

America in Bloom 2015 EVALUATION FORM



Participant: Henderson County, North Carolina

Population Category: Over 40,000

Visiting Dates: June 25 & 26, 2015

Judges: Alex Pearl & Barbara Vincentsen

America in Bloom envisions communities across the country as welcoming and vibrant places to live, work, and play – benefitting from colorful plants and trees; enjoying clean environments; celebrating heritage; and planting pride through volunteerism.

All judging criteria will be adjusted to the climate and environmental conditions of the participant’s location.

The judges’ report is based on efforts in management, planning, maintenance, improvement, and innovation of each of the following criteria:

Criteria	Actual Points	Possible Points
1. Floral Displays	140.00	175.00
2. Landscaped Areas	141.50	175.00
3. Urban Forestry	130.00	175.00
4. Environmental Efforts	122.00	175.00
5. Heritage Preservation	142.00	175.00
6. Overall Impression	97.50	125.00
Total	773.00	1000
%	77.30	
Bloom Rating	4 blooms	

Five blooms= 85% Four blooms = 72.50–84.95% Three blooms = 60.00–72.45% Two blooms = 45.00–59.95% One bloom = <45.00%

Participant representatives met: (including email)

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|---------------------|--|---|
| Name: Mia Freeman | Title: America in Bloom Chair | Email: miasandmore@yahoo.com |
| Name: Carol Elliott | Title: AIB committee member | Email: celliott192@yahoo.com |
| Name: Karen Baker | Title: Asst Director Hendersonville Visitor Center | Email: kbaker@historichendersonville.org |

General Comments and Suggestions:

Welcome back to your second year of participation in America in Bloom. Your efforts have clearly made a difference in the county and it shows. We are happy to announce that you have achieved a prestigious 4 bloom rating for 2015. Congratulations to Mia Freeman, Carol Elliott, Karen Baker as well as the mayors and members of council for all of the Henderson County municipalities who embrace the America in Bloom ideals of promoting better communities. We appreciated meeting with government officials from the various municipalities during the judges' visit. They provided us with insights into the available resources and issues of their respective governances. They appear to have an open dialogue. We were excited to experience the enthusiasm of the people we spoke to and sights we saw.

An idea to use for promoting America in Bloom is to request businesses to use a tag line in their weekly advertisements. For example a hardware store might say, "The judges are coming in 10 weeks. Special of the week is clean up bags." The following week the ad line might say, "The judges are coming in 9 weeks. The special of the week is..." And so on for each week prior to the judges' visit.

In an effort to engage the youth of the community in thinking about the future, it is suggested the Community Foundation of Henderson County establish a fund whereby a committee of youth 14-18 year of age from the community manage the funds, establish guidelines for grants and oversee the distribution of funds. Thus the experience can teach them about the needs of their community, empower them to make tough financial decisions, and help them see the value of philanthropy.

Twenty-nine bike routes of varying lengths and difficulty snake their way through Henderson County. Four golf courses and 12 parks are available for citizens to experience both active and passive recreational life styles. *With such diverse recreational activities, such concepts as bike safety, walk safe, bike rodeos, bike maintenance, bike routes to school, recycling of bicycle tires and other related topics can be explored at special events.*

The judges did not have an opportunity to speak with anyone from the schools. *In the future speaking to someone familiar with curriculum, student clubs, school maintenance and operations, would give insight into the youth of the community and their efforts in the community.*

Henderson County has an active Master Gardener program and Friends of the Parks. Both have high visibility in community gardens and public garden areas. There is a sense residents of Henderson County appreciates the outdoors. *It brings to mind to organize a Men's Garden Club.*

Retail spaces are operating a high occupancy rate. *However, for those spaces that are vacant it is suggested the landlords be approached to allow non-profit groups to set up stagnant displays in the window space alone. Even allowing the windows to be painted rather than just looking at empty space would be an improvement over an unattended space.*

Farm City Day is a wonderful event that celebrates the agricultural roots of Henderson County. A combination of a good water supply, good weather, soil and know how continue to expand this component of the economy. Large greenhouse complexes are now adding to the market place with the technology to grow a wide variety of vegetables and flowers for worldwide markets. *As apples are a major contributor to the economic strength of the county use apple wood for carvings, whittling or made into art objects.*

Previous America in Bloom judges commented on logging volunteer hours on a large scale. It was apparent this advice has been taken to heart. For example, this year Flat Rock Park reported 717 volunteer hours. This translated to over \$15,000 of donated services. In fact, the Participant Profile reports that volunteer hours across many departments, including Animal Control, Law Enforcement and the library, to name a few, totaled nearly 52,000 hours! While still in its infancy, recording volunteer hours is being done to great effect and highlights the importance and value of all that work. Keep it up!

1. Floral Displays Flower beds, containers, baskets, window boxes. Arrangement, originality, distribution, location, diversity, balance, harmony, quality of maintenance. Use and integration of annuals, perennials, ornamental grasses, bulbs, tropical plants, and seasonal flowers that provide year-round interest.	Max points	Actual Score
Municipal		
Leadership and plan of action for floral displays	20	16
Concept and design, variety of plantings, overall effect	20	16
Maintenance and quality of displays	20	16
Design for all seasons	15	12.
Business		
Concept and design, overall effect	15	12
Maintenance and quality of displays	15	12
Residential		
Concept and design, overall effect	15	11
Maintenance and quality of displays	15	11
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement in design, planting, and maintenance of floral displays	20	17
Financial and in-kind contributions to floral displays	20	17
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	175.00	140.00

Comments and suggestions:

The gardeners at the Flat Rock Theater have created a number of gardens that are thoughtful as well as whimsical. The flower circle intermingling of poppies and sunflowers into a circle design is such a display.

