

## Executive Summary

“In a broader sense, the word *greenway* is a generic term for a wide variety of linear open spaces”<sup>1</sup> applied synonymously to similar land uses, such as greenbelts, parkways, green space, trails, and linear parks. While the terminology is only 30 years young, the principles found within greenway planning are centuries old. This Greenway Master Plan endeavors to establish a framework for a countywide system of interconnected greenways and trails for the benefit of our citizens and enhancement of our community quality of life.

During the past 12 months, a Board appointed Greenway Steering Committee has worked with the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission, County staff, and key stakeholders to create the first ever “Greenway Master Plan for James City County.” This process focused on key issues that are shaping development polices and urban design not only in James City County, but also across the nation. This Greenway Master Plan lays the foundation for this new program, with future plan revisions focusing on corridor details and implementation strategies.

## Defining Greenways

James City County has defined greenways as linear open spaces that are managed for conservation, recreation, and/or alternative transportation uses.<sup>2</sup> Greenways often follow natural features such as ridgelines, stream valleys, and rivers; and cultural features such as canals, utility corridors, abandoned rail lines, zoning buffers, roadways, and wherever there is a break in the land pattern. Although each greenway is unique, most greenways are networks of natural open space corridors that connect neighborhoods, parks, and schools to areas of natural, cultural, recreational, scenic, and historic significance. These passageways link people and places to nature for the enjoyment and enhancement of the community.

This plan will become a component of a broader Open Space Master Plan, which is seen as an important planning tool of the James City County Comprehensive Plan. (*Refer to the Open Space graphic, Appendix 13.1.*) The Division of Parks and Recreation will manage the Greenway Master Plan whose main goal is to balance environmental protection with the need for recreational amenities. This new comprehensive and integrated plan will result in open space preservation, environmental protection, species habitat protection, land conservation, historic preservation, healthier lifestyles, passive recreation, heritage tourism and ecotourism initiatives, and a more livable and sustainable community. The nexus of these greenway benefits helps us move closer toward a shared vision of *community* in the truest sense of the word.

## Citizen Input

The success of this planning effort hinged upon strong community involvement and grass-roots support. During the planning process, educational information was made available to the public through various means as outlined in the Communication and Education Plan, including the FYI educational insert in July 2001. Citizen information was gathered during public meetings, focus group sessions, public presentations, and Internet surveys from a broad cross-section of the

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<sup>1</sup> Greenways, Charles Flink and Robert Searns, in partnership with the Conservation Fund, 1993, preface.

<sup>2</sup> Definition from the Virginia Outdoors Plan, 1996.

community. This supporting data provided information essential to formulating goals and strategies for the plan.

The benefits associated with greenways are overwhelmingly positive. Communities investing substantial resources to this effort enjoy widespread citizen support and the realization of healthier lifestyles, a more diverse economy, a beautiful environment, and a more enjoyable quality of life.

Six goal areas were developed based upon benefits associated with greenways. These goal areas were refined with Steering Committee input to produce outcomes and strategies during the focus group sessions.

1. Economic Development Goal

Address both the appropriate costs of implementing the greenway system (including land acquisition and capital improvements) and the multi-objective benefits resulting from its creation that will have a positive economic impact on the community.

2. Recreation/Health and Wellness/Safety Goal

Design the greenway system as a recreational resource with public access connections to other recreational resources, offering a full spectrum of recreation and exercise opportunities that are safe for all users.

3. Transportation Goal

Provide corridors that bicyclists, pedestrians, and others can use to get from one place to another, free from motor vehicle conflicts, as an alternative to motor vehicle use.

4. Environmental Goal

Design a plan that preserves, promotes, and enhances awareness of the County's environmental assets, including developing a comprehensive greenway system that is sensitive to environmental, historical, cultural, scenic, and open space resources.

5. Education Goal

Educate the public about the need for and benefits of greenways and educate the greenway system user about the area's natural and cultural history.

6. Quality of Life Goal

Design a greenway system that maximizes accessibility for greenway system users, nearby property owners, and neighborhoods to achieve a walkable, livable, and sustainable community.

Citizens consistently rated Quality of Life as the most important greenway goal. The Environmental Goal ranked second among goals, reflecting a strong concern for environmental protection, open space protection, and historic preservation. The relationship between open space, recreation, and leisure were shown to be significant factors in community planning and quality of life, both as an amenity and as an economic benefit to attract more businesses to the area. Citizen requests for more trail facilities were consistent throughout the planning process.

### **Greenway Corridor Planning**

While most greenways are green and natural, greenways do change within a variety of changing cultural contexts. The overriding principle as a linear open space remains unchanged, however, the amount of green depends on the local context. Five main types of greenways include vehicular, cultural, recreational, aquatic, and environmental.

