Virginia Association of Counties
ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

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APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 3, 2019.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.
If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact Gage Harter.
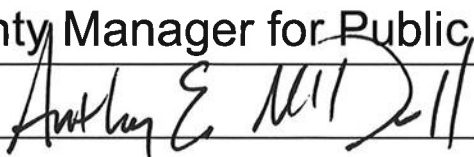
PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: County of Henrico

Program Title: Route 5 Corridor Study Public Engagement Portal

Program Category: Information Technology

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Title: Deputy County Manager for Public Safety

Signature:

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Executive Summary

The Route 5 Corridor Study Public Engagement Portal (the portal) was created to engage citizens and stakeholders for a 14-mile corridor study. Consisting of 1,220 acres of land and more than 900 individual property owners, the zoning of the corridor ranged from agricultural to urban mixed-use. One of the oldest roads in the United States, connecting the former capital of Williamsburg with the current capital of Richmond, it has experienced its share of development while retaining a decidedly rural/agricultural character. In order to reach the numerous stakeholders and increase citizen involvement, the department created a dedicated website with an interactive portal. Since implementation in May 2017, the portal has provided a platform for public comment, maximizing options for stakeholder input. Comprised of informational elements and participatory opportunities, the portal enhanced the department's ability to create awareness, educate, and expand public input in the planning process. The portal afforded the department an opportunity to showcase the study area using virtual and historic markers tours. Stakeholders had an opportunity to share their thoughts about the corridor through a community survey, and a public input map. Because of its simple and easily replicated design, the department has created a second public engagement portal for a new planning study area and will use the Route 5 Portal as a model for other future planning studies.

Challenge Faced By Locality

The Route 5 study area is located in the eastern part of the county. Adjacent development has historically been rural in nature, with small farms and large-acreage homes, but has evolved to include suburban-style single family subdivisions, places of worship, compact commercial nodes, and an urban mixed-use project. Additionally, the corridor includes a portion of a 52-mile shared-use trail which is used by locals and tourists alike.

Route 5 is believed to be the second oldest road in the United States, connecting the colonial capital of Williamsburg with its modern capital in Richmond. Following the path of an old Native American trail, the road was used to bring agricultural products to market, as well as move troops during the American Revolution and the Civil War. It was the second roadway in Virginia to be designated a Virginia Byway (August 1975). Primarily a two-lane, undivided road, Route 5 is maintained by the Virginia Department of Transportation. Traffic signalization, driveway access, right-of-way dedication and road widening are coordinated with the state.

Because of the role it has played in the region's history, and its continued importance in the county's transportation network, the corridor has been studied numerous times. Recommendations for tree preservation, building setbacks, and sign regulations have competed against those to widen the road, change the byway designation of a section of the road to another street, or build a parallel roadway beyond the existing right-of-way.

The county's Board of Supervisors directed the Planning Department to initiate a study of the Route 5 corridor, from its boundary with the City of Richmond to its boundary with Charles City County in March 2017. The study's purpose was to evaluate the existing character of the area and offer recommendations for use in review of future development proposals. Integrating and respecting the existing agricultural, residential and commercial characteristics of the area was paramount. A total of 748 parcels (1,221 acres) were included in the study area, which consisted of the 14-mile Route 5 corridor and the land 500-feet from the centerline of the road.

In addition to many long-time residents who were familiar with the previous studies, there were new residents who had moved to the area seeking a more rural aesthetic. Though the first mile of the corridor is distinctly urban, with condominiums and townhomes, a CSX railroad line, and a bulk liquids storage terminal, the remaining 13 miles contain some of the remaining farms in the county, several with significant views and vistas, interspersed with low-density

residential development. There were also several stakeholder groups with an active presence on social media. It was imperative staff create a tool to engage all stakeholders and encourage their participation.

How The Program Fulfilled the Awards Criteria

The public engagement portal was identified as a necessity to ensure information- and idea-sharing among the area's diverse stakeholders. Creating a portal was an essential mechanism in providing contextual information so all interested parties understood the relevant planning issues, as well as historical background. Users were encouraged to share their questions, comments and concerns related to the study area in an open forum that was available 24 hours a day/7 days a week.

How the Program Was Carried Out:

An online solution appeared to be the most promising option to increase public input, citizen interaction and transparency, while allowing remote participation at any time of day. ESRI's ArcGIS Online was determined to be the most appropriate vehicle for the public participation portal. In addition to having a low cost, it could be integrated into the study website maintained by the department. The county maintains an Enterprise License Agreement with ESRI, so no additional cost was incurred. A technology specialist and the project planner were given a month to develop the portal using the ArcGIS applications.

