

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

6.a. General Summary

The Morgan Creek Greenway Feasibility Study involved extensive coordination with landowners, stakeholders, greenway users, and the general public. The following community engagement activities took place:

- Community Survey (Web-based, with paper copies available)
- Public Meetings (3)
- Site Walks (2)
- Stakeholder Engagement
 - North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT)
 - North Carolina Botanical Garden
 - Internal staff
 - Kings Mill and Morgan Creek Neighborhood Residents including cyclists
 - Chapel Hill Parks, Greenways and Recreation Commission

Feedback received was generally positive. Community members expressed a desire to access nature and avoid Fordham Blvd wherever possible on the corridor. Some residents saw the potential for a greenway to address issues with people trespassing on private property to access Morgan Creek or Merritt's Pasture, and for the presence of greenway users to slow down automotive traffic within the neighborhood. Fordham Blvd is seen as a major barrier to travel in the area, and many community members would like to see crossing improvements to support walking and biking to the UNC campus and Downtown Chapel Hill. Community members would also like to see greater connectivity to neighborhoods south of Morgan Creek and to be able to access Merritt's Pasture from the east. Concerns shared by residents with the project team include impacts to neighborhood safety from more people visiting and traveling through the community, and the safety of greenway users on proposed on-street segments.

STAKEHOLDER COORDINATION

Meetings were held with key stakeholders to review project scope, their project requirements and concerns.

NCDOT

The NCDOT Division 7 engineer and the division programs manager met with the consultant and Town, to review Alternative A, a sidepath primarily along 15-501 Fordham Boulevard and advised of the following:

1. NCDOT has no major improvements planned to this area of Fordham Boulevard for the near future
2. The route would require NCDOT encroachment agreements
3. Curb and gutter would be required where the trail is within the clear zone
4. Guardrail typically only allowed where warranted for vehicle safety
5. Crossing is preferred at Manning Dr.
6. Boardwalk and other design features should keep in mind access for maintenance of drainage

NC Botanical Garden

Key staff, including the director, from the botanical garden met with the project team to review the route alternatives and advised of the following.

1. Limitations of conservation easements along Morgan Creek that prohibit development
2. Presence of rare plant and animal species
3. Overall support for the project and excitement about providing better access to the Gardens

Transportation Planning and Public Works Department Staff

Town staff from transportation and public works have been involved throughout the development of the project through multiple meetings, site walks, community meetings, and email correspondence. These staff have offered key feedback and critical direction on the following:

1. Design must be responsive to neighborhood concerns
2. The need for pedestrian accommodations with the project to improve access and also funding opportunities
3. Technical requirements for the streets including minimum travel lane widths for emergency vehicles and provision of traffic data
4. Considerations for changes to traffic patterns, traffic calming and pavement marking
5. Narrowing travel lanes long term to provide a pedestrian lane is not preferred but could be considered as an interim or pilot project

Kings Mill and Morgan Creek Neighborhood Residents including Cyclists

Residents who are regular cyclists met with the project team and Town staff to discuss the project and their current cycling habits and considerations relative to the proposed greenway extension. Key takeaways are:

1. A connection along Fordham Boulevard would be the most direct route and much flatter than riding through the neighborhood but not as pleasant.
2. Many cyclists already cut across Fordham Boulevard at Otey's Rd.
3. Connecting to Manning Dr. would be a safer connection.
4. Making a key connection from Southern Village, the pasture, the Morgan Creek and Kings Mill Neighborhood to campus and beyond (Trader Joe's was mentioned several times) would greatly increase the livability of neighborhoods along the route.
5. Routes through the neighborhood would be less inviting because they are steeper
6. Consider screening where there are impacts to vegetation that buffers the neighborhood from 15-501

Chapel Hill Parks, Greenways and Recreation Commission

The project team presented the preliminary feasibility analysis to the Chapel Hill Parks, Greenways and Recreation Commission. That commission's primary concerns were around potential environmental impacts of development along the stream bank at Morgan Creek, general impacts to tree cover and floodplain, and about providing access to users with a wide range of abilities. At a subsequent Commission meeting Parks and Recreation staff heard from community stakeholders regarding the alignment along Morgan Creek "Alternative C", this included information on Conservation Easements, the impacts a paved greenway could have on the creek.

ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

General Summary

The Morgan Creek Greenway Feasibility Study involved extensive coordination with landowners, stakeholders, greenway users, and the general public. In addition to the project and engagement opportunities were advertised in the following channels:

- Kings Mill Morgan Creek Neighborhood Listserv – 297 members
- Tarwheels Newsletter - 525 members
- TOWNnews –7555 subscribers
- Parks and Recreation eNews - 2551 subscribers
- Social Media (Town of Chapel Hill)
 - Facebook - 13,000 followers
 - Twitter - 20,000 followers
- Social Media (Parks and Recreation Department)
 - Facebook - 13,000 followers
 - Twitter - 751 followers
- Signiacades – 3 Town of Chapel Hill locations

Web Survey

A community survey was conducted from November 13 through December 20, 2023, through PublicInput.com, with paper copies available. Recognizing the diversity of Chapel Hill, the survey was provided in five languages, including English, Spanish, Chinese, Karen, and Burmese, reaching 1,514 people.

Respondents left 2,409 comments providing feedback on a number of topics influencing greenway design.

Key findings included the following:

- **Existing Trail Use**
 - Ninety percent (90%) of respondents reported use greenways for health and exercise and 79 percent for recreation, but a full quarter (25%) use greenways to run errands or reach essential services and 20 percent use greenways to commute. Only one percent of survey respondents do not use greenways and trails in Chapel Hill.
 - Greenways and trails in Chapel Hill are popular, with the largest group of respondents (41%) reporting they use greenways a few times a week, and an additional 31 percent using greenways a few times a month. Eighteen percent (18%) of respondents use greenways daily.
 - Participants primarily use greenways for walking (93%) and biking (55%).
 - A lack of safe biking and walking connections to and from greenways and trails is the greatest barrier to greenway use in Chapel Hill, selected by 66% of respondents. Other barriers include unsafe street crossings and intersections (43%) and motor vehicle traffic and/or speed (29%). Some respondents reported a lack of parking and issues with car break-ins at the Morgan Creek Greenway trailhead on NC 54 as barriers, as well as having to drive from their home in order to use the greenway.
- **Future Trail Use**
 - Thirty-six percent (36%) of respondents plan to use the proposed segment of the Morgan Creek Greenway a few times a month when it is constructed, while an additional 31 percent will use it a few times a week. Eleven percent (11%) of respondents will use the greenway daily.
 - Respondents plan to use the proposed greenway segment primarily for walking (88% of respondents) and biking (58%), with others planning to use it to view nature (43%), run or jog (42%), hike (39%), or do activities with children and family (38%). Nineteen percent (19%) of respondents plan to use the greenway for commuting.
- **Trail Route Priorities**
 - Routing along or providing access to Morgan Creek is important, with 70 percent of respondents selecting it as their top routing preference. Other priorities of the community include a route that provides connections to neighborhood streets (ranked 2nd) and to existing sidewalks (3rd), but routing options that are the most cost-effective or most direct are lower priorities, ranking sixth and eighth, respectively.
- **Respondent Travel Habits**
 - Forty percent (40%) of respondents currently commute via car and 28 percent work from home, but many respondents commute via bicycle (13%), walking (9%), or transit (4%).
 - In the future, 55 percent of respondents would like to commute by bicycle and 41 percent would like to walk. Thirty-one percent (31%) of respondents would like to work from home and 27% would like to use transit, while only 19 percent would like to commute by car, indicating significant potential for commuting on the proposed segment of the Morgan Creek Greenway.
- **Other Comments**
 - Respondents emphasized the need for greater connectivity in the study area, with many citing Fordham Blvd as a major barrier for walking and biking. Written comments expressed a desire for crossing improvements at Manning Dr and greater physical separation for people walking and biking across the NC-86 bridge. Additionally, respondents expressed frustration with being unable to access Merritt's Pasture from the east or cross Morgan Creek and reach neighborhoods to the south.
 - Respondents would like to be able to connect to other greenways and trails in Chapel Hill, enabling longer trips to additional destinations. Gaps in the network received many comments from respondents who use greenways, and designing connections to neighborhoods along the routes of greenways is also highly desired.
 - Survey respondents requested greenway amenities including lighting, trash and pet waste receptacles, rest areas, emergency call boxes, and expanded parking at trailheads.
 - Property owners adjacent to the proposed greenway extension have concerns regarding property impacts from trail users related to noise, trespassing, and property values. A route using Meadow Ln and Winter Rd may endanger trail users crossing Winter Rd at its intersection with Fordham Blvd near the base of an exit ramp.
 - Where possible, respondents would like a trail that follows Morgan Creek to provide a more scenic route, but respondents raised concerns about topography, erosion, flood risk, and use of permeable materials. Many comments suggested an unpaved trail surface in areas near Morgan Creek to reduce environmental impact.

