

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Chapter 2

2.1 General Overview

The City of Graham is the Alamance County Seat, located within the Piedmont Triad section of North Carolina. About halfway between Durham and Greensboro, Graham sits along Interstate 40/85. Then a Town, Graham was incorporated in 1851 after Orange County was split in two, creating Alamance County, and thus the need for a County Seat.

Graham is the 56th largest municipality in North Carolina and is generally contained within a north-south rectangle, split by Interstate 40/85, with patchy annexation patterns to its south and east. It is bounded by the City of Burlington to the west and northwest, the Town of Haw River on the northeast, and the Town of Swepsonville on the southeast. It is also bordered by Boyd's Creek to the West, Great Alamance Creek to the South, and the Haw River to the East.

Graham's strategic location in the growing Piedmont region and small city charm have allowed for steady growth over the last 50 years. In 2003, the population was 13,619, up from 10,426 in 1990. As of 1990, there was a fairly uniform distribution of ages in Graham, indicating a variety of families, young professionals, and retirees. The majority of Graham residents work in either Graham or Burlington, the neighboring city to the West.



Alamance County Courthouse, in the center of Graham.

Graham's geography and population characteristics have an overarching impact on the pedestrian planning process. They significantly affect transportation, the environment, local ordinances, and everyday decisions by motorists and pedestrians. Because of the even distribution of ages, increasing growth, and adjacency to other municipalities and major stream corridors, this Pedestrian Plan will recommend facilities that cater to these needs and take advantage of existing resources. The following sections summarize the existing conditions, current pedestrian usage, community concerns, and existing plans and ordinances.



2.2. Inventory of Existing Pedestrian Conditions

Pedestrian conditions vary across the City on spatial and temporal scales. Most major roads through Graham carry a significant amount of traffic, including heavy vehicles, and often lack adequate pedestrian facilities. During rush hour, traffic increases dramatically, including heavy vehicles in the City's downtown core. Traffic remains fairly consistent throughout the day at Graham's three I-40/85 exit ramps, with many vehicles entering the City to use gas stations and fast food restaurants. Residential roads have relatively minimal traffic and low speed limits, providing safe walking for most residents. There is no mass transit option in Graham.

Citizens in Graham who walk are typically children, adults who do not always have access to a vehicle, and those who walk for recreation or exercise. This is based largely on observation and Steering Committee input.

To understand the City's pedestrian condition, it is important to consider a number of specific factors that affect the overall character of the community. The findings are presented below.

2.2.1 Trip Attractors

People currently walk to a variety of destinations across Graham for various purposes. These destination points are referred to in this document as trip attractors. The most common categories of pedestrian trip attractors in Graham include:

- Downtown
- Schools (North Graham Elementary, South Graham Elementary, Graham Middle School, Graham High School, Alamance Christian School, River Mill Academy)
- Shopping locations (grocery stores, shopping centers, restaurants, Downtown)
- Parks (Bill Cooke Park, South Graham Park, playgrounds)
- Community and recreation centers (Graham Recreation Center, Maple Street Recreation Center, Skate Park)
- Historic and other points of interest (Graham Public Library, Graham Historical Museum, Lynwood Cemetery, Providence Cemetery)
- Places of employment (business areas, industrial parks, City offices, Courthouse)



Pedestrian at Bill Cooke Park, a Graham trip attractor.

Each of these categories of pedestrian trip attractors were considered when determining locations for the physical pedestrian improvements recommended in Chapter 3 - Pedestrian Network

Plan. They represent important starting and ending points for pedestrian travel and provide a good basis for planning ideal walking routes. Some of the most important trip attractors that were identified are shown on *Map 1 - Existing Conditions*.

2.2.2 Land Use Characteristics

Graham has a variety of land use types radiating out from its urban Downtown center. The Downtown area itself is diverse with civic, industrial, commercial, and residential uses in the immediate vicinity. Overall, residential is the dominant land use type of Graham, surrounding Downtown and in other developments south of Interstate 40/85. Commercial land uses are found in the Downtown, along the major road corridors of Main St./Highway 87, Highway 54/Harden St., and near the Interstate access points with gas stations and restaurants. City offices are centered Downtown with all schools east of Main St. Industrial sites are scattered with concentrations in the north and some along the interstate. There is a small percentage of recreational land use although the few existing area parks are fairly large.

The heaviest concentration of urban land uses is found north of Interstate 40/85 surrounding the Downtown. Open, rural land is still commonplace south of the interstate with scattered residential areas and some commercial activity along S. Main Street.

