



Raleigh
Parks

2020 2021 Raleigh Parks *Annual Report*

Letter

from the Director



It is with great pleasure we present the 2020-2021 Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department Annual Report highlighting our many significant accomplishments over the past year.

We all saw the important role parks play in improving and maintaining the health and wellness of our community during the pandemic. Parks and greenways experienced high usage numbers during this time, which reinforces how parks contribute to the vitality and well-being of our community and residents.

Planning and implementation continued to move forward on capital and bond projects. Please visit our website at <https://www.raleighnc.gov/parks> and search "current projects" to follow the progress.

- Dorothea Dix Park's 18 acre Plaza & Play project is well underway, and the parks' first public building, the Greg Poole, Jr. All Faith's Chapel, opened in May 2021. The Chapel will host various events including art performances, concerts, wellness classes and community events.
- When COVID-19 shut down our in-person programming, Recreation and Resources staff pivoted to building a collection of video resources

in order to continue offering exceptional experiences to our Raleigh community. The Play Anywhere initiative allowed us to offer value when families were homebound and needed to find ways to remain active and healthy.

- 2020 allowed us to complete several of our facility improvement projects, as well as open River Bend Park, the newly constructed John Chavis Community Center, and a brand new playground and challenge course at Barwell Road Park.
- In March 2021, we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Historic Dentzel Carousel at Pullen Park Amusements!
- The Parks Division continued their on-going fleet transformation effort by purchasing electric equipment, vehicles and tools in order to reduce environmental impact. Look for their "We're Plugged In" trailer around downtown Raleigh!
- Our Equity Team staff led important conversations across the department on racial equity, implicit bias, and self-reflection. We also launched the Racial Equity Tour Program to provide employees with a deeper understanding of the historical context of facilities and places within the Raleigh Parks system.

We will continue to work hard to provide a model parks system for all citizens and visitors of Raleigh to enjoy and be proud of. We are committed to maintaining our parks and facilities in a clean and safe manner, to preserving and protecting our natural environment, to looking into Raleigh's unique culture at our museum and historic sites and providing the highest quality recreation opportunities for citizens of every age and ability.

In closing, I would like to sincerely thank City Council and the citizens of Raleigh whose continued and unwavering support make these accomplishments possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Oscar Carmona". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a white background.

Oscar Carmona, CPRE, Director

Together we connect and enrich our community through exceptional experiences.



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Plaza & Play

Well Underway

The 18-acre **Plaza & Play** project along Lake Wheeler Road aspires to be an inviting and inspiring public space for all ages. With one-of-a-kind play spaces, a grand civic plaza, a waterfall wall fountain, gardens, and areas to cookout and relax with family and friends, the Plaza & Play will welcome our community from across the street, throughout Raleigh and beyond. The site's history will come alive through public art, interpretive signage, and a rehabilitated historic house. The design for Plaza & Play, led by landscape architecture firm Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, is well underway, with the third public meeting scheduled for July 2021.

Greg Poole

All Faiths Chapel

The chapel opened in May 2021 as the first public building in Dix Park. Built in 1956, the hospital's mid-century modern chapel is now beautifully restored to highlight original features like the stained-glass window, handcrafted wood paneling, stainless steel fixtures and terrazzo floors. Renovated by Dix Park Conservancy in 2020, the chapel and grounds provide all the amenities of a modern community gathering space while retaining its historic charm. Various events and activities will occur at the chapel, including concerts, history lectures, art performances and exhibits, wellness classes, and family weddings.



The Creek Project

Begins

The Rocky Branch, which runs along the northern border of Dix Park, has been displaced and polluted over time. The first step in restoring and enhancing the Rocky Branch is studying current conditions and identifying options for remediation and use of the creek and adjacent landfill area. To fund this work, the City and Dix Park Conservancy collectively applied for and were awarded four grants: Water Resource Development Grant, offered through the State Division of Water Resources; Land and Water Fund Grant; NC Environmental Enhancement Grant, offered through the NC Attorney General's Office; and Duke Energy Foundation Powerful Communities: Nature Grant.



