

**WHY WE PLAN** To manage Gastonia's future wisely we need a shared vision of what we want to attain for ourselves, our children and our future generations – and then direct our actions toward achieving that vision. This vision must seek to balance a wide array of community needs, objectives, and realities. It must be both idealistic and practical - reflecting our highest ambitions, while taking into account the social, economic, political, geographic and environmental realities we are likely to face over the next twenty years and beyond. The comprehensive plan is a tool to achieve this goal. It serves as a long-range vision of what we want the City of Gastonia to become, as a tool for making decisions to achieve that vision, and as a specific program of action for reaching the stated objectives.

**THE VISION** In the year 2020, Gastonia is a great place, with great people and great promise, with a strong and diverse economy, an efficient and fiscally responsible government, a vibrant central city, a high quality environmentally sustainable transportation system, and diverse neighborhoods.

We have a high quality of life, characterized by the efficient delivery of public services combined with land use planning that promotes sustainable development principles. We have a strong sense of community and are knowledgeable about our cultural and historic resources, and scenic assets which we strive to preserve and enhance. We have outstanding recreational amenities with linkages to a comprehensive system of greenways and trails, bike paths and walkways; and livable streets. The Gastonia of the year 2020 confidently navigate regional and global challenges pertaining to the national economy, housing, energy and sustainability. We work hard to implement our comprehensive plan, understanding that implementation is a collaborative effort which requires innovative public/private partnerships.



## THE KEY GUIDING PRINCIPLES

### 1. GROWTH PATTERNS AND DIRECTIONS

Over the next twenty years, the City will stimulate a development pattern that will allow it to operate as a fiscally responsible entity.

### 2. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

To ensure long-term development, Gastonia of the future will focus to develop a diverse economic base.

### 3. HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Gastonia will work with local leaders to help carry out the goals of state and county agencies to educate and train the community.

### 4. REGIONAL PLANNING

Gastonia will promote collaboration among communities within the county and the greater region to manage growth and development to ensure a high quality of life for the residents of the City and the region.

### 5. UTILITIES AND URBAN SERVICES

The City will provide adequate, reliable and affordable services that meet demand and are consistent with development policies and plans; and achieve these services through safe, environmentally sensitive and cost efficient methods.

### 6. TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE PATTERNS

The City will establish policies and land use patterns that create a balanced, fiscally responsible and environmentally sustainable transportation system, utilizing all available modes of transportation, to efficiently move people.

### 7. ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Gastonia will continue to lead and cooperate with the region to establish policies that preserve and enhance our natural environment.

### 8. OPEN SPACE, PARKS AND RECREATION

Gastonia of the future will have an abundance of parks and open spaces with connecting greenways that accommodate the variety of recreation needs of a growing and diverse population.

### 9. NEIGHBORHOODS

New and existing Gastonia neighborhoods will encourage a sense of community, offer a variety of residential alternatives, and provide easy access to daily activities.

### 10. THE CENTER CITY

Through public and private efforts, the center city will become the primary location for new amenities within the City, featuring a variety of retail destinations, cultural and civic activities, and quality housing opportunities, and will evolve into an energetic destination for our growing population.

### 11. COMMUNITY APPEARANCE AND IDENTITY

Gastonia's visual appearance will demonstrate its community pride with economically vibrant and visually pleasing corridors, gateways, commercial areas and neighborhoods. Gastonia will guard and build upon its assets to retain its distinctive character and enhance its community identity.

GASTONIA  
2020  
OUR  
PLACE  
IN THE  
FUTURE

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Executive Summary

### ORGANIZATION OF THE PLAN

The 2020 Comprehensive Plan is a strategic document that compiles information, community dialogue, and preferred public policy choices for the City. It reflects on Gastonia as it once was, identifies the realities of the city as it is today, and includes future aspirations and goals for the City (as identified by citizens), through the year 2020. The vision, goals, objectives, policies, and maps within the Comprehensive Plan provide the foundation for the City's development regulations, capital programs, and municipal services. The plan includes thirteen chapters which describes the background and trends on a particular subject, describes what has changed since the adoption of CityVision 2010, and outlines new directions, policies, and programs.

