

Town of Hildebran Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan



April 2021

Town of Hildebran Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan

Prepared for:

Town of Hildebran

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April 2021

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**Town of Hildebran
Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan**

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Section I Introduction

Section Overview

Background

Methodology

Town of Hildebran Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan

Introduction

Background

The Town of Hildebran is a small town in eastern Burke County, just west of the City of Hickory. Hildebran, named for its early settlers, was first incorporated in 1899 and re-incorporated in 1973, and it maintains a strong connection with its heritage as the seat of the historical Hildebran High School, originally constructed in 1917. In the years between 1957 and 1965, the auditorium, gymnasium, and new main school building were added. These buildings—and the stairwell tower from the 1920's schoolhouse—still stand in the town-owned Albert L. Parkhurst Municipal Complex where, for a number of years, the 1950's schoolhouse served as the Hildebran Town Hall.



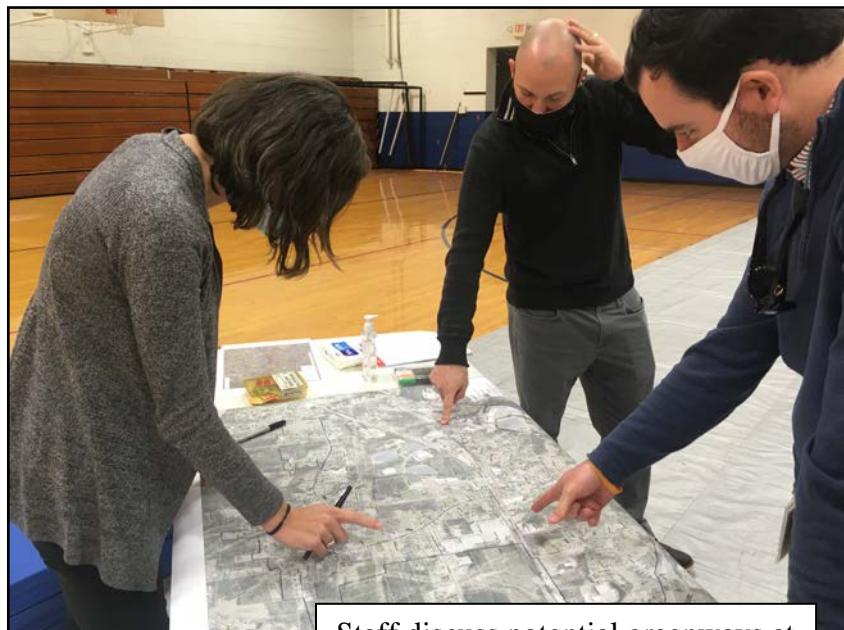
Remaining stairwell tower from historic Hildebran High School, 2020.

The town received a grant from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) to build its first park, Hildebran Community Park, which opened in the summer of 2012. The park offers swings, playground equipment, a nine-hole disc golf course, fitness

equipment, a bocce court, a horseshoe area, and a ¼ mile walking trail. In addition, a large, paved parking lot is centrally located, serving the covered picnic pavilion and historical train depot building, which are available for rental. A small sidewalk network is present in some areas of town, which is used for recreation and for transportation by some residents without access to an automobile. Several funded sidewalk improvements are upcoming in Hildebran, and they are discussed in the coming chapters.

A recent renewed interest in building a town park within the Parkhurst Complex, as well as ongoing regional greenway trail initiatives, have spurred the need to review the community's park and facility priorities. The Town recognizes the need to plan for the maintenance and improvement of these facilities and to seek the public's insight regarding future recreational opportunities. In 2020, the Town hired the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) to develop a comprehensive town-wide parks plan. This plan should serve as a road map

for the next 10 years, informing policy and budgetary decisions as they relate to parks and pedestrian facilities. WPCOG planning staff has worked closely with town staff and thoroughly considered public input for the development of this plan.



Staff discuss potential greenways at December public meeting, 2020.

Methodology

The Town acknowledged from the onset that public input must weigh in heavily in order for the planning process to be successful. In order to gain a strong understanding

Section I. Introduction

of public perceptions and desires regarding recreation, the Town sought public input through a community-wide recreation survey, a pre-advertised focus group meeting, and periodic review by the project team. The comments provided by the 7 public meeting attendees and the 69 survey responses assisted the team greatly in selecting and prioritizing projects. In selecting the final priority ranking for projects, the project team considered survey responses as well as project costs and coordination with other projects.

Section II Demographics

Section Overview

This section of the study looks at the town's growth from 2000 to 2019 and compares it to other governmental units. It also looks at what age groups in Hildebran have population increases and which groups have population decreases. An analysis of Hildebran Income levels and Owners vs. Renters is also included in the analysis.

Demographics

Demographics for Hildebran

Between 2000 and 2010, the population of Hildebran increased 37.4% from 1,472 to 2,023. Burke County's population grew 2.0% between 2000 and 2010, while the Hickory MSA's (Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties combined) population grew 6.9% and the State's population gained 18.5%. Population estimates indicate that the population of Hildebran has fallen 1.1% since 2010 to 2,001 in 2019. Burke County's population is estimated to have grown by 823 since 2010, while a population gain of 2.2% occurred in the Hickory MSA. Between 2010 and 2019, North Carolina's population increased 10.0% while the US population grew 6.3%.

Table 1.
Population Change (2000-2019)

Place	2000	2010	Change 2000-2010	% Increase 2000-10	2019	Change 2010-2019	% Change 2010-19
Hildebran	1,472	2,023	551	37.4	2,001	-22	-1.1
Burke Co.	89,145	90,912	1,767	2.0	91,660	823	0.9
Hickory MSA	341,851	365,497	23,646	6.9	373,456	7,959	2.2
N. Carolina	8,049,313	9,535,483	1,486,170	18.5	10,487,088	951,605	10.0
U.S.A	281,421,900	308,745,538	27,323,638	9.7	328,239,523	19,493,985	6.3

Source: 2000 and 2010 Census, US Census Bureau and NC Office of Budget and Management, 2020.

Census results clearly show that the older population is steadily increasing in Hildebran and recreation activities should be geared for this group. The population of Hildebran's age 45 to 59 group grew from 256 in 2000 to 429 in 2010. The 173-person growth in the age 45 to 59 cohort was the largest age group population increase in Hildebran between 2000 and 2010. The second largest age group increase in Hildebran between 2000 and 2010 was in the 60 and over group. The population of the 60 and over cohort increased from 338 in 2000 to 502 in 2010. The 164-person increase is due to the aging of the “baby boomer” generation.

Table 2.
Hildebran Population Change Age Groups (2000-2010)

Age Group	2000	2010	Change + or (-)
Under 10	196	242	46
10-19	161	237	76
20-44	521	613	92
45-59	256	429	173
60 and over	338	502	164
Total	1,472	2,023	551

Source: 2000 and 2010 Census, US Census Bureau.

Population growth of 46 children occurred in Hildebran's under age 10 group between 2000 and 2010. The number of persons in the 10 to 19 group increased from 161 in 2000 to 237 in 2010. Population gains also took place in age 20 to 44 group. The population of the 20-44 cohort rose from 521 in 2000 to 613 in 2010.

Income Levels for Hildebran

The median household income for Hildebran according to results of the 2014-2018 American Community Survey was \$39,167 while the average (or mean) household income was \$56,245. More than 25% (27%) of Hildebran's population live in households whose income was below the federal poverty level. Nearly half of households in Hildebran earn less than \$35,000 annually. About 11% of households earn more than \$100,000.

Table 3.
Hildebran Household Income Levels, 2014-18 ACS

Age Group	Number	%
Less than \$10,000	110	13.1%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	72	8.6%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	96	11.4%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	129	15.4%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	118	14.0%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	150	17.9%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	75	8.9%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	51	6.1%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	25	3.0%
\$200,000 or more	14	1.7%
Total Households	840	
Median Household Income	\$39,167	
Mean Household Income	\$56,245	

Source: 2014-2018 American Community Survey (ACS), US Census Bureau.

Hildebran Renter vs. Owner Characteristics

Results from the 2014-2018 ACS reveal that Hildebran had 914 housing units. Close to 92% of housing units were occupied, while about 8% were vacant. More than 80% of housing units are detached 1-unit structures, while 14.3% were mobile homes. About 69% of occupied housings were owner-occupied, while the remaining 31% were renter occupied. The median housing value was \$140,900 with median owner costs (for owner-occupied units with a mortgage) of \$1,114. Median gross rent in Hildebran in 2014-18 was \$658. Rent takes a large proportion of household income for many renters. For 70.1% of renters in Hildebran, rent costs more than 30% of annual household income.

Table 4.
Hildebran Housing Characteristics, 2014-18 ACS

<i>Age Group</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Total Housing Units</i>	914	100.0%
<i>Occupied Housing Units</i>	840	91.9%
<i>Vacant Housing Units</i>	74	8.1%
<i>1-unit detached Units</i>	754	82.5%
<i>Multi-Unit Housing</i>	29	3.2%
<i>Mobile Homes</i>	131	14.3%
<i>Owner-Occupied Housing Units</i>	580	69% of Occupied Units
<i>Renter-Occupied Housing Units</i>	260	31% of Occupied Units
<i>Median House Value</i>	\$140,900	N/A
<i>Median Selected Monthly Owner Cost (with Mortgage)</i>	\$1,114	N/A
<i>Median Gross Rent</i>	\$658	N/A
<i>Gross Rent 30% or More of Household Income</i>	159	70.1% of Occupied Units Paying Rent

Source: 2014-2018 American Community Survey (ACS), US Census Bureau.

Section III Public Input

Section Overview

This section of the study looks at how Hildebran involved a broad range and representative number of citizens in preparing the plan.

Background

Survey

Public Input Meeting

Summary

Background

With recent discussions regarding the development of a new town park and restoration of historical high school structure, a number of conflicting visions for the town-owned Parkhurst Complex exist. In response to the considerable interest and fundraising by community groups, the Town (in partnership with Hildebran Historical Development Association, HHDA) has contracted to stabilize the remaining brick tower from the historic school building to serve as a historical community monument, which should be completed by Summer 2021. Significant community interest indicated a strong desire to update the property for use as a park and events location, and the Town contracted with WPCOG staff to create a system-wide plan for parks and pedestrian facilities. The Town of Hildebran understood the importance of public input in informing the development of this plan.