1. Vehicular Greenways recognize the importance of improving the driving experience through enhanced roadway aesthetics, such as scenic viewsheds, gateways, billboard restrictions, sign ordinances, wildflower meadows, tree canopies over the road, landscaped medians, etc. This plan makes specific recommendations to create scenic buffers and multiuse pedestrian and bicycle trails parallel to existing roadway corridors.

2. Cultural Greenways provide opportunities to elevate the green quality of streetscapes as they weave through suburban, urban and commercial areas. Given the heavy reliance of the County's economic base upon tourism, this plan recommends implementing Main Street USA design guidelines as a way to enhance the attractiveness of our roadways to visitors and the greater community.

3. Recreational Greenways respond to citizen requests for more walking and biking trails. Recreational enjoyment by citizens remains one of the single greatest factors in promoting greenways and trails. "Walking continues to be the number one recreational activity in America,"<sup>3</sup> and in James City County, the 2001 Comprehensive Plan survey revealed 86% of citizens want more walking and biking trails. Fully 65% of Americans walk for recreation, health or leisure, 31% bicycle, 24% visit natural areas, 20% jog, and 15% hike/backpack.<sup>4</sup> Based on the Virginia Outdoors Plan standards, the Division of Parks and Recreation has identified a shortage of 100-miles of walking trails for our County. The timing and location for future trail development over the next ten years is outlined in the Action Plan. These trails should be integrated with the sidewalk and bicycle plans to partner resources when these systems overlap.

4. Aquatic Greenways, also known as blueways, combine the benefits of recreational and environmental greenways. Our three primary blueway corridors are the James, York, and Chickahominy Rivers, in addition to numerous streams and tributaries.

5. Environmental Greenways represent stream, river, and wetland corridors that are protected under the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act, as well as other natural and contiguous open spaces. The plan recommends giving special attention to those sensitive areas because of their environmental significance. Two goals of environmental greenways are to preserve open spaces and provide access to natural areas that permit trail construction without damaging the natural environment. In many instances, trails are recommended as part of the multi-objective open space protection/acquisition strategy. Ten of the larger protected waterways include: Powhatan, College, Gordon, Yarmouth, Diascund, Ware, Taskinas, Mill, Skiffe's and Wood Creeks.

### **Developing the Greenway Map**

The key word describing greenways is connections. Creating a comprehensive list of places that people want to visit required generating several maps, each with a unique way of inventorying sites, facilities, and interpreting data. An inventory of all parks and schools served as the base map to construct three specific maps: the easement map, land use map, and the park and facility inventory map. The Steering Committee recommended this plan include data from neighboring jurisdictions to adequately address connectivity between all facilities within the Historic Triangle of Jamestown, Yorktown and Colonial Williamsburg. The end product was a map with an

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<sup>3</sup> National Recreation and Parks Society.

<sup>4</sup> Virginia Outdoors Plan, p.90, 1996.

inventory of significant sites, parks and open spaces, pedestrian and bikeway trail corridors, technical information, and the action plan.

Other Greenway Master Plan elements detailed trail planning and design issues to include:

Greenway Planning and Design

The plan includes a detailed description of design standards to be applied in the planning, design, construction, or improvement of greenways and trails.

Maintenance and Management

Three types of trail maintenance programs are identified, as well as issues related to safety and security for users and nearby residents. Operational plans for the maintenance and management of new trail facilities are recommended as an integral part of any new trail design. The plan also takes into account the ownership and liability issue. The risk assumed is born entirely by the user, with reference made to Virginia Code –29.1-509.

Implementation Strategies and Funding Mechanisms

This section includes a comprehensive description of five methods used to acquire land for greenways: fee-simple purchases, multi-objective properties, donations, easements, and regulatory means. Funding mechanisms include local, state and federal funding programs, grants from private foundations and corporations, small-scale donation programs, and volunteer assistance programs.

Appendix

Much of the technical data supporting this document can be found in the appendix, such as the multi-objective benefits associated with greenways, which are tied directly to the six goal areas. Additional funding mechanisms that may become available in the future are detailed as well. A separate section compiles national survey data over a ten-year period to dispel many fears citizens may have concerning how trails affect crime, safety, and property values.

**Action Plan**

The Greenway Master Plan is guided by the development of a ten-year Action Plan, to be revised concurrently with the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The Action Plan prioritizes trail development projects based on community input during this process and the Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Master Plan. Each proposal will detail corridor recommendations, land acquisition or easement strategies, capital expenditures, potential funding sources, and timelines for completion.

The Greenway Steering Committee endorsed the Action Plan, which recommends an annual funding mechanism of one-cent of the real estate tax rate be designated for greenway and trail capital improvement projects.

*“To make a greenway is to make a community.”  
–Charles Little, author of Greenways for America.*