

HISTORIC CHARLTON PARK MASTER PLAN

06/24/2024



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- Sarah Nelson** - *Citizen-at-Large*

***Master Plan Steering Committee in bold**

MASTER PLAN PROCESS

The Barry County Parks & Recreation Commission developed this master plan in conjunction with a consultant team and supported by community input.

PROJECT GOALS

The goal of the planning process is to develop a successful, innovative, and sustainable Site Master Plan for Historic Charlton Park to direct future operational and facility improvements.

Maximize potential of property assets

Meet the cultural, historical, and recreational needs of Barry county users

Welcome people of all abilities, ages, and background

Primary focus: long-term stability, management, and programming of existing assets and facilities

Secondary focus: development of new assets and facilities

PROJECT SCHEDULE

FALL 2023
Project awarded

NOVEMBER 2, 2023
Master planning team kicks off the project with the Barry County Parks Commission and completes an initial site visit at Charlton Park.

DECEMBER 9-10, 2023
Public Input Session #1

OPEN DECEMBER 9-22
Public Input Survey

WINTER 2024
The planning team develops a draft master plan, working closely with the parks commission and park staff, and meeting monthly to discuss design approaches, revisions, and solutions.

MAY 2024
Public Input Session #2

MAY 2024
The planning team refines the master plan and prepares cost opinions and supporting graphics.

JUNE 2024
The Historic Charlton Park Site Master Plan is delivered to Barry County for implementation.

HISTORIC CHARLTON PARK

Historic Charlton Park is a 310 acre property bounded by the Thornapple River to the south and Thornapple Lake to the east. Irving Delos Charlton donated the property to Barry County in 1936, and the Barry County Museum was built from 1944-1950, now known as the Irving D. Charlton Memorial Museum.

This Site Master Plan addresses the entire property, with the following exclusions:

- Prioritizing historic building maintenance, repairs, and new acquisitions.
- Estimating costs for interior renovations including restroom improvements, though these areas of need were identified and noted in the plan.
- Acquiring permits for identified work in the wetlands and floodplains.

The Park's unique identity falls in a few areas:

- An extensive collection of antique items, including machinery that is regularly used for grounds maintenance.
- Multiple ecosystems including riparian habitat, wetlands, uplands, historical farmland, and meadows. These offer diverse bird and wildlife habitat and a prime recreational opportunity.
- Visitor categories include recreational users, education-focused school groups, and large-scale public events. Balancing these three user types and prioritizing investment across the site were significant challenges in the design process. The Steering Committee established the highest priority to be based on the greatest number of days of use. This would specifically address the experience of school groups and recreation area visitors, with consideration of large events secondary.

RECREATIONAL USE

The Recreational Area includes the trail system north of the entrance road and all areas east of the gate, encompassing the boat launch, all pavilions, and the beach area. The most frequent visitors use the site for walking, boating, and fishing, including ice-fishing. This plan includes improvements to high-use amenities along the waterfront, parking areas, and barrier-free access, while also considering the greatest value of investment.

VILLAGE USE

The Historic Village contains 25 historic residences, businesses, and community building that were moved from various locations in the County to depict a village of the early 1900's. The village is the heart of many special and private events such as weddings. School groups are frequent visitors in the spring and fall, but are currently functioning with inadequate facilities. This plan addresses these needs by improving accessibility and creating an entry sequence to transport children back a century.

EVENT USE

Events throughout the year, primarily in the summer, bring thousands of visitors into the park in high concentrations, requiring flexibility for site amenities, parking areas, and traffic patterns. This plan considers the major events as a secondary use following regular use.

GENERAL INFORMATION

VISITOR ACCESS

- Visitors access the park primarily by car, but also by mountain bike, road bike, and walking. Motorized vehicles are not permitted off road.
- Regular visitors often park and walk the trails and roads. Some roads are wide enough to allow vehicles and pedestrian safely simultaneously, but there is opportunity to separate pedestrians and vehicles for an improved and more natural walking experience.
- There is limited barrier-free access due to road and trail surfaces, minimal barrier-free parking, and boardwalks.
- Occasional issue with vandalism; the Steering Committee indicated no interest in fencing the property.
- School groups are transported by school bus and chaperon vehicles.

HISTORIC VILLAGE

- The Historic Village attracts families, individuals, and school groups; demonstrators and educators include both paid part-time staff and volunteers.
- Historic Village includes the County Parks Office at the Upjohn House (3 full-time staff, several part-time and seasonal staff).

EVENTS AND COLLECTIONS

- Charlton Park holds 10-12 events per year, each attracting up to 6,000 visitors at each. Events include Of Christmas Past, the Great Lakes Longbow Invitational, Gas & Steam Club Events, Civil War reenactments, and Antique Car Shows. Weekend events utilize the park's DNR Group Camping Permit. These events dramatically increase visitor attendance but also tax the existing infrastructure and pose parking and traffic flow challenges.
- There are ten (10) campsites with electrical hookups on the Big Green that are reserved for those requiring medical equipment. Other campers sprawl on the Big Green and surrounding areas, often mixing modern vehicles with antiques. The majority of campers use RVs, trailer campers, and vans.
- Parking for events is provided in lawn areas; staff and volunteers set up a rope system to establish parking aisles. The car show, the largest event, directs parking to the high meadows off of River Road where a shuttle service delivers visitors to the Village.
- Antique tractors have steel wheels which can not drive on asphalt.
- The County possesses a train and some track; there is potential for a loop track but significant infrastructure and permitting would be required.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Boardwalks may be feasible for wetland trails if not cost-prohibitive.
- There are several soil types on site, often with cobblestones, making agriculture difficult.
- Forest species include beech, maple, walnut, and oak.
- A large portion of the site is wetlands and/or floodplain which poses construction and permitting challenges.
- There is an opportunity to investigate and efficiently manage regular high water levels.

TRAILS

- Some trails are newly constructed with new trail maps and signage. Most trails are heavily used by regular park visitors.
- Trails are typically lawn, leaf litter, and packed soil. There are no paved, accessible trails or boardwalk beyond the Historic Village. Specific areas may require enhancements to provide a more stable, dry surface.
- Trails are multi-use. Primary users are walkers, but may include horse trail riders and bikers.
- The Parks Director indicated an ongoing discussion with Southwest Michigan Mountain Biking Association (SWMMBA) for a fat tire bike track.

WIDE SHARED ROAD TO RECREATION AREA



VAULT TOILET AT BOAT LAUNCH



BEACH PARKING



TRAIL SIGNAGE AND MAPS



VIEW TO THE RIVER BY THE VILLAGE



SHELTERS AT BEACH AREA



PRIMARY ENTRY INTO THE VILLAGE



UNDEFINED BUS PARKING AT THE VILLAGE



CONCRETE CURBING AT BEACH SAND AREA



WETLANDS



PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- Construction in wetland poses requires extensive reviews and permitting with Michigan’s EGLE Department and the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).
- Improvements should not negatively impact large portions of wetlands and/or water frontage.
- Hydric soils may not be stable within wetlands, making some types of construction difficult.

