

NC STATE

POLISHING THE GEMS:

SOUTHERN VILLAGE OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT PLAN

April 2021



Prepared for:

Southern Village HOA, Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Prepared by:

The Natural Learning Initiative, NC State University

Acknowledgements:

We applaud Southern Village HOA Board of Directors (Susana Dancy, President), for their dedication to stewardship of approximately 82 acres of local green infrastructure. The Southern Village system of neighborhood parks and open spaces provides multiple ecosystem services to its human and nonhuman residents, offering recreational, educational, and aesthetic enjoyment to everyday life. Young residents especially benefit from the freedom of active outdoor play, exploring, engaging, and learning with nature, having fun with each other in their own childhood time and space. Sincere thanks to the 265 Southern Village households, including young people, that responded to the open space survey and shared information about current use and ideas for improvement. A special thanks to the young and adult residents who shared ideas about the SV open space system in the focus group discussions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June 2019, Southern Village HOA (SVHOA) appointed the Natural Learning Initiative (NLI, a research, evaluation, and design assistance unit at NC State University), to develop an open space assessment and management plan to be used as a tool to recommend site improvements and establish investment priorities based on community need and potential costs.

A UNIQUE, MATURE COMMUNITY

Southern Village is a 312-acre, nationally recognized innovative, urban community. Established in 1994, blessed with an extensive open space system of approximately 82 acres owned and managed by SVHOA, serving households living in 550 single-family homes, 375 townhomes and condominiums, and 250 apartments.

By any measure SV is a unique, mixed-use, urban development in a region and nation still implementing old, inappropriate, community development models. This means, that the baseline of quality for an open space management plan is already higher than in most communities. That said, the SVHOA Board, responding to concerns expressed by SV residents and based on their own direct observations, decided that a systematic, community-wide assessment of the SV open space system was called for after more than a quarter century of use and cultural change.

Open space owned by SVHOA includes 72.45 acres of natural buffers of preserved woodland with informal trails, including the Fan Branch of Obie Creek; 6.54 acres of designated parks of various shapes and sizes; 1.40 acres of managed recreation space (Central Park soccer field and basketball courts); two pond-based spaces; managed pathways; and 1.44 acres of small, unimproved wooded parcels, including a wooded cemetery.

A major asset is Fan Branch Trail (publicly owned, jointly maintained by SVHOA), which is part of the Chapel Hill Greenway system. The trail runs parallel to the Fan Branch of Obie Creek, bisects the community and connects Southern Community Park to the south and Morgan Creek Trail to the north.

Open spaces not owned by SVHOA include Market Street Green, Southern Village Apartments playground, Scroggs Elementary School playground, and the Southern Community Park. Because these spaces are used by SV residents, they were included the household survey.

PURPOSE

Based on the assessment results, the purpose of this document is to provide a decision-making tool to help guide the SVHOA Board in prioritizing short- and long-term, cost-effective open space improvements that respond to community concerns, focused on:

- Easy fixes with probable costs.
- One-time investments with probable costs.
- Establishing annual management.
- Improving routine maintenance.
- Engaging residents.

Policy changes aimed at increasing permanent community value to the open space system may also result. The document is structured around each of the six categories of open space currently maintained and managed by SVHOA. Open space assets not owned by SVHOA are also included.

APPROACH

A GIS-based map of the SV open space system was created showing SVHOA holdings, each with verified location, boundaries, size, and name (see page 13). The open space assessment is based on information gathered by NLI via field visits conducted with SVHOA president and independently, together with a household survey developed in collaboration with SVHOA. The survey was the principal means of gathering information about how residents used SV open spaces and ideas for improvement. Administered in the Fall of 2019, information was gathered about space category, activity type, frequency, duration, and means of access. Suggestions were solicited for improvement related to both adult and young residents. Late Fall 2019, three focus groups were convened, two for adults to discuss the survey results and issues arising, and one for youth to discuss their experiences as users and propose ideas for improvement. Focus group and survey results have been integrated in the document.

Survey respondents (N=265) represented a length of residence in SV of between 24 years and less than a year. Forty percent were resident for 10 years or more, 28% for 5-9 years, and 32% less than 5 years. Families with children represented almost 70% of respondents. In these families, children under 3 years old were 7% of the total and 3-11 years old, 40%. More than half the families reported children 12 and older. Visiting children were also reported. Of these, 48% were 12 years or older.

More than half (54%) of respondents said their children used the SV open space system, almost entirely on foot or bicycle. Sixty-six of these young residents responded to the survey directly as independently mobile users (i.e., without accompanying adults). Since children beyond a certain age are likely to be the most frequent, extensive users, and substantial beneficiaries of the SV open space system, special attention was given to engaging them in the process to ensure their adequate voice.

Across the whole SV community, from young children to retired older adults, SV stands out as an extraordinarily walkable/bikeable, active community, and therefore likely to be more sociable, with higher levels of social capital. All of which means residents are likely to be healthier.

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OVERALL FINDINGS

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

Altogether, the seven types of open space received 1033 mentions. Most mentioned in rank order were parks (21% mentions), HOA-maintained paths (21% mentions), and Fan Branch Greenway/Trail & Brookgreen Minipark (20% mentions). Less mentioned were informal trails (14 % mentions, including paths connecting to Culbreth Middle School), unimproved natural areas (14% mentions), and ponds (10% mentions). Although gross mentions of ponds were low, for a sizable group of children, these neighborhood “fishing holes” offer a unique, highly valued community resource.

For each type of open space, five closed-ended questions assessed rates of common activities, including: exercise, playing, enjoying nature, spending time together outdoors, and social events, as well as an open-ended “other” activity question. Patterns of use and recommendations for improvement for each type of open space for adults and children follow below.

PARKS (maintained by SVHOA)

The nine Southern Village designated parks range in size from .10 acres to 2.42 acres. Equally popular park activities of SV residents were exercise, enjoying nature, spending time together, and playing. The most frequent additional activity was dog walking. *Benches/seating, improved grass, shade trees and more trash/recycle bins* were the most prominent suggested improvements for adult users of parks. *Play equipment maintenance, shade trees, new play equipment, and improved grass* were the most prominent improvements for children, to which independently mobile young residents added a list of specific improvements, including: Portable equipment: hula hoops, jump ropes, and balls to play with; huge treehouse; collecting pieces of wood and natural materials to build forts and teepees; wood working; camping; community fire pit by the lake; frisbee golf course that spans the neighborhood; ropes course.

Individual parks received variable lists of concerns, comments, and suggestions from the focus group discussions of which, Arlen Park received the most and is therefore discussed first followed by selected items for each other park.

ARLEN PARK (2.42 acres)

Although Arlen Park is the largest of the neighborhood parks, Halloween vandalism 10 years ago seems to have had a lasting, negative effect on Arlen’s usability. Residents said it looks abandoned, uninviting, difficult to “read,” and lacking a clear pathway/circulation system. Environmentally, the site is bereft of topsoil (possibly connected to the blow-and-mow approach to maintenance), and verdant vegetation. Of major contention is the historic cemetery, apparently dating back to the early 1700s, which appears disrespected and in disrepair.

Similar concerns were expressed about the former slave cemetery, part of the SVHOA wooded lot fronting Meeting Street. General consensus was that action needs to be taken related both to the cemeteries and to upgrading the quality and possibly the redesign of Arlen Park as a community open space asset. Some recognized potential value as a place for children. There also appears to be some difference of opinion among immediate neighbors about the degree to which Arlen Park should be open and accessible to the community. Also expressed was the sense that SVHOA Board recognizes the issues around Arlen Park and is prepared to work with residents to create an action plan.

CENTRAL PARK (1.4 acres)

Central Park (soccer field and basket ball courts) is next in size, behind Arlen Park and is the most heavily-used SV open space, especially for young residents attracted by the open, grassy area for playing ball, other games, and running around. Focus group participants called it a “great place for frisbee, soccer, lacrosse, basketball,” and added, “never saw baseball, a diamond’s in the corner but not used.” Others commented on the field being a good place for meeting people, particularly dog owners, who suggested that a time could be designated for unleashed dogs, say 6:00 to 8:00 pm, knowing the issue is controversial. Other voices wished there were public tennis courts.

Maintenance concerns included the need for more shade beyond that provided by trees on the periphery. Drainage problems were noted several times—also in the survey. The problem seems to be soggy, muddy conditions after a rain, which make the field unusable. (NOTE, this problem may have been fixed recently, as well as erosion from tennis courts.)

EDGEWATER PARK (1.26 acres)

Edgewater Park, fronting Fan Branch Greenway/Trail, is the third largest SV park and for many residents appears to work well. As one commented, "We send our kids there on their own (5 and 9) without hesitation." Others mentioned that there was a lot to do there and that it was shaded – an important quality for children. Also noted was "crowding" after school (not necessarily negative), and that the playground was used by people from the other side of the neighborhood.

The adult focus group recognized the functionality for children. For adults who like to be around kids, there is nowhere to sit and there's only one table. The suggestion was made to install a coffee type table or two for adults who want to read.

MEETING STREET PARK (0.34 acres)

Some called Meeting Street a "Neat little park," "Just an open patch of grass, and "Nice when you get in." Others asked, "How do you get there?" – while recognizing that kids pass such information around their community. These comments pose the question, "is the park 'good enough'" or are there cost effective, quality improvements that could be made?

UNWIN PLACE (0.19 acres)

Unwin Place attracted substantial comment as a small, heavily used, residential cul-de-sac "island," grassy space, – "not really a park," according to one respondent. The space serves as a "trail head" and gathering place for one of the informal trails leading to Culbreth Middle School. Paraphrasing, Unwin Place is described as a nice, cozy, traffic-free, kid-sized enclosed area for pickup play, very different to an open field. Respondents noted that adults go there with toddlers. The main problem is that heavy use by children results in worn grass and a muddy surface. Residents have therefore asked for additional maintenance. "Kid resistant grass," was suggested. Replacement of peripheral trees taken down some years ago was recommended.

GRAYLYN PARK "TRAFFIC ISLAND"

(0.17 acres)

Defined as a 'small space and "not really a park," Graylyn is still used as a park, if for no other reason than it is attractive to children who have no other place to go except Scroggs playground, which is unattractive and has no shade. Participants said, "Children use it all the time, especially 3rd through 6th graders, mostly boys playing soccer." Therefore, it is "not green anymore." Even though Graylyn is essentially a large traffic circle, adults said, "traffic but does not bother me... bit confusing, so people drive slowly."

