



George Poston Park Master Plan

Final Draft:
August 2025



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

GASTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Chad Brown - Chairman
Cathy Cloninger - Vice-Chair
Jim Bailey - South Point Township
Allen Fraley - Cherryville Township
Bob Hovis - Crowders Mountain Township
Tom Keigher - Gastonia Township
Scott Shehan - Gastonia Township

PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD

Alex Ormaza - Chair	Sheriff Chad Hawkins
Monte Monteleone - Vice-Chair	Eddy Ivester
Cathy Cloninger - BOC	Cynthia Isenhour
Steven Amos	Scott Pagan
Alan Cloninger	Peter Rhew
Chad Duncan	Victor Rodriguez
Ronald Eddington	Martha Stowe
Cathy Hart	Scott Suggs

PARKS, RECREATION & TOURISM

Michael Applegate — Director
Ellen Fenters — Assistant Director

COUNTY ADMINISTRATION

Matthew Rhoten - County Manager
Steve Eaton - Assistant County Manager
Brian Sciba - Assistant County Manager
Vincent Wong - Deputy County Manager
Ray Maxwell - Executive Director of Capital Projects

PLANNING TEAM

Benesch

2359 Perimeter Pointe Pkwy, Suite 350
Charlotte, NC 28208
www.benesch.com
704-521-9880





TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Planning Overview.....4**
- Site Analysis..... 5**
 - Natural Features..... 5
 - Man-made Features..... 5
 - Site Analysis Summary..... 9
- Community Engagement..... 10**
- Recreation Facility Needs.....12**
 - Preliminary Master Plan.....12
- Final Master Plan/Physical Needs..... 13**
 - Final Master Plan.....14
 - Project Costs..... 14
- Exhibits..... 16**
 - Final Master Plan Exhibit.....16

PLANNING OVERVIEW

George Poston Park is Gaston County's largest park at around 344 acres. The land for George Poston Park was a gift to Gaston County from the late Edith Poston in 1987 given in memory of her late husband, George Poston. Mr. Poston used the property for recreational purposes and Mrs. Poston wanted people to always enjoy the beauty of the property. The first phase of the park, featuring eight athletic fields and a horseshoe complex opened to the public in 2001.

