

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE PLANNING AREA

Purpose

County officials, local organizations, and the community at large developed the Henderson County 2020 Comprehensive Plan (hereinafter “Comprehensive Plan”) adopted July 6, 2004 (as amended through September 16, 2009). A principal recommendation of the Comprehensive Plan is the detailed study of individual communities within the County. The Green River-Tuxedo-Zirconia GRTZ Community Plan (hereinafter “GRTZ Community Plan”) is a community-specific comprehensive plan that outlines future goals related to Land Use and Development, Community Character and Design, Natural and Cultural Resources, Agriculture, Housing, Community Facilities and Public Services, Transportation, and Economic Development.

Process

The plan development process began with the adoption of the GRTZ Community Plan Advisory Committee Charter by the Board of Commissioners on April 2, 2012 and appointment of the committee on May 7, 2012. The Committee consisted of ten (10) community residents and two (2) ex-officio members representing the Henderson County Planning Board (serving as a liaison to the Board) and Village of Flat Rock. The Committee’s purposes were to advise the Board of Commissioners by recommending policies specific to the GRTZ Planning Area. The Committee met for the first time on July 10, 2012.

The Committee gathered public input through two (2) public input sessions and a mailed survey that went to every listed property owner in the planning area. The County held the initial public input session on September 11, 2012 at the Tuxedo Baptist Church. Approximately 80 community residents participated in the meeting by discussing the strengths of, concerns for, and 15-year vision for the community.

The Committee held 14 successive meetings following the initial public input session during which the Committee reviewed each of the Plan’s elements. The Committee formed recommendations and action strategies for the Plan elements based on input from the public, County staff, and relevant experts.

The County held a second public input session on August 13, 2013 to allow residents to comment on the Plan. The Committee then held its final meeting to review the public input and finalize the Plan on September 10, 2013. The Committee presented the Plan to the Planning Board at a joint meeting held October 17, 2013.

Planning Area Boundary

The Planning Area is located in the southern portion of Henderson County and includes 36,933 acres of land (15.39% of the County acreage and 17.59% of the County’s jurisdictional acreage). The Planning Area’s northern boundary follows Pinnacle Mountain Road and the Green River Gamelands. The eastern boundary follows the border shared by Polk and Henderson Counties. The Transylvania and Henderson Counties border defines the western boundary. The southern boundary is defined by the Henderson and Greenville Counties border (See Map 1, Planning Area Boundary (Pg. 61)).

Historical Overview, Community Beginnings



The location shown here depicts where the road through Howard Gap crosses the Green River. The photo was courtesy of “Hendersonville and Henderson County: A Pictorial History.”

Appreciation of the Green River Valley’s geographical characteristics, natural beauty, and economic potential began centuries ago. Originally blazed by migrating herds of bison, elk and deer, the Cherokee and other Native Americans used the valley as hunting grounds. The area was also the likely entrance of Spanish explorer Hernan de Soto into Western North Carolina during his search for gold in the 16th century. A trade route developed from their activities and the present-day Howard Gap and Old Howard Gap Roads follow perhaps this route leading into Western North Carolina. Most of the 65 miles of this historical road leading from Fletcher, NC into Union, SC remains intact; the exception being a steep portion of the road removed during the construction of Peter Guice Bridge across the Green River.

Settlement of Henderson County increased following the Revolutionary War, but conflicts became inevitable with settlers entering Cherokee territory. The State of North Carolina and the Cherokee, in an attempt to reduce conflict between the groups, established a western boundary for colonial settlement in the Hopewell Treaty of 1785. The Hopewell Treaty of 1785, valuable resources, arrival of early settlers and the natural beauty of the area, lead to the first mass marketing of American real estate (including the lands in the Green River, Tuxedo, and Zirconia area). Properties within the Green River, Tuxedo, and Zirconia area were part of the “Speculation Land.” The 400,000 acres of these lands covered all or parts of what is today Buncombe, Henderson, Polk, Rutherford, Gaston, McDowell, Mecklenburg and Union Counties. Some of the county’s first settlers chose the Green River valley as their home, including John Corn, William Davis, and John Staton. According to legend, John Corn and his wife, Elizabeth, gave the Green River its name.

Communities began taking shape as a result of these early activities. James Fain (1980) wrote that Green River and Tuxedo were “identifiable community centers” long before Hendersonville (93). Interestingly, post offices played an important role in community identity. Established in 1853, the Green River Post Office was the first in the area with Meredith Freeman serving as postmaster. Freeman’s other civic roles included justice of the peace and election judge. In 1908, Tuxedo’s post office opened under the name, Lakewood. Postmaster Joseph O. Bell selected a truly unique name after encountering multiple Lakewoods. The Zirconia Post Office is the area’s only office in active service.



This location shows Tuxedo’s first post office, which was located in a building now occupied by a general store. The photo was courtesy of “Hendersonville and Henderson County: A Pictorial History.”

