

Work Session of the Sandy Springs City Council was held on July 21, 2026 at 6:00 PM, Mayor Rusty Paul presiding.

I. Staff Discussion Items

Mayor Rusty Paul called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

A. 2026-177 Update on The Next Chapter

Michele McIntosh-Ross, Planning & Zoning Manager, Sukirti Ghosh, Principal, RHI, and Carlos Perez, Principal, Perez Planning and Design, presented an update on the Comprehensive Plan (The Next Chapter) and Recreation and Parks Master Plan.

The Next Chapter Update

RHI Principal Ghosh provided an update on the City of Sandy Springs' Comprehensive Plan process, referred to as "The Next Chapter." The plan is on an approximately one-year timeline, with the Comprehensive Plan completed by June 2027. The City is currently about four months into the overall process and approximately one month into the active community discussion phase. The next six months will focus heavily on public engagement, with a regular cadence of public meetings, leadership updates, stakeholder meetings, and community pop-up events continuing through January 2027.

Community Engagement to Date

The project team has already begun significant outreach through both formal and informal engagement methods. Engagement efforts have included:

- **Public Meeting No. 1**, which included a presentation and interactive activities such as map exercises, budget allocation activities, and public comment opportunities.
- **Community pop-up events** at locations and events such as the Farmers Market, Juneteenth, Sesame Street Live, Stars and Stripes, concert series events, and World Cup watch parties.
- **Stakeholder meetings** with City departments, Council of Neighborhoods, Art Sandy Springs, Sandy Springs Conservancy, nonprofit groups, Mayor and City Council, Planning Commission, Board of Appeals, and the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee.
- A project website for **The Next Chapter**, which is being updated weekly and allows residents to provide ongoing comments and feedback.

Early engagement numbers are strong. The team reported reaching approximately **400 people through pop-up events**, completing **12 stakeholder meetings**, holding regular meetings with more than **90 participants**, receiving input from **Public Meeting No. 1**, attracting approximately **1,700 unique website visitors**, and collecting more than **3,200 comments**.

Preliminary Community Feedback Themes

The feedback presented is preliminary and based on early stakeholder meetings, elected and appointed board input, and the first public meeting. Major themes emerging so far include:

Land Use and Development

Residents and stakeholders expressed a strong desire for balanced growth while preserving Sandy Springs' neighborhood character. There are concerns about overdevelopment, particularly the pace of multifamily residential construction. At the same time, there is support for revitalizing aging or

underutilized commercial properties, especially in the North End, and for improving the appearance and function of Roswell Road as a key corridor. The need for more neighborhood-serving retail was also identified.

Transportation

Traffic congestion remains a major concern, especially along Roswell Road. Participants also expressed interest in improving walkability, strengthening regional connections, and expanding the City's trail network. The feedback recognizes the progress Sandy Springs has made on trails over the past decade while also identifying continued demand for better pedestrian and multimodal connectivity.

Economic Development

Feedback showed support for a diverse workforce and a desire to strengthen Sandy Springs' regional identity and awareness. However, there are also concerns about over-commercialization. The City is being encouraged to balance economic growth with quality-of-life considerations and community character.

Housing

Housing affordability emerged as a top concern. Participants expressed interest in housing options for young families, seniors, empty nesters, and workers. Feedback on multifamily housing is mixed: some participants support additional apartments, while others believe there is already too much multifamily development. Concerns were also raised about residential lot assemblages, teardowns, affordability, tree canopy impacts, stormwater management, and preservation of neighborhood character.

Parks, Greenspace, Natural Systems, and Sustainability

There is strong interest in preserving, expanding, and improving parks and greenspaces, which connects closely with the City's Recreation and Parks Master Plan update. Participants also expressed support for protecting and expanding the tree canopy, addressing flooding and stormwater issues, encouraging sustainable development practices, improving access to the Chattahoochee River, and creating more playgrounds and places for recreation.

