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Title: Update to Bolin Creek Greenway Conceptual Master Plan

PURPOSE: The purpose of this agenda item is to present the results from the community engagement process for Phases 3 and 4 of the Bolin Creek Greenway and review for new technical and regulatory challenges. A resolution updating the plan is provided for the Town Council's consideration.

Indexes:

Code sections:

Attachments: 1. A: Resolution Accepting Bolin Creek Greenway Update, 2. B: BCG Engagement Framework, 3. C: BCG Survey Results, 4. D: BCG Survey Comments Summary, 5. E: BCG Survey Geo-Coded Responses, 6. F: BCG Wikimapping Survey Responses, 7. G: BCG Flyer & Public Information, 8. H: BCG Race and Equity Pocket Questions

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10/17/2023 1 Town Council

Update to Bolin Creek Greenway Conceptual Master Plan

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DEPARTMENT: Communication & Engagement; Planning

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COUNCIL DIRECTION:

___ Race/Equity ___ Climate ___ Comprehensive Plan __x__ Other

At a Council Meeting on March 28, 2023, The Town Council voted 6 - 1 to direct staff "to conduct public engagement on the alternative alignments in the 2009 (Bolin Creek Greenway Conceptual Master Plan) between then and October 17, 2023, and to bring a report to the Town Council no later than October 31, 2023." The engagement results presented herein reflect the results of the community survey undertaken from June to October 2023, including survey data, summary of comments received, and Race and Equity Pocket Questions.

INFORMATION: The Bolin Creek Greenway Conceptual Master Plan makes recommendations for 4.8 miles of trail near Bolin Creek and Jones Creek, which extends from Wilson Park to Homestead Road, and from Lake Hogan Farms to Buckhorn Branch. The plan includes action steps, project prioritization and phasing, land acquisition strategies, and potential renovation recommendations.

The planning area starts at Estes Drive Extension and encompasses the land around the creek through Carolina

North Forest under Homestead Road. Phase 3 of the plan provides most centralized east-west connections from the greenway corridor to nearby neighborhoods. Phase 4 continues from the railroad tracks through the PH Craig tract. The corridor for these greenway segments extends approximately three miles.

The Town Council direction on March 28, 2023, to conduct public engagement followed a Council Work Session held on February 14, 2023, in which the Council received a staff presentation that included historical context for the 14-year-old greenway plan.

Work on the Bolin Creek Greenway Conceptual Master Plan began after the then Board of Aldermen authorized the Town Manager on November 18, 2008, to execute a contract with Greenways Inc. to complete a greenway plan for the area.

When the Draft Bolin Creek Greenway Conceptual Master Plan was presented publicly on December 8, 2009, the Board directed that different trail alignments be included for Phases 3 and 4 in the adopted plan. At that time, the Board directed staff to establish a process for public input on Phases 3 and 4. Per the Board's direction, the adopted version of the *Bolin Creek Greenway Conceptual Master Plan* includes three alternative alignments, which are:

- **Creekside Trail Alignment** - The proposed design for the greenway, recommended in the Bolin Creek Greenway Conceptual Master Plan, is for approximately two miles of trail near Bolin Creek, which extends from Estes Drive to Homestead Road. This option was identified as the 'preferred alignment' in the final draft of the plan and described as the most successful in terms of serving the largest number of neighborhoods along the corridor, offering the most options for accessing the trail.
- **Upland Forest Alignment** - A greenway alternative outside the floodplain that would direct users to Seawell School Road. This route utilizes existing trail corridors that vary in width from 18 inches to 15 feet. Some of the constraints of this alignment include steep topography, increased engineering costs, and potential ADA accessibility constraints.
- **Bolin Connector Alignment** - This route would tie into existing and proposed bicycle facilities. Proposed to create a "Complete Streets" concept. Complete Streets accommodate all modes of transportation, allowing bicyclists, pedestrians, transit users, vehicles, as well as commercial and emergency vehicles to navigate Town streets safely. Challenges of this alignment include concerns that many parents expressed during 2009 engagement that they desired an off-road facility for their children to safely bicycle on. Additionally, making cost effective trail connections from Estes Drive to Homestead Road presented engineering constraints.

