

PITTSBORO PEDESTRIAN TRANSPORTATION PLAN

the town of pittsboro, north carolina | 2009



Prepared for:
**The Town of Pittsboro, NC and
The North Carolina Department of Transportation,
Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation**



Prepared By:
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER OUTLINE:

1.0 OVERVIEW

1.1 VISION STATEMENT

1.2 MEASURABLE GOALS

1.3 THE PLAN AND THE PLANNING PROCESS

1.4 PUBLIC BENEFITS OF PEDESTRIAN TRANSPORTATION

1.0 OVERVIEW

The Town of Pittsboro, local organizations and individual citizens have long been involved in efforts to improve conditions for pedestrian safety, access, and mobility. Most recently, in 2007, the Town applied for and was awarded a grant from the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to conduct a comprehensive pedestrian planning process. This plan combines past planning efforts with new research and analysis, plus a full public input process. The result is a complete, up-to-date framework for moving forward with tangible pedestrian transportation improvements.

A Steering Committee composed of local citizens, town staff, regional planners, and public health advocates was assembled to guide the development of the Pedestrian Transportation Plan. Greenways Incorporated, an alternative transportation planning firm, led the planning process. Having included a significant public input component, this document is a result of the dedication and efforts of the Town of Pittsboro and its residents.

This document presents an assessment of existing pedestrian facilities in Pittsboro, along with the findings of the public input process. From these findings, a set of phased recommendations is developed for a pedestrian system that meets the current and future needs of local residents. These recommendations include an integration of both on-road and off-road pedestrian facilities along with improved roadway crossings. The recommendations include both physical changes and policy changes to help guide pedestrian-friendly growth. The Plan also provides program recommendations to promote walking and funding sources to facilitate the Plan's implementation.

1.1 VISION STATEMENT

Vision statements and project goals were collected through public workshops, project steering committee meetings, input from Town staff, and an online survey of local residents. These were combined, condensed, and crafted into the vision statement on page 2. The statement expresses the desired outcome of the plan, as opposed to current conditions.

Pittsboro's Pedestrian Plan Vision Statement:

"Pittsboro's vision is to develop a comprehensive and connected pedestrian network that provides safe access to homes, schools, workplaces, park and recreational facilities, and other important destinations as part of an active and walkable community. We envision children walking safely to school, seniors walking to nearby destinations, citizens moving safely in high traffic areas, tourists moving about community and downtown areas easily on foot, and motor vehicles driving at safe speeds in Pittsboro. Pittsboro's goals and objectives will help guide town officials, staff, citizens, and other stakeholders to help make this vision a reality."

1.2 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

These goals reflect input from local residents, the project Steering Committee, and the project goals of the Town staff and NCDOT. While the Town of Pittsboro must lead the effort to fulfill these goals, overall success will require continued, active participation and encouragement from local residents and community organizations.

Goal 1: Increase routine walking for transportation and recreation.

- Objective A: Increase signage to promote safe walking.
- Objective B: Increase media and programs to promote safe walking.
- Objective C: Increase overall walking trips.

Goal 2: Improve pedestrian safety along roadways, at intersections, and off-road.

