

2013 PART Report

Recommendations of the APA-NC Planning Assistance Resource Team (PART) for Stoneville, NC

North Carolina Chapter of the American Planning Association

12/1/2013

PART – Stoneville Site Visit

Spring 2013, the North Carolina chapter of the American Planning Association initiated a new pilot program called the Planning Assistance Resource Team (PART). PART is a program which allows North Carolina planners and other professionals to help communities or organizations contemplate solutions to specific problems or issues. The inaugural year of the PART program brought three panelists to the town of Stoneville, North Carolina, on October 22-23, 2013. The following report describes the outcomes of the 2013 PART program.

PART Team and Site Selection

APA-NC called for applications from planners and other professionals in the state willing to volunteer their time and services on a short term basis as part of an assistance panel. APA-NC received approximately 20 panelist applications from professionals from across the state working in all sectors- local government, private consulting and academia. Concurrently, APA-NC requested applications from communities and organizations interested in receiving technical assistance from PART in 2013. The specific focus of 2013 was on the intersections of health in comprehensive planning, in small or rural communities. APA-NC received multiple sponsor applications.

A subcommittee of APA-NC's executive committee, led by the state chapter's professional development officer, reviewed panelist applications and sponsor applications. In summer 2013, the subcommittee asked three professionals to lead a late 2013 visit to the town of Stoneville. Stoneville, in coordination with the Rockingham County Health Department and the Community Transformation Grant (CTG) program (an initiative of the NC Department of Health and Human Services' Division of Public Health paid for by a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), submitted a request for planners to help identify an implementation strategy for a trail planned to connect the downtown to a nearby state park.

Panelists were asked to serve based on their specific experience with planning, designing or managing trail or bikeway and downtown redevelopment projects elsewhere in the state. The following three professionals volunteered their time on the 2013 PART panel:

Glenn Harbeck, AICP

In June of 2012, Glenn accepted the position of Director of Planning, Development & Transportation for his hometown of Wilmington, NC. He now leads a multi-disciplinary team of 55 planners, transportation and traffic engineering specialists. Between 1986 and 2012, Glenn provided community planning consulting services to over 100 communities in North America and the Caribbean. Before starting his own consulting practice, he held several planning positions with local, regional and state government, and with an international land planning and design firm. Glenn earned a B.S. in Environmental Studies from the College of Environmental Science and Forestry at Syracuse University, where he was a New York State Regents Scholar, and a Masters in Regional Planning from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he was Mellon Graduate Fellow.

Linda Giltz

Linda is a Senior Planner and has been with Land-of-Sky Regional Council the past 15 years. She has a variety of experience in land use, transportation, greenways, growth management and economic development planning at local and regional scales. She provides technical assistance to local governments on planning and development issues and assists with the development of policies, regulations and long range plans. She also has extensive group facilitation experience with a variety of groups, has written numerous grant applications and has planned workshops and conferences. Prior to working at Land-of-Sky, Linda lived in Charlotte and worked for the UNC-Charlotte Urban Institute, Cabarrus County and IBM. She has a Master of Arts degree in Geography from UNC-Charlotte (1996) and a B.S. degree in Computer Science from Duke University (1981).

Graham Smith

Graham is the Principal/Branch Manager of a local office for a national landscape architecture firm – DHM Design. He has 19 years of professional experience as a landscape architect, working in multiple US states and China. Graham is an active member of ASLA, ULI-Triangle, and supports the Virginia Tech Landscape Arch Department. [Add education bio]

Several others played key roles in support of the PART visit. Lauren Blackburn, the APA-NC Vice President for Professional Development, led communications with the sponsor community and handled logistics on behalf of the state chapter. Lauren also attended the site visit, providing additional technical assistance and documenting panelist recommendations.

Annie Martinie, the CTG Region 5 Healthy Eating and Active Living Lead, served as the primary applicant. Annie's role was to identify opportunities for PART assistance in the region. Shea Cox, the CTG Region 5 Lead Administrator, joined Annie during the site visit to Stoneville. They were also joined by representatives of the Rockingham County Health Department during a community workshop the evening before the site visit.

Jesse Day, senior planner with the Piedmont Triad Regional Council, served a key role by providing data, relevant studies and reports, and setting up interviews with local officials and stakeholders. The Piedmont Triad Piedmont Triad Regional Council and Rural Planning Organization, provide technical assistance to small and rural communities in Rockingham County.

