



Chatham Trail Feasibility Study

The Chatham Trail Feasibility Study was prepared under the leadership and guidance of the following organizations:

Chatham Rotary Foundation
Chatham Hall
Hargraves Military Academy
Town of Chatham
Reimagine Chatham
Hill Studio



CHATHAM HALL



TOWN OF
Chatham
VIRGINIA



HILL
STUDIO

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Background	7
Part 1: Kickoff and Feasibility Evaluation	10
Part 2: Trail Recommendations	15
Hurt Park	17
Train Depot	18
Chatham Burial Park	19
Union Memorial Garden	20
Harris Field	21
Gilbert's Restaurant	22
Chatham Hall	24
Hargrave Military Academy	28
Part 3: Proposed Trail Map	32
Cost Estimates	35
Conclusion	38

The background of the page is a photograph of a natural landscape. The upper portion shows a dense forest of trees with bare, light-colored branches, suggesting a late autumn or winter setting. A few evergreen trees are visible, adding some green to the scene. The lower portion of the image shows a field of tall, dry, yellowish-brown grass and some fallen leaves. A solid dark green rectangular box is overlaid on the middle of the image, containing the title text.

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

The Chatham Rotary Foundation is seeking to advance its vision for a walking and biking trail system. Building upon the 2010 Beautification Plan developed by Virginia Tech, which outlined a proposed three-mile perimeter walking trail, this current initiative aims to revisit and expand the original concept. Respondents of a past survey for the Growth and Renewal Strategic Plan, completed in late 2024, said they wanted to see a system of byways or walking trails around the town. This desire for a system of walking trails evolved into a discussion about how to approach the system's development utilizing existing walks, town owned properties, public spaces, and partner participation, specifically Chatham Hall and Hargrave, each of whom currently have private trails in place.

The completed study will serve as the basis to begin building out the features to provide the town and adjacent areas with a broad selection of choices to enjoy exploring the scenic and historic community.



Existing trail at Hargrave Military Academy



People walking on trail in nature
CHATHAM TRAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY | 6

The background of the slide is a photograph of a natural landscape. The upper portion shows a dense forest of trees with bare, light-colored branches against a pale blue sky. A large, dark green evergreen tree is prominent on the right side. The lower portion of the image shows a field of tall, dry, yellowish-brown grass and some fallen brown leaves, suggesting an autumn or winter setting.

Background

BACKGROUND

In 2024, the Chatham Rotary Foundation (as part of the Reimagine Chatham initiative) secured a grant to develop a Growth and Renewal Strategic Plan for the Chatham Area. One common theme from the Steering Committee, key stakeholders, and general community was the desire for more outdoor recreation activities, including more walking and biking opportunities. Reimagine Chatham secured a grant to conduct a feasibility study for a series of walking trails throughout town. Hill Studio was selected to conduct the study.

The current study involves assessing the feasibility of the initial alignment from the 2010 plan, identifying improvements to enhance accessibility and reduce the need for private property easements, proposing alternative routes as necessary. Additionally, the plan will incorporate interior trail loops and connections to existing sidewalks, town owned properties, various public places, and points of interest, including historic sites and architectural landmarks. Key priorities include considerations for phasing based on ease of implementation, leveraging existing infrastructure, and addition of amenities. The collaboration also emphasizes engaging local stakeholders, like Chatham Hall and Hargrave Military Academy, to explore opportunities for trail integration on their properties.

This study will evaluate the feasibility of the originally proposed layout, recommending changes to the layout as needed, while also assessing opportunities for a series of loop trails. The study will provide recommendations for phasing the trail construction and will provide a high-level cost estimate.

