Summary Report on the
Blue Ridge Road Corridor Study
Public Visioning Workshop
April 2, 2011
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1 Introduction

1.1 BACKGROUND

The Blue Ridge Road Corridor Study is being undertaken to develop a blueprint for collaborative, integrated systematic planning and development along the corridor. The study is an effort to craft a vision and strategy for sustainable revitalization, redevelopment, and renewal along the corridor.

Extensive groundwork has been completed over the past three years to organize and engage more than 200 interested parties in the area’s future. To build upon this groundwork, the planning process will begin (informed by the visioning session results) by engaging an outside consultant with funds secured from stakeholders and the recently awarded Sustainable Communities grant.

The final study will include a detailed summary of all the work and findings from the process, along with detailed recommendations on coordinated land use; transportation projects; housing; open space and greenways; infrastructure planning processes across jurisdictions and within agencies; an assessment that captures the benefits of sustainable development; economic development; and zoning and comprehensive plan amendments.

On-going outreach efforts are intended to ensure input from the State, City, institutions, business interests, property owners, neighbors, and interested residents. The public visioning workshop was publicized through a City of Raleigh initiated press release to news media and an email, using both the City’s system and the database compiled by the stakeholder group over three years of meetings and outreach. Turnout for the workshop, estimated at about 90 participants, fully utilized the capacity of the venue.

1.2 PUBLIC VISIONING WORKSHOP PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The Blue Ridge Road Public Visioning Workshop was held on April 2, 2011, at the NC State Fairgrounds, Gov. James G. Martin Building, 1025 Blue Ridge Boulevard. The intent of the workshop was to set the tone for trust-building and long-term collaboration throughout the government, institutional, academic, medical, business, and residential community on the future of the Blue Ridge Road Corridor. Discussions held and input collected will feed into the development of a Request-for-Proposal for a consultant to assist with the study.

Based on the results of the public workshop, the following tasks will close out this phase of the project:
• This summary report will be finalized, published, and uploaded to the Blue Ridge Road Corridor project web page.
• Notice of the summary report will be distributed to all stakeholders and visioning public workshop participants.
• The scope of work and study area will be confirmed to reflect stakeholder and public input.
• The Raleigh Urban Design Center will draft a Request-for-Proposal, which will be posted for comment by Blue Ridge Road Corridor stakeholders.

1.3 PUBLIC VISIONING WORKSHOP FORMAT

The Gov. James G. Martin building meeting room was set up with 10 table rounds to accommodate approximately 90 participants, including staff. Prior to and during the workshop participants had the opportunity to examine large-scale maps that displayed the following Corridor elements:

• City of Raleigh 2030 Comprehensive Plan – Growth Framework Map
• Planimetric map
• Major Property Owner map
• Land Use map
• Bus Routes map
• Topography map
• Project area aerial

Following a welcome and introduction by Grant Meacci, Managing Designer, Raleigh Urban Design Center, major property owners provided brief presentations of their future plans. Presenters included:

• Wesley Wyatt: State of North Carolina Fairgrounds:
• Lisa Schiller: Rex Healthcare Master Plan:
• Dan Gottlieb: North Carolina Museum of Art Campus
• Tom Skolnicki: Centennial Biomedical Campus Guidelines
• Jessie Taliaferro: Centennial Authority (RBC Center)
• Eric Lamb: City of Raleigh Office of Transportation Planning

1.4 PRESENTATIONS OVERVIEW

Following is a brief synopsis of the presentations provided by key property owners:

NC State Fairgrounds, Wesley Wyatt explained that their master plan is a good road map but is not set in stone. Some of the fairgrounds funds have been transferred to the State General Fund, which affects
how much and when they can proceed with their master plan. The State allocated land between Blue Ridge Road and Edwards Mill Road, up to Reedy Creek Road, and to the NC Fairgrounds. Some of that land is now held by the NCSU Veterinary school.

**Rex Healthcare**, Lisa Schiller, gave a presentation on the organization’s planned new cancer center and the proposed new bed tower, which will greatly increase their size and the number of people at their facilities.

