

AN ANALYSIS OF THREE GREENLINE PROJECTS OF MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

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INTRODUCTION

Urban greenspaces have long served as a haven in the midst of the bustling metropolitan center that characterizes American culture. Whether it is a park, a trail system, or simply a playground, the urban population is drawn to these spaces, considering them opportunities for physical activity and social connection. These greenspaces are often categorized according to their usage or origins. Generally, a *greenspace* (or “open space”, as landscape architects refer to it) is an area “valued for natural processes and wildlife, agricultural and forest production, aesthetic beauty, active and passive recreation, and other public benefits.”¹ There are more specified terms within the subject that refer to various types of greenspaces. *Greenways*, for example, are defined by Charles E. Little in his book *Greenways for America* as primarily a “linear open space established along either a natural corridor ... or overland along a railroad right-of-way.”² This paper focuses on *greenlines*, which are typically along the path of or on the path of an abandoned railroad. The term greenline is used to designate an independent trail separated from motorized traffic (either geographically or sectioned off from the road) to be used by all citizens of the urban area for walking, running, and biking. In the past thirty years, many cities across the United States such as Boston, Massachusetts and Detroit, Michigan are enjoying urban greenlines or greenways and experiencing their advantages. These advantages include health benefits, increase in property value, and even stabilization (or decreases) in crime rates. Often urban parks have served as the stage of social integration, entertainment, and healthy physical activity. Memphis, Tennessee does not differ from any other city that desires those same commodities.

¹ United States Department of Agriculture: Forest Service: Open Space Conservation, “Frequently Asked Questions,” (United States Department of Agriculture: Forest Service, 2010), <http://www.fs.fed.us/openspace/>.

² Charles E. Little, *Greenways for America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 2.

URBAN GREENSPACES

Urban greenspaces serve as a proxy of sorts for the open environmental spaces that the rural and suburban areas of the United States possess. In cities, the land space is often used for housing (both corporate and residential), transportation, entertainment facilities, and tourism ventures. Cities are increasing in size and population every year in such a way that by 2008, the United Nations reported that more than half of the human population on Earth was residing in an urban area.³ With an expected increase of almost five billion by 2030, the urban population of the Earth will be straining the limits of cities around the world.⁴ This is why urban greenspaces are becoming more important as the decade continues. Urban greenspaces not only offer a multitude of advantages like health benefits and economic development, but they also serve as the city's representation of the natural world beyond the metropolitan limits. The same United Nations report that warns against the growth of urban populations also emphasizes the importance of the "use of urban space to reduce poverty and promote sustainability" while "protecting the environment and managing ecosystem services" to reflect the needs of the population.⁵ One advantage of the current urban populations is the interest in urban greenspaces.

The development of interest in urban greenspaces began with Frederick Law Olmsted in the late nineteenth century. Olmsted was an imaginative figure of his time—he foresaw the importance of urban greenspaces in regards to the poor, children, and even how urban greenspaces correlated to health.⁶ He wanted them to be used as a public amenity for those who were underprivileged and disconnected from the community. While aesthetic beauty was a

³ United Nations Population Fund, "State of the World Population 2007: Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth," (United Nations Population Fund website, 2007), <http://www.unfpa.org/>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Elizabeth Stevenson, *Park Maker: A Life of Frederick Law Olmsted*, (1977), 161.

concern of Olmsted, it was the advantages of viewing nature that he championed. He believed strongly in a correlation between the health of an environment and the health of its denizens.⁷

The career of visionary Frederick Law Olmsted is almost certainly the marker for the beginning of urban greenspaces in American cities.

Frederick Law Olmsted was born in 1822 and went through a series of vocations before he found, at thirty-five years old, the profession that would make him famous. In New York City, Olmsted entered a design contest with well-versed British landscape architect Calvert Vaux and presented a plan for the future Central Park that they called the “Greensward.”⁸ The team won the competition, and from that moment on Frederick Law Olmsted’s career as a landscape architect began. In later years, Olmsted would be acknowledged as a “father of the greenway movement in America.”⁹ His prominent place in the greenway movement is expanded thoroughly in Little’s book, *Greenways for America*. Charles E. Little writes,

“As it happens, the tracks of the great park-maker, Frederick Law Olmsted, are all over the modern greenway movement. Arguably, if any single person “invented” the idea of greenways, it was he.”¹⁰

This statement aptly summarizes the importance of Olmsted in the greenway movement. Without his contributions to the landscapes of cities like New York City and Boston, urban greenspaces would not have developed so rapidly in recent years as the loss of urban green spaces increased.

⁷ Frederick Law Olmsted, *Yosemite and the Mariposa Grove: A Preliminary Report*, (1865), 5.

⁸ Stevenson, *Park Maker*, (1977), 167.

⁹ J.G. Fabos, “Greenway planning in the United States: its origins and recent case studies,” *Landscape and Urban Planning* 68, 2004, 321-342. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/>.

¹⁰ Little, *Greenways for America*, (1990), 7.

Little's book is often cited as the premier piece of literature concerning greenways in the United States. He begins with Olmsted because of his overwhelming influence in urban planning and landscape architecture. Once Olmsted completed Central Park in New York City, he left in 1863 to accept a job as manager of the vast Mariposa estate in northern California, where he encountered sites such as Yosemite and the College of California (Berkeley), both of which inspired him to continue his work as a landscape architect. It is Olmsted's experience in California that Little supposes is the origin of the "Olmstedian source of the greenway idea."¹¹ At the Berkeley campus, Olmsted suggested a walking area along the neighborhood bordering the campus as well as a pleasurable scenic drive that linked the campus to other parts of the area.¹² Little hypothesizes that this day (October 3, 1865) "might very well serve as the point in history at which the time line for greenways should begin."¹³ The next project that Olmsted was dedicated to is likely the best example of the earliest urban greenspace. Olmsted, urged by his partner Calvert Vaux, removed himself from the west and traveled to Brooklyn, where he planned something he called the linear Park Way. Park Way, according to Olmsted, was the primary means of access to Prospect Park. "Prospect Park," Little writes on the subject, "... was to be a replicated rural landscape utterly removed ... from the toilsome city surrounding it."¹⁴ A linear park—that is, a pathway designated as a recreational nature area—is precisely what today's urban populations are creating across the United States. It has, however, taken time for the importance of urban greenspaces to develop in light of the twentieth century's rapid urban development.

¹¹Little, *Greenways for America*, (1990), 9.

¹²*Ibid.*.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 11.

In the century or so that has passed since Olmsted's career, the United States has had a tenuous relationship with urban greenspaces, often forgetting the urban landscape cities once treasured in favor of industrialization and modernity. Olmsted's work was continued by similar, younger landscape architects such as George Kessler and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., through initiatives like the City Beautiful Movement. Not long after the turn of the century, cities across the United States opted to beautify their urban spaces with trees, gardens, and "parkways", or recreational driving roads. Memphis was one of these cities that focused on creating beautiful open spaces for its citizens to use—it is in fact the origin of Overton Park and Riverside Park, two of the cities' oldest urban greenspaces.¹⁵ Once World War I began in 1914, however, urban greenspaces lost their importance as the rise of industrialization eclipsed urban landscaping. The United States then went through the Great Depression, furthering the loss of interest in urban greenspaces. It was not until the end of World War II that what Little calls the "race for open space" began.¹⁶ Chunks of unclaimed land parcels in rural and suburban areas were suddenly bought by parties interested in creating nature reserves or county parks. When the owners of these parcels—anyone from conservationists to activists—realized the random assortment of the land parcels, some "began to wonder about the efficacy of this approach."¹⁷ The land parcels were, at best, "blobs" of unconnected land "unrelated either to natural processes or to social need."¹⁸ The connectivity needed to enjoy the land as an urban greenspace shared by a community was lacking in this opportunistic scramble for open space. The economic difficulties of the seventies and eighties deteriorated the public interest once more.¹⁹ The hope for urban

¹⁵ Tennessee Encyclopedia, "Memphis Park and Parkway System," (Tennessee Encyclopedia, 2010), <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/>.

