

SUGAR HILL GREENWAY CONCEPT LIVABLE CENTERS INITIATIVE VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE #2 SUMMARY

September 9, 2020 | 6:00 to 7:00 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 feedback on the draft concept for new greenway segments that will connect SR 20 neighborhoods to Downtown Sugar Hill and Richland Creek. 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
- Eric Childs, Landscape Architect, Toole Design

Welcome and Project Overview

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.

Project Overview

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.

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's Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) program. 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 near I-985. This project looks at the feasibility and conceptual design for a greenway within the study area.

Project Schedule

This project began in May with the Existing Conditions and Technical Analysis. Over the summer, the project team developed alternative routes and solicited input from the community on the preferred route for each corridor. A draft report has been developed outlining the preferred route, draft conceptual designs, and an implementation strategy. The full report will be posted to the project page later this week and highlights will be presented during this meeting. After the meeting, an online survey will be open through the end of September to continue collecting community feedback on the draft concept. The report will be revised and finalized in October. After this project is completed, the City will move toward implementation, including the identification and allocation of funding, detailed design, and construction.

Concept Direction

Meghan McMullen, the engagement lead from Toole Design, summarized how the Existing Conditions and Technical Analysis and community input shaped the selection of the preferred route and the characteristics of the conceptual design. Route selection considerations included tradeoffs between user comfort and safety, available right-of-way, topography, access to destinations, constructability, and estimated cost. Community engagement activities informing the route selection included Core Team meetings, a Virtual Open House held in July, and an interactive online Community Input Map. Key direction from community members through these activities included:

- Use public right-of-way when possible
- Connect to local businesses, parks and plazas, natural areas, and Downtown Sugar Hill
- Begin building regional connections to the Chattahoochee River and Lake Lanier
- Create cohesive branding and landscaping
- Feature art and history
- Support multimodal connections to transit
- Prioritize natural settings
- Make it feel safe with lighting and visibility
- Include bike and vehicle parking
- Make it family- and pet-friendly
- People are concerned about crossing major intersections
- Amenities like water fountains, shade, and seating are desired

More detailed information on route selection considerations is available in the draft report and individual activity summaries on the project page.

Draft Conceptual Design

Figure 1 shows the preferred route for this section of the greenway, connecting to Downtown Sugar Hill, two new parks, and shopping centers at SR 20 and Buford Hwy. It will intersect with the first phase of the greenway, which is currently moving into construction, at W Broad St near City Hall.

SR 20 West

This corridor extends from Downtown Sugar Hill at W Broad St/Sycamore Rd to a new community park on SR 20 just west of Sugar Ridge Dr. There is currently a 5-foot sidewalk with a variable width buffer. In the proposed concept, most of this corridor will have a 12-foot concrete shared use path with a 5-foot landscaped buffer on the south side of SR 20. Shade trees will be added along the route for comfort and aesthetics. In some locations, retaining walls or small bridges will be needed to address the steep topography on the south side of the road. Proposed locations for wayfinding signs, wayside rest areas, and public art are shown in Figure 2. The future development route shown in that map shows where an alternate route should be added as undeveloped properties develop to provide an option that allows users to travel along local roads instead of along SR 20.

The City is planning to create a new community park on a City-owned parcel on the south side of SR 20 just west of Sugar Ridge Dr. A trailhead will be added at the northeast corner of the park for greenway users to access the park, park their bikes, use a bike repair station, rest, use the restroom, and enjoy the park. Limited vehicle parking will be included

