for this node. The third node offers active adventure activities with a skate park and bike pump track. Walking trails, an outdoor meditation space, picnic areas, and a disc golf practice area offer amenities to promote health and wellness in a variety of ways. Parking is a vitally important feature to meet the demands of the park as well as deliver access to visitors. To connect destinations within walking distance an entryway with pedestrian access is located at the intersection of Highlands Road and 1<sup>st</sup> Street.



**WHITMIRE PROPERTY - CONCEPT 1**

TOWN OF FRANKLIN, NORTH CAROLINA

APRIL 2023



## CONCEPT 2

This park concept alternative delivers a variety of amenities that are all connected with a wide multi-use walking path network. An open lawn is framed by a large multi-use pavilion and an existing stone wall from the old homesite. At the base of the stone wall, an open plaza space with seat walls and shade sails acts as a gathering space adjacent to the inclusive playground, adventure playground, and climbing wall. Pickleball courts, a picnic pavilion, and small picnic shelters provide spaces for multi-generational gatherings and play spaces. A skate park, bike pump track, natural surface trail, and disc golf practice area deliver activities to meet the needs of visitors seeking more active activities. Along the western slopes of the property is an expansive open lawn anchored by an amphitheater. This open lawn overlooks Franklin’s downtown with the Blue Ridge Mountains in the background. The nearby Little Tennessee River Greenway, Wesley’s Park, and the downtown district can be accessed via the pedestrian entrance at the intersection of Highlands Road and 1<sup>st</sup> Street.



### WHITMIRE PROPERTY - CONCEPT 2

TOWN OF FRANKLIN, NORTH CAROLINA

APRIL 2023





# THE FINAL MASTER PLAN



## FINAL SITE DESIGN

Based on the response from the community meetings for the proposed Whitmire Property, the Town felt that Concept 1 closely reflected the needs of the Town and meets many of the desires of the community as expressed in the public involvement process. Concept 2 was further refined by adding other requested park amenities to create the Final Site Master Plan. The consensus was that this proposed plan is sensitive to both the desires and long-term goals of the community and Town staff. This plan is designed to meet current and future needs of park users and Franklin residents.

At the core of the Final Site Master Plan are opportunities to expand recreation, enhance community social gatherings, and support health and wellness within a park that the Town of Franklin and its residents can enjoy. To succeed in achieving these goals various amenities are proposed.

The amenities proposed to promote community development and health and wellness include an amphitheater with a large open lawn, a large multi-use pavilion that can be utilized for a variety of events such as a farmer's market, family reunions, and community gatherings, two dedicated pickleball courts, a meditation space amongst the existing bamboo, a paved trail network that circumnavigates the park and connects surrounding neighborhoods, and a natural surface trail that connects the upper and lower sections of the park.

Gathering spaces and play places for multi-generational visitors include a large picnic pavilion with adjoining restroom facilities, small picnic shelters, picnic areas with tables under old-growth trees, seat walls with and without shade sails with an adjacent plaza space, a disc golf practice area, a bike pump track that will connect to the adjacent skate park, a climbing wall, and adventure play area, and an inclusive playground.



**WHITMIRE PROPERTY - FINAL CONCEPT**

TOWN OF FRANKLIN, NORTH CAROLINA

MAY 2023



## ACCESS AND CIRCULATION

The Whitmire Property is located near the intersection of Main Street and Highlands Road just east of downtown Franklin. 1<sup>st</sup> Street and Van Raalte Street will continue to be the major vehicular access points for the park. The redesign and expansion of parking throughout the park provide a safer, more accessible facility to meet the needs of the community. A small parking lot for the lower section of the park will be accessed via Crane Circle.

The paved walking path serves as an amenity both for circulation throughout the park, and connection to the surrounding neighborhoods, and as a health benefit for users. A variety of paths throughout the park provide the opportunity for a safe and equitable recreation experience for all park users. The ADA-compliant multi-use path will provide visitors with the opportunity to circulate around the perimeter of the park. The layout of the trail



system also allows for walking and enjoying the park while keeping the recreation elements within the site allowing parents and grandparents to walk while keeping an eye on kids in scheduled programs. Walking paths provide a recreational element for walking and casual bike riding that allows park users to use them for unstructured exercise and safe walking opportunities.

A natural surface trail connects most of the park amenities located on the upper section of the site to the amenities developed in the lower section of the park. This will provide visitors with the opportunity to experience two different environments found on the site.

To attract users to the park a decorative entrance will greet visitors at the prominent intersection of Highlands Road and 1<sup>st</sup> Street. From this pedestrian space, visitors can connect to the existing sidewalk to gain access to the Little Tennessee River Greenway, Wesley's Park, and downtown Franklin. All these amenities will be set amongst open spaces and aesthetic landscaping.

