City of Afton Greenway Engagement Project

In partnership with:
City of Afton & Ron Moorse (City Administrator)
Resilient Communities Project (RCP)
University of Minnesota Graduate Students:
Jasper Goldstein, Marcus Hansen, Jen King, Jackson Matthies, Ayden Schaffler, Cristian Tineo

Fall 2025

INTRODUCTION

Afton Trail Opportunities:

The City of Afton in Washington County is an exurban area of 25.6 square miles of land.[2] The land use includes agricultural fields, preserved natural resources, community areas, primarily single family housing, and local businesses. Estimates by the Metropolitan Council in 2024 indicate there are 1,212 housing units, and a total population of 3,038 people.[3] The majority of the city's population includes homeowners, and has a median household income of $130,000.[4] Afton is home to Afton State Park, a small historic downtown area, and Belwin Conservancy, which protects 1,600 acres of prairie, savanna, and woodlands, much of which includes public access.[5] The Afton Alps ski area is closely linked to Afton. Given its proximity to a major metropolitan area and current agricultural land, Afton has already and will likely continue to experience development pressure.

The University of Minnesota project team is partnering with the Resilient Communities Project (RCP) and the City of Afton to develop a community engagement plan that the City can then use to help identify potential locations for a greenway trail system. The timing of the project coincides with planning for two major regional trails: a north-south trail from Stillwater to Afton and an east-west trail from Battle Creek Park to Afton. According to the City's 2018 comprehensive plan, Afton aims to preserve its rural character, maintain a low population density, and maintain natural open spaces – all of which factor into local community culture and trail planning priorities.[6]

Goals of the Project:

[1] All photos in the report taken during a student visit to Afton on October 30, 2025 by Stina Kilsmeier-Cook (RCP).
[2] Afton, MN. "Welcome to Afton, Minnesota," n.d. https://www.ci.afton.mn.us/welcome.
[3] "Annual Population Estimates - Metropolitan Council." n.d. Metropolitan Council. https://metrocouncil.org/Data-and-Maps/Research-and-Data/Annual-Population-Estimates.aspx.
[4] US Census Bureau. 2025. "Census.gov | U.S. Census Bureau Homepage." Census.Gov. September 30, 2025. https://census.gov/.
[5] Belwin Conservancy. "Belwin Conservancy," n.d. https://belwin.org/.
[6] City of Afton. 2018. "City of Afton: Draft 2040 Comprehensive Plan." September 18, 2018. https://www.ci.afton.mn.us/comprehensiveplan.

The University of Minnesota team will provide Afton with two key deliverables: a robust research driven report based on case studies that focuses on community engagement options, strategies, and recommendations, and delivery of a pilot workshop that Afton can leverage for future engagement.

- *Community Engagement Strategies:* The City desired to be proactive in preserving greenway corridors and open space in advance of anticipated future development.[7] In order to do this effectively, a major priority of the City is to ensure community engagement throughout each step of the planning process. The University of Minnesota team worked collaboratively with City Administrator Ron Moorse to prioritize community engagement strategies. This included types of engagement, how to reach people and stakeholder identification, and questions to ask to elicit feedback from community members and stakeholders throughout the engagement process.
- *Pilot Engagement Workshop:* The University of Minnesota team developed a pilot stakeholder engagement workshop, and will deliver it to City of Afton staff, council members, members of the parks and natural resources committee(s), a representative from Washington County, and potentially other community members. The graduate team will pilot the workshop with City of Afton staff, who can then leverage components of it to engage other stakeholder groups throughout the planning process. The City will then use community engagement strategies and tools to inform future inclusive community-based partnerships to establish greenway planning and goals and prioritize strategies / criteria. This includes strategies and tools to inform and engage stakeholders to build trust and buy-in and elicit feedback.

Guiding Questions:

The community engagement team will use guiding questions to orient their research and development of deliverables. These include:

1. Given Afton's unique small town character, connection to natural resources, and agricultural land, what should community engagement in the planning process look and feel like?
2. Which outreach and engagement approaches might be used to involve stakeholders *early* in the planning process to:
   1) provide information regarding the purpose and goals of the greenway corridors planning effort,
   2) communicate the importance of, and the City's strong interest in, obtaining feedback from the community to guide the planning process, and

[7] Resilient Communities Project. "SOW RCP-59&61 Afton Greenway - Engagement." October 10, 2025.

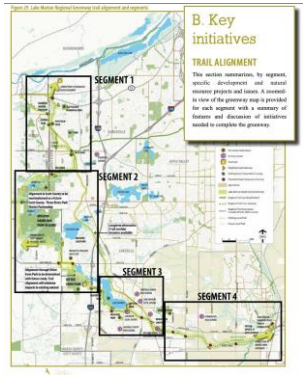
3) help identify and prioritize the corridor route evaluation criteria to be used to ensure the selection of appropriate locations for greenway corridors and trails?

