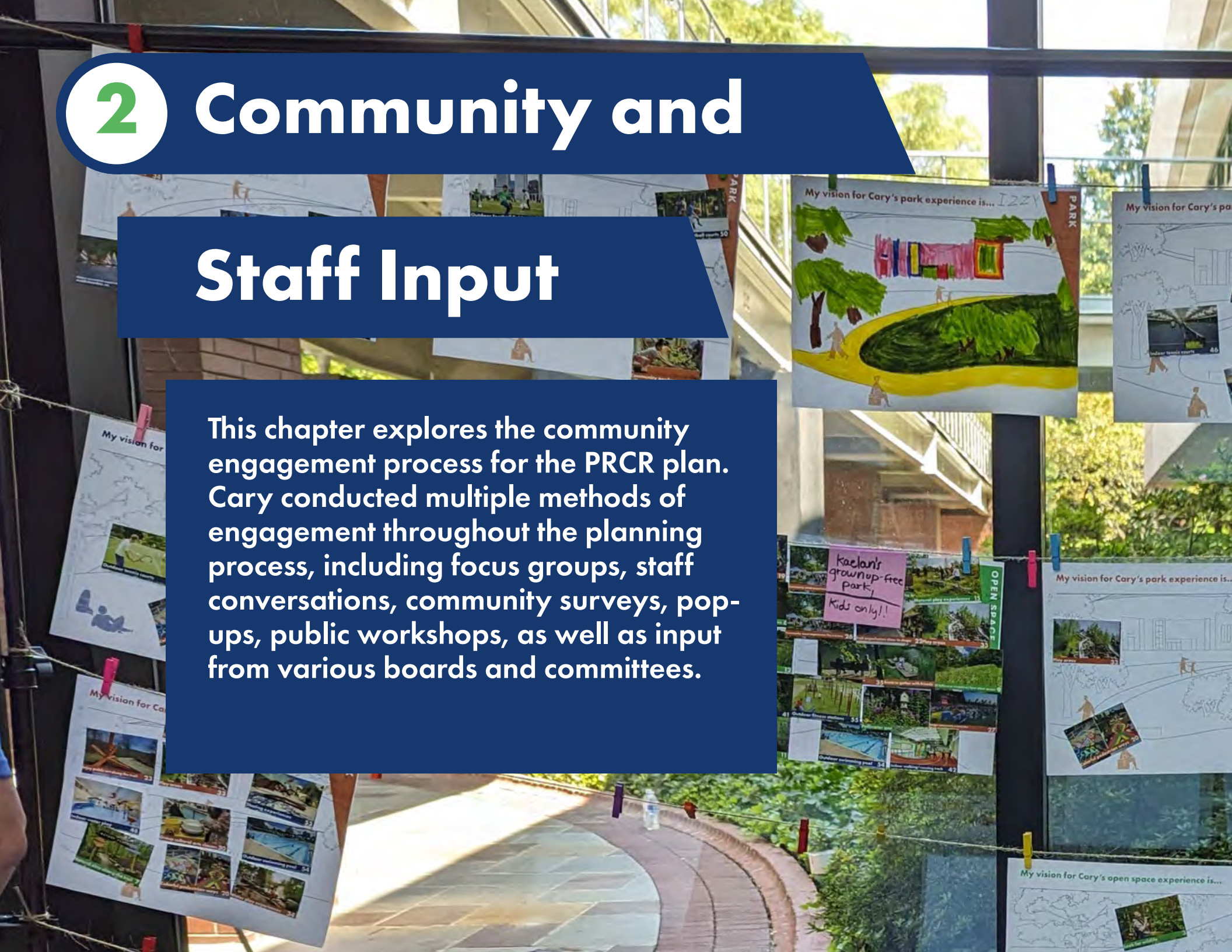


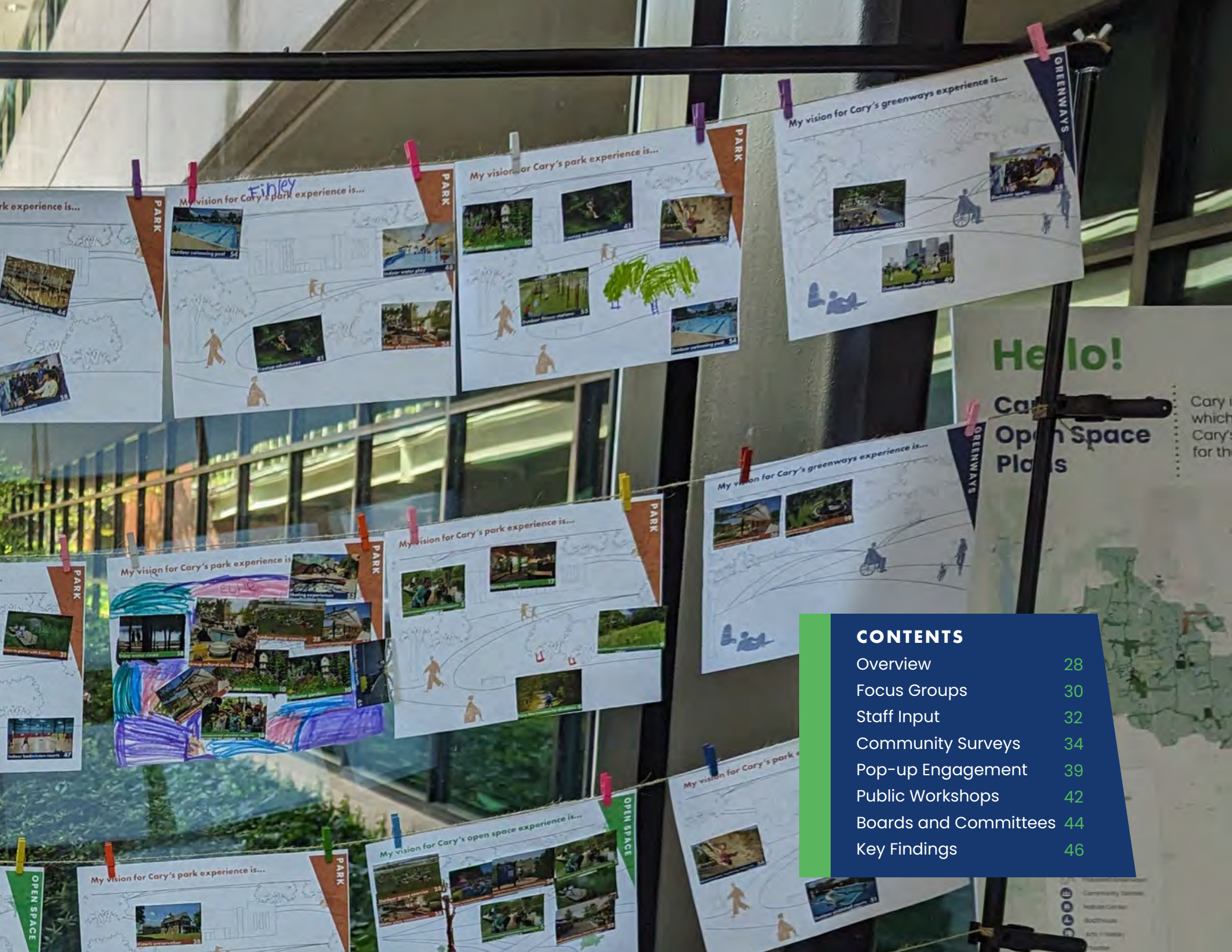
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Community and

