

## **Asheville Area Wayfinding Program Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. *Why does the area need better signage?***

A mini-assessment on wayfinding by national tourism industry leader Roger Brooks illuminated the Asheville area's need for a signage program to help move visitors and residents throughout the county and to destinations and attractions to enhance economic impact. Following Brooks' visit, the BCTDA held a public charrette to discuss tourism product development. Participants of the charrette workshops choose gateway improvement, directional signage and information kiosks among their top choices for destination development initiatives. Likewise, tourism experts agreed that wayfinding offered the best return on investment in terms of new tourism products for the Asheville area.

With more than 2.9 million overnight leisure visitors to the area last year, the tourism industry collectively understood that they must begin to address the need for better signage. The BCTDA took a proactive approach to developing a much needed wayfinding program in the Asheville area.

### **2. *What are the goals of the program?***

The aim of the comprehensive wayfinding system is to facilitate wayfinding for visitors and residents throughout the Asheville area, while enhancing the destination's sense of place as well as the region's history and character. The program also aligns with Asheville area destination brand, which invites visitors to have a personal experience each time they visit. Program objectives include:

- Increase economic impact by moving visitors throughout the region
- Increase overnight room nights
- Enhance visitor satisfaction by providing easy navigation routes
- Decreasing traffic congestion by reducing visitors' search time for destinations and parking
- Create repeat visitation by increasing awareness of depth of destination
- Reflect and expand the Asheville area destination brand

### **3. *How is the program funded?***

The City of Asheville and Buncombe County each contributed \$75,000 and \$25,000 respectively to the design and master plan along with financial contributions ranging from \$2,500-\$5,000 from the towns of Weaverville, Woodfin, Montreat and Black Mountain, and the Asheville Regional Airport.

The Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority dedicated \$1.65 million for sign fabrication and installation costs for the project through its Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF), including a commitment of \$150,000 for the long-term maintenance of the wayfinding program. The City of Asheville contributed an additional \$90,000 for garage and parking identification.

### **4. *Who designed the program?***

The Partnership on Wayfinding selected MERJE, a leading environmental graphics and wayfinding firm, to design the wayfinding elements and develop the message schedule and location plan. Following a review of many proposals garnered from a public Request for Qualifications, the Partnership on Wayfinding interviewed four wayfinding firms before selecting

MERJE. MERJE partnered with Gannet Fleming, a traffic and transportation planning firm, to develop the location plan for the signs, kiosks and gateway monuments.

**5. *How was the location plan developed?***

Professional traffic planners utilizing industry best practices were engaged to develop the routing for this regional wayfinding program. Approximately 70 stakeholders, including representatives from area attractions, City and Town staff and officials, local artists and designers, tourism industry leaders, and representatives from area business associations and neighborhood groups, were interviewed during the process. Routes and individual sign locations were reviewed in the field with the State Department of Transportation, City of Asheville Traffic Engineers and Tourism officials.

The routing and sign locations are based on the easiest route for a "first time visitor". With this in mind the best route for a first time visitor, may not be the one most commonly utilized by locals or those familiar with the area. In some cases the best route may not even be the shortest.

Ease of giving directions, quantity of decision points, traffic congestion, turning cues, safety, pedestrian/vehicular conflicts, accessibility and perception/image all play a part in determining what the best route may be.

**6. *Did you have any public meetings?***

Yes, two open houses were held during the planning phase in the summer and fall of 2007. The public meetings were announced in The Citizen-Times and through a variety of partner list serves. Several newspaper articles in a variety of publications followed the open houses and subsequent phases of the program.

**7. *How were the sites/attractions/destinations selected for the signs?***

The listings were selected based on a *Criteria for Inclusion* developed by MERJE, based on best practices with their experience in other communities and on stakeholder feedback during the interview process. Sites/attractions/destinations must fall within one of several categories. In general, attractions must receive a significant number of visitors per year and be cultural, civic, registered historic, or visitor service in nature. Private businesses are not included in the program. See question number 15 for information on requests for signage.

**8. *How was the size of the signs determined?***

The font and size of the signs follow standards set by the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). MUTCD defines the standards used by road managers nationwide to install and maintain traffic control devices on all public streets, highways, bikeways, and private roads open to public traffic. MUTCD requires a font size of 4" on signs on roads with 35 mph and under speed limits and 6" for roads with speed limits over 35 mph. North Carolina Department of Transportation (DOT) requirements align with MUTCD guidelines.

**9. *Why do some signs have one listing and some signs have two or three? Why aren't there more than three listings on a sign?***

The location of the attraction or destination and the route to get to those attractions or destination dictate the number of listings on each sign. Naturally, if several attractions are located in the same vicinity, the listings will be on the same sign. If an attraction is not in the same location as any others, it will be listed on a sign alone.

