

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## OVERVIEW

Greenways allow multiple objectives to be met at once. They create open space recreation that promotes healthy living, conserves habitats and biodiversity, aids in tourism and economic development, and preserves cultural and community assets. Henderson County first planned for county-wide greenway connections in 1999. Since then, almost eight miles of greenways have been constructed in the County. Today, the County is planning for the future with realistic and achievable goals like improving the quality of life, protecting the County's natural, cultural, historic, and scenic resources, providing safe and accessible recreation, and creating alternative transportation opportunities. This Greenway Master Plan establishes and communicates a broad vision for a countywide Greenway Network, and provides guidance to Henderson County and its partners, so that all involved can collaboratively work towards and benefit from that vision.

Implementation of this Greenway Master Plan will be a long-term process. Through the creation of new goals and reaffirmation of goals previously adopted in the Comprehensive Plan, Community Plans, and Community Health Assessments, this plan will lay the foundation for the continued success of the County in its greenway efforts over the next thirty years. As time passes, the County will adapt to growth and change - public objectives, local situations, and funding opportunities will evolve. The Henderson County Greenway Master Plan should be viewed as a working document that will still be relevant thirty years from now. The County should update the entire document, as well as reevaluate the recommendations and implementation method, approximately every five to ten years to ensure the continued improvement and enhancement of the area's greenway efforts.

This Master Plan identifies three types of greenways: Priority Greenways, Destination Greenways, and Connection Greenways. The three Priority Greenways are the Oklawaha Greenway, Ecusta Trail, and French Broad River Greenway. These greenways are important connections to other western North Carolina residents. The trails would eventually join a proposed regional trail network, The Hellbender Regional Trail, via adjacent counties. This Master Plan's identified Destination Greenways are: Community of Edneyville, Mills River Valley Trail, Town of Fletcher Greenways, Green River Game Land Greenway, and the Village of Flat Rock's Carl Sandburg Home Greenway. These potential routes link the different greenways together expanding the reach of each greenway for the user. Connection Greenways are yet to be defined and will evolve over time. They are meant to be direct routes, extensions of Priority or Destination Greenways, that can be utilized for commuting as well as recreation.

In the next few pages, the Policy and Action Step Recommendations are laid out in their entirety. Each recommendation is integral to the success of this plan, so all are included within the Executive Summary.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Greenways should be recognized in County policies as a tool to build communities, promote health benefits, provide outdoor education opportunities, encourage a sense of safety and awareness of the surrounding neighborhoods and properties, provide transportation connectivity, and provide a safe place for our future generations to walk, bike, and explore our natural environment.
- The County should determine a policy to incorporate the use of existing and future utility easements for public use greenways.
- The County should adopt a similar policy as the Mountain to Sea Trail to explore alternative options to work around uninterested property owners such as the use of NCDOT roads, bike lanes, sidewalks, etc.
- The County should request that NCDOT reconsider its policy on bike/ped projects related to required local match requirements. Many local governments cannot provide the required funding match.
- The County should consider adopting a Greenway Overlay District in the Land Development Code that would primarily apply to the identified Priority Greenways.
- The County should strive to connect greenways to existing public transportation facilities.
- The Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) should support the greenway network by seeking the advancement of projects and funding in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) when local matching funds are available.
- Economic development opportunities should be supported and encouraged along identified greenway corridors.
- The County should work with non-profits, the Partnership for Health, the Council on Aging, and other partners to educate the public and property owners about the benefits of greenways as a health and wellness goal.
- The County should work with the NC Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry to further develop outdoor recreation in Henderson County and the region with a focus on the Greenway Network.
- When appropriate, the County should work with the Henderson County Board of Public Education and local school representatives to connect schools with greenway opportunities.

## ACTION STEP RECOMMENDATIONS:

### ADOPT THE PLAN

- The previously adopted community plans and future community plan efforts should be used to explore locations and needs for the County's Priority and Destination Greenways.
- The County should consider establishing a greenway board to implement the Master Plan and feasibility studies.
- The County should continue to seek public participation, including public information sessions, while implementing various plan recommendations.
- The County should publish a website dedicated to this Master Plan and include an interactive map to encourage greater public input.

