

Noonday Creek Trail Extension Scoping Study



Final Report
September 2023



Acknowledgments

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Bells Ferry Elementary School
Canterbury Homeowners Association
Canton Road Neighbors
Chadd's Ridge Homeowners Association
Cherokee County
City of Woodstock
Cobb County Community Development
Cobb County PARKS
Cobb County Water System
Georgia Department of Transportation
Town Center CID / Town Center Community Alliance
Vanderlande

And the many individual residents and community members who participated in meetings, events, survey and mapping activities, and provided comments.

Prepared by:



In partnership with:



September 2023



Noonday Creek Trail Extension Scoping Study

Final Report

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“Cobb County... Expect the Best!”

Cobb County Department of Transportation
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Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction
Background.....1-1
Overview1-1
Planning Process Overview1-5
Approach and Timeline1-5
Study Area.....1-7
Location and Context.....1-7
Project History1-9
Chapter 2: Engagement
Stakeholder Steering Committee2-1
SSC Meeting #1 - July 14, 20222-2
SSC Meeting #2 - December 14, 20222-3
SSC Meeting #3 - May 16, 20232-5
Public Engagement Activities.....2-7
Intercept Survey2-7
Neighborhood Walking Tour2-11
Online Interactive Map2-12
Public Meetings.....2-13
Chapter 3: Study Area & Analysis
Overview3-1
Transportation Network.....3-1
Sidewalks and Bicycle Facilities3-2
Safety and Propensity3-4
Trail Usage.....3-4
Utilities.....3-5
Land Use and Development3-7
Neighborhoods and Subdivisions3-7
Community Facilities and Destinations.....3-10
Zoning and Land Use.....3-11
Environmental Considerations.....3-13
Hydrological and Geological Considerations3-15
Chapter 4: The Concept
Alternatives Considered.....4-1
Overview4-1
Alignment Evaluation.....4-3
Trail Extension Concept4-5
Overview4-5
Crossings and Typical Sections.....4-21
Materials, Open Spaces, and Amenities4-25
Signage.....4-29
Recommendations.....4-31
Summary4-31
Estimated Cost4-32
Potential Partners and Funding Sources.....4-33

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1. Study Area Context Map1-2
Figure 2. Regional Trail Vision.....1-3
Figure 3. Scoping Study Process Diagram.....1-5
Figure 4. Study Area Context Map1-8
Figure 5. Cut Sheet for Noonday Creek Trail Project1-10
Figure 6. SSC Priorities for Evaluating Potential Trail Options.....2-3
Figure 7. Zip Codes of Survey Respondents.....2-10
Figure 8. Community Feedback on Potential Trail Amenities2-15
Figure 9. Community Members at March 2023 Open House2-16
Figure 10. Display Board on Potential Trailhead at Noonday Creek Park ..2-17
Figure 11. Biking and Walking Facilities in the Study Area.....3-3
Figure 12. Trail Usage Along Noonday Creek Trail3-4
Figure 13. Neighborhoods and Subdivisions3-8
Figure 14. Community Facilities3-9
Figure 15. Future Land Use.....3-12
Figure 16. Historic Districts and Resources Within the Study Area3-14
Figure 17. Water Resources Within the Study Area3-15
Figure 18. Maps and Notes from Alignment Work Sessions4-2
Figure 19. Trail Alignment Options Evaluated4-4
Figure 20. Proposed Trail Preferred Alignment.....4-6
Figure 21. Proposed Trail Segment Key Map4-8
Figure 22. Illustrated Typical Section: Trail At-Grade.....4-21
Figure 23. Illustrated Typical Section: Trail Boardwalk.....4-22
Figure 24. Illustrated Typical Section: Trail Beneath Bridge.....4-22
Figure 25. Proposed Bridge Crossings.....4-23
Figure 26. Potential Trailhead Locations.....4-28
Figure 27. Interpretive Signage Design Standards.....4-30
Figure 28. Active Wayfinding Signage Design Standards4-30
Table 1. Trail Concept Estimated Cost.....4-32

Appendix
Noonday Creek Trail Extension Scoping Study Concept Report



1

Introduction

Project Background and History, Purpose, Process, and Study Area



Background

Overview

Located within the heart of northern Cobb County, the Noonday Creek Trail currently extends approximately seven miles, from near Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park to a trailhead located immediately west of Bells Ferry Road (colloquially known as the Bells Ferry Trailhead), as seen in **Figure 1**. It is part of the larger Mountain-to-River (MTR) Trail network which connects Kennesaw Mountain to the Chattahoochee River. As shown, the existing trail traverses along arterial streets and portions of Noonday Creek while passing by – or in close proximity to – destinations such as Town Center Mall, Fifth Third Bank Stadium, Kennesaw State University (KSU), Aviation Park, and commercial and office complexes. It also provides connections to the growing trail network within the Town Center Community Improvement District (TCCID), including segments along Big Shanty Road and Town Point Drive.

A second portion of the Noonday Creek Trail is located north of Cobb County within the City of Woodstock in Cherokee County, providing a multimodal trail connection from State Route (SR) 92 to downtown Woodstock.

In addition to being a priority trail within Cobb County, the Noonday Creek Trail is a critical component of the Atlanta Regional Commission's (ARC) *Regional Trail Vision*. ARC has identified the Northwest Corridor Trail, which includes the Noonday Creek Trail, its proposed extension, and the MTR Trail as a Regionally Significant Trail (see **Figure 2**), making it a priority for regional and federal funding.

As of the writing of this plan, in fall 2023, the City of Woodstock has just started construction on a project to extend their portion of Noonday Creek Trail, filling the gap between SR 92 and Shallowford Road, bringing the Cobb County and Woodstock segments that much close together. The remaining gap, between Shallowford Road and Bells Ferry Road, is the subject of this scoping study. If filled, it would complete the connection between Downtown Woodstock and Kennesaw Mountain, continuing on via the MTR Trail to the Chattahoochee River.



View of the existing Bells Ferry Trailhead along the Noonday Creek Trail



Noonday Creek Trail entrance from Chastain Meadows Parkway

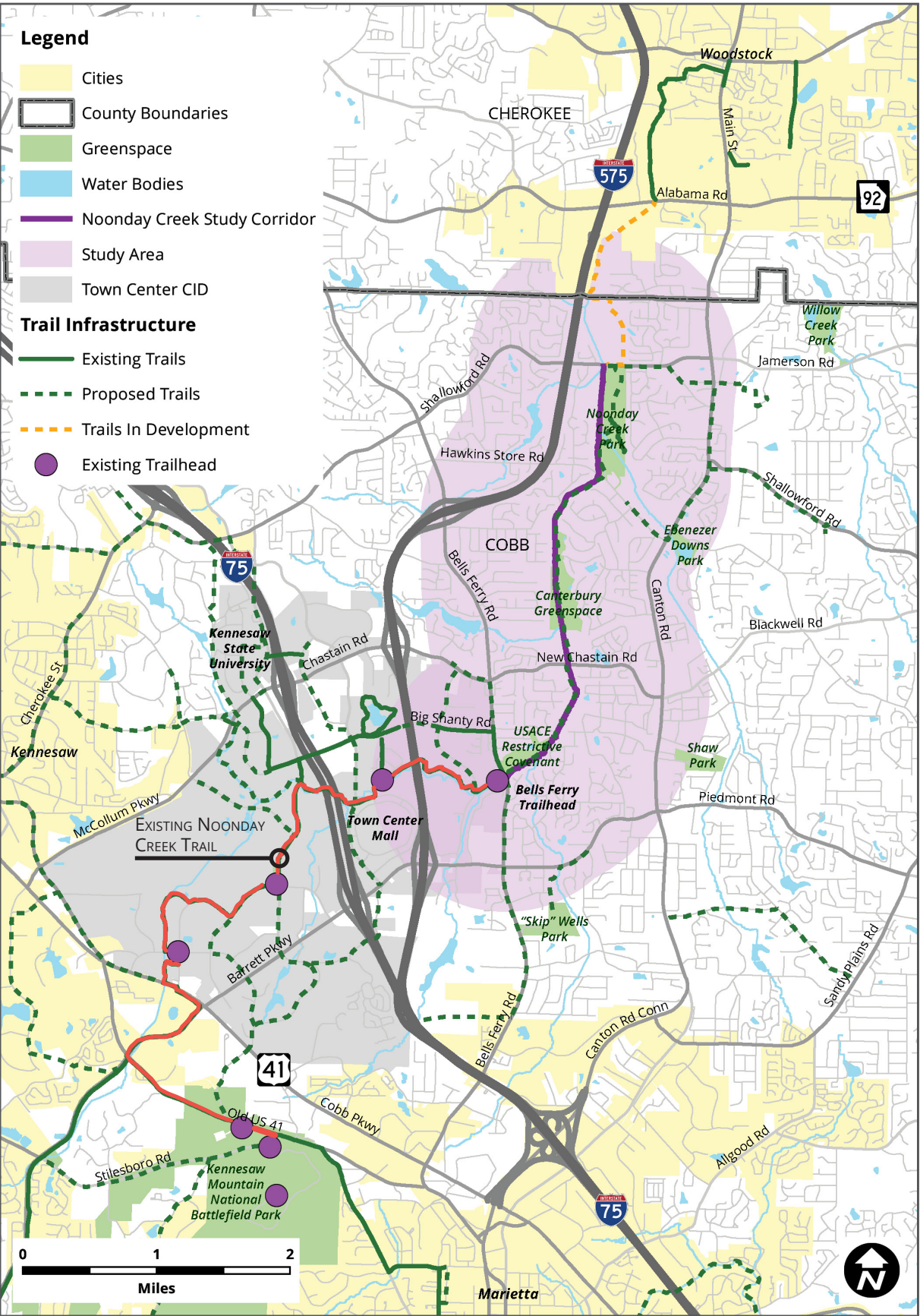


Figure 1. Study Area Context Map

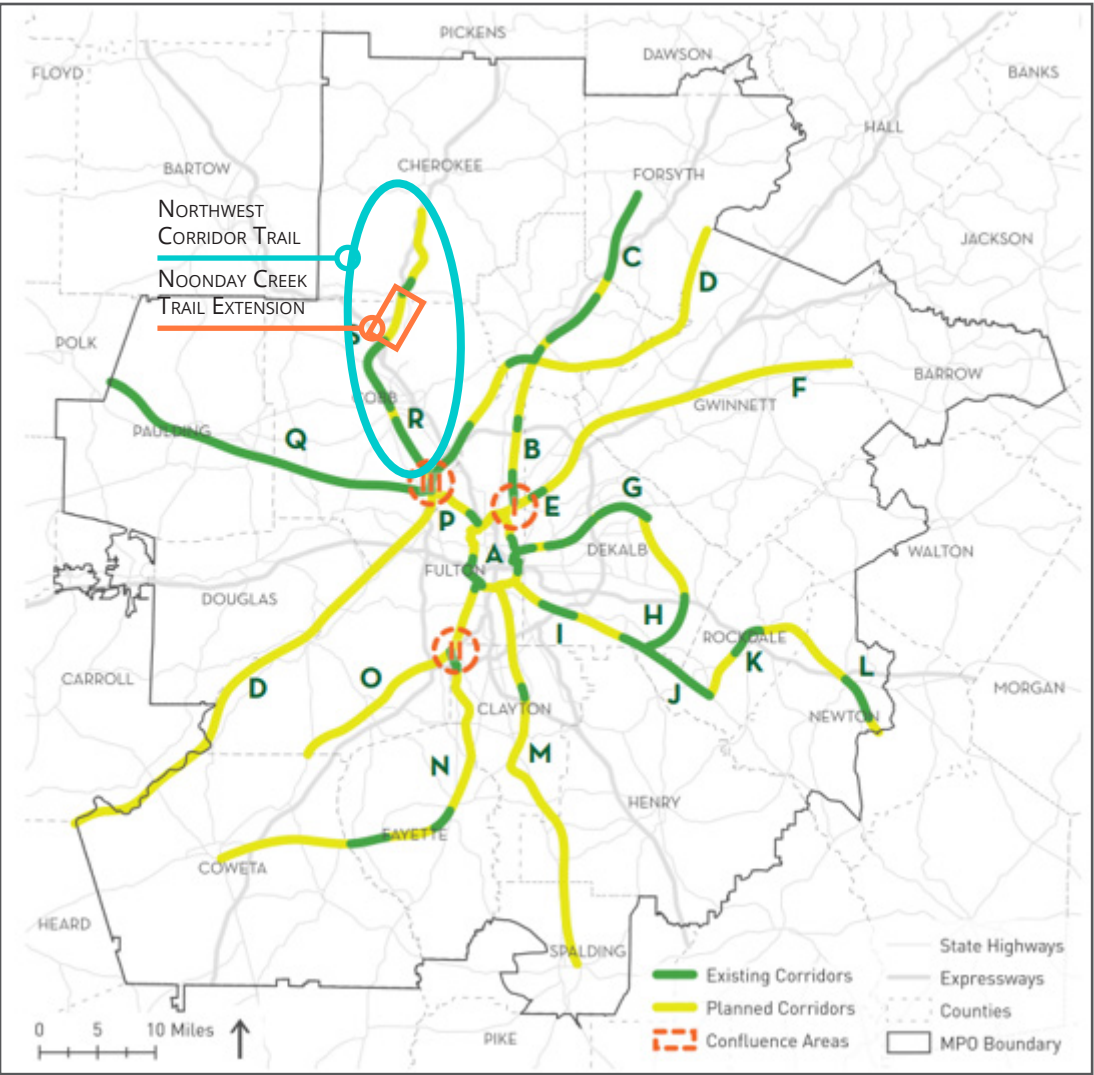


Figure 2. Regional Trail Vision (Source: Atlanta Regional Commission)

Project Purpose

- Evaluate the feasibility of extending the Noonday Creek Trail from the Bells Ferry Trailhead to Noonday Creek Park.
- Examine existing conditions and data, considering potential impacts, challenges, and opportunities, which will inform future decisions about potential alignments, design, and next steps.
- Evaluate alternative alignment and design options and recommend a preferred alternative based on study findings, community input, and guiding principles.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate various potential options for closing this critical gap in the regional trail network between Bells Ferry Road and Shallowford Road and to develop a concept and recommendations for advancing the project. Cobb County sought to develop a plan that is consistent with the vision and goals of the County's Comprehensive Plan, the County's *Greenways and Trails Master Plan*, and the *Atlanta Region's Plan*. Other objectives include:

- Seek broad public and stakeholder support,
- Maximize safety, connectivity, and efficiency,
- Address the existing and future needs of trail users, and
- Support future federal funding applications.

Ultimately, the goal of this Scoping Study was to evaluate the feasibility of a trail connection through the study area and prepare a concept report that identifies a locally preferred alignment option and the anticipated coordination, resources, and permitting needs for advancing the project through the design and implementation phases.

To accomplish this, the project team set out to conduct a thorough assessment of existing conditions, both alongside the creek and along roadways in the surrounding area, to understand opportunities and constraints in developing a potential trail connection through the study area. The team then evaluated and refined a series of potential alignment options, based on several criteria and factors to develop recommendations and identify a locally preferred alignment option. Details on the alternatives and evaluation process are discussed in later chapters of this planning report.

This report summarizes the scoping study process, providing an overview of the study area, existing conditions, stakeholder and community engagement activities and feedback, the conceptual alignment, and alternatives considered for the extension.



Cobb County Staff Consider Potential Alignment Options



Field Work Helps Inform Potential Trail Extension Options

Planning Process Overview

Approach and Timeline

The planning process took place over the course of roughly 18 months, beginning in March 2022 and wrapping up in September 2023. Generally, the process followed four key phases, as illustrated in **Figure 3** below:

- Project initiation
- Existing conditions and technical analysis
- Alternatives evaluation and concept development
- Final report and project deliverables

Throughout the planning process, stakeholder and community engagement was ongoing. To guide the process, provide input on key findings and potential recommendations, and help promote engagement activities, Cobb County established a Stakeholder Steering Committee (SSC). The group comprised representatives of Cobb County departments and agencies, neighborhood and community groups, and other key stakeholders. Additional details on the stakeholder and community engagement process are provided in the following chapter.

Following project startup and the review of prior plans and studies, the next step in the process was to develop a baseline understanding of existing conditions, ranging from land use and zoning to the state of roadway infrastructure, the transportation network, and environmentally sensitive areas. A key part of this process was also gaining a better understanding of other projects

underway or coming soon that might affect the potential trail extension or require inter-agency coordination going forward.

In identifying potential alignment options and alternatives for further analysis, the team took into consideration factors such as access, connectivity, and user experience; environmental concerns and potential permitting needs; and utilities, property, constructibility, and anticipated costs. Consideration and evaluation of potential alternatives was an iterative process of internal analysis and work sessions, consultation with the Project Management Team (PMT) and County staff, and stakeholder input. Having identified multiple potential alignment options, the County hosted a Community Open House to get feedback to inform refinement of those options. Additional details about the alternatives evaluation process are presented in Chapters 3 and 4 of this report.

The final phases of the scoping study process included development of a Cobb County concept report and preparation of this planning report. The concept report identifies and describes the locally preferred alignment option and key factors that will inform the preliminary engineering or design phase and implementation. The planning report is a summary of the overall process, key findings, and recommendations for advancing the project into the design and implementation phases.



The project team examined conditions along Noonday Creek, considering traffic, safety and environmental concerns, to identify opportunities and challenges within study area and determine potential options for extending the trail.



To determine the best way to reach the public, team members reviewed community demographics and developed a strategy with many forms of stakeholder and public engagement, including in-person and online methods.



Using information gathered during the Existing Conditions Analysis and Stakeholder and Community Engagement phases, the team evaluated multiple potential alignment options, considering factors such as access, connectivity, and equity; user experience; potential impacts; relative cost; and environmental considerations.



Taking into consideration findings from the alternatives analysis and evaluation phase alongside input from Cobb County staff and community and stakeholder feedback, the team identified and developed a concept for the locally preferred alignment option.

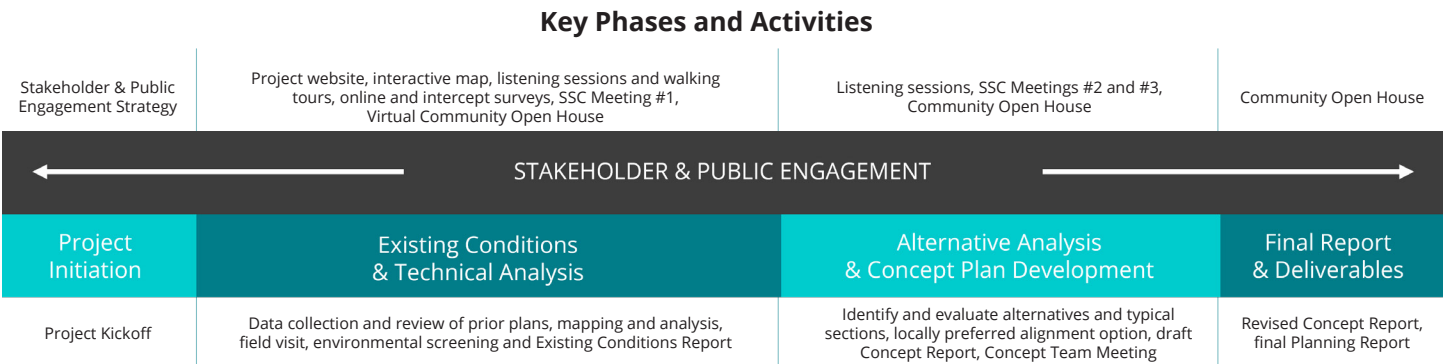
Existing Conditions Analysis

Stakeholder and Community Engagement

Alternatives Analysis and Evaluation

Concept Development

Figure 3. Scoping Study Process Diagram





Study Area

Location and Context

The existing Noonday Creek Trail stretches seven miles from Kennesaw Mountain to Bells Ferry Road. Part of the larger Mountain-to-River (MTR) Trail network, it connects Kennesaw Mountain to the Chattahoochee River. Located east of the Town Center Community Improvement District (CID), the existing trail serves as an amenity to numerous communities and neighborhoods; it provides connectivity to various commercial, recreational, and educational uses, including the Town Center at Cobb mall, Kennesaw State University and Fifth Third Bank Stadium, and Aviation Park, among others.

The subject of this scoping study is the area northeast of the existing Noonday Creek Trail, generally along both sides of the creek between the trailhead at Bells Ferry Road and Shallowford Road at the north end of Noonday Creek Park, as shown in **Figure 4**. Shallowford Road opposite Noonday Creek Park is where the City of Woodstock's Noonday Creek Trail Extension project will terminate.

The study area is largely residential, characterized by single-family residential uses to the north, east, and south of the Bells Ferry Trailhead, and some multi-family and commercial development west of Bells Ferry Road, in the boundaries of the Town Center CID.

In addition to recommending the extension of this segment of the Noonday Creek Trail, Cobb County's *Greenways and Trails Master Plan* proposed a number of trails for this area, including extension of the Noonday Creek Trail and several segments along nearby roadways. Despite the opportunities for connectivity, there are limited walking and bicycling facilities in the study area for people to access either the Bells Ferry Trailhead or Noonday Creek Park.

The study corridor crosses three roads classified as minor arterials (Bells Ferry Road, New Chastain Road, and Shallowford Road) and one local street, Hawkins Store Road. The remaining streets within the study area are local streets, primarily residential, serving local neighborhood traffic.



View of the existing Bells Ferry Trailhead parking lot



Bells Ferry Road Bridge over Noonday Creek

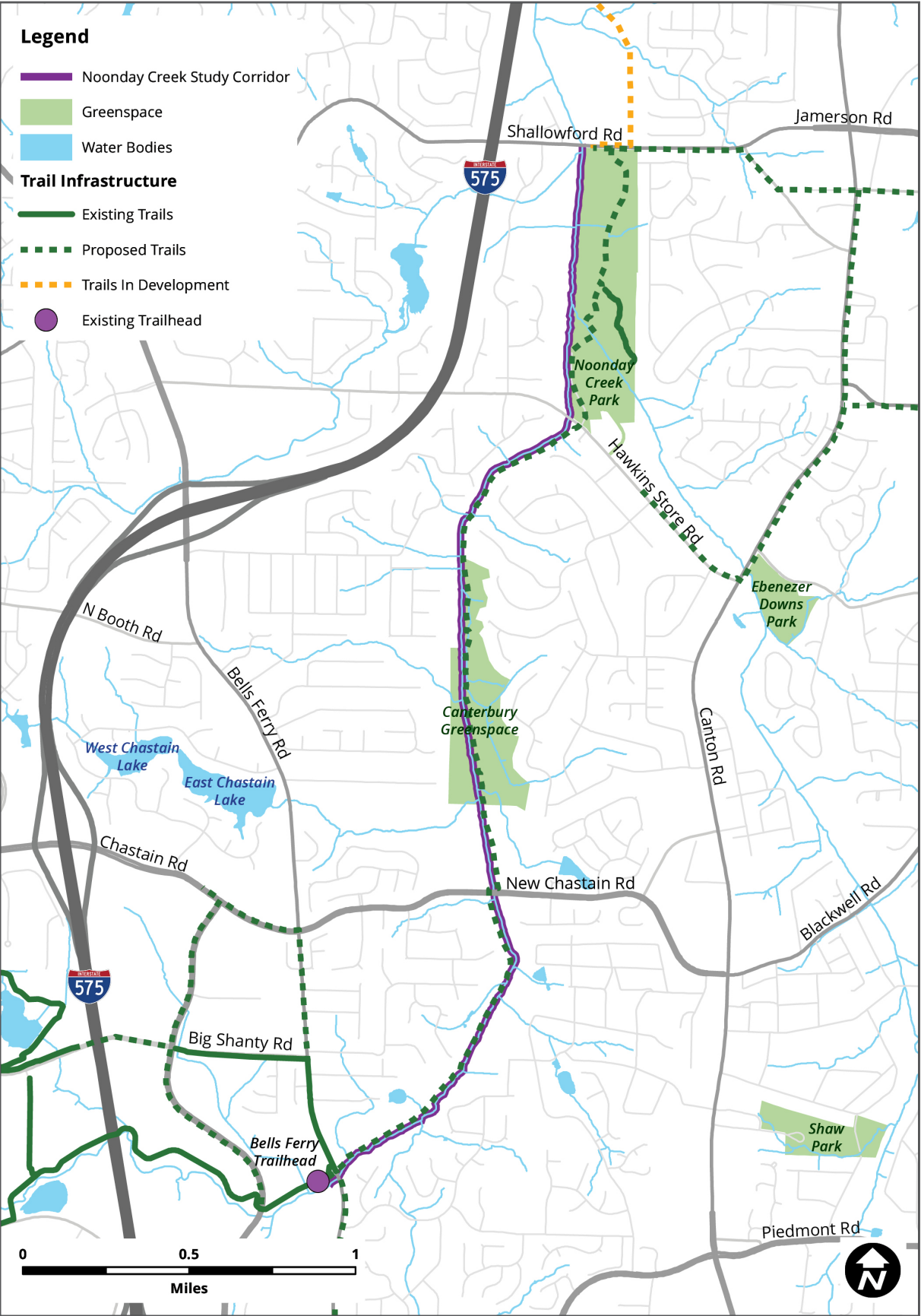


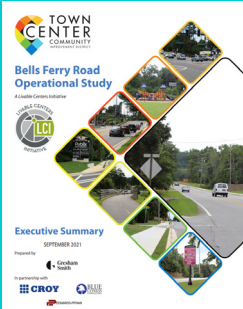
Figure 4. Study Area Context Map

Related Studies & Projects



Cobb County Greenways & Trails Master Plan

This plan provides a framework and strategy for connecting existing segments of trail, for connecting key places, and for providing options for all trail users



Bells Ferry Road Operational Study

The study identifies potential safety and efficiency improvements for all modes of transportation between Chastain Road/New Chastain Road and Barrett Parkway/Piedmont Road



Bells Ferry Road Bridge Replacement Project

Cobb County is replacing the Bells Ferry Road Bridge over Noonday Creek between Rockbridge Road and Lloyd Drive at the entrance of the Trailhead



Woodstock Noonday Creek Trail Extension

The City of Woodstock is extending its portion of the Noonday Creek Trail from SR 92 to Shallowford Road - construction started in the summer of 2023

Project History

Initially conceptualized years ago, the Noonday Creek Trail Extension was identified as one of eight priority projects in the Cobb County *Greenways & Trails Master Plan*, adopted in 2018. **Figure 5** shows one side of a ‘cut-sheet’ included in the appendices of that plan. As part of that planning process, the Noonday Creek Trail project received significant community support, with many people citing a desire for increased connectivity between Downtown Woodstock and the Town Center area.

