Appendix B: Benefits of Greenways and Blueways

A well designed network of Greenways and Blueways simply makes our lives better - positively influencing our economic growth opportunities, environmental protection efforts, sense of community, safety from natural disasters, attempts to keep ourselves healthy, opportunities for recreation, and our ability to experience many of the community’s interesting places in new ways.

The citizens of Region 2000 have expressed an interest in maximizing their quality of life and have articulated a vision for a community whose design and growth helps them achieve this goal. The benefits that can come from Region 2000’s Greenways and Blueways system are many. Some examples are described below.

Connectivity
At community meetings held in November and December 2002, participants were asked what they wanted to achieve through the implementation of a Greenways and Blueways Plan. The most commonly stated interest was the development of a regional system of connected routes that would allow users to move more easily throughout the larger community by foot, bike, and boat.

A regional greenways and blueways system helps meet that interest by connecting hubs such as community parks, historic sites, neighborhoods, shopping centers, schools, and community common areas. The system can also link existing municipal/county trails and parks with major corridors such as the Appalachian Trail and regional destinations like Smith Mountain Lake State Forest.

Greenways can also provide a different type of connectivity - the connection between people and their local history, their community and each other. Successful greenway projects across the United States often serve as new “main streets”, where neighbors meet, children play, and community groups gather to celebrate. For cities and towns, both large and small, greenways have become a cultural asset for community activities. Some areas sponsor “greenway days” to celebrate the outdoors and local traditions. Others sponsor walking and running events on their greenways to support charity events or extend traditional sporting events. Blueways can be the site for water-based festivals and competitions.
may exist in Region 2000 to link land corridors to river corridors, providing great educational and recreational opportunities, and better access to these natural resources. The interpretation of important historic and archeological sites along greenways and blueways can serve to increase awareness and appreciation of the area’s rich history. Finally, civic groups often adopt segments of their regional system for clean-up, litter removal, and environmental awareness programs.

**Water Resources and Air Quality**

If you stand at the front of an audience and ask, “Who wants a clean environment?” you can be pretty certain that every hand in the room will go up. The arguments that emerge over natural resource protection are generally driven by how we go about protecting these, not if we protect them. A greenway system is an effective tool for achieving our natural resource protection goals.

As buffers of trees and grass along a river corridor, greenways filter runoff from neighboring land before it gets to the river. These greenways slow storm water to allow sediment to drop out before it enters the stream or river, and they absorb extra nutrients that can be harmful to the aquatic community in large doses. These natural processes do not take place if storm water is collected in pipes and discharged directly into water bodies.

By slowing storm water runoff, vegetated buffers also protect waterways from the scouring effect that can come from unimpeded storm waters - protecting soil surfaces and the sides of streams and rivers from erosion that can dump excess sediment into the water body and reduce its ability to purify itself. Buffers can also provide a cooling affect on water bodies that helps keep the natural cleaning functions viable.

Beyond their surface water protection capabilities, greenways help maximize the quantity and quality of water that is allowed to seep into the ground to recharge aquifers. The more pavement and buildings there are to cover soil, the less water penetrates it during a storm event. When rain soaks into the ground, it becomes the groundwater we withdraw from our wells. If we continue to withdraw water from aquifers without letting it replenish, these underground reservoirs will become depleted. Region 2000 is growing in population and should be concerned about long term impacts of growth on its groundwater. The region should also be considering its air quality as growth occurs. As alternative transportation corridors, greenways can serve to reduce traffic congestion, helping to improve local air quality. Since the majority of automobile trips are less than two miles in length, offering viable, alternative transportation choices through greenways can encourage people to bicycle and walk more often, especially on short trips, thereby reducing traffic congestion and automobile emissions.
Flood Protection
Much of today’s flood damage is the result of the transformation of wetlands, the channelization of river corridors, and increased development in floodplains. As a flood control measure, open space near bodies of water acts as a primary storage zone during periods of heavy rainfall. The Region 2000 Greenways and Blueways system can help control the rate at which water rises in a river during a storm event and protect the community from the disastrous effects of a flood.

Health Benefits
Greenways provide us the opportunity to lead more active lives. When asked how they would use an integrated network of greenways and blueways, 83% of the Region 2000 survey respondents said they would use them for walking or jogging, 75% said they would use the trails for fitness or recreational biking, and many other folks said they would use the trail network for roller blading, walking pets, or commuting to work. A regional system that provides easy, safe, pleasant access between jobs, houses, shopping destinations, and recreational destinations allows us a better opportunity to include physical activity in our busy, daily schedules.

