





Jerry Stensland

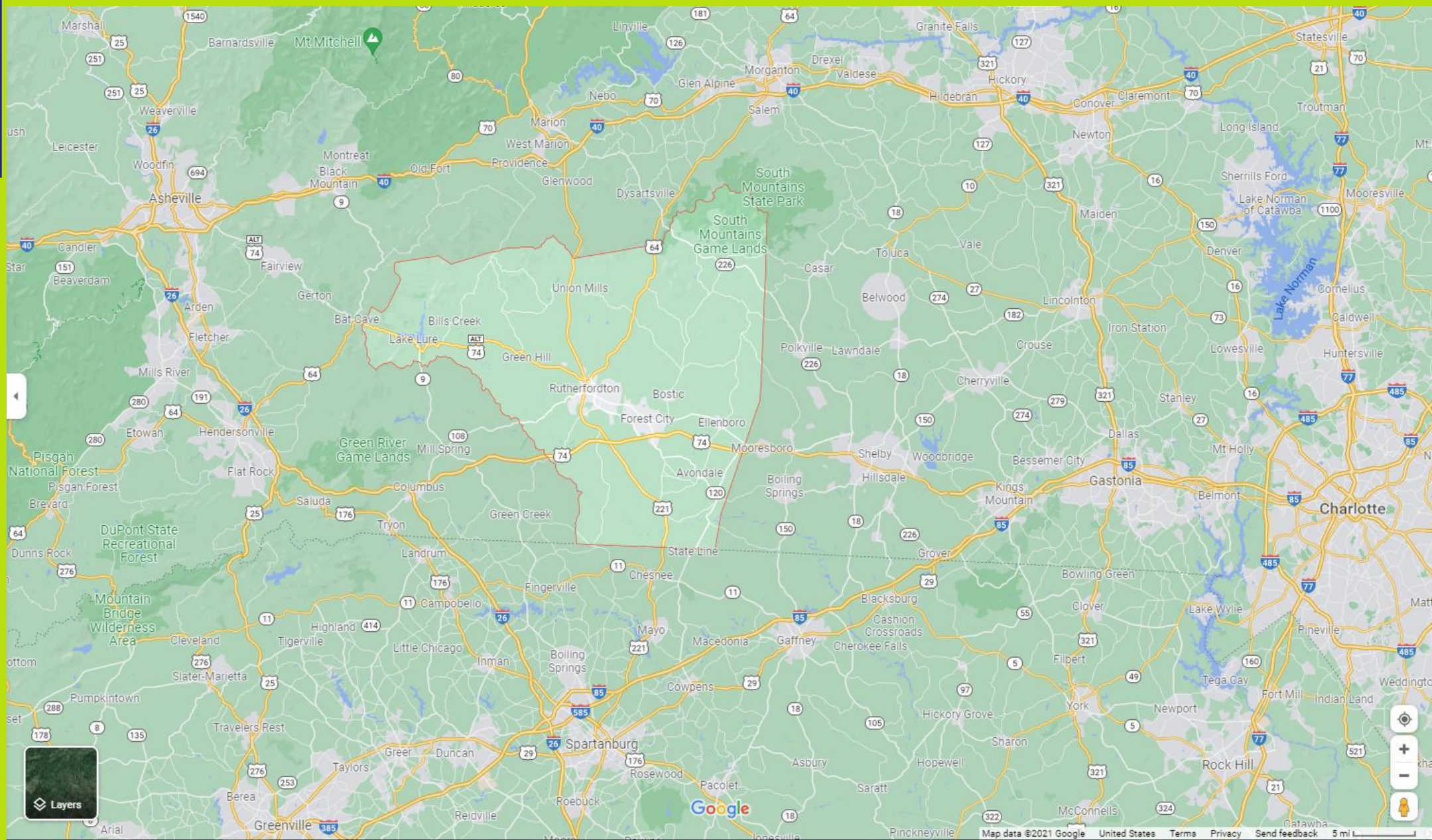
Foothills Regional Commission – Safe Routes to Schools Coordinator, RPO Planner  
Rutherford Outdoor Coalition – Co-founder and President

Karyl Fuller

Foothills Regional Commission - Economic and Community Development Director

Doug Barrick

Town of Rutherfordton - Manager







- 13.56 miles, 12-foot wide paved. Fully opened in Fall of 2019.
- Connects five communities (Gilkey, Ruth, Rutherfordton, Spindale, Forest City)
- Constructed on old rail line at cost of \$5.5 million
- Averaging 130,000 trips per year
- Trail website: [www.ThermalBeltRailTrail.com](http://www.ThermalBeltRailTrail.com)
- Including the Purple Martin Greenway, Rutherford County has 15.5 miles of paved trail at least 10-foot wide. One mile for every 4,387 people. Most per capita of any county in the Carolinas?!?





