

Policy Area 2: Sidewalk, Bikeway and Trail System



Key Words and Phrases:

From Town Meeting:

DESIRED FUTURE

- Bike lanes along major connectors
- Hiking trail along old railroad bed to Stokesdale & along Haw River
- Connecting greenways for recreation and transportation
- Bike lanes on road
- Connect community areas and parks
- Horseback riding trails/agritourism
- Bike lanes (150, Pleasant Ridge)
- Lighted, paved sidewalks along Old Summerfield Rd & bike lanes
- Greener method of moving around town (walking, biking, etc) safely - & park & ride facilities
- Parking at Strawberry Rd walking trails
- Walking trails to connect TC shopping & other trails
- Several parks joined by hiking/biking trails
- Bike lanes Lake Brandt

Single function land use zoning at a scale and density that eliminates the pedestrian has been the norm for so long that Americans have forgotten that walking can be a part of their daily lives.

Peter Calthorpe
1989

UNWANTED FUTURE

Note: No citizen comments concerning this subject were a significant element of the Unwanted Future.

Town Council/Zoning Board Comments From Joint Kick Off Meeting:

- Trails (walking & bicycle), paths that connect to greenways, leading into our town



- Trail system development and connectivity
 - Design trail system to be used as transportation and recreation connecting people to town core

The above *key words and phrases* were gleaned from (1) the Town Meeting for the Comprehensive Plan (2) the Joint Kick-Off Meeting of the Town Council and Zoning Board and (3) from comments made by members of the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee. These key words and phrases were employed to generate the following **Common Objective** and related **Policies for Walking, Hiking, and Biking**.



Common Objective for Sidewalk, Bikeway, and Trail System

The Town of Summerfield shall strive to become a walkable and bikeable community. Working in cooperation with private sector interests, the Town shall pursue a high level of connectivity between neighborhoods and other destinations in town such as schools, parks, and shopping. A well-integrated network of streets, sidewalks, bikeways, hiking trails, and horseback riding trails will provide for a multitude of driving, walking, bicycling, and riding alternatives.

Policies for Sidewalk, Bikeway, and Trail System

Policy 2.1: SIDEWALKS, BIKEWAYS, and TRAILS should be provided on a priority basis to connect residential areas to non-residential destinations, such as schools, parks, libraries, shopping centers or similar facilities.

Policy 2.2: The use of (1) **NATURAL GREENWAY CORRIDORS** such as streams and floodplains, and (2) **MAN-MADE GREENWAY CORRIDORS** such as utility and transportation rights-of-way and easements, should be secured as the backbone of the Town's off-road trail system.

Policy 2.3: PEDESTRIAN AND BIKEWAY UNDERPASSES, BRIDGES, and other crossing features should be constructed where necessary to maintain a continuous system of trails and bikeways.

Policy 2.4: STRIPED BICYCLE LANES and appropriate signage should be required ALONG NEW OR IMPROVED COLLECTOR OR HIGHER LEVEL STREETS. Bicycle lanes and signage may also be required along other streets, to be determined on a case by case basis.

Policy 2.5: PUBLIC BIKEWAY AND WALKWAY CONNECTIONS BETWEEN NEW AND EXISTING NEIGHBORHOODS should be encouraged. Local streets or connecting paths should be used as necessary to promote a town-wide network for pedestrian and bicycle travel. Public access to existing private sidewalk and trail systems shall be encouraged, especially when such trails serve as a critical link between destinations.

Policy 2.6: All FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS AND SITE PLANS should be examined for pedestrian and bicycle compatibility. Bikeway and pedestrian routes passing through or adjacent to new developments should be identified and planned for in the construction of such developments.

Policy 2.7: All new public and private non-residential developments should be encouraged to provide for BICYCLE PARKING and ACCESS if the development is within about 1000 feet of an existing or funded bikeway.

Policy 2.8: All future ROAD CONSTRUCTION AND IMPROVEMENTS should be examined for bikeway feasibility. In addition to the Summerfield Trail Plan, consideration should be given to state and regional hiking and biking initiatives such as the State Mountains to Sea Trail and the Greensboro Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization Bi-Ped Plan.

Policy 2.9: Bicycle facilities and their impacts should be included in TRAFFIC IMPACT ANALYSES for new developments, if such impact analysis is required.

