

Chapter 3: Public Input

What do we want?

Stakeholder Interviews

PARTICIPATING STAKEHOLDERS

Arts Council of Moore County

Dr. J.H. Carter III & Assoc.

Moore County Chamber of Commerce

The Nature Conservancy

Pinehurst, Southern Pines, Aberdeen CVB

Sandhills Ecological Institute

Sandhills Prescribed Burn Assoc.

Dr. Barbara Sherman

Three Rivers Land Trust

Southern Pines Appearance Commission

Southern Pines Public Library staff

TOSP Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee

Town Council members

TOSP Administration department

TOSP Fire department

TOSP Parks & Recreation department

TOSP Police department

TOSP Public Works department

The public input process launched on August 22, 2022 with two days of stakeholder interviews. Community members who have unique knowledge of Whitehall, its environmental characteristics, and the value it serves Southern Pines and Moore County were included in the interviews. Mack Cain and Cyndee Bonacci of CPL and Brent Green and Michael Supino of Creech & Associates facilitated the interviews, which were held at the Whitehall house.

Whitehall's native ecosystems were highlighted by many people, who urged the Town to maintain its natural conditions and protect the native flora and fauna. The interviewees supported opening Whitehall for passive recreation, such as walking trails and birdwatching.

The functional needs of Whitehall were highlighted. Many discussed the importance of managing the longleaf forest stands and the habitats of the existing red cockaded woodpeckers. Town staff noted that access to the property needs to be improved for further public use and that emergency access must be prioritized. Many suggested connecting Whitehall's trails to adjacent parks, like Reservoir and Elizabeth Rounds as well as nearby greenways and West Southern Pines.

Stakeholders offered suggestions on ways to use Whitehall while respecting its natural ecology. Some ideas included outdoor classrooms, open lawns, and renovating the existing structures for Town events and private rentals. Several suggested small-scale, outdoor activities, like recreation programs, small (possibly acoustic) concerts, and cultural events. It was suggested that Whitehall could function well as a "living laboratory" for environmental education and controlled burns.



First Public Input Meeting



Whitehall Comes to
Life With Your Voice!

Public Input Meeting

Tuesday, Aug. 23
6pm

Douglass Community
Center
1185 W. Pennsylvania
Ave.

———— TOWN OF ————
SOUTHERN PINES
———— NORTH CAROLINA ————

The first public input meeting was held on August 23, 2022 at the E.S. Douglass Community Center. Thirty-five attendees gathered to discuss the master plan and to share their ideas, vision, and any concerns. Project landscape architect and park planner, Mack Cain of CPL, facilitated the meeting. Emphasizing the importance of stakeholder and public input, Cain explained how community ideas and opinions would shape the development of the plan.

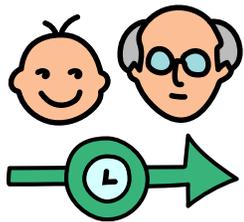
Attendees actively engaged, offering various ideas including potential options for trails, the development of restrooms, and possible uses for key structures like the main house, barn, and carriage house. There was consensus that protecting the native ecosystems should be the highest priority and that active recreation was likely not appropriate for Whitehall.

All attendees were encouraged to complete and share an online survey. The meeting was an essential first step to receive valuable insights from those invested in the master plan. The engagement and feedback from all input processes played a significant role in shaping the master plan, considering both the needs and wants of the public and the preservation of Whitehall's unique features.

Online Survey



An online survey launched in late August and remained open for 2 months. 686 people completed the survey. The findings from the survey are summarized on the following pages.



Nearly half of respondents were 26-45 years old. One-third were 46-65 years, while almost 20% were 66 or older. Participants under 18 represented 3% of the total respondents.



57% or nearly 400 participants self-reported that they live in the corporate limits of the Town of Southern Pines. Another 172 indicated they live in a Southern Pines area zip code, but are not Town residents.



Nearly half say they use a Town of Southern Pines park at least once a week, while nearly 20% use one of our parks daily. One-third say they do use our parks, but on a less frequent basis, i.e. monthly or several times a year.



