

Chapter 10: Action Steps for Implementation

The Buncombe County Greenways and Trails Master Plan included a comprehensive evaluation and identification of needs for projects, programs and policies. Collectively, when implemented, these initiatives are intended to realize a regional, connected greenways and trail system.

Adoption of the Plan signifies an interest among Buncombe County's leaders to take the input generated by citizens, communities and organizations within the region and transfer it into meaningful action.

Plans are by nature long-range and leave County leaders, staff and partners with a lot of discretion to define how they implement the Plan. This plan is not prescriptive and its recommendations are advisory, not sacrosanct. It should be allowed to evolve over time. Things change and the findings of the Greenways and Trails Plan in 2012 could require reconsideration as influences evolve, the County grows, new opportunities emerge, constraints arise and policies change.

Action Steps

With Buncombe County's greenway system in its nascent stage there are several actions to be undertaken over the next one to five years, five to 10 years, and 10 to 20 years. The amount of resources allocated to implement the recommendations of this Plan will determine when certain projects, programs or policies are realized.

This chapter contains 10 major action steps that emerged from the major themes of the Plan. They are intended to help guide development of the proposed greenways network and create a supportive program and policy environment for greenways and trails throughout Buncombe County.

These action steps are not in priority order. Rather, the Action Steps for Implementation should be reviewed and prioritized on an annual basis with the Greenways & Trails Commission, the Land Conservation Advisory Board, representatives of cities and towns in Buncombe County, County management and the County Commissioners.

The purpose of this review is to set forth a 12-month or two-year strategy for Parks, Greenways & Recreation Services to help guide how they pursue grants, what they request for annual budget allocation, how they interact with neighborhoods and organizations, and how they engage non-profits, land conservancies, schools and other partners.

Some of the Action Steps are ambitious and will require significant efforts beyond designing and constructing greenways. If it determined, for example, that a three-year or five-year period should be devoted almost exclusively to construction, then the tradeoffs among other Action Steps should be evaluated to determine the impacts of such a focus and which partners might be willing to help carry out other Action Steps.

Beyond Implementation

At some point in the future this Plan will be outdated. Most long-range plans require some type of revision approximately 10 years after adoption unless major actions or requirements change these assumptions. The Plan can evolve by incorporating its findings into other planning efforts undertaken by the County, cities and towns, and partners. Land use plans, small area plans, transportation plans, infrastructure/utility plans and strategic plans should consider how they influence greenways and trails and the findings of this plan.



Asheville's Glenn's Creek Greenway is an example of a matured greenway that represents several facets of sound implementation strategies. Destinations along the route are easily accessible, multi-modal transportation connections are prevalent, and a key regional stakeholder, UNC Asheville, conducts day-to-day maintenance and trail patrol.

Cultivate Existing Partnerships & Identify New Partners

Build upon the momentum created by Connect Buncombe and the Greenways Please campaign to formalize existing partnerships and pursue new partners with public and private sector interests.

Engaging different organizations in fundraising efforts can be challenging, as some will desire short-term marketing-based partnerships while others may become long-term contributors to volunteer, land acquisition, or construction efforts. It's important to cultivate these relationships among a diverse set of partners to maintain and create momentum for greenways and trails.

There already exists tremendous energy among the public, private and non-profit sectors in Buncombe County to pursue greenways. This was evident through the Connect Buncombe / Greenways Please campaign that ran concurrently with the Greenways and Trails Master Plan. This built upon efforts by cities and towns, organizations such as RiverLink and the YMCA, and businesses along the rivers and existing greenways, who have been promoting programs and investments in greenways.

Other communities across the United States have built partnerships that diversify the foundation of support for greenways and trails. Places such as Greenville, SC, have found willing partners in the health sector. Chattanooga, TN, and the Trust for Public Land partnered to preserve properties as places to construct greenways or connect via greenways. Pittsburgh, PA, engaged a multi-faceted team of partners and landowners to fund long-distance trail construction and rails-to-trails conversions. During the Greenways Please campaign Buncombe County found willing partners in a local ice cream shop and local coffee roaster, showing that partners can come from many different business sectors.

The Connect Buncombe effort is poised to create a network of volunteers and organizations who can pursue funding and provide some level of maintenance and management of the greenways system. Other partners such as non-profits, niche markets, and major employers also have a role to play.



Identify Strategic Grant Opportunities

Work with County leaders, non-profits, local and regional governments, and major employers to methodically identify the most appropriate funding sources for new projects and programs.



