

WHITEHALL AT RESERVOIR PARK MASTER PLAN PROGRAM NARRATIVE May 5, 2023



The following narrative is a description of the Whitehall at Reservoir Park Master Plan. The various components of the program are identified by a letter and a name on the Master Plan Illustration. A description follows in this narrative to explain each item and element of the approved program. Many program items are too small to show on the plan and are explained in the narrative.

A. Reservoir Park Entrance & Parking:

The main entrance to Reservoir Park. Several trail systems converge at this point so that the entrance can also be identified as access to Whitehall Park. The change will require a new entrance sign, lighting, and landscape. Near the entrance is parking lot #2 that transforms this area into a trailhead for Reservoir and Whitehall. There is a potential for connecting to the Southern Pines Greenway by following the gas easement up to Cherokee Road and over to the Greenway. See (X) of the narrative.

The Conservation easement does not allow for paved parking in the easement, so the spaces will be on the Reservoir Park property or be gravel parking only. The access road will have a control gate to manage parking separate from the lake access road.

Reservoir Parking Lot: The existing Reservoir Park parking lot is under pressure to serve the lake and the trail systems. By connecting the bike trails and nature trails to this parking lot, it becomes a more diverse and centralized trailhead where more activity and amenities converge. The existing lot becomes one of the four (4) corners of Whitehall Park serving as a trailhead network to provide easier access to Whitehall Park.

Entrance Road: The existing Entrance into Reservoir Park is so close to the edge of Whitehall Park that it can easily become an integral part of the overall park circulation system and provide access to both parks. A parallel bike trail is positioned alongside the entrance road to allow users safer access to the park without mixing with vehicles.

Parking Area #2: The topography in this area is relatively flat and near the trails that lead into Whitehall Park. This spot becomes a 2nd trailhead for both parks and picks up users who may be going to Reservoir Park for the trails and do not want to get into the crowds at the lake. This will relieve some pressure on the lake parking lot. Parking spaces will spread out under the trees so that no large trees are lost. Picnic tables and benches will be spaced around the edges of the parking so users can post-up before or after their trail use.

B. Perimeter Multi-Purpose Trail:

A multi-purpose paved trail adjacent to the existing entrance road connects the entrance to the Lake Parking lot. Users are separated from the entrance road and are connected to the overall multi-purpose paved Perimeter Trail system that encircles all of Whitehall Park, connects to the parking lots and creates a two-mile bicycle loop around the parks. The multi-purpose paved trails can be used by all members of the family. The trail weaves between the large trees as it runs adjacent to the (A) Reservoir Park Entrance Road. Patrons can begin at Parking lot #2 (A) and ride their bikes into Reservoir Park or connect to the other trails in Whitehall Park.

There is a small wetland that was created by the entrance road construction. It lies along the trail and offers an additional attraction. The wetland is crossed by a boardwalk to provide users closer access to this unique ecological feature that harbors a unique variety of native flora and fauna. Educational/interpretive signage is located along the trail as well as rest stops, and wetland overlooks.

The overall perimeter trail also serves as a protective firebreak to the properties outside the park and provides fire and emergency personnel quick and easy access to the park and the edges of the burn sections.

The Perimeter Trail runs along the inside of the east border of the park adjacent to the residential properties. The trail provides excellent access and additional protection for the control burn sections that are behind the houses. The trail identifies the boundary of the site for park users and residents. Adjacent owners can access the park by connecting to the trail. Residents are free to erect privacy and security fences along this line if they so desire. This element of the overall park program is usable paved trails that are separate from the soft surface trails in the preservation areas, thus providing ADA access as well as accommodating strollers. By placing the multi-purpose trails on the perimeter, it leaves the inside of the park natural and relatively undisturbed. Parts of the old existing dirt trail and road are used to develop this route. Educational/interpretive signage could be located along the trail.

The Three Rivers Land Trust, that holds the easement on Whitehall, explained that the Conservation easement does not exclude bikes, but it does exclude impervious paving. The trails can be crushed gravel or pervious asphalt as long as the construction does not damage the forest. Most of this section of trail already exists as a cleared natural walking trail.

