

Agenda

TREE BOARD

Regular meeting

9 a.m. Wednesday, Sept. 17, 2025

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



1. **Call to order, roll call, and confirmation of quorum**
2. **Agenda changes and approval**
3. **Minutes review and approval**
Minutes from regular meeting on June 18, 2025
4. **Discussion items**
 - A. Discuss timing of National Pollinator Week- Sarah Meadows
 - B. Review Draft Riverwalk Master Plan
 - C. Discuss Crape Myrtle bark scale
5. **Updates**
 - A. Invasive Removal Team
 - B. Prohibited/Recommended Plant List
 - C. Garden Club
 - D. Staff: Chantal updates
6. **Adjournment**

Interpreter services or special sound equipment for compliance with the American with Disabilities Act is available on request. If you are disabled and need assistance with reasonable accommodations, call the Town Clerk's Office at 919-296-9443 a minimum of one business day in advance of the meeting.

Minutes

TREE BOARD

Regular meeting

9 a.m. June 18, 2025

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



Present: Chair Tim Logue, Vice Chair Thomas Darling, Brian Mayell, Mixon Nelson, and Gregory Yavelak

Absent: Matt Archibald, Linda Paynter

Staff: Public Space and Sustainability Manager Stephanie Trueblood

1. Call to order, roll call and confirmation of quorum

Chair Tim Logue called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. Public Space and Sustainability Manager Stephanie Trueblood called the roll and confirmed the presence of a quorum.

2. Agenda changes and approval

Logue added discussion Item 4.B, Juvenile Plant Pruning in Parks. There were no other changes to the agenda.

3. Minutes review and approval

Minutes from regular meeting on May 21, 2025.

Motion: Mayell moved approval of May 21, 2025, minutes with not changes. Yavelak seconded.

Vote: 5-0. Motion passed.

4. Discussion items

A. Discuss Treasure Tree selection from 2025

Motion: Darling moved to approve white oaks at Dorothy N. Johnson Community Center as 2025 Treasure Trees. Mayell seconded.

Vote: 5-0. Motion passed.

B Juvenile plant pruning in parks

Brian will submit proposal of new pruning program to be added to the next Tree Board agenda for discussion. Brian will prune stubs on Riverwalk.

5. Updates

A. Invasive Removal Team

Tim reported Tree of Heaven that needs to be cut behind furniture store. Tim reported the hackberry needs to be cut at Cates Creek Park. Tim suggested a need to develop a plan for the bamboo patches on Riverwalk and in Gold Park.

B. Prohibited/Recommended Plant List

No update

C. Garden Club

No update

D. Staff

- Logue will provide a script and visuals to the communications team for a video on Japanese knotweed.
- Invasives and riparian restoration for fall video ideas were discussed.

6. Adjournment

Logue adjourned the meeting at 10:48 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Stephanie Trueblood".

Stephanie Trueblood
Public Space and Sustainability Manager
Staff support to the Tree Board

Approved: Sept. 16, 2025



TOWN OF HILLSBOROUGH

Riverwalk Master Plan



Adopted Sept. 16, 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. More information can be found at osbn.org. The Town of Hillsborough was established in 1754 just north of a navigable ford in the Eno River which was crossroads of these 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. In 2025, Riverwalk suffered its worst damages from flooding after Storm Chantal swept through the area. The Eno River rose more than 20 feet and spread well beyond the 500 year floodplain line. Several of the wooden boardwalks on Riverwalk were damaged, most likely from debris impacting the structures. Trees were downed and silt and mud were deposited in all flooded areas. Sanitary sewer overflows occurred which complicated clean up efforts. All bridges were inspected and found to be structurally sound and undamaged after the storm.

