

# Greenways

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**OBJECTIVE:** Establish a Countywide network of greenway trails for conservation, recreation, transportation and education throughout Albemarle County, and linked to trails in the City of Charlottesville.

## Introduction

This section of the Comprehensive Plan is intended to serve as a guide for the establishment of a countywide network of greenways. Recommended in this section is the construction of an approximately 52-linear-mile greenway network along streams and rivers, along with proposed actions to implement and maintain this system. The purpose of the system is to link people to the area's natural, recreational, cultural and commercial resources. The provision of greenways is recommended in the Land Use Plan Section of this Comprehensive Plan, the Open Space and Critical Resources Plan and the completed Neighborhood Plans (Neighborhood Three [Pantops] Plan and the Crozet Community Study).

It is recognized that this is an ambitious plan and that development will be a very long term project (beyond 50 years). It is also recognized that full development of this plan may never be realized due to financial constraints, topography, or a property owner's unwillingness to locate a trail on his or her property. The trail locations proposed in this section are conceptual in nature. Ultimate location of a trail may not be along a river or stream corridor due to steep slopes, soil type, sensitive resources, environmental resources or other community concerns. Also, there may be areas identified in this section for a greenway trail, that for various reasons do not lend themselves for trail construction.

It is expected that certain trail segments within the total greenway network will be established as high priority projects and resources will be initially target for the construction of these trail segments. It is expected that large portions of the greenway system will be built on an opportunistic basis by various civic groups and/or members of the development community. Prior to construction of any trail segment, a detail plan with the specific trail location and type will be formulated to allow community input and comments.

The construction of a greenway system is a huge undertaking that involves many different groups and individuals, therefore, it is important to generate broad community support for the plan, prioritize areas for development, and utilize creative and innovative methods of funding and developing the greenways. The complete Greenways Plan is attached as Appendix A to this Comprehensive Plan.

## What are Greenways?

Greenways are areas of open space, usually linear in nature. They are often located along streams/rivers, utility easements, abandoned railroads and along roadways. The proposed Albemarle County greenway system is located primarily along streams and rivers; however, there are some sections proposed to be located away from water-courses.

The Albemarle County greenway system has four major functions:

1. Protect important and/or sensitive resources - Greenways corridors can function to preserve and maintain streamside forests and buffer areas, which are highly productive and diverse systems which provide many important benefits. The quality of water can be maintained or improved by forested buffer strips along streams and rivers. The trees and shrubs filter and trap sediments and absorb pollutants from overland runoff and from the shallow ground water zone. The major pollutants include herbicides and the nutrients nitrogen and phosphorus. Although these nutrients are essential for the growth and development of all plants, an overabundance of either one may upset the delicate balance of the plant-nutrient-water relationship and actually become toxic to plants and animals.

The streamside forest and buffer areas are not only vital to improving water quality, but they generally house a great variety of plants and habitats, which is the main reason why they produce a great diversity of wildlife. Trees and shrubs are important for nesting birds and other animals and produce an abundance of food for wildlife. Contiguous forest areas also provide protective pathways for safe movement or migration of animals.

Streamside forest and buffer areas make streams and rivers suitable for many kinds of fish and other aquatic creatures. Tree roots help stabilize the stream bank and provide cover for fish, crayfish and aquatic insects. Plant materials that fall into the stream/river are a vital food source for many organisms. Bacteria, fungi, aquatic insect larvae, crayfish and other invertebrates break down this plant material into small particles. This very fine plant material known as detritus, is used as food by many small aquatic animals such as minnows and insect larvae, which are major food source for the larger game fish.

Greenways also serve as overflow areas to absorb storm runoff and prevent flood damage; recharge aquifers; and maintain settings for natural and historic features, particularly historic and prehistoric archeological sites.

2. Provide recreational and educational opportunities - Greenways provide recreational opportunities such as hiking, bicycling, fishing, picnicking and canoeing. Also, greenways can function as “living classrooms” for nature studies of life histories and behavior of plants, animals and fish. These areas also have a great variety of birds making them favorite sites for bird watchers. Greenways increase the public’s awareness of the environment.

