

# SUSTAINABILITY ANNUAL REPORT FOR BUNCOMBE COUNTY



# INTRODUCTION

**THREE YEARS AGO**, on May 15, 2012, Buncombe County adopted its Sustainability Plan. The Sustainability Plan was created as a five year plan for the County and its residents to make improvements in three broad areas: community, environment, and economy. These three areas became the framework for defining the Sustainability Plan. Within each of these broader areas are specific goals, 14 in all. The adopted goals and their objectives address the wide reaching and interconnected needs and desires of our community. This Third Year Annual Report provides information related to each of the 14 adopted goals, their objectives, and the indicators used to measure progress. At the bottom of each goal page is a section which includes specific program descriptions or accomplishments highlighting the County's "Sustainability in Action" efforts.

Themes which emerged during this year's Annual Reporting process have been involvement, connection, and communication. Throughout several goal areas, citizen participation and community involvement have been increasing (e.g., Parent U, local volunteer rate). Initiatives that have connected public and private partners, such as economic and physical development ventures, and those that have connected local farmers with distributors through the Farm-to-Table movement, have seen much success this past year. Cross department and agency collaboration has resulted in unique and effective programs, such as the domestic violence initiative eNOugh!. These programs will likely continue to thrive throughout their development due to the solid foundation laid this past year.

This Third Year Annual Report provides information on the progress related to the 14 Sustainability Goals. Buncombe County remains committed to the accomplishment of each of these goals, and supports the efforts made by County departments and our sustainability partners to improve 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 travelled (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

The volunteer participation rate for Asheville is

# 29%

Ranked 35<sup>th</sup> in the country for mid-size cities

## EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

The Asheville City Schools graduation rate in 2014 was the highest in history

# 86.5%



## EQUITY IN ACCESS

# 1,956

Residents were connected to services through the Community Service Navigators (CSN) Program in FY2014



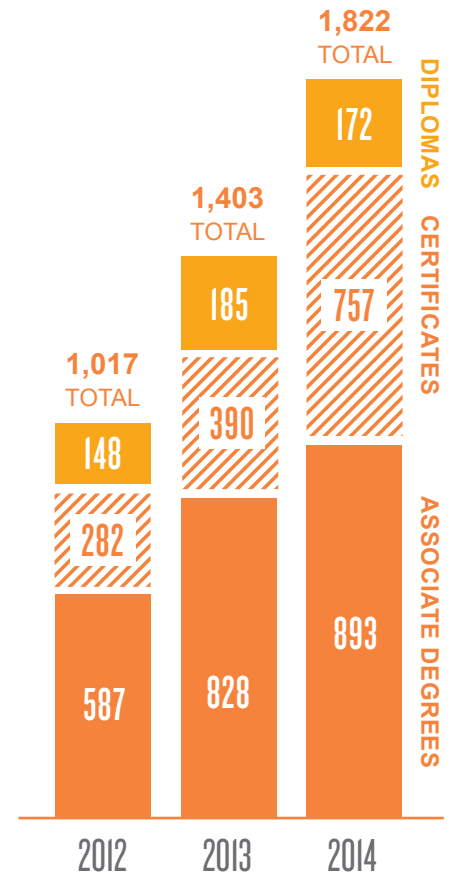
Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College (A-B Tech) has awarded 23,493 degrees/diplomas through August 2014



# EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES THAT MATCH THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

## PROGRESS

- Increase high school graduation rate.**
  - The Buncombe County's Schools graduation rate has improved from 73.1% in the 2010-2011 school year to 83.2% in the 2013-2014 school year.
  - The Asheville City Schools graduation rate in 2014 was 86.5%, the highest in history.
- Expand quality and quantity of early childhood development programs.**
  - Asheville City Schools operates a preschool that serves 180 children, ages 0-5, primarily from disadvantaged families. Those families are afforded numerous resources through the family support programs.
- 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 Schools increased from 102,178 in the 2009–2010 school year to 121,000 in the 2013-2014 school year.
- Promote programs that supplement equitable educational opportunities for all ages.**
  - The number of Title 1 parent meetings in Buncombe County Schools increased from 131 in the 2010–2011 school year to 201 in the 2013–2014 school year.
  - In 2014, four Asheville City Schools formed Racial Equity teams and began the process of both listening and sharing solutions to promote Excellence with Equity for all students and families.