The Noonday Creek Trail system was identified by ARC as a Regionally Significant Trail in the agency’s Regional Trail Vision 2020, which is a supplement to *Walk.Bike.Thrive!* As “key links for connecting the regional trail network; crossing jurisdictional boundaries; connecting cities, regional activity centers, or parks; or serving as destinations for residents and visitors” (*Regional Trail Vision, p10*), Regionally Significant Trails are priorities for regional and federal funding.

In 2021 Cobb County received Regional Transportation Planning Study program grant funding for a planning level scoping study for the Noonday Creek Trail Extension. The purpose of these studies is to develop concepts that improve safety, mobility, and access for all roadway users, while also preparing projects for advancement to scoping and/or preliminary engineering phases.

This scoping study builds on the findings and recommendations of the *Greenways & Trails Master Plan*, recognizing the potential for this trail extension to fill a critical gap in a long-envisioned network connecting Downtown Woodstock to Kennesaw Mountain and beyond.

Throughout the study process, the project team refined and expanded on the initial recommendations, taking into consideration coordination needed with recently completed and ongoing projects, including the planned replacement of the Bells Ferry Road Bridge (Cobb County Project B2101) and the Woodstock Noonday Creek Trail Extension from SR 92 to Shallowford Road.

The bridge replacement project - currently in design - is funded with 2022 Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) dollars; however, Cobb County is also seeking additional funding support. *The Bells Ferry Road Operational Study*, conducted for the Town Center CID in 2021, included a concept for the bridge with one lane in each direction, a dedicated northbound left-turn lane to the trailhead, and a multi-use trail/walkway on both sides of the bridge. The concept indicated that the bridge would be wide enough to accommodate a future extension of the Noonday Creek Trail from the existing trailhead on the west side of Bells Ferry Road beneath the bridge to the east side of the road.

The City of Woodstock recently began construction on its Noonday Creek Trail Extension project, lengthening its portion of the trail southward from Downtown into Cobb County. The project, designed in consultation with Cherokee and Cobb Counties, will extend Woodstock’s Noonday Creek Trail from Alabama Road (SR 92) to Shallowford Road - the identified terminus of the priority project in Cobb County’s *Greenways & Trails Master Plan* and this scoping study



Figure 5. Cut Sheet for the Noonday Creek Trail Project from Cobb County’s Greenways & Trails Master Plan



2

Engagement

Stakeholder and Community Engagement Activities, Key Themes



Stakeholder Steering Committee

The Stakeholder Steering Committee (SSC) served as a sounding board during the study process, providing input on concerns and opportunities, as well as feedback on the formation of potential trail alignments. Additionally, they assisted with outreach to the larger community, serving as liaisons to community groups, neighborhoods, and agencies.

The SSC was intentionally formed to include representatives of various organizations and associations, including but not limited to neighborhood associations, Cobb County departments and agencies - including Community Development, Parks, Transportation, and the Water System - and the Town Center Community Improvement District.

The SSC convened three times over the course of the study process, coinciding with key milestones throughout the planning process. The first meeting was held relatively early in the process, and provided an overview of the scoping study process and anticipated timeline. The second meeting was an interactive workshop session to gather input and feedback on potential alignment options and considerations. The third meeting took place toward the end of the study process, and was an opportunity for stakeholders to provide input on the draft concept before it was submitted and prior to the last community open house.

Noonday Creek Stakeholder Steering Committee Participants

In addition to the Cobb County Department of Transportation, which managed the project, the Stakeholder Steering Committee included representatives of the following organizations:

- Atlanta Regional Commission
- Bells Ferry Civic Association / Keep Cobb Beautiful
- Bells Ferry Elementary School
- Canterbury Homeowners Association
- Canton Road Neighbors
- Chadds Ridge Homeowners Association
- Cherokee County

- Cobb County Community Development Agency
- Cobb County Parks Department
- Cobb County Water System
- Town Center Community Improvement District / Community Alliance
- Vanderlande
- City of Woodstock

SSC Meeting #1 - July 14, 2022

Held via Microsoft Teams, the first SSC meeting provided an extensive overview of the study, including background, community context, results from stakeholder engagement efforts, and next steps. Attendees also had the opportunity to ask questions, provide feedback, and engage in conversation with the project team.

The presentation provided some history of the project, noting that the Noonday Creek trail extension was identified as a priority project in Cobb County's *Greenways & Trails Master Plan* and has been designated a Regionally Significant Trail by the Atlanta Regional Commission. It included some feedback that was initially gathered on this potential project during the *Greenways & Trails Master Plan*, showing the relative importance of this project to community members at that time (2017-2018).

- The team also provided background information on the study area, touching on:
- Surrounding land uses and development within the study area
 - Existing biking/walking network, including trail segments and trailheads of the Noonday Creek Trail
 - Roadway conditions
 - Environmental characteristics

The project team also gave an overview of the study process, timeline, and anticipated community engagement activities, as well as a snapshot of preliminary results from the public intercept and online survey, conducted during the spring and early summer of 2022.

- Attendees asked several questions about trail design considerations, and the potential alignment, as well as corresponding concerns. General themes from this discussion included:
- Concerns about possible impacts of the trail and construction on area residents
 - Concerns about pedestrian safety in the area, particularly in regards to the speed of traffic along area roadways (Shallowford Road, Bells Ferry Road)
 - General enthusiasm for the study and potential trail extension
 - Suggestions for potential amenities along the trail, including bike repair stations, restroom facilities, playgrounds, and seating.
 - The need to coordinate with upcoming Bells Ferry Road bridge and water main replacement projects

Slides from the first Stakeholder Steering Committee Meeting, July 14, 2022

Feedback from Greenways & Trails Master Plan

During development of the Greenways & Trails Master Plan, the **Noonday Creek Trail Extension** was consistently one of the most common desires and top priorities throughout community engagement activities.

- 22% of people surveyed at the Bells Ferry Trailhead indicated they would like more connections to other trails or transportation facilities
- 11% of all comments on proposed new trails during summer festivals supported the proposed extension of the Noonday Creek Trails
- Comments on the Parks Master Plan (2016) also pointed to connecting to Noonday Creek Trail north of Hwy 92 as a priority

Example comments:

"Please finish Noonday Creek Trail to Cherokee County!"

"It would be so easy to improve access to the Noonday Creek Trail and I wouldn't need a car to access it."

Challenges and Opportunities

Steep incline at Noonday Creek trailhead (Bells Ferry Road)

Possible at-grade option for route on northern side of Bells Ferry Road (Cobb County water easement)

Lack of pedestrian access on high-speed, curved road that provides access to single-family residential (New Chastain Road)

The varying widths of the channel and roadway along Noonday Creek may mean boardwalk and/or wider setback from the waters edge is needed in some areas



SSC Meeting #2 - December 14, 2022

The second SSC meeting was held in person at the Vanderlande office, located on Chastain Meadows Parkway, around the corner from the Bells Ferry Trailhead. The focus of this meeting was an interactive workshop-style session to gather thoughts and input on potential alignment considerations.

To start, the project team provided attendees with a refresher on the study, touching on the study purpose and background information and context for the project. Next, the presentation reiterated key considerations for the study and provided an update on engagement activities conducted leading up to this second meeting.

The team shared key takeaways from continued research and technical analysis related to property ownership, environmental considerations, topography, and sidewalk connectivity. Highlights included:

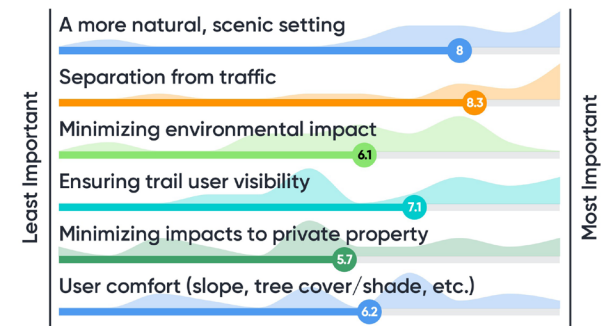
- Aligning with County-owned land along the creek can help minimize potential impacts to private property

- A possible alignment that would allow the trail to pass beneath bridges could create a safer and more comfortable condition for users (as opposed to crossing roads at-grade)
- There is likely a need to use small bridges or culverts to minimize potential negative impacts to wetlands and streams
- While the area along the creek itself is relatively flat, there are slopes along Bells Ferry Road and New Chastain Road that may require walking or biking uphill and may necessitate retaining walls
- The lack of sidewalks may make it more difficult for people to reach the proposed trail; access points should be considered

The project team then presented a summary of the potential alignment options currently being considered and factors being used to evaluate those potential options. Using a real-time interactive polling platform, participants were asked first to describe their vision for the potential trail extension and then to provide their opinions on what factors are most important to consider when determining potential trail alignments. Results are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. SSC Priorities for Evaluating Potential Trail Options

As we think about how to evaluate potential options, what factors are most important to you?



Attendees were then led through a facilitated discussion of potential alignment options and considerations, providing written and verbal feedback on three segments. Key discussion points included, but are not limited to:

Map 1: Bells Ferry Road to near New Chastain Road

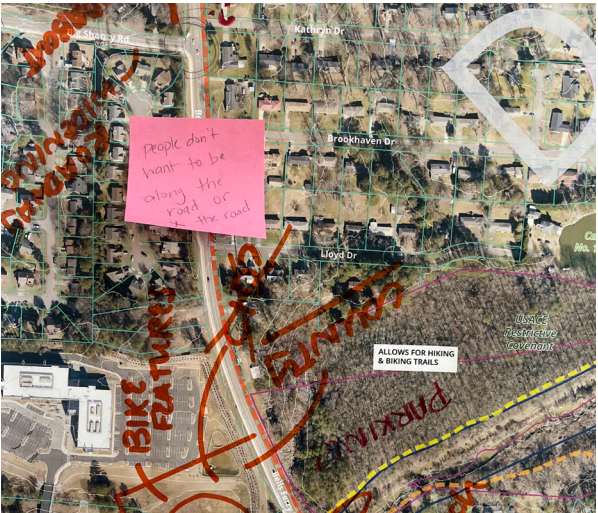
- Strong preference for avoiding any route that follows the road network
- Strong preference for following Noonday Creek, with a willingness to have the trail cross the Creek as needed to avoid property impacts
- Desire for more bike amenities at the existing trailhead
- Concern that parking is already limited and often full (especially on weekends)

Map 2: New Chastain Road to near Hawkins Store Road/south end of Noonday Creek Park

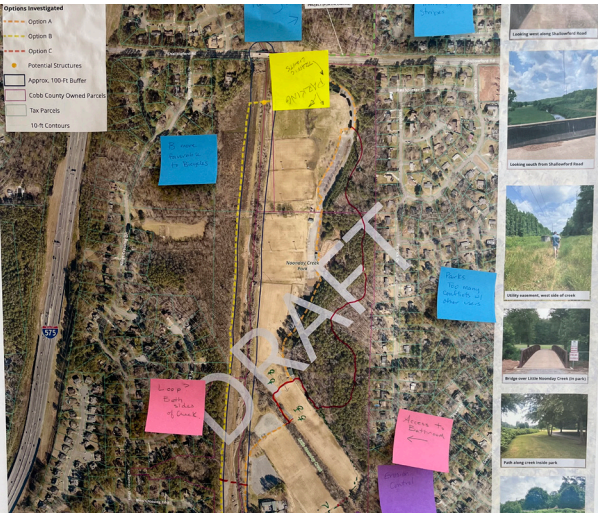
- Strong preference for aligning a trail along the west side of the Creek in this area
- Support for a spur connection from Bells Ferry Road to the trail along the Creek via the utility easement north of New Chastain Road
- Suggestions for development of “pocket parks” or small passive recreation areas
- Strong preference for a boardwalk with wire-type railings that allow for uninterrupted views

Map 3: Hawkins Store Road to Shallowford Road/north end of Noonday Creek Park

- Concern regarding conflicts between potential trail users on the northern end of Noonday Creek Park and people using the parking lots, soccer fields, and BMX track
- Desire for traffic calming measures at park entrances
- An alignment along the west side of the Creek would be more favorable to cyclists



SSC Workshop Comments on Map Segment near Existing Bells Ferry Trailhead



SSC Workshop Comments on Map Segment Including Noonday Creek Park



SSC Meeting #3 - May 16, 2023

The third SSC meeting focused on getting input from stakeholders on the draft concepts and potential locally preferred alignment alternative, prior to holding the last community open house. Conducted online, the project team provided a brief recap of the scoping study and then gave an overview of potential alignment options that had been analyzed to-date, as well as a summary of feedback received during the March 2023 Community Open House. Following the presentation, the group engaged in discussion of potential refinements to the alignment options using an online interactive whiteboard to provide comments on maps, precedent images showing potential trail amenities, and other materials.

In identifying potential alignment options, the project team drew upon technical analysis of existing conditions, environmental considerations, community feedback, site visits, and input from Cobb County staff. Refinements to the potential trail alignments built upon input from the SSC during the last meeting in December 2022, conversations with Cobb County staff and the PMT, as well as community feedback during the March 2023 Community Open House. In addition to community and stakeholder feedback, considerations as part of this process included the overall length, the number of structures needed, potential impacts to private property and right-of-way needs, utility impacts, ecological considerations, and estimated costs.

At this meeting, two potential alternatives were presented for SSC discussion and feedback. The first - Option 1 - is a creekside alignment that primarily follows the west side of the trail and which is approximately 3.8 miles long. The second - Option 2 - would travel along the east side of Bells Ferry Road from the creek northward, across New Chastain Road, where it would rejoin the west side of the creek.

The group discussed potential benefits and challenges of both options, including, but not limited to cost, potential property impacts, the number of crossings and structures needed, and alignment with community preferences.

In addition to being the preferred alignment based on public and SSC feedback, the creekside option is also lower cost and has fewer property impacts compared to the roadside alignment. Additionally, the group took into consideration community feedback received at previous engagement activities. Challenges, however, include the multiple creek crossings, possible impacts to private properties in two constrained areas, and the constrained space for the trail opposite Noonday Creek Park.

Option 2 (the combined roadside and creekside option), while less favorable based on community feedback, leverages the cleared area where the utility easement is along the west side of the trail, crosses the creek fewer times than Option 1, and would have fewer wetland impacts. The challenges of this option include higher cost, increased discomfort for users being close to the road, and an overall greater number of potential property impacts.

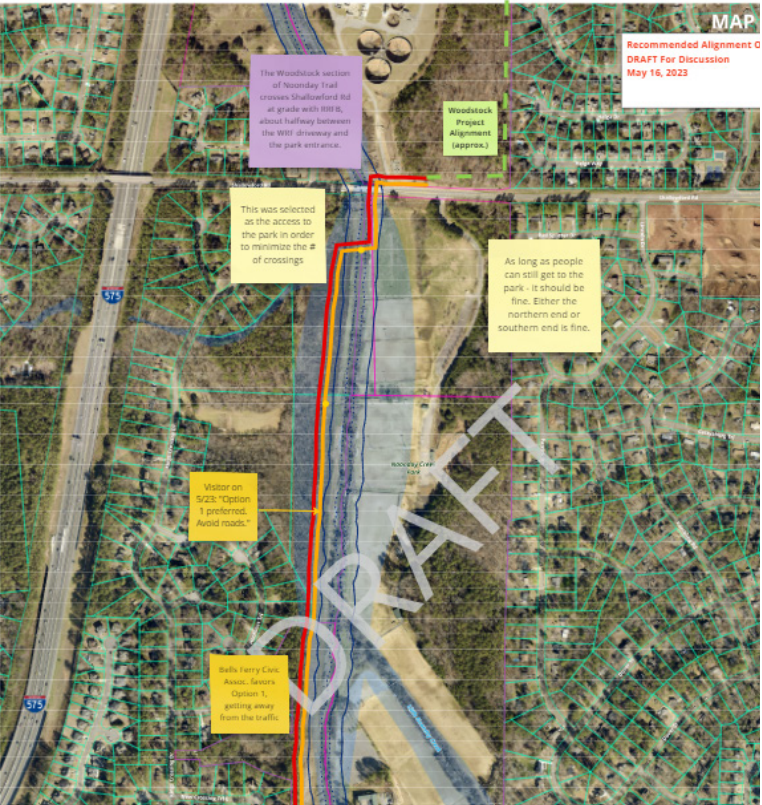
Following this, the project team facilitated a discussion utilizing an interactive online whiteboard tool, which offered participants the opportunity to provide real-time feedback. Participants were asked to provide comments on alignment options shown on maps with aerial imagery and to indicate preferences for types of railings and screening options, seating options, and other trail related amenities. Examples of these tools and comments provided can be seen in the images at right.

An extensive discussion among the SSC members was then had regarding the alignment options, process, and possible design and amenity options, among other topics.

Images captured from the online interactive whiteboard used during the third SSC meeting

How to Use the Map

Drag these sticky notes to the map and type your comments and ideas, or click the "comment" bubble in the toolbar on the left side of your screen. You can also right-click to add a sticky note. If you're using a mobile device, press the + button to access the toolbar.



Carol: Would like to see interpretive signage - some for the ecology, some for the history

Sticker Box



Drinking Fountains

Place stickers/dot here if you like this option

Water fountains definitely needed

Visitor 5/23: "Of course."



Pet Waste Stations

Place stickers/dot here if you like this option

Good idea so the area doesn't become a toilet

Yep



Emergency Location Markers

Place stickers/dot here if you like this option

Absolutely




Public Engagement Activities

Intercept Survey

During the spring and summer of 2022, the project team conducted a community survey to better understand how people use the trail and nearby public spaces, gauge interest in a potential extension of Noonday Creek Trail within Cobb County, and gain insight into preferences to inform a potential future extension of the trail.

The survey was conducted both online and in-person at the Bells Ferry Trailhead and Noonday Creek Park on Thursday June 9, 2022 from approximately 4:30-6:30pm and Saturday June 11, 2022 from approximately 10am-12pm. On both days, project team members went to both locations to try to reach a wide and diverse number of respondents doing a variety of activities. The days and times were chosen in consultation with Cobb County PARKS Department to try to align with scheduled activities and busy times at both locations.

For the in-person surveys, people could choose to have project team members read questions aloud or write their own responses on paper copies of the questionnaire. A Quick Response (QR) code was also available for people who preferred to take the survey online at another time.



Intercept survey at the Bells Ferry Trailhead

The online survey was promoted by Cobb County DOT through email newsletters, the department’s trail planning website, social media, District 3 Commissioner JoAnn K. Birrell, and through the Stakeholder Steering Committee.

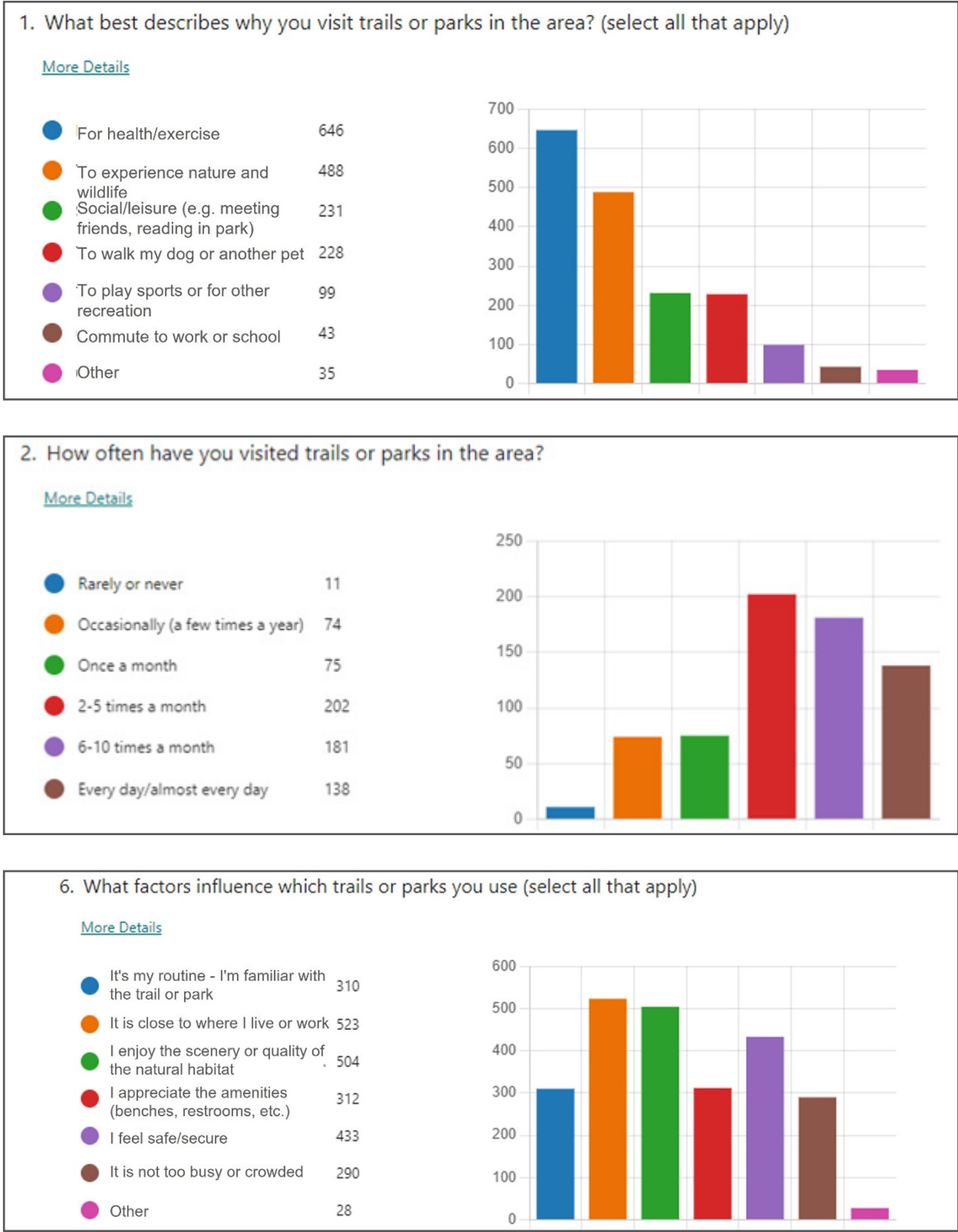
In total, 749 surveys were completed, split 91 percent online (684 surveys) and nine percent in-person (65 surveys). Participants were asked to provide opinions on their trail usage, trail facilities and amenities preferences, and general opinions on the proposed extension.

