II. NEEDS ANALYSIS & OBJECTIVES

Community residents cited the intersection of Howard/College Avenue and McDonough Street for needed improvements to facilitate pedestrian and bicycle use between north and south Decatur.

II.A Opportunities & Constraints

The inventory provides the basis for the analysis of opportunities and issues that drive the development of the corridor vision and design. Figure II.1 graphically summarizes this section.

II.A.1 Opportunities

- Shaped by topography and transportation, Decatur's development and form segments the city into four major quadrants, divided north and south by College Avenue and east and west by Clairemont Avenue /McDonough Street. Each quadrant is roughly a mile in circumference, and offers neighborhood oriented circular route options.
- In addition to the six anchor nodes, Decatur has 9 public schools[1], Agnes Scott College, Columbia Theological Seminary, 8 churches, 11 historic buildings, 8 parks, 3 indoor athletic facilities, and a core of city and county governmental facilities. Each could either promote accessibility through route adjacency or trail integration into their site, and/or serve as a community gathering destination point.
- Decatur has numerous, historic residential neighborhoods offering a wealth of character. Relatively small building setbacks are conducive to a pedestrian oriented environment. Residential streets are generally lower in traffic volumes and speed, offering favorable non-vehicular transportation possibilities.
- The PATH multi-use paved trail currently under construction along Howard Avenue is an asset that must be tied into the overall DPC plan. Other existing trails should also be used where possible.
- Pedestrian and bicycle circulation between north and south Decatur could be significantly supported with safety and aesthetic improvements across College Avenue. The City has already identified the intersections of College Avenue - McDonough Street, and College Avenue - Candler Street as locations for improvements. In addition, the redistricting of school boundaries will create increased traffic of all types for those north of College Avenue who will now attend Oakhurst Elementary on Mead Road.
- Floodplains and creeks are natural starting points for potential greenway sites or conservation easements. Decatur has four major creeks and associated floodplains that can be investigated for greenspace preservation. In addition to water quality benefits, the protection of stream corridors offers extensions into areas outside the city. Continuous linear greenspace corridors are more environmentally beneficial than small disconnected parcels of undeveloped land.
- Several large private lots of scenic beauty occur north of Dearborn Park and should be investigated for possible greenspace preservation options.
- Some streets, e.g. North McDonough Street, offer more potential than others for pedestrian/bicycle streetscape improvements, given existing right-of-way, traffic counts and road characteristics.

[1] *Includes schools that have been converted to alternative uses (or are planned for conversion).*

II.A.2 Constraints

- Residential development has already occurred within all streambank/floodplain areas.
- Numerous private property owners of small lot parcels would be impacted by access proposals along existing creeks, creating a challenging and lengthy potential approval process and lower probability of attainment.
- Decatur has very little undeveloped property, a category of land usually considered first for acquisition for greenspace preservation.
- Several key major arterial and collector roads are state roads (e.g. Clairemont Avenue, Scott Blvd, etc.). Proposals to modify these roads to benefit nonvehicular modes of transportation are often difficult to get implemented.
- The railroad tracks parallel to and on the north side of College Avenue present an obstacle to pedestrian access between north and south Decatur. Economically, pedestrian crossings generally should occur where vehicular crossings are made. In two of the four intersections within Decatur, two are underpasses, offering little ability to improve the pedestrian experience given existing bridge constraints on the road width.
- While the six anchor nodes offer key hub points for considering route options, some sections of the city lack a strong focal point/node to serve as a central neighborhood guiding element. This is particularly true in the northwest quadrant of the city. This area is negatively impacted by Scott Boulevard, which has the highest traffic volumes and speeds in Decatur, and serves as a subdividing element. (Should the currently active freight rail-line running north-south along the northwestern portion of Decatur ever be abandoned or used for trolley service, this section of the city could enjoy an advantageous position of corridor connectivity outside the city limits.)

II.B Summary of Community Input

The first set of Stakeholder and Public meetings established the desired characteristics and objectives of the Decatur Preservation Corridor. Consistent attributes cited included:

- variety (both on-street and greenway segments);
- inclusion of unifying elements, including wayfinding;
- incorporation of destinations and nodes;
- amenities along the way (e.g. benches, water fountains, etc.);
- circular, closed route options/patterns vs. single linear route;
- public safety;
- improvements required at some road crossings (e.g. across College Avenue);
- pedestrian and bicyclist mixed-use capability, although bicyclists do not have to share all segments of the path - can use roadways;
- connection of all “quadrants” of Decatur into the system;
- and, accessibility of some greenspace sites, conservation of others.

When asked to provide a preference of a greenway/recreational trail vs. a predominately on-street, pedestrian transportation corridor, community participants split in their opinions (see Appendix V-A, V-B for the alternatives presented). However, participants were consistent in their desire for a Decatur wide corridor, offering both greenspace accessibility and pedestrian and bicycle transportation routes to key destinations, other neighborhoods and city assets.

