

Executive Summary

Over the past four years the Buncombe County Parks, Greenways and Recreation Services and the Buncombe County Greenway & Trails Commission has been working towards the vision of a Comprehensive Greenway & Trails Master Plan to guide all future regional greenway development in the County.

In June 2011, the effort to craft such a Master Plan began with the goal of linking existing and proposed greenways together to create a cohesive network for recreation and active transportation.

The effort to produce the Buncombe County Greenways & Trails Master Plan over the past year involved the input of more than 2,600 people and organizations throughout the county. Volunteers of the County's Greenways Commission put hundreds of hour toward the effort.

This Executive Summary outlines the key ideas from this input and tenets of the Greenways & Trails Master Plan that will guide multi-use trail investments in Buncombe County over the next 10-20 years.

A greenway is defined as a course for pedestrian and bicyclist use through linear open space, oftentimes along a natural corridor, river or stream. The Plan identifies 102 miles of proposed greenway corridors in Buncombe County. Thirteen (13) miles of greenways are already constructed within municipalities.

Citizens and stakeholders throughout the process had one primary question: "Where are the greenways going to go?" The bulk of the planning effort was focused on identifying where future corridors could be planned in relation to the existing population, growth

areas identified through the Buncombe County Land Use Plan, and where institutions as well as recreational and educational facilities could be connected through a system of greenways.

The planning and construction of greenways will take many years. Depending on the nature of the greenway and context in which it is built, the cost can range from less than \$30,000 per mile for a dirt path to \$1 million per mile for a paved trail in an urban setting.

Greenways should not be planned or built unless we also consider how they are to be designed, funded, operated and maintained. A countywide greenways system represents the County's first modern foray into constructing and maintaining linear infrastructure, as common public facilities such as sewer systems, water lines and roads are under the management of other government agencies.

It is these other agencies, particularly the Metropolitan Sewerage District (MSD) and North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), that afford Buncombe County some of its greatest opportunities for building a regional greenways system. Many sewer easements make ideal locations for greenways and trails. NCDOT's right-of-way and future project investments are critical to providing connections or trails adjacent to roadways in rural areas.

Other key elements in building and maintaining a well-connected countywide greenway network:

- ◆ **Programs:** A network of organizations and partners whose actions promote greenway use

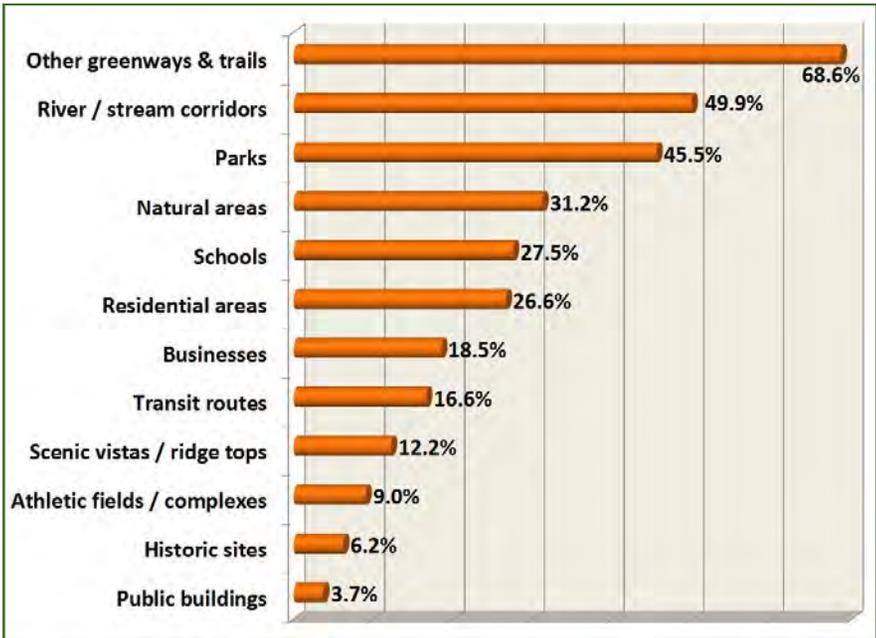
Greenways:
 "Trails, open pathways, sidewalks and bike lanes that build corridors to connect our parks and businesses, schools and neighborhoods, towns and cities, in Buncombe County".