The hanging flower baskets in downtown Hendersonville are excellent examples of what hanging baskets should look like. They are lush with colorful foliage and plants, uniform in size distributed evenly throughout Hendersonville's business district. *Consider carrying their colors themes or plant selections into other county municipalities' public buildings and spaces.*

Incorporate leafy vegetables into the public landscape design. Such plants as parsley, oregano, mirabar spinach, tricolor sage, and loose leaf lettuces are just a few of the possible selections that could be added to the palette of possibilities.

Throughout the community there is a tendency to overuse certain cultivated plants in municipal spaces. Of note are Knock Out roses and Stella D'ora daylilies. Consult with the North Carolina Department of Transportation for recommendations of alternative plant selections.

http://www.ncdot.gov/doh/operations/dp_chief_eng/roadside/wildflowerbook/.

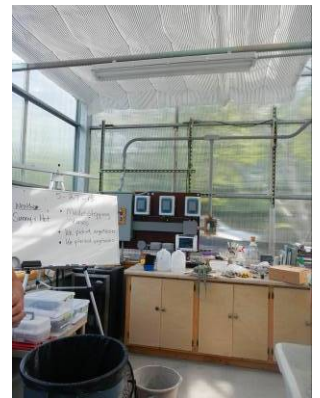
Henderson County is a participant in The National Pollinator Garden Network (NPGN) <http://www.millionpollinorgardens.org/>. This is a collaboration of national, regional, and local gardening clubs that are working to restore critical pollinator populations in support of the President's Executive Strategy

to “Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators.” Henderson County, through its high school and Bullington Gardens, are working to inspire individuals and community groups, institutions and the garden industry to create more pollinator habitat through sustainable gardening practices, habitat conservation and provide these groups the tools to be successful. The NPGN network collectively represents approximately 800,000 gardeners, 10,000 schoolyard gardens and brings a baseline of a 250,000 registered pollinator gardens nationwide. *Schools can incorporate this theme into lesson plans and extend it into establishing gardens on the school grounds. There is an additional opportunity to possibly link up with the North Carolina Experimental Station which has been performing research into apple orchard management and practices, of which bees are a component.*

Extend some of these pollinator garden themes into sites in the surrounding communities of Laurel Wood, Flat Rock and Mills River.

Embracing the pollinator program may also lead to following Monarch Watch <http://monarchwatch.org/>. Monarch Watch is a cooperative network of students, teachers, volunteers and researchers dedicated to the study of the Monarch butterfly.

The BOOST Program working out of Bullington Gardens is well run. It provides meaningful instruction and application of Horticultural topics to high school students with special needs. *Garden staff and school parent-teacher association (PTA) might investigate working with the school system to develop a youth corps of children that with appropriate supervision and instruction could maintain one or more selected school gardens when school is not in session.*



There are 154 places of worship in Henderson County representing a wide array of beliefs. Working in partnerships with such county agencies as Juvenile Crime Prevention Council, the Library, Social Services, and Board of Health, to name a few, approach these organizations to promote a food program such as “Plant a Row For the Hungry” (http://www.gardenwriters.org/gwa.php?p=par/par_campaign.html).

Investigate the interest of churches, businesses, non-profit groups for adopting a garden in public spaces identified around the county. Municipal services can provide guidance and oversight for what plants are appropriate to be incorporated into the plan, prepare the beds; provide traffic control for the groups when planting sites should the sites be located along streets, and clean up at season's end. Water application and bed maintenance would be part of the organization's responsibility.

For those citizens of Henderson County who do not live in a residential property but are condo or apartment dwellers, create a contest for balcony, window box or container gardens. Entries can be done through photographs.

Retail and commercial businesses of all types are spread out throughout the county. Possibly the Chamber of Commerce or Rotary would consider initiating an Adopt-A-Pot program for the business community. For a fee businesses could rent a large decorative pot full of flowers for a season to be placed outside their establishments. The business owners would be responsible for the maintenance tasks for each display. This could start out as a one-season experience with the possibility of extending to other seasons with alternative choices.

2. Landscaped Areas		
Overall design and suitability of landscape, turf, and ground covers. Use of native plants. Overall design and suitability for location/use. Good use of design principles (i.e., balance of plant material and constructed elements, harmony, color, texture, shape, etc.). Sustainability. Integration of hardscapes, lighting, site features. Maintenance (weeds, mulching practices, edging). Site rejuvenation and rehabilitation. Efforts in strategic planning. Community gardens, children’s gardens, healing gardens, Audubon and other specialty public gardens and zoos.	Max points	Actual Score
Municipal		
Overall design and planting of landscape, turf and groundcovers	15	13
Environmental management of sports fields and turf	15	12
Quality of landscape maintenance	15	12
Sustainable management, naturalization and eco-design	15	12.5
Business		
Overall design and planting of landscape	15	12
Management of turf and groundcovers	10	7
Quality of landscape maintenance	15	12
Residential		
Overall design and planting of landscape	15	12
Management of turf and groundcovers	15	12
Quality of landscape maintenance	15	12
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement, i.e. garden clubs, neighborhood groups, Master Gardeners and University extension, in funding, planting, and maintenance of landscaped areas	15	12.5
Participation in future planning (committees, councils, and advisory boards.)	15	12.5
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	175.00	141.50

Comments and suggestions:

Bountiful Harvest, a 30 plot community garden located in Jackson Park, is an example of a well-organized site. Gardeners must maintain their own plot. The center island is planted for all to both contribute and to harvest. The passive solar greenhouse is a good example of a functioning space on a shoestring budget. The simplicity of the design and mechanics is well worth duplicating.

