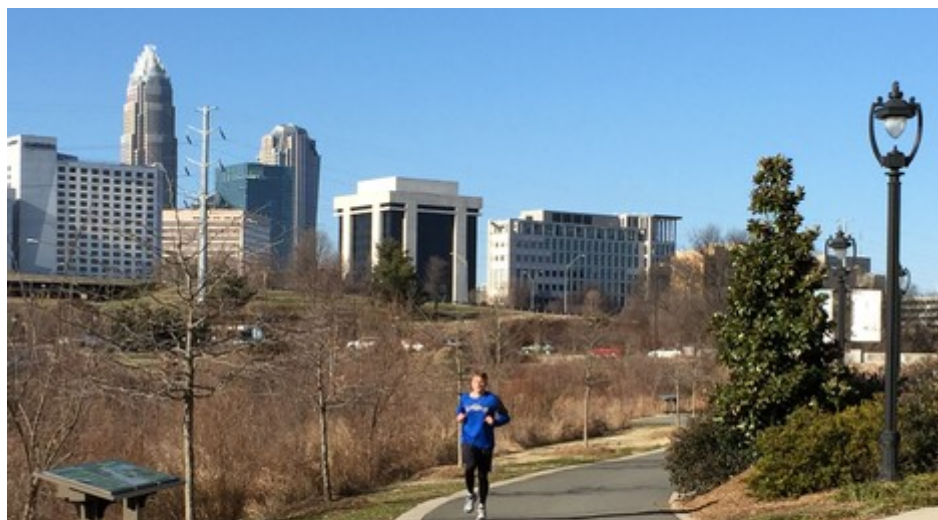


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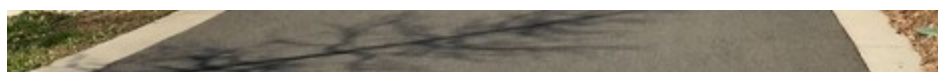
# Charlotte's greenways lead to nature, active lifestyles

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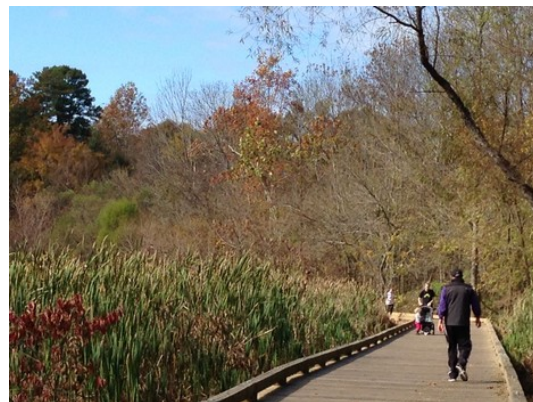
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View of uptown Charlotte from the trail on Little Sugar Creek Greenway.  
*Mary Gilbert*

Come rain or shine, **Charlotte's greenways** – linear parks established along creek and river corridors – abound with activity from residents and travelers who favor the great outdoors.

Hosts of walkers, some with leashed dogs, stroll leisurely. High school cross-country teams do training runs. Young professionals toting backpacks walk to work, while grocery shoppers return home with their bagged goods. Parents push newborns in baby strollers. Children eagerly try out their first bikes. More avid bicyclers weave through the throngs, courteously saying “on your left” to announce their presence. Bird watchers with binoculars pause to observe



feathered flocks. Skateboarders test their balance and maneuvering skills. Others prefer more quiet pursuits and sit on benches to reflect upon the scene's natural beauty.

Mary Gilbert

The many creeks in [Charlotte](#) form a city-defining landmark. [Mecklenburg County](#) capitalized on that by constructing a system of [greenways](#), [trails](#) and access trails along the creeks and the waters of the Catawba River that is one of the oldest in North Carolina and the southeastern U.S. A forward-thinking graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte originally proposed the countywide program in 1980. Since then it has grown to be among the most comprehensive in the country.

In a survey conducted early on, approximately 73% of respondents preferred greenways and trails as the number one amenity that Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation could provide. Charlotte's greenways serve [multiple purposes](#), including recreation, alternative options for transportation, land preservation, habitat conservation for plants and animals, flood mitigation and water quality.

"The greenways are important to connect people with nature, provide a network to get to destinations, and help people address their need for health and fitness," said Gwen Cook, greenways planner at Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation.

The 41 miles of greenway trails (more are [planned](#)) traverse through a variety of urban, suburban and rural areas. They link users to adjacent neighborhoods, historical landmarks, parks, schools, shopping areas, medical centers, dining establishments, special event spaces and more.

Trails consist of a variety of surfaces, including asphalt, gravel, dirt, metal pedestrian bridges and wooden boardwalks. Anything non-motorized is permitted on them.

For wildlife the open lands of the greenways ensure ease of travel, woods offer security and creeks provide sustenance. It is common to spot deer, frogs, fish, ducks, turtles, river otters, beavers, coyotes, snakes and butterflies. The hundreds of species of birds, such as the American redstart and scarlet tanager, make Charlotte's greenways a paradise for bird lovers. Nestled in the treetops of the Four Mile Creek Greenway in south Charlotte is the county park system's first documented great blue heron rookery.

Cook's advice? Just get out and enjoy Charlotte's greenways.

### When you go

[Maps](#) for each of Charlotte's greenways are on the Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation website, as are [guidelines](#) for using the greenways.

Click [here](#) for other articles by Mary Gilbert. You also can read her travel stories on her blog, *The Roads Traveled*, at [theroadstraveled.com](#).

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**Mary Gilbert**

Charlotte Travel Examiner

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