**Museum of Art**, Dan Gottlieb, reminded participants that the museum campus is at the western gateway to the city and draws people from all 50 states to Blue Ridge Road. The museum is committed to restoration of open space at their facility.

**Centennial Biomedical Campus**, Tom Skolnicki, NCSU University Landscape Architect, said that the campus includes the College of Veterinary Medicine and the University Club. NCSU updates their plans for the centennial campus every 5 years and invites the community to provide input. In their current plans, Trinity Road extends into the campus and become the new ceremonial entrance. They have designed enhanced facilities and connections between the facilities. There will be a multi-purpose trail along the north side of Hillsborough Street and the east side of Blue Ridge Road (walk/bike). They will always protect and retain the pastures people see as they drive down Hillsborough Street.

**Centennial Authority/RBC Center**, Jessie Taliaferro, reported that the Authority sees the RBC Center as the heart of the entertainment district. They have the option to deck their parking and allow multi-use development on their property similar to the Durham Bulls stadium. The Authority would like more people to use public transit and hopes to see bus service to the RBC/Carter-Finley lot. The RBC Center is in favor of a single-rail people mover.

**City of Raleigh Office of Transportation Planning**, Eric Lamb reported that the City’s 2030 Comprehensive Plan proposes to extend Lake Boone Trail to Edwards Mill Road. This extension, along with the Edwards Mill extension, will continue to help traffic flow in the Blue Ridge Corridor area. A meeting will be held by NCDOT May 12th, from 4pm to 7pm in the Martin Building about Blue Ridge/Hillsborough intersection plans. There are 20 trains a day along the NCRR rail corridor. The federal rail administration may have funding for improvements to the intersection. Blue Ridge Road is proposed to pass under Hillsborough Street and Beryl Road. Instead of the existing intersection, there will be a connector road through the corner of the NCSU CBC property to route traffic between Hillsborough and Blue Ridge. The transit station location and design is not final, but it is possible that it might be elevated on a platform over where Blue Ridge road goes under Hillsborough Street.
The City also is studying the bridge over Wade Avenue and what will it take to retrofit it for pedestrian traffic. They are studying five other bridges along the I-40 corridor for similar upgrades. There is strong demand for transit connection between a Hillsborough/Blue Ridge transit center and the Crabtree valley area.

The presentations were well received. Participants suggested including additional large property owners including Meredith College, the Highway Patrol, NC Military Campus, and the Arboretum. *What role can they play and how should they be considered in this area plan?*

### 1.5 HOW THE INPUT WAS COMPILED AND ANALYZED

The presentations were followed by small-group discussions, during which participants reviewed the study area and answered questions, verbally and on comment forms distributed to all participants. All table notes were compiled verbatim and can be viewed in their raw format in Appendix A—Table Notes of this report. Participants also were encouraged to illustrate their ideas on a large-scale planimetric map placed at each table. Scans of the maps created by participants can be viewed and downloaded at [http://www.flickr.com/photos/40641567@N03/sets/72157626475898817/detail/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/40641567@N03/sets/72157626475898817/detail/).

At each of the small-group discussion tables, facilitators asked the following questions to spur discussion. Recorders noted responses.

- What is your vision?
- What is the study area?
- Can we accomplish our vision through a corridor study (Blue Ridge Road and its edges) or area plan (Blue Ridge road and all surrounding property)?
- Are there any specific topics or issues that should be addressed in the project scope? (which will translate into an Request-for-Proposal)

Prior to wrapping up the workshop, each table ‘reported-out’ on their consensus highlights and top priorities.

Following the workshop, staff synthesized the points of commonality and recurring themes across comments. The themes are written up in this report, with accompanying staff analysis and response. Where appropriate, supporting quotes from the notes and comments are included in the narrative. The intent is to demonstrate the integrity of the public process by:

- Capturing all comments received during and after the workshop;
- Reviewing each comment; and
• Identifying major themes that emerged from the comments, which will be used to develop a scope of work and Request-for-Proposal.

