



Building our trail. Connecting our communities.

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What is the Firefly Trail?

It is a proposed, partially funded multi-purpose path for pedestrian, bicycle and other non-motorized uses that will stretch about 39 miles from Athens to Union Point, Georgia. It will be built on or near the historic corridor of the Athens Branch of the Georgia Railroad.

What is a rail-trail?

Rail-trails are paths that follow the routes of abandoned or otherwise out-of-use railroads. They provide a safe, off-road resource for walking, running, bicycling, skating and other non-motorized uses. Being wide, level (railroads need gentle grades), and connected to communities, they are perfectly suited to people of all ages and abilities, providing tangible benefits for health, safety, historic preservation, active transportation, community pride, and economic development. Rail-trails may be paved, made of crushed rock, or even left as dirt. They range from half a mile to more than 200 miles long.

Which communities will the Firefly Trail connect?

Its northern end will be on East Broad Street in Athens. Moving south, trail users will pass through Winterville into Oglethorpe County, where the trail will connect Arnoldsville, Crawford, Stephens and Maxeys. Continuing into Greene County, trail users will pass through Hutchins and Woodville before reaching the southern terminus in downtown Union Point.

What benefits do trails provide?

Trails are safe places for exercise and active transportation, so they help people of all ages combat cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity and other effects of inactive lifestyles. By separating bike/ped traffic from roadways, trails can improve safety. Trails bring foot and bicycle traffic, which is good for business, and long trails often attract significant tourism. Trails can be resources for historic preservation and education, as well as corridors for nature. Trails tend to reduce crime in the areas they serve and increase nearby property values. Most importantly, trails make communities more attractive

places to live and work, which helps recruit and retain investment in new businesses, industries and residents.

What is the status of trail development?

Athens-Clarke County has hired a contractor to build a 0.8-mile segment of the Firefly Trail from East Broad Street to Old Winterville Road, including bridges over the North Oconee River and Peter Street. ACC also has instructed staff to begin right-of-way acquisition between Old Winterville Road and Winterville Road, and to work with Firefly Trail Inc., and Athens Land Trust to start approaching landowners along the rest of the corridor in ACC.

At the same time, Maxeys has secured a \$100,000 recreational trails grant with the intent of building about a mile of trail within its city limits. Firefly Trail, Inc., is launching a major fund-raising campaign to assist Maxeys and, we hope, pave significantly more trail within that city. Winterville, Woodville and Union Point are actively seeking funding sources.

What is the history of the Athens Branch?

The Georgia Railroad, Georgia's first state-chartered railroad, opened in 1841 to connect Athens to Augusta by way of Union Point. Originally, it terminated in Athens at Carr's Hill, but in 1888, bridges were added over Trail Creek and the North Oconee River to bring trains into downtown. The Athens Branch was abandoned in 1984 by CSX Transportation, which finished removing rails and other structures by 2000. Public outcry over the demolition of the Trail Creek trestle, made famous by the rock band REM, led Athens-Clarke County to buy the trestle.

Is the rest of the corridor intact?

No. Portions of it are still owned by CSX. Other portions are owned by adjacent landowners who have clear title. For some portions, ownership is unclear. Fortunately, we have heard from a number of property owners who are eager to help make the trail a reality. Unfortunately, some other property owners are opposed to the trail.

Is opposition unusual for a trail project?

No, in fact, it occurs with just about every trail ever developed, including such iconic paths as the Appalachian Trail and Georgia's Silver Comet Trail.

How do you plan to handle opposition?

Much of the opposition to trails grows out of fear of crime and loss of privacy. The experience of hundreds of other communities is that trails tend to reduce crime and increase safety. Also, impacts on privacy are typically much lower than landowners fear. In the few places where there are actual impacts, privacy fencing, landscaping and signage can mitigate problems. Addressing opposition requires listening, open communication, and patience.

What about crossing Trail Creek?

Engineers have determined that the partially demolished trestle over Trail Creek cannot be upgraded to support a multi-purpose path. Athens-Clarke County has committed to creating a railroad-grade crossing of Trail Creek in the future. In the meantime, the Firefly Trail will come off railroad grade to use an existing Greenway bridge over the creek.

How much will it cost to build the Firefly Trail?

Cost depends on how much of the corridor is donated and the surface material used (concrete, asphalt, or crushed cinders). In urban areas, a good rule of thumb is \$1 million per mile. In rural areas, the cost can be much lower. Our very rough estimate for the 38 miles from Old Winterville Road to Union Point is about \$13 million.

Where will you get the money to build it?

Lots of sources over time. Most long trails are built in segments as funding becomes available. Funding for the first segments of the Firefly Trail is coming through Special Local Option Sales Taxes and federal and state grants. Possible future sources include private donations; transportation sales taxes; special local option sales taxes; gifts and grants from private businesses, industries and foundations; public fundraisers, and a variety of state and federal programs. Donors can make a big difference: In Greenville County, S.C., a \$1 million commitment from Greenville Health System helped make the Swamp Rabbit Trail a reality.

Are other trails proposed for Northeast Georgia?

Yes. The big vision is that the Firefly Trail will be the first part of a network of trails serving the entire region, including Watkinsville, Madison and Greensboro. Also, Athens-Clarke County is in the process of expanding its Greenway network and improving its bicycle and sidewalk infrastructure.

How can I help?

We need volunteers, advocates and donors! For more information, please visit our website or send us an email. Firefly Trail Inc., is a 501(c)3 organization, so donations are tax-exempt to the full extent allowed by law. Thank you for your support!

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