

HOW TO Get Involved

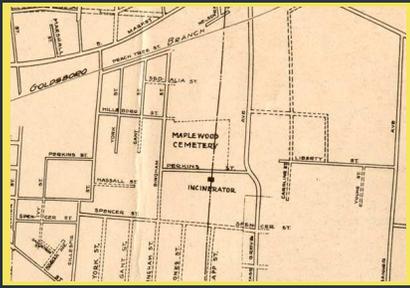
We want your input and involvement in the process. You can assist by attending community planning meetings and neighborhood work days, and by providing input in the vision of what the park could be once the environmental conditions are addressed.

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Environmental Justice for
BINGHAM PARK
Cottage Grove Neighborhood
GREENSBORO, NC





HISTORY

Bingham Park is a small scenic park located in east Greensboro in the Cottage Grove neighborhood. It was once widely used, but for various reasons the park is currently underutilized. The park sits atop the waste of a city landfill which operated from 1925 to 1955. The almost 13-acre former landfill contained incinerated and solid waste.

The Cottage Grove neighborhood saw much development—both commercial and residential—in the 1950s. The area increasingly came to be seen as a middle and upper-middle class neighborhood for black Greensboro denizens.

Paralleling the founding and expansion of Cottage Grove was the nearby construction and opening of Morningside Public Housing across Cottage Grove Avenue (now English Street). Opened in 1952 as the first housing built specifically for low-income African Americans in Greensboro, Morningside resembled standard public housing units from that era—block, high-density apartments, with 400 units.

In the fall 1964, Dr. William Hampton, the first African American councilman of Greensboro and practicing physician, founded and opened Hampton Elementary on a sixteen-acre lot adjacent to where the buried landfill. With a neighborhood school established, the area further solidified itself as a desirable locale in which to reside.

Just to the west of the park is the Willow Oaks development - a relatively new mixed housing and mixed income community built as a HUD Hope VI redevelopment project that replaced Morningside Homes. When Morningside Homes existed the park was home to children playing on the playground and youth playing pickup basketball games. During that time the park was considered to be a neighborhood asset, but with the demise of Morningside and the arrival of the new residents of Willow Oaks, the park has essentially been abandoned and neglected.

The demise of a community park is often met with a sense of loss and sadness. Although that was initially the case with Bingham Park, many residents came to view the park as a hazard once they learned that it was built on top of a former landfill. Because the landfill was constructed during an era when regulations were not as stringent as they are today, the landfill was not lined. Lining a landfill prevents toxic chemicals from leaching into the soil and groundwater. The combination of this landfill not being lined and the absence of regulations regarding what types of materials could be disposed of there, resulted in a variety of toxic materials being introduced into the soil and groundwater.

PRESENT DAY

Many of those toxins are still present to this day. While this news is shocking and cause for concern, it is not surprising. Scientists have known for decades that the presence of toxins in the soil and water can cause increased incidents of certain types of chronic diseases including several types of cancer as well as contributing to reproductive issues. Once residents in the neighborhood became aware of the dangerous conditions in the park some of them worked with members of City Council and City of Greensboro staff to remedy the situation. While there have been some stop-gap measures taken to address the issue, the necessary measures needed to fully remedy the problem have yet to be implemented.

REMEDATION & IMPROVEMENT

In an effort to support area residents in their endeavor to achieve permanent solutions to the issue, the Center for Housing and Community Studies at UNC Greensboro and Cone Health have partnered on a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that will enable them to offer technical assistance, health impact assessments, and additional resources to the residents in the area that surrounds the park. This project intends to center the resident's needs and desires regarding the remediation of the park and to assist residents as they learn more about the toxins that are still present and how those toxins may currently affect their health and quality of life.

The story of Bingham Park is unfortunate, but not uncommon. It is one of many examples of environmental racism that is rampant in communities of color throughout the country. It is particularly egregious that a park was built on top of a hazardous, un-remediated site where countless children and young adults have been exposed to toxins in South Buffalo Creek that runs through the park. East Greensboro is a part of our city that has long been neglected in terms of investment and infrastructure. We hope that this project, in conjunction with other community-centered and community-driven efforts, will be the beginning of much needed change for residents of the area.

Bingham Park