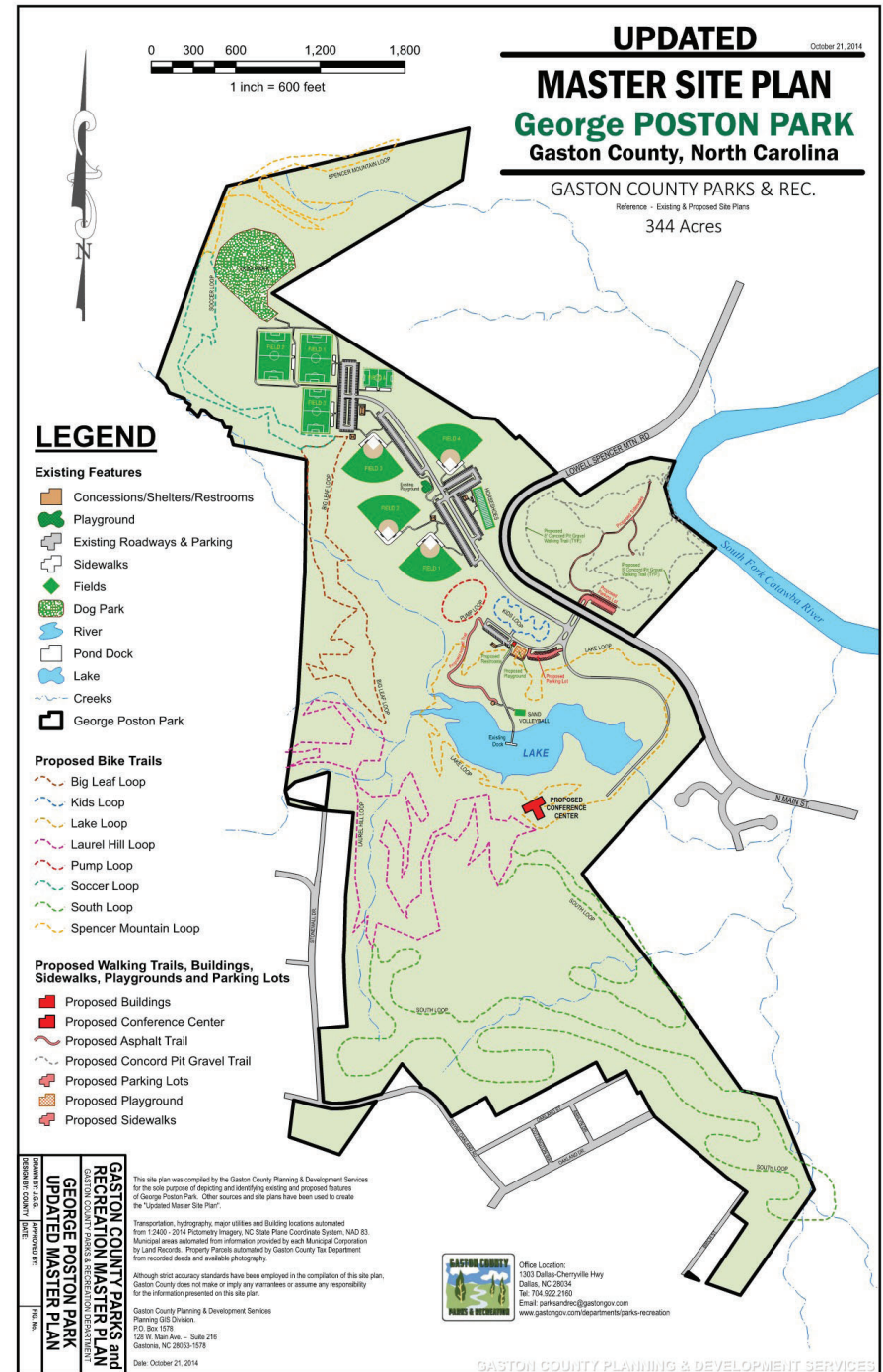
An extensive network of mountain bike trails has been added in phases over the years as well as the lakeside development including picnic shelters, volleyball and a fishing pier. Most recently, the addition of a pump track has become a large draw for cyclists.

Presently, the Carolina Thread Trail is developing a trail through the park connecting Spencer Mountain with the Town of Lowell which would provide the potential for more park users.

Recognizing the growing need for more accessible parks and recreation facilities Gaston County Parks & Recreation desired to update the Master Plan for George Poston Park developed in October 2014 (shown at right). George Poston Park is already a thriving and active regional park with many updated amenities.

The County's intent is to develop a future vision for the park for the next ten years and incorporate additional opportunities for recreation offerings while assessing the continued need for the existing offerings. The Park Master Plan is likely to be developed in phases, coordinating with the new through trail construction and available funding resources.

The following document provides a summary of the planning process, includes a plan for park improvements and provides an initial budget estimate for construction. The purpose of this master plan is to provide County staff and elected officials with a vision for the park, with the understanding that final design and construction will likely reflect changes based on future conditions.



SITE ANALYSIS

The following is a description of the natural and existing man-made features of George Poston Park. These existing features are important determinants in planning the future recreation facility improvements.

NATURAL FEATURES

There are several natural features within the park site that impact future development. These features include:

TOPOGRAPHY

There is considerable elevation change across the park rising from elevations in the 640s around the lake to the 760s/770s along the fringes and internal areas currently used by the mountain biking trails. The elevation continues to rise towards the north as the park transitions to Spencer Mountain for which the summit is at elevation 1264.40.

The core area of the park exhibits the flatter topography with elevations in the 740s/750s. This is the area where the athletic fields have been developed.

SOILS

Poston Park is predominantly comprised of Tatum Gravelly Loam soils. The Tatum series consists of well drained soils with moderate permeability and slow to very rapid surface runoff. These soils are suitable for park development.

