



Mecklenburg County
Park and Recreation



CITY OF
CHARLOTTE

OCTOBER '24

**MECKLENBURG COUNTY
MTB TRAILS &
BICYCLE PARKS
PLAN**

BUILD - ACTIVATE - MAINTAIN



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



PURPOSE & PROCESS

Purpose

Mecklenburg County has been celebrated over the past two decades as a national example of organizational partnerships – especially between the Tarheel Trailblazers and Mecklenburg County – working to build, activate, and maintain MTB assets. Those successful partnerships have begun to reach the limit of what they can do within their organizations’ current staff capacity, capital planning and investment processes, and maintenance practices.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS PLAN IS TO SUPPORT MECKLENBURG COUNTY PARK & REC, THE TARHEEL TRAILBLAZERS, AND THEIR PARTNERS WITH RECOMMENDATIONS TO SERVE THE GROWING NUMBER OF MTB RIDERS AND SKILL LEVELS ACROSS THE REGION WITH FACILITIES THAT ARE BETTER CONNECTED AND BETTER INTEGRATED WITHIN OUR COMMUNITIES.

Nothing in this plan should be interpreted as a binding commitment on behalf Mecklenburg County, the City of Charlotte, Tarheel Trailblazers, or their partners. This includes recommendations related to new funding and new bicycle amenities. Improvements to existing parks / public sites, or the development of new parks / public sites, will go through appropriate public engagement processes to inform if and how the recommendations herein are incorporated.

Process

This plan was developed in partnership with the following organizations:

- Tarheel Trailblazers
- Charlotte Department of Transportation
- Mecklenburg County Park & Rec
- Trips for Kids Charlotte
- Mecklenburg County Public Health

Representatives from these partner organizations worked through a planning process to develop key recommendations for expanding the mountain bike and bicycle park network in Mecklenburg County.

Planning Process

1

Learn from Others
Learn from other communities recognized as national leaders in the construction, maintenance, and programming of MTB trails and bicycle parks.

2

Map Our Network
Inventory the existing network of MTB assets and bicycle parks in Mecklenburg County;

3

Evaluate Gaps
Complete a data-driven “gap analysis” to identify geographies and user groups that are not served by the current network;

4

Collaborate
Talk with partners, understand organizational interests, and establish shared goals;

5

Identify Opportunities
Develop recommendations for expanding, maintaining, and programming the countywide MTB and bicycle parks network

6

Send It!
Create an implementation action plan that identifies responsible organizations, sets near-term targets, and lays the foundation for ongoing collaboration.

Key Terms

MTB Trails

Trails intended for use by people on mountain bikes (MTBs), and/or multi-use trails on which people riding mountain bikes are permitted along with other types of trail users (e.g. hikers or horseback riders).

Bicycle Parks

Recreation facilities, other than greenways or MTB trails, intended primarily for people riding bicycles. Such recreation facilities may include, MTB skills courses, pump tracks, MTB jump lines, etc.. Bike parks come in many shapes and sizes and may include a number of individual amenity types as listed in the Facility Types section on page 10.

VISION & GOALS

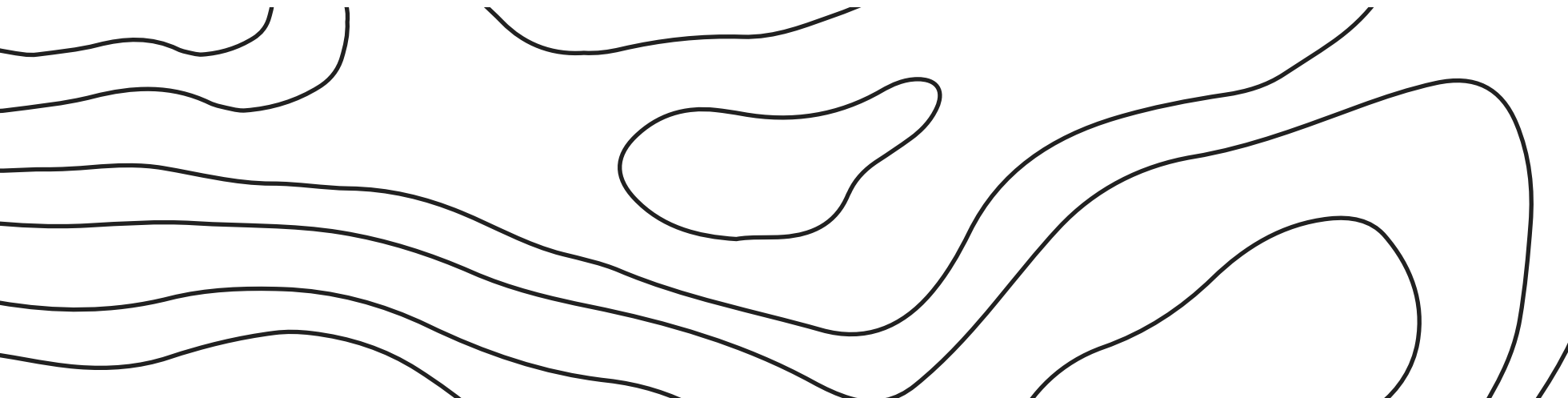
Vision

The vision statement and plan goals were developed by the partner organizations listed on the previous page. The vision statement describes the aspirational future reality for mountain biking in Mecklenburg County. The goals are the key guiding principles for taking mountain bicycling (MTB) in Mecklenburg County to the next level and serving the growing number of riders and skill levels across the region.

**MECKLENBURG COUNTY IS A
NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED MTB
DESTINATION WHERE PUBLIC,
PRIVATE, AND NON-PROFIT PARTNERS
COLLABORATE CLOSELY TO BUILD,
ACTIVATE, AND MAINTAIN A MTB
TRAILS AND BICYCLE PARKS NETWORK
THAT SERVES RIDERS OF ALL AGES,
ABILITIES, AND BACKGROUNDS.**

Goals

- 1 Expand MTB facilities and accessibility for youth/beginners.
- 2 Develop a MTB network that is connected by greenways.
- 3 Create a more inclusive MTB network that addresses the needs of diverse riders and responds to inequalities in the community.
- 4 Support partnerships for maintaining and programming MTB assets.
- 5 Celebrate MTB experiences as a valuable tool for boosting tourism, active transportation, and public health.
- 6 Include MTB facilities and bicycle parks as an integral part of the capital planning, community engagement, and investment process for County parks and greenways.



IMPLEMENTATION ACTION PLAN

SEND IT!

Priority recommendations for achieving Mecklenburg County's MTB trails and bicycle parks vision (See page 56).

- 1 Identify the "Priority Opportunity Sites" that are on the County's 5-year Capital Improvement Plan and integrate MTB trails and/or bicycle parks within those planned investments through the public engagement process.
- 2 Build 3 youth-focused MTB skills areas in the next 5 years.
- 3 Build beginner-level MTB trails adjacent to existing greenways.
- 4 For greenways in planning and design, integrate parallel MTB trails where possible.
- 5 Work towards dedicating County resources to support MTB trail maintenance.
- 6 Grow the Tarheel Trailblazers organization to have paid staff.

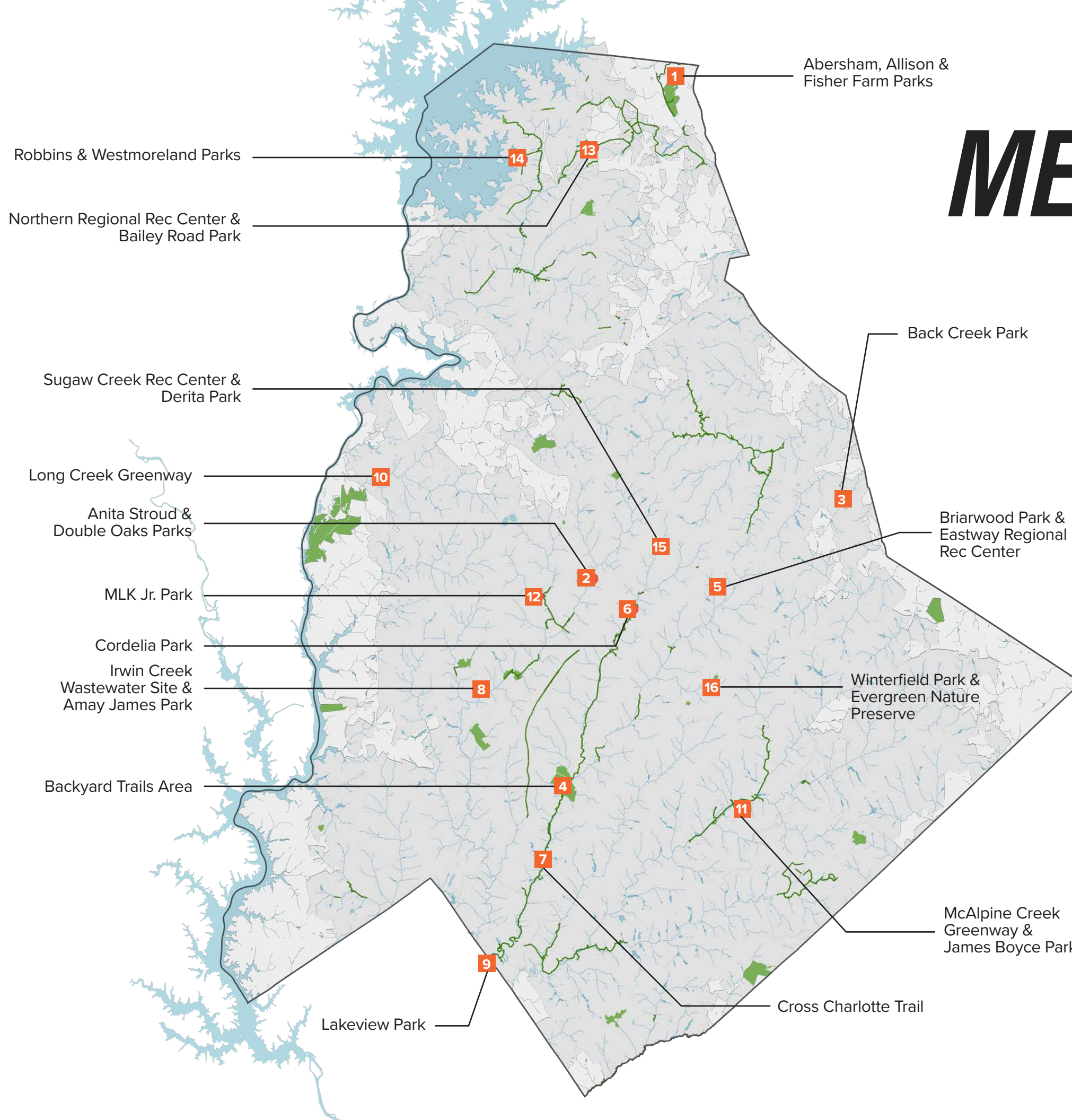
MECKLENBURG COUNTY

PRIORITY OPPORTUNITY SITES

Places where key partners should focus their resources to expand mountain bicycling in Mecklenburg County

(See page 22 for more on the process for selecting these sites, including an equity-based analysis of gaps in the County's existing MTB trails and bike parks network.)

- 1. Abersham Park, Allison Park, & Fisher Farm Park** (Town of Davidson + Davidson Lands Conservancy + Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation)
- 2. Anita Stroud Park & Double Oaks Parks** (Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation)
- 3. Back Creek Park** (Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation)
- 4. Backyard Trails Area** (Charlotte Water + Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation)
- 5. Briarwood Park & Eastway Regional Recreation Center** (Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation)
- 6. Cordelia Park** (Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation)
- 7. Cross Charlotte Trail** (Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation + City of Charlotte + Partners)
- 8. Irwin Creek Wastewater Site & Amay James Park** (Charlotte Water + Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation)
- 9. Lakeview Park** (Town of Pineville) County Park & Recreation)
- 10. Long Creek Greenway** (Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation + Partners)
- 11. McAlpine Creek Greenway / James Boyce Park** (Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation)
- 12. MLK Jr. Park** (Mecklenburg Parks and Recreation + Partners)
- 13. Northern Regional Recreation Center, Caldwell Station Creek Greenway, Bailey Road Park** (Town of Cornelius + Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation)
- 14. Robbins Park & Westmoreland Park** (Town of Cornelius, Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation + Partners)
- 15. Sugaw Creek Recreation Center & Derita Park** (Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation)
- 16. Winterfield Park & Evergreen Nature Preserve** (Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation)



INTRODUCTION

The process for developing the recommendations in this plan was designed first to **LEARN** from peer communities; then to deliver recommendations that will help partners **BUILD**, **ACTIVATE**, and **MAINTAIN** a countywide MTB trails and bike parks network that supports the vision and goals described below.



LEARN

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BUILD

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ACTIVATE

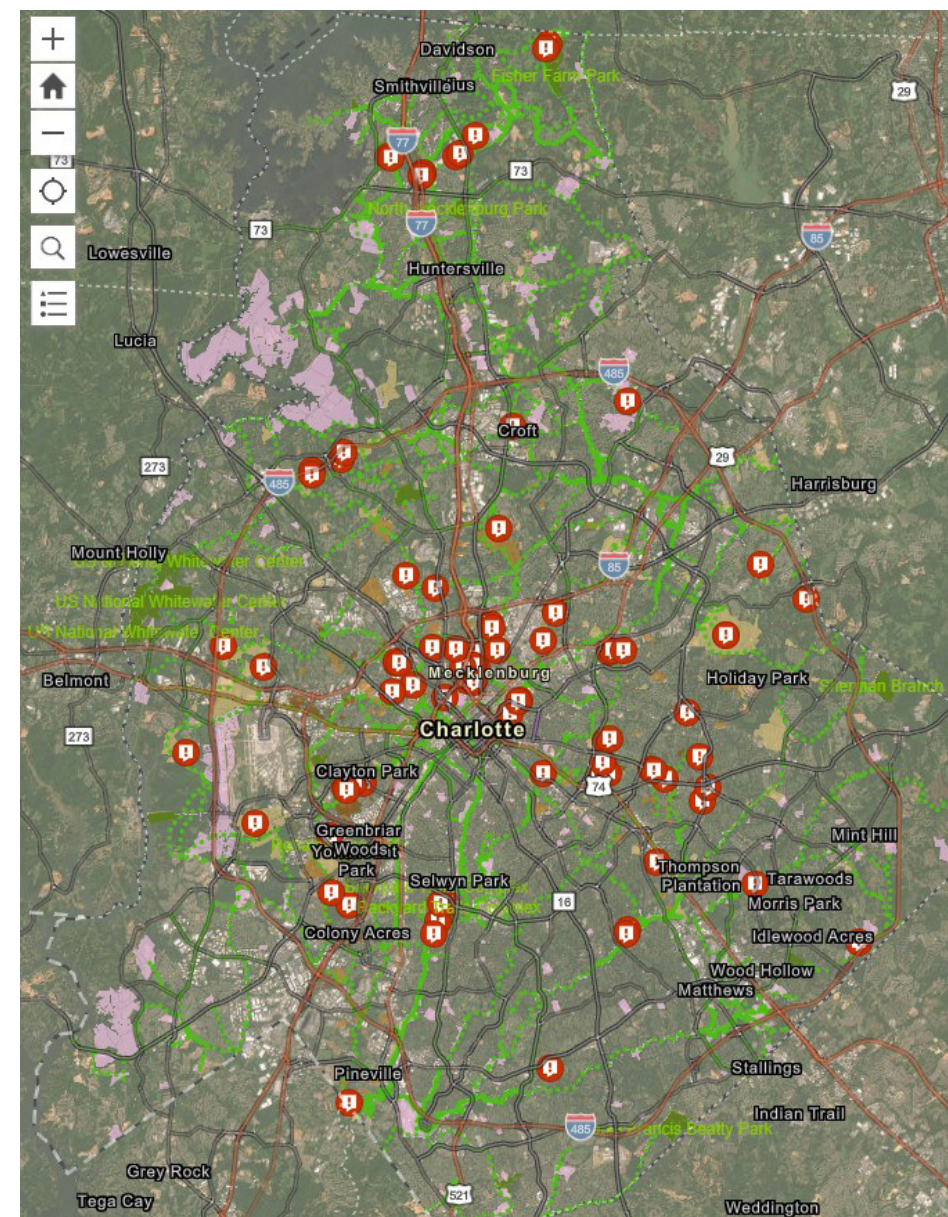
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MAINTAIN

Page 52

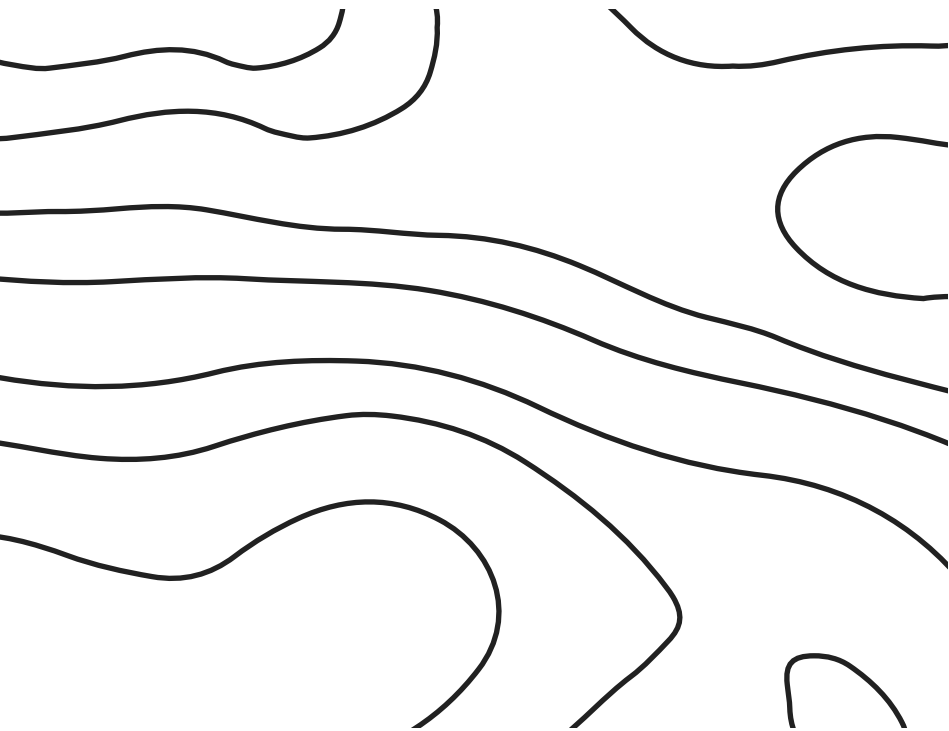
This plan was developed in partnership with the organizations who are most responsible for supporting the countywide MTB trails and bike parks network – Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation, the Tarheel Trailblazers, Mecklenburg County Public Health, the Charlotte Department of Transportation, and Trips for Kids Charlotte. Representatives from these key organizations collaborated to develop the plan through a series of peer community interviews, workshops, stakeholder conversations, and an online mapping exercise. The recommendations in this plan represent a shared vision for building, activating, and maintaining the MTB and bicycle park network in Mecklenburg County.



The interagency steering committee and Tarheel Trailblazers Board collaborated using an online mapping tool to capture 89 unique locations/suggestions for MTB trails and bicycle parks. The project team used feedback from this exercise and the gap analysis to develop priority opportunity sites for future MTB and bike park infrastructure.

MTB TRAILS & BICYCLE PARKS – VISION & GOALS

The vision and goals below were developed in partnership with key organizations working to BUILD, ACTIVATE, and MAINTAIN MTB trails and parks throughout Mecklenburg County. These goals recognize that Mecklenburg County is not starting from zero. In fact, our region has been celebrated over the past two decades as a national example of organizational partnerships – especially between the Tarheel Trailblazers and Mecklenburg County – working to build and maintain MTB assets. Those successful partnerships have begun to reach the limit of what they can do within their organizations’ current capacity, capital planning processes, and maintenance practices.



THIS PLAN SUPPORTS LOCAL PARTNERS WITH GUIDANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO TAKE MOUNTAIN BICYCLING IN MECKLENBURG COUNTY TO THE NEXT LEVEL AND SERVE THE GROWING NUMBER OF RIDERS AND SKILL LEVELS ACROSS THE REGION.

Goals

Expand MTB facilities and accessibility for youth/beginners.

Beginner-level MTB facilities serve more people and attract lifelong riders. It’s important to include advanced difficulty trail lines and facilities within the County’s network, but the best MTB destinations in the country focus on providing more youth/beginner experiences with progression to advanced facilities. (“Rely on your youth.” – Erin Rushing, NW Arkansas Trailblazers)

Develop a MTB network that is connected by greenways.

Mecklenburg County’s growing greenway network is among its most celebrated recreational assets. With broad use and broad support, County greenways are already an integral part of the overall bicycling culture in Mecklenburg County. Following the example of other leading MTB regions, Mecklenburg County should capitalize on its greenways by using them as spines that connect more people and places to MTB experiences across the region.

Create a more inclusive MTB network that addresses the needs of diverse riders and responds to inequalities in the community.

Mountain biking is attracting a more diverse group of riders, but the trail riding population isn’t fully reflective of Mecklenburg County’s diverse population. There are only 5 MTB trails/bike parks in “Priority Communities” – places identified by Mecklenburg County as priorities for increasing access to recreation based on demographic, equity, and parks access data. MTB facilities also give kids a positive outlet, which is an important part of building community and supporting inclusivity within the bicycle culture. Building more MTB facilities, with a focus on the people and places that currently lack access to them, will support a greater diversity of riders and a more vibrant MTB culture in Mecklenburg County.

Support partnerships for maintaining and programming MTB assets.