CALDERON PARK (0.15 acres)

As someone commented, Calderon is a "Formal park, not a kid park." Others added, "Just an open patch of grass." "Bench swing." "Very pleasant." Some said the park was hard to find and not highly used. Historically, apparently, years ago, a neighbor took the space over and started a community garden. Today the park still reads as a private garden, as part of the adjacent house. For years the water bill was paid by the homeowner. The community garden purpose is no longer viable as everybody has their own garden. Some commented on poor maintenance, maybe in contrast to the formal style of the 'garden/park.' For a member of the Aging In Place SV group, the park could be considered a potential gem as a place to gather.

Discussion in two directions resulted, either to redesign for functional use like a children's playground or as an adult playground with chin-up bars, stationary bikes, elliptical weights, croquet, a ping-pong table with divider (bring your own bats and balls), and tables and chairs to play checkers, chess, and backgammon. The question is, would people be attracted? Conclusion: Calderon Park needs to be assessed in detail, framed by its neighborhood context, and possibly be redesigned.

MARKET POCKET PARK (0.10 acres)

Market Pocket Park, AKA "sandy park," because of the sand covering the entire ground surface, has the great advantage for families with very young children is that the park is fenced and entered through an attractive, arched gateway. This means accompanying adults can relax while children play safely, unable to run out into the street. Focus group participants noted the suitability for parents or babysitter with children, that it was quiet and usually not too many people but at the same time a great way to meet other people. The park is indeed a rarity of park provision, as a place where young parents can gather, particularly those at home during the workweek.

The focus group discussion noted that Market Pocket Park was one of several planned in the SV "historic area" (1996) but unfortunately discontinued in the new areas. However, small parks are still needed because backyards are small, and one "cannot throw a ball too far." Also, the social function as a meeting ground has not faded and perhaps is even more important nowadays.

The only negative comment was, "no shade," which is extra important for very young children who need to be protected from direct sunlight, especially in the summer months. Adults too need to be protected and be thermally comfortable. Surprisingly, negative comments about the 'sea of sand' were not made. Sand not only increases solar radiation via reflection, it can go home in shoes and clothing, and present an unnecessary domestic cleaning chore. If it covers the entire site, ground level planting at child height is curtailed.

SVHOA-OWNED WOODED PARCELS

(4 parcels, 1.10 acres, total)

Four small wooded spaces, plus a rectangular wooded lot/cemetery (0.37 acres) comprise more than an acre of public space. The 4 small parcels comprise, awkward triangular forms that appear not usable from a formal perspective but nonetheless may still serve as valuable places for nature play. Participants commented, "Nice natural areas," where "Children build forts," and a "Great treehouse built with pallets. Very cool."

Participants mentioned how the parcels were used to stage leaf collection, so lost functionality. Now neighbors move their leaves there too. The question is, how do residents perceive them? As their own backyards? Clearly, they have value for children but unfortunately an opportunity to verify did not occur. Participants agreed that they could be better maintained and possibly repurposed? "Could be neat spaces."

PONDS (maintained by SVHOA)

HOA-managed Brookgreen and Highgrove ponds received half the mentions that parks did. Of the two ponds, Brookgreen appeared to be the more popular. Highest-ranking activity *enjoying nature*, followed in rank order by *spending time together*, *exercise* and *playing*. *Fishing* was mentioned as an additional activity.

Benches was the top-ranked improvement suggested for adults to support fishing, relaxation, and nature-related activities, such as bird watching. Other improvements included *dock*, *maintenance/reduce litter*, *reduce algae*, and *add fountains/water feature*. The latter would aerate and help clean the water and reduce the occurrence of algae. Pond ecosystem health appeared important to adult residents. Respondents made positive comments about the renovated Brookgreen Pond Trail and queried the status of the pond behind Southern Village Apartments, noting that "many kids on that side of the neighborhood use it for fishing and playing."

Benches was also the top ranked suggestion for children, along with *stock with fish*, and *dock/boardwalk*. These results indicate fishing as a potentially primary activity for young residents, underscored by independently mobile children who also considered Brookgreen Pond as the most popular—visited at least once a month by almost two-thirds of responding children. Their serious interest in fishing resulted in larger chunks of pond time. More than a third spent more than 60 minutes per visit. Besides fishing, children used the ponds as places to relax, "sit by the water," and walk the dog. Similar suggestions for improvement included *benches* as the top choice, which would add to the sociability and fishing functionality of ponds. These conclusions were further reinforced by focus group comments such as, "Great for fishing." "Needs stocking" to maintain a sustainable population of fish.

Results suggest that SVHOA-managed ponds

surrounded by open space could be considered 'pond-based parks,' as active places where users enjoy nature shared with others, including fishing as a serious, specialized, multigenerational use.

PATHS (maintained by SVHOA)

SVHOA-managed paths (Arlen Park Path, re-routed some years ago, Brookgreen Pond Path, and the path adjacent to Central Park), received 21% of mentions (identical to parks), from survey respondents. Top-ranked activity was *exercise*, followed by *enjoying nature*, *spending time together*, and *playing*. *Dog walking* was an important additional use.

Benches and lighting were top-ranked suggested improvements for adult use of paths. Secondary improvements included *signage/trail markers*, *leash dogs*, *more pet waste stations*, and *better drainage*.

Leash dogs and lighting were top-ranked

improvements of paths use by children, partly reinforcing suggestions for adults. Path activity was mentioned by 70% of independently mobile children.

A "wildcard" focus group question addressed the possibility for a SV pathway connection to Carrboro High School? According to participants, "there's a way to get there across three properties from SV and connect to the traffic circle. If there's demand and support, we should request it to the town."

INFORMAL TRAILS (within SVHOA-owned land but not maintained by SVHOA)

Informal trails include paths connected to Culbreth Middle School and an undetermined number of others. This category received 14% of mentions from survey respondents. Top-ranked informal trail activity was *exercise*, followed by *enjoying nature*, *spending time together*, and *playing*. Other mentions included *walking to school* plus a few mentions of *dog walking*.

Improvements for use by adults included *better drainage*, *re-grading*, and *erosion control*. Secondary improvements included *signage/trail markers*, *lighting*, and *maintain bridges*.

The adult focus group mentioned that a large number of children get to school through the woods, using the trails. Trails in general are also used by people with dogs and for mountain biking.

Top-ranked improvements for use of trails by children was *Improve trails*. Suggestions duplicated those above. Many children use these trails to commute to school, indicating that without periodic maintenance heavy traffic may degrade trails over time.

Independently mobile children using Culbreth-connected paths made suggestions for improvement including adding lighting, making less muddy (surface with wood chips?), adding hard surface (for biking), making “less rocky,” widening, marking clearly, keeping clear, maintaining bridges, and “annual or semiannual trash clean up.” Given the number of comments, it is easy to imagine that use would increase if improvements were made.

On the question of SVHOA maintaining informal trails, survey respondents voted 71% in favor and 29% against the idea. Focus group participants agreed that SVHOA should maintain informal trails, especially the connections to Culbreth Middle School.

An issue is that liability is changed if SVHOA maintains the trails. People are “invited” to use them and the SVHOA Board is responsible, except for those where there’s a sign saying, “do not use this path” (that SVHOA maintains). Residents have shown periodic interest in trail maintenance. Eagle Scout projects have been implemented.

The lack of a SV Trail Map was reiterated in the survey and focus groups. Commented one participant, “To have a good map of the neighborhood with path, trail, and park locations, would make it more inviting and walkable.”

FAN BRANCH GREENWAY/TRAIL & BROOKGREEN MINIPARK

Fan Branch Greenway/Trail (jointly maintained by HOA), and Brookgreen Minipark received 20% of mentions from survey respondents. Top-ranked activity was *exercise*, followed by *enjoying nature, spending time together, and playing*. Dog walking was also mentioned.

Top-ranked improvements for use by adults was trash/recycling, followed by *benches/seating and lighting*. Secondary improvements included *signage/trail markers, leash dogs, and pet waste stations*. Unleashed dogs negatively affect both adult and child use of pathways.

Top-ranked improvements for use by children were lighting and leash dogs/pet waste stations Unleashed dogs and poor lighting on pathways may well be perceived by parents as safety issues for children, which could be a barrier to developing natural play/nature education.

The majority of independently mobile children frequently used the greenway and minipark—more than half more than once a week. Suggestions for improvements included lighting (“too dark when walking home in the evening”) and installing a drinking fountain.

Brookgreen Minipark was the subject of several focus group concerns, including lack of shade, spacing of benches, and a hedge that blocks visibility. On the other hand, the potential for the minipark to serve as a social

“crossroads” was evident. Locating a gazebo there as a meeting place was suggested.

UNIMPROVED NATURAL AREAS

(selected)

Unimproved Natural Areas included were the area between Graylyn Dr, Glenhaven Dr, Brookgreen Dr and Central Park and the area between Culbreth Middle School, Fan Branch Trail/Greenway and Highgrove Park.

Top-ranked natural area activity was *exercise*, followed by *enjoying nature, spending time together, and playing*. Dog walking was mentioned as an additional use along with walking to school and nature-related activities.

Suggested improvements for use by adults included manage natural areas and improve including poison-ivy removal, tree pruning, and management of water quality. *Preserve nature and leash dogs* were secondary suggestions reflecting the value of natural habitat.

Suggested improvements for use by children included improve trails and manage natural areas and bike access as a secondary improvement.

Unimproved Natural Areas were used by the majority of independently mobile children, who referred to wooded trails connecting to Culbreth Middle School. Also popular was the area between Graylyn Drive, Glenhaven Drive, Brookgreen Drive and Central Park. Comments regarding use by mountain bikes were repeated.

The focus group recognized that the woodlands were not actively managed and wondered if they were underused. Are they considered to be passive spaces with informal trails, used during the day? One focus group participant asked if the woodland between Highgrove Pond and Fan Branch Greenway/Trail could be made more accessible for children, so the woods may be used more actively. Commenting as a parent, another participant said, “This is a great natural area. My kids enjoyed exploring there when they were younger, helping to develop their autonomy.”

OPEN SPACE NOT OWNED BY SVHOA

Open spaces not owned by SVHOA were mentioned by almost three-quarters of respondents. Places included Market Street Green, Scroggs Elementary School playground, Southern Village Apartments playground, and Southern Community Park.

Top-ranked activity was *exercise* followed by *spending time together, playing, enjoying nature, and social events*.

Improvements for use by adults included benches/seating, lighting, and leash dogs.

Improvements for use by children included soccer fields, leash dogs, lighting, and improve grass.

HOUSEHOLD SURVEY WITH FOCUS GROUP COMMENTS

A household survey was the principal means of gathering information from Southern Village residents about their open space use and ideas for improvement. Administered in the Fall of 2019, information was gathered about resident use of SV open spaces (type, frequency, duration, activity, and means of access). Suggestions were solicited for improvement related to both adult and young residents. Results reported here, include Focus group comments.

