

Orange County Trails Plan FAQs

What is the Trails Plan project?

The Trails Plan is a new Orange County Trails Plan (OCTP) and will serve as both a physical plan and policy implementation guide developed through an analysis of existing conditions and trends, evaluation of existing plans and trail systems, and other policies and initiatives. The outcome of this process will be a comprehensive trails plan that utilizes trail planning principles, a community engagement process, relevant data and analysis of trends, identification of opportunities and strategies, means and methods of coordination among different jurisdictions and trail systems, and an implementation plan with performance measures that track progress on achieving the goals and objectives of the plan.

The result of this planning effort will be a comprehensive, coordinated trails vision for the County, with corresponding policy recommendations and guidance for implementation of the plan over the next 20 years. The anticipated product will be a user-friendly, graphically pleasing document, reflecting concise goals, objectives, and policy recommendations.

Who is leading the project?

The Trails Plan is being led by the Orange County, North Carolina Department of Environment, Agriculture, Parks, and Recreation (DEAPR) in partnership with a consultant team from Gensler. The Parks and Rec Council serves as a project steering committee, reviewing and providing feedback on deliverables and informing the direction of the project.

What is the ideal outcome?

The Trails Plan will feature recommendations for trail development and connections in a composite GIS map and report with guiding principles that reflect the goals and vision collected through public engagement.

What is the process and schedule for developing the Trails Plan?

The project consists of five tasks that will occur in 2025, including:

- Task 1: Community Outreach & Public Engagement
- Task 2: Project Steering Committee & Reporting
- Task 3: GIS Mapping & Analysis
- Task 4: Priority Trail Corridors – Site Assessment & Cost Estimate
- Task 5: Orange County Trails Plan

Task 1, Community Outreach & Public Engagement, is a critical step in developing a community-supported Trails Plan that can be successfully implemented through the County's various environmental, recreational, and financial plans and programmatic strategies/operations. This task will consist of a project webpage, monthly frequently asked questions (FAQs), a public vision workshop in May, and online feedback forms to make the engagement process as accessible as possible for as many Orange County residents as possible.

Why is this happening now?

Orange County is undertaking a Trails Plan to create a comprehensive source for the future, from several documents and plans created in the last two decades. Different parks and trails plans specific to certain places or projects were developed in the past, but these prior efforts need to be consolidated into one plan, along with connections to town and other open spaces, as well as a look at future needs.

How are you integrating lessons learned from previous outreach, such as the Land Use 2050 effort?

Gensler has conducted a thorough review of previous plans, existing maps, and past outreach efforts including the Orange County Land Use 2050 outreach summaries. The team will build upon what they have learned through this review, including the following six key takeaways:

1. Engagement with underrepresented groups (including youth and African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian community members) will be critical for delivering a widely supported Trails Plan.
2. A multi-channel engagement approach including in-person workshops, digital feedback opportunities, and more has been successful in the past for capturing a wide range of perspectives.
3. Within the community, there is strong support for environmental protection, climate action, and investing in parks and trails throughout the county.
4. There is significant community interest in:
 - a. Balancing the preservation of environmentally sensitive areas with increased access to parks and rec facilities, and
 - b. Multi-modal connectivity across the county, especially between parks and open spaces
5. Approximately 50% of the sites identified in the 2030 Parks & Recreation Master Plan have been constructed/completed to date.
6. The Mountains to Sea Trail (MST) connection is a top priority and a prominent part of the Orange County Trails Plan.