Figure 1. Preferred Route - Overall

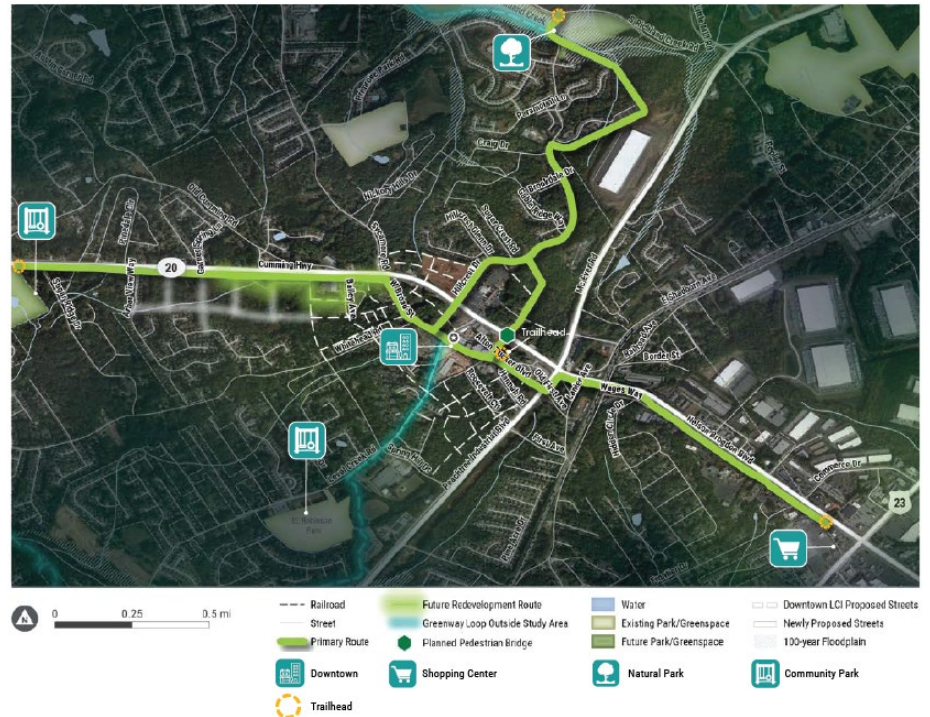


Figure 2. Proposed Route - SR 20 West



Poll: How comfortable would you be using the SR 20 West segment?

Participants were asked to respond to a live interactive poll using the Mentimeter platform. Most participants said they would be comfortable walking or biking in this segment (53%), but just under half said they would either be probably use the route but be a little nervous (24%) or that they don't think they would feel comfortable walking or biking here (24%). They were asked to explain what made them feel uncomfortable in the chat box. Responses are shown below.

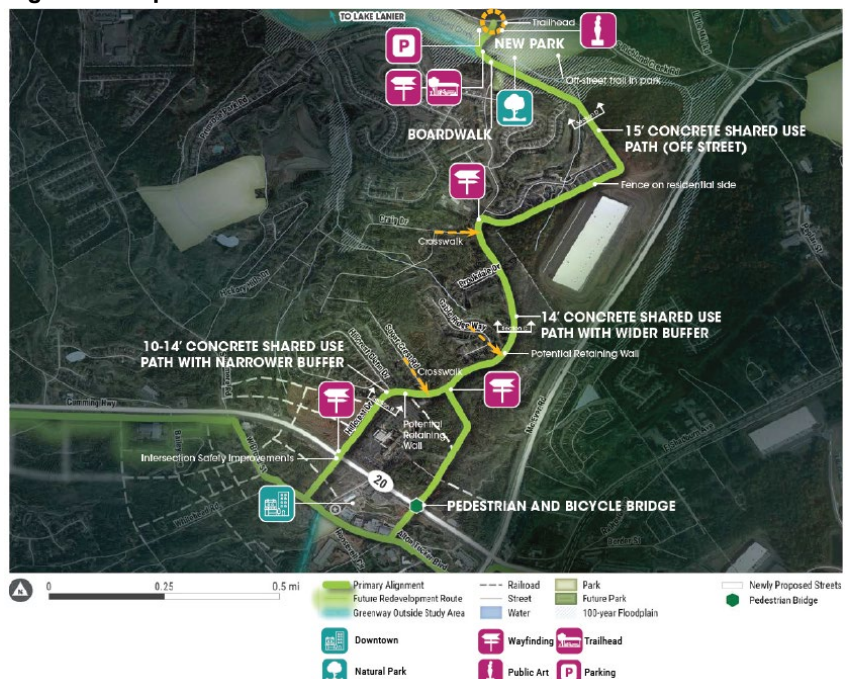
Participant Comments:

- *Participant: Is it possible to put the shade trees between the greenway and the road to act as more of a buffer? I love the trees, but it would be great to see them on the other side.*
- *Participant: Yes, agree about the trees.*
 - *Toole Design (TD): We would love to put trees in the buffer between the shared use path and the road. Unfortunately, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) regulates the size and type of objects you can put immediately next to a state route, and that includes trees. This is what they call a clear zone, which is meant to provide recovery space for vehicles that exit the roadway. The size of tree that is allowed in that space is up to a 4-inch caliper, which basically means you cannot put any tree that would ultimately grow large enough to provide shade and a better sense of protection.*
- *Participant: Safety from vehicle traffic – guardrails/posts along the road side*
 - *TD: See above*
- *Participant: Too little space between sidewalk and road.*
 - *TD: Wherever possible, the width of the buffer will be maximized. However, because there is a steep incline with guard rails and multiple retaining walls on the south side of the road, the available width in many areas is constrained. In some locations, additional right-of-way would have to be acquired.*
- *Participant: Friendship's speed is 45 mph, which might be something to bring SR 20 down to*
 - *TD: The speed limit is currently 45 mph in this area.*
- *Participant: As bikers it can be frightening too along that route*

