

COMMONS PARK MASTER PLAN



SECTION 4, Commons Park Master Plan

MASTER PLAN OVERVIEW

The development of Commons Park demonstrates a strong commitment to public open space in central Eagle River. For several years, Town Square Park, adjacent to Business Boulevard, has provided a public gathering place and focal point for local residents. Town Square is a small park, inadequate to meet the needs of the community for gathering space or for other recreational opportunities. The more recent addition of eight acres significantly improves the opportunities for both gathering and recreation.

Park bond funds, approved by the voters in 1998, have supported development of the eight-acre park. During the master planning process, many members of the community expressed a strong desire to use available funds for additional land acquisition. The more prevalent view suggested that the existing eight acres should be developed and only that land required for establishing a trail link to the New Glenn Highway should be acquired.

Two final master plan alternatives were developed. The first identified the optimum park, which was expanded to fourteen acres. This plan required the acquisition of an adjacent six acre site that is zoned B-3. This alternative dropped out of consideration as the funding consequences became clear. The proposed expansion site has since been developed for single family housing.

A primary goal of the park master planning process was to identify a trail link from the New Glenn Highway to the Central

Business District of Eagle River. Optimally, the trail link would connect through Commons Park. A number of options were identified, all of which required the acquisition of easements or additional land. Due to property development in the area, none of the original options has proved viable. The only option, currently remaining for a trail link creates a connection between the New Glenn Highway Bike Path and the Central Business District, but no direct connection to Commons Park. The proposed trail route lies within an existing trail easement as shown on Figure 4-3.

The final park master plan lies within the existing eight-acre boundary. The park is primarily passive in character. It does not feature athletic fields or specialized activities. Instead it features large open spaces that offer flexibility of use. A large plaza area is suitable for public gatherings and festivals. Other features include:

- Picnic Pavilion,
- Playground and Tot Lot,
- Hilltop Overlook,
- Stage and Amphitheater,
- Walking Paths,
- Sledding Hills, and
- Connections to the surrounding neighborhood and the Transit Facility

Two phases of park construction have been completed since the master plan was finished. The first was completed in the summer of 2000 and the second during the summer of 2003. Figure 4-1 is a photograph of the park taken shortly after completion of Phase I construction. With minor variations, construction of the park has followed the direction of the master plan. Completion of the park master plan will require one or two additional phases of construction, depending on available funding.



Figure 4-1 Phase I development of Commons Park

The following discussion of the park master plan follows the process that was utilized in developing the plan. The first task was to conduct a site investigation. The outcome of this task was an identification of opportunities and constraints to development within the site. The second task was to determine the park program, or those components that residents wished to have incorporated into the park design. This was determined through public meetings and the Steering Committee. The third task was to develop the park master plan. As with most parks, it was not financially possible to complete construction in one phase, so a fourth task identified priorities and phasing for park construction.

EXISTING CONDITIONS/SITE ANALYSIS

Following is a summary of existing physical conditions on the site:

- **Topography** - The site has some interesting existing topography, with a total elevation change of 26 feet. The topography offers opportunities for grading and the creation of land forms within the park, but could constrain the development of sports fields or other uses that require large, flat surfaces. The northern half of the site, adjoining Regency Drive, is relatively flat and low. It is identified on figure 4-2 as the lower terrace. The southern half of the site rises to a natural hill 26 feet above commercial properties to the east and the lower terrace to the north. The hill offers excellent views over Business Boulevard toward the Chugach Mountain Range.
- **Vegetation** - Virtually the entire site has been previously cleared and disturbed. The existing vegetation consists largely of alder, birch, and other shrubby plants. A few mature birch trees and four spruce trees were retained as part of the Phase I Improvements. Existing vegetation offers neither opportunities nor constraints to park development.
- **Soils** - Soils on the site may pose future development problems. Excavation on the northern portion of the property, which occurred as part of the Phase I Improvements, encountered a deep layer of highly frost-susceptible silt. If additional site locations are designated to support structures or paved areas, such as trails or concrete walks, silt excavation and backfill will be required. An area slightly greater than an acre was excavated in the northern portion of the site and backfilled with structural fill. This area is now well suited for hard surfaces and structures.