TYPES OF FACILITIES

A map (Figure 1, next page) was included for reference, interspersed throughout the community survey. The survey focused on the six types of open space comprising the SV open space system, plus a 7th category: 'Open space not owned by SVHOA.'

1. Parks
2. Ponds
3. Paths (informal, within SVHOA-owned land but not maintained)
4. Paths (maintained by SVHOA)
5. Fan Branch Greenway/Trail & Brookhaven Minipark
6. Unimproved natural areas (selected)
7. Open space not owned by SVHOA

WHO RESPONDED?

Respondents (N=265) represented a length of residence between 24 years and less than a year. Forty percent were resident for 10 years or more, 28% for 5-9 years, and 32% less than 5 years.

Families with children represented almost 70% of respondents. In these families, children under 3 years old were 7% of the total and 3-11 years old, 40%. More than half the families reported children 12 and older. Visiting children were also reported. Of these, 16% were under 3 years; 65% were 3-11; and 48% were 12 years or older.

MENTIONS BY FACILITY TYPE

Altogether, the seven types of open space received 1033 mentions. The most popular type was parks (21% mentions), HOA-maintained paths (21% mentions), and Fan Branch Greenway/Trail (20% mentions). Less popular were informal trails (14 % mentions, including paths connecting Culbreth Middle School to Fan Branch Trail/Greenway and Highgrove Park), unimproved natural areas (14% mentions), and ponds (10% mentions).

For each type of open space, five closed-ended questions assessed rates of common activities: exercise, playing, enjoying nature, spending time together outdoors, social events), as well as an open-ended "other" question. Patterns of use and recommendations for improvement for each type of open space for adults and children follow.

CHILDREN'S INDEPENDENT USE OF OPEN SPACES

Fifty-four percent of survey respondents said their children used SV open spaces (owned and not owned by SVHOA). Those who said "yes" were directed to ask their children to complete a series of survey questions to get more details.

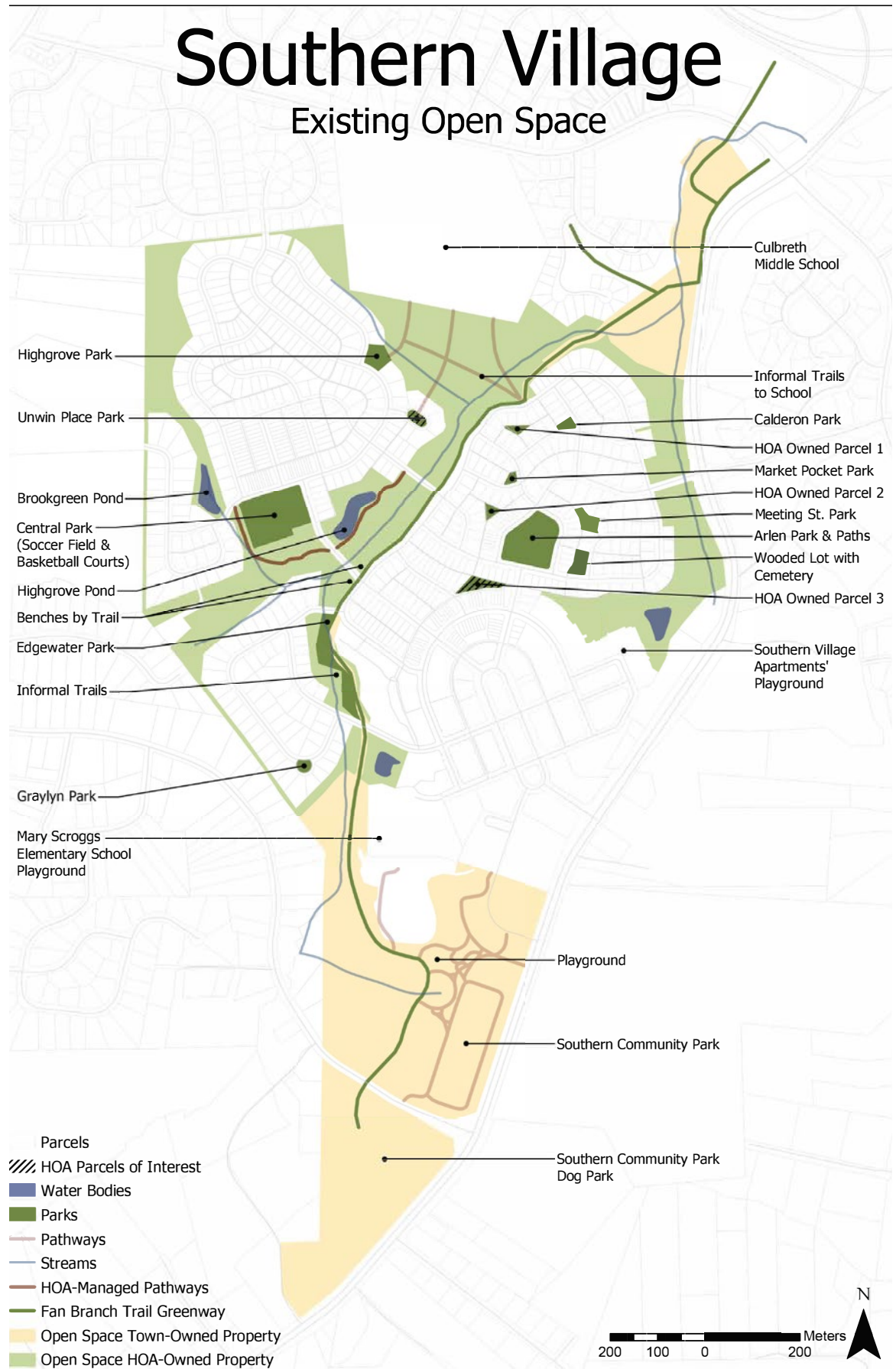
All independently mobile children who responded to this question (N=66), said that parks (79%) and unimproved natural areas (61%) were their most popular destinations.

Almost 90% of independently mobile children traveled to SV open spaces by foot (57%) or bicycle (32%), or with scooter or skateboard (6%). "Walking is a priority in my family, a 9-year-old stated. "I walk to my math class located in the church building. I bike to pick up groceries from Weaver Street Market on my own or with my mom."

DOG BEHAVIOR ISSUES FOR BOTH ADULTS AND CHILDREN

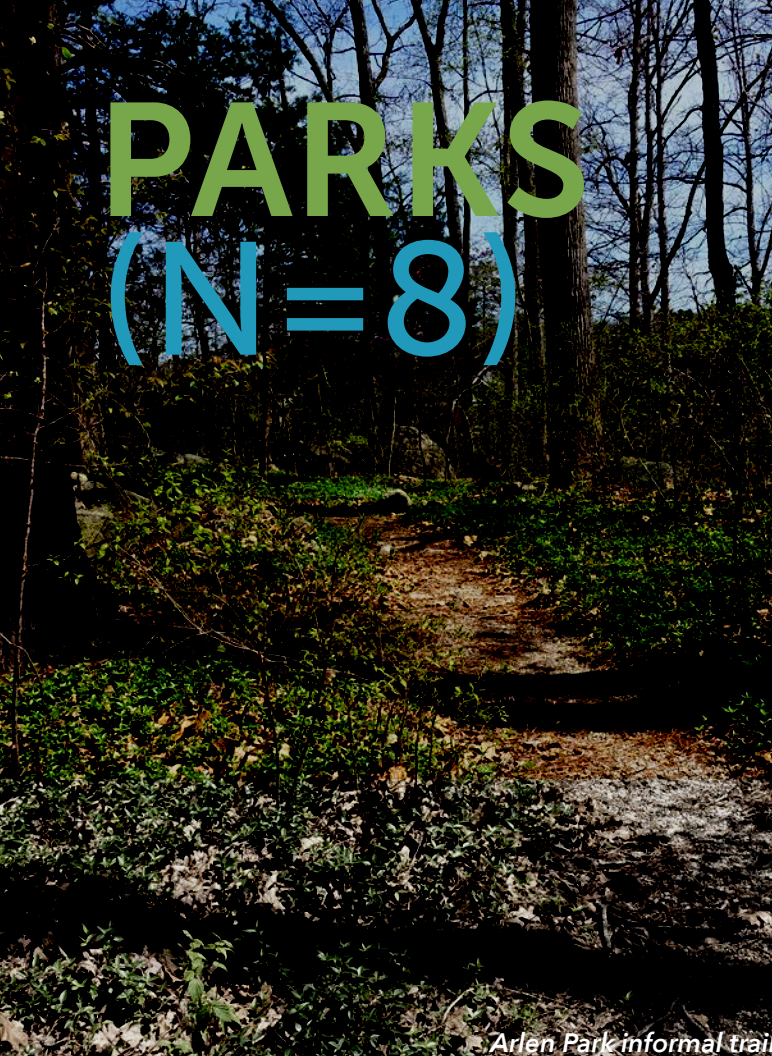
Even though dog walking was reported as commonplace in SV, issues related to dog/owner behavior in open spaces were several times mentioned by both adult and young survey respondents, similar to those in many other communities. Focus group adult participants noted that areas around Southern Village apartments are well served by dog receptacles; whereas, in Central Park there is only one receptacle, serviced infrequently, and sometimes overflowing. Apparently, because of relative expense, the SVHOA board has been reluctant to invest in additional receptacles. Participants suggested adding a second receptacle in Central Park?

Figure 1. Map of the Southern Village Open Space System



Prepared By: The Natural Learning Initiative

PARKS (N=8)



Arlen Park informal trail

Parks received 21% of mentions from survey respondents. Park users were asked how often they used them, for how long, how they got there, activities engaged, and suggestions for improvement.

Frequency of use of parks

Central Park and Edgewater Park appeared to be the most frequently used. Arlen Park was relatively well used but less frequently, with Highgrove Park next in rank order. Unwin Park was clearly the least-used park, with Meeting, Calderon, and Market Parks following in rank order from next least.

Duration of use of parks

Central Park and Edgewater Park appeared to attract the longer use, with Highgrove and Arlen Parks next longest. Calderon, Market, Meeting, and Unwin Parks attracted the shortest stays.

Means of travel to parks

Of 244 mentions, 63% were walk, 20% bike, and 9% car. Other means included scooter, skateboard, and run/jog.

What do residents use SV parks for?

Respondents were asked for the most common activities they engage in as users of SV parks (Figure 2). Of 495 mentions, exercise, enjoying nature, spending

time together, and playing were most popular with 22-20% mentions each. Social events accounted for 5% of mentions. Other activity mentioned dog walking (4%).

Parks improvements for use by adults

This open-ended question elicited 72 responses, less than half those for children (see below), summarized in Figure 3.