Several stakeholders provided critical background information to the PART panel during the site visit. Jodi Lester and 2 members of the Stoneville Town Council, as well as Mayor Ricky Craddock discussed the town's needs with PART panelists during a community workshop the evening of October 22. Several other former and candidate local and county elected officials also provided helpful information during the workshop.



Two interviews provided critical insights about regional assets and economic concerns. Connie Fox and Walter Summerlin, both employees of the Mayo River State Park, provided helpful information to panelists during a visit to the state park on October 23. Graham Pervier, the president of the Rockingham County Partnership for Economic Development and Tourism, participated in an interview with panelists on October 23. He explained the current and prospective economic assets of the county, also describing challenges to recruiting major employers to the region.

[October 22 Stoneville Comprehensive Land Use Public Meeting](#)

Schedule for Visit

The evening of Tuesday, October 22, most PART panelists convened in Stoneville to assist with and observe a community meeting regarding the development of a land use plan for the town. The town's Comprehensive Land Use Plan was in the initial phases, and the evening workshop provided citizens an opportunity to describe their hopes and concerns for the town's land development future. Improving downtown streetscape infrastructure and character, enhancing community walkability, and capitalizing on regional tourist attractions were included among the concerns and ideas expressed by workshop participants. PART panelists helped interview community members and document concerns during the workshop.

On Wednesday, October 23, panelists convened at the municipal park on the outskirts of Stoneville. Panelists, led by Jesse Day and CTG staff, walked portions of the alignment of a proposed trail connecting the town park to Mayo River State Park. The town has successfully received grants and easement donations to begin construction of the first phase of

the natural surface trail. The trail alignment intersects with US 220/Future I-73, a major north-south transportation route connecting the Triad region to central Virginia. Panelists discussed alternatives to crossing the bridge, and walked possible routes parallel to the highway.



PART Team Member Glenn Harbeck Looks at Trail Options under US 220 to Connect Stoneville Town Park with the Mayo River

Panelists visited nearby Mayo River State Park to inquire about park history and plans with available staff. State park officials explained plans for acquiring lands along the Mayo River to allow for trail development to nearby towns, destinations, additional river access points and a proposed visitor's center. They also discussed moving their maintenance facility so they could build a group camping area at the existing park site.