Staff Input

This chapter explores the community engagement process for the PRCR plan. Cary conducted multiple methods of engagement throughout the planning process, including focus groups, staff conversations, community surveys, pop-ups, public workshops, as well as input from various boards and committees.





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Hello!

Cary's
Open Space
Plans

Cary is
which
Cary's
for the

- Community Groups
- Arts Center
- Boards
- Arts Institute
- Arts

Overview

The planning process for the PRCR plan consisted of three major engagement milestones.

In the first milestone, the goal was to both inform Cary residents of the PRCR planning process and receive feedback that would guide an understanding of needs. During this phase, the planning team conducted stakeholder focus groups, a community survey, and pop-up engagement.

The second milestone involved sharing draft goals with community members through pop-up engagement, a series of public workshops, and an online input form with identical questions to the in-person engagement to better understand community priorities. This feedback would ultimately guide the development of strategies and action items.

In the final milestone, the planning team sought feedback from the community on implementation priorities to inform the recommended action plan.

A variety of tactics were used throughout the community engagement process to hear from a broad range of participants. This included random and online convenience surveys and in-person engagement, such as pop-ups at Spring

3

Public Workshops

1,344

Survey Responses

100

Focus Group Participants

470

Pop-up Participants

Daze and Lazy Daze arts and crafts festivals, public workshops at community centers, and stakeholder and staff focus groups. Engagement from parallel planning processes such as Count Me In, Cary!, the Open Space Plan, Bike Cary, and community center engagement also informed the plan and contributed to the overall process.



● Engagement at Cary Lazy Daze

● Parallel Engagement Processes

This planning process benefited from related ongoing processes happening in Cary. Ongoing engagement for Count Me In, Cary!, the Open Space Plan, Bike Cary, the Greenway Safety Campaign, and potential community center projects added additional insights about community perspectives on facilities and open space. Input shed light on community priorities for parks, sustainability, facilities, and recreation programming in Cary.



● Community feedback from community centers engagement

Focus Groups

Throughout the engagement process, Cary held 12 stakeholder focus groups.

Overall, feedback from these groups highlighted the community's deep appreciation of Cary's parks and greenways and the wide variety of programming options available. These focus groups included about 140 participants and covered the following topics:

- Teen Council
- History and Culture
- Older Adults
- Cultural Arts
- Community Recreation
- Outdoor Facilities
- Venues
- Sports and Recreation
- Greenways
- Inclusive Recreation



● Image at top: Older adults focus group.

● Image at bottom: Sports and recreation focus group.

Focus Group Takeaways

#1 Enhance Communication

Expand marketing and outreach efforts to increase awareness of Cary's programs, facilities, and events to community members. Increase the use of social media and regular email updates to listservs.

#2 Improve Equity and Access

Improve access for underserved communities and those with language barriers, including a more streamlined sign-up process for programs and improved transportation access.

#3 Improve Accessibility

Increase greater ADA accessibility in cultural arts facilities and for amenities throughout all Cary facilities, such as bathrooms and parking.



#4 Upkeep Maintenance

Prioritize the upkeep of all facilities, especially the maintenance of older facilities and infrastructure.



#5 Make Programs More Inclusive

Prioritize creating programming for all ages, including teens and older adults. Expand programming options that are more inclusive of diverse cultures.

#6 Keep Up with Growth

Expand programs and facilities to keep up with increased demand as Cary's population grows. Specific amenities highlighted as general community needs or with increased demand included aquatics, camps, and daycare.

Staff Input

Cary staff contributed significantly to the development of the PRCR plan.

Staff had multiple opportunities to provide input on the plan, whether it was through staff focus groups or regular meetings with Cary leadership. Overall, feedback highlighted Cary staff members' dedication to the park system. Many staff who participated worked for Cary for more than 10 years, which not only shows dedication on the part of staff, but also reflects how this strengthened institutional knowledge is clearly recognized by community members who continue to participate in the system.

During the action plan process, a series of five focus groups were conducted with Cary staff to brainstorm implementation strategies. Staff were encouraged to consider current and future needs over the next 10-20 years through an approach that would identify:

- Projects that the plan should incorporate
- New programs or initiatives that Cary should take on
- Potential partners or collaborators that could help Cary achieve its goals



● Image at top: Staff focus group conversation

● Image at bottom: Staff workshop mapping activity

Staff Input Takeaways

#1 Improve Communication and Staff Engagement

Facilitate better internal communication between staff and different departments.

#2 Ensure Appropriate Resources

Ensure that the department has the staff and resources that they need by focusing on more recruitment efforts to recruit more full-time staff, expanding marketing, and enhancing support for staff.

#3 Build Knowledge

Increase environmental and cultural stewardship among staff, including promoting sustainable practices and knowledge about strategic planning.

#4 Enhance Technology Support

Advance software capacity and technology enhancement across the system.

#5 Upkeep Existing Facilities

Continue to reinvest in and evolve Cary's existing facilities as the community grows.

#6 Stay at the Top of the Arc

Prioritize infrastructure improvements and maintain what Cary has, creating new financial models.

#7 Learn from Similar Communities

Learn from communities that are already experiencing similar growth trends to better understand strategies on how to grow smarter.

#8 Evolve During a Time of Transition

Develop consistent procedures for parks and facilities to support a more consistent user experience.

Community Surveys

The primary objective for the community surveys was to gather data that would inform recreation and cultural programming and the management, operation, and development of parks, open space, and greenway assets in Cary for years to come.

