

# **Kings Highway Park Master Plan**

**March 2016**



### **Kings Highway Park Master Plan Contributors:**

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A special thanks to all community members who contributed time and ideas during the public input sessions.

## **Introduction**

Kings Highway Park is an 18-acre natural area located at 1001 Ben Johnston Road, Hillsborough North Carolina. The property is bounded by the Eno River and Lake Ben Johnston to the south and west and by the North Carolina Railroad corridor to the north. The park includes 11 acres on the north side of Ben Johnston Road and 7 acres on the south side. The park is owned and maintained by the Town of Hillsborough but is not located within the town limits. The park is located in Hillsborough's Extra Territorial Jurisdiction, ETJ, an area of unincorporated land upon which the Town of Hillsborough is legally allowed to exercise authority. The Town Board officially opened Kings Highway Park to the public May 2007.

Most of the park is forested but is accessible by natural surface trails. Bisecting the park is a utility easement that is owned and maintained by Piedmont Electric. The easement includes restrictions for development and use. Any improvements to the easement area will need to be coordinated with Piedmont Electric.

The Eno River and streams within the park are subject to the Neuse River Basin Buffer Rules. Any use or development within the buffer zones must be permitted by the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality. Development may also be prohibited in sections of the park that fall within the 100-year floodplain in accordance to the Town of Hillsborough Floodplain Ordinance.

Prior to being dedicated as a park, the town utilized the property on the south side of the road for activities related to the on-going maintenance and dredging of Lake Ben Johnston, a source of Hillsborough's drinking water. Dredging continues to occur approximately every 15 years or as needed. At the center of the southern portion of the park is an area that is used as a dewatering basin for sediment, a byproduct of dredging. In between dredging operations, the area is maintained as an open vegetated meadow.

The name Kings Highway Park is based on the presence of remnants of a river ford and historic road known as King's Highway located on the property. The historic roadbed is visible and crosses the northern portion of the park.

Kings Highway Park also includes nearly 1 mile of natural surface walking trails and a canoe/kayak boat launch area. The park is used currently for fishing, boating, and walking. Motorized vehicles are prohibited. The park trails and activity areas were developed primarily through the work of volunteers. For much of the park's history volunteers have helped to maintain the natural surface trails and activity areas. Several eagle scout projects have brought amenities to the park such as benches, a kiosk, and a picnic area. Many of these facilities are now aging and are in need of repair or replacement.

In 2014, several neighbors expressed concerns relating to the on-going dredging activities, general maintenance, and illegal activities at the park. Members of the Parks and Recreation Board and town staff met with neighbors and discussed the issues. Staff shared concerns with the Hillsborough Town Board that in turn directed that immediate improvements for safety and appearance be made, and requested that a master plan be developed for the park. The Town Board determined that the dredging and dewatering activities would continue but expressed that the site would also remain open to the public as parkland. In response to neighbor concerns the Town increased Police and Public Works patrols at the site. The Town also installed two gates at the parking area. The outer gate is locked by the Police Department when the park is closed. The inner gate is locked at all times and is only opened for maintenance access. The gates have been successful in reducing illegal activities and trespassers.

The Hillsborough Parks and Recreation Board was tasked with developing a master plan for Kings Highway Park. The following sections of this document provide an overview of the vision for the park as a community resource and offer recommendations for additional improvements at Kings Highway Park. An implementation schedule for the recommended improvements is also included as a guide for future budgetary and prioritization decisions.

## **Master Plan Process**

The Parks and Recreation Board developed the following Vision Statement, goals and project schedule:

### **Vision for Kings Highway Park**

Kings Highway Park is a safe and welcoming public resource connected to the Hillsborough community and is maintained for passive recreation, educational opportunities, and natural beauty. The park design shall advance sustainable resource management principles and recognize the significant cultural and natural resources of the site.

### **Goals of the Master Plan**

Establish a Master Plan for Kings Highway Park that includes maintenance instructions as well as recommendations for expansion of the park as a natural and recreational resource. The Master Plan will identify compatible activities and amenities and make recommendations that will guide future budget requests relating to additional infrastructure and environmental investment in Kings Highway Park.