FRESHWATER EMERGENT WETLAND



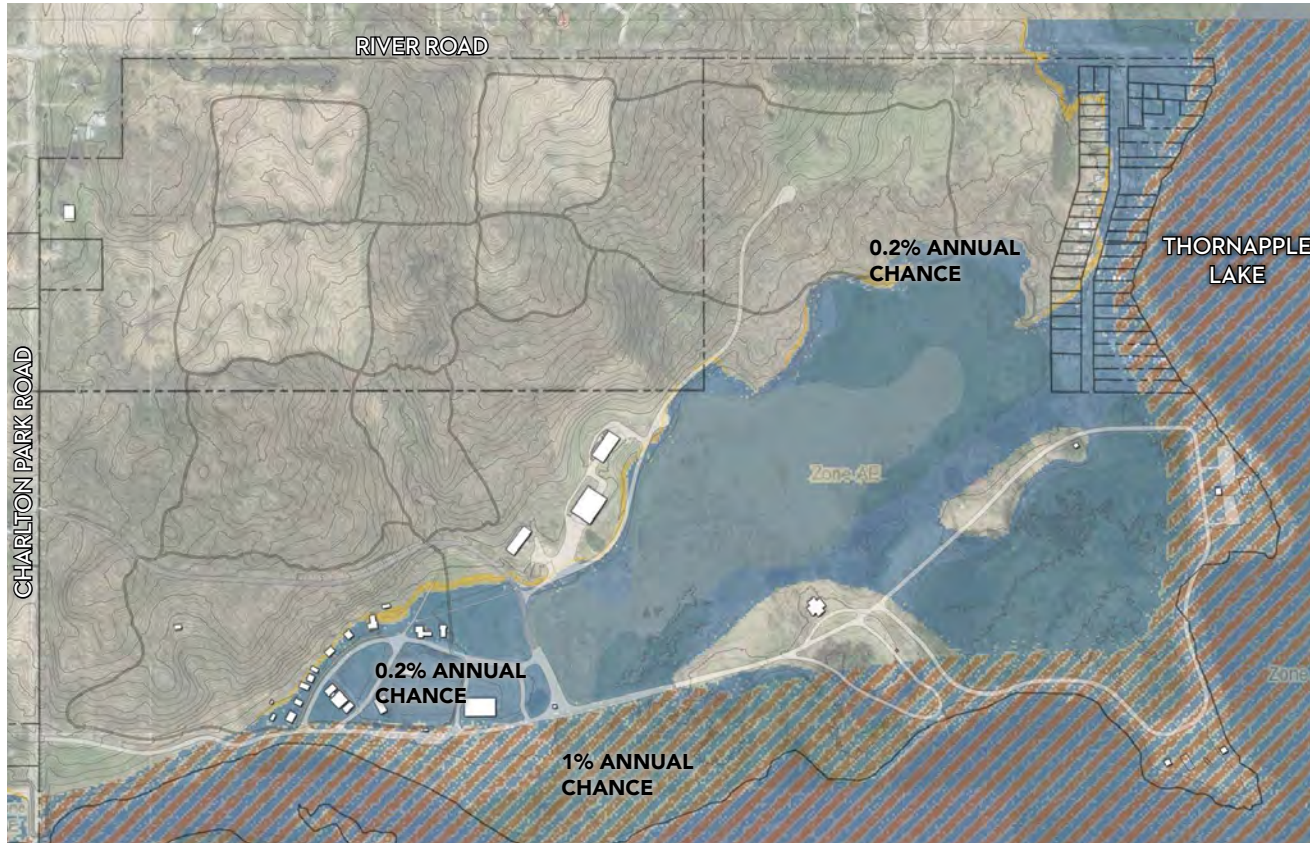
FRESHWATER FORESTED/SHRUB WETLAND



WATER BODY



FLOODPLAIN



PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- Construction in the floodway requires extensive reviews and permitting.
- Improvements within the floodway are at risk of flooding and must be constructed to withstand water flow.
- Soils within the floodplain may not support some types of improvements.

NATIVE AND INVASIVE SPECIES

Charlton Park is a stop along the Birding Trail and offers multiple habitat types including forested wetlands, upland fields and forests, and water's edge, resulting in diverse birding opportunity. Visitors may spot an endangered cerulean warbler, among many other native bird species. Invasive species are a threat to Charlton Park's habitats, and include gypsy moths, purple loosestrife, zebra mussels, and phragmites.

PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- Removal of invasive species and protection of enhancement of native species should be a priority.
- Provide educational resources and viewing areas for birding.
- Implement the master plan respecting habitat and minimizing impact on healthy habitat.
- Provide tools and education for reducing waterway contamination, including transporting and disposing of bait, and washing and draining watercraft.

VEGETATION



A large portion of the site is designated wetland, while the remainder is an upland forest, field, or maintained lawn area.

WETLANDS

- The site contains both freshwater emergent wetland and freshwater forested/shrub wetland.

UPLAND FOREST

- Wooded areas include walnut, beech, maple, and oak. A small Scotch pine plantation exists in the property center.

FIELDS

- Fields in the north were historically corn and grain, but are now either maintained lawn or native plantings.
- The northwestern field was planted by the CRP with the intention of regular controlled burned; maintenance staff brush-hogs it every 1-2 years.
- The north central field was used for demonstrative agriculture but has been fallow since the mid 2000s.
- The northeastern fields are maintained lawn and used for events and parking.

PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

Historic vegetation should be maintained where feasible to strengthen the historic character of the property. Wetlands must be protected, all improvements must comply with EGLE's requirements. Multiple landscape types are optimal for interesting trails; the existing trail system includes routes through fields, forest, and edging wetlands.

