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# Blue Ridge Road District Study





# Blue Ridge Road District Study

*Prepared by*      *Urban Design Associates*  
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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA)  
North Carolina State Fairgrounds  
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North Carolina Department of Water Quality (NCDWQ)

Raleigh Arts Commission

Raleigh Business Owners

Raleigh Citizen Advisory Councils

Raleigh Historic Development Commission (RHDC)

Raleigh Property Owners

Raleigh Public Affairs and RTN

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, School of Public Health, Department of Environmental Sciences and Engineering

U.S. National Guard



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# FOREWORD

*“Real estate developers and deal makers salivating like fairgoers over funnel cakes about prospects for a mini boom town in the once-sleepy western gateway to Raleigh. In the place of pine trees and agricultural land, they envision a bustling entertainment district brimming with restaurants, hotels and stores, along with new office buildings and townhouses to accompany a smattering of developments already there. Business interests looking to open hotels, restaurants, and shops are angling for a slice of arena patrons’ spending money. Along the way, they’re hoping to establish profitable niches in what could become a vibrant commercial district and office setting on Cary’s doorstep. Within a few years, some predict the area — bounded by the Wade Avenue Extension, Interstate 40, Hillsborough Street, and Blue Ridge Road — will be hard to recognize. “I think it’s going to be one of the most sought after addresses in the Triangle,” said one developer. “It really is a hot area, and the arena is what’s driving it.”*

*Some local leaders insist that a new comprehensive plan be developed to govern growth within several miles of the arena. They fear that approving projects piecemeal could bring strip malls and congestion to a part of the Triangle that has largely escaped the grasp of suburban sprawl. Visions of revamped West Raleigh are nothing new. Over the years, as plans for building the arena gradually came together, a variety of master plans have emerged, but most have simply gathered dust.”*

*News and Observer October 20, 1999*

Well, some of you may remember the arena small area plan from 2001 that was forward thinking but also, ultimately, has gathered dust. Some piecemeal development of the corridor has indeed occurred since that time. So why are we here again developing comprehensive planning for the Blue Ridge corridor? After all, Einstein said insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

Of course the world has changed over the past 13 years, and has begun to catch up with the visionaries. As urbanist James Howard Kunstler has pointed out, “The 20th century was about getting around. The 21st century will be about staying in a place worth staying in.” We have been fortunate locally to retain a strong quality of life and continued although diminished

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rapid growth in the face of the realization of limited resources. However, the sustainability of our approach to growth is now in greater question. In 2002, the State of North Carolina was ranked 49th in the nation in terms of overall planning commitment by the American Planning Association. The General Assembly has since formed the NC Sustainable Communities Task Force in view of the need to plan for a sustainable future.

During the course of our discussions, the Blue Ridge Road stakeholders group realized that this district could serve as a State-wide model for 21st century urban planning. This has been confirmed by the first place ranking of the Corridor on the recent Sustainable Communities Task Force grant award. In parallel with the goals of the Task Force, the Corridor offers the potential to bring together the components of land use planning, transportation, and affordable housing while preserving open space and the environment, optimizing public health, and enhancing economic development. The Corridor can serve as a pilot for NCDOT's new Complete Streets policy to collaborate on multi-modal transportation options needed to serve the community and complement the context of the area. Another indication of the Corridor's significance Statewide is the funding of North Carolina's first comprehensive Health Impact Assessment by Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation to be conducted in parallel with the planning process.

We now have an outstanding team led by the Raleigh Urban Design Center with the support of area stakeholders. As most of the land in the Corridor is State-owned, the need for interagency and multi-jurisdictional cooperation is essential to move this process forward. Looking around the room, I think today is a good start in that context. Our goal has always been to have bottom-up planning to engage as many stakeholders as possible in order to have a successful outcome. As we welcome Urban Design Associates to the planning team today, our focus will ultimately be on implementation of their recommendations.

As the native American proverb says, "We do not inherit the land from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children." Please do not lose this window of opportunity. Thank you for your interest and support.

Dr. Stuart Levin  
Chair, Blue Ridge Road Advisory Council

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## KEY ATTRIBUTES OF THE BLUE RIDGE ROAD DISTRICT STUDY

- » The public and property owners are consulted up front to establish a vision, define the study area, identify key questions, and refine the scope.
- » The plan contents will work backwards from implementation to ensure that the recommendations can realistically be carried forward.
- » Intra- and inter-governmental (and business interests) coordination is built into the process given the overlapping jurisdictions along the corridor, public ownership patterns, and the interrelated nature of the issues.
- » The result is the identification of realistic, actionable recommendations and the assignment of responsibility to participating organizations.