ESRI ArcGIS Online is a subscription-based, cloud-based service which allows users to store content in a secure environment that can be used anytime, anywhere – on any device with an internet connection. Once logged into ArcGIS Online, a user is presented with a feature-rich environment designed to create, upload and present web content. The department chose to employ ArcGIS Online with its Story Map Series, Story Map Tour Templates and WebApp Builder application.

The Story Map Series Template was used to present all content in easy-to-read tabs, very similar to modern day internet browsers. An introductory tab **(Figure 1)** welcomed participants to the portal and encouraged their participation.

The Story Map Tour Template was then used to create two interactive tours. The first, a Virtual Tour, focused on development and land use along the corridor **(Figure 2)**. The second, a Historic Markers Tour, allowed users to view all the federal, state and local historic markers/signs/ plaques (30) located along the corridor **(Figure 3)**. While not interactive, each contained a recent image and brief description so stakeholders could orient themselves to familiar surroundings and have an opportunity to explore areas of significance within the study area.

The Survey tab provided the first opportunity on the portal for public participation. The tab linked to a Survey Monkey survey **(Figure 4)**, where results could eventually be queried and exported. Participants were asked a series of questions, including how they used the corridor, whether they were satisfied with local services and how they'd describe the study area to someone from out-of-town. Respondents were also asked about their use of the Virginia Capital Trail, the shared use path that runs parallel to the corridor.

The final tab was the Public Input Map **(Figure 5)**, which was created using the ArcGIS Web AppBuilder application. The map gave citizens the chance to identify "Opportunities" (strengths) and "Challenges" (issues) within the study area. This interactive map allowed users to pan and zoom within the study area and view locations in more detail than they would with a static map. The tab included a dialog box with step-by-step instructions, as well as tips for enhancing the user experience. Information was provided so a participant could change the map background and turn layers on and off. Users were encouraged to add points to the map identifying opportunities or challenges within the study area. By zooming into an area of interest and clicking to add a point, a dialog box popped up requesting additional information,

such as the comment they wished to share and contact information. Once saved, the comments became available for others to view **(Figure 6)**. They were also saved to a database table where the information could be viewed, queried and exported.

Together, the tours and input map allowed for a visual assessment of the area. Including the interactive map and community survey made the experience more personal for the participant. They had the ability to focus on areas of importance, whether it was their residence, work or community shopping centers. By choosing ArcGIS Web AppBuilder users with limited computer skills could mark up a map and share their comments without the requirement of attending a community meeting.

Acknowledging stakeholders had varying technological skill levels, department staff brought laptops to meetings and provided tutorials on how to use the portal. In addition, as high-speed internet is not readily available to all citizens in the study area, instructions were left at the local library located along the corridor so interested users could access the portal from that facility.

Comments from the community survey and the public input map, along with those from exit surveys conducted following each meeting, were collected, reviewed and categorized. Responses to the community survey played an integral role in drafting goals, objectives and strategies.

Financing/Staffing:

The hardware and software used for the Route 5 Portal consisted of items already owned or licensed by the county. The project manager/planner provided images and corresponding written descriptions for both the Virtual and Historic Markers Tours to the technology specialist who imbedded them into the portal. The technology support specialist linked the Survey Monkey survey to the portal and created the format for the Public Input Map. Together the

planner and specialist wrote the introduction and instructions. A breakdown of manpower, hardware and software is listed in the table below.

Resource	Process	Type	Cost
ESRI ArcGIS "Creator" Online Subscription	Data Collection & Display	Software	Appx. $500 per year per license, depending on license agreement
Survey Monkey	Data Collection	Software	Free
Technology Support Specialist	QA/QC & Development	Manpower	$1,177
Project Manager (Planner)	QA/QC & Development	Manpower	$1,882
Total Cost			**$3,559**

Program Results

Based on a review of the analytics, the portal saw significant use in the time periods between meeting announcements/notifications and the days immediately following a community meeting or open house. The most significant spike in portal use was on the final day of the survey, following an email reminder. Over 27% of survey responses were attributed to that one day. Through the portal, 168 survey responses and 38 points of concern were created.

