

CITY PLANNING

Southeast Special Area Study

Phase 1 Report

JANUARY 2020

raleighnc.gov



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1 Project Introduction

Area Study Process and Plan Purpose

As Wake County continues to grow, development pressures affect not only Raleigh but also the rural and natural areas on the periphery of the city. The Southeast Special Area Study examines the policies that guide development and conservation in this area and engage the public in a conversation on the issues that face them. The intended result is area specific policy guidance for the Southeast area.

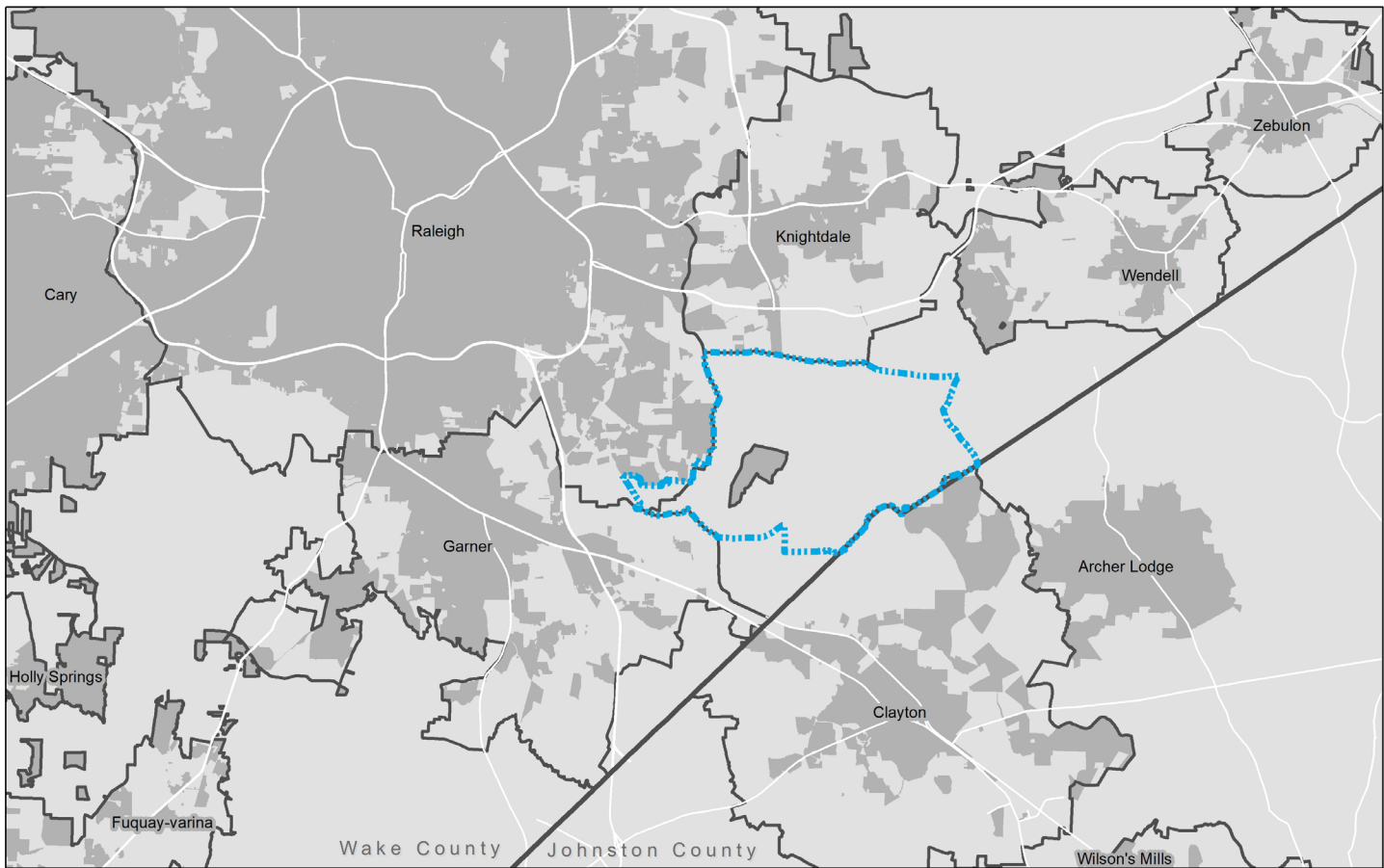
In addition, the Southeast Special Area Study is a response to guidance from the 2030 Comprehensive Plan. The Plan influences development and conservation decisions through policies such as the Future Land Use Map, which describes the desired future land use and describes policies to help achieve it. In this map, several Special Study Areas are identified as areas that will require more focused community outreach to


determine the preferred land use pattern. The Southeast Special Area Study is focused on one of the Special Study Areas.