Spring 2021 Dix Park welcomed the community back for a full outdoor program schedule – along with the first indoor classes in the newly renovated chapel. Along with returning favorites like Yoga in the Park and preschool nature programs, all-age art classes, youth yoga, Tai Chi, and birdwatching joined the line-up of free activities at Dix Park.

In-Person

Programs Return

Early Park

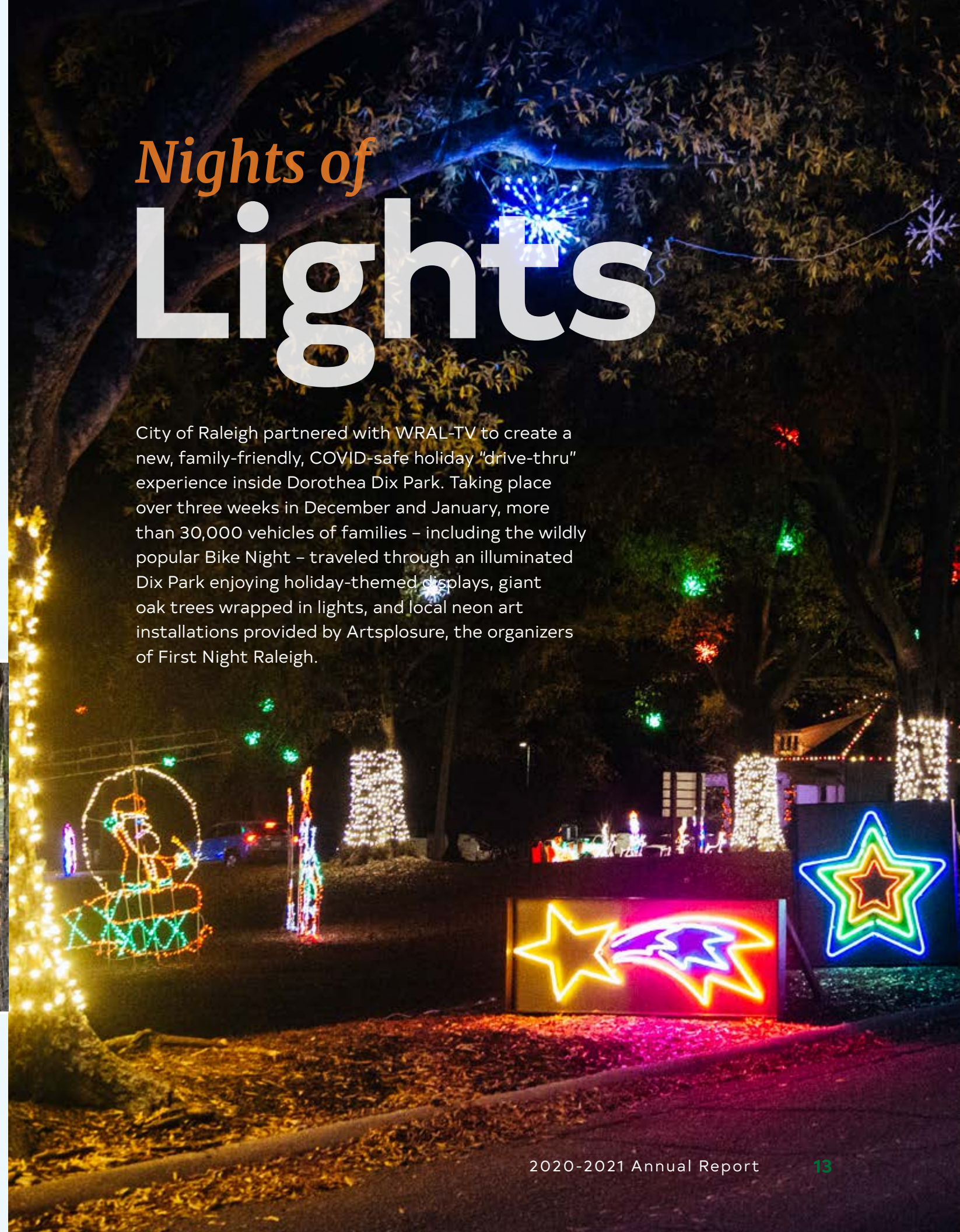
Improve- ments

As we continue the transition from a 150-year-old state hospital campus to a 21st-century public park, new features and amenities are being added to make Dix Park more welcoming, comfortable, and fun. The first round of these enhancements includes a tree-shaded hammock grove, swinging benches around the Big Field, wayfinding and historical signs, two picnic and play areas – with swings, shade structures, and grills – along with bike racks and benches throughout the park.