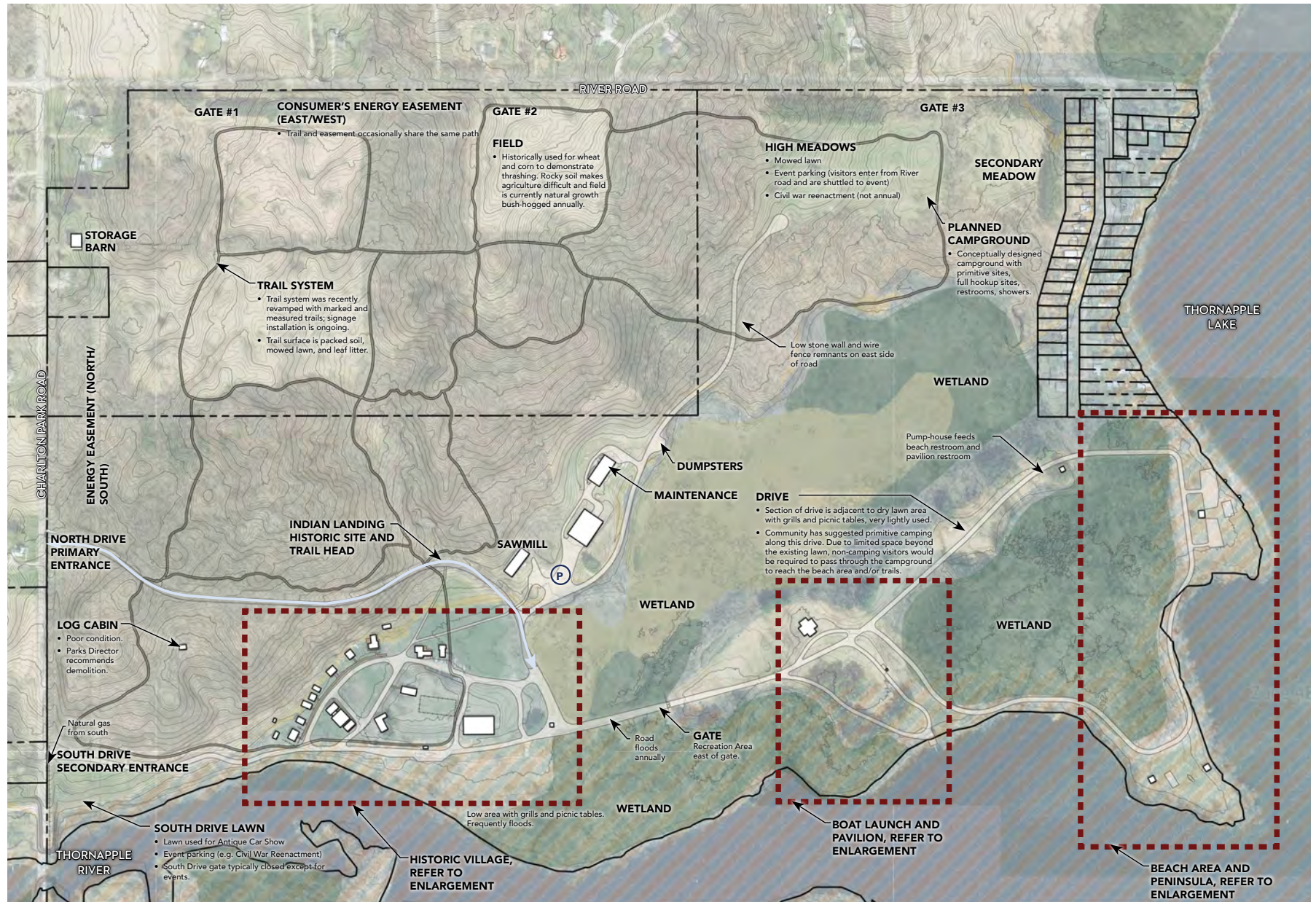
HIGH MEADOWS



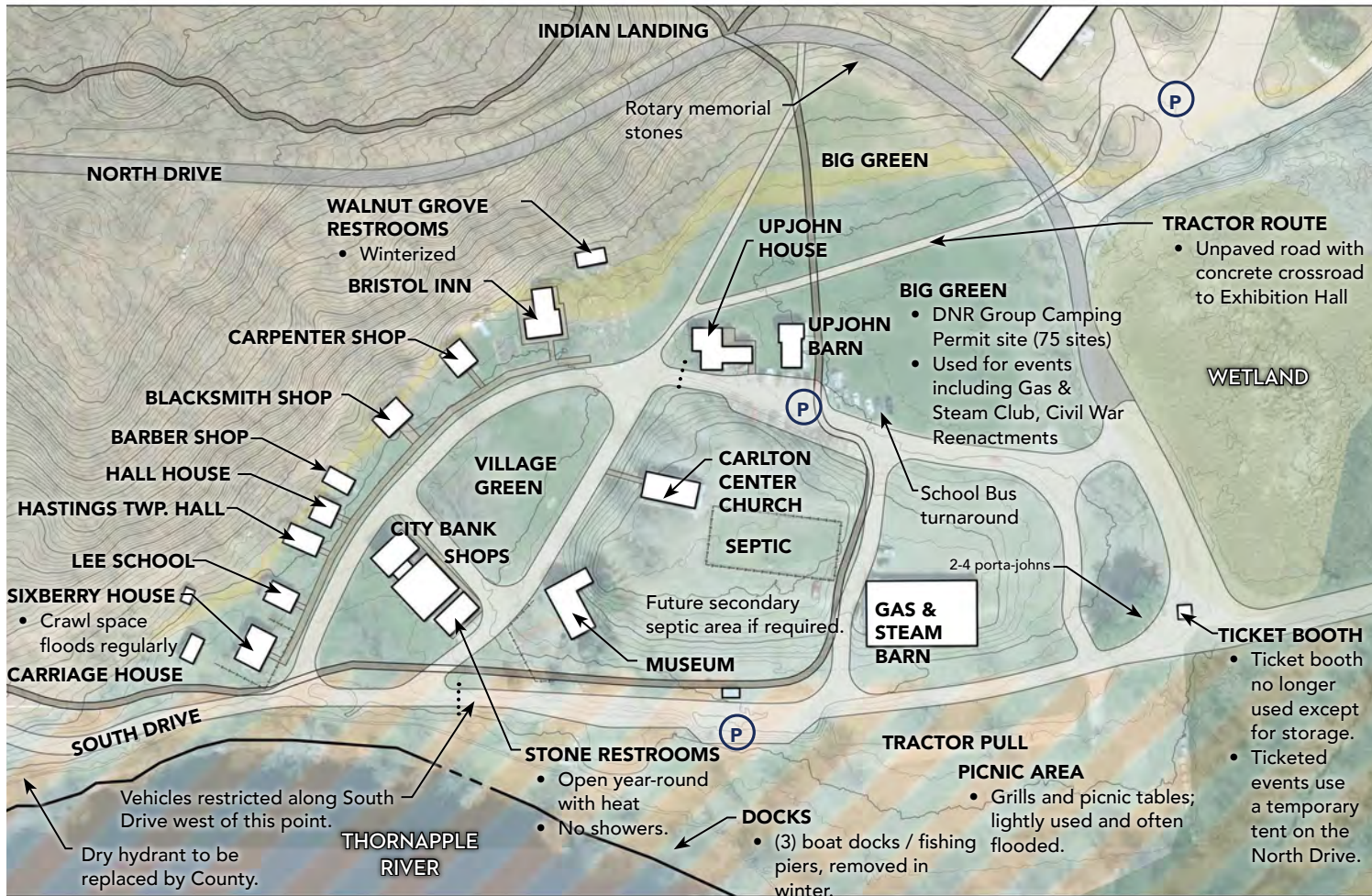
BEECH-MAPLE FOREST



OVERALL SITE



HISTORIC VILLAGE



VILLAGE OPPORTUNITIES

- Improvements to accessibility.
- Entry sequence for all vehicles
- Defined parking area with minimal paved area
- Reduction of pedestrian-vehicular conflicts
- School bus parking, unloading, and loading area.
- Restroom improvements

VILLAGE CHALLENGES

- Poor drainage in the Big Green during wet events
- Maintaining the historical character while improving access and amenities.
- Balancing event volume with everyday use.
- Available land limited by adjacent wooded slopes, floodplain, and wetland.

BIG GREEN



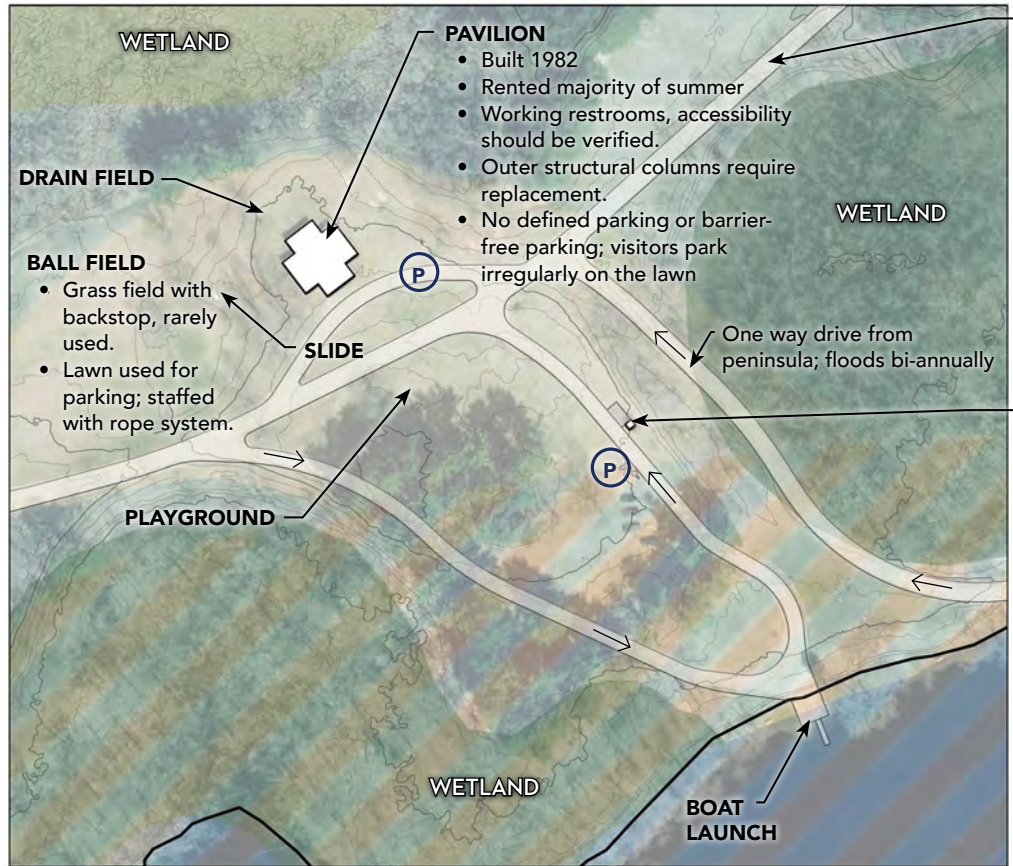
PARKING NEAR TRACTOR PULL



MAIN STREET + STONE RESTROOMS



BOAT LAUNCH AND PAVILION



- PAVILION**
- Built 1982
 - Rented majority of summer
 - Working restrooms, accessibility should be verified.
 - Outer structural columns require replacement.
 - No defined parking or barrier-free parking; visitors park irregularly on the lawn

- DRIVE**
- Lawn adjacent to drive is above the floodplain and wetland, but little to no wooded areas provide dry ground.