Two great walking trails trace their way through Mills River Park and the Park at Flat Rock. *Investigate linking the two parks' trail systems.*

Jump Off Rock, located in the community of Laurel Park, is a scenic overlook which provides a panoramic view of rolling pastures, the Blue Ridge and Pisgah mountain ranges over 20 miles away. This site offers spectacular scenic mountain views and photographic opportunities during all four seasons of the year.

The Park at Flat Rock advisory board chaired by Ginger Brown is accomplishing wonders. The board’s vision is establishing a future direction in the molding of this former 67-acre 9-hole golf course. Monies raised are being spent judiciously. Public awareness of the park's current state and the dreams of what it will contain are being embraced by the community. *An amenity that might have some use along the trails is a life trail system (www.playworldsystem.com). These are workout stations that are focused on older adults and others that might be limited in their movements but can gain a work out. In the children’s playground area include a*

writing surface and vegetable based chalk for children to use their imaginations. Consider as the park matures seeking focus groups of different ages to provide input for programming and facilities. The theme could be 'Consider the Possibilities'.

The Dog Park at Mill Run Parks, while new, is being used regularly. *With such an interest in dogs the following events might be of interest: Yappy Hours, Dog Dips, Dog Jogs (or walks), Dog safe plant sale, scavenger hunts, canine bake sale or Barktoberfest. Wags-to-witches canine costume parade, pet cemeteries, coffee and conversation with a vet or dog groomer, tail gating and canine health fair are but a few other ideas to bring about interest in dog parks.*

Identify landscape projects around the county such places as Flat Rock Park that may be suitable for jail inmates and weekender offender programs under appropriate supervision to work on.

Elizabeth House, a hospice care facility, is very much attuned to the caring environment of life's end stages of its patients. The grounds are well tended by staff and volunteers and a beautiful landscaped area graces the grounds. *Consider adding fragrant plants to the mix of plants on the grounds, especially near entrances and patios.*



Residential areas of Hendersonville, Flat Rock, Laurel Park, Mills River and other outlying areas throughout the county were well maintained. They are making a concentrated effort to keep in check such invasive species as Kudzu, Oriental Bittersweet and multiflora roses.

The Park at Flat Rock and Mill Run Park are two sites where no bike racks were observed.

Construction of the Sierra Nevada Brewing Company was envisioned with forethought to be environmentally sensitive in the area in which they were building. Materials that were on the existing grounds including lumber from the trees and boulders on the site were incorporated in the building and on the site. Other elements of the landscape use native plants to blend the building into the landscape. Many native trees were planted to enhance the landscape.

Flat Rock Playhouse, the State Theatre of North Carolina, is located on the site of the original Flat Rock trading grounds. Scores of volunteers maintain the grounds, which are in pristine condition.

3. Urban Forestry Distribution, variety and suitability of trees; new plantings; urban tree program; qualified personnel or access to trained individual(s); inventory or database; frequency of tree surveys; care and maintenance programs; preservation of heritage trees and woodlots and green buffer zones; scheduled succession plantings. Efforts in management, planning, maintenance, improvement, and innovation. Written policies, bylaws and regulations, long-and short-term plans.	Max points	Actual Score
Municipal		
Overall plan of action, tree planting programs, variety of species, inventory	20	15
Tree maintenance	15	12
Preservation and restoration of natural areas	15	12
Tree protection/planting regulations and by-laws	15	11
Business		
Overall planting program	20	14
Tree maintenance	15	12
Residential		
Overall planting program	20	14
Tree maintenance	15	11
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement in funding, planting, and maintenance of trees (i.e. Tree CityUSA)	20	15
Volunteer involvement of youth in tree programs (i.e., Arbor Day, etc.)	20	14
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	175.00	130.00

Comments and suggestions:

Settlers started arriving in Henderson County before the Revolutionary War. To this day, Henderson County remains primarily a rural area with reminders of the early forests settlers encountered. *Consider developing a Heritage Tree program to preserve the special trees in your area. Heritage trees may be on either on public or private property. Each candidate tree need to be assessed by a certified arborist and evaluated by a review committee and each Heritage Tree owner receives a certificate. Trees can be nominated as an individual or a collection, but must have the owner's approval and meet criteria for health in addition to being selected according to one of the following categories:*

- *Specimen: A tree of exceptional size, form, or rarity.*
- *Historic: A tree recognized by virtue of its age, its association with or contribution to a historic structure or district, or its association with a noted person or historic event.*
- *Landmark: Trees that are landmarks of a community.*
- *Collection: Trees in a notable grove, avenue, or other planting.*

American Forests <http://www.americanforests.org/bigtrees/tree-protection-toolkit/establish-a-heritage-tree-or-champion-big-tree-program/> can provide further guidance on establishing and maintain a Heritage Tree program.

The trees planted at Bear Cat Loop by the school children of Bruce Drysdale School with assistance from the Tree Board were well done. The selection of trees added to the diversity of plants in the community. *This would be a good opportunity to enlist those students who did the project to bond with the trees as junior arborists. After adopting a tree and given some instructions, each would accept responsibility for making sure the tree was watered and cared for in its initial years. They could plant small gardens in the space of the tree base. For their efforts they might be given hats, t-shirts and possibly a field trip.*

An additional thought for the tree planting at Bear Cat Loop is to add signage recognizing the students for their efforts. As the trees were planted as a component of a curriculum this expands the story these trees have to tell.

Apple growing is a big part of the Henderson County economy. The North Carolina Experiment Station has devoted many of its resources to ensure management practices are efficient. The Henderson County Visitors Bureau has also devoted energies to promote the industry. *Consider establishing a living library devoted to apple varieties along with accompanying information. As part of an urban agriculture program, establish a demonstration plot of those varieties that are most profitable in the region.*

Hendersonville has been recognized for being a Tree City for 24 years and has the ability to extend their influence into other municipalities in the county. One scenario might be to seek out nominations from landowners for heritage trees as discussed earlier. Another opportunity might be to advise commercial lot owners and city planners on tree selection and placement. This is an extension of the "NeighborWoods" program (<http://neighborwoodsmnth.org/>). Moreover the Tree Board in conjunction with possibly the North Carolina Extension (Master Gardeners?) could develop a youth training program whereby children become Stewards. These Stewards would receive education from local arboriculture (tree) experts on tree identification, tree biology, proper tree care, tree regulations, tree planting, natural area restoration, nursery tree production, and the benefits of trees. After the training, the Stewards will be equipped to take on the task of spreading accurate information about trees to their own neighborhoods. The Tree Board will offer guidance and assistance throughout the project. To obtain information about a similar program run by Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Union County in New Jersey, see nichnadowicz@ucnj.org.

Compiling a tree inventory can open up opportunities for personnel involved the developing parks at Flat Rock and Mills River and revive the appearance of an aging cemetery. Working in conjunction with the Tree Board, and Park & Recreation, local colleges, scouts, and schools and other interested organizations could compile a tree inventory of parks and cemeteries.

Special day events like Arbor Day and Earth Day afford multiple opportunities to educate the community to the benefits and needs of the urban forest. Grade-appropriate programming such as exhibitions related to the theme of trees may showcase student experiments they may have performed, stories they may have written, cost analysis of the value of trees, observations over time of tree growth, problem solving along the lines of what is taking place at the experiment station, or new frontiers for plants.

Set a goal for the density of the urban forest along with diversity of tree species in public spaces.

4. Environmental Efforts Sustainability practices. Recycling (paper, glass, metal, plastic, electronics, clothing, etc.), policies and by-laws, sustainable development strategies, waste reduction, hazardous waste minimization and collection (oil, paint, chemicals, used batteries, etc.), water quality and conservation, energy conservation, environmental cleanup activities, reducing carbon footprint, environmentally friendly transportation, LEED certification, air, noise and light pollution, rain gardens and rain barrels, composting, energy efficiency, youth programs, etc.Events such as Earth Day, Recycling Days, Bike to Work Days, etc.	Max Points	Actual Score
Municipal		
Leadership in environmental initiatives	25	19
Effective communication of environmental strategies and initiatives	25	18
New programs, improvement and innovation	25	18
Business		
Participation in environmental efforts	20	15
New programs, improvement and innovation	10	7
Residential		
Participation in environmental efforts	20	14
New programs, improvement and innovation	10	7
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement in environmental efforts	20	12
Youth participation in environmental activities	20	12
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	175.00	122.00

Comments and suggestions:

Environmental efforts in Hendersonville are underway in many sectors of the town and appear to be picking up steam. Given the natural beauty of this area, it is easy to see why.

Unfortunately, we did not have the opportunity to visit any of the schools in the area and do not have a strong understanding of any integration of sustainable efforts in the school curriculum or daily practice. *Learning to treat our environment with respect is a habit best begun at an early age and is an area where our children can bring very good habits home from school. We recommend that a visit to one or more of the schools combined with a presentation by a teacher and/or volunteers from the schools would be a welcome addition to the judges' tour.*

While touring Elizabeth House we were informed they had not done an energy audit in a number of years. *We recommend organizations, schools; businesses and homeowners do so every 5 years. Information can be obtained through such agencies as Duke Energy (www.duke-energy.com), Small Business Center Network (www.ncsbc.net), and www.Homeperformancenc.com.*

A special project for an elementary school class would be to list all the environmentally friendly initiatives underway in the school. These could include recycling, cafeteria composting, daylighting, etc. Different classes could then combine lists to see what practices others observed.

The use of condensed natural gas (CNG) to power public vehicles is on the rise in Henderson County. In addition to the county vehicles in use in 2014, we understand that more have been added, including street sweepers and the vehicle used for the 100+ mile tour with the judges. In addition, the five newest buses in the public transit system running through Henderson County are also powered with CNG. As icing on the cake, all buses run by Apple Country Transit are equipped with bike racks.



Given the heavy annual rainfall enjoyed by Henderson County, it is no wonder that installation of rain gardens has become a popular – indeed occasionally required- strategy for controlling runoff and erosion. *While design and installation of rain gardens in commercial and municipal properties is usually performed by professionals, rain gardens are also effective strategies for residential areas. Consider providing a “How to” guide for creating your own rain garden handout through the county website and in print at the library or municipal building. An excellent manual which not only provides a step by step instruction manual but also explains the theory behind the system can be found at www.bgGreenSource.org/raingardens/.*

Recycling containers have been strategically located in all public spaces visited by the judges. We also understand that recycling containers are made available to all residents and recycled material may be dropped off free at the recycling center. *We suggest different size waste containers be made available to residents with different tax rates for pick up of the chosen container, encouraging a much higher consciousness of recycling and its value. This is possible in Henderson County as trash pickup is a separate line item in the bill.*

The recycling center is an active, attractive facility creatively laid out in a manner which takes great advantage of the hilly terrain of the area. This facility is truly a model of its kind, with dumpster openings set at convenient levels for citizens to unload debris. *We agree with last year’s judges that a similar facility placed in a county location convenient for residents in the opposite part of the county would be an excellent idea.*

The Environmental Center does not accept plastic flower pots for recycling but Lowes does - a true boon to gardeners. *Consider combining a pot collection station with a plant sale as a fundraiser. Members of the organization could then drop pots at Lowes for recycling.*

The County supports an excellent website concerning recycling and waste and has published a brochure "Henderson County Recycles."

The judges were pleased to learn that the First Congregational Church has installed a new solar roofing system which will supply the bulk of the electrical power needed for the facility. We commend the First Congregational Church for reducing energy consumption.

The judges’ tour of Jackson Park Community Gardens with Cooperative Agent Kerri Roach included a discussion of the passive solar greenhouse in the corner of the garden. Creative strategies were incorporated using readily available materials such as beverage containers and metal barrels to create mass to mitigate temperature swings in a most effective manner. This has proven so effective that the greenhouse, created out of polyethylene sheeting, a simple metal frame, and containers of water can be used year round, maintaining a winter temperature above 50°.

Laurel Park has created a Nature Park in town, redirecting a stream and planting native species to create a

meadow. Volunteers raised \$15,000 to augment the original grant for the park. In addition to raising money, volunteers help maintain the park.

The Sierra Nevada Brewing Company facility has continued to evolve in the year since the previous judges last visited. Built to very high environmental standards, a LEEDS gold rating is pending. This handsome facility includes not only a brewery but also a restaurant and amphitheatre, vegetable and herb gardens, and landscapes planted with native species. The list of sustainable practices onsite is truly impressive from the obvious examples such as solar panels which shade the parking lot to the permeable pavers underfoot. We applaud not only the strategy, but also the corporate inclusion of tours, concerts and restaurants which bring tourists to the site and educate them on the strategies in place. As the first of the corporate facilities in Fern Cliff, the new industrial park, Sierra Nevada has set a high standard and is demonstrating how environmentally sound practice helps attract business. Knowledgeable guides are able to provide information to visitors on the many strategies that are included.

In addition to the initiatives that were included in the construction of the buildings and site at Sierra Nevada, numerous strategies for sustainable operations have been incorporated in the daily operations of this facility. Local produce is used to provide farm to fork dining during the growing season. Spent grain is recycled to farms for animal fodder while food waste is composted. Rainwater is captured in both above and belowground cisterns and is used for facility toilets, and plant irrigation, among others. Waste water is treated on site, and captured methane is used to fuel some processes.

5. Heritage Preservation	Max Points	Actual Score
Historical, natural, agricultural, and cultural heritage. Preservation and restoration of buildings, homes, churches, cemeteries; heritage sites and/or monuments; heritage parks, historical gardens; artifacts; historical society; heritage advisory committee, museums, archives, history books, and interpretative programs; ordinances and policies. Resource availability. Farmers markets, festivals and parades.		
Municipal		
Leadership in preservation and restoration initiatives	25	21
Legal protection of heritage sites	25	20.5
Resource availability for preservation and restoration	25	20.5
Business		
Conservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of properties	15	12.5
Participation in and support of heritage/cultural activities	15	12.5
Residential		
Conservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of properties	15	12.5
Participation in and support of heritage/cultural activities	15	12.5
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement in cultural, historical, and natural heritage activities	20	16
Youth involvement in heritage activities	20	14
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	175.00	142.00

Comments and suggestions:

The history of Henderson County and the various communities which make up this county in North Carolina has created a heritage rich in diversity. Jump Off Rock provides soaring vistas of the Blue Ridge and Saluda Mountains which surround the intermountain plateau and provides an environment of unparalleled beauty which has lured settlers and visitors alike and at the same time provide a glimpse into the early inhabitants of the area.

Summer colonies of wealthy southerners were joined by retirees in the towns of Laurel Park, Hendersonville and Flat Rock, while farmers and ranchers settled in the area around Mills River. While the population growth has varied from the early 1800s to today, resurgence in interest by retirees to move to the area has resulted in a phenomenal population growth in the past 50 years. With this strong growth has come a strong effort to preserve the heritage of the area. Hendersonville established the Historic Preservation Commission in 1995. Their efforts have facilitated identification of nine local historic districts and several local landmarks. Ten additional landmarks are listed on the National Registry.

