

# CITY PARKS/OPEN SPACE

## SUBAREA

### INTRODUCTION

The beginnings of the Oak Ridge system of parks and open spaces can be seen in the “Master Plan, Oak Ridge, Tennessee” produced in 1948 by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Architects-Engineers for the Atomic Energy Commission. A perimeter greenbelt and open spaces in the interior of residential blocks can be seen on the maps in that report. To a large degree, what was shown on the maps described things that were already present on the ground. By 1948 the community was well along in making the transition from being the Clinton Engineering Works, a government owned and operated manufacturing site, to becoming the city of Oak Ridge, Tennessee. The generous open spaces and well located parks and schools were part of the original development plan put in place as the community was built originally.

A legacy of this history is that Oak Ridge is rich in recreation resources, but challenged in being able to manage and maintain them. National standards for recreation facilities suggest that a city have ten acres of parkland for each 1,000 of population. In Oak Ridge, each 1,000 people have access to 46 acres of parkland. A few years ago the city conducted a survey of other cities of similar size to provide some benchmarks for evaluation of local performance. In that exercise, Oak Ridge had 45.6 more miles of trails than the average miles of trails in the comparable cities. But, the other side of the coin is that comparable cities had 41 full-time and 84 part-time employees on the average, while Oak Ridge had 22 full-time and 63 part-time employees.

### The Greenbelt System

The concept of greenbelts emerged in the development of planned new towns in England and later the U.S. during the early twentieth century. These “garden cities” had a swath of public open space around the perimeter of the town to provide separation of town from countryside or adjacent urban settlement. The greenbelt also provided a definite boundary for the town, preventing the undefined sprawl of towns into the surrounding countryside. The TVA town of Norris is an example of this development pattern.

Oak Ridge had well defined edges on three sides in its original configuration. It is contained on the western and eastern ends by the Clinch River, and on the south by the Clinch River and the DOE Reservation. On the northern edge, where the city stretches along the length of Black Oak Ridge, a greenbelt of public land defines the north edge of the city.

In Oak Ridge, the greenbelt has an added quality. From the beginning city blocks were laid out in a curvilinear system of superblocks with significant undeveloped spaces left in the middle of the block. In these large blocks the streets and houses were fitted carefully to the topography, making it possible to minimize the grading and ground disturbance associated with development. One consequence is that the interior greenbelt areas now have forests of mature hardwoods. Wildlife tends to abound in the city in these areas of natural landscape. Many blocks also have at least one area where perimeter lots were not developed with housing, allowing the interior greenbelt to extend out to the street. Where these greenbelt extensions to the street are across from or near each other, they facilitate the movement of wildlife from greenbelt to greenbelt without being exposed to unnecessary threat.

The city has approximately \_\_\_\_ acres of land in greenbelt outside the DOE reservation but inside the city limits. This acreage does not include city parks or school playgrounds.



## Greenways and Trails

The best description of the city greenway system is this language about greenways on the city web site.

“The Oak Ridge Greenways project is an effort to weave natural corridors through the City to community resources such as parks, schools, cultural centers, shopping areas, and areas of employment. The greenways are founded on three principles. First, where possible, the greenways follow natural corridors such as floodway zones or existing right-of-ways thus reducing conflicts with private land holdings. Second, the greenways are conceived as interconnected loops. Finally, the greenways are conceptually designed to connect those areas and resources which are of value to Oak Ridgers and which distinguish Oak Ridge as a special place to live. These areas include the striking natural landscape of the city, its’ neighborhoods, schools, parks, cultural facilities, and places of work and commerce.”

According to Dan Robbins, Chairman of Greenways Oak Ridge, the system has approximately nine miles of paved trails, 32 miles of gravel DOE patrol roads, 13 miles of dirt hiking trails, and 35 miles of cycling trails. (The Oak Ridger, 4/20. 2018)



***North Ridge Trail***



***A.K. Bissell Park***

For more detailed description of Oak Ridge Greenways visit the following sites:

Greenways Home (<http://tnlandforms.us/greenways/>)

Google Map of Greenways (<http://tnlandforms.us/greenways/gps/googlew.php>)

Maps and detailed information about individual greenways, such as North Ridge Trail, can be found at (<http://tnlandforms.us/greenways/maps03/nr.htm1>). The other trails that can be accessed in the same way are: Cedar Hill, Pine Grove, Emory Valley, Gallaher Bend, Melton Lake, Big Turtle Park, Worthington, North Boundary, Wildflower, Haw Ridge, Black Oak Ridge, and UT Arboretum. This list is somewhat misleading because some of the greenways, Melton Hill for example, are single trails from one point to another, or a loop, while others on the list, Haw Ridge for example, is a 28 mile network of trails in a specific part of the city. The Black Oak Ridge Conservation Easement is a 13.7 mile network in the forests above Heritage Center, and the UT Arboretum is a network of 8 + miles in their University facility. The total system offers citizens of Oak Ridge a variety of experiences, some suitable for the novice neighborhood walker, some worth the best efforts of seasoned hikers. But a system this large is also a maintenance challenge. Nature is constantly trying to reclaim its place. The efforts of a dedicated group of volunteers provide major assistance to the city in maintenance and improvement of the system.