The Southeast Special Area Study will use public input, issue analysis, and data collection to formulate recommendations for the area. Recommendations will focus on land use guidance but will also consider related issues such as transportation and natural resources. The process will include the following components:

- Existing conditions discovery
- Community 'listening sessions'
- Issues & opportunities analysis
- Presentation of choices & public engagement
- Recommendations & report

FIGURE 1 MAP OF STUDY AREA



 Study Area Boundary

The study area is located in southeastern Wake County, adjacent to Johnston County. The extra-territorial jurisdictions of Raleigh, Knightdale, Garner, and Clayton abut the study area.



2 Phase One Engagement

Overview

The Phase One engagement took place between March and August 2019 and served as an introduction of the project to the general public, as well as agencies and jurisdictions with interests in or adjoining the study area. During Phase One, staff compiled input about issues and opportunities in the area from local government staff, community organizations, residents and stakeholders to direct the focus of future phases of the project. This report summarizes that input. Details on outreach methods is included in Appendices A and B.

Engagement Activities

Feedback from the public was provided through in-person events and an online survey. Five community listening sessions were held in June 2019, including:

- Weekend listening session at Barwell Community Center.
- Evening listening session at The Passage Church.
- Early morning drop-in meeting at The Passage Church.
- Listening session conducted in Spanish at Primera Asamblea de Dios de Raleigh.
- Listening session with "resource landowners" at the Neuse River Resource Recovery Facility.

FIGURE 2 PHOTOS OF ENGAGEMENT



Input was also received online through a survey that was available between May 30 and September 16, 2019. Additional details about these and other promotional activities is included in Appendix A.

Phase One engagement activities aimed to understand the big picture priorities and vision that residents and visitors have for the study area. Participants were asked to identify features or qualities of the study area that they like or are important to preserve and those that they don't like or may need work. Participants were also asked to rank their top issues for the study to focus on and to share what they hope the area will be like in 2050. Additional information about event activities and survey questions are included in Appendix B.

Summary of Input

In total, approximately 400 people participated in Phase One engagement, producing nearly 600 individual comments on the study area. Staff compiled this in-person and online input and evaluated the leading issues and themes that emerged from the feedback. Overall, the input from Phase One made clear several themes of importance to the public: preservation of the area's rural character, preservation of the Neuse River, and concern over infrastructure sufficiency given the surrounding growth.

What should be preserved?

When asked what about the study area they would like to see preserved, many

people pointed to the rural nature of the area. In fact, 'rural' was the second most common term among all the comments with 49 occurrences, followed by 'nature' (46) and 'farm' (42). 'Quiet' was another common descriptor of positive qualities of the area, with 30 comments referencing it. Similarly, many people pointed to the area's greenway trails, especially the Neuse River Trail, as being important to them, along with other preserved natural areas in the region such as Clemmons Forest and Lake Myra. Specifically, the Neuse River was mentioned in 33 comments, and 'greenway' was mentioned in 20 comments.

Many people also expressed that they like that the area is close to destinations and amenities while not directly in an urban environment. Shopping or commercial areas were brought up 41 times in the feedback, and 'proximity' was mentioned 30 times. Relatedly, the input showed that people like that most of the study area is outside city limits, with 28 comments referencing this as a positive aspect of the study area.

What needs attention?

Input on what in the area could be improved formed a clear theme: Traffic was the most common topic with mentions in 84 comments. Many comments expressed frustration with increasing traffic congestion, particularly on Poole Road, Rock Quarry Road, and Smithfield Road. Comments also identified the lack of safe pedestrian facilities (22) or viable transit (22) options in the area as an area for improvement.

Another point of concern was increasing residential development in the area.

Growth was mentioned in 15 comments, and 17 comments mentioned density, often with an interest in being smart with its placement in the study area, if at all. For some, housing (37) developments should not come at the expense of the rural character of the study area. For others, the needs for more and affordable housing (17) was an area for improvement.

Shopping and access to commercial areas was clearly an important topic to people, as it showed up in responses to what could be improved in the area as well. Some felt strongly that they wanted better access to shops, while others felt that they didn't want these areas dispersed around the study area or too close to existing residential and natural areas.

