

Creekline Trails of Opelika

MASTER PLAN AND MAP

For **2023-2030** - FINAL

(updated 2023.06.12)

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Master Plan is to update and improve the initial plan and map for Creekline Trails of Opelika sketched out four years ago by Rocky and Shealy Langley (with help from many other supporters and friends). This updated plan clarifies the places and spaces which are current and potential trail project sites, develops criteria for qualifying which places are good potential locations for future trails, and prioritizes specific segments for Creekline Trails projects. This Master Plan will serve as a guide for continued planning and constructing of creekside trails and greenways for recreation, alternative transportation, and for conservation of valuable blueways (along watershed streams) and greenways (with plants and trees) across the City of Opelika. Our aim is to connect neighbors with nature for the benefit and use of all the citizens and friends in our local community as well as the many visitors attracted to the City of Opelika.

PLANNING GROUP FORMED

This plan and map are the products of the Creekline Planning Group formed by the Advisory Board. The Planning Group collected information, developed trail project criteria, evaluated possible places and spaces for potential trails, and prioritized potential trail projects for the planning timeline. The results are in this written plan and the map shown in Figure 2.

SCOPE OF THE PLANNING TASK

Our task is to create a current, well-defined plan and map that is an accurate, fact-based visual representation of the Creekline Trails project. This updated Master Plan and Map are intended to be living documents to be revisited and revised as needed for our dynamic community as people, places, and spaces change and grow.

PLANNING TIMELINE: One of our goals is to create a plan and map that will guide planning, prioritizing, and building Creekline Trail projects from **2023-2030** to synchronize our timeline with the recently completed *Opelika Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for 2020-2030 (finalized April, 2021)*.

PART OF A BIGGER STORY

We acknowledge gladly that the work of Creekline Trails is a part of a much bigger story. That story is about the vibrant and multifaceted development and growth of the Opelika community and economy. We encourage readers to learn more about that bigger story as described in the referenced *Opelika Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan* and the *City of Opelika Master Plan* just to mention two important sources.

Toward the end of this plan, we address two key points to put Creekline Trails in the context of this bigger story: (1) How does the Creekline Trails project complement these bigger picture plans for the City of Opelika? (2) How do specific Creekline Trails projects connect to specific alternative transportation and road projects planned by the City of Opelika?

For the purposes of this plan, we will stay focused on the work of Creekline Trails. But we keep in mind that we work in close collaboration with the City of Opelika, and intend for this work to complement and connect with future plans for alternative transportation and roads which are in the works by the City of Opelika all across the City. Mutual support and communications between the citizen volunteers of Creekline and City representatives is essential for our work. We also recognize the support and fiscal sponsorship of the Envision Opelika Foundation which has been crucial for the progress made by the Creekline Trails of Opelika through a citizen and City partnership.

This document will collect information from maps and other sources and use this information to identify and name specific places and segments of potential trail sites. Using this list, we will review each segment and develop practical criteria to evaluate, qualify, and prioritize each segment as a potential site for a trail and greenway project.

REVIEW OF THE ORIGINAL CREEKLINE TRAILS MAP

The first objective is to clarify the location and status of potential trail segments along the creeks of Opelika. We begin with a closer look at the original Creekline map.

