



TOWN OF HILLSBOROUGH

# Gold Park Master Plan



Adopted February 2023

## **Background**

Located in West Hillsborough at 415 Dimmocks Mill Road, Gold Park is a 24-acre community park owned and maintained by the Town of Hillsborough. Prior to being developed as a park, the parcel was owned by the Eno River Mill, which also has been known over the years as the Eno Cotton Mill and the Eno Plant.

The mill began operations in 1896 and expanded throughout the 20th century. The parcel that now houses Gold Park was undeveloped, but a portion of it was used as a baseball field. Baseball was a favorite pastime in the mill villages for both athletes and spectators. Children and adults played informal pickup games, and the best athletes played on the mill-sponsored team. Mills throughout the state sponsored teams, and match-ups were highly anticipated social events. A winning team was a source of great pride for workers in the local community. The mill closed its operations in 1984, and the park property was vacated. An interpretive sign located adjacent to the current baseball field shares the history of the site. The Eno River Mill now functions as a multi-use business incubator and houses manufacturing and event facilities, the Orange County Arts Commission, and The Expedition School, a public charter school for grades kindergarten through eighth.

## **Development of the Park**

In 1991, the land was donated to the town by owners of the Eno River Mill for use as a park. The town worked for years to develop a design and to secure funding for a park. The town conducted several public meetings with residents to determine the amenities the community wanted included in the design. In 2006, the town received a Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) grant for \$500,000, which allowed the town to develop construction documents and prepare for construction. The design included a restroom facility with storage areas, picnic shelters, playgrounds for ages 2-5 and 5-12, a dog park, a multiuse field, and walking trails.

Gold Park opened to the public in 2009. Multiple improvements have been made to the park over the years, including expansion of the dog park, additional play equipment, numerous tree plantings, and the installation of a pollinator garden and bee hotel. The garden was installed and is cared for by the Master Gardeners of Orange County, who conduct regular volunteer workdays at the garden in the spring through fall. In 2014, the Riverwalk greenway — which serves as the Mountains-to-Sea Trail in Hillsborough — was completed, connecting Gold Park to downtown Hillsborough and Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area.

The following pages include photographs and original development plans for Gold Park.