Top issues

When asked to draw out their most important issues, participants showed interest in many of the topics raised in other questions. Natural Resources – both with regards to recreation and environmental concerns – topped the list, with over 100 participants calling out each as important. Getting Around by Other Modes (transit, bicycling, walking) and Getting Around by Car were the next most popular issues, with 94 and 84 participants identifying each, respectively. Overall, however, all issues were identified as important by a significant number of participants, between 70 and 100, and there was no clear breakaway issue. In other words, there appears to be diversity in the priorities among participants.

Big Picture Visions

When asked to identify a vision for the study area in 2050, the top themes included the preservation of farms and the rural character, the affordability and diversity of available housing, and the preservation of the Neuse River. Below are some example responses, and a full list of responses can be found in Appendix B.

"is still peaceful and safe! That is has undeveloped spaces with natural resources."

"Developed in an environmentally sound way. Maintain the "rural" feel but understand that the area is growing."

"Better protected from dense development around the Neuse River."

"...will still be family oriented with each changing process. Economical for everyone, i.e. affordable, green space."

"still has it's southern charm, but its affordable"

"Has not pushed out local residents and become unaffordable to live in... keeps its rivers clean and has parks for people to enjoy"

"Stays much as it is... small towns with development kept near interchanges and already developed ones. Has lots of green space and opportunities to get outside."

3 Next Steps

Phase One input will be used to generate land use guidance and other area-specific policy to shape future development. Likely options for public consideration will include greenway improvements and land conservation, two major themes from the first round of public input.

In early 2020, a series of public meetings and an online survey will be conducted to allow the public to review the findings of Phase One and select preferred policy alternatives to be included as recommendations in the project report.

4 Study Area Characteristics

The Study Area

The Southeast Special Area Study focuses on approximately 18 square miles in southeast Wake County, bordering the City of Raleigh to the northeast and Johnston County to the southeast. The study area is roughly bounded by southeast Raleigh, Wake County's boundary with Johnston County, Poole Road, Smithfield Road, and Old Baucom Road.

The study area is located at the nexus of nearby municipalities' urban service areas (USA). These areas are planned for utility service in the short- and long-term. The study area contains Raleigh's short and long-range USAs. Knightdale's short-range USA is adjacent to the study area's northern boundary, and the long-range USA for Wendell and Garner are also adjacent to the study area. The site is also nearby to the extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) of several municipalities, including

Raleigh, Knightdale, Garner, and Clayton. The ETJ is the contiguous area in which a municipality has authority to enforce zoning and other planning tools.

