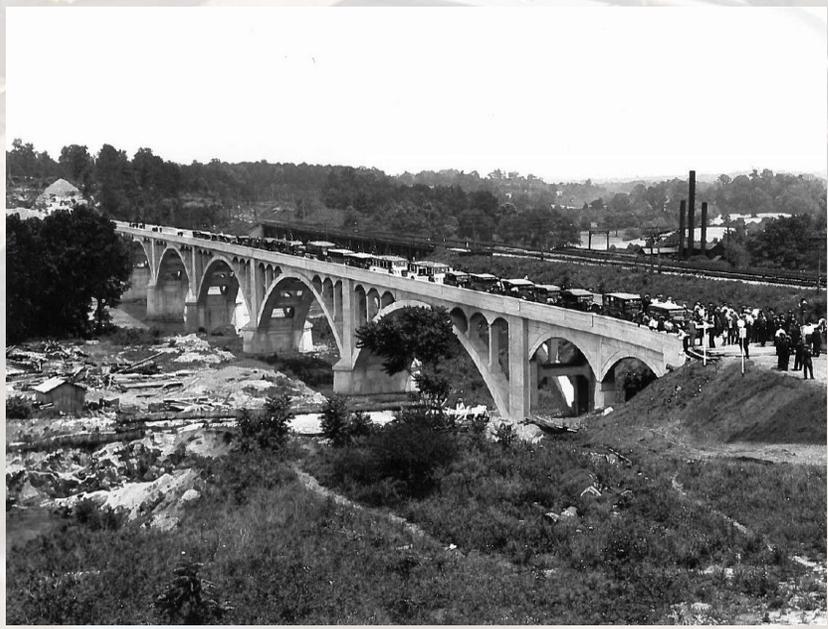


Wil-Cox Bridge Recreation Area





Community Assistance Team

The Tourism-Recreation Investment Partnership for Davidson County Foundation (TRIP) asked the North Carolina Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects (NCASLA) to provide a Community Assistance Team (CAT) to help develop ideas to improve the pedestrian and biking experience around the soon to be acquired Wil-Cox Bridge over the Yadkin River. The North Carolina Department of Transportation's Division 9 provided technical support for the study. TRIP hosted an orientation to the site on March 21, 2014, and a design charrette was held April 10-11, 2014 in a meeting room in the Holiday Inn at Childress Vineyards in Lexington.

The CAT, led by NCASLA members Lynn Raker and Emily Blackwell, worked diligently during the 2-day charrette to produce the findings and recommendations in this document. Participants from other local agencies and the community who were key to developing the proposals found in these pages are acknowledged on the following page of the report.

NCASLA Community Assistance Team

The NCASLA CAT is a group of landscape architects and other allied professionals that assists communities in developing conceptual solutions for design and development of parks, town centers, street corridors and other infrastructure. The CAT workshop may last a few hours or several days. Professional expertise is offered on a pro-bono basis, while the host community or agency typically provides accommodations, meals, transportation, work space and materials. A final presentation and/or report from participants is customary. Final reports often are used by the community to pursue more detailed implementation on strategies for the project.



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Introduction to the Project

The Wil-Cox Bridge, named for highway commissioners W.E. Wilkinson of Charlotte and Elwood Cox of High Point, is one of only six of its type left in the state. The 1300-foot long, 2-lane concrete arch bridge with seven open-spandrel arch spans opened to traffic in 1924. The Wil-Cox Bridge was the first public bridge to cross the Yadkin River between Davidson County and Rowan County. For more than eight decades, US Highway 29, and later US Highway 70, traffic flowed across the bridge.

In 1957, I-85 was constructed with a new 4-lane bridge over the river. As part of the improvement project, a second 2-lane bridge was built parallel to the Wil-Cox Bridge to carry northbound US 29/70 traffic. The Wil-Cox Bridge continued to carry southbound US 29/70 traffic. After 50 years of increasing traffic loads, the 4-lane I-85 bridge was due for replacement. Carrying more than 70,000 vehicles per day, the bridge not only was a bottleneck for interstate traffic; it also was structurally deficient.



View looking north of I-85 bridge construction

bridge over the Yadkin River, NCDOT permanently closed the Wil-Cox Bridge to vehicular traffic. With the plan to complete the pedestrian conversion of the Bridge, they would add railings, complete an adjacent parking area and transfer ownership of the bridge to Davidson County in 2014. An interpretive kiosk on the Davidson County side would be forthcoming.

With a focus on the development and enhancement of Davidson County's tourism and recreational infrastructure, TRIP was the obvious agency to spearhead improvements around the Wil-Cox Bridge that will provide accessibility and amenities to further enhance the visitor experience.

In 2000, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) began plans to replace both the I-85 and the southbound US 29-70 bridges and demolish the old Wil-Cox Bridge. In 2009, a grassroots effort took hold to preserve the bridge as a pedestrian bridge and connection to a broader greenway system. In lieu of demolition, NCDOT was willing to transfer ownership and responsibility for maintenance, offering Rowan and Davidson counties \$2.5 million—the estimated cost of demolition. Originally, both counties agreed to accept the bridge, but in 2009, Rowan County withdrew from the agreement. Swayed by impassioned appeals of Commissioner Billy Joe Kepley, who envisioned the bridge's many benefits to tourism and recreation, Davidson County committed to accepting sole ownership in 2010. The Bridge would enhance potential tourist destinations Trading Ford and Civil War Fort York, as well as provide a critical link in the county's Blueway Master Plan and the Daniel Boone Heritage Canoe Trail.

In December of 2013, upon the opening of the new 2-way 29/70



NCDOT file photo of I-85 bridge under construction



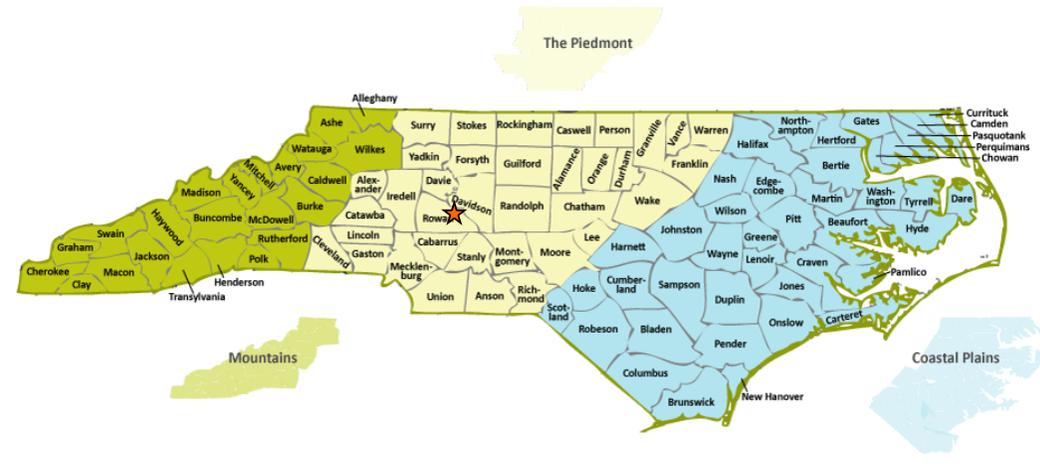
The Site

History: The Wil-Cox Bridge over the Yadkin River connects Davidson and Rowan counties in the central Piedmont region of North Carolina. While the Bridge is somewhat of an icon in its own right, it represents an even richer history of early Native American and later European settlement of the region.