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

## SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- In 2014, Asheville City Schools launched Parent U, a community collaboration to assist and empower parents, schools, and the community to become more engaged in our children’s learning and development. Parent U offers courses throughout the year in academic support, health and wellness, and social issues to support children’s success in school and in life. Twenty community businesses, organizations, and educational institutions have signed-on as Parent U partners and are sustaining a variety of programs offered each week.
- A-B Tech’s Sustainability Technologies Program was started in the 2010-2011 school year through a Department of Energy grant. The program has since become self-supporting with three graduates in 2012, five in 2013, and seven in 2014. Alumni have found employment with local renewable energy companies, have founded their own companies, are employed as Energy Auditors and/or green builders, or have chosen to further their education. Some alumni are exploring other areas of Sustainability such as: waste-stream management, architectural salvage, permaculture and sustainable agriculture, sustainable transportation, and non-profit work in social and environmental justice.
- Buncombe County Schools utilize a new curriculum framework in which students are reading, writing, speaking, listening and moving in every class, every day.



# HEALTHY PEOPLE

## PROGRESS

- **Decrease rates of childhood and adult obesity.**
  - The percentage of diagnosed obesity among adults age 20 and older in Buncombe County in 2014 was 23.6%, less than the 2009 baseline measure of 24%.
  - Prevalence of overweight and obesity among students in kindergarten through fifth grade in Buncombe County was 33.07% in 2014, reflecting a decrease from 33.17% in 2012.
- **Decrease infant mortality and low weight births.**
  - The percentage of low birth weight decreased from 10% in 2012 to 9.1% in 2014. In 2014, the percentage of low birth weight babies born to those mothers served by the nurse family partnership was 7.46%.
  - The infant mortality rate has decreased from 5.4 per 1,000 live births in 2010 to 5.3 in 2014.
- **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.**
  - In 2014, during the Affordable Care Act open enrollment periods, Buncombe County Health and Human Services (HHS) worked closely with the insurance representatives located in the department's lobby to help clients that did not qualify for Medicaid to have easier access to healthcare options.
  - In the Fall of 2014, Buncombe County HHS, School Health, and the Immunization Clinic promoted flu shot clinics at schools throughout the County. Ads through print, radio, and the schools helped direct citizens to a flu shot clinic in their area. There was a 20% increase in flu immunization acceptance within all City and County school districts in 2014.

## SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- In 2014, Buncombe County HHS collaborated with United Way's 2-1-1 program to provide better information when calls are transferred to the 2-1-1 program. Buncombe County provides information about the nature of the call upon the transfer to the call center. United Way has more information up front to better manage the call and meet callers' needs.
- A-B Tech and the Friends of the A-B Tech Allied Dental Programs celebrated the 40 year anniversary of the A-B Tech Dental Clinic this year. Patients receive treatment at the Clinic, staffed by dentists, dental assistance instructors, and students, at reduced pricing. Services include routine and deep cleaning, fluoride treatment, sealants, and digital dental radiographs. Also provided under the Dental Clinic is the Children's Dental Sealant Program. The College partnered with Eblen Charities to provide this program to all second graders in Buncombe County and Asheville City schools at no cost on Fridays, from January through May.
- The Community Health Improvement Process (CHIP) brings over 70 Buncombe County organizations together to outline strategies targeting community health priorities. Methods to measure and track this effort are being created by this group.







# 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 Fiscal Year (FY) 2011, \$2.5 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, 652 families were assisted since FY2011.
- **Provide educational opportunities in financial planning and homebuyer education.**
  - Through OnTrack and Habitat for Humanity's educational efforts, 1,062 individuals have participated in financial planning and homebuyer education classes since FY2011.



## SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- A Housing Needs Assessment and Market Study is conducted every five years on behalf of the City of Asheville and the four-county region including Buncombe, Henderson, Madison and Transylvania. The 2015 study concluded that the region has a significant gap in housing supply across housing types, family size and income. The study will be incorporated into the 2015-2020 Consolidated Strategic Plan for the use of HOME funds, which will be released in April, 2015.
- For FY2016, new construction projects on existing infrastructure will continue to be prioritized to receive Buncombe County affordable housing funding.
- In FY2016, the County will expand the amount of assistance available per emergency repair, up to \$15,000 for critical systems such as HVAC, electricity, roofing, and well or septic repair. This will enable low income families that live in older housing stock to remain in their homes. Typically the families that are assisted are elderly, disabled, or families with children.



+



+



+



=

652

FAMILIES ASSISTED THROUGH THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAMS IN THE 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 2014, 3,403 individuals volunteered 23,009 hours with 170 nonprofits. The volunteer participation rate for Asheville is 29% and Asheville is ranked 35<sup>th</sup> in the country for mid-size cities.
  - In 2014, there were 80 members who served on the Consumer Advisory Committee for HHS and 14 members who served on YEAH, the Consumer Advisory Committee for teens.
- **Ensure that information reaches citizens.**
  - Links for additional sources of information on the Building Permits & Inspections page of the County's website has increased from eight in 2012 to 26 in 2013 to 35 in 2014.
  - The number of users of Buncombe County social media has soared:
    - Facebook friends - was 316 in 2011 and is now 3,500.
    - Twitter followers - was 460 in 2011 and is now 3,223.
    - E-Zine subscribers – was 2,010 in 2010 and is now 3,097.
    - YouTube subscribers - was 250 in 2012 and now there are 976 subscribers with 70,000+ views.
  - Buncombe County funding for community, economic, and cultural development increased from \$13,282,070 in FY2011 to \$17,399,913 in FY2015.
- **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 979 in 2014.



## SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- Buncombe County Government was among numerous North Carolina governments to earn recognition at the 8th North Carolina City & County Communicators' (NC3C) Excellence in Communications Conference. Buncombe County received seven awards.
- The Buncombe County Sheriff's Office continued to seek out partnerships with the community and other stakeholders through their Community Oriented Problem Solving (COPS) teams. This program has been extremely successful in helping the Sheriff's Office deal effectively with property crimes, including residential break-ins. The COPS teams work in specific areas that are identified by property crime rates to solve cases, identify individuals who are continually committing break-ins, correct environmental factors that may help facilitate crime, and share information with the community about actions taken and outcomes achieved.



## EQUITY IN ACCESS

### PROGRESS

- **Promote an array of transportation options.**
  - Miles of Asheville Redefines Transit (ART) routes have increased from 176.2 in 2010 to 179.7 in 2014.
  - Miles of sidewalks in the County have increased from 417.3 in 2011 to 493.2 in 2014.
  - Mountain Mobility ridership has increased from 148,578 trips provided to 7,456 subscribed passengers in FY2010 to 162,100 trips provided to 12,842 subscribed passengers in FY2014.
- **Increase quantity and quality of recreational activities.**
  - The number of athletes involved in the Special Olympics increased from 518 in 2012 to 670 in 2014, a 29% increase.
  - The number of municipally-owned parks, pools, and recreation centers in the County increased from 92 in 2012 to 101 in 2014.
- **Build an extensive network of social services with locations in each high school district.**
  - In FY2014, the Community Service Navigators (CSN) program connected 1,957 residents with services. CSN connected 423 people to HHS programs, and 1,534 to other community resources.
- **Increase the availability of locally produced foods to low income individuals and increase their educational opportunities regarding farms and locally produced foods.**
  - There were three community gardens on County-owned property in 2013. In 2014 that number increased to 13.
  - The Buncombe County Cooperative Extension educated the community on healthy food options and preparation through nutrition classes. Participation in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program (EFNEP) classes decreased from 2,511 in 2012 to 2,417 in 2014. An additional 7,457 received information in newsletters and pamphlets.



### SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- Buncombe County Public Libraries received a \$60,000 grant through the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) program, awarded through the NC Library, in June 2014. The grant helped to fund the “Scan the Plan” project, in which special equipment and grant funded personnel scanned thousands of architectural drawings in the North Carolina room at Pack Library downtown. The result of the program was the preservation of these rare architectural plans, while also making them newly accessible on-line.
- The CSN program outreach efforts have almost doubled contact with Buncombe County residents from July 2013 to June 2014.
- Two school sidewalk projects began in 2014 supported through Buncombe County and NCDOT. Near Hominy Valley Elementary School, construction began for a pedestrian signal, crosswalk, curb ramps, and sidewalk. Construction of a sidewalk, curb and gutter also began along Eastwood Avenue to Charles D. Owen Middle School. These projects remove barriers for students walking to school, improve traffic control, and increase community pedestrian and bicycle safety.



# SAFE, LOW CRIME COMMUNITIES

## PROGRESS

- **Support neighborhood watches and community policing.**
  - In 2014, 12 new community watch programs were established, for a total of 143 programs throughout the County.
- **Foster a sense of neighborhood pride and civic responsibility.**
  - A year-round drop box for disposal of unused prescription and illegal drugs was offered throughout the year, and three Drug Take Back events were held, in which 1,278 pounds of drugs were collected. With the 1,050 pounds collected in the previous two years, 2,328 pounds of drugs have been collected to date through these programs.
  - The detention prevention vehicle visited schools and was featured at 27 different events in 2014.
  - The Major Mouse program reached 1,755 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 1,391 in 2014. This saved 90,481 jail days that offenders awaiting trial may otherwise have spent in the detention facility.
- **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 19 additional officers trained in 2014 in Crisis Intervention Training (CIT), bringing the total to 272.



## SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- In May 2014, the domestic violence initiative “eNOugh!” kicked off in Buncombe County. The initiative is designed to reduce the incidence of domestic violence and eliminate domestic violence homicides, improve treatment resources for offenders and victims, and ensure a coordinated community response to domestic violence. The program will include focused deterrence on previous offenses, lethality and risk assessments of offenders to evaluate the danger to victims, electronic monitoring of offenders, and a high risk team consisting of law enforcement, social workers, court officials, and others who share information and coordinate action.
- The Sheriff’s Department’s Special Response Team continued training and response to high risk tactical operations, including responding to barricaded suspects, high risk arrest warrants, and search warrant executions in the County. The Special Response Team trains and responds with the Crisis Negotiation Team. The Team trains together for 12 hours each month. In addition, individual team members receive specialized training from the North Carolina Justice Academy in areas specific to their Team roles.
- Adjacent to the Public Safety Training Center, Buncombe County is constructing an indoor firing range for law enforcement. The range includes 12 lanes, 50 yards in length. North Carolina requires officers to qualify each year with the weapon that they carry. Locating the range within Buncombe County, and adjacent to the Public Safety Training Center, increases training opportunities for all of the County’s law enforcement.



# RESISTANCE TO NATURAL AND MANMADE HAZARDS

## PROGRESS

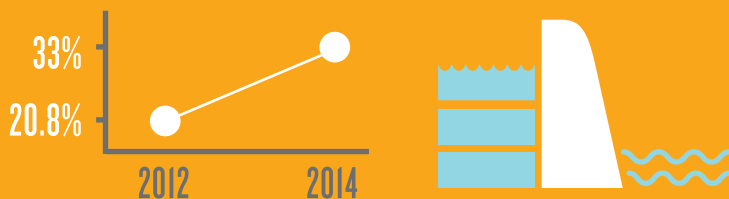
- **Locate critical facilities outside high hazard areas.**
  - There continue to be no critical facilities permitted within the 100-year floodplain.
- **Ensure local preparedness for emergencies (floods, fuel shortages, climate change, fire, droughts, earthquakes, food shortages, landslides, hazardous materials incidents, medical epidemics, etc.).**
  - Since 2003, 265 individuals have received Community Emergency Response (CERT) training. No funding was available in 2014 for training new responders.
  - The average response time for emergency calls has improved since 2007, decreasing by 25%, from 10.75 minutes to 8.01 minutes in 2014, with the Sheriff's Department responding to 69,873 calls.
  - Through the Public Safety Training Center, 9,147 students were trained in 2013 with 59,137 manhours. In 2014, 11,301 students were trained with 69,550 manhours.
  - In 2014, 33.3% 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

- Work continued within this year to complete the Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan, slated for adoption within FY2015. Adopting a Hazard Mitigation Plan is a requirement for local governments in North Carolina for applying and receiving mitigation grant funds. By identifying the risk of natural hazards in Buncombe County, the goal is to mitigate the potential damage of these hazards on the community. Educating the public regarding hazard mitigation/emergency preparedness is an important part of the Plan, and is an activity that is ongoing in Emergency Management.

**50%** INCREASE OF JURISDICTIONAL DAMS WITH EMERGENCY ACTION PLANS IN PLACE SINCE 2012



- Emergency Operating Plans (EOP) for local businesses and agencies often include a required training exercise component involving the Buncombe County Emergency Services Department. In 2014, Mission Hospital, UNC-A, the Biltmore Estate, and Buncombe County Schools included Buncombe County Emergency Services in completing training for each of their EOPs.
- In 2014, Buncombe County distributed nearly \$98,000 of federal emergency food and shelter funds through local non-profit organizations. These funds supplemented crisis food and shelter programs available in the community.



# HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS

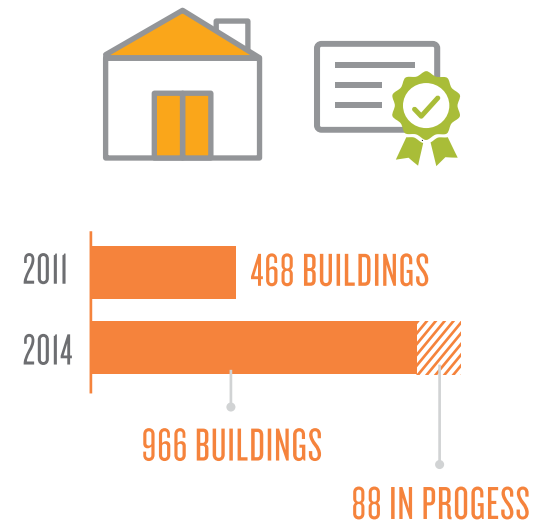
## PROGRESS

- **Promote healthy buildings and homes.**
  - The total number of Green Built certified buildings has increased from 468 in 2011, to 966 in 2014, with 88 in progress.
  - Buncombe County Building Permits and Inspections provided more inspections in 2014 than in 2013, from 26,502 to 32,633. 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 573 in 2014.
- **Improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists.**
  - There are 570 miles of roads suitable for biking in Buncombe County.
- **Decrease injuries.**
  - Buncombe County HHS inspected 85 adult care homes in 2014. In both 2012 and 2013, 87 adult care homes were inspected.
  - In 2014, Buncombe County HHS inspected 2,098 homes for safe sleeping arrangements for children and infants. Those same homes were also inspected for fire safety plans. In 2012, 608 homes were inspected.

## SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- Through the management of the Community Recreation Grant, Recreation Services invested in 18 non-profit projects and programs in FY2014 that enhanced and/or increased recreation, health & wellness, cultural education and community engagement opportunities for Buncombe County citizens.
- The Collier Cove Nature Preserve and walking trails in the Royal Pines community opened to the public in 2014. The grand opening and ribbon cutting took place on September 20, 2014.
- The new 3/4 mile paved greenway at Lake Julian Park was completed during FY2014. The greenway is located on the County managed lake property behind Wild Wings Café on Long Shoals Road. The County is currently moving forward to connect this new greenway to Lake Julian Park.
- Buncombe County received \$50,000 in funding from the NCDOT Bike-Ped program to complete a feasibility study for a section of the Bent Creek Greenway Corridor.

## NUMBER OF GREEN BUILT CERTIFIED BUILDINGS HAS INCREASED



# ENVIRONMENT

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

*The Buncombe County Sustainability Plan Vision Statement*



## PARTNERSHIPS FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

15 environmental education programs reached a total of

# 70,087 PEOPLE



## POLLUTION AND WASTE PREVENTION

County curbside recycling increased **3%**

County drop-off recycling increased **13.5%**

Commercial cardboard recycling increased **13%**



## EFFICIENT TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

# 69%

of employers in Buncombe County offer incentives and/or facilities for people to walk/bike to work

Buncombe County has reduced energy consumption in government owned buildings from 71,010 Btu per square foot in FY2013 to 64,471 Btu per square foot in FY2014.



# PARTNERSHIPS FOR CONSERVATION / PRESERVATION / RESTORATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

## PROGRESS

- **Conserve and protect water resources.**
  - The linear feet of riparian buffers has increased from 500 feet (1/4 acre) planned in FY2012 to 9,000 feet (3 acres) completed by the Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) in FY2014.
  - The number of livestock excluded from streams by measures installed by the SWCD has increased from 80 in FY2012 to 270 in FY2014.
- **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 39 projects and 5,561 acres in 2014.
- **Restore natural resources.**
  - The number of linear feet of streams restored by the SWCD has grown from 1,055 feet in FY2011 to 3,837 feet in FY2014.
- **Encourage sustainable land use.**
  - The number of conservation plans by the SWCD has increased from six in FY2012 to 15 plans in FY2014.
- **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 70,087 in FY2014.



## SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- The Soil and Water Conservation District is working with the North Carolina Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation and the North Carolina Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts to develop a pilot project to determine if crowd funding will work for SWCDs.
- The SWCD reports that participation in education programs regarding healthy streams and waterways is at an all-time high.
- The SWCD partners with agencies such as the North Carolina Division of Water Resources and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, particularly on animal waste management issues and stream restoration projects, to facilitate water quality improvements (i.e. identify water quality problems and potential solutions).
- Buncombe County has nine projects targeted to be completed by FY2016 that will reduce CO2e by 3.96%. Six of those projects are currently in progress.

### RIPARIAN BUFFERS IN FY2014



**RIPARIAN BUFFERS INCREASED OVER 14,000 LINEAR FEET SINCE 2012**





# POLLUTION AND WASTE PREVENTION

## PROGRESS

- **Improve air quality.**
  - Current design value for ozone in the County fell from 68 ppb in 2012 to 64 ppb in 2014.
  - 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.
- **Improve water quality.**
  - The number of permits issued for on-site septic system repairs increased from 109 in 2012 to 141 in 2014.
  - The number of Community Conservation Assistance Program (CCAP) projects increased from one in 2012 to one planned and four completed in FY2014.
- **Reduce the use of harmful chemicals.**
  - 821 citizens were certified in safe pesticide use in 2014.
  - 8,200 residents were trained in Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in 2014.
- **Manage waste—reduce, reuse, recycle.**
  - Amount of hazardous and special waste recycled:
    - The amount of white goods that were recycled increased from 260 tons in FY2011 to 370 tons in FY2014.
    - The amount of electronic equipment recycled increased from 91 tons in FY2011 to 161 tons in FY2014.

