

# RIDGEWALK BENEFITS ANALYSIS



## THANK YOU!

This document is the result of a widespread community effort. A warm thank you to all the elected officials, Town of Hillsborough staff, business leaders, community members, partner agencies, and appointed board members who contributed to this document through their support, stories, survey responses, and enthusiasm for Hillsborough and its future.



TOWN OF  
**HILLSBOROUGH**  
NORTH CAROLINA



**SUMMIT**  
DESIGN AND ENGINEERING SERVICES

# Contents

Summary .....	4
<b>SECTION ONE: RIVERWALK .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Riverwalk .....	9
Riverwalk’s History .....	10
Culture and Community .....	12
Survey Takeaways .....	14
Stakeholder Interviews .....	16
<b>SECTION TWO: RESEARCH ON GREENWAYS .....</b>	<b>22</b>
Benefits of Greenways .....	24
Economic Impact .....	25
Property Values .....	26
Environment .....	27
Health .....	28
Transportation .....	29
<b>SECTION THREE: RIDGEWALK’S POTENTIAL .....</b>	<b>30</b>
Ridgewalk .....	32
Connection to Existing Plans .....	34
Wildlife Crossings and Safety .....	40
Future Train Station .....	42
Transportation & Housing Cost Burden .....	46
Reducing Congestion .....	47
Funding Ridgewalk .....	48
Conclusion .....	49
<b>APPENDIX .....</b>	<b>50</b>
Academic Sources .....	52
Stakeholder Survey Results .....	54

# Summary

The Town of Hillsborough is exploring the possibility of expanding its existing greenway network with the development of “Ridgewalk,” a proposed greenway that will run from north to south, connecting the southern neighborhoods of Hillsborough to Riverwalk and downtown.

To demonstrate the potential benefits of an additional greenway, this analysis combines several types of source. First, it studies Riverwalk and how the greenway has benefited the community since its implementation. Next, a survey was created to assess Hillsborough residents’ experience of Riverwalk, and how a new greenway would be received. Interviews were then conducted with local business owners and community members to reveal their perception of the trail, how it has changed the town, and what their attitude was toward a new greenway.

It then analyzes a survey 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.

Finally, the proposed 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.

By highlighting the successes of Riverwalk and other greenways, this document demonstrates the immense benefits that Ridgewalk will provide to Hillsborough and the wider community.

## **This Benefits Analysis includes:**

**A description and history of Riverwalk**

+

**Input from Hillsborough stakeholders about the impacts of Riverwalk**

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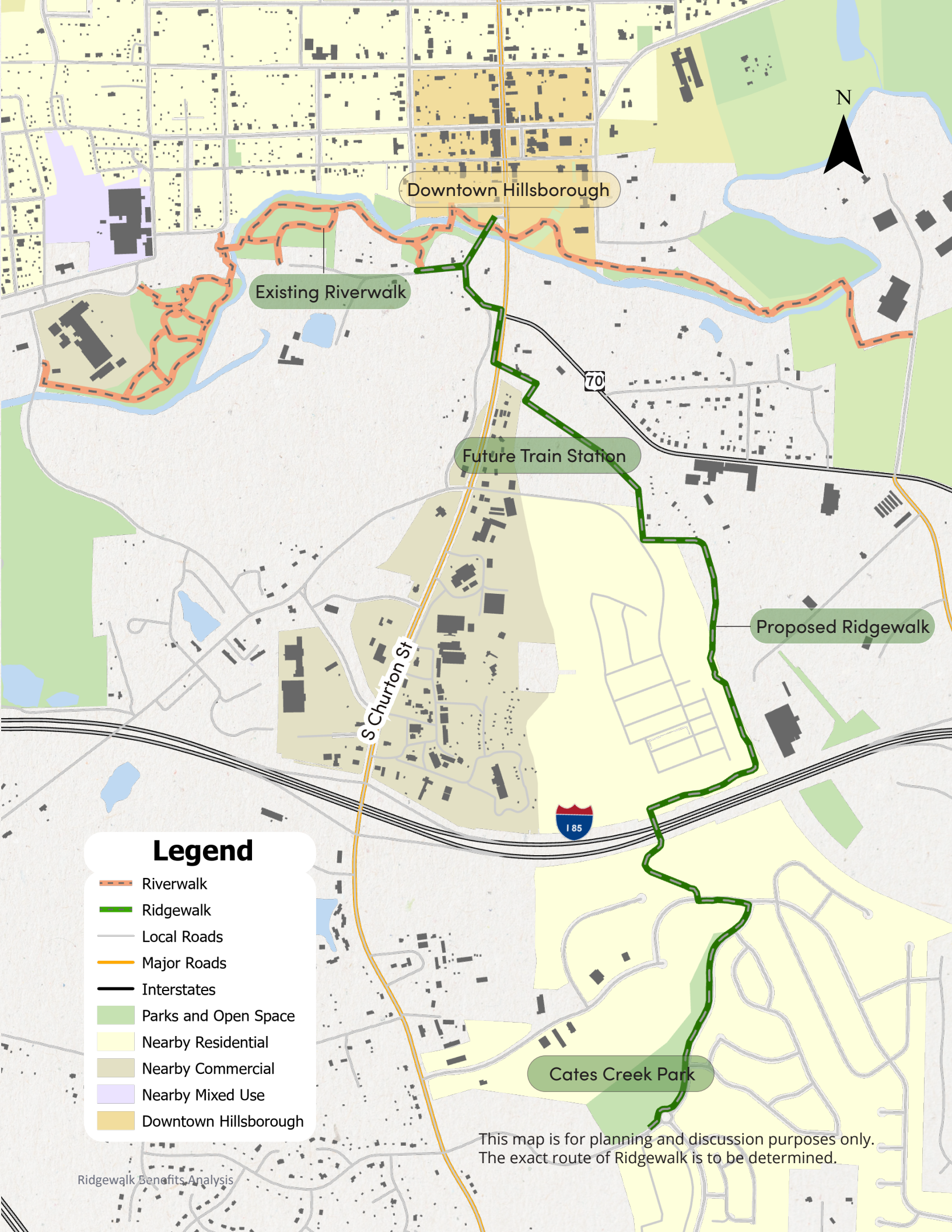
**Research on greenways across North Carolina and the United States**

+

**A summary of all plans and documents that support investment in Ridgewalk**

+

**Description of the impacts Ridgewalk would have on Hillsborough.**



### Legend

- Riverwalk
- Ridgewalk
- Local Roads
- Major Roads
- Interstates
- Parks and Open Space
- Nearby Residential
- Nearby Commercial
- Nearby Mixed Use
- Downtown Hillsborough

This map is for planning and discussion purposes only. The exact route of Ridgewalk is to be determined.

# SECTION ONE:

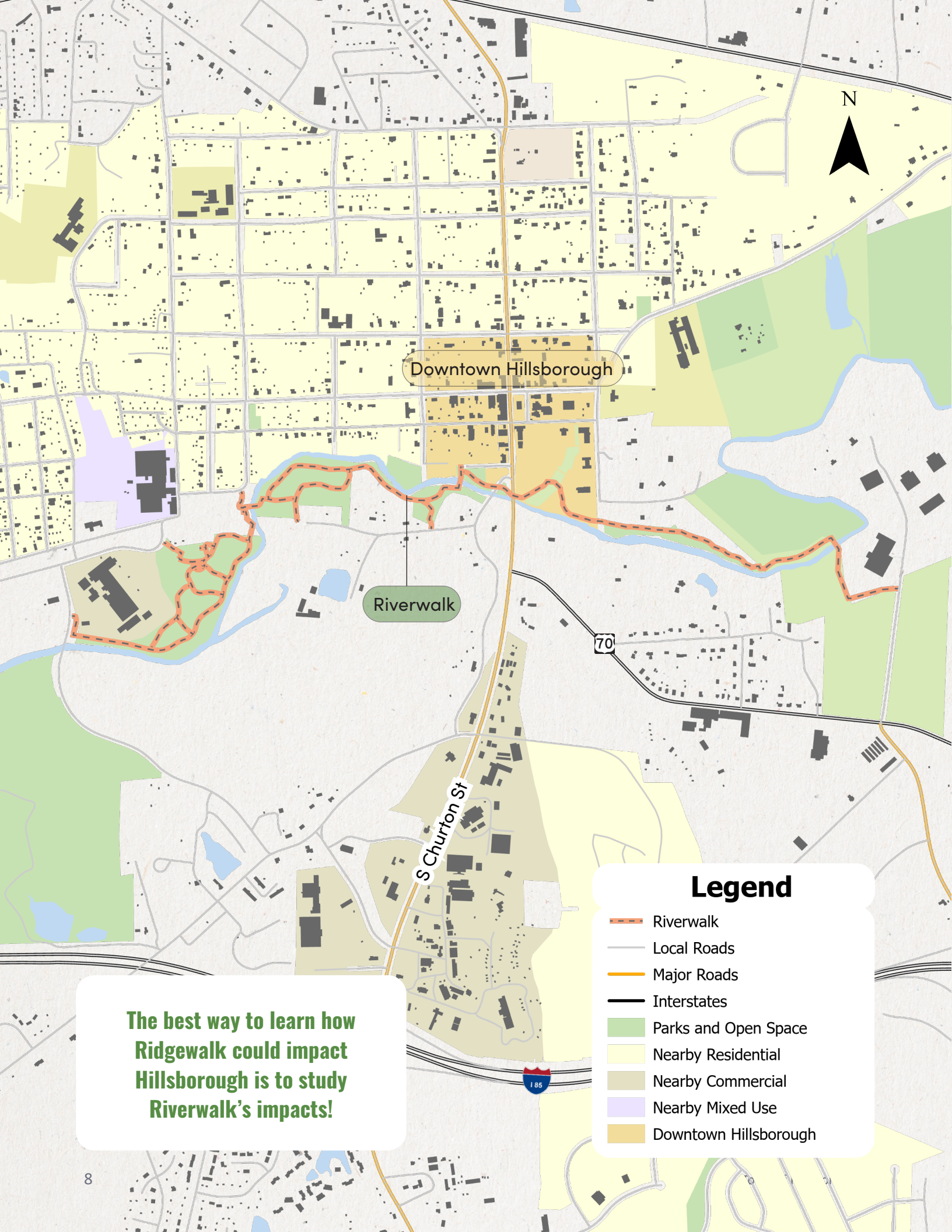
## RIVERWALK

The best way to study the impacts a new greenway would have on Hillsborough is to study the impacts of the existing greenway.

The following pages describe Riverwalk and its impact on Hillsborough. To draft this study, the team used a combination of a stakeholder survey, interviews with business owners and town leaders, and demographic and observational data.



Benches along Riverwalk



Downtown Hillsborough

Riverwalk

70

S Churton St

185

### Legend

- Riverwalk
- Local Roads
- Major Roads
- Interstates
- Parks and Open Space
- Nearby Residential
- Nearby Commercial
- Nearby Mixed Use
- Downtown Hillsborough

**The best way to learn how Ridgewalk could impact Hillsborough is to study Riverwalk's impacts!**

# Riverwalk

Hillsborough's Riverwalk is a paved, universally accessible trail that extends approximately three miles along the Eno River from east to west. Riverwalk is part of the Mountains-to-Sea trail, and Hillsborough is one of the only towns that the Mountains-to-Sea trail goes directly through, making it an important "trail town" along the way.

The western end of the greenway begins on the sidewalk adjacent to Eno River Brewing and the Eno River Mill, a historic mill from 1896, which has been converted into spaces for a gym, wedding venue, offices, small scale manufacturing, and a charter school. From there the path continues east and branches into additional paths such as "Gold Loop," which connects the trail to Gold Park. The trail then continues east and provides access to downtown Hillsborough, with a popular entrance adjacent to Weaver Street Market, then meanders past the Occaneechi Indian Village Replica Site, Hillsborough Community Gardens, and finally terminates at the eastern town boundary. After leaving the Town of Hillsborough, it becomes the Mountains-to-Sea trail and moves toward the Historic Occaneechee Speedway. The path is well-connected to public art, culture, and historic displays, areas of commerce and employment as well as residences and neighborhoods.

The greenway acts as a connector between destinations, a place for exercise and communing with nature, a cultivator for community events, and the green heart of Hillsborough. The bulk of the National Register Historic District lies in a grid pattern to the north of the greenway, with many historic homes and local businesses. South of the trail are neighborhoods that have been annexed over time and are more suburban in character. There are new subdivisions, restaurants, and commercial strips located along South Churton Street. There is access to Interstate 85 and Interstate 40. Recent development in the southern portion of town is more dense than older neighborhoods. The proposed greenway would connect the existing trail by foot and bicycle to the future station and further connect the southern portions of the community with the downtown Hillsborough.

Riverwalk has taken on a life beyond a piece of connective infrastructure. As this study reveals, it is now tied to the identity of Hillsborough itself. Functioning in a similar way to a "public square," the greenway has become the springboard to many events, volunteer activities, education opportunities, spaces for public art, and more to make Hillsborough a highly attractive place to live and visit.



NATJA Riverwalk Group Tour  
Source: Town of Hillsborough

# Riverwalk's History

The concept of Riverwalk came from a desire to reconnect the public with the community's natural and cultural resources. Before its implementation, the railroad and highway systems, a lack of sidewalks, and congested streets made walking or bicycling through the community difficult. Hillsborough's neighborhoods, as a result, were isolated from one another. Historically, the Eno River was used for both travel and trade during colonial and pre-colonial times as part of the Great Indian Trading Paths. Hillsborough was a crossroads stop for major routes and crossings of the Eno River.

In the Victorian Era, there were riverside paths that the population used for recreational purposes while visiting Hillsborough. However, parcels of land along the river were eventually all subdivided and sold off to private landowners. This meant that the public could only access or even see the Eno River from a few points without trespassing.

Almost 30 years ago, a group of citizens approached the Town of Hillsborough with the idea of reopening public access to the Eno River.

Creating new park space connected by a linear greenway was an attractive but challenging proposal as the Town of Hillsborough had limited resources and staff available to facilitate the project. The Planning Department was tasked with studying the feasibility of implementing a greenway and was aided by citizen volunteers who provided surveying and landscape architecture expertise. The feasibility study and a conceptual layout was produced in 2001 that called for two new pedestrian bridges across the Eno River.