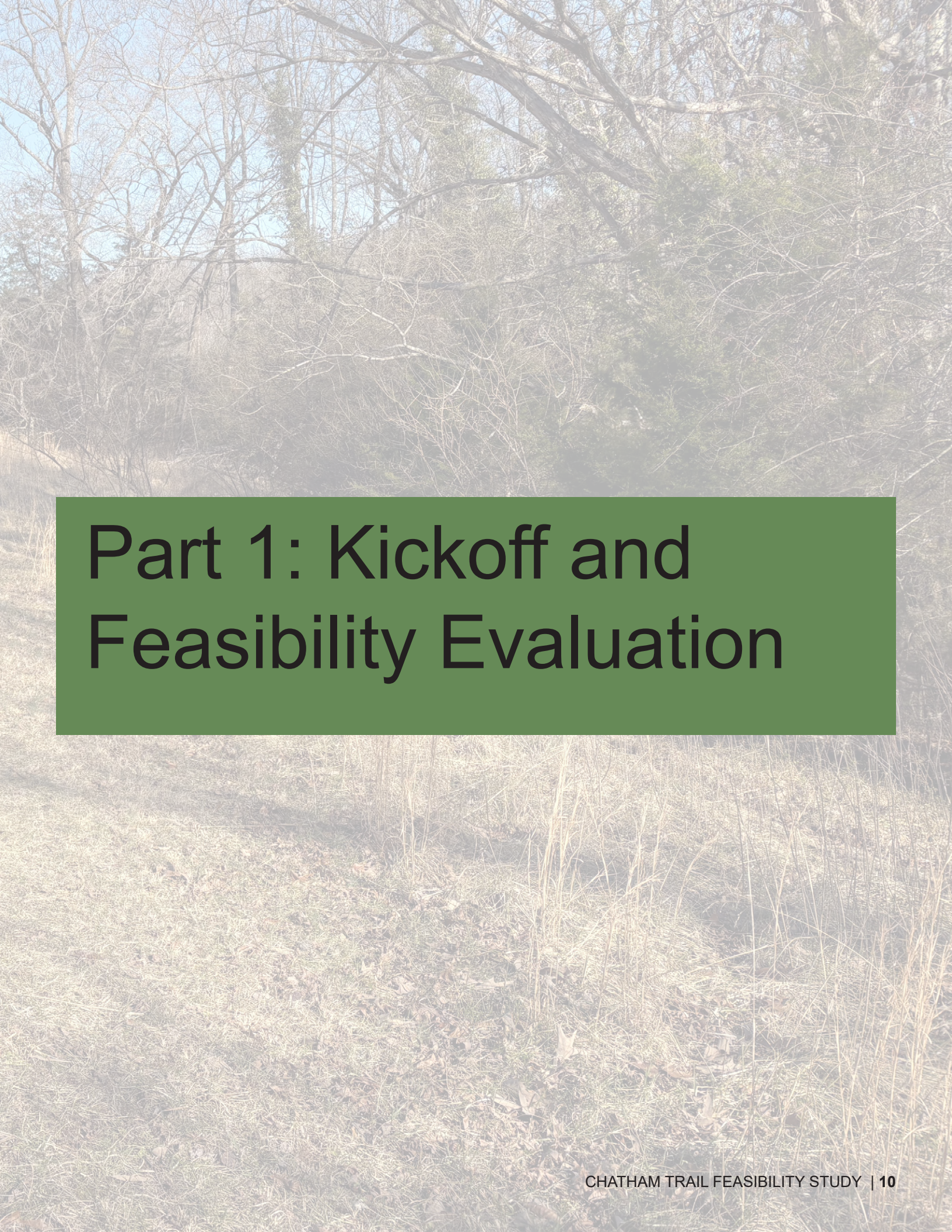
The study is funded by a second grant secured by the Chatham Rotary Foundation, Inc. This work is under “Phase 2” of Reimagine Chatham, the report’s “implementation” phase. The project followed the process shown in the following pages.



Existing trail at Chatham Hall



Trail connection to historic site
CHATHAM TRAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY | 9

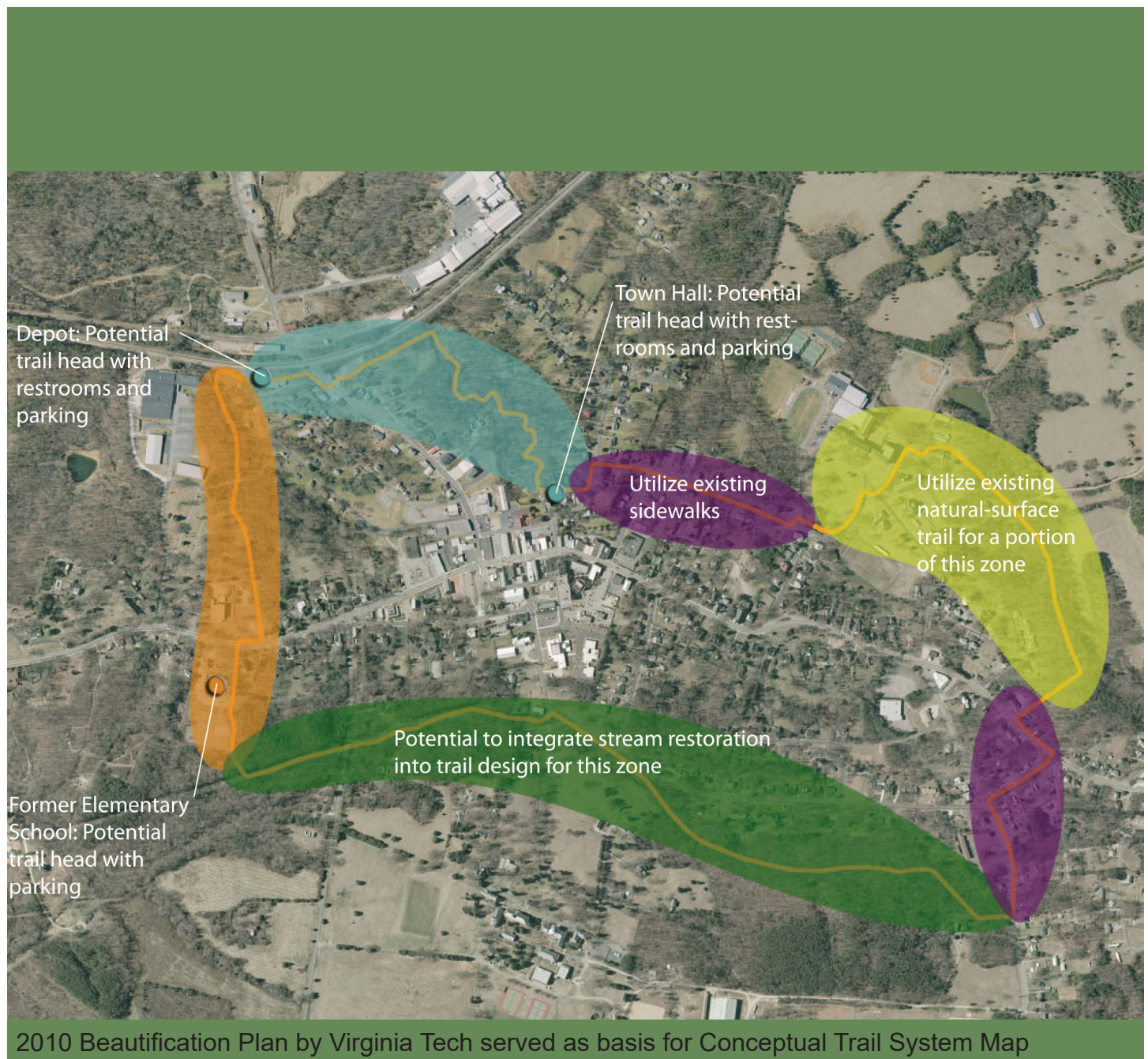
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Part 1: Kickoff and Feasibility Evaluation