The rest of the overall multipurpose Perimeter Trail system around the park also provides fire management control and completes the overall loop trail system. It begins at any of the four (4) corner trailheads and connects to each trailhead without backtracking. The westside section of the trail connects the (T) backstage trailhead to Reservoir Park and its existing lake perimeter natural trail system. It includes a walking trail connection to the existing disc golf course.

C. Longleaf Preserve:

The majority of the vegetation in this area is mature longleaf pine and is inside the conservation easement. The area needs to be preserved and restricted to only soft trails and burn areas. Efforts to get RCWs to move into this area will enhance the natural uniqueness of the space. The town needs to work with a forester to establish an effective 'Burn Plan' for the site and to plant additional Longleaf seedlings to start a replacement cycle for the pines.

The area has some of the best Longleaf habitats in the park. It is isolated which aides in forest management and preservation. Only the (W) nature trails pass through the area and are laid out to serve as access and fire breaks for burn control. The trails also connect directly to the (A) parking lot at Reservoir Park as an additional trail head access point.

D. East Side Nature Trails:

A series of soft surface nature trails that range from wide to narrow with a variety of different surface treatments from natural soil to mulch or fine gravel screenings. These trails are purposefully kept to the interior of Whitehall Park and connect to the other trails forming a weaving network. The multipurpose trails and nature trails connect to create a network of trails that become the edges and borders of 15 – 20 acre burn areas.

Alignment of the nature trails along both sides of the creek is intended to isolate the creek area as a separate and unique burn section. Maintenance methods and burn procedures for stream banks are different from the open pine forests. This allows the Burn Team to address the stream area independently from the longleaf pine and woodland sections. Much of the old existing dirt trails are used to develop these new interlaced routes. The nature trails also connect to other trail routes and amenities throughout the park.

Elizabeth Rounds Park (F) also becomes a trail head for Whitehall Park being adjacent to proposed parking lot and entrance. The existing restroom serves the trails so that it is not necessary to build another trail restroom internal to Whitehall Park. Educational and interpretive signage is placed along these trails to identify the native flora and fauna.

E. Entrance Loop Road:

Because the driveway through the (H) RCW area cannot be widened, the access road to the main house is planned as a one-way loop road beginning at Elizabeth Rounds Park (F). The main entrance off Pee Dee Road is a two-way road to the proposed parking lot #1. This allows patrons to come and go from the parking lot through the main entrance without having to ever enter the park. The entrance road transitions down to a one-way road as it crosses the small creek over an arched culvert bridge. From the bridge, it continues as a one-way road along an old dirt roadbed up to the Open Field (K). The field becomes an overflow parking for big events. From the field, it loops around the carriage house and connects to the drop off in front of the Main House. It continues along the old driveway as an exit from the park out to the future Indian Trails Road (I). Any new service utilities to the main house will also follow this same route.

The combined entrance, loop road and parking lot 1 will keep vehicle traffic isolated to this corner of the park and not penetrate the interior of the park. Emergency vehicles will enter and exit by this same route.

F. Elizabeth Rounds Park Improvements:

Elizabeth Rounds Park will continue to function as a children's park, but its restroom, close proximity to the perimeter trails, parking lot 1, and soft surface trail system makes it a perfect trail head. It places the trailhead close to Pee Dee Road for a greater visibility to the public. This arrangement provides a much-needed trail restroom without having to build a new one inside Whitehall. The existing trail in Elizabeth Rounds ties to the East side Perimeter trail. The grass open area can serve as a group gathering space for the buses parking and can be an overflow parking area during major events. The presence of the play structure also relieves some of the pressure to include a structured playground inside the Whitehall Park site.

