

A large crowd of people is gathered outdoors at what appears to be a community event or festival. In the background, there are several large, tan-colored tents and tall, green trees under a clear blue sky. The people are dressed in casual attire, and the overall atmosphere is bright and sunny.

3

Cary's Existing

PRCR System

This chapter explores Cary's existing parks, recreation, and cultural resources system, including an inventory of all existing parks and facilities. This chapter shares Cary's existing level of service standards, an overview of 10-minute walk access to parks and community centers, and where gaps in access currently exist.



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A High-Quality, Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources System

Cary's high-quality park system serves residents and visitors from all over the region.

Cary's four major sports venues host over 350 events and tournaments annually, attracting more than 650,000 people and generating over \$17 million in economic impact and visitor spending.¹ Cary has outstanding cultural arts facilities. From the Cary Arts Center to the Koka Booth Amphitheatre, The Cary Theater, Page-Walker Arts and History Center, and beyond, Cary offers a broad range of cultural arts and history programs.

Cary is also an early leader in inclusive play, specialized recreation, and inclusive services. The Kids Together Playground at Marla Dorrel Park has been bringing children of all abilities together to play for more than two decades. Cary's specialized recreation program provides offerings for individuals of all ages and abilities, including art, dance, performing

arts, culinary, fitness, nature, outdoor recreation, sports, social gatherings, special interests, and special events.

In the 2022 Cary Biennial Survey, Cary residents ranked seven categories for parks and recreation and gave very high rankings overall—between 8 and 9 on a 1-9 scale where 9 is excellent.² The top three scores were for inclusiveness, overall experience, and facility quality. These rankings reflect how Cary's system is well-known as an industry-leading system that strives to serve all communities. From exceptional maintenance to high-quality parks, sports, and cultural destinations, the system is high-performing in many aspects. Throughout the planning process, stakeholders recognized and consistently praised Cary PRCR staff for their excellent customer service and clear dedication to the community. Cary PRCR staff are the cornerstone of the system, and continue to uphold and maintain the parks, facilities, and amenities that so many community members know and love.

¹Cary PRCR, 2024.

²Cary Biennial Survey, 2022.



● Children playing with bubbles at Lazy Daze



PRCR Inventory

Cary has a robust inventory of parks, recreation, and cultural facilities. Today, the system has 2,690 park acres consisting of 39 parks and over 95 miles of greenways.¹

Cary has a unique and diverse park system. The system comprises traditional metro, community, and neighborhood parks and focuses on providing a high level of service for programmed athletics and cultural arts activities. The 2012 Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources System Plan expanded the traditional park classifications to include more classifications. It based them on how a park functions and serves different parts of the community and region. The following sections define the park classifications and list the parks and facilities within each.

¹ Cary PRCR, 2024.



● Kids Together Playground at Marla Dorrel Park

Park Classifications



Metro Parks

Definition

Metro parks are the largest park type in Cary's system. They can contain a variety of recreation amenities, such as basketball, softball, baseball, sand volleyball, and soccer fields; multipurpose fields; cricket batting cages; playgrounds; picnic shelters; and orienteering and challenge courses. They generally serve not only the entire town but also surrounding communities and visitors.

Metro Parks

- Downtown Cary Park*
- Fred G. Bond Metro Park
- Middle Creek School Park
- Thomas E. Brooks Park

*For further information on Downtown Cary Park, see the following pages.



● Map of metro parks in Cary



● Bond Lake Boathouse



● Tennis courts at Middle Creek School Park

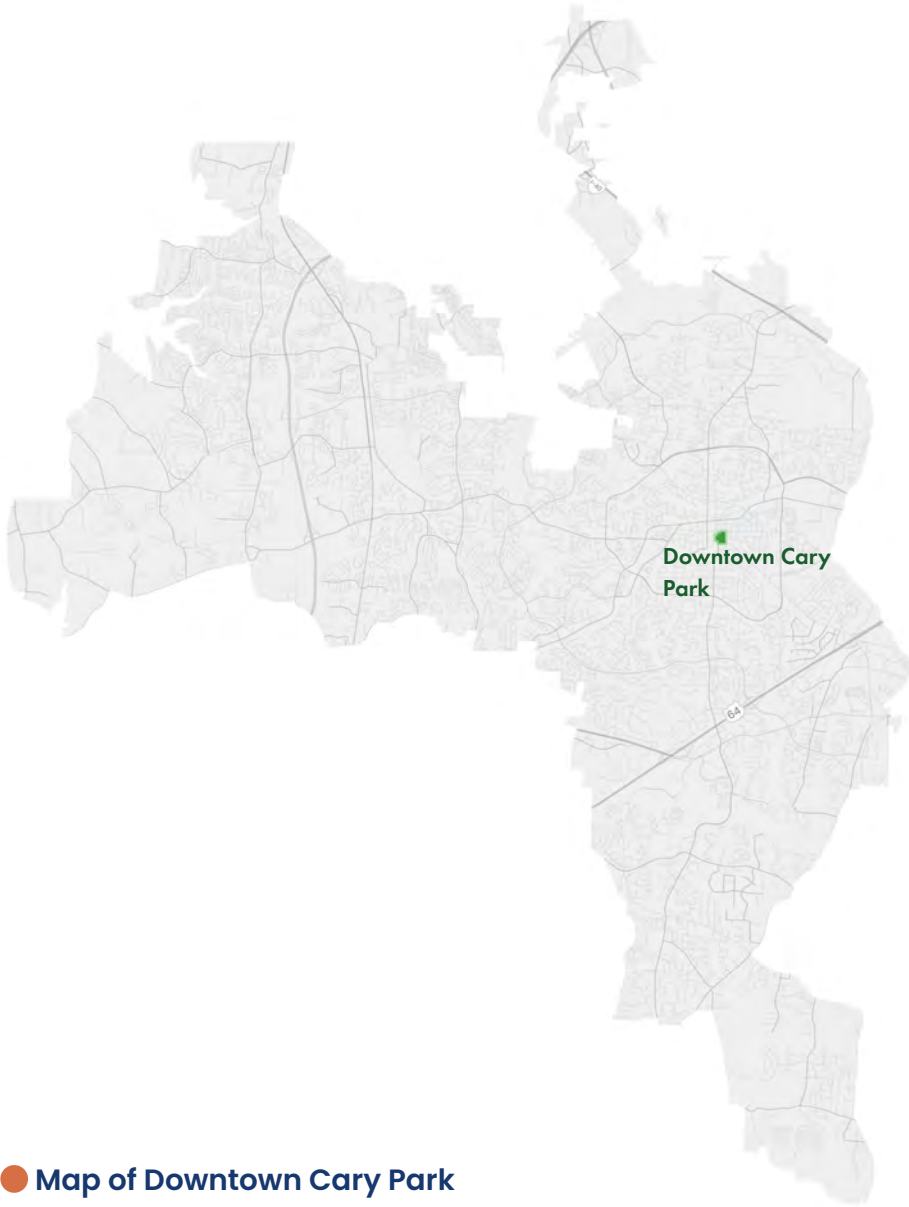


● Ice skating rink at Downtown Cary Park



● Cricket batting cages at Thomas E. Brooks Park

Downtown Cary Park



Park Highlight

Downtown Cary Park is a metro park at the heart of Cary’s revitalization. Nestled at South Academy Street and Kildaire Farm Road, across from the Cary Arts Center, this lively park features a stunning, lighted fountain. It is a bustling community hub with musical performances, outdoor movies, recreation, games, public art, and more. Cary held the Park’s grand opening Nov. 19, 2023, with a ribbon cutting ceremony, live entertainment, flyovers, and celebrity meet-and-greets.

Spanning seven acres, Downtown Cary Park includes a playground, a performing arts pavilion, fire pits, a sports lawn, and more. The Park hosts 750+ programs and events annually¹, making it a cornerstone of downtown Cary and a magnet for visitors from all over the region. It’s home to the Cary Farmers Market and various holiday-themed events, with visitors spending an average of 1 hour and 20 minutes in the Park, with 25% exploring other downtown businesses.

One of the Park’s unique events is the Pimento Cheese Festival, featuring over 50 vendors offering creative items like pimento cheese sushi and ice cream.¹

¹Cary PRCR, 2024.

● Map of Downtown Cary Park



● The Nest Playground at Downtown Cary Park

Key Amenities

- **Great Lawn Pavilion:** An open-air space hosting concerts, movies, and group fitness in the heart of the park.
- **The Nest:** A playful area with cardinal-themed structures and a splash pad for kids.
- **The Barkyard:** A social spot for dogs to play and make new friends.
- **The Bark Bar:** An open-air pavilion serving drinks for guests and their pets.
- **Park Street Courts:** Facilities for table tennis, volleyball, putt-putt, and more.
- **The Skywalk:** An elevated walkway 17 feet above the park for a unique canopy experience.

Community Parks



Definition

Community parks are designed to serve a broad purpose and population within a service area of two miles. They should allow for group activities and offer recreational opportunities that are not feasible or desirable at the neighborhood level. Community parks are recommended to help address the active recreation needs of Cary residents and offer the best opportunities to create distinctive facilities that respond to national recreational trends or unique community needs. Cary also partners with Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) through joint-use agreements that expand public access and shared use of school facilities for recreational purposes.

Community parks should be developed for both active and passive recreational activities. This could include undeveloped land to remain in a natural condition or be restored with a naturalistic character. Community park amenities in Cary include climbing walls and boulders, volleyball courts, athletic fields, basketball courts, playgrounds, picnic areas, and trails linked to the greenway system.

