

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** 

## Plan Purpose

## **Background**

Cherokee County is located north of Atlanta, Georgia, and its trademarked phrase is "Where Metro Meets the Mountains." The County's unique blend of suburban and rural characteristics, the convenience of and access to nearby Atlanta, the accessibility to nature and the nearby mountains, and the attraction of several notable communities within the County has fueled significant population growth over the past 25 years.

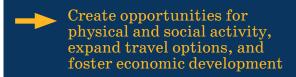
The scope of past trail and greenway planning efforts have typically been limited to specific parts of the County, typically individual communities. This inaugural Cherokee County Greenways & Trails Master Plan acknowledges the ongoing maturation of the County and consolidates those efforts into a singular vision specifically focused on the development of and investment in a greenways and trails network.

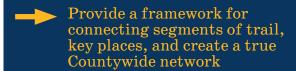
## **Plan Purpose**

With an overall purpose to articulate a single vision for the future of trails in the County, this plan emphasizes partnerships across jurisdictional boundaries – both within Cherokee and with its neighbors – to develop an overall trail and greenway network that promotes economic development, recreation, and transportation.

The planning process consisted of documenting existing conditions, engaging the community, identifying the future network, developing overall design guidelines, and preparing a capital development program and associated strategies for implementation.

### Plan Goals





## **Plan Objectives**

Develop a Vision and Goals to Guide Future Trails Development

Document Existing State of Greenways & Trails

Promote Decision-Making Grounded in Guiding Principles and Best Practices

Recommend Trail Design
Criteria & Guidelines

Recommend Future Trail Connections and Extensions in Coordination with Municipalities, Neighboring Cities & Counties

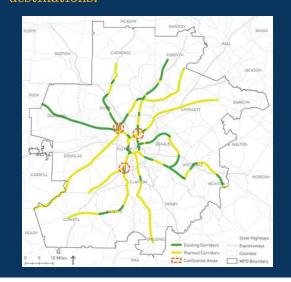
Provide Guidance on Partnerships, Funding, Operations & Maintenance

**Identify Priority Corridors & Projects** 



## **Atlanta's Regional Trail Vision**

The Atlanta Regional Commission's (ARC) Regional Trail Vision identifies regional active transportation needs, strategies, and recommendations for increasing accessibility and connectivity within the Atlanta region. The Cherokee County Greenways & Trails Master Plan supports this vision by seeking to fill existing gaps, connect to high-demand activity centers, and provide access to parks, natural areas, and scenic destinations.



## **Greenway and Trail Benefits**



### **Healthy Communities**

Trails can help create long-term medical cost savings, help people realize a variety of health benefits, and reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.



#### **Economic Development**

Many communities with trails have experienced growth in jobs and revenue, downtown reinvestment, and increased support of local businesses.



#### **Safety and Security**

Studies have shown that trails do not increase crime, but rather help improve a sense of safety and reduce property and violent crime rates in communities.



#### **Property Values**

Research has consistently shown that properties and lots adjacent to trails sell faster and are worth more than similar property not located next to a trail.

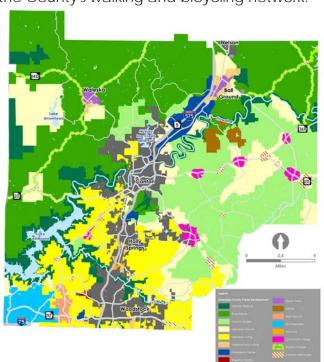
Bridge diverse Means of Connectivity to Preservation of commuting & demographic destinations natural space transportation groups Recreation & Educational exercise amenities Role of Trail System in **Cherokee County** Design & aesthetic Economic development value Sense of Improve quality of Promote Property value community life walkability enhancement

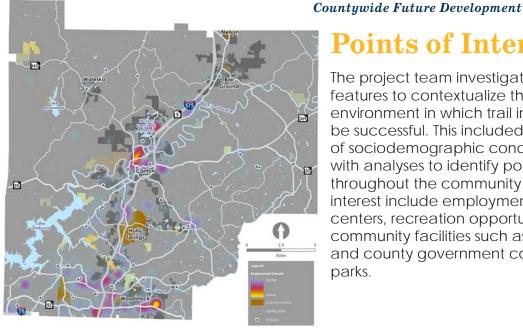
## **Existing Conditions**

The planning process began with a review of existing conditions across Cherokee County to provide an understanding of local community features and to gauge how a future trail and greenway network can align with the future vision for Cherokee County. The project team performed a series of data-intensive analyses to understand conditions that will inform the possibility for expanding the County's walking and bicycling network.

## Comprehensive & Land Use Planning

The project team reviewed various Comprehensive Plan efforts undertaken by the County and individual municipalities. Such plans include the articulation of the land use and development vision for their respective jurisdictions and therefore include broad contextual information to support where trail and greenway connections may be most beneficial. Future development maps show how the County wants to manage growth over the span of the next several decades.