"To support and promote the development of an environmentally friendly system of connected trails and greenways to improve health, alternative travel, economic development, and recreation in coordination with towns, cities, communities, businesses, non-profit organizations and adjacent counties."

- Mission of the Buncombe County Greenway & Trails Commission

Exhibit ES-1: Survey: To what places do you think greenway connectivity should be a priority?



through activities such as education, adopt-a-greenway efforts, and volunteer patrols.

◆ **Safety:** A diverse set of users will take to the greenways and they must be accommodated safely. Studies show greenways can increase the safety of neighborhoods where they are built.

◆ **Economics:** Greenways attract new business, promote job creation, enhance property values, and can help promote a strong local economy. We need to look no further than Greenville, SC, and Abingdon, VA, to see the positive influence greenways can have on a community's and region's economy.

- ◆ **Health:** Obesity is now considered an epidemic in the United States. In rural and unincorporated areas, greenways provide the most accessible and visible facility for physical activity.
- ◆ **Maintenance:** A greenway system is only as good as the condition of its surfaces and adjacent amenities. Our climate requires special consideration for design and maintenance practices to ensure four seasons of use per year as greenways are not only recreational facilities, but provide key transportation connections.

Past Planning Efforts

Several existing plans informed the findings of the 2012 Greenways and Trails Master Plan. Some efforts were directly incorporated into this plan, such as corridor-specific master plans or feasibility studies, while others helped establish the theme of the plan.

Two seminal planning efforts in Buncombe County—conducted in the late 1980s and early 1990s addressed the importance of local context. The Riverfront Plan (1989) was a charrette-based plan focusing on the Asheville riverfront area.

In 1991 a set of design guidelines as part of The Asheville Riverfront Open Space Guidelines were crafted. Since many of the greenways identified as part of a countywide system follow natural waterways, these guiding principles are still applicable.

Over the past 10 years, other efforts helped lay the foundation for this Plan.

- ◆ **Wilma Dykeman RiverWay Master Plan (2004);**
- ◆ **Buncombe County Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update (2006);**
- ◆ **Land of Sky Regional Council Regional Trails Master Plan (2008);**
- ◆ **Buncombe County Parks & Recreation Master Plan (2008);**
- ◆ **French Broad River / NC 251 Greenway Feasibility Study (2010);**
- ◆ **US 70 / Swannanoa River Greenway Feasibility Study (2010);**
- ◆ **French Broad River MPO 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan (2010);**
- ◆ **Buncombe County Sustainability Plan (2012); &**
- ◆ **Municipal Greenways, Bicycle & Pedestrian Plans.**

Users & Design Typologies

Buncombe County’s context for greenways ranges from rural and natural areas to suburban and urban neighborhoods. Even unincorporated areas have characteristics representative of an urban setting. Therefore, the range of trail typologies were developed to span these varied contexts and potential use.

Further, the type of users who are likely to use greenways in these environments is just as diverse. A well-connected greenway system is one the most diverse facets of our built environment in terms of how people interact. Exhibit ES-1 illustrates feedback from survey respondents as to the types of places they would like to reach via a greenway.

When compared to traditional walking trails or paved walkways within parks, their function transcends a recreational or experiential purpose to include a transportation element. When compared to other transportation facilities, greenways have a much more diverse set of user capabilities, “vehicles”, and speeds occupying and traveling through the same space.

A family walking the dog along a trail has different needs than the bicyclist using the greenway as a link between two roadways. The needs of a person in a wheelchair vary greatly from running club participants or a child learning to ride a bike.

How we accommodate a multitude of functions depends on understanding the context of the greenway and what user types are most likely to interact. The Plan defines four trail typologies (Exhibit ES-2) for greenways and trails in Buncombe County. The typology illustrations are a starting point for planners, architects and engineers who design greenways.

