

## SUGAR HILL TRAIL CONCEPT LIVABLE CENTERS INITIATIVE

### CORE TEAM MEETING #1

June 23, 2020 | 10:00 to 11:30 am | Zoom Meeting

#### Participants

##### Project Team

Kaipo Awana, Planning Director, City of Sugar Hill

Addie Weber, Project Manager, Toole Design

Blake Loudermilk, Engineering Lead, Toole Design

Meghan McMullen, Engagement Lead, Toole Design

##### Core Team

Julie Adams, Vice Chair, City of Sugar Hill Planning Commission

Troy Besseche, Assistant City Manager, City of Sugar Hill

Jeff Coleman, Senior Pastor, Church on the Hill

Vince Edwards, Transportation Planning Engineer, Gwinnett County DOT

Brandon Hembree, City Council, City of Sugar Hill

Joel Hoffman, Creative Content Coordinator, City of Sugar Hill

Bobby McGraw, Executive Pastor, Sugar Hill Church

Megan Mendez, Neighbor

Kristen Petillo, Neighbor

Jay Petillo, Neighbor

Daniel Piotrowski, Transportation Planning Engineer, Gwinnett County DOT

#### Welcome and Introductions

Addie Weber, the Toole Design project manager, welcomed the group and reviewed the agenda, project team, and core team members responsibilities. The core team consists of staff, elected and appointed officials, partner agencies, neighbors, and local businesses. Its purpose is to 1) share community insight, 2) coordinate and collaborate with relevant partners, 3) give feedback on draft concepts, and 4) connect to team members' networks to increase the project's reach.

#### Project Background, Goals, and Schedule

Meghan McMullen, the Toole Design engagement lead, reviewed the project background, including several previous projects that led to or influenced this effort: the *Sugar Loop Greenway Master Plan (2016)*, the *Sugar Hill SR 20 Corridor Study (2018)*, the *Sugar Hill Downtown Master Plan LCI (2018)*, the GDOT SR 20 widening project, and the BUILD Grant application for a new pedestrian and bicycle bridge.

Several guiding principles for developing a signature trail were shared, based on previous plans and initial conversations with staff:

1. Designing a safe and comfortable facility for users of all ages and abilities;
2. Connecting community facilities and other useful destinations;
3. Maximizing access to nature; and
4. Using existing public land and right-of-way as much as possible.

The facility should be designed to attract and support a wide range of users, including people who fall into the "interested but concerned" group of bicyclist design user profiles and have higher standards for safety and comfort. Wherever possible, facilities will be designed to be separated from vehicular traffic, allow sufficient width for passing and social walking/biking, and maximize user safety and comfort. Side paths and off-street trails are

preferred, but a combination of sidewalks, bike lanes, buffered bike lanes, and bike boulevards may be necessary in constrained locations.

The project area is shown in Figure 1 and includes the SR 20 corridor from Pinedale Circle to Buford Highway, as well as the Hillcrest Drive corridor from SR 20 to Richland Creek. An exact alignment has not yet been selected and will be determined as part of this project.

The primary elements of the project scope are:

- Analyze existing conditions;
- Engage with the community;
- Select a preferred alignment;
- Develop a conceptual design;
- and
- Prepare a GDOT Concept Report.

The project schedule is fast paced, with draft deliverables being submitted by the end of August. Upcoming activities include an interactive online WikiMap for the community, a Virtual Open House (July 15 from 2 to 3 pm via WebEx), and Core Team Meeting #2 (July 22 from 10:00 to 11:30 am).

### Existing Conditions Analysis

Meghan and Blake Loudermilk, the Toole Design engineering lead, shared highlights from the existing conditions analysis. The analysis is currently in progress and the project team asked participants to share feedback on the draft information shared to help ensure correct information is included in the report. The group reviewed major existing destinations, locations of future development, opportunities to connect people to nature, existing pedestrian and bicycle facilities, available right-of-way, conflict points, nearby parcel ownership, crossing locations and conditions, stormwater, topography, and traffic.