**Employment & Activity Centers** 

## **Points of Interest**

The project team investigated community features to contextualize the overall environment in which trail initiatives could be successful. This included an analysis of sociodemographic conditions along with analyses to identify points of interest throughout the community. Points of interest include employment and activity centers, recreation opportunities, and community facilities such as schools, city and county government complexes, and parks.

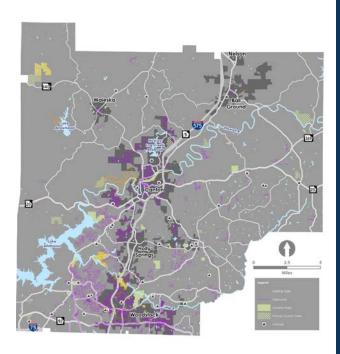


## **Natural Features**

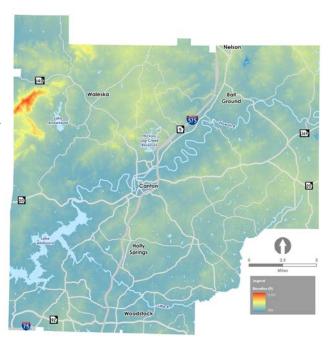
Natural features abound throughout the County, creating both opportunities and challenges for the development of a trail and greenway network. The project team examined the County's topography, water features, flood hazard areas, conservation areas, and historical and cultural resources.

## **Existing Infrastructure**

Lastly, existing infrastructure and conditions related to walking and cycling which could tie into a future trail and greenway network were identified across the County. This includes trails, sidewalks, bicycle and pedestrian safety, and utilities. The project team reviewed these existing facilities in relation to property owned by Cherokee County, cities, the state of Georgia, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to identify opportunities for enhancing trail access and connectivity across the County.



Existing Trail & Pedestrian Infrastructure



Topography & Elevation

## **Additional Considerations**

Additional inputs in the analysis of walking and bicycling conditions in Cherokee County consisted of reviewing:

- Previous plans and studies sponsored by Cherokee County or Cities
- 2050 ARC Population and Employment Forecasts
- Programmed Projects through Cherokee County SPLOST and GDOT

The project team conducted a composite analysis of all of these inputs to identify communities most in need of trails within Cherokee County. In turn, this helped inform the types of facilities to construct and the prioritization of the overall greenways and trails network.

## **Community Engagement**

The planning process included significant efforts to craft the plan to align and reflect the vision of the community. The project team gathered feedback through a variety of in-person and virtual mechanisms.

## Trail Advisory Committee (TAC)

A Trail Advisory Committee (TAC) was convened to help guide the planning process. Representatives included staff from County agencies, City governments, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), among others. This group met six times during this process:

- 1. March 2024 Discussion of Overall Vision
- 2. April 2024 Review Existing Conditions
- July 2024 Discuss Initial Trails and Greenway Network
- **4. September 2024** Discuss Design Guidelines and Project Prioritization
- October 2024 Review Draft Recommendations
- 6. December 2024 Review Final Recommendations

## Online Engagement

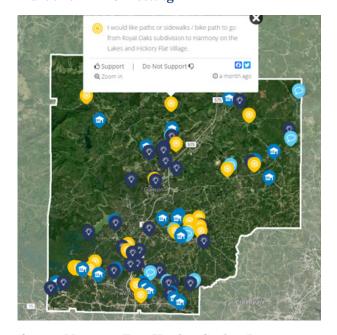
An online component was also used to solicit feedback by developing a website using an online interactive platform. This website included traditional surveys and interactive map components simulating the same exercises and information utilized in the in-person open house events. The website also included additional background information and documentation.

### **Feedback Mechanisms**

- Trail Advisory Committee
- · Online Engagement
- · Community Open Houses
- Community Pop-Up Events
- Stakeholder Interviews



Presentation by Consultant Team During the March 2024 TAC Meeting



Online Mapping Tool Used to Gather Input



## **Community Open Houses**

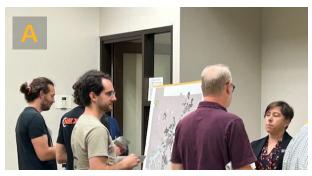
Six community open houses were held throughout the planning process across two overall rounds. In the first round, participants were invited to provide feedback on their vision for the future trails and greenways network. In the second round, participants were asked to review draft recommendations and provide feedback on the initiatives they were most excited (or concerned) about.

