

RECREATION ELEMENT

Introduction

The purpose of this element is to identify key issues relating to parks, recreation, and greenways in Henderson County, and to establish relevant Recommendations and Action Strategies to address those issues.

Appendix III, *Public Parks in Henderson County* contains a comprehensive inventory of all recreational facilities in Henderson County. Map #16, *Public Parks, Recreation Sites, and Proposed Greenways* (Appendix I) and Map #13, *Educational Facilities and Libraries* (Appendix I) shows the location of these sites.

Public Input

Citizen Survey respondents appear to place very low importance upon recreational issues relative to other issues such as protection of air and water quality, both in terms of programming and spending.

The Community Meeting results differ from those of the Citizen Survey in that the participants indicated a high level of support for existing parks, as well as a need for additional parks and recreation programming. Recreation was the fourth most important “Primary Category” issue identified during the Community Meetings, comprising approximately 7% of the 11,696 comments gathered. Approximately 4% of the comments pointed to support for maintaining and expanding recreational services, while 2% specifically indicated a need for walking / biking paths. Only 0.09% of the comments expressed opposition to bike / walking paths, and no comments opposed recreation services in general.

In addition to the recreation-specific comments addressed above, a number of Community Meeting attendees expressed interest in County support for a cultural arts center, a large assembly facility, Community Clubs, and other similar facilities / organizations.

Although it is not reflected in the data, Community Meeting organizers observed an enormous amount of pride in existing community clubs / community centers. While the overall volume of related comments was relatively low, the participants who made those comments did so with considerable energy and passion. It is safe to say that

where community clubs / community centers exist, they are an important source of local identity.

The Lockwood Greene study identified the county's quality of life, including its recreational services, as one of the county's key strengths.

A summary of *Designing Our Future's* recreation-related input states that, "While appreciating the opportunities currently available, people want to place a strong emphasis on developing more activities for teens and young adults. Citizens offered several suggestions for consideration, including enriching school programs with renewed focus on music and the arts, better maintenance of existing parks, and the building of new parks with enhanced facilities." *Designing Our Future* also recommends the following, in order of priority:

- Develop recreational activities for teens/young adults
- Construct a multipurpose performing/visual arts center
- Renew focus on music and the arts in schools
- Upgrade maintenance of existing parks
- Create a dedicated tax for arts and recreation efforts
- Coordinate public/private efforts

The 1993 *Henderson County Comprehensive Land Use Plan* survey results indicated that 66% of the 163 respondents agreed that, "Henderson County has good parks and recreation facilities." Furthermore, out of 15 key identified issues, Water Quality and Schools were rated the two most important, with Parks / Recreation Facilities weighing in as the 11th most important issue.

On Monday, February 24, 1992 the Henderson County Parks and Recreation Advisory Board hosted a forum involving 63 community leaders to formulate recreation priorities for the county. The recreation forum identified 16 key priorities which the participants then ranked by casting 1,263 votes. The two most important needs identified by the participants were a multi-purpose gymnasium and greenways / bike / walking trails. Further details regarding the results of that process are available in Appendix II, *Recreation Forum Results*.

Recommendations & Action Strategies

Recommendation R-01: Meet recreation needs through 2020.

Henderson County, its municipalities, public schools, and the Federal and State governments all contribute to an extensive recreation network across Henderson County.

Figure R.1 summarizes countywide public recreational acreage.

Figure R.1 Countywide Public Recreational Acreage		
Ownership		Total Recreation Acreage / Miles
Developed Local Parks	County	248.93 Acres
	Municipal	119.01 Acres
Federal / State Lands		24,499.4 Acres
Greenways		10.01 Miles under development

Figure R.2, below, reveals the relationship between current population figures, 2020 population projections, and existing recreational facilities.

