



## **SECTION 6 GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

As identified in the inventory portion of this plan (Section IV: Existing Park Facilities), there are two separate, existing recreational facilities owned and operated by Catawba County, Riverbend Park, and Bakers Mountain Park - with St. Stephens Community Park to be renovated and County-operated in the near future. Each of these parks is unique and offers many opportunities for park users. The County has foreseen the need for a plan to guide the direction of the Parks System for the future. This Comprehensive Parks Master Plan serves as a map for the future of recreation facilities for the Catawba County Parks Division, incorporating recommendations to accomplish the objectives set forth in the Master Plan. These recommendations are divided into the following categories:

- Roles of the Catawba County Providers
- Roles of other Recreation Providers
- Park Proposals and Recommendations
- Facility Proposals and Recommendations
- Priorities for Development

### **6.2 ROLES OF CATAWBA COUNTY PROVIDERS**

Catawba County offers a wide variety of passive and special-facility recreation. It is the mission of Catawba County Parks to preserve Catawba County's unique and diverse natural heritage through education and conservation while providing quality passive recreation opportunities.

Meeting the recreational needs of all users requires a joint effort between various agencies and the private sector. No one group can, from a practical standpoint, provide all the proposed improvements/facilities for the future. As mentioned in Section V, Recreation Needs Assessment, the local municipalities and private sector provide a wealth of active recreation such as athletic programming, and facilities within the County. Therefore, Catawba County Parks should continue to focus on providing passive recreation through education and conservation opportunities.

Catawba County Parks Division should continue to maintain existing relationships with the Catawba County Historical Association, Catawba Valley Heritage Alliance, area educational institutions and other public/private sectors; as well as create new partnerships - in order to achieve its objectives for the future. Communication with these organizations is extremely important and will improve planning activities while avoiding duplication. The local municipalities,



school institutions, and the County may share many of these programs and/or facilities. In addition to partnering with other agencies, Catawba County should continue to search for additional organizations that have common interests in recreational programs and facilities.

The Parks Division should also continue to develop pedestrian corridors to connect existing park facilities, public schools, and other destination points where feasible. In addition to being important to the success of the County's Parks program, these corridors foster safety and preservation of the environment while improving the quality of life for all participants.



As mentioned in the recommendations, the Planning and Recreation Departments of the Catawba County and its municipalities should meet periodically to update their existing and planned projects.

## 6.3 ROLES OF OTHER RECREATION PROVIDERS

### Municipalities

Municipalities have a strong investment in active recreation and athletic programming while Catawba County Parks Division is the primary provider of passive recreation and educational programming for this area. Catawba County Parks Division and the municipalities have been coordinating with each other and developing partnerships; and they should continue to work together to provide recreational opportunities. Each agency can, and should, play a role in the all-inclusive arrangement of services that make up the park system. The key to an ongoing relationship between the municipalities and Catawba County is to maintain honest communication among both staff and elected officials – thus assuring that the common goals are achieved.

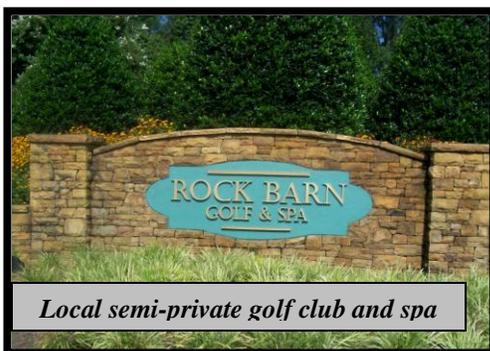
### School System and Educational Institutions

The School Systems within Catawba County already provide recreation facilities within the County. However, there are no joint-use agreements established with the County Parks Division or other active recreation providers. Due to the uniqueness of what the County Parks Division provides, utilizing recreation facilities and amenities is not a necessity for the Parks Division. However, the school system has recognized the educational opportunities County Parks offer



to the system. School field trips to the County parks have been very beneficial by providing enrichment classes offering environmental education through a hands-on learning experience. The partnership between the school systems and County Parks Division should continue to develop through diverse education opportunities. Increasing the operational hours will help accommodate school field trip schedules. This will result in the least possible expenditure(s) of public funds by providing hands-on educational opportunities within the County as opposed to having to commute outside the County. Lenoir Rhyne College and Catawba Valley Community College are currently partnering with Catawba County Parks to provide advanced environmental interpretative education. More detail is provided below.

### **Private Sector**



The private sector provides recreational amenities and programs such as golf courses, tennis clubs, and outdoor adventure companies. The Parks Division should develop partnerships and be active in generating more opportunities to share recreational activities. Potential partnership opportunities could be developed in the future with local medical and health providers, and other private organizations.

### **Private Residential Developers**

The private sector is an important component for the Parks Division in providing resources and opportunities for the parks. Developers can assist Catawba County by the dedication, construction, and/or reservation of future park sites, open space and/or greenway corridors during the overall development process. The recently adopted Unified Development Ordinance provides a mechanism for Developers to fund land for parks, sidewalks, trails, greenways, recreational, and open space purposes. All major residential conventional subdivisions must either provide on-site open space for use of the property owners within the development or pay a fee in-lieu of land for on-site open space. By establishing





this regulation, the County can apply subject monies from the fee in-lieu for the dedication or reservation of future park sites and/or open space, which contributes more to a community rather than a development.

The Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) should be amended to include a public parkland dedication requirement in order to produce potential park sites that meet the goals and objectives of the Parks Division while granting credit for open space dedications. For example, a development adjoining a future greenway would dedicate a public easement for a greenway corridor as the private property is developed. The general locations of park facilities proposed by this master plan provide adequate guidance for the County to determine where the public dedications would be considered.



Currently, the Catawba County Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) requires any subdivision of 25 lots or more - which are ½ acre or less in size - to construct sidewalks on one side of the street. Also conventional subdivisions providing onsite open space must install trails in preserved areas of a subdivision development.

Although the County should be flexible with development opportunities, it must require the developer to provide right-of-ways or easements for pedestrian facilities. All development approved by the County should include the accommodation of pedestrians by the developer(s). The Catawba County Comprehensive Parks Master Plan delineates future greenway corridors along significant tributaries in the County. As development occurs along these future greenway corridors, it is recommended that the County require the Developer/Property Owner to dedicate a public easement for the greenway facility along the subject property.

## **Partnership Opportunities**

A good partnership results in greater productivity, better services and reaches a much larger audience than would benefit without the partnership. Partnerships also foster efficiency while reducing redundancy in services. The result is more quality services available and reduced costs. Catawba County Parks has a tremendous opportunity to engage in mutually beneficial partnerships with a vast number of civic and public organizations in the area that share a similar mission.