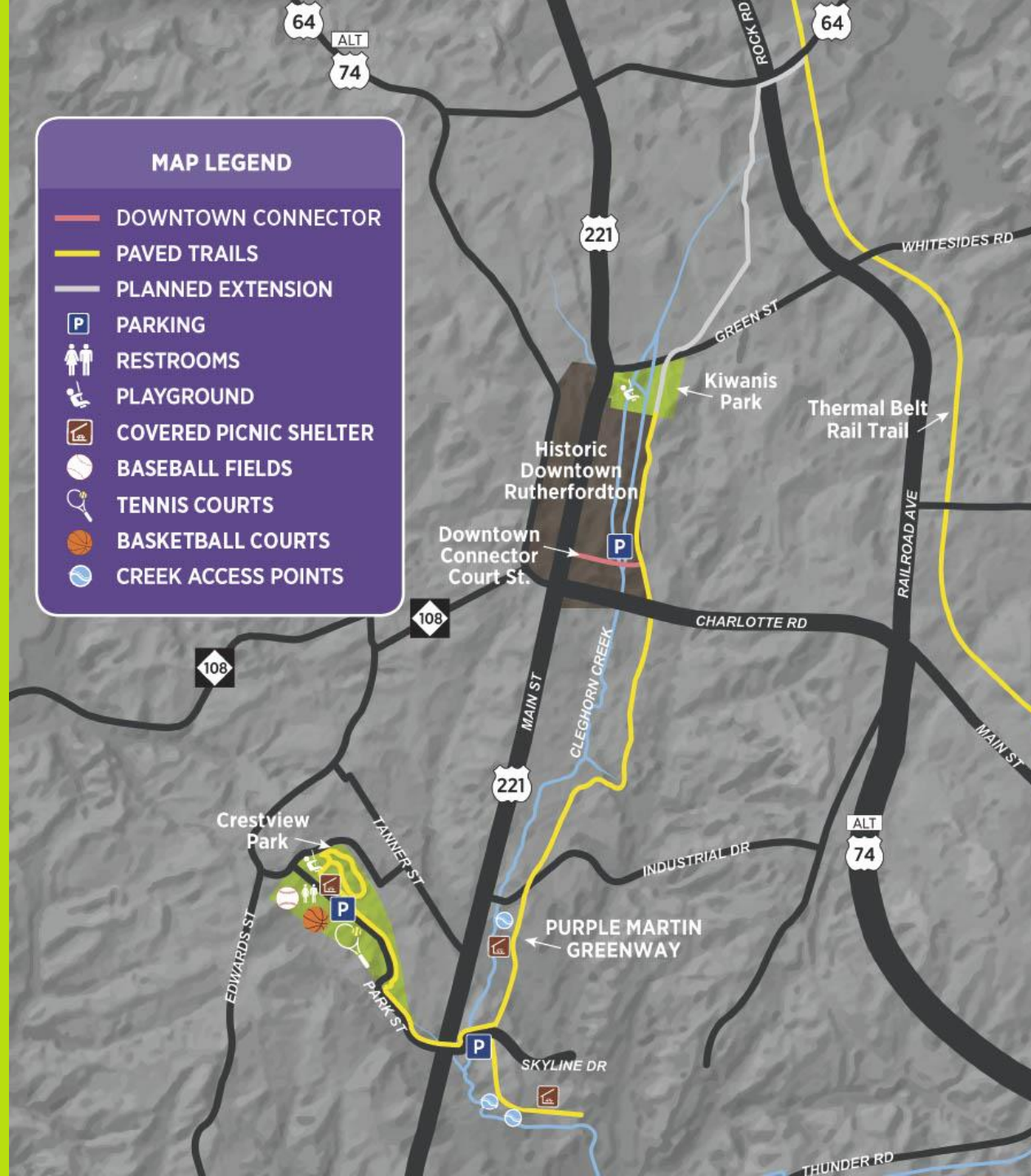
## PARKING AREAS

- MILE 0, TRAIL HEAD  
Oak Springs Road, Rutherfordton
- MILE 2.1  
Bechtler Mint Site Historic Park  
342 Gilboa Church Road, Rutherfordton
- MILE 4.8  
1006 Railroad Avenue, Rutherfordton
- MILE 7  
Downtown Spindale  
Spindale Street & W Main Street, Spindale
- MILE 11.2  
Downtown Forest City  
172 Park Square, Forest City
- MILE 12.5  
Pine Street & S Broadway Street, Forest City
- MILE 13.5, TRAIL HEAD  
Forrest W Hunt Elementary School

## MAP LEGEND

- PAVED TRAILS
- NATURAL TRAILS
- POTENTIAL EXTENSION
- 1/2 MILE MARKER
- MILE MARKER
- BASEBALL DIAMOND
- BASKETBALL COURT
- BIKE RACK
- BIKE REPAIR STATION
- BRIDGE
- DOG PARK
- FOUNTAIN
- GOLF COURSE
- KIOSK
- LIBRARY
- PARKING
- PICKLEBALL
- PLAYGROUND
- PUBLIC POOL
- REST AREA/BENCH
- RESTAURANTS
- RESTROOMS
- SHELTER
- SHOPPING
- SPLASH PAD
- TENNIS COURT
- TRANSIT STOP  
M-F 7:45 am-5pm
- WATER FOUNTAIN
- WORKOUT STATION