The lake area exists within Chewlacla loam which corresponds to floodplain areas. These soils are somewhat poorly drained with frequent to rare flooding for very brief to long periods. Depth to water table is 6-24 inches from November to April.

HYDROLOGY/DRAINAGE

The South Fork Catawba River flows along a portion of the northeastern property line. There are three smaller tributary streams within the park that discharge directly to this river. According to the National Wetlands Inventory there are no apparent wetlands within the park.

VEGETATION

The park site is predominately wooded within the steeper slopes and in the trails system areas. They consist of mostly hardwood trees with some pine.

MAN-MADE FEATURES

EXISTING FACILITIES

George Poston Park has served the residents of Gaston County and the region for nearly 25 years. It has functioned as a regional park and a destination for mountain biking. Poston Park provides opportunities for family activities and sports activities including picnicking, soccer and baseball/softball.

The park currently encompasses around +/- 344 acres and provides a variety of active and passive recreation opportunities. Existing facilities within the park include:

Athletic Fields:

- Softball/Little League Fields: 4 lighted
- 2 Batting Cages
- Soccer Fields: 4 lighted

Picnic Facilities:

- One large shelter
- Two small shelters

Other Facilities:

- Horseshoe Complex: 20 lighted courts
- Volleyball Court
- Pump Track, lighted
- 13 miles of single-track mountain bike trail
- 7 miles of hiking trails (including 1/2 mile paved greenway)
- Two Playgrounds
- Dog Park
- 12 AC Lake w/ Fishing Pier
- Lakeside ADA paved walkway

The existing park facilities are meeting some of the region’s recreational needs, however, there is still the opportunity for additional offerings, especially with trail connectivity being developed via the South Fork Trail.

BALL FIELDS

There are 4 lighted ballfields in the center of the park used for softball and Little League. There are also two batting cages located adjacent to the horseshoes complex.



PICNIC SHELTERS

There is large picnic shelter serving the soccer field complex and two smaller shelters, one located near the pump track and small playground, and one located near the lake. All shelters are connected via sidewalks. The 2024 Parks & Recreation Master Plan Update noted the need for 12 additional shelters systemwide by 2030. Picnic shelters ranked 5th in the high priority rating from the community survey. Additional picnic shelters could be introduced around the park.

SOCCKER FIELDS

There are 4 lighted soccer fields at the north end of the park. Fields 1 & 2 are the two most heavily used. Field 4 is a small field that is not used very much even for practice. Even though the 2024 Parks & Recreation Master Plan Update notes the need for additional soccer fields by 2030. The topographical constraints of the site prohibit expansion of fields without significant grading and clearing operations.



HORSESHOES

A large tournament level horseshoe court complex with 20 lighted courts was initially constructed when horseshoes was still extremely popular. The facility has not been used for tournaments in recent years and does not get much use on a daily basis. Consideration should be given to possible re-use/downsizing of this area of the park as the interest in horseshoes has declined.



VOLLEYBALL COURT

There is one existing sand volleyball court located near the lake. It is connected via paved trails.



PUMP TRACK

The most recent addition to Poston Park is the 10,000 SF pump track. This facility has become a favored destination for bike enthusiasts from near and far. A Red Bull Pump Track World Championship Qualifier has recently been held here.



TRAILS

Poston Park has seen the development of several miles of trails since the park opened. The Piedmont Area Single Track Alliance has constructed 13 miles of mountain biking trails (11 trails/loops) throughout the park of all challenge levels. There is a short Kid's Bike Trail for beginners located in the woods adjacent to the pump track that is relatively flat, but not heavily used.



There is an additional seven (7) miles of hiking trails, including ½ mile of paved trail offered within Poston Park.

PLAYGROUNDS

The park currently has two playground areas; one located near the ballfields and features multi-component play units for mixed ages. The playground area is enclosed with the raised plastic edging with a rubberized surfacing and sidewalk access to the parking. A second playground was constructed near the pump track area for the younger age group with climbing apparatuses and swings.