Groups such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts continue to assist the County parks in developing new amenities and improvements at the parks as well as allowing these organizations opportunities for youth programming. The Parks Division should continue to develop these partnerships and actively generate more opportunities to share recreational activities. Potential partnership opportunities could be developed in the future with local nonprofits, and other private organizations such as outdoor clubs, garden clubs and environmental preservation groups such as the Catawba Valley Heritage Alliance, Foothills Land Conservancy, Catawba Valley Paddle Trails Association, and others.

The following is a list of prospective and existing partners along with a brief description of Catawba County's current relationship and future opportunities for partnership growth.

## Catawba County Schools

### Currently:

The Catawba County Parks Division offers environmental and interpretive educational programs by appointment. This allows the Parks Division to create presentations that are directly related to each individual's course of study. Several staff members also volunteer their time to visit schools as guest speakers. School systems in the County also use County parks for Cross Country training.

### Future Opportunities:

Once adequate staffing has been achieved, staff will be able to conduct more environmental and interpretive educational programs at the schools and parks. Staff could also be trained to provide onsite educational historical interpretation the County assists in the operation of Murray's Mill and Bunker Hill Covered Bridge. Focus on educating



students about the natural and historic heritage of Catawba County should be a priority and geared toward the general course of study. Cross-country events could be hosted by the parks. Future school sites should be planned in order to maximize opportunities for both passive and active recreation activities in partnership with non-profit organizations such as the Optimists and YMCA.



## YMCA of Catawba Valley



**Currently:** The branches of the YMCA of Catawba Valley (YMCA) use park facilities for summer camp programs.

**Future Opportunities:** The YMCA and Catawba County parks should engage in joint marketing since each share a common theme of providing supervised family oriented recreation opportunities. Catawba

County Parks offers passive recreation opportunities that the YMCA does not provide, while the YMCA offers active recreation which the County does not provide. The YMCA and County Parks Divisions can work together to make patrons aware of the opportunities offered by each organization.

## Duke Energy, Crescent Resources and Other Developers

**Currently:** Catawba County recently participated in the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) relicensing process for Duke Energy, where Duke Energy agreed to develop several sites for recreational use on the lakes. In addition, Duke Energy currently owns several boat access points on the Catawba River.

**Future Opportunities:** At such time that the license is renewed and any offers are submitted by Duke Energy, the County will study the feasibility of a partnership in operating a passive, environmentally friendly park(s). The County will contact Duke Energy to coordinate any amenities associated with its FERC relicensing, with recommendations associated with the plan. This could include the gameland properties or connectivity facilities.

The County will participate with Crescent Resources and other developers on any future initiative(s) and secure easements on the Catawba River as part of the Carolina Thread Trail (a regional greenway network), which involves the free-flowing segment of the Catawba River below Lookout Shoals Dam to the east of the Town of Catawba.



## Optimist/Recreation Organizations

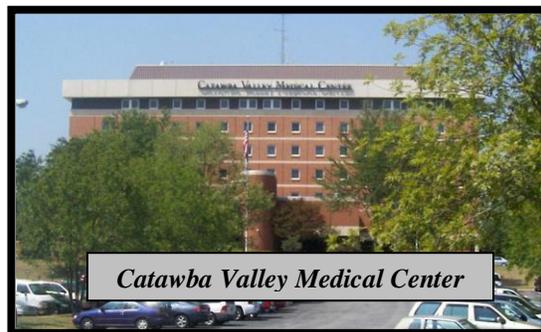
**Currently:** There is no current partnership.

**Future Opportunities:** When future park sites are identified or land has been donated to the County it should be surveyed first for the natural heritage, preservation, and passive park aspects of the site. If a site is deemed impracticable for preservation and/or use as a County park, possible active recreation use by the Optimists or other active recreation providers should be explored. When there is a need and the site can support the activities, partnership opportunities should be explored.

## Healthcare – Catawba Valley Medical Center, Frye Regional

**Currently:** There is no current partnership.

**Future Opportunities:** Efforts should be made to make healthcare providers aware of the recreational opportunities provided by Catawba County Parks. Certain patients may benefit from the therapeutic and physical attributes provided by natural settings.



## Lenoir- Rhyne College and Reese Institute

**Currently:** Lenoir-Rhyne’s Biology and Science Department have both used Riverbend Park and Bakers Mountain Park for educational purposes. Classes, labs, internships and research projects have been conducted at Catawba County Parks.

**Future Opportunities:** Due to the natural heritage and environmental significance of Catawba County Parks, these sites should be fully utilized as outdoor laboratories and classrooms that are conveniently located and available for educational enrichment of the students. Efforts should be made to partner with Lenoir-Rhyne and the Reese Institute to determine how to create the most accessible and beneficial partnership. Park/Planning and college staff should meet and prepare a proposed plan of action.



## Catawba Valley Community College (CVCC)

**Currently:** CVCC's Biology Department conducts classes and labs at Catawba County Parks. They also engage in civic and environmental projects such as the statewide Litter Sweep. Over 60 students participated in the last Litter Sweep at Riverbend Park and Oxford Dam.



**Future Opportunities:** Efforts should be made to partner with CVCC to determine how to create the most accessible and beneficial partnership. Park/Planning and college staff should meet and prepare a proposed plan of action.

## Catawba County Science Center

**Currently:** There is no current partnership.

**Future Opportunities:** The Science Center is located in Hickory's SALT (Sciences, Art, Literature - Together) Block in the Arts & Science Center of Catawba Valley and offers exhibits and educational opportunities that relate to nature and the environment. Efforts should be made to partner with Catawba County Science Center to determine how to create the most accessible and beneficial partnership. Park and Science Center staff should meet and prepare a proposed plan of action.



## Local Municipalities

**Currently:** Catawba County and the municipalities within the County participated in the Unifour Recreation and Open Space Task Force as facilitated by the Western Piedmont Council of Governments and created the Greater Hickory Recreation/Tourism Plan.



**Future Opportunities:** The planning and recreation departments of the municipalities within the County should meet periodically to discuss development and recreation projects that are planned or underway within the County. In addition, the County will work with other local municipalities to develop detailed plans which connect the recreational opportunities shown in the Greater Hickory Recreation/Tourism Plan. Thirdly, the purpose of these meetings will be to discuss upcoming project opportunities and development, trends in demographics and growth, newly identified citizen needs in recreation and open space and recreation master plan updates. This will help insure that redundancy in services is prevented and that all opportunities for partnerships and connectivity are being utilized.