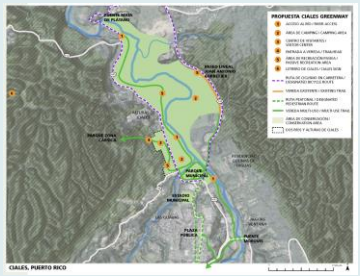
3. How can the City identify and bring in key partners and stakeholder groups?
4. Which engagement strategies from case studies resonate the most with the Afton community? How have other communities successfully incorporated community insights early in the planning process?
5. How can the unique values, ethos, and culture of Afton be represented in the community engagement process? Given Afton's small population, how can Afton's outreach and engagement ensure diverse community voices are heard?
6. Given the small size of the City staff, which strategies will work best for Afton to leverage for community engagement?

Case Studies:

Below is an introduction to case studies used in this report. The findings from these allowed us to identify and develop a robust list of recommendations and tools for community engagement in Afton.

Case Study Name	Year	Description	Image from Case Study
Clay County, MN *Heartland Trail Study*	2024 (Study)	State / regional trail that connects Lake Itasca to Detroit Lakes. The plan identifies specific corridors and outlines what the public wants to see from the trail, and where it should be. The plan also engages landowners within the study area to try to promote buy-in.	

Dakota County, MN *Lake Marion Greenway*	2013 (Plan)	Metro county of the Twin Cities with a robust greenway trail system. This portion includes a 2013 expansion into new cities.	
Fargo, ND *Red River Greenway Study*	2023 (Study)	The City owns extensive right-of-way along the Red River and has been slowly building a trail system. This study identifies strategies to expand the greenway to create a consistent corridor from north to south, and outlines what the public wants to see from a greenway corridor.	
Lower Rio Grande Valley, TX *Caracara Trails*	In Progress	Rural trail system that connects major cities / cultural locations in the area, including the Gulf of Mexico and South Padre Island to Brownsville, which borders Mexico, and Bahia Grande Unit of the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge.	

Municipality of Ciales, Puerto Rico *Ciales Greenway*	2021-2022 (Study)	Ciales is a municipality in Puerto Rico; it has a town center along the Rio Grande de Manati, with its wider landscape extending into the island's rural central mountainous region, positioning it as a "green gateway," with a proposed trail system.	
Providence, RI *Woonasquatuck Vision Plan*	2018 (Plan)	The Woonasquatucket Vision Plan focused on neighborhoods along the Woonasquatucket River Corridor in Providence, Rhode Island. These are historically industrial, diverse, and culturally vibrant areas experiencing redevelopment pressure and environmental challenges.	 
Seattle, WA *Greenways Initiative Baseline Study*	2016 (Study)	The Seattle Greenways Initiative focused on improving connections between neighborhood parks and walking/biking routes across the city, with special attention to communities that have been historically underserved.	
St Louis, MO *Brickline Greenway*	In Progress	20-mile stretch of greenways for public use separate from roads and motorized vehicles. Project gained support from community members and politicians for this major public-private partnership.	

Sugar Hill, GA *Sugar Hill Greenway*	2022	16.5-mile multi-use trail in a fast-growing suburban/exurban community on the edge of metro Atlanta. The area has a mix of newer subdivisions, commuters, and semi-rural land, making car travel the norm.	
Tacoma, WA *J Loop Neighborhood Greenway*	2025	Two-mile corridor designed to create a safer, low-stress route for people walking and biking. It connects key community destinations such as Link Light Rail stops, the Hilltop Business District, and the People's Community Center.	

"**Good communication is key**.
Keep the lines of communication open.
Build trust with your community.
All of this goes a long way."

Dan Farnsworth
Transportation Planner, Fargo-Moorhead Area Metro COG[8]

[8] Dan Farnsworth, Transportation Planner, in discussion with the authors, November 10, 2025.

TYPES OF ENGAGEMENT

Introduction:

As Afton begins to develop a plan to identify future greenway corridors, community engagement needs to be an important element in planning efforts. However, community engagement can take a wide variety of forms, ranging from simple ad hoc feedback at public meetings to a booth at pop-up events at community-led festivals. Community engagement needs to be tailored to individual communities, as residents have differing needs and desires. There are dozens of event types, meetings, and surveys that can be used to solicit feedback, all of which have strengths and limitations. Through an analysis of case studies and existing engagement toolkits, a tailored toolkit of engagement events was developed to allow the City of Afton to pick and choose the events they think will be the most successful.

