

Greenways are a great investment



Ken Shelton

Many Henderson County residents live stressful, unhealthy lifestyles deficient in physical exertion. Sadly, “physical inactivity” has been designed into our lives as we are separated from jobs, schools, shopping, exercise, nature and each other by a requirement to travel by car.

Inactivity contributes to many chronic diseases including obesity, diabetes, hypertension and depression, which are among the most prevalent, costly and preventable of all health problems. Together, they account for two-thirds of all deaths in the United States.

As a physician, if there is one prescription I could write that could cure most of these ills, it would read: “EXERCISE, REPEAT.” Following this “script,” for each hour of regular exercise, you would gain about two hours of additional life (American Heart Association). That’s a good return on investment.

Henderson County needs more safe places designed and integrated into our lives that encourage people to ride, run, walk and play.

Our roadways have become “car”-ways devoid of pedestrians and cyclists. Roughly one in five Henderson County residents are too young, too old, can’t afford or don’t own a car and have few independent, safe transportation options.

The best solution: greenways.

Greenways provide safe, non-motorized, alternative transportation access to our schools, parks, shopping and work sites. Importantly, they encourage exercise.

Greenways are essentially “linear parks” that safely connect public places, schools,

work sites, shopping, communities, cultural heritage sites and nature. They provide opportunities for outdoor recreation, conservation and people-powered transportation. They connect our separated parks, trails and open spaces that are currently accessible only by auto.

On greenways, families can safely spend quality time riding, walking and playing together without busting their budget.

Henderson County can confront our obesity epidemic by creating public infrastructure that encourages active living. Studies have shown that every \$1 invested in greenways reduces local health costs by \$3. That’s a great return on investment.

Our Constitution lists in its preamble six purposes. One of these is to “promote the general welfare.” Government is promoting the general welfare when it creates greenways that protect the interests of future generations, preserving our land, rivers and wildlife while improving the quality of life for residents.

This is why our government has incentivized greenways. For every “local” dollar (contributions from local government, private and business donors), the federal transportation system invests \$4. That’s a huge return on investment.

Greenways accelerate economic development, attracting new businesses and creating opportunities for OUR kids to stay and prosper in Henderson County. Studies show that every \$1 invested in greenways has an economic impact between \$3 and \$10. That’s a terrific return on investment.

In summary, we cannot afford to NOT invest in greenways.

I applaud county commissioners for their leadership and direction when they voted to establish a committee to draft a Henderson County Greenway Master Plan. After this committee’s plan was completed

in the fall of 2018, it was published: www.hendersoncountync.gov/greenway-network.

The Greenway Master Plan has since been endorsed by many county committees/boards, businesses, our hospitals and multiple influential nonprofit boards and future greenway partners. Public input has been sought, and overwhelming public support (92 percent approval) has been shown in a survey. This duplicates multiple national surveys that have shown that “walkable trails” are the No. 1 selection of all desired recreational amenities across ALL demographics (race, age and gender).

On April 1, the commissioners endorsed the Greenway Master Plan and decided to further invest in the future of our community and children.

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

Henderson County residents, now that our improved and connected future is visible, please reach out to your commissioners to thank them, and ask them to implement this plan by designating significant resources to make greenways a county priority. Ask them to keep the momentum going by funding projects with a recurring, substantial and annual commitment. The payback will be huge, and we will all be the beneficiaries.

Henderson County has spoken, and it wants greenways — in our lifetime.

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.