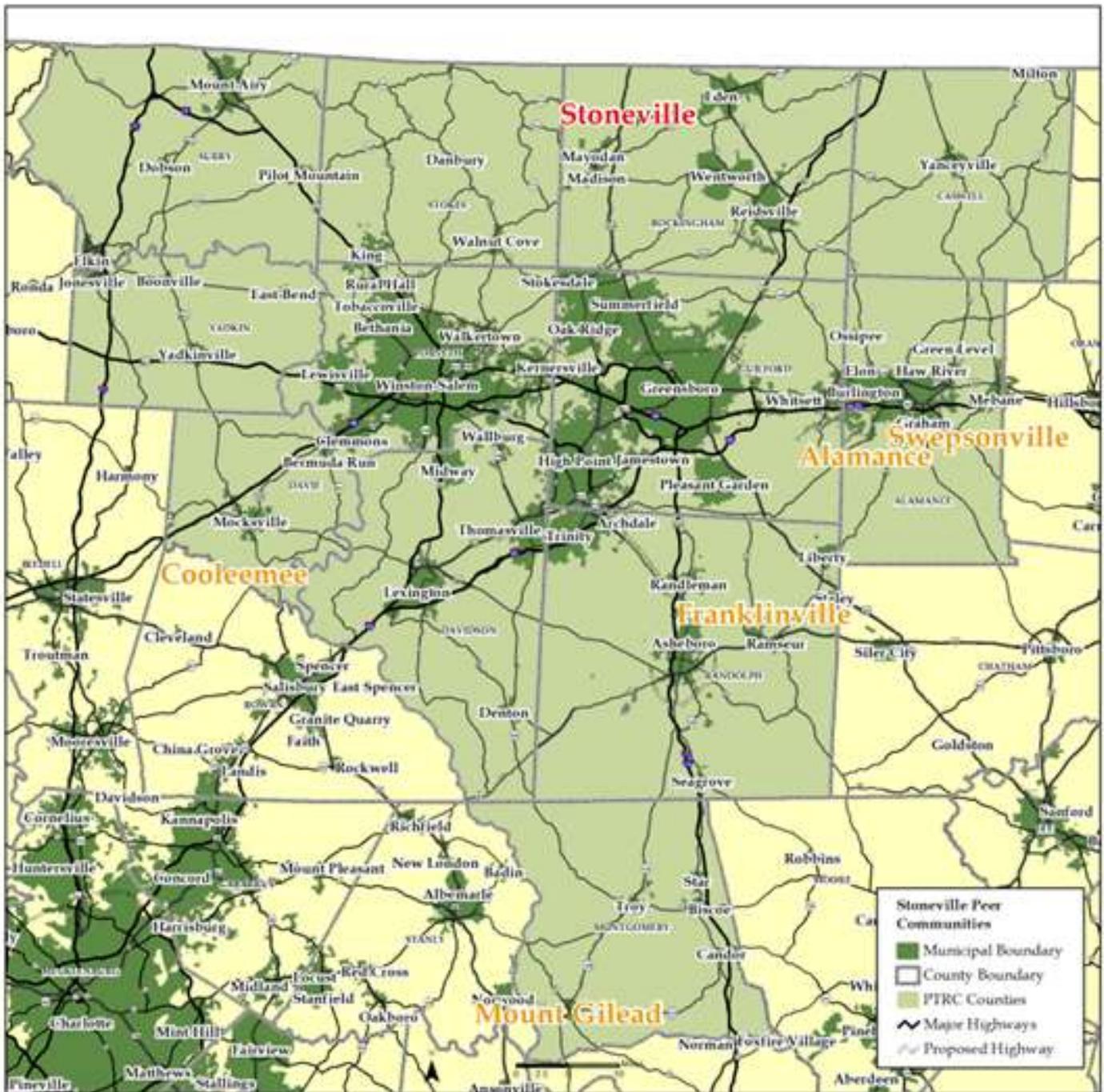
Panelists interviewed Graham Pervier at the municipal building in Stoneville during a working lunch. Mr. Pervier described the prominent industries in the town and surrounding region, properties being considered for major retail and employment development, and constraints to attracting additional business and employers to Stoneville and Rockingham County. Mr. Pervier also explained how a variety of tourism-related activities in the county are promoted and planned in conjunction with the Economic Development Partnership and the Tourism Development Authority.

PART panelists spent the remainder of the afternoon summarizing the goals and alternatives for implementing walking and biking trails between the town center and Mayo River State Park. Other related ideas and concerns were raised, such as downtown redevelopment, place-making, branding, and funding strategies. Panelist recommendations were categorized into three tiers of implementation (short term, mid-term and long-term). This formal report was written and revised over the following weeks.

Lauren Blackburn distributed the final report to APA-NC executive committee members, CTG leaders and town officials in December 2013. PART members continued to provide limited support to town and regional transportation staff through winter 2013-2014, given their awareness of the town and interest to further help. Available members of the PART team will present their recommendations to the town council in early 2014 in coordination with local land use plan events.

Background Information

Stoneville, population 1056 according to the 2010 US Census, is the smallest incorporated community in Rockingham County. It is located in the northwestern portion of the County, close to the intersection of NC 770 and US 220/Future I-73. Stoneville is approximately 30 minutes north of Greensboro, North Carolina, and 20 minutes south of Martinsville, Virginia.



Regional Map

Stoneville was first settled in the early 1800s, and established by way of a general merchant's store started by the Stone Family in the mid-1800s. The town was incorporated in 1877, and became a major trade center for the region as tobacco warehouses and railroads drew patrons. Employment and population declined in the town as the tobacco and furniture industries declined in the mid-1900s. In March 1998, a major tornado devastated the community by destroying lives and several prominent buildings.

The town has two major employers in or near the incorporated limits: Southern Finishing (furniture) and Unifi-Sans (yarn spinning). The town has an elementary school, a library/community center, a municipal services building/fire

department, a small downtown business center, and a well-developed municipal park. Downtown streets have sidewalks and benches, but the town is missing sidewalks or safe walkways in other parts of town.



Downtown Stoneville looking north

The Mayo River State Park is located 4.5 miles southwest of the town, and became state property in 2003 after a history as a mill-village recreation area. The park includes a large picnic pavilion designed by prominent architect Antonin Raymond (a student of Frank Lloyd Wright), a small pond, walking trails, and a visitor's center. The nearly 2500 acres at Mayo River State Park does not currently have public canoe access to the nearby Mayo River, but long-range park plans show acquiring properties to and along the Mayo River. The state park is a relatively new addition to the state parks system, and PART members noted that more programmed activities may yield more visitors to the park. Currently, it draws mostly local patrons for family gatherings and small social events. Plans to secure properties northward toward NC 770 are part of a larger tourism strategy by the region to encourage more paddling and canoeing visits.

