



# **Webster: Heart & Soul**

Adopted March 4, 2015



# Webster: Heart & Soul

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## 1. Introduction

Webster, like many mountain communities, is assessing its future and how it will emerge successfully from growth and economic challenges in Western North Carolina. In undertaking this planning effort the Town of Webster desired to identify methods to improve its existing policies. The community wants to promote a more walkable town in order to improve community cohesion and public health.

The Town secured a grant through the Southwestern Commission's Mountain Landscapes Toolbox Implementation Fund to undertake the effort with the help of a consultant. This report reflects the results of that effort, which began in July 2014 and concluded in March 2015 with adoption of the plan by the Town Board.

### Background

Webster's history is one that plays an important role in the formation and history of Jackson County. Webster was the county seat of Jackson County for sixty years, from the community's founding in 1853 until the county seat was moved to Sylva in 1913. Webster's history began in April 1853 when "for one hundred dollars, an eighteen acre tract of land, bought from Nathan Allen, became the site of Webster, Jackson's county seat. In 1859 an act to incorporate the town of Webster was passed by North Carolina's General Assembly."

Much of Webster's original town limits remain unchanged from the original corporate limits. The population was 363 at the time of the 2010 Census.

Webster prides itself on being a residential community nestled between mountain ridges but with convenient access to nearby Sylva and Cullowhee. "Lying in an area of natural beauty, Webster proper is built on a ridge flanked by rolling farmland which ascends into tree-covered hills. With nearby King's Mountain and the Tuckasee River, its immediate area is limited...However, one has only to lift his eyes to see the beauty of the distant, blue, encircling mountains. Beginning in the foothills, they rise in a series of ranges to meet the horizon in soft irregular contours and bring to the viewer a sense of serenity, strength, reassurance and permanence."

Southwestern Community College, with an enrollment of more than 2,600, is situated on the Town's eastern border with Sylva and is a major educational institution in the region. The Smoky Mountain Center, NCDOT Division 14 and the Southwestern Commission all call Webster home for their area offices.

These employers and institutions, along with the proximity of West-



The community assets in Webster and its setting reflect its status as a historic community in Jackson County. White frame churches, the Old Webster School and the old county jail still remain as reminders of the area's rich history.



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ern Carolina University, have challenged Webster in terms of how to respond to area demand for housing, how to accommodate growth that fits within the town's residential character and whether or not the community desires a commercial core or development of a traditional Main Street. None of these challenges have easy solutions given Webster's location, citizen preferences and market impacts.

During early discussions for this plan, the Town Board identified the following questions to answer as part of defining its future:

- ◆ How do we properly celebrate Webster's history?
- ◆ How do we keep our residential community feel?
- ◆ How can we better engage residents?
- ◆ What is the proper context and fit of Webster within greater Jackson County?
- ◆ What type of opportunities exist to position Webster for future success?
- ◆ What do we need to do to develop sound policies related to existing conditions and future growth?

This plan attempted to identify some answers to those questions and define tools and strategies to propel Webster forward in partnership with Jackson County, the Southwestern Commission, NCDOT, Southwestern Community College and others.

## Guiding Principles for Webster

In 2012 Webster approved its current zoning ordinance after embarking on a community visioning effort led by the Division of Community Assistance with the North Carolina Department of Commerce. The multi-year effort sought to reframe policies for Webster and give the community a modern zoning ordinance to help guide future development.

## Guiding Principles for Webster

We believe that in order to help maintain what we cherish about Webster and still accommodate growth, we have to create safe and friendly streets for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists and to encourage protection of the rural nature of our town. That being said, we view these principles as enhancing choices of where to live or how to travel, rather than limiting them.

With that, the community established a set of guiding principles based on the statement shown at left. These principles are:

- ◆ An attractive community with a strong sense of place;
- ◆ Broad-based community participation;
- ◆ Enhanced public places;
- ◆ Integrated transportation choices; and
- ◆ Maximized use of existing infrastructure and ensured proper maintenance.

Webster should be commended for continuing to consistently reflect these guiding principles as these themes are similar to the early framing discussions for this Plan. Webster is working to improve community attractiveness by hiring a new landscaping contractor and upgrading the Town Hall property. The Town is working to maximize existing infrastructure by partnering with Duke

Energy to upgrade street lights. To enhance public places, ideas were posed during this Plan to enhance the existing ballfield site and install a publicly-accessible water fountain somewhere in Webster.

## Input from the Town Board

Before engaging the public at large, this planning effort sought to identify key themes from the Town Board to establish some ideas to for development of the Plan.

The Board members were asked to write their responses to the following Focus Question:

**What actions can Webster take to prosper in a manner that is suitable to existing residents while accommodating future residents and businesses with the growth of Jackson County?**

Things that will (in no particular order):

- Honor the community’s heritage
- Build upon existing conditions and desires
- Accommodate growth in a predictable manner
- Allow people to easily get from one place to another
- Be sensitive to the character and context of the area
- Help foster a greater sense of community

The Board’s responses to this reflected a range of ideas inclusive of various projects, programs and policies are summarized below.

Through the Focus Question and subsequent discussions at the monthly Town Board meetings, it was determined that community



The Town Board was engaged during the first meeting for this Plan to answer a Focus Question aimed at developing a set of tangible strategies to improve Webster.

## What actions can Webster take?...

- ◆ Promote what we are and what we have.
- ◆ Promote a walkable community by providing basic access, social space and lighting.
- ◆ Keep the historic vision alive by telling the story of Webster in creative, engaging ways.
- ◆ Enhance “the Loop” on Buchanan Loop Road as a place where people can safely walk.
- ◆ Improve the walking trail at the old school site.
- ◆ Establish bicycle routes in and around town.
- ◆ Provide better access to the SCC campus and nearby employers as well as to area churches.
- ◆ Build new partnerships with government agencies to increase opportunities for success.
- ◆ Assist seniors so they can remain independent in their homes and stay in the community.
- ◆ Promote community gardening as a community engagement and social interaction tool.
- ◆ Install signage related to history, health, safety and walking routes.
- ◆ Update/refine ordinances to protect property values and guard against unsuitable uses.
- ◆ Provide more town-sponsored events to improve community awareness and social cohesion.
- ◆ Create a logo and slogan that defines Webster.
- ◆ Provide places for the community to socialize.
- ◆ Improve the overall appearance of the town.

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and social cohesion was the primary driving force that encapsulated the overarching theme of the discussions for this Plan.

Improving overall community and social cohesion occurs through two means:



The county's ballfield site next to the Old Webster School quickly emerged as a space where the Town Board and community desired improvements to improve the community.

1. The town and its residents invest in a public space, either through acquisition of a new space or improvement of an existing space, to build facilities and provide programs aimed at social interaction.
2. Private market forces establish businesses and private/public spaces that provide a place for community members to interact.

The former is a very common theme within local governments as they tend to have public spaces such as parks, greenways, community centers and other areas that provide such a space. The latter is typically found in the historic downtown areas of small towns and is comprised of a diverse cross-section of business types.

The challenge with Webster is that neither context is present in the community. The prospects of the private market developing such a space in Webster is limited due to existing market conditions, the community's desire to keep its residential feel and a lack of land use policies that encourage this type of development.

Therefore, it was determined through discussions with the Town Board that the town identify and pursue strategies to improve social cohesion through the public realm.

The most readily-available opportunity for this exists near the Old Webster School on the ballfield property, which is a public park owned and managed by Jackson County and utilized primarily by Jackson County public schools. This space quickly became the focus of this Plan's overall effort.

## Community Walkabout

The Town Board shared that its top priorities to meet the goals for increased social cohesion were the ballfield space in combination with existing sidewalks along NC Highway 116 and opportunities for investment in a walking path along Buchanan Loop during the community walkabout. The purpose of the walkabout was to explore community desires and priorities for how these spaces could be improved and to

gain greater perspective on how Webster residents viewed their community.

The community walkabout occurred October 27, 2014 and had approximately 20 participants comprised of more than a dozen town residents along with the Mayor, Town Board members and Planning



Buchanan Loop Road is a popular place for residents to walk and jog. The road is managed by NCDOT and is a two-lane route without sidewalks or a walking path.

Board members.

The walkabout began at the ballfield with a discussion on the participants' ideas for enhancing that space. The group then walked along NC 116 to the intersection with Buchanan Loop Road to discuss walkability and potential improvements along the loop.

The event concluded at Town Hall where participants were asked to note their priority in terms of potential upgrades to the ballfield and other overall townwide improvements.

The results of that effort are what led to the many recommendations contained in the subsequent chapters of this Plan.



Participants in the community walkabout experienced the community first-hand by observing sites along NC 116, including the ballfield site and the intersection of Buchanan Loop Road.

## Rediscovering Western North Carolina

While Western North Carolina has always been a sought-after area for retirees, the region is enjoying a resurgence as the economy improves. Increasingly, older adults are seeking walkable communities so they can age in place. This is a departure from previous decades where large mountainside or golf course estate lots were a preferred destination.





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## 3. Community Characteristics Review

### Demographics & Land Use

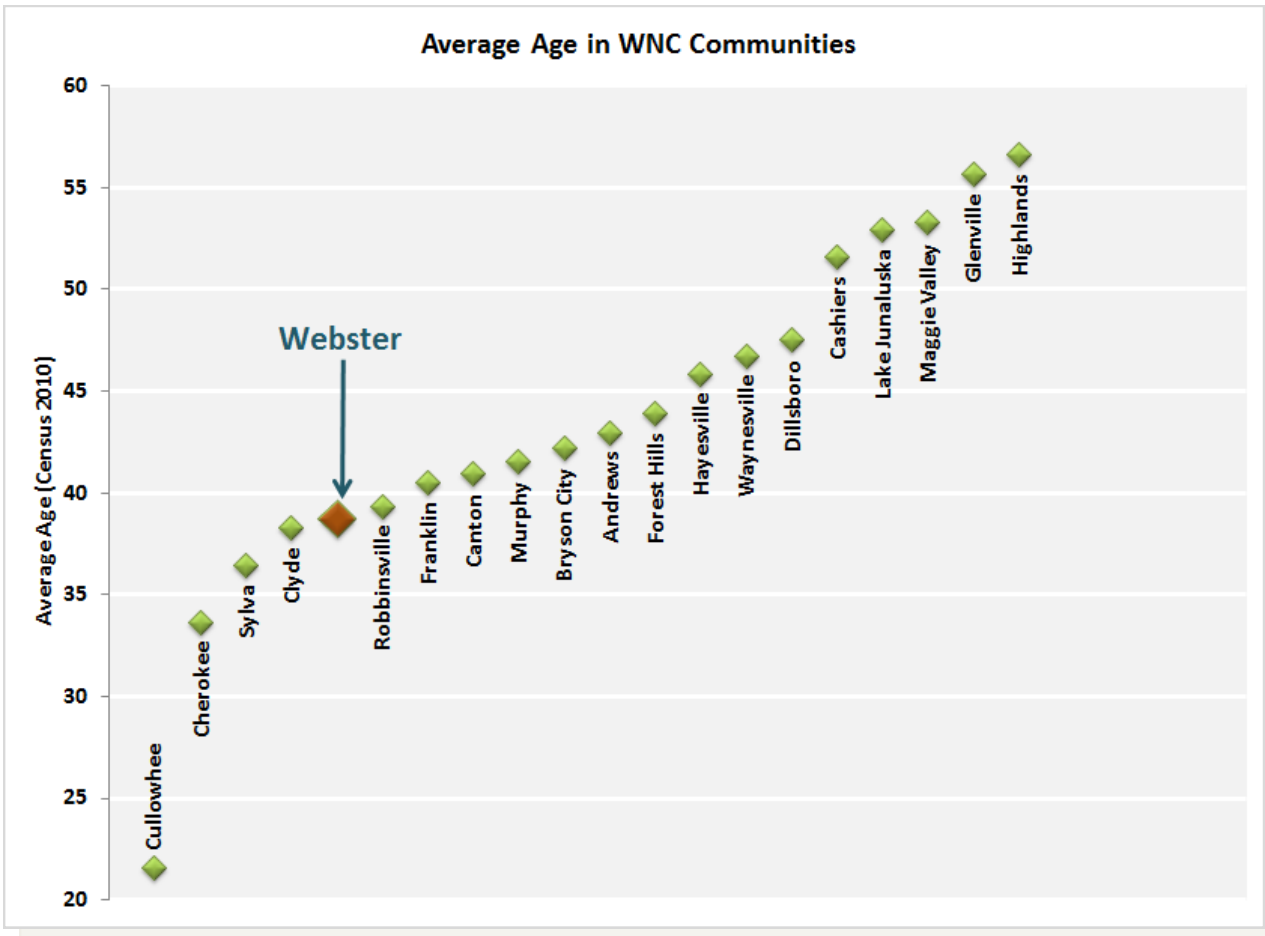
The 2010 Census revealed Webster to have 363 residents and 157 households. With 175 housing units, 65.6% of these are owner occupied, a rate similar to the overall rate for Jackson County.

It's difficult to draw many conclusions from Census data for communities with a population as small as Webster's. However, one revealing figure is the average age of Webster residents.

The figure below shows where Webster ranks according to mean or average age of residents. Cullowhee is an anomaly in the region among towns and Census Designated Places due to its student population. Webster ranks in the lowest quartile of average age among communities in the seven counties of the Southwestern Commission's area.

The average age of 38.7 tends to support the findings of this plan to encourage more community and social cohesion through places such as parks, trails and walking routes. This would indicate there are families in Webster that desire these facilities. This is a statistic to track over time. Given Webster's small population base, the mean age could change dramatically with small shifts in the population.

Average Age of Webster Residents Compared to other WNC Communities





## Webster, North Carolina: At-A-Glance

### Quick Facts (2010 Census)

Population:	363
Average Age:	38.7
Households:	157
Average Size:	2.31
Housing Units:	175
Owner Occupied:	65.6%



### Land Use Overview of Webster

Assessed Acreage:	1,235
Residential District (R-1):	91.5%
Government District (G-1):	7.5%
Business District (B-1):	1.0%

### Parcel Analysis

Number of Parcels:	300
Undeveloped Parcels (Zero Building Value):	99 parcels, 41% Parcels < 1 Acre: 22 parcels, 4.4% (8 are stand alone, 14 adjoin larger parcels, 3 are a right-of-way and 2 belong to a utility)
Average/Median Size:	4.1 / 1.6

### Tax Value (from Parcel Records)

Total Tax. Building Value:	\$38,320,580
Total Tax. Land Value:	\$31,344,060
Tax Exempt Acreage:	226 / 18%
Jackson County Tax Rate:	0.28
Webster Tax Rate:	0.05
Jackson Tax Revenue:	\$19,506
Webster Tax Revenue:	\$22,989

### Webster Land Use Regulations

Zoning Ordinance  
Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ)

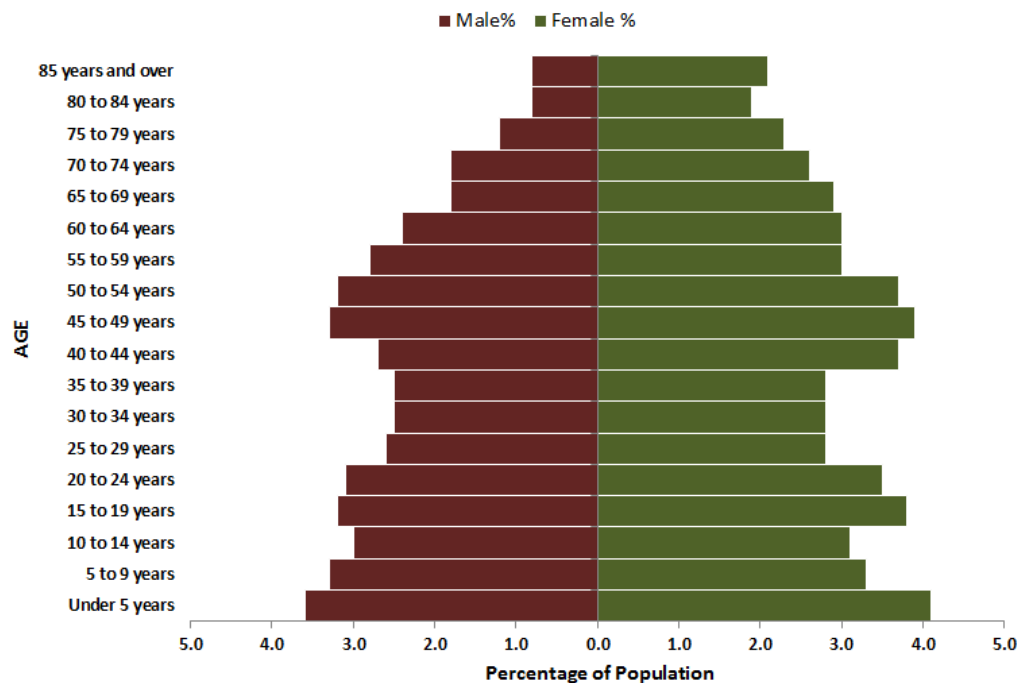
### Regulations Administered by Jackson County:

Sediment Control  
Subdivision  
Cell Tower  
Mountain and Hillside Development  
Historic Preservation

A population pyramid helps a community understand the spread among different age groups. This helps determine the type of services and needs in a town. It represents the percentage of the population, divided by male and female, for age ranges.

The population distribution for Webster is very similar to Jackson County's.

Population Pyramid for Webster, North Carolina (2010 Census)





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## Policy Review

Local government planning happens when citizens, appointed board members and elected officials think about and make plans to address current and future community conditions. Land use regulation, of which zoning is a type, are tools that implement a community's objectives identified through a planning process. When combined with planning, zoning and other types of ordinances are more than a set of rules dictating where one can build a house, open a store, or start a church. Land use decisions affect traffic, neighborhood property values, overall community character, and the cost of government services such as water, roads, and community amenities. Perhaps most important is that land use regulation is a tool that can allow a community to remain or become a desirable place to live.