Synthesis & Recommendations:

Varying sizes of communities and greenway projects showcase different types of engagement that the City of Afton greenway project can leverage. Considerations include:

- **Reach Audiences through Community Open Houses & Individual Stakeholder Meetings**
  - Lake Marion Greenway (Dakota County, MN): The project gathered community feedback over a two month period. They presented to various commissions and city councils that the greenway would pass through, and held community open houses for a broader audience, along with individual or small group stakeholder meetings when appropriate.
- **Provide Opportunities for Interaction at Pop-up Events at Community Festivals**
  - Heartland Trail Study (Clay County, ND): The Heartland Trail Study is another smaller town project that used similar engagement strategies, but incorporated other elements. These included pop-up events at festivals and farmers markets where they could interact with the community in a more casual setting. These events were

deemed useful and received positive feedback. Additionally, the team held landowner meetings to specifically address landowner concerns and ensure their voices were heard.

- **Hear, Elevate, and Address Community Voices and Concerns (e.g., Community Safety and Accessibility)**
  - J Loop Neighborhood Greenway (Tacoma, WA): Though this project is in a larger urban city, there are valuable takeaways. They put more emphasis on safety and accessibility due to its urban setting. Although Afton isn't an urban city, it can still be useful to think about safety and accessibility in any greenway projects.

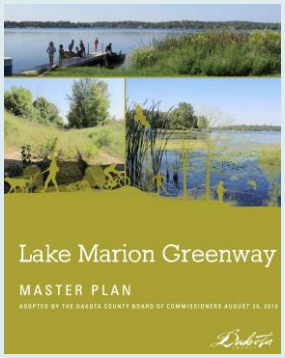
> "In the Heartland Trail Study, we focused on connecting communities across a rural area. We had different demographics of folks who owned property and farmland, so we held **landowner meetings**. They **respected the process, felt heard, and also felt respected**."
>
> *Dan Farnsworth*
> *Transportation Planner, Fargo-Moorhead Area Metro COG*[9]

Case Study Connections:

The case studies analyzed each used a different selection of engagement tactics tailored to the needs of their own community. Generally, most case studies used:

- pop-up events
- open houses
- an online survey

[9] Dan Farnsworth, Transportation Planner, in discussion with the authors, November 10, 2025.

Case Study Name	Description	Image from Case Study
Dakota County, MN *Lake Marion Greenway*	The Lake Marion Greenway is a local example of greenway planning in a context similar to Afton's vision. The process utilized traditional and modern means to solicit feedback. Public comments were gathered over a two-month period and culminated in presentations to commissions and City Councils. Community open houses were held throughout the study area. Finally, meetings with stakeholders were held, and engaged cities, park departments, private businesses, and landowners.	
Clay County, ND *Heartland Trail Study*	The Heartland Trail Study utilized a variety of engagement tactics, including six pop-up events at festivals, farmer's markets, and the MSUM Earth Day. The project team also held a landowner focus group meeting, which was dedicated to answering questions for landowners. Rather than blindside landowners with a completed trail design, this meeting allowed them to learn about the project, give feedback, express concerns, and shape the trail alignment before the project is finalized. The focus of these engagement events were to educate and allow the public to help craft their ideal regional trail.	

Tacoma, WA *J Loop Neighborhood Greenway*	The J Loop Greenway utilized a variety of engagement tactics to collect input about safety, accessibility, and local needs for the greenway. Public open houses and project meetings were held throughout the neighborhood. Direct mailings were sent to residents and businesses near the proposed corridor. Finally, pop-up events were held on streets near the corridor as well as at festivals and other community events.	

Toolkit: Types of Engagement

Based on research into traditional and innovative engagement strategies, below is a toolkit of engagement strategies that the City of Afton can use to proactively plan for greenways.

Tool	**Description**	**Strengths & Limitations**	**Time Required** (L/M/H)	**Cost** (L/M/H)
Public Meeting	A traditional meeting held at a government building which typically includes a presentation and Q&A.	Can be used in tandem with other engagement events, but this strategy attracts a low number of residents.	M	L
Public Comment Period	A window of time where the public can submit comments regarding a project.	Should be used when federal or state requirements dictate, but this strategy does not engage many people on its own.	L	L
Steering Committee	A guiding committee typically made up of staff and other interested parties that guides the development of the plan. Steering committee members may represent specific groups of community	Should be used for complicated planning projects where diverse interests are involved.	M	M