Most participants cited health and exercise or nature and wildlife as the main reason for their use of area trails and parks. Very few respondents utilized trails in order to commute to school or work. In general, respondents visit area trails and parks year-round. Many of the respondents visit trails or parks several times a month, with the most common responses being two to five times per month, or six to ten times per month.

The amount of time respondents reported spending on trails or at parks varies, with one hour being a typical response. Some respondents reported workouts with a typical distance of 30 or more miles, indicating the popularity of trails with cyclists in the area.

Participants offered a variety of preferences concerning why they visit certain trails or parks, their favorite trail activities, and trail surfaces. For most respondents, the proximity of the facility either to their home or job was the deciding factor on choosing a particular trail or park, followed closely by their enjoyment of the scenery and nature. Regarding trail surface, over half of respondents had no preference with respect to paved or natural surface, while those who expressed a preference favored paved trails over natural surface ones.

Select results from the survey conducted during the summer of 2022.





Several amenities were particularly popular with respondents, including restrooms (which had the largest response, with 69 percent of respondents favoring this amenity), scenic overlooks / boardwalks, and green space / open grassy areas. Although security features (i.e. call boxes and cameras) were only marked by 35 percent of respondents, people who chose this option were particularly concerned about safety, as indicated from comments received both in the online and in-person survey.

Factors included within the “Other” category include:

- Proximity of a trail or park to stores
- Proximity of trails for cyclists
- The diversity of parks within the area
- Ease of access
- Trail surface
- The elevation of the trail

For 60 percent of respondents, Noonday Creek is their favorite trail, followed by trails in Kennesaw and the Silver Comet Trail.

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to provide any additional comments about the potential trail extension of the Noonday Creek Trail. Of the 429 responses received, the majority (81 percent) indicated general support for the trail. The general support expressed was accompanied by suggestions for specific alignments and trail amenities, as well as locations for additional trail access points and ideas for trail user crossings.

Many respondents specifically mentioned a desire to have connectivity into the City of Woodstock / Cherokee County. Additionally, several expressed a preference for an alignment following the path of Noonday Creek, or a more secluded trail in general.

Fifty-seven responses (13 percent) mentioned a preference for specific amenities along the existing or proposed trail. Suggestions included, but were not limited to:

- Bathrooms
- Benches
- Bike facilities, such as a pump station
- Bike lane striping along portions of the trail
- Increased green space
- Native vegetation
- Pavilions and picnic tables / spaces
- Pet amenities, such as water stations and bag stations
- Playground
- Trail lighting
- Water fountains
- Wild life interaction / observation areas

Forty responses (nine percent) expressed concerns about topics such as impacts to the natural environment, security for residential areas, safety for trail users, and proximity

to vehicular traffic. Some of the comments regarding residential security expressed complete opposition, while others simply stated that there should be an adequate buffer between the residential development and potential trail extension. Six comments mentioned the need to ensure adequate safety and security for trail users, with suggestions such as call boxes, a stronger police presence, and security cameras. Four comments mentioned parking and over-crowding as a concern.

Residents were also asked to provide their zip code in order to provide an understanding of where they reside, and how broad interest may be in this study. As shown in **Figure 7**, nearly one-third of respondents live in zip code 30066, which lies generally to the west of I-575, and includes the Bells Ferry Trailhead and much of the study corridor. The zip code with the second most number of responses is 30144, which lies west of the study area, and includes the Town Center and Kennesaw State University.

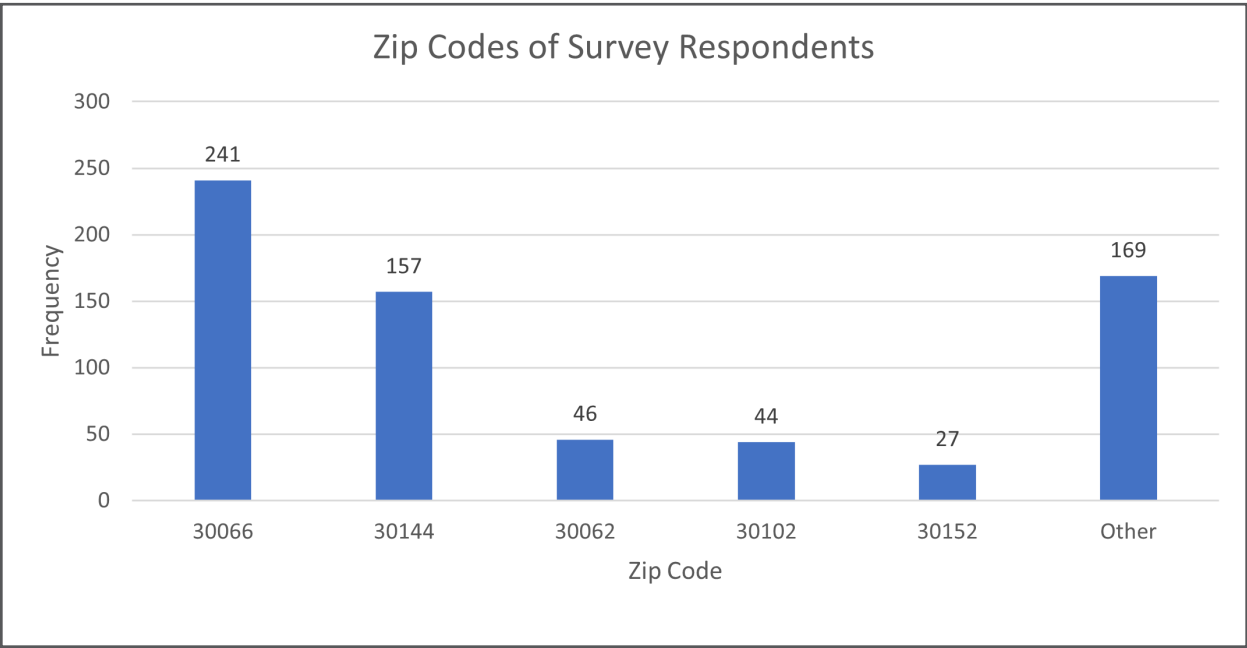
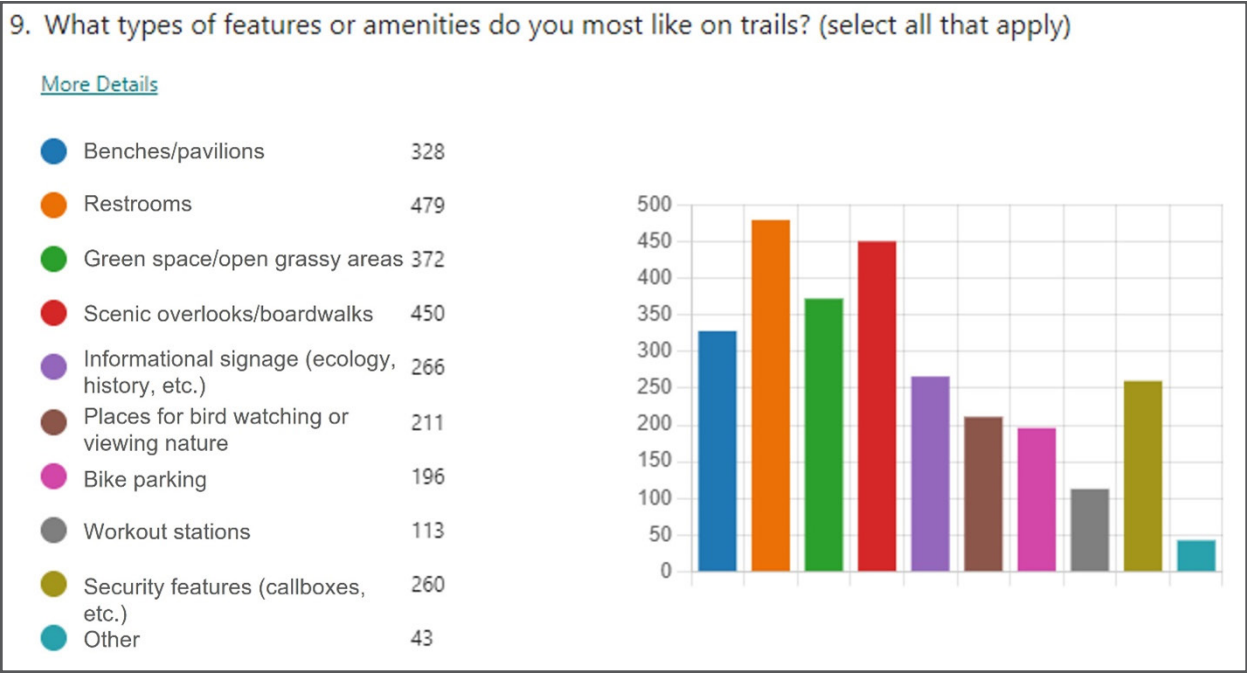


Figure 7. Zip Codes of Survey Respondents



Neighborhood Walking Tour

On August 15, 2022, project members joined residents of the Canterbury Park neighborhood for a tour of the walking trails built as an amenity for residents. The subdivision, located on the site of a former golf course on the east side of Noonday Creek, lies roughly between the Chastain Glen neighborhood (on the north side of New Chastain Road) and Canterbury North subdivision, just south of Hawkins Store Road. At the time it was built, the developer constructed a small system of walking paths and foot bridges that crisscross wetlands and tributary streams to Noonday Creek. The land is owned by Cobb County; however, the trails are maintained by volunteers from the neighborhood and homeowners association.

The tour led participants through the walking paths and provided opportunities for interaction and dialogue between neighborhood residents and project team members, as well as for community members to offer suggestions and feedback on potential considerations for a possible trail extension. The walking tour was also an opportunity for project team members to observe firsthand portions of the creek and adjacent wetlands they would not have otherwise been able to visit. This yielded valuable insights into local conditions, including considerations for drainage patterns, maintenance, wildlife, and plant species.



Community members and project team members participate in the Canterbury walking tour



Noonday Creek, which runs parallel to the Canterbury walking tour route

Online Interactive Map

As part of the public engagement process, the project team developed a crowdsourcing online mapping tool. This tool allowed community members to view the study area within the greater context of the surrounding area, and provide input about concerns and opportunities regarding a potential trail extension within the study area. The map featured several categories of comments:

- Features or places that should be highlighted
- Concerns about potential access to particular areas
- Preferences for access to a particular place or destination
- Miscellaneous feedback

More than 30 comments were received, the majority of which were overwhelmingly positive and in favor of the trail extension, with negative comments generally focused on the security needs of any potentially affected private property.

Much of the feedback was regarding possible trail alignment options, including unfavorable feedback on at-grade roadway crossings due to their associated risks (especially along New Chastain Road), as well as possible traffic calming measures to increase the safety of all trail users. Multiple participants also provided feedback on potential amenities and features they would like to see along the trail extension. Participants expressed particular enthusiasm for amenities such as water bottle filling stations, bike racks and tire pumping/bike repair stations, pocket parks, and educational signage. Community members also commented on existing or potential connectivity of the trail, including with adjacent businesses in the Town Center area, as well as future connectivity opportunities stemming from the extension of the Noonday Creek Trail in Woodstock.

The Noonday Creek Trail Study is examining options to extend Noonday Creek Trail from the Bells Ferry Trailhead northward to Noonday Creek Park. We would like to hear from you about features or places that should be highlighted (scenic vista, interesting natural feature, etc.), places or destinations you would like access from the proposed trail, any concerns you might have about trail access in the area, and other feedback. The study corridor for the proposed trail, shown on the map below, follows a portion of Noonday Creek. For more information, please visit <https://cobbcounty.org/trail-planning>.

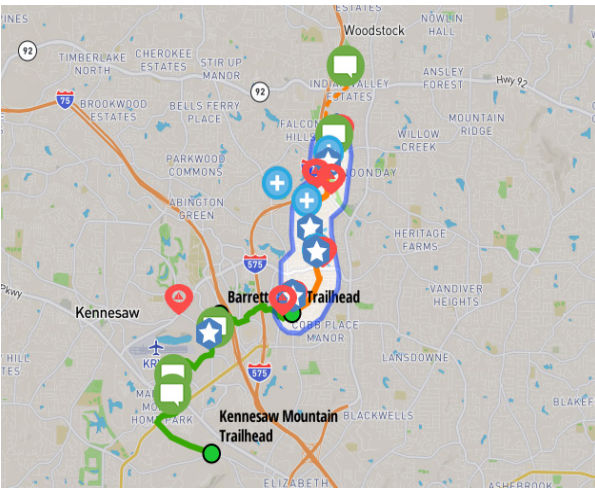
Instructions:
To add comments to the map, please click on "Add Points and Comment" in the menu bar below, select one of the point categories, and click within the study area to place your point and provide a comment.

Please note, the orange study corridor is not intended to convey a proposed route, rather, it is to serve as a focus for the study area.

Add points and comment

Study corridor	Feature or place that should be highlighted
Study area	I would like to access this place or destination
Existing Noonday Creek Trail	I have concerns about potential access to this place
Existing Trailheads	Other – I would like to tell you more about this place
Noonday Creek Trail under development (Cherokee County)	

Instructions and categories for comments on the interactive mapping platform



Comments placed on the online interactive mapping platform



Public Meetings

Virtual Public Meeting - July 27, 2022

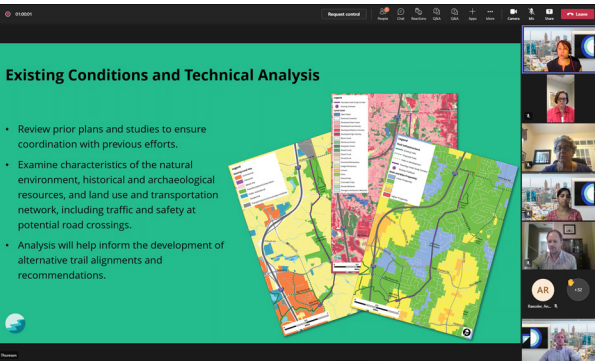
A public meeting was held via online meeting platform on Wednesday, July 27, 2022, starting at 6:30pm. The Gresham Smith team was present, as well as several Cobb County team members, and Commissioner Birrell of Cobb County District Three. Several dozen members of the public were in attendance, and included residents of the surrounding area, property owners of land adjacent to the study corridor, and HOA representatives for several neighborhoods.

During this meeting, staff presented an overview of the scoping study, including a description of what a scoping study is, existing conditions, and next steps, as well as intercept survey results, and instructions on how to use the online interactive mapping tool. Public input was also gathered using the meetings via audience participation questions, such as the one shown below.

Project team members gave an overview of future public and stakeholder engagement opportunities, including public meetings, walking tours/listening sessions, and the online interactive mapping platform. A demonstration was given on the mapping tool, including how to access the site, an overview of the page and map, and how to submit comments and concerns, as well as how to “mark” the map with points.

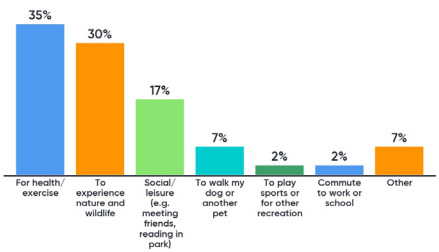
Throughout the presentation, members of the public also had the opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns. These included questions and comments regarding:

- Proximity and potential impacts to private property and why this extension is being proposed
- Support for the trail extension project, as it will allow for greater connectivity and cycling opportunities
- County ownership of land in the area
- Potential impacts to livestock currently present on private land
- Possible access points and the locations of these



Screenshot of materials presented during the Virtual Public Meeting in July 2023

What best describes why you visit trails or parks in the area?



Results from interactive online polling question during Virtual Public Meeting in July 2023



Noonday Creek, as seen during the summer of 2022.



Community Open House - March 7, 2023

Held at Bells Ferry Elementary School from 5:30 until 7:30pm on March 7, 2023, this Community Open House provided an opportunity for community members to learn about the trail extension study, and comment on potential alignment options being considered, trail amenities, and options for railings and screenings. Numerous project team members and representatives from Cobb County were present at the open house, including staff from Cobb County Department of Transportation and Parks Department, Commissioner JoAnn K. Birrell of District Three, and others. A total of 62 community members attended the meeting.

The open house format encouraged attendees to view materials at their own pace and interact with project team members.

The meeting set-up consisted of five stations, each focused on a component of the project:

- **Project Overview:** Project overview, including study purpose and history, considerations, and a general timeline
- **Community Context:** Existing conditions, including land use, characteristics of Noonday Creek, and possible impacts from the proposed extension
- **Community Engagement:** Summarized previous community engagement efforts, including surveys, meetings, and online engagement
- **Potential Trail Alignments for Consideration:** Three potential alignments, displayed as large-scale maps, on which participants were invited to provide feedback
- **Options for Trail Amenities and Railings/Screenings:** Overview of potential options, on which participants were invited to provide feedback

Attendees were asked to provide feedback regarding the potential trail alignments and examples of possible amenities and facilities, as well as screening and railing options. The overall preference for trail alignment was to follow Noonday Creek, as opposed to roads. No strong preference was indicated for either side of Noonday Creek, except in instances where it may skirt private property. Additional comments expressed excitement about increased connectivity to Woodstock; inquiries about private fencing; a desire for avoiding roadway crossings; and concerns about a planned at-grade crossing at Shallowford Road.

Another station asked community members to weigh in on the types of amenities, railings, and screenings they would be most interested in seeing as part of a potential trail extension. Results from this exercise are shown in **Figure 8**. The most desired amenities include shade structures, restrooms, water fountains, benches, pet waste stations, and play or picnic areas. The most popular screening/railing options were open wood fencing with natural plantings, and grass buffers with fences and shrubs.

Community members provided extensive feedback, both written and verbal, the majority of which was overwhelmingly positive. Among the written feedback, 32 of the 36 comment cards submitted expressed support and enthusiasm for the trail extension. Three responses were opposed to the trail in general due to concerns about safety and security. One response expressed concern about possible negative environmental impacts. Other specific feedback provided included:

- Preference for avoiding at-grade crossings and right angles
- Specific concern regarding the speed of traffic along Shallowford Road if the at-grade crossing (planned as part of Woodstock's Noonday Creek Trail Extension project) were to be kept in place
- Preferences for separating cyclists and pedestrians where possible

Figure 8. Community Feedback on Potential Trail Amenities

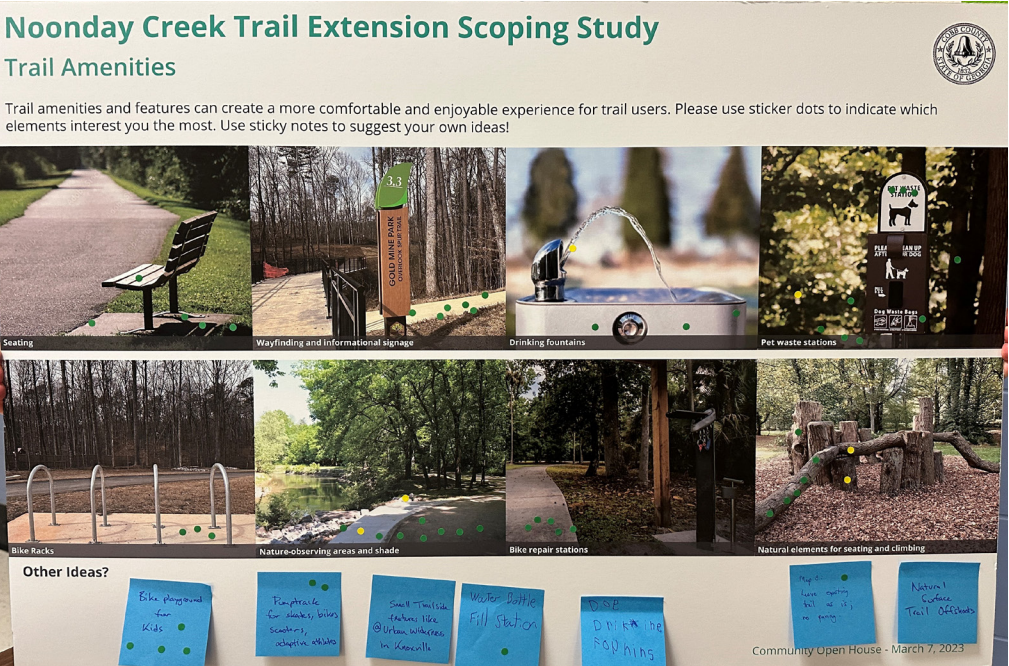


Figure 9. Community Members at March 2023 Open House





Community Open House - August 9, 2023

A final Community Open House was held on August 9, 2023 in the Community Room at Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta at Town Center on Big Shanty Road, from 5:30pm until 7:30pm. As with the first in-person open house, community members were able to interact with project team members and County staff, at a self-guided pace. Additionally, a looping presentation was projected on a screen at the back of the room throughout the duration of the open house to provide background information on the study.

More than 47 people attended the meeting, including residents of the Canterbury, Stockton’s Mill, Farmbrook Village, Kings Crossing, Stone Creek, Logan Park, Falcon Woods, Morgan Station, Bellestone, and Chestnutt Hill neighborhoods, as well as people affiliated with Kennesaw State University, the City of Woodstock, Cherokee County, Canton Road Neighbors, the Bells Ferry Civic Association, MTB Atlanta/SORBA, Vanderlande, Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, and the Marietta Daily Journal, among others.

The meeting set-up consisted of four stations, each focused on a different project component:

- **The Draft Concept:** The process involved in developing the locally preferred trail alignment, including factors and consideration evaluated along the way
- **Design Features & Potential Amenities:** Proposed design features, including surface materials, railings, fencings/screenings, signage, etc. and a display board on the proposed trailhead at Noonday Creek Park
- **Community Context:** Supplemental information highlighting key findings from the existing conditions analysis and field visits
- **Community Engagement:** Highlights and key outcomes from community engagement activities to-date, including the March 2023 public meeting, community surveys, and Stakeholder Steering Committee.

In total, 16 comment forms were submitted during the meeting. The written feedback received was overwhelmingly positive, with all community members who provided feedback expressing enthusiasm and support for the trail extension. Many respondents stated overall enthusiasm for increased connectivity and access to wildlife. None of the written feedback provided to the project team expressed opposition to the project. Several responses did include suggestions and concerns regarding alignment, access, wildlife impacts, and trailside amenities. Four of the comments expressed concern about ensuring access and connectivity, as well as the alignment, including:

- Consideration for the Canton Highway/ Shallowford/Jamerson corridors in order to improve access
- Preference for a connection from the Canterbury neighborhood
- Ensuring access from Chastain and/or Hawkins Store Road crossings
- Concerns with Duncan Road and Barrett Crossing Shopping Center

Attendees also suggested various amenities for the trail, including pavilions, picnic tables, exercise stations, public art, and signage.

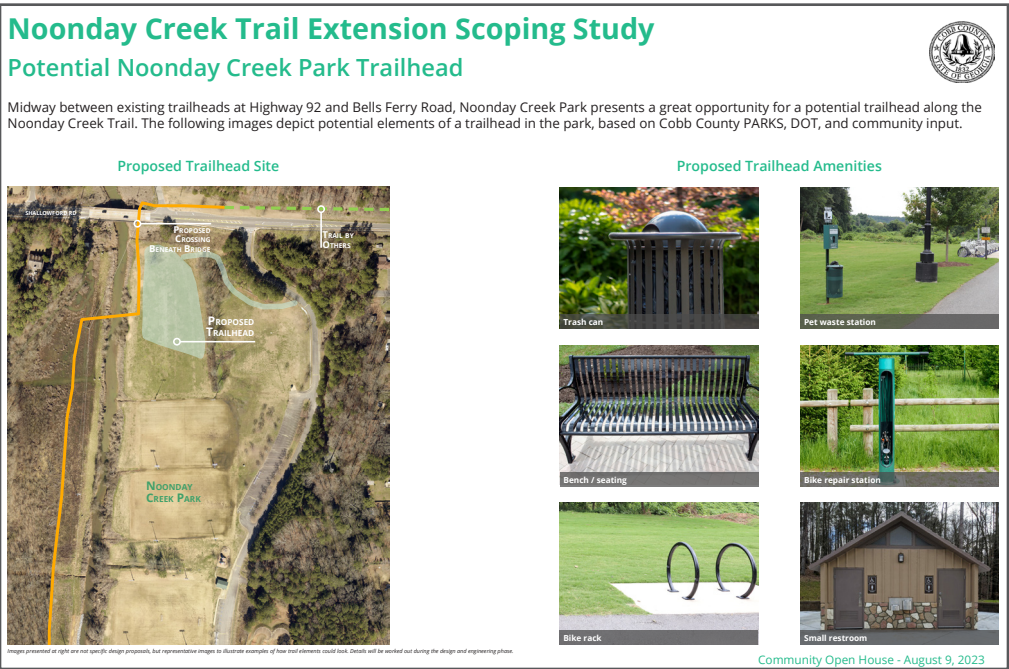
Community members were also able to provide written feedback on the large display maps showing the locally preferred trail alignment and possible future connections. Many of the comments included suggestions for possible trail connections, as well as preferred amenities and possible locations for expanded parking.