**1960:** This aerial photograph shows the original alignment of the Eno River before it was channelized.

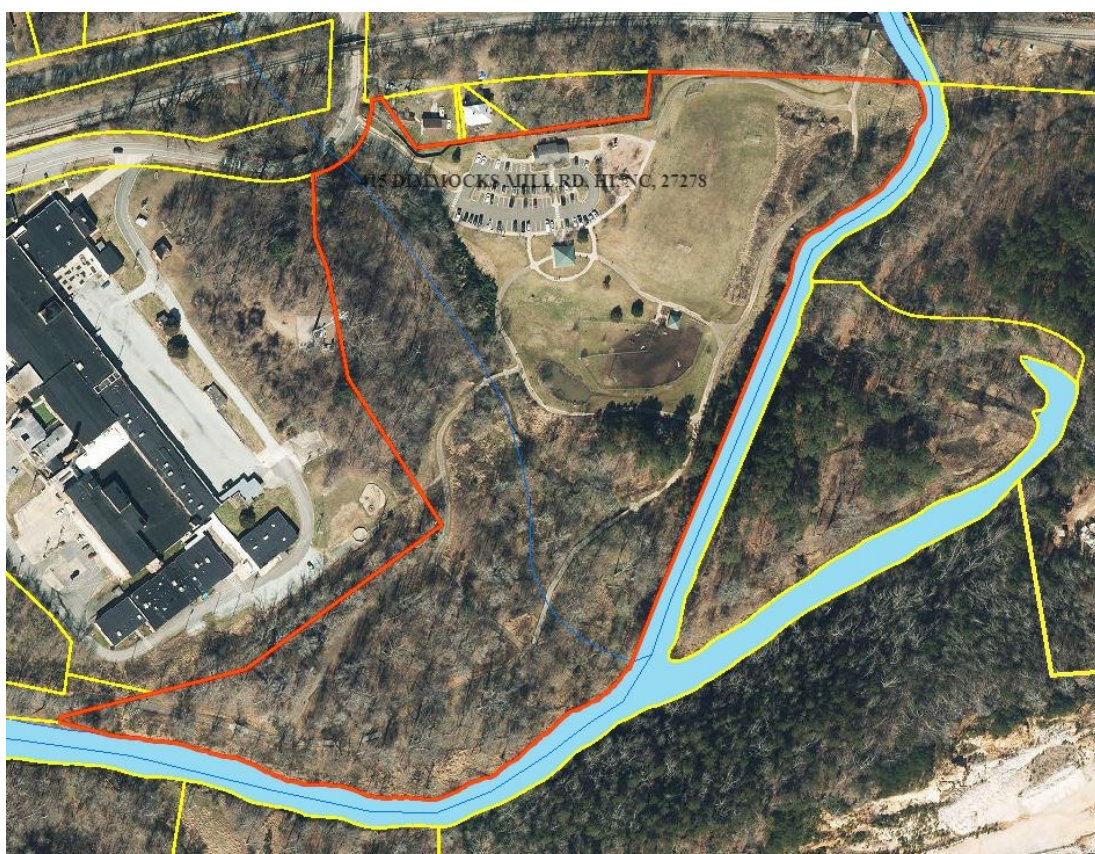


**2006:** This aerial photograph with map overlay shows the property that would soon become Gold Park prior to construction. Channelizing of the river is evident here.





**2010:** This aerial photograph shows the park just after construction ended, prior to the dog park expansion and the pollinator garden installation.



**2021:** This aerial photograph shows the park in its current configuration.

## Park Use and Existing Conditions

Gold Park is a community-scale park. It is utilized by local and regional residents and groups. The central picnic shelter and multi-use field are available for reservation and are often used for events such as birthday parties and family reunions. The field is not programmed but rather functions as a large community lawn. The park is frequently used by school groups, especially The Expedition School, which is located nearby at Eno River Mill.

Gold Park is located adjacent to a section of the Eno River that was channelized in the mid-20th century. A stream called the Bellevue Branch also crosses the park. In heavy storms and extended rain events, the river and stream expand into the floodplain, which encompasses a majority of Gold Park. The park was designed to withstand these flood events with minimal damage and cleanup needed. Both the river and stream have 50-foot riparian buffer zones that are protected and cannot be developed. There is no permitted access to the river from within the park.

Multiple utilities cross the site. Duke Energy overhead transmission lines are located within a 30-foot easement through the park. Several sewer mains converge in the park and also have 30-foot easement areas. The utility easements are protected from development and maintained by the utility providers.

A constructed wetland and bioretention area serve as the park's stormwater catchment and treatment facilities. These areas were sized to accommodate the amount of impervious surface created by the park's development. Expansion of impervious surface in the park may require construction of additional stormwater treatment facilities.