Although the Green River valley was habitable, residents put a significant amount of work into constructing bridges, railroad lines, and community buildings. In 1820, Peter Guice built the first



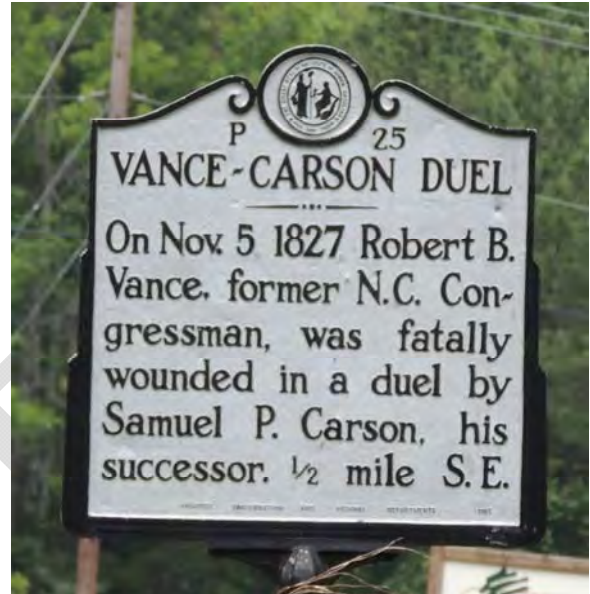
This picture shows Tuxedo Elementary School that is no longer in operation. This photo was courtesy of “My Tuxedo No Longer Fits: Tales from Tuxedo.”

Tuxedo Depot (1910), Tuxedo Elementary School (1924), Green River Baptist Church (1903), Cedar Springs Church, Tuxedo First Baptist Church (1900’s), Staton’s Grocery (1920), and Tuxedo Community Store.

Two industries that played important roles in the growth of Zirconia and Tuxedo, as well as surrounding areas, were mining and textile manufacturing. Zircon, the namesake of Zirconia, is among the variety of minerals mined in Henderson County, but its discovery had one of the greatest impacts. Zirconium oxide was used in the manufacturing of incandescent gaslights and Thomas Edison’s light bulb. Edison visited Henderson and other parts of western North Carolina during the late 19th century. Dr. Levi Jones discovered the presence of Zircon in 1879 near his home, which is a site now inhabited by Lake Summit. Jones, along with Meredith Freeman and General Thomas Clingman, opened some of the first mines. Later, Captain M.C. Toms purchased and leased zircon mines with W.E. Hidden, a British geologist who discovered hiddenite. Despite its short-term success and replacement by the carbonized cotton thread, zircon lent its name to the township, a church, and a post office. Green River Mills emerged in 1907 and textile manufacturing became the area’s next major industry. Founded by Joseph O. Bell, the mill was one of the County’s first modern production facilities. An estimated 275 people were employed in its early years and a mill village developed around it, providing housing, a community store, a baseball field, a daycare, and other services. A significant part of the present Tuxedo community is made up of the historic mill village. Bell’s service to Henderson County extended beyond the mill; his civic roles included postmaster, justice of the peace, road trustee, and state senator. After World War I, an economic downturn led to increasing cotton prices and Green River Mills could no longer compete in the market. The mill passed between different managers, until Robert W. Boys became president and chartered a new company, Green River Mills, Inc., in 1933. By the mid-20th century, J.P. Stevens Company had acquired the mill and began producing a variety of synthetic yarns used in bedding until the late-20th century. West Point Pepperell bought the plant in 1988 and operated until 1990, in which 250 people lost their job. Brittain and Sons owned the mill until it closed around the turn of the century. The mill was torn down due to the unsafe nature of the building around 2011.

Landmarks standing out for their unique contributions to the history of Green River, Tuxedo, and Zirconia range from a lake and summer camps to a dueling site and a kingdom. Created in 1920 by the

Blue Ridge Power Company, Lake Summit became an important source of hydroelectric power. Summer residences and camps emerged along its shores and attracted seasonal visitors. Camps Greystone (1920) and Mondamin (1922) are the first established in the area, with Camps Arrowhead (1937), Green Cove (1945), Glen Arden (1951), Falling Creek (1969), and Green River Preserve (1988) following as the popularity of summer camps grew. A short distance from Lake Summit is the site of the Vance-Carson Duel. Once friends, Robert Vance and Samuel Carson were opposing candidates for Congress in the 1827 election. Although an 1802 law made duels illegal in North Carolina, the candidates decided to settle their disagreements using this method. A loophole in the law permitted the duel to take place, since the challenge was issued from outside of the state. Vance, who was fatally wounded, lent his name to nearby Vance Mountain. One of the most unique places in the area has disappeared almost entirely. The Kingdom of Happy Land began in the late 1860s when over 200 freed slaves created a communal settlement in the Green River valley. Migrating from plantations in Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, the group sought a place to begin their new lives. The Davis family, known for their hospitality, welcomed them to Oakland and provided land to create a kingdom. Communal living allowed residents to share money and resources through a common fund. They selected Robert Montgomery, an educated house servant, and Louella, his sister-in-law, to lead them as king and queen. At its height in the 1870s, the kingdom grew to nearly 400 people and purchased over a hundred acres from the estate. Many residents working in Flat Rock and Hendersonville were drawn away from the community, resulting in its decline by the early 1900s. Only remnants of a chimney and a cellar are left.



The Green River, Tuxedo, and Zirconia communities that comprise the GRTZ Community Plan have a significant past, which will continue to impact the area and Henderson County in the future.

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