



# Memorial Park

## 2018 MASTER PLAN

Athens-Clarke County Leisure Services Department  
Office of Park Planning



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Memorial Park is one of the flagship parks of Athens. The 72-acre park is nestled in the heart of five points. Many generations have enjoyed the amenities that Memorial Park has to offer, creating cherished memories in the process.

The park offers a wide variety of amenities that draw not only the citizens of Athens-Clarke County, but also those of neighboring communities. Hikers and walkers can enjoy the beauty of the Birchmore Trail. The paved walk around the lake offers a casual stroll with opportunities to feed the

local ducks and watch turtles sun themselves on logs. The zoo provides a haven for rehabilitated non-releasable native animals, while providing opportunities to educate the public about these creatures. Recreational amenities like picnic shelters, a swimming pool, community building, and basketball courts attract people of all ages and abilities to enjoy the park. The park is also home to Athens Creative Theater (A.C.T.). Here, community members can learn the art of the theater and participate in a variety of shows year-round.

## INTRODUCTION

Many recreation and educational programs take place in the park throughout the year. From the hundreds of children that attend summer camp to the almost 2,000 “Deck the Hollow” participants, Memorial Park is a programming center for the community. These programs rely on the park to have adequate working infrastructure to support them. This master plan provides the first step to ensuring the long-term longevity of this community treasure.



# PARK HISTORY



Fairhaven Tuberculosis Sanatorium -1925

The rich history of Memorial Park began in 1925 with the construction of Fairhaven Hospital. This building now serves as the recreation hall for the park. In 1946, Memorial Park was dedicated and opened to the public. The Deer Game Reserve Project was dedicated in 1955, forming the foundation for Bear Hollow Zoo. The park has flourished over the years, and received incremental maintenance in order to keep the park safe and functional for the public.



Fred Birchmore - 1947

1925

The publicly funded tuberculosis sanatorium, Fairhaven Hospital, is built.

1946

Memorial Park is dedicated and opens to the public with a day camp for children.

1955

Deer Game Reserve Project, which is the foundation for Bear Hollow Zoo, is dedicated.

1958

Teen Canteen is dedicated.

1987

Grand opening of Bear Hollow Wildlife Trail.

2000

Grand opening of the Birchmore trail.

2001

Dog Park is developed.





One of several stormwater infrastructure blow outs.



The lower courses of the retaining wall at Memorial Lake have failed and parts of the lake is green with algae.



Improperly built stone retaining walls are crumbling throughout the park.



Heavy erosion in the dog park has created structural failures along the fenceline.

# EXISTING CONDITIONS

Over the past 70 years, time, topography, and stormwater have caught up with the park. That, along with the immense popularity of the park, has left it in a state of being “loved to death.” A sense of urgency is imperative for the short and long-term viability of Memorial Park.



# EXISTING CONDITIONS



The historic front of Fairview Hospital has been converted into basketball courts and the fencing creates unappealing views and pedestrian barriers.



Lack of stormwater management has undermined pavement.

Memorial Park is long past due for renovation.

Aside from not meeting code, the stormwater system throughout the park has failed, resulting in widespread erosion issues. The lake has silted in with sediment and needs to be dredged, and the functional features of the dam need replacement. All of the recreation amenities are dated, and some, such as the playground have exceeded their life expectancy. The zoo has reached capacity for rescue animals, and the lack of appropriate sewer and water access has created significant issues for the long-term management of the facility. While the zoo meets all state and regulatory standards, it fails to meet higher professional standards. Additionally, the perimeter fence as well as all exhibits are in need of replacement. The dog park is well used, but the steep slope paired with the deep shade have limited the ability to properly correct the erosion issues.



# VISIONING

The time has come for Memorial Park to have a vision for the future. Staff reached out the public to take part in the creation of this vision, and a multi-stage vision process ensued. Both online, and in person, citizens responded to questions such as; “What does Memorial Park mean to you?” “What do you like and dislike about Memorial Park?” “What activities and amenities would you like to see in the park in 10 years?”

*“...In a lot of ways Memorial Park is an example of the best of what Athens is...”*

*“...Beautiful, peaceful greenspace where I feel nature and beauty are respected. Athens should consider this area a treasure and a point of pride...”*



A “dotmocracy” exercise with maps of the existing park allowed citizens to identify areas they wanted to keep, fix, or remove. This provided park planners with valuable information on the issues and opportunities facing Memorial Park and informed the development of conceptual vision maps for the future of the park.