### Round 1 - Gather Input and Feedback

- 1. May 9, 2024 Woodstock (A)
- 2. May 14, 2024 Canton (B)
- 3. May 16, 2024 Virtual (C)

#### Round 2 - Present Initial Recommendations

- 1. October 23, 2024 Bridgemill Fire Station (D)
- 2. October 29, 2024 L.B. Buzz Ahrens Jr. Recreational Center
- 3. October 30, 2024 Virtual

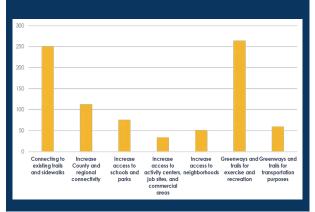




## **Understanding Priorities**

The project team, in consultation with the TAC, identified potential priorities to guide the development of the trails and greenways network, which was then presented in general community meetings to gauge relative interest in those priorities.

As shown below, the trail system is seen as largely benefiting exercise and recreation including a strong priority for it to connect to existing trails and sidewalks.







## **Pop-Up Events**

Recognizing that many people may not be willing or able to attend formal community meetings, the planning team set up popups at community events to make it easy and convenient to provide input, meeting residents where they are. These events were held similarly to the two rounds of open houses, with initial events focused on gathering general input and later events focused on soliciting input on draft recommendations. Three pop-up events were held during the Woodstock Farmer's Market in May 2024 (E), Canton First Friday in October 2024, (F), and Cherokee County Pumpkin Festival in October 2024 (G).

## **Stakeholder Interviews**

In addition to the organizations identified for participation in the TAC, several other agencies and organizations were identified to hold more specific conversations in regards to how their respective missions interface with the potential for a trails and greenways network. These interviews were conducted over the course of Summer 2024 with representatives of County agencies, City governments, neighboring jurisdictions, public and private schools, colleges and universities, utility providers, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and bicycling organizations.









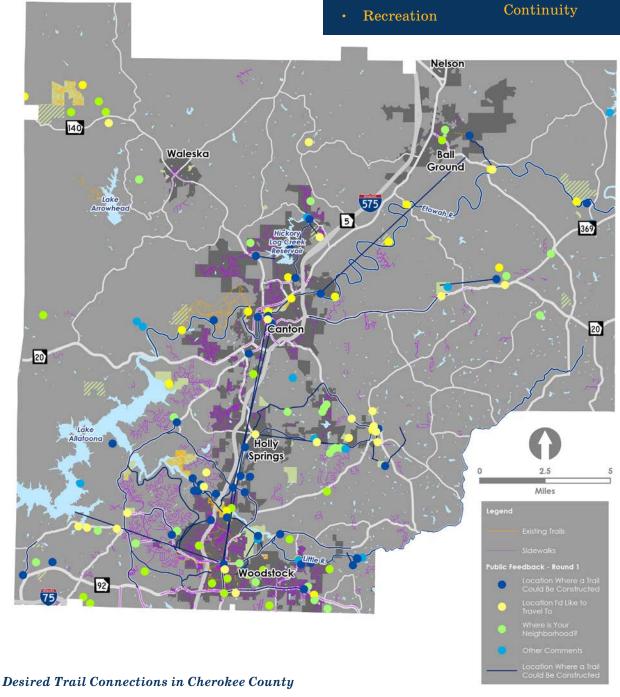
## Feedback Received

Participants in meetings were asked to identify locations for trails, places to connect to, and other similar items on a blank map of Cherokee County. Results were used to enhance ideas for trail and greenway connections in the County and develop the recommended network.

## **Trail Visioning**

Cherokee County residents value a trail network that enhances:

- Connectivity
  - onnectivity •
- Health
- Nature
- Preservation
- Safety
- Walkability
- Conservation
- Network Continuit



## **Trail Typologies**

Successful trail and greenway systems fulfill a variety of purposes and needs - they should provide a range of experiences for an array of different users. Additionally, trail and greenway networks should be designed to allow people to access a variety of utilitarian and recreational destinations while providing safety and comfort. Lastly, they should include appropriate amenities, signage, wayfinding, and art.

To this end, the Cherokee County Greenways & Trails Master Plan is built upon five typologies - greenways, sidepaths, soft surface trails, mountain bike trails, and blueways. Each trail typology is geared towards certain modes of travel in specific settings and contexts, and as such, should consider appropriate design features and amenities for those users and settings.

## **Greenways**

Greenways, sometimes called multi-use trails, primarily accommodate recreation but can also allow for commuting and other utilitarian trips.

They are typically in their own, independent right-of-way and can be used across different non-motorized modes of transportation including pedestrians, bicyclists, dog walkers, strollers, skaters, wheelchairs, and other mobility devices.



## **Sidepaths**

Sidepaths are generally shareduse or multi-use paths parallel to streets and are typically wide enough to allow for both walking and bicycling. Sidepaths primarily accommodate utilitarian trips but can also provide recreational opportunities for residents who live in close proximity to them. Like greenways, they can be used by people engaged in a variety of non-motorized modes of transportation.



### **Soft Surface Trails**

Perhaps the most common trail type that currently exists in Cherokee County, soft surface trails provide primarily recreational experiences for users, including hiking, exercise, and experiencing nature. Soft surface trails usually cater to hikers, dog walkers, and trail runners, but they sometimes can be shared by mountain bikers or equestrians.