DRAIN FIELD

- BALL FIELD**
- Grass field with backstop, rarely used.
 - Lawn used for parking; staffed with rope system.

SLIDE

WETLAND

One way drive from peninsula; floods bi-annually

PLAYGROUND

WETLAND

BOAT LAUNCH

- BOAT LAUNCH BF PARKING**
- (2) barrier-free parking spaces for standard vehicles, and vault toilet installed in 2023.

- BOAT LAUNCH**
- Heavily used.
 - Originally designed for up to (4) boats; now serves up to (2) boats due to equipment size increases.
 - Kayak launch may conflict with boat launch activity.

- BOAT LAUNCH OPPORTUNITIES**
- Improvements to accessibility.
 - Entry and maneuvering sequence for long trailers.
 - Define parking for higher capacity and to improve safety.
 - Addition of accessible route to the boat launch and a new kayak/canoe launch.
 - Improve awareness of invasive species management.

- BOAT LAUNCH CHALLENGES**
- Surrounding floodplain and wetlands.
 - Existing vegetation and slopes limit reconfiguration options.

PAVILION



BOAT LAUNCH



BEACH AREA AND PENINSULA

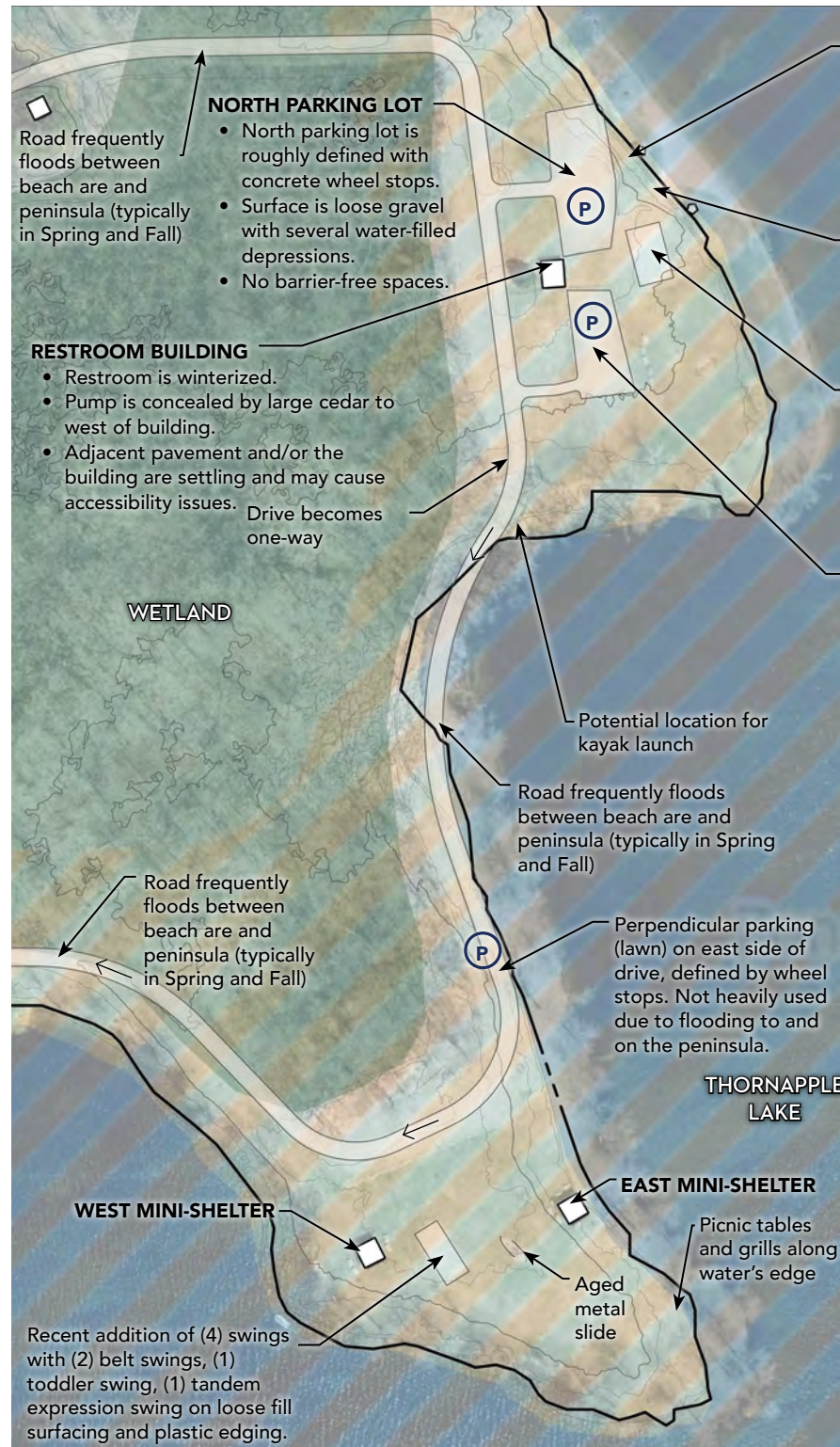
NORTH PARKING LOT AT BEACH AREA



MINI-SHELTER ON PENINSULA



BEACH AREA SHELTER + PLAYGROUND



SHELTERS

- (2) pentagonal shelters with (1) picnic table in each.
- Shelters provide minimal shade and are in deteriorating condition.

SAND BEACH

- Beach area contains coarse sand and small gravel. Area is defined by concrete wheel stops.

PLAYGROUND

- Playground is 1-2' above grade with loose fill and plastic edging.
- No accessible route to the playground.

SOUTH PARKING LOT

- South parking lot is roughly defined with concrete wheel stops.
- Surface is lawn and/or loose gravel.
- No barrier-free spaces.

Lake frontage is heavily used for ice fishing when weather permits.

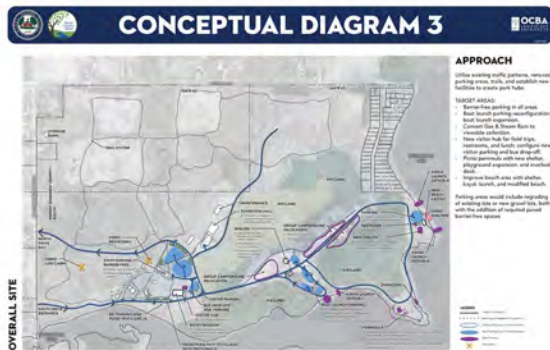
MINI-SHELTERS

- Mini-Shelters each house up to 4 picnic tables. Spaces are rented ~50% of the summer, suspected due to limited capacity, reduced access due to flooding, and deteriorating condition of paving.

