

Connect Buncombe reveals greenways brand

[Karen Chávez, kchavez@gannett.com](mailto:kchavez@gannett.com) 11:52 a.m. EST November 6, 2015



(Photo: Courtesy photo)

ASHEVILLE - Welcome to the Buncombe Turnpike Trail Network.

Not sure where that is? It's right under your noses. The nonprofit Friends of Connect Buncombe debuted the first countywide trail and greenway brand Thursday night during a celebration at the DoubleTree by Hilton among local elected officials, business owners and civic leaders, cyclists, runners, and residents who just like being outdoors.

In September 2012, Buncombe County adopted a comprehensive Greenways and Trails Master Plan to guide regional greenway development in the county. The new branding unveiled Thursday is the result of a broad-based input effort over the summer, aims to create a new identity connect existing greenways across the city and county with those yet to come, as a way to promote tourism, diverse and safe transportation options, and connect the community, heritage and natural beauty of Buncombe County.

A tall order, but one that the community has already seemed to rally around.

"This new brand system powerfully connects our past to our future and we are grateful for the leadership and support of Friends of Connect Buncombe in catalyzing our efforts," said David Gantt, chairman of the Buncombe County Commissioners.

Gantt said one of the most consistent requests from constituents and business prospects looking to relocate to Asheville, after schools and housing, is greenways and parks.

Gantt said he is going to ask the community to support a bond to help build greenways, and pointed to other cities who have recently voted for such bonds, including Chapel Hill, in which 78 percent of voters passed a \$5 million bond for greenways on Tuesday. Also, last year, the small town of Wake Forest passed with 66 percent of voters a bond for \$4.6 million for greenways.

Brownie Newman, Buncombe County commissioner and vice president of business development for FLS Energy, who was on the new branding steering committee, said the effort to expand the greenways will have to be a public-private partnership.

This summer, Friends of Connect Buncombe partnered with other greenway advocacy groups and selected Arnett Muldrow and Associates to carry out the new branding development with geographic and thematic input meetings and research into the history of Buncombe County. The costs were covered by donations from members and sponsors and by in-kind services provided by Arnett Muldrow.

"People came in from every part of Buncombe County to participate, from neighborhoods, businesses, builders, the environmental community was really engaged," said Newman, who admitted he was at first skeptical of the idea, but is now excited about the vision.

"Greenways are so important to make Buncombe County a healthy community for our future. We spend our days starting at computer screens at work, and at home with our kids. I love Pisgah National Forest and the Smokies, but we shouldn't have to drive an hour when we want to go outside and go for a run or a ride a bike," Newman said.

"Greenways are also important to job creation. There are few things that will add to the quality of life better than a greenway system."

He pointed to the success of greenways in other other communities, including the Virginia Creeper Trail, a 34-mile multi-purpose trail near Damascus, Virginia, and the Swamp Rabbit Trail in Greenville, S.C. Ty Houck, director of greenways, natural and historic resources for Greenville County Parks, Recreation and Tourism, said the now widely famous trail system, which first opened with four miles in 2009, contains 18.6 miles.

An economic impact study by Furman and Clemson universities showed the Swamp Rabbit has more than a half-million users, 25 percent of which come from outside Greenville County, and \$6.7 million of tourism revenue is left in town from users of the trail.

"Trails are great, but you've got to show the economic impact," Houck said. "They're fun, but they're so much more. They are a necessity when you're talking about universal accessibility."

Some of the businesses who believe in the necessity and the economic value of greenways happen to be the breweries. Leah Ashburn, president of Highland Brewing, and Susann Hackett, New Belgium community relations specialist, said they called on the Asheville Brewers Alliance to help fund the greenways.

"I said to them, 'Wouldn't it be amazing if Asheville were the city where breweries built greenways?'" Ashburn said. "And all these breweries said yes."

The funding has already started. They have created a logo and brand, "Breweries for Greenways," where every six weeks or so, breweries collaborate to make a new beer whose sales will benefit the Friends of Connect Buncombe, the lead nonprofit for fundraising for construction of trails and greenways in Buncombe County.

The first collaboration was in July with Highlands and New Belgium, a Belgian Session Ale called Footpath. Ashburn said they brewed six barrels and sold the beer at Highlands, donating \$2 per pint to Connect Buncombe. So far, with four collaborations, \$15,000 has been raised. The next Brewing for Greenways event will be at 5:30 p.m. Nov. 13 at Hi-Wire Brewing, 197 Hilliard Ave., in a collaboration between Hi-Wire and Ben's Tune Up and the French Broad Chocolate Lounge.

"This is a rolling program that can keep growing so we're not taxing any one company," Ashburn said.

Existing greenways are estimated at about 18 miles across the county, from Black Mountain to Asheville to Weaverville, with 80-100 more miles proposed.

Hackett said she is hoping some of those proposed miles will connect Highland Brewing in East Asheville with New Belgium in the River Arts District with Sierra Nevada in Fletcher so people can ride their bikes on a brewery tour. She called on other businesses to work with the breweries on matching funds.

For now, said Friends of Connect Buncombe vice president Suzanne Molloy, the new Buncombe Turnpike Trail Network brand should be used for trail heads, maps, brochures, directional signs, product development like T-shirts, advocacy and capital campaigns to unify all existing greenway initiatives.

She said the new brand logo draws upon the existing Buncombe County government logo by incorporating dark blue mountains and two evergreen trees set in the foreground of a trail. It is named in honor of the Buncombe Turnpike, which was once one of the most used roads in Western North Carolina, bringing prosperity and innovation to the mountains.



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(<http://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2015/08/24/seeing-green-enka-candler-businesses-push-greenway-network/32229691/>)



One of the new logos that came out of a new branding and marketing study for the Buncombe County greenways system, now known as the Buncombe County Turnpike Trail Network. (Photo: Courtesy photo)