

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1

1.1 Scope and Purpose

In March of 2005, the City of Graham contracted with Greenways Incorporated (GWI) to create a Pedestrian Transportation Plan. The project was started and funded through the bicycle and pedestrian planning grant initiative of the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT). The project area is the entire Graham Municipal Boundary, encompassing over 9 square miles. The City of Graham is split by I-40/85 with the Downtown to the north and increasing development to the south and east of the interstate.

Because Graham continues to grow and attract more residents annually, a pedestrian friendly environment becomes essential to the City's livability. The Pedestrian Transportation Plan offers an improved alternative transportation network that addresses specific pedestrian safety concerns while recommending key pedestrian routes and connections. The Plan recommends both new pedestrian facilities and enhancements to older facilities in order to best connect pedestrians to their key destinations.

While walking is the least expensive and for some, the only transportation mode, implementing, building, and maintaining a high quality pedestrian system requires comprehensive planning and long term funding. The Pedestrian Transportation Plan will be a key resource for the City in securing grants from a growing supply of funds dedicated to pedestrian safety and livable communities.

The planning process took 12 months to complete and included regular input from a local steering committee made up of representatives from the City Planning Department, the Recreation and Parks Department, the NCDOT, and local citizens. Together, the committee brought focused feedback throughout the course of the planning process. Additionally, the City of Graham worked closely with GWI to ensure significant levels of public input, including two public open house workshops, a survey, and a public comment form to gauge the residents' interests, uses, and concerns.

This document presents the findings of the public input process along with an assessment of the existing pedestrian facilities in Graham. From these findings, a set of phased recommendations was developed for a pedestrian system that meets the future needs of the area's residents. The recommendations include both physical changes and policy changes, along with suggestions for programs and funding sources to facilitate the Plan's implementation.



Beautiful sidewalk along Elm St.



1.2 Benefits of Walking

Communities across the United States have been implementing strategies to improve their walking environments and serve the needs of pedestrians. This is done not only to promote public safety, health and welfare, but also because of the growing awareness of the multiple benefits of walking. These benefits include alternative transportation options, increased health and fitness, lower levels of traffic congestion, environmental benefits, economic benefits, and an increased sense of community among residents.

1.2.1 *Transportation Benefits*

In 1995, the National Personal Transportation Survey found that roughly 40% of all trips taken are less than 2 miles. By making these short trips on foot, rather than a car, citizens can have a substantial impact on local traffic and congestion. Additionally, many people do not have access to a vehicle or license and are not able to drive. In an auto-dependant environment, this situation leaves the elderly, the young, and the underprivileged without a means to get around for even basic daily trips. An improved pedestrian network provides greater and safer mobility for all residents, and allows for a more productive community overall.

1.2.2 *Personal Health*

It is well documented that an active community is a healthy community. There are numerous studies affirming that sedentary lives and prolonged periods of inactivity are major deterrents to health, sometimes doubling the risk of morbidity and mortality from coronary heart disease and stroke¹. Obesity and diabetes, particularly in children, have risen dramatically in recent years with the majority of U.S. states having obesity prevalence rates of 20% or greater². The U.S. Department of Health now recommends 60 minutes of physical activity every day to maintain body weight. Improving the connections between schools and neighborhoods in the City of Graham can positively influence children's health by providing opportunities to further incorporate exercise into their daily lives.

Overall, the rise in the occurrence of obesity, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, osteoporosis and some cancers affecting all ages are clearly linked to lack of physical activity. A safe, walkable community provides a means and facility to pursue exercise and improve health for all.

1.2.3 *Environmental Improvements*

When people choose to get out of their cars and make trips by foot, they make a positive environmental impact. They reduce their use and dependence on gasoline and reduce the volume of air pollutants. According to the EPA, there is strong evidence that reducing air pollution from automobile use can protect children's health³. For example, during the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, when driving was reduced and ambient ozone levels fell by 27.9 percent, emergency room visits for asthma dropped by 41.6 percent. These results suggest that while pedestrians are improving their own health through physical activity, they are also improving the health of those around them by not contributing to air pollution with their automobile trips. Other im-



pacts can be a reduction in overall neighborhood noise levels and improvements in local water quality as fewer automobile-related discharges wind up in the local rivers, streams, and lakes.