2 Vision

Participants were provided a draft vision statement composed by the founding stakeholder group. During the small-group discussions participants were asked to discuss and edit the draft for inclusion in this summary. Consensus on the vision statement is expected to guide the process moving forward.

Following is the draft distributed to all participants:

**DRAFT VISION STATEMENT**
The Blue Ridge Corridor is a carefully zoned boulevard that encourages mixed-use development, cultural, commercial, entertainment, residential, office – both private and State owned). The Corridor would be developed for a level of appropriate density for day and evening / weekday and weekend use to take advantage of its major assets: the medical zone; the museum zone; the university zone; the greenway and open space, east-to-west recreational corridor.

Following is an update on the draft vision statement. It incorporates attributes that key property owners, business owners, visitors, and residents want people to experience during a day or evening on the corridor in the future.

**UPDATE DRAFT VISION STATEMENT**
The Blue Ridge Corridor District is a 24/7 urban place, with distinct activity areas unified by the corridor. The corridor is beautifully landscaped with wide sidewalks and pedestrian-scaled lighting. Bicyclists and pedestrians have easy access along the corridor to the greenway and open space and to the medical, museum, and university zones. Transit links activity centers, campuses, residential areas, and Downtown. Surrounding the corridor is sustainable, integrated development; the result of the successful partnership among State, City, and private property owners that emphasized collaboration and master plan integration and enhancements. The District supports and encourages mixed-use development (cultural, commercial, academic, retail, entertainment, residential, and office – both private- and State-owned). Surrounding the District is natural landscape and a thriving residential community.

Comments contributed by participants relative to the vision include:

• *Craft the vision in a way that the highest value is sought on the areas that are still available for development and have that development bring benefit to the existing elements.*
• The area should have a ‘campus’ feel and strive to promote a 24-hour community with retail to support Rex, dining to support the RBC Center, Art Museum…’ Do not limit mix of uses to specific zones.
• Create an environment that brings people in for events and lets them plan an entire day in the area.
• The vision should highlight the natural environment, open space and greenway trails as an asset to the area
• ‘Carefully zoned’ is too planner oriented—make it more simple.
• ‘Carefully zoned’ is a very important part of the statement.

3 Study Area

Participants were asked what the study area should include. Upon examining and discussing a draft that included Edwards Mill Road to Hillsborough Street as a starting point, participants shared their ideas about what to include in a new urban place that the corridor might become:

• Edwards Mill to Beltline and Duraleigh to Western Boulevard
• I-40 to Faircloth, to include Meredith College
• Hillsborough Street to Edwards Mill
• Western Boulevard to the Edwards Mill/Blue Ridge Road intersection
• Western Boulevard to Crabtree Valley Mall
• Edwards Mill to I-440
• Connectivity to Umstead on Reedy Creek Road 100,000 people go through the Umstead Park entrance.
• Use existing road network in Meredith Woods for limits

Participants enthusiastically embraced the idea of a thriving, sustainable destination that supports current development and future master plans with people, activity, and inter-connectivity. Establish zones within the corridor with distinguished frontage character: Historic Fair building, gateway location, light rail stop. Corridor frontages should vary from urban, to transitional to suburban. The entire corridor needs to be planned to connect to Downtown.

Asked whether their vision would best be fulfilled through a corridor study or an area plan they submitted commentary that, despite the classification, expands those definitions to include elements of each. Yes, a corridor study that focuses on Blue Ridge Road and its edges is important; corridor is the main thread connecting different nodes of activity centers, all uses can go in each activity center. But [there is] too much focus on the road by using the word corridor.
Many suggested that an area plan that includes all surrounding property is generally, equally important. *Create an area plan, but focus development around the Corridor. Reference the entire area and not just the corridor. Some suggested a carefully zoned ‘area’ rather than ‘boulevard’ or ‘road.’*

Comments relative to this question focus on the formation of a ‘distinct district.’ *Would prefer ‘district’ or ‘area.’* *The plan should attempt to seemingly integrate all the master plan efforts and create new opportunities for redeveloping Blue Ridge as a distinct district with the BRC as the mainstream of activity.*

People are looking to connectivity to the larger community/city and Downtown. *The district should be a destination easily accessible to and from Downtown.*

## 4 Scope

Participants were asked about specific topics or issues that should be addressed the project scope. Overall participants agreed that a sustainable, walkable, bikeable, mixed-use, urban center should characterize the corridor in the future. Consequently, much discussion focused on interconnectivity between land uses, multi-modal transportation and transit, including rail and bicycling, roadway improvements, greenways and open space, and land use and economic development.