¹⁶ Little, *Greenways for America*, 1990, 31.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

greenspaces, however, persisted despite the lack of communal or political interest and funding. People still desired urban greenspaces to connect with their city, harkening back to an idea that Frederick Law Olmsted pioneered in his career as a landscape architect. Olmsted's most well-known linear park is likely the Emerald Necklace of Boston, which still stands today as one of the city's valued assets as a "meeting grounds for people of different backgrounds and classes."²⁰ This connectivity and sense of community that Olmsted inspired with his urban greenspace projects has been adopted today by the greenway movement for American urban centers. One component of the greenway movement has originated from another part of America's history: railroads.

Abandoned railroads provide an excellent skeleton for greenlines, or linear parks as Olmsted called them. A railroad is often a well-established route within a populated urban area. It has typically been cleared out of brush, branches, and other unnecessary obstructions. These advantages have all been noticed by those interested in creating urban greenspaces. In recent years, many of the railroad lines have become silent, made obsolete by the powerful freight transportation industry. Abandoned railroads lay useless, "crumbling physically and financially" even as the communities around them began using them as pathways for activity and exploration.²¹ Citizens using the abandoned railroads then recognized the need for legitimization of these readymade paths. According to the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy website, the rails-to-trails movement began "quietly, gradually, [and] hesitatingly" in the mid-1960s. "It was primarily a Midwestern phenomenon," the website continues, "barely noticed in places like New York, Los Angeles, or Washington, D.C." The movement focused on converting rail corridors

²⁰ Emerald Necklace Conservancy, "Frederick Law Olmsted: His Life, His Vision," (Emerald Nature Conservancy, 2010), <http://www.emeraldnecklace.org/>.

²¹ Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, "History of the Rail-Trail Movement," (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy website, 2010), <http://www.railstotrails.org/>.

into public trails. It was a simple and prudent solution to the failing transportation system that left its degraded foundations on the landscapes of cities everywhere. As the movement for environmentalism pushed forward in the seventies—Memphis experienced this when their own citizens strongly protested and won the abolishment of an I-40 interstate route that would have cut through Overton Park—advocates for these “rails-to-trails” found themselves in need of assistance. They required legal counsel, funds to acquire the land, and the support of the larger community of the city or area beyond their own circle of activists. The final step would be acquisition of the abandoned railroad path and then the creation of the greenline.

The steps to creating an urban greenline may seem simple, but the railroad industry does not make the acquisition of an abandoned railroad easy. There is not only difficulty in acquiring the railroad, but there is also a lengthy process to follow in order to keep the railroad line secure and safe. The best resource center for this process is the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, founded in 1984. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is an organization that focuses on the conservation of “rail corridors” to “[recycle] the whole transportation system” left behind by the industry, according to David Burwell, a cofounder and lawyer who helped the organization gain fundraising.²² Its founders—David Burnell and Peter Harnik—are products of the “environmental wars” of the 1970s that joined together to represent communities who desired a rail-trail (greenline).

Their humble beginnings in 1984 began with desperate phone calls from citizens across the northern United States seeking help to save their abandoned railroads. Since then, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy has grown into a respected organization that has created over 1,400 rails-

²² Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, “A Trip Down Memory Trail: 20 Years of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy,” (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy website, 2006), <http://www.railstotrails.org>.

trails from one end of the coast to the other.²³ This organization has encouraged and helped thousands of rails-to-trails initiatives by publishing guidebooks (such as *Trails for the Twenty-First Century: Planning, Design, and Management Manual for Multi-Use Trails*), obtaining financial resources and most importantly, providing a sound step by step process to follow when working with the railroad industry. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy website has an extensive online library full of resources, available freely to the public, to facilitate the process of creating a rail-trail, or greenline.

The process primarily begins with an interested party or advocacy group and an abandoned railroad. The stakeholders are typically active representatives of the community (bicyclists, hikers, runners) as well as residential communities, small businesses, conservationists, or health advocates. The process then moves, according to the website, to the question of the presence of the abandoned railroad and how to obtain it. It is an abandoned railroad if: “(1) the rail service is discontinued (2) the Surface Transportation Board officially approves the abandonment and (3) the tariffs (pay schedules) are canceled.”²⁴ After this, the advocacy group typically begins encouraging a wider scope of interested stakeholders. The importance of an interested and committed constituency is the most important key to forming a greenline. One study in Boston, Massachusetts showed that sixty-four percent of the landscape architects and urban planners involved in the Southwest Corridor Project accommodated and listened to community wishes because they believed it “guaranteed project survival.”²⁵ An interested constituency is also crucial when negotiations begin with the railroad company as it

²³ Henry Jaffe, “Peter Harnik: First Responder,” (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy website, 2006), <http://www.railstotrails.org/>.

²⁴ Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, “Frequently Asked Questions,” (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy website, 2010), <http://www.railstotrails.org/>.

²⁵ Katherine Crewe, “The Quality of Participatory Design: The Effects of Citizen Input on the Design of the Boston Southwest Corridor,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 67, 2001, 437-455.

often influences the amount of financial support the interested party acquires. Community involvement signals financial stakeholders (both private and public) of the long-term viability of the project.

Many advocacy groups prefer representation through organizations such as The Trust for Public Land, begun in 1972 by Peter Harnik, for negotiations with the railroad company. The Trust for Public Land is a “national, nonprofit, land conservation organization” that focuses on “ensuring livable communities for generations to come.”²⁶ One component (“Parks for People”) of the organization’s focus is the establishment of urban greenspaces such as parks or playgrounds. They also identify “land for protection” as well as “funds that might be used to protect that land.”²⁷ They offer real estate and legal staff to help during the process as well as the service of “purchasing [a] property temporarily until it can be permanently protected by a government or community land trust.”²⁸ This particular organization offers the advantage of experience and expertise in dealing with the railroad companies. Once the constituency commits to the greenline, then negotiations with the railroad company often commence with either railbanking or an outright purchase of the railroad line. For the greenline projects particular to this paper, I will focus on the process of railbanking.

Railbanking is a method used by railway companies to set aside lines that are abandoned or soon to be abandoned to preserve them for future use. After the beginning of the twentieth century, many railroad lines in the United States began to disintegrate as the automobile began to dominate the road. After 1975, the amount of unused railroad lines amounted to nearly 65,000

²⁶The Trust for Public Land: Conserving Land for People, “About TPL” (The Trust for Public Land website, 2010) <http://www.tpl.org/>.