- Some comments suggested using an existing Orange Water and Sewer Authority (OWASA) easement along Morgan Creek as a greenway route. Private property owners have placed signs warning of a venomous snake habitat as a deterrent to trespassers. Existing aboveground sewer pipes cross Morgan Creek and are used by some area residents to cross the creek in the absence of a bridge, raising safety concerns.
- A greenway bridge across Morgan Creek between *Ashe Place and Arboretum Dr should be retained in the greenway design to provide a safe and legal connection between neighborhoods on either side of the creek.

*In 2019 it was determined that a bridge crossing in the area of Bartram Drive was a better location than Ashe Place.

- A connection to trails at the North Carolina Botanical Garden is desired, but signage restricting bicycle use may be necessary.
- Respondents have safety concerns with greenway sections that use a shared street design through the Morgan Creek neighborhood, preferring to incorporate physical separation between the greenway and roadway.
- Respondents are frustrated waiting for trails that have been promised for years to begin construction, and that many residents have to drive to access a greenway that is within walking distance but unreachable due to private property and a lack of connections.
- Route alternative C (Morgan Creek Alignment) is desired for user experience, but respondents recognized that sections of this alternative may be impractical for construction.

Public Meeting

A drop-in style public meeting was conducted on December 9, 2023, at the Chapel Hill Public Library to allow the public to review maps and information boards about the project at their own pace. Town and consultant design staff were available to guide participants through the materials and answer questions. Paper copies of the web survey were available as well as a general meeting comment form. The meeting was advertised on the Town's website and social media sites, through emails from the Town to local advocacy organizations, and property owners, and with physical flyers.

Presentation materials included alignment maps, site analysis maps, typical sections and comparable images.

Feedback:

- Residents suggested placing the trail on the north side of Fordham Blvd.
- Residents have concerns with a greenway crossing at Morgan Creek Rd and Fordham Blvd, and at Winter Dr.
- The greenway should avoid routing along Fordham Blvd east of Morgan Creek Rd.
- Additional parking should be provided, potentially at the west side of Merritt's Pasture.
- A route along Morgan Creek would be more scenic and safer for recreational users, but less desirable for commuters.
- There is an empty lot on Morgan Creek Rd that could potentially provide an easement connecting the greenway to the neighborhood.
- Two attendees completed comment forms indicating a preference for Alternative B as it provides a more pleasant user experience than routing along Fordham Blvd and minimizes impacts to private property and the environment.

Public Meetings and walks by Town

- November 21, 2023. The project team presented an update on the project and preliminary route alternatives to the Chapel Hill Parks, Greenways, & Recreation Commission.
- December 14, 2023, from 12:30 – 3:30 p.m. At the Morgan Creek Greenway parking lot approximately 16 people were on site to find out more about the project, some of which participated in a walk to review the connection from the existing trail to the new extension.
- December 14, 2023, from 4:00 – 5:00 p.m. A virtual meeting was held, with five participants.
- December 15, 2023, from 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. A virtual meeting was held, with one participant.
- January 30, 2024, from 1:30-4:00 p.m. At Merritt's Pasture the project team met with neighborhood residents and other stakeholders to discuss alignment and design alternatives.

Other Resident Feedback (from client, emails filed)

A virtual meeting with residents of the Morgan Creek neighborhood including cyclists was held on August 1, 2023, to gain an understanding of resident concerns at the neighborhood level. Key points were raised, including:

- Residents of the neighborhood who bike across Fordham Blvd usually choose to cross at Oteys Rd and continue north toward the UNC campus as it offers a flatter biking experience than Mason Farm Rd. Grades of existing roads should be considered as part of the route alternatives to provide a route with the fewest grade changes.
- On-road sections on Morgan Creek Rd are acceptable for biking but will likely encounter opposition from some residents.
- The project team should identify potential screening treatments to address privacy concerns from adjacent property owners.
- This project will fill a major gap between bicycle and pedestrian facilities in Chapel Hill and help improve connectivity between parks. Providing adequate separation or screening from Fordham Blvd is important to ensuring a comfortable user experience.

Additional feedback was obtained from neighborhood residents:

- There has been previous concern within the Morgan Creek and Kings Mill neighborhoods over painting center line stripes on the streets, resulting in stripes being removed from Morgan Creek Rd and Kings Mill Rd. Neighbors likely would oppose additional striping to add bike lanes, and would instead prefer bike route signage.
- Cyclists traveling east on Morgan Creek Rd have two options: to use Woodbine Dr which offers more variation in topography before transitioning to a sidewalk on Fordham Blvd between Manning Dr and Old Mason Farm Rd, or to use Kings Mill Rd which is more level before transitioning to dirt paths within the North Carolina Botanical Garden.
- A new neighborhood resident expressed concerns about representation within the survey and at public events for the greenway and opposes the greenway routing in front of their residence.