## North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT)

**Currently:** Catawba County has a NCDOT grant for the improvement of the Bunker Hill Covered Bridge Site.

**Future Opportunities:** A partnership should be created with NCDOT for additional development of the Interstate 40 rest areas. Aspects of this partnership will include the development of informational kiosks that highlight the high quality of life in Catawba County. Information would include recreation opportunities, history, and tourism elements. Potentially the Interstate 40 rest areas would be incorporated into a proposed greenway that links to the Bunker Hill Covered Bridge Historical Site. There would be enormous potential for marketing and economic benefits from promoting Catawba County at the rest areas since over 700,000 visitors stop at these sites annually. The County should communicate with NCDOT to coordinate SAP bicycle lane requests to be included in the budgeting process – prior to road resurfacing.

## Catawba Valley Visitors Bureau

**Currently:** Catawba County Parks has worked with the Visitors Bureau by providing them with photographs of natural heritage and historical site subjects. Brochures about the parks have been distributed to them as well.

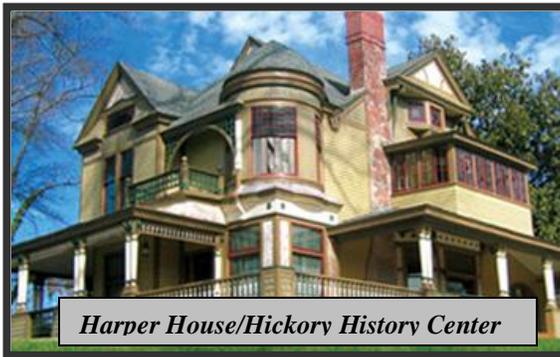


**Future Opportunities:** Work with the Visitors Bureau's staff to develop a marketing strategy that highlights recreation opportunities and quality of life attributes that relate to the natural heritage of Catawba County. Partnering with the Visitors Bureau will be essential in developing a diverse presence at the Interstate 40 rest areas.

## Catawba County Historical Association

**Currently:** Catawba County Parks is partnering with the Catawba County Historical Association on grant opportunities and the ensuing site improvements. Staff is also engaged with the Historical Association to explore further partnering opportunities.

**Future Opportunities:** Bunker Hill Covered Bridge and Murrays Mill historical sites offer natural opportunities for passive recreation. Since both sites contain significant natural heritage areas, and education and preservation are key components of the missions of the Catawba County Historical Association and Catawba County Parks Division, partnering is natural. Both of these sites are



*Harper House/Hickory History Center*

located in areas that have very limited recreation opportunities. By adding passive recreation components and staffing to these sites, the public will have access to a far greater venue. Security, education, and preservation efforts both naturally and historically can be facilitated by a strong partnership.

## Civic Non-Profits

**Currently:** Catawba County Parks works with Civic Non-Profits in a variety of ways that include providing educational and volunteerism opportunities.

**Future Opportunities:** Efforts should be made to meet with the following Civic Non-Profits and others to discuss how these groups may be better served and explore potential partnerships.



- Boy Scouts of America and Girl Scouts of America
- Hickory Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Chamber of Commerce Visitor's Center
- Foothills Bird Club
- Catawba Valley Heritage Alliance
- Catawba Valley Outing Club
- NC Garden Club, Local Affiliates
- Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina
- Catawba Valley Paddle Trails Association
- NC Birding Trail, Inc.
- Unifour Recreation and Open Space Task Force
- Catawba Land Conservancy

## 6.4 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

### Bicycle and Pedestrian-Based Tourism

Studies have shown that economies are impacted *very positively* where bicycle and pedestrian tourism is fostered and promoted and where investments are made in bicycle and pedestrian facilities. (See Section 1.3 for a more detailed listing of the economic impacts.) The number of people who feel comfortable walking or riding bicycles is a measure of the quality of life in that area.

### Trails and Greenways

Trails and greenways are extremely popular amenities for vacationing bicyclists and pedestrians. Tourists and visitors to the area often return to communities that provide places (which are safely removed from busy roads) for walking and bicycling. Trails offer scenic recreation, which is suitable for a wide range of ages and abilities. Many times, lodging is in close proximity to popular trails, thereby increasing occupancy for the owner. For residents in these locales, investments in trails and greenways can increase property values and improve the overall livability of a community, as well as attracting, retaining, and expanding tourism and the associated revenues.



Investing dollars in greenways yields substantial community-wide returns. These returns are in the form of increased property values, attraction of new businesses, recreation revenue and reduced water treatment and flooding costs. Not only are tourists attracted to these areas, but business leaders are selecting sites for the relocation and expansion of industries and corporations where the



quality of life is high and recreation opportunities are abundant. Increasingly, corporations are recognizing the benefits of convenient fitness and recreation for their employees and are seeking these greenway amenities for potential locations.

Greenways, as vegetated buffers located adjacent to waterways, act as “filters” to clean the water, trapping nonpoint source pollutants. These pollutants, which include sediment, pesticides, fertilizers, oil, gas, and other chemicals, are transported into streams, rivers, and/or lakes by stormwater when rain or snow events occur. Greenways can reduce the need for expensive pre-treatment of the water supply by cleaning it before it reaches municipal water sources.

## On-Road Bicycling



Bicycle tourism often occurs with little or no investment in facilities or the infrastructure which is normally required to sustain motor vehicle-based tourism. In areas where networks of lightly traveled back roads and accommodations are prevalent, on-road bicycle routes can provide both visitors and residents an ecologically sound alternative to vehicular travel for sightseeing and recreational travel. When bicycle tourists are attracted to such regions, they become potential customers for bed & breakfasts, restaurants and other service providers in the community.

## Trail Development

The ongoing construction of bicycle and pedestrian facilities is proving to be a very wise economic investment for the communities through which they pass. Trails and pathways have a positive effect on nearby property values with homebuyers and business owners realizing the effect that such facilities bring to a community. According to research by the *Rails to Trails Conservancy*, there are vast amounts of people, who are using ‘rail’ trails. It is easy to understand how communities can profit economically by meeting the needs of trail users – restaurants, convenience stores, bicycle and other merchandise shops, campgrounds, and alternate lodging. All of these types of entrepreneurs attribute the location of a nearby trail to at least a portion of their success. Realtors and homebuyers alike are recognizing the benefits of properties located near trails. Both locally and nationally, the construction of trails have proven to be a cost effective use of public funds. In particular, multi-use trails allow more visitors and residents to replace automobile trips with non-motorized trips, thereby moving the citizenry closer to achieving public health objectives, including increased opportunities for physical exercise.



## Parks

Research has substantiated the direct proportion between economic growth and the existence of parks and open space in communities and municipalities around the country. This growth includes increased property values in residential, urban and industrial communities, and increased revenue from tourists.

### **Increased Property Value**

The real estate market consistently demonstrates that residents throughout the country are willing to invest larger amounts of money in properties that are located close to parks and open space areas than they would for homes that do not offer these types of amenities. The higher values of these homes produce higher property taxes in the affected area. In some instances, additional property taxes are sufficient to recoup the annual debt charges on bonds, which were originally used to finance park acquisition and development.