#### Core Issues from Public Comment:

- Limited parking
- Limited access to different park elements
- Small size and condition of the pool
- Lack of restrooms in the zoo
- Outdated and inadequate facilities and infrastructure
- Dog park erosion issues

Once staff received information from the initial visioning process, they developed three conceptual vision maps for the park. Each had variations on the focus of major park elements. Citizens responded to each of the three concepts and ranked the various park amenity configurations shown in each map.

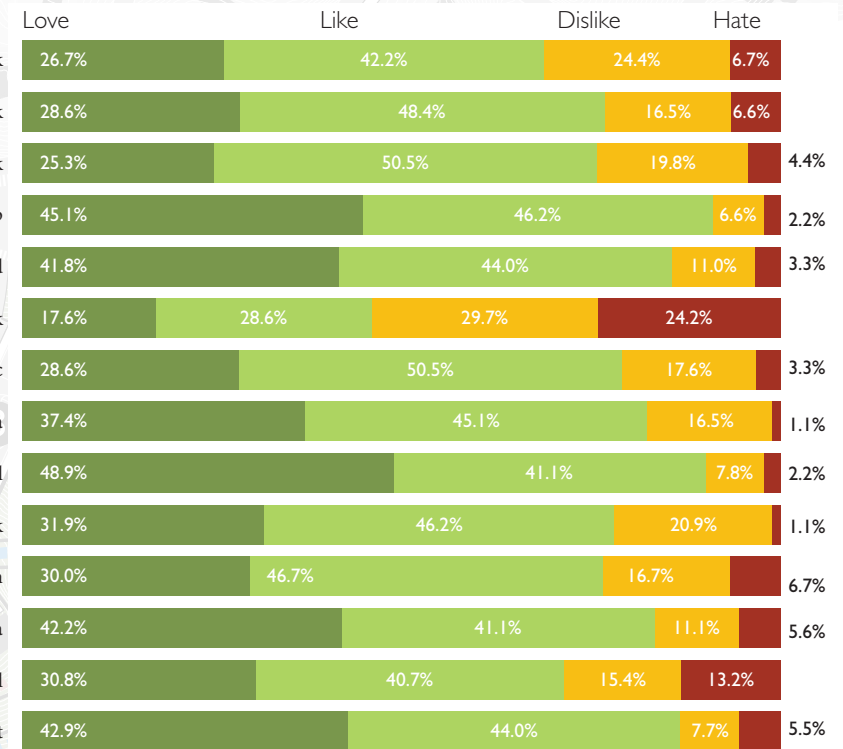


Combined results from “dotmocracy” exercise.



The identification of the top elements of each plan helped further plan development into a unified vision. This “dream vision” process allowed staff to develop the master plan based on the preferences of citizens.

1. Relocate A.C.T Outside Memorial Park
2. Ramp to Underground Parking Deck
3. Basketball Courts on Top of Parking Deck
4. Paved Walking Loop
5. Playground
6. Artificial Turf Dog Park
7. Two-way Drive with Cul-de-sac
8. Improved and Expanded Lakeside Plaza
9. Woodland Garden Trail
10. Overlook
11. Outdoor Classroom
12. Bear Hollow Entrance Plaza
13. Relocated and Improved Swimming Pool
14. Greenway Along Sewer Easement



Sample of results from public input survey.



This master plan establishes the path for improvements to the park’s infrastructure and amenities. Parking, vehicular circulation, and pedestrian circulation will be resolved through various means; degrading infrastructure will be replaced; and popular amenities throughout the park will be renovated or replaced. Athens Creative Theater will remain at Memorial Park until a new location is found.