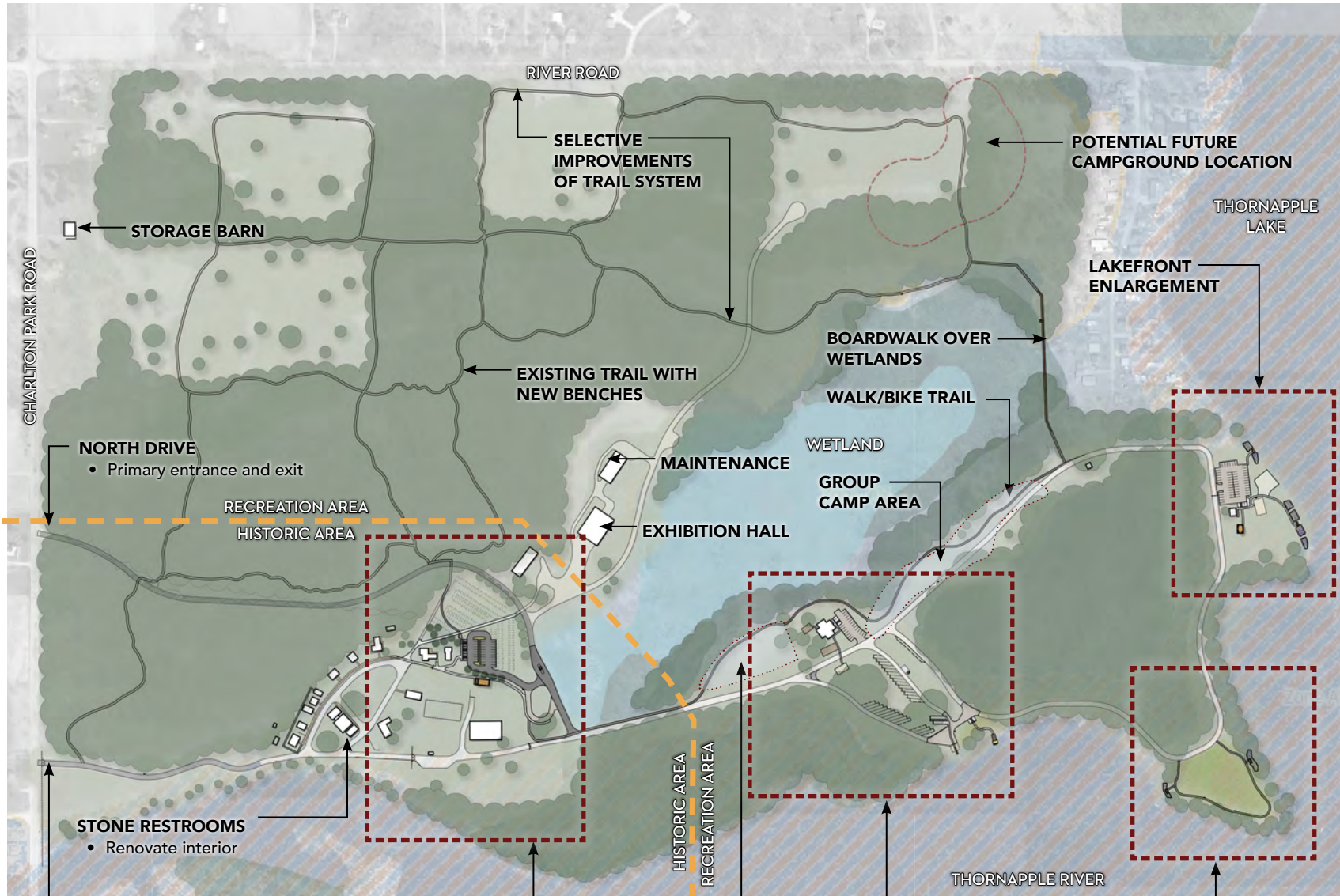
DESIGN ITERATIONS

Initial concept diagrams proposed three different approaches from least to most change and were discussed with the Steering Committee.

Revised conceptual diagrams refined the circulation patterns and amenities and presented three alternative options addressing the entry sequence and parking at the village.



OVERALL MASTER PLAN



NORTH DRIVE
 • Primary entrance and exit

RECREATION AREA
 HISTORIC AREA

STONE RESTROOMS
 • Renovate interior

SOUTH DRIVE
 • Multi-use trail entrance/exit.
 • No vehicle access except special events and emergencies.

VILLAGE ENLARGEMENT

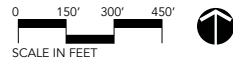
SELECTIVE IMPROVEMENTS OF TRAIL SYSTEM

- Benches at viewpoints or intersections along trail.
- Improve trail surface to compacted gravel in select wet areas.
- Interpretive signage that may include bird identification within each habitat type, and/or tree/plant identification tags.

