

Agenda

PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD

Regular meeting

7 p.m. Tuesday, June 17, 2025

Board Meeting Room of Town Hall Annex, 105 E. Corbin St.



1. Call to order and confirmation of quorum

2. Agenda changes and approval

3. Minutes review and approval

Minutes from regular meeting on May 20, 2025

4. Discussion items

A. Riverwalk Master Plan: Review draft plan and discuss recommendations and priorities

5. Parks and recreation-related reports

A. Board of Commissioners: Robb English

B. Planning Board: Hooper Schultz

C. Intergovernmental Parks Work Group: Staff

6. Park steward reports

A. Gold Park: Cole Kenworthy

B. Cates Creek Park: Richard von Furstenberg

C. Murray Street Park: Hooper Schultz

D. Kings Highway Park: Robb English

E. Hillsborough Heights Park: David Weinberg

F. Riverwalk: Nevin Daryani

G. Turnip Patch Park: Wendy Kuhn

7. Staff updates

Recent repairs, Churton Street widening update

8. Adjournment

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Minutes

PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD

Regular meeting

7 p.m. May 20, 2025

Board Meeting Room of Town Hall Annex, 105 E. Corbin St.



Present: Chair Cole Kenworthy, Commissioner Robb English, members: Wendy Kuhn, Nevin Daryani, Todd Cayton, David Weinberg, Paul Weinberg and Planning Board member Christian Neuschmidt

Absent: Vice Chair Richard von Furstenberg and member Hooper Schultz

Staff: Public Space and Sustainability Manager Stephanie Trueblood

1. Call to order and confirmation of quorum

Chair Cole Kenworthy called the meeting to order at 7 p.m. Public Space and Sustainability Manager Stephanie Trueblood called the roll and confirmed the presence of a quorum.

2. Agenda changes and approval

There were no changes to the agenda

Motion: Commissioner Robb English moved to approve the agenda as presented. Member Wendy Kuhn seconded.

Vote: 7-0. Motion passed

3. Minutes review and approval

Minutes from regular meeting on April 15, 2025

Motion: Member David Weinberg moved approval of the April 15, 2025, minutes as submitted. Member Paul Weinberg seconded.

Vote: 7-0. Motion passed.

4. Discussion items

Trueblood introduced Scout Troop 1226 attending the meeting, as they have been studying local government.

A. Riverwalk Master Plan: Review rules and permitted uses

Trueblood and the board discussed rules and permitted uses of town parks. The board decided to add a recommendation to the park master plan to investigate options for speed control of wheeled recreational vehicles for safety, for example, speed limits, a public awareness campaign, and eye-catching temporary or permanent signs. They discussed assisted electric recreational vehicle usage on Riverwalk. The board discussed electric vehicle assisted vehicles, like scooters, segways, and bikes, should continue to use the pathways, but rules need to be clarified and communicated to the public and enforcement officers. However, golf carts, mopeds, and all-terrain vehicles should be prohibited. No action was taken.

Member Nevin Daryani arrived at 7:06 p.m.

B. Riverwalk Master Plan: Review Special Events

Trueblood and the board reviewed special events and their relation to Riverwalk Park. They discussed permits, size, and the effects on the public. Also, the board discussed the town's separate permit and special events calendars. The board is recommending for the master plan to join the special events and park reservation calendars.

5. Parks and recreation-related reports

A. Board of Commissioners

Commissioner Robb English reported the town commissioners heard public comments on the budget. He discussed challenges for the town. Also, the town is building a new public works facility to protect town assets. There will be no new town employees for the next three years. Trueblood added, the Cates Creek Park basketball courts will not be in the fiscal year 2026 budget, but English stated it will be included in the fiscal year 2027 budget.

B. Planning Board

Member Christian Schmidt stated the board ruled to recommend allowing Automated Teller Machines on buildings at banks and annexing a parcel on Oakdale Drive. Also, there was an application to rezone a site near Sportsplex as multifamily residential. The developer seeks to provide work-force housing and offered pedestrian connections from the Eno Haven apartments to Sportsplex.

C. Intergovernmental Parks Work Group

English reported the Climate Council Meeting hosted a presentation about the Heat Action Plan for Orange County municipalities coordinating in excessive heat events.

6. Park steward reports

Board members reported on the conditions of the parks for which they serve as stewards. Trueblood noted any small repairs that needed attention and gave brief reports on small repairs that had been made since the previous meeting.