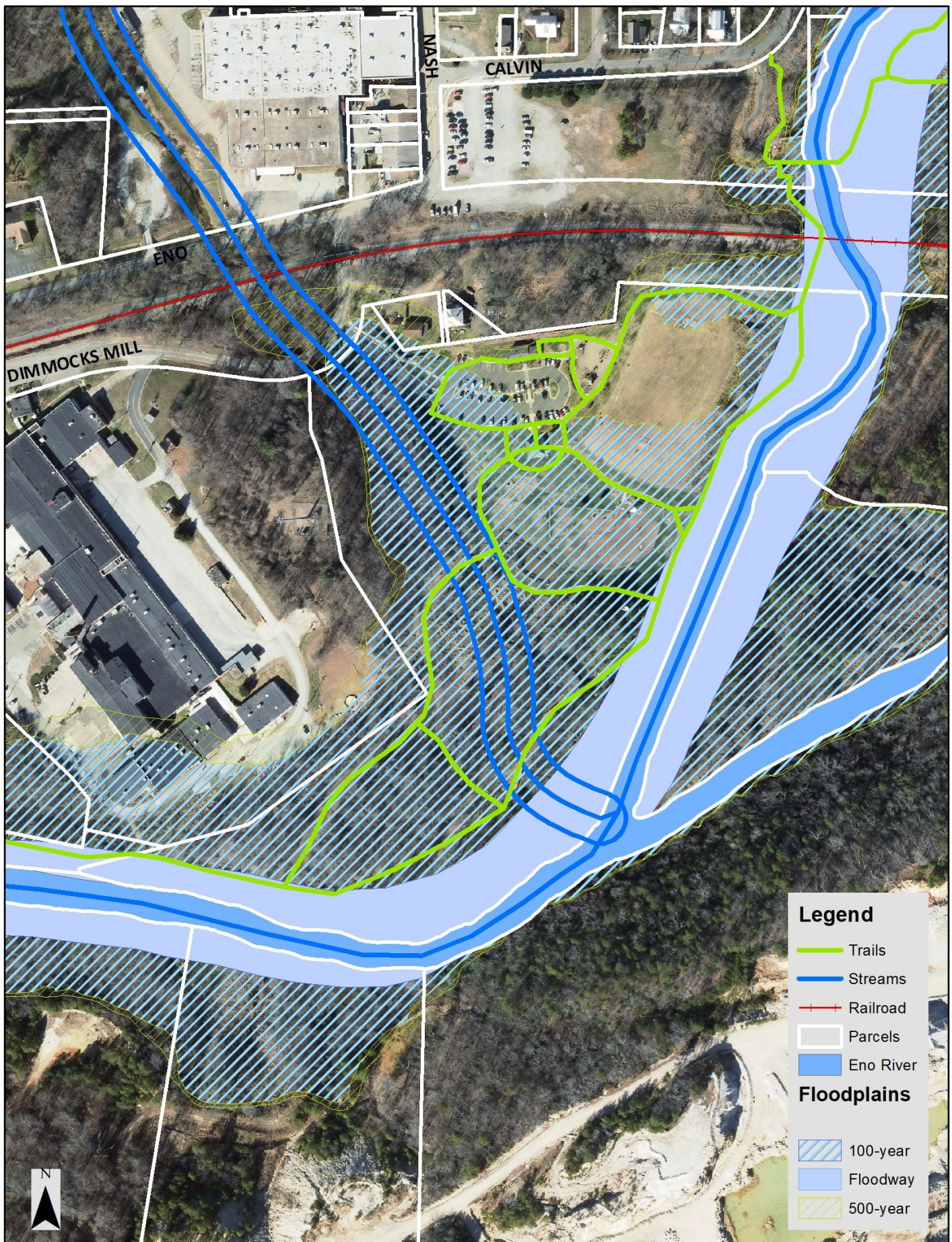
In 2015, the town contracted with the North Carolina Forest Service to develop a forest management plan for Gold Park. The plan explains that Gold Park is considered a mixed bottomland hardwoods forest. The species composition includes American elm, green ash, hackberry, loblolly pine, red maple, river birch, sweetgum, sycamore, and yellow poplar. Invasive species like Chinese Privet, multiflora rose, Japanese stilt grass, and tree of heaven are present in the understory and threaten native species. The plan recommends the following priorities:

- Maintaining the riparian buffer to protect water quality.
- Maintaining a healthy forest to reduce radiant heat and improve air quality.
- Removing hazardous trees that pose a threat to the public.
- Maintaining an understory in forested areas to provide future forest.
- Maintaining the health and quality of trees and forest stands.
- Removing and managing invasive species.

The town has continued to add amenities to the park, including accessible, musical-play stations; benches; planters; wayfinding signage; native plantings; and climbing equipment. The town has considered adding sunshades over the play area but learned that the clearance requirements preclude this type of installation. The town also has considered a request for splash pads but determined access to the natural water supply is preferred.