G. Pee Dee Road Parking Lot #1:

This is the perfect location for developing the main entrance parking lot. There are tall, scattered pines on flat topography where parking spaces can be easily spread out under the trees without clearing the trees. The lot can accommodate upwards to 100 cars, if desired, with very little impact on the overhead canopy. The site is close to Pee Dee Road and not deep inside the nature park, thus keeping vehicles isolated to the edge of the park. Using the multipurpose trail as the walkway access to the main house allows the parking to be used for all types of events and activities. All the trail systems converge here, with a bathroom in close proximity, it makes the perfect trailhead. The (H) RCW Preserve is very close, so Senior Citizens who come to see these rare birds will not have a long hike to see them. The loop road and hard surface trail connections make an ADA access route. Picnic tables scattered around the edges of the car and bus parking lot provide post-up and rest spots before or after visiting the park.

The trail from the parking leads up to the access point for the porch and down to the basement of the Main House. The porch overlooks the RCW preserve (H), so it becomes the perfect vantage point from which to orient visitors to the RCW area with telescopes and cover for inclement weather. The basement can become a museum, orientation, video, gift shop for the people who come to see the RCW. There are restrooms in the basement to easily accommodate these patrons. The porch and basement can be sealed off from the rest of the house and remain open. Many visitors come to Whitehall just to see the RCW so this is a very accessible corner of the overall park that can function independently from the rest of the park and Main House.

H. Red Cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) Preserve:

A 200-foot federally mandated setback is identified for each nesting tree starting from the most outside tree. This area is off limits to any new development or activity. The existing tennis court can be converted to a viewing blind for those who wish to get up close to see the birds. The preserve is surrounded by trails and roads so that it can be effectively controlled and protected during a burn session without the danger of fire escaping into the RCW area or affecting the house. Maintenance of the RCW area can be kept independent of the other forest maintenance activities. The limits of the RCW Preserve need to be identified by a series of markers around the perimeter to set it apart as a separate management area for the birds. Environmental law prohibits the use of machinery in the RCW areas, so all maintenance work must be hand done.

Since the RCW is one of the premier attractions of the park, having it clearly identified and isolated, helps manage the people who come exclusively to see it. They park nearby, walk to the house, observe the birds, and go back just as they came. The basement of the house becomes a welcome center, orientation, museum, and educational center for the RCW attraction. Educational/interpretive signage is located in the preserve and throughout the park.

I. RCW Area Expansion:

The Red Cockaded Woodpeckers are one of the main reasons people will come to Whitehall Park. The current area is relatively small and will be under pressure based on the increased visitation. Therefore, there needs to be an area to expand RCW nesting trees. The area between the Main House and parking area is a perfect location and has the kind of vegetation to support the use. The location works well with parking lot #1 and the proposed visitor center in the Main House. There are other areas of potential RCW expansion on the property (C).

J. Carriage House and Associated Parking:

Although there is a parking lot at the entrance, there is a need for some parking closer to the house for caterers, instructors, guests, managers, maintenance, staff etc. The chosen location is close to the house and Carriage House, but somewhat out of sight. It can serve as bus parking as well, especially with the Carriage House restrooms adjacent to it. A small arrival patio off the back of the carriage house serves as a group gathering and loading space. Another patio extension off the front of the Carriage house serves to extend the indoor and outdoor venue toward the view.

The building will obstruct views of the buses and cars from the open field areas of the park. The structure lends itself to be a support space function for the park visitors. The slab on grade floor makes it easily accessible and the existing bathroom provides a cost-effective enhancement for visitors. The architectural character and layout of the carriage house makes it suitable as a multi-function space that could serve small

events and other adjacent park programming. Pedestrian doors must be added on the woodland side to meet code.

K. Open Field:

Due to the field being adjacent to the loop road, the open field can serve as an overflow parking area during major events. The field is roughly an acre and could accommodate up to 90 cars. Due to its location adjacent to the proposed (M) dog trails, this space could also be fenced as an off-leash area for dogs during certain times and days of the week. That provides dog walkers with a place to release their pets and keep them from roaming free through the rest of the park.

The northwest area of the field is the best location for agriculture plots as a community garden. The segregated location keeps the field better protected from park users. The entire field should be fenced to protect the proposed garden plants from local wildlife and contain the off-leash dogs.

