

Chapter 4:

Implementation Program

Implementation is where “the rubber meets the road.” It is the stage during which recommendations are acted upon, long-term decisions are made, and money is committed. It is this implementation stage that turns a planning document into an on-the-ground reality.

Implementation of the recommendations contained within this Region 2000 Greenways and Blueways Plan will require consistent leadership, new programs, and additional funding. It will require a management and oversight partnership between the public and private sectors in Region 2000, and a champion and management structure for the Greenways and Blueways Program.

In the short term, it will be necessary for the Region 2000 Regional Commission to continue its assumption of a leadership position with respect to implementing this program at the regional level. However, the Regional Commission will not, by itself, be able to accomplish the recommendations of this plan. It will need to build upon the existing partnerships with local governments and join with private sector groups, organizations, landowners and businesses to accomplish the stated goals.

This chapter walks through six steps of implementation that are suggested for realizing the regional greenways and blueways vision that is defined in this document. Those steps are:

- Step 1: Develop a governance structure
- Step 2: Agree on priorities and time lines
- Step 3: Focus on the regulatory and planning process
- Step 4: Start negotiating
- Step 5: Secure funding
- Step 6: Start building

The chapter follows a consistent format; first listing and describing the step, then presenting an action list for completing that step. The appendices included at the end of this plan offer greater and more specialized detail on the subjects of finance, design, and management. These chapters can serve as reference materials as the communities follow the steps and actions listed here.

Overview

Governance

Step 1: Develop a governance structure

Implementing the Region 2000 Greenways and Blueways program should take place at the local government level and should be respectful of local government realities while responding to regional needs. A regional body should guide the overall process and assist with the burden of land acquisition and facility development. This regional body would be a partnership with local governments, state and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations. Local jurisdictions would continue to be responsible for all site specific decisions related to the development of their specific components of the regional network.

The following paragraphs represent the consultant's recommended strategy for establishing a regional organization that would champion the implementation of the Greenways and Blueways Program:

Currently, the Region 2000 Regional Commission is the only organization in the area that is both willing to and capable of championing the vision for a Region 2000 Greenways and Blueways Program. The Commission has agreed to absorb the initial efforts of the Greenways and Blueways program into its existing system. To do this, the Regional Commission would need to create a new Greenways and Blueways project among its existing services.

Organizational Structure

The new project would function as just one of many operations within the Regional Commission and would be supported administratively by the Commission (see organizational chart on the following page). A Greenways and Blueways Board would direct the project and would be made up of local government, business, and citizen representatives. A minimum of one staff person will be needed to launch the Greenways and Blueways Project. Funding for the staff position could initially come from philanthropic grants and could be supported with some public funds from local and/or state government.

Duties and Activities

The principal responsibility of the Greenways and Blueways Project is to champion the full development of this plan. The goals, objectives, tasks, and prioritized projects found throughout this document will serve as the guiding framework for an action strategy. In some cases, the Regional Commission may be required to assist local government partners in raising funds, coordinating efforts between themselves and other private sector groups, and assisting with trail development activities where appropriate.

Through the Greenways and Blueways Project, the Regional Commission should serve a technical support function for the local governments in their greenway and blueway activities - bringing them information about new state level programs and funding opportunities, sponsoring work-

