In the early 1980's, the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) began construction of James White Parkway, a controlled access four-lane highway which bisected South Knoxville in order to link Downtown Knoxville to a broader highway network and series of destinations southeast of Knoxville including the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

The project was never completed and only a 2-mile portion of this seldom used four-lane highway exists today extending Downtown Knoxville south across the Tennessee River where it terminates in a dead-end. In and around property acquired for the highway’s completion, a series of outdoor recreation destinations began to develop which together has evolved to become Knoxville’s Urban Wilderness, one of the most popular and dynamic outdoor recreation destinations in the United States.

The spectacular 1000-acre outdoor adventure area includes over 50 miles of trails and greenways, a nature center, lakes, historic sites, dramatic quarries, adventure playgrounds, five city parks, and a 500-acre wildlife area. It is composed of two major areas, the South Loop and the Battlefield Loop.
Because of the Urban Wilderness’s expansive scale that grew organically over time, navigation and access is unclear and there is no primary entrance or connection between the two loops.

The dead-end terminus of the incomplete James White Parkway was identified as an ideal site for an Urban Wilderness Gateway because of its accessible location and position between the Battlefield and South Loops.

The terminus site was acquired by the City of Knoxville via an excess land transfer from the Tennessee Department of Transportation. However, the design team proposed extending the gateway along the full length of the Parkway in order to open up opportunities for increased public space, connectivity and ecological enhancements.
Long-Term Framework Plan

The overall framework plan for the Urban Wilderness Gateway is comprised of three critical layers: access and community connections, continuous programming amenities and program nodes and destinations.

Access and connections define the points of entry into the Urban Wilderness Gateway Park and considers improved connectivity between the park and existing neighborhood destinations to improve overall mobility in South Knoxville neighborhoods as well as across the Tennessee River.

Continuous programming amenities are the elements that run the length of the corridor—trails, wayfinding, lighting, planting and ecology.

Program nodes are the unique spaces and programming opportunities that punctuate the corridor.
Long-Term Framework Plan: Access and Connections

Connectivity is absolutely key to the success of the Gateway Park and Greenways. Linkages between destinations, both within and outside the project, must be clear, legible and logical. Access to the greenways, amenities and trailheads is also key. The public engagement work confirmed the need for a well-connected and accessible site - this was the top priority for both stakeholders as well as members of the community who completed the online survey.

The James White Parkway greenway is the primary circulation corridor, connecting Morningside Park and Downtown Knoxville to the Urban Wilderness, Baker Creek Preserve and the neighborhoods of South Knoxville. The Cottrell Greenway is a complementary route, providing local access in dedicated on-street bike lanes.

Future connections to existing and new trails, such as the James White Greenway and the G+O Trail, will link the project to the larger network of bike and pedestrian routes in the City.
Long-Term Framework Plan: Continuous Amenities

Urban Wilderness Gateway Park and the James White Parkway and Cottrell Greenways will host a combination of continuous programs offering continuous trails and paths for cyclists, runners and pedestrians along with a series of destinations activated by unique sets of programs and amenities.

Continuous programs and amenities will run along the James White Parkway and Cottrell Greenways, from Baker Creek Preserve to Morningside Park. These include:

- Running and Biking Trails,
- Wayfinding,
- Lighting,
- Planting and Ecology
Long-Term Framework Plan: Program Nodes

Along the connected trail system the Park will include a series of destinations, each with a particular set of programs and amenities. These nodes will vary in size and number of programs, and programs will be paired for complementary uses and connections to neighboring destinations.

1. Baker Creek Preserve
Open Lawn, Picnicking and Picnic Pavilion, Gatherings and Small Events, Adventure Playground, Drinking Fountains and Restrooms,

2. James White Parkway Terminus
Plaza for Events and Festivals, Play Area with climbing and slides, Parking, Drinking Fountains and Restrooms,

3. Wynn Ave and 4. Sevier Ave
Public Art, Transit Stop

5. Anita Interchange
Open Lawn, Dog Park, Outdoor Classroom, Skate Park, Public Art, Transit Stop
**Implementation + Project Phasing**

The timeline of the project’s full build-out is open ended, with future phases still to be determined. As such, it is critical for the project to establish guiding principles to ensure the project’s goals and objectives are met in both short and long term. Below are the five key design principles that will guide Phase 1 projects as well as the future execution of the James White Parkway and associated park spaces and amenities.

1) Create a distinctive, easily recognizable, and primary gateway into the Urban Wilderness.

2) Create a destination and public realm amenity by augmenting existing on-site facilities with new, complementary improvements.

3) Improve ease and means of accessing the Urban Wilderness trail system via a well-connected circulation network and clear, logical wayfinding.

4) Improve ecological performance through new stormwater management infrastructure, robust planting, and increased permeable surface area.

