

POLICY IMPLICATIONS & RESEARCH

Community Trail Development

“What [you] need to have in place is a good... comprehensive long range plan or a good zoning ordinance that allows you to get trail easements from property owners when they’re coming in for development review process.”

-NC City Planner

Many communities in North Carolina want to build pedestrian/bicycle trails. However, the process can be long and complicated, and best practices in this area have not been sufficiently disseminated. To find out more about these best practices and to determine how policies play a role in community trail development, researchers with the North Carolina Physical Activity Policy Research Center studied trail making in North Carolina and in other states. They interviewed people involved with trail development at various sites to identify the influence of policy in this process. This fact sheet contains suggestions for trail planning and building in North Carolina based on the findings.



Bolin Creek Trail; Chapel Hill, NC



Rock Quarry Trail; Hendersonville, NC

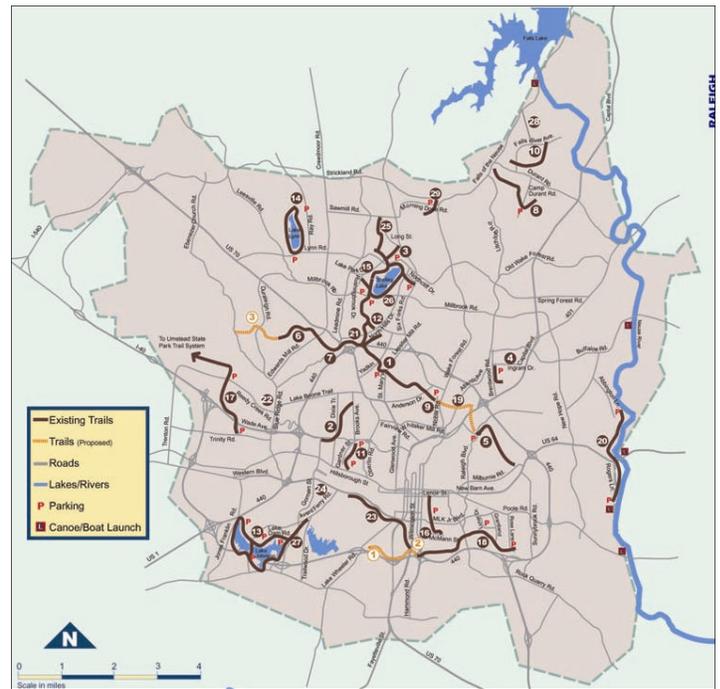
Trail Building Policies

If you are thinking of building a trail or trail network in your area, consider implementing policies to help obtain land and funding for greenways. For example:

- A subdivision ordinance can require that any proposed residential development that coincides with a trail on a Master Greenway plan must be dedicated (given) to the city/municipality, or must give an easement to allow for a public trail to be put in place. To read the phrasing used by Durham, NC, visit www.ci.durham.nc.us/departments/planning/pdf/subord.pdf.
- Impact/exaction fees tied to development can help fund trail and recreation development.
- Bond issues can generate the up front money needed to start your project.

Just getting started? Here are some things to keep in mind...

- Begin thinking about trails early on, especially in undeveloped areas. It is easier to build in new areas than in those that are already built.
- Contact your NC Division of Parks and Recreation Regional Trails Specialist. He or she can provide consulting on how to get started on the process. Find your state trails contact at ils.unc.edu/parkproject/trails/contact.html.
- If your municipality is writing or revising a comprehensive plan (designating land uses in particular areas), make sure the plan includes trails. Having a rational plan can provide leverage later in the process. Consider writing a master greenways plan. The North Carolina Department of Transportation has a bicycle and pedestrian planning grant program. It has secured \$400,000 for the 2007 cycle. More information can be found at www.itre.ncsu.edu/ptg/bikeped/ncdot/index.html.
- Try to get community leaders, especially local politicians, to champion your project early in the process. Their support can be invaluable.
- Utilize volunteer and non-profit organizations such as NC Rails to Trails (www.ncrail-trails.org). These groups often can contribute expertise, enthusiasm, and help.
- Talk with your area Council of Governments (COG) to see if they have, or are interested in coordinating a linked network of trails/green spaces. For example, the Triangle J COG is implementing the Triangle Greenprint Project. More information can be found at www.trianglegreenprint.org/overview.htm.
- Trail building is a long process. Expect to hear a lot of “no’s” from potential collaborators before you hear a “yes.”



Capital Area Greenway Map; Raleigh, NC. Image courtesy of Raleigh Parks and Recreation, www.raleighnc.gov.