Exhibit ES-2: Typologies

Costs Key: \$ = Low; \$\$ = Moderate; \$\$\$ = High

Urban-Suburban / High Use

| Costs | |
|--------------------|-----------|
| Construction: | \$\$\$ |
| Amenities: | \$\$\$ |
| Access: | \$\$\$ |
| Acquisition Costs: | \$\$\$ |
| Contingencies: | \$\$\$ |
| Maintenance: | \$\$ / \$ |

Urban-Suburban / Moderate Use

| Costs | |
|--------------------|-----------|
| Construction: | \$\$\$ |
| Amenities: | \$\$ |
| Access: | \$\$\$ |
| Acquisition Costs: | \$\$\$ |
| Contingencies: | \$\$\$ |
| Maintenance: | \$\$ / \$ |

Suburban-Rural / Moderate Use

| Costs | |
|--------------------|------|
| Construction: | \$\$ |
| Amenities: | \$ |
| Access: | \$\$ |
| Acquisition Costs: | \$\$ |
| Contingencies: | \$\$ |
| Maintenance: | \$\$ |

Foot Path / Hiking Trail

| Costs | |
|--------------------|--------|
| Construction: | \$ |
| Amenities: | \$ |
| Access: | \$ |
| Acquisition Costs: | \$ |
| Contingencies: | \$ |
| Maintenance: | Varies |

Priority Corridor Map Legend

-  **Greenway Corridor:** The Priority Corridor that is the subject of that particular profile, identified through this Plan or past studies.
-  **3-5 ft Walking Trail:** Connectors to corridors that are intended as a hiking trail with natural surfaces. May be alternate routes to Priority Corridors.
-  **Other Greenway Corridors:** Priority Corridors that are not the subject of the profile.
-  **Long-Term Planned Greenways:** Corridors that should be studied in future plans or required if new development influences them.
-  **Existing Greenway:** Built corridor.
-  **NCDOT Complete Streets:** Corridors or connecting routes that are best suited for sidepaths or sidewalks to connect to a Priority Corridor.
-  **Areas of Concentrated Agricultural Resources** are general areas of the County where agricultural land was identified for potential for preservation and promotion of agri-tourism.

| | |
|---|---------------------------|
|  | Schools |
|  | Parks |
|  | Community Centers |
|  | Farmer's/Tailgate Markets |
|  | Public Lands |

Complete Streets

Some streets in Buncombe County have been identified in this Plan for “Complete Streets” treatments to reflect areas of notable demand for bicycle and pedestrian movements along streets. Some routes shown for Complete Streets are where corridors run along roadways or connection to a priority corridor should occur along a street.

A Complete Street can be defined as one that is designed to provide for the safe movement of all users of all abilities at all times. This does not mean that all streets are required or should have bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Some streets may have parallel off-road greenways to provide an accessible route while others may have sidepaths. Some may require a combination of sidewalks and bike lanes to serve as a greenway connection in a constrained area. For streetside improvements in Buncombe County, a partnership with the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) should be established.

And Buncombe County should pursue adoption of Complete Streets policies to help guide discussions with not only NCDOT, but also with each municipality and the French Broad River MPO. It will also help in developing partnerships to fund greenways or bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Priority Corridors

A total of eight (8) primary corridors were identified as high priority once results of public input, stakeholder engagement, field work, and professional analysis were generated. Figure ES-3 contains a countywide overview of the Priority Corridors.

The “Priority Corridors” (pages 6-7) represent 5 pre-

viously un-identified routes as well as the findings from the Wilma Dykeman RiverWay Plan and the US 70 / Swannanoa River and French Broad River / Highway 251 studies. These 8 corridors represent the highest priority for Buncombe County to pursue detailed planning, design, land acquisition and construction over the next 10 to 20 years.

To the greatest extent possible, the routes were evaluated to identify acceptable corridors along rivers and streams or existing utility or sewer easements; within the boundaries of publicly-owned properties; and situated where they appear to have least impact on private property.

It is intended that pursuit of implementation of these routes begin with corridor feasibility studies similar to what was conducted for the Wilma Dykeman RiverWay, the US 70 / Swannanoa River Greenway and the NC 251 / French Broad River Corridor.