Two surveys with different sampling strategies were employed - a random survey and a convenience survey. While the random survey was sent out to a list of randomly selected households and ensured that survey responses were representative of the Cary population, the convenience survey allowed any member of the public to access and take the survey online. The surveys sought to collect data on a variety of relevant measures, including:

- Demographics such as gender, age, and income

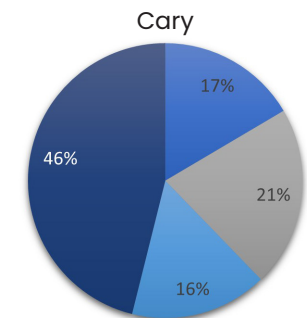
- Preferred methods of outreach and information sharing
- Usage of existing sites and spaces
- Barriers to the use of parks and recreation resources
- Importance of facilities and programs in the community
- Satisfaction with parks and recreation resources
- Opinions regarding funding and desired budget priorities
- Agreement or disagreement to statements regarding recreational and cultural programming, as well as parks, open space, and greenway assets
- Special topics, including preferences regarding public art and desired travel times to park spaces

For the random sample survey, to yield findings that were generalizable to the entire community of Cary's 176,987 residents¹ with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, a sample size of 383 responses was targeted. To achieve this, a list of 7,000 Cary residential households was randomly selected and a recruitment postcard was sent to those households, inviting them to take the survey. Out of those 7,000 households, the random survey achieved responses far above the target, with 554 responses.

Overall demographics from random sample survey respondents highlighted a slightly higher percentage of respondents who identified as male, with 63% of

respondents who were 36–65 years old, 57% of respondents who earned between \$75,001–\$150,000, and 78% who identified as white.² More detailed breakdowns of the survey demographic profiles are highlighted in the following figures.

Many of these demographics of survey respondents are aligned with Cary's overall demographics, where 62% of the population is between the ages of 18 and 65, and about half of the population identifies as male.¹ While the survey did not reflect Cary's existing racial demographics as accurately, where the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) population since 2021 has grown to 42%,¹ the planning team worked to incorporate additional methods of engagement to bridge this gap, including through public workshops, stakeholder focus groups, and pop-ups held throughout the planning process.

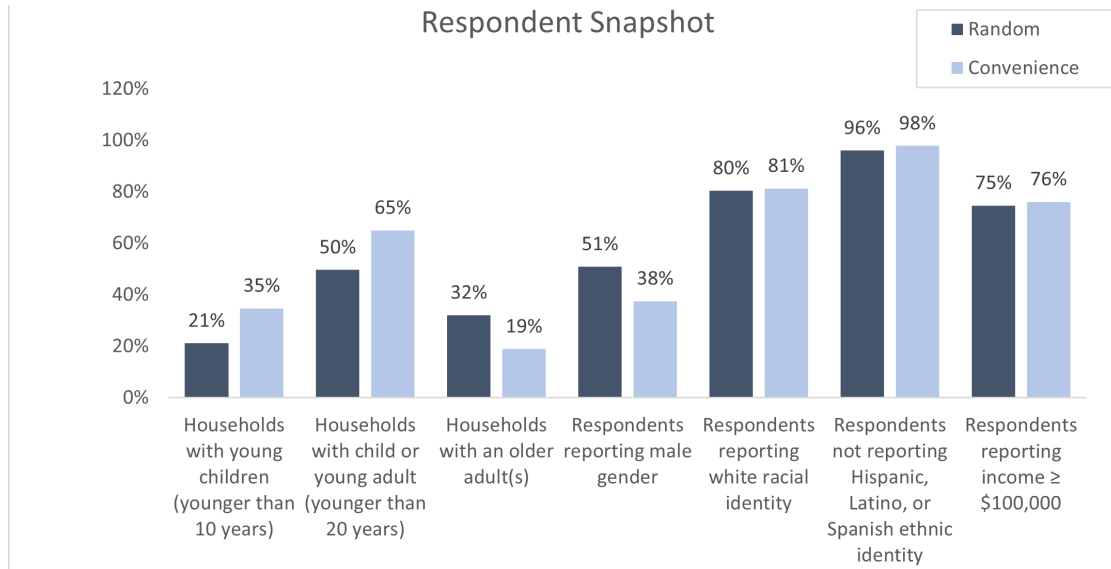


- Western Cary (west of Highway 55)
- Southern Cary (south of Highway 64)
- Downtown/Maynard Loop
- Central Cary (all other areas not listed above)

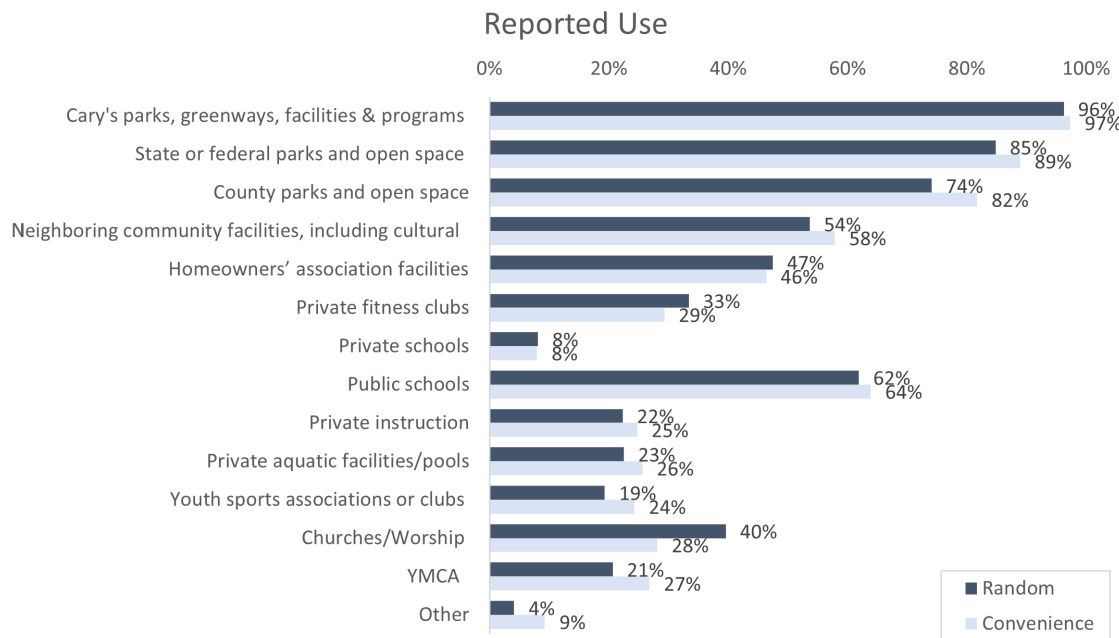
¹Population of Cary at the time the survey was conducted. Source: 2021 American Community Survey, U.S. Census.

