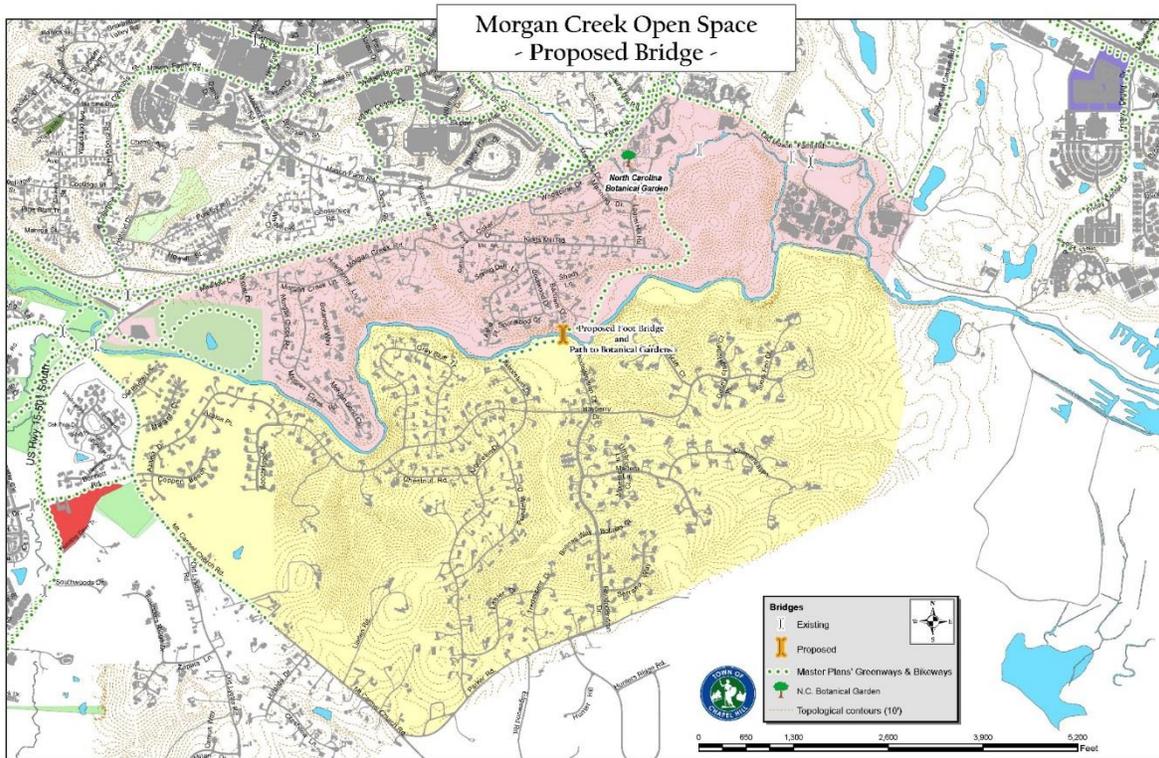


Morgan Creek Bridge Project
Public Meeting: January 14, 2020 7:00 – 9:00 PM
North Carolina Botanical Garden, Auditorium
100 Mason Farm Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27514

SUMMARY



Introductions

Bill Webster, Project Manager, Parks and Recreation Department

Rationale

To provide connectivity between a major creek and two neighborhoods that do not have pedestrian access across the creek. Probably the biggest lack of connectivity in Chapel Hill.

Original Proposal

Street to street connection between Ashe Place and Arboretum Drive

- Connect the two streets with a bicycle and pedestrian bridge
- Project determined to be not feasible due to flood modeling. At least one house would be impacted by flood changes by a bridge of any suitable size.

Current Proposal

Connect trails on north and south sides of Morgan Creek with a bridge near Bartram Drive. Bridge would be close to existing sewer pipe crossing on creek.

- Provided visual of bridge.
- Premanufactured bridge comes in on flatbed, lowered by crane, clearing necessary for bridge to be installed.