Nights of Lights

City of Raleigh partnered with WRAL-TV to create a new, family-friendly, COVID-safe holiday “drive-thru” experience inside Dorothea Dix Park. Taking place over three weeks in December and January, more than 30,000 vehicles of families – including the wildly popular Bike Night – traveled through an illuminated Dix Park enjoying holiday-themed displays, giant oak trees wrapped in lights, and local neon art installations provided by Artsposure, the organizers of First Night Raleigh.



River Bend Park

River Bend Park opened in late 2020 and includes a playground, a kayak loading/unloading area, parking, restrooms, a kayak launch, and access to the Neuse River Greenway.

River Bend Park is one of several launch sites on the Neuse River for small non-motorized crafts, including canoes and kayaks.

In 2012, the City purchased 24.97 acres north of US Highway 401 and Interstate 540 from the Developer of 5401 North as a potential neighborhood park site. Raleigh citizens approved the 2014 bond referendum for parks, which allocated \$2 million for park master plan development and phase one construction of the River Bend Park site.



Park Projects (cont.)

Historic

John Chavis Memorial Park Community Center



The newly constructed John Chavis Community Center opened in June 2021 and includes a two-story center with a full-size indoor gym, elevated walking track, fitness center, and numerous classroom and meeting spaces. A renovation to the original Carousel House will allow for interior event space and exterior bathroom access. Linking these two buildings together will be a new central plaza with an integrated water feature and a large playground for all ages and abilities.

The park was entered into the National Register of Historic Places on April 19, 2016.

The Raleigh City Council approved the Strategic Implementation Study on June 21, 2016. The study strategically refines the park master plan adopted in May 2014 and presents the park improvements expected using the 2014 Parks Bond funding.

The project's design phase began in the Fall of 2016, highlighted by numerous public input sessions. The Schematic Design was presented to the Raleigh Parks, Recreation, and Greenway Advisory Board on March 16, 2017, and was approved by the Raleigh City Council on March 21, 2017. The project was awarded a National Parks Service Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program Grant and City of Raleigh Stormwater Cost-share Program funds.





Community and Neighborhood Center **Renovations**

Raleigh Parks is excited to announce the completion of a few of our park projects! We have made facility improvements at [Sanderford Road Park](#), [Lake Lynn Community Center](#), [Eastgate Park](#), [Powell Drive Park](#), [Biltmore Hills Park](#), and [Ralph Campbell Neighborhood Center](#).

Please visit raleighnc.gov to virtually tour these spaces.

Barwell Road Park Improvements

This included the addition of a new playground, challenge course, and multipurpose field to the park. The park will also include shade structures and a drinking fountain. The "challenge course" is made of a series of obstacles with a start-and-stop timer at each end. The course provides varying levels of difficulty to make it fun for kids and can also be used for athletic training for teenagers and adults. In addition to the obstacle circuit, a two-lane, 40-yard sprint track will provide another area for training or challenging a friend to a race. The challenge course is provided by a donation from the Carolina Panthers partnering with the City of Raleigh on the project and opened in July 2021.

Greenway

Master Plan

The City of Raleigh's Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department is excited to be updating the Greenway Master Plan. This project, completed in coordination with the PRCR System Plan Update, is the first update to the greenway plan since 1989.

The first Capital Area Greenway Master Plan was created in 1976, with updates occurring in 1986 and 1989. The original 1976 Plan, and subsequent updates, have been the guiding documents for staff, residents, land developers, and community groups. These updates emphasized using the greenway system for recreation and encouraged their inclusion in parks and recreation offerings in the city. The 1989 Update created a system hierarchy that identified corridors, connectors, nodes, and loops. However, corridors running along waterways remain the primary backbone of the system.

This project includes a robust public involvement process consisting of various opportunities for citizens to provide input into the plan. Members of the plan update team will be staffing booths at local events, holding public open house meetings, and creating an interactive, online survey.

