

MAJOR DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

KEY ISSUES IN THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF GASTONIA

ECONOMY

1. Gastonia is a community for working and living. Maintaining the primary economy here is crucial to the fiscal health of the city and the prosperity of its inhabitants.

REGIONAL GROWTH

2. Located at the geographic center of the Piedmont, Gastonia is in the heart of one of the fastest growing regions in the United States, and poised to take advantage of the shift of capital, jobs and people to the sunbelt. An integral part of the Charlotte urban region, Gastonia is a partner in the region's housing and job markets. Gastonia is also a competitor within the region, seeking a fair share of good jobs and high-quality development.

MUNICIPAL BOUNDARIES

3. The City of Gastonia should encompass the full urban Gastonia community. Efficient provision of municipal services depends on the City's ability to annex areas as they become urbanized. Gastonia should use its power of annexation as the urban area grows in order to have municipal growth match urban growth.

GROWTH DIRECTION

4. Gastonia is not growing in a geographically balanced fashion. In recent years the west side has fallen behind the east side, leaving the west side with an aging population, fewer shopping opportunities, and an increased poverty class. To achieve a more balanced growth pattern, strategies should be undertaken to address the problems of the west side and support quality growth in areas that are experiencing stagnation or decline.

THE OLDER CITY

5. The older part of Gastonia including downtown, the surrounding neighborhoods, and the outlying mill villages are declining even as the newer areas of Gastonia grow. Efforts to fight crime, reduce visual blight, develop jobs, and redevelop land can help overcome this trend. One or more major public/private projects can become a catalyst for reinvestment and/or growth. (One example is the re-use of the Firestone Mill)

UTILITIES AND GROWTH

6. The Catawba Creek sewage treatment plant covers a drainage basin that includes Gastonia's two major growth corridors, Union Road and New Hope Road. The Catawba Creek plant, however, cannot be expanded beyond its present capacity. Furthermore, its treatment technology is outdated. Expansions in system capacity must take place at other wastewater treatment plants in other drainage basins. Further expansion of the Long Creek and Crowders Creek Plants will

be required to accommodate growth throughout the whole city. Since *development follows the extension of sewer service*, Gastonia can guide and direct its future suburban growth by planning the location and extension of sewer service into new drainage basins.

DENSITY AND SPRAWL

7. Housing is permitted at densities that are too high for development supported by individual wells and septic tanks, and oftentimes too low for areas with water and sewer service. The efficient use of land will become ever more important as land costs increase and environmental regulations tighten. Well planned growth, greater densities where appropriate, and innovative use of land can avoid sprawl and save money through more effective use of land, roads, water and sewer service. Density *in and of itself* does not constitute a problem. Residential development densities greater than Gastonia's prevailing R-15 standard should be welcomed when good design is incorporated and supporting public services and facilities are available.

COMMUNITY IMAGE

8. Gastonia's entrances, the major thoroughfares leading into the City, provide the visitor with his



An aerial view of downtown Gastonia

or her first impression of the community. Some major entrances such as West and East Franklin Blvd., Long Avenue, and South US 321, are visually cluttered and give an unfavorable first impression of Gastonia. The entrances should be beautified through investments such as landscaping and special entrance signs. With the cooperation of businesses and civic groups joint public/private efforts can be undertaken to develop strategies for each major corridor and to carry out those strategies. Gastonia should also establish corridor overlay zones providing new development guidelines for land uses, signs, parking lots and building placement.

ENVIRONMENT

9. Increasingly, good stewardship of our environmental resources will be necessary to improving Gastonia's quality of life and competitiveness.
10. Gaston County is a National Ambient Air Quality Standard non-attainment area for ozone pollution. The EPA has set a goal of 15% reduction in Mecklenburg and Gaston Counties by 1996. Coordination of land use and transportation is crucial to maintaining and improving our air quality. Conservation of open spaces will be important as we continue to urbanize as a region. This can be done through acquisition and/or expansion of local and state park lands, development of greenways, and private efforts such as land conservancy trusts.

GROWTH SCENARIOS

Designing an avenue by which public effort is structured is the catalyst by which strategy becomes reality. A community's values in terms of quality of life, character and scale, urban form, esthetic appeal and integration of new development with the existing and future city fabric must be the starting point. Certain assumptions must be made when assaying the opportunities and challenges facing the community and then determine how to achieve the priorities through and aggressive implementation program that emphasizes practical results.

ALTERNATE GROWTH SCENARIOS

In order to determine the appropriate approach and response to future development, four alternative growth scenarios were analyzed. The growth scenarios illustrate different patterns of generalized land use and planning area levels.

