

# THE CHAVIS CONVERSION

CITY OF RALEIGH, THIS PHOTO; SPERNA, INSET

**LEFT**

A parks department decision to move Chavis Park's carousel from the original pavilion sparked protest.

**INSET**

In the segregation era, the carousel was one of the amenities that made the park a regional destination.

## FINDING WHAT A PARK IN RALEIGH HAS MEANT TO ITS PUBLIC HAS TAKEN A WHOLE NEW SET OF TOOLS.

BY JONATHAN LERNER

**I**N MAY OF LAST YEAR, a master plan for the renovation of a park was presented to the city council of Raleigh, North Carolina. This park occupies about 28 acres of pleasantly rolling, if undramatic, terrain and is situated within a modest residential area close to downtown. It was once something of a showplace, but had deteriorated. The new master plan is well thought out but not radical. It's hardly the kind of design proposal that provokes strong emotion. Still, after turning in a unanimous aye vote, the city council gave it a standing ovation. More than the plan itself, they were applauding the process that produced it. The plan will renew the park, but arguably more important was what it represents—a repair of the troubled communication between the city and its African American community. One recent misunderstanding in that long, volatile relationship had to do with a carousel. The carousel, oddly enough, became a flash point.



**LEFT**  
A proposed heritage walk—the dotted line—would link Chavis Park and the South Park–East Raleigh neighborhood to downtown.

**RIGHT**  
The neighborhood's modest houses are attracting a new population of young urbanites.

**OPPOSITE**  
The concept master plan for the renovation of Chavis Park.



The carousel—some old-timers call it the merry-go-round—was a remaining original feature of John Chavis Memorial Park. Named for a free black man, a Revolutionary War veteran who founded a school in 1808 where both white and black children were taught, Chavis Park was extravagant for a facility built for African Americans in the segregated South of 1937. It had picnic shelters, as you would expect, and a bit of the rustic stone hardscaping typical of parks, like it, constructed by the New Deal-era Civilian Conservation Corps. It also had tennis courts, a swimming pool, and a bathhouse. Even after it opened, it continued to be enhanced. A stadium was erected at the sports field. In 1952, a miniature train ride was introduced. After the Korean War, the shell of a Cougar jet fighter, modified as a playground slide, was installed.

To many, the airplane acknowledged black participation in the armed forces generally, and recalled the black troops billeted in the park during World War II—and even nodded to the Tuskegee Airmen, an illustrious African American squadron, though one with no particular Raleigh connection. The carousel, too, had symbolism. It had 12 rows of bejeweled, carved horses and

two chariots with red upholstery. Illuminated panels, painted in oils, depicted seascapes and landscapes. It revolved to the music of a Wurlitzer military band organ. Of all the park's embellishments, it was the most lavish. It was also an artifact of racial segregation—a larger and fancier carousel had been in place since 1921 on the other side of the city, in the larger and more elaborate Pullen Park, a park for whites only. Despite the obvious inequalities between these white and black facilities, by all accounts Chavis Park was treasured by the people for whom it was intended. In comparison to other public spaces welcoming to African Americans, its abundance of features and activities made it a destination for people from all over eastern North Carolina.