Community Parks

- Cary High School Park
- Davis Drive Middle School Park
- Green Hope High School Park
- Harold D. Ritter Park
- Jack Smith Park
- Mills School Park
- North Cary Park
- Robert V. Godbold Park

● Map of community parks in Cary



● Community parks in Cary provide a range of unique amenities

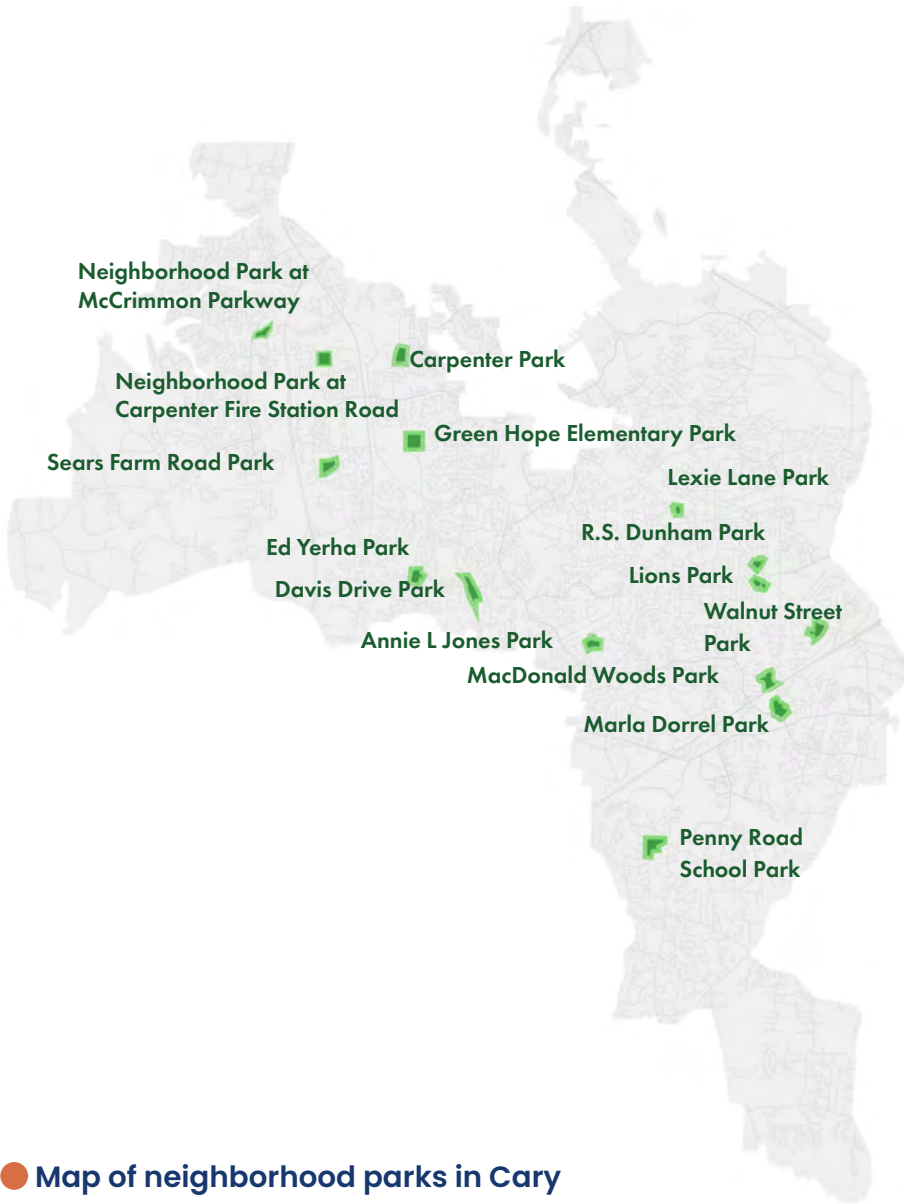
Neighborhood Parks

Definition

Neighborhood parks form an integral part of the system and create a sense of community by providing a place to engage in informal sports and playground activities, and associated social gathering areas. These parks are intended to serve nearby neighborhoods, usually within a service area of one mile. Neighborhood parks in Cary typically have amenities like walking trails, basketball courts, picnic shelters, and playgrounds and should be linked to the greenway system.

Neighborhood Parks

- Annie L. Jones Park
- Carpenter Park
- Davis Drive Park
- Ed Yerha Park
- Green Hope Elementary Park
- Lexie Lane Park
- Lions Park
- MacDonald Woods Park
- Marla Dorrel Park
- Neighborhood Park at Carpenter Fire Station Road
- Neighborhood Park at McCrimmon Parkway
- Penny Road School Park
- R.S. Dunham Park
- Sears Farm Road Park
- Walnut Street Park



● Map of neighborhood parks in Cary



- Neighborhood parks in Cary provide amenities intended to be accessed in proximity to a nearby neighborhood

Mini Parks

Definition

Mini parks are small pieces of parkland meant to serve a residential or business area within a quarter-mile radius. Mini parks should be designed to complement the downtown and urban areas. They include small publicly accessible open spaces connected by sidewalks and typically offer amenities such as benches, walking paths, gathering areas, or unique features like public art. Specifically, mini parks should be based on their proximity to major pedestrian corridors that act as gateways to Destination Centers and other urban multi-use centers. They can also be located near larger event or festival spaces that may take place in public areas. Mini parks may be used as instead of a neighborhood park when there is limited opportunity to acquire sufficient parkland. Mini parks may also be used to create pockets of park development along trails and greenway corridors.

Mini Parks

- Dorothy Park
- Heater Park
- Kay Struffolino Park
- Rose Street Park
- Urban Park
- West Street Park



● Map of mini parks in Cary



● Playground at Urban Park



● People playing pick-up basketball at Rose Street Park



● Walking path at Kay Struffolino Park



● Pedestrian bridge at Dorothy Park

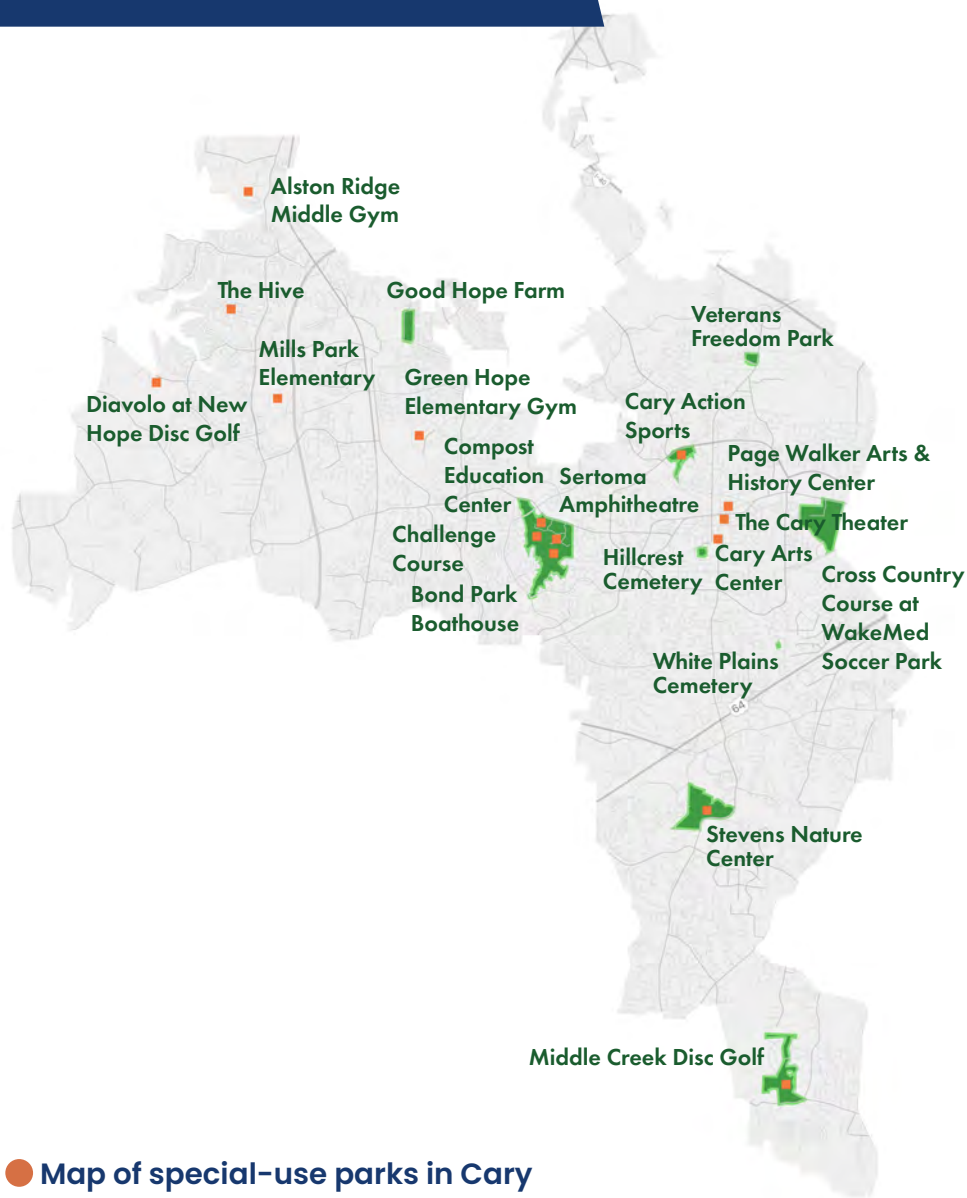
Special-Use Parks/ Facilities

Definition

Special-use parks in Cary are made up of historic resources and cultural landscapes that provide unique amenities to residents and visitors. Often it is the component or facility located on the site that makes for a special use park. Some uses that fall into this classification include special population group facilities; cultural facilities such as historic areas, gardens, and memorials; single-purpose sites; and sites occupied by a special-use building, such as historic structures. Special-use facilities often have a more significant, and even regional, draw. These parks include facilities like Good Hope Farm and Veterans Freedom Park.