Staff and project team members were able to interact extensively with community members, many of whom provided verbal feedback, in addition to the written feedback. Comments included, but were not limited to:

- Flooding concerns, including near the Hawkins Store Road bridge
- Desire for increased footpaths, particularly off of Rock Bridge Road, Farmbrook, and Kings Crossing

After the public meeting, the County received feedback via email. Most of the feedback indicated support for the trail extension and suggested access points and amenities. Three emails mentioned concerns about security for adjacent homes and environmental impacts. Four individuals expressed opposition to the trail extension, citing concerns such as potential flooding, less privacy, and a rise in crime.

Figure 10. Display Board on Potential Trailhead at Noonday Creek Park



Commissioner Birrell talks with an attendee while others view displays at August 2023 Community Open House



A project team member talks with community members over a map during August 2023 Community Open House



3

Study Area & Analysis

*Study Area and Location, Connectivity, Land Use and Community,
Environmental Considerations*



Overview

The study area generally falls within a one-mile buffer of Noonday Creek between the Bells Ferry Trailhead and Shallowford Road.

The extension of the trail would serve not only those who utilize the trail for recreation, but also those who may not own a vehicle or lack consistent access to reliable transportation as well as area residents and visitors who would like non-vehicular options when traveling to local destinations. By expanding the reach of the trail, more residents will be able to reach job opportunities, schools (such as KSU), retail, dining, and recreational and green spaces, positively impacting the local economy.

Additionally, the Noonday Creek Trail extension has been identified as a priority project in Cobb County's *Greenways & Trails Master Plan*, and has also been designated a Regionally Significant Trail by the Atlanta Regional Commission.



Project team members conducting a field visit

Transportation Network

Connectivity

The roadway network around Noonday Creek consists of minor arterials that provide connections between residential neighborhoods, the Town Center, and the I-75 and I-575 interchanges; and local roads, primarily located within neighborhoods in the area. Bells Ferry Road is a two-lane roadway that travels north-south to the west of Noonday Creek. North of the Bells Ferry Trailhead, Bells Ferry Road intersects with New Chastain Road, a two-lane, east-west roadway also classified as a minor arterial. Further north, Noonday Creek crosses beneath Shallowford Road, a two-lane minor arterial that also serves as the southern terminus of the planned Noonday Creek Trail extension from the City of Woodstock. The east-west local road consists of two lanes and provides access to Noonday Creek Park.



View of Noonday Creek, Looking Northeast from Bells Ferry Road

Sidewalks and Bicycle Facilities

Existing Facilities

The existing Noonday Creek Trail extends from Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park to Bells Ferry Road. A multi-use path along Big Shanty Road connects to the Noonday Creek Trail via the existing Mall Connector Trail. There are no existing on-street bicycling facilities within a mile of the project corridor. There are sidewalks on the following streets that intersect the project corridor, as shown in **Figure 11**, which can promote connectivity to nearby neighborhoods and destinations if and when a trail extension is constructed:

- West side of Bells Ferry Road from the existing Noonday Creek Trail to Big Shanty Road
- Both sides of Bells Ferry Road from Chastain Road / New Chastain Road to just south of Chastain Landings Court to Chastain Manor Way
- North side of Big Shanty Road from Bells Ferry Road to Chastain Meadows Parkway, and further west
- Both sides of Chastain Road from Bells Ferry road to Chastain Meadows Parkway, and further west
- South side of New Chastain Road from Bells Ferry Road to Canton Road, and further east
- North side of Hawkins Store Road from Bells Ferry Road to Canton Road
- South side of Shallowford Road from I-575 to Canton Road, and further east

While sidewalk facilities exist along minor arterials and thoroughfares in the area, there are numerous neighborhoods which do not have sidewalk facilities that connect to these major roadways. An example is the Brookhaven neighborhood east of Bells Ferry Road and

Other neighborhoods along Shallowford Road west of I-575 and along Hawkins Store Road do not have sidewalk facilities within them. Connectivity to the Town Center is provided through Chastain Road and Big Shanty Road.

Proposed Facilities

The Cobb County *Greenways & Trails Master Plan* identified a number of desired or proposed new facilities, pulling from area plans, studies, and new analysis. Recommendations from the plan include:

- **Bells Ferry Road Trail Sidepath:** from Rock Ridge Preserve Trail to Noonday Creek Trail
- **Bells Ferry Road Trail Sidepath:** From Big Shanty Road to Chastain Road
- **Big Shanty Road Extension Trail Sidepath:** From Chastain Meadows Parkway to Big Shanty Trail. A sidepath between Chastain Meadows Parkway and Bells Ferry Road on the south side of Big Shanty Road was completed in 2020.
- **Chastain/Chastain Meadows/Big Shanty On- and Off-Street Bicycle Facilities:** From Noonday Creek Trail to Chastain Road
- **Canton Road North Trail Sidepath:** From Noonday Creek Park to Lake Drive
- **Noonday Creek Park to Kell H.S. Trail Sidepath:** From Shallowford Road at Noonday Creek Park to Kell High School

Currently, no funding has been allocated for implementation.

Woodstock Trail Extension

A portion of the Noonday Creek Trail system lies within the City of Woodstock. The existing trail is mostly within downtown Woodstock; however the City has recently completed design of a project to extend the trail southward into unincorporated Cherokee and Cobb Counties from SR 92 to Shallowford Road. This project will close a portion of the current gap between Bells Ferry Trailhead in northern Cobb County and the SR 92 trailhead in the City of Woodstock. Construction began in fall 2023.

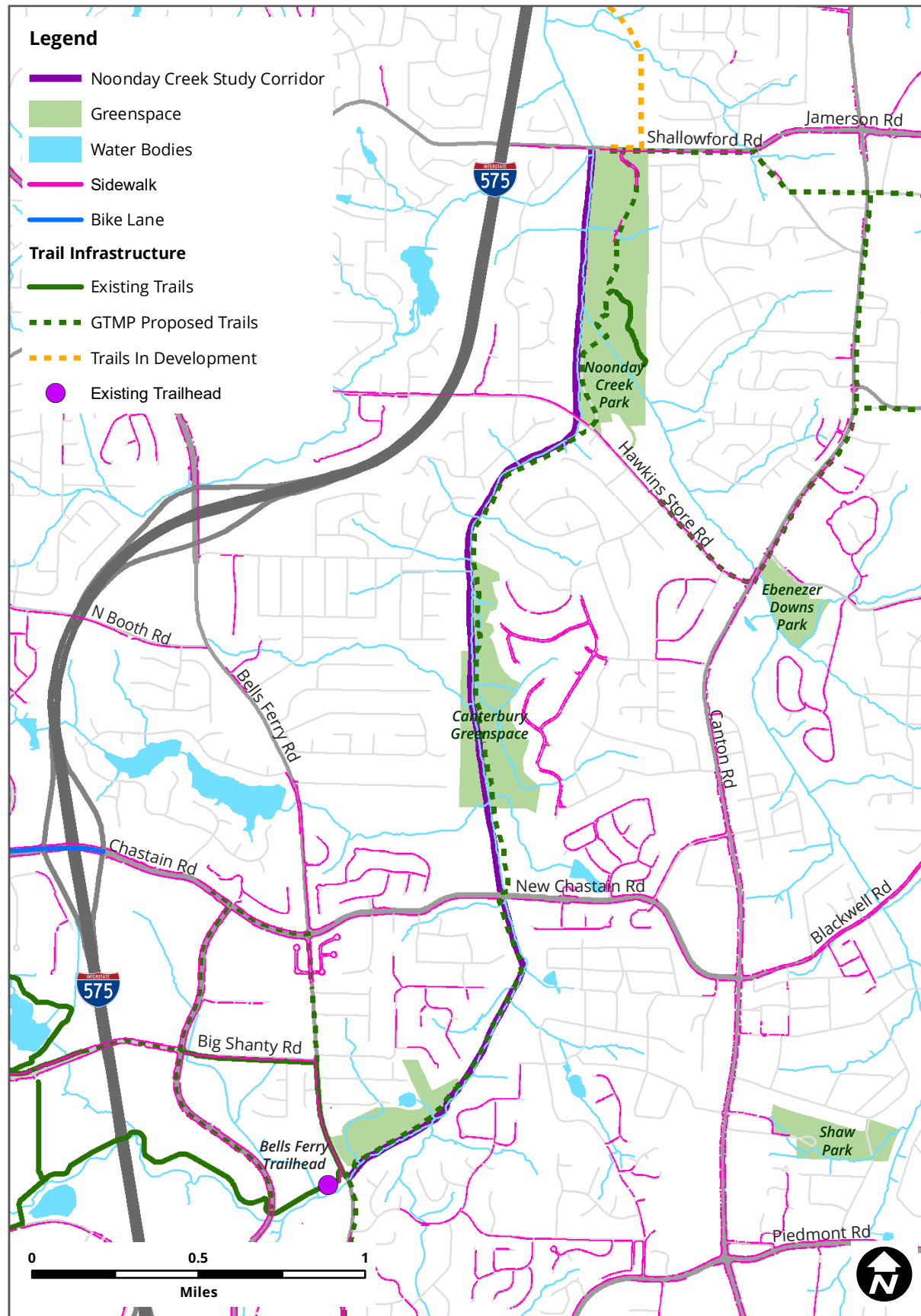


Figure 11. Biking and Walking Facilities in the Study Area

Safety and Propensity

ARC's *Walk. Bike. Thrive!* plan includes a safety risk analysis for the entire Atlanta region based on reported crashes involving vulnerable users relative to the estimated miles walked and biked by Census tract in the Atlanta region. The Noonday Creek Trail Extension study area has a low to medium relative risk of bicyclist-involved and pedestrian-involved crashes.

As trails are expanded in the area, the facilities provide a path for pedestrians and cyclists that is separated from the roadway, decreasing the relative risk of conflicts with vehicles. Where at-grade crossings are necessary, proven safety countermeasures, such as rectangular rapid flashing beacons (RRFBs), pedestrian hybrid beacons (PHBs), median and pedestrian refuge islands, and crosswalk visibility enhancements should be considered as the trail is designed.

The Walking and Biking Propensity analysis from *Walk. Bike. Thrive!* is a composite analysis of location-based characteristics that identifies areas with high propensity, or relative demand, for walking and bicycling. Factors include population and employment density, proximity to trails, transit, schools, and retail locations.

The analysis shows areas of medium-to-high walking and biking propensity adjacent to the study area. The higher-propensity areas are primarily correlated with where people live, shop, and work along Canton Road and Bells Ferry Road. This suggests that there is demand for multimodal facilities in the area, including the potential trail extension. It also suggests that the higher-propensity nodes could benefit from the inter-connectivity provided by the proposed trail extension, and that the presence of expanded trail facilities may increase the propensity for walking and biking in the area.

Trail Usage

The Town Center CID collects data to measure trail usage throughout the year. Data shown below reflects trail use for the period from approximately July 2019 to July 2022 (note: data collection began at slightly different points for each count station, depending on when counters were installed).

Trail usage is measured in terms of average daily traffic (ADT) from 2019 to 2022, representing individuals traveling along a trail. Trail use data was collected at several locations along the existing Noonday Creek Trail, including: Vaughn Road, US 41 East, Town Center Park, I-75, I-575, and Bells Ferry Road.

The trailheads east of I-75 including Town Center Park, I-575, and Bells Ferry have the highest daily trail usage with 358, 537, and 517 users, respectively, as shown in **Figure 12**. These data indicate a high potential for users to continue along the proposed extension, should it be built.

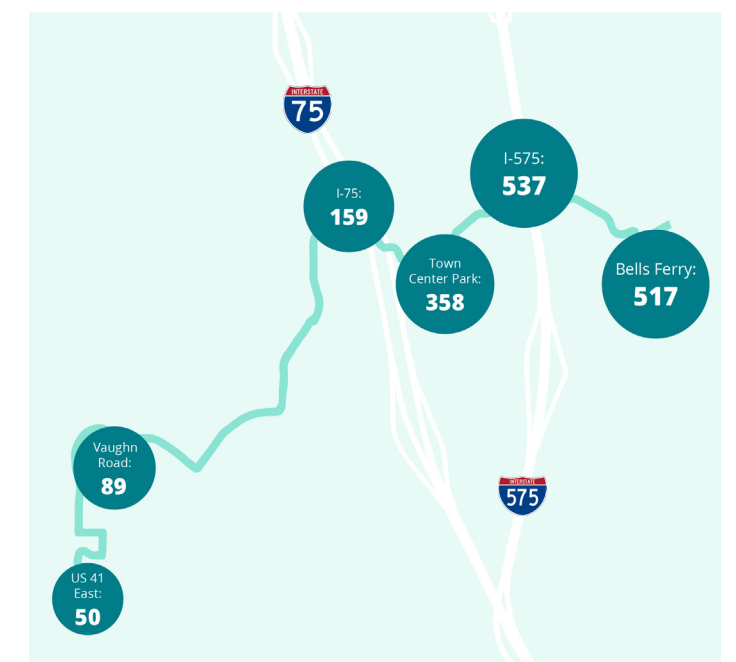


Figure 12. Trail Usage Along Noonday Creek Trail (average daily traffic)



Utilities

Underground and Overhead Utilities

Multiple utilities run along Noonday Creek in the study area, including water, sewer, electrical, and gas. In addition to property ownership, the project team is considering overhead and underground utility lines in proximity to the creek to understand where coordination with utility companies may be necessary to construct the preferred alignment of the trail. Most of Noonday Creek contains utilities along either one of the banks, or both, depending on the location along the creek.

A water main runs along the east side of Bells Ferry Road, which crosses the creek. Cobb County Water System (CCWS) is currently working on a project to replace 16,000 feet of water main along Bells Ferry Road between US 41 and Chastain Road (W2360); it will be under construction prior to the completion of this plan and should not affect the proposed trail extension.

CCWS also maintains a gravity sanitary sewer line along the west side of Noonday Creek throughout the study area - along the west side of the creek, from Bells Ferry Road to Shallowford Road (and beyond at both ends of the corridor). A half-dozen or so adjacent sewer lines that serve the Piedmont Hills, Addison Heights, Chastain Glen, Canterbury and other neighborhoods on the east side of the creek feed into the line on the west side at various points throughout the corridor. Dozens of manholes for the sewer line are in place to facilitate maintenance. CCWS is part of the PMT for the project and has been coordinating closely with the project team and Cobb County DOT throughout the study.

CCWS has easements with many private properties along the creek that allows access to underground utilities, including water and sewer lines, for maintenance purposes. Likewise, Cobb County Marietta Water Authority (CCMWA) has an existing water main in an easement just north of Shallowford Road, where the Woodstock Trail Extension project will terminate. As design and implementation advances, Cobb County DOT will work with CCWS, CCMWA, and private property owners to negotiate easements and/or acquisitions as needed.

Overhead electrical lines traverse the north end of the study corridor, within Noonday Creek Park. The overhead power lines can be seen in aerial imagery and from the ground.

Georgia Power provides guidance that general consideration should be given to maintain a minimum of 25 feet of undisturbed area around a structure or attachment location. Additionally, Georgia Power will consider accommodating recreational facilities within easements provided that the facility does not interfere, obstruct, or endanger existing utilities.

With the locally preferred alignment option following the west side of the creek through the study area for a significant distance (see Chapter 4), coordination between Cobb County DOT, CCWS, and the County's chosen designer will need to coordinate closely to ensure the trail design does not interfere with utility access and maintenance. Guidance provided by CCWS is included in the concept report for the trail extension (a companion deliverable to this planning report). Likewise, coordination will be needed with Georgia Power.



Manholes dot the landscape along the west side of the creek, following the underground sewer line.

Land Use and Development

Neighborhoods and Subdivisions

Much of the development to the east, south, and southeast of the study area consists of single-family homes and subdivisions. There are 60 subdivisions within a half-mile of the Bells Ferry trailhead, as shown in **Figure 13**.

The largest of the subdivisions is Piedmont Hills, which extends from the northeast of the trailhead, to the southeast. Its westernmost boundary abuts Noonday Creek and Bells Ferry Road, while its southernmost border is adjacent to Piedmont Road. A smaller, but substantially sized subdivision east of Piedmont Hills is Woodgate. To the north of the existing trailhead, and both Piedmont Hills and Woodgate is Addison Heights, whose western border approaches Noonday Creek's eastern banks.

The residential development to the southwest of the trailhead is contained within two subdivisions, the Gardens at Laura Creek, and the Vintage Club. Northern subdivisions include Big Shanty Plantation, Grayson Place (the smallest in size of the area subdivisions), and Brookhaven, which extends from Bells Ferry Road to Noonday Creek. The majority of the development to the west of Big Shanty Plantation and the Vintage Club consists of commercial development.

The pattern of single-family residential continues north of the Bells Ferry Trailhead, throughout the study area. In this area, the largest subdivision (measured in area) is Canterbury Park, whose northwest border abuts Noonday Creek's eastern bank. To the west of Noonday Creek lies Durham Estates and Maggie Valley.

Several of these subdivisions are designated historic (developed in or prior to 1974), including Addison Heights, Brookhaven, Canterbury, Durham Estates, Piedmont Hills, and Woodgate.

Commercial and Office Development

Located to the west of the Noonday Creek Trailhead at Bells Ferry Road, the TCCID (Town Center Community Improvement District) is a self-taxing district generally bounded by Chastain Road to the north, Bells Ferry Road to the east, Shiloh Valley Drive to the south, and Barrett Lakes Boulevard to the west. The TCCID has a high concentration of commercial development, including smaller commercial spaces, national chain anchors, and office space.

There is a significant amount of commercial development along the Canton Road corridor. This commercial development is lower-density compared to TCCID, generally consisting of fast food restaurants, and individual retail stores, including drugstores and other shops that serve consumer needs. Much of the development is classified as General Commercial or Neighborhood Shopping, and services the surrounding single-family residential neighborhoods.

Reflecting the diversity of the commercial districts and development within this area (including within the TCCID itself), there are a number of commercial zoning classifications assigned. The zoning classifications include those which are compatible with smaller, neighborhood-oriented commercial, commercial centers which serve multiple communities, and regional commercial centers which serve communities within and outside of Cobb County.

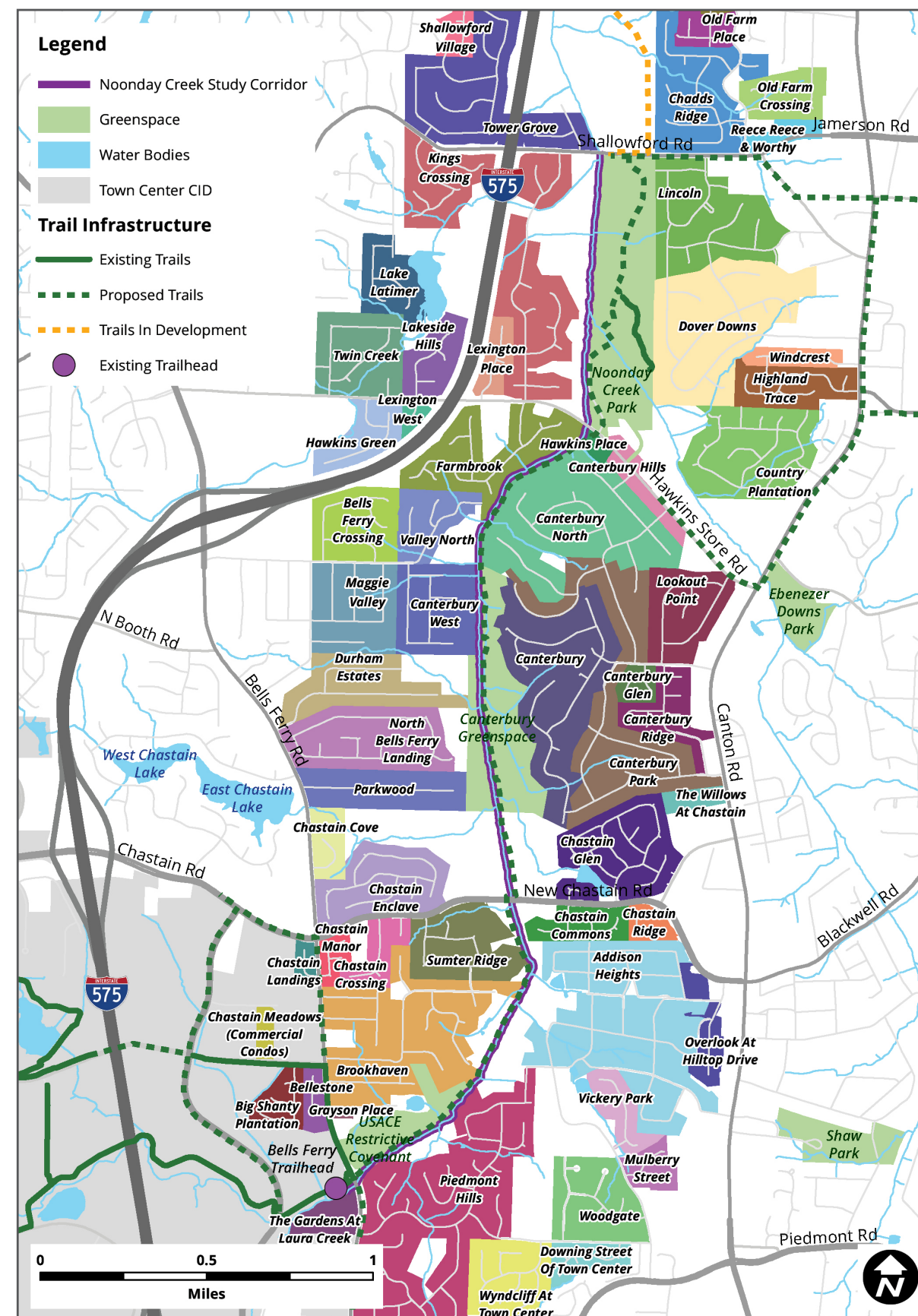


Figure 13. Neighborhoods and Subdivisions

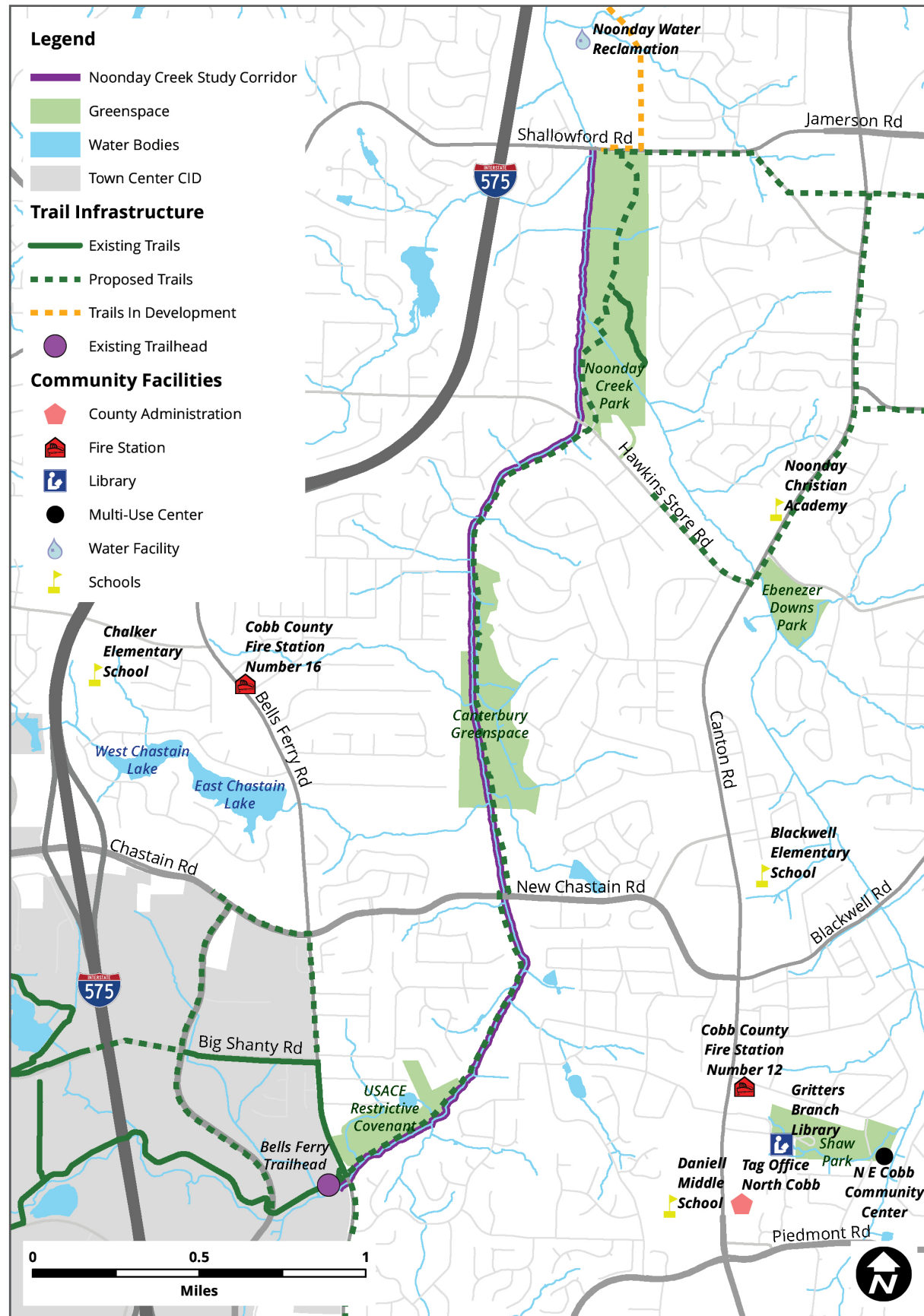


Figure 14. Community Facilities

Community Facilities and Destinations

The study area includes numerous community facilities and destinations including schools, libraries, commercial districts, and government and public safety facilities. These are depicted in **Figure 14**.