### **Scope of Work/Project Schedule of Master Plan**

August 2015: Conduct site visit to Kings Highway Park

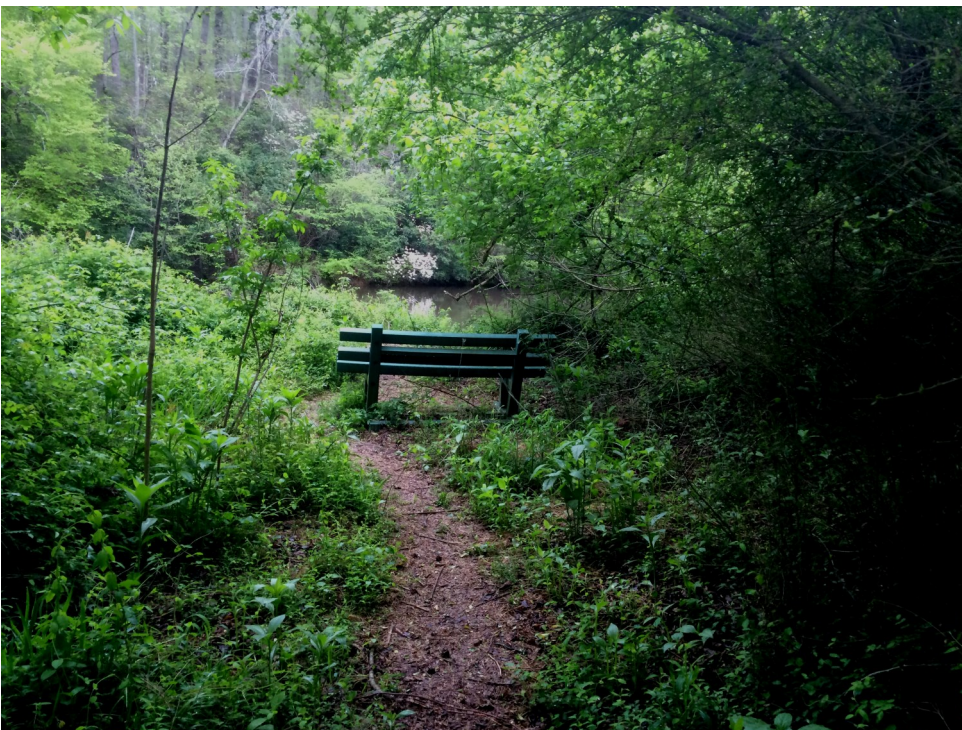
September 2015: Review existing plans, Analyze internal connectivity, Develop recommendations

October 2015: Analyze external connectivity, Develop recommendations

November 2015: Develop Vision and Goal statements, Develop recommendations for activities and amenities