Overall Takeaway

The Comprehensive Plan update is in its early but active engagement phase, and the City has already received substantial community participation. The most prominent early themes are **preserving neighborhood character, managing growth, improving walkability and transportation options, addressing housing affordability, protecting tree canopy, expanding greenspace, and revitalizing key commercial areas such as Roswell Road and the North End.**

Next Steps

The project team will continue community engagement over the next several months through additional public meetings, stakeholder discussions, advisory committee meetings, and pop-up events. Feedback will continue to be refined and analyzed as the City works toward developing the final Comprehensive Plan for submission by **June 2027**.

Recreation and Parks Master Plan Update

Perez Planning and Design Principal Perez provided an update on the Recreation and Parks Master Plan, sharing preliminary findings gathered to date through public meetings, conversations with City leadership, and input from the advisory committee.

The findings are not yet final, as two important community engagement data sets are still forthcoming:

- Results from the statistically valid mail survey sent to residents

- Results from the online survey, which is expected to launch soon and remain open for approximately one month

Key Themes Identified So Far

Community feedback to date shows a strong interest in improving connectivity and access to parks, trails, and recreation opportunities throughout the city. This includes both physical access, such as paved and unpaved trails, and improved awareness through signage, wayfinding, and better communication about available park amenities.

There also appears to be support for both enhancing existing parks and expanding the overall park system where possible. This may include acquiring additional parkland to improve access to parks across Sandy Springs.

Another major theme is the role of parks as community gathering spaces. Residents value parks not only for recreation and athletics, but also as places for special events, social connection, and bringing the community together.

The update also noted demand for multigenerational and inclusive recreation experiences. This includes park and recreation opportunities for children, older adults, families, and residents with varying needs and abilities.

Finally, early feedback suggests there may be community willingness to invest additional resources in parks, including potential support for increased tax dollars or a future bond initiative.

Overall Takeaway

The preliminary findings indicate that Sandy Springs residents value parks as essential community assets and are interested in improved access, expanded amenities, stronger connectivity, inclusive programming, and continued investment in the city's recreation and parks system.

Next Steps

• Leadership Work Sessions

- July 21: Mayor & Council Work Session (6PM)
- July 22: Planning Commission Work Session (6PM)

• Community Engagement

- Conjoint and Recreation & Parks Survey – will be released to public this week
- Public Meeting #2: August 17 & 20, 2026
- Pop ups and engagement activities

• Sandy Springs Today + Draft Policies

Mayor Paul asked for clarification on the term balanced growth that was presented as something the community wants, specifically requesting a definition of what it means in the context of the Recreation and Parks Master Plan.

RHI Principal Ghosh explained that **balanced growth** means protecting existing neighborhoods while directing new growth along specific corridors. It also includes providing community amenities that support

a sustainable, resilient, and long-term community. Overall, the concept is about balancing preservation with thoughtful development and services that enhance quality of life.

Councilmember Melody Kelley expressed appreciation for the in-person engagement activities and asked when an update on the Housing Needs Assessment will be available.

Kristin Byars Smith, Assistant City Manager, explained that staff recently received the draft Housing Needs Assessment from the consultant team and are reviewing it to confirm requested changes were made. Once reviewed, it will be shared with Council, and staff will determine the next steps for presenting it to the public. No specific timeline was provided, but it is expected to be shared soon.

Councilmember Kelley expressed concern that the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee has only two meetings remaining and would like the committee to have time to review and thoughtfully consider the Housing Needs Assessment before the process concludes.

Assistant City Manager Byars Smith explained that the draft Housing Needs Assessment was already shared with the comprehensive planning team as a draft document so they could begin reviewing the content and determine how to incorporate it into their ongoing work.

Councilmember Kelley asked whether the team has engaged with any developer or development-related stakeholder groups as part of the planning process.

RHI Principal Ghosh explained that developer-type stakeholder groups have not yet been engaged, but the team plans to hold additional stakeholder meetings in August. Staff developed a large list of stakeholders in coordination with City staff and are preparing to schedule those discussions.

Councilmember Kelley suggested revising the survey language about willingness to pay increased taxes so that it is clearer for renters. She noted that renters may experience property tax increases indirectly through monthly rent rather than as an annual tax bill, and recommended wording the question in a way that helps renters understand the potential monthly impact of a park bond.