Hillcrest

This corridor connects Downtown to Richland Creek and several neighborhoods along the way. It includes on-street segments on Hillcrest Dr as well as off-street sections in natural areas. Figure 3 shows the proposed route. To the south, there will be two ways to access Downtown, either via a shared use path next to Hillcrest Dr or via an parallel off-street connection that will tie into a planned pedestrian bridge over SR 20 near the E Center. Depending on how the undeveloped parcels at SR 20 and Peachtree Industrial Blvd develop, this off-street path may actually be a shared use path next to a smaller local road

Figure 3. Proposed Route - Hillcrest



within the future development. Crosswalks will be added at the existing three-way stops at Sugar Crest Rd, Gable Ridge Way, and Craig Dr to allow safe access from neighborhoods to the shared use path on the east side of Hillcrest Dr. Just north of Craig Dr, the path will veer off-street through natural areas to both address community requests for natural settings and to avoid a steep hill on the north end of Hillcrest Dr. It will cross over Richland Creek on the north end of the corridor and connect to S Richland Creek Rd, which will improve connectivity to Lake Lanier and its recreational amenities. Part of the greenway in this section will be a boardwalk where it crosses the creek or passes through steep and uneven topography.

There will be a new park on City parcels at the north end of the corridor. It will retain its wooded character and focus on informal and passive activities, creating a space for community members to connect with the natural environment. Features may include a natural play area, playground, shade garden, pavilion, creek access, and dog park. Unpaved trails in a forested setting will extend into the property, giving community members another opportunity to use trails in natural settings. The exact design will be determined in a master plan for the park, with additional input from the community.

Poll: How comfortable would you be using the Hillcrest segment?

Most participants (80%) said they would be comfortable walking or biking in this segment, with a few saying they would not feel comfortable (13%) or that they were not sure (7%). They were asked to explain what made them feel uncomfortable in the chat box. Responses are shown below.

Participant Comments

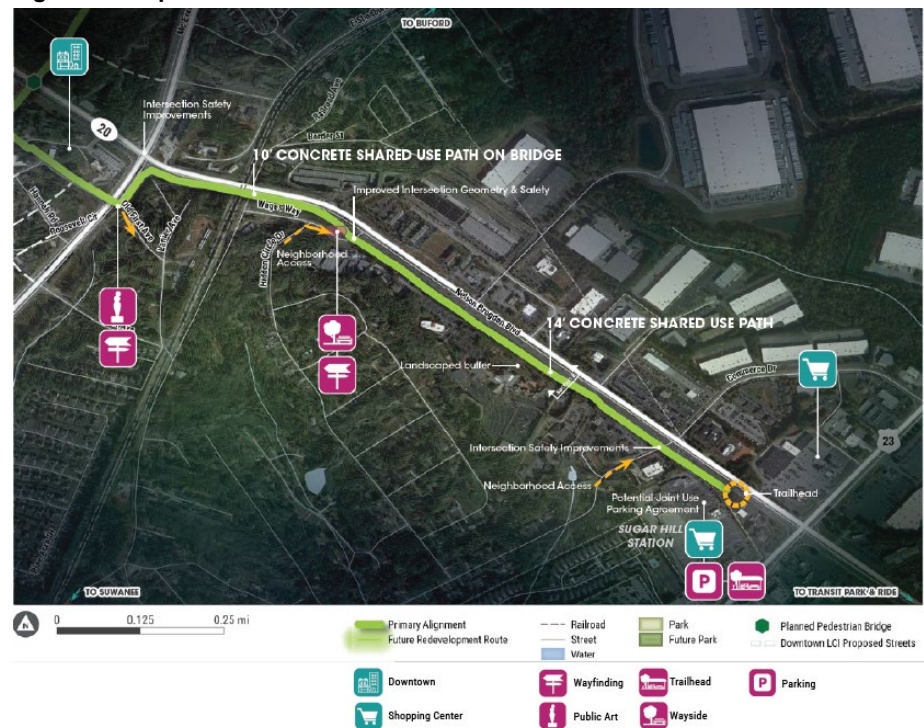
- *Participant: As residents of Primrose Creek, there is about 200 feet between my property and the creek. This proposed trail will reduce that width and allow users of the greenway closer to my home. Will there be any walls, privacy walls, or barriers to protect the residents from users of the walkway? It would be ideal to have the trail on the north side of the creek as a barrier for the homeowners.*
- *Participant: Regarding the Hillcrest section, what will the setback be from the properties on Buckthorn Dr?*
 - *TD: It is recommended to add a fence on the residential side of the greenway through the wooded area to give more privacy and a clear delineation. There will be a wooded landscape buffer as well. The exact width of the buffer between the greenway and residential properties varies along the corridor and will be determined in the design phase. Neighbors will have additional opportunities to weigh in on features like buffers and lighting as the project moves into the detailed design phase. There are various options for safety patrols, call boxes, or geocoded 911 markers that could also be considered in the design.*
- *Participant: Since this is getting people "into nature," I'm hoping you'll make extra effort to remove a minimal amount of mature trees so that the residents on Buckthorn Drive can maintain some of their privacy.*
 - *TD: This project did not include a survey of the land, which will be included in the design phase. A survey is needed to identify the locations of specific mature or specimen trees. The intention is to retain the natural setting and trees with minimal disruption.*