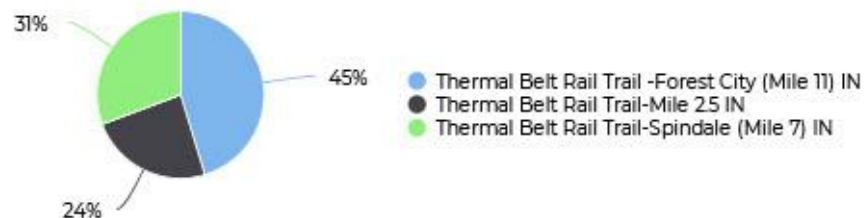




## Last Year Total - All Sites

November 1, 2020 → October 31, 2021

### Distribution by Site



### Total-All Users

Total

**123,837**

### All Users

Daily Average

**339**

### Cyclists

Total

**70,821**

### Cyclists

Daily Average

**194**

### Weekends - Cyclists

11/01/2020 → 10/31/2021

Daily Average

**309**

### Weekdays - Cyclists

11/01/2020 → 10/31/2021

Daily Average

**148**

### Pedestrians

Total

**53,016**

### Pedestrians

Daily Average

**145**

### Weekends - Pedestrians

11/01/2020 → 10/31/2021

Daily Average

**167**

### Weekdays - Pedestrians

11/01/2020 → 10/31/2021

Daily Average

**137**

### Weekends - All Users

11/01/2020 → 10/31/2021

Daily Average