²Cary PRCR Random Survey, 2023

● Respondents' demographic snapshot, random sample and convenience survey



● Reported parks, recreation facilities, open space, and trails use, random sample and convenience survey



● Image at right: Joggers on the Reedy Creek Trail

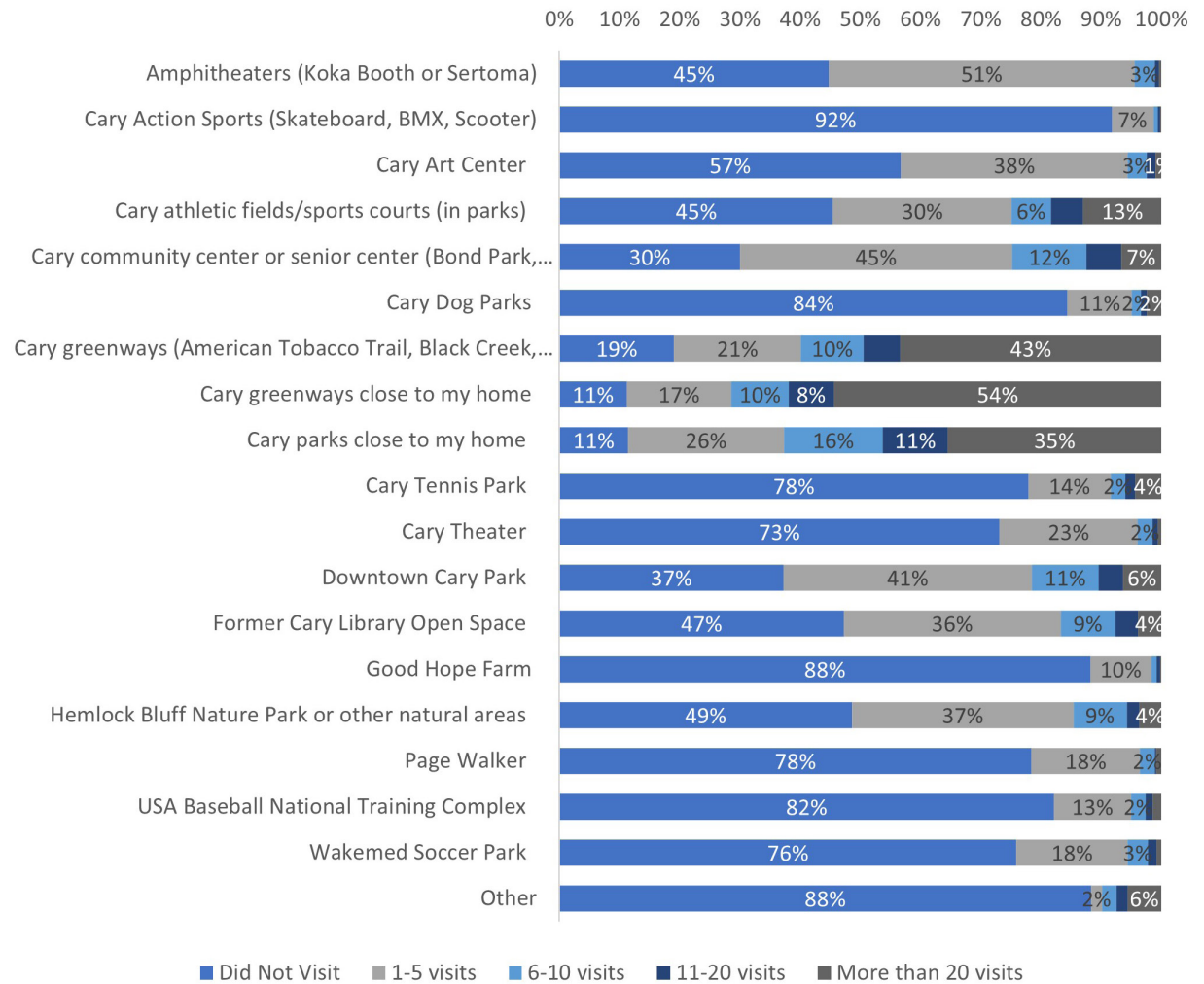
Key Findings

In terms of the use of parks and greenways, more than 95% of survey respondents indicated they used a Cary park, greenway, or facility in the past year, and more than 80% of respondents used a Cary park close to their home, a Cary greenway close to their home, and other Cary greenways at least once in the past year.¹

Respondents to the random survey shared the Cary website as the number one way they learn about Cary Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources services and programs. Responses from the convenience survey were largely consistent, except in the case of social media. A much greater percentage of the convenience sample expressed a preference for social media as a communication mechanism. These responses reinforce the need for additional marketing support to further the use of these mechanisms for sharing information and communicating with the public.

The most frequently used facilities among the random sample respondents were greenways and parks close to respondents' homes, with 89% of respondents reporting at least one visit to these facilities in the past year, as shown in the figure to the right.

Frequency of Use



¹Cary PRCR Random Survey, 2023

● **Reported frequency of site use in prior year, random sample and convenience survey**