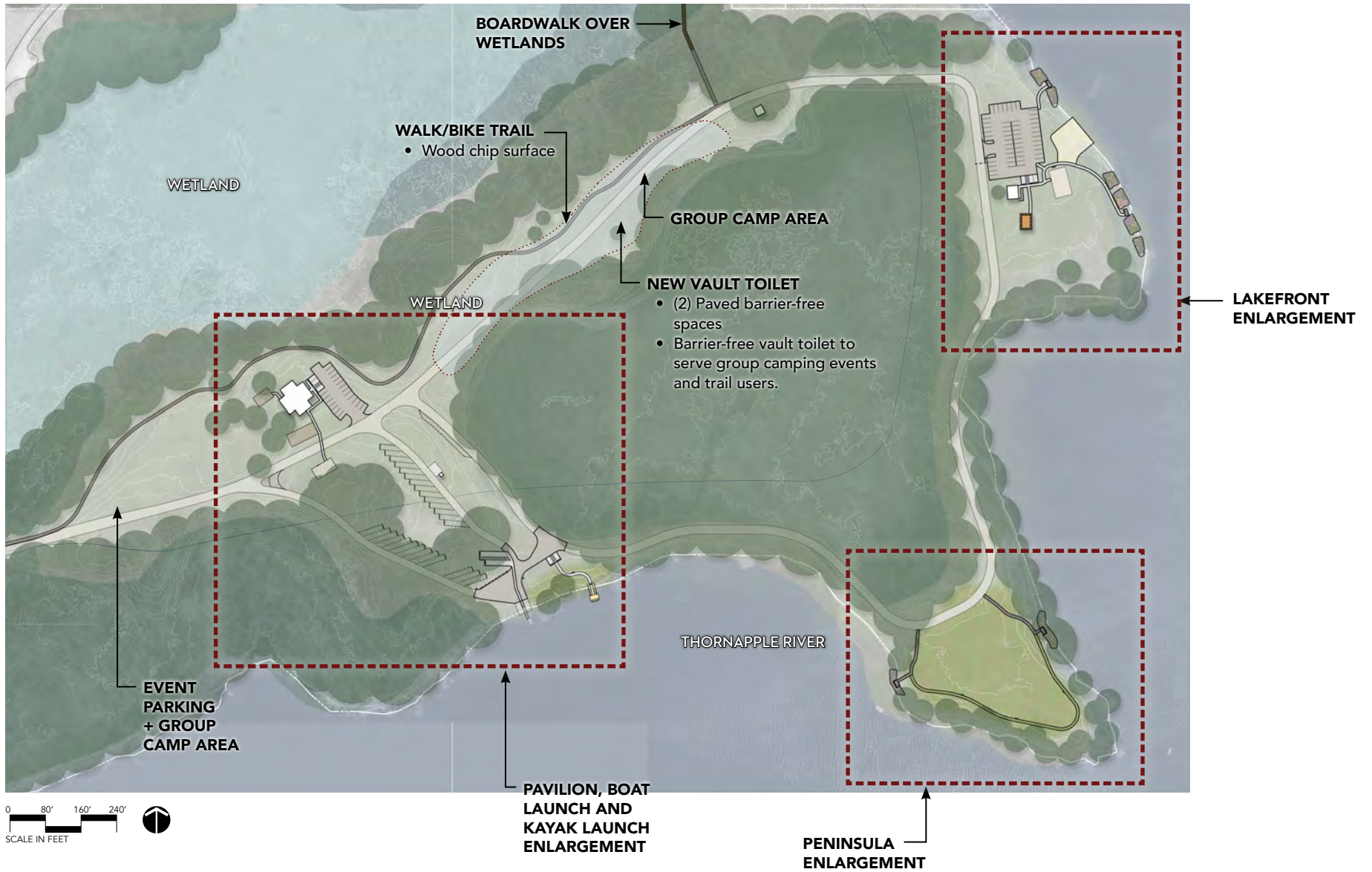
EVENT PARKING + GROUP CAMP AREA

PAVILION, BOAT LAUNCH AND KAYAK LAUNCH ENLARGEMENT

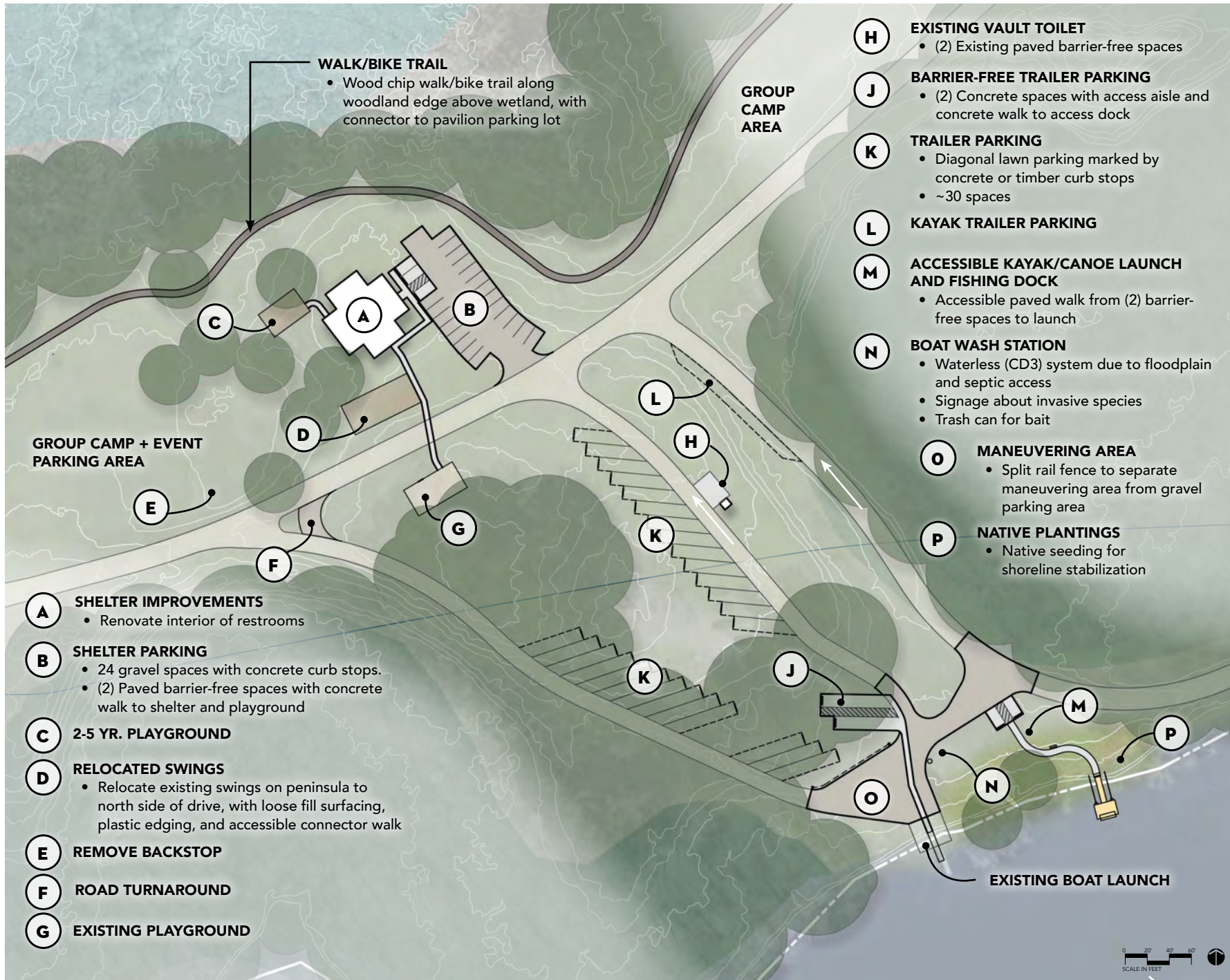
PENINSULA ENLARGEMENT



RECREATION AREA



PLAN: PAVILION, BOAT LAUNCH, AND KAYAK LAUNCH





WATERFRONT APPROACH

Charlton Park's beach area offers a free swimming area that is not available elsewhere nearby. The waterfront is also heavily used for fishing, picnicking, and as a boating location. The proposed parking reconfiguration utilizes the gravel area more efficiently while opening land to the south of the restroom building.

Increasing accessibility is a priority; concrete barrier-free spaces and a concrete walk that connects the parking, restroom, shelter, playground, and the southern overlook deck provide an accessible route to each amenity.

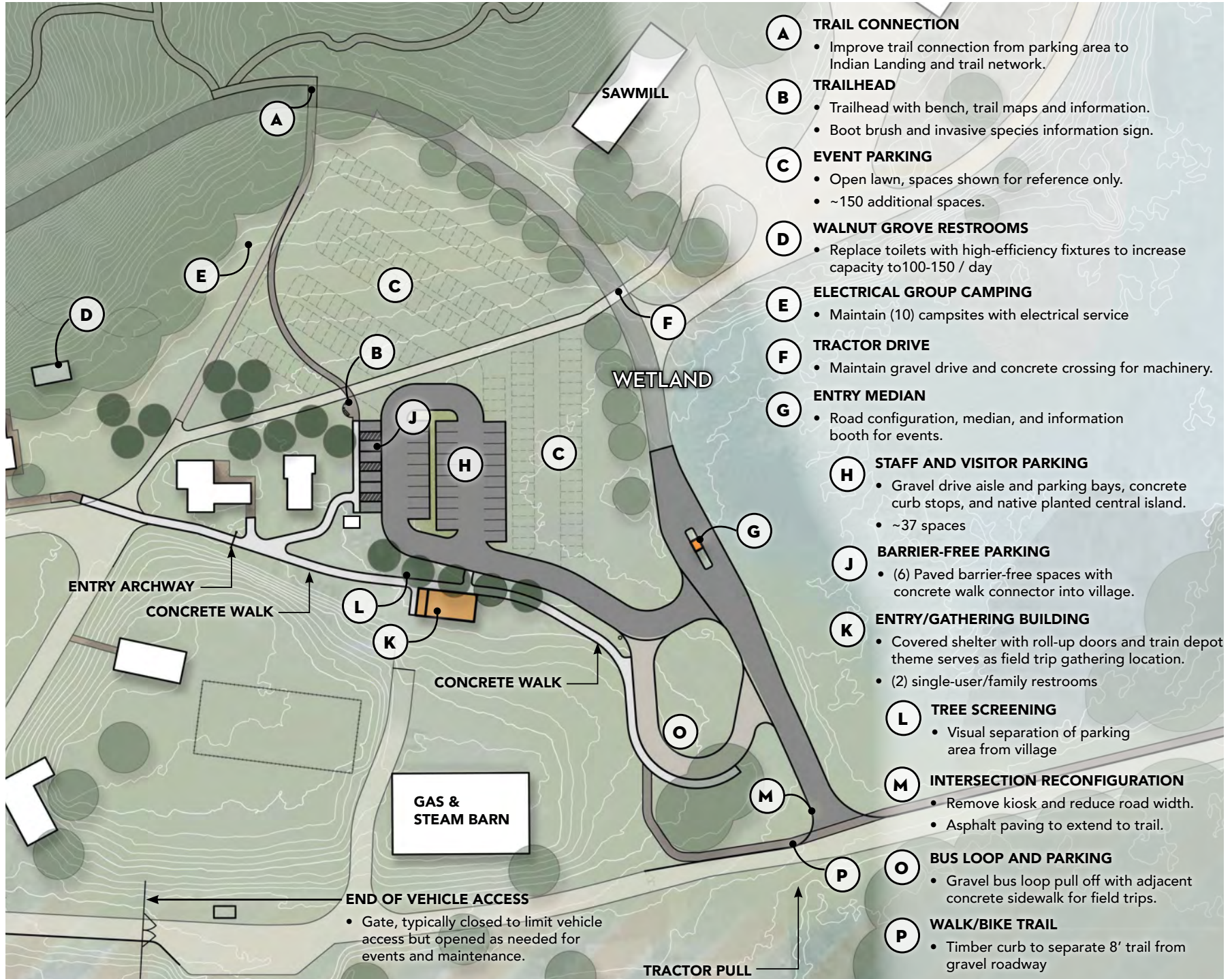
The narrow beach provides more sand area while reducing the waterfrontage, encourage families and children to play with the sand but reducing the amount of debris and erosion.




