



SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT for QUALITY of LIFE



GREENWAYS AND OPEN SPACE

What is it?

The term “open space” refers to undeveloped areas which may or may not include significant environmental features, such as wetlands, or to areas such as agricultural land or parks. Greenways are corridors of protected open space managed for conservation, recreation and transportation purposes. Greenways often follow natural land or water features and link nature preserves, parks, cultural features and historic sites with each other and with populated areas. While open space preservation maintains habitats and protects a diverse ecology, trails and greenways improve communities by providing recreation and transportation opportunities in addition to positively influencing economic and community development.

Costs

The costs for developing the open space or greenway plan will include staff time and/or consulting fees. The cost of acquiring the open space will vary according to the amount of land to be acquired and the methods used for doing so.

Shared Impact and Benefits

- Open space, trails and greenways improve air quality by protecting the plants that naturally create oxygen and filter out air pollutants such as ozone, sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide.
- Trails and greenways provide a safe, inviting and inexpensive avenue for regular exercise.
- Trails and greenways can boost economic renewal and growth. Tourism and recreation-related spending on items such as bicycles, in-line skates and lodging are just a few of the ways trails and greenways positively impact community economies.
- Open space and greenways may mitigate flood damage, serving as natural floodplains. A protected floodplain works as a “safety valve” for flooding. It also serves as a natural buffer that protects streams, rivers, and lakes from runoff from non-point source pollution.
- Greenways have been shown to increase property values and give adjacent properties greater marketability.
- Open space and greenways protect important habitat and provide corridors for people and wildlife.



This Action Item can be implemented as a

- POLICY
- ORDINANCE
- PROGRAM

How long does this take to implement?

Developing the greenway/open space plan itself will take from a few months to a year or more. Implementing the plan is a long-term and on-going project.

The Bottom Line

- A formal plan for open space preservation and greenways provides a framework for future growth by prioritizing what open space should be protected and what open space should be available for development.
- Greenways and open spaces also can preserve critical environmental areas, provide recreational opportunities and guide new growth into existing communities.

Interested? Read on!



Who needs to be involved in implementation?

An open space plan committee consisting of:

- Members of the local governing board and/or planning board
- Citizens
- Property owners
- Developers
- Environmental groups
- Community groups
- Parks and recreation department
- Public works department
- Land trusts

Action Steps

1. Read the **Basic Information** section below
2. Assemble a local open space committee made up of local citizens and property owners, business leaders, environmental groups, and elected or appointed officials to determine areas of open space that are important to the community and need to be protected.
3. The open space committee may want to reference the Voices & Choices of the Central Carolinas Open Space Framework Plan. This plan is particularly useful in providing information about what types of uses can co-locate successfully with various types of open space. (See **Basic Information**).
4. Map potential and priority open spaces and greenway locations using GIS. It may be helpful to refer to the Voices & Choices maps when doing so.
5. Ensure that there is adequate outreach/public education during this process. It is helpful to have an understanding of who actually owns the land that you wish to preserve as open space or greenway and ensure that those property owners are included in discussions.
6. Change the subdivision ordinance or land development regulations to require that a certain amount of open space be set aside in every development.
7. Adopt "Open Space" zoning, ensuring that "public good" criteria are met.
8. Investigate grant opportunities, and develop plans for addressing maintenance of greenways. Protected open space may or may not require maintenance.
9. Begin acquiring land through conservation easements, public/private partnerships and outright purchase.
10. Develop a plan for evaluating the community's open space preservation/greenway program.

Who's doing this?

- The Town of Davidson has developed open space zoning requirements. www.ci.davidson.nc.us or Meredith Judy at mjudy@ci.davidson.nc.us
- The Town of Weddington has recently adopted conservation subdivision zoning requirements in conjunction with an updated land use plan. Contact the Town Planner at (704)846-2709 for more information.
- Several entities are developing the Nations Ford Greenway to link the Charlotte system of greenways with the Catawba River and the Fort Mill area in South Carolina. Contact Karl Froelich at the Trust for Public Land at karl.froelich@tpl.org.
- The Anne Springs Close Greenway in the Fort Mill area contains over 2,000 acres of open space and provides a buffer for the Town of Fort Mill. Contact Bill Steele at (803)547-0234.