DOG PARK

A dog park is located at the far north end of the park with areas designated for large and small dogs. There is no shade or seating for dog owners. A shelter with benches could be added in this location.

LAKE & FISHING PIER

This 12 AC lake is connected to parking via paved ADA access routes. An ADA compliant fishing pier is constructed on the north side with access to the parking area.



RESTROOMS

There are four (4) restroom buildings located throughout the park in the soccer, ballfield, horseshoe and pump track areas. There is not a need to add any additional restrooms as this time.

PARKING

There is parking located throughout the park at the soccer, ballfield, and horseshoes areas. In addition, there is parking that supports the pump track, lake and volleyball areas.

Additional parking should be considered, especially with the extension of the South Fork Trail through the park and development of a trailhead for the Poston Connector at the north end of the park.

ZONING

The park site is currently zoned Civic (CIV) within the Town of Lowell which allows for development of parks and open spaces with the facilities and activities proposed for this master plan update.

SURROUNDING LAND USE

The park site is located adjacent to single family residential neighborhoods to the east, west and south. The park borders Spencer Mountain to the north and touches the South Fork Catawba River on the east side. Lowell Spencer Mountain Road also bounds the east side of the park with a section of the park across the road as well.

UTILITIES

The site is well served by utilities. Water, sewer, and electric services are all available.

SITE ANALYSIS SUMMARY

OPPORTUNITIES

- The park is well served by public utilities, reducing infrastructure installation costs.
- Existing amenity areas and open space reduce potential construction costs by reducing clearing and grubbing required for expansion.
- Pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to and within the park is being developed by CTT via the South Fork Trail.

CONSTRAINTS

- A significant portion of the site is unavailable due to steeper slopes. Future trail extension is still a valid use for these areas.
- Majority of soils found onsite have some development restrictions requiring special care in facility placement and design. Some undercutting and structural soil replacement may be required for trails and pads. Subsurface soil investigation is highly recommended.
- The park consists of open wooded areas which provide shade, visual interest, and wildlife habitat. Any development needs to be carefully designed to minimize the impact on these features.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

George Poston Park – Community Meeting: March 26, 2025

A community meeting was held in-person at the Caromont Health Park on Wednesday March 26, 2025. It was advertised as a drop-in from 5 pm to 7 pm. We had approximately forty-five (45) attendees that signed in and many stayed the entire time. In addition to representatives from Benesch, there were also representatives from Gaston County Parks & Recreation on hand to answer questions.

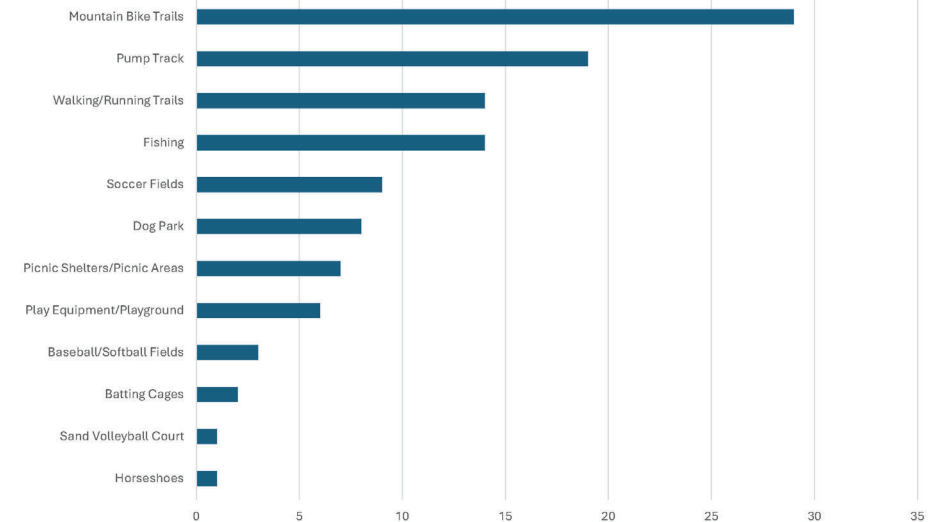
Attendees were able to view an existing master plan exhibit. There were also exhibits reflecting elements currently offered in the park and elements typical of regional parks on which attendees could vote for their preferences. An exhibit featuring different components for a bicycle skills area was also available for preference voting. There were also open ended question and comments boards for attendees to provide further input.