	members.			
Stakeholder Committee	A group of individuals with vested interest in the project that helps guide the development of the project. Stakeholders may include landowners, businesses, freight officials, HOAs, or residents.	Should be used as a supplement to steering committees, as these groups offer specific guidance based upon their experience in their respective industries. If budget allows, pay stakeholders for their time.	H	L/H (if paid)
Council Presentation	A traditional presentation to an elected body.	Should be used in tandem with other engagement events, as this strategy only engages elected officials.	L	L
E-Mail Comments	An e-mail directly related to the project can be established which can collect written comments from residents.	Can be used at the end of a public process when a final document is being shared.	L	L
Public Open House	An event dedicated to the project held at a gathering place somewhere within the community. This format typically includes interactive boards and a "come-and-go" format, where residents can come at a time that fits their needs and leave at any time. Staff members engage with community members in an informal, conversational manner.	Use several times throughout a planning process, particularly at the beginning, middle, and end. Tailor each pop-up to the residents you expect to engage, and ask meaningful questions to build the plan with the community, rather than for them.	H	H
Pop-Up Event	Pop-up events latch onto popular community events to solicit feedback. Typically, pop-up events consist of a booth with flyers, interactive boards, and staff ready to engage in conversations and answer questions. Pop-ups can also be hosted in community parks or along important corridors.	This tool is very effective at soliciting surface level engagement. Meeting people where they are allows them to provide feedback without having to take time out of their day to go to a scheduled meeting or open house. Detailed engagement is less effective at pop-up events, however.	M	M

Mail-in Survey	A mail-in survey consists of a questionnaire that is either mailed to residents or available at local businesses. Residents fill out the questionnaire, then mail their completed surveys to City Hall.	Use in tandem with an online survey, as not all community members have reliable access to the internet. If used on its own, response rates are generally low and mail is expensive.	M	H
Online Survey	An online survey consists of the same questionnaire as a mailed survey, but is hosted online by a survey provider (SurveyMonkey, Google Forms, Survey123, etc.). QR Codes and links can be shared online or printed onto flyers to share with residents.	Can be used at several points in a planning process (particularly for gathering vision/existing conditions at the beginning and directional feedback in the middle) to solicit a variety of feedback. Use with physical surveys.	M	L
Mentimeter Live Survey	At a public event, a Mentimeter survey can solicit live feedback by asking questions and allowing the live results to be viewed as they are submitted.	Use at a public event where residents have reliable access to the internet and personal technology.	M	M
Focus Group or Stakeholder Meetings	Focus group meetings involve specific groups of stakeholders providing the project team with feedback and insights in a small group setting. Focus groups may include city departments, private sector industries, landowners, or other groups that have a special interest in the project.	Use as much as possible during engagement efforts, as focus groups provide valuable insight into issues a project may bring to their industry or agency. Should not substitute for public engagement, though.	H	M/H
Landowner Meetings	An open house or presentation that specifically invites landowners that may be affected by a project. These landowners can learn about the project, ask specific questions, or provide	Use when private land is being planned for development, particularly if eminent domain may be involved. This method can dispel rumors and allow landowners to meaningfully provide input.	M	M/H

	detailed feedback at an early stage in the project process.			
Coffee Klatch	An informal meeting at a resident's home. Typically, a small box of engagement materials (flyers, questions, worksheets, surveys, games, etc.) is given to a community member so that they can host the event themselves.	Good for controversial projects as the small group setting allows for meaningful conversations and compromises to rise.	H	M
Group Bike Ride	A group bike ride takes community members on a bicycle caravan along a proposed greenway corridor or nearby, to get boots-on-the-ground insights into what challenges the project faces and generally build excitement for a new greenway.	Use in tandem with other engagement tactics but allows for boots-on-the-ground planning. With this method, community members can see the sites in person and understand challenges and opportunities. May not be accessible to everyone.	H	M
Interactive Map	An interactive map allows community members to identify points along a set corridor on an online map where they have issues or ideas.	Requires a knowledge of GIS to implement but allows community members to place their comments at the specific point they'd wish to comment on.	H	H
1-on-1 Interview	A tailored meeting with one specific individual with one member of the project team.	Use when one specific stakeholder requests or when challenges affect one individual.	H	M
Charrette	An engagement tactic that challenges community members to design their ideal greenway with assistance from staff.	Can be difficult to implement if staff aren't trained in design or if the public is not receptive to design. Engages community members in a creative manner, allowing both community members and staff to gain additional understanding they may not get from a	H	M

		one-sided presentation.		
Visual Preference Survey	A survey, typically available on-line or on paper, that shows community members pictures of various scenarios and asks them questions about the images.	Good for introducing concepts that are more technical in nature in a manner that is easy to understand.	M	L

Additional Community Engagement Ideas

from "The Active Plan: Lower Rio Grande Valley Active Transportation & Active Tourism Plan"[10]

1. Form an **outreach team** to engage communities and introduce the idea.
2. Develop content that introduces audiences and **generates excitement**.
3. Seek out a wide array of public venues to present at in order to **cultivate interest** and generate a **sense of ownership**.
4. Take **small groups of potential stakeholders on visits** to the best sites.
5. **Recruit knowledgeable citizens** and community leaders to lead visits to give a taste of the vision and an opportunity to develop a **personal connection to the natural resources**.