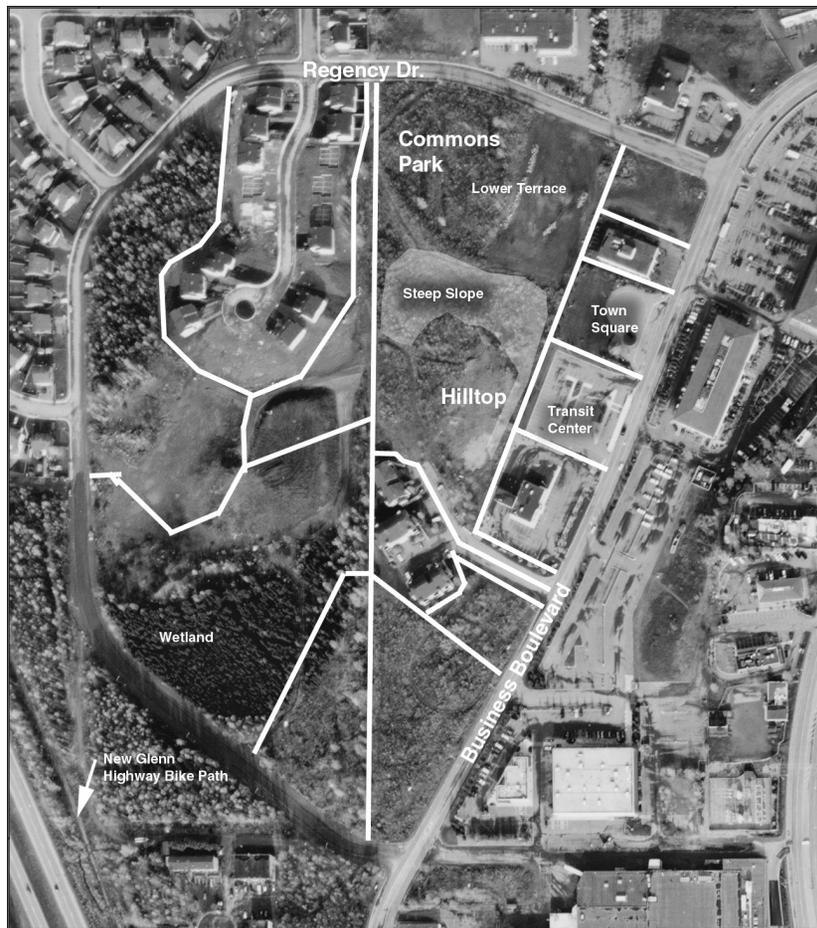


Figure 4-2 Commons Park, Existing Conditions

- Easements - There is a twenty-foot-wide easement for utilities and drainage that runs east-west across the northern end of the site.
- Views - As mentioned earlier, there are excellent views from the hilltop toward the Chugach Mountain Range and overlooking Business Boulevard.

Based on the physical characteristics of the park, soils are the only real constraint to development. Utilities are available for site amenities. The site has flat space near Regency Drive to accommodate uses that would require relatively level areas. The hill on the south side of the site offers the opportunity to capture views and add visual interest to the park.

At the time the master planning effort was started, there were no connections between Commons Park and other key destinations within Eagle River. Integral to the Eagle River Revitalization Plan is a need to connect the New Glenn Highway Bike Path to the Central Business District. Optimally, this link would have a direct connection to Commons Park. Recent residential development on parcels surrounding the park has precluded the opportunity of creating a direct link between the New Glenn Highway Bike Path and Commons Park. Figure 4-3 identifies the parcels surrounding Commons Park and identifies the existing easement through Tract 5-B of Eagle Glenn South, which offers the greatest promise for establishing a link between the existing bike path and the CBD.