## BUILT ELEMENTS

The proposed park will be critical to addressing several recreational and cultural needs near the heart of Franklin. The following are the elements recommended for development at the site:

**Amphitheater:** This element is proposed to provide a space for cultural and community events. The ability to meet the needs of the community with an amphitheater will provide the opportunity for community building, times for celebration, and an economic driver for the Town of Franklin. A large open lawn adjacent to the amphitheater can be used for visitors to enjoy events as well as open space for picnics, lawn games, and recreational purposes.



**Multi-Use Pavilion:** Anchoring the park along Van Raalte Street is a large multi-use pavilion. This facility will meet the needs of the community in a variety of ways. The pavilion is large enough that it can house a farmer's market, family reunions, and other large gatherings. The pavilion will also provide the possibility of providing a recreational space with covered, temporary basketball and pickleball.



**Inclusive and Adventure Play Area:** The addition of a playground to the site helps as a stand-alone recreation element but also supports other components proposed in the master plan. This plan



recommends that both an inclusive and adventure-style playground be built. It is recommended that, as finances permit, a pour-in-place surface be incorporated for safety and to reduce maintenance costs. Along with the play equipment, a rock-climbing wall will provide another element for visitors to the park.

**Pickleball courts:** Pickleball is currently the fastest-growing recreational sport in America. The addition of dedicated pickleball courts to the Whitmire Property helps meet current demand in the town as well as the planned growth as pickleball continues to increase in popularity throughout all age demographics.



**Meditation Space:** Along the western boundary of the park is a large stand of bamboo. Completely eradicating it will be cost-prohibitive and detrimental to the slope along Highlands Road. Nestling the proposed meditation space within the bamboo will provide a unique offering in the park to visitors. It will also promote mental health and well-being in the community.



**Bike Pump Track:** A skate park is currently being constructed at the park site. Constructing a bike pump track adjacent to the skate park will provide access to activities with similar uses. The bike pump track will allow users a space to hone skills and introduce newcomers to the sport. A skate pad is currently under development at the park site in the northernmost corner of the park. This plan recommends that the skate pad deck be used as a shared element with the bike pump track. This will help expand the functionality of these compatible recreation use types.



**Disc Golf Practice Area:** An 18-hole disc golf course is currently available on the property. However, with the introduction of other park amenities the risk for conflict increases dramatically. To continue to provide the recreational amenity of disc golf to visitors a disc golf practice course is proposed in the lower section of the park. This amenity will provide a space for disc golfers to practice their skills as well as introduce possible new players to this growing activity.



**Picnic Shelters and Shade Elements:** Picnic shelters and areas with shade are critical elements to support the active recreation elements and playground facilities. They provide shade during the hot North Carolina summers, create a space that can be used for large and small group gatherings, and deliver a space that can be used for programs and other educational or social events. A variety of shelters are proposed varying in size and material. They include a large picnic pavilion with restroom facilities, smaller picnic shelters, and shade sails with seat walls.



**Picnic Areas:** Parks provide the opportunity for a variety of gathering spaces. In addition to the sheltered picnic pavilion and picnic shelters, open picnic areas are proposed to provide a space for people to gather and enjoy a picnic. These spaces will include tables and grills. They are scattered throughout the park to provide a cost-effective method of enjoying other environments throughout the park site.



## SUPPORT FACILITIES

**Restrooms:** The proposed large picnic shelter also contains restroom facilities to serve the park and its visitors. The location of these key support elements provides centralized access for the convenience of park users as well as utility for maintenance and programmatic access.

**Landscaping and Open Lawn:** Throughout the site, there are old-growth chestnut trees, a stand of bamboo, and other evergreens that provide a great sense of place. The Town will need to evaluate the trees for health and strive to keep as many of the chestnuts as possible. To enhance the park the addition of decorative trees, aesthetic landscaping, and an open lawn is proposed. This will not only add beauty to the park but also provide a sense of place to visitors.

**Parking:** The addition of formal parking lots throughout the park ensures that vehicular access provides a safe location for vehicles and pedestrians alike. This is critical due to the multiple entrance points for visitors and several different use zones. The addition of these parking areas throughout the park will mitigate possible conflict between the variety of park users and uses. To facilitate large events a grassed field along 1<sup>st</sup> Street is available for overflow parking.

**Utilities:** The necessary utilities needed for site development are directly adjacent to the property. Reconfiguration of these resources will be needed to meet the demands of the updated park.

## PROGRAMMING

Recreational programs offered by the Town of Franklin are an integral part of the community. How amenities are used and managed is just as important as the actual amenities themselves. Proper programming will allow the Town to maximize the benefits of the park for years. The Whitmire Property will be a multi-purpose park that can serve a variety of different programmatic needs.



The proposed site development for the Whitmire Property will provide the opportunity to support cultural programming. Program elements that are added to the park site include walkability, the



possibility for environmental education, and the ability to host special events and classes for both large and small groups. The park's proximity to the school provides the ability for the site to potentially be used for after-school programming as well as recreation camps held during school breaks.