[10] Rails to Trails. "The Active Plan: Lower Rio Grande Valley Active Transportation & Active Tourism Plan." Halff Associates, Inc. and City of Brownsville, November 2016. Accessed November 14, 2025. https://railstotrails.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/The-Active-Plan-Lower-Rio-Grande-Valley-Active-Transportation-and-Active-Tourism-Plan.pdf.

HOW TO REACH PEOPLE

Introduction:

Effectively reaching Afton residents, community members, and other stakeholders will be central to Afton's community engagement strategy, especially in a semi-rural community like Afton where communication networks may be more informal and casual. Research from comparable greenway and trail projects shows that success depends on combining multiple outreach modes – both digital and in-person – to build awareness, trust, and a sense of shared ownership in the project.

Stakeholder Identification:

One key stakeholder group that the City Council already formed is the Greenway Corridor / Trail Working Group. Other stakeholder groups include residents, private landowners, farmers, local businesses, community leaders, and trail and planning professionals from Washington County.

For further stakeholder identification and analysis, one common technique is:

- Brainstorm the list of potential stakeholders or stakeholder groups
- Place the name of each stakeholder group at the top of a sheet
- On the left side of the column, list the criteria or factors the stakeholder would use to judge the efficacy of the trail system (or their expectations of the trail system)
- On the right side, list out what can be done to satisfy or address the stakeholder[11]

Synthesis & Recommendations:

- **Blend Outreach to Include Traditional In-Person Communication, Digital, and Informal Interactions**

[11] Bryson, John M. 2004. 'What to Do When Stakeholders Matter: Stakeholder Identification and Analysis Techniques'. *Public Management Review* 6 (1): 21–53. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719030410001675722.

- Sugar Hill Greenway (Sugar Hill, Georgia): In this fast-growing suburban community, engagement relied on a mix of in-person and digital outreach to reach residents spread across subdivisions and semi-rural areas. Pop-up events at parks, mailed postcards, and an interactive map allowed both new and long-term residents to engage at their comfort level. For Afton, this demonstrates how a blended outreach strategy – that is, pairing traditional communication with basic digital tools – can reach a wide range of stakeholders, including homeowners who may not attend formal meetings but are open to simple, localized interactions.

- **Host Events at Familiar Community Locations**
  - Woonasquatucket River Greenway (Providence, RI): This case study showcases the power of community partnerships and trusted local networks. The planning team worked with bilingual "Community Connectors" and used venues like churches and arts centers to host discussions, ensuring inclusion of underrepresented voices. For Afton, this highlights the potential of working with existing community leaders and interacting at familiar gathering places such as the town hall, elementary school, local churches, or Belwin facilities to build comfort and legitimacy, especially where formal outreach might feel disconnected.
- **Focus Engagement on Amenities, Shared Values, and Experiences**
  - Red River Greenway Study (Fargo, ND): The team behind this shifted engagement toward preference-based questions rather than site selection, asking residents what amenities, trail surfaces, and experiences they preferred. This approach avoided property conflicts while capturing meaningful data about use and expectations. For Afton, where most land is privately owned, focusing on how residents would like to use a future trail, rather than where it should go can foster constructive dialogue and reduce opposition from landowners concerned about siting or access.

Together, these cases suggest that Afton should pursue a relationship-driven, visible, and preference-centered approach to engagement. Combining local partnerships, on-the-ground presence, and accessible feedback tools can help the City *build shared ownership of the greenway vision* while respecting its rural character and private property dynamics.

Case Study Connections:

Each project – though set in a different geographic and cultural context – offers lessons that Afton can adapt to its rural character, small population, and high rate of homeownership. The case studies reveal that successful greenway engagement requires:

- layered communication
- local presence
- tailored feedback tools that reflect community identity

Case Study Name	Description	Image from Case Study
Sugar Hill, GA *Sugar Hill Greenway*	Engagement combined digital and in-person outreach: pop-up booths at community events, an interactive online map for residents to mark destinations or concerns, mailed postcards to nearby homeowners, and social media updates through city and HOA channels. Consistent branding and school partnerships helped the City reach both long-term residents and newer suburban families. For Afton, this model illustrates how a blended outreach strategy, mixing in-person visibility with simple online tools can effectively engage rural homeowners and build trust around trail planning.	
Providence, RI *Woonasquatucket River Greenway*	The Woonasquatucket River Greenway project centered on in-person, community-based outreach in diverse neighborhoods along the river corridor. The Planning Team used a mobile engagement kit (English and Spanish) at local events, partnered with Community Connectors who shared information by word-of-mouth, and hosted meetings in trusted neighborhood spaces such as churches and arts centers. This approach prioritized meeting people where they were building relationships through visibility and cultural familiarity rather than relying on digital or mail-based outreach.	