Throughout the evening, Benesch provided short overviews on the master planning process and the protocol for the community meeting with attendees upon arrival. Conversations with the attendees were held throughout the drop-in session.

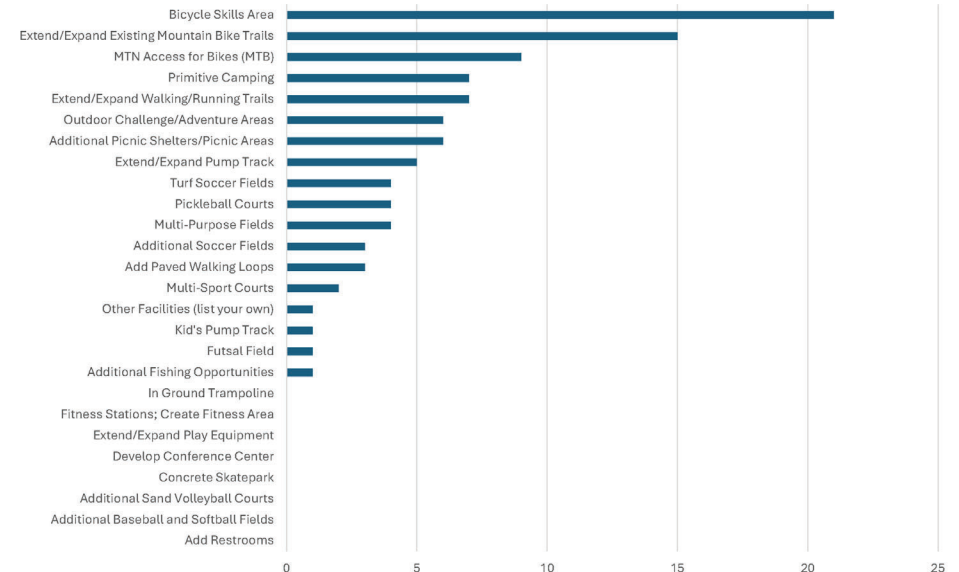


Tabulations from the voting exhibits resulted in the following:

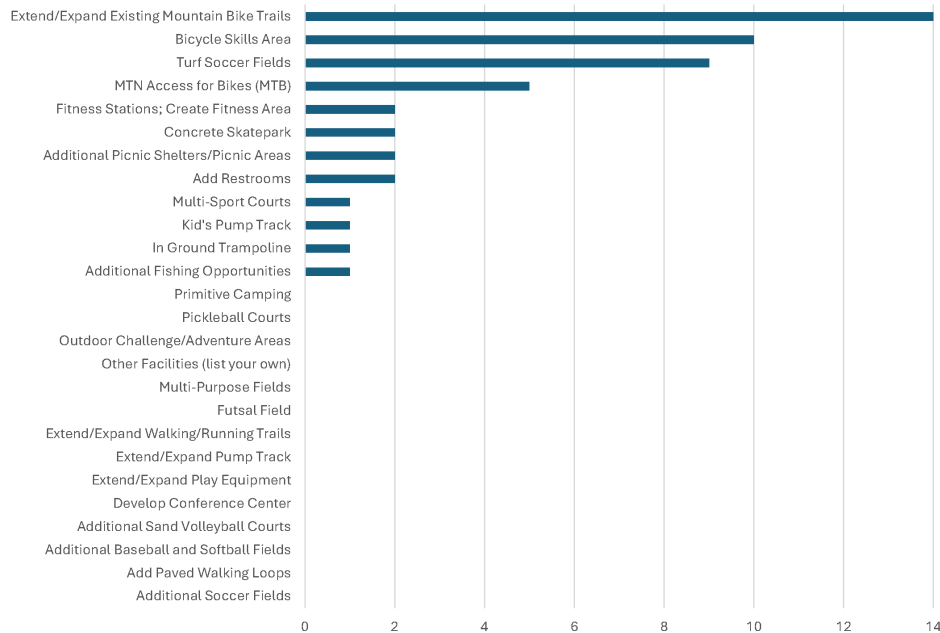
What amenities/activities do you currently use at George Poston Park?



