At the core of the City’s seven-mile long riverfront is Town Common. Town Common is an important point of community-river convergence and can best be described as Greenville’s “central park”. Town Common is bounded to the east and west by historic neighborhoods. The park also serves as the ‘front door’ to the riverfront from the City’s central business district, Uptown.
Greenville's riverfront has evolved over time. Downtown was an authentic and thriving downtown African-American neighborhood located along the City's riverfront.
The entire Downtown except the Sycamore Hill Baptist Church was demolished. This was a result of the Shore Drive Redevelopment project (an Urban Renewal project) which led to the dramatic removal of the community located in what is now called Town Common.
“The Church was like two arms reaching out and embracing the community.”

Former Downtown Resident
During the master planning and design process, former ‘Downtown’ residents recalled their memories of the predominately African American neighborhood which was eradicated as a result of the City’s Urban Renewal project.

“I lived at 408 West First Street. I lived there from birth until 1965. After they moved us out, they called this ‘Uptown’ when it was actually ‘Downtown’. Why they changed it, I don’t understand that.”

Bertha Gaye, Former Downtown Resident
The park master planning and design process uncovered generational scars from urban renewal and resulted in community rifts. As the design team discovered, there is a significant opportunity to tell the story of Downtown and the Sycamore Hill Baptist Church while bringing contemporary park programming to the sacred space.
Design Framework

Thematic zones were established within the park to designate program and activity opportunity areas including both east-west and north-south orientation.

**Tar River**

**Greene Street**

- Anchored by the Sycamore Hill Baptist Church Commemorative site

**First Street**

- Extends the pedestrian activity of Evans Street into the park

**Town Common**

- Builds upon construction of new playground

**Playground**

**Thematic Zones:**

**CIVIC**

**ENTERTAINMENT**

**PLAY**

**EAST-WEST**

**1ST STREET PROMENADE**

**Thematic Zones:**

**RIPARIAN**

- Living Shoreline

**ACTIVE GREEN SPACE**

- Extends the activity of both Evans Street and the playground into the park

**NORTH-SOUTH**

- Creates a new front door to Town Common
Concept Alternatives

Based on initial community feedback and analysis of existing conditions, the design team presented two concept plans for Town Common for public review & feedback:

CONCEPT 'A' DESIGN FRAMEWORK

CONCEPT 'B' DESIGN FRAMEWORK
Schematic Design: Illustrative Plan

1. Sycamore Hill Missionary Baptist Church Commemorative Tower + Plaza
2. Sycamore Tree Grove + Commemorative Gardens
3. Relocated Veterans Memorial
4. Relocated Sundial
5. 1st Street Promenade
6. Interactive Water Feature / Ice Skating Rink
7. Farmers Market Plaza
8. Civic Building
9. Amphitheater + Event Lawn
10. Boardwalk
11. Multi-Purpose Field
12. Playground
13. Future Playground Expansion
14. Active Living Shoreline
15. Beach
16. Kayak Launch + Fishing Pier
17. Dock + Viewing Platform
18. Kayak + Canoe Rental
19. Town Creek Wetland Restoration Area
20. Parking + Access Drive
21. South Tar River Greenway
22. Restrooms
23. On-Street Parking
24. Planted Median

Project Links:
- [https://elgl.org/we-build-this-city-remaking-the-greenville-nc-town-common/](https://elgl.org/we-build-this-city-remaking-the-greenville-nc-town-common/)
Living Shoreline & Stabilization Techniques

Along the living shoreline, banks are stabilized with native vegetation, rip-rap, terraces, and steps. Clusters of trees are planted within the shoreline area, providing both bank stabilization near the river’s edge and shade for park visitors. The park’s tree canopy and understory vegetation are designed to maintain views of the river while stabilizing the river bank and providing areas of shade throughout the park.
A Place to Celebrate Native Plantings...

The park will be comprised of three primary planting zones—riparian, garden, and lawn. These planting zones will create a sustaining landscape, that responds to the ecological characteristics of the park as well as activities and program recommended as part of this plan.
Town Common is a place for families. Per the Master Plan, a playground has been constructed on the eastern edge of the park. The playground serves as an important first phase project that increases park activation. A grant from Trillium Health Resources and City funds were used to build the first project.

Project Links:
Town Common Playground is an inclusive accessible playground that can accommodate children of all physical abilities.
The playground integrates the topography of the park to create exciting play opportunities.
The success of the Playground at Town Common provided critical momentum for the City to take on Phase II improvements. These improvements include the construction of a commemorative memorial on the site of the Sycamore Hill Baptist Church that celebrates both the Downtown community and the Church. The memorial serves as a place for healing and celebratory remembrance, to reflect on the past while creating an acclaimed regional and national attraction for the City.
As a result of a five-month design process, the design team worked extensively with community residents and stakeholders to define a vision for the Sycamore Hill Gateway.
A signature tower and associated commemorative landscape will tell the history of the Church and the Downtown community through dynamic and emotionally powerful interpretive features.
The Sycamore Hill Gateway Plaza was opened to the public on the 50th anniversary of the Urban Renewal project on August 11, 2020. At the core of the commemorative is a flexible outdoor community space that can be used for special events such as weddings, small performances, commemorative-related events, outdoor dining, and other community gatherings.
The plaza is a place of storytelling and learning. A series of precast concrete walls with glass interpretive panels tell the dynamic history of the Downtown community and the Sycamore Hill Baptist Church which once occupied the site.
An iconic tower creates a dynamic beacon at the corner of First & Greene Street which symbolizes the former stained glass church bell tower.

Project Links:
- https://www.greenvillenc.org/glimpse/