

SUSTAINABILITY ANNUAL REPORT FOR BUNCOMBE COUNTY



INTRODUCTION

BUNCOMBE COUNTY'S Sustainability Plan was adopted four years ago, on May 15, 2012. The Plan outlined a five year process for improving Buncombe County's community, economy, and environment. Within these three areas, 14 goals were adopted as part of the original Plan. This fourth year Annual Report provides information related to the 14 goals, their objectives, and the indicators used to measure progress. At the bottom of each goal page is the "Sustainability in Action" area, highlighting specific programs or accomplishments during this period.

In the Sustainability Plan, as well as within each of the Annual Reports, photos have been used that represent each of the goals. These photos have been graciously provided by local sustainability partners including County staff, outside agencies and organizations. The photos are of people, places and activities within our beautiful County, and we are grateful for the stories our partners have shared through their pictures as well as their words.

Information in the Sustainability Annual Report comes from many sources. Most information is directly reported from those individuals whose daily work activities impact the indicators' status. These individuals and those with whom they work maintain high quality programs and strive to improve services for Buncombe County. In addition to reports that are received annually from our sustainability partners, data is also tracked through agency reports and websites.

This fourth year Annual Report tracks the progress that has been made on implementing strategies related to the 14 Sustainability Goals and their objectives. Buncombe County remains committed to accomplishing each of the goals through the conscious decisions we make as County departments and outside partnering agencies in regard to our expenditures of time, resources, and effort. It is only by being aware and intentional in our actions that we can make improvements to our community, environment, and economy.



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

COMMUNITY



EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES THAT MATCH THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

- Increase high school graduation rate.
- Increase access to higher education.
- Expand quality and quantity of early childhood development programs.
- Increase parent and community involvement in the educational system and in the education of individual children.
- Promote programs that supplement equitable educational opportunities for all ages.
- Ensure that all children are reading at grade level by the end of 3rd grade or have a reading intervention program/curriculum in place.



HEALTHY PEOPLE

- Decrease rates of childhood and adult obesity.
- Reduce tobacco use and exposure to second hand smoke.
- Assure the availability of a medical home for all to increase appropriate, age-specific health screenings and preventative care and improve equality in access to health care.
- Decrease infant mortality and low weight births.
- Increase access to mental health and substance abuse prevention programs.
- Increase access to affordable health insurance.



AFFORDABLE, GREEN, AND LIVABLE HOUSING

- Provide educational opportunities in financial planning and homebuyer education.
- Expand housing rehabilitation and repair programs.
- Provide affordable and workforce housing assistance funding for new developments in areas with existing infrastructure.
- Promote home ownership while also supporting quality rental developments that are required to remain affordable and safe.
- Ensure the availability of a diverse housing stock.
- Ensure that County regulations, ordinances, and other programs do not impede, and where possible, provide incentives for the adoption of sustainable products and strategies.



CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DECISIONS

- Create partnerships across multiple sectors of the community to reduce duplication of services and to assist in prioritizing and funding initiatives.
- Increase opportunities for civic engagement and participation.
- Ensure that information reaches citizens.
- Value and respect the contributions of all Buncombe County citizens.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES



EQUITY IN ACCESS

- Improve equality in access to health care.
- Promote an array of transportation options.
- Increase quantity and quality of recreational activities.
- Build an extensive network of social services with locations in each high school district.
- Increase the availability of locally produced foods to low income individuals and increase their educational opportunities regarding farms and locally produced foods.
- Ensure reliable access to information resources (i.e. broadband internet).



SAFE, LOW-CRIME COMMUNITIES

- Support neighborhood watches and community policing.
- Foster a sense of neighborhood pride and civic responsibility.
- Provide a comprehensive criminal justice system that includes law enforcement, court staff, alternative treatment providers, and members of the community who collaborate to deliver justice while protecting the public.
- Promote crime prevention through environmental design for residences, businesses and our parks.



RESISTANCE TO NATURAL AND MANMADE HAZARDS

- Locate critical facilities outside high hazard areas.
- Ensure local preparedness for emergencies (floods, fuel shortages, climate change, fire, droughts, earthquakes, food shortages, landslides, hazardous materials incidents, medical epidemics, etc.).



HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS

- Improve and increase opportunities for safe, active living.
- Promote healthy buildings and homes.
- Decrease unintentional injuries.
- Improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

The following Objectives have been added since the Plan adoption in order to provide additional guidance to reach our goals:

AFFORDABLE, GREEN, AND LIVABLE HOUSING

- Work in partnership with outside organizations to assist families in finding safe, affordable housing.

SAFE, LOW-CRIME COMMUNITIES

- Engage with the community as a partner to problem solve community issues.
- Provide a comprehensive public safety system in which communication between agencies is seamless and effective, and staff is continually trained using best methods and practice.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

ENVIRONMENT



PARTNERSHIPS FOR CONSERVATION/PRESERVATION/RESTORATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

- Conserve and protect water resources.
- Protect ecological systems/wildlife.
- Promote energy conservation programs.
- Restore natural resources.
- Encourage sustainable land use.
- Educate the public to help them reduce their environmental footprints.



POLLUTION AND WASTE PREVENTION

- Improve air quality.
- Improve water quality.
- Reduce the use of harmful chemicals.
- Manage waste – reduce, reuse, recycle.



ACCESSIBLE, MULTI-MODAL, AND EFFICIENT TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

- Reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT).
- Increase multi-modal options.
- Encourage land development connected to existing transportation corridors.
- Promote access to goods and services in areas of significant population density and in neighborhood hubs.

ECONOMY



SUSTAINABLE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

- Promote farmland preservation and decrease loss of agricultural land.
- Promote sustainable agricultural production and personal and community gardening in connection with the County's agricultural heritage.
- Increase demand for locally produced foods.



