

# Top 10 Planning Events in North Carolina 1946 – 2006

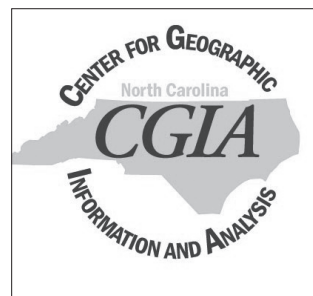
*David R. Godschalk, FAICP, Wes Hankins, FAICP, and Michelle E. Nance, AICP*

*To celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the UNC-Chapel Hill Department of City and Regional Planning, this article outlines the top ten planning events, plans, and programs that have occurred in North Carolina in the past 60 years.*

Inspired by UNC's Department of City and Regional Planning's 60th anniversary, this article outlines the top ten planning events in North Carolina in the past 60 years. Members of the North Carolina Chapter of the American Planning Association (NCAPA) were asked to provide nominations for the top 10 list. After receiving over 50 unique entries (many were nominated more than once), the three authors condensed the impressive list into ten events, plans, and programs that had, and continue to have, lasting impact on North Carolina communities, citizens, and the planning profession.

## 10) Creation of a Statewide GIS Program

North Carolina established one of the first state Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in 1977 as part of the Land Policy Act under the aegis of the Land Resources Information Service. Now named the NC Center for Geographic Information and Analysis (CGIA), it is the lead coordinating agency in state government for geographic information. Its mission has been to build and maintain a statewide database of digital geographic information and to provide GIS services to federal, state, and local governments, the private sector, and



academic institutions. Its work is overseen by the NC Geographic Information Coordinating Council (NCGICC).

Located in the NC Department of Environment and

Natural Resources (NCDENR), CGIA has worked on a cost-recovery basis since its inception. Its responsibilities are to manage and distribute digital geographic information about North Carolina, to operate a statewide clearinghouse, and to provide Internet access to state geographic information, including NC OneMap. CGIA provides planners with application development, data development and enhancement, image analysis, spatial

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analysis, GIS system planning, and technical assistance. Its significance stems from its pioneering role in bringing digital data and GIS technology to North Carolina agencies, organizations, and private sector firms from the early days of these new information system approaches.

## 9) Capital City Greenway Plan

The Capital City Greenway report was prepared over the 18 months prior to its transmittal to Raleigh's City Council in September 1972. Shortly thereafter, the City created its greenways program in 1974 and adopted its first official greenway plan in 1995, using a Capital Improvement Program budget. This was followed by the City's first greenway demonstration project.

Raleigh's greenway concept was for a riparian-based corridor system. In order to relate to the City's needs, the report had to address issues that were topical at the time, offering an alternative perspective on the importance of these riparian corridors, the functions they perform, and the public costs/benefits involved with choices. Thus, floodplain regulations, FEMA Insurance eligibility, and sediment control enforcement had to be included because the City had not resolved the issues, and they were inseparable from greenway corridor location and function.

By necessity the report was very focused on Raleigh, yet over the next 10 to 15 years, the concept took several avenues to communities throughout the state. For the local governments around Raleigh, proximity provided ready access to greenway-related information and the possibility of interconnections, and the Triangle J

Council of Governments provided a forum for further concept sharing. The Triangle Greenways Council, a nonprofit NGO, was founded specifically to promote the greenway concept to local governments throughout the region. Similarly, another group of volunteer advocates organized and held NC Greenway Conferences throughout the state, with the first four in Raleigh, Charlotte, Winston-Salem, and Durham.

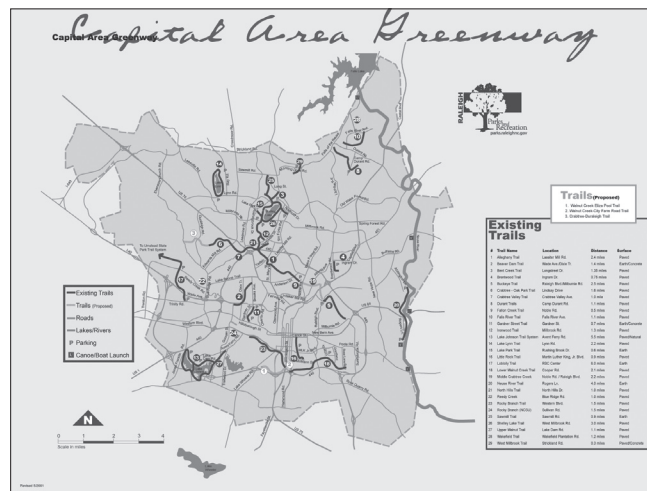
Paralleling and enabling the acceptance of the greenway concept by local governments across NC has been the steady evolution of environmental regulations and programs. Changes that have advanced the greenway

movement over the past quarter century include:

- Widespread interest in FEMA Insurance eligibility that encourages local flood damage avoidance programs and the buyout of damaged structures.
- Clean Water Act amendments, from wetland protection to non-point source coverage to stormwater control.



**The Capital City Greenway report is significant because it jump-started the greenway movement in North Carolina, becoming a state and national model.** Images courtesy of Raleigh Parks and Recreation.



- State sediment control regulation and river buffer rules.
- Clean Air Act amendments for non-attainment area designation that recognize the benefits of tree protection and alternative transportation.
- Transportation Act amendments, from transportation enhancements, to national recreational trails, to non-motorized transportation.
- Creation of NCDENR's Trails Program and NC-DOT's Bicycle and Pedestrian Program.
- Establishment of the Clean Water Management Trust Fund, Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, and Conservation Tax Credit Program.

Greenways received their first major nationwide visibility in the 1987 report from the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors. That report was followed closely by a feature article on greenways in National Geographic magazine, beginning the spread of the greenway concept across the country. Then in 1991, Charles E. Little's book *Greenways for America* identified Raleigh's Capital City Greenway report as the first modern greenway plan; requests for copies of the report and related information were received from around the state, nation, and world. National Greenways Conferences were held in Raleigh and Asheville shortly thereafter, and the Rails to Trails Conservancy

has since begun International Trails and Greenways Conferences. Further, the Conservation Fund began its American Greenways Program for greenway education and promotion. The Capital City Greenway report is significant because it jump-started the greenway movement in North Carolina and became a model used by organizations and governmental agencies throughout the state and country.



**The Clean Water Management Trust Fund addresses water pollution issues through financial incentives.** *Photos courtesy of the North Carolina Coastal Federation.*



### 8) Establishment of the Clean Water Management Trust Fund

Created by the NC General Assembly in 1996, the Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF) makes grants to state and local government agencies and nonprofit conservation organizations to help finance projects that address water pollution problems. Grants are used to enhance or restore degraded waters, protect unpolluted waters, and contribute to a network of riparian buffers and greenways for environmental, educational, and recreational benefits.

The CWMTF is a voluntary, incentive-based water quality program administered by a 21-member Board of Trustees appointed by the Governor. Between 1996 and 2006, the CWMTF has awarded 781 grants totaling \$595.8 million that leveraged over \$906 million in private and other public funds. More than half of the grants have been used to acquire land for buffers, floodplains, wetlands, and greenways. In total, these grants have helped to protect more than 317,000 acres and 3,600 miles of riparian buffers.

The significance of the Clean Water Management Trust Fund stems from its creation of a public funding source to encourage water quality protection, as well as to enhance the state's quality of life and economy.

## 7) First Historic District Zoning

Founded in 1766 by German Moravians, Salem was a place where the Moravians could practice their religious beliefs free from the persecution experienced by their brethren in Europe. Salem thrived as a center for commerce and education for generations, yet it was slowly engulfed by the surrounding development of the town of Winston (founded on land donated by the Moravians in 1849). In 1913, Winston and Salem merged, and the historic structures and environment of Salem became threatened as the city expanded in the early 20th century.

In 1948, the potential deterioration of the area was halted when the Winston-Salem Board of Aldermen designated Old Salem as an "H" Historic District, becoming the first local historic district in North Carolina. Later, pursuant to legal action, the State's enabling legislation was drafted and approved, using the Old Salem district as a model. Old Salem is internationally recognized as one of the premier museum districts in the United States and receives thousands of visitors each year.

The broader significance lies in the precedent that was set by the creation of this historic district. Currently, there are over 70 historic preservation commissions in North Carolina authorized to designate local historic districts. Historic district designation is an honor that has helped countless communities celebrate and protect their local architecture, history, and character through

zoning regulations on appearance.