Figure R.2 Existing Recreational Facilities & Population			
Year		2003	2020*
Population		90,000	130,000
Population (thousands)	Current Total	90	130
Rec. Facilities per 1,000 Persons**	22.00 facilities	0.24	0.17
Local Govt. Acres per 1,000 Persons	367.94 acres	4.09	2.83
Federal / State Acres per 1,000 Persons	24,499.40 acres	272.22	188.46
Greenway Miles per 1,000 Persons	10.01 miles	0.11	0.08
<p>*Assumes no changes in current facilities. **Includes Connemara, but no other State or Federal facilities. *** Does not include trails within National and State lands or city sidewalks. Addresses traditional greenways that are open for biking, walking, and other non-motorized forms of transportation, and that link recreation, residential, and commercial centers.</p>			

Henderson County’s existing recreation services, including greenways, are important to the health and well being of the citizens of Henderson County, and they are an asset in terms of future growth and development. Continuing population growth will only increase the demand for and use of facilities and services. There will be a need for increased maintenance and upgrading of existing recreation facilities and services, plus the need for the development of additional facilities and services.

Henderson County Government will continue to act as a leader in the fiscally responsible provision of recreation services in Henderson County. Cost-effective leadership will involve pursuing outside funding and sharing costs with other jurisdictions where feasible and will require proactive planning to anticipate needs.

This Comprehensive Plan does not set forth specific infrastructure and program improvements needed to satisfy recreation demands through the year 2020. However, it does establish specific action steps to identify needs and improvements.

A. Create a countywide recreation master plan.

A countywide recreation master plan (recreation plan) will be the primary mechanism through which the County identifies, plans for, and budgets for its future recreation needs.

The recreation plan should have the following characteristics:

- a) Be a regional plan funded and developed in conjunction with the municipalities within Henderson County, the Henderson County Board of Education, and the Apple Country Greenway Commission.
- b) Derive guidance from public input.
- c) Set 5, 10, and 20-year recreation goals. In doing so, it should set the appropriate *Level of Service* (see glossary and Action Strategy R-01.B, below) for different categories of recreation services and facilities.
- d) Revise and incorporate the *Apple Country Greenway Master Plan* (Map #16, *Public Parks, Recreation Sites and Proposed Greenways*) and integrate greenway and recreation planning.
- e) Explore consolidation opportunities.
- f) Explore ways to expand support for community clubs.
- g) Build upon recreation needs identified in completed Community Plans (see Section 4 of this Comprehensive Plan), and conversely, inform the development of new Community Plans based upon defined levels of service.
- h) Establish future recreation funding needs and mechanisms. There are a number of funding opportunities available for recreation and greenway development, some of which are listed in Appendix III.
- i) Define ways in which recreation and school facilities planning and operation can be more effectively combined. The recreation plan should relate to the long-range

school facilities master plan that is recommended in Section 3, *Public School Facilities Element* of this Comprehensive Plan.

- j) Inform future revisions of the *Henderson County Transportation Improvement Plan* and *Comprehensive Transportation Plan* (Section 3, *Transportation Element*) with regard to greenways.
- k) Relate to a countywide sewer and water master plan (Section 3, *Sewer and Water Element*) with regard to the use of new sewer and water rights-of-way as greenway paths, where this is appropriate from a location and legal standpoint.
- l) Inform the County's *Strategic Plan*.
- m) Inform the County's *Capital Improvement Program*.
- n) Transform level of service standards into recreation service requirements and other standards to be built into the *Land Development Code*.

B. Utilize "Level of Service" analysis in recreation planning

New approaches to recreation planning will allow the County to better anticipate and meet future needs. The "state of the art" in recreation planning across the nation lies in a concept commonly referred to as "Level of Service" (LOS) analysis. Simply put, LOS means identifying and setting standards for the amount of recreation infrastructure and services that the local government should strive for on a per capita basis in order to satisfy the reasonable expectations of the constituent public. LOS is a general goal that varies with the type of facility in question. The value of the LOS approach is that it provides the local government with a mechanism by which to anticipate, plan, and budget for recreation needs across its jurisdiction, at a variety of scales. LOS standards are not hard and fast rules, but rather are general guidelines that provide a benchmark for performance and a defensible mechanism upon which to base regulatory mechanism that pass some of the costs of recreation development to the land development community. The recreation plan will establish level of service standards for Henderson County which are based upon rigorous analysis of public input and industry standards nationwide.