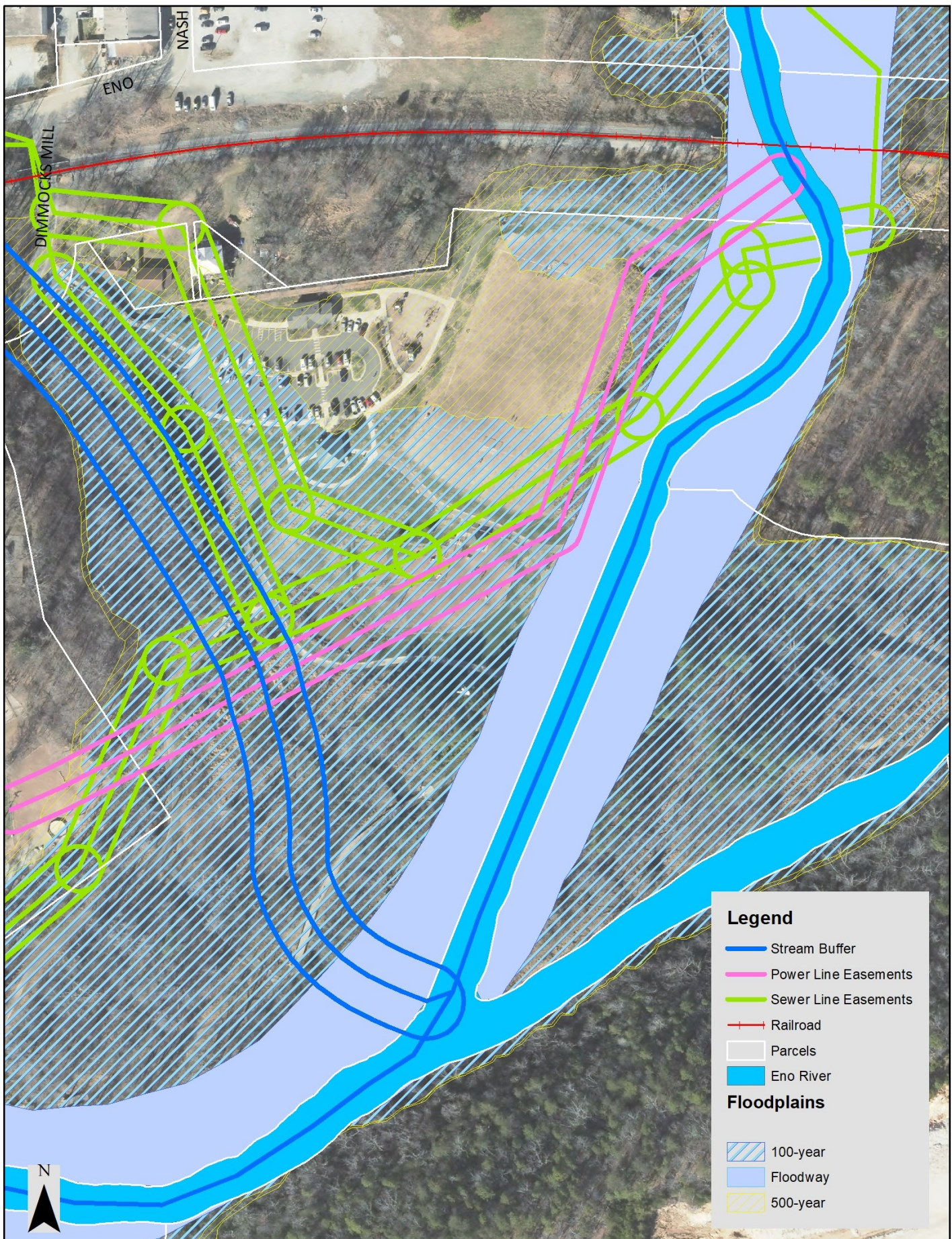
The following pages include maps showing the site constraints that limit development in Gold Park.





This map shows the flood-prone areas in Gold Park. Much of the property is within a 100-year





This map shows site constraints in Gold Park, including floodplains, stream buffers, power line easements, and sewer easements.



## Master Plan Priorities

In 2022, the Hillsborough Parks and Recreation Board and the Hillsborough Tree Board — in coordination with the town’s public space and sustainability division and stormwater and environmental services division — developed a list of recommended improvements for Gold Park. The recommendations are detailed in this master plan and are intended to guide future spending decisions. This plan should be updated every three to five years.

## Recommendations

- Maintain the existing park amenities and playground equipment in safe and working order.
- Remove invasive plants from riparian buffer areas, and plant native and adapted trees and shrubs.
- Investigate options to introduce public access to Eno River for wading and water play.
- Cease mowing operations on the bank behind the restroom, and plant bank with native grasses.
- Provide interactive and natural play features (Example: games area).
- Provide additional seating areas, picnic tables, and “chill” zones (Example: hammock park).
- Provide additional recycling containers.
- Remove the baseball backstop.
- Reconfigure the field to be a youth-size soccer field with other play areas.
- Section the multi-use field with trees and landscaping to provide opportunities for various recreational areas.
- Investigate options for adding basketball courts.
- Add new recreational amenities to the field area (Examples: Gaga ball, disc golf practice baskets).
- Investigate opportunities to provide bike share programs.
- Add public and interactive art (Examples: interactive art wall, sensory wall, story walk, sculpture)
- Add interpretive signage (Examples: wildlife, sustainability topics)
- Provide public Wi-fi.
- Incorporate sustainability initiatives when feasible (Examples: electric vehicle charging equipment, solar array, water bottle filling station).
- Investigate options to restore the Eno River to its natural channel.
- Incorporate green infrastructure when feasible (Examples: Filterra boxes, bioswales, pervious pavements, green roofs, rain water harvesting, reforestation, rain gardens).