Natural shallows in this vicinity along the Yadkin River facilitated crossings for hunting, travel and trading, hence the well-known description “Trading Ford.” Native American habitation in the trading ford area is documented as far back as 9500 BC, and early European settlements have been traced back to 1567.

The shallow crossing by “interstate” trading paths spawned many towns along the way, including Salisbury in 1753-55. Later, it played a role in both the Revolutionary and Civil wars, as well as a key link for mail from Washington DC to New Orleans during the time of the Louisiana Purchase.

Wil-Cox Bridge Community Assistance Team



Physical Characteristics: The focus area of this study, the Wil-Cox Bridge and land just to the north along the Davidson County side of the Yadkin river and Trading Ford Way, is sparsely developed. Much of it lies in the flood plain, or is steeply banked with distinct rock outcroppings. Unlike the former industrial property directly across the river on the Rowan County side, it is currently not served by public water and sewer service.

A range of indigenous hardwood canopy and understory trees, cedars and pines are present along with herbaceous ground covers such as Pipsissewa (*Chimaphila umbellata*). Mixed in are a number of introduced and volunteer non-native trees, shrubs and herbaceous species. Farther up the river, especially around Boone’s Cave Park, pockets of mountain laurel, hydrangea, hornbeam, beech and other valued native species may be found along north-facing slopes and outcroppings.

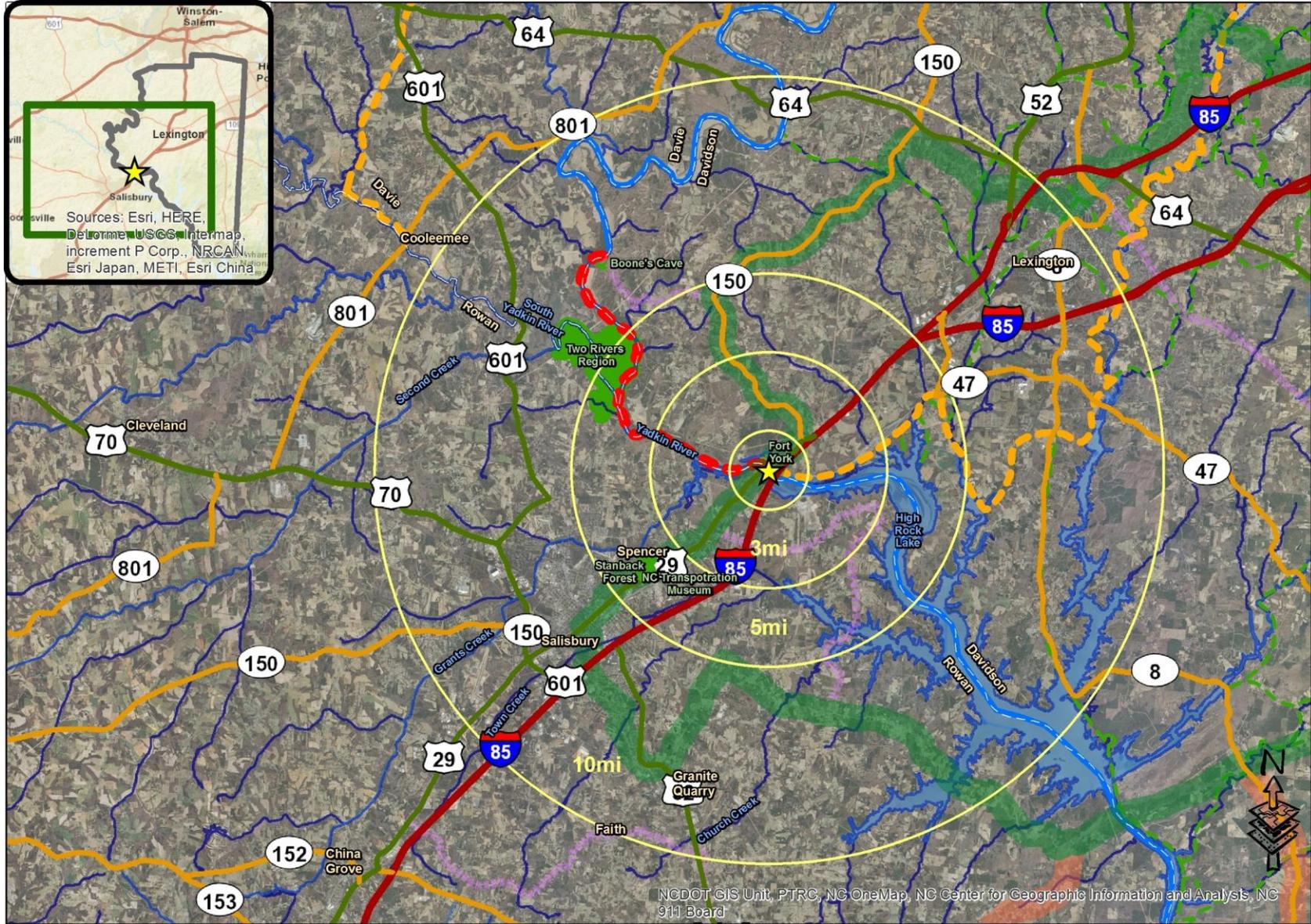
Several cities have water utility intake stations along the river, both up- and downstream

from the bridge. The river course has been altered by downstream dams, which is dramatically evident through photo-documentation over the past decades. Water levels also may fluctuate noticeably with dam activity.

The river tends to look muddy much of the year, particularly following heavy rains. Still, it is highly valued for the fish and wildlife it supports, as well its recreational offerings.