²⁷The Trust for Public Land: Conserving Land for People, “About APL: Frequent Questions” (The Trust for Public Land website, 2010) <http://www.tpl.org/>.

²⁸*Ibid.*

miles, prompting Congress to secure the railroad lines. In 1983, the number of abandoned railroad miles increased, prompting Congress to take action by amending the National Trails System Act to create “railbanking.” Railbanking is the process of preserving the corridors left behind by the railroad lines, leaving them to be used as trails. The legality of railbanking was confirmed when the Supreme Court “unanimously upheld the constitutionality” of it in 1990.²⁹ By choosing an officially abandoned railroad line, an advocacy group can have the line railbanked in order to use it for a greenline. The advocacy group, or interested party, must then file a “Statement of Willingness to Assume Financial Responsibility” with the Surface Transportation Board (the authority on deciding the status of abandonment for a railroad) and the railroad company.³⁰ The advocacy or organization uses this statement not as a final acceptance of financial responsibility, but as an expression of interest in taking financial responsibility for the railroad line should it become a trail. The advocacy group or organization must also understand that the railroad company can activate and restore service to the line at any time. At any given point, the railbanked line *could* be reopened for service through application of the Surface Transportation Board, which handles all railbanking procedures.³¹ The interested party must keep the railroad line somewhat intact, including but not limited to letting bridges and trestles remain where they are and prohibiting the building of permanent structures on the right-of-way.³² By this point, the advocacy or organization has railbanked the line and begun the transformation of it into a greenline. The final step in the process is to generate publicity about the new greenline as well as clean it up for usage. Often this process includes incorporating the concerns

²⁹Ed. Karen-Lee Ryan and Julie A. Winterwich, *Secrets of Successful Rail-Trails: An Acquisition and Organizing Manual for Converting Rails into Trails* (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 2009), 44.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹*Ibid.*

³²Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, “Railbanking Fact Sheet,” (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy website, 2010), <http://www.railstotrails.org/>.

of the community such as the security of the area and its design and beautification. The final step in this process is to allow the surrounding community to understand the advantages of the urban greenline, as its public availability will offer many assets to the city such as economic development and health benefits.

ADVANTAGES OF A GREENLINE

Urban greenlines offer many assets to the surrounding population, but the paramount advantages are the opportunities for physical activity (health benefits), economic development (increased property value), and reduced or stabilized crime rates. The most important reason for the creation of an urban greenline is the health benefits they provide. According to the Office of the Surgeon General, currently two-thirds of adults and nearly one in three children are overweight or obese in the United States.³³ An urban greenline is the perfect amenity to help offset the current obesity epidemic affecting the country. Another reason for an urban greenline is the opportunity for economic development that it provides. Urban greenlines often create jobs for maintenance and security, as well as increasing the property value upwards of nine percent, as it did in the Mountain Bay Trail of Wisconsin.³⁴ For example, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy website offers an Economic Development fact sheet stating that a 2002 survey of recent home buyers that ranked trails “as the second most important community amenity out of a list of 18

³³ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: Office of the Surgeon General, “The Surgeon General’s Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation Fact Sheet,” (Office of the Surgeon General, website, 2010) <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/>.

³⁴ Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, “Economic Benefits of Trails and Greenways,” (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy website, 2010), <http://www.railstotrails.org/>.

choices.”³⁵ Another important component of a greenline, however, is safety. Many of the rails-to-trails projects report reduced or stabilized crime rates, and frequently refute the claim that a greenline is an opportunity for crime.³⁶ One study by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy found that out of the 372 rails-to-trails surveyed, less than one percent had an increase in crime. Many police stations actually reported the greenlines as a possible deterrent of crime due to the number of people using the greenline.³⁷ In consideration of all of these assets, it then stands that an urban greenline in any city has an excellent chance of helping with many cities’ problems regarding health, economic development, and crime.

An urban greenline provides an infinite number of opportunities for physical activity, including hiking, walking, biking, and running, all of which are simple and accessible means of increasing one’s physical health. The current health profile of the United States is an excellent reason to cite the importance of an urban greenline for a city. Nearly two-thirds of Americans today are obese or overweight, increasing their chances of contracting type II diabetes, a disease that increases the risk for cardiovascular disease, stroke, and kidney disease.³⁸ Many factors contribute to this epidemic, including poor diet and a lack of physical exercise. The sedentary lifestyle is increasingly affecting the lives of American children as well—children ages eight to eighteen spend roughly over three hours a day watching television, videos, DVDs, or movies.³⁹ Type II diabetes is increasingly affecting the lives of children and teenagers in an unprecedented

³⁵ *Consumer’s Survey on Smart Choices for Home Buyers*, National Association of Realtors and National Association of Home Builders, (2002). PowerPoint.

³⁶ Tammy Tracy and Hugh Morris, *Rail-Trails and Safe Communities: The Experience of 372Trails* (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 1998) <http://www.railstotrails.org/>.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁸ United States Department of Health Services and Human Services, *Surgeon General’s Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation*, (Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, 2010), 7.

³⁹ Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “Overweight and Obesity: Contributing Factors”, (The Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009) <http://www.cdc.gov/>.

manner. In 2000, it was reported that by 1999, some urban areas had new case rates of type II diabetes reaching levels as high as forty five percent (Memphis, Tennessee was one area). With an understanding of the health problems at a national level, it is easy to understand why an urban greenline could offer a remedy to some of these health problems that the American population faces. One study in 2008 found that “improvements in neighborhood physical activity environments were associated with 2.03 lower BMI and 73% more exercise hours.”⁴⁰ Memphis, Tennessee, for example, is one area that reports some of the highest rates of obesity, childhood obesity, and heart disease.

Memphis, Tennessee and its respective county—Shelby County—has reported some of the worst statistics in regards to health over the past twenty years. For example, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported that Tennessee was ranked in the top category for obesity, with thirty percent or more of the adult population obese or overweight.⁴¹ Shelby County ranked thirty one and a half percent of their adult population as obese or overweight, one of the highest in the state.⁴² Many of the citizens of Shelby County also have diabetes (a reported eleven percent).⁴³ The younger population of the area is affected as well; The Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, conducted by the Healthy Memphis Common Table, reported in 2005 that at least fifty percent of the children surveyed for childhood obesity were “at risk” or “overweight.”⁴⁴ An urban greenline offers the opportunity to enjoy nature in a healthy manner that inspires physical

⁴⁰ Amy H, Auchincloss et. al, *Neighborhood Resources for Physical Activity and Healthy Foods and Their Association with Insulin Resistance*, *Archive of Internal Medicine* 169: 1698-1704. <http://www.railstotrails.org/>.

⁴¹The Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “Diabetes Data & Trends: County Level Estimates of Diagnosed Diabetes—State Maps,” (Department of Health and Human Services: CDC, 2007) <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/trends.html#State/>.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Healthy Memphis Common Table, *Memphis and Shelby County Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 2005: Tracking our Progress toward Reversing the Epidemic of Obesity and Diabetes* (Memphis: Healthy Memphis Common Table, 2005) <http://www.healthymemphis.org/>.

activity. “Adults should do at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week,” according to the Surgeon General’s Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation; they also recommend at least one hour of activity a week for children and teenagers.⁴⁵ Studies have proven that the availability of a greenline or park near a neighborhood or community increases the physical activity of the citizens.⁴⁶ Many trail-users in Missouri and Indiana, for example, reported a higher level of physical activity since the creation of their respective greenway trails.⁴⁷ Urban greenlines offer an area for physical activity that is not only accessible, but typically beautiful as well, increasing the likelihood of usage.⁴⁸ The beauty of urban greenlines also increases the property value of the areas surrounding the linear park.

