

Granite Creek Corridor Plan aims to make downtown asset more visible, usable

Public weighs in on possible improvements



An ongoing area plan for the Granite Creek Corridor is looking at ways to make the downtown-Prescott creek more accessible to users, including at the intersection at Willis Street. Currently, trail users are directed to use a crosswalk along the busy street section. (Cindy Barks/Courier)



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Granite Creek improvements that are already in the works will make the downtown-Prescott creek bed and the trail that fronts it safer and more attractive.

The City of Prescott has been working for months on ways to make local residents and visitors feel more comfortable using the shady creek's paths as a transportation route through the downtown. Construction is scheduled to begin in September on a number of improvements.

Despite those steps, however, downtown Prescott still faces the issue of how to make the creek — considered a hidden gem — more visible and accessible.

That is where an ongoing Granite Creek Corridor Plan comes in.

PUBLIC MEETING

On Wednesday, July 7, about 28 people tuned in to a Zoom public meeting about the Granite Creek planning process that got underway in January. Half of the participants were city officials or members of the planning team, while the other half were interested community residents.

Tyler Goodman, assistant to the city manager and the project manager for the area plan, said the main purpose of the project is to find ways to ensure that the community will use the improvements that are taking place on the creek itself.

"The whole goal is to capitalize on the improvements," he said, referring to the city's \$1.6 million Granite Creek Corridor improvement project.

That project, which got City Council approval earlier this year, will include improvements such as better lighting in the underpasses along the Greenways Trails; new signs; a handicap-accessible entrance to the trail at Goodwin Street; removal of medium and large elm trees; improvement of the trail surface and improvements to creek channels.

Much of the work in the creek and on the Greenways Trail is expected to get started in September and be complete by spring 2022.



Local resident Angelo Ossanna walks along a shady section of the Granite Creek Greenway Trail with his dog, Mollie, on Thursday, July 8, 2021. The trail is in line for improvements, starting in about September. Meanwhile, a corridor area plan is also underway to find ways to make the creek area more visible and accessible. (Cindy Barks/Courier)

IMPROVING VISIBILITY AND ACCESS

But even with the improved creek bed and trail, the experts say the several-block area around Granite Creek needs work to make people aware that the creek is there, and is usable.

Leslie Dornfeld of the PLAN-et consultant firm led off Wednesday's meeting by noting that the area plan "is not for the creek itself." Rather, she said, the plan focuses on how to connect the nearby businesses and the community to the creek.

The corridor plan kicked off in early 2021 with the appointment of a working group that included city officials and downtown business owners, as well as representatives from the Prescott Chamber of Commerce, Arizona Public Service (APS), Sharlot Hall Museum, Prescott Creeks, the city's Tourism Advisory Committee, the Planning and Zoning Commission, and the Northern Arizona Council of Governments.

The working group began its process in January with a half-day site walk through the project area. The group then met two more times, and Dornfeld's team also had smaller

meetings with entities with downtown interests such as the Prescott Unified School District.

LESSONS FROM SITE WALK

Among the things that the group learned early on was that the land along Granite Creek is a “tremendously underutilized asset.” Still, the presentation stated that with some city assistance, “it could grow and become another destination within the downtown.”

In addition, the study maintains that redevelopment is needed in some of the commercial areas along the creek. One possible place to start that effort would be at the city-owned vacant building on McCormick Street across from the Founding Fathers Collective, the presentation said.

The study also suggests that the Whiskey Row alley, which the city recently improved with lights and a mural, “needs to be better activated.” For instance, it suggests vendor carts, landscaping, or temporary pop-ups.

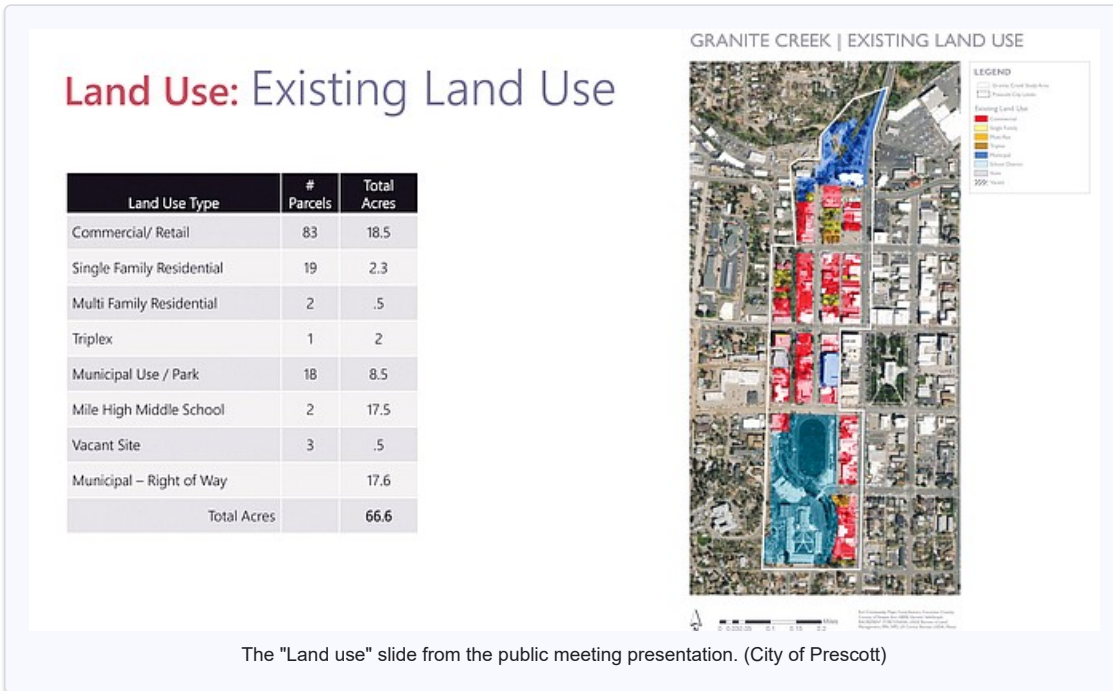
The site walk also turned up issues with mobility and circulation. Dornfeld’s presentation noted that pedestrian circulation is currently disconnected by the creek corridor, adjacent buildings, fences, walls and parking lots.

Goodman said one of the main recommendations so far is to provide more mid-block access points to the creek, similar to the small stairway and ramp that already exists along the Greenway Trail between Goodwin and Gurley Streets near the Sharlot Hall Museum.

Also in obvious need of improvements is access to the trail at Willis Street. Currently, trail users are directed toward a street crosswalk near Willis and Granite streets.

Goodman pointed out that traffic at that point on Willis Street tends to be fairly heavy and fast, which can make for difficult pedestrian crossing. He said the study likely would recommend some traffic changes along Willis, such as traffic calming.

Members of the public also made a number of suggestions, such as a better utilization of the Mile-High Middle School area, and a more thorough look at best practices for downtown creek areas around the world.



NEXT STEPS

Going forward, Goodman said the area-planning process likely would include several smaller coffee shop meetings with the public, as well as a possible second public meeting.

Ultimately, the recommendations will go to the Prescott Planning and Zoning Commission and the Prescott City Council for review. A final draft is expected by about January 2022.

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