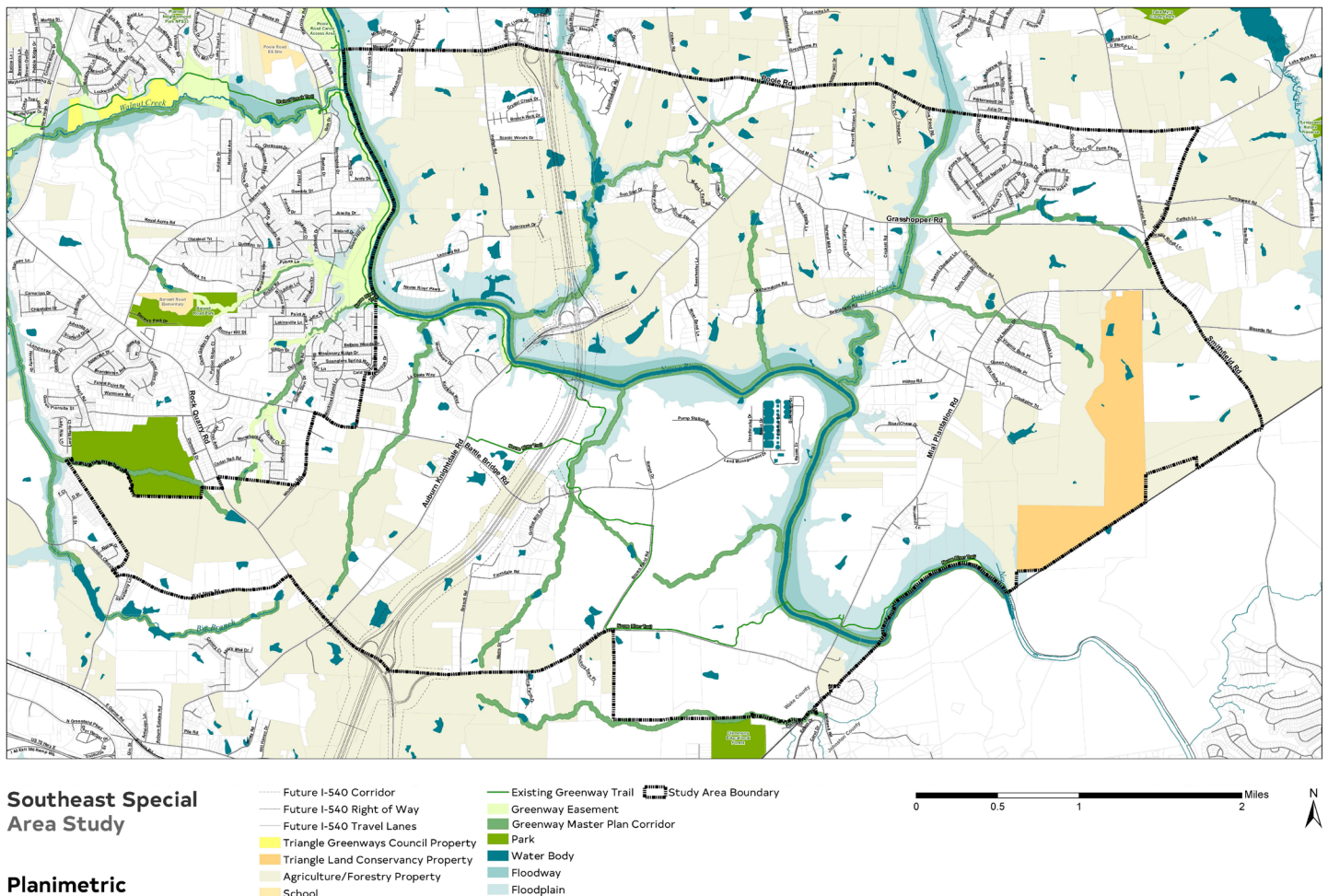
The study area's access to existing and planned utilities will play a central role in the nature and timing of development. Properties within or contiguous to the City's corporate limits, inside the extra-territorial jurisdiction (ETJ), and adjacent to existing utility lines may connect to the City's water and sewer utilities by annexation into the corporate limits. One of the challenges of the Southeast Special Area Study will be to determine how the City should respond to requests for water and sewer utilities in a way that is applied fairly and has a rational basis in the City's long-term policy framework.

The Southeast Special Area Study will focus on identifying potential and future land uses in Raleigh's Urban Services Area.

The study will provide baseline data, suggest an organizational framework for multiagency collaboration, and outline a community

outreach process with a goal of involving the community in shaping a response to the changing conditions in the area.

FIGURE 3 MAP OF STUDY AREA



Major Characteristics

The area remains predominantly rural. Located within the original 1868 townships of St. Matthews and Marks Creek in eastern Wake County, vestiges of the thriving tobacco trade of the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century remain. Significant land area remains dedicated to agriculture and forestry. Of the study Area's 11,760

acres, nearly 4,800 acres (40% of the total), is classified for agriculture or forestry.

The Neuse River is the prominent natural feature that courses through the study area, and its forested floodplains serve vital ecological functions. Poplar Creek and Marks Creek are major tributaries and sub-basins of the Neuse that lie within the study area.

The Neuse River provides vital habitat for a wide variety of plant and animal species. The Neuse and its freshwater tributaries are important spawning areas for striped bass, shad, herring, and other migratory species. The river is also home to the Neuse River waterdog, an aquatic salamander, and the Carolina madtom, a small, spotted catfish. These species have been proposed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for listing as threatened and endangered, respectively.

The Neuse River Trail is a regionally treasured recreational amenity that traverses the study Area. The trail is part of both the North Carolina Mountains-to-Sea Trail and the East Coast Greenway.

In the northeastern part of the study area lies the Walnut Hill Historic District, one of the most significant historic and cultural resources in Wake County. Triangle Land Conservancy manages the Sarah and Bailey Williamson Preserve at Walnut Hill, a 405-acre preserve that is rich in historic and natural resources.

Walnut Hill is adjacent to the Riverwalk conservation tract to the south, which is owned by the State of North Carolina and managed by the Town of Clayton under a stewardship agreement. The Riverwalk tract links Walnut Hill to the Neuse River Trail and is an open space for the eventual creation of an interconnected system of greenspace serving all the municipalities surrounding the Southeast Special Study Area.

The Randleigh Farm tract, jointly owned by City of Raleigh and Wake County, comprises two parcels totaling approximately 415 acres. The tract is in City of Raleigh

jurisdiction, representing a non-contiguous or satellite annexation. A conceptual master plan, completed in 2006, proposes the tract be considered for two public schools, an environmental education center, protected open space, and other uses.