Studies have also concluded that the positive relationship between park proximity and property value also holds true in low-income urban areas. In dense, urban neighborhoods, the value effect of nearby green space can be stronger than the resident's lot value, increasing the lot value and yielding higher property taxes that could help to fund the cost of the park.

As farmland and forests are consumed at the edges of fast-growing municipalities, developers have come to realize that preserving open or natural space within new communities can increase the value of home lots. Thus developers advocate designing around and preserving natural and rustic features such as meadows, orchards, fields, pastures, stream valley habitat and woodlands.

The values of commercial properties also increase when parks or outdoor facilities (outdoor festivals, movies, restaurants, etc.) are in the immediate locale. Studies indicate that "commercial asking rents" near park property exceed rents in surrounding submarkets.



### **Revitalization of Businesses and Residents**

In recent years, there has been a trend to revitalize inner-city and urban areas to improve their quality of life. The success of this revitalization has included the addition of parks and recreational activity in downtown areas. Generally speaking, people do not want to live or work in an environment where they have no refuge from downtown city buildings, without having any place to go out for a stroll, walk the dog, or just enjoy some sunshine. In studies of downtown revitalizations, the top recommendations include “the dramatic expansion of parks and open spaces”.



### **Tourism**

A park often becomes the signature attraction for a community or municipality. It is often used as a marketing tool to attract residents, tourists, conventions, and businesses. Parks often shape the identity of the area and give residents a sense of pride. For example, Virginia’s Creeper Trail – a 34-mile rail trail – was named for the train that climbed Iron Mountain, with a native plant (bearing the same name) growing alongside the route; likewise, the Outer Banks of North Carolina lures cyclists from all areas, due to its reputation for expansive bicycle trails as well as wide, paved shoulders along its roads.

Organized events held in public parks – arts festivals, athletic events, food festivals, concerts, plays, etc. – often bring substantial positive economic impacts to their communities by filling hotel rooms and restaurants, and bringing customers to other local business enterprises.

## **6.5 PARK PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

As previously stated, Catawba County Parks Division should focus on developing and operating regional parks, linear parks and special facilities as needed. *Section V - Recreation Needs Assessment*, indicates recommendations for providing parks which offer passive recreational opportunities for County residents. The two major County Park facilities have continued to be enhanced over the years by adding facilities and amenities in recent years. There are still facilities in the park system that need enhancements.



In addition, the Parks Division should focus on developing and operating the existing parks and special use facilities, along with pedestrian corridors. *Section IV - Existing Park Facilities* identified the additional acreage and park facilities needed in the County. The park proposals described below have been formulated to address the existing and future park needs for Catawba County through the year 2017.

## **General Recommendations**

### **Recommendation #1: Facility and Program Accessibility**

*Every park and recreation facility the Catawba County Parks Division operates should respect and provide the needs of the disabled through design and programming. All new facilities should be designed to meet current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. Currently the Parks Division is in compliance with these regulations at existing facilities; however, as new facilities are acquired or developed, priority should be given to the necessary upgrading of any existing facilities that are non-compliant.*

### **Recommendation #2: Design and Daily Maintenance**

*The facilities owned and operated by the Catawba County Parks Division should be inviting places for residents of the County and visitors to the area. Priority should be given to improving the design of facilities so that they are architecturally and functionally progressive and environmentally-friendly designed and operated utilizing green initiatives where practical. Daily maintenance practices should be continued to maintain the current level of cleanliness and longevity of all facilities. Master planning should always be completed for park improvements or new facilities prior to final budgeting and design, making the phasing/development more transitional and of higher quality.*

### **Recommendation #3: Greenways**

*Based on state and national studies, walking and biking are highly desired activities. The community surveys also indicated the local demand for these facilities, with a majority of the respondents favoring the development of greenways. Although this Comprehensive Parks Master Plan includes specific recommendations regarding portions of a greenway system, a comprehensive greenways master plan needs to be developed for Catawba County in conjunction with local municipalities that identifies a phased approach for the development of a connected greenway system across the County. For the*



*purposes of this study, existing and recommended greenway routes developed by the municipalities were used as connection points for the County greenway plan. The proposed greenway proposals are shown further on in Section VI – Goals and Recommendations.*

#### **Recommendation #4: Bike Lanes**

*Given the high cost of fuel for vehicular transportation, air quality concerns, and the need to increase the health and fitness of the population, a planned network of bike trails, bike lanes, and shared roadways should be developed to support alternative transportation to recreation facilities and travel within Catawba County. Future roadway construction within the County should include provisions to accommodate pedestrian and bicycle travel as delineated on the Catawba County Small Area Plans. This network should connect both existing, and future park facilities and greenways. In addition, bike racks (sheltered at schools and other potential high-use areas) should be installed at all publicly owned facilities across the County.*

#### **Recommendation #5: Greenway Corridor**

*Partnership with CWMTF, conservancies and other private entities to establish a greenway corridor with trail and stream buffer zone for Jacobs Fork, Henry Fork and Lyle Creek Streams.*

#### **Recommendation #6: Greenway Land Donation**

*Link the park system with greenways and tie them into the major floodplain/open space system where applicable through fee simple donation or conservation easements where possible.*

#### **Recommendation #7: Signage**

*Develop a uniform system of signage for parks and greenways.*

#### **Recommendation #8: Parks Advisory Committee**

*Encourage the formation of a Parks Advisory Committee comprised of representatives from each of the Small Areas of the County and County staff, which would meet periodically to discuss and advise regarding planning, plan*



updates, implementation, grants, user needs, and other issues involving the Catawba County Parks Division.