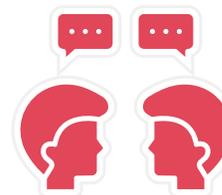
82% say they support the Town's purchase of the Whitehall property. Less than 1% said they were not in favor of it. The remaining 17% indicated they had no opinion on this question.



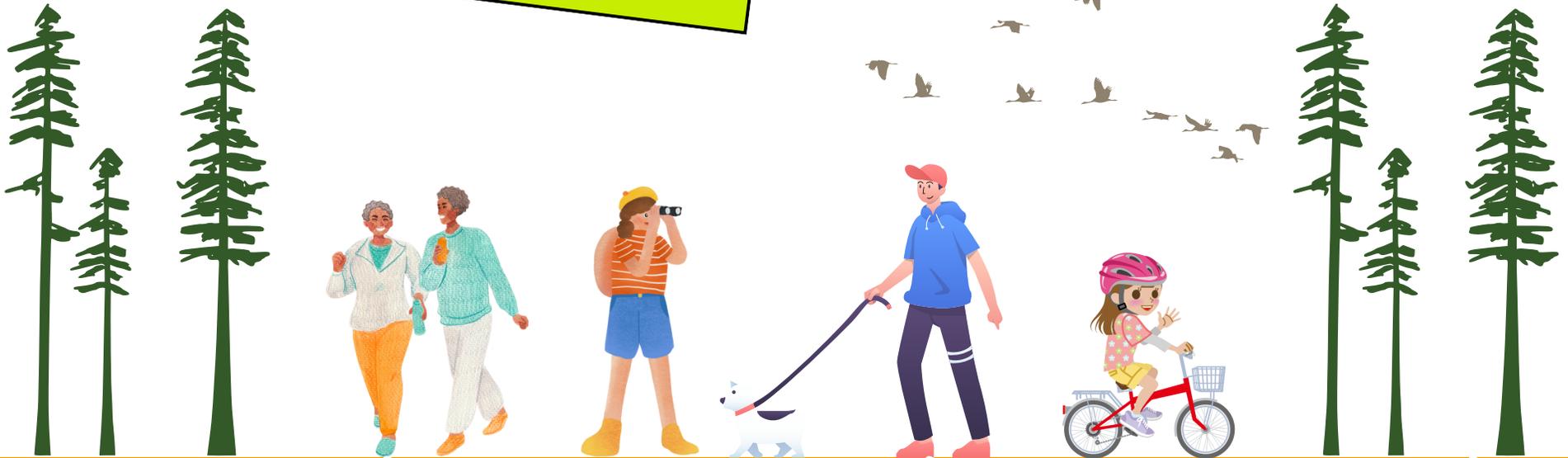
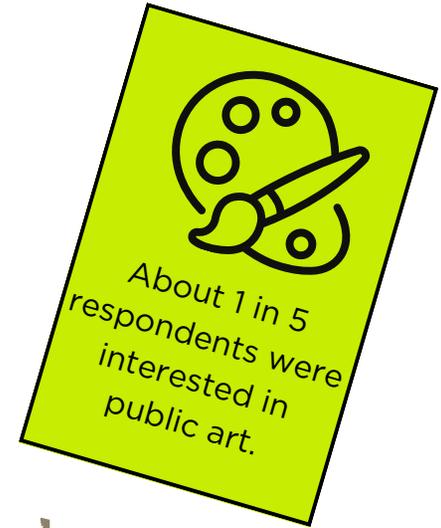
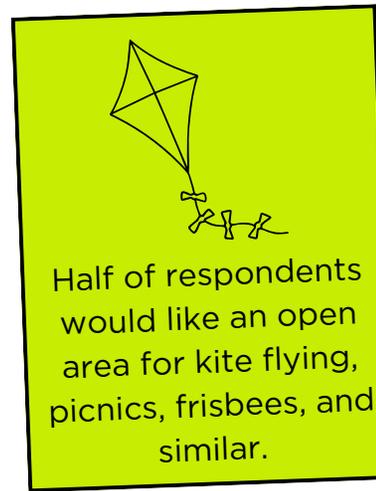
HOW WE SPREAD THE WORD!