Growth in Southeast Wake County

The study area is experiencing steady market demand and incremental residential growth continues. From 2004-2013, ten (10) new subdivisions, consisting of 350 lots on 432 acres, have been developed. Since that time, several other new developments have been approved. This growth is fueled by the demand for homes on larger lots and the quasi-rural lifestyle with proximity to urban amenities and jobs.

Growth pressures to the south and east of Raleigh are driving the need for new public utility and transportation infrastructure. Growth is the primary factor behind two major infrastructure projects that are slated for the area. The Neuse River East Parallel Interceptor, a new sewer pipeline that will provide for future flow growth and prevent overflows during peak wet weather, is expected to be completed in 2022. The Triangle Expressway Southeast Extension, I-540, is also planned to traverse the study area, with the project scheduled to break ground in 2027. The study area encompasses three expressway interchanges: Rock Quarry Road; Auburn Knightdale Road, near the highway's crossing of the Neuse River; and Poole Road. These interchanges are expected to become pressure points for growth attracted by I-540 access and proximity to Raleigh and its adjoining municipalities in eastern Wake County.

5 Appendix A – Phase One Engagement

Phase One Engagement

Overview

The Phase One engagement took place between March and August 2019 and served as an introduction of the project to the general public, as well as agencies and jurisdictions with interests in or adjoining the study area. During Phase One, staff compiled input about issues and opportunities in the area from local government staff, community organizations, residents and stakeholders to direct the focus of future phases of the project.

Staff Core Technical Team

To support the development of the Southeast Special Area Study, City Planning convened a core technical team of City of Raleigh staff, including representatives from Planning, Public Utilities, Parks, Recreation & Cultural Resources, Transportation Planning, Solid Waste, Stormwater, Sustainability, Historic Preservation, Economic Development, and Housing & Neighborhoods. During a November 30 workshop, the group completed a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats analysis and discussed the major issues facing the study area for consideration during the course of the study. The following themes emerged from the workshop:

- Need for intentional interjurisdictional collaboration.
- Northeast study area most likely to develop first because of continuity to existing city limits and availability and proximity to water infrastructure; urban development within the southeast portion of the study area would be a long-term prospect.
- Potential to leverage Public Utilities investment for sustainable growth through greater utilization of its reuse water distribution system, as well as preserving open space for mitigating nutrient pollution.
- Potential to cultivate a greenbelt east of I-540 that includes the Raleigh tract, Public Utilities croplands, and the Walnut Hill Preserve as anchors.
- Opportunity to implement of resiliency measures through floodplain conservation and promoting green, low-impact development (GLID) stormwater management techniques.
- Opportunity to development projects that meet City sustainability objectives, including place-based economic development through outdoor recreation, ecotourism, niche agriculture, and renewable energy.
- Opportunity to leverage the NC Opportunity Zone that encompasses southeastern third of study area. For example, marketing available properties for creation of an 'innovation hub' focused on natural resource and conservation themes, renewable energy, and green development.

External Stakeholder Outreach

City Planning also engaged with planning staff from surrounding municipalities, including Garner, Knightdale, Wendell, and Clayton, and staff reached out to Johnston County, with which the study area shares a boundary. These outreach conversations provided existing conditions information and yielded several key takeaways:

- Interest in preserving and expanding green spaces for both preservation and recreation in the eastern part of the study area.
- A difference of perception of what 'low density residential' looks like between Raleigh's context and those of smaller town jurisdictions and the county.
- Awareness of recent or ongoing comprehensive planning efforts in surrounding jurisdictions, and the need for ongoing coordination, including:
 - [PLANWake](#), a comprehensive plan for Wake County initiated in Summer 2018 and expected to conclude in Spring 2020.
 - [KnightdaleNext](#), a recent comprehensive plan for Knightdale adopted in 2018.
 - [Garner Forward](#), a recent comprehensive plan for Garner adopted in 2018.

One outcome of these conversations was to integrate promotion of PLANWake into Southeast Special Area Study in-person events when feasible.

In addition to these interjurisdictional conversations, City Planning also engaged representatives from several natural

resource and land conservation-related organizations, including Triangle Land Conservancy, North Carolina Forest Service, Wake Soil and Water Conservation District, and the Friends of the North Carolina Mountains-to-Sea Trail. A June 26, 2019 roundtable discussion focused on the major issues and concerns of these organizations regarding the study area, opportunities for collaboration, and ways that Raleigh and Wake County could further collaborate with these organizations to advance shared objectives.