There are two public schools within one mile of Noonday Creek, both located east of Bells Ferry Road. Bells Ferry Elementary School is located at the northeast corner of Bells Ferry Road and Piedmont Road. Daniell Middle School is located further east, closer to the western border of Canton Road.

While KSU is located outside of the immediate study area, its proximity to the study area (approximately two miles from Noonday Creek) and connection to the existing Noonday Creek Trail affords an opportunity for increased access to the campus. The majority of the campus is bound by I-75, with several facilities, including the stadium, located to the south of Big Shanty Road within the TCCID.

The closest library to the proposed Noonday Creek Trail extension is Gritters Library, which is a location within the Cobb County Public Library System. It is located almost directly east of the trail, to the east of Canton Road. In addition to schools and libraries, the area contains one government office (the North Cobb Tag Office along Canton Road) and two fire stations. These fire stations are Cobb County Fire Station #12 and Fire Station #16.

Parks and Greenspace

A potential extension of Noonday Creek Trail would provide additional recreation and active transportation opportunities to several neighborhoods in northern Cobb County, connecting them to Bells Ferry Trailhead and Noonday Creek Park, and facilitating access to parks and recreation in the City of Woodstock. Several parks, greenspaces, and other recreational facilities are within the study area.

Bells Ferry Trailhead

The Bells Ferry Trailhead is the eastern terminus of the existing Noonday Creek Trail at Bells Ferry Road. The trailhead was completed in 2017 and includes 50 parking spaces, restrooms, a drinking fountain, and a bike share station. It also includes trash receptacles, seating, and lighting.

Canterbury Greenspace

Between New Chastain Road and Hawkins Store Road east of Noonday Creek, the Canterbury Park neighborhood contains a network of trails within a wetland area. While this area is not officially a park and the trails are primarily for use by Canterbury residents, they are located on property owned by Cobb County.

Noonday Creek Park

Noonday Creek Park is a 99-acre park located in the northern portion of the study area, with access from Hawkins Store Road and Shallowford Road. The park has 482 parking spaces, three restroom buildings, a concession area, picnic area, and a playground. The park features twelve soccer fields, two football fields, a BMX track, and a meeting track.

Other Nearby Park Facilities

Within one mile of this portion of Noonday Creek are two additional parks: Ebenezer Downs Park and Shaw Park. Existing and potential future sidewalks or trails in the vicinity of these parks could provide multimodal access to a future extension of Noonday Creek Trail.



Zoning and Land Use

The study area is largely characterized by residential land uses. These primarily consist of Low Density Residential (LDR) uses in the form of single-family residential homes and neighborhoods. Residential development within this portion of Cobb County has traditionally consisted of single-family dwellings within subdivisions. Although this pattern continues, some more moderate density single-family residential communities, townhomes, and condominium complexes have been developed at more moderate densities in select areas. Areas along Bells Ferry Road and New Chastain Road are designated as Medium Density Residential, such as townhome and condominium developments.

The map shown in **Figure 15** illustrates future land use, as articulated in Cobb County's current Comprehensive Plan, which designates future land use to the year 2040. As shown, development patterns in this area are not planned for significant change - continuing with patterns similar to what is already in place today - with much of the study area to remain lower density residential uses.

Also as shown, commercial uses tend to be concentrated along busier roads, such as Bells Ferry Road south of Chastain Road and along Chastain Road, west of Bells Ferry Road. The Town Center CID, which lies to the west of Bells Ferry Road and south of Chastain Road, contains some commercial and institutional uses, within Community Activity Center (CAC) category. Specifically, commercial districts within the study area are generally zoned for:

- Smaller neighborhood retail
- Community retail
- General commercial uses

Likewise, the area along Canton Road, east of the study area, is characterized primarily by commercial and institutional uses within areas designated as CAC and Neighborhood Activity Center (NAC) - meant to serve the needs of nearby communities or neighborhoods.

Farther afield from the creek, in the outer parts of the study area is land classified as Public/Institutional (PI), seen in smaller pockets along major roadways. Much of the land located to the west of the study area, within the TCCID, is categorized as Regional Activity Center (RAC) - intended to support a higher intensity of development to serve a regional market with uses such as retail/service, medium/higher density residential, office, and others.

Importantly, much of the area immediately adjacent to Noonday Creek throughout the study area consists of land designated as Park/Recreation/Conservation (PRC), as shown in green in the map at right. The PRC land use category provides land for active or passive recreational uses for public and privately owned property. Environmentally sensitive areas such as flood plains and wetlands are also included within this category. Land designated for such uses along the study corridor includes the area bound by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Restrictive Covenant (see page 3-13), the area along both sides of the creek north of Chastain Road/New Chastain Road, and Noonday Creek Park.

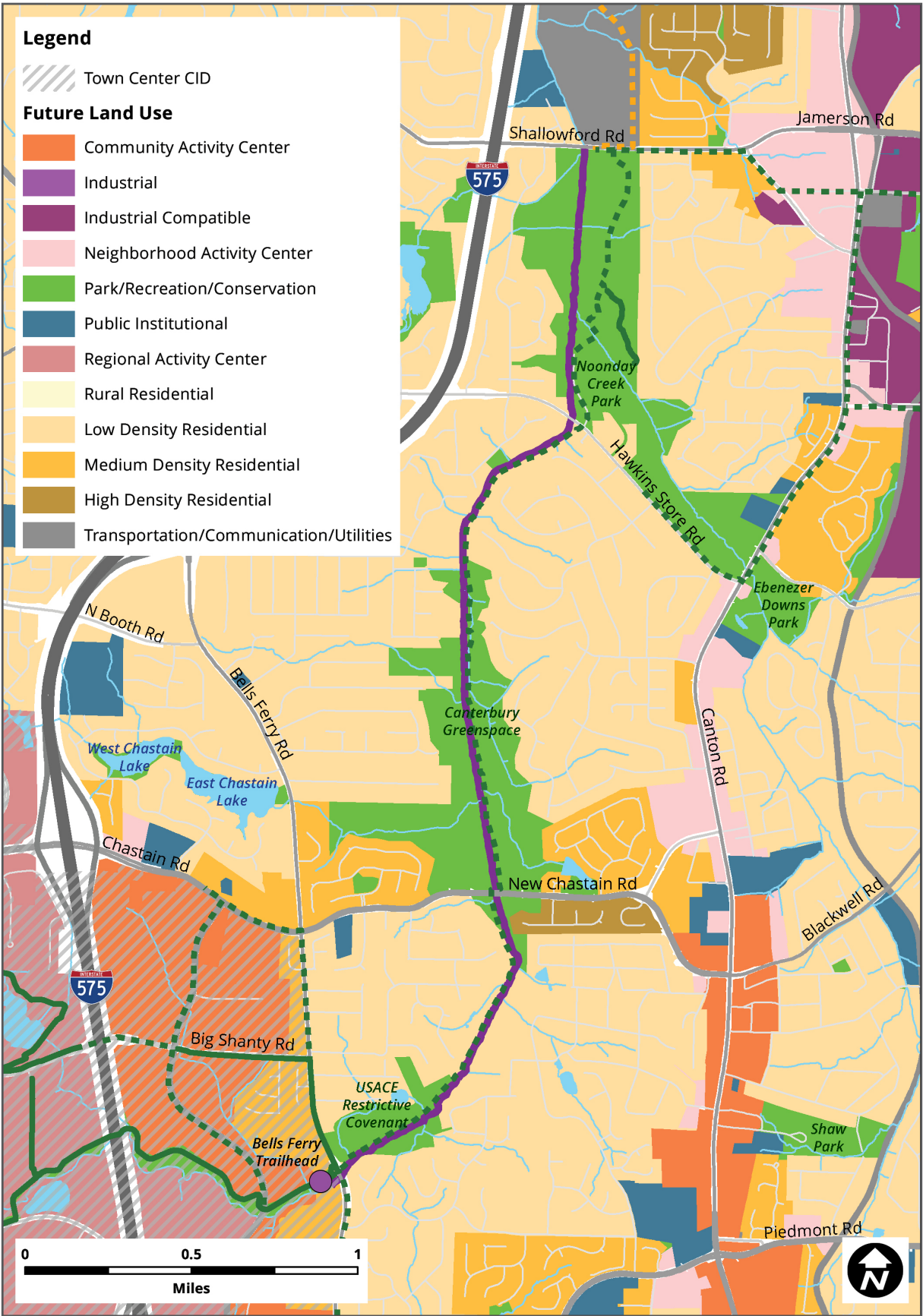


Figure 15. Future Land Use



Environmental Considerations

Ecology

Two wetland areas and 24 streams were identified within 150 feet of the Noonday Creek Study Corridor. Aerial imagery and soils data indicates the presence of wetlands systems along the eastern side of the study corridor.

State and Federally Protected Species

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Consultation lists the federally endangered Michaux's sumac (*Rhus michauxii*), federally threatened Cherokee darter (*Etheostoma scotti*), white fringeless orchid (*Platanthera integrilabia*), and federal candidate monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) as species of concern within the project area. Potential habitat was found for the following species:

- **Monarch butterfly** (*Danaus plexippus*): Potentially suitable habitat occurs statewide, but is not likely to affect the study area.
- **Cherokee darter** (*Etheostoma scotti*): Habitat is present in Noonday Creek, but is considered extirpated within the Noonday Creek watershed.
- **Dwarf sumac** (*Rhus copallinum*): Habitat is not present within the survey area evaluated due to invasive species infestation (kudzu) within the woodlands. Neighboring woodlands may provide suitable habitat.
- **White fringeless orchid** (*platanthera integrilabia*): Suitable habitat is present within the wet prairies observed within the sewer easement

A preliminary review for state-listed species of concern identified Georgia aster (*Symphyotrichum georgianum*) and lined chub (*Hybopsis lineapunctata*) as species of concern within the project area.

- **Georgia aster** (*Symphyotrichum georgianum*): Suitable habitat was observed along the west side of Noonday Creek in areas of the sewer easement
- **Lined Chub** (*Hybopsis lineapunctata*): Suitable habitat is present within Noonday Creek

History

A history assessment was conducted for areas within a half mile of each side of Noonday Creek, excluding properties located west of I-575. For the purpose of this scoping study, historians used the year 1974 to define properties as being of a "historic age." Readily available data from the Cobb County Tax Assessor; historicaerials.com; Georgia's Natural, Archaeological, and Historic Resources GIS (GNAHRGIS); Google Earth; and a windshield survey was used to identify potential historic-aged properties. This evaluation identified several historic-age resources, as shown in **Figure 16**:

- One historic-age bridge
- Nine historic-age districts
- One historic-age park
- 21 historic-age houses

Archaeology

An archaeology evaluation was conducted at a total of thirteen previously surveyed sites located within one kilometer of Noonday Creek. One site is within the immediate vicinity of the creek, and three additional sites have the potential to extend into the project corridor, depending on the results of further future investigations.

USACE Restrictive Covenant

A Restrictive Covenant was established between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and Cobb County for several acres of property northeast of the Bells Ferry Road bridge in 2003 as an off-site wetland mitigation and preservation site associated with an extension of runway at Cobb County International Airport. It is associated with USACE Permit Number 960010730. The covenant and mitigation plan provides for a linear park along Noonday Creek, and could accommodate a bicycle and hiking trail, and would compliment on-site wetland preservation and enhancement.

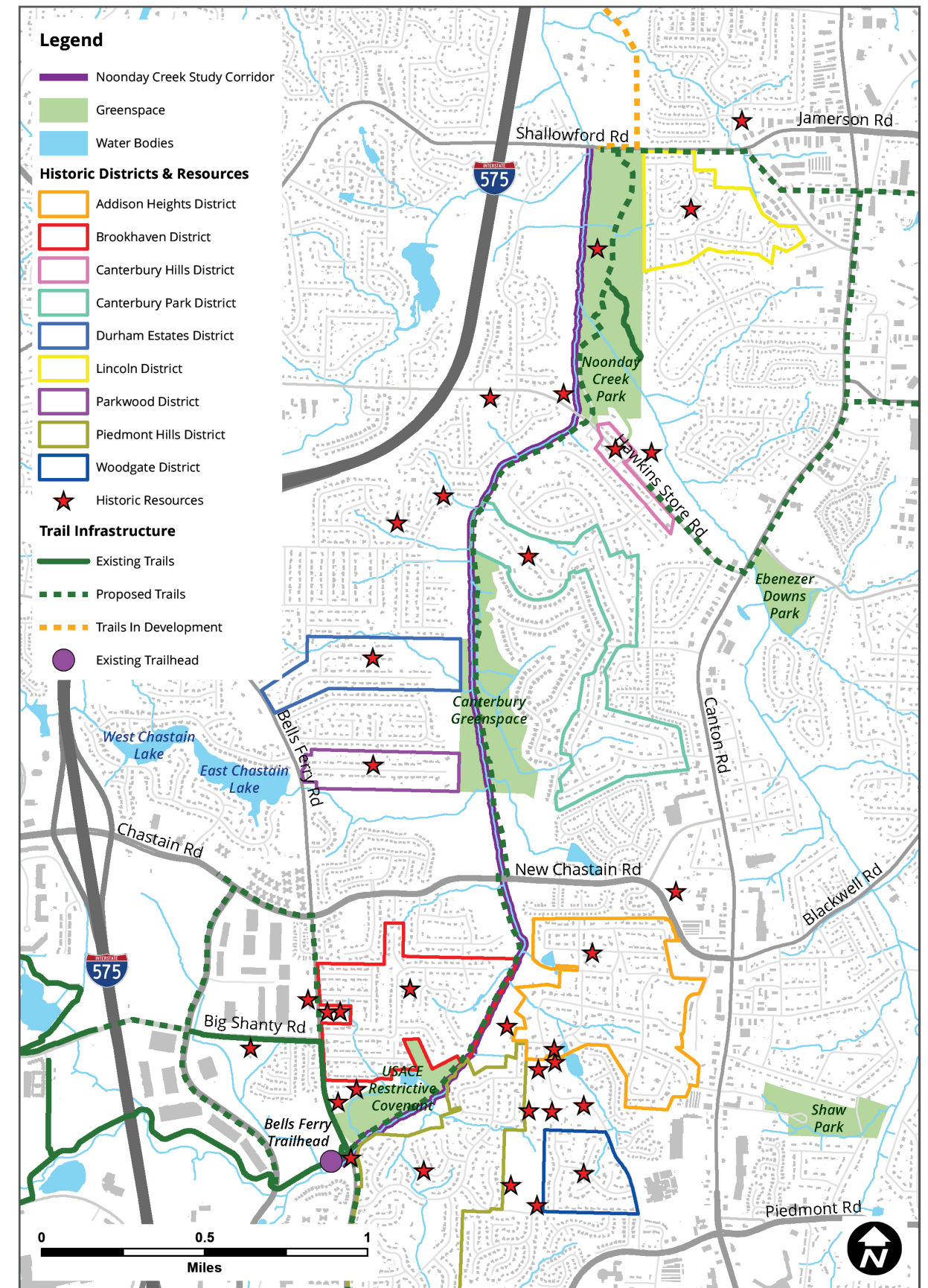


Figure 16. Historic Districts and Resources Within the Study Area

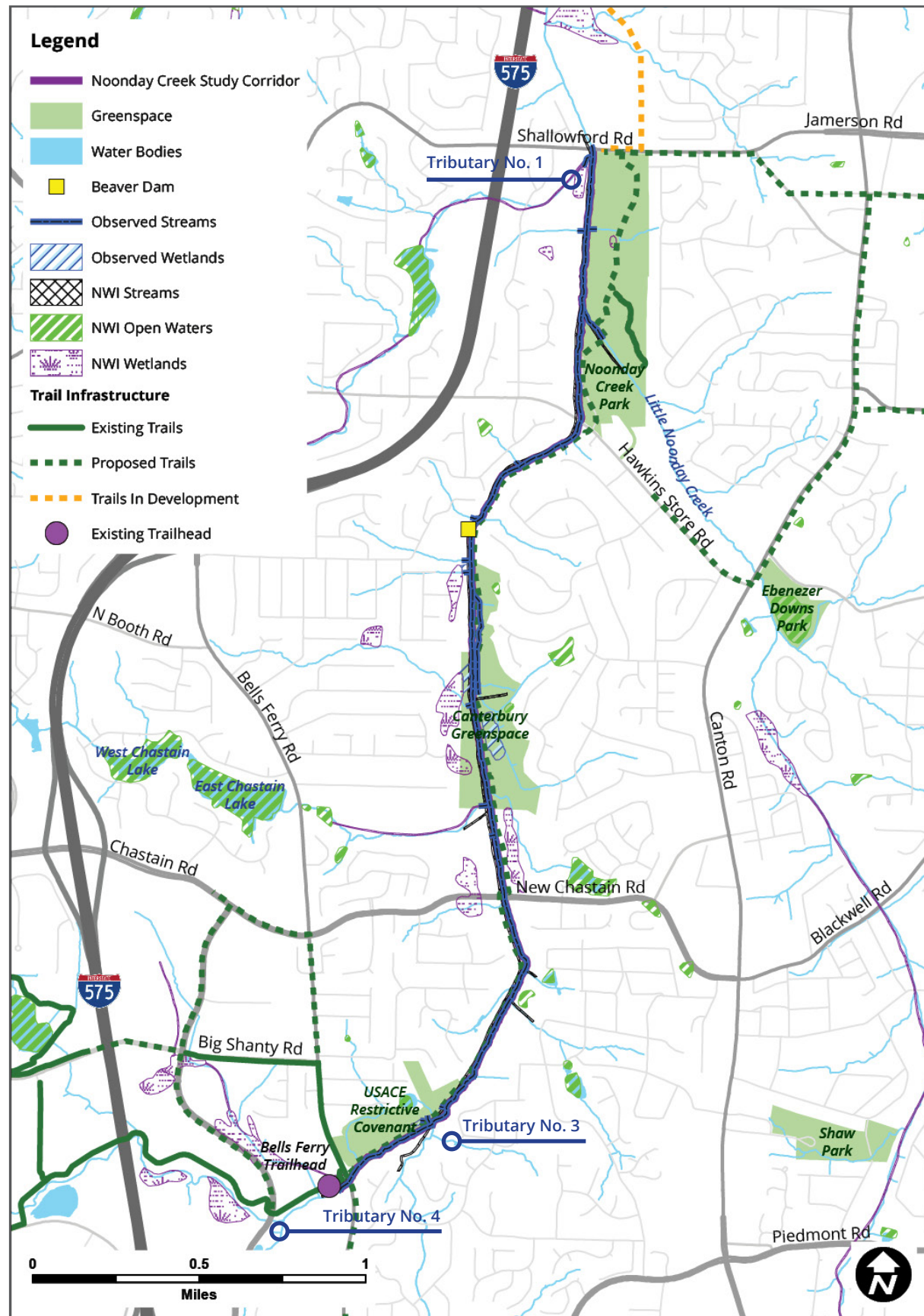


Figure 17. Water Resources Within the Study Area

Hydrological and Geological Considerations

Hydrology

Noonday Creek is one to three feet deep on average, with a steady and clear flow with established vegetation along the banks. The channel width is approximately 25 to 50 feet under normal/low flow conditions, with an established floodplain width between 300 to 500 feet for the 100-year base flood event, and areas as wide as 1,000 feet in some locations. High water marks noted during the site visit indicated regular rise in water surface elevations of approximately five feet, with extreme rises of ten to fifteen feet for larger storm events (ten year events or more).

Multiple tributaries enter Noonday Creek, including regulated streams:

- Noonday Creek Tributary No. 1
- Noonday Creek Tributary No. 3
- Noonday Creek Tributary No. 4
- Little Noonday Creek

Additionally, there are unnamed tributaries approximately 1,500 feet, both upstream and downstream of New Chastain Road, as well as several smaller intermittent streams, ponds, and wetland areas along the length of the trail, as seen in **Figure 17**.

Noonday Creek is a FEMA-regulated Zone AE stream that drains an area of 34.39 square miles from downstream of Shallowford Road, and 17.50 square miles upstream from Bells Ferry Road. The majority of Noonday Creek is located within the regulated floodplain, and a proposed trail along the creek would fall within the floodway.

The drainage area consists primarily of urbanized, developed land consisting mostly of residential areas, with some additional commercial developments. There are residential structures in the vicinity of the proposed trail, with some structures within the FEMA designated floodplain. There are existing water and sewer utilities within the floodplain along the west side of the creek.

Due to the fact that much of the sewer easement along Noonday Creek falls within a floodplain or floodway, a trail constructed along the creek will likely require specific permits and impact costs as well as the implementation timeline.

Geology

The study area lies within the Piedmont Physiographic Province of Georgia. The soil profile for the Piedmont Physiographic Province consists of superficial soils that are the residual products of the in-place weathering of the parent rock. Along the creek, there are sub-grade soils that may consist of soft and wet soils. If the trail were to be constructed along the creek, these types of soils may require stabilizing prior to fill placement and/or pavement construction. The terrain along Noonday Creek is relatively flat and therefore may not drain well.



Turtle Observed Near Noonday Creek During a Field Visit



4

The Concept

Trail Extension Concept, Alignment Maps, Alternatives Considered

Alternatives Considered

Overview

Throughout the course of the scoping study, a number of potential trail alignment options were considered and evaluated. The team took an iterative and collaborative approach, using a series of mapping exercises, workshop style brainstorming sessions, and work sessions with Cobb County staff and the PMT.

Beginning in the fall of 2022, upon completion of the Existing Conditions Analysis task and associated report, the team conducted a series of sessions, both internal and with County staff, to examine key findings from the existing conditions and field visits, overlay maps and data, and to talk through the potential opportunities and challenges presented by alignments along roads, adjacent to the creek, and through nearby neighborhoods. Using large printed maps, online whiteboard platforms, and a variety of other tools, as shown in **Figure 18**, the team mapped out potential options for further evaluation and consideration.