### **Recommendation #9: Endowment Fund**

*Consider creating an Endowment Fund through the North Carolina Community Foundation to allow for the County Parks Division to receive various donations that will be used for future park development, land acquisition and other park improvements.*

### **Recommendation #10: Intergovernmental Cooperation**

*Coordinate planning efforts with the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG), municipalities and school systems within Catawba County to provide greenway and park facilities. The planning and recreation departments of the municipalities within the county should meet periodically to discuss development and recreation projects that are planned or are underway within the County. The purpose of these meetings will be to discuss upcoming project opportunities and development, trends in demographics and growth, newly identified citizen needs in recreation and open space and recreation master plan updates of the municipalities and the County. This will also insure that redundancy in services is prevented and that all opportunities for partnerships and connectivity are being used. In addition, the County will work with other local municipalities to encourage economic development and create detailed greenway plans, which connect the recreational opportunities shown in the Greater Hickory Recreation/Tourism Plan, which was prepared by the Unifour (Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties and municipalities).*

### **Recommendation #11: Connectivity**

*Strongly encourage or require developers to provide connectivity between public facilities such as parks, schools and other pedestrian/bicycle facilities. Also work with non-profit groups, such as the Carolina Thread Trail initiative, to develop regional trail connectivity.*

### **Recommendation #12: Greenway Funding**

*Consider using the subdivision fee in-lieu and grants to fund greenway construction where the need for pedestrian connections cannot rely on the timing of private property development.*



### **Recommendation #13: Educational Programming**

*Develop a consistent environmental education program and interpretative facilities for the parks and along greenway corridors.*

### **Recommendation #14: Stewardship Programs**

*Develop stewardship programs and a community volunteer program for the Catawba County Parks Division.*

### **Recommendation #15: Interpretative Signage**

*Consider placing signage to identify historic and natural landmarks along greenway corridors to enliven the pedestrian experience.*

### **Recommendation #16: Walkable Communities**

*Promote land uses and site designs that make walking/bicycling convenient and enjoyable. Encourage the inclusion of public greenways or trails in private developments.*

### **Recommendation #17: Partnership Agreement**

*It is recommended that the County staff meet with existing and potential partners to determine needs and potential partnership opportunities. The County should begin this process by developing an approach to potential partners in order to establish an understanding of each entities needs and ultimately resulting in a partnership agreement. The process will require periodic progress meetings with each partner to facilitate the partnerships goals and objectives. This may entail presentations to the partner's board or committee.*

### **Recommendation #18: Recreation Easements**

*Encourage the coordination and planning for future utility easements with greenway facilities. The easements should be established to allow for the inclusion of recreation facilities.*



## **Recommendation #19: Green Building**

*It is recommended that the Parks Division implement green building components into existing and future park facilities. These efforts will strengthen the Catawba County Parks Division's mission of education and preservation of the environment of Catawba County. Green building techniques consist of building materials and construction practices that reduce environmental impacts, such as green house gases, water pollution, air pollution, and inefficient energy use.*

## **Recommendation #20: Land Dedication of Public Access**

*Consider having developers provide right-of-ways or easements for proposed and future greenway facilities or preservation of riparian buffers (land that is traversed or bounded by a natural watercourse).*

## **Recommendation #21: Operating Hours**

*Catawba County Parks should be operated on a schedule that includes at least 6 days a week of staffed operation with the current seasonal hours and holidays. This would be more in line with the State parks schedule and consistent with the State's guidelines for park systems funded through its grants. Currently, Catawba County Parks operates only 4 days a week. Based on research, the Catawba County Parks Division appears to be the only park system in the state that operates on such a limited schedule. By operating on a limited schedule, schools have difficulty utilizing the sites and programs, marketing the parks as a tourism destination cannot be achieved, and the public is being underserved in passive recreation opportunities. The 4 day a week operating schedule was adopted in fiscal year 2001/2002 in response to the State's budget crisis and a normal operating schedule has not been restored. Attendance has increased over 10% a year since 2002 and the percentage increases annually. The demand for additional open days is apparent based on the increased attendance and public input. Operation of the parks on a 6 day a week schedule will require additional staffing. Staffing is an essential aspect of being open for additional days. The public hearings prior to the opening of Riverbend and Bakers Mountain Parks emphasized the facilities being staffed as the top priority of the public, for reasons of security, public safety, and programming. Since the Catawba County Parks Division began operation in 1999, there has not been a single reported incidence of vice-related or violent crime.*



## **Recommendation #22: Update/Complete Beneficial Planning Documents.**

*To be aware of our resources, help with community planning and market our area, the County, in conjunction with the Historical Association, needs to update and/or complete the following documents:*

- *An Inventory of Significant Natural Areas of Catawba County, North Carolina, including the significant geological sites, and how all these sites relate in location to greenways and blueways; (A blueway is an established trail route on a waterway, used for canoeing or kayaking.);*
- *A survey of historical sites within the County; and*
- *A survey of cemeteries within the County.*

*The Parks Division could use these documents to determine the specific location of parks, trails and greenways. If a recreation facility is planned in close proximity, these documents will help to determine the feasibility of connectivity. A comprehensive listing of County sites would also help in the marketing of Catawba County as a destination (place) for visitors, aid in economic development through the adaptive reuse of historic buildings or increase the possibility of obtaining grants from educational sources.*

## **Recommendation #23: Recreation Marketing Plan and Brochure**

*Both the community survey and meetings indicated a general “lack of knowledge” by the residents of Catawba County as to the availability of facilities and programs across the County. The Hickory Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Chamber of Commerce Visitor’s Center should develop, in association with the County, a county-wide marketing plan and brochure that contains maps, tables, and descriptions of the available park facilities and programs in the County. Marketing partnerships should also be explored within the Unifour region (Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties, along with their municipalities). Funding should be appropriated for brochures, marketing and program costs.*

*A comprehensive PowerPoint presentation, advertising Catawba County recreation areas, should be created and presented to civic groups, such as, Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, Optimist Club, Garden Clubs, Pilot Club, etc., to increase park awareness. Educational and awareness presentations should be continued and increased in the school systems.*

## **Recommendation #24: Contiguous Property Acquisition**

*When property that is contiguous to existing and future parks becomes available, all reasonable efforts should be made to acquire the property. Large acreage*



*parcs such as Riverbend and Bakers Mountain are unique and beneficial because of the large acreage. Large acreage habitats are more beneficial to wildlife and preservation efforts. Contiguous property enlarges existing habitat and provides additional buffering from development. Large acreage parks offer recreation amenities that can only be achieved on sites of over 100 acres. Due to the rapid growth and development of the County over the past twenty years the need for preservation of large acreage sites is apparent. Any contiguous property next to Riverbend Park or Bakers Mountain Park that can be acquired should be the highest priority. Efforts need to be made immediately to seek first option on all contiguous properties. At the time these options are sought, other possibilities should be presented to the property owner as well; conservation easements and tax advantages may appeal to some owners who wish to retain their property. Some property owners may be receptive to conservation easements while retaining title to the property. A conservation easement will allow the County the opportunity to use the land for recreation while reaping the immediate benefits of preservation. Numerous grant sources can be used for land acquisition. Care should be taken to choose the correct process and timing for acquisition to meet the full potential of some grants.*

## **Recommendation #25: Acceptance of Fee Simple Land Donation**

*If land is offered to the County as donation by fee simple title with no restrictions, the property should be surveyed for natural heritage significance and relationship to existing plans and parks. If the land contains no environmental hazards, restrictive covenants or restrictive easements it can be useful and beneficial for the County to assume ownership. Not all donated land has to be developed into a park in order to be useful. Retired agricultural land and property that has no natural heritage significance does offer beneficial open space and environmental protection of watershed and viewshed. Some property may have the potential of generating revenue for future park expansion and development by the passive presence of forestry management and timber production. Any land donation to the County serves a great public need even if it is banked for the future, because the development and public needs of the distant future (over 50 years) is unknown. If donated property were properly managed, the revenue and future significance of the property would far exceed its current contribution to the tax base. If the County chooses not to accept land donation of a particular property, efforts should be made to assist the property owner with contacting an agency that accepts land donations or conservation easements. Land donations in which the County has no interest in owning could be donated to the proposed Catawba County Parks Endowment Fund through the NC Community Foundation.*



## **Recommendations for Existing Parks**

### **Recommendation #26: Bakers Mountain Park**

It is recommended that the County acquire land contiguous to Bakers Mountain Park whenever the opportunity arises. (See Appendix Map 5 - Bakers Mountain Park Map) for adjacent parcels that meet the requirements for the Parks Division.