Figure 2. What do residents use parks for? Time with family outdoors, enjoying nature, exercise, and play are the predominant uses of identified park areas. Walking/exercising/playing with dog was the almost exclusive entry in the “other” category, making it a notable specialized use. These results indicate that SV parks are primary locations for physical activity, being together as a family outdoors, and connecting to nature.

Parks improvements for use by children

This open-ended question elicited XX responses, more than half those for c (see below), summarized in Figure 4.



Figure 3. Park improvements for use by adults. Benches/seating, improved grass, shade trees and more trash/recycle bins are the prominent suggested improvements for adult use of parks. These results indicate that clean, well-maintained vegetation and adequate seating are crucial to park enjoyment for adult users. Secondary improvements include dog-related needs, proper lighting, and flowering trees/plants. The recurrence of leash dogs and dog waste stations throughout the survey suggest contention between dog-owners and other users.

Parks were the most popular destination of independently mobile children, mentioned by 79% of child respondents.



Figure 4. Park improvements for use by children. *Play equipment maintenance, shade trees, new play equipment, and improved grass* are the most prominent suggested improvements for child use in SV parks. Secondary improvements include *improved soccer fields, improved basketball courts, play equipment diversity and keeping dogs on leash*. These results indicate that play equipment types and quality are high priority for SV residents with children. Shade trees and grass prominence suggests that adequate greenery is critical to outdoor play.

Central Park (soccer field and basketball courts) was the most frequently used (62% at least once a week, 84% at least once a month). Four other parks were used at least once a week: Highgrove Park (37%), Edgewater Park (31%), Unwin Place (27%), and Arlen Park (22%).

Children spent the longest time at Central Park, with 37% spending more than 60 minutes there. Unwin Place, Edgewater Park, and Arlen Park also accounted for longer stays (in the 30-to-60-minute range). Stays in Highgrove Park were shorter.

One child mentioned Southern Village Club as one of the 'hot spots' of Southern Village. The tennis courts are one of his favorite places, where he goes to play tennis with his dad and to play ball on the field.

Independently mobile children reported a range of activities pursued in in SV parks (Figure 2) and suggested improvements that could be implemented to better support their activities (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The most popular activities for children in SV parks were *sports* (in Central Park), *socializing* (meeting other children/youth), *playing, walking dogs, and exercising* – with a small minority exploring nature.



Figure 6. Children's suggested improvements to SV parks focused on three items: *maintenance of grass areas, shade trees, and lighting*. The importance of *benches and signage* were also underscored. Several other items were mentioned.

Independently mobile and focus group young residents contributed a further list of park ideas, including:

- Portable equipment: hula hoops, jump ropes, and balls to play with.
- A huge treehouse.
- Collecting pieces of wood and natural materials to build forts and teepees.
- Wood working.
- Camping.
- Community fire pit by the lake.
- Frisbee golf course that spans the neighborhood.
- Ropes course.

Suggested improvements identified in Question 22 include *green space maintenance, improved trail connectivity through Arlen park, increased awareness of green spaces/maps, improved signage, and no unleashed dogs*. Arlen and Unwin parks are the most frequently mentioned in terms of suggested improvements and needed maintenance. Basketball court improvements, including more benches and lighting, were also mentioned.

Individual parks received further comments from adult respondents and focus group participants, detailed below by park:

Central Park

- Good to have Central Park.
- Wide, open grassy area for running around.
- Great place for frisbee, soccer, lacrosse, basketball.
- Never saw corner baseball diamond but not used.
- Now 5-6 graders are in the bigger fields.
- Good for meeting people.
- People meet informally with dogs.
- Time for unleashed dogs 6:00 to 8:00pm? Controversial?
- I wish there were public tennis courts.

Maintenance concerns.

- Needs more shade. Trees on the periphery.
- Drainage problem. Gets saturated, cannot be used.
- Muddy and soggy after a rain.
- Complaints probably about runoff erosion.
- Soccer fields in good condition now.
- Erosion from tennis courts. Fixed!

Arlen Park

- One of the larger neighborhood parks (2.73 acres).
- Halloween vandalism happened 10 years ago.
- Became abandoned.



Arlen Park, entry

Cemetery maintenance is a concern.

- Looks abandoned (multiple mentions).
- Important historic place. Mason family.
- Some graves from 1700?
- Historic preservation.
- Sacred place.
- Another cemetery (segregated) faces Meeting Street.
- Work with historical society to preserve cemeteries.

The park feels unusable (multiple mentions).

- Entrance is uninviting.
- Just used for walking, passing through.
- Some people don't like to go by.
- Walk around but not through.
- I don't use it anymore, it is depressing.
- Has gone down over the years.
- Currently attracts nuisance behavior.



Arlen Park, cemetery

Trails do not exist.

- People altered the trails.
- Amorphous system of paths.
- The flow does not exist anymore.
- Mindful of what trail should I walk or not.
- As a new neighbor, not sure if allowed to use or not.
- Confusing signage.



Arlen Park, sign

No topsoil left.

- Blowers too strong, take topsoil.

What does Arlen park want to be?

- Given the location important to open up.
- Would love to see some useable space.
- Formalize trails.
- Requires railings.
- Seems to be community maintained.
- Some neighbors want to "return it to nature" and voiced concern that people try to use it.
- If quality was upgraded would it be used?
- If attractive, people would go in.
- Better signage to communicate park use.
- Clean up as a passive space.
- Benches – multiple mentions.
- Benches to meditate.
- We love the natural space.
- Should not be another green. Maybe just a small patch of grass in the center.
- Native landscape.
- Junipers might make sense.

Envision as a place for kids.

- Given the size & proximity, would love to see a play area.
- Interact with nature (not a playground).
- Nice to have a protected space for young children. "Our family uses Arlen Park to walk the dogs. It's a cool place. I explore the graveyards with my dad and talk who's buried there." – Youth Focus group.



Arlen Park, informal trail

Who would restore?

- Get goats to clear the under growth?
- Needs openness.
- The challenge is to get people into it, instead of a peripheral trail.
- Find somebody to design a sustainable, special trail.

The SVHOA Board

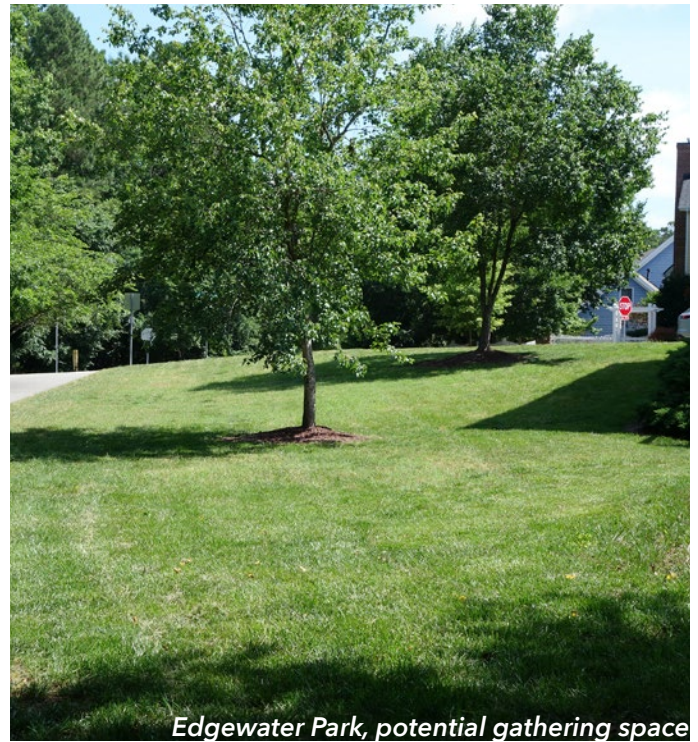
Ten years ago, produced an initial design for walking across the park and built walls to modify the circulation. Now people are trying to open trails and add signs. The Board is willing to get resident insights.

Edgewater Park

- Works well.
- We send our kids there on their own (5 and 9) without hesitation.
- A lot to do there.
- Shaded, very important for young kids.
- Crowded afterschool.
- "I go to Edgewater Park with friends." – Youth
- Focus group.
- Used by people from the other side of the neighborhood.
- From a functionality perspective, good for children but not adults.
- We like listening to kids but no place for adults.
- Only one table that somebody placed there. Perhaps coffee table type for adults to read the paper.



Edgewater Park from Fan Branch Greenway



Edgewater Park, potential gathering space

Highgrove Park

Suggestions for improvement.

- Needs more play equipment.
- Expand area for play.
- Increased activities.



Highgrove Park, entry

Market Pocket Park

- "Sandy park"!
- Playground with a fence.
- Good for young children because it is enclosed.
- Bad because no shade.
- Used by parents with or babysitter with children.
- Usually not too many people.
- Great way to meet other people from the community.
- Weekday use, close to home.
- Weekends visit other parks.

- Do people go to parks near their houses? Not locally used.
- Pocket parks planned in the historic area (1996). None in the new areas.
- Needed because backyards are small, cannot throw a ball too far.
- In 1994 did not have individual mailboxes so idea was people meet at collective mailbox.



Market Pocket Park, interior



Market Pocket Park, community toystore

Meeting Street Park

- Neat little park?
- How do you get there?
- Kids find these places.
- Just open patch of grass.
- Nice when you get in.



Meeting Street Park, entry



Meeting Street Park, interior

Calderon Park

- Could not find!
- Formal park, not a kid park.
- Just open patch of grass.
- Very pleasant.
- Bench swing. Not highly used.
- Years ago, neighbor started a community garden.
- So, reads as part of the house, as a private garden.
- He used to play the water bill.
- Does not have a defined purpose now because everybody has a garden.
- Poorly maintained, so we haven't been in a year
- I would consider it my yard with the Aging In Place group twice a year.
- Each public space is a different hidden gem!



Calderon Park, entry

How to improve?

- Functional use like a playground instead of contemplative feel?
- Adult playground with chin-up bars. Stationary bikes. Elliptical weights.
- Croquet, for example.
- Ping-pong table with divider, bring your own bats and balls.
- Table and chairs - would people be attracted?
- Checkers, chess, backgammon.



Unwin Place Park

- Cozy, traffic-free, kid-sized area for pickup play.
- Adults go there with toddlers
- Gathering place for informal trail to Culbreth Middle School.
- "Not really a park."
- Heavy use by children produces worn grass and muddy surface.
- "Kid-resistant grass" suggested.
- Additional maintenance requested.
- Trees previously taken out need replacing.



Graylyn Park "circle."