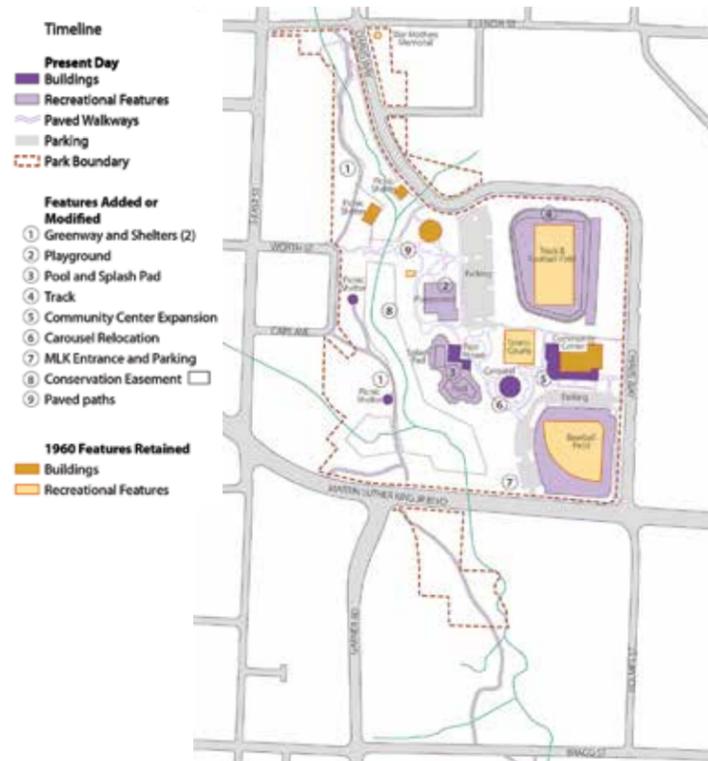
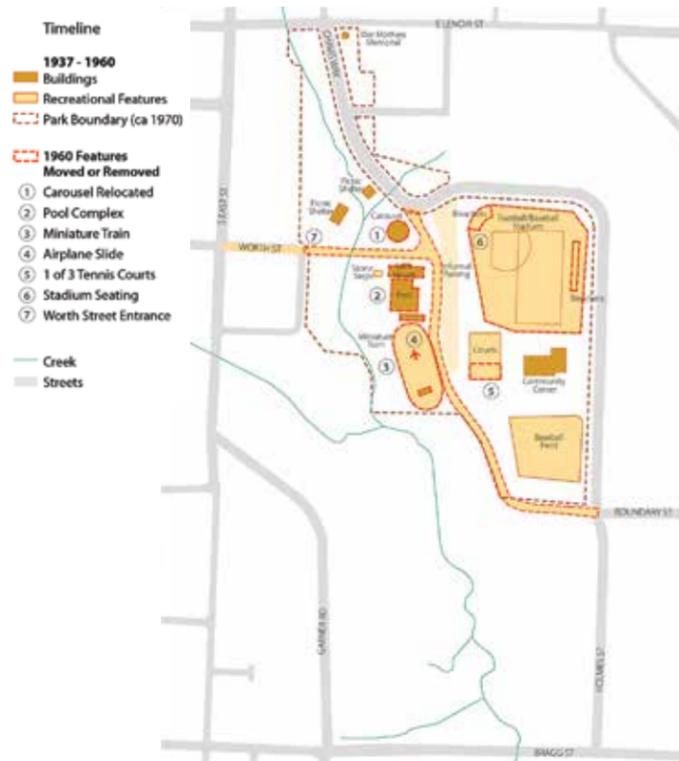
Raleigh, the state capital, was laid out on 400 former plantation acres in 1792; the original town was a rectangle with an orthogonal grid punctuated toward each corner by a public square. After the Civil War there was an influx of former slaves, and many settled in the city's southeast, where two colleges for black students were quickly founded, Shaw University in 1865 and St. Augustine's College in 1867. Other institutions for African Americans were soon established nearby. So were subdivisions offering the chance of home ownership in the black neighborhoods of South Park and East Raleigh, which both border Chavis Park. (The two neighborhoods

now comprise a National Register Historic District.) Despite the codification of Jim Crow in the early 20th century, black and white Raleigh continued to meet downtown, in particular around Moore Square, the point on the grid from which the black neighborhoods extended south and east. The city market, which included African American vendors and was patronized by both populations, was located there, as were many other black-owned businesses.

In 2008, the Raleigh Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources Department decided to move the Chavis Park carousel to a new spot. A few years earlier, a neighborhood street at the park's southern edge had been refashioned into a wide crosstown arterial; a new park entrance and parking lot had been constructed leading in from the new road, and it was felt that the carousel would be more accessible and attract more riders if it were at a higher elevation, close to and visible from this new boulevard. There had been other changes to the park over the years. The stadium had been demolished and the airplane and train ride removed. Some park entrances had been closed. A creek runs inside the park's western edge. Old people recall playing there—splashing barefoot, catching crayfish—as their first childhood encounters with nature. But it had become thickly overgrown, interrupting sight lines and isolating the corridor of parkland



on its far side. This was intentional, the naturalization of a riparian buffer mandated by rules of a conservation easement. But that had either not been made clear or it was not generally understood, and the overgrowth, too, became symbolic of the diminishment of the park. It seemed to echo the deterioration, over recent decades, of the once cohesive South Park and East Raleigh neighborhoods, which were also beginning to be unsettled in a different way, because of proximity to the resurgent downtown, by newcomers and the prospect of gentrification. Perhaps the community's resentment was exacerbated by the fact that Pullen Park, the former whites-only park, was about to undergo a \$6 million renovation.



Symbols have power. “Longtime residents were beyond angry,” recalls Vernice Miller-Travis. They organized a petition drive calling for improvements in the park and opposing the carousel’s relocation. They lost on the carousel, but “the outpouring of emotion was what led the parks department to recognize that they were out of their element and needed some outside help,” she says. Miller-Travis is a senior associate at Skeo Solutions, with expertise in brownfields redevelopment, environmental justice, and collaborative design and planning. The parks department decided to initiate a public process that came to be called the “Chavis Conversation.” Skeo Solutions won the contract to facilitate it. “Normally we’re working in places where there has been some kind of environmental challenge,” Miller-Travis says. “This was not about environmental cleanup, but it was about the restoration of a landscape that once had been very productive,” she says. It was about restoring “the culture of the landscape.”