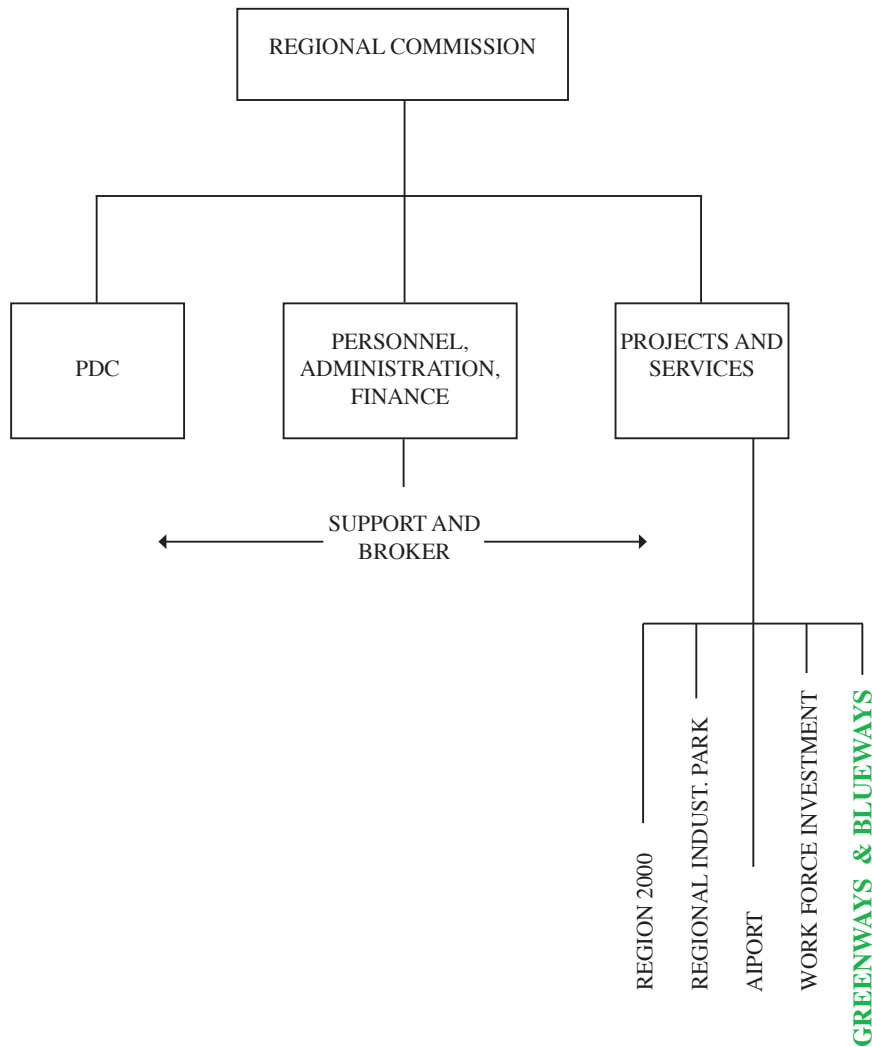


Chart 4-1:
This organization chart shows how the new Greenways and Blueways project can fit into the existing organizational structure of the Region 2000 Regional Commission.

shops to talk about new protection strategies that can be incorporated into local plans and codes, and promoting a general awareness of the benefits of natural areas protection among local elected officials and the citizens from Region 2000.

The Greenways and Blueways Project should also include a land stewardship component. As the partnership acquires rights to property that make up the system, stewardship responsibilities will also be assumed in perpetuity. Proper management of the network will be essential for its continued success in providing safe opportunities for residents and visitors and for assuring that the natural resources on the property are well cared for.

The Regional Commission should publish an annual report that provides the community with an update of its progress as well as a quarterly newsletter (or articles in the local media) that keep the community up-to-date with the project. Appropriate arrangements and assignments should be made so that the four-county Greenways and Blueways GIS mapping

system continues to be kept up-to-date. Finally, the Regional Commission will want to launch and maintain a web site that provides up-to-date information about the Greenways and Blueways system, as well as a library of completed projects.

Funding

The Regional Commission will have to provide some seed money to get the Greenways and Blueways Program up and running. It must also generate long-term financial support for future operations. Other initial funds should be raised from a combination of public and private sources. Local governments should be asked to make a contribution and private sector organizations, such as foundations, conservation groups and trail-user groups should also contribute. An initial budget of \$100,000 would allow the Regional Commission to employ the necessary staff and launch the project.

Completion of the system will require an investment of capital. Across the country, the most successful programs are generally found in communities where the local governments have committed themselves financially to the project. Often they will have private sector partnerships in which local government dollars and private sector donations can be used together to leverage additional state and federal financial assistance.

Some communities in Region 2000 may need several years to develop the public support and interest before they can justify a significant financial contribution. In these areas, local user groups, property owners, and local businesses may be able to form partnerships that can get the ball rolling, financially. Local governments in this situation should actively support the effort through other areas of influence such as its master planning process, and revisions to its zoning, subdivision, and land management ordinances. These subjects are explored more fully under Step 3.