KICKOFF AND FEASIBILITY EVALUATION

A one-day kickoff Meeting with the Trail Committee for the Chatham Walking Trail Feasibility Study was conducted on February 24, 2025. Hill Studio walked potential trail sections and met with Trail Committee representatives and various stakeholders to discuss opportunities for trails on their respective properties.

Hill Studio prepared base maps and preliminary alignments based on the 2010 Beautification Plan developed by Virginia Tech and using County/Town GIS data. The study had a particular focus on topography and property ownership, as these were anticipated to be the largest obstacles to development of the system.



Trail Committee, Design Team, & Representatives:

- Joe Rogers – Chatham Rotary Foundation and Co-Chair of Reimagine Chatham
- Dick Camp - Chatham Rotary Foundation and Co-Chair of Reimagine Chatham
- Alisa Davis - Mayor, Town of Chatham
- Nick Morris – Town Manager
- John Harris – River District Consulting
- Frank Fox – Chatham First and Reimagine Chatham
- Kathy Ramsey – Chatham First and Reimagine Chatham
- Mary Lee Black – Chatham First
- Joel Keneipp – President, Chatham First
- Michelle Andrade – Chatham Hall and Reimagine Chatham
- David Mitchell – Bridge Web Solutions and Reimagine Chatham
- Eddie and Susanna Hix – Chatham First
- Sam Redding - Hargrave Military Academy
- Chris Lawrie – Hill Studio, Project Consultant

KICKOFF AND FEASIBILITY EVALUATION

Items requested by the group during Kickoff:

- Chatham First Self-Guided Walking Tour should be included in the system.
- Art Murals for key locations in town.
- Park Benches at key resting areas around the trail system
- Interpretive signage at key historic locations and natural areas
- Water stations for hydration
- Exercise equipment in areas along the paths
- Signage, rest areas, and exercise stations
- No new lighting was requested along the walking routes
- Colorful and inviting Art installations along routes create opportunities for local artists.
- Color coding of signage and other elements
- Destination Nodes, and side routes to specific interest areas
- 5k run with Mile-markers
- Ringold Trail Danville was mentioned as a successful case study



Benches for relaxation



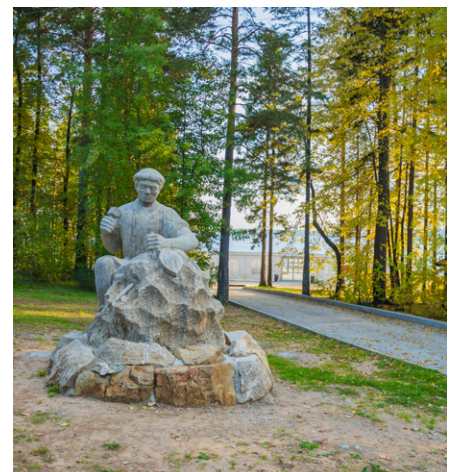
Interpretive signage



Exercise station



Water station



Art installations along trail

Consideration was given for biking trails, but there is too much congestion and not enough infrastructure to support separate bike lanes on town streets without considerable change to existing structure. Also, Hargrave and Chatham Hall did not want additional bikes on campus due to liability and safety concerns, as well as insufficient infrastructure.

Over the next 4 months, Hill studio conducted multiple site visits, analyzing and evaluating possible areas for opportunities and inclusion into the system. Through this process the overall concept and scope of the system became more clearly defined.