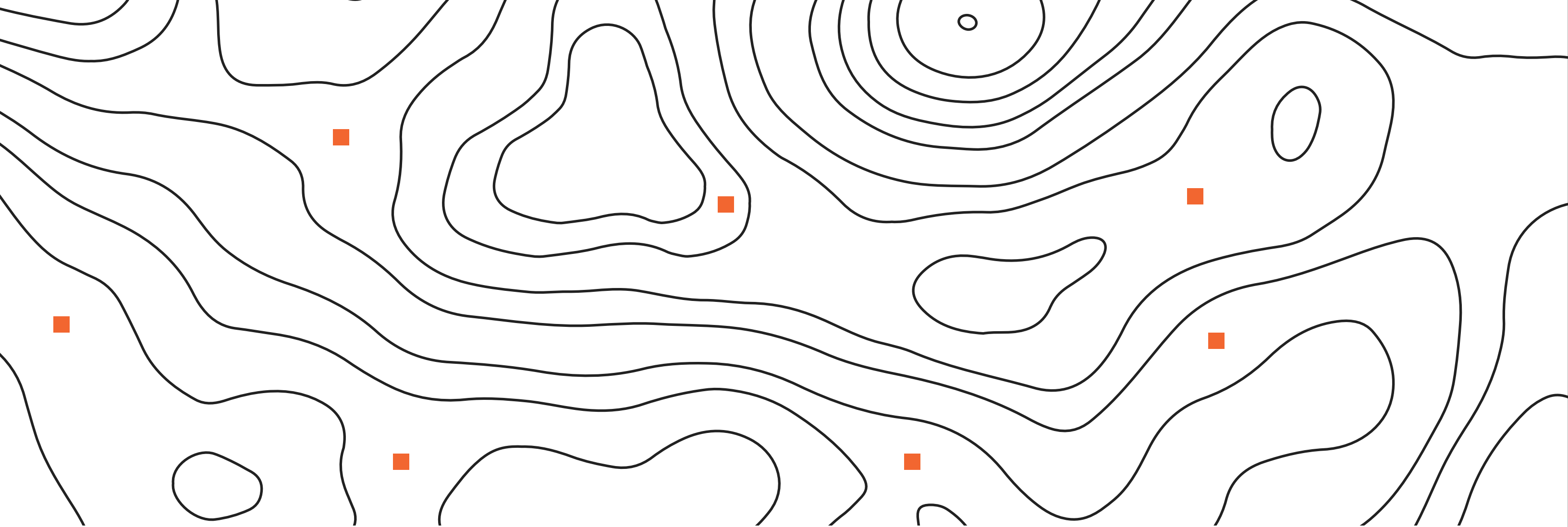
To continue the high level of maintenance provided for our current mountain bike facilities, new partnerships and resources need to be leveraged. Adding more bike park amenities into the county system will require a clear evaluation of the future maintenance needs as facilities come online. Identifying more resources for construction/ maintenance and clear roles that leverage the greatest strengths of public/private/non-profit partners will be essential. The same holds true for programming our existing and future MTB assets as there is currently a gap in organizations providing structured MTB programming, competition, and education opportunities within our community.

Celebrate MTB experiences as a valuable tool for boosting tourism, active transportation, and public health.

Great bicycle networks and bicycling cultures have proven to be a valuable tool for economic development, public health, and transportation safety. Greenways have long been understood to be a key part of that story. Through the transformative successes of places like NW Arkansas; Knoxville, Tennessee; and Denver, Colorado; there is a growing recognition of the importance of MTB trails and bicycle parks in supporting other shared goals. Education, outreach, and programming are key part of telling that story effectively and helping more people understand the value of mountain biking to overall quality of life, tourism, health, and economic development.

Include MTB facilities and bicycle parks as an integral part of the capital planning, community engagement, and investment process for County parks and greenways.

The development of MTB facilities in the County over the past two decades has occurred on a largely ad hoc basis. MTB trail development has relied on the enthusiasm of the Tarheel Trailblazers for identifying opportunities within “leftover” land in County parks and the willingness of the County to let the THTB explore those opportunities. During recent park planning efforts the potential for MTB trails and bicycle parks has been a larger, more proactive part of Mecklenburg County’s conversation. This includes the Meck Playbook: Park & Recreation Master Plan and individual planning studies for future parks. The County should formalize an evaluation for potential MTB trails and bike parks as a part of all planning/ scoping processes for park and greenway investments.



MTB TRAILS & BICYCLE PARKS – ***FACILITY TYPES***

The following facility types are generally listed in order from the most beginner-level facility (Traffic Gardens) to the most advanced (Jump Lines). However, some facilities (like Pump Tracks and Skills Areas) can vary widely in the level of difficulty and type of rider they are designed for. Also, some facilities (like Bike Parks and Gateway Parks) typically incorporate multiple individual facility types that may vary in level of difficulty to cater to a broader range of riders at a single site.

Traffic Garden

A traffic garden (or traffic park) is a mostly level street surface play area for children with pavement markings intended to mimic roadways, crosswalks, stop signs, and other elements of a typical streetscape. Commonly installed at schools and parks, traffic gardens offer a fun way for children to learn the rules of the road and practice early bicycling safety skills.



User Groups

Beginner, tailored to introduce children to the rules of the road.



Space Requirements

Typically between 4,000 square feet and 15,000 square feet.



Maintenance Requirements

Once installed, maintenance is relatively minimal. Typical maintenance involves refreshing pavement markings every 5+ years based on wear. Replacing/repairing any associated educational signage may be required on a similar timeframe. Use of standard traffic paint is typical. Use of longer-lasting pavement marking materials is more expensive, but will reduce future maintenance.




Recommended Supporting Facilities


Because traffic gardens are specifically oriented toward young children, supporting facilities like restrooms, parking areas, shade structures, and playgrounds are recommended.





Gateway Parks

Gateway parks and trails are designed specifically for new and beginner off-road bicycle users. They are typically located near trailheads of large cross-country trail networks, in bike parks, or as standalone facilities in communities making them easily accessible and visible. They feature gently flowing and undulating trail, average gradients of 5% or less, wide tread surfaces (36"-60") and open sight lines to minimize risk, injury, and physical exertion. Optional obstacles (typically at-grade to 24" above ground level) may be interspersed along the trail corridor. Gateway Parks also typically have a beginner-oriented Skills Area at or near the trailhead.

- **User Groups**

Beginner, typically tailored to introduce newcomers and youth to off-road cycling.
- **Space Requirements**

10-30 Acres to support 1 - 3 miles of trail ideally in a canopied or woodland space.
- **Maintenance Requirements**

Typical maintenance includes daily monitoring of conditions for open/close status; weekly/monthly checks for unplanned hazards and necessary clearing; and bi-annual to annual inspection and improvements of trails and man-man features for integrity and safety.
- **Recommended Supporting Facilities**

Gateway parks and trails are designed to create entry points into trails systems and serve as beginner friendly facilities. Because they are oriented towards newcomers and youth, facilities like restrooms, parking areas, and water fountains are recommended.



Skills Areas

Skills Areas can be an element of a bike park or a standalone facility. Their emphasis is on playful skill and confidence building with ground-fixed obstacles that usually require pedal-powered propulsion to overcome. Skills areas typically do not include large-scale pump, push pull, or gravity powered facilities but may include them at a micro-scale. Skills areas simulate obstacles and skills found on cross country singletrack trails such as skinnies (narrow wooden bridges), rock gardens, root drops, ledges, rollers, and narrow elevated obstacles in a concentrated space. Skills areas geared toward very young riders on strider bikes or 12’ wheeled pedal bikes are often known as bicycle playgrounds.



User Groups

Riders of all ages and skills levels. Difficulty and rating typically increase with obstacle height above ground surface/risk factor/exposure.



Space Requirements

Smaller in scale, skills areas typically range from ¼ Acre - 1 Acre of relatively flat to gently sloping land. Most obstacles are less than 36” in height.



Maintenance Requirements

The maintenance of skills areas is dependent on the types of facilities that are present. Typical maintenance includes daily monitoring of conditions for open/close status; weekly/monthly checks for unplanned hazards and necessary clearing; and bi-annual to annual inspection and improvements of trails and man-man features for integrity and safety. Maintenance requirements can be reduced based on the materials of skills features themselves, and using a hardscape material (scrap sidewalk pieces, crushed aggregate, asphalt) to connect between skill features instead of dirt.



Recommended Supporting Facilities

Skills areas can be standalone amenities and are often incorporated into a larger bike park areas. Skills areas foster a safe environment for developing bike handling skills, and are often used to bring riders together for skill-building workshops and social gatherings. Recommended supporting facilities include shade structures, spectator areas, and signage indicating skill difficulty levels, safety guidelines, and park rules.



Pump Tracks

Pump Tracks are condensed circuitous trail facilities that provide a smooth undulating surface with banked turns on relatively level sites for bikes to practice building kinetic propulsion and speed without pedaling. By “pumping” the bike and body together over the undulating surface riders can propel themselves around the entire course without the use of the bike’s pedals. Pumping (push-down, pull-up) is a core bicycle skill that can be useful in various situations, and is highly aerobic. Pump Tracks be configured to have either a dirt, concrete, or asphalt riding surface



User Groups

Pump tracks attract a diverse range of user groups including mountain bikers, bmx riders, kids and families, strider users, skateboards and scooter riders (if the riding surface is asphalt or concrete). Pump tracks are amongst the safest off-road bike facilities because they have safe and clear fall zones, predictable smooth surfaces, open visibility, and require minimal skill to enjoy. For this reason, they are great for bikers of all ages and skill levels.



Space Requirements

There are three main types of pump tracks: modular, dirt and asphalt/concrete. Modular pump tracks are composed of concrete or plastic and require 1,000-2,000 sq. ft. Dirt pump tracks are constructed using mineral soil and/or clay and require ¼ to 1 acre in size. Asphalt/Concrete pump tracks are made using asphalt or tarmac, require ¼ acre to 1.5 acres in size, and are custom designed to fit the space and riding needs of each individual project.



Maintenance Requirements

Maintenance is highly dependent on the type of pump track surface. Modular pump tracks, asphalt pump tracks, and concrete pump tracks require little to no regular or cyclical maintenance. Dirt pump tracks require seasonal cyclical maintenance and conditions management as they are susceptible to rain and moisture.



Recommended Supporting Facilities

Pump Tracks can be found as a standalone bicycle amenity or can be incorporated into a bike park or trail network (typically near a trail head). Pump tracks are natural gathering areas for kids and families, and are often found in open areas with little shade. Because of this shelters and shade structures, as well as spectator areas are recommended.



Bike Parks

Bike parks are purposely planned, clearly delineated, access limited, single-use (bike only) park spaces composed of multiple individual component facilities. Bike parks are tailored to various off-road bicycle experiences, with a heavy emphasis on skill, thrill, and play. Bike parks are typically a part of larger regional parks that include playgrounds, ballfields, picnic shelters, and other amenities.



User Groups

Bike parks can be designed to accommodate a wide variety of skill levels and mountain bike subgenres, including adaptive use or specialized facilities designed to accommodate individuals with disabilities or special needs. Bike parks provide opportunities for skills progression in a risk managed environment and are recommended for beginner, intermediate, advanced, and expert users.



Space Requirements

Bike parks are typically 5-100 acres in size and 3 or more component facilities (pump track, flow trail, skills area, jump lines, etc).



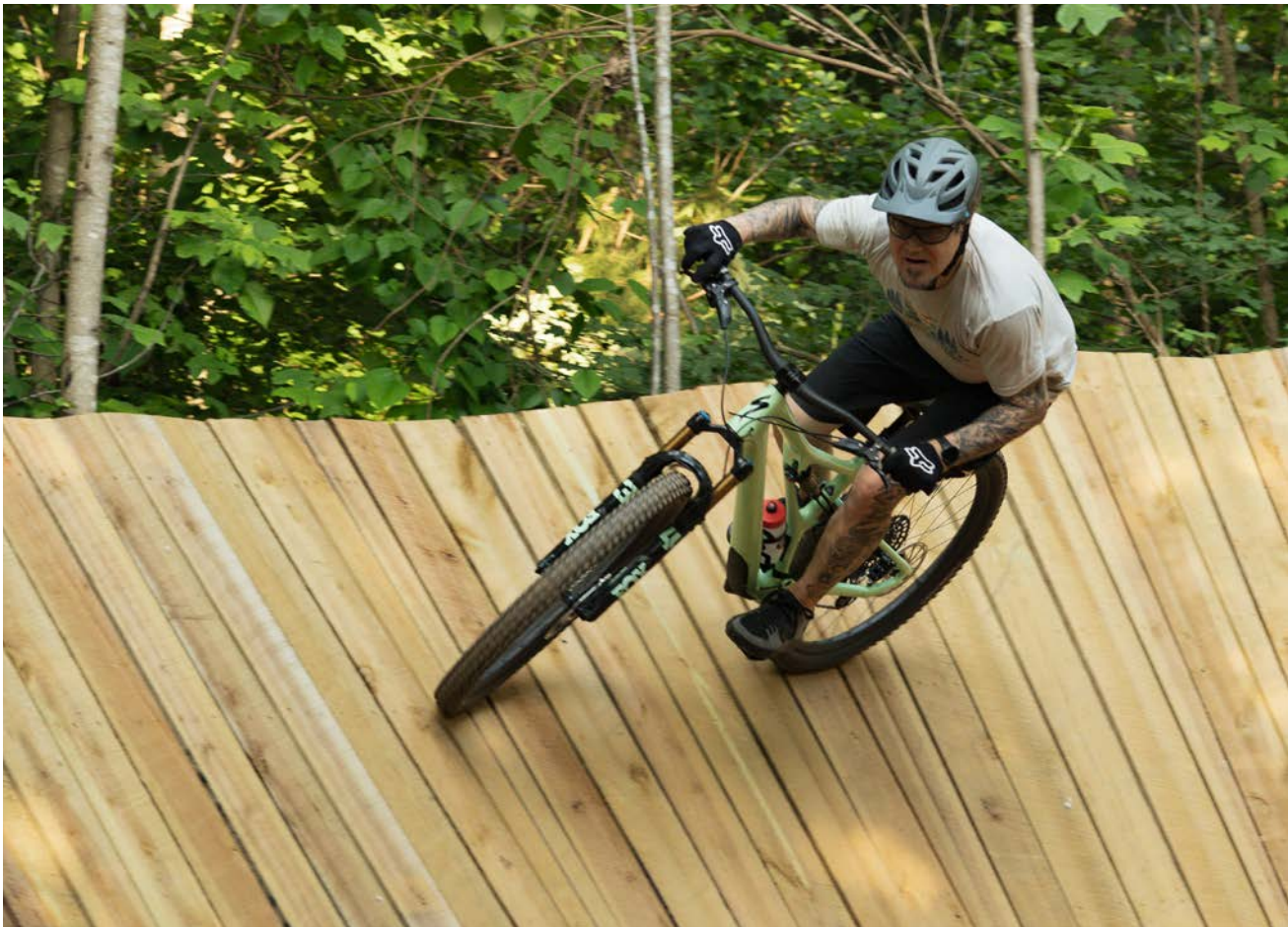
Maintenance Requirements

Typical cyclical maintenance of a bike park may require management and oversight from a volunteer group or land manager. Typical maintenance includes daily monitoring of conditions for open/close status; weekly/monthly checks for unplanned hazards and necessary clearing; and bi-annual to annual inspection and improvements of trails and man-man features for integrity and safety. Because bike parks are risk-managed facilities, maintenance of signage is a critical element to reduce landowner liability.



Recommended Supporting Facilities

Because bike parks are destinations, it's recommended to provide amenities that cater to the needs of visitors and enhance their experience. Amenities such as restrooms, bike rental services, and shops for food and beverages are often found at bike parks. In addition, informational signage indicating trail difficulty levels, safety guidelines, and park rules is recommended.



Flow Trails

Flow trails are linear gravity-propelled mountain bike trails that are characterized by smooth, rhythmic, uninterrupted experiences that require little braking or pedaling. Flow trail areas are typically highly manipulated by machinery to support a series of interconnected left and right arcs combined with strategically placed undulations (ups and downs). Flow trails are focused on fun and playful experiences, and offer progressive user difficulty levels by incorporating varying degrees of undulation prominence which can provide air time. A landscape with a long, gradual slope is ideal for flow trail construction. Flow trails can be long or short, typically ending when the trail reaches the bottom of a slope. A climbing or return trail pairs well with a flow trail for users to “lap” the trail for another run.



User Groups

Flow trails are designed for beginner, intermediate, and advanced mountain bike riders. Similar to bike parks and pump parks, they are typically designed with progression in mind. Changes in average grade and surface steepness/ prominence varies with skill level with average grades of 3-5% for beginners, 5-7% for advanced, and 7-10% for experts.



Space Requirements

10-20 acres or ¼ mile to 1 mile, less dense than XC trail as it follows a consistent downhill trajectory it may require more linear alignments across landscapes.



Maintenance Requirements

Typical maintenance includes daily monitoring of conditions for open/close status; weekly/monthly checks for unplanned hazards and necessary clearing; and bi-annual to annual re-grooming/re-shaping of trail surface and inspection of man-man features for integrity and safety.



Recommended Supporting Facilities

Flow trails are often found as part of larger trail systems or bike parks and require similar facilities, including parking, restrooms and water stations. Bike repair stations, equipped with tools, tire pumps and basic supplies are also recommended.



Cross-County Singletrack

Cross-country (XC) trails are linear or circuitous facilities that traverse landscapes with primitive, less developed trail tread corridors that provide feedback to the riders through natural obstacles such as roots and rocks. XC riders are often seeking primitive, longer-distance and duration rides for fitness or connection with nature. XC trails offer a mix of terrain, and may include climbs, descents, natural and man-made technical obstacles. XC trail construction involves less manipulation of the soil and tread surface compared to flow trails and gateway trails.



User Groups

XC trails are often multi-use facilities that support a diverse range of user groups Including mountain bikers, trail runners, hikers, dog walkers and nature enthusiasts. XC trails that are designed use for mountain bikes are often called “bike-optimized”. This usually means that the turns are adequate radius and slope for bikes among other intentional bike-specific characteristics including specific average grades and carefully managed intersections.



Space Requirements

In a Southeastern woodland setting, 10 acres of land will typically yield 1 mile of cross country singletrack trail and at an ecologically sound and sustainable trail density. Trail systems that feature 5 miles or more are often desired by XC riders due to their ability to travel distances at speed with pedal-power. Smaller areas with XC loops less than 5 miles are great candidates for a Gateway Trail upfit to serve beginner riders.



Maintenance Requirements

Typical maintenance includes daily monitoring of conditions for open/close status; weekly/monthly checks for unplanned hazards and necessary clearing; and bi-annual to annual inspection and improvements of trails and man-man features for integrity and safety.



Recommended Supporting Facilities

In general facilities such as parking, restrooms and water stations are recommended. Bike repair stations, equipped with tools, tire pumps and basic supplies are also recommended to assist riders in case of mechanical issues.



Jump Lines

Jump lines are a specific facility type generally incorporated into bike parks to provide progression and repeatable fun for all skills related to jumping. Jump line area include a designated start area (with associated entrance signage) that is typically elevated to provide riders the speed necessary for the jump lines without excessive pedaling to gain momentum. Best practice jump line areas will include lines for beginner jumping (table tops, low consequence/low speed), intermediate jumping (larger taller table top jumps, increased speed), and advanced jumping (steeper jump angles, requirements for more precise riding) in close proximity to facilitate progression and skill building. Jump line areas may be constructed of all dirt surfaces, but may be designed with prefabricated wood/steel jump lips and dirt landings, prefabricated lips and hardscape landings (asphalt), or an entirely asphalt surface for lips and landings.



User Groups

Jump lines can serve all ages of riders and most skill levels outside of first time riders as basic pumping skill (acquired from a pump track) are desired for riding beginner level jump lines.



Space Requirements

½ acre - 1 Acre



Maintenance Requirements

Maintenance is highly dependent on the type of jump line surface. Fully dirt jump line areas require regular maintenance by skilled labor to ensure jump radii are consistent after erosion events. Wood/steel jump lips require little to no regular maintenance for the life cycle of the product, and asphalt jump lines require minimal maintenance similar to a paved pump track.



Recommended Supporting Facilities

Jump Lines are typically incorporated into a bike park or trail network area. Jump Lines can be natural gathering areas where shade structures and spectator areas will be well suited. Emergency access should be well provided to jump line areas.



Bike Polo Courts

Hardcourt bike polo is a team cycling sport that combines elements of hockey and polo, except that players ride bicycles instead of horses. The game is played on a hard, smooth court. Players must avoid touching the ground (a.k.a. “dabbing”) while using mallets to hit a ball into the other team’s goal. Hardcourt bike polo emerged in the 1990’s. Its popularity has boomed in recent years, including in Mecklenburg County through groups like the Charlotte Bike Polo Club.



User Groups

Skill levels vary from very advanced and technically adept players to beginners just learning to play.



Space Requirements

Bike polo courts vary in size, but are typically the size of ~2 tennis courts. For competition events, bike polo courts can be no smaller than 120 feet x 60 feet and no larger than 155 feet x 80 feet. Bike polo courts are often shared spaces with other hardcourt sports like tennis and basketball, although it is necessary to have solid boards around the perimeter of the court to prevent the ball from leaving the playing surface through a fence.



Maintenance Requirements

Bike polo courts are hard courts (asphalt or concrete) that require the similar levels of maintenance to tennis courts or basketball courts. Cracks in the court surface should be proactively filled or patched, once a year or more frequently as necessary, to avoid creating hazardous court conditions that may “catch” a bike tire during play.



Recommended Supporting Facilities

Restrooms, water fountains, and parking areas are recommended. Lighting to accommodate night matches is also recommended.

BMX Race Track

A BMX Race Track is a specifically designed course for BMX racing, a type of bicycle racing inspired by motorcross (BMX is short for bicycle motorcross). BMX tracks are composed of dirt rollers and jumps call “rhythm sections”, and large bermed turns over 8’ tall. The hold 8 riders at a time racing head to head and track lengths vary from 900 to 1300 linear feet. BMX tracks are generally associated with the USA BMX organization and are only open for riding during official practice sessions and races.



User Groups

Riders of all ages and abilities can ride a bmx track including young children on strider bikes.



Space Requirements

1.5-2.5 Acres



Maintenance Requirements

BMX tracks require monthly maintenance to keep the dirt surface groomed, although additives to the dirt to promote hardening and asphalt bermed turns can greatly reduce the maintenance needs. USA BMX groups typically provide maintenance at their tracks.



Recommended Supporting Facilities

BMX tracks host weekly racing during the Spring, Summer and Fall and require facilities like restrooms, parking areas, and water fountains. Bleachers for spectators are also recommended. BMX tracks are often park of regional parks which can provide ample parking, or as part of a large signature bike park facility.

