

# Community involvement key in Greenline development

## Questions linger about Greenline safety, to be addressed at public meeting

By Eric Heinz  
Mpact Memphis  
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It's an exciting time to be a Memphian. Not only are we seeing initiatives to improve areas of town such as Brooks Road and The Highland Strip, but a number of opportunities are becoming available for Memphians to directly influence how our city will look in the coming decade. The Wolf River Greenway, The Nonconnah Creek Greenway, and The Greater Memphis Greenline are three grassroots efforts currently being organized by your fellow Memphians.

Over the last few days, I met with residents in the High Point Terrace area, asking them what their feelings were about the proposed 13-mile Greater Memphis Greenline project to convert the discontinued CSX right-of-way into a multi-use public trail. The majority of the people I met were supportive of the project. Increased opportunities for socialization with neighbors, pedestrian routes free from cars, and increases in property values were among the reasons cited for support of the Greenline, however these opinions were not shared by all.

It's no secret that the reputation of Memphis City parks is not as positive as parks in other cities, such as Millennium Park in Chicago. Stories of the homeless living in Confederate Park, cruisers taking over the parking lot at Tom Lee Park during summer nights, and shootings of innocent children caught in gang crossfire while playing at neighborhood parks are sad, but common realities faced by the citizens of Memphis.

Being well aware of the reputation of Memphis City parks, I was not surprised when I met residents who were against the prospect of a linear park in their backyards. The fear of crime that the Greenline might attract, especially during twilight hours, was a common complaint. Their fear is justifiable, as the current plan for the Greenline has the project bisecting multiple communities, some of which have had a history of a high crime rate.

The Greater Memphis Greenline is far from being the only project which has experienced such controversy during the planning phase. A similar project was planned and built in Boston from 1976 to 1986. The Boston South-west Corridor is a 5-mile linear park that, just as the CSX right-of-way, borders neighborhoods of varying densities and income levels. During the planning phase of this project, it too faced resistance from residents. In 2001, a study was published by Katherine Crewe, an Associate Professor of Planning at Arizona State University, reviewing crime statistics from 1996 to 1998, in order to see the effect the greenway had on crime rates in adjacent neighborhoods a decade after completion of the project.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Crewe found that the Boston South-west Corridor had no significant increase in crime for homes adjacent to it.

Should these results be used as an indicator of success for the Greater Memphis Greenline? Although the results of Professor Crewe's study are promising, it will take more than scientific studies to garner support from all stakeholders. It will take citizen participation in all phases of the project, from planning to maintenance of the completed project. The negotiations for acquiring the property from CSX have prolonged over years, with CSX disregarding City ordinances for property upkeep in the meantime. Without active participation and negotiation between all stakeholders, the Greenline project will face a similar delay once the land is acquired.

On February 8<sup>th</sup>, The Greening Greater Memphis organization will be holding a public meeting at the Memphis Botanic Gardens, doors open at 5 pm. Hosted by Carol Coletta, the meeting will feature keynote speaker Alex Garvin, a renowned public realm strategist and author of *Parks, Recreation and Public Space: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Agenda*. If you're interested in supporting the initiatives to green greater Memphis, participate in the meeting and let your elected officials see your support. If you have concerns about the projects, voice your concerns to the elected officials and civic leaders so they can be addressed. The best community projects occur when all stakeholders come out as winners, and these grassroots efforts depend upon your involvement.

For more information, please visit [www.GreeningGreaterMemphis.org](http://www.GreeningGreaterMemphis.org).

<sup>1</sup>Crewe, K. Linear parks and urban neighbourhoods: A study of the crime impact of the Boston South-west Corridor, *Journal of Urban Design*, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 245-264, 2001.