Lake Johnson

Loop Trail

The completed Lake Johnson Loop Trail Project re-opened to the public on April 16, 2021, included repaving and improving drainage conditions along a one-mile section of the existing paved section of the Walnut Creek Trail that runs between the Lake Johnson Waterfront Center on the north side of Lake Johnson, and the dam located adjacent to Lake Dam Road. This segment is located on what's commonly referred to as Lake Johnson's East Loop Trail.

City of Oaks Foundation

A year like 2020 has made us appreciate the importance of time outdoors, fresh air, and social interaction like never before. While our department has collaborated in the past with the City of Oaks Foundation to offer financial assistance for youth programs and environmental education, many popular summer camps and outdoor nature programs were canceled. So as families relied more heavily on our parks and nature preserves for the exercise, recreation, and connection to the community and the environment they had been missing this past year, our partnership focused more on improving existing parks and opening more natural spaces for the community to enjoy.

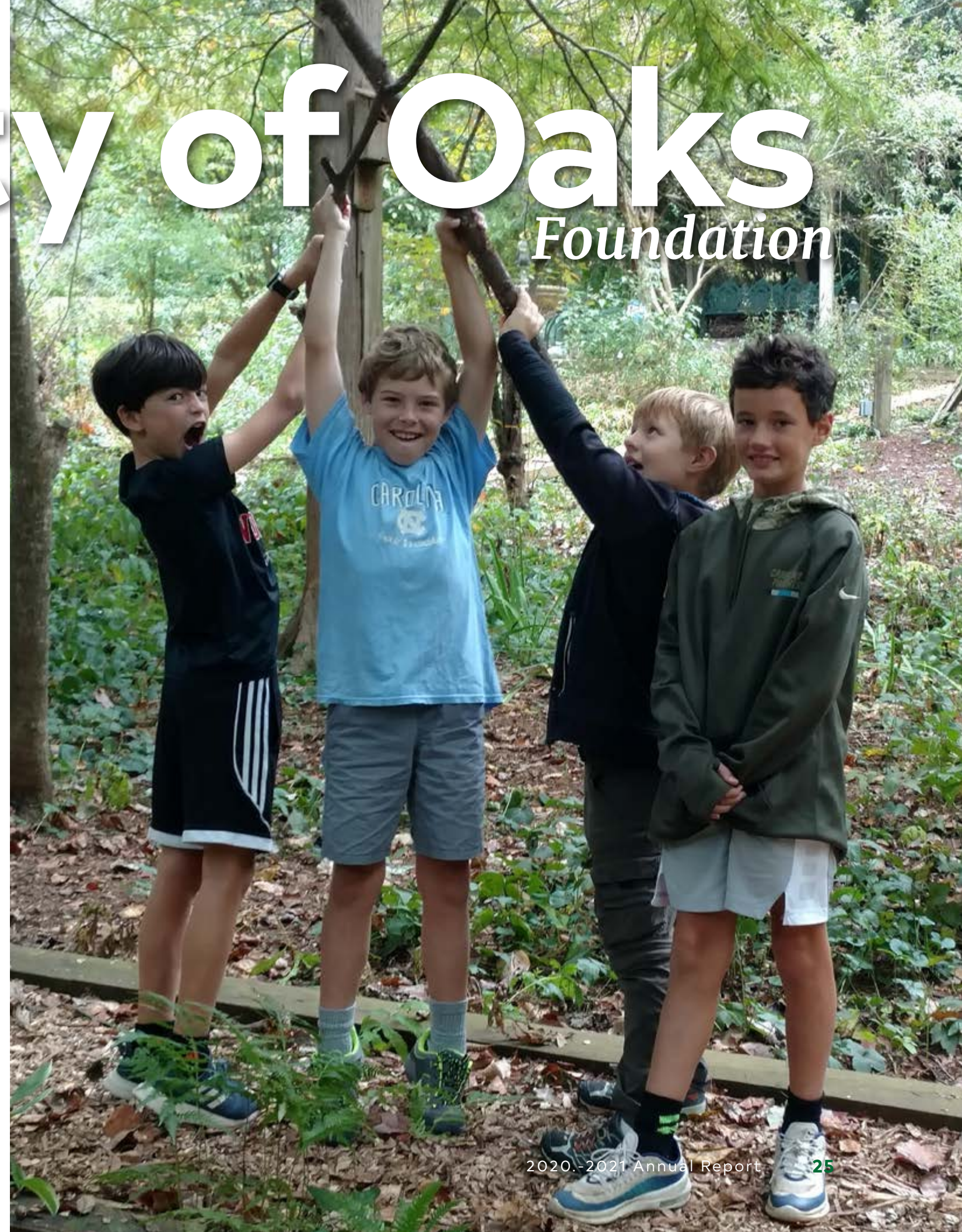
To celebrate Earth Day 2021, the Raleigh City Council accepted the donation of Joslin Garden from the City of Oaks Foundation. After ten years of planning and collaboration with the department to make this dream a reality, this 4.3-acre natural wonder in the heart of Raleigh will soon be enjoyed by residents and visitors, and a significant environmental legacy will be preserved. This new park features woods, streams, trails, and a diverse collection of native and exotic plants, arranged in formal and informal styles.