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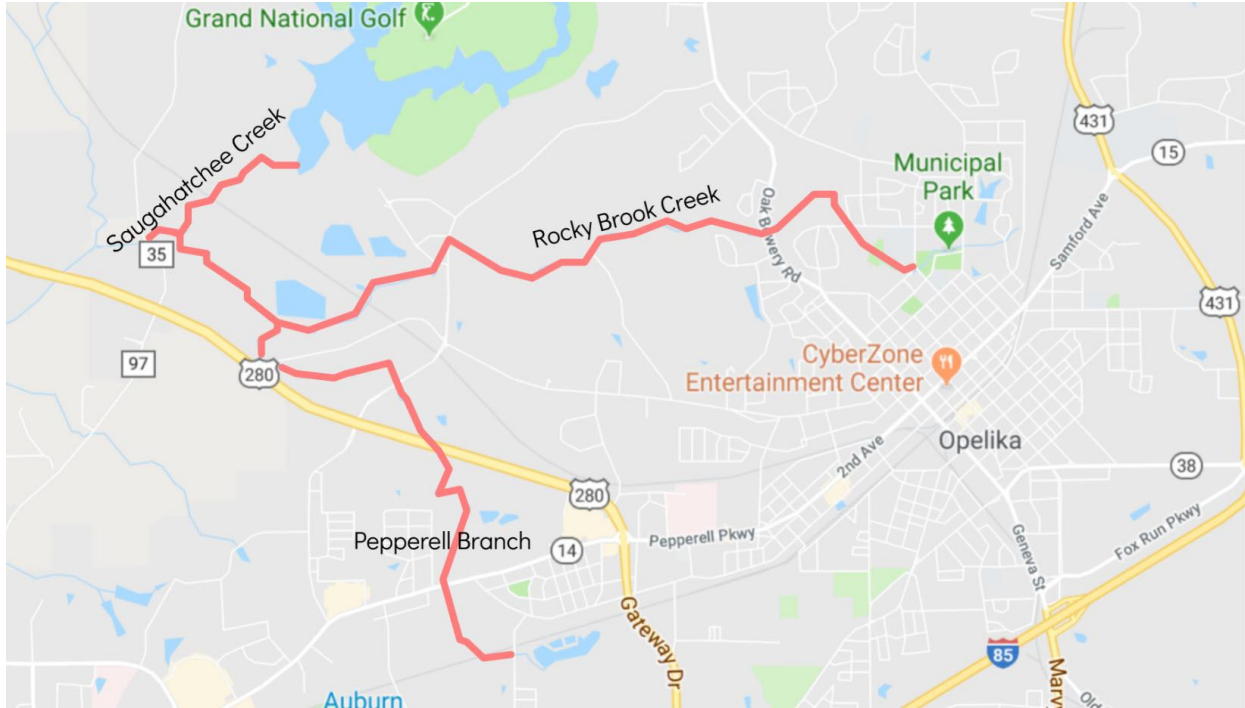


Figure. 1 - Creekside Trails of Opelika System Map sketched out in 2018.

Original Map Note: Since this map was created as a first sketch for the purposes of envisioning a series of creekside trails, this map should be seen as preliminary to guide the planning process and subject to changes as we move forward with more specific plans.

Refining a Master Plan includes developing a carefully considered set of planning criteria. (See below: CRITERIA TO QUALIFY AND PRIORITIZE TRAIL SEGMENTS.) Planning criteria are based on respect for private and public property rights related to any designated trail segments or greenspaces. We also keep in mind that our aim is to create well-designed trails and greenspaces that will provide positive benefits favored and supported by local property owners and residents near any trail as well as benefits for the broader Opelika community and economy.

Before we clarify trail planning criteria, we start with a clear description of the three main creeks in the City. These creeks flow and converge to form the watershed streams across the City of Opelika.

FOLLOW THE FLOW FROM POINTS OF ORIGIN FOR THREE CREEKS

Logically, the best way to describe the watershed streams of Opelika is to **start at the sources** of water and **follow the flow of each creek downstream**. In these terms, the map shows three places where the proposed creekside trails originate: (1) the wetlands space just south of the old Pepperill Mill site on 1st Avenue and south of the railroad, (2) a point where Rocky Brook Creek enters Municipal Park flowing under Rocky Brook Road, and 3) the south end of Lake Saugahatchee where a dam marks the outflow over a waterfall into a continuation of Saugahatchee Creek.

From each of these three points of origin, the watershed streams flow along three main lines:

1. **Pepperell Branch Creek line.** This creek line starts in the wetlands space just south of the old Pepperill Mill site on 1st Avenue and south of the railroad. The line runs westward to the Cunningham Drive bridge. The line continues from the west side of the Cunningham Drive bridge and crosses the railroad track, turns north and crosses under Pepperell Parkway (where there is a new private, multi-use apartment/retail development underway called “The Ballfields” by a private developer on the corner of Pepperell Parkway and 30th Street diagonal from the Walmart). The creek line then follows the creek to make its way north through a wide swath of undeveloped land to the west of the Springs of Mill Lake subdivision before going under Highway 280. From there the line runs northeast and crosses under Veterans Parkway. This is where Pepperell Branch Creek enters the OIDA (Opelika Industrial Development Authority) property through a culvert under Veterans Parkway to connect with our current trail site (Pepperell Branch-Waverly). As we know, our current trail work follows the creek as it runs toward what we now call the “Fork” in front of the lift station before turning west toward Sandy Beach Point. After a hairpin loop around the Point, the creek continues on until it crosses under the Waverly Parkway bridge close to Highway 280. After crossing under the Waverly Parkway bridge, the line follows the creek and meanders north where it is joined by Rocky Brook Creek and continues on to flow into Saugahatchee Creek just east of the point where the Saugahatchee Creek line ends at the east side of the Grand National Parkway bridge.
2. **Rocky Brook Creek line.** This line starts at Rocky Brook Creek Road and the entrance to Municipal Park. The line follows Rocky Brook Creek through the park passing the well-known Salem-Shotwell Covered Bridge. The line continues on

