



## Agenda Abstract

### BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Meeting Date:	Sept. 23, 2024
Department:	Public Space and Sustainability
Agenda Section:	Regular
Public hearing:	No
Date of public hearing:	N/A

#### PRESENTER/INFORMATION CONTACT

Stephanie Trueblood, Public Space and Sustainability Manager

#### ITEM TO BE CONSIDERED

**Subject:** Ridgewalk Benefits Analysis and Feasibility Study Phase 2

##### Attachments:

1. Presentation Slides
2. Ridgewalk Benefits Analysis
3. Ridgewalk Feasibility Study Phase 2

##### Summary:

Ridgewalk is a proposed off-road greenway for bicycles and pedestrians that connects downtown Hillsborough to the future train station site and crosses the interstate to connect to Cates Creek Park in Waterstone. In fall 2022, the town contracted Summit Design and Engineering to develop a feasibility study to determine preferred alignments for the greenway, conduct preliminary analysis, develop concept-level designs, and present preliminary cost estimates. The study was presented to the town board in June 2023 and discussed in depth in September 2023. The feasibility study identified an alignment for the trail that met all the goals of the project however the cost estimates showed it to be a very expensive project at over \$18 million dollars.

The town board directed staff to investigate other potential alignments and analyze the effects of the proposed project. The purpose of the additional studies was to determine if there were more cost-effective ways to make the strategic bicycle/pedestrian connections and to look deeply into the benefits that Ridgewalk is likely to bring to the town. Detailing the advantages of the trail may help the town rationalize the project's expense and determine potential funding opportunities and partnerships.

Over the past year the project team determined two additional potential alignments for the greenway that are more affordable. These alternative alignments are detailed in the Ridgewalk Feasibility Study Phase 2. Cost estimates show the alternatives to be between \$7 and \$9 million dollars, less than half the original cost. However, the new alignments require road crossings and use of the single lane trestle on Exchange Club Lane.

In the Benefits Analysis, the project team conducted extensive public outreach to study the effects that Riverwalk has had on the town and conducted an academic review of national studies on the benefits of greenway infrastructure to communities by boosting the local economy, public health, environmental quality, transportation safety and efficiency, and social or cultural benefits. Then Ridgewalk is assessed for its potential positive impacts on the community, its connection to Hillsborough's existing plans, and mapping its potential ability to further connect the community to residential and commercial areas through non-automobile transportation modes.

**Financial impacts:**

Financial analysis of the various alignments, both original and alternative, is provided in the presentation. Analysis shows that there is sufficient surplus in annual debt payment to move forward with Alternative 1 or 3, whichever is preferred. These are segments which connect downtown to the future Train Station site and Collins Ridge greenway.

**Staff recommendation and comments:**

Staff recommends continuing to coordinate with NCDOT on Alternative 4 because if the bridge over the rail corridor is lengthened as part of the I-85 widening project and the greenway crosses under rather than over the interstate, the town could realize millions of dollars in project cost savings. It will likely take 3-5 years to find out if lengthening the bridge for the greenway passage will be allowed.

Staff recommends moving to the engineering phase of the project only when the town is confident that construction can be funded because engineering documents and permits expire, and regulations change after several years.

This project is consistent with the Strategic Plan: Connected Community Objective 1 and Initiative 1.3, as well as the Comprehensive Sustainability Plan: Transportation and Connectivity recommendations.

**Action requested:**

Review Ridgewalk Feasibility Study Phase 2 and Benefits Analysis results, determine which alternatives accomplish the project goals and are preferred, and provide direction to staff on next steps.