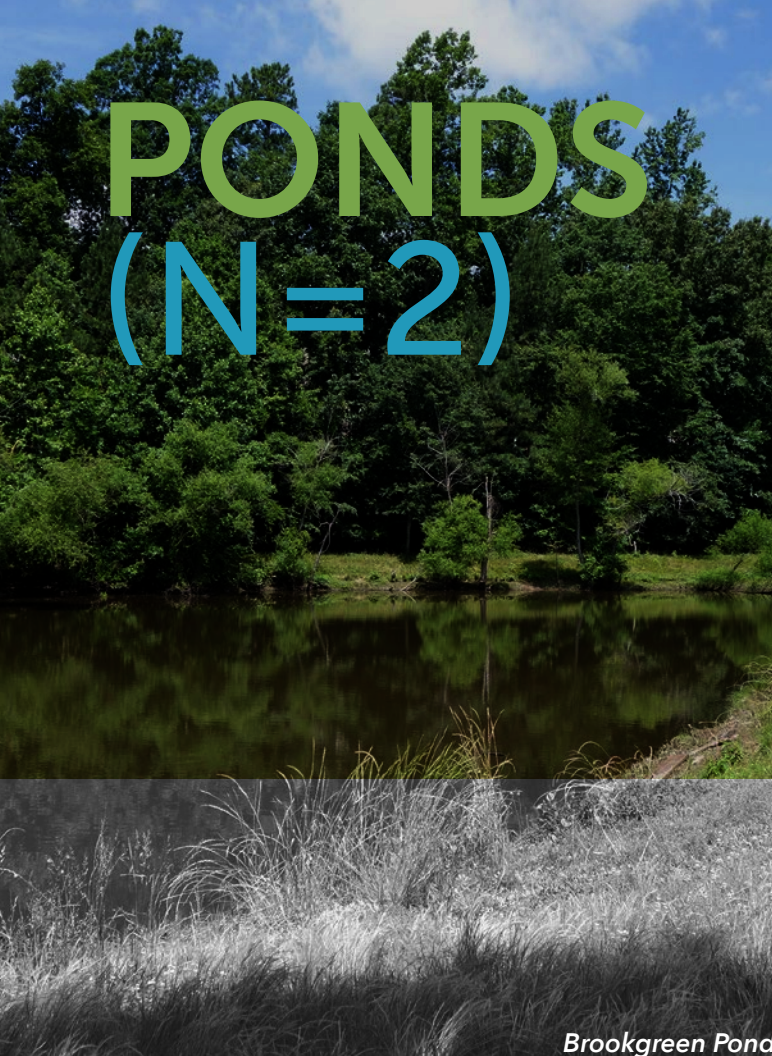
- Small space.
- Not a park but often used as one.
- Known as the "bowl".
- Used by 3rd - 6th graders, mostly boys playing soccer.
- Not green anymore. Children use it all the time.
- More traffic but does not bother me.
- Bit confusing, so people drive slowly.



SVHOA Parcels

- Remnant, very small spaces.
- Awkward triangular forms, not that usable.
- Nice natural areas.
- Great treehouse built with pallets. Very cool.
- Children build forts.
- Used to stage leaves. So lost functionality.
- Now neighbors move their leaves there too.
- How do people perceive them?
- As their own backyards?
- The whole area collects water and feeds the pond.
- Could be better maintained. Repurposed?
- Could be neat spaces.

PONDS (N=2)



Brookgreen Pond

HOA-managed ponds (Brookgreen and Highgrove), received 10% of mentions (half mentions of parks), from survey respondents. Pond users were asked how often they used them, for how long, how they got there, activities engaged, and suggestions for improvement. HOA-managed ponds are surrounded by open space and could be considered pond-based parks. Questions were asked about the status of the pond behind SV apartments.

Frequency of use of ponds

Brookgreen appeared more frequently used than Highgrove pond, although at the “once every six months” level, the reverse was the case.

Duration of use of ponds

Durations were similar for both ponds and relatively short in relation to potential fishing activity, which could be interpreted as a need to increase the attraction for fishing, especially for children, as discussed below.

Means of travel to ponds

Of 109 mentions, 74% were walk, 17% bike, and 5% car. Other means included scooter and run/jog.

Activities related to ponds

Five closed-ended questions were asked (exercise, playing, enjoying nature, spending time together outdoors, social events), plus an open-ended “other” question. Of

200 mentions, *enjoying nature* (33% mentions), was the most important. *Spending time together* was next (23% mentions), followed closely by *exercise* (20%) and *playing* (11% mentions). Other activities mentioned were mainly fishing, with a few mentions of dog walking.

Focus group comments.

- Love new path. Use a lot more now.
- More welcoming and goes to Parkview.
- Great for fishing – children and adults.
- Need stocking.
- Sustainable population of fish?
- Are fish edible? Consult expert?
- Water quality and condition tested every year.
- Deepest 10 feet, need dredging periodically.
- Kids get in culverts, pop up manhole covers.
- Problem replacing.
- Drainage issues with Brookgreen Pond.
- Not a pleasant place but attractive to a 10 year boy.
- Pond close to school was fenced off for safety.

Results suggest that SV ponds or “pond parks” are active places where users enjoy nature, often shared with others. Fishing is a serious, specialized, multigenerational use.

Pond improvements for use by adults

This open-ended question elicited 53 responses (more than children), demonstrating considerable interest in pond quality related to adults, mainly as a place to sit and enjoy placid nature, reinforcing the notion of “pond park.” The need for comfortable benches is clearly presented in Figure 7.



Figure 7. Pond improvements for use by adults. *Benches* is the most notable suggested improvement for adult use of ponds. More benches could support fishing, relaxation, and nature-related activities, such as bird watching. Notable secondary improvements include *dock*, *maintenance/reduce litter*, *reduce algae*, and *add fountains/water feature*. Comments noted that a water feature would aerate ponds, potentially helping to clean pond water and reduce the occurrence of algae.

Survey comments included positive response to renovated Brookgreen Pond Trail and a query about the status of the pond behind Southern Village Apartments, noting that “many kids on that side of the neighborhood use it for fishing and playing.”

Pond improvements for use by children

This open-ended question elicited 35 responses, as presented in Figure 8.



Figure 8. Pond improvements for use by children. *Benches*, *stock with fish*, *dock/boardwalk* are the most notable suggested improvements for child use of ponds. These results indicate that fishing is a significant activity for children at the ponds. Notable secondary improvements include *nature-education*, *clean water*, *maintenance/reduce litter* indicate that a clean and healthy pond ecosystem is critical for use by children.

Ponds were mentioned by 45 % (n=30) of independently mobile children, they indicated that of the two ponds, Brookgreen Pond was the most popular as was visited at least once a month by 64% of the responding children. As might be expected, the 30 pond users spend larger chunks of time there, with 30%-37% spending more than 60 minutes each visit. Benefiting from these unique SV natural resources, pond users traveled there mostly by walking (74%), mainly to fish, as well as to relax, sit by the water, and walk the dog. Suggestions for improvement were made (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Top improvement suggested by independently mobile children was benches, which add social comfort and facilitate “watching the water.” Also desired are several functional requirements directly related to improving fishing activities.

“A deck would be awesome,” said a young focus group participant, “on Brookgreen Pond south bank.” He goes by there by himself or with friends or family to fish, mentioned hooking a catfish, and suggested restocking was important. Another young resident mentioned the field by the fenced-in pond north of Mary Scroggs as a place where her family go to view fireworks. She called this pond “Heart Lake One, because it is shaped like a heart.” Highgrove Pond, she said, is also known as “Heart Lake Two, because it is not so heartlike as Heart Lake One.” When children name places, it signifies extra value and special relationships.



Highgrove Pond

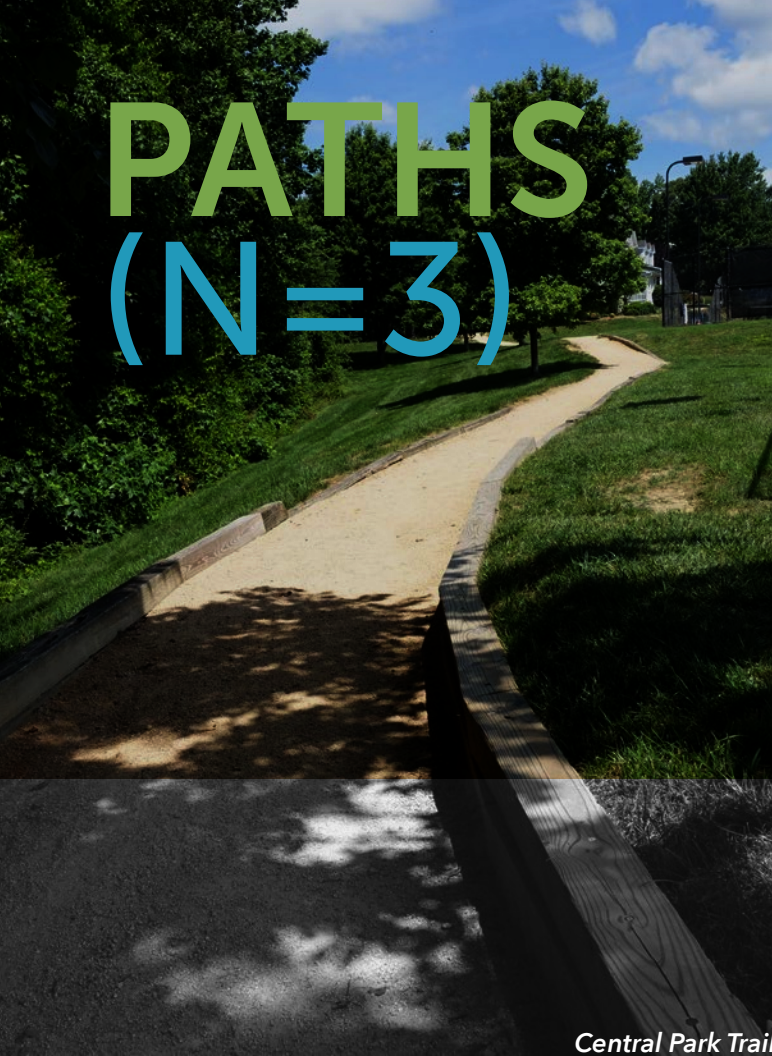


Highgrove Pond, intergenerational fishing



Brookgreen Pond

PATHS (N=3)



Central Park Trail

SVHOA-managed paths (Arlen Park Path, re-routed some years ago, Brookgreen Pond Path, and the path adjacent to Central Park), received 21% of mentions (identical to parks), from survey respondents. Respondents were asked how often they used paths, for how long, how they got there, activities engaged in, and suggestions for improvement.

Frequency of use of paths

The path adjacent to Central Park was somewhat more frequently used, with Arlen Park Path less so, and Brookgreen Pond Path somewhere in the middle.

Duration of use of paths

Duration is mainly less than 30 mins for all three paths.

Means of travel to paths

Of 213 mentions, 73% were walk, 18% bike, 4% scooter, and 3% car. Other means included skateboard and run/jog.