Trail Funding Resources

- Adopt-a-Trail and the Recreational Trails Program are state and federal grant programs that provide anywhere from \$5,000-\$50,000 for trail building. Information can be found at <http://ils.unc.edu/parkproject/trails/grant.html>.
- The Clean Water Trust Fund provides grants to local projects that address water pollution, and waterways are often good locations for potential trails. Information can be found at www.cwmf.net.
- Visit the NC Million Acre Initiative for a list of possible state and federal funding sites at www.onencnaturally.org/pages/home/home.html.
- The federal Department of Transportation bike pedestrian program is active in non-motorized transport projects. Information can be found at www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/index.htm.



American Tobacco Trail; Durham, NC

Did you know that in 2006, 67% of North Carolina adults reported that their physical activity would be higher if their community had more accessible sidewalks or trails for walking or bicycling? (source: NC BRFSS, 2006)



Reed Creek Greenway; Asheville, NC

Already decided to build a trail? It is important to...

- **Coordinate with other departments, stakeholders, and neighboring trail builders.** Often, different entities can come together to support a trail for different reasons (e.g., water management, physical activity, transportation, etc.). Reach out to gather momentum. Use the varying interests as support rather than a hindrance on trail construction.
- **Make connections with other trails.** Think beyond municipalities and counties to help complete a larger network of trails, such as the East Coast Greenway (www.greenway.org/) and the Mountains to Sea Trail (www.ncmst.org/).
- **Talk early with residential stakeholders whose properties are near the trail.** They may be interested in the benefits of trails, but have heard false rumors about crime and litter.
- **Make sure the trail fits with the planned municipal or county bicycle and pedestrian network.** It is important to build connecting trails rather than piecemeal projects that do not lead anywhere.
- **Work with local bicycle/pedestrian planners in the Planning Department.** They can often facilitate trail projects.
- **Good signage on trails is important as both a way to promote trails and to address concerns of crime and safety.**
- **Get a steady source of funding rather than one lump sum.** This will help ensure the completion of the trail, not just the start of construction. Think of it like building a road in terms of time and cost.
- **Convince developers of the benefits of the trail as a selling point to customers.** This will make them more likely to contribute land or money to the project.
- **Set up funding for trail maintenance.** If you want the trail to be used, you will have to take care of it.
- **Be creative about acquiring land for the trail.** Durham relied on power easements, new subdivisions, sewer easements, abandoned railroad beds, impact fees, and developer land donations to get the South Ellerbe/Ellerbe Creek Trail built.
- **Be patient and persevere.** The process is long and arduous, but it is worth the effort to have a trail network in your community.

Federal Policies that Affect Trail Development

There are a number of federal policies and regulations to keep in mind when planning and building trails.

-The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) created a set of accessibility guidelines which explain how all places of public accommodation are to be made accessible. The U.S. Access Board also created a committee which developed recommended access standards for facilities, natural recreation trails, and Outdoor Recreation Access Routes (paths which connect the primary elements of a site – restrooms, parking lots, and picnic areas). Information can be found at www.ada.gov.



Ellerbe Creek Trail; Durham, NC

- The Clean Water Act, Sections 401 and 404 (1982, 1999) regulate wetlands development. Permits issued under these laws require that developers avoid, minimize, or compensate for impacts on wetlands. Most greenways that will run for a mile or more within close proximity to a creek or in a flood plain now require federal permits. The Environmental Protection Agency can comment upon and appeal the permitting of these plans. The acts can be found at www.epa.gov/region5/water/pdf/ecwa_t4.pdf.

-Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA - 1979) has increasingly worked towards disaster prevention. Any project planned in a designated flood zone must receive FEMA's comment in the form of a CLOMR (condition letter of map revision) or LOMR (letter of map revision). Although a greenway is a flat structure that normally creates a small amount of impervious surface, any boardwalk structures or bridges that are part of a greenway may be judged to be enough of a barrier in a creek's floodway to cause a rise in adjacent flood levels. Information on CLOMRs can be found at www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/fhm/fq_rev04.shtm.



Indian Reed Trail; Brasstown, NC

Physical Activity Policy Research Network

This project was conducted by the Physical Activity Policy Research Network (PAPRN). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) created the PAPRN in October of 2004 to study the effectiveness of policies related to increasing physical activity in communities. website: prc.slu.edu/paprn.htm.

For more information contact: Kelly Evenson, PhD, University of North Carolina Department of Epidemiology, Bank of America Center, 137 East Franklin Street Suite 306, Chapel Hill, NC 27514; email: kelly_evenson@unc.edu website: www.hdpd.unc.edu