## PLAN OVERVIEW

- 1 Quinn Hall would become rentable space for public / private events and also function as additional programming space for summer camp or zoo events and Athens Creative Theater would be moved to their own facility within the county.
- 2 A 150-200-car parking garage would be built with the entrance on the side of the structure. The entrance drive would be realigned for safety. A parking study will need to be conducted to guide development of the parking deck.
- 3 A drop-off area is within close proximity to the swimming pool, zoo entrance, event lawn, and recreation hall and be accessed through the parking deck.
- 4 The pool will be expanded and improved in its current location. The deck will be expanded and the pool will accommodate 8 lanes that are 25 meters long.
- 5 Bear Hollow will be slightly expanded and completely renovated. This includes an entrance plaza with a greeting area, a gift shop, restrooms, educational space, and a new reptile house. The new layout provides an interpretive trail for visitors that is separate from zookeeper-access trails for all animal enclosures. Exhibits in Bear Hollow would be completely renovated. All utilities within the zoo would be upgraded and expanded.
- 6 The one-way drive down to the lake retains the current circulation pattern, while increasing the number of parking spaces. This area would see additional sidewalks, formalized parking areas, and pavement resurfacing.
- 7 A kids adventure trail will have several different “play nodes” with interpretive and interactive play elements.
- 8 The improved playground would remain in the same place and would double in size. Additional play elements will surround the playground.
- 9 The shoreline of Memorial Lake would be redesigned and regraded to encourage a wide variety of native lakeside vegetation. A natural shoreline creates more habitat for wildlife, which increases biodiversity for a healthy ecosystem. The Memorial Park Watershed Management Plan outlines various improvements including forebay restoration, pond dredging, outlet control, and spillway reconstruction. Meandering paths through the lakeside plantings give other ways for visitors to experience the lake.
- 10 An outdoor amphitheater provides a space for outdoor performances but could also be used for summer camp programs or rented out for events.
- 11 The dog park would stay in its current location, but would be terraced to reduce erosion. Additionally, the new dog park adjacent to it would allow for seasonal rotation to reduce the long term impact.
- 12 This parking lot will have 8 spaces that could be used for zoo staff and double as a trailhead for the Birchmore Trail.
- 13 The greenway is planned to run through Memorial Park as part of the 2016 Greenway Network Plan. This version follows along the existing sewer easement which is currently occupied by the Birchmore Trail. Sections of the trail would be realigned to allow for the greenway to pass through while minimizing the disturbance to the trail system as a whole.
- 14 The existing area for parallel parking along Gran Ellen Drive will be formalized to allow for 3 spaces.
- 15 An interpretive wetland would be created in the old Birchmore swimming hole. This would be viewable from a boardwalk with interpretive signage.
- 16 Various points along Birchmore Trail will have stormwater mitigation improvements.



# MEMORIAL PARK VISION CONCEPT PLAN

293 Gran Ellen Drive  
January 2018

North 0 100 200 feet

Prepared by  
ACC Leisure Services  
Office of Park Planning



for Athens  
Clarke County  
Leisure Services





## PLAN VIEW #1 - PARK HUB AND BIRCHMORE IMPROVEMENTS

- ❶ Quinn Hall would become rentable space for public / private events and also function as addition programming space for summer camp or zoo events and Athens Creative Theater (A.C.T.) would be moved to their own facility within the county. Operations for A.C.T. would remain at Memorial Park until a suitable location has been found.
- ❷ This area is for existing and future monuments, but will be designed so that emergency vehicles have access to the front of Memorial Hall.
- ❸ Basketball courts would be located on top of the parking deck and would be surrounded by a chain link fence to reduce likelihood of a ball bouncing over the edge.
- ❹ A pavilion will be built with elevator and a lawn on top of parking deck.
- ❺ A multi-purpose paved area could be used for pavement games such as four square, wall ball, hopscotch, shuffle board, etc. The surface could be painted concrete or rubber surfacing material.
- ❻ This is a pick-up/dropoff area accessible from the deck. This area acts as a hub for the pool, zoo, event lawn, and recreation hall.
- ❼ The pool building will be completely renovated as part of the zoo entrance improvements. These renovations include an admissions booth, improved bathrooms, and changing rooms.
- ❽ The pool is expanded in its current location to accomodate water aerobics, swim lessons, eight 25-meter swim lanes, and an expanded deck.
- ❾ Bear Hollow will be expanded and improved upon. See Plan View #4 for more information.
- ❿ The improved zoo amphitheater will be expanded to include additional seating.
- ⓫ The event lawn creates a multi-use space that could host park programs; be rented out for small events or gatherings; or provide a play space for summer camp.
- ⓬ A new plaza will complement the architecture of the historic sanitarium.
- ⓭ This parking lot has 8 spaces that could be used for zoo staff and double as a trailhead for the Birchmore Trail. The dumpster would also be enclosed in this area.
- ⓮ Birchmore Trail would be improved with some realignments, stormwater mitigation, and interpretive elements.
- ⓯ A stormwater wetland would be created for general stormwater improvements.
- ⓰ The greenway is planned to run through Memorial Park as part of the 2016 Greenway Network Plan. This version follows along the existing sewer easement which is currently occupied by the Birchmore Trail. Sections of the trail would be realigned to allow for the greenway to pass through, while minimizing the disturbance to the trail system as a whole.