Natural rock outcropping typical of area



Wil-Cox Bridge Study Area

- ★ Bridge Site
- Piedmont Heritage Loop
- North Uwharrie Loop
- Proposed Connectors

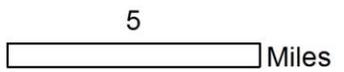
Regional Trails

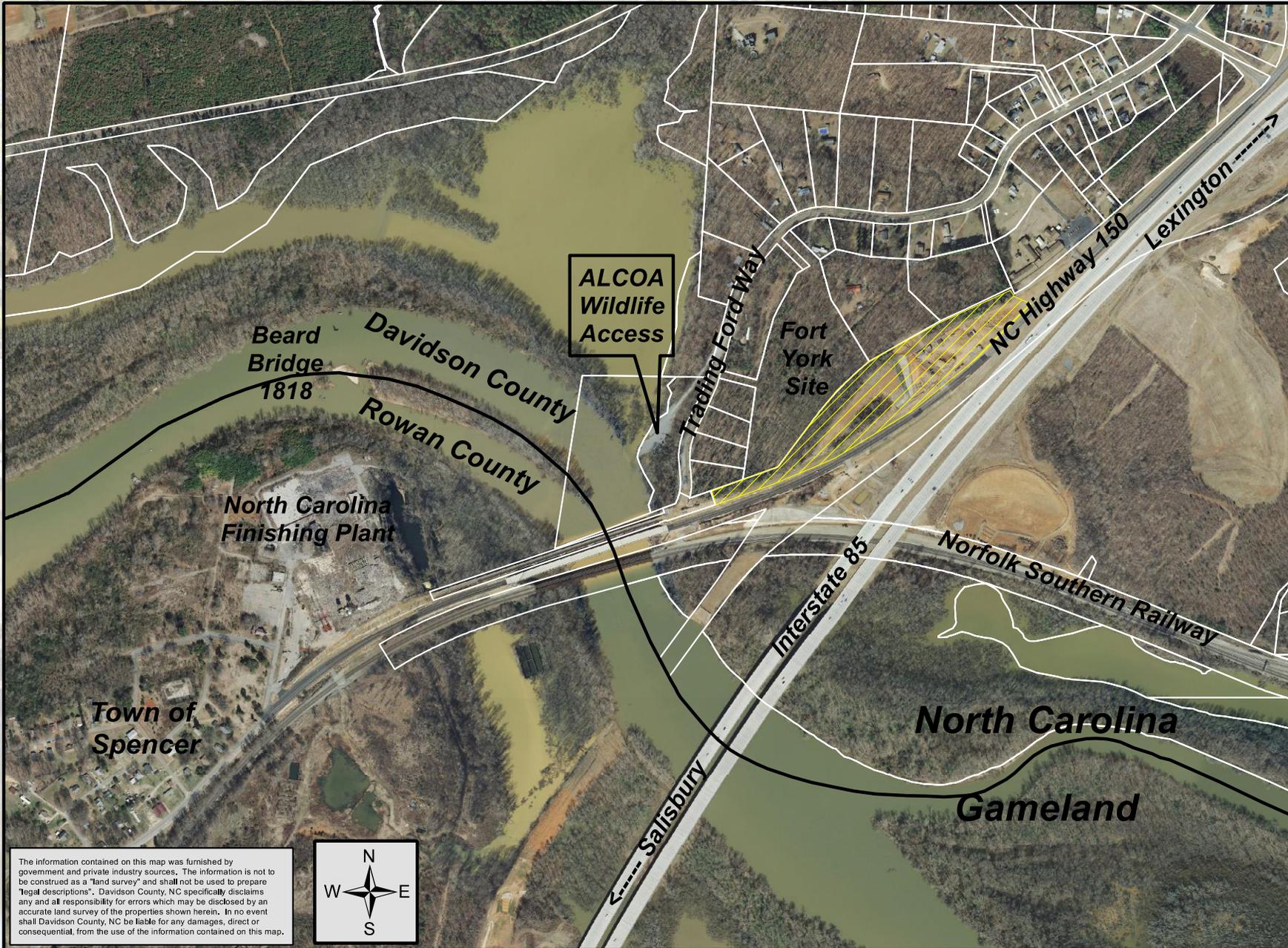
- State - Proposed
- Regional - Proposed
- Local - Proposed
- Blueway



Disclaimer: The information contained on this map does not replace information that may be obtained by consulting the official source of the information. In no event shall Davidson County, NC or the consultants of Davidson County, NC be liable for any damages, direct or consequential, from the use of the information contained on this map.

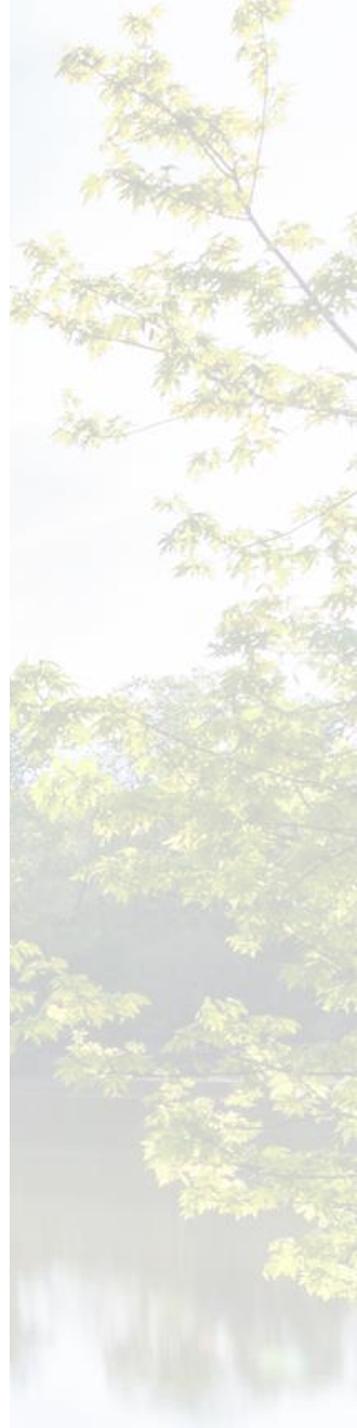
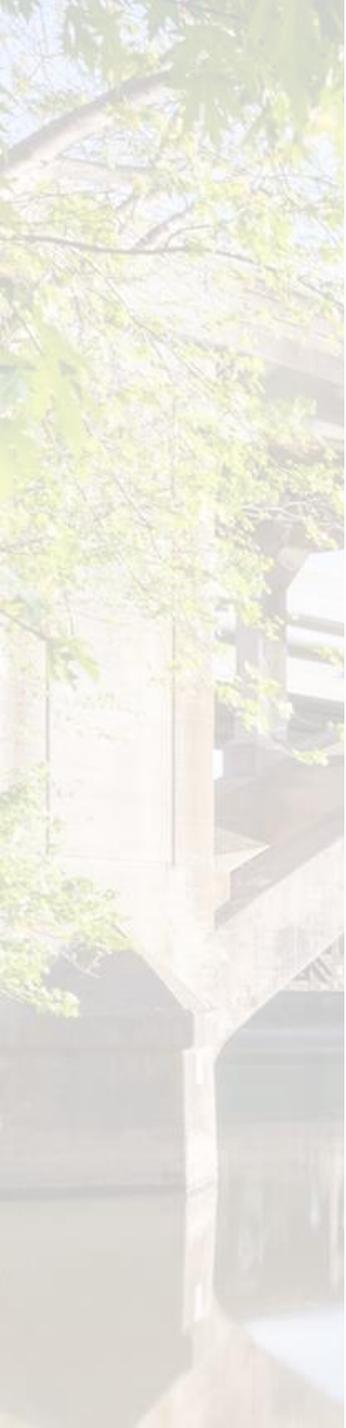
Author: Kathryn Clifton, GISP, PLS
 Date: Tuesday, April 19, 2016
 Document Path: H:\projects\wil-cox_bridge\rfq_connections_map_85x14.mxd