Special-Use Parks/Facilities

- Alston Ridge Middle Gym
- Bond Park Boathouse
- Cary Action Sports (Robert V. Godbold Park)
- Cary Arts Center
- Challenge Course (Bond Park)
- Compost Education Center (Bond Park)
- Cross Country Course at WakeMed Soccer Park
- Diavolo at New Hope Disc Golf
- Good Hope Farm
- Green Hope Elementary Gym
- Hillcrest Cemetery
- Middle Creek Disc Golf
- Mills Park Elementary
- Page Walker Arts & History Center
- Sertoma Amphitheatre (Bond Park)
- Stevens Nature Center (Hemlock Bluffs Nature Preserve)
- The Cary Theater
- The Hive
- Veterans Freedom Park
- White Plains Cemetery



● Map of special-use parks in Cary



● Stevens Nature Center



● People playing disc golf at Diavolo at New Hope Disc Golf



● Volunteers at Good Hope Farm



● Cary Arts Center

Sports and Entertainment Venues



● Map of sports and entertainment venues in Cary

Definition

Cary's sports and entertainment venues serve not only Cary residents but also visitors from across the region. These venues include Cary Tennis Park, the USA Baseball National Training Complex, WakeMed Soccer Park, and Koka Booth Amphitheatre.

Spanning 24 acres, **Cary Tennis Park** boasts 32 championship courts, including one stadium court with permanent seating and seven covered courts for year-round play. With open play and court rentals available year-round, the public can play on the same court as world-class tennis and pickleball champions.

Nestled in Thomas Brooks Park, the 224-acre **USA Baseball National Training Complex** boasts four meticulously maintained fields, including a stadium field that seats up to 1,754 spectators, with additional lawn seating for around 250. A 2024 expansion added a 40,000-square-foot indoor practice facility, making it usable year-round.

WakeMed Soccer Park is home to a 150-acre complex with a 10,000-seat stadium and seven additional soccer fields. Built as the second stadium specifically for soccer in the United States in 2002, it was also renovated in 2012 and has become the proud home of the North Carolina Football Club (NCFC) and North Carolina Courage.

Located among 14 acres of hardwoods and beautifully situated next to Symphony Lake, **Koka Booth Amphitheatre** blends with its natural setting as one of the most distinctive performing arts venues in the Southeast. With a capacity of 7,000, the Amphitheatre hosts national touring shows, the North Carolina Symphony's Summerfest series, plus a wide variety of cultural festivals and large-scale community events.

Sports and Entertainment Venues

- Cary Tennis Park
- Koka Booth Amphitheatre
- USA Baseball National Training Complex
- WakeMed Soccer Park



● Sports and Entertainment Venues are unique in Cary. They function as both a public park that is open to all while also being home to top of the arc facilities.

Community Centers

Definition

Cary's community centers are focal points of recreational programming, providing space for classes, meetings, and special events. The service area is within a five-to-ten-minute drive, but is programmed to serve the entire community's needs. Today, community centers are designed to serve all demographic groups in one setting. These include preschool, grade school, middle school, high school, single adults, young families, extended families, and older adults. Designated spaces for older adults and teens should be considered as components of these facilities.

These facilities host a range of programs and classes along with an open gym with opportunities for badminton, basketball, pickleball, and volleyball. Centers also include opportunities for hosting full-day camps, reserving outdoor picnic shelters, and hosting gallery exhibitions.

Community Centers

- Bond Park Community Center
- Cary Senior Center (at Bond Park)
- Herbert C. Young Community Center
- Middle Creek Community Center



● Map of community centers in Cary



● Community centers serve many important functions for Cary residents

Greenways

Definition

Greenway trails serve as vital connections across Cary, linking neighborhoods with parks, activity centers, schools, and community centers. Greenway trails in Cary allow residents convenient access to natural settings within easy walking distance of their homes, where they can enjoy walking, running, and biking along a corridor removed from traffic. Greenway trails also connect to on-road bike facilities, sidewalks, and transit stops, facilitating alternative transportation options. Greenways help preserve open space that is often in floodplains and stream corridors. In this way, greenways are an environmental, recreational, and transportation resource that all residents can enjoy. Cary residents value the greenway network and often mention the greenways as an essential reason they love living in Cary. According to the random survey conducted in 2023, trails and greenways ranked as the top facilities for Cary to increase in the future.¹

The White Oak Creek Greenway and the Black Creek Greenway represent one of Cary's longest regional greenways, extending over 14 miles.² Part of the East Coast Greenway, a designated N.C. trail, the White Oak Creek and Black Creek greenways connect the American Tobacco Trail, the city of Durham, Bond Park, Lake Crabtree County Park, Umstead State Park, and the city of Raleigh. Cary's greenway network ties together many adjoining municipal greenway networks, including Raleigh and Durham greenway networks. In total, the Triangle Region boasts a 300+ mile regional greenway system that has the potential for greater economic impact.³

Publicly accessible greenways are more prevalent in the western and central areas of Cary. Downtown and southern and eastern areas of Cary have fewer stretches of connected public greenways, although residents living in communities

¹ Cary PRCR Random Survey, 2023.

² Cary PRCR, 2024.

³ Gaertner, Jenna Rae, "Growing greenways are a favorite amenity in the Triangle," Spectrum News, March 2023.



LEGEND

- Existing Greenways
- Proposed Greenways
- Greenway Corridors
- Street-side trails

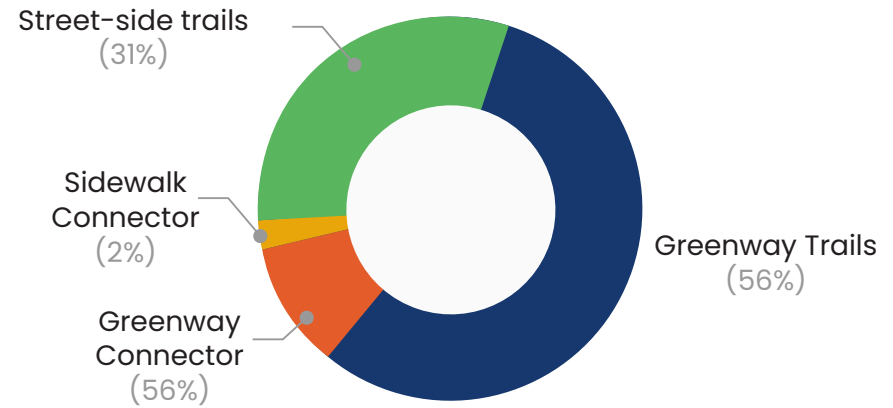
Map of greenways in Cary

with HOAs may have additional access to privately maintained greenways within their community.

Greenways in Cary are primarily off-road, but in areas where greenways are adjacent to roadways, they have been referred to as street-side trails (though street-side trail term is redefined with this plan update). There are a handful of areas where sidewalk connectors are identified as part of the greenway network.

Major Trailheads

- Black Creek Greenway Trailhead @ West Cary Middle School
- New Hope Church Road Trailhead @ American Tobacco Trail
- Old Reedy Creek Trailhead @ Lake Crabtree
- White Oak Creek Trailhead @ Green Level High School



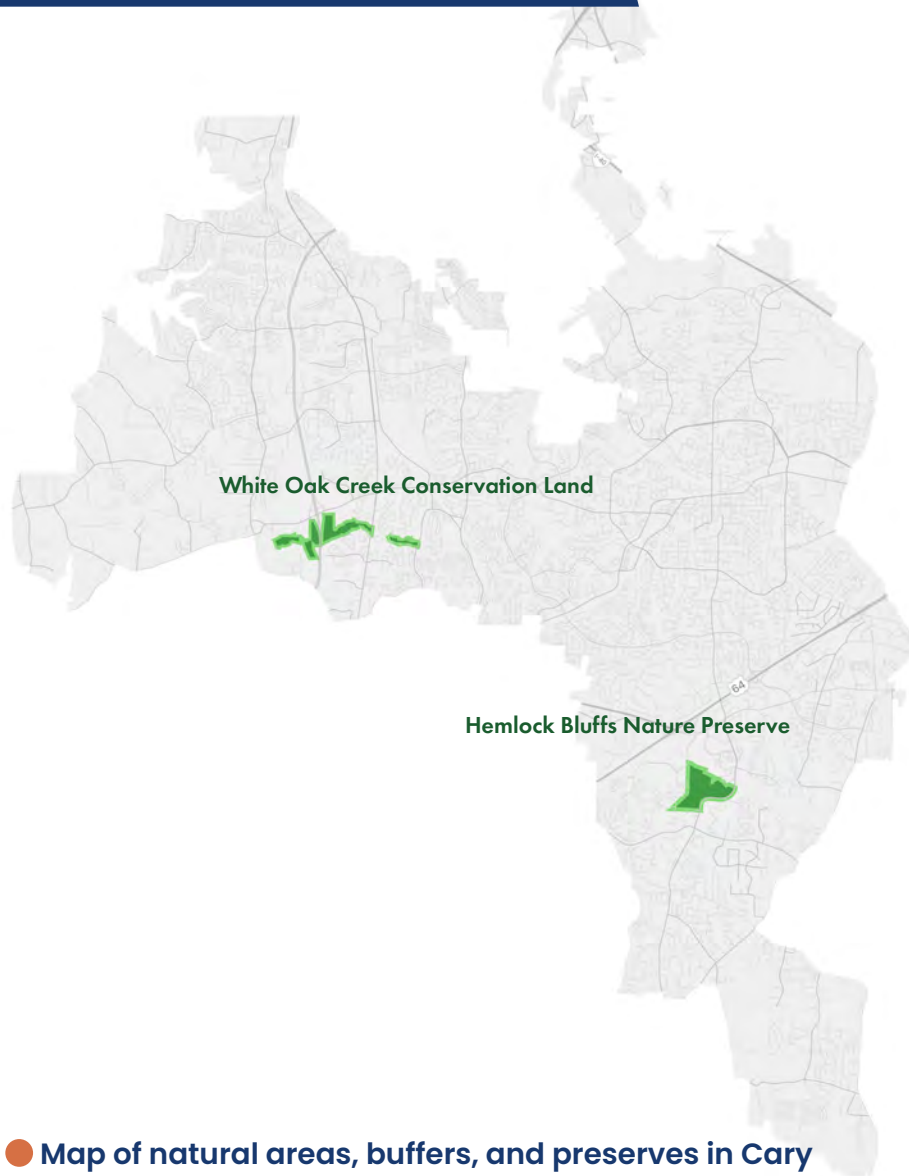
Types of Greenways in Cary¹

¹Cary PRCR, 2024.