People walking on trail in nature

The background image shows a natural landscape. The upper portion is filled with a dense canopy of bare, light-colored tree branches against a pale blue sky. Below the trees, a field of tall, dry, yellowish-brown grass and some fallen leaves is visible. A semi-transparent dark green rectangular box is overlaid on the middle of the image, containing the title text.

Part 2: Trail Recommendations

TRAIL RECOMMENDATIONS

Utilizing existing GIS data and findings from the kickoff meeting and site visits, Hill Studio prepared recommendations for trail connections to important Waypoints throughout town and potential future spurs to connect points of interest in Town, all utilizing Main Street as the core. This assessment included the identification of private property and potential challenges such as topography, and accessibility. The following focus areas were identified:

- Hurt Park
- Train Depot
- Chatham Burial Park
- Union Memorial Garden
- Harris Field
- Gilbert's Restaurant



Hurt Park



Train Depot



Chatham Burial Park



Union Memorial Garden



Harris Field



Gilbert's Restaurant

Hurt Park lies in the center of town and has several historic features: a historic clerk's office, and a restored barn connected with a newly paved walking loop. The intent is to incorporate the park into the system as a main trail head central to town, with restrooms and parking.



Park Entrance



Trail Entrance Sign



Historic Barn with Interpretive Signage

TRAIL RECOMMENDATIONS



Historic train station

The Restored Train Depot and areas adjacent are points of interest in the proposed trail system. The historic train station building currently houses a visitor center and a museum. The existing parking lot and restrooms provide a great opportunity for a trailhead. Parking will be available at the Depot if it is used for trail access.



Old train platform



Museum and parking lot

The historic Chatham Burial Park provides a quiet destination, rich with history and memorials to Chatham's past residents. Chatham Burial Park was founded in 1872. There were original plans to connect this area to the depot, but this is not feasible as an initial phase, due to topography and property constraints. There may be opportunities for future connections as the town acquires more land adjacent to the Depot, Ennis, and Norfolk Southern.



View of Burial Park from road



Sign



The Burial Park sits on a hill

TRAIL RECOMMENDATIONS



South Main Street has many scenic and historic homes, and is on the southern limits of the current historic district at Union Memorial Garden cemetery. The oldest cemetery in Chatham is Union Memorial Garden, a historical African American cemetery founded in 1870.

The historic cemetery connects current residents to our roots



Cemetery Sign

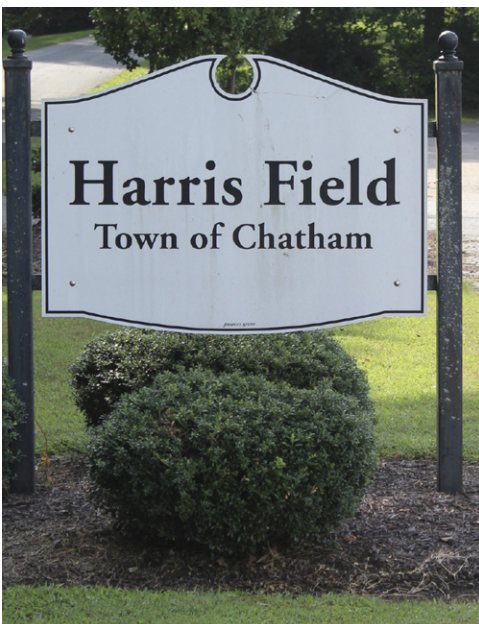


Cemetery as peaceful place for remembrance and reflection

Harris Field, on Davis Road, just south of town, has pickleball courts currently under construction as well as available town-owned land for nature walks and other uses. Town-owned land along Tanyard Branch might also be suitable for a future phase of nature trail sections connecting downtown to Harris Field. The existing baseball fields and concession building will continue to attract users to this park. The property extends considerably further past the new pickleball courts, and this undeveloped section is heavily wooded. This section is available for future development. A mountain bike trail is proposed around the perimeter of this area to take advantage of the rolling topography and wooded environment.



Playground at the park



Park entrance sign



Baseball Field

TRAIL RECOMMENDATIONS



North Main Street to Sower's Garage marks the end of the current national register historic district. A grant was sought to extend this historic district to the northern town limits which would include Gilbert's Restaurant but has been put on hold because of cost. Meanwhile, Gilbert's has officially been recognized as a historic landmark, earning a spot on the Virginia Landmarks Register and more recently was approved for the National Register of Historic Places. Gilbert's had an important role in the civil rights era, and a commemorative marker is planned and it may undergo restoration in the future. It is a rich historic site with much potential for reuse and interpretive design

Historic Gilbert's Restaurant, a vital community hub for Black residents during the Jim Crow era