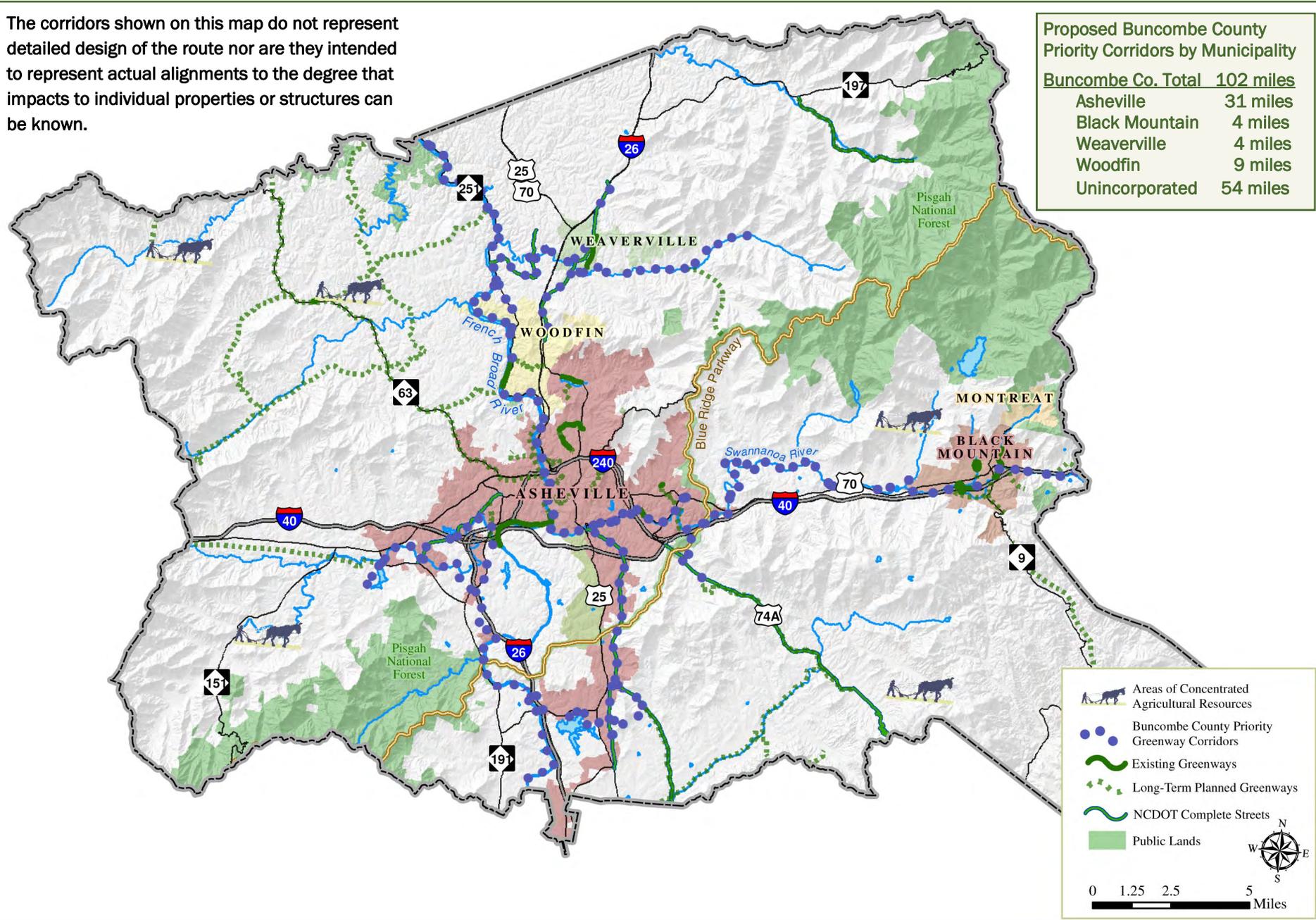
Once these studies are complete, projects can then advance to land acquisition, detailed design and construction. Prioritization of these corridors should be evaluated on a regular basis as circumstances such as growth patterns and opportunities change.

The priority corridors do not have to be constructed in their entirety before to working on the other priority corridors. Site specific challenges may occur within one of the priority corridors which does not allow for completion and efforts should be focused on moving the greenway system forward.

These profiles of the Priority Corridors do not represent detailed design of the route nor are they intended to represent actual alignments to the degree that impacts to individual properties or structures can be known or cost estimates fully derived.

Exhibit ES-3: Buncombe County Greenways & Trails Overview

The corridors shown on this map do not represent detailed design of the route nor are they intended to represent actual alignments to the degree that impacts to individual properties or structures can be known.