The key takeaways from the meeting include:

- Protecting existing farmland and forest to sustain active agriculture and forestry in the area.
- Working with interested and willing landowners to obtain conservation easements to further buffer the Neuse River Trail and the Walnut Hill Preserve.

Other external stakeholders consulted were Southeast Raleigh Promise and the Wake County Voluntary Agricultural Districts Board.

Public Outreach

Five in-person community listening sessions were held throughout the study area, including:

- Weekend listening session at Barwell Community Center on Saturday, June 8 at 10 am
- Evening listening session at The Passage Church on Tuesday, June 18 at 6:30 pm

- Early morning drop-in meeting at The Passage Church on Thursday, June 20 at 7 am
- Listening session conducted in Spanish at Primera Asamblea on Tuesday, June 25 at 6:30 pm
- Listening session with 'Resource Landowners' at the Neuse River Resource Recovery Facility (NRRRF) on August 29 at 8 am

In addition, eight "pop-up" events were held to get the word out about meeting times, promote the online survey and offer an alternative way to collect input. These included:

- Anderson Point Park on Saturday, June 15.
- Downtown Clayton Farmer's Market on Saturday, June 15.
- The Corner Grocery (located at the intersection of Poole Road and Smithfield Road) on Wednesday, June 19.
- Knightdale Station Park on Thursday, June 20.
- Southeast CAC Community Celebration at Barwell Community Center on Saturday, June 29.
- Shoppes at Battle Bridge on Tuesday, July 30.
- Market at Riverwood on Wednesday, July 31.
- East Regional Library, Knightdale on Thursday, August 1.

An invitation-only meeting for resource landowners was held on August 29. One hundred thirty-six (136) invitation letters were sent to the property owners within the study area with landholdings greater than 10 acres. Twenty-six (26) landowners attended. Landowners had numerous questions about City of Raleigh annexation policy, as well as questions about eligibility for connection to City of Raleigh public utilities.

The key takeaways from the meeting include:

- Water quality concerns regarding the presence of radon in drinking water wells.
- High costs of access to reliable internet access for large parcels.

In addition to "pop-up" events, promotional efforts for Phase One events took a variety of forms. Postcards with information about the plan, the in-person events, and the online survey were sent to over 1,700 property owners within the study area. The City also publicized the events through email notices to City newsletter subscribers, social media posts, and the project website. Presentations were made to the South Citizen Advisory Council on May 13, and to the Southeast CAC on May 9 and August 8. City Planning staff also worked a booth at the Southeast CAC Community Celebration on June 29.

Phase One Event Process

Each in-person event had a similar structure and included similar questions and exercises.

Presentation

At the start of each event, City staff gave a [presentation](#) to introduce the plan scope and goals and to provide basic information about the study area.

Mapping Exercise

Maps of the study area were provided, and participants placed green and red dots to geographically locate the strengths and weaknesses of the specific features. Participants provided further comments on sticky notes and on the map itself. (See Appendix B for full report of comments.)

Issue Prioritization Exercise

A list of issues was provided, and participants used dots to indicate their top three most important issues the area is facing. Each individual chose their top three, and additional comments were collected on the meeting materials.

Visioning Exercise

Lastly, participants were given an open-ended prompt to share a big picture vision for the area. The prompt was “In 2050, I hope this southeast area is...” Participants shared responses that were both positive and negative, brief and fleshed-out.

Phase One Survey Overview

The [online survey](#) asked similar questions and provided an opportunity for more open-ended responses for each section. Respondents were asked to identify areas and qualities that should be preserved and those that require some attention. Survey respondents were also asked to rank a set of issues and to identify a larger vision for the area in 2050. The survey was open from May 30 through September 16, 2019.

6 Appendix B – Phase One Input

Event and Survey Questions

Question 1

What do you like about this area?
What would you like to see preserved?

Question 2

What do you not like about this area?
What needs attention or could work better?

Question 3

What topics or issues are most important to you? Choose your top three.