Cyclocross Course

A cyclocross race course is a loop, typically between 1.5 and 2 miles long, that combines multiple surfaces. Riders navigate through grass, dirt, and sometimes pavement, potentially encountering obstacles that force them to dismount and carry their bikes. Cyclocross racing is akin to obstacle course racing on bicycles, with hills, manmade obstacles (barriers), and interesting terrain features thrown in for good measure. Cyclocross courses can be a permanent fixture in a park or they can be set up specifically for races by tying together elements of a park in a manner that may only be used during an event.



User Groups

Cyclocross courses cater to most levels of off-road bicycle riders and are meant to be ridden on cyclocross bikes (modified road bikes with knobby tires) or mountain bikes. Cyclocross racing is a great discipline for an urban area. The courses lend themselves to bikes of multiple types, and the courses are compact enough to be laid out in most city parks.



Space Requirements

Cyclocross courses typically fit into less space than a mountain bike trail of equal length. Temporary cyclocross courses set up specifically for an event can make use of spaces within existing parks that have ~15 acres of total space. A permanent cyclocross course can be developed in conjunction with a larger bike park or trails area as a complementary bicycle facility.



Maintenance Requirements

In grass turf areas, some light reseeded and straw may be applied to help turf regenerate after a race. Other standard maintenance considerations apply base on the varied surfaces of the course (dirt, asphalt, etc).



Recommended Supporting Facilities

Cyclocross courses are a great addition to a park that already houses bicycle recreation facilities such as mountain bike trails and bike park areas. Restroom facilities are preferred to support organized races.

2

EXISTING CONDITIONS & GAP ANALYSIS

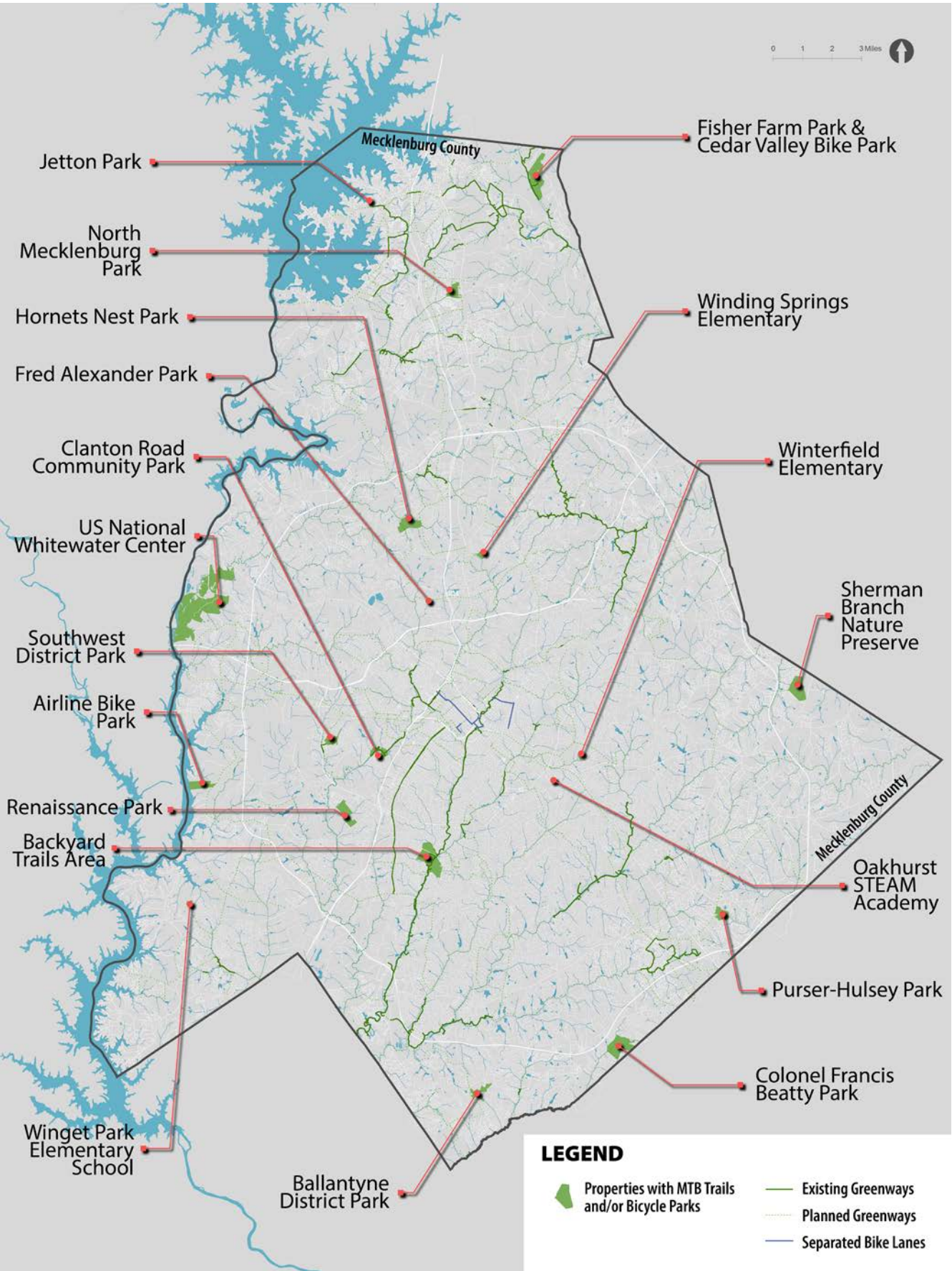


EXISTING MTB TRAILS & BICYCLE PARKS

There are currently 19 sites across Mecklenburg County with MTB trails and/or bike parks. The table and map below illustrate the location of these sites, the facilities they contain, the types of riders they serve, and the organizations responsible for their maintenance.

Location	Facility Type	User Groups	Managing Organizations
Airline Bike Park	XC Trails; Jump Lines, Pump Track	Beginner; Intermediate; Advanced	THTB; Charlotte Water; Mecklenburg County
Arbor Glen Outreach Center / Clanton Road Community Park	Traffic Garden	Beginner	Mecklenburg County
Backyard Trails Complex	XC Trails	Beginner; Intermediate; Advanced	THTB; Charlotte Water; Mecklenburg County
Ballantyne District Park	XC Trails, Jump Line	Intermediate	THTB; YMCA; Mecklenburg County
Colonel Francis Beatty Park	XC Trails; Pump Track, Jump Lines	Beginner; Intermediate; Advanced	THTB; Mecklenburg County
Fisher Farm Park & Cedar Valley Bike Park	XC Trails, Jump Lines, Flow Trail	Beginner; Intermediate; Advanced	THTB; Town of Davidson; Davidson Lands Conservancy; Mecklenburg County
Fred Alexander Park	Pump Track	Beginner; Intermediate	Mecklenburg County
Hornets Nest Park	BMX Track	Beginner; Intermediate; Advanced	Mecklenburg County
Jetton Park	XC Trails	Beginner;	THTB; Mecklenburg County
North Mecklenburg Park	XC Trails; Pump Track	Beginner; Intermediate	THTB; Town of Huntersville; Mecklenburg County
Oakhurst STEAM Academy	Traffic Garden	Beginner	Mecklenburg County; CMS
Purser-Hulsey Park	XC Trails, Jump Lines	Beginner; Intermediate	THTB; Town of Matthews
Renaissance Park	XC Trails	Beginner; Intermediate	THTB; Mecklenburg County
Sherman Branch Nature Preserve	XC Trails	Intermediate	THTB; Mecklenburg County
Southwest District Park / Southview Recreation Center	XC Trails	Beginner; Intermediate	THTB; Mecklenburg County
US National Whitewater Center	XC Trails	Beginner; Intermediate; Advanced	USNWC; Mecklenburg County
Winding Springs Elementary School	Traffic Garden	Beginner	Mecklenburg County; CMS
Winget Park Elementary School	Traffic Garden	Beginner	Mecklenburg County; CMS
Winterfield Elementary School	Traffic Garden	Beginner	Mecklenburg County; CMS

Table 1. MTB Trails & Bike Parks Snapshot





GAP ANALYSIS

Understanding how our existing MTB trails and bicycle parks are (or aren't) serving people across Mecklenburg County, is a key step in developing recommendations for the future development of MTB trails and bicycle parks. The project team developed a data-driven methodology for identifying gaps in Mecklenburg County's existing MTB trails and bicycle parks network. Using data from a variety of sources, the team layered 5 screening maps through a simple spatial analysis exercise to illustrate the people and places that could benefit the most from expanded MTB trails and bike parks infrastructure.

- 1

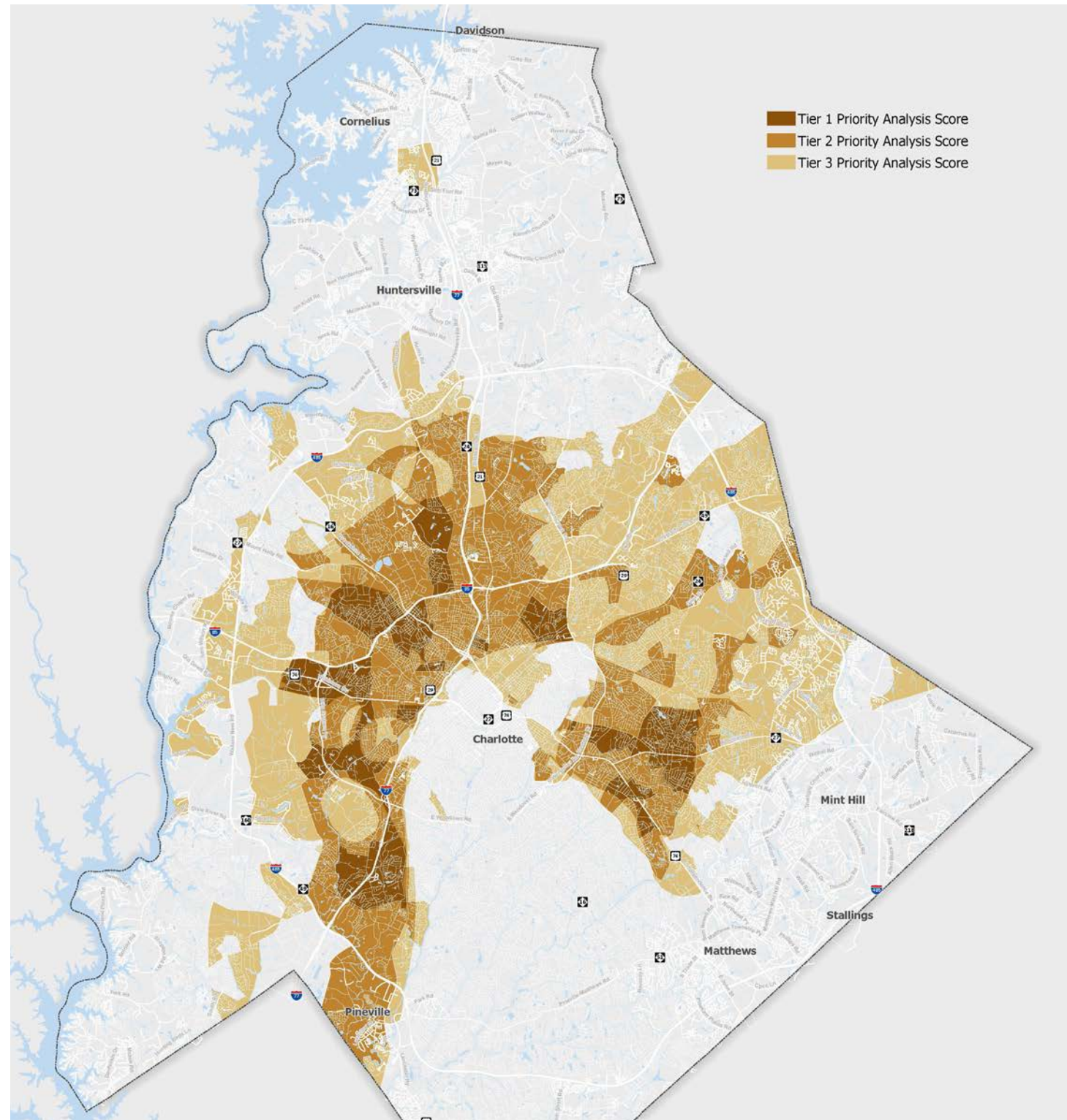
Lack Access to Existing MTB Trails & Bicycle Parks
Places further from 0.5 miles from properties with existing MTB trails and bicycle parks.
- 2

Park & Rec Priority Communities
Places within the County identified through the Meck Playbook – Park & Recreation Master Plan process as “Priority Communities” for improving access to recreation.
- 3

Public Health Priority Zones
Places within the County identified by Mecklenburg County Public Health as areas with the greatest need and vulnerability to public health risks.
- 4

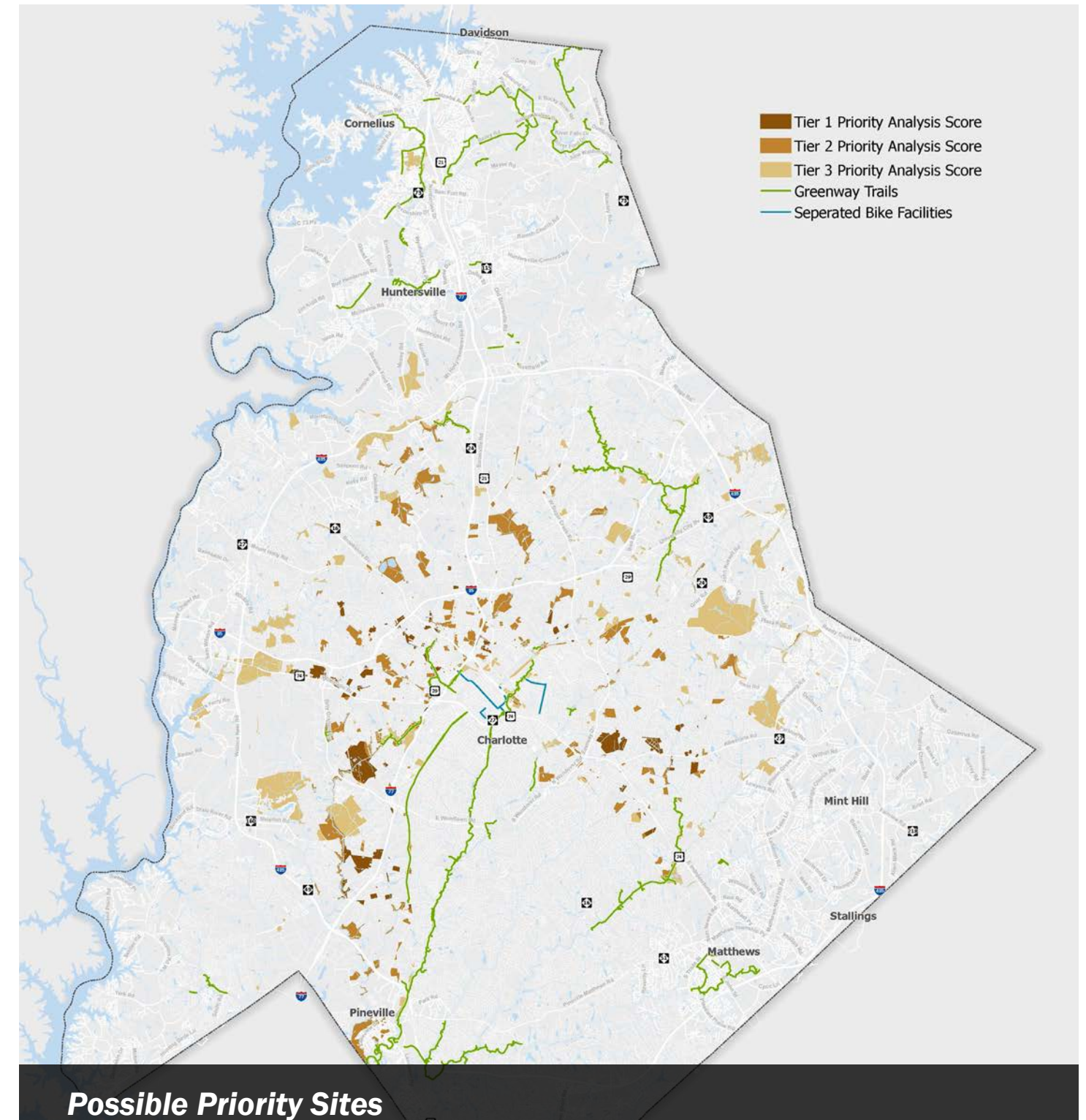
High Percentage of Youth Population
Places within the County where 25% or more of the population is less than 18 years old.
- 5

“The Arc” – Equity Indicators
Places within the County, identified through the Charlotte Future 2040 Comprehensive Plan process, which have a historical pattern of racial and economic segregation.



Gap Analysis Map

Areas in the County that showed up on all 5 screening maps were assigned a “Tier 1” score. Areas that show up on 4 of the 5 screening maps were assigned a “Tier 2” score. Areas that show up on 3 of 5 screening maps were assigned a “Tier 3” score.



Possible Priority Sites

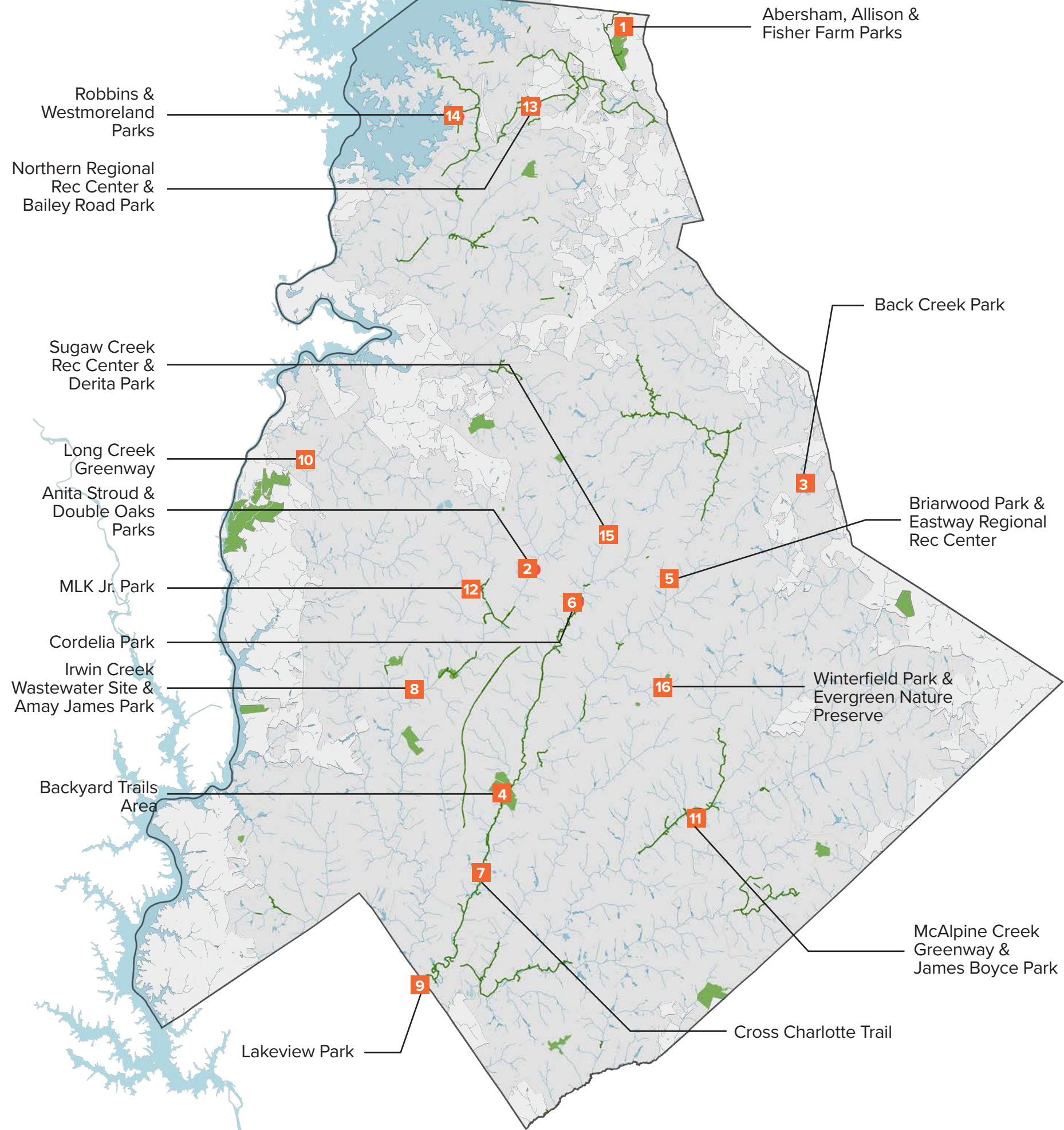
The team identified publicly-owned lands within the Tier 1-3 areas, as possible sites to consider for focusing future development of MTB trails and bicycle parks. These possible priority sites were then vetted with key groups – including Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation, the Tarheel Trailblazers, Mecklenburg County Public Health, and the Charlotte Department of Transportation – to determine the best sites to advance in support of their shared goals.



PRIORITY OPPORTUNITY SITES

Priority Opportunity Sites” are places where key partners should focus their resources to expand mountain bicycling (MTB) in Mecklenburg County and serve the growing number of riders and skill levels across the region. “Priority Opportunity Sites” were selected based on the places that provide the best opportunities to:

1. Serve a critical gap in the existing network by providing access to the people and places that need it the most (see Gap Analysis);
2. Utilize land with ideal characteristics for accommodating new MTB trails and parks;
3. Capitalize on existing MTB trails and/or bicycle parks that have great potential for expansion of facilities to serve different user groups and skill levels;
4. Align with potential programming and partner support; and
5. Grow the mountain biking culture throughout the County.