Tasks and Timelines

- 1) The Regional Commission should formally establish a Greenways and Blueways project within its organizational framework. (Summer 2003)
- 2) Local governments should identify partners in the private sector that may have an interest and the ability to assist in implementing specific Region 2000 Greenway and Blueway segments. (Summer 2003)
- 3) The Regional Commission and all local governments should take the appropriate steps to endorse and adopt this plan. (Fall 2003)
- 4) An initial 2003-04 operating budget should be drafted and the funding for it should be secured. (Summer 2003)

- 5) The following two tasks should commence under step 1, but should continue on indefinitely (Ongoing)
 - Ongoing 1: Local governments should continue to assist Region 2000 Regional Commission with the expansion and updating of the GIS system.
 - Ongoing 2: Regional Commission staff should work with local governments and private sector groups to promote and market the Region 2000 Greenways and Blueways program.

Step 2: Agree on priorities, timelines, and approaches

Once a general management and oversight organization has been established, the partnership should work through its set of near-term protection and construction priorities, agreeing as a body to collectively support and pursue them.

The exercise of prioritizing protection projects can alarm residents if they believe their lands are being targeted for government acquisition. It is imperative that the Regional Commission avoid this situation by treating private land owners with the utmost respect. This may mean private meetings with them to ensure they are aware that their land is not being taken and keeping all draft considerations private.

The importance of maintaining good communication throughout this process cannot be overstated. This should include regular newsletters or articles in the local paper about the process and should include many meetings with private landowners who might be affected by a proposed regional Greenways and Blueways corridor. Residents must be assured that their property is not being taken from them and not being devalued. They must be assured that the necessary management and stewardship structure is in place to keep any corridor safe and enjoyable for the users and the surrounding land owners. Failure to allay these potential fears can be disastrous for a project.

Finally, initial consideration should be given to the type of funding strategy the regional partners would like to pursue. In Step 5, the Board and the local governments will actually put together a financing campaign and will write grant applications for assistance with specific corridors. During Step 2, Appendix D should be used as a menu of options around which discussion should take place to determine the most desirable approach. No decisions are binding at this point, but will help groups determine what is feasible for them over the next several years and will help inform discussions about priorities and timelines.

Tasks and Timelines

- 1) For each Region 2000 Greenway and Blueway corridor, local governments should work with private residents and community groups to determine the most appropriate facility type for that

Prioritizing

Internal Review and Adjustment

corridor and to discuss potential management concerns. This may require the need for additional analysis of ecological features in the corridor and a series of meetings designed to work through public concerns.

- 2) A Phase 1 and Phase 2 timetable should be created to clarify when individual pilot projects will be initiated/completed.
- 3) Local governments should be encouraged to develop their own Greenways and Blueways plans that build upon the structure identified by this regional initiative.
- 4) Decisions should be made about which sources of funding will be pursued and the project board should develop a Greenways and Blueways Capital Improvement Program.

Step 3: Focus on the regulatory and planning processes

A great deal can be accomplished by building on and expanding the tools available through existing short and long range land use planning processes currently in use. Suggested enhancements may include the creation of new partnerships to foster resource stewardship, leveraging new funding sources, research and analysis of new and innovative approaches to land conservation, and an assessment of the role of growth management tools applicable under the Code of Virginia. This analysis would be the first step in identifying changes that would better support conservation and livable community design, such as updated stormwater management ordinances or conservation subdivision ordinances. The needs and opportunities may vary greatly in each of the different jurisdictions, so the tasks and timelines below may need to be modified to fit individual circumstances.

There are important roles to be played here by both the Regional Commission and the local governments. As the regional oversight agency, the commission will have to help bring new ideas from around the state and nation to the Region 2000 jurisdictions, support them as they try to determine which models to follow, and provide a regional perspective on proposed land and resource management practices. The local governments must look for new ways to adapt their local planning documents and procedures so that resource protection and the provision of recreation opportunities are acknowledged as critical components of land development and growth management decisions.

Local governments should use this plan as a resource when updating their zoning and subdivision regulations. They should also reference this plan as one of the guiding documents to be used in local development review decisions and in local green infrastructure planning.

There are many available resources to help communities encourage better land development and land preservation practices. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation both maintain web sites that list numerous programs developed to promote these ideas. In addition, the Virginia Chapter of the American Planning Association prepares reports and hosts seminars related to local level planning practices, model ordinances, and growth management strategies. Working together, the regional government and the local governments can personalize their planning documents and procedures to facilitate efficient protection of the corridors outlined in this document.

