

Chapter 2: Buncombe County Context

The communities throughout Buncombe County are as diverse as its landscape. Some sectors of the County remain in a rural and natural state, with farmlands and pasture abutting steep mountain grades. Other areas have experienced rapid growth and, while not within city or town limits, have urban centers, neighborhoods and other commercial areas. The cities and towns of Buncombe County—Asheville, Biltmore Forest, Black Mountain, Montreat, Weaverville, and Woodfin—each have qualities that contribute to the overall feel of the County and the region.

Factors such as terrain, historic landmarks and proximity to rivers and streams make each community unique while adding to the challenges of realizing a regionwide, inter-connected greenway system. The challenges faced in planning for and constructing greenways and trails systems in Western North Carolina can be traced back to ancient eras when the network of streams and rivers carved valleys throughout the southern Appalachian Mountains. Travel by any mode—whether for transportation or recreation—in Western North Carolina has always been difficult, as the far-traveling landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted noted in the late 1800s that the stage roads in Western North Carolina were “as bad as anything, under the name of road, can be conceived to be.”

The mountains and waterways of this region will continue to provide the likely course for greenway corridors to connect cities, schools, downtown areas and natural features. The routes to connect our communities will become popular destinations in and of themselves and provide opportunities for a fully integrated system of primary greenway facilities.

Today recreationalists flock to Western North Carolina to ride the Blue Ridge Parkway, experience moun-

tain vistas, hike numerous trails, and wheel down single track mountain bike trails that rank among the best in the United States. The area is also a hub for artists and culinary endeavors. This combined with the cultural influence of like-minded residents who reside in Buncombe County and contribute to our active lifestyles, complement a strong tourism-based economy and create a context within Buncombe County that should help naturally promote a stronger greenway culture.

This chapter reflects the factors that contribute to the uniqueness of communities across Buncombe County. It also profiles the feedback gathered during the public meetings and stakeholder workshops in 2011 and 2012.

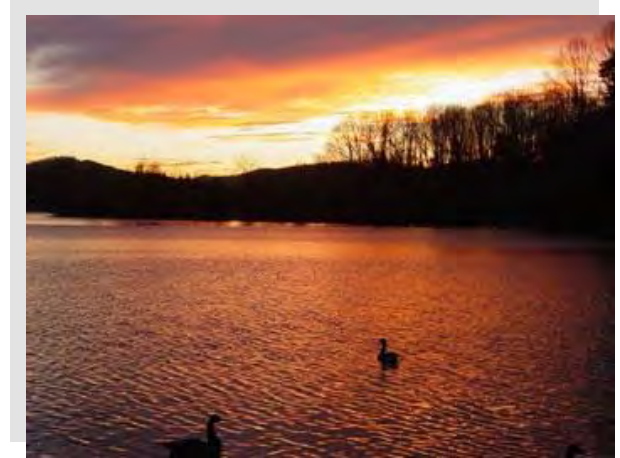
There is an expectation among area stakeholders that Buncombe County, its municipal partners, non-profits, land conservancies and other government agencies will act as a unified voice to create a regional greenways system.

Community Influences & Destinations

The following pages contain brief profiles of Buncombe County communities, cities and towns. These profiles were developed through stakeholder workshops, seven public meetings held throughout the County, and an online survey that asked respondents to name destinations in their community and across Buncombe County that they would like to access via a greenway.

Influences are major features of a community that can impact how and where a greenway is constructed (e.g. a river or major highway). **Destinations** are places people may travel to or start from to use a greenway. Some influences may also be destinations or have destinations near them.

Buncombe County Greenways & Trails Master Plan



Sunset over Lake Julian near the Arden community in south Buncombe County. The Lake Julian Greenway Corridor is one of the planned Priority Corridors identified in this Plan.

Photo Credit: Buncombe County

Community Influences & Destinations



Alexander

Influences & Destinations

- French Broad River
- Alexander Park & Greenway Trail
- Marshall & Madison County
- NC 251 / Riverside Drive bicycle route
- Ledges Park
- Mountain bike trails
- Walnut Island



Arden

Influences & Destinations

- Lake Julian & Park
- YMCA Reuter Center & Biltmore Park
- Former Brookwood Golf Course
- Bent Creek Trails & Blue Ridge Parkway
- Jake Rusher Park
- Royal Pines Park
- French Broad River
- Fletcher Park
- Airport area shopping centers
- Roberson area schools



Biltmore Lake in the Enka community.