7. Staff updates

Trueblood said:

- Repairs will be made on the Riverwalk at the Calvin Street entrance.
- The Orange County Parks and Recreation is hosting workshops for a county wide trails plan.
- Staff is reviewing the engineered plans for the section of Ridgewalk in Collins Ridge.

Colleen Cederberg of Hillsborough Heights introduced herself as a potential Planning Board member.

8. Adjournment

Motion: Kuhn moved to adjourn at 8:32 p.m. P. Weinberg seconded.

Vote: 8-0. Motion passed.

Respectfully submitted,



Stephanie Trueblood

Public Space and Sustainability Manager

Staff support to the Parks and Recreation Board

Approved: June 17, 2025



TOWN OF HILLSBOROUGH

Riverwalk Master Plan



Adopted ?? 2025

Background

Riverwalk is a paved, universally-accessible, urban greenway that extends on an east-west alignment for approximately two miles along the Eno River in downtown Hillsborough. Riverwalk is part of the primary corridor of the North Carolina Mountains-to-Sea trail. Riverwalk is one of the only sections of the Mountains-to-Sea trail that runs directly through a downtown area.

The western end of the greenway begins on Eno Mountain Road adjacent to the Eno River Mill, a historic mill from 1896, which now houses the Eno Arts Mill and Orange County Public Arts Commission, as well as other offices, small scale manufacturing, and a charter school. From there the greenway runs east along the Eno River and branches into additional paths such as “Gold Loop,” in Gold Park and the “Virginia Cates Bartow Loop”. Riverwalk has neighborhood access from Calvin Street and downtown Hillsborough, with the main entrance adjacent to Weaver Street Market and the Eno River Parking Deck. Access is also available on Faribault Lane, Cameron Street, and Alison Street. The greenway passes through Orange County’s River Park and adjacent to the Occaneechi Village Replica Site behind the Orange County Justice Facility and Farmers Market Pavilion. The greenway connects to the Historic Occoneechee Speedway, one of the original NASCAR tracks and the only surviving dirt track from NASCAR’s inaugural season, which is owned and maintained by North Carolina State Parks. Archaeological sites once occupied by the Occaneechi are present in the vicinity of Riverwalk on property owned and maintained by the North Carolina Archaeological Conservancy.

Riverwalk serves as part of the town’s transportation network for bicyclists and pedestrians and is a popular destination for recreation that connects neighborhoods and points of interest in town. The greenway offers access to parks, public restrooms, restaurants, and shopping areas.

History

In precolonial times, paths along the Eno River were used for travel and trade as part of the Great Indian Trading Paths. The Occaneechi Indians, a tribe originating from the Ohio River Valley, settled along the Eno River in the early 1700s. They established a village in Hillsborough, which was visited by explorer John Lawson in 1701. The village was later excavated by archaeologists, revealing a small, fortified settlement with a cemetery. The Town of Hillsborough was established in 1754 just north of a navigable ford in the Eno River which was crossroads of major trade and travel routes.

In the Victorian Era, riverside paths were used by community members for recreation and socializing. Over time, as parcels of land along the river were subdivided, sold to private landowners, and developed, the paths were lost to the public. This meant that the community members had limited access to the Eno River without trespassing.

The concept of a publicly-accessible greenway along the Eno River came from a desire to reconnect the public with the community’s natural and cultural resources. Before Riverwalk was built, the railroad, heavily-trafficked street network, and a lack of sidewalks, made walking or bicycling through the downtown area difficult. Hillsborough’s neighborhoods were isolated from one another.

In the 1990s, a group of residents approached the Town of Hillsborough with the idea of reopening public access to the Eno River. Creating new park space connected by a linear greenway was an attractive but challenging proposal as the Town of Hillsborough had limited resources and staff available to facilitate the project. The Planning Department was tasked with studying the feasibility of implementing a greenway and was aided by community volunteers who provided surveying and landscape architecture expertise. A feasibility study and a conceptual layout were developed in 2001. The study called for the development of an urban accessible greenway to be constructed in phases.

Phase I: Previously in 1995, a landowner had granted a large acreage of land along the river to the Town of Hillsborough. This parcel would eventually become Gold Park. The dedication provided the momentum for the first phase of the project, allowing for 1 mile of trails within a 22-acre community park. Hillsborough applied for and received a \$500,000 North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund grant from the State, which is the maximum amount allocated per year to a project. The park was opened to the public in 2008. The quick success and popularity of the park helped build support and confidence that the Town of Hillsborough could oversee extending the trail to connect the park to the downtown area.