This included layering and consideration of a variety of data and factors, including but not limited to:

Transportation Network

- Roadway functional classification
- Posted speed limit
- Crossing opportunities
- Sidewalks and trails
- Bridge condition
- Safety and crash history

Land Use and Community Context

- Existing and future land use
- Parks and other publicly owned land
- Community facilities
- Existing utilities

Environmental Factors

- Historic-age structures and districts
- Wetlands, open waters, streams
- Flood plains, flood zones, and floodways
- Stream buffer requirements
- Topography and slopes
- Permitting requirements

Drawing from this initial identification of potential alignment options, the team identified three main potential options with variations, including options on both sides of the creek, and along Bells Ferry Road. In evaluating these potential options, the team identified and considered a range of factors in several categories:

- User Experience
- Access and Equity
- Utility Impacts
- Property Impacts and Right-of-Way Considerations
- Environmental and Permitting Needs
- Cost Considerations

These options were further refined based on input from Cobb County and the PMT, then presented to the Stakeholder Steering Committee (SSC) in December 2022 (see Chapter 2 for more information). Based on feedback from the SSC, the team again refined the potential options, met with staff from Cobb County DOT, PARKS, and Community Development, and then presented a variety of options to community members for input and feedback at the March 2023 Community Open House. After gathering feedback from the Community Open House, the project team revised and refined the two primary alignment options and shared these versions with SSC in May 2023. Based on input from this meeting and Cobb County, it was agreed that an alignment along the west side of the creek was the preferred option, while an alignment that partially follows Bells Ferry Road was the first alternative.

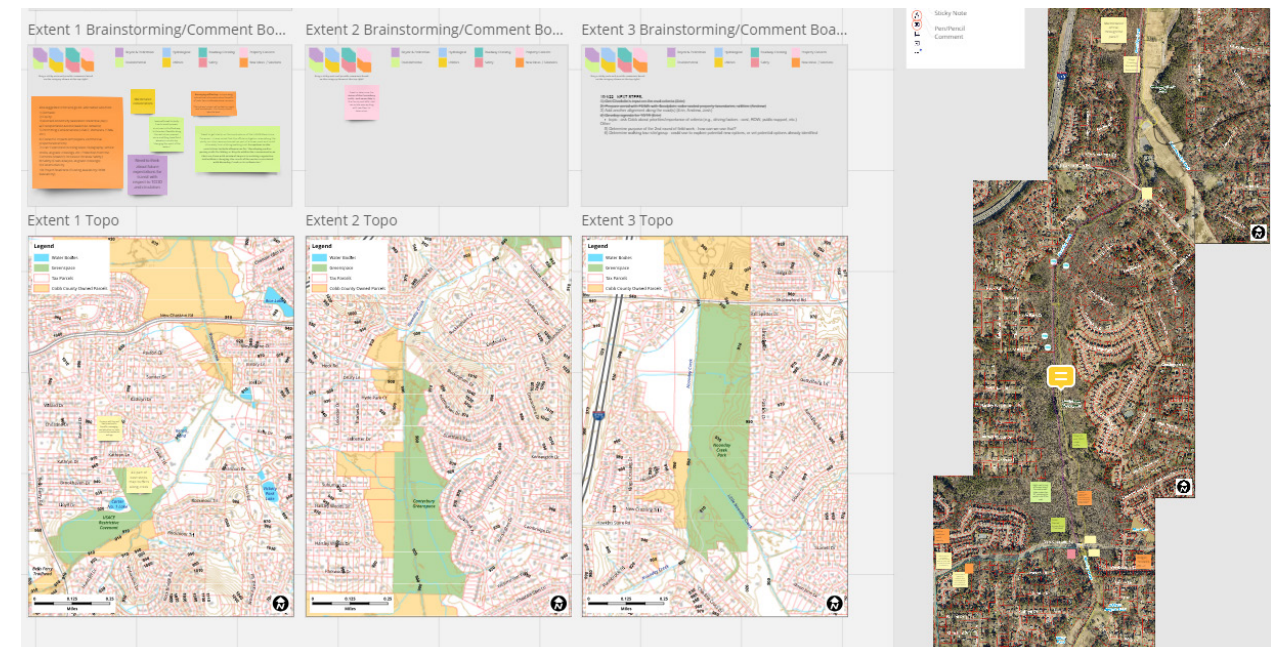


Figure 18. Maps and Notes from Alignment Work Sessions



Project team members and Cobb County staff at an alignment evaluation work session



A team member adds feedback and comments to alignment evaluation maps



Alignment Evaluation

Ultimately, two primary alignment options were selected for inclusion in the concept report, as shown in **Figure 19**: the Locally Preferred Alternative (Option 1) along the creek and Alternative 1 (Option 2) partially along Bells Ferry Road.

Locally Preferred Alternative: Option 1

As documented in the approved Concept Report for the Noonday Creek Trail Extension (which accompanies this report as one of the final deliverables for this scoping study), the locally preferred alternative largely follows the west side of Noonday Creek. The Creekside or Preferred Alignment (Option 1) was chosen as the preferred alignment because it is anticipated to impact fewer private properties, require less utility relocation, cost less, and because it aligns more with community preferences, as expressed in survey results, at the Community Open House, and through the Stakeholder Steering Committee.

Additionally, this alignment along the creek would provide separation from the roadway, making a safer and more comfortable experience for trail users - one that is removed from vehicular traffic and that is more scenic. Although it requires more structures for stream crossings than the roadside option, it is anticipated to impact fewer private residential properties, and is anticipated to cost less than the roadside option - at \$19 million total for design, right-of-way, utilities, construction, and environmental mitigation. This option also better aligns with community and stakeholder feedback in that it avoids having the trail alongside a road on which people regularly drive 45 miles per hour or more and at-grade road crossings.

Alternative 1 / Option 2

The primary alternative evaluated, which is also included in the approved Concept Report, is referred to as the Bells Ferry Road and Spur Alignment (Alternative 1 / Option 2). This option would provide a multi-use path connecting from the Bells Ferry Road bridge to the east side of Bells Ferry Road. From there it would continue northward along Bells Ferry Road, through the future proposed roundabout at the intersection of Big Shanty Road (GDOT PI No. PI0019616) and continue to cross New Chastain Road at the existing traffic signal. The trail would then continue northward to the existing sewer line and easement, where it would rejoin the west side of Noonday Creek. From there, this alternative would follow the Creekside or Preferred Alignment along the west side of the creek into Noonday Creek Park, where it would connect to the proposed future trailhead and Woodstock's future trail (PI 0016015).

This alignment would avoid some potential impacts to private property along the creek, but in total is anticipated to impact a greater number of parcels overall - in part due to the wider buffer needed when a trail is alongside a road - compared to the creekside option. It requires fewer stream crossings, but would provide a less comfortable and desirable experience based on proximity to the roadway and vehicular traffic. It is also a more expensive option, due in part to utilities, drainage, grading, environmental impacts, and erosion control; this alternative is estimated at slightly more than \$20 million. Feedback received during multiple stakeholder and public outreach activities indicate a preference among community members to avoid alignments along the road or that cross the road, favoring a creekside alignment over a roadside one. These are some of the reasons the creekside alignment emerged as the locally preferred option and basis for the concept.

Primary Alignment Options

After identifying and exploring multiple iterations of potential trail alignments crisscrossing the creek, two primary alternatives were evaluated:

The Locally Preferred Alternative (Option 1) - Creekside

Alternative 1 (Option 2) - Bells Ferry Road and Spur Alignment

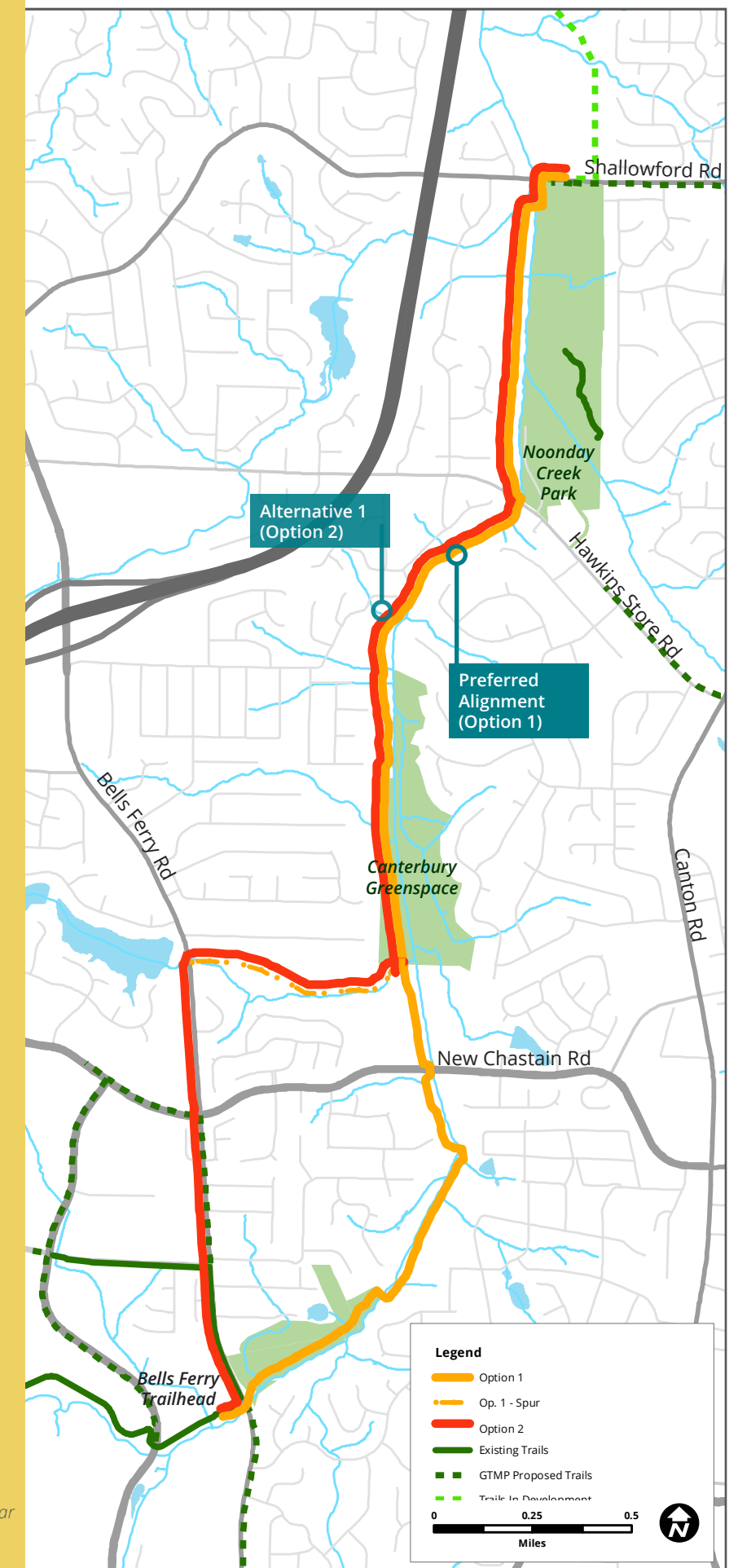


Figure 19. Trail Alignment Options Evaluated

Note: The proposed alignments from the spur perpendicular to Bells Ferry Road northward would be contiguous. They are shown offset here for illustrative purposes.



Trail Extension Concept

Overview

The project - proposed to be called the **Noonday Creek Trail Connector** - will start at the end of the existing Noonday Creek Trail segment in Cobb County, located in the Bells Ferry Trailhead, just west of Bells Ferry Road. It will end approximately opposite the entrance to Noonday Creek Park along the north side of Shallowford Road by tying to the City of Woodstock's Noonday Creek Trail Extension project (GDOT P.I. No. 0016015), which terminates with a crossing of Shallowford Road at the north end of Noonday Creek Park.

The trail is proposed to be approximately 3.8 miles long, with roughly 56 percent of the length of the trail traversing publicly owned land. It will be a multi-use trail intended for use by people on bicycle and on foot, primarily paved with concrete, and will be anticipated to include approximately 1000 linear feet of boardwalk.



Utility easement along the west side of Noonday Creek

As an option, the project could also include a roughly 0.6-mile spur trail connection between the west side of the creek and Bells Ferry Road, mainly in Cobb County-owned land where there is a sanitary sewer line north of New Chastain Road.

Consistent with community and stakeholder feedback heard throughout the scoping study process, the trail is proposed to follow Noonday Creek, primarily along the west side of the creek, as shown in **Figure 20**. Vegetation, fencing, and privacy screening would be used to enhance the aesthetics of the trail and provide screening from nearby residential properties.

Noonday Creek Trail Connector

The proposed project is a 3.8-mile hard surface, multi-use trail stretching between the existing Bells Ferry Trailhead and Shallowford Road. It leverages publicly owned land and would fill the remaining gap in the Noonday Creek Trail system between Downtown Woodstock and Kennesaw Mountain.

Figure 20. Proposed Trail Preferred Alignment



Key Features

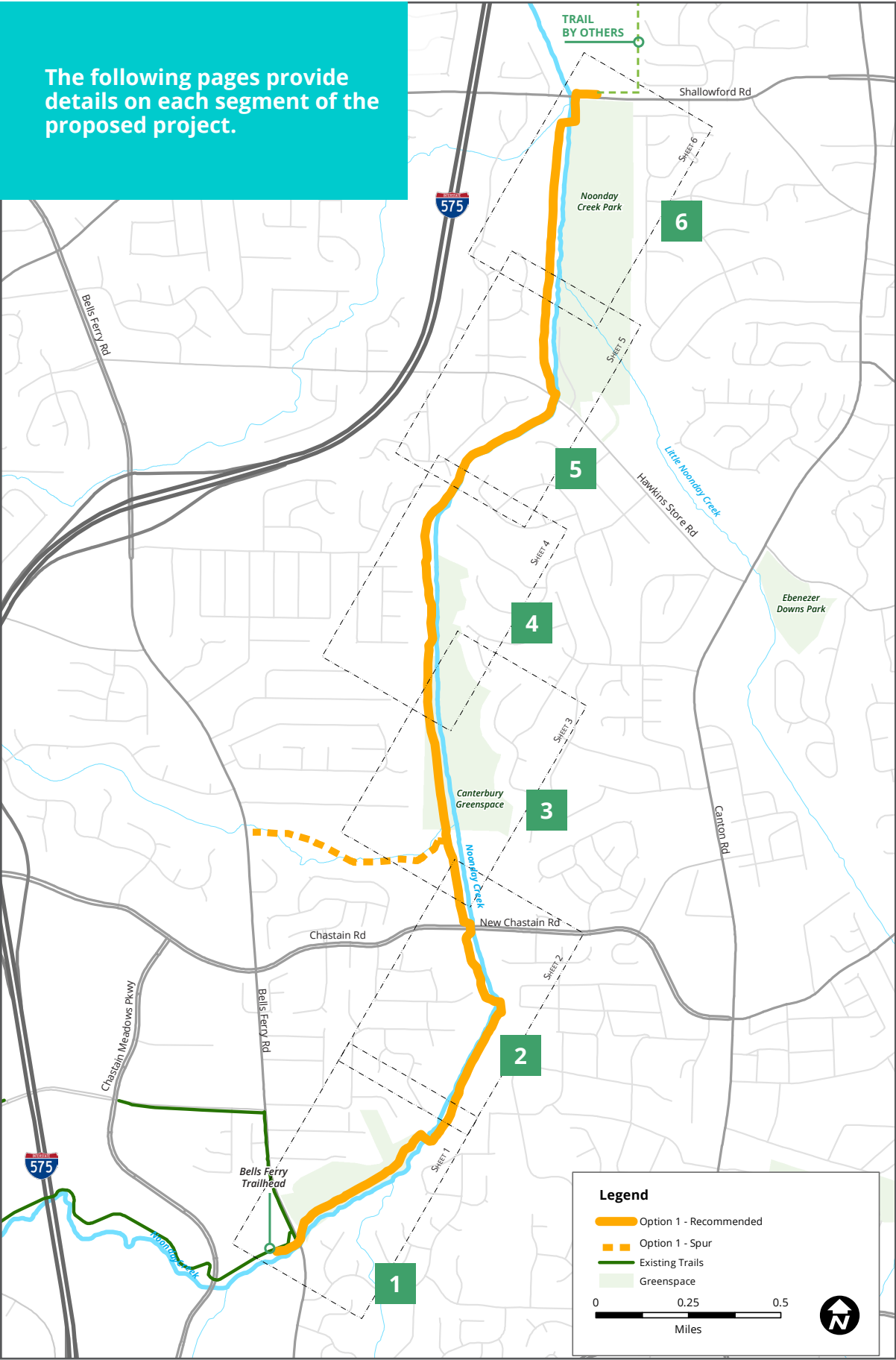
- 3.8 miles in length
(An optional 0.6-mile spur trail to connect with Bells Ferry Road north of New Chastain Road could be included if desired)
- Paved multi-use trail with some segments of boardwalk
- 10 feet wide with 2-foot wide shoulders on either side
- Largely follows the west side of Noonday Creek, parallel to the existing sewer line and easement
- Crosses Noonday Creek three times and passes beneath four roadway bridges
- Smaller bridges and/or culverts will be used to cross smaller streams and tributaries
- Vegetation, fencing, and privacy screening provided where appropriate

The proposed trail is recommended to be 10 feet wide with two-foot-wide shoulders on either side (the typical section may be narrowed in some areas where needed as determined during the design and engineering phases of the project). Boardwalk segments, where needed to cross streams, wetlands, and/or where reoccurring ponding is likely, are recommended to be constructed using composite material or concrete timbers with adequate measures implemented to provide traction for trail users in wet conditions. Small bridges and culverts will be used to traverse smaller streams and tributaries.

The trail is proposed to pass beneath existing roadway bridges at Bells Ferry Road, New Chastain Road, Hawkins Store Road, and Shallowford Road, with sufficient vertical clearance. The trail would skirt Noonday Creek Park - while providing access via existing sidewalk along Hawkins Store Road - in order to avoid potential conflicts between park and trail users.

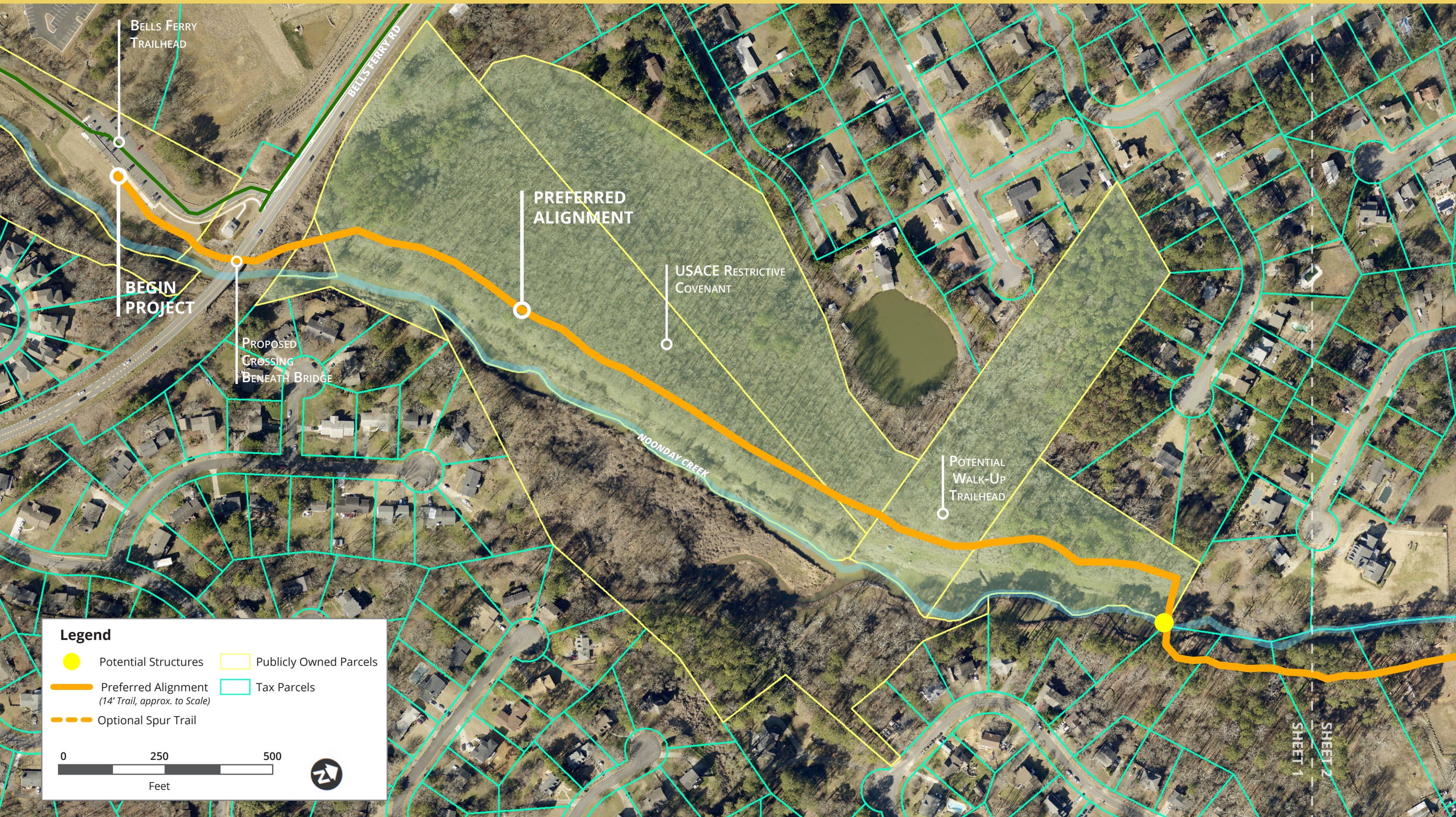
Small recreation areas or walk-up trailheads are proposed in publicly owned land at the southern end near Bells Ferry Road and north of New Chastain Road. These will feature minimal, small-scale amenities such as seating, shade, and signage. A larger trailhead is proposed at the north end of Noonday Creek Park.

Details on the proposed alignment and trail features are provided in the following sections, in order of the segments shown in **Figure 21**.



Concept Segment 1

The proposed trail starts by tying into the existing trail at the Bells Ferry Trailhead. It passes beneath the Bells Ferry Road bridge over the creek and continues along the east side of the creek, leveraging publicly owned land. Several acres of land in this area are the site of a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Restrictive Covenant, which allows for passive uses like hiking and biking trail as part of a linear park envisioned along the creek. A portion of this area could also be used for a walk-up trailhead with direct neighborhood access, if desired.



