

SUGAR HILL GREENWAY CONCEPT LIVABLE CENTERS INITIATIVE VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE #1 SUMMARY

July 15, 2020 | 2:00 to 3:00 pm | WebEx and Dial-in

This virtual open house was hosted by the City of Sugar Hill to inform the community about the Sugar Hill Greenway Concept Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) project and get input on preferred greenway characteristics. This meeting was held virtually due to social distancing requirements in response to COVID-19. Staff was supported by consultants from Toole Design, a multimodal transportation planning and design firm with national experience in trail design. Presenters included:

- Kaipo Awana, Planning Director, City of Sugar Hill
- Addie Weber, Project Manager, Toole Design
- Blake Loudermilk, Engineering Lead, Toole Design
- Jeff Ciabotti, Principal-in-Charge, Toole Design
- Ashley Gunderson, Engineer, Toole Design
- Meghan McMullen, Engagement Lead, Toole Design

Welcome

Addie Weber, the project manager from Toole Design, welcomed participants to the meeting and explained how they will be able to participate in the online format. They were invited to submit comments and questions using the chat function, respond to Mentimeter interactive polling, and give verbal feedback at the end of the meeting. Addie gave an explanation of how to use the WebEx interface to provide feedback.

Background

This project began with the *Sugar Loop Greenway Master Plan* in 2016, which outlined a 16-mile greenway loop through the city. It has also been informed by other local planning work and infrastructure projects, including the Sugar Hill SR 20 Corridor Study (2018), the ongoing GDOT SR 20 widening project. Since then, it has evolved and become more concrete.

This project focuses on creating connections between Downtown and Richland Creek (part of the originally planned greenway route) and connecting neighborhoods along SR 20 to Downtown and the future greenway loop. The study is funded by a grant from the Atlanta Regional Commission. Planned parks on City-owned parcels will anchor this portion of the greenway on the western end (SR 20 near Sugar Ridge Dr) and northern end (Hillcrest Dr at Richland Creek). Long term, this section of the greenway will help build out connections to the Chattahoochee River, Lake Lanier, and the Georgia Regional Transit Authority park and ride transit lot. This project looks at the feasibility and conceptual design for a greenway within the study area shown in the map below. The study area is about 3 miles east to west and 1.3 miles north to south. For reference, the east-west length would be about a 60-minute walk, 30-minute run, or 20-minute bike ride in one direction.

Project Schedule

The project is wrapping up the Existing Conditions and Technical Analysis phase and will move into Route Selection and Conceptual design next week. An online community input map is also live through July 26th to provide feedback on specific locations in the study area. There will be another virtual open house on August 13th to review the draft concept and it will be accompanied by an online survey. The full draft report will be submitted to the City by the end of August, with revisions to follow.

Guiding Principles

Draft guiding principles for this project were developed based on the Sugar Loop Greenway Master Plan (2016) and input from staff and the project steering committee (Core Team). They are to develop a signature trail amenity for Sugar Hill by:

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 (ROW) as much as possible.

Greenway Benefits and Features

Jeff Ciabotti gave an overview of greenway benefits and features, noting that over the last 25 years trails and greenways have moved from a “nice thing to have” to key parts of a communities to support a high quality of life. They deliver multiple benefits, including safe mobility, physical health, mental health, economic health, and environmental health.

- **Mobility:** Greenways offer safe, affordable transportation choices for people trying to get from Point A to Point B as part of a connected pedestrian and bicycle network.
- **Physical Health:** Greenways provide a safe, convenient, and affordable place for people to exercise. Less than half of the adults living in the U.S. meet their recommended level of physical activity, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Walking and biking can help maintain healthy weight; strengthen bones; lift mood; and prevent and manage conditions like heart disease, high blood pressure, and Type 2 diabetes, according to the Mayo Clinic. This can lead to a healthier community and reduced healthcare costs.
- **Mental Health:** Greenways can help reduce stress, allow people to connect with nature, and create opportunities for social interaction and fun experiences.
- **Economic Health:** Greenways positively impact the economy through tourism and events, increased property values, reduced healthcare costs, and a general uptick in consumer spending. They have become a top community amenity sought by homeowners, according to the National Association of Home Builders.
- **Environmental Health:** Greenways protect and link fragmented habitat and provide opportunities to protect plants and animals, reduce emissions, and can help protect water quality by creating buffer zones for streams and lakes to prevent soil erosion and filter pollution. They can also enhance community aesthetics.