through Municipal Park around the perimeter of the playground and railroad area. The line then crosses Denson Drive and continues along Calhoun Drive to the Opelika Tennis Center and then runs behind Opelika Middle School to the point where the creek flows under McClure Avenue. After crossing under McClure Avenue, the line follows the creek up and around the Collinwood neighborhood and on to cross under Oak Bowery Road north of Blackhawk Drive. From there the line runs westward and south of the Cannongate subdivision until it goes under a bridge at White Road. From White Road the creek line continues more or less westward crossing under Veterans Parkway just south of Gabby Drive. It then turns south and crosses under Saugahatchee Lake Road bridge (Saugahatchee Lake Road is now closed), and continues to cross under the railroad embankment and under a pond access road before the line enters the Wood Duck Nature Preserve. The line then continues west running north of and parallel to Waverly Parkway and ends by flowing into Pepperell Branch Creek.

3. **Saugahatchee Creek line.** This line starts at the south end of Saugahatchee Lake at a lake dam and runs along Saugahatchee Creek which flows under a high railroad embankment through a culvert. This line continues on until it is shown to end at the east side of the Grand National Parkway (Highway 35) bridge.

WHERE THE CREEKS FLOW: PLACES AND SPACES

A BREAKDOWN OF POTENTIAL CREEKLINE TRAILS BY SEGMENTS

These creek line descriptions include geographical points where each creek line originates and flows along through spaces to places where the line crosses roads, highways, railroads, and other barriers, and on to points where the line ends. This allows for a breakdown of each creek line into useful, identifiable segments. The following list **numbers and names creek line segments in order of flow from upstream to downstream:**

Pepperell Branch Creek line - 6 segments:

- P01-Gateway Drive to Cunningham Drive bridge.
- P02-Cunningham Drive bridge to Pepperell Parkway.
- P03-Pepperell Parkway to Highway 280.
- P04-Highway 280 to Veterans Parkway.
- P05-Veterans Parkway to Waverly Parkway bridge at 280.

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- P06-Waverly Parkway bridge to Saugahatchee Creek.

Rocky Brook Creek line - 7 segments:

- R01-Rocky Brook Road at Municipal Park to McClure Drive.
- R02-McClure Drive to Oak Bowery Road.
- R03-Oak Bowery Road to White Road bridge.
- R04-White Road bridge to Veterans Parkway.
- R05-Veterans Parkway to Saugahatchee Lake Road bridge.
- R06-Saugahatchee Lake Road Bridge to Saugahatchee Lake dam.
- R07-Wood Duck Preserve paths at Rocky Brook Creek.

Saugahatchee Creek line 2 segments:

- S01-Saugahatchee Lake dam to the railroad embankment culvert.
- S02-Railroad embankment culvert to Grand National Parkway bridge.

A total of fifteen (15) line segments are identified. We note these segments may be broken down further according to adjacent property lines or public easement areas, but for our planning purposes at this time, we will address each of these segments as defined.

THE P05 SEGMENT NOW IN PROGRESS

We can start by celebrating the fact that *P05-Veterans Parkway to Waverly Parkway bridge at Highway 280* is the major segment (almost a mile in length) that has been fortunate enough to receive significant State (ADECA) grant funding awarded in 2022 with local City matching funds and local citizen fundraising. Work on a full multi-use trail is now in the construction contracting phase guided by City of Opelika Engineering and collaborating with citizen-led activities to build out additional nature walk paths and pocket parks. This is an exciting part of the bigger Creekline Trails of Opelika Master Plan that we hope will serve as a model for future trail projects to come.

