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## Riverfront area gets critique

### Greenways, footbridges among interns' suggestions

by Joel Burgess, JBURGESS@CITIZEN-TIMES.COM  
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ASHEVILLE — Move Riverside Drive and Swannanoa River Road. Build footbridges over railroad tracks. And plant greenways.

Those are some of the things Asheville needs to do if it wants to transform its long-neglected waterways, a group of design interns told local leaders and the public Friday.

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"Asheville's rivers have lost their meaning to the city," said intern Sophie Martin, of Aspen, Colo., describing the area's main problem.

The plans for the French Broad and Swannanoa rivers, including Biltmore Village, got a good reception from some of the major players in the drama surrounding the fate of the river areas.

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#### The districts, the proposed changes

- River Arts — Straighten Riverside Drive, get passenger rail, build sidewalks and greenways.
- Confluence of French Broad and Swannanoa — Plant greenways along the eastern bank of the French Broad, build footbridges over the railroad tracks, create Swannanoa River Park.

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Design Workshop, a national planning company with offices in Pack Place, invited 16 interns for a one-week project to boost the river areas and reconnect it to downtown.

They read old plans, including the Wilma Dykeman Plan, which pushes for greenways. They spoke with government officials, artists and developer Kent Smith, whose company, Global Development Resources, was a major sponsor of the project.

Suggestions included reducing unused railroad spurs to allow for bike lanes and sidewalks, adding new bridges and making existing bridges more pedestrian-friendly. Interns said they tried to get in touch with railroad company Norfolk Southern about the tracks but got no response.

The River Arts District ideas should be promoted for the area's small but thriving arts scene, said intern Ian Wick, of Denver, Colo.

"Right now we see a lot of galleries downtown. Why not in the River Arts District?" Wick said. Financial help such as tax credits for builders should be available to avoid displacing resident artists, he said.

Resident and Curve Studios owner Pattiy Torno said she liked pedestrian crossings at the French Broad and over the railroad. They would help in dealing with a recent increase in crime, Torno said.

"The challenge though in any kind of a plan in Asheville is getting the political will to make it happen," Torno said.

Ideas have been floated before, including a \$120 million concept from Smith. Disagreements sunk that idea. To implement even part of what the interns suggested would take \$250 million, he said. But more than that, it would take someone to unite factions.

"It's like a football team with a whole host of great players, but no coach," he said.

Those include artists, environmentalists and developers. But obstacles remain, not the least of which is an estimated \$250 million price tag.

"You would be hard-pressed to find anybody that didn't think this was a great idea," said RiverLink Executive Director Karen Cragolin. "Let's go reclaim the river, let's put greenways in, let's make it accessible, let's make it mixed-income. But then there's money."

-Biltmore Village — Move Swannanoa River Road away from the river, build bridges to Biltmore Village, use green spaces to handle floodwaters.

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