Since greenways serve both a recreational and transportation function, as well as provide access to rural areas, natural areas, schools, parks and neighborhoods, this diversity makes greenways and programs that support them an eligible expenditure through a variety of sources. Non-profit organizations, foundations, state grants and federal funding are available for a variety of program and project investments. Many require some level of local contribution, or match, to leverage the grant.

While greenways present many opportunities, it is important to be strategic in how funding is pursued. Some sources of funding have application and reporting requirements that necessitate many hours of staff time to organize an application. This can equate to thousands of dollar of personnel resources just to pursue the grant. Projects funded through federal sources have less dollar-for-dollar buying power due to more stringent design requirements, reporting standards, environmental analysis and administrative fees applied to the grant from state agencies responsible for overseeing the grant program. To strategically identify and pursue the best grants for the best projects and programs, Buncombe County should:

- ◆ Seek input from non-profits, cities and towns, state agencies, and other partners on which funding sources best fit the project or program being pursued.
- ◆ Organize annual funding meetings with cities, towns and non-profits to avoid having several communities or agencies compete for the same funding source.
- ◆ Identify organizations, individuals or companies that can provide “soft match”—typically through human resources or land dedication—where allowable through funding sources.
- ◆ Recognize that partnerships and volunteers are not free and not always easy to manage.
- ◆ Take advantage of funding sources for programs and marketing.

Secure Local Funding Commitments

Identify available funding through Buncombe County’s annual budget for implementation of the Greenways & Trails Master Plan. Coordinate programs and projects investment with cities and towns.

The efforts to develop a countywide greenway system begins with a commitment of funding via the County’s annual budget to conduct a variety of tasks related to building the greenway system, ensuring its usage and promotion, coordinating volunteer efforts, and maintaining the system. Greenways, and the many efforts that support them, are an emerging role for Buncombe County. The County is urbanizing with notable growth around existing communities. This urbanization leads to an expectation among residents and businesses for certain type of services, including greenways.

Adoption of this plan does not require any specific level of funding allocation for greenways. That is for County leaders and Commissioners to determine in consideration of other funding needs. The level of effort County staff provides for greenways is dependent upon this funding and the degree to which partnerships (addressed in Action Step #3) are utilize to maximize and build upon the County’s commitment.

Short-term strategies for securing local funding commitments can include:

- ◆ Annual allocation of funding for staff, programs, projects & maintenance.
- ◆ Strategies for use of General Obligation Bonds for major greenway investments.
- ◆ Develop a Memorandum of Understanding of funding expectations with local governments and partners.
- ◆ Identify where shared use of facilities for greenways and trails management and maintenance can be located in coordination with cities and towns.

Long-term funding strategies could include:

- ◆ Dedicated funding source, via specialized revenue sources as allowed by law.
- ◆ Pursue partnerships for maintenance and land acquisition with state agencies such as State Parks, utilities and the Department of Transportation.



Create a Landowner Outreach Program

Develop strategies along with a robust program to maintain consistent contact with landowners adjacent to planned greenways as the County and its partners work toward acquiring property for greenways.



The number of landowners that are likely to be engaged as the County plans for and implements the Priority Corridor identified in this plan will require, as detailed in Chapter 5, a focused, well-orchestrated and well-managed landowner outreach effort. This effort will require a long-term commitment and potentially a partnership with the real estate community. Six elements were identified to create a comprehensive landowner outreach program.

1. **Research & Education.** This element addresses the need to demonstrate to landowners that a cohesive vision is in place, is supported by a wide constituency, and how the project can benefit the landowner.
2. **Ownership.** A listing of landowner contacts along the greenway corridors will be necessary for communication and outreach work. It is also valuable to identify properties along Priority Corridors when they go on the market for sale and create a right-of-way account to acquire properties as they come up for sale.
3. **Prioritization.** Acquisition ranking criteria can be applied to identify the highest priority properties within the focus corridor areas.
4. **Coordination with County Leaders.** This element addresses the need to make sure that feasible alternatives with land/easement acquisition issues and project design have been identified and analyzed for their ability to benefit the most citizens at acceptable costs.
5. **Conduct Outreach and Education.** The information gained from previous tasks can be presented to landowners within the greenway corridor. During outreach efforts it will be important to enhance dialogue with landowners.
6. **Encouraging Participation.** Engaging landowners early and offering regular dialogue with them can help when the acquisition process begins and allay fears about how greenways are designed and constructed.