Activities related to paths

Five closed-ended questions were asked (exercise, playing, enjoying nature, spending time together outdoors, social events), plus an open-ended "other" question. Of 413 mentions, *exercise* (31% mentions), was the most important, followed by *enjoying nature* (26%), *spending time together* (20% mentions), and *playing* (13% mentions). *Dog walking* (14% mentions) was an important additional use. Minor activities mentioned

were social events (3% mentions), and using paths to get from one place to another, including school.

As might be expected, results suggest that SV paths serve as active routes, where users enjoy nature and sharing path experiences with others.

How can paths be improved for use by adults?

This open-ended question elicited 49 responses (more than for children). The need for comfortable benches and lighting is clearly presented in Figure 10. General pathway comments included positive mention of recent SVHOA efforts to improve pathway quality.



Figure 10. Path improvements for use by adults. *Benches & lighting* are the most notable suggested improvements for adult use of paths. Both improvements may enhance pathway use by providing places to rest while proving a feeling of safety at night. Notable secondary improvements include *signage/trail markers*, *leashed dogs*, *more pet waste stations*, and *better drainage*. Unleashed dogs affect both adult and child use of pathways. Additionally, benches and wayfinding may affect adult use of pathways.



Loop off Greenway



Potential Gathering Spot



Fan Branch Greenway

Path improvements for use by children

This open-ended question elicited 41 responses (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Path improvements for use by children. Leash dogs and lighting are the most notable suggestions for path improvements for children. This may indicate that both unleashed dogs and poor lighting on pathways are perceived by parents as safety issues for children.

Path activity was mentioned by 70% of independently mobile children. The recently improved path alongside the soccer fields was the most popular path, with 65% of these children using it at least once a week, and another 15% at least once a month. The newly installed Brookgreen Pond path was a close second with 45% using it at least once a week, and another 28% at least once a month. Arlen Park paths were less popular but still used by 40% children at least once a month. Duration of use for all paths varied considerably up to 60 minutes. The large majority of children walked or walked a dog on SV paths (Figure 13).



Figure 12. For independently mobile children, major path activities included play sports (presumably reflecting use of the Central Park path), as well as walking and dog walking. Meeting friends and exercising were also mentioned.

Focus group “wildcard question.” Can a pathway connection be made to Carrboro High School? There’s a way to get there across three properties from SV and connect to the traffic circle. If there’s demand and support, we should request it to the town.



Central Park Path, entry

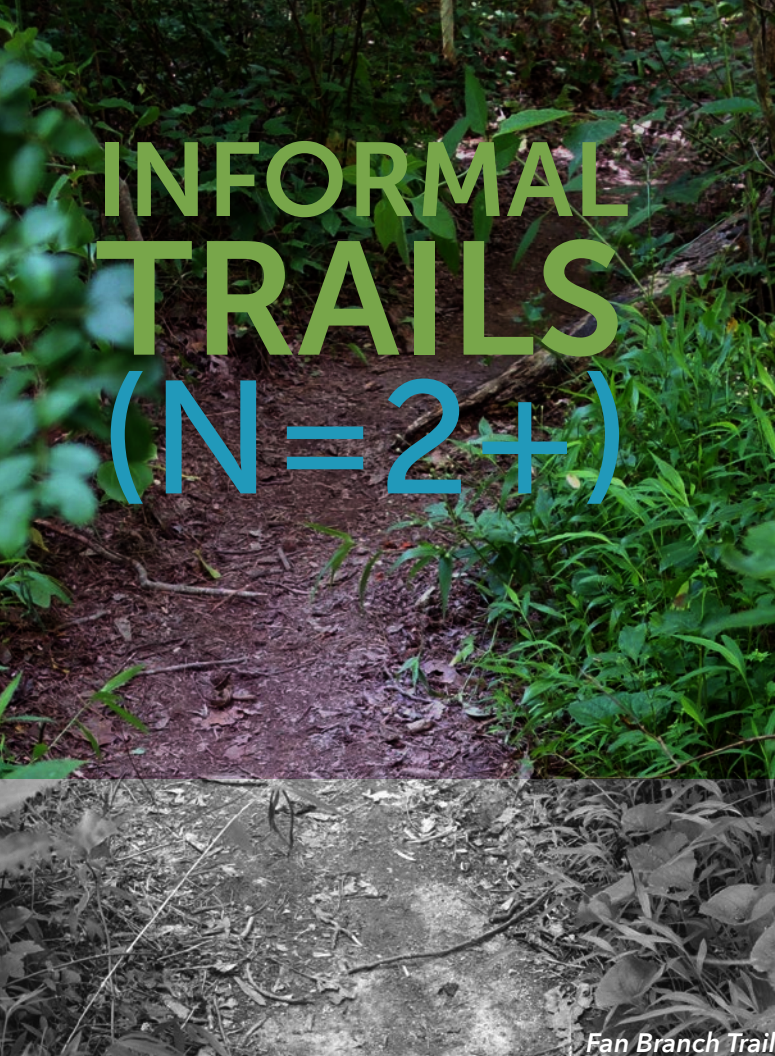


Central Park, family games



“See you later”

INFORMAL TRAILS (N=2+)



Fan Branch Trail

Non-SVHOA informal trails received 14% of mentions from survey respondents. Informal trails include two paths connected to Culbreth Middle School (from Fan Branch Trail/Greenway and Highgrove Park), and an undetermined number of others. The survey asked informal path users how often they used them, for how long, how they got there, activities engaged in, and suggestions for improvement.

Frequency of use of trails

The Culbreth-connected paths were used as expected, more than once a week.

Duration of use of trails

Durations were in the "less than 30 min." range.

Means of travel to non-SVHOA informal trails

Of 104 mentions, 81% were walk, 12% bike, 2% scooter, and 1% car. Other means included walking to school.

Activities related to non-SVHOA informal trails

Five closed-ended questions were asked (exercise, playing, enjoying nature, spending time together outdoors, social events), plus an open-ended "other" question. Of 226 mentions, exercise (31% mentions), was the most important, followed by enjoying nature (23%), spending time together (16% mentions), and playing (8% mentions). Other mentions (n=41), as expected, mainly included walking to school plus a few mentions of dog walking.

As might be expected, results suggest that non-SVHOA informal trails are active routes to and from school, where users enjoy nature and sharing path experiences with others.

Informal path improvements for use by adults

This open-ended question elicited 36 responses (less than for children). The need for comfortable benches and lighting is clear (Figure 13).



Figure 13. Informal path improvements for use by adults.

Improve trails was the primary suggested improvement for adult use of non-HOA informal trails, included suggestions for better drainage, re-grading, and erosion control. Notable secondary improvements include *signage/trail markers*, *lighting*, and *maintain bridges*. Way-finding and safety appear to be primary concerns for adults using non-HOA informal trails.



Should SVHOA maintain informal trails?

Of 104 mentions, 71% were in favor and 29% against SVHOA maintaining informal trails. General comments included management suggestions:

I think an alternative to the HOA maintaining the trails could be a parks committee that once/twice a year organizes a trail clean up and light maintenance. Note, the HOA should have some level of oversight for the bridges.

The user groups for these trails, and the adjacent natural area goes beyond students walking to/from school. There are other existing natural surface trails in the area which are used by bikers, hikers, and dog walkers. Many of those bikers are students from Culbreth and surrounding schools. The trail that exists frequently gets "tied together" with other local trails. I've answered "no" to CVHOA maintaining these trails, but with a caveat. If the CVHOA steps in to arrange some sort of maintenance, it need to be done in consultation with professional trail builders to appropriately maintain with bike use in mind.

Until now, SVHOA has never maintained informal trails. Now the Board is, for example, more inclined to assist in replacing bridges.



Informal Trail, Highgrove Woodland

Focus group discussion about SVHOA maintaining informal trails.

Participants agreed that SVHOA should maintain informal trails, especially the connections to Culbreth Middle School. A participant commented, "We encourage kids to be independent, to use the greenway and the informal trails around the creek, called "Creektown."

One issue is that liability is changed if SVHOA maintains the trails. People are "invited" to use them and the SVHOA Board is responsible, except for those where there's a sign saying, "do not use this path" (that SVHOA maintains). Residents have shown periodic interest in trail maintenance. Eagle Scout projects have been implemented. Bridge was installed by developer, replaced by Eagle Scout. Christ Church has a troupe. Methodist church downtown has one of the oldest troops in the country.

A trail map is not available! "Would love to get one," commented one participant. "Would help accessibility to have a good map of the neighborhood with path, trail,

and park locations, to make it more inviting and walkable. Would love to see more people use the trails. Each of us knows parts of the neighborhood that are fantastic for kids, for us, for all." One participant mentioned an old map he had, showing trails around the neighborhood.

Informal trail improvements for use by children

This open-ended question elicited 55 responses (Figure 14).



Figure 14. Informal path improvements for use by children. *Improve trails* was the primary suggested improvement for child use of non-HOA paths. Suggestions included better drainage, re-grading, and erosion control. Many children use these trails to commute to school, indicating that without periodic maintenance heavy traffic may degrade the pathways over time.

These suggestions were reinforced by independently mobile children using Culbreth-connected paths used by 17% of these children for walking (a few biking) to and from school, at least once a week by more than half (from Fan Branch Trail/Greenway, 77%; from Highgrove Park, 52%), for 30 minutes or more. Many suggestions for improvement we elicited, including adding lighting (several mentions), making less muddy (surface with wood chips?), adding hard surface (for biking), making "less rocky," widening, marking clearly, keeping clear, maintaining bridges, "annual or semiannual trash clean up." Given the number of comments, it is easy to imagine that use would increase if improvements were made.

Trails to Culbreth Middle School.

One child described that when enrolled in Culbreth Middle School he biked to school and dropped his bike with other neighborhood children at Unwin Place Park, then walked the informal trails to school. He estimated 8-10 bikes would be left at Unwin Place Park. After school, some kids walked their bikes up the hill to the edge of the field and biked down through the woods. Would be nice if these paths were maintained, he commented.

The adult focus group mentioned that a large percentage of children get to school through the woods or via the upper end, via the sport fields. Typically, they use the shortest path available. Idea of trespass, direct line to where you go. Two trails identified. Steep area. One connects to sidewalk. Both have bridges. Combination of walking and biking. High schoolers a bit more responsible. Trails also used by people with dogs and for mountain biking. Lots of biking, via the greenway, out of the community. No significant conflict between walkers and bikes. They are out at different times.

A child participant mentioned that children taken to school by car, walked home through Gardner Circle and onto Highgrove Drive, where they peel off onto their respective streets leading to their homes.