SURVEY Signs



Survey Results



85%

WOULD LIKE THE PROPERTY ENHANCED FOR PUBLIC ACCESS

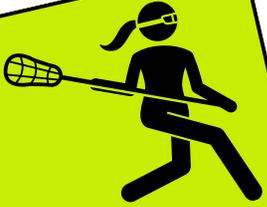
55%

WOULD LIKE TO SEE PASSIVE USES ONLY (TRAILS, BIRDWATCHING)

12%

WANT THE PROPERTY LEFT IN ITS PRESENT CONDITION

Survey Results



Other activities suggested for Whitehall included tennis, racquetball, lacrosse, and gaga ball.



1 out of 4 respondents suggested building a swimming pool at Whitehall.



16% of the respondents suggested adding pickleball courts.



"What events would you like to see on the Whitehall site?
List your top three choices."

81%

expressed interest in passive events, like yoga, hikes, etc.

42%

are interested in outdoor concerts

There was a smaller level of support for cultural festivals, outdoor movies, or private events like weddings. It's also worth noting that over 60% indicated they'd be fine if there were no events at Whitehall.

Survey Results



Over half suggested using the existing structures for park support facilities, like restrooms, lockers, changing rooms, etc.



Respondents expressed interest in using the buildings for classrooms and educational events or to provide information on the park.



There was some support for renting out the Whitehall spaces, especially the barn, for weddings, parties, and other private events.

HOW SHOULD WE USE THE HOUSE?



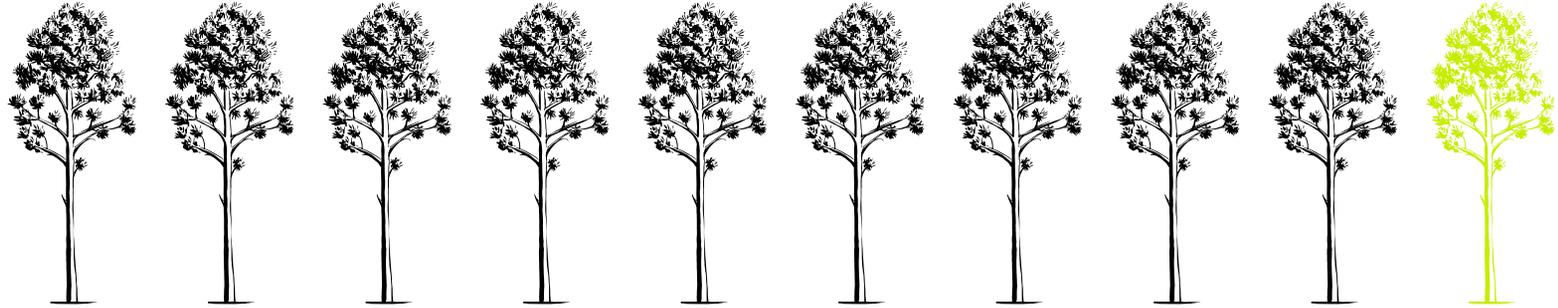
THE **TOP 3** SUGGESTIONS FOR THE HOUSE INCLUDED A MUSEUM OR EXHIBITS, CLASSROOMS OR LEARNING SPACE, AND A RESTAURANT/CAFE.

THERE WAS A SMALLER LEVEL OF SUPPORT FOR USING THE HOUSE FOR LARGER EVENTS, AS A CIVIC/MEETING SPACE, OR AS A SENIOR CENTER.

Survey Results



ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION



OVER 90% OF RESPONDENTS SAY IT IS "EXTREMELY OR SOMEWHAT" IMPORTANT TO PROTECT THE LONGLEAF PINES AND THE RED COCKADED WOODPECKER.

CONNECTIVITY TO OTHER PARKS



NEARLY 8 OUT OF EVERY 10 RESPONDENTS SAY IT IS "EXTREMELY OR SOMEWHAT" IMPORTANT TO CONNECT WHITEHALL TO OTHER PARKS.



