

Southern Pines Town Council Approves Master Plan for Whitehall at Reservoir Park: May 10, 2023

On Tuesday, May 9th, the Southern Pines Town Council gave their unanimous approval to the master plan for "Whitehall at Reservoir Park." During a public hearing, Assistant Town Manager Jessica Roth and Parks & Recreation Director Cindi King emphasized the plan's focus on providing passive recreation opportunities while also protecting the longleaf pine forest and red-cockaded woodpecker habitats.

During the hearing, the Town Council heard from ten community members. Many expressed gratitude towards the Town for purchasing the 157-acre property and for creating a plan that is considerate of community feedback while also preserving the natural environment. A few individuals shared their knowledge on controlled burns and how it plays a crucial role in keeping the longleaf forest healthy.

The master plan has more than 5 miles of trails, which includes a 2-mile loop trail that is accessible for people with disabilities. The trails will connect to Reservoir Park and other existing trails and greenways. The trail system serves another purpose by creating designated areas where controlled burns can take place safely.

The Whitehall master plan preserves the open fields for outdoor activities like picnics, kite flying, and open play. Additionally, the plan recommends renovating the existing carriage house to provide more programming options for the Town's library and parks & recreation departments, and to serve as a welcoming entry point for visitors. The plan attempts to minimize disturbance on the Whitehall property by using facilities at Reservoir and Elizabeth Rounds parks whenever possible.

The Councilmembers expressed their appreciation to the community for collaborating with the Town to confirm a vision and determine what is needed and desired for Whitehall. They also thanked past Councilmembers for prioritizing the land purchase as well as the previous owners, who permanently protected the natural habitats by placing a conservation easement on the land and selling it to the Town for preservation and public use. Dr. Barbara Sherman sold the property to the Town in December 2020 and prior to, the property was owned by the David Drexel family.

Councilmembers noted that the master plan is an important first step in enhancing Whitehall to make it publicly available. The budget for the upcoming fiscal year includes \$260,000 to create construction drawings for phase 1 and to perform essential land management duties, such as safeguarding the longleaf pine forests and red-cockaded woodpecker habitats. Additionally, Town staff will explore different options for funding, including grants, to help with the planned improvements.

"The Town spent \$1.65 million to buy Whitehall and the cost of fully constructing the master plan will be much more than that," Town Manager Reagan Parsons shares. "As a community, we need to be patient and work on creative partnerships to secure funding other than property taxes from current residents. The Town hopes that by preparing construction drawings for the first phases of the plan, we can show that we are 'shovel ready' and begin construction as soon as funding is secured."

Staff and Council explained the name, "Whitehall at Reservoir Park," a strategic nod to build upon the existing reputation and name recognition of Reservoir Park. "Reservoir Park is a beloved community park that adjoins Whitehall and is recognized as

Jessica Roth, Assistant Town Manager



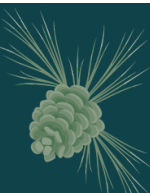
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a gem in the Sandhills. Our disc golf course is already on both properties and the various trails will further connect Whitehall to Reservoir Park," offers King. "Both Reservoir and the Elizabeth Rounds playground will provide important facilities to support Whitehall, including parking, restrooms, and entry points from Central Drive and PeeDee Road."

King also shared staff's research that supports the 'Whitehall at Reservoir Park' name. "If you look at the totality of the existing Reservoir and Elizabeth Rounds parks plus Whitehall's 157 acres, you realize that we really have a 326-acre park. The overall 'Reservoir Park' includes a 95-acre lake, permanently protected longleaf pine stands, an 18-acre disc golf course, playground, and exercise stations. Once the Whitehall trails are fully constructed, over 7 acres of trails at 'Reservoir Park' will connect to the Southern Pines greenway network."

"We looked at how this 326 acres compares across the state and saw that Reservoir Park is then the 4th largest municipal-owned park in North Carolina," adds King. "That puts us in a class with parks that are in much larger cities, including Raleigh's highly recognized 307-acre Dorothea Dix Park, River Park North (487 acres) in Greenville or West Point on the Eno (404 acres) in Durham. Reservoir Park is not just a gem in the Sandhills, but it is truly a gem for all of North Carolina. We hope that recognition will aid in securing outside funding and support to bring this master plan to life."

Roth thanked the community for the extensive feedback that provided key guidance on the plan. "On behalf of the Whitehall project team, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Southern Pines community for the invaluable input over the past 9 months. We had active participation of over 100 community members during three public meetings. We heard feedback from 800 individuals through online surveys, plus many e-mails and phone calls. We received guidance from experts on the longleaf forest, the red cockaded woodpeckers, and the role that passive recreation provides in Moore County. The Three Rivers Land Trust, which holds a conservation easement on about 40% of Whitehall, has provided their nod of approval. All of this feedback and community support has been instrumental in developing a thoughtful master plan that truly reflects the needs and desires of Southern Pines."

The Town contracted with CPL and Creech & Associates on this project. CPL led the public input and landscape architecture work, while Creech developed architectural concepts for the barn, carriage house, and main house.

The Southern Pines Public Library hosts a monthly book club at the Whitehall house, in addition to other programming. The Parks & Recreation department also schedules programs on the property, including an upcoming summer camp. To learn more, please visit:

Library programs: sppl.net

Parks & Recreation programs: sopinesnc.info/parksandrec

Master Plan and future progress updates: sopinesnc.info/whitehall