**476**

### Weekdays - All Users

11/01/2020 → 10/31/2021

Daily Average

**284**





























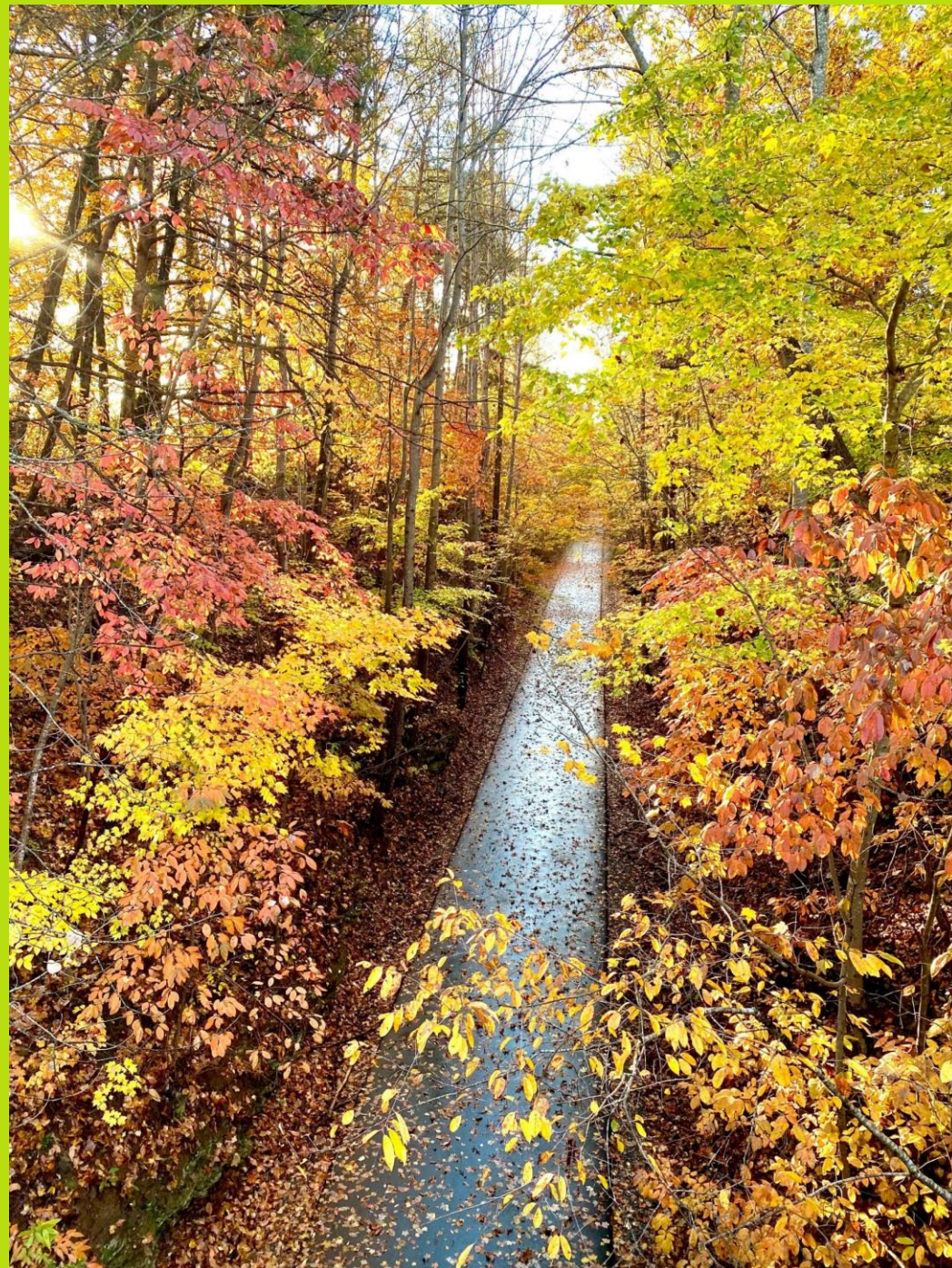
























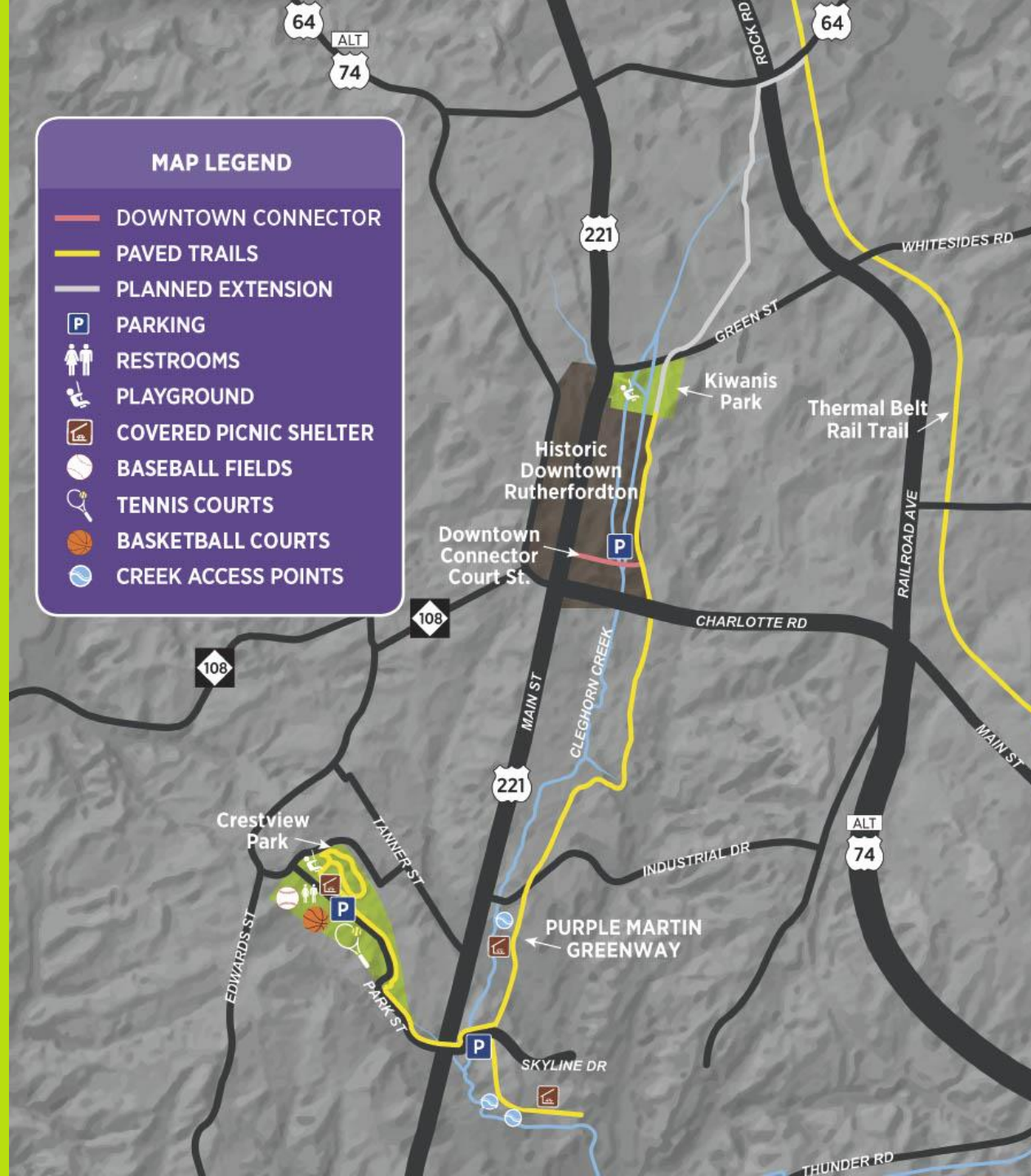












































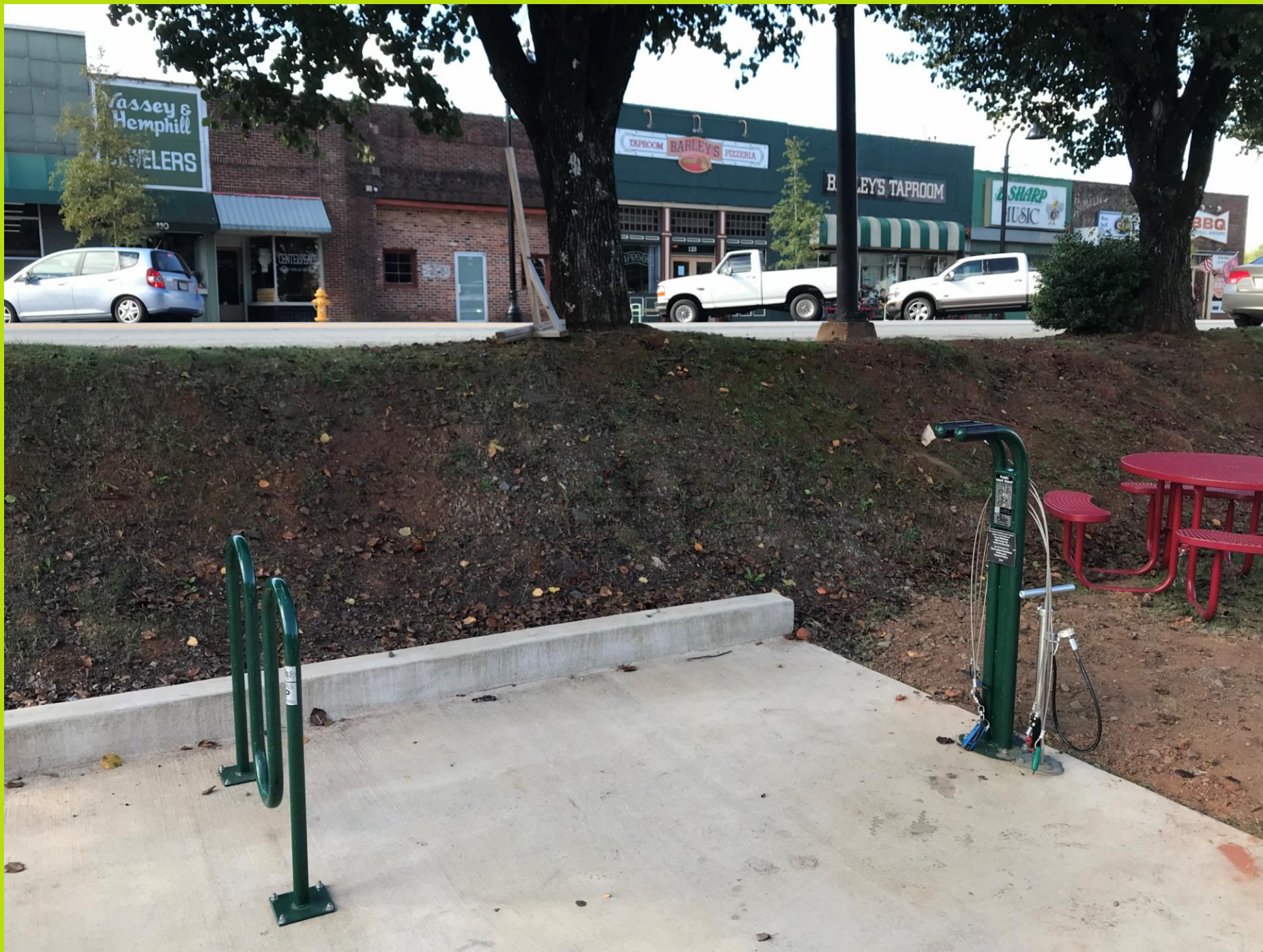








































































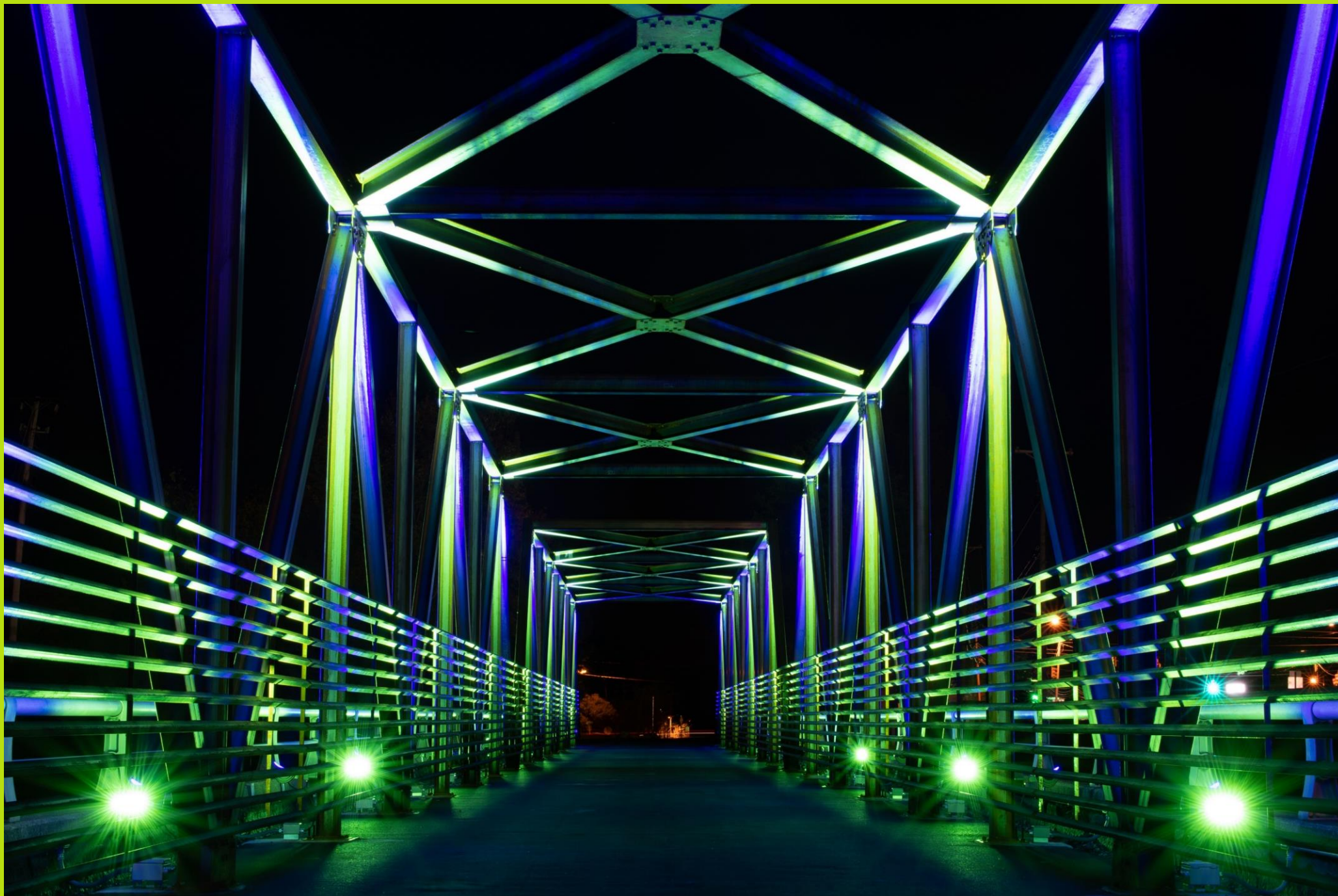








































1989 – Rutherford County and State of NC purchase corridor from Norfolk Southern. Corridor transferred to non-profit Rutherford Railroad Development Corporation.

1999 – Multiple local entities receive grants for construction and legal costs to put gravel down over the rails and crossties to create a trail.