The Mayo River, with its navigable waters starting near the Virginia state line, has a wide range of class-rapids for novice and experienced paddlers alike. Currently, kayaks and canoes can access the Mayo River at a handful of put-ins north of Stoneville on private property. The nearby Dan River is a more well-known and broader waterway already well-travelled by regional sport and river enthusiasts.



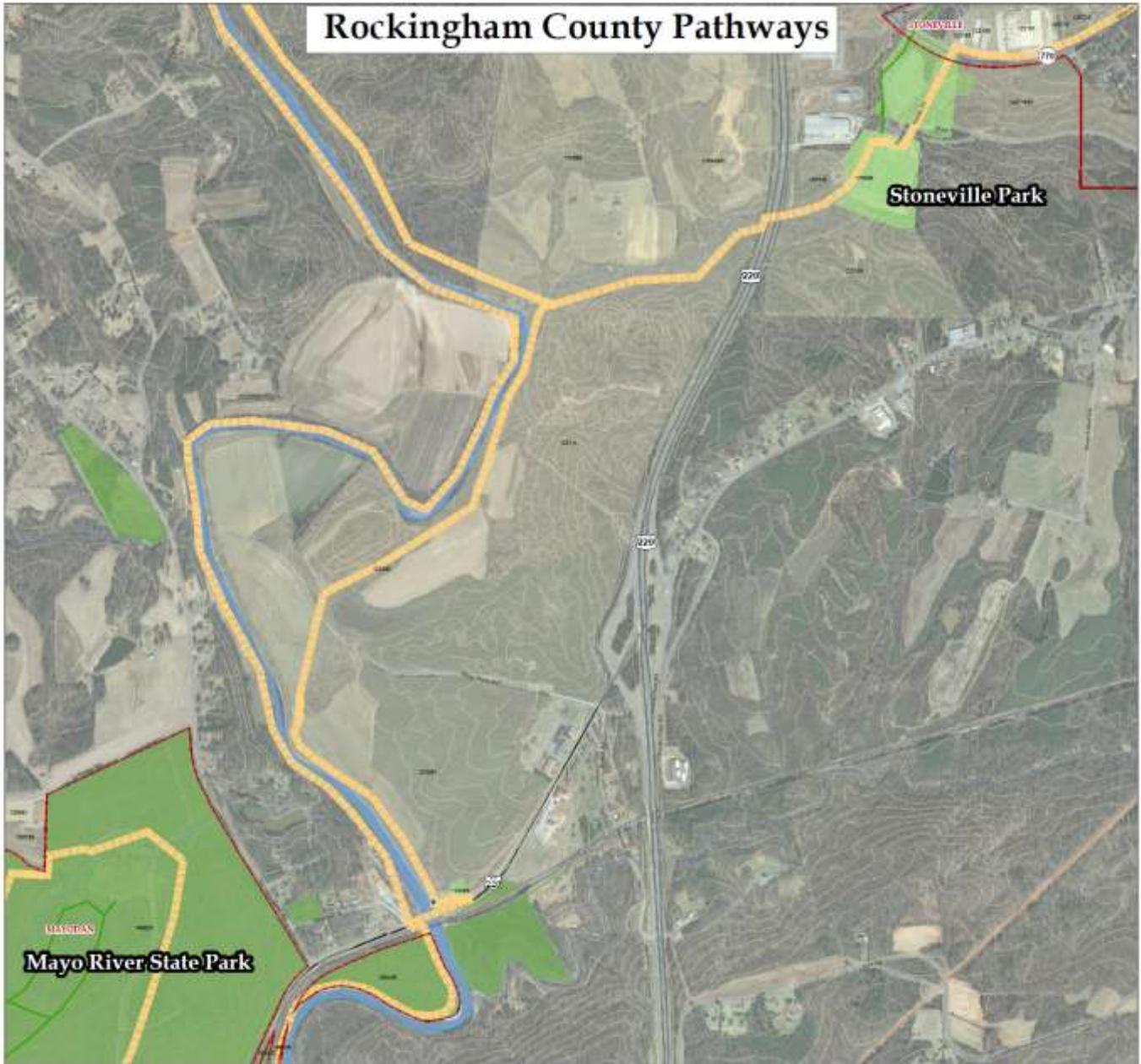
Mayo River Access off of US 220 Business near State Park Entrance

High unemployment is a major concern for the County. Changes to local industry over the past 50 years, an aging population, mis-matched employee skills to prospective industrial needs, and competition from nearby urban centers have contributed to slow employment growth near Stoneville. Significant transportation improvements near Greensboro and success in landing several major manufacturing businesses in the County show promise.