## CCAP WATER QUALITY PROJECTS



## SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- Since 2010, the WNC Regional Air Quality Agency (WNCRAQA) has partnered with multiple agencies to retrofit 25 fire engines with air pollution control devices that decrease emissions of particulate matter, carbon monoxide, and hydrocarbons.
- Cooperative Extension educated 15,450 citizens in practices to reduce fertilizer and pesticide use that could impact water bodies.
- The County’s Solid Waste Department is planning 46 household hazardous waste collection days in 2015. The Department promotes household hazardous waste and special waste recycling through its website, brochures, word of mouth, telephone calls, and ongoing operations.
- WNCRAQA participates in many public education activities related to pollution prevention. During 2014 they helped with North Carolina Division of Air Quality’s Air Quality IQ contest for middle school children and held the annual Air Quality Excellence Awards program. Additionally, Air Quality presentations were given to groups including local fire departments and the students attending the Buncombe County Soil and Water Conservation Field Days.





# ACCESSIBLE, MULTI-MODAL, AND EFFICIENT TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

## PROGRESS

### ● Reduce vehicle miles traveled and increase multi-modal options.

- Vehicle Miles Travelled (VMT) was 2.7 billion in 2010. In 2014 the VMT was 2.8 billion, a 4% increase.
- The percentage of people driving alone to work in the County in 2014 was 79%.
- Miles of alternative transportation options increased from 1,261.6 in 2011 to 1,354 in 2014:
  - Miles of ART routes have increased from 176.2 in 2012 to 179.7 in 2014.
  - Miles of Mountain Mobility routes have remained constant at 98.1.
  - Miles of sidewalks in the County have increased from 417.3 in 2012 to 493.2 in 2014.
  - There were two Park and Ride lots in the County in 2014.

### ● Increase multi-modal options.

- The number of individuals using alternative transportation options:
  - ART ridership declined from 1,525,212 riders in FY2010 to 1,441,395 in FY2014.
  - Mountain Mobility ridership increased from 7,456 passengers taking 148,578 trips in FY2010 to 12,842 passengers taking 162,100 trips in FY2014.
- A 3/4 mile section of greenway was completed in 2014.
- Annual bike and pedestrian counts in the City of Asheville increased from 4,086 in 2012 to 5,244 in 2014.



### ● Promote access to goods and services in areas of significant population density and in neighborhood hubs.

- The number of new commercial building permits within 1/4 mile of transportation options increased from 13 in FY2010 to 25 in FY2014.
- The percentage of County households that were within 1/4 mile of transportation options increased from 69% in 2011 to 70.6% in March 2015.

## SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- On January 1, 2015, ART began offering service on Sundays and improved service to the Emma and Oakley sections of Asheville. Asheville City Council approved funding for the change in the FY2015 budget.

- Over the last several months, Buncombe County and NCDOT have worked with community partners to examine and review possible routes for a feasibility study of a multi-use/multi-modal, paved greenway that will connect Brevard Road to the entrance of the Lake Julian Park. Over 200 members of the community turned out for a public input meeting.
- In 2014, Mountain Mobility had ten vehicles that ran on propane or gas and 12 that ran on compressed natural gas (CNG). The City of Asheville had more than 30 vehicles running on CNG.

### 2014 ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION USAGE

1,441,395

ASHEVILLE TRANSIT  
RIDERSHIP

162,100

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

The unemployment rate in 2014 was

# 4.7%

Down from 8.4% in 2010



*Photograph Courtesy of ASAP*



## SUSTAINABLE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

In 2014, Buncombe County contributed funding towards 7 conservation easements protecting

# 289 ACRES



163 specialized courses were offered through A-B Tech Economic and Workforce Development-Continuing Education Programming, an increase from 80 courses in 2012



# SUSTAINABLE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

## PROGRESS

- **Promote farmland preservation and decrease loss of agricultural land.**

- 260 acres were added to the Voluntary Agricultural District program (VAD) in FY2014.
- Two farms (124 acres) were added to the Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District program (EVAD) in FY2014 with a total of seven farms (733 acres) in the program which began in 2011.
- Buncombe County contributed funding towards four conservation easements which permanently protected 289 acres in 2014. The County has contributed funding towards 16 conservation easements since 2010, permanently protecting an additional 1,727 acres. County funding has leveraged an additional \$7,710,184 in grants, owner and private donations since 2010.



Photograph Courtesy of ASAP

- **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 26 CSAs, offering 1,220 shares, in 2014.
- 111,757 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 2014.

- **Increase demand for locally produced foods.**

- The number of farmers markets has grown from 12 in 2011 to 17 in 2014. Additionally, there are 16 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 292 in March 2015.