2000 – Surface Transportation Board approves request to rail bank the corridor and allow ‘interim’ use as a trail.

2001 – Trail is opened after gravel applied to 7.87-mile section from Gilkey to Spindale. Rails and crossties remain under the gravel.

2001 – Lawsuit filed by some trail corridor neighbors primarily asking for compensation for their land that was used for the railroad. Trail remains open.

2003 – District Court judge rules largely in favor of the trail, leaving one issue to go to the NC Supreme Court.

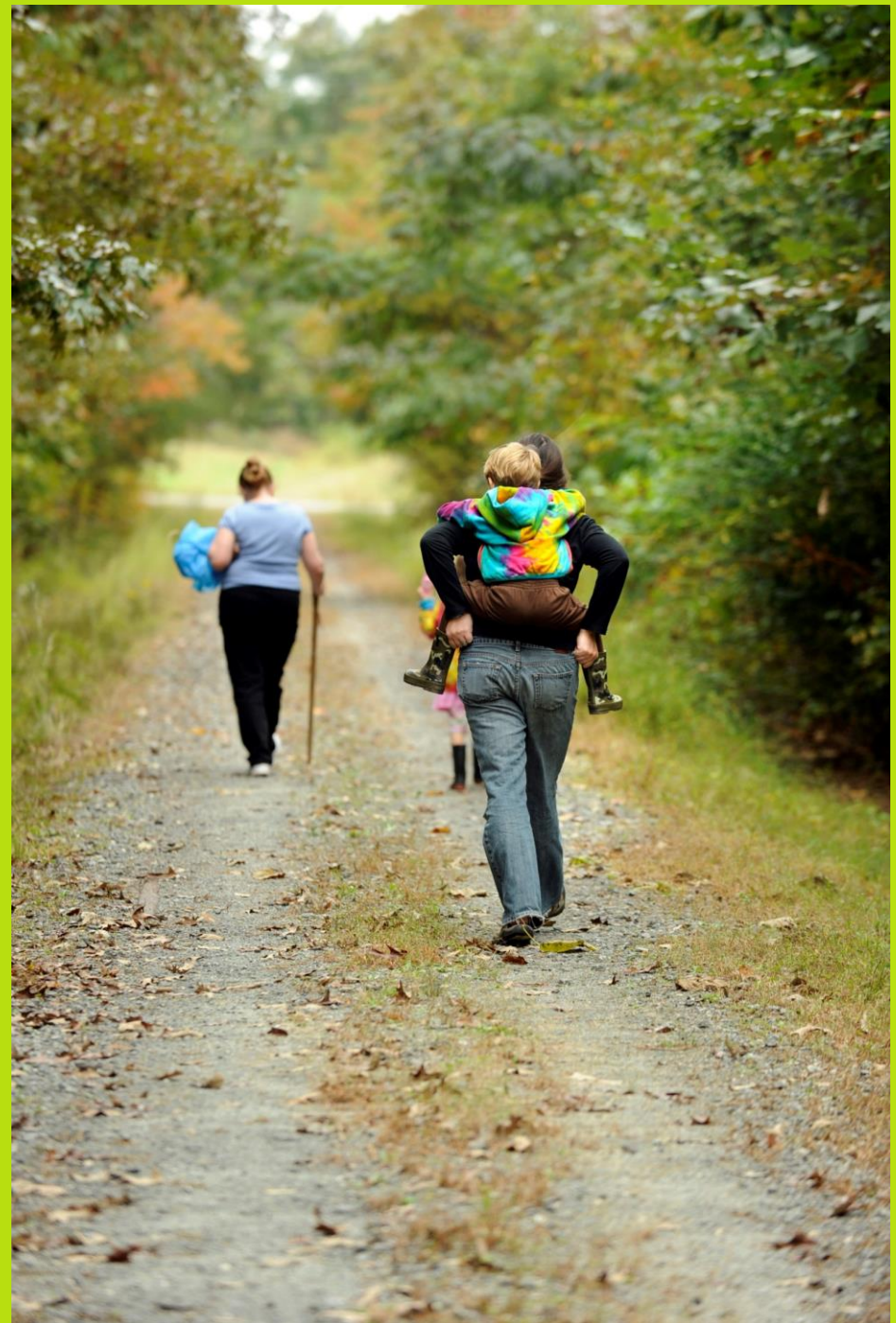
2005 – NC Supreme Court rules in favor of the trail. Determines that the corridor is the equivalent of fee simple ownership and thus can be used as the owner sees fit.