CRITERIA TO QUALIFY AND PRIORITIZE TRAIL SEGMENTS

The next step is to define specific criteria that can be applied to qualify, evaluate, and prioritize each segment. The criteria are crafted to help answer two core questions:

1. What makes a given segment a good possibility for a trail project?
2. How do we prioritize segments for potential trail development and construction projects?

After careful consideration, we agree on using the following criteria. Note that the criteria at the top of this list are tagged as “essential” meaning that if a segment cannot reasonably be expected to meet the criteria, the segment is not qualified to be included in the current list of potential segments for planning purposes, although the segment may be reconsidered if we receive new information..

ELEVEN (11) CRITERIA:

1. CREEK PROXIMITY. The segment is located in close proximity to one of our three major creeks. (essential)
2. ACCESS. All properties in the segment have a reasonably high likelihood of being accessible by obtaining a public easement from any affected private property owner, or a site where there is already a public easement in place or a place already under City management. (essential)
3. SPACE. The segment has a minimum of 30 feet of accessible natural green space adjacent to the creek bank. (essential)
4. OBSTACLES. The segment has no insurmountable physical, utilities, or other property obstacles. (essential)
5. PARKING. The segment has available access and space for public parking. (essential)
6. TRAIL SUITABILITY. The segment is suitable for a nature path, surfaced, or full paved or concrete multi-use trail.
7. LEVEL. The segment is level enough for a trail with limited grading and clearing.
8. DRY. The segment is dry enough to construct foot paths or full multi-use trails with minimal bridging.
9. AMENITIES. The segment has potential for amenities such as a public restroom or covered pavilion.
10. BENEFITS. The segment would generate benefits that would be well-received by local property owners and other citizens both near the segment and in the broader Opelika community.

11. RESOURCES AND TIME. The segment offers a trail-building opportunity that is a good match (considering both estimates of budget and time) for the available resources of Creekline Trails and time available for leaders and volunteers..

FIRST PASS EVALUATION - SEGMENTS TO INCLUDE OR NOT INCLUDE

Considering the criteria and available information on individual segments, our first pass review separates the segments into two groups:

1. Segments to include in the Master Plan because the segment either meets criteria or is a strong enough candidate to warrant further consideration, or
2. Segments not to include for now because they do not meet essential criteria although some segments may be reconsidered pending new information.

Group 1: Segments to include in the Master Plan

The following segments meet all or most of the criteria for inclusion:

- P01-Gateway Drive to Cunningham Drive bridge.
- P02-Cunningham Drive bridge to Pepperell Parkway.
- P04-Highway 280 to Veterans Parkway.
- P05-Veterans Parkway to Waverly Parkway bridge at 280.
- R01-Rocky Brook Road at Municipal Park to McClure Drive.
- R04-White Road bridge to Veterans Parkway.
- R06-Saugahatchee Lake Road bridge to Saugahatchee Lake dam.
- R07-Wood Duck Preserve paths at Rocky Brook Creek.
- S01-Saugahatchee Lake dam to the railroad embankment culvert.

Group 2: Segments not included at this time

These segments are not included at this time subject to further consideration in the future pending new information:

- P03-Pepperell Parkway to Highway 280. This segment along Pepperell Branch Creek appears to be private property managed as part of the Springs of Mill Lake property development. We do not see an opportunity to propose a trail project for this segment at this time so it is not included pending any further information.
- P06-Waverly Parkway bridge to Saugahatchee Creek. This segment is just downstream from the P05 Veterans Parkway to Waverly Parkway bridge at 280 segment now under construction. This segment involves private property owned by a large developer whose potential interest in a trail project is currently unknown. The segment is not included for now pending any new information.

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- R02-McClure Drive to Oak Bowery Road. This is an intown residential area that would require much more work with mostly individual residential private property owners to work out numerous easements. This segment is not included for now unless we receive any new information of interest in a trail project.
- R03-Oak Bowery Road to White Road bridge. A small number of residential owners along part of this segment near Oak Bowery Road expressed opposition to a trail project at this time. However, we are aware of future development extending Arrowhead Avenue that may open the possibility of interest in a trail project on a part of this segment closer to White Road. So this segment is not included in the plan for now but part of this segment related to the Arrowhead development may be considered for a project in the future.
- R05-Veterans Parkway to Saugahatchee Lake Road bridge. We need more information to clarify the status of this segment. Therefore, the segment is not included at this time.
- S02- Railroad embankment culvert to Grand National Parkway bridge. We also need more information to clarify the status of this segment. This segment is not included at this time.