Pursue Conservation via Ordinances & Alliances

Update conservation subdivision ordinance & Develop Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with area land conservancies to define potential roles in pursuing land acquisition that promote connectivity.

The County’s land conservation program is a highly successful program that has resulted in the preservation of thousands of acres of open space throughout Buncombe County. Currently, the program is designed to protect large tracts of land meeting specified criteria. Connections among these large tracts currently are not assigned high priority. However, there is a need to connect the open spaces with natural corridors that provide a link for both human and wildlife movement. This need will grow as the County continues to urbanize. An expansion of the land conservation program’s mission, to include preserving connections among the open spaces in the County, would benefit all users of the open spaces.



Another recommended change would revise the administration of the option for conservation subdivisions permitted in steep slope areas. Currently, the focus is on the conservation of large tracts of open space within subdivisions. Pathways for walking and running, such as would be provided by greenways, are identified as passive recreation areas and are limited to no more than 5% of the conserved area. The revision of this policy to identify greenways as a permitted use within conserved areas and permitting greenways to be dedicated to the County for maintenance and operation would promote development of greenways in new subdivisions.

Land conservancies can help play a role via a formal alliance with the County that:

- ◆ Identifies appropriate roles for the County and conservancies.
- ◆ Is tailored to the context of each conservancy.
- ◆ Delineates types of land that are for protection vs. lands for public use.
- ◆ Creates opportunities for agricultural preservation & agritourism.
- ◆ Outlines a strategy for land banking for future greenway corridors.

THE TRUST for PUBLIC LAND



Amend Ordinances to Support Greenways

Adopt new and revised ordinances related to requirements for dedication of land along planned greenways through new development, floodway protection, and conservation subdivisions.



Adoption of new and revised ordinances will be necessary to implement the policy changes recommended throughout the Plan.

Development Requirements. One of the strategies was the requirement that land be set aside for, and, in some cases, greenways constructed as part of land development by private developers. The revision of ordinances establishing the standards for land development should be pursued to address the dedication of land for greenways and, where appropriate, the construction of greenways. Buncombe County's subdivision ordinance currently sets standards for the provision of open space in subdivisions located on steep slopes, but it neither establishes general standards for open space nor does it identify greenways as meeting open space standards.

Fee in Lieu. Buncombe County should establish a fee in lieu option to the provision of open space and construction of greenways. Such an option allows developers to pay a fee in lieu of providing open space or other identified required amenities within a development. The fees can be used for land acquisition for, construction of, and/or maintenance of greenways, as well as other activities related to the identified purpose of the open space.

Floodwater Protection. Amendment of the County's flood protection ordinance is recommended to encourage greenways within floodways. Incentives can be provided to property owners who allow the location of greenways within floodways. Ordinances prohibiting paved greenways within required stream buffers should be revised to permit hard surfaced greenways if best management practices and low impact development techniques are used to reduce the impact of stormwater runoff.

Complete Streets. In devising a Complete Streets policy, the County's ordinances should be revised to require construction of pedestrian facilities as part of new development in areas with urban density. Greenways should be identified as an option for providing pedestrian facilities. Ordinance changes can assist in addressing the challenge of funding greenway development.

Conduct Detailed Plans for Priority Corridors

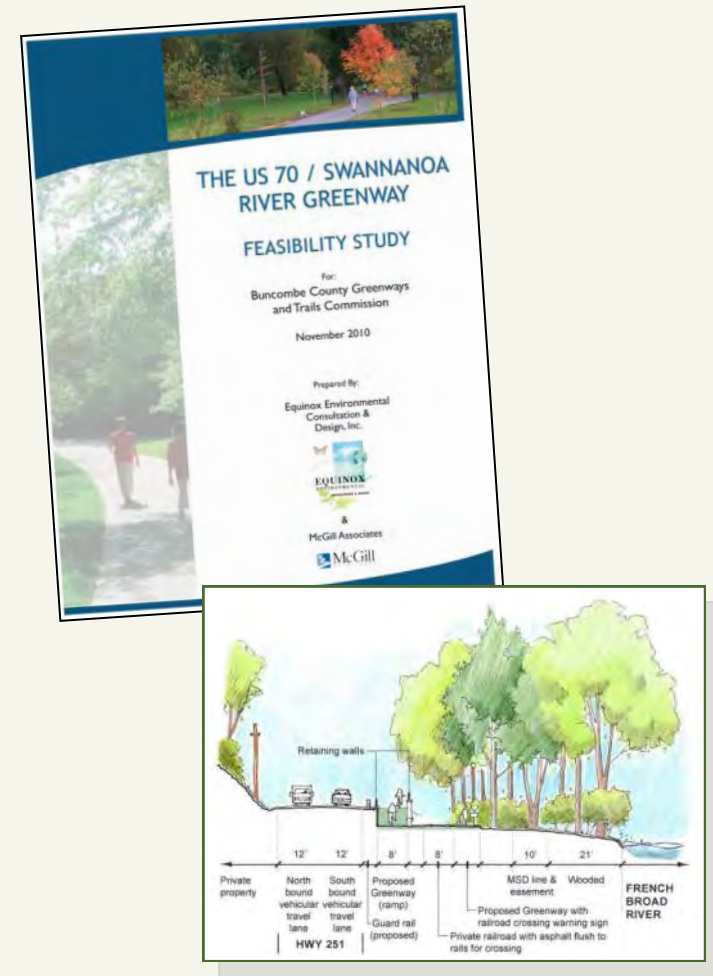
Develop corridor-specific plans similar to the US 70/Swannanoa River Greenway and French Broad River/NC 251 Feasibility Studies along the five new Priority Corridors identified in the Plan.