SUSTAINABLE LOCALIZED ECONOMY

- Provide incentives to businesses for growth.
- Encourage a “business-friendly” regulatory environment.
- Promote “Buy Local” programs.
- Ensure a diverse economy with competitive wages.
- Support small business development.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- Identify and reduce barriers to employment (e.g., childcare, transportation, housing, insurance).
- Provide robust job training that fits present and anticipated workforce demand.
- Encourage collaboration among workforce and educational institutions.

COMMUNITY

Buncombe County promotes a sense of community through public engagement. We celebrate a healthy, safe, well-educated, and thriving community with a sustainable quality of life.

The Buncombe County Sustainability Plan Vision Statement



CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Buncombe County YouTube views in 2015 were

195,564

AFFORDABLE, GREEN AND LIVABLE HOUSING

For FY17, housing applications for construction projects on existing infrastructure will continue to be prioritized to receive affordable housing funding.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Asheville City Schools published a new 5-year strategic plan with three focus points – Early Childhood, Academic Achievement, and Whole Child.



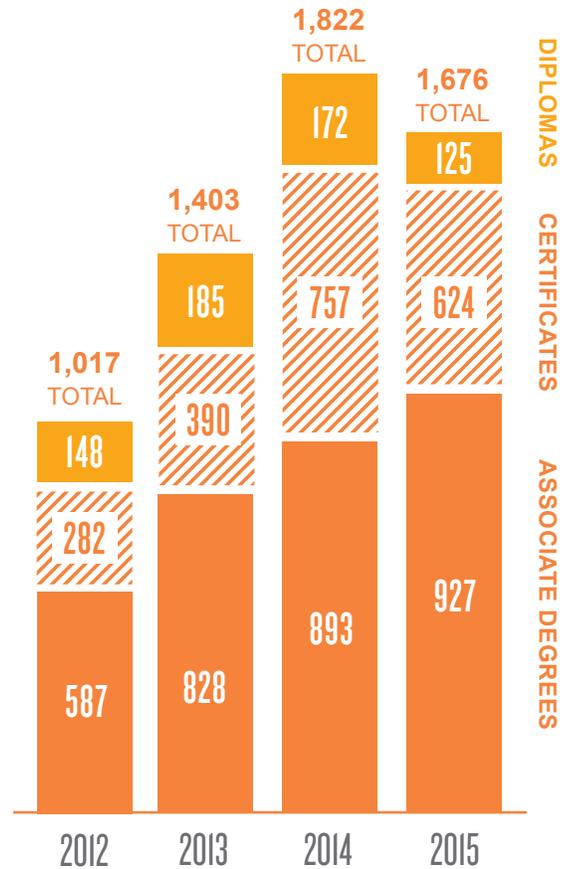
The Buncombe County Special Olympics Young Athletes Program for children ages two through seven provides an opportunity for youth to participate in fun activities which helps them develop motor skills and hand-eye coordination.



EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES THAT MATCH THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

PROGRESS

- **Increase high school graduation rate.**
 - The high school graduation rate for Buncombe County Schools (BCS) has improved from 73.1% in the 2010-2011 school year to 85.2% in the 2014-2015 school year.
 - The Asheville City Schools (ACS) graduation rate increased from 73.7% in the 2010-2011 school year to 85.4% in the 2014-2015 school year.
- **Expand quality and quantity of early childhood development programs.**
 - The number of children enrolled in pre-K programs has fallen from 5,235 in 2011 to 4,101 in 2015.
- **Increase parent and community involvement in the educational system and in the education of individual children.**
 - The number of volunteer hours contributed to the Buncombe County School System increased from 102,178 in the 2009–2010 school year to 121,140 in the 2014-2015 school year.
- **Ensure that all children are reading at grade level by the end of 3rd grade or have a reading intervention program/curriculum in place.**
 - The rate of Buncombe County Schools’ 3rd grade students reading at grade level has increased from 52.4% in the 2012-2013 school year to 63.9% in the 2014-2015 school year.



Number of Individuals Receiving Associate Degrees, Certificates and Diplomas at A-B Tech

SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- Literacy continues to be a major focus for BCS. New teachers and new teachers to K-3 grade levels are trained each fall on best literacy practices. School literacy teams collaborate in conjunction with curriculum specialists and instructional coaches to provide ongoing professional development for teachers. State mandated mCLASS benchmark assessments are completed three times each year with progress monitoring and interventions for those students who are at-risk of not being on grade level.
- ACS is constructing two new schools, Asheville Middle School and Isaac Dickson Elementary. Buncombe County has invested approximately \$56 million in these two facilities, both of which are designed around sustainable principles and enhanced learning. The new Isaac Dickson Elementary school may become the 'greenest' school in the state and perhaps the Southeast.





HEALTHY PEOPLE

PROGRESS

- **Decrease rates of childhood and adult obesity.**
 - The percentage of diagnosed obesity among adults age 20 and older in Buncombe County decreased from 24% in 2009 to 23.5% in 2015.
 - The prevalence of overweight and obesity among students in kindergarten through fifth grade increased from 33.17% in 2012 to 33.8% in 2015.
 - The percentage of adults meeting physical activity guidelines decreased from 62.1% in 2012 to 55.7% in 2015.
- **Decrease infant mortality and low weight births.**
 - The percentage of low birth weight decreased from 10% in 2012 to 9.2% in 2015.
 - The infant mortality rate has increased from 5.4 per 1,000 live births in 2010 to 6.6 in 2015.
- **Assure the availability of a medical home for all to increase appropriate, age-specific health screenings and preventative care and improve equality in access to health care.**
 - The percent of people without access to mental health care or counseling has increased from 6.6% in 2012 to 8.3% in 2015.
 - The rates of uninsured non-elderly adults decreased from 23.6% in 2012 to 19.2% in 2015.
- **Reduce tobacco use and exposure to second hand smoke.**
 - The smoking rate in Buncombe County decreased from 17.5% in 2009 to 15% in 2015.

SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- Buncombe County's Health and Human Services (HHS) partners with MANNA Food Bank to distribute nutrient dense, perishable food to citizens who qualify for federal food assistance. At each of the nine distribution sites across the County, which are set up like small farmers markets, residents are able to choose healthy foods in these "pop-up markets" while connecting with neighbors and volunteers. From June 2014 to June 2015, the pop-up program has distributed 176,169 pounds of food (approximately 146,807 meals) to families throughout the County. The markets are voluntarily staffed by Community Service Navigators with HHS to ensure residents have information on immunizations, HIV and STDs, flu prevention, and safe sleep for babies. Cooperative Extension agents provide cooking demonstrations at the markets, and law enforcement officers are there to build relationships with residents.





AFFORDABLE, GREEN, AND LIVABLE HOUSING

PROGRESS

- **Provide affordable and workforce housing assistance funding for new developments in areas with existing infrastructure.**
 - Funding in support of affordable housing continues to be a priority. Since FY11, over \$2.8 million has been allocated to support affordable housing through the Affordable Housing Services Program.
- **Work in partnership with outside organizations to assist families in finding safe, affordable housing.**
 - Through the affordable housing programs supported in the County, 781 families have been assisted since FY11.
- **Provide educational opportunities in financial planning and homebuyer education.**
 - Through OnTrack and Habitat for Humanity's educational efforts, 1,569 individuals have participated in financial planning and homebuyer education classes since FY11.

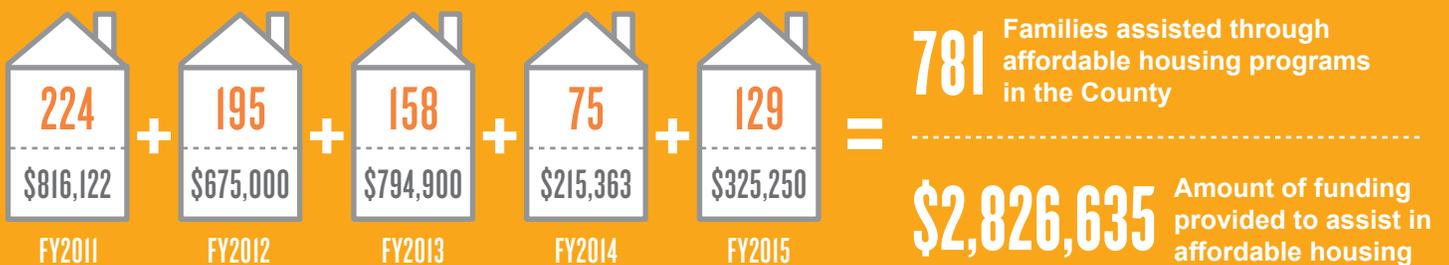


SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- In April 2016, Asheville Area Habitat for Humanity celebrated the relationship between the City of Asheville, the County of Buncombe and the nonprofit by breaking ground for a new house. This affordable, Green Built NC house is named in honor of the public funds that helped create the infrastructure for the West Asheville subdivision, where it will be the last and 25th house constructed.

The house is located on Soulshine Court, a new street built off Johnston Boulevard and named for a Warren Haynes song, in honor of the musician's years of commitment to Asheville Area Habitat. The street was created with a combination of grants and loans from Buncombe County's Affordable Housing Services Program and from Housing and Urban Development (HUD) HOME funds through the City of Asheville. This creative collaboration between the County, the City, and a nonprofit demonstrates the commitment needed from many sources to address the affordable housing crisis faced by so many Buncombe County residents.

The energy-efficient 3-bedroom house will be purchased by a single mother with two children, who works for another nonprofit performing intake services for veterans. Like so many others in our County, she works hard on behalf of others but falls short in her ability to purchase a safe, affordable home for her family. After completing 200 hours of sweat equity – or volunteer labor helping to build her house – she will close on the home and begin paying a zero-percent interest mortgage. When completed, the City/County House will be the 293rd house built by Asheville Area Habitat for Humanity in Buncombe County.





CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DECISIONS

PROGRESS

- **Increase opportunities for civic engagement and participation.**
 - In 2013, 2,700 individuals volunteered 22,000 hours with nonprofits. In 2015, more than 3,400 individuals volunteered 23,000 hours with 170 nonprofits. The volunteer participation rate for Asheville is 29% and Asheville is ranked 30th in the country for mid-size cities.
 - The number of youth involved in four nonprofit organizations (YMCA of Western North Carolina; the YWCA of Asheville; the Girl Scouts, Buncombe County; and Boy Scouts of America, Daniel Boone Council) was 19,360 in 2010 and increased to 20,813 in 2015.
- **Ensure that information reaches citizens.**
 - Links for additional sources of information on the Building Permits & Inspections page of the County's website have increased from eight in 2012 to 53 in 2015.
 - The number of users of Buncombe County social media continues to increase:
 - Facebook friends - 316 in 2011 and in 2015 there were 4,196.
 - Twitter followers - 460 in 2011 and in 2015 there were 3,969.
 - E-Zine subscribers – 5,000 in 2010 and in 2015 there were 3,100.
 - Buncombe County funding for community, economic, and cultural development increased from \$13,282,070 in FY11 to \$15,075,977 in FY16.
 - The percent of residents not proficient in English was 3% in 2009 and dropped to 1.8% in 2015.
- **Value and respect the contributions of all Buncombe County citizens.**
 - The number of surveys collected with comments and feedback from participants of Parks and Recreation programs and facilities jumped from 98 in 2012 to 1,500 in 2015.

SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

Volunteer Services for Region B (Buncombe, Henderson, Transylvania, and Madison counties) reports that over 600 senior adult volunteers served more than 190,000 hours through the Foster Grandparent Program (FGP), Senior Companion Program (SCP), and Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). In FY15, Volunteer Services sponsored three events:

- 9/11 National Day of Service and Remembrance: Volunteer Services sponsored a toiletry drive for Operation North State, a nonprofit organization that sends holiday boxes to North Carolina troops overseas.
- Martin Luther King, Jr. National Day of Service: Volunteer Services partnered with Hands-On Asheville-Buncombe and AmeriCorps to celebrate the MLK National Day of Service. An estimated 200 volunteers gathered to work on six "Hands On" service projects.
- Mayors' and Elected Officials' Day of Service: Volunteers gathered in each of the four counties to celebrate National Service with local Mayors and other elected officials.





EQUITY IN ACCESS

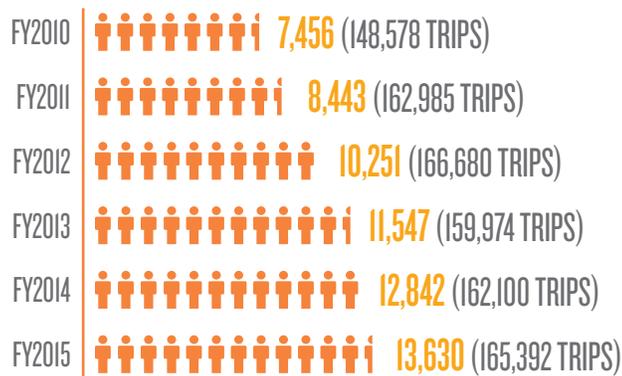
PROGRESS

- **Improve equality in access to health care.**
 - The ratio of primary health care providers to population has improved from one per 821 in 2012 to one per 786 in 2015.
- **Promote an array of transportation options.**
 - Miles of Asheville Redefines Transit (ART) routes have increased from 176.2 in 2010 to 179.7 in 2015.
 - Miles of sidewalks in the County have increased from 417.3 in 2011 to 493.2 in 2015.
 - Mountain Mobility ridership has increased from 148,578 trips provided for 7,456 subscribed passengers in FY10 to 165,392 trips provided for 13,630 subscribed passengers in FY15.
 - A 0.4 mile section of greenway was completed in 2015 adding to the existing 13 miles of County greenways, for a total of 13.4 miles.



MOUNTAIN MOBILITY RIDERSHIP HAS INCREASED

SUBSCRIBED PASSENGERS



- **Increase quantity and quality of recreational activities.**
 - The number of athletes involved in the Special Olympics increased from 518 in 2012 to 522 athletes in 2015.
 - The number of municipally owned parks, pools, and recreation centers in the County increased from 92 in 2012 to 101 in 2015.
- **Increase the availability of locally produced foods to low income individuals and increase their educational opportunities regarding farms and locally produced foods.**
 - The Buncombe County Cooperative Extension provided technical assistance to 19 school gardens in 2012. There were 27 school gardens in 2015.
 - There were three community gardens on County property in 2013 and in 2015 there were at least 13.
 - The Buncombe County Cooperative Extension educated the community on healthy food options and preparation through Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) nutrition classes. Participation in the classes decreased from 2,511 in 2012 to 2,500 children and adults in 2015.

SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- The Buncombe County Special Olympics hosts year round athletic programs including powerlifting, bowling, swimming, soccer, bocce, basketball, gymnastics, and cheerleading. Approximately 50 athletes compete in these events annually. In addition, Buncombe County Special Olympics hosts the annual Spring Games where 500 athletes compete locally, requiring the support of approximately 1,000 generous volunteers and support personnel.





SAFE, LOW CRIME COMMUNITIES

PROGRESS

- **Support neighborhood watches and community policing.**
 - In 2015, 19 new community watch programs were established, for a total of 162 programs throughout the County. This has increased from 84 programs in August 2011.
- **Foster a sense of neighborhood pride and civic responsibility.**
 - A drop box for disposal of unused prescription and illegal drugs was offered throughout the year, and two Drug Take Back events were held, in which 735 pounds of drugs were collected. With the 2,328 pounds collected in the previous three years, 3,063 pounds of drugs have been collected to date through these programs.
 - The detention prevention vehicle visited schools and was featured at 15 different events in 2015.
 - The Major Mouse program reached 865 children during school visits.
- **Provide a comprehensive criminal justice system that includes law enforcement, court staff, alternative treatment providers, and members of the community who collaborate to deliver justice while protecting the public.**
 - The number of offenders supervised by Pretrial Release increased from 1,197 in 2012 to 1,522 in 2015. This saved 98,930 jail days that offenders awaiting trial may otherwise have spent in the detention facility.
 - The average response time for emergency calls has decreased from 10.75 minutes in 2007 to 8.42 minutes in 2015, with the call volume increasing to 70,125 calls.
- **Provide a comprehensive public safety system in which communication between agencies is seamless and effective, and staff is continually trained using best methods and practices.**
 - There were 178 additional officers trained in Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) in 2015, bringing the total to 450.

SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- In 2015, 26 residences/businesses received information about crime proofing their individual locations. The Community Oriented Problem Solving (COPS) Team works within the community and seeks partnerships to facilitate good relations and learning opportunities.
- The Buncombe County Anti-Crime Task Force (BCAT) is the longest running multi-agency drug task force in the state. BCAT's main objective is to address long-term narcotic investigations and to disrupt narcotic sales and flow through Buncombe County, the City of Asheville, and western North Carolina. The total street value of seizures (including vehicles, currency, drugs, and firearms) from this unit's work is over \$8.2 million.