2001-2014 – Trail remained in gravel. Limited parking, almost no signage. Conditions deteriorated over time. Was used by some, but underutilized and underappreciated.









Photos:  
Nancy Pierce





## Cultivating Dreamers...

*Between 2005-2019 there were 12 studies or plans that included trail elements and specifically mentioned the importance and potential of the rail trail.*

### **2005 – Rutherford County Heritage Plan**

- Idea of a countywide trail system is included with a mention of the Forest City section of the rail trail

### **2006 – Rutherford County publishes Arts, Parks & Recreation Comprehensive Plan.**

- Leads to creation of new county staff position

### **2006 – Town of Rutherfordton Land Use Plan**

- includes a heritage trails network, connecting to the rail trail and creating the Purple Martin Greenway

### **2010 – Regional Trails Plan (Innovate: Trails) published by Isothermal Planning & Development**

### **2015 – Rutherford County Comprehensive Transportation Plan**

### **2015 – Forest City Pedestrian Plan. The number #1 priority project is to extend the rail trail into Forest City.**

### **2017 – Thermal Belt Rail Trail Master Plan, funded by RHI Legacy Foundation**

### **2017 – Rutherford County Tourism creates master plan called Rutherford Bound – Mountains to Main Streets**

- Plan is heavily focused on outdoor recreation and trails.

### **2017 – Rutherfordton Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan**

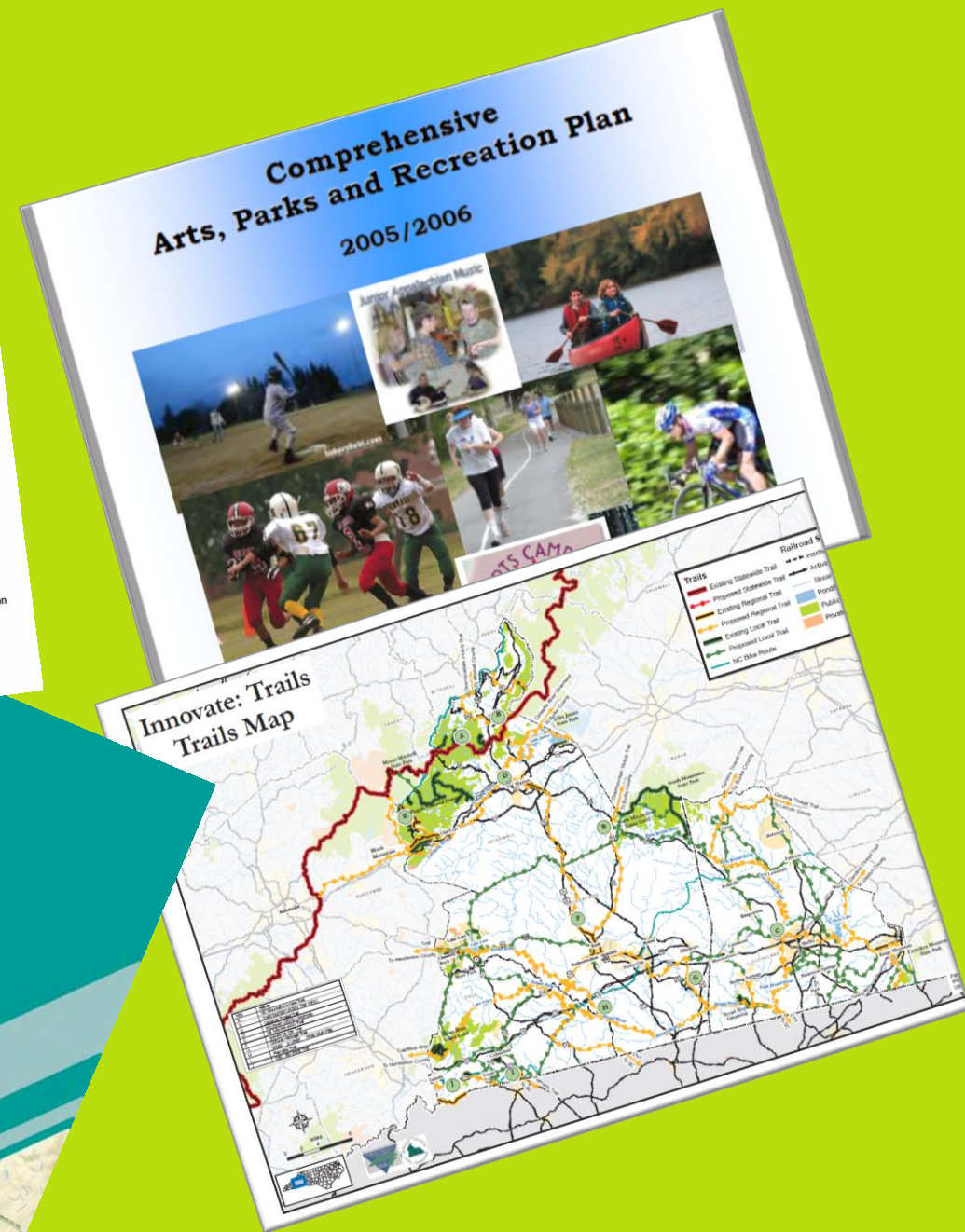
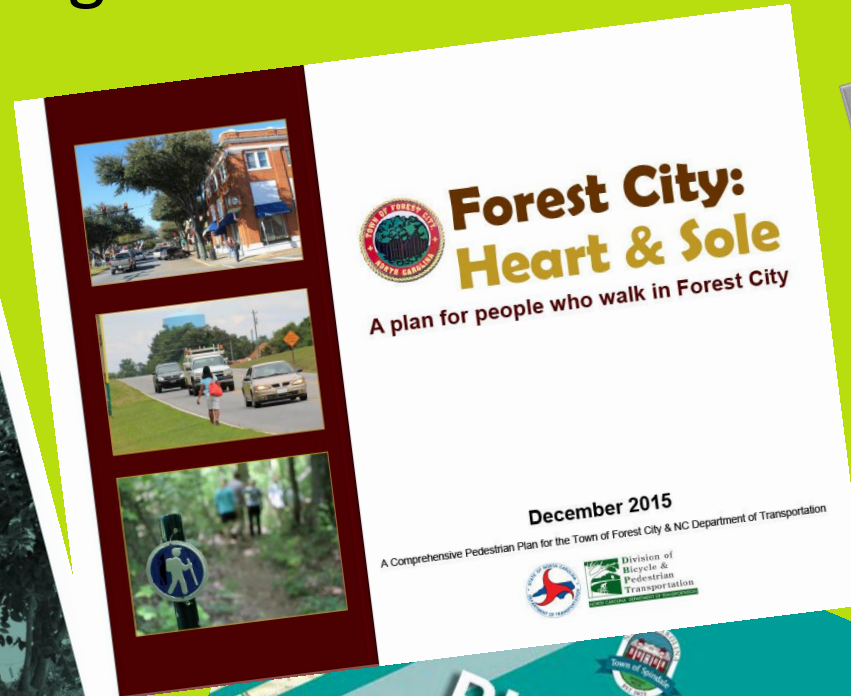
### **2018 – Rutherford County Parks & Recreation Master Plan**