Several key challenges were identified for each section of the project, including:

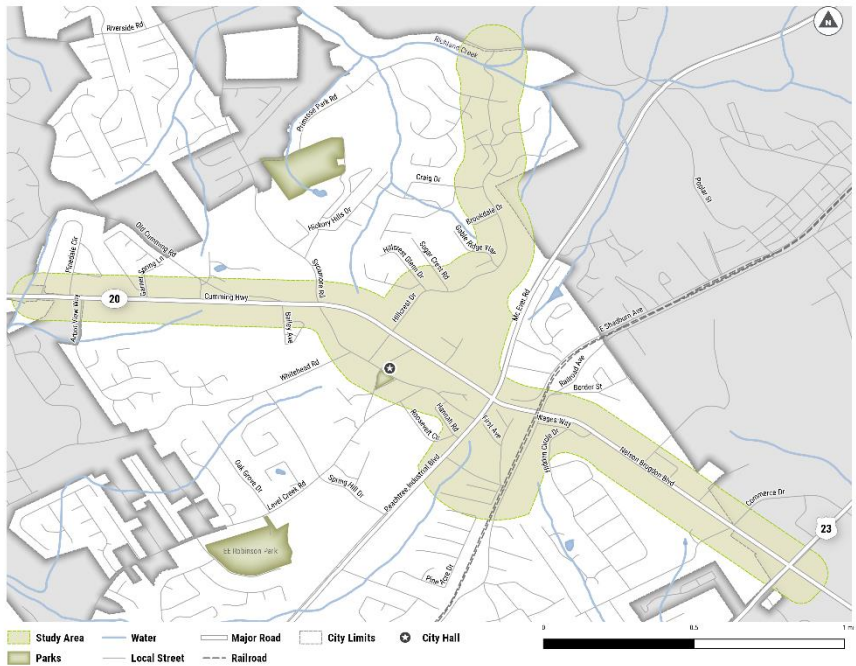
#### SR 20 West

- High traffic volumes and speeds
- Narrow usable right-of-way
- Creeks, ditches, drainage, and retention walls
- Limited crossings (2.3 miles from Sycamore Road to next crosswalk at Suwanee Dam Road)

#### Hillcrest Drive

- Hillcrest Drive intersection
- Steep slope between Shire Village Drive and Primrose Park Road
- Stormwater and utility conflicts throughout
- Sections with narrow usable right-of-way
- Topography and floodplain near Richland Creek

**Figure 1. Study Area**



### *Downtown*

- Narrow right-of-way
- Side street and driveway conflict points
- On-street parking (parallel and perpendicular)
- Relatively new streetscape
- Planned pedestrian/bicycle bridge integration
- Alton Tucker Boulevard/Peachtree Industrial Boulevard intersection design and signalization

### *SR 20 East*

- Railroad crossing
  - GDOT cooperation necessary for existing bridge, which is currently being designed with 5' sidewalks that would not accommodate both pedestrians and cyclists
  - Norfolk Southern and Amtrak cooperation necessary for new crossing
- GDOT coordination for SR 20 widening project
- Peachtree Industrial Boulevard intersection
- Frontier Drive intersection slope and sight lines
- High traffic volumes and speeds

### **Vision**

Blake introduced a discussion about the project vision by sharing a series of images of different greenway elements and character to help spark discussion. Core Team members discussed which greenway elements are most exciting or concerning to them, and which they think will be most critical to the project's success. Their comments included:

### *Exciting Elements*

- Connect to existing greenspace.
- Being able to access a safe and well-marked place to run near home.
- The opportunity to connect with local public transit options and facilitate multimodal travel behavior.
  - Connect to planned Gwinnett County Transit Route 50, which is expected to open in the next year.
  - Consider designing trailheads as mobility hubs that are designed to support other multiple modes of transportation.
    - Shelters for both trail users and future transit riders
    - Safe spot to wait for rideshare
    - Local business advertising
    - Art/wayfinding
    - Landmark meeting place
  - Connecting to the regional transportation network should be a cornerstone of the plan.
- Find opportunities to encourage healthy behaviors.
  - Water fountains.
  - Stops with outdoor exercise equipment for body weight exercises. Blake mentioned Mary Black Rail Trail and Tyger River Park in Spartanburg as good examples.
- Weave part of the trail closer to businesses where people can walk or cycle to shops and restaurants, like the BeltLine.
- Promote an "opt outside" mindset around the project.