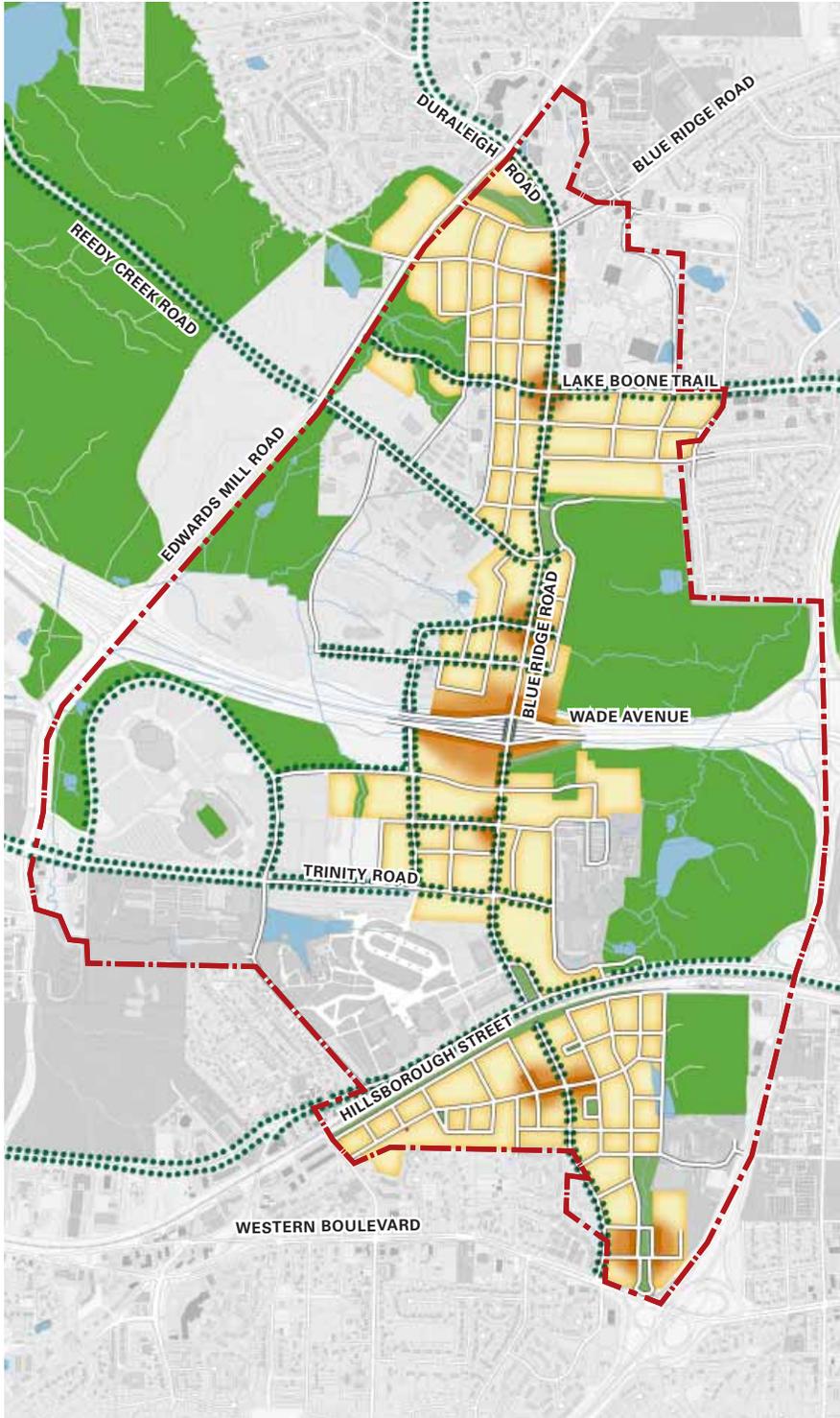
The Blue Ridge Road District Study looked at a two-mile stretch of Blue Ridge Road that is flanked by many of Raleigh’s greatest attractions: the North Carolina Museum of Art, the PNC Arena, Carter-Finley Stadium, and the North Carolina State Fairgrounds. With the additional support of major employers and institutions like the various State departments that are headquartered here, the NC State University Centennial Biomedical Campus, and Rex UNC Health Care (Rex Hospital), this area hosts well over 6 million visitors a year.

Even with all of these assets, the Blue Ridge Road District struggles to support these visitors with limited local road network, poor pedestrian access, a lack of entertainment and service uses, and a very car-centric, suburban character.