*Phase I:* In 1995, a landowner granted a large acreage of land along the river to the Town of Hillsborough. This provided the momentum for the first phase of the project, allowing for 1 mile of trails within a 22-acre community park. This allowed the Town of Hillsborough to apply for and receive a \$500,000 North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund grant from the State, which is the maximum amount allocated per year to a project. The park was named "Gold Park," and opened to the public in 2008. The quick success and popularity of the park helped build support and confidence that the Town of Hillsborough could oversee extending the trail to connect the park to the downtown area.



*Phase II & III:* The property needed to complete this phase of Riverwalk was challenging for the Town of Hillsborough to obtain. It had been inherited overtime by landowners who lived throughout the United States. Hillsborough acquired the necessary parcels over five years, utilizing a second Parks and Recreation Trust Fund grant of \$398,000 to assist in the purchases. The Town of Hillsborough was also drafting and adopting a comprehensive pedestrian and bicycle plan during this time. The Community Connectivity Plan incorporated completing Riverwalk and connecting neighborhoods to the trail system with safe and convenient paths and sidewalks. In 2009, the Town of Hillsborough focused its efforts on a \$1.7 million sidewalk project that connected isolated neighborhoods in North Hillsborough to Gold Park and the Historic District. Nash Street, for example, had 1.3 miles of sidewalk constructed connecting two elementary schools, low-to-moderate income neighborhoods, and hundreds of residents with safe access to the community park and trail system as well as the historic downtown area.

Once all properties were acquired, the Town of Hillsborough created a conceptual plan and strategy for construction, coordinating various stakeholders and advisory boards to give input into the process. Public meetings were held

to solicit community engagement for the final plans. Early engineering was conducted and provided cost estimates. The Town of Hillsborough was able to receive a third Parks and Recreation Trust Fund grant of \$425,000. Hillsborough also received additional funds from the Recreational Trails Program and SunTrust Foundation (now the Truist Foundation.) In 2013, the engineering and construction documents were finalized. The proposed trail had many site constraints including steep slopes, unsuitable soils, constrained property limits, existing utilities, and tree preservation areas that made engineering difficult. Permits were required from nearly every state regulatory agency in North Carolina as the Town of Hillsborough attempted to construct an urban greenway while maintaining the natural and cultural environment of the Eno River corridor.

Construction of Phase II and III lasted one year, with the grand celebration of opening day occurring on October 11, 2014. It was attended by hundreds of residents and visitors. The Town of Hillsborough utilized patience and persistence to keep the vision alive as it navigated each step of the process, slowly gaining public support that continued to grow momentum until Riverwalk's completion was accompanied with almost total encouragement and anticipation.



# Culture and Community

Riverwalk has become an incubator of community and social events in the past decade. There are now so many reasons to visit Riverwalk in addition to transportation, exercise, and closeness to nature.

## SOCIAL ACTIVITIES:

Riverwalk offers access to neighbors and friends. You're likely to pass someone you know while walking along the path, and say hello or stop to chat. Small, frequent social interactions increase a person's sense of well-being and build community, one greeting, one smile, and one wave at a time. In this sense, Riverwalk has had a large part in strengthening the sense of community in Hillsborough.

**Riverwalk has played a large part in strengthening the sense of community in Hillsborough.**

More formal groups and events have sprung up because of Riverwalk. The Hillsborough Tree Board and the volunteer Invasive Species Removal Team are responsible for removing unwanted or harmful non-natives and planting appropriate species. In the past year, volunteers planted over 1,000 native plants in 30 species, ranging from sycamore and oak to strawberry and elderberry.

Anyone can download a Riverwalk Scavenger Hunt form from the Town's website and spend a fun couple of hours learning from interpretive signs and observing nature. Just one more benefit of Riverwalk.

The Hillsborough Running Club organizes an annual 5K and half marathon, both of which use Riverwalk as part of their routes.

These events wouldn't be as much fun or be as safe if they were all on streets!



The Eno River farmers market would undoubtedly be popular in any case, but Riverwalk allows some customers to access it without getting in their car.

## RIVERWALK-BASED EVENTS:

Many events take place on or around Riverwalk, including:

- The Solstice Celebration Lantern Walk
- Spiral of Light
- The River Park Concert Series
- The Hillsborough Running Club annual 5K and Half Marathon
- Arts Cycle
- Hand-made Parade
- First Fridays at Eno Arts Mill
- Uproar Public Art Festival
- And so much more!



Clockwise from top left: Bicyclists gather at Riverwalk, multiple modes of exercise on Riverwalk, Habitat Restoration sign, NATJA Riverwalk group tour, and Occaneechi Village Replica Site. Source: Town of Hillsborough

# Survey Takeaways

To gauge impressions of Riverwalk and the potential Ridgewalk, the Town released a public survey in February 2024, which was held open until April, 2024. The survey was available in English and Spanish, in digital and paper formats. Signs were placed along Riverwalk with a Quick Response (QR) code to the online survey. This page shows a summary of key takeaways from survey responses. *For detailed survey responses, please skip to the end of this document.*

## WHAT DO THE SURVEY RESULTS TELL US?

The majority of the people who took the survey were from Hillsborough, with others responding from Orange County, Durham, and Chapel Hill.

In the three months the survey was open, 586 people responded (583 in English and 3 in Spanish). That alone indicates the high level of interest Hillsborough stakeholders have in Riverwalk and greenways!

The majority of survey respondents use Riverwalk often: between a two and five times a week and once or twice a month. Almost 12% of respondents said they use Riverwalk every day.

Respondents use Riverwalk mostly for physical exercise or “relaxation or leisure,” but “observing nature” and “socializing or chatting with friends” were also shown as reasons. Respondents also said they use Riverwalk for transportation.

Walking is the most popular form of exercise on Riverwalk, followed by running or jogging. The majority of respondents spend thirty minutes to an hour on the trail.

Of the respondents who answered from the trail, many were traveling to shopping, dining, or to meet a friend. Some, who gave specific answers, were also going to the library, Gold



A sign along Riverwalk asking for survey responses.

Park, Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area overlook, Eno River Arts Mill, the dog park, Churton Street, Eno River Brewery, car repair, “to get from downtown to the sportsplex, Weaver Street Market, school, “running errands,” and the farmers market.

The majority (70%) of respondents indicated that they reach Riverwalk by car. This tells us two things: one, that Riverwalk is not equally accessible by foot to all Hillsborough residents who use it, and that Riverwalk draws users from the County and the region.

**When asked to rate their experience of Riverwalk, the average respondent answered 4.6 out of 5!**

Riverwalk users often stop to eat or shop when on the trail. Destinations include: The Eno River Brewery, Weaver Street Market, the library, The Wooden Nickel, Nash Street Tavern, Cup A Joe’s, Nomad, and more.

Question 13 asked “if you don’t live in Hillsborough, is Riverwalk the primary reason you come to Hillsborough? What else do you do while you’re here?”

Respondents mentioned a wide diversity of reasons they come to Hillsborough. Riverwalk was one of the main reasons, but respondents also mentioned riding bicycles, shopping in town, dining at restaurants, visiting breweries, shopping, the dog park, visiting friends, and more.

When asked to describe their experience using Riverwalk, “peaceful,” “relaxing,” and “nature” were some of the top responses.

Many respondents said that they have started exercising more because of Riverwalk, that it is an important part of life in Hillsborough, and they take visitors to Riverwalk.

**When asked if they would use a north-south trail (Ridgewalk) connecting downtown Hillsborough to southern portions of the community, the majority of respondents answered in the affirmative, with the following words repeating the most often: Absolutely. Definitely. Yes.**

The majority of respondents believe an additional greenway will enhance quality of life in Hillsborough. The average answer to this question is 9.4 out of 10.

When asked an open-ended question about how a second greenway would enhance quality of life in Hillsborough, respondents expressed a diversity of reasons that they believed Ridgewalk would enhance quality of life. Many respondents mentioned excitement about not needing to use a car as frequently and being able to bike into downtown. Some mentioned the potential for reduced traffic congestion if their neighborhood was accessible by bike trails. Other respondents mentioned access to green space for the residents and visitors of Hillsborough would greatly increase quality of life. Other respondents mentioned the health effects of having increased walkability and mobility options.

**Overall respondents were very positive and believe Ridgewalk will improve quality of life.**

# Stakeholder Interviews

*Thank you to our interview participants:*

**Chapel Hill/Orange County Visitors Bureau** - *Laurie Paolicelli, Hannah Hemphill*

**Anne & Arthur Fine Arts Supply** - *Erin Campbell*

**Collins Ridge Neighborhood** - *Sherra Lawrence*

**Colonial Inn** - *Elise Tyler*

**Cornwallis Hills Property Owners Association** - *Al Soulier*

**Eno River Association** - *Kim Livingston*

**Eno River Mill** - *Alex Gold*

**Hillsborough Visitors Center / Historic Hillsborough** - *Amanda Boyd*

**Former Hillsborough Mayor** - *Jenn Weaver*

**Summit Design & Engineering Services / Local Developer** - *Jim Parker*

**Becketts Ridge Neighborhood** - *Marty Ferris*

**Hillsborough Invasive Species Removal Volunteers** - *Tim Logue*

**Local Artist / Former Mayor** - *Tom Stevens*

**Weaver Street Market** - *Alice Lamson*

**Whit's Frozen Custard** - *Kathy and Barry Hupp*

**Hillsborough / Orange County Chamber of Commerce** - *Scott Czechlewski*

Stakeholder Interviews were conducted virtually through February, March, and April 2024. These community members were identified as being part of a business, organization, or community group that may have experienced impacts as part of Riverwalk's opening. The planning team was curious to know if there were business decisions made in relation to Riverwalk's opening; if community members could recount the before and after effect of the greenway's opening on the Town; and if there were any anecdotes or stories that could help illuminate just how many businesses or community efforts Riverwalk has helped launch in its history. These types of questions were asked of each participant, with some variation in questions depending on whether the participant was part of a local business, related to arts and culture, tourism, an environmental group, or representing a residential community. Regardless of background or role in the community, the unanimous response was of resounding love and appreciation for Hillsborough's Riverwalk.



**Riverwalk has expanded access to neighborhood commercial areas.**

It was clear from interviews conducted that the trail has become integral to Hillsborough's identity and part of daily life for both long-time residents and newcomers. The trail began as an idea for a recreational amenity, winding through nature, but has emerged and continues to take on increasing importance as a platform for education on local history, increased tourism, social opportunities and events, environmental health, transportation connections across town, an accessible place for exercise and promoting public health, a venue for arts and culture, and so many other things that Hillsborough's residents and visitors are continuing to create together.

One of Hillsborough's biggest attractions is its history. Before Riverwalk, this was emphasized as one of the main reasons a tourist should visit the Town. While that is still true today, Riverwalk is used as a connecting platform between many different sites. Located near the Visitors Center, Riverwalk connects places like the Occaneechi Village Replica Site and the Historic Occaneechee Speedway. This has provided the community and visitors with more access and opportunity to learn its local history, and the trail has become ubiquitous in advertising materials and websites as a must-see place to understand Hillsborough. This has transformed Hillsborough's approach to tourism, as the Town now advertises itself even more dynamically while also increasing its access to interpretive sites to further emphasize the Town's historic character.

Interview participants noted that the Town has been rapidly growing over the past decade, so it is difficult to point directly to Riverwalk and say that it has been the only difference. However, there was consistent agreement that there has been a "night and day" change in the community. Before 2014, Hillsborough could be characterized as a "sleepy Town" with not a lot going on in terms of restaurants, retail, or events. However, since 2014, when Riverwalk was opened, the town has experienced an incredible influx of

growth and new activities. This can generally be attributed to the quality of life, which in turn can be attributed to amenities like Riverwalk.

**There was consistent agreement that there was a "night and day" change in the community since 2014, and much of the change has been attributed to Riverwalk.**

Those interviewed stated their complex and multifaceted relationships to the greenway, as a space for quiet reflection in nature; to care for and exercise with members of their family; the first place they take their visitors to see, a quick walking spot after lunch; or a place to greet and talk to neighbors. Seeing the community out and about was especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic; where the need to socially distance became necessary to protect one another, Riverwalk provided a venue through which the community could be socially resilient as a place to safely socialize while remaining outdoors. The path has also given new groups a platform, including running and hiking clubs, and even a team of "Invasive Species Removal Volunteers." When community members see the volunteers work, they often stop and engage to ask, "What are you doing?" sharing a moment of education and sometimes connection for further volunteers.

Before the "Invasive Species Removal Volunteers" had formed, invasive privet had grown around fifteen to twenty feet tall along the banks of the Eno River. This visually prevented the community from seeing its river and prevented the proliferation of native species from taking root. As the volunteers continued their work, native river oats grew supporting a food chain that improves the environment for pollinators and other insects, that in turn feed larger animals. The connections between native habitat made by removing invasive species further expand wildlife diversity and improve the health of the

environment. The team also plants native trees that absorb runoff, keep sediment out of the river, stabilize the banks from erosion, and cool the water temperature to improve conditions for aquatic life. All the aesthetic and environmental benefits from Riverwalk would not be possible today if the invasive species remained, which is almost certainly the case were all the properties along Riverwalk to remain in private hands. Riverwalk and greenways in general help conserve the environment and protect its quality into the future as well. By having acquired properties along the Eno River, development is prevented from encroaching too closely to sensitive environmental areas. Riverwalk is also noted to provide access to nature while preserving and enhancing it. The trail connects to the Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area, Gold Park, and is designated as part of the North Carolina Mountain-to-Sea Trail. It features environmental interpretive signage to educate as well as opportunities to see birds and other wildlife, raising awareness and appreciation of environmental protection.

Riverwalk is an important transportation connection for both wildlife and human beings. Those interviewed stressed the importance of how West Hillsborough and Hillsborough now felt closer together than ever before. Two historically separated communities now share a safe and convenient pathway between commercial areas and neighborhoods. This has greatly expanded people's mental map of where it's possible to go in the Town. The connection has also improved business opportunities for the successful cluster of restaurants, a pet supply store along South Nash Street, and businesses at the Eno River Mill. Two businesses that benefit greatly from Riverwalk connection include a new brewery and a private school. Patrons of the brewery can safely reach their destination without using an automobile. Students can safely get to the school or go on walks during the school day with their classmates. These businesses enliven

West Hillsborough and further "triangulate" the activities a resident or visitor of Hillsborough can enjoy without driving between destinations. Activity begets activity, and the more people drawn to opportunities along Riverwalk, the more attractive a destination it becomes. This creates a highly social and economically productive environment. As people spend their time and money in the area, they can enjoy their community this way.