Policy 2.10: PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE FRIENDLY SCHOOL ZONES should be established and implemented around all schools. Consider sidewalks as a priority near schools.

Policy 2.11: Trails and bicycle-related improvements and maintenance should be an integral component of the Town's ANNUAL BUDGET for public infrastructure. Appropriations toward the creation of a community-wide trail system shall be considered in the context of other Town budget priorities.



Notes and Commentary

Walking and Hiking

Nearly all of the comments received from area citizens and Town leaders concerning walking and hiking in Summerfield emphasized *off-street trails*, as opposed to traditional *sidewalks within a street right of way*. Therefore, the bulk of the comments following address the development of off-street trails, particularly as located in greenway corridors¹.



Greenway corridors use largely natural features such as river and creek floodplains to create linear parks and locations for off-road trails. These natural corridors are supplemented, as opportunities allow, by man-made corridors such as utility and transportation rights of way. Together, these two types of corridors can provide for a complete, interconnected system of linear park spaces and trails within a community. The Town of Summerfield is blessed with a pattern of development, stream configuration, and even a rail corridor that offers good opportunities for greenway and related trail development.

The kinds of separated off-street trails found in greenways have the advantage of totally removing the pedestrian and the cyclist from congested streets where potential sideswipes or other accidents with cars are more likely. Obviously, greenway trails may also provide for a more pleasant walk or ride in a natural setting than might be found along a high speed roadway.

One disadvantage of the off-street trail is that it tends to be viewed more as a recreational opportunity than as a serious transportation facility. Off-street trails may also be so remote from activity centers and destinations that they have little utility for commuting or running errands. Therefore, such trails should, whenever possible, connect with sidewalks and bikeway facilities to gain access to places of employment, shopping, and gathering.



Bicycling

Unlike hiking trails, which may involve more undulating terrain found in off-street locations, most comments received concerning bicycling in Summerfield referred to the desire for on-street bike lanes. Therefore, the following comments place bikeways in a largely on-street context.

Roughly 100 years ago, bicycles came into their own as a very popular form of transportation. Despite the predominance of dirt roads in many communities, bicycles were used for commuting to work, running errands, and for pleasure (a la "A Bicycle Built for Two"-- written in 1892). It is no surprise that the success

¹ Note: This narrative section addresses the development of greenway trails in their role as a pedestrian travel option within the Town of Summerfield. The other aspect of greenways as part of the town's open space system will be addressed elsewhere in this plan under the policy section on Park and Recreation Improvements.

of a bicycle shop in Dayton, Ohio allowed its two owners to build and fly the world's first working airplane at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Bicycles were then a big business and an important transportation option for many people.²

A century later, there are two major problems confronting the widespread use of bicycles in Summerfield. The first is the perception of bicycling as primarily a recreational pursuit. The second, more significant problem is a street system that forces all travelers, including bicyclists, onto a limited number of high traffic, high speed roadways that are not designed to accommodate bicycles. The first problem is actually a function of the second, in that until Summerfield's road system is properly configured to accommodate bicycles, thereby increasing the number of bicyclists on the street, bicycling will continue to be viewed primarily as a recreational outlet.

Listed below are the four basic types of bikeways available for application along most streets and roadways in Summerfield:



◀ **Shared roadway with regular lane width.**

Bicyclists share the existing road with other vehicle traffic (the majority of road mileage in the United States falls into this category)

▶ **Wide curb lane**

Bicyclists share a wide outside (curb) lane with other vehicle traffic



▶ **Separated path or lane**

Bicyclists have dedicated paths and trails (or sometimes very wide lanes) that offer significant separation from other vehicle traffic.

◀ **Bike lane.**

Bicyclists have dedicated road space that is adjacent to but separated from other vehicle traffic lanes



All photos on this page
courtesy of
www.pedbikeimages.org

² It wasn't until Henry Ford started mass production of automobiles in the 1910's that cars came into more common use.

There is currently no national standard for choosing the appropriate type of bikeway for use with a particular roadway type. Usually, the type of bicycle facility recommended depends upon a number of variables including the traffic volume and speed of the roadway, right of way width, shoulder width, stormwater drains, frequency of driveways and intersections, and presence or absence of turning lanes. A final and oftentimes controlling variable is the availability of funds.