She asked if the City is considering opportunities to acquire or create parkland through partnerships with commercial redevelopment projects? She noted that redevelopment and repurposing efforts, including potential public-private partnerships, may provide opportunities to add recreational spaces without relying solely on traditional land acquisition.

Perez Planning and Design Principal Perez confirmed that the City is considering different models for expanding parkland, including partnerships with private development. As the planning process moves into visioning and recommendations, staff and stakeholders will evaluate the most appropriate tools to meet park needs. He noted that green space can often serve as a catalytic element in redevelopment and will be further explored with staff.

Councilmember Kelley emphasized that trail network expansion should be considered carefully alongside other City priorities, especially where trails may create tension with protected neighborhoods. She suggested that future trail policies should recognize these tradeoffs. She also recommended prioritizing trails that reinforce other City goals, particularly mobility. She distinguished between purely recreational trails and trails that help residents get to important destinations, stating that mobility-supporting trails should receive higher priority in the planning process.

Councilmember Melissa Mular expressed support for the word cloud and said it reflected themes she heard from residents. She emphasized that community priorities should not be viewed in isolation, using tree canopy as an example of an issue connected to redevelopment, new development, land assembly, and stormwater. She expressed interest in seeing how the planning process evolves and what policies result from recognizing these interconnected issues.

RHI Principal Ghosh agreed and noted that the interconnected issues being discussed are directly related to the broader balanced growth conversation.

Councilmember Andrew J. Chinsky noted that the first meeting received positive feedback and commended staff and the project team for their efforts. He requested that, where possible, future meetings be streamed so members of the public can tune in and follow the process. He acknowledged that the activity format of the first meeting may not have been ideal for streaming but stated that several residents had requested greater public access. He also expressed appreciation for the multilingual engagement efforts, particularly outreach occurring at apartment complexes, and noted that the materials he reviewed were well done. **Councilmember Chinsky** then asked about the conjoint survey, specifically how the response rate is progressing and whether the responses received to date are expected to provide a representative, scientifically valid cross-section of the community.

RHI Principal Ghosh said the response to the Conjoint survey has been phenomenal. The survey was sent to more than 2,700 members of the community, and more than 1,000 responses have already been received, which significantly exceeds the 5% to 10% response threshold needed for a statistically valid survey sample. He noted that the project team conducting the Conjoint survey will analyze the conjoint portion independently. In addition, once the survey is publicly released, the team will compare and evaluate responses from that broader public release separately. He stated that, overall, the response rate has been excellent and is expected to provide strong data for the analysis.

Councilmember Chinsky stated that the strong response to the Conjoint survey may be something the City could share with the Georgia Municipal Association in the future as an example of a new tool being used by cities for public engagement. He then asked whether there will be safeguards for the public-facing portion of the survey to help prevent individuals from taking the survey multiple times and potentially skewing the sample. They asked how that process will work.

RHI Principal Ghosh said as part of the media release process, the team has been coordinating with the City's Communications Department and the City Manager's Office. He noted that the media release will include language asking residents who have already completed the survey not to submit another response, and instead to share the survey with neighbors and other residents who have not yet had an opportunity to participate. He stated that the team is mindful of avoiding duplicate responses and potential skewing of the survey results.

Councilmember Chinsky thanked staff and the project team for their efforts and stated that they look forward to seeing the survey results.

Councilmember Mary Ford presented two brief questions and comments. First, she referenced the stakeholder groups that had not yet been engaged and requested that Council receive a list of those groups. She noted that, during the initial input process, she had suggested engaging representatives from the public schools in the area and stated that she would like to better understand the extent to which that outreach is occurring. Second, **Councilmember Ford** noted that when the process was launched, she signed up on the website to receive email updates but did not recall receiving any updates to date. She requested information on how many people have signed up to receive updates and what process is being used to

proactively share information with them. Councilmember Ford stated that while it is helpful that updates are being made to the website, residents may not think to check the website regularly. She added that proactive communication with those who have requested updates would be an important additional step.

II. City Council Discussion Items

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:26 p.m.

Approved: August 4, 2026

Russell K. Paul, Mayor

Raquel D. González, City Clerk