

Arena Committee

Subcommittee: Greenway Planning

Committee Members: Michael Owens (chair), Marty Johnston, Ronald Williams, John Bennett, Mark Dana and Nick Deffley

Overview:

The Arena Planning Committee will help define the high level scope of the proposed Arena site and surrounding Canal District. This includes the size, capacity, programming of the arena as well as surrounding support services of the area including mobility and transportation, parking, business development, greenway networks and general connectivity to the surrounding neighborhoods and downtown. Sub committees were formed to study more specific areas as they relate to the arena and Canal District. The Greenway subcommittee focused specifically on the connection to existing neighborhoods, the downtown area, and potential amenities within the Canal District. Savannah has not yet embraced the use of Greenways as economic and health amenities to our city. Using the Springfield Canal will be an excellent beginning to a large project of greenway systems.

What is a Greenway?

The first task of the committee was to define and understand what exactly a greenway was and how it fits into our community. Greenways are corridors of protected open space managed for conservation and recreation purposes. Greenways often follow natural land or water features and link nature reserves, parks, cultural features and historic sites with each other and with populated areas. Greenways can be publicly or privately owned, and some are the result of public/private partnerships.

Trails and Greenways provide countless opportunities for economic renewal and growth. Increased property values and tourism and recreation related spending lodging are just a few of the ways trails and greenways positively impact community economics.

Trails promote natural resource management strategies that ensure environmental preservation, quality of life and economic development:

- Providing a “buffer” between the built and natural environments
- Allowing passive recreational use and educational access to protected areas
- Increasing the value of open space to the public by providing access
- Enhancing property values of communities by connecting them to open space areas

- Providing an alternative mode of transportation
- Encouraging cleaner air by decreasing air pollution by automobiles
- Supporting communities and businesses through eco-tourism

In a 1992 study, the National Park Service estimated the average economic activity associated with three multi-purpose trails in Florida, California and Iowa was \$1.5 million annual. US Fish and Wildlife Service, bird watchers spend over \$5.2 billion annually.

The sub-committee feels strongly that as we move forward with any plans for the Greenway it is imperative that a comprehensive plan be developed to educate the community on what a Greenway is and how it will benefit our neighborhoods.

Crime:

The subcommittee discussed concerns about the greenway attracting crime along the trail and in the surrounding neighborhoods. Across the country many citizens oppose proposed greenway trails for their neighborhoods because of a belief of increased crime. Research suggests trails can help reduce the level of crime being experienced in urban neighborhoods.

- A study of the Burke-Gilman trail, which passes through high-density urban neighborhoods and crime-prone areas in downtown Seattle, found little or no crime or vandalism experienced by adjacent property owners. Similar studies in suburban Minnesota and Wisconsin echo these findings
- A National Geographic article refers to greenway studies showing that “trails are no less secure than other areas of human use and cause no increase in crime... A long-term study of the Appalachian Trail revealed impressively low crime statistics considering the volume of people who use the facility.” Statistics from a planner in Raleigh, North Carolina indicate “you’re probably safer on a greenway than in most areas. People with a criminal mind-set don’t usually frequent places like that.”
- A survey of greenways in several states has found that such parks “typically have not experienced serious problems regarding vandalism, crime, trespass, or invasion of privacy... Prior to developing those park facilities, these concerns were strongly voiced in opposition to the proposed trail. After park development, however, it was found in opposition to the proposed trail. After park development, however, it was found that fears did not materialize... concerns expressed by the neighbors opposed....have not proven to be a post-development problem in any of the 60 parks surveyed.”

- One property owner along a proposed 26 mile trail in Iowa was skeptical about the trail, and was part of a group saying the land should belong to them; and the trail would bring vandalism from city trail users. He went to see for himself and saw pedaling, jogging, and walking..."You know something," he told his wife when he returned home, "all those people were smiling." He has since turned from trail opponent to one of its most diligent volunteers.

Georgia Greenway:

The Coastal Greenway project will be a 160 mile trail connecting South Carolina and Florida through Georgia's six coastal counties, as part of the larger East Coast Greenway. A major aim of the project is to create a safe space for people to enjoy the outdoors and be connected to their neighboring communities. Joseph Marinelli, president of Visit Savannah, which promotes the area's tourism industry, said his office will work to promote the greenway once it has been completed in Savannah. "Savannah is already a very green community, with much of the Savannah experience being outdoors. Adding one more outdoor experience – and a unique one at that- will just help us to attract more people of likeminded interests. And quite frankly, it would attract a younger crowd, like the millennials."

The push for more trails in Georgia and nationwide, comes from groups who encourage healthier lifestyles and protection of the environment by providing this kind of alternate transportation option.

Conclusions:

The Subcommittee overwhelmingly supports the development of a Greenway along the Springfield Canal and hopes that eventually all of the canals can be connected by "Green Necklace" that surrounds our community with a recreational corridor. Hopefully the City of Savannah will monitor future opportunities to receive grant funding for the greenway. Our research indicates that several potential grants could help with funding. However, we also discussed many concerns relating to problems associated with the existing Springfield Canal and challenges to make the Greenway a reality. The list below will need to be considerations in moving forward with Greenway Development along the Springfield Canal.

- Need an environmental study of the canal water and in some areas, the right of way. Anecdotally there is a perception that the ground near the canal may be contaminated.
- The canal would need a major cleanup as there are mattresses, barrels, shoes, clothes etc. floating throughout the canal.
- An extensive community engagement piece would need to be developed to educate them on the benefits of a Greenway.

- The existing map that ties into the educational school hub should be the area for our first greenway (map attached)
- As part of the community engagement piece, initial design work should be developed so that future greenways in the community have the same basic design but would include design features significant to their neighborhoods.
- FEMA lots along the canals should be incorporated into the Greenway plan.
- The greenway should be included in the design of drainage systems when developing the Arena site.
- The greenway is separate from the Arena development and should be moved forward regardless of whether the arena is built or not.
- The greenway should help correct any drainage problems along the corridor.
- The design of the greenway should include protection of wetlands, natural habitat and waterways
- The greenway should be used as a way to connect neighborhoods

A study in the October 2000 issue of the Physicians and Sports Medicine found that physically active individuals had lower annual direct medical costs than did inactive people. If all inactive American adults became physically active, the potential savings could be \$76.6 billion in 2000 dollars. Also recreation together builds strong families, the foundation for a stronger society.

“Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to the body and soul”

John Muir