The project team prepared a two-page survey that was distributed through the Town Hall and East Burke Senior Center, as well as an electronic version available on the Town websites, asking respondents questions regarding current and future parks in the Town. The survey was shared in October 2020 and was available through December 2020. Approximately 300 surveys were handed out, and a total of 69 responses were collected (63 online; 6 paper surveys). Over 50% of the survey respondents were between the ages of 45-64, the largest demographic segment in the town limits, with several expressing their preference for accessibly designed sidewalks and park features. This demographic segment is consistently growing, and new recreational amenities should be designed accordingly. It is important to note that, though most survey respondents reported an above-average household income, over 25% of Hildebran's population live in households which income is below the federal poverty level. Likewise, for most renters in Hildebran, rent costs more than the recommended 30% of household income, meaning that few resources remain for personal recreation equipment or other desires. The Town's future park improvements should account for an aging population and should serve those with impaired mobility and scarce personal resources.

Despite the challenges presented by the Coronavirus pandemic, the Town was able to host one socially distanced public input meeting, inviting the public to attend and provide

feedback regarding park design, connectivity needs, and parks in general. The meeting, held from 6-7 pm on December 1, 2020 at the town-owned gymnasium on South Center Street, was pre-advertised and promoted via the Town's website and social media, as well as the electronic message sign located on Highway 70 entering town. Due to the ongoing pandemic and winter cold, only 7 people attended the public meeting. Nonetheless, the input gathered from this meeting and the 69 survey responses were used to determine priorities for development and renovation at the existing park and for development needs for future parks. The Town of Hildebran strives to keep an open dialogue regarding community needs, and future public input will help to refine the longer-term projects.

During the planning period, the project team convened and conversed several times to review the plan. The committee prioritized final recommendations based on the detailed survey responses.

Survey

In October 2020, the Project Team developed a two-page survey to be distributed in Hudson that asked for citizen input regarding the existing park, potential pedestrian improvements, and future park facilities. The survey was available at Hildebran Town Hall (drive-through only due to pandemic) and the East Burke Senior Center, located in Hildebran. The survey was available for approximately two months, and—in that time—69 people responded. Approximately 300 surveys were handed out with a total of 69 responses received by the Town; the estimated response rate is 20%. The survey and results can be viewed on the following pages:

Town of Hildebran Parks Survey

- 1. How many persons living in your household (counting yourself) are?**
- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under age 10 | <input type="checkbox"/> Age 25-34 | <input type="checkbox"/> Age 55-64 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Age 10-19 | <input type="checkbox"/> Age 35-44 | <input type="checkbox"/> Age 65-74 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Age 20-24 | <input type="checkbox"/> Age 45-54 | <input type="checkbox"/> Age 75+ |
- 2. What is your age?**
- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under age 10 | <input type="checkbox"/> Age 25-34 | <input type="checkbox"/> Age 55-64 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Age 10-19 | <input type="checkbox"/> Age 35-44 | <input type="checkbox"/> Age 65-74 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Age 20-24 | <input type="checkbox"/> Age 45-54 | <input type="checkbox"/> Age 75+ |
- 3. Do you live in the Town of Hildebran?**
- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
- 4. Do you work or play in the Town of Hildebran?**
- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
- 5. What is your household income?**
- | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under \$20,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$20,000 - \$34,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$35,000 – \$49,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000 - \$74,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$75,000 - \$99,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100,000 or more | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say | |
- 6. What is your ethnicity?**
- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-hispanic |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
- 7. Greenways are defined as natural or landscaped, linear open spaces, often along a natural feature, such as a stream or ridge. They typically link parks or other features and provide trails for walking, jogging, running, and biking. They can become travel routes between major public facilities and other points of interest.**
- Would you be in favor or oppose expanding network of greenways and sidewalks throughout Town of Hildebran?**
- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Favor | <input type="checkbox"/> Oppose |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
- 8. What features would most interest you in a new greenway trail or sidewalk?**
- Attractive natural scenery for recreation
 - Access to parks and open spaces
 - Location in relation to shopping and other community facilities
 - Potential tourism draw for Hildebran businesses
 - Lighting and other safety features
 - Loop route
 - Connection to larger trail system in Burke and Catawba Counties
 - Connection from your neighborhood to community center/amenities
 - Paved walking surface; ADA accessible slopes
 - Particular location of interest in Hildebran. Where? _____
- 9. Check below improvements that could be made to Hildebran's existing park?**
- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Add lighting to facilities | <input type="checkbox"/> Increase beautification in parks (<i>landscaping, maintenance</i>) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Add more public restrooms | <input type="checkbox"/> Add more parks and open space |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Add picnic and seating areas | <input type="checkbox"/> Add ADA accessible playground features |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Improve walking path/trail accessibility | <input type="checkbox"/> Add sidewalk/greenway connection to neighborhoods |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | |

- 10.** *The Town of Hildebran owns the property on South Center Street that once housed the historic Hildebran High School. The Town is seeking public input regarding a proposal to build a park on this property.*
Would you be in favor or oppose using tax dollars to fund park development and improvement?
 Favor Oppose

11. **Please check ALL facilities from the list below that you feel should be developed at this new park or throughout the Town of Hildebran. Please consider other members of your household as well.**
 Outdoor Exercise Equipment Bocce Courts Open Space/Natural Areas
 Disc Golf Greenway Connections Horseshoe Pits
 Walking Track Sand Volleyball Courts Shuffleboard Courts
 Splash pad Pickle Ball Outdoor Restrooms
 Covered Picnic Area Dog Park Outdoor Stage
 Outdoor Basketball Courts Multi-use Sports Fields Playgrounds
 Other: _____

12. **Do you have any other thoughts you'd like to share regarding the Town of Hildebran's parks or walking/biking routes?**

13. **What do you want visitors to know about Hildebran? For example--history, restaurants, natural beauty... what does the town represent to you?**

Town of Hildebran Parks Survey (*Results*)

69 Total Responses (63 online / 6 paper)

- 1.** **How many persons living in your household (counting yourself) are?**

<u>25</u> Under age 10	<u>20</u> Age 25-34	<u>34</u> Age 55-64
<u>31</u> Age 10-19	<u>30</u> Age 35-44	<u>5</u> Age 65-74
<u>11</u> Age 20-24	<u>42</u> Age 45-54	<u>5</u> Age 75+

2. **What is your age?**

<u>0</u> Under age 10	<u>9</u> Age 25-34	<u>15</u> Age 55-64
<u>1</u> Age 10-19	<u>14</u> Age 35-44	<u>3</u> Age 65-74
<u>1</u> Age 20-24	<u>24</u> Age 45-54	<u>2</u> Age 75+

3. **Do you live in the Town of Hildebran?**

<u>34</u> Yes	<u>35</u> No
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4. **Do you work or play in the Town of Hildebran?**

<u>59</u> Yes	<u>10</u> No
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5. **What is your household income?**

<u>3</u> Under \$20,000	<u>6</u> \$20,000 - \$34,999	<u>6</u> \$35,000 – \$49,999	<u>19</u> \$50,000 - \$74,999
<u>10</u> \$75,000 - \$99,999	<u>11</u> \$100,000 or more	<u>14</u> Prefer not to say	

6. **What is your ethnicity?**

<u>1</u> Hispanic	<u>65</u> Non-Hispanic
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7. *Greenways are defined as natural or landscaped, linear open spaces, often along a natural feature, such as a stream or ridge. They typically link parks or other features and provide trails for walking, jogging, running, and biking. They can become travel routes between major public facilities and other points of interest.*

Would you be in favor or oppose expanding network of greenways and sidewalks throughout Town of Hildebran?

<u>60</u> Favor	<u>7</u> Oppose
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8. **What features would most interest you in a new greenway trail or sidewalk?**

<u>42</u> Attractive natural scenery for recreation
<u>40</u> Access to parks and open spaces
<u>13</u> Location in relation to shopping and other community facilities
<u>21</u> Potential tourism draw for Hildebran businesses
<u>44</u> Lighting and other safety features
<u>24</u> Loop route
<u>21</u> Connection to larger trail system in Burke and Catawba Counties
<u>16</u> Connection from your neighborhood to community center/amenities
<u>32</u> Paved walking surface; ADA accessible slopes

Particular location of interest in Hildebran. **Where?**

 - **Henry River area (x2)**
 - **Connect to Hildebran Park**

9. **Check below improvements that could be made to Hildebran's existing park?**

<u>33</u> Add lighting to facilities	<u>22</u> Increase beautification in parks (<i>landscaping</i> ,
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12. Do you have any other thoughts you'd like to share regarding the Town of Hildebran's parks or walking/biking routes?

 - *More things for children. Also the pool area looks like a dump now and needs to be cleaned up. It used to be a nice area to take the kids swimming.*
 - *I would LOVE sidewalks extended to make crossing over the railroad tracks and/or bridge safer*
 - *A nice well-lit walking track would be great!*
 - *We need to have handicapped accessible facilities throughout the town.*

- *We already have a park with picnic area. The new park needs to be more of an entertainment area. A nice kitchen facility would help churches and youth organizations raise money during concerts. Also it would be safer to prepare or store food.*
- *Please keep in mind concerning older disabled citizens who would like easy access to walking trails. Thanks you and God bless.*
- *The old school could be a hub for biking or walking trails. Would have room to park and then bike to other smaller locations or businesses. To bike down to Henry River and back towards NC Hwy 10, and back to the Hub.*
- *Need a bike path.*
- *Town pool would be nice. We miss the old one.*
- *I live on N Center Street past the fire department and would like a safe and easy accessible way to cross the train track. The bridge is often congested and people drive too fast on the bridge.*
- *Just hope you are able to make good use of the space where the high school was.*
- *Looking forward to changes in park and greenway*
- *Would love to see the Town connect its existing sidewalks to the proposed Burke/Catawba River Trail initiative.*
- *Keep it simple and peaceful. Make it beautiful, not destroy the area with a stage or splash pad.*
- *We need more sidewalks and hopefully some new businesses/restaurants in town. There is already a park at the old depot. I don't think we need another one.*
- *Connectivity is important.*
- *Promote and maintain*
- *Needs to be more information and promotion so people know what is available. Town needs to support HHDA because they provide lots of activities for our town.*

13. What do you want visitors to know about Hildebran? For example--history, restaurants, natural beauty... what does the town represent to you?