**111,757** CITIZENS OBTAINED KNOWLEDGE IN FOOD SYSTEM RELATED INFO

NUMBER OF FARMERS MARKETS INCREASED

**12 → 17**



## SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- WNC Farm Link is a partnership facilitating successful relationships between farmers looking for land to farm, and landowners aspiring to keep their farm and forest land in agriculture. Their vision is a resilient agricultural region where farmers have affordable options for accessing farm and forest land to create sustainable farm operations, where landowners have viable opportunities for keeping their land in farming, and where agriculture continues to be an integral part of our economy, environment, and community. Gaining access to high quality, affordable farmland is one of the most difficult obstacles for beginning farmers and expanding agricultural operations. As farmers retire, the question of whether the land will be farmed and remain available for local food production is a growing concern. WNC Farm Link connects retiring farmers, absentee landowners, and heirs of farmers who may be unsure of what they should do with their land with the aspiring farmers who are eager to farm.
- Cycle to Farm 2015 almost doubled in size this year with 161 registered riders. Five farms in the Sandy Mush area were visited as cyclists rolled through the mountains, hills and farmland of that community. At the farms, cyclists purchased and sampled products from the farms. The event ended at the Addison Vineyard Winery in Leicester where a meal was served featuring local food, with music and winery tours.



# SUSTAINABLE LOCALIZED ECONOMY

## PROGRESS

- **Provide incentives to businesses for growth.**
  - In 2014, the number of new jobs created through economic development incentives was 329, up from 285 the previous year. The total capital investment for new economic development incentive activity totalled \$268,520,000. The number of jobs created through the expansion of existing businesses was 295, up from 273 the prior year.
- **Promote “Buy Local” programs.**
  - In 2014 the number of participating producers in the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) increased, with 18 certified processors and 160 certified farms, up from 12 and 112 in 2013.
- **Ensure a diverse economy with competitive wages.**
  - The unemployment rate has decreased significantly since 2010. The latest unemployment rate was 4.7% in 2014, down from an annual average in 2010 of 8.4%.

## SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- A Job Fair sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce was held at the WNC Agricultural Center on January 8, 2014. Over 2,000 job seekers were placed with 93 (9 more than the previous year) employers seeking employees. The event was so successful that a 2015 Job Fair has been scheduled.
- The Farm-to-Table movement has helped Asheville earn its reputation as a "Foodtopia" and continues to grow as more restaurants, grocery stores, and farmers markets offer meats, vegetables, fruits, and other foods that are locally grown and produced. Sales of such locally produced items as trout caviar, hand-picked blueberries, heirloom apples, and artisan breads and cheeses support both the establishment where the transaction occurs and the local producers. This expansion of farm-fresh food has been embraced by residents and visitors who receive the benefit of eating the freshest foods they can find, while also helping the local economy.



- Buncombe County has worked closely with the Asheville Area Chamber to facilitate local expansions and new investments. Some key investments include:
  - BorgWarner announced a \$55 million expansion, adding 154 new jobs to build turbo engine parts found in cars and heavy equipment, as well as Indy race cars.
  - Kearfott Corp. is investing \$11.9 million in its Black Mountain plant, adding 75 new jobs to build navigation equipment, including systems on NASA's Voyager 1.
  - Jacob Holm Industries is investing \$45.9 million in its plant making nonwoven fabrics, hiring 66 new workers.



# 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 106 in 2014. In 2012 there were 127 individuals employed through Work First.
  - The number of referrals to the ASPIRE economic development job readiness program was 183 in 2014, with 25 graduates. In 2012 there were 307 participants and 58 graduates.
  - There were 212 individuals served by the Client Supply job readiness program in 2014. In 2012 there were 121.
- **Identify and reduce barriers to employment.**
  - The number of preschoolers (ages 0-4 years) served by the daycare subsidy program was 1,728 in 2014 and 1,799 in 2012.
  - The number of clients served through Emergency Assistance funding for rent was 710 in FY2014 and 878 in FY2012.
- **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 to 69 in 2014 from 62 in 2012.
  - The number of customized or specialized courses or services offered through A-B Tech Economic and Workforce Development-Continuing Education Programming increased to 163 in 2014 from 80 in 2012.



## SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

- A-B Tech and the Chamber of Commerce promoted a Job Fair in March 2015 for the new Asheville Outlets, opening in May 2015. Over 800 full and part time retail positions were available to be filled.
- Through two Duke Energy grants and equipment funding provided to the college by the NC Community College System, A-B Tech is establishing an Advanced Manufacturing Center.
- The number of NC Works Customized Training Program state-funded training projects with area industry partners administered and coordinated by A-B Tech grew from five in 2013 to 12 in 2014. The value of the training funded by the State through these projects is over \$2 million.
- Through the NC Advanced Manufacturing Alliance grant from the Department of Labor, North Carolina has placed 186 interns in jobs state-wide over the last three years; of that number, 66 have been placed by A-B Tech's Economic and Workforce Development-Continuing Education Program.
- Building on A-B Tech's Craft Beverage Institute of the Southeast, the Economic and Workforce Development-Continuing Education program will offer a new Beverage Logistics certificate in the Summer of 2015.