Location	Recommended Facilities for Consideration	Managing Organizations
Abersham Park & Fisher Farm Park	XC Trails; Flow Trails, Jump Lines, Pump Track; Skills Area, Gateway Trails	Town of Davidson + Davidson Lands Conservancy + Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation
Anita Stroud Park & Double Oaks Parks	Pump Track; Skills Area; Traffic Garden	Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation
Back Creek Park	XC Trails; Pump Track; Skills Area; Traffic Garden, Gateway Trail	Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation
Backyard Trails Area	MTB Features Parallel to XCLT Greenway; Pump Track; Skills Area, Jump Lines, Gateway Trail, XC Trail	Charlotte Water + Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation
Briarwood Park & Eastway Regional Recreation Center	Gateway Trail, Pump Track; Skills Area	Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation
Cordelia Park	Flow Trail, Gateway Trail, Pump Track, Skills Area	Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation
Cross Charlotte Trail	MTB Trails Parallel to XCLT Greenway; Pump Track; Skills Areas	Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation + City of Charlotte + Partners
Irwin Creek Wastewater Site & Amay James Park	XC Trails, Flow Trails, Traffic Garden	Charlotte Water + Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation
Lakeview Park	Xc Trails, Gateway Trail, Flow Trails	Town of Pineville
Long Creek Greenway	MTB Trails Parallel to Long Creek Greenway; Pump Track; Skills Areas, Jump Lines, Bike Park	Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation + Partners
McAlpine Creek Greenway / James Boyce Park	MTB Trails Parallel to McAlpine Creek Greenway; Gateway Trail, Pump Track; Skills Areas	Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation
MLK Jr. Park	Flow Trail, Jump Lines; Pump Track; Skills Area	Mecklenburg Parks and Recreation + Partners
Northern Regional Recreation Center, Caldwell Station Creek Greenway, Bailey Road Park	MTB Trails; Pump Track; Skills Area, Jump Lines	Town of Cornelius + Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation
Robbins Park & Westmoreland Park	XC Trails; Pump Track; Flow Trail Skills Area	Town of Cornelius + Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation + Partners
Sugaw Creek Recreation Center & Derita Park	MTB Trails; Gateway Trail, Pump Track; Skills Area; Traffic Garden	Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation
Winterfield Park & Evergreen Nature Preserve	XC Trails; Pump Track; Skills Area; Traffic Garden	Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation

Table 2. Priority Opportunity Sites Table

Abersham Park & Fisher Farm Park

Town of Davidson / Davidson Lands Conservancy /
Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation

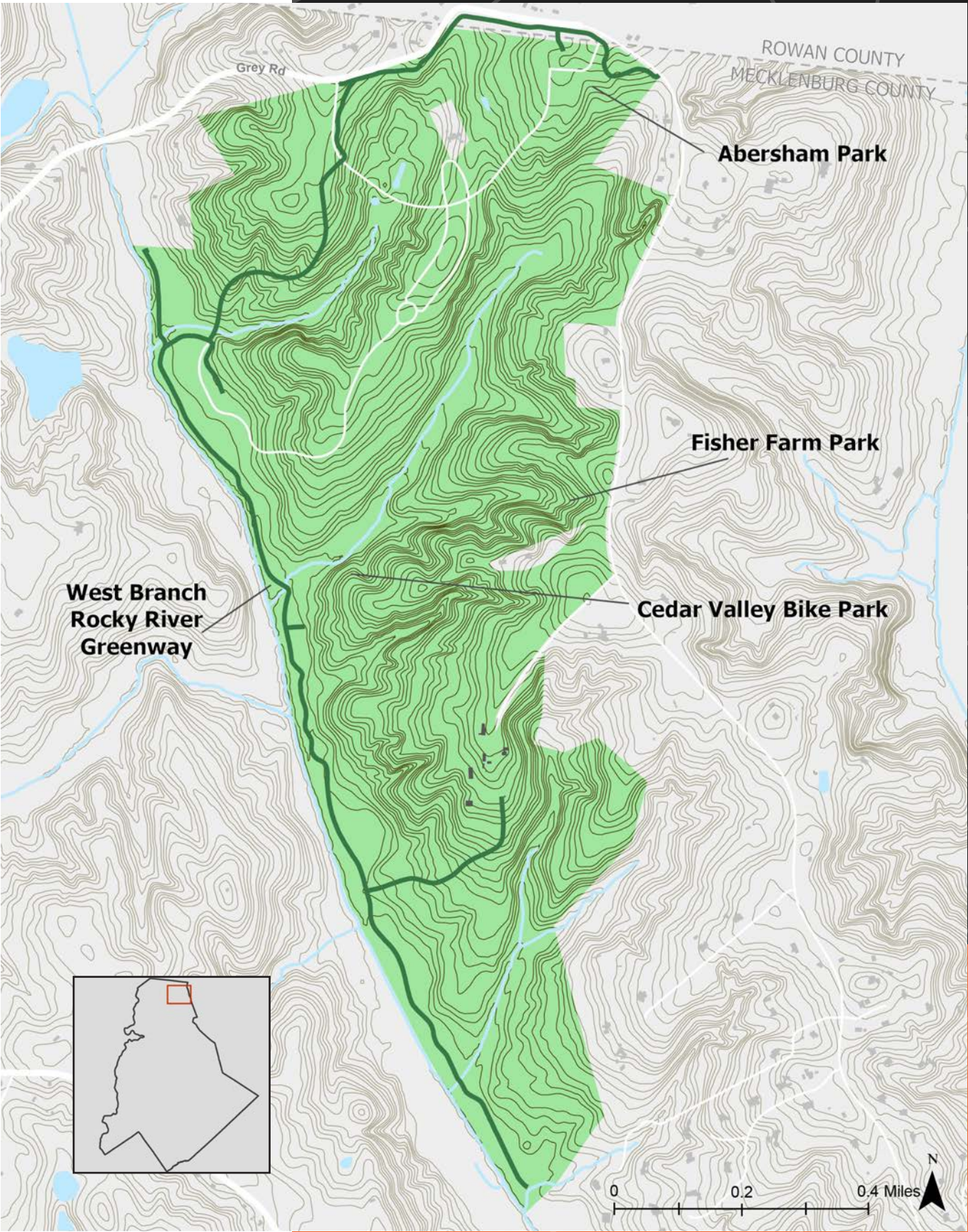
550 acres
(combined acreage)

Why is this a priority opportunity site?

- Located adjacent to the existing Fisher Farm Park / Cedar Valley Bike Park, Abersham Park offers an ideal opportunity to add trail mileage for an expanded and connected trail network which could be the largest in a Mecklenburg County public park.
- Fisher Farm Park and Cedar Valley Bike Park currently contain 7 miles of popular MTB trails in the northernmost portion of Mecklenburg County. It is the site of the annual Fisher Fest event hosted by the Tarheel Trailblazers. Fisher Fest is a regional celebration of mountain biking with various races, bike demos, jump competitions, trail prep work, camping, costume rides, food, and music.
- Directly adjoining Fisher Farm Park (to the north) is the Allison Farm Parcel (owned by Mecklenburg county) which has been partially developed with mountain bike trails through the Cedar Valley Bike Park trail network and the Twisted Sister XC trail. Property still remains within the Allison Farm parcel to expand the Cedar Valley Bike Park trails on the east side of the West Branch Rocky River tributary that runs between the Allison Farms property and Abersham.
- Just north, and immediately adjacent to Fisher Farm Park is Abersham Park, a large, 240-acre park that is currently dedicated to passive recreation including walking and biking along the legacy paved streets remaining from the residential development and the West Branch Rocky River Greenway .
- The West Branch Rocky River Greenway currently connects both parks, the Cedar Valley Bike Park, and the internal park drives, providing a large network of low-stress bicycling experiences on paved and natural surfaces.
- There is ample opportunity for development of multi-use (hiking and biking) cross country trails that could provide a connected, natural surface MTB experience within the sprawling 500+ acres of property at Abersham Park, Allison Park, & Fisher Farm Park.
- Forested hillsides on the Abersham Park property can support multi-use or MTB-only trail, with a particular interest in contouring machine-built trail. These future trails have the opportunity to include substantial mileage for multi-use single track in addition to MTB-only trail to accommodate all varieties of trail users and trail experiences.
- The popularity of the existing trails system, the important role that this area plays in regional bike programming and culture, and the ample available acreage for the development of new MTB assets, makes the Abersham Park, Allison Park, & Fisher Farm Park area one of the most important regional opportunities for the development of a world-class MTB park.

Recommended Facilities for Consideration

XC Trails, Flow Trails, Gateway Trails



Anita Stroud Park / Double Oaks Park / Ivory Baker Recreation Center

Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation
+ City of Charlotte

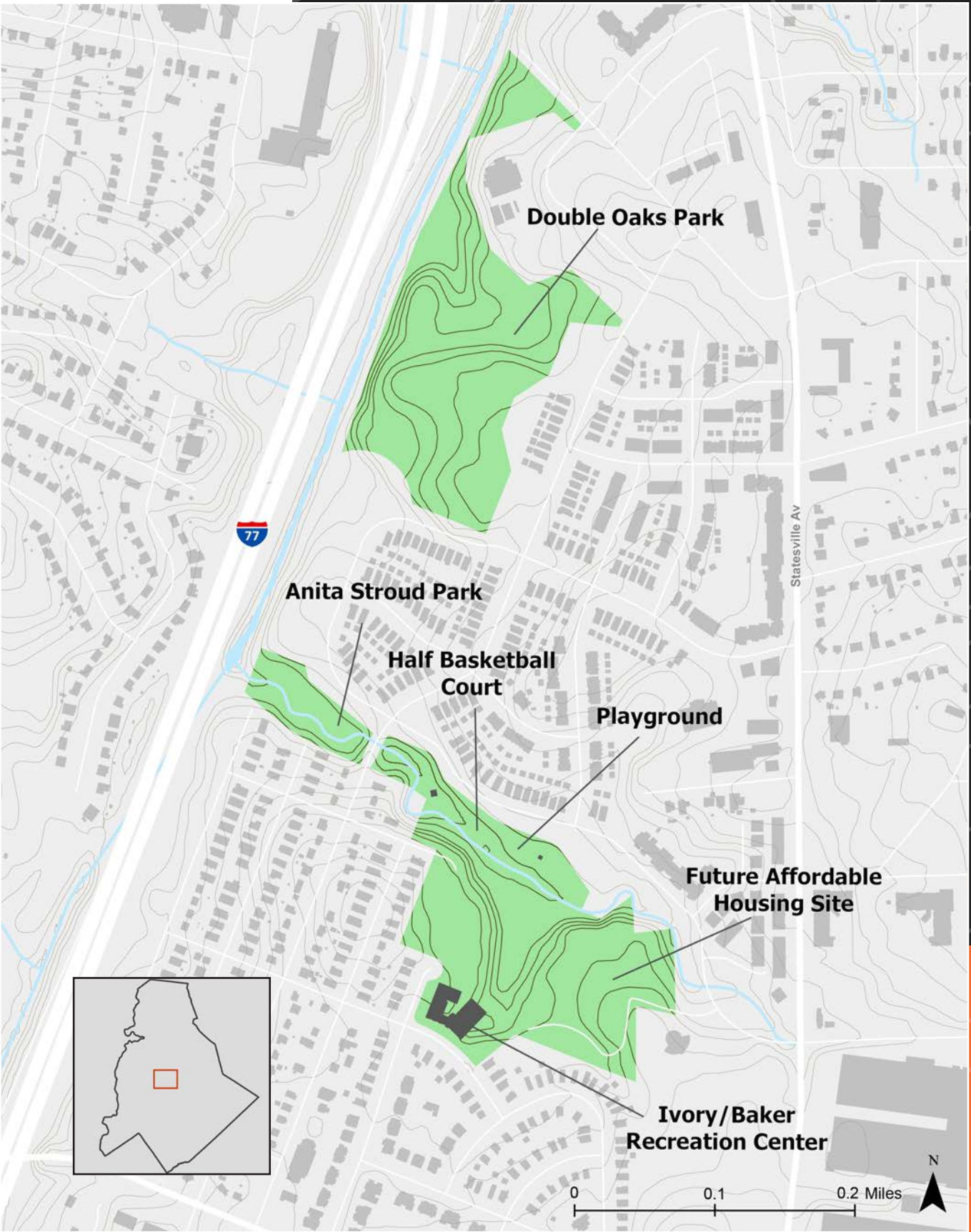
39 acres
(combined acreage)

Why is this a priority opportunity site?

- This group of public properties links the Brightwalk and Double Oaks neighborhoods just north of Uptown Charlotte. These sites were identified as priority sites in the Gap Analysis. These properties will be connected into the countywide greenway network via a planned Irwin/Stewart Creek Greenway extension from Oaklawn Ave to Atando Ave.
- Double Oaks Park is a 15.7 acre site between I-77 and Double Oaks Road that sits on top of an old landfill. The park is undeveloped and offers an ideal opportunity for the development of MTB facilities within a priority area. Grading into the site is likely not possible due to environmental concerns with the old landfill. However, bringing in material to create a bike park with a pump track and skills areas could be an excellent use of this currently unused space.
- Children have been observed exploring these areas on bikes and practicing bike skills on old concrete slabs left from the demolition of the old Double Oaks Elementary School building.
- The old Double Oaks School site, owned by the City of Charlotte, is being planned for a future affordable housing development. The portions of this property nearest Anita Stroud Park may provide some limited opportunity for the incorporation of outdoor amenities. THTB and Mecklenburg County Park & Rec should coordinate with the City of Charlotte (and their selected affordable housing developer) to discuss whether some small MTB runs or skills areas might be possible to include as an amenity for local children.
- A pump track or MTB skills features adjacent to the Ivory Baker Recreation Center would offer new youth-oriented amenities to that rec center and support the high percentage of youth population in the Double Oaks neighborhood.

Recommended Facilities for Consideration

Pump Track; Skills Area; Traffic Garden



Back Creek Park

Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation

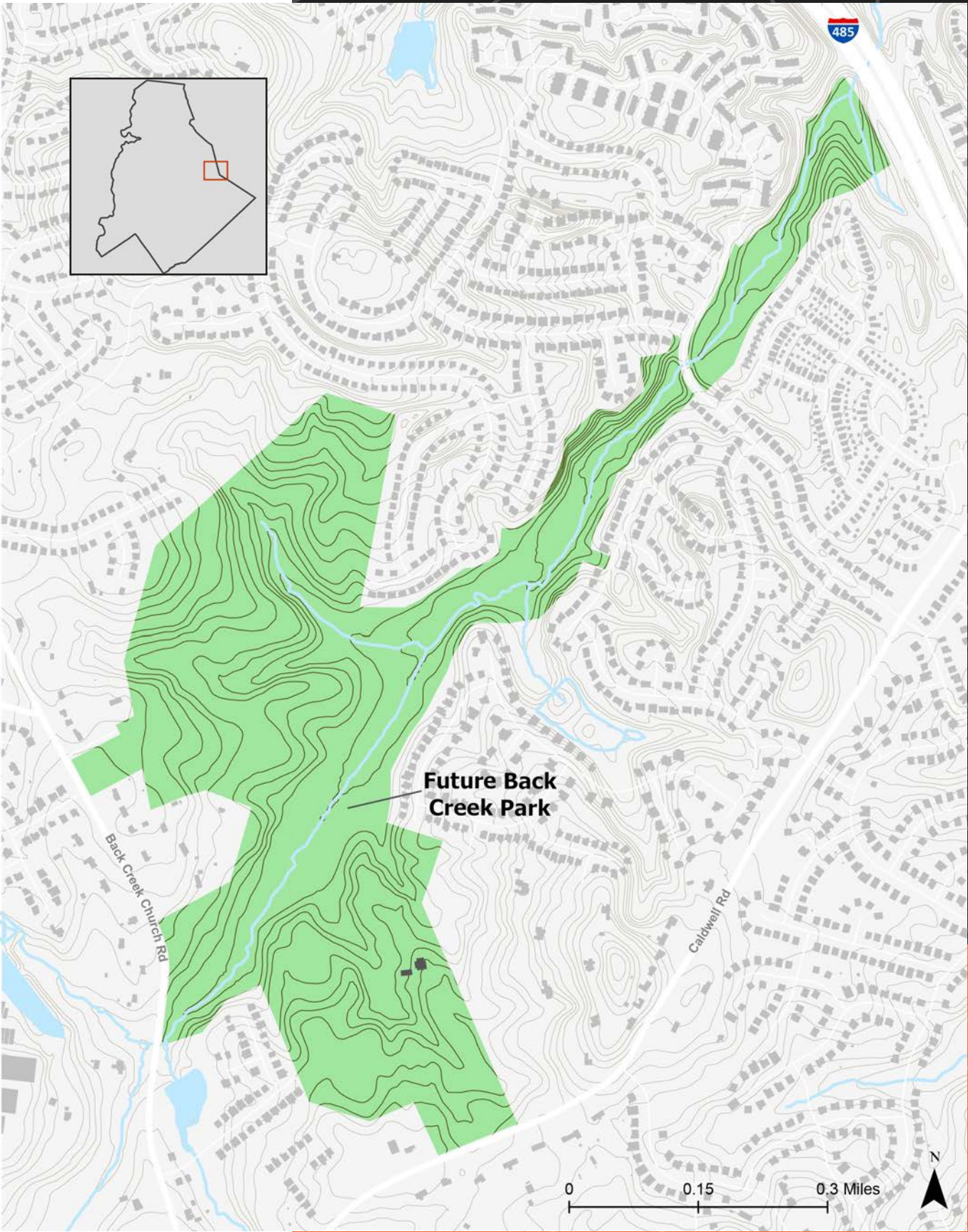
175 acres

Why is this a priority opportunity site?

- The future Back Creek Park property was acquired by Mecklenburg County. The planning study for the future park identifies MTB trails as a potential use within the “active park” zones. There is also an opportunity for a traffic garden and/or pump track to be developed in conjunction with other park uses.
- The park is along the future Back Creek Greenway corridor with planned future connections under I-485 to Cabarrus County.
- This site was identified as a priority site in the Gap Analysis. It would provide MTB / bike park access in a far eastern portion of Mecklenburg County where that access is currently lacking.
- Because this park is still in the planning/design phase, it is an ideal candidate for the incorporation of MTB trails and bicycle park amenities.

Recommended Facilities for Consideration

XC Trails; Pump Track; Skills Area; Traffic Garden, Gateway Trail



Backyard Trails Area

Charlotte Water + Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation
+ Tarheel Trailblazers

This opportunity site consists of multiple areas in and around the Backyard Trails area that are connected by the Cross Charlotte Trail but do not currently have MTB facilities.

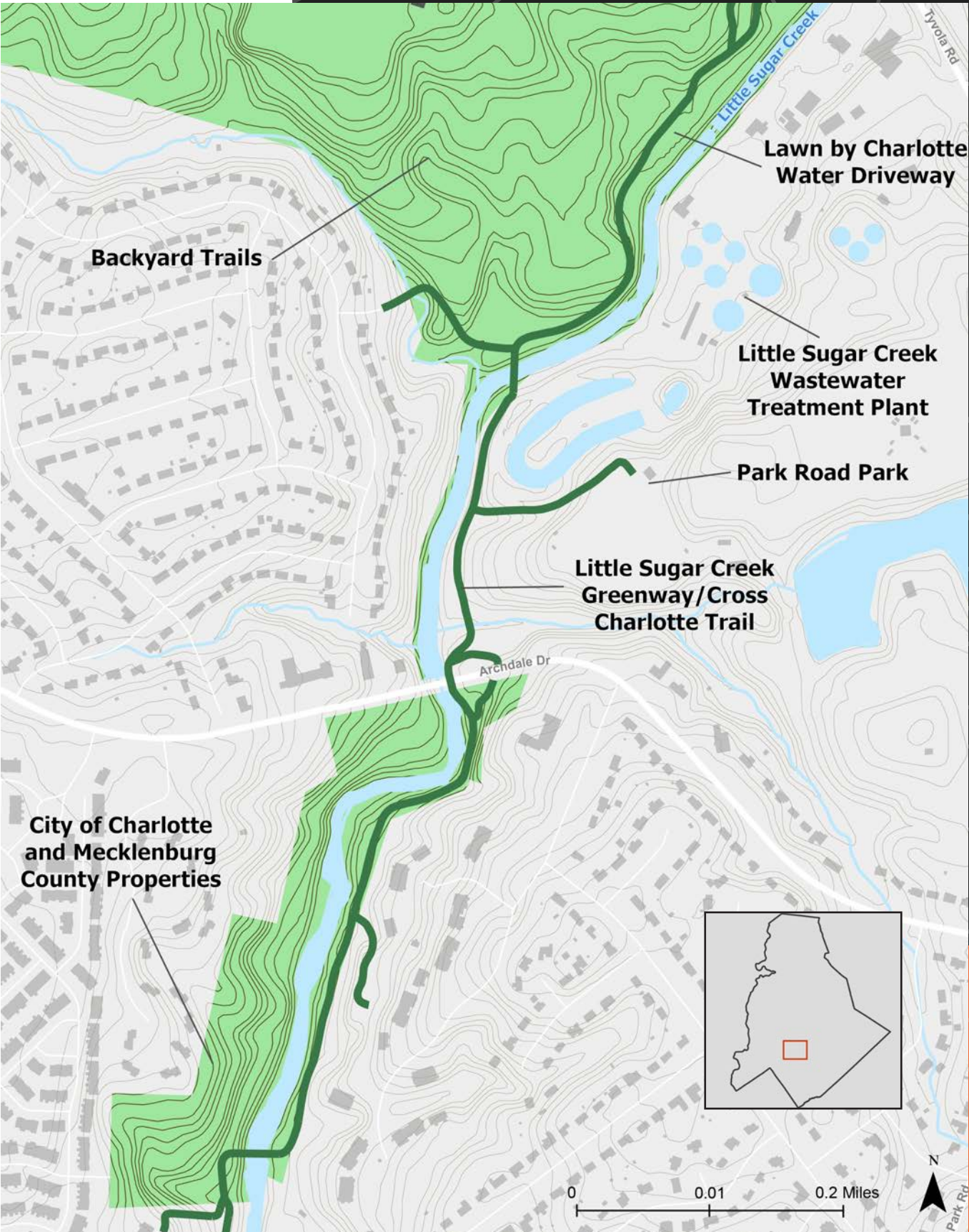
- 1.5 Acres at the intersection of the XCLT and the Charlotte Water entrance drive
- ~13 Acres owned by a combination of City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation to the west of Little Sugar Creek between Archdale Rd and the large bridge on the XCLT near the Mount Clare Lane neighborhood connector

Why is this a priority opportunity site?