The portal allowed the sharing of accurate information across social media platforms. Special interest groups active within the study area were able to share a web link for the official project website and interactive map versus posting a summary of information collected from

a meeting or via word of mouth. This encouraged those unable to attend the meetings the opportunity to participate. Transparency was created by making comments on the public input map available to all users.

Feedback on the project has been overwhelmingly positive. Citizens expressed their appreciation for having a platform where they could share opposing points of view or offer comments without having to wait to speak directly to staff. This innovative process of citizen input has also received overwhelmingly positive responses from county representatives, including appointed and elected officials, as well as multiple county departments. Previous projects included a dedicated website; the Route 5 Corridor Study was the first attempt by Planning staff to integrate a public engagement portal as part of the citizen engagement process. It is believed, because of the transparency provided, and the opportunity for interactive participation, overall meeting attendance also increased dramatically; all community meetings/open houses averaged well over 100 attendees.

Upon adoption of the Route 5 Corridor Study, the interactive portion (Survey, Public Input Map) of the Route 5 Portal was disabled. However, because of the positive feedback received, the it has become a prototype for other planning studies in the county. A similar public engagement portal was created and implemented for a subsequent planning effort (Glen Allen Small Area Study) elsewhere in the county.

Brief Overview

As part of Henrico County's 2026 Comprehensive Plan, several areas of the county were recommended for further study. The Route 5 Corridor (New Market Road) was one of these special focus areas. Located in the eastern portion of the county, it has been identified as one of the oldest roads in the United States, connecting the colonial capital of Williamsburg with current capital in Richmond. Adjacent development includes small farms and large-acreage lots, interspersed with suburban-style single family subdivisions, places of worship, compact

commercial nodes and an urban mixed-use project. The Virginia Capital Trail, a 52-mile shared use path runs parallel to the study corridor.

The study area consisted of a 14-mile corridor, including over 1,220 acres of land and more than 900 individual property owners. With distinct, identifiable land uses, it was paramount to devise an inclusive, easy-to-use platform to encourage citizen participation. A public engagement portal was chosen as the best method to engage the diverse stakeholders of the area.

Available 24 hours a day/7 days a week, the portal provided an opportunity for Planning staff to provide information, while also maximizing options for public participation. Individuals, who otherwise were unable to attend evening meetings, could share their concerns and ideas for the future development of the corridor.