### **Recommendation #27: Riverbend Park**

It is recommended that the County acquire land contiguous to Riverbend Park when the opportunity arises. In addition, the public input indicated a need for primitive camping as a desirable amenity. Currently there are no public primitive camping areas located in the County. It is recommended that the County add approximately 20 camp sites at Riverbend Park. (See Appendix Map 6 – Riverbend Park and Catawba River Greenway)

### **Recommendation #28: St. Stephens Community Park**

This existing 9.1 acre park facility has traditionally been operated by the City of Hickory as an active recreation facility. Due to the age of the facility and the resulting wear and tear, this County-owned park is scheduled to undergo renovations and improvements to convert it for use as a passive park. The improvements will include the “filling in” of the existing swimming pool, the conversion of the bath house into a park office with public restrooms and a meeting room and the renovation of the existing picnic shelter. New additions to the park will include a dog park approximately 2 acres in size, horseshoe pits, an ADA compliant walking trail of about ½ mile in length and a natural surface, interpretive trail. The interpretive trail will focus upon landscaped gardens and urban forestry as a part of the educational programming at the park. Due to contractual agreements, the renovations and improvements of St. Stephens Community Park have a high priority designation.

In keeping with the existing operations and public input, it will be necessary to provide security staffing, maintenance staffing and program staffing for the park.

### **Recommendation #29: Mountain View Recreation Center**

5.05 acres of the Mountain View Recreation Center are owned by Catawba County, but the daily operation of the park is handled by the Mountain View Recreation Association. The County is required to bring the facility into ADA



compliance. This will necessitate adding ADA compliant parking, restrooms and making the pathways and structures accessible under ADA guidelines. The County will also be addressing maintenance-related safety concerns with the infra-structure of the facility within the next 5 years.

It is recommended that the County periodically review the contractual agreement for maintenance and operations with Mountain View Recreation Association.

### **Recommendation #30: Birding Affiliations**

Riverbend Park is listed as one of the top 40 birding destinations in North Carolina. Park staff contributes valuable research data by actively banding hummingbirds and passerines (songbirds). Monthly bird walks and other environmental education programs are hosted by the Catawba County Parks Division.

The Western NC Birding Trail is a guide which links existing bird watching sites across the state into a cohesive and marketable unit, while connecting birding with local communities, business, communities and other local attractions. The group is currently in the process of identifying and nominating sites in the western area of the state. Bakers Mountain and Riverbend Parks are being considered as two of these sites. The first meeting for the Mountain region was recently held at Riverbend to explain the benefits of the NC Birding Trail, and review the application process to be included on the trail. Mountain communities will see trail development in 2008, which will include portions of the State west of Interstate 77. Catawba County Parks Division plans to fully participate in the NC Birding Trail program in order to promote nature based tourism and increase education conservation opportunities for residents and visitors.

### **Recommendations for Future Parks**

#### **Recommendation #31: Regional Parks / Mountain Creek Park**

There are two regional parks within Catawba County. These regional parks are components of the Catawba County Parks Division and include Bakers Mountain Park and Riverbend Park. Currently there are no County Parks in the southeastern portion of the County. (See Appendix Map 4 - Proposals and Recommendations Map). *Section IV – Existing Park Facilities*, reflected a need for a regional park facility to be located in this area. This need was not only determined by the park service areas from the State and National Standards, but more importantly, this need was reflected by the responses to the community survey and community workshops.



Understanding this need, the County has recently negotiated with Duke Energy to obtain park property through the FERC relicensing process and through the Key Harbor Crescent Agreement. These negotiations have resulted in identifying a parcel of land located adjacent to Lake Norman which could be used by the County for this purpose. The County anticipates having access to a minimum of 300 acres and a maximum of 600 acres to develop a park facility. (See Appendix Map 9 - Mountain Creek Park Comprehensive Master Plan Map)

This parcel has the potential to be a tremendous natural resource and amenity for Catawba County residents. Although no natural resource inventory has been conducted, there are numerous habitats and natural features that are deemed significant for preservation. One of the main features of the site is the lake shore frontage which allows multiple opportunities for park users.

To the extent possible, water access sites should be linked with other preserved open spaces. Water-based recreation facilities should be developed to provide appropriate public use and enjoyment of carefully selected portions of the shoreline. Water-based recreation improvements may generally include beach areas, waterfront overlooks, fishing piers, docks and canoe/kayak launch sites.

Where appropriate, water access sites should also be improved with a variety of outdoor facilities including picnic facilities, dog parks, trails, interpretive signage and open lawn areas. Supporting services should also be developed including parking lots, restrooms and utilities. Where provided, these facilities should create a balance between the need for public access and the protection of shoreline environments. A boat house should also be considered for boat storage by boating organizations and to provide a facility for boat rentals, lessons, and/or tours for canoes, kayaks, and other small hand-carry boats.

As a recommendation for all park facilities, a meeting/educational facility is also proposed for this park. It would offer multiple opportunities for schools, environmental groups, and other organizations. Restrooms and the park office need to be strategically located to allow for smooth operation of the park. These facilities should be situated so as to minimize and preserve the existing resources.

Primitive camping was listed as need by community survey respondents. It is recommended that 20 primitive camping sites be included in the proposed park.

### **Recommendations for Greenways/Hiking Trails**

Walking and biking are two highly sought after activities based on the community input in addition to the state and national standards. The community survey ranked greenway and walking facilities of the highest importance in regards to



facilities that could be developed in the County. The hiking trails should be designed to primarily serve walkers and joggers and in many cases bicyclists. The trail surface can be either natural or paved and normally is 10 feet in width.

