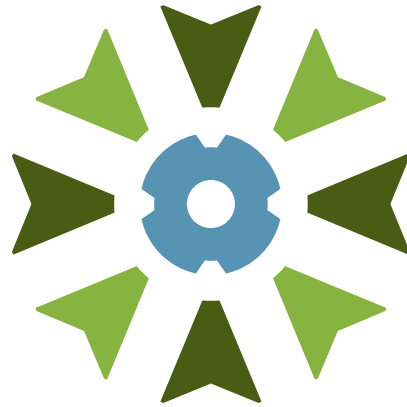




OCMULGEE HERITAGE TRAIL

VISION PLAN



OCMULGEE HERITAGE TRAIL

The Ocmulgee Heritage Trail is a public/private partnership envisioned by NewTown Macon in 1996. NewTown Macon continues to plan trail expansions and raises private funds to support improvements. Once new portions of the trail are complete, Macon-Bibb County operates and maintains improvements in perpetuity as public parks.

Partnership ensures that representatives from a variety of stakeholder groups with different areas of expertise can provide input and guidance on the implementation of the Vision Plan. This plan represents the interest and efforts of:

Macon-Bibb County Parks and Beautification • Macon Water Authority
Macon-Bibb County Planning and Zoning • Macon-Bibb County UDA • Macon-Bibb County
Community Foundation of Central Georgia • Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Georgia Department of Transportation • The PATH Foundation • NewTown Macon
Trust for Public Land • The Peyton Anderson Foundation
Bike Walk Macon • E. J. Grassmann Trust • James H. Porter Charitable Trust

*Our Vision is a seamless bicycle and pedestrian urban trail system
that connects our parks and public spaces.
Our goal is to provide more and better options for bicycles and pedestrians.*

The Ocmulgee Heritage Trail Master Plan envisions a multi-use river trail system that supports biking and walking as attractive, safe transportation options, offering equitable access to the city's public spaces.

ACTION IDEAS

This Vision Plan is an opportunity to share best practices to improve coordination and connectivity within our city and to discuss how we can create and improve an environment supportive of bicycle and pedestrian transportation.

Policies and investments in the project lists may include:

- Projects that implement “complete streets” concepts, where the right-of-way is designed for all modes of travel, including people walking, biking, taking transit, and driving.
- Sidewalk network extensions in urban neighborhoods with segments widened where needed.
- Complementary pedestrian bridges and pedestrian intersection improvements that include ADA-compatible ramps, bulb-outs, and special crossing signals.
- Bike lanes on more neighborhood and major streets.
- Multi-use bike/pedestrian trails (off-street, grade-separated) that offer residents the opportunity to make utilitarian and leisure trips separated from vehicular traffic.
- Bike facilities (racks, lockers, bathrooms) at major transit stops/hubs at key activity centers.

BEGINNINGS & PROGRESS

In the early 1990s, downtown Macon was in dire straits. The anchor retail tenants had abandoned giant downtown buildings to move to indoor malls, leaving downtown desolate and decaying. Not long into its existence, the Peyton Anderson Foundation and its founding President Juanita Jordan began contemplating how to reverse downtown's fortunes. Fortuitously, Brenda Barnett from the Trust for Public Land scheduled a meeting with Jordan to discuss how the Peyton Anderson Foundation might help the Trust advance its program for urban recreational trails. At the time, Jordan was working to found a non-profit to implement best practices in downtown revitalization, which became NewTown Macon. Seeing an opportunity, Barnett offered to cooperate to help found NewTown if Jordan would help form a vision for an urban trail in Macon. From this moment forward, Jordan made the creation of a multi-use river trail system central to Macon's downtown revitalization strategies and NewTown has been responsible for implementing this program.

Knowing the trail needed champions, Jordan recruited Ben Porter, who at that time was serving on the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Board. Porter and Jordan recruited Macon-based contractor Chris Sheridan, who brought Macon-based engineer Bill Hodges into the project. This group of volunteers approached Mike Ford, who was just completing a volunteer commitment at the Museum of Arts and Sciences. Thanks to Jordan's leadership, Porter, Sheridan, Hodges, and Ford spent much of their personal and professional time and resources creating the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail.

These volunteers began their work by forging an alliance between Macon City and Bibb County leaders around the idea of the trail. In a very unusual move, the city and county partnered to issue \$5 million in bonds to launch the trail, with a commitment from NewTown Macon to raise significant private resources to match these funds.

From 1995 until 2000, the plan was to construct the first leg of the trail on the west side of the river, which would be cantilevered or floating on the river. While attempting to engineer a solution within the budget, Charles H. Jones Gateway Park was constructed as the first trail amenity, expected to serve as

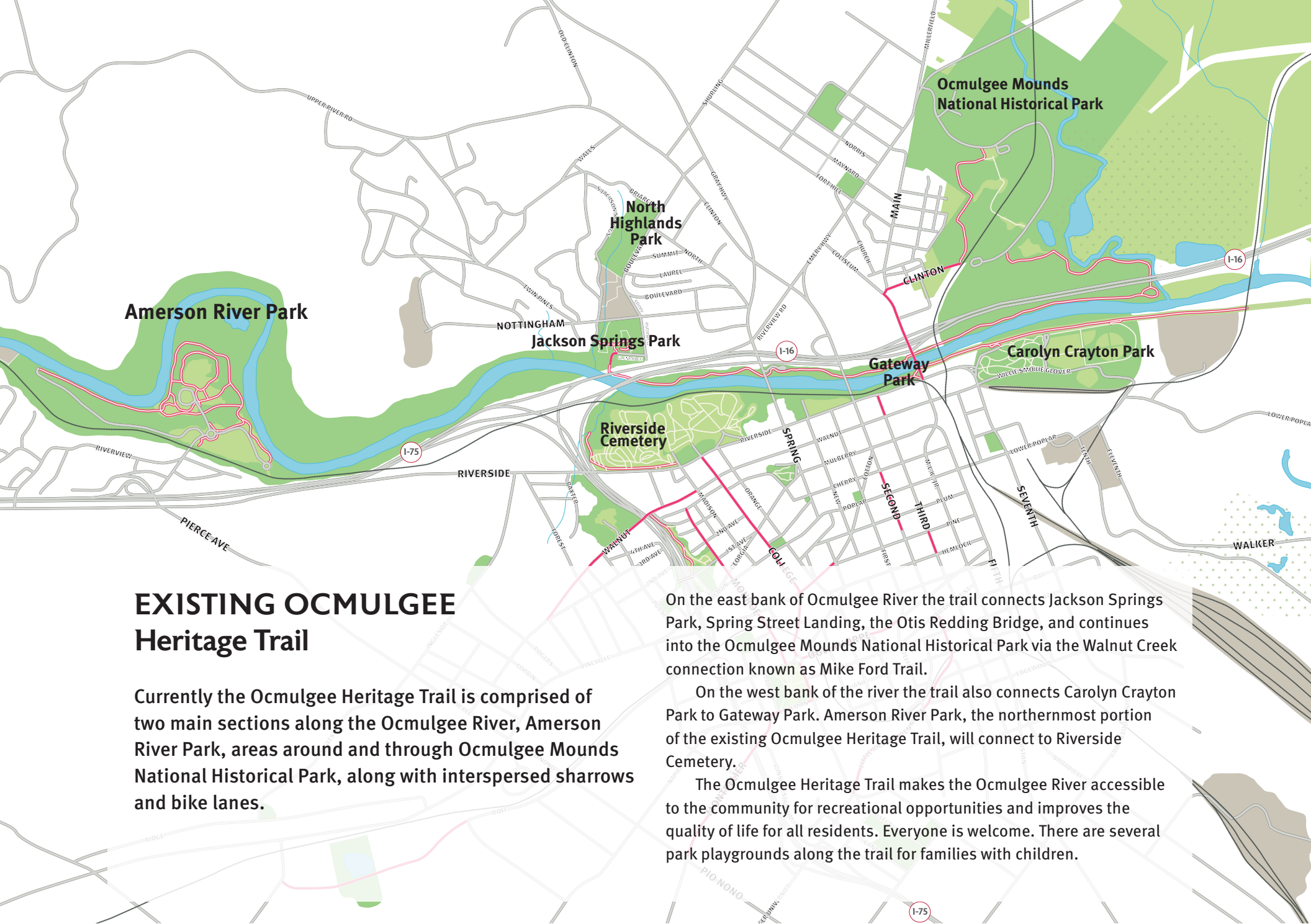
a trailhead for the downtown trail. Several years were spent trying to engineer a solution to have a trail on the downtown side of the river before the group turned their attention to the east.

Around 2001, the first section of walkable trail was built across the river from Gateway Park, connecting the Otis Redding and Spring Street bridges. This section quickly led to an extension from Spring Street to Glenridge Drive. Projects proceeded to include an extension running from Gateway Park to Central City Park, then a gravel trail along the levee. Improvements to the Riverside Drive sidewalk and the construction of Rotary Park came next. Soon thereafter, the trail was extended from Glenridge Drive through the William G. Lee Camellia gardens to Jackson Springs Park.

Later, a partnership with then Ocmulgee National Monument created a trail from Clinton Street to the Monument's visitors center and a short spur was added from Gateway Park to the north to an overlook. Improvements were made from the gatehouse at Riverside Cemetery to the north end of the cemetery and loop returns were built on the east end of the Otis Redding Bridge.

In 2016, Macon Water Authority donated nearly 200 acres of land to create Amerson River Park. With more than \$9 million invested in improvements, Amerson River Park continues to be the crown jewel along the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail.

Most recently, several key connections have been completed along the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail. The Walnut Creek Connector, known as the Mike Ford Trail, connects the Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park to the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail. Additionally, sidewalks have been widened and bike lanes have been added to Third Street, between Walnut Street and Riverside Drive. These improvements help connect the trail to downtown. This connection will be completed once a crosswalk is added to Riverside Drive at Third Street to make crossing Riverside safer for trail-goers.



EXISTING OCMULGEE Heritage Trail

Currently the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail is comprised of two main sections along the Ocmulgee River, Amerson River Park, areas around and through Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park, along with interspersed sharrows and bike lanes.

On the east bank of Ocmulgee River the trail connects Jackson Springs Park, Spring Street Landing, the Otis Redding Bridge, and continues into the Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park via the Walnut Creek connection known as Mike Ford Trail.

On the west bank of the river the trail also connects Carolyn Crayton Park to Gateway Park. Amerson River Park, the northernmost portion of the existing Ocmulgee Heritage Trail, will connect to Riverside Cemetery.