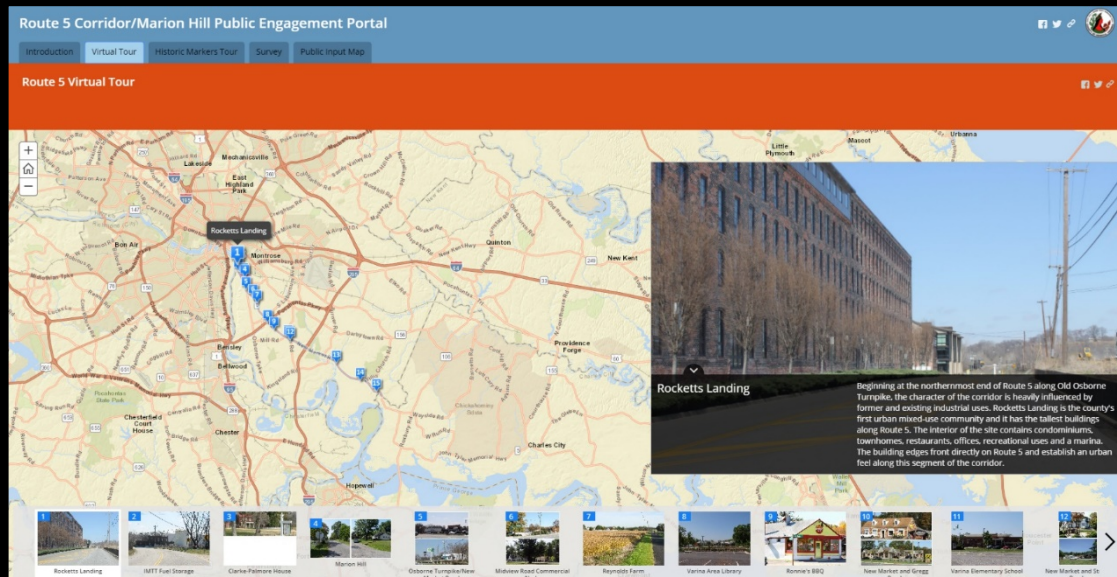# Route 5 Corridor Study Public Engagement Portal