Previous master plan updates for the park had come to little, she says, because decision makers hadn’t seen that the local heritage “had to be an integral part of this process or they

weren’t going to be able to get the community to participate and support this effort.” The nearly two-year Chavis Conversation went beyond the parks department’s brief, which called for dialogue and ideas; Skeo produced the new master plan for the park as well. It generally retains the original layout and surviving features like picnic shelters, a wide flight of stone steps that used to serve as an amphitheater, and a stone bench built in 1945 as a war mothers’ memorial; it calls for similar stonework in constructing new amenities. The original carousel building, now empty, is envisioned as accommodating a café and exhibit space. The plan calls for expanding the sports fields and installing restrooms, benches, shade structures, fitness equipment, bike racks, and a skate area. Maybe there will be a new kiddie train, and another airplane—a World War II P-51 is suggested, to explicitly honor the Tuskegee Airmen. Connectivity would be enhanced with new creek crossings, enhancements to the park edge, and reopened entries. Building it out may cost anywhere from \$20 million to \$40 million, because several big-ticket facilities proposed, including a rebuilt community center and an aquatic complex, have yet to



1938



1959



2010

be fully programmed. But a first phase has been funded with \$12.5 million. Schematic design is now getting under way by the architecture firm Clearscapes and the landscape architecture firm Surface 678, along with Skeo Solutions, whose staff includes landscape architects. That the master plan concept is straightforward is no reason that the design team can’t create something engaging and vital, a park well used and loved again as it once was. The less tangible intention of embodying and sustaining the unique local history may be harder; in any case, that is unlikely to be achieved entirely or even primarily as a function of design.

The community’s reaction in 2008 against moving the carousel can be seen as having sparked the park renovation. But, in a sense, that reaction had been primed. Two essentially grassroots



**LEFT**  
Hazel Logan, a neighborhood resident since 1945, recorded a “cell phone diary” video about the park’s history.

**FAR LEFT**  
In the park’s heyday, a now-vanished pool was an important attraction.

**OPPOSITE**  
The airplane slide came to symbolize African American participation in the armed forces.



initiatives, both concerned with the history and future of that part of town, were already in progress. One was a project of the South Park–East Raleigh Neighborhood Association to create an archive. The other was an effort to begin work on a revitalization strategy for the area, prompted by the Central Citizens Advisory Council (CAC), a conduit for public input on issues of zoning and development. The latter effort took the form of a community visioning process, led by landscape architects from the design school at North Carolina State University (NCSU). This eventually produced a master plan for a neighborhood heritage walk, which has an explicit ulterior purpose, to spur reinvestment. These two initiatives

came into being because “we recognized the demise of the park, and with the development occurring in downtown we felt threatened,” says Lonnette Williams, a neighborhood native and leader who chairs the Central CAC. As in many communities, there’s a relatively small core of activists in South Park–East Raleigh. Many are senior citizens with long memories, which the discussions involved in these two projects brought to top of mind. Many of these individuals were already involved with both initiatives when the carousel crisis, as it is sometimes referred to, erupted (and some of the same participants would later become active in the Chavis Conversation). Also, the city, despite its perhaps tone-deaf gestures—like moving the car-

ousel, which after all was intended as an improvement to the park—was paying attention to this part of town. “In Raleigh now, downtown is an economic engine,” says Grant Meacci, ASLA, then a planning and design manager at Raleigh’s Urban Design Center, a unit of the city planning department. He describes a “ripple effect” because “there’s finally in-migration,” and because the Chavis Park area is a logical and unobstructed direction for that new urbanistic energy to spread. The new Chavis Park master plan may not be that complicated, but it is a result (as is the heritage walk proposal) of this complex of simultaneous, interwoven undertakings on the part of neighborhood activists, the city, and NCSU.

A paradox of segregation was how it encouraged African American communities like South Park–East Raleigh to cohere. This was a community of homeowners and strivers. “On every corner there was some black business and close by was the resident who owned it,” says Williams. “They were achievers. The influence of the colleges really contributed.” She says, “We didn’t work while we were in school. Homework was your work, so you could prepare yourself, so you could achieve. That was commonplace. Those who didn’t go to college went into the military or got jobs that enabled them to get more training and be successful.” She and others recall a place where people knew and took care of one another. “Being part of a family, a contributing member of society, that was an expectation.... We seem to have lost all that, with integration.” As opportunities to live elsewhere and advance economically with fewer obstacles became available, the community began to lose vitality. Some houses fell into disrepair. There is no longer any neighborhood retail presence to speak of. Many residents who remain are elderly.