Fargo, ND *Red River Greenway*	Engagement combined structured stakeholder coordination and public outreach: a steering committee representing city departments, Metro COG, Riverkeepers, NDDOT, and community organizations guided the process, while pop-up events, an interactive website, and an online survey gathered input from residents. Outreach included postcards, social media, emails, and local press to drive participation. Rather than asking where the greenway should go, surveys focused on amenities, surface types, and usage patterns, such as how often residents visit, what features they value, and how they access the trail. Fargo's approach demonstrates how targeted, preference-based feedback focused on user experience rather than alignment can help identify priorities while avoiding conflict around property sitting in small, homeowner-dominated communities.	

Toolkit: How to Reach People

Tool	Description	Strengths & Limitations	Time Required (L/M/H)	Cost (L/M/H)
Mobile Engagement Kit	A set of materials that can be portable and useful in a variety of settings and formats. These may include printed items to distribute to community members, or activities for them to engage with and learn on the spot. Consider pamphlets, event flyers, postcards, informative boards, QR codes for surveys, audio equipment	Pop-ups, existing community events, and informal gatherings provide dynamic spaces to utilize an engagement kit. The variety of materials included should be relevant for a range of ages, relationships to Afton, and times of day.	H	H

	and technology that can assist people with diverse learning styles and access needs.			
Digital Mapping Platform	An interactive tool for community members to connect their experiences across space and time. People can contribute in writing and visuals to convey their experiences in particular places and visions for the future.	People should be able to easily access the map online. In-person events, recordings, and guides can accompany the platform.	H	H
Postcards	Postcards can be printed and mailed to disseminate critical information throughout the planning process. These can feature work by artists, and be great additions to engagement kits.	These can introduce residents to the project, encourage ways to participate, and serve as a reminder for important events. Mailings can further branding, creating a recognizable and consistent presence in the community. It's key to pair these with other forms of print and digital media.	L	L
Community Connectors	This group consists of leaders in the community who help initiate informal gathering. These individuals may be involved in the development of the project. They can utilize materials from the mobile engagement kit to host a "coffee klatch" or informal gathering in their homes, businesses or organizations.	In a small area like Afton, community members who are excited about the trail system can serve as engagement leads. This can be an effective way to leverage established trust.	L	L
Pre-Engagement Survey	A short survey can offer an initial way to learn about who's in the community and their interest and awareness of the project.	Surveys can be an effective way to gather and analyze data. A digital form or paper survey can serve both as a primer for participants as they check	M	L

		into an event, and a source of data for organizers to track attendance. Multiple choice questions on demographics and current preferences offer an easy way to introduce the topic for engagement.		
Social Media	Tech platforms that people are already on can be an effective way to reach them, share information, and get feedback. Audience identification, paid “boosts” or advertising, and interaction strategies increase reach.	It costs money to pay to “boost” a social media message but it can be effective in targeting a specific geography or group of people in the community.	M	L/M

QUESTIONS TO ASK

Introduction:

It is important to ask community members targeted questions about future greenspaces because their input can help ensure the new areas are equitable, well-used, and truly benefit the community. Including residents in the planning process creates a sense of shared ownership and leads to more planning and implementation. Although any community feedback can be useful, certain questions can solicit valuable feedback for the upcoming project.

Synthesis & Recommendations:

The following questions and consideration may be relevant to Afton to create community awareness and buy-in for the trail system planning process.

- **Use Online Surveys to Provide an Accessible Way to Gather Insights from Multiple Perspectives**
  - Brickline Greenway (St. Louis, MO): This project is subdivided into smaller projects for smaller neighborhoods / communities within the larger city. They have an online survey asking local residents important questions such as how they currently engage in the projected greenspace area, how far away they live, and what benefits they hope to bring to their communities. All of these central ideas can be used in similar ways to Afton.
- **Focus on Big Picture Community Goals and Values**
  - Ciales Greenway (Municipality of Ciales, Puerto Rico): Similar to Afton, this project aims to connect more developed areas with the surrounding natural environment. This project used multiple community visioning sessions that included targeted, yet big picture questions for the residents to consider.
- **Solicit Input from and about the Broader Community & Note Opportunities for Connection**
  - Seattle Neighborhood Greenways (Seattle, WA): The planning components of this greenway system focused on making the greenways accessible not just for residents but also people visiting, which is a planning consideration that Afton shares. People from the metro area enjoy visiting Afton to see their beautiful landscapes and the river, so it is important to think about all the people who will be using the greenways, including in planning questions.