The least costly and perhaps safest way to develop bikeways is to employ a network of appropriate, interconnected local streets. No extra expense is involved because no extra right of way, paving or signage is required. Unfortunately, the use of interconnected local streets in Summerfield has been hampered by subdivisions and developments that do not connect with one another, but rather empty out onto the closest major road.



One of the simplest and most effective actions that the Town can take in providing for bikeways is to require that new developments connect their streets (or at least provide a connecting bike *path*) to adjacent developments. This would allow bicyclists to travel along the interior streets of neighborhoods, without having to pedal along heavily trafficked roads. This objective can be accomplished simply by intelligent planning in the layout of new neighborhoods.

Regarding an existing neighborhood that lacks a street connection to an adjoining neighborhood, a good option is to pursue the pedestrian and bicycle path option, linking one neighborhood to another. Obviously, any

retrofitting of pedestrian and bicycle connections between existing neighborhoods would require a full consultation with neighborhood residents. Hopefully, with attitudes changing about health and obesity, access to schools, parks, and other destinations, and enhanced real estate values, some existing neighborhoods will see the advantages of having access to a community-wide bikeway system.

Equestrian Trails

Guilford County reportedly has among the largest, if not the largest, per capita horse populations in the State of North Carolina. Consider the following *excerpts* from a communication received concerning the issue of horse trails in Guilford County:

“Keep in mind that as the human population increases, the horse population generally does too, particularly in the exurban areas like Summerfield. More than 50% of those horses are on farms with 5 head or less, which represents the typical hobbyist owner, not professional boarding/training/breeding (though Guilford Co does have several of those, too).”

Generally speaking, a trail system of 5 miles or less in a park is going to attract local riders looking for nice short day ride. You won't have people trailering in from much more than an hour away. As

mileage and variety increases, the attraction will increase for riders from further away. For any trail system, regardless of mileage, adequate parking for multiple trailers is critical because the majority of people will have to transport their horses, even if they are local.

Planning for manure management, water, toilets, etc are also important. And, last but not least is planning for the trail experience and types of users, whether the trail will be shared use; all horse trails do not have to be 8 foot wide packed screenings greenways - with appropriate careful trail design up front, native surface trail can be created and maintained sustainably.

In 1996, Guilford County had the highest horse population in the entire state -- 5,600 horses. Between 1996 and 2008, it was estimated that the horse population in North Carolina nearly doubled; if Guilford County followed that trend, the local count of horses would be nearing 10,000.

Source: American Horse Council

A shining example of a local regional trails system. . . is the FETA system (Foothills Equestrian Trails Association) in Polk County. Google FETA trails and see their website. It is a very carefully managed trail system with over 100 miles of trails, almost entirely on private property, using hundreds of easements and access agreements. Access is limited to County tax payers. It is a HUGE property value incentive - people want to buy into that system and pay a premium to be on it. And what I really like is that it decentralizes access and traffic, lowering capital and maintenance cost. Most people directly access it from their property or neighborhoods, reducing the need for large centralized parking areas - there are a few much smaller trailheads where people can park a couple trailers as needed. The wear and tear on the trails is much less because users are so dispersed. There are strict rules about safety and not riding when it's wet. People are much more invested in volunteering on work days because it is their backyard. But, the big hurdle is getting around the NIMBY attitudes that many property owners have – Polk Co was fortunate that a critical mass of property owners "got it" and saw the future value of such a system."³



Of note, the FETA horse trails system referenced above is located on numerous private properties whereby land owners in Polk County have agreed to come together to create a “cooperative” trails system for the exclusive use of horses. If given a choice, equestrians would naturally prefer that trails for horses not be shared with bicyclists or even hikers.

³ E-Mail Communication from Barbara Oslund to Carrie Spencer dated February 15, 2009.

Bicyclists, in particular, can sometimes “spook” a horse, causing potentially dangerous situations.



While it may be possible for private property owners and horse riding advocates to do something similar in Summerfield, this is not the prerogative of the Town or this Community Plan in particular. In a rapidly growing and relatively small community like Summerfield, paths paid for with public funds would more likely be multi-use facilities rather than trails for the exclusive use of horses. Stated another way, Town funding for the designation and construction of off-road trails is more likely to receive broad voter approval if such trails are

open to a variety of users. One way to avoid possible conflicts between equestrians and other user groups is to designate time of day or day of week use restrictions. Posting such information at trail heads can inform users of such restrictions at various points of access to the trail system.