

# Graphics 101: Inviting and Igniting Greenway Use

by John R. Innes, Owner, User Friendly Maps

How does the average person learn about your greenways? Consider this question from outside your role as a parks and rec insider. Do people happen to spot greenway joggers and bicyclists while driving along in their car? Do they notice trailhead signs, hear rumors, or read announcements on the news or the Web? These are the way people learn about your greenways. But which methods can you use to create the most bang for your marketing dollar?

In considering my question, I ask you to temporarily disregard your most loyal greenway fans. We love those devoted and loyal users, but they are already supporters and do not need any encouragement to explore the greenways. Try instead to focus on those *other* people who are only *half*-interested or even completely *disinterested* in greenways. *Those* are the people whom User Friendly Maps wants to excite and ignite. Those are the people who will become your newest greenway users.

My firm has spent years carefully studying the thinking of all types of greenway users. Based on our firsthand experience, what follows are some common ways that even an inattentive citizen is likely to learn about your greenways. You probably know other ways, and we will invite you to share your suggestions during the TRPA Conference session. You will note that every form of promotion mentioned below has its pros and cons. Offering excellent user guides is very important, but you cannot afford to neglect any of these promotional methods.

## Noticing Greenways from the Car

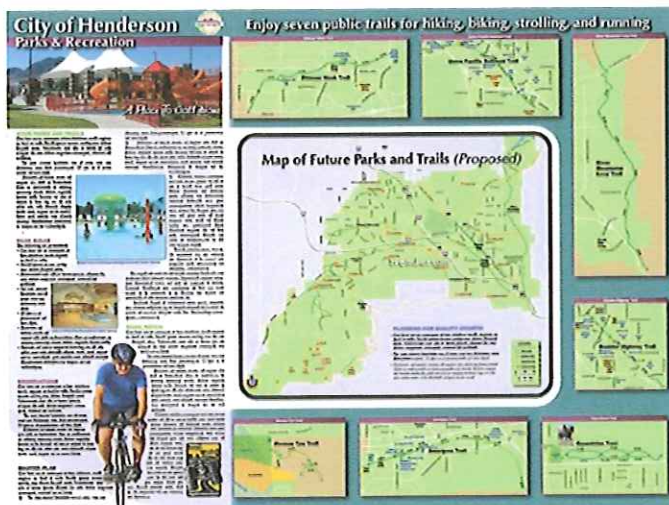
Obviously, some greenways do run parallel to the edges of roads, and the resulting visibility of bicyclists, runners and walkers is a natural advertisement for the greenway. But, by their nature, greenways are typically routed away from vehicular traffic. Therefore, this method of line-of-sight promotion will create a spotty public perception of your overall greenway presence. Your public officials may know nothing of your greenways beyond what they can see through *their* car windshields. Long experience indicates that relying on this method of promotion is useful only if your greenways happen to be located on highway right-of-ways or if they closely follow your roads for other reasons. Otherwise, this strategy will not ignite much interest within your target audience.

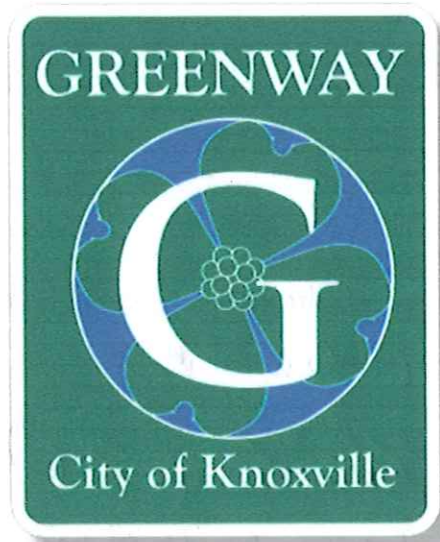
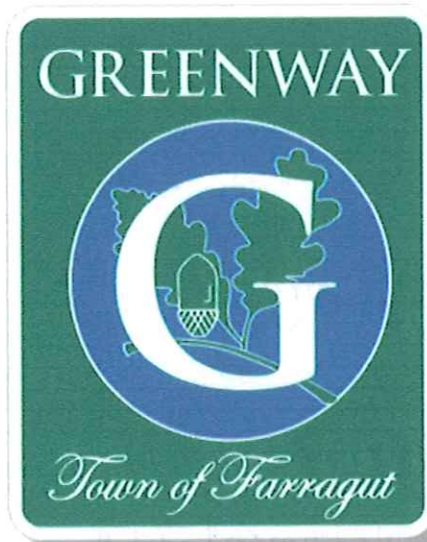
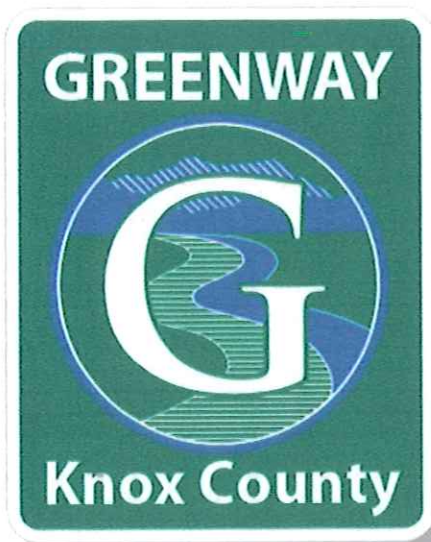
## Trailhead Signs