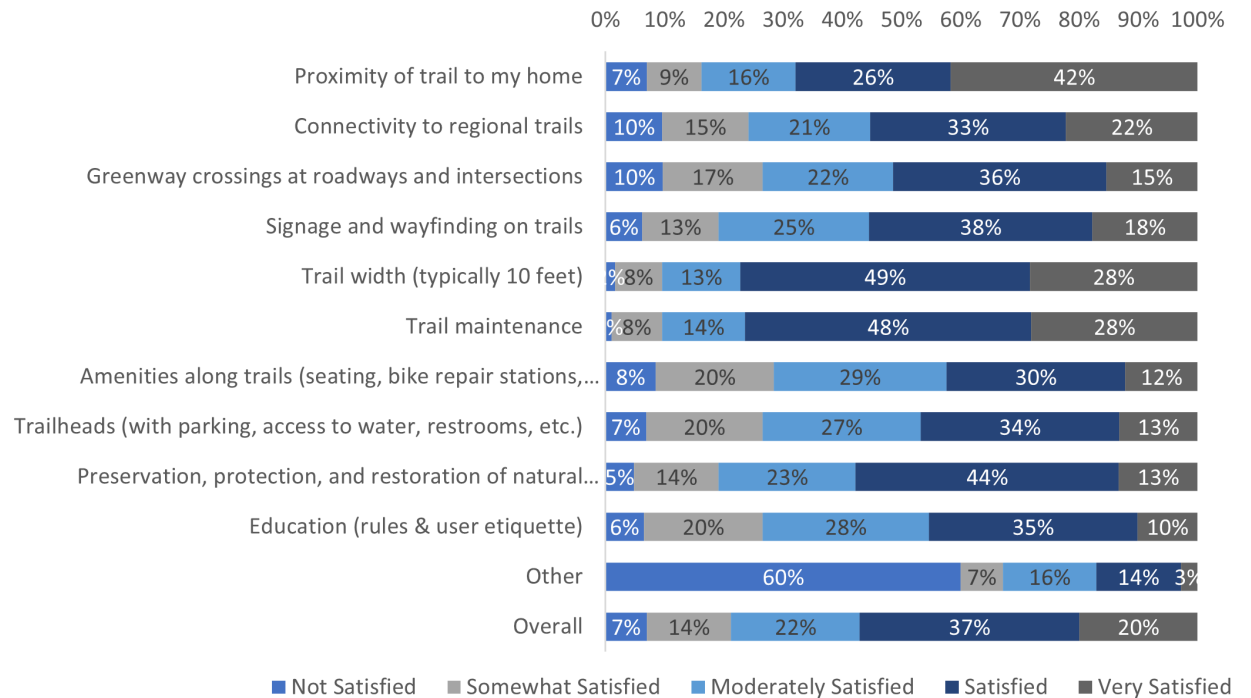
Regarding the importance of current facilities, programs, greenway destinations, and natural areas, respondents chose “Cary greenways closest to my home,” “Cary parks close to my home,” and “Cary greenways (American Tobacco Trail, Black Creek, White Oak)” as the top three most important facilities. As for indoor facilities, the top three most important facilities included nature centers and environmental instruction, a track for walking and running, and program space for older adults.

Satisfaction regarding Cary greenways and trails was also evaluated based on several characteristics. Respondents indicated the top three areas they were satisfied with included trail width, trail maintenance, and trail proximity. These three factors were also the highest rated among the convenience sample. Of note, open-ended “Other” responses to this question varied dramatically, although two repeating themes included the need for safer navigability of trails (e.g., bridges, speed or rules enforcement) and addressing responsibility of dog owners (i.e., the presence of dog waste).

When presented with a list of potential barriers that prevent Cary residents from using parks and recreation services, the top three barriers to use included lack of awareness of offerings, lack of a park, recreation facility, or trail within a 10-minute walk, or lack of time. While some of these barriers are not unique to Cary’s park system and are harder to tackle, some of them, such as expanding awareness of PRCR offerings, can be addressed through initiatives like increased marketing.

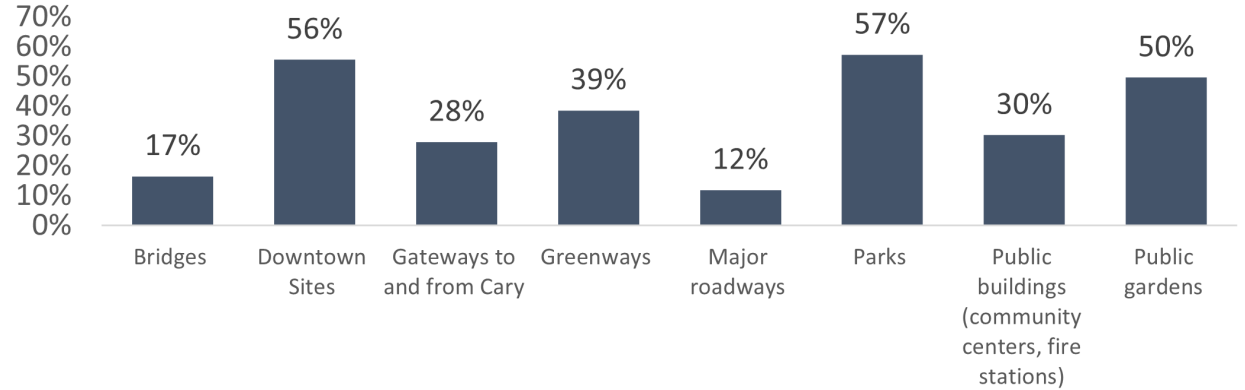
When asked about what destinations are most important to access by greenway, survey respondents indicated parks, downtown Cary, and shopping centers that include grocery stores, restaurants, and retail as the top three destinations. When asked about the most important aspects of natural areas and open space, survey respondents chose stream and creek conservation; preservation, protection, and restoration of natural areas; and wildlife habitat and migration corridors.