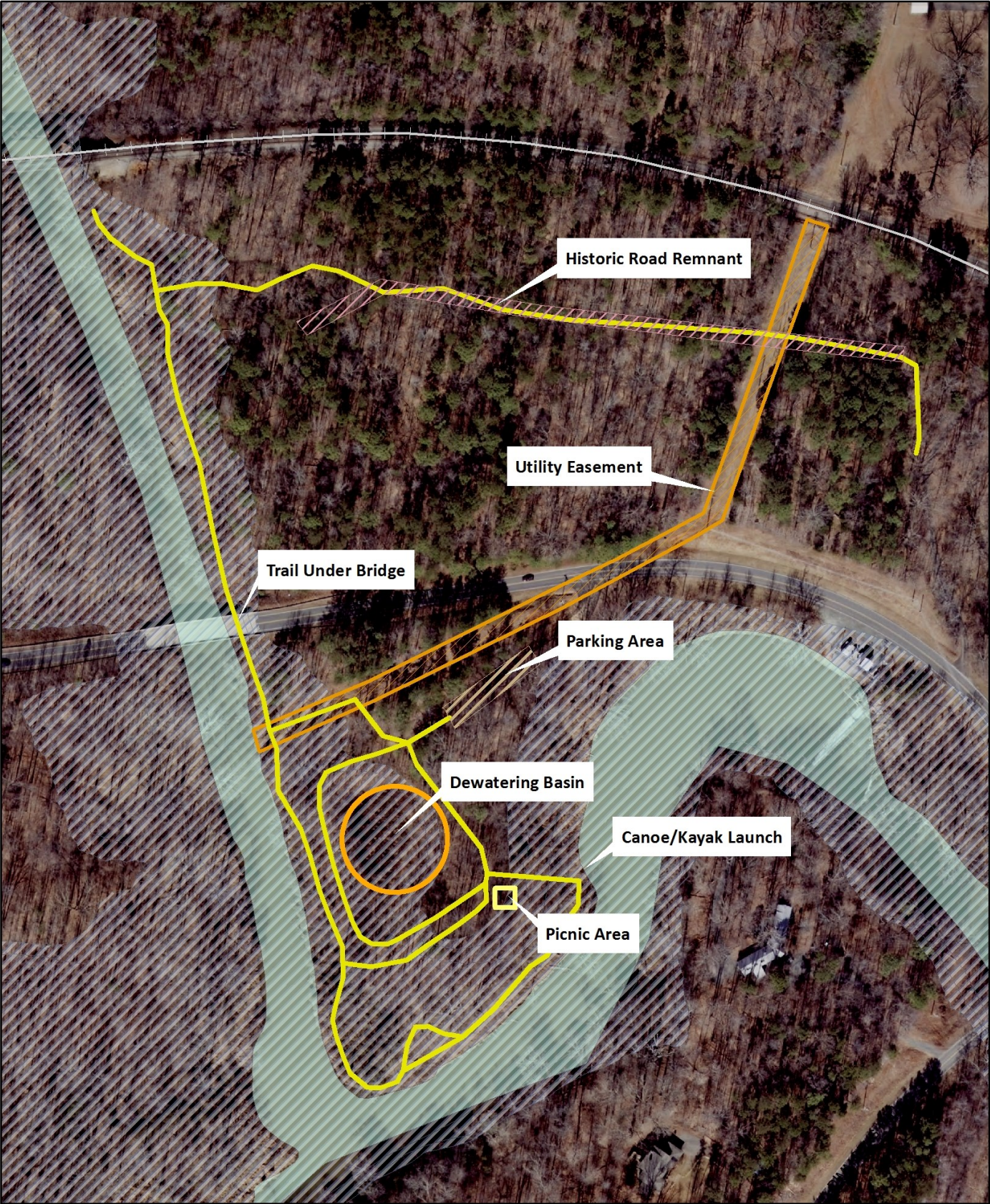
December 2015: Review DRAFT Master Plan, Set Priorities, Develop Implementation Plan

January 2016: Review Final Master Plan and make recommendation to Town Board



Bench near Lake Ben Johnston

This map shows the existing activity areas at Kings Highway Park (2015)



Kings Highway Park: Existing Conditions (2015)

Existing Trails Utility Easement Railroad Corridor Eno River Flood Plain



## **Concerns About Existing Conditions**

The following list represents concerns related to Kings Highway Park that have been voiced by park neighbors and visitors as well as Parks and Recreation Board members.

- Illegal activity in parking area and under NCDOT bridge
- Litter in parking area and fishing areas and under bridge
- Not pedestrian accessible from town/feels disconnected from town
- Parking area not visible from road
- Parking area too small, hard to turn around
- Park feels isolated/creepy
- Poor connectivity between north and south sides of park
- Utility easement through center of park is unattractive
- North side is undiscovered and inaccessible
- Private property is not marked
- Trails are overgrown
- Activity areas are overgrown
- Dewatering basin berms are overgrown
- Limbs and brush are not cleared
- Dead trees overhanging trails are not removed
- Silt fence left from dredging is dangerous and unsightly
- Picnic area in unkempt
- No trash/recycling receptacles
- Parking area is muddy and rutted
- Parking area is shady and scary
- No informational signage
- Trails are not marked