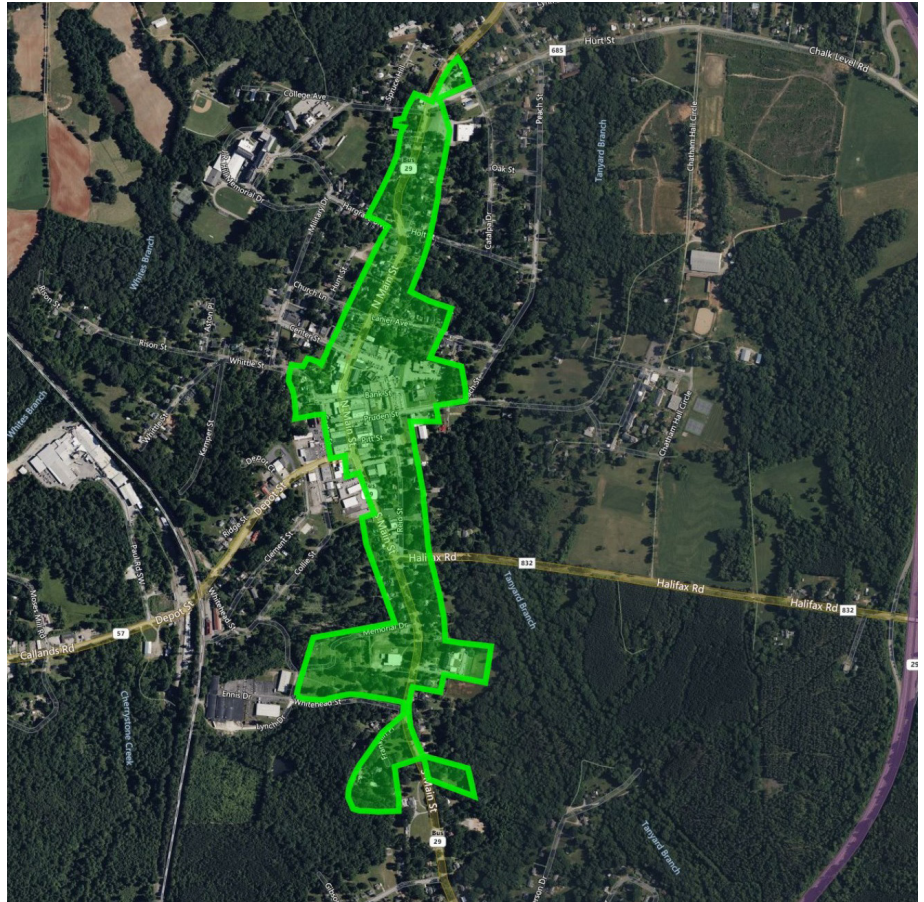


Sower's Garage on Main Street

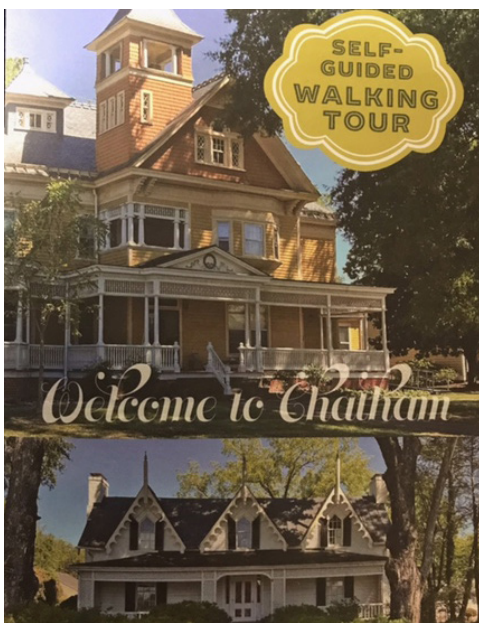


Main Street at Gilbert's Restaurant

Recent progress has been made finalizing the interactive walking tour of town, featuring homes and historic sites throughout the historic district. Called “A Self-Guided Walking Tour of Chatham”, this tour highlights the historic waypoints & residences along main street and adjacent streets and will be included in the proposed walking trail routes. This tour will also be distributed as a separate brochure.



Map of historic district



Brochure for self guided tour



Sample signage for historic site

TRAIL RECOMMENDATIONS

Chatham Hall school site was visited, and the team identified a series of existing trails on campus for inclusion in a town trail system. Quality of experience and safety/access were assessed. Chatham Hall was an active participant on the steering committee and supportive of these efforts which will improve the quality of life in our community and benefit their students. The willingness of the school to allow access to certain of the existing walking trails on campus has offered an opportunity to provide a more complete and diverse system by including more scenic and natural sections.

Hill Studio worked together with staff to identify areas that they believe can safely provide the public with good walking opportunities while protecting the integrity of the campus environment. The plan includes gates and signage to close sections on campus when conditions warrant.

The Primary trail system aims to improve the existing path at Chatham Hall and bring the public into their beautiful land including access to an Arboretum, an Equestrian show barn, and a Peace Garden. The Secondary system will be open at set times, when not in use for events, and weather permitting. These Secondary trails will include an Equestrian Loop, and a Fitness Trail loop through somewhat strenuous terrain.