## The Power to Regulate Land Use

North Carolina's towns are creatures of the state. When it comes to land use regulation, Webster can only act when it has received power from North Carolina's general assembly, which provides a wide range of land use ordinance-making authority.

- ◆ First is a general grant of regulatory authority allowing a town to, "by ordinance define, prohibit, regulate, or abate acts, omissions, or conditions detrimental to the health, safety, or welfare of its citizens and the peace and dignity of the city, and may define and abate nuisances (G.S. 10A-174)."
- ◆ Next is general police power authority. Ordinances developed with police power authority allow towns to regulate a variety of activities, including nuisance abatement, noise control, emission of pollutants, outdoor advertising, flea markets, adult businesses, domestic and dangerous animals, junked or abandoned vehicles, and others (G.S. 160A-177).
- ◆ Finally, the legislature has granted explicit authority to enact zoning, subdivision control, building codes, housing codes, and a variety of growth management and environmental regulations.
- ◆ Case law also guides a town's ability to regulate land use.

Webster has the ability to adopt many more ordinances than its two current regulations: the Town of Webster Zoning Ordinance (adopted in 2012) and Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ). Additionally, Jackson County administers five of its ordinances to regulate Webster land use.

**How does Webster compare to other towns of similar size?** North Carolina has 56 municipalities with a population between 300 and 500. A quick online survey of these towns reveals that comparison towns are few. Research about the comparison towns revealed three themes:

- ◆ Most are in eastern North Carolina (56%),
- ◆ Many do not have an online presence (55%), and

- ◆ Of those that have an online presence, only 14 provide online ordinance access.

The chart below identifies the most common ordinances towns similar in size to Webster have in their code of ordinances or in their unified development ordinance (UDO). All have a zoning ordinance and most have a sign ordinance and a subdivision ordinance. Some towns, like Webster, rely on the county for land subdivision. After the main three, the types of ordinances begin to vary. Towns Webster's size also regulate nuisances, noise, junk cars, and have stand-alone manufactured housing/mobile home park ordinances (some regulate manufactured housing through their zoning ordinance). Less common are ordinances related to tree cutting, abandoned structures, communication towers, solar and wind energy, and soliciting.

Compared to other small towns, Webster has fewer land development tools in place. In 2006, the UNC School of Government conducted a study, *An Inventory of Local Government Land Use Ordina-*

Town	County	Population	Region	Type of Ordinance						
				Zoning	Sign	Subdivision	Nuisance	Noise	Junk Car	Manuf. Home
Webster	Jackson	369	West							
Washington Park	Beaufort	449	East							
Caswell Beach	Brunswick	422	East							
Duck	Dare	385	East							
Hobgood	Halifax	341	East							
Pollocksville	Jones	327	East							
Minnesott Beach	Pamlico	455	East							
Atkinson	Pender	318	East							
Topsail Beach	Pender	387	East							
St. Helena	Pender	412	East							
Simpson	Pitt	418	East							
Grimesland	Pitt	446	East							
Peachland	Anson	426	Pied							
Forest Hills	Jackson	365	West							
Beech Mountain	Watauga, Avery	324	West							
<b>Color Key</b>				Have Ordinance		County Administrators		No Ordinance		
Percent of Comparison Towns with Ordinance				100%	93%	71%	64%	57%	36%	29%
Percent of Towns in NC with Ordinance				89%	82%	82%	81%	77%	84%	79%

*nances in North Carolina.* Compared to the results from this report, Webster has fewer ordinances than most cities and towns across the state.

**Doing More.** Having established that the Town of Webster can do more to regulate land, the question then becomes does it want to do more and does it need to do more.

- ◆ **Want to Do:** Through a series of conversations, Webster's town council has indicated that it may want to make policy related changes in the zoning ordinance. Recently, the Town Council directed the town attorney to research and report on ordinance adoption, lot subdivision, non-conforming lots, mobile home regulations, nuisances, and a variety of proposed definitions (see Appendix).
- ◆ **Need to Do:** The attorney's report highlights the need for ordinance corrections (e.g. references to sections that do not exist). These corrections do not constitute substantial policy change, but they are necessary. Additionally, in 2013, the NC General Assembly passed S.L. 2013-126. This bill, which applies to actions taken on or after October 1, 2013, applies to local development ordinances and board rules of procedures.

A table in the Appendix from the UNC School of Government notes the points the Town should examine for potential amendments to ensure that the Town's Zoning Ordinance complies with the law. According to the School of Government, "It is not mandatory that all of these items be explicitly addressed in ordinances, but any inconsistent provisions should be amended and local governments procedures must comply with these provisions effective October 1, 2013." The Town of Webster needs to review its ordinance and make these necessary compliance changes.

Somewhat related, the changes from S.L. 2013-126 result from efforts of the Zoning, Planning and Land Use Section of the NC Bar Association. This same group will propose another set of changes in the 2015 General Assembly session. Working with the town attorney, the Town of Webster should keep a watch on these changes as they move from proposed legislation to an adopted bill. A good place to keep up with the changes is through the NCPLAN listserv, the NC Chapter of the American Planning Association, the NC League of Municipalities, and through the town attorney's affiliation with the NC Bar Association.

### **Plan Review**

There are no Webster community-specific plans available for review as part of this plan. Jackson County and the Southwestern Commission have conducted several planning efforts that considered Webster in the overall countywide or regional context.

**Jackson County Land Development Plan (2006).** The Jackson County Land Development Plan provides data on population growth, building permits issued, and other various indicators of growth and development. Areas in which growth has occurred are identified and the rates of growth provided. The Plan contains information regarding projected growth as well as identifying estimated locations of future growth. As part of the forecast of future growth and development, the Land Development Plan identifies obstacles to development in Jackson County, including infrastructure restrictions such as limited road capacity and lack of sewer service in certain areas and natural constraints such as steep slopes and flood plains.

The Plan notes how steps have been taken by some communities to address and manage growth and development. Webster is identified along with Sylva, Dillsboro, and Forest Hills as communities that adopted ordinances, subdivision regulations, and related regulations to guide and direct growth.

For Webster, the Plan notes that officials “made a conscious effort to retain the peaceful quality of life that now exists in Webster by adopting regulations limiting development to single family residential homes.” The Plan also cites Webster’s guiding principles.

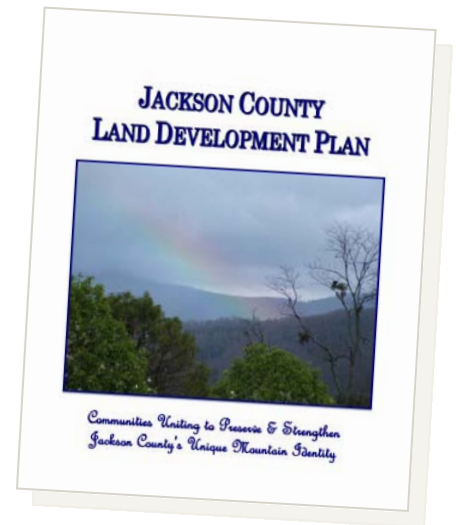
Nearly a decade has passed since the Land Development Plan was adopted. This prompted Jackson County to begin a Comprehensive Plan effort in late 2014 to develop a new plan for the coming decade. The planning process will carry through 2015.

**Jackson County Recreation Master Plan Update (2013).** The Plan addresses current and changing recreational needs, issues, and demands of Jackson County residents. It serves as a tool to aid Jackson County Parks and Recreation Department staff through the next five to ten years in providing diverse recreational programming and opportunities while promoting healthy lifestyles and improving the quality of life in Jackson County.

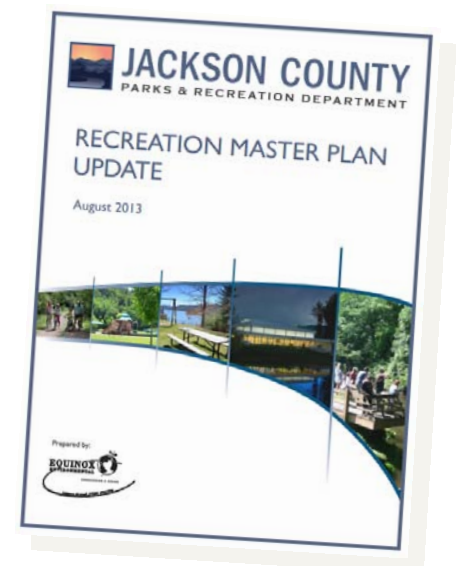
One of the Plan’s goals is to maximize existing assets by utilizing and expanding existing parks and facilities that are in-line with trends of growth and popularity. For Webster, this includes an objective to “Develop Joint-Use Agreements for all facilities with Jackson County School System,” including a new agreement with the old Webster School. Joint-Use Agreements allow for organizations to utilize these public assets while shielding the owner(s) from liability as a result of that use.

The plan inventories the old Webster School property and area to include the ballfield site, the school building, the batting cages and the walking trail. It also identifies the river access areas in Webster.

The plan includes “park district” sectors of the county with Sylva and Webster paired into one district. There are no recommendations, other than for the Joint-Use Agreement, for the ballfield site.



The County’s Land Development Plan cites Webster’s initiatives to adopt ordinances and other regulations to help guide and direct growth.



The County’s Recreation Master Plan Update identifies a goal to pursue a Joint-Use Agreement for the Old Webster School site to help encourage more community use.

## Transportation Review

**Jackson County Comprehensive Transportation Plan (2010).** The Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) was led by the Southwestern RPO and NCDOT to ensure that the progressively developed transportation system will meet the needs of Jackson County over a 40-year period. The CTP “serves as an official guide to providing a well-coordinated, efficient, and economical transportation system for the future of the region.”

The CTP, which is undergoing an update in 2015, is used by the RPO and NCDOT to select projects to consider for funding through the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program, which is the document that identifies which projects are funded.

The CTP identifies long-range improvements to a variety of transportation systems and inventoried existing facilities and services. For Webster, the CTP includes:

- ◆ **Highway Improvements:** Upgrades along NC 116 to modernize the cross-section of the road to provide shoulders and straighten some curves along the route. The CTP notes NC 116 is constrained through Webster and would be difficult to widen or add lanes due to these constraints. Specifically, the CTP states: “Widen and straighten NC 116 (Webster Road) from NC 107 to US 441. Widening the pavement to 11’ lanes would help this facil-

NC 116 Profile from the Jackson County CTP.

<p><b>NC 116</b>  <b>Proposed improvements from NC 107 to US 441</b></p>	<p><b>ID No: Jack0012-H</b></p> <p><b>Last updated on: 12/08/09</b></p>
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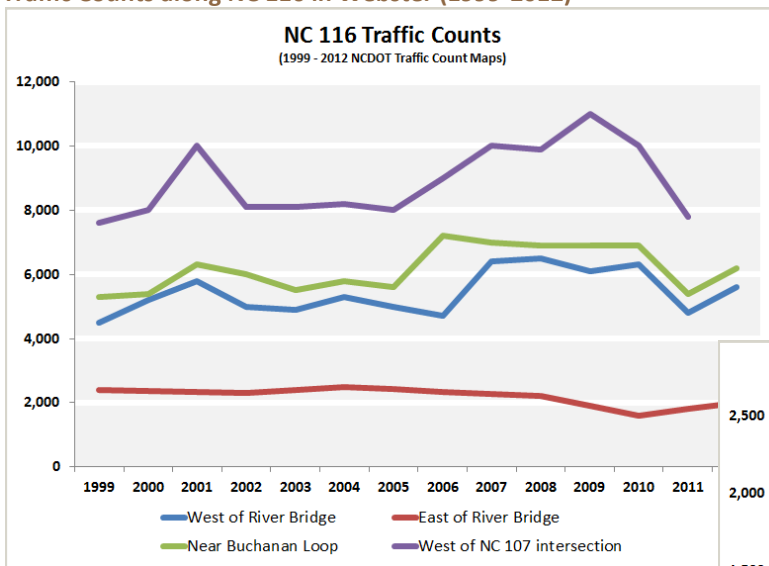


ity handle the traffic more safely. Volumes are expected to range from 5900 to 10,800 vehicles per day (vpd) in 2035. The capacity along this facility is 10,400 to 11,500 vpd. Widening is not recommended in the city limits of Webster as it may be difficult with the residential and historical development.”

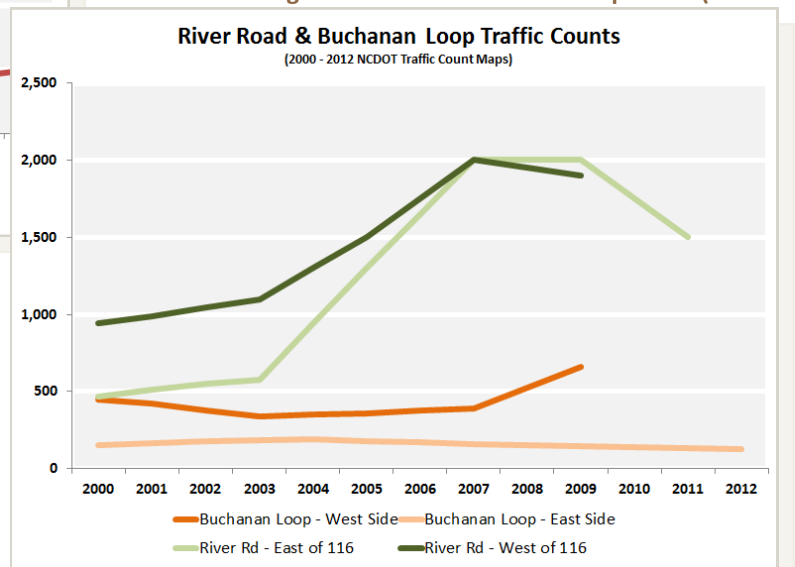
- ◆ **Pedestrian Improvements:** Buchanan Loop Road is a road identified as “Needs Improvement” with the addition of sidewalks. The CTP identifies a need for sidewalks along the new Southwestern Community College road linking NC 116 to NC 107.
- ◆ **Bicyclist Improvements:** Plans for a multi-use trail, originally identified in a 2003 effort by Jackson County, are in the CTP along the River through Webster linking to Cullowhee. River Road is identified as a local bicycle route.

**Traffic Volumes on Webster-area Roads.** Information obtained from NCDOT’s online traffic count maps indicate volatility in traffic figures in the time period from 1999 through 2012 (the latest year available). The economic recession of the 2000s caused traffic volumes to fluctuate greatly and decline in many areas around the region and the state. There are four count locations along NC 116 and these are shown in the figure below. The highest counts along NC 116 are near the intersection of NC 107. Traffic counts are also illustrated for River Road and Buchanan Loop Road.

**Traffic Counts along NC 116 in Webster (1999-2012)**



**Traffic Counts along River Road & Buchanan Loop Road (2000-2012)**





## 3. Opportunities for Increased Walkability & Physical Activity

A primary reason for Webster being awarded the grant to conduct this Plan was an emphasis on improving walkability and, thereby, improving overall community health.

### Improving Public Health Through Walkability

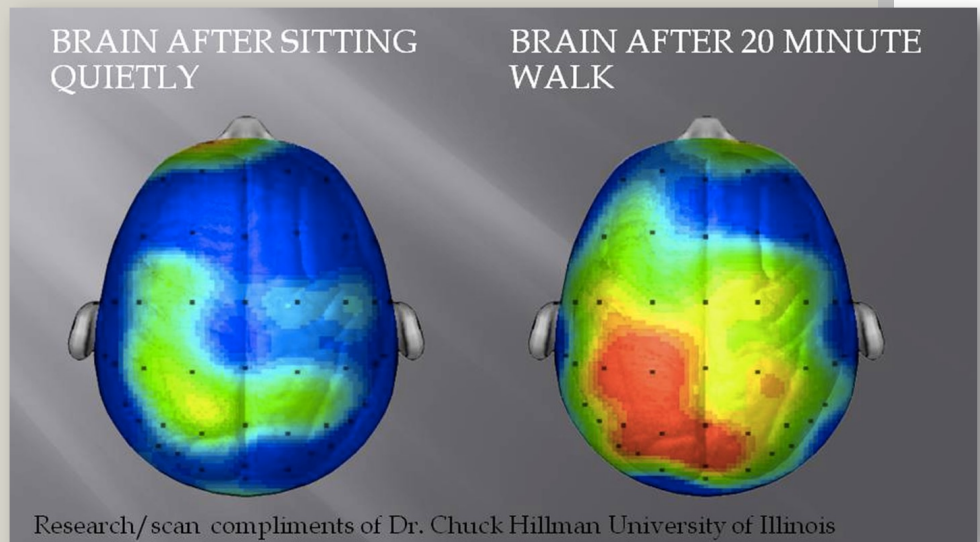
The World Health Organization defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Using this holistic definition of health implies that to improve the health of a population, the social determinants of health (the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global, national and local levels) must be considered and addressed to promote health and wellness for all. These same factors should be considered with regard to walkability.

Wellness is much more than physical health, exercise or nutrition. It is the full integration of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. There are several health benefits to walking:

- ◆ It is a low-impact and easy way to improve physical health that can be enjoyed by people of all ages.
- ◆ Walking gives your heart, blood vessels and lungs a good workout, as well as increased cardiovascular fitness; increased strength and flexibility; improved joint mobility; improved posture and coordination; and decreased body fat.

## Walking: The New Wonder Drug

No longer do communities have to ponder complex ways to improve physical activity in their community. The simple act of providing places where people can safely walk is proving to be a medical miracle as research continues to indicate that walking 10,000 steps a day can vastly improve an individual's health.





- ◆ It is one of the best ways to reduce the risk of health problems such as stroke, heart disease, some cancers, diabetes and arthritis—all leading causes of death in Jackson County.
- ◆ Thirty (30) minutes of moderate walking per day five days a week can help ensure a longer, healthier and happier life.
- ◆ One hour of walking may increase your life expectancy by two hours.
- ◆ Improve mood and improve overall sense of self.
- ◆ Historic walking tours or designated routes can help community members and visitors gain greater appreciation, in an active way, of Webster.