Barnardsville & Big Ivy

Influences & Destinations

- Rural development, farms and pastureland
- Big Ivy Community Center
- Barnardsville township center
- Barnardsville Elementary School
- Ivy River
- Coleman Boundary
- Hiking trails near Blue Ridge Parkway
- Navitat



Walking trail and playground at the Big Ivy Community Center near Barnardsville.



Enka - Candler

Influences & Destinations

- Buncombe County Sports Park
- Sand Hill - Venable Elementary School
- Pisgah School & Candler Elementary
- Enka High School & Middle School
- AB Tech, Enka Campus
- Hominy Creek
- Beaverdam Community Center
- Biltmore Lake
- Bent Creek trails

Community Influences & Destinations



Fairview

Influences & Destinations

- Rural development, farms and pastureland
- Blue Ridge Parkway
- Fairview Elementary School
- Cane Creek Middle School
- Fairview Public Library
- Reynolds High School & Middle School
- Cane Creek
- US Highway 74A & NC Highway 9
- Hickory Nut Gap



Erwin, Leicester, Sandy Mush

Influences & Destinations

- Rural development, farms and pastureland
- Erwin Schools Complex
- Leicester School
- Leicester Library
- French Broad River
- Sandy Mush Game Lands



Greenway connecting Carrier Park and Hominy Creek in West Asheville.



Swannanoa

Influences & Destinations

- Swannanoa River
- Warren Wilson College
- Owen Schools
- Village center
- Grovemont community & library
- Bee Tree Lake
- Owen Park & Pool
- US Highway 70
- Blue Ridge Parkway
- Azalea Park & Nature Center



Facilities at Owen Park in the Swannanoa community.



Asheville

Influences & Destinations

- Downtown & River Arts District
- French Broad & Swannanoa Rivers
- Carrier Park & West Asheville
- Biltmore Village & Biltmore Estate
- UNC Asheville & Beaver Lake
- AB Tech Main Campus
- Existing Greenways & Wilma Dykeman RiverWay & Blue Ridge Parkway
- Haw Creek, Nature Center & Azalea Park
- City Neighborhoods

Community Influences & Destinations



Biltmore Forest

Influences & Destinations

- Large estate lots
- Blue Ridge Parkway
- Biltmore Estate
- Mountains-to-Sea Trail
- Carolina Day School



Black Mountain

Influences & Destinations

- Downtown & Lake Tomahawk
- Greenways, parks & garden
- Montreat College & The Oaks
- Swannanoa River
- Elementary & Primary School
- Ridgecrest
- Point Lookout Trail
- Retreats & camps
- Catawba Falls & Headwaters
- NC Highway 9 & US 70



Montreat

Influences & Destinations

- Montreat College
- Hiking trails
- Mt. Mitchell
- Downtown Black Mountain
- Point Lookout Trail
- Ridgecrest
- Black Mountain



Weaverville

Influences & Destinations

- Downtown Weaverville
- Nature Park
- Lake Louise & Reems Creek
- Vance Birthplace
- Blue Ridge Parkway
- North Buncombe schools
- Woodfin & North Asheville
- Windy Gap
- French Broad River



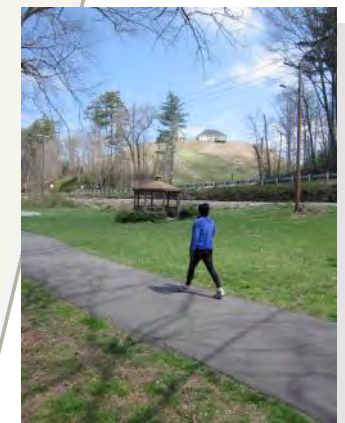
Point Lookout Trail to Old Fort.