Prior to the Greenways & Trails Master Plan, Buncombe County conducted detailed feasibility studies for the US 70 / Swannanoa River Greenway and the French Broad River / NC 251 Greenway. Each of these corridors connect to the planned Wilma Dykeman RiverWay, which underwent a detailed corridor study adopted in 2004. These studies provide the foundation for detailed design efforts by analyzing the placement of the planned greenway by conducting field work, evaluating terrain and constraints, identifying the types of landowners present in the corridor, and defining preliminary cost estimates of construction.

The Greenways & Trails Master Plan identifies five new Priority Corridors that should undergo a similar study. These studies typically require some level of preliminary design and identification of features such as bridge, access points, trailheads, parking areas, types of amenities specific to the corridor, and other structures. If for purposes of making strategic land purchases, pursuing grant funding for design, or placing requirements upon a developer for constructing a greenway, then a planning-based feasibility study should be conducted. These types of studies typically range from \$40,000 to \$70,000 per corridor. If implementation is more imminent or a funding source is identified for construction, this may necessitate a full design effort, which can cost up to \$200,000, depending on the length of the corridor.

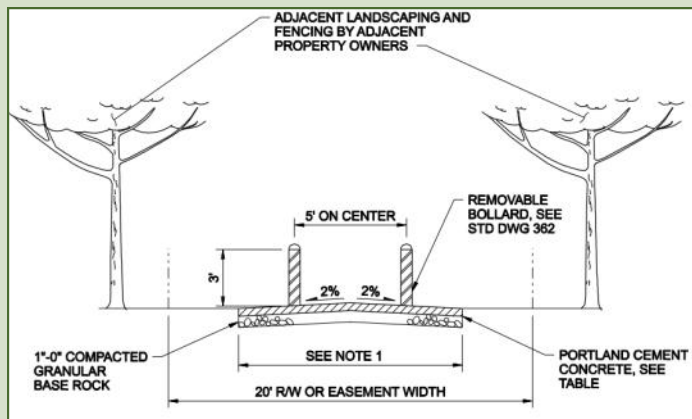
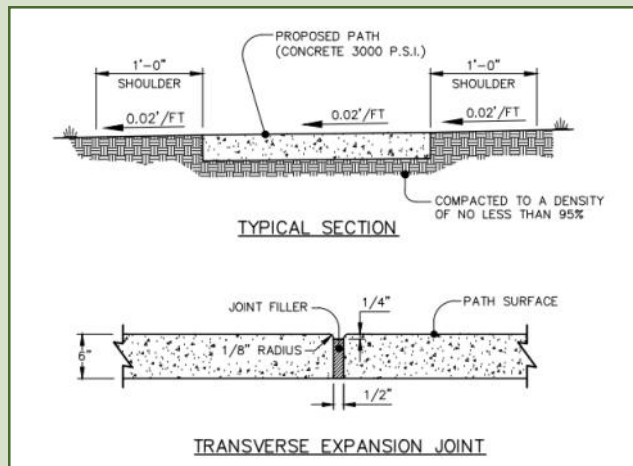
Buncombe County should be partnering with cities and towns for funding and outreach when these corridors cross municipal boundaries. In developing these studies, the County should:

- ◆ Prioritize the five priority corridors for study once funding is available;
- ◆ Be proactive in meeting with funding partners, MSD, NCDOT, French Broad River MPO, the Blue Ridge Parkway, utilities, and others; and
- ◆ Integrate these studies with the Landowner Outreach Program.