- The Backyard Trails (BYT) are the epicenter of historical and modern-day mountain biking in the heart of Charlotte. The ~18 miles of single track in this area have become incredibly accessible through the connectivity provided by the XCLT. When the Huntingtowne Farms to Tyvola Rd. segment of the XCLT was completed in 2018, it linked the three primary riding areas that make up the Backyard Trails (the Farmbrook, Marion Diehl, and Park Rd Park trail networks). Riders can now circulate easily between the three BYT trail areas. The BYT trails are now accessible via the 31-mile XCLT, linking to thousands of potential new riders.
- There are many opportunities to add new riding experiences to this signature MTB facility, with two immediate priority areas for planning and investment
 - There is a cleared lawn area near the intersection of the XCLT and the Sugar Creek Wastewater Plant driveway that would be ideal for a pump track, skills area or other bike park amenity in the heart of the existing XCLT / Backyard Trails Complex. If this lawn area is deemed to be infeasible/undesirable by Charlotte Water for the development of MTB assets, there are other areas within the site that could be explored.
 - There is ~13 acres of Mecklenburg County Property and City of Charlotte Property along Little Sugar Creek just south of the Archdale Road that can support a Gateway Trail experience (wide dirt or gravel paths) paralleling the creek and utility easement, along with a progressive MTB trail utilizing the wooded portions of the parcels with topography.
- These two opportunities would add experiences not currently found within BYT that increase the range of riders that are able to utilize this asset.

Recommended Facilities for Consideration

- MTB features parallel to XCLT Greenway; Pump Track; Skills Area, Jump Lines, Gateway Trail, XC Trail



Briarwood Park & Eastway Regional Recreation Center

Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation

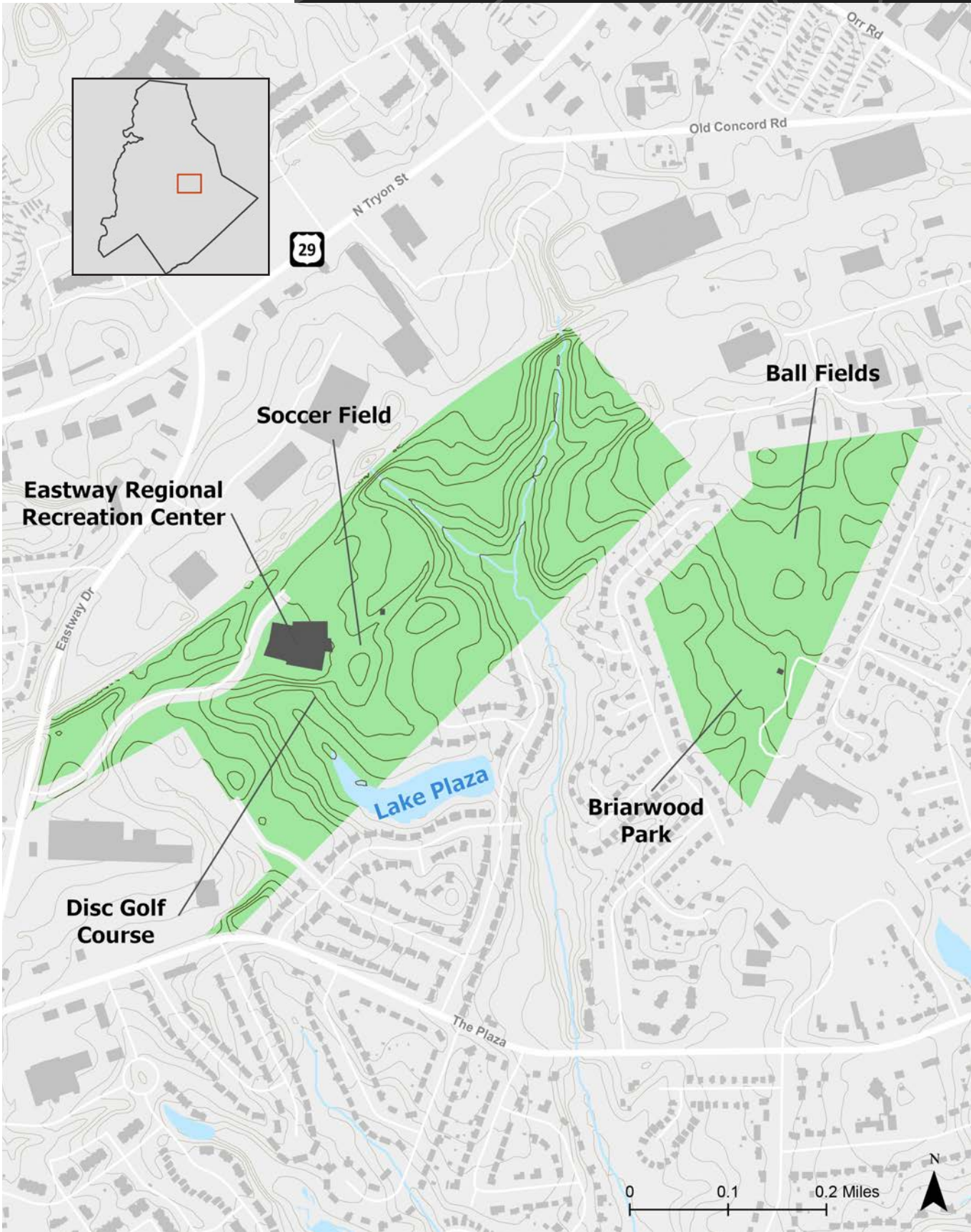
120 acres
(combined acreage)

Why is this a priority opportunity site?

- Opened in 2021, Eastway Regional Recreation Center is a first-of-its-kind facility in northeast Charlotte offering a wide variety of recreational and fitness amenities. Those amenities do not currently include MTB assets, but modular pump tracks and bicycle skills areas could work in areas around the recreation center.
- There is also a ~1-acre, wooded area at nearby Briarwood Park. It is relatively flat and could be suitable for the development of a gateway trail.
- This site was identified as a priority site in the Gap Analysis. It would fill a gap geographically and in terms of the populations that have close access to a MTB asset.
- This area is close to the Cross Charlotte Trail via low-stress, on-street bicycle connections up to Orr Road.

Recommended Facilities for Consideration

Gateway Trail, Pump Track; Skills Area



Cordelia Park

Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation

21 acres

Why is this a priority opportunity site?

- This site was identified as a priority site in the Gap Analysis. It is adjacent to the Cross Charlotte Trail / Little Sugar Creek greenway and supports the vision for developing a chain of MTB assets along that regional greenway facility.
- The topography of Cordelia Park is well-suited for the development MTB trails and/or bike park elements with little other possible uses. The flat area near the greenway is well-suited for the development of a skills course area and/or pump track if desired. This area is likely within the floodplain which may create some constraints for development of MTB assets that need to be evaluated further.
- Cordelia Park has a history of cycling. Cyclocross and urban rides have unofficially incorporated the trails and hills into their routes for years.
- Cordelia Park was also the site of a very successful MTB demonstration project in June 2021 which installed two temporary MTB trails – a beginner level and an intermediate level – and a pop-up skills area. Over 500 people participated in the demonstration project with 97% of survey respondents rating the project as “Excellent – I want a bike park in my neighborhood.” ([The Cordelia Pop-Up Bike Park: Summary Report & Guide](#). 2021.)

Recommended Facilities for Consideration

Flow Trail, Gateway Trail, Pump Track, Skills Area



Cross Charlotte Trail (XCLT)

Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation
+ City of Charlotte + Others

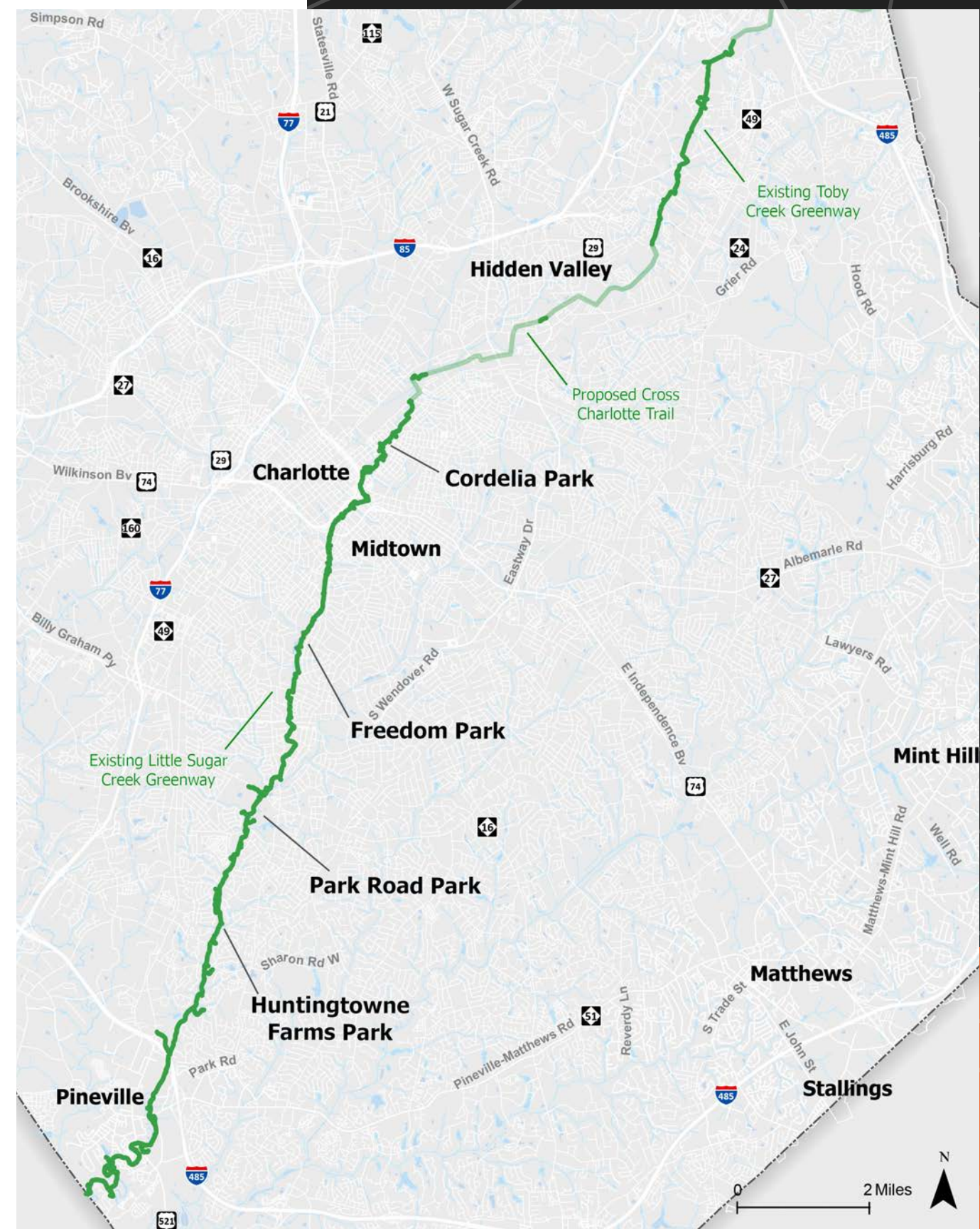
Various sites along a ~31-mile greenway trail alignment from South Carolina to Cabarrus County

Why is this a priority opportunity site?

- The development of the Cross Charlotte Trail is a partnership between Mecklenburg County, the City of Charlotte, and others. It provides an ideal opportunity for a beginner-level MTB trail facility adjacent to a regional greenway – similar to the “All-American Trail” in northwest Arkansas.
- The southern portion of the XCLT, from the Mt. Clare Ln. connector to the South Carolina state line, offers ample opportunities for the development of parallel MTB facilities, skills areas, and pump tracks.
 - South of the Mt. Clare Ln. neighborhood connector wide grass shoulders provide space for MTB play parallel to the greenway
 - In the Huntingtowne Farms area there are wide lawns along the XCLT where parallel MTB trails, features, a pump track, and/or a skills area could be built. This area is likely within the floodplain which may create some constraints for development of MTB assets that need to be evaluated further.
 - In between Sharon Road West and I-485 there are some larger wooded areas adjacent to the XCLT where connected MTB trail loops could be developed with direct access to the greenway as terrain allows
- Northern portions of the Cross Charlotte Trail from Uptown to the Cabarrus County line also present opportunities for skills areas and other bike park developments at locations such as:
- 16th street park, Cordelia Park, Hidden Valley Park
- The Cross Charlotte Trail is a signature parts of the bicycle culture in Mecklenburg County. Developing a chain of highly-visible MTB experiences that build from these existing assets will serve the growing number of riders in the region and encourage more people to try mountain biking.

Recommended Facilities for Consideration

MTB Trails parallel to XCLT Greenway; Pump Track; Skills Areas



Irwin Creek Wastewater Site & Amay James Park

Charlotte Water + Mecklenburg County
Park & Recreation

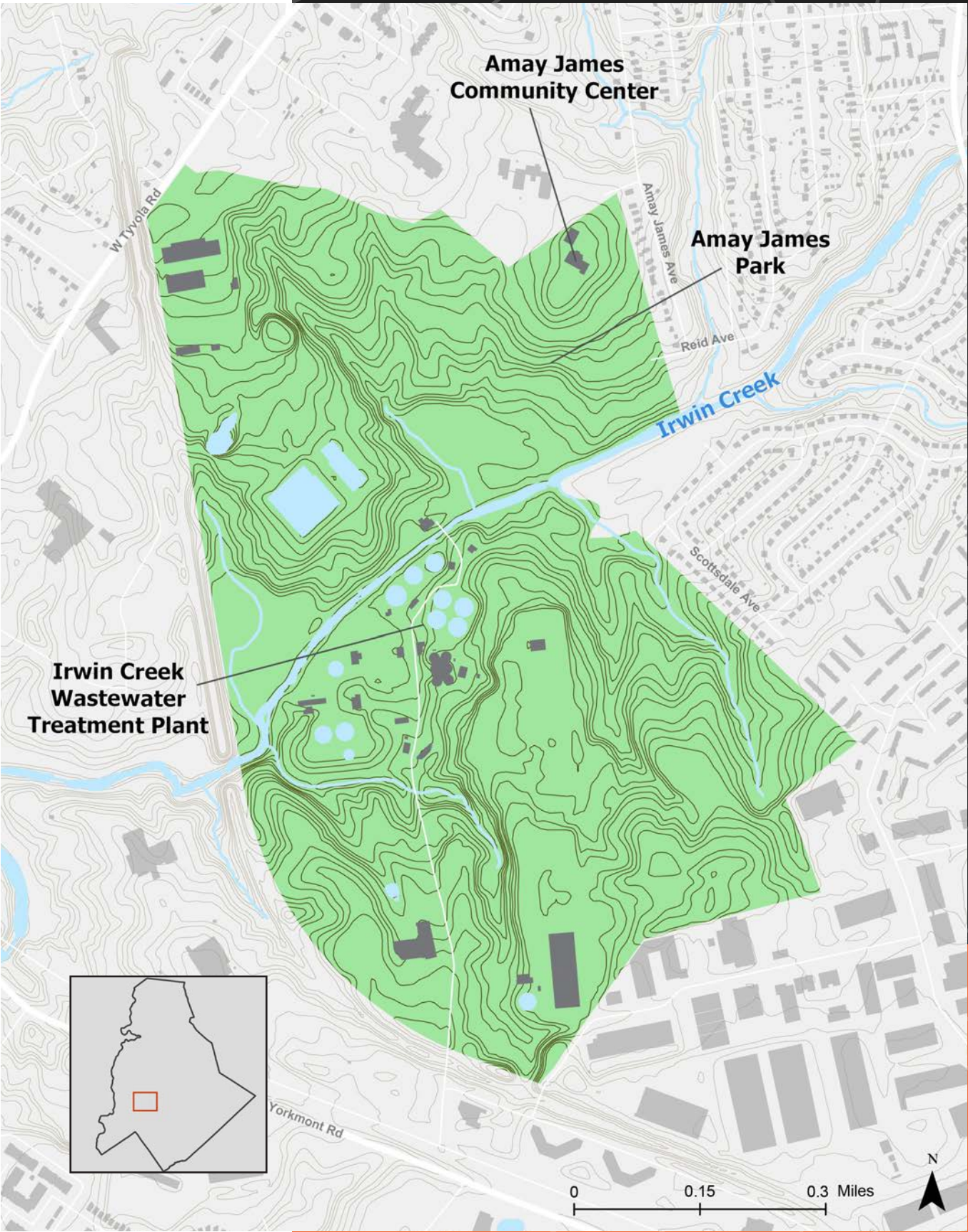
366 acres
(combined acreage)

Why is this a priority opportunity site?

- Despite being located near some existing MTB/bicycle park facilities, the needs in this area of the County are great, and this site was identified as a priority site in the Gap Analysis. This site is located within neighborhoods that have been identified as priority areas by Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation and Mecklenburg County Public Health. It is also within a neighborhood that has a high percentage of youth population.
- The majority of the Charlotte Water property in this area is undeveloped wooded land suitable for the construction of MTB trails. The rolling topography in portions of the property offers an ideal opportunity for the development of MTB trail loops with a progression of difficulty to serve a wide variety of riders
- The Amay James Park master plan calls for the development of urban agriculture on the Mecklenburg County park property. This may preclude the development significant MTB assets, however a small MTB trail connector should be incorporated to provide access from the Amay James Park & Recreation Center sites to MTB trails on the Charlotte Water property to the west.
- This site is located on the future Irwin Creek Greenway, which is a part of the regional [Seam Trail](#). The Irwin Creek Greenway corridor extends NE into Clanton Park and Revolution Park. There are additional opportunities for the development of MTB features adjacent to the greenway and within those parks.
- An old paved area may provide an opportunity for a traffic garden. Further investigation is required to verify the pavement quality and current use.

Recommended Facilities for Consideration

XC Trails; Flow Trails, Traffic Garden



Lakeview Park / Pineville Park

Town of Pineville + Mecklenburg County
Park & Recreation

265 acres
(combined acreage)

Why is this a priority opportunity site?

- These undeveloped park properties are located in southern Mecklenburg County along the border with South Carolina. Tucked between a Norfolk Southern rail line, the South Carolina state border, residential neighborhoods, and Little Sugar Creek, these constrained park parcels offer rolling topography, forested land, and direct connections to the existing Little Sugar Creek Greenway / Cross Charlotte Trail and the future Sugar Creek Greenway.
- These properties were identified as priority sites in the Gap Analysis. They would provide an opportunity to serve the Town of Pineville and southern Mecklenburg County with new MTB assets. MTB facilities here would also attract riders from York and Lancaster Counties, in South Carolina.
- There is a high percentage of youth population in the neighborhoods near these park properties.
- Because of the land characteristics, there is little opportunity to develop these properties for recreational fields and playgrounds. The rolling topography and connections to adjacent greenways offers an ideal opportunity for the development of MTB trail loops with a progression of difficulty to serve a wide variety of riders.

Recommended Facilities for Consideration

XC Trails, Gateway Trail, Flow Trails



Long Creek Greenway

Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation
+ Others

366 acres
(combined acreage)

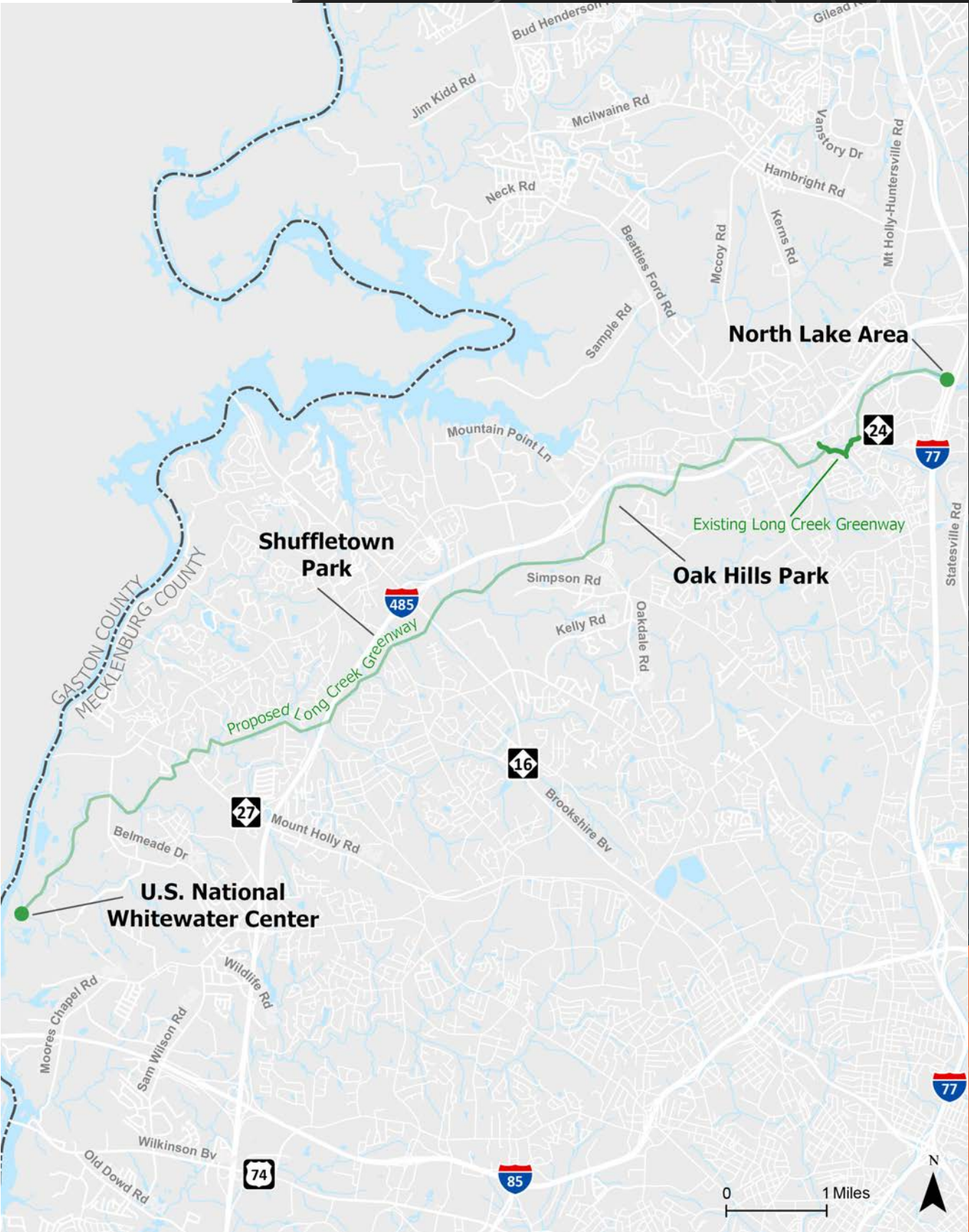
Various sites along a ~13-mile greenway trail alignment from the US National Whitewater Center (USNWC) to Northlake Mall area.