Greenways serve a number of important functions: linking parks together to make for a cohesive park system, allowing for safe pedestrian/bike access within a community, emphasizing how nature can interact with the built environment, and enhancing property values. In many respects protected open space or natural resource areas have much in common with greenways. They preserve natural resources, provide corridors for wildlife habitats and provide buffers against developed areas. The primary difference between a greenway and a natural area is that greenways emphasize use and are generally linear in nature. The location of a greenway within a particular urban area could easily make it a light traffic corridor. Important aspects of developing greenway corridors are to link parks, neighborhoods, schools, downtowns and other destinations areas together. These corridors provide access to natural areas and to a safe, affordable alternative mode of transportation. The Catawba County Parks Division currently has no greenways established in the County. This Master Plan recommends five greenway corridors in Catawba County: Lyle Creek, Jacob's Fork, Henry Fork, Riverbend/Lookout Shoals, and a portion of the Carolina Thread Trail. (See Appendix Map 4 - Proposals and Recommendations Map) As part of the FERC relicensing, Duke Energy has committed funds in their financial report for a 1.5 mile greenway extending east from Riverbend Park, along the Catawba River. Additional funding will be needed to construct the trail. It will be important for Catawba County to obtain easements and/or acquire property as viable opportunities become available. (See Appendix Map 7 - Henry Fork and Jacob Fork Greenway/Blueway Map.)

Catawba County will work with the Town of Catawba and the Catawba Land Conservancy to acquire easements as viable options become available from Lookout Shoals to the gamelands and Hudson Chapel Road.

Currently, Catawba County Parks Division has walking and hiking trails at Bakers Mountain Park and Riverbend Park. There are a total of 18 miles of walking/hiking trails within the park system. Currently Catawba County has a deficient amount of walking and hiking trails. The Recreation Standards recommend 57 miles of trails in addition to the existing 18 miles in place. The Recreation standards recommend that by the year 2017, an additional 66 miles of trails should be added to serve the community, based on the standard of 0.5 miles per 1,000 residents. A portion of the 66 miles should include the walking/hiking trails within various municipalities that adjoin the County trail system.



### **Recommendation #32: Lyle Creek Greenway**

It is recommended that the County work with the Town of Catawba and City of Conover to jointly develop this greenway, capitalizing on the availability of the floodplain areas of Lyle Creek. The proposed greenway is approximately 12 miles long which will most likely be developed in multiple phases and implemented as funding is allocated. The greenway primarily will travel along Lyle Creek and will provide a vital link from the Town of Catawba to a potential park site for the City of Conover. In addition, the proposed corridor will also connect with the Historic Bunker Hill Covered Bridge Park, Interstate 40 Rest Area, Lyle Creek Elementary School and nearby residential neighborhoods. The proposed costs, addressed in *Section VII – Action Implementation Plan*, for implementing the proposed 12 miles of greenway is considerable and will offer the potential for partnering with the Town of Catawba and the City of Conover. As stated in the General Recommendations, the municipalities and the County should jointly fund the development of a countywide greenway master plan which will provide a more defined document addressing greenway placement, easement acquisition, and construction cost estimates. (See Appendix Map 10 - Lyle Creek Greenway Map)

### **Recommendation #33: Henry Fork River Greenway**

Henry Fork Greenway is proposed to be located primarily along the Henry Fork River but also proposes connecting to Bakers Mountain Park. (See Appendix Map 7 - Henry Fork and Jacob Fork Greenway/Blueway Map) Located in the southwest portion of Catawba County, the greenway will offer local residents and visitors a passive amenity for biking and walking that currently is not being provided. In addition, the greenway will connect to the City of Hickory's regional Henry Fork Recreation Complex, which allows an alternate mode of transportation for local residents to travel to the park. The proposed 14 mile linear park has been established as a long term project that may not be developed within the next 10 years and will likely require multiple phases to develop. However, the greenway is also proposed by the City of Hickory as a potential greenway. It will be important for the County and the City of Hickory to partner in this initiative.

### **Recommendation #34: Jacobs Fork River Greenway**

Jacobs Fork River Greenway, like the Henry Fork Greenway, has also been established as a long term project that may not be developed within the next 10 years. This 11-mile greenway also proposes connecting to Bakers Mountain Park and to the Henry Fork Greenway where the tributaries meet. This will create a regional linear park once completed. It will be important for the County to obtain easements and/or acquire property as viable opportunities become available. (See Appendix Map 7 - Henry Fork and Jacob Fork Greenway/Blueway Map.)



## **Recommendations for Blueways and River Access**

An ever-increasing form of passive recreation is river trails, often called blueways. Blueways are linear paddling trails for canoe and kayaking. These linear trails allow for water-based passive recreation along rivers and lakes which provide adequate water depth for such activities. Catawba County has a number of tributaries and rivers which allow for this activity. As the popularity continues to grow, it will be important for the Catawba County Parks Division to promote these blueways so residents of Catawba County and visitors can be more aware of the opportunities available for this type of recreation.

### **Recommendation #35: Catawba River Blueway**

Catawba County is fortunate to have the Catawba River as a vital component of the regional blueway system. The Catawba River Trail, which borders the northern and eastern portions of Catawba County, has multiple points for access along the river and offers users multiple areas for paddling in Catawba County. The total length of the river trail along the Catawba River is approximately 42 miles. There are various river access points along the Catawba River and portages along the dams, which are primarily provided by Duke Power. (See Appendix Map 13 - Duke Energy AIP Recreation Offerings Map)

### **Recommendation #36: Jacobs Fork and Henry Fork Blueway**

Two of the primary tributaries of the Catawba River are the Jacobs Fork and Henry Fork Rivers. These rivers are located in the southwest portion of Catawba County - flowing from Burke County through Catawba County and into Lincoln County. (See Appendix Map7 - Henry Fork and Jacobs Fork Greenway/Blueway Map) The two rivers connect to create the South Fork River (near the intersection of Highway 321 and Highway 10) and flow due south. These two tributaries allow for canoeing and kayaking, thereby creating a viable blueway for local residents and visitors. The designated blueways will allow users river access and an opportunity to travel along the future greenways adjacent to the rivers. The areas should also provide trailheads for the future greenways. Fortunately, blueways do not require development other than a portage area with parking access. The total length of the Henry Fork Blueway is approximately 14 miles; and the Jacobs Fork Blueway, approximately 25 miles. The length of river, from where these tributaries meet, flow south to Lincoln County and become the South Fork River, is approximately 8.6 miles. The connected segments of individual blueways provide ample opportunity



for long or short paddle trips. The County will pursue a partnership with the National Whitewater Center to form connectivity from the South Fork River to the water park.

Catawba County Parks Division will work with the Catawba Valley Paddle Trails Association to create a plan for the development of a Jacobs Fork/Henry Fork and South Fork blueway. This plan should include a survey of all potential portage and access sites, determine the owners of these sites, and create a site plan for each location. The plan should include cost estimates, identify grant sources, and establish a long range maintenance and promotion program.