1.2.4 Economic Benefits

A pedestrian friendly city can help both the individual and the community economically. Walking is a free means of transportation. The cost of owning and operating a car with surging gas prices is a significant percentage of our incomes. Walking is a necessity for some and a financial gain for all. A walkable community is also a sign of high quality of life, attracting new residents and businesses, and spurring economic development.

1.2.5 Quality of Life

Many factors go into determining the quality of life for the citizens of a community. The local education system, prevalence of quality employment opportunities, and affordability of housing are all items that are commonly cited. Increasingly though, citizens claim that access to alternative means of transportation and access to quality recreational opportunities such as parks, trails, greenways, and bicycle routes, are important factors for them in determining their overall pleasure with their community. Happy, active citizens radiate a high degree of livability within a community, and this livability factor can, as mentioned above, attract new businesses, new residents, and new opportunities - all important components of maintaining a high quality of life in the community.



Pedestrian-friendly pocket park (Sesquicentennial Park) in City square. This park opened in 2001, celebrating the City's 150th anniversary.

1.2.6 Summary and Additional Resources

Many private and public organizations have completed studies and surveys that show the many benefits of walking. The ideas presented above are only a small sample of the information that is available. If you would like to learn more about the benefits of walking, the Internet can be a great source of information. An excellent starting-point for resources is the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center's website (www.walkinginfo.org/pp/benefits), based out of Chapel Hill, NC. Another excellent resource is Active Living by Design, (www.activelivingbydesign.org), a program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and part of the UNC School of Public Health, also in Chapel Hill, NC.

1.3 History

While this is Graham's first Pedestrian Plan, it is part of an ongoing, historic effort and desire to provide safe and enjoyable walking opportunities for its residents and visitors. Previous efforts and new policies have established walkable environments throughout portions of City including the older Downtown area and new developments. Today, there is a need to connect and improve these existing facilities.



Funding assistance to create this plan has come from the State of North Carolina's Department of Transportation (NCDOT) as part of its 2004 Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning Grant Initiative. The City of Graham was awarded one of the grants in the first year of this Initiative. This Initiative is part of a growing movement statewide and within the NCDOT to promote the idea that all citizens should have access to safe, convenient walking and bicycling options that get them to their destinations. The NCDOT's Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation was established in 1974 and has developed laws and policies and increased access to information, funding, and other forms of assistance.

A series of existing local, county, and state transportation, recreation, and growth management plans (outlined in Section 2.3) recommend and support pedestrian improvements and enhancements. These plans, along with the groundwork laid by previous efforts, provide a foundation for the City of Graham Pedestrian Transportation Plan.

1.4 Vision and Goals

The following pedestrian planning goals and objectives were generated for the City of Graham in 2005 as a result of Steering Committee Meetings and Open House Public Workshops:

- Promote safe walking in Graham for all types of residents and visitors and promote the safe interaction of motorists and pedestrians
- Provide sidewalks and improved crosswalks in school and commercial areas
- Aid in revitalizing Downtown through safety and aesthetic improvements, while connecting pedestrian corridors into Downtown
- Improve the existing sidewalks and connect the gaps between them
- Develop off-road greenway trails that protect the environment, provide unique recreational opportunities, and connect into the on-road sidewalk system
- Improve accessibility for children, elderly, and the handicapped
- Reduce traffic congestion
- Increase awareness and promotion of the City's pedestrian needs

Taken together, these goals and objectives form a vision of what the City of Graham aims to achieve:

Create a pedestrian-friendly environment with a system of pedestrian facilities that links together existing resources and destinations (especially schools and Downtown), allows for safe interaction between pedestrians and motorists, supports alternatives to automobile travel, increases recreation opportunities, advances the community's mobility, quality of life, and development, and encourages and rewards the choice to walk.





Citizens convey their goals for the City of Graham.

(Footnotes)

¹ Fox, Dr. Kenneth R. *The Influence of physical activity on Mental Well-Being.*

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services

³ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). (2003). *Travel and Environmental Implications of School Siting.*





Cinema in Downtown Graham