Phase II & III: The property needed to complete the connection to downtown was challenging for the Town of Hillsborough to obtain. Hillsborough acquired the necessary parcels over five years, utilizing a second Parks and Recreation Trust Fund

grant of \$398,000 to assist in the acquisitions. The Town of Hillsborough adopted a comprehensive pedestrian and bicycle plan during this time. The Community Connectivity Plan prioritized completing Riverwalk and connecting neighborhoods to the greenway with sidewalks. In 2009, the Town of Hillsborough focused its efforts on a \$1.7 million sidewalk project that connected neighborhoods in North Hillsborough like Hillsborough Heights and Fairview to Gold Park. Nash Street, for example, had 1.3 miles of sidewalk constructed connecting two elementary schools and hundreds of residents with safe access to the community park and trail system as well as the downtown area.

Once all properties were acquired for the second and third phases of Riverwalk, the Town of Hillsborough created a conceptual plan and strategy for construction, coordinating various stakeholders and advisory boards to give input into the process. Public meetings were held to solicit community engagement for the final plans. Early engineering was conducted and provided cost estimates. The Town of Hillsborough was able to receive a third Parks and Recreation Trust Fund grant of \$425,000. Hillsborough also received additional funds from the Recreational Trails Program and SunTrust Foundation (now the Truist Foundation.) In 2013, the engineering and construction documents were finalized. The proposed trail had many site constraints including steep slopes, stream buffers, floodplain, unsuitable soils, and constrained property limits.

Construction of Phases II and III lasted one year, with the grand celebration of opening day occurring on October 11, 2014. It was attended by hundreds of residents and visitors. The Town of Hillsborough utilized patience and persistence to keep the vision alive as it navigated each step of the process, gaining public support that continued to grow momentum and enthusiasm for the project until Riverwalk's completion.

Connectivity and Safety

Riverwalk is intended to provide both recreational and transportation benefits to the community. The greenway is designed to be accessible and welcoming to all users. Maintaining public safety and universal access is paramount. As the trail becomes more popular it is important to maintain the level of service and safety that the community expects. Entry and connections to the trail are limited to town-authorized access points.

Bicycles, scooters, skateboards, and other personal wheeled vehicles are allowed. Electric assisted equipment is also allowed. The paved greenway is only 8 feet wide and bridges are 10 feet wide. Users of wheeled vehicles are expected to dismount if not able to pass other pedestrians safely. Pedestrians have the right of way. Visitors must use caution and be considerate of other users. Excluding town maintenance vehicles, all golf carts, ATVs, and other motorized vehicles are prohibited.

The town is planning to construct a new greenway named Ridgewalk which will connect downtown Hillsborough and Riverwalk to the future train station site, Collins Ridge, and across Interstate 85 to Becketts Ridge Drive and terminate in Cates Creek Park. This project has been prioritized by the Board of Commissioners and is in the design and engineering phase. Ridgewalk will provide essential connectivity for Hillsborough residents and visitors between downtown, residential neighborhoods, schools, shopping and dining, and other key destinations and services in town. Riverwalk and Ridgewalk are intended to work in coordination as an interconnected greenway system that provides an alternative means of transportation as well as an accessible recreational trail for residents and visitors.

Environment and Natural Resources

Riverwalk is built along the Eno River which runs through the center of Hillsborough and is the source for the town's drinking water. Portions of Riverwalk occur within the floodplain of the Eno River. The greenway is designed to withstand flooding but clean up is required after flood events to make sure the trail is safe for visitors.

There are several streams that converge in the Eno River. The town protects streams through requiring riparian buffers. These buffers, typically 50 feet, are preserved, undisturbed land along streams and other surface water bodies. Riverwalk is a permitted use within the stream buffer. Most of the greenway is in Zone 2 of the buffer and only one area is within Zone 1, the first 30' of the buffer. There are no permitted access points to the Eno River along Riverwalk though community members often make their own paths. These unofficial access points can be damaging to the environment leading to compaction and erosion of stream banks and riparian areas. There is interest by the town to provide permitted access to the Eno River at a suitable location in the future.