Woodfin

Influences & Destinations

- YMCA Woodfin
- Woodfin Elementary School
- Riverside Park
- French Broad River
- Weaverville & North Asheville
- Woodfin Community Center
- Reynolds Village



Greenway at Woodfin's Riverside Park.

Community & Stakeholder Outreach

A five-pronged approach to gathering input from across Buncombe County was employed to reach as many communities and diverse populations as possible. While new technology such as online surveys and social networking allow citizens to provide commentary on specific aspects of the Greenways and Trails Master Plan, Buncombe County felt it imperative that citizens and stakeholders be engaged one-on-one through a variety of methods. The five-pronged approach included:

- ◆ **11 Public Meetings**, which drew more than 300 citizens, were held in October 2011 and May 2012 at:
 - ◇ Arden (x2);
 - ◇ Asheville (x2);
 - ◇ Barnardsville;
 - ◇ Black Mountain;
 - ◇ Enka;
 - ◇ Fairview;
 - ◇ Leicester; and
 - ◇ Weaverville (x2).
- ◆ **Two-Day Stakeholders Workshop**, which drew 138 invitees from several interest groups across the region, and included sessions for:
 - ◇ Elected officials & town managers;
 - ◇ Economic development;
 - ◇ Health & wellness;
 - ◇ Maintenance & policy;
 - ◇ Recreation & programs;
 - ◇ Sustainability & environment; and
 - ◇ Transportation & connectivity.
- ◆ **Information Booths at 12 public festivals** throughout the summer and fall of 2011;

Exhibit 2-1: Geographic distribution of survey respondents

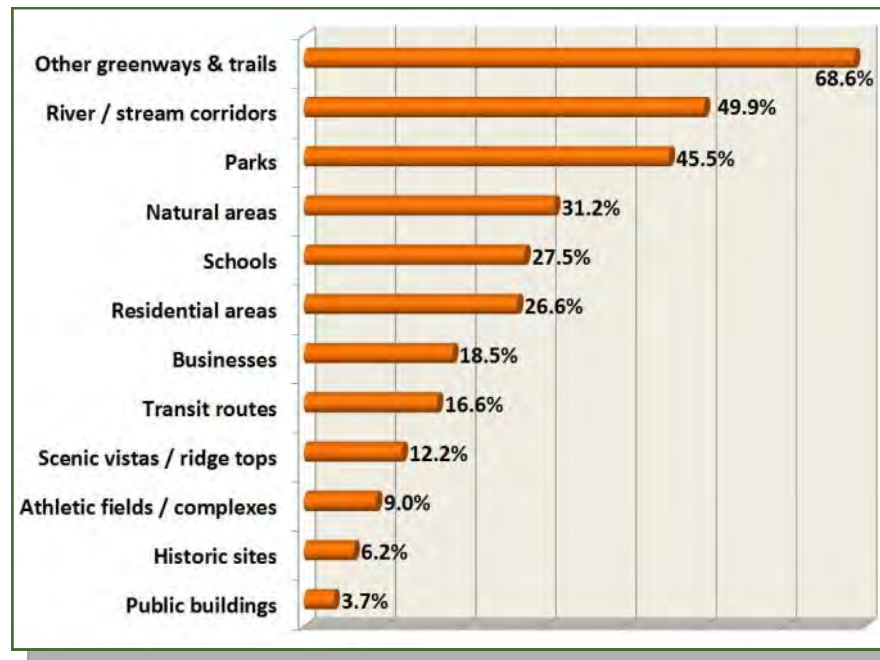
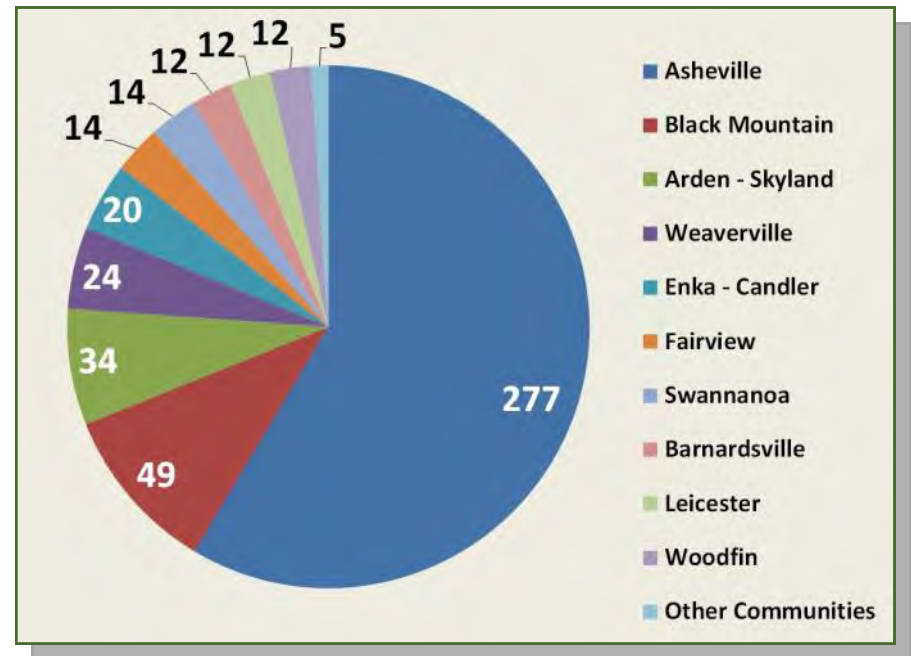