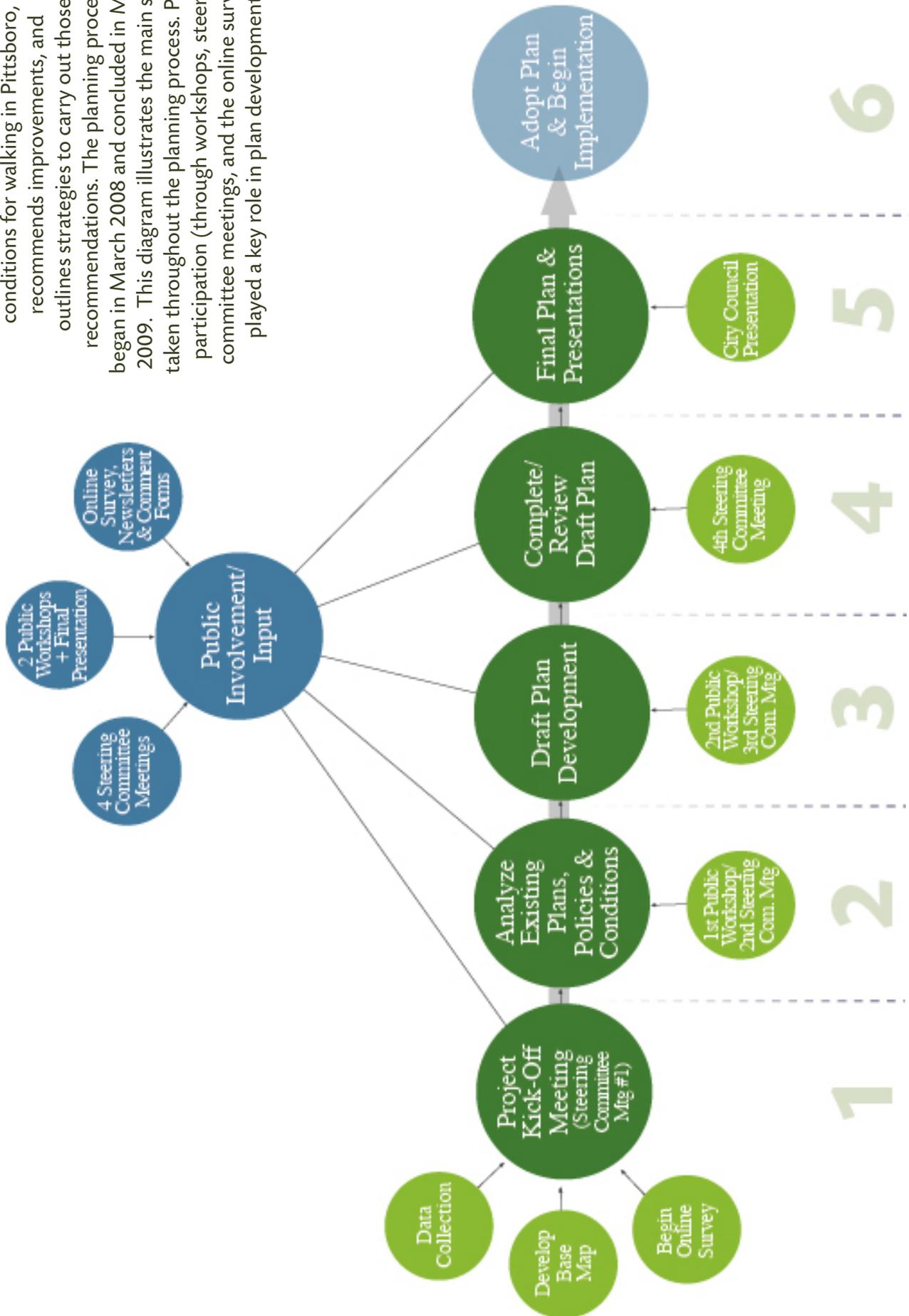
- Objective A: Increase the ratio of roads with sidewalks.
- Objective B: Increase connectivity of the existing sidewalk network.
- Objective C: Increase off-road paved and unpaved walkways.
- Objective D: Increase law enforcement patrols to increase motorists' yielding to pedestrian.
- Objective E: Reduce automobile traffic speeds in town.
- Objective F: Increase the ratio of intersections with appropriate crossing devices, e.g. crosswalks, ped heads, ped signs.

Goal 3: Include updates for pedestrian transportation in new comprehensive land use plan.

- Objective A: Update the requirements for sidewalks and walkable areas to be included in development plans.
- Objective B: Develop design plans and criteria for sidewalks and public space.
- Objective C: Develop a plan for looping area existing sidewalks that will connect to a destination.
- Objective D: Develop safety features along roadway and highway to point out pedestrian usage of sidewalks.

1.3 THE PLAN AND THE PLANNING PROCESS

This plan communicates the current conditions for walking in Pittsboro, recommends improvements, and outlines strategies to carry out those recommendations. The planning process began in March 2008 and concluded in March 2009. This diagram illustrates the main steps taken throughout the planning process. Public participation (through workshops, steering committee meetings, and the online survey) played a key role in plan development.



1.4 PUBLIC BENEFITS OF PEDESTRIAN TRANSPORTATION

When considering the level of dedication in time and valuable resources that it will take to fulfill the goals of this plan, it is also important to assess the immense value of pedestrian transportation. As stated in comments from over 230 Town of Pittsboro residents, walking will help to improve people’s health and fitness, enhance environmental conditions, decrease traffic congestion, and will contribute to a greater sense of community.

Scores of studies from experts in the fields of public health, urban planning, urban ecology, real estate, transportation, sociology, and economics have supported such claims and have acknowledged the substantial value of supporting walking as it relates to active living and alternative transportation. Communities across the United States and throughout the world are implementing strategies for serving the walking needs of their residents, and have been doing so for many years. They do this because of their obligations to promote health, safety and welfare, and also because of the growing awareness of the many benefits of walking.



By providing attractive, safe, and accessible places for people to walk (such as this sidewalk corridor heading downtown from West 64), the Town will encourage increased health and physical activity among its residents.