What facilities would you like to see developed/retained/improved?



What facility do you think should be the highest priority for development?



What specific recreational needs do you have within George Poston Park?

- Shelter rental, dog park playground, ball fields, pump track, skills area would be great!
- Expand Mountain Biking Trails, bike trails from the top of Spencer Mt, downhill mountain biking trail tech lines, possible jump line, but prioritize DH technical trails.
- Would like to see existing trails remain the same, expand trails onto the mountain.
- RC dirt track
- Conserve existing trails and expand trail system to include more elevation (Spencer Mt.).
- Conserve natural areas & trees
- Concrete Skatepark
- Conserve and expand existing natural single track trails.
- Connect Thread Trail to Poston

- Turf, places to practice Monday through Thursday. Turfing our soccer fields would allow our kids to be more competitive, drive tourism, improve health, and other reasons.
- Observation deck at the top of the mountain
- Flow trails from top of Spencer Mountain by trail design.
- Remove or at least relocate proposed conference center.

General Comments:

- South Fork River access and keep extending connectivity.
- Connect paved trail to thread trail in Lowell.
- Turf the soccer fields
- Turf soccer fields
- Disappointed no skatepark
- Fields children can use for practice and games. Turf. Get with the times.
- Connect natural trail to thread trail in Lowell
- One of the best things at Poston is the “natural” landscape. Lots of trees and natural trail.
- Don’t lose that.
- Tons of storm downfall, ^ fire risks
- Keep Poston MTB trails rough n’ rugged - best part of Poston is how natural it is - leverage resources to include MTB trails on the mountain.
- Pickleball Courts
- Turf the soccer fields



FINAL MASTER PLAN/PHYSICAL NEEDS

The final master plan was developed by addressing the recreational needs expressed by the community during the community meeting, Park & Recreation Advisory Board input and staff desires with the physical limitations found on the existing site and along the greenway expansion. The description of proposed park elements is broken into the different recreation areas.

BICYCLE SKILLS AREA

With selective tree removal and consideration of the topography a bicycle skills facility is proposed adjacent to the pump track replacing an overgrown, soft surface “Kid’s Bike Trail”. With the heavy focus on mountain biking within the park there was a fair amount of support for the skills area to assist with proper education towards beginner and intermediate cyclists.



PICNICKING

Two additional picnic shelters (20' x 20') are proposed with one inside the dog park centered between large and small dog areas. The second shelter will be located between the bicycle skills area and the pump track.

SKATE PARK

There was heavy support during the community meeting for a skate park in a Gaston County park. With the focus towards biking at George Poston Park, the introduction of a skate park into this environment seemed very compatible. The skate park is proposed to be located adjacent to the pump track.

WALKING LOOP/PATHS

A paved connector from the skate park/pump track area to the lake was proposed in the previous master plan and has remained in this update as well. A new paved walking loop is proposed around the Bicycle skills and pump track areas in this plan.

A separate project being conducted by Gaston County and the CTT is the ongoing construction of the South Fork Trail. The South Connector across Lowell Spencer Mountain Road is finishing construction and will connect into the core of the park extending northwest to the Poston Connector before touching the Spencer Mountain Base Loop and Summit Trail.

TURFED SOCCER FIELDS

There was also heavy support during the community meeting for synthetic turf soccer fields. The master plan shows soccer fields 1 & 2 being converted to synthetic turf fields.

PARKING

With the construction of the South Fork Trail through George Poston Park and the Poston Connector to Spencer Mountain it was apparent that additional parking related to the trails was needed. Two areas of parking expansion have been proposed.