# MEMORIAL PARK VISION CONCEPT PLAN

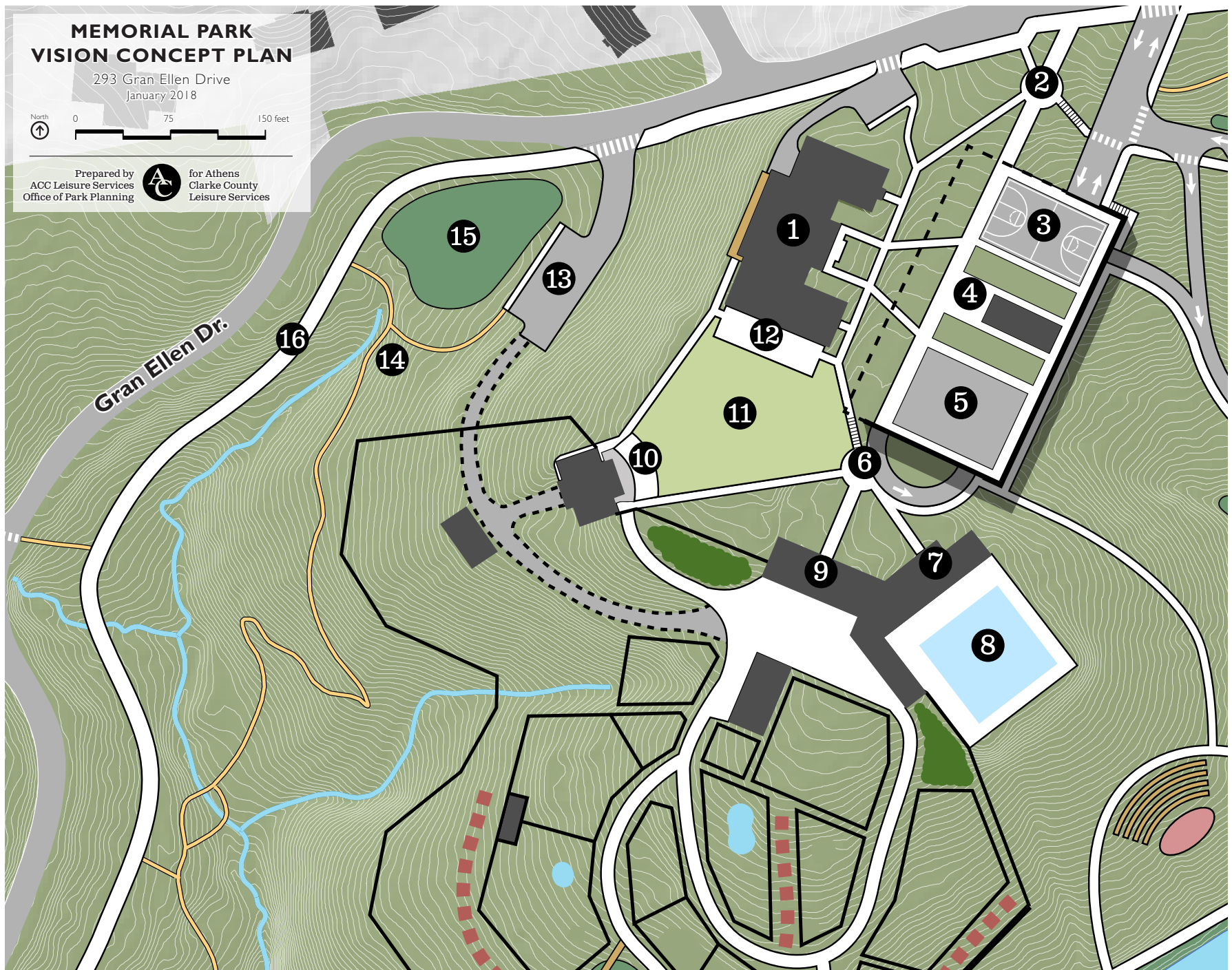
293 Gran Ellen Drive  
January 2018



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## PLANVIEW #2 -VEHICULAR CIRCULATION AND PLAY AREAS

- 1 The intersection of the park drive and Gran Ellen Drive will be improved.
- 2 A pull off will be built along Gran Ellen Drive as a bus dropoff and could act as a potential Athens Transit Bus line in the future.
- 3 The greenway is planned to run through Memorial Park as part of the 2016 Greenway Network Plan. This portion follows Gran Ellen Drive with a roadside greenway trail. For alignment outside of the park, please reference the Greenway Network Plan.
- 4 The proposed vehicular circulation for the main entrance to Memorial Park will be similar to the current circulation. It begins with a two-way road that leads directly into the top level of the parking deck. Alternatively, users could turn left into the one-way loop with parking.
- 5 This is a pick-up/dropoff area accessible from the deck. This area acts as a hub for the pool, zoo, event lawn, and recreation hall.
- 6 This is a one-way exit from the parking deck on the lowest level and links into the one-way drive.
- 7 Parallel parking spaces for 5 cars or 2 buses.
- 8 Improved angled parking lot with 31 spaces.
- 9 The existing pavilion will be removed, and a swale will be constructed to accomodate stormwater drainage. This area can also be used as an open lawn for passive play, and will better facilitate pedestrian circulation.
- 10 New location of rentable picnic shelter designed with consideration of stormwater flow.
- 11 Any needed improvements will be made to existing picnic shelter.
- 12 The improved playground would remain in the same place and would double in size. This area would also be surrounded with a variety of play elements.
- 13 The restrooms will be improved and stairs will be added to link the existing pavilion to the restrooms. This connection also provides a sidewalk loop that can act as a trike track or for parents to walk while watching their children.
- 14 A kids adventure trail will have several different “play nodes” with interpretive and interactive play elements. Possibilities include balance beams, interactive musical instruments, and a hillside play area where you get back down to the playground via a slide or stairs.
- 15 Swales along the park drive will help mitigate stormwater erosion during heavy rain events.
- 16 The existing parking lot will be formalized and the shelter will be rennovated to address stormwater issues.
- 17 Parallel parking spaces for 8 cars or 4 buses.