Many neighborhoods that experience the advantages of living near a greenline report stories of real estate property selling faster or better near the greenline, as well as an opportunity for economic development. Property values can increase over five percent, with areas near the greenline reporting faster sales than any other neighborhood.⁴⁹ Urban greenline residents can experience a rise in quality of life as well, perceiving a relationship between the presence of the trails and the neighborhood wellbeing.⁵⁰ Small businesses also appreciate the presence of urban greenlines. Chattanooga, Tennessee, for example, was once characterized by “unemployment and crime, polluted air, and a deteriorating quality of life” that encouraged a transient population,

⁴⁵ *Surgeon General’s Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation*, (Office of the Surgeon General, 2010).

⁴⁶ Mark I. Ivy and Roger L. Moore, “2000 Cary Greenway Neighbor Study: Assessing Landowner Attitudes Towards Proposed Greenway Trail Development,” (North Carolina State University, Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources, 2001) <http://www.railstotrails.org/>.

⁴⁷ Erica Gies, *Health Benefits of Parks: How Parks Keep Americans and Their Communities Fit and Healthy*, Trust for Public Land, 2006. <http://www.tpl.org/>.

⁴⁸ Rails to Trail Conservancy, “Health and Wellness Fact Sheet,” (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 2010) <http://www.railstotrails.org/>.

⁴⁹ Rails to Trail Conservancy, “Economic Benefits of Trails and Greenways,” (Rail-to-Trails Conservancy, 2010), <http://www.railstotrails.org/>.

⁵⁰ Donald L. Greer, *Omaha Recreational Trails: Their Effect on Property Values and Public Safety*, National Park Service, 2000. <http://www.railstotrails.org/>.

making it difficult to keep the formerly-stable tax base.⁵¹ However, a series of changes swept the city in the past decade: local government and businesses, as well as community groups, invested in the construction of parks and trails as well as a greenline. The greenline and other tourism industries like the Tennessee Aquarium opened and the local economy flourished, bringing in an “estimated \$500 million” a year.⁵² All of these open space initiatives successfully transformed the city. Today, the area enjoys a network of greenways and trails that have provided many opportunities for local economic development, whether it is local businesses established along these greenways or increased property value. If the greenline projects in Memphis, Tennessee experienced the same level of success, then perhaps the city would report a similar transformation. Currently, however, it is too early to tell if the effects of the greenline projects, as only one is near completion. Chattanooga does represent an excellent example of a city that faced its obstacles and used urban greenspaces to help overcome them. Many of those same obstacles that hindered Chattanooga also obstruct the progress of Memphis. Perhaps the most important obstacle for the greenline projects is overcoming the crime rates of Memphis.

Urban greenlines often run through the innermost parts of a city, connecting the fractured sections of a city to a greater metropolis. Many times the first concern for the creation of an urban greenline is the fear of “increased crime.”⁵³ Community members are typically concerned that the proposed greenline could serve as a means of transportation for the crime in the urban area, inviting unwanted outsiders into their property as well.⁵⁴ These concerns are valid considering the prevalence of crime in urban areas, but they are irrelevant considering the studies

⁵¹ The Trust for Public Land, “Economic Benefits Report of Open Spaces: Attracting Investment,” (Trust for Public Land, 2010) <http://www.tpl.org/>.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Chares A. Flink et. al, *Trails for the Twenty-First Century: Planning, Design, and Management Manual for Multi-Use Trails*, second edition (London: Island Process, 2001) 39.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

and reports that have shown a decrease and even stabilization in crime near an urban greenline. Many reports indicate little to no increase in crime near the urban greenlines.⁵⁵ A study on The Bush Creek Trail in Santa Rosa, California, for example, reported that “[the greenline] neither increased crime nor decreased property values” and that “on the contrary, the most overwhelming opinion by residents . . . is that the trail/creek has a positive effect on the quality of life in the neighborhood,” which sixty four percent of the respondents answered during the survey.⁵⁶ Only five percent of the urban greenlines (there were three hundred seventy-two greenlines total) studied in the Rails-Trails and Safe Communities Report of 1998 reported trespassing.⁵⁷ The same report also detailed the national rate of burglary in urban areas compared to the urban greenlines; in 1996, the former was 1,117 incidents per 100,000 inhabitants. The urban greenlines in the study did not report any burglary to adjacent homes in the same year.⁵⁸ Although urban greenlines may initially cause concern, studies show that urban greenlines help deter and even stabilize crime. Urban greenlines can also be made safe by neighborhood watch groups, volunteer bike patrols, well-placed lighting and emergency phone stations.⁵⁹ As long as the greenline is used, then the people will assure the safety of the greenline and its adjacent neighborhoods. Regardless of the city, these facts are important to publicize when beginning the creation of an urban greenline, as safety and security are often the first concerns of the community. During this study of the greenline projects in Memphis, many people openly questioned the city’s ability to have a successful greenline due to its high crime rates and unsafe

⁵⁵ Safe Communities Report, 1998, 5. <http://www.railstotrails.org/>.

⁵⁶ National Trails Training Partnership: American Trails, “Impacts of Trails and Trail Use: Trail Effects on Neighborhoods: Home Value, Safety, Quality of Life,” (American Trails, 1992) <http://www.americantrails.org/>.

⁵⁷ Safe Communities Report, 1998, 8. <http://www.railstotrails.org/>.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Rails to Trail Conservancy, “Police and Safety,” (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 2010) <http://www.railstotrails.org/>.

reputation. The analysis below will examine these concerns as well as highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of each location for the greenline projects.

THE NEED FOR A GREENLINE IN MEMPHIS

Memphis is a moderately sized city in western Tennessee in a region known as the Mid-South. In 2000, the population of Shelby County was estimated at 897,472, a number that included the residents of Arlington, Bartlett, Collierville, Germantown, Lakeland, Memphis, and Millington.⁶⁰ It is a large metropolitan area that encompasses one main urban center (Memphis) surrounded by several suburban cities (Germantown, Bartlett, etcetera). Memphis is unfortunately characterized more by its disadvantages than its advantages. Memphis is most well known for its poor health, its poverty, and its high crimes.