**RIGHT AND INSET**  
On a “Site Safari,” as part of the Chavis Conversation, kids used maps to identify what they liked and disliked about the park, and then drew their own visions for it.

**OPPOSITE TOP AND BOTTOM**  
Community members at the “Design Your Park” station, during a Chavis Conversation forum, and Lonnette Williams, the chair of the Central Citizens Advisory Council.



The distance from Moore Square, downtown, to the farthest point of Chavis Park is only one mile. It’s an easy walk along shady, level, human-scale residential streets. Most of the existing buildings and larger available parcels in and next to downtown have already seen redevelopment. South Park–East Raleigh’s original shotgun houses and bungalows have their charm, and they are more affordable than larger houses in originally white historic neighborhoods similarly close to downtown. Already, some houses have been renovated. There has been single-family infill as well, mostly compatible in style and scale with the existing fabric. The fear of longtime residents was that “if something didn’t happen positively to improve this park,” says Williams, “we would lose it”—lose not the green space itself so much as the profound meaning it held for those who had grown up with it, and lose along with that an important piece of the city’s identity. The park, Williams says, “had its problems. It didn’t have amenities—no restrooms or water fountains, no concession stand. So why would people come here?” It was necessary “to make the public aware that this park had good bones and structure,” she says. “And history.”

concept design for an expanded and more sophisticated exhibition and repository space there. He also produced a series of “knowledge maps.” These big posters, densely collaged with captioned archival images of the neighborhood and of the city’s black history, were widely distributed—in people’s possession, triggering memories—before the carousel crisis.

The effort by the CAC to consider revitalizing the area had received some funding from the city. That enabled the short-term rental of a storefront near Moore Square where initial visioning and design workshops were held, facilitated by the NCSU landscape architecture professors Celen Pasalar and Kofi Boone, ASLA, with their graduate students. Then funds became

SKED SOLUTIONS, TOP RIGHT, CRAIG GRANT, STUDIO 323, BOTTOM LEFT

SKED SOLUTIONS



**LEFT**  
A stone bench was constructed as a war mothers' memorial after World War II.

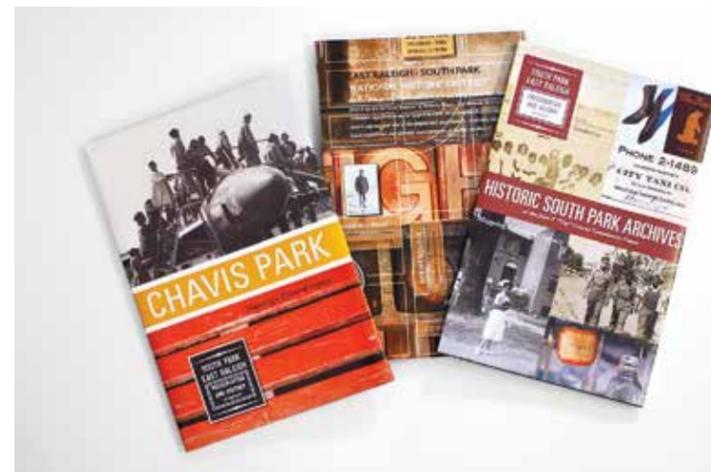
**BELOW**  
Kofi Boone, ASLA, explored using smartphones to solicit community input for the heritage walk.

**OPPOSITE**  
The graphic designer Kermit Bailey, along with his students at NCSU, created "knowledge maps" that illustrate the neighborhood's history.



SKEO SOLUTIONS, TOP; LEFT, CRAIG GRANT, STUDIO 323, BOTTOM RIGHT

available through the university for multidisciplinary faculty research projects of various kinds. Boone secured one of these grants, to support the "exploration of place-based narratives." The place in question was this same part of southeast Raleigh. The researchers receiving it, in addition to himself, were Bailey, the graphic designer, and a sociolinguistics professor, Robin Dodsworth. With this support, Boone continued the work he and Pasalar had already started, which involved community members in identifying and mapping locations that a revitalization plan should address either because they were problematic—unsafe or trashed out, say—or because they presented opportunities, such as an appropriate location or sizable enough parcel for introducing new retail or multifamily housing. As a way to encourage participation in these discussions from the elderly, Boone gave out smartphones with which they could record "cell phone diary" videos of themselves talking about sites that held meaning for them. His work culminated in the concept plan for the heritage walk linking Chavis Park and the surrounding neighborhood with downtown. Dodsworth and her students, meanwhile, were collecting oral histories, though for purposes of linguistic analysis rather than to influence the built environment. Still, the park continually came up in their interviews, and she says that her subjects were "talking about Chavis Park and southeast Raleigh in a way that is a practice of preservation." So there were these overlapping



KERMIT BAILEY, LEFT, CRAIG GRANT, STUDIO 323, RIGHT

layers of information gathering—all this talking and listening centered in space upon Chavis Park and variously concerned with the community's past and its regeneration—already taking place when the parks department-sponsored Chavis Conversation started in 2012.