The Ocmulgee Heritage Trail makes the Ocmulgee River accessible to the community for recreational opportunities and improves the quality of life for all residents. Everyone is welcome. There are several park playgrounds along the trail for families with children.

Existing Trail and City Parks & Greens

Macon has affectionately been known as “A City in a Park.” This statement still holds true today. Throughout downtown and across town, the parks system in Macon provide focal points for Maconites. Part of the Vision Plan is to use the Trail to help connect the parks. Some notable greenspaces in Macon include:

Amerson River Park contains 180 acres of pristine forests, meadows, and wetlands surrounded by a river oxbow. The park’s natural beauty is complemented by a state-of-the-art playground, a canoe launch and takeout, miles of trail, and pavilions overlooking the river.

Jackson Springs Park is a nature lover’s paradise. This neighborhood park is filled with majestic stone bridges and benches, a mossy brook, and beautiful perennials and evergreens. The months of January and February are a great time to catch the camellias in bloom underneath the hundred-year-old hardwood trees.

Spring Street Landing is often thought of as where the Trail begins. Right off of the Spring Street Bridge, just before the interstate ramp, there is a playground, public art, and a boat ramp where canoes, kayaks, and tubes can take out. This is the southernmost public take-out before reaching Hawkinsville.

Dr. William G. Lee Camellia Gardens

The late Dr. William G. Lee was a founder of the American Camellia Society in the 1930s and his estate in Shirley Hills boasted numerous, beautiful camellia plants. The City of Macon acquired the land in 2008 and began restoring the property for a public park. The Gardens feature over 200 varieties of camellias, including many rare plants. The public can access the William G. Lee Camellia Gardens through Jackson Springs Park and through Glenridge Drive.

Part of the National Park Service, the **Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park** interprets over 17,000 years of continuous human habitation in Central Georgia. There are ceremonial mounds from the Mississippian Period and an incredible view of downtown Macon from the top of the Great Temple Mound. The park has an extensive trail system and is connected to the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail via the Mike Ford Trail. Recent expansion of the park quadrupled the authorized boundary from 701 acres to more than 3,000 acres.

Charles H. Jones Gateway Park is at the corner of Riverside Dr. and Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. Initially referred to as Gateway Park because of its prominent location along Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., the park was renamed for the late philanthropist and local businessman, Charles H. Jones.

Tattnall Square Park is one of the oldest urban parks in the country, and the second oldest in the state of Georgia. Located on a city block across from Mercer University, this park offers picnic space, a playground, nearby dog park, pickleball courts, soccer field, and plenty of room to enjoy a nice day in Macon. The park is also a popular spot for free public movie screenings, festivals, and special events.

Carolyn Crayton Park is Macon’s largest and oldest public park and a beautiful natural setting featuring playground areas, picnic areas large enough to accommodate groups, and a gazebo. Home to Macon’s historic Luther Williams (baseball) Field and the heart of Cherry Blossom Festival, the level terrain makes the park ideal for hosting tournaments, festivals, and events. The park stretches along the levee at the southernmost end of Ocmulgee Heritage Trail.



OCMULGEE HERITAGE TRAIL ACTION AREAS

An integral part of planning for the future of our city includes investing in infrastructure and programs that encourage walking and biking as viable options for transportation.

This Vision Plan is a visualization of a seamless bicycle and pedestrian system connecting parks, trails, neighborhoods and attractions.

By compiling project **Action Areas** into one comprehensive plan, the network becomes apparent, illustrating the key connections and access between neighborhood districts that will exist when the plan is fulfilled.

The following pages highlight six, general Action Areas with an overview of each section.