The following new map shows the segments qualified for inclusion in the master plan:

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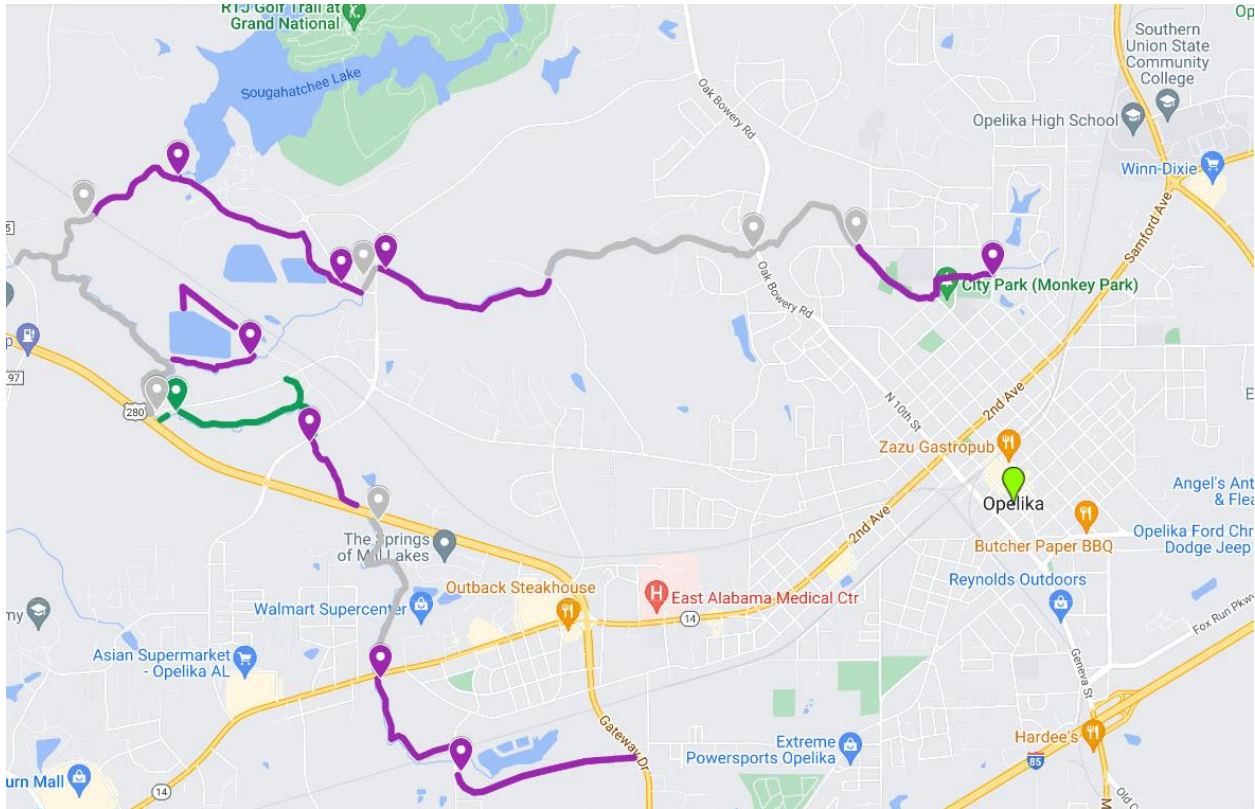


Figure 2. Creekline Trails Master Plan Map - 2023-2030

The Master Plan Map is color coded. GREEN indicates a segment where a trail project is in progress or completed. PURPLE indicates potential trail segments where future trail projects are being considered. GRAY indicates segments not included in the current Master Plan pending further information or interests in a trail project. Here is a link to the Google Map that allows zoom and pan for better viewing of segments with annotations.

[Creekline Trails of Opelika - Master Plan Map 2023-2030](#)

After careful review, we concluded that the previous plan can be improved by breaking down potential trail lines by segments following our streams, and by giving well-qualified segments priority. We recommend giving priority to segments which meet criteria for building a good trail with acceptable greenspace to move forward with as many segments as possible as resources and time become available.