The high prevalence of obesity and diagnosed diabetes within Shelby County is one of the most important concerns for the area. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (referred to hereafter as CDC), Shelby County, Tennessee has 563-663 per 100,000 deaths per year related to heart disease while the national rate stands at 428.⁶¹ Memphis also has one of the worst obesity rates in the state; Shelby County ranked in the top two quintiles for both diabetes and obesity in 2007.⁶² A third of Shelby County's current population is above the normal BMI index number.⁶³ Healthy Memphis Common Table, a nonprofit organization dedicated to "to mobiliz[ing] Greater Memphis to achieve excellent health for all."⁶⁴ Healthy Memphis Common Table is focused on making Memphis a healthier city by encouraging

⁶⁰ United States Census Bureau, "American Fact-Finder: Memphis Fact Sheet," 2000 United States Census Data, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁶¹ The Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "Diabetes Data & Trends: County Level Estimates of Diagnosed Diabetes—State Maps," (Department of Health and Human Services: CDC, 2007) <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/trends.html#State/>.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Healthy Memphis Common Table, (Healthy Memphis Common Table, 2010), <http://www.healthymemphis.org/>

physical activity, healthy lifestyle changes and promoting health equity. These choices would all be well supplemented by the presence of an urban greenline, which would encourage healthy levels of activity while transforming Memphis into a more bike-friendly city. Memphis is not a city well-known for its physical facilities; one disadvantage that contributes to the population's poor health is its lack of bicycling facilities. Though there are many parks in the city itself, the busy and dangerous traffic removes the possibility of biking to them. Memphis ranked as one of the third worst cities in the nation for cycling, discouraging the kinds of physical activity needed to offset the health problems that characterize the area.⁶⁵ These disadvantages not only perpetuate each other, but they contribute to the other problems that Memphis faces.

Aside from the poor health of the city, Memphis's high crime rate also deters such transportation. Violent crimes such as robbery and aggravated assault occurred more than four thousand times last year alone, with aggravated assault reaching 7,646. In 2008, the FBI Crime statistics reported a violent crime (murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) count of 12,397—the highest count of violent crimes in the state of Tennessee.⁶⁶ Robbery in Memphis, for example, is three times the national average while murder is two and a half times the national average.⁶⁷ In 2006, the Commercial Appeal reported that, according to the crime reports released by the FBI, “the eight-county Memphis metropolitan area recorded 1,262.7 violent crimes per 100,000 residents, the highest rate in the nation.”⁶⁸ The same metropolitan area was ranked the second most dangerous metropolitan area out of twenty-five

⁶⁵ Tom Charlier, “Bicycle lanes not part of the plan for Memphis,” *Commercial Appeal*, July 5, 2010, <http://www.commercialappeal.com/>.

⁶⁶ United States Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, “2008 Crime in the United States,” (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2008) <http://www.fbi.gov/>.

⁶⁷ CityRating.com, “Crime Statistics: Memphis Crime Report,” (CityRating.com, 2010) <http://www.cityrating.com/>.

⁶⁸ Chris Conley, “Memphis leads U.S. in violent crime,” *Commercial Appeal*, September 27, 2007 <http://www.commercialappeal.com/>.

cities, according to the Morgan Quitno Awards.⁶⁹ Memphis, in comparison to Nashville and Atlanta, reported highest number of violent crimes per 100,000 in 2008 (Table 1).

Table 1: Comparison of Violent Crime in Metropolitan Areas⁷⁰

Metropolitan Area	Violent Crime Per 100,000	Population	Total Area Actually Reporting
Memphis	1,207.3	1,290,901	99.9%
Nashville	781.2	1,548,974	100.0%
Atlanta	500.9	5,396,819	99.9%

The city also has large socioeconomic disparities; suburban areas such as East Memphis, for example, report a median household income of \$54,944 in 2008, compared with North Memphis, an area that reports a median household income of \$23,977 in the same year.⁷¹ Nationally, twelve percent of the individuals living in the United States are below the poverty line, but in Memphis, that number reaches just over twenty percent.⁷² Historically, the city developed into separated areas known as downtown, Midtown, North Memphis, South Memphis, and East Memphis. The city spread eastward as it developed—with downtown being the oldest part of Memphis, and the suburbia of East Memphis standing as the youngest. The city’s development has run concurrently with its history of racial division, creating certain communities (Hollywood, New Chicago, and etcetera) that have been characterized as low-income, with little or no commodities and typically housing a high population of minorities. There is also deep socioeconomic and racial disparity in the city, typically characterizing the

⁶⁹ MorganQuitno Awards, “13th Annual America’s Safest (And Most Dangerous) Cities: Overall (344 Metropolitan Areas: Most Dangerous 25” (Morgan Quitno Awards, 2006) <http://www.morganquitno.com/>.

⁷⁰ United States Census Bureau, “American Fact Finder,” 2000 Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000) <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁷¹ City-Data.com, Zip Codes 38107 and 38117, (City-Data.com, 2009), <http://www.city-data.com/>.

⁷² U.S. Census Bureau data, 2000.

predominantly African-American areas as low-income and the predominantly white areas as affluent. Those communities lacking in affluence have remained much the same for years, commonly lacking amenities like grocery stores or electricity. These obstacles could impair the success of an urban greenline, but in some ways it is precisely what Memphis needs. That is why Memphis citizens are currently pushing for the completion of an urban greenline that would ultimately begin at downtown and end at Cordova, Tennessee.

In some ways, the city of Memphis holds a considerable amount of potential for change. In recent years, Memphis has become interested in changing the reputation of its city. It has revitalized its downtown area and created many opportunities for the tourist industry with places like Graceland, Mud Island, and Beale Street. In January 2010, *The New York Times* gave Memphis a friendly review of the city and gave it the new title of “indie Memphis.”⁷³ The article was full of recommendations for restaurants and activities that tourists would enjoy in Memphis. With three accredited institutions of higher education and a host of activities to enjoy—ranging from strolling in Overton Park to watching bison at Shelby Farms Park—Memphis has the chance of transforming itself into a positive and more unified community. While the complete eradication of poverty and crime is impossible, it is possible to revitalize areas with new amenities that offer healthy alternative lifestyle options while creating safer communities.

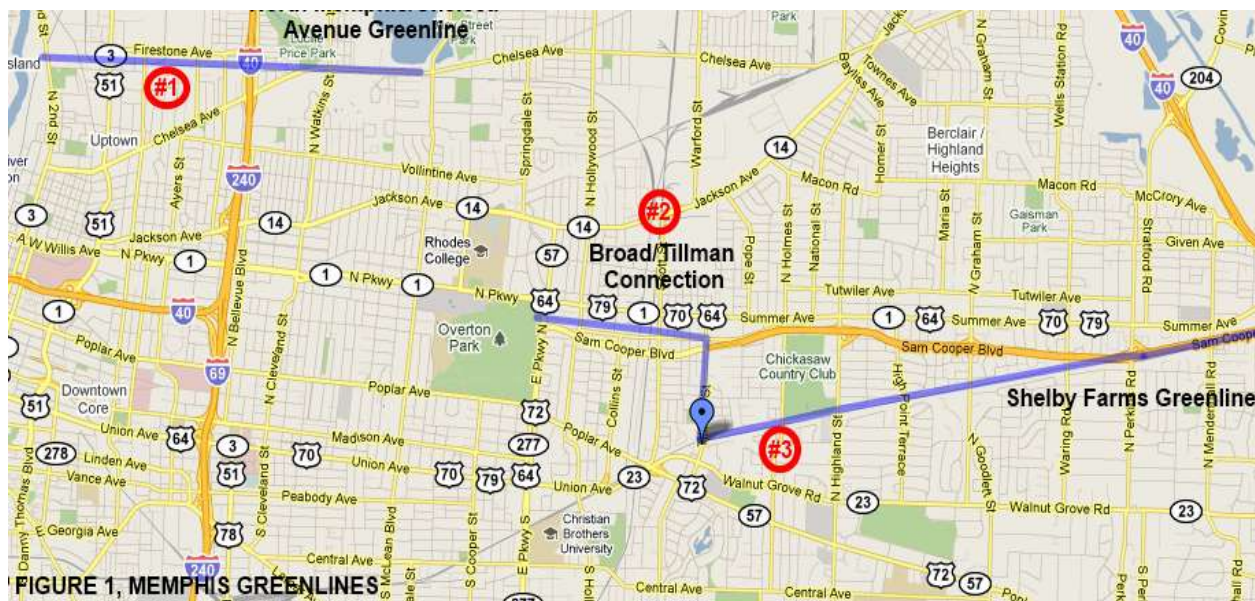
All of the disadvantages that are present in Memphis are also present in cities like Detroit and Boston, yet the latter metropolises have utilized some of their urban space in a manner that has helped some of the city’s problems. Urban greenspaces create many opportunities for addressing some of these disadvantages. Communities near a greenline often utilize the space as

