



ANNUAL REPORT | BUNCOMBE COUNTY SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

May 2013





MEASURING SUSTAINABILITY



VISION STATEMENT

Buncombe County is a leader in sustainable practices through the collaboration of citizens, institutions, businesses, and government. We promote a sense of community through public engagement. We celebrate a healthy, safe, well-educated, and thriving community with a sustainable quality of life. We are stewards of the environment who advocate the conservation, preservation, and restoration of resources. We are part of a community and environmentally-conscious economy that is stable and diverse. We have a strong sense of place, and continue to work to preserve our distinctive landscape and culture. We are committed to continually improving our community for the betterment of future generations.

The first Sustainability Plan for Buncombe County, adopted in 2009, was crafted as a response to the environmental and economic imperatives for sustainability and efficiency. This plan was primarily focused on the operation of the County's facilities and fleet. In adopting this plan, the County's leadership recognized that sustainable decision making is "a balance of environmental stewardship, social responsibility and economic vitality."¹ The balance of these critical and interrelated elements continues to be reflected in the efforts of the County's governance today. The Board of Commissioners recommitted the County to these principles with the adoption of a County-wide Sustainability Plan on May 15, 2012. The plan is intended to guide the efforts of both local government and the greater community toward sustainable practices.

The vision statement above, crafted by Buncombe County and its Sustainability Partners in 2011, helped guide the development of the goals and objectives which comprise the Sustainability Plan. County departments and area agencies then helped to define the strategies for implementation and the indicators used to measure progress. Over the past year these departments and agencies have worked

to act on the Plan's strategies, in alignment with the goals identified by the Sustainability Plan, as well as those of the individual departments and agencies. For this reason, the Sustainability Plan for Buncombe County was also formally adopted as Buncombe County's Strategic Plan.

As a part of the process of building a more sustainable Buncombe County, a commitment has been made to provide an annual report on the progress of the Plan's implementation. Furthermore, the Sustainability Plan will be reviewed and updated every five years. The intent of the Plan is to both guide and inform residents of Buncombe County as we strive for a more conscientious management of our resources and improvement of the quality of our lives.

This document serves as the first annual report on the Sustainability Plan for Buncombe County. It briefly reflects some of the successes and challenges realized during the first year of implementation of the Plan. This Annual Report is offered as an additional resource to those seeking to better the environment, community and economy within Buncombe County.

¹ Buncombe County Sustainability Plan (2009)



SUSTAINABILITY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Sustainability Plan was crafted using goals and objectives that address the interconnected needs and desires of our community. The 14 goals that were established can be categorized in the areas of economy, environment, and community. Each goal is supported by objectives that serve as statements of action to guide activities toward goal accomplishment. During the first year of implementation, County departments and agencies worked toward accomplishing the objectives identified through the Plan's

development, and also added a few new objectives that clarify actions. In measuring progress on these objectives, indicators are tracked to establish a statistical basis for evaluation. For each goal listed in the annual report, the objective that is being tracked is shown in italics (beginning on page 5). Shown below are each goal and its objectives, followed by an example of a strategy currently employed to accomplish the goal.



EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES:

- 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.

Buncombe County Schools Graduation Initiative program includes Twilight School and minimesters. The goal of the program is to increase opportunities for students to get back on track for graduation.



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.

Buncombe County Parks, Greenways and Recreation Services started a "Take a Walk with a Doc" program, where walkers join volunteer doctors for an hour and half long walk at a local park to learn about important health topics and get answers to basic health questions in an informal, relaxed and fun way.



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 served 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.
- Work in partnership with outside organizations to assist families in finding safe, affordable housing. (new)

Buncombe County Building Permits and Inspections developed and posted guidelines for the acceptance of alternate materials and methods, providing the potential opportunity for less costly and more energy efficient construction.

- educational opportunities regarding farms and locally produced foods.
- Ensure reliable access to information resources (i.e. broadband internet).
- 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 healthcare. (new)

is seamless and effective, and staff is continually trained using best methods and practices. (new)

The Buncombe County Sheriff's Department's Community Oriented Problem Solving (COPS) program is working in partnership with the NC Department of Transportation to utilize inmate labor to clean up trouble spots within the County. These projects focus on trash and graffiti removal, as well as beautification and maintenance activities.