OCMULGEE HERITAGE TRAIL

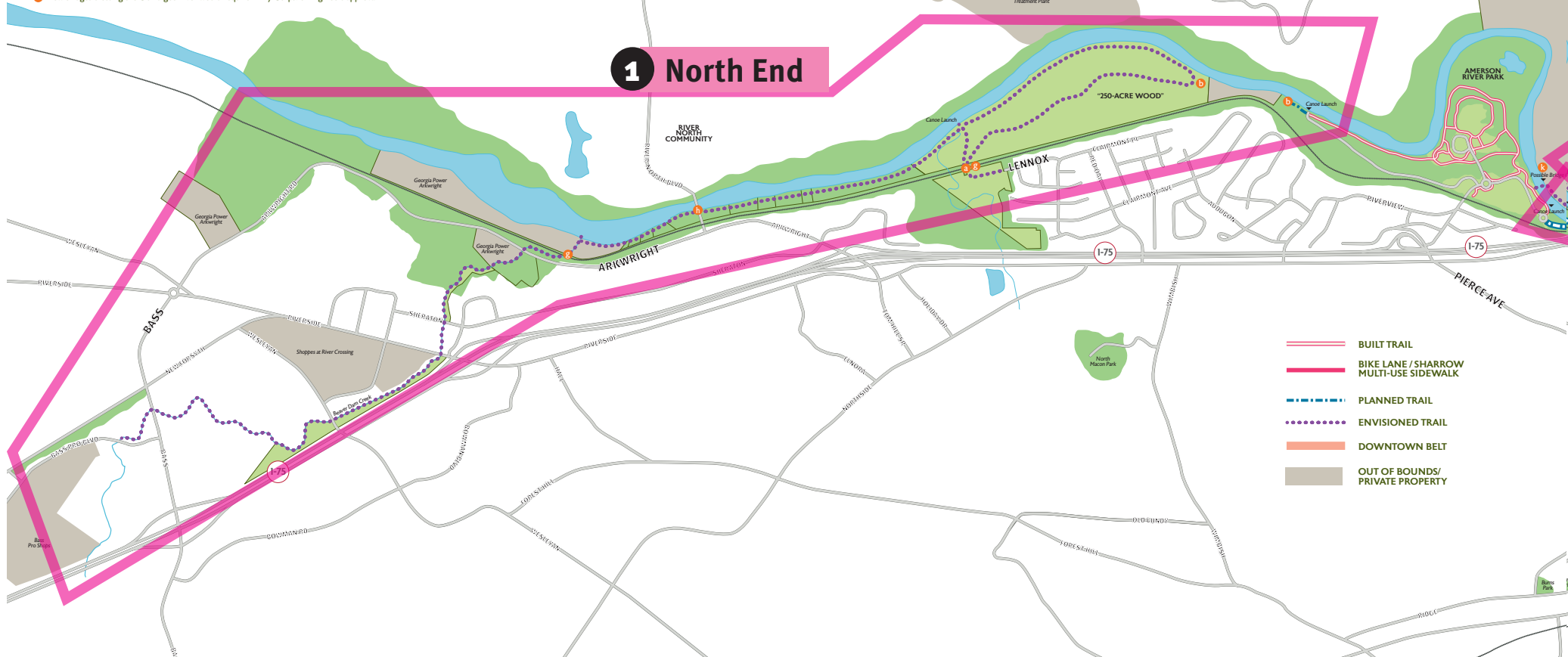
Vision Plan

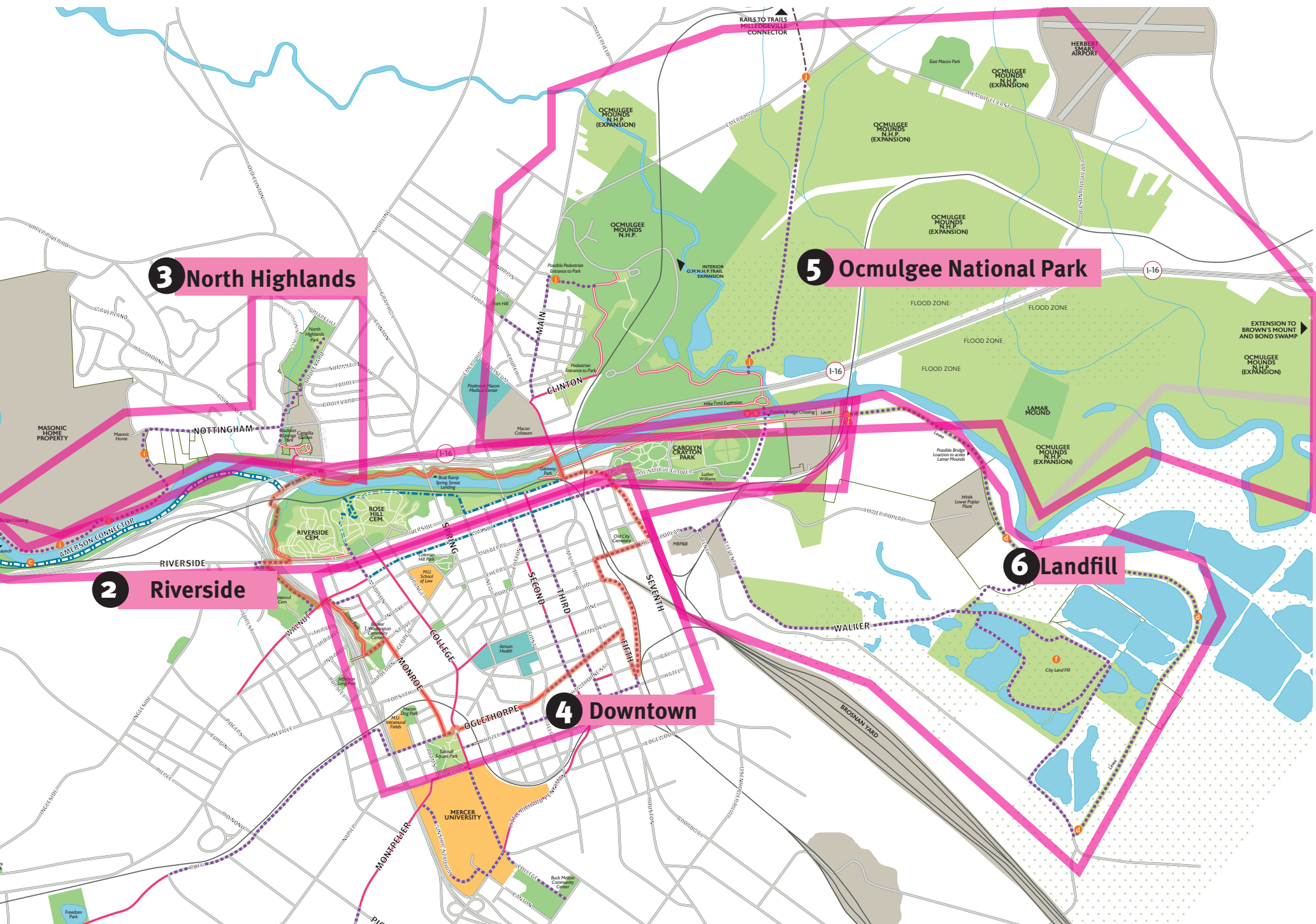
Action Areas

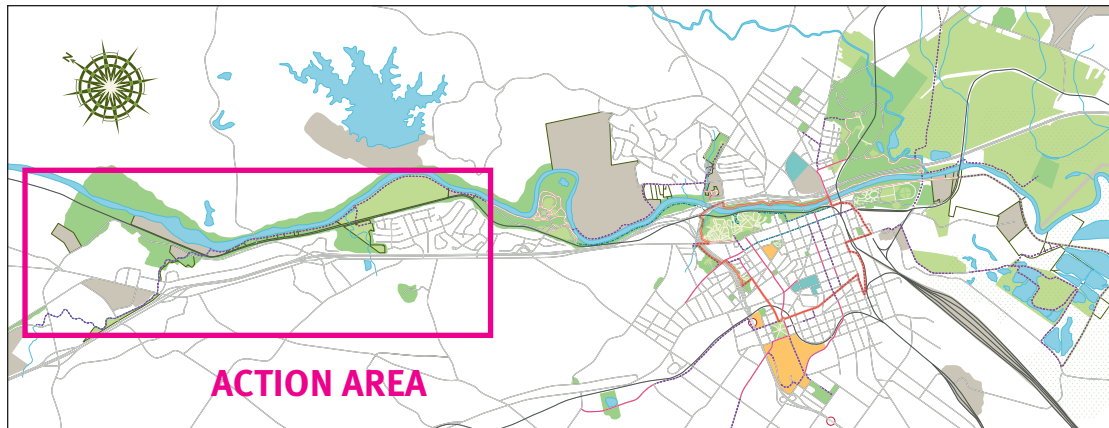
1. North End
2. Riverside
3. North Highlands
4. Downtown
5. Ocmulgee National Park
6. Landfill

POINTS OF NOTE

- 1 Lennox Road trail requires railroad crossing access.
- 2 The connection of Amerson River Park to the "250 Acre Wood" is separated by private property—easement/approval access required.
- 3 The plan for the Amerson Connector requires approval from Norfolk Southern and MWA.
- 4 Levee access south of Carolyn Crayton Park (CCP) requires MWA, Army Corps. of Engineers, and private landowner approval.
- 5 Bridge connecting CCP to the Mike Ford Extension contingent on MWA (future of the levee) and Army Corps. of Engineers.
- 6 Trail around the city landfill contingent on Macon-Bibb and environmental studies.
- 7 All new RR crossing require permissions from Norfolk Southern.
- 8 Trail crossing at River North Blvd. contingent on property owner(s) approval.
- 9 Nottingham connector would include new bike path/sidewalk and property owner approval/easement for access along the river.
- 10 Access on or into the O.M.N.H.P. contingent on Park permission(s) and alignment with Park plans.
- 11 New bridges crossing the Ocmulgee River would require Army Corps. of Engineers approval







The **NORTH END ACTION AREA** extends the trail north along the Ocmulgee River and continues along Beaver Dam Creek to Bass Road.

Much of the the property along this route is currently available for OHT expansion. However, there are several private land holdings that will require permissions, easements, or purchases to complete this phase.

Areas highlighted in yellow on the next page represent specific needs, challenges, or opportunities for improvements.