Most parks and rec departments mark the starting point of their greenways with a trailhead sign. Often small in size, these signs indicate the name of the greenway and are often positioned so that pedestrians can easily see them. This type of sign is very important in raising public awareness of greenway locations. Unfortunately, most drivers remain focused on traffic signs and signals and may “tune out” even a beautifully crafted trailhead sign. Small trailhead signs tend to be effective only if the public approaches the trailhead on foot (e.g., on a loop around a school or in a neighborhood greenway that outsiders almost never enter). Otherwise, an appropriately sized and situated trailhead sign is a powerful tool for promoting the locations of your greenways.

## Word of Mouth

Our experience suggests that most people probably know where the *closest* greenway is. Word of mouth is a powerful promoter, and neighborhood walkers, bikers, strollers and runners tend to talk to each other. What’s missing is information about the *second-closest* greenway, or the *longest* or the *shortest* or the *most secluded* or the *most public* or the greenway





with precisely measured *loops*. Knowledge of these special features are what entice people to venture out from their nearest greenway. Word of mouth is useful if your system has very few greenways and those greenways are very simple. But, as your system grows, so will your need for detailed data about the greenways. At that point, a printed or online guide will likely become necessary.

#### Stories in the Media

I know of few things as frustrating as watching a local TV news story about a local greenway. There is something about the limitations of TV reports that often fails to create the intended positive effect. Plus, the limited time does not allow the viewers sufficient time to study the route. Newspaper stories, with their lengthier descriptions and clip-and-save maps, are better, but papers are reluctant to devote coverage unless the greenway has been newly opened or has been dramatically improved. Still, a positive story by a pro-greenway TV station or newspaper is powerful publicity. And, although there can be exceptions, news coverage is usually free!

#### Searching the Web

Web-based maps have become a staple for all forms of portable Web devices. Despite some interesting urban legends to the contrary, these online maps are usually accurate. The quality varies depending on the source. Therein lies a problem, since users may assume that the city or the county has reviewed and verified the greenway information they see online. The truth is that most third-party map sources blindly grab their data from local GIS sources. Many municipal GIS departments place a low priority on accurately mapping greenways. So, unless your department is providing greenway data through your own website, you cannot know for sure what greenway information the public is receiving online.

#### Greenways Maps

Since my company is called User Friendly Maps, you would

expect us to heavily favor specialized maps — and we do! I can think of no better way to accurately portray a greenway (either on paper or on the Web) than to depict that complete greenway from beginning to end, including a scale and any familiar reference points.

But are maps the perfect answer to everything? If it were that simple, you could simply walk down to your local map department or graphic designer and obtain very useful maps of your greenways system. Most of my clients report challenges associated with both of those solutions. I will discuss those during my talk and invite you to share your own experiences.

So what is best way to invite the average citizen to explore your greenways further? Is it through better maps, signs, word of mouth or the media? The answer is as richly textured as the demographics of the greenway users themselves. Users can be younger, older, urban, rural, single, family-oriented, fit and frail — and they all benefit from greenways. User Friendly Maps has learned that promoting your local greenways will require a careful fine-tuning of all available promotional strategies. Naturally, we have included the most effective of these in our custom guides and signs.

*Plan to attend our greenway signage session at the TRPA State Conference in September. We will present examples that demonstrate how our clients have combined these elements to invite and ignite their own greenway users. The TRPA presentation will focus on graphics that apply to typical municipal greenways.*

*User Friendly Maps is a Tennessee-based firm that designs park and recreation guides nationwide. Its greenways products include easy-to-read user guides and a system of greenway signage. Some local clients include Knoxville, Knox County, Oak Ridge, Morristown, Farragut and Sevierville. The largest recreation client is the 650,000-acre Cherokee National Forest.*