The Henderson County Heritage Museum in downtown Hendersonville, lodged in the Historic Courthouse, is home to numerous displays as well as well-catalogued archives. Managed by both paid staff and dedicated volunteers, this museum is a treasure. The impressive collection of artifacts is handsomely displayed in well-designed rooms arranged by period. A handsome diorama of the Saluda Grade, an early architect's exhibit and a replica of a general store are a mere sampling of the offerings. Archival material is digitally stored and well-catalogued. *We were not informed of any recorded oral history project. If one is not ongoing we suggest the*

museum or Genealogical Society contact the Southern Oral History Project (www.SOHP.org). They can guide them through the process.

The Henderson County Genealogical and Historical Society operate from the Heritage Museum. This group of dedicated volunteers provides curatorial services at the museum and works with the archives. The group publishes a quarterly journal and has published several volumes of area history. In addition, they support a most informative website about services available at the museum. For those interested in archival research, the museum's library and research room are open to the public weekdays. A full-time historian is on staff at the museum to direct the ongoing work on the extensive collection of archival information and artifacts.

Most impressive is the fact that the entire Flat Rock District is now included in the National Register of Historic Places. Historic Flat Rock, Inc. actively pursues maintaining and upgrading the preservation and awareness of heritage within the district. This group holds a biannual Historic Tour of Homes and holds a large gala as a fundraiser each year. Historic Flat Rock, Inc., a non-profit organization is an extremely pro-active forward thinking preservation organization. Over the years this group has acquired numerous historic properties, putting preservation easements in property deeds, finding like-minded owners to purchase the properties and continue with improvements. Fund raising efforts have been successful in raising large sums to continue the group's efforts. An excellent summation of the group's goals and achievements is available on the web in a beautifully designed website <http://historicflatrockinc.org>. Truly this organization is comprised of a remarkable group of dedicated volunteers.

In addition to the District designation, many individual sites within the Village of Flat Rock are designated as historic landmarks. A local ordinance clearly spells out requirements for such designation and for locations of markers on designated properties.

The Village of Flat Rock has further emphasized the importance of historic preservation to the town by adopting an historic residence and converting it into the town hall with a small book exchange adjacent. These are excellent, high profile examples of reuse of historic structures.

The Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site is located across the road from the playhouse. Actors from the Flat Rock Playhouse perform works from Sandburg's poetry.

Within the county there are seven historic districts. In addition to the districts there are numerous historic sites with both local and national designations. Most commercial buildings within the historic district of downtown Main Street in Hendersonville boast well-designed plaques uniformly located at eye level which includes information about the structure's past. Additional plaques announce national designation on some buildings.

Annual historic walking tours are scheduled with Hendersonville. One unusual tour which is held on alternate years features the upper floor or lofts within the downtown business district. *Two organizations you may wish to consider for listing tours of historic places are the National Trust for Historic Preservation <http://nationaltrusttours.com/our-tours/> and Preservation North Carolina <http://www.presnc.org/>.*

Henderson County is home to many annual festivals and parades, with extensive farmers' markets incorporated into the events. For the past 60 years, Henderson County has been home to Farm City Day. This event is a daylong festival with both urban and rural displays and activities and markets. Many old traditions are highlighted in numerous displays and activities. Now held in Jackson Park, the event attracts

approximately 10,000 visitors. As the largest apple producing county in the seventh largest apple producing state in the country, Henderson County hosts the official state Apple Festival. This event is held on Labor Day weekend on historic Main Street in Hendersonville and runs for four days. A highlight of the street fair is a grand parade. In addition to the celebratory farmers markets, local markets are held throughout the county. A very well done flyer lists 25 farms markets within the county.

The Henderson County website <http://hendersoncountync.org/> does a most commendable job of presenting a calendar of events including information on available parking for visitors. The County Government has done a fine job of promoting the community. *In the future they may want to include a link to the America in Bloom website and highlight the efforts of the local America in Bloom committee.*

There are numerous historic cemeteries within Henderson County. Of particular note is the terraced cemetery which surrounds St John in the Wilderness Episcopal Church. Both the cemetery and the church are on the National Register of Historic Places and are truly exquisite. The cemetery is still active, and maintenance of the historic portions of the cemetery is excellent. Many of those buried in this cemetery are people of historic importance. *If you have not already done so, consider publishing a booklet which includes the history of those interred in the cemetery and their role in the development of the area.*

Numerous other cemeteries are located in the county. Several years ago a group of dedicated volunteers searched sites and archives and completed a full list of cemeteries, both private and public, in the county. This list, available on-line and includes literally scores of sites.

Two additional cemeteries in close proximity are the Morse Grove Cemetery and the Ebenezer Baptist Cemetery. *Some of the older monuments in these cemeteries are leaning and should be straightened before more damage occurs. More frequent mowing would also improve the general appearance of these two cemeteries.*

To further encourage the efforts of property owners, we suggest Hendersonville Historic Preservation Commission of the Henderson County Genealogical and Historic Society consider adopting an annual Historic Preservation Awards program to honor those who have exerted extra effort to maintain the visual quality of the environment and protect the cultural heritage of the town. Categories such as "most sensitive addition," "most sensitive restoration" and the like could provide encouragement to those working in guidelines for preservation while maintaining houses which work for today's living styles.

