

Workplan Abstract

Background – Prior to the onset of recessionary economic conditions, citizens and leaders in the Asheville region of western North Carolina identified “greater regional coordination” on issues of growth management and sustainability as a primary need for the region’s communities. This need surfaced due to the unprecedented levels of population growth and land development that occurred during the last 10-20 years. The region is a beautiful place to visit and live and has drawn many people, businesses and retirees. High returns on investment, combined with varied and sometimes minimal land use controls for residential and commercial development, provided tremendous incentives for the conversion of farmed and forested lands. This has, in some cases, threatened our mountain culture and traditions and created new challenges for the preservation of our high quality of life, natural assets and cultural values. In addition, land constraints deriving from the region’s mountainous terrain continue to limit the stock of developable land, causing sharp increases in land and housing prices that threaten to exacerbate existing burdens of affordability for a large number of residents. A history of conservative values with respect to land use and personal property rights, as well as large disparities in land use and other planning regulations, make it challenging to address these growth-related issues.

In response to the expressed need for greater regional coordination, local government and non-profit representatives from a five-county region of western North Carolina have convened to conduct a Livable Communities Initiative. Representing residents and organizations of Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania Counties, the Initiative will be guided by a Consortium including members from public and private housing, planning, transportation, economic development, research, educational and philanthropic organizations. The purpose of the Consortium is to oversee the development of a Regional Plan that comprehensively integrates or “weaves” the region’s many existing planning documents in comprehensive and holistic guide for regional sustainable development.

Creating a “Living” Document – The Plan and the strategies and projects included within it will be a “living” document, and not “another plan that sits on the shelf,” outdated after just a few years. It will serve as a focal point or blueprint for the region’s public and private citizens, communities, organizations, and stakeholders as the region changes and grows together. The Plan will be a flexible tool designed to be modified, changing with the opportunities, needs and progress of the region over time. It will regularly and perpetually integrate the Local and Federal Livability Principles with housing, transportation and other infrastructure needs while helping to maximize balanced land use in North America’s most biologically diverse ecosystem.

Project Design - The Region recognizes it has numerous, strong, and current plans and strategies (both regionally and/or locally) in the areas of transportation, housing, land use, economic development,

conservation and more. While these numerous plans and strategies help position the region with respect to the Livability Principles, the region does not have an adequate long-term sustainability plan.

The Plan will be developed over a three-year period with unprecedented community input throughout the region. It will also include previously unparalleled transparency through the use of a multi-faceted public involvement plan blending both traditional outreach (such as charettes and community forums) and modern outreach (such as networking and other media outlets). This integrated outreach approach is needed in order to serve the region's diverse but interrelated rural and urban Appalachian communities. Consortium partners will take additional measures to include multi-generational and rural mountain landowners, farmers, urban minorities, small business owners, immigrant workers, retired senior citizens on fixed incomes, seasonal second homeowners, health care providers, tourism-dependent interests, and transit-dependent citizens as well as other populations that are traditionally left out of most public processes.

Process to Develop a Regional Plan - We have developed a seven stage process to develop our Regional Plan, which includes the following activities:

Stage 1 – Project Start-Up Develop and implement Governance Structure; begin initial public outreach; complete agreements and MOUs; issue RFPs to solicit consultants. Includes *Activity 1: Governance and Partnerships*

Stage 2 – Preparing Data and Outreach Gather, inventory, and assess existing plans, strategies, and data; design and begin to implement detailed public outreach strategy. Includes *Activity 2: Collect and Evaluate Plans and Data* and *Activity 3: Public Engagement*

Stage 3 – Public Engagement Events, Phase 1: Reality Check #1 Conduct “Reality Check” process to gather widespread, unprecedented community input on scenario planning models and existing, combined plans and strategies.

Stage 4 – Create Draft Plan and Alternatives Create draft plan and alternatives by merging existing plans/strategies and data analysis with community, Consortium, and leadership input. Includes *Activity 4: Job Creation*, *Activity 5: Improve transportation and housing options by integrating planning for transportation, housing, employment, land use*, and *Activity 6: Identify potential infill and brownfields sites*

Stage 5 – Public Engagement Events, Phase 2: Reality Check #2 Gather widespread, unprecedented community input on the draft plan and alternatives to incorporate that input into the draft.

Stage 6 – Refine & Release Incorporate public input into the final Regional Plan and release it broadly to the public.

Stage 7 – Implement Regional Plan Seek opportunities to implement strategies and projects identified during process, work to develop a structure and funding opportunities for ongoing support of project, pursue regional and local adoption, identify proposed revisions in existing regional Plans. Includes *Activity 7: Identify proposed revisions to Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), and Regional Consolidated Strategic Housing and Community Development Plan*