Project Status

The Town has worked with NC Botanical Garden staff to find a bridge location that would not create unacceptable flood impacts to adjacent properties and provide access to the NC Botanical Garden. The Town and University have an informal agreement to proceed with design and permitting. The project would eventually require a formal agreement. Design and permitting is expected to start in February 2020.

COMMENTS / QUESTIONS

- 1. I lived south of Morgan Creek for 30 years. Walked across the pipe with my children. Great opportunity to take grandchildren across.**

Response: Noted

- 2. All for the bridge. Live on Morgan Creek neighborhood side of bridge. May be a time when kids are still in High School that they can walk to friend's house on the other side.**

Response: Noted

- 3. Why won't it be built to multimodal / bike standards?**

Response: At this time we believe the bridge will be designed for pedestrian use for the following reasons:

- The approach trails will not be built to bicycle standards for street bikes. We anticipate that there will be a 1,100 feet long natural surface trail westward to Audubon Road and a similar 550 feet long natural surface trail eastward to Bartram Drive. These will not be designed for bicycle use.

- The NC Botanical Garden has no plans to convert these trails to multi-modal status.
- There is a significant cost difference. A narrower pedestrian bridge would likely be about 6 feet wide and would cost less than a 12 feet wide bike/pedestrian bridge.
- Bicyclists would still be able to use the bridge. If multiple people are using the bridge at the same time the bicyclist would have to dismount and walk the bike across. We believe that this would be a reasonable accommodation.

4. Are there any future plans to build a multimodal trail to this section from Merritt's Pasture to Ashe Place?

Response: Town staff believes that at least in the near term this would be highly unlikely for the following reasons:

- This idea is not recommended in the Town's master Greenway Plan.
- There are many private properties along this stretch. Several property owners have indicated that they are unhappy with the informal natural surface trail that already exists. We believe that the amount of opposition would only increase if a paved path were proposed.
- Construction costs would likely be very high because of the proximity of Morgan Creek to any possible trail location, steep slopes, and known rock in this area.

We have offered to reconsider this approach if the neighborhood can come to some kind of consensus regarding formal trails of any type in this area.

5. Are there any future plans to build a multimodal trails to this section from Ashe Place to Bartram Drive or beyond to the Botanical Garden?

Response: Botanical Garden staff have indicated that there are no plans for multi-modal trails in this area. The Elephant Rock Trail (one section of which is on the OWASA easement) connects Bartram Drive to the Botanical Garden, which will remain a footpath.

- 6. My son grew up in the area, would love to have connectivity across the creek. Is it possible to have 24/7 right of way through garden property using this bridge?**

Response: The North Carolina Botanical Garden advises that trails outside the Garden proper (outside the deer fence) are open year-round, 24/7. The bike/pedestrian connector trails leading to and from the proposed Morgan Creek Bridge will be similarly open.

- 7. Concerned about possibility of unofficial paths cutting through yards to get to trails and bridges.**

Response: It is common throughout town for residents to create informal paths in order to access the town's formal trails. In most cases these trails are built from individual homes directly to the adjacent trail or through property owned by homeowners associations. If the bridge is built and people trespass to access the trail we would recommend that the landowner contact the Town police department (north side of the creek) or the sheriff's department (south side of the creek).

- 8. Concerned about parking on local streets to access trails and bridges.**

Response: Staff has heard this as a potential issue with almost every new greenway and trail project. The issue has never risen to the point where staff has been contacted to help resolve the problem. We do acknowledge that this could be a concern. However, in this case we believe that there is little risk of extensive parking on streets due to the nature of the neighborhood and the street pattern. If problems do arise there are regulatory solutions such as limitations on parking and use of local parking permits.

- 9. I live on Meadow Lane. We have no parking signs on both sides of the road and some people do park to access Merritt's Pasture. Not enough to do anything about it, but it does happen.**

Response: Meadow Lane is a private road. Residents of Meadow Lane have the option to contact the Orange County Sheriff and discuss the possibility of having people trespassed.