Case Study Connections:

The concepts in the questions below appeared across a majority of case studies in a variety of forms (surveys, in-person questionnaires, quick online polls, one-on-one and small group discussion prompts, etc.). A handful of case studies noted the value of having materials and presentations in multiple languages to ensure that all community members were included and reached.

The categories of questions logically grouped into:

- Awareness and Engagement
  - This category allows for Afton to gauge where stakeholders are at with understanding and developing a shared vision for the Afton greenway corridors / trail planning project.
- Geography
  - This category allows Afton, at a birds-eye view, to start to get a sense of community members and stakeholders geographic and demographic relationship to the conceptual corridors.
- Usage
  - These questions allow Afton to understand people's desires, motivations, and barriers to what would make the trails most effective and ensure high usage.

Toolkit: Questions to Ask

Category	Question(s)	Considerations
Awareness & Engagement	Are you aware of the greenway corridors / trail planning project in Afton?	If people know about the project beforehand, they are often less likely to vote against it with prior information
Awareness & Engagement	What are you hoping to get out of the Afton greenway corridors / trail project? What benefits do you hope this project will bring to the community?	More people will be on board and potentially help with the process if they are getting benefits from it
Awareness & Engagement	What benefits do you hope this project will bring to the community?	This allows Afton to understand the broader value the greenway trail system can bring to the community

Awareness & Engagement	What concerns, if any, do you have about developing trails in Afton?	With lots of private land in Afton potentially being used for greenways, some people may have concerns
Awareness & Engagement	If you have any additional comments not addressed by this survey, please provide those comments. <open response>	Open ended questions allow for new ideas to be included in the data collection process
Awareness & Engagement	If you would like to be informed about upcoming events related to <trail system>, please leave your name and email here. <open response>	Gathering emails and names allow for ongoing opportunities to reach out to these individuals for future greenway planning events
Geography	How far away do you live from Afton's current trail system(s)?	This is useful to Afton because some people come from outside the city from Woodbury or further and their wants/needs may be different than locals
Geography	Which places in Afton would you like to be more connected to?	Provide a map of Afton and people can put a dot next to the amenities they feel should be connected
Geography	What is your relationship to Afton? (Live, Work, Visit, etc.)	This allows for the City to understand who is providing feedback on the greenway trails. The City could have Afton residents and visitors use different colors to code their responses, which would allow for them to keep track of the various inputs.
Usage	How do you currently engage with natural resources in Afton?	Can be open ended or provide a list of options for people to "vote" on or rank
Usage	What motivates you to walk, bike, roll, or drive?	This can get at the functionality of the trail and the types of transportation or usage modes it needs to include
Usage	Are there any barriers that prevent you from pursuing use of the existing greenways / trails in Afton?	It is important for all people to be able to enjoy the public greenways regardless of potential problems that may arise

Usage	What are the most important amenities or features you would like to see included in this project? What features would you like to see along a greenway?	Including benches, signs, water fountains, bike parking, emergency call stations, shelters, garbage cans

PILOT EVENT MATERIALS

Overview of Pilot Workshop:

The University of Minnesota Engagement Team will design and facilitate a 60-90 minute workshop in the City of Afton on December 15 at 7:00pm CST. The workshop will serve as a model community engagement opportunity and will provide multiple stakeholder engagement activities. The intention is for the City of Afton to then be able to leverage these engagement resources for future events with the community that the City organizes.

Scheduled Attendees:

- City Council Members
- Ron Moorse (City of Afton, Administrator)
- Elissa Thompson (Washington County, Landscape Restoration Specialist)
- Sven Risom (City of Afton, Natural Resources & Groundwater Committee)
- Katie Bloome (Belwin Conservancy, Executive Director)
- Chair & Members of Afton Parks Committee

Workshop Goals:

  - Identify what type of greenway people want
  - Promote buy-in of greenway in Afton (people are aware and excited)
  - Leverage materials from this event for future workshops and pop-up events
  - Share criteria selection process, tools, and know-how

Agenda:

- Pilot meeting agenda (60 - 90 minutes)