- *We would love to explore the history of our town and have festivals related to our community.*
- *Great school and location. Great little small town.*
- *Good, friendly people; yummy restaurants.*
- *Hildebran is home to me. <3*
- *History and natural beauty*
- *History and that it has a vibrancy – a good place to live, work, and play*
- *History and museum*
- *That we are open to individuals with special needs and welcome them to Hildebran*
- *We need to offer more about our heritage and use the many older mills like Hickory has. We really need a nice restaurant or brew pub.*
- *History – I had the pleasure of attending Hildebran High School for the last 2 years before it closed. I was devastated when that happened. I pray that the town will preserve it and continue to make improvements.*
- *Growing up here. It needs to expand and bring in new business. There no growth.*
- *Family, tight-knit community, that stands for family values. We need to clean up all the trash walking up and down our roads and make everyone a outside area for families to hang out and bike/walk. I want people to know we are trying to put our best foot forward by getting all the druggies out.*
- *History, charm, becoming a destination.*
- *The history of the town.*
- *The history*
- *History*
- *So many of our store fronts are closed. I would like to see more business in the town again.*
- *History and family*
- *The town is home to me. I have lived in many difference places through the years and Hildebran has always been home. We are a small town, but we are mighty and strong.*
- *History. The Town of Hildebran represents family to me.*

Section III. Public Input

- *History—tower/high school, Henry River Mill Village, churches.*
- *This town has an easy-going feel to it, with a few local places and a few fast food spaces, along with convenience to larger towns when necessary.*
- *History.*
- *Moved here 8 years ago so don't know much of the history except the Mill Village. If they are able to restore it or do something with it, then transportation between the two sites would be a good attraction. History for the older people and Hunger Games for the youth. Can't really afford sampling restaurants, but I do love the natural beauty.*
- *Right off the road in any direction, there lots of beautiful nature to enjoy.*
- *Small town feeling*
- *Natural beauty*
- *Beauty*
- *The Town is working to create a business-friendly, residential-friendly environment where commercial and residential growth are the primary focus of the town.*
- *I would like the Town to have a modern, fresh place for families to come and visit. Currently, most everything is old and ugly.*
- *Hildebran could be so much more than what it currently is. Surrounding towns have restaurants and small shops and are thriving. It would be nice to be able to do this in Hildebran.*
- *History... It can be a gateway into Burke County and the town has a lot of history*
- *History*
- *History*
- *History*
- *All of the above. Town leaders need to work together to show unity and support groups willing to provide entertainment, etc. for our town.*

Public Input Meeting

The project team hosted one socially distanced public input meeting, inviting the public to attend and provide feedback regarding park design, connectivity needs, and parks in general. The meeting, held from 6-7 pm on December 1, 2020 at the town-owned gymnasium on South Center Street, was pre-advertised and promoted via the Town's website and social media, as well as the electronic message sign located on Highway 70 entering town. Due to the ongoing pandemic and winter cold, only 7 people attended the public meeting and discussed Town facilities with staff.

In order to facilitate meaningful participation while minimizing potential exposure to the coronavirus, the meeting consisted of four separate stations in different corners of the gymnasium. The sign-in station offered paper parks surveys, one station focused conversation on restoration of tower on historical high school property, one station displayed a town-wide map to review existing sidewalks and potential greenway locations, and one station had an aerial photograph of the proposed new park property and movable to-scale park amenities to help visualize a completed site plan. While only a few participants were in attendance, discussion from this meeting provided clarity, particularly regarding the proposed downtown park. Given the park's small size and proximity to existing Town park with playgrounds, discussion indicated that the new park should be largely-passive and peaceful, with naturalized landscaping and nice spaces to gather or take a lunch break. Though there are a number of possible park elements that have been requested and could fit on-site, this overarching vision of a unique and serene greenspace guides the final recommendations for park development.

Summary

The public input results, including survey responses, write-in comments, and public meeting participation, were thoroughly reviewed by the project team, as they will inform the recommendations of this plan. The park improvements/additions with the greatest public support are:

Section III. Public Input

1. Greenways and sidewalk connections throughout the Town
2. Accessible, level walking path through the new Town Park
3. Splash pad at the new Town Park
4. Outdoor accessible restrooms at the new Town Park
5. Peaceful sitting spaces and picnic shelter for groups at new Town Park

There was also considerable support for more playground equipment, an outdoor stage for events, a dog park, and multi-use sports field. With regard to greenways and walking/biking routes, comments indicated that safety is a great concern—including lighting and visibility, even walking surfaces, and safe cross-walks. If a new greenway route is established, it should prioritize safety, attractive scenery, and access to open space.

The input from surveys and public meeting has provided the foundation for Hildebran's park improvement planning. The following pages will provide a more detailed discussion of recommended projects and which factors—beyond public input—play into their prioritization.

Section IV. Existing Parks and Facilities

Section Overview

Inventory and Recommendations for Town-Owned Parks

Inventory and Recommendations for Biking/Pedestrian Network

Inventory of Parks and Open Space Near Hildebran

General Recommendations

Inventory and Recommendations for Town-Owned Parks

The Town of Hildebran owns and operates several facilities, including the Town Hall property, Hildebran Community Park, and the Albert Parkhurst Municipal Complex (which began its life as a school, and was more recently occupied as the Town Hall). The Parkhurst complex includes the Hildebran Auditorium, Gymnasium, 1950's school building containing Community Center, Sheriff's Department, and space available for rent. Though the original 1917 school building burned down in recent years, the historical tower still stands as a tribute to the beloved local high school. Approximately one acre of the Parkhurst complex is currently undeveloped and under consideration for a new pocket park.

Hildebran Community Park

Established in 2012 with assistance from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF), the Hildebran Community Park is the first and only town-owned park. This 3.5-acre park is located

within an easy walk of
Town Hall and the
Municipal Complex, as
well as surrounding high-
density residential areas.

The park offers swings,
playground equipment, a
nine-hole disc golf course,
outdoor fitness equipment,
a bocce court, a horseshoe
area, and a ¼ mile walking

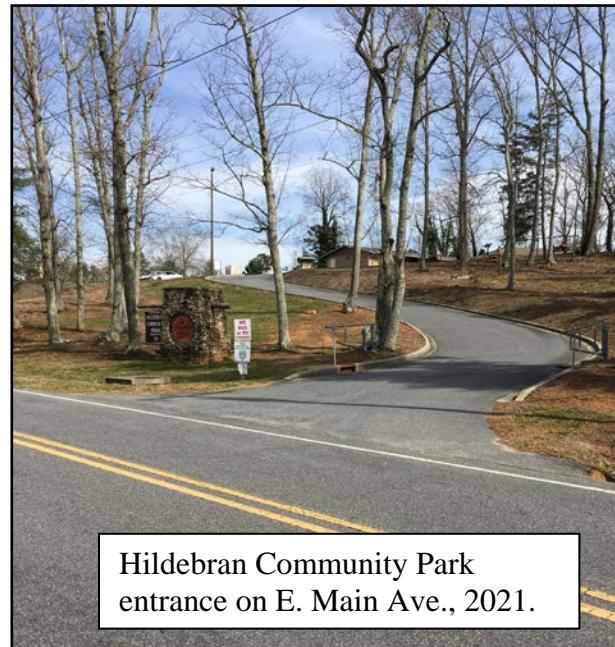


trail connecting facilities with the large parking area. The park also offers a 30'x75' covered picnic pavilion, which includes men's and women's restrooms, and a remodeled historical train depot that are available to rent for special occasions. The park facilities

are often utilized for birthday parties and children's free play. Being that the park's facilities are relatively new and well-maintained, and that the small space is built out nearly to capacity, there are few improvements needed at this time. Some considerations for this park are listed below:

Recommendations:

1. **Unsafe sidewalk connection.** Sidewalks along East Main Avenue connect the park with the downtown district and nearby apartment complex. However, the existing sidewalk (discussed later in this section) is located on the northern side of the street, and there is no safe way across to the park entrance. The park entrance is located near a blind curve and in an area with challenging slopes. A crosswalk and/or other design features should be implemented to improve pedestrian visibility.



Hildebran Community Park entrance on E. Main Ave., 2021.

2. **ADA Standards.** While portions of the $\frac{1}{4}$ mile walking trail may be considered accessible, the park's topography precludes it from offering a truly accessible walking route for the Town's significant aging and disabled populations. However, to the extent possible, care should be



Inaccessible playground border at Community Park, 2021.

taken to ensure that park facilities can be accessed by all users. This could include

adding guardrails near steep slopes, installing new playground surfacing, and adding thresholds over any borders. Ground play elements should be included, which can be utilized by those of all ability levels.

3. **Beautification and site maintenance.** The park site, while relatively new and well-maintained, is showing signs of wear in some areas. General maintenance is effective in keeping the grounds clean and mowed, but additional landscaping could be installed to enhance existing features while protecting against erosion. With the park's existing naturalized feel, the addition of certain native plant species and pollinator gardens can enhance wildlife viewing.

Gymnasium / Albert Parkhurst Complex

The Albert L. Parkhurst complex, named for a former Hildebran Mayor, began its life as a school in 1917 and has been operated by the Town of Hildebran for many years. The complex includes the Hildebran Auditorium; Gymnasium; a storage/restroom building that is leased by Burke County Recreation; and the 1950's school building containing Community Center, Sheriff's Department, and Town Council Chambers. Though the original 1917 school building burned down in recent years, the historical tower, containing an old stairwell, still stands as a tribute to the beloved local high school. The Town of Hildebran and the Hildebran Heritage Development Association (HHDA) are partnering to fund the stabilization of the tower with structural supports. The approximate 2 acres surrounding the old building footprint and extending into the



rear parking area is under consideration for a new pocket park, a complement to the property's current uses.