L. Picnic Area:

The area is centrally located between the (P) fruit orchard, barn, (K) and open field and is adjacent to the (N) multi-use trails and (M) dog trails. The trees are tall and shady so when the underbrush is cleared the area will feel open with clear views of all the surrounding amenities. The area will become the central gathering place for patrons to post up while in the park or picnic on the grounds. A series of picnic tables, trash receptacles, grills, benches, and bench swings should be scattered in the shady areas. There needs to be at least two (2) small picnic shelters that have four (4) to six (6) tables each. Because the picnic area is adjacent to the central multi-use trail, this will allow vehicles to access the area for picnics, events, and maintenance.

M. Dog Trails:

The dog trails are a series of narrow dirt or mulch trails weaved through this section of the park specifically for people who want to walk their dogs. The dogs would have to be on leash, but these trails are exclusively for dogs and are open all year. The trails layout to create loops so a person can walk a long time and make different loops and routes as desired. Dogs coming into the park will be restricted to stay along the direct routes to the dog trails from the central multi-use trail or parking lots. This serves to restrict the other natural and wildlife areas of the park from the impact of dog use. The intent is to separate dogs from other uses and give them an exclusive area to walk their dogs. Trail benches and a small shelter are included as amenities for the owners. Other Park visitors may use the dog trails if they desire, but they must be willing to accept the presence of dogs.

N. Central Multi-use trail:

A central multi-use trail connects the Main House area of the park over to the Entrance Road at Reservoir Park. The central multi-use trail is 10' wide to accommodate emergency, service, police, and maintenance vehicles. All other multi-use trails in the park are 8' to 10' wide depending on the location and use. The central trail runs along the outside edge of the forest canopy in the picnic area, adjacent to the open spaces and is part of the overall bike trail system.

The central trail serves as an access road from parking lot #1 to the barn. A drop-off space is added by the barn, for brides and other VIPs.

O. Wildflower Meadow:

This open space is converted in native wildflowers as a meadow. The wildflower seed mix includes annuals and perennials to provide longevity and variety to the color splash. A small viewing platform and photo spot is set on the south end of the meadow for good sun exposure and long views of the flowers. The deck includes bench swings and a shade arbor for native grapes. Native bee boxes and honeybee hives are located in the adjacent forests to help with pollination of the flowers and fruit trees. The town could schedule an annual 'Flower Pick' event in the field as a revenue generator.

P. Fruit Orchard:

This is an area of open land where multiple types of fruit trees can be added to develop an orchard, especially being adjacent to the wildflowers. A grape arbor and viewing platform are set at the end of the space to function as an amenity and stage for weddings or photos. Events themed around fruit harvest time will work well with this amenity. The events could be staged on a patio adjacent to the barn. The Southern Pines area is famous for peach trees. Various varieties of peach should be considered for the orchard as a throwback to the local history. A fruit orchard grower should be consulted on how to establish the orchard.

Q. Pecan Grove:

There are several sizeable pecan trees already in this location. The trees are in desperate need of prescriptive treatment and pruning. New trees need to be planted to replace the existing ones as they die out. The town should open the side of the barn facing the grove and create a patio or paved area as an outdoor extension of the barn. The patio can accommodate a variety of activities based on what events occur in and around the barn. Events can be based on harvesting the pecans or fruit and centered on using the patio as a base. A pecan grower should be consulted on how to improve the grove.

R. Open Space Lawn:

The large open space event lawn is a central feature of the park. It offers a wide variety of opportunities for events and activities. It can be used by large crowds' single individuals. It should be kept in a mowed condition that is comfortable year-round for planned and impromptu activities and events. A couple of the larger single trees in the open can be leased out as Climbing Trees to local providers. A small presentation patio is located on the western end of the lawn against the forest, to accommodate small events. The perimeter trails is run around the edges of the field and along the tree line to define the space. The trails serve to contain the burn process for the lawn and protect the forest. Burning a grass field is the best way to maintain the health of the turf. However, a grass burn is very different from a forest burn.