## City Parks

The city operates nineteen park and recreation facilities. This does not include greenways and school playgrounds or athletic fields. Most of them are located in residential neighborhoods or along Melton Hill Lake. Specific characteristics vary from park to park. A list of parks and what they offer can be found at <http://orrecparcs.oakridgetn.gov/parks/>. As a system the parks offer opportunities for picnics, playgrounds, basketball, soccer, softball, walking, fishing, Disc Golf, and swimming.



***LaSalle Park***



***Carl Yearwood Park***

# FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS & PLACE-MAKING

The Oak Ridge Parks and Greenways system is a wonderful resource for the citizens of the city. It can be even better if ways are found to knit it together as a system more integrated into the fabric of the city and the daily lives of its citizens. Some initiatives to do that are already in the works. Some have been developed as part of this Blueprint process. Here is a short list of proposed and potential improvements with brief comments about each:

- Rails to Trails. This is an active project to use the abandoned CSX railroad right-of-way between Elza Gate Park north of Melton Lake Drive and the southern terminus at South Illinois Avenue. The city is currently soliciting proposals from design firms. This pedestrian link through the residential area of the city would offer an opportunity to link several pieces of the greenway system together. Key design challenges for this project will be how to link it to existing and planned recreation facilities along Melton Hill Lake and where and how to terminate it at the south end.



- It is suggested that a greenway link be made from the rails to trails project to Main Street by a new link through the Woodland neighborhood.
- It is suggested that a new greenway link be made from the southern terminus of Rails to Trails to the Scarboro and Grove Park neighborhoods by use of the DOE patrol road just to their north.
- It is suggested that a greenway link be made from the existing eastern terminus of the North Ridge Trail to the Rails-to-Trails Elza Gate terminus. This will be a physically difficult link, but it would link two of what are likely to be among the most popular trails in the system.

This list provides examples of the kinds of improvements that might be made to improve the system. The list may change as the Blueprint process moves from subarea reports to the summary plans for the city as a whole.

# City of Oak Ridge GREENWAYS



- Big Turtle Park
- Blanchard Park
- Chickadee Park
- Emory Valley Greenway
- How Ridge Greenway
- Walden Greenway