Entrance to Arboretum



Seating area



Existing trail



Chatham Hall sign



Gates at entrance



Existing trail



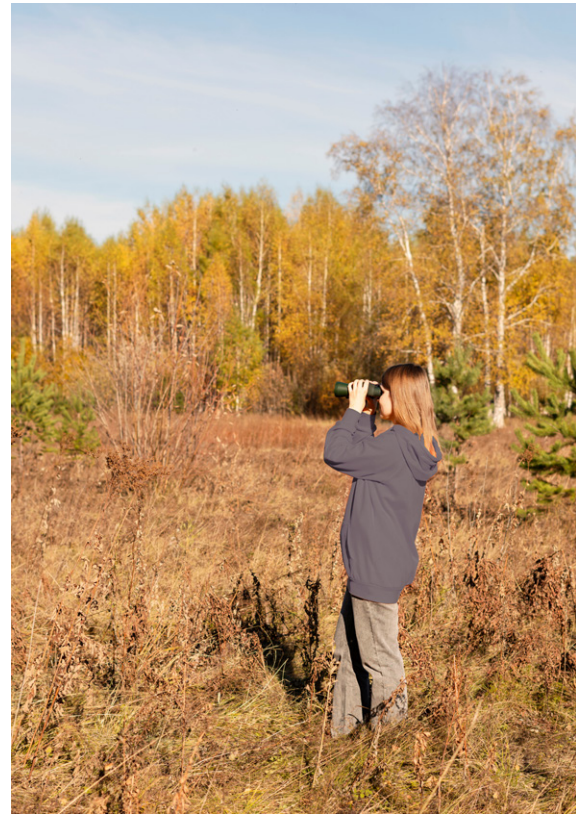
Existing trail

TRAIL RECOMMENDATIONS

The plan also includes the development of a small park at the corner of Pruden and Peach Streets. This property is currently vacant and unused and is owned by Chatham Hall. A local business may assist in the development of this site, if conditions allow.

Activities that may be designed into the park program:

- Birdwatching
- Swing seating
- Kiosk for interpretive signage
- Watering station & exercise areas
- Additional Parking so the park can serve as a Trailhead
- Park Signage
- Park Benches
- Space for stretches, and space for yoga.
- Equipment ideas: pull ups, horizontal climbing bars
- Interpretive signage showing the history of Chatham Hall school
- School historians may have input - Mary Lee Black & Bill Black
- Health and wellness Diagram “Living Well”



Birdwatching



Potential location



Exercise station



Swing seating



Benches for outdoor relaxation



Water station



Space for outdoor fitness

TRAIL RECOMMENDATIONS

Hargrave Military Academy identified existing trail sites around their campus for inclusion. The school was an active participant on the initial steering committee and has been supportive of the efforts to improve quality of life in the community and benefit their students. The willingness of the school to allow access to certain of the existing walking trails on campus has offered an opportunity to provide a more complete and diverse system by including more scenic and natural sections.

Hill Studio worked closely with school staff and together identified areas that can safely provide the public with good walking opportunities while protecting the integrity of the campus environment. The proposed walking trails contain provisions to restrict public access as needed by the school. The trails will be an important component of the Chatham Walking Trail experience.



Hargrave Military Academy



Existing trail with seating area



Existing sidewalk

The first phase of trails connects the center of campus to the north end of town through a beautiful woodland area. There is currently an existing trail in this area that may be enhanced with a mulch surface, and wayfinding signage. A series of gates and a fence will keep visitors from venturing into the adjacent cadet training areas, where cadets train and use specialized equipment that may be dangerous to the general public. Phase 2 will allow visitors to make a long loop around this area at certain times when not in use by cadets, and only if gates are open.



Existing trail



Cadet training area



Existing trail with fence

TRAIL RECOMMENDATIONS

The planning process led to the idea of developing a small park where one nature trail ends at Main Street, near Gilbert's Restaurant. Development of this space, owned by Hargrave, could provide a needed recreation amenity at the north end of town where there are currently fewer public parks for the community. This design may include a Picnic shelter, pollinator gardens, and park benches. The hope is that this space would eventually serve as a public park anchor space for creative reuse of Gilbert's.