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 contributions of all Buncombe County citizens.

An Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program for low income youth and adults is offered by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Services office. This program offers hands-on demonstrations of healthful food choices and preparation practices.

Buncombe County Public Relations is developing Volunteer and Community Board Member 101 Courses, which will train and inform new members on County functions and programs.



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.
- Engage with the community as a partner to problem solve community issues. (new)
- Provide a comprehensive public safety system in which communication between agencies



RESISTANCE TO NATURAL AND MANMADE HAZARDS:

- Locate critical facilities outside high hazard areas.
- Ensure local preparedness for emergencies (floods, fuel shortages, climate change, fires, droughts, earthquakes, food shortages, landslides, hazardous materials incidents, medical epidemics, etc.).

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and emergency response plan training is provided by Emergency Management Services. The training is grant funded and offered to local communities within the County as requested.



EQUITY IN ACCESS:

- Improve equality in access to healthcare.
- 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



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 Public Safety Training Facility was completed in late 2012, where firefighters, EMS staff, and law enforcement receive specialized training.



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.

Buncombe County's Soil and Water Conservation District and Buncombe County's Cooperative Extension Services provide training and certification workshops for County residents to learn best management practices regarding agricultural activities, runoff, and water quality.



POLLUTION AND WASTE PREVENTION:

- Improve air quality.
- Improve water quality.
- Reduce the use of harmful chemicals.
- Manage waste - reduce, reuse, recycle.

The WNC Regional Air Quality Agency partnered with Buncombe County Solid Waste and outside sponsors to swap almost 900 conventional gas cans for lower emitting cans, resulting in a total

emissions reduction of 3,400 pounds of volatile organic compounds (VOCs).



ACCESSIBLE, MULTI-MODAL, AND EFFICIENT TRANSPORTATION NETWORK:

- Reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (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.
- Support the development of the County Greenways and Trails Master Plan. (new)

The Safe Routes to School program provides funding and program ideas for schools to make infrastructure and program changes so that youth can more safely walk or bike to school.



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.

Buncombe County supports community gardening activities with grant funding and training.



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.

The Chamber of Commerce is developing a Business Accelerator program, where small businesses will be paired with investors and mentors over a three-month period. The program is being designed to make these businesses more solvent and ready to succeed.



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.

AB Tech's Economic and Workforce Development Continuing Education programming is coordinated with existing and expanded industry to customize or design specialized courses for current and future employees.

BUNCOMBE COUNTY SUSTAINABILITY REPORT



EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES THAT MATCH THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY



75.3% of third graders in Buncombe County scored at or above grade level for reading proficiency in 2011-2012 school year.

Working to *expand the quality and quantity of early childhood development programs*, there are 23 four-star facilities and 51 five-star facilities within Buncombe County. Fifty-nine of these centers are enrolled in the Subsidized Childcare Program. There are 1,799 preschoolers, ages 0-4 years, who are served by the Daycare Subsidy Program, with an average waiting list time of 7.75 months.

The *high school graduation rate* increased from 73.1% to 77.9% in Buncombe County Schools and from 73.7% to 80.7% in Asheville City Schools in 2011 (four year cohort graduation rate).

The number of *higher education degrees* through AB Tech increased as associates degrees awarded rose from 587 in the previous year to 728, but there were fewer certificates and diplomas awarded, decreasing slightly from 282 to 268 certificates and 148 to 136 diplomas.



HEALTHY PEOPLE



In 2012, 33.7% of the K-5 students in Buncombe County were overweight or obese. Targeted in part to *decrease rates of childhood and adult obesity*, the Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners Program worked to provide grants and technical support to 19 school gardens in 2012. Buncombe County Parks, Greenways and Recreation Services operated 17 facilities that are open to the public for physical activity.

To *reduce tobacco use and exposure to second hand smoke*, the Health Center trained 151 health providers in 2012 in implementing the "5 A's" Cessation Counseling Method to use with patients to help them quit smoking. The smoking rate in 2009 was 17.5%, and has risen to 18.3% in 2012.