● Families walking at Bond Park

Natural Areas, Buffers, and Preserves



Definition

Natural areas, buffers, and preserves are set aside to conserve significant natural or cultural resources, landscapes, and open space. These areas typically include dedicated watersheds, wetlands, or natural/non-developed areas such as steep slopes. In some cases, environmentally sensitive areas are considered as open space and can include wildlife habitat, stream and creek corridors, or unique and/or endangered plant/animal species. Improvements should be kept to a minimum, with a focus on the natural environment, interpretive exhibits, outdoor education, nature centers, natural surface trails, and trail connections to regional open space and/or community trails and greenways. Design and management of these areas should be oriented toward providing non-motorized access, a sense of open space/solitude, and environmental protection of sensitive resources.

Preserves in Cary include Hemlock Bluffs Nature Preserve, which gives residents and visitors access to about three miles of nature trails and scenic overlooks. Hemlock Bluffs is also home to the Stevens Nature Center, which provides interactive, educational nature exhibits and historical exhibits, as well as nature interpretation and environmental education programs for all ages throughout the year.

Natural areas include about 285 acres along the three-mile stretch of White Oak Creek between N.C. 55 and Jordan Lake.¹ Cary is working with the Town of Apex and the Triangle Land Conservancy on the White Oak Creek Conservation Management Plan which will inventory, evaluate, and create a management plan for about 485 acres of land along White Oak Creek, west of NC 55.¹

Natural Areas, Buffers, and Preserves

- Hemlock Bluffs Nature Preserve
- White Oak Creek Conservation Land

● Map of natural areas, buffers, and preserves in Cary



● Wetland area along White Oak Creek



● Signage at Hemlock Bluffs Nature Preserve



● People at Hemlock Bluffs Nature Preserve



● Outdoor education area at Hemlock Bluffs Nature Preserve

Existing Level of Service

Cary's existing level of service standards are based upon park typologies, where service areas vary in size based on the type of park.

Service areas for mini parks, typically seen in more urban parts of downtown, are based on a quarter-mile radius around the park center. This smaller radius is more relevant for mini parks, as these types of parks are typically accessed more by walking rather than biking or driving. Other park types, such as neighborhood parks, are mapped using a one-mile radius from the park center, and community parks are mapped using a two-mile radius, indicating that these parks are typically accessed more by driving or biking, with people traveling farther distances outside of their local neighborhoods to access them. These types of parks are intended to serve a broader community. They typically have a wider range of amenities but can be more

specialized, which warrants the need to travel farther to access these parks. Metro parks, special-use facilities, and preserves have no set level of service coverage area, as these parks and facilities are intended to have Cary-wide access.

These maps show that many areas of Cary fall within the existing level of service standards for park access, with some areas enjoying access to multiple park types. This map focuses on access to Cary-owned parks. The central gap in the map, for example, includes a large golf course and other private recreation amenities. Other gaps in access exist in the northeastern, southern, and western areas of Cary. In some of these areas, greenway access provides recreational and open space benefits to residents complementary to parks. Greenways provide places to walk, bike, and experience nature. Additionally, many greenways are evolving to include pause places along the trail, such as picnic areas, food truck areas, play places, interactive art, or areas to stop and enjoy a scenic view and nature.

| Park Type | Service Area |
|-------------------|--------------|
| Mini Park | 1/4 mile |
| Neighborhood Park | 1 mile |
| Community Park | 2 mile |
| Metro Park | Cary-wide |

● Existing park type service areas

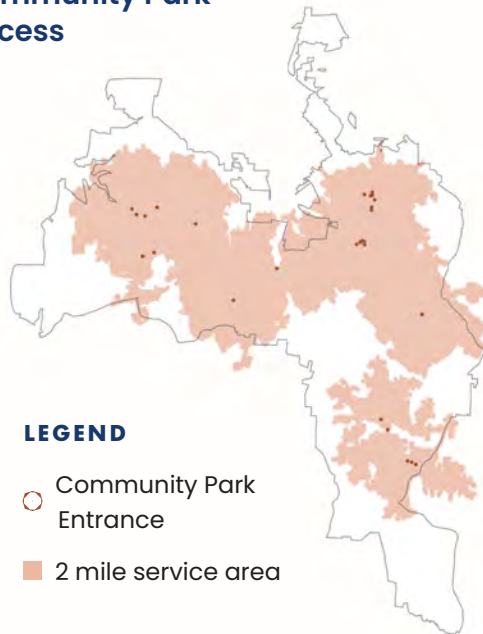
Mini Park Access



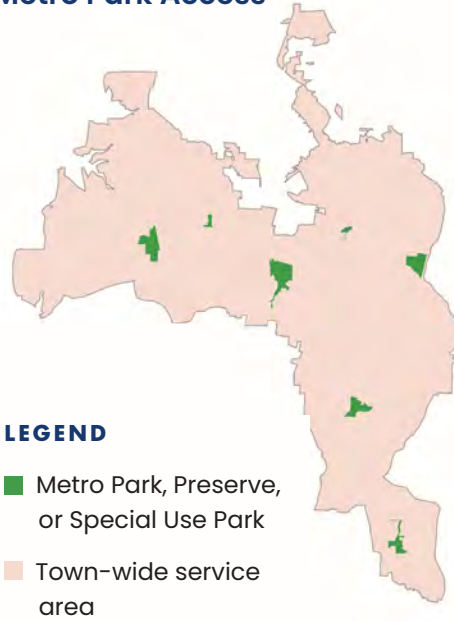
Neighborhood Park Access



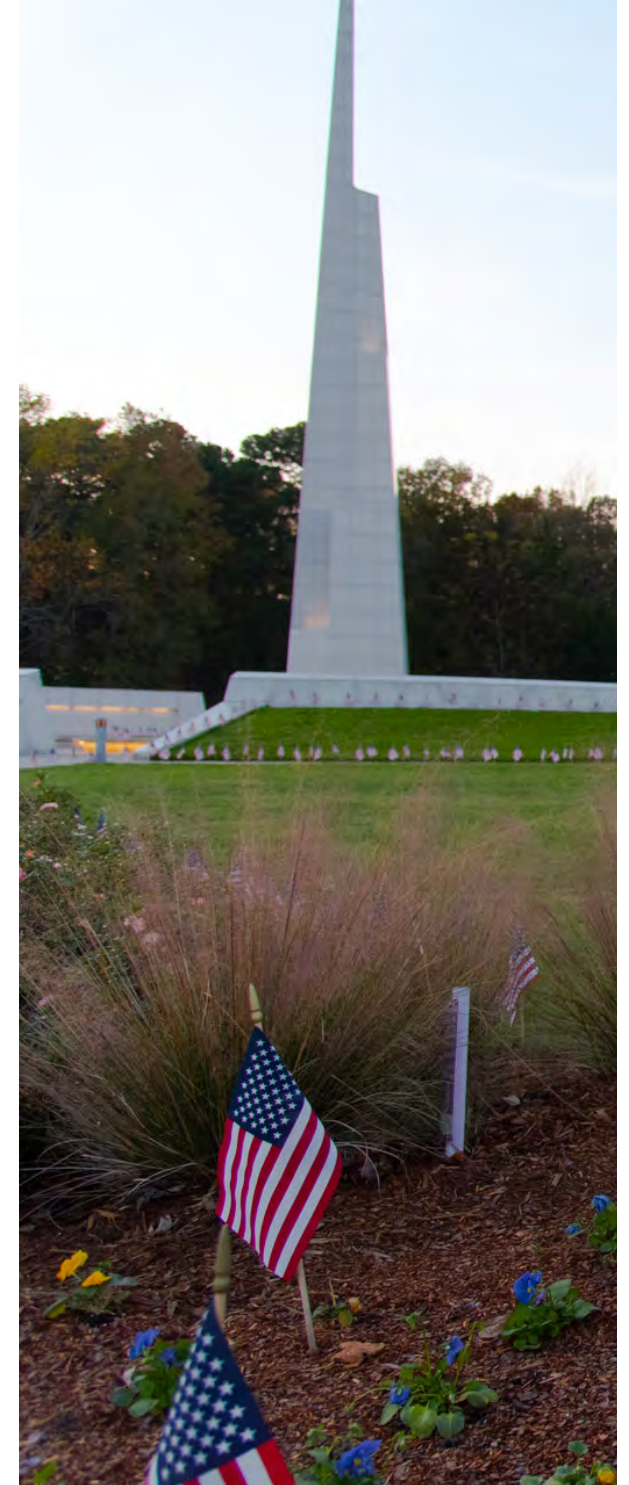
Community Park Access



Metro Park Access



- Existing service areas for different types of Cary parks
- Image at right: Veterans Freedom Park



Mapping Park and Greenway Access Using 10-Minute Walk Criteria

10-Minute Walk Standard

To complement the existing level of service standards, the planning team mapped access using the 10-minute walk standard which analyzes areas where there is 10-minute walk access and where there are gaps¹. This methodology comes from the Trust for Public Land (TPL), Urban Land Institute (ULI), and the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), which partnered together in 2017 to advocate for everyone in the U.S. to have access to a quality park within a 10-minute walk of their home. Convenient access to parks and open space contributes to a higher quality of life and improves overall public health.