Picnic pavilion



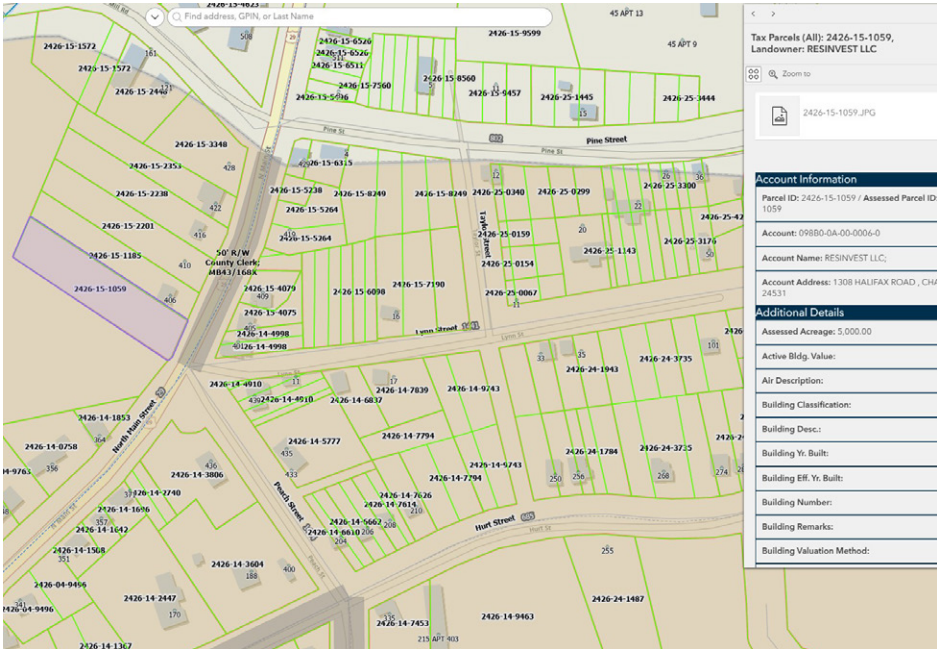
Park bench in garden



Pollinator garden with gazebo

An adjacent property acquisition may be a long-term objective to increase the space of the park.

The trails at these two schools will be an important component of the experience of Chatham Walking Trails, as they provide a rural experience of unpaved nature trails, in contrast to the paved town routes.



Parcel map showing opportunity for potential acquisition



Entrance to potential park



Garden at entrance of new trail

The background of the page is a photograph of a natural landscape. The upper half shows a dense forest of bare, thin trees with some evergreens, set against a clear blue sky. The lower half shows a field of tall, dry, yellowish-brown grass and some fallen leaves. A semi-transparent dark green rectangular box is overlaid on the middle of the image, containing the title text.

Part 3: Proposed Trail Map

PROPOSED TRAIL MAP

Based on the findings from the planning process, Hill Studio prepared a conceptual map of the trail system. This was reviewed with the Trail Committee and revised through multiple iterations, working closely with the two schools. Hill Studio also identified different trail surface options for new sections and made recommendations for phasing. These maps are part of a feasibility report, and any features will need to be developed in more detail in following consultant studies.



Many existing sidewalks in town can connect to proposed new trails

The town and local civic organizations may pursue a grant to solicit designs of wayfinding signage to assist and enhance the experience of this trail system. The signs should use the accepted branding. Through additional studies, the town might determine sign locations, layout, type, size, number needed, production of the signs, or development of specs for their production.



Mile Marker along trail



Trailhead with restroom pavilion



Signage Example



Informational Sign along trail

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Cost Estimates

COST ESTIMATES

Hill Studio provided a high-level order of magnitude estimate of the trail system as recommended, with a focus on estimating cost according to phases as delineated.

Tentative Phasing timeline:

1. Signage for Waypoint Walks
2. Delineation of nature trails
3. Gate and grading for nature trails as needed
4. Signage for nature trails
5. Connecting sidewalks
6. Development of pocket parks
7. Develop PR and Brochures and Web info
8. Promotion of system

OFFICIAL PHASES (see corresponding cost estimates)

- Phase 1: Signage for existing Waypoint Town paths
- Phase 2: Nature trail Phase 1
- Phase 3: New Connecting Sidewalks and Pocket parks
- Phase 4: Nature Trail Phase 2

Full Project

TOTAL COST

Chatham, VA - Walking Paths & Trails - Cost Estimate 6-24-25

PHASE 1

Town Paths - Signage for Existing Town Paths				
Description of Work	Qty	Unit	Unit Cost	Estimated Cost
Wayfinding Signage for existing Town paths (includes post, concrete footing, & sign)	35	EA	\$ 3,500	\$ 122,500
Subtotal				\$ 122,500
Arch/Eng Survey and Design Services (10%)				\$ 12,250
TOTAL PHASE 1				\$ 134,750

PHASE 2

Nature Trails - Delineation of Primary Phase 1 Nature Trails				
Description of Work	Qty	Unit	Unit Cost	Estimated Cost
Demolition, Clearing, & Grading	1	allow	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000
Erosion & Sediment control measures	1	allow	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,500
Hargraves Phase 1 Trail surfacing (Wood Chips 3' width)	2500	LF	\$ 2	\$ 5,000
Chatham Hall Primary Trail improvements (asphalt)	1500	LF	\$ 20	\$ 30,000
Chatham Hall Primary Trail improvements (mulch)	500	LF	\$ 2	\$ 1,000
Fencing	200	LF	\$ 75	\$ 15,000
Gates (posts & chainlink)	6	EA	\$ 1,000	\$ 6,000
Wayfinding, Open/Closed Signage	8	EA	\$ 800	\$ 6,400
Interpretive Signage	6	EA	\$ 3,000	\$ 18,000
Subtotal				\$ 88,900
Arch/Eng Survey and Design Services (10%)				\$ 8,890
TOTAL PHASE 2				\$ 97,790