- 10. All for the bridge. Would have been better at Ashe Place. Doesn't want this to be a bridge to nowhere. Floods come once a year, would like there to be funds to amend and maintain the trails specifically after floods. Are there plans for developing the trail and making it more resistant to flooding?**

Response: We are at very beginning of the design process. We have agreed that the University of North Carolina (UNC) will be responsible for day-to-day maintenance and the Town will be responsible for capital maintenance of the bridge. Our design team will look at the trail, especially as it approaches the bridge. We will provide more information about this issue in the future.

- 11. Totally supportive of bridge. More damage was done by OWASA when they changed sewer pipes, the bank needs to be stabilized on the side of the property. Have lived there since 1980.**

Response: We do not have the resources to evaluate the entire creek, but we will look at these issues near the bridge as we design the project. We will consider options such as bank stabilization.

- 12. What is usable width envisioned for the bridge?**

Response: At this time, we anticipate installing a 6 feet wide bridge. Multimodal bridges are 12 feet wide.

- 13. What materials would be used for the bridge?**

Response: We anticipate installing a pre-built steel and concrete bridge. We no longer use wood if at all possible. The bridge would be built of cor-ten steel. This steel weathers to a rust like finish that blends nicely into wooded environments. Almost all Town trail bridges are cor-ten steel and concrete. You can see examples on the Morgan Creek Trail and the Bolin Creek Trail west of Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

- 14. Bicycles are discouraged in the Botanical Garden.**

Response: The North Carolina Botanical Garden's trail etiquette policy discourages bikes on the Piedmont Nature Trail system with the exception of the bike-pedestrian path which extends from Old Mason Farm Road to Laurel Hill Road.

15. Can the bridge be built over the sewer pipe?

Response: This option is not likely due to possible maintenance needs of the sewer line. From a visual standpoint it would be good solution, but OWASA would likely not allow it. We will be happy to ask OWASA when we meet with them to discuss early design issues.

16. Some present are vehemently opposed to a multimodal bridge. Want to limit access and encourage pedestrian access from those living nearby.

Response: Noted

17. Respect the existing Orange Water and Sewer Authority (OWASA) easements. Keep them the way that they are. Please don't remove trees. OWASA replaced sewer lines with minimal tree loss.

Response: There will likely be some tree loss on the north bank due to the bridge location, the need to back a flatbed truck to the bridge site, and the need to stage a crane to install the bridge. A major goal of any design will be to minimize tree loss. We will replant as needed after construction. Part of the design package will be a landscape plan that will be available for public comment.

18. The Morgan Creek Greenway by Culbreath Road was installed in a similar way as proposed here. Take a look to see how the vegetation has recovered.

Response: Noted. Staff reminds everyone that construction is always disruptive and unattractive. However, North Carolina's climate allows for fairly quick post-construction recovery for vegetation.

19. Clarify placement of the bridge on the map.

Response: The preliminary concept can be viewed on the [Morgan Creek Bridge Project Web Page](#). As the design progresses the location may shift based on flood modeling and other design needs. As these changes occur the web page will be updated and people on the project email list will be keep informed as changes occur.

20. Backyards back up to the area and erosion is an issue. What will be done to address these issues?

Response: The Town plans on working with adjacent landowners to identify landscaping needs. We believe it is in our mutual interests to provide adequate landscape buffers.

We will also look at protecting the stream bank in the areas near the proposed bridge.

21. What usage is anticipated?

Response: We believe that there would be an increase in trail use over current levels. However, we believe that increase would be limited in scope and would consist mainly of people who already live in the neighborhood. We anticipate a very limited amount of use from people who live outside of the immediate neighborhood. People living in the Mount Carmel Road area, etc. will likely discover that they can visit the Botanical Garden without driving on Fordham Boulevard. Based on past experience we believe this type of behavior will be very limited.