The Raleigh Urban Design Center administered this effort, supported and directed by a representative advisory group of major stakeholders, land owners, and tenants. This study seeks to provide a coordinated blueprint to guide future development within this District that will be implemented over time, reverse the trend of anemic economic development, and establish a true sense of place. To this end, the project team utilized a series of stakeholder, focus group, and public meetings to seek input, foster consensus, and identify future opportunities for the Blue Ridge Road District.

The overall vision plan is a combination of the three major framework elements: (1) Transportation, (2) Green Infrastructure, and (3) Development. The following pages give a brief overview of the recommendations coming out of this study, and the full final report will be used to inform zoning amendments, comprehensive plan amendments, and transportation-related design improvements. Ultimately, this information will help to establish design guidelines for mixed-use zoning districts, heights, edges, public art, and urban design, thereby aiding large property owners in the realization of this district’s vision.





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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## NEAR TERM

- » Extend Lake Boone Trail over to Edwards Mill Road
- » Evaluate options for a more compact interchange at the Wade Avenue Bridge to provide better access and maximize developable land
- » Maintain a signalized intersection at Trinity Road and Blue Ridge Road
- » Provide a transit circulator serving the area between the Arena and the Stadium
- » Depress Blue Ridge Road under Hillsborough Street, railroad tracks, and Beryl Road per the NCDOT underpass project
- » Upgrade and improve Macon Pond Road to be a front door and a proper connection from Rex Hospital to Edwards Mill Road
- » Upgrade Ligon Street connection

## MID TERM

- » Connect the Arts District to the Entertainment District via a new connection across Wade Avenue
- » Improve intersection at Blue Ridge Road and Forest View Road
- » Connect the NCSU campus to the facilities across Blue Ridge Road via a new east/west street pedestrian connection
- » Establish a street pattern between NCSU and the east edge of the Stadium /Arena parking that facilitates expansion

## LONG TERM

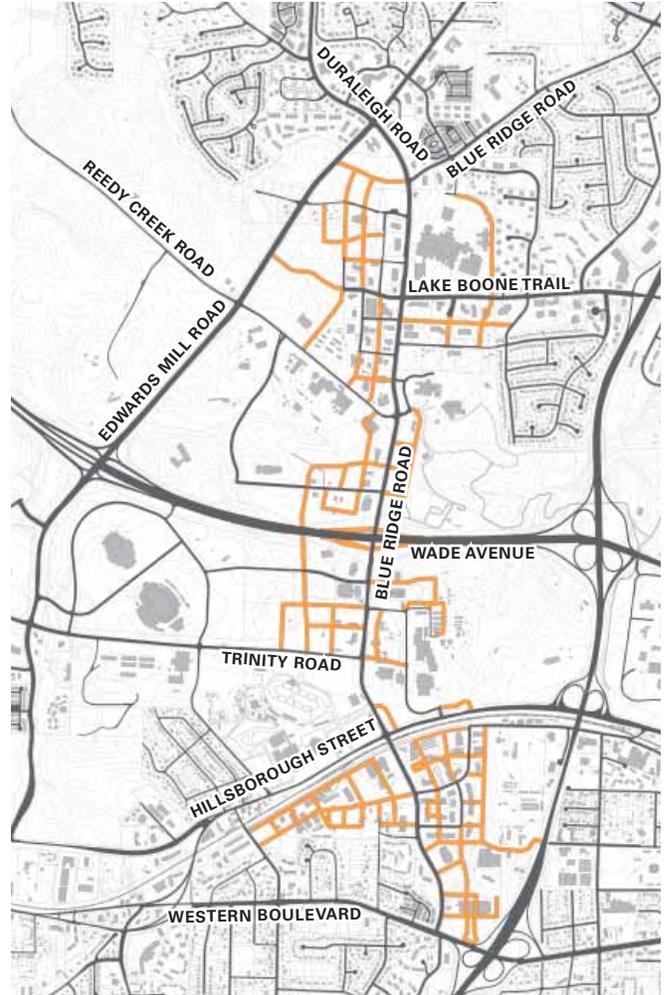
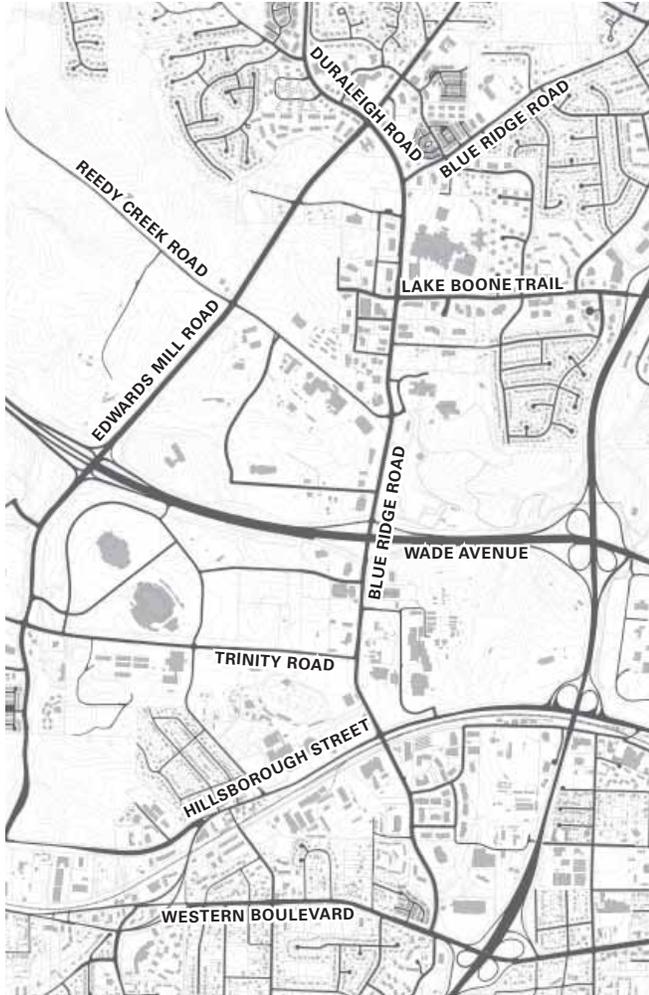
- » Reconfigure street connections to accommodate an interconnected and pedestrian-friendly district as redevelopment occurs
- » Improve connectivity with additional north/south streets parallel to Blue Ridge Road