**City of Oak Ridge  
Achieving Breakthroughs**

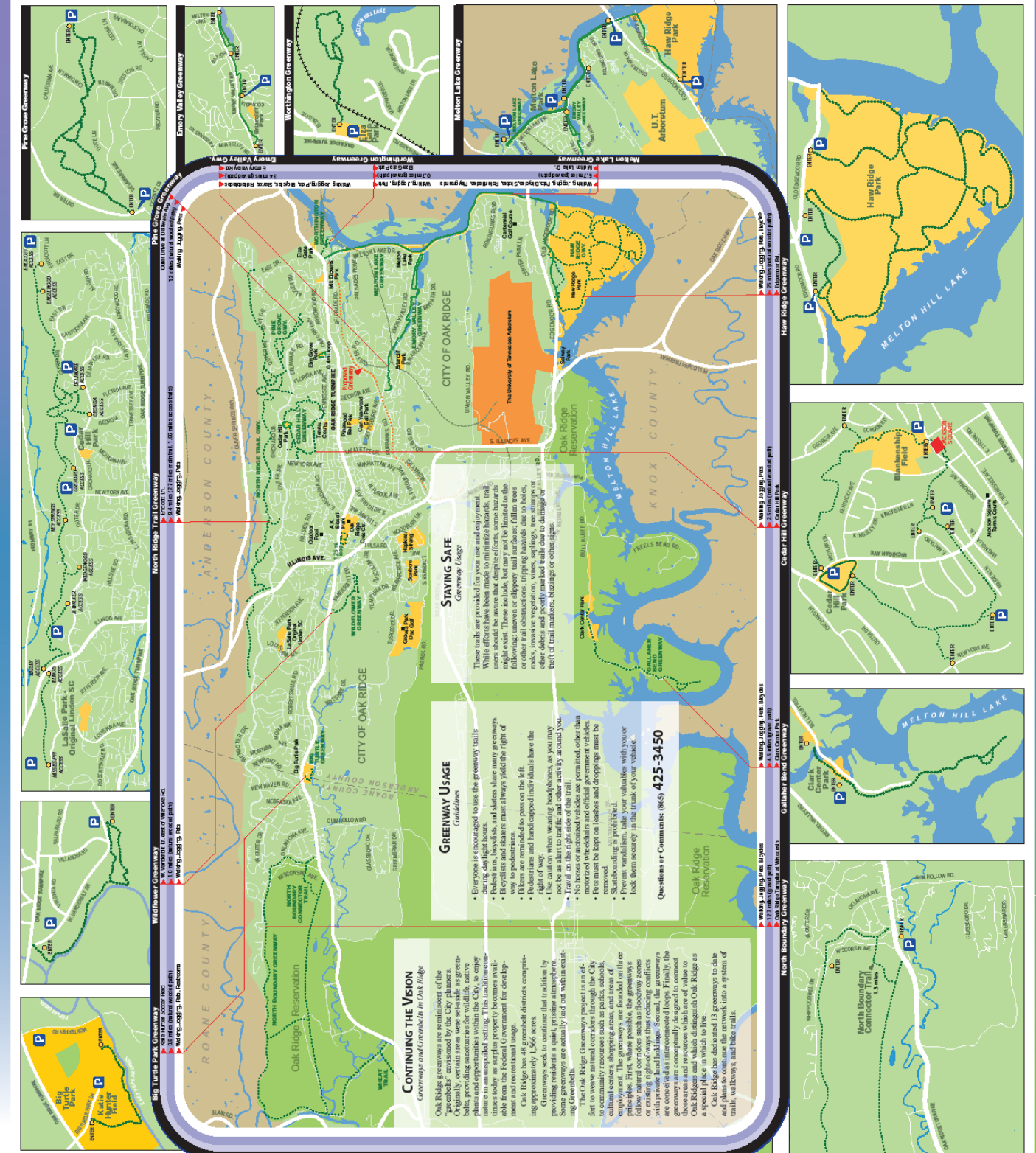
1408 Oak Ridge Turnpike - Oak Ridge, Tennessee 37860  
423-3450

**SCALE FOR MAIN MAP:**

0 0.5 1.0 km  
0 0.5 1.0 mi

**LEGEND**

- Major Road
- Minor Road
- Oak Ridge City Limits
- Federal Reservation
- Water
- Parking Area
- Landmark



### CONTINUING THE VISION

*Greenways and Greenbelts in Oak Ridge*

Oak Ridge greenways are reminiscent of the "greenbelts" envisioned by the City planners. Originally, certain areas were set aside as greenbelts, providing natural resources for the quality of life within the City. This tradition continues today as surplus property become available from the Federal Government for development. Oak Ridge has designated greenbelts comprising approximately 1,266 acres.

Greenways seek to continue that tradition by providing residents a quiet, pristine atmosphere. Some greenways are actually "old" or within existing greenbelts.

The Oak Ridge Greenways project is an effort to weave natural corridors through the City to community resources such as parks, schools, cultural centers, shopping areas, and areas of employment. Greenways are located on three follow natural corridors such as floodway zones or existing rights-of-way that reduce conflicts with private land holdings. Second, the greenways are conceptually designed to connect those areas and resources to which are of value to Oak Ridge and which distinguish Oak Ridge as a special place in which to live.

Oak Ridge has dedicated 13 greenways to date and will continue to create a system of trails, walkways, and bike trails.

### GREENWAY USAGE

- Guidelines*
- Everyone is encouraged to use the greenway trails during daylight hours.
  - Pedestrians, bicyclists, and skaters share many greenways. Bicyclists and skaters must always yield the right of way to pedestrians.
  - Bikers are reminded to pass on the left.
  - Pedestrians and handicapped individuals have the right of way.
  - Use caution when wearing headphones, as you may not be able to hear your activity around you.
  - Trail on the right side of the trail.
  - No horses or motorized vehicles are permitted, other than motorized wheelchairs and official government vehicles.
  - Animals must be kept on leashes and droppings must be removed.
  - Skateboarding is prohibited.
  - Prevent vandalism, take your valuables with you or lock them securely in the trunk of your vehicle.

### STAYING SAFE

*Greenway Usage*

These trails are provided for your use and enjoyment. While efforts have been made to minimize hazards, trail users should be aware that despite efforts, some hazards might exist. These include, but may not be limited to the following: uneven or slippery trail surfaces, fallen trees or limbs, invasive vegetation, vines, saplings, tree stumps or other debris and poorly marked trails due to damage or lack of trail markers, blazes or other signs.

Questions or Comments: (865) 423-3450