SR 20 East

SR 20 begins at Downtown at the intersection of Alton Tucker Blvd and Peachtree Industrial Blvd. This intersection was selected for the crossing instead of SR 20 and Peachtree Industrial Blvd because it has lower volumes of traffic and is slightly less intimidating. Several modifications to that intersection are recommended to make it a safe place to cross, including crosswalks, a pedestrian refuge island, elimination of the continuous right turn slip lane, and a dedicated thru signal phase for pedestrians and cyclists. From there, the greenway will head

north to SR 20 and head east toward Buford Hwy along SR 20. This allows for a grade-separated crossing of the Norfolk Southern railroad along the bridge. This recommendation is dependent on decisions from GDOT and the Gwinnett County Department of Transportation (GCDOT), which are currently designing a road widening project on SR 20 from Peachtree Industrial Blvd to Buford Hwy. The City has submitted a request to modify the project design to include a shared use path, but GDOT and GCDOT have not reached a decision at this time. If the request is denied, the alternative will be to upgrade the at-grade rail crossing First Ave and use Railroad Ave and Wages Way to reconnect to SR 20.

Figure 4. Proposed Route - SR 20 East



There is a wider amount of space available for a shared use path in this part of the corridor, including a wider area that is already publicly owned. There will be a 14-foot concrete shared use path with a wide landscaped buffer and shade trees in this area. The wider area will also allow the path to meander with subtle curves to make it feel like more of a parkway experience.

Poll: How comfortable would you be using the Hillcrest segment?

Most participants (81%) said they would be comfortable walking or biking in this segment, with a few saying they would not feel comfortable (6%) or that they were not sure (13%). They were asked to explain what made them feel uncomfortable in the chat box. Responses are shown below.

Participant Comments

- *Participant: Will the new path be straight or curvy?*
 - *TD: In this section, there is enough right-of-way to make it curvy.*

Downtown

The character of the greenway Downtown has more of a city feel, coming off SR 20 to local roads: W Broad St, Alton Tucker Blvd, and Hillcrest Dr. Phase 1 of the greenway, which is moving into the construction phase, will tie into this project at the intersection of Church St and W Broad St. There are several locations for wayfinding and public art Downtown. A trailhead will be located near the E Center at the intersection of W Broad St and Alton Tucker Blvd. It will include bike parking, water fountain, art, wayfinding signs, and covered seating that can double as a pick-up spot for rideshare or transit users. Its location will take advantage of proximity to the existing public parking garage and public restrooms that are accessible from the exterior of City Hall as additional amenities. Additional features like a bike share station, nearby Zip Car parking, a designated rideshare pickup spot, and

coordination with Gwinnett County Transit's planned on-demand vanpool service in this area to help facility multimodal travel as a mobility hub.

There are multiple greenway facility types that will be used in different locations Downtown. Pedestrians will use existing sidewalks. In the center, the shallow building setbacks and recently installed streetscape limit the space available for a dedicated bicycle facility. For this reason, a bike boulevard treatment will be used between Hillcrest Dr and Alton Tucker Blvd, with cyclists riding in the street with cars. This will include pavement markings and signage to draw attention to cyclists, as well as traffic calming features to encourage slow and careful driving. On the eastern and western end of the corridor where there is more space available, there will be a two-way cycle track, a protected bicycle facility, on the north side of the road. The intersection of W Broad St and Alton Tucker Blvd will be realigned to create a more standard T-intersection with a three-way stop and high visibility crosswalks to help transition between the facilities and slow down traffic.