As a result, we include nine of the fifteen segments identified and do not include six segments at this time pending further information for possible future consideration. The

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nine segments included represent roughly six (6) miles of trails and greenways if all segments were completed. This would be a significant accomplishment which will greatly expand the opportunities for people of all ages in our community to enjoy many of our most beautiful natural streams while conserving and protecting Opelika's natural resources and promoting watershed stewardship.

SECOND PASS - RANKING SEGMENTS FOR PROJECT READINESS AND PRIORITY
Of the nine (9) segments identified for inclusion in the Creekline Trails Master Plan, one segment (P05 Veterans Parkway to Waverly Parkway bridge at 280) is now grant funded with construction underway. What follows is a priority ranking of all segments with comments on readiness to start a trail building project. This ranking is made by members of the CTO Planning Group considering available information on the eleven (11) criteria to reach an informed evaluation and with review and comments from the members of the Advisory Board and in consultation with the City. The rankings are made for practical planning purposes and are subject to change.

SEGMENT RANKINGS

#1 - P05-Veterans Parkway to Waverly Parkway bridge at Highway 280. TRAIL NAME: Pepperell Branch Creek-Waverly Trail. With grant and city matching funding and citizen donations, the construction contracting process is in progress with construction of the main trail expected to start sometime this summer. Citizen volunteer work continues to tackle more clearing and invasive plant removal. This segment is therefore a high priority for additional trail building projects such as building nature paths off the main trail to be paved and the design and installation of pocket parks and greenway planting projects. We recommend that the Design/Construction Committee and Planning Committee continue to develop projects for this site in the near future. Coordination with the City and selected construction contractor will take place once we move from the contacting to the construction phase expected later this year.

#2 - R01-Rocky Brook Road at Municipal Park to McClure Drive.

A natural path clearing and construction project could be started here very soon in collaboration with Parks and Recreation and the Lee County Master Gardeners. An old partial path has been uncovered recently while clearing invasives at the Caroline Dean Wildflower Trail working with the Lee County Master Gardeners by the Covered Bridge. This could be an easy win-win for all parties and we recommend exploring a project in the near future.

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#3 - R07- Wood Duck Preserve paths at Rocky Brook Creek.

Here is another collaboration opportunity with the leaders and volunteers at Wood Duck which would be a win-win. This would also serve hikers and visitors to this popular hiking and birding area with a new, improved trail experience. Since the current construction at Pepperell Branch Creek-Waverly will connect to the Wood Duck Preserve, taking on a natural trail project would be doable soon with Creekline volunteers. This project may also involve assisting with restoration and rebuilding of some bridging. We recommend continuing our collaboration with Wood Duck volunteers to plan and complete a trail project at Wood Duck in the near future.

#4 - S01-Saugahatchee Lake dam to the railroad embankment culvert.

This is a prime location for a trail along the start of Saugahatchee Creek as the stream leaves Saugahatchee Lake and makes its way downstream on the long journey to the Tallapoosa River. This potential creekside trail segment would run through a beautiful forest near the creek that is owned and managed by the Opelika Water Board. While the possibilities for a trail here are still in the early stages of discussion, we recommend keeping this segment in our plan and hoping for the opportunity to develop a trail project here in the future.

#5 - R06-Saugahatchee Lake Road bridge to Saugahatchee Lake dam.

This would be a slight departure from the criteria in order to take advantage of a route that is managed by one public entity, the Opelika Water Board. If access was obtained, that would clear the way to build a trail all the way across this stretch to the dam at the south end of Saugahatchee Lake to connect with the S01 segment. Again, the possibilities for a trail along this route are in early stages of consideration and depend on further discussions with both the Water Board and the City. However, we recommend keeping this segment in our plan pending further discussions.

#6 - R04-White Road bridge to Veterans Parkway.

This is prime forest land that follows Rocky Brook Creek across large holdings by a few owners. The first owner of about half or more of the property along this segment is Gene and Carolyn Hunter (of the White family who has owned this large area for generations). We understand that they have stated they are open to discussing a trail project along the south bank of the creek. If current information is correct, that leaves three (3) other owners. This may be doable but will depend on further discussions with property owners. Pending the outcome of these discussions, we recommend keeping this segment in our plan and hope to make progress in discussions in the near future.

#7 - P04-Highway 280 to Veterans Parkway.