Weaver Street Market, with a prominent location at the "center point" of Riverwalk, and where the future Ridgewalk would connect, benefits greatly from foot traffic along Riverwalk. While sales have generally grown since the market's opening, the pandemic caused things to slow down. However, the prepared foods area, where lunch and breakfast are served has seen growth and there are near-daily returning customers. While there is no formal monitoring or tracking of patrons coming from or going to Riverwalk, through the interviews it was mentioned that trips of Weaver Street are often combined with a walk.

**Riverwalk has connected East and West Hillsborough, two previously separated communities by providing a safe and social pathway through town.**

The space to walk has had a noticeable impact on many of the interviewed participants' lives. Almost everyone discussed how their walking has increased because of Riverwalk's opening. Riverwalk is also a space for running or jogging, bicycling, or other exercise activities. One feature that sets Riverwalk apart from other greenways in the region is its accessibility. For the elderly, disabled, families, children, and everyone in the community, Riverwalk is wide, paved, or utilizes

boardwalks that allow for highly comfortable use of the trail. Ramps and bridges are easily navigated by mobility aids. Some participants noted that when they heard the trail would be paved, it was conflicting with their ideas of a natural trail down by the Eno River, however, since its completion it has become clear that the access has gone hand-in-hand with protecting and appreciating nature. Today, walking along the trail, one can see families with strollers, wheelchairs, children learning to ride bicycles, and more. Riverwalk is making the Town of Hillsborough a more active and healthier place to live by providing the space, infrastructure, and opportunity to recreate. As a larger audience grows through accessibility, areas along Riverwalk have been activated with programming and public art that have come to be greatly appreciated by the community.

**Riverwalk is making the Town of Hillsborough a more active and healthier place to live by providing the space, infrastructure, and opportunity to recreate.**

While not the venue for every event in Hillsborough, the connectivity provided by Riverwalk has had a reciprocal relationship with many events, such as Last Fridays and the Artwalk, allowing many members of the community an alternative way to get to the events without a car or a way to extend the evening's fun. Other events include the Arts Cycle and Handmade Parade, The River Concert with live music, the local Farmers' Market, and more. Riverwalk itself was, for three years, the site of a community-beloved work of art by the artist Patrick Dougherty. Shortly after Riverwalk's completion, the work titled "A Sight to Behold" was constructed from local brush and saplings, creating a whimsical castle-like structure that

captured the hearts and imaginations of many locals and visitors. The structure was so beloved that it became a venue for weddings and photoshoots. As a structure made from organic materials, its deconstruction was inevitable once it was damaged from snow. However, Riverwalk now is connected to the River Park Arch, by Jonathan Brilliant, a Raleigh-based artist that designed a steel frame with wood lattice work repurposed from one of Hillsborough's large beloved trees that fell over during a hurricane.

Perhaps the most well-attended event emblematic of Riverwalk's impact on local arts and culture in Hillsborough is the Solstice Celebration Lantern Walk, held annually in December. Participants walk the length of Riverwalk with creatively designed lanterns creating a beautiful atmosphere. Interview participants claimed that the initial idea was



"A Sight to Behold" by Patrick Dougherty  
Source: Town of Hillsborough

**“Riverwalk has been the most significant addition to the town in the 21st Century. It was a game changer. We had high expectations and our expectations were just blown out of the water.” – Tom Stevens, local artist and former Mayor of Hillsborough**



expected to bring in several hundred people, however, the event ended up drawing over two thousand locals and visitors. It has since become a beloved part of life in Hillsborough that continues to grow annually. Riverwalk is a vibrant and important public space to the Hillsborough community. Through the briefly conducted interviews numerous vignettes illuminated the various ways quality of life in Town is improved because of the greenway's existence. The community has been brought closer together and shares deeply in its many benefits across different points of study, yet literally connects them all. Since 2014, now a decade ago, Riverwalk has seen an increasing role in the community.

When asked about Ridgewalk, those interviewed noted that the greenway would be different than Riverwalk but held the same potential to create new value and positive change for Hillsborough's future. Participants imagined a future where visitors come in off the train and can walk or ride a bike into the Town, particularly for its events. Parking lots that sit mostly vacant south of the Downtown could also be utilized with a new safe connection to walk into the area. Neighborhoods that are isolated without sidewalks would suddenly have a safe way that connects them to the rest of their community.

**When asked about a new greenway, those interviewed noted that Ridgewalk would be different than Riverwalk but held the potential to create new value and positive change for Hillsborough.**

Cates Creek and other areas were identified as places that could be better protected with Ridgewalk, and Invasive Species Removal Volunteers could assist the Town in removing more non-native vegetation to help the environment thrive. There was generally unanimous love for the idea of expanding the network. Will Ridgewalk be fully implemented and benefit the Town in the ways Riverwalk has? Only time will tell, but, it seems that Hillsborough's community members are more than on board.

## **SUMMARY**

Hillsborough stakeholders undoubtedly value Riverwalk, and expressed excitement about the potential for the Ridgewalk expansion of the network. People use Riverwalk for recreation, exercise, quality time, access to nature, transportation to local businesses of varying kinds, and more. Survey respondents believe Riverwalk impacts their lives positively and use the trail regularly. They were excited about bicycle access to downtown, access to additional green spaces, and increased walkability. Riverwalk is be an essential part of Hillsborough's quality of life for locals and an important amenity for visitors to enjoy.

# SECTION TWO: RESEARCH ON GREENWAYS

This section provides a review of academic studies that attempt to quantify the effects greenways have had in other communities across the country. These studies inform how Ridgewalk would benefit Hillsborough.



A greenway in Minneapolis.  
Source: Adobe Stock

# Benefits of Greenways

Numerous studies have documented the benefits that greenways bring to local businesses, property values, the local tax base, human health, the environment, and the social life of the community. Benefits have been documented for cities and towns of all sizes, and for rural regions.

The extent and magnitude of the impacts range considerably, depending primarily upon the nature of the greenway itself, as well as the surrounding environmental, economic and community context. Trails in suburbs, small towns (such as Hillsborough), and rural areas typically have modest, but positive, impacts on nearby residential property values and business activity. Trails near waterways or wetland areas absorb stormwater and reduce runoff, while forest trails provide benefits through carbon sequestration and carbon storage by preserving intact forested areas.

Greenways that draw cyclists may attract bicycle repair, equipment, and food and lodging providers. Trail usage improves human health and reduces pollution and congestion from automobile traffic.

**Quantitative analysis of four greenways in North Carolina found that every \$1.00 invested in one-time trail construction generates a total of \$1.72 from local business tax revenue, sales tax revenue, and health and transportation benefits. This return can be expected for an investment in Ridgewalk. In addition to this multiplier, the investment will likely improve the business climate and draw other investment.**

*The information below details research of economic contributions of Direct Expenditures from Greenway Users in a report produced by the North Carolina Department of Transportation, Institute for Transportation Research and Education at North Carolina State University, and Alta Planning and Design that utilizes extensive data and statistical software to estimate the benefits from greenways across the state.*

Shared Use Path	Year Calculated	Annual # of Trips	Business Benefit Type	Business Output	Employment	Labor Income
American Tobacco Trail	2015-2017 Avg.	480,800	Direct	\$3,000,000	59	\$1,370,000
			Indirect	\$1,202,000	8	\$375,000
			Induced	\$1,466,000	11	\$465,000
			<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,668,000</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>\$2,211,000</b>
Brevard Greenway	2015-2017 Avg.	76,000	Direct	\$831,000	16	\$380,000
			Indirect	\$331,000	2	\$105,000
			Induced	\$404,000	3	\$129,000
			<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,566,000</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>\$614,000</b>
Little Sugar Creek Greenway	2016	382,600	Direct	\$2,783,000	56	\$1,280,000
			Indirect	\$1,112,000	7	\$345,000
			Induced	\$1,366,000	10	\$433,000
			<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,261,000</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>\$2,059,000</b>
Duck Trail	2016	145,700	Direct	\$3,643,000	66	\$1,614,000
			Indirect	\$1,518,000	10	\$492,000
			Induced	\$1,770,000	13	\$562,000
			<b>Total</b>	<b>\$6,931,000</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>\$2,668,000</b>

Source: Evaluating the Economic Impact of Shared Use Paths in North Carolina (2015-2017)

# Economic Impact

**Greenways have very positive effects on nearby business activity – they attract new businesses and increase the sales of existing businesses that meet the needs of trail users.**

Businesses purchase supplies and materials and hire workers, so the economic impact of a strong business community ripples through the entire local and regional economy, increasing jobs and tax revenues. There are two main types of trails, tourism-based and local user-based, and they attract different types of users. As part of North Carolina’s Mountains-to-Sea trail system, Hillsborough’s Riverwalk and planned Ridgewalk may serve both tourists and locals.

Tourism-based trails and greenways draw people from outside the community. Because the greenway is a destination for cyclists or hikers, it may stimulate the development of businesses that serve these users. These can range from food and beverage businesses, to lodgings, to equipment suppliers (if the trail attracts cyclists or long-range hikers), to regional gift shops, to gas stations and other services. Local user-based greenways draw local area residents (possibly from outside the immediate political jurisdiction, but still from within the local economy) for recreation (walking, hiking, or cycling) or for task-oriented trips, such as commuting to work or school, completing errands, or to visit a destination near the trail or greenway, such as an eatery or farmers’ market.

The two main types of business activity studies of trails and greenways are direct analyses of business activity near the trails and quantitative community-wide economic impact studies.

Both types of studies have documented very positive economic impacts for greenways of all types. Direct analyses of business activity can include (i) documentation of the presence of specific businesses near the trail/greenway, (ii) surveys of business owners near the trail asking them to estimate the impacts of trail / greenway usership on their specific business; also interviews with knowledgeable observers, (iii) analyses of taxable sales trends over time for businesses near the trail versus the community overall. Quantitative economic impact studies document the total impacts on a local economy over time; specifically, over the time it takes for an increase in direct consumer purchases at a business facility to ripple through the local economy in secondary and tertiary effects. These effects are then expressed as total employment created, total output by industry, and total taxes collected.

## KEY FINDINGS:

1. Quantitative analyses of the impacts of four trails in North Carolina found that every \$1.00 invested in one-time trail construction generates a total of \$1.72 annually from local business tax revenue, sales tax revenue, and health and transportation benefits.
2. The annual economic impact of bicycling on the Outer Banks is \$60 million, including 1,407 jobs supported by 40,800 visitors for whom bicycling was an important reason for choosing to vacation in the area. The annual return on bicycle facility investment was estimated to be nine times higher than the initial investment.
3. Analysis showed that both local residents and non-local users spent a total of \$2.5 million annually related to their recreation visits on or near the Virginia Creeper trail. Of this amount, non-local visitors spent about \$1.2 million directly in the Washington and Grayson County economies. (Note: This study is 20 years old, so the impacts are likely to be far greater today than they were in 2004.)

# Property Values

Most people like living near greenways, so they are willing to pay more for homes located there. These property value impacts result in higher tax revenues, as well. Property value impacts and property owner perceptions vary by type of trail and context. Property value impacts are greatest in urban areas and for urban mega-trails (e.g., New York High Line), because these areas do not have much nearby green space. Hence the trail becomes an unusual amenity that attracts investment and residential gentrification. These dramatic effects are less likely the smaller the community and the closer green space access is for everyone. The real estate value/tax revenue premium is somewhat lower, but there are no negative effects, such as residential displacement experienced in large cities.

The major types of studies done to date are surveys of property owner perceptions, both before and after development of the trail, and quantitative analysis of changes in property values before and after trail development. Property owner perceptions through surveys are positive overall. Owners have been asked questions like whether the trail had a positive impact on the sale price of their property and whether it would help the property sell more quickly. In the few cases where property owners expressed negative perceptions prior to trail development, these perceptions all disappeared after the trail was constructed and owners saw that their fears were unfounded.

Quantitative studies include all the properties within a community, both before and after a trail is developed. They measure the effect of each of the factors that could influence the price of a home, including its distance from a trail. These studies show very positive effects on residential property values, usually within one-half mile of a greenway. Property value premiums range from

3% to 5% overall, but they can reach as high as 15% (excluding iconic, mega-urban trails such as the New York High Line, where the premiums may exceed 40%).

## KEY FINDINGS:

4. A quantitative study of 376 residences sold between 2003 and 2005 found that each foot in distance away from the trail decreases the sale price of a home by \$7.00 (an amount comparable to that found in other studies at that time).

5. A national survey of 3,247 recent and prospective home buyers found being near walking & jogging trails ranks among the top five most desired features.

6. The authors reviewed 20 quantitative studies and found that overall, the home price premium for locating near a greenway is 3% - 5% above the average price in the community, although it can range as high as 15%.

7. Interviews with 26 residential and commercial landowners near a trail found convenience, access, and physical fitness to be the chief benefits of the trail, along with its ability to foster social interaction and an opportunity for children to play outdoors. Although the owners perceived the impact on property values to be unclear, they thought the trail would improve their property's salability.

8. Quantitative study of 48,657 properties found that homes within 50 meters of bike paths in New Castle County, DE sold, on average, for 4 percent more than similar homes without bike paths.

# Environment

Greenways have very positive impacts on the natural environment. Studies of environmental impacts of greenways proceed in two steps. First, they show the damage to the environment that is avoided through the construction of a trail instead of building a road or other physical development. They also show the ways the trail and the area around it improve the natural environment, through replenishment of the water supply, water quality improvement, flood mitigation, wildlife habitat conservation, air pollution removal, and carbon sequestration (and carbon storage) in trees on protected open space. To do this, they use publicly available national land cover data, and then calculate the environmental services per acre of that land cover. They use models developed by the U.S. Forest Service to estimate the air pollution removal and carbon sequestration and storage benefits of preserved open space. Second, they monetize these benefits or absence of costs to derive an estimated environmental dollar value of the greenway.



A green infrastructure project.  
Source: UNC School of Government.

## KEY FINDINGS:

9. Montgomery County, PA estimated the following environmental services savings annually:

- \$31.6 million annually through replenishment of the water supply, water quality improvement, flood mitigation, wildlife habitat conservation, air pollution removal, and carbon sequestration in trees.
- \$97.4 million in lifetime cost savings of carbon storage in trees.
- \$10 million annually in avoided annual stormwater system maintenance.
- \$180 million in avoided annual stormwater pollutant removal costs.