Picnic area at Kings Highway Park

## Review of Existing Plans

### **Parks and Recreation Master Plan**

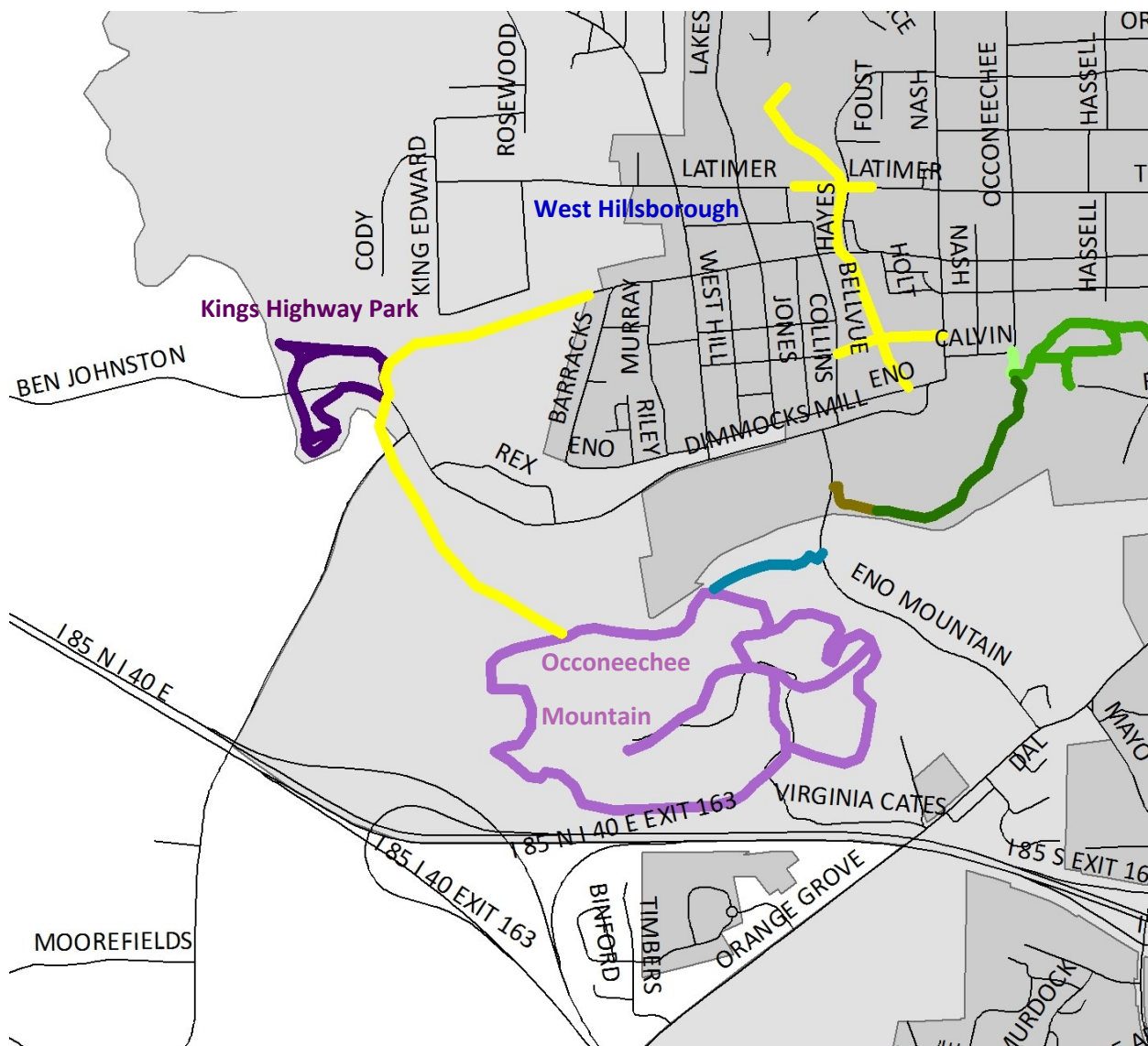
According to the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, Kings Highway Park is located in Park District 6. Recommendations for District 6 include studying the feasibility of providing a pedestrian connection from West King Street to Kings Highway Park.