Why is this a priority opportunity site?

- A chain of MTB assets along Long Creek Greenway could connect directly to the existing trails system at the USNWC and the vision for future parks and trails along the Catawba River as described in the recent Meck Playbook plan.
- Long Creek Greenway is being developed in phases, with the northernmost phases (near Northlake Mall) already in construction or completed. Future planned phases will extend the greenway corridor to the south, into areas where large public properties span both sides of Long Creek.
- Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation recently purchased the old Oak Hills golf course along Long Creek and has a long-term lease with NCDOT for another 144 acres of property adjacent to I-485. Portions of these properties could be developed for MTB trails and bike park areas.
 - Interesting topography and connections to existing/planned park amenities provides an ideal opportunity for a MTB trail facility, with a progression of skill levels, adjacent to this regional greenway.
- Public properties along the future Long Creek Greenway were identified as potential priority sites in the Gap Analysis.
- MTB trails parallel to Long Creek Greenway, complemented by bike park elements and skills areas at publicly owned properties along the greenway, would create a progressive MTB trail asset similar to the All American Trail in Northwest Arkansas. (See page 44.)

Recommended Facilities for Consideration

MTB Trails parallel to Long Creek Greenway; Pump Track; Skills Areas, Jump Lines, Bike Park



**McAlpine Creek Greenway / James Boyce Park /
McAlpine Creek Park**

Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation

508 acres

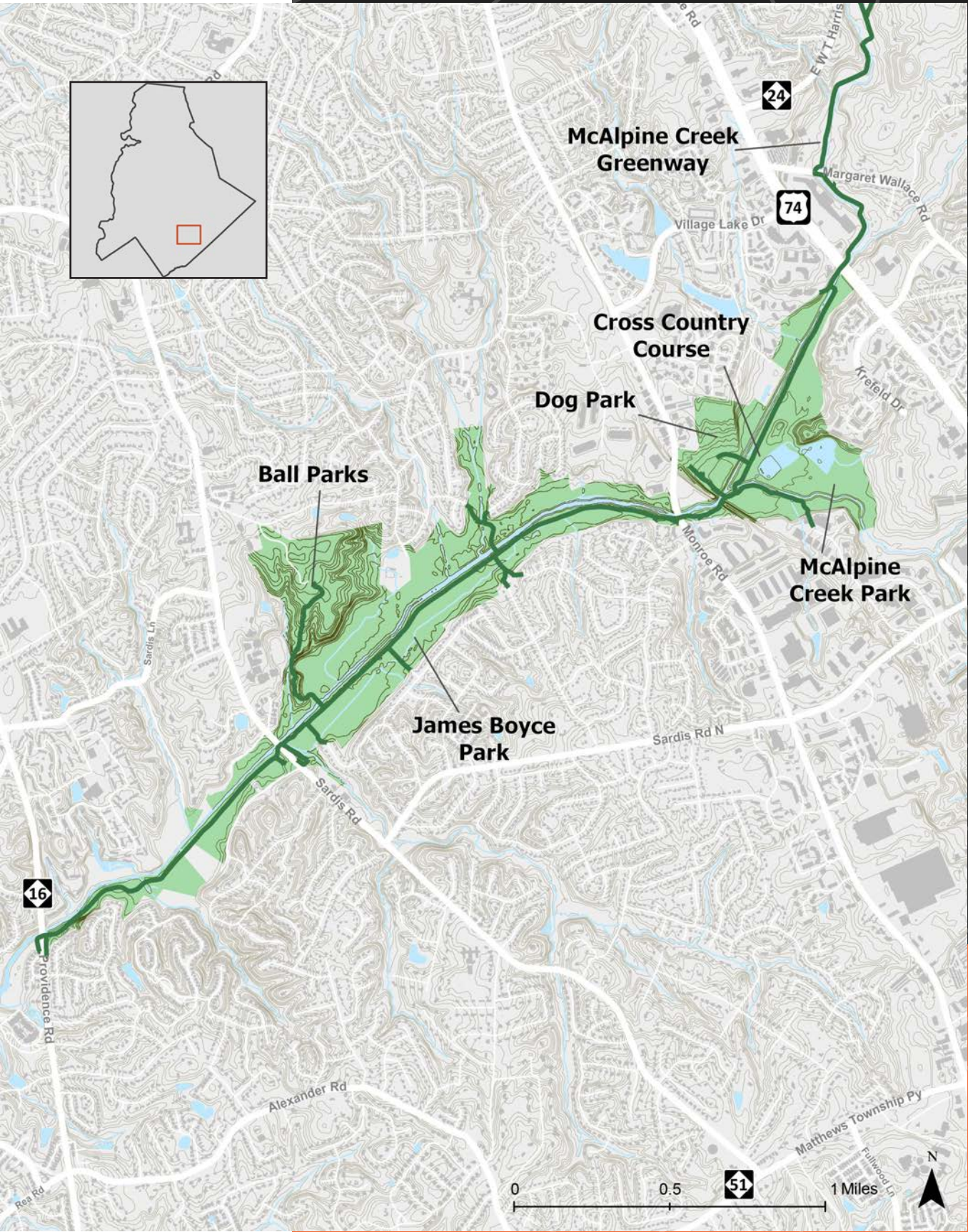
(James Boyce Park) + other publicly owned sites along the
McAlpine Creek Greenway

Why is this a priority opportunity site?

- Public properties along McAlpine Creek Greenway were identified as potential priority sites in the Gap Analysis.
- Natural trails already exist within Boyce Park and McAlpine Creek Park with greenway connections that support access to communities on both sides of Independence Boulevard (US74). The existing trails are well used by walkers and integration of MTB use into the park should take that into account with the design of multi-use trail, or in the incorporation of bicycle only areas. This recommendation is not suggesting a conversion of the championship XC running course, but rather looking at opportunities on other park owned parcels in this area along the greenway along with James Boyce Park
- The topography in areas of Boyce Park would support the development of interesting trails loops.
- There are large wooded areas and greenway-adjacent opportunities for developing parallel trails and bike park features in both James Boyce Park and McAlpine Creek Park.
- The future Lynx Silver Line and Silver Line Trail will connect to McAlpine Creek greenway, offering regional access to MTB facilities in this location.
- MTB trails parallel to McAlpine Creek Greenway, complemented by bike park elements and skills areas at publicly owned properties along the greenway, would create a progressive MTB trail asset similar to the All American Trail in Northwest Arkansas.

Recommended Facilities for Consideration

MTB Trails parallel to McAlpine Creek Greenway; Gateway Trail, Pump Track; Skills Areas



Martin Luther King Jr. Park

Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation

29 acres

Why is this a priority opportunity site?

- This site was identified as a Tier 1 priority site in the Gap Analysis.
- Martin Luther King Park sits along the Stewart Creek Greenway and is well connected via the existing greenway network to many neighborhoods on the west side of Charlotte, just outside of Uptown
- The ~12 acres of wooded area on the site features 30' of elevation change which is well suited for a compact and progressive bike park experience. This terrain lends itself well to flow trail and jump lines that maximize the available gravity, designed in a progressive manner.
- There are flat areas exist that may offer room for a pump track and skills area.

Recommended Facilities for Consideration

Flow Trail, Jump Lines; Pump Track; Skills Area



Northern Regional Recreation Center / Caldwell Station Creek Greenway / Bailey Road Park

Town of Cornelius + Mecklenburg County
Park & Recreation

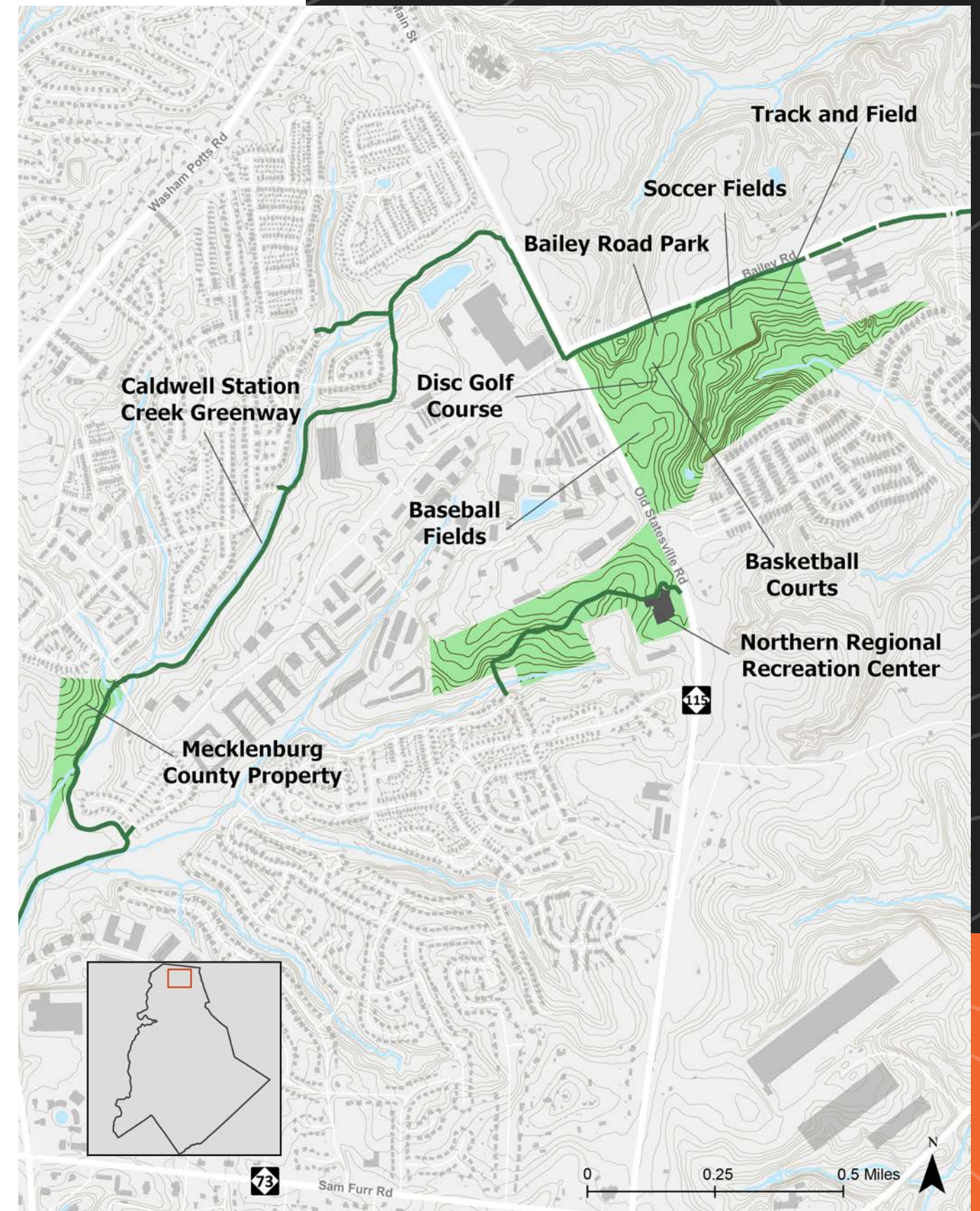
102 acres
(combined acreage)

Why is this a priority opportunity site?

- Bailey Middle School hosts an [Outride: Riding for Focus](#) cycling education program, which “uses cycling as a tool to promote physical, emotional, and social well-being in youth.” This priority opportunity site offers an opportunity to support that existing program with short MTB trails and/or bicycle parks that Outride students could use on park property adjacent to the middle school.
- MTB trails and bike parks would help to strengthen the bicycling culture and demand that already exists at Bailey Middle School. There are a significant number of students who ride to school, and PE teachers have set up a mentorship program among students to support their peers in riding.
- Existing natural surface trails at Bailey Road Park have the potential to be enhanced to act as a gateway trail for mountain biking.
- The Northern Regional Recreation Center property includes a short existing greenway that is planned to connect through future projects to the broader greenway network in north Mecklenburg County. There are opportunities for the development of a pump track and skills area on that property with direct connections to the greenway network.
- A Mecklenburg County Owned property along Caldwell station creek greenway just south of Bailey Rd has a clearing from an old home site and ~30’ of elevation change. It would be well suited for bike park jump lines and a pump track accessible via the greenway network.

Recommended Facilities for Consideration

MTB Trails; Pump Track; Skills Area, Jump Line, Gateway Trail



Robbins Park & Westmoreland Park

Town of Cornelius and Mecklenburg County
Park & Recreation

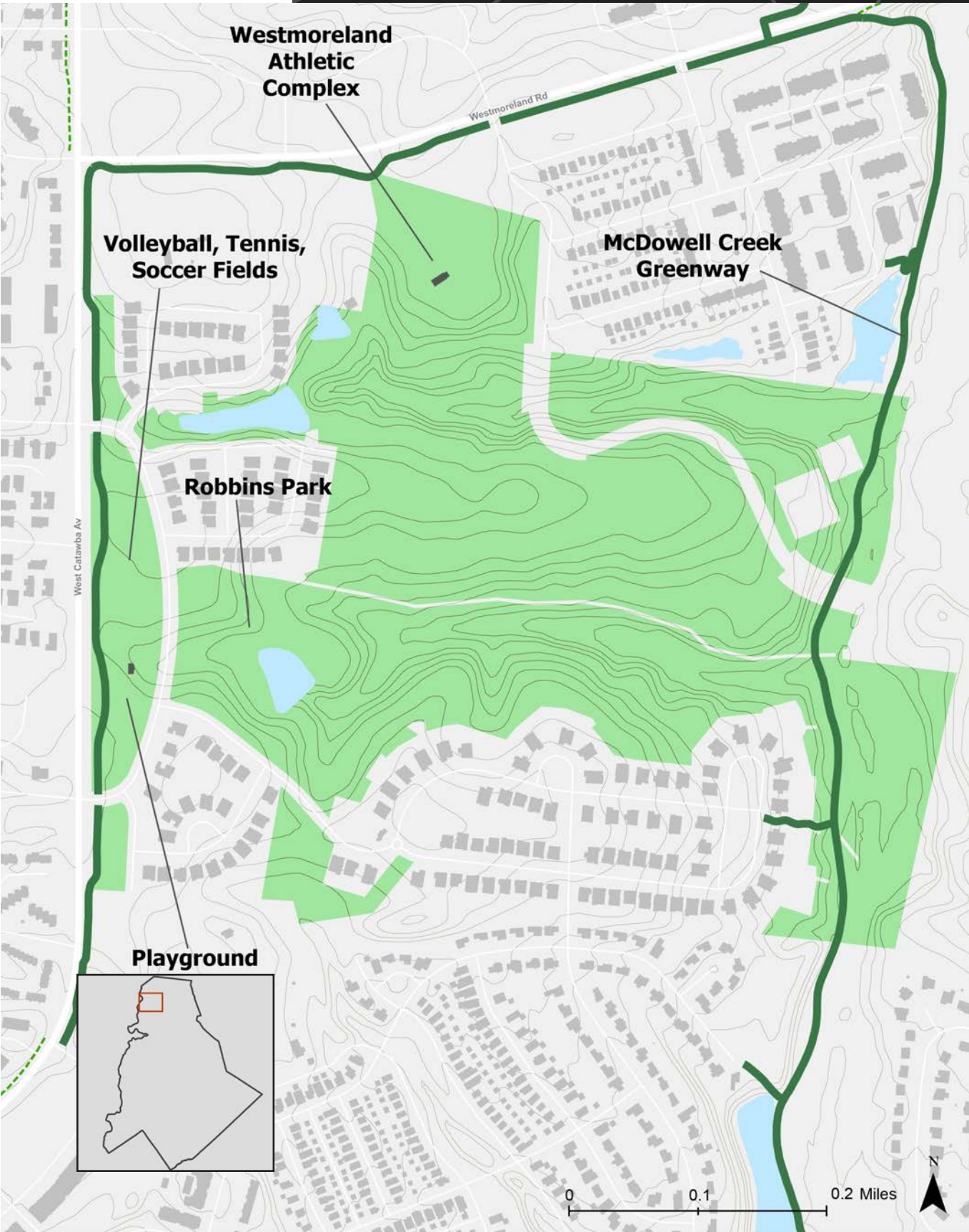
122 acres
(combined acreage)

Why is this a priority opportunity site?

- This site was identified as a priority site in the Gap Analysis.
- Robbins Park is located along the McDowell Creek Greenway which provides great bicycle connectivity within Cornelius (and to Huntersville) and is also part of the town’s signature “Emerald Necklace” greenway network.
- There are existing natural surface trails within a 25-acre forested area south of the McDowell Creek tributary, and another ~25 acres of young growth forest on the north side of the McDowell Creek tributary which could support more single track trail.
- The Northcross Drive Road Extension Project (administered by the Town of Cornelius) is currently under construction and displaced portions of the disc golf course at the park. During such time as the disc golf course is being redesigned, opportunities to add a gateway trail experience at Robbins Park should be explored, including reconfiguring the existing natural surface trails at the park to create a more functional and robust trail network for all users. Enough topography is present to support a flow trail as a part of the network.
- Space exists with the proposed trail areas for skills areas or a pump track to complement the trail experience.

Recommended Facilities for Consideration

XC Trails; Pump Track; Flow Trail, Skills Area, Gateway Trail



Sugaw Creek Park/Recreation Center & Derita Park

Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation

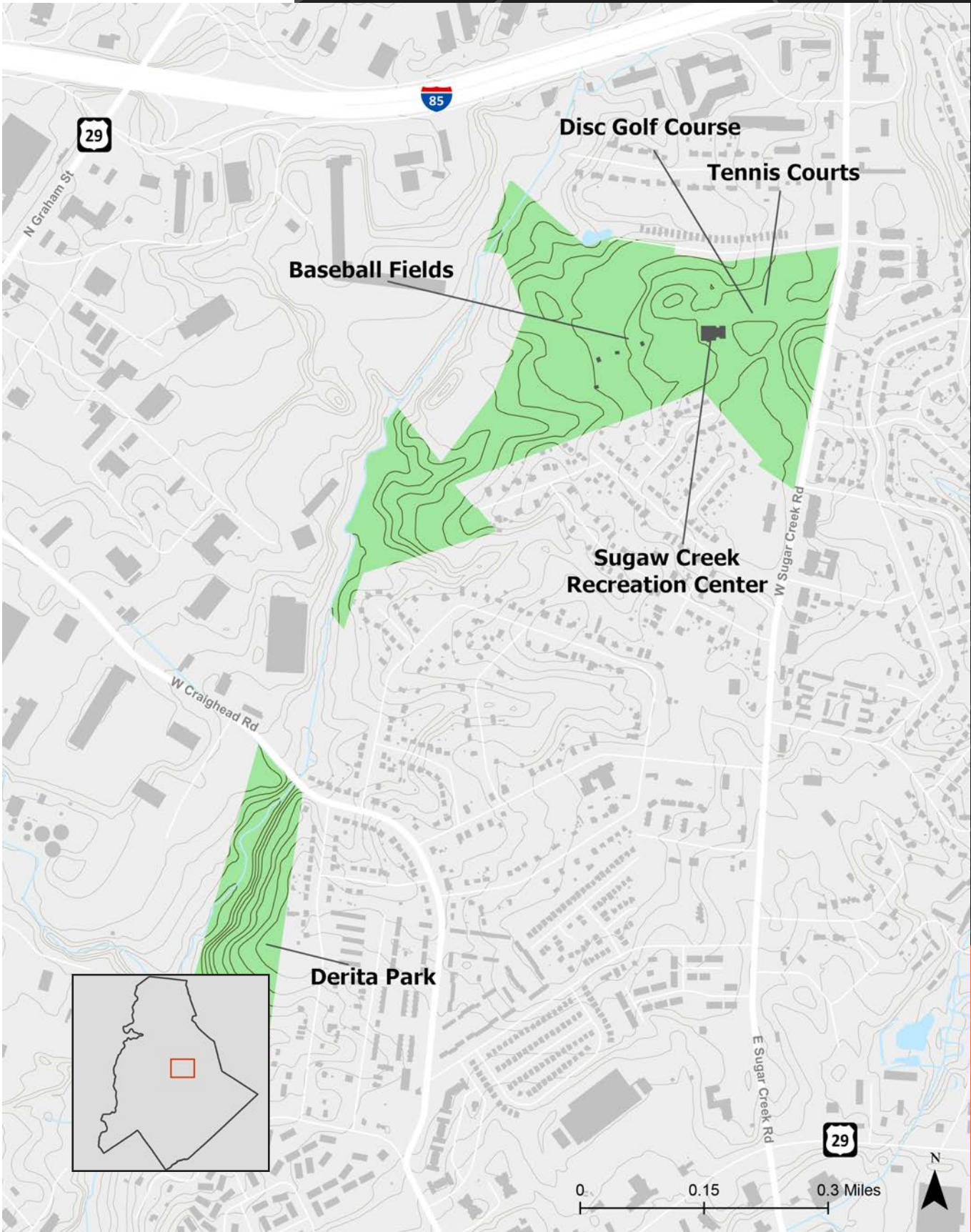
107 acres
(combined acreage)

Why is this a priority opportunity site?

