

York County Embraces Parks, Greenspace, as Key to the Future

By Greg Suskin, Public Information Officer
York County

Ebenezer Park has been a fixture on the shore of Lake Wylie for decades. Visitors will tell you they love to come here on a summer weekend to swim, picnic, fish, boat, and camp. It's tough to find an RV site all year, as reservations stay booked much of the time.

In 2021, Ebenezer Park became more than a fixture, it became a destination. York County began a \$4.6 million renovation effort in 2019, which included huge upgrades to the 26-acre park.

Here are some of the highlights:

- 10,000 square foot semicircular pier with covered shelters; including double sided swings and picnic tables
- Enlarged and dredged swimming/beach area enclosed by semi-

circular pier

- Multipurpose event building for concerts, movies in the park, and special occasion rentals
- Redesigned vehicle parking lot; as well as an angle spaced parking lot for boat, kayak, canoe, and paddleboard trailers
- Additional boat slips for loading and unloading of watercraft
- A boardwalk at the Ranger Station with park benches
- Meandering trails through the woods
- Basketball court
- Beach Volleyball
- Arbor Entrance with beach chairs



Ebenezer Park (Photo by Chris Jackson, York County Engineering)

Those upgrades have drawn plenty of attention, and the park plans to add additional staff, and host more events throughout the year. It's a great place to come and be active, or just relax by the lake, and smell the burgers and dogs cooking on a grill nearby.

Pat Morrison is superintendent at Ebenezer Park, and has overseen the dramatic changes there.

"Since the renovation, the park has experienced a higher than normal volume of visitors," Morrison said. "The demand was so high during our peak season (May-Sept.) that we had to turn many guests away due to limited parking. The attendance during those peak months was nearly double our normal volume of visitors, and was somewhat overwhelming at times for our staff and volunteers.

"For me, personally and professionally, it was the highlight of my 27 year career at Ebenezer Park," he added. "It was a joy to see the excitement and memories that so many families made in the summer of 2021."

The relaxed lakeside experience at Ebenezer Park couldn't be any more different than what you find at Field Day Park at Lake Wylie! It's focused like a laser on intense competition at every level, and it's rarely quiet.

The park offers baseball, pickleball courts, huge multi-purpose fields for soccer/football, a playground, walking track, pavilions, and a community center.

It's 32 acres of competitive team sports, raucous cheers, and bigtime tournaments.


Park Superintendent Jason Ratterree said the park's atmosphere brings people of all ages.

"One of the best things about the park is there's a little something for everyone," he added. "Whether it's youth playing on the athletic fields, or even adults playing on the athletic fields ... or using the community center for a gathering like a birthday party, or a baby shower."

Field Day Park opened on Halloween in 2020, and has quickly become home to several team leagues, and adult and youth sports programs. It's also a great place to walk your dog, or just exercise.

What's more, Field Day Park was paid for entirely by the people of the fast-growing Bethel Lake Wylie community. Voters approved a special tax district to fund the park, and today they see and enjoy the benefits of that decision.

In just a few short years, York County has jumped into the park business with both feet.

In addition to Ebenezer and Field Day, there are two other major parks now in development: Catawba Bend Preserve, our biggest park project ever (see sidebar below), and Allison Creek Park, which is also on beautiful Lake Wylie. The future also looks bright as master plans are being created for additional parks. 

Catawba Bend Preserve

For more than two years we knew it as "Riverbend." In 2018, York County was able to purchase 1,900 acres of land on the Catawba River that was slated to have thousands of new homes on it. Instead, it's being transformed into a premier outdoor adventure park.

In October of 2021, Riverbend officially became Catawba Bend Preserve. All but 200 acres of the site is now protected under a conservation easement. The future park sits in a bend of the wild and scenic Catawba River, and features a variety of pine groves, grassy fields, and large ponds.

York County Council approved the Catawba Bend Preserve Masterplan, which anticipates more than \$50 million in proposed construction and improvements over a 15-year period in three phases.

The park is so large it will include areas for tent camping, RV camping, mountain biking, outdoor concerts, and environmental education. First to appear will be the entrance gate, and a paved five-mile walking trail along the Catawba River.

A park loop road will connect the many diverse activities offered, including 25 miles



Catawba Bend Preserve (Photo by Greg Suskin, York County PIO)

of interior hiking trails.

The Catawba River is the centerpiece of the park, and visitors will have access to not only spectacular scenery along the water, but launches for boats and kayaks. Down the road, Catawba Bend Preserve has plans

for a national-park-style lodge to host special events. This is a large-scale, long-term project that will unfold as we seek a mix of public, private, and grant-based funding to make it a reality.

Stay tuned!