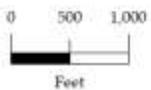
Capitalizing on Rockingham's low cost of living, access to natural amenities, and proximity to the Triad region indicate opportunities to grow the tourism economy and improve resident's quality of life.

A long range plan of special interest to the PART team is the Rockingham County Pathways Plan created in 2013. The plan calls for 25 miles of off-road pilot trail projects to connect recreation and natural areas to town centers in the county. These pathways in some cases will be natural surface trails and in other cases paved greenways. One trail, shown to connect downtown Stoneville to Mayo River State Park, is shown in the plan as a nearly 5-mile pathway along utility easements and a small tributary of the River. This route was the primary subject of study for the PART panel.

Rockingham County Pathways



Stoneville to Mayo River State Park



Trails:

- State - Proposed
- Regional - Existing
- Regional - Proposed
- Local - Existing
- Local - Proposed
- Existing Water Access
- Proposed Water Access

Bike Routes:

- Proposed
 - Existing
- ### Transportation:
- Major Highways
 - Roads
 - Sidewalks
 - Proposed Sidewalk
 - Railroads

Other:

- Schools
- Buildings
- Hydrology
- Utility Easements
- State Owned
- Other Conserv Lands, Parks & Gov Property
- Parcels Along Priority Tr (Parcel #)
- Municipal Boundary
- 10 Foot Contours



Date: January 23, 2012



Disclaimer: Mapping for planning purposes only. Access to private land requires permission. Information shown here has no claim of accuracy.

Proposed Trail Connection between Mayo River State Park and Stoneville Town Park

Interviews revealed a great deal of community pride in Stoneville. The 1998 tornado showed community unity and an interest in rebuilding. Several pocket parks in the downtown were erected following the destruction to commemorate lost life and historic events. Improving the local economy and public health are interests that can both be addressed by providing more transportation options, an improved downtown image, and expanded connections to regional recreational destinations such as the Mayo River and regional bicycle routes. Mayo River State Park staff indicated that a regional visitor's center is being considered where the Mayo River and NC 770 intersect to further draw tourists to the region.

The downtown is a relatively compact and walkable town center, and it provides many opportunities for enhanced business development. Residents and community leaders noted a lack of both eating establishments and dilapidated buildings. PART members noted that commercial signage in the downtown was inconsistent or in disrepair. Little wayfinding signage was available to direct residents or visitors to places of interest, such as schools, community centers, and shopping. Additional sidewalks and safer crossings may also encourage more pedestrian visits to the downtown.



Downtown Stoneville Park and Businesses

Below is a list of some of the most noted assets and partnerships on which to build more recreational opportunities, resident quality of life, and tourism development:

- Dan River Basin Association (DRBA)- a major regional champion for paddling sports
- Mayo River State Park- a potentially major venue for outdoor enthusiasts and regional visitors
- Municipal Park – a well-developed town park including multiple ball courts and future trail connections
- Community Support – local leaders and residents are determined to see change and growth
- Mayo River and Dan River- While the Mayo River is somewhat inaccessible and lesser known, the Dan River draws visitors from the southeast
- Regional coordination - the town works closely with county agencies and sub-regional chambers of commerce

Below is a list of some of the most noted challenges impeding growth in recreational opportunities, resident quality of life, and economic development:

- Transportation - congestion leading to and from Greensboro and Winston-Salem
- Education - workforce skills and education are not well-matched to incoming industry needs
- Downtown aesthetics - signage and some building facades are in disrepair or do not have a consistent design pattern
- Limited local fiscal resources - a relatively high tax rate limits the town's abilities to raise additional funds for capital projects

Recommendations

The PART team divided its recommendations for trail implementation and downtown improvements into three phases: a short-term (1-2 year) plan, a mid-term (3-10 year) plan, and a long-term (11+ years) plan.

