

APPENDIX H:

**KEY EXCERPTS FROM THE
GWINNETT COUNTY OPEN
SPACE & GREENWAY STUDY
(2002) AND THE PEDESTRIAN,
BICYCLE & GREENWAYS PLAN
FOR GWINNETT COUNTY (1995)**

**KEY EXCERPTS FROM:
Gwinnett County Open Space and Greenway Study (2002) and
Pedestrian, Bicycle and Greenways Plan for Gwinnett County (1995)**

GWINNETT COUNTY OPEN SPACE AND GREENWAY STUDY (2002)

The Gwinnett County Open Space and Greenway Study (2002) went into considerable detail in defining and identifying the benefits and potential sites for greenway acquisition and or protection. The following are excerpts from that report.

"Open space" or "greenspace" is land in a natural or minimally developed condition that provides community benefits in the form of environmental protection and passive recreation opportunities. Greenways are linear corridors of greenspace that frequently contain trails for recreational use and non-motorized transportation. An open space and greenway master plan is a comprehensive guide to protecting greenspace: what, where and how to protect it.

.....the term greenway is reserved for linear elements of the greenspace system.

There are four ways in which greenspace can protect and enhance water quality: by protecting riparian zones; by protecting floodplains; by limiting impervious surfaces; and by protecting groundwater recharge areas.

Publicly available greenspace and greenways can also serve as tourist attractions, generating increased economic activity and sales tax revenues. Some Gwinnett County parks already attract residents from across the Atlanta metropolitan area; as the County expands and connects its greenspace system, it has the potential to become a regional destination for outdoor recreation. Greenways are especially valuable in this regard.

Transportation Benefits

Gwinnett County has grown in a low-density pattern with automobile use as the almost exclusive mode of transportation. As a means to reduce traffic congestion, the County is shifting its transportation planning to include a variety of modes of travel for local residents. The Comprehensive Transportation Plan adopted in September of 2001 has identified numerous transportation alternatives to single family cars including bus service, sidewalks, bicycle lanes, bicycle paths and multi-use paths. A network of greenway corridors is an important component of such a plan.

Greenway corridors throughout Gwinnett County can serve as extensions of the road network, offering connections between home, work, schools, libraries, parks, shopping areas, transit stops and tourist attractions. Greenway-based bikeways and walkways are most effective for certain travel distances. National surveys by the Federal Highway Administration have shown that most Americans are willing to walk as far as two miles to a destination, and bike as far as five miles. Destinations should be linked to multiple origins throughout the community with a combination of off-road trails and on-road bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Cultural Benefits and Preservation of Historic Resources

Greenspace can enhance a community's sense of place through protection of its unique natural and historic resources. Preservation of the historic landscape provides a tangible and visible link to a community's past, helping to define the community identity and increasing awareness and appreciation of local history. Additionally, preserving cultural sites within the greenspace network provides controlled public access that protects resources and enhances interpretive opportunities.

Even small pieces of greenspace can serve as community builders. A successful urban greenspace or greenway project can serve as a kind of town commons or main street where neighbors meet, children play and community groups gather.

Enhancing Aesthetics

Greenspace adds comfort to our life by making our communities more inviting. Greenspace can do this by buffering adjacent land uses, thus presenting a more desirable view. Additionally, greenspace offers considerable aesthetic benefits. While it may sound simplistic to say "people like greenspace," it can be proven that some companies considering relocation include greenspace resources as a part of their evaluation for potential new homes. They recognize that there is value in having protected greenspace and that their employees enjoy the prospect of natural areas near work and home.

Safety and Security Benefits

*Although some people express concerns that parks and greenways may harbor criminal activity, a 1998 study, *Rail-Trail and Safe Communities*, written by Tammy Tracy and Hugh Morris of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy in cooperation with the National Parks Service, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program presents documentation of a very safe environment.*

The Rail-Trail and Safe Communities study shows that parks and greenways have very low incidences of reported criminal activity. Greenspace typically attracts local residents who use the facility frequently, creating an environment that is virtually selfpolicing and very safe.

Health and Recreation Benefits

Access to greenways encourages more people to walk or bike to short-distance destinations, which improves the health of residents. Studies have shown that as little as 30 minutes a day of moderate-intensity exercise (such as bicycling, walking or in-line skating) can significantly improve a person's mental and physical health and prevent certain diseases. Providing opportunities for participation in these outdoor activities, close to where people live and work, is an important component of promoting healthy lifestyles for Gwinnett County residents.

Primary Goals

The primary goals below drive both the targeting of greenspace and the methods of greenspace preservation.