A: Trailhead access / Parking

B: Bridge/Road Crossing

A: Railroad trestle underpass

A: Railroad crossing, River North Neighborhood entrance

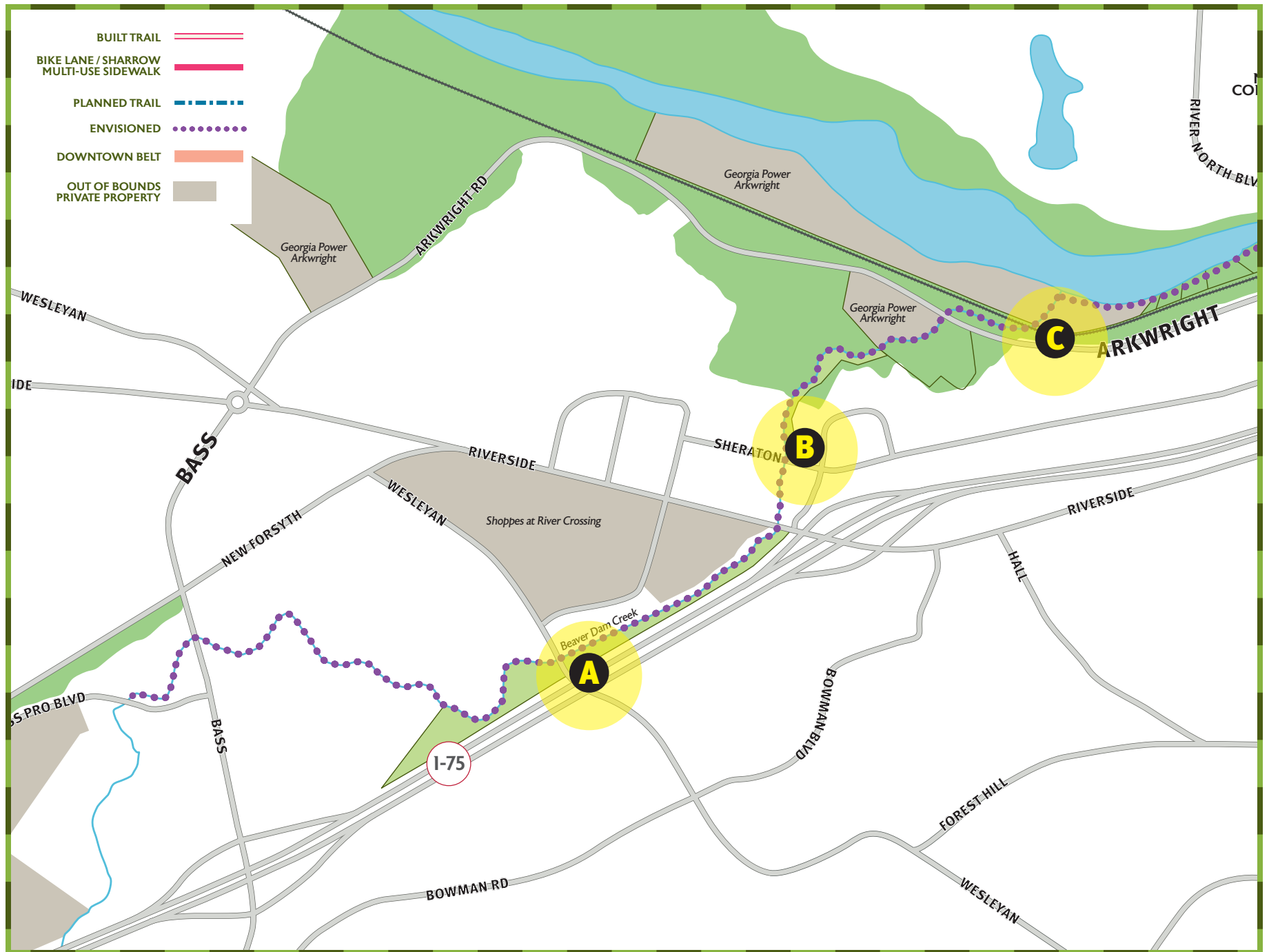
E: Railroad crossing

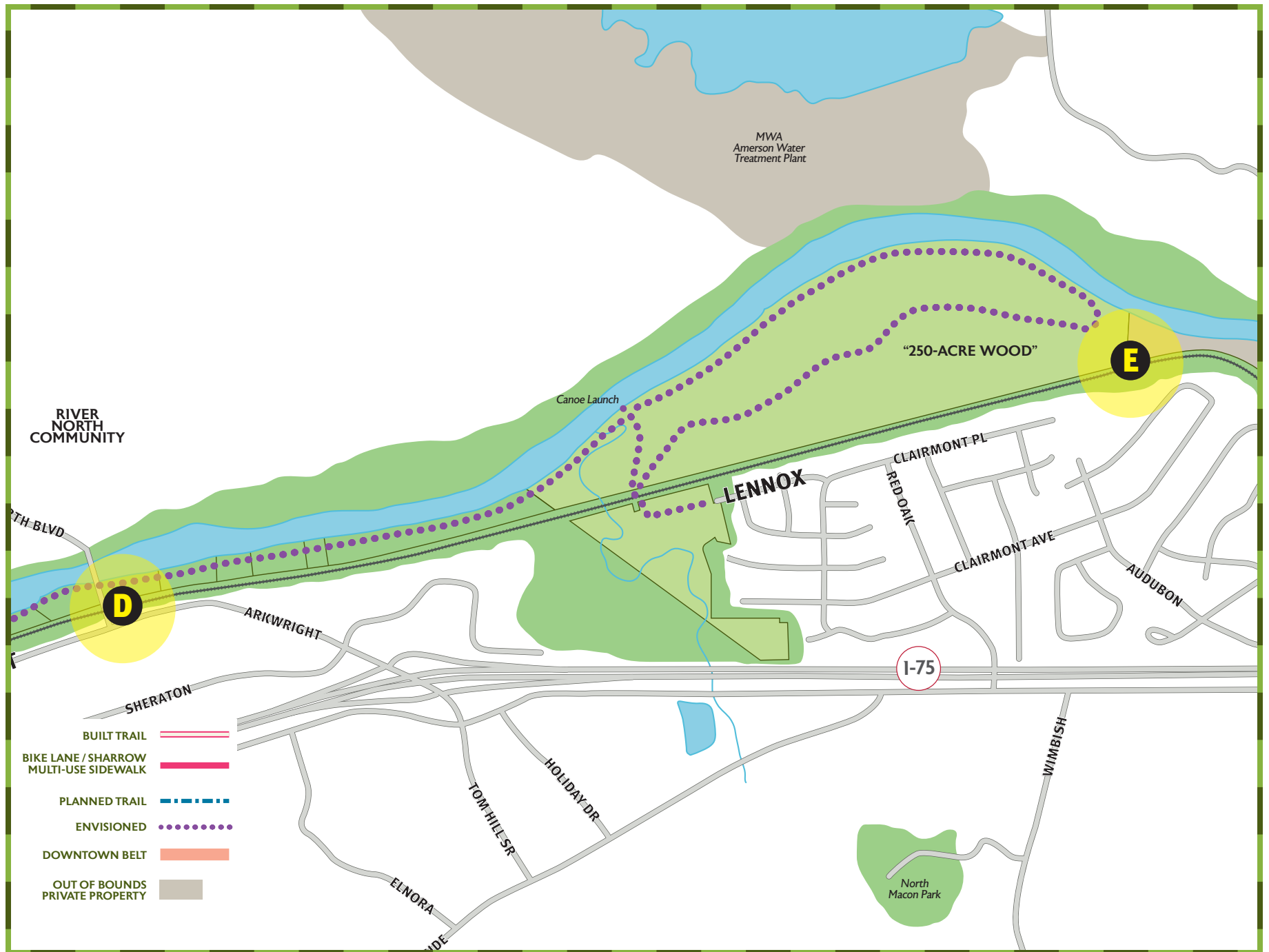


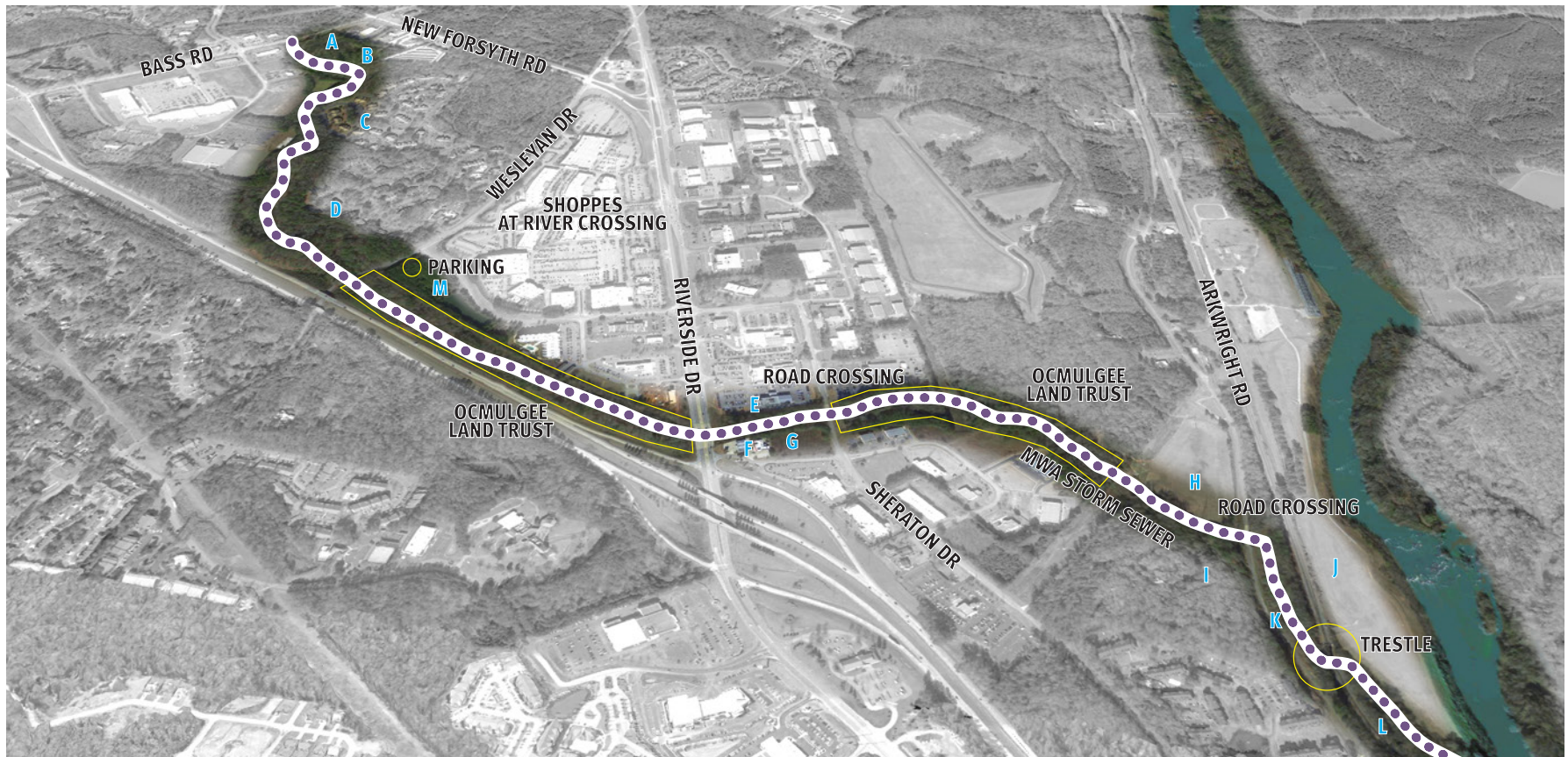
PRECEDENT PHOTO: Protected underpass.



PRECEDENT PHOTO: Protected underpass.







The **BEAVER DAM CREEK** trail would connect Bass Road to the Ocmulgee River. Much of the trail would be built on land owned by the Ocmulgee Land Trust or follow on MWA sewer/stormwater easements (with permission from MWA).

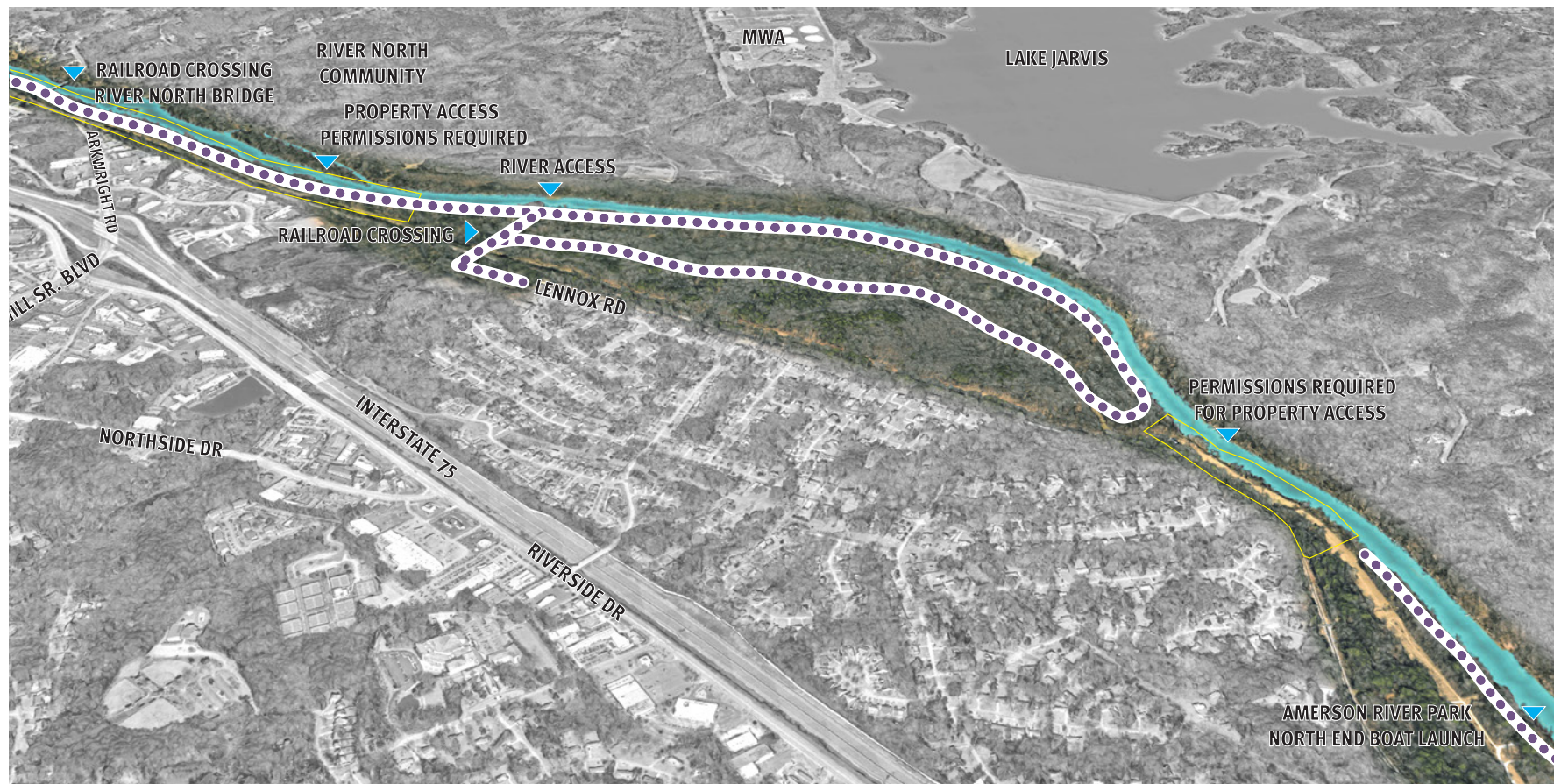
There are several areas where the trail would require additional access permissions from private land owners. These areas are identified in blue.

There are at least four points where the trail would intersect with roadway bridges as well as a railroad trestle.

PROPERTY OWNERSHIP*

- A - McCook-McCook-Jarrard LLC
- B - Macon-Bibb County
- C - Falls at Spring Creek Macon
- D - Legacy at River Crossing
- E - Jackson Family Real Estate
- F - Always Exit 55 LLC
- G - Triangle Hospitality LLC
- H - Georgia Power
- I - Georgia Power
- J - Georgia Power
- K - 4601 Arkwright Road LLC
- L - 4601 Arkwright Road LLC
- M - River Crossing Shoppes LLC

**Data from QPublic.net, March 2023*



This satellite overview shows the envisioned trail from the **River North to Amerson River Park**. Part of this section would also include a new trailhead entrance at Lennox Road with parking along with a canoe/float launch. This section requires railroad crossing access as well a property permissions.

Lennox Road Trailhead would provide an additional access point to Ocmulgee Heritage Trail and the Ocmulgee River. The trailhead would have parking and protected railroad crossing.

The south end of the trail would ultimately connect to Amerson River Park via private property access. Permissions/easements required.