### COMPLETE PRIORITY GREENWAY SEGMENTS

- Priority Greenways, as identified in the Master Plan (Section 2.2), should be considered first for construction to create regional connections.
- The county's Priority Greenways should be identified and included as part of the regional greenway system for the French Broad River MPO area.
- The County should work in cooperation with Transylvania County, the City of Brevard, the City of Hendersonville, and the Town of Laurel Park to develop the proposed Ecusta Trail, if it is reasonably determined that the rail line from Hendersonville to Brevard has no viable future rail use. As part of this effort, the County, in conjunction with the above local governments, should consider requesting the State acquire the rail line for the purpose of establishing a greenway. The County and its partners should also review the federal rail banking statute as a means of securing and preserving the line.

### EXPLORE FEASIBILITY OF DESTINATION AND CONNECTION GREENWAYS

- Destination and Connection Greenways, as identified in the Master Plan, should be constructed as funding opportunities become available.
- The Municipal Inner Loop Greenway should be supported to connect historic Hendersonville, Laurel Park, and the Village of Flat Rock to the Priority and Destination Greenways with health and wellness destinations, local attractions, and businesses.
- County staff should have the discretion to assess when an area is "ready" for the greenway process. The county should also consider completing formal feasibility studies to aid in this assessment.

### EVALUATE GREENWAY EASEMENT OPTIONS

- The County should develop greenways through voluntary negotiations or contributions.
- The County should encourage non-profits to work with local landowners to secure easements and establish a method to receive and hold financial contributions for greenways.
- Greenway easements should be procured in conjunction with sewer and/or utility easements when a project is proposed for an area identified as a possible greenway route.

## IDENTIFY FUNDING AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- The County should utilize public-private partnerships and work with local business owners, industries, and the Partnership for Health to secure funding to complete the Greenway Network.
- The County and surrounding municipalities should consider setting aside funding each budget year for greenway development that would be used for grant match and other related funding needs related to the Greenway Network.
- The County should work with the Tourism Development Authority (TDA) to secure funding for portions of the Greenway Network that will increase tourism and enhance economic development.
- The County should coordinate with municipalities to seek funding that is only available to municipal governments for the creation of the identified Greenway Network within those municipalities.

## DESIGN AND CONSTRUCT TRAILS

- The County should coordinate design and construction efforts with other local governments and non-profits for a uniform and consistent Greenway Network.
- All greenway construction efforts should be based on a phasing plan as identified in a corresponding feasibility study.
- The County should consider phasing greenway construction when necessary if a paved trail cannot be achieved. This could include acquiring easements for a grass walkway or mulch or gravel type surface in order to get a greenway on the ground. Funding for final trail paving could then be achieved later.
- The County should work with NCDOT to provide multi-use paths or utilize sidewalks to achieve the overall connection of the greenway network. NCDOT roads and bike routes should connect sections of the greenway network when no other connections are available or for short-term connection solutions.
- Appropriate hydraulic modeling should be performed whenever a greenway is to be constructed in a floodplain.
- Greenway designs and plans should consider the surrounding environment and minimize adverse effects.
- Greenway design should consider not only the greenway itself, but also trail amenities to create a complete, accessible, and comfortable experience for a wide variety of expected users. As the trail network grows, key amenities for longer greenways could include restrooms, lighting, benches, water fountains, and bike repair stations.
- The County should work with its partners to establish a regional trail branding and way-finding program. This will help legitimize the network and create a consistent way to market greenways for economic development, community health, and tourism purposes.

## MAINTAIN TRAILS:

- Maintenance of existing greenways should be a priority.
- The County should coordinate maintenance efforts with other local governments, non-profits, and partners.

Greenway maintenance is essential to the long-term viability and sustainability of the greenway network. The network should be viewed and maintained as a public resource. This plan recommends a strong, collaborative approach to maintenance.

- The County should not only consider low-maintenance greenway designs, but also the most efficient and cost-effective means for maintaining the greenway network. Options include:
  - Contracting a private party that specializes in outdoor facility maintenance
  - Creating an inter-governmental agreement with the City of Hendersonville and other municipalities to garner equipment and resources
  - Working with non-profits to set-up volunteer maintenance on certain sections when possible
  - Establishing a separate fund in the Parks and Recreation budget to cover greenway maintenance costs
  - Creating an avenue for greenway users to report maintenance issues specific to the trail. This could be done via a smart phone application, a specific telephone line, or a email address dedicated to the greenway.
- A routine maintenance schedule for the greenways should be developed and tracked. Maintenance of trail amenities such as lights and solid waste collection should also be considered.