What makes a greenway great?

Greenways can serve many purposes for many people. When it's connected to other greenways, trails, roadways, and destinations as part of a network, the benefits increase exponentially.

- Trails are great and their best when they are designed for everyone. We want to make sure people of all ages and abilities are safe and comfortable using the facility.
- They can connect people to destinations they want to go like nature, businesses, and gathering spaces.
- The journey becomes as important as the destination. We want to develop an experience along the route that is enriching and fulfilling, with features like art, overlooks, bridges, educational kiosks, rest stops, and programming with activities and events to keep the trail active and populated throughout the year.
- They're great when they're part of a "low-stress system" designed to the highest national standard, which makes it comfortable for all users. It should connect to on-street facilities, help access places of interest, and be easy for people to understand where they're going.

This project will be designed to maximize the use of trails (natural settings) and side paths (adjacent to roadways) that are separated from vehicles as much as possible. Ideally, these tend to be 10 to 14 feet wide and have a comfortable buffer between roadways. When we are constrained by limited right-of-way or there are cost issues associated with acquisition, other facilities may be used for short segments of the route, such as a combination of sidewalks, buffered or unbuffered on-street bike lanes, or bike boulevards where bikes share the road with vehicles on low-speed, low-volume roads. The overarching design goal will be to create consistent and safe greenway experience across the entire network using the highest level of design standards.

What makes a greenway great to you?

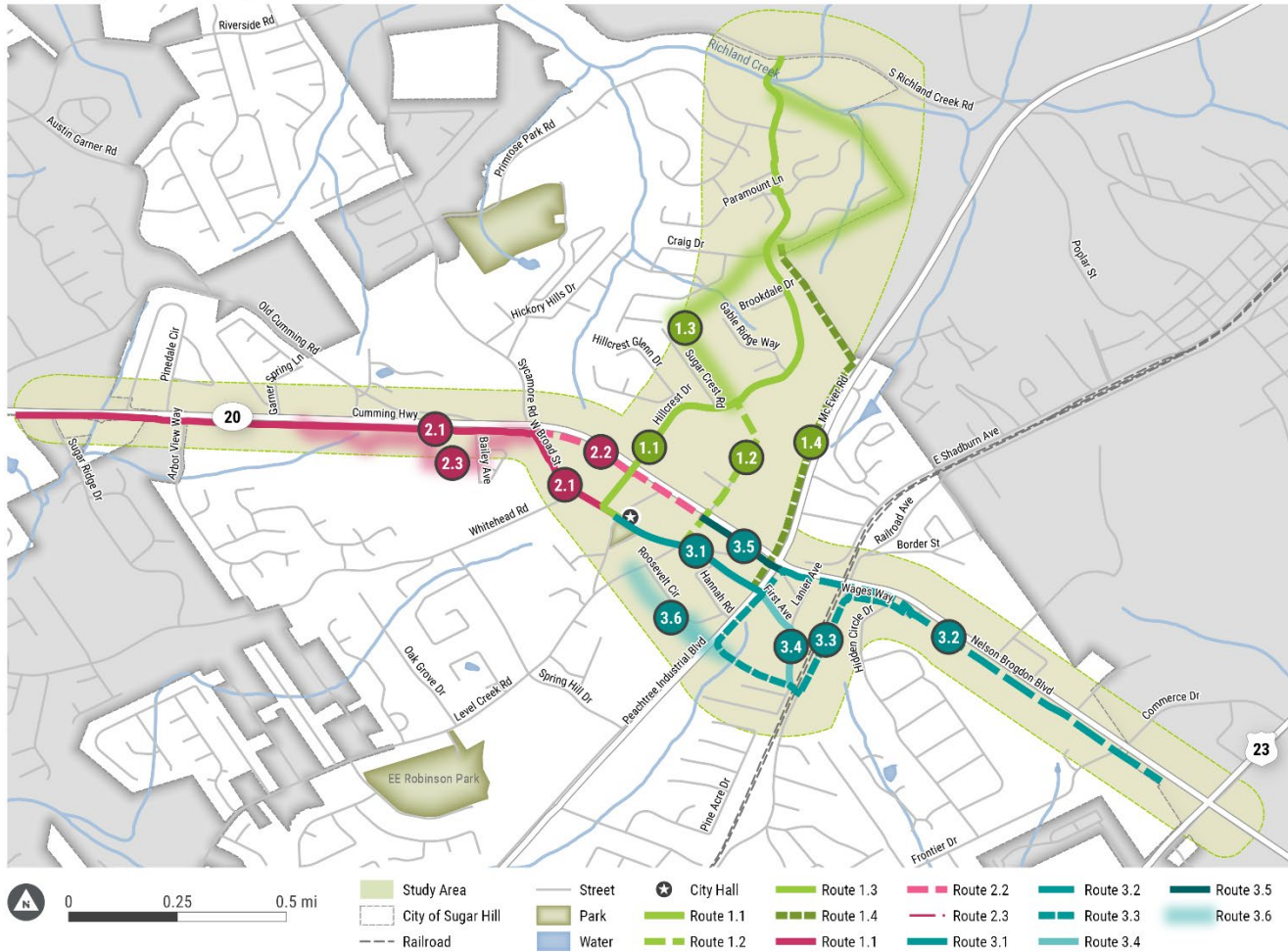
Jeff asked participants to respond to a Mentimeter poll to answer the question, "What makes a great greenway to you?" Responses were updated live on the screen and discussed with the group. They will be incorporated into the conceptual design. Responses included:

- Safety
- Shade and trees
- Wide walkways
- Areas marked for biking vs. running/walking
- Artwork
- Access to features like downtown, river parks, etc.
- Natural areas. A great greenway finds its way predominately through natural areas and less so along major roads.
- The ability to be in nature while in the city. Safe area for long runs.
- Access to activity areas like downtown, river, and parks (3)
- Accessible and plenty of parking. Lighting.
- Separated facilities for bikes/peds/cars
- Pet friendly
- Safety, multiple uses, welcoming feel with cohesive signage and maps
- Connected to activity areas
- Bike parking racks
- Golf cart
- Are we going to allow golf carts?
- Mix of wooded areas and winding past coffee shops, access to business by biking/running
- Clean and well maintained
- Places to visit (historical, etc.) or places to pause
- Water for drinking
- Lighting
- Accessible and pet friendly
- Education on local flora and fauna
- Speed limits for bikes/e-bikes

Critical Challenges and Alternative Routes

There proposed project area is broken into three corridors—SR 20 West, Hillcrest Dr, and SR 20—that converge in Downtown Sugar Hill. Several potential alternative routes—for each corridor will be presented and a preferred route will be selected at a later date, taking public input into account. Meghan McMullen and Ashley Gunderson from Toole Design gave an overview of the alternative routes being considered and critical challenges associated with each. The route segments shown on the maps were numbered for identification. The preferred alignment will include a combination of multiple route segments.

City of Sugar Hill Greenway Concept LCI - Alternative Alignments



Route Selection Considerations

Several factors are considered in determining the best route for the greenway that participants should keep in mind as they review the alternative routes. These include user comfort and safety, available right-of-way (ROW), topography, access to destinations, constructability, and estimated cost. There are tradeoffs between each of these considerations that the community will need to decide on to move forward.

SR 20 West

This corridor runs along SR 20 from Sugar Ridge Dr in the west to Downtown in the east. W Broad St between SR 20 and Hillcrest Dr is also being considered as a potential route for this corridor. A future park on an existing

city-owned parcel will be the anchor on the western end of the corridor. As the path gets built out further to the west in the long term, it will eventually connect to the Chattahoochee River. There are some businesses along this route, but much of the land in this area is currently undeveloped. Residential neighborhoods are located off SR 20 both to the north and south in this area.