Exhibit 2-2: To what places do you think greenway connectivity should be a priority?

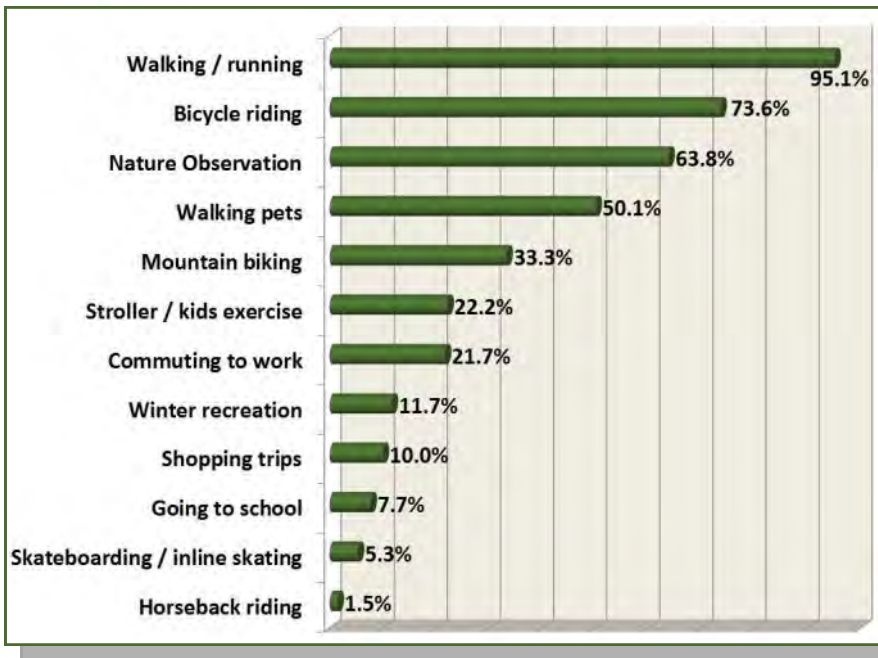


Exhibit 2-3: What activities influence your use of greenways?

- ◆ **Online Survey**, which was completed by more than 500 respondents and disseminated through information booths and public forums, Facebook, websites for communities and organizations, and through announcements.
- ◆ **Greenways, Please:** A marketing campaign consisting of newspaper columns, public service announcements, a promotional video, social media and photo campaign with 700 images submitted by citizens that drew attention to Connect Buncombe and the Plan throughout the process.

Survey Results

The survey conducted as part of the Greenways and Trails Master Plan was intended to gather specific information from Buncombe County residents and visitors as to what types of places they would like to access via a greenway, with a strong emphasis on their desires for greater connectivity.

Exhibit 2-4: What factors deter you or your family from using a greenway?