The Town currently operates the gymnasium, auditorium, and community center as hourly rentals. The Parkhurst complex also serves as the site of the Town's seasonal farmers' market, and the large parking area is often utilized for Cruise-Ins or other outdoor events. An additional parking area in the rear serves the town complex and the adjacent elementary school ballfields, programmed by Burke County Recreation.

Recommendations:

1. **Enhance landscaping**, particularly along South Center Street sidewalk, and tie in with new park landscaping. Add benches along the sidewalk.
Landscaping should invite sidewalk users into the town complex to enjoy the park.



- 2. Evaluate safety and accessibility of concession building; consider demolition.**

The concessions building in the rear of the complex, currently used by Burke County Recreation, was constructed in 1953 and is in severe disrepair. Outdated stormwater management and ongoing

Sidewalk between S. Center St. and Parkhurst Complex, 2021.

erosion have created a number of hazardous areas near the exterior base of the building. If this structure cannot reasonably be repaired and upfit for modern accessibility standards, the Town should consider demolishing the building. Options should be evaluated with the input of Burke County—an ongoing stakeholder with adjacent ball fields. Demolition would free space on site for the

construction of a new concessions/restroom building, green space, or a new park amenity. Extra asphalt in this area should also be demolished to reduce impervious surfacing on-site, and any new amenities should be connected to the main park site with a designated pedestrian walkway.

3. **Utilize vacant space within gymnasium building.** Approximately 4000 square feet in the rear of the gymnasium building is current empty or underutilized. With minimal investment, the Town could update this space to house a meeting room (to complement the gymnasium's rental by parties, this space could accommodate food serving) and/or locker rooms for basketball teams.

New Town Park:

The site of the historical school building and rear parking area, within the Albert L. Parkhurst town complex, has been proposed as a new downtown park for Hildebran. The site is



approximately two acres and features the remaining school stairwell tower. The tower will be rehabilitated in Spring 2021, to stabilize the structure following the 2017 fire on the property and prepare it as a monument to the Town's history.

Future site of new Town Park, 2021.

The remainder of the park site is vacant and relatively flat, with a gradual slope down from the entrance on South Center Street to the abutting ball fields to the west. The complex offers extensive parking in the front and rear, as well as sidewalk connections to the downtown district on S. Center Street. With much of the complex and surrounding property developed with impervious surfaces, the Town would like to emphasize park landscaping for a relaxing and inviting green space—an oasis in the downtown district.

The park should feature elements or themes that are unique to Hildebran. For many survey respondents, Hildebran represents familial ties, history, and the beauty of the natural environment. These themes will be incorporated into the design of the new park, featuring the historical school tower, artistic renderings of area wildlife, landscaping with native plants, and gathering spaces that foster a sense of community. This park can also serve as a central hub for future greenway trail networks in Hildebran.

Recommendations:

Public comments and survey results indicated strong support for development of the new park on South Center Street. The park could serve as a central hub for future greenway networks and is well located for town events. Park amenities should serve (and be accessible to) all users, be unique to Hildebran, and complement the existing uses within the town complex.

1. **Develop a meandering, level-surface walking trail** around the park, creating a looped walking route with accessible pedestrian connections to all park amenities. This path would connect with existing sidewalk on South Center Street, completing a pedestrian route to Town Hall and other amenities. Survey responses and community conversations have indicated a strong desire for a level walking loop at this park, which would serve populations with disabilities who cannot safely utilize the steep walking loop at the existing town park. With a creative, meandering design, this path can serve as a walking loop while also providing accessible routes to each of the park's amenities. Following the right-of-way at First Street SW, this path could ultimately be connected with the existing walking track on the adjacent school property.
2. **Provide a covered picnic area near the gymnasium.** One of the most popular amenities requested at the new park is a covered picnic area. This can be utilized informally for picnicking, during outdoor events, and can be rented by group parties. It is common for the gymnasium to be rented for children's birthday parties, although no food or drink is allowed inside. A picnic area positioned near the gymnasium entrance could complement existing uses and provide a space for serving cake.

3. **Splash pad.** Strong community support is evident for a splash pad: a great option for aquatic recreation without the considerable expense of maintaining, operating, and



Splash pad in nearby Morganton, roughly 40' diameter. Morganton News Herald, 2019.

insuring a swimming pool. The nearest splash pads to Hildebran are currently in Valdese and Hickory, and residents would like a place to cool off locally. A splash pad could also become a destination for families outside Hildebran, drawing them into town to eat lunch and shop at local stores. By utilizing the existing slope of the park site—and potentially partnering with Burke County for ball field irrigation—the used splash pad water (untreated with pool chemicals) can be safely released back to the soil without the cost of filtering or sewer treatment.

4. **Small outdoor stage** for events, such as outdoor concerts and school field trips. This should be properly scaled to accommodate a small group of musicians but not to dominate the intimate one-acre park. The stage should be served with electricity, which is readily available on-site. In placing the stage, consider the angle of the sun for evening events. Strategically-planted shade trees can ensure that the stage is visible to spectators during sundown events. The stage should include a ramp for ADA access and movement of heavy equipment. In order to accommodate a range of different events and gathering sizes, the Town should consider an open-air stage design that is covered with a roof but open on all sides.

5. **Seating and landscaping.** It is important to provide seating along the walking route and throughout the park for peaceful enjoyment. Landscaping should be used to enhance the seating areas and other park amenities, and large shade trees may be planted to block the setting sun at evening events. Landscaping should include a whimsical mix of native shrubs, trees, and flowering plants. Care should be taken to ensure landscaping does not block visibility of park areas for police patrol.
6. **Interactive art features and/or small play structures.** Whimsical art installations and interactive features should be included in site design to create a strong sense of place. The town should seek out local artists to brainstorm possible installations, including metalworking, stained glass, sculptures, and/or murals. Preliminary discussions have centered on statues or other three-dimensional objects with which park users can interact. Interactive sculptures, such as those located at zoos, can also serve as great photo opportunities, drawing more attention and park users to the community.
7. **Provide outdoor restrooms** for park users. Restrooms will be open to park users during regular hours. This could be achieved in a number of ways: retrofitting the rear of the gymnasium building that is not currently in use, updating the storage building restrooms that currently serve the school's adjacent ball fields, or installing a stand-alone restroom facility on-site. Restrooms should be ADA-accessible and in

good repair. Based on preliminary research, the most efficient and cost-effective option to achieve safe and accessible restrooms would be building or installing a new structure.



8. **Construct a concessions space.** A concessions area would serve attendees at concerts and staged events and could be rented out for private parties. The existing concessions building on the property—currently occupied by the Burke County Board of Education for the adjacent school ball fields—is outdated and in disrepair. If this outdated building is demolished, a new concessions structure could be built where it stood—a central location serving the ball fields and the town park. Some joint use agreement with the school system may be possible to support this amenity.

Inventory and Recommendations for Biking/Pedestrian Network

Pedestrian infrastructure is found throughout Town of Hildebran. Sidewalks are present and/or planned and connect several surrounding neighborhoods to popular destinations within Hildebran. The study team conducted a walking audit of the existing pedestrian infrastructure within Hildebran. Walking audits note mobility barriers and determine the safety and accessibility of pedestrian infrastructure for all neighborhoods and ability levels. Many, such as those with disabilities or neighborhoods with lower incomes rely on a fully established pedestrian network for safe transportation. Pedestrian networks that are not well connected or have unsafe amenities could result in pedestrian accidents and fatalities. While most pedestrian infrastructure in Hildebran is in overall good condition, the study team noted specific areas that could use improvement or better connectivity for mobility. Recommended improvements serve to display more hazardous examples found during the walking audit and do not represent a comprehensive review of the current pedestrian network. The following recommendations highlight existing safety hazards and proposed new walking routes through the town. For more information regarding priority of projects and potential funding options, refer to the following chapters.

Recommendations:

1. **Improve safety and connectivity of crosswalk at the intersection of Main Avenue and South Center Street.** The sidewalk ends abruptly creating a

hazardous surface for persons with wheelchairs, walkers, or strollers.

The lack of detectable warnings make this crossing dangerous

for those visually impaired. Detectable warnings serve as warnings at roadways for those visually impaired. This intersection is in

close proximity to the Public Library and Senior Center.



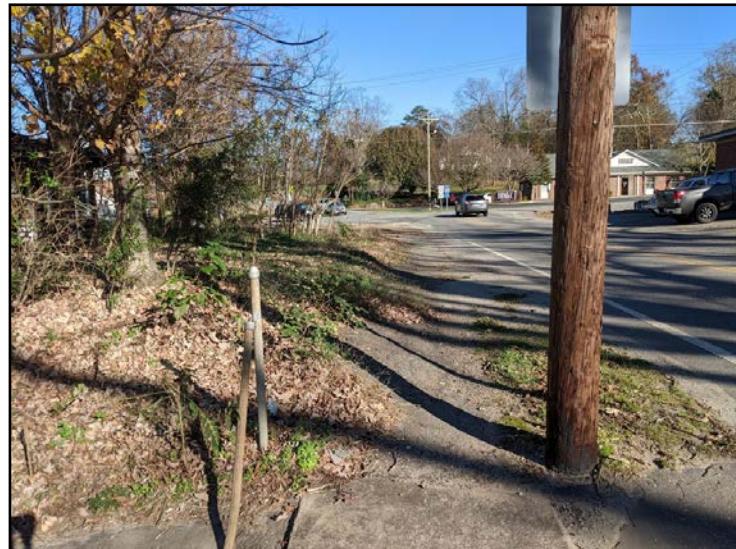
Continuation of sidewalk on Main Avenue West – note the gap between the crosswalk pictured above and the continuation of sidewalk below. The resulting terrain of the gap is hazardous for pedestrians.

2. Close gaps in sidewalk network on Main Avenue West and connect to South Center Street.

Sidewalk extends to

the neighborhood on Main Ave West, but does not connect to South Center Street.

The picture below shows where the current sidewalk begins after a residential driveway cut/parking area. Persons in wheelchairs, those with visual impairments, and able-bodied citizens cannot safely navigate the area between sidewalk



sections. While inventorying this sidewalk segment, the study team noted a cyclist utilizing sidewalk (where available) as a safer alternative to the roadway.



