

Introduction

A brief summary of the purpose and scope of the BIG Picture comprehensive planning initiative was presented by Dennis Madsen, Manager of Urban and Long Range Planning. It was noted that the desire to expand the city's greenway system had been mentioned by many people at various BIG Picture events. As a result, the greenways focus group was established to provide an opportunity for additional dialogue and input on this important topic.

Existing Greenways

To begin the discussion, attendees were asked to share their general impressions of the existing greenways system. The responses included the following:

1. The system is designed pretty well with adequate parking and good access
2. It is generally separated from auto traffic
3. The system needs better connectivity; it currently has too many incomplete segments
4. It needs to link more destinations if it is to be used as an alternate transportation mode rather than primarily for recreation
5. The system needs a better east-west route
6. Allocation of pavement to cyclists and pedestrians can be confusing; additional signage and pavement markings are needed to clarify the rules
7. Wayfinding signage is not yet a critical issue
8. More park-like amenities are needed such as benches and water fountains
9. The system is well maintained; grass is neatly mowed
10. The concrete surfaces used in some areas are not conducive to running, reflect too much light and have poorly done expansion joints

History of Current Plan

Marie Bostick, Executive Director of the Land Trust of North Alabama, gave a brief history and overview of the current Greenways Plan. She noted that it had been initiated in 1993 due to a citizen's interest in creating a pathway along Aldridge Creek for his children to walk to school. The proposed system includes approximately 180 miles of paths and trails. Although there were initial citizen concerns, the system has now been widely embraced by the community.

Future Greenways

Attendees were asked to suggest future improvements which should be priorities for the system. The responses included the following:

1. Extend the Aldridge Creek greenway north across Weatherly Road to connect to neighborhoods in the Chatterson Road area
2. Work with Valley Hill Country Club to find a solution for extending the Aldridge Creek greenway through the club's property
3. Construct the Smithers Mountain Greenway through the Lakewood Drive area which would both encourage revitalization in that neighborhood and provide an important link between Downtown and Alabama A&M University
4. Address the safety issues on Bankhead Parkway and create a loop extending up Bankhead Parkway across Monte Sano and down into the Dug Hill and Hampton Cove areas
5. Create an east-west route either along Holmes Avenue and/or on property adjacent to the Norfolk Southern rail line which would link several destinations including Downtown, UAH and Research Park
6. Create a bike/pedestrian connection from the east side of Memorial Parkway to the west side
7. Complete a connection between Research Park and Providence
8. Connect Big Spring, Brahan Spring and John Hunt Parks

Other Thoughts and Suggestions

The following ideas for improving the greenway system were also noted:

1. Encourage private funding for new greenways by local corporations and through crowdsourcing
2. Make the system more "destination focused" so that it can have both a transit and recreational role
3. Consider adding gravel paths adjacent to existing pavement for runners
4. Connect existing greenway segments before building new unconnected parts of the system
5. Consider installing shorter entrance bollards and putting wider spaces between them to allow easier bicycle access
6. Amend city codes to require developers to construct greenway connections to adjacent neighborhoods and nearby destinations
7. Although not a part of the greenway system, it was noted that Old Big Cove Road south of Sutton Road was heavily used by bikers and should be considered for safety improvements
8. Coordinate Huntsville's greenway plan with those in adjacent communities
9. Consider using Strava running and cycling GPS data as a resource for planning future routes
10. In general, it is acceptable to have segments of the greenway system located along streets if they are relatively short and link key segments. However, a system where pedestrians and bicyclists are separated from autos is considered the most desirable.

Next Meeting

It was noted that the input from today's session would be reviewed and possibly used to create a preliminary priority list of projects for further refinement and discussion at the next focus group meeting.