- *Increase recreation opportunities:
Recreation opportunities normally associated with quiet areas of traditional parks - such as areas for a quiet walk, a spot to read a book, bird and wildlife observation or simply relaxing and watching nature—are ideally suited for open space areas. Greenways provide opportunities for more extensive walking, running and cycling. In open spaces with access to streams and rivers, there are opportunities for such pastimes as paddling and swimming.*
- *Protect and improve water quality:
Faced with increasing regulatory controls on drinking water, stormwater management and wastewater management, Gwinnett County benefits by maximizing the water quality benefits of its greenspace program. As discussed in Section 1B, greenspace can protect and improve water quality in a number of ways.*
- *Increase connectivity via a system of greenway trail :
A comprehensive greenway system will not only increase recreational opportunities but will provide environmentally friendly transportation options. The greenway system should provide numerous access points throughout the County. Sidewalks and bike lanes should be developed to complement the multi-use trails and make additional links and loops within the greenway system.*
- *Reduce environmental impacts of development:*

A good greenspace plan is more than just a blueprint for parks and trails; it is an integrated approach to protecting natural resources and ensuring that the patterns of development allow for sufficient open space and a high quality of life. Although acquisition may be the focus of Gwinnett County's greenspace program, it alone cannot provide sufficient open space to meet the needs of its residents.

Therefore, this plan includes policy recommendations to manage development in ways that result in additional greenspace preservation and environmental protection. These recommendations can help guide future revisions of the County's comprehensive plan, zoning code and development ordinances.

Secondary Goals

The secondary goals were not the major drivers of the policy recommendations, but to the extent feasible, the recommendations are intended to meet these goals as well.

- *Enhance aesthetics throughout the County*
- *Protect plant and animal habitat*
- *Promote biodiversity*
- *Enhance air quality*
- *Improve transportation opportunities*
- *Mitigate traffic congestion*
- *Realize economic benefits of open space and greenways*
- *Enhance tourism opportunities*
- *Promote good health*
- *Protect historic and archeological resources*
- *Protect cultural resources*
- *Promote safety and security of open space and greenway systems*

PEDESTRIAN, BICYCLE AND GREENWAYS PLAN FOR GWINNETT COUNTY (1995)

In 1995, the Gwinnett County Department of Planning and Development drafted a report entitled Pedestrian, Bicycle and Greenways Plan for Gwinnett County (Third Draft). The goal of the plan was, "To contribute to the overall quality of life and economic well being of Gwinnett County by developing and improving opportunities for walking and cycling." The plan recommends a "multifaceted" or comprehensive approach to developing an interconnected system of walkways, bikeways and greenways. Based on citizen input and research, the 1995 plan concluded that:

- *Walking and bicycling play a significant role in an intermodal transportation system by reducing traffic congestion, connecting to transit park and ride lots, and improving air quality.*
- *Walking and bicycling can replace a short trip that would usually be made by automobile.*
- *Improving opportunities for walking and bicycling throughout the County reaps multiple "quality-of-life" benefits including health, economic, increases in tourism and environmental.*
- *Improving opportunities for walking and bicycling can help give Gwinnett County a competitive edge over other metropolitan areas in attracting and maintaining businesses.*
- *Walking is the most popular recreational activity of Gwinnett residents.*
- *Greenways are one of the most desired recreational facilities; bicycle trails rank second.*
- *Gwinnett citizens want to walk and bicycle from home.*
- *Gwinnett County sidewalk policies and regulations need to be improved to satisfy ADA regulations and be comparable to many other cities and neighboring counties.*
- *Bicycle lanes should be considered as part of road improvement projects. The construction cost of adding bicycle lanes to road projects is estimated at 5 to 8% of total project cost and significantly benefits motorists by providing room for disabled vehicles, service and delivery vehicles.*

Throughout the implementation of the greenway system plan, the multi-agency committee should work together to update all department comprehensive plans to reflect system improvements. Regulations, ordinances and design standards for the greenway system should be developed by the committee to ensure consistency throughout the system. The committee should take the lead in working with allied staff in the municipalities to implement the same design standards throughout the County.

As with all multi-agency efforts, there needs to be a lead agency. It is recommended that the lead agency be the Department of Community Services, Division of Parks and Recreation. It is also recommended that a staff person with Parks and Recreation serve as the Open Space Coordinator and work with other staff in the County and citizen groups who are interested in greenways.

The current role of the Recreation Authority should be expanded to include open space and greenways along with County park and recreation facilities. The Recreation Authority would serve as a conduit for public input on open space and greenways, and would aid the Parks and Recreation staff in making decisions pertaining to the design and implementation of greenway and open space facilities. The Recreation Authority should have the option of forming a subcommittee with representatives from the Recreation Authority and other interested citizens who want to focus on open space and greenway issues.