10. The presence of trails and their surrounding open space have a positive impact on the environment. Within a quarter mile of the Greenway in the Delaware Watershed are 9,900 acres of open space, which includes 5,800 acres of tree canopy. The tree canopy supports natural habitats and ecosystems by removing air pollutants and improving air quality, replenishing the water supply, and mitigating floods. These ecosystem services are estimated to have the following benefits:

- Water Quality \$2,000,000
- Flood Mitigation \$8,218,000
- Wildlife Habitat Preservation \$125,000
- Air Pollution Removal \$1,658,000
- Carbon Sequestration / Storage \$15,304,000
- Total Value of Environmental Benefits: \$39,340,000

**Greenway corridors are an opportunity to showcase and implement examples of innovative stormwater green infrastructure!**

# Health

Greenways have very positive impacts on human health, since they facilitate exercise through walking, hiking, and cycling. Studies of the impacts on human health of using greenways employ user counts (as they pass by an electronic counter on a trail), as well as surveys of users who report the frequency and duration of their use of the greenway, and their modal choice (walking, hiking, or cycling). Analysts translate these activities into health outcomes using statistical relationships established over many years by entities such as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization’s Health Economic Assessment Tool, and other international agencies that study disease and mortality statistics to document statistical relationships between types of human activity and health outcomes.

These health benefits are then “monetized” (translated into dollar savings in medical treatment costs avoided) to estimate the economic impacts of improved health through exercise. Studies show these impacts are highly positive.

**Communities across the United States are realizing the value in active lifestyles and investing in infrastructure to promote and support biking and walking for health, transportation, and fun.**

## KEY FINDINGS:

11. A study determined that [a] region’s investments in paved and unpaved trails had contributed substantially to improved health, employee retention, and visitor spending in the region. Methods included surveys of cyclists and non-cyclists, quantitative analyses of property values near the trails, and surveys of tourists visiting the region.

12. A study reported the following annual health benefits of protected open space (including trails) in a county of 860,578 persons:

- \$225 million in annual medical costs due to cardiovascular disease, diabetes, depression, cancer, and obesity avoided through moderate to strenuous exercise in protected open spaces.
- \$243 million in costs to businesses due to employee absenteeism and “presenteeism” (working while ill) avoided, because workers are healthier thanks to exercise in protected open spaces.
- \$219 million in recreational benefits, which represents the amount of money residents stated they would be willing to spend in the private market to participate in the activities they currently do for free in the county’s open spaces.

13. In its comprehensive study of the impacts of four trails in North Carolina, ITRE documented significant health benefits to cyclists and hikers on the trails, including cost savings due to lower rates of heart disease, diabetes, dementia, stroke, and other maladies.

14. A medical journal study found that walking trails provide significant health benefits to low-wealth persons. Trails are associated with the greatest increase in exercise for those most at risk of inactivity, particularly those who were not already regular walkers, have a high school education or less, or who earn less than \$15,000 per year. Trails that were at least one-half mile long, paved or located in the smallest towns were associated with the largest increases in exercise.

# Transportation

In cities and towns such as Hillsborough, a greenway may also provide users with an alternative to the automobile for running errands or completing other tasks. This may reduce traffic and improve circulation in the town. Transportation cost-related studies use surveys to ask greenway users how often they use the greenway and whether their use of the trail substitutes for their use of the automobile. Analysts then use these survey results to estimate reduced traffic congestion and other reduced automobile-related costs.

## KEY FINDINGS:

15. A study of trails in North Carolina documented significant transportation cost-related savings among all the trails due to traffic reduction, lower vehicle collision costs, lower roadway maintenance costs, and lower annual household vehicle maintenance costs because of walking, hiking, and cycling on the greenways.

16. A study of Chittenden County, VT reported success in reducing downtown automobile traffic congestion through a network of greenways. Results include:

- Increased residential use of the greenways for walking or cycling as of 2007. Almost all towns in Chittenden County had bike or walking trails as of 2007.
- South Burlington, as of 2007, had 16 miles of pathways. The documented impacts of these path and trail networks include health benefits from biking or walking, as well as reduced downtown traffic levels during the busy commuting hours.

17. Another academic study examined the preferences of commuters for different types of cycling paths and the impacts of cycling paths on property values. The study found that those commuting by bicycle were willing to go out of their way to use a safer route, with the largest detour for on-street, designated bicycle lanes, followed by routes without parking and routes with an off-road bicycle lane.



# **SECTION THREE:**

# **RIDGEWALK'S**

# **POTENTIAL**

What would a second greenway look like in Hillsborough? Who would it affect and how would it make life for town residents different? Would it affect wildlife? Safety? Traffic congestion? How would it relate to the future train station and support riders? How would the Town fund Ridgewalk?



# Ridgewalk

Ridgewalk is a proposed greenway reaching approximately 2.6 miles south from Downtown Hillsborough. The route will connect existing neighborhoods and new housing developments to the center of town, the future train station, and other amenities and businesses.

Several schools, including four elementary schools downtown and cross country runners from high schools would have access to the trail. It is reasonable to expect, given knowledge of precedents outlined in this document, that additional businesses will choose to locate near the new greenway.

The creation of Ridgewalk would mean that the majority of residents of Hillsborough have access to downtown, to Riverwalk, to culture, activities, and amenities, without having to access a car.

## CONNECTIONS AND EQUITY

Now more than ever, communities are aware of the importance of equal access to amenities, green space, and safe transportation connections for all residents, regardless of income, age, race, or ability.

Today, Riverwalk offers a way to connect with nature and the Eno River, a place for children to learn about the environment and local ecology in a safe environment, a safe and tranquil way for people to exercise and travel between various areas of town.

However, Hillsborough residents who live south of Interstate 85 don't have a safe way to access these amenities without driving. This creates a dichotomy between the neighborhoods of Hillsborough that have access to green space and those that do not.





**More than 1040 existing households would have direct access to the greenway, and thus be connected to many amenities throughout Hillsborough without using a car.**

**Legend**

- - - Riverwalk
- Ridgewalk
- Local Roads
- Major Roads
- Interstates
- Parks and Open Space
- Nearby Residential
- Nearby Commercial
- Nearby Mixed Use
- Downtown Hillsborough

**RIDGEWALK**  
(estimated route)

Cates Creek Park

Old Mill

Becketts Ridge

Collins Ridge

Retail & Commercial

Employment Centers

Future Train Station

Occoneechee Speedway

Occaneechee Village Replica Site

Gold Park

Downtown Hillsborough

This map is for planning purposes only. The final route is to be determined. Location labels are approximate.

# Connection to Existing Plans

Ridgewalk is supported by many existing plans created over years by the Town of Hillsborough, Orange County, State agencies, and other organizations, both as a specific project recommendation and in general alignment with broad recommendations, visioning, or values.

These pages list relevant area plans and the ways in which they support investment in Ridgewalk.

## COMPREHENSIVE SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

Hillsborough developed a comprehensive plan in 2023 as a means to connect a variety of systems such as housing, economic, transportation, environmental, and social systems in the context of sustainability. Sustainability is a major factor in most systems, particularly for a Town of Hillsborough that values and actively supports sustainable development and design.

Ridgewalk is a priority recommendation in the Comprehensive Sustainability Plan, described on page 6-35 of the document, indicating that the greenway is being studied for feasibility. The greenway recommendations map (p. 39 of this document) shows the general route for Ridgewalk.

In more general terms, there are many ways that implementing Ridgewalk will help implement the vision of the Comprehensive Sustainability Plan.

In a survey conducted for this plan, over half of respondents claimed the natural and scenic areas are primarily what make Hillsborough a great place to live. Respondents also said that reducing traffic congestion and expanding sidewalks, greenways, and trail infrastructure were some of the town's most pressing needs. Tree and forest preservation and land conservation and

protection were other highly ranked needs.

Ridgewalk is a sustainable project that has the potential to address many goals and objectives identified within the Comprehensive Sustainability Plan, particularly related to Land Use, Environmental Systems, and Transportation Systems. At its core, Ridgewalk is a transportation and recreation feature, but it explicitly supports sustainability efforts as well as ecologically conscious land use decisions and positive social and economic impacts.

The Comprehensive Sustainability Plan calls for investing in infrastructure that supports preferred land use and growth patterns, such as Smart Growth. Smart Growth encourages more compact and walkable spaces with a mix of uses. These spaces allow residents to spend fewer resources and less time on travel, encouraging more active lifestyles and less reliance on cars for short trips, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution at the community and regional level. The Future Land Use Map also supports the development of Ridgewalk. Several of the areas designated "Permanent Open Space," or areas intended for use as parks or natural areas, are located along the proposed route.

**Ridgewalk is a priority project of the Comprehensive Sustainability Plan with the conceptual route shown on the greenway recommendations map. An similar greenway was identified in the previous Comprehensive Plan.**

According to the Sustainability Plan, "Providing safe and accessible non-vehicular connectivity throughout the town is a critical foundation to

equitable and sustainable growth” (p. 6-12). In their survey, they found that “those making an annual income of \$49,000 or less were twice as likely to choose lack of public transportation options as a top concern.” While Ridgewalk does not address transit directly, the link to the train station will include transit and micromobility options.

Ridgewalk builds upon goals that prioritize projects that support preferred growth and development patterns while also supporting ecological, economic, and social well-being. The natural buffer created by Ridgewalk helps support natural systems by generating a wildlife corridor that helps connect wildlife to natural resources such as the Eno River.

### **PREVIOUS COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

Though the adoption of the Comprehensive Sustainability Plan in 2023 rendered the former Comprehensive Plan obsolete, it is important to note that the former plan recommended a greenway called “Cates Creek Greenway,” which is similar to Ridgewalk in everything but name. Inclusion in multiple comprehensive plans is an indication that the community’s interest in a project has remained consistent over many years.

### **TOWN OF HILLSBOROUGH STRATEGIC PLAN**

A review of the Town of Hillsborough’s strategic plan will quickly lead one to realize that Ridgewalk would help the Town of Hillsborough achieve the vision, the values, steps toward each of the five focus areas (Sustainability, Connected

**There may be no better project than Ridgewalk to help the Town meet objectives in each of the five focus areas of the Strategic Plan.**

Community, Economic Vitality, Community Safety, and Service Excellence) areas, and many of the specific objectives and initiatives of the Plan. Objective 1, Initiative 3 under Connected Community specifically mentions Ridgewalk.

### **ORANGE COUNTY STRATEGIC PLAN**

In 2023, Orange County worked with a consultant to develop a Countywide strategic plan that prioritizes and aligns County programs and services. This Strategic Plan is composed of several strategic goals, including Environmental Protection & Climate Action, Healthy Community, Housing for All, Multi-modal Transportation, Public Education/Learning Community, and Diverse and Vibrant Economy. Each of these strategic goals has a goal statement that outlines Orange County’s vision for improving upon each strategic goal. The goal statement is supported by objectives that offer some directional clarity on how the County can achieve this vision, followed by a set of performance measures that set specific, tangible outcomes for the County to achieve within set time frames.

Ridgewalk supports several of these strategic goals, including Environmental Protection & Climate Action, Healthy Community, and Multi-Modal Transportation. As a multi-use path, Ridgewalk is an inherent benefit to developing better multi-modal transportation options for Hillsborough and Orange County residents alike and will contribute to the performance target of 3-5% annual increases in satisfaction of residents towards walking or biking in the County. Additionally, Ridgewalk supports the objectives of providing more multi-modal options for the County, reducing congestion, and supporting the Safe Routes to School Plan. Ridgewalk also supports environmental protection and conservation by connecting open spaces and promoting environmental stewardship by connecting residents with natural resources. Another unique way Ridgewalk supports the strategic goals for Orange County is through the Healthy Community goal, as the County has

identified the need to promote physical well-being. One objective of this goal is “Invest in services and programs that improve the health and quality of life of the community (e.g., recreation and public open spaces, arts, etc.).” Ridgewalk’s status as a recreational outdoor open space supports the strategic plan as it is a unique opportunity for residents to increase their physical well-being through exercise on the shared-use path.

## **ORANGE COUNTY MASTER AGING PLAN**

The Master Aging Plan (2022-2027) is the fifth cycle of strategic planning for the Orange County Department of Aging, using a framework developed by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) framework for an Age-Friendly Community (AFC).<sup>1</sup> The AFC framework focuses on eight domains of livability that influence the quality of life for older adults, including: outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information, and community and health services.

Ridgewalk aligns with the Master Aging Plan by enhancing livability by providing a quality outdoor space that enhances transportation, sense of community, and health. Further, Ridgewalk directly supports two goals of the plan, namely Goal 1 - Outdoor Spaces & Buildings: Optimize usability of outdoor spaces and buildings for older adults, and Goal 2 – Transportation: Increase access to and awareness of affordable, safe, and equitable mobility options for older adults in all parts of Orange County. Both goals have objectives that specifically call for the need to increase access to equitable spaces and transportation options. Goal 2, Objective 2.2 states, “Expand availability and improve transportation options for older adults.” Because Ridgewalk will be a paved, accessible greenway, it will permit users of all ages and abilities to use the path for

recreation or for transportation to their preferred destination.

## **ORANGE COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION MASTER PLAN 2030**

The Orange County Parks & Recreation Master Plan was developed in 2014 as an update to the County’s first Parks & Recreation Master Plan released in 1988. Parks & Recreation Master Plans assist localities such as Orange County in making informed decisions regarding the need for public open space in the form of active parks that have sport or other recreational amenities, and passive parks that provide connections to nature. The Parks & Recreation Master Plan found that there was strong interest in “expanding both active recreation and low-impact recreation activities – especially for hiking, biking, and swimming.” (Pg. 1-9) The most desired park facilities were trails and the most desired program areas were for walking, hiking, biking, swimming, summer camps, and yoga. To address these desires, The Plan specifically offers a recommendation, “Build More Trails and Connect Open Spaces.” (Pg. 1-11) This recommendation calls for connecting open spaces and integrating trail systems throughout the County, permitting residents to walk or ride bikes seamlessly between natural destinations.