Typically, soft surface trails are comprised of dirt, gravel, or crushed aggregate and should be designed to consider potential for conflicts between different users and environmental and natural resource impacts.





### **Mountain Bike Trails**

Mountain bike trails, such as those at Olde Rope Mill Park and Blankets Creek, are exclusively for recreational purposes and usually accommodate only mountain bikers. However, some locations may allow for both biking and hiking.

Compared to soft surface trails, mountain bike trails provide more varied terrain to maintain cycling interest. As such, design of these facilities should consider environmental impacts with respect to inclines, declines, rocks, ruts, and gravel that are commonplace in the natural environment.

## **Blueways**

Blueways are recreational facilities which follow navigable waterways, such as rivers and creeks. Blueways are typically utilized for kayaking, canoeing, rafting, and tubing, among other passive aquatic activities. Blueway design should consider water flow and volume, have multiple points of access to accommodate visitors of different ages and abilities, and have detailed route and safety information.



## **Amenities & Wayfinding**

## Meaningful Nodes

Incorporating different elements into wayfinding can enrich the trail user experience and foster a deeper connection to Cherokee County.

- Cultural Node Highlight local culture by integrating art installations, featuring cultural landmarks, installing descriptive plaques, and utilizing storytelling features that narrate the heritage and traditions of the community
- Ecological Node Incorporate educational or interactive signage and exhibits that explains local flora and fauna, natural habitats, and conservation efforts
- Historical Node Offer insights into the area's historical past events, notable figures, and architectural heritage

## Wayfinding & Branding

Effective wayfinding design enhances the user experience and improves public safety. Incorporating branding elements unique to the County and local communities into signage, lighting, and trail design helps create a strong visual identity and fosters a sense of place.

## **Amenity Overview**

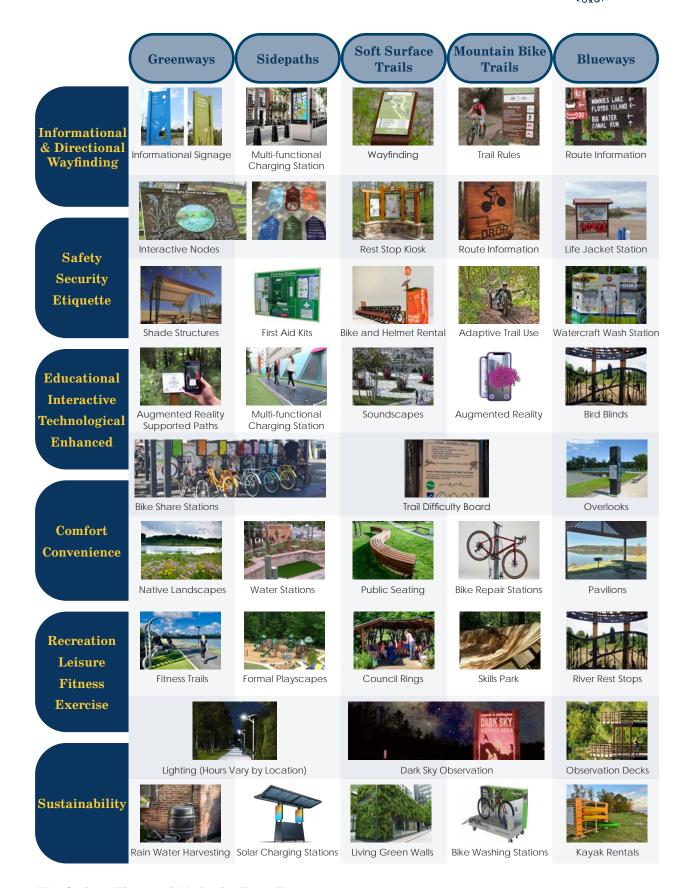
Designing and developing amenities with a user-centric approach is crucial to fostering positive experiences and encouraging frequent usage. A wellplanned amenity caters to a diverse range of needs, enhancing community satisfaction and promoting a vibrant, inclusive environment. Thoughtful integration of modern technologies and sustainable practices not only addresses immediate requirements but also prepares the community for future growth and opportunities. Additionally, creating spaces for learning, relaxation, and personal development supports holistic well-being and a higher quality of life for all users. Below are key themes that were used to categorize facility types across all trail typologies:

- Information, Directional, and Wayfinding
- · Safety, Security, and Etiquette
- Educational Interactive and Technologically Enhanced
- Comfort and Convenience
- · Recreation and Leisure
- Fitness and Exercise
- Sustainability



Example Wayfinding Signage





Wayfinding Themes & Nodes by Trail Typology

## **Network Development**

## **Development Process**

The network development process for the Cherokee County Greenways & Trails Master Plan consisted of assessing previously recommended projects from other plans and studies alongside programmed projects and existing conditions findings.