Challenges

Critical challenges in this area include:

- High volume of traffic (25,500 AADT) including a high share of freight traffic
- Narrow publicly owned ROW in some sections, limiting the potential for a wider buffer
- Existing guard rails and retaining walls in some locations
- Conflicts with creeks, ditches, and other stormwater management features
- Limited crossings (more than two miles between the crosswalks at W Broad St/Sycamore Rd and Suwanee Dam Rd)

Alternative Route Segments

- 2.1: W Broad St (Hillcrest Dr to SR 20) and SR 20 (W Broad St/Sycamore Rd to new city park) within the public ROW
- 2.2: SR 20 (W Broad St/Sycamore Rd to planned pedestrian bridge)
- 2.3: Off-street path in a natural setting on the south side of SR 20 through a combination of City-owned and privately-owned parcels

Participant Comments

Participants responded to the discussion using the chat feature, with comments including:

- *"I like the 2.3 option if possible!"*
- *"Agree with you....the more natural and away from traffic the better."*
- *"Agreed!"*

Downtown

Routes from each of the three corridors converge in Downtown Sugar Hill, which serves as the primary anchor point with its many destinations like The Bowl, City Hall, the E Center, the Eagle Theater, businesses, and higher density residences.

Challenges

Critical challenges in this area include:

- Narrow right-of-way
- Side street conflict points
- On-street parking
- Relatively new streetscape investment
- Pedestrian bridge integration at the E Center
- Alton Tucker Blvd/Peachtree Industrial Blvd intersection crossing

Alternative Route Segments

- 2.1: W Broad St (Hillcrest Dr to SR 20) and SR 20 (W Broad St/Sycamore Rd to new city park) within the public ROW
- 2.2: SR 20 (W Broad St/Sycamore Rd to planned pedestrian bridge)
- 1.1: Hillcrest Dr (Broad St to Richland Creek)

- 1.2: New path from Broad St to Hillcrest Dr, including proposed pedestrian bridge over SR 20
- 3.1: Alton Tucker Blvd (Hillcrest Dr to Peachtree Industrial Blvd), including a portion with a shared use path and an on-street portion with shared lane markings (sharrows) and traffic calming
- 3.5: SR 20 (Peachtree Industrial Blvd to proposed pedestrian bridge)

Hillcrest

The Hillcrest corridor will connect Downtown Sugar Hill to Richland Creek and the future natural park that will be located on S Richland Creek Dr. It will connect to residential neighborhoods, the Bowers development, and Sugar Hill Church. Long term, it will help form a connection toward the Lake Lanier recreational area.

Challenges

Critical challenges in this area include:

- Hillcrest Drive intersection (speeds, distance, and right turn slip lanes)
- Steep slope between Shire Village Dr and Primrose Park Rd
- Sections with narrow right-of-way
- Topography near Richland Creek
- Stormwater utility conflicts

Alternative Route Segments

- 1.1: Hillcrest Dr (Broad St to Richland Creek)
- 1.2: New path from Broad St to Hillcrest Dr, including proposed pedestrian bridge over SR 20
- 1.3: Off-street path in wooded areas between neighborhoods and connecting to Richland Creek
- 1.4: McEver Rd (SR 20 to Maplecliff Way) and off-street path in wooded areas to reconnect with Hillcrest Dr

SR 20 East

The SR 20 East corridor runs between Downtown Sugar Hill and Buford Highway along SR 20 or parallel roads. It will provide access to nearby neighborhoods as well as businesses and organizations located along SR 20. Long term, it will form part of the connection toward the park and ride transit center near I-985 to facilitate multimodal commute options.

Challenges

Critical challenges in this area include:

- Norfolk Southern railroad crossing (bridge on SR 20 or at-grade at First Ave)
- Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) SR 20 widening project currently in design and does not include a shared use path over the bridge, so support from GDOT and Gwinnett County DOT will determine feasibility of that route
- Peachtree Industrial Blvd intersection (speeds, distance, and right turn slip lanes)
- Frontier Dr sight lines
- High traffic volumes and speeds

Alternative Route Segments

- 3.1: Alton Tucker Blvd (Hillcrest Dr to Peachtree Industrial Blvd), including a portion with a shared use path and an on-street portion with shared lane markings (sharrows) and traffic calming
- 3.2: Peachtree Industrial Blvd (Alton Tucker Blvd to SR 20) and SR 20 (Peachtree Industrial Blvd to Sugar Hill Station)