Ridgewalk will unequivocally support many of the goals and recommendations that are part of the Parks & Recreation Master Plan as it directly addresses the findings of the plan regarding the public desire to be more connected to nature via hiking and biking trails. Additionally, Ridgewalk promotes healthy lifestyles and enhances quality of life for much of Hillsborough by connecting neighborhoods directly to natural resources such as rivers and parks. It also serves as a useful amenity to a diverse range of age groups, as it can function as a transportation and recreational amenity that supports users with limited mobility

## **THE ORANGE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

The Orange County Comprehensive Plan is a guiding document developed by the County to inform future policy and land use decisions through the year 2030. The plan was officially adopted in 2008 and has had subsequent amendments in the following years. While the plan is 16 years old, there are many recommendations that still ring true. For example, the Transportation Needs section outlines the County's need to keep pace with increasing development by offering more alternative transportation options while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality.

The Orange County Comprehensive Plan directly called for "An efficient and integrated multi-modal transportation system that protects the natural environment and community character." The Plan also states that countywide transportation systems serve the needs of the senior population, youth, as well as the economically disadvantaged and the disabled.<sup>2</sup>

The incorporation of Ridgewalk into Hillsborough and Orange County's transportation network explicitly supports the goals and objectives of the County's comprehensive plan by providing an accessible transportation option connecting residents of different ages and abilities to key points throughout Hillsborough. One important aspect of Ridgewalk that cannot be downplayed is the ability to connect youth to schools and recreation amenities such as skate parks or pools. Ridgewalk can also play a greater role in the transit options of Orange County by providing another greenway that can be extended in the future. Ridgewalk also supports The Comprehensive Plan's recommendations for expanding parks and trails by providing an additional greenway, generating greater access to natural beauty and ecosystems for residents of Hillsborough, Orange County, and visitors or tourists.

## **DURHAM-CHAPEL HILL-CARRBORO METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION COMPREHENSIVE TRANSPORTATION PLAN**

The Comprehensive Transportation Plan released by the Metropolitan Planning Organization has consistently found that there is a strong desire to provide more multi-modal opportunities for commuting and traveling to key points of interest in the County. The plan has also found that many bicycle routes throughout the County are deemed dangerous due to lack of adequate road shoulders, poor visibility, and other issues. The Plan specifically recommends additional bike routes through Hillsborough.

**Ridgewalk meets specific and general goals in every adopted plan mentioned in these pages, ensuring that it is a necessary and timely project that will benefit the town and the region.**

Ridgewalk strongly supports the general goals of the Comprehensive Transportation Plan by providing a permanent, protected multi-use path for the Town of Hillsborough, increasing the viability of bicycle transportation within the Town of Hillsborough. Ridgewalk's connection to other transit modes such as passenger rail will further allow residents to seamlessly travel to their destinations without the need for a personal vehicle.

## **SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN**

The Safe Routes to School Strategic Action Plan is a plan that outlines existing conditions for students and families that are walking or biking to school. The Plan offers explicit design recommendations for Hillsborough schools and the Town of Hillsborough itself to implement to increase the ability of students to reach their schools in a safe and efficient manner.

Ridgewalk would directly serve the action plan, as it will provide direct connections to dense neighborhoods filled with families and schools, allowing students to safely reach their school without having to walk alongside fast-moving traffic. The greenway would permit students to ride bikes or walk, allowing them to build relationships with the other students who use the path and strengthen social and communal bonds while providing a unique exercise and recreational experience for them. The greenway would also provide opportunities for cross-country events, field trips, and educational opportunities.

## **NC MOVES 2050**

The importance of transportation connectivity that could be addressed through greenways continues to be evident through these plans. The statewide transportation plan, NC Moves 2050, has several transportation goals that directly support Ridgewalk. These goals include providing transportation access for all by improving multi-modal access and ensuring safety and security by promoting multi-modal safety.

Ridgewalk would meet the NC Moves Tier 1 Action which calls for accelerated flexible multimodal strategies to meet the needs of an aging population and residents with disabilities. NC Moves specifically emphasizes the economic impacts of greenways and, when speaking of

tourism, states that “choices for travel (reliable public transit, convenient options and well-connected sidewalks and greenway paths) are important to both residents and visitors.”

In summary, the proposed Ridgewalk project is greatly supported by many different plans for the state, the region, and the Town of Hillsborough. Ridgewalk has the opportunity to reduce traffic congestion, support Hillsborough’s need for multi-modal access, support the local economy, preserve natural areas, support Smart Growth, and improve quality of life.

## **A LANDSCAPE PLAN FOR WILDLIFE HABITAT CONNECTIVITY**

The Landscape Plan for Wildlife Habitat Connectivity is a plan developed as part of an informed public-private partnership to research and identify landscape habitats and how best to connect them. This plan also brought together a variety of entities to increase coordination on conservation goals regionally. This plan is important to the Hillsborough and Orange County region as it offers specific instructions for the region to conserve natural ecosystems allowing the diverse wildlife of the area to move seamlessly from ecosystem to ecosystem.

According to the Landscape Plan, in the US, over one million vertebrates are killed each day due to wildlife-vehicle collisions, which in turn creates massive safety issues for drivers. From 2011 to 2013, more than 61,000 wildlife-related vehicle crashes were recorded in the state of North Carolina alone, causing nearly 20 human fatalities, more than 3,400 injuries, and more than \$149 million in damages.



# Wildlife Crossings and Safety

In addition to all the benefits for human mobility, Ridgewalk would be essential for wildlife mobility, wildlife safety. It would also reduce the number of animal-related accidents on Interstate 85 through Hillsborough.

All wildlife need to move from place to place in order to find food, water, and other necessities of life. When an interstate highway lies between one area and another, an animal will try to cross, ending up hit by cars and often causing accidents fatal to automobile passengers as well.


The North Carolina Department of Transportation published a report of animal-related crashes by county for 2020-2022. The report stated that there are hundreds of animal-related crashes in Orange County alone every year, and between 2015 and 2022 the County consistently ranked between 22 and 33 in a list of counties with the most crashes, out of the 100 counties in North Carolina.

In 2022 there were a total of 313 animal-related crashes in Orange County, and the County ranked 23 in the list of counties with the most crashes.

While there are currently ways, like underpasses, bridges and culverts, for wildlife to safely go under I-85, animals don't necessarily know where those safe passages are.

**Between 2020 and 2022, there were a total of 801 animal-related crashes in Orange County, causing 48 total injuries and causing an estimated \$2,557,150 in property damage.**

Ridgewalk, a greenway where habitat would be connected on either side, would guide animals safely toward the underpass and reduce danger to both animals and humans.



**Ridgewalk can create a connection for animals as well as humans. Giving wildlife a safe passage under I-85 not only will reduce animal fatalities, but dangerous animal-related vehicle crashes.**

Animals will find a path under the interstate more natural and less stressful than any potential pedestrian bridge over the interstate, making an passage under the interstate more effective and realistic.

The most common animals to cause accidents on interstates in North Carolina are deer, but other large species, such as coyotes and bear, are also at risk of causing accidents. Other animals are less likely to cause accidents but are still at risk of losing their lives, including turtles, racoons, skunks, snakes, and more.



Source: Adobe Stock



# Future Train Station

The Town of Hillsborough is working with the state to reestablish passenger rail service and provide economic development in Hillsborough through the development of a new Amtrak passenger rail station. The new station is planned for a 20 acre site that is adjacent to the North Carolina Railroad corridor.

Two small area planning processes informed the funding request for a train station to the North Carolina Department of Transportation. The station was funded in the 2016-2025 State Transportation Improvement Program. In 2020, the Town of Hillsborough entered into a funding agreement with the North Carolina Department of Transportation and GoTriangle to begin the design and construction of the station building and site.

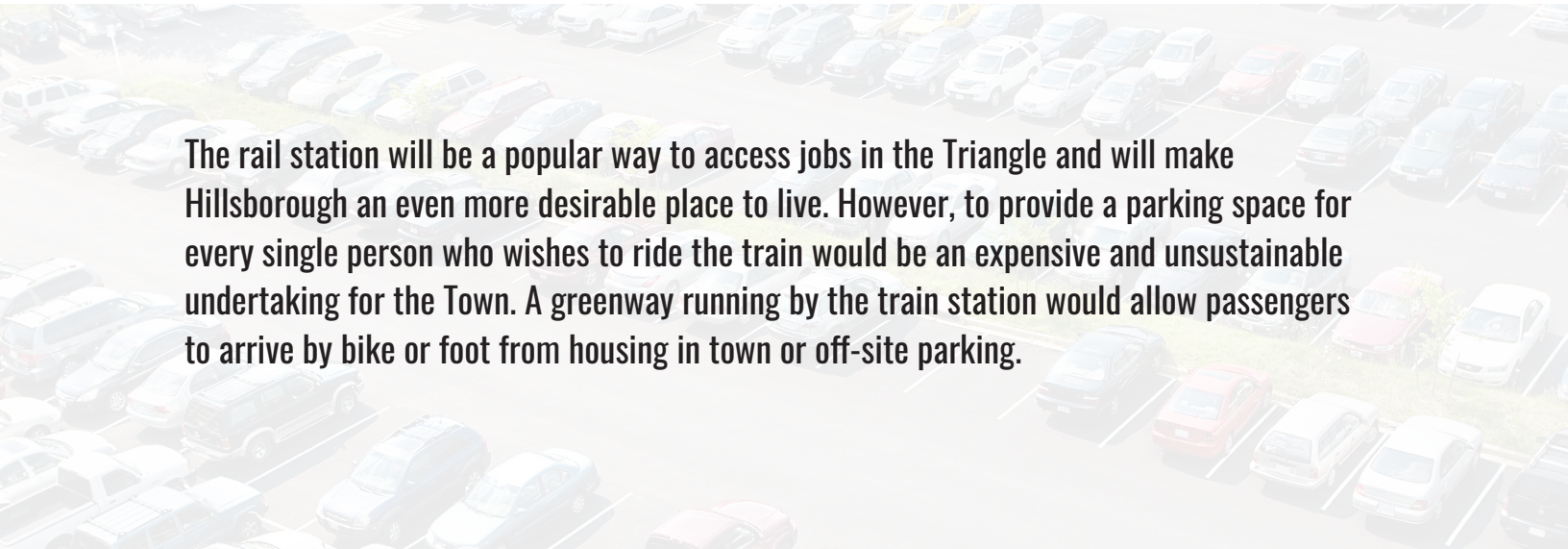
Planning, design, and construction document-level engineering of the train station building, covered platform, parking, site circulation, connectivity to the site, and other improvements are all currently underway. The design and engineering of the station and a greenway connection was awarded to the firm Clearscapes in December 2021 at a cost not to exceed \$800,000.

The train station will be approximately 7,000 square feet and provide space for Town of Hillsborough offices and passenger service areas. The new station will be primarily used as the Town of Hillsborough's new board room

and meeting space until future expansion and construction of the station's platform can proceed. The addition of a passenger rail station in Hillsborough will be an exceptionally impactful influence on the town and the region. The station will make it possible to live in Hillsborough and the surrounding community and work in the Triangle without commuting in a car, bringing both opportunities and challenges to town.

One of the largest or most disruptive impacts to Hillsborough will be the number of people who choose to board the train in Hillsborough; whether they live elsewhere in town, in Orange County, or further away, commuters may want to park at the train station.

To accommodate every car for every commuter is expensive. Acquiring and paving over land is an unnecessary expense for the Town of Hillsborough that will result in additional impervious surfaces, which has myriad negative impacts on the Town of Hillsborough. Impervious surfaces, especially black asphalt in the large amounts found in parking lots, increase stormwater runoff into nearby waterways, prevent water from seeping into the ground to replenish the aquifer, and contribute to rising ambient temperatures.



**The rail station will be a popular way to access jobs in the Triangle and will make Hillsborough an even more desirable place to live. However, to provide a parking space for every single person who wishes to ride the train would be an expensive and unsustainable undertaking for the Town. A greenway running by the train station would allow passengers to arrive by bike or foot from housing in town or off-site parking.**



Downtown Hillsborough

N

The proposed Greenway will connect to the future train station, providing greater transit mobility for Hillsborough residents and visitors alike.

Future Train Station

70

S Churton St

185

### Legend

- - - Riverwalk
- Ridgeway
- Local Roads
- Major Roads
- Interstates
- Parks and Open Space
- Nearby Residential
- Nearby Commercial
- Nearby Mixed Use
- Downtown Hillsborough

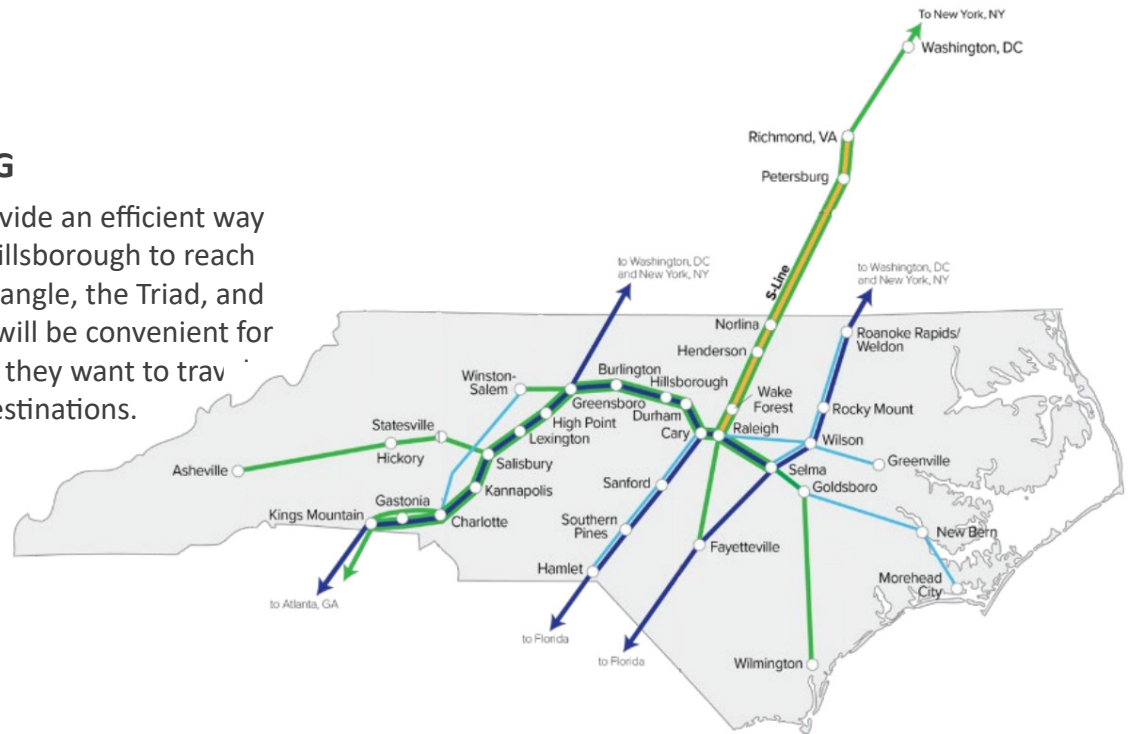
Cates Creek Park

OLD NC 89

This map is for planning purposes only. The final route is to be determined. Location labels are approximate.