ACTIONS:

- Railroad crossing
- Re-surface of entry off of Lennox Road
- New car park
- Trail signage
- Barriers



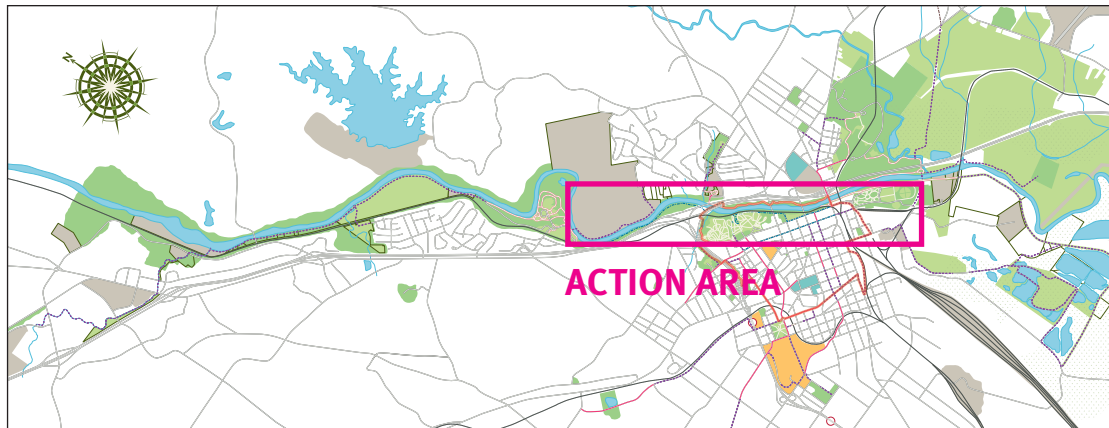
ENVISIONED: Entrance to Lennox Road Trailhead



EXISTING: Lennox Road termination



ENVISIONED: Carpark with trail access via tunnel



The **RIVERSIDE ACTION AREA** runs along the “downtown” side or west bank of the Ocmulgee River and from Amerson River Park to Carolyn Crayton Park and along the levee to the railroad crossing. A planned connector from **Amerson River Park to Riverside Cemetery** is currently on hold due to the I-16/I-75 interchange project.

The Riverside action area will provide key connection points linking Amerson River Park to Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park and to downtown via the Riverside and Rose Hill Cemeteries connectors.

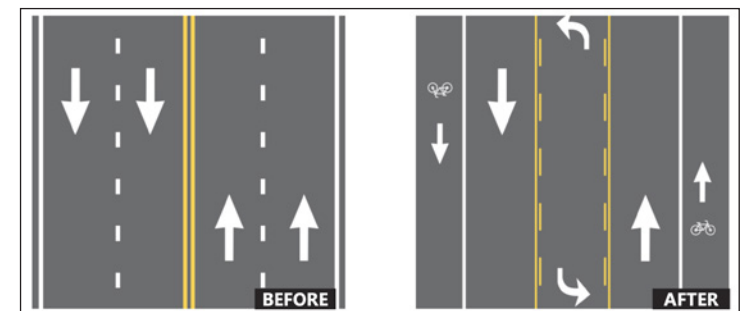
Riverside Drive is also included in this action area and plays a critical role in connecting Gateway Park with Rose Hill Cemetery and downtown. This stretch of Riverside Drive would greatly benefit Trail usage by creating a Road Diet to adapt protected bike lanes.

Areas highlighted in yellow represent specific needs, challenges, or opportunities for improvements including protected bike lanes and elevated bridge access.

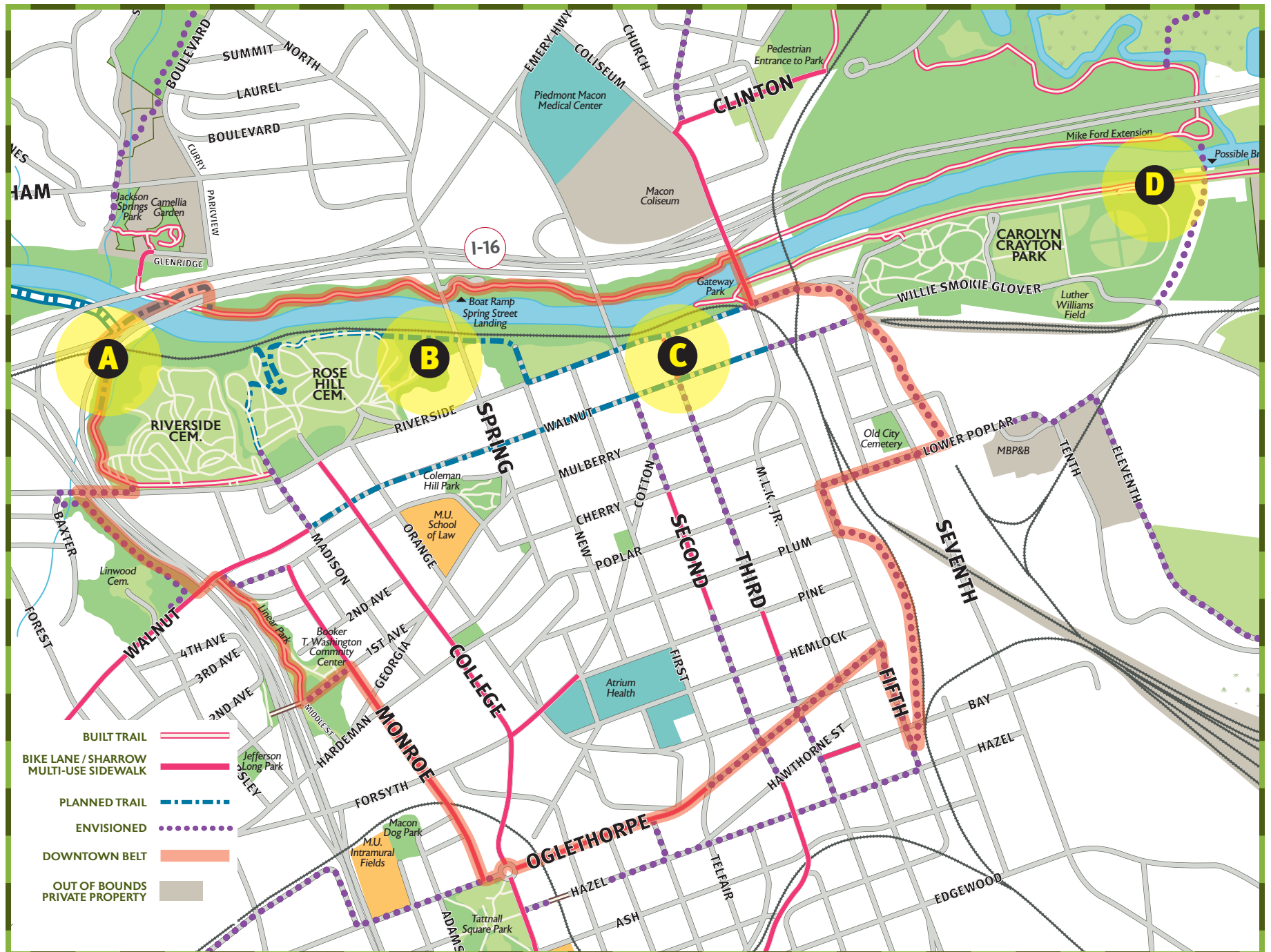
- A:** Ocmulgee River Crossing and Amerson River Park Connector
- B:** Rose Hill Connector
- C:** Riverside Drive realignment
- D:** Levee Bridge



PRECEDENT PHOTO: Example of a protected bike lane



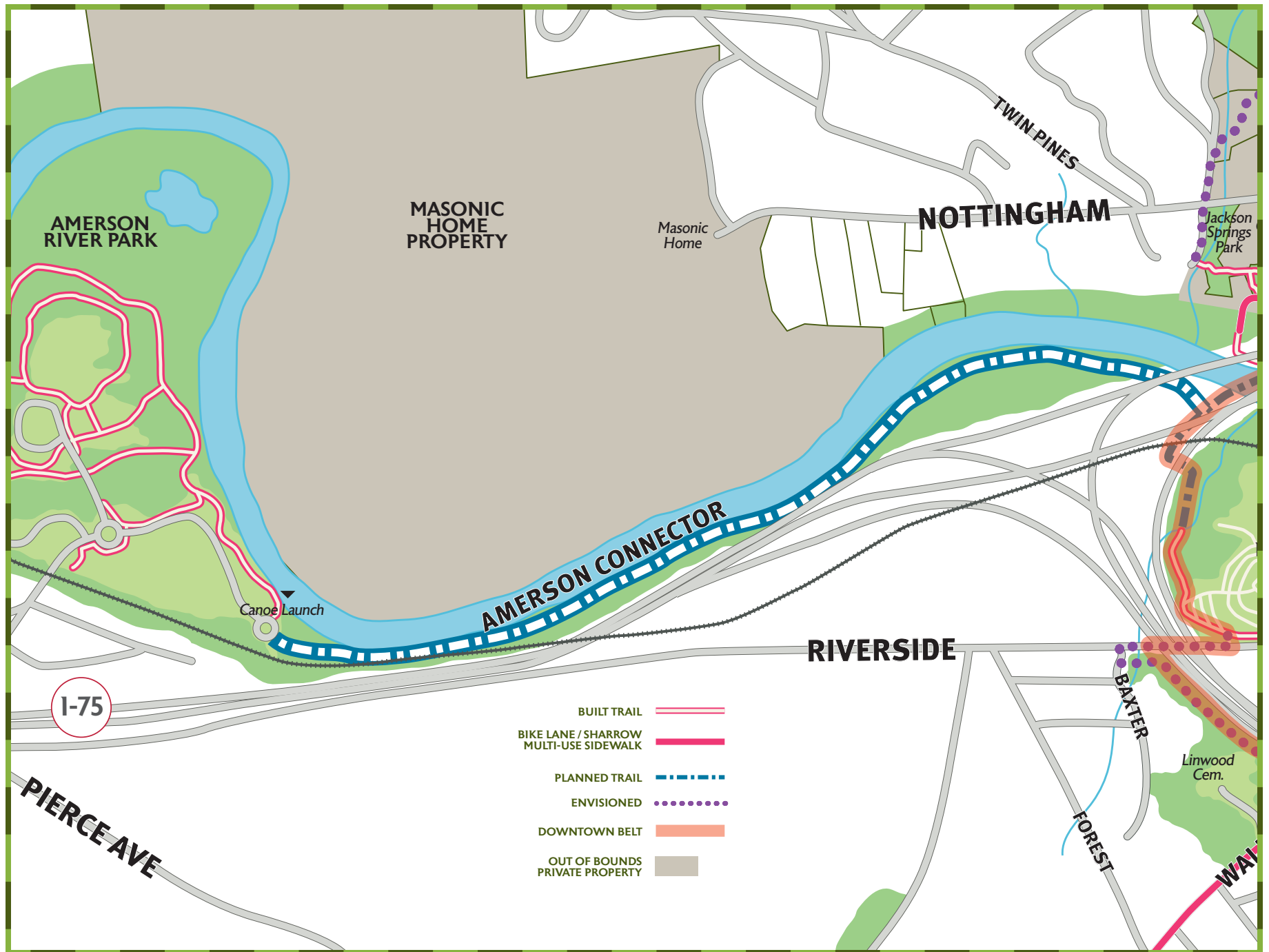
Before and after example of a Road Diet. Source: FHWA





The Amerson River Park Connector (ARPC) is perhaps the most vital portion of the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail. The primary goal of the OHT is to provide connection: neighborhood to neighborhood, park to park, person to person. Currently, the OHT has built trail from Riverside Cemetery south to the Ocmulgee Mounds Park and north from Amerson River Park. The ARPC would link the north and south ends of the trail creating an unbroken path of connectivity.