For that, Skeo organized a Public Leadership Group, made up of people who had some connection within a two-mile radius of the park. It ended up as a group of 16, including people who had grown up in the neighborhood and, for example, a smart growth advocate with a master's degree in public planning; a board member of an African American tennis club; the president of the homeowners association of an affordable-housing development; and the youth program coordinator for a southeast Raleigh community-development nonprofit. The group's first meeting was a daylong retreat largely dedicated to building cultural competence, which Travis-Miller describes as "giving people the space and freedom to talk." One exercise was to ask members of "every racial and ethnic or gender group" present to voice every derogatory term "people have referred to you and your tribe as," Travis-Miller says. "Every stereotype, the N-word and all the other things.... You would think that that would be a terrifying process, but it is often a hilarious conversation, because when you say out loud the things you have heard in the ether, it's just so ignorant." Several of the parks department's project team members participated in that meeting, and Skeo had led a similar exercise for department staff the day before. "They recognized that there was some skill set that they didn't have in order to connect with that community," Travis-Miller says. "The challenges of racial and cultural miscommunication that had happened over time needed to be factored in." The Chavis Conversation leadership group met



monthly; one meeting was a charrette, and there were also several open forums. The group was recently honored with the city's Raleigh Environmental Stewardship Award, which is given for achievement in addressing issues of environment, economics, and social justice.

The importance of Chavis Park to the surrounding community was clear from the public-engagement work Boone had already done aimed at neighborhood revitalization. "The topic of the park dominated, because of the immediacy of the crisis" provoked by the plan to move the carousel, he says. People recalled a richness of experiences and activities that would be rare for a community of any class or ethnicity to have enjoyed at its neighborhood park: summer day camps; water pageants; Easter egg rolls; Shaw students presenting Shakespeare outdoors; Negro League baseball games, as well as high school and college meets, at the stadium; wedding receptions; the neighborhood's first color TV, at the community center; civil rights marches stopping off on their way to the state capitol downtown; and "Teenage Frolics" dance parties

# THE PUBLIC CONVERSATION HAD TO FACTOR IN RACIAL AND CULTURAL MISCUES THAT HAD OCCURRED OVER TIME.

broadcast on a local television station. “Activities that were temporal, things that happened and then evaporated but were really important to them—these were the things they were attached to,” Boone says.

“Now here, on this concrete area, teenagers would dance,” one elderly resident reminisced, for example, while recording a shaky cell phone video as she walked through the park. “Can you imagine these six-year-old girls, and some boys, too, slipping down here and squeezing through the crowd, to see the best dancer, a dancer called Rubber Legs?” Boone grins, “The old-timers all knew who she was talking about.” Boone was inspired by Photovoice, a participatory photo mapping methodology that has been used in community development and public health projects. Here, applying it to urban design with the aid of the smartphone, “there were two questions being asked,” he says. “A lot of our processes are away from the