### **Connectivity Plan**

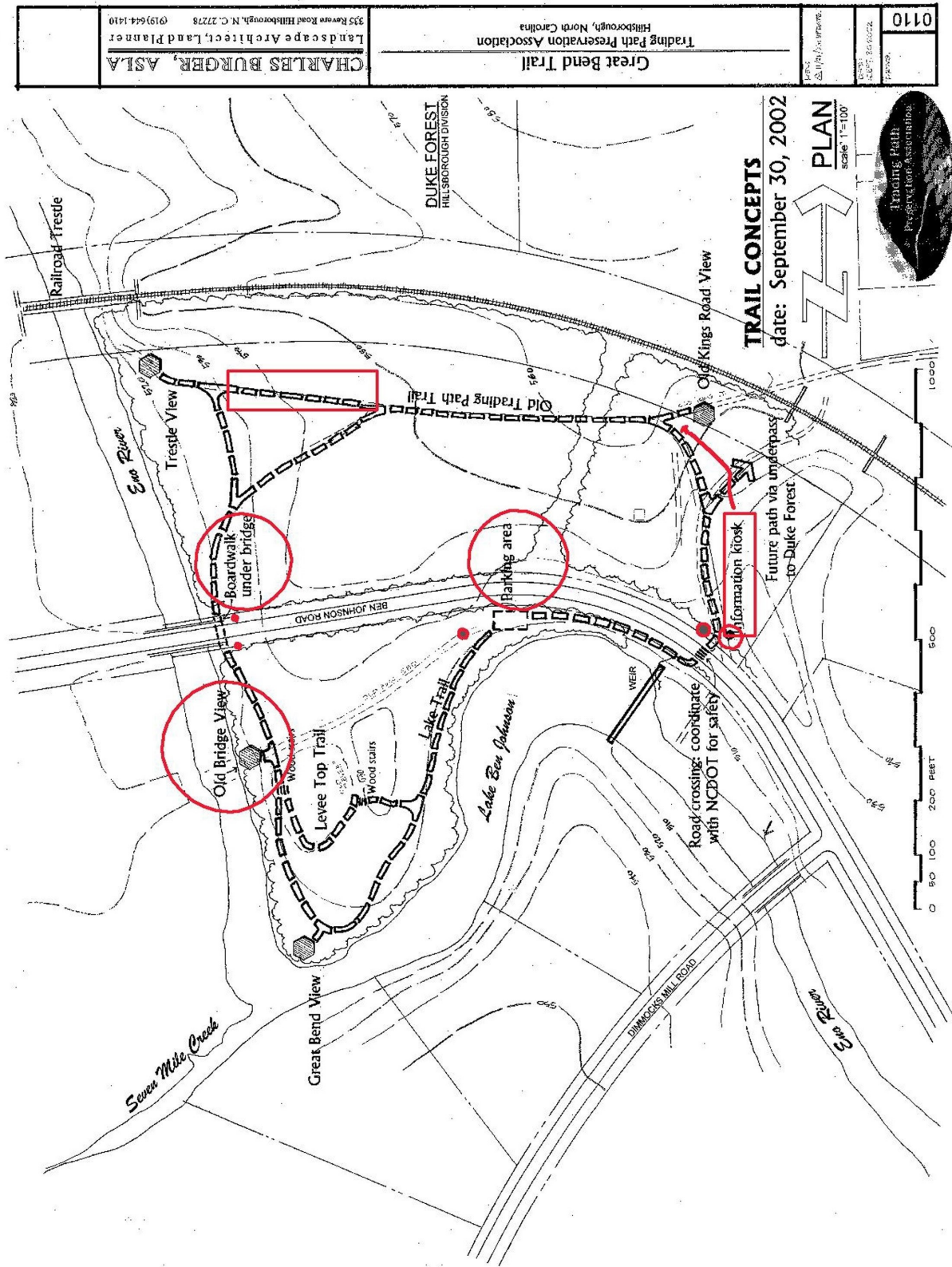
Hillsborough's Community Connectivity Plan recognizes that as the Mountains-to-Sea trail corridor through Orange County is defined, Kings Highway Park may end up being proximal to the trail. Recommendations include linking the park to the trail if that is the case. The park is also located along one of Orange County's recommended bike routes along Ben Johnston Road. The Connectivity Plan also reiterates the need for a pedestrian trail connection between Kings Highway Park and West Hillsborough and recommends studying feasibility for connecting the park to Occonee Mountain.

Map Snapshot: Greenway and Trail Recommendations from Community Connectivity Plan

Recommended new trails are shown in yellow.