- Running along Derita Branch in north Charlotte, Derita Park and Sugaw Creek Park and Recreation Center were identified as priority sites in the Gap Analysis. They are located within neighborhoods that have been identified as priority areas by Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation and Mecklenburg County Public Health. They are also near neighborhoods that have a high percentage of youth population.
- A future planned greenway extension would connect these properties to the Cross Charlotte Trail (to the south) and the Doby Creek greenway in the University Research Park area (across I-85 to the north). The future greenway connection would support a linked MTB trail system spanning several properties.
- Portions of these properties already have informal, natural surface trails. The rolling topography, especially in Derita Park, offers an opportunity for developing interesting MTB trails. A Gateway Trail network may also work well on these properties
- There may be limited opportunity for skills areas or pump tracks in between the existing ball fields, playground, and disc golf course. Portions of the existing basketball courts or parking areas could also be used for a traffic garden.
- These recreational areas are within Charlotte’s Corridors of Opportunity investment areas and provide an opportunity to increase youth access to amenities that support recreation and physical activity.

Recommended Facilities for Consideration

MTB Trails; Gateway Trail, Pump Track; Skills Area; Traffic Garden



Winterfield Park & Evergreen Nature Preserve

Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation

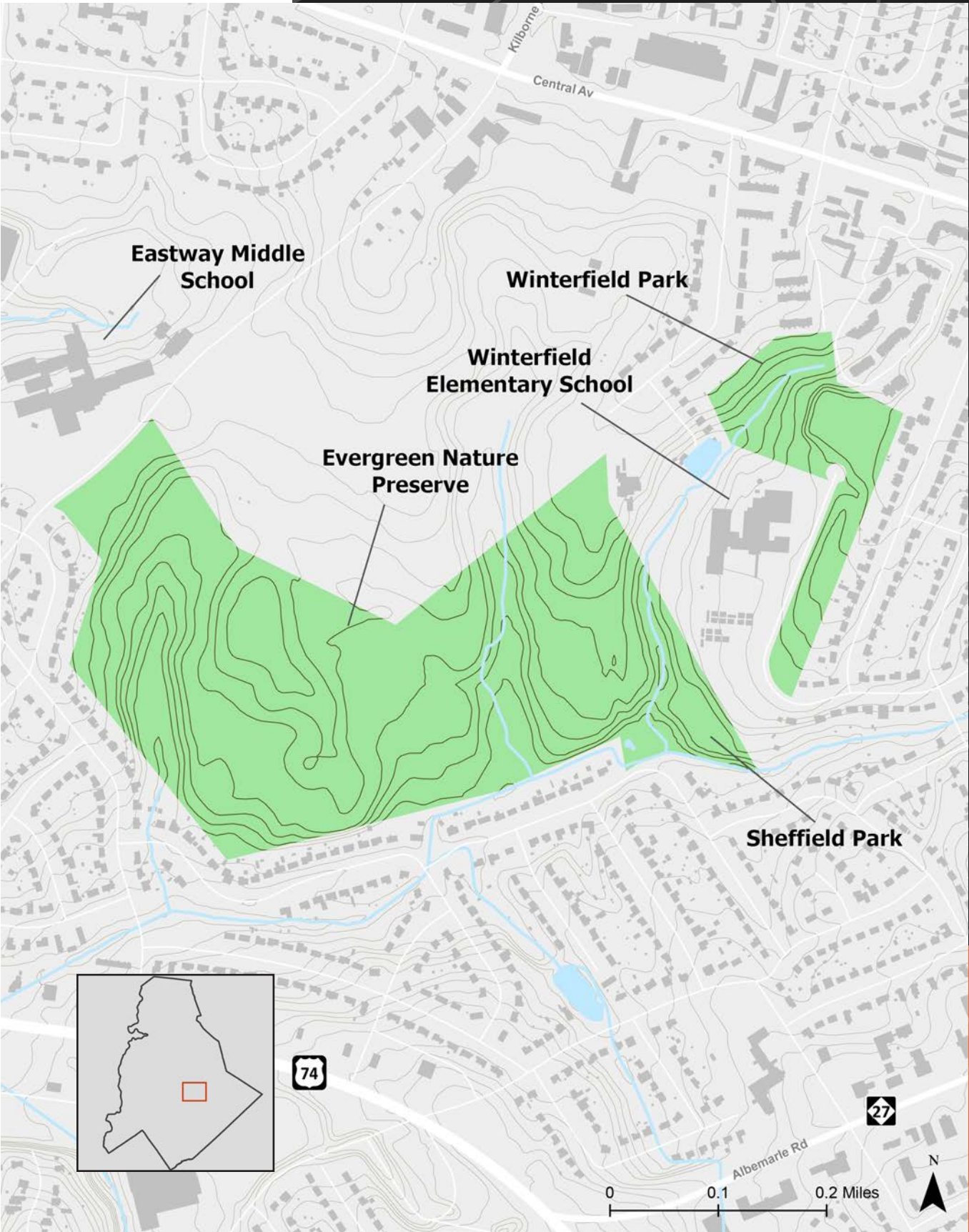
99 acres
(combined acreage)

Why is this a priority opportunity site?

- This site was identified as a priority site in the Gap Analysis.
- The nearby Eastway Middle School hosts an [Outride: Riding for Focus](#) cycling education program, which “uses cycling as a tool to promote physical, emotional, and social well-being in youth.” This site offers an opportunity to support that existing program with MTB accessible trails and/or bicycle parks that Outride students could use on property near the middle school.
- There is room in Winterfield Park, at the end of the Winterfield Place cul-de-sac for the development of a pump track and/or small skills areas that could serve the high percentage of youth population in the nearby neighborhoods. There’s an existing informal connection from the field at the end of Winterfield Place to Rosehaven Dr. that could be formalized to promote pedestrian and bicycle connectivity in the area.
- A natural surface trail along the perimeter of the Evergreen Nature Preserve could provide MTB recreation and important east-west bike connectivity to bike facilities on Norland Road (Charlotte Bike Route 8) and other neighborhood bike routes. A paved trail could be considered in this area as well.
- There are some important considerations for developing MTB Trails in Nature Preserves while preserving Nature Preserves as a critical community and environmental asset. See page 42 for more.

Recommended Facilities for Consideration

XC Trails; Pump Track; Flow Trail, Skills Area



MTB TRAILS IN PARKLAND DESIGNATED AS NATURE PRESERVES

Parkland designated as Nature Preserves is a critical community and environmental asset. Mecklenburg County designates properties as Nature Preserves when they have special natural resources or community value that elevates their level of protection beyond a typical park property. As such, the County has developed internal policies to help support that level of protection and ensure Nature Preserve properties continue to provide critical ecosystem services for generations to come.

While Evergreen Nature Preserve is identified in this plan as an opportunity site for the future development of MTB trails, Mecklenburg County has currently not approved this use. Recognizing the sensitivity of Nature Preserves, the following proposed guidelines are recommended to protect Nature Preserves from the potential human impact of future MTB trails and/or bicycle parks.

- Not every park or Nature Preserve is suitable for the development of MTB trails or bicycle parks. Unless there are substantive changes to the characteristics, planned uses, and/or countywide policies around Nature Preserves, consideration of Nature Preserves for MTB trails or bicycle parks should be limited to those proposed in this plan and subsequently approved by Mecklenburg County.
- The specific alignment of MTB trails should be developed in coordination with Mecklenburg County to ensure they do not threaten the unique natural characteristics of each Nature Preserve.
- If allowed, MTB trails should be located around the perimeter of Nature Preserve properties to avoid bisecting habitat areas. Trail facilities with high density trail networks, have a heavier impact and should be avoided.
- MTB trails should sit “light on the land.” Trail design and construction should be done by professionals qualified to ensure adequate grading, erosion control, trail durability, and environmental sustainability. All trail construction and maintenance must be performed and/or coordinated with the natural resources trail building team.
- The consideration, design, construction, and maintenance of any MTB trails and/or bicycle park facilities in Nature Preserves must be approved and coordinated with the Mecklenburg County natural resources team.



Nature Preserves to consider for future MTB Trail or bike park development include:

Evergreen Nature Preserve
(see page 41)

Sherman Branch Nature Preserve –
improvements/maintenance, but not expansion,
of existing MTB trails.

3

RECOMMENDATIONS



POP-UP BIKE PARK

WELCOME!

Before you ride, read the rules of the trail:

- Always wear a helmet
- Make sure your mountain bike is in working condition
- One-way travel down the hill
- The BLUE trail is for intermediate riders
- The GREEN trail is for beginner riders
- Only use when open

MECKLENBURG COUNTY
CITY OF CHARLOTTE

LEARN

The project team, including THTB board members and Mecklenburg County staff, conducted a series of interviews to learn from other communities recognized as national leaders in the construction, maintenance, and programming of MTB trails and bicycle parks. Key lessons from those interviews are provided below.

Denver, CO

With access to world-class MTB facilities on the front range of the Rockies, Denver, CO boasts one of the best bicycle recreation and outdoor adventure experiences in the country. Denver's urban mountain bike parks are innovative, well-maintained, and very well-used. Those facilities are complemented by the Denver Mountain Parks system (14,000 acres) and the Jefferson County Open Space System (56,000 acres), which together include over 325 miles of trails and recreational opportunities just outside the city limits.

Key Lessons for Mecklenburg County

- The MTB community is enthusiastic, but you can't please everyone. Despite some tradeoffs for the most advanced riders, investing in beginner-level facilities serves more people and attracts more riders.
- Incorporate a conservation/sustainability ethic into the construction and management of the park system.
- Coordination between park planners, advocates, and consultants leverages the strengths of all actors and is key to efficiently and conscientiously building a MTB parks and trails system.
- Bike/gear libraries can help lower the barrier to entry, and in particular, can be leveraged by camps and schools to make mountain biking more accessible to youth.

Northwest Arkansas

In the last decade, the communities of Northwest Arkansas have gone from having few bicycle parks and trails to one of the most celebrated mountain biking regions in North America. Driven by significant investment from the Walton Family Foundation, the NW Arkansas Trailblazers and their partners have built a world-class mountain biking network that focuses on serving youth/beginners and connecting riders to regional anchors like downtown Bentonville, the University of Arkansas, parks, theaters, and museums.

Key Lessons for Mecklenburg County

- Develop natural surface trails parallel to paved greenways. It creates an opportunity for users of all ages & abilities to ride together.
- Connect bike parks and MTB trails using greenways. The more connections to trails or destinations, the better.
- Locate entry level skills parks strategically. Entry level trails and skills parks closer to neighborhoods support access for youth/beginners.
- Trails are more popular than pump tracks because they take users to new destinations.
- Exercise caution and employ progressive design elements for jump lines directly adjacent to greenways. Greenway users create an audience that can put pressure on beginners to perform beyond their capacity and lead to potential injuries.
- Hiring mountain bike professionals elevates the implementation and design of facilities.
- Prioritize beginner level-facilities to attract new riders and serve the most people. Anticipate that advanced riders, who want targeted investment in challenging courses and trails, may criticize this approach as "dumbing down" the MTB trail network.
- Write utility easements to include provision for recreational trails.

Knoxville, TN

Knoxville's 1,000-acre Urban Wilderness area is a unique regional asset with recreational, cultural, and historic significance. Anchored by the Urban Wilderness Gateway Park and the South Loop trail system, Knoxville boasts an emerging network of mountain bike trails and parks that connect across Urban Wilderness land to greenways and bicycle routes throughout the region. Local leadership is focused on growing the bicycle parks and trails network in a way that attracts riders with greater racial, age, and skill-level diversity.

Key Lessons for Mecklenburg County

- It's important to emphasize to the community that natural surface trails aren't just for mountain bikers. Build a coalition of support that spans different trail user audiences.
- Communicate often and clearly define roles for all stakeholders, including maintenance responsibilities.
- Set aside funding for natural surface trails and bicycle parks within regular capital investment cycles.
- Strong partnerships (e.g. Urban Wilderness Alliance, Legacy Foundation, Ijams Nature Center) create more funding streams & help garner community support.
- Leverage partnerships to expedite planning and implementation where the government cannot be as flexible. For example, non-profits can often be more nimble than local government in acquiring property and maintaining trails.
- Trail users should look like your community, in terms of race, age, and skill-level. Access to bicycle parks and trails should not be isolated to advanced riders and affluent neighborhoods/people.
- Understand the regular investment of labor, materials, training, and expertise needed to support trail maintenance.



BUILD

The recommendations below support the goals shared by THTB, Mecklenburg County, and their partners to build a nationally recognized MTB destination that serves riders of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

Identify The “Priority Opportunity Sites” That Are On The County’s 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan And Integrate MTB Trails And/Or Bicycle Parks Within Those Planned Investments Through the Public Engagement Process

A key first step for implementing the recommendations of this plan should be coordinating with Mecklenburg County to determine which priority opportunity sites identified by the plan are on the County’s capital investment plan. Integrating MTB trails and bicycle park facilities within the design of upcoming investments is the most efficient and organized way to grow the MTB network across the County because it leverages existing capital dollars and County staff resources dedicated to the oversight of park projects. Any signature bicycle park within the region will require CIP support. The future Back Creek Park is a great example of incorporating MTB trails and amenities in a park CIP process. The property for Back Creek park was acquired by Mecklenburg County, and the planning study for the future park identifies MTB trails as a potential use within the “active park” zones.

Review the remaining “Priority Opportunity Sites” that are not on the 5-year Capital Improvements Plan and identify opportunities to advance high priority projects via other funding methods

The Tarheel Trailblazers have access to grant funding resources that may support the development of MTB trails and Bike Parks outside the County’s 5-year CIP process. As a part of the first action item, above, THTB and the County should collaborate to identify priorities for project implementation at priority opportunity sites that will not receive County investment in the near term.

Build 3 Youth-Focused MTB Skills Areas in the Next 5 Years

While THTB maintains over 110 miles of MTB trails across the region, there are very few dedicated MTB skills areas in the County. Youth-focused MTB skills areas offer a great way for youth and families to try mountain biking, enjoy healthy outdoor recreation, meet other riders in the community, develop skills, and become invested in the regional MTB culture. THTB and Mecklenburg County should collaborate to build 3 skills areas, with lines and features specifically oriented toward beginner riders, in the next 5 years. Using modular features, built and installed by specialty manufactures, will help support this aggressive goal. Ideal candidates for the installation of skills areas include Cordelia Park, Fred D Alexander Park, Northern Regional Recreation Center, Abersham Park, and the unused lawn area along the XCLT near the Sugar Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant/Backyard Trails.

With the strong mountain biking interest we have in the region, it’s one of the craziest things to me that Charlotte has so few MTB skills areas next to a park. A mountain bike skills area doesn’t always have to be a huge expensive pump track. Very basic things would go a really long way.

Shawn Gentry – Founder and Director, CLT MTB

Build Beginner-Level MTB Trails Adjacent to Existing Greenways

Following the NW Arkansas model of MTB culture-building, the THTB and County should collaborate to build beginner level MTB trails along existing greenways. This supports a goal that the THTB adopted several years ago of having 100 miles of MTB trails accessible via greenways by 2031. Because these will be natural surface trails, and prone to erosion damage, the County should seek areas for trails that are out of the floodway. The County should also determine if there are adequate conditions and visibility for these natural surface trails to be multi-use, MTB and walking/hiking trails. Potential candidates for these type of facilities include:

- Little Sugar Creek Greenway between Archdale Dr. and I-485 (especially in the vicinity of Huntingtowne Farms Park and just south of the Backyard Trails)
- McAlpine Creek Greenway between Independence Blvd. and Providence Rd. (especially in the vicinity of James Boyce Park) Irwin Creek Greenway between Revolution Park Dr. and Clanton Rd.
- Mallard Creek & Toby Creek Greenway in vicinity of UNCC and University Research Park



Skills area and beginner level MTB trail adjacent to a greenway in the Knoxville Urban Wilderness

For Greenways in Planning and Design, Integrate Parallel MTB Trails Where Possible

Evaluating future greenway corridors for the inclusion of parallel natural surface trails should become a standard part of the early conversations when greenways are being planned and designed. Mecklenburg County Park & Rec should collaborate with THTB to discuss these potential opportunities. Where adequate width, topography, and other conditions allow, the inclusion of natural surface trails along new greenways will capitalize on existing capital investment processes to expand beginner-oriented MTB assets. This will also support the THTB goal of having 100 miles of MTB trails accessible via greenways by 2031. The County should consider securing a professional MTB trail designer(s) through an on-call contract to review proposed greenway alignments and greenway designs in progress to determine where integration of multi-use natural surface trails is feasible (considering location of floodway, built environment constraints, topography, etc.). Trail-building professionals can also assist by “flagging” natural surface trail alignments during initial land clearing for greenway construction. Natural surface trails should be constructed before final paving is completed on the adjacent greenway to avoid any heavy machinery used for MTB trail construction impacting the finished greenway surface.



Collaborate with the Charlotte Bicycle Program to Explore Opportunities for City Capital Improvement Projects to Integrate/Connect MTB Facilities

The Charlotte Department of Transportation’s Bicycle Program is a leader in the region for building new bicycle infrastructure. There may be opportunities through the Charlotte Bicycle Program to support the expansion of the regional MTB network by:

1. integrating MTB facilities or bicycle parks within its projects, or
2. by connecting existing/planned MTB facilities through the construction of new on-road bicycle facilities.

Bicycle Program staff may also be a conduit for collaboration with the City’s neighborhood- and corridor-based CIP programs, like the Corridors of Opportunity Program and the City’s Strategic Investment Areas. The THTB should collaborate with CDOT’s Bicycle Program staff to identify opportunities for supporting and expanding Charlotte’s MTB through planned neighborhood and corridor investments.

Build More Wooden Features to Supplement Existing Trails

Skills features provide variety and skills progression for the different kind of riders across the County. Incorporating wooden skills features is a great way to upgrade legacy trails or provide dedicated skills areas adjacent to existing trails. Wooden features can be custom built within existing trail lines or ordered and installed as modular components from specialty manufacturers.

Accommodate/Encourage Bike Polo

The Charlotte Bike Polo club is a member of the North American Hardcourt Bike Polo Association (NAHBPA) with sister clubs in Raleigh and Asheville. The club currently has no dedicated space for practices and matches, and is frequently in competition with pickleball and basketball for limited court space. The county should designate a hardcourt space with the following characteristics for use by Charlotte Bike Polo Club:

- At least the size of two tennis courts;
- Lighted court, to accommodate night practices/matches;
- Near a greenway, to accommodate/encourage players to arrive by bike;
- Space restricted for use by the Charlotte Bike Polo club at least two times a week.

The County should also consider bike polo in the planning and development of future multi-purpose hardcourts.



INFRASTRUCTURE HIGHLIGHT

WHAT'S WORKING NOW — FRED ALEXANDER PARK PUMP TRACK

Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation recently completed a series of improvements to Fred Alexander Park in north Charlotte. Among those improvements was the first asphalt paved pump track installed by Mecklenburg County.

Staff had been looking for opportunities to add a paved pump track somewhere within the County park system, and they noticed that most of the kids using Fred Alexander Park arrived by bicycle. During public engagement to discuss the park improvements, County staff polled the community about different options for park amenities. A bicycle pump track ranked highly and was included in the final park design. The County used a specialty contractor with experience constructing paved pump tracks to ensure it was designed and built correctly. The total park improvements budget was \$580,000, and the total cost of the pump track was approximately \$260,000.

Residents and community partners have had very positive reactions to the pump track. Bike patrol officers from the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) are excited about the opportunity for kids to come to the park and interact CMPD while doing something fun. The Tarheel Trailblazers are working with the County to explore opportunities for constructing a beginner-level MTB trail in the wooded area near the pump track that would leverage the community enthusiasm for the pump track and introduce more riders to mountain biking.

Because this is Mecklenburg County's first asphalt pump track, it also provides a great opportunity to evaluate and learn more about the maintenance and programming necessary to support future paved pump track installations.



Fred Alexander Park pump track, the first asphalt paved pump track installed by Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation.



Site plan for recently completed improvements to Fred Alexander Park.

ACTIVATE

Current Bicycle Programming in Mecklenburg County

The following is a snapshot of current bicycle education, outreach, and competition programming happening in Mecklenburg County. This is not a comprehensive list, nor is it limited to MTB-specific programming. It is just a representative snapshot of the types of activities already underway.

Education

- [“Learn to Ride” events](#)
- [CLT Bike Camp](#)
- [Trips for Kids Charlotte](#)
- [All Kids Bike](#) – supported by Mecklenburg County Public Health and CMS
- [CLT MTB](#) – private/group instruction and coaching
- THTB Annual Trail Coordinator Training

Outreach/Engagement

- [Open Streets 704 / Corridors Connect](#)
- [Charlotte Critical Mass](#)
- [Plaza Midwood Tuesday Night Ride](#)
- International Bike to School Day – supported by Mecklenburg County Safe Routes to School Program
- Ales and Trails Group MTB and Urban Rides
- There are a variety of other group rides with varying levels of organization/regularity (group rides to school, bike shop rides, Freewheelin’ Friday morning breakfast meet ups, etc.)

Competition/Festivals

- [THTB Fisher Fest](#)
- [THTB Airline Race League](#)
- [Summer Shoutout Short Track Series](#)

Grow THTB to Have Paid Staff

Expanding the capacity of the THTB organization through paid, full-time staff has been a goal of the organization for many years. The Tarheel Trailblazers are aware of peer organizations, like the NW Arkansas Trailblazers and the Appalachian Mountain Bike Club (Knoxville, TN), with greater capacity for regional programming and communications through their paid staff positions. Hiring a full-time director, and eventually, other supporting staff members, is a critical action for supporting the other implementation recommendations in this plan.

There are several strategies that can help THTB diversify and expand their funding sources to achieve this critical goal:

1. **Grant Writing and Fundraising:** Develop a robust grant-writing strategy to secure funding for staff salaries. Leverage local, state, and national grants that align with the club’s mission.
2. **Sponsorship and fundraising:** Leverage the community support of the organization by developing a business sponsorship program that provides value to local supporting businesses through THTB marketing and events. Continue to develop the fundraising component of Fisher Fest.
3. **Membership Growth:** Increase club membership by promoting its benefits. Engage with local riders, schools, and community centers. A larger membership base translates to more financial support, making paid staff sustainable.
4. **Secure a Maintenance Reimbursement Agreement with Mecklenburg County:** Similar to the Knoxville, TN model of trail management, the THTB are well-suited to be the primary MTB trail maintenance provider for Mecklenburg County Park & Rec.
5. **Volunteer Transition:** Gradually transition key volunteer duties into paid positions. Identify dedicated volunteers who can take on staff roles, ensuring continuity and expertise.