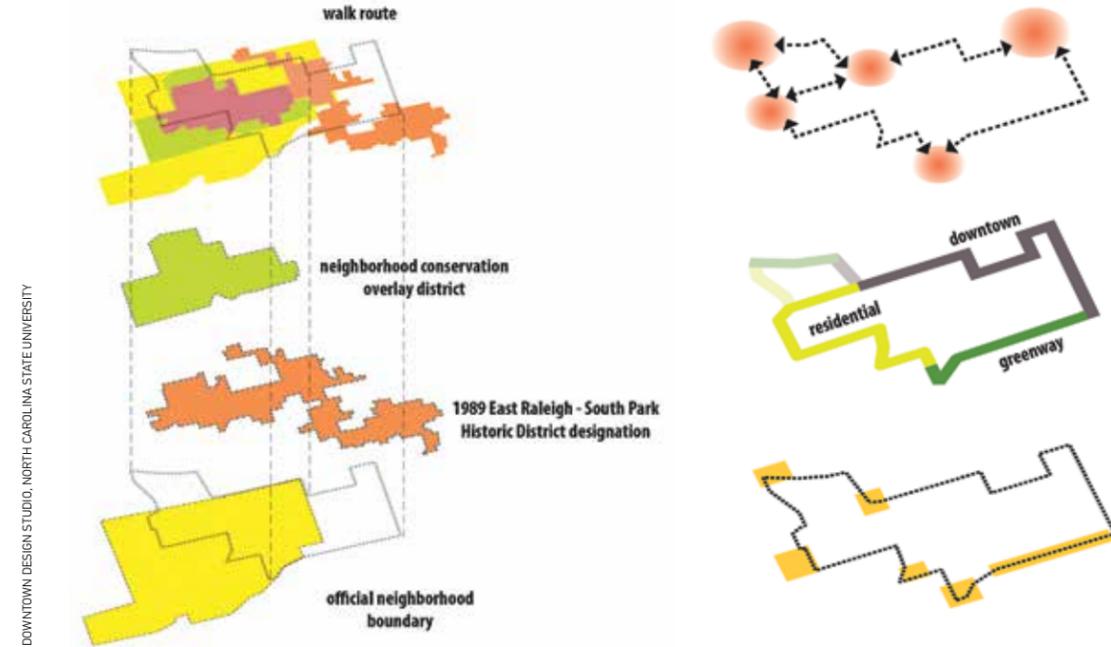
place you’re trying to consider, sitting around a table, looking at maps. So would you think about it differently if you were out literally in the place?” And what if “this allowed people to get involved if they didn’t want to or couldn’t participate in group settings?” In this instance, that was 17 seniors, who shot 48 videos. He points out that “young people have a totally different perspective, as do new residents,” and envisions using the technique to collect such multiple points of view in future projects. Another application of smartphone technology, which Boone is turning his attention to, could be as a visual preference tool. He suggests using Google Cardboard, a system that combines a mount for a smartphone—the 21st-century analog of the old stereoscopic slide viewer—and apps that can create 3-D views of a place. On site, with photos or renderings embedded in the app or beamed from the cloud overlaid onto the phone’s real-time pictures of the site, “you could simulate alternatives.”

The collaboration among Boone, Bailey, and Dodsworth was, all three willingly admit, an odd liaison. Boone refers to a perhaps arcane dialogue in academia about the differences among multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary work. Interdisciplinary efforts borrow approaches from each other, and transdisciplinary ones carve out “new disciplinary space,



**RIGHT**  
The heritage walk will link key neighborhood spots with redesigned streetscapes and opportunities for historic interpretation.

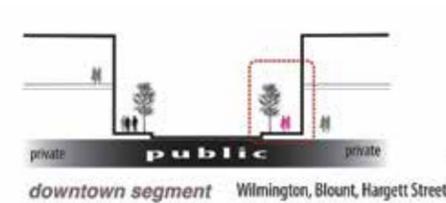
DOWNTOWN DESIGN STUDIO, NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY



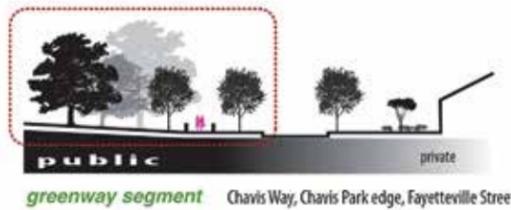
Reconnect major institutions and open spaces that were once vital components to the historic neighborhood fabric with a continuous, safe, enjoyable, and walkable route.

Develop a narrative framework for “storytelling” using the diverse characteristics of the physical environment as the context and setting.

Identify and target certain key areas along the walk for public realm and infrastructure improvements, and initiate public/private partnerships to facilitate funding for identified improvement projects.