Riverwalk is built within an urban hardwood forest. The town worked to protect and preserve trees in the greenway corridor during design and construction of the trail because preservation and maintenance of the tree canopy is essential for establishing a healthy ecosystem. Trees provide food and habitat for wildlife, produce oxygen to breathe, store carbon, clean pollutants from the air and soil, and reduce stormwater runoff impacts and urban heat island effects. Hillsborough's Tree Board is responsible for planting, maintenance, and removal of town trees including those along Riverwalk. The board also manages the Treasure Trees Program which recognizes special and significant trees in town a tree identification program, which provides informational signage about various tree species around town and on Riverwalk.

In 2015, the town commissioned an Urban Forest Plan for Riverwalk. The recommendations in the plan include assessment and removal of hazardous trees, maintenance of the understory for safety and aesthetics, removal and control of invasive species, and planting and care of native plant species.

Native plants are essential to biodiversity and environmental resilience. Plants that have adapted to local climate, soil, and other conditions provide food and habitat for wildlife and help mitigate impacts from flooding and erosion. Increasing the use of native plants and reducing invasive species helps maintaining biodiversity and ecological health. Significant efforts have been undertaken by the town to promote native plants and remove invasive plant species. The Tree Board formed a volunteer invasive species removal team that meets weekly to remove invasive plants from Hillsborough's public spaces and to plant native plants in public spaces. The team has made great progress on Riverwalk, removing invasives like privet, tree of heaven, stilt grass, and honeysuckle and replanting the cleared areas with native riparian plants. The town uses Riverwalk as an example educate the community on the importance of native plants and best practices for removing invasives.

In recent years, the town has installed green infrastructure to along Riverwalk to slow and treat stormwater runoff and reduce erosion. Two examples of green infrastructure projects include compost blankets near the observation platform and planted bioretention swales near the Allison Street entrance.

Utilities

Riverwalk is built adjacent to one of the town's main sewer outfalls which carries wastewater to the treatment plant. A 20-foot easement that is maintained by the town's Utilities Department exists along the sewer main. The easement provides the access necessary for maintenance of the sewer line. Elevated manholes are evident along the sewer main adjacent to the trail. In significant storm events, the sewer line can be inundated with stormwater leading to sanitary sewer overflows. Storms can also produce down trees or debris that damage infrastructure or risks to the public. In such events, the greenway is closed until the area is thoroughly evaluated and can be safely reopened. The trail may also be closed if repairs or improvements to the sewer lines are necessary.

There are also Duke Energy aerial transmission lines along Riverwalk. Duke Energy maintains a 30-foot easement on these lines. These lines provide power to West Hillsborough and beyond. Duke Energy is responsible for line clearance and vegetation management in the easement area to protect the power lines. The town coordinates with Duke Energy on regular maintenance of the power lines and easements as well as repairs and improvements to the utility lines.

Additionally, North Carolina Railroad owns and maintains a 200-foot corridor for the rail lines through town. A segment of the rail corridor is adjacent to Riverwalk. The town has granted an easement to North Carolina Railroad through Gold Park for any work necessary on the trestle.

Beyond the easements, maintenance of Riverwalk is conducted by the Town of Hillsborough.

Amenities

The town has invested in high-quality amenities for Riverwalk. There are numerous benches, picnic areas, waste and recycling stations, and pet waste containers along the trail. Public restrooms are available at Gold Park. Parking is available at Gold Park, on South Nash Street, in downtown Hillsborough, and at the Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area and Occoneechee Speedway.

The town has a branded interpretive signage program that began on Riverwalk but has extended to sites around town. The signs cover a range of historical and educational topics. Additionally, emergency signs are located every tenth of a mile along the trail with unique address points that help emergency services find anyone in need of help. Wayfinding kiosk and signs are provided at the trail entrances and key intersections and rules signs are provided at every entrance.

Events

Riverwalk has been used for many arts and cultural events such as the annual Solstice Lantern Walk and the Uproar Public Art Festival which kicked off in 2024 and occurs biennially. The trail has also been used for weddings, photoshoots, plays, and pop up musical performances. River Park, which is owned and operated by Orange County, is located on Riverwalk and is used for many community events such as the River Park Festival, Hog Day, and weekly Eno River Farmers Market. Community groups also utilize Riverwalk for races and sponsored walks as well as for guided educational tours and outdoor classrooms.

The Town does not generally program activities or events in parks or on the greenway but allows and relies on partner agencies and organizations such as the Alliance for Historic Hillsborough, Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation, Hillsborough Arts Council, Orange County, Eno River Association, North Carolina State Parks, and many other community groups to program the parks and greenway. The town benefits greatly from ongoing partnerships between local government and community groups. Events must be scaled appropriately and public access must be maintained. The trail is intended to serve all users and be open to the general public during operating hours.