- Welcome presentation (10 minutes)
    - Share goals of workshop
    - Introductions (including Ron)
    - Project background
        - Consider live word cloud / mentimeter / live technology
    - Overview of stations, process for the evening, and why this matters
        - Each station leader provides a 30-60 second intro + overview of station
- Stations (30 minutes)
    - Attendees self-select and break out to each station. Each station will include an engagement and criteria activity. These will model community engagement strategies
- Debrief (15 minutes)
    - Feedback
    - Next steps
    - Closing (including Ron)

Content & Materials:

- Structure - Breakout stations
    - Purpose: Present accessible types of greenways and get feedback at stations

  Team 1: Community Engagement
    - 1: Which amenities would you like to see along a new greenway in Afton?
    - 2: Creating a Mobile Engagement Kit

  Team 2: Criteria
    - 3: TBD
    - 4: TBD
- Materials / boards - Example of board below

Which features would you like to see along a new greenway in Afton?

(select your top three preferences)

Boardwalks along natural features

Water Activities

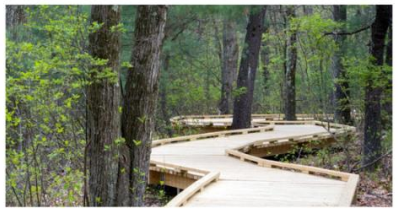
Butterfly and Native Gardens

Seating

Art & Murals

Family Friendly

Path Type #1



Path Type #2

Downtown Access

CONTRIBUTIONS

Jasper Goldstein: I learned about and shared information on a few case studies including the Brickline Greenway in St. Louis, MO. These case studies were the basis of a lot of information in our report and presentation. I helped with the synthesis of the subtopics in our report. I also created a lot of the slides in our presentation.

Marcus Hansen: in our initial group meeting I helped create a task document to divvy up tasks and see what had to be done. I did research on 2 case studies, one in Georgia (Sugarhill regional greenway) and one in Tacoma, WA(Jloop greenway). Here I broke down both case studies for the report with effective methods, tools, and takeaways. I helped with taking the raw slides and adding design and content. I put the information that jen took from the interview with Dan and put it into slides to talk about. I also am currently assisting with the boards for our pilot workshop on the 15th. I also attended the afton field trip. I presented slides 6-10 at the class presentation and will help facilitate discussion at one of our boards during the pilot event.

Jen King: For the report, I wrote the introduction section, all recommendations / synthesis subsections, and drafted / restructured the questions section. I finalized the report for the team, including drafting any remaining sections, editing, revising, formatting, adding citations, etc. I conducted research on two case studies (Lower Rio Grande Valley, TX and Dakota County, MN). For the presentation, I created some slides' content and edited the presentation so that it was formatted consistently (images, font, text, structure, no errors / typos). I also presented the questions section of the report. For project management, I attended every meeting with our Afton partners, sent out agendas beforehand for half of the meetings, attended the Afton field trip, and finalized our deliverables so that they were ready for submission. I also participated in the interview with Dan Farnsworth and documented notes for the team.

Jackson Matthies: I completed two case studies, the Woonasquatucket River Greenway (Providence, RI), and Seattle Greenways / Neighborhood Greenways / Seattle Parks & Recreation "Greenways Initiative Baseline Study. I helped conduct the interview with Dan Farnsworth along with Ayden and Jen. I helped create our slides show and primarily added a lot of the information to the slides that were presented. I presented the first 5 slides of the presentation to the class. I am working on helping create materials (coloring sheets) for the Afton workshop. I also attended the Afton Field trip and will be there to help facilitate discussion during the pilot event on the 15th.

Ayden Schaffler: I served as the project coordinator with RCP and the City of Afton, communicating information and typically leading check-ins. I also created agendas for roughly half of our meetings, which I attended all of as well. I also researched two case studies (the Red River Greenway and Heartland Trail Study) and developed the outline for our draft document, including creating the "three questions" approach to the report. Then, I built out the "Engagement Events" section of the document, including the toolkit. Next, I organized the interview with Dan Farnsworth and led it with the help of Jen and Jackson. I then developed the Executive Summary and several of the slides for the final presentation. I've also helped develop the agenda and framework for the pilot workshop. Additionally, I added alt text for all imagery in the report to increase accessibility at the request of RCP. Finally, I presented the pilot workshop strategy and executive summary for the class presentation.

Cristian Tineo Jr:
I did research on the case study for the Ciales Greenway in Puerto Rico. I assisted with building out the toolkit for the "How to Reach People" section, and helped with initial drafting of the toolkit for "Questions to Ask." I reviewed the case studies and searched for potential contacts to interview. I connected with people from the Woonasquatucket River Greenway, but was not able to set up a time to meet. During the presentation, I talked about slides 11-13, and edited slide 22. Lastly, I'm creating the boards that we will utilize for engagement at the pilot workshop.