Informal trail along Fan Branch Stream

Fan Branch Greenway/Trail & Brookgreen minipark

Fan Branch Greenway/Trail, jointly maintained by HOA, and Brookgreen Minipark received 20% of mentions from survey respondents. The survey asked how often respondents used them, for how long, how they got there, activities engaged in, and suggestions for improvement.

Frequency of use of Fan Branch Greenway/Trail & Brookgreen minipark

Fan Branch Greenway/Trail was used more frequently than Brookgreen minipark, both mainly more than once a week.

Duration of use of Fan Branch Greenway/Trail & Brookgreen minipark Durations were longer for Fan Branch Greenway/Trail than Brookgreen minipark.

Means of travel to Fan Branch Greenway/Trail & Brookgreen minipark

Of 225 mentions, 69% were walk, 22% bike, 4% scooter, and 1% car. Other means included skateboard and run/jog.

Activities related to Fan Branch Greenway/Trail & Brookgreen minipark

Five closed-ended questions were asked (exercise, playing, enjoying nature, spending time together outdoors, social events), plus an open-ended "other" question. Of 434 mentions, exercise (34% mentions), was the most important, followed by enjoying nature (27%), spending time together (22% mentions), and playing (9% mentions). Dog walking was mentioned as an additional use. Minor activities mentioned were social events and using paths to get to and from work and school.

Results suggest that Fan Branch Greenway/Trail serves as an active route (including to work and to school), where users enjoy nature and sharing path experiences with others. Residents recognize that the greenway is used by people from outside of the community. One respondent queried if the exercise equipment on the Greenway was used adequately?



Fallen tree across Fan Branch stream

Brookgreen Minipark

Focus group participants voiced several concerns about Brookgreen Minipark:

- Out in the sun, not inviting.
- Benches are too far apart, add another one?
- May be a gazebo to make a meeting place.
- Hedge prevents seeing in.
- No benches are provided before arriving at Southern Community Park
- Middle School boys play pick-up football nearby.



Minipark off Fan Branch Greenway



Minipark off Fan Branch Greenway

Fan Branch Greenway/Trail & Brookgreen minipark improvements for use by adults

This open-ended question elicited 63 responses (more than for children). The need for comfortable benches and lighting is clearly presented in Figure 15.



Figure 15. Fan Branch Greenway/Trail & Brookgreen minipark improvements for use by adults. *Trash/recycling bins* is the strongest improvement suggested for adult use of paths. *Benches/seating* and *lighting* are also suggested as a means of enhancing pathway use by providing places to rest while proving a feeling of nighttime safety. Notable secondary improvements include *signage/trail markers*, *leash dogs*, and *pet waste stations*. Unleashed dogs affect both adult and child use of pathways. Additionally, lack of benches and way-finding may negatively affect adult use of pathways.

General pathway comments included positive mention of recent SVHOA efforts to improve pathway quality.

Fan Branch Greenway/Trail & Brookgreen minipark improvements for use by children

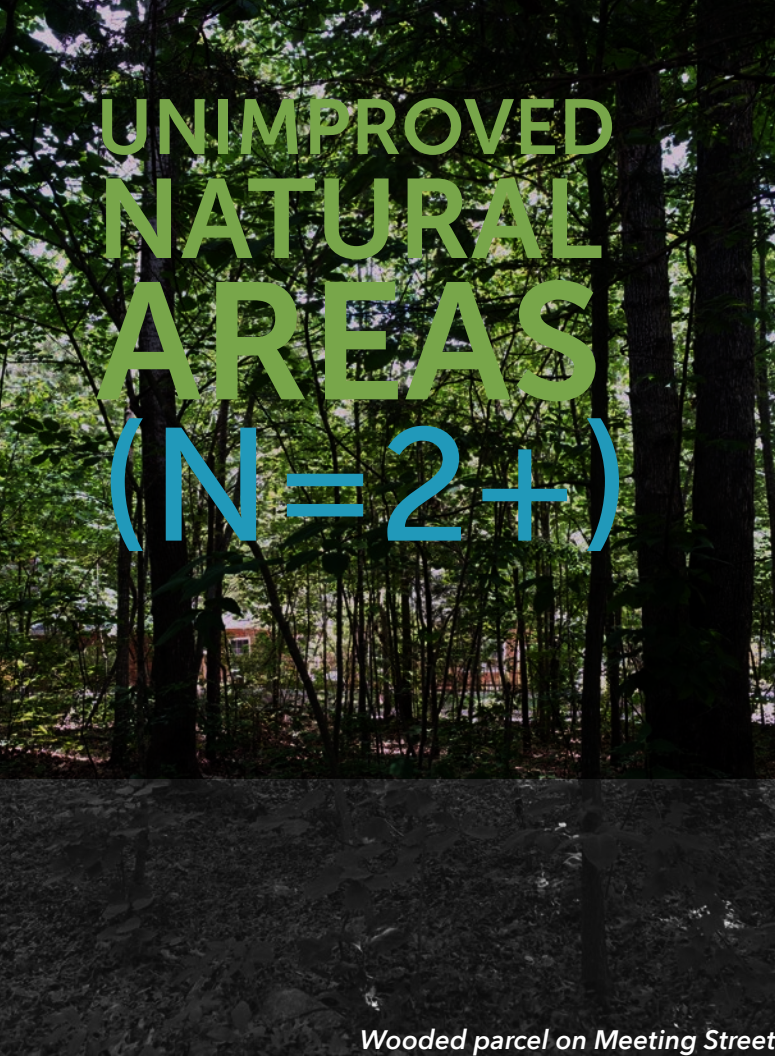
This open-ended question elicited 41 responses (Figure 16).



Figure 16. Fan Branch Greenway/Trail & Brookgreen minipark improvements for use by children. *Lighting* and *leash dogs/pet waste stations* are the most notable suggestions for path improvements for children. Together, unleashed dogs and poor lighting on pathways may well be perceived by parents as safety issues for children. This could present a barrier to developing natural play/nature education.

Branch Greenway/Trail & Brookgreen Minipark was used by 68% of independently mobile children. Of 45 children responding, more than half (54%), used the greenway more than once a week and 85% at least once a month; 56% used the minipark benches at least once a month. Trips on the greenway for 84% of young responders lasted up to 60 minutes duration. Again, nearly all children walked or rode a bicycle, some mentioned walking the dog and “hanging with friends.” Suggestions for improvements netted a couple of suggestions for lighting (“too dark when walking home in the evening”) and installing a drinking fountain.

UNIMPROVED NATURAL AREAS (N=2+)



Wooded parcel on Meeting Street

Unimproved Natural Areas received 14% of mentions from survey respondents. Included were the area between Graylyn Dr, Glenhaven Dr, Brookgreen Dr and Central Park and the area between Culbreth Middle School, Fan Branch Trail/Greenway and Highgrove Park. The survey asked how often respondents used them, for how long, how they got there, activities engaged in, and suggestions for improvement.

Frequency of use of unimproved natural areas

Both named areas were used once a month or more. The Graylyn Drive area was used more frequently.

Duration of use of use of unimproved natural areas

Durations were mainly within the 30 min or less range.

Means of travel to unimproved natural areas Of 120 mentions, 76% were walk, 16% bike, 2% scooter, and 8% other.

Activities related to unimproved natural areas

Five closed-ended questions were asked (exercise, playing, enjoying nature, spending time together outdoors, social events), plus an open-ended "other" question. Of 232 mentions, exercise (28% mentions), was the most important, followed by enjoying nature (27%), spending time together (18% mentions), and playing (16% mentions). Dog walking was mentioned as an additional use along with walking to school and nature-related activities.

Results suggest that unimproved informal pathways serve as active places where users enjoy nature and sharing path experiences with others.

The focus group recognized that the woodlands were not actively managed and wondered if they were underused. Are they considered to be passive spaces with informal trails, used during the day? Use by Southern Village Tennis Club Summer Camp for taking walks in the woods was noted.

One focus group participant asked if the woodland between Highgrove Pond and Fan Branch Greenway/Trail could be made more accessible for children, so the woods may be used more actively. Commenting as a parent, another participant said, "This is a great natural area. My kids enjoyed exploring there when they were younger, helped to develop their autonomy."

Unimproved natural area improvements for use by adults

This open-ended question elicited 26 responses (Figure 17).



Figure 17. Unimproved natural area suggested improvements for use by adults. *Manage natural areas and improve trails* are the most prominent improvements suggested for adult use. *Manage natural areas* included enhancements such as poison-ivy removal, tree pruning, and management of water quality. *Preserve nature and leash dogs* are notable secondary suggestions, perhaps indicating that some residents believe that this area should be valued as natural habitat.

General comments on unimproved natural areas included strong statements regarding the natural values of these spaces.



Approach to wooded parcel off alley

Unimproved natural area improvements for use by children

This open-ended question elicited 26 responses (same as for adults) (Figure 18).



Figure 18. Unimproved natural area suggested improvements for use by children. *Improve trails and manage natural areas* were the most notable improvements suggested for use by children. *Manage natural areas* included enhancements such as poison-ivy removal, tree pruning, and management of water quality. *Bike access* is a notable secondary improvement, suggesting that mountain/bike riding are popular activities for Southern Village children.

Unimproved Natural Areas were used by 60% (n=40) of responding independently mobile children. For these, the most popular area lay between Culbreth Middle School, the Greenway, and Highgrove Park, used at least once a week by 43% of the 60% of independently mobile children and by 74% at least once a month, presumably to go back and forth to school. Children also spent longer times there. Quite popular also is the area between Graylyn Drive, Glenhaven Drive, Brookgreen Drive and Central Park, with 66% of the 60% independently mobile children using it at least once a month. Again, visits were made almost exclusively by foot or bicycle. A small number of comments for improvement mentioned “more trails” and “real mountain bike trails.”

A young focus group participant mentioned his middle school brother who plays in the woods by the creek behind his house south of Glenhaven Drive. Another participant said she uses the green space on the corner of Aberdeen Dr and Graylyn near the creek to play with her sister.



Boundary wall to wooded parcel



Gravestone in wooded parcel cemetery

OPEN SPACES NOT OWNED BY SVHOA



Open spaces not owned by SVHOA were mentioned by 183 (73%) of respondents. Spaces included Market Street Green, Scroggs Elementary School playground, Southern Village Apartments playground, and Southern Community Park. Of these, Southern Village Apartments Playground had the lowest use.

Frequency of use of open spaces not owned by SVHOA

Southern Community Park and Market Street Green were the more frequently used spaces. Independently mobile children mentioned going to The Green and Market Street to meet with friends or with family for trips to the movie theater, pizza restaurant, Tumble Gym, Al's burger restaurant, Subway, and the Weaver Market Street. One child thinks The Green should be renamed "Movie Star Park" because of the stage.