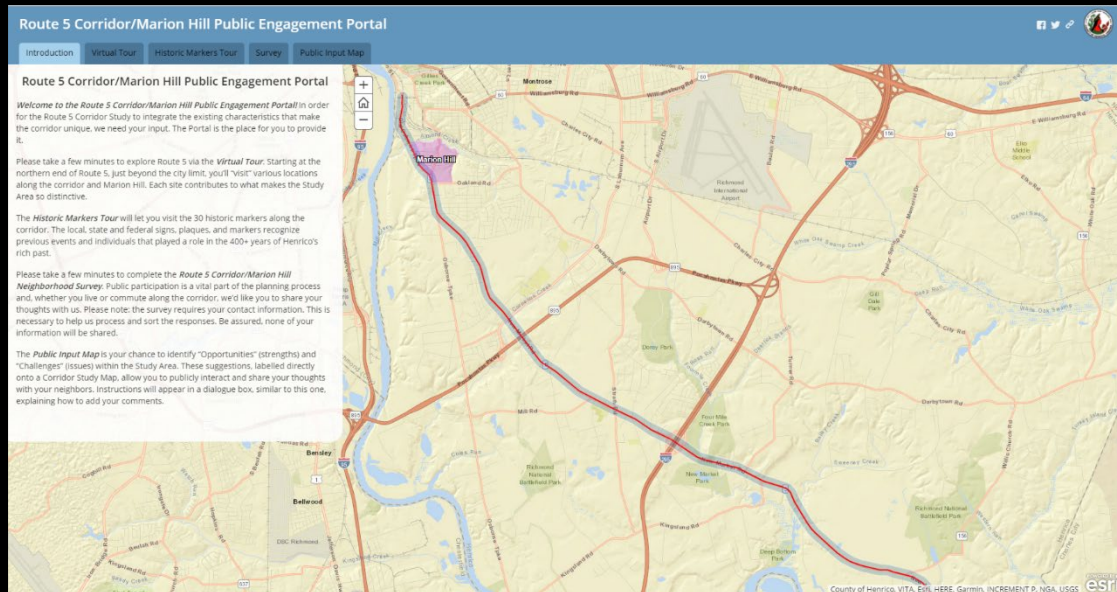
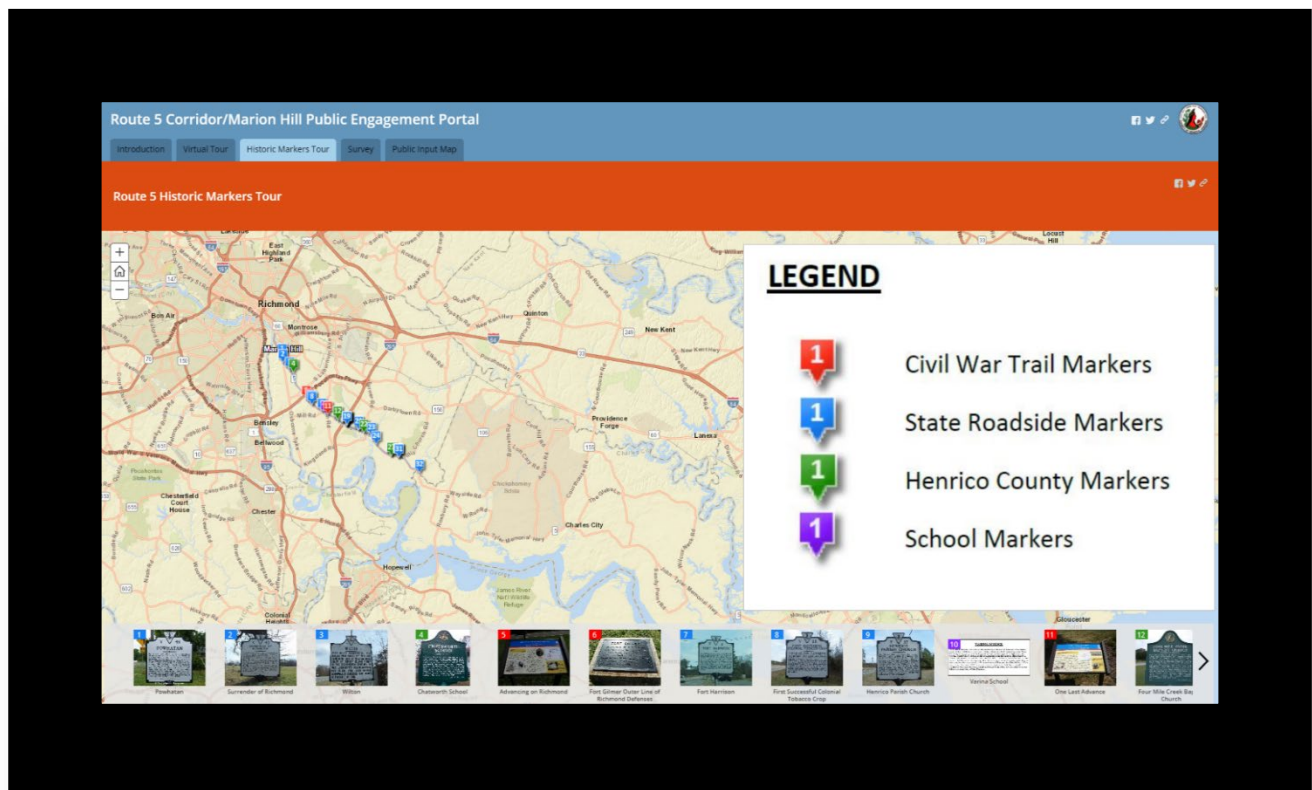**FIGURE 1: INTRODUCTION**

