

# Strategic Implementation Study

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# John Chavis Memorial Park

Draft Report - April 14, 2016



# John Chavis Memorial Park

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NEW FACILITIES

SPORTS FACILITIES

PLAY, CREEK and OPEN SPACE

EVENT SPACE

IMPROVED CIRCULATION and ACCESS

REFERENCE



① *Original Carousel Building (1950's)*  
Source unknown

② *Grandstand and Stadium Entrance*  
Courtesy of Lewis Watson

③ *Chavis Park Train (April, 1959)*  
Source unknown

④ *Olympic Pool (1930's)*  
Courtesy of Ms. Esther Delaney

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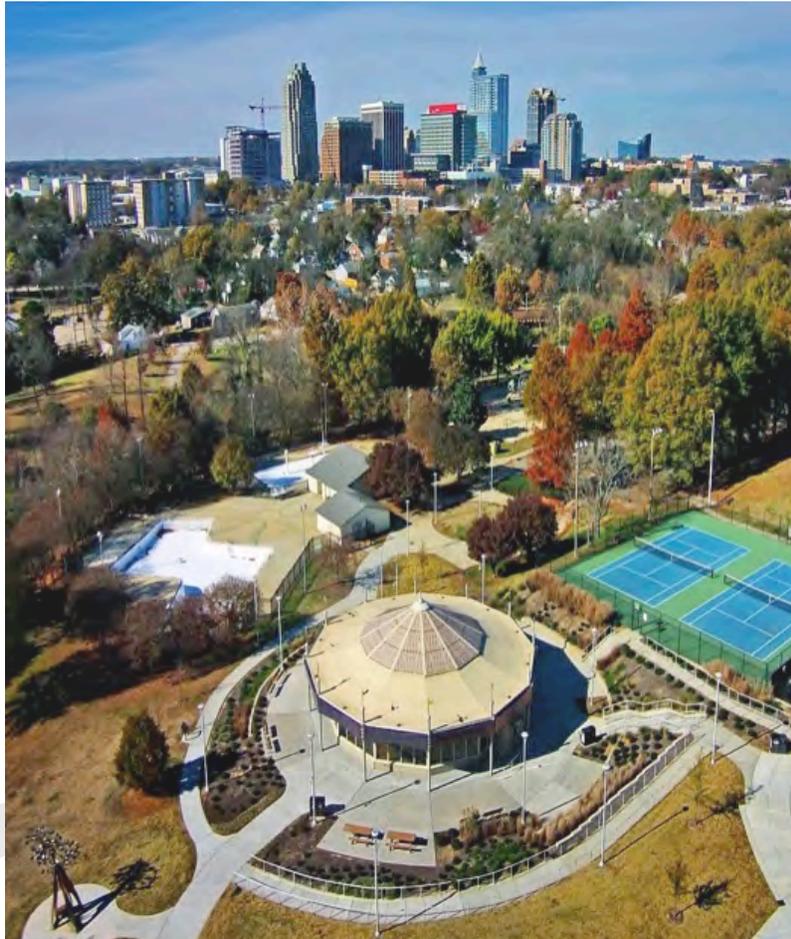
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# 2014 Master Plan Vision

## The John Chavis Memorial Park Master Plan Vision Statement



Aerial view of John Chavis Memorial Park, courtesy of Lift Aerial Marketing , LLC

*John Chavis Memorial Park is a vibrant community center, downtown attraction and regional destination. The park celebrates the rich history, culture and arts of the surrounding neighborhoods and the City of Raleigh, and offers wonderful public recreation opportunities, event spaces and programs that foster community life. A place of pride and profound remembrance, the park celebrates the life and work of educator John Chavis, recognizes the community's contribution to World War II, and honors the significance of the park's history to the African-American community during and following segregation.*