5) Establish design guidelines and standards for all future Urban Wilderness entry points.
The James White Parkway Terminus + Urban Wilderness Gateway Site

There is no one gateway moment or threshold to pass through in this project—instead the entire James White Parkway becomes the 2.2 mile and 112-acre gateway to the Urban Wilderness. This spatial and processional experience extends and expands on the traditional concept of a gateway and connects the Urban Wilderness to the heart of downtown Knoxville. The linear park culminates in the highway dead end and underpass bridge—an incredibly unique place with charismatic features.

The terminus design unites the two worlds of the site - urban and wild - in order to create a strong, distinctive threshold that accentuates these differences and celebrates the underpass as a framing device and a place for play. Occupying the clearing that currently exists behind the underpass, the woodland plaza is a soft, shaded gathering space planted with multi-stem trees and furnished with picnic tables. Slides and rocks are built into the existing embankment hill and frame the west edge of the space. Improvements at the Baker Creek Preserve Trailhead create a more open and public entrance to the site’s famous mountain biking trails with a large sloped lawn, soft plaza gathering space, picnic pavilion, and parking. The greenway winds through the site and ends at the trailhead, completing the connection from the Terminus.
Public Exhibition + Block Party

On Saturday, June 2, 2018, the City of Knoxville and Urban Wilderness Project Team hosted a public exhibition and block party at the James White Parkway Terminus to share project ideas and gather input from the community. Visitors were invited to learn about the project through visual displays including diagrams, drawings, aerial photographs, and a 15’ long matchbox car-scale plan of the project. Mostly importantly, party-goers had the opportunity (for the first-time ever!) to experience the James White Parkway terminus as a pedestrian and imagine the space as a park for people, rather than as a dead end.
Public Exhibition + Block Party
Matchbox Car Scale Plan
Public Exhibition + Block Party
PROPOSED BAKER CREEK PRESERVE ENHANCEMENTS INCLUDE A NEW BIKE PARK
James White Parkway Terminus
Concept Design Rendering
James White Parkway Terminus Concept Design Plan

Terminus Parking (69 Spaces)
Shade Trees + Pedestrian Walkway
Bioswale
Event Plaza
Kids Bike Circuit
Ride Center
Swings
Bouldering + Climbing Rocks
Slides
Woodland Plaza and Picnic Area

Cottrell St. Greenway
Greenway
Greensway + Soft Surface Path
Restrooms
Tilson St Extension

URBAN WILDERNESS GATEWAY PARK
CITY OF KNOXVILLE
V&M | port | SANDERS PACE ARCHITECTURE | EQUINOX |
James White Parkway Terminus
Concept Design Rendering
Spaces north of the bridge maintain the infrastructural scale, materials and qualities of the Parkway. The areas behind the bridge stand in stark contrast, distinctly intimate and shaded with a softer, natural material palette. The underpass divides these two worlds with a palette of vibrant orange. The programming in the three areas is connected and centered around intergenerational play and biking.
Kids Bike Circuit

- Advanced Area in woods
- Beginner Area - Movable jumps and features
- Bridge
- Beginner Area - Movable jumps and features
James White Parkway Terminus
Concept Design Rendering
James White Parkway Terminus
Concept Design Rendering
James White Parkway Terminus Pavilion

**Building Skin**
A lightweight translucent or perforated system defines space and diffuses natural light while opening up to landscape program.

**Building Structure**
Steel columns and beams are the primarily structural system with a lattice steel substructure providing support for the building skin.

**Building Program**
Independent solid elements with integrated infrastructure support adjacent park activities.

**Branding and Wayfinding**
Branding and wayfinding unique to each Urban Wilderness location is integrated into building program elements.

**Plaza Surface**
Landscape program at the terminus extends through the open areas of the Gateway Pavilion.
Baker Creek Preserve Entrance
Concept Design Rendering
Baker Creek Preserve Entrance
Concept Design Plan

- Entry Wall
- Meadow Planting
- Greenway + Soft Surface Trail
- Secondary Greenway, connection to Baker Creek Bottoms
- Adventure Playground (relocated)
- Sloped Lawn
- Bike Park
- Trailhead

- Soft Plaza
- Flexible Parking Plaza (15 Spaces)
- Picnic Pavilion + Restrooms
- Existing Kids Mini Pump Track
- Soft Plaza

WOODLAND

CITY OF KNOXVILLE

URBAN WILDERNESS GATEWAY PARK
Baker Creek Preserve Entrance
Concept Design Section

- Picnic Pavilion + Restroom
- Soft Plaza
- Parking
- Understory planting enhancement
- Dense tree planting
- Loop path
- Sloped Lawn
- Baker Creek Bottoms
- Baker Creek
- Greenway
- Taylor Rd

URBAN WILDERNESS GATEWAY PARK

CITY OF KNOXVILLE
Baker Creek Preserve Entrance
Concept Design Rendering
Baker Creek Preserve Entrance
Concept Design Rendering
Baker Creek Preserve Entrance
Ride Center

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