- Utilities - All utilities, including water, sewer, and electricity are readily available within the park. As part of the Phase I Improvements, a water service line and electrical service were installed. There is a 480-volt transformer and distribution panel, which is stepped down to 120-volt distribution panels at two locations.

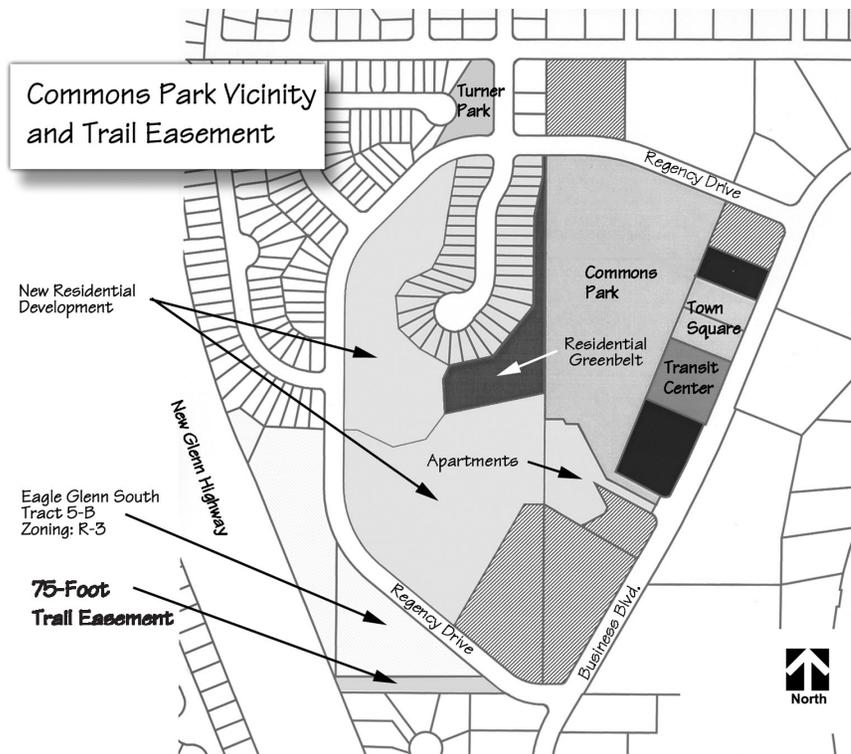


Figure 4-3 Park Vicinity and Easement

COMMONS PARK PROGRAM

The Commons Park Program included some predetermined items, such as the trail link to the New Glenn Highway. Beyond that, much of the park program was based on community input. This input was provided by means of a Citizen's Advisory Committee and three public meetings. Two additional meetings were held with an ad hoc parks group. A wide range of program elements were proposed for inclusion in the park. Following is a list of the program elements:

- Open spaces to accommodate various sports activities and community events such as the Bear Paw Festival, Music in the Park, a possible Shakespearean festival, Tuesday outdoor market, and a dog-sled race start.
- Use of the hill for views, possible amphitheater, possible small pavilion, and sledding.
- Lighted walking and ski track around the perimeter (connecting with existing trail).
- Permanent space (a minimum of 15,000 to 16,000 square feet) for a community library.
- Skateboard park/lighted skating pond.
- Pedestrian connections to the CBD, the highway trail, and nearby neighborhoods.
- Indoor carousel featuring animals from Alaska.
- Covered picnic tables in proximity to small children's play area.

- Berms on the west and north edges of the park to protect property owners from park noise and the park from road noise.
- Restrooms and electrical outlets.
- Parking for regular use and events (parking may not be required if it can be designated elsewhere).
- A new pedestrian/bicycle link with as few interruptions as possible between the New Glenn Highway Bike Path and Business Boulevard.
- Incorporation of the Transit Center and Town Square Park as integral components of the park. The parking lot for the Transit Center might also serve the park.

Commons Park could not accommodate all of these features and through public feedback a prioritized list of park components was identified. A listing of these components and a description of how they were included can be found in the Final Master Plan Section.