The garden has been enjoyed by neighbors for generations and more recently has hosted programming

by the City of Oaks Foundation that has attracted visitors from all over the Triangle. Though COVID-19 led to the cancellation of recent events, the garden has hosted Easter egg hunts, Mothers' Day tea parties, outdoor art and music programs, and programs focused on nature and the environment. Visitors are welcome to see the park for themselves during business hours and from dawn to dusk on weekends.

Through additional collaboration with our department, the foundation has partnered with local businesses to provide over \$35,000 for teen programs and summer youth employment and over \$10,000 for other youth development programs like the Neighborhood Ecology Corps. It also facilitates the fundraising efforts for local volunteer groups aligned with Raleigh's parks, such as the Friends of Millbrook Dog Park and the Raleigh Riders program, which provides assisted biking through local parks. Finally, many people chose to partner with the foundation to make charitable donations for local park improvements and volunteer projects.

Working together with the City of Oaks Foundation, Raleigh's Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources Department helps maintain a great outdoors for a great Raleigh!



The Numbers

In March of 2021, the department launched a new recreation management system, RecTrac and associated website, RecLink. RecTrac processes the registrations, rentals, memberships, ticket sales, and point-of-sale transactions for the programs and services offered by the department. RecTrac was configured and implemented completely remotely during the pandemic by an interdepartmental team of PRCR, Finance, and IT staff. RecTrac replaces the previous recreation management system, Class, implemented in the mid-1990s. PRCR also developed a virtual training program to accompany the launch, training over 550 end users in various aspects of the product. Some of the enhancements implemented with RecTrac include: better website performance, easier access to register with financial assistance, online boat rentals, online amusement ticket sales, and online facility rental requests. Through May 2021, RecTrac has processed over 30,000 activity enrollments, 60,000 facility reservations, and 1.6 million dollars in revenue.

The PRCR Department's 2020-2021 operating budget is **\$58,685,513**.

The Department's Capital Improvement Budget for FY20 is **\$1M**.

5%
Business Process
Management
\$2,675,600

6%
Park Development
& Communications
\$3,416,386

18%
Natural & Cultural
Resources
\$9,688,252

34%
Parks/Grounds
Maintenance
\$18,410,197

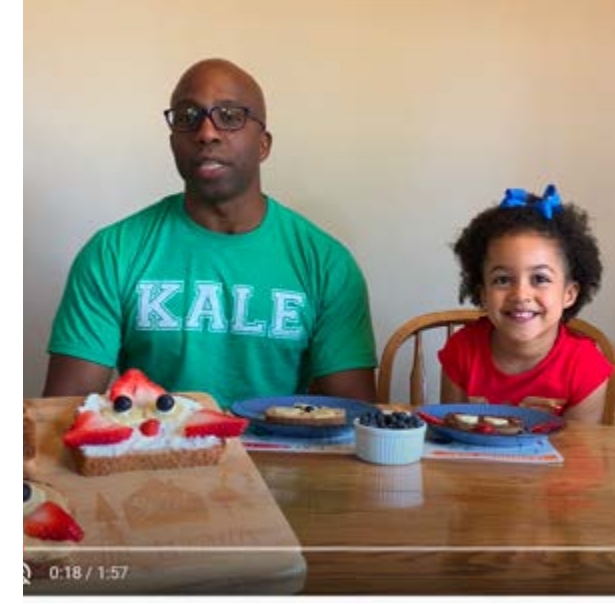
38%
Recreation
\$20,641,461

Programs and Initiatives

Serving the Community Through COVID-19

REC Program

The Recreation and Education Center (REC) program was designed in response to rapidly changing family schedules due to COVID-19. This program is for elementary and middle school students participating in traditional, year-round, and modified school calendars, home school students, and participants enrolled in virtual learning. This program strives to provide a fun environment modified for the safety of staff and participants. Program operational hours are 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Recreation and Education Centers (REC) activities include arts and crafts, active and quiet games, outdoor activities, physical activity, movies, cards and board games, and other activities. Time during the day is designated for each participant to participate in remote learning, digital time, or a quiet activity.



Play Anywhere

The Play Anywhere initiative was launched to maintain the connection with the community during a time when our programs were canceled and facilities closed due to COVID-19. Over 50 staff members and facilities were challenged to think of ways to transition activities and programs traditionally held in person into a format that could be shared through the website. This program was developed in March 2020 in direct response to COVID-19 and the impact on Raleigh Parks operations. Raleigh Parks program and facilities staff were challenged to think of ways to transition activities and programs traditionally held in person into a format that could be shared through the website. As the community struggled to find a new norm at home, Raleigh Parks stepped in with easy, creative ways to remain active and healthy in various categories (Be Creative, Let's Explore, Be Well, Let's Learn, Be Active).

Play Anywhere has allowed us to maintain contact with current patrons and has allowed us to engage with a new audience. We have been able to offer value when families were homebound and needed to find ways to remain active and healthy. We are hopeful that it has allowed us to maintain and build relationships with the community that will increase revenue for program registration once we can offer in-person opportunities again. Through the Play Anywhere initiative, we created 117 videos and generated over 5,500 engagements through social media. As part of the Play Anywhere initiative, we created the "Laugh Line" where callers could hear a joke of the day and leave suggestions. Some days Raleigh Parks received over 100 calls.



Programs and Initiatives (cont.)

The COVID pandemic hit in March 2020 (FY20), sending most Parks Maintenance employees home to work. In late June 2020, parks field employees began a staggered return to the workplace.

Bee Hotels and Butterflies



To support urban agriculture and pollination efforts along with the City's BeeCity USA designation, Park Maintenance Staff installed Bee Hotels to support non-hive bees. Certified Monarch Way Stations were installed at Brookhaven and Lake Lynn Parks and 3 locations along the Greenway system to support migrating Monarch butterflies. Greenhouse staff propagated hundreds of Asclepias plants for these Way Stations. These weigh stations' habitats will support the preservation of the species.

Old Tree, New Life

One of the oldest Oak Trees in Nash Square (estimated at 120 years old) declined significantly in summer 2019 and was removed later that fall. The City of Raleigh commissioned artist Corey Lancaster to carve the newest Nash Square squirrel (Berkeley). Parks Staff helped to position and base the squirrel in place in August 2020.



Volunteer and Invasive Management Services

The Volunteer Services program launched the Dix Park Garden Volunteer Program, Dix Park Monthly Maintenance Program and held four mini volunteer appreciation events. The Invasive Team partnered with the Resources Division to create an internal conservation crew program that will work at Resources sites to address invasive species.



Parks Division *Efforts*

Programs and Initiatives (cont.)

Pullen Park

Carousel Centennial

The Historic Dentzel Carousel at Pullen Park Amusements will be celebrated its' 100th anniversary on March 28, 2021. Raleigh Parks provided a month of educational and fun family programs throughout April, including a virtual birthday celebration that included guest speakers sending their birthday wishes, a slideshow of old carousel photos, and a Zoom recording to present the centennial plaque.

Themed daily programs included Painting Mondays, Historic Tuesdays, Wurlitzer Wednesdays, Carousel Crafting Thursdays, Photography Fridays, and Snazzy Sundays.

Greenway

Safety Campaign + Master Plan

In April 2021, Raleigh Parks introduced the "Share the Greenways" campaign focusing on safety reminders across the Greenway System. Raleigh Parks challenged users to find four different safety messages on signage across the city – Stay Alert, Be Mindful of Speed, Stay to the Right, Pass on the Left, and Stay Connected.



