

CATAWBA RIVER CORRIDOR PLAN:

Appendix B - Benefits of Greenways

Benefits of Trails and Greenways

Trails and greenways provide a variety of benefits that ultimately affect the sustainability of a region's economic, environmental, and social health. These benefits include:

- *Economic Value*
- *Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation*
- *Healthy, Active Living Opportunities*
- *Recreational Activities*
- *Environment Protection and Enhancement*
- *Educational Opportunities*

Economic Value

Greenways provide economic value for both adjacent property owners and communities as a whole. In Mount Holly, the Catawba River Greenway will be an attractive community highlight benefiting the overall economy through attracting residents to the area, improving quality of life, raising property values, connecting people to businesses, and stimulating new recreation-based business.

Trails and Greenways Increase Real Property Values
There are many examples, both nationally and locally, that affirm the positive connection between greenspace and property values (1). Residential properties will realize a greater gain in value the closer they are located to trails and greenspace. According to a 2002 survey of recent homebuyers by the National Association of Home Realtors and the National Association of Home Builders, trails ranked as the second most important community amenity out of a list of 18 choices (2). Additionally, the study

found that 'trail availability' outranked 16 other options including security, ball fields, golf courses, parks, and access to shopping or business centers. Findings from the Trust for Public Land's Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space, and the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's Economic Benefits of Trails and Greenways (listed below) illustrate how this value is realized in property value across the country.

- Apex, NC: The Shepard's Vineyard housing development added \$5,000 to the price of 40 homes adjacent to the regional greenway – and those homes were still the first to sell (3).
- Front Royal, VA: A developer who donated a 50-foot-wide, seven-mile-long easement along a popular trail sold all 50 parcels bordering the trail in only four months.
- Salem, OR: land adjacent to a greenbelt was found to be worth about \$1,200 and acre more than land only 1000 feet away.
- Oakland, CA: A three-mile greenbelt around Lake Merritt, near the city center, was found to add \$41 million to surrounding property values.
- Seattle, WA: Homes bordering the 12-mile Burke-Gilman trail sold for 6 percent more than other houses of comparable size.

- Brown County, WI: Lots adjacent to the Mountain Bay Trail sold faster for an average of 9 percent more than similar property not located next to the trail.

- Dayton, OH: Five percent of the selling price of homes near the Cox Arboretum and park was attributable to the proximity of that openspace.

Trail Use Impacts Community Economies

Tourism and recreation-related revenues from trails and greenways come in several forms. Trails and greenways create opportunities in construction and maintenance, recreation rentals (such as bicycles, kayaks, and canoes), recreation services (such as shuttle buses and guided tours), historic preservation, restaurants and lodging. A greenway running north-south in Mount Holly will also advance connectivity to businesses and the Downtown and also become a community highlight attractive to potential new residents.

- The Outer Banks, NC: Bicycling is estimated to have an annual economic impact of \$60 million and 1,407 jobs supported from the 40,800 visitors for whom bicycling was an important reason for choosing to vacation in the area. The annual return on bicycle facility development in the Outer Banks