Legend

Potential Structures

Preferred Alignment
(14' Trail, approx. to Scale)

Optional Spur Trail

Publicly Owned Parcels

Tax Parcels

0

250

500

Feet

SHEET 1
SHEET 2

Legend

Potential Structures

Preferred Alignment
(14' Trail, approx. to Scale)

Optional Spur Trail

Publicly Owned Parcels

Tax Parcels

0250500

Feet

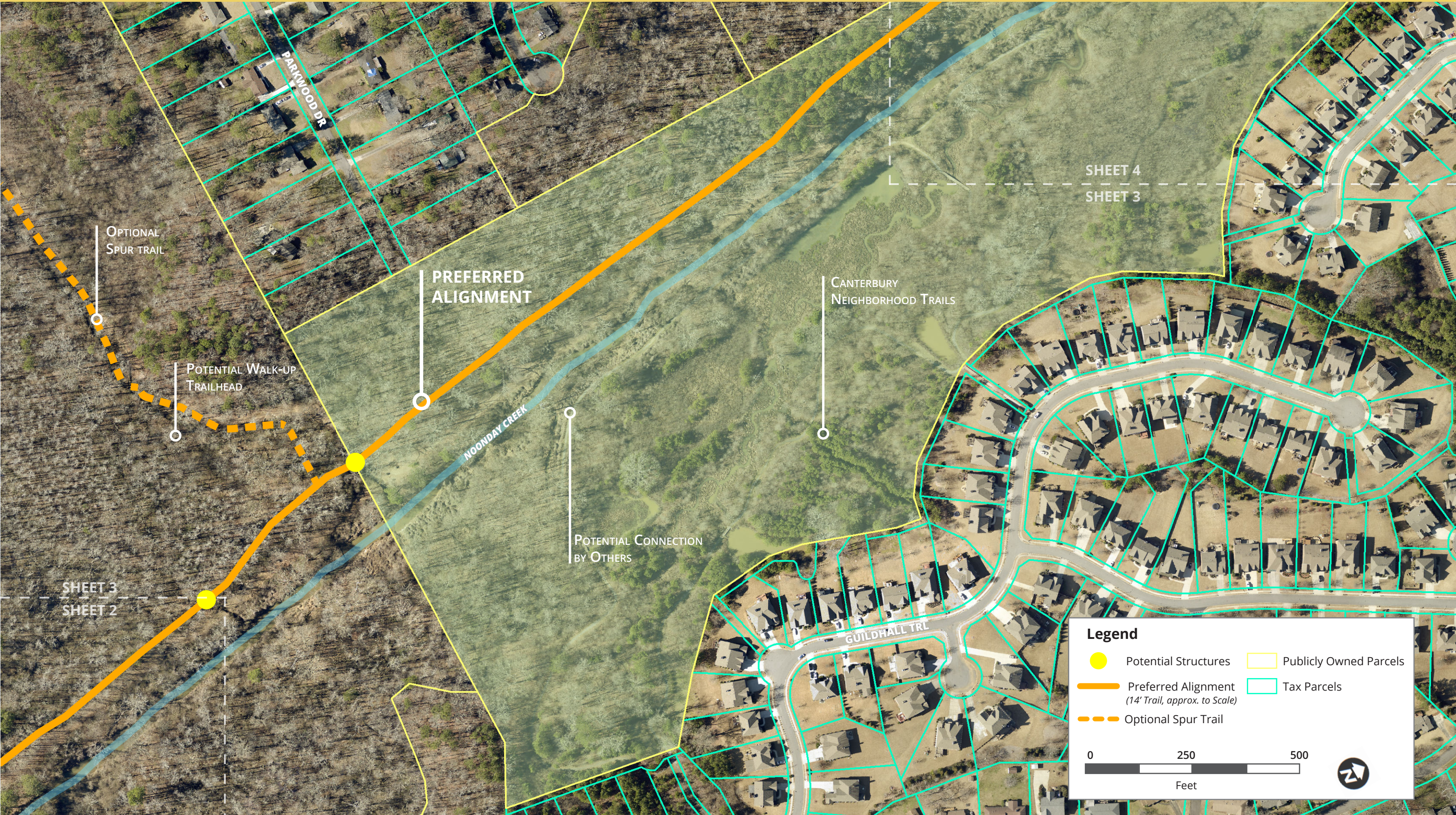
Concept Segment 2

Having crossed briefly to the east side of the creek, the proposed trail continues northward, leveraging publicly owned land and crosses back to the west side of the creek - also on publicly owned land - south of New

Chastain Road. A few culverts and a small bridge are likely needed in this area. The trail then passes beneath the two spans of New Chastain Road and continues along the west side of the creek in publicly owned land.

Concept Segment 3

The proposed trail continues along the west side of Noonday Creek through publicly owned land adjacent to the Parkwood, Canterbury West, and Durham Estates neighborhoods. There is potentially an opportunity to establish a walk-up trailhead in the County-owned land, stretching east-west from Bells Ferry Road to the creek - the site of a sewer line and easement. Additionally, in the future a potential connection across the creek to the Canterbury neighborhood could be provided if agreed upon by Cobb County and the neighborhood.



Potential Structures

Preferred Alignment
(14' Trail, approx. to Scale)

Optional Spur Trail

Publicly Owned Parcels

Tax Parcels

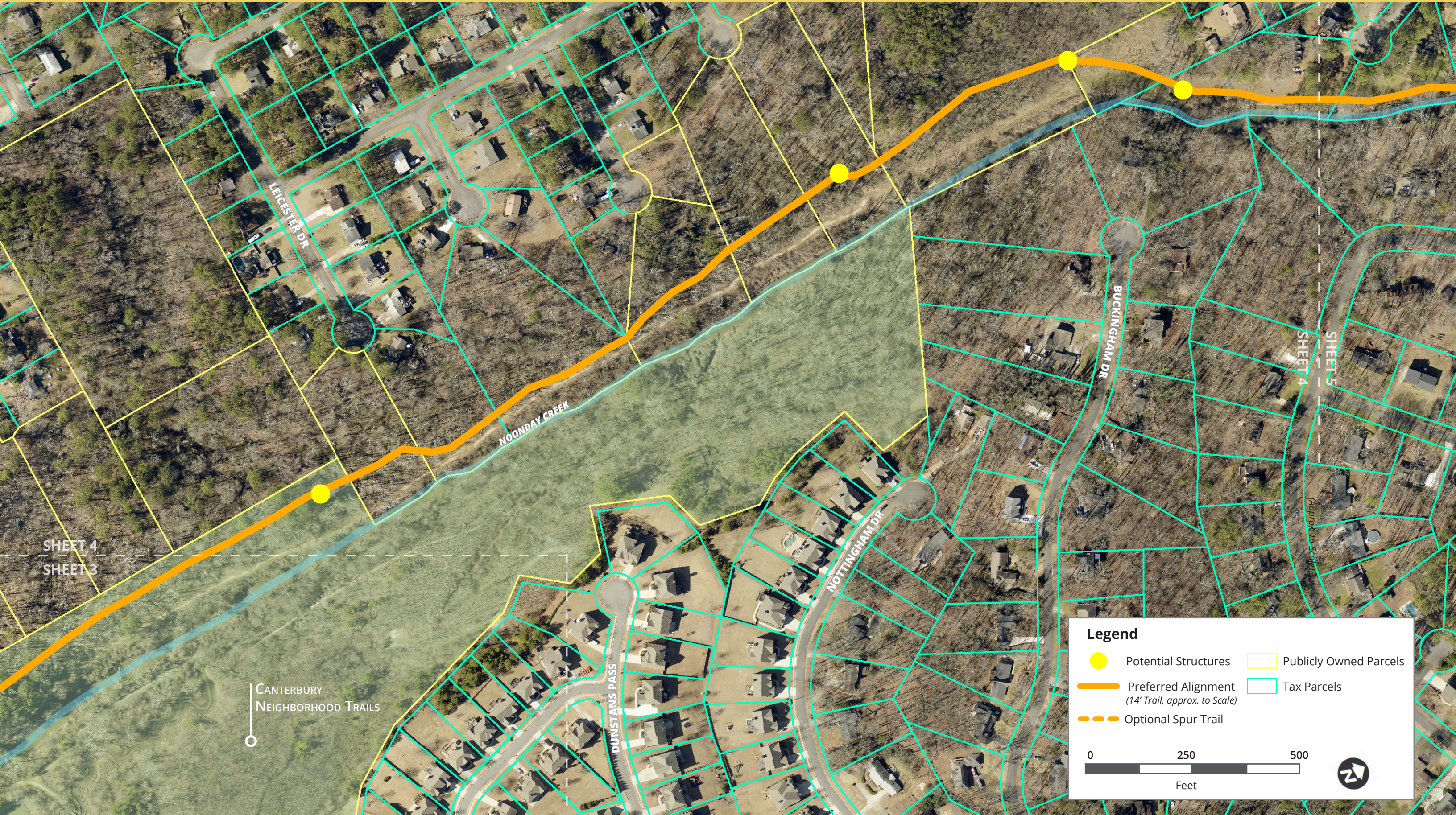
0250500

Feet

Concept Segment 4

Continuing northward along the west side of the creek, the proposed trail leverages additional publicly owned land. The trail is proposed to parallel the sewer easement along this side and coordination between

Cobb County DOT and CCWS will be important as the project progresses through design. Several culverts and smaller structures may be needed to cross tributaries and streams through this area.



Concept Segment 5

Approaching the Farmbrook neighborhood and Noonday Creek Park, the proposed trail continues on the west side of the creek, passing beneath Hawkins Store Road. Access to the southern entrance of Noonday Creek Park can be achieved using existing sidewalk on

Hawkins Store Road to the driveway to the park. North of Hawkins Store Road the proposed trail leverages additional publicly owned land and avoids potential conflicts with activities inside the park.





Concept Segment 6

The trail continues opposite Noonday Creek Park to avoid conflicts with the soccer fields and other park activities. The trail is proposed to cross back to the east side of the creek at the north end of the park, where a trailhead is proposed. The trailhead would include

seating, trash receptacles, pet waste stations, a bike repair station, and perhaps a small restroom. The trail is proposed to cross beneath Shallowford Road and could replace the flashing beacon included in Woodstock's trail extension, eliminating an at-grade crossing.

Crossings and Typical Sections

The Noonday Creek Trail Connector is proposed as a 10-foot-wide paved multi-use trail. Ten feet represents the width of a typical section of the main trail surface. It will also have two-foot-wide shoulders on either side, to promote proper drainage, allow room for passing, and provide a buffer between the trail and adjacent fences, vegetation, and other items. As a result, the full width of most segments of trail will be 14 feet.

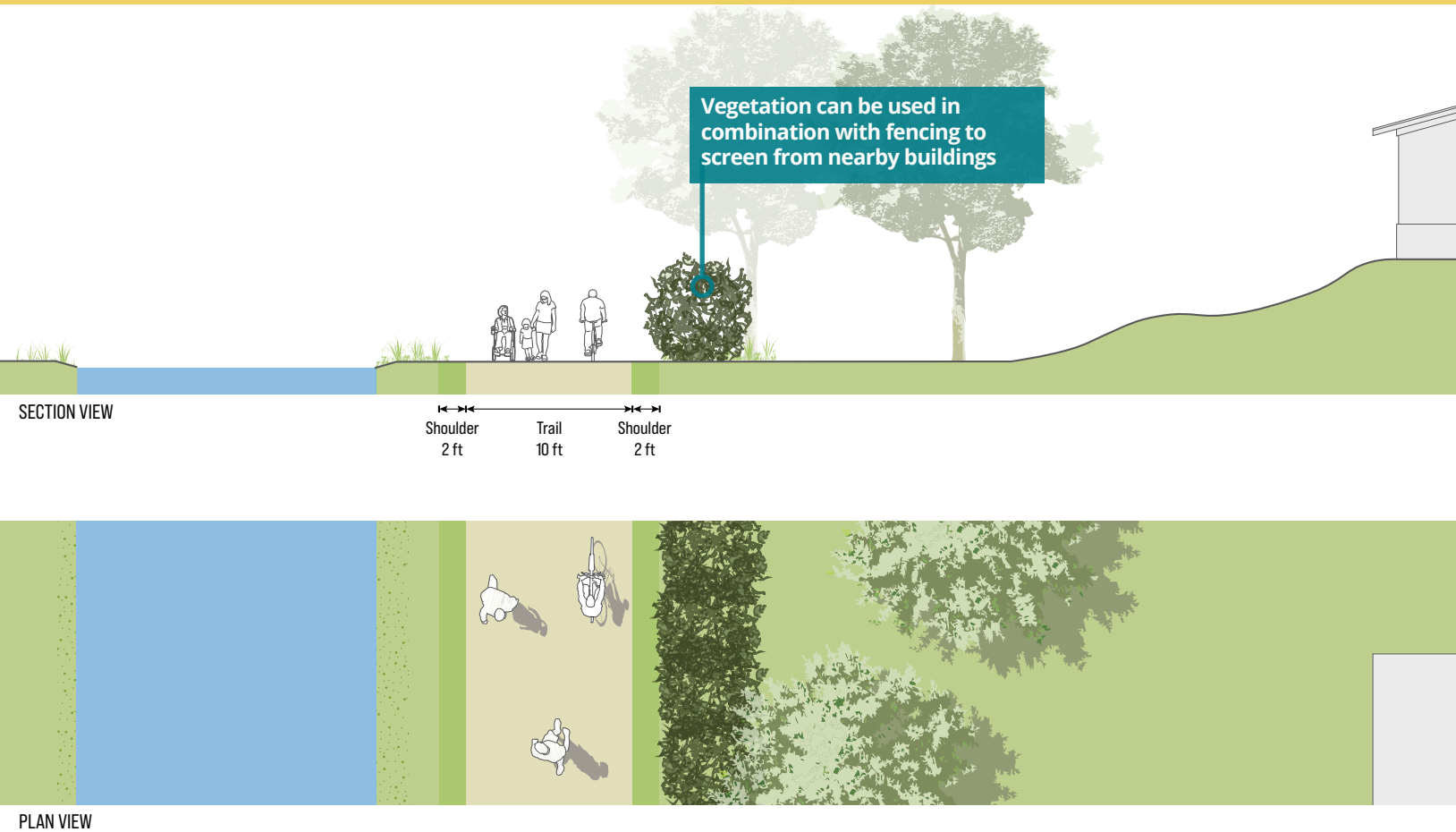


Figure 22. Illustrated Typical Section: Trail At-Grade

The images on this page show three different views that represent what typical segments of the proposed trail might look like - both in a cross-section type of view (at the top of each image) and in a plan or overhead view (at the bottom of each image). These illustrate what a typical trail will look like at ground level with vegetative screening (**Figure 22**), on a typical boardwalk segment (**Figure 23**), and passing beneath a roadway bridge (**Figure 24**).

As shown, the main path of the trail is proposed to be 10 feet wide with two-foot-wide shoulders on either side. Because a boardwalk also needs to include the full proposed cross-section, consisting of both the 10-foot wide trail and the two-foot wide shoulders, those segments are proposed to be 14-feet wide to allow for adequate passing and horizontal clearance from handrails, unless a narrower section is necessitated by constraints.

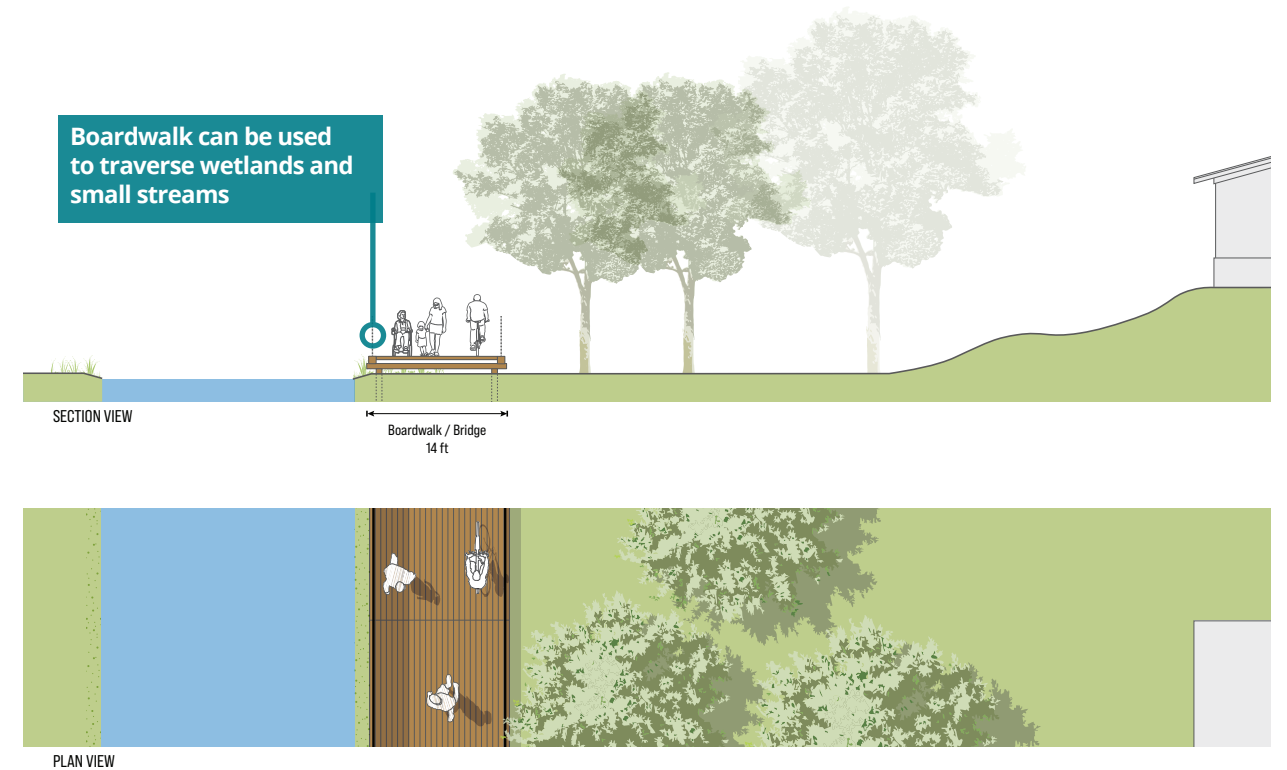


Figure 23. Illustrated Typical Section: Trail Boardwalk

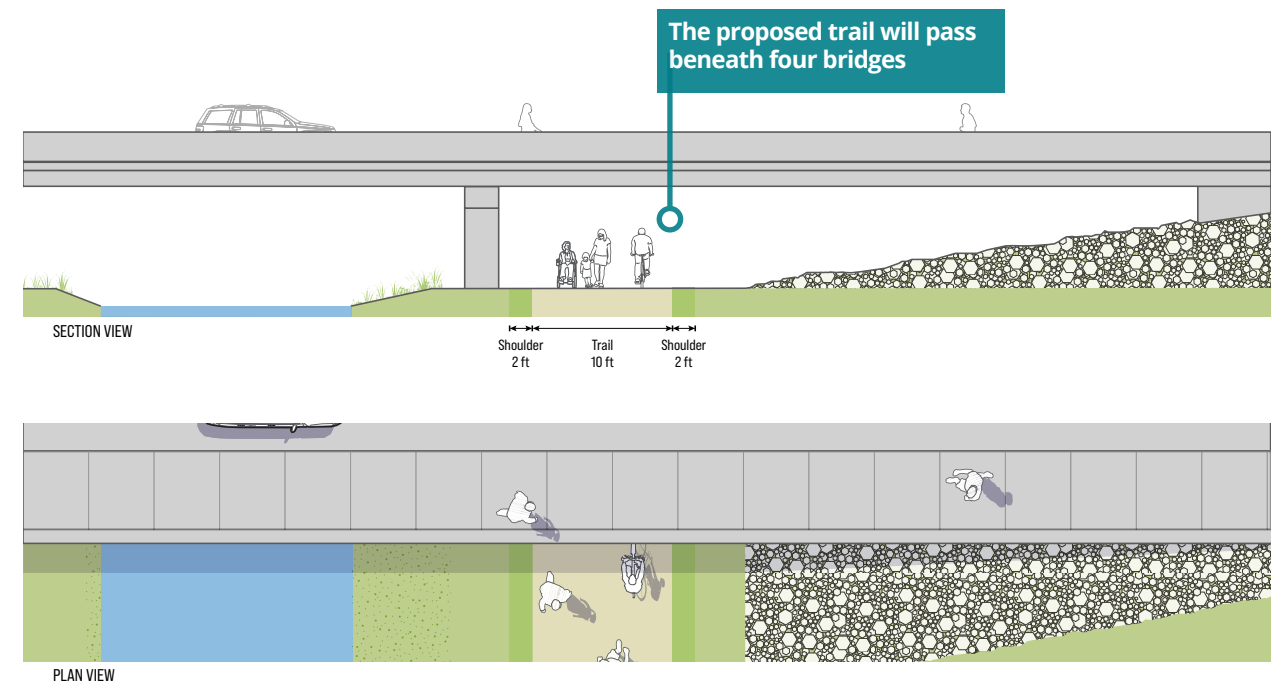


Figure 24. Illustrated Typical Section: Trail Beneath Bridge

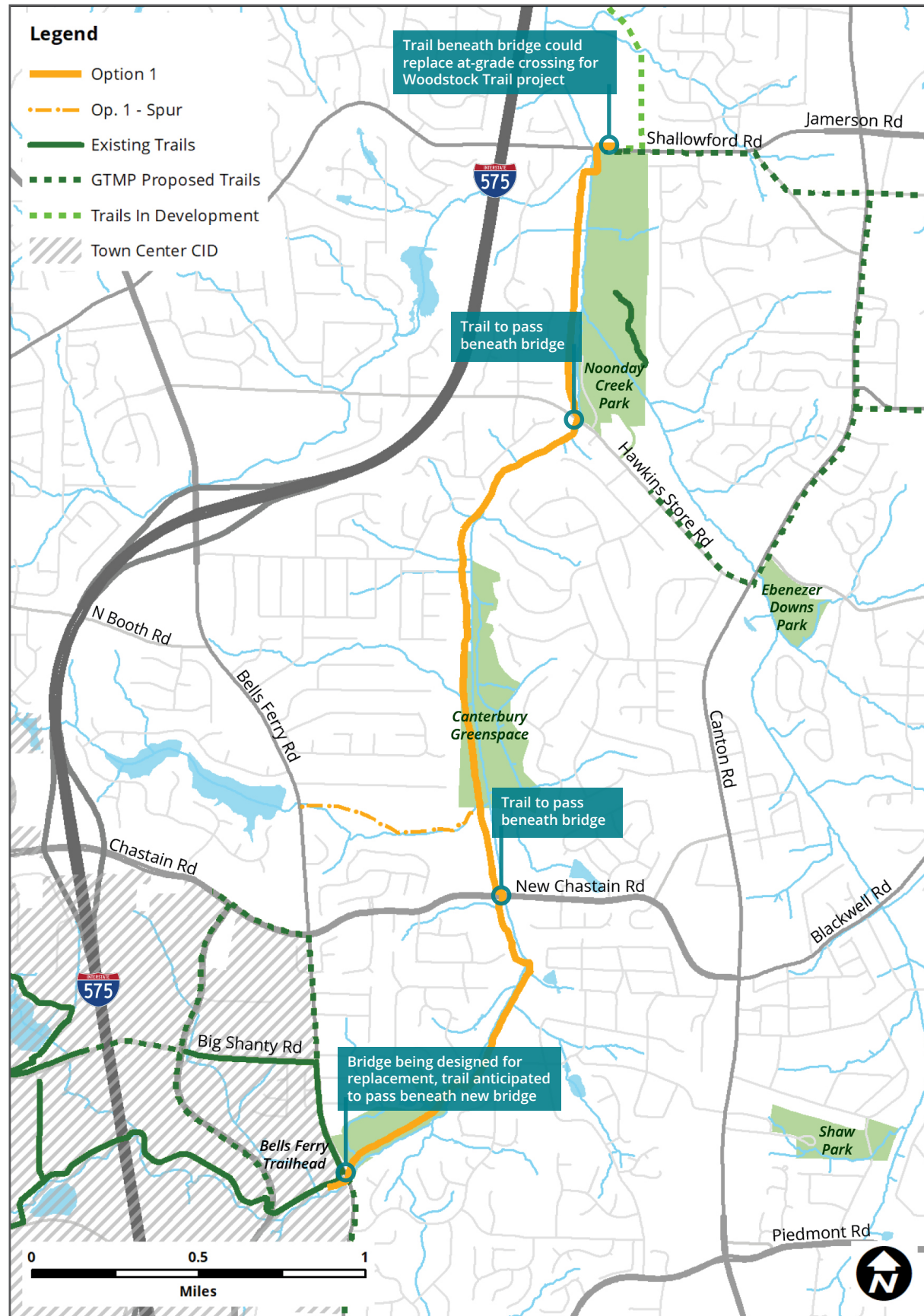


Figure 25. Proposed Bridge Crossings

Bridge Crossings

The proposed trail will pass beneath four intersecting roadways, crossing under bridges that pass over the creek: at Bells Ferry Road, New Chastain Road, Hawkins Store Road, and Shallowford Road, as shown in **Figure 25**. Each of these bridges is high enough to meet the minimum necessary vertical clearance of eight feet. Given the proximity of Noonday Creek and the anticipated water levels during rain events, a variance will be needed to allow the trail to span a flood elevation for some bridges that is less than the typical minimum design year.

The Bells Ferry Road bridge over Noonday Creek is currently being designed for replacement. Cobb County DOT is working with consultants on a design that will be able to accommodate a trail extension beneath it, as was recommended in the *Bells Ferry Road Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) Corridor Study* in 2021.

The proposed crossing beneath the Shallowford Road bridge could be an alternative to the at-grade crosswalk with rectangular rapid-flashing beacon that is part of the City of Woodstock's Noonday Creek Trail Extension project.

The bridges are all either high enough or narrow enough that they let in natural light, but it is recommended that consideration be given to lighting the underpasses to enhance safety and security. The bridge underpasses also present opportunities for incorporation of public art, such as murals to enhance the aesthetics of the trail and make them more visually appealing. These can be developed in partnership with local artists or arts organizations, and could highlight special features about Noonday Creek and the surrounding area, serving as an educational opportunity for trail users. There is precedent for such treatments of road bridges over trails throughout Metro Atlanta, including on existing segments of the Noonday Creek Trail, as shown in the photo at top right.