FINAL PARK MASTER PLAN

Three master plan alternatives were prepared and presented to the public. The Final Master Plan, as seen on Figure 4-4, is based on the alternative that had the most public support. It also incorporated some features of the other two alternatives.

The location of the pedestrian/bicycle link between the New Glenn Highway and Business Boulevard, as currently proposed,

is the result of changing site conditions and recent development. Parcels adjacent to the park have rapidly developed into single family housing, precluding the opportunity to obtain easements originally identified for the trail connection. While it would have been desirable to have a direct connection to the park, the new link accomplishes the fundamental goal of establishing a clear pedestrian link between the New Glenn Highway and the Central Business District.

Following is a physical description of the park improvements, recommendations for construction phasing, and a construction cost estimate for the recommended park improvements.

Recommended Improvements

1. Walkways

The Commons Park Master Plan features a hierarchy of walkways. The most important is the bike path connection between the New Glenn Highway Bike Path and the Eagle River Central Business District. This multi-use pathway will be constructed to Municipal standards within the existing easement.

The second tier of the walkway system includes park pathways. These pathways will meet A.D.A. accessibility requirements, but are not as wide and do not have to be built to the same standard as the multi-use bike path. The third component of the walkway system is the stairs to the hilltop overlook. There is an accessible route to the overlook, but the stairs offer both an interesting design element to the park and a shortcut from the transit parking area to the hill top.

- Central Business District/New Glenn Highway Bike Path.** The new pedestrian/bike path connection will occur within a 75-foot public trail easement that exists on the south side of Tract B-5 of Eagle Glenn

South. This route is the shortest and most direct link possible between the New Glenn Highway and Business Boulevard. The new trail will be constructed to multi-use trail standards and will be routed within the easement to where it connects with Regency Drive. The trail will then parallel the south side of Regency Drive, within the road right of way, until it meets the intersection of Regency Drive and Business Boulevard. Pedestrians or cyclists can then use the newly completed sidewalks on Business Boulevard for access to Commons Park. The route of the proposed multi-use trail can be seen on Figure 4-5.

- b. Park Pathways.** Pathways within the park that are not part of the trail connection to the new Glenn Highway, do not need to be built to the same standard. These pathways could be built to a width of six or eight feet. Walkways should be hard-surfaced (asphalt is acceptable) and meet A.D.A. standards. No shoulders are required, and it is desirable to bring the lawn directly adjacent to the walkway.
- c. Hilltop Stairs.** Stairs to the hilltop overlook should be constructed of cast-in-place concrete or some equally durable surface. Expanded metal treads on a structure may be desirable, because metal treads require little snow removal maintenance. The stairs provide direct access from the Transit Center to the hilltop. The A.D.A. accessible route uses park pathways around the back side of the hill.

2. Playgrounds

There are two playgrounds included in the master plan, an area for children ages two to five and a regular playground for children five and above. Considering the residential development in the area, demand for the playgrounds is expected to be high. Playgrounds should be generous in

size and must meet all of the required safety and A.D.A. accessibility standards.

3. Stage

A stage area is included near the existing Town Square Park. The stage area should be a hard surface and low enough to the ground that hand rails are not required. The stage can be constructed of concrete, metal, or wood. Ample electrical connections should be provided at the stage. It is not intended that the stage be covered. However, the ability to cover the stage with a tent structure, for example, should not be precluded by the design of the stage.

4. Amphitheater

The amphitheater should be molded out of the side of the hill facing the stage. Terraces that are six to ten feet deep are recommended with two to three feet of grade difference between them. The grade difference between terraces should be sloped at a 3:1 slope maximum. It is intended that the amphitheater would be covered in lawn with no permanently installed seating.

5. Hard-Surface Area

The hard surface area is intended as a community plaza that will be used for festivals and community gatherings. Asphalt surfacing is used in this area with concrete edging. The plaza area is broken up with planting areas and an irregular edge to avoid creating a "parking lot" appearance. Landscaping in this area will be important in creating the plaza character that is envisioned for the space. This is the single most expensive element in the park. The area can serve a variety of functions from large gatherings to a place suitable as a temporary skate board park.