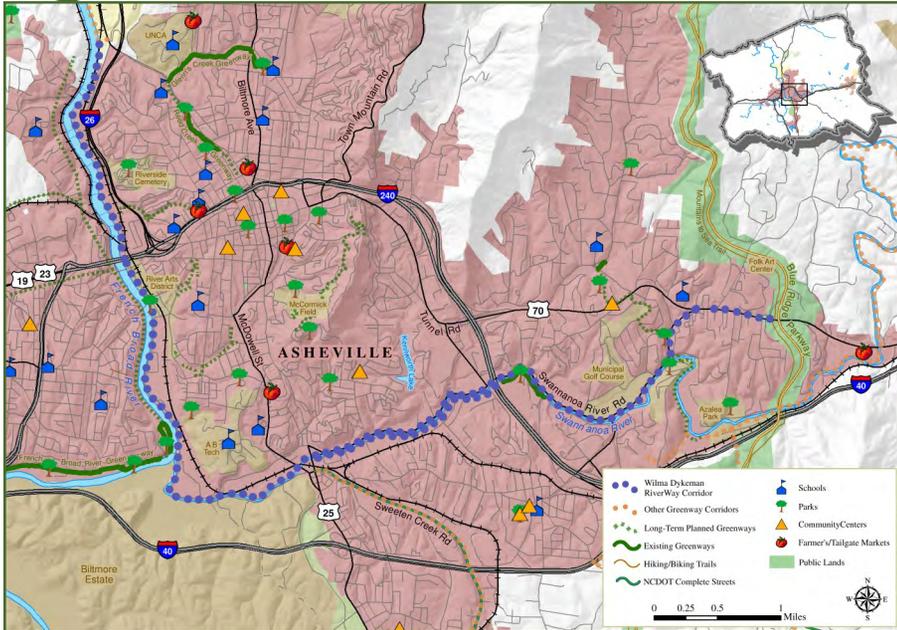
Proposed Buncombe County Priority Corridors by Municipality

| Buncombe Co. Total | 102 miles |
|--------------------|-----------|
| Asheville | 31 miles |
| Black Mountain | 4 miles |
| Weaverville | 4 miles |
| Woodfin | 9 miles |
| Unincorporated | 54 miles |

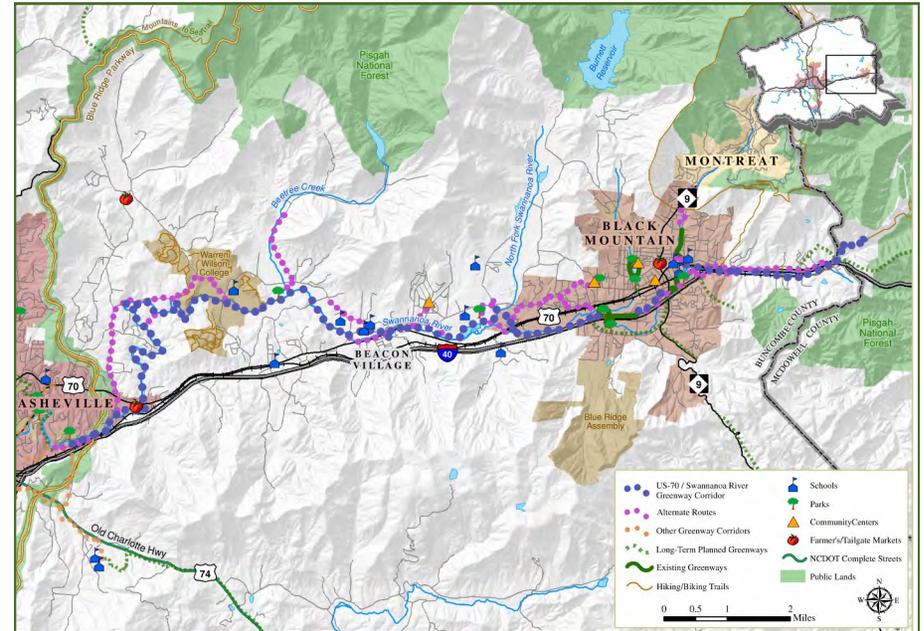
- Areas of Concentrated Agricultural Resources
- Buncombe County Priority Greenway Corridors
- Existing Greenways
- Long-Term Planned Greenways
- NCDOT Complete Streets
- Public Lands