⁷³ Melena Ryznik, “Roll over, Elvis. Meet Indie Memphis.,” *New York Times*, January 31, 2010 <http://travel.nytimes.com/2010/01/31/travel/31next.html/>.

a source of connectivity with the city. With the proper level of use, studies have also shown that crime rates often stabilize in the area near the greenlines.⁷⁴ Greenlines have also played a role in deterring crime because of the presence of people using the area. Property values increase along greenlines as well, encouraging economic development and revitalization. In the past ten years, many citizens of the Memphis have recognized the importance of greenspaces, and begun the process of incorporating them into the map of Memphis.

THE MEMPHIS GREENLINE PROJECTS

Figure 1: The Greenline Projects of Memphis



Three greenline projects are currently occurring in Memphis, Tennessee, with all three in varying stages of completion. As established before, Memphis characterizes a city in need of an urban greenline as it has the potential to connect on a larger, metropolitan level as opposed to a neighborhood level (Uptown, Midtown, and etcetera). The hope is that if all three greenlines are

⁷⁴ Rails-to-Trails and Safe Communities report.

completed, they would create a continuous greenline from downtown Memphis to East Memphis, and in the future extending it to Cordova, Tennessee.

The first project (Figure 1, #3) was begun by an umbrella organization that focused on environmental initiatives in Memphis called Greening Greater Memphis. The organization—a coalition of several nonprofit groups in Memphis—had its first public meeting in February 2007 to announce the plan for what is now called the Shelby Farms Greenline. Shelby Farms Greenline is in East Memphis, stretching nearly seven miles from Tillman Road to Farm Road, stopping at Shelby Farms Park. Once an abandoned CSX railroad, it is currently (July 2010) in the stages of completion with a grand opening scheduled for October 2010. The second project is the Tillman/ Broad connection (Figure 1, #2) begun recently by the same group to serve as both a pathway to Overton Park—one of the city’s most beloved urban greenspaces—as well as an opening into Midtown Memphis, an area known for the artsy Cooper-Young district and Rhodes College, the city’s superlative private liberal arts college. The Tillman/Broad connection is currently in the planning stages, but it has a well-established community support system in the Binghampton neighborhood, a charming, historical area that has transformed itself in the last five years. Robert Montague, the president of the Binghampton Development Council, described it once having an undeserved reputation of crime and high drug activity.⁷⁵ The final greenline project (Figure 1, #1) has barely begun. The North Memphis/Chelsea Avenue Greenline is a section of abandoned Union-Pacific railroad that would serve as a connection to downtown Memphis, beginning at the conjunction of Chelsea Avenue and North Evergreen Street and ending at Second Street near Washington Park. Unfortunately, this area is extremely troubled by drug activity and the highest crime activity of any of the precincts in the Memphis Police

⁷⁵ Personal communication with Robert Montague, July 20 2010.

Department.⁷⁶ In the end, the dream to connect Cordova, Tennessee with downtown Memphis will only occur if the Broad/Tillman connection and the Chelsea Avenue Greenline share the same level of success as the Shelby Farms Greenline. All three would vitalize the communities surrounding them, including stimulating local businesses and encouraging physical activity. They would also provide a means of “green” transportation across the city. The primary means of success for these greenlines is the presence of a strong, committed community support and funding from both the private and public sector. All three greenlines, however, are very unique to their areas, with differing advantages and disadvantages that will factor into their success as a greenline.

Table 2: Socioeconomic Differences in the Memphis Greenline Areas

Greenline Projects, 2000	Population	White (%)	African-American (%)	Individuals Below Poverty Level (%)	Median Household Income
Shelby Farms Greenline ⁷⁷	169,706	70.4%	24.6%	12.4%	\$41,686
Tillman/Broad Connection ⁷⁸	19,200	37.7%	56.4%	29.2%	\$27,306
Chelsea Avenue Greenline ⁷⁹	44,346	18.7%	78.3%	34.7%	\$21,259

Each greenline has a series of advantages and disadvantages that influence the progress of the projects. This paper will explore the conditions necessary to a successful greenline and how these conditions are present (or not present) in the three greenlines projects mentioned above. These three projects will show both the characteristics congruent with success for a

⁷⁶ Memphis Police Department Annual Report, (Memphis Police Department, 2009).

<http://www.memphispolice.org/>.

⁷⁷ United States Census Bureau, 2000. Zip Codes: 38112, 38111, 38117, 38122, 38120, 38134. Data was averaged accordingly. <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁷⁸ Zip Code: 38112. *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Zip Codes: 38107, 38108. *Ibid.*

greenline as well as the obstacles that can deter the establishment of a greenline. While Memphis has many obstacles that deter the city from moving forward into modernity, greenline projects such as the ones presently occurring could be one way to bringing the city closer to overcoming its fractured identity.

Figure 2: Section of the near-completed Shelby Farms Greenline (a) and construction on the Cypress Creek Bridge (b) (July 2010)



The Shelby Farms Greenline began as a cohesive effort by several environmental groups in Memphis under the umbrella organization Greening Greater Memphis. These environmental groups included Greater Memphis Greenline, the Shelby Farms Park Conservancy, and the Wolf River Conservancy. The primary advantages of the Shelby Farms Greenline are its strong community leadership and its quick acquisition of funds. The greenline project had been on the

minds of these Memphians for “years.”⁸⁰ Without the support of these environmental organizations, it is likely that the greenline would have never occurred. The Greenline began as a classic a rails-to-trails project, beginning with an abandoned CSX railroad.⁸¹ Greater Memphis Greenline—the advocacy group that followed the rules of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy in order to acquire the railroad line—used the Public Fund for Land Trust to negotiate with the railroad company, as initially they asked for \$17 million.⁸² “Railroads companies are notoriously difficult to deal with, and they have a lot of old laws on the books that are on their side,” Laurie Adams, of the Shelby Farms Park Conservancy, told the *Memphis Flyer* in 2010. “They don’t mind sitting on the line forever, and there’s not a whole lot of incentive for them to sell it.”⁸³ The organizations interested in the CSX railroad, however, had plenty of incentive, and the greenline completed far ahead of schedule, according to Syd Lerner, the executive director of Greater Memphis Greenline.