The planning team used this methodology to measure current access to both parks and greenway trails. This methodology was used in recognition of the important recreational and

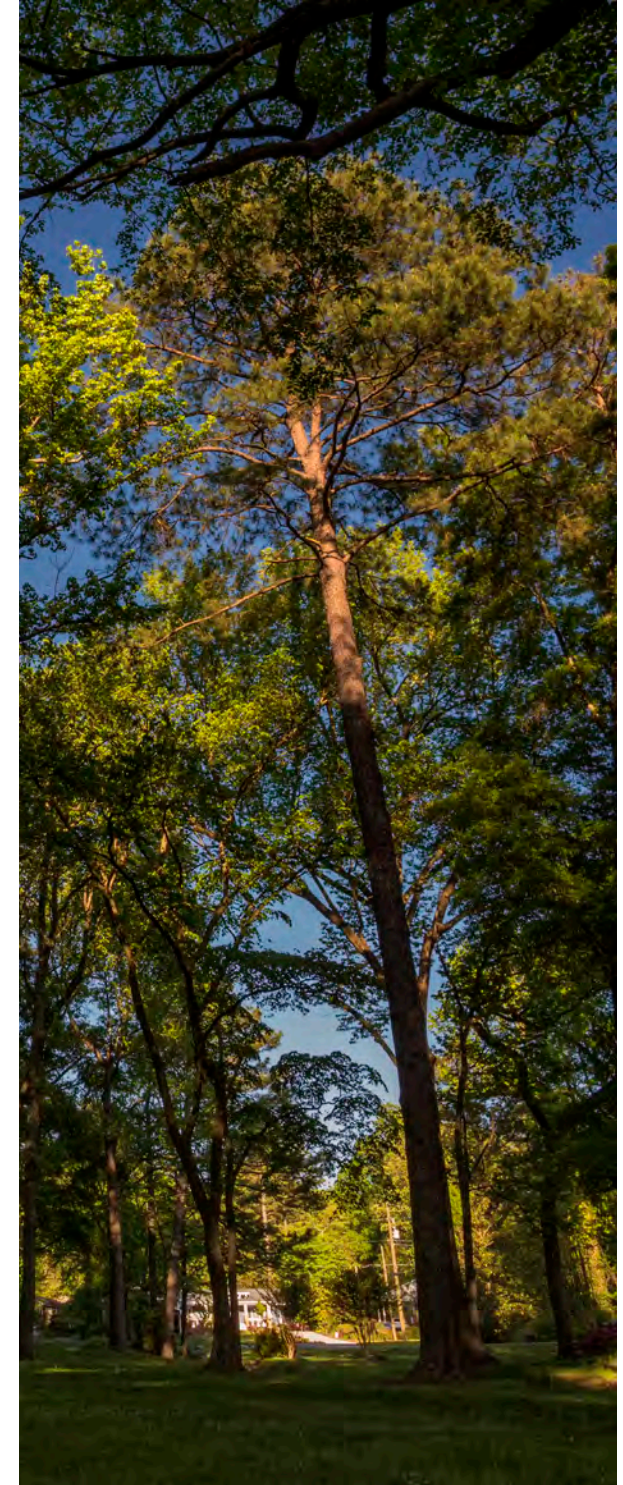
greenspace value of greenway trails, and the role greenway trails play in connecting community members to parks. The analysis methodology included mapping 10-minute walk access to park entrances, greenway trails, and other greenway access points. This method considers road conditions, sidewalks, and overall traffic to show where a feasible 10-minute walk area exists in relation to a park or greenway trail. Today, 56.2% of Cary residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park or a greenway trail.² This percentage is lower than most peer communities, where on average, 73% of residents within peer communities live within a 10-minute walk of a park or a greenway trail.³

¹10-minute walk, Trust for Public Land, 10minutewalk.org, 2024.

²Cary PRCR, 2024.

³NRPA Park Metrics, National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), 2023.