0 1.25 2.5 5 Miles

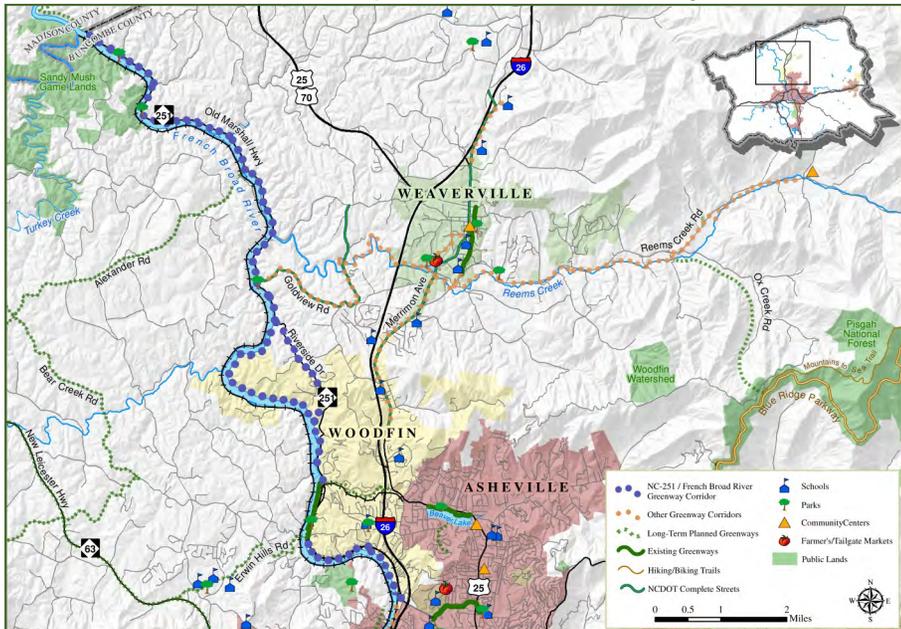
Wilma Dykeman RiverWay Corridor



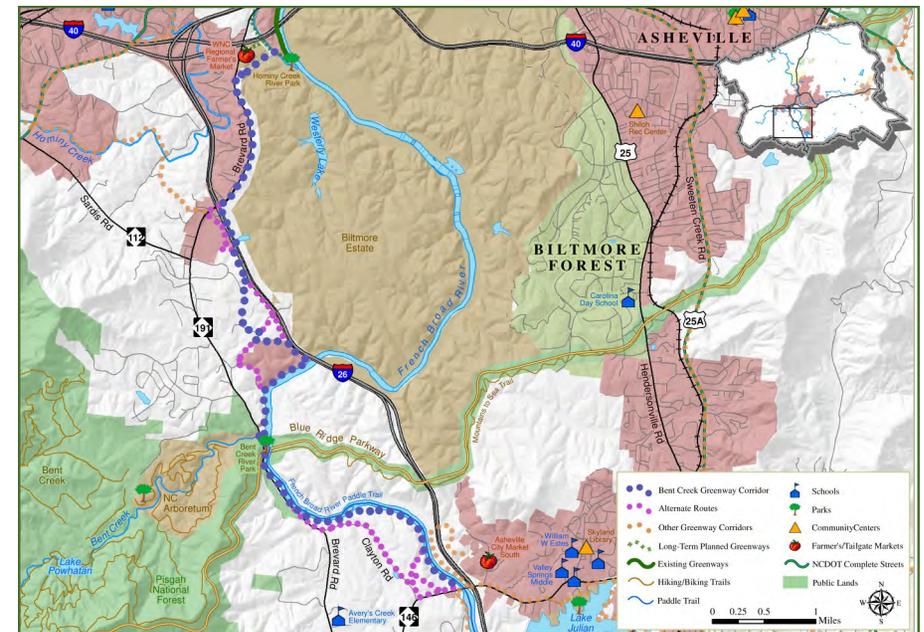
US 70 / Swannanoa River Greenway Corridor



