

Mecklenburg Livable Communities

Natural Resources Think Tank: Meeting 1

Represented Partners & Their Current Initiatives Report-Outs

Catawba Lands Conservancy: Mission is to protect natural and undeveloped land. Work with land owners to protect natural, undeveloped land and farmland. Purchase land or purchase conservation easements on land.

Catawba Riverkeeper Foundation: 3 main concerns: water quality, quantity and security. Programs revolve around initiating and expanding education and advocacy around protecting the Catawba River Basin.

Keep Mecklenburg Beautiful:

- Adopt city streets: clean streets and keep litter out of storm drains
- Great American Cleanup
- Beautification Grant: funds to beautify Charlotte neighborhoods (i.e. community garden)
- Panther Tailgate Recycling: volunteers distribute bags to tailgaters for collecting recyclables
- Recycling the Runway: students design outfits out of recyclable materials in order to raise awareness
- Paint a Can: schools paint their trash and recycling dumpsters
- Event Recycling: providing the right receptacles at various events
- Litter Index: Asses how much litter is on the side of the road around the county
- National Tree Planting Day

Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation: Has a division dedicated to the protection of natural resources. Organize Special events focused on natural resources. Manage endangered and federally protected species. Invasive species removal. Provide high quality recreation and natural environmental stewardship. Offers camps for area youth.

North Carolina Sustainable Energy Association (NCSEA): Non-Profit organization aimed at promoting clean energy in North Carolina. Working on advanced energy storage and the smart grid. Three focus areas: public policy, economic development, and education. Focus on creating a path towards sustainable and affordable energy features. Working with Raleigh on a renewable energy plan. Working on a Water energy nexus project.

Sustain charlotte: Non-Profit organization. Focus is on transportation and land use.

- Sustainable Neighborhoods Program

- Transportation Choices Alliance
- Education in Schools
- Annual Earth Day Awards Event

Town of Davidson: Has a master plan that prioritizes open space and trails. Has a rural area plan aimed at protecting 1500 acres of undeveloped farm land. Town priority to figure out where development can occur while also maintaining open space, wildlife corridors, and natural resources.

Charlotte Water: Purchase land for watershed preservation/protection. Part of Envision Charlotte initiative, focusing on “smart” water metering. Look for ways to help customers conserve/use less water. Water resources planning initiatives. Works with Catawba Water Management Group, which is an organization that focuses on extending and enhancing the capacity of the river.

City of Charlotte Water Quality:

- Storm water control device retrofits
- Reedy Creek Water Restoration Plan.
- Approximately 1 mile of water restoration each year
- Water education programs

Carolina Raptor Center:

- Public Education on Birds
- Habitat Restoration for Birds
- Re-Nesting Program
- “Measuring Wonder” Initiative: seeks to measure the experience of learning about natural systems
- Bird Rehabilitation and Release
- Bird Releases at Events

Mecklenburg County Solid Waste: Goal is waste reduction through increased recycling and reduced recycling contamination. Focus on three main areas: residential, Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, and commercial businesses.

Duke Energy: Energy efficiency programs for residents and small/large businesses.

Charlotte Water: City of Charlotte Environmental Focus Area Plan

Centralina Council of Governments: Connect our Future Regional Framework and Tools

Gaps & Root Cause Discussion

What gaps exist?

- Environmental damage and tree loss is an accepted byproduct of economic growth and development
- Importance of trees: City of Charlotte tree save and mitigation fund to plan/regrow tree canopy
- Focus too much on trees: Aquatics, wetlands, and fields that are equally important. Want to focus on various types of habitats
- Ordinances are often focused on maintaining/preserving only one type of habitat. For example, the requirement to plant trees with new construction versus planting other types of habitats
- Urban open spaces: density is great, but we need to balance that out with urban green spaces.
- Shifting baselines: there is often a perception that we have done enough but the state that we are in now is still worse than how it was before development happened

Why do these gaps exist?

- Money drives decisions
- Lack of communication between city/county/department/organizations
- People in general have a fear or misunderstanding of nature
- Many ordinances developed in the 80's or 90's, and it is hard to reverse outdated perspectives
- What the state and the city want are two different things
- Lack of political will: money/power – lots of planning but instituting those plans requires politicians to agree
- Lack of engagement – people don't vote and aren't paying attention to what politicians are doing.
- Not having the necessary tools to implement the plan – mismatch of tools and implementation
- Focus on short term economic benefits and not long term quality of life
- People aren't educated in biodiversity so bad decisions are made
- No connection to nature – people aren't in nature so people aren't engaged with nature
- Knowledge – people don't know so they don't understand. Lots of the general public just don't care

Ideas for New Collaborative Initiatives

Initiative: Natural Resources Joint-Use Task Force

Initiative: Riparian Buffers on the Catawba River Funded by Water Bill Surcharge

Initiative: Energy-Water Nexus Education Project

Initiative: Natural Resources Curriculum for Public Schools

Initiative: Public Art Project Illustrating the Threat of Polluted and/or Over-Developed Areas

Initiative: Mecklenburg County Eco-System Services Accounting Project

Initiative: Develop Critical Habitat Guidelines (to assist in their identification)

Initiative: Smart Growth Scorecard for Development

Initiative: Urban Planners in Residence Program

Initiative: Coordinated Partnership of Organizations for Local Environmental Advocacy

Ideas for Expanding Current Initiatives

Current Initiative: Wildlife Habitat Development

Current Initiative Owner: Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation

Collaboration Opportunity: Partnership with Duke Energy to Place Pollinator Habitats at Park & Rec Facilities

Current Initiative: Grants for Addressing Food Deserts

Current Initiative Owner:

Collaboration Opportunity: Leverage Resources and Expand Impact with Partnership Between Green Teacher Network, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Food Policy Council, and Keep Charlotte Beautiful

Current Initiative: Energy Efficiency Education

Current Initiative Owner: Duke Energy

Collaboration Opportunity: Partnership with Ada Jenkins to Extend Education to Low-Income Populations

Current Initiative: North Carolina Solar Ordinance Template

Current Initiative Owner: North Carolina Sustainable Energy Association

Collaboration Opportunity:

Current Initiative: Neighborhood Beautification Projects

Current Initiative Owner: Keep Charlotte Beautiful & Keep Mecklenburg Beautiful

Collaboration Opportunity: Leverage Resources and Expand Impact through Partnership with City of Charlotte Water Quality, Catawba Lands Conservancy, Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation, Catawba Riverkeepers Foundation, and Carolina Raptor Center

Current Initiative: Complete Blocks Program

Current Initiative Owner: City of Charlotte

Collaboration Opportunity: Partnership with Catawba Riverkeepers Foundation, UNC Charlotte, and Sustain Charlotte

Current Initiative: Keeping Watch on Water

Current Initiative Owner: Catawba Riverkeepers Foundation & UNC Charlotte

Collaboration Opportunity: Partnership with Sustain Charlotte

Current Initiative: Gardens at Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools

Current Initiative Owner: Green Teacher Network & Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools

Collaboration Opportunity: Partnership with Sustain Charlotte and Catawba Riverkeepers Foundation

Current Initiative: Raptor Habitat Development

Current Initiative Owner: Carolina Raptor Center

Collaboration Opportunity: Partnership with Keep Charlotte Beautiful to Develop Raptor Habitats