6. Picnic Pavilion

The picnic pavilion is an open-sided structure with

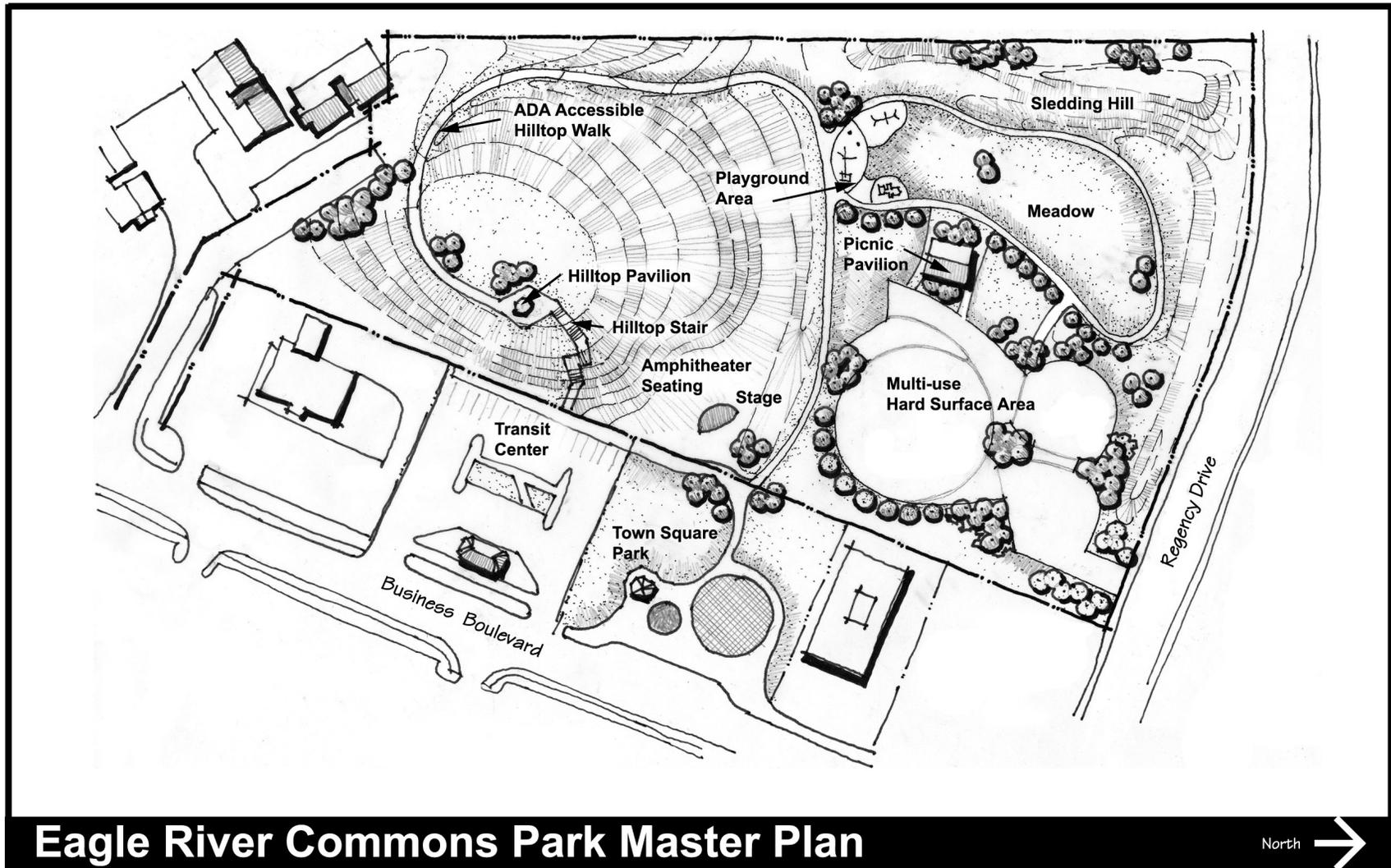


Figure 4-4 Master Plan

concrete pavement and picnic tables. Electrical service has been included next to the structure as part of Phase I Improvements. The structure should be designed locally and meet all of the required codes for wind and snow loading. Materials for the structure can be purchased locally to simplify issues of scheduling and shipping. A desirable size for the structure is 1,800 to 2,500 sq. ft.