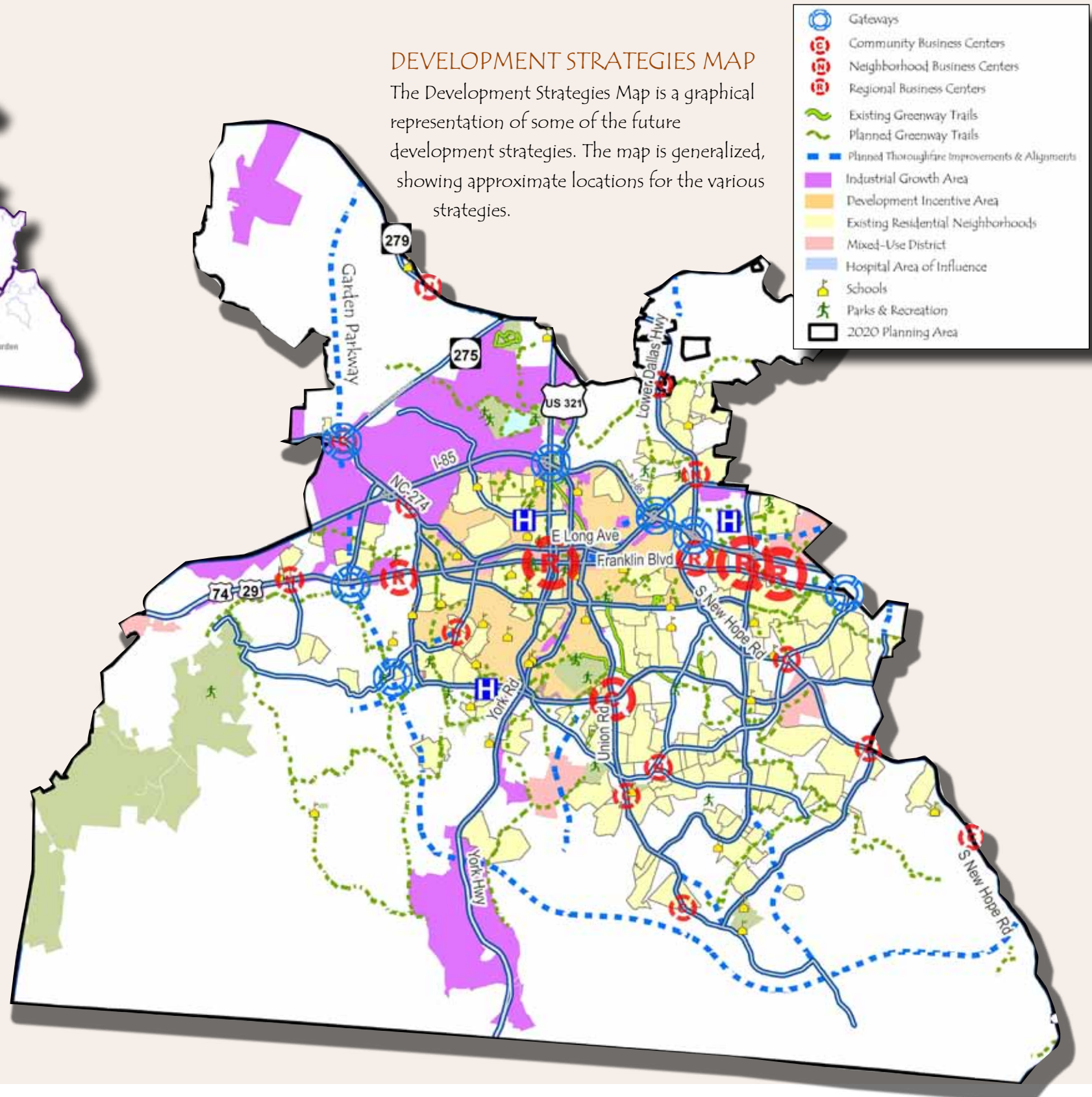


### THE 2020 PLANNING AREA

When planning for any city's future, assumptions must be made about future annexation, utility coverage areas, transportation improvements, and private development. In order to get an accurate population projection and to better address the specific needs of different parts of the City, this plan is based upon a planning area, which includes both the City proper and the surrounding areas. The planning area is broken down into eight sectors: Northwest, Northeast, East, Southeast, Southwest, Central, Garden, and Crowders. The sectors are based on census tracts, which generally follow major roads or stream corridors, current City limit lines or existing annexation agreement boundaries. The planning area could also be called the functional City; that is, the region in which decisions made in Gastonia affect growth, character and quality of life. As businesses and people relocate to Gastonia, they tend to look at the functional City rather than the municipal City. The maps in the plan show both the current City limits and the 2020 planning area. It should be noted that the boundary of the planning area does not imply areas to be annexed or areas to be included in the City's extraterritorial jurisdiction. Rather, it is a defined area that can be studied in a systematic manner that will lead to meaningful planning and decision making. Due to the City's growth during the past ten years, the possibility of a new toll road through the southern part of the county, and updated annexation agreements, the 2020 planning area is much larger than the 2010 planning area and includes two additional sectors to the south: Garden and Crowders.

### DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES MAP

The Development Strategies Map is a graphical representation of some of the future development strategies. The map is generalized, showing approximate locations for the various strategies.



## A Plan for Housing & Neighborhoods

### CHAPTER 3

Neighborhoods are the building blocks of overall community development. They are diverse, dynamic social and economic entities with unique characteristics, which are recognized by residents of both the neighborhood and community at large. A healthy sustainable neighborhood is one that has physical, social, and economic sustaining elements that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The decision to live in this community will depend on the availability of an adequate supply of decent housing that provides a variety of choices to meet the needs of a single individual or a family regardless of what those needs are. Thus, Gastonia's vision recognizes the need to preserve and create sustainable neighborhoods and enhance the quality of life and livability in Gastonia.

#### Goal:

Ensure that new and existing neighborhoods provide a sense of community, offer a variety of quality residential alternatives, contain strong neighborhood institutions, and provide easy access to daily activities.

#### Objectives:

- Encourage well-planned neighborhoods that have a sense of community.
- Ensure a variety of housing opportunities and choices for all income levels.
- Ensure new neighborhoods provide public spaces, pedestrian connections and a variety of landscaping.
- Strengthen the urban core by protecting and enhancing older established neighborhoods.
- Preserve and conserve Gastonia's cultural and natural heritage.



## A Plan for Economic & Human Development

### CHAPTER 4

Economic growth and prosperity is vital to the quality of life of the residents of Gastonia. A strong, healthy economy will ensure that the community is sustainable and continues to thrive as an attractive place to live, work, and play. This chapter recognizes that as the economy transitions, Gastonia must work collaboratively to attract a more diverse economic base and develop opportunities to strengthen and train our workforce.

#### Goal:

To achieve a business climate using human capital and infrastructure development to foster diverse economic growth while encouraging a stable economy that provides a balance of goods and services, business opportunities and an enhanced quality life for all our citizens.

#### Objectives:

- The City will cooperate and assist with public and private efforts to foster a diverse economy that attracts human capital and minimizes the impact of cyclical economic downturns.
- The City will work with teaching and training facilities to accommodate new areas of job training programs and ongoing educational opportunities for community residents.
- The City will provide the infrastructure necessary to accommodate existing and new businesses.
- The City will protect the business climate for existing businesses and maintain opportunity for business expansion.
- The City will work to enhance the quality of life of existing and future City residents.
- The City will provide resources for new and expanding businesses and industries while conserving and enhancing the natural and cultural resources of the community.
- The City should research and take action to advance unique opportunities for economic expansion and diversification.
- The City will cooperate with economic development plans across Gaston County and the region in a manner that minimizes conflict between jurisdictions.
- Adopt land use strategies that enhance and support the development of human connectivity.
- Enhance the quality of life of the citizens and better prepare them for the changes in our economic environment by ensuring that the City's human capital are adequately prepared for the jobs of today and the future.



## A Plan for Public Utilities & Community Services

### CHAPTER 5

The City will provide adequate, reliable, and cost effective services that meet demand and are consistent with development policies and plans; and will achieve these services through safe, environmentally sensitive and cost efficient methods.

#### Goal:

The provision of safe and reliable services that meet current and future public demand, maintain consistency with land use plans and policies, and remain environmentally sensitive and cost effective.

#### Objectives:

- Plan and locate new utility infrastructure that supports the community's vision for the location and pace of growth.
- Encourage utility planning that contributes to a high quality of life for Gastonia residents and businesses by ensuring safe and efficient utility delivery.
- Upgrade and expand the City's water treatment system to meet demands and conform to regulatory guidelines.
- Require that utility planning protects Gastonia's natural environment and resources.
- Protect the Mountain Island Lake water source and watershed.
- Upgrade and expand Gastonia's wastewater treatment system.
- Operate an environmentally friendly wastewater collection and treatment system.
- Address water pollution associated with stormwater runoff.
- Work with regional partners to improve utility services where possible.
- Ensure that City facilities, such as police, fire and recreation are easily available to all citizens.
- Seek opportunities for the City to provide environmental education and to assume a leadership role within the community.
- Plan for a safe community.
- Assist the Gaston County School System in preparing for and accommodating growth.