The Catawba Valley Paddle Trails Association reports the following current, planned, and/or desired access points to the existing blueways, as follows:

**Table 6.5.1**

<b>BLUEWAY</b>	<b>CURRENT ACCESS</b>	<b>PLANNED ACCESS</b>	<b>DESIRED ACCESS</b>
Jacob Fork	Newton's Jacob Fork Park		1) Finger Bridge 2) Highway 127 3) Old Shelby Rd.
Henry Fork	Henry Fork Soccer Park	Sandy Ford Rd	1) Henry River Village 2) Portage around Shuford Mills in Brookford
South Fork	Newton's Jacob Fork Park		1) Rocky Ford Rd. on the Hmong property

### **Recommendations for Existing Special Use Facilities**

Catawba County Parks Division has developed a strong partnership with the Catawba County Historical Association (CCHA) over the past several years. The two entities share similar goals in the preservation and educational aspects of resources within the County. Murrays Mill and Bunker Hill Covered Bridge are two valuable resources within the County that the Parks Division and CCHA are looking to work together to enhance and manage these special facilities and meet the goals for each agency. The following recommendations are for the existing sites and a description of proposed recommendations.



### **Recommendation #37: Bunker Hill Covered Bridge Park and Greenway to Interstate 40 Rest Area**

Catawba County Parks Division will partner with the Catawba County Historical Association to continue developing and improving a passive park presence at the Bunker Hill Covered Bridge Park. The County and Historical Society have established a partnership for this park by promoting and enhancing the historic bridge, through the provision of improved access and the development of facilities for the park. The County received a grant from NCDOT to develop a parking area, pedestrian bridge and restroom facility. Since receiving the grant, the County has re-evaluated the future potential for the facility in regards to environmental education, park amenities and the promotion of the historic site.

This evaluation consisted of creating a master plan for the existing property and adjacent properties, allowing for a unique facility. As part of the master plan, the addition of two parcels to the north and one parcel east of the existing property will be pursued. Proposed park facilities consist of a dog park, improved picnic area, picnic shelter, outdoor classroom, environmental education area, open meadow and a trail system. In addition, the master plan proposes a one-mile, multi-use trail from the park to connect to the Interstate 40 rest area along Lyle Creek. This connection would allow visitors from across the nation (who stop at the rest area) the opportunity of visiting one of North Carolina's significant historical attractions. Support facilities consist of an access road, parking areas, pedestrian bridges, and a multi-use building for restrooms, an office, and a meeting room. (See Appendix Map 8 - Bunker Hill Covered Bridge Area and I-40 Rest Area Map)

To develop this vision, a committed partnership of the Catawba County Parks Division and the Catawba County Historical Association will be necessary. In addition to potential funding possibilities, this partnership allows for the Parks Division to assist with the maintenance and development of park amenities and facilities, therefore allowing the historical society to dedicate their efforts in educational programming and maintaining the historical structures. (See Appendix Map 8 - Bunker Hill Covered Bridge Area and I-40 Rest Area Map)

### **Recommendation #38: Murrays Mill**

Catawba County Parks Division will partner with the Catawba County Historical Association to continue developing a passive park presence for the Murrays Mill Historic District. Improvements will vary but potential amenities will include trail development, picnicking, interpretative elements, picnic shelters and environmental education. (See Appendix Map 11 - Murray's Mill Historic District Proposed Overall Site Plan) This partnership allows the Catawba County Parks Division to assist with the maintenance and development of park amenities and program staffing,



therefore allowing the association to dedicate its efforts in the educational programming and preservation of the historical structures. (See Appendix 11 - Murrays Mill Historic District Proposed Overall Site Plan)

### **Recommendation #39: Blackburn Landfill Future Development**

Blackburn Landfill is located within the Startown Small Area Plan. The facility serves as the primary landfill for Catawba County. There have been discussions of developing park amenities as areas of the landfill reach capacity. Selected areas of the landfill have the potential for multiple park amenities to serve the County residents. (See Appendix Map 12 - Conceptual Site Development Plan – Blackburn MSW Landfill) Any potential park improvements developed will be long range and will not occur within the next 10 years. As future planning occurs, Catawba County should carefully evaluate the site to determine if there is the potential for developing a County park at this location.

### **Recommendation #40: Former Central and Northwest (C & NW) Railway Corridor between Maiden to Newton**

The former C & NW railway corridor between Maiden and Newton should be preserved for future public use. In other areas of the State, abandoned rail lines are used for greenways, trail systems excursion rail lines and utility corridors.

### **Recommendations for Priority Methodology**

The Park System for Catawba County Parks Division will be an expansive network of facilities that will likely be implemented incrementally. Development will occur piece by piece, in a coordinated effort between Catawba County, surrounding communities and other local and state government bodies. This section describes how the recommended facilities in the County Park Division are prioritized.

The following factors guided the prioritization of individual segments of the County Park Division and were derived from input and desires specified by the residents of Catawba County and the focus group:

- Preservation of significant natural areas contiguous to existing County parkland;
- Improvement to existing Catawba County Park Facilities and partner facilities;



- Access to natural areas through parks and greenways; and
- Regional connections to surrounding communities and destination areas.

Land acquisition should always be a high priority for the Catawba County Parks Division. As land prices escalate and large area parcels are developed, it will become more difficult to acquire these properties; it is recommended that the County obtain such properties as the opportunity becomes available. Many of the recommendations require some land acquisition to implement the proposed facilities; it will be necessary for the County to develop a strategy for land acquisition. Lower priority projects were established primarily due to the funding necessary to implement the capital improvements. It should be noted that if an opportunity arises (through Land Development Requirements, or Municipal/NCDOT participation, etc.) for the implementation of an identified facility improvement, that opportunity should be taken regardless of its rank in the priority list.

### **Priorities for Development**

The park facility prioritization is an essential tool that provides the Catawba County Parks Division with a breakdown of the priority for each capital improvement. Given the magnitude of the budgets for improvements to existing parks and for new park and greenway facilities, prioritization of these needs is clearly important. The following is a list of priorities, not necessarily in order, based upon the needs assessment process.

#### **Top Priority Projects**

- Land Acquisition for Contiguous Park Property
- St. Stephens Community Park Renovations
- Mountain View Recreation Center ADA Compliance Upgrades
- Bunker Hill Covered Bridge Development
- Lyle Creek Greenway
- Bunker Hill Bridge connection to Interstate 40 Rest Area
- Bunker Hill Bridge connection to Town of Catawba
- Mountain Creek Park Development
- Murrays Mill Improvements
- Riverbend Park Enhancement

**- End of Section -**