## Original Site Plan for Kings Highway Park (2002):



This site plan served in the early years of park development as a guide for trail and activity area layout. An updated site plan with proposed activity areas and trails is included on Page 13. The Lake Trail and crosswalk on Ben Johnston Road are eliminated from the updated recommendations. The Lake Trail would cause negative impacts to the stream buffer and terminates at Ben Johnston Road at a location unsafe to pedestrian. The crosswalk is no longer recommended due to safety concerns and NCDOT requirements.

## **Proposed Activities and Amenities**

Below is a list of activities and amenities determined to be compatible at Kings Highway Park.

### **Compatible activities may include:**

Canoeing/Kayaking  
Fishing  
Walking/Hiking  
Picnicking  
Educational Areas/Activities  
Natural Play Areas/Activities

### **Amenities may include:**

Benches  
Picnic Tables  
Trash/Recycling Containers  
Boat Launch/Biodock  
Kiosk/Park Trail Map  
Interpretive Signage  
Parking Areas  
Native Plants Identification  
Outdoor Classroom  
Pollinator Garden  
Natural Play Areas/Equipment  
Labyrinth  
Fairy Gardens



### **Photos show:**

Lake Ben Johnston  
Dewatering Basin  
Trail on North Side of Kings Highway Park

## Canoe and Kayak Launch/Biodock

Currently the canoe and kayak launch at Kings Highway Park consists of a gravel path leading to the waters edge on the west bend of Lake Ben Johnston. This site was used as access for dredging equipment and is permitted for a permanent boat launch. However, as the water level falls the area becomes muddy and unusable. A floating dock will resolve this issue and provide access at all times. The Parks and Recreation Board worked in coordination with the Stormwater Resource Manager and members of the public to develop a plan for a biodock. A biodock provides access for boaters and improves water quality by removing excess nutrients through a constructed floating wetland. The project provides a better solution for a kayak and canoe launch while also helping to meet nutrient reduction requirements. The biodock will be visible to the public and will provide an educational opportunity, helping to facilitate citizen understanding of other nutrient reduction projects anticipated in future years. During Master Plan development neighbors asked if the biodock could be moved to another location further from residential properties. The Parks and Recreation Board investigated this idea but found that the proposed location is best suited for the biodock based on engineering standards and permit requirements. However, the board agreed to reduce the overall size of the biodock so as to present less visual impact to neighbors.



Existing conditions at canoe/kayak launch include 10' wide gravel path to waters edge.



An example of a floating constructed wetland. The biodock will include a floating dock bordered by a wetland similar to the example here.

## **Wayfinding Signage**

The Town of Hillsborough has installed wayfinding signage for key destinations in town. The existing Kings Highway Park signage was installed as part of the wayfinding program. As new destination or directional signage is installed it should be coordinated with the wayfinding program. For instance, a kiosk with a trail map of the park would be helpful to first time visitors. The kiosk should be located adjacent to the parking area and should be coordinated with directional kiosks located in downtown Hillsborough.



Wayfinding Kiosk with Downtown Map

## **Interpretive Signage**

The Town of Hillsborough has installed interpretive signage along Riverwalk and at key visitor sites around town. Kings Highway Park is an excellent site to continue this project. Signs such as these can help visitors understand the context of the park by identifying the natural and cultural resources of the site and its many uses through the years.

### **Sign topics may include:**

The Kings Highway Historic Roadbed  
Lake Ben Johnston and Town Water Supply  
Dredging and Dewatering Activities  
The Biodock and Water Quality Concerns  
Tree Identification and Native Plants  
Invasive Species and Threats  
Eno River Habitat and Species



Interpretive signs along Riverwalk

## **Recommendations**

The following section includes recommendations for upkeep and improvements at Kings Highway Park. See the proposed site plan map on the following page for proposed trail layout and activity areas.

### **General Maintenance**

Maintain trails and activity areas regularly (Pruning, weed eating, etc.)