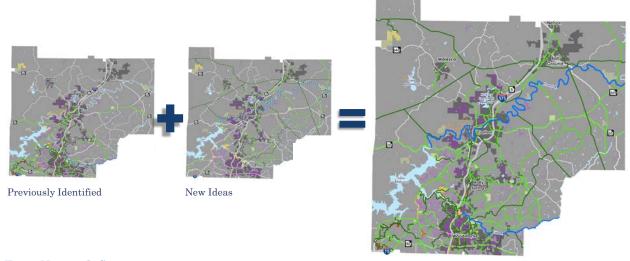
From there, the project team developed 95 new trail and greenway project ideas, particularly in the northern and central portions of the County where there were fewer existing or previously identified trail projects compared to more developed areas of the County such as Woodstock, Holly Springs, and southwest unincorporated Cherokee County.

## **Project Sources**

A little more than half of the network, or 133 of the 228 trail projects, consists of projects stemming from recommendations from previously adopted plans and studies across the County. There are also projects that could be aligned with SPLOST, TIP, or long-range GDOT projects:\*

- Greenways & Trails Master Plan 95 projects
- Canton Forward LCI 1 project
- Canton Transportation Master Plan 12 projects
- Cherokee Moves CTP 26 projects
- Connect the Creeks LCI 12 projects
- Southwest Cherokee Parks & Trails Plan - 29 projects
- Woodstock Greenprints 50 projects
- Alignment with previously programmed or long-range projects -16 projects

\*Note: the number will not add up directly as some projects came from multiple sources.



Trail Network Components

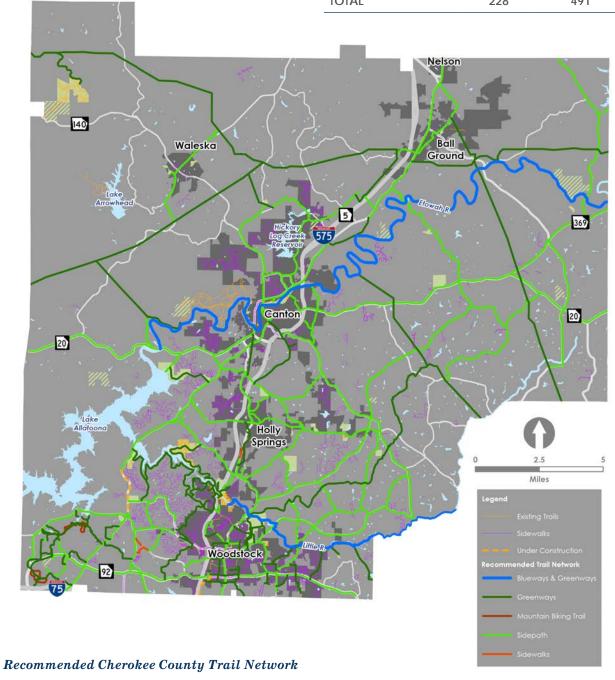


## **Trail Project Universe**

The network consists of 491 miles, with nearly 228 linear miles of sidepaths, 209 miles of greenways, 48 miles of blueways, and five miles of mountain bike trails. Previous sidewalk projects that help fill existing gaps to access future trails were also included in the network.

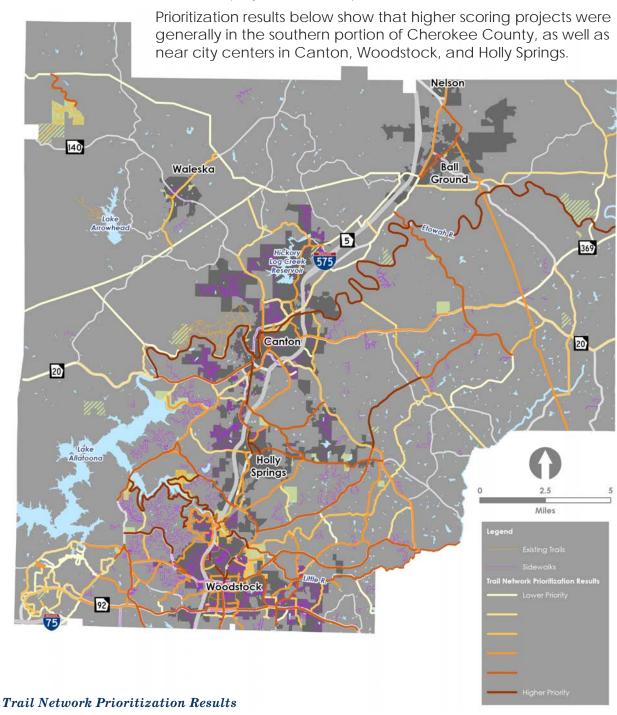
### Trail Project Universe by Typology

Typology	# of Projects	Total Length (miles)
Blueways	4	48
Greenways	90	209
Sidepaths	128	228
Sidewalks	4	1
Mountain Bike Trails	2	5
TOTAL	228	491