## Activity Connection Plan

An Activity Connection Plan or ACP is a planning model aimed at identifying investments to improve the walking and bicycling environment of a given community. The ACP assesses potential infrastructure improvements that safely and efficiently deliver citizens to locations where they are most likely to participate in recreation or sport.

Most active transportation trips are for recreation and many communities still have yet to either embrace or implement a comprehensive active transportation plan. The ACP is a means to get communities started on improvements proven to be effective and help usher users to desirable community assets.

Additionally, the model identifies site improvements that further attract users or provide a better return on investment for city funding. The model contains several steps including:

1. Identifying community activity sites (parks, schools, trails, gyms);
2. Identifying participant generator areas (neighborhoods, office, civic);
3. Identifying primary and secondary streets connecting sites with users;
4. Meeting with stakeholders and reviewing plans for existing projects or ideas;
5. Recommending physical and programmatic projects or policies to improve conditions of streets and sites.

The ACP model was proposed for Webster as a means to link increased walkability and health by identifying those site most conducive to promoting physical activity. The utility of the ACP was quickly confirmed in discussions with the Town Board about their overall vision for improvements.

The following pages contain the ACP-related outcomes and recommendations for two identified sites: the ballfield and Buchanan Loop.



Walking along NC 116 is a popular activity in Webster, as pedestrian traffic was observed at all times of the day during the Plan development process and community meetings.

## Webster Ballfield Primary Site

**Site Description:** The Webster ballfield complex represents the most significant site for physical activity in Webster. The site currently has a walking path and ball fields, but with investment and resources, could easily accommodate many more outlets which help attract users of all ages and abilities.

### Why is this park important?

The hub of Webster activity opportunities, Webster Field is and can be an even more attractive site with the ushering in of recommendations. Added appeal could also generate economic activity by attracting neighboring community residents.



### Site Assets:

- Baseball Field
- Batting Cage
- Walking Path
- Approx. 1 acre of lawn space

### Recommended Site Improvements

Webster residents expressed a strong preference for the following upgrades to the site (in order of priority):

- Erect a covered picnic/performance shelter.
- Construct a Nature Playscape.
- Construct a playground for 5 to 12 year olds.
- Erect educational kiosks highlighting Webster history.
- Construct a dog park or community garden.

### Recommended Infrastructure Improvements:

- Work with NCDOT to pave parallel drive aisle including buffered walk space from school driveway to field entrance.
- With improvements, consider mid-block Rapid Flash Beacon pedestrian signal and ladder crosswalk connecting to western driveway access area.
- Add bicycle racks and a water fountain (with a dog spout) at the site.



The old Highway 116 roadbed in front of the ballfield provides an opportunity for a skate park or other uses that will not conflict with walking path users.

## Next Steps: Ballfield & Old Webster School Area

The ACP identified potential improvements to the site, which is owned by Jackson County. The Jackson County Recreation and Parks Master Plan did not identify any future improvements to the site but county officials expressed a willingness to work with Webster to identify funding sources for improvement to the space.

The Town presented ideas for the ballfield site to the Recreation Advisory Board for Jackson County in January 2015. The Board agreed to add the pavilion to its list of items for budget consideration.

It is advisable for Webster and the County to pursue options for the site to include improvements that span age groups and allow for both a unique space for the County as well as a place for Webster residents to socialize.

The top priorities identified by participants in the community walkabout are illustrated below. The idea of a picnic and performance pavilion beyond the outfield area of the ballfield and a nature playscape in the area along the old roadbed below the ballfield received the highest number of votes.

Other ideas included a playground for 5 to 12 year olds and educational kiosks along the walking trail. A community garden, dog park, skate park, workout stations and a bicycle pump track had less support.

## Top Priorities for the Ballfield Site

### #1 Priority

#### Picnic/Performance Pavilion

A place where the community can gather to host events, socialize and conduct a variety of functions.

**Estimate: \$40,000 to \$80,000**



### #3 Priority

#### Playground for 5 to 12 year olds

A playground uniquely designed for this age group and abilities. The old school playground is for younger children.

**Estimate: \$30,000 to \$50,000**



### #2 Priority

#### Nature Playscape



A playground that is based on natural features and allows children to experience nature through play.

**Estimate: \$40,000 to \$50,000**

### #4 Priority

#### Interpretive Panels at Walking Trail



Placards placed along the walking trail that tell the story of Webster—its history and its people.

**Estimate: \$1,000 each**



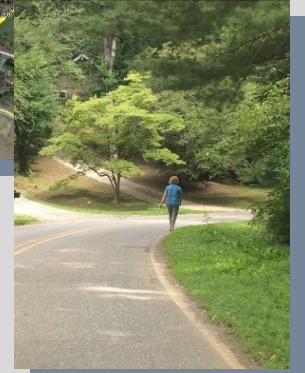
# Webster: Heart & Soul

## Buchanan Loop Road

**Site Description:** Buchanan Loop is already being used by residents for walking and bicycling. However, the road is rather narrow with limited sight lines and could be enhanced to encourage slower vehicle speeds and improve safety. By doing so, use could increase and active participation improve.

### Why is this route important?

Buchanan Loop, though currently an unofficial walking route, can become a significant addition to the activity options for Webster. Further, such a loop can be the first of a system of loops that could also be developed and significantly upgrade the walking and bicycling options in the Town.



### Site Assets:

- 1.8-mile paved loop road
- Webster Cemetery
- Link to via Ballfield walking path via NC 116 sidewalks.

## Recommended Site Improvements

- Add promotional signage and orientation maps along circle to inform users.
- Install a water fountain near Town Hall, the start of the route.

## Recommended Infrastructure Improvements:

- Ask NCDOT Division 14 to identify available right-of-way around the Loop.
- Add 4- or 5-foot shoulder and extruded curb to define space and provide buffer for users.
- Add Shared Lane Markings on road to elevate awareness to the presence of bicyclists.
- Provide Wayfinding signage.
- Enhance western loop entrance and Webster Road with high visibility crosswalks.



Extruded curb and shoulder space can improve safety with minimal investment.

## Next Steps: Buchanan Loop Road

Upgrading Buchanan Loop Road to include pedestrian facilities along one side of the road requires a partnership between the Town, NCDOT and Jackson County. The construction of any pedestrian facilities along the route will need to be maintained by the Town (within corporate limits) and the County (in unincorporated areas).

Constructing traditional curb, gutter and sidewalks along the 1.8 mile loop could cost up to \$1.5 million. Lower cost options that meet ADA requirements are possible along the route and include construction of a shoulder with an extruded curb between the travel lanes and the shoulder. This option would be less costly (approx. \$300,000) but is not an option identified in NCDOT's design standards, which are intended for more urban contexts. Other options include a separated walking path with a 5-foot grass buffer between the walking path and edge of pavement. This could be constructed for a similar cost as the shoulder/extruded curb option but could have greater right-of-way impacts.

The state's Strategic Transportation Investments law likely means that any major improvements along the route will take at least 10 years. Lower cost options may be achievable through other non-DOT funding sources such as health grants. Maintenance costs will vary based on the type of facility and who maintains it. Sidewalks require less maintenance than gravel or asphalt, but overall costs vary based on encroachment of foliage and maintenance by property owners.

## Options for Walking Facilities Along Buchanan Loop Road

### Traditional Curb, Gutter & Sidewalk

A 5-foot wide sidewalk adjacent to the travel lane, complete with curb and gutter, like those along NC 116.



### Extruded Curbed Walking Path

A shoulder along the road that is separated from the travel lane by an extruded curb with breaks to allow for drainage.



### Buffered Sidewalk



A sidewalk with a 5-foot buffer from the road. This does not require curb, gutter and sidewalk, like those shown here on US 64 in Lake Lure.

### Addition of Gravel or Paved Shoulder



Adding a gravel or paved shoulder along the Loop would give pedestrians a place to walk or a refuge when cars approach.

[www.pedbikeimages.org](http://www.pedbikeimages.org)  
Photo by: Dan Burden



# Webster: Heart & Soul

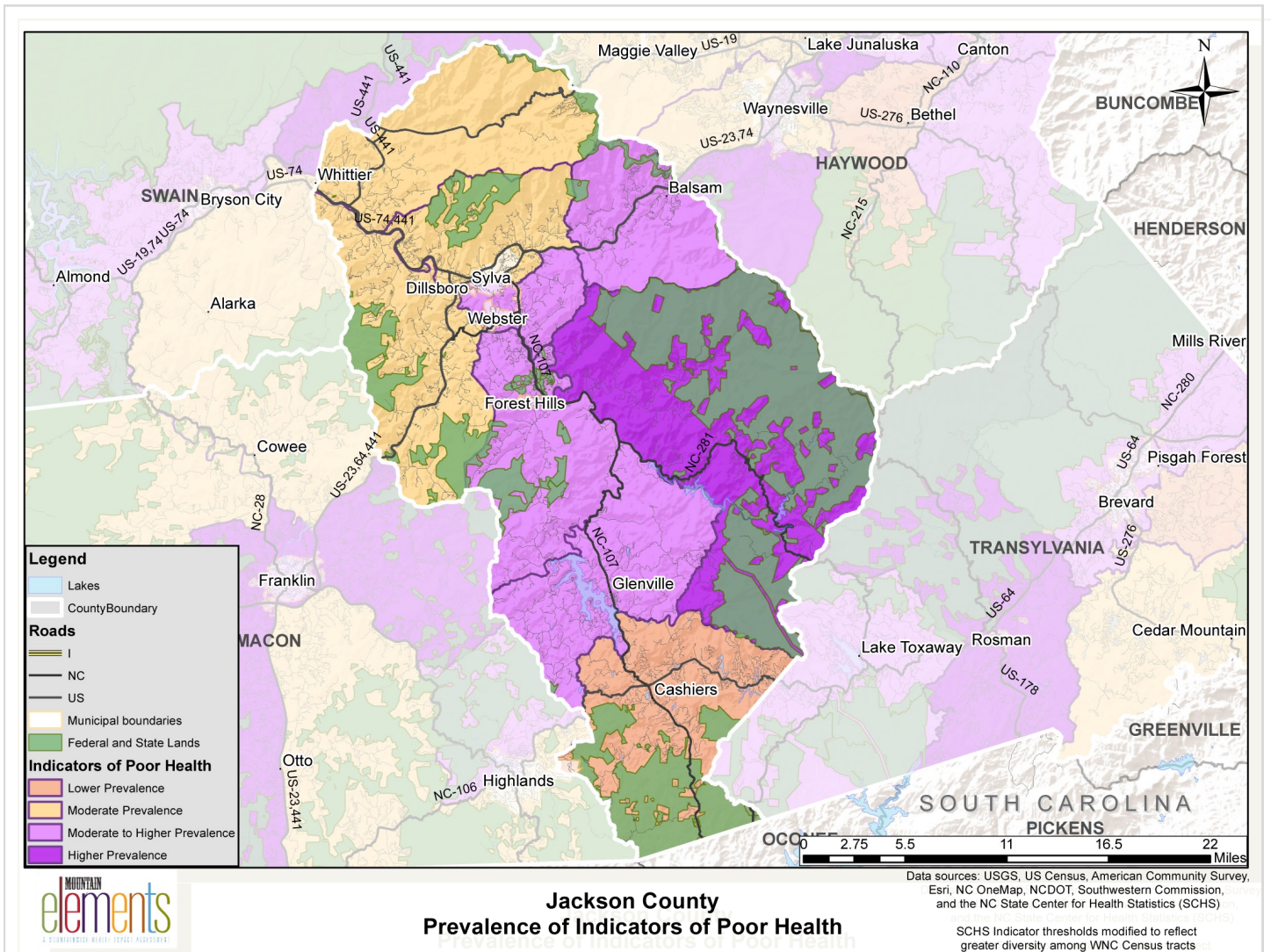
## Health Hot Spots

A regional health impact assessment called MountainElements conducted analysis on Jackson County to identify where pockets of poor health conditions reside. MountainWise, a CDC-grant funded initiative commissioned the study with hopes that health would be incorporated into planning efforts for WNC communities.

The map below illustrates health hot spots in Jackson County with the dark and light purple colors indicating those areas where the indicators suggest the poorest health conditions reside based on 13 different health and socioeconomic factors. Most of Webster is located in a Census tract where there is a moderate to high prevalence of poor health conditions. Webster's population comprises roughly 10% of the tract. The factors that influenced this status are:

- ◆ Heart disease mortality rates;
- ◆ Stroke mortality rates;
- ◆ Percent of households on food stamps;
- ◆ Percent of population with only a high school diploma;
- ◆ Percent of population living below the poverty level; and
- ◆ Percent Hispanic population.

Jackson County Health Hot Spots



## Health Impacts of Improved Walkability

The importance of improvements in access to the ballfield site and along Buchanan Loop Road relate directly to increasing opportunities for improved public health. The ACP recommendations are intended to maximize the potential for residents and visitors to use the facilities, thereby having the greatest impact on public health.

In her article, “Sidewalks—A Smart Investment,” Dr. Kathleen Beine of Kingsport, Tennessee notes that “there are many approaches and solutions to the [health] crisis... A significant part of the solutions is to make it easy to be physically active—where you don't have to load up a car and drive someplace, or join a gym. Just make it easy by walking out your front door and lead your family on a neighborhood adventure outing, possibly to a small community park to play and visit with other neighbors.”

The improvements recommended in this plan are proven to improve health but can be costly investments. Webster should utilize this type of information and research, along with the health elements of this Plan, to make the case to health-based funding sources as to why they should invest their resources in Webster.

The table on the next page summarizes broad health benefits of various types of walking facilities investments.

**Research proves people are willing to walk longer distances to reach a destination if they are given safe and convenient facilities.**





# Webster: Heart & Soul

## Broad Health Benefits of Walking Facility Investments

Facility:	Description	Broad Health Benefits (↑ = Positive; ↓ = Negative)
<b>Complete Streets</b>	A “complete street” is one designed to provide appropriate space for the safe movement of all users including motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians. In addition, a street is deemed “Complete” if it adequately considers and optimizes adjacent land uses, is designed for a context sensitive travel speed, and provides ample buffer space between uses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↑ Gives ample space for pedestrians and bicyclists, fostering and promoting active modes.</li> <li>↑ An attractive and vibrant street can attract more use and users</li> <li>↑ Buffer space and design limit high vehicle speeds, conflicts with defenseless users</li> <li>↓ <b>All elements of the street need to be maintained to ensure continued intentions</b></li> </ul>
<b>New Sidewalks</b>	Constructing new sidewalks compliant with ADA standards where they currently do not exist is a cornerstone of a walkable and active community. New sidewalks will vary in width where pedestrian use is higher and should be built with adequate roadway buffer space where warranted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↑ Provide stable and predictable walking surface</li> <li>↑ Heighten profile and presence of pedestrians to motorists</li> <li>↑ Can be usable space for providing street furniture, signage, vegetation</li> <li>↑ Are not prone to flooding, roadway debris, or rutting like gravel or dirt surfaces</li> <li>↓ <b>Initial construction can generate noise, dust, and potential stress</b></li> </ul>
<b>Crosswalks</b>	Providing a designated space for pedestrians to cross a street either at an intersection or mid-block is the intended use for crosswalks. Crosswalk design can range from simple paint schemes, to more complex design including the use of pedestrian or traffic signals, pedestrian countdown signals, auditory devices and refuge islands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↑ Fosters pedestrian movement at predictable locations</li> <li>↑ Allow accessibility to particular land uses</li> <li>↑ Heightens awareness for pedestrian presence to drivers</li> <li>↑ If used with an elevated platform, can calm traffic and reduce severity of possible crash</li> <li>↓ <b>Without maintenance, crosswalks can lose both reflective properties and visual prominence</b></li> <li>↓ <b>Crosswalks generally put pedestrians in direct line with motorists. Use is principally dependent on driver compliance.</b></li> </ul>
<b>Separated pathways/ Greenways</b>	Greenway routes are constructed to ADA standards, are generally outside of roadway right of ways and span through open space, riverways, or through designated easements. Greenways are free of vehicle traffic, but can intersect roads and accommodate all user types both pedestrian and bicyclists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↑ Remove user from roadways</li> <li>↑ Dedicated pedestrian/bicyclist space</li> <li>↑ Connect land uses other than by roadway</li> <li>↑ Provide stable walking surface</li> <li>↓ <b>If isolated, perception of danger heightened</b></li> <li>↓ <b>User type variability could lead to bike/pedestrian, or bike/bike crashes</b></li> <li>↓ <b>If outside of peripheral vision of motorists, crashes rates at intersection increased</b></li> </ul>
<b>Natural pathways</b>	A natural path is one that is without a paved or artificial surface and can be used by pedestrians and bicyclists. Natural paths are generally built with minimal enhancements, and can be near roads or streets or in natural landscape settings like hills, or river or lake shorelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↑ Remove users from roadways</li> <li>↑ Dedicated pedestrian/bicyclist space</li> <li>↑ Immerse users in a natural setting</li> <li>↑ Lower cost to construct</li> <li>↓ <b>Surface can become unpredictable or unstable without normal maintenance</b></li> <li>↓ <b>Can be limited due to weather events such as flooding or soiling</b></li> </ul>



## Pedestrian Safety

Ensuring pedestrians are safe and feel safe is critical to improving community health. There are a number of documented approaches to law enforcement that enhance the safety of pedestrians. Most of these involve simply targeting existing enforcement of traffic laws to locations where there is high pedestrian traffic or a documented history of pedestrian-vehicle conflicts. Speed enforcement is particularly important in areas of high pedestrian traffic, as small differences in vehicle speed make dramatic differences in survivability for the pedestrian.