PHASE 3

Town Paths - New Connecting Town Paths, Landscaping, & Signage					
	Description of Work	Qty	Unit	Unit Cost	Estimated Cost
	Demolition, Clearing, & Grading	1	allow	\$ 15,000	\$ 15,000
	Erosion & Sediment control measures	1	allow	\$ 7,500	\$ 7,500
	Crosswalks - painted	20	EA	\$ 800	\$ 16,000
	Concrete Sidewalk 3'-5' width	2750	LF	\$ 100	\$ 275,000
	Landscaping	1	allow	\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000
	Wayfinding Signage for new paths	10	EA	\$ 2,500	\$ 25,000
	Interpretive Signage	5	EA	\$ 5,000	\$ 25,000
	Website/ QR development & promotional brochures	1	allow	\$ 8,000	\$ 8,000
	Curb and Gutter, other drainage improvements as needed	1	allow	\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000
	Subtotal				\$ 471,500
	Arch/Eng Survey and Design Services (10%)				\$ 47,150
					\$ 518,650
Chatham Hall's Fitness Gateway Park					
	Description of Work	Qty	Unit	Unit Cost	Estimated Cost
	Demolition, & Clearing, & Grading	1	allow	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000
	Erosion & Sediment control measures	1	allow	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,500
	Utility Improvements	100	LF	\$ 200	\$ 20,000
	Water station	1	EA	\$ 12,000	\$ 12,000
	Parking improvements	1	allow	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000
	Exercise Equipment	1	allow	\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000
	Benches	6	EA	\$ 2,000	\$ 12,000
	New 5' Sidewalks	100	LF	\$ 100	\$ 10,000
	Lighting Improvements	4	EA	\$ 6,500	\$ 26,000
	Landscaping	1500	SF	\$ 15	\$ 22,500
	Park Signage	1	EA	\$ 8,000	\$ 8,000
	Kiosk- interpretive signage	1	allow	\$ 8,000	\$ 8,000
	Subtotal				\$ 173,000
	Arch/Eng Survey and Design Services (10%)				\$ 17,300
					\$ 190,300
Hargrave's Nature Park at Gilbert's					
	Description of Work	Qty	Unit	Unit Cost	Estimated Cost
	Demolition, Clearing, & Grading	1	allow	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000
	Erosion & Sediment control measures	1	allow	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,500
	Utility Improvements	100	LF	\$ 200	\$ 20,000
	Retaining wall along main street sidewalk	1	allow	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000
	Benches	6	EA	\$ 2,000	\$ 12,000
	New 5' Sidewalks	100	LF	\$ 100	\$ 10,000
	Lighting Improvements	4	EA	\$ 6,500	\$ 26,000
	Landscaping	1500	SF	\$ 15	\$ 22,500
	Park Signage	1	EA	\$ 8,000	\$ 8,000
	Pavilion - shelter	1	allow	\$ 35,000	\$ 35,000
	Kiosk- interpretive signage	1	allow	\$ 8,000	\$ 8,000
	Subtotal				\$ 174,000
	Arch/Eng Survey and Design Services (10%)				\$ 17,400
					\$ 191,400
	TOTAL PHASE 3				\$ 900,350

PHASE 4

Nature Trails - Delineation of Secondary Phase 2 Nature Trails					
Description of Work	Qty	Unit	Unit Cost	Estimated Cost	
Demolition, Clearing, & Grading	1	allow	\$ 15,000	\$ 15,000	
Erosion & Sediment control measures	1	allow	\$ 7,500	\$ 7,500	
Hargraves Phase 2 Trail surfacing (Wood Chips 3' width)	10000	LF	\$ 2	\$ 20,000	
Chatham Hall Secondary Trail improvements (mulch, stone fill, grip-tape, railings)	1	allow	\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000	
Wayfinding Signage	20	EA	\$ 800	\$ 16,000	
Interpretive Signage	6	EA	\$ 3,000	\$ 18,000	
Benches	6	EA	\$ 2,000	\$ 12,000	
Subtotal				\$ 138,500	
Arch/Eng Survey and Design Services (10%)				\$ 13,850	
TOTAL PHASE 4				\$ 152,350	

TOTAL ALL PHASES	\$ 1,285,240
20% contingency	\$ 257,048
	\$ 1,542,288

The background of the page is a photograph of a natural landscape. The upper portion shows a dense forest of trees, many of which are without leaves, suggesting a late autumn or winter setting. The lower portion of the image shows a field of tall, dry, yellowish-brown grass and some fallen leaves. A solid dark green rectangular box is overlaid on the middle of the image, containing the word 'Conclusions' in white text.

Conclusions

CONCLUSIONS

Hill Studio compiled the findings, recommendations, and maps into this single report document for easy distribution. This document will be made available electronically and in printed format. An enlarged print of the proposed trail map will also be provided for the town for reference.



Opportunities for outdoor relaxation



Parking lot at trail entrance