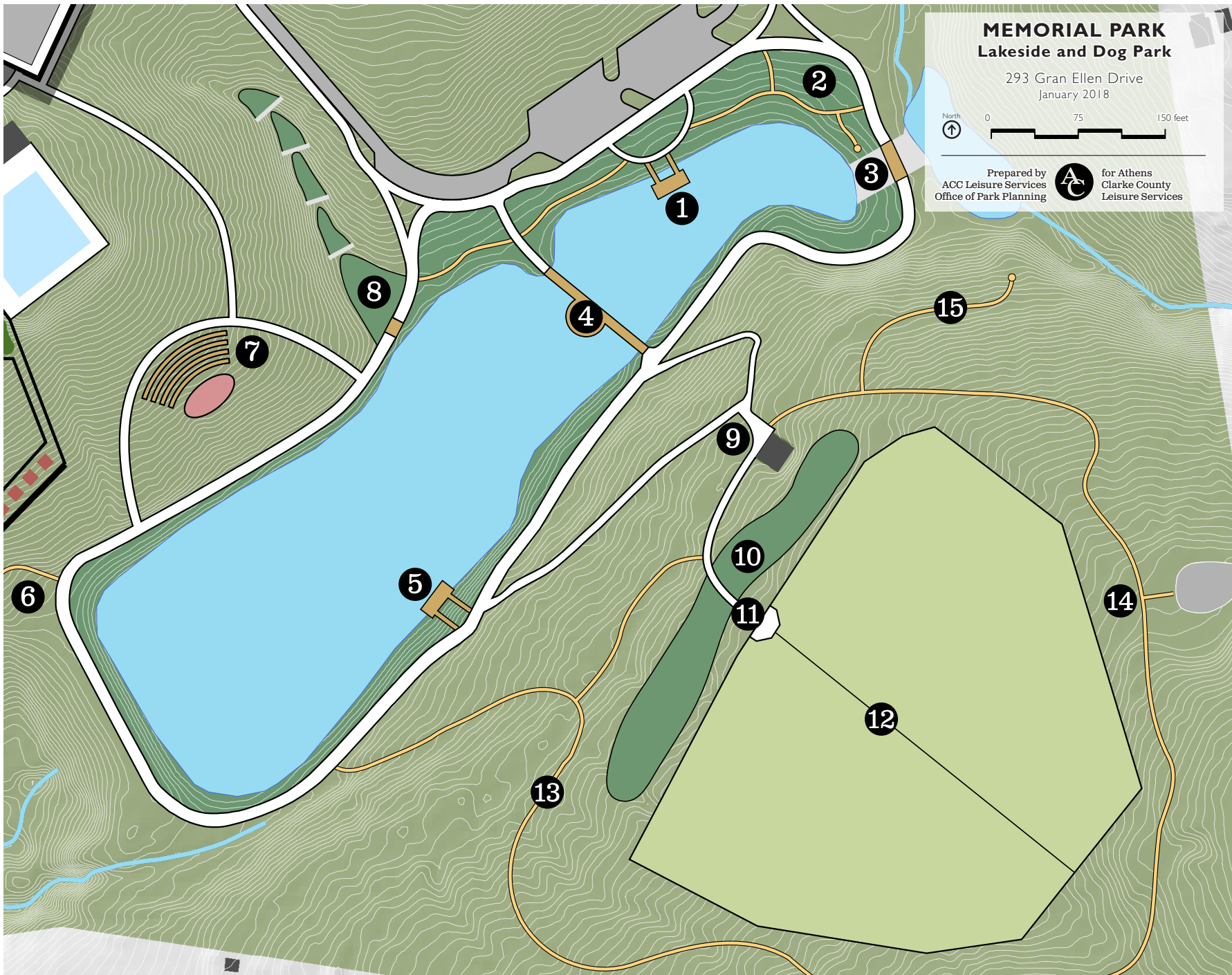




## PLAN VIEW #3 - LAKESIDE AND DOG PARK IMPROVEMENTS

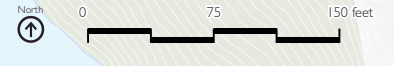
- 1 Observation deck with a bench.
- 2 Natural paths along the shoreline allow for educational opportunities of the native plantings in this area.
- 3 Forebay will allow for increased stormwater mitigation and feature a waterfall with stepped pools. In a study prepared by Toole Engineers, they found that the forebay was undersized and needed to be redesigned to accommodate a larger storm event.
- 4 An event dock on the lake provides a scenic overlook and accommodates small groups.
- 5 Existing observation deck.
- 6 Birchmore Trail addition will link the lakeside experience to the natural Birchmore corridor.
- 7 An outdoor amphitheater provides a space for outdoor performances but could also be used for summer camp programs or rented out for events.
- 8 A stepped bioswale leads down the ravine from the new parking deck and falls into a wetland. Additionally, stormwater will be piped from stormwater inlets along the one-way drive.
- 9 Improvements will be made to the concrete paving and will address sedimentation and erosion issues around the existing bathrooms. Additionally, any necessary bathroom improvements will be made.
- 10 A bioswale built on the downslope of the dog park creates a filtration system between the dog park and Memorial Lake.
- 11 Airlocks with rotating dog parks allow for seamless installation of new dog park without closure of existing dog park.
- 12 The dog park would stay in its current location, but would be terraced to reduce erosion. Additionally, the new dog park adjacent to it would allow for seasonal rotation to reduce the long term impact.
- 13 Currently, a social trail from Woodland Hills exists in this area. This trail would be realigned to mitigate erosion, cut out invasives, and provide a walking experience for dogs and their owners. The foot trail around the dog park would host native plants and act as a space to walk dogs that may need a break from the dog park environment. Trails expose dogs to natural sounds and smells and help stimulate them mentally.
- 14 The entrance from Woodland Hills, which contributes to erosion in the area, will be formalized and realigned to be more sustainable in the long run.
- 15 A viewing area with benches could be located off the main trail.