Tasks and Timelines

- 1) Complete an audit of local zoning, subdivision, and land development ordinances - looking at how well they currently protect land and water resources and how well they facilitate the protection of the proposed corridors of the regional Greenways and Blueways system. Incorporate new ideas and models from other communities in Virginia and across the nation.
- 2) Communities that do not have an existing ordinance which sets standards for protection of the floodplain areas should create and adopt one. The ordinance should be consistent with regional and local goals. Other existing local floodplain ordinances from within the region should be consulted.
- 3) Reference the goals of this Greenways and Blueways plan in the appropriate sections of local and regional comprehensive growth management plans.
- 4) Local governments should use the design guidelines contained within this plan as the basis for consistent construction, signage and facilities across the regional system. The region should conduct research and convene forums to assess new and innovative conservation design practices and their applicability to Region 2000 jurisdictions.

Step 4: Start negotiating

In step 4 the Board should start thinking about legally-binding, landowner negotiations. Essentially, you are talking to landowners about your vision of connectivity and natural area protection AND about their interest in participating. This is setting the stage for the actual land acquisition process that will occur once there is cash in hand and land on the block.

It is highly advisable that local governments and regional governments team up with non-profit land protection organizations for this step. These organizations do not have the power to condemn land and do not have

Landowner Negotiations

the power to tax, and for these reasons, they generally ruffle fewer feathers when they talk about the acquisition of someone's property rights -even if the conversation is only about voluntary donation of some of these rights. Local land trusts or other environmental organizations often have a great deal of experience selling the benefits of conservation and often have excellent personal and professional relations with local land owners.

Tasks and Timelines

- 1) Local governments should begin the process of researching land ownership within corridors identified for future greenways and blueways.
- 2) The Board should develop new contacts and foster existing relationships with key landowners. Consideration should be given to determining the best methods for working with these individuals as partners.
- 3) Non-profit land conservation groups should be consulted regarding procedures for land owner negotiations.

Funding

Step 5: Secure funding

There are two primary stumbling blocks in the implementation of a plan like this one – soft support in the high levels of the local government and lack of a dedicated revenue stream. If you can secure a consistent, long-term, adequate funding source for the development of the system, most other problems can be worked out. The initial discussions about how to pay for land protection and stewardship have already occurred in Steps 1 and 2. Step 5 is where action is taken on these already agreed upon strategies.

Tasks and Timelines

- 1) The Regional Commission should contact a consulting entity such as the Trust for Public Land (TPL) to get assistance in putting together a strategy for achieving the funding goals developed in Step 2.
- 2) Local bond issues to help pay for land and water protection and recreational resource expansion should be put on future election ballots in the various jurisdictions.
- 3) Private sector donations should be raised through a capital campaign and should be directed to a Regional Greenways and Blueways Fund that could match local government contributions and could help leverage additional federal support.
- 4) Applications should be made to State and Federal funding sources

Step 6: Start building

The partnership is in place, private landowners are in line, the money is flowing. It's time to start making the corridors a reality. In Step 6, the community is engaged in the actual acquisition of land rights (fee-simple and easement). This is also where construction projects occur for multi-purpose corridors and where facilities such as benches, lights, recycling bins, and bicycle racks are installed.

Tasks and Timelines

- 1) Acquire the rights to property and add it to the Region 2000 GIS database.
- 2) Create construction diagrams for trail facilities and hire a construction firm.
- 3) Publicize the new segments widely and hold public celebrations at the site with volunteer groups and local elected officials.

Final words about implementation

Implementation involves both deliberate action and continued planning. While presented here as a fairly linear set of activities where one follows the next until the project is concluded, the system is actually a bit more circular. Generally, the flow is :

- data is gathered
- preliminary decisions are made, and
- action steps are taken.

Along the way, the preliminary decisions are re-examined to assure that they continue to take the community in the desired direction. New data is also collected, and action steps are adjusted and amended to respond to new realities. Checking back with the original plans and decisions, while in the process of continuing to move towards the next step, the Greenways and Blueways Board will be able to keep the momentum moving forward while keeping an eye out for changing conditions that should be responded to.