First of all, the Shelby Farms Greenline had the support of both the public and the private sectors. According to Dr. Mike Kirby, a professor of urban studies at Rhodes College and an extremely active community leader, the success of the Shelby Farms Greenline was in part due to its funding from the private sector. As a result, the Shelby Farms Greenline developed much quicker than expected in comparison to other rails-to-trails projects. Syd Lerner informed me that projects typically take ten years or more, whereas the Shelby Farms Greenline was complete in six to seven years.⁸⁴ During our communication, Lerner made it clear that the key to the greenline’s success was the strong community support from both the neighborhoods, as Dr.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Bianca Phillips, “Greater Memphis Gets Green ... Finally,” *Memphis Flyer*, February 04, 2010, <http://www.memphisflyer.com/>.

⁸² Personal communication with Syd Lerner; June 24, 2010.

⁸³ Phillips, “Greater Memphis,” *Memphis Flyer*, 2010.

⁸⁴ Personal communication with Syd Lerner, June 24 2010.

Kirby suggested. The lucky “mix of public and private funds” for the beginning section of the greenline also helped its completion.⁸⁵ Finally, the support of the Shelby Farms Park Conservancy assures long-term management of the greenline, establishing a likelihood of long-term stability.

The advocacy group Greater Memphis Greenline, Lerner told me, did not expect this quick success. It is understood that the Shelby Farms Greenline currently stands as Memphis’s first greenline victory, but since it is barely completed, there is no data to establish its long-term success nor its effect on Memphis crime and health. However, based upon other established greenlines such as the Philadelphia Greenways System and the Burke-Gilman Trail in Seattle, Washington, Memphis can expect an increase in property value and stabilization in crime rates. The Burke-Gilman Trail reported that property near the trail sold on average “six percent more” and that “homes immediately adjacent to the trail did not experience an increase in burglaries and vandalism.”⁸⁶ Chattanooga, Tennessee, as mentioned earlier, has gone through an amazing economic revitalization once its greenways system was finalized.⁸⁷ Today, cities like Philadelphia have experienced the same increase in economic value; a report on the city stated that the park system had “provided the city with a revenue of \$23.3 million, municipal savings of \$14.5 million, resident savings of \$1.28 billion and a collective increase of resident wealth of \$729 million.”⁸⁸ All of these post-completion advantages will develop accordingly in Memphis, based upon the current success of the Shelby Farms Greenline.

⁸⁵ Phillips, “Greater Memphis,” *Memphis Flyer*, 2010.

⁸⁶ Seattle Engineering Department: Office For Planning, *Evaluation of the Burke-Gilman Trail’s Effect on Property Values and Crime*, (Office For Planning, 1987) <http://www.railstotrails.org/>.

⁸⁷ Trust for Public Land website, “Economic Benefits of Open Spaces: Attracting Investment,” <http://www.tpl.org/>.

⁸⁸ Trust for Public Land, *How Much Value Does the City of Philadelphia Receive from its Park and Recreation System?* (The Trust for Public Land, 2008).

Figure 3: The Meeting Tillman Avenue and Broad Avenue (July 2010)

The second greenline is the Tillman/Broad Avenue connection (Figure 3). This particular area has the strongest personal identity of the three greenlines. The Memphis Flyer once described it as “that run-down area near Broad Avenue” in an article detailing the community’s development in 2006.⁸⁹ This community was once very different from what it is today—Robert Montague, director of the Binghampton Development Council, said it was “not unified” and the it “lacked communications” of any kind when he began work in the area several years ago. The Memphis Police Department reported that the area had a total of 7,401 crimes in the Tillman precinct alone in 2009. The Memphis Crimetracker reported three drug offenses, dozens of accounts of vandalism and burglary, and over ten accounts of aggravated assault and simple assault in the area from June 30 2009 to August 6 2009. In the same track of time in 2010, however, the area reported less than twelve accounts of vandalism and less than thirty accounts

⁸⁹ Mary Cashiola, “Bringing Back Binghampton, *The Memphis Flyer*, February 10, 2006. <http://www.memphisflyer.com/>.

of burglary, a slight decrease from the previous summer.⁹⁰ Many people have recognized the area's potential for change. Montague said it began with extensive community outreach efforts by repairing homes and creating life skill classes to keep the population off the streets. Home repair initiatives were the overreaching focus, in order to help clean the area up and separate it from its "high-crime" reputation, as Montague called it. This cohesive community support is evident in the charming Caritas Village (Figure 4), a restaurant community center that sits at the heart of the Binghampton neighborhood, described as a "100-year-old neighborhood on the edge of Midtown."⁹¹ While driving through the neighborhood, one can see the changes the community is creating, including the installation of an urban garden and plans for a farmer's market in the fall of 2010.⁹² These kinds of amenities arise from community leadership and grassroots efforts, the kind of dedication needed to create a greenline.

Figure 4: Caritas Village



⁹⁰ "June 30 2009 [to] August 6 2009," (Memphis Crimetracker, 2009) <http://www.memphiscrimetracker.com/>.

⁹¹ Phillips, "Greater Memphis," *Memphis Flyer*, 2010.

⁹² Personal communication with Robert Montague, July 20 2010.

Figure 5: Scott Avenue

Luckily for Binghampton, that is precisely what those organizers at the Greater Memphis Greenline have in mind. Tillman Avenue is the urban end of the Shelby Farms Greenline, serving as an excellent beginning for another leg to bring the whole greenway closer to downtown Memphis. The plan is to create a bike lane along Tillman Avenue—separate from the busy traffic—and move west along either Broad Avenue or Scott Avenue (Figure 5). Sarah Newstok, the executive director of Livable Memphis, an organization under the umbrella of Greening Greater Memphis that describes itself as “speaking out for the streets,” emphasizes the importance of revitalizing the small businesses in the area.⁹³ Both paths are feasible, she informed me, with several advantages and disadvantages, but opinions differ on the best route. Scott Avenue, for example, has better visibility, but it is also completely abandoned. Broad Avenue, on the other hand, has a series of small businesses and art galleries that could use revitalization, but it has poorer visibility than Scott Avenue. Both streets have expressed interest

⁹³ Personal communication, Sarah Newstok, July 1 2010.

in the bike lane connection to Newstok, especially places like Republic Coffee and Tea, a popular café in Memphis. Republic Coffee is an excellent example of a small business that would benefit from the urban greenlines as it sits at the junction between the Tillman/Broad Avenue connection and the Shelby Farms Greenline. In the end, whatever decision is made it will only increase the area's strength as a community. The Tillman Avenue/Broad Avenue connection would serve as a excellent commodity for Binghampton, as well as continuing the large-scale greenline in the hopes of reaching downtown Memphis. The final key to plan, however, is the completion of the North Memphis/Chelsea Avenue Greenline, the potential greenline with the largest number of realized obstacles.