Examining transportation conditions and expanding transit options was a top priority. *There is no central traffic control for the Carter-Finley, RBC, and the Fairgrounds: They all handle it separately. There should be great consideration given to increasing the modes of transportation.*

Participants suggested that the study examine multi-modal scenarios, including enhanced mass-transit services and pedestrian/bike access across bridges. *Highest pedestrian counts, only area in Raleigh that isn’t served with transit.* Several tables emphasized a donut hole in local transit: *CAT routes don’t come down from Crabtree to the Blue Ridge Road Corridor area, and Triangle Transit routes don’t go up to the Crabtree area.* Also, several participants suggested that *bus stops need to be serviced well with adequate amenities such as shelter and benches.*

Participants suggested roadway improvements and better access management and connections along Blue Ridge Road between Lake Boone Trail and Wade Avenue. They also suggested intersection improvements, and called for a tighter grid system related to the following streets that intersect with Blue Ridge Road:

- Duraleigh Road and Edwards Mill Road
- Lake Boone Trail
• Wade Avenue
• Hillsborough Street
• Western Boulevard

Region wide, conversation is focused on commuter rail (which carry express trains) and regional rail (which have more stops than commuter rail). Several participants commented on transit-oriented development. One commenter noted that the station [should be] oriented more towards Fairgrounds and southern properties. Another participant commented that there should be a rail stop at Rex Healthcare and the NC Museum of Art.

Participants called for healthy communities and the need to create conditions for physical activity. People called for a capacity to walk between destinations and to make the walk interesting, like including ground floor retail in new development. Suggestions included a greenway connection, more accessibility, and an increase in bike lanes along Blue Ridge Road. Wade Ave represents a major barrier to the area’s walkability. Open space shouldn’t be touched. There are a number of greenways to connect, but if bicycles are to be used as a means of transportation (in addition to recreation), Blue Ridge Road should have adequate bike lanes.

There was a call to support existing plans and investigate additional land use and development opportunities within that context. Focus on existing facilities like the Highway Patrol Facility and DOT Maintenance.

New life as a 24/7 urban place calls for a focus on economic development, from land use and development, to job creation, to providing amenities that attract employees, visitors, and residents to spend time and dollars there. Comments included: Identity=people destination. Brand=entertainment. Concentrate on visitor services along the corridor to serve visitors and residents. Corridor should have a positive, cohesive identity – link visitor destinations, streetscape and signage will help. Design elements should welcome people to Raleigh.

Several tables noted the opportunity to create a variety of housing opportunities. There is a high employee concentration in the corridor but not a lot of housing options. Address affordable housing in the mix, close to transit, [and the] market area.

SCOPE events
• Public Visioning Workshop
• RFP Development
• Contract with Consultant (Land use and development opportunities, Inventory analysis: urban design inventory, trans conditions, bike/ped analysis, environmental conditions, infrastructure, economic and market analysis)
• Updates to Founding Stakeholder Group 30%, 60%, 90%
• Additional public workshops

5 Conclusions

The individual components of the Corridor provide great possibilities for the area as an attractive cultural destination, green recreational corridor venue, and economic engine. The approximately 90 participants provided a wealth of input about the area and what people would like to see and experience. The following is a summary of the major themes and general conclusions that emerged from the analysis of the input received from the workshop.