### **2018 – Isothermal Regional Bicycle Plan**

### **2019 – Spindale Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan**



# Cultivating Dreamers...







## Champions and small victories...

- A few persistent people can make all the difference...
- Keep at it, continue to plan and dream
- In 2014, the county paved a 1.8 mile section to six feet wide. Paved over the rails! Use on that short section skyrocketed. Funded by 2012 RTP grant with a private foundation providing the match.
- Later in 2014, ROC partnered with the newly formed RHI Legacy Foundation and raised \$125,000 from a single golf event to extend the pavement and improve the rest of the TBRT.
- In 2015, the Town of Rutherfordton built the first one-third of a mile of the Purple Martin Greenway. Section had no formal parking and went to a dead end, but highlighted a beautiful and unknown part of Cleghorn Creek. Use was substantial and solidified Town Council support for more.
- In 2016, the big shift happened...











# THE DAILY COURIER

Friday, March 25, 2016 • \$1.00 • Serving Rutherford County • [www.thedigitalcourier.com](http://www.thedigitalcourier.com) • Local Matters

## Rails-to-Trails could extend 13.5 miles

### Forest City enters agreement with railway

BY JEAN GORDON  
JGORDON@THEDIGITALCOURIER.COM

**FOREST CITY** — The popular Rails-to-Trails corridor that begins in Spindale and continues to Gilkey could be extended after the Town of Forest City and the Thermal Belt Railway entered into a lease agreement on Thursday morning with the railway company.

The official transaction with Thermal Belt Railway releases its lease rights on the corridor between Alexander Mills and Gilkey for \$250,000 and Rutherford Railroad Development Corporation (RRDC) enters into the lease for the portion of the corridor from Alexander Mills to Oakland Road.

The rent for the lease is a one-time payment by the Town of \$250,000 to RRDC who utilized those funds to pay Thermal Belt

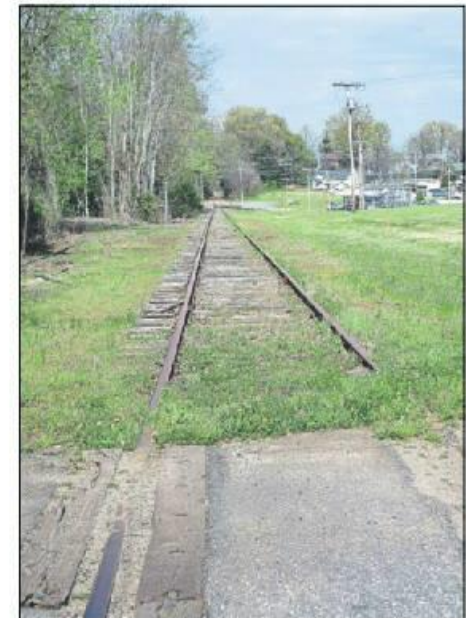
**“This is an exciting opportunity for the Town of Forest City and Rutherford County.”**

— John Condrey  
city manager

Railway for its corridor rights. The lease terminates if rail use of the corridor is reactivated, said City Manager John Condrey.

“This is an exciting opportunity for the Town of Forest City and Rutherford County,” said Condrey. “I envision a few years from now people can get on the trail from Forrest Hunt School to Gilkey to walk or ride their bikes anywhere from one mile or 13 miles.

SEE **TRAILS/PAGE A10**



This portion of the railway near the Florence Mill project and the Rutherford County Farmers Market could be developed as a part of the 13.5 mile Rails-to-Trails.