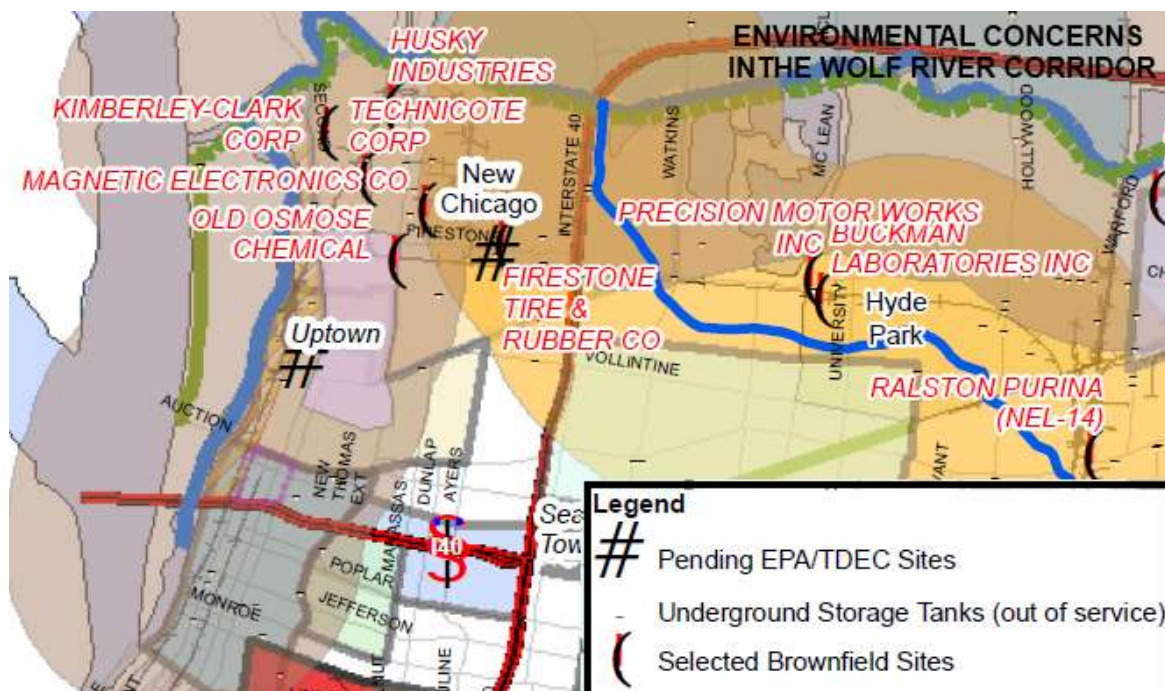
Figure 6: North Memphis/Chelsea Avenue Greenline



The North Memphis/Chelsea Avenue Greenline is currently an abandoned railroad owned by the Union-Pacific Railroad Company (Figure 6). This summer, efforts have been made to connect with a viable community in the area, but nothing has come to fruition, according to Syd

Lerner at the Greater Memphis Greenline. Community representatives were recommended to both Lerner and I but we reached dead ends on both sides. The North Memphis/Chelsea Avenue Greenline is unlike the other two projects because it is troubled by the highest levels of crime (the precinct for the area reported 10,123 crimes in 2009) and poverty in comparison (Table 2).⁹⁴ The area has one neighborhood on the proposed greenline—the New Chicago community—but driving through the area suggests more abandoned homes than occupied ones. U.S. Census data indicates that in the zip codes for this area, a third of the individuals are below the poverty level line.⁹⁵ The area is riddled with abandoned lots and old industrialized sites such as the Firestone plant. There is also evidence indicating industrial contamination, including one pending EPA site and at least four brownfields (Figure 6).

Figure 7: Environmental Concerns in Wolf River Corridor⁹⁶



⁹⁴ Memphis Police Department Annual Report of 2009, <http://www.memphispolice.org/>.

⁹⁵ “Zip Code: 38107” and “Zip Code: 38108”, U.S. Census Bureau, (American FactFinder, 2000), <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁹⁶ Environmental Concerns in the Wolf River Corridor (GIS Map, 2008)

The presence of contaminated sites along the greenline would call for a lengthy and expensive clean-up process in order to make the area fit for public use. However, an additional major disadvantage in this area is the absence of a strong and supportive community. I could not establish contacts with this community during the course of this project, though numerous attempts were made. Several community representatives were recommended by Dr. Kirby and Mr. Lerner, but I could never reach the people by either email messages or telephone calls. The best summary of my experience with this area is epitomized by my visit the New Chicago Community Development Council office. One afternoon I called the office to initiate contact with an employee, but no one answered the phone, and there was no option of leaving a voicemail. I decided to drive to the office and find someone to speak with, but when I initially drove by the building it appeared abandoned. The location was correct but there appeared to be no employees at the council office. There was not a receptionist in the lobby nor was there an employee in the upstairs office I was led to. Aside from a janitor, several kids playing in the small gym downstairs, and the gentleman who showed me the office, there was not any indication that this was a working community development Council office. It became clear to me that this potential greenline project was remarkably different from the others. Current efforts are under way to acquire the abandoned railroad, but community contact as of July 2010 has yet to be made, according to Syd Lerner, who expressed the same difficulty that I experienced.⁹⁶ One component of the greenline is its proximity to the international corporation Buckman Laboratories. This company has experience with community outreach efforts, primarily in the eastern side of the corporation's property, near McLean Avenue, which is opposite of the proposed greenline. During an interview an environmental engineer and community outreach representative at Buckman, Andrew C. Fondaw, expressed a cautious support for the future

⁹⁶ Personal communication with Syd Lerner.

greenline. He emphasized that Buckman Laboratories will be ready to support this project as soon as a unified and responsible community will take charge of the plan.⁹⁷ As discussed, poverty, high crime rates, as well as the possible presence of contaminated industrial sites are hindering the formation of a strong community and are slowing down the efforts to bring the North Memphis greenline close to the level of the Tillman/Broad connection.

CONCLUSIONS

Successful greenlines require a strong community willing to unite under a leader or a leading organization or representative. They also must garner grassroots support and provide or find a means of financial support. In short, a city interested in placing an urban greenline on its map must have a well-established network of support to establish the feasibility of success. A city's community is the paramount advantage to have for the garnering of public interest and funding. In the case of the Shelby Farms Greenline, the unified presence of the Shelby Farms Park Conservancy with the other nonprofit identities present under Greening Greater Memphis was the reason for the profound success of the project.

In accordance with other greenline projects, Shelby Farms Greenline will likely generate economic development and stabilize crime rates in the area. After the success of the first greenline, the Greater Memphis Greenline advocacy group has expressed interest in beginning the other two projects. Bike lanes are already proposed for the Tillman/Broad Avenue connection, though the route has yet to be finalized.⁹⁸ The final component of the greenline project—the North Memphis/Chelsea Avenue greenline—will be, in my opinion, the most interesting to watch unfold in the future. As it presently stands, the feasibility of an urban

⁹⁷ Personal communication with Andrew Fondaw, July 12 2010.

⁹⁸ Editorial, "Cyclists catch a break," *Commercial Appeal*, July 17, 2010 <http://www.commercialappeal.com/>.

greenline in the area is low. With these obstacles in mind, however, it is also important to remember the transformative role that an urban greenline can play in a disconnected city. Sometimes an urban greenline can simply offer the opportunity of a bike ride or nature walk, but in the greater scheme, it can also turn a city's future around. Urban greenlines facilitate many opportunities for change in a city by providing health benefits, an increase in property values and economic development, and the stabilization of crime rates. All of these advantages create safer, healthier, and more stable communities in urban areas troubled by the injustice of poverty and the prevalence of crime. Memphis, Tennessee is one such area that has the potential to change from a troubled metropolis to a healthier, safer, and more economically stable community. Perhaps with the creation of the greenlines, Memphis will construct a new reputation and identity that no longer focuses on violent crime and high obesity, but rather a streamlined, progressive community that constantly reinvents itself in the face of its challenges.

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