Officers patrolling areas of high pedestrian activity can also step up enforcement for distracted driving violations, unsafe lane changes, failure to signal, aggressive driving, DUI, and other unsafe motorist behaviors that create a particularly grave danger for vulnerable road users. These actions by motorists can discourage individuals from choosing walking as their mode of transportation for short trips because a car gives them more protection from dangerous drivers.

Officers patrolling near unprotected crosswalks, intersections with unmarked crosswalks, or signalized intersections where there is heavy turning traffic should pay particular attention to the crosswalks and ticket or warn motorists who fail to yield the right-of-way. In addition, crosswalk enforcement actions, often referred to as “stings,” provide a targeted way to increase public awareness of the requirement to yield to pedestrians in crosswalks. They are discussed in the next section.

**Vehicular Speed.** The speed of the vehicle at the time of the pedestrian accident plays a large part in the severity of the pedestrian’s injuries. Studies have shown that the chance of a pedestrian being killed by an automobile can increase from 6% at 20 mph to 94% at 40 mph. Pedestrian crashes in North Carolina most frequently occur with the automobile traveling 30-35 mph.

**Crosswalk Enforcement Actions.** Police departments in jurisdictions participating in the *Watch for Me NC* campaign, including Jackson County, have received specialized training in conducting crosswalk enforcement actions. In these targeted operations, officers set up around a marked, unsignalized crosswalk and have an officer, usually wearing highly visible clothing but not a police uniform, cross the street. The decoy officer is trained to begin crossing when an approaching vehicle is far enough away to easily stop but close enough to see him/her. Other officers intercept drivers who fail to yield and issue citations or warnings, along with educational material. When these actions are held, they are typically accompanied by press releases to maximize educational impact.



The speed of the motor vehicle at the time of impact with a pedestrian is major influence on the likelihood of death.

*Illustration modified from Lancashire County Council (UK) pedestrian safety campaign.*

Campaigns usually begin less aggressively, issuing warnings to all but the most egregious violators or those who are committing multiple traffic violations, and move toward issuing tickets instead of warnings after the campaign has received news coverage. In some jurisdictions nationally, creative decoys are used to further attract public attention. For example, Las Vegas has had the plainclothes officers serving as decoys dress up as Santa Claus in December and



Many of the walkers along Buchanan Loop Road are older adults and parents with strollers. Seniors are twice as likely to be victims of a fatal pedestrian crash as any other age group.

in the small town of Mechanicsburg, PA, the mayor has gone through training with the police department and frequently serves as the decoy instead of a police officer. Support for planning crosswalk enforcement actions, including accompanying educational handouts, is available through the *Watch for Me NC* program.

**Safety for Children.** There are special factors to consider related to young pedestrians. Children may be more difficult to for drivers to see, and often lack mature decision-making skills which may cause them to dart into roadways or fail to look both ways before crossing. It is incumbent on licensed adult motor vehicle operators to be prepared for such situations.

Additionally, active transportation plays a vital role in children getting the needed 60 minutes of exercise per day and parents' perception of safety has a profound effect on how much children are permitted to walk or bicycle to destinations including school and recreational facilities.

Vehicle speed is a critical factor in the likelihood that a child survives a crash with an automobile. Studies have shown that a child is seven times more likely to die if hit by a car at 30 mph when compared to being hit by a car at 20 mph.

**Safety for Seniors.** Another factor to consider is the particular vulnerability of older pedestrians. Numerous studies at both national and regional levels have shown senior citizens are at least twice as likely to be victims of fatal pedestrian crashes as any other age group and are also more likely to be injured in motor vehicle crashes.

Seniors over 75 years old are even more at risk. Despite the dangers, walking is particularly important for seniors as many are no longer able to drive safely or comfortable driving and research has shown a strong connection between moderate physical activity such as walking and reduced rates of dementia and improved overall mental and physical health in seniors.

Seniors are particularly vulnerable pedestrians for many reasons. First, they frequently can't move as quickly as younger pedestrians. A study conducted by Transportation Alternatives and the New York City Department of Transportation found that the average speed at which a 75-year-old without an identified disability crossed a street was 2.5 feet per second.

However, the minimum crossing time permitted by the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) assumes that pedestrians can travel at 3.5 feet per second. As a result, many jurisdictions have begun requiring longer crossing intervals at intersections that are near senior centers or high concentrations of elderly residents. Another option is to provide a push button that allows an elderly, disabled, or slow moving pedestrian to request a longer crossing time.

Seniors also frequently have reduced visual acuity, making it more difficult for them to see hazards and react to them. Senior mobility experts such as Sandra Rosenblum of The Urban Institute estimate that as few as 35% of senior pedestrian injuries involve being struck by a vehicle.

Many injuries such as falls that don't involve a vehicle are not reported to police and therefore are not incorporated into common pedestrian safety statistics. Maintenance of sidewalks that are level and free of obstructions and complying with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements regarding detectable warnings and visible signage are particularly important to the safety of older pedestrians.

Finally, seniors often suffer more serious injuries than younger pedestrians would from the same collision or fall simply because their bodies aren't as resilient. Extensive recovery periods from an injury that may have been minor for a younger person can seriously impact an older person's long-term health prospects.

**What about enforcement for pedestrians?** While motorists ticketed for failure to yield to pedestrians often demand "equal treatment," it is important to remember that motorists and pedestrians are not equal in their vulnerability, their potential to cause harm to others, or their requirements for being on the road.

Whereas all legal motorists are licensed, theoretically responsible adults operating machines that have the potential to kill or maim, pedestrians include the very young and very old and people incapacitated by illness or disability who may not be able to fully understand the rules of the road. Pedestrians are not required to have a license to simply walk.

Educational efforts to reduce problematic pedestrian behaviors have value, but enforcement focus is most effectively used on ensuring that licensed road users are prepared to respond to obstacles and control their vehicles even in adverse circumstances.

Practically speaking, because most people have a survival instinct, the majority of "jaywalking" or technically illegal street crossings by pedestrians take place in circumstances where a crash is not likely to occur. Therefore, issuing tickets to pedestrians who disobey signals or cross between adjacent signalized intersections typically does not have any significant impact on pedestrian crash rates.



While signs erected by property owners may not be in compliance with sign ordinances, they can be a positive feature in a community that wants to promote walking as a safe and enjoyable activity.

## 4. History Tour & Physical Activity Route

Webster desires to promote the community's rich history and pride. The introduction and health sections of this plan provide a summary of these themes. Through input from the Town Board and community, the Webster History Tour and Physical Activity Route maps and materials were developed so the town could publish them in brochures and post online to promote the community.

### Webster History Tour

There are 20 properties in Jackson County that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places; six of them are in Webster. These properties are:

- ◆ Lucius Coleman Hall House;
- ◆ Elisha Calor Hedden House;
- ◆ Walter E. Moore House;
- ◆ Webster Baptist Church;
- ◆ Webster Methodist Church; and
- ◆ Webster Rock School.

The Webster cemetery is also considered a place of historical significance for the community as are several other properties. The History Tour brochure is intended to provide an overview of these places so visitors and residents can gain a greater understanding of the historical significance of Webster in the context of Jackson County and greater Western NC.

Brochures are limited in the amount of space dedicated to providing information. The influence of smart phone technology allows Webster to promote its history beyond the brochure by developing online materials for those seeking more information.

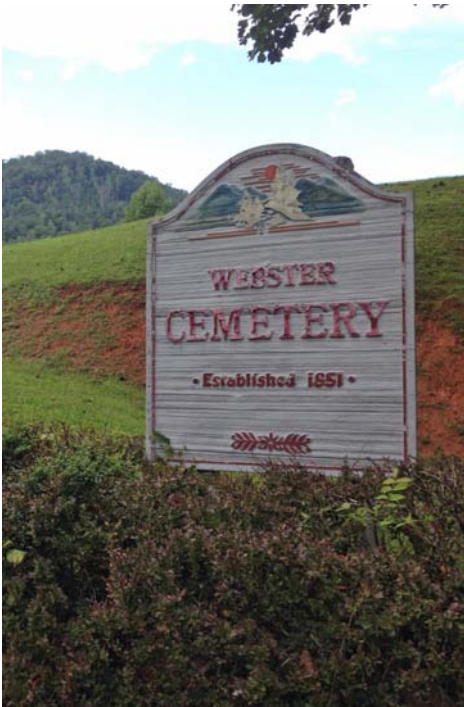
### Physical Activity Route

The interest in exploring public health themes through Webster: Heart & Soul stemmed in part from interests to publish and promote a physical activity route. The basic act of walking on a regular basis can have far-reaching positive influence on an individual's health.

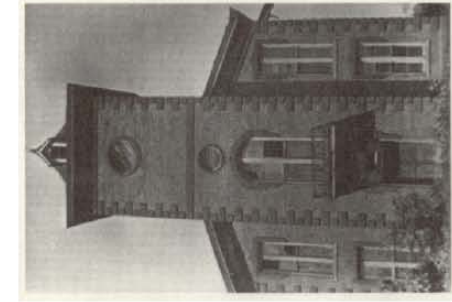
On most days one can observe several Webster-area residents walking along highway 116 and Buchanan Loop Road. Sidewalks also connect Webster from the River to Southwestern Community College.

The brochure emphasizes the walking loop that includes these sidewalks along with Buchanan Loop Road and the walking trail at the ballfield.

Webster can pursue funds to publish and promote this brochure through entities such as the Jackson County Health Department and MountainWise. It is hoped that Webster can also use this to showcase the need for walking facilities along Buchanan Loop.



Webster's Cemetery dates to before the Civil War and is located along Buchanan Loop Road. Historians and genealogists gravitate toward cemeteries to gain a greater understanding of the area, their families and history.



**Old Webster Courthouse**  
Demolished 1935

## A History Tour of Webster, NC

Established 1853 | Incorporated 1859

“A community in which the daily walk down the street brings good mornings from housewives sweeping their porches, hellos from small children playing in their yards, hopeful greetings from tail wagging family dogs, brief chats with neighbors one meets on the road, and an exchange of friendly waves with those speeding to school or work.”

- Louise Davis

Just Above the Tuckasegee (1974)

- 1. Lucius Coleman Hall House**  
**NC 116 near Rock Quarry Road**

The Hall House is where Webster begins. Believed to have been built in the 1850s, the house was the first such structure in the area and sits on the west bank of the Tuckasegee River overlooking a grassy lawn and flat field. In the late 1800s a 2.5-story, one-room deep T-plan house was added to the structure. The T-plan set an example for other frame houses built in Webster but no house has the grand staircase and entrance hall seen in the Hall house.

- 4. Webster Methodist Church**  
**North side of NC 116 next to Old School**

After the opening of lands to settlers in Western NC, church services were held in local homes and were led by preachers who rode hundreds of miles each month to serve congregations. Built in 1887 the church was the first for the Webster Methodist Congregation. Its design is similar to other churches built in the county before the 1900s but the wealth of detail, both Gothic and classical, make it outstanding. No changes have been made to the church since its construction.

- 2. Webster Baptist Church**  
**West side of Tuckasegee River NC 116 Bridge**

Webster Baptist sits atop a small hill facing the NC 116 bridge. Built in 1900, the original interior floor plan of the sanctuary remains unaltered. The main façade of the church is three-bay with tall-rounded windows flanking the bell tower and includes Queen Anne block glass. The church is noted for its furniture, which was designed, built and donated by local master cabinetmaker Joseph Warrenton Cowen and his son Lawrence Cowan.

- 5. Walter E. Moore House**  
**East of Post Office along NC 116**

Famed NC lawyer and politician Walter E. Moore built the house in 1886. Moore served several years in the NC House of Representatives and was House Speaker in 1901. The Moore house set the style for several Webster-area buildings constructed after 1886.

- 6. Elisha Calor Hedden House**  
**East of NC 116 at Buchanan Loop Road**

Hedden House is a modest Queen Anne style two-story dwelling and the largest historic house remaining in Webster. Built around 1910, it is one of the County's best examples of a large, frame T-plan house. Hedden came to the area to work for the budding early 20th century lumber industry in Western NC.

- 7. Webster Cemetery**  
**Buchanan Loop Rd 1/2 mile north of NC 116**

Webster Cemetery was established in 1851 and many of Jackson County's founders and early prominent residents are buried here. The cemetery includes the graves of several Civil War veterans.

- 3. Old Rock School**  
**North side of NC 116 next to the Methodist Church**

The old "Rock School" was completed in 1938 by the Works Progress Administration. River rock was a common building façade material used across Western North Carolina on many homes and institutional buildings such as schools. It once served as Webster High School and Elementary School and was active from 1936 to 1960. The building is used by the Southwestern Child Development Center. The gymnasium/auditorium is sometimes used for community events.

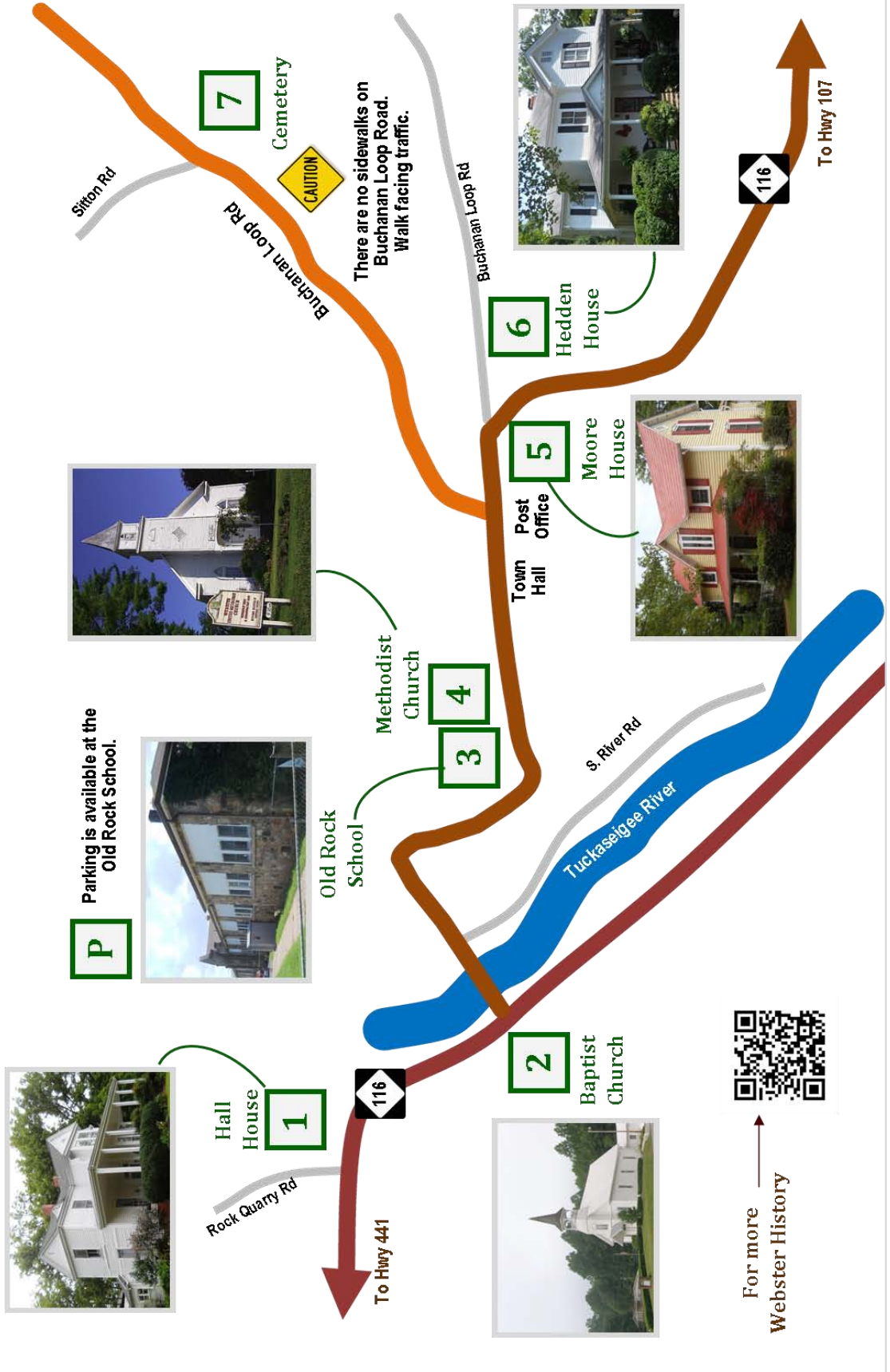




# Webster: Heart & Soul

## History Tour Brochure — Interior Panels

Webster has six of the 20 properties in Jackson County that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The original county seat, Webster has a rich history that we invite you to explore by car or on foot. The map below includes properties listed on the National Register as well as the Webster Cemetery.



**Did you know?**  
Health & Safety Facts

**Walking: The Wonder Drug**

**20**

Walking 20 minutes a day will burn 7 pounds of body fat per year.

**45**

Walking 45 minutes a day halves the odds of catching a cold.

**6**

**Dementia**

Seniors who walk 6 to 9 miles a week are less likely to suffer from mental decline as they age.

**30**

**Heart Disease**

Walking 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week can reduce the risk of heart disease & reduce stress, cholesterol & blood pressure.



**Slow down!**

Driving slower saves lives. A pedestrian is 7 times more likely to die if hit by a motorist at 30 mph compared to 20 mph.