3. Provide an alternative transportation system - Greenways can function to provide pedestrian and in some cases bicycle connections to natural, recreational, commercial and cultural resources. Portions of the planned greenway system in the County will be located near a large segment of the County's population, allowing citizens to travel by foot and bicycle instead of by the automobile to parks, activity centers and commercial areas. Greenways will provide important connections between County neighborhoods and provide an excellent opportunity to promote public access to rivers and streams and improve the overall environment of the neighborhood. Greenways can help build Albemarle County's sustainable future by connecting people and land in a manner that helps re-establish the close connections between the environment, economy and society.
4. Provide an economic benefit - Greenways can promote the areas economy while maintaining environmental assets directly in terms of eco-tourism, and indirectly, in terms of increased property values. Commercial properties, especially restaurants, can consider greenway/river oriented development. Design could encourage trail users to come-up to the shopping/commercial area and encourage shoppers to visit the river.

## **General Principles**

1. Establish a greenway system in Albemarle County that provides:
  - Protection of river corridor vegetation, water quality and the viability of wildlife habitats;
  - Recreational opportunities such as hiking, bicycling and fishing close to residential areas;
  - An alternative transportation link of the County's and City's communities, parks, activity centers, schools, and commercial and office areas, thus reducing traffic congestion; and
  - Educational opportunities such as nature hikes, species and plant identification, and interpretation of historic, architectural and natural resources.
2. Coordinate adjacent land development with consideration of the greenway, so that existing and future development will be integrated and harmonious with the greenway system. Integrate existing off-river/stream trails into the greenway system. Encourage public involvement in the planning and development of the greenway system.
3. Provide a cost-efficient trail system while meeting the principles outlined. Provide long-term-funding, maintenance, and administration for the implementation of the greenway system through a public-private partnership.

4. Develop community pride in the greenway system by increasing people's awareness and appreciation of the greenway system through promotions and special events.

## **Existing Greenway Facilities**

Currently, the only section of greenway in the County is a 2,700-foot section that is located between Elks Drive and the Rivanna River, from Route 250 East north to Darden Towe Park. Currently, minimal improvements have been made to this section of greenway. However, the County has received an ISTEAs grant to provide major improvements to this section. Connecting to this County segment, there is a 1.32-mile greenway with a 10-foot pedestrian/bicycle crushed-stone trail located in the City south of Route 250 East along the Rivanna River.

Dedication, or reservation for future dedication, of land for the construction of a future greenway trail, has been made at the following locations: 1) Riverrun; 2) Glenmore; 3) Rivanna Reservoir at the end of Woodburn Road; 4) Rivanna Reservoir north and east of Hydraulic Road; 5) Moore's Creek at Avon Street; and 6) Biscuit Run adjacent to Foxcroft.

## **Greenway Advisory Committee**

A Greenway Advisory Committee should work with the Albemarle County Planning and Community Development Department and Parks and Recreation Department, and in cooperation with the City of Charlottesville and Rivanna Trails Foundation, to oversee and coordinate greenway implementation and maintenance. Implementing and maintaining a greenway system will require a public/private partnership that will involve many different groups and agencies. An oversight entity such as this advisory committee is desired to facilitate communications among the agencies, organizations and citizens groups involved to ensure that actions are coordinated. Therefore, it is recommended that a new organization tentatively called the Greenway Advisory Committee be created. Committee membership should consist of representatives from the development community, landowners, environmental community, civic groups, historic preservation community, naturalists and business community. Also, at least one person with a biological background in such areas as botany, ornithology, mammals, etc. should be on the committee. The proposed responsibilities of this Committee may include:

- Prioritize the various greenway projects.
- Determine methods to promote and fund the greenway system.
- Review trail plans to ensure that they are designed in a manner that adheres to agreed-upon locations and standards.
- Serve as advisory to the development process as necessary, and suggest methods in which a site can connect or be integrated into the greenway system.
- Coordinate efforts of County Government agencies, private organizations, land owners and developers on matters involving the greenway system.
- Propose recommendations to the County such as amendments to current zoning and subdivision regulations to facilitate implementation.
- Refer landowners to appropriate land trusts; be pro-active in acquiring right-of-way/donation of land for greenways

- Work with the community and allow for citizen’s input on trail related issues.
- Arrange and coordinate operation and maintenance of the greenway system with volunteers and cooperating organizations.

**Strategy:** Establish a Greenway Advisory Committee to assist the County in designing, implementing, promoting, and maintaining a greenway system.