The information contained on this map was furnished by government and private industry sources. The information is not to be construed as a "land survey" and shall not be used to prepare "legal descriptions". Davidson County, NC specifically disclaims any and all responsibility for errors which may be disclosed by an accurate land survey of the properties shown herein. In no event shall Davidson County, NC be liable for any damages, direct or consequential, from the use of the information contained on this map.





Program and Concepts for Planning Areas

Planning Area A

Area A: Wil-Cox Bridge and parking area on Davidson County side

Providing an accessible connection to the bridge in Area A is the highest immediate priority for design implementation. An access road for vehicles heading southbound on US 29 terminates in a small parking lot off what formally was the road leading up to Wil-Cox Bridge. The parking lot is separated from the bridge by the excavated road bed and the rock outcroppings adjacent to the old right-of-way. The natural ledge the outcrop forms could be incorporated into an expanded viewing area as well as a possible connecting route to the river's edge some thirty feet below.

The river access road, Trading Ford Way, from which the driveway to the boat launch in Area B connects, has been terminated by NCDOT just short of the new parking lot. This was done to reduce unnecessary vehicular traffic along Trading Ford Way, which remains accessible from the north. The design team suggested rethinking the complete dead-ending of Trading Ford Way, and phasing in controlled access for permitted vehicles. A rotary was also considered, but narrow right-of-way along Trading Ford Way, along with topographical constraints, would likely prevent implementation.

Area A Program Elements:

- Functionally and visually integrate newly-installed NCDOT parking area into a more park-like setting.
- Create an accessible route for pedestrians and bicyclists to approach and enter onto bridge.
- Include a resting area with site for interpretive sign that will be provided by NCDOT.
- Connect parking area with access walk to boat launch area.



View from Fort York looking down at Area A



New parking area adjacent to rock outcropping above river

Planning Area A

Area A Design Concept 1

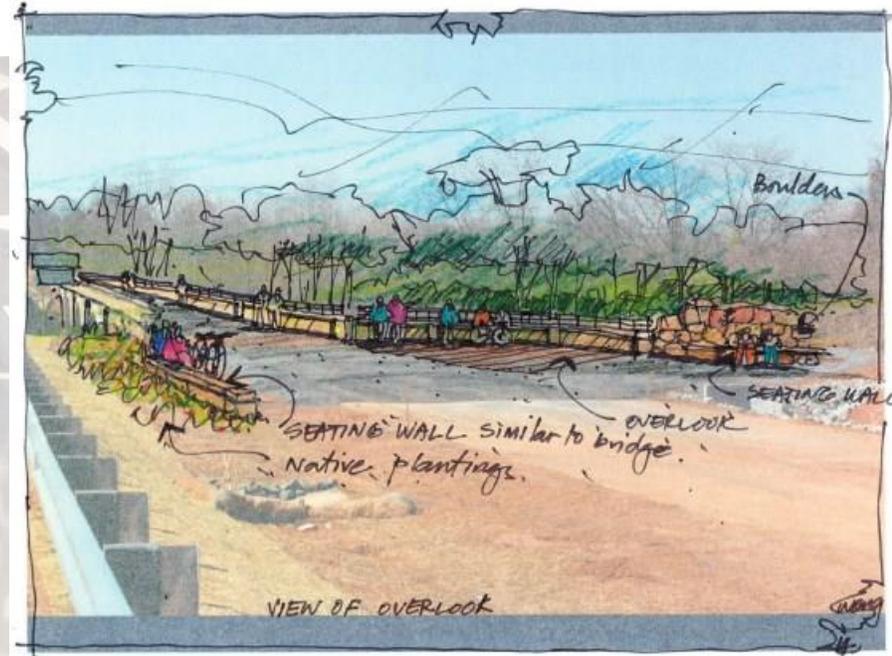
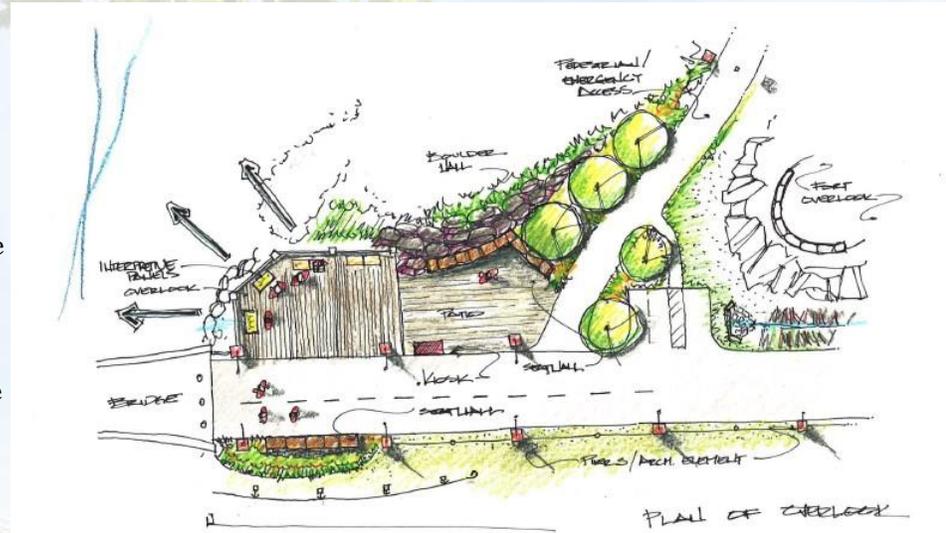
The design team produced two concepts for Area A. Both schemes accommodate accessibility from the parking area and provide an overlook, seating and interpretive signage opportunities, and both incorporate the existing rock outcropping.