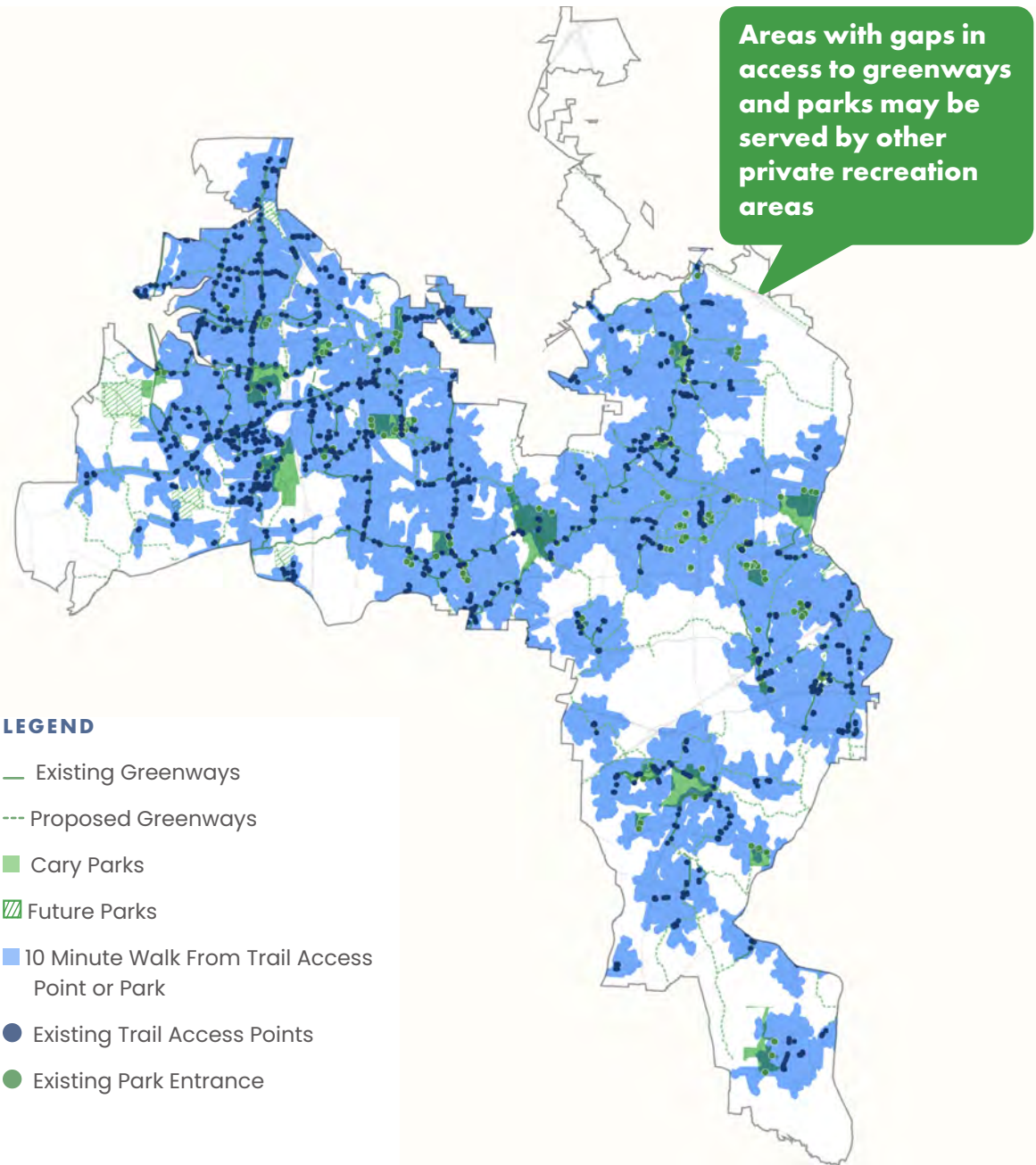
● **Image at right: Heater Park**



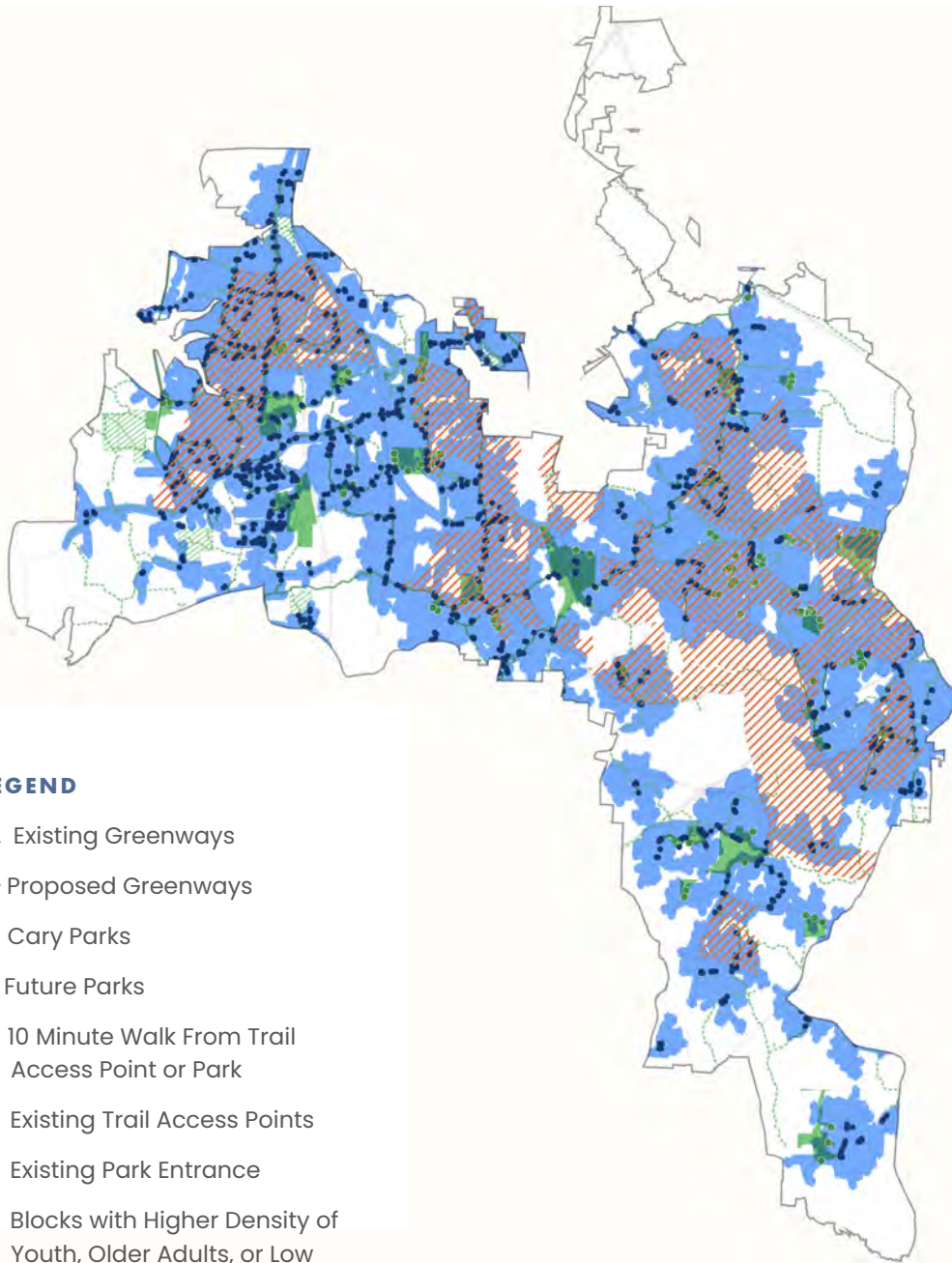
Greenway and Park Access

This analysis shows some areas with limited greenway connections and gaps in park access, including the southern and central areas of Cary and parts of downtown. It should be noted that part of the gap is due to HOAs and other communities that have private open spaces and trails in these areas. Therefore, filling these visible gaps may not be feasible for Cary, especially if these areas are fulfilling the access needs.

Cary has plans to expand the greenway trail network, and the Bike Plan will further increase access via an on-road network. As Cary is assessing these gaps in access, priority areas should be considered, such as areas where there are gaps in access in census blocks with a higher density of youth, older adults, or low-income residents.



● Current service areas of Cary showing 10-minute walk access to greenways and parks

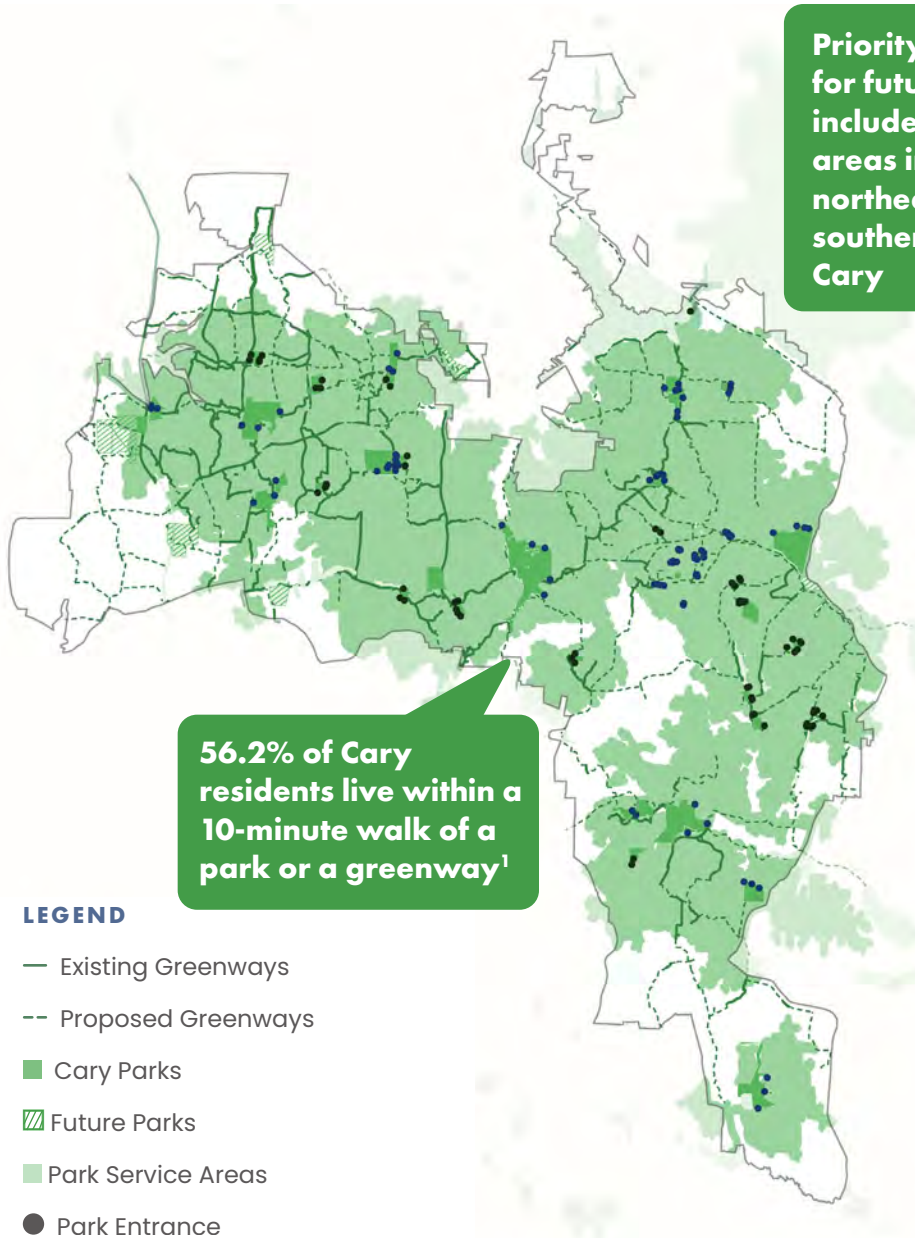


In assessing gaps in access, priority areas should be considered, such as areas with gaps in access that have a higher density of youth, older adults, or low income residents.

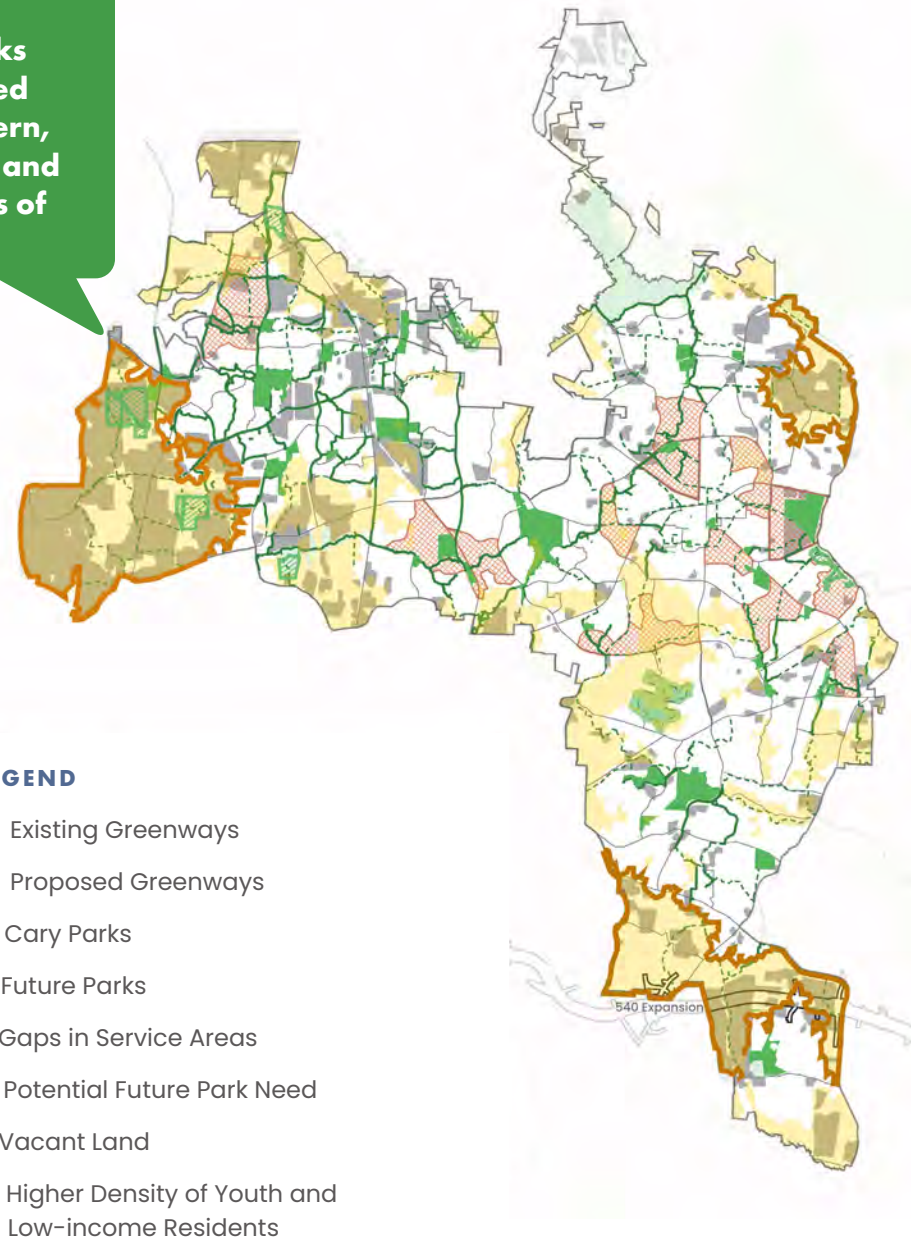
LEGEND

- Existing Greenways
- Proposed Greenways
- Cary Parks
- ▨ Future Parks
- 10 Minute Walk From Trail Access Point or Park
- Existing Trail Access Points
- Existing Park Entrance
- ▨ Blocks with Higher Density of Youth, Older Adults, or Low Income Residents

● Identified census blocks with higher need for 10-minute walk access to greenways or parks



Priority areas for future parks include outlined areas in western, northeastern, and southern parts of Cary



Existing service areas for Cary Park Types

*for the purpose of analyzing service areas for all park types, metro parks, special use facilities, and preserves are also mapped using a 2 mile radius

Gaps in service areas for Cary Park Types

¹Cary PRCR, 2024.