Remove poison ivy from trails and activity areas

Remove storm debris

Remove diseased or dead trees that pose a danger to trails, parking and activity areas

Remove litter

Refresh surfacing at picnic and parking areas

### **Recommendations to Improve Parking**

Improve existing parking area so turn around is possible

Improve surfacing and visibility of existing parking area

Construct new gravel parking area on north side

Provide safe visible parking areas

### **Recommendations to Improve Internal Connectivity**

Improve trail connectivity between north and south sides of park

Improve the trail that is located under the road bridge

Provide loop trails on north side of park

Provide visible entrance on north side of park-not on utility easement

Install natural surfacing on the trail around dewatering basin

Provide benches, trash cans/recycling, and picnic tables in activity areas

### **Recommendations to Improve External Connectivity**

Study feasibility of pedestrian connection to West King Street

Study feasibility of pedestrian connection to Duke Forest

Study feasibility of pedestrian connection to Oconeechee Mountain State Natural Area

Study feasibility of pedestrian connection to Orange County corridor of Mountains-to-Sea Trail

### **Other Recommended Improvements**

Investigate options for changing name of the park to highlight educational opportunities and natural setting

Establish activity areas and view areas as indicated on proposed improvements map

Install interpretative/educational signage

Install biodock at permitted location

Evaluate site for Eco Heal building and/or outdoor classroom

Provide trash/recycling receptacles at parking areas

Install a park kiosk with trail maps at parking area

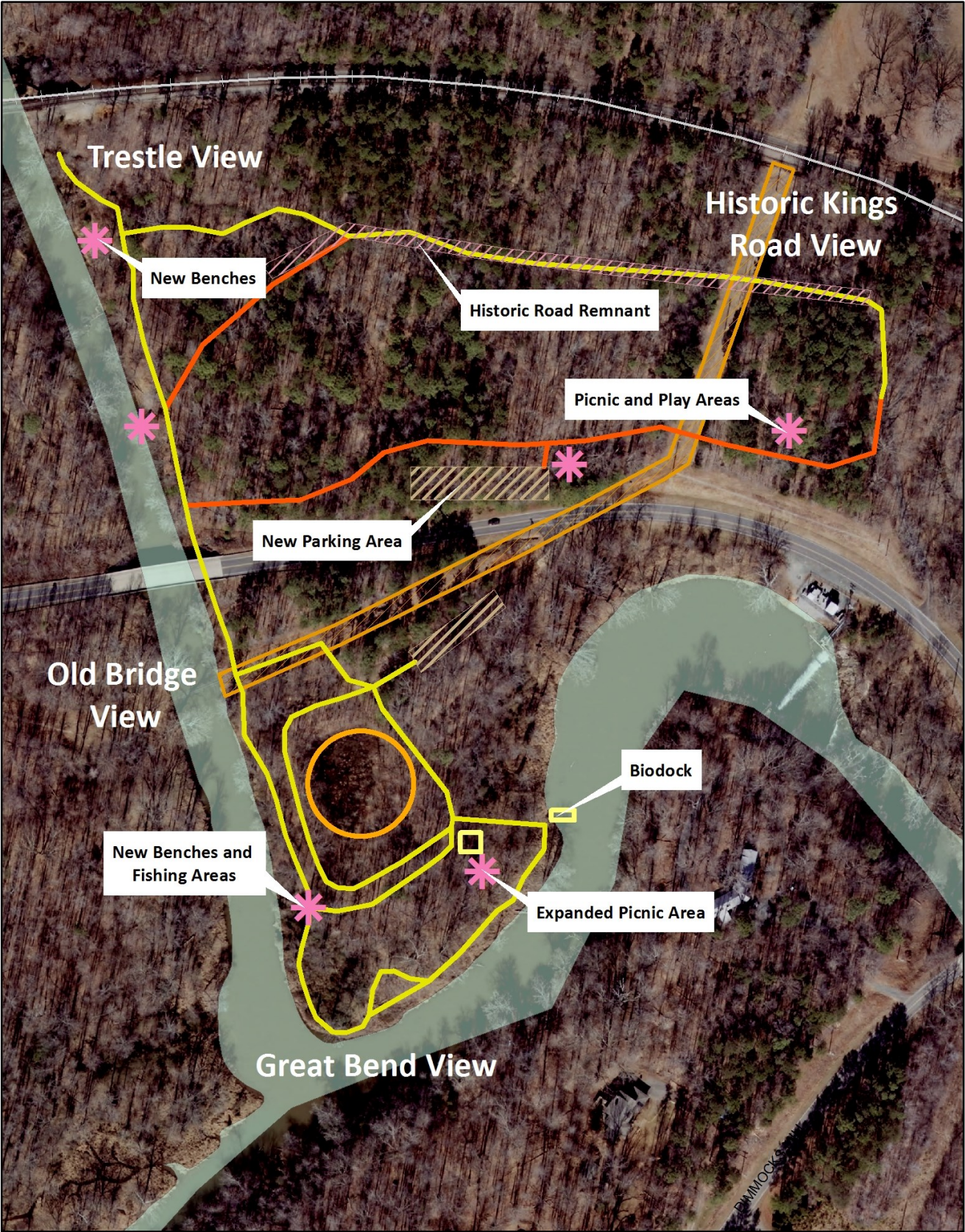
Install natural play areas and equipment

