

Connecting Neighborhoods through Public Art

GREENSBORO, NC



During the dedication of *Over.Under.Pass*, a public art project by sculptor Jim Gallucci and lighting designer Scott Richardson, in Greensboro, North Carolina.

PHOTO BY
LYNN DONOVAN
PHOTOGRAPHY

THE CITY OF GREENSBORO HAS A POPULATION of more than 277,000 that is more racially diverse (56 percent white and 33 percent African-American) and slightly younger (a median age of 36) than many other cities in North Carolina. Greensboro's city center is its central business district and serves as both an engine of employment and an important cultural destination, with several historic sites, cultural destinations, and museums in the area. However, for decades, an overpass of a North Carolina Railroad line running parallel to a large four-lane road has acted as a barrier between the city center and the historically underserved, predominantly African-American neighborhoods to the south. This lack of connection is problematic not only because of the disjuncture it causes but also because it has reinforced historic social and racial divisions.

In general, Greensboro is a car city with poorly developed pedestrian networks. To remedy this, following the city's Center City Master Plan, Action Greensboro—a local nonprofit focused on economic, educational, and cultural development in the city—established the Downtown Greenway Project in collaboration with the City of Greensboro. The Downtown Greenway is a planned four-mile walking and biking trail. It will loop around the city center and use public art to engage residents in a unique and authentic way. The intent of the project is to transform the urban landscape, re-establish connections within the diverse community, and promote health and wellness through physical activity.





**Evening view of
*Over.Under.Pass.***

PHOTO BY PETER VAHAN

Public art, selected by the Downtown Greenway Art Selection Panel, which consists of community stakeholders, elected officials, and city staff, has been and will be installed at key sites determined by the project team. The hope is that each piece will activate and encourage use of the Greenway as an alternative means of transportation. One of the art commissions, *Over.Under.Pass*, was installed in the previously mentioned abandoned underpass—near the Morehead Park section of the greenway. Its name is meant to signal the transformation of the railway overpass from a barrier to a point of connectivity.

Community dialogue was an important aspect of the project. To ensure community participation in the planning process, Greensboro Neighborhood Congress helped the project team to organize citizens and public meetings. Public meetings were held in schools, churches, and community centers, places easy for community members to access. The information gleaned at these meetings was used to inform the design of the greenway and its public art commissions.

As a true public/private partnership project, partners also have worked closely with numerous city government agencies, including the Parks & Recreation and Planning, Police, and Transportation Departments, to gather support from local foundations and corporate supporters as well as private investors. With \$6.5 million invested to date on the project, Greensboro has secured over \$200 million in completed and planned investment.

The economic impact of the greenway has already exceeded expectations and spurred other area community development. Greensboro's Parks & Recreation Department tracks trail use. Analysis of the data indicates higher pathway use of the Morehead Park section compared to others in the citywide system. Numbers and time-of-day usage also indicate that the *Over.Under.Pass* pathway is being used by downtown visitors and commuters as an alternate route into and out of the city and not just for recreational purposes, although an unanticipated level of enthusiasm has sprung up around using the greenway for organized fitness events. Overall, the Downtown Greenway project has activated the area, helping to enhance relationships between area neighborhoods and businesses.

The greenway trail system is just over 18 percent complete with three-quarters of a mile of finished trails. To ensure that current and future public art installations are well-kept, an endowment has been created by project managers to fund the maintenance of all public art; maintenance funding is a common challenge for public art projects. As it is an integral aspect of the project, the Downtown Greenway Project continues to reinforce the value of public art and the continued opportunity it presents to redefine and revitalize Greensboro.