2.2.3 Existing Pedestrian Facilities

The majority of existing pedestrian facilities are located in the Downtown area, and also within several new subdivisions (See **Map 1 - Existing Conditions**). These facilities are in place because of previous Downtown development ordinances and newer subdivision regulations. While these existing facilities offer a good starting point, many pedestrian connections to and from the Downtown area are needed, as are connections across Interstate 40/85, to make the City truly pedestrian friendly. Worn footpaths are common where these connections are needed (near schools, in gaps within the sidewalk system, and below the interstate bridges). Finally, where sidewalks do exist, some improvements are necessary such as the addition of curb ramps, striped crosswalks, signal countdowns, and raised medians. The current environment for pedestrians is generally unsafe, handicap inaccessible, and in need of improvement.



Elm St. streetscape in Downtown.

While most facilities are lacking or inadequate, several fair examples exist including sections of Elm St. and N. Main St. where sidewalks are on both sides, and a grass buffer separates the road from the sidewalk. The Downtown streetscape around the Courthouse also offers a pleasant environment for pedestrians. Still, crosswalk improvements and curb ramps would go a long way to improving conditions along these routes.

Currently, there are no official greenways within the City of Graham. Linear, undeveloped open spaces, stretches of sewer easement, and existing canoe accesses can be found along the area's waterways offering an opportunity for greenway development.

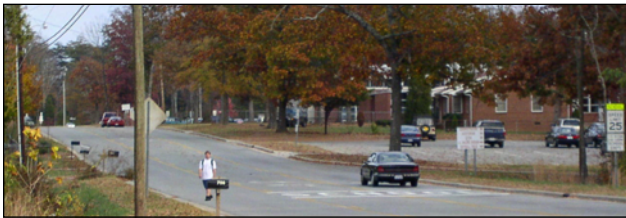


All sidewalks in Graham were mapped as part of this process by the Consultant using GPS (Global Positioning Systems) technology.

2.2.4 Connectivity

Achieving overall pedestrian connectivity is a major goal for this Plan. As previously mentioned, there is a lack of connectivity between pedestrian facilities and trip attractors. Some of the connections will be fairly easy to implement, such as filling minor gaps within the existing sidewalk system. Other pedestrian connections will be more difficult and expensive to implement, such as the provision of sidewalks and crosswalks around most of Graham's schools and commercial areas.

These latter improvements, however, are highly valuable to the community, particularly in the realm of child safety. Specifically, North Graham Elementary, South Graham Elementary, and Graham High School, all sustain significant child pedestrian traffic, but have no sidewalks whatsoever. Improvements to these areas could potentially save lives, and at the very least, they could provide children with a safer route to school.

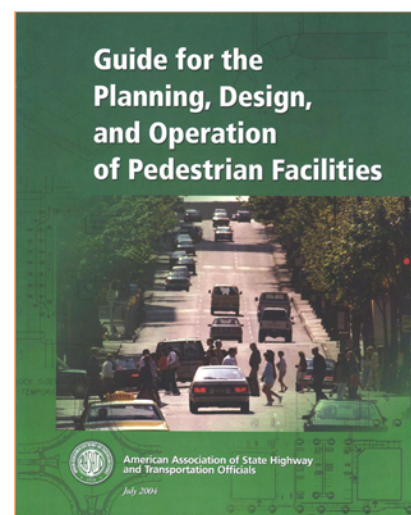


Children walking in the auto-oriented road environment near Graham High School.

2.3 Existing Plans and Ordinances

Pedestrian planning in Graham is shaped by planning and project development at many levels. The Federal Government produces standards and guidelines that are then customized at the state, regional, and local levels. The State produces long-range policy, project, and funding documents that are based on local-level needs and state-level interests and capacities. Alamance County and the City of Graham have also produced growth management, parks and recreation, and transportation plans that all incorporate some level of attention to pedestrian issues and provide recommendations. All of these documents represent important efforts, provide valuable insight and background, and have influenced the development of this Plan.

Of all the plans, guidelines, and strategies, the most important documents for guiding this process are: The American



Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Guide for the Planning, Design, and Operation of Pedestrian Facilities, the NCDOT's Long-Range Statewide Transportation Plan (updated in 2004), the Burlington Graham Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's Transportation Plan Update (2005-2030), the City of Graham Recreation and Parks Plan, the City of Graham Growth Management Plan (2000-2020), and the City of Graham Development Ordinances. These key works are summarized below. Information about more specific policies and programs are described in Chapter 4. For further information, please consult the reviewed document in its entirety.