Remember that expanding the organization to include paid staff will usher the Tarheel Trailblazers into uncharted territory. THTB will need to navigate new accounting intricacies and legal compliance, especially concerning employee benefits and tax documentation.



Expand the Region’s Multi-Day MTB Festival

Fisher Fest is the Charlotte region’s signature MTB festival, attracting riders from across the region to enjoy MTB races, rides, music, and food at Fisher Farm Park in Davidson. THTB should continue to focus on this event as its primary annual programming opportunity. THTB should focus on growing the event, expanding the participation and programming to include:

- major fundraising and sponsorship to support a growing THTB budget,
- regional trail build/maintenance activities supported by an increasing number of volunteers,
- youth and adult educational programming attracting new riders,
- maintenance training for volunteers, and
- regionally/nationally significant cross-country MTB and cyclocross competitions
- trail running races and social events to include all aspects of the trail user community

Up Your Communications Game

To broaden the reach of communications and outreach around MTB assets and programming, THTB should oversee regular, well-coordinated promotional efforts with Mecklenburg County and other partners. These efforts could include scheduled posts on partner social media platforms, daily/weekly updates on the THTB website, targeted newsletters to subscribers, and regular distribution of content to bike shops, non-profits, and other partners. Additionally, placing posters and flyers at MTB trailheads and having a presence at races and pop-up events (i.e. running races, community festivals, etc.) would boost visibility. THTB does a good job of providing website updates on trail conditions throughout the County. To increase awareness and observance of those trail condition updates, THTB should explore implementing an expanded notification system, potentially through newsblasts or a dedicated mobile app. Implementing this type of communications program with more reach and consistency will likely require hiring at least one full-time staff member within the THTB organization.

Recruit and Host a Regional/National MTB Race Event

Hosting a regional or national MTB or cyclocross race event would help to establish Mecklenburg County as a world-class MTB destination, generate attention and excitement from the bicycling community, and attract new riders. It would also generate economic benefits for bike shops, restaurants, and the hotel/hospitality sector. Ideally, Mecklenburg County would become a regular fixture on a regional/national race tour. THTB should talk with representatives from major MTB racing organizations (e.g. USA Cycling, NICA, IMBA) to understand what requirements and opportunities there are for hosting a regional or national MTB/cyclocross race event. The US National Whitewater Center (USNWC) could be an important partner in this effort. The MTB trails and support facilities at the USNWC could provide an ideal competition venue. Perhaps more importantly, the USNWC events/communications teams would be a valuable resource in helping to recruit, promote, and host a national race.

Expand Youth & Adult Education Programming by Partnering with Existing Vendors

Mecklenburg County has some fantastic local providers of bicycling education programming. Vendors/organizations like CLT MTB, the US National Whitewater Center (USNWC), CLT Bike Camp, and Learn to Ride are well-established, trusted resources for bicycle programming, with CLT MTB and USNWC providing mountain-bike-specific education and programming for youth and adults.

As Mecklenburg County continues to grow, and demand for MTB instruction and programming increases, the existing bicycling education vendors in the county will be well-positioned as resources that can expand their current offerings. THTB should work with these organizations to start (or grow) MTB educational programming to include more adult clinics, youth summer camps, private lessons, and instructional group rides. This recommendation goes hand in hand with the recommendations for expanding MTB skills areas and beginner-level trails throughout the County. Those types of facilities will be necessary to expand the type and number of MTB educational programs offered throughout the County.

Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation can also seek to improve the process by which MTB coaching vendors are allowed access to spaces within parks that are conducive to teaching, such as grass fields for basic skills drills.

Organize “Learn to MTB” Programming for Youth/Adults

THTB, Mecklenburg County, and other partners should collaborate to host “Learn to Mountain Bike” events for youth and adults. This would be similar to the existing [Learn to Ride](#) program in Mecklenburg County (and could be an expansion of that existing program) with a focus on introducing beginner MTB techniques and skills. The THTB could organize and promote a Learn to MTB program through existing instructors, which would also provide some good exposure for camps and lessons offered by local instructors. THTB, Mecklenburg County, and other partners should sponsor the program so that it is free for participants. The program could start at 2-3 times/year, then grow based on demand and sponsorship support.

Coordinate Event and Competition Programming with Partner Organizations

THTB and Mecklenburg County Park & Rec should serve as a conduit for coordinating programming with partner agencies that might want to host their own events and activities at MTB sites. THTB has valuable experience planning and hosting events at MTB sites across the County. As the County grows, it’s likely that more organizations may seek to host events at MTB sites. THTB should encourage partner organizations to host their own MTB programming and competition events. This will help broaden the audience for mountain biking and grow the bicycle culture across Mecklenburg County. THTB can support and promote partner organizations events by offering advice based on their event planning experience and helping to spread the word via the THTB communications channels.

Host “Community Build/Maintenance Days”

Celebrating the construction of new MTB facilities is one of the best ways to activate new assets, generate excitement, and draw new riders from surrounding neighborhoods. As new MTB facilities are constructed, THTB and Mecklenburg County should host “community build day” events where the community is invited to come and help put the finishing touches on new facilities. This could include constructing wooden features/structures; final grading on new pump tracks or trails; or building supporting assets like signage and benches. Similar events can also be organized as maintenance days for existing facilities. For example, Bicycle Trails Council of the East Bay organizes an annual community maintenance day in support of the Dirt World bicycle park in Richmond, CA. Recent maintenance focused on routine repairs to the park’s dirt jumps and pump tracks.



Build/maintenance days should be organized carefully so that the work opportunities are appropriate for untrained volunteers and children. All build/maintenance days should be overseen by trail-building professionals and/or THTB trained volunteers. The goal of these events is to support greater participation and awareness, not efficiency. When possible, build/maintenance days should conclude (or be followed soon after) with ribbon cuttings events that include food vendors, music, and inaugural rides with the surrounding community. THTB, Mecklenburg County, and their partners should collaborate to broaden the reach of communications around build/maintenance days and opening new MTB assets.

PROGRAMMING HIGHLIGHT

WHAT'S WORKING NOW — CLT MTB

For the past 7 years CLT MTB has been providing day camps, skills clinics, and personal coaching for mountain bikers of all ages and skill levels. Founder and Director, Shawn Gentry, started CLT MTB in 2016 with a few kids participating in a summer camp. Since then, CLT MTB has grown into an extensive regional MTB education program. They currently run 7 weeks of summer camps with 20-30 kids each week and have 30-50 kids participating in their Junior Development Club.

The program operates in County parks through the rental of park shelters used as meet up points. Park & Rec does not charge a separate fee for the use of the mountain bike trails. This is an important policy that the County should maintain to make these educational programs financially feasible and encourage the growth of mountain biking in the region.

CLT MTB is a hallmark program for MTB skills development and education across the Charlotte / Mecklenburg County region. CLT MTB caters to everyone – from riders with advanced, jump-line, skill levels to retirees learning to enjoy mountain biking for the first time – but it is primarily a youth-focused program. That youth focus is very important for the development of new riders and the region's MTB culture. Expanding effectiveness and participation in programs like CLT MTB will require more youth/beginner-level skills development areas and MTB trails, particularly in proximity to existing MTB trail assets.



MAINTAIN

Work Towards Dedicating County Resources To Support MTB Trail Maintenance

Mountain biking has become a big part of the recreational landscape in Mecklenburg County. It provides value through contributions to public health, youth empowerment, economic development, and overall quality of life. It seems appropriate for the County to recognize that value, and the growing number of MTB trail users, by dedicating resources to the maintenance of MTB facilities. This could be in the form of Park & Rec maintenance staff dedicated to MTB trail maintenance (e.g., Denver, CO), or it could be in the form of a payment to a non-profit partner that handles trail maintenance (e.g., Knoxville, TN). Whether through internal staff or payments to third-party non-profit partner, County Park & Rec should dedicate resources to MTB trail maintenance. Without such resources from the County, it is unlikely the MTB system can expand and reach its potential as a recreational amenity in Mecklenburg County.

The Appalachian Mountain Bike Club (AMBC) is the official maintenance provider for the 58 miles of natural surface trails within the City of Knoxville, TN. The Knoxville Parks & Rec Department pays AMBC \$100,000/year for maintenance, staffing, and materials for trails.

Develop a Tools Library and Maintenance Assets Management System

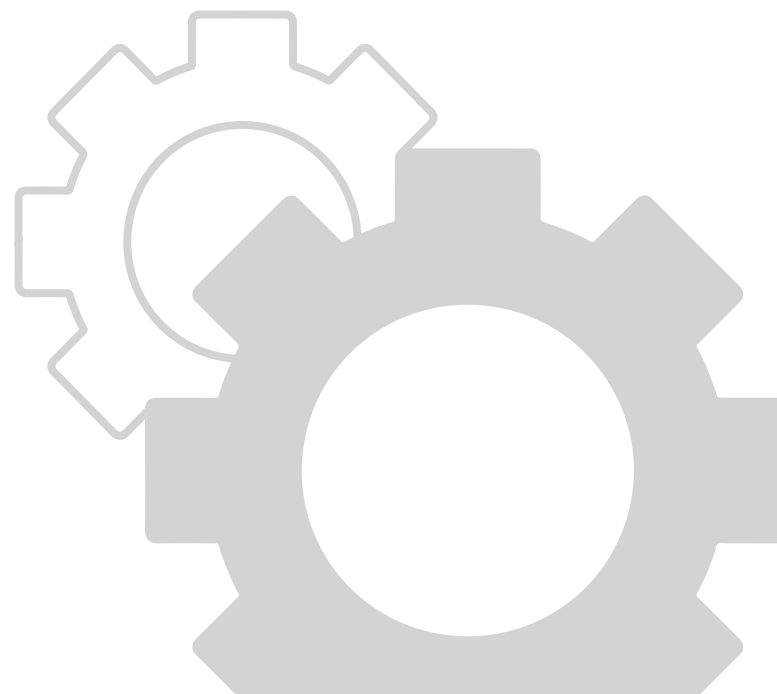
THTB should consider building out a tools library and using a maintenance assets management system. The tools library should include heavy tools necessary for trail maintenance to reduce reliance on rental of heavy equipment and volunteers' tools. The tools library could be managed so that approved THTB volunteers and County maintenance crews both have access for trail maintenance activities. The maintenance assets management system would allow THTB and the County to track the different types of tools in the library, the required training to use/operate each tool, and a list of approved operators for different types of tools/equipment. This could start simply, for example through a tools library in a shipping container and a shared spreadsheet as an asset management system, and grow to meet the needs of the THTB and the County as they collaborate on trail maintenance.

Create Maintenance Plans for Major MTB Facilities

The Tarheel Trailblazers and Mecklenburg County Park & Rec should collaborate to create maintenance plans for each major MTB / bike park location (e.g. Backyard Trails; Fisher Farm Park; etc.). The maintenance plans should specify regular (annual or more frequently) maintenance activities needed to keep MTB trails and bike parks in good condition, as well as less frequent maintenance activities that may represent significant planned expenditures (e.g. trail reconstruction; replacement of structures; planned revegetation; etc.). The overall maintenance plan should aggregate anticipated yearly costs of maintenance activities across the countywide system so that the County and THTB can plan their maintenance budgets accordingly. The maintenance plans should also be used to coordinate maintenance activities across the two organizations, so that County maintenance crews and THTB volunteers can cover more locations/trail miles.

Provide Professional Training for Maintenance Volunteers

Volunteers are the backbone of the THTB, supporting everything from communications, to programming, to trail construction and maintenance. Broadening the pool of volunteers qualified to perform trail maintenance will enhance the THTB's capacity and support the other goals in this section. The THTB should consider expanding the annual trail coordinator training program to include a second training opportunity, led by trail-building professionals, to educate more volunteers on best practices for sustainable trail maintenance. THTB should organize trail maintenance days where new volunteers/trainees are paired with veteran volunteers and professional trail-builders, reflecting an apprenticeship model of maintenance training.

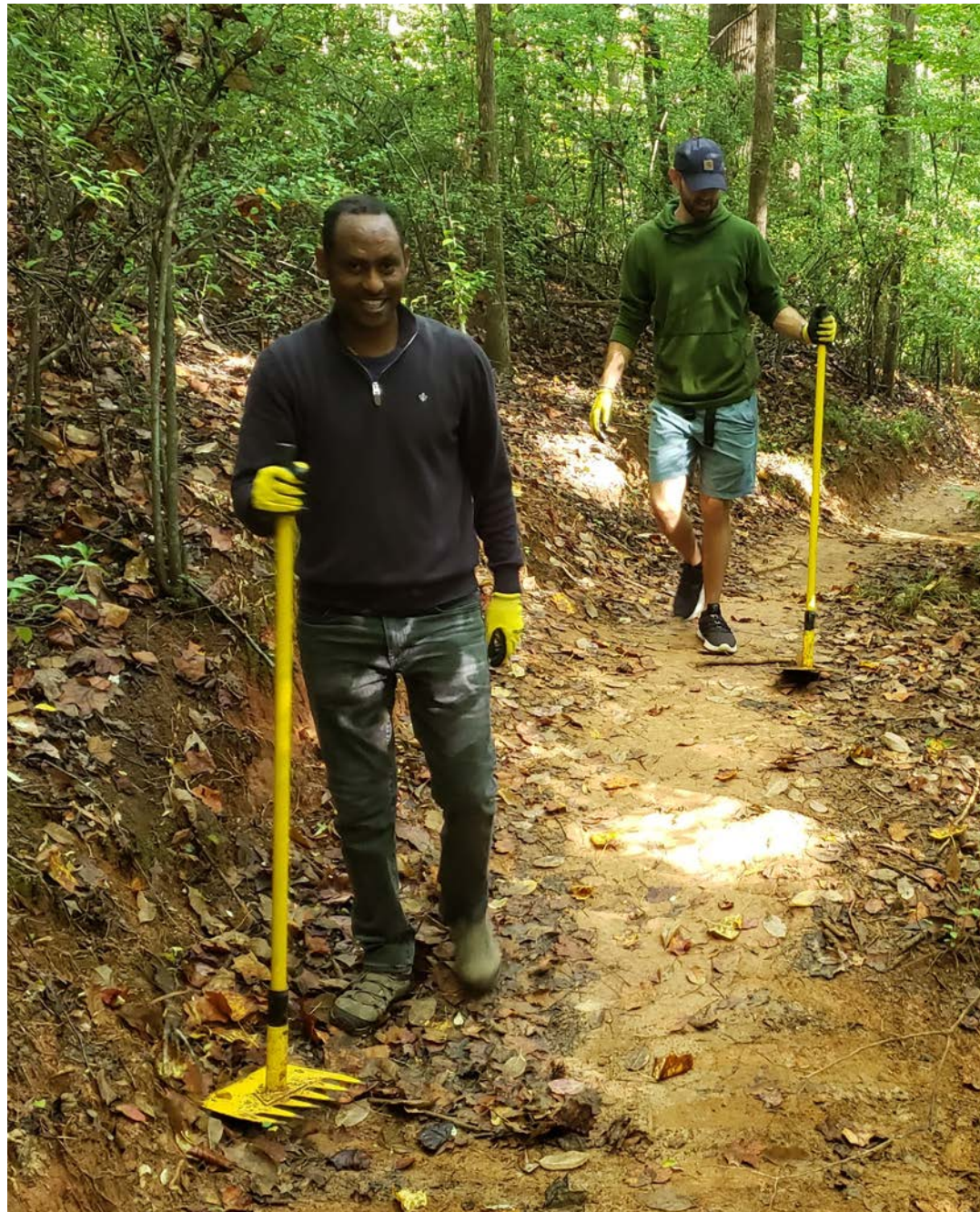


Improve Legacy Trails

Natural surface trail management/maintenance best practices have evolved significantly in the last 20 years. Some of the legacy trails across Mecklenburg County are aging and in need of a refresh/rebuild using sustainable trail construction/maintenance techniques. Furthermore, the needs of the mountain bike community and the goals of the THTB and Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation have evolved, and trail networks designed 20 years ago may not provide the experiences desired today.

The THTB should conduct a high-level audit of the legacy trails within Mecklenburg County (trails originally constructed more than 10 years ago), to evaluate overall trail condition and use. The THTB should prioritize proactive maintenance on the legacy trails that are most heavily used and most in need of repair. In some cases, this may require major maintenance, new trail alignments, and/or new construction approaches (more substantial grading, professional trail contracting, more robust materials). In other cases, THTB and their partners should consider redesigning legacy trail networks to diversify trail offerings for a wider range of skill sets, riding types, and user experiences, while maintaining portions of the legacy trail networks as components of reimagined trail offerings.

During evaluation of significant improvements or redesigns to legacy trail networks, THTB volunteers should coordinate with Mecklenburg County Park and Rec Capital Planning staff to ensure the current goals of the community are being served. This coordination will ideally allow for planning for financial resources to implement legacy trail network enhancements.



WHAT'S WORKING NOW — TARHEEL TRAILBLAZERS



The Tarheel Trailblazers (THTB) Mountain Bike Association was founded in 1990 by a handful of local mountain bike enthusiasts. THTB is a non-profit organization, with a mission to provide their community the best possible opportunities to enjoy mountain biking. They do that by:

***Protecting, improving
and maintaining
the numerous trail
systems available for
MTB use in and around
metro-Charlotte***

***Being the voice of
advocacy for
mountain bikers***

***Continuously looking
for new locations to
develop trail systems
in and around
metro-Charlotte***

***Providing a source
of information on
rides and other
activities related to
mountain biking***

THTB is the lead organization providing maintenance of MTB trails in Mecklenburg County. Over the years the THTB association has grown to include over 650 resourceful, energetic and active men and women of all ages. Their volunteers work directly with local land managers, building and assisting in the maintenance of carefully constructed, sustainable mountain bike trails. The maintenance agreements that THTB has with Mecklenburg County, and other organizations, allows them to maintain over 110 miles of trails.

THTB does not currently have paid staff, but their Board and volunteer group includes highly-trained, professional, MTB trail builders capable of operating heavy equipment, designing, and maintaining complicated trail projects that protect the natural environment. Without the Tarheel Trailblazers, there would be little to no maintenance of the MTB trail network in Mecklenburg County.

THTB has begun to reach the capacity of what they are able to build and maintain through volunteer efforts and their working board. Growing the organization to include paid staff, like other regional MTB associations, will be critical to expanding the countywide MTB trails and bike parks network to serving the growing number of riders across the region.





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IMPLEMENTATION ACTION PLAN



SEND IT!

The recommendations below are the most critical for THTB, Mecklenburg County, and their partners to begin implementing now.

1

Identify the “Priority Opportunity Sites” that are on the County’s 5-year Capital Improvement Plan and integrate MTB trails and/or bicycle parks within those planned investments through the public engagement process.

Responsible Parties: Mecklenburg County Park & Rec with support from THTB

Actions: Start by facilitating a workshop between Mecklenburg County Park & Rec and THTB to examine the sites in the Park & Rec capital improvement plan and identify areas of alignment with the MTB priorities described in this plan. The workshop described above should happen as soon as schedules allow, so that Park & Rec and THTB can collaborate on planned investments that may already be in design.

2

Review the remaining “Priority Opportunity Sites” that are not on the 5-year Capital Improvements Plan and identify opportunities to advance high priority projects via other funding methods.

Responsible Parties: THTB with guidance and support from Mecklenburg County Park & Rec.

Actions: This conversation can be integrated into the workshop from the first Action Plan item, above. The Tarheel Trailblazers have access to grant funding resources that can be a catalyst for developing MTB trails and Bike Parks at properties that may not be a part of the County’s current 5-year CIP. All planning prior to fundraising by the THTB should be coordinated directly with Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation.

3

Build 3 youth-focused MTB skills areas in the next 5 years.

Responsible Parties: THTB with support from Mecklenburg County Park & Rec

Actions: Start by identifying areas where the County will permit THTB to pursue the development of MTB skills areas. This plan recommends several ideal candidates. Determine what resources the THTB organization has to support the development of skills areas with modular MTB features. In order to meet the goal of constructing 3 skills areas in the next 5 years, it will likely be necessary for County Park & Rec to play a financial role through future fiscal year budget requests/allocations. The THTB and County Park & Rec should begin collaborating on sites and potential project budgets immediately to support this collaboration.

4

Build beginner-level MTB trails adjacent to existing greenways.

Responsible Parties: THTB with support from Mecklenburg County Park & Rec

Actions: Start by identifying areas where the County will permit THTB to pursue the development of natural surface trails next to existing greenway corridors. This plan recommends several ideal candidates. Determine what resources the THTB organization has to support trail development. The THTB and County Park & Rec should begin collaborating on sites and construction/safety protocols immediately to support this collaboration. After receiving preliminary approval from the County, the THTB should consider using this effort to support a regional fundraising campaign. (For example... “Help us build the next great MTB trail, parallel to the Little Sugar Creek Greenway! Mecklenburg County Park & Rec is on board. All we need is your financial support to make this exciting vision a reality.”)



5

Work Towards Dedicating County Resources to Support MTB Trail Maintenance.

Responsible Parties: Mecklenburg County Park & Rec & Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners (Note – Municipal Park & Rec Departments within Mecklenburg County may also play a role.)

Actions: Start by setting aside a funding allocation for maintenance of MTB trails and bicycle parks. This could be for additional county staff or to support maintenance contracts with non-profits / third parties. This action should be integrated with the timeline for the preparation of Mecklenburg County’s next fiscal year budget (FY 2026), which is likely to be adopted in June of 2025. Conversations among THTB and Mecklenburg County Park & Rec should begin now to prep for a request to the County Manager’s Office. It will likely be necessary to supplement that budget request with an enumeration of planned maintenance needs and activities. Therefore, an initial funding request to support the development of maintenance plans for major MTB facilities may be a more appropriate first step for the FY2025 budget. A more comprehensive maintenance budget request would follow, ideally in FY2026.

6

Grow THTB to have paid staff.

Responsible Parties: THTB with support from external funders

Actions: Start by developing a preliminary list of organizations/ foundations with missions that align with the mission and goals of THTB. Non-profit development/fundraising is a highly specialized, connection-based skillset that members of the THTB Board may or may not have. THTB should consider hiring a non-profit development specialist on a contract basis to evaluate opportunities for external funding and approach organizations, foundations, and individuals with strategic funding requests. This is an action that should begin as soon as the THTB Board has capacity and resources to pursue it.