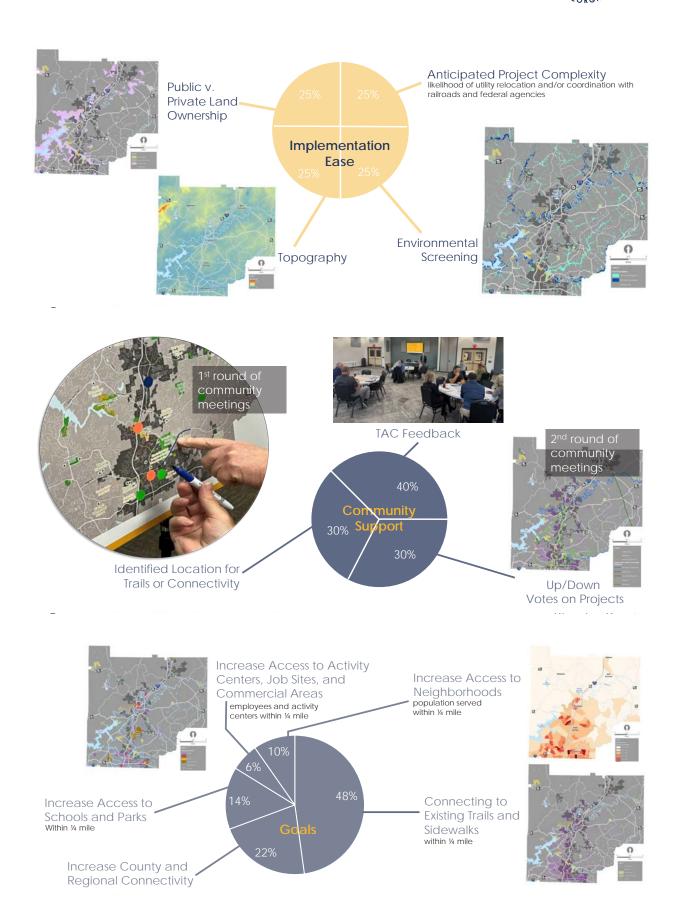


## **Project Prioritization**

The project team considered three overall categories - implementation ease, community support, and plan goals - with the intention of prioritizing trail projects across the County to support identifying short-term, mid-term, long-term, and aspirational priorities for implementation. Each category was worth up to 100 points and factored into the evaluation of each trail project on a 300-point scale.







## Implementation Plan

The implementation plan for the *Cherokee County Greenways & Trails Master Plan* evaluates different factors, such as consideration of the project prioritization results, program delivery, available funding, cost share between cities and the County, and potential sources of external funding to derive a 30-year program that can benefit County residents and visitors for years to come. This plan will be periodically updated as conditions and priorities within the County change over the next 30 years.

## **Potential Funding Sources**

The Plan considers multiple sources and types of funding for implementing the trail and greenway network within Cherokee County. Some facilities can be incorporated into existing infrastructure or programmed projects as part of current funding sources, while other facilities require a more detailed approach and necessitate diverse funding resources and programs.

### **Local Funding**

- Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax
- Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax
- Bonds
- · General Funds
- Impact Fees
- · Private Foundations & Grants

### Regional Funding

 Appalachian Regional Commission Area Development Program

#### **State Funding**

- Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program
- Downtown Development Revolving Loan Fund

### **Federal Funding**

- Transportation Alternatives Program
- · Recreational Trails Program
- Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program
- Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program
- Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity Grants
- · Reconnecting Communities Pilot
- · Safe Streets and Roads for All
- · Community Development Block Grants
- · Federal Lands Funding Programs



Portion of Etowah River Trail is Parallel to the Georgia Northeastern Railroad Line in Canton



## 30-Year Trail Plan with Two Options

The culmination of the *Greenways & Trails Master Plan* process is a 30-year trail implementation plan across the County. The plan consists of four timeframes:

- Short-Term (0-10 Years)
- Mid-Term (10-20 Years)
- Long-Term (20-30 Years)
- Aspirational (30+ Years)

The 30-year implementation plan is presented through two distinct scenarios - a base scenario that calls for an investment of approximately \$1 million to \$2 million annually for trail projects and an enhanced scenario that calls for an investment of approximately \$5 million to \$6 million annually for trail projects. The implementation plan factors in cost share assumptions between the County and cities to delineate which tier projects belong in both funding scenarios.

The base and enhanced options serve as a guide based on existing priorities and available funding. Priorities and available funding may shift over time, and the projects assigned to each tier are not in a ranked order. Lastly, the County should explore any unforeseen opportunities to implement trail projects, regardless of tier.