MUTCD and DOT guidelines only allow for three messages per sign for driver safety. Studies have found that drivers are only able to read and react to three messages in the time it takes to approach a sign.

**10. *Can you just add a new listing, change a listing or change an arrow on an existing sign?***

The sign faces are constructed of an aluminum panel covered with NCDOT required prismatic reflective vinyl. A digital print with an anti-graffiti overlam is then applied to the reflective vinyl. The aluminum panel is welded to a sleeve, which slides over the pole. New vinyl cannot be applied to the existing vinyl once the sign constructed. In order to make a change to a sign, a new panel has to be constructed from start to finish.

**11. *Why are the bolts showing on the poles?***

MUTCD and the North Carolina Department of Transportation require breakaway posts on roads for the safety of drivers. The bolts you see are the breakaway elements, should the post be hit by a car.

**12. *What's written on the back of the signs?***

Each town or city in the wayfinding program chose a unique design for the back of signs within that jurisdiction. Asheville chose to display quotes from authors and poets that were either native to Western North Carolina or spent a significant amount of time living and writing in the region. Nineteen quotes from 14 different authors/poets are featured on the back of signs in the City of Asheville. For a list of the quotes, go to [ExploreAsheville.com](http://ExploreAsheville.com). Black Mountain chose to feature the rocking chair, a symbol of hospitality for their town, Weaverville chose to display its town clock, and Woodfin's signs feature falling leaves.

**13. *Who created the finials on top of the signs?***

The finials were created by three local artists. A public call for artists was released during the planning phase. Three artists were selected to create the five finials that adorn the top of the sign poles. We're proud to be the only community in the country using hand crafted finials. The artists created stellar work. For more information on the artists, please visit the wayfinding section on [AshevilleCVB.com](http://AshevilleCVB.com) or [BCTDA.org](http://BCTDA.org).

**14. *Where are the information kiosks located?***

There are eight kiosks located in downtown Asheville, and one each in West Asheville, Historic Biltmore Village, Black Mountain, Weaverville and Woodfin.

### **15. How can I get listed on the signs?**

The attractions and destinations that are included in the program fall under one of several categories (for example: historical, cultural, visitor services, public attractions) in the *Criteria for Inclusion*. The signs are designed to help visitors find their way more easily. If an attraction or destination aligns with one of the categories, it must then meet a required number of points to be included in the program. Points are based on hours of operation, size of attraction and regional significance, to name a few.

As we move forward, we understand that there may be requests for signage. A standing wayfinding committee has been established to handle these requests and will meet on a quarterly basis. All requests will follow an established procedure. Contact Cate Marvill for information.

*--Note: Additions or changes must go through an approval process based on the Criteria for Inclusion. If additions or changes are approved, installation is dependent upon available funds. Funds may be applied for from the Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) and must follow the TPDF application process.*

### **16. How was the fabricator/installer chosen for the job?**

The public bid process for the fabrication and installation contract followed the bidding requirements for North Carolina public bids, specifically the mandates set forth in **Article 8 of Chapter 143 of the North Carolina General Statutes**.

The project went through two bid processes, one in October 2008 and one in February 2009. Bids received from the first open bid were well above the budget, so changes were made to the program and a second bid was announced. At the start of each bid opening, the project was advertised in the Asheville Citizen-Times. An "Invitation For Bids" with complete project information was advertised on October 19, 2008, February 1 and February 8, 2009. The bid documents were also advertised online in the plan rooms at Dodge Construction (<http://dodge.construction.com/>) and Associated General Contractors (<http://www.agc.org>), and hard copies were available in the plan rooms at F.W. Dodge Room in Greenville and Associated General Contractors in Asheville. Companies interested in bidding on construction projects typically subscribe to a service that sends notification of open bids.

We received bids from all over the country. As mandated by NC General Statutes, the award must be made to the lowest responsible bidder. L&H in Philadelphia were the lowest bidders and had pre-qualified as a responsible bidder for the wayfinding program, thus the award had to be made to them.

Rather than bid out the entire project turnkey, the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority chose to infuse elements that were unique to Asheville in the sign program. We utilized the skills of local professionals as allowed outside of the public bid. The signs and kiosks reflect the talents of a writer, graphic designer and artisans, who created the six handcrafted finials you see atop each of the signs. The handcrafted finials cost significantly more than an off-the-shelf sign topper, but we were pleased to have the opportunity to showcase local artists on the signs. The Asheville area sign program is unlike any other sign system in the country. L&H contracted with two local companies, Appalachian Paving & Concrete and Morgan Signs, to assist with the installation. The Asheville branch of Mattern & Craig were hired as construction managers to oversee L&H and the installation.