PENINSULA APPROACH

Due to continued erosion along Thornapple Lake and regular flooding, maintaining a drivable road through the wetlands is high investment and high maintenance. This plan recommends no significant erosion-reducing measures such as sea walls and heavy rip rap. Instead, as the road edge erodes, the County may allow the road to narrow and eventually convert to a multi-use trail with no vehicular access.

This approach allows the peninsula to become a passive recreation area to showcase the natural beauty of the waterfront.



20 May 2024									
Historic Charlton Park									
Barry County Parks									
Draft Prioritization Plan									
Description	Priority (review required by Board)	Anticipated Cost	Goal reached through project						
			Utilize and enhance existing facilities and assets	Increase waterfront access	Accessibility	Address environmental considerations	Enhance recreation user experience	Enhance event user experience	Enhance educational user experience
Historic Village Projects									
Walnut Grove Restroom Improvements	HIGH	\$ -	x				x	x	x
Stone Restroom Improvements	HIGH	\$ -	x				x	x	x
Paving and Parking Reconfiguration	MEDIUM	\$ 301,000.00			x		x	x	x
Bus Loop	LOW	\$ 87,500.00			x			x	x
Train Depot Building	LOW	\$ 699,600.00			x				x
Pavilion and Boat Launch Projects									
Kayak Launch and Barrier-Free Access	HIGH	\$ 149,900.00		x	x		x		
Boat Launch Parking Improvements	MEDIUM	\$ 98,500.00		x	x		x		
Shelter Restroom Improvements	MEDIUM	\$ -	x		x		x	x	
Shelter Parking Reconfiguration	LOW	\$ 80,500.00			x		x	x	
2-5 Year Old Playground	LOW	\$ 79,300.00					x		
Swing Relocation	LOW	\$ 51,700.00	x				x		
Lakefront Area									
Beach Improvements and Parking Reconfig.	HIGH	\$ 169,600.00	x	x		x	x		
Restroom Improvements	MEDIUM	\$ -	x						
Shoreline Plantings	MEDIUM	\$ 9,800.00		x		x	x		
Shelter	MEDIUM	\$ 230,300.00		x	x		x	x	
Overlook Walk and Decks	LOW	\$ 27,200.00		x	x		x		
Meadow Peninsula									
Meadow Planting and Shoreline Stabilization	MEDIUM	\$ 102,800.00				x	x		
Removal of Existing Shelters and Play Equip.	LOW	By Owner				x			
Overlook Decks	LOW	\$ 31,700.00		x		x	x		
Trails									
New Rec Area Trail	MEDIUM	\$ 48,500.00					x		
Wetland Boardwalk	LOW	\$ 331,700.00		x			x		
Existing Improvements to the Existing Trail	LOW	\$ 31,800.00	x		x		x		
Campground									
Public Campground (non-event)	LOW	\$ -					x		

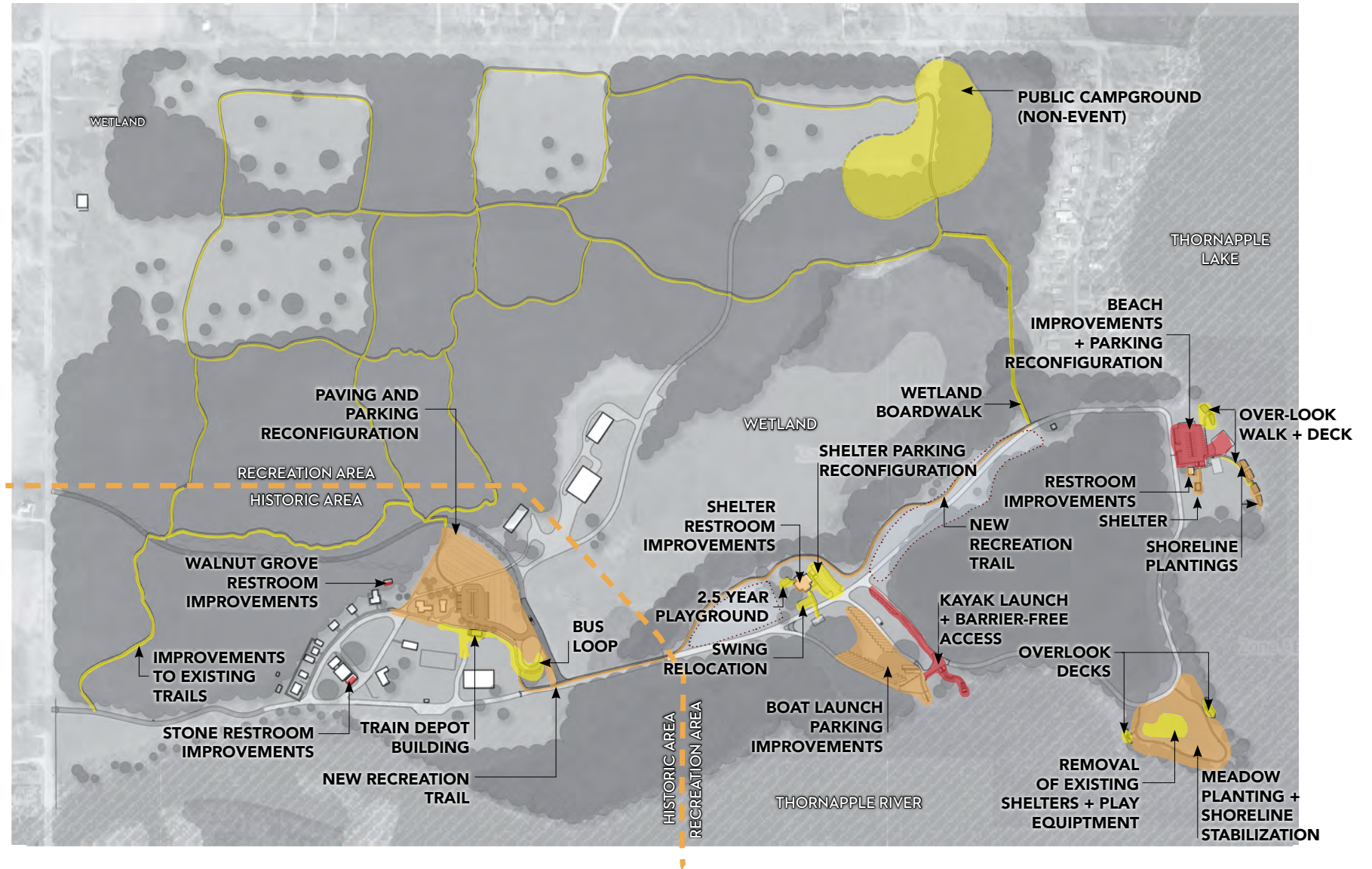
PRIORITIZATION APPROACH

The master plan was broken down into several projects in each area. The goals identified align with the original Request for Proposals (RFP) language for the vision of the park, as well as goals discussed with the steering committee throughout the process, such as improving accessibility. Generally, projects achieving more goals were ranked as higher priority due to providing more value to the park.

COST INFORMATION

The costs provided are based on 2024 construction prices and include a 28% increase for design, contingency, and escalation. In providing these opinions of probable cost, it is understood that the Consultants (OCBA) have no control over market conditions and these opinions of probable cost are made on the basis of the Consultant's professional judgement and experience at a master plan level. The Consultants make no warranty that the cost of work will not vary from this opinion of probable cost.