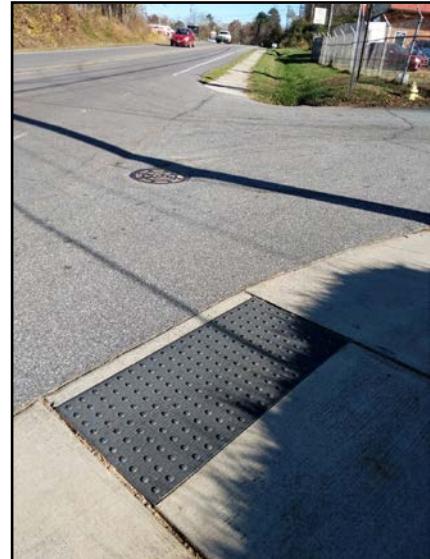
- 3. Address obstructions along the pedestrian path of travel on Main Avenue West.** As shown in the picture to the right, the business on Main Ave West has a parking area that obstructs the pedestrian path of travel. Someone in a wheelchair or visually impaired could not safely navigate around parked cars. Reassessing the parking location is recommended.



- 4. Fix curb ramp alignments and/or add detectable warnings where pedestrians cross roadways.** Curb ramps should be properly aligned and curb ramps/sidewalk should have detectable warnings at road crossings. While the bottom curb ramp

has a detectable warning, the sidewalk on the other side of the roadway does not. The bottom curb ramp could lead visually impaired pedestrians into the roadway due to improper alignment.

5. **Address hazardous cross slope along sections of Main Ave East.** Though difficult to see, the picture below displays a dramatic cross slope at the intersection and the sidewalk. There are no detectable warnings on



either side of the roadway warning pedestrians about to enter a roadway. The sidewalk segment before the pictured roadway has a cross slope that far exceeds the 2% maximum allowed.

6. **Add high-visual midblock crosswalk extending from the sidewalk to Hildebran Community Park on Main Ave East.** Advanced signage warning motorists of a pedestrian crossing should be placed since there is a blind curve before the driveway cut.

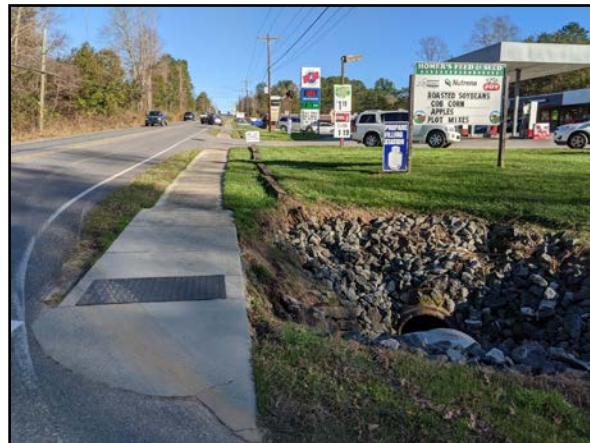


- 7. Improve midblock crossing at new park site** – must be accessible and safe for all users. Sight distance for motorists and pedestrians at the crossing must be addressed, and current crosswalk leads to a curb with no pedestrian amenities.



Sidewalk is recommended extending from the crosswalk to Town Hall on the east side of South Center Street.

- 8. Add accessible sidewalk/walking track loop in proposed park site.**
- 9. Address steep drop-offs and sidewalk obstructions along U.S. 70.** Barriers are recommended at steep drop-offs for pedestrian safety. Excess vegetation in the path of travel can cause hazardous obstructions. The sidewalk in front of Food Lion on Hwy 70 is obstructed with a steep incline next to the sidewalk (pictured below). Removal of the obstruction and safely railing are recommended for this segment of sidewalk.



10. Improve the intersection of U.S. 70 and South Center Street. The intersection is very unsafe and inaccessible to many pedestrians due to a built-up median. There are no detectable warnings on either side of the crossing. Replacing the median with accessible sidewalk and connecting that sidewalk with the existing sidewalk on US 70 and South Center Street is recommended.



11. Safety improvements to Hwy 70 sidewalk. Sidewalk along U.S. 70 across from CVS Pharmacy is very narrow and close to busy roadway. Recommend wider sidewalk and/or wider separation and barrier from traffic. Gaps in the existing sidewalk network along Highway 70 should be addressed with the construction of new sidewalk or multi-use path.

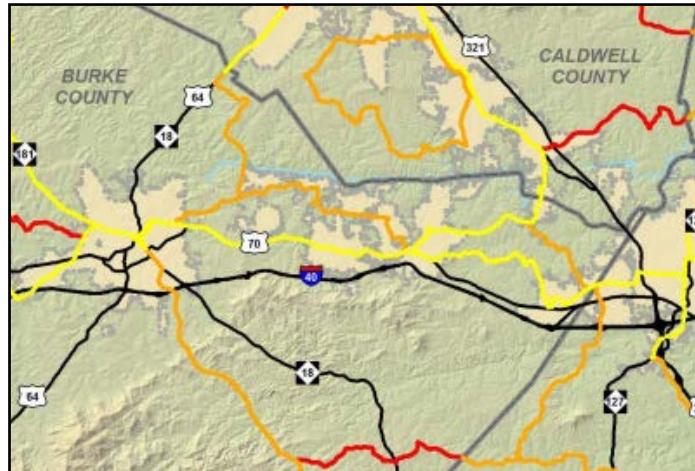
12. Widen N. Center Street bridge (over CSX railroad) and add sidewalk connection. Several survey respondents suggested a need for ADA accessible railroad crossings. Some respondents live on N Center Street and do not feel comfortable crossing the congested, narrow bridge (across the railroad) leading onto a very busy intersection at U.S. 70. Pedestrian infrastructure should be

considered along this roadway and bridge. This project, including the addition of a center turn lane and pedestrian facilities, is recommended in the regional Comprehensive Transportation Plan and is currently under review by the Greater Hickory MPO and NC DOT. Enhanced safety and accessibility for cyclists and pedestrians should be addressed along all railroad crossings located near residential areas, entertainment, or places of employment.

13. Establish bicycle and greenway routes to connect with wider cycling network.

- **Widening and modernization of Wilson Road is currently under consideration by NC DOT.** The road serves as a popular bike route into Long View, and the addition of bike lanes and/or signage should be considered. The Town of Hildebran's Pedestrian Plan also recommends sidewalk along this route. The construction of a multi-use path could improve connectivity for bicycles and pedestrians.

- **Route Segment 5 from Western Piedmont Bicycle Plan would connect Hildebran with Connelly Springs and Long View and with other Burke County routes.** The recommendations for this route segment include 4-



ft shoulders on US 70, Rhodhiss Road, McDuffy Rd, Bailey Rd, Icard-Rhodhiss Rd, Warlicks Church Rd, N Center St, First Ave NE, Third Street NE, Cline Park Drive, US 70A, and First Ave SW.

- **Route Segment 14 from Western Piedmont Bicycle Plan would connect Hildebran with the Town of Longview and the City of Hickory.** This route also links with other Catawba County routes in downtown Hickory to create a network of other connections to Alexander

County, Brookford, and Conover. The recommendations for this route segment include sharrows along Highway 70A/1st Ave SW into Longview.

14. Bicycle and pedestrian connections should be included as part of the Exit 118

NCDOT funded project. Interchange improvements are currently scheduled.

Project designs include roundabouts for interchange traffic. Bicycle and pedestrian amenities are recommended to connect to the proposed project and should be included along the proposed bridge and roundabouts. The following recommendations are associated with the funded Exit 118 interchange improvements and could potentially create a loop for cyclists and pedestrians.

This route would provide a safe bicycle and pedestrian crossing across I-40 and connect residents to trails, neighborhoods, and employment opportunities. While the Town prefers multi-use paths, Hildebran is willing to accommodate sidewalk and/or bike lane options where other amenities are not feasible or safe.

- Bicycle and pedestrian amenities along Old NC 10/Main Ave West, including both of the proposed interchange improvements and the bridge, to connect to existing sidewalk on S Center Street. This would provide a safe crossing for cyclists and pedestrians across I-40 via the proposed Old NC 10 widened bridge. While the more southern roundabout is near Town limits, bicycle and pedestrian accommodations are recommended for planned future trail connections between neighboring municipalities.
- S Center Street intersects with U.S. Hwy 70. Improved bike and pedestrian facilities are recommended at this intersection. S Center Street have several sidewalk deficiencies and gaps that should be addressed. Please see recommendations under “Recommended Pedestrian Improvements”.
- From the S Center Street and U.S. Hwy 70 intersection, bike and pedestrian amenities could be extended to the west to connect to existing pedestrian facilities along U.S. Hwy 70.
- Bike and pedestrian facilities could also be included along 3rd St SW to create a loop and connector facility between Old NC 10 and U.S. Hwy 70.

15. Extend sidewalk network along Main Avenue East to connect with Hwy 70.

The Town of Hildebran has received MPO funding to construct new sidewalk

extending from the existing sidewalk terminus on Main Ave E at 3rd St SE extending a half-mile east to U.S. 70. This connection will extend all the way down Main Ave East and loop back to connect to the existing sidewalk on U.S. 70.

16. Pursue opportunities to connect Hildebran with regional trail initiatives. The Catawba River Trail is a proposed trail connecting eastern Burke County municipalities to Morganton and Hickory proposed pedestrian amenities. Hildebran connections are included in the current feasibility study. The Wilderness Gateway Trail, discussed further in the next section, will also pass near Hildebran's southern border at the Henry Mill Village.

Inventory of Parks and Open Space near Hildebran

NC State Parks

Lake James State Park: Serenity and beautiful lake views await. Lake James State Park provides access to 25 miles of trails (including 15 miles of mountain biking trails); restrooms; picnicking; camping; swimming; fishing; and boating on a 6,812-acre lake. The park is managed by the NC Division of Parks and Recreation. Located at the base of the Linville Gorge, this park offers connections to the Overmountain Victory Trail, Fonta Flora State Trail, and Mountains-to-Sea Trail.