## A Plan for Open Space, Parks & Recreation

### CHAPTER 6

Recreation has been a part of Gastonia's community life since the City's inception. Gastonia's textile mills sponsored athletic and recreational programs and area churches and service clubs also sponsored recreational programs. In addition, the City's public parks and recreation facilities have greatly contributed to the social fabric and quality of life in Gastonia. A quality municipal parks and recreation system is vital to the growth and development of the City. It also provides the community with substantial health and economic benefits to the community.

Gastonia's increased growth rate has made the preservation and construction of parks, recreational facilities, and open space more critical than in the past. Because of the tremendous amount of residential and commercial growth occurring in previously undeveloped areas, particularly in the southeast, the City must take steps to ensure that large tracts of land are set aside for open space preservation and future recreation needs.

#### Goal:

To provide a variety of active and passive recreation opportunities, and to preserve valuable open space for the enjoyment of the residents of Gastonia.

#### Objectives:

- Provide park and recreation facilities to meet the needs of a diverse population at accessible locations throughout the City.
- Increase participation with other public and private agencies to maximize the efficiency of the City's facilities and programs.
- Maximize all available and develop new funding sources for the maintenance, updating, and construction of parks and recreation facilities and open space opportunities.
- Provide an open space system that protects natural habitat areas, enhances our quality of life and links people, neighborhoods and resources together.
- Construct and encourage additional greenway trails to capitalize on available open space, to provide an alternative mode of transportation, and connect new and existing neighborhoods.



## A Plan for the Center City

### CHAPTER 7

Together, the downtown and its' surrounding neighborhoods defines an area known as the "Center City". This area helps define who we are as a city and is an overall measure of the economic health of the community. Without a strong and vital Center City, the City of Gastonia would be just another sprawling amorphous suburb of Charlotte. This Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan serves as the long term source of ideas and inspiration for actions that will be aligned with and mutually supportive of the vision and principles noted herein. It also recognizes the significant advantage a strong core provides in a highly competitive economy. A vibrant Center City symbolizes smart growth at its best, fighting regional sprawl and building a sustainable economy and community.

#### Goal:

The Center City will emerge as an energetic 24-hour destination featuring a variety of retail outlets, cultural and civic activities, and quality housing opportunities, which will provide the stability necessary to increase property values and attract new private investments.

#### Objectives:

- Create a sense of place by reconnecting people to the Center City.
- Attract a diverse range of new investments to establish the center city as the dominant economic, social, and cultural center of Gastonia.
- Increase the number of people living downtown by providing a unique residential experience.
- Ensure easy, safe and pleasurable mobility throughout the Center City for cars, pedestrians and cyclists.
- Ensure adequate infrastructure for existing and future development.



## A Plan for the Franklin Boulevard Corridor

### CHAPTER 8

The Charlotte metro area is expected to add nearly 400,000 people over the next 20 years. With downtown Gastonia a relatively short 20-30 minute commute to Uptown Charlotte and the airport, Franklin Boulevard offers an authentic and historic urban environment that, if positioned well, could attract a sizable percentage of that regional growth to capitalize on revitalization efforts.

The vision for the Franklin Boulevard corridor is to create places of distinction at key points along the corridor that enhance its character, strengthen the City's economic vitality and expand opportunities to attract residents, visitors and workers by increasing accessibility. These community focal points build upon existing issues and opportunities to create mixed use places that encourage walking, cycling, and use of transit, which can also serve as a source of civic pride and economic vitality within the community.

#### Goal:

Achieve a better balance between regional mobility and local multi modal accessibility along Franklin Boulevard.

#### Objectives:

- Develop methods to improve multi modal connectivity between parcels along Franklin Boulevard, including street connections, cross-access driveways, shared-use paths and sidewalks to help reduce vehicle miles of travel and intersection delays along the Franklin Boulevard corridor.
- Establish one or more overlay planning districts to guide the desired urban form, scale and character of redevelopment and infill development in the downtown and transition areas, with a funding mechanism to generate revenue for needed capital improvements described in the master plan.
- The City will invest in public infrastructure along the corridor to encourage private investment in desired locations



## A Plan for Regional Planning & Interjurisdictional Coordination

### CHAPTER 9

The City of Gastonia is committed to working in collaboration with regional partners to develop a regional framework for planning on all levels. The City further recognizes that it does not operate in isolation and that the activities within its corporate boundaries impact other jurisdictions within the region and is committed to further examining regional planning issues for the Greater Charlotte Region.