**Strategy:** Develop guidelines to identify appropriate greenway trail types and locations, design features for the various greenways, trail access points and trail facilities.

**Strategy:** Explore biking, jogging and pedestrian alternatives for railroad rights-of-way if any line is abandoned. Of particular interest are the sections from the Urban Area to Crozet and the Blue Ridge Mountains, and from the Urban Area to Shadwell along the Rivanna River.

**Strategy:** Explore a pedestrian trail system along existing public roads and trails in Mountain areas.

**Strategy:** Map existing road traces and trails.

## **Greenway System Network**

The following areas below have been identified by the County as the general location for the greenway network along river and streams. These areas should be viewed as providing the main components of an overall greenway system. The maps in Appendix A: Greenways Plan, showing the location and type of trails, are intended to be conceptual in nature and do not address details. Instead, these maps are intended to provide a framework for the implementation of the greenway system, and are not intended to preclude future opportunities for greenways not shown here. It is assumed that exact locations of trails will be determined in cooperation with communities and property owners of the area.

### **Urban Area (Neighborhoods 1-7 ) and Rivanna Village**

- Rivanna River and South Fork Rivanna River from the Ivy Creek Natural Area to Rivanna Village/Milton Airport.
- Moore's Creek and tributary from the Rivanna River to Ragged Mountain Reservoir.
- Biscuit Run from Moore's Creek to the southern portion of the Neighborhood 4 & 5 boundary.

- Meadow Creek from the Rivanna River to Brookmill Subdivision (Portions of this trail are in the City).

## **Hollymead/Piney Mountain**

- Powell Creek and tributary stream from the South Fork Rivanna River to the Forest Lakes/Jefferson Village area.
- Jacob's Run and the North Fork Rivanna River from Chris Greene Lake to the eastern boundary of the Hollymead Development Area.

## **Crozet**

- Powell's Creek from Jarman's Gap Road/Orchard Acres to Crozet Avenue.
- Lickinghole Creek from the Lickinghole Creek sedimentation basin to Brookwood subdivision.
- Slabtown Branch from Crozet Avenue to the Brownsville/Henley School complex.
- Parrott Branch from the Crozet Elementary School to the Beaver Creek Reservoir.

## **Rural Area**

- Rivanna River from the eastern portion of the Rivanna Village to Fluvanna County.
- James River from Fluvanna County to Nelson County.
- Unnamed tributary of Moore's Creek from the Ragged Mountain Reservoir to Reservoir Road.

**Strategy:** Utilize the Comprehensive Plan greenway maps (in the Appendix) as a conceptual plan for implementing the greenway system.

## **Greenway Trail Implementation**

The process of turning a plan for the greenway system into a reality is a complex but exciting challenge that will require a cooperative effort involving many different people and organizations. While the total land area of the proposed greenway is relatively small, its benefits will be widely felt. It is unlikely that a single entity such as the Albemarle County Government can or will have the means to acquire or manage the extensive system proposed in this section. Therefore, it is recommended that the network of greenways be owned and managed through a partnership effort. The system should be established piece by piece, by a number of entities using various methods. The Greenway Advisory Committee will coordinate the activities of the partners in implementing the greenway system. Possible partners include the Rivanna Trails Foundation, developers, landowners, citizen groups, non-profit organizations, State agencies, and other localities including the City of Charlottesville.

### **Recommendation:**

- Work with private and government agencies at the local, state, regional and national levels to implement a greenway system in Albemarle County.

The following proposed actions should be considered by the County to implement the Greenway Plan:

## **Prioritize Greenway Segments**

The Greenways Advisory Committee should initially select two greenway segments of one to three miles long as high priority for trail construction within a 5-10 year time frame. This action is proposed in order to bring recognition to the greenway section of the Comprehensive Plan and to launch the greenway implementation process. The two greenway trail segments selected should be easily accessible and relatively easy to implement. Securing the necessary funds for the greenway construction and maintenance should become a cooperative effort between the County, the Greenway Advisory Committee and the greenway partners. Other trail segments identified should be built during this initial phase of implementation on an opportunistic basis.

### **Recommendation:**

- The Greenways Advisory Committee should propose two pilot greenways. The greenway segments selected should be easily accessible and relatively easy to implement.