At the north end of the park at the trailhead for the Poston Park Connector, a new parking area with a projected parking count of +/- 97 spaces is proposed in the location of the existing soccer field 4. This is a small field that as noted previously is rarely used.

A parking expansion of approximately +/- 21 spaces is proposed in the parking lot adjacent to the horseshoe courts. With the decline in horseshoes, especially on the tournament side, ten courts will be removed (leaving ten courts) for the parking expansion.

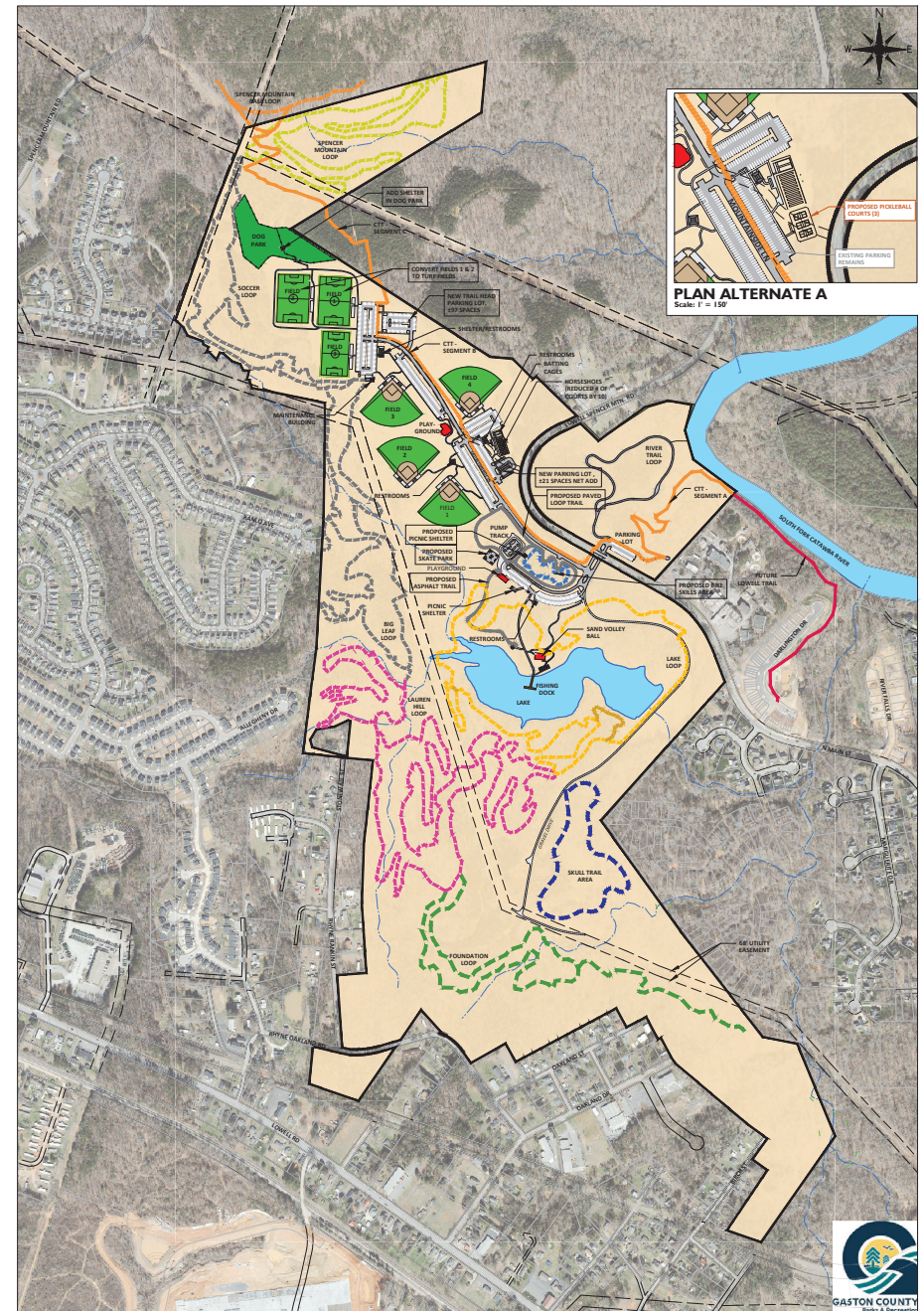
During the master plan presentation to the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board on August 18, 2025, discussion took place and the Board asked that an alternate be reflected for the addition of pickleball in lieu of the 21 space parking expansion. As a result, three (3) pickleball courts are shown as an alternate that can be sited within the footprint of the existing lighting layout for the deleted ten (10) horseshoe courts.