# CONCLUSION

**BUNCOMBE COUNTY'S** third year of implementation of the Sustainability Plan has allowed the County to identify trends. With at least three years of data, this is the first year where more meaningful illustrations have been used to describe the progress in several areas. Also, in this year's Annual Report we have celebrated success through our Sustainability in Action information on each goal page rather than focusing on strategies.

Throughout the next year of implementation, an important area of focus will be on new facilities and developments that are planned within Buncombe County (i.e., growth). These include developments in the areas of education, health, and the economy.

## **Educational Facilities:**

- Three new public schools will open this year, two in the City of Asheville and one in the Enka Candler community.
- Beside the recently constructed Public Safety Training Center and A-B Tech's Public Safety Training Facility Classroom building, the new firing range for law enforcement will be near completion.
- A-B Tech's Allied Health and Workforce Development Building, parking deck, and Auditorium/Multi-purpose building will be complete within the next year.

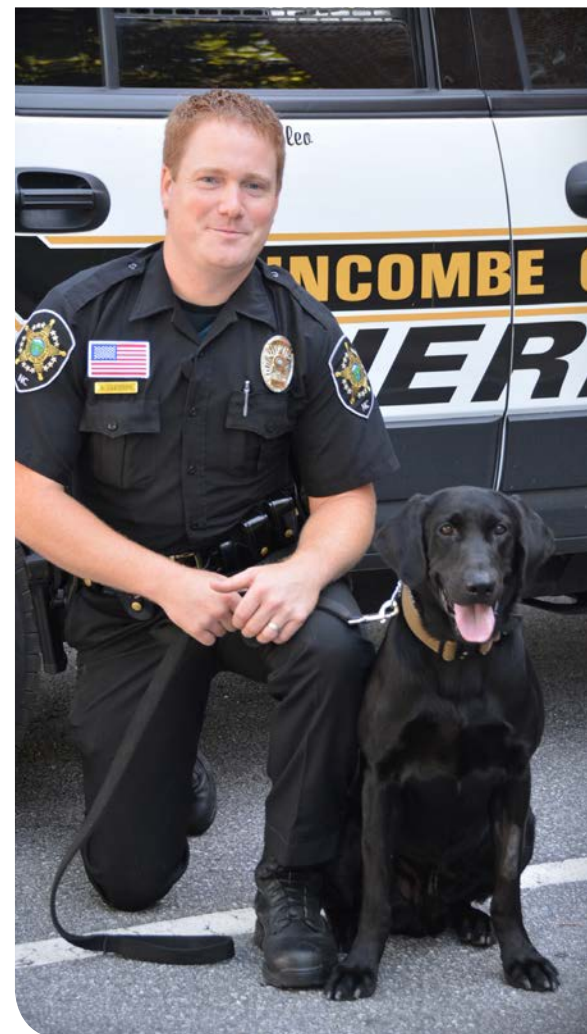
## **Health Facilities:**

- Mission Health System is the largest employer West of Charlotte with 10,500 employees within the hospital system and a total job impact of over 12,000 workers. Currently a \$420 million multi-year project for the hospital is being designed to transform facilities and increase services.
- Buncombe County HHS facility addition and garage will begin construction, which includes a seven-story addition to the current building.

## **Economy:**

- Expansions or relocations of several craft beer companies and suppliers, including Highland Brewing, Hi Wire, Wicked Weed, and White Labs, Inc., will provide over 150 new jobs with investment of nearly \$20 million over the next five years. Currently 18 craft breweries are located within Buncombe County.
- There are eight new hotels planned or under construction in downtown Asheville, including both boutique hotels and larger chain hotels such as Hilton Garden Inn, Marriott, and Hyatt Place. These support our tax base and local tourist industry sector.
- The Asheville Regional Airport announced a \$64 million expansion beginning this year and expected to be complete in 2017.

The County's Sustainability Plan is implemented through County departments and local agencies, but its ultimate success relies on its ability to influence and improve citizens' lives. The Plan itself only provides guidance and a framework; the initiatives and programs that are being pursued are those efforts that are making the difference.





**2015 SUSTAINABILITY ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR BUNCOMBE COUNTY**

Download this report online:  
[buncombecounty.org/Sustainability](http://buncombecounty.org/Sustainability)