## 6) Construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway

The Blue Ridge Parkway was conceived during the Great Depression as a scenic tourist link between Shenandoah National Park in Virginia and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina and Tennessee. Construction began on the "two year project" in September 1935. However, the project was not finished until 1987 when the Linn Cove Viaduct was completed, placing the majority of the construction within the past 60 years.

The route through Virginia was fairly easily established, but a bitter rivalry developed between North Carolina and Tennessee for the rest of the route, as both states recognized the economic benefits that would arise in the short and long term. The final decision was left to Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior and administrator of relief funds. After intense consideration, he sided with North Carolina, establishing the route now traveled. North Carolina and



**In 1948, the Winston-Salem Board of Aldermen designated Old Salem as an "H" Historic District, becoming the first local historic district in North Carolina.** *Photos courtesy of Old Salem, Inc.*



Virginia were to purchase and donate the right-of-way and the federal government would build and maintain a parkway under the auspices of the National Park Service.

Stanley W. Abbott was appointed resident landscape architect for the new park-to-park road. Abbott was influenced by the likes of Frederick Law Olmstead and wanted to create a park-like environment that would blend in with the natural surroundings and showcase not only panoramic views of the mountains, but also agricultural settings, streams, and forests.

Unlike many of the national parks that were established in pristine wilderness areas of the country, the Blue Ridge Parkway is a restored landscape. When construction began, much of the landscape had been devastated by clear-cutting logging operations, streams were fouled, and commercialization was already taking over the few scenic areas. The conservation program in which this scenic parkway was to be developed was described as “a museum of managed American countryside,” and this concept led to the conversion of 469 miles of ordinary countryside into a thing of eye-catching beauty. Abbott designed not only a parkway but a total recreation program, incorporating visitor centers, hiking trails, campgrounds, milepost markers, interpretive programs, visitor services, and lodges into a series of “parks” interspersed strategically along the route.

The last section to be constructed, the Linn Cove Viaduct, has been called the “most complicated segmental bridge ever built.” The Viaduct is an elaborate double-S curve elevated bridge that skirts the side of Grandfather Mountain. The purpose of elevating the roadway rather than blasting it into the side of the mountain was to limit the impact on ecologically sensitive Grandfather Mountain.



**With 20 million visitors a year, the Blue Ridge Parkway is the most visited unit in the national park system.** *Photo courtesy of the National Park Service and the Blue Ridge Parkway.*



This project not only provided relief for the Appalachian Mountain region during the Great Depression, but the parkway has continually been a major tourist attraction and major economic engine for western North Carolina. With 20 million visitors a year, the Blue Ridge Parkway is the most visited unit in the national park system and its value is ever increasing as a visual and recreational resource for growing urban populations.

## 5) Research Triangle Park

Research Triangle Park (RTP) is a public-private, planned research park, created in 1959 by leaders from business, academia, and industry. The park is located between Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill, and

is one of the most prominent high-tech research and development centers in the United States.

The Park encompasses 7,000 acres of North Carolina pine forest and has designated approximately 1,100 acres for development. It is home to more than 136 companies, more than a hundred of which are related to research and development. Companies represented

there engage in high-technology research, development, and manufacturing in such areas as the health sciences, pharmaceuticals, computers, optics, and many other for-profit and nonprofit enterprises. All of these institutions work together with the Park companies, reflecting a special spirit of cooperation and learning within the scientific and technological community.

RTP has proven to be one of the most important and massive economic, social, and educational planning efforts in the state over the last 60 years. In one generation it transformed a collection of middling government, university, and industrial towns into a high-tech region. RTP is a cutting edge example of innovative economic development planning and physical planning and is one of the most significant development projects ever undertaken in North Carolina.