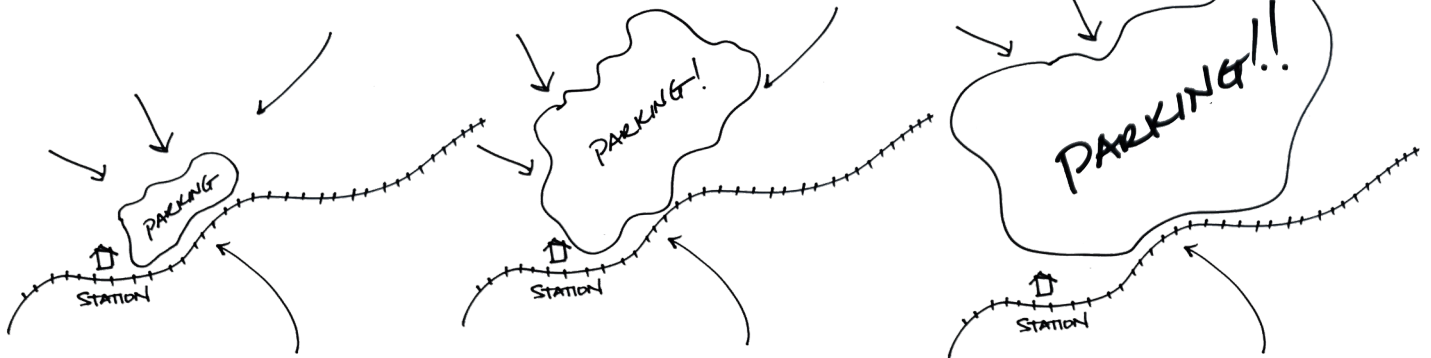
## LIMITS ON PARKING

The train station will provide an efficient way for people to get from Hillsborough to reach multiple points in the Triangle, the Triad, and the Charlotte area. This will be convenient for Hillsborough residents if they want to travel by train to a choice of destinations.

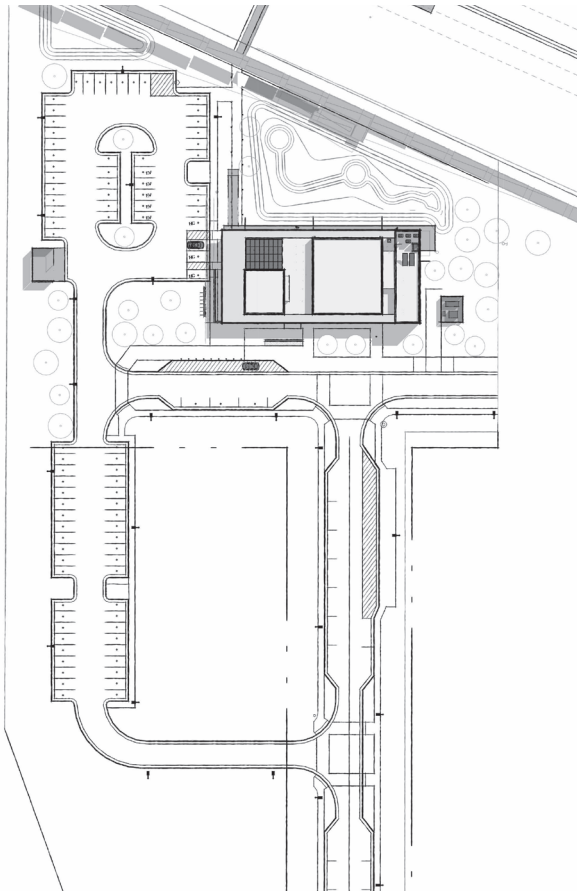


However, it will also be appealing for residents of anywhere within an hour's radius who work in other localities to board a train in Hillsborough if there is plentiful parking. This demand will only be increased as 85 is widened and area population increases. This will increase traffic in town and reduce available parking for Hillsborough residents. If there are multiple trains a day and most cars are parked more than 8 hours, this will almost immediately limit access to parking.

Building more parking will only help very temporarily. Parking will not be able to keep up with the demand. This concept is called "induced demand;" the very idea that a resource is available creates an increased demand for it. If you know there is parking available and there will be free-flowing traffic, you are more likely to drive alone in your car, and therefore more cars will be on the road and parking in a lot. If you know that parking is scarce, you will be more likely to share a ride or find alternative means of arriving at your destination.



Demand for parking at the train station will grow with parking's availability. Creating more parking will only create more demand. The Town's best option is to create safe alternatives for people to access the train.



Existing parking lot plans for the train station. Source: Town of Hillsborough

There are several ways that the Town of Hillsborough can work to mitigate impact from automobile demand to the station, including shuttles, cost of parking, and carpooling educational campaigns. However, for people who live in Hillsborough, Ridgewalk can provide an excellent, safe way for walkers and riders of all types to reach the station safely. Ridgewalk could also help reduce strain on parking by allowing access from commuter lots and along the greenway as well as transit routes.

### PROVIDING SPACE FOR BIKES

The Town of Hillsborough's initial plans for the station include parking lots with parking for cars and some racks for bike parking. On average, a single auto parking space, if replaced with bike racks, can accommodate 8 to 12 bicycle spaces.

If the Town of Hillsborough were to replace only 10% of the planned parking spaces with bike parking, the train station could accommodate 100 or more additional bikes, increasing the capacity of the rail station while using significantly less space. (The more bike spaces provided in lieu of car spaces, the greater the capacity.)

Accommodating more modes of transportation, such as scooters, motorbikes, and more can help even more people reach the train station without a car, further lessening the impacts of the station on Hillsborough.

### Three takeaways:

- 1: It's expensive to build enough parking for future demand at the station.**
- 2: Providing options for other ways to reach the train station, like biking or walking, would be most beneficial.**
- 3: Ridgewalk is the perfect way for Hillsborough residents to access the train station.**

# Transportation & Housing Cost Burden

Housing costs in Hillsborough have been rising steeply in the past decade, as Hillsborough becomes a more sought-after place to live. This is compounded by all of the factors that have led to the national housing affordability crisis. Greenways have been shown to raise values for homes within a short distance, but is that always a good thing? Not necessarily. For households who are already cost-burdened (defined as spending more than 30% of their income on housing), rising costs are detrimental. Additionally, most households (78%) in North Carolina own two or more vehicles.\*

\*ACS 5-year Estimates 2022, Table B08141, "Means of Transportation to Work by Vehicles Available."

\*\* Estimate created using [NerdWallet's Monthly Car Cost Calculator](#)

A household that relies upon two vehicles is under a significant financial burden. Even the most efficient and economical vehicles can generate an excess cost of over \$1,000 a month from fuel costs, maintenance, taxes, insurance, and car payments.

Conservative estimates place the total annual cost for owning two vehicles from anywhere between \$12,120 and \$25,114.\*\*

If households in the town of Hillsborough were to replace one vehicle in their household with a bicycle or e-bicycle, not only would they be saving thousands of dollars each year, they would also be contributing to a reduction in traffic congestion, carbon emissions, and improved mental wellbeing.

**One way for a household to offset high housing prices is to have the option of owning and maintaining only one vehicle. Accessing town and the train station (and the Triangle) via Ridgewalk would give some households that option.**



# Reducing Congestion

There are many reasons for people to visit Hillsborough. Festivals, concerts, history, the farmers market, and charming local businesses are just a few of the draws. However when all these visitors arrive in cars, it can create significant traffic congestion.

Ridgewalk would provide a venue by which residents living south of I-85 would be able to access downtown, removing some of the cars arriving in downtown. Off-site parking agreements for events along Ridgewalk could direct visitors to park along Ridgewalk and access downtown via foot or bike.

The combination of Riverwalk, Ridgewalk, a connected network of sidewalks, and perhaps an awareness campaign about carpooling, could help alleviate traffic congestion and improve quality of life.

**South Churton Street has an average of 21,500 trips per day!**

**With limited space and growing population, it is important to expand non-car options to access downtown.**



# Funding Ridgewalk

## GRANTS

There are a number of ways Hillsborough could pay for Ridgewalk, which would likely all be a combination of grants and local funds.

There are state and federal funding sources the Town could access, which are listed below. The greenway would likely need to draw on multiple funding sources with some local match. Eligibility and match requirements vary by funding source.

Potential funding sources include:

North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation:

- Recreational Trails Program Grant
- Safety and Education Grant
- Connecting Communities to State Trails Grants
- Complete Trails Program
- Parks and Recreation Trust Fund

North Carolina Department of Transportation:

- Complete Streets
- Multimodal Planning Grant Initiative
- Integrated Mobility
- Highway Safety Program

United States Department of Transportation/  
Federal Highway Administration

- Surface Transportation Block Grant program
- Transportation Alternative Set-Aside
- Recreational Trails Program
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Grant Program
- Discretionary Grants
- Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program
- Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program

United States Department of Housing and  
Community Development:

- Community Development Block Grant  
Neighborhood Revitalization Program

North Carolina Department of Natural and  
Cultural Resources:

- Land and Water Conservation Fund

Durham-Chapel-Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan  
Planning Organization:

- Transportation Alternatives Program Direct  
Attributable
- Surface Transportation Block Grant
- Carbon Reduction Program
- Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality

United States Environmental Protection Agency:

- Community Change Grants

## MUNICIPAL FUNDING

The Town may wish to dedicate existing resources to the project, or to create a new, specific fund by issuing a bond for the project. A bond would need to be approved by residents and would be used for only Ridgewalk.

Since Riverwalk and Ridgewalk are regional amenities, it would make sense to work with Orange County to fund the project.

## OTHER SOURCES

To supplement grants and any other municipal funds the Town may wish to contribute, there are other, creative ways that the project budget could be supplemented.

Sources could include but are not limited to:

- Corporate sponsorships
- Personal donations
- Naming rights
- Partnership with Orange County
- Orange County Transit Tax
- Partnership with State elected  
representatives

# Conclusion

Riverwalk has made a tremendous positive impact on Hillsborough, and an investment in Ridgewalk would multiply that impact.

Ridgewalk would increase the number of people able to access Hillsborough destinations via bike or foot, increase equitable access to resources for all residents, reduce traffic congestion, and contribute to positive social interactions and physical health outcomes for residents.

Ridgewalk would help preserve habitat and safe highway crossings for wildlife, increase town residents' interaction with nature, and provide more opportunities for residents of all ages to learn about and interact with nature.

Ridgewalk can help Hillsborough gain positive impacts from the new commuter rail station, while mitigating the negative effects of increased traffic and parking needs.

There are many options to fund Ridgewalk, ranging from State and Federal grants to Town of Hillsborough funds to trail sponsorships.

By providing more opportunities for passive and active recreation, Ridgewalk would help Hillsborough residents live healthier, happier lives, support local businesses, and promote economic development.

**“Very excited for this project and I hope it comes to fruition!”**

- survey respondent



# APPENDIX



# Academic Sources

Pages 24-29 of this document lists “Key Findings,” references from multiple academic journal articles about the benefits of greenways. Source details are listed below, corresponding to the number listed with each.

1. Institute of Transportation Research and Education (ITRE): Evaluating the Economic Contribution of Shared Use Paths in North Carolina, 2018.
2. North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and Institute of Transportation Research and Education (ITRE): Bikeways to Prosperity: Assessing the Economic Impact of Bicycle Facilities, 2006.
3. Virginia Department of Conservation: The Virginia Creeper Trail: An Assessment of User Demographics, Preferences, and Economics, 2004.
4. Kardeniz, D., The Impact of the Little Miami Scenic Trail on Single Family Residential Property Values, University of Cincinnati School of Planning, 2008.
5. National Association of Home Builders: What Home Buyers Really Want, 2021.
6. Crompton, J. and Nicholls, S.: The Impact of Greenways and Trails on Proximate Property Values: An Updated Review, Journal of Park and Recreation Administration, 2019.
7. Corning, S., R. Mowatt and H. Chancellor: Multiuse Trails: Benefits and Concerns of Residents and Property Owners, Journal of Urban Planning and Development, 2012.
8. Racca, D. and A. Dhanju: Property Value / Desirability Effects of Bike Paths Adjacent to Residential Areas. University of Delaware, 2006.
9. Montgomery County, PA Planning Commission: Return on Environment: The Economic Impact of Protected Open Space in Montgomery County, 2022.
10. Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources: Pennsylvania’s Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2014- 2019.
11. BBC Research and Consulting: Economic and Health Benefits of Bicycling in Northwest Arkansas, 2018.
12. Montgomery County, PA Planning Commission: Return on Environment: The Economic Impact of Protected Open Space in Montgomery County, 2022.

13. Institute of Transportation Research and Education (ITRE) North Carolina State University: Evaluating the Economic Contribution of Shared Use Paths in North Carolina, 2018.
  
14. Brownson, R., et al.: Promoting Physical Activity in Rural Communities: Walking Trail Access, Use, and Effects, American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 2000.
  
15. Institute of Transportation Research and Education (ITRE) North Carolina State University: Evaluating the Economic Contribution of Shared Use Paths in North Carolina, 2018.
  
16. Mason, Z. and Coburn, M.: Small Town Traffic Congestion: Policies for Alleviating Traffic Congestion in Downtown Hanover and Norwich. Dartmouth College, NH, 2007.
  
17. Krizek, J.: Two approaches to valuing some bicycle facilities' presumed benefits. Journal of the American Planning Association, 2006.