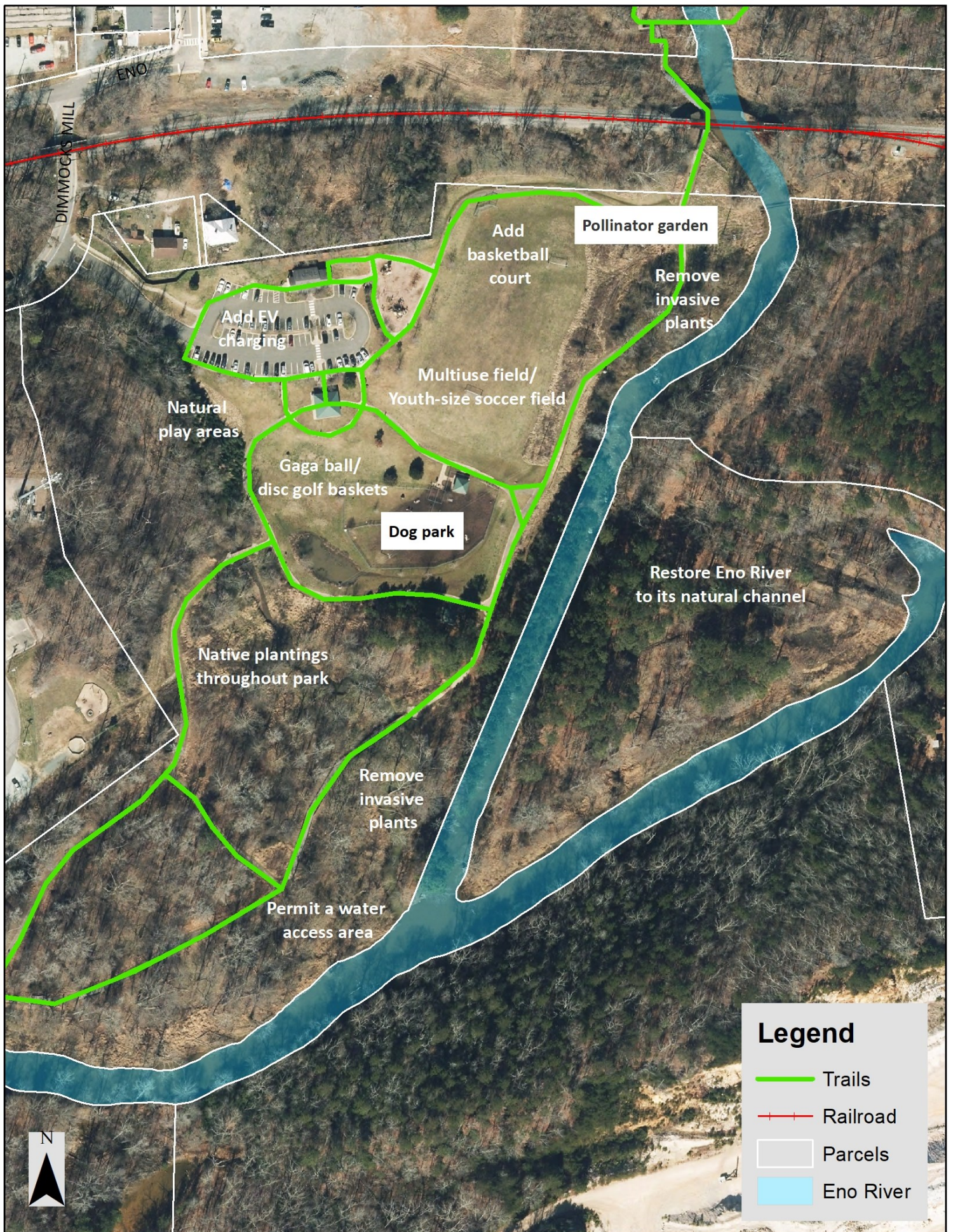
## Priorities

The implementation priorities are as follows:

1. Remove the baseball backstop.
2. Investigate options for adding basketball courts.
3. Investigate options for adding a permitted water access area.
4. Incorporate sustainability initiatives, especially electric vehicle charging equipment.

Recommendations are noted on a map of Gold Park on the following page.





This map shows approximate locations for the recommendations included in this plan.