Above: Two examples of bridge mural art on the Noonday Creek Trail in the Town Center area (Credit: Town Center CID)



Roadway bridges over this segment of Noonday Creek provide sufficient vertical clearance for a trail to pass beneath.



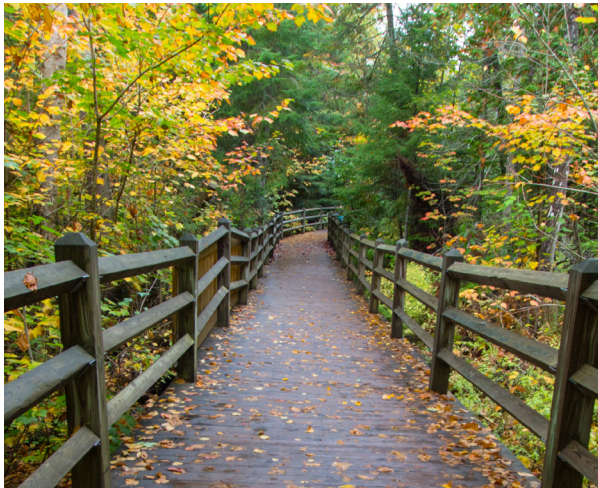
Materials, Open Spaces, and Amenities

Trail Materials and Surface

The Noonday Creek Trail Connector is proposed to be paved with concrete, consistent with other segments of the Noonday Creek Trail system - including those already built in the Town Center area and the City of Woodstock's forthcoming project between SR 92 and Shallowford Road. While Cobb County does not have a required standard for the look and feel of trails, the Greenways and Trails Master Plan provides design guidance for greenway trails such as this and should be consulted for other design ideas as the project progresses.

Some segments of the proposed trail will utilize boardwalk to traverse wetlands, small streams, and areas where reoccurring ponding is anticipated. It is recommended the boardwalk be constructed of durable materials that will reduce long-term maintenance, such as concrete or steel footings and either composite material or concrete planks on the surface. While more expensive than traditional timber, these materials are likely to reduce the cost of maintenance over time. Where exposed to sun, composite decking material can get hot, which may be a challenge for trail users walking dogs. Likewise, when wet, composite decking material can be slippery. However, there are products available with slip-resistant finishes or anti-slip treatments, and there is currently no best practice or standardized treatment for increasing traction on boardwalks for trails.

As noted in the previous section, the concept anticipates the need for three small bridges to cross Noonday Creek. It is anticipated these will be small bicycle-pedestrian bridges, similar in style to the one in Noonday Creek Park over Little Noonday Creek (see top image on this page), or other prefabricated bridges used on other trails throughout the county. The steel railings allow for views of the creek and surrounding nature between railings and supports.



Examples of potential surface treatments for the proposed trail. These include concrete paving, prefabricated bridges with open railings, and composite decking for boardwalks.

Small Stream Crossings

In addition to the three larger bicycle/pedestrian bridges needed to cross Noonday Creek, it is anticipated that eight smaller footbridges or pipe culverts will be needed where the proposed trail crosses minor ditches, ephemeral streams or tributaries, and swales or places where small amounts of water flows into or away from the creek. Such structures would allow passage of water beneath the trail and encourage drainage away from the trail surface. Smaller footbridges would resemble a low boardwalk with composite planks, and would require structures to hold them in place. As a lower-cost alternative, small pipe culverts could be placed in ditches or streams to convey water beneath the trail without overtopping the surface. Consideration should be given to end treatments such as headwalls or flared ends where they are visible, and will vary depending on the exact location and cost.

Fencing and Screening

While much of the locally preferred alignment for the proposed trail falls within publicly owned land, the trail lies within a largely residential area. Landscaping and privacy screening can be provided to enhance aesthetics screen nearby residential properties. Fences, vegetation such as trees and shrubs, and other forms of screening can help increase privacy and keep users on the trail.

A range of options for fencing and vegetation are available, and details will be determined as the project advances through design and engineering phases. During the March 2023 Community Open House, attendees were asked to note preferences for fencing and screening options along the trail. The most supported options used natural materials such as wood fences with openings between slats that provide protection but still allow people to see through to nature and wildlife in the surrounding area. Wide buffers with dense plantings can also help provide greater separation and a sense of privacy. The images shown at right provide examples that can serve as inspiration for future design phases.



A variety of treatments can be provide privacy and screening between the proposed trail and nearby private property, including wood fencing, vegetation, and planted buffers.



Trailheads and Amenities

Small recreation areas or walk-up trailheads are proposed in publicly owned land at the southern end of the proposed trail - one in the publicly owned property near the site of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Restrictive Covenant just east of Bells Ferry Road, and one just north of New Chastain Road, where there is a sewer line and easement running east-west between Bells Ferry Road and the creek as shown in **Figure 26**.

Both are anticipated to be for passive use only, and feature minimal, small-scale amenities such as seating, shade, and signage. The first of these could provide direct access from the adjacent Brookhaven neighborhood, if community members are in favor, or access could be provided from forthcoming sidewalk that will be provided on Bells Ferry Road as part of the bridge replacement project. The second walk-up trailhead would connect to Bells Ferry Road, potentially providing access to/from the neighborhoods north and south of this access point (Chastain Enclave, Parkwood, and North Bells Ferry Landing) as well as those on the west side of Bells Ferry Road (Chastain Lakes). If such a connection is pursued, it will be important to consider a suitable location for a crossing of Bells Ferry Road - the nearest one is 2,000 feet south at New Chastain Road.

A larger trailhead is proposed at the north end of Noonday Creek Park, where there is currently a large expanse of un-programmed space. Being at the midway point between the existing trailheads and access points at Bells Ferry Road and SR 92, Noonday Creek Park presents a great opportunity for a potential new trailhead along the Noonday Creek Trail. In consultation with Cobb County DOT and the PARKS Department, several ideas for potential amenities and features have been identified. These include, but are not limited to: trash receptacles, pet waste stations, benches or seating, bike racks, a bike repair station, and perhaps a small restroom facility.



Examples of potential amenities that could be included at the proposed trailhead in Noonday Creek Park.

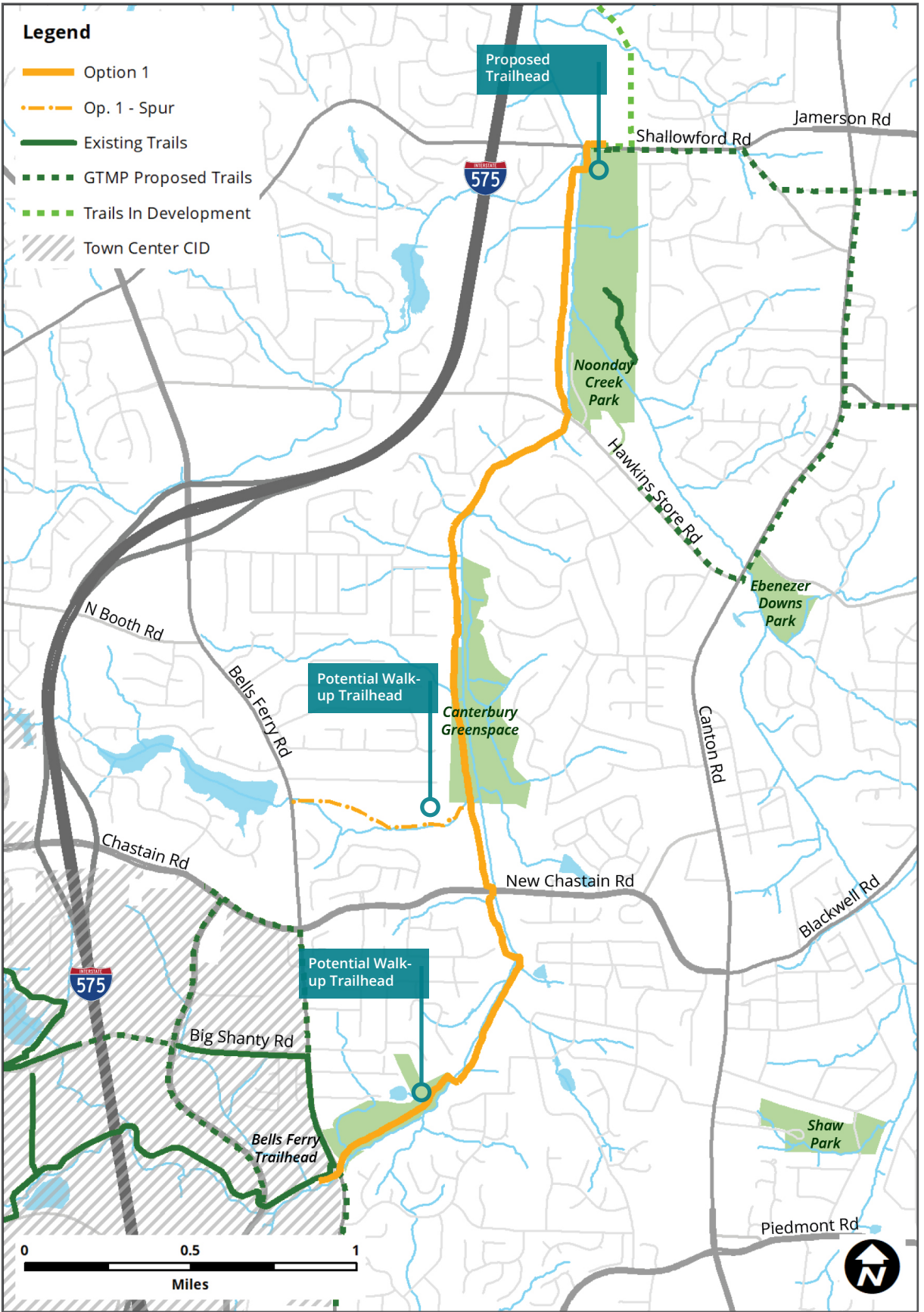


Figure 26. Potential Trailhead Locations



Signage

Signage is an important component of any trail system. It helps people navigate the trails, orient themselves to nearby destinations, and provides educational information about the surrounding environment. A variety of signs will likely be needed for the proposed Noonday Creek Trail Extension, including directional or wayfinding signs, interpretive signs, trail rules, and others.

Cobb County PARKS is responsible for maintenance of trails throughout the county, including signage. In 2021, the department completed a Park Signage and Wayfinding Design Standards Manual to establish uniform branding and enhance the ability of visitors to successfully navigate the County's parks system. The manual is intended for use by administrators, consultants, planners, community groups, and others to plan, select, and implement signage and wayfinding for all PARKS facilities. It includes standards for entry signage, rules, interpretive signs, wayfinding signs, and other custom signs. The images in **Figure 27** and **Figure 28** at right are excerpts from the manual and examples of recently installed signage at the Discovery Park at the RiverLine, which includes footpath trails throughout the park.

Potential interpretive signs throughout the proposed project could inform visitors about the history of the area, the flora and fauna present, ecological functions and sensitivities in the surrounding environment. Wayfinding signage could orient visitors to connections to the Woodstock portion of the trail, the Town Center area, Kennesaw Mountain, and other nearby destinations, as well as access points. Where possible, it is recommended to include the distance to points of interest in both miles and length of time.

As the project progresses through design and engineering, signage should be developed following the County's Park Signage and Wayfinding Design Standards Manual.



Examples of recent Cobb County park and trail signage at the new Discovery Park at the River Line

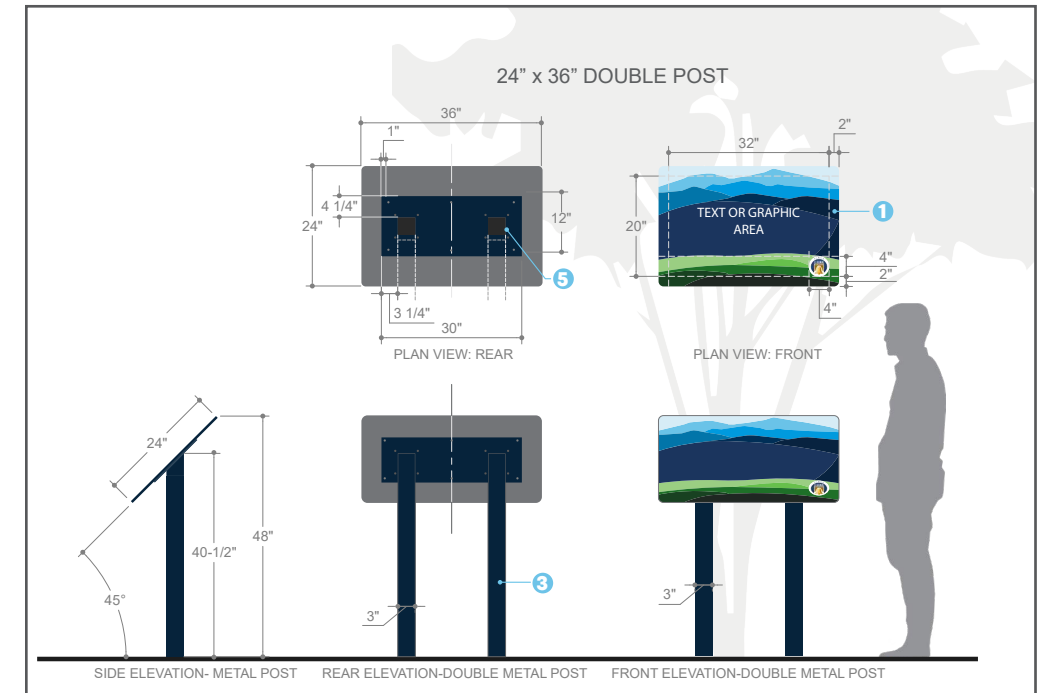


Figure 27. Interpretive Signage Design Standards (Source: Cobb County PARKS)

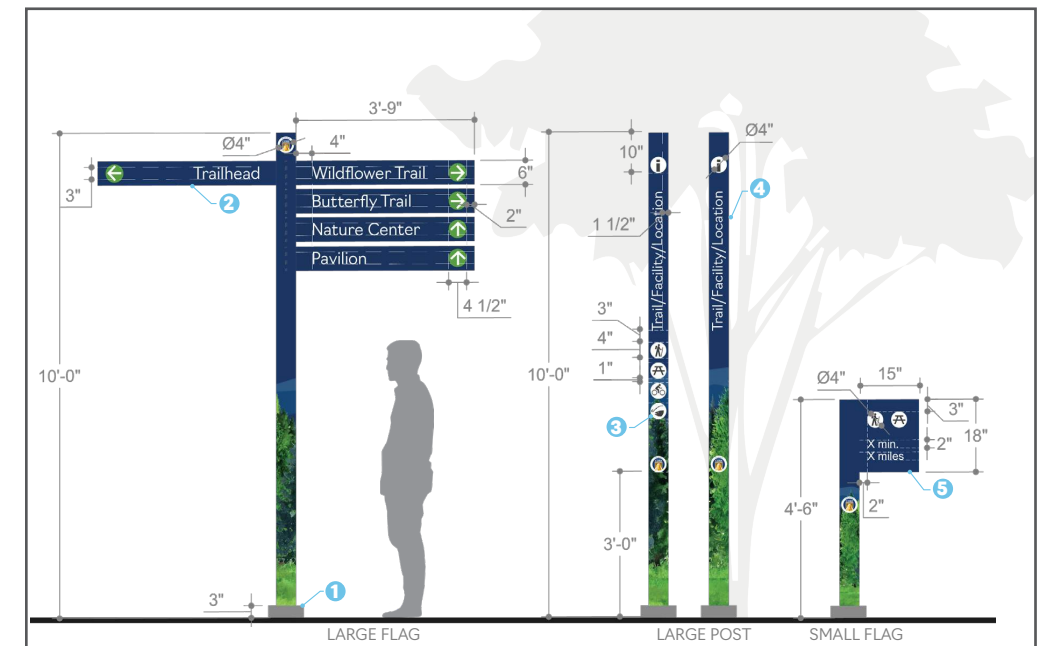


Figure 28. Active Wayfinding Signage Design Standards (Source: Cobb County PARKS)



Recommendations

Summary

Funded in part through the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) Regional Transportation Planning Study (RTPS) program (with local matching funds provided through Cobb County’s Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax [SPLOST] program), this scoping study was intended to: a) study the feasibility of potential project alternatives; and b) develop a project concept that will help improve safety, mobility, and access for transportation system users, while gathering information and conducting analysis to prepare the project for advancement to the next stages of design and engineering.

The Noonday Creek Trail Extension Scoping Study recommends design and construction of a roughly 3.8-mile segment of multi-use greenway trail along Noonday Creek, between the Bells Ferry Trailhead and Shallowford Road. Slightly more than half (approximately 56 percent) of the proposed conceptual project alignment lies within publicly owned property, and much of it runs parallel to a Cobb County Water System (CCWS) sewer main - in places through and parallel to the utility’s easement. The project is proposed to begin at the current terminus of the existing Noonday Creek Trail, within the Bells Ferry Trailhead, just west of Bells Ferry Road. The trail is recommended to

continue northeastward, largely following the creek, to the north side of Shallowford Road, where it will meet with the City of Woodstock’s Noonday Creek Trail Extension. That project is anticipated to begin construction in September of 2023.

The project is recommended to be designed as a ten-foot-wide, multi-use trail with two-foot wide shoulders on either side, using a combination of paved concrete surface and boardwalk segments, made of either composite or concrete timbers. The recommended project would also include design and construction of the proposed trailhead at the north end of Noonday Creek park.

To advance this project through the next phases of design and engineering, it is recommended to perform field run topographic survey to identify the main features of the topography of the project area, including but not limited to creeks, streams, ditches, lakes, and above and below ground utilities. Preparation of an environmental document will also be needed along with hydrologic/hydraulic analysis, utility plans, and design plans.

It is recommended that the project be pursued as one single project for the design and engineering phase, rather than to break it up into shorter segments. This is due to the requirements for the environmental document and preparation as well as the need to meet logical termini. If desired, it may be possible to construct the project in phases; however, that decision can be made at a later time and may depend on funding and available resources.

Optional elements, such as the potential Spur Trail (see **Figure 20** or **Figure 21**) and the potential connection across the creek to the Canterbury Neighborhood could be added later, if desired. Likewise, if Cobb County elects to pursue developing walk-up trailheads at the potential locations identified (see **Figure 26**), those could be added at a later time, depending on available resources and potential partners.

The vision for the Noonday Creek Trail Connector is to provide a safe and comfortable connection to fill a critical gap in the regional trail network.

Estimated Cost

Estimates for trail construction around the Atlanta region vary considerably, based upon context, location, trail type, design, and features. In the early 2020s, it is not uncommon for projects to cost upwards of \$3 million per mile. As inflation, labor, and materials costs have increased dramatically in recent years, it is likely actual costs are somewhat higher. Recent examples from projects in Cobb County range from \$1.97 million to \$2.6 million per mile from 2020 to 2023. In 2018, Cobb County’s Greenways & Trails Master Plan estimated that 12-foot wide greenway trails (off-roadway, in independent alignments) could cost as much as \$2.9 million per mile.

Total per-mile costs for trail projects may be higher or lower depending upon the details of the project - the thickness of the asphalt or concrete used, the number of structures needed to cross wetlands and streams, the extent and cost of environmental mitigation, and the amount of land to be acquired. Elements such as retaining walls, traffic control devices, signage, utility coordination and relocation, and other factors can also affect the cost of trail projects.

Based on the current conceptual design, it is estimated that the Noonday Creek Trail Connector project would cost approximately \$19 million. This is a planning-level estimate, based on estimates developed for construction, right-of-way, and environmental mitigation, with estimates for preliminary engineering and utilities estimated as a percentage of construction cost. It includes estimated costs for concrete surface, graded aggregate base (GAB), bridges, culverts, boardwalk, fencing, utilities, drainage, engineering inspection, landscaping, erosion control, the proposed trailhead at Noonday Creek Park, and contingency among other things. Right-of-way costs are intentionally conservative and account for acquisition, not easements. A breakdown of the estimated cost as of July 2023 is shown in **Table 1** below. It should be noted that this excludes the cost of the optional 0.6-mile spur trail that would connect Bells Ferry Road to Noonday Creek north of New Chastain Road, the cost of which is estimated to be approximately \$1.6 to \$2.0 million.

Table 1. Trail Concept Estimated Cost

Phase	Preliminary Engineering (PE)	Right-of-Way (ROW)	Construction (CST)	Environmental Mitigation	Total
Notes	23% of CST	With 20% contingency	With 20% contingency	Wetlands, stream buffers, and stream impacts	
Amount	\$2.25 M	\$4.98 M	\$9.62 M	\$2.13 M	\$19.14 M

Note: Cost estimates are as of July 2023 and in 2023 dollars and are subject to change with fluctuations in the cost of labor, materials, and inflation. Amounts do not sum to total due to rounding.



Potential Partners and Funding Sources

There are a variety of potential sources of funding for trail projects such as this. Cobb County historically relies on funds via the voter-approved SPLOST alongside federal funds through the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) for trail projects. From time to time, the County has also secured other grant funding, including from the Federal Land Access Program, among others.

At the time of the writing of this report (summer 2023), Cobb County is pursuing a variety of options to help fund the Noonday Creek Trail Connector. It is anticipated that ARC will issue another call for projects to solicit applications for the regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) in the next several months. Federal funding, such as through the TIP, requires local matching contributions - typically around 20 percent (although it depends on the program source).

The following sections provide a brief overview of some potential sources of funding that may be considered to help cover the cost of future design and implementation phases.



View of Noonday Creek beneath the Bells Ferry Road bridge

TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP)

Any transportation project in the region utilizing federal funds must be approved by ARC and be included in the Atlanta Region’s Plan - the comprehensive long-range Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). ARC also develops the short-term TIP, which allocates federal funds for the planning, design, and construction of high-priority projects in the RTP. It can include capital and non-capital surface transportation projects, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, other transportation enhancements, and safety projects. ARC is responsible for developing the TIP and ensuring it meets federal planning requirements.

SPECIAL PURPOSE LOCAL OPTION SALES TAX (SPLOST)

In November 2020, Cobb County residents approved an extension of the SPLOST, a six-year one-cent sales tax. The sales tax went into effect January 1, 2022 and will last for five years. The project list included approximately \$329.9 million in transportation improvements. Pedestrian improvements are among the categories of projects, and priority trail projects being considered for funding can be added.

CONGRESSIONALLY DIRECTED SPENDING

Reinstated in 2022, Congressionally Directed Spending is way for Senators to advocate for programs and projects critical to their constituents, states, and the country. The U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations will again accept requests from Senators on their funding priorities for fiscal year 2024. It is possible that filling this critical gap in the regional trail network could be considered a priority at the U.S. Senate level.

INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND JOBS ACT

In 2021, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), sometimes referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), replaced the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act. The new law includes billions of dollars for new transportation investments, including increased funding for active transportation projects - a roughly 70 percent increase for the legacy Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program amounting to more than \$1 billion per year across the country. Eligible projects include pedestrian and bicycle facilities, particularly those that are priorities on Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), County, or regional non-motorized transportation plans. (See <https://www.dot.ga.gov/GDOT/Pages/TAP.aspx> for more information)

GEORGIA OUTDOOR STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

The Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act was approved by voters in 2018 and took effect July 1, 2019. The program provides grants and loans to support state and local parks and trails, provide stewardship of conservation land, or acquire critical areas for the provision or protection of clean water, wildlife, fishing, or natural resource-based outdoor recreation, among other activities. The 2023-2024 cycle recently opened, with the pre-application window typically closing in October each year.

RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM

The Recreational Trails Program is a federal grant program funded by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and administered in Georgia by the Department of Natural Resources. The purpose of the program is to support recreational trails and trail-related facilities. Eligible applicants include local governments. The pre-application window for the 2023-2024 cycle opened September 1, 2023.

Additionally a variety of private organizations and programs support trail projects, although many target smaller projects and may have funding caps lower than the anticipated cost of this project. Throughout this scoping study process, Cobb County has coordinated closely with partners at ARC and at the GDOT to keep them apprised of and involved with the study process. These partnerships will be important going forward as the project advances into implementation phases.



Scenic spot along Noonday Creek



Noonday Creek Trail Extension Scoping Study



September 2023