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 Occaneechee Mountain State Natural Area and Occaneechee 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, Occaneechee 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 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
- Provide universal access to greenway amenities
- Investigate options to encourage shared use of the greenway and safe speeds by all users
- Consider setting a speed limit for greenway users
- Continue regular inspections of greenway facilities and make necessary repairs
- Coordinate with utility providers on any maintenance, repair, and improvements projects
- Remove invasive plants and add native plant species to riparian areas
- Investigate opportunities to add green infrastructure
- Investigate options to introduce permitted public access to Eno River for wading and water play while protecting stream buffers and sensitive and critical habitat and environmental areas
- Connect the future Ridgewalk greenway to Riverwalk
- Provide town's standard double-unit waste and recycling containers at trail entrances
- Provide shade canopies over picnic areas
- Investigate opportunities to provide additional seating and gathering areas
- 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)
- Communicate rules and trail etiquette through signage and public information campaigns
- Continue to provide tree identification signs
- Continue to provide emergency marker signs
- Continue to provide wayfinding signs
- Add a wayfinding sign and kiosk at the Calvin Street greenway entrance
- Consider adding distances to key destinations on directional signage
- Continue to provide the Riverwalk brochure at greenway entrances
- Investigate options to join special event and park reservation calendars on the town website to showcase events and reservations of the greenway
- Coordinate with partners on special events and greenway closures
- Support efforts by North Carolina State Parks and Archaeological Conservancy to provide safe and welcoming public access to their properties along the Mountains-to-Sea Trail
- Support efforts by partners to promote the greenway as part of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail
- Support efforts by partners to promote arts, cultural, and educational events along the greenway
- Incorporate sustainability initiatives where appropriate

Maps

The following maps are included in this plan for reference.

- Riverwalk Segments: This map shows the names and locations of the various segments of the greenway
- Floodplains and Hydrology along Riverwalk : This map shows the water bodies and floodplains affiliated with the greenway
- Riverwalk Connectivity to Trail Systems: This map shows how Riverwalk connects to existing trail systems and sidewalks and the future planned Ridgewalk greenway

Photos

The following photos show the construction of Riverwalk and existing amenities on the greenway:



Bridge Installation (2014)



Bridge (2024)



Construction of Entrance (2014)



Riverwalk Entrance (2015)



Construction of Entrance (2014)



Construction of Boardwalk (2014)



Calvin Street Entrance (2014)



Calvin Street Entrance (2018)



Volunteer Invasive Species Removal Team



Volunteer Invasive Species Removal Team



Compost Blanket Installation



Compost Blanket Installation



Native Wildflowers on Riverwalk



Bioretention Garden



Flooding from Storm Chantal (2025)



Damage from Storm Chantal (2025)



Flooding from Storm Chantal (2025)



Damage from Storm Chantal (2025)



Flooding from Storm Chantal (2025)



Silt Deposited from flooding during Storm Chantal (2025)



Wayfinding Kiosk



Interpretive Signage



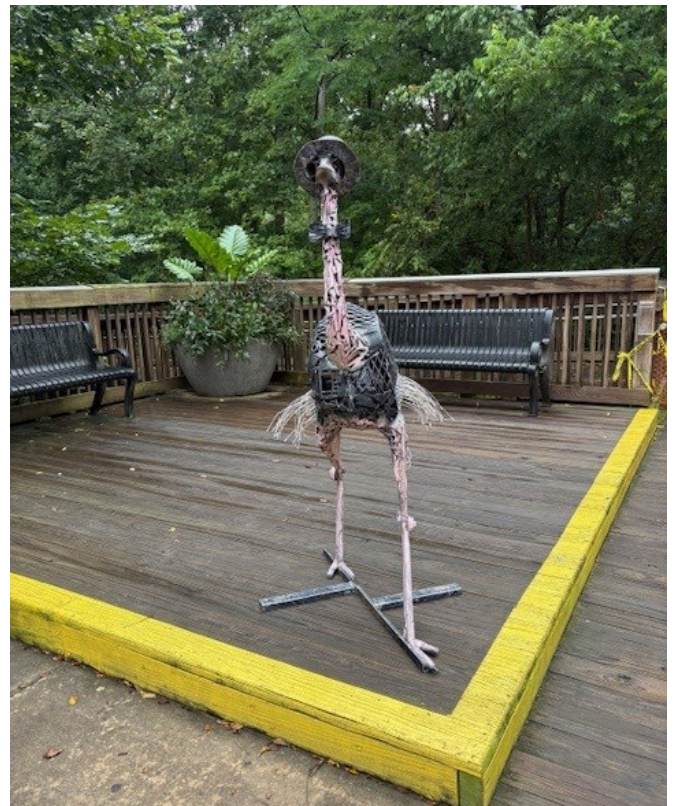
Stickworks Sculpture (2014-2018)