## **Aspirational Projects**

The *Greenways & Trails Master Plan* consists of so many ambitious projects, but the County can only fund and deliver so many projects over the span of 30 years - regardless of the level of investment the County chooses to pursue following this plan's adoption.

To this end, the plan includes a tier for projects which are unfunded for this initial plan but can be revisited during a future update of the plan.



Sidepath Along Olde Rope Mill Park Road in Woodstock

A high-level comparison of the number of trail projects and linear miles each scenario can deliver is included in the table below. The following pages discuss short-term projects in the base and enhanced scenarios and the spatial extent of both trail networks.

#### Comparison of Trail Capital Development Work Programs - Base Versus Enhanced Options

	Base Option		Enhanced Option	
Projects by Tier	# of Projects	# of Miles	# of Projects	# of Miles
Short-Term (0-10 Years)	31	76	35	90
Mid-Term (10-20 Years)	7	8	16	33
Long-Term (20-30 Years)	7	11	22	41
Total 30-Year Trail Plan Projects	45	95	73	164
Aspirational	183	396	155	327
			TOTAL TRAIL NETV	VORK - 491 miles

## **Short-Term Projects**

Below is a list of short-term projects in the Cherokee County Greenways & Trails Master Plan based on project type and each project's corresponding identification number. Blueways are shown in blue, greenways are dark green, sidewalks are in red, and sidepaths are shown in light green.

The base option includes 31 short-term projects while the enhanced option includes 35 short-term projects - all projects in the base option plus four additional projects that can be funded with additional investment by the County.

## **Base Option Short-Term Projects**

	Little River
BW-1	Woodstock Gr
	along the Little
	Mill Poad to Ea

## r Blueway

eenprints project e River from Arnold Mill Road to Earny Road

## BW-2

### Trestle Rock Trail

Woodstock Greenprints project along the Little River east of Olde Rope Mil Park in Woodstock to Arnold Mill Road



## Little River Blueway -J.J. Biello Park

Woodstock Greenprints project in J.J. Biello Park along the Little River



## **Etowah River Blueway**

New project along the Etowah River from SR 20 to Forsyth County



### **Towne Lake Pass**

Woodstock Greenprints project to connect to Project GW/SP-7



## Towne Lake Parkway Connector

Woodstock Greenprints project from Running Deer Parkway to Woodstock High School



### Rubes Creek South

Connect the Creeks LCI project from south of SR 92 to existing **Rubes Creek Trail** 



## Woodlands Trail West

Woodstock Greenprints project from Neese Road to Trickum Road



### Etowah River Trail

New trail project to connect Boling Park to SR 140



#### The Mill Trail

Canton TMP project from Harmon Park to Mill Industrial Way



### Etowah River Bridge

Canton TMP project to construct bridge along Etowah River Trail



## **Canton Utility Easement Trail**

Canton TMP project from Univeter Road to SR 140



## **Bridget Hammond Trail**

Woodstock Greenprints project from Main Street to Arnold Mill Road (East/West Segment)



## **Bridget Hammond Trail**

Woodstock Greenprints project from Arnold Mill Road to Little River (North/South Segment)



## First Baptist Church to **Trickum Connector**

Woodstock Greenprints project from Shadow Chase Way to Trickum Road



## The Woodlands Trail East

Woodstock Greenprints project from SR 92 to the Little River



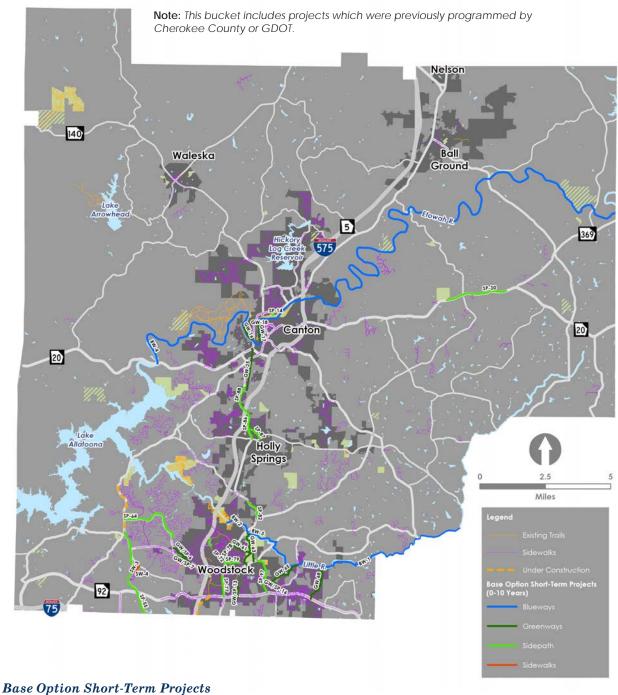
Old Bascomb Road Project from 2022 CTP along Old Bascomb Road	SP-77 Main Street - Segment 2 Connect the Creeks LCI project from SR 92 to Fowler Street			
Old Bascomb Court Project from 2022 CTP along Old Bascomb Court	SP-78 Education Connector 2022 CTP & Woodstock Greenprints project from Main Street to Ridgewalk Parkway			
Canton Mill Drive Canton TMP project from Etowah River Trail to Mill Industrial Way	SP-79 Dobbs Road 2022 CTP & Woodstock Greenprints project from Main Street to Dobbs Trail			
SP-30 SR 20 - Segment 7 Programmed project to add sidepath from Cherokee Veterans Park to Soleil Boulevard	Holly Springs Parkway New project from East Cherokee Drive to Fox Creek Drive			
SP-55  Bells Ferry Road  Programmed project from Cobb County to Victoria Road	SP-86 Holly Springs Parkway New project from Holly Street/ Hickory Road to Hembredge Drive			
Towne Lake Parkway 2022 CTP & Woodstock Greenprints project from Bells	SP-87 Hickory Springs Parkway New project from Holly Springs Parkway to Hickory Road			
Ferry Road to Towne Lake Hills South Drive	SP-88 Marietta Highway 2022 CTP & Canton TMP project from I-575 to Univeter Road			
Rope Mill Road Woodstock Greenprints project from Towne Lake Parkway to Woodstock Parkway	Dupree Park Connector - Segment 2 Woodstock Greenprints project along Neese Road from SR 92 to Arnold Mill Road.			
Additional Enhanced Option Short-Term Projects				
All Base Option Short-Term Projects Plus 4 Additional Projects Across the County				



