



# Times-News

## A Legacy of Richness

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ECO NOTES



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If I were Henderson County, intent on leaving my wealth to my heirs, I'd start with inventorying my precious assets. I'd start with my mountain ranges which are over 300 million years old. Then I'd review my watersheds, including the French Broad, one of the oldest rivers in the world. I'd look to the biodiversity of my region, the richest of any in a temperate zone. I'd include the fact that I was one of the largest apple baskets of the southeast and that my agricultural community was a valuable, but vanishing jewel. I'd include the connection to the land that thousands of our native population have, many of whom have worked the land since Revolutionary War days. I'd add in the sense of community and community spirit that has lifted this county in difficult times and been a source of inspiration in better years.

Then I'd look at my liabilities. Growth outstripping land use rules, being one of the biggest concerns. Without better protection to waterways, ridgetops and flood zones, all my assets are threatened. Like a runaway train that has lost its brakes in rugged and uncertain terrain, overdevelopment could easily deplete what's left of my legacy. We are running out of one of our rivers, the Mills River, and now about to tap a far from pristine French Broad for drinking water.

Next, I would look at how my assets were being maintained. Increasingly, there is a growing awareness that development needs to be sensitive to the contours of the land. The first truly green commercial building is being built on Main Street in Hendersonville, the largest solar installation in the world is being constructed at the Fletcher Business Park and many developers and builders are becoming more sensitive to their building practices. They understand that building on steep slopes might give a few well-heeled out-of-towners a view, but at a price too high: erosion, the potential of mudslides, the problems of water accessibility and the damage to viewscapes. Some developers understand what they have to do to make good neighbors, but some have little interest in our land but for the price it will fetch and how it can be used.

That is why in my estate planning, I would depend on my trustees to adequately protect my assets. The residents of this place would be my most critical trustees. It is their desires and concern for protecting this beautiful place that will determine whether our natural heritage is a lasting legacy or merely the subject of an exhibit at our new historical museum. My elected trustees, our elected representatives, will be entrusted to make the hard decisions to ensure that economic interests are balanced with the protection of our natural resources. If I have chosen my trustees wisely, I would have found conservative people who understand that conserving my assets is the best strategy for long term growth. If I've chosen poorly, my trustees will overlook that more than \$1 billion has come into county coffers in the past decade, not from development, but because we have maintained some of our land in its natural state. Tourists come with their dollars to enjoy our farmland, to fish in our streams, to hike in our mountains to enjoy our eateries and purchase our crafts.

Our trustees, our county commissioners, will only work for us if they hear from us. Two opportunities lie ahead. The commissioners will soon decide if developers must prove the existence of potable water before they begin construction. This due diligence saves developers money in the long run, protects homebuyers and prevents our county from bailing out developers by bringing our precious resources, i.e. public water, to connect when it is "discovered" that there isn't enough water after all. This is totally preventable and the costs are all passed on to the homebuyer. Next, the commissioners will decide whether to approve the Etowah-Horseshoe Community Plan. I've talked about the benefits of this plan extensively in this column before. For more information, check our website at: [www.eco-wnc.org](http://www.eco-wnc.org). This plan comes to a public hearing on Thursday, May 7<sup>th</sup> at 7 PM at the Historic Courthouse. Let the commissioners hear from you. Commissioner contact information can be found on ECO's website or on the county's [www.hendersoncountync.org](http://www.hendersoncountync.org).

Finally, becoming better stewards of our natural heritage includes cutting our energy footprint. Here in the south, a tremendous amount of our energy comes from coal, a cheap but toxic substance that damages streams, air, mountaintops and the workers who must work in the field. ECO is holding its second annual Earth Day Energy Expo on Saturday, April 25<sup>th</sup> from 10-3 at Blue Ridge Community College. Lectures and workshops will be held, see the latest electric cars on display, meet local green vendors to plan action in your home that can save energy and money, and view over two dozen projects produced by local students on energy stewardship and air quality. It's an opportunity not to miss.

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