South Mountains State Park: South Mountains State Park is known for its rugged and challenging mountain topography and 3000' elevation change within the park. This park features an 80' scenic waterfall and offers over 40 miles of hiking, biking, and equestrian trails. Other park features include a Visitors Center and amphitheater, educational programming, car camping and backcountry camping sites, trout fishing, picnicking, and restrooms. The park is managed by the NC Division of Parks and Recreation.

Surrounding Town and County Parks

Henry Fork River Park: This large 100-acre park is located just off I-40 at Exit 121 in Hickory. The park hosts frequent soccer games and tournaments on its seven soccer fields. It also offers picnic areas, permanent restrooms, several large playgrounds, an asphalt walking track, and kayak/canoe access to the Henry Fork River. The Alpine Tower ropes course, also featured on site, is a popular destination for climbers.

Bakers Mountain Park: The park is located on the highest elevation point in Catawba County (1780 feet). The park features 197 acres of mature Chestnut Oak forest with nearly 6 miles of hiking trails.

Rhodhiss Park & River Access: Only 5 miles from Hildebran, the Rhodhiss Park offers a walking trail, picnicking area, and a playground. Just across the road (can use same

parking area) is a hiking trail down to the Catawba River and a boating access managed by the NC Wildlife Resources Commission.

Longview Recreation Center: Just three miles from downtown Hildebran, the Long View Recreation Center offers indoor and outdoor recreation with baseball and soccer fields, a paved walking track, restrooms, picnic shelter, playground, outdoor basketball, tennis courts and swimming.

Valdese Lakeside Park: Valdese Lakeside Park offers 300+ acres of undisturbed nature along the banks of Lake Rhodhiss. This recent acquisition by the Town of Valdese is in its first phase of development with several miles of lakeside greenway, a parking area, picnic shelter, dog park, kayak launch, and other amenities on the way.

Valdese Community Center & Family Splash Park: The recreation center is a community staple, featuring a fitness center, gymnasium, bowling alley with snack bar, tennis courts, and a beloved year-round swimming pool. Adjacent to the community center is the Valdese Family Splash Park, featuring a splash pad, playground, picnic shelter, and multi-purpose building.

Geitner-Rotary Park: Located along Lake Hickory and US Hwy 321 in Hickory, this park offers 96 acres of beautiful views, boating, restrooms, picnic areas, hiking/biking or resting spots next to the Catawba River. The passive park now offers mountain biking trails and pump track, as well as a paved greenway loop.

Rutherford College Town Parks: Rutherford College offers one existing town park along Malcolm Blvd with a playground, picnic shelter, and stage for community events. The Town is also in the process of building a new passive Greenway Park behind the Town Hall, which will offer forested walking trails, nature-themed play structures, picnic shelters, story walk trail, and amphitheater.

Catawba Meadows Park: Located in Morganton, this park boasts a segment of the Catawba River Greenway, 18-hole disk golf course, ball fields, playgrounds with universal design features, and ziplining infrastructure.

Catawba River Soccer Complex: This 30-acre complex offers 6 lighted regulation soccer / lacrosse fields with expansion plans that would allow for regional tournaments. Additional amenities include petanque courts, playground equipment, a dog park, a large

picnic shelter, and access to the adjacent Catawba River Greenway, connecting with Catawba Meadows Park.

Fonta Flora County Park: Coming soon to Burke County, this park will have several amenities ranging from an 18 hole disc golf course to nature observation platforms and trails. The proposed park location is on NC 126 in the western portion of the county.

Regional Trails

Catawba River Trail: This proposed trail would link the existing Catawba River Greenway in Morganton, along the river through Burke County, to the planned trail system in the City of Hickory. This planned trail segment could ultimately connect with the existing Fonta Flora State Trail in Morganton and the newly-designated state Wilderness Gateway Trail in southern Burke County.

Wilderness Gateway Trail: The Wilderness Gateway State Trail, established in 2019, will meander through Catawba and Burke Counties, providing connections from the Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail and South Mountains State Park to the Valdese and Hickory. Part of this trail will include a paddle trail in Catawba County.

Cambarus Loop Blueway Trail: This segment of the proposed Wilderness Gateway Trail is named after a crayfish species recently discovered in the area. The blueway, or paddle trail, will connect the Henry Fork and Jacobs Fork Catawba Rivers with the South Fork Catawba River in Newton and Bakers Mountain Park. This southern Catawba County segment of blueway and associated greenway has great potential for linking into the Hildebran area near the historic mill village, south of town.

Future Hickory Trail System: The City of Hickory recently passed a bond referendum to enhance city-wide pedestrian infrastructure. Ongoing construction projects, including the City Walk and River Walk, will connect across Hickory to the proposed Aviation Walk, a greenway surrounding the Hickory Airport—very near Hildebran’s Wilson Road.

NC Mountains to Sea Trail: This trail stretches from Clingmans Dome in the Great Smoky Mountains to the Outer Banks, with approximately 700 miles built out. It extends through northern Burke County across the Linville River and through the Pisgah National Forest.

Fonta Flora State Trail: This is a long-range project seeking to connect Asheville to Morganton via nearly 100 miles of hiking and biking trails. The trail, established in 2015, already has 15.7 miles of designated trails built out, including 4 miles along Morganton's Catawba River Greenway and over 6 miles at the Fonta Flora County Park at Lake James (Burke County).

Upper Catawba River Blue Trail: This is a designated trail with 16 canoe/kayak access sites along the Catawba River from McDowell to Catawba and Alexander Counties. Designated access areas are available at two locations in Alexander County: Wittenburg Access Area and Dusty Ridge Access Area.

Overmountain Victory Trail: Approximately 330 miles long, this trail runs through NC and neighboring states. As a historical route, this trail follows the path traveled by militiamen during the Revolutionary War to the pivotal battle of Kings Mountain. The trail runs through Caldwell and Burke Counties.

General Recommendations

County Schools: The Town should maintain open communication with the Burke County school system regarding opportunities for partnership and shared facilities. The Hildebran Elementary School offers a number of ball fields that are utilized by school teams and Burke County recreation leagues. These fields are adjacent to the Albert L Parkhurst complex with a shared parking area in between. Burke County Schools currently rent several small buildings in the rear of the Town complex to house maintenance equipment and ball game concessions. New outdoor restrooms in the park could be utilized by spectators from neighboring ball games. The Town may also consider a partnership with the school system to use drainage water from splash pad as irrigation for the school's ball fields, which are downhill from town park.

Parks & Recreation Advisory Board: The Town should appoint the Planning Board, or another similarly-appointed board, as the official parks and recreation advisory board. This Board would be responsible for periodic review and update of the Town's Parks Plan, and could provide parks-related recommendations to the Town Council. This Board should work closely with the Town Council member who is appointed to the regional Recreation and Tourism Committee.

Greenways: A number of regional biking and pedestrian greenway systems are planned in the coming years in surrounding Burke and Catawba Counties—including the state-designated Wilderness Gateway Trail. Where possible, pursue opportunities to construct greenways in Hildebran that will connect with these larger networks. By strategically investing in a greenway system this way, the community can reap the benefits of surrounding trail systems with less local investment.

“Friends” Group for Parks: It is common across the country, particularly in small towns, but also in large federally-managed wilderness areas, for non-profit groups to

form around the support and maintenance of locally-beloved parks and recreation resources. By establishing a network of fundraisers and maintenance volunteers, small places can create big destinations. Resources are available to help establish new Friends groups, which are typically spearheaded by community members rather than town staff.

Dog Park: Public input indicated a significant interest in the construction of a dog park in Hildebran. While the town's existing parkland cannot accommodate this amenity, the town should consider building this low-cost amenity if appropriate land becomes available.

Coordinate Road Improvements with NCDOT: The N.C. Department of Transportation's Complete Streets policy directs the department to consider and incorporate several modes of transportation when building new projects or making improvements to existing infrastructure. Because of this policy, all bicycle and pedestrian recommendations included within an adopted Plan must be considered at no cost to the municipality if the roadway is ever prioritized and funded for a roadway project within the State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP). This policy is discussed in further detail in the Cost Estimates section of this plan.

Section V Site Plans

Section Overview

This section looks at the recommended renovations and development for new and existing parks and recreation facilities in Hildebran. Proposed renovations and development are shown on maps for each park. This section is broken down into the following:

Existing and Proposed Sidewalks and Greenways

Hildebran Community Park – Recommendations

Proposed New Town Park - Recommendations

Section VI Cost Estimates

Section Overview

The facility improvements planned for the Town are divided into three phases over the next ten years. This section provides a cost estimate for each phase as well as the total cost to renovate and develop the parks.

Background

Cost Estimate

Cost Estimate

Background

The renovation of existing parks and creation of new parks will involve significant funding over the next 10 years. Funding will be used for improvements and new facilities at the Town's existing parks. In some cases, projects are already budgeted and they are ongoing. With limited resources, the Town felt that it would be best to phase improvements and future facilities over the next 10 years.

The cost estimates shown can be used as planning tools for future budgeting and project development. When preparing for specific projects, the Town should consider the impacts of inflation and should budget contingency money to assist with unanticipated expenses.

Cost Estimate

Short-Term (Years 0-3)	Cost
1) Hildebran Community Park	
ADA Playground Additions	\$ 4,000
Beautification and Landscaping	\$ 5,000
2) New Downtown Park	
Accessible Walking Path	\$ 66,000
Splash pad	\$ 90,000
Picnic pavilion	\$ 50,000
Outdoor stage	\$ 80,000
Demolition of old Concession Building	\$ 20,000

Section VI. Cost Estimates

Construction concessions/restroom building	\$ 170,000
Beautification (landscaping, signage, seating)	\$ 37,000
Individual play structures	\$ 15,000
TOTAL COST, SHORT-TERM PHASE:	\$ 537,000

Intermediate (Years 4-7)	Cost
1) Hildebran Community Park	
Crosswalk / sidewalk connection	NCDOT Cost Share

2) New Downtown Park	
New art feature / sculpture / mural	\$ 25,000*

**Costs for this amenity can vary greatly based upon the artistic medium and the availability of local artists.*

3) Albert Parkhurst Complex	
Landscaping along S. Center St.	\$15,000
Meeting room in gymnasium	\$5,000

TOTAL COST, INTERMEDIATE PHASE:	\$ 45,000
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Long-Term (Years 8-10)	Cost
1) New Facilities	
Dog Park (minimum 1 acre)	\$ 20,000

TOTAL COST, LONG-TERM PHASE:	\$ 20,000
-------------------------------------	------------------

TOTAL COST, HILDEBRAN PARKS PLAN	<u>\$ 439,300</u>
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Funding for Bike & Pedestrian Projects

Aside from the Town's budget and traditional recreational grants, several funding options exist for bicycle and pedestrian-oriented projects on state-maintained roadways. The N.C. Department of Transportation's **Complete Streets** policy directs the department to consider and incorporate several modes of transportation when building new projects or making improvements to existing infrastructure.