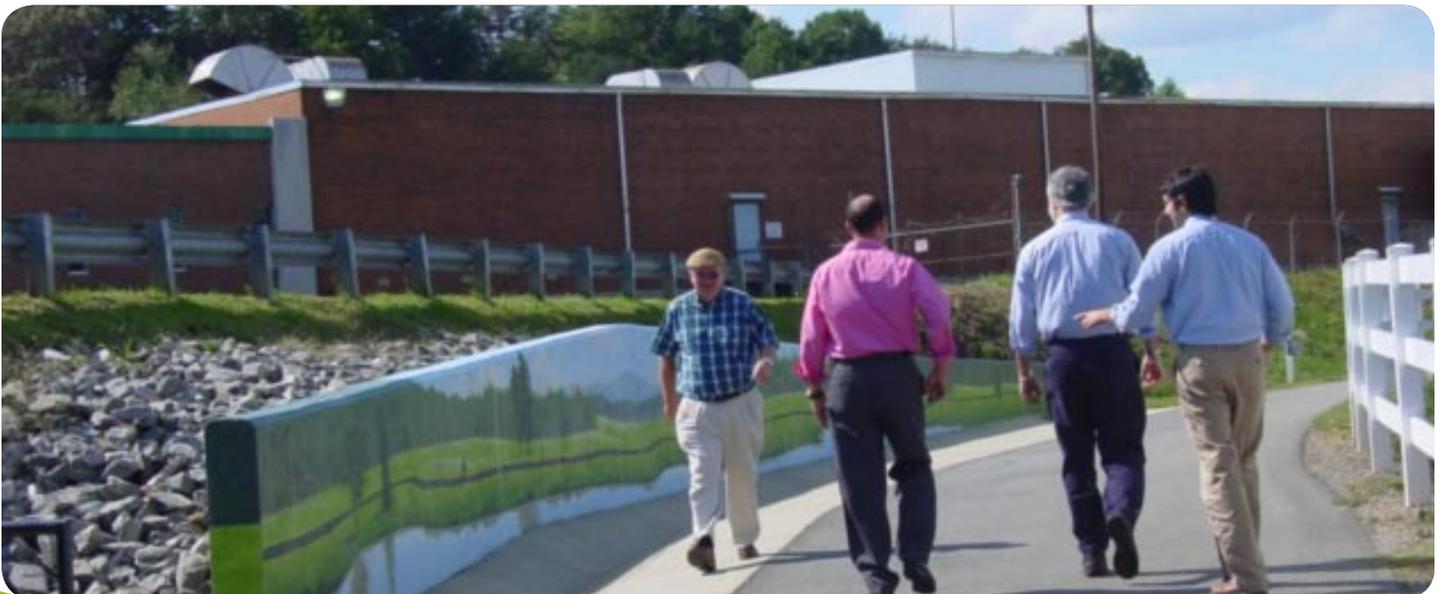
is approximately nine times higher than the initial investment (4).

- Damascus, VA: At the Virginia Creeper Trail, a 34-mile trail in southwestern Virginia, locals and non-locals spend approximately \$2.5 million annually related to their recreation visits. Of this amount, non-local visitors spend about \$1.2 million directly in the Washington and Grayson County economies (5).

- Morgantown, WV: The 45-mile Mon River trail system is credited by the Convention and Visitors Bureau for revitalizing an entire district of the city, with a reported \$200 million in private investment as a direct result of the trail (6).

- Tallahassee, FL: The Florida Department of Environmental Protection Office of Greenways & Trails estimate an economic benefit of \$2.2 million annually from the 16-mile St. Marks Trail (8).

Pedestrians along the Lovill's Creek Greenway in Mt. Airy, North Carolina.



- San Antonio, TX: Riverwalk Park, created for \$425,000, has surpassed the Alamo as the most popular attraction for the city’s \$3.5-billion tourism industry (7).
- Pittsburgh, PA: Mayor Tom Murphy credits trail construction for contributing significantly to a dramatic downtown revitalization.
- Allegheny Passage, PA: The direct economic impact of the trail exceeded \$14 million a year, encouraging the development of several new businesses and a rise in property values in the first trailhead town.
- Leadville , CO: In the months following the opening of the Mineral Belt Trail, the city reported a 19 percent increase in sales tax revenues.
- Dallas, TX: The 20-mile Mineral Wells to Weatherford Trail attracts 300,000 people annually and generates local revenues of \$2 million.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation

The sprawling nature of many land development patterns often leaves residents and visitors with no choice but to drive, even for short trips. In fact, two-thirds of all trips we make are for a distance of five miles or less. Surveys by the Federal Highway Administration show that Americans are willing to walk as far as two miles to a destination and bicycle as far as five miles. The Catawba River Greenway, as part of the local transportation system, will offer effective transportation alternatives by connecting homes, workplaces, the YMCA, parks, Downtown, and cultural attractions.



Kids enjoy biking in Durham, North Carolina.

Regional connectivity through alternative transportation can also be achieved once adjacent trail networks are completed and combined. A regional trail initiative is underway in the Charlotte region. The Catawba River Greenway would become part of the Carolina Thread Trail and the regional trail network. As population and development continue to increase, this type of greenway connectivity will serve as a high-quality alternative transportation option.