Who's doing this? (cont.)

- Rowan County Board of Commissioners has initiated a seventeen mile greenway project to follow Grants Creek, linking Rowan, Cabarrus and Davidson Counties. Contact Leda Belk, County Commissioner at (704)636-0361, email: ledas@bellsouth.net.

Any jurisdiction, municipality or county, can participate in this action item. In fact, it is best done on a multi-jurisdictional basis, to foster interconnectivity of greenways as a transportation resource and interconnectivity of open spaces to permit wildlife migration.

Resources

North Carolina General Statute 160A-372 allows for municipalities (and NCGS 153A-331 for counties) to require the dedication or reservation of recreation areas or, alternatively, to require provision of funds to be used to acquire recreation areas. This dedication (or payment of fees in lieu of dedication) can be incorporated into a municipality's subdivision ordinance or land development regulations. In this scenario, the developer must set aside a certain percentage of the acreage for open space. This would have no effect on overall lot sizes. Fees collected in lieu of dedication must be used to acquire recreation areas off-site. Section 6-29-1130 of the South Carolina Code is sister enabling legislation for that state.

-  The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) was enacted June 9, 1998 and expires on September 30, 2003. It will be replaced by new legislation proposed by the US Department of Transportation. As TEA-21 was a major funding source for greenway development, acquisition of scenic easements and historic properties, and preservation of abandoned railway corridors, it is expected that the reauthorization will continue to provide similar funding.
<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/tea21/sumcov.htm>
-  The North Carolina Park and Recreation Trust Fund grant may be used to acquire land to protect scenic or natural resources. For the 2002-2003 funding cycle, applicants could request up to \$250,000 with a requirement for 50 percent matching funds. Property acquired through this program is publicly-owned and accessible.
<http://www.ils.unc.edu/parkproject/partfund/home/index.html>
-  North Carolina's Clean Water Management Trust Fund was established by the General Assembly in 1996 to help local governments, state agencies and conservation non-profit groups finance projects that specifically address water pollution problems. The grant may be used toward building a network of riparian buffers and greenways for environmental, educational, and recreational benefits. Several major parcels of land on the west side of Mountain Island Lake have been preserved using this resource.
<http://www.cwmtf.net/cwmtffactsheet.htm>
-  In South Carolina, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism (SC PRT) operates two grant programs that can be used for greenway and park development. The Recreation Land Trust Fund (RELT) is a state-funded program that provides grants of up to \$100,000 for acquisition of property for public recreation. The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) provides grants for up to \$250,000 for acquisition or development of outdoor recreation facilities. Both programs require a match of 50 percent.
-  The Eastman Kodak American Greenways Awards (a partnership involving Kodak, the Conservation Fund and the National Geographic Society) provides small grants to stimulate the planning and design of greenways in communities throughout America. Grants can be used for all appropriate expenses needed to complete a greenway project, with the maximum grant award being \$2,500 and most grants ranging from \$500 to \$1,000. Applications can be obtained at:
<http://www.conservationfund.org/forms/kodakform03.html>



Basic Information

- North Carolina General Statute 160A-372 and South Carolina Code 6-29-1130 allows for municipalities to require the dedication or reservation of recreation areas in subdivisions or, alternatively, to require provision of funds to be used to acquire recreation areas. North Carolina General Statute 153A-331 allows for counties to require developer funding of recreational areas within, or near, new subdivisions.
- Open space zoning rearranges density in subdivisions as they are being planned so that only a portion of the buildable land is taken up by houses and roads. The rest of the land is set aside as permanent open space (or may remain as working farmland). The same number of lots will be built out, and overall density for the development may remain the same, although density bonuses may also be allowed. The open space that is conserved in this way can be required to be laid out so that it will ultimately create an interconnected network of protected land.
- In 1994, the NC Department of Transportation adopted administrative guidelines to consider greenways and greenway crossings during the highway planning process. This policy was incorporated so that critical corridors, which have been adopted by localities for future greenways, will not be severed by highway construction.
- Voices & Choices, together with the Open Space Institute at UNCC, has developed an Open Space Framework for the Central Carolinas. The framework is a conceptual plan that is intended to act as a reference and guide for preserving land for a wide range of open space benefits. The plan addresses six types of open space: natural habitat, wetlands and floodplains, farmland and timberlands, rural heritage and scenic areas, urban greenspace and parks and recreation. The framework includes a synthesis map covering 14 counties in North and South Carolina.