#### Goal:

To improve the quality of life of residents in Gastonia and throughout the region by promoting increased multi-jurisdictional communication and cooperation in order to recognize and solve problems that transcends the corporate boundaries.

#### Objectives:

- Continue coordination of Development and growth management issues.
- Increase multi-jurisdictional communication - The City shall continue to coordinate with adjoining jurisdictions on issues such as location of growth and development, provision of public facilities and services, conservation of natural resources, revenue sharing, and to discourage sprawling rural residential development outside of planned growth areas.
- Continue to coordinate with adjacent jurisdictions regarding proposals for new development near common borders in order to foster a sustainable land use pattern.
- Coordinate transportation planning and service provision with regional transportation agencies.
- Schools play an important role in the quality of life and desirability of the City. The City will continue to coordinate with the Gaston County School District to anticipate future growth and plan for the location of schools, co-locating other facilities and services, and other issues.



## A Plan for Environmental Quality

### CHAPTER 10

The Environmental Quality element provides a policy basis for the protection and enhancement of Gastonia's natural environment. While the Environmental Quality element contains policies that relate directly to many aspects of the natural environment, the concept of environmental protection and preservation is integrated into all aspects of the Comprehensive Plan. Environmental stewardship is a core value of this Plan, and it plays an integral role in guiding how the City accommodates growth and provides services. The City can protect environmental quality by ensuring its land use policies, codes, and standards are up to-date with contemporary best management practices; that it is compliant with state and federal environmental laws and administrative rules; and that it leads by example in employing environmentally sound and sustainable practices in its municipal operations.

#### Goal:

Maintain a healthy and attractive natural environment that supports clean air, water and soil, and recognizes the need to provide a good quality of life, helps to maintain property values, and promotes tourism while allowing new development.

#### Objectives:

- Protect watersheds, streams and wetlands to ensure excellent water quality that meets the residential and commercial needs of the community.
- Protect and improve Gastonia's air quality by reducing the amount of airborne contaminants.
- New development will be sensitive to the natural environment.
- Use well-reasoned environmental regulations to ensure the protection of our natural resources.
- Improve environmental awareness throughout the community.



## A Plan for Community Appearance & Identity

### CHAPTER 11

Community appearance and identity is a thread running through the entire Comprehensive Plan. Every section of the Plan deals, in some manner, with the face Gastonia presents. The Comprehensive Plan seeks to establish and maintain a positive community identity by:

- ◆ Simulating a development pattern that is well designed and sustainable.
- ◆ Enhance pedestrian connections.
- ◆ Continue and enhance the marketing and branding strategies to promote the City.
- ◆ Promoting a residential development pattern that encourages a sense of community and offers a variety of residential alternatives.
- ◆ Sustaining livable neighborhoods and promoting pride in property and community.
- ◆ Creating and maintaining an excellent system of parks, and open spaces with connecting greenways.
- ◆ Taking public action to prevent blight and to promote reinvestment in existing buildings.

#### Goal:

To enhance the quality of the visual environment, particularly our gateways, corridors and neighborhoods to create a distinctive and appealing image that demonstrates our community pride.

#### Objectives:

- Display our pride by enhancing public spaces, roadways, and neighborhoods through tree planting, landscaping, limited signage and other improvements.
- Utilize public spaces and facilities as opportunities to highlight our community appearance and identity.
- Promote the many benefits of good community appearance and the importance of aesthetics.
- Amend City regulations to strengthen and promote citywide beautification.
- Increase the level of volunteerism and leadership from a broad citizen base.
- Identify and initiate funding sources.