Summary of 2009 Public Engagement Process

- In 2009, Greenways Inc. consultants solicited public input in two public workshops and paper and online comment forms (surveys). About 100 people provided input at the two workshops through direct conversation with the consultants and Town staff, the Greenways Commission, map markups, and comment forms.
- The first workshop (May 20, 2009) presented three separate greenway alignments - the Bolin Connector, the Creekside Trail, and the Upland Forest Trail. The second workshop (Sept. 21, 2009) presented a preferred draft alignment where participants were invited to make comments.
- Overall, the majority of May 2009 workshop attendees preferred the Creekside Trail. Connections that resulted from the Upland Forest Trail alignment were also very popular. Most participants at the

September 2009 workshop also supported the Drafted Preferred Alignment (Creekside).

Summary of 2023 Public Engagement Process

- In 2023, Town staff led an engagement process from June to October using a communitywide survey and repeated the questions from the 2009 process. The Town’s use of a variety of online tools - a survey, an interactive mapping tool, social media - as well thousands of postcards and flyers, door-to-door literature distributions in select neighborhoods, and outreach at community events with a commitment to engaging a diversity of voices - through translation, interpreters, and paper questionnaires - generated feedback from across the community.
- At the end of the engagement period, the Town received 1,769 responses to the survey and 644 comments. A WikiMapping survey where people can leave comments on a map generated an additional 144 comments about trail usage. The greenway project webpage received 2,717 views over this period, and it consistently ranked among the top-viewed webpages on the Town website.
- For the preferred trail alignment question -- separating responses from those who live in Carrboro (1,253 responses) - a majority or 66% favor the Creekside Trail Alignment. Respondents who live in Carrboro also had preferences: 14% for Upland Forest, 9% for Bolin Connector, and 10% for “something else.”
- For the preferred trail alignment question - considering responses from all survey takers who answered this question (1,735 responses) -- a majority prefer the Creekside Trail Alignment with similar percentages as the Carrboro respondents. About 66% of respondents selected Creekside. The Upland Forest Alignment received the second-highest favorability at 14% while about 10% preferred the Bolin Connector Alignment. Some respondents (10%) preferred “something else” and provided comments on alternative routes.

More Information about the 2023 Greenway Engagement Process

Using Town of Carrboro guiding plans and engagement tools/techniques, Town staff prepared the *Bolin Creek Greenway Engagement Framework*, which was provided to the Town Council on May 19, 2023. The framework is informed by the *Inclusive Carrboro Communication and Community Engagement Plan*, the *One Orange Racial Equity Framework*, and the *Carrboro Connects Comprehensive Plan*. Staff relied on guidance from these documents to conduct an equitable and inclusive engagement process that sought to gather input from all segments of the Carrboro community.

Project outreach began in June 2023 and has consisted of paper and online information/map materials; an invitation to residents to take self-guided or virtual tours of the trail using an online StoryMap; have an option to use a WikiMapping survey (where public input is collected on a map); take surveys (paper and online); and provide comments, questions, and feedback on use of trails and alternative alignments. The community survey was open June 23, 2023, to October 3, 2023.

To broaden and diversify engagement, staff implemented a plan to “go where the people are” by seeking participation at some of our town’s favorite community events that attract lots of people. Staff hosted public tables with greenway maps and interactive tools at the Carrboro Farmers Market, Carrboro In Motion, July Fourth, Frederick Douglass Community Reading, National Night Out, the Latin American Festival, and the Carrboro Music Festival, and visited local groups such as the Carrboro Run Club and Fleet Feet Runners.

Toward its goal of equitable engagement, this effort placed emphasis on reaching those who are most often marginalized in these conversations. Town staff worked with El Centro Hispano and the Refugee Community

Partnership to conduct canvassing to increase survey participation among immigrants and refugees. Outreach was made in the town's historically Black neighborhoods with a staff team going door-to-door to drop off literature bags, which included a letter from Mayor Damon Seils about the greenway survey and a postcard inviting survey participation. Staff also received assistance in distributing information about the survey to residents through the RENA Community Center, St. Paul AME Church, and the Chapel Hill-Carrboro NAACP. Town staff also provided survey information to participants of Community Safety Task Force listening sessions held at the Jackson Center and IFC.