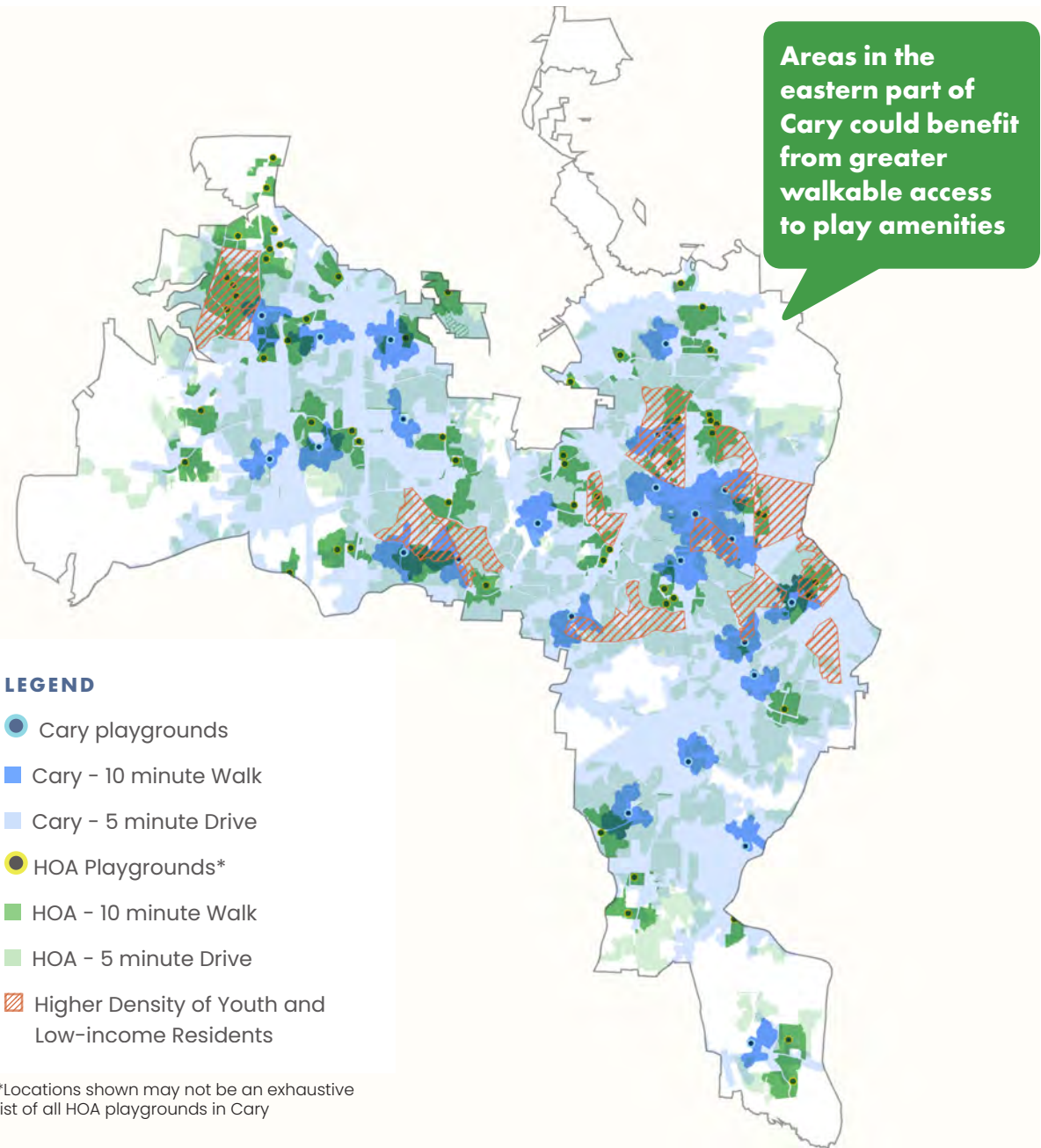
Play Access

Playgrounds are a unique type of amenity in Cary. Considering only Cary-owned playgrounds, the community has significantly fewer playgrounds than its peers. However, private playgrounds, like those provided by HOAs for their residents, are widespread in Cary. Totaling both Cary-owned and privately owned playgrounds adds up to a total number that is higher than peers on a per capita basis.

Regardless of how supply is calculated, data indicates unmet demand for playgrounds exists in Cary. Playgrounds were in the top six outdoor recreation needs in the random survey. In the survey, 52% of respondents overall and 80% of respondents with young children (under 10) reported the need for more playgrounds.¹ In addition, 72% of households with young children expressed a need for more aquatic spray features such as fountains or splash pads.¹

As illustrated in the following map, understanding priority play areas may take into account where there are HOA playgrounds and Cary playgrounds in comparison to areas with residents of higher need, such as census tracts with a higher density of youth and low-income residents. Understanding play access through this lens may help prioritize where the greatest needs for additional play areas exists across Cary.

¹Cary PRCR Random Survey, 2023.

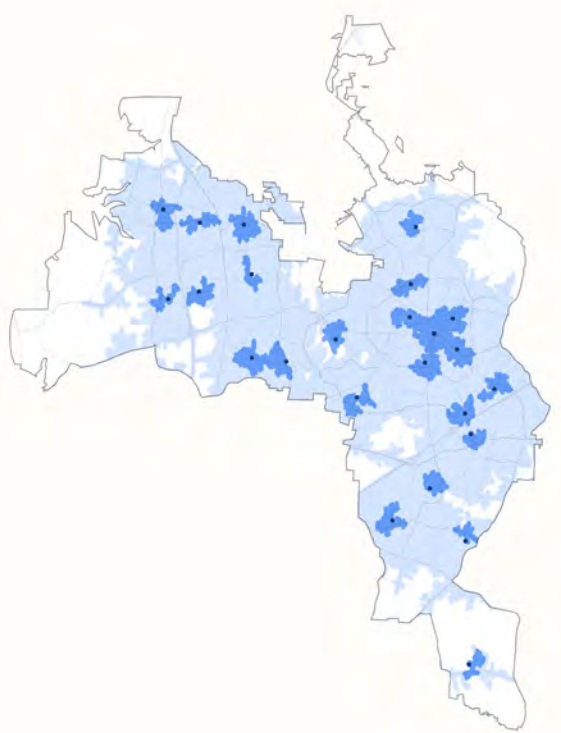


Understanding play access in Cary: Existing access and potential priority play service areas

Cary playgrounds

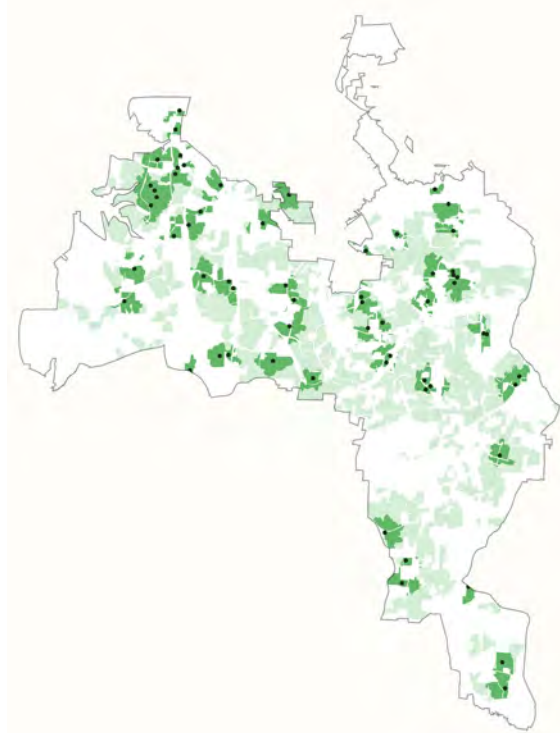
HOA playgrounds

Youth + low income



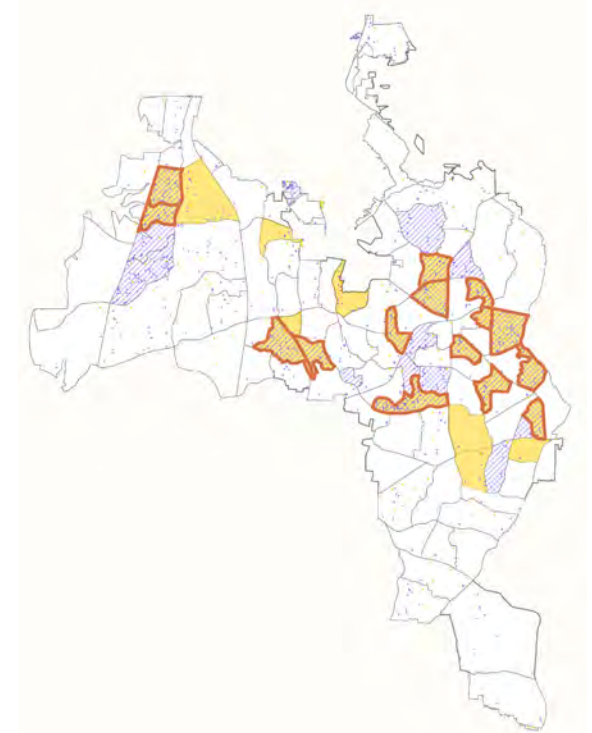
LEGEND

- Cary playgrounds
- 10 minute Walk
- 5 minute Drive



LEGEND

- HOA Playgrounds
- 10 minute Walk
- 5 minute Drive



LEGEND

- Youth population
- Low-income Residents Population
- ▨ Higher Density of Youth*
- Higher Density of Low-income Residents*
- Higher Density of Youth and Low-income Residents