C. Enhance recreational space requirements within land development ordinances.

At present, the Henderson County Zoning, Manufactured Home Park Ordinance, and the Water Supply Watershed ordinances require the dedication of common spaces in certain circumstances. While such requirements are important, there are minimal, if any, standards regarding the quality or functionality of common space. The County will identify and act upon ways to improve the quality of recreational spaces provided

for in its ordinances. The County will also identify and incorporate measures into its ordinances that allow for the procurement of publicly accessible recreational space through the development process. Such improvements and acquisitions should be guided by the recreation plan. Note that this Comprehensive Plan *does not* intend for the development community to bear the entire burden of recreation facility development. Rather, the improvements acquired through the development process should be but one component of an overall approach to recreation facilities improvement that is coordinated and scheduled through the recreation plan.

D. Integrate public schools and recreation planning.

Henderson County's public schools are excellent locations for public recreation (see Figure F.7, *Public Primary and Secondary Schools*) and there is opportunity to improve the capabilities of these campuses by allowing them to serve multiple purposes as schools, recreational facilities, and community centers.

At the present time, the county's 21 public schools provide numerous recreation benefits to the communities they serve, from walking tracks and playgrounds to basketball courts and soccer fields. Current school policy is to allow the general public access to outdoor recreation / sports facilities when such facilities are not occupied by school functions. Indoor facilities, such as meeting rooms and gymnasiums, are not open to general public use, although such facilities can be utilized for organized events through prior arrangement with school administration.

Further integration of school facility planning with recreation planning will provide cost benefits and will increase the utility of school campuses for recreation purposes.

The *Public School Facilities Element* of this Comprehensive Plan recommends the development of a long-range public school facilities master plan, while this element calls for the development of the recreation plan. Representatives of the Henderson County Public Schools and Henderson County Parks and Recreation should cooperate in the development of both documents, and each document should be regularly updated to maintain cross-consistency.

Recommendation R-02: Form a community and regional greenway network.

Greenways enhance public health and quality of life, and contribute to the local economy by attracting visitors and residents. The term "greenway" is a common descriptor for multi-use pathways that usually form linkages between concentrations of

services or residences, and that link recreational facilities to communities. Greenways typically function as both recreational facilities in and of themselves and as alternative transportation routes.

In 1999, Henderson County entered into an interlocal agreement that formed the Apple Country Greenway Commission. Since that time, it has participated in the development of the Oklawaha Greenway. The County will identify ways to continue working with area municipalities and appropriate non-governmental organizations to create a network of community and regional greenways.

Establishment of such a network would create linkages within and between population centers, commercial centers, schools, recreation areas, and other key nodes. It should also create linkages between communities both inside and outside of the county. Such a network should be designed to serve multiple needs, including recreation, transportation, open space protection, and others as defined. Such a network should generally accommodate a variety of uses, including walking, biking, and horseback riding.

Planning for a greenway network will continue within the recreation plan, as mentioned above, which will incorporate and improve upon the existing *Apple Country Greenway Master Plan*.

E. Integrate recreation and transportation planning.

Action Strategy (A) of this element calls for the development of a countywide recreation master plan, a key ingredient of which will be long-term greenway development plans.

The recreation plan will identify future greenway paths. Because greenways meet both recreational and transportation needs, and because much of the funding for greenway development is derived from federal and state transportation funding sources, it is necessary for greenway plans to be reflected in the *Henderson County Comprehensive Transportation Plan (HCCTP)* (see *Transportation Element*). The HCCTP should be updated and amended at such time as the recreation plan is completed. Conversely, the recreation plan should reflect any guidance derived from the HCCTP. Furthermore, both documents should both inform, and be informed by, Community Plans envisioned in Section 4 of this Comprehensive Plan.

F. Develop a strategy for the reuse of rail lines in Henderson County.

Henderson County is fortunate to host two separate rail lines: one running from the Ecusta plant in Transylvania County towards Hendersonville; and another running from Saluda, north through Hendersonville, towards Asheville. Existing rail lines can be seen in Map # 12, *Transportation* (Appendix I). While these rail lines are an asset to Henderson County, a recent series of plant closings brings the long-term viability of these rail lines into question, and the possibility of their abandonment exists.

While it would be unfortunate to lose the freight-hauling services provided by these rail lines, they can continue to be an asset to the county even after they are abandoned for such purposes. In particular, they are an ideal location for the development of greenways. Across the nation, local governments are taking advantage of existing “abandoned” rail lines for this purpose, and they are doing so with funding from state and federal transportation and recreation sources.