#### 4) Passage of the Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA)

In 1974, after a vigorous debate, the NC General Assembly passed the historic Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA). The Act found that the state's coastal lands and waters were among its most valuable resources, they were subjected to increasing pressures, and they required a comprehensive plan for their protection, preservation, orderly development, and management. It established a cooperative state-local program of coastal area management, under which local governments in the 20 coastal counties were required to prepare land use plans, following guidelines published by the Division of Coastal Management in the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

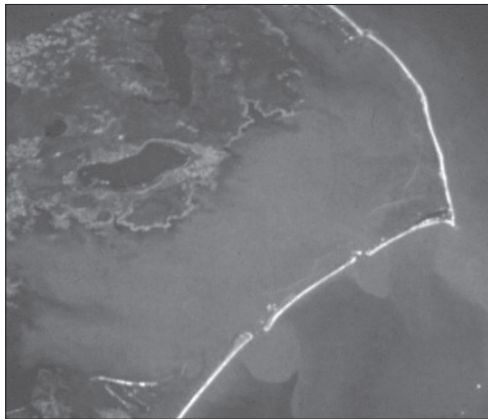
A 15 member Coastal Resources Commission was created to designate Areas of Environmental Concern (AECs) and to oversee approval of plans and development permits, which had to be consistent with the counties' land use plans. Designated AEC categories include: the estuarine system, the ocean hazard system, public water supplies, and natural and cultural resource areas. In 1978, the CAMA program won official recognition and eligibility for funding under the federal Coastal Zone Management Act. CAMA's significance is based on establishing the state's first systematic

requirements for local government land use plans and for its pioneering recognition of the need to balance environmental protection, economic development, public safety, use, and recreation—the essence of sustainable development.

#### 3) Creation of NCAIP/NCAPA from SEAIP

Prior to the creation of the North Carolina Chapter of the American Institute of Planners in 1969, the North Carolina planning community was a "Section" within the Southeastern Division of the American Institute of Planners. In May of 1968, the Juster Committee recommended dissolving SEAIP and in September, the SEAIP Executive Committee acted upon this recommendation

and dissolved the Division. In May of 1968, there was also a push for the formation of the NC Chapter of the American Institute of Planners (NCAIP). Approval for the formation of NCAIP was granted at the AIP Board of Directors meeting in January of 1969. Two months later, the North Carolina Chapter of the American Insti-



**CAMA recognizes the need to balance environmental protection, economic development, public safety, use, and recreation.** *Photos courtesy of NC Division of Coastal Management.*



tute of Planners was officially formed with the passage of Chapter Bylaws.

At its inception, NCAIP had approximately 100 members. Notable NCAIP initiatives included the establishment of the Summer Planning Institute, creation of a Chapter Awards program (recipient of an AIP Award), issuance of a paper strongly supporting the development of an undergraduate planning degree in North Carolina, and an annual North Carolina Planning Conference hosted by the Chapter and the UNC Institute of Government.

With the merger of the American Institute of Planners (AIP) and the American Society of Planning Officials (ASPO) during 1978-79, the North Carolina Chapter of the American Planning Association (NCAPA) replaced NCAIP. By 1979-80, NCAPA had approximately 500 members. Currently NCAPA has approximately 1,530 members. Significant initiatives have included employing a lobbyist for a more effective legislative presence, establishing a series of NCAPA "prep" sessions for Chapter members taking the AICP exam, attaining nonprofit status, and supporting Smart Growth.

From the SEAIP era to NCAIP, and more recently NCAPA, the planning community and the State of North

Carolina have benefited from the activities of these three organizations and their relationship with the UNC Institute of Government. Hosting the annual planning conference for many years, the Institute of Government staff have partnered with NCAIP/NCAPA to provide

North Carolina planners and citizen planners with outstanding educational opportunities.

## 2) Local Government Technical Assistance

North Carolina practicing planners can draw upon an enviable wealth of technical assistance provided by three public sources: 1) the NC Division of Community Assistance, 2) a system of multi-county Councils of Government (COGs), and 3) a group of experts at the Institute of Government in the School of Government at UNC Chapel Hill.

The Division of Community Assistance (DCA), within the NC Department of Commerce, assists local governments with com-

munity development, economic development, smart growth management, and downtown revitalization. With six district offices, the Division administers the Small Cities Community Development Block Grant Program, the Main Street Program, and the Community Planning Program.

Seventeen multi-county NC COGs provide elected officials with forums for discussion of regional planning



**North Carolina practicing planners can draw upon an enviable wealth of technical assistance resources.** *Photos courtesy of North Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Community Assistance.*



and development issues. The COGs were established by the General Assembly in 1972 as a statewide system for intergovernmental cooperation and planning.