There are many stories to tell relating to the history of Henderson County. There might be enough interested individuals in each town to write articles about particularly interesting individuals each month, posting them in a column in the local news. One town and one individual each week or each month should be selected for this column or local radio station "bit." The lead in could be "and on this day in"

6. Overall Impression Lack of litter and graffiti. Maintenance of public open spaces, medians and boulevard strips, streets, sidewalks, walking and biking trails, curbs, ditches, road shoulders, unattended and vacant lots, buildings, garbage receptacles; lack of weeds, dog waste policies and receptacles, notices/posters appropriately displayed, vandalism not evident. Maintenance of the hardscape: walls, lamp posts, benches, playgrounds, etc.Appropriate use and placement of sculpture, wayfinding signs, graphic elements such as banners, signs and murals.	Max points	Actual Score
Municipal		
Overall cleanliness	10	8
Maintenance of public roads and shoulders	10	7.5
Condition of public buildings and properties	10	8
Impact of graphic elements - banners, wayfinding signs, murals, etc.	10	8
Business		
Overall cleanliness	20	16
Condition of buildings and properties	20	16
Residential		
Overall cleanliness	10	7.5
Condition of buildings and properties	10	7.5
Community Involvement		
Participation in clean-up efforts, adopt-a-spot, annual cleanup days, etc.	15	12
Recognition of volunteer efforts	10	7
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	125.00	97.50

Comments and suggestions:

The town centers in each of the towns we visited are attractive and well-maintained, and each has a personality distinctly its own. The entry sign for Hendersonville is distinctive and immaculate. *We understand you are working on a design for introductory signage at the entries to each of the towns and look forward to seeing the results of this effort. These entry signs should be attractive in all seasons and should be as distinctive as the towns themselves. Should organizational signs be included as part of the gateway signs, be sure they are neatly organized and their presentation integrated into the entry sign without overwhelming it.*



The entry signage from the major access roads into Henderson County is limited at this time. A group has been working to “brand” the County and is reported to be working on entry and wayfinding signs. *We encourage you to move forward in this direction.*

Litter and graffiti seem to have been banished from most areas we saw in the County. Trash and recycling receptacles in public areas were attractive and conveniently placed. Many included separate but connected receptacles for cigarette butts. However, cigarette butts were evident in most public spaces. *Request business*

owners clean up debris left in front of their businesses. Consider making this a priority on cleanup days. Some groups can earn dollars by forwarding cigarette butts to Terracycle (www.terracycle.com) who will then recycle the butts, exposing them to gamma radiation, separating and shredding the plastics and organics, composting the paper and tobacco and diluting the toxic residue [cellulose acetate] to be melted into pellets. This byproduct will become a shipping pallette or a train tire. Sponsor a "penny for a butt" event.

As the largest of the towns, Hendersonville is home to the largest of the downtown areas. Main Street in Hendersonville has recently undergone a redesign of the roadway and sidewalk infrastructure with amazing results. The offset pattern of the roadway allows for wide plazas for seating and outdoor dining. Storefronts have been replaced. Sidewalks, roadway and curbs were pristine as were the planting beds and hanging baskets. Newly installed directional signage is attractive and informative. Consider adding low planting or groundcover or, as an alternative, river rocks at the base of the signs. Murals designed and executed by Coca Cola are striking and add visual appeal to this area. Lamp posts, benches and waste receptacles were attractive and in excellent condition. The downtown district boasts a 95% occupancy rate. Much has been accomplished in the Business Improvement District and the pride of place is evident. The newly installed way finder sign scheme directs visitors and citizens alike to the many businesses in the downtown business district. Signs are situated on every corner at eye level. White letters are highlighted from the blue background. Signs are annually updated to correct any changes in businesses.

Parking in Hendersonville is largely located on streets behind Main Street. The lots and parking garage are generally clean and well maintained. One privately owned parking lot on W. Allen just off Main is in deteriorating condition with cracked paving and many weeds. We understand the property is vacant and on the market. Perhaps the city could lease the parking area until the property is sold, with the understanding that improvements to the lot would be in lieu of rent. This should improve the aesthetics of the lot which is near the entry to downtown Main Street.

The numerous public parks in Henderson County offer many opportunities for both active and passive enjoyment of open spaces. Play areas were well maintained. Of particular note is the skate board facility at Patton Park which was funded, in part, with funds raised by the children who desperately wanted this new facility. Congratulations to them for their determination and ingenuity. We recommend that a plaque be placed near the entry to this facility noting the group or groups who helped raise these funds.

There are many relatively short walking trails throughout the County which appear to be well used and well-maintained. Indeed, the County has more than 180 miles of trails. Interconnection between these trails which would enable both walkers and bikers to travel between parks would be a welcome addition. Beautiful narrow, winding, hilly roads beckon bikers, but the lack of shoulders makes biking treacherous, and the rather short trails are not ideal for biking. In recent years biking has had a huge resurgence in popularity. Perhaps the County, in conjunction with the municipalities, could plan, fund, and install bike routes along some of your beautiful roadways. A bike-a-thon could be scheduled to alert residents to the initiative and help raise seed money to get the project underway.

We were surprised to learn that the miniature golf course in downtown Hendersonville is a publicly owned facility! This course appeared well-maintained and very popular.

"Bearfootin' Bears" is an initiative in the downtown municipal improvement district to raise awareness for the Hendersonville community. Citizens can sponsor any one of the three sizes of bears decorated and displayed in the downtown Hendersonville Historic District. In the fall the bears are auctioned off to new owners with

the proceeds going to the specific non-profits listed with each bear. The bears offer a window into the variety of non-profit and community organizations that help to make Hendersonville and Henderson County such a wonderful place to live, work, and play in.