..... Ocmulgee Heritage Trail
 _____ Railroad Line

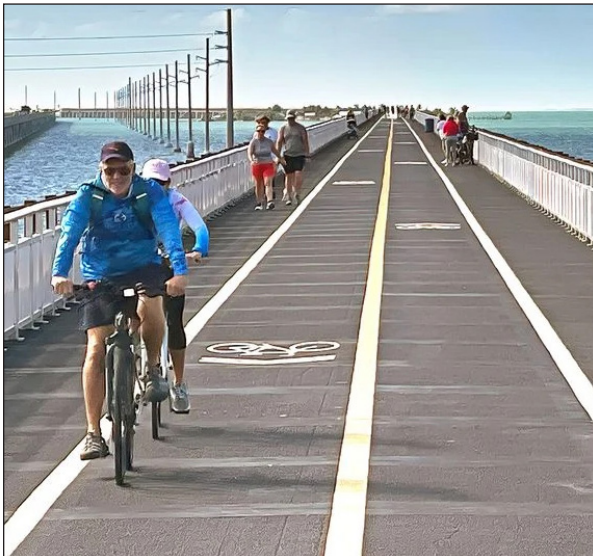


Ocmulgee river crossing at Riverside Cemetery, Amerson Connector (South End), and Glenridge Trailhead

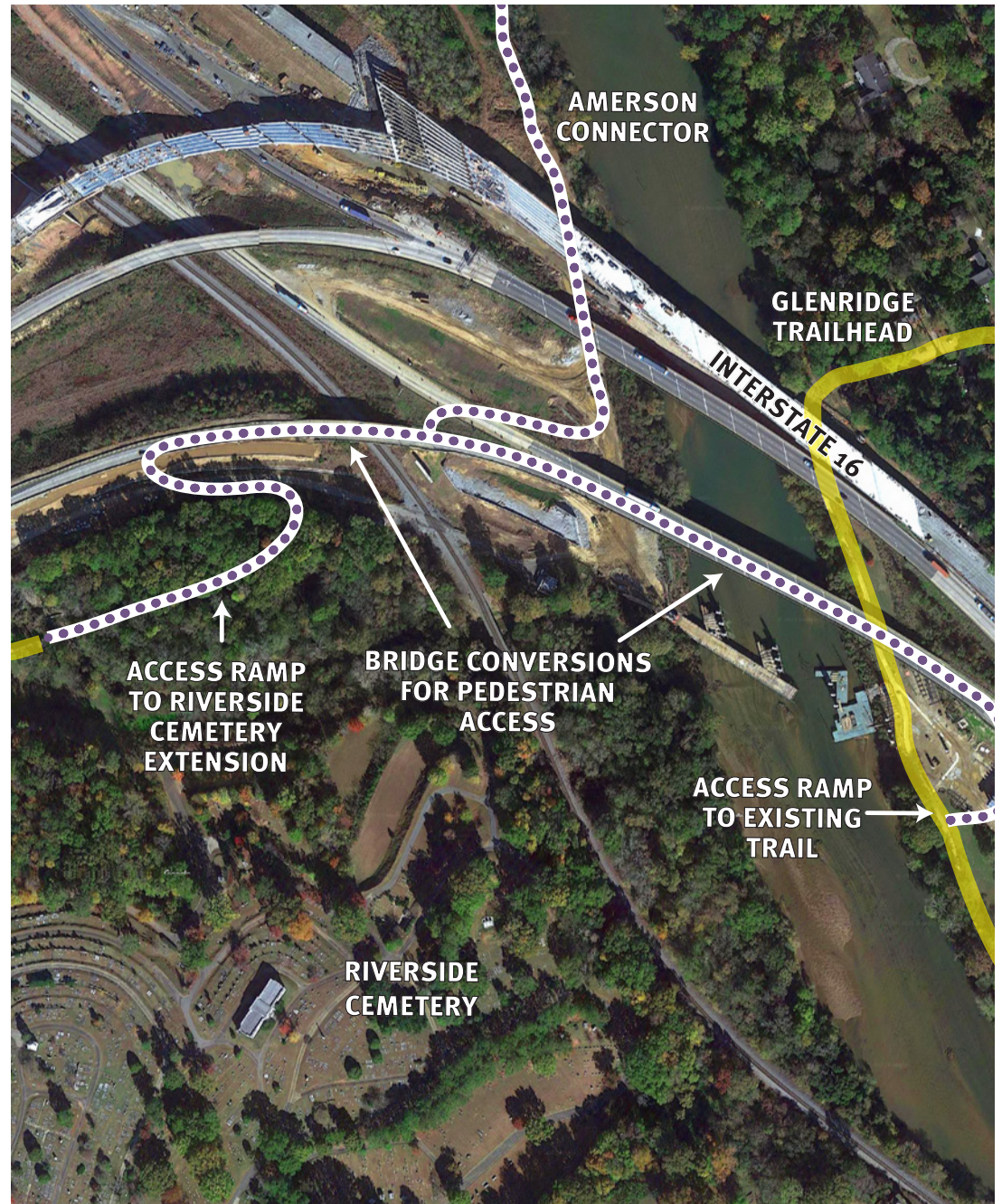
One of the most important pieces to the success of the Trail is to link across the river. A primary access point for this connection is a planned conversion of a decommissioned traffic bridge. The bridge will be fitted with pedestrian/cyclist safety features and sunshades. A second bridge that crosses the railroad will also be converted to connect with Riverside Cemetery.

ACTIONS:

- Bridge conversion with access ramps
- Trail signage
- Trailhead map kiosks



PRECEDENT PHOTO: Repurposed Seven-Mile bridge in the Florida Keys for pedestrian and bike travel



The **Rose Hill connector** will link the Riverside Cemetery Extension to Riverside Drive by way of Rose Hill Cemetery. Using portions of existing cemetery roads along with new trail, this planned project will run underneath the Spring Street bridge along the river banks and up to Riverside Drive.

ACTIONS:

- Trail signage along designated areas in Rose Hill
- Trailhead map kiosk
- New trail



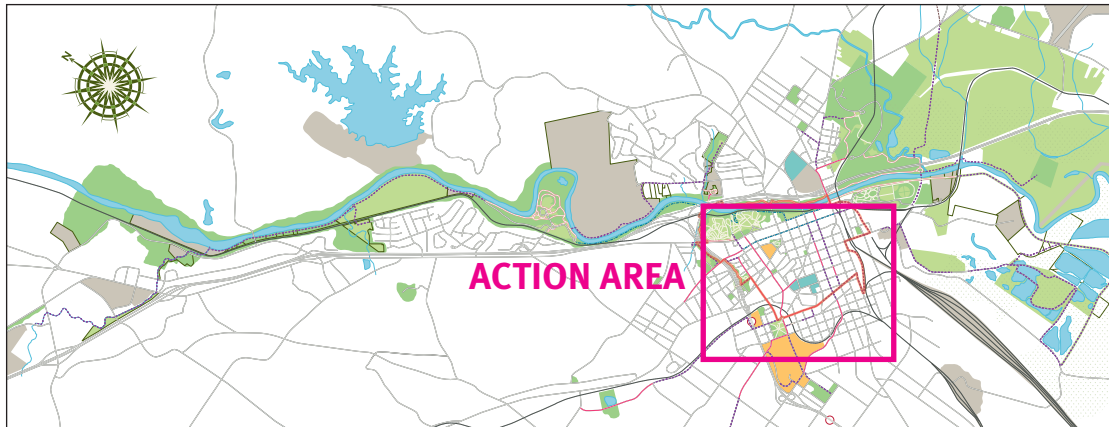
A river crossing connecting the levee trail near to the Mike Ford Trail would provide park-to-park access between Carolyn Crayton Park and Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park.

ACTIONS:

- Bridge with access ramps to levee trail
- Trailhead map kiosks



PRECEDENT PHOTO: Taplow Footbridge, UK



The **DOWNTOWN ACTION AREA** is loosely bordered by Interstate 16, Interstate 75, Mercer University, and Fifth and Seventh Streets. While most of downtown's streets have wide sidewalks with several streets already designated with sharrows and bike lanes, much can be done to improve walkability and safety for pedestrians and cyclists. A key component for the Downtown Action Area is to create a beltline for maximum accessibility—shown opposite in orange. The beltline will tie together sharrows, bike lanes, and trails and create neighborhood connections which is also part of the vision for the **Macon Action Plan**.

While the completion of the beltline requires the construction and development of new trail, much of the downtown area could be converted to Trail access by means of adding new bike lanes and sharrows along with OHT branded signage and painting crosswalks at intersections along the designated trail streets.

The following pages show examples in the Action Area that represent specific needs, challenges, or opportunities for improvements.