Founded in 1931, the UNC Institute of Government has continually provided knowledge-based services, including nonpartisan legal, public administration, management, and financial expertise, training, advice, research, and publications to public officials and citizens. It supports the annual NC planning conference, offers a number of planning short courses, and assists state and local elected officials in drafting bills and ordinances.

The significance of these three local government assistance resources stems from the opportunity they provide for planners to get valuable technical assistance, objective advice, and consistent legal interpretations from an accessible public source without having to hire a consultant.

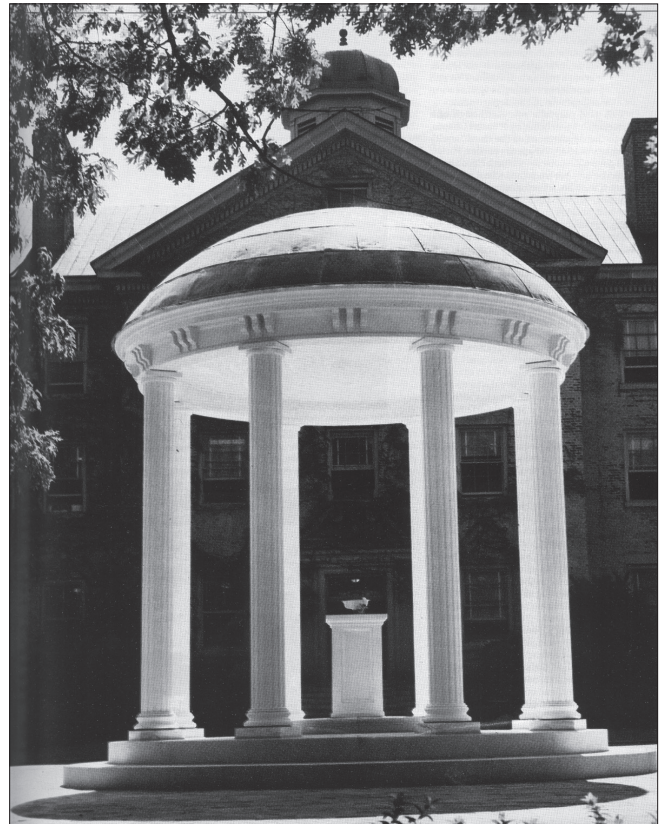
### 1) Establishment of Graduate and Undergraduate Planning Degrees in NC

The Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of North Carolina is one of the oldest, largest, and most highly regarded programs of graduate planning study and research in the United States. Founded in 1946 to demonstrate the practical application of social science methods to problems of government, it became the first planning program in the nation with its principal university base in the social sciences rather than in landscape design, architecture, or engineering. Offering both Master's of Regional Planning and Ph.D. degrees, the department's graduates and faculty are well known for their outstanding contributions within the profession and the academy.

Included in a 1973 NCAIP paper on planning education was the following statement:

“NCAIP should provide strong support to develop at least one bachelor's program in planning at a university in the state that fully meets AIP accreditation standards.”

The establishment of the undergraduate degrees at East Carolina University (ECU) in 1974, and Appalachian State University (ASU) in 1975, was the initial step in fulfilling the NCAIP mandate. East Carolina University offers a B.S. in Urban and Regional Planning and Appalachian State University offers a B.S. in Community and Regional Planning. Both of these degree programs were created to meet the demand for entry level planners within North Carolina. Both programs stress interdisciplinary relationships with other academic units, computer skills, and experiential learning opportunities within a small class setting.



**Planning education programs were created to meet the demand for entry level planners within North Carolina. Above is a photo of the Old Well, a symbolic landmark at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Photo courtesy of David Godschalk.**



The accreditation of ECU's B.S. in Urban and Regional Planning by the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) in 2003 fulfilled the remaining portion of the NCAIP mandate—an accredited bachelor's program in planning at a university in North Carolina.

### **Conclusion**

Planning in North Carolina has changed dramatically over the past 60 years, driven in large part by the programs, policies, and departments described in this Top-ten list. Without question, these events have shaped the physical, economic, and governmental landscape in the state, while giving planners new tools and new vehicles to improve their communities. Planning practices may have changed in large part due to these events, but the spirit of public service still motivates the profession and will continue to do so over the next 60 years of evolving practice.