AASHTO Guide for the Planning, Design, and Operation of Pedestrian Facilities (2004)

This guide, published by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, provides guidance on the planning, design, and operation of pedestrian facilities along streets and highways. It focuses on identifying measures that accommodate pedestrians on public rights-of-way. It includes information on pedestrian characteristics, planning strategies, site development, roadway/sidewalk design, intersection design, signals, signing, and maintenance.

NCDOT Long-Range Statewide Transportation Plan (2004)

The latest version of this document calls for connectivity improvements between different modes of transportation as well as the development of new opportunities for multimodal transportation. To achieve this, the plan asks for a larger financial investment in pedestrian facilities than has historically been available. It also promotes the idea of strengthening the importance of community-level goals in transportation planning and "mainstreaming" the development of pedestrian facilities, i.e. ensuring that pedestrian facility planning is considered early on in the project planning and is a regular part of everyday transportation across the state, rather than a secondary consideration or overlooked component.

Website: <http://www.ncdot.org/doh/preconstruct/tpb/statewideplan>

NCDOT Long-Range Transportation Plan: Bicycling and Walking in North Carolina (1996)

This Plan defines and promotes the vision of the Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation. This vision affirms the idea that "All citizens of North Carolina and visitors to the state will be able to walk and bicycle safely and conveniently to their desired destinations". Goals of this Plan include providing bicycle and pedestrian facilities, providing strategies of education, enforcement, and encouragement, and promoting new ways to advance pedestrian safety.

Website: <http://www.ncdot.org/transit/bicycle/about/Longrangeplan2.pdf>

NCDOT Pedestrian Policy Guidelines, Bridge Policy, and Greenway Policy and Guidelines

The NCDOT provides numerous guidelines for pedestrian facilities, bridges, and greenways. These are guides for implementing policies and pedestrian improvements. This includes requirements for communities to request incorporating pedestrian facilities as part of the TIP (Transportation Improvement Program). It also includes the incorporation of local greenways into the highway planning process. These may be found at the website below.

Website: http://www.ncdot.org/transit/bicycle/laws/laws_intro.html



Burlington Graham Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's Transportation Plan Update (2005-2030)

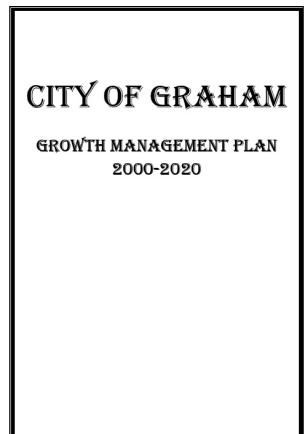
One of the listed goals of this Transportation Plan is the identification and improvement of pedestrian transportation network facilities to better accommodate pedestrian access. Public survey data supports the idea that building sidewalks, crosswalks, and greenways is very important in the MPO area. Specific goals include enhancements, connectivity, and integration of pedestrian facilities along with pursuing pedestrian project funding. Specific roadway/sidewalk improvements are listed in the appendix and include Graham-Hopedale Road as it heads north into Burlington.

Website: <http://www.mpo.burlington.nc.us/datanreports/main.htm>

City of Graham Growth Management Plan 2000-2020

This Plan addresses city growth and how to plan for future development and revitalize older portions of the City. The City's goals are to retain a small town atmosphere that is Downtown-centered with a focus to revitalize the core area, creating a more pedestrian friendly environment with sidewalks, trails, and aesthetic improvements. The Plan encourages alternative forms of transportation, making neighborhoods connected to multiple uses by sidewalks, and promoting a greenway system that links the City's recreational resources. It also calls for a Sidewalk Plan that would outline and propose new sidewalks, while requiring new development to include sidewalks. More specific recommendations include developing a greenway system along rivers and creeks, including the Haw River, and improving the Downtown area by making it more pedestrian oriented through streetscape and storefront enhancements. This plan was particularly useful in determining current and future trip attractors, such as 'village centers', 'neighborhood centers', and traditional neighborhood developments.