- 3.3: Wages Way (SR 20 to Railroad Ave), Railroad Ave (Wages Way to First Ave), First Ave, and Peachtree Industrial Blvd (First Ave to Alton Tucker Blvd)
- 3.4: Lanier Ave (First Ave to Old First Ave) and Old First Ave (Lanier Ave to Peachtree Industrial Blvd)
- 3.5: SR 20 (Peachtree Industrial Blvd to proposed pedestrian bridge)
- 3.6: Off-street extension of First Ave west of Peachtree Industrial Blvd

Participant Comments

- *Thanks for talking to [GDOT] about that! 5 feet would not feel safe in that section!*
- *Need a wider bridge over railroad or a pedestrian bridge.*
- *3.3, 3.4, and 3.6 involve an at-grade railroad crossing. Not safe.*

Question and Answer Session

Participants were invited to participate in a question and answer session to discuss the alternative alignments shared and their vision for the greenway. Comments were submitted through the chat box in WebEx. Comments included:

- **Is there a design in mind for the proposed PED bridge across SR 20? Will it have stairs? Will it be ADA Accessible?**
 - *Troy Besseche: Yes, there will be an elevator, stair tower, and ramps/slopes that are ADA compliant. We applied for grant applications to get federal funding for this and its construction will depend on receiving federal funding.*
- **Are there still tentative plans for the Buford landfill to become park that may get connected to the greenway?**
 - *Kaipo Awana: I am not aware of any plans to convert that to green space.*
 - *Troy Besseche: The limitations on regulatory compliance and monitoring over a 20 to 30 year closure period precludes it from becoming a park for 20 years at least. There are significant impacts post-closure.*
- **Is there a master plan or timeline for getting all of this work started or completed? Hearing that this project is 4 years in the works, it makes me temper my excitement a bit.**
 - *Addie Weber: That's part of what we're looking at with this study, what is the potential cost so the City can get moving forward on identifying sources for that funding. Hopefully, that will be sooner rather than later but that will be somewhat dependent on cost.*
 - *Troy Besseche: The process we started for the first phase of the greenway south of SR 20 got started in 2015. We just awarded construction contract for the majority of it, which brings the total cost somewhere around \$6 million for about five miles of trail. The cost comes from bridges and boardwalks and grading activity in natural areas, so the cost of this new phase would depend heavily on the alignment and where it runs. A natural environment is a better experience for a greenway, but the tradeoff is cost. The funding could come from grant sources or the next SPLOST vote in 2023. We estimate at about \$1 million a mile and this is a little over four miles.*
- **Since we have sidewalks along a large portion of these proposed areas already, the more greenspace the Greenway can go through the better, in my opinion. Being able to enjoy greenspace and nature that then connects to downtown I think would be much more desirable and ultimately safer as it separates walkers and runners from vehicle traffic. Obviously, there are tradeoffs but I think it'd be worth the wait and cost to do it right.**