Create a strong partnership among property owners, large institutions, State, City, and residential community. The Blue Ridge Road Corridor group is committed to maintaining and enhancing the quality of development in this part of West Raleigh. Consensus and on-going collaboration ideally will create the conditions for individual organizational success. The result will be a sustainable community and urban place of well-planned, successful development that is accessible to local business enterprises, the communities that border it, and the people who drive, bike, walk, or take public transportation to it to work, frequent its services, shop, and recreate.

Examine transportation conditions and emphasize multimodal transportation. Designed exclusively for cars, the corridor needs better transit service and quality facilities for bikes and pedestrians. Through the ‘Capital Area Bus Transit Development Plan,’ the City and its partners will provide a long-range capital investment and bus operating service plan to implement improvements for new and/or expanded commuter bus, as well as local and in-fill bus service. The system could connect with the transit system currently being evaluated in the Triangle Transit analysis of alternatives for the region. It is likely that transit growth depends on passage of a ½ cent transit sales tax in order to have an infrastructural advancement which would include light rail. Rex-Crabtree-Downtown is among the heaviest potential ridership for such a light rail system. The Bus Development Plan is designed to complement the rail service plan within Wake County. Bus services will provide high frequency transit on non-rail corridors, as well as connections to all rail stations permitting residents and workers from all areas to easily access the regional rail system. Currently, there is tentatively planned a rail stop at Blue Ridge Road and Hillsborough Street. Bus service needs to include attention to bus stop amenities.
Additionally, sidewalks and intersection improvements, ideally, will be an element of all updated master plans and the City’s CIP budget.

**Link and integrate current land use and future master plans.** The 2030 Comprehensive Plan’s future land use scenario for the corridor is generally aligned with participant concerns and helps pave the way for future rezonings in the study area. The new Unified Development Ordinance, currently being drafted, will provide a new suite of mixed-use districts and frontage standards for implement land use recommendations.

**Attract new uses.** There may be opportunities to utilized land not currently under development. Bringing new uses and investment to the corridor may require incentives in addition to other investments. These incentives could target existing property owners and properties. Appropriate funding mechanisms will be needed.

**Make roadway and accessibility improvements.** North Carolina’s Department of Transportation Complete Streets policy is an approach to interdependent, multi-modal transportation networks that safely accommodate access and travel for all users. Complete Streets recognizes the significant influence that street design has on safety, environmental integrity, public health, economic vitality and community livability. The project scope can incorporate recommendations that help fulfill goals established by stakeholders, including landscaping, lighting, wayfinding, and high-grade stormwater management systems.

**Create an urban place that supports physical activity and is welcoming to visitors, employees, and residents.** Future land use discussions and plans will be guided by a vision of a 24/7 urban place that serves people whether they be residents, employees, students, or visitors with outdoor physical activities on the Blue Ridge Road and its adjacent greenways and properties. As highlighted at a previous meeting, NCSU College of Design professor, Kofi Boone, and his students argued in a presentation that the dramatic increase in obesity in this country in recent years is correlated to the increase in sprawl, with major public health implications regarding walkability. Major property owners along the Corridor have an opportunity to model a 21st century urbanism that presents a win-win proposition for them and the communities they serve. The Blue Ridge Road Corridor group envisions bicycle and pedestrian-friendly access along the corridor as a primary short-term goal within the context of physical activity and a welcoming environment.

**Connect the greenway.** Enhancing open space and recreational amenities could attract new uses to the study area.
Examine creating housing options. The 2030 Comprehensive Plan’s housing element is aligned with suggestions offered at the workshop. The quality of housing in Raleigh is fundamental to the quality of life for all city residents. Raleigh enjoys a large and diverse base of well-maintained housing. New housing choices, in coordination with land use and transportation, will accommodate a variety of housing styles in the city’s growth centers that can offer a model for Blue Ridge Road stakeholders to evaluate moving forward.

6 Next Steps

- Post Workshop Summary to City of Raleigh project web site.
- Email notification to all workshop participants and other interested parties.
- Confirm stakeholder financial contributions to Blue Ridge Road Study.
- Prepare a project scope-of-work and request-for-proposal.
- Kick-off the project.