Implementation Phase	Focus Areas	Resources Needed	Action Steps	Questions for further study
Short-Term	Programming, Branding, and Signage	Communication with park staff	Encourage state park to establish regular public events	What is the capacity of state park staff to program activities?
		Local downtown business association	Initiate downtown community social events (movies, markets, etc)	
		Planning support	Develop local ordinance for downtown commercial and wayfinding signage	
		Grant budget	Provide mini-grants to businesses to improve signage	
Mid-Term	Extend or improve sidewalks and paths; Promote town regionally	Sidewalk construction grants or funding	Compete for state or non-profit funds to build sidewalk between town, park and school	
		Coordination with chamber and economic development leaders	Develop marketing materials for the town; Promote online	
		Volunteer coordination	Engage local or regional trail enthusiasts to help build natural surface trail between town park, US 220, and to Mayo River SP	
		Coordination with NCDOT	Identify trail passage options under US 220	How can the existing culvert be retrofitted to permit trail users?
Long-Term	Build trails along river; Façade improvements	NCDENR action	Build visitor's center at Mayo River and NC 770	What are the specific plans and decisions to be made for placing the visitor's center?
		Easement acquisition and trail construction funding	Extend trails along Mayo River between state park and visitor's center for multiple users	
		Local funding, staff support	Façade grant program for downtown businesses	

Implementation Steps Matrix (See attached)

Specific Recommendations for Short-Term (1-2 years): *Programming, Branding, and Signage*

- learn from Mayodan’s entry into Main Street program
- adopt a comprehensive land use plan including specific recommendations for downtown improvement
- create a wayfinding/branding signage plan, including funding package, for downtown businesses
- create strategy for marketing the town and region, packaging tourism destinations
- develop detailed paddle trip descriptions for the Mayo River, including what to expect and access points
- add signage at beginning and end of take-out/put-in points along Mayo River
- incorporate “mud runs” and other sporting events as programming at Mayo River State Park
- ask chambers of commerce to spearhead town tourism strategies
- lobby to locate visitor’s center at NC 770/Mayo River
- promote regional cycling routes, clubs
- study the feasibility of adding shoulders to 770 for cyclists
- work with state and regional agencies to encourage walking/biking education for kids
- activate downtown spaces (i.e. movies, family events)

Specific Recommendations for Mid-Term (3-10 years): *Improve sidewalk and trail infrastructure; Promote town regionally*

- extend sidewalk to the municipal park
- add shoulders on NC 770, signage for cyclists
- make improvements to pocket parks
- market local fresh food options
- study options for passage under US 220 for trail
- build natural surface trails on properties connecting to the town park
- continue to acquire properties along river
- pursue NC Main Street program
- program open space in downtown for larger-scale community activities

- promote Stoneville area for water sports and day-trip for eating
- work with cooperative extension/health promotion to mentor K-8 on outdoors, recreation, health and farming

Specific Recommendations for Long-Term (11+ years): *Build trails along river to state park; Façade improvements*

- create façade improvements program
- build trails along river between visitor's center to state park
- consider reusing an underutilized warehouse building space as recreation-community center
- build visitor's center at NC 770/Mayo River
- implement land use plan recommendations to support rec-tourism, hotels/restaurants

Funding and Resources

Some of the recommendations from the PART panel will require financial resources. For local infrastructure improvements, Powell Bill funds and federal funding administered by NCDOT may be options for sidewalk and major greenway-trail infrastructure. NCDOT may also consider incorporating on-street improvements to NC 770 as part of a roadway design project. Stoneville should advocate for facilities such as bike lanes and shoulder improvements to make for safer bicycle routes in the region. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) and Recreational Trails Program grants administered by the NC Division of Parks and Recreation should be considered for funding trails, river access areas and related amenities.

The town has been successful receiving small grants from companies and non-profits such as REI. Volunteer labor is another excellent resource for installing natural surface trails connecting the town park to the state park. Additional small-grant funding from non-profit organizations, such as the Kate B Reynolds Foundation, may be an option for funding small improvements in Stoneville such as façade improvements or signage installation.

The Town of Stoneville should take the lead on many of these initiatives, but will continue to depend on partnerships with regional and county agencies and businesses to affect change. The Rockingham County Health Department should continue to champion interests in Stoneville focusing on public health and the built environment. Staff support from organizations such as the Piedmont Triad Regional Council will also be important to develop the necessary policies for an enhanced town center and increased opportunities for lodging and dining in Stoneville.