# Stakeholder Survey Results

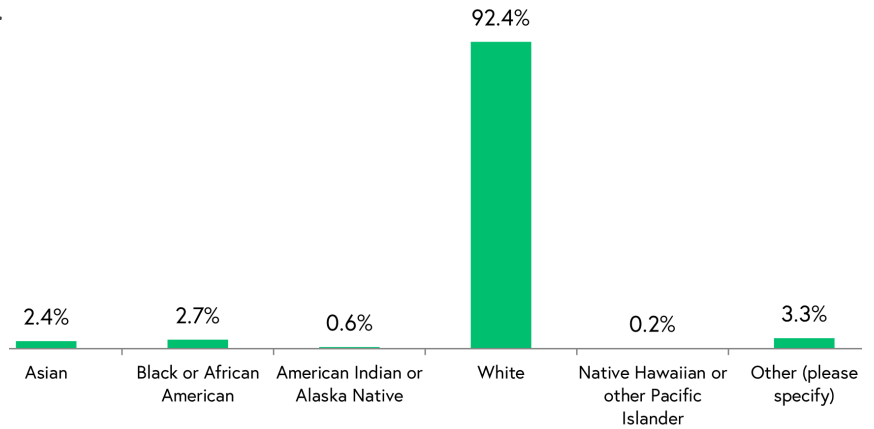
To gauge stakeholder impressions of Riverwalk, the Town released a survey in February 2024. The survey was available in English and Spanish, in digital and paper formats. Signs were placed along Riverwalk with a Quick Response (QR) code to the online survey. In the three months the survey was open, 586 people responded (583 in English and 3 in Spanish). That alone indicates the high level of interest Hillsborough stakeholders have in Riverwalk and greenways! The following pages show a summary of the survey results.

## Where do you live?

The majority of respondents live in Hillsborough or Orange County with some respondents living in Durham, Chapel Hill, Mebane, or Raleigh.

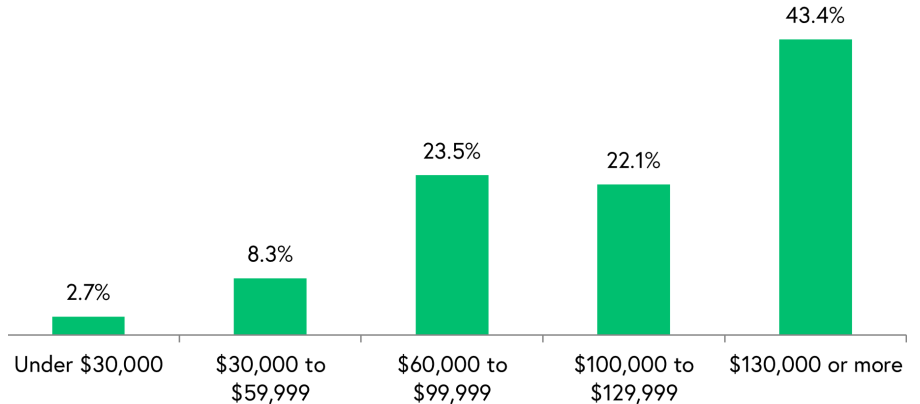
## Which of the following best describes your race?

The demographics of the respondents mirror the population of Hillsborough, with slightly less minority populations represented than in the overall population. Of the survey respondents, 92% were White, 3% Black or African American, 3% Asian, and 3% Other. Additionally, respondents were 5% Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish ancestry.



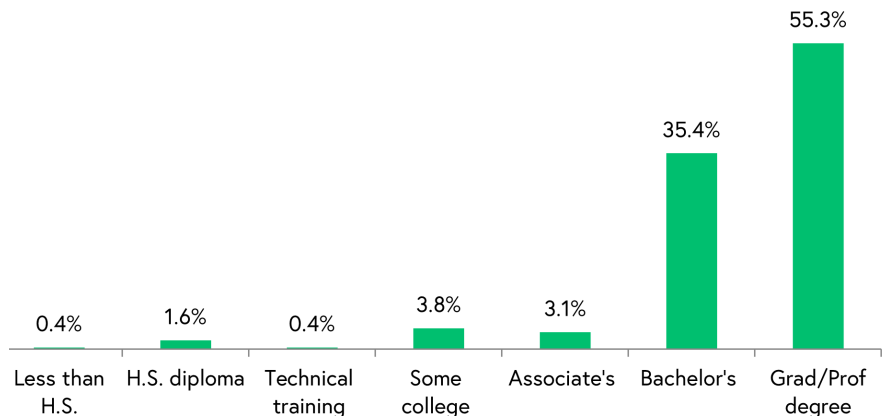
## Would you say your total annual household income is:

Respondents of the survey were slightly wealthier than Hillsborough population overall. Hillsborough median household income in 2022 was \$86,250. 35% of respondent's households make less than \$100K and 65% make over \$100k.



## Which of the following is the highest level of education you have completed?

Respondents were also well educated, with 55% of respondents have completed a graduate or professional degree. Additionally, 35% of respondents have completed a bachelor's degree and three and four percent have completed an associate degree and some college respectively.





**583**  
people  
responded  
to the  
survey!

**GROWING GREENWAYS**  
Share your thoughts and experiences  
to help us expand greenways in Hillsborough!  
Disponible en Español.

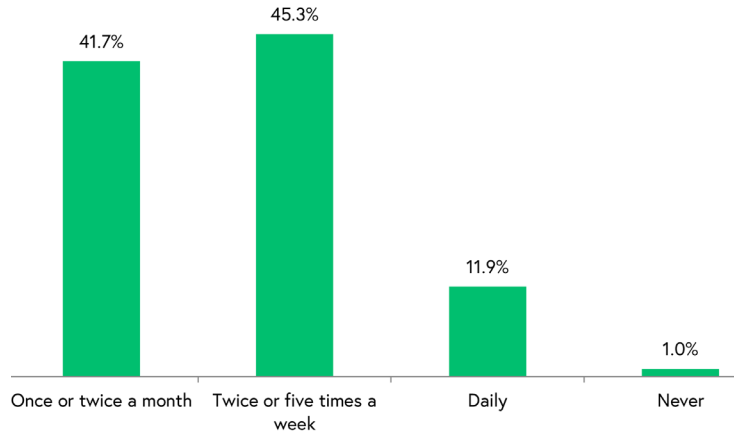


ENGAGE  
HILLSBOROUGH

To receive a paper survey by mail, email [smallplanning@cumtids.com](mailto:smallplanning@cumtids.com),  
mailed the survey and provide your home address.

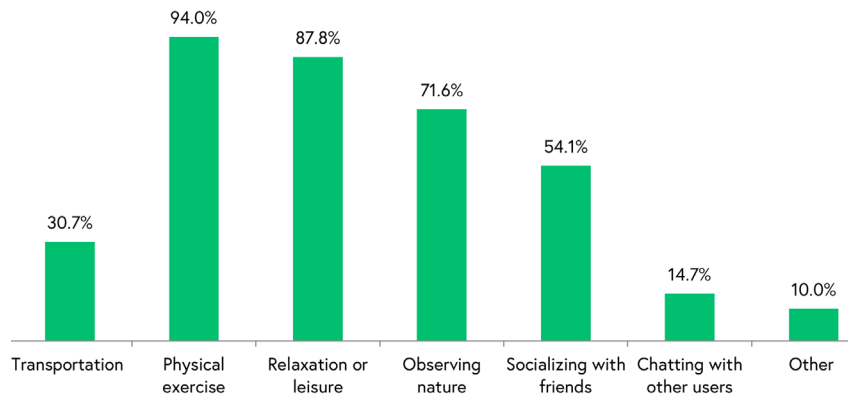
**Question 1: How often do you use Riverwalk?**

42% of respondents use Riverwalk once or twice a month and 45% use Riverwalk twice to five times a week. 12% use Riverwalk daily and 1% of respondents never use Riverwalk.



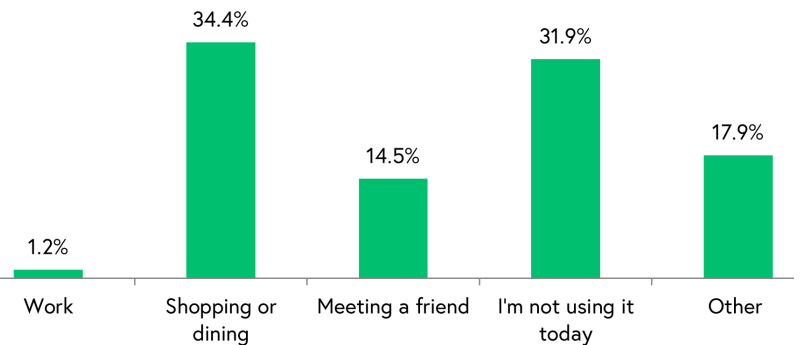
**Question 2: For what purposes do you use Riverwalk?**

Respondents were asked to indicate all purposes for which they use Riverwalk. The majority of respondents use Riverwalk for physical exercise followed by relaxation or leisure. Other major reasons include observing nature, socializing with friends, and transportation. Please note that the graph numbers indicated percentage of total responses, not percentage of responders.



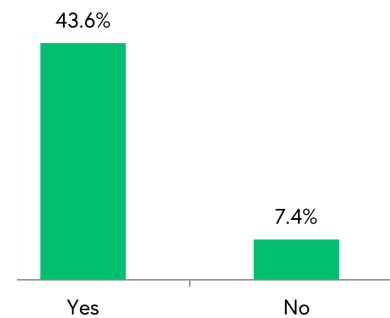
**Question 3: If you are using Riverwalk to travel to a specific destination today, where are you going?**

Of those respondents who were using Riverwalk for transportation, most were going shopping or dining (35%) or meeting a friend (15%).



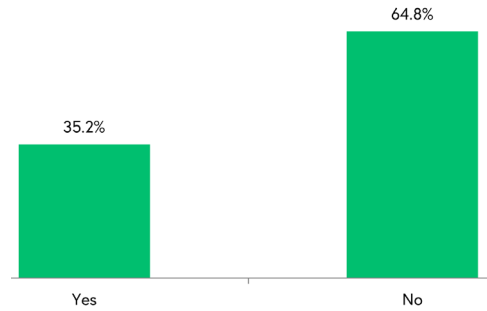
**Question 4: If you weren't able to take Riverwalk to your destination today, would you have used an automobile?**

Of those respondents who were using Riverwalk for transportation, 44% would have used a car if they were not able to use Riverwalk. (Please note that this answer excludes respondents using the trail for exercise or not on the trail when responding.)



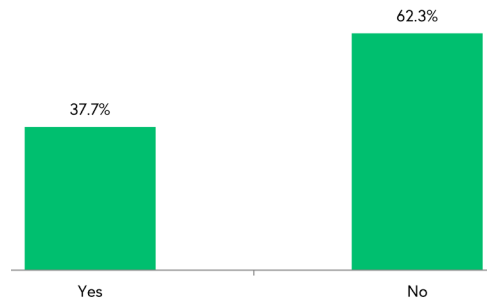
**Question 5: Do you generally bring children with you when you use Riverwalk?**

65% of respondents do not generally bring children with them to Riverwalk, while 35% of respondents do bring children.



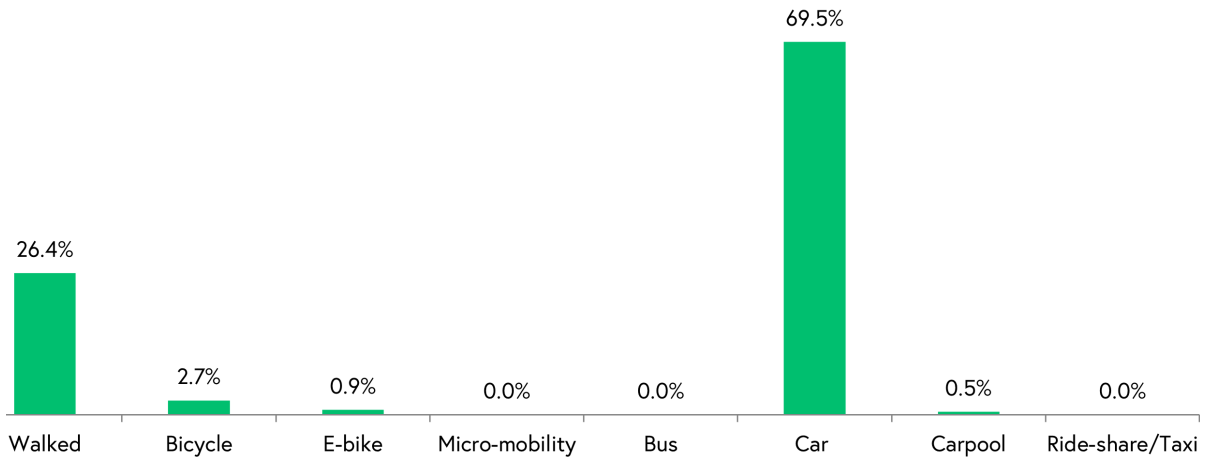
**Question 6: Do you generally bring a pet with you when you use Riverwalk?**

62% of respondents do not generally bring pets with them to Riverwalk, while 38% of respondents do bring pets.



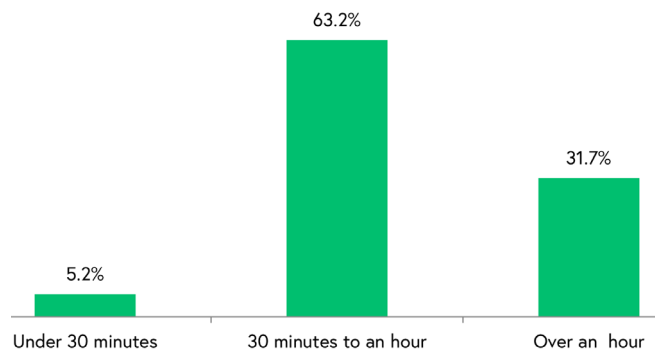
**Question 7: How did you get to Riverwalk today?**

The majority of Riverwalk users arrive by vehicle (70%). Some users arrived by walking (26%). The rest of users arrived by bicycle, e-bicycle, or carpooling.



