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### Five advisory boards endorse countywide greenway plan



AREA PLANS & FEASIBILITY STUDIES			
NAME	PLAN STATUS	ENTITY	SUMMARY
Oklawaha Extension Feasibility Studies	Underway	Henderson County	Projected completion date is December 2018. Extends the Oklawaha north to Buncombe County and south to Flat Rock.
Ecusta Rail Trail Planning Study and Economic Impact Analysis	Complete	City of Hendersonville	Next steps are to acquire right-of-way access.
Mills River Valley Trail	Complete	Town of Mills River	A greenway directed north along Hwy 280, beginning at the intersection of Hwy 191, is currently in preconstruction.
Edneyville Community Plan	Complete	Henderson County	Planned future connection of Oklawaha Greenway to Edneyville Community Center.
Park at Flat Rock Master Plan	Underway	Village of Flat Rock	Vision to connect the park to the Carl Sandburg Home via a greenway.
Town of Fletcher Greenway Master Plan	Complete	Town of Fletcher	Over 3 miles of greenway have already been completed. An additional 6 miles are proposed.
Hwy 191 Multi Use Path Feasibility Study	Complete	NCDOT	A multi-use path will connect with Mills River's Hwy 280 trail and another multi-use path will be created near Rugby Middle School.

#### Comments



By Bill Moss, Published: November 28, 2018

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Clearing a major hurdle, Henderson County's new Greenway Master Plan won the endorsement of the county Planning Board on Nov. 15, the fourth advisory board to bless the blueprint for a 71-mile network of paved trails. Last week, the Transportation Advisory Committee also blessed the plan, becoming the fifth county board to do so.

Planning Board members asked questions about funding, how the county would get around unwilling landowners and whether rail company Watco would be willing to give up the track for a greenway. After a brief discussion, the board voted unanimously to recommend that the county commissioners adopt the greenway plan.

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greenway extension

"This is just the first step," said Hunter Marks, a Planning Board member said who served on the Greenway Master Plan committee. "It's a concept, it's a plan of what we see down the road. There's a lot of details, we'll get to those details. This can be a game changer. Things like greenways help attract

people, and I just think this is a really important step for the county."

Grady Hawkins, the county commission's liaison to the Planning Board, said money is the biggest hurdle to a project of this magnitude.

"When we were talking about right of way, we have already looked at running out of Jackson Park over to Blue Ridge Community College," he said. "We explored some options there to go down the sewer line by the airport and it looked reasonable until we got to the end of the runway and we decided we didn't want to mix it up with landing planes. It's quite a challenge to have a 30-year plan. I would think we would at least realize the challenge that's ahead of us on these projects and go after them — particularly the money."

Drafted over a six-month period, the 87-page plan envisions priority greenways, destination greenways and connection greenways that link parks and other destinations, such as the Carl Sandburg home and the Sierra Nevada and New Belgium breweries (in a segment connecting to Buncombe County greenways).

The county's plan would be woven into greenway plans that have been adopted or are currently under study in Fletcher, Hendersonville, Laurel Park, Mills River and Flat Rock. Funding could from a variety of sources.

"It's a mix of grants, public funding, nonprofit organizations such as Conserving Carolina and even groups like the TDA," Chris Burns, the greenway committee chair, told the Planning Board. The Tourism Development Authority is setting aside revenue from a quarter-cent of the county's hotel tax for greenway development. The master plan is one of the threshold assets any applicant for greenway money needs.

"One of the first things they ask is, 'Do you have a comprehensive plan in place?'"

Burns said.

Burns and John Mitchell, the county's director of community and business development, assured the Planning Board that land acquisition would be on a voluntary basis. The process would be similar to what the state has used in developing the Mountains-to-Sea Trail.

"Typically what happens is they would use a public right of way or they'd stick with the road" to go around unwilling landowners, Burns said. "The hope here is that over the years as people see that a lot of those concerns by property owners really don't pan out, they are over time going to allow the trail to come through their property."

During a public comment period, three people spoke in favor of the greenway plan.

While Hendersonville is known as a retirement community, the fastest growing demographic moving to the county is 33 and under, said Steve Gwaltney, a banker who moved to the area eight years ago. Greenways are one of the tools the county needs to recruit young workers, he said.

"There are competing communities for the workforce that do not have the natural resources," he said. "They don't have our mountains, they don't have beautiful rivers but they have greenways."

"It does invite industry," Planning Board Chair Steve Dozier said. "The funding is not secure. It's something that will take a lot of work and a lot of effort from many people to secure funding for it."

In an online survey, 93 percent of respondents said they approved or strongly approved of the greenway plan while just 2 percent opposed it. The most represented age group was 75-74. When asked what was the most important factor to consider in greenway planning, 55 percent chose "connection to other destinations." Almost 600 people responded, which was the heaviest response of any recent county survey, planners said.

The greenway plan goes Wednesday to the county Transportation Advisory Committee. Asheville-based land planning consultants Equinox is studying two greenway segments — northern and southern extensions of the Oklawaha Greenway. The planners are on track to present a report to the county in December or January.

\* \* \* \* \*

To read the greenway plan and respond to the survey [click here](#).

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