Increasing access to mental health and substance abuse programs, there were 325 substance abuse assessments that resulted from food assistance programs referrals in 2012. Also, 6.6% of adults reported that they were unable to receive desired mental health services or counseling in the past year, down from 18.2% in 2010.

Through the Senior Reassurance Program administered by the Sheriff's Department, 59,130 phone calls were made serving 162 residents in 2012.

BUNCOMBE COUNTY SUSTAINABILITY REPORT



AFFORDABLE, GREEN, AND LIVABLE HOUSING



To date, 664 homes have been certified as Healthy Built in Buncombe County; 140 more are in progress at this time. (2012)

In ensuring that County regulations, ordinances, and other programs support sustainable products and strategies, Buncombe County Permits and Inspections completed 1,108 house wrap and window flashing inspections, issued 41 commercial statements of compliance for HVAC system installations, and issued 398 residential energy efficiency certificates. The County also developed and posted guidelines for the acceptance of alternative materials and methods that are not specified under the Building Code, but satisfy its prescriptive requirements, and which may be less costly and more energy efficient than traditional products and methods.

The County provided affordable and workforce housing assistance funding in support of 33 repairs/rehabilitations, 16 single family homes, and 72 multi-family units in 2012.

In support of providing educational opportunities in financial planning and homebuyer education, homebuyer and financial planning classes were provided to 256 families through OnTrack, and 84 families received similar training through Asheville Area Habitat for Humanity.



CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DECISIONS



To ensure that information reaches citizens, the Public Relations department posts information in a variety of formats including Twitter (1,053 followers), YouTube (250 subscribers), and Facebook (1,474 friends/responses). The agency OnTrack distributed 6,722 rental guides in 2012, linking citizens searching for rental units to information on housing availability and services.

Increasing opportunities for civic engagement and participation, fair housing activities reached 183 participants, including workshops and one-on-one community outreach and assistance. The County's first Smart Justice Fair was held in April, through which nearly 50 residents learned about the court and criminal justice process, including alternative sentencing programs.

In 2012, there were 183 participants in fair housing activities.

BUNCOMBE COUNTY SUSTAINABILITY REPORT



EQUITY IN ACCESS



To increase the availability of locally produced foods to low income individuals and increase educational opportunities regarding farms and locally produced foods, the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program through Cooperative Extension trained 2,511 youth and adults in good nutrition practices for healthy living. There are two community gardens on County property, and 11 garden groups that participate in the 'Gardens that Give Alliance' initiative in conjunction with Parks, Greenways and Recreation Services.

In support of building an extensive network of social services, there are 43 locations served by nurse-social worker teams, prevention staff, and/or economic services community outreach representatives.

Recreational activities were extended to 518 athletes through Special Olympics in 2012. In addition, there are 18 parks and pools managed by Buncombe County Parks, Greenways and Recreation Services. There are 13 miles of existing greenways in Buncombe County and 132 miles of trails, including federal parkway trails.

417 citizens connected to services through the newly implemented Community Navigator Program administered by Health and Human Services.



SAFE, LOW-CRIME COMMUNITIES



18 additional community watch programs were formed in 2012, totaling 102 throughout the County.

In providing an effective public safety system, the average response time for emergency calls continues to decrease, from 9.53 minutes in 2009 down to 9.26 minutes in 2012. Through the Drug Take Back programs and drop boxes at the Sheriff's Department and the Asheville Police Department, 586 pounds of prescription drugs were collected and were properly disposed (see adjacent picture from a program held at a local middle school). In 2012, 7,035 individuals toured the Detention Prevention Vehicle, and 6,050 students participated in the weekly reading program where deputies visit and read to students at 22 different elementary schools.

The County's comprehensive criminal justice system inclusive of law enforcement, court staff, treatment providers, and members of the community supports programs targeting adjudicated youth and those at risk of offending such as those through the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council, which served 464 youth in 2012. The comprehensive criminal justice system also supports alternative sentencing programs and innovative courts such as Pretrial Release (1,197 supervised in 2012), Nuisance Court (326 defendants in 2012), Drug Court (52 in 2012), SOAR Court (27 in 2012), and the Justice Resource Center (226 in 2012, partial year).