7. Hilltop Pavilion

The hilltop pavilion is the lowest priority element in the park program. It would be a valuable enhancement to the park, but less important than the other elements included in this alternative. This may be a good project for a volunteer group to undertake. The structure should be open-sided and similar in appearance to the pavilion located in Town Square Park. A structure that is ten to fifteen feet across would be suitable in this location.

8. Restrooms

There are no permanent restrooms included in the park design. A niche is provided within the hard surface area suitable for several portable toilets. Permanent restroom facilities have proven to be a major maintenance problem.

9. Lighting

Walkway lighting is intended for the multi-use trail. Lighting for additional walkways can be provided at a later date and placement of conduit should be included in each park development phase to support this.

10. Irrigation

A quick-coupler irrigation system has been constructed in the first two phases of the park. The system is now essentially complete and will provide water coverage throughout the park. To reduce on-going maintenance, it may be desirable to convert the system to a fully automated system at some point in the future.

11. Landscaping

Landscaping in the park should use a limited variety of hardy and durable plants. Plantings should be confined, wherever possible, to planting beds surrounded by edging for maintenance purposes. Trees should not be planted in open lawn areas. Some of the trees that were preserved as part of the Phase 1 Improvements occur in open lawn, but this should not serve as an example for new plantings.

Tree and shrub plantings on the east-facing slope of the berm adjacent to the neighboring residential area should be avoided. This area is intended as a sledding hill. Plantings may be included on the west side of this berm.

PHASING AND CONSTRUCTION COSTS

A. Phase 1

Phase 1 of Commons Park was completed in the summer of 2000, and included the following:

1. Excavation and preparation of sub-base for multi-use hard surface area.
2. Placement of berms along the property line adjacent to residences and along Regency Drive.
3. Placement of topsoil and seeding of lawn areas in the northern portion of the site.
4. Providing quick-coupler irrigation system for watering new lawn areas.
5. Installation of electrical service and distribution panels.