FIGURE 2: VIRTUAL TOUR

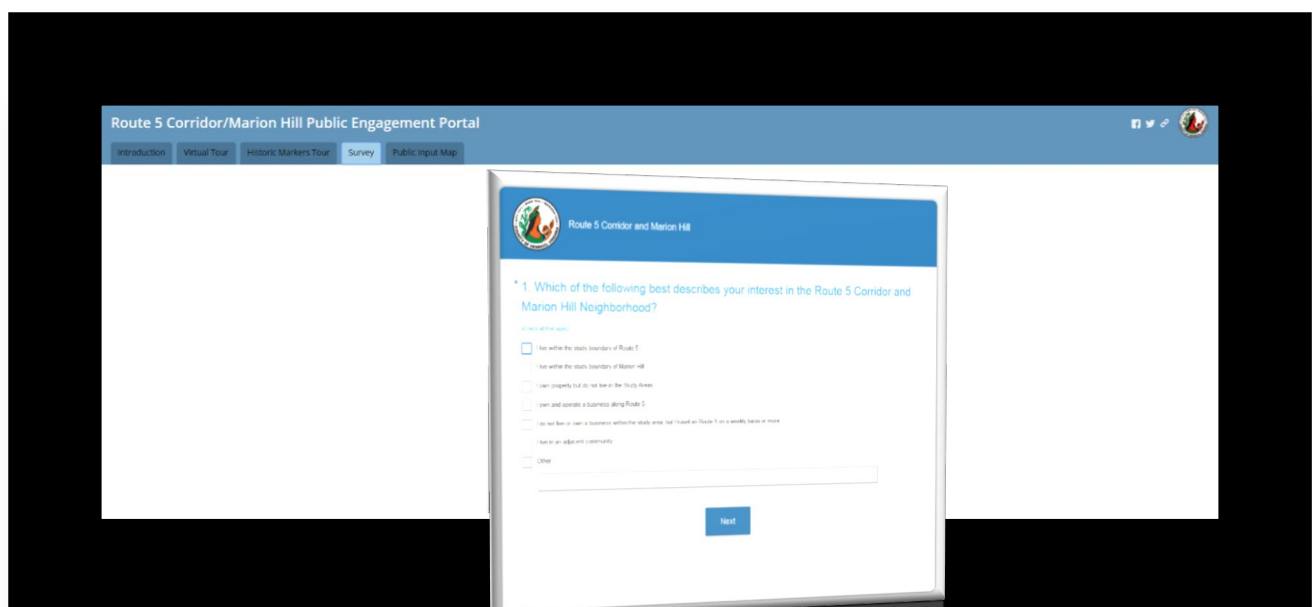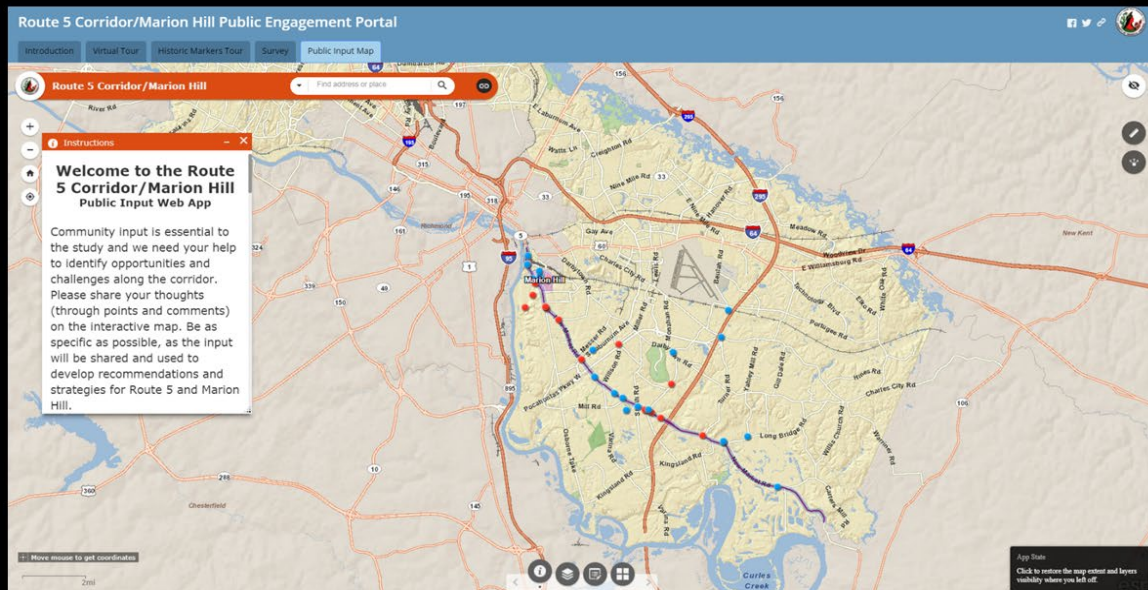**FIGURE 3: HISTORICAL MARKERS TOUR**
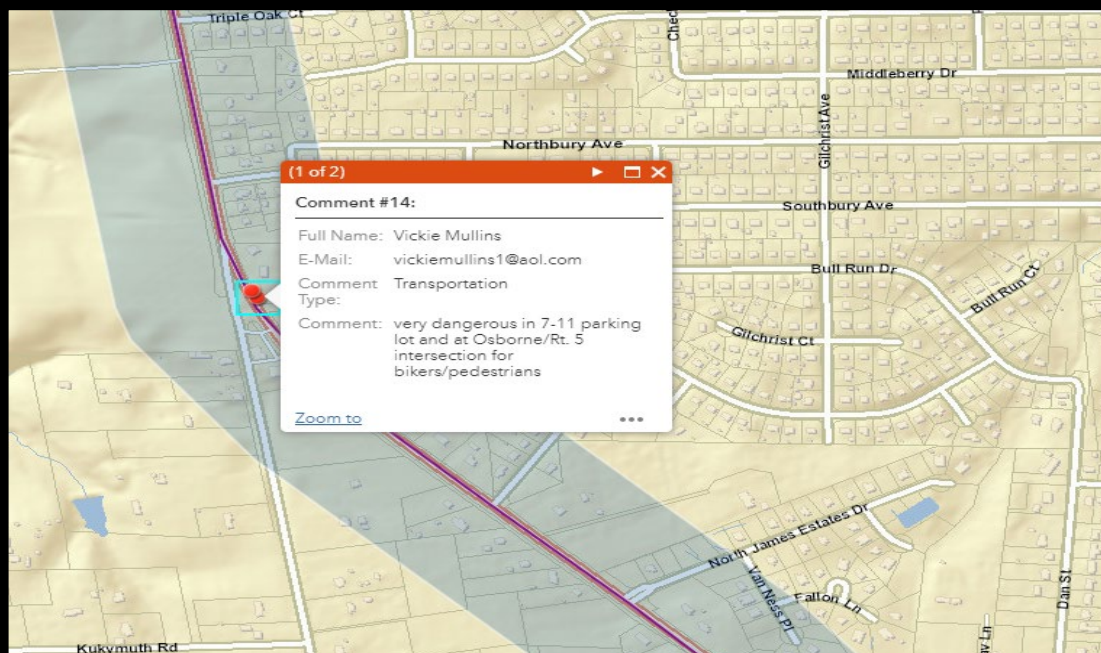

FIGURE 4: SURVEY

FIGURE 5: PUBLIC INPUT MAP

FIGURE 6: POSTED COMMENT