Satisfaction with Trails and Greenways

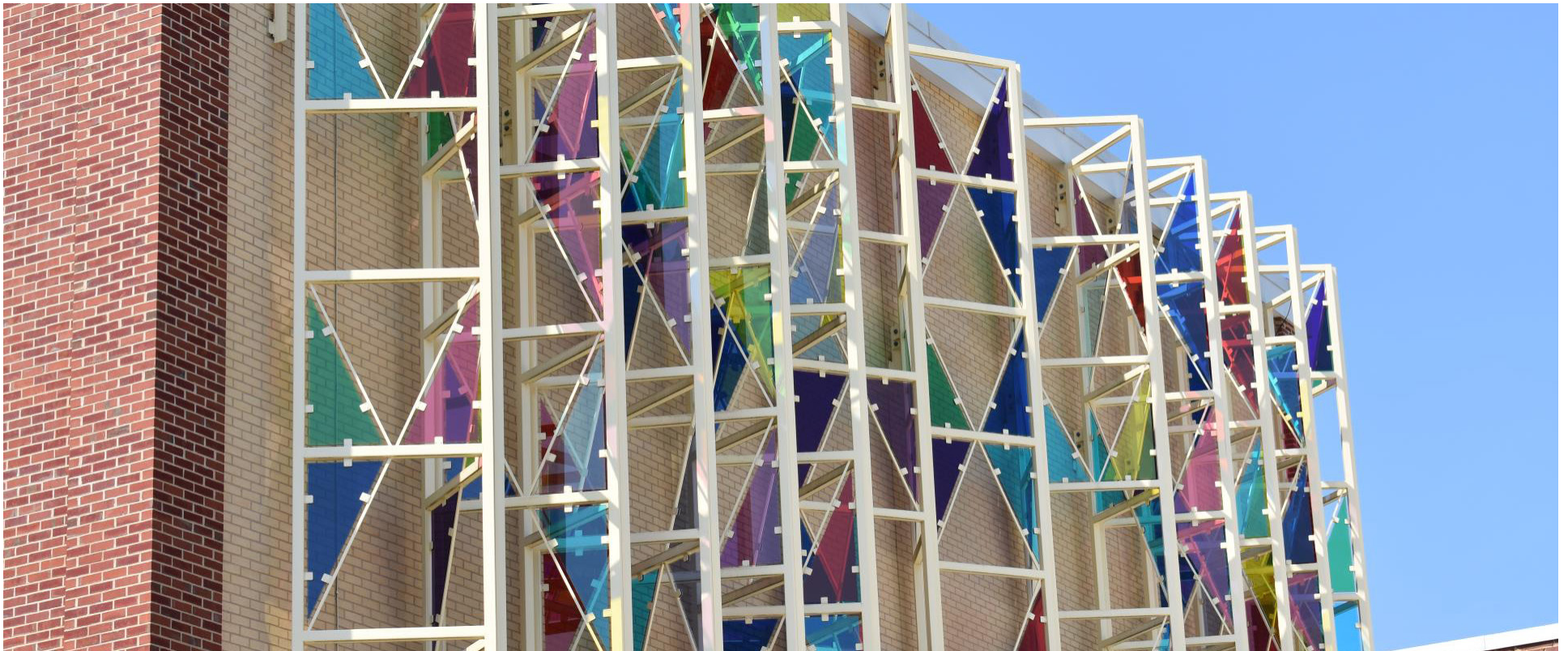


● Trail and greenway satisfaction ratings, random sample and convenience survey

Regarding the importance of certain programs, special events, and festivals, the top three responses included events such as Lazy Daze; environmental and nature programs; and inclusion programs for people with disabilities. Survey respondents were also asked about special topics of interest, including preferences regarding public art and reported willingness to travel to park spaces. Top responses to the question, “Where would you like to discover public art?” included parks, downtown sites, and public gardens.



● Preferred public art locations, random sample and convenience survey



Pop-up Engagement

Cary held pop-up engagement at the 2023 Spring Daze and Lazy Daze arts and craft festivals as a key part of in-person engagement.

These events were a great opportunity to engage with residents and receive feedback on the plan. Thousands of Cary residents attended the events, which allowed the planning team to engage with hundreds of community members.

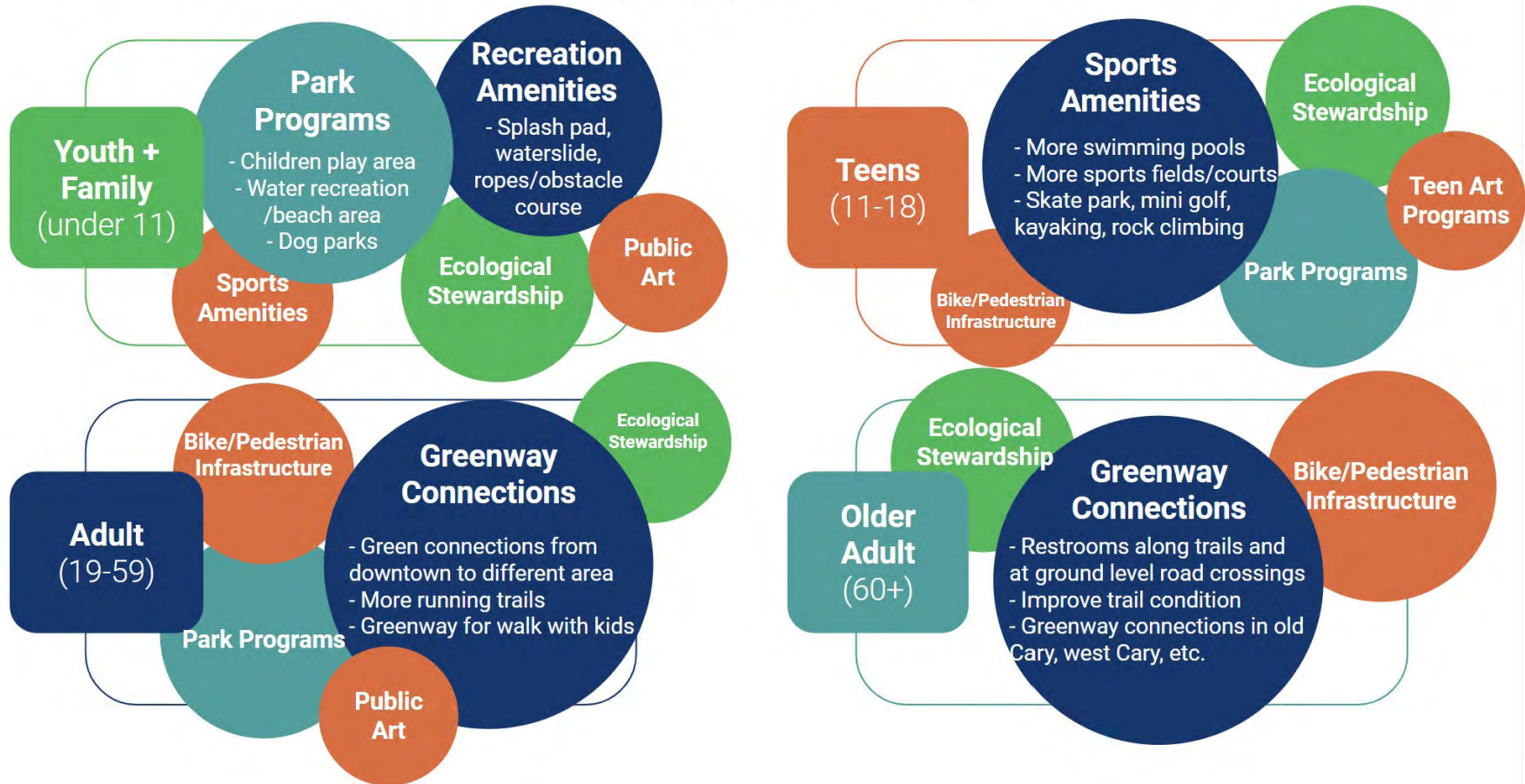
At Spring Daze, Cary received 290+ comments on the plan from more than 350 participants, and at Lazy Daze, over 120 participants shared over 300 responses on the draft goals. Participants at Lazy Daze created collages with images of experiences and activities that resonated with them for the future of Cary's parks, open spaces, and greenway experiences, which resulted in more than 70 collages.



● Image at left: Public art at Cary Art Center

● Engagement activities at Cary Spring Daze and Lazy Daze

What needs do different age groups have?