A: Linwood Connector

B: The intersections where Monroe Avenue crosses Hardeman and Georgia

C: Fifth Street realignment

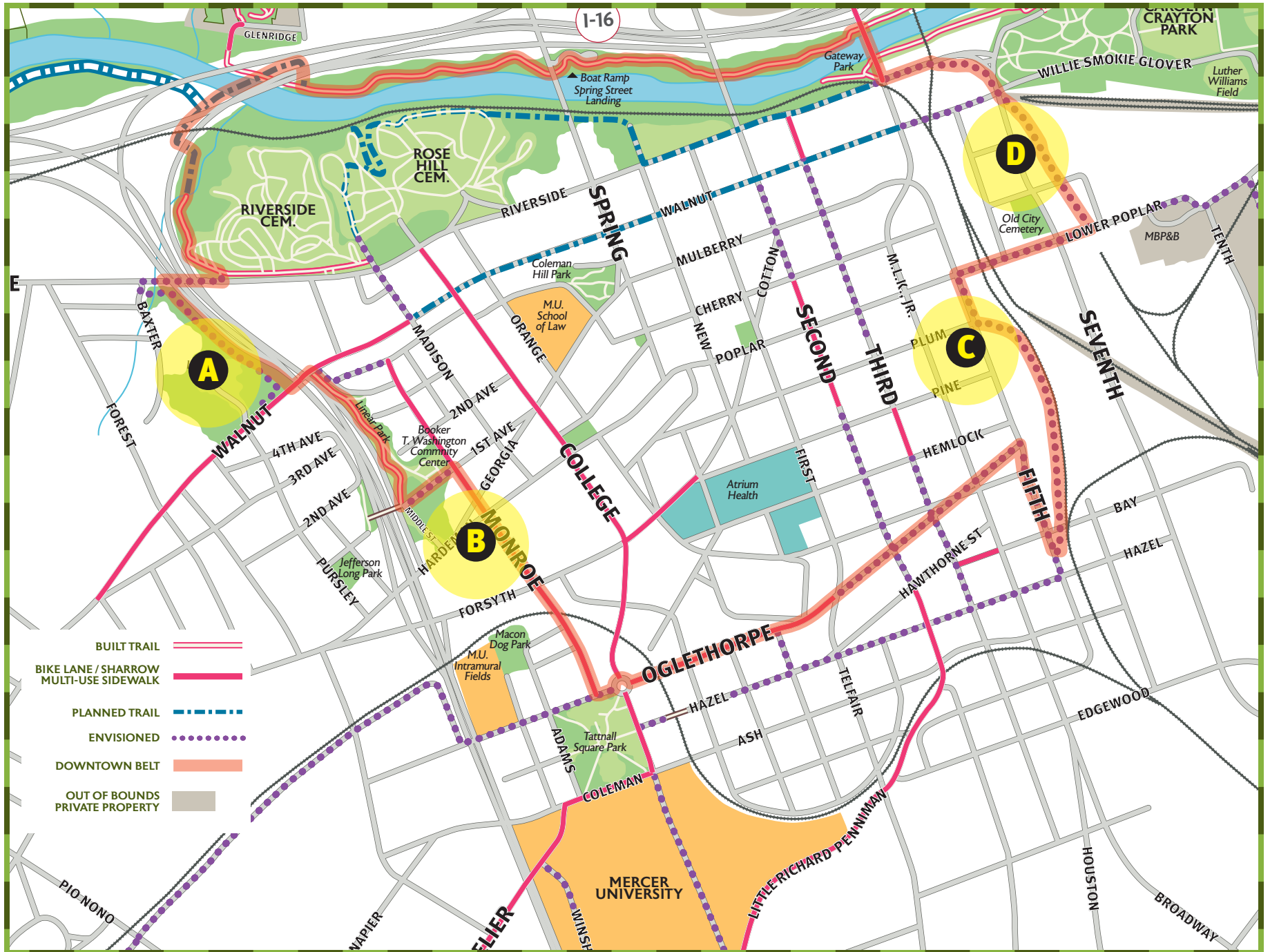
D: Seventh Street realignment



PRECEDENT PHOTO: Rapid-flash beacon, zebra stripe crossing



PRECEDENT PHOTO: Painted lane intersection





This satellite overview of the **DOWNTOWN BELTLINE** illustrates how the OHT can also serve as a hub to connect the neighborhoods around downtown. With the Beltline, geographic and man-made barriers no longer separate the neighborhoods.

Using the Trail to connect neighborhoods is also a key component of the Macon Action Plan.

Much of the OHT system in the Downtown Action Area would rely primarily on reimagining the streetscapes to include bike lanes or sharrows. Many of the downtown streets were built wide enough to where traffic calming measures could be utilized as well to allow for shared road access

Monroe Street currently implements sharrows to connect Tattnall Square Park to Linear Park; however, there are three major street crossings at Forsyth Road, Hardeman Avenue, and Georgia Avenue that need addressing.

Both Forsyth and Hardeman have existing traffic signals that could be adapted for crosswalks.

ACTIONS:

- Use rapid-flash beacons
- Street striping for crosswalks
- Crosswalk signs
- Trail signage



PRECEDENT PHOTO: Dual direction bike lanes



EXISTING: Monroe and Hardeman



ENVISIONED: Monroe and Hardeman



EXISTING: Monroe and Georgia



ENVISIONED: Monroe and Georgia

Fifth Street runs along the lower end of downtown and is currently striped for four traffic lanes but could easily be restriped to allow for bike lanes and two traffic lanes. An alternate concept for Fifth would be to build new trail through the green space adjacent to Fifth and utilize an abandoned rail line that would include a access ramp.

ACTIONS:

- Restripe from four lanes to two, add bike lanes
- Street striping for crosswalks
- Build new trail adjacent to Fifth
- Trail signage
- Barriers



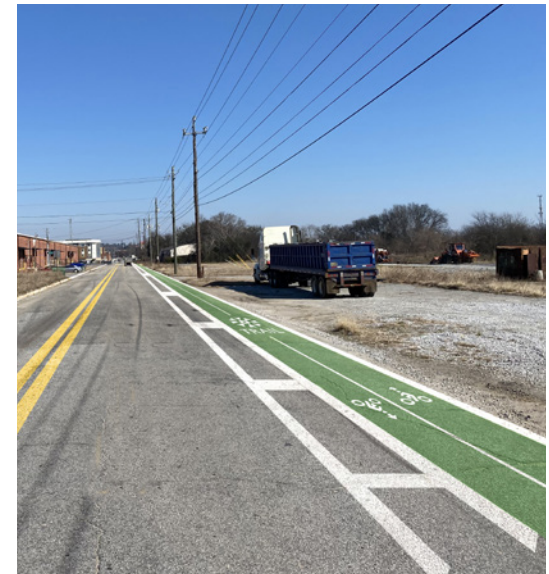
PRECEDENT PHOTO: Spiral bike/pedestrian ramp



PRECEDENT PHOTO: Single direction bike lane



EXISTING: Fifth Street showing multiple lanes



ENVISIONED: Fifth Street restriped



EXISTING: Fifth Street view towards Poplar Street with “new trail” overlay



EXISTING: Abandoned rail bed next to active line



EXISTING: Raised rail ramp



EXISTING: Abandoned trestles spanning Bay Street underpass

Similar to Fifth, **Seventh Street** could easily be adapted to incorporate both bike lanes and sharrows on existing surfaces. An alternate, more scenic option, could be to repurpose abandoned rail spurs to connect Riverside Drive to Lower Poplar.

ACTIONS:

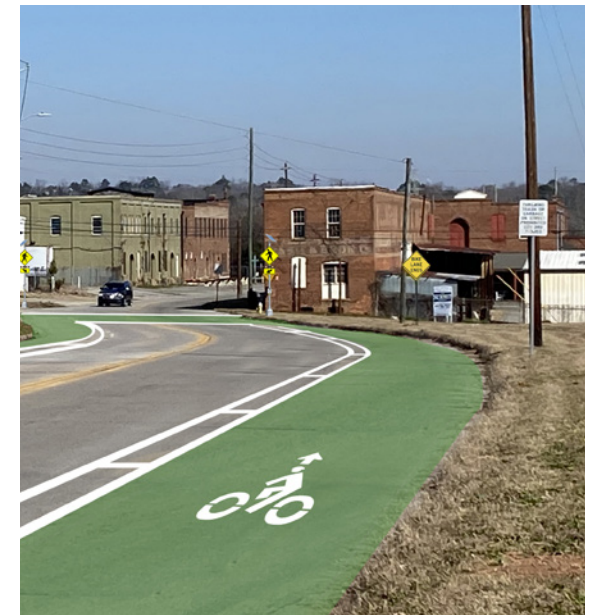
- Street striping for crosswalks
- Bridge install using existing trestle
- Trail signage



PRECEDENT PHOTO: Painted outside bike lanes



EXISTING: Seventh Street showing four lanes



ENVISIONED: Seventh Street restriped



EXISTING: Riverside-Walnut railroad spur; south view



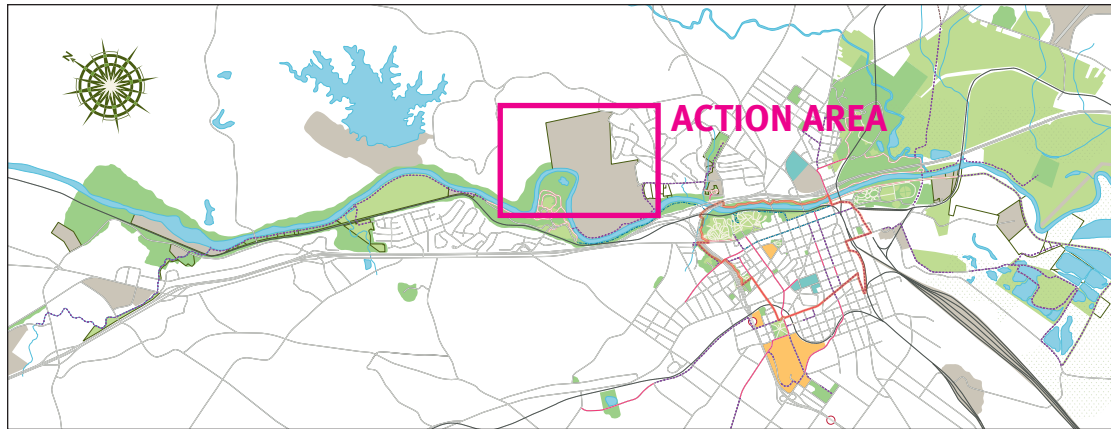
EXISTING: Riverside-Walnut railroad spur; north view



EXISTING: Railroad trestle spanning Cherry Street could be retrofitted with a bridge.



PRECEDENT PHOTO: Protected pedestrian bridge



The **NORTH HIGHLANDS ACTION AREA** connects the Glenridge Trailhead on the east bank of the river to North Highlands Park and Amerson River Park. An envisioned connection would include new trail along Nottingham Drive and then north along the Ocmulgee River. The connection of the OHT from the Glenridge Trailhead, through Jackson Springs Park (JSP), down Nottingham Drive, and along the Ocmulgee River to Amerson River Park could eliminate any interference with existing rail lines and Interstate expansion.

A secondary spur from Jackson Springs Park could include a woodland trail that connects with North Highlands Park.

Areas highlighted in yellow represent specific needs, challenges, or opportunities for improvements including new trail and a pedestrian bridge.