Second Public Input Meeting



The second public input meeting was held on January 12, 2023 at the E.S. Douglass Community Center. Approximately 70 attendees were present to review 3 potential concept plans for Whitehall. Project landscape architect and park planner, Mack Cain of CPL, facilitated the meeting. He shared three plans, varying in intensity of enhancements. All were focused on passive recreation.

Plan #1 was the lowest intensity concept and featured very minimal enhancements, such as nature trails and picnic areas.

Plan #2 expanded on plan #1 and incorporated enhancements like a wildflower meadow, orchard, community garden, fishing dock, and accessible trail around the perimeter of the property.

Plan #3 was a little more intense, incorporating elements such as primitive campsites, a ropes course, and a small presentation stage.

Attendees actively engaged, offering their reactions to the plans. Concept plan #2 was the preferred plan. Some people felt plan #1 didn't offer enough enhancements, while the general feeling for plan #3 was that it contained unnecessary elements. All attendees were encouraged to complete and share an online survey, which was active for 2 weeks following the meeting and completed by 114 people. The results of the second survey are summarized on the following pages.

Survey Results



HARD SURFACE ACCESSIBLE TRAILS

80%

say these are a "must have" or "nice to have."
Only 12% say they definitely don't want hard surface trails at Whitehall.



INTERIOR SOFT SURFACE NATURE TRAILS

83% say these are a "must have" or "nice to have."

Focus on things that are missing in other parks in Southern Pines or nearby, like accessible trails and trails without dogs everywhere.

Thank you for including public input! These are excellent ideas.

Prescribed fire plans...maintaining and upkeeping the native plants and grasses - the ground cover is most threatened.

Whitehall has always been a residence set within a larger nature preserve with trails for exercise and enjoying the beauty of the trees, meadows, ponds, and wildlife.

UTILIZE EXISTING PARK AMENITIES

91%

support using the restrooms and playground at Elizabeth Rounds in lieu of building this infrastructure at Whitehall.



I would like to see more active experiences for children. It does not need to be a traditional playground, but some small elements throughout that make this space accessible for young families.

I know Whitehall will change but I feel we need to keep it as natural as possible. Too many innovations will detract from the natural beauty.

I am concerned with the idea of putting parking and other intensive activities near the Red cockaded woodpecker preserve.



The community prefers adding a parking lot to Reservoir Park instead of building a lot off PeeDee Rd. (which is close to the RCW habitat).



We can "tread lightly" at Whitehall by limiting construction activity. A parking lot can be added at the entrance of Reservoir Park to connect to the Whitehall trails. The bathrooms at Elizabeth Rounds and Reservoir can serve Whitehall. These choices not only help preserve Whitehall, but are also budget friendly!



67%

do not want primitive campsites at Whitehall. Only 16% expressed some degree of support.

I do NOT want ropes and adventure courses at Whitehall whether free or not.



The ropes course needs to happen. There is nothing on this location for kids and this would be different than any other park location.

The campsite idea is not ideal to me since it creates security and sanitary concerns. It seems out of place in this park.

59%

do not want to see an adventure ropes course at Whitehall. Of those who may be interested, they would prefer to use it if it were free of charge.

Based on community feedback, the adventure ropes course and primitive campsites are not included in the final master plan.





17%

say the separation of dogs and humans at Whitehall is essential.

84%

support some separation of dogs and people.

16%

say dogs should be allowed everywhere at Whitehall.



Enforcement of dog leash requirement needed unless a trail for dogs only is provided.

To suggest that dogs be restricted to certain areas is just absurd to me.

An exclusive off leash dog trail. Friendly dogs only.

I would REALLY like "passive dog walking space" where my dogs can be off leash but also away from public if the public doesn't like them. So many Whitehall users right now enjoy excessive dog wandering space.



Decisions about dogs using Whitehall is a policy matter. The master plan allows for flexibility in operating rules with regard to dogs. There is community support for doing something different at Whitehall and the Town can further analyze options when formal rules for Whitehall are established.