In the concept to the right, an overlook deck is built as much as possible on grade with the walk from the parking area to maximize accessibility. Seat walls frame the back of the deck as well as the left side of the broad walk leading up to the bridge. The rock outcropping behind the deck seating is a natural backdrop and transition to the native surroundings.

Decorative light poles with banners line both sides of the walk, lending architectural prominence and ambience, security, and a visual rhythm leading to the bridge. The interpretive kiosk invites viewers as does additional informational signage along the rails. Tying the built amenities to the setting, clusters of native plants soften and frame the primary architectural features.

A narrower walk runs between the overlook and parking area, offering visitors a connecting route to the boat launch area along the river bank below.

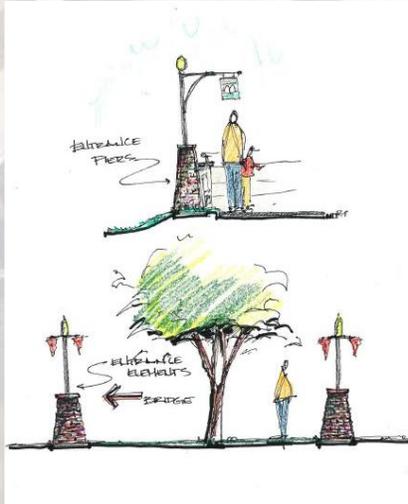
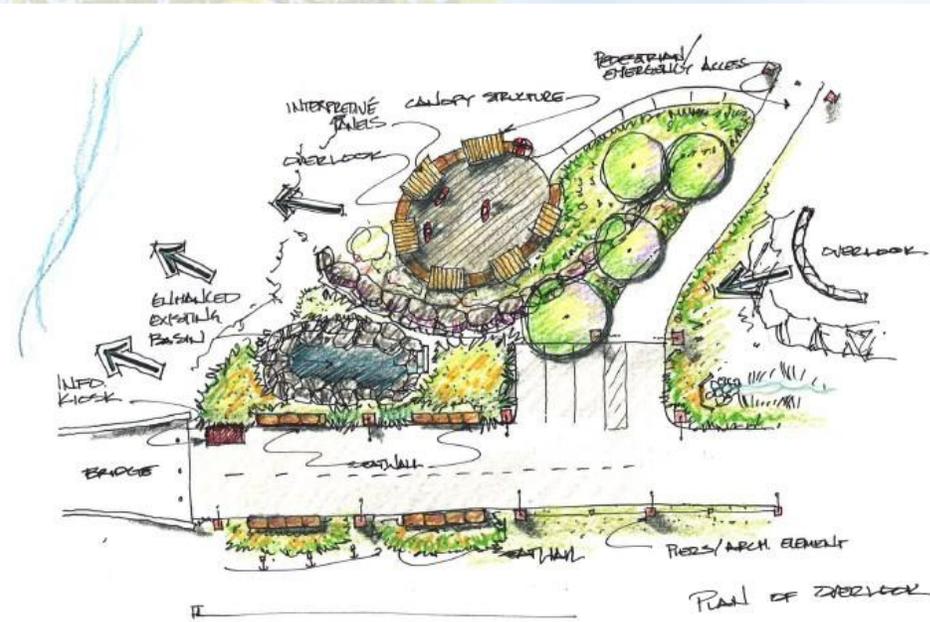
Wayfinding signage throughout the Bridge area, on both Davidson and Rowan County sides, should have a consistent graphic theme.



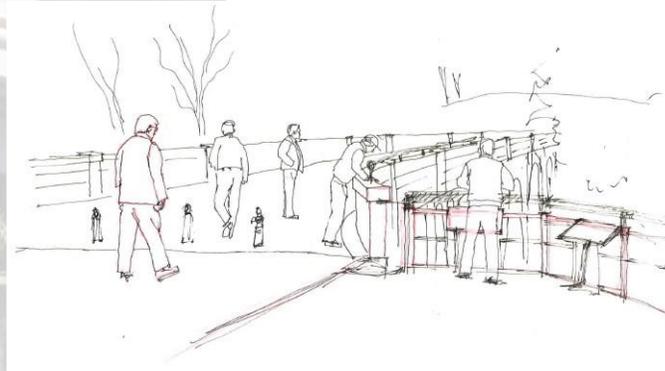
Area A Design Concept 2

An alternate concept for Area A, pictured at right, creates a more linear approach to the bridge, with bench seats lighting the broad walk and the information kiosk located prominently at the beginning of the bridge. This concept also reconfigures an existing riprap drainage basin to better compliment the visual assets of the natural setting. Native plant groupings would soften the basin reconstructed with indigenous rock.

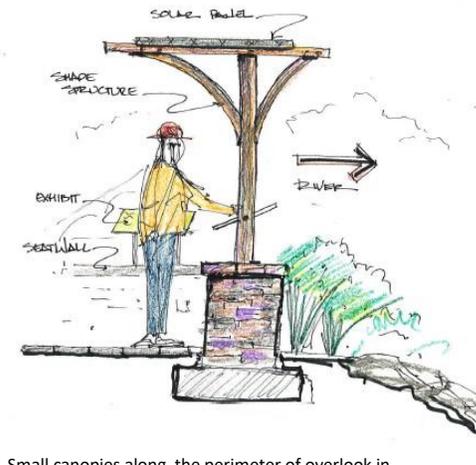
In this scheme, the overlook accessed from a walk off the parking lot would perch above the rock outcropping and be encircled by small canopy structures to provide shade for visitors enjoying the view. Additional interpretive signage may be incorporated into the perimeter of the overlook. Again, groupings of native trees, shrubs and groundcover would visually nest the new structures.



Decorative light poles with banners and native rock bases



Interpretive signs line the railing of the overlook in Concept 1. Removable bollards deter vehicles from entering bridge.