CONFERENCE CENTER

The 2014 master plan proposed a conference center south of the lake. The development of trails and the existing topography are not conducive to development of a conference center in this area of the park. There was not any support for a conference center in Poston Park. Furthermore, the clubhouse at Rankin Lake can be used for conferences and is only 15 minutes away. The conference center component has been removed from the master plan update.

PROJECT COSTS

An order of magnitude budget estimate was developed for the improvements shown in the final park master plan. Total build out of these improvements is currently estimated to cost approximately \$6.8 million, including a projected 4-year inflation factor. However, it is very likely that if all the proposed plan elements are implemented they would be implemented in phases over the next 10 years. Updated estimates would need to be prepared with each phase. This overall projected construction cost is broken into the following project element costs on the following page.



MASTER PLAN

GASTON COUNTY, NC

Order of Magnitude Budget Estimates

Prepared 6/11/25

Based on Master Site Plan Dated 5/20/25

ITEM	COST
Clearing/Demolition	\$8,500.00
Grading/Erosion Control	\$75,000.00
Storm Drainage	\$159,500.00
Parking Improvements (2 lots, 118 spaces asphalt paved w/C&G)*	\$360,000.00
Sidewalks (4" concrete)	\$32,000.00
Asphalt Trail (8' wide, 2" w/6" ABC) - Bike Skills/Pump Track Loop	\$135,000.00
Asphalt Trail (8' wide, 2" w/6" ABC) - Skate Park/Lake Connector	\$52,000.00
Utilities (Plan assumes no new utilities needed)	\$0.00
Picnic Shelters (25' x 25' w/Conc. Pad) - 2 shelters	\$150,000.00
Park Furnishings (tables, benches, trash receptacles, etc)	\$17,500.00
Skate Park (6,500 SF) (allowance)	\$500,000.00
Bicycle Skills Area (Allowance)	\$375,000.00
Soccer Fields 1&2 (Conversion to synthetic turf)	\$2,000,000.00
Probable Sub-Contractor Budget	\$3,864,500.00
Contractor Overhead, Profit, and General Conditions (15%+/-)	\$579,675.00
Probable Total Construction Budget (Without Contingency)	\$4,444,175.00
Design Fees, Survey, Geotechnical (12%+/-)	\$533,301.00
General Contingency (25%+/-)	\$1,111,043.75
Inflation Factor (4% per year for 4 years - 16%+/-)	\$711,068.00
Total additional fee items and contingency	\$2,355,412.75
Probable Total Budget (including additional fees and contingency)	\$6,799,587.75

Note: This estimate has been prepared based on the elements reflected at a master planning level. General assumptions have been made on anticipated design & engineering needs that may be needed to implement the master plan elements. Upon completion of an as-built survey, subsurface investigation and final design, engineering & architecture, a refined cost estimate should be prepared reflective of a complete final design and/or phasing. Furthermore, the above estimate is based on current 2025 construction dollars with an estimated inflation factor of 4% per year (for a four year projection) and will need to be updated to reflect the time frame in which the project will be phased and/or constructed.

**Should the three pickleball courts be constructed in lieu of the proposed 21 parking spaces in the space currently occupied by the ten horseshoe courts (designated for removal), the cost should still fit within the \$360,000 line item.*