S. Loop Trail:

A paved loop trail around the edges of the four defined open spaces will become one of the most desirable and used features of the park. The trails follow the outside edges of the event lawn, pecan grove, fruit orchard and wildflower meadow just beyond the tree line. Because it is a paved multi-use trail in a loop layout, it can be used in a wide variety of manners. Every event in the park will use the trails for access, service, and circulation. The trails also function to isolate the event lawn, pecan grove, fruit orchard and wildflower meadow separately, so each unique area can be effectively managed differently or burned as needed without encroaching on the forest preserve. The loop trail connects the major central features of the park and educational signage associated with each area can be placed along the route. The trail can be developed as a gravel trail and later topped with asphalt.

T. Indian Trail Road Extension & Parking:

We anticipate that Indian Trail Road may be extended someday. If not, it can still be extended to service the park trails and the stage area. Any utility services needed in the area can be buried alongside the road and to the stage without cutting through the park or forest. A small parking lot spaced out under the trees and located for access to the back of the presentation patio for speakers, events etc. The lot prevents performers from dragging their vehicles and materials through the park and across the event lawn to reach the presentation patio. The lot also serves as a small trail head for visitors who want to use the trails and avoid mixing with major events on the lawn, at the house or in the barn.

U. Presentation Patio:

A small, informal, paved area with minor electrical and audio services is set at the end of the Event Lawn. The services are built into a seat wall on the back side of the patio. The space is not meant to be a large amphitheater, but a small venue for minor outdoor events. It is not meant to compete for events like the one at the downtown Sunrise Theatre. It will have no formal seating, only blankets on the grass on the event lawn. Tent covers can be used over the patio as needed.

V. Pond:

Revitalize the pond and raise the water level for a more attractive appearance and establish waterfowl attractions, fishing dock, and perimeter trails. It can become a great educational tool.

W. West Side Nature Trails:

A network of soft surface nature / walking / hiking trails allows patrons to access and enjoy the longleaf preservation areas and other amenities interior to the park. The trails connect to the Reservoir parking lot and Indian Trail Lot to allow access from those trail heads. The trails are laid out to form various 15 – 20-acre sections for the Burn Program. Most trails follow old existing dirt trails and routes. Some of the existing trails need upgrading to cover exposed roots and stumps that currently present hazards to users.

X. Pipeline and Greenway Extension Trail:

The Dixie Gas Pipeline easement extends from the entrance at Reservoir Park on Highway 22 eastward to Cherokee Road. It is possible to extend a trail across Central Drive at the entrance to Reservoir Park and over to Cherokee Road.

At Cherokee Road the trail turns north and runs 300 feet along the road and connects to the existing Southern Pines Greenways trail that turns back westward to Reservoir Park. This creates a large loop around Mill Creek as part of tying Whitehall Park, Reservoir Park and the overall Southern Pines greenway system together into a joint trail system. It may also be possible to connect under Cherokee Road with a tunnel to the Lake and create a loop trail around the lake.

Y. Main House:

The architectural detailing and adjacent outdoor gathering spaces of the house suggest that it should be preserved and put on display to the public. The organization of the interior spaces lends itself to programming several different functions. Several exterior entrances provide separate entry points to help reinforce the idea of multi-use programming. Accessibility and building systems upgrades remain the biggest hurdle when considering options for reuse, but the craftsmanship and detailing beauty far outweigh the complications for renovation.

Z. Barn:

The barn was originally a Chicken House. The barn needs some major upgrades for it to support any proposed functions. The floor plan and adjacent covered space make it appealing for a variety of activities. The large open interior space can serve as a park and recreation storage facility with minimal cost impact. If desired, a more extensive renovation could yield wonderful gathering/reception space to facilitate a large number of Town activities and functions. Bathrooms can be added with doors on the inside and outside to accommodate accessibility. The restrooms need a large septic field and tank to accommodate the use. The drain field can be laid out under the pecan trees, fruit tree orchard or wildflower meadow. An outdoor patio on the Pecan Grove side of the barn is recommended as an overflow space for events and a home base patio for activities on the grounds.