## TRANSPORTATION

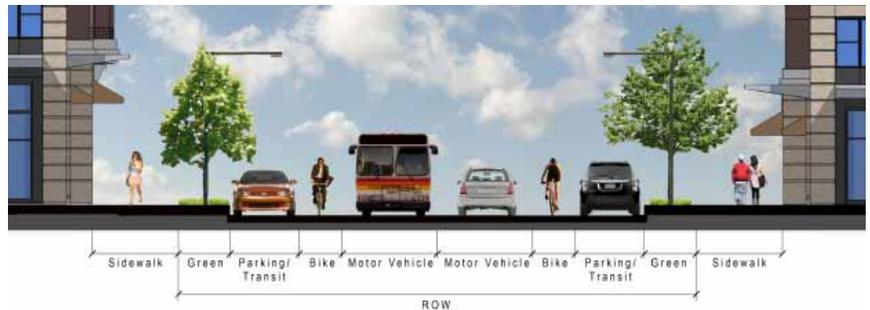
It is impossible to talk about the image, character, and function of the Blue Ridge Road District without addressing the impact of the road itself. Throughout this vision study, we heard about not only the ugliness of the road, but the dangers and inconveniences associated with traffic congestion, rate of speed of cars, the lack of safe and wide sidewalks, the lack of safe crossings, the lack of bicycle lanes, and the deficiencies in transit service. Amend applicable public and private facilities master plans.

In order to address these concerns, key improvements are recommended:

- » **Blue Ridge Road Improvements:** Blue Ridge Road, in its various recommended cross sections, will serve as a pilot project for the North Carolina Department of Transportation Complete Streets program.
- » **Wade Avenue Bridge Improvements:** The Wade Avenue Bridge does not currently have enough dimension to provide safe pedestrian and cycle passage. This structure needs to be widened to accommodate these while the ramps to and from Wade Avenue should be evaluated for a more compact and urban configuration.
- » **Secondary Street Network:** In order to facilitate positive change in the district a secondary street network should be developed to improve mobility and reduce isolated development parcels and expansive parking areas. This concept includes the exploration of an additional north/south street connection under Wade Avenue to better link the District's existing facilities to each other and to new mixed-use development and services.
- » **Blue Ridge Road Transit:** We encourage the planned extension of the Wade County Transit Plan's Creedmoor Road / PNC Service. In addition to this, we also recommend a District-serving bus line that runs at a fairly high frequency (every 10 minutes) to connect Crabtree Valley Mall at the northern end down to the intersection at Western Boulevard to the South and additional stops to existing local and regional bus routes.
- » **Hillsborough Grade Separation:** This project is already underway, and should continue. It is crucial that the pedestrian and cycle connections be improved as part of the strategy to improve vehicular flow.
- » **Light Rail Transit:** This area would most certainly benefit from future light rail service. Combined with the other bus transit improvements, secondary street network, and cycle connectivity, the District will truly embody multi-modal transit.