Healthy, Active Living Opportunities

A region’s trail network will contribute to the overall health of residents by offering people attractive, safe, accessible places to bike, walk, hike, jog, skate, and possibly places to enjoy water-based trails. In short, the trails network will create better opportunities for active lifestyles. The design of our communities—including towns, subdivisions, transportation systems, parks, trails and other public recreational facilities—affects people’s ability to reach the recommended 30 minutes each day of moderately intense physical activity (60 minutes for youth). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “Physical inactivity causes numerous physical and mental health problems, is responsible for an estimated 200,000 deaths per year, and contributes to the obesity epidemic” (9).

In identifying a solution, the CDC determined that by creating and improving places in our communities to be physically active, there could be a 25 percent increase in the percentage of people who exercise at least three times a week (10). This is significant considering that for people who are inactive, even small increases in physical activity can bring measurable health benefits (11). Additionally, as people become more physically active outdoors, they make connections with their neighbors that contribute to the health of their community.

The Catawba River Greenway and its greenway and sidewalk spurs will connect people directly from their homes and places of work into a long system of trails that provide safe, enjoyable areas to exercise. Trailheads will also be provided for those who begin their exercise along the Greenway.

Recreational Activities

The growing popularity of outdoor recreation activities, such as running and mountain biking has increased the need for quality recreational facilities such as greenways. Greenways can enhance existing recreational resources in an area by linking parks, schools, and recreational centers. A number of parks and recreation centers already exist in Mount Holly. But the Catawba River Greenway will provide a means to connect these parks and also provide additional recreational opportunities not currently provided in these existing facilities. Bicycling, hiking, jogging, picnicking, camping, orienteering, and photography are some of the most common activities that could be enjoyed along the river. These could be enjoyed by people of all ages and interests.

Environment Protection and Enhancement

There are a multitude of environmental benefits from trails, greenways, and open spaces that help to protect the essential functions performed by natural ecosystems. Greenways protect and link fragmented habitat and provide opportunities for protecting

plant and animal species. Trails and greenways reduce air pollution by two significant means: first, they provide enjoyable and safe alternatives to the automobile, which reduces the burning of fossil fuels; second, they protect large areas of plants that create oxygen and filter air pollutants such as ozone, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide and airborne particles of heavy metal. Greenways improve water quality by creating a natural buffer zone that protects streams, rivers and lakes, preventing soil erosion and filtering pollution caused by agricultural and road runoff.

Educational Opportunities

The interpretation of natural, historic, and cultural resources along a trail serves to educate people of all ages. Trails can become outdoor classrooms with informational plaques and signage. A number of specific natural and historic sites along the Catawba River provide opportunities for education. The Catawba River represents dozens of stories that tell the history of the landscape and its people. Varying topographic conditions along the corridor contain different plant communities, wetlands, etc. which provide a means for environmental protection, education, and stewardship.

As an educational tool, trail signage can be designed to inform trail-users about environmental issues pertinent to the Catawba River watershed. This includes water quality issues such as sedimentation, erosion, and eutrophication. Such signs could also include tips on how to improve water quality. Similarly, a greenway can serve as a hands-on environmental classroom for people of all ages to experience natural landscapes, furthering environmental awareness.

Appendix B Footnotes

1 American Planning Association. (2002). *How Cities Use Parks for Economic Development*.

2 National Association of Realtors and National Association of Home Builders. (2002). *Consumer's Survey on Smart Choices for Home Buyers*.

3 Rails to Trails Conservancy. (2005). *Economic Benefits of Trails and Greenways*.

4 NCDOT and ITRE. (2006). *Bikeways to Prosperity: Assessing the Economic Impact of Bicycle Facilities*.

5 Virginia Department of Conservation. (2004). *The Virginia Creeper Trail: An Assessment of User Demographics, Preferences, and Economics*.

6 Rails to Trails. (Danzer, 2006). *Trails and Tourism*.

7 American Planning Association. (2002). *How Cities Use Parks for Economic Development*.

8 Rails to Trails. (Danzer, 2006). *Trails and Tourism*.

9 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (1996). *Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*.

10 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2002). *Guide to Community Preventive Services*.

11 Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. (2006) *Health and Wellness Benefits*.