**North Carolina Pedestrian Laws**

- ◆ When a sidewalk is available, pedestrians must walk on the sidewalk.
- ◆ Where sidewalks are not provided, any pedestrian walking along and upon a highway shall, when practicable, walk only on the extreme left of the roadway or its shoulder facing traffic which may approach from the opposite direction. Such pedestrians shall yield the right-of-way to approaching traffic.  
*(NC General Statutes, Chapter 20, Section 174a)*
- ◆ Motorists shall yield right-of-way to pedestrians within any marked or unmarked crosswalk in residential and business areas except where there is a traffic or pedestrian signal regulating traffic movements.  
*(NC General Statutes, Chapter 20, Section 173a)*
- ◆ Pedestrians also have right of way when approaching an alley, building entrance, private road, or driveway from any sidewalk or walkway.  
*(NC General Statutes, Chapter 20, Section 173c)*



Jackson County is a North Carolina Watch for Me NC Community  
[www.watchformenc.org](http://www.watchformenc.org)



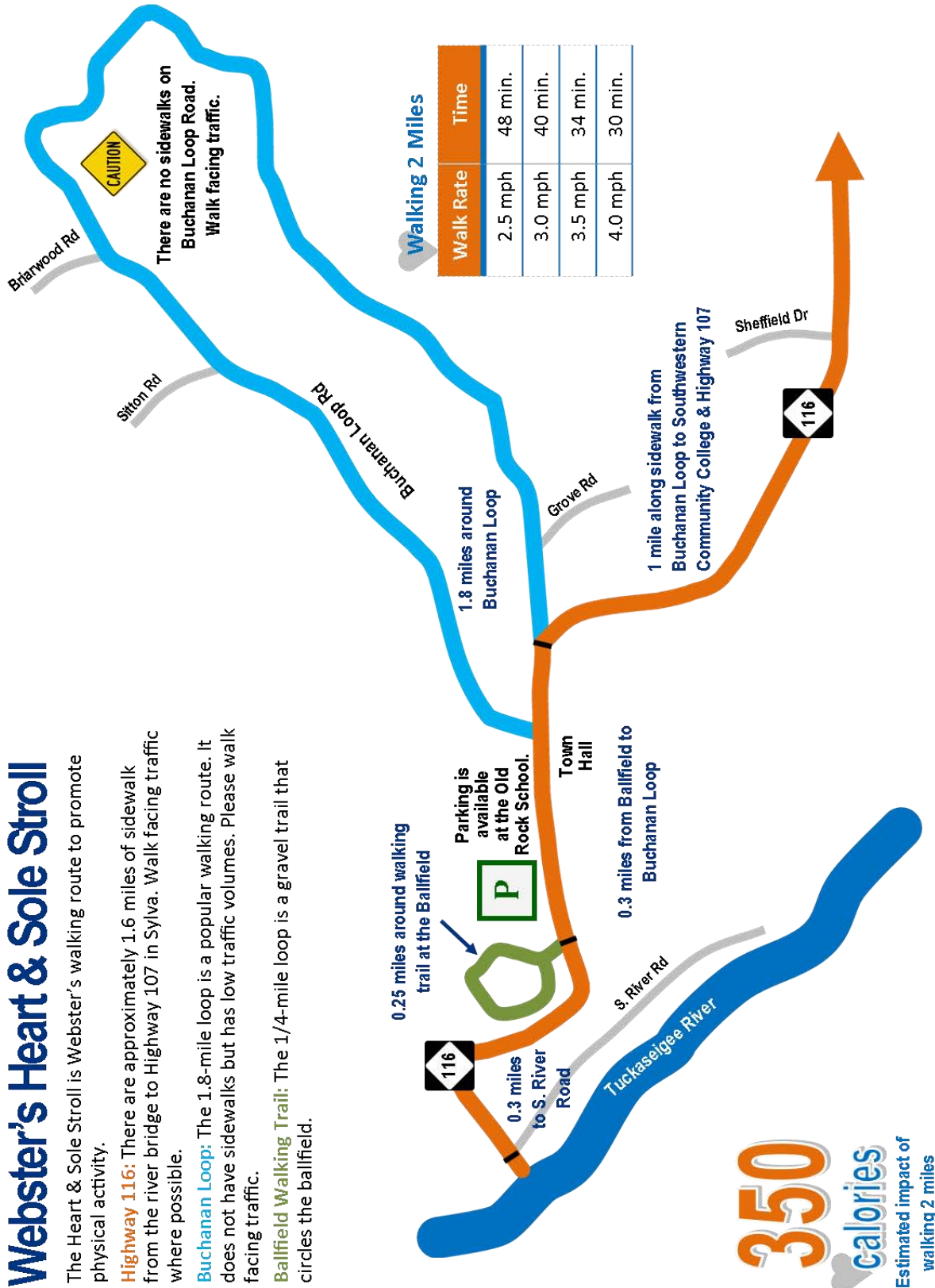
## Webster's Heart & Sole Stroll

The Heart & Sole Stroll is Webster's walking route to promote physical activity.

**Highway 116:** There are approximately 1.6 miles of sidewalk from the river bridge to Highway 107 in Sylva. Walk facing traffic where possible.

**Buchanan Loop:** The 1.8-mile loop is a popular walking route. It does not have sidewalks but has low traffic volumes. Please walk facing traffic.

**Ballfield Walking Trail:** The 1/4-mile loop is a gravel trail that circles the ballfield.





## 5. Action Steps for Implementation

The completion of the Webster: Heart & Soul Plan is the first of many steps to improving the community. The primary responsibility for implementation of this plan lies with the Town of Webster but there are numerous local partners willing to help. These include Jackson County, the Southwestern Commission and NCDOT.

This chapter provides a set of action steps for moving forward with the recommendations of the Plan, as well as potential partners to help Webster implement that specific action. These actions were developed in consideration of the Town Board's input to the Plan, the community's input through the public workshop and the consultant's recommendations from reviewing existing policies and plans.

Implementation strategies contained in this Plan reflect what is considered to be feasible in terms of accomplishments over the next one to 10 years. Webster and its partners are poised to take advantage of any opportunity that arises to fund and implement recommendations of this Plan.

While projects such as the pedestrian facilities along Buchanan Loop Road may be one of the highest priorities, it is also the most expensive and time-intensive project. The County, Southwestern Commission and NCDOT are all likely partners who can help identify funding for the projects. Other opportunities may arise to address other needs in the meantime and no opportunity should be refused.

The 10 Action Steps for Implementation illustrated on the following pages help guide how Webster can move forward with planning for future budget allocations and engaging the community in refining priorities as conditions and priorities change.

### Toward a Land Use Plan

It is recommended that Webster work toward developing a more comprehensive land use plan to help guide future development in tandem with its ordinances. A land use plan is a tool communities use to plan for future growth and change. Some communities have a document called a Comprehensive Plan that evaluates and sets future goals for all systems in a community such as recreation, transportation, natural resources, utilities, education, housing, and economic development. Land use (or land development) is typically one chapter of the Comprehensive Plan.

Other communities have a stand-alone land use plan that also addresses a community's systems; however, they often have a narrower view and deal with issues related to the appropriate uses and development of land. For a town Webster's size—one with few systems to investigate—it may not really matter if the Town calls it a Comprehensive Plan or a Land Use Plan. The important thing is for the town to plan adequately for its future vision and needs.



**Working toward implementation of the Action Steps identified in this chapter help showcase that Webster is serious about its future and responsive to input from the community. These recommendations stem from input from the community and intended to fulfill Webster's Guiding Principles while promoting greater social cohesion among residents.**



# Webster: Heart & Soul

## 10 Action Steps for Implementation

### 1 Adopt this Plan

This is the first stage of implementation. The Plan should be forwarded to regional and state decision-makers, such as Jackson County, Southwestern Commission, NCDOT, and MountainWise, for consideration. Agencies in Jackson County should also receive a copy for consideration when local plans or ordinances are updated.

*Partners: Town of Webster*

### 2 Update the Zoning Ordinance

The Town of Webster should ask its Planning Board to examine updating the existing Zoning Ordinance to reflect changes mandated in by the NC General Assembly and recommendations contained in this Plan. The Town should track activities in the 2015 session to identify changes that could be mandated during the year. Jackson County’s planning staff can serve as a resource and help guide any changes.

*Partners: Town of Webster, Jackson County*

### 3 Upgrade the ballfield site & install water fountain

In January 2015 Jackson County’s Recreation Advisory Board agreed to include upgrades to the ballfield site to include a picnic/performance pavilion. The project will be considered in upcoming budget discussions. Webster will be asked to participate in some capacity when this occurs and should continue to work with the County for additional site upgrades as needed, including a public water fountain.

*Partners: Town of Webster, Jackson County, TWSA*

### 4 Pursue funding for Buchanan Loop pedestrian facilities

The Town should ask NCDOT to evaluate short- and long-range improvements to Buchanan Loop. Increased signage or the addition of shoulders could be a short-term investment as the community works with the Southwestern Commission to identify funding and programming options for sidewalks or other similar pedestrian facilities. Jackson County is working with the Cullowhee community to maintain sidewalks along DOT routes and could assist.

*Partners: Town of Webster, NCDOT, Southwestern Commission, Jackson County*

### 5 Develop a Land Use Plan

The Heart & Soul Plan is the foundation of improved communitywide planning. Webster should determine the timing and scope of a Land Use Plan to better guide future decision-making and help position the town to effectively respond to challenges related to land use that could arise through new development pressures.

*Partners: Town of Webster, Jackson County, Southwestern Commission*



## 6 Work with Jackson Co. & Southwestern Commission on plan updates

Jackson County's Comprehensive Plan and Comprehensive Transportation Plan are each undergoing updates in 2015. The results of these plans can impact Webster and help integrate the Town's interest into the overall county and regional interests. Elements of Webster: Heart & Soul should be considered for inclusion in those plans so the themes it contains are adopted by the County and Commission.

*Partners: Town of Webster, Jackson County, Southwestern Commission*

## 7 Fund an initiative to develop a brand & town seal for Webster

In order to increase its identity Webster should pursue an effort to develop a common logo or brand for the community in combination with a town seal. The products of this effort can be used in documents and official correspondence as well as promotional items.

*Partners: Town of Webster, Southwestern Commission, Chamber, Tourism Development Authority*

## 8 Develop a wayfinding system

Several WNC towns have erected wayfinding signage in and around their communities to serve as both an identity and resource for visitors. Webster's history commands greater attention to motorists passing through the County on US 441 or NC 107 who may not even know of its presence. Webster can work with County, Tourism Development Authority (TDA) and other municipal staff on the system.

*Partners: Town, of Webster, Jackson County, Tourism Development Authority*

## 9 Adopt a Complete Streets Policy

Promoting a healthy community goes hand-in-hand with endorsing the concept that all streets in Webster should be safe for all modes and all users of all ages and abilities. A Complete Streets policy, via resolution, supports this plan and complements NCDOT's policy. It will also help with funding pursuits for Buchanan Loop. A sample is included in the Appendix.

*Partners: Town, NCDOT, Southwestern Commission*



More info:

[www.littlefreelibrary.org](http://www.littlefreelibrary.org)

## 10 Erect a Little Free Library®

Communities are starting to erect what is known as The Little Free Library®. It's a "take a book, return a book" kiosk where community members can exchange their favorite books. This "box full of books" that can be built in a place such as in front of Town Hall, in a Community Garden or near the Old School. Purchased from the website, they cost between \$250 and \$1,000.

*Partners: Town of Webster, Jackson County Library.*

### Zoning Ordinance Recommendations

Overall, for a town its size Webster's Zoning Ordinance meets the Town's current needs even though it needs technical corrections and legal amendments. The consultant's analysis of the Town of Webster's Zoning Ordinance (April 2012) was completed for this Plan to identify the strengths of Webster's regulations as well as standards that may need additional consideration. A detailed set of recommendations was presented to the town in a memo.

Some key recommendations were:

- ◆ **Illustrations.** Consider adding illustrations and diagrams throughout the ordinance. Small illustrative maps or diagrams may clarify portions of the ordinance.
- ◆ **Plain language.** Consider plain language that makes the ordinance easier to read. Some communities have rewritten their ordinance to reflect plain language. The Town can research plain language ordinances from other towns to assess whether this is a good strategy the Town.
- ◆ **Zoning Map.** The Town should add a title and date to its Official Zoning Map to show it is current and update to those reviewing it.
- ◆ **Setbacks.** There are several recommendations on how the Town can clarify its policies for setbacks, such as greater clarity when it comes to determining how to measure any setback other than the front.
- ◆ **Special areas.** Provisions in the zoning district standards where natural features (e.g. Tuckasee River), topography, and history and culture are given special attention. The Town of Webster may want to consider zoning provisions that protect or enhance distinctive areas.

### WCU Student Survey

Webster was able to secure the services of a WCU class to help survey the town on a topic of its choosing. A group of students in a management course at Western Carolina University's College of Business is designing a survey to be distributed to Webster residents to help understand what the residents want out of their local town government.

The survey will question the residents on what they feel would help build the community and benefit them the most. This survey will help guide future decisions in Webster for future improvements including the walking trail around Buchanan Loop and the ballfield.

This effort was starting as the Heart & Soul Plan was being finalized. The project consultant and mayor met with WCU professors to identify the type of survey question that would be most beneficial to Webster.

## Appendix

The Appendix contains the following:

1. UNC School of Government *“Checklist for Potential Local Ordinance Amendments Necessitated by S.L. 2013-126 (H. 276).”* Accessed on January 14, 2015.
2. UNC School of Government: *“Coates’ Canons Blog: Consistently Inconsistent? Considering Consistency Statements for Zoning Amendments.”* Published September 15, 2014.
3. Sample Complete Streets Resolution. Resolution of the Board of Alderman setting forth the commitment to complete streets for the town of Black Mountain, NC. September 8, 2014.
4. Visually Speaking: Bring your stories to life. A comprehensive guide to sign development. This resource provides guidance on how Webster can brand itself through signage and how to integrate community signage across various media.



Published on School of Government (<http://www.sog.unc.edu>)

## Checklist for Potential Local Ordinance Amendments Necessitated by S.L. 2013-126 (H. 276)

S.L. 2013-126 applies to actions taken on or after October 1, 2013. Local development ordinances and board rules of procedure need to be amended to conform to the new law. The table below notes the specific points that should be examined for potential amendments to secure conformance with this new law. It is not mandatory that all of these items be explicitly addressed in ordinances, but any inconsistent provisions should be amended and local governments procedures must comply with these provisions effective October 1, 2013. Several provisions in the bill allow, but do not require, new for local government options that may require ordinance amendment for implementation. These are noted in the table below as "(optional)."

Topic	Statute As Amended
A. Determinations of Zoning Administrators	
1. Define "decisions" that may be appealed to BOA	G.S. 160A-388(a1)
2. When zoning administrator makes a final, binding determination, written notice is provided to person making request and the property owner	G.S. 160A-388(b1)(2)
3. Landowners may provide constructive notice of a final, binding determination by posting sign on the affected site for 10 days	G.S. 160A-388(b1)(4)
B. Hearings	
4. Provide mailed and posted notice for hearings on all quasi-judicial matters, whether heard by BOA, governing board, or planning board {no published hearing notice required by statute, can be required by local ordinance}	G.S. 160A-388(a2) G.S. 160A-381(c) G.S. 153A-340(c1)
5. Provide that oaths for witnesses in hearings can be administered by chair or clerk to the board	G.S. 160A-388(f)
6. Add provisions that chair to board rules on requests for and objections to subpoenas, with appeals possible to full board	G.S. 160A-388(g)
C. Appeals	
7. Person receiving final, binding determinations (and others with standing to appeal) has 30 days from receipt of notice of determination to file appeal to BOA	G.S. 160A-388(b1)(3)
8. May create and designate specialized boards to hear technical appeals (optional)	G.S. 160A-388(a)
9. May provide for appeals to BOA from development regulations other than zoning (optional)	G.S. 160A-388(b1)
10. Appeals to BOA are filed with city or county clerk and appeal must state grounds for appeal	G.S. 160A-388(b1)(1)
11. Provide that zoning administrator provides to the BOA all documents and exhibits regarding a determination that has been appealed, with copy to appellant and land owner	G.S. 160A-388(b1)(5)
12. Provide for expedited appeal hearing if request for stay of enforcement is denied	G.S. 160A-388(b1)(6)
13. Provide that appellant may request stay of final decision on permit or building permit pending resolution of appeal	G.S. 160A-388(b1)(6)
14. Provide that official making determination that has been appealed is to appear at hearing as witness	G.S. 160A-388(b1)(8)
15. Provide that BOA shall continue hearing if new issues are presented that were not in notice of appeal and immediate consideration would unduly prejudice a party or the local government	G.S. 160A-388(b1)(8)
16. Provide that when BOA hears appeal from a COA decision by a historic	

commission, hearing is on the record from the HPC and scope of appellate review is that of G.S. 160A-393(k)	G.S. 160A-388(b1)(9)
17. Set standards and procedures for mediation and alternative dispute resolution for appeals (optional)	G.S. 160A-388(b1)(10)
D. Variances	
18. Revise variance standards to remove "practical difficulty" and add specified showings required to establish "unnecessary hardship"	G.S. 160A-388(d)
19. May add provisions allowing variances for development regulations other than zoning (with consistent standards) (optional)	G.S. 160A-388(d)
E. Decisions	
20. Amend BOA voting provisions to provide that 4/5 majority rule applies to variances only, not to appeals or special and conditional use permits	G.S. 160A-388(e)(1)
21. Provide for written decisions on quasi-judicial matters that reflect determination of contested facts and application of standards in ordinance, signed by chair, filed with clerk, and delivery to applicant, landowner, and other party submitting written request for decision	G.S. 160A-388(e2)(1)
F. Miscellaneous	
22. Counties amend references to G.S. 153A-345 to reference G.S. 160A-388 and/or GS 153A-345.1 instead	G.S. 153A-345.1

Effective 10/1/2013, the statute reads:

§ 160A-388. Board of adjustment.

