

2022 2023

Raleigh Parks

Annual Report



Raleigh
Parks

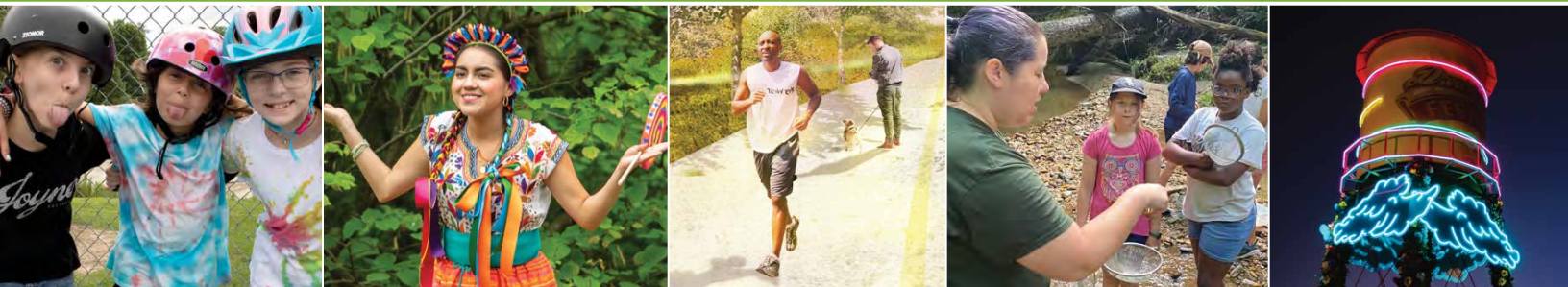


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Letter

from the Director



I am excited to share this annual report. I firmly believe that parks are in the DNA of Raleigh. From being called the “City of Oaks” to “A Park with a City In It,” we are fortunate to have great support for our parks, recreation, and cultural resources system. There is no better evidence than our November 2022 Parks Bond Referendum results. The approval rating for the bond was over 73%, demonstrating that parks are essential to our community. This bond will reinvest in many of our parks and greenways, create new opportunities and improve access to public facilities and programs.

Over the last year, we have continued to focus on ways to better serve our growing and changing community. Raleigh Parks collaborates with various groups and individuals to broaden our reach. These partnerships positively impact community health and wellness, improve the stewardship of our ecological systems, encourage creativity, honor Raleigh’s history, and allow us to better engage with our community and visitors. Equity will be the foundation of all our work to ensure everyone feels included and heard. We continue to work towards removing barriers and improving access to our programs and facilities.

This report highlights our excellent work as a department and its impact on the community. Thank you to the thousands of volunteers who work tirelessly to support Raleigh Parks, our passionate Board and Commission Members, and the inspiring staff of this department, who are exceptional. We appreciate the collective support of the City Manager’s Office, the Raleigh City Council, and our community’s vision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen C. Bentley". The signature is stylized with a large "S" and "B".

Stephen C. Bentley, Director
Raleigh Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department

Health & Wellness

Parks and recreation is essential to meeting the health and wellness needs of the community. Programs and partnerships improve access to information and resources that encourage a healthy lifestyle.



Neighborhood and Community Connection Projects

The Neighborhood & Community Connections (N&CC) program identifies, prioritizes, and builds new walkable connections to parks and greenways. The program promotes health equity throughout the City, using geospatial modeling and data analysis to guide investment in those communities which are most at risk of adverse health outcomes and most in need of improved access to outdoor recreation opportunities. The funding source for N&CC projects was the 2014 Parks Bond Referendum and land acquisition funds. The following projects are complete: Edwards Mill Road to Laurel Hills Park, Ray Road to Lake Lynn Park, Ileagnes Road to Peach Road Park, North King Charles Road to Crabtree Creek Trail, Midtown-Street Albans to Crabtree Creek Trail at Industrial Drive, and Vintage Drive to Walnut Creek Trail.