- Natural resources (recreation)

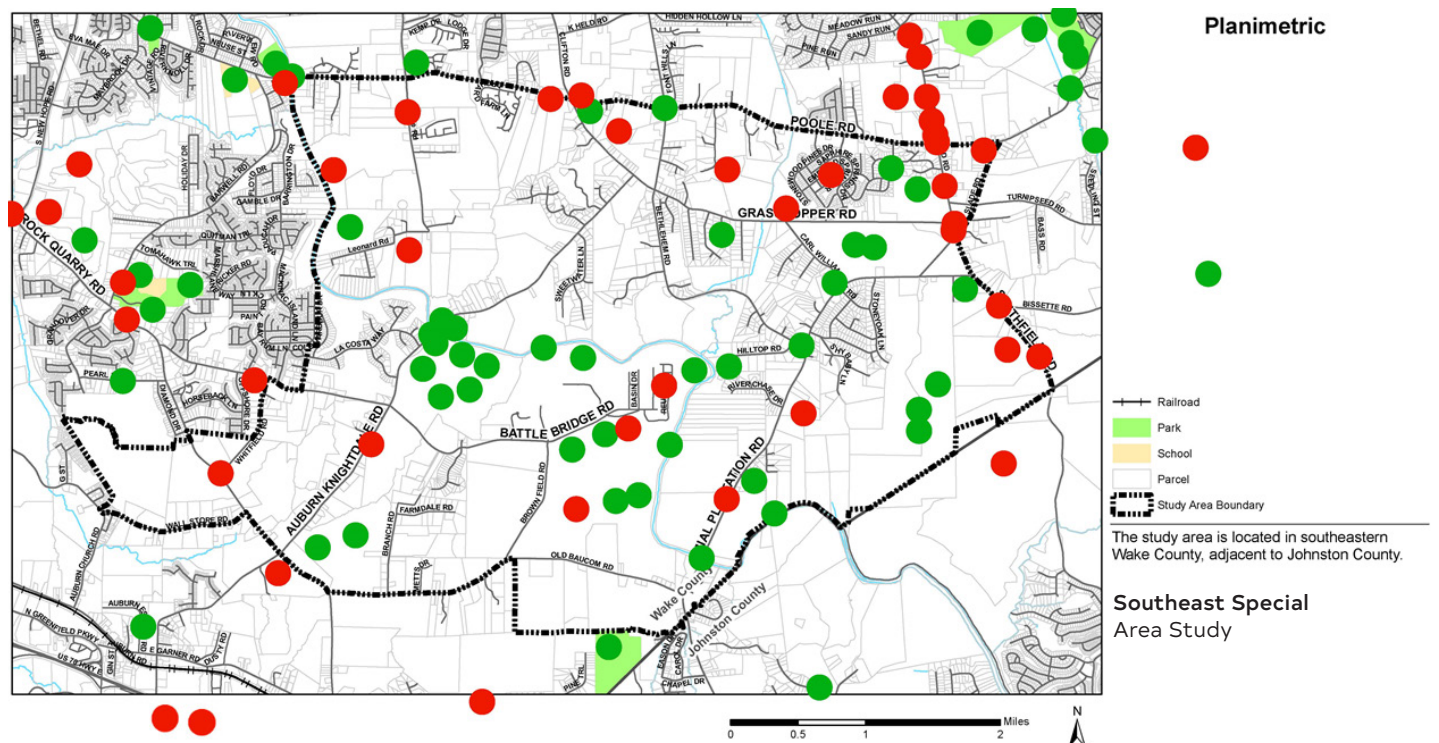
- Natural Resources (environment & stormwater)
- Getting around by car
- Getting around by other modes (transit, bicycling, walking)
- Proximity to commercial centers
- New development (density, urban form, transitions between uses)
- Housing (availability, types, affordability)
- Other (please specify)

Question 4

Finish the sentence.

"In 2050, I hope the Southeast Area..."

FIGURE 4 EVENT INPUT



Question 1

Green Dots	
Open Space	Lake Myra
	Neuse River Trail
	Neuse River greenway entry/parking
	Neuse River Trail
	Preserve trails!
	Buffer along river
	Keep Neuse River new at Randleigh. Possibly a school at Randleigh
	Nice natural area
	Greenway
	Greenway → future park?
	Walking
	Neuse River Trail
	Clemmons Forest
	Sunflowers. Like rural space
	Large tracts of public open space
Farmland	Family owned farm land
	Farmland
	City of Raleigh farm (green space farm)
	Randleigh farm - excellent opportunity for open space - educational, etc.
	Farmland/Ponds/Wildlife
Commercial	Paul Lee's
	Old store
Others	Neighborhood
	Event venue and historical
	Any new development should be near interchanges, away from rural areas/walkability/mixed-use
	Light rail
	Downtown Clayton cool!
	Civil War Camp