## A Plan for Transportation

### CHAPTER 12

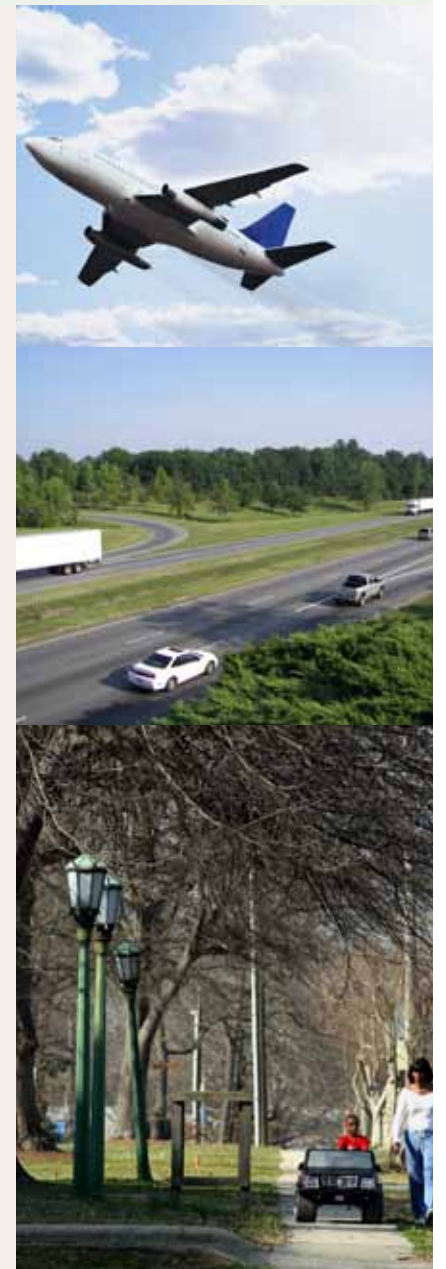
An effective transportation system is critical to the economic and social well being of the community. The City of Gastonia recognizes the importance of developing an efficient transportation system that is environmentally sensitive and fiscally responsible, while being responsive to the community's needs, remaining consistent with land use plans, and fostering economic vitality. The goal is to achieve a balanced system that meets the needs of people of all ages and abilities, while also meeting the needs of businesses, industry, and area employers.

#### Goal:

An efficient transportation system that is environmentally sensitive and fiscally responsible, while being responsive to the community's needs, remaining consistent with land use plans, and fostering economic vitality.

#### Objectives:

- Ensure that transportation plans are coordinated with land use goals.
- Develop an efficient street and highway network capable of providing an appropriate level of service for a variety of transportation modes.
- Increase the community's use of the transit system and pursue objectives that support rapid transit to Charlotte.
- Develop a transportation system that promotes healthy neighborhoods and improves environmental quality.
- Ensure that regional programs and projects are consistent with the City's plans and policies.
- Expand transportation funding levels to maintain and improve the transportation system.
- Apply context sensitive design principles to new or expanded infrastructure projects.



## A Plan for Land Use & Development

### CHAPTER 13

Gastonia seeks to develop with an appreciation for sensitive environments, long term quality of life, economic efficiency, and community character. Therefore, the application of smart growth principles is indispensable for Gastonia, both in implementing the Comprehensive Plan and preparing for its eventual success. This Plan recognizes and supports the principles and goals of smart growth.

#### Goal:

Continue the development, growth and vitality of Gastonia, while providing for a sustainable, well balanced, economically viable, environmentally sound land use mix that preserves the City's unique character and a high quality of life for Gastonia residents.

#### Objectives:

- Incorporate smart growth and sustainability principles and goals into the City's land use regulatory scheme.
- Establish land uses that encourage cost-effective development.
- Promote reinvestment, and diversification in Downtown and the Center City, to reinforce its importance as the economic, cultural and civic center of the City.
- Encourage new investment in areas that have undergone residential and retail disinvestments.
- Make zoning decisions based upon the long-range impact on adjoining areas and the City as a whole.
- Ensure that local ordinances reflect a high priority for environmental concerns and that policy promote efficient use of public infrastructure.
- Promote convenient and concentrated commercial development that serves residents and strengthens both the local and regional market.
- Maintain and strengthen the character of the City's various residential areas by:
  - ◆ Promote planning as a positive, cooperative community function.
  - ◆ Promote the highest and best use of land with special attention to use options in transition areas.
  - ◆ Develop object and rational criteria for subdivision or rezoning request: Apply the following guidelines when reviewing applications for subdivision or rezoning anywhere in the City.
  - ◆ Continue efforts to achieve a more balanced residential and retail growth pattern.
  - ◆ Promote preservation as a tool for economic development and community revitalization.
  - ◆ Ensure that transportation and land use planning decisions are complimentary rather than contradictory.



# GASTONIA 2020 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

## OUR PLACE IN THE FUTURE

City of Gastonia  
 PLANNING DIVISION  
 Development Services Department  
 150 S York St, Gastonia, NC 28053  
 704.854.6652