## **Incorporate Greenway Plan into the Development Process**

During the development process, the County Planning Department will identify areas proposed for trail locations. The areas identified will be the highest priority in open space dedication, and the County will seek, through dedication, donation or open space easement, the preservation of these corridors and the possible development of trails as identified in this section. Also, new and existing residential and nonresidential developments should consider providing internal trails that link their development to the greenway.

Developers may increase the marketability of their developments and provide amenities by contributing to the greenway system. Protected scenic views, open space and trails near or adjacent to residential or nonresidential developments are valuable amenities and economic studies indicate that such amenities increase the value of the site.

### **Recommendation:**

- Encourage developers to contribute to the greenway network by dedicating land, donating easements or funds, or constructing a portion of the greenway trail.

## **Individual Landowners**

Public greenway trails may have an impact on a landowner's privacy. Some people fear that a greenway trail may bring litter, vandalism, and other crimes, believing that security measures may be needed to protect them against these problems. On the other hand, many people who live along greenways elsewhere speak enthusiastically about the benefits of their trail: they enjoy the nearby

recreation, protection of trees and open space, and resulting increase in property values. Crime has not been a major problem on trails in other parts of the country. When a trail receives regular use, the presence of people discourages crimes.

### **Recommendations:**

- Encourage individual landowners whose land, or parts thereof, could be part of the greenway network to donate land or easements.
- Support the establishment of methods to address safety and maintenance concerns of adjacent property owners.

## **Methods of Obtaining Land**

In most cases, outright purchase of land by the County or a private organization may be the best way to establish a greenway; however, there are other methods of obtaining land needed for the greenway system such private donations and voluntary conservation or public access easements. It is not the County's intent to utilize the right of eminent domain to acquire land for the greenway system.

## **Sources of Greenway Funding**

The County should explore sources of financing available from organizations who support and encourage greenway development in Virginia.

### **Recommendations:**

- Utilize the Greenway Advisory Committee to solicit private donations of land for the greenway system.
- Continue annual funding in the County's Capital Improvement Program to be used for land acquisition and development of the greenway system.
- Attempt to obtain private, federal and State funds for construction of the greenway system.
- Attempt to initiate a fundraising campaign for implementation of the greenway system.

## **Maintenance**

Maintenance is one need of the greenway trail that is often overlooked. Administrative overhead can be reduced if portions of the greenway can be maintained by private organizations involved with the greenway system. The trail must be maintained on a regular basis. The issues that are most likely to cause concerns for adjacent residents are maintenance related such as trash, overgrown weeds, fallen limbs or trees, and insufficient or poorly maintained screening that buffers the homes from the trail. Once a trail is established a regular maintenance schedule should be put in place. In addition, funds should be reserved for major maintenance problems that may arise from storm and/or flood damage.

Neighborhood groups, church groups, and civic groups such as scout troops, garden clubs and Rotary Clubs may wish to participate in an “Adopt-a-Greenway” program to maintain a section of the greenway network. As mentioned earlier, it is proposed that the Greenway Advisory Committee would publicize and build citizens support for greenways, and to coordinate citizen volunteer programs to assist with maintenance.

**Recommendations:**

- The County’s Parks and Recreation Department will be primarily responsible for maintaining the greenway system.
- Utilize the proposed Greenway Advisory Committee as an outreach group to build community support and coordinate volunteer programs to maintain segments of the greenway system.

**Public Awareness**

Local awareness and interest in the development of a greenway system is critical for success. Promotion and marketing are key ingredients of a successful greenway system. Often when a trail project is promoted people assume that it will be completed in a short period of time. It is imperative that people are aware the greenway system is a long-term project. It is also essential to maintain contact with local interest groups and keep them apprised of the project’s status in order to cultivate support. Encouraging citizen participation in the development of the Greenway Plans will give the community a “stake” in the success of the greenway system. Increase community awareness of the existing greenway system and future planned segments by providing brochure which include maps, length of trails, photographs, directions, park logos, etc. Have regular events on the trail such as nature walks, bird watching, trail/river clean-up days, photo competitions, walk-a-thon, etc.

**Recommendations:**

- Encourage public involvement in the planning and development of the greenway system.
- Inform and educate the public about opportunities generated by the greenway system.
- Utilize the Greenway Advisory Committee to promote the greenway system.