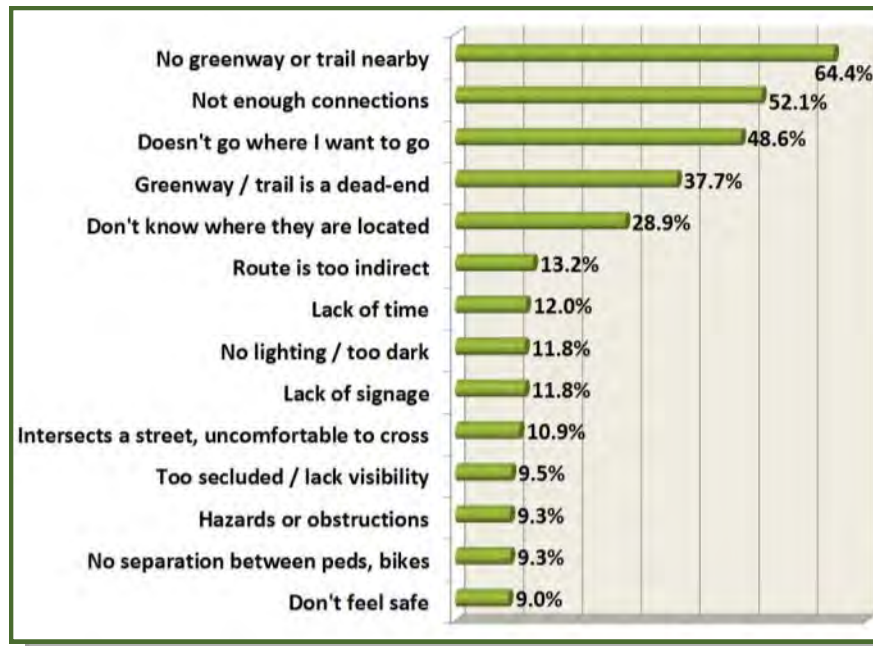


Exhibit 2-1 illustrates the geographic distribution of the more than 500 respondents to the survey, of which more than half were from the City of Asheville. Black Mountain, Arden-Skyland, Weaverville and Enka-Candler each had between 20 and 40 respondents.

The survey included 15 questions with a variety of formats to gauge specific interest in projects, programs and connectivity to various destinations, including general desires and community-specific locations. For exhibits 2-2, 2-3, and 2-4, respondents were allowed to pick multiple preferences. Most notable were these responses:

Exhibit 2-2: To what places do you think greenway connectivity should be a priority? Recreational areas and natural areas were the primary general destinations, with schools, residential areas and businesses comprising leading commute destinations.

Exhibit 2-3: What type of activities influence your use a greenway? The leading responses were related to walking, running, bicycling and nature observation. Respondents also strongly noted they use greenways for reaching a destination such as work, schools or shopping areas.

Exhibit 2-4: What factors deter you or your family from using a greenway? The lack of greenways or trails near a residence or business and a lack of connectivity between existing greenways were cited as the main deterrents of greenway usage. A few respondents cited concerns about safety or hazards as reasons that would discourage them from using a greenway.

Respondents were also asked to identify three specific destinations within their community and five specific destinations elsewhere in Buncombe County they would like to access via a greenway or trail. The purpose of the two questions was to encourage them to consider both local and regional attractors. As noted, these individual responses were used to generate the influences and destinations noted in the community profiles. Additionally, Exhibit 2-5 shows the top destinations identified by the more than 500 respondents.

Stakeholders: What We Heard

The two-day stakeholders workshop gathered a diverse set of stakeholders to answer a subject-specific focus question about greenways. Participants were asked to prioritize their responses, which were discussed during each subject area session. The results of the subject area sessions were then cross-tabulated and synthesized into major themes that constitute the major objectives for Buncombe County and its partners to pursue a regional greenways and

trails system. The themes of this synthesis are included on the following pages and are listed in no particular order. Throughout development of the Buncombe County Greenways and Trails Plan these themes served as guidance in developing various sections of the Plan and to ensure the results of the plan were consistent with what we heard from stakeholders and citizens.