Duration of use of open spaces not owned by SVHOA

Length of stays for Southern Community Park and Market Street Green generally were longer than SVHOA open spaces. For Scroggs Elementary School Playground use was in the 30-60 min. range. Independently mobile children mentioned visiting Southern Community Park with family members and using Scroggs playground with friends.

Means of travel to open spaces not owned by SVHOA

Of 284 mentions, 54% were walk, 23% bike, 18% car, 4% scooter, and 1% skateboard.

Activities related to open spaces not owned by SVHOA

Five closed-ended questions were asked (exercise, playing, enjoying nature, spending time together outdoors, social events), plus an open-ended "other" question. Of 507 mentions, exercise (26% mentions), was the most important, followed by spending time together (21% mentions), playing (18% mentions), enjoying nature (15%), and social events (13%). Respondents also mentioned thirty-five other activities (Figure 19).



Figure 19. While exercise is the most popular use identified, the use of these areas seems to be a diverse mix that includes time outdoors with family, enjoying nature, playing, and social events. The social events category includes a number of "other" uses, such as entertainment, concerts, movies, and art shows.

Open spaces not owned by SVHOA improvements for use by adults

This open-ended question elicited 37 responses (Figure 20).



General comments about spaces not owned by SVHOA
 included strong statements regarding the natural values
 of these spaces.
 Southern Community park, soccer league all day.

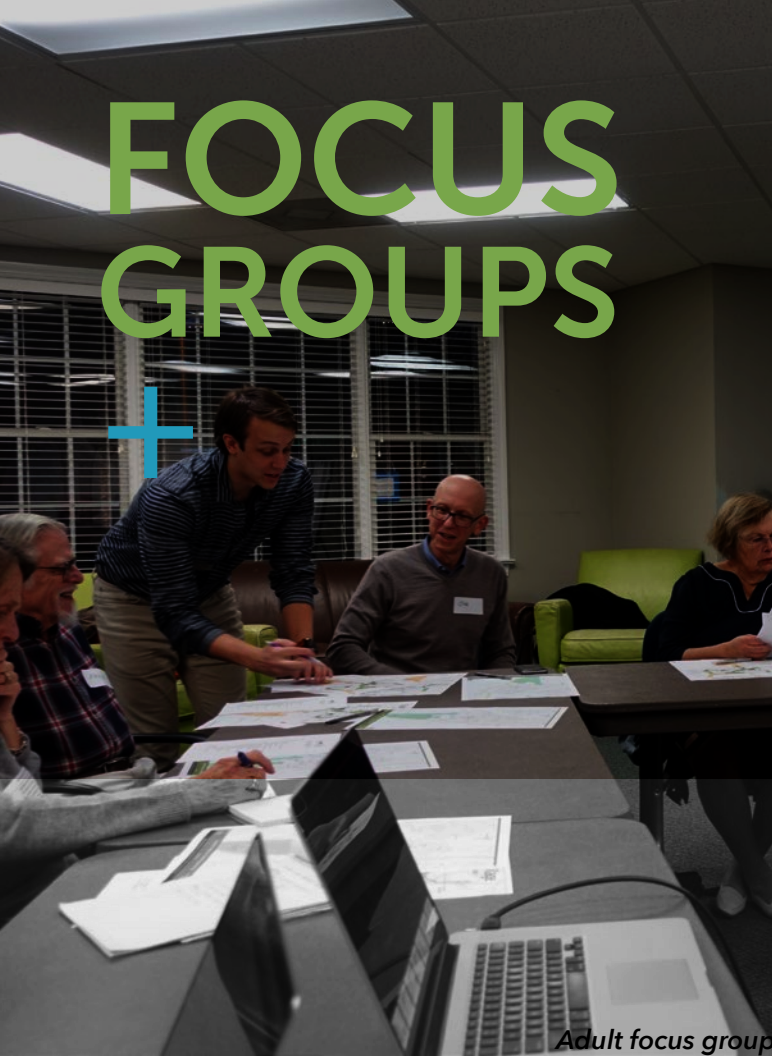
**Open spaces not owned by SVHOA improvements for
 use by children**
 This open-ended question elicited 43 responses
 (Figure 21).



**Figure 21. Open spaces not owned by SVHOA improvements
 for use by children.** Soccer fields, leash dogs, lighting, and
 improve grass are the major improvements suggested for use
 by children. Soccer fields includes night access to fields, better
 field maintenance, and improved soccer equipment. Lighting
 was largely related to extended outdoor play on sports fields.
 Leash dogs is a recurring issue throughout Southern Village,
 but in this area, it was a dominant concern – likely because
 there is a dog park nearby.



FOCUS GROUPS



Adult focus group

Following a draft analysis of the Household Survey, focus groups were held in Southern Village for adults and youth, mid-December 2019. A plot of participant home locations indicated good geographic spread across SV (Figure 22).

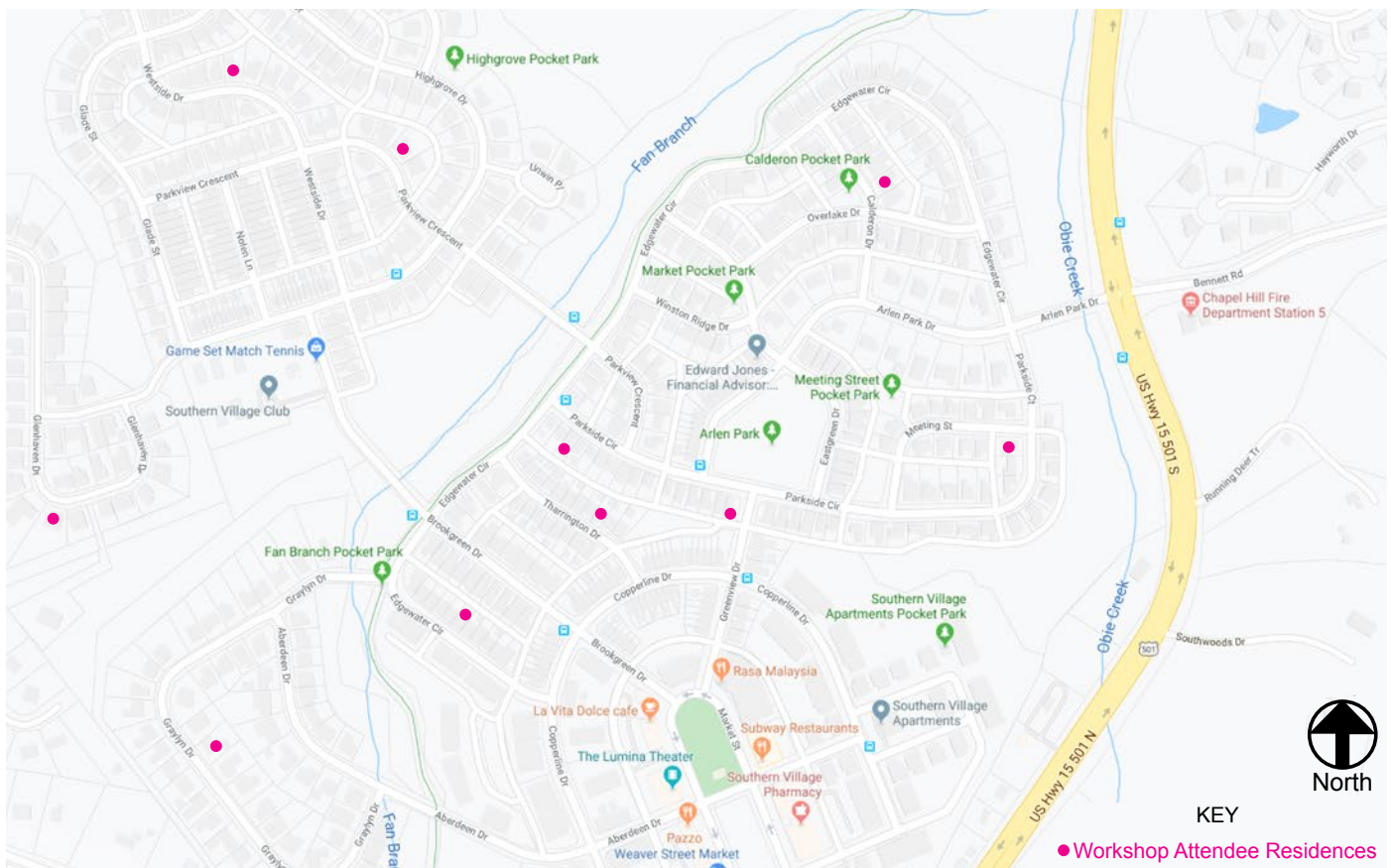


Figure 22. Workshop Attendee Residences.

Adult Focus groups

Two adult focus groups were held late afternoon and early evening, with a total of 12 participants ranging from long-term residents now retired to recently arrived (from DC and the West Coast). Reasons for living in Southern Village included walkability ("sidewalks that take you somewhere"), multigenerational mix, mix of residential types and walkable commercial center.

At the beginning of each session, a standard, written agenda was reviewed and a short introduction on behalf of the SVHOA was made by Board President, Susana Dancy. A short summary of the household survey results was presented to frame the discussion, facilitated by NLI's Robin Moore around each open space type. A running record of the discussion was entered by NLI's Dr. Nilda Cosco. Place-specific comments and ideas have been integrated into the narrative, including several concerning fields, grass, and the landscape maintenance company.

Following the meeting, one of the participants spoke with a group of residents over age 60 to seek additional ideas. Suggestions included:

- Low impact fitness zones alongside kids' play areas;
- Low impact outdoor exercise class;
- Meditation park with labyrinth and benches, including reading;
- Tables for outdoor crafts, picnics, and games (chess, checkers and puzzles), with competitions to attract participants;
- Horseshoe pits, pickleball, etc., with seating for spectators;

Youth Focus group

Two young residents (girl aged 9 and boy aged 14), participated in the youth focus group led by NLI staff, Brandon Dupree and Bria Sledge. After introductions and discussing the focus group purpose, the children talked about their families, schools and remembered experiences of living in throughout the Southern Village community. Home locations were recorded along with favorite places traveled to - and how - independent from adults, as well as places used with families. Activities were discussed. Their drawings suggested improvements to outdoor spaces and new amenities that could benefit the Southern Village community as a whole. The session ended with final thoughts and a beautiful narwhal drawing. Place specific comments and ideas have been integrated into the narrative.



Youth focus group with NLI facilitator



Adult focus group

SOUTHERN VILLAGE RESIDENTS WILLING TO VOLUNTEER

FORTY PERCENT OF 164 RESPONDENTS

(adults and children) expressed willingness to participate in an evening focus group meeting. Almost a third (32%), expressed a willingness to volunteer on Management Plan implementation. Taken together, these positive responses indicate a substantial level of interest in SV open space and its management. Contact information was passed to SVHOA Officers.