Benefits Analysis

In 2024, the town conducted a study about Riverwalk to inform the planning of the future Ridgewalk greenway. Nearly 600 responses were collected on a community survey. Some of the key survey findings are included below. The majority of the people who took the survey were from Hillsborough, with others responding from Orange County, Durham, and Chapel Hill. The majority of survey respondents use Riverwalk often: between a two and five times a week and once or twice a month. Almost 12% of respondents said they use Riverwalk every day.

Respondents use Riverwalk mostly for physical exercise or “relaxation or leisure,” but “observing nature” and “socializing or chatting with friends” were also shown as reasons. Respondents also said they use Riverwalk for transportation. Walking is the most popular form of exercise on Riverwalk, followed by running or jogging. The majority of respondents spend thirty minutes to an hour on the trail. Of the respondents who answered from the trail, many were traveling to shopping, dining, or to meet a friend. Some, who gave specific answers, were also going to the library, Gold Park, Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area overlook, Eno River Arts Mill, the dog park, Churton Street, Eno River Brewery, car repair, “to get from downtown to the sportsplex, Weaver Street Market, school, “running errands,” and the farmers market. Full and detailed survey responses are available in the Ridgewalk Benefits Analysis which is published on the town website

Stakeholder interviews were also conducted as part of the benefits analysis. Interviewees reported that Riverwalk makes the Town of Hillsborough a more active and healthier place to live by providing the space, infrastructure, and opportunity to recreate. When asked to rate their experience of Riverwalk, the average respondent answered 4.6 out of 5.

The study included quantitative analysis of four greenways in North Carolina and found that every \$1.00 invested in one-time trail construction generates a total of \$1.72 from local business tax revenue, sales tax revenue, and health and transportation benefits.

Maintenance and Operations

The Public Space & Sustainability Division develops and manages town facilities and grounds available to the public, including parks, greenways, cemeteries, sidewalks, streets and urban spaces. The division coordinates with other town departments and divisions such as Public Works, Stormwater and Environmental Services, Utilities, and Police regarding any issues and projects on town property that pertain to their operations and authority.

Parks and greenways are inspected monthly by staff. Riverwalk bridges and boardwalks are inspected by a third party contractor every three years. The Parks and Recreation Board and Tree Board share responsibility for recommending improvements to parks and greenways. These boards act in an advisory capacity to the Hillsborough Board of Commissioners. Parks and Recreation Board members also inspect parks and greenways as park stewards once a month and provide a second set of eyes to identify any issues.

Rules

Rules and regulations for town parks and greenways are found in the Code of Ordinances, Chapter 3, Article 7. Rules are posted on signage at greenway entrances. Rules and etiquette are also conveyed to the public through town news and social media.

Master Plan Recommendations

In 2025, the Hillsborough Parks and Recreation Board and the Hillsborough Tree Board — in coordination with the town's public space and sustainability division developed a list of recommended improvements for Riverwalk. The recommendations are detailed in this master plan and are intended to guide future spending decisions. This plan should be updated every three to five years.

The following list includes recommendations for the Riverwalk. Please refer to the Gold Park Master Plan for recommendations related to Gold Park.

- Maintain the existing amenities and equipment in safe and working order
- Continue regular inspections of greenway facilities and make necessary repairs
- Remove invasive plants and add native plant species to riparian areas
- Investigate options to introduce permitted public access to Eno River for wading and water play
- Provide town's standard double-unit waste and recycling containers at trail entrances
- Consider adding permanent public art to Riverwalk
- Consider using Riverwalk to showcase temporary public art (Ex: sculpture tours)
- Expand the interpretive signage program (Ex: invasive species and riparian restoration, trees and pollinators)
- Coordinate with utility providers on any maintenance, repair, and improvements projects
- Investigate options to encourage shared use of the greenway and safe speeds by all users
- Communicate rules and trail etiquette through signage and public information campaigns
- Continue to provide tree identification plaques
- Continue to provide emergency marker signs
- Investigate options to join special event and park reservation calendars on the town website
- Coordinate with partners on special events and greenway closures

Priorities

The implementation priorities are as follows:

1.

Maps

- Segments
- Hydrology/Floodplains
- Connectivity to Ridgewalk
- Recommendations (if needed)

Photos?

Riverwalk Segments