Return to Camp and School Programs

For many families in Raleigh, attending summer camp or one of many before-school, after-school, and track-out programs is part of everyday life. Even in 2022, Raleigh Parks was still operating under the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. **During the summer of 2022, over 10,000 campers returned post-pandemic.** They attended our traditional summer X-Press camp, where they had opportunities to visit colleges, learn a new skill, and play and learn in nature. In 2023, we plan to welcome over 12,000 campers. We provide similar activities for our nearly 1,000 year-round school youth per week, where participants can blend fun with learning, recreation, health, and social skills.



Female participation in youth flag football has increased by over 100% since its first official season in the spring of 2021.



Girls Youth Basketball and Flag Football

With the growth of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) and other travel organizations, girls youth basketball participation has been a challenge. Still, we have found ways to persevere and build relationships with surrounding municipalities to create an exceptional experience for our participants.

- We partnered with the Town of Clayton and split game locations for the Mitey Mite Girls (ages 9-10) and Little League Girls (ages 11-12). We were able to run a successful season with more participants.
- Female participation in youth flag football has increased by over 100% since its first official season in the spring of 2021.
- Participation continues to rise as participants become more comfortable and familiar with the inviting style of play within team and league formation.


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Health and Wellness Initiatives

Mental Health First Aid Training

The Health and Wellness Team partnered with Alliance Health to certify Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources staff in Mental Health First Aid for adults. Participants learn to recognize signs of mental health or substance use challenges in individuals ages 18 and older, offer support, and guide a person toward appropriate mental care.

 **Raleigh Parks partners** annually with Wake County Child Nutrition Services **to provide over 22,000 meals to summer camp participants** in low-resource communities.

Summer Food Service Program

Raleigh Parks partners annually with Wake County Child Nutrition Services to provide over 22,000 meals to summer camp participants in low-resource communities. This partnership ensures camp participants have access to meals throughout the day during out-of-school time.

Healthy Lifestyle Summer Program

Raleigh Parks, in partnership with Wake County Cooperative Extension, recruits AmeriCorps VISTA Associates to facilitate a series of healthy lifestyle-related programs. **This partnership provides nutrition, education, and physical activity experiences to more than 1,500 camp participants, ages 6-14, at 26 X-Press Summer Camp locations.** Nutrition education classes also were hosted at four community center locations, and more than 100 pounds of fresh produce was distributed to attendees.

Equity

Parks and Recreation is essential for strong, healthy, and resilient communities. We are working to ensure fair and equal access to quality parks and recreation programs and services.

2022 Parks Bond Projects

Committed to establishing and advancing an equitable community for all, the City strives to improve and expand the parks and greenway system to accommodate the fast-growing development and population. **In fall 2022, the Raleigh community overwhelmingly (73%) approved the \$275M parks bond referendum**, designed to address evolving community priorities, promote park equity and access needs, and balance new growth and existing facility improvements. As part of the proposed FY2024 Capital Improvement Program budget, the \$275M bond funding will roll out with early-phase investment in high-priority areas based on equity and park and greenway access. Extensive community engagement will maximize public input and support during the project planning and design phase to ensure successful project delivery.

Trust for Public Land's on Common Ground Grant

Raleigh Parks was awarded a \$25,000 On Common Ground grant by the Trust for Public Land, one of only nine municipalities across the United States selected for this program. As part of this grant award, a \$3,600 travel stipend will send three Raleigh Parks staff members to the 2023 Welcoming Interactive Conference in San José, California. They will participate in workshops and training programs on social contract theory and equitable engagement practices. On Common Ground is part of a national research and advocacy program centered entered on lifting the capacity of parks and other public spaces to mitigate the impacts of polarization, oppression, and racism by promoting contact between people from different social groups. **Staff will utilize the grant funding to create a program called "Welcome to Raleigh Parks,"** which will foster belonging with two under-resourced and isolated groups within society and our department - families receiving financial assistance and those newly arrived in the United States.

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 **Raleigh Parks was awarded a \$25,000 On Common Ground grant** by the Trust for Public Land, one of only nine municipalities across the United States selected for this program.



Accessibility for Parks Grant

The NC Department of Parks and Recreation awarded Raleigh Parks a **\$300,000 Accessibility for Parks Grant**. The grant will be used for universal-design-focused renovations to Caraleigh Park, emphasizing sensory play. Staff will work closely with the local community, the Mayor's Committee for Persons with Disabilities, and the Specialized Recreation and Inclusion Services team to create a fun and inclusive environment.

Financial Assistance Program

Play It Forward Raleigh awarded **\$115,432 in assistance through non-taxpayer resources**, helping 774 individuals attend quality programs throughout the year. Twenty-five children experiencing homelessness attended traditional summer camps, school programs, and swim lessons. We shared information about the financial assistance program, parks programs, and job opportunities at 19 community events. During the Sanderford Road Touch-a-Truck Event, 482 financial assistance applications and 76 job flyers were distributed to attendees. For families receiving financial assistance, we created five new programs, the most popular one teaching patrons how to register and make payments through our RecLink software. New this year is a Gift Guide that provides information

about donations, memorial-giving, and sponsorship opportunities. We also developed a Community Resource Guide listing contact information for organizations in Raleigh and Wake County, including food pantries, mental health agencies, short and long-term shelters.

Cultural Outreach and Enrichment Program

The Cultural Outreach and Enrichment Program (COE) serves Raleigh's refugee and immigrant communities by fostering a greater sense of belonging in this historically under-resourced population. COE works with partner organizations to provide English language classes, connect community members to the City of Raleigh and partner services, and host programs and special events celebrating our cultural diversity.

English Language Program

The English Language Programs provided opportunities to **learn English, understand American culture, and connect with other non-English speakers by attending free English classes and cultural programs**. In the past year, we increased in-person class attendance, held virtual tours with the North Carolina Museum of Art, attended an intergenerational ceramics class at Pullen Arts,



and had an artist residency through Teaching Artists Connect and Specialized Recreation and Inclusion Services.

Language Collaborative Cohort

Raleigh Parks represents one of six City of Raleigh departments in the Language Access Collaborative, facilitated by the Building Integrated Communities (BIC) team at the Institute for the Study of the Americas at UNC Chapel Hill. **The collaborative brings together government and community organizations from nine North Carolina locales to create plans to expand communication with residents in community languages.**

Women-Only Swim Time and Aquatics Safety Month

During Water Safety Month, Raleigh Parks offered a **free women-only swim time, including a water safety clinic**. Interpreters were present to ensure this critical skill was accessible to different groups.

Juneteenth Celebration

Raleigh Parks continues to provide education and celebrate the historical contributions of Raleigh's African American community through various programs and special events. In 2022, we hosted several cultural events, including Juneteenth celebrations at the Historic John Chavis Memorial Park and Carolina Pines Community Center. We also offered programming at the City of Raleigh Museum, the Pope House, and Mordecai Historic Park to acknowledge this rich African American tradition. In 2023, we established a new partnership between Carolina Pines Community Center and the Department of Equity and Inclusion to host a Juneteenth Karaoke/Open Mic Celebration.



We also offered **programming at the City of Raleigh Museum, the Pope House, and Mordecai Historic Park** to acknowledge this rich African American tradition.



Conservation



Parks and Recreation is essential to building resilient, climate-ready communities. We value healthy ecosystems, responsible land management, and environmental education and work hard to implement sustainable practices.

Smoky Hollow Concept Plan

In November 2022, Raleigh City Council formally approved and adopted the Concept Plan and name change for the future Smoky Hollow Park. **The 14-acre site will be converted from a city maintenance facility into a natural and passive park space.** A key feature of the concept plan is the realignment and restoration of Pigeon House Branch, an urbanized stream draining the northern part of Downtown and areas to the west. Other elements include constructed wetlands, central greenway and other pathways, gathering spaces and plazas, and ornamental and naturalized landscape areas. The 2014 and 2022 Parks Bonds fund this project.

Title 1 Environmental Education Programming

During the 2022-2023 school year, Nature Programs delivered 64 programs to 21 Title I Pre-Kindergarten classrooms. Each classroom receives three programs seasonally at no cost to the school. The programs reflect North Carolina Early Learning Standards, incorporate the Spanish language, and connect students to the natural world in an engaging, hands-on format.

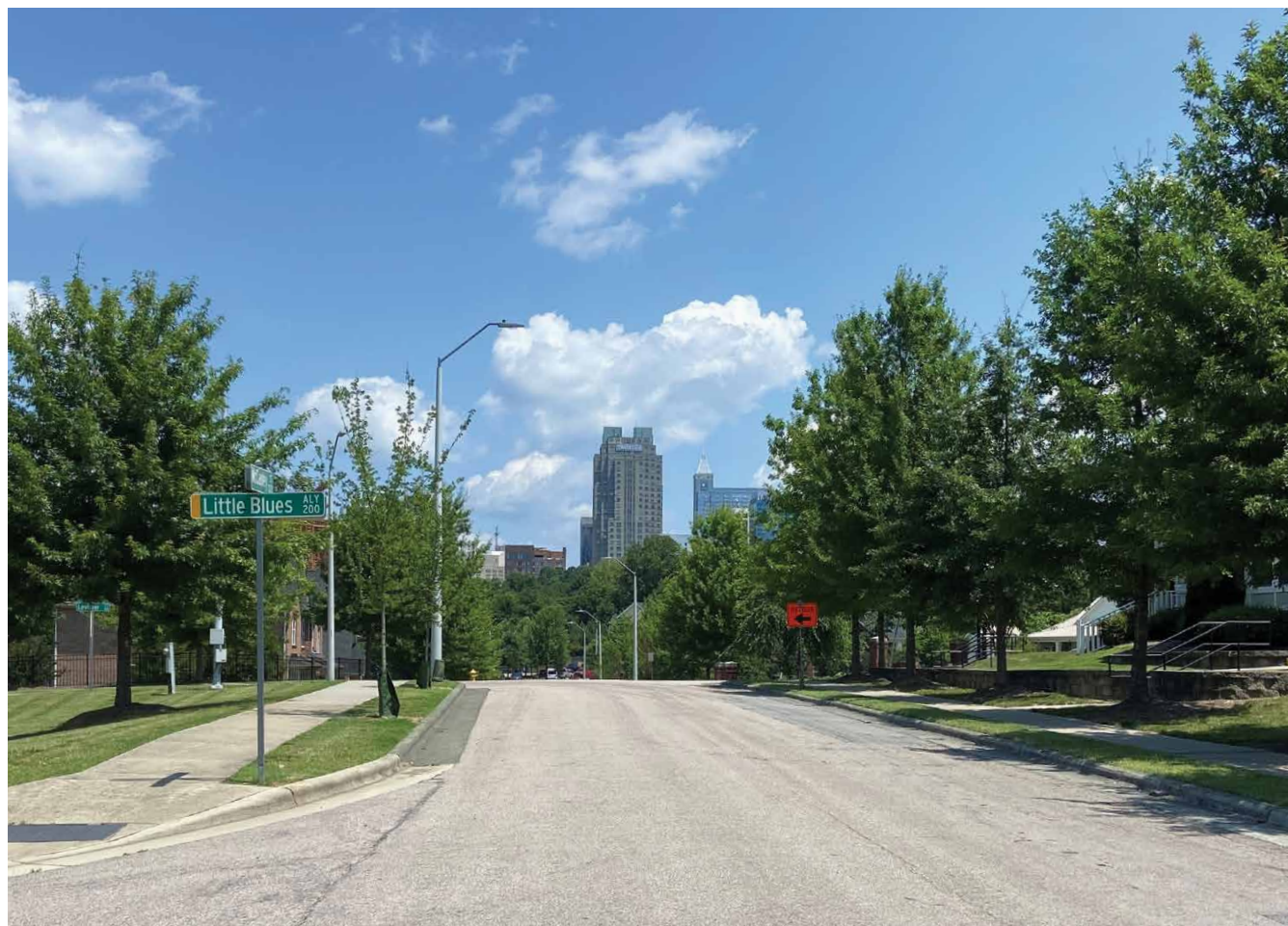


The Urban Forestry division of Raleigh Parks completed the first planting season of the Street Tree Equity project by **planting 350 trees.**

Street Tree Equity Project

The Urban Forestry division of Raleigh Parks completed the first planting season of the Street Tree Equity project by planting 350 trees. It was the first year of a three-year project to plant 1,000 street trees in areas just southeast of downtown Raleigh. **The project seeks to reduce environmental inequities and improve Raleigh's urban forest in areas lacking street trees.**

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Continued Electrification of Vehicles and Small Equipment

Parks and Natural Resources is working towards 80% electrification of all small equipment, including mowers, by 2026. We have transitioned 20% of small equipment, including four totally electric maintenance crews. We continue to work with Vehicle Fleet Services to electrify vehicles as technology and funding allow. Currently, we have two electric vehicles and six hybrid F150 trucks.



Strategic Partnerships & Community Outreach

Strategic partnerships allow us to expand our impact and foster equitable access to resources throughout the community. Community outreach strengthens our connection with the community.

Dix Park Conservancy

In addition to providing vital funding for the construction of Dix Park's Gipson Play Plaza, multiple state and federal grants support development thanks to the public-private partnership with Dix Park Conservancy. Equity and inclusion are at the forefront of projects receiving these funds, first with a \$1M Wake County ARPA grant for site accessibility improvements, universally improving access and safety for all. Second, \$150,00 from the State of North Carolina and \$75,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities support creation of a Cultural Interpretation Plan that explores how to connect future visitors to the park's complex history. Dix Park Conservancy is also leading the renovation of the Stone Houses and grounds to become a welcoming gateway into Dix Park with public amenities, including a public restroom and multi-modal pathways.

Partners for Environmental Justice

A partnership with Partners for Environmental Justice (PEJ) led to the creation of Walnut Creek Wetland Park and the Norman and Betty Education Nature Center between 2003 and 2006. Walnut Creek Wetland Park honors that partnership by providing monthly meeting spaces, serving as a non-voting member on their board, and collaborating on land stewardship and youth education projects. On the weekend of Earth Day in 2023, Walnut Creek Wetland Park partnered with PEJ to host the designation of Walnut



Creek becoming protected Urban Waters by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This designation is the first in North Carolina and the 21st in the county. It makes Walnut Creek eligible for federal protection funds and creates additional opportunities for Southeast Raleigh and the greater watershed community to engage with their creek.

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City of Oaks Foundation

While continuing to protect and preserve Raleigh's natural treasures, like the new Joslin Garden Park, the City of Oaks Foundation has expanded its partnership with Raleigh Parks to unite public and private resources to make our community a better place and to ensure a great outdoors for a great Raleigh. This past year, the Foundation provided over 100 families with financial assistance through the Give Play program, removing financial barriers so that more citizens could enjoy our summer camps and recreational programs. The Foundation also acted as a fiscal sponsor and incubator, empowering local community organizations to raise charitable funds to support new and existing park projects like Skate Raleigh's skate park on Capital Boulevard and the Millbrook Dog Park. Linking corporate sponsors and volunteers, the Foundation helped to coordinate planting one hundred trees in southeast Raleigh to improve climate resiliency, air and water quality, and the livability of historic neighborhoods. The City of Oaks Foundation and the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department have made significant progress in keeping Raleigh's natural spaces and recreational programs open for everyone to enjoy.



Collegiate Rowing at Lake Wheeler

In the past year, Raleigh Parks established Lake Wheeler as a rowing destination for the southeast and beyond. Partnering with Duke University, the University of North Carolina, the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), and the Greater Raleigh Alliance, Raleigh Parks is investing significantly to host competitive rowing at Lake Wheeler. In April, we hosted 18 collegiate teams from across the country at the 2023 Lake Wheeler Invitational. We hosted the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) Championships roughly four weeks later. This event included teams from Boston College University,



Clemson University, Duke University, Notre Dame, University of Louisville, University of Miami, Syracuse University, University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, and the University of Virginia. The ACC Championships will return to Raleigh three more times in the next five years, and an invitational will be held annually for the next eight years.



This past year, the Foundation **provided over 100 families with financial assistance** through the Give Play program.

Bucy Foundation

The partnership between The Bucy Foundation and Raleigh Parks has created safe, local places for participants to play soccer for free.

- It provides opportunities to develop important life skills and build community.
- Raleigh Parks hosted pop-up leagues and installed permanent futsal pitches with lighting, fencing, goals, and benches. The pop-ups were the first of the foundation's vision to help build 25 fields by 2025 as part of their Free Play Soccer™ initiative.
- The Free Play Soccer™ initiative aims to repurpose unused or underused space to create courts and pitches for participants to play on.



Cultural Program Partnerships

MEXICAN CONSULATE PARTNERSHIP

increases engagement and trust with Mexican community members by providing events and programs that enrich lives and celebrate Mexican culture. Peach Road Cultural Center hosted a Children's Day event to honor the Mexican holiday of Día del Niño, a series of outdoor Spanish language movies highlighting Mexican films, and a soccer match between the Mexican and Guatemalan Consulates open to the community.

TRIANGLE AREA PARENT SUPPORT ensures parents can be confident caregivers who know where to find the resources they need to care for their family. Peach Road Cultural Center hosted a Toy Swap, a Winter Safety event, and a Mother's Day event this year.

WELCOME HOUSE supports English language learners and newcomers to the U.S. by providing free morning English classes at Peach Road and Method Park. Welcome House is also a partner of World Refugee Day, fostering a greater sense of belonging with those newly arrived in the U.S.

U.S. COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES & IMMIGRANTS has created opportunities to form critical social and economic networks and build inroads to meaningful participation in society.

REFUGEE HOPE PARTNERS provided a preschool enrichment program for children whose parents are attending English class a Peach Road, a 3v3 Futsal program, and a spring egg hunt.



EXPANDED FOOD & NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAM (EFNEP) combats food insecurity in the community and encourages healthy lifestyles by incorporating nutritious food and activity into everyday life. The EFNEP's Eat Smart Move More program empowers community members when meal planning by increasing nutritional knowledge. Participants are incentivized to attend through free groceries, and a certificate at the end of the class.

WAKE UP AND READ promotes childhood literacy and parental involvement in our multinational and multilingual communities. Peach Road Cultural Center hosted Mom's Morning Out, a program where parents can voice their concerns and get community validation and encouragement in an encouraging atmosphere.

RALEIGH MUSIC COLLECTIVE & PEACH ROAD CULTURAL CENTER host a free Youth String Program focusing on building competency, leadership skills, and self-esteem. Every child has the right to access and experience the arts and receive quality musical instruction and education.

Marketing Ambassador Program

The Raleigh Parks Marketing Ambassador Program directly connects parks to people, and people to parks, through smiling faces and meaningful conversation. Our ambassadors engaged with nearly 26,000 community members and made significant connections with over 4,500 individuals. Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS), we intentionally reach every subsection of the city. Equity in access to and knowledge of parks, greenways, and recreation programs is essential to every person's well-being, and the Marketing Ambassador Program has been a vital and beloved tool in furthering our mission.

Better With A Buddy Campaign

During May 2023, the "Better With A Buddy" campaign promoted greenway safety and encouraged people to visit greenways with a companion. Marketing ambassadors met over 650 greenway visitors, offering to take photos of "buddies" in each greenway location in a Raleigh Parks photo frame. Greenway users had an opportunity to upload a photo with their buddy for a chance to win a free picnic provided by a local business, Raleigh Picnic Co.

Nate McMillan Gymnasium Naming at Lions Park Community Center

Anthony Lucas, a close childhood friend of Nate McMillan and community advocate member, petitioned to recognize Nate's contribution to the community and the City of Raleigh. The petition was to rename the gym Nate grew up in, which served as a safe place to help develop his basketball skills. The renaming ceremony was held Friday, July 22, 2022. Anthony additionally donated ten new Apple MacBooks to Lions Park Community Center for use by summer camp and after-school participants and youth in the community.

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Raleigh Parks Marketing Ambassadors engaged with nearly **26,000 community members** and made significant connections with over **4,500 individuals**.



Fisher Street Park with Housing & Arts

Raleigh Housing has facilitated the development of new homes in the College Park neighborhood of East Raleigh for several years. As a vital part of this project, Fisher Street Park relocated to a new site in a central neighborhood with funding from a federal HUD grant. Constructed between February and August 2022, with a grand opening in September 2022, Fisher Street Park now features a playground, basketball court, and picnic shelter. Various public art elements celebrating the history and residents of the College Park neighborhood are located throughout the park site. Additional improvements and public art installation were also completed at the nearby Pender Street Park, known by many in the neighborhood as "Johns Stokes Garden."

Raleigh Youth Council

Raleigh Youth Council is comprised of over 70 teens who complete multiple service projects and host monthly drives to support various local organizations. The council hosted a Specialized Recreation Dance, Santa's Workshop, and Toys from Teen events, serving over 100 Roberts Park community patrons. In addition to community service, they participated in five conferences, including the Spring Convention, where they received an award for best service project.



Fisher Street Park relocated to a new site in a central neighborhood with funding from a federal HUD grant. Fisher Street Park now features a playground, basketball court, and picnic shelter.





Raleigh Parks Special Events

Raleigh Parks has built community through many special events. Several returned for the first time since the pandemic.

DREAMVILLE FESTIVAL: Over 100,000 attendees gathered April 1-2 for this year's sold-out festival at Dorothea Dix Park. Attendees from 23 countries camped out as early as noon on the festival's last day to see the much-anticipated headliners, Drake and Usher. Other performers included Ari Lennox, Burna Boy, and North Carolina-raised, Grammy Award-winning, multi-platinum hip-hop artist J. Cole. Now in its third year, Dreamville has become one of the country's most popular and largest artist-curated music festivals and has made a major cultural and economic impact on Raleigh.

GOLDEN YEARS CELEBRATION: Raleigh Parks, in partnership with Capitol Broadcasting Company, held the 65th annual Golden Years Celebration in person for the first time since the pandemic. This event spreads holiday cheer to our active, older adults at the Raleigh Convention Center.

HALLOWEEN DANCE AT MILLBROOK EXCHANGE PARK: A costume-themed event for our Specialized Recreation and Inclusion Services Program participants returned for the first time after the pandemic. Led by students who serve as members of the Raleigh Youth Council, the event was a successful night of fun and dancing.

HOLIDAY EXPRESS: This popular event returned for the first time since 2019, creating a winter wonderland at Pullen Park for a record-setting 17 nights. Over 30,000 visitors attended in December 2022, and guests were entertained with dazzling lights, train rides, games, and even a visit from Santa Claus himself.



Raleigh Parks partners with organizations to meet the needs of the community.

- ▶ **SUMMER MEAL SERVICE** is delivered in partnership with Wake County Public School System and provides approximately 26,000 meals for kids while attending Raleigh Parks summer camp.
- ▶ **NATIONAL NIGHT OUT**, offered at Tarboro Road Park in partnership with the Raleigh Police Department, enhances the relationship between neighbors and law enforcement while bringing back a true sense of community.
- ▶ **MOBILE HEALTHCARE BUSES** offering free vision and dental services meet the community's physical needs near Peach Road Cultural Center.
- ▶ **COATS FOR A CAUSE** at Sgt. Courtney T. Johnson collected and distributed hundreds of coats to families.
- ▶ **PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL AND STATE PROFESSIONAL SPORTS TEAMS** include hosting *NFL Play60* events with the Carolina Panthers, establishing futsal programs with the NC Courage, and attending hockey games with the Carolina Hurricanes.
- ▶ **PRODUCE PROJECT** ensures communities have access to fresh and healthy produce. To date, we have sold 3,000 shares and donated 23,000 pounds of fresh produce to local non-profit organizations, with 44% sold in vulnerable communities.