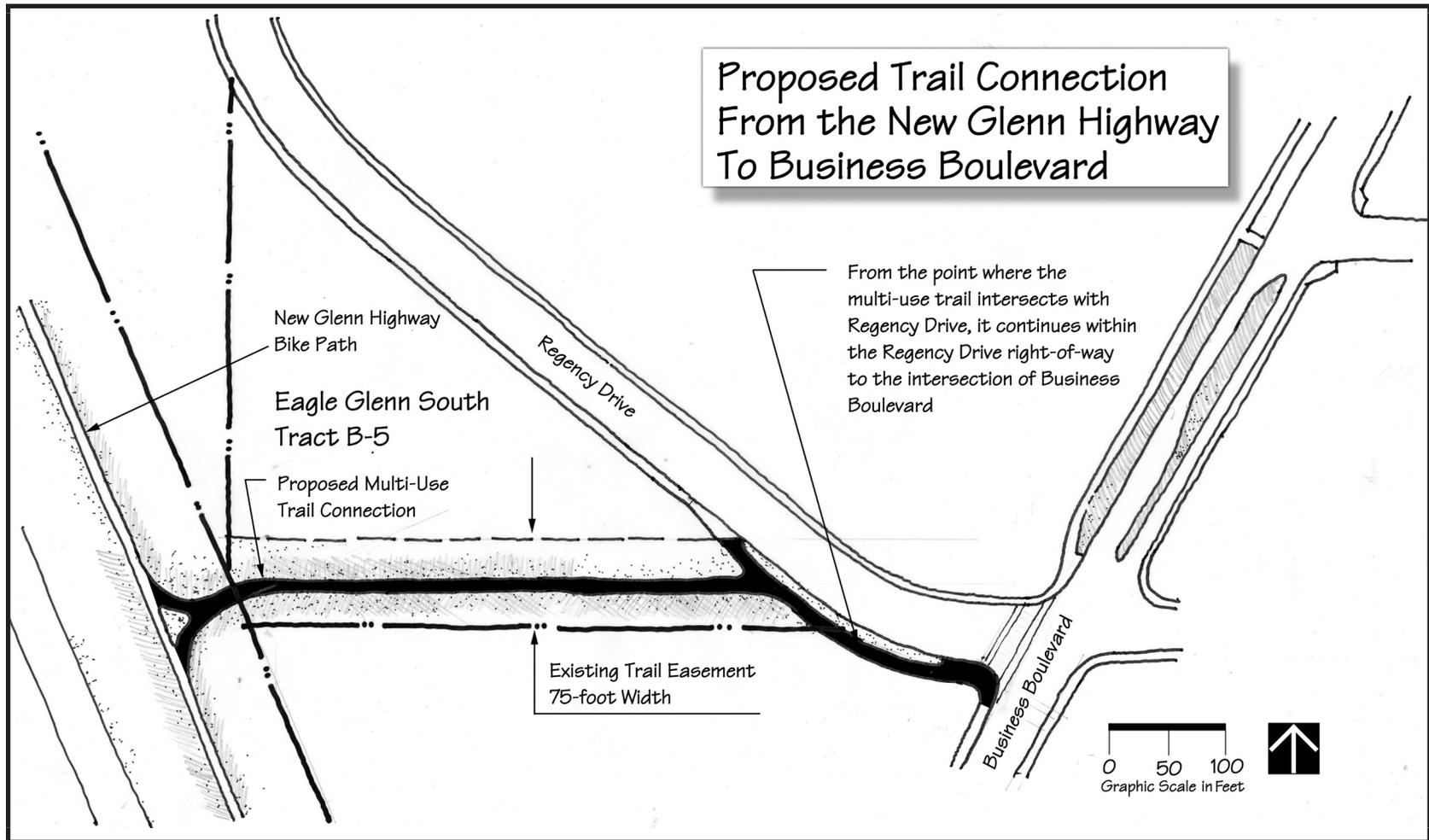


Figure 4-5 Proposed Trail Connection

B. Phase 2

Phase 2 of Commons Park construction was completed in the summer of 2003, and included the following items:

1. Paved plaza area,
2. Storm sewer connection for runoff from the plaza area,
3. Construction of the meadow walkway,
4. Clearing and grubbing of the Hilltop Area,
5. Topsoil and seeding of the Hilltop Area,
6. Grading of the amphitheater area,
7. Construction of the playgrounds,
8. ADA accessible walkway to the Hilltop, and
9. Installation of quick coupler irrigation system
10. Picnic Pavilion
11. Hilltop Pavilion
12. Stage

3. Stairs to Hilltop	Lump Sum	\$40,000
4. Electrical Work	Lump Sum	\$81,000
5. Walkway Lighting	45 ea.	\$135,000
6. Walks and Paving on Hilltop	Lump Sum	\$45,000
8. Landscape Improvements	Lump Sum	\$75,000
Total for Phase 4:		\$376,000

End of Section

C. Phases 3 and 4

Phase 3 construction is dedicated to building the multi-use trail connection from the New Glenn Highway Bike Path to Business Boulevard. This project is not dependent on any other construction in the park and can be completed as a stand-alone project. The trail connection will be constructed to Municipal standards for a multi-use trail. The trail follows the route identified in Figure 4-5. Most of the connection is situated within the dedicated trail easement, but from the point where the trail intersects Regency Drive, it follows the south side of Regency Drive to the intersection of Business Boulevard.

Phase 4 construction represents the final phase for implementation of the master plan. It includes the following components:

