

# Guiding Principles

## Regional Greenspace Project

*Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham and Region 2020*

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### **1. Economic Development:**

Greenspace is a key in the attraction of new business and industry through the existence of places and interventions that function to enrich and improve quality of life for citizens of the region. New business operations, whether from start-up, relocation, or expansion, imply multiple levels of commerce for a given region or community including: jobs, revenue and income production, expansion of residential population and housing units. Desirable industrial and business operations seek locations in communities that provide quality of life amenities which are proven to entice and retain talented management and a skilled labor force. Parks, greenways, waterfronts, recreational and sporting venues provide much needed provisions for various forms of active and passive recreation.

### **2. Recreation and Gathering Places:**

Greenspace amenities become significant gathering places for people to interact, increasing the positive impact of community building initiatives. Parks also provide excellent venues for large scale community and civic gatherings, increasing community spirit and contributing to sense of place. Trails for hiking, bicycling, walking, canoeing and equestrian use provide opportunities for citizens to engage in regular physical activity and potentially measures of alternative transportation.

### **3. Health:**

Greenspace contributes significantly to the overall health and wellbeing of citizens by encouraging outdoor recreational activities and active physical lifestyles. In addition, the long-proven benefit of greenspace upon mental health is increasingly important relative to the high stress lifestyles experienced by many citizens. Other health related benefits attributable to greenspace include improved air quality (surrounding greenspace), positive impact on stormwater runoff, and visual softening of the built environment

**4. Scenic Quality:**

View sheds are defined by the visible characteristics of the natural and built environment. Scenic landscape qualities are provided by natural phenomena and other appealing features such as forests, mountains, pastures, farms. In addition, the built environment can also contribute to scenic quality if comprised of appropriate architecture including bridges, civic, and commercial buildings, and other iconic structures resulting in a signature urban skyline.

**5. Nature Based Tourism:**

Nature Based Tourism industry provides economic value to the preservation of greenspace as a viable industrial component through increased revenues from lodging, food, beverage, entertainment, and other retail value to the region. The net result is increased prosperity for local merchants and enhanced quality of life greenspace amenities for local residents.

**6. Connectivity through *Alternative Transportation Interventions*:** Avant Garde development practices encourage densities which are rapidly gaining increased desirability by the residential housing consumer. Such development patterns provide for inclusion of elements consistent with the philosophy of *Smart Growth* and encourage walking, cycling, and forms of electric and cart transportation. This further facilitates the existence and availability of greenspace by allowing for the practical intervention of alternative mobility within a neighborhood village. Designated lanes for cyclists, along with a thoughtful network of sidewalk connections for pedestrians and joggers is proven to facilitate non-motorized mobility, decreasing auto traffic congestion, gasoline consumption, and air quality concerns. In addition, alternative transportation concepts promote healthier lifestyles through increased physical activity.

**7. Historic and Cultural Education:**

Greenspace and trails provide connectivity and accessibility opportunities for engaging the region's unique historic and cultural heritage. Current studies indicate a growing link between preservation of historic and cultural sites and attraction of Nature Based Tourism visitors. In addition, celebration of such icons in the landscape helps to preserve and maintain the much desired "sense of place" qualities for a given region.

**8. Water and Air Resource Protection:**

Greenspace plays a crucial role in protecting the biological health and water quality of rivers, streams, reservoirs, lakes, ponds, and wetlands. Greenspace filters storm water runoff from roads, parking lots, rooftops, lawns, golf courses, and other built environments that produce contaminants transported to public waterways. Greenspace protects critical groundwater recharge areas, especially

in highly porous limestone terrain. Green buffers capture fine dust particles (particulate matter) and filter other air contaminants and noise from intensive human activities (e.g. mining, industrial operations, and traffic). Also, tree canopies and other vegetated areas play a crucial role in mitigating urban heat island effects caused by radiant heat from paved surfaces and rooftops.

- 9. *New Ruralism: preservation of rural character, Farms and Family Lands:***  
As development encroaches upon the rural landscape, greater focus and attention is directed toward concern for the loss of our working lands; the farmland and agricultural areas. Patterns of dense development allow for the co-existence of agricultural and residential development while protecting the functional and scenic value of the rural landscape and farmlands. Productive farmlands are a type of greenspace utilized for dairy, poultry, cattle, and crop or timber production. Also included under agricultural purposes are lands with the bonus of bucolic vistas supporting the maintenance, and recreation associated with horse farming and equestrian interests. In addition, vineyard and orchard production including, pecan, peach, blueberry, plum, pear, and apple, all common to this geographic region present aesthetically pleasing rural scenery and contribute to the region's sense of place.

- 10. *Habitat and Biological Protection:***  
Greenspace provides food, forage, shelter and migratory access for wildlife while also protecting biological diversity and ecosystem integrity. In addition it is important to note the Nature Based Tourism/economic value associated with habitat protection. For example, a rapidly growing category of Nature Based Tourism is birding. Alabama's geographical positioning, including Dauphin Island's well documented function as a gateway to the US mainland for migratory birds, provides Alabama's interior with vast potential for development as a birding destination. The habitat must be preserved and protected if the birds are to continue their long followed migratory patterns through the state. In addition, citizens also need protected natural environments for fresh air, clean water, recreation, and refuge from their daily routines.