DRUGS COLLECTED

2,328 + **735**
POUNDS + POUNDS
IN FY2012 - 2014 IN FY2015



Drug Take Back Program





RESISTANCE TO NATURAL AND MANMADE HAZARDS

PROGRESS

- **Locate critical facilities outside high hazard areas.**
 - A private middle school was permitted this year in the 100-year floodplain, but outside the floodway. This is the first critical facility to be built within the 100-year floodplain since the adoption of the Sustainability Plan.
- **Ensure local preparedness for emergencies (floods, fuel shortages, climate change, fire, droughts, earthquakes, food shortages, landslides, hazardous materials incidents, medical epidemics, etc.).**
 - Since 2003, 265 individuals have received Community Emergency Response (CERT) training. No funding was available in 2014 or 2015 for training new responders.
 - Through the Public Safety Training Center, 10,644 emergency service providers and law enforcement personnel received training in 2015, bringing the total to 31,092 since the Center was opened in 2013.
 - In 2015, 65% of jurisdictional dams with a dam hazard potential of high or intermediate had an Emergency Action Plan in place. This has increased from 20.8% in 2012.



SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- Flood events can occur throughout the year and throughout the County. The worst flood event in 2015 occurred on December 28, and primarily hit northern and eastern Buncombe County. There were eight water rescues made by fire departments during the storm, with people being assisted from their homes as well as their vehicles. There were 38 post flood inspections that occurred involving both a building official and the floodplain manager to determine if homes could still be occupied safely. No structure was condemned due to the storm damage, but several repair permits were necessary.
- In 2014, the most damaging flood event occurred on April 28, primarily affecting the Town of Woodfin in northern Buncombe County. Five inches of rain fell within 24 hours in the Woodfin-Weaverville area, while at the Asheville Airport, it was reported that less than one inch fell within that same time period. There were 64 post flood inspections that occurred, and 10 structures condemned due to the storm damage.
- Buncombe County implemented the Nixle Community Engagement/Emergency Notification platform for emergency messages. All the telephone numbers in the 911 database were uploaded to Nixle to receive emergency messages via telephone calls, and cell phone users have the option to also participate in receiving emergency messages. Residents can opt-in to the system and configure their account with preferences for receiving various types of message. For example, residents might want to receive emergency messages by phone call, text and email but then only receive community information via email. In the sense that the 911 database is included and anyone in the County can opt-in with their cell phone, the system is countywide. Residents can go to www.nixle.com to register, or may text BCAlert to 888-7777 to register for emergency alerts.



HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS

PROGRESS

- **Promote healthy buildings and homes.**

- The total number of Healthy Built certified buildings has increased from 468 in 2011 to 1,116 in 2015, with 130 in progress.
- Buncombe County Building Permits and Inspections provided more inspections in 2015 than in 2012, up from 23,378 to 36,701. These inspections include building and trade inspections for code compliance and safety.
- The number of residential energy efficiency certificates issued in Buncombe County increased from 398 in 2012 to 633 in 2015.

- **Improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists.**

- The number of traffic accidents involving cyclists/pedestrians was 73 in 2008 and 113 in 2015.

- **Decrease injuries.**

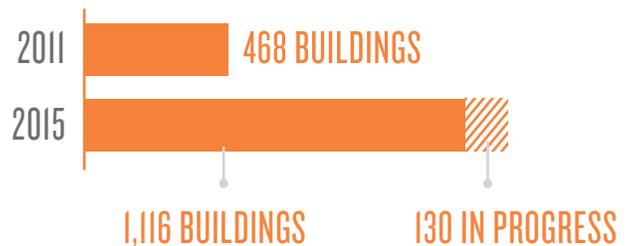
- The percent of children kept safe from maltreatment while in foster homes was 100% in both 2012 and 2015.

- **Improve and increase opportunities for safe, active living.**

- There were 18 Buncombe County owned parks facilities in 2015, including soccer fields, walking trails, swimming pools, boating, etc.



NUMBER OF HEALTHY BUILT CERTIFIED BUILDINGS HAS INCREASED



SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- A community meeting was held at Enka Middle School in April 2015 titled, “Clean Up Candler.” Community residents, business owners, County staff, and state and local officials attended the meeting, which drew more than 250 attendees. Volunteers organized the event which allowed residents to voice their concerns about how they want their community to look. Sidewalks, appearance standards, and future NCDOT projects were discussed as well as ways to make the community safer from drug activity, graffiti and speeding. The meeting allowed a public exchange of information to occur between local officials and residents.



ENVIRONMENT

We are stewards of the environment who advocate the conservation, preservation, and restoration of resources.

The Buncombe County Sustainability Plan Vision Statement



POLLUTION AND WASTE PREVENTION

The County Solid Waste facility purchased a Global Positioning System (GPS) for its compacting equipment allowing the operator to efficiently compact waste. This GPS system indicates when optimum compaction of trash has occurred, saving expensive landfill space, extending the life of the landfill, and reducing fuel consumption.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The Sustainability Committee at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College (A-B Tech) is committed to reducing A-B Tech's carbon footprint and helping A-B Tech become a model for sustainability in Western NC. The committee is pursuing potential grant opportunities for water-refilling bottle stations and more renewable energy projects on campus.



EFFICIENT TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

Mountain Mobility is presenting SERVE Awards to drivers that go above and beyond. To receive the SERVE Award, drivers must reflect the County's values toward employees and others every day: Show pride in our work; Exhibit caring in all we do; Respect others; Value and practice honesty; Exercise responsibility.

The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) staff developed a Pedestrian Count Program for the region and administered more than thirty pedestrian counts using the MPO's automated pedestrian counter. These counts help inform local staff of pedestrian volumes on corridors.



PARTNERSHIPS FOR CONSERVATION / PRESERVATION / RESTORATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

PROGRESS

- **Conserve and protect water resources.**

- The Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) completed 242 feet (2.5 acres) of riparian buffers in FY15, bringing the total to 14,255 feet (7.25 acres) completed since FY12.
- The number of livestock excluded from streams by measures installed by the SWCD has increased from 80 in FY12 to 300 in FY15.