**MEMORIAL PARK  
Lakeside and Dog Park**

293 Gran Ellen Drive  
January 2018



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ACC Leisure Services  
Office of Park Planning



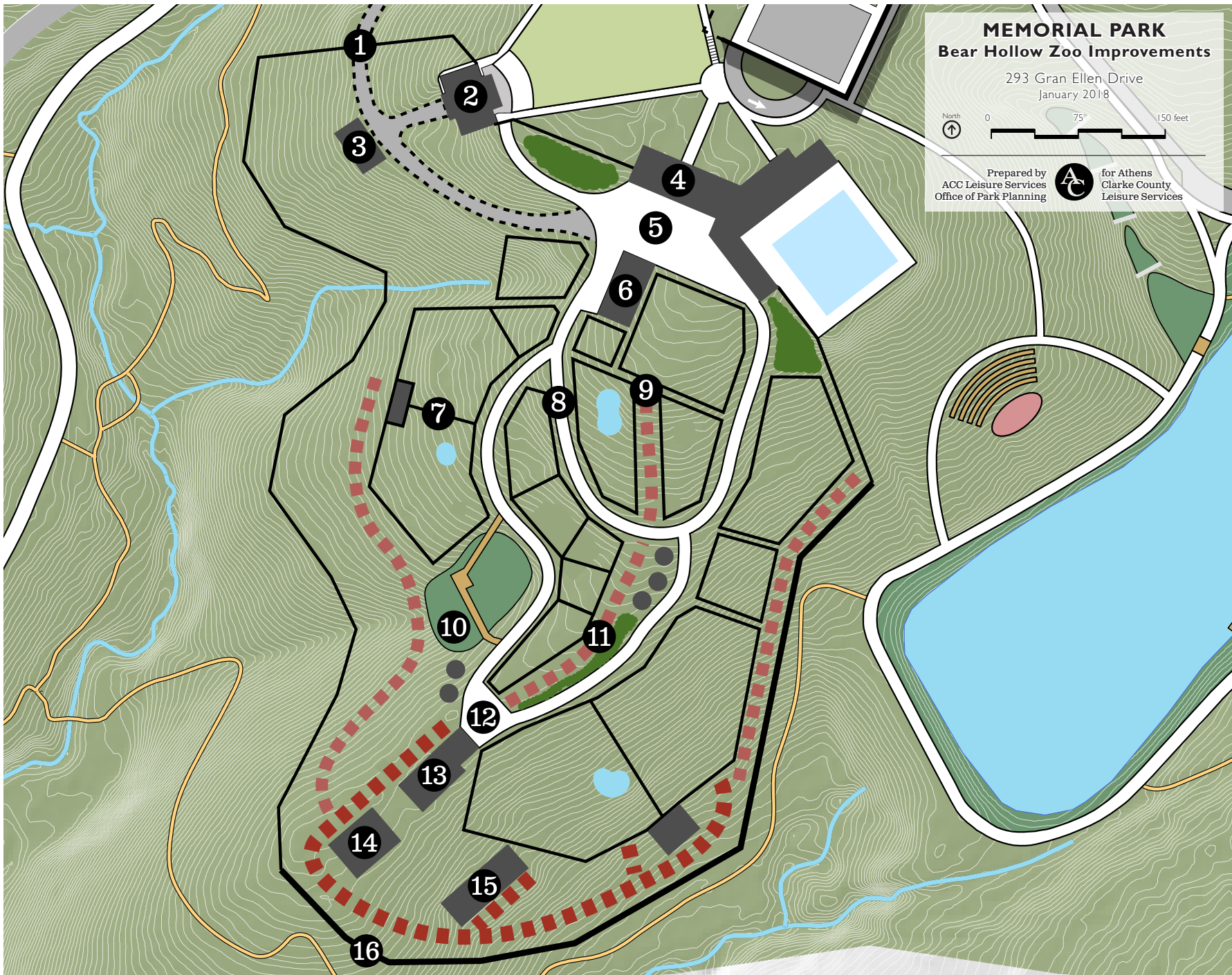
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Leisure Services