Jean Gordon/  
Daily Courier





# Trail Partners







## Rail trail gets \$4.2 million boost from RHI Legacy Foundation

FROM STAFF REPORTS

FOREST CITY — The Thermal Belt Rail Trail is moving forward and should become a reality in late 2018 as a result of action taken by the RHI Legacy Foundation Board of Trustees at its meeting on Monday.

The RHI Legacy Foundation Board voted to fund construction of the 12-foot wide, 13.36-mile asphalt trail that will connect communities across the county from Forrest Hunt School to Gilkey. The grant also includes funding for up to six potential trailheads to provide parking and other amenities at access points for the trail. The grant request was approved for \$4,250,000.

SEE TRAIL/PAGE A5

Persons of

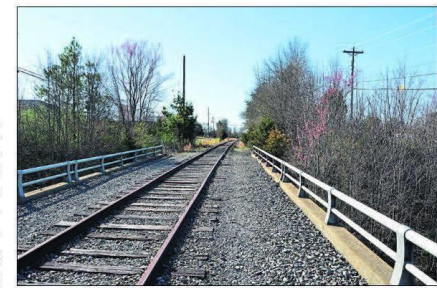
## TRAIL

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Dr. Bobby England, chairman of RHI Legacy Foundation stated, "The construction of this trail represents a transformational project for the county that combines health and wellness, economic development and neighborhood improvement. Due to this project's importance, we prioritized it outside of the Foundation's normal grant cycle."

In 2016, the Town of Forest City received a \$149,000 grant from RHI Legacy Foundation to survey and engineer the trail. Forest City applied on behalf of Rutherford County, Ruth, Rutherfordton, Spindale as well as itself. In addition, Forest City received an Appalachian Regional Commission grant for trail-head design and master planning. McGill and Associates and David Odom Engineering are providing the trail design and engineering. Keith Webb from McGill and David Odom made the presentation to the RHI Foundation Board.

Keith Webb said, "David and I have both worked in the county over 20 years. By far, this project reflects the highest level of intergovernmental cooperation and common purpose that we



A portion of the railroad that will become part of the expanded 13-mile Thermal Belt Rail Trail is shown.

have ever seen."

The RHI Legacy Foundation's grant will provide the funds to pave the trail, but the amenities along the trail will be each local governments' responsibility. As an example, the Forest City recently applied for a state PARTF grant that would provide fitness equipment, a picnic facility, and other recreational opportunities.

The engineering for the entire 13.36-mile trail will be complete by August 1. After August 1, the McGill and Odom firms will focus on road encroachment agreements with NCDOT, an overpass agreement with CSX and erosion control plans for the entire corridor. The construction project will be put out for bid by November with bids awarded by January 2018. Construction could start by March with an anticipated nine-month construction schedule. Assuming the proposed schedule is met the

trail would be complete by the end of 2018.

RHI Legacy Foundation is a grant making organization that has a broad mission to make Rutherford County healthier. The Foundation invests in projects that address healthy eating and active living because of the impact of healthier lifestyle choices on decreasing the incidence of disease.

Jill Miracle, RHI Legacy Foundation's Community Impact Director explained, "Trail development is a priority for us because free and convenient access for individuals and families to be outdoors will make an impact on how healthy Rutherford County residents can be. We look forward to the day when local adults practice healthy behaviors and pass those habits down to the next generations. Trail development and recreation is a big piece of our active living strategy, and we are pleased to be a part of this important Rail Trail project."

## BUD

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

No new included in the budget.

County receive a 1% increase in living adjustment with the payroll. A pay adjustment a recent pay raise will begin in 2019.

No new budget are recommended for the new budget. The special coverage of the state he county pays only cover percent rate may elect a rate at the rate.

"I want board for y and guidance the entire County M Garrison. "difficult but

The original proposal Commission called tax increase budget would public health sioners ultimately they would tax increase Garrison to options for eration.

The rel across the es in departments, ICC the original proposal were approved balanced in a large amount balance."

"David (Odom) and I have both worked in the county over 20 years. By far, this project reflects the highest level of intergovernmental cooperation and common purpose that we have ever seen."

--- Keith Webb, McGill

"The construction of this trail represents a transformational project for the county that combines health and wellness, economic development and neighborhood improvement. Due to this project's importance, we prioritized it outside of the Foundation's normal grant cycle."

-- Dr. Bobby

England, Chairman of RHI Legacy Foundation

## TRUSTEES

The annexation of the property will run in a narrow Russell Wicker said. "The strip off Dixon Ridge Road will run in a narrow









## Trail Partners – Key Accomplishments

- Each entity signed a 99-year lease for their section of trail
- Developed and passed uniform ordinance for trail regulations
- Each entity agrees to maintain their section of trail. Partners communicate regularly and will share equipment and resources.
- Cultivated support with elected officials, support for trails across all elected bodies is broad
- Maintain trail website and social media presence through a contractor
- Reconstituted Rutherford Railroad Development Corporation (RRDC)





# Community Partners



Lake Lure, Chimney Rock &  
THE BLUE RIDGE FOOTHILLS

**RUTHERFORD  
BOUND**













# THERMAL BELT RAIL TRAIL ENHANCEMENT MASTER PLAN RUTHERFORD COUNTY, NC

DRAFT ISSUED: SPRING 2021

A RUTHERFORD BOUND PROJECT







## Lessons Learned

- Even a small amount of new trail can trigger significant change
- Bring your lawyer
- Foster intergovernmental cooperation
- Celebrate wins
- Elected officials buy-in
- Find champions
- Continue to plan and dream
- Number one question: Where's the bathroom





## Up next...

- \$200,000 investment by Tourism in trail enhancements
- Crossing improvements at 9 DOT managed intersections
- \$75,000 DOT grant to study connecting schools to the trail system. Ten (10) schools within a mile of a TBRT or PMG now.
- Feasibility study completed on connecting TBRT to Peavine Trail in Marion (18 miles). Rail corridor may have reverted to original property owners.
- Bostic Spur? (3 miles) – currently unused rail corridor, same ownership at TBRT. Currently leased to railroad operator.