- **Protect ecological systems/wildlife.**

- The number of conservation easements with some Buncombe County funding has increased from a total of 23 projects and 3,835 acres in 2010 to 43 projects and 5,948 acres in 2015.
- The number of endangered species in Buncombe County has increased from four in 2013 to seven in 2015.

- **Promote energy conservation programs.**

- Energy consumption in Buncombe County Government buildings has declined from 71,010 BTU/SF (39,020 electric and 31,990 natural gas) in FY13 to 55,709 BTU/SF (33,609 electric and 22,100 natural gas) in FY15.

- **Restore natural resources.**

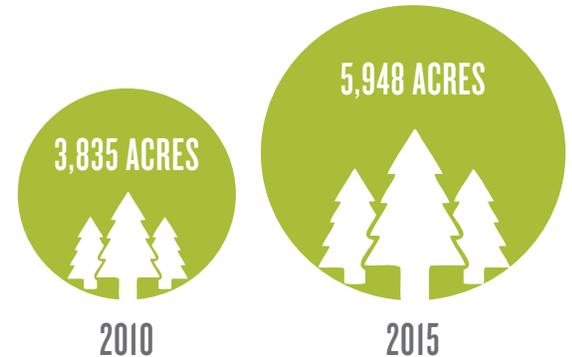
- The SWCD restored 121 linear feet of streams in FY15, bringing the total to 5,013 feet restored since FY11.

- **Encourage sustainable land use.**

- The number of conservation plans by the SWCD has increased from six in FY12 to 14 plans in FY15.

- **Educate the public to help them reduce their environmental footprints.**

- The number and reach of environmental education programs have grown from 13 programs reaching a total population of 57,068 in 2009 to 15 programs reaching a total population of 71,707 in FY15.



NUMBER OF CONSERVATION EASEMENTS HAS INCREASED



SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- The Sustainability Committee at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College (A-B Tech) has recommended an energy performance contract for A-B Tech campuses. Reports show significant opportunities to save substantial amounts of energy and water through various efficiency measures. The committee is also pursuing potential grant opportunities to reduce disposable plastic bottles on campus and more renewable energy projects on campus that can offset energy and demonstrate cutting edge photovoltaic technologies.
- Buncombe County changed exterior lighting to more efficient LED fixtures on six of its buildings; changed partial interior lighting fixtures from old fluorescent to efficient LED in three of its buildings; and conducted HVAC system efficiency upgrades in five of its buildings last year. The County is in the process of changing old screw-in type CFLs to screw-in LED in all of its buildings.



POLLUTION AND WASTE PREVENTION

PROGRESS

- **Improve air quality.**
 - Current Design Value for Ozone in the County fell from 68 ppb in 2012 to 63 ppb in 2015.
 - Current Design Value for Fine Particulate Matter in the County declined from 9.3 µg/m³ in 2011 to 8.5 µg/m³ in 2014 (Fine particulate matter data for 2015 not available at date of publishing).
 - Annual median Air Quality Index (AQI) for Buncombe County has increased from 35 in 2012 to 36 in 2015 (based on 180 of approximately 365 days of monitoring data; AQI data for 2015 not final at date of publishing).
- **Improve water quality.**
 - The number of NC Agricultural Cost Share Program (NCACSP) projects increased from six planned and two installed in 2012 to 15 installed in FY15.
 - The number of impaired waters in Buncombe County has increased from six streams on the 303(d) list in 2010 to eight streams in 2014.
- **Reduce the use of harmful chemicals.**
 - 824 citizens were trained in safe pesticide use in 2015, bringing the total number of citizens trained since 2012 to 3,468.
 - 8,175 residents were trained in Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in 2015, bringing the total to 34,294 residents trained since 2012.
- **Manage waste—reduce, reuse, recycle.**
 - The number of trash/recycling centers in Buncombe County parks has increased from nine in 2012 to 26 in 2015.



AMOUNT OF HAZARDOUS & SPECIAL WASTE RECYCLED IN FY2015



64 TONS
HOUSEHOLD
HAZARDOUS WASTE

196 TONS
TOTAL SINCE FY2012



260 TONS
WHITE GOODS

1,211 TONS
TOTAL SINCE FY2012



2,345 TONS
TIRES

9,713 TONS
TOTAL SINCE FY2012



3,484 GALLONS
USED OIL

16,309 GALLONS
TOTAL SINCE FY2012



440 GALLONS
ANTIFREEZE

1,344 GALLONS
TOTAL SINCE FY2012



311
LEAD ACID
BATTERIES

1,563 BATTERIES
TOTAL SINCE FY2012



232 TONS
ELECTRONIC
EQUIPMENT

578 TONS
TOTAL SINCE FY2012

SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- The Buncombe County landfill captures and destroys methane gas in a generator creating electricity for renewable energy and removing a toxic greenhouse gas from the environment. Removing this toxic gas from the environment allows the County to create carbon credits that can be sold on the open market. Last year Buncombe County registered 33,016 carbon credits, which is equivalent to removing 6,951 vehicles from the road. Since the inception of the program, the equivalent of 19,156 vehicles has been removed.
- Approximately 4.6 million gallons of leachate have been recirculated through the bioreactor program since 2007, resulting in 926 less truck trips to the wastewater treatment plant (WWTP); providing a savings of \$345,638 in avoided hauling and treatment costs.