*The existing street network (above, left) does not provide enough network to a walkable and sustainable district. The proposed framework (above, right) adds a secondary network of streets to support the development and increase connectivity. A typical street cross-section (to the right) will provide ample facilities for pedestrians, transit, bicycles, and cars.*



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## NEAR TERM

- » Protect the existing wetlands
- » Provide an improved loop on the NCMA greenway
- » Prepare comprehensive, District-wide trail map for way-finding, and theme loops based on the district served
- » Incorporate a comprehensive public art program to unify the District
- » Provide wide sidewalks near the State Fairgrounds, PNC Arena, and the Carter-Finley Stadium, as well as along the thoroughfares that link these institutions with parking resources

## MID TERM

- » Connect the existing trails to the north around the Rex Hospital expansion and west to Schenk Forest
- » Implement a pedestrian connection at the NCMA under Wade Avenue to NCSU College of Veterinary Medicine campus
- » Capitalize on linkages to the JC Raulston Arboretum as a neighborhood amenity

## LONG TERM

- » As development comes on line, evaluate recreation needs of new population and incorporate localized green spaces

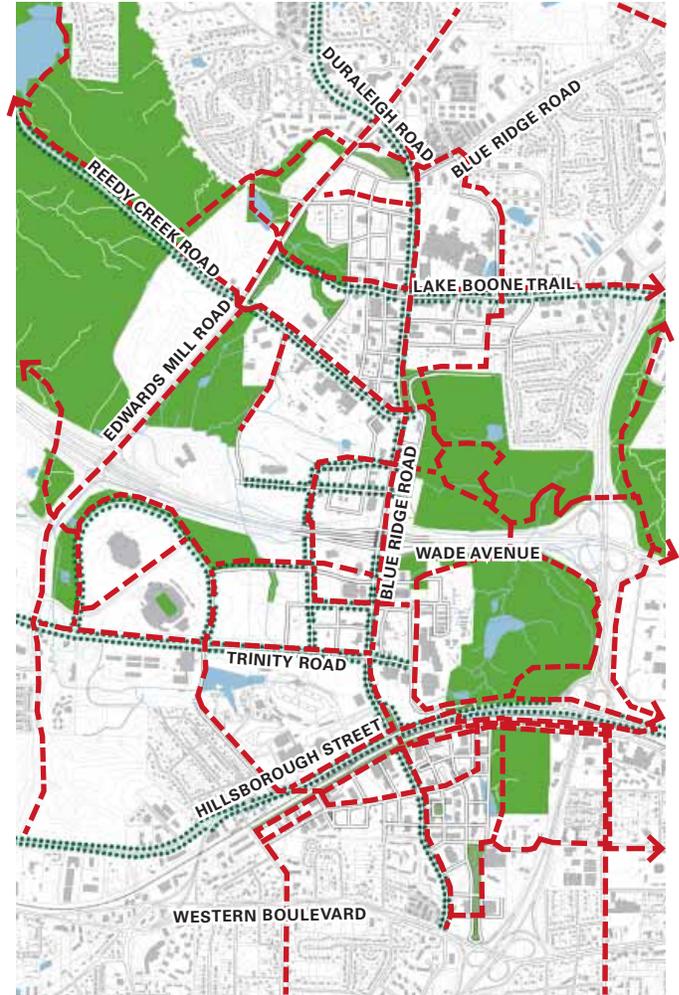
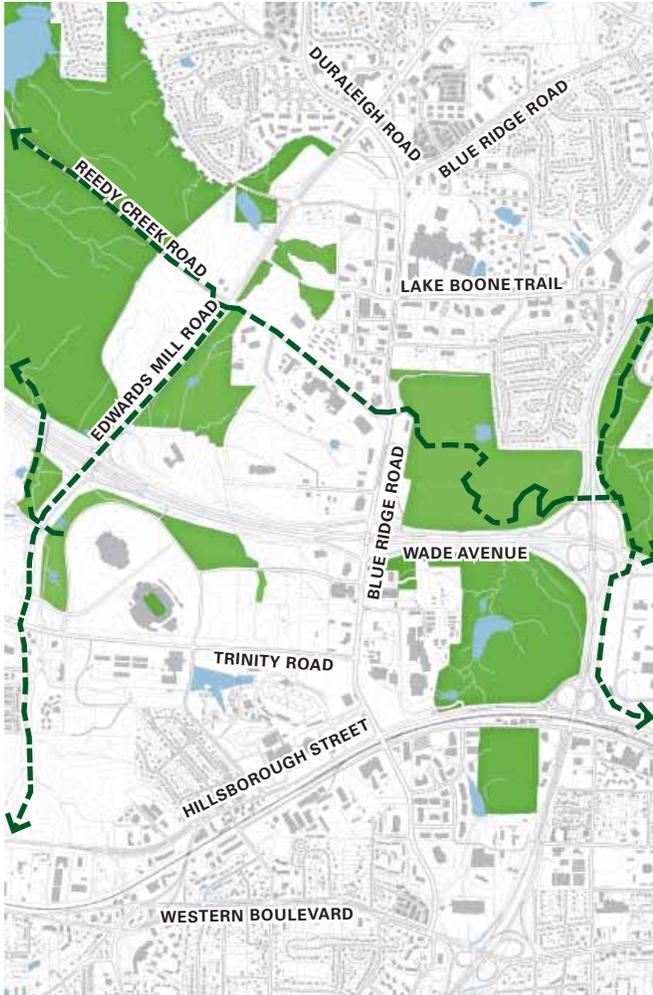
## GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