On the other side of Veterans Parkway from our current P05 trail project site, Pepperell Branch Creek can be traced upstream across private property to where the creek crosses under Highway 280. We do not see any record of discussions or fact-finding about the property or owners along this segment at this time. Until we know more, we suggest considering this segment as a good opportunity to explore for a possible trail project and so we recommend considering actions to reach out to property owners and explore trail project possibilities for this as a priority segment.

#8 - P01-Gateway Drive to Cunningham Street bridge.

We understand that the City is working on plans for adding a new road from Gateway Drive to run across the area just south of the wetland area (that feeds Pepperell Branch Creek) and south of the railroad to connect with Cunningham Drive near the bridge at Pepperell Branch Creek. When this happens, we are encouraged by the City to view this as an opportunity to propose a trail and greenway project for this new segment at the start of Pepperell Branch Creek. We would welcome this opportunity and also hope for the broader possibilities of revitalizing the larger area around the old Pepperell Mill site (which is now mostly cleared and ready for a new stage of development as a mixed use residential/retail site) and Pepperell Village with its beautiful neighborhood park. We recommend monitoring this closely to coordinate with the City for a trail project when the time comes.

#9- P02-Cunningham Street bridge to Pepperell Parkway.

From the west side of the Cunningham Street bridge (that is the bridge over Pepperell Branch Creek just south of the railroad crossing), this section proceeds along the creek westward and turns to the north after crossing the railroad, then runs across a long corridor of undeveloped property until it goes by the new “Ballfields” mixed use development (to include residential, retail, and restaurant spaces) and reaches Pepperell Highway. At this time we do not foresee a specific opportunity to discuss a potential trail or greenway project along this section. However, we understand that at least a portion of the southern end of this long section may have property restrictions that limit further development and therefore open the possibilities for proposing a trail and greenway project in the future. We recommend exploring any opportunities to contact the appropriate parties and discuss the possibilities for proposing a future trail project to enhance at least the southern portion of this segment.

| PRIORITY NO. | SEGMENT NO. | NAME |
|--------------|-------------|--|
| 1 | P05 | Veterans Parkway to Waverly Parkway bridge at 280 |
| 2 | R01 | Rocky Brook Road at Municipal Park to McClure Drive |
| 3 | R07 | Wood Duck Preserve paths at Rocky Brook Creek |
| 4 | S01 | Saugahatchee Lake dam to the railroad embankment culvert |
| 5 | R06 | Saugahatchee Lake Road bridge to Saugahatchee Lake dam |
| 6 | R04 | White Road bridge to Veterans Parkway |
| 7 | P04 | Highway 280 to Veterans Parkway |
| 8 | P01 | Gateway Drive to Cunningham Street bridge |
| 9 | P02 | Cunningham Street bridge to Pepperell Parkway |

TABLE 1. PRIORITY RANKING OF TRAIL SEGMENTS

CREEKLINE AND THE BIGGER PICTURE

We can now return to address two key points raised earlier to put the Creekline Trails projects in the context of the bigger Opelika story:

1. How does Creekline Trails complement bigger picture plans for the City of Opelika?
2. How do specific Creekline Trails projects connect to specific alternative transportation and road projects planned by the City of Opelika?

CREEKLINE COMPLEMENTS THE BIGGER OPELIKA PICTURE

In the bigger picture, the City of Opelika is working all across the city to improve the full range of community infrastructure to encourage smart growth including vehicle,

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pedestrian, and bicycle transportation projects with roadside greenway landscaping, safety crossings, and more. By working to build creekside trails and greenways that connect neighbors with nature for recreation, alternative transportation, and conservation of Opelika's watershed and greenways, Creekline Trails support the work of the City. Our projects complement the broader efforts of the City to assure our community has a healthy and vibrant lifestyle with appreciation for our unique streams and other natural resources.

CREEKLINE CONNECTS TO THE BIGGER OPELIKA PICTURE

Whenever Creekline can pursue a trail and greenway project that has the potential to connect with other multi-use paths, sidewalks, or bicycle lanes throughout the City, we are always glad to make those connections for the benefit of trail users. The more connected we can make our plans for all kinds of trails, sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and safe crosswalks, the better our community will be for all.

We recommend approval of this new Master Plan and Map for 2023-2030 subject to review and revision as needed in the future.*

CTO Planning Group

Shree Summerlin, Planning Committee Chair

Graham Yuill

Mike Akins

**Approved by the Creekline Trails of Opelika Advisory Board, June 12, 2023.*