Small canopies along the perimeter of overlook in Concept 2

Planning Area B

Area B: Alcoa Boat Launch Area and surrounding river frontage on Davidson County side

Alcoa owns land currently used for a boat launch for fishing and other river recreation. A fairly steep gravel drive connects Trading Ford Way to the boat launch area on the riverfront. The existing launch pad is graded and compacted with an inconsistent gravel surface.

The shoreline varies with fluctuating water elevations. A small “lake” or cove just upstream from the launch is used for kayaking and other water craft practice. Together with the boat launch and additional attractions upstream such as Boone’s Cave Park, these amenities suggest numerous possibilities for Davidson County to expand recreational opportunities along the Yadkin River. A possible summer workshop for teens could include building a simple boat and testing its water-worthiness in this river “lake.”

In addition to Davidson County, the LandTrust for Central North Carolina has in ownership and/or under conservation easements significant lands just upstream along the Yadkin River and at its confluence with the South Yadkin River. Future partnerships between agencies could expand and define a broad range of new river-related tourism and recreational opportunities.

Area B Program Elements:

- Enhance function and appearance of existing boat launch area.
- Connect with walk and bikeway to bridge parking area.
- Incorporate riverfront access to better accommodate fishing and viewing.



Boat launch area with driveway up to Trading Ford Way



“Lake “ in center behind trees



Wet areas along shoreline

Area B Design Concepts

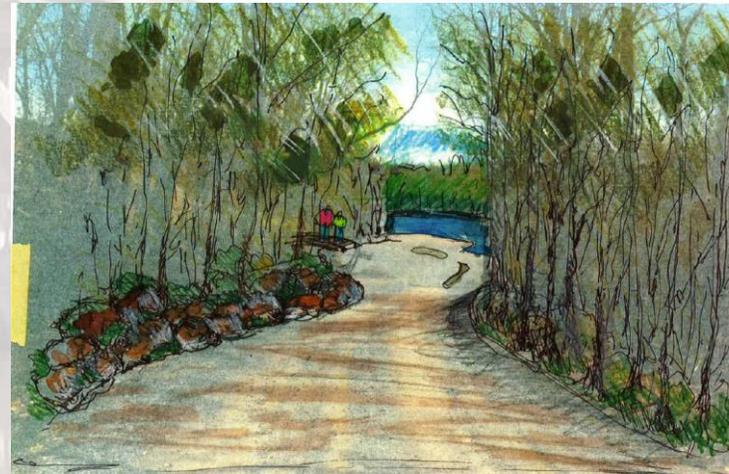
The access for pedestrians and bicyclists from the parking/overlook area could coincide with the closed section of Trading Ford Way, with some additional casual overflow parking in an already widened area in the right-of-way. The overflow parking area would be gravel surface with minimal structural enhancements, to minimize the impact on the surroundings. As throughout the designs presented in this report, appropriate native plant groupings and rock clusters could be added to enhance the natural setting.

The incised and eroding banks along the left side of the drive down to the boat launch could be buttressed with attractive stacked stone retaining walls, using rock and design details as similar to the rock outcroppings that characterize the area. Native shrub and ground cover plantings would help anchor the infill material and soften the appearance of the drive.

The boardwalk shown on next page would weave through existing trees along waters edge, allowing easier and safer access to the waterfront. The boardwalk would be of environmentally sensitive materials and construction technique, so not to have adverse impact on the site. Where paths are feasible foot bridges would connect over wetter areas.



Eroded banks along driveway to boat launch.

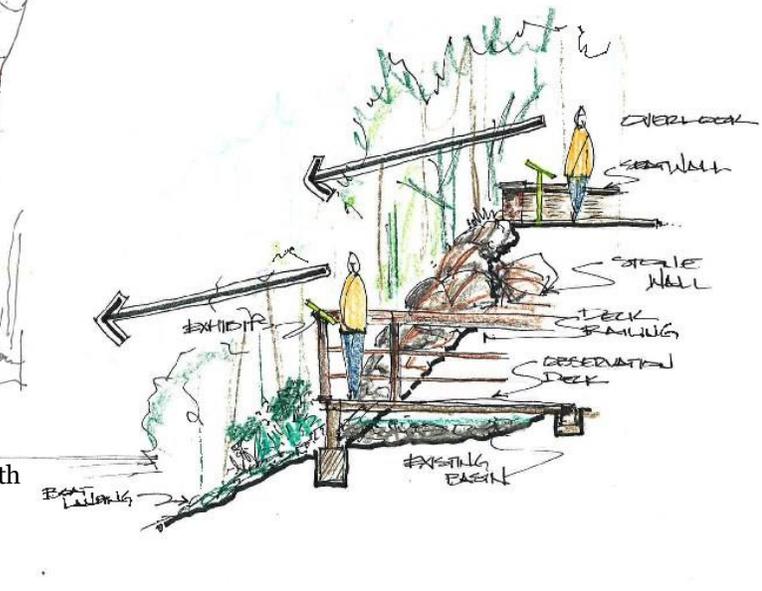


Native rock stacked retaining wall to reflect existing rock outcroppings

Area B Design Concepts

A floating boardwalk would skirt the water's edge as well as weave through existing trees, connecting foot paths on the higher ground.

Easy-to-install, low maintenance, "no-dig" environmentally friendly boardwalk systems are available for this cost-effective investment in recreational resources. Because the system is self-contained and relatively easy to assemble, with some professional oversight it may conceivably be installed by volunteer community groups.



At the bridge end of the board walk, it may be possible to install a foot path with a switchback configuration to a point where a set of steps could be built parallel to the bridge, up the incline of the bank. The steps would bring the user to the level of the overlook, near the parking lot and the bridge entrance.

Area C Design Concepts

Ample space exists to provide a tree-lined multi-use path within the remnant right-of-way property. Several architectural relics from the previous industrial use add interest and should be retained if future redevelopment of the private property can integrate them into the plan.

Where right-of-way narrows at the south end, biking access must either merge into the highway or cross to the other side. Crossing could be problematic; either way, accommodations for safety must be carefully considered. Conceivably, a standard sidewalk for pedestrians may be installed at this point leading south on the current side. Again, further study and design will be needed for this extension.

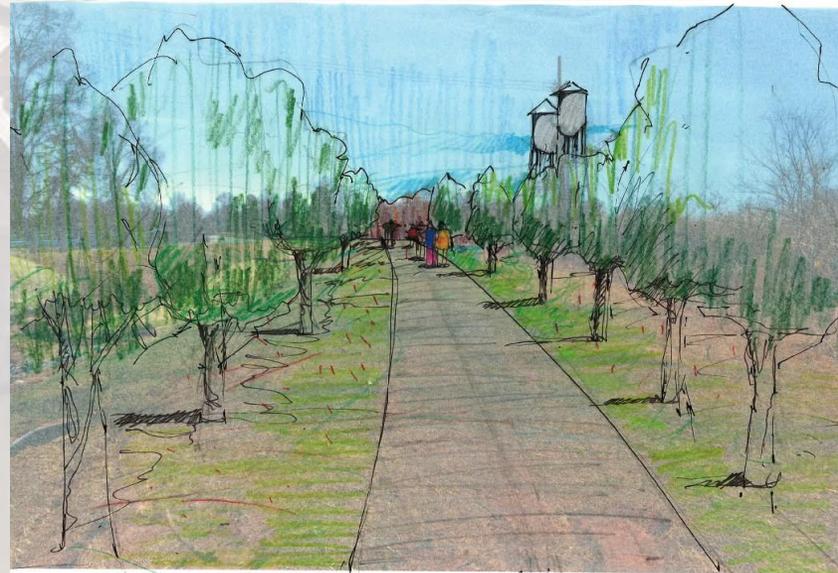


Intriguing redevelopment opportunities for the former NC Finishing Co. property will likely emerge in the future. A previous plan was abandoned several years ago with lack of funding, but as the economy and market improves, the site may enjoy renewed interest from developers. The design team enjoyed brainstorming about possible uses (a brewery?) as well as the advantages adjacent conservation and recreational river frontage would offer.

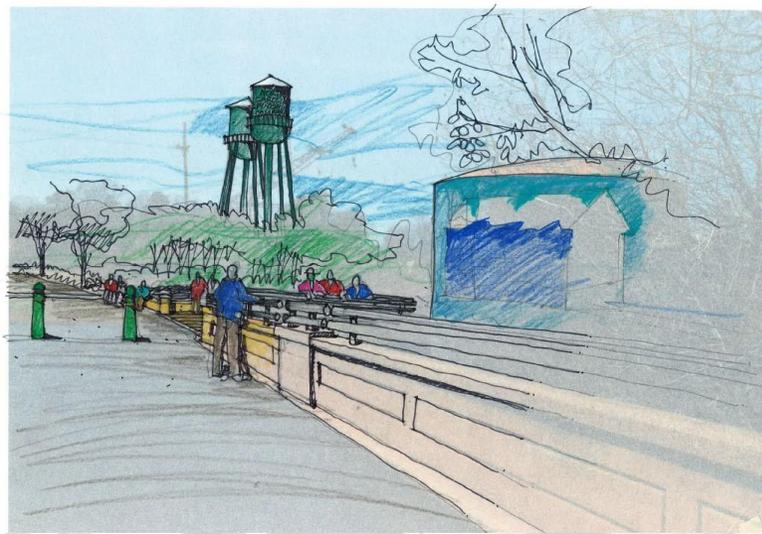
Wil-Cox Bridge Community Assistance Team



Remnant right-of-way left from US 29 realignment to new bridge



Tree-lined multi-use path in former right-of-way



Area C Design Concepts

To ensure a cohesive project, the approach to the bridge on the Rowan County side should reflect similar design details as on the Davidson County side, with respect to the different conditions. For instance, the Rowan County side has a more recent history of heavy industrial use, to which the remaining tanks attest. Due of site topography, previous use, and availability of water and sewer utilities, adjacent properties on the Rowan County side are more likely to be commercially redeveloped by the private sector. Barring any environmental hazards, the tanks could be incorporated into the final design for the site.

Regardless of the future of this large developable tract, the expanded right-of-way should be developed with an attractive multi-use path leading onto the Wil-Cox Bridge. A viewing deck with seating and signage should be considered for this side as well.



Observation deck on Rowan County side of bridge

Wil-Cox Bridge Community Assistance Team



Planning Area D

Area D: Fort York Site—private property at time of charrette

Fort York is a relatively well-preserved Civil War encampment located just above the Yadkin River on the Davidson County side, adjacent to former US 29-70—what is now the access road to the Wil-Cox Bridge. The fort was positioned on the high hilltop above a rocky outcropping to provide clear visibility to protect the railroad bridge below, in anticipation of the advancement of Union General George Stoneman's troops. The fort became the site of one of the final military successes of the Confederacy, although the skirmish occurred three days after the surrender of General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox. In the end the railroad bridge was spared.



View to bridges from Fort York property



NCDOT remnant right-of-way property

The Fort York tract is currently privately owned, although the LandTrust for Central North Carolina is pursuing a plan to acquire and hold the property until it can identify the appropriate agency to preserve and interpret the historic integrity of the site. The pending preservation and interpretation of this significant historic resource, along with the availability of adjacent DOT properties, suggests opportunities for more far-reaching cultural and tourism development plans.

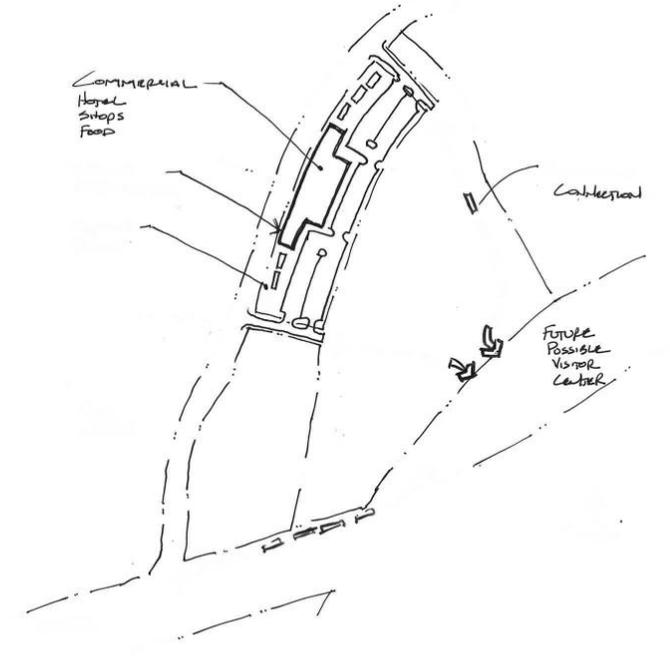
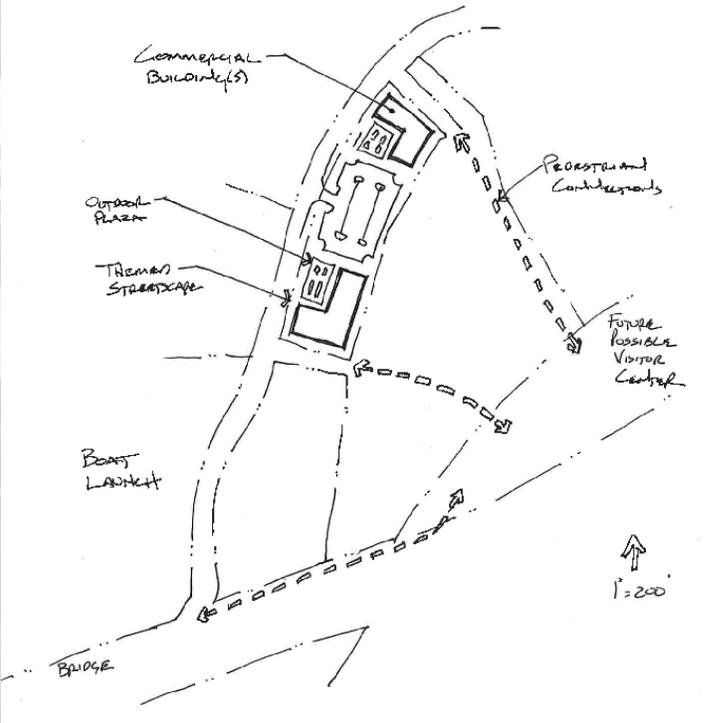
The most ambitious suggestion from the design team was use of remnant NCDOT right-of-way just north of the Fort York site as a future visitor's center (below) that would function as the official entry to the combined resources of the area—the Trading Ford interpretive center, Fort York historical site, and the Wil-Cox Bridge and river recreation access. While the concept is obviously long-term, it is worthy of consideration by Davidson County in regard to retaining the property.





Area D: (cont.) Other properties along Trading Ford Way

Just across Trading Ford Way from the drive down to the boat launch is an area of unkempt vegetation and a few deteriorating structures. This area is just beyond the iconic York Hill Restaurant sign, a remnant of the once-popular local dining destination. Although lack of access to a public sewer utility may limit the intensity of potential uses, a low-impact development that would complement the river recreation plans for the area may be feasible. The team sketched a couple of quick schematics for uses that might serve a nearby popular campground, as well as long-range plans for Fort York, the boat launch and Wil-Cox Bridge access.



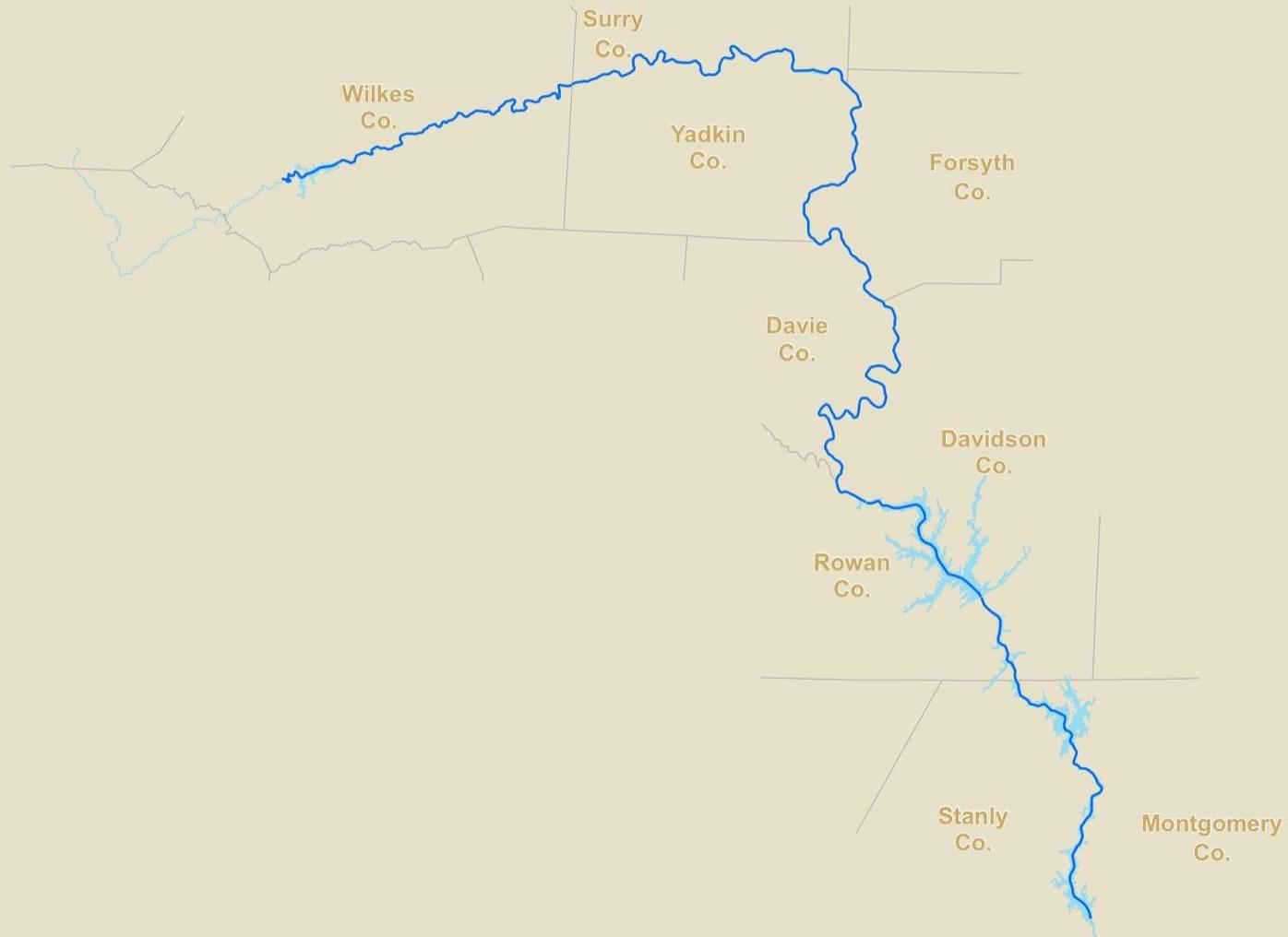




WIL-COX BRIDGE CONCEPT
NOT TO SCALE



YADKIN RIVER STATE TRAIL







TRIP

Tourism Recreation
Investment Partnership

DAVIDSON COUNTY FOUNDATION

www.visitdavidsoncounty.com



*Natural and
Cultural Resources*