French Broad River / NC 251 Greenway Corridor

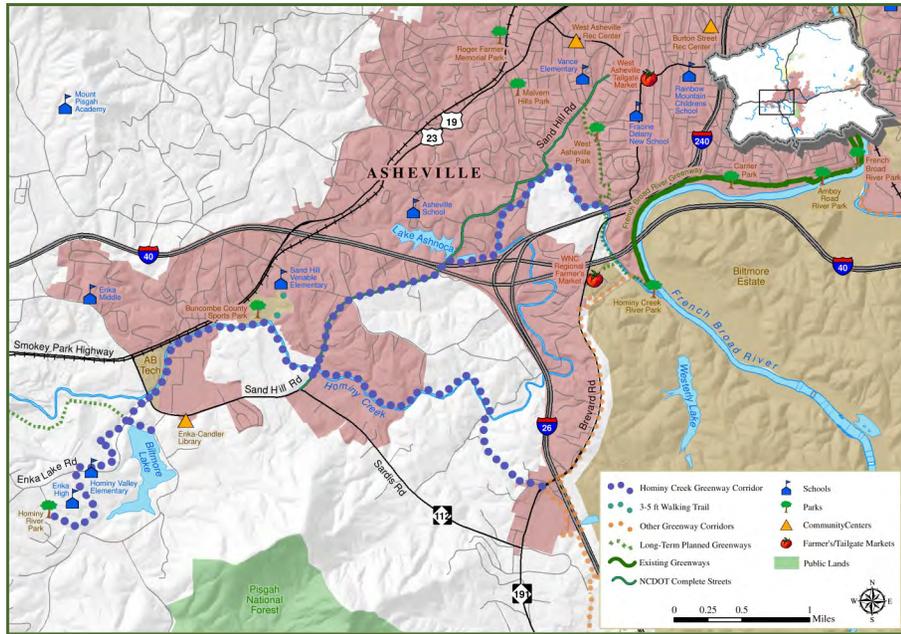


Bent Creek Greenway Corridor

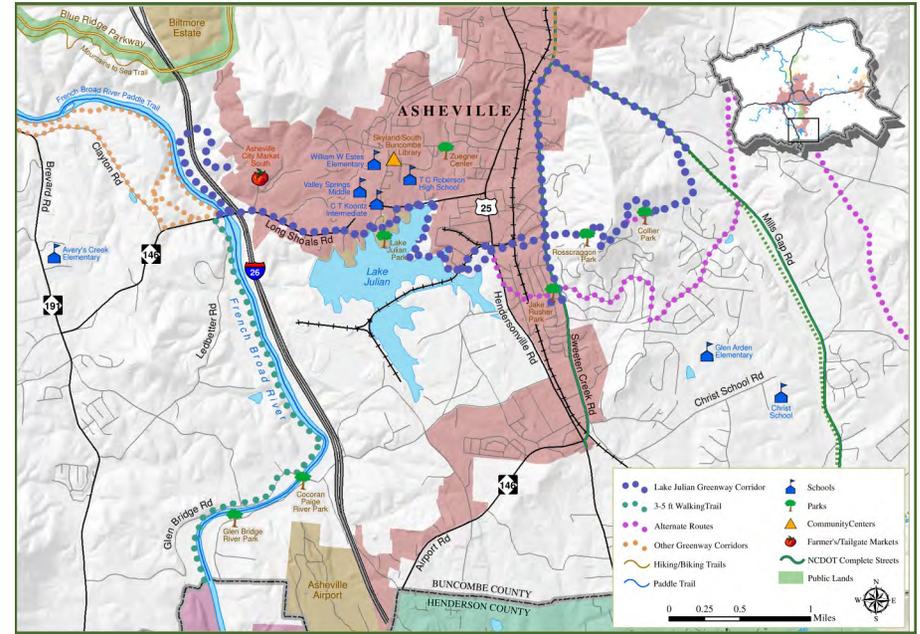


Detailed versions of these maps can be viewed in Chapter 3: Priority Corridors of the Plan.