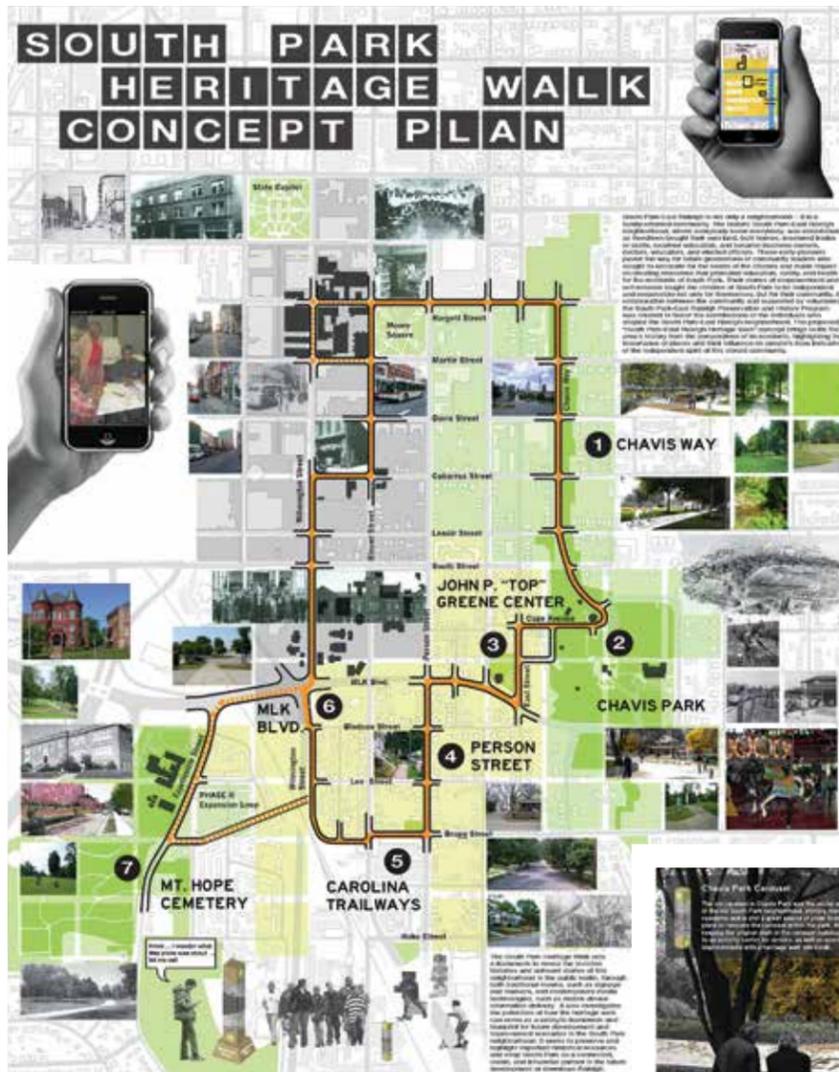
**DOWNTOWN CORE AREAS CAN HIGHLIGHT STORIES RELATING TO:**  
work and professional life; owning and operating a business; markets; shopping; theater and performances; entertainment; church and worship; being a college student; and education



**GREENWAY AREAS CAN HIGHLIGHT STORIES RELATING TO:**  
recreation; sports and exercise; playing; the neighborhood park; carousel; swimming pool; egg hunts; teenage frolic; Negro League baseball



**RESIDENTIAL AREAS CAN HIGHLIGHT STORIES RELATING TO:**  
family and traditions; growing up in the neighborhood; being parents and grandparents; cooking and food; holidays; walking to school; owning properties; building a house



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT**  
A presentation board for the heritage walk plan; neighborhood residents at the dedication of a historic marker honoring John Chavis, the park's namesake; and a concept rendering of the heritage walk and repurposed original carousel pavilion.



collectively," he says. "Multidisciplinary is what we did, which was parallel processes that may or may not have crossed over or seeded one another." Dodsworth says, "What we all wanted to see happen was the documentation of the meanings of physical spaces." Her interest is neither landscape design nor historic interpretation but how language changes over time within distinct populations. She says that the designers "wanted someone who could help them create a corpus of oral history [but] they didn't have good recording equipment. They wanted people who were used to doing long interviews where someone is encouraged just to talk." She adds, "That was great for me, because then they have what they need and I also have material for linguistic analysis.... I myself independently did not have connections there, and it's

a community that's interesting in so many ways. [But] I came into it because I had digital audio recorders, not because they cared that much about the linguistics." Still, Boone points out that "all three of us have a technique of actually directly engaging people, asking questions, getting...their perception of the place." He notes, "We did informal measurements comparing the results from the different streams. That's how the themes that were identified through the cell phone diaries occurred. It wasn't just the commonalities among the videos, but comparing it to what people were reporting and talking about in the other studies."



**TOP**  
The new carousel pavilion was designed to evoke a tent.  
**INSET**  
It's still a popular draw.

All three used videography, too. The linguistics researchers at NCSU usually produce video documentaries of their study populations. One made from material gathered in the Chavis Park area ran repeatedly on local public television. Dodsworth says, "In that way, we contributed. That seems to have value for members of the community," to view the recorded narratives of the cohort that grew up in Chavis Park, at a particular time. Bailey, for his part, took the collaboration itself as a topic to investigate, he says: "A graphic designer, a linguist, and a landscape architect—why are we together?" He made videos to screen at academic conferences that contain clips from the cell phone diaries and the linguists' interviews and of him, Boone, and Dodsworth considering that question. "Myself and Kofi, we both use the word mapping," Bailey muses. "Robin's work I don't necessarily see as mapping, but she's very involved with pattern and tracing data, over time or within a specific pool of people. That's analogous to a map." Dodsworth came away with a new understanding of "the relationship between physical space and other social facts," she says. "If you want to know how and why language changes over time, you have to know how people are interacting. I got to see who people are when they are in a space, how they see themselves differently in different spaces."