Website: <http://www.cityofgraham.com/growth%20mgnt%20plan.htm>



City of Graham Comprehensive Recreation and Parks Master Plan (1998)

This Plan was developed by the City of Graham as a guide for future decision-making regarding parks and recreation services. Recommendations include an environmental park and nature trail at South Graham Park connected to trails leading to the Haw River, a mountain bike trail at Bill Cooke Park, a perimeter fitness trail at Greenway Park, the development of canoe/hiking/biking trails along the Haw River, and hiking/biking trails along the Little Alamance and Great Alamance Creeks. The recommended greenways would provide excellent recreation opportunities as part of the future Mountains-to-Sea Trail (MST), taking advantage of the river's and creek's hydrologic features. To make this all possible, this Plan suggests seeking funding resources, land donations, easement options, and various partnerships with the State, the County, neighboring cities, private organizations, and non-profit groups.

City of Graham Development Ordinances (Last updated 2006)

This collection of ordinances is generally focused on promoting the health, safety, and welfare



of the City of Graham and its ETJ. Specific ordinances include addressing sidewalk construction during development, setting aside open space during development, and other regulations such as not allowing parking on sidewalks. These specific ordinances are described in Chapter 4 and policy recommendations/action steps are listed to further guide the City of Graham in developing and updating City ordinances to improve future pedestrian conditions.

2.4 Community Concerns, Needs, and Opportunities

Numerous forms of public input (open house public workshops, public comment forms, and Steering Committee Meetings), provided first hand accounts of the existing pedestrian conditions in the City of Graham. The community's concerns, needs, and opportunities regarding these conditions emerged from these inputs. The results are summarized below and have been incorporated into the Pedestrian Network Plan presented in the following chapter. More detailed results are found in Appendix A.

2.4.1 Open House Public Workshops

Two sets of public workshops occurred, in the Fall of 2005 and in the Spring of 2006. The first open house public workshop was held to gather public input early in the planning process and receive visions, goals, and specific recommendations. The meeting consisted of two presentations regarding the scope, goals, and principles of the plan. As a means of public input, workshop facilitators were available to personally engage in dialogue about the concerns, needs, and opportunities that workshop participants expressed regarding the plan and process. Additionally, workshop participants provided direct input by drawing and writing on input maps, allowing each participant to highlight areas and routes of particular concern. The main concerns that emerged from the public workshops revolved around safe routes to schools and recreation centers, access in and around the Downtown Area, and sidewalk improvements along Maple St. and the northwest portion of Main Street. Additionally, the public workshop participants highlighted routes south of I-40/85 that could serve as primary pedestrian corridors.

The second public workshop was held to receive feedback on the preliminary network (sidewalk and greenway) recommendations, intersection improvement sites, and prioritization of both. Overall, citizens were pleased with the network and felt like it addressed the most important areas. Specific intersection improvement sites were recommended as high priorities. There was also emphasis on the need to improve the condition of deteriorated and/or narrow existing sidewalk on Main St. north of Downtown.

2.4.2 Pedestrian Surveys

The City of Graham promoted a survey and public comment form to gauge the community's concerns about the City's existing and future pedestrian conditions. Both were distributed at the public meetings and the public comment form was distributed in the City October newsletter. The survey asked specific questions about walking frequency, factors determining the decision to walk, ranking of important pedestrian issues, and funding options. The public comment form asked participants to describe specific conditions along a walking route of choice.



Generally, citizens who filled out comment forms recommended sidewalks in various locations along with crossing improvements. The most common concern was a lack of a connected sidewalk network. Other comments included a need for more sidewalks around schools, improved crosswalks (especially along Main St.), reduced speed limits for automobile traffic, heavy automobile traffic, and narrow sidewalks.



Members of the Steering Committee discuss potential pedestrian corridors.

2.4.3 *Steering Committee Recommendations*

The Steering Committee provided valuable feedback and recommendations to this Plan on a regular basis. Aside from contributing to the Plan's main goals and objectives (Section 1.4 – Vision and Goals), the Committee also provided comments on specific routes and made suggestions for long-term pedestrian corridor extensions to serve future development. Finally, the members of the Committee facilitated public feedback through assistance during the public workshops and by administering the pedestrian survey.

While numerous ideas, concerns, and recommendations were received from the Committee, their chief goals for the Graham pedestrian environment were:

- 1) Prioritizing areas with children, such as schools
- 2) Meeting ADA guidelines, such as curb ramps
- 3) Increasing connectivity and filling sidewalk gaps
- 4) Connecting sidewalks and trails
- 5) Traffic slowing
- 6) Improving existing narrow and/or deteriorating sidewalk
- 7) Improving access and connectivity to Downtown