## PLAN VIEW #4 - BEAR HOLLOW ZOO IMPROVEMENTS

- ❶ Maintenance / Emergency vehicle gated access.
- ❷ The Zoo Operations building would be renovated once the animal food and nutrition prep kitchen is moved into a new building within the zoo.
- ❸ Holding area for small animals (birds, reptiles, and small mammals) used for educational purposes.
- ❹ The zoo gatehouse will have a greeting area, an office, restrooms, a gift shop, and a rentable classroom.
- ❺ Main entrance plaza with seating and educational opportunities.
- ❻ Reptile house will be completely rebuilt.
- ❼ Paddocks with the opportunity to rotate grazing animals to reduce overgrazing issues.
- ❽ ADA accessible pedestrian path for visitors.
- ❾ Zoo keeper / emergency ATV access.
- ❿ Wetland garden exhibit. This would have educational opportunities and would reference revegetated lakeside improvements.
- ⓫ Zoo keeper access with vegetative screening.
- ⓬ Small gathering plaza adjacent to restrooms with seating and educational opportunities.
- ⓭ The current barn will be renovated to include animal food and nutrition prep kitchen, public restrooms, and storage.
- ⓮ Storage shed for zoo equipment, vehicles, or holiday decorations.
- ⓯ Quarantine buildings for animal care.
- ⓰ The zoo's perimeter fence at this point will provide screening of work area from Birchmore Trail.





**MEMORIAL PARK**  
**Bear Hollow Zoo Improvements**  
293 Gran Ellen Drive  
January 2018

North  
0 75 150 feet

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ACC Leisure Services  
Office of Park Planning

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Clarke County  
Leisure Services



# MOVING FORWARD

*“You’ve got to think about big things while you’re doing small things so that all the small things go in the right direction.” Alvin Toffler*

This master plan sets the tone for the future of Memorial Park. Implementing all of the elements of this vision will take time and careful consideration for phasing. The next step for Memorial Park should be the development of an implementation plan that provides guidance for the responsible rehabilitation of the park. Stormwater will be the first issue in need of resolution. Staff are already working to remedy the issues with the lake and forebay. New stormwater infrastructure leading to those features are critical to protecting natural resources and preventing further degradation of the park and its natural features. Water, sewer and electrical infrastructure are in desperate need of upgrade. A plan needs to inform these renovations so they will be located appropriately.

Upon completion of the rebuilding of Memorial Park’s infrastructure foundation, it will be time to move to the amenities for the park. This master plan document will guide those developments, and provide a plan to phase them appropriately. A citizen put it best when they said that Memorial Park is a treasure to Athens. It is time to ensure the longevity of that treasure for generations to come.

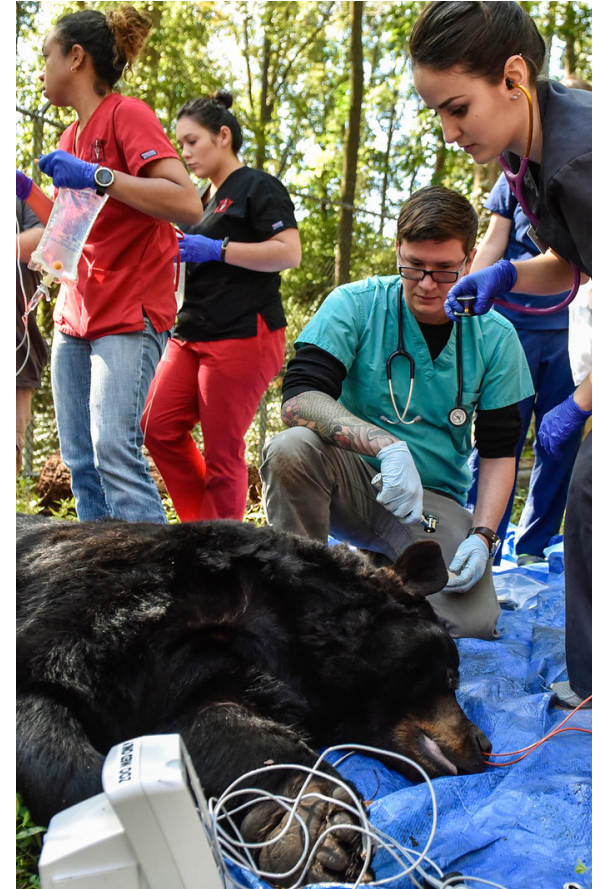


# GET INVOLVED



*Show your support for the future of Memorial Park by joining our mailing list. Share the vision with your neighbors and friends. We need your help to make this vision a reality.*

*Join the Memorial Park Master Plan listserv for updates and more information as this project moves forward.*



## **Volunteer Opportunities**

Are you interested in helping the park now? There are opportunities available to volunteer with the park and the zoo. Visit <http://athensclarkecounty.com/volunteer> for more information.