Even now, with enthusiastic support from the city and a design team in place, the future of Chavis Park's new improvements is not guaranteed. Neighborhood activists are optimistic, but guarded. "The \$12.5 million is just a start. It's going to take still a lot of vigilance to shepherd this process through," Lonnette Williams says. "We want to see it to completion." Triage and trade-offs may be inevitable. Cassie Schumacher-Georgopoulos, ASLA, a senior planner in the parks department, says, "To see it not be that community gathering space anymore has been really hard. If you don't look at it from a facilities aspect, but from a community-feeling aspect, that's one of the priorities: How do you bring back that feeling?" Following through on the

DOWNTOWN DESIGN STUDIO, NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY, TOP LEFT AND BOTTOM RIGHT; CITY OF RALEIGH, TOP RIGHT

SKEO SOLUTIONS, TOP; CITY OF RALEIGH, BOTTOM



**ABOVE**  
These steps served as seating for student performances of Shakespeare.

proposal for the South Park Heritage Walk might help. After auditing several hours' worth of the oral histories, one can say "that feeling" can seem to have emanated from Chavis Park itself. More accurately, it is an expression of the once-intact community that centered on the park.

The heritage walk would interpret and honor that community's history, using new media technology as well as conventional tools such as signage. But the plan calls for more than an educational walking tour. Boone's team's proposal "moves beyond the

narrative aspect and investigates potentials of how the heritage walk can serve as a catalytic framework and blueprint for future reinvestments in the area." It would do that by creating a continuous, safe, inviting loop of pedestrian routes, which would lend definition to the somewhat ragged boundaries of South Park. It would connect institutions such as Shaw University and a segregation-era high school and cemetery to the park and to Moore Square downtown. It identifies, and would link to, target areas for future residential and retail investment, and even proposes to initiate public-private partnerships to facilitate

CRAIG GRANT, STUDIO 323

## THE OBJECT IS NOT ABOUT FACILITIES SO MUCH AS A COMMUNITY'S FEELING, SAYS A SENIOR PARK PLANNER. "HOW DO YOU BRING BACK THAT FEELING?"

that redevelopment. The heritage walk could surely help reestablish a dynamic, connected community. It wouldn't be the same community, but it could eventually become similarly important to its residents, and to Raleigh.

But the heritage walk's future is even more uncertain than the full realization of the Chavis Park master plan. Unlike that proposal, the walk idea was developed apart from the city's formal planning structure. "The challenge with projects like this, for a city that's siloed," says Grant Meacci, is that it's "comprehensive, and spans four or five different departments that all have different funding strategies and a backlog of things they want to do"—departments responsible for things such as streets and transportation, parks, economic development, and housing. "Hopefully," says his Urban Design Center colleague

Dhanya Sandeep, an urban planner, "there will be some elements that can be picked out and be easily done." A pedestrian- and bike-friendly redesign is already planned for a street that forms one long leg of the heritage walk's route that leads north through the neighborhood to Moore Square. Other elements of the proposal were worked into the new park plan; for example, the original carousel location, to be named Heritage Plaza, would be one of the heritage walk's nodes. "Ideas float around, and beyond just the city's implementation, it triggers many initiatives from the community and from

other people," Sandeep says. "There's movement just because a proposal, a planning process, happened."

Why has the renovation of Chavis Park received genuine support from the city now, after a long period of indifferent maintenance and master plan updates that did not halt the decline? The community's vocalizing its demand for renovation is certainly a factor. It is also tempting to attribute some credit—for instilling an orientation toward good urbanism, perhaps even for illuminating how racism has affected the urban form and condition—to the fact that at least three city council members have been designers. Randolph Hester, FASLA, a University of California, Berkeley professor emeritus who once taught at NCSU and once lived in South Park, was a member from 1975 to 1977. Russell Stephenson, an architect, has been on the council since 2005. Another architect, Thomas Crowder, who died recently, served for 11 years; Kofi Boone calls him one of the neighborhood's "most vocal champions." Then, the city's willingness to initiate the Chavis Conversation and ultimately to embrace the new park master plan surely reflects a recognition of the neighborhood's value in the context of the city-center revival, and the value within that revival of a sizable, close-in green space. Also, just as the Chavis Conversation was going on, new city guidelines for public participation in park planning were being adopted. "That might have helped the city open up," says Alisa Hefner, a landscape designer at Skeo Solutions. "They had just gone through this process of internal evaluation and recognized that things were not working." Mistrust between African American communities and government extends far beyond this park, this neighborhood, and this city. But some damage appears to have been mended in Raleigh. Time will reveal whether the patches hold. ●

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