(a) Composition and Duties. – The zoning or unified development ordinance may provide for the appointment and compensation of a board of adjustment consisting of five or more members, each to be appointed for three years. In appointing the original members or in the filling of vacancies caused by the expiration of the terms of existing members, the city council may appoint certain members for less than three years so that the terms of all members shall not expire at the same time. The council may appoint and provide compensation for alternate members to serve on the board in the absence or temporary disqualification of any regular member or to fill a vacancy pending appointment of a member. Alternate members shall be appointed for the same term, at the same time, and in the same manner as regular members. Each alternate member serving on behalf of any regular member has all the powers and duties of a regular member. The ordinance may designate a planning board or governing board to perform any of the duties of a board of adjustment in addition to its other duties and may create and designate specialized boards to hear technical appeals.

(a1) Provisions of Ordinance. – The zoning or unified development ordinance may provide that the board of adjustment hear and decide special and conditional use permits, requests for variances, and appeals of decisions of administrative officials charged with enforcement of the ordinance. As used in this section, the term "decision" includes any final and binding order, requirement, or determination. The board of adjustment shall follow quasi-judicial procedures when deciding appeals and requests for variances and special and conditional use permits. The board shall hear and decide all matters upon which it is required to pass under any statute or ordinance that regulates land use or development.

(a2) Notice of Hearing. – Notice of hearings conducted pursuant to this section shall be mailed to the person or entity whose appeal, application, or request is the subject of the hearing; to the owner of the property that is the subject of the hearing if the owner did not initiate the hearing; to the owners of all parcels of land abutting the parcel of land that is the subject of the hearing; and to any other persons entitled to receive notice as provided by the zoning or unified development ordinance. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, the city may rely on the county tax listing to determine owners of property entitled to mailed notice. The notice must be deposited in the mail at least 10 days, but not more than 25 days, prior to the date of the hearing. Within that same time period, the city shall also prominently post a notice of the hearing on the site that is the subject of the hearing or on an adjacent street or highway right-of-way.

(b1) Appeals. – The board of adjustment shall hear and decide appeals from decisions of administrative officials charged with enforcement of the zoning or unified development ordinance and may hear appeals arising out of any other ordinance that regulates land use or development, pursuant to all of the following:

- (1) Any person who has standing under G.S. 160A-393(d) or the city may appeal a decision to the board of adjustment. An appeal is taken by filing a notice of appeal with the city clerk. The notice of appeal shall state the grounds for the appeal.
- (2) The official who made the decision shall give written notice to the owner of the property that is the subject of the decision and to the party who sought the decision, if different from the owner. The written notice shall be delivered by personal delivery, electronic mail, or by first-class mail.
- (3) The owner or other party shall have 30 days from receipt of the written notice within which to file an appeal. Any other person with standing to appeal shall have 30 days from receipt from any source of actual or constructive notice of the decision within which to file an appeal.
- (4) It shall be conclusively presumed that all persons with standing to appeal have constructive notice of the decision from the date a sign containing the words "Zoning Decision" or "Subdivision Decision" in letters at least six inches high and identifying the means to contact an official for information about the decision is prominently posted on the property that is the subject of the decision, provided the sign remains on the property for at least 10 days. Posting of signs is not the only form of constructive notice. Any such posting shall be the responsibility of the landowner or applicant. Verification of the posting shall be provided to the official who made the decision. Absent an ordinance provision to the contrary, posting of signs shall not be required.
- (5) The official who made the decision shall transmit to the board all documents and exhibits constituting the record upon which the action appealed from is taken. The official shall also provide a copy of the record to the appellant and to the owner of the property that is the subject of the appeal if the appellant is not the owner.
- (6) An appeal of a notice of violation or other enforcement order stays enforcement of the action appealed from unless the official who made the decision certifies to the board of adjustment after notice of appeal has been filed that because of the facts stated in an affidavit, a stay would cause imminent peril to life or property or because the violation is transitory in nature, a stay would seriously interfere with enforcement of the ordinance. In that case, enforcement proceedings shall not be stayed except by a restraining order, which may be granted by a court. If enforcement proceedings are not stayed, the appellant may file with the official a request for an expedited hearing of the appeal, and the board of adjustment shall meet to hear the appeal within 15 days after such a request is filed. Notwithstanding the foregoing, appeals of decisions granting a permit or otherwise affirming that a proposed use of property is consistent with the ordinance shall not stay the further review of an application for permits or permissions to use such property; in these situations the appellant may request and the board may grant a stay of a final decision of permit applications or building permits affected by the issue being appealed.
- (7) Subject to the provisions of subdivision (6) of this subsection, the board of adjustment shall hear and decide the appeal within a reasonable time.
- (8) The official who made the decision shall be present at the hearing as a witness. The appellant shall not be limited at the hearing to matters stated in the notice of appeal. If any party or the city would be unduly prejudiced by the presentation of matters not presented in the notice of appeal, the board shall continue the hearing. The board of adjustment may reverse or affirm, wholly or partly, or may modify the decision appealed from and shall make any order, requirement, decision, or determination that ought to be made. The board shall have all the powers of the official who made the decision.
- (9) When hearing an appeal pursuant to G.S. 160A-400.9(e) or any other appeal in the nature of certiorari, the hearing shall be based on the record below and the scope of review shall be as provided in G.S. 160A-393(k).
- (10) The parties to an appeal that has been made under this subsection may agree to mediation or other forms of alternative dispute resolution. The ordinance may set standards and procedures to facilitate and manage such voluntary alternative dispute resolution.

(c) Special and Conditional Use Permits. – The ordinance may provide that the board of adjustment may hear and decide special and conditional use permits in accordance with standards and procedures specified in the ordinance. Reasonable and appropriate conditions may be imposed upon these permits.

(d) Variances. – When unnecessary hardships would result from carrying out the strict letter of a zoning ordinance, the board of adjustment shall vary any of the provisions of the ordinance upon a showing of all of the following:

- (1) Unnecessary hardship would result from the strict application of the ordinance. It shall not be necessary to demonstrate that, in the absence of the variance, no reasonable use can be made of the property.
- (2) The hardship results from conditions that are peculiar to the property, such as location, size, or topography. Hardships resulting from personal circumstances, as well as hardships resulting from conditions that are common to the neighborhood or the general public, may not be the basis for granting a variance.
- (3) The hardship did not result from actions taken by the applicant or the property owner. The act of purchasing property with knowledge that circumstances exist that may justify the granting of a variance shall not be regarded as a self-created hardship.
- (4) The requested variance is consistent with the spirit, purpose, and intent of the ordinance, such that public safety is secured, and substantial justice is achieved.



No change in permitted uses may be authorized by variance. Appropriate conditions may be imposed on any variance, provided that the conditions are reasonably related to the variance. Any other ordinance that regulates land use or development may provide for variances consistent with the provisions of this subsection.

(e) Voting. –

(1) The concurring vote of four-fifths of the board shall be necessary to grant a variance. A majority of the members shall be required to decide any other quasi-judicial matter or to determine an appeal made in the nature of certiorari. For the purposes of this subsection, vacant positions on the board and members who are disqualified from voting on a quasi-judicial matter shall not be considered members of the board for calculation of the requisite majority if there are no qualified alternates available to take the place of such members.

(2) A member of any board exercising quasi-judicial functions pursuant to this Article shall not participate in or vote on any quasi-judicial matter in a manner that would violate affected persons' constitutional rights to an impartial decision maker. Impermissible violations of due process include, but are not limited to, a member having a fixed opinion prior to hearing the matter that is not susceptible to change, undisclosed ex parte communications, a close familial, business, or other associational relationship with an affected person, or a financial interest in the outcome of the matter. If an objection is raised to a member's participation and that member does not recuse himself or herself, the remaining members shall by majority vote rule on the objection."

(e2) Quasi-Judicial Decisions and Judicial Review. –

1. The board shall determine contested facts and make its decision within a reasonable time. Every quasi-judicial decision shall be based upon competent, material, and substantial evidence in the record. Each quasi-judicial decision shall be reduced to writing and reflect the board's determination of contested facts and their application to the applicable standards. The written decision shall be signed by the chair or other duly authorized member of the board. A quasi-judicial decision is effective upon filing the written decision with the clerk to the board or such other office or official as the ordinance specifies. The decision of the board shall be delivered by personal delivery, electronic mail, or by first-class mail to the applicant, property owner, and to any person who has submitted a written request for a copy, prior to the date the decision becomes effective. The person required to provide notice shall certify that proper notice has been made.

(2) Every quasi-judicial decision shall be subject to review by the superior court by proceedings in the nature of certiorari pursuant to G.S. 160A-393. A petition for review shall be filed with the clerk of superior court by the later of 30 days after the decision is effective or after a written copy thereof is given in accordance with subdivision (1) of this subsection. When first-class mail is used to deliver notice, three days shall be added to the time to file the petition.

(f) Oaths. – The chair of the board or any member acting as chair and the clerk to the board are authorized to administer oaths to witnesses in any matter coming before the board. Any person who, while under oath during a proceeding before the board of adjustment, willfully swears falsely is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.

(g) Subpoenas. – The board of adjustment through the chair, or in the chair's absence anyone acting as chair, may subpoena witnesses and compels the production of evidence. To request issuance of a subpoena, persons with standing under G.S. 160A-393(d) may make a written request to the chair explaining why it is necessary for certain witnesses or evidence to be compelled. The chair shall issue requested subpoenas he or she determines to be relevant, reasonable in nature and scope, and not oppressive. The chair shall rule on any motion to quash or modify a subpoena. Decisions regarding subpoenas made by the chair may be appealed to the full board of adjustment. If a person fails or refuses to obey a subpoena issued pursuant to this subsection, the board of adjustment or the party seeking the subpoena may apply to the General Court of Justice for an order requiring that its subpoena be obeyed, and the court shall have jurisdiction to issue these orders after notice to all proper parties.

G.S. 153A-345 is repealed except that any local modification to that section in effect on September 30, 2013, shall be treated as a local modification to G.S. 160A-388 from October 1, 2013, through June 30, 2015. It is replaced by:

§ 153A-345.1. Board of adjustment.

(a) The provisions of G.S. 160A-388 are applicable to counties.

(b) For the purposes of this section, as used in G.S. 160A-388, the term "city council" is deemed to refer to the board of county commissioners, and the terms "city" or "municipality" are deemed to refer to the county.

(c) If a board of county commissioners does not zone the entire territorial jurisdiction of the county, each designated zoning area shall, if practicable, have at least one resident as a member of the board of adjustment; otherwise, the provisions of G.S. 153A-25 regarding qualifications for appointive office shall apply to board of adjustment appointments.

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## Coates' Canons Blog: Consistently Inconsistent? Considering Consistency Statements for Zoning Amendments

By Adam Lovelady

Article: <http://canons.sog.unc.edu/?p=7851>

This entry was posted on September 15, 2014 and is filed under Land Use & Code Enforcement, Legislative Decisions, Planning, Zoning

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When the city council or county commission considers a rezoning or zoning ordinance amendment the board must approve a statement about the amendment's consistency with adopted plans and public interest. According to the statute "[t]hat statement is not subject to judicial review." And yet we have two recent examples of North Carolina courts reviewing consistency statements. What gives? This blog reviews the statutory requirements, the recent cases, and some guidance for moving forward.

In North Carolina "[z]oning regulations shall be made in accordance with a comprehensive plan" (160A-383; 153A-341). Our courts have interpreted that mandate to require a comprehensive approach, but not necessarily a formal document called a "Comprehensive Plan." As part of the statutory procedures for zoning, though, the planning board and governing board must consider consistency with applicable plans and adopt a statement concerning that consistency. As my colleague David Owens wrote [here](#), plans are not binding, but governing boards must procedurally consider and acknowledge them.

Under 160A-387 and 153A-344, when a local government first seeks to adopt a zoning ordinance or adopt comprehensive revision, the planning board must prepare or review and comment on the proposed ordinance or revision, including a written recommendation on adoption.

Amendments to the ordinance must be referred to the planning board for review and comment as to "whether the proposed amendment is consistent with any comprehensive plan that has been adopted and any other officially adopted plan that is applicable." The planning board is tasked with providing a "written recommendation to the governing board that addresses plan consistency and other matters as deemed appropriate by the planning board." The planning board must provide that recommendation within 30 days of referral. After that the governing board may take action on the ordinance amendment without planning board recommendation. To be sure, this is a procedural step; it is not determinative. Even if the planning board finds that the zoning amendment is inconsistent with the comprehensive plan, the governing board may still consider and approve the amendment (160A-383 & 387; 153A-341 & 344).

The governing board, too, has a procedural requirement to consider consistency and public interest. For municipalities, General Statute 160A-383 requires that "[w]hen adopting or rejecting any zoning amendment, the governing board shall also approve a statement *describing* whether its action is consistent with an adopted comprehensive plan and any other officially adopted plan that is applicable, and *briefly explaining* why the board considers the action taken to be reasonable and in the public interest." The county version of the statute, at GS 153A-341, is substantially the same, but with one procedural difference: the commission must adopt the consistency statement prior to adopting or rejecting the amendment.

The statute specifies that the consistency statement "is not subject to judicial review." As our courts have considered the requirement and the scope of review, they have interpreted this to mean that the decision content of the statement ("Yes, this amendment is consistent with the comprehensive plan." Or, "No, this rezoning is not in the public interest.") is not reviewable. Courts can, however, review whether a local government acted properly when adopting (or failing to adopt) the required statement, including the presence of necessary elements of the statement.

### The Board Must Take Action

In *Wally v. City of Kannapolis*, 365 N.C. 449, 722 S.E.2d 481 (2012), the North Carolina Supreme provided some guidance into what is—and what is not—sufficient for a consistency statement.

In *Wally*, a property owner applied for rezoning. The city council, as part of the public hearing for the rezoning, received a

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staff report that included analysis of the proposed rezoning, including compatibility with the surrounding area and safety issues. Staff concluded that the rezoning was “consistent with the long range goals of the City, and reasonable in light of existing and approved infrastructure.” The council approved the rezoning. Neighbors challenged the rezoning, claiming among other things that city council failed to adopt a consistency statement as required by the statutes.

The case was appealed up to the North Carolina Supreme Court. The city argued that it met the statutory requirements for a consistency statement. When city council approved the rezoning, the city claimed, it impliedly approved the staff statement of consistency and reasonableness. And the council adopted a statement that “Council’s final vote conforms to the guidelines under which they are granted final authority to act upon a rezoning petition.” And in any event, the city argued, the consistency statement is not subject to judicial review. The court was not persuaded.

The court emphasized that although an approved consistency statement is not subject to judicial review, “the statute does not prohibit review of *whether* the City Council approved a statement, which is the issue here.”

The court noted that “the statute requires that defendant take two actions in this situation: first, adopt or reject the zoning amendment, and second, approve a proper statement.” In this case, council failed to take the second step. It is not enough to have a staff report with some consistency analysis. The council must take action to approve the statement. Moreover, council’s adoption of a generic statement about conforming to guidelines for zoning authority is insufficient. There must be some explanation and description regarding the specific zoning matter at issue, as required by the statute for consistency statements.

For more on the *Wally* decision and elements of plan consistency, check out my colleague Rich Ducker’s blog [here](#).

### **More Than Cut and Paste**

The North Carolina Court of Appeals has offered additional guidance into what is—and what is not—sufficient for a consistency statement in *Atkinson v. City of Charlotte*, 760 S.E.2d 395, 396 (N.C. Ct. App. 2014).

In *Atkinson*, a property owner initiated a zoning text amendment to exempt certain parking decks from floor area ratio requirements. The zoning committee of the planning commission reviewed the proposed amendment and voted unanimously to recommend approval. As part of the recommendation, the zoning committee included a statement finding that the amendment was consistent with adopted plans and reasonable and in the public interest. At the city council hearing the mayor informed council members that the zoning committee “found this petition to be consistent with the adopted policies and reasonable and in the public interest.” City council approved this “statement of consistency” and the zoning amendment. Neighbors challenged the amendment as failing to comply with the statutory requirement for consistency statements.

This case had notably different facts from *Wally*. In *Wally*, no consistency statement was adopted. In *Atkinson*, the council formally adopted and approved a statement from the zoning committee titled “Statement of Consistency.” The city, understandably, pointed to that adopted statement, arguing that they met the statutory requirement and that the content of the statement is not subject to review. Once again, the court was not persuaded.

For the *Atkinson* decision, the NC Court of Appeals drew guidance from the NC Supreme Court’s language in *Wally*. In *Wally* the court said that the statute “requires more than a general declaration that the action comports with relevant law.” The consistency statement must “*must describe whether the zoning amendment is consistent with any controlling land use plan and explain why it is reasonable and in the public interest.*” Thus, court review of adequacy of a consistency statement will consider:

1. *Did the council take action to adopt a consistency statement?*
2. *Did the statement include a description of whether the amendment is consistent with any controlling land use plan?*
3. *Did the statement include an explanation as to why the amendment is reasonable and in the public interest?*

“Once it is determined that a proper statement, which includes a description and explanation, has been adopted, the content of the statement ‘is not subject to judicial review.’” In *Atkinson*, the city adopted a statement, but that statement lacked the necessary description and explanation. A mere conclusory statement (e.g., “This amendment is consistent. Period.”) is insufficient.

As an aside, the neighbors also challenged the role of a zoning committee of the planning commission—they argued that

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the full planning board must review and make recommendation on zoning amendments. Because the court found the consistency statement lacking, it did not address the question about the planning commission structure and requirements.

### Now what?

So where does that leave us? Here are some practical considerations for compliant zoning amendments.

Each case needs a unique consistency statement. The governing board can't just cut and paste the generic statement from the last rezoning case. Nor can the board merely check a box on a checklist. The statement must reflect the unique character of the particular amendment through description and explanation. The basic format may be the same for all consistency statements, but each one should reflect the particular amendment. As a guide, you might start with this:

- The amendment is/is not consistent with applicable plans because \_\_\_\_ *[Describe elements of controlling land use plans and how the amendment is or is not consistent]*\_\_\_\_\_.
- And the amendment is/is not reasonable and in the public interest because \_\_\_\_\_ *[Briefly explain why. Factors may include public health and safety, character of the area and relationship of uses, applicable plans, or balancing benefits and detriments.]*

Can staff or the planning board draft the statement for governing board approval? Yes. The statutory requirement is that the governing board shall *approve* or *adopt* the statement. A draft statement provided by the planning board or staff should be sufficient, so long as the governing board has the statement and takes formal action to approve it. The planning board already has to comment on consistency of amendments for rezonings and zoning text amendments. For continuity of review, the planning board could apply the same standards as the governing board, including a description of how the amendment is consistent and an explanation as to why it is reasonable and in the public interest. Recall that the governing board is not bound by the planning board's findings.