One of the greatest assets of this part of Raleigh is the green space surrounding the District. The North Carolina Museum of Art and Museum Park, Carl Alwin Memorial Schenk Forest, William B. Umstead State Park, the JC Raulston Arboretum, and even the pastures at NC State’s Centennial Biomedical Campus all stand in stark contrast to the concrete and asphalt expanse of Blue Ridge Road.

Many of the participants throughout the process described with great affinity the trails and recreational attractions for cyclists, runners, and hikers, but they all complained of the same frustration: the public open spaces and facilities are not well-connected to each other, and the nature of development in the District further aggravates this phenomenon. Amend applicable public and private facilities master plans.

The recommendations of this study concentrate on providing better connections and better access to the existing open space resources:

- » **Implement Additional ‘Connector’ Linkages:** Explore the possibility of a pedestrian connection under Wade Avenue in order to link the NC State Centennial Biomedical Campus with the NCMA trails and pedestrian bridge.
- » **Improve Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure:** All new and existing roads within the District should be improved over time to provide broad, safe sidewalks and dedicated bike lanes. This is especially critical along Blue Ridge Road itself as it functions both as a spine and front door for the entire District.
- » **Create Walkable/Bikable Loops within the District:** By improving key road linkages and access to open spaces while using streets and crossings to link facilities, an interconnected system of multi-use trails and sidewalks within the District is created which is a benefit to recreational users and commuters alike.



*The existing public/private open space and trails diagram (above, left)  
 The proposed public/private open space, trail and improved sidewalk framework (above, right)*

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## NEAR TERM

- » Develop branding and theming for districts
- » Create a mixed-use development on the NCMA side of Blue Ridge Road with potential for a hotel
- » Locate NCSU practice facilities to take advantage of parking access during non-event hours and activate Entertainment District
- » Add a hotel conference facility associated with the Fairgrounds that can serve as an economic generator

## MID TERM

- » Expand Rex Hospital
- » Locate potential DHSS offices along Blue Ridge Road adjacent to the National Guard site
- » Locate mixed-use development along Blue Ridge Road
- » Complement existing neighborhoods with residential uses

## LONG TERM

- » Redevelop K-Mart® site as a mixed-use center coupled with restored and protected streams/wetlands in the low-lying riparian areas of the site
- » Site larger office and commercial footprints more closely to the proposed station

## DEVELOPMENT

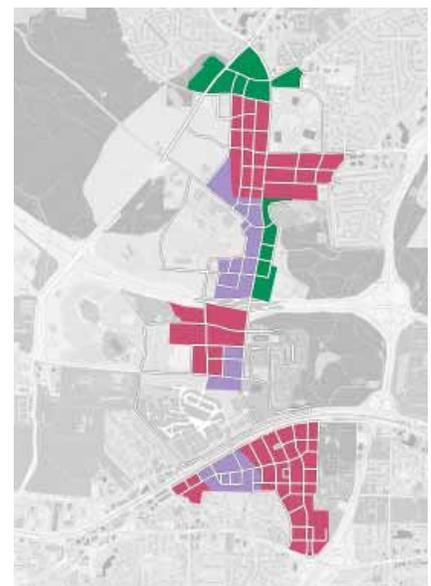
The current development pattern in the Blue Ridge Road District is car-oriented, suburban, and, relatively, low-density. In order to achieve the vision that this plan has captured, densification of development must occur over time. Additionally, the area would greatly benefit from a more diverse range of uses. Currently restaurants, service retail, and residential are either non-existent or under-represented. We believe that the market would support these uses immediately if the character of the existing infrastructure were improved and properly entitled land was readily available. Amend applicable public and private facilities master plans.