Public communications relied on news releases (with media coverage from WCHL-Chapelboro, The Daily Tar Heel, WRAL and Indy Week), email blasts, social media posts, yard signs, flyers, and large format posters, some of which were displayed at Chapel Hill Transit stops. Public information was provided in various formats and in English and Spanish. Multilingual paper surveys (English, Spanish, Korean, Burmese, Karen and Chinese) were provided at the Carrboro Century Center, the Willow Creek Laundromat, and engagement tables at community events.

In addition to online surveys, the project webpage included a Frequently Asked Questions, the *Bolin Creek Greenway Conceptual Master Plan* and other project resources, and a project history timeline.

The engagement process has resulted in more than 1,769 survey responses; 644 comments from the survey; and 144 comments on the WikiMapping system. The project webpage received 2,717 views, social media posts received higher than average engagement, and Town staff received dozens of emails and phone calls about the process during this timeframe.

2023 Greenway Survey Results

Takeaways from the greenway survey:

1. A majority of community members prefer the Creekside alignment for the Bolin Creek Greenway.
2. Community members want more trails and greenways.
3. Community members would use trails more often if they could easily bike to, walk to, or park at a trailhead.
4. While a majority of community members support the Bolin Creek Greenway Conceptual Plan, a significant number expressed environmental concerns and opposition to a paved greenway within comments provided.

Survey results include the following:

- Creating more trails in Carrboro ranks as very important to 76% of survey respondents.
- Most survey respondents are familiar with trails in Carrboro with about 55% reporting they use them a "few times per week." More than 93% of respondents reported that they have used the corridor along Bolin Creek.
- Obstacles for ability to use trails in Carrboro for most respondents is lack of connections, followed by unsafe street crossings, accessibility concerns, lack of information, and other concerns. If they could easily bike to, walk to, or park at a trailhead, 66% reported that they would use the trails more often. About 31% of respondents say they can already access trails.
- Feedback on trail usage was that a majority would use the future greenway for fitness or recreation,

followed by, in order of preference, commuting to/from destinations in Carrboro/Chapel Hill, socializing, walking a dog, and environmental education.

- Most respondents would use the greenway for walking, followed by, in order of preference, bicycling, running/jogging, using a stroller, using a wheelchair, roller-blading, and other activities.
- Destinations to get to by trail by order of preference were Downtown Carrboro, Carolina North Forest, Chapel Hill, Wilson Park, UNC, Chapel Hill-Carrboro Schools, and other locations.
- About 39% of respondents perceive the environmental conditions along the Bolin Creek corridor as fair while others perceive the conditions are good (33%), poor (15%), or do not know (13%). Most respondents expressed their interest in improving environmental conditions along Bolin Creek as very important (66%), followed by somewhat important (29%) and not important (5%).
- Most respondents or 66% prefer the Creekside Trail Alignment. The Upland Forest Alignment received the second-highest favorability at about 14% while about 10% preferred the Bolin Connector Alignment. About 10% of respondents preferred “something else” and provided comments on alternative routes.
- In response to a question asking whether additional connections along the Bolin Creek Corridor could be made, 62% of respondents selected that “enough connections have been made” while about 33% selected that they would like to see “additional connections” and about 4% selected that there are “too many connections.”
- Most respondents totaling 79% support the *Bolin Creek Greenway Conceptual Plan*.
- In response to a question about whether the goals of the Bolin Creek Greenway project are being met, about 56% of respondents perceive they are. Others responded, “don’t know” (27%) or “no” (17%). *The project goals are to protect and improve water quality along Bolin and Jones Creeks, to provide safe and non-motorized connections to various uses along the corridor; and to enhance and preserve the recreational resource that exists along Bolin Creek.*
- About 12% of respondents participated in the development of the Bolin Creek Greenway Conceptual Master Plan in 2009 by attending workshops, completing surveys, or providing input to the then Carrboro Board of Aldermen (Town Council).
- Most respondents or 76% live in Carrboro. Additionally, respondents work in Carrboro (22%), own a business in Carrboro (7%), are a student attending in/near Carrboro (7%), live in the Northern Transition Area (2%), or other (16%) for which most respondents reported they live in Chapel Hill.
- The highest number of respondents or 55% live in the 27510 zip code, followed by 33% in 27516, and 8% in 27514.
- Data taken from a question asking about the closest intersection to their home address resulted in a geocoding analysis of respondents, showing participation across Carrboro town limits.
- Respondents represented a diverse range of ages with a slightly higher number in the 35-44 age group (26%), followed by 45-54 (22%) and 25-34 (18%).
- Respondents reported as 51% female, 47% male, and 2% other.
- The primary language spoken at home among respondents was English (90%), followed by Spanish