ACCESSIBLE, MULTI-MODAL, AND EFFICIENT TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

PROGRESS

- **Reduce vehicle miles traveled.**
 - Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) has increased from 2,683 million in 2010 to 2,899 million in 2015.
 - The percentage of people driving alone to work in the County in 2015 was 80%.
- **Increase multi-modal options.**
 - The number of individuals using alternative transportation options:
 - Asheville Transit ridership declined from 1,525,212 riders in FY10 to 1,458,306 in FY15.
 - Mountain Mobility ridership increased from 7,456 passengers taking 148,578 trips in FY10 to 13,630 passengers taking 165,392 trips in FY15.
 - A 0.4 mile section of greenway was completed in 2015 adding to the existing 13 miles of County greenways.
 - Annual bike and pedestrian counts in the City of Asheville increased from 4,086 in 2012 to 9,281 in 2015.
- **Promote access to goods and services in areas of significant population density and in neighborhood hubs.**
 - The number of new commercial building permits issued by Buncombe County within ¼ mile of transportation options increased from 13 in FY10 to 30 in FY15.
 - The percentage of County households within ¼ mile of transportation options was 70.8% in January 2016, an increase from 69% in 2011.



SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- Mountain Mobility completed a Community Transportation Service Plan (CTSP), a five-year vision for transportation in Buncombe County. The focus of this plan is to evaluate the transportation services that already exist; to identify ways to maximize operating efficiencies; and to enhance the mobility options for Buncombe County citizens.

- The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Board passed the 2016-2025 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), a document that reflects funded transportation projects as well as projects that are in development.
- The 25-year Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) was developed to highlight the region's vision, goals, and projects that are planned for the next twenty-five years.

2015 ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION USAGE

1,458,306

ASHEVILLE TRANSIT
RIDERSHIP

165,392

MOUNTAIN MOBILITY
TRIPS

ECONOMY

We are part of a community and environmentally-conscious economy that is stable and diverse.

The Buncombe County Sustainability Plan Vision Statement

SUSTAINABLE LOCALIZED ECONOMY

Venture Asheville is the entrepreneurship initiative of the Economic Development Coalition for Asheville-Buncombe County, with the mission to transform Asheville into a thriving hub for top-tier entrepreneurs who build world-class companies. Venture Asheville's work connects entrepreneurs with mentors and startup funding. The program acts as a hub for entrepreneurship resources and education, bringing visibility to Asheville's unique startups and talent pool.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The Annual Homecoming Career Fair sponsored by the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce was held at the WNC Agricultural Center on January 7, 2016. Over 2,000 job seekers attended and 110 employers and resources were available.



SUSTAINABLE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

The opening of the Farm Heritage Trail, a scenic driving route of several conserved farms in northwest Buncombe County, was celebrated in the Spring, 2016. The trail is open to the public to serve Buncombe County residents, as well as visiting tourists.

Through the NCWorks Customized Training Program, A-B Tech trained 935 employees of local businesses and industries in fiscal year 2015, a record for this category of training at A-B Tech.



SUSTAINABLE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

PROGRESS

- **Promote farmland preservation and decrease loss of agricultural land.**
 - The number of acres in the Voluntary Agricultural District program (VAD) has remained steady with 27,033 acres in 2011 and 27,015 acres in 2015.
 - One farm (157 acres) was added to the Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District program (EVAD) in FY15 with a total of eight farms (890 acres) in the program, which began in 2011.
 - Buncombe County contributed funding towards four conservation easements which permanently protected 387 acres in 2015. The County has contributed funding towards 20 conservation easements since 2010, permanently protecting an additional 2,113 acres. County funding has leveraged an additional \$10,400,199 in grants and owner and private donations since 2010.
- **Promote sustainable agricultural production and personal and community gardening in connection with the County's agricultural heritage.**
 - The number of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs increased from 23, offering 1,070 shares, in 2011 to 28 CSAs, offering over 1,300 shares, in 2015.
 - Approximately 112,000 citizens obtained knowledge or developed new skills in farming, gardening, agri-tourism, farm marketing and related areas as a result of Cooperative Extension training and information in 2015.
 - The number of community and school gardens has decreased from 32 in 2011 to 27 in 2015.
- **Increase demand for locally produced foods.**
 - The number of farmers markets has grown from 12 in 2011 to 17 in 2015. Additionally, there are 20 U-pick operations, 18 roadside stands, and the regional farmers market in the County.
 - The number of local outlets (restaurants, retail, and tailgate markets in Buncombe County) grew from 232 in 2011 to 287 in January 2016.

NUMBER OF FARMS IN ENHANCED VOLUNTARY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT PROGRAM (EVAD) KEEPS GROWING



8 EVAD FARMS, **890** ACRES



SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- The SWCD worked with the Agricultural Advisory Board, using a grant from the Buncombe County Recreation Services to establish a Farm Heritage Trail in Buncombe County. The scenic driving route is on public roads passing by several of the conserved farms in northwest Buncombe County. There is signage throughout the route, an online downloadable map, printed maps, and a calendar on the website (www.farmheritagetrail.org) that highlights events at farms and other special events along the trail, such as farm demonstrations, Farm to Table meals, hikes, and traditional crafts demonstrations. The farms on the route, which are open to the public during posted hours, must be permanently conserved or in the VAD or EVAD programs. The offerings at the farm stops include: local wine, jams, honey, plants, trout, apple cider, corn, peppers, squash, onions, lamb, pork, beans, tomatoes, asparagus, eggs, and Amish goods.



SUSTAINABLE LOCALIZED ECONOMY

PROGRESS

- **Provide incentives to businesses for growth.**
 - In FY15, the number of new jobs created through economic development incentives was 417, up from 329 the previous year. The total capital investment in FY15 for new economic development incentive activity totalled \$4.8 million. The number of jobs created through the expansion of existing businesses was 352, up from 295 the prior year.
- **Promote “Buy Local” programs.**
 - In 2015 the number of participating producers in the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) was 17 certified processors and 123 certified farms, up from ten processors and 109 farms in 2012.
- **Ensure a diverse economy with competitive wages.**
 - The unemployment rate has decreased significantly since 2010. The unemployment rate was 4.1% in 2015, down from an annual average in 2010 of 8.4%.
 - Per capita income was \$26,209 in 2009 and \$26,424 in 2015.
- **Support small business development.**
 - The number of businesses with fewer than ten employees was 5,411 in 2008 and 5,399 in 2015.

