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## Kudos to county for Master Plans

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Posted Jul 9, 2017 at 2:01 AM

I applaud the Henderson County Board of Commissioners for its decision to create the Henderson County Recreational and Greenways Master Plans. This forward thinking will bring hugely positive impacts to our county.

County residents should embrace an improved economic future based on clean air/water, outdoor recreation and a superb quality of life. We should actively advocate for safer bike and pedestrian-friendly trail networks that connect to our existing parks.

“People-powered” connectivity should be an important part of this vision, providing healthy, alternative transportation options to get to school, work, recreation and shopping. We should imagine a trail network that links our homes, parks, playgrounds and other destinations and points of interest.

As the county designs its recreational future, citizens should ask commissioners to integrate into these plans improvements in countywide health and safety, encouraging “active transportation” (walking and biking) and promoting a default opportunity to walk and bike to places instead of traveling there by auto.

The goal of all transportation is “effective” transit to get from point A to Point B. To tip the scales to more “active transportation,” we need a greenway network accessible to those needs. Multiple surveys have shown that walkable trails are the No. 1 selection of all desired recreational amenities across ALL demographics (race, age and gender).

Although 10 percent of automotive deaths involve pedestrians or cyclists, only 1 percent of transportation funding goes to bike/pedestrian projects. To impact this locally, we need more bike- and pedestrian-friendly opportunities.

The most important factor for bicycle travel is safety, and the biggest fear is being hit by a car. We should design a safe and comfortable biking environment that appeals to interested but concerned potential cyclists. This represents roughly 60 percent of all Americans who would bike if only it weren't so difficult and dangerous. This is particularly true for women riders as well as younger and older people.

This means greater separation from traffic with detached bike lanes. Alternatively, greenways (“linear parks”) following streams where development cannot occur would be ideal. Drivers would also benefit from fewer bikes on the road.

An attractive Master Plan implementation will bring in more tourism and economic growth through non-polluting companies that will seek out our region. Focusing on quality of life reinforces our love of place, draws in more tourism and attracts new business. If we seek new businesses using high standards, they will lure the right businesses that will attract more of the same.

In the 21st century, entrepreneurs and high-tech companies don't need to live in big cities as long as there is high-speed broadband, reasonable airport/interstate access and educated workers. Attracting these complementary businesses brings economic development and creates better opportunities for our children (and their kids) to stay here instead of seeking distant or urban employment for good-paying jobs.

Developing these Master Plans provides unique opportunities to determine what works best together for our county and municipalities by designing places where people want to be while bringing our communities closer together.

I hope the commissioners select new members to the Recreational Advisory Board who will recognize the commissioners' critical decision to develop and implement the Recreational and Greenway Master Plans.

The critical threshold distance is 20 miles for a trail system to become a tourist destination, and the longer the trail, the greater the distance people will travel to visit and the longer they may stay. It is my sincere hope that these Master Plans include the design and eventual construction of a regional trail system, eventually connecting the popular Oklawaha Greenway with the 280 Multi-Use Pathway (MUP) and the future Ecusta Trail (on the unused railroad right of way between Hendersonville and Brevard).

Commissioners, thank you for this milestone. Henderson County residents will reap many benefits from your decision to adopt these Master Plans, including economic development, alternative/active transportation, recreation, connectivity, health and wellness, conservation corridors, public access and wildlife habitat preservation.

*Guest columnist Ken Shelton, an area physician, is a longtime advocate of biking/walking transportation projects and has worked with local government in the past to promote such efforts.*

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