INCREASED HEALTH AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

A growing number of studies show that the design of our communities—including neighborhoods, towns, transportation systems, parks, trails and other public recreational facilities—affects people’s ability to reach the recommended daily 30 minutes of moderately intense physical activity (60 minutes for youth). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “physical inactivity causes numerous physical and mental health problems, is responsible for an estimated 200,000 deaths per year, and contributes to the obesity epidemic.” The increased rate of disease associated with inactivity reduces quality of life for individuals and increases medical costs for families, companies, and local governments.

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The CDC determined that creating and improving places to be active could result in a 25 percent increase in the number of people who exercise at least three times a week. This is significant considering that for people who are inactive, even small increases in physical activity can bring measurable health benefits. The establishment of a safe and reliable network of sidewalks and trails in Pittsboro will have a positive impact on the health of local residents. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy puts it simply: “Individuals must choose to exercise, but communities can make that choice easier.”

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Walking is an affordable form of transportation. According to the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (PBIC), of Chapel Hill, NC, the cost of operating a car for a year is approximately \$5,170, while walking is virtually free. The PBIC explains, “When safe facilities are provided for pedestrians and bicyclists, more people are able to be productive, active members of society. Car ownership is expensive, and consumes a major portion of many Americans’ income.”

Walking becomes even more attractive from an economic standpoint when the rising price of oil (and decreasing availability) is factored into the equation. Since 2000, oil prices have more than quadrupled. The rising cost of fuel reinforces the idea that local communities should be built to accommodate people-powered transportation, such as walking and biking. Pittsboro’s traditional mixed-use and generally compact land development pattern, combined with new strategies for improving pedestrian transportation, could allow for a local reduction in auto- and oil-dependency.

From a real estate standpoint, consider the positive impact of trails and greenways, which are essential components of a complete pedestrian network. According to a 2002 survey of homebuyers by the National Association of Home Realtors and the National Association of Home Builders, *trails* ranked as the second most important community amenity out of a list of 18 choices (incidentally, ‘highway access’ ranked first). Additionally, the study found that ‘trail availability’ outranked 16 other options including security, ball fields, golf courses, parks, and access to shopping or business centers. Findings from the American Planning Association (*How Cities Use Parks for Economic Development*, 2002), the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (*Economic Benefits of Trails and Greenways*, 2005), and the Trust for Public Land (*Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space*, 1999) further substantiate the positive connection between trails and property values across the country.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS

When people choose to get out of their cars and walk, they make a positive environmental impact. They reduce their use of gasoline, which then reduces the volume of pollutants in the air. Other environmental impacts 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. Furthermore, every car trip replaced with a pedestrian trip reduces U.S. dependency on fossil fuels, which is a national goal.

Trails and greenways are also part of the pedestrian network, conveying their own unique environmental benefits. Greenways protect and link fragmented habitat and provide opportunities for protecting plant and animal species. Aside from connecting places without the use of air-polluting automobiles, trails and greenways also reduce air pollution by protecting large areas of plants that create oxygen and filter air pollutants such as ozone, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide and airborne particles of heavy metal. Finally, greenways improve water quality by creating a natural buffer zone that protects streams, rivers and lakes, preventing soil erosion and filtering pollution caused by residential development and agricultural and road runoff.



*Environmental benefits can be further promoted through walking by offering interpretive signs that educate passers by about the local environment and environmental systems.
(Photo from americantrails.org)*



By walking for our trips that are less than 2 miles, we could eliminate 40% of local car trips.

TRANSPORTATION BENEFITS

In 2001, the National Household Travel Survey found that roughly 40% of all trips taken by car are less than 2 miles. By taking these short trips on foot, rather than in a car, citizens can have a substantial impact on local traffic and congestion. Additionally, many people do not have access to a vehicle or are not able to drive. An improved pedestrian network provides greater and safer mobility for these residents.

According to the Brookings Institution, the number of older Americans is expected to double over the next 25 years. All but the most fortunate seniors will confront an array of medical and other constraints on their mobility even as they continue to seek an active community life. Trails that are built as part of the pedestrian transportation network generally do not allow for motor vehicles. However, they do accommodate motorized wheelchairs, which is an important asset for the growing number of senior citizens who deserve access to independent mobility.

For age demographic projections specific to Chatham County, please consult the Chatham County Council on Aging. As seen in Appendix A, the majority of survey respondents were over the age of 45, indicating a very engaged demographic.

Children under the age of 16 are another important subset of our society who deserve access to safe mobility. According to the *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency*, fewer children walk or bike to school than did so a generation ago: In the past few decades, the percent of students between the ages of 5 and 15 who walked or biked to or from school has dropped from roughly 50% to about 15%.

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 within their community. Communities with such amenities can attract new businesses, industries, and in turn, new residents. Furthermore, quality of life is positively impacted by walking through the increased social connections that take place by residents being active, talking to one another and spending more time outdoors and in their communities.

