



Date: July 10, 2018

To: Thomas J. Bonfield, City Manager
Through: Keith Chadwell, Deputy City Manager
From: Terry Bellamy, Transportation Director
Subject: Durham Belt Line Trail Master Plan

Executive Summary

The Transportation Department, with the assistance of Stewart Engineering, Inc. (Stewart) and staff from other City departments, has been working to develop a master plan for the Durham Belt Line Trail. Following multiple stakeholder group conversations, steering committee meetings, community surveys, public open houses, and City staff review, a draft final Durham Belt Line Master Plan is offered for adoption.

Recommendation

City Council approval of the following actions is recommended:

1. To receive a presentation on the Durham Belt Line Trail Master Plan; and
2. To conduct a public hearing and adopt the Durham Belt Line Trail Master Plan.

Background

For many years there has been interest in converting the unused Belt Line rail corridor into a bicycle and pedestrian trail. The Belt Line Trail is recommended by both the adopted Downtown Durham Master Plan and the Durham Trails and Greenway Master Plan. The City applied for and was awarded funding through the TIGER FY 2014 grant program to prepare a master plan for the Belt Line Trail. Since February 2017, City staff have been working with Stewart to prepare the master plan.

The Durham Belt Line is envisioned to be a trail that extends 1.7 miles from Downtown Durham, through the Innovation District, and through the Trinity Park, Pearl Mill Village, North Durham and Duke Park neighborhoods to the Avondale Drive area. In 2017 the abandoned rail line was purchased from the Norfolk Southern Railroad by the Conservation Fund, a non-profit organization that works to conserve land for parks across the United States. The City of Durham is in discussions with the Conservation Fund to purchase the 17 acres with a combination of federal and local match funds.

During the first round of community outreach in 2017 more than 150 residents attended a Visioning Workshop held at the Durham Armory and more than 250 residents participated in the initial Belt Line survey. In addition, targeted small group discussions were held with primary project stakeholders, and the steering committee and city staff participated in a peer project walking tour of the Greensboro Downtown Greenway. Based on steering committee and public input, the project vision and goals were developed to provide direction to the development of the master plan.

In April 2018 a draft of the Belt Line Master Plan was released for steering committee and public review. During the second round of community outreach more than 140 residents attended an Open House at the Durham Nativity School and 318 residents completed the follow-up Belt Line survey. In advance of the Open House City staff mailed 495 postcards to residences within 500 feet of the Belt Line corridor (to both property owner and resident, if different), sent announcements to six nearby churches, planted yard signs at six locations near the Belt Line, and placed posters at more than 50 businesses and other public places. Comments from the meeting and survey have been incorporated into the attached final draft of the Master Plan.

Issues and Analysis

Converting the rail line to a trail has been planned for over 20 years. The Belt Line Trail Master Plan is a thorough effort to engage citizens, landowners, and other stakeholders in the City and discuss goals for the trail and a framework for the design of the trail and surrounding areas. The planning for the Belt Line Trail has been coordinated with the Ellerbe Creek Stormwater Restoration Project being undertaken by the Public Works Department.

The work described in the previous section has resulted in a final draft master plan with five sections: Vision, Corridor Analysis, Design, Implementation, and Design Palette. An electronic version of the plan and appendices can be found on-line at www.durhambeltline.com. The draft plan includes recommendations that address trail design, natural systems, safety, design guidelines for trail-side development, operations and programming, and housing and equity. Key elements include the following:

- Provides 1.7 miles of trail with ten new connections, eight of which re-link neighborhoods historically severed by the rail line
- Serves 1,843 households within ½ mile of the trail that do not have access to a vehicle. Approximately 20.5 percent of households within ½ mile of the trail lack access to a vehicle compared to 9.5 percent of households in the City of Durham as a whole
- Re-uses an historic railroad bridge and recommends the adaptation of an historic railroad trestle as a scenic downtown overlook
- Recommends three trail cross-sections that fit the context of each neighborhood, separating bicyclists and pedestrians where possible to increase the safety and mobility of trail users
- Identifies four acres of restored forest, riparian area, and meadow habitat, and six acres of new urban green space
- Includes opportunities for green infrastructure features to improve stormwater filtration in the Ellerbe Creek watershed
- Incorporates Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) features to increase safety

Cost Estimates and Funding

The draft plan includes preliminary cost estimates for the trail and other components (pages 98-99). The cost estimates are divided into four categories. The first two categories provide estimates for the main “Durham Belt Line Trail” and “Trail Essentials” that achieve the primary goals for a trail as outlined in the plan. The other two categories, “Other Items” and “Park Amenities,” are for items that could be built at the outset or constructed separately as funding becomes available; many of these items would likely be funded through non-transportation sources including state programs, grants, local funding, and

private funding. The plan discusses non-traditional local funding sources that could include fundraising campaigns, corporate donations, public-private partnerships, and implementing a value capture program. A project overview tri-fold brochure is attached.

Housing and Equity

The draft plan includes a discussion and recommendations on housing and equity issues. The project team worked closely with staff from various City departments including Community Development as part of the master plan. Additional information is provided in the attached equity planning strategies summary.

- The benefits and impacts section (pages 32-35) points out the potential economic and community benefits and impacts of the trail. See also the environmental justice and social equity section of the Appendix.
- The housing and equity recommendations (pages 58-61) includes policy level recommendations on housing and equity that were informed by the stakeholder interviews, the social equity analysis conducted by Kofi Boone, resident surveys, and subsequent conversations with staff from various City departments.
- The urban infill / housing and equity implementation sections (pages 107-111) include specific strategies and potential partners needed to advance key housing and equity recommendations, including details on encouraging neighborhood scale, affordable (“missing middle”) housing, preserving affordable rentals, and the development of equitable development guidelines.

Alternatives

The Durham City Council could decide to:

- Adopt the Durham Belt Line Trail Master Plan
- Send the item back to staff for further review

Financial Impacts

There is no direct financial impact for the City of Durham related to adoption of the plan, but additional future resources would be needed to implement project and program recommendations in the plan.

SDBE Summary

The Department of Equal Opportunity/Equity Assurance did not review this item for compliance with the Ordinance to Promote Equal Business Opportunities in City Contracting.

Attachments

Presentation, “Durham Belt Line Trail Master Plan”
Durham Belt Line Trail Master Plan
Project Overview Brochure (Tri-Fold)
Equity Planning Strategies Summary