22. Will people use the bridge to commute from the south side of the creek to UNC?

Response: We believe that there will be a very limited number of bicycle commuters who will use the trail and bridge to access UNC. The natural surface trail would likely discourage people with street bicycles. Steep terrain on south side would also limit bike use to strong bikers who are willing to peddle up the steep grade on their return trips.

23. Most hikers and bikers would cross James Taylor Bridge if going to UNC. Would you guess 20-30 users per day using the bridge.

Response: We have no objective method to estimate numbers. The 20-30 users per day estimate seems reasonable, but we have no way to confirm those numbers.

24. Concern over permanent disruption of natural areas.

Response: The natural surface path would mirror those already in place throughout the Botanical Garden. Most trails are less than 3 feet wide, can be built without machines, and can avoid trees. These types of trails often have small drainage improvements or other minor improvements needed to provide level footing. The biggest impact would come from construction of the bridge piers.

- 25. Bank erosion along the area; OWASA is filling in with giant cobbles. Can see the rationale of having a path on the north side of the easement; large cobblestones are on the south side.**

Response: The Town will work with Botanical Garden staff during the design to make the bridge and trail sustainable and safe. Landscape architects will be part of the design team and will work on the project with the goal of providing an aesthetically pleasing, environmentally sustainable, and safe facility.

COMMENTS / QUESTIONS RELATED MORGAN CREEK TRAIL PROJECTS

- 26. How might someone in the future get from Merritt's Pasture to the proposed bridge?**

Response: The Town is currently working on plans to extend the Morgan Creek Trail across Merritt's Pasture to Fordham Boulevard. The trail is also being designed to act as a side path along Fordham Boulevard, past the entrance of Morgan Creek Road to Otey's Road. The design process was stopped about 2 years ago in order to allow the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to complete a safety study along Fordham Blvd. The study has been completed. We intend to restart the design process in February 2020. There will be public meeting(s) for that project as well.

- 27. Where are we with design and what is the anticipated cost of the project to extend the Morgan Creek Trail to Otey's Road?**

Response: The design is at about the 60% point. A very rough estimate is \$1.5 - \$2 million to build.

- 28. Why not stop the side path section at Morgan Creek Road instead of continuing to Otey's Road? There are steep slopes along the section near Otey's Road and several homes that are close to Fordham Boulevard.**

Response: We note the concerns and agree with the observations. Ultimately any decision to proceed with construction will come after a robust public input process. We note three primary reasons for designing the side path all the way to Otey's Road:

- Otey's Road appears to be the best possible location for an at-grade bicycle/pedestrian crossing of Fordham Boulevard

Morgan Creek Trail – Bridge Project

Public Meeting: January 14, 2020 7:00 – 9:00 PM

North Carolina Botanical Garden, Auditorium, 100 Mason Farm Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Page 9 of 9

- The Town has long range plans to build an interconnected system of side paths along all of Fordham Boulevard.
- The extension to Otey's Road would provide a closer connection point to the Morgan Creek Trail for many residents.

29. Update on a crossing of Fordham at Otey's?

Response: NCDOT has wrapped up the Fordham Boulevard pedestrian safety study. NCDOT has communicated that because there is currently no path they cannot review the crossing. When funds become available the Town may build a path to Otey's Road. At that time we would expect NCDOT to consider a crossing.

Next Steps

We will continue to work on the design portion of the project and incorporate input received so far. As soon as we achieve the next level of design we will share that design with everyone on the email distribution list and we will place updated design plans on the project website.

At some point in the future we will hold another public meeting(s).

I will be here to serve you through mid-March. Please feel free to comment by contacting me at bwebster@townofchapelhill.org or 919 968-2819. I prefer email because I will then have a written record of your concerns, but I am also very happy to discuss these issues on the phone or in person.

I am retiring from Town employment effective April 1, 2020, but will be out of the office starting in mid-March. Marcia Purvis will assume the role of project manager beginning around March 19, 2020. Questions and concerns can be directed to her at mpurvis@townofchapelhill.org or 919 968-2750.

Bill Webster, Project Manager
Chapel Hill Parks and Recreation Department