- *Participant comment: Agreed. This will make it more difficult to get the job done, however the long-term benefits are without question! We live off Hillcrest Glenn Cir and would love access to a trail that takes us to Richland in minutes!*
 - *Participant comment: Agree!*
- **As a biker, the portions of the Silver Comet Trail that are further out with few road crossings are better than those closer in. Also, congestion is a consideration for biking vs walking. The BeltLine in Atlanta can sometimes be very congested, which causes conflict and safety issues for bikers for walkers.**
 - *Blake Loudermilk: When looking at trail design, Jeff spoke to this a bit earlier. Volume plays a big part, just like for roadways. The more volume we have, the more separation we need between different user types. There was a question about a centerline as well. The wider you get, the more purposeful we have to be about delineating the different modes. For example, passing bicycles need adequate distance to pass in both directions without creating more conflict with pedestrians. The wider trails get, the more important it becomes to allocate the space specifically to different modes so everyone knows where they're supposed to be.*
 - *Jeff Ciabotti: The key is when you are interacting with trails at intersections, which is where most injuries tend to occur. Having good clear wayfinding is important and warning signs ahead of those areas is important. There will be different context through the different neighborhoods and downtown areas, so there will need to be a specific design aesthetic of the trail is noticeable so that people all know where the trail is and when they will be interacting with it. Where there are areas of constraint, you need to create a legible and comfortable on-street design to create a cohesive user experience for families.*
 - *Blake Loudermilk: Intersections are often where you are most constrained because you already have existing elements like poles, utilities, or crosswalks so it's really important that we pay special attention to how we cross these busy streets in that high-speed environment and elevate your most vulnerable users, pedestrians and cyclists.*
- **Have we considered offering sponsorship of sections by local area businesses and organizations?**
 - *Kaipo Awana: Yes, it has been in conversations but I don't know that we've moved forward with a way for an organization to adopt a section, but we have talked about it.*
 - *Meghan McMullen: This is a method that has been used in other communities that could be considered here.*
- **We have walked a good bit along SR20, and it is difficult to hold a conversation with the car noise. Just want to say thanks for hosting this presentation. We definitely enjoyed it, and look forward to seeing Sugar Hill become even sweeter!**
- **Did I understand correctly that Hillcrest routes may depend upon the pedestrian bridge across SR 20 being built? And we are a couple years out on that bridge?**
 - *Meghan McMullen: In part, yes. Certain alignments connect more directly to that bridge, so it is an influencing factor for those segments. There are alternative ways we can connect, so it's not a dealbreaker.*
- **If the trail goes further out from the roads, will it require substantially more acquisition of private property? How would all that happen?**
 - *Meghan McMullen: Yes, if it's in natural areas, it will likely require property acquisition. Certain parcels are already owned by the city, which would allow more access to nature without acquisition. But if we pursue a primarily off-street route, private property will likely be involved and it will be a slower process as we have conversations with those property owners and engage in the acquisition process.*

- *Kaipo Awana: It could be that we coordinate with private property owners as they redevelop and work with them to get those sections of the trail built through the design review process as well.*
- **I think I heard a phase of the greenway is already completed. If that's true, where is it?**
 - *Meghan McMullen: Yes, the first section of the greenway has been completed. It is on Peachtree Industrial Blvd close to EE Robinson Park and Gwinnett Church and is a fairly short segment.*
 - *Brandon Hembree: The rest of Phase 1 was awarded Monday night for construction.*

Community Input Map Tutorial

We have created an online community input map to submit comments about this project. The link is <https://wikimapping.com/sugarhillgreenway1.html> and it is available on the City's website and social media. The project team gave a demonstration of how the interface works and encouraged participants to complete it and share it with other community members.

Wrap-up and Next Steps

Addie closed the meeting with a summary of next steps. The draft concept will be developed by the end of August and then there will be another Virtual Open House and an online survey to provide feedback on the draft concept before it is finalized.

Chat Box Comments

Comments were submitted to the chat box throughout the meeting. Comments that were not discussed previously are included below for reference:

- *Participant: The top image looks like Greenville.*
 - *Project team: Yes, it is the Swamp Rabbit Trail in Falls Park on the Reedy River in Greenville.*
- *Participant: Not a fan of golf carts on Sugar Hill greenways personally.*
- *Participant: What about the south side of the greenway, south of SR 20?*
 - *Project team: We are considering that section existing since it is already under construction. The focus of this study is crossing SR 20 and connecting east and west of downtown.*
- *Have we added any specific parking areas?*
 - *Project team: Our acquisitions to date have been very strategic to serve as trailheads with parking and possible future amenities. There may be limited parking added in some trailhead locations, but we will try to leverage existing public parking, such as the Downtown garage. We will also create access points to neighborhoods to encourage people who live nearby to walk or bike to the greenway.*
- *Participant: Incorporate art elements throughout so people can see other things along the way and highlight the arts community.*
- *Participant: Thanks for hosting this—I'm very excited to see it all come together!*
- *Participant: Thanks for hosting this and allowing for comments and feedback. This will be a tremendous amenity for our great city!*
- *Participant: Grateful for the insights. Everyone have a fabulous rest of the day.*
- *Participant: Thank you! Great info*