Programs and Initiatives (cont.)

We're *Plugged In*

As a part of the City of Raleigh's on-going fleet transformation effort, the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department has purchased electric vehicles, maintenance equipment, and tools which reduce fuel consumption, maintenance costs, and noise pollution, eliminate the chance of fuel spills, improve air quality, and prevent long-term adverse impacts to operators' hearing and health.

To date, the PRCR Department has purchased one Nissan Leaf (appropriately assigned to our Urban Forestry division), three Global Electric Motorcars (GEM) vehicles, three Polaris utility vehicles, four 60" zero-turn mowers, one 48" stand-up mower, and 80 pieces of handheld maintenance equipment (chainsaws, bed edgers, backpack blowers), and an electric bus.

The Central Business District Maintenance Crew (which often starts work before sunrise in high profile parks near residential condos and lofts) has found that noise complaints from urban dwellers have dropped significantly due to the electric mowers. This spring, the crew purchased a mobile charging trailer that charges the equipment while traveling between park sites. The Parks Division's next goal is to add permanent charging stations in parks and purchase electric equipment for ballfield and park crews.



Programs and Initiatives (cont.)

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts

Can we Talk Sessions - These sessions are department-level conversations facilitated by the Equity Team. The discussions address topics on the local, state, and national level and include racial equity, implicit bias, and self-reflection. As we navigate the internal struggle of being 'professional' and 'human,' it is essential to acknowledge the feelings and viewpoints of colleagues to facilitate a stronger working environment. We want to use this time to have an open and authentic dialogue. A facilitated conversation will set the tone as employees use this time to process and examine the current state of our City and organization.

Racial Equity Tours - The PRCR Equity Team invited staff to participate in the 2021 Raleigh Racial Equity Tour Program. This collaborative endeavor aims to provide employees with a deeper understanding of the historical context of facilities and places within the PRCR system. This tour will also highlight and celebrate prominent local persons of color who advocated for social justice and change within Raleigh communities.



Keeping *in Touch*

Get Social with Raleigh Parks

Get Social with Raleigh Parks: the department embraces social media to keep members of the community engaged and to help us stay informed about what matters to them. We look at social media as a customer service tool, allowing us to interact with citizens, receive feedback and share information.

Our online social media community has grown to **46,965** members.

18,146 Twitter followers

15,984 Facebook followers

434 Pinterest followers

359 YouTube subscribers

12,401 Instagram followers

Join the conversation

Have a question about the parks? **Ask us.**

Have a shoutout about something fun in the parks? **Tell us.**

 [Facebook.com/raleighparks](https://www.facebook.com/raleighparks)

 [Twitter.com/raleighparks](https://twitter.com/raleighparks)

 [Instagram.com/raleighparks](https://www.instagram.com/raleighparks)

 [Pinterest.com/raleighparks](https://www.pinterest.com/raleighparks)



Boards and Commissions

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Mayor: Mary-Ann Baldwin
At Large Council Member,
Mayor Pro Tem: Nicole
Stewart

At Large Council Member,
Jonathan Melton

Corey Branch

Patrick Buffkin

David Cox

Stormie D. Forte

David Knight

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Vice-Chair: Beverley Clark

Carol Ashcraft

Karen Crispen

Gregory Etheridge

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Lex Janes

Marsha Presnell Jennette

Brad Johnson

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Bain Jones

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Patty Williams

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Chair

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Conservancy, **Vice-Chair:**

Corey Branch, Raleigh City
Council Member

Orage Quarles, Vice Chair, Dix
Park Conservancy

Nancy McFarlane, Dix Park
Conservancy

Carlton Midyette, Dix Park
Conservancy

Jennifer Wagner, Chair, Parks
Recreation Greenways
Advisory Board

Oscar Carmona, Director,
Parks Recreation and Cultural
Resources Department

Tansy Hayward, Assistant City
Manager

Alicia Knight, Associate Vice
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David Smith, Deputy
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Administrative
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Assistant Director: Sally
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Assistant Director: Scott
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*at time of printing





Raleigh
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