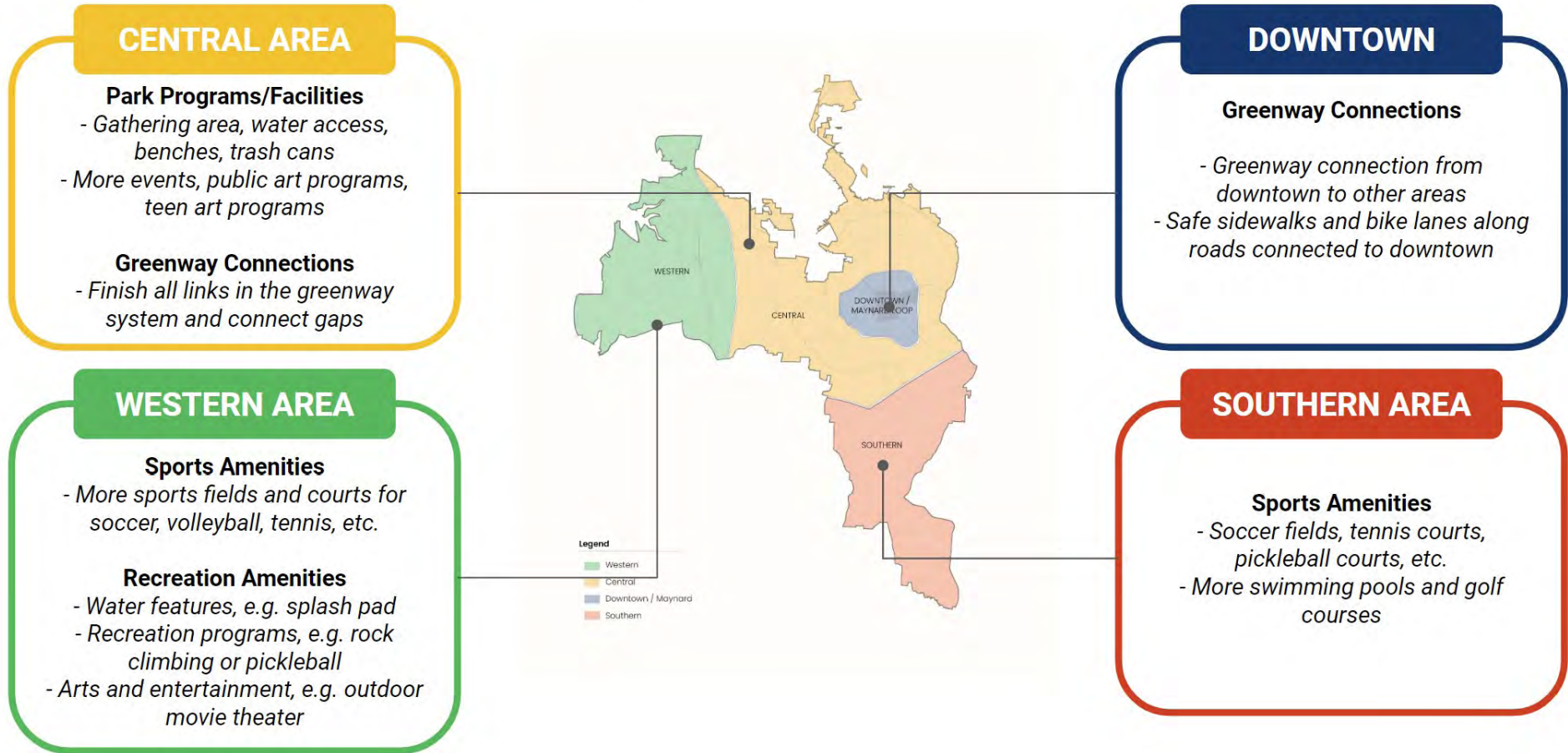
● Spring Daze pop-up engagement results: needs by age group

A key focus of Spring Daze engagement was understanding the different needs of different age groups in Cary. Youth and families prioritized park programs, such as children’s play areas and water recreation amenities like splash pads. In contrast, teens prioritized sports amenities, such as swimming pools, sports fields, sports courts, and skate parks.

Both the adults and older adult groups highly prioritized greenway connections. The common thread throughout all age groups was to prioritize ecological stewardship. Overall, feedback received from Spring Daze reinforced how Cary’s greenway network and parks are a highlight of living in and visiting Cary.

Feedback from Spring Daze also indicated how needs varied across Cary geographically. Whereas the central area of Cary and downtown prioritized greenway connections and expanded park programs, such as events and public art programs, areas in the western and southern areas of Cary prioritized sports amenities, including a need for more sports fields and courts.

How do ideas and needs vary across Cary?



● Spring Daze pop-up engagement results: Needs within different areas of Cary

Public Workshops

The PRCR Plan included two major community workshop milestones.

The first milestone included three public workshops in the fall of 2023 to receive feedback on the draft goals for the PRCR plan. These workshops were held at parks and community centers, including Ritter Park, the Cary Senior Center, and Mills Park Elementary School. This was an important opportunity to share the plan's draft goals with community members, and to have them rank which goals resonated most with them. To allow for greater participation, an online input form was made available with the same questions as at the in-person workshops. From both the in-person workshops and the online input form, Cary collected over 450 comments that ultimately shaped the plan's recommendations.



● Individuals at the PRCR Public Workshops

Overall, the top three goals that community members supported most were:

- Creating a balanced and diverse open-space network
- Enhancing experiences, access, and ecosystems along Cary's greenways
- Sustaining and enhancing an exceptional park system.

As was done at the Spring Daze and Lazy Daze pop-ups, community members were invited to create collages of their desired PRCR experiences at the public workshops. Participants selected from 60 images of spaces, amenities, and activities to create their collages. The images selected most often included indoor and outdoor water play experiences, colorful pedestrian walkways and public art, pollinator gardens, and places to gather with friends.

Online Survey

Top responses for what people would like to see for Cary's parks and facilities



#1
Trails integrated with nature experiences

49%

Percentage of respondents who chose this image¹



#2
Protected forests

41%



32%



32%

#3
Pollinator gardens & protected wetlands

Tie!



When asked if there was anything else people would like to see for Cary's parks and facilities, **pickleball courts** were a top response mentioned 42 times!



#4
Wildflower meadows/low-mow areas

30%



#5
Enjoy a peaceful moment in nature

29%

¹Online survey participation numbers, 2024

Board and Committee Involvement

Cary staff met with the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resource Advisory Board and their committees throughout the planning process. The advisory board and each committee identified specific needs to enhance PRCR offerings, ensuring they meet the diverse needs of Cary's growing community.

PRCR Advisory Board

The PRCR Advisory Board emphasized the importance of sustainable growth, adapting offerings to the needs of a changing population, and modernizing facilities to meet residents' high expectations. The board also recommended they begin to reimagine the future of athletics, proactively maintain community centers, and be creative with multi-use spaces to make the most of available land.