Question 2

Green Dots	
Traffic	Smithfield Rd expansion needed
	Widen Smithfield Rd
	Smithfield Rd and Poole Rd need help on traffic
	Turn lane - 2 lane (Smithfield Rd)
	Traffic (Smithfield Rd)
	Traffic (Smithfield Rd)
	Smithfield Rd is nothing but an on-ramp to I-87
	Traffic issues:
	1. Pool Rd from I-440, east to Smithfield Rd/Wendell Falls Pkwy
	2. Smithfield Rd from I-87, south to Pool Rd/Major Slade Rd
	3. Realign the intersection of Smithfield Rd/Major Slade Rd/Grasshopper Rd
	4. Hodge Rd from Pool Rd, north to I-87
	Smithfield Rd and Poole Rd need help on traffic
	Hodge/Poole Rd intersection/traffic light
	Poole Rd need to be wide
	Widen road turning lane (Poole Rd)
	Wide 2 lane road (Hodge Rd)
	lagoon community wastewater open lagoon
	traffic
	Traffic (Rock Quarry Rd)
	Traffic (Rock Quarry Rd)
Public Transportation	Roads and congestion (Rock Quarry Rd)
	Traffic (Rock Quarry Rd)
	Road improved. Lots of truck traffic, cars as well (Mial Plantation Rd)
Landfill	Widen road (Mial Plantation Rd)
	No mass transit
	More bus stops
	More bus stops
Landfill	No more landfills
	Private landfill
	Landfill

Red Dots	
Wastewater Treatment	Smell of wastewater treatment plant
	Wastewater treatment plant
	Positive - we need it
	Negative - stay up to date on technology. Do not pollute.
Infrastructures	No gas line!
	Infrastructure disruption on drainage/wildlife
	City water
	Trash cans (around the intersection of S New Hope Rd and Eva Mae Dr)
	Trash cans (around Grasshopper Rd)
Others	Shops
	No long-term/defined land use plan to guide development 50-100 year timeframe incentive
	What parts of this block of land should be Raleigh vs other municipalities?
	Potholes
	Owners may sell land to developers

Question 3

Natural Resources (recreation)	32
Natural Resources (environment & stormwater)	27
Getting around by car	25
Getting around by other modes (transit, bicycling, walking)	30
Proximity to commercial centers	24
New development (density, urban form, transitions between uses)	17
Housing (availability, types, affordability)	18
Other (please write on a sticky-note and place here)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity to commercial centers is good as is • Density is bad • Preservation of historical areas and development of same • Likes Knightdale library seeing the stars • Dislikes light pollution • Restriction on malls • Mixed use around interchange. Work - live - play • Randleigh Clemmons mountain to sea • If dense around intersections/interchanges, mixed-use NOT spread out • Keeping rural feel • Transportation options to alleviate traffic • More city water, less well water • Park experiences for older people and young people need stormwater infrastructure, so that roads don't flood in heavy rain; need access to drivers licenses or identification, public transportation to shopping centers • No more check points with the intent to catch Latinos who are coming from work • Good/accessible schools • Variety of schedules and programs • Good educators 	

Question 4

"In 2050, I hope the Southeast Area..."

More recreational areas - parks
 More schools with cultural programs
 Better medical facilities, especially for rehabilitation for the elderly
 Good retirement facilities that are affordable
 Good natural resources, especially water
 A more affordable adult care
 Medical assistance for the elderly
 Prescription alternative (more affordable)
 Keep green/farm land with green pathways/connectors to neighborhoods
 New good schools and diverse programs
 Balanced development. Good retirement places, parks, recreation, groceries
 Covenants for private home to keep grass controlled and trash pick-up
 safe water/wells
 Heaven is a wonderful place for 2050!
 Keep the Green areas. More schools, transportation, affordable houses, work more with the people.
 More roads so the traffic is not heavy, but I know when the city grows, everything grows.
 Transit system (rail)
 On-line high schools
 Free college
 Free healthcare
 Highways + Roads improvement to fit needs of growing population
 Restrictions put on billboards as a standard
 Has not pushed out local residents and become unaffordable to live in
 Keeps its rivers clean and has park for people to enjoy
 In 2050, I hope the Southeast Area is a diverse community where people live and work.
 Controlled growth
 • Residential
 • Schools
 • Commercial
 Preserved open spaces
 My hope for this area is to remain rural, good place to raise a family. Lots of natural area for the community to enjoy.
 (Southeast area) will have improved public transportation. (Southeast area) built enough schools to accommodate the youth in the region.

Survey Input

A summary of survey question responses is available in an interactive report online [here](#).
 All survey comments can be viewed online [here](#).