### Concerning Elements

- Participants believe safety will be the top concern for most neighbors, including crime, lighting/visibility, and user conflicts:
  - Crime
    - Some people are concerned that trails are associated with crime. We have an opportunity to improve awareness on the real vs. perceived risks, especially for those who may not have visited the Silver Comet or other regional trails to experience the value they add to the community.
  - Lighting/Visibility
    - Want to ensure the design will feature adequate lighting to help users and neighbors feel safe.
  - User Conflicts
    - Participants mentioned an interest in limiting the times of day when cyclists can use the trail to create times when it is free of bikes.
    - Addie clarified that rather than limiting what types of users can use the trail, it is better to make sure there is adequate space for all users to avoid conflicts and educate the community about trail etiquette.
- Participants wanted to know if parking would be included in the design or not.
  - Addie clarified that it would be possible to incorporate locations for trail parking, but that the ideal scenario would be for most people who live nearby to walk or bike to the trail.
  - The *Sugar Hill Loop Greenway Master Plan (2016)* shows several conceptual greenway trailheads, with Downtown as the primary trailhead and a secondary trailhead in this area at the intersection of the trail with Richland Creek.
  - With the loop design of the overall greenway, there is not a great distance between any neighborhood and the greenway, so the idea of a trailhead is not as important as it might be for other trails like the Silver Comet that have more limited neighborhood connections. In the future, want to see neighborhoods connecting to the greenway via smaller trails
  - The intention is to maximize the use of existing parking Downtown to serve trail users who do not live nearby, rather than to pave much additional parking.

### Critical Elements to Success

- Enriching community awareness will be essential to move the project forward.
  - There is a deep-rooted intolerance for engaging with cyclists on the road, so improving relationships between drivers and cyclists, as well as promoting general safety awareness for both roadway user groups, will be important.
  - Participants recommend an educational campaign as part of the launch.
  - Could include school education as part of the program.
- Promoting safety by installing lighting and minimizing conflicts
- Consider alternatives to crossing the railroad on the current bridge, such as via Wages Way.

### SWOT

The group discussed the project's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). Toole Design prepared initial considerations and participants added their thoughts, including:

#### Strengths

- Existing downtown destinations
- Natural beauty at Richland Creek
- Sections with enough available right-of-way, such as much of SR 20 east
- Publicly controlled land near route

- Large tracts of land provide opportunity to route the trail in more natural areas

### *Weaknesses*

- Railroad crossing
- Uncomfortable environment (high speeds, truck traffic, lack of shade, limited buffer)
- Constrained right-of-way in some locations
- Natural features and topography requiring bridges or other treatments
- Limited existing destinations and connecting facilities
- Low lying areas with propensity for flooding
  - Blake mentioned this will be a balancing act with facility width, stormwater design, and cost. For example, underground stormwater may be needed to fit in a wide trail in some locations but will be expensive. He clarified the conceptual design will not include a full survey, which will occur at a later design phase, and encouraged participants to share any known flooding locations.

### *Opportunities*

- Bring people to Downtown events by foot or bike
- Use greenspace as anchor destinations
- Use parallel neighborhood streets or off-street connections to improve comfort and safety
- Reinforce Sugar Hill character through design
- Encourage revitalization for the areas around the railroad tracks and for aging shopping plazas
- Promote a more cohesive vision for future land use, which currently shows future mixed-use areas as a bit of a patchwork and needs an overlay to bring the different parts of Sugar Hill
- Link to Laurel Ridge Trail and other recreation facilities near Buford Dam and Lake Lanier
- Important to make the roadway feel as comfortable as possible along the edges with landscaping, in line with GDOT's requirements
- Take advantage of GDOT widening project to leverage that construction and minimize the cost of the railroad crossing/bridge on SR 20 east
- Make this trail an impressive gateway and front door to the city
- Promote the value of family time and getting out into nature for mental health

### *Threats*

- Difficulty and/or expense obtaining necessary right-of-way
- Need for cooperation from Norfolk Southern and GDOT
- Challenges relocating utilities, fire hydrants, or other conflicts
- Constrained funding sources due to economic crisis
- Potential opposition from neighbors
- The upcoming SR 20 widening project will encourage more free flow traffic and may change the character of SR 20 in this area. When the portion of SR 20 from the interstate to Buford Hwy went to 6 lanes it helped queuing at signals, but it also became more of a racetrack with people zipping through and changing lanes, which changed the character of the corridor overnight.

### **Wrap Up and Next Steps**

Toole Design will contact participants throughout the process to get their assistance spreading the work about community engagement activities, including the WikiMap that will launch next week and the Virtual Open House on July 15<sup>th</sup>. Toole will provide text and graphics that can be used to promote these activities.

The next Core Team meeting will be held on July 22<sup>nd</sup> and will cover an update on community feedback, a discussion of alternative alignments, and considerations for specific design elements. Participants confirmed that 10:00 to 11:30 am works well for their schedules. The option to either hold the meeting virtually via Zoom or in a

socially distant outdoor setting was presented and participants liked the idea of meeting outside. Toole will follow-up with a poll to confirm all members feel comfortable with this option and finalize an outdoor location.

Participants were asked to contact Meghan McMullen with any ideas or follow-up questions at [mmcmullen@tooledesign.com](mailto:mmcmullen@tooledesign.com)