To support these goals, the board stressed the importance of recruiting, retaining, and promoting high-quality staff, and allocating sufficient funds to maintain staff spaces, ensuring they remain in outstanding condition. The evolution of Cary Teen Council was identified as a future priority, ensuring it remains relevant and engaging for the

youth of Cary. The board also advocated for more outreach to underserved communities and neighborhoods to promote equitable access to services, as well as rebranding initiatives like the "Play it Forward" program to increase its visibility and impact.

Athletics Committee

The Athletics Committee highlighted a diverse range of needs to expand and enhance Cary's sports and recreational facilities. Among the top priorities is the establishment of an organized boys' volleyball league and drop-in play opportunities. They recommended creating sand volleyball courts, adding them in downtown Cary, and prioritizing individual rentals. The committee also underscored the need for a public swimming pool facility accessible to all residents and the continued acquisition of open space for park expansion, with specific metrics linked to population growth.

Expanding age-targeted recreation programs, particularly those that differentiate Cary's offerings from neighboring communities, was identified as a key strategy to attract new residents.



● Signage at Bond Park

The committee emphasized the importance of developing programs that support mental health and create virtual or alternative options to reach residents with mobility challenges.

The committee proposed the inclusion of intergenerational activities to foster connections across age groups, and advocated for collaboration with local artists and cultural organizations to enhance cultural programming in parks. Additionally, they recommended introducing meet-up exercise opportunities led by community members to encourage social interaction and physical activity.

Accessibility was identified as a key need and the committee stressed the importance of creating more parks that are appropriate for individuals with special needs or physical disabilities, including both youth and adults. They also identified the need for a weight training facility and outdoor sports facilities for basketball, pickleball, and baseball. The committee further recommended the development of cultural arts facilities like the Cary Arts Center, in other areas of Cary.

Cultural Arts Committee

The Cultural Arts Committee emphasized the need for increased funding for cultural arts, larger venues with more occupancy, and more public art installations. The committee identified the need for additional art facilities outside the Cary Arts Center and better-performing spaces to support traveling shows and other major events. Improving coordination with Downtown Cary Park was noted as crucial for optimizing cultural programming across Cary.

The committee also stressed the importance of flexibility in adapting to changes in culture, diversity, and trends, ensuring that Cary's cultural offerings remain relevant and inclusive. They recommended evolving the use of technology to modernize programming and prioritizing sustainable and innovative practices.

To ensure that Cary has a cohesive approach to programming, the committee underscored the need to coordinate with HOAs and adjacent municipalities to ensure that programming efforts are not duplicated across the region. Beyond cultural arts, the committee advocated for increasing cool areas in parks to escape the heat, improving transit access to parks, and implementing wider bike lanes with safe separation from vehicles.

Greenways Committee

The Greenways Committee emphasized the need to close existing greenway gaps and to prioritize expanding the greenway network to newer residential complexes and neighborhoods to further promote access across Cary.

The committee also emphasized the importance of leveraging greenways for economic development, highlighting their potential to attract residents and businesses to the area. Equitable and inclusive access along the greenway network was also important to the committee, particularly ensuring that greenways are accessible to people with disabilities, older adults, and those requiring ADA compliance along the trail.

The committee recommended strategies for enhancing the user experience and encouraging greater community interaction with the greenways through new technologies. They suggested the creation of an app that showcases all of Cary's greenways, and could provide users with tools to create routes and explore new facilities.

Key Findings

Based on the input received, six key themes showed up consistently throughout the community, stakeholder, and staff engagement process.



Cary's parks, recreation facilities and programming are **well-loved**.

A Highly Used System

95% of random survey respondents used a Cary park greenway, facility or program in the past year.

A Local Highlight

Cary's greenway network and parks are a **highlight of living in and visiting Cary**.

Caring Staff and Quality Facilities

With high-quality facilities and a diversity of programming, Cary's staff goes the extra mile to support community members.

Expand system and program offerings to keep up with growing population

Indoor Facility Needs

Indoor fitness, court sports, indoor aquatics, performance spaces, nature-focused program spaces, and senior-focused program spaces.

Outdoor Facility Needs

Trails and greenways, natural areas, parks within walking distance, picnic areas, playgrounds, soccer fields, outdoor track, and community gardens.

Maintain, Update, and Improve

Supporting existing parks, facilities, and greenways was a top priority for future funding allocation.



Enhance and grow the greenway network

More Miles, More Connectivity

Link existing trails and improve the distribution of all trails and greenways within the Cary park system.

Enhance the Experience

Create pauses and destinations along greenways. Add more amenities including pump tracks, repair stations, restrooms, and drinking fountains.

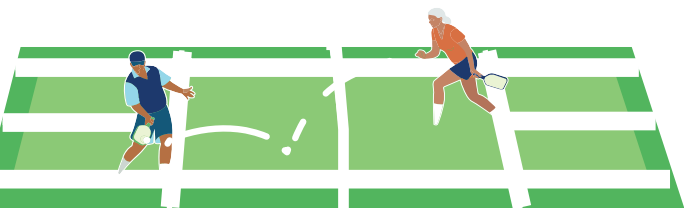
Multimodal Transportation

Increase dedicated and protected bike infrastructure and pedestrian connections. Older adults and teens would like to see an expanded GoCary network.

More Places to Walk and Run

Outdoor and indoor tracks were high priorities in the community centers survey.





Improve **access** for Cary's diversifying community – varied cultures, ages, and abilities

Growing Teen Population

Better bicycle and transit access and more programming for middle and high school students.

Multicultural Inclusion

Expand culturally relevant programs, facilities, and events.

Inclusive Programs and Facilities

Improve ADA access at facilities and add inclusion services (audio descriptors, translators, multilingual staff). Add more age-friendly facilities for seniors.



Embed **resilience** and environmental stewardship across the network

Places to Experience Nature

Greenways and natural areas appeared in the top five outdoor facilities in the random survey. A nature center was the top answer for indoor facilities.

Ecological Stewardship

Community members advocated for protecting native plants, wildlife, and habitat via pollinator gardens and wildflower meadows.

Sharing Cary's History

Focus groups suggested creating interpretive moments along the greenways to highlight Cary's history and natural resources.

Prepare for the **future**: resilience, technology, and communications

Anticipate Climate Change

Address climate-related concerns that impact parks, facilities, and greenways, including extreme heat and flooding.

Communications and Partnerships

Spread awareness of existing programs, and collaborate with surrounding non-profits and organizations across ethnic and cultural boundaries to promote events.

Software and Technology

In response to community feedback, in 2024, Cary improved the reservation system and has been working to use new technology.