*John Chavis Memorial Park will always offer a safe and welcoming gathering space where family and friends of all cultures come to play, relax, learn and celebrate the big events and small, meaningful moments of life. The park grounds provide a beautiful, clean and refreshing refuge, with access to nature and an expansive view of the downtown Raleigh skyline. Park features and programs promote fitness, health and wellness by offering a range of recreational activities for people of all ages and abilities. Just a few steps from downtown, the park is always full of activity, inspired by innovative programming that is interactive, fun and dynamic.*

# Strategic Implementation Plan

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

A bold vision for John Chavis Memorial Park was born out of a community consensus building process begun in May 2012 to “honor our past, plan for the future”. Approved by the Raleigh City Council in May 2014, the John Chavis Memorial Park Master Plan now challenges all stakeholders on how to best develop the park. The Strategic Implementation Study is the bridge from the Park Vision to the beginning of Schematic Design. The purpose of this study is to confirm - and, at times, refine - the assumptions and aspirations within the adopted Master Plan, as well as to uncover additional opportunities and challenges that may impact their implementation. The study has been comprised of four related tasks:

#### **Identify successful examples of related park features envisioned by the community**

The study has considered dozens of other parks across the country that share key similarities with John Chavis Memorial Park - urban parks, destination parks, historic community parks, parks that help to tell the African-American story, and parks that have undergone phased transformations.

#### **Address challenges and opportunities to meet the goals of the Park Master Plan**

The core of the study has been a technical planning and programming analysis to help maximize the impact of the Master Plan design concepts while ensuring that they may be implemented in a responsible and sustainable manner. Study conclusions vary in detail for different areas of the park:

- Areas recommended for Phase 1 have been studied in more detail and include more specific design and program recommendations to address challenges or enhance the adopted Master Plan.
- For areas of future work, the study recognizes that community needs and desires may change over time and that recreational and cultural opportunities in downtown are evolving. In these cases, the study identifies potential challenges and opportunities that will need to be addressed and provides a range of considerations to be evaluated based on the community needs and context at the time those areas are funded.

#### **Propose Phase 1 improvements within the \$12.5 million bond budget**

A primary point of emphasis has been the evaluation of different potential combinations of park amenities that appropriately balance a broad range of important considerations:

- Consistency with the adopted Master Plan priorities
- Adequate scale to have a meaningful impact for the community and park users, but also compact enough to be cohesive and achievable within the currently available funding
- Possibility of logical construction sequencing during both Phase 1 and future phases while maintaining access to critical park amenities

#### **Plan for the long-term development and operation of the park**

Looking ahead, it is important to understand John Chavis Memorial Park as both a community anchor providing needed services for the surrounding neighborhood as well as one of several destination parks providing broader cultural and recreational opportunities for downtown. Developing a sustainable, long-term approach to achieving the aspirations in the adopted Master Plan is dependent upon balancing both of these aspects of the park.

## Public Process

The Strategic Implementation Study process has been structured to continuously balance technical planning and programming analysis with ongoing public engagement. The schedule for the study was organized around a series of public events in which the community was invited to review and share feedback at each step during the study:

**Public Kickoff Meeting 1 (July 30, 2015):** Share feedback on related park precedents from around the country

**Public Meeting 2 (October 01, 2015):** Provide input on potential site plan refinements and preferences for specific park elements

**Public Leadership Group (PLG) Meeting (October 28, 2015):** Detailed review of potential site plan refinements

**Public Meeting 3 (December 7, 2015):** Provide input on revised potential site plan refinements and on potential Phase 1 scope

**Public Meeting 4 (February 16, 2016):** Provide input on recommended site plan refinements and on revised potential Phase 1 scope

**Park, Recreation and Greenway Advisory Board Meetings (April 21 / May 19, 2016):** Public testimony received before, during, and after the April 21 meeting, followed by Board deliberations before recommendations to Raleigh City Council

**City Council Meeting (TBD):** Summary TBD

At each meeting, attendees were asked to record their feedback on the presentation boards and/or on individual comment cards. All written comments received were compiled and are included in this report in the summaries for each meeting in Appendices A-E

Following each public meeting, the project team evaluated the public feedback received for opportunities to improve the proposed refinements. Working from the adopted Master Plan priorities and within the context of related technical and budgetary constraints, public feedback directly influenced the updated refinements presented at subsequent meetings. The impact of public feedback on the Strategic Implementation Study may be traced through the evolution that occurred over the course of the study to both the proposed site plan refinements as well as the proposed Phase 1 scope.

The following Phase 1 Recommendations and the Park Development Strategies advance the 2014 Park Master Plan that was adopted by the Raleigh City Council in May 2014, particularly the community consensus-based Concept Plan and Priorities (pages 22, and 62-63 of that document). Each of the high level conclusions of the study is presented below in the context of public feedback and budget implications, as explored during the 8-month study period.



View of Public Meeting 3, courtesy of Clearscapes

## Phase 1 Recommendations

1) The single highest priority in the 2014 Park Master Plan is a new Community Center. This study recognizes this primary improvement as a means to activate a central core area for the park. It recommends a two-story building, built into the hillside to maximize park space, with overlooks of the park, creek and downtown Raleigh, and with easy access to both levels of the park: the track and field at the upper level and the Carousel Plaza/Central Plaza/Play Corridor at the lower level. Responding to public feedback, the recommended adjustment to the location of the center will allow the existing center to remain open during Phase 1 construction and to provide supportive facilities like restrooms at both levels of the park that may be designed for access beyond community center operating hours. Programmed to be 50% larger than the existing center, the center will include an air conditioned gymnasium with indoor walking track, marketable rental and programmatic spaces, and an enlarged fitness room that overlooks the track and field area. This amenity is estimated to require 80% of the \$12.5 million bond funds allocated to the park.

2) The core of the park will also be reinvigorated with a Central Plaza, the first of the fully-accessible, highly-functioning, outdoor spaces that will connect amenities and natural features. As an outdoor extension of the new community center, it is strategic from a programming and construction sequencing perspective to construct this plaza in unison with the new center, replacing the existing outdoor pool and bathhouse in that area that have already exceeded their lifecycles. The Central Plaza is the first priority item among multipurpose events spaces in the 2014 Park Master Plan.

Responding to public feedback, the Central Plaza is to be designed to accommodate year-round activities. The plaza meets the 2014 Park Master Plan's recommendations for community-gathering and event space, with electricity, water, amphitheater seating, integrated sound and lighting for performances, festivals, and food trucks. This amenity is estimated to require 10-15% of the allocated bond funds.

3) While the new Community Center and Central Plaza will activate the core of the park, there is a need to re-invest in the park's historic gathering areas which lack basic amenities such as restrooms, water fountains, electricity, and lighting. The study focuses infrastructure improvements in the Original Carousel Building, specifically: 1) stabilization and conditioning of the building shell and 2) installation of: windows around the entire building, heating and cooling systems, and restrooms that meet code requirements for the range of potential future uses identified for the building. The adaptive reuse of the Original Carousel Building is the second highest priority in the 2014 Park Master Plan which calls for a range of potential uses there including a cafe, historic exhibit space, and flexible music and event venue. This first step will result in unique programmable and rental space within the Original Carousel Building. The recommended restroom design, mostly tucked into a vestibule for the building, limits impacts to the historic structure and surrounding grounds which are the most historically intact portion of the park. The restrooms may be designed with both internal and external access to also serve the adjacent playground and historic picnic shelters.

Responding to public feedback received over the course of the study, annual capital improvement funds, in addition to the bond funds, were prioritized to ensure strategic infrastructure enhancements are installed here in Phase 1. Public Art funding was also identified to substantially contribute to historic interpretation, as anticipated in the Heritage Plaza area. It is equally important that enhancements in this area advance the recommendations of South Park East Raleigh Neighborhood's (SPERNA) South Park Heritage Walk community initiative. The public request for more specialized functions such as dedicated food service and standalone restrooms is beyond the Phase 1 strategic focus on multipurpose spaces. However, these interests will be continually pursued, especially with future funding opportunities and expected increases in park activity levels.

## Park Development Strategies

As called for in the 2014 Park Master Plan, the study works to ensure a balance between community-oriented and city-destination aspects of the park. Phase 1 improvements are purposely multi-use spaces able to accommodate a broad range of activities to activate the core of the park. Looking beyond the core area, future amenities become more specialized, such as the athletics and amusements. Balancing the roles and scope of these items will require ongoing evaluation, especially in the context of future conditions and needs among area parks and facilities. Scale and function strategies for the following critical improvements will be key to the successful implementation of the 2014 Park Master Plan: A) Aquatic Center, B) Amusements, C) Enhanced Track and Field

Looking ahead, it will be critical to evaluate future phases of John Chavis Memorial Park (JCMP) in the context of all parks at the downtown periphery, with each understood to be an independent community park as well as part of a broader interconnected and coordinated strategy for destination recreation, culture, and history for downtown Raleigh and beyond. To be successful, each of these parks must be singular - each should celebrate and be designed around their most unique qualities without replicating the character or destination features of their neighbors. Similarly, as evidenced by exploding interest in greenways, bike share, and other alternative paths and modes of transportation, it must be understood that the connections between destinations are as much a part of the user experience as the destinations themselves. Special consideration should be given to developing a signature path or connection between all these parks so that they may be viewed and experienced collectively, with shared resources and experiences for the citizens of Raleigh.

**A)** The study outlines development strategies regarding the function and location of the future Aquatic Center. As described with both indoor and outdoor pools, it would be the City's most significant aquatic center - on par with regional destination attractions. On the other hand, it is identified in the 2014 Park Master Plan as one of several features, not a primary feature. The study determined the envisioned facility would require 2-3 times more parking than shown on the Concept Plan and would eliminate other planned features such as athletic courts.

Responding to public feedback to maintain the park's planned amenities, the study recommends that the indoor and outdoor pools be consolidated within the Aquatic Center, which itself may be designed to open seasonably to the outdoors. Secondly, outdoor water play is recommended in the Central Plaza design in Phase 1, in concert with the closure of the existing outdoor pool.

**B)** The desired second Amusement needs to be carefully programmed and located to complement the park's attractions and provide the enticing "wow moment attraction." The recommended location will allow co-ticketing and programming with the existing carousel. In this location, the future amusement may link into the adjacent Play Corridor or function independently, without interrupting the intended open flow and views of the park. Based on relevant amusements across the country, the study includes criteria to help inform the future selection of an appropriate amusement.

Responding to public feedback, the space for the second Amusement is sufficient for a range of amusement types, including an oval track the size of the historic train ride. One of the key



View of Youth Safari at the historic stone steps, courtesy of Skeo Solutions

criteria suggested for the second amusement should be related to the park's unique story and the plan's desire to celebrate movement. Based on future conditions, there may be a need for a destination attraction, not replicated elsewhere. Alternatively, if the park visitation is high, it may be a supporting amenity for people already in the park.

**C) Refining the Enhanced Field and Track** components of the 2014 Park Master Plan presents various outdoor athletic opportunities, as documented in the study. The shift in the Community Center location during the study made more space available at the track level, including the possibility of a future regulation-sized track. While the area cleared from the center and existing hillside will largely be reserved for the future two-story Aquatic Center; the foundation of the existing center

could accommodate temporary, multi-purpose athletic courts. Programming of these courts, between development phases, will ultimately inform the design of anticipated athletic facilities in this area.

Based on the public feedback, the study suggests enhancements to the recreation-oriented track and a new regulation-sized football field within it. Looking ahead, the needs of existing (and potentially new) community partners with a wide range of programming interests should be considered in further design refinements. Tennis courts, though temporarily removed during Phase 1, are expanded in the future per the 2014 Concept Plan and programming recommendations of the study. Between development phases, the on-site multi-purpose courts, along with nearby tennis and aquatic facilities, will be heavily marketed to customary park users.