Tracking Progress

- 📌 **Let Centralina Council of Governments know when you have developed an open space plan or adopted open space zoning by contacting Carol Lewis at 704-348-2730 or clewis@centralina.org.**
- 📌 Record the amount of protected open space you have at the beginning of the process and monitor annually.
- 📌 As you develop a greenway and open space plan, share it with Centralina so that we can include it in the regional GIS database, and so that it can be used to help establish connective systems of open space and greenways throughout the region.
- 📌 Keep Voices & Choices informed of your planning efforts by contacting them at www.voicesandchoices.org.

FAQ's

Q: Won't this cost the community money in terms of both acquiring the land and losing tax base?

A: Evidence shows that open space preservation is ultimately not an expense but an investment that results in important environmental and economic benefits. Preserving green space makes a community a more attractive place in which to live. Studies show that homes along greenways almost always increase in value, making up for the "lost" open space. In addition, more compact development that is a product of open space preservation requires less infrastructure, such as roads, water and sewer, which will benefit the community financially. Creating dedicated open space can also make good use of otherwise unusable land, such as floodway fringe. (See the Trust for Public Land's "Economic Benefits of Open Space" at <http://www.tpl.org/publications/economicbenefits>.)



FAQ'S (cont.)


Q: People came to our community for the rural feeling and the bigger lots. Why would they want these high-density “conservation subdivisions” right next door?

A: In conventionally designed subdivisions, all of the buildable land is used for either streets or house lots. Under this method, all of the land in the community will eventually be built out – with no open space or “rural feeling” remaining. Open space zoning provides a way to preserve rural atmosphere, even to preserve working farms. One way to ensure that land development corresponds to the values of the community is through the charrette process, which is a marathon community work session that enables citizens to visualize alternative development patterns. By participating in a charrette, neighboring property owners can be involved in the design process of a subdivision.

Q: Will developers want to build with these new codes?


A: In their publication “Smart Growth, Smart Choices”, the National Association of Homebuilders endorsed smart growth principles including, “Innovative land use techniques that use land more efficiently: Communities should adopt the innovative land-use policies that encourage... cluster development that allows for higher densities in one area and open space preservation in another. Local governments need to recognize that existing zoning ordinances and land use codes are often the biggest barriers to smart growth.”

Intersecting Interests




CLEAN AIR POLICY

Providing greenways provides additional travel choices and can reduce the number of cars on the road. Since motor vehicles are one of the largest sources of nitrous oxides in this area, reductions in vehicle miles traveled will lead to improvements in air quality.




TRANSIT CONNECTIVITY

Greenways can serve as important transportation links for pedestrians and bicyclers, allowing them greater access to destination points or to other transit connection points like bus and rail stops.



NATURAL BUFFER ZONES

Greenways can serve as natural buffer zones that protect streams, rivers and lakes from pollution run-off from non-point source pollution.



SEDIMENTATION & EROSION CONTROL

More trails and protected green space means less impervious surface, which will aid with sedimentation and erosion control.



For More Information

The Iowa Department of Transportation has prepared a resource with clear vision and objectives statements for developing greenways, cost estimates for greenway design and much more. <http://www.dot.state.ia.us/trails/index.html>



Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's Trails & Greenways Clearinghouse provides technical assistance, information resources and links to a wealth of other greenway sites. <http://www.trailsandgreenways.org/>



The Trust for Public Land publishes "Local Greenprinting for Growth" a step-by-step guide for land conservation. The publication is available at: <http://www.tpl.org/greenprinting>.