

Meeting Summary

Subject: Cobb County Greenways and Trails Master Plan Stakeholder Work Session

Date: July 18, 2017

Location: Cobb County Civic Center
548 South Marietta Pkwy SE, Marietta, GA 30060

Summary

On July 18, 2017, the *Cobb County Greenways and Trails Master Plan* project team held a stakeholder work session with representatives of the Cities, Community Improvement Districts, and other key organizations within Cobb County. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an overview of the project and solicit input about expanding the future trail network.

Attendees included representatives of the following communities and organizations:

- City of Acworth
- City of Austell
- City of Marietta
- City of Powder Springs
- City of Smyrna
- Cobb County PARKS Department
- Cobb Travel and Tourism
- Connect the Comet / River Line Historic Area, Inc.
- Cumberland Community Improvement District
- Kennesaw State University
- Marietta Convention and Visitors Bureau
- National Park Service
- Town Center Community Improvement District
- Trust for Public Land

Specifically, the team gave an overview presentation that briefly discussed the purpose of the project, summarized key findings from the process to-date, provided an update on ongoing trail projects, and highlighted best practices with regard to branding, signage, programming and other ways to leverage a trail system. Throughout the presentation, the project team asked questions and encouraged dialogue and discussion amongst attendees.

It should be noted that for the purposes of this plan, the County is focused on trails outside of parks and is considering trails primarily for transportation purposes, but also for recreation and leisure. The plan is considering trails alongside roadways, sometimes called “sidepaths,” as well as trails along independent alignments, such as along a creek.

This document is a summary of the discussion that took place throughout the course of the work session. It reflects comments made by attendees and the responses and discussion that ensued.

Branding, Wayfinding, Maps, etc.

- It is important to promote trails to visitors, as well as residents, using maps and signs. Branding and communication are key to getting more people to use the trail system and to encouraging exploration and drawing visitors.
 - Signage can also communicate important information along a trail, such as distance to a restroom.
 - Sometimes people don't understand how trails are shown on maps and programming can help this.
- Consider the role of individual trail maps vs. maps of the entire system. Major trails such as the Silver Comet Trail and Kennesaw Mountain trails could act as anchors and attract people to other connecting trails.
- Visitors centers can also help communicate and promote trails.
 - Welcome Center representatives should have and understand maps and brochures about trails to explain to visitors.
- The City of Powder Springs is doing a lot to encourage more people to use its trails:
 - The City has created a linear park along the Silver Comet Trail with exercise and fitness equipment and other amenities.
 - The City has put trailheads in downtown Powder Springs to draw people into town.
 - The two trails maintained by the City are 5K-certified and are qualifiers for the Peachtree Road Race in Atlanta, which makes them popular among runners.
 - Public art has also recently been installed to help with branding.
- South Cobb suffers from a lack of a cohesive identity at the moment, but there is a great opportunity to capitalize on the history of the area and the presence of the Chattahoochee River there.
 - Build upon the area's rich history and heritage.
 - Build an identity on this history to create a sense of unification. There are challenges to doing this in unincorporated areas.
- Bikeshare may help connect the various trails and areas - Kennesaw State University is interested in implementing a bikeshare program. The challenge is that the campus is in two cities. An intergovernmental agreement would be needed. It might be worth coordinating with Zagster, which is also thinking about unification between adjacent bikeshare systems.
- Consistent amenities on trails would be helpful – the County should consider setting standards or guidance for amenities along trails – drinking fountains, etc.
 - Mile markers are important for navigation and for public safety.
- Partner with local businesses for signage.



Figure 1. Project team members give a presentation on the Greenways and Trails Master Plan on July 18, 2017

- There may be an opportunity for signage to include names of adjacent businesses in exchange for restroom use, etc. (Ex: Swamp Rabbit Trail in Greenville, SC, where this practice has spurred new small businesses)

Programming and Activities

- Bike stations for personal bikes would be good – this has been implemented successfully in Portland, Oregon and Denver, Colorado.
 - Cobb County currently has a policy that requires bike racks at community facilities, but more could be done to encourage private development to include bike racks as well.
- Bike-to-work programs could be beneficial in terms of increasing usage of trails and reducing congestion, improving health, etc.
 - Perhaps there are incentives that could be offered to companies that encourage employees to bike to work.
- Encourage people to bike to parks and trails, rather than drive. This may require more education and incentives, but some of the trail locations have limited parking. If the goal of using a trail is for exercise, why not get some exercise on your way to the trail?
- The Powder Springs Comprehensive Plan has identified economic development incentives for developers to tie into trails. The plan has identified new development nodes and encourages access to biking and walking facilities within those areas.
- Consider public-private partnerships, workforce development, and health and wellness programs as options - this would lead to viable, sustainable cities that can market to businesses.
- Economic development underlies all of this. Consider tax credits for employees who bike to work. Also, consider incentives for development along bus routes. (Ex: Connect Downtown program by Central Atlanta Progress) For universities, there could be incentives for off-campus housing developments.
- Partnerships between tourism, economic development, and other similar groups can go a long way toward increasing programs and interest in trails.
 - Bring Cobb's Competitive EDGE organization in to the conversation after the completion of this plan.
- It is important to Acworth to connect to Kennesaw and the National Battlefield Park, not just to maintain the trail within the city.
- Schedule programming such as yoga to catch people's attention at trailheads and draw in more users.



Figure 2. County Project Manager Eric Meyer engages the stakeholders in open discussion on July 18, 2017

- Trailheads are important to the overall success of a system. It is important to have a variety of trailhead types and to have enough of them.

About the Plan and Process

- Although this is a Cobb County plan, the County and the project team are also coordinating with adjacent communities, such as North Fulton and the City of Atlanta, to explore how to align recommendations where applicable in order to encourage regional connectivity.
- One of the recommendations from this study will likely be for a group/consortium of people to work on promoting/advocating trails.



Figure 3. Members of the project team speak with stakeholders following the work session on July 18, 2017.

About the Trail Network / Trail Types

- Most existing sidepaths seem to be constructed on roads where speeds are too high to walk and bike comfortably. A road diet may be an affordable way to do a sidepath treatment, depending on local conditions. It was suggested that one possible location for this might be on McCollum Parkway next to Kennesaw State University.
- Cumberland Community Improvement District's plan has options for cycle tracks as a long-term goal.
- Leverage the unique characteristics and history of a place to build character into the trails and make them more distinctive.

Other Discussion Points

- Cobb County's approximately 80 miles of existing trails is much more than many communities with trail master plans have. Now is a great time to start thinking about how to leverage the trails that the County already has.
- The Chattahoochee River National Recreational Area is undertaking a maintenance plan for trails. As part of that plan, the agency is looking at connectivity of trails outside parks, to the surrounding communities.
- Friends-of-parks, student groups, and adopt-a-trail programs may be helpful for maintenance of trails and greenways.