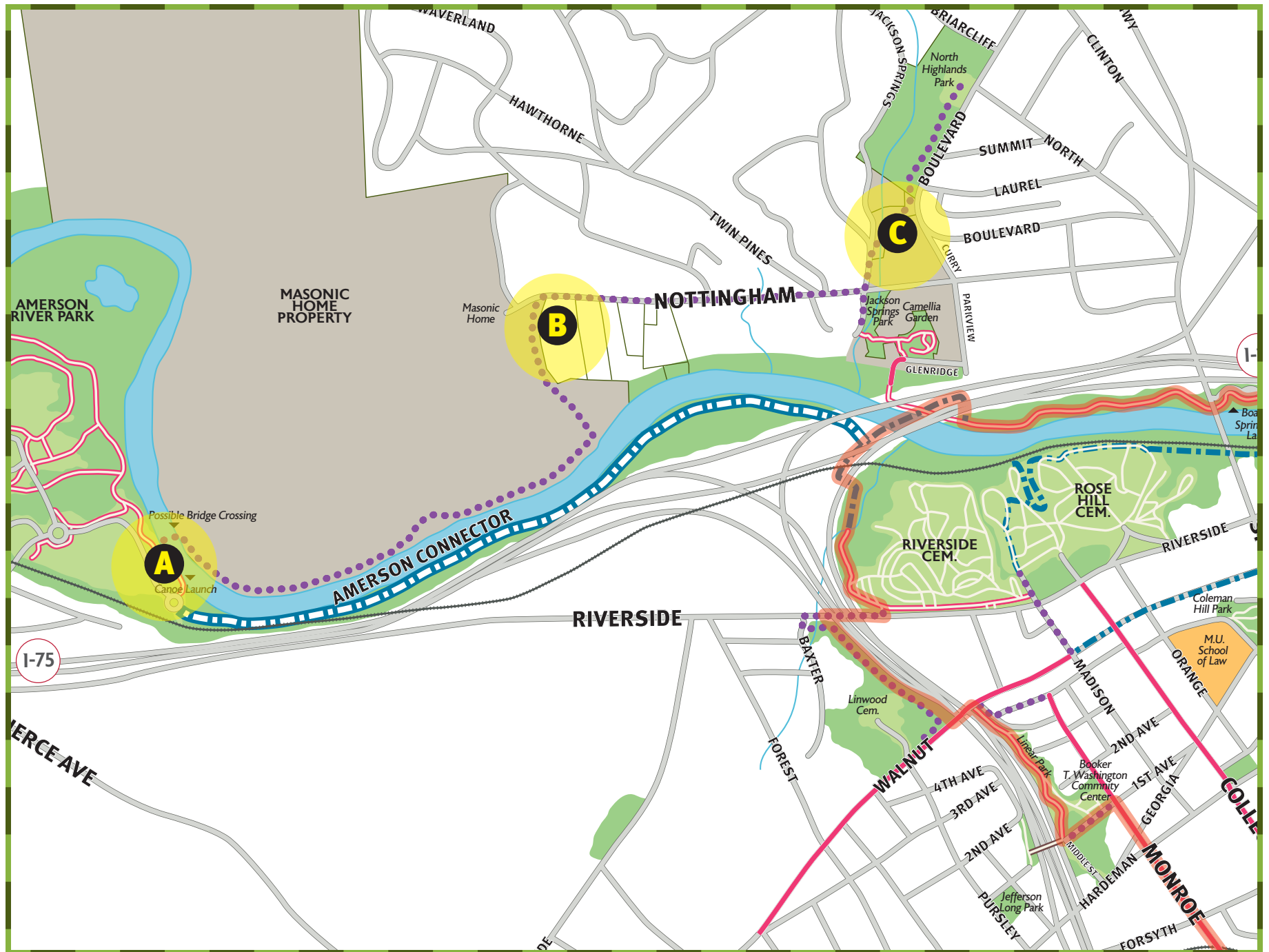
- A:** Bridge to connect to Amerson River Park south of the Pavilion
- B:** Trail construction along Nottingham to connect Jackson Springs Park to Masonic property trail and onto ARP Bridge
- C:** Woodland trail to connect Jackson Springs Park to North Highlands Park



PRECEDENT PHOTO: Low-profile lane divider



PRECEDENT PHOTO: RiverEdge Park Pedestrian Bridge





This satellite overview of the **NORTH HIGHLANDS ACTION AREA** shows the envisioned trail connections from Glenridge Trailhead to Amerson River Park and North Highlands Park.

Adding a connection along Nottingham Drive with a shared pedestrian/bike lane from Jackson Springs Park to the Masonic Home property and along the river would allow a bridged connection to Amerson River Park.



ENVISIONED: Trail expansion mock up along Nottingham



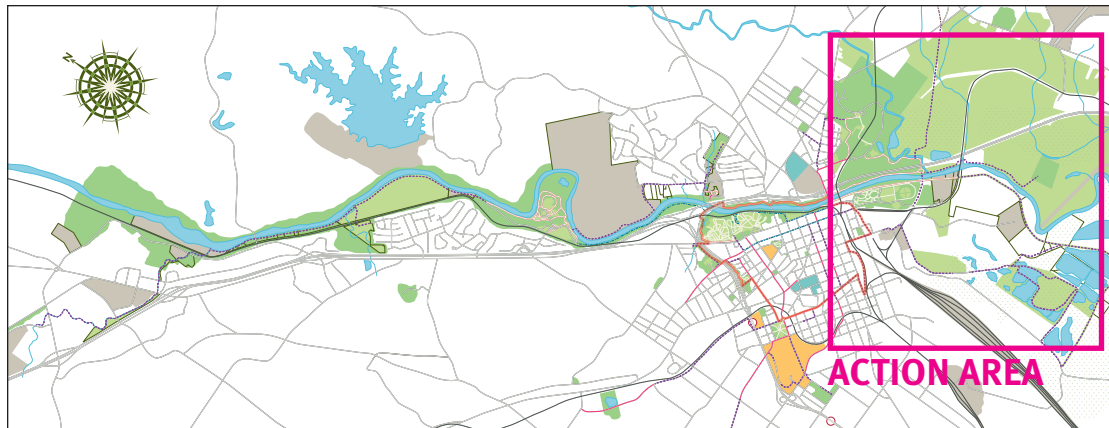
ENVISIONED: Trail expansion mock up along Nottingham



ENVISIONED: Trail expansion mock up along Nottingham



ENVISIONED: Bridge connecting Amerson River Park to North Highlands Area



The **OCMULGEE MOUNDS AND LANDFILL** could play a vital role for the southern end of the Trail. Connections into and through these areas could include river-side access along the levee, Rails-to-Trails connection, and expansion to Browns Mount.

Any long-term plans for trail building or access to this Action Area will require additional collaboration with the National Parks Service, Army Corps of Engineers, Macon Water Authority, Macon-Bibb County, railroad, and private land owners.



EXISTING: Boardwalk connecting the Mike Ford trail to Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park



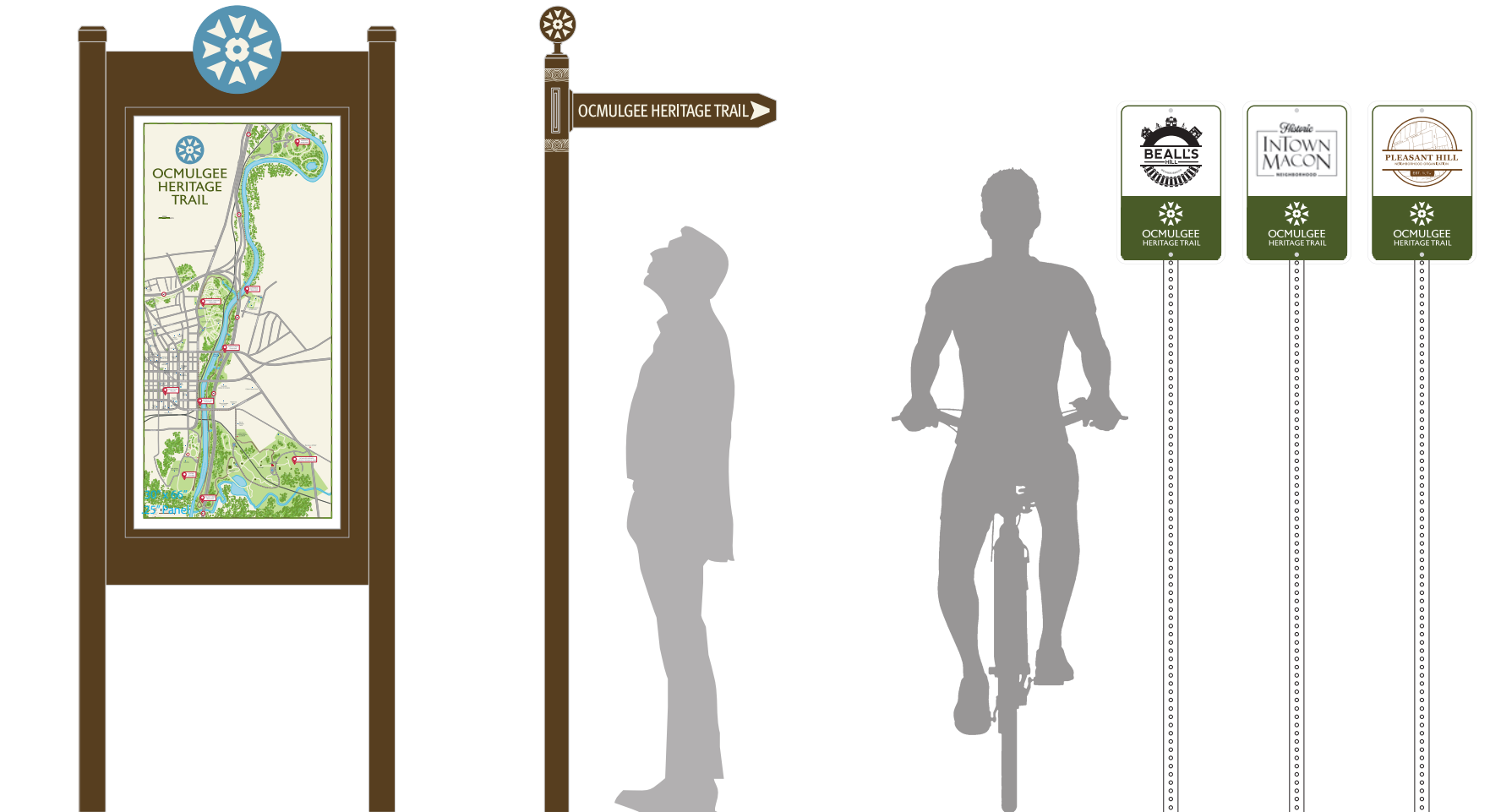
PRECEDENT PHOTO: Surface, bike-friendly railroad crossing



EXISTING: The levee trail at Carolyn Crayton Park intersects with railroad tracks and extends onto private land.

TRAIL SIGNAGE

The Ocmulgee Heritage Trail and connected parks and places will be co-branded with specific directional and informational signage and maps based on application. Examples below: General overview map, on-trail directional, and neighborhoods



CONNECTIONS AND CROSSINGS

Comprehensive access to the OHT would include multiple railroad and river/creek crossings and traffic intersections. Below are precedent photos from other trail systems.