While many of these trails exist, an excellent example of a regional “rail to trail” project can be found in the Virginia Creeper Trail (<http://www.vacreepertrail.org/>), which is a 33 mile long multi-use trail linking Abington, Virginia to Whitetop Mountain in North Carolina. Such a greenway in Henderson County would provide recreational benefits to local residents, attract tourists from around the world, and would compliment the county’s tourist economy.

Another alternative with potential benefits to the local tourist industry would be to utilize the existing rail facility as a tourist rail line linking Brevard, Hendersonville, Saluda, and Asheville. The Great Smoky Mountains Railroad, which links Dillsboro, North Carolina, to Bristol, Tennessee (<http://www.gsmr.com/>) is a good example of such.

The rail banking program, created by U.S. Congressional amendment in 1983, allows the temporary, though generally long-term, use of disused rail corridors as public trails while maintaining the option of reactivating such corridors for rail use. Federal and State transportation funds can be used for such conversion.

Both alternatives are likely to present significant benefits to the county. However, they may not be compatible with each other. Further study is necessary in order to identify the alternative that is in the best interests of the public in terms of physical health, economic development, and fiscal impacts. Furthermore, regardless of which alternative proves most beneficial to the county, preparations should be made to take advantage of existing rail lines in the near future. Approximately 2 years after cessation of use by the controlling rail operator, rail rights-of-way revert to the ownership of adjacent property owners. Steps to acquire use of the right-of-way must be taken prior to and during this 2-year window so as not to lose the opportunity to develop either alternative.

The County will sponsor a study and develop a strategy to acquire rights to existing rail lines in Henderson County for use as greenways or as tourist rail lines at such time as those lines are retired by the rail operator. An effective strategy will require the cooperation and participation of federal, state, and local governments, political leaders and non-governmental organizations, and rail operators both in and outside of Henderson County.

Recommendation R-03: Identify and act upon practical options for inter-local cooperation and consolidation in recreation planning, funding, and management.

The County will identify and, where practical, act upon opportunities to consolidate recreation and greenway planning, management, and funding with its municipalities. Appropriate consolidation would allow local governments in Henderson County to meet recreation needs effectively while avoiding unnecessary duplications in services, resulting in more efficient expenditures of revenues.

Recreation consolidation can exist at a variety of levels. At its lowest level, local governments coordinate their recreation planning through joint master planning exercises in order to ensure that service provision is uniform, that services are appropriately distributed geographically, and that duplications are minimized where possible. At its highest level, consolidation means the formation of a countywide recreation authority, and the transfer of local government recreation assets to that authority. A countywide recreation authority is perhaps the most efficient level of consolidation in terms of cost savings, but requires a high degree of cooperation among the constituent governments to ensure that the needs of each jurisdiction are equitably satisfied.

No specific action steps are proposed for this recommendation. Implementation should begin with the development of the recreation plan and should continue through ongoing dialogue between local governments.

Other Action Strategies

The following Action Strategies are intended to implement any number of the aforementioned Recommendations.

G. Identify Staff responsible for grant acquisition.

Numerous funding sources exist for the purposes of recreation and greenway development. Staff is familiar with many such sources, and others may be identified through the development of the recreation plan. Effective grant writing can result in cost savings, but requires dedication and knowledge. An individual within County Government should be charged with this responsibility. Consolidation may lead to an individual responsible for grant-writing on the part of all county jurisdictions.

H. Promote the county's recreation infrastructure as an economic asset.

As indicated in the Lockwood Greene Study, recreation services, including greenways, contribute to local economic well-being by serving as tourist attractions and by contributing to quality of life for businesses and residents. The County will continue to promote its recreational assets as part of its overall economic development strategy, as implemented through organizations such as the Travel and Tourism Department and the Chamber of Commerce.

Relationship to Other Elements

This Comprehensive Plan calls for the development of a number of Community Plans across the county (Section 4, *Community Planning Framework*). A recreation element will be included in each Community Plan. The recreation elements of such plans will both inform and be informed by the recreation plan and the transportation plan. Furthermore, Section 4 will direct that, where relevant, the County will work (through the Community Planning process established within Section 4) with Federal and State land management agencies (Forest Service, Park Service, etc.) to identify and implement measures to protect the boundaries of, and entry corridors into, public facilities.