By the Numbers

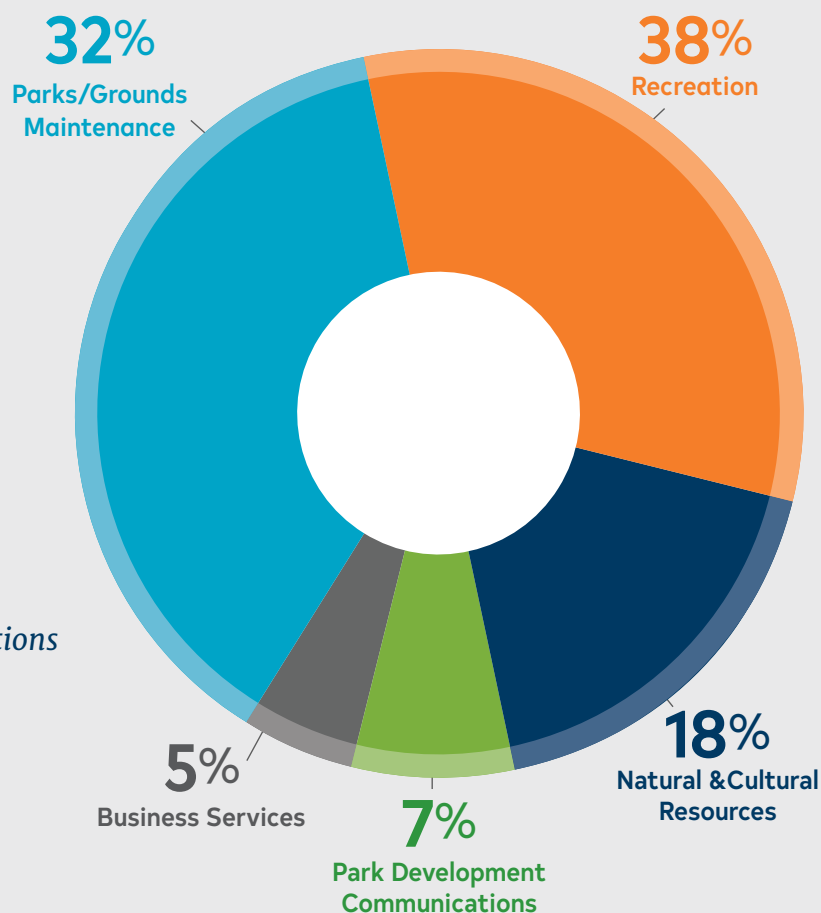
BUDGET

The Raleigh Parks 2022-2023
Operating budget is **\$63.7M**

The FY23 Capital Improvement
budget is **\$10.5M**

- Recreation
\$24,029,367
- Parks/Grounds Maintenance
\$20,612,822
- Natural & Cultural Resources
\$11,447,526
- Park Development & Communications
\$4,329,300
- Business Services
\$3,307,368

= TOTAL \$63,726,383



AT A GLANCE

19	Miles of Greenway
75	Playground Locations
59	Ballfields
22	Athletic Field Open Spaces
110	Tennis Courts
12	Pickleball Courts

1	Futsal Court
8	Aquatic Facilities
8,961	Volunteers
10,055	Acres of Parks & Greenways
38	Neighborhood & Community Centers

Get Social with Raleigh Parks



Staying Connected @RaleighParks

Raleigh Parks embraces social media to keep community members 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 **58,456**

19,400 Twitter Followers

18,000 Facebook Followers

440 Pinterest Followers

716 YouTube Subscribers

19,900 Instagram Followers

170,000 GovDelivery Subscribers

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

 Twitter.com/raleighparks

 Pinterest.com/raleighparks

 Instagram.com/raleighparks

Boards & Commissions

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Gregory Etheridge
Van Fletcher
Hugh Fuller
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April Love
Marsha Presnell Jennette
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Marsha Presnell-Jennette,
PRGAB Liaison

HISTORIC CEMETERY ADVISORY BOARD

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**Raleigh
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Raleigh Municipal Building
222 W. Hargett St., Suite 608
Raleigh, NC 27601