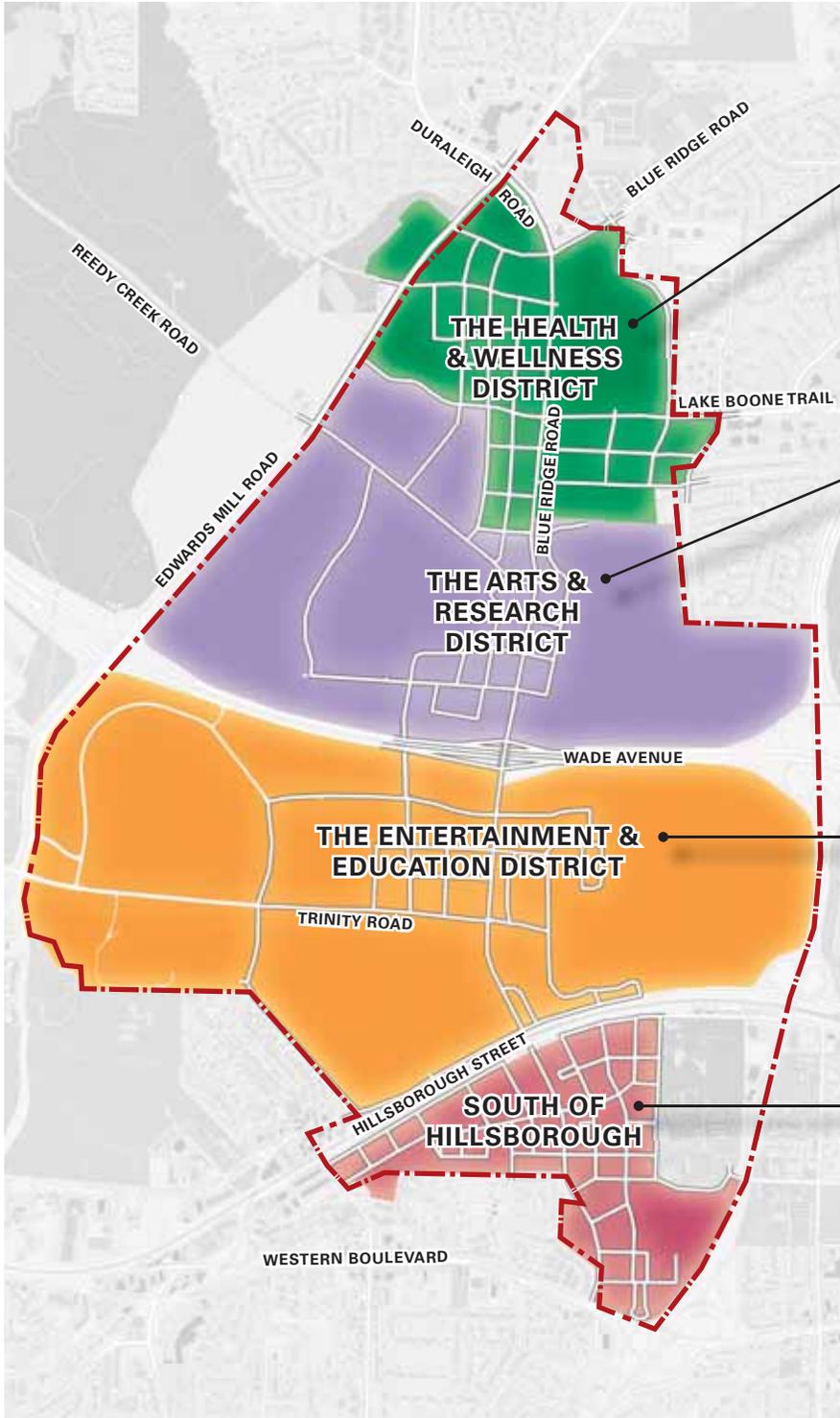
These following items summarize the development recommendations for the Blue Ridge Road District:

- » **Develop Distinct, Walkable Sub-Districts:** The two-mile-long corridor of Blue Ridge Road divides nicely into four walkable districts. We are recommending that each sub-area be programmed and designed to relate directly to the attractions and employment centers that anchor them, such as the NCMA being one of the anchors for the Arts and Research District.
- » **Focus Density Around Mixed-Use Nodes:** Each sub-area should possess a mixed-use nucleus that aggregates service, retail, and entertainment uses to create vibrant hubs and easily serviced transportation nodes.