**Ball Ground Connector** 

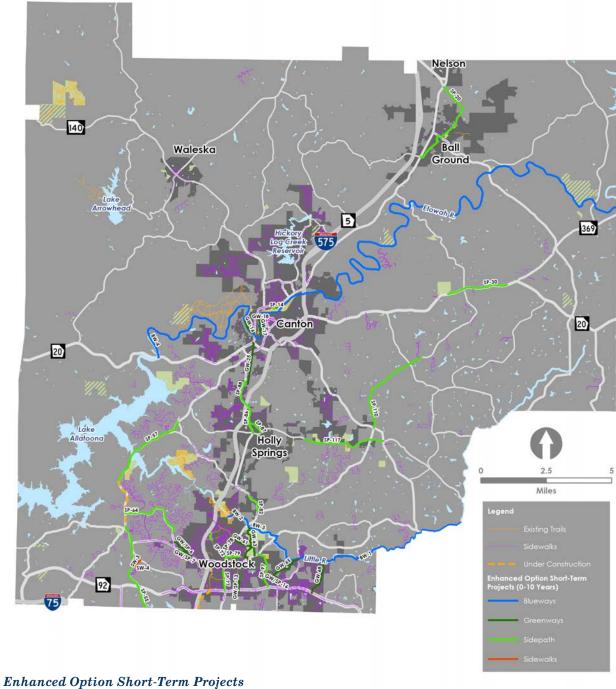
**East Cherokee Drive** 



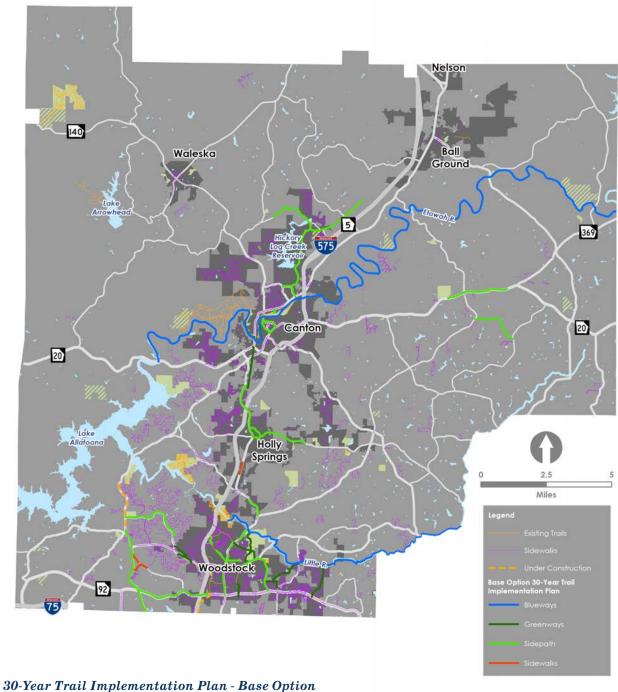




**Enhanced Option Short-Term Projects** \$96 million to 35 \$155 million **Projects Cost Range Total Miles** 



**Base Option 30-Year Trail Implementation Plan** \$100 million to 45 95 \$168 million **Projects Total Miles Cost Range** 





Financed Option 30-Year Trail Implementation Plan

73

164

\$248 million to \$401 million

Projects

Total Miles

Cost Range