Develop and follow forest management plan

Remove silt fence and posts left from dredging project

Remove invasive species where possible

This map shows proposed activity areas and new trails at Kings Highway Park.



Kings Highway Park: Proposed Improvements

 Amenities    Existing Trails    Proposed Trails    Utility Easement    Railroad Corridor    Eno River



Below is a schedule for the implementation of recommended improvements to Kings Highway Park.

<b>Implementation Schedule</b>	<b>Immediate</b>	<b>1-3 Years</b>	<b>3-5 Years</b>	<b>On Going</b>
<b>General Maintenance Recommendations</b>				
Maintain trails and activity areas regularly				✓
Remove poison ivy from trails and activity areas				✓
Remove trees that pose a danger to trails, parking and activity areas				✓
Remove debris after storms				✓
Remove litter				✓
Refresh surfacing at picnic and parking areas	✓			
<b>Recommendations to Improve Parking</b>				
Improve existing parking area so turn around is possible	✓			
Improve surfacing and visibility of existing parking area	✓			
Construct new gravel parking area on north side		✓		
Provide safe visible parking areas				✓
<b>Recommendations to Improve Internal Connectivity</b>				
Improve trail connectivity between north and south sides of park		✓		
Improve the trail that is located under the road bridge			✓	
Provide loop trails on north side of park		✓		
Provide visible entrance on north side of park-not on utility easement		✓		
Install natural surfacing on the trail around dewatering basin			✓	
Provide new benches, trash cans/recycling, and picnic tables in activity areas			✓	
<b>Recommendations to Improve External Connectivity</b>				
Study feasibility of pedestrian connection to West King Street		✓		
Study feasibility of pedestrian connection to Duke Forest		✓		
Study feasibility of pedestrian connection to Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area			✓	
Study feasibility of pedestrian connection to Orange County corridor of Mountains-to-Sea Trail			✓	

Additional Recommendations	Immediate	1-3 Years	3-5 Years	On Going
Investigate options for changing name of the park to highlight educational opportunities and natural setting		✓		
Establish activity areas and view areas as indicated on proposed improvements map		✓		
Install interpretative/educational signage			✓	
Install biodock at permitted location	✓			
Evaluate site for Eco Heal building and/or outdoor classroom			✓	
Provide trash/recycling receptacles at parking areas	✓			
Install a park kiosk with trail maps at parking area		✓		
Install natural play areas and equipment			✓	
Develop and follow forest management plan	✓			
Remove silt fence and posts left from dredging project	✓			
Remove invasive species where possible				✓

The Recommendations and Implementation Schedule in this plan are designed to guide future prioritization and budgetary decisions. The list is not exhaustive. It is anticipated that new recommendations will be added as connectivity studies are conducted and activity areas are established.

### **Partnerships**

In years past, much of the construction of facilities in Kings Highway Park has been executed by volunteers. For instance, the existing kiosk and picnic area were built as Eagle Scout projects. Volunteer groups have offered time and labor to make improvements that the town staff were unable to schedule. Scout troops and other volunteer organizations have helped to maintain the trails and remove litter on several occasions. Partnerships and volunteer opportunities such as these help to build community support and ownership of the park. Kings Highway Park offers a multitude of volunteer and educational opportunities. It is important for the Town of Hillsborough and Parks and Recreation Board to continue to support and advance opportunities such as these in the future.

### **Plan Updates**

In order for this Master Plan to remain relevant it is recommended that it be reviewed and updated every five years.