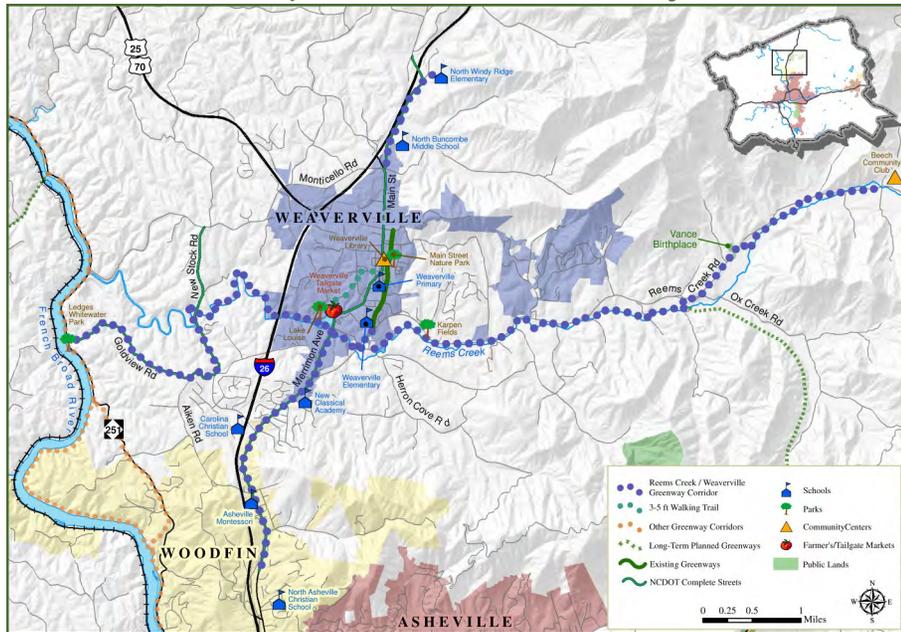
Hominy Creek Greenway Corridor



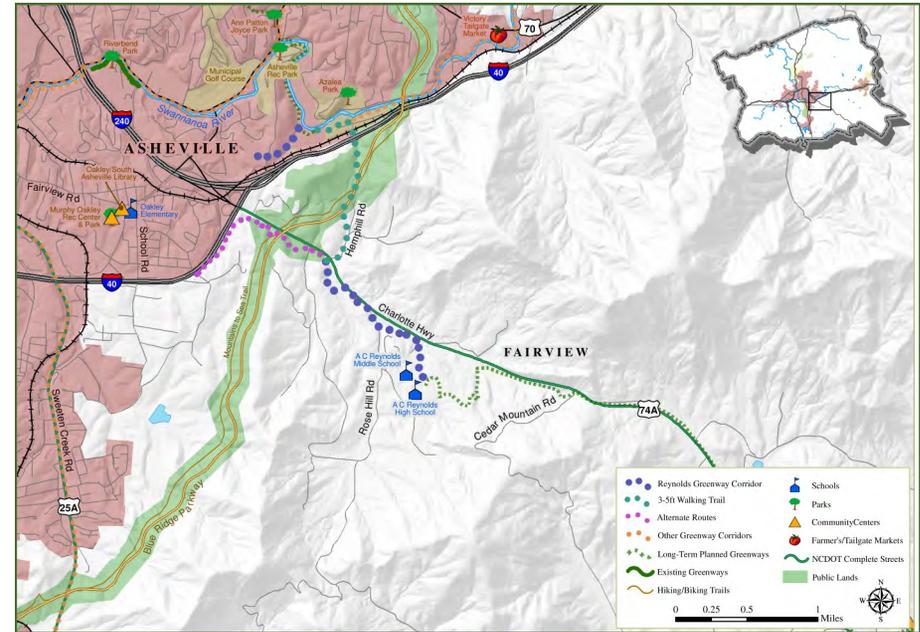
Lake Julian Greenway Corridor



Reems Creek / Weaverville Greenway Corridor



Reynolds Greenway Corridor



Detailed versions of these maps can be viewed in Chapter 3: Priority Corridors of the Plan.

Action Steps for Implementation

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

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

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

The 10 Action Steps for Implementation should be reviewed and prioritized on an annual basis with the Greenways & Trails Commission, Parks, Greenways and Recreation Services Advisory Board, representatives of cities and towns in Buncombe County, County management and the County Commissioners. The purpose of this review is to set forth a 12-month or two-year strategy for Parks, Greenways & Recreation Services to help guide how they pursue grants; what they request for annual budget allocation; how they interact with neighborhoods and organizations; and how they partner with non-profits, land conservancies, schools and other partners to maximize efficiency and expedite implementation.

Some of the Action Steps are ambitious and will require significant efforts beyond designing and constructing greenways.

Cultivate Existing Partnerships & Identify New Partners

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



Secure Local Funding Commitments

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



Identify Strategic Grant Opportunities

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



Create a Landowner Outreach Program

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

Pursue Conservation via Ordinances & Alliances

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



Amend Ordinances to Support Greenways

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

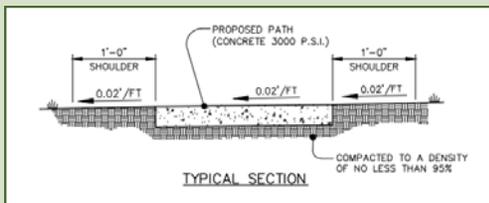


Conduct Detailed Plans for Priority Corridors

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

Develop Standards & Specifications for Greenways

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



Organize a Greenways Training Program

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



Evaluate Performance

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