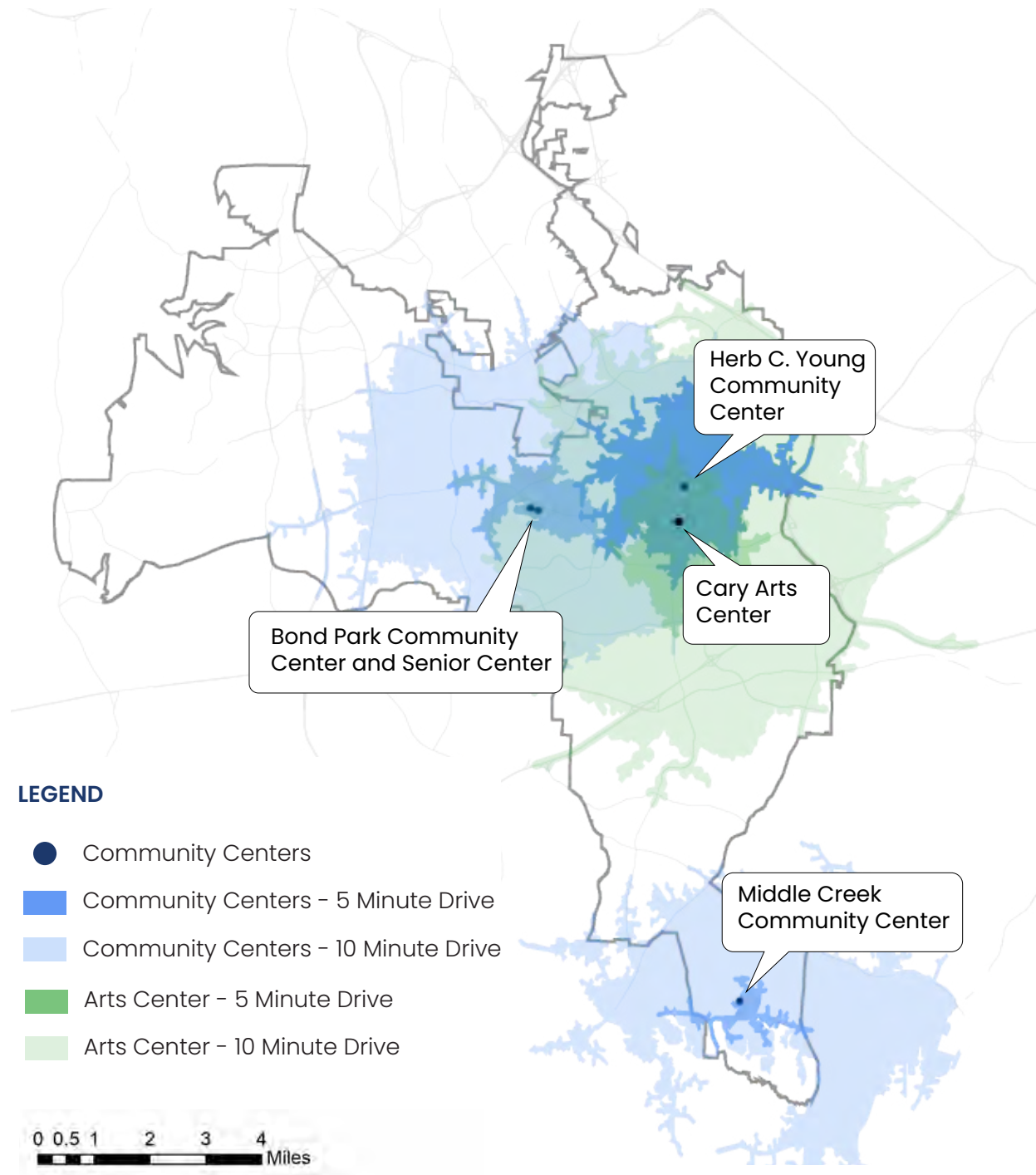
● **Methodology for identifying priority play service areas**

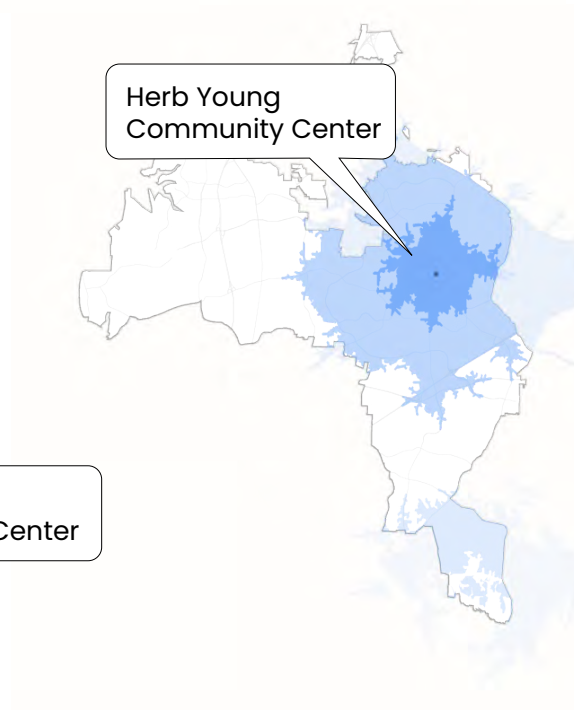
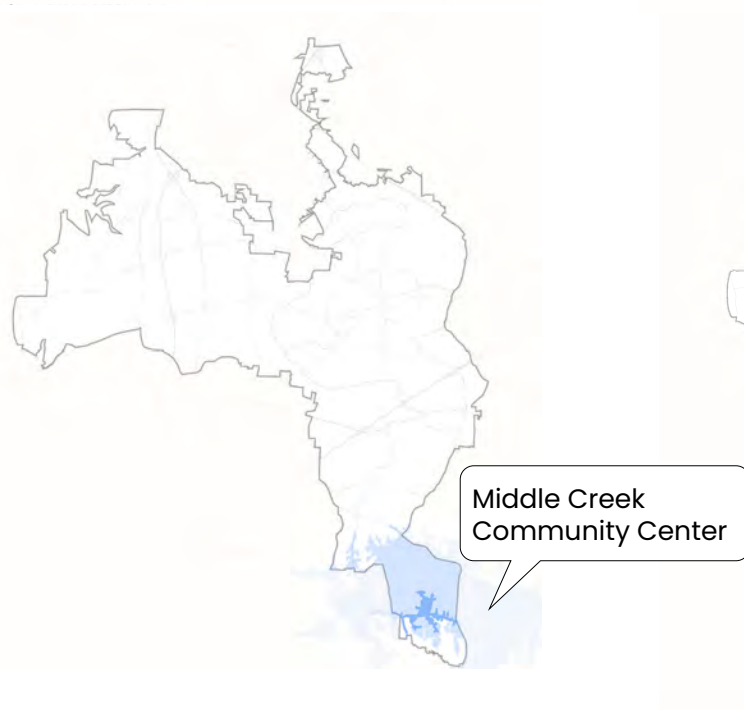
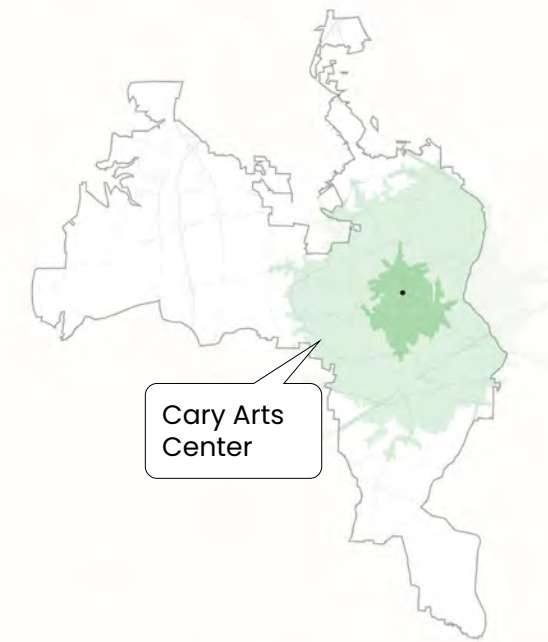
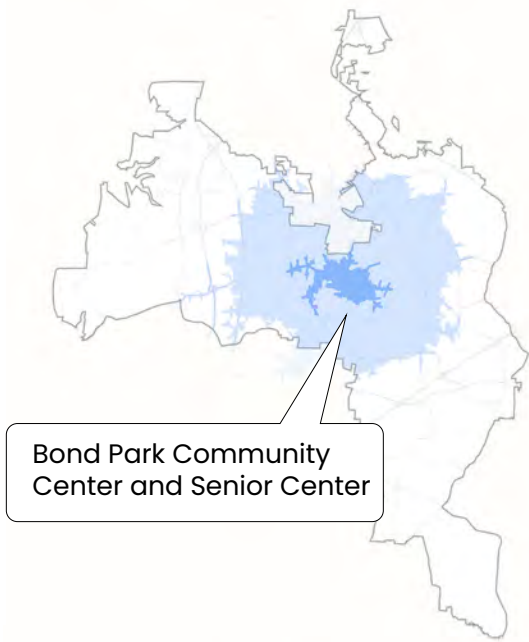
*Of all census block groups with youth/low-income residents, block groups shown contain over 25% population of each group in Cary

Mapping Community Centers Access

The following maps illustrate access to existing community centers, using a methodology based upon areas within a five- and 10-minute drive.

Gaps in access to a Cary's community center currently exist. Central and some southern portions of Cary have access to community centers within a five- and ten-minute drive. However, there is a service gap west of NC Highway 55. Planning for future community centers can work to fill gaps and increase service across Cary. While Herbert C. Young Community Center is an existing community center in Cary, it is one of Cary's oldest facilities and needs renovation. If Cary builds future facilities, these facilities can serve as examples for future renovation of Cary's existing community centers and senior center.





LEGEND

- Community Centers
- Community Centers - 5 minute Drive
- Community Centers - 10 minute Drive
- Arts Center - 5 minute Drive
- Arts Center - 10 minute Drive