Develop Standards & Specifications for Greenways

Work with cities and towns to develop a common set of design standards and specifications to be applied to new greenway construction to ensure consistent construction standards and maintainability.



Greenways are safer and require less maintenance when they are designed, not just built. The complexities in building greenways along rivers and streams, in areas with steep terrain, or through areas constrained by the built environment, necessitate the establishment of a set of design standards. Greenways and trails in different settings require very different design considerations to account for the environment in which they are built and differing requirements for universal accessibility. Municipalities have standards and specifications that establish how streets, stormwater systems, water lines, sewer lines, culverts, bridges and other infrastructure is constructed. A similar set of standards and specifications for greenways will help promote consistent design that is compliant with prevailing design standards and across jurisdictional boundaries.

It is recommended that Buncombe County along with the cities and towns partner to develop a set of greenway- and trail-specific design standards. These standards would be adopted by each government agency to help guide how greenways and trails are constructed and ensure consistency in basic design parameters across jurisdictions. This should include:

- ◆ Design specification for typologies, bridges, tunnels, railings, materials, amenities, parking areas, bicycle parking and signage;
- ◆ Accessibility standards to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and associated Accessibility Guidelines;
- ◆ Common street interface / intersection designs;
- ◆ Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles; and
- ◆ Methods for documenting design exceptions when these design standards cannot be met due to constraints in the natural or built environment.

Organize a Greenways Training Program

Develop a training program for new volunteers and partners who wish to work on maintaining trails, conducting programs along the greenways and constructing some facilities.

Working with partners and the National Trails Training Program (NTP) to develop a greenway-specific curriculum will help volunteers, design and planning professionals, contractors, and other partners who wish to design and construct trail facilities, work on maintaining trails, and conduct programs along the greenways. The training program would provide educational opportunities and resources to educate people about greenways and make sure trails are constructed and maintained to a high standard of safety and accessibility. Since there is an increased reliance on volunteers, such a training program will help keep volunteers safe as well as improve safety for trail users.

The Georgia Trails and Greenways Program office coordinates trainings on trail construction, trail maintenance and trail education. They offer Trail School with courses on Design and Layout; Construction and Maintenance, and Crew Leader training programs. The Program has also funded trail signs, maps and other efforts.

Items to include in a training program include:

- ◆ Assessment checklist
- ◆ Procedures to ensure consistent application
- ◆ Skills for:
 - ◇ Maintenance
 - ◇ Accessible greenways and trails maintenance
 - ◇ Bicycle & pedestrian facility maintenance
 - ◇ Trailhead / parking area facility maintenance
- ◆ Training support for developers, design professionals, surveyors and contractors.



Photo: Asheville Greenworks

Evaluate Performance

Understand the degree to which greenways and trails are playing a role in the region by regularly collecting data on usage, economic impact, environmental impacts and program implementation.

A greater degree of emphasis is being placed on evaluating and documenting how well projects, programs and policies related to greenways are performing. In some cases, requirements for measuring performance of an investment come from funding sources or policy makers who oversee funding programs. Below are several categories of methods to evaluate greenways and trails investment. Whether or not they are required by a funding source or by law, it is good practice to be tracking measure such as these to help provide documentation for grant pursuits, confidently showcase the benefits of the system to the public, and help evaluate how and where future investments are made. Partners, volunteers and the Greenways Commission can assist in collecting some of this information and the ability to collect some measures may not be possible in the short-term.

Greenways & Trails Performance Measures

Facilities

- Miles of greenways & trails
- New miles of greenways & trails
- Residents within 1-mile of access points
- Corridor Plans completed
- Connectivity of other bike/ped facilities, river access, recreational opportunities, closing gaps
- Change in costs over time

Funding / Resources

- Annual allocation / contributions
- Staff time
- Number of funding partners
- Grants pursued / awarded
- Number of volunteer hours

Usage / Participation

- User counts, by mode, user type
- Program participants
- Members of Connect Buncombe
- People engaged through public outreach
- Economic impacts
- Presentations to neighborhood groups, businesses, schools, etc.
- Participants in education, encouragement & training activities
- Adopt-a-Greenway partners
- Safe Routes to Schools

Others

- Acreage preserved for future use, environmental & agricultural conservation
- New jobs located near greenways
- Change in health factors (long-term)

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