Directional Signage

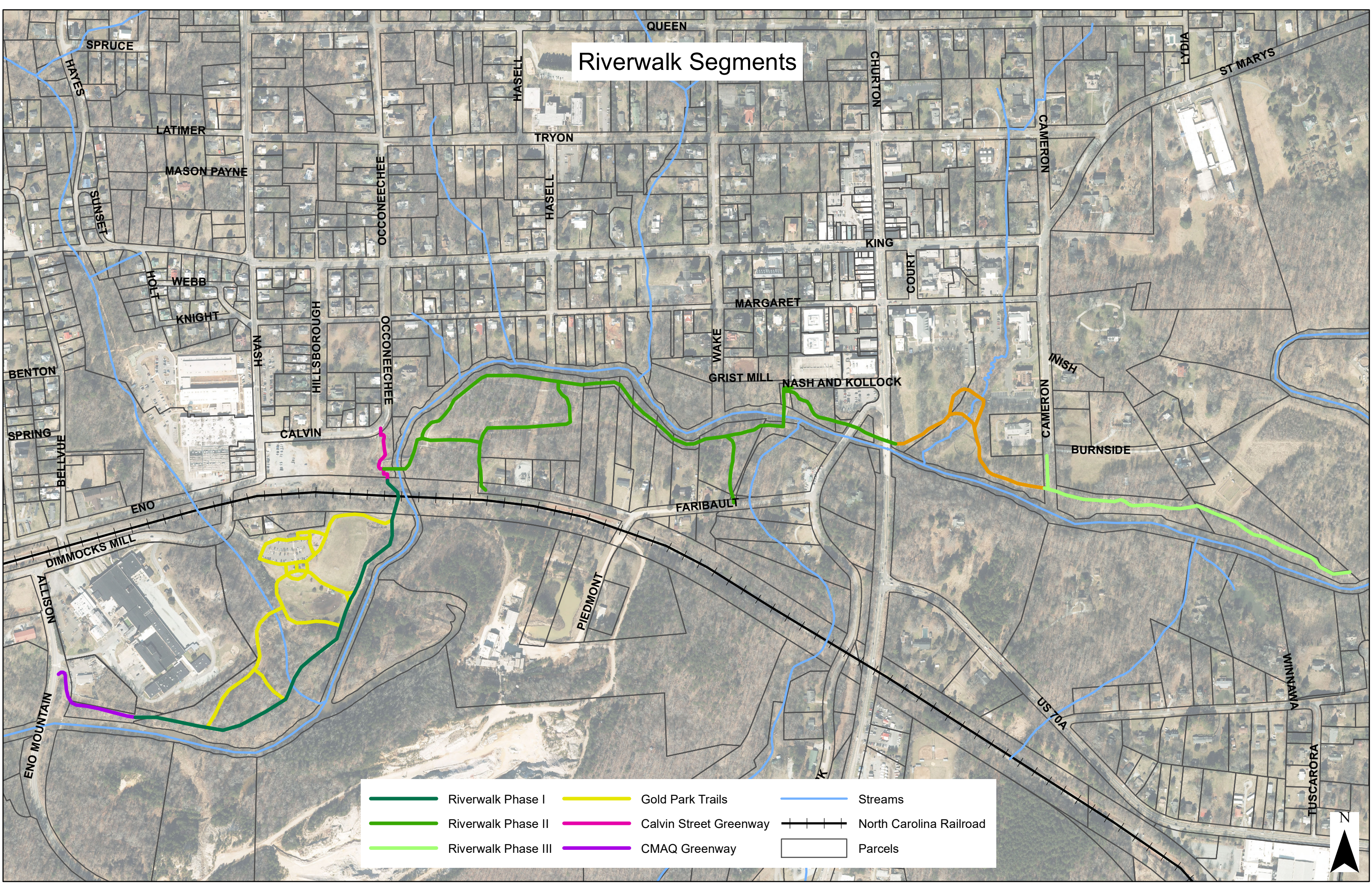


Public Art from UPROAR Festival (2023)



Public Art from UPROAR Festival (2025)

Riverwalk Segments



	Riverwalk Phase I		Gold Park Trails		Streams
	Riverwalk Phase II		Calvin Street Greenway		North Carolina Railroad
	Riverwalk Phase III		CMAQ Greenway		Parcels