Because of this policy, all bicycle and pedestrian recommendations included within an adopted Plan must be considered at no cost to the municipality if the roadway is ever prioritized and funded for a roadway project within the State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP). If bicycle and pedestrian amenity recommendations are not included in an adopted plan, a cost share agreement between NCDOT and the municipality can be entered.

The table below illustrates the funding responsibilities for Complete Streets incorporating bicycle and pedestrian and roadway public transportation facilities.

Complete Street Cost Share			
Facility Type	In Plan	Not in Plan, but Need Identified	Betterment
Pedestrian Facility	NCDOT pays full	Cost Share	Local
Bicycle Facility	NCDOT pays full	NCDOT pays full	Local
Side Path	NCDOT pays full	Cost Share	Local
Greenway Crossing	NCDOT pays full	Cost Share	Local
Bus Pull Out	NCDOT pays full	Cost Share	Local
Bus Stop (pad only)	NCDOT pays full	Cost Share	Local

Bicycle and pedestrian improvements within a municipal boundary are subject to local maintenance. A local maintenance agreement will be executed prior to the completion of a construction project.

Section VII Recommendations

Section Overview

This section provides a strategy for the Town to implement the plan.

Recommendations are grouped into three phases over the next ten years. Walking and biking connectivity recommendations have not been included in phased plan; these projects must be pursued with the opportunity arises. The recommendations are as follows:

Short Term Recommendations (Years 0-3)

Intermediate Recommendations (Years 4-7)

Long Term Recommendations (Years 8-10)

Walking and Biking Route Recommendations

Recommendations

The recommendations in the plan are summarized in this section. They have been assigned target dates for implementation and grouped according to target dates. The recommendations are grouped into the following phases: Short Term (Years 0-3), Intermediate (Years 4-7), and Long Term (Years 8-10)

The Town of Rutherford College should use this summary as a guide and planning tool to prioritize the recommendations, set annual goals, prepare budgets, and set specific dates. The recommendation summary can also be used as a check off list for accomplishing the recommendations.

Short Term Recommendations (Years 0-3)

Hildebran Community Park

- ADA Playground Additions
- Beautification and Landscaping Updates

New Downtown Park

- Accessible Walking Path with paved surface, minimum 5' wide
- Splash Pad
- Picnic Pavilion
- Outdoor Stage
- Demolition of old Concession Building
- Construction of new concessions/restroom building
- Beautification (incl. Landscaping, Signage, Seating, Trash Bins, etc.)

Section VII. Recommendations

- Low-Impact Play Areas with individual playground elements (should incl. at least one “ground play” element accessible to wheelchair users.

Intermediate Recommendation (Years 4-7)

Hildebran Community Park

- Crosswalk / sidewalk connection on East Main Avenue

New Downtown Park

- New art feature / sculpture / mural

Albert Parkhurst Complex

- Update landscaping along South Center Street (and add benches)
- Create meeting room in rear of gymnasium

Long Term Recommendations (Year 8-10)

New Facilities

- Create dog park on future town property

Walking and Biking Route Recommendations

- Improve safety and connectivity of crosswalk at Main Avenue and S. Center St.
- Close gaps in sidewalk on Main Ave. West; complete connection to S. Center St.
- Address obstructions along the pedestrian path of travel (parking areas, concrete barriers, excess vegetation, etc.)
- Fix curb ramp alignments and/or add detectable warnings where pedestrians cross roadways
- Address hazardous cross slope along sections of Main Avenue East
- Add high-visual crosswalk extending from existing sidewalk on Main Avenue East to Hildebran Community Park entrance
- Improve mid-block crossing at new downtown park on S. Center St.
- Construct accessible walking track in new downtown park
- Correct steep drop-offs and sidewalk obstructions along U.S. 70
- Improve the intersection of U.S. 70 and S. Center St.
- Safety improvements to sidewalk on U.S. 70
- Widen N. Center St. bridge over railroad; add sidewalk connection
- Establish bicycle / greenway routes through town, incl. multi-use path along Wilson Rd
- Include bicycle / pedestrian connections in the Exit 118 / Curleys Fish Camp Road re-alignment (currently in design, funded by NC DOT)
- Extend sidewalk network along Main Avenue East to connection with U.S. 70
- Pursue opportunities to connect Hildebran with regional trail initiatives

Section VIII Funding and Resource Guide

This section contains a listing of various funding and technical assistance sources that are available to the Town of Hildebran. Several options are available for assistance through foundations, and state and federal governments. Each agency specifies certain types of projects that they will fund and requires different obligations from the Town. More information on each agency's goals and interests can be found below.

Funding and Resource Guide

Greater Hickory MPO & NCDOT

Local Administered Project Program (LAPP)

The Locally Administered Projects Program (LAPP) prioritizes and programs local transportation projects in the region that utilize federal transportation funding. This process involves regular calls for projects, and results in new projects added to the GHMPO's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The GHMPO generally receives \$3,335,000 annually in Surface Transportation Block Grant Direct Attributable (STBG-DA) that municipalities can apply for during project submissions.

Strategic Transportation Investments (STI) Funds – Bicycle and Pedestrian Projects

The State Transportation Investments (STI) law allocates available revenues based on data-driven scoring and local input for new transportation projects throughout the state of North Carolina. It is used to develop the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), which identifies the projects that will receive funding during a 10-year period. NCDOT updates the STIP every two years. Bicycle and Pedestrian projects are included in the STIP, however, funding is competitive as only 5% of overall STI funds are dedicated to bicycle and pedestrian projects.

Complete Streets Policy

The N.C. Department of Transportation's "Complete Streets" policy directs the department to consider and incorporate several modes of transportation when building new projects or making improvements to existing infrastructure.

Section VIII. Funding and Resource Guide

The table below illustrates the funding responsibilities for Complete Streets incorporating bicycle and pedestrian and roadway public transportation facilities.

Complete Street Cost Share			
Facility Type	In Plan	Not in Plan, but Need Identified	Betterment
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Greenway Crossing	NCDOT pays full	Cost Share	Local
Bus Pull Out	NCDOT pays full	Cost Share	Local
Bus Stop (pad only)	NCDOT pays full	Cost Share	Local

Bicycle and pedestrian improvements within a municipal boundary are subject to local maintenance. A local maintenance agreement will be executed prior to the completion of a construction project.

State and Federal Funding— Many of the sources below require a local match. In many cases, the match could be through local governments and/or private foundations.

- **NC Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF)** - the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) awards dollar-for-dollar matching grants to local governments for parks, public beach access, and improvements in state parks. The statewide program helps local governments reach their park and public access goals to improve the quality of life in their communities.
- **Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF)** - North Carolina's Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF) was established by the General Assembly in 1996 as a non-regulatory organization with a focus on protecting and restoring the State's land and water resources. CWMTF awards grants to non-profit and governmental organizations to protect land for natural, historical and cultural benefit, limit encroachment on military installations, restore degraded streams, and develop and improve stormwater treatment technology.
- **Water Resources Development Grant Program** – Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)'s water-based recreation funding program provides cost-share grants and technical assistance to local governments throughout the

state. Applications for grants are accepted for seven eligible project types: general navigation, recreational navigation, water management, stream restoration, water-based recreation, Natural Resources Conservation Service Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) stream restoration projects and feasibility/engineering studies. The non-navigation projects are collectively referred to as state and local projects.

- **NC Recreational Trails Program (RTP)** – This program works with Trails Program staff as well as the NC Trails Committee to enable volunteers, nonprofit organizations and government agencies to develop trail plans, preserve land and manage trails for all trail users. RTP is funded by Congress with money from the federal gas taxes paid on fuel used by off-highway vehicles. Its intent is to meet the trail and trail-related recreational needs identified by the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). RTP is a reimbursement grant program. Safety and Education grants are also available through the RTP.
- **Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP)** –The Federal Lands Access Program (Access Program) was established in 23 U.S.C. 204 to improve transportation facilities that provide access to, are adjacent to, or are located within Federal lands. The Access Program supplements State and local resources for public roads, transit systems, and other transportation facilities, with an emphasis on high-use recreation sites and economic generators.
- **Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (NPS Planning Grant)**
 - RTCA helps create local, regional and state networks of parks, rivers, trails, greenways and open spaces by collaborating with community partners and National Park areas in every state. Applications for support from the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program are competitively evaluated based on the following criteria:
 - The project has specific goals and results for conservation and outdoor recreation expected in the near future.

Section VIII. Funding and Resource Guide

- Roles and contributions of project partners are significant and well-defined.
- There is evidence of broad community support for the project.
- The project fits within RTCA focus areas (although proposals falling outside these areas are considered).

Parks, Open Space, Land Preservation

NC Department of Environmental and Natural Resources

Extensive list of funding and tax credit resources

NC Department of Commerce Rural Economic Development Division

Economic statistics and funding opportunities in areas such as Heritage Tourism, Economic Impact/Tourism Research and Community Development. The Rural Economic Development Division is over an increasing number of grant programs. This division also provides planning services, analysis and identification of resources needed to strengthen rural economic and community development projects.

NC Parks and Recreation Trust Fund – see description above.

Urban & Community Forestry Grant Program

This is a federally funded cost share program to encourage citizen involvement in creating and sustaining urban and community forestry programs. Municipalities, counties, regional agencies, interest groups, educational facilities and private organizations are eligible to apply for funding for projects that enhance and promote the urban forest.

NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund – see description above.

NC Resource Conservation & Development

Section VIII. Funding and Resource Guide

Provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, improve, and sustain our natural resources and environment. There are nine regional offices serving North Carolina counties.

The Trust for Public Land

TPL helps conserve land for recreation to improve the health and quality of life of American communities. Several grant opportunities are available through this program, including equitable opportunities grants.

Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust

Grant funding with an emphasis on improving the health of North Carolina communities.

- **Rural Forward NC** - Funded by Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust, the Rural Forward NC program offers technical assistance and capacity building to amplify the impact of rural leaders, organizations, and coalitions to improve major health indicators in rural North Carolina.

Other Resources

Eat Smart, Move More NC Funding Opportunities

This program is sponsored by the Division of Health and Human Services, and Department of Public Health.

Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of North Carolina

The foundation supports programs that increase access to health services for the uninsured, provides health education, promotes healthy lifestyles and supports health initiatives that target children, older adults and minorities

Shade Structure Grant Program

Grant opportunity for common areas without shade trees.

NC Cooperative Extension Offices

Section VIII. Funding and Resource Guide

Extension offices offer technical assistance in many areas including forest health and stormwater management. Extension agents develop partnerships with local groups and should be considered for local funding source opportunities. Some offices may offer funding opportunities in sustainability planning and educational outreach programming.

Appendix A

Site Specific Master Plan for New Downtown Park

Section Overview

Description

History

Purpose

Topography

Hydrology

Soils

Plant Habitats/Vegetation

Existing Structures

Recommendations

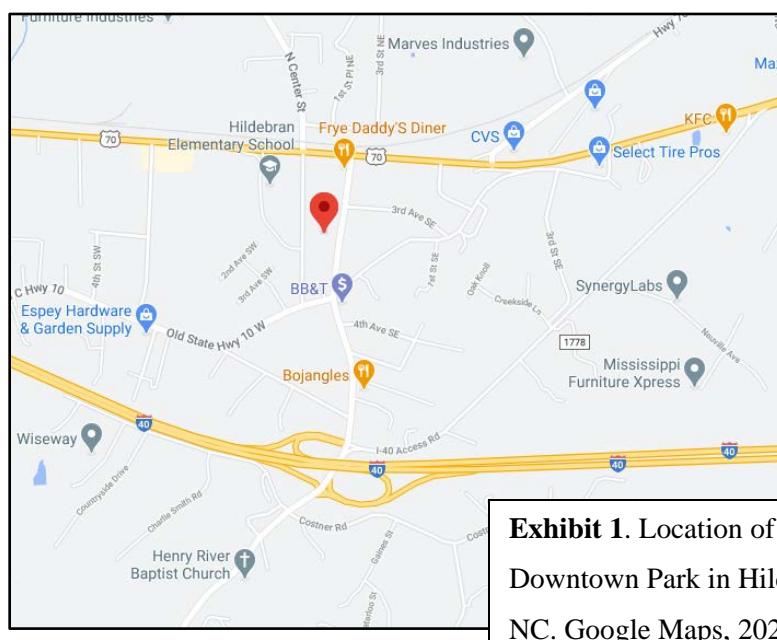
Site Specific Master Plan for Tower Park

Park Discussion

Description

The site of the proposed park is located within the Albert L. Parkhurst Municipal Complex owned by the Town of Hildebran, across the street from Town Hall on South Center Street. The municipal complex covers over 5 acres, including the Hildebran Auditorium; Gymnasium; a storage/restroom building that is leased by Burke County Recreation; and the 1950's school building containing Community Center, Sheriff's Department, and Town Council Chambers.

The vacant site of the historic 1917 school building and extending into the rear parking area is under consideration for a new pocket park. The site contains a remaining stairwell tower from the old structure, to be restored and maintained as a monument to the town's history. The remainder of the proposed park site includes one acre of grassed field, entrance to the town's gymnasium, a two-tier lower parking lot and concessions area—which is shared with the county school system to serve the adjacent elementary school's ball fields.



The park can be accessed from South Center Street or from First Street SW, by the Hildebran Elementary School's baseball fields. It is only a few blocks from both Highway 70 and Interstate 40. The park is in the downtown (central business district) and is surrounded by office-institutional and commercial, with a sidewalk network extending to many of the nearby residential neighborhoods.

History

The Albert L. Parkhurst complex, named for a former Hildebran Mayor, began its life as a school in 1917 and has been operated by the Town of Hildebran for many years. The complex includes the Hildebran Auditorium; Gymnasium; a storage/restroom building that is leased by Burke County Recreation; and the 1950's school building containing Community Center, Sheriff's Department, and Town Council Chambers.

Though the original 1917 school building burned down in recent years, the historical tower, containing an old stairwell, still stands as a tribute to the beloved local high school. The Town of Hildebran and the Hildebran Heritage Development Association (HHDA) are partnering to fund the stabilization



Exhibit 2. View of historical tower and adjacent 1953 school building, 2021.

of the tower with structural supports. The tower will be rehabilitated in Spring 2021, to stabilize the structure following the 2017 fire on the property and prepare it as a monument to the Town's history. The grassy park site is located between the old Town Hall (the 1950's school building) and the gymnasium, which are connected to the S. Center St. parking lot.

The site contains a number of storage sheds and exterior buildings constructed for the former Hildebran High School in the 1950's and 60's, which are in various states of disrepair. The concessions building adjacent to First Street SW occupies prime real estate at the entrance to the new park, centrally located to effectively serve the park and the adjacent school ball fields. The building is outdated and inaccessible, and it should be replaced or removed.

Purpose

The purpose of the park and the proposed improvements is to serve those who live, work, or play in Hildebran with local, quality facilities for recreation. In addition to the ongoing rehabilitation of the tower monument, the proposed park project seeks to utilize over an acre of existing greenspace to build a centrally-located community gathering space. With much of the complex and surrounding property developed with impervious surfaces, the Town would like to emphasize park landscaping for a relaxing and inviting green space—an oasis in the downtown district. The primary uses of the park site will be passive, such as walking or picnicking, with some nature-themed play elements scattered into the landscape. The site will effectively serve all community members, regardless of age or ability level, with access to green space for relaxation and exercise.

The park should feature elements or themes that are unique to Hildebran. For many survey respondents, Hildebran represents familial ties, history, and the beauty of the natural environment. These themes will be incorporated into the design of the new park, featuring the historical school tower, artistic or interactive renderings of area wildlife, landscaping with native plants, and gathering spaces that foster a sense of community. This park can also serve as a central hub for future greenway trail networks in Hildebran.

Site Analysis

Topography

Eastern Burke County offers rolling terrain, including downtown Hildebran surrounding the Parkhurst Complex, which slopes down noticeably to the west. The new park's highest point is approximately 1,200 feet at the South Center Street sidewalk, sloping down to the lowest point of 1175 feet at First St SW. From First St SW, the moderate downward slope continues beyond the adjacent baseball fields, to a forested ravine. The average slope of the new park site is approximately 6%. The middle building site is fairly level, while the driveways on South Center Street slope much more steeply. While minimal grading will be required on the park site, the slopes of the existing sidewalk network pose some obstacles for elderly or handicapped users.



Hydrology

There are no wetlands, floodplains, or surface water on or near the park site. The Parkhurst complex, which currently contains over 65% impervious surface, drains down slope to toward the ball field complex, toward a Drowning Creek tributary and ultimately into the Catawba River. The property, and much of the Town of Hildebran, is located within the WS-IV Watershed Protected Area, and future development of this site must comply with all applicable regulations.

The slope of the park site, complimentary use of adjacent ball fields, and distance from ecologically-sensitive areas could provide opportunities for creative partnerships with splash pad run-off. Existing storm water infrastructure runs under the aging concessions stand, draining to a ditch along the ball fields at First Street SW. The Town should coordinate with Environmental Planning staff to ensure that new infrastructure facilitates proper discharge of surface water.



Exhibit 4. Drainage ditch along First St SW, which will receive storm water from the park site, 2021.

Soils

As shown in the exhibit below, the entire new park property is composed of an urban land soil complex (FeB), as it has been developed for several decades. The entire site is suitable for recreational development with some limitations regarding dustiness. The soils in and around the Park include:

FeB Fairview-Urban land complex, 2 to 8 percent slopes, moderately eroded



Exhibit 5. Albert L. Parkhurst
Complex soils, USDA Web
Soil Survey, 2021.

Plant Habitats/Vegetation

As previously mentioned, the majority of the park's acreage has been developed for recreation and is either built-upon or maintained as grass. There have been no reported records of any state or federally protected plant species on the park property.

Existing Structures

Existing structures within the complex include the 1953 schoolhouse housing the Council Chambers and Sheriff's Department office, the 1960 gymnasium operated as a rental, a 1953 storage building, and the 1953 concessions building. The schoolhouse and gymnasium have received some rehabilitation over the years, but the storage and concessions buildings in the rear



Exhibit 6. Existing concessions building from First St SW, showing storm drainage under foundation. 2021.

are in considerable disrepair. Demolition of the existing concessions building is recommended to clear space for a new, safe, and accessible structure.

Recommendations

The recommendations for improvements to Tower Park have been informed by the preceding analysis and extensive public input (as detailed in the Town of Hildebran Comprehensive Parks Plan, 2021). Physical needs for the park are broken down into two phases and are displayed with their associated costs on the following pages.

PARTF Phase (Short-Term)

- Demolition of existing concessions structure
- Construction of new concessions
- Construction of new restroom structure (may be co-located with concessions, stage, or picnic pavilion)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ mile accessible walking path (to connect handicap parking with all park amenities and to provide a looped walking route)
- Splash pad (approximately 2800 SF, or a 30' diameter)
- Picnic pavilion for group gatherings
- Outdoor stage for concerts and other town events

- Small scattered play structures
- Associated landscaping, signage, and seating to establish the new park

Future Phase

- Additional art features and/or interactive play elements. These could include outdoor statues, covered walkways, and murals on exposed walls. The Town should engage local artists to provide commissioned work that is reflective of the local history and character.
- Additional safety lighting to illuminate walking track.