As criminal justice staff members are trained in best methods and practices, the Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) was provided to 221 individuals in 2012, including officers, magistrates, and E-911 operators.

BUNCOMBE COUNTY SUSTAINABILITY REPORT



RESISTANCE TO NATURAL AND MANMADE HAZARDS



In the first three months of 2013, 1,230 firefighters, law enforcement and emergency services personnel received training at the Public Safety Training Facility.

In ensuring local preparedness for emergencies, all newly hired Buncombe County Department of Health staff completed Incident Command System courses, and at-risk staff were fitted for N-95 respirators to be better able to fulfill their role in a disaster. Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training has been provided to 240 individuals, and a grant has been received for additional training to be held in 2013. The Public Safety Training Facility became operational in December 2012 and provides training opportunities for firefighters, law enforcement and EMS responders.



HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS



In working to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists, the Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) program is being implemented with 11 schools that have received funds, made infrastructure and/or program changes through intentional SRTS activities, or are engaged in planning activities.

To promote healthy buildings and homes, there were 2,226 homes inspected for fire safety plans during DSS home visits, 608 homes inspected for safe sleeping arrangements for children/infants, and 376 homes inspected for firearm safety plans/proper firearm storage. In addition, there were 87 adult care homes inspected in 2012. Building Permits and Inspections completed 23,378 building or trade inspections in 2012, and issued 1,482 certificates of occupancy. Eblen Charities performed 68 housing quality inspections.

2,290 homes were inspected for working smoke alarms through DSS home visits in 2012.

BUNCOMBE COUNTY SUSTAINABILITY REPORT



PARTNERSHIPS FOR CONSERVATION/PRESERVATION/RESTORATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES



480 students participated in classroom lessons offered by the Soil and Water Conservation District this year.

In *protecting ecological systems/wildlife*, and *conserving and protecting resources*, eight easements were recorded in 2012 which conserved 359 acres. To date, 72,079 acres have been protected through conservation efforts. Measures were taken to exclude 80 livestock from streams. As of March 2013, 357 farms have enrolled in the Voluntary Agricultural District Program (VAD) to conserve 26,579 acres as farmland.

Promoting energy conservation programs, Buncombe County operations had a total of 26,528 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions in 2012, primarily resulting from vehicle fleet, building operation, and off-road equipment.



POLLUTION AND WASTE PREVENTION



The *Air Quality* index is 35, keeping the County in Air Quality Attainment Status for 2012. The current design value for ozone is 68 parts per billion, and the design value for fine particulate matter is 9.4 micrograms per cubic meter.

Aimed at *reducing the use of harmful chemicals*, there were 1,118 participants trained in safe pesticide use through the Cooperative Extension office, and 9,319 participants trained in Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices.

To help *improve water quality*, there were two NC Agricultural Cost Share Program projects installed, and six projects are planned for the next fiscal year.

In *managing waste (reduce, reuse, recycle)*, the County collected 90 tons of household hazardous waste, 260 tons of white goods, 4,964 gallons of used oil, 315 gallons of antifreeze, 558 lead acid batteries, and 91 tons of electronic equipment. There were 1,244 new on-site wastewater permits and 109 repair permits for existing septic systems issued in 2012. There are 9 trash/recycling centers at County parks.

The County collected and recycled 2,698 tons of tires in 2012.





BUNCOMBE COUNTY SUSTAINABILITY REPORT



ACCESSIBLE, MULTI-MODAL, AND EFFICIENT TRANSPORTATION NETWORK



To help *reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and increase multi-modal options*, 37 employers and 342 employees participated in the Strive not to Drive Challenge. Asheville Redefines Transit (ART) ridership declined slightly over two years from approximately 1.5 million riders to 1.4 million; Mountain Mobility ridership increased from 148,578 to 166,680 between FY 2010 and 2012.

The *County Greenways and Trails Master Plan is being developed*, beginning with 667.7 miles of roads with ratings for bicycle use within the County, with 570 of these listed as suitable for biking.

The number of passengers registered with Mountain Mobility increased by 21% from FY2010 to FY2012.



SUSTAINABLE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS



The Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners supported the development of 19 school gardens in FY2012.