The final concept for the Whitmire Property allows the Town to also meet the desire for additional pickleball facilities, health, and fitness needs, and provide a variety of play opportunities for people of all ages. This plan also helps the park better serve the diversity of age groups throughout the town and the surrounding areas.

The open lawn space provided at the park provides the opportunity to host small concerts, day camps, and other community-building events such as arts and crafts classes and events, social events, and seasonal and holiday events.



## IMPLEMENTATION

### OPINION OF COST

A preliminary opinion of the probable cost was developed for the Whitmire Property Master Plan. The provided opinion of probable cost includes assumed general expenditures such as site preparation, building structures, access, site utilities, parking, and specific park development features.

The anticipated cost in 2023 for the proposed park at the Whitmire Property is approximately \$7,534,320. It should be noted that this estimate is based on master plan level design. Final construction documents will have to be completed to present a more accurate opinion of probable costs.

To accommodate the needs of the community and mitigate project costs it is recommended that the Town break the development of the park into phases. To ensure the implementation of successful park projects, they need to be broken down into manageable project components. Phasing must account for the complex set of interdependencies between investments in project infrastructure and the need to establish a “sense of place” and completion—even though the ultimate build-out of the park project will progress over some time.

It is therefore important to map out the life of the project, including the expected project cycle and phases as best as possible, while also accounting for uncertainties and making decisions on how best to solve anticipated issues. This will help to ensure project continuity and clarity of roles, responsibilities, and interdependencies. In many cases, a phasing schedule is a major part of the master plan, highlighting the timetable and phasing for the delivery of the site’s development. This guides the Town and the community on how planned development will be staged with infrastructure and services provided and will provide the reasoning for the chosen phasing order. The phasing of the park development should show which elements will be built first and which later, which decisions should be made early, and which should be allowed to evolve in response to future opportunities.

Park project phasing should be planned around the potential to deliver the envisioned master plan. It is important to note that phasing a project does not mean that each phase should be done consecutively; with phasing implementation often overlapping for project continuity.

PHASE 1	
DESCRIPTION	TOTAL ITEM COST
Parking Lot	\$311,250
10' Wide Paved Trail (2,600 Linear Feet)	\$208,000
Concrete Plaza Space w/ Seat Walls	\$91,800
Amphitheater	\$300,000
Picnic Pavilion w/ Restrooms	\$500,000
Picnic Shelter (1)	\$40,000
Inclusive Playground w/ Pour in Place Surfacing	\$450,000
Adventure Playground w/ Pour in Place Surfacing	\$450,000
Pickleball Courts (2)	\$80,000
Pedestrian Entrance	\$32,000
Relocate Disc Golf	\$5,000
Site Furnishings and Signage	\$50,000
Site Development	\$701,600
<b>Subtotal:</b>	<b>\$3,219,650</b>
Contingency (20%)	\$643,930
Site Design, Survey, Construction Phase Services	\$880,000
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$4,743,580</b>

PHASE 2	
DESCRIPTION	TOTAL ITEM COST
Gravel Parking Lot	\$23,450
Natural Surface Trail (2,400 Linear Feet)	\$60,000
Multi-use Pavilion	\$600,000
Picnic Shelter (2)	\$50,000
Shade Sails	\$70,000
Picnic Areas	\$25,000
Rock Climbing Wall	\$400,000
Bike Pump Track	\$350,000
Meditation Space	\$7,500
Site Furnishings	\$15,000
Site Development	\$333,000
<b>Subtotal:</b>	<b>\$1,933,950</b>
Contingency (20%)	\$386,790
Site Design, Survey, Construction Phase Services	\$470,000
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$2,790,740</b>

## FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Identification of sufficient funding is a crucial element that is required to implement this master plan. The Town of Franklin should evaluate the existing departmental budget and funding for capital improvements.

- Property/Sales Tax Revenues
- General Obligation Bonds
- Grants
- Contributions
- Park Foundations
- Partnerships
- Local Gifts

The Town should be aggressive in applying for grants and other funding mechanisms to reduce Town expenditures for capital improvements in approaching the development of the park.

## MAINTENANCE CONSIDERATIONS

During the master planning phase, careful consideration was given to ongoing maintenance needs for the park. In addition to selecting materials that are resilient, durable, and long-lasting the layout of the park also considered the surrounding neighbors and limited resources for park maintenance. Elements of the plan that exemplify this include:

- Formal parking lots will provide the opportunity for centralized formal waste collection areas. Locate waste receptacles throughout the park for easy access to park users. This will, in general, help reduce litter in the park.
- Layout of new looped pathways provides the ability to get to remote parts of the park for maintenance.
- The addition of storage areas in the park is critical to making sure that the park can be efficiently maintained.
- Incorporating suitable landscape material for the site is essential to provide a beautiful setting while minimizing landscape maintenance. Specifying properly sized trees and shrubs is critical to a park setting to promote safety while enhancing the park.

- Utilize materials that are high quality and construct facilities in a way to minimize maintenance.
- Incorporate rules and regulations throughout the park to aid in mitigating damage from park users.