(4%), Karen (2%), Burmese (1%), Chinese, Korean, and other.

- Respondents identified as White (83%), followed by Asian/Pacific Islander (6%), Hispanic (5%), Black (2%), and Multiple ethnicities or other (3%). Note that the highest number of respondents (132) skipped this question. The race/ethnicity composition of Carrboro is 9% Asian/Pacific Islander; 13% Hispanic; 10% Black; 62% White; and 6% multi-racial.
- Most respondents heard about the project through word of mouth (50%), followed by community groups and blogs (24%); Town website (22%); social media (18%); outdoor signage (15%), and neighborhood associations (10%).

Review for Technical or Regulatory Challenges

Staff was also directed to undertake a review of the alternative alignments for any technical or regulatory challenges and consulted with the Town Engineer, Sungate Design Group, and Axiom Environmental, Inc. The review has considered Town, State and Federal regulations pertaining to natural environmental conditions, endangered species, special flood hazard areas, streams and wetlands, and fish and wildlife. The proposed Creekside alignment crosses the Norfolk Southern Railroad. Coordination with the railroad to obtain concurrence for the crossing will be required. This review did not identify regulatory roadblocks to any of the conceptual alternative trail alignments.

The Carolina North Development Agreement (2009) and associated Restrictive Covenants (2013) for Conservation Areas have also been reviewed. Moving forward with Phases 3 and 4 will involve approval in accordance with the existing Development Agreement and restrictive covenants.

Attachments

- Resolution Receiving Bolin Creek Greenway Conceptual Master Plan Update (Attachment A)
- BCG Engagement Framework (Attachment B)
- BCG Survey Results (Attachment C)
- BCG Survey Comments Summary (Attachment D)
- BCG Survey Geocoded Responses (Attachment E)
- BCG WikiMapping Survey Responses (Attachment F)
- BCG Flyer/Postcard (Attachment G)
- Race and Equity Pocket Questions (Attachment H)

Guiding Plans and Documents

- Bolin Creek Greenway Conceptual Master Plan - <https://www.carrboronc.gov/DocumentCenter/View/12366/Bolin-Creek-Greenway-Conceptual-Master-Plan>
- Inclusive Carrboro Communications and Community Engagement Plan - <https://www.carrboronc.gov/DocumentCenter/View/10525/Inclusive-Carrboro-Communications-and-Community-Engagement-Plan>

- One Orange Racial Equity Framework -
<https://carrboro.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5398852&GUID=D3093EFE-6567-4F6F->
- Carrboro Connects Comprehensive Plan -
<https://www.carrboronc.gov/2389/16175/Carrboro-Connects-Comprehensive-Plan>

FISCAL IMPACT: The cost of the engagement process totaled about \$13,500, including contract services for greenway maps and a WikiMapping system to collect public input; collateral materials such as flyers, posters, signage, and postcards; and language translation. This cost includes an estimate for following up with summaries of community feedback and future Town actions to be provided in the same manner that the public input was requested at the outset.

Town staff time amounted to hundreds of hours to develop the project webpage, online survey, and numerous information resources; to attend community events and answer questions of residents in person and via email; to deliver information packets in neighborhoods; and to facilitate coordination with community partners conducting outreach.

RECOMMENDATION: The Town Manager recommends that the Town Council receive the information and consider adoption of Attachment A.