In *promoting sustainable agricultural production and personal and community gardening, and increasing the demand for locally produced foods*, the NC Cooperative Extension Office, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP), and Blue Ridge Food Ventures work to increase marketing to connect farms with buyers. The number of participating producers in ASAP's certified local program is 109, with 10 certified processors. Participating vendors in Buy Local Programming include 5 bed and breakfasts, 14 bakers/caterers, 9 distributors/wholesalers, 13 grocers, 1 hospital, 65 restaurants, 1 school system, 12 farmers markets, and 23 Community Supported Agriculture programs (CSAs). There were 16 community gardens which received grant funding through the Buncombe County Health and Human Services Department in 2012. Cooperative Extension programs reached over 9,500 clients with workshops and information on enhancing farm profitability and sustainability.

BUNCOMBE COUNTY SUSTAINABILITY REPORT



SUSTAINABLE LOCALIZED ECONOMY



482 jobs were created, and 231 jobs were retained through existing businesses in 2012.

Providing incentives to businesses for growth and encouraging a diverse economy with competitive wages, the average annual wage of new jobs created was \$42,300. The total capital investment of new or expanding companies was \$256.1 million (including new and expanded building, machinery and equipment) in 2012. The per capita income was \$26,347.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



Robust job training that fits present and anticipated workforce demand is provided through AB Tech's Economic and Workforce Development/Continuing Education programming, which customized 80 courses or services for businesses, serving 62 participating companies in 2012. Through this collaboration among the workforce and educational institution, NC Career Readiness Certifications were awarded to 818 individuals.

Reducing the barriers to employment, there were 1,799 childcare subsidies, 582 bus passes, 401 bus tickets, 466 car repairs, and 749 gas cards provided. There were 1,352 people diverted from ongoing/continuous unemployment benefits through the benefits diversion program. There were 307 Work First recipients served by the Aspire program, and 121 served by the Client Supply/Job Readiness program.

127 individuals found employment through participation in Work First this year.



SUMMARY

As we conclude the first year of implementation and move into the next, we must acknowledge the nature of the Plan as a “living” document. Although formal development and adoption of the Sustainability Plan for Buncombe County have passed, successful implementation of the Plan will rely on the continuous improvement of strategies and the performance measures that guide them, as well as proactive efforts to identify and resolve the challenges which impede our path to a better Buncombe County.

In this light, the development of the Sustainability Plan continues as we work to identify trends and common themes related to the needs and challenges we face as a community. Although the first Annual Report does not contain enough data over time to establish statistical trends, several key themes are identifiable when considering the County’s efforts during the first year of the Plan’s implementation: self-sufficiency, accessibility, and collaboration. The establishment of community and school gardens serves as just one example which embodies the triple bottom line approach to sustainability within Buncombe County. While it is immediately apparent that local gardens increase the availability of locally produced, quality foods, these enterprises also introduce new producers and consumers to our local economy, as well as promote healthy personal and environmental choices. It is ongoing activities such as these which the Plan seeks to foster, support, and promote.

Despite the adoption of the Plan as a County-wide initiative, efforts in the first year of the Plan’s implementation were largely limited to the internal activities of the County Government. While we strive to work in the best interest of County residents on a daily basis, this must be done within the bounds of strict financial, regulatory and political constraints. Though there were many successes realized in the first year, challenges included: the general economic climate; a continuously evolving regulatory environment; and engaging cooperation and participation outside of local government. As our community works together to shape a better Buncombe County, we must also be careful not to counteract or invalidate the work that has already been done.

Within the second year of implementation, we anticipate receiving additional input from community agencies on updating strategies and monitoring indicators. County departments, now familiar with the process, will continue to provide reliable information on a full year of activity. Additional indicators which may be more relevant in tracking the progress of certain objectives have been identified by our partners, and will begin to be tracked in this second year. The coordination and development of other plans, such as the 2013 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update, will include specific information and linkages to our sustainability efforts. Existing and new strategies will be employed that will help us continue to achieve progress on meeting the goals established through the Sustainability Plan, and ultimately improve our environment, community and economy.

To access the full Sustainability Plan and further details on its development and adoption, please visit www.buncombecounty.org/sustainability. In addition, we invite you to send questions and comments to sustainability@buncombecounty.org.