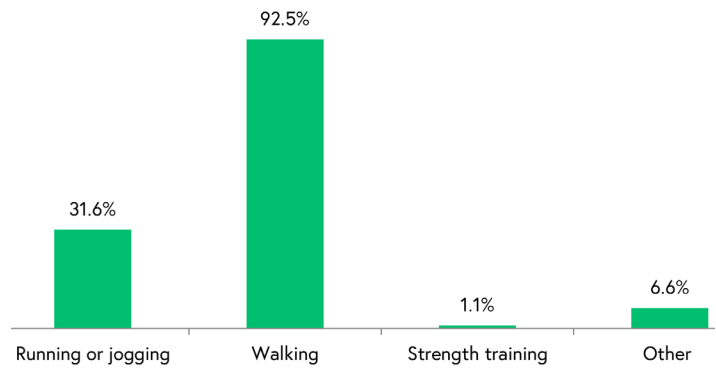
**Question 8: How much time do you spend on Riverwalk?**

The majority of respondents use Riverwalk between 30 minutes to an hour (63%). Other respondents use Riverwalk for over an hour (32%) or under 30 minutes (5%).



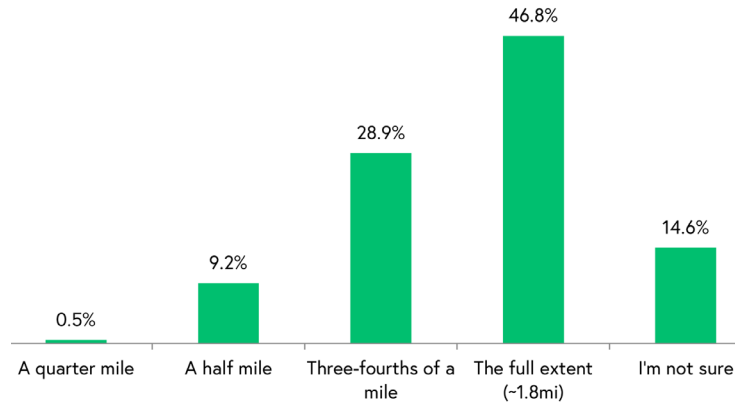
**Question 9: If you exercise on Riverwalk, which exercise do you do?**

Of those using Riverwalk for exercise, the most popular type of exercise is walking. Other popular types of exercise are running or jogging, and strength training. (Respondents were asked to check all that applied.)



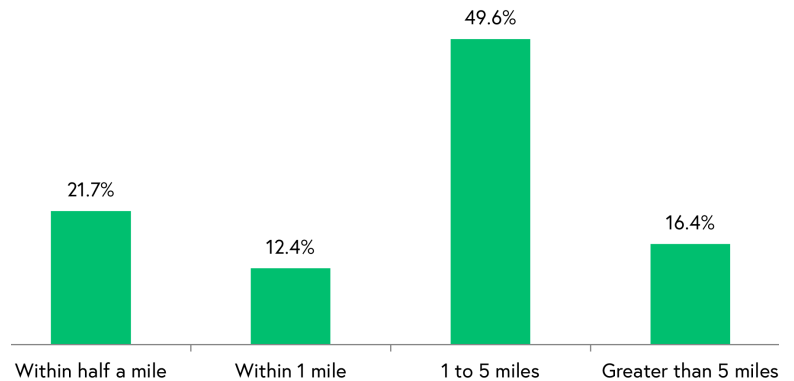
**Question 10: How far do you usually go on Riverwalk?**

Most respondents (47%) usually travel the entire 1.8 miles of Riverwalk. Other respondents travel a shorter distance, including three-fourths a mile (29%), a half mile (9%), or a quarter mile (0.5%). Other respondents were not sure how far they usually travel (15%).



**Question 11: How far do you live from Riverwalk?**

As most of the respondents to the survey live in Hillsborough, it follows that 84% of respondents live within 5 miles of Riverwalk. The other 16% of respondents live more than 5 miles away from Riverwalk.



**Question 12: If you live in Hillsborough, do you ever shop or get something to eat before, after, or while using Riverwalk?**

Respondents mentioned Weaver Street Market, Eno River Brewery, Wooden Nickel, OC Library, Antonia's, Whitt's, Ixtapa Restaurant, Bakeshop, and more.

Answers are shown to the right in a "word cloud," which shows answers in text size corresponding to the number of times the answer was repeated.



Question 13: If you don't live in Hillsborough, is Riverwalk the primary reason you come to Hillsborough? What else do you do while you're here?

Respondents mentioned a wide diversity of reasons they come to Hillsborough. Riverwalk was one of the main reasons, but respondents also mentioned riding bicycles, shopping in town, dining at restaurants, visiting breweries, grocery shopping, using the dog park, visiting friends, working in town, and more.

Question 15: What three words describe your experience using Riverwalk?

Relaxing, peaceful, and beautiful were the top three words mentioned about respondents experience with Riverwalk. Other words that were repeated include nature, safe, fun, convenient, calming, pleasant, enjoyable, scenic, and clean.

Responses to this question are displayed in the word cloud below. A word cloud displays words sized in relation to how many times they were repeated in all answers.



Question 14: How would you rate your experience of using Riverwalk? (Use a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "poor" and 5 being "great.")

**The majority of respondents seem to have a great experience with Riverwalk, as the average response from this answer is 4.6 out of 5!**

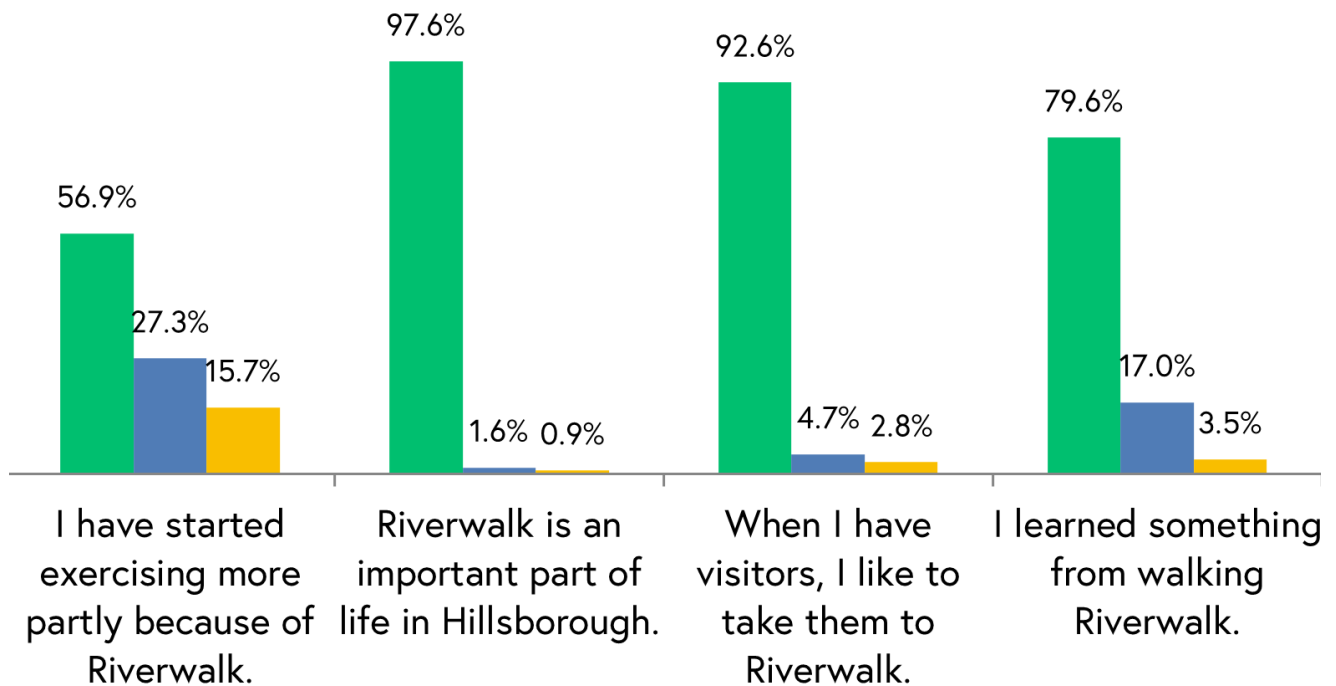
Question 16: Rate each statement below and respond with: Agree (green), No Opinion (blue), or Disagree (yellow).

Over half of survey respondents answered that they have started exercising more because of Riverwalk.

Almost all survey respondents said that Riverwalk is an important part of life in Hillsborough.

Nearly 93% of survey respondents said that when they have visitors, they take them to Riverwalk.

Nearly 80% of survey respondents said that they have learned something from Riverwalk.



■ Agree

■ No Opinion

■ Disagree

Question 17: If the town were to implement a north-south trail (Ridgewalk) connecting downtown Hillsborough to the southern portions of the community, would you use it?

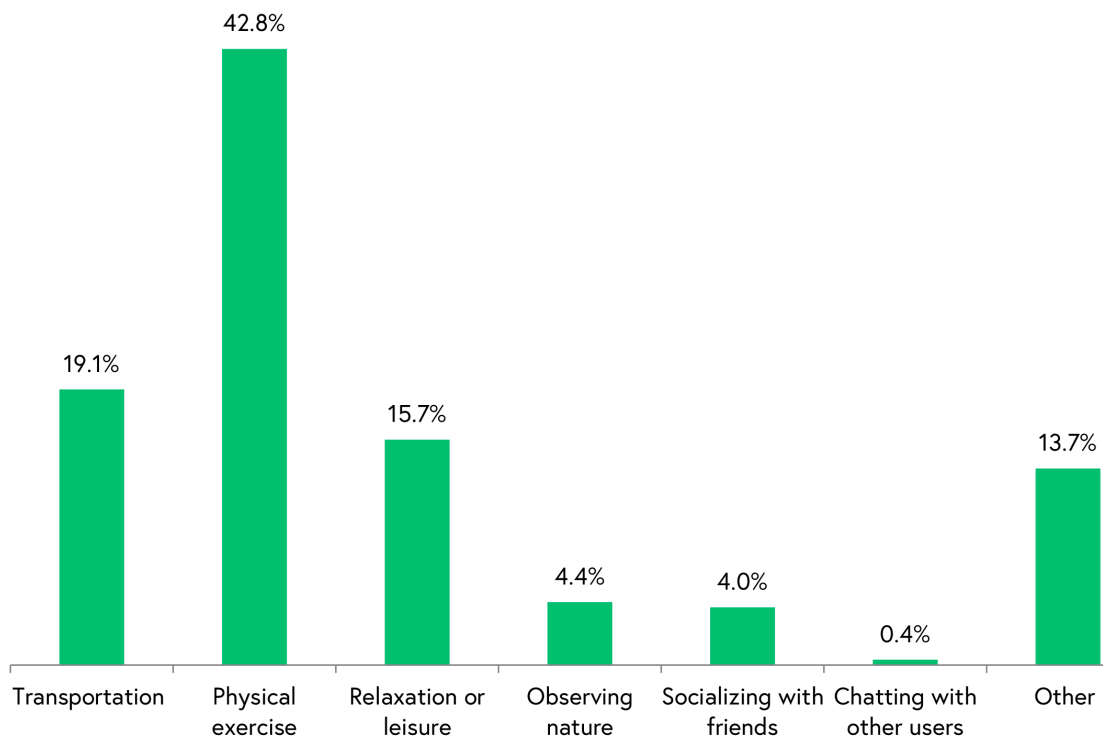
The majority of respondents said “yes” to this question. Some respondents added additional comments in support or against the additional greenway. One respondent said “Absolutely. I live in the southern portion of Hillsborough and dislike using a car to get downtown.”

Answers to this question are shown in the word cloud below.



Question 18: If yes, for which of the following activities would you use the new trail?

Answers to this question heavily favored “physical exercise,” which is consistent with how people use Riverwalk now. However, there were more responses that said they would use the new trail for transportation than they do Riverwalk. Of the “other” responses, most stated that they would use the trail for “all of the above.”



Question 19: Do you believe a second greenway would enhance the quality of life in Hillsborough? (1 = no enhancement, 10 = high enhancement)

The majority of respondents believe an additional greenway will enhance the quality of life in Hillsborough.

**The average response from this answer is 9.4 out of 10.**

Of those who responded less than 5 out of 10, they mentioned worries of a lack of bathroom facilities, distance from where they live to where Ridgewalk would be, some of which are programmatic issues that could be addressed in Ridgewalk's design.

Question 20: Please explain how a second greenway would enhance, or not enhance, the quality of life in Hillsborough.

Even when given an open choice, respondents expressed a diversity of reasons that they believed Ridgewalk **would enhance** quality of life in Hillsborough. Many respondents mentioned excitement about not needing to use a car as frequently and being able to bike into downtown. Some mentioned the potential for reduced traffic congestion if their neighborhood was accessible by bike trails. Other respondents mentioned access to greenspace for the residents and visitors of Hillsborough would greatly affect quality of life. Other respondents mentioned the health effects of having increased walkability and mobility options. **Overall respondents are very positive and believe Ridgewalk will increase quality of life.**

### Some excerpts from responses to Question #21:

**“Absolutely, we are south of 85, and would drive less if we could bike to errands.”**

**“If y’all put in some port-a-potties, I would!”**

**“All the time!! I would be very excited to have this option.”**

**“Probably not - there needs to be additional sidewalks or something safe to access the riverwalk”**

Question 21: If a new greenway (Ridgewalk) were to connect Downtown Hillsborough with a planned train station in the southern end of town, would you use the greenway as part of your commute to work instead of driving?

There was about a fifty-fifty split between those that could use Ridgewalk to commute to work and those that could or would not. Other respondents mentioned being work from home, retired, or living in other communities. Of those who said they would not commute on it, many mentioned using it for other trips such as shopping and dining. Other respondents mentioned that it would depend on when and where the train stops are in the Triangle area.

Question 22: Do you have further comments about the idea of a second greenway in Hillsborough?

Respondents mentioned a variety of additional comments. Several folks mentioned the need for a connection to the north of Hillsborough in the future as well. Other folks mention the need to ensure future growth in Hillsborough is sustainable, as additional greenways and investment could spur more folks to move in from other areas. Other folks mention the need for amenities along the trail, such as water refill stations, bathrooms, places to sit, and places to lock bikes. A few folks mention the congestion of bikes and dogs on Riverwalk and encourage Ridgewalk to consider how to deal with that. On the other hand, other folks want to allow bicycles on additional trails, such as the Speedway Trail, so that they can be used for transportation around town.

### More excerpts from responses to Question #21:

**“Absolutely! This would be such a value add for Hillsborough, especially if there was a way for pedestrians to safely cross 70. We live 3.5 mi from the Riverwalk and can’t get there safely via bike because of 70.”**

**“I would donate money to get this project up and running.”**