The Henderson County Visitor's Center, open 362 days per year, is staffed by knowledgeable volunteers and contains a wealth of information about the area for all visitors. We understand that the County has been named the #1 retirement community in the United States by USA Today. We can see why.

The new town hall complex in Mills River has been very well conceived, with attractive trails, a new children's playground, playing courts and a pavilion for picnics and gatherings. The facility is beautifully maintained. *We encourage you to continue in your efforts to open the road leading to the front of the building which is so attractively landscaped.*

The Park at Flat Rock, while still under development, is clearly a standout addition to the town. Volunteers abound, all working to improve this treasure. The new pavilion is under construction, the main building is nearly complete, and the children's playground has been designed and is on the way. Fund raising for this project has been impressive, as is the master planning and fiduciary responsibility. Developing a park of this magnitude with no increase in taxes is no mean feat! Congratulations!

Jump Off Rock in Laurel Park is a spectacular overlook with breathtaking views of the mountains. Recently, the town has invested a great deal of time and effort to prune and remove vegetation which obscured the views across the mountains to spectacular effect.



Signage in the County is generally adequate. With such a large area to cover, it is occasionally difficult to keep up with maintenance. *We recommend that during the "off" season, maintenance crews take time to straighten signs that are leaning.*

Most strip malls in the County appear to be well maintained. *Most parking lots for these shopping areas have few planting areas and minimal trees. We understand that as new large anchor tenants move in, the County zoning office is actively pursuing compliance with the recently updated land use ordinance. We encourage citizens to attend zoning meetings which concern mall development and voice support for the new ordinance to avoid a repeat of the "stripped" malls of yesteryear.*

Henderson County has a vibrant and growing tourist trade, with many local bed and breakfast establishments. We were fortunate to have the opportunity to visit a Bed and Breakfast on Tiffany Hill, which is an establishment worthy of a visit on its own merits. The beautiful park-like setting and elegantly appointed Inn deserve the rave reviews this establishment is getting.

Create an event to promote public awareness for municipal services and non-profit agencies that not only inform citizens of their purpose but also how citizens can possibly benefit from their participation.

As Henderson County is noted for its apple production, during Farm Day or at another winter event consider have a “wassailing event.” While most people assume that wassailing is a type of holiday revelry, most don’t understand what it is. Wassailing has ties to tree fruit production in Medieval England as a way to ward off evil spirits, honor the trees for the season that just ended, and bless the trees for the season to come.

Set up a Help-O-Meter to keep track of the number of hours youth volunteer in the community. This can be done through schools, churches, public agencies, and or non-profit organizations.

Checklist for Judges and Participants:

Yes	No	N/A	
X			Were the judges given a community profile, itinerary, and map prior to their arrival?
X			Did the itinerary provide for seeing a representative cross-section of the participant?
X			Were the guides knowledgeable about the participant and horticultural aspects?
X			Were the judges able to modify the schedule if needed?
X			Did the judges meet with the media?
X			Did the judges meet with municipal leaders?
X			Were the judges asked to give presentations?
X			Were the judges able to meet with and talk to volunteers?
	x		Was enough time allotted to complete the evaluation form in a quiet place?

DEFINITIONS

Municipal: City hall and other municipal properties, parks and open spaces, roads, roadsides, sidewalks, cemeteries, schools and sports facilities, empty lots and brownfields, libraries, hospitals, assisted living, churches, universities, and colleges

Business: Commercial and industrial sectors, shopping centers, stores, office buildings, restaurants, mixed use developments, service stations, railway and bus stations, plant nurseries/garden centers

Residential: Single family residences, condominiums, town houses, planned communities, apartment buildings, gated communities, manufactured home communities, trailer parks, residential developments, neighborhoods, graduated care facilities

Community Involvement: Volunteer efforts by individuals, clubs, youth groups, church groups, civic organizations, and social clubs for community enhancement



2015 Special Mentions

Participant: Henderson County, North Carolina

Recognized Criterion: Heritage Preservation

Throughout Henderson County various non-profit organizations plus historic preservation commissions actively work to preserve the aesthetics of the region. Numerous districts and landmarks within the county have received local designation with the protection which accompanies this distinction. Most impressively, Historic Flat Rock, Inc., a 501C dedicated to preserving the heritage of the area, has a very active volunteer base which effectively raises monies. Funds are then used to purchase historic properties which are at risk. The organization will attach preservation easements on the deed and assist in finding appropriate buyers to acquire and improve the property. This organization is based in Flat Rock District which is included in the National Register of Historic Places. The Henderson County Genealogical and Historical Society is housed in the restored historic courthouse. Located in the County Heritage Museum the society publishes a quarterly journal and has produced several volumes of area history. Archives are actively managed and available to researchers. Additionally the Heritage Museum tells the history of Henderson County through the displays of local artifacts.

Special Project or Initiative: Park at Flat Rock

Recently, Flat Rock acquired a 67-acre golf course to develop as a park. An advisory board of well-organized volunteers have raised funds and provided thousands of hours to assist in the development efforts. A new pavilion, a community building and children's playground will be completed in 2015. Trails throughout the site provide opportunity for rest and recreation. Taxes have not been raised.

America in Bloom ... Planting Pride in Our Communities
2130 Stella Court, Columbus, OH 43215 • (614) 453-0744 • Fax (614) 487-1216
www.americainbloom.org • aib@americainbloom.org