How much detail do you need in a statement? A brief statement such as above with some description and explanation is legally sufficient. Courts will not review the substance of the content (even if they disagree with the finding), but courts will review whether the description and explanation is there in the statement. Just how much detail to include is a policy decision for the local government and the particular ordinance amendment. Some local governments will choose to craft a few simple sentences to meet the legal standard. Others may opt to provide an exhaustive 10 page consistency analysis, identifying all applicable comp plan elements. Either should be acceptable, so long as the governing board has the statement in front of them and formally adopts it. If your community does have a long consistency analysis, you may consider a shorter summary statement for explicit adoption by the governing board. The statement should serve as a useful tool for plan implementation and protection from court challenges (especially for claims of spot zoning), but the statement need not be overly-complicated or lengthy.

Regardless of who drafts the statement, the governing board must take formal action to adopt the statement. A passing reference to the staff report or the planning board statement is insufficient. For municipalities, it appears that the governing board action to adopt the statement may be part of the motion to approve or deny the amendment. The county statute, though, requires that the consistency statement be adopted "*prior to* adopting or rejecting any zoning amendment."

If a statement is formally approved and it includes a description of consistency and an explanation of reasonableness and public interest, then the substantive content of the statement will not be subject to judicial review.



# TOWN OF BLACK MOUNTAIN

160 Midland Avenue  
Black Mountain, NC 28711

BoA Regular Session  
September 8, 2014  
Agenda Item 5-B

## RESOLUTION R-14-02

### RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF ALDERMEN SETTING FORTH THE COMMITMENT TO COMPLETE STREETS FOR THE TOWN OF BLACK MOUNTAIN

**WHEREAS**, the term “Complete Streets” describes a comprehensive, integrated transportation network with infrastructure and design that allows safe and convenient travel along and across streets for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motor vehicle drivers, public transportation riders and drivers, and people of all ages and abilities, including children, youth, families, older adults, and individuals with disabilities; and

**WHEREAS**, streets that are not designed to provide safe transport for all users present a danger to pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transportation riders, particularly children, older adults, and people with disabilities; more than 110,000 pedestrian and bicyclists are injured each year on roads in the United States, with children and older adults at greatest risk and disproportionately affected; many of these injuries and fatalities are preventable, and the severity of these injuries could readily be decreased by implementing Complete Streets approaches; and the Town of Black Mountain wishes to ensure greater safety for those traveling the streets in its streets; and

**WHEREAS**, the Town of Black Mountain wishes to encourage walking, bicycling, and public transportation use as safe, convenient, environmentally friendly, and economical modes of transportation that promote health and independence for all people; and

**WHEREAS**, the Town of Black Mountain acknowledges the benefits and value for the public health and welfare of increasing transportation by walking, bicycling, and public transportation in order to address a wide variety of societal challenges, including pollution, climate change, traffic congestion, social isolation, obesity, physical inactivity, limited recreational opportunities, sprawl, population growth, safety, and excessive expenses; and

**WHEREAS**, sedentary lifestyles and limited opportunities to integrate exercise into daily activities are factors contributing to increase obesity among adults and children and numerous correlated adverse health consequences, such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, certain cancers, asthma, low self-esteem, depression, and other debilitating diseases; and

**WHEREAS**, the Town of Black Mountain wishes to build upon the existing NCDOT Complete Streets Policy that recognize the importance of addressing the transportation needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transportation user riders.

**NOW, THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED** that the Town of Black Mountain hereby recognizes the importance of creating Complete Streets that enable safe travel by all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation riders and drivers, and people of all

ages and abilities, including children, youth, families, older adults, and individuals with disabilities.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Town of Black Mountain affirms the Complete Streets infrastructure addressing the needs of all users should be incorporated into all planning, design, approval, and implementation process for any construction, reconstruction, retrofit, maintenance, alteration, or repair of streets, bridges, or other portions of the transportation network, including pavement resurfacing, restriping, and signalization operations if the safety and convenience of users can be improved within the scope of the work; provided, however, that such infrastructure may be excluded, upon written approval by the Board of Alderman where documentation and date indicate that:

1. Use by non-motorized users is prohibited by law;
2. The cost would be excessively disproportionate to the need or probable future use over the long term;
3. There is an absence of current or future need; or
4. Inclusion of such infrastructure would be unreasonable or inappropriate in light of the scope of the project.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Department of Building, Planning and Zoning should evaluate how well the streets and transportation network of Black Mountain are serving each category of users; and

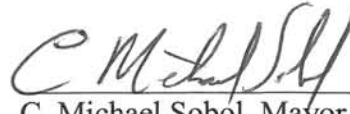
**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Department of Building, Planning and Zoning and Public Services Department should review and either revise or develop proposed revisions to all appropriate plans, zoning and subdivision codes, laws, procedures, rules, regulations, guidelines, programs, templates, and design manuals to integrate, accommodate, and balance the needs of all users in all projects; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Department of Building, Planning and Zoning and Public Services Department should make Complete Streets practices a routine part of everyday operations, should approach every transportation project and program as an opportunity to improve public streets and the transportation network for all users, and should work in coordination with other departments, agencies, and jurisdictions to achieve Complete Streets; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that trainings in how to integrate, accommodate, and balance the needs of all users should be provided for planners, civil and traffic engineers, project managers, plan reviewers, inspectors, and other personnel responsible for the design and construction of streets, bridges, and other portions of the transportation network.

**NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the Board of Aldermen of the Town of Black Mountain, that procedures should be established to allow increased public participation in policy decisions and transparency in individual determinations concerning the design and use of streets.

READ, APPROVED AND ADOPTED this 8<sup>th</sup> day of SEPTEMBER 2014



C. Michael Sobol, Mayor

ATTEST:



Darlene R. Whisenant, Town Clerk



Matt Settlemyer, Town Manager



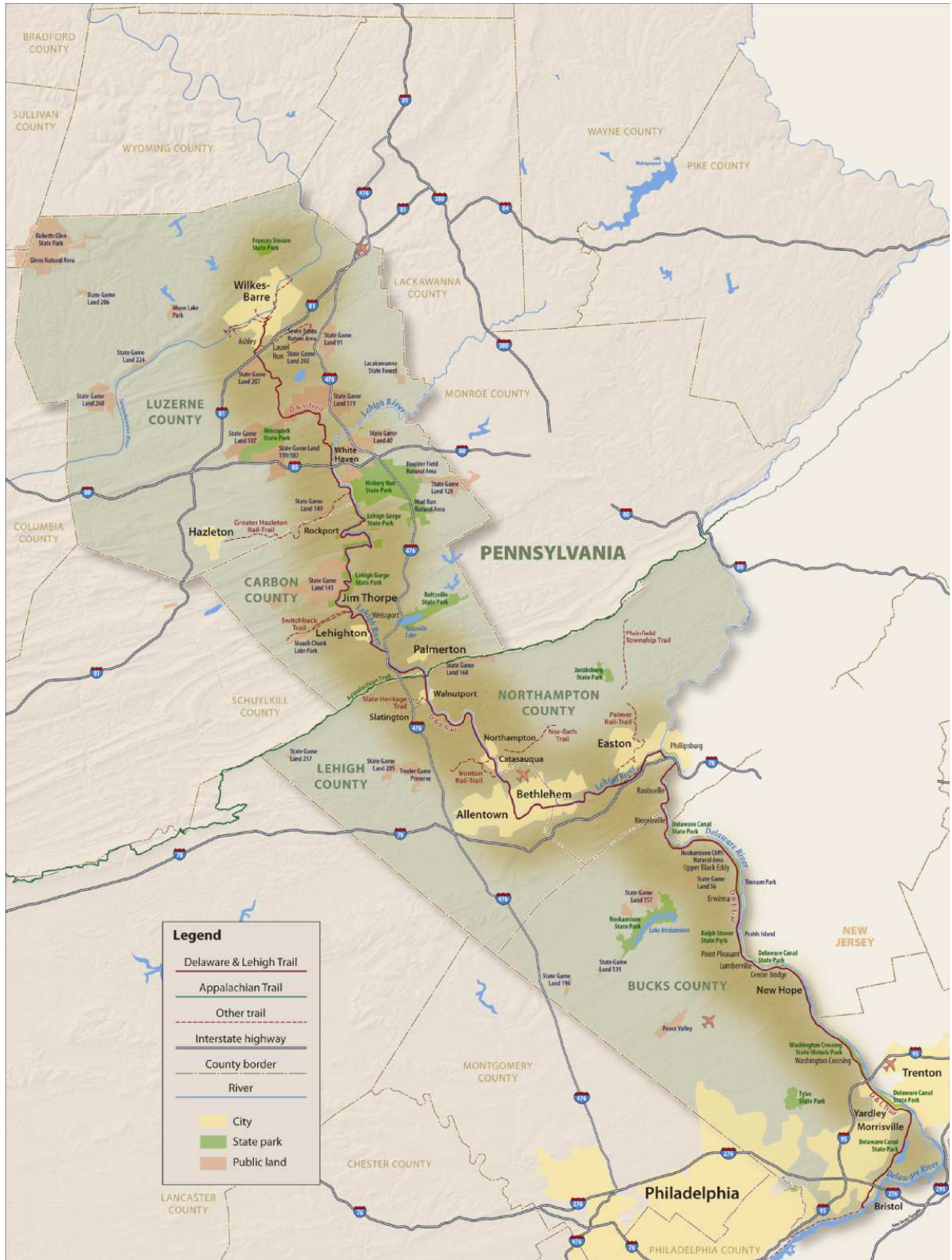
# Visually Speaking

*Bring your stories to life*

A comprehensive guide to sign development  
*within the*

**Delaware & Lehigh  
National Heritage Corridor**

# The Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor



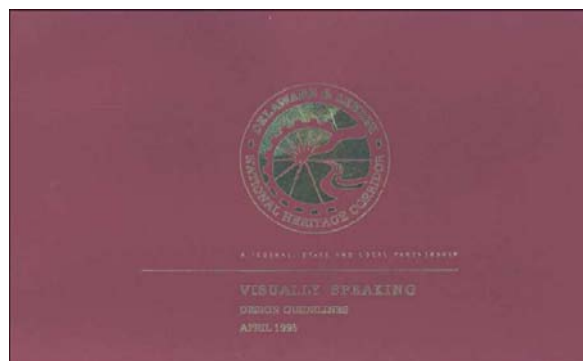
## Introduction

The Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor (D&L) is a joint effort of private groups and interested citizens, county and municipal governments, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the federal government to conserve cultural and natural resources in the five-county region of Pennsylvania that traverses the historic Delaware and Lehigh Canals (see map on adjacent page). Since the Delaware & Lehigh's designation by Congress in 1988, it has been our mission to restore historic places, conserve green space for public use, and preserve and interpret our heritage to enhance life for generations to come.

One mandate of the D&L is to help visitors and residents navigate the Corridor and better understand its rich and complex history, culture, and landscape. Creating signs that direct travelers, welcome visitors, and interpret sites is an important means of fulfilling that mandate. We hope that you will take advantage of this opportunity to enhance your site and the Corridor by adding proper signage.

## *Visually Speaking*

*Visually Speaking* is a set of guidelines for the development of signs throughout the Corridor. The D&L has over 600 signs installed across the Corridor's diverse landscape. The standards set in *Visually Speaking* provide for a unity that links them all together, while allowing each site to tell its unique story.



All signs must conform to the standards found in *Visually Speaking*. Developed exclusively for the D&L by Cloud Gehshan Associates, *Visually Speaking* has set the standard for wayfinding systems across the nation. Copies of the guidelines are available from the D&L office and online at <http://www.delawareandlehigh.org/index.php/documents-resources/>.

## Using this guide: Deciding on a Sign Type

This guide is divided into two parts—Part A and Part B. Part A focuses on the development of interpretive signage, while Part B covers directional and regulatory signage. Determining which types of signs you want is very important to this process because different staff members will help you with different types of signs. The descriptions below will help you decide what type of sign suits your needs.

### Interpretive (Part A)

In *Interpreting Our Heritage*, Freeman Tilden defines interpretation as, “An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.” To achieve this, interpretive signage uses images and simple but engaging text. The key point is that interpretation should not come in the form of a bulleted list of facts but as a narrative explanation of the larger meaning and significance of a site. One of the D&L’s historians or environmental specialists will work with you on these types of signs.

Interpretive signage ***should not*** be used to:

- tell visitors what they can and cannot do on a site
- list facts or figures without interpretation
- provide directional information
- provide only a map or only photos without text
- create a bulleted list, like this one

### Directional and Regulatory (Part B)

These signs provide the opportunity to direct visitors to or through a site, welcome visitors, provide maps, and list specific regulations. The text on these signs should be short and simple so that visitors can read them while passing by in a vehicle or on foot. The D&L Trail Steward will work with you on these types of signs.

#### **Table of Contents—Flip to Part A or Part B**

Part A: Interpretive Signage .....	p.5
Part B: Directional and Regulatory Signage .....	p.14
Part C: Appendix and Additional Resources .....	p.16

## Sign Types

The D&L produces three main types of signs: **interpretive (1)**, **directional/regulatory (2)**, and **directional (3)**.



**Clockwise from top:**  
an interpretive display;  
a directional sign with  
regulatory symbols; a  
directional entrance  
sign

## Part A: Developing Interpretive Signs

Interpretive and directional signs, or “waysides,” can be a cost-effective means of communicating your story to the public. Waysides are used to add meaning to visitor experiences by providing directions, additional information, an introduction to an otherwise hidden story, or explanations regarding regions, towns, or sites.

Developing effective signage requires a good deal of vision, organization, and design work but can be a rewarding experience. In order to ease the process and keep signage consistent, the D&L staff compiled this booklet to assist with your efforts. This booklet provides basic information to help you work with a D&L representative to complete your new signs. Because interpretive signs require a keen sense of design and writing, they will be the subject of much of this pamphlet.

### What is interpretive signage?

In *Interpreting Our Heritage*, Freeman Tilden defines interpretation as, **“An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.”**

To achieve this, interpretive signage uses images and simple but engaging text. The key point is that interpretation should not come in the form of a bulleted list of facts but as a narrative explanation of the larger meaning and significance of a site. One of the D&L’s historians or environmental specialists will work with you on these types of signs.

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- tell visitors what they can and cannot do on a site
- list facts or figures
- provide directional information
- provide only a map or only photos without text
- create a bulleted list, like this one

## Interpretive Signs



**Interpretive signs** consist of a fiberglass panel set into a thick-cast aluminum base (see the examples below). These signs contain additional information, interesting stories, and explanations that will improve visitors' experiences and understanding of a site.

The D&L can help design all three types of designs to suit your specific needs. This booklet, however, is primarily devoted to the development of **interpretive signs**. For the development of other sign types, please contact the appropriate staff member listed on the back of this booklet.



**Low-Profile Interpretive  
Panel and Base**



**High-Profile Interpretive  
Panel and Base**

## Interpretive Panels: High-Profile or Low-Profile?

There are two types of interpretive waysides: **low-profile** and **high-profile**.

- **Low-profile** wayside panels are either 24" x 18" or 36" x 24" and are mounted at waist height for reading from above.
- **High-profile** wayside panels are 36" x 48" and are mounted upright (like a poster).

Each type of sign is intended to serve a specific purpose:

- **Low-profile** signs are placed directly on location, so the user can look at the "real thing" and the sign at the same time.
- **High-profile** signs provide information in areas where they do not compete with the "real thing." They can also represent a greater amount of information than low profiles.



**Low-profile wayside**  
(24" x 18" or 36" x 24")



**High-profile wayside**  
(36" x 48")



## Low-Profile Arrangements

Low-profile signs are always stand-alone units that may be installed near other low-profile signs but are never connected to them.

## High-Profile Arrangements

High-profile signs can be arranged in a variety of patterns. Several arrangements are pictured below. Please discuss arrangement options with a D&L staff member.



**Stand Alone High-Profile Sign**

**Three High-Profile Signs Side by Side**



**Three-Sided High-Profile Kiosk**

## Using Outdoor Exhibits Effectively

Before designing and writing your sign, consider the following issues.

*What role will your sign play?*

Sites with few staff members will use signs as a substitute for active interpretation. Sites with on-site staff will use signs to supplement their existing programs or as a means of appealing to visitors in off-peak hours. Signs can be used to meet a variety of site needs, but each site should consider the role of the sign before they begin design.

*Where is the best location?*

Next to writing successful text, your biggest challenge is selecting the wayside's location.

Consider the following tips:

- Never allow a wayside to block a view.
- Let the site speak for itself.
- Use the sign to supplement the natural view.
- Place the panel so the reader can glance from the sign to the place it discusses.
- Consider visitors' safety. Be sure readers have a safe place to stand while viewing the wayside.
- Make sure you do not overload your site with signs. Too many signs are a distraction.
- Consider future landscape maintenance. Will it be easy to access and maintain the sign in the future?
- If possible, choose locations to minimize vandalism.



**Signs can welcome visitors and interpret history in a variety of settings.**

## Developing Your Wayside Panels

The design, writing, and production process can take any number of paths. Below is a general outline of the process. Use the attached checklist (pages 15-16) to track your progress.