EXISTING TRENDS SCENARIO

The underlying assumptions for this scenario may be summarized as the continuation of existing conditions and trends. The major driving forces are market-based development and a flexible planning approach:

- Continued outward expansion similar to growth that has occurred in east and southeast sectors of the planning area since 1970;
- Availability of new areas for potential development is influenced by transportation and other infrastructure improvements;
- Future expansion of utility service will be guided by the Sewer Improvement Program;
- Planning for the redevelopment of downtown is emphasized by the Downtown Association and the City with limited infill, development and redevelopment occurring in the urbanized core of the city.

INFILL/REDEVELOPMENT SCENARIO

The infill development and redevelopment growth scenario is characterized by utilizing undeveloped land within the city's existing service area, resulting in a more compact city.

- Infill sites result from a lack of or insufficient access to public services, physical/environmental limitations, or a general unattractiveness to the market;
- Undeveloped tracts in urban and suburban areas not used during earlier growth would be developed with minimal outward expansion;
- Large tracts of open land remaining in certain areas within the urbanized portion of the city represent significant opportunities for future infill development; and,
- Redevelopment of declining or transitional areas would be the objective of urban revitalization.

TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS SCENARIO

The transportation corridors growth scenario is characterized by linear development along major transportation routes. Downtown represents a dense, urbanized core, with many potential development locations along transportation corridors:

- Density of development decreases with distance from the urbanized core.
- Timing of development is influenced by construction of street improvements, with high visibility commercial development at intersections; and,
- Residential development occurs along streets connecting these commercial corridors.

GROWTH CENTERS SCENARIO

The Growth Centers scenario is characterized by a dynamic central city and peripheral growth centers. This strategy is best illustrated in the Garden Cities in England and New Towns in the United States.

- Central core area, regional growth centers, and community growth centers represent varying mixes and levels of services and activities where people live, work and play;
- Regional growth centers with mixed use development in suburban and rural areas connected by arterial streets and highways; and,
- Regional growth centers contain uses and resources to support day-to-day activities.

PREFERRED GROWTH SCENARIO

In order to take advantage of the positive attributes of each of the four scenarios described earlier, a combination of scenario characteristics is considered the preferred approach to future development within the city and planning area.

The Preferred Scenario derives the majority of its characteristics from refinement of the Infill, Growth Center and Transportation Scenarios. The Existing Trends Scenario is considered only as the future growth of the area impacts development which is currently in place.

The intent of the Preferred Growth Scenario is to focus activities into community growth centers which include a mix of activities for people to live, work and play. The focus of these growth centers and of the overall Planning Area is the Central Core Area, the Eastern Core, medical/retail, and the industrial growth area in the Northwest.

Infill and redevelopment in the CBD will increase commercial/office and retail activity, and promotion of housing in the area will promote and reinforce a “24 hour” activity center. The CBD should be the major center for all governmental activities, major financial institutions, cultural and entertainment activities and community events.

Other growth areas include regional centers and community and neighborhood centers. These mixed use centers will support the surrounding neighborhoods for retail and service needs and will serve as locations for potential employment. Community and neighborhood centers will provide retail and service establishments and will support adjacent neighborhoods providing basic consumer goods and other immediate needs of the citizens.

These centers will have their own identity and sense of place. Unique character of the areas will be reinforced through the use of unifying urban design and development controls for signs, building setback, landscaping and other elements which will enhance the visual quality of the centers.

Connecting these centers will be major thoroughfares. Development along these transportation corridors will not be precluded but will be allowed densities which will not hinder traffic flow and will encourage use of the existing and planned



Franklin Square is one element of Gastonia's 3,000,000 square-foot regional retail center.

transportation network. The corridor will also have their unique character.

Each of the community and neighborhood centers will emulate a sense of place with their own urban design guidelines.

A redevelopment and infill effort concentrating on core area single-family neighborhoods will be encouraged. Through the use of incentives, financing, and other techniques, vacant land and substandard housing in the core area will be developed and redeveloped to promote gentrification and the efficient use of existing and planned infrastructure. A secondary effort to infill outside the core area neighborhoods will also be promoted to use existing and proposed infrastructure to its fullest extent without overloading or over-saturating the systems.

The purpose of the preferred scenario is many fold; however, several key points should be emphasized. These key points include:

- Promotion of economic development and the continued economic vitality of the area through the revitalization of the Central Core Area;
- Development of recognition of the diversity in character and unique qualities of areas in the city and planning area through enhancement of the unique sense of place these areas have; and,
- Protection and recognition of the environment through sound urban planning and design techniques.

The preferred scenario capitalizes on the positives, attempts to correct or reverse the negatives and suggests a sound approach to development with a basis in strong urban planning and design, which can be satisfying and rewarding from the citizens of today and tomorrow.