Figure 5. Proposed Route - Downtown



Poll: How comfortable would you be using the Downtown segment?

Most participants (79%) said they would be comfortable walking or biking in this segment, with a few saying they would probably feel comfortable but may be a little nervous (7%), not feel comfortable (7%), or that they were not sure (7%). They were asked to explain what made them feel uncomfortable in the chat box. Responses are shown below.

Participant Comments

- *Participant: Too congested Downtown at Broadstone*
- *Participant: Too congested Downtown, West Broad is narrow now*
- *Participant: Would be a great idea to close vehicle traffic in front of Broadstone altogether. Downtown is really congested.*
- *Participant: Agree*

Access Points

Proposed access points for the greenway are shown in Figure 6. The yellow dots show locations where the greenway will connect to existing streets with crosswalks. The orange dots show where it will connect to existing streets, but crosswalks will be added to improve access. The aqua dots show trailheads, which will have amenities like seating, bike parking, and water fountains. The magenta dots show where the greenway will connect to proposed future streets as undeveloped properties develop over time.

Poll: Are there any additional access points that should be added?

Most participants (77%) thought the proposed access points looked about right, with some saying they were not sure (23%). No participants specified locations where they thought an access point should be added or removed.

Participant Comments:

- *Participant: The access points were thought out pretty well*

Priorities

Participants were asked about their priorities for implementing this portion of the greenway.

Poll: Which corridor would you like to see built first?

Participants ranked the four corridors in the order they would like them to be constructed. Based on their collective rankings, the preferred order was:

- 1st: Hillcrest
- 2nd: Downtown
- 3rd: SR 20 East
- 4th: SR 20 West

Figure 6. Proposed Access Points



Question and Answer Session

- *Participant: When is the first trail expected to be completed with construction?*
 - City of Sugar Hill (City): The short answer is that funds haven't been programmed for the construction of this segment yet. As Phase 1 gets completed, we'll be looking at our capital plan over the next five years to fund the connectors to Downtown.
- *Participant: As a resident of Buckthorn Drive (south side of the creek), I have some concerns such as how will construction affect homeowners on Buckthorn Drive? How will traffic be managed on Hillcrest Drive since this is all residential? Will the Hillcrest Drive road be extended? How will the noise level be controlled? Will there be security at each access point? What will be the hours of operation? How will litter be controlled? Where will parking be offered?*
 - TD: A lot of those questions are design dependent and will need to be answered comprehensively with the residents as the design moves forward. Usually, after you conceptually develop the route itself and get agreement on where it is going, what it will look like, and where the access points will go at the conceptual phase, there is a next level of planning that gets into feasibility and answers those types of questions. There are many options depending on how innovative you want to be. From a management perspective, the City will likely take responsibility for the maintenance and may partner with local organizations to help with litter control. There are a few points where existing or recommended parking will provide access to the greenway, including the Downtown parking garage and limited amounts of parking at both proposed parks. It is also possible to get a joint access agreement to use existing private parking as well, such as at shopping plazas along the route, but that will have to be determined in partnership with those owners. The short answer on most of those questions is that your ideas and input will impact those answers and this is the beginning of that conversation.
- *Participant: When will at least one phase be complete so residents can start using the trail? Will it be 5 years before any of this can be used?*
 - TD: The first phase of the greenway is underway and was recently awarded a construction contract. That section will connect Whitehead Rd to Downtown going through Level Creek Rd and over to Gwinnett Church and E.E. Robinson Park. It is possible that this project will be ready in less than 5 years, that is just a more conservative and realistic timeline for funding.

Next Steps

Draft Concept Report

The draft report will be posted to the project page this week. This meeting focused on the route and conceptual design, which are detailed in the report. The report also includes information about the concept direction, design considerations, and implementation strategies.

Friends of the Greenway

Participants were encouraged to join the Friends of the Greenway group to support the development and later the programs and activities of the greenway. To get involved, find the Sugar Hill Greenway group on Facebook (@SugarHillGreenway).

Schedule

Participants will be sent a follow-up email with links to the draft report and an online survey to give additional feedback on the draft. They were encouraged to share this information with their neighbors, friends, and co-workers to help the City get more input. The survey will be open through the end of September. The report will be

revised and finalized in October, along with a complementary GDOT Concept Report that meets the requirements of the state agency.

More information about this project is available on the project page at cityofsugarhill.com/sugarhilltrail. Any additional questions or comments can be directed to Kaipo Awana, the director of planning, at kawana@cityofsugarhill.com.