Exhibit 2-5: Top Destinations Desired for Greenway Connectivity, as Identified by Survey Respondents

Destinations	Responses	Destinations	Responses
West Asheville	112	Riverside Drive	27
Blue Ridge Parkway	108	Beaver Lake	25
French Broad River	91	Marshall	19
Bent Creek	89	Tunnel Road	18
Downtown Asheville	88	Biltmore Estate	17
River Arts District	81	Swannanoa	17
Swannanoa River	60	Weaverville	15
Schools	52	East Asheville	13
Carrier Park	49	AB Tech	12
UNC Asheville	49	Biltmore Park	12
Nature Center & Azalea Park	45	South Asheville	12
Arboretum	44	Lake Tomahawk	11
Black Mountain	42	North Asheville	11
Grocery Store	36	Ridgecrest	10
Biltmore Village	33	Farmers Market	9
Warren Wilson College	32	Lake Julian	9
Montreat	29	Buncombe Co Sports Park	8

What we heard...

Context & Identity

- Acknowledge community identity and placemaking potential of greenways.
- Build upon community culture and themes.
- Incorporate art
- Engage youth & older adults.
- Recognize that support will vary among communities.
- Create “cool” communities.



Partnerships & Economic Development

- Develop a plan of action to keep the public sector engaged.
- Define what is already in place.
- Know the needs of the private sector.
- Reach out to schools, non-profits and land conservancies.
- Incentivize greenways investment.
- Work with law enforcement.



Access & Connectivity

- Provide direct connections from greenways to gathering places.
- Enhance neighborhoods through greenway connectivity.
- Prioritize schools, parks and natural areas.
- Understand the need for safety features at access points.
- Connections to transit are increasingly important.



Land Acquisition & Management

- Identify appropriate techniques.
- Develop a fee in lieu program for greenways development.
- Place requirements on development as with sewer, roads and water.
- Eminent domain is not preferred.
- Work to preserve large parcels.
- Get ahead of growth.

Funding Strategies

- Pursue a dedicated source of revenue.
- Communities should recognize a common interest in funding greenways.
- Identify less-restrictive (e.g. non-federal) funding sources.
- Coordinate funding to lessen burden on small towns.
- Development-based requirements can allay some costs.

Health Impacts

- Be equitable by constructing greenways in communities that benefit the most.
- Build upon the creativity, spirituality & salubrious lifestyles of people.
- Understand the impacts of safe practices & design on health.
- Recognize the positive role greenways play in stress relief, family dynamics, & mental health.
- Design and access matter.

What we heard...

Design

- Consider life-cycle maintenance costs in design and construction.
- Understand the need for visibility and how that relates to security for users.
- Explore different surface types based on context.
- Use local materials and green techniques.
- Recognizing the proper context for amenities is important.



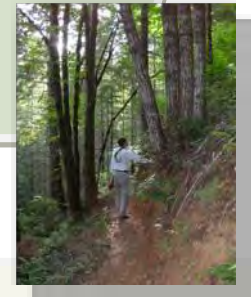
Environment & Ecosystems

- Enhance floodplains and riparian zones.
- Restore streams along greenway routes.
- Connect people to natural features.
- Preserve “wild areas” and design greenways accordingly.
- Identify partners who can provide environmental benefits along with greenways and trails.



Responsibility & Liability

- Define how it affects towns, partners, volunteers and others.
- Develop agreements to lessen liability for private property owners.
- Establish, follow, and enforce policies for use.
- Protect volunteers.



Programs & Education

- Reach out to people of all ages and abilities.
- Build upon existing programs led by various non-profits.
- Coordinate with schools, universities, and colleges.
- Create demonstration projects.
- Develop training programs for greenway usage & maintenance.

Volunteers & Advocacy

- Keep volunteers and advocates engaged.
- Develop an Adopt-A-Trail program in cooperation with schools, retreat centers, neighborhood associations and non-profits.
- Actively promote greenways through various channels.
- Understand the impacts of tourism.

Utilities, NCDOT & Railroads

- Ensure these entities understand a desire to make them a partner.
- Identify easements and right-of-way that can benefit greenways.
- Engage them early in the planning and design of new greenways.
- Make sure they are at the table.
- Understand their business model.

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