This input resulted in the modification to the project scope to a comprehensive corridor master plan

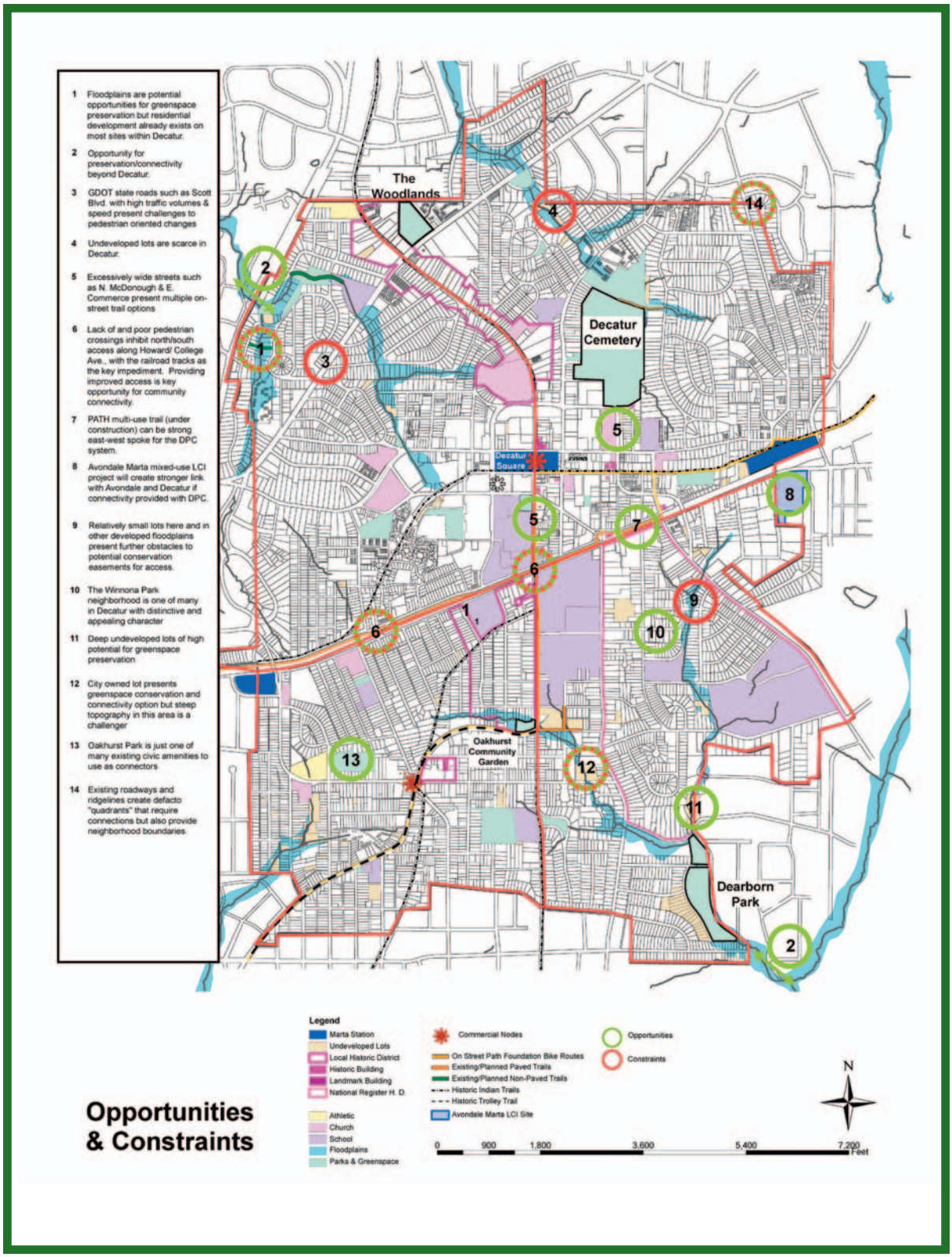

Figure II.1: Opportunities and Constraints

with proposed alternative segments, phasing and typological based cost estimates, instead of the original detailed single route trail master plan.

The goal of the second set of Stakeholder and Public meetings was to evaluate a preliminary system-wide trail system concept. The overall response was positive to the expanded vision for the corridor. Several additional and alternative segments proposed in these sessions were incorporated into the final plan. Participants attending the public meetings tended to favor on-street segments, often for their perceived "easier implementation" vs. obtaining private owner easement approvals. Participating stakeholders tended to prefer more connections and access to traditional greenspace sites. All groups emphasized the need for resolving the problem of crossing the CSX railroad tracks and Howard/College Avenues. More frequent and safer pedestrian and bicycle crossings along this route were viewed as a key critical success factor for the Decatur Preservation Corridor project.

Participants at the September public meeting.