Studies have shown that as little as 30 minutes a day of moderate-intensity exercise (such as bicycling, walking, or in-line skating) can significantly improve a person’s mental and physical health and prevent certain diseases. Providing opportunities for participation in these outdoor activities, close to where people live and work, is an important component of promoting healthy lifestyles for area residents.

In 1987, the President’s Commission on Americans Outdoors released a report that examined American leisure activities and quality of life. Limited access to outdoor resources was cited as a growing problem throughout the nation. The Commission reported that a national system of greenways could provide all Americans with access to open space resources.

Wildlife Habitats and Natural Communities
In addition to the many benefits that greenways and blueways provide for human populations, they are also an essential component of protecting the natural areas that sustain the plant and animal species with whom we share the planet. Swaths of green that connect to larger open space hubs and that provide access to water bodies are critical elements in the preservation of species habitat.

These sanctuaries allow animal species to move about in a manner that separates them from threatening human uses of land, and they allow natural systems to be maintained. By linking upland habitat with lowland habitat and protecting large intact parcels of trees and clean water, we maintain the opportunity for natural systems to sustain themselves. We also assure that opportunities to interact with nature - to observe wildflowers, animals, and majestic forests -continue to be conveniently available.
Efficiency and Growth Management

Greenways can provide three important benefits that fit into this category:

1) They can minimize the costs of providing community services
2) They can provide important boundaries for growth and potentially conflicting land uses
3) They can provide another transportation option that reduces strain on existing road infrastructure.

As communities debate the right balance in the allocation of scarce financial resources to meet ever increasing demands for public services, it becomes more and more important to minimize unnecessary expenditures and maximize revenue potential. One way communities go about doing this is by planning their growth and development so that more compact, higher density development occurs in some areas while other areas are left intentionally open, and therefore without need of service provision. Studies that examine this balance between the revenue generation of a particular land use and the financial obligations associated with providing services to a particular type of land use, regularly report that open spaces such as greenways are cost effective.

Greenways that serve as buffers between potentially conflicting land uses provide a much appreciated service to businesses (allowing them some distance from neighborhoods that are potentially intolerant of heavy traffic or late night activity) and to residents (allowing them a more secluded personal environment). When trail segments are included as part of these buffers, access between the uses is enhanced.

Finally, greenways can provide highly efficient routes for citizens interested in alternatives to driving to their destinations - connecting people who prefer to commute by foot, bicycle, or other non-motorized means between their homes and workplaces. Greenway corridors serve as extensions of the road network, offering realistic and viable connections between origins and destinations such as work, schools, libraries, parks, shopping areas and tourist attractions. According to national surveys by the Federal Highway Administration, Americans are willing to walk as far as two miles to a destination, and bike as far as five miles. Using these limitations as a guide, destinations can be linked to multiple origins throughout Region 2000 with a combination of off-road trails and on-road bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Safety and Security

One of the most successful deterrents to criminal activity is the increased presence of residents in a neighborhood, and greenways have proven to be an effective tool for encouraging outside activity. In fact, some greenway systems have even been developed as part of efforts to deter criminal activity since greenways typically attract frequent, local users who create an environment that is virtually self-policing. Even crime sta-
Statistics and reports from law enforcement officials have shown that parks and greenways typically have low incidences of reported criminal activity.

Separate from criminal concerns, greenways and blueways can help us feel more safe, providing off-road bicycle and walking routes and well maintained water-based routes. These sorts of areas allow individuals and families to be more at ease when engaging in outdoor activities.

Property Values and Economic Development

Often undervalued is the positive effect greenways and blueways can have on the financial bottom line, including higher real property values, and increased tourism and recreation related revenues. Many home buyers and corporations are looking for real estate that provides direct access to public and private greenway systems, and open space is viewed as an amenity by residential, commercial and office park developers.

In many areas, greenways have been shown to raise the value of immediately adjacent properties by as much as 5% to 20%. For example, in a new development in Raleigh, North Carolina, new lots situated on greenways were priced $5,000 higher than comparable lots off the greenway. This is a very real gain for property owners, and is also beneficial to local governments that depend on property taxes to support their service provision.

In addition to their relationships to individual properties, communities that have a strong system of greenways have attributed these systems to their success in recruiting new businesses. In Morganton, NC, (a town of about 17,000 people) the greenway was cited as one of the amenities that led to the town's designation as one of the 50 best small towns in the South East. It was also a factor in Caterpillar Corporation's choice of Morganton as the site for its new facility.