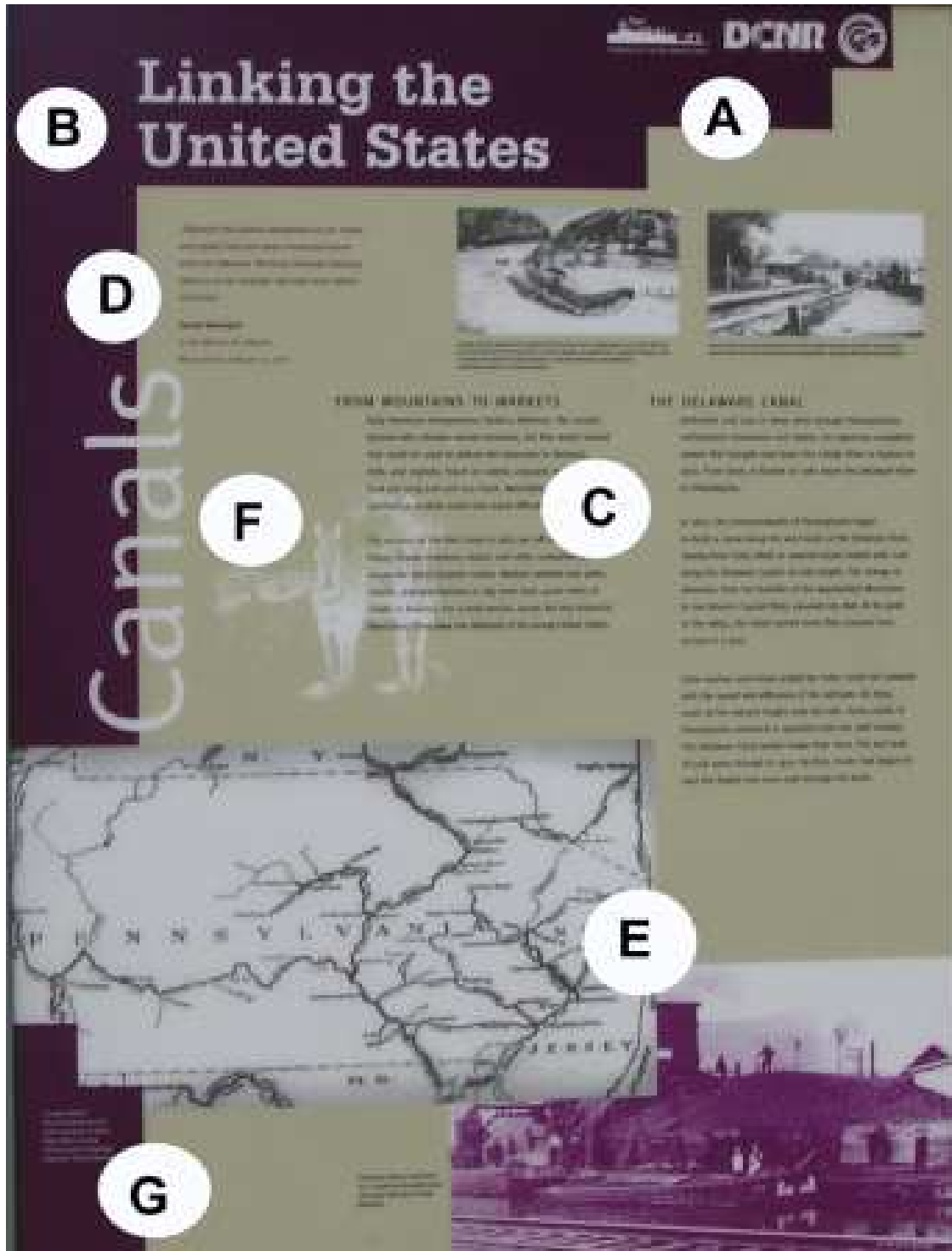
- Brainstorm within your organization. Why do you want or need waysides? What topics would you like to include? Where will they be located? Name a single contact person to communicate with the D&L representative.
- Contact the D&L to arrange a meeting and “walk through” of the process. Discuss possible funding or cost sharing methods.
- Begin assembling material (quotes, text, pictures, etc.) for the sign. Work with the D&L to edit the material.
- Submit a draft of the sign to the D&L to be forwarded to the sign manufacturer for final design and production. Typical production schedules are 6 to 8 weeks but can vary depending on the number of signs ordered and the manufacturer’s workload.
- When your sign order is received, the D&L can offer technical assistance with installation and make recommendations regarding maintenance.
- Because our sign manufacturer produces signs digitally, future editing and reproduction will be relatively quick and less expensive than the initial order.



**A low-profile sign interprets the remains of Lock 21 in Delaware Canal State Park.**

## Elements of an effective sign

Of course every **interpretive** panel tells a different story, but we try to keep some features of each sign consistent. Please refer to the following diagram and list for an explanation of each sign element.



**Use these guidelines and the sign template at the end of this booklet to design each sign:**

**“A” Logos:** Each panel includes logos of the organizations that funded and helped design the sign. The D&L logo is always included and is placed last. Typically a sign will have two to four logos. All logos must be submitted along with the sign draft, in a high-quality electronic format, such as tif. or eps.

**“B” Title:** Create a “catchy” heading for your sign. Examples are: “Going Native” for a sign on invasive and native species; “From Superfund to Super Habitat” for a sign on the restoration of the Lehigh Gap; “It’s a Short Commute” for a sign on locktenders’ homes.

**“C” Text:** The biggest challenge is writing effective wayside text. The text should tell a story, by providing important or interesting information without overburdening the reader. Avoid technical language. Assume your audience is an average high school student.

The text submission must be accurate and factual. This might require historical research into the topic, if it does not already exist.

Word limits are flexible, but keep these guidelines in mind:

- 100-150 words, limit 3 paragraphs = 18” x 24” (low profile)
- 150-200 words, limit 4 paragraphs = 24” x 36” (low profile)
- 250-300 words, limit 5 paragraphs = 36” x 48” (high profile)

**“D” Quote:** Every panel includes a quote. This helps give the story a human voice. Consider recognizing an important figure in your organization, a historical celebrity that commented on the site, or a local who knew the site well. The most effective quotes will be the most unique, witty, or colorful. There are many websites that provide quotations. Consider [www.quotationspage.com](http://www.quotationspage.com), [www.quotegarden.com](http://www.quotegarden.com), or [www.quoteland.com](http://www.quoteland.com).

**“E” Pictures and Graphics:** Pictures are the easiest and most effective means of attracting readers. Choose historic photographs or drawings, charts or graphs describing important trends, or diagrams showing how artifacts worked.

The D&L can provide a designer to create an image, graph, chart, or map. These services cost extra and will be incorporated into the final cost of the sign.

When choosing a graphic, consider the quality of the original. When reproduced on a large sign, poor quality files can become discolored and disfigured. Files that are fuzzy or out of focus in the original cannot be used. All photos and graphics must be at least 300 DPI and formatted in RGB color. Please submit photos and graphics on a CD.

**“F” Icons:** Some sign designs include a simple line drawing or icon in the background. One approach is to use the same icon on all signs, tying them together with a common theme. Another approach is to use a unique icon for each sign, relating to that specific sign text. The simplest icons are the most effective, attracting the reader but not distracting them from the main text.

**“G” Captions:** Captions will identify the subject of a graphic and tie it into the main text. Keep in mind that many readers will look only at the graphics and captions and not read the full text, making the captions an important means of telling your story. Make sure that each caption stands alone as a bite size story so that readers leave with at least one message. Keep captions short; aim for one sentence.

## Writing Your Text

*Topic:*

Review your organization’s mission statement and the D&L’s Interpretive Plan (available on the D&L website: [www.DelawareandLehigh.org](http://www.DelawareandLehigh.org)). Decide how this story fits into both.

*Consider your audience:*

Try to picture your typical site visitor, and ask these questions: What is the main reason the visitor is at the site? What questions do you hear most often? Are visitors local, regional, or national? How much information will the visitor be willing to read in one place? Generally, assume your visitor has the knowledge and reading skill of the average high school student.

*Main points:*

Answer the question, “What should the reader know after reading the sign?” Make a list of three or four key points. If you have trouble deciding which points to include, ask yourself the following:

- Is this something that a non-expert, casual reader will care about?
- What makes this point important enough to include it over all others?
- If this point is left out, can the story still be told?
- Am I trying to cram too much into this sign?

*Writing the text:*

You are now ready to begin the best part of this project, developing the story. Try to write a short paragraph for each point. Low-profile interpretive waysides should have 3 paragraphs. High-profile interpretive waysides should have 3-4 paragraphs. See page 12 for word limits.

*Editing and design:*

When you feel comfortable with the text, it is time for others to help you edit. Submit your draft to the D&L. Be prepared to make several changes, in order to fit the text into the design and optimize the impact of your sign.

## Part B: Directional and Regulatory Signage

These signs provide the opportunity to direct visitors to or through a site, welcome visitors, provide maps, and list specific regulations. The text on these signs should be short and simple so that visitors can read them while passing by in a vehicle or on foot. The D&L Trail Steward will work with you on these types of signs.

**Directional signage comes in a variety of shapes and sizes, each for a specific purpose:**



**From right to left:** pedestrian directional blade, auto tour directional sign, main entrance sign



## Developing a directional signage system

You may decide to install just one entrance sign at your site, or you may install dozens of different types. The number and style of signs you use will depend on how you envision visitors coming to and passing through your site.

For example, you might install the following:

- 1) On nearby street: a vehicular directional sign to direct drivers to site entrance
- 2) At site entrance: a large entrance sign intended to welcome visitors
- 3) At site parking lot: a pedestrian directional blade to guide visitors through site

*Create a Map.* Sometimes it is useful to print out a map of your site and sketch out what your signage system might look like. Here is a sketch of the example above:





## Frequently Asked Questions

*Why is the D&L doing this?*

When the United States Congress established the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, it recognized our living landscape as nationally significant. The use of standard signage throughout the 165-mile Corridor conveys a unified image to locals and visitors alike. Your wayside will be a part of this larger project.

*How much do panels typically cost?*

The prices vary based on the number of signs ordered, the complexity of the design, and the size of the panels. A ballpark estimate for **interpretive signs** is:

24" x 18": Low-Profile Panel \$580 + Base \$390 = \$970

36" x 24": Low-Profile Panel \$800 + Base \$400 = \$1,200

36" x 48": High-Profile Panel \$1,300 + Base \$750 = \$2,050

Keep in mind that total prices are subject to cost sharing. In some cases, the total your organization will pay is 50% of the prices listed above.

Each interpretive panel order includes the cost of **two panels**—one for immediate use and one to keep in storage for replacement.

*How soon can we expect our panels?*

Submitting sign orders in batches will lower the overall production cost. The D&L will submit your entire batch of signs for production, as soon as all drafts are finalized. The standard schedule for panel fabrication is approximately six weeks from the time of submission.

*What happens after we receive the signs?*

- Signs will be delivered directly to you. Review the shipment against the final drafts and check for damage. **Report all problems within seven (7) days.**
- Signs should be installed following sign manufacturer and *Visually Speaking* specifications. The D&L can installation specification sketches to assist.
- To maximize the life of your sign, develop a maintenance program. Request a copy of *Projecting Your Image, Protecting Your Investment*, the D&L's sign maintenance brochure.

## Sign Development Checklist

*This checklist will help guide you through the interpretive sign development process. Refer to this booklet, Visually Speaking: Bring your stories to life, for the specifics on each step.*

- Determine how much money you have to spend on signs. Create a budget.
- Brainstorm within your organization. Why do you want or need signs? What type of information do you need to communicate to the public? Name a contact person to communicate with the D&L.
  - Name of contact person: \_\_\_\_\_.
- Contact the D&L to express your interest in developing signs for your site. Request a *Visually Speaking* sign development booklet and any additional information regarding grants and the sign development process (see pages 2-3).
- Review your management plan or mission statement and consult your staff to determine which stories and ideas are most important to your organization. Each story should form the basis of a sign (see page 13).
  - Stories and ideas to include: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Based on how many and what kinds of stories you need to tell, determine what types of signs you need: entrance, directional, or interpretive (see pages 4-6). Will interpretive signs be high-profile or low-profile (see page 7-8)? Consider how many signs you need and where they will be installed.
  - Number of signs:
    - Entrance: \_\_\_\_\_
    - Directional: \_\_\_\_\_
    - Interpretive: \_\_\_\_\_
      - High-Profile: \_\_\_\_\_
      - Low-Profile: \_\_\_\_\_

- Assemble the materials for each sign (see pages 11-13).
  - Logos (note specific format on page 12)
  - Quotes
  - Pictures, Graphics, and Icons (note specific format on page 12)
  - Text
- Submit all materials to the D&L for editing and design. The D&L will submit a draft to the sign manufacturer. It may take several weeks for the manufacturer to convert the draft into a proof.
- Review proofs (typically via email or in electronic format), make corrections or changes, and resubmit to the D&L. This process will continue until the proofs have been finalized and approved by the partner and the D&L.
- The D&L will submit the finalized proof to the sign manufacturer for production. Production can take from 6 to 8 weeks.
- Receive the shipment of signs and bases.
  - Review the panels *within seven (7) days* to confirm that they are undamaged and all text and graphics match the final, approved proofs.
  - Properly store the extra replacement panel in a safe location.
- Install the signs. Signs should be installed following sign manufacturer and *Visually Speaking* specifications. The D&L can provide free technical assistance or can help arrange installation through a contractor for a fee.
- Refer to the D&L's sign maintenance guidelines for suggestions on ways to create an inventory of your signs and provide for their regular maintenance. This is essential to prolonging the lifetime of the signs and protecting your investment.
- Enjoy sharing your stories with the public!

## Sign Template

[Download this template: [http://www.delawareandlehigh.org/images/library/Sign\\_Template.doc](http://www.delawareandlehigh.org/images/library/Sign_Template.doc)]

*Create a template for each sign and submit to the D&L. Use the example below as a guide.*

**HIGH PROFILE OR LOW PROFILE?:** low profile

**LOGOS:** Lehigh Gap Nature Center, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, DCNR, D&L

**TITLE:** Crossroads at the Gap

**QUOTE:** “The ideal mountain trail is that which has no end.” Imer Adams, *Walking in the Clouds*, 1939

**SIDEBAR DATE OR TEXT:** 1923 - 1975

**ICON OR WATERMARK:** watermark of hiking boot print

**GRAPHICS:** trail map, photo of hikers on mountain, inset photos of wildlife

**CAPTION:** Ospreys, Baltimore Orioles, and Common Mergansers (above, left to right) can be seen at Lehigh Gap Nature Center.

### **TEXT:**

Hike it! Bike it! Boat it!

The Lehigh Gap is a crossroads of recreational and educational opportunities. Two historic trails, the Appalachian Trail and the D&L Trail, intersect here, providing a network of hiking trails along with Lehigh River Water Trail boat access, opportunities for fishing, and world-class bird watching.

The Hiker’s High Way

The Appalachian Trail follows the ridge on both sides of the Lehigh Gap, running 1,245 miles south to Georgia and 930 miles north to Maine, from where you are standing. The Blue Mountain Eagle Climbing Club of Reading and the since-vanished Blue Mountain Club of Easton blazed the Lehigh Gap section of the AT during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Currently, the Philadelphia Trail Club maintains the section, which features summit views, scrub habitat, and lush forests.

The Hawk Highway

The Lehigh Gap is part of the Kittatinny Ridge “Important Bird Area,” an Audubon Society designation that recognizes the importance of this area as a crossroads for migratory and local birds. The ridge serves as the Northeast’s primary corridor for migratory hawks, kestrels, and other raptors, and hosts over 140 other species of birds. The Lehigh Gap Nature Center is the perfect spot to take in all of the action.

◆ PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM, PHOTOCOPY, AND SEND COPY TO D&L STAFF CONTACT ◆

**FORM "A"**

Project Start Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**LETTER OF COMMITMENT: Implementation of "Visually Speaking"**

**I. Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Organization:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Fax:** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-Mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

**II. Please indicate the number of signs or brochures requested to complete the proposed project:**

_____ Low profile Wayside (Small)	_____ Entrance Sign
_____ Low Profile Wayside (Large)	_____ Pedestrian Historical Marker
_____ High Profile Wayside	_____ Site Brochure
_____ Kiosk	_____ Activity Brochure

**III. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Estimated Total Cost of Project (if known)**

**B. \_\_\_\_\_ Local Cash Match (will be at least 50% of Total Project Cost)**  
**Source of Match** \_\_\_\_\_

**C. \_\_\_\_\_ Corridor Grant Requested (Subtract B from A)**

**IV. Please Indicate the following (use additional sheet, if necessary):**

**A. Describe the signs/brochures to be developed.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**B. Define the story and Corridor theme to be addressed.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**C. Describe your routine maintenance and replacement plan.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**V. Are graphics necessary?** \_\_\_\_\_ **Do you have the graphics?** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Is text already written?** \_\_\_\_\_ **Is research necessary for text?** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Do you have a descriptive quote? (required for Waysides)** \_\_\_\_\_

**AGREEMENT:** I (we) agree that our organization will work with the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor staff to develop *Visually Speaking* elements to meet the quality standards required. I (we) agree to establish a routine maintenance/replacement plan to continue meeting the Corridor's standards set in *Visually Speaking*.

Signature

Organization

Date

*Please mail photocopy of completed form with original signature to:  
Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, 2750 Hugh Moore Park Rd., Easton, PA 18042*

*Notes:*

*Notes:*

We hope this pamphlet has provided a quick introduction to the sign process. Of course, D&L staff members are always available to assist you with any aspect of the sign process. Feel free to contact the following staff members.

*Signage Program and Funding:*

**Elissa Thorne**  
610-377-4063  
Elissa@DelawareandLehigh.org

*Interpretive Signage:*

**Silas Chamberlin**  
610-923-3548 (ext.222)  
Silas@DelawareandLehigh.org

*Directional and Entrance Signage:*

**Scott Everett**  
610-923-3548 (ext.232)  
Scott@DelawareandLehigh.org

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Edited by Silas Chamberlin: 8/18/10