Graham County Implementing Smart Growth 101:

Smart growth strategies help towns and cities grow stronger economically through many ways—by using land strategically, making the most of existing resources, and using public funds to catalyze private development. Ten principles of smart growth exist that guide the development of communities regardless of size; these principles range from mixing land uses to encouraging community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions. Graham County, and western North Carolina as a region, is exploring ways towards sustainable development with smart growth strategies in mind. This mindset is especially timely since the local cog (Council of Government) is working towards writing a comprehensive plan, comprehensive plan, and completing a regional visioning project. Graham County was one of 22 communities selected by Smart Growth America (SGA) to receive free technical assistance for implementing smart growth tools. In April 2013, Graham County officials, regional stakeholders, community representatives, and local residents met with SGA planners as a part of a two-day workshop. The attendees embraced the ideas of smart growth, especially the ideas that emphasize active living and public health, and plan to use the ideals as a basis for the upcoming planning documents.

Representatives from the following organizations were at the Workshop:

Communities
City of Andrews
City of Robbinsville

Governmental Agencies
Graham County Government
Graham County Health Department
Jackson County Government
Transylvania County Government
Community Transformation Grant Project

Non-profits
GREAT
Hi-Top ASSIST Consortium
Church Mouse Ministries, Inc.
WNC Alliance
Smoky Mountain Native Plant Association
Other

Kostelec Planning
Southwestern Commission, Region A

Progress on Implementing Smart Growth 101:
Since the previous report, Graham County, and western North Carolina as a region, has continued the momentum generated by the SGA event regarding smart growth principles. In conjunction with the Southwestern Commission planning project, the following activities have taken place:

1. The Opportunity Initiative of Southwest North Carolina, or Opt-In SWNC, has continued implementing its goals and objectives in Graham County and regionally.
2. Graham Revitalization Economic Action Team (GREAT) has continued to meet quarterly.
3. 2/3-7/14 Round 2 Opt-In Community workshops where 80+ Graham County citizens came together to work on a regional vision. For more details visit: http://www.optinswnc.org/round-2-workshops-kick-off-the-graham-county-report/
4. 5/5/2014 The Grand Opening of the Santeetlah Bike Trails, a 9 mile trail completed by the US Forest Service, Graham County Department of Public Health, Graham County Department of Recreation, GREAT, Community Transformation Grant and many community volunteers.
5. The contracted initiative between MountainWise (Community Transformation Grant Region 1) and Kostelec planning has continued as “MountainElements”. More information about the MountainElements project along with “hot spot” maps that indicate areas of poor health can be found here: http://mountainwise.org/mountainelements/
6. 5/5/2014 A MountainElements workshop was held in Graham County by MountainWise and Kostelec Planning where Graham County residents and stakeholders came together to help develop strategies and interventions to assist people living in areas with a high prevalence of poor health conditions, identify places where people can go to do healthy things, formulate action steps that various stakeholders can undertake, in partnership, to improve the health of the community, and share existing or planned programs, events or activities aimed at improving the various elements of health for individual and/or the community at-large.
7. 5/24/2014 The Grand Opening of the new playground located at the Stecoah Valley Cultural Arts Center. The playground was funded in entirety by private donations. The center hosted a play day complete with refreshments and an outdoor movie screening. The estimated attendance was 400 people.
8. 8/26/2014 A regional MountainElements Symposium is planned where the results of the project will be shared. The MountainElements package will consist of a thorough health chapter to be added to a comprehensive plan, “hot spot” maps that identify high need areas within the region and a regional Health Impact Assessment.