PRIORITIZATION PLAN



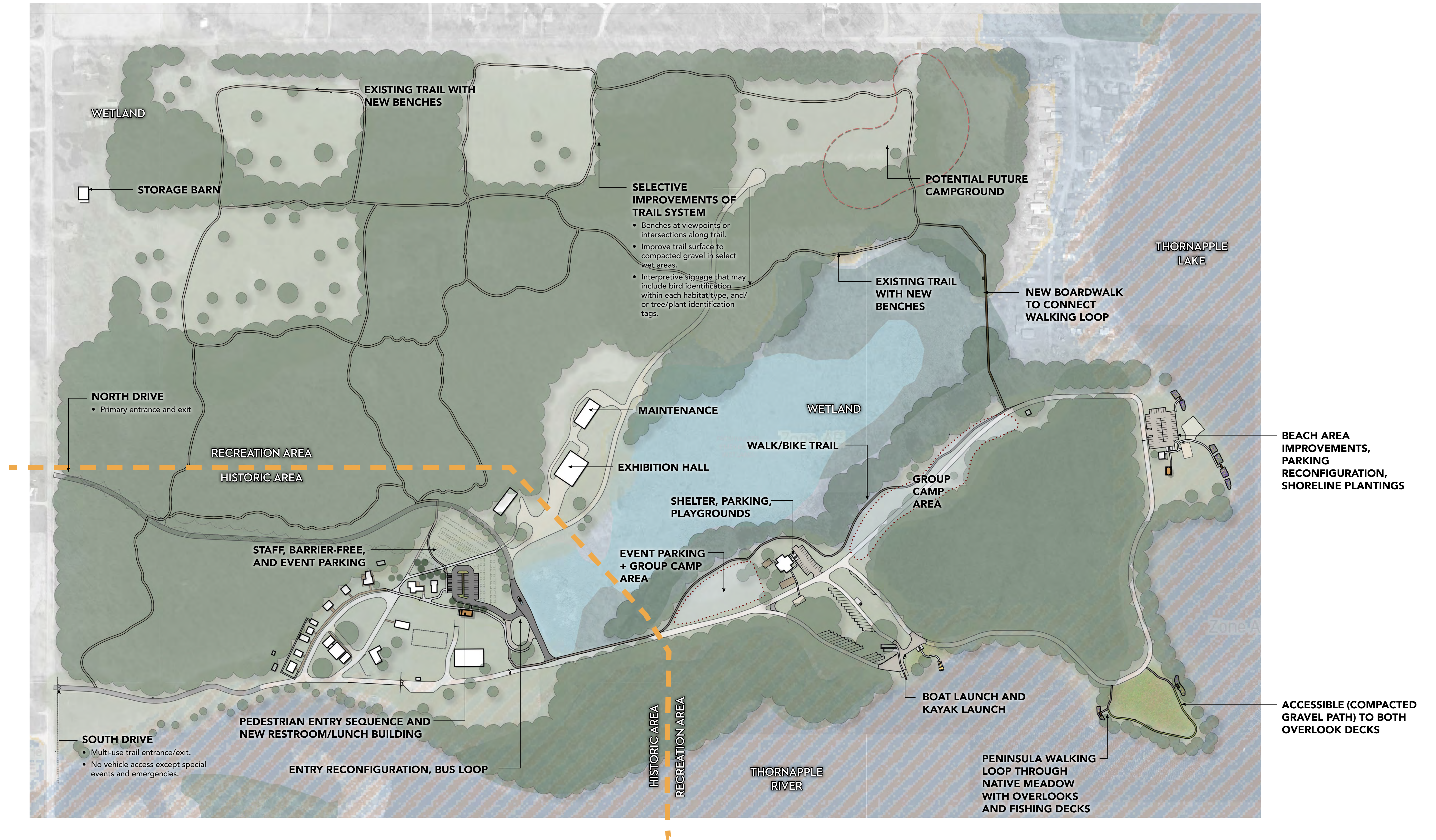
- HIGH PRIORITY ■
- MEDIUM PRIORITY ■
- LOW PRIORITY ■



OVERALL PLAN



REVISED 06/24/24

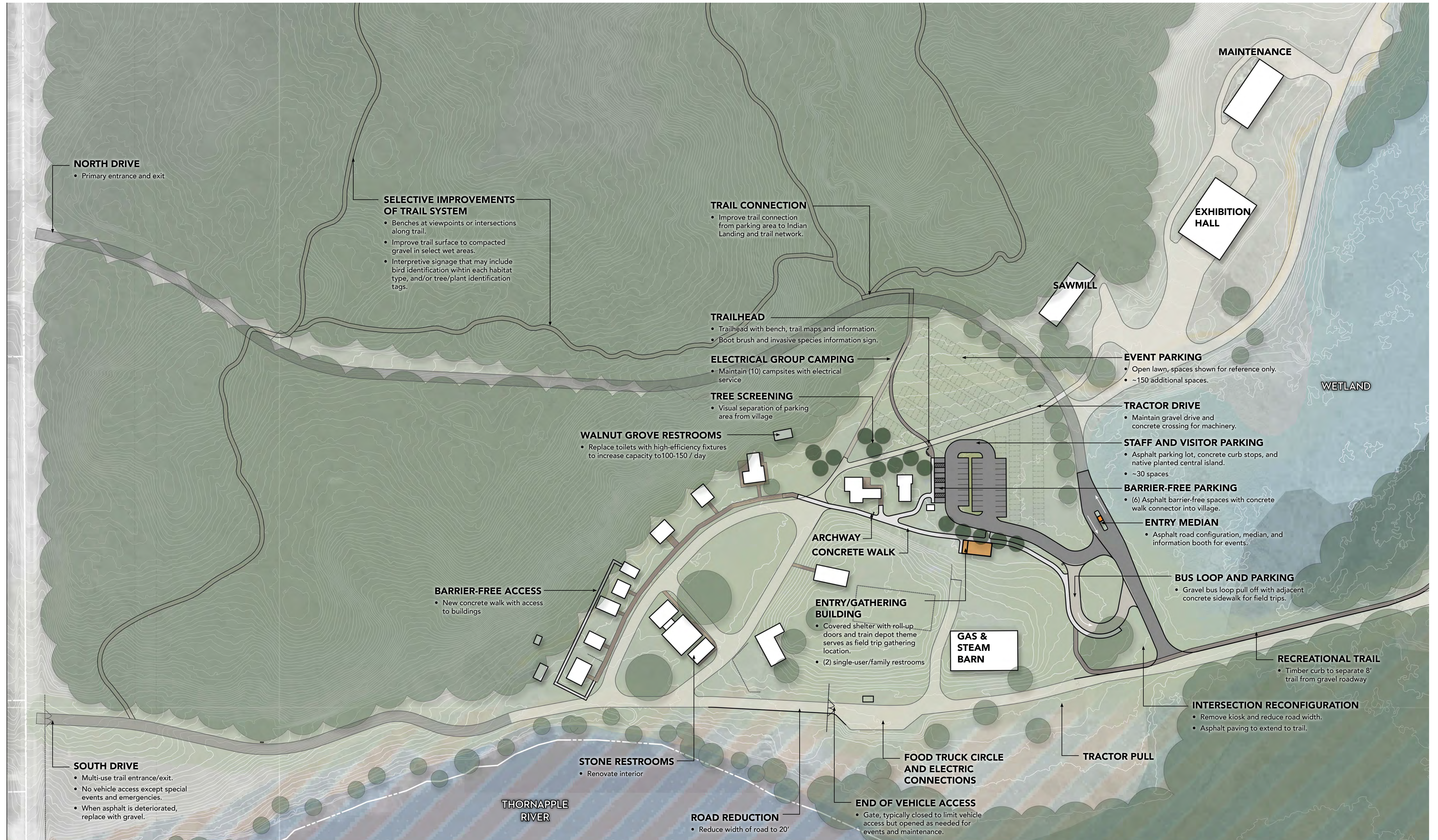




HISTORIC AREA



REVISED 06/24/24





RECREATION AREA



REVISED 06/24/24