### PRIORITY SITES FOR REDEVELOPMENT

-  EARLY ACTION SITES
-  PRIVATELY HELD- TO BE DEVELOPED AS MARKET/ZONING ALLOWS
-  STATE PROPERTIES- TO BE DEVELOPED AS RELOCATION RESOURCES BECOME AVAILABLE





*Above: District Character Sketches  
To the right: District Diagram*

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ACTION PLAN				
	NEAR TERM	MID TERM	LONG TERM	ENTITY
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>				
» Extend Lake Boone Trail over to Edwards Mill Road	x			City of Raleigh
» Evaluate options for a more compact interchange at the Wade Avenue Bridge to provide better access and maximize developable land	x			NCDOT
» Maintain a signalized intersection at Trinity Road and Blue Ridge Road	x			NCDOT
» Provide a transit circulator serving the area between the Arena and the Stadium	x			City of Raleigh
» Depress Blue Ridge Road under Hillsborough Street, railroad tracks, and Beryl Road per the NCDOT underpass project	x			NCDOT
» Upgrade and improve Macon Pond Road to be a front door and a proper connection from Rex Hospital to Edwards Mill Road	x			NCDOT & City of Raleigh
» Upgrade Ligon Street connection	x			NCDOT & NCSU & City of Raleigh
» Connect the Arts District to the Entertainment District via a new connection across Wade Avenue		x		City of Raleigh Urban Design Center & City of Raleigh
» Improve intersection at Blue Ridge Road and Forest View Road		x		NCDOT
» Connect the NCSU campus to the facilities across Blue Ridge Road via a new east/west pedestrian connection		x		NCSU & City of Raleigh
» Establish a street pattern between NCSU and the Stadium /Arena that facilitates expansion		x		City of Raleigh Urban Design Center & City of Raleigh
» Reconfigure street connections to accommodate an interconnected and pedestrian-friendly District as redevelopment occurs			x	City of Raleigh Urban Design Center & City of Raleigh & Private Developers
» Improve connectivity with additional north/south streets parallel to Blue Ridge Road			x	City of Raleigh & Private Developers
<b>GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE</b>				
» Develop comprehensive District Stormwater Strategy that is integrated into infrastructure and development in innovative ways	x			City of Raleigh
» Provide an improved loop on the NCMA greenway	x			NCMA
» Prepare comprehensive, District-wide map for way-finding, and theme loops based on the District served	x			City of Raleigh Urban Design Center & City of Raleigh
» Incorporate a comprehensive public art program to unify the District that integrates the natural resources, water features, and other environmental assets of the area	x			City of Raleigh & NCMA

**ACTION PLAN, CONT.**

	NEAR TERM	MID TERM	LONG TERM	ENTITY
» Provide wide sidewalks near the State Fairgrounds, PNC Arena, and the Carter-Finley Stadium, as well as along the thoroughfares that link these institutions with parking resources	x			City of Raleigh & NCDOT
» Connect the existing trails to the north around the Rex Hospital expansion and west to Schenk Forest		x		City of Raleigh
» Connect greenway at the NCMA under Wade Avenue to NCSU College of Veterinary Medicine campus		x		City of Raleigh & NCMA & NCSU
» Capitalize on linkages to the JC Raulston Arboretum as a neighborhood amenity		x		NCSU & City of Raleigh
» As development comes on line, evaluate recreation needs of new population and incorporate localized green spaces and facilities for active pursuits, such as trails, playgrounds, indoor multi-purpose spaces, and open-turf areas			x	City of Raleigh & Private Developers
<b>DEVELOPMENT</b>				
» Develop branding and theming for districts	x			City of Raleigh Urban Design Center & Core Stakeholder Advisory Team
» Create a mixed-use development on the museum side of Blue Ridge Road with potential for a hotel	x			NCMA
» Locate practice facilities to take advantage of parking access during non-event hours and activate Entertainment District in the near term	x			NCSU & Centennial Authority
» Add a hotel conference facility associated with the Fairgrounds can serve as an economic generator as well as serve a crucial need into this area	x			Fairgrounds & Private Developer
» Expand Rex Hospital to the west		x		Rex Hospital
» Locate potential DHSS offices along Blue Ridge Road adjacent to the National Guard sfite		x		NCDOA
» Locate mixed-use development along Blue Ridge Road		x		Private Developers
» Complement existing neighborhoods with residential uses		x		Private Developers
» Redevelop K-Mart® site as a mixed-use center which could also include a regional storm water management facility			x	Private Developers
» Site larger office and commercial footprints more closely to the proposed transit station			x	Private Developers