JOBS CREATED INCREASES

THROUGH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INCENTIVES

329	⋮	417
FY2014		FY2015

THROUGH EXPANSION OF EXISTING BUSINESS

295	⋮	352
FY2014		FY2015

SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- Burial Beer announced its second brewing facility and tasting room with an investment of \$1.8 million and 17 new jobs.
- The newest strategic plan for the Asheville-Buncombe Economic Development Coalition (EDC) is the AVL 5X5 Vision 2020 Strategic Plan. While integrating with the existing AVL 5X5 plan framework, the new plan focuses primarily on core areas where the EDC has the greatest potential to affect positive change, beginning with the traditional areas of industry-specific business retention, expansion, and recruitment. The specific goals for this plan with measurable targets include the following: 3,000 new direct jobs; \$50,000 average annual wage; \$650,000,000 of new capital investment; 50 new high-growth companies; and \$10 million of new equity investment.





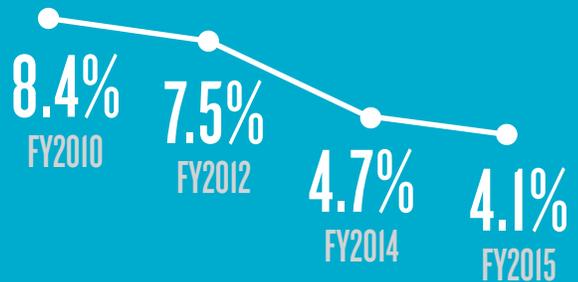
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

PROGRESS

- **Provide robust job training that fits present and anticipated workforce demand.**
 - The number of people placed in employment through participation in Work First was 127 in 2012 and 85 in 2015.
 - The number of referrals to the ASPIRE economic development job readiness program has decreased from 307 participants in 2012 to 215 in 2015.
 - The number of individuals served by the Client Supply job readiness program has increased from 121 in 2012 to 170 in 2015.
 - The number of NC Career Readiness Certifications issued in 2010 was 257, and in 2015 there were 152 issued.
 - The number of individuals served by the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board job readiness and job search programs has increased from 3,339 in 2010 to 3,776 in 2015. This includes those individuals served by the four career centers in and around Buncombe County.
- **Identify and reduce barriers to employment.**
 - The number of preschoolers (ages 0-4 years) served by the daycare subsidy program was 1,962 in 2011, and averaged 1,885 per month in FY15.
 - The number of children on the waiting list for subsidized childcare was 1,262 in 2011, and decreased to 757 in 2015.
 - Types of transportation assistance provided by HHS in 2015 included 206 bus passes, 253 bus ticket books, 284 mileage reimbursements, 219 Eblen gas vouchers, and 23 car repairs.
- **Encourage collaboration among workforce and educational institutions.**
 - The number of companies participating in training and/or services through the A-B Tech Economic and Workforce Development-Continuing Education Programming increased from 62 in 2012 to 70 in 2015.



THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE HAS DECREASED SIGNIFICANTLY



SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- The Mountain Area Workforce Development Board helped to create the Raising Awareness of Manufacturing Possibilities Career Pathways initiative. In cooperation with the public schools, community colleges, and the NC Works Career Centers, the initiative supports efforts to increase the knowledge and consideration of advanced manufacturing careers in areas as diverse as biotechnology, healthcare, communication, and aviation.
- A-B Tech has completed the purchase and installation of the first round of training equipment to establish its new Advanced Manufacturing Center. Short term training courses that can lead directly to jobs or skill enhancement include: Industrial Maintenance Academy, Fundamentals of Automated Machining (completion earns students the NCWorks Pre-Apprenticeship Certificate), Computer Numerical Control (CNC) Machining, Automation Academy, Aerospace and Structural Composites, and Beverage Logistics.

CONCLUSION

BUNCOMBE COUNTY'S Sustainability Plan has become the "living" document that it was intended to be. The Plan's implementation has been the direct result of County departments and local agencies who have remained committed in participating with these efforts. As agencies' priorities change, funding is reduced, or staff transitions, tracking and reporting reliable indicator information can be difficult. Much effort has been made to include indicator measurements from consistent data sources and reporting periods, as this has been the benchmark for information used in the Annual Reports.

Throughout the fifth year of implementation, the focus will be on continued progress in meeting the established goals and objectives from the current plan, and extending the recent focus of connectivity. New initiatives highlighted in the fourth Annual Report are similar in that each one's success relies on reaching out and extending programs and services:

- The Nixle emergency notification system connects residents with important, potentially life-saving information.
- The new A-B Tech Advanced Manufacturing Center connects students who need training and employment to manufacturing careers using modern equipment and apprenticeship programs.
- The Farm Heritage Trail connects farms and farm goods to residents and tourists through a marketed driving route in northwest Buncombe County. These conserved farms may otherwise remain unknown and uncelebrated without this designation.
- The addition of a greenway in the Brevard Road area to connect to the existing French Broad River Greenway would provide an important linkage in the greenway system.

In addition to completing the implementation of the current five year Sustainability Plan, the five-year update of the Sustainability Plan will be developed this year. The development framework for the update is being established, and input meetings with County staff, outside agencies, and organizations' representatives will begin in July 2016. The document is expected to be complete by January 2017.

The Sustainability Plan continues to track the changes in our community. Our progress in meeting the Plan's goals and objectives is directly related to our progress in making improvements in our community, economy, and environment.





**2016 SUSTAINABILITY ANNUAL REPORT
FOR BUNCOMBE COUNTY**

Download this report online:
buncombecounty.org/Sustainability